



Freeman, M. (2015) 'Branding consumerism: cross-media characters and story-worlds at the turn of the 20th century'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18 (6): 629-644.

Link to official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877913515868>

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.
Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-
<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

Branding consumerism: Cross-media characters and story-worlds at the turn of the twentieth century

Abstract

This article will serve to provide a historicised intervention on the configuration of what have come to be known as cross-media characters, fictional story-worlds, and indeed media branding at the turn of the twentieth century. The study will examine a number of innovative cross-media practices that emerged during the early years of twentieth-century America, practices encouraged by the slippage of commercial logos, fictional characters, and brands across platforms, which altogether occurred through the broader rise of modern advertising and the industrialisation of consumer culture. Grounded in such cultural factors as turn-of-the-century immigration, new forms of mass media – such as, most notably, newspapers, comic strips, and magazines – and consumerism and related textual activities, I will offer two examples of what can be termed respectively as cross-textual self-promotion and cross-media branding during this historical period.

Keywords

Cross-media; Mass Culture; Advertising; Branding; Cross-Promotion; Land of Oz

Introduction

Media convergence – the coming together of forms that were previously separately – has come to dominate contemporary understandings of the models through which popular culture is produced industrially. Entire media industries, along with their technologies and practices, have become increasingly aligned, branded, and networked. As Henry Jenkins (2003) writes, ‘media convergence makes the flow of content across multiple media almost inevitable.’ Convergence has been most typically contextualised as a product of the contemporary media landscape, understood in relation to technological convergences along with the horizontal integration of media conglomeration. These transitions have accelerated the production of similarly converged and branded forms of media content, in turn enabling such content to flow across the borders of media platforms more freely. Industrialised media phenomena such as transmedia, cross-media, media branding and franchise entertainment have thereby all come to occupy systems of production in and across the contemporary media landscape.

While it is certainly tempting to regard media convergence as implying revolutionary shifts in production practices, it is important to recognise the extent to which distribution models have remained bound to more traditional models of consumption. It is also important to more thoroughly historicise the means by which such industrial phenomena of cross-media have evolved across history. Of contemporary forms of cross-media, Nicoletta Iacobacci writes:

In a cross-media environment, content is repurposed, diversified and spread across multiple devices to enhance, engage and reach as many viewers as possible ... It is generally the same [content] re-edited for different screens, fragmented content disseminated on different platforms, possibly incorporating extra content and channels to extend the viewers' experience. Brand here plays a key role and needs to be always identifiable (2008).

This article will serve to provide a more historicised intervention on the configuration of what have come to be known as cross-media characters, fictional story-worlds, and indeed media branding at the turn of the twentieth century. The study will examine a number of innovative cross-media practices that emerged during the early years of twentieth-century America, practices encouraged by the slippage of commercial logos, fictional characters, and brands across platforms, which altogether occurred through the broader rise of modern advertising. Grounded in such cultural factors as turn-of-the-century immigration, new forms of mass media – such as, most notably, newspapers, comic strips, and magazines – and consumerism and other related textual activities, I will offer two interrelated examples of what can be termed respectively as cross-textual self-promotion and cross-media branding during this era.

The first and indeed principal example comprises the promotional work of author L. Frank Baum that stemmed in the immediate aftermath of the publication of his novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900. Mapping the ways in which Baum engineered the advertising of this

novel across multiple platforms – producing a range of cross-textual materials that included newspaper comic strips as well as giveaway mock newspapers – here I will trace the practice of producing cross-media characters, along with their expanding fictional story-worlds, as being enabled through broader industrial developments of advertising. Interlaced with L. Frank Baum’s application of cross-media characters and story-worlds is the second example of Richard F. Outcault and his own dispersion of Buster Brown, a character first appearing in newspapers in 1902 and one generally agreed by most historians to represent one of the earliest and most popular comic strip characters. Examining the means by which Outcault sold and exploited Buster Brown provides a useful case study for understanding what it might mean to comprehend cross-media branding at the turn of the twentieth century. Both of these examples will be contextualised according to the period’s emerging mass consumer culture, thereby revealing the cultural-industrial means through which the wholly dissimilar contexts of early twentieth-century American culture would develop an historical culture of industrial cross-media practices – a culture remaining almost entirely specific to this particular period. We are therefore concerning ourselves here with an altogether different model of cross-media than that which exists today, one born not out of convergence culture but consumer culture.

Emerald city of consumerism

In the period of the late-nineteenth century along with the first two decades of the twentieth century, America had transformed from a rural-farming economy to an urban-manufacturing one, prompting, James Norris writes, ‘a major transformation in the behaviour of American consumers’ (1990: xiii). Nowhere is this transformation better illustrated than in the form of modern advertising itself, its development triggering or at least coinciding with significant industrial-cultural transformations. Susan Mizruchi identifies that ‘[a]dvertising expenditures

rose from \$50 million just after the Civil War to over \$500 million by the century's end, and magazine editors recognized how fully implicated they were in the business end of their enterprises' (2008: 138). The concept of advertising transformed the process of consumption into entertainment – the leisure of reading becoming almost indistinguishable from the leisure of shopping, steering readers from the pages of periodicals to the stores of produce. Around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mizruchi notes, 'for the first time, advertisements, literature, and images from photographic to painterly became packaged together as mutually enhancing products' (2008: 139). Such blurring can be understood as a result of the dominance of mass consumer culture emerging during the early twentieth century. Industrialisation had initiated a mass consumer culture that evolved alongside a booming economy. As sociologist Simon Patten (223) wrote in 1907, the nation grew into an 'economy of abundance.' These decades were significant turning points in the evolution of the production and consumption of culture, itself leading to a transition from an economics of industrial production to an economics of industrialised consumption (Lacey, 2002:21).

