From Movie to Narrative Universe: Transmedia Storytelling of Zootopia Film IP

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Abstract. In the context of the ongoing development of multimedia convergence, cross-media storytelling has become an indispensable part of the film and television industry. Many film IPs have adopted the production mode of cross-media narrative, which not only significantly enhances their popularity but also greatly strengthens audience participation and loyalty. Disney's animated film Zootopia combines film IP with theme parks, spin-offs, games and other media. The IP has successfully expanded its story world through collaborative narrative across multiple media, providing a richer and more diverse story experience for the audience. Therefore, based on the concept of transmedia narrative, this paper focuses on analyzing the film IP of Crazy Animal City and its characteristics and analyses the strategy of transmedia narrative expansion of this IP in terms of content, audience, and science and technology, intending to explore the practical significance of the transmedia narrative of the film IP. This analysis contributes to understanding the use of transmedia narratives in today's film and television industry. It emphasizes the importance of exploring new narrative approaches and media integration strategies. In addition, it provides valuable insights and references for future film intellectual property.

1 Introduction

With the development of technology, the film and television industry no longer disseminates content through a single form of media, but rather multiple media are fused to promote the development of content. Today's popular film and television phenomena such as film and game interaction and media convergence are reshaping the media properties of film with the help of media technology [1]. Narrative studies have always been an important part of film studies, and the emergence of the concept of cross-media narrative has further improved the intellectual framework of the film field. Famous cultural scholar Henry Jenkins formally put forward the concept of "transmedia narrative" in his book, he believes that a story is systematically presented through multiple media platforms, in which each media provides a valuable contribution to the whole story [2]. For example, the classic film IP Harry Potter, which is narrated together through multiple media such as the film series, games and theme parks, makes the whole story more complete and convincing. On the basis of Henry Jenkins, the narratologist Ryan further proposed "transmedia world building". In her view, "world-building" can reflect the relationship between texts in transmedia narratives, i.e. a series of stories around a certain narrative element [3]. In this context, the production mode of transmedia narrative has been widely used in the field of cinema, which breaks through the simple and homogeneous production form and discovers a commercial route to create film IP. This route enhances the film industry and at the same time brings a different experience to the audience.

The world-renowned entertainment company, The Walt Disney Company, now has six theme parks located in Hong Kong, China; Shanghai, China; Los Angeles, USA; Orlando, USA; Paris, France; and Tokyo, Japan. The company has formed a complete industrial chain from the initial stage of creating and cultivating IP, to pioneering theme parks and expanding its business, to today's in-depth integration of resources and on-line and off-line fusion development. The strategy of cross-media narrative is gradually being skilfully used by the film and television industry, but there are problems that have yet to be solved. Firstly, how to appropriately integrate new narrative elements under the premise of maintaining the unity of the story, secondly, there are limitations in user participation, and in addition, some film IPs do not make full use of the potential of existing technologies. To address these issues, this paper takes the Mad Animal City IP as an example and discusses how the film IP has been successfully implemented. At the end of 2023, the world's first "Zootopia" theme park will open in Shanghai Disneyland, China. On the basis of the existing "Zootopia" IP games and spin-offs, the theme park was also successfully launched, and the fusion of multiple media narratives successfully raised the popularity of the film IP. This case provides a good example for the study of cross-media narrative of film and TV IP. Starting from the characteristics and strategies of cross-media narrative, this paper explores how this IP can provide useful practices from the perspectives of cross-media

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narrative in terms of content, audience, and technology, and provides ideas for the development of film IP in the future.

2 Transmedia storytelling characteristics of Zootopia IP

2.1 Consistency: multiple narratives that unite the story

The feature of consistency is essential in the cross-media narrative of film IP. Jenkins mentions in his work that story World-building is one of the critical elements of cross-media narratives, where each media platform explores different aspects of the story world with new perspectives and depths, thus building a richer and more three-dimensional story universe for the audience [2]. That is to say, even though the story is told in different media, all the contents should be consistent and serve the same story universe. The prima facie meaning of narrative refers to two dimensions: one is the character, and the other is the plot expansion of the character's actions [4]. Zootopia film IP then fully demonstrates its consistency in the practice of transmedia narrative based on two aspects: narrative principles and character identity.

The first is the consistency of narrative principles. The content of the stories told in each medium does not require seriality, but subversive content and contradictory logic are not allowed. Kristin Thompson mentions that regardless of the medium, the narrative is considered a series of events occurring in time and space, so a successful narrative lies in the fact that creators can weave a seemingly obvious but complex web of characters, events, time, and space web [5]. The film Zootopia establishes an animal city where all mammals coexist and where the animals' stories take place. This setting is also in the mobile game Zootopia: Your Dream Diary and the spin-off show Zootopia+, which creates a web of Zootopia stories. Although the stories' content is different in each of these mediums, the setting and narrative principles are consistent, allowing the audience to receive the content without a sense of difference.

