TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING - WHY YOUR STORY NEEDS MANY STORIES?

The Need for Different Platforms

Have you ever been disappointed by the movie adaptation of your favorite novel? Or the game version of your dearest movie? Unless you are someone who has totally turned their back to the entertainment medium, it is certain that you have experienced it. Why does this happen? Recreating a new version of a much loved work into another medium is no child's play and there are plenty of things that could falter. But what, if you create instead of recreate! Instead of retelling the story, what if you introduce a brand new story involving the same set of characters and story world in a different medium? A new story that is a slice of the original work. What if Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson appeared in a video game facing threats from the menacing antagonist Jim Moriarty's Brother! Wouldn't you, the fans of Sherlock love to go on a new adventure that has not been part of the book! This exhilarating new method that has been the buzz of the digital world is Transmedia Storytelling. So Transmedia storytelling is nothing but narrating a single story across different platforms using digital technologies. The platform can be apps, video games, comic books, novels or films. Each platform serve as a standalone experience, small pieces that fit into the larger whole.

Numbers Tell Everything

Perhaps digital era's most significant contribution to mankind is the unification of the world. The world has now really become one single place. You can see live footage of what is going on in another nation thousands of miles away or you can even make a purchase from a foreign shop using a simple smartphone! In other words, the entire world is in your palms! Any event is known to the entire world the moment it happens. You don't have to do much to stay updated today. Imagine the era where newspapers were the only source of information! Thanks to internet, information travels at a speed competing with light in this 21st century. Once you are connected, there are plenty of platforms that literally request you to use them. You just have to choose which. Switch on the internet on your mobile and wait for five minutes. How many notifications did you get? Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Linkedin, Tumblr, Instagram… Everyone is eager to tell you what happened in the world between the five minutes you switched off the internet! Did you know that in a single minute on the internet there are 1.8 million likes on Facebook, 144 million emails are sent and twitter tweets count to 278000! Google, the giant search engine carries out 2 million searches every minute and videos worth 72 hours are uploaded to Youtube every single minute! Add to that, 571 new websites are created every minute online! Such is the content world that awaits you online. This opens up a whole new world of marketing too. What if you could tell an interesting story about your work or product using these platforms. As it gets catered to millions of users worldwide, wouldn't this momentously improve the likability of your product. This is where transmedia plays a significant role.

Let Them Involve Themselves WithYour Creation

TheOneRing.Net, an exclusive fan website for 'Lord of the Rings', 'Hobbit' films and its author J.R.R Tolkien, in 2013 and 2014 held a Rewrite Tolkien contest every month which provided a wonderful platform for fans to write passages from 'Lord of the Rings' or 'Hobbit' as if in the hands of another writer. For example, the contest began in September 2013, before the release of 'Desolation of Smaug', the second installment in the 'Hobbit' series and allowed its viewers to pick a passage from the novel that will be included in the film and write it as if in the hands of famous children's writer Dr. Seuss. This was an innovative way to keep the legacy of the films going and this is a style of penetrating transmedia content into the targeted audience. Using the website, the film crew were easily able to pierce into their group of audience. That is one important element of transmedia. You have to know who your customers are and how to reach them. The main objective of transmedia storytelling is of course to absorb the viewer into the world it creates. One has to really feel the challenges and threats of James Bond if he is to really appreciate the game he is playing. And to achieve this, one really has to carefully build the story world. An imaginary world in which the users feel like moving around. Does this remind you of something? The world of architects in Inception? Yeah... Somewhat like that. The same time, the control of this narrative world is with the user. They help develop it. This means that Transmedia storytelling can fall into two categories. The one which is used as a deep marketing tool and which has profit as its predominant objective. The other one is used mainly for entertainment and to keep its fan following and legacy alive.