Mizruchi, in this vein, reiterates that the idea of 'readers as consumers, together with heightened awareness of their own commercial prospects, preoccupied authors of the time in a way never before seen' (2008: 140). The mass magazines of the period, Patricia Bradley further notes, which had developed in the post-Civil War era as a platform to meet the growing need to advertise the new products of the industrial age, 'were in tune with the comfort provided by pleasing the senses. Magazine paper grew glossier, art lush and colorful, design airier' (2009: 8). Magazines, as indeed would other consumer platforms in alternate entertainments, began building upon particular techniques of modern advertising, which would encourage participation from its consumers in order to entice the consumer with artistry or visuality for the sake of steering them elsewhere, across platforms to new products.

In an 1895 column of *Munsey's Magazine*, a popular peoples' magazine, its editor noted that 'some of the cleverest writing, the most painstaking, subtle work turned out by literary men today, can be found in the advertising pages of magazines' (Munsey, 1895: 2). When conceived in the mid-eighteenth century, the magazine was in fact devised to have been very different to that of the novel, for instance, one defined more so by its interactivity. In much the same way as the Internet in the contemporary media landscape,¹ the magazines of this particular historical period were a medium wherein readers could 'come together to share, collaborate, debate' (Gardner 2012: 109). It was the birth of the active audience, an audience that, for the first time, were encouraged to participate in the culture around them – actively shaping that culture. As Jared Gardner points out, '[o]ne of the central ideas governing the early magazine ... was that the magazine should create a space whereby readers could themselves participate as writers' (2012: 103). As we shall see, the magazine's interactivity – 'how much it worked to collapse the distance between author and reader,' as Gardner (2012: 103) continues – would influence the ways through which cross-media practices developed.

According to Mark McGurl, by the first decade of the twentieth century, 'the key elements of a preoccupation with mass visual culture in modern American fiction were in place' (2011: 686). This culture of promotion, moreover, permeated far beyond the pages of magazines. Modern advertising was a language – a strikingly visual language – that was fast permeating across the borders of different platforms and alternate media, each blurring into the others in ways that begin to explain how and why the fictional characters and story-worlds of this period themselves began to permeate more freely across the borders of different platforms and alternate media. At the forefront of many of this era's most innovative practices of cross-textual self-promotion was L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, along with another thirteen published sequels. Lyman Frank Baum, born on May 15, 1856, was in many

ways a cultural entrepreneur who had been interested in innovative new forms of advertising long before he began writing books. His time as a promoter began when he was producing his own stage plays in the 1880s, writing and directing a number of modestly successful plays that toured the country. These roles exposed Baum to the importance of advertising, skills that he developed when founding an innovative trade journal about the emerging practice of visual advertising and the commercial art of department store window dressing called *The Show Window: A Journal of Practical Window Trimming for the Merchant and Professional*, beginning publication in 1897. The journal was followed with a treatise on window dressing titled *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows* in 1900, the same year, notably, as the author published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In it he described strategies for catching the attention of window-shoppers and turning them into absorbed spectators. In Baum's words:

How can a window sell goods? By placing them before the public in such a manner that the observer has a *desire for them* and enters the store to make the purchase. Once in, the customer may see *other things she wants*, and no matter how much she purchases under these conditions, the credit of the sale belongs to the *window* (1900: 146) [emphasis added].

Baum had envisioned the promotion of shopping as entertainment. In these commercial spaces of shops, Erika D. Rappaport notes, 'customers were asked to see buying not as an economic act but as a ... cultural event' (1995: 132). Just as the concept of advertising had enabled the leisure of reading magazines to become almost indistinguishable from shopping, the advent of window dressing had continued the period's rapid cultural transformation of consumption into entertainment² – 'transforming "shopping" into a "fine art"' (Rappaport, 1995: 130). 'Most impressive of all,' wrote the *Daily Chronicle* on March 15, 1909 of the rise of window dressing, 'were the lights and shadows behind the drawn curtains of the great range of windows suggesting that a wonderful play was being arranged' (21). Another *Daily*

Chronicle reporter, this time writing on March 16, made the connection even more explicit, describing the window-gazing crowd as ‘spectators of a tableau in some drama of fashion,’ with each window ‘a painted background ... depicting a scene’ (14). As the shop window contributed to ‘a new visual landscape in which the street had been turned into a theatre and the crowd had become an audience of a dramatic fashion show,’ a growingly synchronised sense of promotional visual style across a multitude of consumer platforms and entertainments had thus steadily transpired (Rappaport, 1995: 134). As such, as the language of visual advertising began to permeate through American consumer culture, this visual language of the ‘illusion window’ had materialised in different forms across different entertainments – transforming multiple aspects of American culture into spaces of promotional or even cross-promotional ‘screens.’ As Bradley notes (2009: 50), for the onlooker, ‘many of life’s decisions could be based on information gained from simply looking.’ As Rappaport continues, ‘along with being asked to buy commodities, shoppers were requested to travel to the city, to different stores owned by the same company’ in much the same way that audiences are today encouraged to experience cross-media consumption (1995: 136). It is therefore crucial to pinpoint this particular era of American cultural history as the industrial beginnings of a number of cross-media practices that blossomed amid shifts toward industrialised mass culture and its commercial prominence of mass visual advertising.