On the other hand, the characters' identities are consistent. Character-centered transmedia film narratives emphasize the consistency and transmission of character roles' external traits and values [4]. Their personalities, hobbies, habits, and social relationships must remain constant regardless of the medium they are presented in. Moreover, the characters' stories are constantly spawned with new episodes in the cross-media expansion to refine their personalities, qualities, and social relationships. Some important characters are called "immovable objects" in the narrative universe and are carriers of intrinsic narrative meaning [6]. They can derive new parts in different media but must remain true to their original character selves. As in Zootopia: Your Dream Diary, the player takes on the role of a designer who encounters Animal Crossing characters whose identities are consistent with the "original," whether it is Judy the rabbit who dispenses justice, Nick the fox who is witty and considerate, or the slow-moving lightning sloth. The main characters and the supporting ones have maintained their identities. For example, Chief Cow, Upstream Mouse, and Weasel in the spin-off series Zootopia+ are all portrayed in the same way as they are in the film. To sum up, whether it is the narrative principle or the identity of the characters, each medium should stay faithful to the original text and make it consistent while spinning off new content.

2.2 Collaboration: content connection across different media

Based on the consistency of the content, the various narrative elements should be coherent and seamless. Different media can present other aspects of a story; these different storylines work together to build a complete cinematic universe. As Rüdiger Heinz argues, transmedia storytelling is where various media and languages participate in and contribute to the construction of transmedia narrative worlds, which, unlike adaptations from one medium to another, can realize or derive the full range of functional stories and characters through a variety of media forms [7]. As a result, these expanded new parts collaborate with the original text to contribute to the coherence of the whole story. In the Zootopia film, the story takes place in a beautiful world where all mammals coexist in harmony. Because of several missing animal cases, Judy, the rabbit police officer, and Nick, the Fox, join hands to expose this seemingly beautiful but hidden world. In Zootopia+, the second episode of the Zootopia spinoff series, "The Life of a Dame in Small Rodent Town," tells the story of the upwardly mobile mouse Judy rescued in the film, picking up where the original series left off when she was nearly struck by a donut and then captured by Judy. In the fourth episode of the spinoff, "Godfather of the Bride," some minor plot points of the main story are revealed. For example, why do the giant polar bears take orders from the mice in the film? In the film version, the size difference was used to create a laugh track, while the spinoff theatre version reveals the reason for this contrast by telling the story from the Godfather's former days. So whether it's the film version of the story, the theatre version, or the story in another medium, a thread ties them together.

One of the keys to transmedia narratives is that each medium contributes to the storytelling universe. Because transmedia is defined as a process, each platform makes a "unique contribution" to the process, resulting in "additional understandings" and new insights at the intersection of different media extensions [8]. The Zootopia film serves as a meta-text that sets the scene for the entire storytelling universe, with the animals living in a "utopian" animal city. The film focuses on the story of the protagonist, Judy, the Rabbit, who becomes a police officer and works with Nick, the Fox, to solve crimes. The mobile game Zootopia: Your Dream Diary builds on the meta-text and engages the player. Since the film's events, Zootopia has become very run down and players follow Judy as a designer to help redesign and rebuild...
the city. The medium of the game adds unique storytelling content about city building to the Zootopia film IP. In the Zootopia-themed park at Shanghai Disneyland, Heat Tracker, the only project in the park, is a story about the induction of a new police officer into the police force, with Chief Bull welcoming "players" to the job and giving them assignments. The project takes the players on a unique police experience. In short, each medium plays its role in narrating a unique storyline, which expands and derives from the meta-text, working together to complete the story universe.

2.3 Participation: Focus on the immersive experience of the audience

Participation is the most critical characteristic of cross-media narratives. Because no matter how the story content is renewed, it is the audience that is served. Even the best content is useless if the audience has no sense of participation in the process. In the transmedia narrative of film IP, the audience can actively explore the story and connect the story threads across different mediums, thus increasing their engagement and immersion. Jenkins emphasizes the importance of giving users something to do in his principles of transmedia storytelling. Ryan builds on this by analyzing the three types of interactivity - external interactivity, internal interactivity, and productive interactivity - where it is mentioned that truly effective interactivity leaves a lasting trace on the system so that other users can see the user's contribution [3]. Thus, audience participation in the narrative gives the audience a sense of engagement and further refines the story of the IP as a whole.

