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***Transmedia Storytelling: Theoretical
Foundations and Practical Applications***

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Abstract

The thesis will explore how principles of narrative coherence and audience engagement function as factors in the success or failure of transmedia storytelling projects. It is vital to research influential scholarly works related to transmedia storytelling. The discussion is oriented toward assessing their contribution to understanding the two above-mentioned critical concepts. These theoretical perceptions are connected with two in-depth case studies on thematic analysis involving the movies in DC Extended Universe and The Witcher video game series. More specifically, an analysis of the DCEU will help illustrate the failure of narrative coherence and audience engagement, partially due to inconsistency within source materials and differences between decision makers. The Witcher games provided a rare, successful transmedia product that enabled further fleshing out of the story world, with solid roots in their source materials. The findings underline a single use of consistent narrative vision and strong audience engagement driven by foundational theories of transmedia storytelling. It gives insight into how dynamics function in successful transmedia projects for creators and scholars alike.

Introduction

Transmedia storytelling has become one of the compelling concepts in modern entertainment in which stories can be streamlined and stretched across a number of media platforms to audiences of unparalleled heterogeneity. This research therefore identifies some of the core theories outlined by scholars in the field of transmedia storytelling and follows through on how their ideas about narrative coherence and audience engagement play out empirically in real case studies.

The two major case studies throughout the thesis are the films based on comics by DC, popularly referred to as the movies of the DC Extended Universe, as well as *The Witcher* video games, particularly the third part of this series. These case studies were chosen because of their different fates concerning transmedial storytelling, with DCEU evidently failing both in narrative coherence and engaging the audience. At the same time, *The Witcher* games are praised as successful story world expansion. The study investigates these projects against the backgrounds of narrative coherence and audience engagement as informed by these theories.

The critical question guiding the research is this: How do narrative coherence and audience engagement, as informed by scholarly theories, determine the success or failure of transmedia storytelling projects, as evidenced by the contrasting examples of the DC Extended Universe and *The Witcher* games? This thesis focuses on an analysis of narrative coherence and audience engagement in transmedia storytelling, with specific regard to the two case studies. These two themes act as a prism through which one can look at the effectiveness of the transmedial projects more broadly, drawing especially on the theories by Henry Jenkins and Marie-Laure Ryan. Certain patterns that recurred regarding these concepts in both source material and adaptations have been found and interpreted within the context of thematic analysis.

DCEU and *The Witcher* games were chosen as case studies because of their high relevance and dissimilar outcomes in an area of concern that involves transmedia storytelling. Data collection was conducted by examining source material—comics and novels—and the adapted work, films, and games, along with audience reception via reviews and quantitative metrics involving sales and revenue.

The thesis is structured into several chapters, each designed to deepen the analysis of transmedia storytelling within the context of narrative coherence and audience engagement.

Chapter 1 begins with a comprehensive review of the literature in the field of transmedia storytelling. This review covers historical evolution and foundational theories, providing a thorough background to frame the research. It examines key concepts, definitions, and debates that have shaped the understanding of transmedia as a storytelling practice, setting the stage for the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 2 and 3 delve into the works of prominent scholars who have significantly contributed to studying transmedia storytelling. These chapters focus on narrative coherence, and audience engagement in transmedia projects. The discussion highlights how these scholars' theories have influenced the field and provide an in-depth look at the challenges and opportunities in maintaining consistency across different media platforms while engaging audiences. In chapter 3 Special attention is given to how marketing strategies have been intertwined with storytelling, often driving the expansion of story worlds across multiple platforms.

Chapters 4 and 5 present detailed case studies, applying the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier to real-world examples. Chapter 4 focuses on DC Extended Universe (DCEU), analyzing how the franchise has attempted to build a cohesive narrative across its films. The chapter evaluates the successes and failures of the DCEU in engaging its audience. In contrast, Chapter 5 shifts its focus to The Witcher video games, exploring how transmedia storytelling has expanded the narrative of the original books into video game medium. The analysis in this chapter looks at how The Witcher franchise has managed to sustain audience interest and narrative coherence across different platforms and what lessons can be drawn from its success.

Finally, the conclusion section of the thesis synthesizes the findings from the case studies and draws conclusions based on the research. This chapter summarizes how narrative coherence, audience engagement, and marketing have been effectively—or ineffectively—implemented in transmedia storytelling.

Chapter 1: Foundations of Transmedia Storytelling

1.1 Historical Evolution of Storytelling

Storytelling has been an integral part of human culture since ancient times, serving as a means of communication, entertainment, and cultural preservation. From oral traditions passed down through generations to the advent of digital media, the evolution of storytelling practices reflects the changing socio-cultural contexts and technological innovations of different eras.

Oral storytelling was the oldest form of human communication, with people telling tales through spoken words, songs, and chants mixed with gestures and facial expressions. Such narratives also helped to pass knowledge, moral lessons, and cultural values within communities. For instance, the Aboriginal Dreamtime stories of Australia can provide a dual purpose, such as entertainment and instruction through oral traditions, embedding cultural knowledge and spiritual beliefs in them across generations for posterity to experience.¹² In many African cultures, griots, who are storytellers but at the same time historians and musicians, are essential figures in carrying out the oral traditions in their communities. Their performances were not mere entertainment but necessary for transmitting history, moral values, and cultural identity.³

As communities grew more extensive, storytelling evolved to take other forms, including visual variety. Early on, this came in the form of wall pictures, like those discovered in Lascaux, France, that were more than 17,000 years old. These paintings depict scenes of daily life, hunts, and spiritual rituals, all telling visual tales that carry stories to posterity.⁴ Similarly, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs are another form of visual storytelling wherein symbols and images relate intricate narratives about gods, kings, and daily life on the walls of temples and tombs.⁵ The

¹ Diamond, J. (1997). *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. W.W. Norton & Company.

² Aboriginal Dreamtime stories are foundational narratives that convey spiritual and cultural values of Indigenous Australian communities through oral tradition.

³ Vansina, J. (1985). *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press.

⁴ Clottes, J. (2008). *Cave Art*. Phaidon Press.

⁵ Goody, J., & Watt, I. (1968). *The Consequences of Literacy*. Comparative Studies in Society and History.

Bayeux Tapestry is a colorful stitching in the middle of a medieval material that tells the tale of the events that led to the Norman Conquest of England, which is a monarchical history written in the form of a story.⁶ The Maya civilization wrote their myths, the events that occurred in their time, and what they knew about astronomy in detailed glyphs and murals. These visual narratives were artistic expressions and represented an integral part of the Maya's understanding of their world and where they fit into it.⁷

The invention of the writing systems meant a significant evolutionary step for storytelling. Written texts made saving and spreading the story in time and space possible, so it became a cultural asset. Epic poems from Mesopotamia, like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from Greece, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey* by Homer, and from ancient India, religious scriptures like the *Vedas* are examples that demonstrate how written narratives could encapsulate myths, histories, and philosophies of whole civilizations.^{8,9} The evolution of written scripts also made it possible to record laws, treaties, and administrative records. It changed storytelling from an exclusively cultural activity into one intensely involved in governance and social organization. For example, Hammurabi's Code is one of the earliest and most complete legal codes, demonstrating how writing began to affect all aspects of human life.

The fifteenth-century invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg was a game-changer for storytelling. It democratized literature, making written texts more accessible to a wider audience. This led to the rise of serialized novels, which were printed serially in newspapers and magazines, gradually reaching a mass readership. For instance, Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* effectively utilized this new format, creating anticipation and sustained interest among its readers.^{10,11}

The printing press also enabled the diffusion of new ideas during the Renaissance and Reformation, illustrating how technological innovation in storytelling can be at the root of seminal cultural and social change. Notably, Martin Luther's *95 Theses* were printed within

⁶ Hicks, C. (2006). *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece*. Vintage

⁷ Schele, L., & Freidel, D. (1990). *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. William Morrow.

⁸ Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Methuen.

⁹ Sanders, N. K. (1960). *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin Books.

¹⁰ Eisenstein, E. L. (1980). *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Slater, M. (1970). *Charles Dickens*. Oxford University Press.

two weeks of him posting them on the church door in Wittenberg, and they were circulated throughout Europe.¹²

New storytelling mediums such as theater, film, radio, and television in the 19th and 20th centuries made the storytelling process more multi-sensory and brought the stories to life in ways that the written or oral narrative could not. The opportunities for serializing story forms within new media, such as radio dramas and television series, became established patterns of human behavior in the way audiences came to expect to experience stories on an episodic basis, much like readers were used to experiencing the serialized novels. At the dawn of the 20th century, cinema arose as a potent, new medium for storytelling. Films such as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)¹³ and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)¹⁴ seized the potential of film to tell complex, emotionally engaging stories through images and sound. Radio dramas used audio to create narrative worlds, as in Orson Welles' famous version of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1938)¹⁵ that seized the audiences' imaginations.¹⁶

Having recently emerged at the end of the 20th century and developing in the early 21st century, storytelling has shifted to a multiplatform activity in tandem with other kinds of digital media, named transmedia storytelling. Contrary to the canons of classical storytelling, which are usually put into one single media format, transmedia storytelling entirely denies that the story could have its medium; instead, it breaks it down into different platforms. As Henry Jenkins stresses, the *Matrix*¹⁷ franchise demonstrates that transmedia storytelling deploys the story across films, video games, comics, and online content so that it tells one piece of the puzzle after the other to achieve a comprehensive, immersive story universe. Another noteworthy example is the franchise *Harry Potter*¹⁸ which develops its stories through books,

¹² Pettegree, A. (2015). *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation*. Penguin Press.

¹³ Griffith, D.W. (dir.). 1915. *The Birth of a Nation*. USA.

¹⁴ Eisenstein, S. (dir.). 1925. *Battleship Potemkin*. USSR.

¹⁵ Welles, O. (dir.). 1938. *The War of the Worlds*. USA: Mercury Theatre on the Air.

¹⁶ Hilmes, M. (1997). *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁷ Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (dirs.). 1999. *The Matrix*. USA.

¹⁸ Books: Rowling, J.K. 1997-2007. *Harry Potter Series*. UK: Bloomsbury. Movies: Columbus, C., Cuarón, A., Newell, M., & Yates, D. (dirs.). 2001-2011. *Harry Potter Film Series*. USA/UK: Warner Bros.

movies, games, and Pottermore—an Internet page for fans to explore more of the world of wizards,¹⁹ that opens additional revenues and ways of interaction with fans.

1.2 Theories of Storytelling

When I first started you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn't really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. and now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.²⁰

Many theoretical insights and practical frameworks in transmedia storytelling enhance our understanding of how stories can unravel across different media platforms. Attempting to articulate the complexities related to transmedia narratives, it becomes fundamental that we first consider the preliminary ideas forming the groundwork for such a practice. Some scholars have added value to the field of transmedia storytelling using their unique perspectives and ideas. This chapter introduces the reader to the key concepts and definitions these scholars have developed and opens a more in-depth look in subsequent chapters.

Henry Jenkins is one of the critical theorists of transmedia storytelling. He introduced the theory of "convergence culture" discussing how media convergence has changed the nature of storytelling and how stories are told and consumed. Jenkins defines *transmedia storytelling* as the process by which integral elements of a narrative are dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. For instance, the *Matrix* franchise has branches of its narratives in films, animated shorts, video games, and online content; each medium can provide unique readings into the story world, thus creating a much richer and more profound experience of the narrative. The core of this argument has to do with Jenkins' emphasis on the participatory nature of modern media consumption. In a convergent culture, audiences are not only passive recipients of stories but also active parts who are involved and contribute in one way or another to the narrative. This is

¹⁹ Anelli, M. (2008). *Harry, A History: The True Story of a Boy Wizard, His Fans, and Life Inside the Harry Potter Phenomenon*. Pocket Books.

²⁰ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

the participatory nature of transmedia storytelling since it compels audiences to search different narrative pieces across diverse platforms. Jenkins's concepts have formed the foundation on which an understanding of how the mechanism of transmedia storytelling could bring about story worlds with a wider expanse and greater immersiveness, engaging the audience dynamically.

Marie-Laure Ryan is one of the grand scholars in narratology, particularly in the digitized and interactive media space. The phrase "narrative as virtual reality" denotes that narrative supposedly immerses the audience in a situation akin to a virtual environment. It is the cornerstone for gaining a basic idea about the immersive potential of transmedia storytelling. In *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001)²¹ Ryan further explores the cognitive and psychological dimensions of immersion, emphasizing the role of interactivity in the process of narration. She analyzed interactive digital storytelling in video games and computerized virtual reality, illuminating how these forms combine to give the audience a sense of presence—something at the heart of transmedia storytelling. *Avatars of Story* (2006)²² sees Ryan specifically tackling the evolution of narrative in various media; she has mainly worked on the shift from non-digital and non-interactive storytelling into the digital and interactive realms. This evolution is essential to understanding transmedia storytelling, whereby the stories advance along multiple media platforms. In this regard, Ryan's article *Transmedial Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling* (2013)²³ expressly speaks about transmedia storytelling. She looks at how narratives can be diffused across various media without losing their coherence and the receiver's attention; it jibes perfectly with Jenkins' theses yet gives another viable argument on the structural and cognitive approaches of transmedia narratives. Ryan's contributions, therefore, go a great way toward understanding how story worlds can be built and experienced across media in ways that deepen the sense of immersion for transmedia narratives.

Christy Dena has provided some crucial insights into the general area of transmedia practice, specifically touching on the issue of narrative coherence and internal consistency. She stresses the importance of integrity of the created story across different media platforms. Dena argued that it is only through all working together that the strengths and limitations of each

²¹ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

²² Ryan, M.-L. (2006). *Avatars of Story*. University of Minnesota Press.

²³ Ryan, M.-L. (2013). *Transmedial Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling*.

medium can create a coherent narrative experience.²⁴ The *Star Wars*²⁵ expanded universe, with the central narrative hub in the original film trilogy, aptly exemplifies Dena's concept of narrative coherence. This can be attributed to the fact that the films, books, comics, and games all feed into the same story world, contributing to the richness in narrative within their respective media and, at the same time, ensuring consistency with the central storyline of the universe.²⁶ However, as Dena also emphasizes, the practicalities of transmedia storytelling lie in handling the issues that come up through coordinating various media forms and ensuring narrative consistency. Her insights into real-world considerations in a transmedia production become a vibrant resource when figuring out how to juggle and not drop all those spinning plates in complex narratives across media platforms.

Another work related to this subject belongs to Jason Mittell, who maintains that the complexity of television stories within the digital era can be scrutinized further. He looks into how modern TV programs have used complex narrative forms, for example, non-linear timelines or multi-threaded plotlines, as a way to intensify interaction with an audience.²⁷ There is a structure in the form of complex narratives in multiple characters' interwoven plotlines in some television series, such as *Lost* (2004-2010)²⁸ or *Breaking Bad*(2008-2010)²⁹ .These television programs also heighten their worlds and stretch narrative stories beyond what is seen on the television screen; online elements are added, and viewers can interact with these different elements of the show's world. Since these theories raise the potentiality of a complex narrative having iterations through many media forms, Mittell insists that the complexity of current TV storytelling is supposed to set a precedent for the level of coherence and multiplicity that transmedia storytelling can achieve. More particularly, and through the observation of the development of TV towards expression in more complex yet engaging narratives, Mittell's

²⁴ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

²⁵ Lucas, G., Kershner, I., Marquand, R., Abrams, J.J., Johnson, R., & Lucasfilm (dir.). 1977-2019. *Star Wars Film Series*. USA: Lucasfilm Ltd.

²⁶ Lucas, G., Kershner, I., Marquand, R., Abrams, J.J., Johnson, R., & Lucasfilm (dir.). 1977-2019. *Star Wars Film Series*. USA: Lucasfilm Ltd.

²⁷ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

²⁸ Abrams, J.J., Lindelof, D., Lieber, J. (creators). 2004-2010. *Lost*. USA: ABC Studios.

²⁹ Gilligan, V. (creator). 2008-2013. *Breaking Bad*. USA: AMC.

work thus highlights the potential for transmedia storytelling to develop equally complex but engaging story worlds.

Jill Walker Rettberg explains how narratives shape shifts and reform between media. She investigates the specific material qualities of several media forms, analyzing how they offer to tell and experience a story. Rettberg's work informs the reader about the opportunities and pitfalls in transmedia storytelling concerning media-specific affordances and constraints.³⁰ *The Walking Dead* (2010-Present) started as a comic book³¹, transitioned into a television show³², became a video game³³, and even featured webisodes³⁴. This is just one of many examples of Rettberg's concept: the notion of a narrative across media. Different media changes entail new ways the story is told but add up to an increased totality of the narrative experience for the reader or audience. Rettberg refers to the idea of "remediation," where new forms of media replay, adopt or redo older forms, thus opening up a conversation between different storytelling methods. This is important in understanding how transmedia storytelling may work by each medium playing to its strengths in order to construct a coherent and engaging story. Her analysis reveals the dynamic features of storytelling among media and how transmedia narratives can create even more enriched, more multifaceted experiences of the narrative form.

1.3 Early Examples of Transmedia Storytelling

One of the oldest forms of transmedia narrative is that of the Bible. Oral traditions, manuscripts, printed books, illustrated texts, theater performances, and recently, films and television series—all these have done much in the many ways through which the stories of the

³⁰ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

³¹ Kirkman, R., & Moore, T. (artists: Adlard, C. & Rathburn, C.). 2003-2019. *The Walking Dead*. USA: Image Comics.

³² Darabont, F. (creator). 2010-present. *The Walking Dead*. USA: AMC.

³³ Telltale Games. 2012-2018. *The Walking Dead*. USA: Telltale Games. The *Walking Dead* Telltale Games series won the 2012 Game of the Year award, recognized for its innovative storytelling and emotional depth. This accolade highlighted the game's significant impact on the adventure game genre and its success in engaging players through narrative choices.

³⁴ AMC. 2011. *The Walking Dead: Torn Apart*. AMC.

Bible were told.³⁵ This has imparted the Bible in several manners to different audiences in various cultures under diverse time frames.³⁶

The adventures of Sherlock Holmes, brought to life by Arthur Conan Doyle³⁷, have gone further in their telling than the book in which they appeared to become quite a staple of transmedia storytelling. Beginning with stage adaptations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and continuing through the many film and television versions, the character of Sherlock Holmes has been kept very much alive in one reimagining after another. This has enabled the creation of a story that becomes more profound in its narrative and introduces new audiences.³⁸

L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*³⁹ is a classic example of transmedia storytelling from the past. The story was initially composed as a children's book and has been performed in many formats, ranging from stage plays to silent movies, the 1939 cinematic classic⁴⁰, and so many more, including animated TV series⁴¹, comic books⁴², and video games⁴³. Every such version has just added to the overall popularity and cultural impact that the Oz story has enjoyed over many a generation now.⁴⁴

These historical examples highlight how transmedia storytelling is deeply seated in our tradition of telling stories and has developed throughout time with the enhancement of technology and cultural changes. They form the basis for understanding contemporary practice in transmedia storytelling and the possibility of creating immersive story experiences.

³⁵ The Bible has been translated into over 3,000 languages, making it one of the most translated texts in history. This extensive translation work has allowed its stories to reach a vast array of cultures and communities.

³⁶ Kalogeras, S. (2020). *Transmedia Storytelling and the New Testament Lesson*. IGI Global.

³⁷ Doyle, A.C. 1892. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. UK: George Newnes.

³⁸ Klinger, L. S. (2005). *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories*. W. W. Norton & Company.

³⁹ Baum, L. Frank. 1900. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Chicago: George M. Hill Company.

⁴⁰ Fleming, V. (dir.). 1939. *The Wizard of Oz*. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

⁴¹ Rankin, A. (dir.). 1961. *The Wizard of Oz*. USA: Videocraft International.

⁴² Baum, L.F., & Marvel Comics. 1975. *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. USA: Marvel Comics.

⁴³ American McGee (dir.). 2013. *The Wizard of Oz*. USA: Spicy Horse Games.

⁴⁴ Hearn, M.P. 2000. *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. USA: W.W. Norton & Company.

Chapter 2: Narrative Coherence

“By shaping narrative,” according to Marie Laure Ryan “media shape nothing less than human experience.”⁴⁵ In essence, narrative coherence is an elementary factor in compelling storytelling, especially within the scope of transmedia stories, where storytelling happens across multiple platforms and media forms. This relates to maintaining a logical, consistent, and unified structure in a story that audiences can follow seamlessly, regardless of the platform they use to engage with it. The word itself is the crucial concept concerning what has already been said about creating an immersive and engaging narrative that resonates deeply with the audience. This coherence of a core story, by which different narrative elements are connected, will allow the creator to develop a sound and full story, building complete and detailed narratives that result in a rich, whole storytelling experience. Narrative coherence adds value to audience engagement and ensures that much exploration goes on around themes, characters, and plotlines in a multilayered manner with complexity and depth.

2.1 Jenkins' "Mothership" Concept

Henry Jenkins proposed the notion of "mothership" in his seminal book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006)⁴⁶. It is a central aspect of transmedia, where stories unfold through different media channels, and each can be seen as a complete form in its own right. As Jenkins puts it, the mothership is "the centralized narrative hub anchoring the entire multichannel transmedia experience." The mothership remains to offer the core story elements; the rest of the media will build on this. Typically, it is the central and initial delivery system for the critical narrative, for example, a feature film, a television series, or a book. Other forms of media, such as video games, webisodes, and comics, support developing and enhancing the storyline, maintaining consistency and integrity of the transmedia world.

⁴⁵ Ryan, M.-L., & Thon, J.-N. (Eds.). (2014). *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

⁴⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

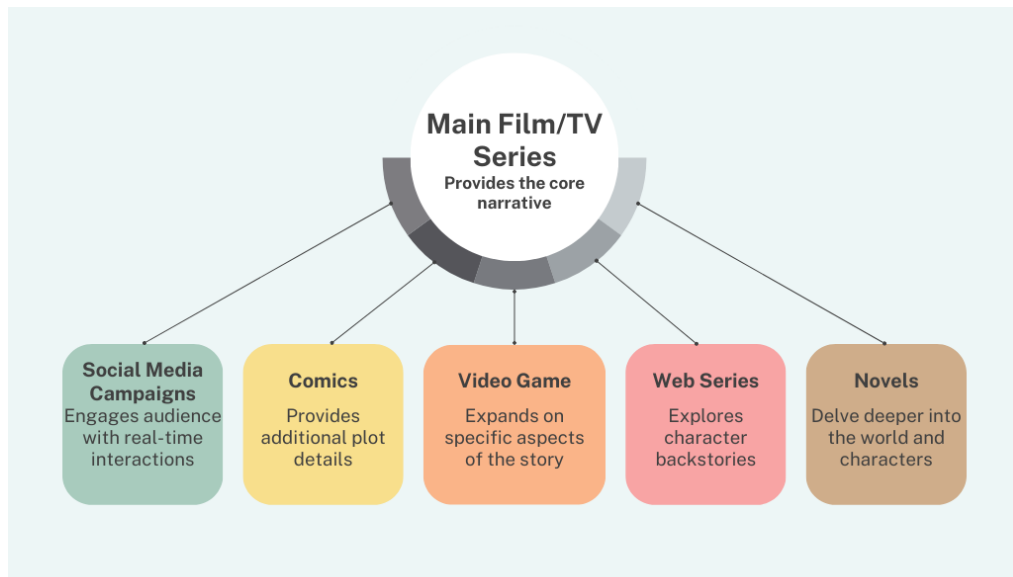


Figure 1: Jenkins' "Mothership" Concept in Transmedia Storytelling

The mothership is the basis of a transmedial narrative. It contains the essential plot points, character development, and thematic elements that other media will reference with significance. For example, in the *Matrix* franchise, the films act as the mothership, providing the primary narrative structure from which other media elements. Other media platforms relay supplementary content that strengthens the core narrative. This may comprise backstories, side plots, and character development that find their initial source in part in the mothership but are essential enablers to a richer understanding of the story. For instance, The *Animatrix*⁴⁷ series of animated shorts provides background stories offering insight into more complexities of the narrative offered in the *Matrix* film series. For Jenkins, one of the most coveted roles is bestowed upon the audience within transmedia storytelling. Mothership will copyright a participative culture wherein audiences become more than mere consumers; they are active seekers who go after these different media forms to piece together the entire story. This participatory aspect is one fundamental tenet in creating an engagingly immersive narrative experience. The mothership is aware of holding on to the coherence and consistency of the narrative throughout these different media platforms. Jenkins points out that although each medium should uniquely add to this story, all of them must fall in line and adhere to the core narrative given by the mothership. This would make it easier for the audience to follow through with the story in any medium they are viewing without disruption or confusion. The mothership concept allows a storyteller to build thorough story worlds with centers that are narrative hubs. Thus, it acts as a tool for enriching the task of a transmedia storyteller. This will increase

⁴⁷ Maeda, M., Watanabe, S., Jones, Y., & Studio 4°C (dirs.). 2003. *The Animatrix*. USA/Japan: Warner Bros.

audience participation while providing an organized system for creating complex narratives on different platforms.

The "motherhood" concept is central to the process of transmedia storytelling. While it gives weight to the center of narrative anchorage, it becomes the base on which all other media elements subsequently rise. Understanding the motherhood concept can help explain how it is called upon to construct cohesive and engaging immersive experiences of transmediality.⁴⁸

Among the primary roles of the motherhood is to provide narrative coherence across different media platforms. The motherhood gives a central storyline to which all medial elements refer, thus ensuring that clarity and consistency are maintained in the general story. For example, in the *Matrix* series, there were some established main storylines in its films and other medial bases with key characters and plot points introduced. The subsequent media forms—the animated shorts, video games, and comics—add context and depth with supplementary material without ever straying from the central story laid down in these foundations by the films. The motherhood concept strengthens audience engagement by providing a central point for storytelling. This is achieved as audiences try to acquire numerous media products in order to gain the whole story. They tend to seek and look out for these many medial products, thus creating an attachment to the narrative.

This is best seen in the *Star Wars* franchise, which uses films as the motherhood and television shows, novels, comics, and video games as ways by which to expand the universe. Here, fans naturally interact with these forms of media to delve further into this created universe, bringing about a participative culture wherein they also contribute their meaning and content. One cannot provide much narrative expansion regarding the motherhood concept. One can create concerned storytelling areas across different media with a required central narrative. This increase may include character backstories, side plots, and other storylines that give alternative perspectives that deepen the central narrative. The motherhood gives these enlargements cohesion and interconnectivity, thereby increasing the complexity and layering of a storytelling experience. For instance, in the case of the *Matrix* franchise, the films are the hub. The general story arc is continued through their linear guidance. At the same time, TV series, web series⁴⁹, and comics circle⁵⁰ filling up the backgrounds and side stories of the

⁴⁸ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

⁴⁹ Wachowski, L., Wachowski, L. (creators). 2020. *The Matrix: Reborn*. USA: Warner Bros.

