TRANS MEDIA BRANDING

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Content

Transmedia Branding – A new Paradigm for Marketing and Communication?

In recent years we have seen a rapid change in the communication programs of corporations and associations, marked by the conversion of traditional marketing, such as advertising and public relations, and massive adoption of social marketing techniques. It remains to be seen how the multi-billion dollar marketing and communication industries will shape up. The breathtaking pace of change can be seen in the United States, where brands have been experimenting with new participative communication models. Interactive and social media have also been gaining importance in European markets.

Meanwhile, a novel narrative form is developing from mass media such as television and print, increasingly interwoven with content from the web. Unlike classical advertising, this participatory approach invites consumers to play an important role in shaping and spreading the narrative.

An ever increasing number of companies have adopted this new form of communication, investing money and creativity in the development of innovative interactive concepts.

In this world of change, how do you know what exactly matters to your customers and business partners? New research methods such as social listening offer a more direct way of tapping market conversations and gaining new insights. With content playing an increasingly central role in communication,

concepts such as content marketing and transmedia branding provide new ways of developing and establishing brand personality, while turning communication into a participatory process that brings the brand to life.

The European Institute for Media Optimization aims to bring together academic work and real-life applications in this emerging new communication paradigm; this book is the first of a series of publications on the subject.

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About this Publication

The purpose of this booklet is to provide an initial framework for one particular new approach to branding in this new media environment, dubbed by the USC Annenberg Innovation Lab as *transmedia branding*. Combining case studies and theoretical analysis, this booklet aims to provide an overview of the design elements of transmedia branding.

Many of the concepts referenced below have been deeply analyzed in the book *Spreadable Media* by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green. In the spring semester 2013, Henry Jenkins and I explored these concepts in the classroom by teaching the first university course on this subject at USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. One of the students, Jerried Williams, wrote his Master's thesis on the topic of transmedia branding. His work is reflected in this booklet.

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Introduction

On August 16, 2012, Intel, in partnership with Toshiba, released the first episode of *The Beauty Inside*, an interactive social film directed by Sundance Award winning director Drake Doremus. Topher Grace of That '70s Show, Spider-Man 3 and Valentine's Day starred in the film alongside Mary Elizabeth Winstead of Scott Pilgrim vs. The World and Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter (IntelPR).

The Beauty Inside is about a man in his twenties named Alex who wakes up every day with a new face and body. Although he takes a new form externally as he morphs into a new person, he remains the same person on the inside. The film chronicles Alex's daily life challenges including where he will work, unique circumstances that arise out of his condition, and romantic relationships. He uses a Toshiba Protégé to journal his fascinating life and document his ever-changing appearance. The Ultrabook serves a crucial role in the film as the one constant in Alex's life, the one thing he can rely on.

The film encouraged viewers to interact with the main character over social media—Facebook and YouTube. They were also invited to audition for a role as the main character, Alex. The nature of Alex's condition meant that anyone, male or female, could play the role. Fan submitted pictures could end up on Alex's Facebook timeline or in a filmed episode on Alex's Ultrabook.

Doremus oversaw casting and would contact viewers if they were chosen to appear in the film. If their performance needed work, he would help

re-record the video. By the end of the film, over 100 unique faces were used for Alex's 24 video diaries on YouTube and in the six episodes of the film sourced from a global audience.

The Beauty Inside was created to get people thinking about a product they can't see, the Intel processor that powers the Toshiba Protégé. This has been one of Intel's greatest challenges. Intel has cycled through various strategies to overcome this challenge. They began with selling the functionality of the product, which became very technical and stodgy. To overcome this, Intel created the legendary Intel Inside campaign. Years later it evolved into a strategy focused on the empowerment to be had from utilizing products powered by Intel through celebrity endorsements and partnerships. As of late, they have realized that the current market requires "something" more engaging to grasp their attention.

This "something" is an evolved method of cross-channel communication, referred here to as transmedia branding. The Beauty Inside campaign is a prime example of the application of transmedia branding. It is important to note that the minds behind *The Beauty Inside* did not set out to create a transmedia branding campaign. They were merely attempting to solve a common problem, garnering attention, with an innovative solution.

Branding is in a state of disruption and re-invention. Recent advances in Internet and consumer technologies have put professional branding tools in the hands of consumers. Everyday people – as individuals and as communities – are appropriating, remixing, and recirculating brand icons beyond the control of those who have historically shepherded the brand. Often these consumer-led brand evolutions become as important as the official brand itself. As a result, brand messages and icons are now shaped as much by the people who consume them as by those who originate them. Consumers have now become, in essence, extended members of an organization's branding team.

If old branding models were based on tight control over the circulation and messaging, such controls are no longer practical or desirable in a world where, if it doesn't spread, it's dead. In this atmosphere, organizations need to embrace new engagement strategies that increase the range of possible

and permissible meanings associated with brands, that open up valid channels of communication with all stakeholders, and that play out across the full range of possible communication channels.

The Transmedia Concept

Former USC professor Marsha Kinder coined the term transmedia in 1991. She stated that brands such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are "commercial transmedia supersystems." The basic premise of the brand is that there are four turtles trained in ninjitsu named after Renaissance artists that have been transformed into protectors of humanity after coming into contact with a mysterious substance. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was first developed as a comic book series. Its success led to the licensing of the characters for toys, cartoons, video games, film and other merchandise. As a result, the brand reached international acclaim. Kinder speaks to this within first-generational transmedia terms:

"In these expanding networks of synergy, connectivity, collectability, restructuring, new world orders (and other postmodernist buzzwords), children, corporations, and countries are learning that transmedia intertextuality is a powerful strategy for survival."