Buster is coming

By the time *The Wizard of Oz* Broadway show had been released in mid-1902, the turn of the twentieth century had witnessed the U.S. economy grow substantially, leading to broader cultural changes across the country. All entertainment industries were affected by this rise in the visual advertising agendas of mass culture that had already taken hold of the period’s

novels and magazine outlets. There is the sense that the histories of cultural developments such as modern advertising, the industrialisation of entertainments, and indeed mass culture itself, are all intertwined together as part of a history of industrialised culture. After all, before the mid-nineteenth century, few forms of mass communication existed, at least forms that provided all parts of the nation with shared information. Yet media at the turn of the century was a rising business in America. The jobs created by growing industries such as retail, oil, and railroads attracted millions of new immigrants. With the population rising from approximately 50 million to 91 million between 1890 and 1910, what was needed, Mizruchi notes, ‘were techniques of persuasion that get all these people to buy’ – techniques of cross-promotion not wholly dissimilar in concept to the cultural practice of window dressing, which had similarly strived to increase commercial breadth through the use of artistry and visuality (2008: 143). Stories that could encourage the continued purchasing of additional newspapers thus became the most important, and as industrialisation and mass production continued to rise, strategies of cross-promotion soon became the priority of these national newspaper and magazine chains, which were well-situated to accommodate a mass audience.

Indeed, whilst a number of American newspapers preached assimilation into middle-class values, print was the first medium to reach a national audience that mostly transcended social divides. Within these complexly overlapping and segregated demographics, after all, was the American newspaper industry, standing directly between the polarities of the upper-middle-class legitimate theatre and the lower class of the movies and vaudeville – feeding both ends of the social spectrum simultaneously. The newspaper thereby served as a kind of cultural mediator between the upper and lower end of society, inviting a mass American readership to emerge as a direct result. For the newspapers, it was ‘assumed that there would be no conflict between the views of the mass of the people, once the people were properly informed and

proselytized in print' (Parsley 2001: 34). The publishing houses recognised the potential of this unifying distribution system, exploiting the newspaper form to advertise the latest novels.

At the epicentre of this cross-promotion was the utilisation of the recently flourishing comic strip, serving as an ideal advertising platform not only because its format consistently found a sizable audience, but also because it transformed, in part, diverse demographics into a shared mass readership. It is important to historicise the cultural climate of window dressing as itself a reflection of early comic strip culture, with the latter ushering in comparable techniques of consumer-orientated visuality that similarly exploited such visuality as a means of steering consumers towards particular products. The comic strip would in many ways industrialise a significant cross-media practice for producing fictional characters and story-worlds – a form of cross-textual self-promotion, itself a practice that would infiltrate surrounding mass media.

Whereas the mid-1930s would see the industrial form of comic art evolve from that of the newspaper-imbedded comic strip to the singular commodity of the comic book, the comic strip form at the turn of the century functioned primarily as an advertising platform, attracting a diverse readership. Ian Gordon argues that comic strips had been formed at the heart of these broader cultural shifts, a period wherein advertising soared, noting that the comic strip form – published inside newspapers – meant that comic strips were themselves a commercial promotional strategy (1998: 12). In Gordon's words, 'these commercial uses came to define comic art to such a degree that comic strip characters at times seemed less storytelling devices and more ciphers, or business trademarks, that sold a range of products' (1998:12). Comics were an extension of the advertising industry; comic strip characters, as Gordon continues, further transformed 'the process of consumption – advertisement, purchase, and use – into entertainment' in much the same way as shopping had achieved (1998: 105).

Comic strips acquired mass appeal, and following the success of *The Yellow Kid* – a strip generally agreed by historians as representing the first of the popular comic strips – creator Richard F. Outcault licensed another comic strip, 1902's *Buster Brown*, to the manufacturers of a range of products. Gordon argues that only with *Buster Brown* did comics reach their full potential as advertising tools, noting that 'the importance of [its] marketing is that it was intended from the start to be licensed to other products' (1998: 43). Since the comic strip was understood at the time as that which used fictional characters as mechanisms of promotion, the American comic strip industry was in fact the first medium wherein owners were actively conceiving of intellectual property as cultural phenomena to be dispersed across platforms.

