Proposed Methodology for Transmedia News Stories Analysis

The Float Project (2009/10), in Brazil and The Great British Property Scandal: Every Empty Counts³ (2012) in the UK⁴

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Abstract: The study of transmedia in journalism is still evolving. Although news organizations around the world have been spreading stories through different and complementary platforms and screens, this does not necessarily constitute the use of transmedia concepts. Usually, the same story is simply distributed across multiple screens. Transmedia news reporting, in our view, would involve the expansion of content and engagement of the audience instead of repetition and propagation. This article studies examples of possible applications of the transmedia concept to the news report by examining *The Float Project* (Flutuador) in Brazil and comparing it to a potential model of engagement, *The Great British Property Scandal: Every Empty Counts* (2012) in the UK. The theoretical framework is provided by Henry Jenkins (2006), Carlos Scolari (2009), Kevin Moloney (2011), Renira Gambaratto (2013), Alzamora and Tárchia (2012) and proposes an evolving analytical model as a methodology for understanding transmedia applied to news features. The study points to major investments in building potential transmedia news reports by Globo Networks and

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3. Although the *The Great British Property Scandal: Every Empty Counts* (2012) by Channel 4 begins as a campaign, we consider a consistent model for composing a transmediatic news feature.

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suggests the necessary involvement of other departments and institutions to achieve full engagement and social relevance, as occurred in the UK project.

Introduction

From a monomediatic practice to a plurimediatic perspective

Until the 1980s, all different media were constituted as independent production units. Journalists were trained to work in print, television, or radio media. Newsrooms of media conglomerates such as Globo Networks, for example, were physically separated, with their own teams, equipment and routines. The reports were produced independently in each medium, i.e., each one had its agendas, routines, languages and modes of production and distribution. The monomediatic practice was anchored in the transmissive logic that outlined the mass media at that time. Each vehicle was seen as a privileged center, which operated autonomously from the point of view of production, circulation and storage of information produced on behalf of the media corporation.

From the 1980s, and more specifically the mid-1990s, this picture began to change. New technologies and communication policies contributed to the foundations of what we now know as media convergence, which configures other communicational logic. This logic seeks to integrate the production and circulation of information of media corporations in a plurimediatic perspective, incorporating them into a new communication environment that includes new forms of circulation and the social media universe.

It is not possible to clearly identify who first connected the word convergence to the communication technologies (Gordon, 2003), but the researcher Ithiel de Sola Pool contributed to its popularization by launching, in 1983, the book *The Technologies of Freedom*, which describes the convergence of modes. "Conversation, theatre, news, and text are all increasingly delivered electronically. [...] These mergers of electronic technology are bringing all modes of communications into one grand system" (Pool, 1983, 27-28).

However, even earlier, in 1979, Nicholas Negroponte of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) already referred to the overlapping of circles labelled as "Broadcast and Film Industry," "Computer Industry," and "Printing and Publishing Industry," scheduled to occur in 2000. With his speech, he toured the United States and raised millions of dollars in financial support for the construction of the MIT Media Lab in 1985.

The popularization occurred with the arrival of the World Wide Web in the mid 1990s and became common sense after the merger of AOL and Time Warner, announced in 2000 (Gordon, 2003; Fidler, 1997). Finally, remember Gordon (2003), companies started to practice the convergence of content between TV and newspaper, which was initially called the cross-promotion or cross-media. The beginnings were sheepishly called programming or integration of weather tips from the TV in the newspapers. In this period, however, the term most commonly used for this connection

between companies was "synergy."

In 2003, Henry Jenkins launched the book *Convergence Culture* in the United States, in which he connected several parallel and interconnected phenomena, constituent of a new economic, industrial, cultural and behavioural functioning model of society and media companies, understanding Convergence as

[...] a word that describes technological, industrial, cultural and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture. Some common ideas referenced by the term include the flow of content across multiple platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, the search for new structures of media financing that fall at the interstices between old and new media, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want. [...] media convergence refers to a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them. Convergence is understood here as an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship (Jenkins, 2006, 282)

For Bauer (2005), although there is no consensus on its meaning, convergence refers to "a mix of barriers and/or reduction of differences between firms or industries. This mix can occur at many levels, from a partial intersection to the complete elimination of differences, and consequently the fusion of formerly separate sectors" (BAUER, 2005, 62). This author defends the possibility of a loose convergence or a deep convergence. Jambeiro *et al.* (2011) consider that in both cases, it is a process linked to capitalist practice that turns out to be, in many cases, "an opportunity to maximize the accumulation of capital" (53).