"What I found was a fairly consistent form of transmedia intertextuality, which positions young spectators (1) to recognize, distinguish, and combine different popular genres and their respective iconography that cut across movies, television, comic books, commercials, video games, and toys"(Kinder).

Former Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and current USC Annenberg professor Henry Jenkins further developed the concept of transmedia, which he evolved into transmedia storytelling. Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as "a process in which 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, Transmedia 202). Jenkins expands upon the concept with greater detail in the following from Convergence Culture statement:

In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best-so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. Redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty" (Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 96).

Building on Jenkins' definition, transmedia branding is defined as a communication process in which information about a brand is packaged into an integrated narrative, which is dispersed in unique contributions across multiple media channels for the purpose of creating an interactive and engaging brand experience.

The transmedia model of storytelling has been successfully used for many purposes, from development of Hollywood entertainment franchises, to independent and public media productions, and most recently, new approaches to public relations and advertising.

The transmedia branding framework relies on collective intelligence, participatory audience techniques and spreadable content. Transmedia innovation can enhance the effectiveness and reach of brands by:

● **Promoting Participation as a Brand Value:** Transmedia storytelling's focus on meaningful participation as a core brand value incites the type of consumer and employee engagement that deepen brand loyalty.

● **Harnessing Collective Intelligence to Deepen and Evolve the Brand:** As brand fans participate more actively, transmedia storytelling techniques allow an organization to use this collective intelligence to co-create, expand, and sustain communication together. Working collectively, they deepen, enrich, and even map the details of the brand's "storyworld" across media and from many different perspectives. This collective intelligence also helps a brand track and respond more quickly and effectively to a highly fragmented and ever-changing media landscape.

● **Generating Spreadability:** One of Henry Jenkins' latest concepts is that of "spreadability," an alternative to "viral" marketing and communication. Spreadability stresses the active choice of individuals and networks to pass along content they find socially meaningful, while the viral analogy describes media circulation "in which people become unknowing carriers of powerful and contagious ideas which they bring back to their homes and work place, infecting their friends and family" (Nieman Journalism Lab). Transmedia collective intelligence and participatory techniques can greatly help the spreadability of brand messages.

Why Transmedia Branding?

Since sometime between the late forties and mid-fifties, consumers in Western societies have been bombarded with brand messages from every possible channel: the never-ending onslaught of TV and radio commercials, newspaper ads, direct mail, billboards, and, more recently, emails and online advertising. Many consumers view marketing as a necessary evil tolerated in order to access

subsidized news and entertainment; but, whenever possible, they look for ways to ignore these messages.

Advertisers, arguably, are equally dissatisfied, as they spend enormous amounts of money to ensure their messages are received. As the saying goes, 50% of all advertising is wasted, but we don't know which 50%. What was initially conceived as an effective mechanism for attracting customers has grown into an oversaturation of unwanted and often ignored commercial messages.

Doc Searls in *The Cluetrain Manifesto* distilled the core problem into one sentence: "There is no market for your messages." Instead, he argues, "markets are conversations" (Searls). This is a reference to a time that predates mass marketing when people gathered in physical places to discuss products with vendors and, more importantly, with other people like themselves. More important than the messages proclaimed by vendors was this engaging dialog.

The core problem of mass advertising is that it cannot cater to this type of individualized discussion. These impersonal, non-relevant messages lead consumers to tune out or, worse, become irate.

Transmedia branding recognizes this limitation of mass media, and uses consumers themselves to help solve it. The principle at the core of transmedia branding is this: rather than bombard audiences with unwanted and redundant brand messages, engage audiences in compelling conversations. This is done, across many different channels, in ways that consumers can and are encouraged to participate. Participation can be direct interaction with the brand or with other audience members, content creation, or even becoming part of the story themselves.

I'm On a Horse

To look more closely at the elements of transmedia branding, let's look at the most iconic transmedia branding campaign to date, Procter & Gamble's Old Spice *The man your man could smell like i*n 2010, created by Wieden+Kennedy. It was kicked off by a humorous commercial for Old Spice Red Zone body wash with former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa (**Fig. 1**). It first shows Mustafa standing in a bathroom with a towel wrapped around him, promoting the benefits of Old Spice's new body wash. He's then transferred to a sailboat to riding a horse on the beach, all without pausing, keeping constant eye contact. As Wikipedia notes: "The punchline of the commercial is Mustafa's non sequitur final statement: 'I'm on a horse', delivered as the camera zooms out to reveal to the viewer that Mustafa is now sitting atop a horse" (Wikipedia).

Fig. 1: Isaiah Mustafa as the Old Spice Guy at the end of the original 'Smell like a Man, Man' commercial

Originally released on YouTube the week before Superbowl 2010 to tap into the annual advertising craze, the spot was promoted as a must-see ad – without Old Spice having to commit to a multi-million dollar ad purchase during the game. The commercial spread across social media like wildfire, achieving 20 million YouTube views in just three days. It was widely discussed in the media and organically promoted by celebrities via Twitter.