SOURCE : ATRESMEDIA

Leave No Table Unturned

So, let us take a look at how transmedia productions happen. In a traditional method, we will have one narrative which is repeated across different platforms such as social networks, apps etc. But, in Transmedia, we develop different versions of the one story depending upon the platform we decide to use. Additionally, new versions of the narrative are created by users because of Transmedia participatory nature. So, it is important to consider several factors for the Transmedia Production. The primary challenges for any narrative productions are the same. What is the genre? Who is the protagonist? What is his goal and what or who stands against him in achieving it? What is the story world? Clear answers to these questions will help build unique passages of the same story for different platforms. Once you are clear about the narrative it is important to define the participatory nature of the production. How will users control the story? How will the user participation help develop the narrative? Is the immersive experience exclusively digital or will it be carried to real life? But, knowing what it provides to the audience is not just enough. You have to know what type of audiences you will be dealing with. How many times have you totally enjoyed an app but never bothered to rate or comment! And as the saying goes in Batman "some men just want to watch the world burn" some of us just sit back and enjoy all the action as well! So there will be viewers who will just remain spectators, there will be users who actively share your

product across and there will be people who not only share but help to enlarge it with new things. A thorough market research will consider all kinds of audience. The next step is to choose the platform. As we said before, there are plenty of platforms to choose from.. It can be websites, web series, comics, films, apps, video & online games, social medias, alternate reality games etc...Depending upon the prefered user experience style, the targeted audience and the value of the platform the right one should be selected. Since Transmedia productions can be done just for entertainment and for profit too, it attracts a wide range of market from multinational corporates to small scale businesses. And so, it is important to define the business model of your production, whether it is free, premium, crowd funded or sponsored. The amazing thing is that all this can coexist! How many times have you played the free version of a game before choosing the premium one? Even Netflix offers first month subscription free with all their packages and the user is free to cancel the subscription any time before it expires. No amount will be charged!

Learn From 'The Blair Witch Project'

One of the earliest and biggest success of transmedia storytelling is a small independent feature film which released in 1999. This film is widely considered as the first film to make use of Internet as the primary marketing tool. 'Blair Witch Project' made within a budget of just 60000 dollars went on to collect 248 million dollars! Much of this success owes to their unique marketing strategy. The film's story revolves around three film students who goes missing in a forest near Burkittsville in Maryland. One year later, their footage is found at the location of their disappearance and it is that footage which is shown as the film to the audience. Now, this very plot is enough to guess what might be the first question in everyone's mind when they watch the film. Is this a real story? And this is exactly what the 'Blair Witch Project' team decided to play around with. Director Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez might have been low on budget but they had a powerful tool to ignite the attention of moviegoers. The ambiguity. They decided to fuel this anxiety of people by starting a website. If you are a filmmaker what would you normally do to marketize your film before its release. Posters? Advertisements? Well.. Directors Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez had nothing of that. Instead they just created a website for 15000 dollars! The purpose behind the website was to indicate that the film was indeed a replica of a real event. The emphasize was to 'indicate' and not 'lie'.

At no point did they deny that the film wasn't a work of fiction but they just kept the uncertainty flowing. The website contained fabricated police reports, extracts from the diary of one of the characters and even interviews of victim parents. This smart move instantly sparked a debate all over the internet if those were real or just promotional materials! This helped the film gain a massive word of mouth publicity. Every week the team kept on adding new pieces to the website and the audience were thrilled to work around their imagination.

The rumors did not stop even when the film hit the theatres because the film employed a unique direction style. Through over the shoulder, minimal image and intimate camera techniques, the film did really look like a footage that was found! Some of the fans of the movie even went on to say that the three students were real and they could confirm the images were real! The 'Blair Witch' site also became a favorite destination for the movie fans and many claims to have found evidences concerning the real disappearance of the students. Nothing was actually presented as a valid proof but it was enough to keep the rumors going. There is a community for anything on the Internet and to penetrate into their audience, the blair witch team got into the witchcraft community over the Internet. Its members readily found their content intriguing and developed a network of links which redirected to the Film's official website. The website gathered 3 million connections a day and it recorded more than 75 million visits!