⁵⁰ Wachowski, L., Wachowski, L., & Darrow, G. 1999. *The Matrix Comics*. USA: Burlyman Entertainment.

characters to add further density to this story world.⁵¹ The Mothership supports different storytelling techniques by allowing the different creators to work with media-specific strengths. Each medium will have specific capabilities informing variables about the story. By anchoring this narrative with a central hub, transmedia storytelling can leverage these, creating a more dynamic and engaging narrative.

For instance, the *Harry Potter* books represent mothership status for laying down primary core narrative material. The movies create a visual rendition of this story, while video games⁵² and the *Pottermore* website allow interactive experiences of moving through trials and tribulations in a new way within this constructed world. This multi-platforming does enhance the storytelling experience as a whole. The mothership concept fosters collaborative creativity between creators and audiences. It provides a core narration inviting contributions from separate creators, adding their angles and talents to the story, leading to a more prosperous, diversified narrative. Moreover, audiences become fellow creators as they engage with and develop the story further by making fan fiction, drawing art pieces, and others. The franchise is based on a matrix of relationships that have developed a long history of shared storytelling between creators and users. In the middle lies a narrative given by films, which provides countless spin-offs, animated shorts, video games, and fan-created content—continuously feeding this living, huge universe called the Matrix universe.

The concept revolves around this: the central narrative hub, often called a "mothership." All other elements are based on and branch off from this source, with their content supplied by the mothership. A clear and cohesive central narrative allows a storyteller to provide continuity and engagement across multiple platforms.

It serves as the central medium through which a main storyline is delivered. It is usually the place where the crucial plot points, definite character arcs, and thematic elements that are going to define the narrative are situated. The central narrative hub works as an anchor, opening up for all other ancillary media to reach the general public—keeping the general story relatively coherent and homogeneous. For example, the Matrix series conveyed this core through the movies that provided the central narrative hub. They set up the core characters and the main plot and flesh out the primary themes of the story. Later media works—the *Animatrix* animated shorts, video games, and comics—cascade from this starting point, fill in context, and add depth without deepening too far from the central narrative laid by the films themselves.

⁵¹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

⁵² Electronic Arts. 2001-2011. *Harry Potter Video Game Series*. USA: Electronic Arts.

The central narrative hub is a founding element at the center that holds all the parts of the transmedia story in place. By doing so, it ensures the cohesion and unity of the narrative within different media platforms. A central narrative hub guides the production of supplementary media by providing a main storyline and extra media elements that detail and enhance this core narrative with alternative views on it. A central story hub will ensure that all supporting content remains consistent with the core story. This is critical to maintaining the integrity of a narrative so that confusion among audiences does not arise.

Anchoring the narrative, the central hub will prompt audiences to seek out a diversity of media that will help them gain a better and more complete understanding of what is taking place. This search leads to deeper engagement and connection with the narrative.

Much of the success in a transmedia story is reliant on having a well-defined central narrative hub. A central narrative core acts as the center from which all other media and, by association, every other point for storytelling uses content to give meaning and unity to the disruptive transmedia narrative. *The Matrix* franchise became the exemplary model representing the central narrative hub concept.

The Matrix Franchise is an instance of how a central 'nexus' location can anchor and unify a complex transmedia storytelling experience; it is just the brainchild of the Wachowskis. Movies themselves, all beginning with *The Matrix* in 1999, feature as the central node of the narrative. They use vital characters and plot lines to create this expansive story, not to mention significant themes. Indeed, this central narrative the films provide is further elaborated by other media to ensure a consistent and engaging story experience.⁵³

At the heart of this franchise lies the trilogy of films: *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)⁵⁴, and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003)⁵⁵. These films set forth the basic plot, development of characters, and main themes for the entire universe of *Matrix*. It lays the groundwork for essential elements: human-machine conflict, Matrix as VR, and the quest of Neo. In its visuals, philosophical underpinnings, and Plot commons, the films raise a base for the entirety of the transmedia narrative.

The Animatrix (2003) is an anthology of nine animation shorts that give some background stories and develop other contexts for the main films. Those shorts give views on the history of the war between humans and machines, individual stories of characters within the Matrix,

⁵³ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

⁵⁴ Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (dirs.). 2003. *The Matrix Reloaded*. USA: Warner Bros.

⁵⁵ Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (dirs.). 2003. *The Matrix Revolutions*. USA: Warner Bros.

or explorations concerning the universe of the Matrix from other perspectives. Due to various storytelling threads that accrue from this main one, *The Animatrix* manages to enhance viewers' knowledge of *The Matrix* universe. This way, enthusiasts can know the backstory and lore more intimately. This enriches the narrative experience without contradicting the film's central core.

Enter the Matrix (2003)⁵⁶ video game is connected directly to the events of *The Matrix Reloaded*. It is based around two new lead characters, Niobe and Ghost, with plotlines that overlap with those of the following film. Players experience missions and stories that expand on the movie's events. *The Matrix Online* (2005)⁵⁷ MMORPG video game represents the action after *The Matrix Revolutions*. Here, one can become a character in the Matrix world, interact with other characters, and engage in storyline updates happening in real-time. This expanded the storyline beyond the film trilogies into a living, evolving, interactive environment.

The Matrix comics fill out several peripheral storylines and character histories that are not fully developed in the films. They give depth to subsidiary characters and offer other angles of view regarding principal events in the Matrix universe. With new narrative threads, the comics give rise to a more comprehensive and layered story.

The film's central narrative hub makes all supplementary media coherent with the core storyline. The coherence of transmedia texts is critical for maintaining a unified, engaging narrative that spans touchpoints. Each of the supplementary elements—be it animated shorts, video games, or comics—expands on the basic narrative established by the films, ensuring the audience is able to explore the story world in great detail.

The Matrix franchise is a clear example of how a salient central narrative hub successfully strengthens engagement and immersion. With a strong and detailed core narrative, the films urge the viewers to search in other media to gain a better comprehension of the story. This, in turn, leads to improved attachment to the narrative as the viewers experience the many aspects of *The Matrix* universe distributed over multiple platforms. This participative trait, like transmedia storytelling, further engages the fans of the Matrix franchise. It lets them find new content and contribute to the ongoing narrative.

The central narrative hub, also known as a "mothership," is most typically sustained centrally in stories of transmedia and in providing other related parts. As the place that houses

⁵⁶ Shiny Entertainment. 2003. *Enter the Matrix*. USA: Atari.

⁵⁷ Monolith Productions. 2005. *The Matrix Online*. USA: Sega/Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

the significant bulk of the narrative, the mothership gives audiences a clear, coherent structure to sustain their whole transmedia life. This central position of a narrative is crucial in a few ways:

A primary narrative hub works as the focal point for the entire story. It introduces the main characters, plot lines, and themes, providing audiences with a solid foundation for the entire narrative. This focal point helps audiences to understand and follow the overarching storyline, even as they engage with supplementary media. For example, in *The Matrix* trilogy, the main storyline provided the backdrop, introduced the primary characters, Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity, and the basic premise of the plot: humans versus machines. This gives an audience enough heft to follow the primary storyline before accessing additional storylines that become accessible using a separate medium.⁵⁸

The existence of a well-defined central hub of narrative encourages the audience to seek out ancillary media to gain a more rounded experience of the story. Audiences are highly motivated to experience ancillary material, such as animated shorts, video games, and comic books, to fill gaps, understand backstories, or achieve different viewpoints. This gives the audience more understanding of the narrative structure and the world under narration. For instance, in the Matrix franchise, audiences who viewed *The Animatrix* or played *Enter the Matrix* gained extra information and context that potentially expanded the depth of what they understood about the movies being made.

A solid central narrative hub is emotionally engaging in delivering a coherent and persuasive storyline that audiences relate to. As audiences follow the main line of storyline engagement, their emotional attachments to characters interest them in story outcomes. Therefore, Emotional engagement is critical for the audiences to be kept across other platforms. *The Matrix* films contains complex characters who articulate and suggest deeper emotional values that make an individual get entrenched in the story.

The central narrative hub mutual coherence primarily comes from maintaining a central, consistent storyline to which all the supplementary media elements refer. It allows the audience to move quickly across different platforms to track the storyline to avoid confusion. Also, it ensures that the several narrative threads fostered in supplementary media align with those prevailing in the main narrative flow so that a tight, compelling story world is realized

⁵⁸ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

successfully. The Matrix franchise can remain consistent by ensuring that all ancillary content, such as animated shorts and video games, adhere to the films' core narrative.

Whereas the exact role of participatory culture in this regard will be discussed later in the thesis, a brief outlook on it as one of the tools for increasing audience engagement with the central narrative hub is needed.

The idea of participatory culture is to make audiences active in the narrative. Instead of being passive receivers of the text, the audience finds themselves in the story through fan fiction and fan art, inevitably involving them in discussions and debates. In this way, active participation creates a more profound association with the narrative and enhances audience engagement. In the context of the Matrix franchise, there has been a lot of fan fiction and art to evaluate various aspects of the story, which adds to the richness of the narrative.

Participatory culture fosters community building among fans in several ways. Online forums, social media groups, and fan conventions give space for fan engagement, expression of meanings or interpretations made by viewers and listeners, and further storyworld elaboration. With this sense of community, the audience becomes more engaged through shared experience and investment in the narrative. One of the primary reasons for its persistence is the vast, lively fan base that participates in *The Matrix* franchise through several media. Fans participate in storytelling and, hence, create additional material related to the text.⁵⁹

Participatory culture allows audiences to add their content and meanings to the narrative, thereby expanding the story. This expansion serves as both an addition to the story and offers new vantage points by which to understand the core of the narrative. Taking the example of the Matrix franchise, fan-made content in terms of theories, analyses, and creative works enhances the depth and complexity of the story, elevating the story experience in its entirety.

More specifically, the heart of a narrative hub is a mothership in engaging an audience in transmedia storytelling. By providing one clear, compelling focal point that invites ancillary media exploration, encourages emotional investment, and ensures narrative coherence, the mothership enriches the perspectival narrative experience. In addition to that, this participatory culture furthers strong audience commitment by suggesting engaging practices, communities, and expanded narratives.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

While the mothership concept is strongly founded on innovative and strategic storytelling, there are also challenges—almost pitfalls to a minimum—without which an understanding of these issues will never be so key. This is needed to work effectively with the central narrative hub in making and weaving cohesive and engaging transmedia stories around it.

The other significant challenge is overspending on the central narrative hub. The ancillary media content may be too dependent on the mothership, so each must be gentle in the narrative. This can reduce an emergent requirement from supplementary content and hugely press down on creative possibilities, decreasing its richness in story worlds. For example, the video games or comics in the Matrix franchise only repeat its films' main plot points without adding new meaningful content. In that case, they may seem redundant and disengage audiences thoroughly.⁶⁰

Another major challenge is narrative consistency across different media. With separate creators and teams working on supplementary content, keeping a tight rein on a narrative's coherence and unity is quite a task. This, risks confusing the audience because inconsistencies in character development, plots, or thematic elements can break the experience. For example, plot inconsistencies between the action in the Matrix films and *Enter the Matrix* or *The Animatrix* can compromise the overall narrative coherence.

Another difficulty is accessibility. When audiences have to go from one media to another to learn something from or make sense of the narrative, there is an access problem. Not all audiences will have the facilities or the inclination to seek out various complementary media, and holes will be brought into their knowledge. In the case of the Matrix franchise, a viewer seeing only the film would need key narrative plot points and character development in the animated shorts or video games that tie into the films themselves.

Transmedia may be a cause of fragmenting the audience. A narrative in the eyes of its diverse audience, therefore, may bring about very varied experiences and some diversified interpretations regarding the story as a whole; this fragmentation would be tough to work around for growing a unified fan community that can dilute the collective experience of the narrative being handed down to people. For instance, fans who only keep up with the Matrix series might have another perspective on the story compared with those who are also into comics and video games.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

⁶¹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

Beyond the pragmatic challenges, scholars and practitioners have critiqued the mothership model of transmedia storytelling several times. These critiques capture the model's theoretical and conceptual limitations.

One common critique is that this model of the mothership enforces a hierarchical structure in transmedia storytelling. With one medium touted as the central place for narration, this model implies that other media are secondary or less important. This embeds a hierarchy with the potential to undermine proper collaboration across true transmediality, where every medium offers something unique yet equal to the narration. Others have, however, opined that a far more decentralized model—where several media act as interdependent narrative hubs—may be the most appropriate for transmedia storytelling due to its collaborative nature.

An emphasis on cohesion with a central narrative hub can throttle back even the creative freedom of supplementary media creators. For instance, writers, artists, and developers of supplementary content may feel that the constraint of working according to the core narrative strangulates innovation and experimentation. This can prevent honest exploration through supplementary media of unique perspectives or storytelling techniques, which can add depth to the overall narrative.⁶²

Another criticism is that the mothership model can diffuse an excessively poorly channeled narrative. When a central storytelling entity gives rise to a vast subsidiary content inflating it, it is likely to become highly fragmented or complicated—hence diluting and challenging to follow for audiences. For example, as Jenkins points out, the vast degree of transmedia expansion given some franchises—like that of *The Matrix*—may be too much information for audiences, which may lessen a central storyline's impact.

Finally, all the additional media produced eventually results in audience fatigue, wherein the audience gets tired by the amount of content they must go through to realize the full potential of a narrative. If the audience considers the supplementary material as optional or highly repetitive, it will bring forth a decline in engagement and interest in the narrative. To minimize this danger, it is essential to ensure that each supplementary media carries relevant and captivating content.⁶³

The mothership concept, therefore, is one of the primordial constituents of what makes for transmedia storytelling and lays a base for both cohesive and engaging narrative construction.

⁶² Long, G. (2007). *Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics, and Production at the Jim Henson Company*. MIT Press.

⁶³ Evans, E. (2008). *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*. Routledge.

Such a central narrative hub is quintessential to the success of projects in transmedia endeavors by drawing on the strengths of each medium and active audience participation. Despite its challenges and criticisms, the mothership model remains one of the solid tools for creating rich and multifaceted story experiences.

2.2 Ryan's Immersive Storyworlds Concept

The work into immersive story worlds by Marie-Laure Ryan has extensively provided insight into what, after all, narrative immersion in transmedia storytelling is. In her work *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*⁶⁴, Ryan explores how narratives engage audiences at both a cognitive and an emotional level to create an immersive experience for audiences. Her theories offer valuable insights into how transmedia projects construct complex, engaging story worlds that captivate audiences across multiple platforms.

Ryan distinguishes cognitive from psychological immersion in a narrative experience. Cognitive immersion deals with intellectual engagement from the audience to the story: following its structure and plot, understanding it, and estimating its thematic depth. On the other hand, psychological immersion concerns affective and experiential participation in a narrative, where audiences literally feel they are part of the story world.

Cognitive immersion is when audiences take up the narrative intellectually, following all the twists and appreciating thematic depth. Transmedia storytelling promotes cognitive immersion by providing entry points into the story by audiences exploring facets of the narrative across media platforms. As Ryan explains, cognitive immersion largely depends on a narrative's ability to offer a coherent and exciting story that arouses intellectual engagement.

For example, considering the complexity of literary works, they require that one get deep into the narrative structure and thematic content, hence making them a cognitively immersive experience. While in a transmedia project, films introduce the primary narrative, supplementary novels and webisodes that explore secondary plot lines and character backstories encourage audiences to intellectually engage with the entire narrative.

Psychological immersion refers to audiences' emotional engagement or involvement with the story, perceiving it as if they were part of it. This element is thus vital in creating a powerful

⁶⁴ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

and memorable narrative experience. Transmedia storytelling can heighten psychological immersion through the richness of story worlds and character development across various media. According to Ryan, psychological immersion is brought about by narrative techniques that provoke strong audience emotion.

For example, there are highly charged scenes in films; in novels, relatable characters and well-rounded personalities are found; and in video games, there are options to act as the character. All this together enhances the onset of an immersed feeling of experiencing the narrative firsthand, like living the events in the story oneself, as it binds with an audience emotionally.

Ryan based the idea of immersive story worlds on rich environments that viewers can further engage with and examine. The regular characteristics that define story worlds are complexity, coherence, and interactivity—the presence of the audience in the narrative.

Creating detailed environments that seem real and lived-in can help audiences suspend disbelief and flow into the narrative. As Ryan identifies, this kind of elaborate world-building is fundamental to narrative immersion: it is through the absolute subordinate detail of a story world that an audience may lose themselves within it.

With transmedia storytelling, this might involve detailed world-building in movies, their further deepening in peripheral novels, and the potential for exploring them through interactivity within video games. For example, the massive size and coherence of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series⁶⁵—the absorbing setting of Middle-earth—greatly helps realize an immersive reading experience.

A coherent narrative is at the core of an immersive story, then. Indeed, all parts of the transmedial narrative must comply with the core story, hence extending audiences' ability to fluently follow narratives from one platform to another. Ryan addresses the burden of consistency in constructing a credible and engaging story world.⁶⁶

For example, the *Harry Potter* series is identically reflected in its books, films, and companion media, so this magical world is vividly realistic. Consistency enables audiences to shift from one medium to another without losing this sense of immersion.

Ryan has considered these events while she examines the role of interactivity and participation in creating an immersive story. Interactive elements, such as video games or Web-

⁶⁵ Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954–1955). *The Lord of the Rings*. George Allen & Unwin.

⁶⁶ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

based formats, enable audiences to engage with the story actively, increasing their immersion. Interactivity may be designed into transmedia projects that allow audiences to influence the video game's outcomes or create platforms where audiences generate content that will continue building a story world.

Ryan argues that interactivity can further increase the effect of immersion by making audiences believe that they are indeed participants in the development of a story. Thus, the extent of interactivity further heightens the audience's sense of involvement in the totality of a story's experience and integral components. For example, the video game series *Assassin's Creed*⁶⁷ plunges a gamer into scenes of history with its historical characters, creating an experience of narrative development that traditional media simply cannot provide.

2.3 Dena's Coherence and Consistency of Narrative

Christy Dena's *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*⁶⁸, was completed in 2009. She puts forward a general argumentation framework for understanding the intricacies involved in transmedia storytelling. Dena insists on the need for narrative coherence and consistency among different media vehicles while arguing that every medium must make unique contributions to telling a unified story and be undoubtedly accessible.

For Dena, there can be narrative coherence, only when all elements of the story across media come to align with the central narrative. In other words, the story makes sense, is energetic in any medium it has been transmediated into, and flows cohesively. This is a fluent experience of narratives, where audiences understand and follow the story without confusion from any medium treated differently. For example, Dena cites the very exemplary case of narrative coherence that happened in *The Matrix* franchise. There, the films act as a hub or core of the narration, while other media, like *The Animatrix* and the video game *Enter the Matrix*, elaborate on it in a manner that never digresses from the plot at all.

⁶⁷ Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Quebec. 2007–2020. *Assassin's Creed* series. USA: Ubisoft. The games are known for their historical settings, allowing players to explore and interact with real historical events and figures, providing a unique form of narrative immersion.

⁶⁸ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

The shorts in *The Animatrix* provide further background stories that enhance the main films, while in the video game, players can continue placing themselves in a setting where they can interactively engage with the Matrix world.

The other key point of Dena's theory is consistency across different media. She considers the idea that every medium is supposed to extend the narrative and provide consistency for the set of rules and logic based on the story world built by it. This would allow the appearance of a peculiar and whole universe—credible—to which an audience shall bind themselves.

Dena uses the example of *The Matrix* franchise to illustrate the point. The consistency in the portrayal of characters, settings, and plot lines across films, animated shorts, and video games ensures the audience has a unified experience.

For instance, the plot devised in the short anime *The Last Flight of Osiris*⁶⁹ is picked up by the video game *Enter the Matrix* and later on referred to in the movie *The Matrix Reloaded*, creating a very consistent narrative strategy across different media platforms in a coherent way.⁷⁰

Supplementary media are essential in elaborating the core story with extra details concerning the plot and characters that may need to be more relevant or spaced in the central medium. All supplementary materials must be organized to support the main narrative, not dominate.

According to Dena, the transmedia elements in *The Matrix*, including *The Animatrix* and the comics, offer an insight into the story world. These media explore backstories and tangential plots that give a greater depth of understanding for the audience viewing the prominent films, enhancing the narrative experience without disrupting the coherence of the core story.

Dena also places a premium on designing accessible transmedia content for a broad audience. While supplementary media enrich the narrative, the core story remains understandable even when users fail to go in for all the additional media and content. Dena acknowledges that *The Matrix* franchise includes a wide range of supplementary text but points out that there is an intended self-sufficiency in the films themselves. To that end, viewers who

⁶⁹ Square Enix. 2003. *The Last Flight of Osiris*. USA: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

⁷⁰ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

do not engage in the supplementary media can also experience and understand the core narrative.

Dena puts forward the following approaches to gaining narrative coherence for a transmedia storytelling entertainment system: A story bible is a document that outlines crucial

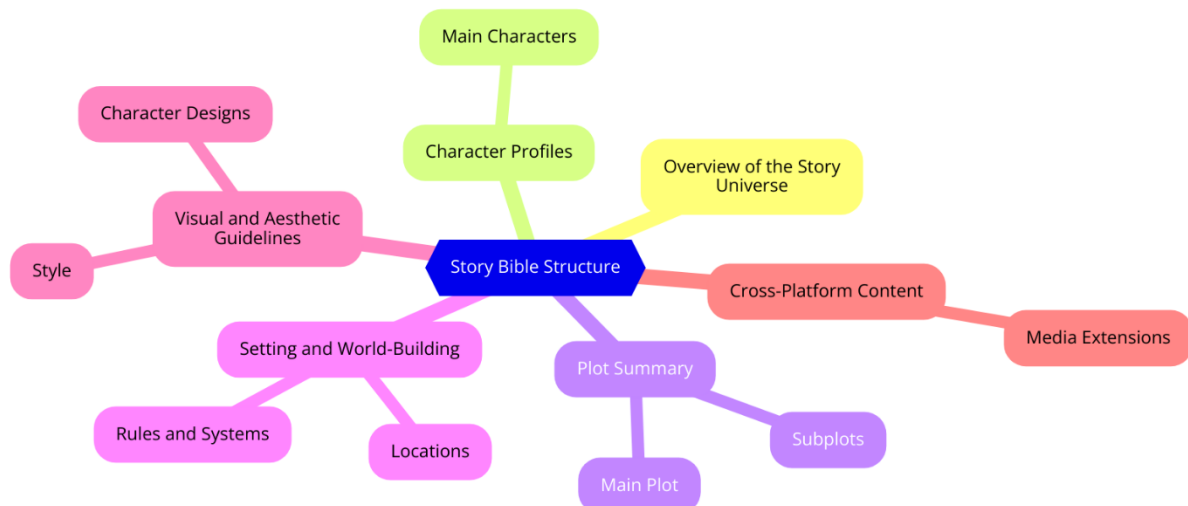


Figure 2: A mind map diagram illustrating a Story Bible

story elements, predominantly plot points, character arcs, thematic elements, and world-building details. In other words, it provides one reference document for the different creators working on any number of renderings within a single transmedia project, therefore ensuring strong continuity with the central story. Dena indicated that the story bible of centralized value helps avoid narrative incoherence, as it enables a unique reference for all creators to contribute to telling the story cohesively at every point in the media.

The narrative coherence is achieved only through effective collaboration and communication among creators. Regular meetings, workshops, or even collaborative tools will ensure that all team members are on the same page and that their contributions align with the overall narrative. Dena adds that consistent communication and collaborative planning in aligning the different media outputs to a central narrative prevent inconsistencies and enhance the general coherence of a transmedia project.⁷¹

In maximizing a narrative experience, the perceived strengths of each medium need to be employed. Different storytelling possibilities exist in fresh media; the creator must exploit these and more to deepen the narrative. Dena argues that the unique qualities of each medium need

⁷¹ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

to be harnessed strategically to enrich a narrative and have different parts of the story told effectively by the medium.

Consistent thematic elements are essential so that thematic elements can be prominent across all media platforms to ensure tight narrative coherence. Norton defines themes explored continuously in all forms of media as creating this singular experience in storytelling—for example, identity, freedom, and resistance. Dena identifies thematic consistency as tending to keep the center fibril of the narrative intact, meaning that a compelling core theme communication reverberates toward all the media constituents to maintain its story world in a coherent order.

The characters must flow across all the media platforms and find a justification within their individual arcs and motivations with the central narrative. This integrated character development will enable the audience to effortlessly move with these characters' transition through various media. According to Dena, well-integrated character development across different media guarantees an audience moving through the characters' progression without contradiction or inconsistency analysis.

Another strategy to further fortify the narrative coherence of a storyworld can be to build narrative arcs across multiple media. These cross-media arcs require audiences to engage with other media forms to follow any complete story. According to Dena, this ability of the cross-media narrative arc to engage users efficiently is due to the fact that such arcs enable fuller experiences of the narrative and deeper immersion into a story world. Christy Dena's contributions to transmedia storytelling theory have been dominated by the issues of narrative coherence and consistency in creating engrossing, submersing story worlds. Trying to align each media component with the core of the narrative and being consistent across all different platforms reassures a target audience that the narration experience will be smooth and enhanced simultaneously.⁷²

2.4 Mittell's Complex TV Narratives

For Jason Mittell, complex television finds representation in sophisticated storytelling methods deviated from traditional episodic forms. This mostly includes a multiple plotline structure, non-linear time tracks, and heavily developed characters across several episodes and

⁷² Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

seasons. As Mittell defines it, "complex TV" shows modern series using advanced means of narration to draw viewers closer.

According to Mittell, complex TV signals a different form of television storytelling than what has traditionally occurred in most programming. While episodic TV is executed through self-contained episodes, complex TV narratives are reliant on serial TV storytelling that rewards long-term engagement with viewers. It allows for more detailed character development and plot intricacies that emerge over time to create a richer viewing experience.

Complex TV, in particular, challenges viewers to actively participate through mechanisms such as nonlinear timelines and multi-threaded plotlines. This type of interactive engagement forms a central characteristic of complex TV that supports its appeal. Simultaneously, the complexity of the narratives allows for deeper explorations of themes and subtle portrayals of characters, thus making complex TV one of the most prominent developments in contemporary television storytelling.

As Mittell puts it, complex narratives are a form of television that incorporates complicated storytelling methods deviating from the conventional episodic structure. In most cases, this has multiple plot lines, a non-linear story chronology, and well-developed characters running through several episodes and seasons. For Mittell, this goes by "complex TV" showing just how contemporary television series' narrative techniques have advanced to engage their audiences more thoroughly.