The next major campaign component was a sequence of 186 short videos, in which Mustafa, standing in a bathtub wrapped in towel (**Fig. 2**), responded to tweets by celebrities, members of the general public, and specific online

Old Spice Guy during the YouTube shoot for the Twitter response campaign

communities directed at the Old Spice Guy. These videos spread as people responded to their surprise inclusion in a major advertising campaign. Moreover, numerous fans shot parodies and posted them on YouTube, and Sesame Street created the 'Smell like a Monster' take-off (**Fig. 3**). Mainstream media entered the discussion by re-airing the original commercial and the YouTube videos, and invited Mustafa to appear in numerous talk shows.

The YouTube respond ads developed their own storylines as subsets of the overall brand story, and jumped back and forth between different types of media. One particular examples stands out because of its transmedia nature. Using his Twitter handle @JS Beals, one man asked the Old Spice guy to ask his girlfriend to marry @JS Beals in real life. Mustafa did so in one of his YouTube responses. Within hours of the video being posted, @JS Beals tweeted: "She

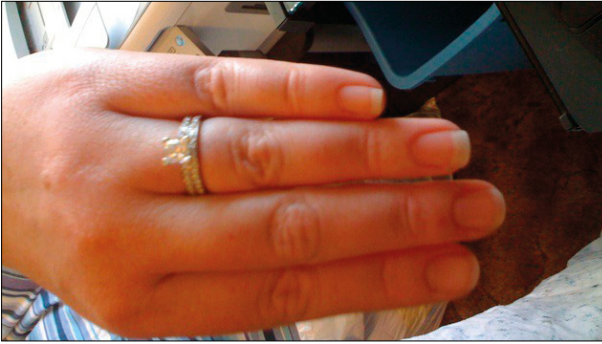**Fig. 3:** Sesame Street's Grover in the 'Smell like a Monster' video on YouTube

Fig. 4: @JS Beals tweeted: "She said yes," and later tweeted this picture to prove it

said yes," and posted a picture of his fiancé wearing a ring (**Fig. 4**). The picture and the corresponding were picked up by Mashable, and then by mainstream media.

Many case studies have been written about *The man your man could smell like*, detailing the flurry of creative content pieces generated by both the brand and the online community. While the creativity and spreadability of the campaign is impressive, so are the return-on-investment numbers as detailed by Event Reports (Precourt):

● In the first six months after the launch of the campaign, Old Spice sales increased 27% year-to-year. By the sixth month of the effort, month-to-month sales had increased 107%.

● 2 billion-plus total campaign impressions since February 2010.

● 40 million total video views in the campaign's first week.

● A 75% share of all brand conversations in the first three months of 2010 (with women having half the conversations).

● The all-time most-viewed YouTube brand channel (and, with 170,000 subscribers, YouTube's top subscription channel).

● 3,000% increase in Twitter followers.

● 2,000% increase in Google searches.

- 800% increase in Facebook interactions.

- 300% increase in traffic at oldspice.com.

Design Elements of Transmedia Branding

This Old Spice campaign is a perfect illustration of successful transmedia branding, which fosters engagement between brands and their target markets. Transmedia branding campaigns appear to share a common set of building blocks, or design elements, which we have identified as: narratives, participation, and brands. Each of these notions relies on specific enabling elements, as outlined in the figure below.

Transmedia Branding Design Elements		
Narratives	**Participation**	**Brands**
Memes	Culture	Protagonists
Media	Communities	Markets

Narratives

People appear to be innately interested in stories. This has been scientifically examined, as neurological researchers study whether the human brain evolved to process and retain information best if it originated in a storytelling format. Is a network of genes responsible for human storytelling ability? Did the evolutionary process hardwire story telling into human brains to increase chance of survival? Scholar Sanjay Nigam postulates that "a compelling storyteller would

seem to have a survival advantage. Just as now, in a market place full of narratives and with the possibility of generating an infinite number through novel permutations and combinations, the better storyteller is likely to out-compete poorer storytellers for resources" (Nigam, Sanjay).

The draw to storytelling has also been sociologically and historically documented. In the early ages of human development, tribesmen passed on traditions orally to ensure collective knowledge was passed on to the next generations. Early cavemen cultures drew on cave walls, depicting important aspects of their lives – hunting, operating with fire, etc. The written word became a dominant form of storytelling with Jewish and Christian cultures wrote down religious texts and duplicated them manually. In 1400, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press launched the golden age of written storytelling. And in the early 20th century, it became technically possible to produce audio and video content.

However, the ability to produce and disseminate written, audio and video content was long limited to a small number of media companies, largely due to cost. Only a few years ago did the broad population gain access to mass media tools like low-cost audio and video recording or blogging. With access to so many tools, people also began to do hybrid forms of storytelling across different media. High-quality stories can be created and shared by almost anyone, quickly and broadly. As stories begin to flood the landscape, new forms of storytelling have yet been developed to help make sense of the noise, like infographics that visualize complex statistics (Hulburt & Voas).

The notions of narratives and media are inextricably linked. A narrative cannot exist – would not be heard, seen, read or experienced – outside a medium. For the purpose of transmedia branding, media here describes a broad variety of communication channels, ranging from interpersonal interactions to pictures, music, art, letters, books, billboards, objects, and certainly traditional mass media as well as social media.

Transmedia branding taps into the apparently primitive draw to good stories and the expanded access to tools that allow people to create and share them. It is ultimately an exercise in engaging storytelling, with a goal for people

to pass the story along. The surest sign of a good story is that it gets retold – and, in fact, this is an imperative in a world oversaturated by content: "if it doesn't spread, it's dead" (Jenkins). Stories that get retold are stories people find easy to understand, meaningful and emotionally engaging. Henry Jenkins has labeled this easy and almost natural dissemination of stories 'spreadability', which is a key enabler of transmedia branding. Part of what makes transmedia branding unique is the telling of these stories as an integrated narrative across many different media channels, in different content forms, such as the written word, audio, videos, cartoons and others.