In its review of the 1905 *Buster Brown* theatre production, for example, the *New York Times* cited the character as a 'toy star,' a term evoking its cultural status as a primed merchandiser (January 22, 1905: 3). On June 4, 1904, an advert printed beneath the latest *Buster Brown* comic strip validates the cross-media construction of the character and indeed its early comic strips. Readers were asked to 'send a two-cent stamp' to the property's publishing house in exchange for 'a copy of *Buster Brown's Birthday* book' (*New York Times* January 22 1905: 3). In one sense, this cross-promotional tactic can indeed be understood in relation to the larger cultural context of the earlier analysed window dressing phenomenon – a cultural climate built upon similar cross-promotional notions of exploiting artistry as a branded promotional mechanism. In this case, the visual artistry of the *Buster Brown* comic strip served as the artistic lure – the textual equivalent of a shop window, which similarly enticed further consumption – steering its readership from the initial attraction of the character's comic strip 'window' to the continued purchase of this character's related product, the credit for the subsequent sale of *Buster Brown* books or *Buster Brown* theatre productions each

belonging, fundamentally, to the ‘window.’ In a broader sense, then, as Gordon reiterates, this technique had enabled newspaper comic strip characters such as Buster Brown to emerge as ‘the crucial link between comic strips and the development of a visual culture of consumption in America, unit[ing] entertainment and consumer goods’ (1998:53). Indeed, the character soon became linked with commodity items such as Buster Brown shoes, with the character itself facilitating its move as a commodity to promote other commodities. Be it the media text of a Buster Brown book, itself a commodity, or Buster Brown-branded products, all became increasingly devised as all-fiction advertising for the others – and it was precisely the empty signifier status of Buster Brown, as a visual comic strip character, which most prominently ascertained its move as brand across multiple products and platforms. This phenomenon can be historicised as cross-media branding, a practice emerging from the era’s modern advertising, and one that would influence other instances of cross-textual and cross-media branding practices in the further entertainments of, most notably, Baum’s Land of Oz.

Following the yellow brick road

This language of visual advertising as epitomised by Baum’s ‘illusion window,’ these cross-promotional ‘screens,’ was indeed permeating across the borders of different platforms and alternate media in ways that facilitated the cross-media production of the Oz characters and story-world. Central to this was the emergence of other aspects of visual culture, such as the poster. Maurice Talmeyr, a social commentator writing in 1896, insisted that ‘the poster is indeed the art of this age’ (216). For Marcus Verhagen (1995: 136), the cultural advent of the poster ‘revolutionized the entertainment business’ as a ‘manifestation of the emergence of mass culture ... and as a catalyst in the development of other mass cultural forms.’ The significance of the poster on turn-of-the-century cross-media practices lies in its visual

language. The poster, much like the shop window, functioned as a visually artistic ‘screen’ designed to attract the attention of consumers, steering audiences. Advertising ‘language,’ as in consistent colour branding, had emerged – a language of promotional branding that defined the construction of Baum’s Land of Oz as a story-world, with entire cornerstones of this story-world divided according to colour. Baum and his illustrator W. W. Denslow created twenty-four colour plates and one hundred two-colour illustrations for *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* novel. Colour, moreover, established the geography of the story-world: the North of Oz was called the Gillikin Country, and its colour was purple; the Munchkins in the East of Oz, meanwhile, occupied a space of blue; the Winkies in the West were yellow; the Quadlings in the South were red; and the denizens of the Emerald City were green. As Dorothy journeyed through the fairyland, the book’s colours changed, signifying her entrance into another of the land’s mystical countries. The author’s innovative use of colour was the first of Baum’s many strategies for forming his Oz works as cross-textual – if not yet cross-medial – works. Each region of Oz, that is, had been branded in line with the strategies of advertising. According to Anne M. Cronin (2010: 55), advertising campaigns of this era incorporated consistent colour schemes, which provided for consistent branding. The application of consistently selected colours to a product had by this time become understood by advertisers as a means of branding this product across platforms. Such devices of brand-building, in this case, at least, were thus components of the exact same devices exploited by Baum as world-building.

Following the publication of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, indeed, correspondence between Baum and his publisher reveals the author’s discontent with the way in which his novel had been promoted. However, following the bankruptcy of the George M. Hill Company and the establishment of Reilly & Britton in 1904, Baum had allied himself with a new publisher that would thoroughly apply the period’s rising shift towards mass consumption and cross-media

branding. Inspired by the comic strip industry's effectiveness at promoting characters across media, Baum and his publishers exploited this phenomenon themselves when it came to promoting *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, the first of Baum's Oz sequels, published on July 5, 1904. Outcault's strategy of exploiting a fictional character as cross-platform promotional reinforcement can be traced through Baum's dispersal of his Oz characters and story-world. This latter example will provide a means of documenting a further cross-media activity during this historical period, one that can be termed here as cross-textual self-promotion.

The result, then, was a series of twenty-six comic strip pages written by Baum and syndicated by the Philadelphia North American to the Sunday comic strip sections of newspapers across the country. The series, titled *Queer Visitors from the Marvelous Land of Oz*, ran weekly from August 28, 1904 to February 26, 1905. The narrative events chronicled in the *Queer Visitors* comic strips began shortly after the end of *The Marvelous Land of Oz* novel, simultaneously advertising this novel whilst also forming a narrative bridge between this book and the earlier published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The character of Ozma, for example, having been announced the new ruler of the Land of Oz during the denouement of the second novel, performs her first act of diplomacy in the comics – authorising the visit of Oz characters including the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Woggle-Bug to the United States of America where the adventures of the comic strip series took place. A flying contraption known as the Gump had been taken apart during the end of the second book but was reassembled in the comic series to provide transportation to the USA. From their initial landing point in Missouri, the Oz characters travelled to the Kansas farm where the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman are reunited with Dorothy for the first time since the original novel – extending the story of the protagonists across different media. New narrative information was provided to those who followed the Oz adventures across such media. In