The Matrix Mantra

Different platforms different stories…That itself sounds like Matrix world right? Who else could get attracted to this technique than the Matrix team themselves! In 2003, came 'Enter the Matrix', the first video game based on Matrix series. It presented more than an hour of original footage directed by Lana and Lily Wachowski. It was developed by Shiny Entertainment and distributed by Warner Bros. Interactive Environment. The game featured 'Ghost' and 'Niobe', two supporting characters from the second and third installment of Matrix Movie Franchise and allowed users to play as either one of them. Majority of the levels in the game included controlling the characters from a third person point of view and using guns and other fighting objectives to conquer enemies. One of the special features of Matrix Movies was the movement of camera along the shot as the shot progressed in slow motion. To bring this effect into the game, the players could activate what is called bullet time, to shoot in midair or to dodge between bullets. The plot of the game starts with Niobe and Ghost discovering a package left in the Matrix by the crew of rebel ship Osiris which was recently demolished. Niobe and Ghost escape from the Matrix before Agents get them and finds that the package has a message to the city of Zion warning them about an attack from Sentinels. Now Niobe and Ghost have to organize a defense by calling back the ships to Zion. During the meeting of the captains in the ship, the agents attack them.

One hour of live footage was filmed in 35mm exclusively for the game by the Wachowskis. Another unique element of the game was the first appearance of Mary Alice in the role of the character Oracle. Gloria Foster, the actress who initially played the Oracle met with unfortunate death during the filming of the 'Reloaded' and 'Revolutions', second and third part of the Matrix Series. Though she had completed her part in 'Reloaded' she was yet to begin 'Revolutions'. The game included a sequence that specifically explained her change in appearance due to an attack from Merovingian. The players, by taking control of one of the characters would feel like having a direct impact on the story. This could result in a stronger connection of viewers to the movie which cannot be experienced by others who just saw these supporting characters for a very minimum time on screen.

The Matrix has spawned several such comics, books, short films and video games that tell parallel stories which fits together to their actual plot. One of their other prominent Transmedia Production was 'The Animatrix', which featured nine animated short films surrounding the backstory of Matrix Universe. The total running time was around 101 minutes and four of the films were written by the Wachowskis themselves. You have heard from 'Morpheus' about the war between man and machines which ultimately led to the creation of Matrix. But you didn't see that in the film. Did you?

One of the distinctive attractions of the animatrix series was that it showcased this early man machine war. Another absorbing backstory was the struggle of character 'Jue' to convey a message regarding enemy machines to an ally vessel crew in the short animated film 'Final Flight of the Osiris'. The beginning of 'Matrix Reloaded' specifically discusses about this communication and only the viewers who witnessed these additional scenarios in 'The Animatrix', would really understand the depth of that moment, that 'Jue' gave her life to make sure the information was delivered. Even in the starting missions of 'Enter The Matrix' video game, the player is asked to recover Jue's message and deliver it to the meeting that we see in the film.

SOURCE : SPIRALOFHOPE

Star Wars and the Transmedia Strategy

One of the biggest explorers of transmedia storytelling is none other than the epic George Lucas franchise 'Star Wars'. In fact its transmedia history can be traced way back to July 1977, just 4 months after the premiere of the first film in the franchise. It was then that Marvel published the first comic book based on Star Wars and though it began by narrating the same scenes in the movies, slowly new events started happening. The very next year released 'Splinter of the Mind's Eye', a novel published by Alan Dean Foster, which narrated the events between the first two films of the original series. Interestingly enough the book was originally written to be produced as a low budget sequel to 'Star Wars', if the original film failed. In 1987, West End Games released Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game which became the primary source for what is known as Star Wars Expanded Universe. Expanded Universe is the name given to all the officially released Star Wars fictional products. They include video games, books, comic books, television films, toys and so on. The products directly produced by Lucasfilm is considered as Star Wars Canon and they include the Star Wars Films, Clone Wars Television Series and the Rebels Series. But in April 2014, Lucasfilm announced that all previous Non Canon works will be rebranded as Star Wars Legends. The legends branded expanded universe narrate stories expanding over a period of 40000 years in that galaxy far far away and the films only narrate the events around a 66 year time span. One of the earliest Legend branded product was the 'Dawn of the Jedi', comic released in 2012. The series narrated the earliest period of Jedi Order, starting from as early as 36453 years before Battle the Battle of Yavin. (BBY)