In this context, it's important to note that not any combination of more than one medium qualifies for what we define as transmedia branding. An important principle of transmedia is that pieces of content are dispersed in unique bits and collectively make up a narrative. It's not that you tell the same story again and again, just in a different medium. It's that you tell a story a bit at a time in each medium, and, taken together, they create a full story.

The underlying idea is that when storylines become redundant, they are more likely to stop spreading. On their journey from and to different groups of people, the story bits frequently move across channels and, as people may add, delete or change content, may become altered in the process. For example, one unique element in *The man your man could smell like* was a random tweet by a man asking the Old Spice Guy to propose to the man's girlfriend on his behalf. Old Spice Guy responded with a bathtub video doing as requested, which led to the man tweeting "she said yes." The tweet and a corresponding photo were picked up by Mashable.com, crossing the story over into editorial media.

One type of content that is particularly suitable for transmedia narratives is a meme, because of its spreadable nature. Introduced by Richard Dawkins in The Selfish Gene, a meme "conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" (Dawkins). He cites as examples of memes tunes, ideas, catchphrase, clothes, fashions, etc."leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. Memes are "condensed images that stimulate visual, verbal, musical, or behavioral associations that people can easily imitate

and transmit to others" (Center for Communication and Civic Engagement). Memes have become a central component of Internet culture and play an important role in transmedia narratives, such as images of the Old Spice Guy himself.

It's important to note that the Internet is not a prerequisite for transmedia branding. Transmedia narratives have existed for as long as humans have communicated. For instance, the argument could be made that today's major religions since their inception have spread around the world as transmedia narratives. However, today's transmedia experiences are shaped in profound ways by emerging patterns of networked consumptions and grassroots production, as consumers play a more active role in shaping how stories travel across the culture.

Participation

Participation is central to the transmedia branding process. The notion of audience participation is one of the more integral concepts that differentiate transmedia branding from traditional one-directional marketing communications. The narrative seeds reasons for the audience "to care." Once people are intrigued they gravitate to the story and actively seek ways to participate. Completing call to actions such as Facebook liking a post, emailing a video to a friend, tweeting a signup link, commenting, submitting user-generated content or passively watching a video on a sponsored YouTube channel are forms of participation. The nature of transmedia branding allows for the audience to participate as much or as little as they want and only with content that they find interesting.

With a compelling narrative in hand, effective transmedia branding makes it inviting and easy for people to participate in the story. This notion of audience participation is the key concept that differentiates traditional one-directional marketing communications from transmedia branding. As consumers participate in a brand story, they make it personal, relevant, and targeted in a way that

is difficult for a brand to do itself. They are also much more likely to spread the story, which is critical to the success of a transmedia branding project. People *want* to interact with spreadable narratives, provided it's the right storyline for the right audience, and they may actively help to localize and reframe messages they think have potential interest within their communities.

Participation covers a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from passing on conversations to leaving comments on blogs or articles to generating new content, parodies and additional storylines. In addition to creating, changing and spreading content, effective participation relies on additional notions: culture, community and policy. In the United States, Internet participation has become a mainstream activity. Recent data show, for example, that 37% of US internet users have rated a product, service or person using an online rating system, and 32% have posted comments on online news or on products they bought (PEW).

An understanding of culture is also vital to participation strategies. Creating spreadable content first requires a deep understanding of target audiences and their cultures, which author Grant McCracken refers to as "the body of ideas, emotions, and activities that make up the life of the consumer" (McCracken, p 1). Getting culture right, he argues, can result in billion dollar swings for major consumer brands as "corporations live and die by their connection to culture" (McCracken, p 13). The idea is that brands need to be able to read popular culture in order to engage successfully with target audiences. Obviously popular culture is in constant flux and has generational, ethnic, geographic and religious dimensions that weigh heavily into how people react to brand communication.

As brands understand culture better, they can help foster a "brand community," defined as "a group of ardent consumers organized around the lifestyle, activities, and ethos of the brand" (Fourier & Lee). A common example is Harley-Davidson, whose devoted fans transformed a near-death company of the eighties into a top-50 global brand 25 years later. True fan communities curate brand attributes and may even, as in the case of Harley-Davidson, transform the brand entirely as they feel strong emotional ownership. They may do so with or without the support of the corporations that own the brands – there is only so much the owner of the brand can do to stop them. Brand communities may congregate

in the real world at club meetings or conventions and/or organize on the web. Extreme forms of communities are described as consumer tribes: "They do not consume things without changing them; they cannot 'consume' a service without engaging in a dance with the service provider, where the dance becomes the service. Participatory culture is everywhere" (Cova, Kozinets, Shankar).

Maybe the least obvious factor influencing participation is the notion of policy. However, its impact on how widely and freely opinions and content are shared cannot be ignored. Policy regulates many aspects of public life, such as the right of free assembly, copyright law or net neutrality. Clearly, less restrictive policies fosters participation, as people are allowed to freely gather, speak, change, create and spread content.