In transmedia storytelling, complex TV narratives assume a very significant role. Transmedia storytelling is a process in which narrative content is dispersed onto different platforms to discuss and explore story elements across varied media. Complex television lends itself to this type of approach because its plots are already complex and have thick worlds that give much to mine for extension outside the frame of just the television set.

In his work on convergence culture, Henry Jenkins underlines how this concerns complex TV and transmedia storytelling. According to Jenkins, transmedia storytelling further opens up the story world as something that cannot be accomplished with traditional, single-platform storytelling. This interweaves audiences across several medial formats into a more interactive and participative experience.⁷³

Through multi-threaded plotlines and non-linear timelines, contemporary complex TV narratives enhance the transmedia experience by adding more depth to narratives that can be

⁷³ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

explored through supplementary media such as webisodes, games, and social media interactions. These make audiences active participants in the narrative and allow them to engage with the story world in different ways on multiple platforms.

The basic features that distance complex TV narratives from traditional episodic television include the richness and depth of storytelling, providing a more engaging and immersive experience for viewers. Using sophisticated narrative methods, complex TV shows can create intricate story worlds that give viewers space to increasingly participate and invest in them emotionally over a long period. Below, I will consider some significant features that make up complex TV narratives, starting with non-linear time structures.

One of the most specific hallmarks of complex TV, though, is nonlinear timelines. This allows for a much more intricate design and engaging story. Though traditional linear narratives follow events in chronological order, a nonlinear timeline depicts events out of sequence, like a jigsaw puzzle for viewers to piece together.

Jason Mittell discusses the art of non-linear timelines in his book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. He comments that a method of narration/Like this plotting technique, it helps to build suspense and deeper character development by supplying backstories at strategic and often fragmented moments, such as glimpses into the future.⁷⁴ This way, viewers can literally piece it together through the linearity disruptions, hence becoming more involved in the narrative.

Lost television series is known for its non-linear storytelling. Indeed, it frequently uses flashbacks, flashforwards, and flash-sideways⁷⁵ to delve into characters' pasts, present, and parallel universes—a technique providing character detail but meanwhile inviting mystery, suspense, and a sense of anticipation.

Similar to the practice in *Lost*, *Breaking Bad* uses such non-linear episodes more in its opening sequences. It often opens episodes with scenes chronologically cut off from the rest of the storyline but whose context is revealed later. This, therefore, enhances the narrative suspense and has it- thus enhancing interest in the building plot for the viewers.

⁷⁴ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

⁷⁵ A "flash-sideways" in TV shows and movies refers to a narrative device that shows events happening in a different timeline or alternate reality, often running parallel to the main story. Unlike flashbacks (which show the past) or flash-forwards (which show the future), flash-sideways sequences present an alternate version of events that might have occurred under different circumstances.

One of the staples of complex TV storytelling is its use of multi-threaded plot lines, which allow several story arcs to move concurrently with events within a series. The mechanics of this narrative technique do an outstandingly good job at adding depth while generating a richer view that audiences see when following various plots interwoven.

According to Jason Mittell, multi-threaded plotlines have become a major strategy for increasing the level of narrative complexity in contemporary television storytelling. These plotlines increase narrative complexity by opening several vistas and story developments that come out parallel. Continuous attention and remembering of the previous episodes are needed to understand how the plot threads interweave.⁷⁶

In *The Wire* (2002-2008)⁷⁷ TV series, multi-stringed plotlines reveal nearly every nook and corner of Baltimore society, from the police department to dealing with drugs and from education to journalism. With each newer season's edition, a new set of characters pops up in new storylines. All these get integrated under one structure, possibly presenting the hardships that Baltimore City is facing.

Game of Thrones (2011-2019)⁷⁸ runs overtime on multi-threaded plot lines, with many characters and storylines running across different locations within its fantasy world. This makes for an essential vehicle for the series to construct a complicated and engrossing storyline. Viewers are made to remember the political, social, and personal conflicts that advance the plot.

Deep character development that unfolds over long periods is a more traditional hallmark of complex TV. Around the turning point of events, they detail them better and with rich nuances. Jason Mittell identifies this depth according to the characters through their long-term arc as one-way complexities and contradictions that can be revealed in them to render them relatable and compelling.

Walter White's development in *Breaking Bad*, from a high school chemistry teacher to the kingpin of unofficial pharmacopeia, epitomizes deep character development. He has incrementally changed his morality with changing motivations across multiple seasons, proving the character's complexity. The change that Walter undergoes has been evaluated in

⁷⁶ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

⁷⁷ Simon, D. (creator). 2002-2008. *The Wire*. USA: HBO.

⁷⁸ Benioff, D., & Weiss, D. B. (creators). 2011-2019. *Game of Thrones*. USA: HBO.

various scholarly articles that focus on how he can change the conventional concept of heroism or morality.⁷⁹

The Wire includes the heavily developed character of Bubbles because he passes from the addiction to drugs to redefining his life. Thus, this plot is followed emotionally and psychologically by an increase in his growth, which shows that the series focuses on realism and aspects relating to multi-dimensional characters.⁸⁰ Complex TV stories seem to lend themselves quite naturally to transmedia storytelling. The tangled plot and dense story world offer a high return in materials that can be created and elaborated on in different media platforms to enrich the narrative experience. Jason Mittell discusses how, in the deepest regions of television narratives, complex ways of telling stories in one medium add up to other potential media. This further creates the kind of receiving experience that could be more immersive and participatory for audiences in their consumption.

2.5 Rettberg's Digital Media and Narrative Coherence

Digital media has changed narrative construction and consumption drastically. Newer and much more dynamic forms of storytelling find a place through blogging tools, social media, and interactive, participative platforms. Jill Walker Rettberg has contributed much to exploring how digital narratives like these stay coherent despite their fragmented nature and hypermediation.

In her *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology*⁸¹, Rettberg further describes how digital media influences self-representation and the coherence of narratives. She argues that, typically, digital narratives are fluid because they are always in a state of flux, as they are constantly being updated and reshaped at any given moment by creators and audience. This quite diffuses traditional notions of narrative coherence based on linearity and fixed structures.

Marie-Laure Ryan comes with *Avatars of Story*⁸² to add to the discussion, in which she discusses some scenarios of digital narrative. Ryan talks about the fact that digital narratives' interactivity and hypermedium conditions require new strategies to win back coherence. She

⁷⁹ Sepinwall, A. (2012). *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers, and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever*. Touchstone.

⁸⁰ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

⁸¹ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸² Ryan, M. L. (2006). *Avatars of Story*. University of Minnesota Press.

says that thematic or experiential coherence, which corresponds neither to strictly chronological coherence, is characteristic of many digital narratives and allows for a highly immersive and participative storytelling experience. Rettberg's work on blogging further elaborates on how digital media supports episodic narratives. As she explains in *Blogging*, blogs build ordered narratives over time through their serialized and often fragmented posts. This is an episodic nature, reminiscent of much earlier serialized storytelling, but the unique enhancement of an interactive feedback loop artistic project between bloggers and audiences that arises from the contemporary Internet environment playoffs it well.⁸³

Hypermediated structures are a significant feature of digital media narratives, emphasizing the multiplicity of media forms and their interconnections. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, a concept is strongly known as a screen divided into separate areas or windows carrying different kinds of data. Ryan further comments that it is commonly used in web-based interactive narratives, a combination of different multimedia interactive elements is applied during storytelling. According to Ryan, web-based narrative structures are typically implemented through a hypermediated structure, where the story worlds emanate dynamically. As Ryan explains, many of these narratives work like radiating structures in which several narrative elements are connected through a central hub, through which readers explore different paths in the story and can still have that sense of cohesion. This approach makes it very different from traditional linear narratives and more interactive.

For example, Olia Lialina's *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War*⁸⁴ applies HTML frames to show several fragmented storylines at one time, therefore allowing the reader to follow different threads of a narrative and piece together plots as a whole. Another example might be the work of M.D. Coverley's *Califia*⁸⁵ is a multimedia hypertext that combines text with images and icons to create a visually rich narrative experience. The story is navigated through a simple directional design that allows readers to follow different characters' trails and explore an extensive archive of documents, maps, and photos.

⁸³ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸⁴ Oleg Kosyrev. 2004. *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War*. Olia Lialina calls the work a *netfilm*, because of its similarity with cinematic narrative. The grainy black-and-white images and intertitles refer to early silent movies.

⁸⁵ Coverley, M. D. 2009. *Califia*.

Web-based narratives are hypermediated in structure and collocate with the classic definition of coherent narration. If well-designed, however, these narratives will be able to provide a continuous experience since all multimedia elements interweave, and readers will have an opportunity to go through different story paths. This kind of structure can sustain entirely modular and agile ways of telling stories where the reader can put more emphasis on some narrative aspects without losing the trace of the more excellent picture for a story in question.⁸⁶ For Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), remediation theory is defined as what new digital media require: refashioning the older medial forms to a mixed narrative structure that appropriates multiple media strengths. They demonstrate how this hypermediacy—that is, visibility of different media—makes the narrative experience stronger simply by placing the act of mediation center-stage as part of the storytelling process.⁸⁷

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have changed how one constructs and shares a narrative. In these platforms, users can represent their lives through posts, images, or videos in terms of continuing stories. In *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology*, Jill Walker Rettberg writes that current social media narratives are more accumulative than definite, and each post must be seen as contributing towards an emerging story.⁸⁸ In the case of Facebook, for example, by making a timeline of life events, something that amounts to a coherent story of experience is produced. This is constructed through individual posting, contributing to an extensive user life narrative. Similarly, Instagram users create profiles with photos and videos taken at different times, which all tell their journeys. Formally, these narratives of cohesions rely heavily on the continuous and interactive nature of the social media field, where audience feedback and participation are essential for the story.

The result of several fragmented social media posts and context collapse—which involves diverse audiences interpreting the posts—can make it challenging to maintain narrative coherence. At the same time, though, social media creates unique spaces for participative storytelling wherein users and their followers create narratives through comments, likes, and shares. Tools for interactive storytelling, such as Twine and Storyspace, make possible new ways to engage audiences by creating nonlinear and strongly participatory narratives. Indeed, a storyteller could design vibrant designs about story structure that are navigable in many ways

⁸⁶ Ryan, M.-L. (2006). *Avatars of Story*. University of Minnesota Press.

⁸⁷ Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press.

⁸⁸ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

by audience members, which allows for increased narrative coherence through interactivity and user choice. In *Avatars of Story*, Marie-Laure Ryan discusses the role of interactivity in digital narratives. She shows how Storyspace disposes these places: one can travel through them to discover other narrative routes and various outcomes.⁸⁹ For example, the interactive fiction game *Façade*⁹⁰ enables players to steer the story by interacting with the characters, shaping thus a different experience every time through the play in the narrative.

One of the core challenges of interactive storytelling platforms is the balance between user freedom and the coherence of a narrative. Excessive freedom can lead to absurd stories or unsatisfying narratives, while poor liberty may disappoint the notion of agency endowed to the user. Effective design strategies involve flexible narrative frames that organize all user choices in such a way as to perform a coherent whole story.

In their very essence, blogs are episodic. This signifies the below-mentioned principal concept: each posting forms a self-contained unit in an overall narrative. According to Jill Walker Rettberg in her book *Blogging*, Blogs tend to be episodic, meaning that they tell stories in parts, and each entry can stand alone, but together they form a larger, cohesive story.⁹¹ This structure is similar to more traditional episodic narratives found in serialized novels and television dramas, whereby the narrative is paced out over time, with readers kept on their toes by regular updates. Rettberg likens blogs to that sort of serialized format familiar in the novels of Charles Dickens, often published weekly or monthly.

Moreover, this episodic nature makes blogs especially suitable to these atomistic and accelerated ways internet users consume—usually scanning and skimming rather than reading line by line.

This episodic form of blogs accommodates continuous narrative development and flexibility, where bloggers are free to react to real-time events or audience feedback. This interactivity allows for stronger narrativity through the ability to evolve the story organically, adding new constituents and even reader contributions to the text over time. This form of storytelling is dynamic, interactive, and multidimensional; it represents digital media's constant, interactive nature.

Jill Walker Rettberg, in her works, resonates that digital narratives reshape and increase the potential of transmedia storytelling. Digital narratives provide a flexible and interactive

⁸⁹ Ryan, M.-L. (2006). *Avatars of Story*. University of Minnesota Press.

⁹⁰ Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern. 2005. *Façade*.

⁹¹ Rettberg, J. W. (2008). *Blogging*. Polity Press.

medium through which stories can be unfolded on several platforms, encouraging better audience engagement and participation. Rettberg mentions that digital media, in the form of blogs and social media, guarantees narrative coherence unique to the continuous and interactive media of the digital format.⁹²

Much of the digital narrative holds the attribute of interactivity to a high degree, that is, allowing audiences to react to the story directly; in some primary cases, it is just commenting on a blog post or engaging in story-driven social media campaigns. She talks about how this interactivity allows users to create their narrative, which is one of the central tenets of transmedia storytelling.

Digital media supports non-linear storytelling, where narratives do not follow a strict chronological order. This flexibility allows creators to present different story fragments that users can explore at their own pace, enhancing the depth and complexity of the narrative. Rettberg highlights how this non-linear approach can be effectively used in transmedia projects to provide a more immersive experience.

Blogs have become robust tools in transmedia storytelling, allowing for linear or serialized storytelling that is updateable and addable in real time. According to Rettberg, blogs contribute to the large narrative universe of a transmedia project through their episodic nature. For example, a character's blog is able to offer information and extra context details that flesh out the central telling.⁹³ Real-time interaction provided by such social media platforms lies at the very core of transmediality. Rettberg shows how places like Twitter and Instagram can expand a story in ways in which characters can interact directly with their fans, sharing story elements that complement the core narrative.

Projects such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* use social media in a manner where multilayered narrative experiences are created, with video blogs forming the main story and further content provided through the use of social media.

The integration of digital narratives in transmedia storytelling had its share of challenges in adding to opportunities. One of the biggest challenges is narrative coherence across different platforms and media. However, the opportunities for audience engagement and the potential for rich, immersive story worlds are enormous. Rettberg suggests that by leveraging the unique

⁹² Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹³ Rettberg, J. W. (2008). *Blogging*. Polity Press.

affordances of digital media, creators can develop innovative storytelling strategies that enhance the overall transmedia experience.⁹⁴

Narrative coherence is a bedrock storytelling feature, especially across media forms and within transmedia narratives. Indeed, these insights are demonstrated by contributions from the leading theorists in the field, Henry Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, Christy Dena, Jason Mittell, and Jill Walker Rettberg, across structurally complex narratives.

The Jenkins "Mothership" Concept means that a core story world is needed out of which many other stories or facets can radiate to keep an audience cohesive and immersed in an experience. Ryan's Concept of Immersive Storyworlds states that detailed worlds filled with consistencies invite deep engagement in exploration. Dena's Narrative Coherence and Consistency concept looks at the fine line between unity and flexibility across different media platforms. Mittell's Complex TV Narratives reveals the complexities of character development, non-linear time structures, and multi-threaded plotlines in extraordinarily rich and engaging narrative experiences. Last but not least is Rettberg's Digital Media and Narrative Coherence, a profound elaboration regarding how the digital medium and technologies increase the participatory engagement and interactivity of stories and ensure their coherence within a fragmenting and hypermediated site.

The diversity of these perspectives applied simultaneously delivers a complete vision of narrative coherence in transmedia storytelling and indicates its significant role in engaging audiences. Realizing the unique power of different media forms and offering a variance in the narrative structure enables creators to ensure engaging transmedia stories that enchant and resonate with audiences on different platforms.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Key Theorists on Narrative Coherence in Transmedia Storytelling

Theorist	Key Concept	Examples	Implications
Jenkins	Mothership Concept	The Matrix	Ensures coherence through central hub

⁹⁴ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs, and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ryan	Immersive Storyworlds	Lord of the Rings	Engages audience with detailed worlds
Dena	Coherence and Consistency	The Matrix	Balances narrative unity and flexibility
Mittell	Complex TV Narratives	Breaking Bad, The Wire	Deep character development, multi-threaded plots
Rettberg	Digital Media Coherence	Blogs, social media	Interactive and participatory narratives

Chapter 3: Audience Engagement

If old consumers were assumed to be passive, then new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, then new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, then new consumers are now noisy and public.⁹⁵

In transmedia storytelling, this participative potential of the audience and participatory culture are crucial for fully immersive and interactive narrative experiences. Other than passively received message-based methods of telling stories, transmedial storytelling is an invitation to participate as audiences become themselves the co-creators of their world of narratives. It provides more profound analyses of multiple dimensions of audience engagement with participatory culture, drawing mainly on the theoretical contributions of Henry Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, Christy Dena, Jason Mittell, and Jill Walker Rettberg. For Henry Jenkins, participatory culture changes the notion of media consumption from passive to active, emphasizing and highlighting how audiences engage with a narrative and add to it. Jenkins brings up fan-based communities and user-generated content as ways through which audiences further flesh out a story world and create a sense of ownership that sets up a more profound emotional investment. That participatory nature is further explored by Marie-Laure Ryan, who discusses cognitive and psychological immersion through the ways in which audiences mentally and emotionally engage with a transmedia narrative.⁹⁶

Christy Dena's work on audience engagement and interactive experiences is most fitting to provide practical insights into designing narratives that encourage an audience to become active. According to Dena, what is fundamental is the creation of coherent and consistent story worlds full of exploration and interactivity across a range of media.⁹⁷ Similarly, Jason Mittell unpacks audience participation in intricate TV narratives, speaking to the clever devices of

⁹⁵ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

⁹⁶ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁹⁷ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

storytelling that engage audiences and make them actors: participants in a narrative unfolding before their eyes.⁹⁸

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, narrative coherence is a precondition for gaining and maintaining the interest of an audience. If creators provide parts of a transmedia narrative to be fitted into a larger whole, it establishes a tighter relationship with the audience. Coherence allows for fluent passage from one medium to another, enhancing the storytelling experience. For instance, Dena's attention to coherence and narrative consistency helps the audience remain engaged and effortlessly follow the story irrespective of its medium.

Jill Walker Rettberg researches remediation and user interaction within digital media, furthering how audiences have dynamic relationships with transmedia narratives. Her work focuses on how digital platforms catalyze interactive storytelling and user engagement, with case studies of successful transmedia projects that effectively leveraged audience participation.

The section ahead looks toward integrating those theoretical perspectives, enabling better comprehension of how audience engagement and participatory culture enhance the transmedia story experience. We will look into some central concepts and practical examples to explore strategies and benefits for fostering active audience participation, together with challenges and considerations when creating participatory narratives.

3.1 Jenkins' Participatory Culture

Henry Jenkins's theory of participatory culture shifts audiences' role in interacting with media from mere receivers to active ones that further create a narrative world. Unlike typical media use, deep engagement and collaboration among the audience are created in a participatory culture, leading to ownership and deeper emotional investment in the narrative. It has relatively low obstacle levels to artistic expression and civic engagement. Strong support exists for creating and sharing one's creations. Finally, there is an informal mentorship component in which knowledgeable participants experienced with mentors pass knowledge down to novices.⁹⁹ In these fan communities—caucus around shared interests and the creation of fan fiction, fan art, or videos—there is an enriching of the narrative universe. In other words,

⁹⁸ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

⁹⁹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

this is further realized with UGC¹⁰⁰ on platforms such as YouTube and Tumblr, allowing fans to publish their works, reach a global audience, and contribute to a more diversified, dynamic story world. This introduction lays the scene for a deeper examination of participatory culture and audience involvement in how they help transmedia storytelling and, most importantly, how these intersecting concepts resonate within narrative development.

Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture is grounded within a historical context that reflects the changing relationship between media and its audiences. At the very beginning of the mass media age, traditional ways of media consumption were passive. However, over the decades, there has been a cultural and technological shift in moving audiences from simply passive consumers to active participants in creating and disseminating media content.

By the early twentieth century, radio and film were already altering the nature of the audience's experience with the media. Although far more interactive than print, these new forms were still decidedly one-way, with limited interaction or feedback opportunities.¹⁰¹

The real turn in events came with the advent of television in the mid-20th century. TV series created dedicated fan bases that would form some of the very first fan clubs and debate favorite shows, thus setting out the stage for a much more interactive media culture.¹⁰²

The actual change came with digital media and the internet in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which provided a platform for unparalleled levels of interactivity and participation by fans while generating content and sharing it, thus on roots changing the approach to media.

In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins explains how digital technologies drive media convergence, enabling new forms of participatory culture to emerge that are characterized by low threshold models of artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, informal mentorship, and a belief that contributions matter.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ User-Generated Content, While the exact moment when the term "user-generated content" was first used is difficult to pinpoint, it gained prominence in the early 2000s. The concept was closely associated with the growth of Web 2.0, a term that describes the shift to more interactive and user-driven web applications.

¹⁰¹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁰² The first documented fan club was for the television show *Star Trek* in the 1960s, which set the stage for modern fan culture.

¹⁰³ Early online communities, such as bulletin board systems (BBS) in the 1980s, were precursors to modern social media platforms and played a crucial role in the development of digital participatory culture.

Jenkins writes about fan fiction communities in which fans write and distribute stories based on pre-existing media properties that expand the narrative universe in collaborative and supportive ways.¹⁰⁴

YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr just scaled up this participatory culture into more immediate and broadly diffused opportunities for media producers and consumers to interact directly, facilitating real-time discussion, crowd-sourced projects, and the influencing of media franchises.

Participatory culture, which is integral to transmedia storytelling, enhances audience engagement, expands the narrative universe, and fosters a deeper connection between the story and its audience.

Participation culture turns audiences from being simple consumers into performers because the forms of UGC include fan fiction, fan art, and interactive discussions that allow one to be entertained by the world of narratives. Through collaborative story-making, fans create new storylines, characters, and settings that offer dimension to the original content, becoming deeply enriching. Through online forums, social media sites, and fan conventions, these fan fiction readers could generate communities around the narrative, where they can connect, share what they create, and discuss their interpretations. Participatory culture supports continuous feedback between creators and audiences. In doing so, it allows for future narrative developments to keep the story relevant and engaging.

According to Henry Jenkins, participatory culture is engaging oneself actively in media creation and sharing. Several key features typify it, including low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement. Participatory culture offers tools, often free, for creative expression and civic participation alike. In addition, creating and sharing one's works through locales like YouTube and Instagram gives an individual a vibrant support system for their works, thus giving the content creators very active support. Another critical element is informal mentorship, in which expert users guide novices to help them develop the requisite skills and integrate into the community. People also tend to believe in their contribution and its value, an element that calls for active engagement and creativity. Finally, participatory culture supports social connections through everyday creative activities, increasing a sense of community.¹⁰⁵

There are several ways the participatory culture markedly departs from traditional media consumption. Unlike the traditional media characterized by passivity, the participatory culture

¹⁰⁴ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁰⁵ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

is an active culture whereby audiences are enticed to interact directly with the content.¹⁰⁶ In line with that, the centralized major entities controlling traditional media, as opposed to the decentralized ways attached to the participatory culture, are more democratic in the distribution of content creation and distribution.¹⁰⁷ Participatory culture thrives on the pillars of collaboration and collective intelligence: it provides a supportive space or environment in which pooled knowledge and group efforts enhance creative output. Participatory culture is further characterized by high degrees of interactivity, with real-time feedback loops among creators and audiences who help modify and adapt the content.¹⁰⁸

Many examples across media bring participatory culture alive. From fan fiction to fan art, created within communities existing on platforms like Wattpad and DeviantArt—a place for sharing stories and artworks that are inspired by expressions from already released media franchises—through crowdsourcing projects, Participatory Culture is duly illustrated. Crowdsourcing websites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo allow creators to fund their projects by collecting contributions from many supporters.¹⁰⁹ Campaigns, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, have ridden on this capability of the media to mobilize people for a cause-and-effect social change. Participative culture is also well manifested in collaborative knowledge platforms like Wikipedia, wherein people voluntarily create and edit articles, thus contributing to a large bank of information.¹¹⁰ In a nutshell, it is a participatory culture—an inclusive, interactive, and collaborative culture whereby any person can create and distribute media content; hence, it is way different from the old ways of consuming media.

Fan communities are perhaps one of the most basic building blocks of participatory culture, and they play a meaningful role in changing passively consumed media into active engagement and creation. These communities—consisting of passionate people who have an interest in a particular media property, such as a TV series, movie, book series, or video game—are constructed to provide spaces for fans to express their passion for the work, share elements

¹⁰⁶ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

¹⁰⁷ Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Press.

¹⁰⁸ Karpf, D. (2016). *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁹ Brabham, D. C. (2013). *Crowdsourcing*. MIT Press.

¹¹⁰ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

they enjoy the most from it, and connect with people having the same tastes, hence enriching that experience on the whole.¹¹¹

These are at the forefront of many innovative contributions to fan communities, including creating user-generated content titles such as fan fiction, fan art, videos, and cosplay. This becomes how elaboration and expansion in a story's universe occur. According to Jenkins, fan fiction is a freedom that allows fans to write stories out of the original media in alternative scenarios featuring backstories and new adventures that carry on the narrative and extend it in new directions. Fan art visualizes the text's dimensions by capturing favorite characters, scenes, and moments from that particular series. Cosplay brings the narrative to life physically and interdependently in a real sense by having fans dress up as characters from their favorite media. Video sharing on sites like YouTube gives fans a voice, with videos offering insight and analytical perspectives into the narrative. Besides, online forums and social media allow various channels for discussion, debate, and collaboration, ensuring that the story never stops changing.

Fan communities see a host of activities in order to grow and expand on their favorite stories. For example, *Harry Potter* fandom is characterized by dense fan fiction, intricate fan art, and elaborate cosplay events, all working toward the expansion of the narrative universe. The *Star Wars* community produces great fan films, extensive fan fiction, and complex cosplay costumes. This continues to grow the *Star Wars* universe. On the other hand, *Doctor Who* (1963-Present)¹¹² has very talented fans writing fan fiction¹¹³, drawing fan art, or simply organizing fan conventions to give breadth and depth to the experience of a story.

UGC impacts story development, elongating and deepening the addition to a story world. It also provides fans with the ability to generate new heroes and alternative storylines—or even the backstories that all add depth and complexity to a narrative—apart from the canonical storylines that original creators perhaps may not have taken into account.¹¹⁴ UGC allows the expansion of a narrative whenever fans add fresh plots, locations, and characters, thereby keeping alive audience interest in the constantly changing narrative. It also brings different perspectives, thus making the story more inclusive and representative of the different points of view. Platforms that support UGC promote interactive engagement and dialogue between the

¹¹¹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹¹² BBC. 1963–present. *Doctor Who*. UK: BBC.