We believe that market and technologies are linked and work in line

with the expectation of establishing and attending a dynamic flow of consumption of cultural products. The creation of new devices is constant, and the same works for the search for new business and monetization models. Nevertheless, the attempts to capture the scattered attention of the so-called prosumers are bringing important and effective changes in the media and journalistic environment that deserve attention.

In the world of entertainment and journalism, these changes vary in time and space. Kolodzy (2006) considers that the concept carries the proposal to join forces for better quality journalism, which is not always consistent with the actions of the companies when they use the convergence label.

Like Jenkins (2006), Kolodzy points to reception as a determining factor in the convergence process. The increasingly frequent habit of consuming several screens simultaneously, or not, would lead to the expansion of options for those seeking news. We must highlight the fact that varied forms of access to information through multiple media are not something new. What is presented as the differential is the need for the journalists and the productive system to seek the best way to tell a story considering the characteristics of each media surpassing what we are calling mono media practice.

Convergence, says Kolodzy (2006), requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of journalists. It also requires thinking like the audience already thinks in multiple media and platforms. It means to

understand and experiment with new ways of production, distribution and circulation of news. Based on the logic of convergence, the plurimediatric perspective that we call transmedia journalism emerges.

Transmedia Journalism

There is growing conceptual confusion around the media and journalistic universes when we talk about media convergence. Terms like Multimedia Journalism, Crossmedia, Intermedia, Transmedia are aggregated to form this semantic galaxy.

Transmedia storytelling is relatively recent and was used by Henry Jenkins (2003) for the first time in the journal *Technology Review* in 2003 when he stated that "Each particular product is an access point to the franchise as a whole" (135). Access to a movie and its derivatives should be autonomous, i.e., it is not necessary to consume all the products like games and comics, to understand the context of the work.

In relation to journalism, the confusion is even bigger. Domínguez (2012) warns of the risk of putting new labels on old practices. It is, according to this author, an elastic term with a wide variety of theoretical proposals.

Scolari (2013), for example, argues that all journalism is transmedia. In his words, journalism "was born transmedia." He justifies it by the fact of an event to be first reported by radio [and today, internet], then by television, followed the next day by the newspaper and weekly magazine.

The engagement, he says, would be in phone calls and in letters sent to the newsrooms. If all journalism is transmedia, we must question the necessity and validity of the adjective. Wouldn't it be enough to talk about journalism?

In an attempt to organize their use, Alzamora and Tárchia (2012) depart from epistemological discussions about the definitions of discipline, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary to rethink the relationship between media, multimedia, intermedia and transmedia universe of news. Thus, for these authors

The intermediatic prospect [...] must refer to forms of production and circulation of information that are established at the intersection and complementarity of different media environments. In this case, there is no shift or change in the media framework. That is, the information content is presented in a complementary way, for example, in the context of television, radio and newspaper printed in an integrated process in which each medium contributes to their specific production of combined information. (Alzamora and Tárchia, 2012, 31)

In the same perspective, the concept of transmedia presupposes

[...] not just media complementarity, although this is an important feature of the process, but mainly displacement of the characteristics traditionally marked by media environments. Thus they constitute reticular areas of miscegenation between genres and formats of digital media connections. The transmedia journalism constitutes the interstices of the intermedia network, it is not possible to characterize it as specific to any environment alone. (Alzamora and Tárchia, 2012, 31)

Moloney (2011) emphasizes the application of the Fundamental Principles of Transmedia Narrative named by Jenkins (2009) to journalism. For this author, the news would have the characteristic of transmedia expansion, i.e., a story can become viral to be shared by users or be explored in detail, officially or through social networks. It also allows for the

possibility of continuity or seriality to explore the characteristics of each medium and keep the audience's attention for a longer period. The diversity of views, represented in fiction by different characters and other angles of history, would be innate to the principles of journalism and include, increasingly, the point of view of the public. Immersion in the news would be provided through alternative forms of narration. Extrability, real-world and inspiration to action are consistent with public service journalism, which invests in real actions for troubleshooting.