Brands

The most basic component of transmedia branding is the brand—an abstract idea used to differentiate products, whether that product takes the form of a consumer good, personality, company or idea. It is the collection of perceptions held by all those that are aware of the product and the meaning derived from those perspectives. Brands are what consumers buy, while products are what companies make. People or organizations create brands for the purpose of achieving success in the marketplace. A market should be viewed as both, a physical or virtual place for conducting financial transactions in exchange for goods and services or, in a political or social context, as a marketplace for ideas.

A brand most commonly refers to a consumer product or service. Other types of brands are products and services targeting other businesses (B2B), as well as individuals, causes and ideas. As of now, most transmedia branding campaigns have targeted consumer products and services, such as Old Spice. To be expressed in form of a narrative, a brand requires a protagonist ore main character, and might even benefit from secondary characters.

An example of a transmedia-branded cause is Kony 2012, an initiative by the San Diego, Calif.-based non-profit Invisible Children. Its goal has been the arrest and prosecution of Joseph Kony, a notorious Ugandan warlord and human trafficker. The primary strategy was to turn Joseph Kony into a celebrity, so he no longer would be able to hide. They achieved this via meetings with policy-makers, blogs and twitter campaigns, and an enormously successful documentary video created for widespread distribution on YouTube that garnered over 93 million views. In other words, the Kony 2012 campaign turned the warlord into a (transmedia) brand (Invisible Children).

So individuals themselves can turn into transmedia brands, and arguably Barack Obama serves as another example. His persona and presidency comes with a crafted story line – the first African-American president as a symbol for change, youth and liberal values – which has been altered by his opponents to represent lack of economic achievement and a frame for a supposedly damaging healthcare reform, dubbed Obamacare. Meanwhile his fans have created memes in the form of pop art images, such as the stylized "Hope" (**Fig. 5**) poster by artist Shepard Fairey, which first surfaced in the fall of 2008 and since the 2012 election has been altered to symbolize Governor Romney's defeat. As a presidential candidate, Romney had stated he would cut federal funding for PBS, with a reference to Big Bird during a presidential debate, which led to the creation of the meme suggesting the Sesame Street character was in trouble (Examiner) (**Fig. 6**).

A few months after the Gangnam Style Korean pop song and video were released, a parody spread showing Barack and Michelle Obama look-alikes performing Obama Gangnam Style. The Obama transmedia storyline continues to evolve and changes the brand in the process. (**Fig. 7**)

Fig. 5: Shepard Fairey's 2008 'Hope' poster

Fig. 6: The Big Bird 'Hope' meme in the aftermath of presidential candidate Mitt Romney's remarks to defund PBS

Fig. 7: Barack and Michelle Obama look-alikes performing "Obama Gangnam Style" on YouTube.

Cultural Jamming of Brands

Not only brand proponents can contribute to and extend a brand storyline; the same can be achieved by activists opposed to the brand. 'Cultural jamming' is defined as "an organized social activist effort that aims to counter the bombardment of consumption-oriented messages in the mass media" (Handelman & Kozinets). These efforts purposely change brand associations to achieve a negative perception of brand, clearly in direct conflict with what the owners of a brand want it to stand for. This type of activity frequently happens on the Internet and across media. For example, in order to draw attention to British Petroleum's pursuit of Canadian tar sands, Greenpeace in the United Kingdom launched an Internet contest asking people to design and upload their interpretation of the BP logo."The winning logo will be used by us in innovative and exciting ways as part of our international campaign against the oil company," Greenpeace stated on the contest's web site (Greenpeace). Participants created 1,926 variations of the logo, which were uploaded to a designated Flickr site where Greenpeace explains: "Their nice green logo doesn't really seem to fit them too well, so we ran a competition to find a logo that we could use to rebrand BP" (Flickr) (Fig. 8+9).

Fig. 8: Crowdsourced entries to Greenpeace's BP logo contest

Fig. 9: Crowdsourced entries to Greenpeace's BP logo contest

Natural vs. Crossover Transmedia Brands

Some types of brands come naturally into a transmedia existence. These brands not only *have* a story, they *are* the story. This certainly applies to major narratives, such as the Star Wars or Harry Potter franchises, or complex video games such as World of Warcraft.

The Harry Potter brand, for instance, was initially conceived as series of books, which were followed up with a sequence of well-produced movies, which then naturally extended the product line into action figures and toys. Meanwhile, fans created online and offline communities where people could dress and act like the characters from Harry Potter. Parodies came to life, such as the very

successful Potter Puppet Pals. Their web episode of the Mysterious Ticking Noise achieved over 135 million views on YouTube as of November 8, 2012. Universal Studios created the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at their theme park in Orlando, Fla., which was announced in a lead article entitled "Wizarding World Revealed to Muggles" in the Wizarding World News (Universal Studios). In June 2011, author J. K. Rowling launched Pottermore, allowing people to explore "the Harry Potter stories in a whole new way and discover exclusive new writing from J. K. Rowling." (Pottermore)

Blizzard Entertainment's *Warcraft* exemplifies transmedia brands in the gaming world. The *Warcraft* universe spans a variety of media driven by a singular running narrative. The most prominent of *Warcraft's* components is the massive multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* (WoW) which currently boasts over 10 million active subscribers (Cobbett). The eight-year-old game has a loyal fan base that not only consumes the media but also actively engages and participates in it. Player-made user interface add-ons currently sit at over 3,000 on the gaming site Curse.com; YouTube hosts over 1 million user-generated videos; several WoW novels have made the New York Time's Bestseller List; and a movie is currently in early pre-production (Bibbiani). Fans are further engaged at Blizzcon, a real-world convention that celebrates *Warcraft* and Blizzard's other transmedia franchises *StarCraft* and *Diablo*. In 2011 over 25,000 fans attended Blizzcon – many dressed as their in-game avatars – while over 800,000 unique viewers watched from home through DirectTV pay-per-view (Ray).

