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Transmedia Storytelling Practices in Taiwan:

The Case of Pili Glove Puppetry

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Abstract

This research delves into the exploration of transmedia storytelling practices in Taiwan with an emphasis on the Pili glove puppetry tradition—a distinctive aspect of traditional Taiwanese puppet shows that has seamlessly evolved into a contemporary entertainment sensation. The research investigates the ways in which Pili has utilized media channels like television broadcasting and online platforms, alongside social media to broaden its storytelling scope and connect with a wide range of viewers. This research explores how Pili glove puppetry has evolved from a community art form to a media brand by examining the methods employed to update traditional storytelling approaches for modern transmedia formats. By delving into Pili's narrative techniques, on platforms and its widespread utilization of products and online content through a qualitative lens brings insight into how transmedia storytelling can elevate cultural significance and business prosperity in today's digital era. The research offers a glimpse, into how customs interact with worldwide media trends and shows how Taiwanese cultural creations are evolving in the larger framework of transmedia stories.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling in Taiwan, Pili glove puppetry, local storytelling traditions, cultural adaptation, narrative expansion, multimedia engagement

Introduction

Transmedia storytelling involves telling a story across platforms to enhance the overall narrative experience uniquely on each one of them. This method encourages audiences to engage with the story world in ways, for a richer and immersive experience. Transmedia storytelling has become popular worldwide as creators and brands use it to strengthen audience engagement and extend narratives beyond the media formats. Transmedia storytelling allows narratives to surpass boundaries and cultivate worldwide fan bases and cultural interaction through popular series such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe and traditional art forms like Pili glove puppetry in Taiwan.

Pili glove puppetry stands out as a lively expression of Taiwan's traditional puppet shows (布袋戲, Budaixi) that have charmed viewers for many years now. With its roots deeply embedded in Taiwan's cultural legacy this style of puppetry brings together finely made puppets with compelling narratives, martial arts displays and musical acts. What once started as an artistic tradition has now grown into a cultural marvel leaving a lasting mark, on Taiwanese entertainment and societal norms. Pili has redefined puppetry by adapting it into TV shows, movies, comics and digital content creating a modern and diverse franchise that showcases the blend of cultural heritage and modern entertainment in Taiwan.

My reason for choosing this case study is that it represents a unique Taiwanese transmedia model that is quite different from the larger global franchises. In contrast to well-known transmedia franchises, which often operate on a massive scale and rely on established international narratives, the case of Pili glove puppetry offers a localized perspective on transmedia storytelling. This allows for a deeper understanding of how cultural context influences consumer behavior and engagement with content across multiple media platforms. By focusing on a Taiwanese example, the study provides insights into regional storytelling practices and consumer dynamics that are often neglected in studies dominated by Western or global franchises. This choice allows for a more nuanced exploration of transmedia strategies and their impact on purchase intentions within a specific cultural setting.

This article aims to delve into the role of Pili glove puppetry as an illustration of transmedia storytelling in Taiwan and how it has transformed from a traditional art form into a rich storytelling experience across different mediums. Through exploring how Pili has spread its narrative across these platforms the focus is, on showcasing the methods employed to captivate varied audiences and enrich the storyline. This article looks into examining how the stories

connect across forms of media and how audience involvement influences the plot development and how Pili's transmedia strategy affects cultural preservation and contemporary media environments in Taiwan. The goal is to explore the significance of transmedia storytelling for cultural legacy and worldwide media methods.

Transmedia Storytelling Framework

Storytelling has always been recognized as a form of human expression and connection across different times and places in history and in cultures around the world. Creating stories, and the emotions they evoke, has influenced how we evolve and grow as a culture. Over time there has been a transition from narrative to more complex, non-linear forms of storytelling that reflect the changing nature of our society.

The evolution of narrative structures throughout history is a testament to the dynamic nature of storytelling and its intricate relationship with societal, technological, and cultural developments (Ryan, 2004). Innovative ways of telling stories, such as the use of narrative and multiple viewpoints, have pushed the boundaries of traditional storytelling by involving the audience in creating meaning and actively interacting with the story (Genette 1980). With the rise of transmedia storytelling as a storytelling format, the development of media and interactive storytelling has triggered a shift in narrative norms. According to Jenkins (2006), transmedia storytelling involves the strategic distribution of elements of a narrative across multiple platforms to create a unified and coherent entertainment experience for the viewer. At its core, transmedia storytelling aims to expand the narrative universe across platforms, such as films, television series, novels, games and digital arenas.

In this article, I'll explore the network of Pili productions using Henry Jenkins' widely recognized framework, which consists of seven principles: *Spreadability vs. Drillability*, *Continuity vs. Multiplicity, Immersion vs. Extraction*, *World Building*, *Seriality*, *Subjectivity and Performance* (2006). These principles provide a lens through which to analyze the connections and interplay within transmedia storytelling.

Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling explore different approaches to the creation of interactive narratives across a wide range of platforms. Spreadability vs. Drillability highlights the balance between distribution and deep engagement. Continuity vs. Multiplicity contrasts maintaining a consistent canon with exploring alternative storytelling. Immersion vs. Extraction is about the importance of a completely immersive environment versus the ability to extract something from the environment. World building focuses on the creation of detailed

fictional universes, while Seriality is the breaking down of stories into interconnected segments. Subjectivity encourages multiple perspectives, and Performance emphasizes active audience participation, transforming them from passive consumers into active participants (Jenkins, n.d.). The aim of these principles is to ensure that each platform brings its contribution to the overall narrative by fostering engagement and interaction, with the audience.

Compared to storytelling methods that stick to one medium for the narratives presentation format like novels or films that follow a linear storyline progression in a single formality; transmedia storytelling breaks these boundaries by allowing for an expansive and interactive experience across multiple platforms without a predefined order of events or content repetition, on different media outlets. This method enables viewers to connect with the narrative in ways by deciding how much they wish to delve into it deeply. Moreover the collaboration of forms of media encourages an interactive community where enthusiasts can actively participate in and influence the storyline thus creating a dynamic relationship, between creators and audiences.

The field of transmedia storytelling continues to evolve, with preliminary observations suggesting the need for design guidelines to assist in the creation of cross-media works (Dena, 2006). These developments highlight the growing importance of transmedia storytelling in various sectors, including entertainment, education, and public relations. Creating a transmedia series involves various essential components; an engaging and vast story world that can adapt to different storytelling mediums seamlessly; strategic choices in where to showcase the content; and active involvement from the audience to keep them invested in the narratives being told across platforms. The story world needs to be intricate flexible enough to accommodate diverse narratives in different media formats while maintaining a connected experience for the audience. Strategic platform selection ensures that each medium complements the story effectively by offering unique content tailored to its specific strengths—like using comics for backstory details or video games for interactive elements and social media for instant engagement, with fans. As in Marvel Universe, one core story is introduced by a comic book. We can see the same story's different sides in movies. Then they produce TV series to connect some elements. We can explore the universe by going specific theme parks and engaging with the interactive content. Engaging the audience effectively is key because it changes viewers into participants by involving them in fan groups, user generated content and interactive elements. This approach enables a transmedia series to craft an engaging narrative that grips and sustains a worldwide viewership.

In their study Nguyen, Sulistiawan and Ajadari investigate how transmedia storytelling can help reduce risk by fostering consumer involvement through media outlets. They use the example of the movie Mat Biec and its accompanying novel to illustrate how interacting with content, across different platforms can shape consumer buying choices and decrease financial insecurities(2022). It is clearly seen that transmedia storytelling not only offers an immersive experience for viewers, audiences, and users but also makes it easier for companies to create content that maintains strong audience engagement rates.

To truly understand transmedia storytelling principles well requires delving into the practices of transmedia in Taiwan initially and then diving deeper into examining particular case studies, like the Pili glove puppetry.

Transmedia Storytelling in Taiwan

Numerous scholarly books such as *Interactive Narratives and Transmedia Storytelling* by Kelly McErlean, *Transmedia 2.0: How to Create an Entertainment Brand Using a Transmedial Approach to Storytelling* by Nuno Bernardo examine and showcase various practices in transmedia storytelling. These works provide in-depth analyses and insights into how transmedia techniques are implemented across different media platforms, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the field. On the side of things there has been an increasing push to delve into narratives from non-Western cultures in transmedia storytelling. This trend can be seen in pieces *The Dynamic Essence of Transmedia Storytelling: A Graphical Approach to the Journey to the West in Korea* by Barbara Wall. Yet, research in this area is still limited when compared to the other works centered on western stories. What I aim to do is to address the existing gap in research by increasing the visibility of studies related to Taiwan, particularly in the context of Asian media. By focusing on underrepresented aspects, my work seeks to enhance the understanding and scholarly attention given to Taiwan within the broader Asian region.

In the introduction part of the *Taiwan in Visual Culture and Transmedia Representations* published on *Taiwan Lit*, Laura Jo-Han Wen discusses in spite of the fact that literature and history have been foundational, it is equally important to recognize the interdisciplinary aspect of Taiwan studies and how the contemporary media landscape drives future discussions. Studying Taiwan from academic angles helps us understand its culture and history better by combining various perspectives from different fields, like cultural studies and media analysis.