Journalist Margaret Looney (2012) proposes five tips for transmedia stories.

1. Keep content unique: rather than repeating the information on different platforms, use different parts of a story to match a platform's strength and maximize user experience;
2. Provide a seamless point of entry: make sure whichever platform you're using gets readers to interact in a very simple way;
3. Partner up: projects are often complex and require the involvement of other companies, producers or professionals;
4. Keep it cost-effective: there are expensive projects, but it is possible to make transmedia cheaply, for example, by introducing social media to extend the story;
5. The story is no. 1: many creative tools may do more harm than help. Always put the story first.

Thus, we agree with Porto and Flores (2012), for whom "the essence of transmedia storytelling is in the field of longer news features, thus to its wealth of content and narrative construction, as well as the time of production of this genre, which allows a better textual architecture" (12).

These guiding principles of transmedia journalism evoke the perspective of media convergence. From these assumptions, we will seek to analyze the series of articles called *Float Project*, produced by Globo Television Network in 2009/2010 and *The Great British Property Scandal project: Every Empty Counts* (2012) by Channel 4.

Proposed methodology for transmedianews stories analysis

As previously proposed, our goal in this article is to outline an analytical model to be applied to potential transmedia news features, seeking to methodologically contribute to the understanding of the concept of transmedia applied to journalism. We present an initial model. Other issues and layers of understanding can and should be included in this proposal, adapting it where necessary, as proposed by Gambarato (2013).

We depart from previous contributions made by Moloney (2011), Jenkins (2009), Looney (2012) and Scolari (2012), plus the proposed structures analysis transmedia proposed by Gambarato (2013). In her paper, Gambarato (2013) aims to outline "essential features of the design process behind transmedia projects in order to support the analytic needs of transmedia designers and the applied research in the interest of the

media industry, considering analysis as a crucial aspect of the design process” (89). This is made by posing a series of questions divided into ten topics. We make an adaptation of this methodology to analyze our two cases.

1. Premises and purposes

- a) What is the project about? What is the central theme?
- b) What is the main journalistic genre? What is the editorship?
- c) What is the principal media? Print, radio, television, web?
- d) What is the ultimate goal of the project? To inform, engage, entertain, educate?

2. Audiences

- a) What are the audiences for the story? Who are the viewers/users/readers?
- b) What kind of story attracts this public?
- c) What are the screens and devices used by the target audience?
- d) What draws the audience to the project?
- e) Are there other similar projects? What results were obtained by them?

3. Sustainability and Marketing

- a) What is the business model? (open platforms, freemium, premium mix?)
- b) Who are the sponsors? What is the budget?
- c) Does the project have a brand? Is it commercially exploited?

4. Media platforms and languages

- a) What languages are involved? (Audio, video, text, photography, computer graphics, new game, website, application)
- b) What are technological devices needed for the project? (TV, radio, consoles, tablet, smartphone, newspaper, book, website)
- c) How does each device contribute to the project? What is its function?
- d) What distinguishes each platform?
- e) What are their limitations?
- f) Are all platforms needed?

5. Sources and characters

- a) Who are the primary and secondary sources? What are the approaches used with these sources?
- b) Does the story have characters? How many? Are all present in the main story? Are they added later?
- c) What can other points of view be aggregated to reach new audiences that otherwise would not be achieved?

6. Extensions and developments

- a) Does the story continue? In the same media?
- b) How is public curiosity activated to desire more detailed information?
- c) What kind of additional content can be generated?
- d) Does the story extend into further actions?
- e) As the story expands through the media, how does it maintain its continuity?
- f) How to keep the audience's attention for a longer period?

