

Oliveira, M. & Ribeiro, F. (eds) (2015) *Radio, sound and Internet*
Proceedings of Net Station International Conference
pp. 200 -208

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THE USE OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN THE RADIO UNIVERSE

ABSTRACT

The streaming technology was first used in radio soon after its creation in mid-1995. Since its adoption, the radio has a new space, the Internet, and thus began to explore new narratives, with use of different matrices of language, such as visual-verbal, which materialize itself in a graphical interface. In addition to the emergence of a web radio, radio productions began to work with social networking sites on the Internet, in which interacts with users. In this scenario emerges a new narrative for radio, the transmedia storytelling. This article seeks to identify how this narrative takes place in the radio universe and map and classify the elements that make this kind of narrative occurs. The aim is to understand how this narrative is used to propose its best use by broadcasters.

KEYWORDS

Web radio; transmedia storytelling; social network sites; radio production

INTRODUCTION

The broadcast of a sound in the air became a reality in the last decade of the 1800's and started to be used commercially in the later years of the 1910's, making real the idea of radio as a massive, sound-verbal and instant media. Gustavo Cardoso (2009) says that radio had three "ages" or "lives" in its development in the last 90 years. These three "ages" or "lives" cover the changes that create new paradigms, which guide the production of content for a certain period (Cardoso, 2009, pp. 35-36). These "ages" or "lives" follow the concept of *mediamorphosis* created by Roger Fidler (1997), which refers to the metamorphoses suffered by the media throughout their

trajectories in the society in which media emerge from the transformation of their predecessors.

The first “age” or “life” of radio, in Cardoso’s chronology (2009), was characterized by large national broadcasters of continental coverage (in medium waves or short waves, all in modulated amplitude), with radio stations belonging to the state or, in some national cases, private media groups. During this time the radio producers created radio first genres and formats; it happened the development of programs with preproduction, which enabled the development of more sophisticated products such as soap operas; there were the development of models based on government investment or private and the development of radio networks. Also occurs the development and popularization of radiojournals¹ and the conducting of radio experiences as *War of the Worlds*, directed by Orson Welles, an example of tactical media, exploring the boundary of a media (Beiguelman, 2005).

The second “age” or “life” of radio, in Cardoso’s chronology (2009), was characterized by changes in radio universe. Cardoso (2009, p. 36) says that in this period important events was the popularization of microelectronics and the empowerment of social movements that came to occupy media space through pirate radio, which in the future became commercial stations (e.g. Cidade FM in Portugal). In this period also occurred the arrival of TV as a competitor for audience (which made radio change its formats to reconquer public and advertisers) and the emergence of FM transmissions, which made a restructuring on the radio, with the AM radio devoting more space to talk and FM radio more space for music.

The third “age” or “life” of radio, in Cardoso’s chronology (2009), was characterized by the use of Internet to broadcast content, which is possible with the use of the streaming technology released in 1995. “The live streaming is truly the web equivalent of an analogue radio broadcast: it carries the output from the broadcast studio or an outside broadcast unit in real time” (Priestman, 2006, p. 34). We can say that this period is also characterized by the terrestrial broadcast of digital content [in technologies such as DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting), DRM (Digital Radio Mondiale), iBOC (In-Band On Channel) and ISDB-TN (Integrated Service Digital Broadcast – Terrestrial Narrow-band)]; satellite digital broadcasting and cable broadcasting. Both kinds of distribution content (webcasting in Internet or digital broadcasting on air) use graphic interface, where can be used the three

¹ For example, in Brazil the radiojournal got more importance with the advent of World War II, on which listeners were curious to know news from distant battlefields (Ferraretto, 2000).

different language matrices (sonorous, visual and verbal). The radio is no more only sound-verbal, it is also visual.

In the case of transmissions over the Internet, it was streaming technology that enabled real-time transmission of audio content from one point to many receivers. This transmission may be of *web radio type*, *playlist type* (audio list that may include music or spoken word) or *audio on demand* (static audio that can be accessed randomly). These are the sonorous web-casting formats, in which the term “sonorous” indicates that it focuses the sound-verbal content, though it can transmit both sound and image (Van Haandel, 2009).