The article titled "*Taiwan and Transmedia: At the Arts, Moving Stories on All Channels*" from the Frankfurt Book Fair discusses Taiwan's vibrant creative industries and how its storytellers are adept at using diverse media channels to expand narratives beyond traditional formats. The article notes that Taiwanese creators are not only innovating within the literary world but also actively participating in cross-media ventures that include films, games, and digital content. The article also underscores Taiwan's commitment to fostering a creative environment that supports transmedia projects, thus reinforcing its role as a hub for innovative storytelling in the global market.

Although some scholars of literary narratives in East Asia recognize the urgent need to establish new terminology for dynamic story worlds like The Journey, much of the research in this area continues to use the traditional categories of reception studies (Wall, 2016). In Taiwanese perspective for instance, in Porter Anderson's article, a different type of transmedia storytelling technique has been mentioned. We can interpret this term as the 'Taiwanese version of transmedia storytelling.' This approach distinctly highlights how transmedia strategies are adapted and utilized within the Taiwanese context. According to the article, when working on transmedia projects dealing with rights distribution and negotiating revenue sharing can be quite tricky at times. The OSMU (One Source, Multi Use) model is designed to give importance to the rights holder and highlight the significance of the initial creation. In contrast to transmedia practices where secondary adaptations might stray from the original source material the OSMU strategy focuses on preserving the essence of the original work while allowing for extensions and variations, in other formats (2020).

It is essential to examine TAICCA's role in fostering transmedia storytelling practices before jumping to transmedia storytelling practices in Taiwan. Established in 2019 under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture, Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA) plays a role in nurturing the development of Taiwan's creative content industry (CCI). This encompasses sectors like film and television production to emerging content creation in publishing and music as well as animation and gaming fields along with performing arts and visual arts domains too. TAICCA is actively engaged in supporting activities ranging from production to market expansion efforts along with branding initiatives, talent cultivation programs and research activities focused on industry enhancement. TAICCA explains its services in a brochure[4] at their website as funding and investment, international business, culture+ tech content& industry incubation, story and

IT development, talent cultivation and market insights. Gray Tan discusses how storytelling is seen as the form of art that has developed in parallel with human advancement, within TAICCA. When examining the OSMU model though it is apparent that this method highlights the importance of content while permitting different formats to emerge from. He mentions Wu Ming Yu's novel titled *The Magician on the Skywalk* is expected to be transformed into the big-budgeted Taiwanese TV series yet and is set to premiere next year. The novel has even been made into a book as well. This instance demonstrates how the OSMU methodology is put into practice. Following the example of The Magician on the Skywalk, there are also projects and interactive art exhibitions[5] inspired by the novel.

Transmedia storytelling finds applications across domains and disciplines; for example; Fu Jen Catholic University[6] exemplifies interdisciplinary design skills through transmedia storytelling activities overseen by Dr. Chien Wen Lin. Moreover Lin's projects, like the Stanford Design Thinking workshops focus on enhancing students' design thinking and fostering problem solving abilities that span fields. These endeavors conform to design norms and equip students to address intricate real life issues effectively.

ASOMROF is another example of transmedia storytelling practice in Taiwan, blending traditional cultural narratives with advanced technologies to create an immersive and interactive experience. Chang and the team delves into the world of Hakka mythology and traditions to envision a future where Earth embraces global unity and prosperity across different cultures while honoring the essence of Hakka heritage. The project[7] enriches viewer engagement through a blend of technologies, like AR/VR integration "emotion recognition," tech "motion capture," and dance elements. These tools are employed to craft a one of a kind and captivating journey that provides an approach, to interacting with cultural stories.

Transmedia storytelling has gained significant attention in Taiwan, with scholars exploring its implications in various contexts. Schweig (2022) delves into the intersection of narrative, gender, and cultural politics in post-authoritarian Taiwan, particularly through the lens of global

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[5] See for further detail: https://guanhaozhu.com/The-Magician-of-the-Skywalk,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG8CtOP0N94
天橋上的魔術師 | The Short Story Project
All accessed on May 5th in 2024.
[6] See for further detail: https://spark.fju.edu.tw/content/showing-world-fjcus-interdisciplinary-design-capabilities-transmedia-storytelling
Accessed on May 5th in 2024.
[7] See for further detail: https://ars.electronica.art/who-owns-the-truth/en/asomrof/
Accessed on April 20th in 2024.

pop icon Teresa Teng. This study sheds light on how transmedia storytelling can be utilized to navigate complex socio-political landscapes.

Tsai Ming Liang's film "*Days*" showcases a style of transmedia storytelling in Taiwan that I got to experience firsthand at an exhibition during my time there. The event was held at the Museum of National Taipei University of Education (MoNTUE) from October 27th to January 7th. Offered a fresh take, on museum practices while redefining the art of handmade production. Tsai's artistic essence permeates the museum space as it shifts to embody his journey and artistic evolution over time; capturing the essence of his exploration and life experiences within the exhibition—a true reflection of his dedication, to artistry.