Media and entertainment brands *are* the story, and their transmedia nature enables them to engage with pre-existing fan communities and cater to the culture of these communities.

However, most products or services that consumers or companies purchase do not come with a ready-made story they want to share. Since a narrative is central to transmedia branding, companies are presented with two options: create a story or join a story. Whichever route they choose, in order to be consistent it is essential that the story – topic, tone, characters, etc. – is in alignment with the way a brand speaks and behaves.

Old Spice wasn't a story at the time *The man your man can smell like* campaign was conceived. Its brand image was that of an old, stodgy product line, and the brand associations were carried by images and symbols of early 20th century large sailing ships. When the campaign was created, it consistently carried over both themes. Effectively utilizing self-deprecating humor gave the campaign an authentic, human touch. For example, the Old Spice Classic shower gel is sold using the slogan "The original. If your grandfather hadn't worn it, you wouldn't exist." In the initial campaign commercial, actor Isaiah Mustafa projects from a bathtub to a large sail boat and eventually lands on a horse. Throughout, the look and feel of the campaign commercials is consistent with that of traditional Old Spice images.

The alternative to creating a storyline is joining with an existing one. If the right storyline is accessible, a brand has the opportunity to leverage existing audiences, which increases the odds of effective spreadability. In October 2012, one month before the release of the movie *The Hobbit*, Air New Zealand launched a new air safety video staring many of the mythical species — hobbits, elves, dwarfs, orcs and other monsters — from *The Lord of the Rings* movies, which relied on New Zealand for shooting the outdoor scenery (**Fig. 10**). Elf flight attendants recite the full legally mandated text of an air safety announcement. The video includes a quick appearance by the films' director, Peter Jackson, who slips a ring onto his finger, and promptly disappears (Martin).

Fig. 10: Actors dressed as characters from Lord of the Rings in Air New Zealand's flight safety announcement.

Research for Insights

Gaining insights on target audiences is essential to building a successful trans-media campaign. Content and tone that don't match the culture of audiences may lead to unintended consequences. In the best case, spreadability will not happen, as people consider the campaign irrelevant and therefore refuse to engage. Should, however, content or tone be considered offensive, a brand may suffer damage as people participate by publicly speaking up and criticizing it.

Established market research methods include in-depth interviews to focus groups on the qualitative side, as well as surveys and content analysis for quantitative insight. Internet-based research has become widespread and has led to the development of new methods. Robert Kozinets has proposed netnography as an online marketing research technique for providing consumer insight. According to the author netnography is "ethnography adapted to the study of online communities. As a method, 'netnography' is faster, simpler, and less expensive than traditional ethnography, and more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews" (Kozinets). The author proposes a specific methodology for systematically discovering qualitative online content. It is easy to follow and has yielded meaningful results in classroom projects. A related concept is 'social listening' which is frequently also referred to as 'social media monitoring.' It describes the process of accessing user-generated content on the social web and analyzing it for insights. A plethora of web-based services have emerged to automate or otherwise simplify the process of data gathering and analysis. Commercially available tools such as Netvibes, Radian 6 and Sysomos enable both the qualitative analysis of small data sets as well as quantitative scanning of large data sets. The latter, which is frequently paraphrased as 'big data,' represents a significant growth area for obtaining market insights.

Ethical Consideration

Transmedia branding also raises ethical issues, such as in the area of online privacy. This is a much-discussed topic in the context of social media. The production and spreading of user-generated content bears risks of exposing private information about individuals. While this concern is not specific to transmedia branding, privacy concerns should always be considered and monitored at all stages of a campaign.

Transmedia ethics also need to consider truth and transparency, which can become an issue when brands use fictional content and humor mixed in with actual events. For example, in the *Art of the Heist*, carmaker Audi stages a fake violent break-in into the Audi car dealership on Park Avenue in New York City, where two individuals steal an Audi A3. This break-in is the beginning to an online and offline transmedia narrative about this new product line. The day after the theft, at the New York auto show, instead of seeing America's first A3, attendees would see signs reporting the missing car. The ethical dilemma is best summarized in a sentence taken from the official case study on YouTube: "If you had asked the attendees at the show what happened, they would have shrugged, not knowing themselves if this was real or not." This raises the question whether Audi had crossed the line between humor and entertainment on one side, and spreading fear in the real world on the other.

Fig. 11: This staged break-in into the Audi dealership on New York's Park Avenue raises ethical questions.

Does transmedia branding represent the future of marketing?

The internet has spawned a variety of digital and multimedia approaches to marketing, and transmedia branding is one of them. It remains to be seen which if any of these methods will prevail. Meanwhile several trends have clearly emerged:

● Marketers need to create content that target audiences want to engage with, either because it's inspiring, informative or entertaining. Conventional advertising is likely to further erode its effectiveness to reach audiences, as consumers have endless choices of media options that allow them to tune in and out as they wish.

● The core of the transmedia branding method resonates: storytelling across a variety of media is already at the core of media consumption in the social, multimedia internet.

● Social listening, netnography and other research methods are fundamental to the success of a campaign, and need to be utilized before, during and after a given campaign.