¹¹³ FanFiction.net. n.d. “*Star Wars* Fanfiction.” Accessed August 5, 2024.

¹¹⁴ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

makers and the audiences, improving content with feedback and collaboration. As UGC is iterated, the continuous evolution of the narratives according to audience feedback can keep the story relevant and engaging.

Significant UGC in transmedia projects has contributed significantly to fleshing out and adding detail to the narratives. In the *Star Wars* fandom, fan films such as *Star Wars: Revelations*¹¹⁵ span various themes around the Star Wars universe that demonstrate high production values and polished storyboarding. Equally, Harry Potter fan fiction on websites like FanFiction.net shows how UGC could play a role in expanding the narrative scope. Vast databases of stories open up new facets of the *Harry Potter* world, which were otherwise never written by J.K. Rowling¹¹⁶. Another excellent example is the *Minecraft*¹¹⁷ modding community, where modifications extend and flesh out the game to eventually change the experience for the player and give him a more enriched narrative. YouTube channels such as *How It Should Have Ended*¹¹⁸ present comic re-imaginings of mass media, thereby expanding greater narrative discourse with parodies and substitute endings.

Henry Jenkins deems participatory culture the epicenter of comprehending transmedia storytelling, which he perceived to expound on the growth of story worlds rather than story dissemination. The most radical change that Jenkins sees coming from participatory culture is that stories are getting written in terms of how a story is told and the ways a story spreads through various media channels. Participatory culture as a society of active engagement urges audiences to interact, contribute, and help in narrative formation.¹¹⁹ Using collective intelligence to fortify story worlds includes transmedia navigation, where a story is told across proliferating media outlets that are coherent and expansive. With the help of digital technologies, it is put into action—that is, being a connoisseur participant in any of the given transmedia processes—an echoing, multi-representative pathway moving from the main media

¹¹⁵ *Star Wars: Revelations*. 2005. [Fan Film].

¹¹⁶ WINTER IS COMING. 2021. *8 Famous Authors and What They Think About Fanfiction*. The spokesman for her literary agency at the time, Christopher Little, said:

"JK Rowling's reaction is that she is very flattered by the fact there is such great interest in her Harry Potter series and that people take the time to write their own stories. Her concern would be to make sure that it remains a non-commercial activity to ensure fans are not exploited and it is not being published in the strict sense of traditional print publishing."

¹¹⁷ MOJANG STUDIOS. 2011. *Minecraft*.

¹¹⁸ How It Should Have Ended. 2007. *How It Should Have Ended*. [YouTube Channel].

¹¹⁹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

text to other forms of parody, pastiche, and remix.¹²⁰ Activities like theorizing, backstory creation, and even drawing maps of imaginary universes by fans contribute to a deep and dynamic narrative environment. Moreover, even then, power from this fan engagement directly affects the media's creators, usually to the point of incorporating fan comments and theories into the story.¹²¹ From the *Star Wars* saga to video games like *Minecraft*, plenty of examples across various media show how the story world can get richer and more varied thanks to participatory culture.¹²²

The significant challenges that impede the full potential of a participatory culture include its transformative and democratizing nature. A primary challenge to this new participation is the digital divide, which limits the diversity and inclusiveness of content created by excluding those who do not have access to digital technology. Another challenge is that too much information may be generated through user-generated content, which can be immense and overwhelming to the user, leading to the fragmentation of attention and thus not enabling coherent discourse to develop. Lack of gatekeepers and quality controls—the traditional functions—may end up humiliated and with low-quality content.¹²³

The other threat to participatory culture would be the interests of commerce and corporate control. For instance, platforms like YouTube or Facebook will rig algorithms to favor commercial content when profit interests are at stake over the grassroots aspects of participatory culture.¹²⁴

Critics, however, believe that participatory culture negatively impacts narrative coherence. Since it is decentered and collaboratively produced—meaning several creators are creating the same story world without coordination—it includes inconsistencies and contradictions.¹²⁵

Fan-driven expansions may occasionally take a divergent route from what the creators had in mind. These fragmented narratives in multiple directions confuse audiences and will never

¹²⁰ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

¹²¹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹²² Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

¹²³ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

¹²⁴ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹²⁵ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

carry any sort of real punch for the original narrative. The amateur nature of many user-generated content means that not all contributions are high quality and frequently detract from overall narratives, defying easy ways for audiences to distinguish a main storyline from subplots generated by fans.

Several strategies might be employed to address these challenges and criticisms. In the first place, enhancing digital literacy through digital literacy education would go a long way in shrinking the digital divide, allowing more participation within digital culture. It can especially guide users through critically evaluating information and navigating large content.

While quality can be created at higher standards with the help of quality controls on platforms through community moderation, automated filters, and clearer guideline setting during content creation¹²⁶, preservation of the collaboration aspect between original creators and fans in terms of narrative coherence could be guaranteed by having creators provide frameworks or guidelines for fan contribution.¹²⁷ It is crucial to balance the interests of commerce and the community by providing transparent algorithms, fair revenue-sharing models, and focusing on user-generated content. Amplification of voices from all walks of life could ensure richness and inclusiveness. The platforms can encourage underrepresented populations' contributions and offer tools for full participation.¹²⁸ With these challenges and improvements in mind, participatory culture can flourish to expand story worlds while protecting the narrative coherence and quality content.

In conclusion, participatory culture significantly impacts transmedia storytelling; audiences are redefined from mere consumers to active co-creators. Whereas some participatory culture features—active engagement, collective intelligence, and transmedia navigation—are determinants for the dynamic story worlds that are flexible, there are also specific challenges in these areas: digital divides, information overloads, and possible incoherence of narratives. These can be resolved by increasing knowledge about digital literacy, setting up quality control mechanisms, and developing collaboration between creators and fans. The place of participatory culture in expanding story worlds underlines its power to forge richer, more

¹²⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹²⁷ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

¹²⁸ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

significant, inclusive, and interactive narratives. Increased development of digital technologies and platforms will undoubtedly further integrate participatory practice within media production processes, giving birth to even newer forms of collaborative storytelling.

3.2 Marie-Laure Ryan's Audience Engagement & Story Worlds

Marie-Laure Ryan is a prominent figure in narrative and media studies. Her work on narrative theory and transmedia storytelling is preceded by many others. She has been at the forefront of understanding how stories work across media.

This cognitive and psychological absorption leads Ryan to create a basis for comprehending how a given narrative can be involving and immersive. For her, the attention is shifted to mental processes leading to immersion in a story. It points out the importance of the narrative technique of perceiving presence and implication. As Ryan states, immersion is not just a physical or visual experience; it is a mental and emotional one in which one becomes mentally and emotionally involved in the narrative world.¹²⁹

Moreover, Ryan has written at length about how interactivity can increase audience engagement. She argues that making interaction lodged within storytelling will dramatically increase the level of involvement among an audience that can impact the unfolding of a narrative or do so in a non-linear way. This interactivity may range from simple narrative choices to complexly branching narratives dependent on audience choice.¹³⁰

In her work, theories developed by Ryan on the narrative as virtual reality and, consequently, her concept of transmedial narratology are the most influential. According to her, through central narration, vividly surrounding environments could be constructed, akin to a virtual reality wherein the audience would strongly feel "inside" the story world. In this respect, the feeling of being inside the story is created by detailed world-building and consistent elements of the narrative that make the audience suspend disbelief and fully engage with the story.

Marie-Laure Ryan's work significantly contributes to transmediality, a narrative that stretches across several media levels, each having its particular contribution to the narrative. Her ideas on cognitive and psychological immersion are crucial in pinpointing the mechanics by which audiences can be engaged across several formats. It is in applying the theories put

¹²⁹ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹³⁰ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

forth by Ryan that the creators will be better placed to come up with transmedia narratives that remain both coherent and engaging while dispersed over different platforms. One of the core ideas about transmedia storytelling was that it would offer the audience different entry points and a number of different experiences. Here, Ryan's idea of a narrative as virtual reality relates very well to this desire in that it helps underline how transcendently important creating a vivid and coherent story world for exploration through these media really is. The approach will ensure that each platform has something different to give, not only to the overarching narrative but also in letting out an enhanced audience experience.¹³¹

Ryan's focus on interactivity also fits very well with the goals of transmedia storytelling. By making a story interactive, a transmedia narrative can allow audiences to engage with the story meaningfully, either by making decisions, contributing material, or interacting with other aficionados. This interactivity can further cement the audience's bond to the story or create a sense of community among participants.¹³²

Fundamentally, cognitive and psychological immersion is indispensable for comprehensive understanding when people are deeply engaged with narrated works. Marie-Laure Ryan defines *cognitive immersion* as a 'mental entering into a story'—a concentration that turns all recipient faculties onto the narrated world, frequently occurring at the expense of full appreciation of the real world.¹³³ Immersion into a great story at a very high level is of utmost importance for creating highly engrossing and attention-retaining narratives for an audience.

On the other hand, psychological immersion involves an emotional engagement with the story and its characters. Emotional sensitivity to their emotional investment in the story is at an all-time high, along with the characters' excitement, fears, and sufferings as if they were real. In other words, the emotional engagement will deepen their association with the narrative to create a more memorable and impactful experience.

Ryan isolated some of the mechanisms through which cognitive immersion can be attained, cognitive immersion depends on developing a rich, intricate story world. This is all about creating a credible and coherent environment for the audience to dwell in mentally. Enriched descriptions of milieus, cultures, and histories create a vivid narrative space that audiences can

¹³¹ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹³² Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹³³ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

visualize and explore. Cognitive immersion involves the consistency and coherence of the narrative. This would mean everything in the story world holds together without any contradictions or inconsistencies that would detract from an audience's immersion. This will help enhance the story world's plausibility and maintain audience interest. Developing complex and easily relatable characters may make audience cognitive immersion possible. If audiences show empathy towards characters and understand what motivates them, they would be called to be mentally and emotionally involved in the story. In other words, character development forms an integral part of creating an engaging and immersive story.¹³⁴

Psychological immersion can be realized in different ways, particularly in the process of transmedial storytelling, where different media offer their unique opportunities for emotional engagement. Interactivity in storytelling, via choice or even interactive fiction, heightens psychological immersion by giving the audience a sense of agency and control over the story. It places the audience within the interactive fiction, giving them a more profound sense of belonging to whatever narrative is presented.¹³⁵ Much of what transmedia storytelling involves—book, film, video game, virtual reality—as concurrent forms of media can engage not just one sense but several simultaneously. Visual, aural, and sometimes even tactile media can offer an immersive emotional experience. For instance, with virtual reality, one is inside the story world; audiences can witness or experience first-hand events.¹³⁶ When the character development and emotional arc within the story are engaging, it will likely result in deep psychological immersion. The audience gets attached to the characters and relates to them emotionally. This is true of long-form storytelling formats, such as television series or serial novels, where an audience spends a great deal of time with the characters.¹³⁷ It relates to psychological immersion through fan communities and social media. These communities offer a place to discuss, analyze, and expand on the plot, creating a common emotional experience. Participation in the discussion and doing some fan activities may bond the audience emotionally with the story.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹³⁵ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹³⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹³⁷ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

¹³⁸ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

Cognitive and psychological immersion are vital factors that keep readers concerned about and shaken by an issue. The arguments made by Marie-Laure Ryan with respect to the above types of immersion emphasize the necessity of rich worldbuilding, strict consistencies of plot, complex characters, and activity connected with interactivity. Having been applied to transmedia storytelling, multiple media platforms can be used to apply such principles and create highly immersive and emotionally moving experiences. Knowing the mechanisms of cognitive and psychological immersion, one can create stories that will attract a targeted audience meaningfully.

Interactivity is another meat-and-potato element of participatory culture and is essential in reeling in any participating audience in the world of transmedia storytelling. Taking cues from Marie-Laure Ryan, interactivity significantly improves a narrative experience. It is said to give purpose to a person's involvement and emotional connection in any interactive storyline in which they partake.¹³⁹

Influencing the story can be a simple choice or a heavy, significant input. This participatory nature converts the audience from a receptor into co-creators of the narrative. When interaction revolves around the story, creators will have a better chance of engagement because audiences put their time and emotions into a story they can determine.

Interactive components also lend themselves to a sense of agency, wherein audiences perceive that their actions can lead to real and meaningful consequences within a story world. This is a fundamental aspect for the generation of deep-seated connections with the story and commitments toward it. Interactivity can further enhance immersion and the sense of reality of the story because the audience is actively navigating and exploring the story world. *Bandersnatch (Black Mirror Episode)*¹⁴⁰ is an interactive film, a self-standing series entry of *Black Mirror* that, as the story comes across to viewers, enables its audience to choose how it shall go. Its interactive storyline has developed multiple paths and endings by putting the audience in a position to make decisions regarding actions the protagonist should do, hence engaging them. Her interactivity in *Bandersnatch* serves best to underpin the notion of choice-based storytelling as a relevant tool for engagement decentered into something authentic and highly personalized in experiencing a narrative.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁴⁰ Black Mirror. 2018. *Bandersnatch*. [Episode]. Netflix.

¹⁴¹ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

The Walking Dead (2012) Video Game Series has done something very core to the definition of interactive storytelling. Players drive a plot forward and develop relationships with characters by choice, hence leading to different endings. Again, it is relevant that interactivity could inculcate an emotional experience and deep engagement since a player is very attached to the characters and the result of their choice.

Interactive activities in Harry Potter dedicated website *Pottermore*, includes sorting into Hogwarts houses and finding one's patronus charm, among other activities associated with stories. *Pottermore* maintains fan engagement by offering a context where one engages with the narrative and other fans.

Minecraft is a sandbox game that allows players the power to create and research their own worlds. The open-endedness, along with the modularity of the playing environment, offers good advantages concerning interactivity. With a large user community sharing work and engaging in distributed projects, interactivity feeds into engagement and creativity.¹⁴²

Story worlds offer a vital route to audience engagement in transmedia storytelling. Marie-Laure Ryan states the importance of detailed and believable environments in which audiences mentally settle inside. Some essential techniques for creating immersive story worlds include detailed World-Building which requires the development of a vivid, coherent setting with its own rules, history, and geography. It will involve location, culture, and social structure nuances that would bring a world to life.¹⁴³ Take the case of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth: vast lore and elaborate maps make for an immersive experience.

Maintaining consistency across all narrative elements is crucial for immersion. This means ensuring that characters, settings, and events align logically and that there are no contradictions within the story world. Consistency helps audiences suspend disbelief and become fully engaged in the narrative. Immersion can be deepened if the characters are lifelike and complex. Characters with defined personalities, motivations, and character arcs let audiences make emotional connections to them and become invested in their journeys. Character-driven stories mostly engage the audience to an elevated level because they connect personally with a reader, slowly building attachments.

¹⁴² Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

¹⁴³ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rich, sensory details and descriptive language work together within any composition to evoke vivid images in the audience's minds. The use of descriptions that appeal to the senses—sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—makes the story world real and full of life. This technique is effective in this regard, particularly for literature and film.¹⁴⁴

Interactive elements would include choice-based narratives or user-created content to push the level of immersion even higher by allowing audiences to feel in control. Changing the story because of audience influence or living it through various media adds depth and strengthens the feeling of empathy.¹⁴⁵

One of the central challenges to transmedia storytelling is balancing narrative coherence against audience participation. To this, theorists like Marie-Laure Ryan note a delicate balance between having some form of cohesion in telling the story and opening it enough to have audience participation and add to the narrative. Designing a centralized, core narrative structure can reinforce this coherence by generating a core storyline or "mothership" narrative that would center the whole story world and ensure all participatory/transmedia elements hook back into this core structure.¹⁴⁶ Setting clear guidelines for user-generated content is also important; if one encourages fans to generate content that abides by the set rules and themes of their story world, the contributions will enhance rather than disrupt a narrative. These can be given out through official fan forums, social media, and community events.¹⁴⁷ Large collaborative storytelling platforms can make incorporating contributions from an audience easier while ensuring their coherence is maintained. For example, through wikis or another form of collaborative writing, fans can add to the story world in relevant and organized ways, with moderation and oversight from either the creators of the original work or dedicated community managers who care about their consistency with the narrative. Iterative feedback loops between the creators and audiences are instrumental in refining the narrative for coherence. This is because such frequent, even minute-by-minute, feedback from audiences offers insight into how the story is being received by them and, at times, recommends agendas for adjustment of the narrative by creators. In telling stories across transmedia, consistency across media is an

¹⁴⁴ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁴⁵ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁴⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁴⁷ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

essential element since every media platform should uniquely contribute to the narrative but remain consistent in tone, style, and storyline due to careful planning and coordination.¹⁴⁸

While testing for the effectiveness of an engagement strategy in a transmedia storytelling campaign, one must understand how to measure audience engagement and satisfaction. Questionnaires and surveys can measure the immersion and satisfaction of the audience. They can include questions on audiences' emotional and intellectual engagement and enjoyment of the experience. Such surveys enable the audience to respond or give feedback, which may sometimes be resourceful while assessing whether the narrative engages its target audience.

Psychometric Scales would be things like the Narrative Engagement Scale or the Immersive Experience Questionnaire, specially designed to measure the degree of immersion and engagement. The measurement scales have dimensions that refer to each individual's narrative experience and comprise items that assess affective involvement, presence, and flow.¹⁴⁹

One can also find objective measurements for immersion by looking into behavioral metrics related to the time spent dealing with the narrative, the frequency of engaging in the transmedia elements, and participation in community activities. High levels of interaction and participation typically express a highly engaged audience.¹⁵⁰

Heart rate, skin conductance, and eye-tracking are some physiological measures that might be used to ascertain the level of audience engagement. For example, increased heart rate and skin conductance would portray emotional arousal to the experience. At the same time, eye-tracking would indicate which elements in the story hold the most attention from the audience.¹⁵¹

Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and content data analysis of generated content users, better account for detailed audience experience and perception. These methods will help flesh out the nuances of engagement, thus deepening insights into how audiences experience and make sense of the storyline.

Most analytics tools are available on digital platforms, which may include tracing user engagement through metrics such as click-through rates, time on page, and social media

¹⁴⁸ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

¹⁴⁹ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁵⁰ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁵¹ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

interaction. All of these will help in measuring the audience's engagement with different elements of a transmedia story. The analytics give insight into parts of the narrative that are particularly engaging and where improvements can be made.¹⁵²

While participatory culture and transmedia engagement generally hold tremendous promise, they are associated with several challenges and pitfalls. Being aware of these will undoubtedly ensure effective and inclusive transmedia stories.

With multiple creators contributing to the story, there is the likelihood of inconsistency and contradiction that confuse the audience and debunk the narrative's credibility. All contributions must pay attention to the central storyline, which requires coordination and oversight.

There can be a huge variation in the quality of user-generated content. Contributions may range from creative, enriching pieces to plain, not very well-done, or even very deviating pieces from the set storyline. Such quality disparity may hurt the story's general impression and alienate some of its audience.¹⁵³

Audiences may suffer from information overload due to the proliferation of interactive elements and user-generated content load. It can be hard to follow the main narrative thread and meaningfully engage with the story amidst this overwhelming content.¹⁵⁴ Curating the content and clear navigational aids help alleviate the problem.

Another big challenge will be making participatory culture inclusive, bringing diverse voices into the process. Marginalized communities face a range of different barriers to participation, ranging from the availability of digital tools to the sheer hostility of community environments. Addressing such obstacles means building an inclusive culture as part and parcel of creating a rich, diverse narrative experience.

Commercialization can deprive the participatory platform of its authenticity in engagement with the audience. For example, profit-based websites can post commercially viable content rather than what is contributed by grassroots users. The necessary balance between profit motive and genuine audience participation keeps the integrity of the narrative in perspective.

To create engaging and inclusive transmedia narratives, being responsive to vastly different audience preferences and needs becomes highly critical. Diverse content types and formats

¹⁵² Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

¹⁵³ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁵⁴ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

would serve diverse tastes of audiences. In this direction, linear and interactive narratives, and text-based and visual content with different levels of interactivity are offered. From here, through diversification of the content offered, one could get an expanded scope of audiences attracted and enhanced engagement. A further safeguard against the unwieldy quantity of content could be provided by designing user-friendly interfaces and exploratory aids. More transparent menus, search functions, and personalization recommendations make it easier for audiences to find content of interest and follow the narrative more effectively. Community building or support would leverage an atmosphere conducive to participation from diversity. It includes things like active moderation of the community, clear community guidelines, and initiatives that ensure inclusivity and respect. Providing a platform for marginalized voices and fighting some of the barriers to involvement could create an audience more varied and active in participation.¹⁵⁵ This would be adaptive storytelling, considering the audience's feedback and participation by changing the narrative accordingly. In this regard, it would make the story evolve in such a way that it boarded the interests and preferences of the audience to personalize the reading experience.¹⁵⁶ Be aware of cross-cultural differences in preferences for narrative and styles of engagement to reach a global audience. These have regard for cultural sensitivity, multilingual content, and diverse cultural perspectives in the storytelling. By embracing the idea of cross-cultural considerations, creators will start to develop far more inclusive and engaging stories with universal appeal.¹⁵⁷

As technology continues to evolve, new trends are emerging that will shape the future of audience engagement in transmedia storytelling. The trends work with new digital media, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality developments to create increasingly immersive and interactive experiences.

What used to be mere imagination has started materializing. Both virtual reality and augmented reality are changing capacities in which audiences experience narratives. VR immerses users in a totally digital environment, allowing them to wander around the story world and interact with its elements like never before. In contrast, AR overlays digital content on top of the real world, enhancing the physical environment with narrative elements.

¹⁵⁵ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

¹⁵⁶ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹⁵⁷ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.

Accomplished of these technologies offer new avenues for telling profoundly immersive and engaging story experiences.¹⁵⁸

AI has contributed greatly to personalizing the narrative experience. Tailored content recommendations can be created by AI algorithms through interactive elements that analyze audience preferences and behaviors, hence providing a more personalized experience.¹⁵⁹ The AI-driven chatbots and virtual characters have responded to audiences in real-time actions, thus raising their engagement and immersion.

With blockchain technology, a wide new range of opportunities opens for blockchain-based decentralized storytelling platforms.¹⁶⁰ Those platforms can lead to more transparency and safety for the user-generated content, guaranteeing creators' property rights and control over general creativity. Blockchain can be used to point out how new collaboration models and revenue sharing between creators and audiences can be realized.

A social media-neutral transmedia storytelling radar drives engagement and real-time interactivity. Audiences participate in events live, share their experiences, and become involved in the telling via social media.¹⁶¹ All this kindles a sense of community and collective participation that enhances the narrative experience in general.¹⁶²

Gamification techniques, which involve quantification, badges, and leaderboards, enhance audience engagement through the use of play and competitive elements. Interactive storytelling platforms with gamification will ensure that audiences participate more in the matter and probe further into the points raised. This makes engagement in the narrative experience more thrilling.¹⁶³

3.3 Dena's Audience Engagement and Interactive Experiences

Christy Dena is one of the leading scholars of transmedia storytelling; over the years, she pioneers in the parts that deal with narrative coherence, audience engagement, as well as the

¹⁵⁸ Gupta, T., & Bansal, S. (2022). *Immersive Horizons: VR and AR in Digital Marketing*. "Journal of Marketing & Supply Chain Management", 1, 1-7.

¹⁵⁹ AIContentfy. 2023. *AI-Generated Content for Data-Driven Storytelling*. [Blog Post].

¹⁶⁰ BitDigest. 2023. *The Impact of Decentralized Media Platforms on Web3 Dynamics*.

¹⁶¹ Business of Story. n.d. *Social Media Storytelling*.

¹⁶² Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. NYU Press.

¹⁶³ Ryan, Marie-Laure. (2009). *From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative*. "StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies".

interactive experience. She is highly recognized in the field for critically analyzing the complexity that the story develops into and the role that an audience is to play in participating in it.

Dena's work has focused mainly on how transmedia narratives can achieve coherence and offer meaningful engagement across forms—how different types of storytelling can be combined in their intertext to generate a well-articulated transmedia narrative. Dena identifies and analyzes how audiences interact with such narratives, thereby identifying effective mechanisms in transmedia storytelling. Her theories mark the requirement of coherence and the assurance of the narrative fluidity that only flows in the storyline without fragmentation from each media piece.

In the seminal book, *Transmedia Practice: Theorizing the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*¹⁶⁴, Dena elaborates on deep casuistry about transmedia practices in storytelling and gives quite an open framework through which the practice can be understood. She elaborates specifically on various features of the transmedia narratives, such as the reflection and changes in the story values, from indefiniteness to very clear; the assigned story values are widely estimated; use of different media platforms; and strategies of narrative coherence.

Christy Dena's theories on audience engagement and interactivity are germane to transmedia storytelling. Her research emphasizes the potential of interactive narratives to undergo a transferal process where audiences actually transform from being audiences into active participants in the storytelling process. According to Dena, interactivity can improve the magnitude of an audience's engagement with a narrative by giving users meaningful and engaging chances to develop personal investment in it.

Among the significant points of Dena's theories is narrative agency, a concept designating audiences as having a history and an influence on the directions and ends of narratives. The concept is essential to understanding audience engagement in this new storytelling paradigm: transmedia storytelling. By providing a few interactive elements in the form of choice-based narratives or user-generated content, creators can forge a closer connection between audience and story.

Dena also points to the importance of creating rich, vivid story worlds that involve audiences in active participation. Her work presumes that successful transmedia narratives

¹⁶⁴ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

would be those that not only bring along interactive experiences within an integrated approach to telling a story—which would allow audiences to really engage with and add to a narrative—but also increase the rate at which such engagement will occur, which creates a positively dynamic, participatory storytelling environment.

Christy Dena's approach to engaging audiences in her work on transmedia storytelling presents several techniques for deep, meaningful audience engagement in cross-platform narratives. Geared at changing the usually passive viewer into an active participant, these techniques help create much more immersive and engaging storytelling experiences.

Interactive Narratives allows the audience to be entwined within a narrative by creating choices leading to possible other directions in a storyline. It involves the audience with an active role, thereby enhancing one's engagement through the feeling of control over the narrative. For example, consider an interactive movie or a video game whereby a user selects what actions their protagonist will undertake, where exactly they will go, or whom they will talk to for the story to end differently. This personalizes things for one and encourages re-engagement as audiences follow other paths.¹⁶⁵

One can instigate audiences to generate and share their content relevant to the original transmedia narratives to a great extent. This may include fan fiction, fan art videos, or even simple social media posts. Contributing one's own works lets audiences feel part of the story and a part of the whole storytelling process. The best websites that prove this insight are Wattpad and DeviantArt, where one can be an avenue for fans to publish or post their work to engage with others.¹⁶⁶

Putting social media at the heart of a narrative enables real-time engagement and fosters community-building. Elements of stories may be published on social networks, updated with the latest developments in storylines, and engage audiences with comments and discussion forums. From this, a lively environment will arise where audiences are not only engaging with a narrative but also with fellow fans. A few successful samples include Twitter accounts for fictional characters or Instagram stories that reveal plot details.