Another one of the notable Star Wars Transmedia product was 'The Clone Wars', an animated cartoon series that aired on Cartoon Network. Created by Genndy Tartakovsky, the series ran from 2003 to 2005 between 'Attack of the Clones' and 'Revenge of the Silth', two films in the prequel trilogy. The series ran for three seasons and a total of 25 episodes. The first two seasons were collectively known as Volume One. Many concepts used in this series were later used for other Star Wars works, the most notable of them being the very concept of Clone wars which led to the events narrated in Revenge of the Silth. The characters, Asajj Ventress, ARC Troopers, General Grievous who were introduced through the series were also adapted in several of other Star Wars projects. The beginning of the series was set in the year 22 BBY a period just after the 'Attack of the Clones'. Volume One mainly featured Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Jedi Knight leading an attack on the planet of Muunilinst. Timeline of Volume Two was set around the period after Anakin Skywalker's victory over Ventress and Kenobi win over Muunilinst. The series won several awards including Emmy Award for Outstanding Animated Program for their first, second and third seasons. In 2009, Imagine Games Network, ranked 'Clone Wars' 21 on its list of Top 100 Animated Series.

Just 'Bend The Rules'

Moving on from Motion Picture Industry, an innovative transmedia production came from Hewlett - Packard (HP), one of world's leading Information Technology Company. The power of social media is so enormous that it provides a stage for any commoner to showcase his or her talents before the world. We have seen so many who became celebrities through social medias and this is what HP smartly utilized for their holiday campaign 'Bend The Rules' in 2014. Joining with 180 LA, a creative agency based in Los Angeles, HP bought together some of the biggest stars from various social platforms such as, Instagram, Youtube, Vine together with the celebrated Pop Star Meghan Trainor to produce the official music video for her single album 'Lips are Movin'. Now, instead of just using these social superstars to play a cameo in the video, HP put them all to work. Each of them made use of Pavilion x360, HP's convertible laptop, to adorn the creative aspects of the video including designing Meghan's makeup, nails, hair and even the set design and choreography. During production, each one of them recorded their various contributions to the project and shared it with their followers on the respective social platforms. What did it result in? Millions of viewers for just the making of the music video! HP, then combined all these stories together and made a 30 second commercial demonstrating the flexible design of HP x360 and how it bends the rule of Television Advertising. Within two days of the music video launch, it generated 2 million views and within the first month it rocketed up to 45 million. Today, the music video has more than 400 million viewers! The 'Bend The Rules' campaign was nominated for 7th Annual Shorty Awards.

Talent Hunt With TransMedia- The US Navy's Style

You have attended tests, interviews and online sessions to get a job. But, what if someone tested your skills using a game? This is exactly what U.S Navy came up with their 'Project Architeuthis', a campaign to find the right Cryptology Candidates. This was also the first alternate reality game launched by a division of U.S Armed Forces. As we know, Cryptology is not the most sought out job and it represents only a little .0004% of the total U.S Population. So, instead of going for an all out candidate hunt, the U.S Navy decided to bring the ideal candidates towards them. Before launching the game, they created facebook pages and twitter accounts for the fictional characters in the game story.

'Project Architeuthis' was about a mysterious enemy who abducts the engineering head of a highly confidential Navy weapons project. The enemies think they have made a clear escape but Maria, a courageous cryptologist has sneaked into their ship. During next 18 days, she sends cyphers, pictograms and coded messages with clues inside them. Solving one puzzle opens up the door for the other and the players have to keep solving them until they locate the enemy base. The project was launched from the official Navy Cryptology page and with absolutely no paid media support. Every day, they posted a new challenge to the players. The puzzles were launched from facebook and clues were driven from twitter. Some players tried to solve the riddle alone whereas some others opted for team efforts. They even went on to create their own social platforms such as groups and forums in various platforms to discuss the game! Fascinatingly, some people even started communicating using ciphers so that their "enemy" wouldn't uncover their efforts! The project was a huge success and Navy found their right personnel. In fact, it even inspired many to think about cryptology as a profession. Additionally, 'Project Architeuthis' received the best Multi Platform Campaign Award in the 7th Annual Shorty Awards.

