

Constructing "Transmedia Storytelling" Competence and Its Market Value: A Study of Film Directors Transitioning to Series and Games

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Abstract. This study investigates the construction of "transmedia storytelling" competence and its market value, focusing on film directors who transition into television series and game production. Against the backdrop of media convergence and IP-based competition, it addresses a critical gap in existing research, which seldom examines this phenomenon from the creator's perspective. Employing Henry Jenkins's worldmaking theory as a framework and utilizing case studies of the Detective Chinatown Universe, Joy of Life, Black Myth: Wukong, and Blossoms Shanghai, the analysis elucidates how directors evolve from "storytellers" into "world builders." The findings reveal that this transformation involves mastering three core competencies: constructing a unified yet open worldview, orchestrating differentiated narratives across distinct media, and adopting a producer's strategic vision for collaborative IP management. Successful navigation of this shift not only expands a director's artistic and commercial frontiers but also significantly enhances their personal brand equity and the long-term value of their intellectual properties. The study concludes with practical recommendations for directors seeking to make this transition and for the industry to foster an ecosystem conducive to sustainable, high-quality IP development.

Keywords: Transmedia storytelling, film director, world building, intellectual property (IP), media convergence.

1. Introduction

The competitive logic that defines the content industry has been radically shifted by converged media, making standalone works no more but instead building and controlling vast Intellectual Property (IP) story worlds. The veteran Chinese film directors, such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Sicheng, have used this scenery to strategize their way forward to producing television series and games. Others like Joy of Life are examples of such transitions by the shift between the abstract possibility of an idea, and actual industrial practice. As of now, the literature on transmedia storytelling in America has provided a significant and meaningful amount of research on the subject [1]. Much of this research involves work on the IP operation mechanisms; it examines the narrative strategies as applied to particular story worlds such as the "Detective Chinatown world or Joy of Life or looks at theories of transmedia adaptation as applied to a specific genre such as animated

film [2,3]. In these studies, the subject matter is mostly analyzed in terms of industry, textual, or reception viewpoints. Nevertheless, there seems to be an obvious gap in the research, analyzing the phenomenon through the perspective of the creator. In particular, there are only a limited number of works on the transformation, reconstitution, and application of the fundamental narrative competencies of film directors as they shuffle across the media boundaries into series and games. To fill this gap, this paper uses the innovating concept by Henry Jenkins that elucidates the role that movie directors are assuming as storytellers to world builders, through his concept of worldmaking [4].

This paper is devoted to the careers of film directors that shift to series and games and how the development of their careers can be tracked and experienced in terms of the way how they build the transmedia story and what their consequences are in the marketplace. It seeks to understand how the directors can adjust into a new creative identity as a storyteller to a world builder as they move across new media sectors, and how this strategic reinvention enhances their personal brand equity, as well as the monetary worth of their IPs.

This study will use case analysis and the literature review as a methodological approach, where the major case studies will be the Detective Chinatown Universe and Blossoms Shanghai. The term "transmedia storytelling" here refers to a narrative approach where a unified story or story world unfolds systematically across multiple media platforms, with each medium making a distinct and valuable contribution to the whole—a conceptual framework pioneered by media scholar Henry Jenkins.

This question is both theoretical and practical in nature. In theory, it attempts to meditate transmedia storytelling discourse and directorial authorship studies. In a practical sense, it suggests a feasible development way of content developers and provides information that is supportive toward transforming the film and television business in China. To the individual creators attempting this change it offers a theoretical framing as well as practical assurance and can reposition the director as a part of the modern media system. It defines transmedia storytelling as a dimensional extension of authorship in that of an author of a work to that of an architect of a world. This change enables directors to move their creative self-conception to more than implementing one project, and to the long-term building of a cultural IP. By extension, it promotes a shift past the short-term pleasure and pain of works towards long-term artistic perfection, long-term creative health, and a symbiotic renewal, which consolidates the creative work, commercial profit, and professional survival.