Next in line are the technologies of AR and VR, which offer an experience of being immersive and highly engaging to audiences. These technologies create virtual environments or digital overlaying in the real world that allows audiences to participate in a narrative

¹⁶⁵ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

¹⁶⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

tangibly. For example, AR apps that let users discover hidden story elements within their physical environment, or VR experiences where users are right inside the story world, will create manifold engagement.¹⁶⁷

Integrate information into the transmedia storyline that can be digested into games or puzzles that would engage the audience by making them solve problems to develop the storyline further. The technique applies to a game's interactive character, immersing audiences into a narrative. These include examples of multi-platform scavenger hunts and interactive websites showing new story elements after specific tasks have been completed.

*Inanimate Alice*¹⁶⁸ is a transmedial storytelling project: text, still and moving images, interactive, narrating the story of Alice growing up in a digital world. The way the narrative unfolds is through different media, hence encouraging audiences to interject with the story by solving puzzles to advance the plot. This testifies well to the fact that interactivity can fuel engagement and richly put forward an immersive experience in the work.¹⁶⁹

Games such as *The Beast*¹⁷⁰, developed to promote the movie AI Artificial Intelligence, engage audiences with the narrative through real-world clues and puzzles. Participants in the game follow the story across multiple platforms, from websites to email and physical locations, uncovering the plot. According to Dena, this immersive game blurs the line between what is and is not fiction, deeply engaging participants.¹⁷¹

Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge theme park attraction allows for an interactive experience whereby the visitor explores the Star Wars universe interactively, from piloting the Millennium Falcon to various missions taking place around the park. It generally increases the level of engagement with this type of physical and interactive experience and allows fans to live out their Star Wars fantasies in a very granular and immersive environment.

¹⁶⁷ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹⁶⁸ *Inanimate Alice*. 2005–2012. *Inanimate Alice*.

¹⁶⁹ Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁷⁰ Microsoft. 2001. *The Beast*.

¹⁷¹ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

3.4 Mittell's Theories on Audience Participation

For Jason Mittell, the audience's participation in the complex TV narrative is an event of viewers becoming active parties in engaging with and contributing to a storytelling process. The traditional television formats typically situate the viewer as a passive content receiver. Complex television allows for more dynamic interaction in its form. In the words of Mittell, such television, due to complex plots, non-linear timelines, and deep character development, changes viewers into active participants. This shift is exceptionally important in understanding the relationship of a modern audience with media in the context of transmedia storytelling.¹⁷²

Puzzle-solving and viewer collaboration are two significant factors that are part of something much more prominent in complex TV. The type of model that, say, series such as *Lost* represents is the model of using complex or intricate puzzles told within narratives that viewers have to piece together from very fragmented clues. These strategies include involving viewers both on the cognitive level and simultaneously providing space for viewer collaboration. Online forums develop into places where theories can be discussed in an attempt by this community to reach some collective solution to these narrative riddles. This shared engagement at the level of watching deepens the experience into a sense of community, like a shared investment in the story.

Online communities are integral to the narrative depth associated with television series. Communities provide a venue for fans to discuss, theorize on plot events, and create fan-driven content, thus extending stories beyond the TV screen. Fandoms of *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld* (2016-Present)¹⁷³ are huge online, where, with each passing episode, fans dissect them, hypothesizing about upcoming plot twists and adding to the full-bodied lore and fan fiction. Mittell further comments that these online communal spaces do not only flesh out narrative complexity but also make the act of viewing interactive and immersive. Viewers in those online spaces demonstrate their activeness in participation, clearly showing how viewers move from mere passive consumption to active engagement, a hallmark of complex TV. Another major area in which audiences participate is speculative involvement in complex TV. Again, viewers spell out their engagement by developing and eventually sharing fan theories and predictions; that is, the speculative investment here keeps viewers going between episodes and might even signal toward the direction of the narrative—insofar as creators often take cues

¹⁷² Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

¹⁷³ Nolan, J. & Joy, L. 2016–present. *Westworld*. USA.

from popular fan theories. For example, both *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017)¹⁷⁴ and *Doctor Who* have a very long history regarding fan theories that influenced the real way ahead for the directions of the show, proving an enormous impact of audience participation on its development. This kind of interaction illustrates a more challenging level of viewer engagement and creativity fostered by complex TV storytelling.

Fan fiction, fan art, videos—every kind of user-generated content—holds immense power in the complex landscape of television today. They will let fans prolong narrative universes through alternative storylines and character arcs. In this co-creation lies an added value to the original narrative and closer binds between the series and its audience. We can take the example of *Supernatural* (2005-2010)¹⁷⁵ and *Sherlock* (2010-2017)¹⁷⁶ to see how fans actually help make the longevity of a show by telling their own stories and creating more serious engagements with the material. This genre of fan fiction brings to light the collaborative nature of complex TV in which the line between creators and viewers is blurred.¹⁷⁷

Mittell envisions the future as highly innovative in audience participation, propelled again by technological change. Upcoming trends include, for example, narrative personalization driven by AI, decentralized storytelling through blockchain, and VR/AR for a really immersive experience, changing how viewers interact with a storyline. Audience participation becomes an integral part of storytelling. Interaction will be increased, and viewers can affect the storyline. According to Mittell, the future of intricate TV content shall be increasingly blurred by borders among narrative, game, creator, and audience to frame and create a more dynamic, participative culture.

This section thereby keeps the content based on this focus distinct and free of repetition to render a complete understanding of Mittell's impact on audience participation in complex TV within the framework of transmedia storytelling.

¹⁷⁴ Lynch, D. & Frost, M. 1990–1991; 2017. *Twin Peaks*. USA.

¹⁷⁵ Kripke, E. 2005–2020. *Supernatural*. USA.

¹⁷⁶ Moffat, S. & Gatiss, M. 2010–2017. *Sherlock*. UK.

¹⁷⁷ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

3.5 Rettberg's and User Interaction

Jill Walker Rettberg is a prominent digital media theorist who has gained specific recognition for her work on how digital technologies remediate traditional narratives into increasingly interactive and participatory forms. Her scholarship on remediation and user interaction contributes to understanding the fast-changing nature of narrative media today. Rettberg's theories enlighten the role played by these digital platforms in helping to establish a more deep-seated participatory culture whereby audiences take part in acts of storytelling.

For Rettberg, remediation is a representation of prior media into new media, reconfigured and repurposed. This process is crucial in understanding digital narratives and how to capture and engage the reader's imagination. In the book *Blogging*, as she was writing about blogs, Rettberg explains that it is a new medium remediating elements of the traditional diary, journal, and autobiography into an interactive media, and the reader can respond in real time.¹⁷⁸

The remediation is not limited only to blogs but has taken place across many digital media, from social media to video games and online forums. These new digital media remediate the old narrative forms, re-establishing them as more engaging and interactive. For instance, Twitter and Instagram have changed how people narrate personal stories and public events in the current age, enabling users to instantly share their experiences with an international audience and engage them in a conversation.

In her book, Rettberg shows how this media development from online diaries has reached complex, interactive levels of narrative.¹⁷⁹ The sense of community and interactivity that the bloggers forge is due to the allowance of readers' comments, sharing, and interaction with the content. This very interaction transforms the passive reader into an active one by developing a greater connection with the narrative.

Rettberg wrote in 2014 about how these kinds of personal blogs allow readers to engage with a view into life, creating a continued episodic form of storytelling. Blogs, as commented by Rettberg, do not deal only with their contents but with a continuous relation between the blogger and his readers. For example, personal posts on blogs like *Dooce*¹⁸⁰ or *The Artful*

¹⁷⁸ Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁷⁹ Rettberg, J. W. (2008). *Blogging*. Polity Press.

¹⁸⁰ Hansen, H. 2001–present. *Dooce*.

*Parent*¹⁸¹ ask readers to engage with the blogger's experience by including their thoughts and reactions in the comments.

Rettberg also explores the role social media plays in expanding narrative possibilities. Social media has become tremendously relevant to audience-driven content, where users are no longer mere places of consumption but important channels through which stories are created and transmitted. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have changed how narratives are shared and experienced into something more immediate and participatory.

In her examination, Rettberg explains how social media gives way to a participatory culture by letting users generate content collaboratively. This is evident in the way they share personal stories, engage in conversations, and form communities around shared interests. Hashtag campaigns and virality on the platforms prove social media users' collective storymaking power.¹⁸²

Rettberg further remarks that blogs and social media sustain each other, with the latter as a channel of circulation and involvement tool for the former. Perhaps one of the most common ways bloggers do this is by using social media to gain more reach, interact with their audience, and develop a sense of community outside of just the blog. Indeed, this cross-platform functionality—that increases avenues of participation in digital narratives—renders them dynamic and interactive.

Concerning user-generated content, distributed narratives provide coherence and diachronic development. Rettberg recognizes that such a participative device sometimes gives way to various difficulties in preserving narrative consistency but enriches the story through many perspectives. Rettberg focuses on how, in an analysis related to fan fiction communities, user contributions bring depth and complexity to the narrative by often campaigning through themes and character developments not addressed in the original content.

Probably the most famous case is the *Doctor Who* fan community, where fans produced their own stories, artworks, and videos related to the *Doctor Who* universe. These kinds of contributions speak not only to a deeper level of engagement but also to collective creativity within the fan base itself, speaking for the potential of user-generated content in transmedia storytelling.

¹⁸¹ Artful Parent. 2009–present. *The Artful Parent*. [Blog].

¹⁸² Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

3.6 Marketing and Business Benefits

“Transmedia storytelling practices may expand the potential market for a property by creating different points of entry for different audience segments,”¹⁸³ Jenkins wrote. Transmedia storytelling—the process through which just one unified, coordinated story is expressed across various media platforms—has come to be a potent tool in marketing and business. Entertainment companies stretch narratives across formats such as films, books, games, and social media. Through this multifaceted approach, unique added value can be created in audience engagement, with considerable accrual of marketing advantages and business opportunities.

In the previous sections, we considered how narrative coherence and audience engagement work together to create a successful transmedia storytelling paradigm. Narrative coherence and audience engagement instill consistency and interest in a story across several platforms while maximizing audience immersion and interactivity. Key theorists such as Henry Jenkins and Marie-Laure Ryan began to provide a foundation for understanding the potential held by transmedia storytelling. The idea of participatory culture by Jenkins and the insight into immersive story worlds by Ryan underline how transmedia has the power to turn passive consumers into active participants, which creates an emotional commitment to the brand.¹⁸⁴¹⁸⁵ According to Jenkins, there is also a stress on the move from traditional appointment viewing models to paradigms of engagement with viewers self-actively seeking out content across various channels.

Jenkins talks about how audiences are both a commodity and labor in the media industry. Through active engagement, economic value is created for the audience members, packaged, and sold to advertisers. In short, this shift from more traditional models of viewing into an engagement-based model makes a premium out of audiences who spontaneously seek out and engage with content across various channels; it truly demonstrates what engaged audiences can be as a strong product. The challenge lies in the measurement of such engagement. Traditional metrics, such as Nielsen ratings, do not capture the value of the engaged viewer consuming content through alternative means, raising the need for more sophisticated tools to make these

¹⁸³ Jenkins, H. 2007. *Transmedia Storytelling 101*.

¹⁸⁴ Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. NYU Press.

¹⁸⁵ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

measurements.¹⁸⁶ In the model based on engagement, audiences become active agents whose activity creates alternative ways in which markets can generate value—Recommending, Discussing, Sharing. Jenkins argues that even illicit eyeballs and illegal content downloaders add to its economic value by making people aware of it and building communities about it. Ultimately, these activities can improve legal viewership and sales of merchandise, showing how audience engagement is translated into economic gains.

Natalia Sokolova further expands on these ideas by examining the role of 'prosumers' in the media industry. She relates how new media and Web 2.0 have turned consumers into active participants in cultural production, thereby blurring the boundaries between production and consumption, labor and leisure time, professional and amateur.¹⁸⁷ Sokolova also raises the point about the complexity of getting a metric for audience engagement and economic value generated by unauthorized viewing and fan activities, which can build up the brand and create community convergence.

If they can put these insights into practice, companies could successfully develop transmedia campaigns that engage their audiences deeply enough to turn engagement into concrete economic value. Campaigns will now attract committed fan bases who are much more likely to buy merchandise and pay for events while evangelizing the content on social networks. As audiences become addicted to both complex narratives and engaging interactivity, avenues for monetization multiply; thus, the financial impact of a transmedia storytelling strategy is maximized.

Next comes a more specific look at the marketing benefits of transmedia storytelling, specifically how engaging audiences translates into economic value, increases the reach of the market through multiplicity, and provides networks new streams of revenue. It will also consider how developing technologies support such benefits and give the concepts in practice through real examples of successful transmedia marketing campaigns.

A good transmedia storytelling campaign provides not only deep engagement among audiences but also drastically increases a brand's reach. To do so, the application of various media platforms aids in capturing several different segments of the targeted audience for the message. This sums up to an increased impact and appeal for the message being put across. In

¹⁸⁶ Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. NYU Press.

¹⁸⁷ Sokolova, N. (2012). *Co-opting Transmedia Consumers: User Content as Entertainment or 'Free Labour'? The Cases of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. and Metro 2033*. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64(8), 1565-1583.

this strategy, a brand can be in several demographics and geographies, thus increasing its presence and power in the marketplace.

One primary method by which transmedia storytelling expands market reach is via the appeal of the format across various media. Brands could offer different formats, such as film, book, and game, or social media can provide alternatives that can answer these differing segments of audiences. Some are more visually and aurally interested in film, while others like more interactive video games or community features on a social media site. This multi-platform approach lets the story reach a wider audience by engaging with the content in their favorite ways.

The extended reach is expected to have a significant financial impact. According to Muñoz and Calabuig (2021)¹⁸⁸, transmedia storytelling may significantly improve a media project's financial results. The authors illustrate how combining different media forms into one coherent storyline causes an increase in consumer expenditure in many channels: movie tickets, books bought, games purchased, or merchandise sold, among others. This holistic approach will drive direct sales and enhance visibility and brand loyalty, which in the long-term drives financial benefits.

Research on such transmedia projects conducted by Natalia Sokolova around *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*¹⁸⁹ and *Metro 2033*¹⁹⁰ concluded that consumer participation broadens the reach of the market. Sokolova specifies this fact: Transmedia projects invite consumers to enter a joint 'co-production' of the world that is generated; it turns them into brand ambassadors. Prosumers create content, ideas, and artifacts and share them, increasing the scope of the narrative universe and attracting new audience members. This organic growth, made possible by the active participation of fans, lends itself to disseminating transmedia stories to a much broader, more diverse audience base.

In this vein, Hernández-Santaolalla and Barrientos-Bueno's *Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling, Audience Engagement, and Business Strategies* (2020)¹⁹¹ is an investigation into the strategies put in place to help transmedia storytelling gain new segments

¹⁸⁸ Muñoz, P., & Calabuig, D. (2021). *Show me the Money: Quantifying the financial impact of Transmedia*. Hub Edition Digital, 134-146.

¹⁸⁹ GSC Game World. 2007–2018. *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* Series.

¹⁹⁰ 4A Games. 2010. *Metro 2033*. [Video Game]. PC, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3.

¹⁹¹ Hernández-Santaolalla, V., & Barrientos-Bueno, M. (2020). *Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling, Audience Engagement, and Business Strategies*. IGI Global.

of its audience. It elaborates on how these tactics are carried out through local adaptations and targeted social media campaigns, among others, that make the transmedia projects resonate with different regional and cultural audiences. These strategies make the narrative accessible and appealing to a global audience, thus maximizing its market reach.

Several high-profile case studies have also proven the success of transmedia storytelling in expanding market reach. For example, Marvel Cinematic Universe has effectively harnessed films, television shows, comic books, and digital content to engage the global audience. Each medium will provide another entry point into the Marvel universe, catering to different audience preferences and increasing the reach of this brand. This multi-platform strategy has worked wonders at the box office end and infused life into merchandise sales, subscription services, and theme park attendance, thus bearing testimony to how well-planned transmedia has broad market reach.

The potential for transmedia storytelling enables brands to increase their reach within the market. The said brand uses the art of issuing a story across multiple media platforms to attract a number of diverse segments of audiences and amplify its presence in the marketplace further. This step doesn't just increase the base of audiences but is also driven by substantial financial gains derived from it, which have become significant in modern marketing for a brand.

Transmedia storytelling increases consumer engagement and broadens market reach. It also opens many more opportunities for revenue generation. The transmedia project can generate revenue through multiple channels, not only from different media platforms but also from integrated narrative experiences, including direct sales and subscription services, merchandising, and brand partnerships.¹⁹²

The selling of complementary products through various media formats is one of the most integral ways by which transmedia storytelling generates added value. For example, a successful transmedia narrative might include films, books, video games, and merchandise, all adding to its overall revenue value. Han underlines the business performance implications from the model of book publishing by making use of transmedia storytelling, in that integrating a narrative across multiple platforms can increase the number of sold books while also allowing interest in other forms of related media products to dynamically elevate.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Hammel, C. J. 2021. *Transmedia: The Next Step for Multi-Channel Marketing*

¹⁹³ Han, F. (2021). *The Impact of the Book Publishing Transmedia Storytelling Model on Business Performance*. "Journal of Organizational Change Management", 34(1), 1-15.

The other significant form of revenue generation that has been made possible by transmedia storytelling is merchandising. Transmedia projects can be rich and immersive enough to create a wide scope for merchandise, including action figures, apparel, home decor, and collectibles. Lehu considers the role of branded entertainment and product placement in incremental revenue generation because there are a series of places where brands or products can easily be integrated into the storylines in the case of transmedia storytelling.¹⁹⁴ This approach enriches the user experience of storytelling and creates several potent merchandising opportunities for being business-savvy.

The product placement within the transmedia narrative develops immediate ways to generate income. Since brands and products are inlaid into the story, opportunities like these become most pertinent to engaged audiences. Bernstein gives insights into the legal and business sides of entertainment media with respect to the strategic placing of products/brands in entertainment vehicles and their brand partnerships to further monetize transmedia storytelling. These partnerships can lead to significant financial gains, as brands are willing to invest in immersive advertising experiences that capture audience attention.

The study by Natalia Sokolova on the economic value of unauthorized viewing and fan-made content further suggests the revenue possibility of this process. According to Sokolova, even illegal downloaders can increase the worth of a transmedia project because they raise awareness and build viewers.¹⁹⁵ This organic growth could then drive legal viewership and official merchandise sales by fans who want to show support for or otherwise further engage in a narrative world they love.

Besides, new technologies, mainly digital platforms, and subscription services, were incorporated, opening up additional revenues for transmedially produced projects. For instance, VOD platforms enable the effective distribution of transmedia content and place films, series, and other exclusive digital content at the easy disposal of audiences. Zeiser discusses how a transmedia marketing strategy can leverage this for subscription revenues and a loyal consumer base.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Lehu, J.-M. (2007). *Branded Entertainment: Product Placement & Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business*. Kogan Page.

¹⁹⁵ Sokolova, N. (2012). *Co-opting Transmedia Consumers: User Content as Entertainment or 'Free Labour'?* *The Cases of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. and Metro 2033*. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64(8), 1565-1583.

¹⁹⁶ Zeiser, A. (2015). *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media*. Focal Press.

Evidencing the direct economic benefits of transmedia storytelling is the only way to conduct case studies of high-profile franchises. For instance, the *Harry Potter* franchise has used transmedia storytelling to create effective streams of income in everything from book and movie sales to theme park attractions and even merchandising. This means that direct sales and brand loyalty have been maximized for future financial success.

In summary, this multiform approach secures varied revenue streams, from product sales to merchandising and brand partnering and, finally, to digital subscription-based economies. Transmedia projects deliver a holistic and rich narrative experience across many platforms. This gives them the ability to mine different streams of revenue, such as product sales, merchandising, brand partnering, and digital subscriptions. Building a broad mass of users who are both loyal and engaged with your brand in many ways reinforces a means through which they can be turned into money.

Within the rapidly evolving media and entertainment industries, new technologies are genuinely opening up potentials that increase the effectiveness of transmedia storytelling. These innovative platforms and tools put more engaging experiences in front of the audience.

Video on Demand sites have changed dramatically the distribution and consumption of content. Through these platforms, their audiences can easily access much media content, including films, television series, and strictly digital content. According to Anne Zeiser in her book *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media*, VOD platforms are very relevant for any delivery of transmedial content. According to Zeiser, VOD platforms offer barriers to entry into a rich content library and allow interactivity and personalization of viewing. This is important for keeping an audience engaged within a transmedia project. VOD systems provide further development of storytelling in dynamic interactive menus, behind-the-scenes footage, and viewer polls, making it engaging for the viewers to a great extent.

VOD platforms also help distribute transmedia content across regions and demographics, increasing the market reach of a narrative. Global accessibility enables creators to further take care of diverse tastes of the audience and cultural settings, hence enriching the experience of transmedia. This is possible in the case of Netflix, which has been able to capture a global audience through its localized versions, subtitled and dubbed, hence driving both engagement and subscription revenues.

The coming of artificial intelligence and virtual production technologies boosts the possibilities for transmedia storytelling. It is possible to use AI to sniff out audience data and preferences so that creators can tailor it more precisely to individual viewers. Particularly in the work of Larsmon, studying *The Creative Convergence of Artificial Intelligence and Virtual*

Production in the Making of Transmedia Storytelling, AI-driven analytics can make narrative development and audience targeting much sharper. Using AI, creators can predict which story elements the audience will most react to and optimize the content.¹⁹⁷

On the other hand, virtual production is changing how stories are conceptualized and produced. The flexibility and creativity in story creation offer never-before-seen plus points whereby creators may create immersive digital environments and change them in real-time. Larsmon brings this more into focus with examples of how virtual production had been used with *The Mandalorian*: real-time rendering through LED screens developed sets that were naturalistic and raised the overall lushness of the narrative. This technological innovation lessens the charge and, most importantly, the production time. This way, it can create greater detail and visual beauty to up the ante and capture the viewer.

Moreover, AI and virtual production technologies enhance the interactive form of storytelling. AI makes it possible to have interactive storylines insofar as the choices made by an audience are the determining factors in the unfolding of a story, hence making it much more engaging and personalized. Virtual production allows one to create interactive environments for the audience to be in, roam around, and actually work with, thereby reducing the separation between passive viewing and active participation.

Termed as novel money-making avenues, these technologies will not only enhance the narrative experience but also offer new opportunities for monetization: VOD platforms can generate subscription revenue and incorporate targeted advertising based on artificial intelligence analytics, thereby greatly increasing their profitability. Virtual production will create branded virtual experiences and merch, providing more opportunities for revenue streams. Conclusively, the new technologies that worked in transcending the reach and engagement associated with transmedia storytelling have been VOD platforms, AI, and virtual production. That would allow novel forms of dynamic, personalized, and immersive storytelling, resulting in an increased market reach and an expanded economic potential for transmedia projects. With the use of new technologies, the creator can push the boundaries of traditional storytelling, constantly enabling more enriched and emotionally moving stories of increased engagement for audiences worldwide.

¹⁹⁷ Larsmon, S. (2023). *The Creative Convergence of Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Production in the Making of Transmedia Storytelling*. Unpublished manuscript.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)¹⁹⁸ is one of the best examples of successful transmedia storytelling. It has been frosting on this proverbial cake to watch Marvel skillfully use films, TV series, comic books, and digital content as different media to successfully create a unique, comprehensive, and coherent narrative universe. In this way, each medium functions as an entry point into the Marvel universe and provides it with different ways to engage audiences and expand its brand reach.

The MCU epitomizes a case study of how transmedia storytelling achieves participation: users engage in deep content use and contribute to the story expansion through fan fiction, discussions, or social media engagements.¹⁹⁹ This level of engagement is more than building audience loyalty; it creates social media buzz that tremendously amplifies the franchise. The MCU's transmedia strategy has pulled off quite a bit from box office sales, merchandising, and subscription services such as Disney+.²⁰⁰ With interwoven story arcs and characters comes a large number of incentives for fans to work through all products, maximizing their potential for extracting cash from several sources. This multi-platform approach secured the MCU as one of the entertainment giants apart from being a case study on the financial and engagement gains that could be gained from well-formulated transmedia storytelling.

The *Harry Potter* series is another perfect example of transmedia storytelling success. From the books, it has evolved into movie franchises, theme parks, and video game versions; it has also existed in digital forms on sites like *Pottermore*. In *Transforming Harry: The Adaptation of Harry Potter in the Transmedia Age* (2018), John Alberti examines how the franchise has adapted its narrative through different media without losing consistency or engagement.²⁰¹ Equally important, the Harry Potter franchise is accompanied by the soaked-in ability for immersive experiences across audiences. In this vein, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks give fans an actual additive to the story. At the same time, websites like *Pottermore* allow fans to engage more deeply with the narrative through quizzes and articles, coupled with other community features that help set up a virtual fandom. These experiences forge an emotional connection with and loyalty among the fans, leading to repeat visits and continuous

¹⁹⁸ Marvel Studios. 2008–present. *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. USA.

¹⁹⁹ Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. NYU Press.

²⁰⁰ Variety. 2024. *Disney Reports Streaming Profit for Q2 2024 Earnings*.

²⁰¹ Alberti, J. (2018). *Transforming Harry: The Adaptation of Harry Potter in the Transmedia Age*. Wayne State University Press.

engagement with the brand.²⁰² The financial success of the franchise also comes from its merchandising strategy. Harry Potter merchandise, from wands and robes to books and movies, represents an extended and lucrative market. This strategic placement of merchandise within a story world allows fans to easily associate their merchandise with the narrative, enhancing experience and overall satisfaction.²⁰³

According to *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* (2018) by Guynes and Hassler-Forest²⁰⁴, to this day, the Star Wars franchise is a testament to how these sorts of long-running franchises could be continued through means of transmedia storytelling²⁰⁵. Star Wars never stopped creating its narrative in cinema, animated series, literature, comic books, video games, and even recently virtual reality experience. One of the franchise's key strategies has been keeping the story refreshed and relevant by creating different timelines or perspectives around the universe of *Star Wars*. This approach not only allows for new target audiences but also maintains fan longevity. Transmedial storytelling enables profound explorations of characters and events, giving deeper insight into the story world. In addition, *Star Wars* has also been able to leverage fan involvement in its continued storytelling successfully. It encourages creative works from the fans through facilities such as Star Wars fan fiction sites and fan art competitions, building a participatory culture that extends the story beyond officially dispensed products; such engagement furthers the reach and deepens the community of committed fans for the franchise. It is not possible to be too critical of the monetizing strategy of *Star Wars*. The franchise capitalizes on its narrative by selling various products—from action figures and clothing to LEGO sets and home decor. The embedding of merchandise with the story makes each item feel like part of the Star Wars universe, enhancing its appeal to fans.²⁰⁶

The Hunger Games franchise is an example of how transmedia storytelling can be harnessed for both a tight and vividly realized, well-rounded narrative experience. The series

²⁰² Coffey, M. 2024. *Harry Potter Movies Box Office Profit Explained*.