‘How the Saw-Horse Saved Dorothy’s Life,’ for example, published on October 9, 1904, the once weathered Kansas farm of Dorothy’s home was here revealed to be more prosperous. Readers of the comic learnt about a mortgage taken out by Uncle Henry in order to rebuild the farm following its earlier destruction at the beginning of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

Indeed, the *Queer Visitors* comic strip was notable for re-establishing particular characters. Whilst *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, the second novel, had replaced primary protagonists such as Dorothy with new characters, the subsequent comic strip returned to the first novel’s more famous protagonists. This shift can be understood in relation to the comic strip form itself and its earlier discussed industrial construction as part of a broader cross-promotional consumer culture. Ian Gordon points out that it was assumed inside the comic industry itself that the ‘development of popular characters, rather than the graphic form *per se*, accounted for a comic strips’ success’ (1998: 14). Whilst the second Oz novel had focused on an entirely new set of protagonists, the comic strips’ institutional tendency to prioritise recurring characters as successful advertising mechanisms – their status as visual signifiers facilitating their move as brands across products and platforms – had influenced Baum to return to the story’s more familiar faces of Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman as an advertising strategy. Earlier outlined industrial practices of cross-media branding and product tie-ins that had been exploited through the commercialisation of comic strip characters, such as the case of Buster Brown – itself part of broader cross-promotional strategy of consumer culture – had thus been developed here by Baum into practices of cross-textual self-promotion. In utilising his story’s most well-known fictional characters as promotional reinforcement for the sales of his Oz books, braiding all iterations of the Oz story-world together through the presence of particular characters, Baum’s *Queer Visitors* comic strip facilitating both its characters and its story-world as components of a Land of Oz brand that carried across multiple media platforms.

This cross-textual self-promotion had evidently worked, with *The Marvelous Land of Oz* becoming one of the five most in-demand novels according to a report published on October 15, 1904 in the *New York Times* (92). However, this emerging cross-media practice bled far beyond the form of comic strips, permeating into the outer pages of the newspapers that published these comics. *Queer Visitors* may itself have been devised as a promotion for *The Marvelous Land of Oz* novel – advertising Baum’s sequel through the cross-media branding afforded through recurring comic strip characters – but the comic strip served also as cross-platform promotional reinforcement for an even larger advertising scheme, one that further reflected the slippage of fictional characters and brands across platforms that had developed as a result of the broader industrial rise of modern advertising. Beginning on August 18, 1904, newspapers such as the *Philadelphia North American* and the *Chicago Record-Herald* published mock news stories inside their publications that foreshadowed the narrative events of the comic strips, including featuring announcements declaring that an unidentified flying object was approaching Earth, which in the first edition of the comic strip was revealed to have been the Gump transporting the characters from the Land of Oz. These characters – illustrated as they were as visual signifiers that moved across platforms as parts of a visual language of advertising, permeating throughout and across mass consumer culture – became synonymous in this context with competitions interwoven into the fabric of the comic strip adventures. Perhaps the most prominent example was called ‘What Did the Woggle-Bug Say?’ The first seventeen comic strips ended with this question, with a character having asked the Woggle-Bug a riddle relating to his latest adventure. Readers were invited to guess the answer to these riddles in exchange for a prize – the correct answer subsequently chosen by Baum and in turn inspiring the next chapter of the comic strip. Much publicity surrounded these competitions, with each exploiting the Woggle-Bug character as a continued means of

cross-textual self-promotion for the consumption of the Land of Oz story-world in other media – the character’s dispersion across platforms as an advertising signifier effectively steering readers towards the purchase of related Oz products and commodities in much the way same as department store windows lured customers towards particular products in-store.

Such forms of reader participation can be traced directly to the earlier discussed rise of the magazine in mass culture, which had aimed to exploit techniques of reader participation in the hope of circulating these readers across borders. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, magazine readers had been encouraged to contribute as correspondents and collaborators – ‘expected to serve as both subscribers and as potential contributors’ (Gardner, 2012: 107). The culture at the heart of this practice was in many ways a lineal ancestor of today’s participatory culture, a historical antecedent where binaries between author and reader, first began to be broken down. It was indeed a culture of what Frank Kelleter describes as ‘a close interaction between producers and consumers’ that had evolved amidst a rising consumerism of the early twentieth century, a period wherein commercial logos as well as characters and brands flowed across platforms through the permeation of a visual language of modern advertising. An array of fictional works ranging from literature in magazines to comic strips in newspapers had suddenly begun to bleed across from one platform to another – encouraging an increased participation from its mass consumer who were invited to follow works across platforms. For Kelleter, such a form of productivity should be understood as ‘a certain core feature of American popular culture at large,’ thus further highlighting the importance of re-examining the history of participatory and indeed convergence culture in relation to the historical rise of mass consumer culture (2012: 22). Indeed, just as Baum’s treatise on the art of window dressing advised that one ‘must arouse in [the] audience ... longing to possess the goods you sell’ (1890: 8) – and just as comic strips

in the early 1900s continued to encourage the same transformation of the ‘largely indifferent audience of passers-by’ into more ‘absorbed spectators’ (Baum, 1890: 8) through tactics of exploiting fictional characters as strategies of cross-media branding – we realise that industrial practices of cross-media and their acceleration of an increasingly media-crossing active audience was as much a rising characteristic of early twentieth-century consumer culture as it is a continued characteristic of early twenty-first century media convergence.