2. The development of games and series in contemporary China

2.1. Series: "upgrading quality and expanding volume" as a new arena for narrative extension

The Chinese series market strategic project to enhance quality and increase volume has generated an exciting need of long-form narrative works of cinematic production value, thus inviting film directors into the platform-based competitive arena. The increased value of the audience to cinematic quality in series greatly benefits directors who excel in the mastery of the audiovisual language. The fundamental concept of series IP building is that of telling a good story. An example of this principle is the acclaimed development of the Joy of Life IP, where the transmedia narration makes the series the leading driving force of building the world, with the source novel being used as a blueprint. The web novel was initially published as serial in the form of the web novel by the author Mao Ni and then transformed into the screen version by director Sun Hao and screenwriter Wang Juan who served as the IP developers. This adaptation was then successful, and the IP had more extensions such as audio dramas, animation adaptations and games.

In the creation of *Joy of Life*, the role of director Sun Hao is a great example of going through the critical transformation of a classic executor of linear narrative to a molar story world planner. It is an evolution that is reflected in three important areas. To begin with, he created a harmonious audiovisual style and narrative mood that freely combines the rationality and realistic logic of a political play with the mundane humor of a comedy. His heavy reliance on complex cinematic syntax, silky fluid movement of the camera, finely woven lighting, was a deliberate and effortless break with the industrialized, formulaic aesthetics of visual vocabulary used in his early work. This staging did not only increase the visual spectacle of the series, but also met the expectations of the streaming viewers, which were rather high. Second, he displayed a mastery of long-form storyline, which guaranteed depth and real-life character development as a result of a tight partnership with screenwriter Wang Juan. The evolution of the protagonist Fan Xian into a player, despite being a merely a puzzle in the game, became thoroughly plotted, with the sense of integrity and growth logic behind the character and across seasons keeping the viewers engaged, season after season. Third, he created thematic and narrative coherence in multi-platform adaptations, keeping the IP right at the core. The adaptation was among the most thought-provoking works of its genre by identifying and maintaining the distinctive quality of the novel of projecting into a historical context the modern consciousness. This industry resulted in the fact that the core values and spirit of the IP have not lost their coherence, when it was transferred to other media.

This success is firmly testified by market data. The *Joy of Life* has a total view of more than 16 billion and a Douban score of 7.9 in the first season itself [5]. The second season of it broke the platform records by reaching a peak broadcast of 2.23% on CCTV [6]. The series spawned popular cultural discussion and reached an unbelievable commercial success, which is a striking illustration of the abilities of the long tail once money is created by directors of high-quality transmedia IP development.

2.2. Games: technology-empowered narrative, cultural carriers, and market realities

The popular phenomenon experienced by the *Black Myth: Wukong* is clear evidence that video games have become a leading force in transmedia narrative as well as commercial dissemination. The game, itself, under the direction of Game Science, has become the generative core of the IP, which initiates the development of a wide ecosystem around the products, live-streaming, and cultural tourism [7].

The core members Feng Ji and Yang Qi were the embodiment of the strategic focus and the spirit of craftsman that was the foundation of this undertaking of the Game Science team. The commitment to the AAA game domain with the technologies of the Unreal Engine 5 in place allowed developing a cinematic and highly immersive world. The game thus became a de facto standard of testing the hardware performance and live-stream content and naturally created a multifaceted ecosystem of re-creations.

On the basis of this early success, IP operators have been successful in transforming the cultural influence into a concrete commercial asset through such strategic partnerships. Reportedly the sales of official licensed merchandise amounted to ¥150 million in the first 28 hours of sale [8]. After launching the game, the graphics card graphics sales have increased on JD.com by more than 200 percent, and the sales of licensed controllers have exceeded 50,000 units [8]. The true-to-life translation of the digital IP into physical encounters with consumers was also achieved through partnerships with retailers such as Miniso to open themed stores.

Moreover, the game has enjoyed an impressive narrative gravitas, which has produced a tangible attraction force on cultural tourism, and Shanxi Province is among the voluminous beneficiaries.

The cultural tourism profile of the province has also increased significantly as the game and other games use Shanxi as a setting of the story. Significant attraction sites registered considerable growth in number of visitors and revenues. Taking the example of Jincheng City, A-grade tourist attractions that are shown in the city had a total tourism worth of ¥528 million in 2024, which is much above the recently experienced growth rate. The sales of this work were recorded to have exceeded ¥50,000 a day after the formation of specific check-in points in the Iron Buddha Temple.

