Blue Pencil: Experiences in Transmedia⁸

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Abstract: This article aims at analyzing and discussing the proposed objectives and outcomes of a transmedia project that was run in partnership with CICANT/Universidade Lusófona, in Lisbon, Portugal, and the Portuguese media group Impresa, as part of a European Commission-funded project named CIAKL-Cinema and Industry Alliance for Knowledge and Learning. The *Blue Pencil* project had as its main objective the development of a transmedia narrative that grouped different platforms and technologies, which included intersections inside the narrative within the genres of entertainment and education. Taking as its central theme the censorship in Portugal during the Estado Novo, the narrative extends into a short fiction film, a documentary, a site with archive material, an online game that challenges writing on freedom of the press, an online store, and a school program, in partnership with the network of school libraries, to launch the debate of censorship in schools.

Introduction

Technological developments brought about several transformations in the ways we communicate and tell stories. In this context, challenges to the production of narratives vary, one of them being how we can fulfill

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audiences' expectations in an ever more screen fragmented environment.

We tell stories across multiple media because no single media satisfies our curiosity or our lifestyle. We are surrounded by an unprecedented ocean of content, products and leisure opportunities. The people to whom we wish to tell our stories have the technology to navigate the ocean and can choose to sail on by or stop and listen. Technology and free markets have allowed unprecedented levels of customization, personalization and responsiveness such that a policy of "one size fits all" is no longer expected or acceptable. Telling stories across multiple media-transmedia storytelling-allows content that's right-sized, right timed and right-placed to form a larger, more profitable, cohesive and rewarding experience. (Pratten, 2011).

In this context, it puts up the challenge for the production of narratives that could meet the expectations and lifestyle of the audience and asks how well media corporations are prepared to respond to the sophistication of narratives and changes in the behaviours of the audience. What new kinds of narratives are emerging to meet the expectations and lifestyles of the audience?

The transmedia approach is such a powerful storytelling technique because it enables the user to become involved in the material in an extremely deep way and sometimes in a manner that eerily simulates a real-life experience... By spanning a number of media, a project can become far richer, more detailed, and multifaceted. (Miller 2008).

The *Blue Pencil* project took place between October 2011 and December 2012. The project aimed to develop not just a transmedia strategy but also a historical approach to censorship in Portugal and aesthetic, artistic and commercial concepts. For the development of the *Blue Pencil* project, a study was made for a transmedia narrative that had censorship as the central theme. The premise was to create an object of entertainment with educational crossings to make a historical contextualization of

censorship during the Estado Novo in Portugal. We don't want to leave this work on a theoretical analysis of the possibilities of transmedia narratives, but to implement a project that would meet the initial premise, for which a protocol between the Universidade Lusófona and Impresa group was established for the concretization of the project. The proposal develops a transmedia narrative that adds different platforms and technologies that have narrative and dramatic crossings.

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (Jenkins 2007).

From a central core consisting of a short fiction film based on real facts, the narrative spans to a documentary with personalities that were pursued by censorship, and to a website with archive material, a selection of books with the respective censorship and connection to the Universidade Lusófona online store, and an online game that challenges the writing on sensitive issues related to censorship. The process of creating and producing the project began with the planning and organization of information to build a coherent universe that creates streams of consumption across the various platforms of the project. The screenplay of the film and the documentary were worked to create classical narratives, but at the same time, they contained elements that made narrative bridges with other platforms. Based on the book *O Que a Censura Cortou*, by José Pedro Castanheira, edited by Expresso, we worked on the screenplay of the film and the documentary in a

way that retained a connection between them. The objective was to create two scripts in which censorship that was included in a fiction film was related to the documentary through the stories of the interveners. This process proved to be very productive in introducing new fictional elements as they related to the script of the documentary, and *vice versa*, making the narratives stronger and more coherent. The necessity of having scripted narratives that contribute to the whole while being more than the sum of their parts opened doors for the audience to get involved in the project. Another of the requirements was to create separate narratives that could be consumed individually without affecting the consistency and integrity of the narrative. The website was another of the platforms used to provide a context through documents and biographies to complete the information conveyed in the movies. The material that could not be included in the movies, even though it was related to the events narrated in the film and documentary, went onto the website to allow the audience to find out more information about the events. The site also has links to the online store, where all the books discussed in the film, together with censorship of them, are available. With the aim of developing convergence between media and in order to propose a business model that creates synergies between businesses by attracting new investors and financiers for the project to enable the participation of the audience in the text, we developed a game that allowed the audience to write text on the topic of media and censorship, trying to overcome an algorithm that censors certain keywords. The game provides the player with the perception and requirement to write

