Fish Fight: Transmedia Storytelling Strategies for Food Policy Change

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ABSTRACT

The 2010–2013 Fish Fight campaign, produced by Channel 4 in the United Kingdom and hosted by chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, is a transmedia experience designed to (1) draw the public’s attention to the reckless discarding of caught fish because of the quota system intended to conserve fish stocks in the domain of the European Union; and to (2) pressure the authorities to change the European Common Fisheries Policy. The article analyzes the transmedia strategies of the Fish Fight campaign in order to demonstrate how the multiplatform media production contributed to (1) make the public aware of the wasteful discarding of healthy fish at sea under the European fishing quotas; and (2) to amend the European Union’s fishing policies. The research findings point to the effective role of transmedia storytelling strategies in raising awareness in the political sphere through public participation in supporting relevant issues, influencing policy change.

Keywords: Common Fisheries Policy, Fish Fight, Participation, Policy Change, Transmedia Analysis, Transmedia Storytelling, Transmedia Strategies

The Fish Fight campaign, initiated in 2010, was produced by the public service broadcaster Channel 4 in the United Kingdom (UK) and hosted by British chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. The transmedia campaign was designed to (1) draw the public’s attention to the reckless discarding of caught fish because of the quota system intended to conserve fish stocks in the domain of the European Union (EU); and to (2) pressure the authorities to change the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). A transmedia campaign comprises a series of coordinated activities and organized efforts designed to achieve a social, political, or commercial goal by means of multiple media platforms (Francoli, 2014). Thus, the article analyzes the transmedia strategies of the Fish Fight campaign in order to demonstrate how the multiplatform media production contributed to (1) make the public aware of the wasteful discarding of healthy fish at sea under the EU fishing quotas; and (2) to amend EU fishing policies.

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The theoretical framework contemplates the conceptualization of transmedia storytelling in the scope of participatory theory. The methodological approach of the case study is based on the transmedia analytical model by Gambarato (2013) and applied to Fish Fight to depict how transmedia strategies collaborated to influence food policy change. The research findings point to the effective role of transmedia storytelling strategies in raising awareness in the political sphere throughout public participation in supporting relevant issues, culminating in policy amendment. It is not surprising that storytelling has become an important tool in facilitating change in society (Maas, 2012; Semetko, 2004) because the human species is addicted to story, and stories touch every aspect of our lives, even saturating it (Gottschall, 2013).

This is the scenario in which transmedia storytelling is inserted. Although transmedia storytelling remains under construction, there are solid indications of its conceptualization. The advent of convergence culture made people’s daily contact with media more complex from the viewpoint of the media platforms involved in the process as well as the blurring boundaries between audience consumption and production. Convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2) is closely associated with the idea of transmedia storytelling. “Thus, if convergence culture involves a multitude of mediums to provide the consumer with numerous ways of gathering communication and to enhance the participation and enjoyment of the audience, the use of TS [transmedia storytelling] seems the natural way to fulfill these expectations” (Gambarato & Alzamora, 2012, pp. 53–54). In this context, transmedia storytelling contributes to the increasing need for media projects that conform to the new multiscreen and multiplatform modes, content expansion, and audience participation. The transmedia approach provides the audience the opportunity to stay within the scope of a single story universe, while accessing unfolded content through various media channels. The term transmedia storytelling was coined by Henry Jenkins (2003, 2006) and defined as the art of building a storyworld, in which each extension makes a distinctive and valuable contribution to the overall story. Transmedia storytelling is not about repurposing the same content across different platforms but about the meaningful experience that the audience can have by engaging with the content extension of a story spread throughout multiple media channels. Pratten (2011, p. 1) emphasizes the importance of participatory elements inherently incorporated into transmedia narratives: “transmedia storytelling is telling a story across multiple media … with a degree of audience participation, interaction or collaboration.” Hancox (2014) discusses transmedia strategies applied to social change and concludes that this kind of approach highlights “the dignity of the subjects and strives to convey the complexities of the lives and issues by taking advantage of the technology available to challenge audiences to enter, experience and interact with the stories in new ways.” Gaming elements and participatory features, often present in transmedia projects, help transmedia producers interest audiences in various topics unrelated to the entertainment industry:
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