

REVIEW OF THE MASTER'S THESIS

Author:

Véronique Nicole O'Donoghue, BA

Title:

Transmedia Storytelling and Amnesty International in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom 1993-2013

Reviewer:

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The Master's Thesis by Véronique Nicole O'Donoghue presents interesting and topical problem of implementation of participatory tools into communication strategies of non-profit organisations (with focus on the Amnesty International). It puts forward creative suggestion to apply Jenkins' concept of "transmedia storytelling" on public relations of the non-profit organisations.

The thesis opens with sufficiently thorough theoretical introduction explicating seminal concepts of agenda setting, resource mobilisation and transmedia-storytelling drawing on the disciplines of sociology, social movement theory and media studies. The concept of transmedia storytelling is tracked down in a detailed way to its pre-Jenkinsian uses, which deserves special appreciation. It is also impressive that Ms. O'Donoghue systematically connects particular activities of AI to categories of transmedia storytelling as developed by Henry Jenkins and so the concrete activities are always linked with more general categories as their examples.

The thesis is written in appropriate academic style, correctly referencing academic literature which is selected wisely and used with comprehension. The part on transmedia storytelling is clearly based on a single author and one book but it can be tolerated as Jenkins' understanding of transmedia storytelling is a cornerstone of the thesis.

Some aspects of the structure and the main argument nonetheless raise questions which do not debase the quality of the work but nonetheless should be tackled.

Relation between the two main interests of the thesis (agenda setting and resource mobilisation analysis as one interest and transmedia storytelling as the second one) is a little loose. The two parts should be better coordinated; the nexus between the two should be described more explicitly. The lack of connection between the two interests may be due to the fact that clearly formulated research question is missing. We can then ask why strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats of agenda setting and resource mobilisation are examined. Why data collection and analysis did not focus directly and exclusively on the potential of transmedia storytelling?

Another principal issue is applicability of the concept of transmedia storytelling as such. It was developed to address the complex fiction worlds created for and by deeply engaged users, the fans. Does it make sense to transfer it to the members of the publics interested in non-profit organisations? Indeed, can AI have fans in proper sense of the word? This question is very correctly posed on page 25 and it suggests that the author understands the core difference. This question should however be given much more salience and prominence because it is the key determining condition.

It should be also noted that the entire concept of transmedia storytelling is actually used in a kind of metaphoric sense and it would help if the work would reflect upon it.

Transmedia storytelling is not only about the “trans” but also about the “storytelling”. In Jenkins’ terms (to which the author appeals to), storytelling acquires its meaning from the narrative theory. The story is not simply any text but complex fiction world organised according to the narrative principles and dynamics and sucking the “readers” inside into the web of storylines. Can AI’s mission (and non-profit organisations work in general) be presented as “story” with narrative arc, specific types of characters, settings and temporal qualities? Either it should be demonstrated that non-profit organisations do function as stories or metaphorical use of transmedia storytelling should be underscored. At some point we can see that literal application of Jenkins’ concept on the AI practise produces strained examples. This is especially the problem in case of showing that there are diverse roles in AI, as Jenkins requires. e.g. staff-members or volunteers (p. 34). What Jenkins has on mind in this context are roles as characters’ spheres of action in the fiction stories: the victim, the hero, the mentor, the princess, etc.

The last remark refers to the utopian and techno-optimist views of the digital media potential which should better be accompanied by more sceptical perspectives. Transformation of power structures and democratising consequences of the participatory media uses have never been empirically proved and so the perspective putting forward these arguments represents a regularly contested paradigm, not taken for granted factuality.

The really last remark concerns the reference to Hayati and argument about disguised promotional uses of digital communication which strive to create impression they are honest grassroots initiatives. This is unethical practise known as “astroturfing” (the company selling the fake grass) and should not be considered by serious non-profit bodies such as AI.

The degree: 1 (excellent) or 2 (very good) depending on the quality of the defence

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