7. Engagement

- a) What makes the story spread virally?
- b) How does it motivate users to share the news features on their networks, reaching a bigger audience?
- c) What can be gained by engaging the audience in the journalistic production process?
- d) Does it generate alternative forms of storytelling? Which ones?
- e) What are the mechanisms of interaction?
- f) Does the process include a conversation with the audience? Are users answered?
- g) Does the project seek the engagement of other institutions?

- h) Is there any form of immersion in the project? Are commercial products and actions connected to it?
- i) Can viewers/users/readers incorporate elements of the news features in their lives?
- j) Is there an ultimate goal for the project? How to measure it?
- k) Is there the use of social networks? Is there a strategy for it?
- l) Is the remix by the audience officially incorporated into the project?
- m) Is there a reward system for participation?

The Float Project

In 2009, Globo television channel, based in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, launched a series of news features entitled *The Rivers of São Paulo* to study the general conditions of the rivers and their environment. Soon the Tietê River became a central theme due to its bad conditions and importance. The editor had the idea to throw into the river one PET bottle with a GPS inside, allowing the audience to see on a map where the bottle would be retained. The feasibility of this experiment was dropped after the first test. The Department of Journalism and the team from the Research and Development Engineering Department at Globo TV then teamed up to improve the original idea. They decided to build *The Float* device from scratch.

The equipment was developed in partnership with the Institute for

Technological Research of São Paulo. The process of development involved operating systems and naval robotics components capable of ensuring security during filming and sending remote data collected from the river. They also decided to send with the device a “guardian” to take care of the equipment and to monitor daily rates of oxygen in the water. The chosen professional was Dan Robson, a well-known adventurer who accompanied *The Float* for 500 km using a kayak (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The Float device and its guardian Dan Robson. Source: Globo TV

In 2010, the Float Project was turned into a franchise, deployed in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, three major Brazilian cities. The project received an award from the International Broadcasting Convention (IBC) in the special award category as recognition of its social relevance and technological innovation.

1. Premises and purposes

The project dealt with the investigation of rivers in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília. The central theme was the pollution of rivers. The journalistic genre was the news feature, and the editorship was

City/Environment. Although the TV was the main media, the internet, radio

and the newspaper of Globo network also reported about the project, albeit in a disjointed manner and without prior planning. The purpose of the TV station, with the series of reports, was to inform, educate and engage people in the recovery of rivers.

2. Audiences

In São Paulo, the focus of our analysis, the audience of the local channel SPTV is formed mostly by people aged 18-49 years (46%), followed by 36 % of people over 50 years. The program has been losing its audience in recent years. The newscast ended 2012 with an average of 23.3 points (each point equals 60,000 households in Greater São Paulo). On the web, most of the public is also aged between 18 and 49 years of age (76%). *The Float Project* added readers from newspapers and radio.

However, it is necessary to consider the lack of measurement of so-called social TV and the impact of the project on the various media involved. The traditional way of measuring audience by points cannot cover the entire spectrum of a transmedia story. For this reason, we cannot estimate the total audience reached by *The Float Project*.

3. Sustainability and Marketing

The expedition lasted 32 days. It was released on 1 September 2009 and crossed more than 30 cities. More than one hundred professionals were involved, including safety technicians, film reporters, rescue teams, helicopters and engineers. The initial budget was 25,000 dollars, but the

final cost was about 125,000. Altogether, 150 news features were produced during two months of the project in São Paulo waters. The whole project was open to viewers for free on commercial television. In terms of marketing, Globo Television turned it into a franchise, and the eco-athlete Dan Robson even launched his own glass brand based on his visibility during the project.

4. Media platforms and languages

The news features about the float widely used videos, photos, infographics and websites. There were no applications or newsgames related to it, in spite of the great potential. It is necessary to consider that in 2009 there were not as many applications widely used in Brazil as there are today. To learn about the project, possible technological devices were broadcast TV, radio, tablets, computers, newspapers, and smartphones and yet there has not been a distinct language for mobile media. In production, however, the GPS was highlighted because it allowed the real-time geolocation to float all the way. It was not possible to see a clear transmedia strategy from the initial planning, but the transmediality occurred naturally with the use of Twitter, mainly by reporters and staff involved. On Twitter, the hashtag used was #flutuador.