The Zootopia-themed park, where players take on the role of newly recruited police officers, and the emotions they generate during their experience are part of the rich storytelling, which is then passed on by players to social media to be seen by a wider audience, which in turn becomes part of the storytelling. The same can be said for the mobile game Zootopia: Your Dream Diary, where players take on the role of designers and bring their ideas to the game to create a unique view of Zootopia. This process allows audiences to experience a strong sense of engagement and to recognize themselves as the creators of the storytelling. Indeed, transmedia storytelling is a form of storytelling that relies on audience participation, and it involves the creation of a new corpus containing a large number of stories that require new conditions of user participation and analysis [9]. Fans can collaborate to create new storytelling content on social media through derivatives of their favorite IPs. Schiller, for example, focuses on the Harry Potter IP, exploring how fans have adopted Harry Potter houses and peripheral merchandise as a means of self-expression [10]. The Zootopia IP also has a huge fan community, with fans creating a CP for the film protagonists, Judy and Nick, renewing the pair's story through various social media outlets, and even restoring the homage comics, which many people view.

As you can see, fanzines are a productive phenomenon involving fan creation. However, it is essential to note that fans are highly subjective, and the content they create is sometimes not guaranteed to have content unity or narrative logic. This is because fans do not just repeat or reorganize source texts but also involve derivative writing with political or subversive implications [10]. Therefore, how to balance the relationship between fan creation and ensuring the integrity of the story universe is a point worth noting. In short, audience participation gives a new value to the story.

3 Transmedia storytelling strategies of Zootopia IP

3.1 Development of secondary lines: expanding the story world

As mentioned earlier, each medium has its own role to play in enriching the story world through unique storytelling content. Disney has several successful practices in developing subplots by combining its film IP with mediums such as video games, spin-offs, and theme parks to unearth extendable storylines that can appeal to a broader audience. The integration of film and media such as video games is the result of film and television groups maximising the market potential of their IP through cross-media strategies such as extension and synergy [11]. This new content will make the whole story universe more convincing.

The strategy of developing spin-offs has been successful in the cross-media narratives of Zootopia's IP. For example, the spin-off Zootopia+, released in 2022, has six total episodes, each in the range of eight minutes, that tell the stories of the classic supporting characters in the main series. The show bridges the main series in the timeline, telling the story of the little people and the little things that go on in the big city of Animal Crossing. In the case of the first episode, Operation Jumping Car, Judy's family is not prominently shown in the film. In contrast, viewers are introduced to Judy's loving parents and quirky sister in the show, and the story focuses on these supporting characters. Also, in the Zootopia-themed park, the story in the police station has been expanded, with players all acting as new police officers to rescue the kidnapped Shaggy Sheep. These new stories fill in the gaps in the story world and fulfil the audience's expectations. In addition to the new story content, the new characters in the developed subplots are just as important. World-building is a concept that supports multiple characters and narratives across various media, and cross-media expansions often rely on secondary characters [12]. A new character, Robin Thompson, appears in the mobile game Zootopia: Your Dream Diary, which is based on expanding Zootopia's intellectual property. Robin is an otter who is a rookie in the police department and collaborates with the players in the game in their mission to rebuild the city. The appearance of the new character not only expands the characters in the story universe, but also satisfies the freshness of the audience.
The strategy of developing subplots is an essential part of the cross-media narrative of a film IP. The same story told in different mediums always needs more novelty, and new story lines and characters are the winning formula. However, it is worth noting that the new content is balanced with the story itself; it should be based on an extension of the main film. This requires creators to grasp the relationship between innovative content and fidelity to the original film.

3.2 Enhance interaction: trigger fans' memories

Interaction is the most effective way to enhance communication between the medium and the audience, and it is also one of the essential strategies in cross-media narratives. Ryan divides interactivity in digital media into exploratory interactivity, in which users navigate the virtual world. However, their activities do not change the fate of the fictional world or make any changes to the plot, and ontological interactivity, in which the user's decisions determine the possible worlds of the plot and the story's development [13].

