

# THE EVOLUTION OF STORY

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Story isn't dead, it's evolving. Jenkins (2003, para 2) argues that 'transmedia, multiplatform, or enhanced storytelling represents the future of entertainment'. Jenkins (2006) furthermore, defines transmedia storytelling as 'several individual texts that exist over multiple media platforms that make a contribution to the whole'. Media franchises *Superman*, *Pokémon* and *The Walking Dead* illustrate how transmedia storytelling has been used effectively to build their respective storyworld, ensuring the survival of stories well into the future.

Jenkins (2003, pp. 97-98) describes modern media consumers as 'information hunters and gatherers' that actively seek 'character backgrounds and plot points'. Firstly, in the case study of Superman, I will explore how in the past, audiences actively sought out new story information. Freeman (2015, pp. 216-217) explains that when the Superman character first appeared in the 1938 *Action Comics #1* the readers wanted more. This led to the production of the *Superman* comic which released new story information over the two texts *Action Comics* and *Superman*. The second case study will explore how the *Pokémon* storyworld has employed transmedia storytelling. Allison (2006, pp. 207) mentions that after *Pokémon* became popular, the '*Pocketto Monsta Zukan*' or *Pokémon* guide book was released. This provided information about the *Pokémon* universe including *Pokémon* profile details and the 'geography of the *Pokémon* world including hidden treasures or traps' (Allison 2006, pp. 210). Transmedia storytelling is also responsible for expanding any storyworld in new and unique ways. In the third case study, I will explore how *The Walking Dead* comic has been expanded into a game format, starting from an earlier plot point than the comic, and using new characters, the game provides more information about *The Walking Dead* universe. The use of transmedia in these projects highlights why transmedia is so effective at telling stories and provide evidence for how story is not only alive, it's thriving.

## Case Study #1: Superman

Superman, the caped hero, and his storyworld have survived for almost eighty years, providing an example of how transmedia storytelling can be employed successfully. Freeman (2015, pp. 217) explains that Detective Comics, Inc. (later DC Comics) first released *Action Comics #1*, containing Superman's adventures, among other stories, however when the Superman figure grew in popularity, a new comic was made, this time entirely devoted to Superman. Freeman (2015, pp. 217) argues that transmedia storytelling is employed by DC Comics firstly by including the origin story of Superman and an image of him rescuing a woman in the *Action Comics #1* text and then choosing to extend and expand the narrative and explain 'the complete story' in the *Superman #1* comic. This use of transmedia storytelling relies on the audience's thirst for more story information and builds on the world created in the shorter story contained in *Action Comics #1*. Freeman (2015, pp. 218) states that from the beginning it was DC Comics plan to expand the Superman universe over multiple platforms. Freeman (2015, pp. 218) also argues that transmedia was the reason for Superman's success as the sales of *Action Comics* dramatically increased, according to The Washington Post, from 125,000 to 2,000,000 in less than two years. The Superman storyworld was eventually expanded over magazine, radio, television and newspaper comic strip texts, with new versions still available today.

The proliferation and consistency of Superman's storyworld was mainly due to the creative control exercised. Freeman (2015, pp. 218) explains that Superman creator, Donenfeld personally oversaw the production of the *Superman* comic strip, employing the same artists as the comics and magazines, Siegel and Shuster and editing the strip himself. This level of oversight ensured the consistency of not only the story, but the characters and artwork. Freeman (2015, pp. 218) furthermore argues that the newspaper platform also provided the opportunity for Superman's origin story to be expanded on and details such as the names of his home planet and biological parents were given. Long (2007, pp. 15-16) explains that audiences should be able to consume stand-alone elements such as just the comics, however the experience of the audience is enhanced when connections are made between the different media texts. Therefore, the audience for the comic, may not be the same as the newspaper comic strip, however if audiences are aware of both platforms, their understanding may be deepened. The Superman comic demonstrates how transmedia has been used to spread a story over multiple platforms, and at the same time contribute to the whole storyworld.

## Case Study #2: Pokémon

The *Pokémon* storyworld exists over a range of media platforms and has experienced twenty years of success due to the implementation of transmedia storytelling. Bainbridge (2014, pp. 399) argues that *Pokémon* is the 'second most successful game-based franchise in the world' and one of the 'best examples of transmedia storytelling in youth media today'. The storyworld consists of legendary *Pokémon* creatures that *Pokémon* trainers catch and collect. The trainers then use the creatures to battle other *Pokémon* trainers in order to win prizes and develop their *Pokémon* creatures, so that they may earn experience and evolve into more powerful *Pokémon*, with the end goal of becoming a Master *Pokémon* trainer. *Pokémon* began in 1996 as 'a software game for Nintendo's Game Boy' and is based on *Pokémon* creator 'Satoshi Tajiri's love of insect collecting' (Bainbridge 2014, pp. 402). *Pokémon* exists over multiple platforms including animé television series, feature films, merchandise, card games, musicals, manga comic books and theme parks. Jenkins (2003, para 4) argues that *Pokémon* has demonstrated the future of storytelling because no media text is 'privileged over another'. Jenkins (2003, para 10) further argues that any *Pokémon* text is an entry point for new viewers into the 'franchise as a whole'. Therefore the *Pokémon* animé series was another entry point for new users to engage with the narrative, and followed a central protagonist, Ash in his quest to become the best *Pokémon* trainer in the world. Following on from this series, many feature films were produced, providing yet another entry point for new viewers to engage with the *Pokémon* storyworld.