Across the rainbow

The elaborately cross-platform quality of the characters of the *Queer Visitors* comics and its competitions must be understood in this historical context as part of a broader cultural attempt to merge alternate class structures into a shared mass active readership. After all, the comic strip character had been especially effective as a promotional mechanism precisely because it transcended media borders, attracting a mass audience. The recognisable characters of the *Queer Visitors* adventures invited readers of both upper and lower classes to consume particular newspapers as part of a shared readership of mass culture – the characters’ images transcended social divides via their placement inside newspapers. In fact, the newspaper had become a dominant means of constructing fictional characters and their story-worlds as cross-media phenomena during this historical period. The broader cultural changes that had been taking place at the turn of the twentieth century – a time that had seen a dominant turn towards mass communication – inspired authors including Baum to further exploit what comic strips had already achieved as that which utilised fictional characters as mass promotional ciphers for a range of other products. The cultural correlation that had been established between newspapers and their ability to promote fictional characters to a mass

audience across a number of channels informed Baum's subsequent development of *The Ozmapolitan*, for instance – a mock promotional newspaper sent from the Land of Oz itself.

*The Ozmapolitan*³ was a publicity tool devised by Baum and Reilly & Britton – the first issue of which was released in 1904, shortly after the first publication of both *The Marvelous Land of Oz* novel and the *Queer Visitors* comic strip. The faux newspaper, written by Baum and released as a giveaway item inside select newspapers, was similarly envisioned as promotion for Baum's second Oz novel. In exploiting the newspaper form's inherent cross-promotional possibilities as well as building on the concurrent cultural climate as epitomised by window dressing, *The Ozmapolitan* incorporated advertisements for the release of the Oz books. Beyond these adverts, moreover, the newspaper was structured around the visualised exploits of the Oz characters and their interaction with the cross-media story-world. For instance, the debut issue of *The Ozmapolitan* published an interview with the Scarecrow, who discussed the circumstances of his proposed visit to the United States – a visit that was later narrated in the *Queer Visitors* comics. 'We will start,' he said, 'about the first of August and will expect to land somewhere on American soil early in September' (*The Ozmapolitan*, 1904: 1). *The Ozmapolitan* not only promoted the Oz characters' impending reunion with Dorothy, the series' central protagonist, but also revealed that it was in fact Dorothy's desire to see her old friends once again that sparked the *Queer Visitors* trip in the first place – Dorothy's letter of request having been sent to the rulers of Oz following the events of the first novel (*The Ozmapolitan*, 1904: 3). *The Ozmapolitan*, a promotional item for other media products, thus further developing a cross-media tapestry for its characters and story-world – each respective media product weaving into the others across media as part of a mass advertising strategy that crossed the borders of both media and demographic divides. Through the promotional tools of the *Queer Visitors* comic strips and *The Ozmapolitan* newspapers, Baum's Land of Oz

story-world had become the source of what Naomi Klein (2000: 44), writing in reference to contemporary entertainment conglomerates, has termed a ‘cross-promotional web’ – steering the consumer-reader across platforms to different branded products and media texts through the use of visual content, all strategically framed around the advertising potential of fictional characters, in turn producing industrialised mechanisms of a historical cross-media practice.

As has been demonstrated, then, the reading of media texts such as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* became increasingly synonymous with the purchasing of consumer products during this period on account of the industrialisation of consumption. The mechanisms of cross-media branding employed by Outcault’s dispersion of the Buster Brown character and the strategies of cross-textual self-promotion employed by Baum’s expansion of the Oz story-world would soon converge further. That is to say that whilst his strategy had been largely opportunistic rather than planned, Baum had clearly aimed to cross-promote his intellectual property, with the *Queer Visitors* comic strips leading to its further development as a cross-media tapestry – entire characters spun-off in and across other media as branded merchandise stars. The earlier cited character of the Woggle-Bug, for example, had been one of Baum’s most elaborately cross-medial constructions. Introduced first in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, the Woggle-Bug returned in the *Queer Visitors* comic strip, appearing in each of the editions. As Baum was writing the comics he was also planning the publication of *The Woggle-Bug Book*, released towards the end of the comic’s syndication run in early 1905. *The Woggle-Bug Book* was promoted to audiences as an affiliated component of the Land of Oz story-world – the book advertised in newspapers such as the *Chicago Record-Herald* (June 22 1905: 18) alongside earlier Oz novels and listed in the *Motion Picture Studio Directory and Trade Annual* of 1905 as a ‘sequel to “Wizard to Oz”’ (129). *The Woggle-Bug Book* was thereby promoted to its

readership as sharing a branded connection with the Oz books, in turn integrating itself with a number of other texts and characters as part of a platform-crossing fictional story-world.

