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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TRANSMEDIA JOURNALISM

In order to reflect upon transmedia journalism in the digital age, the starting point could be addressing what the digital age entails. The digital age, or the Internet-driven era, dramatically changed the role of traditional media (television, print, and radio) by introducing new media (the Internet, social media, and mobile media). The 24-hour news cycle and the proliferation of social media networks are particularly relevant in the emergence of a distinct scenario in journalism, a hybrid of the mass media logic of transmission and the social media logic of sharing, a hybrid blurring of distinctions between professionals and amateurs, producers and users. The digital age has fomented two key developments: (1) The Internet facilitates publication of user-generated content, and (2) social media networks enable one-to-one communication, as opposed to the one-to-many structure of mass media. Consequently, the lines are blurred not only between professionals and amateurs but also between the message and the messenger, fiction and nonfiction, content and advertisement, facts and alternatives facts, truth and post-truth, and so forth. For instance, news feeds, such as Yahoo News, circulate sponsored stories that look like news, and ad placements in movies, on websites, on blogs, etc., are common practice. Furthermore, in the realm of breaking news, the dramatic changes are quite explicit: “The Associated Press was once the source for breaking news; when something happened in the world AP distributed the story over the wire to gain immediate attention. Now, when something happens, more often than not we learn about it on social media” (Benoit cited by Granados, 2016).

Discussing the role of journalism in the digital age, Bradshaw (2017) posits that the “online” in online journalism has become almost invisible—part of the fabric of all journalism, in the sense that broadcasters, reporters, and correspondents alike are all required to engage with audiences across multiple platforms, creating content for the Web and social media networks. This invisibility implies challenges and, at the same time, offers opportunities to further develop journalism in exciting and innovative ways, as is argued in this book.

With digitization, conceptual confusion surrounding the semantic galaxy around media and journalism universes has increased. Multimedia, crossmedia, intermedia, and transmedia storytelling are frequent terms aggregated in the media convergence process involving news in liquid, fluid, and participative environments (Bauman, 2000). Transmedia storytelling is one of the newest terms. Although it was coined by Henry Jenkins (2003) in the entertainment realm, transmedia storytelling has also been the focus of relevant academic studies connected to journalism (Alzamora & Tárcia, 2012; Ford, 2007; Gambarato, Alzamora, & Tárcia, 2016; Gambarato & Tárcia, 2017; Moloney, 2011, Renó & Flores, 2012).
However, Domínguez (2012) warns against the risk of putting new labels on old practices. Transmedia journalism is an elastic term with a wide variety of theoretical proposals that are explored in this book. Nonetheless, transmedia journalism is still a scarcely explored field with many possibilities to grow and develop into a contemporary approach to news media prosumption (a model of consumption based on production, or co-production of the consumed commodity). This book aims to fill an editorial gap related to the lack of titles that deal specifically with transmedia journalism theory and praxis. The book moves far beyond studies on multimedia journalism to explore how to tell pervasive news stories across multiple platforms and formats, using current digital technologies, expanding the content and engaging audiences. This publication offers a conceptualization of transmedia journalism, delving into theoretical and critical approaches to this new subject. Moreover, the book presents analytical views on transmedia journalism case studies and the applications and implications of technological advancements, such as virtual reality, hashtags, and podcasts in the journalism realm.

**Challenges of Transmedia Journalism**

As the first specific studies on transmedia journalism were conducted only in the late 2000s, difficulties and challenges are as vividly present as the potential to inform people in the best way possible, offering audiences a meaningful and enriching experience across multiple media platforms. Gambarato and Tárcia (2017) define transmedia journalism as follows:

*In sum, we consider that transmedia journalism, as well as other applications of TS [Transmedia Storytelling] in fictional and nonfictional realms, is characterized by the involvement of (1) multiple media platforms, (2) content expansion, and (3) audience engagement. Transmedia journalism can take advantage of different media platforms such as television, radio, print media, and, above all, the internet and mobile media to tell deeper stories. Content expansion, as opposed to the repetition of the same message across multiple platforms, is the essence of TS and, therefore, should be the focal point of transmedia journalism as well. The enrichment of the narrative is facilitated by the extended content. Audience engagement involves mechanisms of interactivity, such as the selection of the elements to be explored, the option to read a text, watch a video, enlarge photographs, access maps, click on hyperlinks, and share information through social networks. Audience engagement deals with participation via, for instance, remixing content and creating original user-generated content. (p. 1386)*

Sam Ford (2007), one of the pioneers in conducting such studies, describes transmedia journalism by highlighting that:

*I’m not talking . . . about giving conglomerates the chance to squeeze more blood from the stone, to get three times as much work from half as many journalists, or else the myth of the uberjournalist, where one person should be sent into the field to take the pictures, do the story, get video, and then come back to write the story, publish the photographs, put the video up on the Web, appear on the TV station, and so on. Instead, what I mean is finding the best platform possible to tell the story in, to use each medium to its strengths. (original emphasis)*

In this sense, probably the first challenge is to ensure that the news media industry understands what transmedia storytelling applied to journalism means and how this form of storytelling can be beneficial
for media conglomerates, journalists, and audiences. One of the main concerns surrounding transmedia journalism is the time-constrained brevity characteristic of news media. Although every newsworthy event could have the potential to be transmediatic, transmedia journalism is optimized when it becomes a proactive planned process (Gambarato & Tárcia, 2017), including the content planning and the design of the audience experience. Moloney (2011) argues that “daily journalism, with its time-constrained brevity, is not a viable option. Transmedia must be designed carefully and developed with a lengthy lead time to be effective” (p. 12). Canavilhas (2014) suggests that the journalism styles more suitable and adaptable to transmedia strategies are reportage, newsgames, and interactive infographics.