5. Sources and characters

There were multiple primary and secondary sources since the number of news features was very large. Engineers, sanitarians, politicians,

environmentalists, the population living by the river and students were among the sources. External characters were also aggregated, like the paddlers who joined Dan Robson during the journey and people waiting along the river to see the float. As curiosity about the expansion of the project in Brasília, Globo has promoted shows with singers and a special appearance of Globo reporters in the closure of the project in 2012.

6. Extensions and developments

The project had broad ramifications and eventually became a sort of franchise. It has already been implemented in Rio de Janeiro, Distrito Federal and returned to São Paulo for another edition. However, the station in the new editions did not change the hedging strategies. Instead, they increasingly restricted the news features to TV and website. An interesting strategy to turn the public's curiosity and get them to delve into the information were the lectures held in schools by Dan Robson and reporters. However, as stated earlier in this article, other additional content could have been generated with the use of social media, mobile applications and newsgames.

7. Engagement

There was no viral dissemination of *The Float Project*, although several news features can be found on the internet in blogs and other online sites, even in the traditional competing media such as the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo. People posted photos on social networks, but the range of

spontaneous release did not reach significant levels and was not encouraged by Globo. Maybe if Globo had invested in this aspect, the results had appeared. The station staff, however, was limited to interviewing the people who waited for the float by the river in several cities.

The engagement with students who visited the reporters during their work in the river and the visits to schools were an important way of involving the audience.

However, it was possible to find negative reactions on the social network Orkut, the most accessed by Brazilians at the time. This was a result of the overexposure and excessive stories on the same theme, about 150 in 2009.

On YouTube, a conducive environment for posting videos and comments, the bulk of publications were made by Dan Robson. The news feature published had an average of a thousand views and rare comments. However, it is necessary to consider the restrictive copyright policy by Globo Network, which determines the exclusion of their videos from that channel when posted by the audience.

The project generated practical actions such as the removal of carcasses of cars that were floating in the river and which were discovered during the expedition. Furthermore, Globo won the international International Broadcasting Convention Award in recognition of the social relevance and technological innovation of the Project.

The Great British Property Scandal: EveryEmpty Counts

In 2011, Channel 4, in the United Kingdom, launched a series of special programs to investigate the British housing crisis and discuss alternative solutions, encouraging audience participation via mobile application. The goal was to engage people to report empty properties they knew of and lobby government and local councils to have a low-cost loan fund for the owners of empty homes who were struggling to refurbish their properties.

The response to the campaign by the TV station was staggering:

- a) 100,000 petition signatures within a week of launching *The Great British Property Scandal* campaign
- b) Over 118,200 supporters in total
- c) Over 7,900 empty homes were reported, many of which have been brought back into use
- d) £17 million allocated for new national low-cost loan funds
- e) George Clarke, who had the original idea and hosted the show, was appointed Independent Empty Homes Advisor to the Government

More information about the whole project can be found on their website. What we want to point out in this article is the capacity of Channel 4 to engage the audience in its project using the Internet and mobile phones. This is something that Globo Television was not able to do, keeping its project restricted to a transmissive perspective.

Final considerations

We are still far from a definitive conceptualization of Transmedia Storytelling and even more distant from its setting and significance in the journalistic universe. In Brazil, we live through a dramatic period of layoffs in newsrooms, which will affect further trials and innovations in this field. A transmedia story does not need to answer all the questions suggested in this methodological outline. Those are merely suggestive paths. Not all projects involving multiple platforms will have the backing of big companies like Globo Television and Channel 4. What counts is the determination to try new ways of telling stories and, above all, engaging audiences. It is not about financial support but the freedom to create and experience.

Eleven years after Jenkins (2003) forged the concept, academics and the market have embraced it and turned it into a buzzword. Projects multiply and show new creative possibilities for journalistic production, as exemplified by *Localore*, *Economics Personified*, and *History's Next Draft*. Those are important examples for further analysis and to continue expanding and testing this proposed methodology for analysis of transmedia news features.

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