TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AS COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT AND AUTONOMOUS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
In this research it will be analyzed if the transmedia storytelling resources used in the audiovisual developments, have a higher incidence on the perception and empathy that the observers have with respect to fictional characters; that is, if the transmedia design encourages the empathy for the audiovisual fictional characters. This is very important in the Audiovisual Communication Degree in order to programme effectively professional and academic activities using the available transmedia technologies. For the experimental development the short film “Expediente 64” has been used. This Final Project was produced, realized and edited by fourth-year students of the Audiovisual Communication Degree in University of Valencia. For the identification of the fictional characters the scale EDI has been used formed by 17 items. The statistical development will be carried out by correlating hypothesis, bivariated analysis and contingency tables. SPSS IBM, v21 has been used as Software. Audiovisual Communication students as well as Multimedia Engineering students, who had not participated in this short film, took part in the experimental research. After the correlation of variables against the two natures of the audiovisual constructs – transmedia discourse and traditional lineal discourse – it has been proven that the dissolved and implemented narrations in a transmedia stage correlates positively with a higher empathy for the characters. Finally, it will be discussed if the transmedia design in the academic proposals in Audiovisual Communication are optimal to achieve a greater cognitive penetration.

Keywords: Transmedia, higher education, teaching-learning, collaborative teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION
The control and use of Information Technologies was one of the initial premises in the new paradigm of university education in Europe, the EEES. It has meant, inter alia, a new concept in the teaching-learning process and a deep reformulation of didactic methodologies. These methodologies accept a permanent abandonment of the classical models based on bibliographical and audiovisual resources as well as temporal and physical spaces, and accept the use of environmental tools which make the teaching-learning process independent. In the commitment to make Higher Education Institutions more flexible and give response to the new demands of the continuous learning, it is especially relevant the incorporation of the web 2.0 tools into the didactic methodologies (Piñeiro & Otero, 2012). A “new paradigm” (O’Reilly, 2005) which supposes the transfer from a static web (1.0), lacking interactivity and, whose technological complexity relegates users to the role of readers, to a dynamic web in continuous updating, with intuitive applications which encourage the appearance of collaborative platforms or any other means of information created by the users, with possibilities of interaction (Castaño, et.al., 2008:19-20).

The web 2.0 tools makes a leading and a reader-user real, who runs his or her own needs (elaborates, shares, thinks, classifies, tags) and also interacts according to the multiple possibilities which appear on his or her screen. It’s about the use of his/her tools with didactic purposes (Graells, 2007) increasingly accepted by teachers through blogs, wikis, webquest, podcast, transmedia storytelling, etc…

It is evident that the great cultural phenomenon of the last two decades has been the generalization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which have constituted the essential of what we all know as Digital Society. The First Great Digital Wave, known as web 1.0, was born by the end of the eighties with the World Wide Web. It meant the online access not only to the information but also to the register, edition and manipulation of images, both static as in movement (Burbules, 1997; Piscitelli, 2009; Castells, 2009).

In the XXI century, The Second Digital Wave has generated the web 2.0 tools, much more interactive, and it has settled the role of the so called “prosumers” (Toffler,1980). Likewise, new interfaces and data terminals have been consolidated which have resulted in the media ubiquity through the pervasive media (Dovey & Fleuriot, 2011; Ekeman, 2013). Thus, we have a pervasive reticularity which has
developed a new type of hybrid knowledge between the information and the entertainment (Marzal & Casero, 2011). All of that leads to a new access to the mass media and to the production of images which have resulted in formats such as webdocs, webseries, podcasts, I-docs, trans and cross-media projects, immersive storytellings and multiple alternative ways to finance, in particular crowdfunding (Fundación Telefónica, 2016).

We are then in an environment where the traditional mass media (radio, press and television) are continuously adapting to the change that means the fact that, no more than a decade before, some of the most influential media today (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) would not have been born or would be practically irrelevant. This repositioning of the traditional mass media is fundamentally taking place in five dimensions.

First the technological dimension, where the digitalization of the means of production, broadcasting and reception have forced to change the business model (Scolari, 2013). Second, the economic dimension. The advertising market has been atomized and it provokes changes in the media corporate structures (Bustamante, 2010) The sociological dimension, with which to change the means and communication channels, implies to modify the habits and routines of the human being, with the logic implications that it involves (Castells, 2009) The way we participate in politics and the way we interact with family and friends has changed and it seems it has no way back. Also, the communicative dimension. The new and the old media do not look at each other as competitors and they have become necessary allies (Lister, et al., 2008; Galán, Rodríguez, Marzal, 2018) Finally, the educational dimension. The revolution in the way we communicate forces us to rethink the traditional structures of creation and transmission of knowledge: the use of transmedia storytelling is increasingly being used as strategy of media literacy (Scolari, Lugo, Rodríguez & Masanet, 2018).