Overall, it can be seen that effective transmedia IPs require a team of creative individuals who are able to take a strategic, world-building point of view early in the process under discussion in *Black Myth: Wukong*. It highlights how filmmakers and producers can, through their long-term sight, use a pivotal piece to grow the technical standards and the storytelling value of an IP on a grander and grander scale in a variety of directions, to create unprecedented and enduring value.

3. Directors' opportunities, impacts, and challenges

3.1. Opportunities: dual expansion of narrative territory and commercial value

The practice of cross-media gives directors the advantage to escape the time restrictions of feature films and creates a vast expansive area to narrate their story. The examples are that the web series called the Detective Chinatown presented new characters, and thus expanded the story universe. It also extends the artistic longevity and relevance of a director's vision, as exemplified by Wong Kar-wai's foray into television with *Blossoms Shanghai*. More importantly, it allows directors to transform into an IP architect, rather than project-based creators, which multiplies the sources of commercial value. The building of the universe of detectives called Chinatown that Chen Sicheng made was a success not only because it extended the boundaries of the narrative with the introduction of new characters but because the IP influence was translated systematically into the real industry value.

A good example is the real-life shooting set of Detective Chinatown 1900 the Leling Film and Television City. It was officially launched in the 2025 Spring Festival, and within seven days, it received over 150,000 visitors and earned over 90 million through tourism revenue in a comprehensive way. This serves as a bright example of multiplier effect of the integration of film-tourism. At the same time, a close cooperation with the national bakery logo "Dad Sugar" combined online texts with offline purchase situations and actively directed the content-based traffic into direct sale.

In another creative dimension, the so-called undecidability and authorial aesthetic of Wong Kar-wai is also resonant in the era of omni media and offers a rich creative expression with commercial rebirth [9]. He built an intertextual tapestry with his first series *Blossoms Shanghai*, which would be supplemented by two short films (*Long Time No See*), which would be extensions of the story, and with his classic film *In the Mood for Love*. It was not only establishing a platform that great anticipation of the 25th-anniversary re-release of *In the Mood for Love* (which garnered a total of more than 50 million at the box office) but also foreshadowing the potential of what might seem like a simple expansion of the Wong Kar-wai story universe. The specified aesthetical richness and disjointed narrative nature enable his compositions to flourish in all sorts of platforms, such as the movie screen and its streaming services to the short video formats, successfully turning his artistic mark into an everlasting personal IP brand.

3.2. Competence development: from "storytelling" to "world-building"

In the transmedia storytelling practice, there is a drastic change in the core competency of the directors with a shift to telling a story to the aspect of building a world. According to Henry Jenkins, in an ideal transmedia storytelling, there should be a visible role of every medium in this process, making its contribution to a coherent story world in a distinct manner [4]. Such paradigm requires directors to act as at the macro-level as world-builders, a competence that is developed upon three pillars.

To start with, building a coherent and open worldview. The essence of an effective transmedia storytelling is the strong convincing story world that encourages and supports diversification [10]. It is the main task of the director to create the rules, visual and tonal vocabulary and the main emotional interests which govern this world. A case in point, the series of the detective, Chinatown by Chen Sicheng is based on a contemporary detective universe, which combines the traditional whodunit techniques with comedic taste. The presence of cohesive features such as the CRIMASTER detective ranking system, recognizable landmark settings worldwide, and a distinct hybrid aesthetic constitute the logic and visual embrace that allows a consistent development not only between films but also web series and others.

Second, knowing how to tell differentiated stories in different media. A director should realize and use the different story grammar of the medium to make harmony, rather than repetition. Although a film can be a master of tonal low-end and visual effect, a web series can go deep in the back-story of secondary characters, achieving narrative complementarity. The web series Detective Chinatown uses this principle successfully since it pays attention to other detectives in the CRIMASTER rankings, which is why the ecosystem of character, and the narrative geography is extended without replicating the central plots of the films.

Third, having a vision of the producer in the collective fashion. Transmedia narrative is a highly organized process. The director actualizes and needs to switch positions, to be the sole author of an enclosed work, into being the tactical planner and nexus of management of the whole IP. This involves superior team playing abilities and the capability to utilize writing talents, game developers, publishers and other professionals at the primary development stages. This is aimed at the consistency of the storytelling at the center as it organizes media-specific events, making it easier to engage long-term world-building and extract values at an industrial level.