in a censorship regime. To attract participation in the game, we developed a contest where the best texts were selected and published in an eBook. This also resulted in a project with the school library network that took the theme of censorship to schools, encouraging students to reflect on censorship. The project reached more than 600 schools and has received 104 works about censorship from various schools. In a transmedia project, the narratives are autonomous but refer to the same universe; all narrative and dramatic bridges need to be considered before the execution of the project so that it maintains its coherence and can create flows between platforms. Table 1 presents some of the narrative bridges designed to make the connection between platforms.

Table.1. Narrative bridges between platforms

	Film	Documentary	Site	Online Store
Letter with a questionnaire for the Express newspaper about May 28, 1926	Re-enactment of the seizure of the letter by Colonel Saraiva.	Mário Soares and Francisco Balsemão speak about the episode of the letter that was lost for 39 years	The letter of Mário Soares and the reply of Balsemão Francisco, 39 years after can be consulted	
Censorship of the raid the house of José Pacheco Pereira	Re-enactment censorship news of the raid on Expresso	José Pacheco Pereira talks about the episode of the raid on his home by PIDE	Can be consulted the news that came out in the newspapers in 1926 with the implementation of the new regime and censorship	
Books "Madam Me" and "New Portuguese Letters"	Colonel Barros Lopes finds that his wife read forbidden books in his absence.	Maria Teresa Horta speaks about the process of seizure of books	Considerations of the Censors about the books can be consulted	Book "Novas Cartas Portuguesas"
Punishment proof of page of the newspaper Expresso	Re-enactment of the telephone conversation between Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and the director of the previous examination, Mario Bento, imposing the punishment	Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa describes the episode that made the regime punish the newspaper Expresso	"Confidências de Mário Bento" Interview of Mário Bento to José Pedro Castanheira from Expresso	Book "New Portuguese Letters"

Implementation

The project is based on an exhibition agreement between the Universidade Lusófona and the Impresa group. In transmedia storytelling, planning release dates is essential to the coherence of the project and necessary to get the audience to follow the narrative through the various platforms. Each platform has its own release, with narrative hooks and links to lead consumers to the next content on the same platform or on

alternative platforms.

- a) Display of teasers to promote television projects (SIC, SIC Notícias).
- b) Launch of the Facebook page. During execution, photographic material was collected from the various phases of the project for this purpose.
- c) Launch of the site.
- d) Release of books in the Online Store of Universidade Lusófona.
- e) Launch of José Pedro Castanheira's text *Confidential Mario Bento* in the digital version of Express magazine.
- f) Launch of the game and contest.
- g) Presentation of the project group Impresa and Universidade Lusófona for the school libraries.
- h) Release of the fiction movie on television (SIC).
- i) Launch of puzzles on the Facebook page.
- j) Screening of the documentary on a cable channel (SIC Notícias).
- k) Debate on freedom of the press (Turin theatre).
- l) Best submitted articles published in Express magazine.
- m) Launch of Kobo eBook
- n) The project entered the festival circuit.
- o) Theatre opening.
- p) DVD, Express, Online Store Universidade Lusófona.

Objectives of the project

- a) Stimulate a consumer base that follows the narrative through the various platforms.
- b) Reach a committed, active, and participatory audience.
- c) Encourage participation and content creation.
- d) Reach a wider audience that is disseminated by various platforms.
- e) Prolong the life of the content.
- f) Increase the audience on platforms that have been losing competitiveness.
- g) Distribution of effort and cost for several platforms.
- h) Finding new financing and business models.
- i) Create an experience that can be rewarding for advertisers, partners, producers and consumers.

Conclusion

Among the key concepts for the realization of the *Blue Pencil* were the convergences that the project had established, serving as a working model and study for future projects of this nature. The project made synergies between companies, where economic convergence was established, benefiting both the project design phase as well as the promotion and display.