In addition, difficulties regarding financing, technical skills, and the material resources necessary and limited staff, human resources, and a transmedia mind-set to produce transmedia news stories are common obstacles to overcome. Throughout the book, these and other challenges, such as incorporating the core principles of transmedia storytelling in journalistic productions, are presented, discussed, and reflected upon.

**Opportunities for Transmedia Journalism**

Journalism has been historically configured as the emergence of a professional identity with claims to an exclusive role and status in society. Deuze (2005) argues that although the conceptualization of journalism as a professional ideology can be traced throughout the literature on journalism studies, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, these values are challenged or changed in the context of current cultural and technological developments. How new media and multiculturalism intertwine with contemporary journalism in the context of fast-changing technology and society impact the perceptions of the roles and functions of journalism.

The changes in technology and society reflected in journalism practices also provoke changes in the roles performed by the media. Couldry and Curran (2003) argue that the power of the media functions in two ways. On the one hand, media power is a term that points out how other powerful forces use the media’s middle mechanism (press reports, television coverage, websites, etc.) to wage their battles. On the other hand, “the power of the media is the emergent power of social power in complex societies whose basic infrastructure increasingly depends on the rapid circulation of information and images” (Couldry & Curran, 2003, p. 4). This scenario outlines challenges for contemporary journalism but also provides opportunities for its necessary transformation.

Newman (2009) argues that media coverage of news events is changing radically. He examined how journalists from top news organizations in the United Kingdom and the United States are increasingly involving the public in the way they search and tell stories and concluded the following: (1) There has been an explosion of social participation in the circulation of news; (2) journalists are increasingly embracing professional actions on social networking tools, such as Twitter and Facebook; (3) social media is not replacing journalism but is creating an important extra layer of diverse information and opinions; and (4) social recommendations have begun to play a significant role in driving traffic to traditional news content.

In this mediascape, transmedia journalism configures the possibility of new approaches and new empirical routes in the contemporary processes of production, distribution, and circulation of news. Although still incipient, the initiatives of transmedia journalism characterize important improvements in the realm of journalistic professional activity. For example, transmedia journalism configures the possibility
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of expanding the circulation of news in the connections of online social media, as well as favoring social engagement with the news in editorial initiatives of multiplatform distributions of journalistic content.

Scolari (2013) posits that transmedia journalism is still a relatively uncharted territory but argues that journalism is undergoing a profound transformation, in which the broadcasting model is giving way to emergent forms of bottom-up communication that, from his point of view, permeate transmedia journalism. As occurs with any type of transmedia storytelling, in transmedia journalism the story is told on various platforms and formats, and prosumers participate in constructing the narrative world.

The combination of the productive activity of the audience and the professional actions of journalists delineates varied possibilities for expanding the news in digital media connections. Transmedia journalism represents, therefore, an empirical and conceptual opportunity to expand news production and circulation of digital media based on multiplatform editorial planning.

According to Steensen and Ahva (2017), digitalization has brought a need to reassess the theories with which we make sense of journalism. Transmedia journalism subscribes to these transformations by providing theoretical and methodological subsidies to support the analytical exercise about professional practices more pertinent to the current technological and social context, as well as to support more sophisticated editorial projects. In this sense, this book portrays transmedia journalism practiced today on a global scale, presenting theoretical and methodological revisions of transmedia journalism, as well as case studies and comparative studies with various approaches.

Organization of the Book

This book addresses the current empirical-conceptual context of transmedia journalism in several theoretical-methodological approaches. These contributions, written by international experts in the field, delineate a global panorama of transmedia journalism by situating general features, empirical specificities, trajectories, and tendencies. The chapters put forward reflections based on case studies and thoughts involving virtual reality, algorithms, hashtags, and podcasts, among others. The book presents a logical chain of aspects that delineate transmedia journalism and its possible uses.

In the first chapter of Exploring Transmedia Journalism in the Digital Age, João Canavilhas (Universidade de Beira do Interior, Portugal) proposes a framework that can support journalists in producing transmedia contents that conveniently explore the characteristics of the media formats and languages involved, enabling the user to engage in the interpretation, change, and distribution of such contents.

Subsequently, in Chapter 2, Tobias Eberwein (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria) presents a reflection on transmedia journalism based on the following questions: How does journalistic storytelling evolve from analog to digital? What are the potentials of narrative journalism across multiple media types and platforms? And what effects do such transmedia narratives have on media users? These questions are answered based on a multi-method research design, which includes an explorative communicator study and an experiment with users.