Their Story is Your Story

We have seen several commercials of baby products and most of them feature the embracement of parenthood. But really is parenting that easy? Never... This is the hard reality that 'Plum Organics', one of the leading organic baby food brands decided to hit upon through their 'Parenting Unfiltered' campaign in 2015. The goal of this campaign was simple. To enhance the trust of Plum Organics brand by accepting or even celebrating the complicated and messy reality of parenting. Plum believed that this examination of real parenting troubles would open up an amazing life for parents and families. By showcasing the real life of parents, Plum implied that they are as real and unfiltered as their life! The campaign was truly spirited because it considered moms and dads as parenting equals and it also featured same sex couples. From pumping breast milk at work to escaping to the bathroom to read and sleepless nights, the campaign assured an emotional connection with the parents. To spread the reachability of the video, Plum collaborated with many influential parents around the Internet. These popular parents then shared their real unfiltered experiences on different platforms using a common hashtag. This tremendously enhanced the organic awareness of the campaign.

Evoke Their Emotions

If you are a tech company what is one way to make your users aware of the real potential of your devices? How about a haunted house? This ground breaking strategy was adapted by O2, a leading telecommunications provider headquartered in United Kingdom.

O2 wanted to showcase and excite the public with the features of various devices they sell, ranging from smart lighting to Bluetooth speakers. VCCP Kin - a creative production house gave them the solution; 'O2 POSSESSED', the first haunted house completely controlled by household smart devices. If generally, the interest of users are generated by delighting and pleasing them, O2 did it by scaring them!

Through creative use of O2 products, multi platform programming and prompt digital content, they were able to terrify the public. For the campaign, they established a haunted house in London just before Halloween. Then, the terrors were set up using O2 devices, a fact which was revealed to the public only in the end. Those who weren't able to attend the terror show in person were also able to join the fun using competitions on social media, live streaming of guest experiences and through films that took viewers around the haunted house revealing how the terrors were set up. This month long project spanned across different platforms such as social media, O2's official website, mobile and experiential.

Each of these platforms were substantial in the reach of the campaign as they attracted more and more fans to attend the event and to live stream the journeys of the guests.

The house was equipped with 12 wireless speakers, 7 LED screens, 2 HD Projectors, 9 Wi-fi Security Cameras, 25 smart light bulbs, 10 wearable equipments with heart-rate monitors, 2 web cameras, 2 Philips smart light hubs, 4 mac minis, 2 Google chromecasts and one gaming PC! Each room had a specific scary theme.

People who live streamed guest journeys through Facebook, Twitter and Youtube were given a chance to spot the ghost and were rewarded in doing so. On the day of the Halloween, O2 released a film through their social channels that demonstrated how scary it was for the guests to be in the haunted house. This motivated people to view O2 product demonstrations to know how they can be of relevance in their own households. Apart from the live streams and the scary wrap film, the content of this campaign was spread across four product demo films, five films for journalists and three for celebrities.