Web radio format enabled real-time radio emission of the four radiophonic elements (speech, music, effect/noise and silence). Real-time emission and the four radiophonic elements are understood by Medeiros (2007) and Prata (2008) as key for a transmission to be understood as Internet radio. By the process of *radiomorphosis* (Prata, 2008), the radio transform itself. Today radio is defined as a cultural creation in which are mere support transmitters, receivers, channels and frequency bands (Meditich, 2010, p. 204). The web radio is one of the radio faces, it uses a live and continuous streaming to deliver its content, a graphic interface to present other informations and, sometimes, other types of online transmission for disclosure content (e.g. podcasting, streaming audio on demand).

Radio in its third “age” or “life” is multiplatform, with contents in different matrices of language, such as sound-verbal, verbal and visual-verbal, which materialize themselves in a graphical interface (Van Haandel, 2009). In this new scenario radio has the opportunity to make new kinds of narrative, such as transmedia storytelling.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN THE RADIO

In the Internet radio producers began to explore new platforms (websites and social network sites the major ones) producing multiplatform content, which started to exhibit different and diverse content, but complementary, featuring, this way, a scenario or transmedia context (Ramos, García, van Haandel & Piñero-Otero, 2012), a term derived from the concept of transmedia narrative coined by Henry Jenkins (2009). In this scenario radio displays different content to tell stories that complement each other (Ramos et al., 2012). An example is a flashback program that features songs in streaming audio and images on social networks and calls for the involvement of users in the network to comment the images and the audio

in order to develop the narrative. In this example which platform cooperates to the understanding of all. Other example is a radio journal with a page in Facebook. This page can received contributions of the audience and broadcasters can comment the content in the Facebook page of the radio journal.

One important point in the transmedia storytelling is that the *prosumers* participate and in the construction of the history (Scolari, 2013, p. 180). They got involved by the possibilities of participation offered by the platforms available. With the participation of the *prosumers* the content changes, with the contribution of many new authors in different platforms, so the message changes and keep changing (Renó & Ruiz, 2012, p. 56). This occurs in a scenario of user multitasking, in which the listeners make actions while follow the transmission.

In the past, until mid-1990's, before the use of digital media, we had a small exploration of transmedia narrative, with the launch of magazines and records related to a radio station or a certain radio program. The radio, in its migration to the digital media (through digital broadcasting and Internet) began to produce histories in new platforms. So the content became multiplatform, which the story uses each platform to explore different parts of the narrative. All the different parts complement the whole story. The radio in the transmedia scenario has to update all its capacity of report (Ramos et al., 2012). Radio producers can use the radio website to present informations (such as news, radio history and staff, promotions or schedule); to interact with e-mail, chatrooms and forums; or to present interact forms to participate in the radio programs, with music voting area or polls. Radio producers also can use social network sites to present parts of the story (videos, texts, photos or more), using the interactive tools of these sites no interact with the users.

The participation of the users (now considered *prosumers*) is important to involve them in the narrative. This participation occurs in forms of posts, especially in social network sites as Facebook, Google+, Instagram, You Tube or Twitter. The posts can be comments, complains, suggestions, praises, asks for musics or other kind of communication. The *prosumers* now build the story with the broadcasters. For example, opinions of users are important to the decisions made in a live transmission. García Gonzalez (2013, p. 256) says that

Social networking has helped create proximity with listeners, as it always did the radio. [...] The radio is forced to adapt content to avoid losing prominence among other means. And as a result, listening radio is becoming more individualized and participative.

The participation, according to Willems (2013, p. 224), has two possible types: the ‘solicited’ and the ‘unsolicited’. In the first listeners take the initiative spontaneously to contact the broadcaster to offer its contribution to content production. In the second, broadcasters invite the audience to participate to make his contribution. In other words, in the first case, users request the participation and in the second, are invited to participate.

But none of the digital tools of user participation has the same degree of openness as the phone. The phone-in can put the listener on air and “free” this listener to participate saying whatever he thinks it’s alright. The only control of radio is take the listener off the air. Digital tools in the radio has the broadcaster acting as a mediator, choosing content to be placed in the air. The final decision of what will be on air is still in the hands of the broadcaster.