²⁰³ Zengler, T. 2021. *Harry Potter Is Still a Multibillion-Dollar Empire After Two Decades*.

²⁰⁴ Guynes, S., & Hassler-Forest, D. (2018). *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*. Amsterdam University Press.

²⁰⁵ *The Mandalorian* TV show, released in 2019, achieved significant success by blending captivating storytelling with rich character development, and revitalizing the *Star Wars* universe with a fresh perspective. Its popularity soared due to its engaging plot, high production quality, and the introduction of beloved characters like Grogu (Baby Yoda).

²⁰⁶ OnQ Solutions. 2024. *Star Wars Retail Brilliance: How the Franchise Drives Sales and Engagement*.

spans books²⁰⁷, movies²⁰⁸, and multiple other forms of digital content, offering audiences the ability to engage with a given number of its conceptualized dystopian worlds.²⁰⁹ Social media and interactive websites were pervasive in the marketing strategy employed by *The Hunger Games*. For example, Capitol Couture's²¹⁰ website gave a sneak-peek look into the fashion and culture of the Capitol while, at the very same time, through games and quizzes, fans could get more insight into the world of Panem. These digital platforms added extra layers to the narrative, further embedding audience engagement and participation. It also helped *The Hunger Games* capitalize on its narrative by developing a wide range of merchandise, from clothing and accessories to theme board games and collectibles. Only then did this merchandising strategy create money; it also reinforced the story world by letting fans take elements of the narrative into everyday life.²¹¹

While a good deal of marketing advantages exist in using a transmedia storytelling approach, there are also several problem areas in this process that are of concern—critical flaws, actually—which any marketer should be aware of if their campaigns are to be successful. Some of these challenges include resource intensification, audience fragmentation issues, intellectual property complexities, legalistic issues, and finally, economic, and ethics-related concerns.

It is resource-intensive, notably involving the investment of time, money, and talent within a transmedia storytelling project. Sousa, De Lemos Martins, and Zagalo (2016) define the role and stakes of digital convergence in the process of transmedia storytelling, emphasizing that developing high-quality content across several platforms involves huge resources.²¹² Production costs can rocket when advanced technologies like virtual production and AI-driven analytics are involved.

A transmedia campaign requires a wide variety of skill sets, from storytelling to technology and from marketing to audience engagement. Therefore, assembling and coordinating a multi-

²⁰⁷ Collins, S. 2008–2010. *The Hunger Games* Trilogy. Scholastic.

²⁰⁸ Lionsgate. 2012–2015. *The Hunger Games* Franchise. USA.

²⁰⁹ Gray, J. (2014). *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: NYU Press.

²¹⁰ Capitol Couture and TheCapitol.PN, another promotional site, were created by the Watson Design Group for Lionsgate. Capitol Couture was a five-issue fashion magazine that "[blended] in-world storytelling with real-world fashion icons".

²¹¹ Vlessing, E. (2012, March 23). *Hunger Games and the power of merch*. The Globe and Mail.

²¹² Sousa, M., De Lemos Martins, M., & Zagalo, N. (2016). *Transmedia Storytelling: The Roles and Stakes of the Digital Convergence Era*. Unpublished manuscript.

disciplined team is simple and also very expensive. Business firms should make strategies that provide the necessary tools and resources for their planning to be achieved.

Another major challenge during this type of storytelling is audience fragmentation, wherein different segments within the targeted audiences have different platforms, and this may be a case for fragmentation. It might be a challenge when it comes to delivering a cohesive narrative experience and measuring the integrated impact of the campaign. Tosun and Dönmez (2018)²¹³ outline knowledge about audience behaviors and preferences as central to targeting and engaging audience segments effectively.

In addressing this challenge, marketers should develop focused content strategies that would serve the preferences of individual audience segments while making sure that the central story is accessible and engaging. Analytics can be used to understand audience preferences and consumption patterns and distribute and engage with content more effectively.

Another complication in developing a transmedia storytelling strategy is IP and legal issues. Bernstein identifies the legal and business essentials of media entertainment that outlines how a creator has to cope with an increasingly complicated set of intellectual property rights across various platforms and collaborators.²¹⁴ This means that it is very important to ensure that the content will be legally protected, with IP rights well defined and managed for avoiding potential legal issues.

Transmedia projects frequently involve many different creators who are working together on the various facets of the story. Inevitably, such collaboration requires clearly stated agreements and contracts that define ownership, use rights, and revenue sharing. Without these legalities accounted for, the project can end up with people at each other's throats over problems easily avoided.²¹⁵

The challenges of transmedia storytelling also include economic and ethical challenges. Sokolova's analysis on user content as entertainment or 'free labor' draws light to the fact that it also has some ethical issues addressed, such as how fan-generated content is encouraged

²¹³ Tosun, B., & Dönmez, M. S. (2018). *Use of Transmedia Storytelling Within the Context of Postmodern Advertisement*. In Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling,

²¹⁴ Bernstein, G. (2015). *Understanding the Business of Media Entertainment: The Legal and Business Essentials All Filmmakers Should Know*. Routledge.

²¹⁵ Stone, J. (2021, June 22). *The future of transmedia*. Naavik.

without offering compensation or credit where due.²¹⁶ While this would develop the narrative with user-generated content and increase the reach of an audience, it raises a question about being fair to fans and contributors.

An issue for transmedia projects is economic sustainability. Indeed, production costs used to be high; continuous content updates are necessary to attract audiences, which places pressure on budgets. Marketers have to make sure that an investment made in telling a story through transmedia measures up against its potential return, and that a project will be able to sustain itself.

While the features of transmedia storytelling offer many marketing benefits, there are also some formidable challenges for the marketer to contend with. Therefore, effective delivery of a transmedia campaign requires attending to resource intensity, audience fragmentation, intellectual property, legal issues, and economic and ethical considerations. By proactively addressing these challenges, companies can unleash the full power of transmedia storytelling to develop engaging stories that involve immersion and are economically viable.

²¹⁶ Sokolova, N. (2012). *Co-opting Transmedia Consumers: User Content as Entertainment or 'Free Labour'? The Cases of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. and Metro 2033*. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64(8), 1565-1583.

Chapter 4: Case Study of the DC Extended Universe (DCEU)

Warner Bros. Pictures and DC Entertainment launched the auspiciously conceived DCEU (2013-2023). Much as Marvel's Cinematic Universe, it seeks to create an associated universe amidst this complex fable, filled with the storied novels of DC Comics onto the silver screen. It began in 2013 with *Man of Steel*²¹⁷, which puts a darker and more introspective spin on the Superman mythos. Finally, there were *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*²¹⁸ and *Suicide Squad*²¹⁹ opening the floodgates on characters and paving the way for an expansive universe. Contrary to Marvel's well-phased approach, DCEU wanted to take a faster route and, hence, resonate with bringing about ensemble films like *Justice League*. This goal was not hidden: to create a multilayered narrative universe where the iconic heroes and villains crossed boundaries into various films, television series, and other media, offering richness and immersion for fans.

The chapter concerns the intricate tapestry of the DCEU, which looks through the successes and failures regarding narrative coherence and audience engagement. With a theoretical underpinning in transmedia storytelling and a focused investigation into some established concepts like top-down and bottom-up design, this chapter sets out to understand how the DCEU approach in these areas impacted the reception and sustainability of that world. The discussion will be anchored on the unique attributes that different media bring to the storytelling process and offer insight into ways in which the DCEU could have utilized those strengths more effectively.

Transmedia storytelling is a new way to run linear leadership across each media platform, none of which replicates what the other is contributing or has contributed to that story experience. It is a technology that supports richer and deeper storytelling by engaging people across different levels while encouraging an in-depth exploration and engagement with the narrative world.²²⁰ Comic books have been fertile ground and often provide the starting point

²¹⁷ Snyder, Z. 2013. *Man of Steel*. USA.

²¹⁸ Snyder, Z. 2016. *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. USA.

²¹⁹ Ayer, D. 2016. *Suicide Squad*. USA.

²²⁰ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

for many of the iconic characters in the DCEU; thus, they excel in rich visual and textual narratives.

They fit deep explorations of character and plot through intricate storylines—in a relatively compact format. For instance, through comics, story arcs can be constantly attended to and developed over time to offer the story both continuity and depth.²²¹ This medium gives a concrete base for any initiative of transmedia storytelling on this capability of creating complex characters and detailed worlds. Films do offer their unique strengths. Visual effects, sound effects, and various cinematic storytelling formats can engage people with a broad reach, featuring an immersive experience that is powered by high production value and special effects. That makes films extremely powerful at delivering poignant emotional and action sequences to the broader masses.

Moreover, with the help of films, there may be a huge socio-cultural impact, hence wide discussion and interest in the narrative. The transitions from comic books into films are delicate arts of adaptation that require much importance on retaining narrative coherence while taking advantage of their respective strengths. Transmedia storytelling works when there is the preservation of the core elements of the narrative while using all available potential of the sole platform to increase audience engagement.

Theories of transmedial design by Marie-Laure Ryan shed much light on how story worlds have been connected until now. The different methods she proposed were top-down and bottom-up, differing methodologies with different effects on coherence in the narrative sense and engaging an audience, respectively.²²² Top-down transmedia design is structured, organized, and devised, where various media platforms have their narrative elements dispersed in a systematic way. In such an approach, different media provide discrete contributions to the story so that an integrated experience can be established among the target audience. For instance, *The Matrix* franchise, minutely planned by the Wachowskis, expands across films, animated shorts (*The Animatrix*), comics, and video games.

Each component provides unique insights and expands the understanding of *The Matrix* universe, relying on the interdependence of media to complete the narrative. The latter, in contrast, concerns bottom-up transmedial design—that is, organic diffusion of a narrative across a variety of media forms as a function of the popularity and cultural resonance of an

²²¹ Penn State University. 2023. *Probing the Question: Why Are So Many Movies Based on Comic Books?*

²²² Ryan, M. 2015. *Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?* “Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies” 7(2), 1-19.

original story. For example, the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* series began as books but then became films, video games, and even merchandise because of their vast popularity.

Diverse new stories and documents are often aggregated into the existing story world, reflecting a more spontaneous growth. The DCEU is an example of bottom-up transmedial design. What had originally succeeded through its richly laid out narratives and character developments in DC Comics then expanded to include films, television series, games, and other forms of media. This was less centralized and reactive to the success of singular parts. Therefore, it saw wild swings in terms of narrative coherence and engaging their audience.

Knowing how the DCEU could have overcome these challenges might be very enlightening in understanding bottom-up transmedia storytelling dynamics and what their implications for further projects are. Regardless of the cinematic adaptations of the DC comics by Warner Brothers, the success of the superhero genre at the box office has refurbished interest in comic books, thereby significantly improving their sales. According to Cox and Steinberg, in 2017²²³, the box-office success of Marvel and DC franchise films brought unprecedented awareness to superheroes, rejuvenating the comic book market. For example, total revenues for comics broke \$1 billion in 2015 and continued growing into 2016 partially because of the blockbuster success of superhero movies.²²⁴

This phenomenon speaks to the mutual relationship between film and comic books within transmedia storytelling. Films act as advertising for their print counterparts, thus moving new fans to come experience the original comic book stories.

4.1 Narrative Coherence in DCEU

Henry Jenkins's "mothership" concept²²⁵ and Davis²²⁶ discussion on the narrative coherence of a transmedia work elucidate the consumption of establishing a consistent tone and style of a particular work across different media platforms. The concept by Jenkins says that there has to be some kind of central hub of the narrative when a form of storytelling has to be coherent in its final tone and style. Davis explains how coherence in tone and style is important for audience involvement and immersion.

²²³ Cox, G., & Steinberg, B. (2017). *Comic book sales fly on the capes of hit movies, TV shows*. Variety.

²²⁴ McMillan, R. 2015. *Marvel vs DC: The Superhero Movie War*.

²²⁵ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

²²⁶ Davis, C. H. (2013). *Audience value and transmedia products*.

The different tones and styles spread across the board for DCEU films caused a narrative disjoint that undercut the setting of a cohesive universe. It deviated out of character with the consistent narrative tone found in franchises like the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which had succeeded. From the success of Christopher Nolan's gloomy *The Dark Knight* trilogy²²⁷ which told a realistic, gritty retelling of Batman stories, the latter DCEU films adopted a very somber tone, much darker than what can usually be found in the comics.²²⁸ This tone change was reflected in movies such as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Wonder Woman*²²⁹.

These darker approaches led to misalignments in the movie portrayals compared to traditional depictions of characters in the comics. This could be observable, for instance, with characters like *The Flash* and *Wonder Woman*, who were portrayed against a grittier and somber backdrop than was originally envisaged for them as personas in the comic books. The lighter, humorous Flash was given a much darker tone, out of sync with the expectations of the audience. The character of *Wonder Woman* went through the same—the icon whose classic associations had been with hope and empowerment was put in a darker setting that headed against where the comic books were coming from.

An already inconsistent approach, this left audiences confused and also prevented them from building any kind of a fascinating story world. The lack of a clear vision created these different tonal shifts from movie to movie—a fragmented viewing experience that jarred. For instance, the tone jump from the dark, serious *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* to the much more inspired *Wonder Woman* was off-putting for audiences. Indeed, it was symptomatic of a more general disjointed narrative strategy that did its very best to preclude an overall coherent tone, vital for audience investment and narrative coherence.

That can also be explained in the sense that the DCEU emulated the success of *The Dark Knight* trilogy without taking into account that the different attributes present in each of those characters brought to the movies themselves—a series of films that were tonally inconsistent and misplaced against the source material. Their approach sharply contrasted with the phased approach of MCU, wherein everything was planned carefully to ensure that every movie has a specific tone and style that somehow contributes to the greater narrative of it all.

²²⁷ Nolan, C. 2005–2012. *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. USA.

²²⁸ Gordon, M. 2016. *DC Comics at the Movies: Why So Dark?*

²²⁹ Jenkins, P. 2017. *Wonder Woman*. USA.

In other words, the tone and style variables of the DCEU simply reflected a much deeper problem–narrative strategy. Once again, going more cutting and attempting to follow the steps of *The Dark Knight* trilogy, this franchise lost the consistency of characters and coherence in the narrative that this kind of project needs for transmedia storytelling. The disjointed approach culminated in the end of audience engagement and the building of a coherent universe, which demonstrates very well that the philosophies of transmedia storytelling, as purported by Jenkins in 2006 and Davis in 2013, have not a collective narrative vision expressed before.²³⁰

Jason Mittell's "complex TV"²³¹ and Marie-Laure Ryan's notion of "story worlds"²³² within a complex narrative, underline that world-building happens progressively. In the case of complex narratives, Mittell argues that serial development is needed to get depth in character and audience investment. Ryan's notion of story worlds speaks to something like a well-constructed environment where each story constituent element serves its unified function. While the MCU patiently built up its universe in a multi-year process, the DCEU has hastened its universe-building phase. The concept of a story world underlines a well-built and connected narrative setting in which each story component makes up a unified whole. Whereas the Marvel Cinematic Universe built up its universe in a multi-year and careful process, it was the intention of DCEU to speed up this universe-building process. The MCU began with *Iron Man*²³³ in 2008, and since then, through many films and TV shows, it has gradually introduced the characters and storylines, giving audiences the chance to set up personal connections with single characters and the overall narrative. By the release of ensemble films like *The Avengers*²³⁴ there was already enough attachment from audiences towards the characters and their arcs.

In stark contrast, the DCEU executed its projects hastily. Launched with *Man of Steel* in 2013, this franchise has since charged into *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Suicide Squad* in 2016, the latter two of which introduce multiple major characters without giving them standalone films to develop their backstories and personalities. This haste was further

²³⁰ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

²³¹ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

²³² Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

²³³ Favreau, J. 2008. *Iron Man*. USA.

²³⁴ Whedon, J. 2012. *The Avengers*. USA.

exemplified by the 2017 *Justice League*, a team-up movie that brought together characters like Batman and Superman with Wonder Woman, The Flash, Aquaman, and Cyborg in advance of most of their solo films.

This meant this approach resulted in underwritten characters and a fractured narrative structure. Audiences could not attach to characters thrown into complicated plots without a background setup. For example, Superman's death in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* did not quite land as it could if audiences had at least been able to invest in his character throughout several movies. Furthermore, characters like Cyborg and The Flash had to be introduced in *Justice League* with no individual films preceding it, which removed audience investment in their stories.

The hurried nature of the DCEU in doing the universe-building needed a more phased and gradual method. It resulted in a host of films that sometimes turned out very disjointed and loosely thrown together. This was unlike what the MCU did, carefully planning and developing each film that enabled the flow from one film to another movie and accordingly created a story world. What it boils down to is that the DCEU, in trying to repeat MCU's success without the same kind of foundational groundwork—in effect, created a less cohesive narrative experience for the audience.²³⁵

The major mistake of the DCEU on a macro level, in terms of its haste to build a universe, is reflected as a massive mistake regarding its transmedial storytelling strategy. What became impossible for this franchise with a rushed character development and audience attachment process underlined by the theoretical frameworks of both Mittell²³⁶ and Ryan²³⁷ is to create a coherent and emotionally relatable story world.

Marie-Laure Ryan's *Immersive Storyworlds* (2001) and Christy Dena's *Transmedia Practice* (2009) each offer a theoretical framework one may pass through to understand why there needs to be some unified creative vision and stable leadership in order for narrative coherence to prevail. Ryan places value on the cohesion of the story world, wherein all

²³⁵ Hernandez, P. 2024. *Why the DCEU Failed: Rushing to Catch Up with Marvel*.

²³⁶ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

²³⁷ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

elements contribute to a unified, sophisticated narrative experience. Dena stresses coherent transmedia policies guaranteeing consistency across media.²³⁸

First, there were considerable problems with the narrative coherence of the DCEU due to frequent changes in creative direction and leadership. Second, these inconsistencies propagated further due to inconsistent transmedial policies. Warner Bros. and DC Films have had too many changes at the helm, which meant there needed to be a coherent vision for the DCEU. Directors and writers would leave projects due to creative differences; this usually meant abrupt turns in the direction of films (Forbes, 2020). For instance, Zack Snyder, who was initially attached to the DCEU on Justice League, left the movie in the middle of production due to personal matters and brought in Joss Whedon to finish the film.²³⁹ The latter resulted in evident tone and style shifts within the same film, which created a disjointed narrative experience for audiences.²⁴⁰

Not only was there a change in leadership, but significant creative differences were greatly prevailing between the key people associated with the DCEU. Most of these disputes resulted in alternate versions wherein films went way off from what their respective directors had envisioned earlier. *Suicide Squad* underwent massive reshoots and editing changes that resulted in a product entirely different from David Ayer's original cut. The final product was a movie with intolerably inconsistent flows, which, in the end, received a lot of criticism from critics and viewers alike.

Besides, the DCEU policy has brewed this incoherent storytelling. From the very beginning, DC films and TV shows remained separate, along with their multiverses. In 2020, the DCEU characters were somehow linked into The CW's Arrowverse²⁴¹ through a *Crisis on Infinite Earths*²⁴² crossover—a retcon policy. On the other hand, this did not create a coherent Earth for all DCEU characters, thus confusing viewers even more by helplessness in their imagination of the mentioned coherence of the story world.

²³⁸ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

²³⁹ Meer, T. 2023. *The DC Extended Universe: A Comprehensive Overview*.

²⁴⁰ Forbes. (2020). *Henry Cavill Likely To Don Cape Again As Superman*.

²⁴¹ CW. 2012–2024. *Arrowverse*. USA. The Arrowverse were consisted of different TV shows based on DC comics heroes such as The Flash and The Green Arrow.

²⁴² *Crisis on Infinite Earths* is a major crossover event in DC Comics that was first released between 1985 and 1986. Developed by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Pérez, this pivotal storyline was designed to simplify the DC Universe by resolving its intricate and conflicting continuity.

More specifically, what held back the DCEU from chaining the narrative coherence needed for a transmedial project to work was precisely the failure to come up with a consistent and unique transmedial strategy. With frequent changes in creative leadership and directions, coupled with inconsistent policies on how the different media forms should be integrated, fragmenting of the narrative experience occurs within the audience.

In a big way, creative differences, leadership changes, and inconsistent transmedia policies undermined the DCEU's narrative coherence. According to both Ryan and Dena, whom many theoretical frameworks created, what is foregrounded with equal appeal in this context is the holding fast to a stable and unified creative vision and transmedia strategy that the DCEU fell short of realizing.²⁴³²⁴⁴

According to Christy Dena, *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments* in 2009 calls for continuity and consistent output in a Transmedia storytelling context. As Dena has rightly put it, reliable production schedules for effective Transmedia projects go in line with the integration of content seamlessly across several media for narrative coherence and audience engagement purposes.

Having delayed and canceled many projects, the DCEU has managed to disrupt the narrative continuity by a mile with gaps and inconsistencies that left the audience confused and undermined the entire narrative structure. Inconsistency stands in really sharp contrast to the minutely planned and executed release schedules of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which kept showering the audiences with films and TV shows nonstop. One of the most notable examples regarding issue was the cancellation of the standalone Batman film to be directed by Ben Affleck.²⁴⁵ This project was initially announced with much anticipation, promising to delve deeper into the character's arc within the DCEU. However, creative differences and Affleck's eventual departure from the project led to its cancellation, leaving a significant gap in the narrative that was never fully addressed.

Other projects, such as *Justice League Part Two*, *Man of Steel 2* and various spin-offs, were delayed indefinitely or flat-out canceled. All these cancellations deprived the fans of the planned trajectory narrative and diminished audience interest. Each project that had been

²⁴³ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

²⁴⁴ Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

²⁴⁵ L. Stone, R. 2024. *Ben Affleck's Canceled Batman Movie: What We Know*.

canceled was a lost opportunity for further growth and deepening of the DCEU story world, leaving it fragmented and incomplete in terms of its narrative experience.²⁴⁶

Further impact was caused by the delays in the continuity of the films, which were already set. For instance, *The Flash*²⁴⁷ standalone movie was delayed several times due to changes in its directorial staff, which ultimately delayed its release date. Such delayed productions consequently contributed to disarray and lack of interest amongst audiences, with key plotlines and character storylines left hanging for prolonged periods of time.

Furthermore, following the cancellation of films like *Cyborg* and *Green Lantern Corps*, some major characters introduced in *Justice League* never really had solo films to develop themes such as their origins and motivations. Again, this failure to develop its characters further gave an audience the impression that the universe had been fashioned in haste and was incomplete, without adequate depth and continuity.

While the MCU had a consistent schedule and a clear roadmap that audiences could follow through with a coherent, evolving narrative, which built on monetary investment over time, this was not so true for the DCEU in general. To a great extent, it could have been more constant and reliable regarding when projects would be released, underlining a critical area of weakness in its transmedial strategy.

The DCEU was too comfortable with delays and cancellations, and the changes disarrayed its continuity and cohesion of narrative. Inconsistent and unreliable output is a surefire way to kill an audience's interest in your story world—as central in Dena's theoretical framework—and compromise its run-time engagement potential.²⁴⁸

In the first section, we discussed what caused the incoherence of the DCEU narrative. First, we analyzed the inconsistency in tone and style across DCEU films that birthed a disjointed narrative experience. The dark tone of the DCEU, with an apparent co-option of the Dark Knight Trilogy formula for success, brought misalignment from traditional depictions in original comic book materials and created a shattered, confusing story world.

We then dissected how universe-building in the DCEU became a rush and how this accelerated approach brought about undercooked characters and a jumbled narrative structure. While the MCU took a paced and gradual approach to introducing its characters and fleshing

²⁴⁶ Rossi, J. 2024. *Canceled DCEU Movies: What Was Planned*.

²⁴⁷ Muschietti, A. 2023. *The Flash*. USA.

²⁴⁸ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

out its universe—to which audiences began forming an emotional attachment—the rapidness of the DCEU caused the audience to not form any emotional attachment to it and had a disjointed narrative.

We then got to the creative differences, leadership changes, and transmedia policy issues that plagued the DCEU. Frequent changes in creative direction and leadership, together with inconsistent transmedia policies, disrupted the narrative coherence and confused the audience. Lack of a unified vision and stable leadership in creativity further fragmented the storytelling.

We have also spoken about how delayed and canceled projects impacted the integrity of the narrative structure within the DCEU. More so, delays and cancellations very often caused gaps in the plot and really did a disservice to the construction of the narrative structure. Inconsistency in producing a continuous and dependable product impaired the audience's interest and developing a story world filled with cohesion.

4.2 Audience Engagement in DCEU

Henry Jenkins's (2006)²⁴⁹ and Davis's (2013)²⁵⁰ insights into audience engagement underline how constant and successful box office performance ensures that interest and investment are sustained. As Jenkins indicates, the sustainability of a transmedia franchise is dependent on the art of active audience participation and investment in franchising, which has taken a frontline place. On the other hand, Davis cites the role that financial success plays in maintaining the audience's faith or trust in the narrative.²⁵¹

The inconsistent box office performance of the DCEU thus had a consequence on the capacity of the universe to attract viewers. While the Marvel Cinematic Universe has seen relatively stable and firsthand box office success among its films, that of the DCEU is characterized by many financial highs and lows that undermined audience confidence and engagement.

For example, both *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Suicide Squad* fit the expectation of substantial opening weekends but faded drastically afterward. What this kind of pattern indicated was that though much interest had been created at the very beginning, negative word-of-mouth and mixed critical reviews about these films lessened audience interest as a whole by sharply bringing down box office revenues in the following weeks. This volatility

²⁴⁹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

²⁵⁰ Davis, C. H. (2013). *Audience value and transmedia products*.

²⁵¹ StatCrunch. 2024. *Analysis Report: Statistical Insights*.

was furthered by the inconsistent quality of the films. No one can tell what audiences would get from each new film.²⁵²

In contrast, *Wonder Woman* was both critically and commercially successful, showing the world that DCEU can pull off a consistent box office performance where the narrative is coherent, with character development that enables audiences to connect with it. This goes on to prove one thing: if the story connects well with the audience, then there is no doubt whatsoever that good audience engagement would be evoked. Unfortunately, this was not replicated seamlessly across other DCEU films that came after; hence, a fragmented audience experience ensued.