To be considered transmedia storytelling, should it have the following characteristics:

- Stories expand through different channels such as internet, comic, novel, social networks, etc.
- Every channel offers its own story which, in conjunction with the rest, creates a higher meaning universe than the sum of all the parts.
- Each channel or means provides a content which can be enjoyed autonomously, without the need to know the other supports.
- The users create own contents which make the contents or stories to expand.

In Higher Education, transmedia storytelling can be an opportunity to optimize resources and to improve the situations in which the student dives into the knowledge by narrating in different supports which are more familiar to him or her than the lineal orality in presentations or traditional literacy (Neri, 2015). As Scolari (2012) notes, to avoid a semantic intoxication, the best is to think transmedia as a very specific type of cultural production or speech where the story, a) is expanded through different means and platforms, b) users take part of this expansion. In the educational field, transmedia “conjugates the production and appropriation of knowledge in a transmedial and collaborative environment of distributed cognitions” (Neri, 2015:5). This is the main reason of this research, try to find whether the transmedia storytelling is more effective than the lineal ones in the distribution of audiovisual resources, especially in education, where it is increasingly being introduced (Scolari, Lugo, Rodríguez & Masanet, 2018).

2 METHODOLOGY

The identification with fictional characters, either audiovisual or written, can be considered as a daily experience with which the viewer may suffer from altered states of intensity of consciousness (Cohen, 2001). In this context, it has been proposed that the emphatic reception, which involves the identification with the main characters, constitutes one of the main mechanisms to explain the effects of the media entertainment (De Wied et al, 2004; Igartua, Páez, 1997a, 1997b & 1998; Zillmann 1991& 1994) The mass media, in particular television, are important because they deal, implicitly and explicitly, socio-moral aspects which affect and explain the development of values as well as some identifications with certain characters, relational styles, conception of life, stereotypes, prejudices, etc, ( Medrano & Aierbe, 2008).

Under psychoanalytic postulates the identification with characters was used as explanatory method for concepts of artistic reception (Freud, 1985; Paraíso,1994). Subsequently, and on the basis of psychoanalyst keys, a conceptual separation between the primary and the secondary identification was established (Zillmann, 1994; Zunzunegui, 1989; Igartua, 2008; Metz, 1982)
For this study, the EDI scale (Igartua & Paez, 1998), was used (Identification with the fiction audiovisual stories characters) which is composed by 17 items which refer to the dimensions of: cognitive empathy (item example “I’ve tried to see things from the point of view of the lead characters”) emotional empathy (item example: “I myself have experienced the emotional reactions”) attraction towards the characters (item example: “I liked the way the main characters are or behave”) and the sensation of becoming the character or melding (item example: “I have felt as if I were one of the lead characters”) The variables of the scale are as follows: EDI 1: “I liked the way the lead characters are or behave”; EDI 2 “I have been emotionally involved in the emotions of the lead characters”; EDI 3 “I have felt as if I were one of the lead characters”; EDI 4: “I have imagined how I would behave if I were in the place of the lead characters”; EDI 5: “I have tried to observe carefully each of the actions of the lead characters”; EDI 6: “I thought I looked like the characters or was very similar to them” EDI 7: “I have felt concerned about what happened to the lead characters”; EDI 8: “I have understood the way the characters act, think or feel”; EDI 9: “I myself have experienced the emotional reactions of the lead characters”; EDI 10: “I thought I would like to act or look like the lead characters”; EDI 11: “I have tried to imagine the feelings, thoughts and reactions of the lead characters”; EDI 12: “I have had the feeling of living myself the story of the lead characters”; EDI 13: “I have understood the feelings and emotions of the lead characters”; EDI 14: “I have felt as “being part” of the story”; EDI 15: “I have been able to anticipate what was going to happen to the lead characters”; EDI 16: “I have tried to see things from the lead characters point of view”; EDI 17: “I have identified with the lead characters”.

It should be mentioned that, as Cohen (2001) states, the attraction towards the characters is not a basic component in the identification with the characters, although it is related to it. In the opposite side, another authors (Slater and Rouner, 2002; Slater, Rouner & Long, 2006) point opposite theses. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) also observed that the wishful identification degree with the characters predicted the perceived attitude similarity with the characters (which constitutes one of the dimensions of the attraction to them). The same authors, in the context of the studies about audiovisual reception, proved audiences establish relationships with fictional characters (for example admiration or imitation) which can lead them to change attitudes, values, aspirations or moral beliefs.

This research is interested in discovering if the audiovisual lineal speech in transmedia spaces benefits the empathy viewers may feel towards their fictional characters. On the basis of an audiovisual fiction, “Expediente 64” has moved its narrative to web spaces keeping the plot, expanding through multiple means and communication platforms where a part of the consumers play an active role in this process of expansion. In the new narrative space, the audiovisual speech keeps an independent narrative and entire sense.