3.3. Challenges: navigating media specificity and audience management

The main issue with transmedia storytelling can be traced to the technological affordances of the various media to narrative, the technical possibilities and constraints created by the technical environments of various media [1]. A film creates a closed, high intensity spectacle to be shared by everyone; a series is episodic, long form companionship; and a game essentially represents interactivity. Directors must, then, transform themselves into the single- medium auteurs into multi-media logic that multi-media architects train. They do not engage in blunt content transplantation but rather the more interesting task of translation and reconstruction of an entire IP kernel to fit into the affordances of each medium. The motivation of a character expressed by a visual metaphor in a movie may be required to be translated into a chain of interactive missions in a game or emotional subplot in a series of episodes.

This required operation of translation exponentially escalates in complexity the audience control task. Such aspects as identity positioning and empathy with the character forecast the audience loyalty (or stickiness) of a premium IP [1]. Nevertheless, the media affordances of diverging media

engender fragmented expectations of the audience. Fire readers typically participate in the activity of collaborative annotation, which is actively aimed at exploring and completing the nuances of the world of the story through play, the text produced therein, and forums on the Internet. General audiences on the other hand are mostly keen on having a high-quality, self-sustaining and fun narrative experience in whatever medium of work that they come across. In turn, that is where the director faces the greater challenge in trying to implement a finer narrative overlaying: that he or she must create a coherent, internally informed, meta-world which provides the core fans with something to explore and at the same time provides the casual consumer with a satisfying narrative in a single media artifact. It requires the director to go beyond the level of a pure creator to become a strategic product manager, a masterful communicator in the community. The depth, integrity of transmedia expansion and long-term sustainability of an IP directly depends on the degree of successful balancing act, rather than a simple visitation of short-term traffic.

4. Recommendations

In case of directors the need is to change the basic mindset to be an executor but not a strategic planner. This requires a wholesome, IP-level approach since the beginning of the project, design of stories with the conscious capacity to be extended into multiple platforms. The innovative work has to be based on extensive cultural knowledge and humanistic ideas so that to achieve the characters with reverberating personalities and strong values. Literacy acquisition in the essence and creativity of various media (series, games, etc.) should be actively pursued so that the key ideas of the IP would be communicated in the mediums in a way that would be both adequate and creative, as opposed to being copied.

To the industry in general, it must be about creating a creative ecosystem that is conducive towards long-term development. This is through a creation of effective cross-domain and cross-media collaboration systems and mechanisms in which the creative capabilities in the film, television, gaming, literature and other associated industries are effectively amalgamated. It is vital to actively develop all-purpose professionals, who are not only artistically sensible but also have practical skills of managing transmedia project. Further profoundly, exploring and adoption of valuation and incentive mechanisms that can be used to encourage investment and cultural accumulation that have long-term utility is required. These systems would aid in leading the market focus into the long-term sustainability of IPs, hence availing the requisite fertile soil to nurture original Chinese IPs with international appeal.

5. Conclusion

The development of transmedia storytelling competence is a crucial and right-time shift among the directors in the cross-media age, as it will allow them to shift their roles as tellers to those of world builders. This revolution does not just broaden the artistic and commercial horizons of individual creators, but also drives the content industry towards more structured forms of development, towards model of industrialization. Although the obstacles are immense in terms of pacing, the integration of workflows, and the control of the audience, the film directors capable of learning the multi-media logic as well as creatively combining the elements that seem utterly different are destined to become the main designers of the IP-savvy future. They are able through visionary works to create self-communicating cultural momentum and attain the deep end of building sustainable film and television IP bases.

By adopting Henry Jenkins's worldmaking theory as a framework and utilizing several case studies, the analysis of this paper elucidates how directors evolve from storytellers into world builders. The research reveals that this transformation involves mastering three core competencies: constructing a unified yet open worldview, orchestrating differentiated narratives across distinct media, and adopting a producer's strategic vision for collaborative IP management. Successful navigation of this shift not only expands a director's artistic and commercial frontiers but also significantly enhances their personal brand equity and the long-term value of their intellectual properties. The study practically recommends directors to make this transition and the industry to foster an ecosystem conducive to sustainable, high-quality IP development.

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