In Chapter 3, Lila Luchessi (Universidad Nacional de Río Negro, Argentina) analyzes how instantaneity and viralization have affected not only journalistic activity but also information selection criteria and audiences’ input on the Web. She based her research on the assessment that online social networks have modified the activities of the press, the actions of audiences, and the social perceptions.

In the view of André Fagundes Pase, Bruna Marcon Goss, and Roberto Tietzmann (Pontifical Catholic University of Río Grande do Sul, Brazil), transmedia projects often need a longer time frame than usual news articles. In Chapter 4, these authors discuss how time plays an important role in transmedia
journalism through an analysis of three cases: Blackhawk Down (published by the Philadelphia Enquirer, in 1997), Inside Disaster (released by PTV, in 2010), and Harvest of Change (published by the Des Moines Register, in 2014).

In Chapter 5, Nohemi Lugo Rodríguez (Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico) proposes a question-based model that focuses on transmedia design when an immersive journalism piece is integrated into a transmedia space. She reviews the narrative techniques and aesthetics of immersive experiences that may contribute to the design of the immersive piece and the transmedia space.

In Chapter 6, Kevin Moloney (Ball State University, United States), based on his current transmedia project, explores the design and execution of transmedia journalism projects to inform professional production and academic experimentation. He discusses how design thinking and audience targeting contribute to project success and presents the Refuge project as a design example of transmedia journalism.

In Chapter 7, Mariana Ciancia and Michele Mattei (Politecnico di Milano, Italy) explore journalism through the design lens. In the first part of the chapter, they describe the contemporary communication scenario, and in the second part, the authors suggest guidelines for applying a transmedia approach within the Italian news business in the form of a conceptual and operational tool.

In Chapter 8, Renira Rampazzo Gambarato (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia), Geane Carvalho Alzamora (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil), and Lorena Peret Teixeira Tácia (University Center of Belo Horizonte, Brazil) analyze how transmedia features are structured and implemented in the news coverage of the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The research findings indicate that the coverage presented systematic content expanded throughout various media platforms (a core characteristic of transmedia journalism) but involved limited mechanisms of audience engagement, particularly in terms of citizen participation.

In Chapter 9, Renira Rampazzo Gambarato (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia) discusses the participatory flair of transmedia journalism within the concreteness of urban spaces by examining The Great British Property Scandal, a transmedia experience designed to inform and engage the public and offer alternative solutions to the long-standing housing crisis in the United Kingdom.

In Chapter 10, Alexander Godulla and Cornelia Wolf (University of Leipzig, Germany) analyze the Future of Food, one of the largest transmedia projects in journalism. The authors consider that this case study provides insights into the modes and combinations of story elements and draws attention to challenges and opportunities for researchers, producers, and users.

In the view of Colin Porlezza (University of Zurich, Switzerland), Eleonora Benecchi (Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland), and Cinzia Colapinto (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy), the analysis of the transmediality of the record-breaking podcast Serial can revitalize long-form journalism, particularly investigative journalism, and strengthen forms of slow and networked journalism. Chapter 11 looks at fan communities not only as an engaged audience, useful for commercial purposes, but also as a source for story development and production.

In Chapter 12, Luciana Andrade Gomes Bicalho (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil) investigates how media activism movements appropriate hashtags to expand the narrative through social engagement. In this sense, hashtags appear as sign processes that perform a mediating function. The study analyzes the news production by the Brazilian media activism group Mídia Ninja [Ninja Media] based on the Peircean semiotic approach.

In Chapter 13, Geane Carvalho Alzamora (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil) presents a case study of the transmedia dynamics of the multiplatform and participative journalistic program Especial
9-N [9-N Special], produced by channels TV3 and 3/24 in 2014, about the non-binding referendum on the sovereignty of Catalonia. The analysis was based on systematic observation of the program and its records on online social networks, seeking to gauge the nature and intensity of the transmedia circulation of the news based on the social engagement observed.

In Chapter 14, Anahí Lovato (National University of Rosario, Argentina) proposes a journey through an experience of transmedia journalism developed by the multimedia communication team at the National University of Rosario, Argentina. In this chapter, she analyzes Women for Sale, a transmedia documentary that addresses the trafficking of people for sexual exploitation purposes and reveals the creation of a complex narrative universe and the selection of stories, platforms, user experiences, and the execution of a transmedia project.

Last, in Chapter 15, Yvana Fechine and Sofia Costa Rêgo (Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil) discuss how transmedia strategies are part of the construction of the ethos in television journalism, based on an analysis of Jornal da Record News, the first Brazilian newscast to be introduced as a transmedia production.

The chapters of Exploring Transmedia Journalism in the Digital Age jointly constitute a relevant contribution to academic research and to the professional practice of transmedia journalism. Although this subject is still rarely explored in the field of transmedia studies, the interest that transmedia journalism arouses around the world is undeniable, as attested by the studies integrated in this book.

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REFERENCES