In this experimental context, the following research hypothesis was posed:

H1: The narrations of transmedia fiction encourages the empathy and the wishful identification with the characters versus the lineal and traditional stories.

3 RESULTS

Different-aged, male and female students of the Audiovisual Communication Degree and of the Multimedia Engineering Degree attended voluntarily this research. They all knew the fiction series “Expediente 64”. A total of 63 university students (average age =23,62, range 21-26, 46% women) participated in the experimental study. They were all questioned after watching the fiction series (12/11/2018). First, students watched the fiction series in original version (lineal) and immediately after they fulfilled a survey about empathy and wishful identification with the characters. Straightaway, they watched it again but this time through different means and platforms keeping its entire sense (transmedia) Finally, four uncompleted surveys were excluded; they remained (N=59).

The results obtained were treated through bivariated and descriptive analysis by Pearson (R_{xy}) correlation. SPSS IBM v.21 was used as statistical Software. Pearson correlation coefficient ranges between -1 and +1. However, it must be mentioned that the magnitude of the relation is specified by the numeric value of the coefficient, showing the sign the direction of that value. In this sense so strong is a relation +1 as a relation -1. In the first instance, the relation is perfect positive and in the second, perfect negative. It has been proceed to correlate each one of the 17 variables in the EDI scale with the age and gender of the respondents.

In response to H1, and according to table 1, it is found a greater significant dependence in the transmedia view of the fiction considered by the viewers, proving much lower the correlation in the final construct. Concretely, the transmedia dependent variables are: EDI 2: “I have felt emotionally involved
in the feelings of the lead characters" (r(59)= .19 p<.001); EDI 11: "I have tried to imagine the feelings, thoughts and reactions of the lead characters" (r(59)= .38 p<.002); EDI 12: "I have felt as if I myself were living the story of the lead characters (r(59)= - .45 p<.001); EDI 14: "I have felt as "being part" of the story" (r(59)= .19 p<.001) and finally EDI 17: "I have identified with the lead characters" (r(59)= .67 p<.001).

The data conclude that the transmedia view of the audiovisual fiction shows the viewer enjoys a greater empathy and identification with the characters in those variables where he or she feels in the place of the characters, increasing this way the effectiveness of the story and confirming a greater audiovisual persuasion.

| Table 1. Correlation Rxy Lineal and transmedia speech/ EDI Scale (Own elaboration) |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
| EDI 1  | -0.22 | -0.45* |
| EDI 2  |  0.08 |  0.05**|
| EDI 3  |  0.27*|  0.19**|
| EDI 4  | -0.35*|  0.45  |
| EDI 5  |  0.35 |  0.54* |
| EDI 6  | -0.04 |  0.67* |
| EDI 7  |  0.82 | -0.22  |
| EDI 8  |  0.83*| -0.60* |
| EDI 9  |  0.29*|  0.05  |
| EDI 10 |  0.72 | -0.33* |
| EDI 11 | -0.87 |  0.38***|
| EDI 12 |  0.03 | -0.45**|
| EDI 13 |  0.19 |  0.05  |
| EDI 14 |  0.45 |  0.19***|
| EDI 15 |  0.38*| -0.45  |
| EDI 16 |  0.21 |  0.55  |
| EDI 17 | -0.09 |  0.67***|

Levels of significance: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
N total= 59

4 CONCLUSIONS

The technology convergence in Higher Education also comprehends its languages and aesthetics and, in the end, its pedagogical meaning. Narrative constitutes then a key question, since it is one of the fundamental operations to construct the meaning and values the story as a way to organize and communicate pedagogical experiences in transmedia environments (Ambrosino, 2017). We are now entering in a new rhetoric in the classrooms where languages of a great interactivity and transmediality mix, especially in the teaching practices in Communication Sciences Degree. They imply a virtual space where the pedagogical, the communicative and the technological paradigm converge. According to Bauman (2015), the teaching practices in these spaces become “liquids” where symbolic aspects prevail. In this regard, Mariana Maggio (2012) affirms that “an educational technology in a didactic sense is neither the environment in itself nor the shift devise, but the knowledge of the teaching which we can develop in each case from the critical analysis of the teaching practices in each environment.

Regarding this, Lion (2006) establishes the need of considering the complex articulations among technology, teaching didactics and knowledge. In the end, it is about creating more complex narratives with a greater success of educational intention. Certainly, the result of this research specifies that the reading of the transmedia storytelling offers a greater empathy to the observers, in this case students,
and gets to perceive a greater empathy with the fictional characters. In conclusion, transmedia storytellings provide a greater pedagogical enrichment if they are conceived from a didactic perspective, strongly committed to understanding (Ambrosino, 2017). That point is particularly important for the teaching programme in the Audiovisual Communication Degree.

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