Love Has No Labels

Beyond nationality, gender, race or religion what are we? Just plain simple human beings and there should exist nothing but love between us. It was this wonderful message which was at the core of one of the most emotionally intriguing campaigns 'Love Has No Labels'. This project, launched by Ad Council collaborating with Upworthy, challenged everyone to rethink our biases which we thought didn't even exist. The video featured skeletons dancing behind custom built x ray screen before unveiling the people from different backgrounds who embraced each other to show that we are all human beings first. In addition to the video, the campaign also featured a Tumblr built website where users could examine their own biases based on a quiz and then in Facebook and Twitter groups, they could find resources on how to overcome them. To enhance the reach of the campaign, they got in touch with celebrities and social media influencers who wholeheartedly spread the message. Furthermore, the campaign initiated joined programs during key times of the year such as Independence Day, Mother's Day, Hispanic Heritage Month and Pride Month. The campaign became a massive success and it's earned media support was valued at 6.4 million dollars. Over 160 million viewers have watched the video since its upload in Upworthy's Facebook page. It is also the second most viewed social activity project behind 2012 Kony.
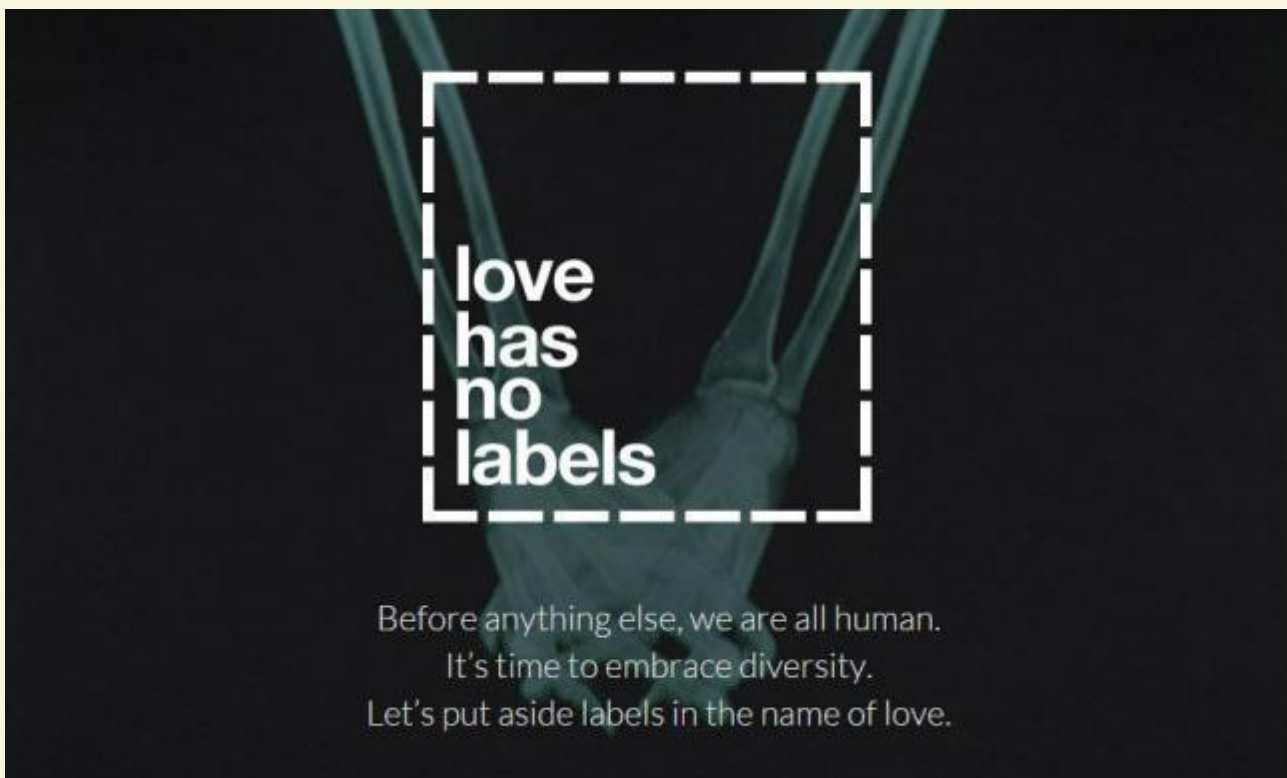
SOURCE : LOVE HAS NO LABELS

You might be surprised how many people volunteered to get scared. The O2 campaign received 49000 applications to visit the house! This out of the box campaign enlightened people who doesn't really see the upcoming of smart tech that technology can really be made real.

The Next Level of Storytelling

There are plenty of examples for wonderful Transmedia productions. To narrate them all will need an encyclopedia. Walt Disney caters different elements of their story across multiple platforms for all their major works today. With the world of information and content growing day by day, transmedia is definitely the future of storytelling. Engaging audience is the primary concern of every storyteller. That is why there are so many different genres, styles and mediums for it. When the lifestyle of the world changes, storytelling too has to change. And that is why Transmedia is the next level of storytelling!

"If you need help with an upcoming project,
 do write to us on hello@srushticreative.com and we'd be glad to help!"

SRUSHTI

www.srushticreative.com