● Participation is essential. When people actively engage with content, share it and create new content, they form a web of conversations with the potential to continuously grow by drawing in more people.

● If it doesn't spread, it's dead. Content that is not shared cannot be discovered and is rendered irrelevant.

In this sense, marketing is likely to become more authentic and democratic.

Industry Case Studies

Transmedia branding can be utilized across a broad range of industries to develop awareness and grow fan communities. Although the underlying concept is the same, the principles of transmedia branding manifest differently across industries and brands. This is illustrated in the following two case studies, which were developed by Jerried Williams and originally published is his Master's thesis (Jerried Williams).

Television Series – True Blood

The launch of the HBO series True Blood (**Fig. 11**) is a great example of transmedia branding and the benefits of having a strong narrative. True Blood is a television drama series based on the Southern Vampire Mysteries series by novelist Charlaine Harris. The adaption of the novel into a television series is a form of multiplicity and allows fans of the novel to experience story from a new perspective. True Blood depicts the co-existence of vampires and humans in a

Fig. 12: HBO's *True Blood* television series was promoted prior to its launch in an award-winning transmedia branding campaign.

small town in northwestern Louisiana. The series centers around a telepathic waitress named Sookie Stackhouse. A major concept of the series is the creation of a synthetic blood product in Japan which allows the vampire community to "come out" of their coffins and make their presence known to humans—no longer requiring human blood to quench their eternal thirst.

HBO partnered with multiple creative and media-buying agencies: Campfire Media, Digital Kitchen, Ignition Creative, Red Creative and PHD. Campfire Media created the Bloodcopy.com blog and other video content. Digital Kitchen crafted the "vampire product" advertisements. Ignition Creative created other print advertisements to drive program viewership. Red Creative worked on online advertisements to entice viewers to tune in. PHD spearheaded traditional advertising. Deep Focus conducted online media buying.

HBO's strategy was to blend the fictional world of True Blood with that of the real world. This is a similar strategy used in the launch of The Blair Witch Project, a campaign that Campfire Media also happened to work on."HBO's idea is to play along that fine line of fully disrupting someone's experience and at the same time immersing them in your experience," said Zach Enterlin, VP-advertising and promotions for HBO. From this statement it is clear that immersion was an important aspect of their campaign from the onset. For many campaigns, this is an early step in the ideation process.

The True Blood campaign began three months before the television premiere on HBO. Campfire Media provided insights into their campaign through a detailed video case study (Campfire Media). The first phase of the campaign was deemed "Discovery." High profile bloggers, vampire hobbyists and other influencers were mailed unmarked envelopes containing secret messages leading to BloodCopy.com, a fictional website where influencers could interact with each other and follow the story. This exemplifies the transmedia branding concept of performance. By creating BloodCopy.com, HBO created a home base fans and began the process of developing a community around a common interest, True Blood. The "swag" gave the Bloggers and influencers something to talk about and fueled conversations. This was the "cultural activator" of the campaign and gave fans "something to do." The website included video performances

by "real" vampires discussing the creation of "True Blood," a fictional beverage containing synthetic blood from the show. These videos are representative of subjectivity in that they allowed fans to explore the world through secondary characters. In the next round of mailers, influencers received actual samples of "True Blood." This tactic exemplifies extractability. It allowed fans to experience an important artifact of the show for themselves. Two videos under the MySpace user account "Blood" were uploaded entitled "Vampire Taste Test – True Blood vs. Human," and one called "BloodCopy Exclusive INTERVIEW WITH SAMSON THE VAMPIRE." There were online gatekeeper interactions. Mini-episodes of discussing the Vampire Rights Amendment and other plot elements were made available on OnDemand. The episodes integrated talent from the campaign.

HBO gave out a prequel comic to the series at the July 2008 San Diego Comic-Con, the largest convention showcasing comic books, science fiction and other popular culture media. At the convention, True Blood held a press conference, which was standing room. The exclusivity of the media event caused a stir and increased the media buzz. The comic outlines the back-story of how TrueBlood was created and the discussions had by vampires about going public to the human world. An old vampire named Lamar who "wonders if TrueBlood is making the world safe for vampires or from them" tells the story. Again, fans were allowed to experience the world from a new perspective, an example of subjectivity. These fictional videos and interviews published online blurred fictional content with real content. As a result, the content spread with ease, making its way to casual fans thereby broadening the scope of reach. The fans became the number one marketers and exemplified the concept of spreadability.

Prior to the series premiere, several commercials featuring vampires in advertisements selling TrueBlood were aired on HBO and published to Facebook. Across the U.S. some vending machines were outfitted with "cards indicating that they were 'sold out' of TrueBlood." The ads were placed on billboards, park benches and bus stops to add to the realism. In addition, HBO partnered with real products and services to publish, "print ads that seem to promote real products and services from Geico, Gillette, BMW's Mini Cooper, Harley-Davidson, Ecko and Monster – but act as if the audiences for these popular goods are

vampires." The cross-promotion with real world products and the fictional True Blood created a deeper sense of immersion for the campaign.

Other campaign elements included "weather reports on radio for vampires who might just be starting their day; a faux ad for movie theaters made to look like the ads for local businesses that normally appear before the show starts; and a faux weekly newsmagazine set to appear on HBO on Demand and HBO internet platforms. The weekly includes a segment called 'The Vampire Report," which covers according to HBO covers "notable events that have occurred over the past week as vampires continue their integration into human society."