The inconsistency of the DCEU at the box office was further compounded by the underwhelming performance of *Justice League*. That film, which would have been expected to be one of the biggest box office draws, became problematic due to its troubled production history and its reception by critics. Underperformances of this nature did not simply have implications for the profitability of a particular film. However, they chipped away at faith in the armor concerning the possibility of a DCEU that could carry on—at least—in a relatively consistent and entertainingly believable narrative universe.

Moreover, the frequency of delays and cancellations in projects within DCEU naturally opened up gaps in the release schedule, further disrupting audience engagement. The inability to provide a constant content flow made the DCEU unable to gain and hold momentum compared to the MCU, with its equally distanced release schedule that endlessly kept audiences hooked. Inconsistent box office performance simply captures the broader DCEU transmedia strategy problems. More importantly, an inconsistent quality threshold and overall incoherent narrative vision are some of the issues that have put critical pressure on this franchise's ability to hold audiences' attention. This is as opposed to the MCU's consistent storyline, which sealed fans' confidence and further invested them in the brand, leading to continued success at the box office. Ultimately, the box office performance of the DCEU reminds one of the importance of financial consistency to ensure that audience engagement will endure. With theoretical frameworks from Jenkins and Davis—respectively—the lack of overall quality and financial reliability results in a difficult task at best when trying to sustain audience interest and investment.²⁵³

²⁵² Forbes. (2023). *The Flash Plummets To 3rd Place At Midweek Box Office*.

²⁵³ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Harsh Criticism can further contribute to audience engagement and the coherence of narratives, Positive critics' inflows enforce audience trust and investment in a narrative; mixed or bad reviews anger audiences against the quality and coherence of a story world.

The DC Extended Universe has received mixed to negative word-of-mouth from critics, which has affected audience perception and engagement. Unlike the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which is generally hailed by critics, many DCEU films are criticized for confusing plots, uneven pacing, and tonal dissonance.

One of the first examples of this divided reception was *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. This film came out with much anticipation and started with an acceptable performance at the box office. However, it received negative reception from critics due to its convoluted plot, poor character development, and ultra-dark tone. Critics said it had done too much in so little time; it had introduced many characters and plot lines without fleshing them out, especially towards the beginning, which would make the storyline disjointed.²⁵⁴

Being a victim of critical reviews, *Suicide Squad* was slammed for manic editing and an incoherent storyline. With so many reshoots and eleventh-hour revisions, the final product reflected this with a disjointed, uneven feel. Critics were quick to note that while the movie trailers suggested a fun, even irreverent take on a team of antiheroes, the final result needed clarification and failed to come through on its promise with a mishmash of tones and styles.

Justice League is another fine example where the critical reception exposed significant problems with the narrative. The reshoots dramatized by Zack Snyder's exit and Joss Whedon taking over were very evident in the clashing tones of these two directors. The critics pointed out that because of these reshoots, there was an uneven tone, the narrative needed to be more cohesive, and some scenes felt like they belonged to other movies. In doing so, this mixed reception only continued to hurt the reputation of the DCEU in its ability to deliver coherent and compelling stories. The DCEU's failure to please critics was due to its rushed production schedule, frequent changes of creative directions, and overall absence of a unified vision. The result was movies that either seemed incomplete or bound together on their own and held no potential for building a coherent and immersive story world.

In contrast, the MCU's films have largely garnered acclaim in terms of coherent storylines, well-developed characters, and consistent tone. The continuation of this critical positivity kept audience trust alive by retaining audience engagement. The success in the MCU reverberates

²⁵⁴ Reynolds, G. 2024. *DCEU Movies Ranked: Every Film in the DC Extended Universe*.

with the fact that critical reception is crucial in transmedia storytelling since this directly affects audience perception and engagement.²⁵⁵

In her work *Transmedia Practice* (2009)²⁵⁶, Christy Dena emphasizes that successful transmedia franchises need preliminary strategic planning and coherent narrative development. From this point of view, Dena provides an understanding of how strategies of transmediality might be coordinated to better engage and build loyalty with audiences.

The DC Extended Universe has been at the receiving end of comparisons with the Marvel Cinematic Universe from time to time, bringing to light deficiencies in it regarding storyline and character development—not to forget poor overall execution. The compact, phased way of universe building by MCU and the success in developing coherent and connected narratives is a standard with which the DCEU has been unable to keep up.

Moreover, poor marketing strategies by DCEU also invited unfavorable comparisons with the MCU. It has been noticed that the marketing by DCEU was pitting them head-on against the MCU, for example, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* with *Captain America: Civil War*. This is a head-on fight that not only spiked audience expectations but also spread the failures of the DCEU even more when it could not provide a more coherent and entertaining storyline compared to what the MCU could come up with.²⁵⁷

The DCEU's approach could have been more cohesive and consistent compared to the MCU's approach to creating a connected story world in which all of the films and character arcs deepened the overall narrative. Many viewers who were expecting a similar level of coherence and character development became disillusioned and stopped engaging and showing brand loyalty.

The wrestle of the DCEU to live up to the set standards by the MCU identifies that strategic planning and narrative coherence stand as very critical attributes for transmedia storytelling. The theoretical insight from Dena also showed how a well-coordinated approach might

²⁵⁵ Reynolds, G. 2024. *All Marvel Cinematic Universe Movies Ranked*.

²⁵⁶ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

²⁵⁷ Frati, M. (2019, September 4). *A tale of two films: Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice and Captain America: Civil War*. Medium.

enhance an audience's engagement and loyalty, which seems to be what the DCEU is missing.²⁵⁸

As Marie-Laure Ryan has argued in her book *Immersive Storyworlds* in 2014²⁵⁹, it becomes rather important to discuss the role of marketing in the shaping of audience expectations and experiences. Ryan talks about how effective marketing might immerse audiences into the story world even before engaging with primary content.

Many of the marketing strategies for the DCEU have usually resulted in heightened expectations not met by the film itself, generating disappointment and disengagement among audiences. Unlike the MCU, which mostly delivered on its promises, the campaigns of the DCEU set up some things that the films could not deliver.²⁶⁰

Such high-profile cases included "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" advertising. The movie was marred by a campaign promising an epic confrontation between two beloved, larger-than-life superhero characters, asking for loads of story development to bridge the continuity gap with further DCEU films. However, the plot was a fragmented work with minimal character development. Therefore, what fans saw did not live up to the hype created by this campaign. This disparity between expectation and reality thus came with immense backlash and disappointment from fans and critics.²⁶¹

The same goes for the "Justice League" marketing, which suggested that audiences would be in store for a far more cohesive, epic team-up film, positioning it as the rival to the MCU's *The Avengers*. However, with its troubled production and massive reshoots, the result was disjointed, lacking the epic narrative people hoped for. The rushed and inconsistent nature of the film was a far cry from the polished, interconnected story promised by the marketing, leading to a sense of betrayal among the audience.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments*. University of Sydney.

²⁵⁹ Ryan, M.-L., & Thon, J.-N. (Eds.). (2014). *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

²⁶⁰ Colbert, S. (2019, February 10). *Warner Bros. has a DC problem: Marketing & PR expectations are the issue*. Screen Rant.

²⁶¹ Forbes. (2023). *The Flash Plummets To 3rd Place At Midweek Box Office*

²⁶² Kownacki, J. (2017, November 20). *8 reasons the Justice League movie marketing failed*. Justin Kownacki.

The DCEU also created unrealistic expectations by overhyping the movies. For example, *Suicide Squad* was sold as this fun, edgy, irreverent take on the superhero genre. Its teasers suggested a dynamic and full-on action movie.²⁶³

Furthermore, even the marketing maintained a focus on its most famous characters: Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. This relegated other characters who could have been fully developed into leads worthy of attention. This approach limited its potential to grow the narrative universe of the franchise in both coherent and inclusive ways, having fumbled opportunities with relatively unknown characters that the MCU did very well to surprise and delight audiences with characters like *Iron Man* (2008) and the *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014)²⁶⁴.

These marketing missteps have long-term ramifications for audience engagement with the DCEU. The continued experience of having expectations set and then not met, produces skepticism and muted anticipation for future releases. This will be contrasted with MCU, where consistency in following through from marketing has developed a staunchly loyal fan base.

The DCEU furnished unequalled lessons regarding how the marketing strategies should align squarely with the actual product's content and quality. Effective marketing not only attracts audiences but also sets the tone for their engagement with the described narrative. Theoretic underpinning from Ryan states that 'marketing' has to reflect the story world truthfully; it must also manage expectations realistically so that audience trust and engagement are maintained.²⁶⁵

Jason Mittell's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*²⁶⁶ provides insight that can be used to better understand the role that competition and saturation play within a market on audience engagement. Mittell discusses how this proliferation of similar content will result in audience fatigue, which in turn requires different storytelling in hopes of standing out within a crowded market. The DCEU has struggled to differentiate itself in an increasingly saturated superhero genre dominated by the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The overwhelming presence of superhero films and TV shows that keep hammering

²⁶³ Wilkinson, A. (2016, August 4). *Suicide Squad is a so-so movie. But its story is a fascinating mess.* Vox.

²⁶⁴ Gunn, J. (Director). (2014). *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Marvel Studios.

²⁶⁵ Ryan, M.-L., & Thon, J.-N. (Eds.). (2014). *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

²⁶⁶ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

audiences with similar content has created a competitive scenario, making it difficult to retain a unique audience reach. It set a very high mark for the MCU in terms of narrative coherence and character development, also in maintaining the audience interest through a continuing stream of connected films. Also, this helped the MCU gain loyal fans and win the superhero genre with an undefeated record that other franchises simply find very hard to compete with.

The fight for the DCEU has been to establish its brand identity and clearly be placed as an alternative to the MCU in this oversaturated market. Due to the inconsistent tone, rushed universe building, and narrative incoherence of the DCEU, it found it hard to locate a place of its own in the eyes of the audience. Movies such as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Justice League* received the most unfavorable comparisons to their MCU counterparts, thus revealing exactly how much the DCEU was struggling to match the high expectations set by the competition.²⁶⁷

The market's oversaturation also brought audiences to the point of superhero fatigue. Sure, there were many releases, but it became hard to keep interests up and thrilled for all of them. The fact that the DCEU could not follow through by providing quality and engaging content did not help. The audience almost came to view the DCEU films as just another entry into an overcrowded genre rather than something that really had to be seen. What delivers a saturated market of unique and compelling storytelling is unique storytelling. Even more importantly, insight from Mittell becomes relevant, as the ability of the DCEU to offer a unique and different narrative than the MCU underlines precisely how competition and saturation impact engagement with the audience. In sum, with a clear and coherent brand strategy from the DCEU, it could maintain audience loyalty and differentiation in an overly crowded superhero-based genre.²⁶⁸

Jenkins' *Participatory Culture* (2006)²⁶⁹ and Marie-Laure Ryan's insights on immersive story worlds²⁷⁰ comment precisely on the crucial role played by fan engagement, which concerns the sustainability of a narrative franchise due to a divided fanbase. While Jenkins talks about the active participation of fans in terms of community building as a centrally

²⁶⁷ Goldsmith, J. (2023, August 23). *Audiences are sick of boring superhero movie universes*. New York Post.

²⁶⁸ Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press.

²⁶⁹ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

²⁷⁰ Ryan, M.-L., & Thon, J.-N. (Eds.). (2014). *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

important strategy to secure the success of a storyworld, Ryan insists on the need for a unique, immersive narrative experience. Inherent in this is a divided fan base that hurt the DCEU's functionality in engaging audiences. This division can be traced back to several different factors: creative differences, inconsistent narrative strategies, and visions for the franchise that often seem to argue with each other.

One of the most prominent examples of fan division within the DCEU is the controversy surrounding Zack Snyder's vision for the franchise. His take on a more mature, darker approach to storytelling in films like *Man of Steel* and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* made his notes resonate exceptionally well with some fans who appreciated how deep and complex his stories are. However, this has alienated other fans who wanted a lighter, more traditional superhero tone; massive polarization followed as the DCEU fanbase became mixed. (Forbes, 2020).

This was furthered by the release of *Justice League*. After Snyder stepped away due to personal tragedy, Whedon's reshoots and changes to the film led to a tonal shift that sharply divided fans. For some viewers, the lighter tone and apparent incoherence were the greatest disappointments; to others, it was riveting. This was epitomized most in the "Snyder Cut"²⁷¹ campaign, in which a faction of the fanbase wanted Snyder's original vision released. Its eventual release as *Zack Snyder's Justice League* in 2021 refueled discussions over the direction of the franchise and outlined boundlessly vast chasms across the fan community as a whole. The theoretical insights by Jenkins and Ryan state that a divided fanbase severely harms the health of a transmedial franchise. According to Jenkins, participatory culture stipulates the existence of a cohesive fanbase that actively participates in protecting the narrative. Ryan's work on immersive story worlds brings to the forefront the need for consistency and unity in the narrative experience to foster immersion and investment. DCEU does not, and hence, the failure to do so results in a broken fan base, undermining the franchise's capability to keep up with long-lasting engagement. The division of the fans for the DCEU draws out the problem of a fractured creative vision and a lack of consistent narrative strategy to situate engagement with fans. Without that, it will polarize enthusiastic fans, decreasing participation and commitment to the franchise. In particular, the two theoretical frameworks by Jenkins²⁷² and

²⁷¹ Sims, D. (2021, March 10). *The Snyder Cut: The wild true story behind the mythic Justice League recut*. The Ringer.

²⁷² Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Ryan²⁷³ provide strong arguments regarding the function of cohesive fandom in transmedia storytelling.

In this section, we looked at what factors had impacted audience engagement with the DC Extended Universe. We started by looking at different box office performances of DCEU films and how this financial unpredictability, coupled with unrealized expectations set by their teasers, led to damaged audience confidence in—and thus subsequent interest for—these films. We have also talked about how people compare the MCU with a rushed and inconsistent DCEU struggling hard to make up for that coherent and strategic story that was told by DC's competitor, attributing to the unfavorable comparisons and lessened audience loyalty overall.

We have seen the power of marketing and expectation, whereby overly zealous marketing by the DCEU set viewers up for extremely unrealistic expectations that these films never really ended up matching. A mismatch in marketing promise versus accurate content made audiences disappointed and skeptical. Not to speak of competition and market saturation, whereby it proved hard to distinguish DCEU within an overly saturated genre of superhero movies dominated by the MCU. It has also generated audience fatigue due to a lack of a unique, constant narrative strategy that contributes to lessened engagement.

We also stepped into the problem of fan division, characterized by different creative visions and contradicting portrayals of characters diluting the DCEU fanbase. That division drastically lowered audience support and is essential for engaging with a unified, coherent narrative strategy in transmedia storytelling.

Through these analyses, we have found focal points regarding their strategies for the DCEU and where they fell short in effectively holding an audience. The theoretical frameworks by Jenkins, Ryan, and Mittell firmly outline the need for quality consistency, coherent storytelling, and a unified fan base in holding onto audiences' interest and investment within a transmedia franchise.

²⁷³ Ryan, M.-L., & Thon, J.-N. (Eds.). (2014). *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

Chapter 5: Case Study of *The Witcher* Video Games

Fantasy worlds have evolved into fertilized ground for transmedia creators. Nowadays, a well-realized fantasy world is often enough reason to create a transmedia project. In 2007 CD Projekt RED²⁷⁴ game studio, started adapting Andrzej Sapkowski's fantasy book series, their endeavors later on became a gold standard of achievement in transmedia campaigns. However, while negotiating the publishing rights, the Polish studio paid this enormously acclaimed writer only a paltry sum of just \$9,500 in today's money after Sapkowski refused to take a percentage of the future profit from the games.²⁷⁵ Little did he know that the games based on the tales of Geralt of Rivia would go on to sell over 75 million units.²⁷⁶ *The Witcher* games reached a high status of being called a national treasure for Poland. The quality product of CD Projekt Red even found itself in political meetings and formal gift exchanges. In 2011, Donald Tusk, who was prime minister of Poland back then, presented Obama with the collector's edition of *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* as a memory of his visit.²⁷⁷

As Stephen Joyce states in his paper *Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem*²⁷⁸, throughout most of the 20th century, the financial power for a transmedia franchise was basically derived from either movies or television series. In both cases, the power of financial investment rested with Hollywood. Therefore, other media creators were making a pretty penny by partnering up with one of the majors in Hollywood. Opportunities for adaptation were rarely turned down due to the lucrative nature of such partnerships. However, what has changed in the 21st century is that this video game industry has grown phenomenally equal in size and financial impact to Hollywood. Nowadays, it is typical for the budgets and returns of high-profile console games—so-called Triple-A

²⁷⁴ Founded by Marcin Iwiński in 2002 in Poland.

²⁷⁵ S. McWhertor, M. 2023. *The Witcher's Author Doesn't Make Any Money Off Witcher Games*.

²⁷⁶ S. McWhertor, M. 2018. *CD Projekt Rejects Witcher Writer's Request for More Compensation*.

²⁷⁷ Donlan, C. 2021. *Obama Praises Witcher 2, but It Doesn't Sound Like He Played It*.

²⁷⁸ Joyce, S. 2023. *Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem*. "Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media".

games²⁷⁹—to match those of blockbuster movies.²⁸⁰ And with this comes the fact that game producers are no longer in a situation to be subservient to some Hollywood franchise.

This chapter tries to map the case of The Witcher games against critical factors contributing to success, as identified within our research into transmedia storytelling in previous chapters. I will explore how the game designers discovered an ideal and fertile ground to develop their transmedia project, drawing from Sapkowski's distinguished Witcher book series, which inherently stands apart from other fantasy literature.

5.1 Narrative Coherence in *The Witcher* Video Games

When, in the mid-1980s, the visionary Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski began to publish the first of *The Witcher* series entries in *Fantastyka*, a Polish science fiction and fantasy magazine, he could not help but envision what enormity of shadow his story world was about to cast upon the realm of fantasy fiction, never mind the whole world of entertainment.

The word 'wiedmin' in Polish, denoting his protagonist, was first translated from Polish into English as 'hexer' in the film adaptation. Nevertheless, CD Projekt RED, in *The Witcher* video game series, decided to translate it to 'Witcher,' a choice further embraced by Danusia Stok in her translation of the novel *The Last Wish*²⁸¹. Sapkowski himself used 'Witcher' in the book *Historia i fantastyka*²⁸². Moreover, I will refer to the franchise and the story world as *The Witcher*—the name under which it became known worldwide.

Sapkowski published three short story collections, including *The Last Wish* (*Ostatnie życzenie*) (1993, English edition: 2007), *Sword of Destiny* (*Miecz przeznaczenia*) (1992, English edition: 2015)²⁸³, *Coś się kończy, coś się zaczyna* (*Something Ends, Something Begins*) (2000)²⁸⁴, and a novel-length collection consisting of *Blood of Elves* (*Krew elfów*) (1994, English edition: 2009)²⁸⁵, *Time of Contempt* (*Czas pogardy*) (1995, English edition: 2013)²⁸⁶,

²⁷⁹ A triple-A (AAA) game refers to a high-budget, high-profile video game developed by a large studio, often with significant marketing and production resources. These games are expected to be of high quality and are designed to appeal to a broad audience, similar to blockbuster movies in the film industry.

²⁸⁰ McCormick, R. 2009. *Video Games Go Hollywood*.

²⁸¹ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Last Wish*. Translated by Danusia Stok, Gollancz, 2007.

²⁸² Sapkowski, Andrzej, and Stanisław Bereś. *Historia i fantastyka*. SuperNOWA, 2005.

²⁸³ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Sword of Destiny*. 1992. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2015.

²⁸⁴ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Coś się kończy, coś się zaczyna*. SuperNOWA, 2000.

²⁸⁵ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Blood of Elves*. 1994. English edition, translated by Danusia Stok, Orbit, 2009.

²⁸⁶ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Time of Contempt*. 1995. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2013.

Baptism of Fire (Chrzest Ognia) (1996, English edition: 2014)²⁸⁷, *The Tower of the Swallow* (Wieża Jaskółki) (1997, English edition: 2016)²⁸⁸, *The Lady of the Lake* (Pani Jeziora) (1999, English edition: 2017)²⁸⁹ and *Season of Storms* (Sezon burz) (2013, English edition: 2018)²⁹⁰.

Geralt of Rivia is the hero of the story—an assassin mutated and educated in a special Witcher school from his childhood to hunt down and destroy monsters. Despite living in a morally dubious world, Geralt can uphold a consistent moral code. Geralt is comparable to Raymond Chandler's famous character, Philip Marlowe, who was both honorable and cynical.²⁹¹ The world of these adventures is deeply founded on Slavic mythology and Polish history; simultaneously, it is heavily indebted to J.R.R. Tolkien. The books benefitted from a dark fantasy world with numerous well-written grey characters always facing moral dilemmas.

The stories of Geralt of Rivia became a sensation in Poland in an instant and were later translated into more than 37 languages. In 2009, Sapkowski received the David Gemmell Legend Award for Best Fantasy Novel.²⁹² By 2020, the books had sold 15 million copies²⁹³, becoming the subject of dozens of adaptations and transmedia projects.

Although one would easily categorize *The Witcher* saga in the fantasy genre, and one could not deny the inspirations that Sapkowski partially drew on for his masterpiece, there is something that makes his work different from the others, something that makes it stand out. The writer is inclined to add his unique flavor to standard fantastical creatures such as elves and dragons, which have substantially shaped the grimdark fantasy subgenre. This genre is known for its gritty realism, exploration of dark themes, and depiction of morally ambiguous characters. These characters are developed in great detail, showcasing flaws even in those considered virtuous. The absence of clear heroes or villains characterizes the moral complexity inherent in grimdark literature. This ambiguity adds a layer of nuance to the storytelling, often absent in other narratives. The author reshaped the elemental principles of fantasy writing using stylistic devices such as fantastical tropes, morally complex characters, and theoretical structures that suggested dark, magical realism. Andrzej Sapkowski holds huge credit for

²⁸⁷ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Baptism of Fire*. 1996. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2014.

²⁸⁸ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Tower of the Swallow*. 1997. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2016.

²⁸⁹ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Lady of the Lake*. 1999. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2017.

²⁹⁰ Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Season of Storms*. 2013. English edition, translated by David French, Orbit, 2018.

²⁹¹ "Jedynie słuszny wizerunek Wiedźmina." *Polityka*.

²⁹² "Andrzej Sapkowski." *Gemmell Awards*.

²⁹³ Werthead. *Sales of Witcher Books Pass 15 Million Copies. The Wertzone*.

popularizing the increasingly prominent grimdark sub-genre. The massive success of The Witcher series in the book series and video game franchise, as well as the Netflix adaptation, has massively influenced the fantasy genre.²⁹⁴

However, what ultimately differentiates the masterpiece of the Polish writer from other fantasies is its deviation from the standard framework of all fantasy stories in terms of having an impressively detailed mythos and extensive topos, the former being "the central knowledge one needs to have in order to interact with or interpret events in the world successfully," (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004, p. 4)²⁹⁵ and the later contributing to "what is to be expected from the physics of and navigation in the world" (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004, p. 4). For example, this matter is evident the instance you open a book from The Witcher series; the map of the story world, which was an inseparable item in all high fantasy books, was absent in Sapkowski's works. The maps had become a necessary part of the fantasy genre as they helped the reader visualize the world and the geography of different locations in the books where the narrative was taking place.²⁹⁶

Tolkien stated, "I wisely started [*The Lord of the Rings*] with a map, and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances)" in a 1954 letter to his friend and fellow author Naomi Mitchison. Reverse-engineering a fantasy world, in his opinion, "lands one in confusions and impossibilities," and he believed that understanding the complexities of the plot required thoroughly mapping out every square inch of Middle-earth.²⁹⁷ Whereas traditional media tells a single story, transmedia storytelling tells several independent stories.

According to Marie Laure Ryan, what glues separate pieces of autonomous stories is the story world. "People are willing to look for information in many documents and across multiple platforms because they are so in love with the story world that they cannot get enough information about it" (Ryan, 2015, p. 4)²⁹⁸. She further suggests that world-building is so important that we may call the transmedia storytelling phenomena transmedia world-building.

²⁹⁴ S. Brooks, A. 2023. *Moral Ambiguity and Geralt of Rivia*.

²⁹⁵ Klastrup, L. and Tosca, S. 2004. *Transmedial Worlds - Rethinking Cyberworld Design*.

²⁹⁶ Joyce, S. 2023. *Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem*. "Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media."

²⁹⁷ Klein, B. 2023. *The Lord of the Rings: Middle-earth Map Revealed in Rings of Power*. Polygon.

²⁹⁸ Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?* "Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies", vol. 7, no. 2, Winter 2015, pp. 1-19. University of Nebraska Press

A fascinating reading of her work, however, would be that the genre of the narrative has some direct relation to the success rate of a transmedia system based on that story. An interesting understanding of her work would be that there is a connection between the genre of the story and the success rate of a transmedia system based on that story. Narrative genres can be categorized based on the emphasis on the world and storyline. Comedies and tragedies, for instance, focus more on the storyline, whereas science fiction and fantasy literature emphasize the nuances of the imagined world. The narrative setting in plot-heavy genres acts as a stage for the characters and their actions, making it simple to adapt the plot to other settings. In fantasy, where the world itself does have significant value, the plot serves as little more than a vehicle to move the reader through many of the story's landscapes, its different biological species, and varied social systems. The more extensive a storyworld is in its first establishment, the more likely users will be provided with access to several possible narratives within it.

One of the undeniable reasons *The Witcher* franchise is subject to successful transmedia projects is that it hosts a rich and engaging fantasy world. The events of *The Witcher* book series take place in a fantasy world, one of the most fascinating and intricate settings in contemporary fantasy fiction. It is a world filled with diverse civilizations, societies, animals, magic, and intricate political systems. Sapkowski crafted a vast universe with many cultures, languages, and traditions. The author's attention to specific details greatly enhanced the narrative depth of the series. An alien but authentic atmosphere was skillfully woven into this imagined planet through the precise inclusion of these details.²⁹⁹

Mythos, Topos, Ethos Integration: Sapkowski drew significant inspiration from Slavic mythology to shape his fantasy universe, but he did not stop at Slavic folklore.