Part of what makes *Pokémon* so successful is that the world in which *Pokémon* is set contains so many details that can be explored over multiple texts. Jenkins (2007, para 5) explains that transmedia works best when applied to a 'complex fictional world' stating that the 'process of world-building encourages an encyclopedic impulse'. This is not only demonstrated by the '*Pocketto Monsta Zukan*' or *Pokémon* guide book publication that explains the strengths and weaknesses of *Pokémon* creatures (Allison 2006, pp. 207) but also by the inclusion in the game, anime series and film series of a *Pokédex*. The *Pokédex* is a piece of technology that tracks the amount of *Pokémon* a player may possess at any given time. Bainbridge (2014, pp. 404) states that the narrative of the *Pokémon* involved 'acquisition' and was one of the first franchises to do this. The *Pokémon* franchise not only encourages collection it furnishes a complete storyworld that the audience can lose themselves in.

## Case Study #3: The Walking Dead

*The Walking Dead* is an example of how a storyworld can expand and take shape over new platforms. *The Walking Dead* franchise started in 2003 with the comic book, then was expanded into the AMC television series in 2010 and the Telltale game series in 2012. *The Walking Dead* comic and television series contain most of the same characters and follow Sheriff Rick, as he awakens from a coma to find that a zombie apocalypse has taken place. Rick then teams up with a group of survivors and is eventually reunited with his family. Ecenbarger (2016, pp. 34) explains how the Telltale game rewards players with additional information about the storyworld. The contribution of the game to *The Walking Dead* storyworld would involve additional entry points for new audience members while providing a new insight and perspective to *The Walking Dead* universe. Jenkins (2006, pp. 97) uses *The Matrix* as an example of transmedia storytelling, stating that *The Matrix* released a computer game alongside the second film which contributed to the franchise's mythology and provided audiences with 'new points of entry' into the storyworld. Telltale's *The Walking Dead* differs from *The Matrix* game because as Ecenbarger (2016, pp. 35) argues, the game provides a new narrative and set of characters that begin in Macon, Georgia as opposed to Atlanta, Georgia which is where the comic book and television series begins. Ecenbarger (2016, pp. 35) argues that Telltale's *The Walking Dead* is a 'true transmedia storytelling experience' because the game builds on the existing world of the comic and is actually set one month earlier than the comic, during the original zombie apocalypse (Ecenbarger 2016, pp. 39).

The game is also unique because there is some overlap in terms of the characters from the comic and the game. Ecenbarger (2016, pp. 39) argues that the game rewards consumers of both the comic and game because of the use of overlapping characters and use of 'intertextual references' from the comic being included in the game. There is also a strong link between the visual style of the game and the comic. Ecenbarger (2016, pp. 38) states that the game is reminiscent of the comic book due to the similarity between the visual style and typeface, creating 'one cohesive world' and assisting the audience in making the connection between game and comic. As Jenkins (2003, para 4) argues, audiences are actively seeking information about storyworlds and are gratified when they can make connections between texts within the same franchise. Therefore, the expansion of *The Walking Dead* storyworld relies on transmedia storytelling.

Transmedia storytelling is evolving not only the way in which stories are told, but the way in which texts are consumed signalling the future of story. Transmedia storytelling has been employed in various different ways. Firstly, the *Superman* franchise employed the use of distributing narrative information over multiple platforms in order to engage audiences and build on the existing mythology surrounding Superman. Transmedia storytelling has contributed to Superman's continued existence, due to the complexity of the Superman character that was built up throughout the years, over comics, magazines, radio, television and film. Secondly, *Pokémon*'s success is due in part to the proliferation of story throughout the years over gaming, film and television platforms among others. *Pokémon* provides numerous entry points for new consumers to buy into the narrative and collect all of the *Pokémon* in order to reach the goal of being a *Pokémon* Master. Finally, *The Walking Dead* franchise uses the game format to expand in the existing universe by creating new characters that do not appear in the comic book or television series, and that also have an earlier starting point. This allows the audience to enjoy the game as a separate entity, but also derive pleasure from making connections between the game and the television series or comic. These examples of transmedia storytelling consist of individual elements that contribute to the storyworld as a whole. Transmedia storytelling not only provides new platforms for existing stories, transmedia allows audiences to explore the world of a story.

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