Overall, the literature on transmedia storytelling in Taiwan reflects a growing interest in exploring the dynamic essence of narratives, audience engagement, and cultural representation through a multi-platform approach. As seen in the diverse range of studies and projects discussed, Taiwan continues to be a fertile ground for innovative storytelling practices that transcend traditional boundaries and captivate audiences across different mediums.

Background on Pili Glove Puppetry

The traditional art of Pili glove puppetry in Taiwan has a history deeply intertwined with the cultural heritage of the island nation since the 17th century when it was first brought over by Chinese settlers as a form of entertainment for festive and communal events such as religious celebrations and local fairs. According to Zhao (2007, as cited in Dai, 2018), the development of Taiwanese puppet shows, which originated in mainland China, can be broadly categorized into seven distinct eras: the Fujian artist era, the northern music era, the classical drama era, the chivalric swordsman era, the Japanese occupation era, the golden light era, and the radio and television era. Throughout time periods showcased in these eras, Taiwanese puppet performances have undergone significant transformations that mirror changes, in creative expression, cultural significance and technological progress that have molded this art form across generations.

The performances includes crafted wooden puppets skillfully manipulated by puppeteers who animated these characters with intricate hand movements while narrating tales of ancient legends, folklore and ethical teachings. Over the years budaixi has transformed into a form of Taiwanese cultural expression blending traditional storytelling with regional dialect nuances, local customs and themes that mirror Taiwan's societal and political environments. Chen explains that Pili puppetry stands out due to its unique approach, diverging from the typical

reliance on motion capture technology by maintaining traditional puppeteering techniques. This approach, which emphasizes intense martial arts sequences, infuses new energy into the art form, setting Pili puppetry apart from other forms of puppetry (2020). Glove puppetry in Taiwan is deeply cherished in culture as a representation of their heritage and sense of national identity. Pili holds a place not just for its entertainment value but, as a cultural cornerstone that mirrors the rich tapestry of the islands history and societal fabric. Wu describes that puppet theatre is considered a truly traditional Taiwanese art form and has become an important cultural symbol, transcending its artistic origins to influence wider political discourse. This influence is evident in its use in recent Taiwanese election campaigns (2003, p. 100).

The transformation of Pili glove puppetry from puppet performances to contemporary media showcases its flexibility and lasting charm. During the 1980s era of increasing television viewership Pili International Multimedia seized the opportunity by transforming the traditional puppet shows, into TV series enriched with engaging narratives, detailed stage settings and special effects. As a result, Pili's expanding content creation allows its storytelling to reach a broader audience. Wei and Xue illustrate this process by providing examples of the new operational methods. Pili International Multi-media Co., Ltd. transformed the traditional glove puppetry model, moving beyond television displays to introduce it in film form in 2010. This shift aimed to engage younger audiences with traditional culture while maintaining the company's core values and operations. The 3D puppetry film Legend Password, released in February 2015, achieved significant success and impressive box-office results both domestically and internationally, opening new avenues for the local cultural industry (2015, p. 688).

The wider impact of utilizing transmedia storytelling in the preservation of heritage and global media strategies is profound indeed. While Teri Silvio highlights the uniqueness of Pili International Multimedia Company's "digital video knights-errant hand-puppetry" (shuwei wuxia budaixi) serials as a distinct Taiwanese cultural genre (p. 285), Jasmine Yu-Hsing Chen (2021) elaborates on this by explaining that Pili puppetry blends the boundaries between animate and inanimate forms, setting it apart from digital and other filmed puppetry forms such as the Muppets. The way Pili goes about it demonstrates how age old cultural customs can be rejuvenated and safeguarded using storytelling methods that resonate with present day viewers. Silvio highlights that the characters also, have become more complex, less morally black and white, more internally conflicted (2011, p.152). By spreading its story, across media channels Pili not only upholds the cultural essence of its traditional puppet performances but also boosts

its recognition and appeal worldwide. This method showcases how transmedia storytelling can act as an instrument, in safeguard cultural heritage by enabling age old customs to evolve and flourish in the modern era of technology. Furthermore Pili's achievements underscore the capacity of transmedia tactics to nurture comprehension and conversation closing cultural divides and advocating universal media methods.

Pili Glove Puppetry as a Transmedia Franchise

This article is currently in draft form. Before analysis of the Pili's transmedia network, this part will be a transition part for it.

Case Studies of Specific Transmedia Elements

This section will provide a detailed analysis of the transmedia interactions within Pili productions during the publication process.

Conclusion

As this article is a draft, the conclusion will be developed based on the findings from the analysis.

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