Chapter 22

Immersive Experience: Convergence, Storyworlds, and the Power for Social Impact

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the evolution of trends in the arts, storytelling, and immersive media, along with the emerging awareness, expansion, and deliberate application of social impact entertainment (SIE). The author discusses how the ideas and concepts of transmedia, convergence, and storyworld-building have now expanded beyond academic theory into more organic commercial and artistic applications. The focus is on how this approach relates to extending intellectual properties and stories into immersive media platforms and beyond. Additionally, the author presents several case studies and examples of emerging arts and media formats to support what we might expect to experience in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

Immersive Media (IM) has become an umbrella term for content that extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional rectilinear screen format. The related term Immersive Experience (IE) is also being applied to live encounters that immerse audiences and participants in a more interactive, visually embodied experience. This chapter provides a variety of examples of the “immersive” arts and technologies emerging in entertainment, arts, media, and cultural landscapes.

The chapter also examines the concept of storyworld-building, transmedia and convergence strategy, and on how immersive media and arts can be used to extend intellectual properties (IP), or create original IP, via these emerging platforms. It also reviews the use and potential use of immersive media for social impact.

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Much like the birth of early traditional cinema, immersive arts and media offer a paradigm shift on how viewers consume visual and audio storytelling and experiences. And—just as there were content concerns in the days of early cinema that resulted in censoring, the birth of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings systems, and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Television Code of Content, so too the power of these formats raises a new level of concern about their impact. As a response, the popularity and adaptive use of Social Impact Entertainment (SIE) is increasing in the entertainment industry, a critical step for the future of immersive media. Additionally, this chapter includes references to organizations supporting the education and application of SIE for content creators, as well as simple guidelines on how to incorporate SIE into the immersive space.

BACKGROUND

The author has spent the last 37 years as both an educator and a practitioner working in immersive media, as well as being involved with futurist organizations, professional trade organizations, new media companies, and emerging technologies. Her experience provides on-the-ground insights about trends in the media and arts space. As new media technologies emerge and are implemented by the creative and business communities, new languages and applications are borne out and discovered. This chapter explores how these emerging platforms can be utilized for social impact as well as entertainment and education.

THE EVOLUTION OF IMMERSIVE MEDIA

In the 19th Century humanity implemented two powerful inventions that changed the course of human evolution—the gas engine and electricity. In less than 130 years, this new “Promethean Fire” accelerated our experience of life on Earth and we now find ourselves catapulted into the start of a new evolutionary era. For those who study mythic aspects of astrology this era marks the romantic narrative notion of the end of the Piscean Age and the beginning of the Aquarian Age. We’ve gone from a period in humanity which was dominated by a devotional approach, and a hierarchy, power-based society, to a more unified network of individualized power with access to technologies and vast information once accessible to only a few. Over the last decades, we have come to realize the tremendous power of global media and imagery to advance our consciousness and understanding of the human condition, life on Earth, and our place in the universe.

On December 24, 1968, during the Apollo 8 mission, astronaut William Anders photographed Earth and a portion of the Moon’s surface from lunar orbit (Figure 1). That photo—Earthrise—has become one of the most influential images of all time as it provided humanity with a truly unique perspective of our place in the universe, much like the invention of the telescope did circa 1608.