Zootopia IP makes efforts on both fronts. First, in exploring interactivity, Zootopia enhances its interaction with the audience by recreating film symbols to trigger fans' memories. Disney has effectively leveraged its "branded landscape" in this regard, immersing guests in imaginative worlds through carefully designed theme park content [14]. For example, the four main areas of the Zootopia theme park - Glacier Town, Sahara Square, the Rainforest Area, and Animal City Centre - considerably replicate scenes from the film. In addition, there are hidden surprises in every area of the park, such as building doors, drinking water points, and even rechargeable batteries in three sizes, which align with the habits of animals of different sizes in the film. Surprisingly, various delicacies from the film have also been brought into the real world, with exquisite paw ice creams that can make consumers feel like they are in the world of the film. For fans, the theme park is like a dream shining into reality; they can see the film's shadow in every corner and every object here. In addition to the excitement of the theme park, there are also places on the way to the park that audiences should notice, and these places also enhance their sense of interaction. For example, the escalator at the People's Square metro station in Shanghai, China, adds interest when audiences ride the escalator and wonderfully overlaps with the Zootopia characters in the wall mirrors. By doing so, the developer enhances the interaction with the audience and increases the awareness of the IP.

Secondly, regarding ontological interactivity, the audience can contribute to the story based on their ideas, thus enhancing interaction. In the game Zootopia: Your Dream Diary, different players build different cityscapes because each player has subjective ideas, which determine the direction of the story for the players is different. For example, every mission completed in the game can unlock storylines and trigger constructions chosen according to the player's preferences. In the game's interactions, players can likewise look for clues from the film. For example, the posters of the lion mayor are plastered on the city streets in the game's scenarios. Therefore, both exploration and ontological interactions can increase interaction with the audience by triggering fan memories, thus enhancing the audience's experience.

3.3 Technology blessing: enhance audience immersion

Immersive experience can only be achieved with the addition of high technology, so the high involvement of technology is also an essential strategy for cross-media narratives. The development of technology has always influenced the development of the film industry. The medium of film is a "human-centered" social practice, a collection of technological media such as film, camera, projector, screen, and computer [15]. By applying various emerging technologies, creators have led to the emergence of phenomena such as VR films, gamified films, and interactive films in cinema. One thing these films have in common is that they significantly increase the audience's immersion. From screen to screen, from viewing to experiencing, cross-media storytelling across mediums has begun to emphasize the use of technology, and Zootopia IP offers a similarly active practice in this strategy.

The Zootopia film was the first to make a technological breakthrough when it successfully designed the geometric modeling and realistic drawing of animal fur. The film used innovative technologies such as Hyperion and Nitro GPUs to restore visible animal fur and construct scenes in the rainforest region [16]. In the theme park, the giraffe exercising in the gym and the leopard police officer giving induction training to visitors are presented to the audience with life-like realism. The designers carefully crafted each mechanically animated figure's hair, skin, and movement effects to make the characters look as if they had stepped out of a film. In addition, the park uses advanced projection technology to present the characters, and the producers created animated multimedia content specifically for the attraction, allowing the animals to jump and run through the park's multi-dimensional environment. Based on this, visitors can experience great immersion from these mediums, and they go from only being able to perceive the world of the film on an audio-visual level to experiencing it directly. In conclusion, while technology is evolving, how film IPs can better integrate with technology in a cross-media storytelling perspective must be constantly recognized and practiced.

4 Conclusion

Against the background of the development of multi-media integration, the role of cross-media narrative is becoming increasingly important in cinema. Film intellectual property tells stories through different media platforms to construct a complete story universe, and this process is also inextricably linked with the audience. Taking Disney's animated film Zootopia as an example, this paper provides an in-depth analysis of the
characteristics of its cross-media narrative and discusses its cross-media narrative strategy. This analysis provides the relevance of cross-media narrative in the film industry.

Zootopia is a film that has captured the audience's attention and successfully expanded its story world by combining it with various mediums such as spin-offs, mobile games, and theme parks. According to the analysis, the cross-media narrative of Zootopia IP is characterized by unity, collaboration, and participation. Each medium collaboratively builds a complete cinematic universe through its unique contribution and taking into account the interactive participation of the audience. In terms of cross-media storytelling strategies, this paper summarises three strategies: firstly, the development of subplots to expand the story world; secondly, the enhancement of interactions to trigger fan memories; and thirdly, the addition of technology to enhance audience immersion. These cross-media strategies make the story world more prosperous and diversified, providing diverse viewing and participation experiences. By complementing each other with different media platforms, the audience's understanding of and commitment to the story world is deepened, thus enhancing the fan bonding of the film's IP. Secondly, the audience is no longer a single recipient in the process but can participate in the narrative through various forms of media, thus deepening the connection between the audience and the story at different levels. Finally, technological advances have also provided strong support for better cross-media storytelling.

Overall, this paper provides valuable insights and references for the future development of film IP and cross-media storytelling, demonstrating how cross-media narratives can be effectively applied to expand story worlds and enhance audience engagement. In the future, more innovative practices will emerge in the film industry under cross-media storytelling.

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