All of this cross-media and indeed cross-promotional activity⁴ was steadily building to *The Woggle-Bug* stage play, a musical comedy extravaganza produced in the same style as 1902's *The Wizard of Oz*. *The Woggle-Bug* musical opened at the Garrick Theatre in Chicago on June 18, 1905. The production represented an example of the ways through which a fictional character such as the Woggle-Bug facilitated a commodified unification of entertainment and consumer good within the visual culture of consumption at the turn of the twentieth century. Whilst becoming linked with commodity items such as a Woggle-Bug board game – exploited as means of promoting and selling consumer products – the character also become the source of promoting and selling further textual iterations of the Woggle-Bug, each similarly commodified as parts of an Oz-branded chain of consumer transactions. This 'chain' of consuming the character extended as far as its narrative, with the premise of *The Woggle-Bug* stage play structured as a continuation of the Woggle-Bug's earlier adventures in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* novel, the *Queer Visitors* comics, and indeed *The Woggle-Bug Book* – simultaneously promoting the sales of each of these texts precisely through exploiting the character as a visual advertising signifier. It was the further embodiment of the mass consumer culture described throughout this article – the period's preoccupation with the cross-promotional lure of advertising once again feeding into the development of Baum's Oz storyworld as a cross-media brand. With each Woggle-Bug product serving as cross-textual self-promotion for a range of other texts, it was therefore the role of the consumer-audience to follow the cross-platform adventures of the branded Woggle-Bug, itself similarly interwoven into a larger cross-platform story-world – each text branching from the others as if following the forking paths of the yellow brick road. Given such elaborate cross-media

activity, we can certainly understand why a trade publication such as *Variety* was addressing the Land of Oz story-world specifically in relation to its cross-media promotional presence. In a review of *The Woggle-Bug* play published on July 18, 1905, for instance, *Variety* referred to the stage production as the ‘sister play’ of *The Wizard of Oz* (20) – a term that neatly acknowledges its entwined commercial correlation as part of the same media brand.

Moreover, it was a correlation that had been propelled on a broader scale by the class-crossing, mass-addressed readership of the comic strip and its own commercial function of promoting fictional characters as ciphers that sold a range of products – transforming the potentially class-segregated audiences of multiple Oz stories into a shared consumer. In steering the entertainment audiences of conflicting class divides across media via cross-textual self-promotion, itself a product of shifts toward a consumer-centric mass culture and the increased industrial ascendancy of branding, these historical practices of cross-media were indeed nothing if not forms of cultural mediation. The familiar, visualised image of fictional characters, carved as the faces of brands, offered advertisers and producers alike new models of cross-media production that would altogether reconcile diverse media with an array of industrially produced consumer items, transforming the differing tastes and spending habits of audiences into a larger mass consumer culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

Home again

In exploring the interlinking of advertising, consumerism, branding, fictional characters, story-worlds, and the rise of mass media, this article suggests that the practice of cross-media was born out of advertising strategies, emphasising, above all, that this phenomenon amplified concurrently alongside broader cultural shifts towards the rise of mass consumer

culture at the turn of the twentieth century. Advertising, as a concept and as an industry, was certainly not a new phenomenon in 1900. In 1758, Samuel Johnson reputedly said that ‘ads are now so numerous that they are negligently perused,’ arguing that ‘the trade of advertising is now so near to perfection that it is not easy to propose any improvement’ (cited in Williams 1980: 172). Yet advertising’s rising cultural prominence around the turn of the twentieth century, in concurrence with the interrelated rise of mass media, collided together to witness the industrial birth of particular cross-media strategies that have since come to define practices of the contemporary media conglomerate, albeit whilst operating under an altogether different contextual model. Amidst the interplay between the architecture of shop window displays and the illuminated advertising billboards that lined the city streets, an ‘institutionalised system of commercial information,’ to borrow Raymond Williams’ phrase, was born – a system of communication that extended far beyond the borders of these windows and reached the ‘screens’ of the intermingling entertainments (1980: 170).

Both the department store window and indeed the comic strip’s display of frozen moments, each captured inside a visual frame, indicated how visually defined characters and artistry could fulfil a mediating function in the face of an industrialised mass consumer culture, one which encouraged their dispersion across platforms amidst a broader industrialised slippage of commercial language, logos, and brands across platforms. As these characters endeavoured to channel the subject’s floating attention as both a reader and as a consumer, the practice of guiding a fictional character across multiple cultural forms had become both a means and a source of branding consumerism to a mass audience. Such branding of fictional characters such as Buster Brown and the adventurers from the Land of Oz ‘helped make modernity attractive,’ as Mark B. Sandberg (1995: 354) aptly concludes more broadly – ‘turning a sense of displacement into mobility,’ and turning visualised fiction into cross-promotional brand

reinforcement. Many of Outcault's Buster Brown products and Baum's Oz products served as emblems of the zone between media text and consumer product – a complex ambiguity of the period's commercial interaction between entertainment and commodities that is fundamental to comprehending the phenomenon of cross-media as a historical industrial practice.