Transmedia storytelling reflects the economics of media consolidation or what industry observers call “synergy.” Modern media companies are horizontally integrated—that is, they hold interests across a range of what were once distinct media industries. A media conglomerate has an incentive to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible. (Jenkins 2007).

The project emphasized the synergy achieved with the *Impresa*

Group for consulting the files of Expresso magazine, which served as the foundations for both narrative fiction and documentary, providing documents that have been integrated into all extensions of the project. The project was designed to be viewed on multiple platforms, leaving the university with their implementation for various platforms and Impresa with the display and promotion. Collaboration with ZON was also essential through initiatives for the promotion and development of new multimedia content, helping with funding and providing a theatre for the premiere of the project on April 23rd.

The premiere was thought to be not only an event to present the project, but at the same time to mark the April 25th revolution of the carnations. The event achieved all the project's goals, having been attended by 350 people and having been reported on in various organs of the national press. As established during the planning of the project, it was launched across multiple channels, with teasers that promoted all extensions of the *Blue Pencil* (film, documentary, website, and games) universe with presented on various platforms.

The project has grown organically to be distributed across multiple platforms, where each narrative was autonomous while contributing to the same universe. The film was exhibited on the open channel SIC on April 24th, making a bridge for the documentary, which aired on April 25th in SIC Notícias. For analysis of hearings, annexed, we note that the movie displayed in SIC achieved a 15.9 share, surpassing the share of RTP with 3.7,

behind TVI with a 21.2 share, demonstrating that a product of fiction can compete with reality shows and talk shows that were displayed at the same time. More significant was the result achieved by SIC Notícias, with the screening of the documentary, which managed 1.2 percentage points more than usual for the same time display. These results prove the convergence between the two platforms, with an increasing audience reached by the migration of the public, who followed the narrative to another platform. There was also a significant increase in participation in the game on the website, proving further convergence results. The project will also fulfill your educational goal, with a debate organized following the screening, featuring Professor José Bragança de Miranda and Dr. José Pacheco Pereira on censorship and its mechanisms in Turin theatre. The school project with SIC Esperança, for the presentation of the documentary in various schools, aimed to introduce the theme of freedom of the press and reached 600 schools, drawing 104 participants of the schools. The *Blue Pencil* project demonstrated, through its practical results, that transmedia narratives in different technologies and platforms do not compete with each other and that all media are present and well established in society. Technologies and traditional platforms can coexist with new platforms. In these narratives, the relationship between platforms and technologies is intensified through adding and creating a more rewarding experience for consumers. The *Blue Pencil* project is an academic, non-commercial purpose, but aimed to show that we can find new ways of funding and business models with content available on a greater number of platforms and with longer exposure to

advertisers, attracting new audiences for platforms that have been losing competitiveness. The *Blue Pencil* project also succeeded in proving the importance of collaboration between businesses and the University through the agreement signed between the University and the Impresa group. The University can develop proposals for content that are then tested in various media, contributing to the study and research of new content that may offer solutions for media companies. The power of transmedia storytelling lies in its cohesion and integration between various platforms. The characters portrayed, as well as parts of their history, reemerge on multiple platforms. On each platform, the narrative benefits from what the platform does best in terms of expression and communication. Thus, the transmedia narrative is focused on linking complementary elements, each of which is conveyed by the complementary platform that best enhances their expressive features, opening pathways to a shared universe.

Tables⁹

9. Additional Tables. Audiometric data acquired from GFK on the dates of the Blue Pencil project screening on the TV channels SIC and SIC Notícias.

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SIC Notícias - Universo - Audipanel

Descrição	Data	Hora Início	Hora Fim	Share (%)	Aud.Média (%)	Aud.Média (000 telespect.)	Aud.Total (000 telespect.)
Lápis Azul (Documentário) (5ª Feira)	25-Abr-13	20:00:00	20:56:48	0,6	0,3	30,1	144,8
	Média PH DU (01 a 23 Abr-13)			0,5	0,2	24,1	148,7
	Diferenças Média Programa para PH			0,1	0,1	6	-3,9
Lápis Azul (Documentário)(R) (6ª Feira)	26-Abr-13	3:00:03	3:56:52	3,6	0,2	16	39,8
	Média PH DU (01 a 23 Abr-13)			2,4	0,1	11,7	31,6
	Diferenças Média Programa para PH			1,2	0,1	4,3	8,2

Fonte: GfK

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