It would be easier to name the mythologies and cultures I DIDN'T draw on. Because there were—just to mention a few—Slavic mythology: vampires, leshies, kikimoras, vodyanoy. There was the Germanic Wild Hunt. The Portuguese bruxa. The Arabic ghul. The Scottish kilmoulis. There were dryads from Greek myths. Paracelsian gnomes. The Japanese kitsune or fox woman. There was the little mermaid, i.e., Hans Christian Andersen. There was Snow White by the Brothers Grimm. There was Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's Beauty and the Beast. Elves and dwarves are—let's say—Tolkienesque. You could say it's quite an eclectic cocktail. But that was the modus operandi I adopted.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Thompson, C. 2023. *4 Reasons to Read the Witcher Books by Andrzej Sapkowski*.

³⁰⁰ Sapkowski, A. 2020. *Andrzej Sapkowski on the Mythologies Behind The Witcher*. *Literary Hub*.

The series delves into political intricacies and societal concerns. Within this imaginative realm, multiple kingdoms exist, each governed by distinct monarchs entangled in power struggles. This fabricated universe is a fertile ground for Sapkowski to explore concepts surrounding authority, prejudice, and moral decay.

When Sapkowski began working on *The Witcher*, he had yet to think of any background information about the series' setting because short stories do not need any basis for great lore. "I began with short stories; you don't create universes in short stories; there is—literally and metaphorically—no place for them" (Sapkowski, 2017)³⁰¹. However, when he switched to writing full novels, "the necessity of some coherent background became imminent. And slowly, step by step, something resembling a universe started to emerge. But it's only in the background, so it plays a secondary role in the story" (Sapkowski, 2017).

The Witcher games benefit significantly from the nuanced treatment of mythos, topos, and ethos established within Andrzej Sapkowski's book series. The fragmented nature of the mythos, spread across short stories and novels, gives game developers the opportunity to explore new narrative territory. The lack of detailed geographical information fosters a sense of discovery and exploration for players. This vagueness in topos, where just hints of geography are given, actively encourages the feeling of discovery and exploration in the player. An intentionally vague description of the physical world's details will leave more to the players' mental mapping and increase their sense of immersion.³⁰²

What is more, dark moral ambiguity and sophisticated struggles with matters of ethics involve the very intrinsic ethos of *The Witcher* universe, which provides powerful grounds for the corresponding game's narrative. The game exploits the darkness of moral ambiguity to pose questions to the players, reflecting the indecision gripping the characters in the books. It is the focus on the numerous dilemmas within the game that draws players in and provides a foundation for a gameplay experience filled with complex decisions. These decisions will determine the direction of navigating through a morally ambiguous world. In general, the multimodal interactivity between mythos, topos, and ethos within *The Witcher* series strongly enhances the game's rich narrative and interactivity, thus facilitating its unique positioning in the transmedia-inspired realm. Overall, the deliberate handling of mythos, topos, and ethos in

³⁰¹ Purchase, R. 2017. *Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski: The Writer Who Created The Witcher*. Eurogamer.

³⁰² Joyce, S. 2023. *Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem*. "Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media."

The Witcher series contributes significantly to the game's narrative depth and interactive engagement, allowing it to carve a unique space within the realm of transmedia adaptations.³⁰³

We can only analyze a transmedia project if we define it as such. Meanwhile, discussing narratives told across several media forms, two scenarios arise adaptations or remediation and transmedia storytelling. A well-known definition of transmedia storytelling is the one provided by Henry Jenkins: "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins, 2007)³⁰⁴.

Building upon Jenkins' theories, Ryan's perspective draws a distinct line between adaptation and transmedia storytelling.³⁰⁵ She emphasizes a fundamental difference: Adaptation primarily focuses on presenting the same story in various mediums, while transmedia storytelling ventures into telling different narratives within a shared story universe. She highlights that a simple adaptation, though possibly perceived as "transmedia" by some, does not fall within the realm of "transmedia storytelling." The key divergence lies in not merely retelling an existing story but in the broader scope of expanding and embellishing the fictional world within the narrative framework (Ryan, 2015).

In an interview for Culture. Pl, story director at CD Projekt Red Marcin Blacha claims that *The Witcher* games are something more than a simple adaptation. As he explained during the conversation: "Of course, we add new characters to the original ones, as at some point the source becomes exhausted – you can't process data sourced from books over and over again. And anyway, none of *The Witcher* games are an adaptation in the sense that they replay a well-known story in a computer game language. They're based on the world created in the original, plus some of the characters, but all the stories are made up by us" (Blacha, 2016).³⁰⁶ The liberty of the production team has made *The Witcher* games a unique experience—for

³⁰³ Joyce, S. 2023. *Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem*. "Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media."

³⁰⁴ Jenkins, H. 2007. *Transmedia Storytelling 101*. *Henry Jenkins Blog*.

³⁰⁵ Ryan, M.-L. (2015). *Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?* "Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies", 7(2), 1-19. University of Nebraska Press.

³⁰⁶ Blacha, M. 2016. *Creating The Witcher's World: An Interview with Marcin Blacha of CD Projekt Red*. Culture.pl.

instance, the character of Phillip Strenger, more commonly known as the Bloody Barron, was missing in the books, and his quest line/missions were solely an addition by the game designers.

In analyzing the narrative coherence of *The Witcher*, it is evident that this media franchise has effectively introduced mythos, topos, and ethos to piece together an immersive and all-encompassing story world. What Andrzej Sapkowski has carefully put in place—a solid base of world-building steeped in Slavic mythology and a dark, morally complex narrative—placed the foundational basis for the creation of a transmedia story world. This world was adapted, expanded, and literally brought to life by CD Projekt Red in video games that proved how beautiful a transmedia narrative model can be. Remaining faithful to the canon lore and giving the opportunity to explore alternative scenarios, the games leave Sapkowski's original vision intact; at the same time, new and engaging experiences are brought to life. Such consideration for narrative coherence set up a new milestone for everything that would come forth in the future within the scope of fantasy transmedia projects.

5.2 Audience Engagement in *The Witcher* Video Games

In transmedia storytelling, we need to look at what each medium brings to the table and how it can help improve the story initially told by another medium. What makes video games more than just digital versions of books or movies? A video game is a medium wherein we can place the audience in the shoes of the main protagonists, let them make their own choices, wrestle with their own moral dilemmas, and, by doing so, allow them to craft their own stories.

The games that take advantage of the choice system will engage the players to a greater degree; in these games, depending on the choices of the player, you could witness a variety of actions, consequences, and outcomes. Whereas a linear writer must deal with time and space, an interactive writer must deal with time, space, and possibilities.³⁰⁷ Interactive authors must organize vast tree structures, each branch representing a brand-new variety of the story.

They also have to think through all the choices that each setting brings to the table, predict every final state of the game after the ending, and then keep track of tens of thousands of variables, situations, and potentialities.³⁰⁸ In consequence, while a film script is 100 pages in

³⁰⁷ Zagal, J. 2011. *Ethically Notable Videogames: Moral Dilemmas and Gameplay*.

³⁰⁸ Newman, J. 2023. *The Branches of a Story: How to Give Players Options in a Narrative*. Game Developer.

length, a modern interactive video game script could be four to five thousand pages in length. For *The Witcher* games to be something more than just a couple of extra characters and ordinary linear stories typical to the games which base themselves on other mediums, *The Witcher* games, specifically *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, have taken full advantage of interactivity, the most powerful tool that the video game medium has to offer in order to increase audience engagement. CD Projekt Red developers have provided more agency, with quests and a choice of dialogue open to players. This resulted in meaningful gameplay that will show the player what kind of quests they are going to undertake and what type of Witcher they are going to become. Such decisions are critical for the game experience, while some others are through the most vital story experience.

The biggest theme in *The Witcher* books is concerned with the same gray area, so when brought into video game format, it gets mixed with a beautifully-fabricated choice system that



Figure 3: A time limited choice sequence in *The Witcher*, Source: IGN

reflects on the same theme and engages the players in *The Witcher* story world—it is this that a functional video game transmedia project should achieve.³⁰⁹

The story of the Bloody Baron in *The Witcher 3* is one of the most famous quest lines among fans of *The Witcher* and one of those moments when the major theme of *The Witcher*

³⁰⁹ Blacha, M. 2016. *Creating The Witcher's World: An Interview with Marcin Blacha of CD Projekt Red*. Culture.pl.

world is going to challenge the players in a compelling way. It is a quest that tasks Geralt with investigating, empathizing, and working out a mystery that expands way further than he had ever imagined. This is an extremely large and special quest line for the game, making what the player decides important. This questline in the game is massive and special because it makes what the player decides important. Unlike games such as *Mass Effect*, where things are clearly good or bad, in *The Witcher 3* and especially in this specific questline, the choices are more uncertain, and the player has to honestly think about what Geralt will do. Most game missions have a clear start and end, but the Bloody Baron quest is different. It fits so well into the game's beginning that it does not follow the usual mission pattern. The Bloody Baron story gives the players an experience that only a video game can offer.

One of the many side activities that one could do in *The Witcher* games was a mini-game called *Gwent*, essentially a card game where, through victory, one could win rare cards. What is quite interesting to note about *Gwent* is that it wasn't restricted to only large and important characters in the game; a player could challenge even random, unimportant NPCs, adding an extra layer of immersion and adapting to the world. This mini-game established such a high level of engagement for the fans of *The Witcher* that it eventually pushed CD Projekt Red into the development of a standalone *Gwent* game, expanding even further on the universe and appeal of the series.³¹⁰

One of the best examples of "What Is" and "What If" transmedia concepts in action is the game *The Witcher 3*. It is a new degree of storytelling ingenuity where one can find canonical extension mixed with creative non-canonical possibilities.

According to Jason Mittell (2014)³¹¹ "What Is" transmedia canonically extends from the narrative and explains or expounds the fictional universe with coordinating precision. That approach works towards giving viewers a comparable story across several extensions and a cohesive understanding of the story world. In the case of *The Witcher 3*, CD Projekt Red nailed the part about expanding lore that was already present from the source material—the novels penned by Sapkowski. They gave character backstories and ventured into new parts of the Continent, adding other lore elements in a manner that made sense. For instance, the game fleshes out more of the Wild Hunt mythology, allowing for a deeper understanding of this

³¹⁰ Fenlon, W. 2016. *How Gwent Became a Competitive Card Game with Single-Player Campaigns*. *PC Gamer*.

³¹¹ Mittell, J. 2014. *Strategies of Storytelling on Transmedia Television*. In M.-L. Ryan & J.-N. Thon (eds.), "Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology", 253–277. University of Nebraska Press.

mysterious and menacing force barely explored in the books. Canonical extension of this sort serves narrative coherence and assures that all pieces of media contribute to a unified story world.

Contrasted to that, "What If" transmedia takes one away from canonical certainties and into alternative storytelling approaches that invite audiences to imagine what-if hypothetical narratives. Non-canonical possibilities are investigated when these strands are divided into parallel dimensions, focusing on tone, mood, character, or style over continued canonical plots and story worlds. In *The Witcher 3*, players are free to make choices that strongly affect the storyline, hence making it a tailored version of Geralt's story. These can either lead to a branched ending, affecting the fate of important characters or even changing the political landscape of the Continent. For instance, what happens to Ciri, Geralt's daughter, greatly differs depending on the choices one has made during the entire game.³¹² This "What If" approach allows gamers to play around with the scenarios and their respective outcomes and allows for a quite immersive and interactive game. *The Witcher 3* is an interaction of these canonical and counterfactual elements, which brings to life multiple dimensions into one rich, complex storytelling that engages the player on many grounds.³¹³

Critical Acclaim and Commercial Success prove to gain successful critical acclaim and commercial success for The Witcher games, testifying that this transmedia project is very effective. The richly detailed world and interactive storytelling have captivated audiences worldwide. The game gained most Game of the Year awards and was much acclaimed for its storytelling aspects, character development, and large open world.³¹⁴ Not only did the game's success strengthen the reputation of CD Projekt Red, but it also highlighted the video game as one strong platform for transmedia storytelling. With over 50 million copies sold across the series, their financial success with the games proved them right in their influence on the gaming industry and popular culture.

The success of *The Witcher* series is irradiating; it has been tremendous for the fantasy genre as a whole, and delivery for other transmedia projects had it steeped with the grimdark sub-genre. Espousing mature themes, moral ambiguity, and deep characters, The Witcher has

³¹² Maher, C. 2022. *The Witcher 3 Ending: Best and Worst Outcomes*. GamesRadar.

³¹³ Mittell, J. 2014. *Strategies of Storytelling on Transmedia Television*. In M.-L. Ryan & J.-N. Thon (eds.), "Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology", 253–277. University of Nebraska Press.

³¹⁴ IMDb. 2024. *Awards for [The Witcher 3]*.

forged a new, all-encompassing standard regarding fantasy and how stories with it are told. This is seen through the unending reign of both darker and more complex fiction with their storylines within video games and books.

The success, combined with the reception of *The Witcher 3*, was so influential that it could even find its impact on one of the most fantastic game franchises—*Assassin's Creed*—in the video gaming world.³¹⁵ This shift is visibly noted in *Assassin's Creed Origins*³¹⁶, *Odyssey*³¹⁷, and *Valhalla*³¹⁸, where games bend towards open-world and heavy narrative design, similar to the immersion and extent to which *The Witcher 3* is known. The crown jewel of Cd Projekt Red successfully set a new standard for other big franchises and action role-playing games by developing creative gameplay and storytelling strategies.

Media coverage and fan communities have played a crucial role in the success of *The Witcher* games. An active fan base has meant that the story world can be expanded and developed—an advantage of a hypertext approach to storytelling. Fans could exchange their thoughts, ideas, fanfics, and debates around *The Witcher* universe on online forums and social media. Another aspect contributing to its lore creation and expansion is the mods³¹⁹ developed by this active fan base, which improve the game in many ways.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is already over nine years old, and CD Projekt Red is not done with it yet. Following the steps of former modders, now part of the development team, CD Projekt Red released REDkit³²⁰: a powerful tool giving players access to the same level of resources the developers used while working on *The Witcher 3*. One of the unique features of REDkit is that it generates new quests, stories, characters, and content that is absolutely new to the game. The quest editor gives customization for designing proper dialogues, arranging the order of events, defining triggers for these, and configuring NPCs for the new quests. Moreover, REDkit allows for the creation of completely new characters and enemies with their

³¹⁵ Vortez. 2017. *How Is Assassin's Creed Origins Like The Witcher 3? Vortez.*

³¹⁶ Ubisoft. 2017. *Assassin's Creed Origins.*

³¹⁷ Ubisoft. 2018. *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*

³¹⁸ Ubisoft. 2020. *Assassin's Creed Valhalla.*

³¹⁹ A mod, short for modification, is a user-created alteration or enhancement of a video game that can change its gameplay, graphics, or features. Mods can range from simple tweaks to extensive overhauls, providing players with customized experiences and new content.

³²⁰ Bennett, T. 2024. *The Witcher 3 RedKit Modding Tools Explained.* Game Rant.

facial expressions, behaviors, movement animations, travel paths, and everything that gives an unprecedented level of creative freedom within *The Witcher 3*.³²¹

The reception of the Netflix series has elevated the transmedia narrative to another rung. Even though the series has garnered popularity, it has also been called on the carpet for the deviations from the storyline. The comparison with the games by CD Projekt Red has shown some weaknesses in one of the adaptations and strengths in the other. While the games have most often been lavished with praise for capturing the spirit of Sapkowski's novels and expanding his story world, the series tends to be criticized for spotty character development and narrative execution. It is an excellent example of needful narrative coherence and the correct manner of appealing to an audience through gripping storytelling on different media platforms.

From the moment *The Witcher* TV series³²² was announced, something ignited inside people: that beloved, detailed fantasy world, with all the depth of *The Witcher 3* game and all those intricate tales from the books of Andrzej Sapkowski, promised a very interesting screen adaptation. While the debut of the first season in 2019 was universally celebrated, it was also tainted by far too many divergences from the original, changes in characters' personalities and fates to shock viewers, and an overall inability to understand what *The Witcher* was about.³²³

Despite the initial disappointment, the series was given a second chance with the release of season two. However, the portrayal of the franchise's cherished characters was further mangled to fit half-baked narrative arcs, extinguishing any remaining excitement and hope for the show's redemption. The release of season three provided one last opportunity for reconciliation. Unfortunately, the viewing experience revealed persistent fundamental flaws reminiscent of the catastrophic narrative missteps seen in the eighth season of *Game of Thrones*. Each episode underscored the creators' lack of comprehension of the source material, a glaring deficiency that continually marred the series.³²⁴ Arguably, one of the most highly noticeable problems is the wrong interpretation of the central themes, particularly destiny. While destiny is a subtle thread in the books, evidencing deep human connections between Geralt, Ciri, and Yennefer, the series relies heavily on destiny as one of its primary plot drivers. It makes light of these

³²¹ R. Myers, A. 2024. *The Witcher 3 RedKit Modding Tools Explained*.

³²² Hissrich, L. (showrunner). 2019. *The Witcher*. USA: Netflix.

³²³ Berman, J. 2019. 'The Witcher' Review: Netflix's Fantasy Series Is a Wild Ride. *Time*.

³²⁴ Moore, K. 2023. *The Witcher Season 3 Worst Rated in Series History According to Audiences*. What's on Netflix.

authentic relationships built from mutual care and personal growth. This thematic misstep is epitomized in the mishandling of the phrase "something more," failing to de-contextualize it from the deep bond shared between Geralt and Ciri.

More than that, it obscures the characters' relations. The deep, intertwining relationships between characters—like Geralt, Ciri, and Yennefer—are turned into shallow, emotionless magical bonds. The books and games, with *The Witcher 3* being the best example, detail these relationships with much more care, displaying depth and nuance, which is absent in the show.

The show similarly missed the mark on social commentary. Embedded into the narrative fabric of *The Witcher* are issues of prejudice, racism, and sexism, yet the series addresses these subject matters in an inconsistent and blatantly heavy-handed way. By interpreting these themes with a broadened Americanized view, the series waters down the very essence of what the original and complex stories offer. This oversimplification is exposed in the stark terms to which the conflict between humans and elves is relegated—a simple good-versus-evil binary tale with no cultural tensions against which the books are set.

One more casualty of misdirection in the series is the rich tapestry of cultural differences between the humans and the elves, which flattens into another de-narration of authentic conflicts and richness. The show remarkably fails to depict these nuances accurately, which not only undermines the original storytelling but also diminishes the credibility of the world-building. In conclusion, for fans of *The Witcher* universe, watching *Netflix's The Witcher* feels like a deep disappointment and somehow a betrayal to the "Mothership" (Jenkins,2006) that Sapkowski created with his novels.

The Witcher series has grown from its humble roots based on the book series written by Andrzej Sapkowski to become something that grew larger than life within the gaming world and, most recently, a massive hit Netflix series adaptation. CD Projekt Red has just concluded *The Witcher 3*, and the developer has announced a whole lot of new projects ready to launch the franchise into a thrilling new era.

CD Projekt Red has ambitious plans for its long-term product outlook unrolled with the setting up five new games in *The Witcher* universe. These projects are currently under development and are known by their codenames; they represent a diverse array of experiences to expand the franchise's reach and depth. *Canis Majoris* will be a remaster of the first *The Witcher* game, and *Polaris* begins a continuation of *The Witcher* trilogy due to be more familiarly known as *The Witcher 4*. By contrast, *Sirius* is a particularly intriguing addition that will expand space for a greater range of players with multiplayer playing features.

Polaris is going to be a milestone title for CD Projekt Red. It becomes a huge technological milestone since Polaris will be CD Projekt Red's first game produced on Unreal Engine 5. This major development is on the roll to continue an entirely new saga for The Witcher franchise and is currently being polished as much as possible. This project is of immense importance, considering that almost half of CD Projekt Red's development team is working on Polaris. Although the release date is still unknown, this still allows fans to follow and expect a heady glimpse of the game sometime before the end of 2024.³²⁵

Beyond the world of gaming, *The Witcher* franchise is also expanding. To satisfy fans' appetite until the new games come, Netflix will forge ahead with more seasons of its adaptation series, featuring Liam Hemsworth as the new Geralt. To this, add an animated title, "Sirens of the Deep," for 2024, and the range of content presented by the franchise has the opportunity to keep rolling for a long time.³²⁶

The Witcher games are one of the rare instances in transmedia history where a project transitioned directly from a book series to a video game, bypassing the typical route of an intermediate TV show or movie. Unlike other similar video game projects that often rely on a visual medium like film or television to establish the visual design and aesthetic of the game, *The Witcher* series uniquely crafted its own rich and immersive world directly from the source material of Andrzej Sapkowski's novels, setting a distinctive precedent in the industry. Other examples of direct book-to-video game adaptations include the *Metro*³²⁷ and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series, which, while noteworthy, have not achieved the same level of success as *The Witcher* series, both critically and in terms of player reception. Although these games have garnered dedicated followings and contributed significantly to their respective genres, they lack the widespread acclaim and cultural impact that *The Witcher* games have attained, highlighting the exceptional nature of CD Projekt Red's adaptation.

The success of *The Witcher's* transmedia journey highlights the inherent potential of fantastical realms in boosting transmedia narratives. This chapter emphasizes the uniqueness of fantasy worlds, which encourages audiences to explore diverse narratives and encourages active engagement, inviting readers and players to participate in the construction and evolution

³²⁵ Taussig, T. 2023. *The Future of The Witcher Franchise: CDPR's Remake, Sirius, Polaris, and Canis*. Game Rant.

³²⁶ Romero, A. 2023. *The Future of The Witcher Franchise: CDPR's Remake, Sirius, Polaris, and Canis*. Game Rant.

³²⁷ 4A Games. 2010. *Metro 2033*

of the story world. This franchise uses more than just an adaptation by delving deep into what is specific and unique with Andrzej Sapkowski's novels: its mythos, topos, and ethos. Fragmented mythos, dispersed in various tales, presents opportunities for creativity for both the audience and developers. The absence of predetermined topos, further accentuated by the lack of said maps, brings about an active immersion since both readers and gamers have to create the geographies of the world and, hence, immerse themselves in it in their minds. Besides that, there exists a moral ambiguity in *The Witcher* series. In all scenarios, complex ethical dilemmas are introduced on the ethos, which becomes fertile ground for interactivity in the actual games.

CD Projekt Red knew how to make the best use of these narrative elements to create something beyond a simple adaptation and invited players to travel through these complex moral landscapes. Such interactivity and such a complex system of choices as it is implemented in *The Witcher* games is a continuation of the line of immersive storytelling begun in the books and reflects their moral ambiguities, empowering players to travel through difficult ethical decisions that are a true hallmark of *The Witcher* world. The video game develops this series' main themes while offering an exceptional, immersive, and engaging storyline that goes far beyond the typical medium. *The Witcher* games series can be called, in fact, a success of transmedia storytelling that triumphed within the entertainment because it combined "What Is" with "What If" dimensions of transmedia storytelling.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I synthesize the findings from the analysis related to narrative coherence and audience engagement of DCEU and *The Witcher* video games. Attention here is concentrated on the main factors that led to success or failure in these transmedia projects through the correlation between theoretical insights and real-world results. The findings in this research offer a number of instructive lessons for both creators and scholars interested in the dynamics of transmedia storytelling.

Research notably showed problems with narrative coherence in the DCEU across all its media platforms. Differing tones and styles across different movies provided an incoherent narrative that confused audiences and took down the very strength of the integrity of its story world. Rushed universe building, typical of paratactic levels of narratives familiar in many shared universes, with little effort applied to developing these elements, made things worse. On Warner Brothers' part, changes in leadership and creative differences resulted in different visions that produced different versions of the screenplay, inherently tainting the narrative intention of the movies. All these created a fragmented story world, filled with inconsistencies to the downfall of the audience's closer relation to the narrative.

Another major failure of the DCEU, which can attest to such critical and box office inconsistency, was that it did not engage its audience properly. The hurry in universe building and inconsistency at the backstage about narrative coherence made it hard for audiences to attach emotionally to the characters or the story. Comparing it to Marvel's considerably successful MCU only pointed to DCEU's storyline and character development failures. Unmanageable expectations from the franchise's marketing strategies were often placed upon movies that could not reasonably live up, leaving audiences disappointed and increasingly disinterested. Indeed, the fractured fanbase—especially in relation to the vision of director Zack Snyder—served to splinter this audience even more, leading the total support to dwindle for the franchise.

In stark contrast to the DCEU, it counts on the fact that *The Witcher* video games have always maintained a very strong narrative cohesiveness. According to Andrzej Sapkowski, CD Projekt Red did an excellent job expanding the story world and adding depth to new elements while staying faithful to the source material. The developers meticulously followed *The Witcher's* universe's mythos, topos, and ethos, which is precisely how they shaped the universe

in which the game's story took place. This whole approach enabled players to create diegetic stories across different platforms within the story world.

The Witcher games excelled at this subject of player engagement; this mainly was intimated through the complicated gameplay and interactive medium—as player agency seemed to embody both the developers' and abstract wills. Choice-based mechanics within games nowadays give a feeling that a player can carve out any story's events, which is simultaneously forceful and compelling. This interactivity, enriched with all the detailing of the world and complex characters, provides an emotionally charged relationship between the player and the story. What more importantly worked for both parties was that fans of the books and new players alike liked CD Projekt Red's respect for the source material and its thoughtful outgrowing of the story world. This approach saw the games achieve great critical and commercial success, remaining very popular to this day.

The evidence collected from the DCEU and *The Witcher* distinguishes important roles in the full success story of a transmedia narrative with coherence and active audience engagement. As much as the narrative flaws of the DCEU were drawbacks, damaged coherence, over-paced universe-building, and a lack of shared vision, they also seemed to fragment the fanbase and give inconsistent box office success.

In contrast, *The Witcher* games show precisely how a well-orchestrated narrative, based on solid source material, can succeed in engaging audiences across media. The fact that the games are able to stay true to their central narrative vision while also giving players meaningful agency is a testimony to the potential interactive media have in engaging audiences. The success of *The Witcher* video games shows how transmedia projects, which accurately heed and expand on their source while giving the audience a chance to experience subjectivity, do indeed have a better shot at creating one coherent and immersive story world.

The analysis of the DCEU and *The Witcher* games gives valuable insights into the operation of transmedia storytelling. It really cannot be stressed enough that there must be coherence and audience engagement in the narrative. Those projects that have yet to do their part in establishing some coherence and cohesive whole will probably not thrive in audience appeal and, thus, not succeed. In contrast, other saner transmedia projects appreciate the source text, beckoning audience interaction and respect.

Such findings certainly have deep-reaching implications for future transmedia storytelling endeavors. More importantly, one needs to practically apply the lessons from these case studies in combining projects that treasure one consistent narrative vision and manage to engage their

audiences sincerely so that people can create successful and lasting transmedia story worlds that engage audiences across diverse platforms.

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