

Virtual Reality Interactive Narratives in Transmedia Cultural Heritage Experiences

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While tangible cultural heritage is physically bound to a space and time, intangible cultural heritage may be undressed of its meaning if separated from the tangible cultural space where it originates (Bouchenaki, 2003). Meanwhile, the need for digital accessibility increases as cultural heritage becomes inaccessible due to preservation (Trizio et al., 2019), natural (Spennemann & Graham, 2007) or human disasters (Al Azm, 2015; Ferreira, 2019), or worldwide travel limitations (Samaroudi et al., 2020). But while the digitalization of tangible cultural heritage has served its purpose of reconciling preservation and digital accessibility, it may now serve as foundation for intangible cultural heritage, as audiences seek 'the experiential aspect of cultural heritage' (Ch'ng et al., 2018, p. v).

Experiences become more immersive when they are not limited to a single medium but use multiple delivery channels to surround the viewer with content, such as in Transmedia Storytelling (Jenkins, 2006). In Cultural Heritage, Transmedia Storytelling can be seen in Augmented Reality enhanced children's book series (Holloway-Attaway & Vipsjö, 2020) while Basaraba (2020) studied its use to expand IDN systems by remixing existing cultural heritage narratives into an interactive documentary (iDoc).

Museums have long used multiple media to convey their historic information but have not kept up with developments in transmedia storytelling (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018).

Attempts to use transmedia in cultural heritage contexts have used museums as sites for technology-delivered narratives without the museum itself being considered as one of the transmedia narratives (Corallo et al., 2019). Following the UNESCO recommendation to protect and promote the role of museums (UNESCO, 2015), it is highly recommended to revolve transmedia themes around the museum's narrative (Schärer, 2015). The addition of Virtual Reality to the transmedia arsenal is in its infancy (Hergenrader, 2020) and presents opportunities for exploration. This paper presents a theoretical framework that uses a 'West-Coast' approach transmedia model (Phillips, 2012) that sees the museum as the 'mothership' (Jenkins, 2014) with the archaeological site and its environmental storytelling (Livingstone et al., 2016) as the second narrative medium and virtual reality interactive narratives as the third pillar that offers participatory involvement for the interactor.

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Authors Bio

Jonathan Barbara is a PhD candidate at Trinity College Dublin reading in the area of Virtual Reality, Interactive Narratives, and Intangible Cultural Heritage. He has an MA in Games Design from UCLAN, UK with publications in Board Game User Experience, Narrative Consistency across Transmedial Narratives, and Game Design Teaching Approaches. He is also a full-time senior lecturer at Saint Martin's Institute of Higher Education teaching Creative Computing, Game Design, Interactive Narratives, Transmedia Storytelling and WorldBuilding.

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