Two documentaries were produced and broadcast by HBO, entitled "True Bloodlines" and "A New Type" to further promote the series and blend the fantasy and reality. In "True Bloodlines" Vampire Legends, explored the earliest portrayals of vampires in legend, literature and cinema."A New Type," discusses vampire culture from Nosferatu to today's sensual, sexual creatures. This exemplified both worldbuilding and continuity by extending the story in a way that provides richer connections to the source material and staying true to the original narrative. The show also covered the modern vampire subculture and real-life vampire clubs. Actors and writers from True Blood appeared in the documentaries. The shows first aired on September 6, 2008, on HBO. Several days before the series premiere on HBO, Blockbuster Video provided free rental of the first episode of True Blood.

As a result of the campaign, BloodCopy.com received: 30,000 Forum Posts, 1.5 million pages viewed, 5.9 Million video views for a total of 50,000 viewing hours. According to Campfire Media, True Blood premiered to 6.6 million viewers. The series has received critical acclaim and won several awards, including a Golden Globe and an Emmy.

Overall, there were hundreds of pieces of media integral to the campaign. This provided a high degree of drillability that allowed fans dive as deep as they want into the content and customize their experience based upon their own unique interests. No one piece of media got massive hits but there was just so

much that there was a snowball effect. Everything fed back into itself in a positive feedback loop. The campaign was so compelling that it became newsworthy and earned media coverage. Transcending engagement and moved towards immersion. The narrative came of the screen and into real life. Tangible real life advertisements for True Blood and the vampire rights amendment created deep connections for fans to the story.

As a television series with an overarching plot that is essentially a metaphor for gay rights and other disenfranchised communities who may have been attacked by the far right, True Blood creates a strong narrative that answers the question, "why should I care." It is this broad and structurally sound narrative that allows for vast creativity in the ideation and implementation of a transmedia branding campaign. The True Blood campaign shows the importance of the narrative—if you can't provide a convincing narrative that stimulates the interest of the audience, they will not engage.

Automotive Brand – Audi: Art of the Heist

On March 31, 2005, Audi of America, Inc. (AoA), the American subsidiary of the German company Audi AG launched a $3 million to $4 million campaign to promote the new A3 , three months before it was made available (**Fig. 12**). The campaign titled "Art of the Heist" targeted 25- to 34-year-old upper-income males who "disliked mainstream advertisements." Ad agency McKinney & Silver and the production firm Chelsea Pictures/Campfire created the campaign, which fused "reality, fiction, and audience participation."

The "Art of the Heist" began with an announcement from AoA that its brand-new Audi A3 had been stolen from the rotating display at the New York Auto Show. Handbills announcing the missing Audi along with the vehicle identification number (VIN) were distributed in 10 cities to substantiate the claim. Anyone with information regarding the location of the vehicle were asked to

Fig. 13: Display at the New York Auto Show about the missing Audi A 3.

call a phone number or visit Audi's website. The website led visitors to a fictitious company "called Last Resort Retrieval, which supposedly retrieved stolen art from high-profile thieves." The hub for the campaign's narrative was Last-ResortRetrieval.com where new characters, Nisha Roberts and Ian Yarbrough, were introduced to the plot. Visitors uncovered clues such as tapped phone calls, surveillance videos, and puzzles after a "glitch" on the website gave unrestricted access to Last Resort Retrieval's private intranet. At this stage, the campaign focuses on the immersion and performance elements of transmedia branding.

A discovery by Ian and Nisha unveiled that the A3 was stolen by an art thief and that hidden inside the car were memory cards with information about an art heist. The newly acquired information led Ian to recovering the A3 from a New Jersey chop shop. The recovery caused a hot pursuit of Ian from East Coast to the West Coast by the original car's thief and then the police. Fictitious advertisements promoting the services of Last Resort Retrieval were placed in Wired, Esquire, and USA Today to lend credence to the story.

The campaign website, LastResortRetrieval.com announced that Ian and Nisha would be making an appearance May 1st at the Coachella Valley Music Festival. AoA's tent was inundated with fans earlier than expected, Chelsea Pictures, which produced the online video for the campaign, killed one of the characters to keep the authenticity of the narrative. Later that month, a television spot featured interior and exterior images of the new A3. To relate the commercial to the campaign's narrative, copy appeared during the spot asking

the public to report the missing Audi to audiusa.com. By bringing the campaign to life by having the lead characters from the narrative engage with fans, the campaign implemented a form of worldbuilding. This evolved into performance when fans of the campaign began creating websites to discuss possible outcomes of the game. The campaign ended in late June at E3, a video game convention held at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Ian apprehended the thief responsible for stealing the A3 in a stage performance in front of those in attendance.

The campaign was deemed a success by Audi and credited with pre-selling 500 A3s before they were even available in North America. Stephen Berkov, Audi's director of marketing, stated that, "The Art of the Heist represents a true innovation in the way Audi connects with its target consumer," in the PR Newswire news service. AoA posted 5,389 A3s sold at the year's end, making 2005 one of AoA's best years in its 73-year legacy.

Unlike the previous entertainment based cased studies i.e. True Blood and Prometheus Audi did not have an elaborate narrative to assist in the development of their campaign. This is an instance of an organization tapping into its core brand messaging to develop a transmedia campaign. In this instance, Audi built their campaign upon the concept of "desire" and coupled with participation, immersion, and performance. The transmedia campaign shows an innovative alternative to transmedia branding for entertainment brands.

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