References

- Baum, L.F. (1900) *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Chicago: George M. Hill Company.
- Baum, L.F. (1900) *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors* (Chicago: Show Window.
- Baum, L.F. (1904) *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. Chicago: Reilly & Britton.
- Baum, L.F. (1905) *The Woggle-Bug*. Typewritten manuscript. From *Copyright Office Drama Deposits 1901-1944* Microfilmed 1976, Reel number 159.
- Baum, L.F. (1905) *The Woggle-Bug Book*. Chicago: Reilly & Britton.
- Baum, L.F. (1907) *Ozma of Oz*. Chicago: Reilly & Britton.
- Borus, D.H. (2009) *Twentieth-Century Multiplicity: American Thought and Culture, 1900–1920*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bradley, P. (2009) *Making American Culture: A Social History, 1900–1920*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chicago Record-Herald* (1905) 22 June, 18.
- Cronin, A. M. (2010) *Advertising, Commercial Spaces and the Urban*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Daily Chronicle* (1909) 15 March, 21.
- Daily Chronicle* (1909) 16 March, 14.
- Friedberg, Anne. (1994) *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. (CA: University of California Press.
- Gardner, J. (2012) *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Gordon, I. (1998) *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture 1890–1945*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Hungry Tiger Press (2000) *The Newspaper of the Land of Oz*. Available at: <http://www.hungrytigerpress.com/tigertreats/ozmapolitan.shtml> (accessed 4 June 2012).
- Iacobacci, N. (2008) From crossmedia to transmedia: thoughts on the future of entertainment. *Lunch over IP*. Available at: <http://www.lunchoverip.com/2008/05/from-crossmedia.html> (accessed 21 July 2013).
- Jenkins, H. (2003) Transmedia Storytelling. *Technology Review*. Available at: <http://www.technologyreview.com/news/401760/transmedia-storytelling/> (accessed 4 February 2013).
- Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S. and Green, J. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. Available at: <http://spreadablemedia.org/> (accessed 08 September 2013).
- Kelleter, F. (2012) Toto, I Think We're in Oz Again (and Again and Again). In: Loock, K.

- and Verevis, C. (eds) *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remake/Remodel*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 19–44.
- Klein, N. (2000) *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. London: Flamingo.
- Lacey, K. (2002) Radio in the Great Depression: Promotional Culture and Propaganda. In: Hilmes, M. Loviglio, J. (eds) *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*. London: Routledge.
- Leach, W. (1993) *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Long, G. (2007) *Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics, and Production the Jim Henson Company*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- McGurl, M. (2011) The Novel, Mass Culture, Mass Media. In: Cassuto, L. (eds) *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 686–699.
- Mizruchi, S. (2008) *The Rise of Multicultural America: Economy and Print Culture 1865–1915*. (USA: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Motion Picture Studio Directory and Trade Annual* (1905), 129.
- Munsey, F. (1895) Gain by Advertising. *Munsey's Magazine*, 2 June, 2.
- New York Times* (1898) 8 July, 10.
- New York Times* (1901) 8 September, 5.
- New York Times* (1904) 15 October, 92.
- New York Times* (1905) 22 January, 3.
- Norris, J.D. (1990) *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society 1865–1920*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Parsley, J.L. (2001) *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Patten, S. (1907) *The New Basis of Civilization*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Rappaport, E.D. (1995) “A New Era of Shopping”: The Promotion of Women’s Pleasure in London’s West End, 1909–1914. In: Charney, L. and Schwartz, V.R. (eds) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 130–155.
- Sandberg, M.B. (1995) Effigy and Narrative: Looking into the Nineteenth-Century Folk Museum. In: Charney, L. and Schwartz, V.R. (eds) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Talmeyr, M. (September 1 1896). L’Age de l’affiche. In: *La Revue des deux mondes*.
- Variety* (1905) 18 July, 20.
- Verhagen, M. (1995) The Poster in Fin-de-Siècle Paris: “That Mobile and Degenerate Art.” In: Charney, L. and Schwartz, V.R. (eds) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Williams, R. (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: NLB.

Notes

¹ For further work on the historicisation of cross-media, particularly that which begins to re-interrogate the past as that which grounds and provokes the claims of the present, see, for example, William Uricchio’s ‘The History of Spreadable Media’ and Derek Johnson’s ‘A History of Transmedia Entertainment’ as part of Henry Jenkins’ Sam Ford’s, and Joshua Green’s *Spreadable Media* project: <http://spreadablemedia.org/>.

² For an examination of window dressing during the period see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (CA: University of California Press, 1994).

³ Mock promotional newspapers such as *The Ozmapolitan* were particularly common and popular during the period. Another example includes the HMS Discovery's 1901 trip to Antarctica, which similarly included many 'branded' and promoted items.

⁴ In chronological order, all of the Oz and Oz-related textual spin-off materials produced by L. Frank Baum and his publishers or affiliates between 1900 and 1907, the particular years of focus in this article, comprise of the following: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (May 17, 1900, novel); *The Wizard of Oz* (June 16, 1902 – December 31, 1904, theatre); *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (July 5, 1904, novel); *Queer Visitors from the Marvelous Land of Oz* (August 28, 1904 – February 26, 1905, newspaper comic strip); *The Ozmapolitan* (1904, mock newspaper); *The Woggle Bug Book* (January 1905, novel); *The Ozmapolitan* (1905, mock newspaper); *The Woggle-Bug* (June 18, 1905 – July 15, 1905, theatre); and *Ozma of Oz* (July 30, 1907, novel).