CLASSIFICATION OF ELEMENTS FROM TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN THE RADIO

We can classify the elements from transmedia storytelling in the radio universe. We can say that radio has four kinds of elements to develop a transmedia narrative:

1) The website: the web radio website – the *heart* of the radio in Internet – where radio station put all the relevant information about itself and its partners, such as news, promotions, hit parade, videos, podcasts, audios on demand, schedule and informations about the staff and history of the radio. You can know the radio just reading the informations.

2) Website interactive zone: the areas in the website of the radio where *prosumers* can interact with the station, such as forums, chatrooms, polls and message areas after a text, audio, photo or video.

3) Social media networks: accounts and pages in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, Google+, MySpace, Flickr and other SNS. These networks are used to develop stories (such as showing a photograph of a broadcaster, a video of a sketch of humor, a romantic text or other kind of message that radio production thinks it’s important. In SNS space these radio posts can be answered by many, building a new story based in the first radio post. The posts of *prosumers* can be part of audio transmission, being read by the announcer. The *prosumer* can also interact directly to the broadcaster, sending comments, suggestions, praises and other kind of texts.

4) Instant messaging app: these elements are the new ones in the radio universe, they are apps developed to cell phones, tablets and iPads to

deliver radio content and to interact with the *prosumers*. Examples are radio stations apps (which helps audience to access the radio streaming and to interact with broadcasters) and apps like WhatsApp, which became used as a tool by the *prosumers* to send their opinions and testimony about a fact that occur in the given time.

SUGGESTIONS OF OPTIMIZED USE OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN THE RADIO

We saw how the transmedia storytelling occurs in the radio universe and the elements of this kind of narrative. Now we present some suggestions to optimize the use of transmedia storytelling.

1) First, we must see the new status of the user, now a *prosumer*. Meneses (2012, p. 175) says that

Regardless of the path that medium we now know as radio take, whether in speech radio or music, the focus will increasingly be centered on the listener, now elevated to the status of user - after all, since Brecht the radio looks for a more receiver asset, which can be called also, and cumulatively, producer (or rather, *prosumer*). And if we compare podcasts, and videos on demand services, we realize this common denominator: more power to the user. [...] Give more power to the listener means also have other types of content and consider effective ways of distributing them.

2) The main narrative, the “mothership” (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2014, p. 178) has to be the transmission of audio in direct. It is the most important element, the one that represent the broadcast or the webcast as radio.

3) Radio stations have to empower their executive producers to become transmedia producers, so they passes to explore vigorously the transmedia narrative. This transmedia producer must be a network manager, the one who knows the importance of the social network sites to the radio station.

4) Radio stations must have a “transmedia planning” (Porto-Renó, Versuti, Moraes-Gonçalves & Gosciola, 2011), observing technical issues, the audience, the story to be told, the business model and the execution.

5) Based on Scolari (2013, p. 82-90), we can say that broadcasters must know what they will tell and write, how they tell and write, what kind of participation, if the participation will influence the narrative, how to manage the participation and control the users, who the audience is, what the commitment of the audience, which kind of narrative experience the audience

is willing to cooperate and participate and what each medium offers us and what better adapted to work for us. We should note that some possibilities are just mere continuations of the radio presents (as the act of online asking for music, which it is analogous to the act of phone to the broadcasters to request a song), but other acts are new situation explorations, building stories that will be completed in multi-platform user experience. In these platforms radio producers should allow user interaction for a full transmedia experience in which user participates creating content together with producers.

6) Radio producers must encourage the participation of users in the contact channels and leave participants increasingly involved with the story, involving them sharing material, commenting on the content of radio and on the content of other users.

7) Following the idea of Jenkins, Ford and Green (2014, p. 194), radio producers should not limit who will participate and how the users will do this. They must see these network places as listening posts.

8) Take care of networks that help public engagement. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2014, p. 181) says that “an engagement model thrives only when the entertainment modes help active audiences to connect with each other and around these modalities.

9) Following the models based in engagement approached by Jenkins, Ford and Green (2014, p. 153), radio production must seek the involvement of users, to ensure that they, from media texts, discuss, comment, search, pass on, generating new material, which is consumed by others, making the audience connect between broadcasters and each other.

10) Radio producers must be aware that the content consumption occurs in motion. This happened with battery radio, but the consumption was only audio. Now notebooks, cell phones, tablets and iPads enable the consumption in motion of various contents.

11) Radio producers must be aware that expanded content increase the contact with the brand.

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