

SMALL CHANGE – BIG DIFFERENCE: TRACKING THE TRANSMEDIA OF RED NOSE DAY

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Abstract: This article analyses transmedia as a non-fictional social phenomenon, discussing the significance of participation, documentary, and community media. Specifically, the article conceptualises transmedia through the lens of charity politics. To do so, I use the Comic Relief charity campaign in the UK to trace how the social traditions, ways of life and sensibilities associated with Red Nose Day have evolved into emerging digital technologies to shape this charity campaign across the borders of multiple media platforms. Embracing how social specificity informs non-fictional transmedia, I position 'infotainment' as a key conceptual logic of non-fictional transmedia, showing how audiences follow the 'ethos' of Red Nose Day across multiple media.

Keywords: Transmedia Storytelling, Non-Fiction, Charity Campaigns, Documentary, Community, Participation, BBC, Red Nose Day

1 Introduction

Today's convergent media industries readily produce stories across multiple media, telling the tales of *Batman* across comics, film and television, inviting audiences to participate in the *Star Wars* universe across cinema, novels, the Web, and more. This transmedia phenomenon may be a common strategy in Hollywood's blockbuster fiction factory, tied up with ideas of digital marketing and fictional world-building, but transmedia is so much more than movie franchises. Yet while scholarship dwells on transmedia's commercial, global industry formations,¹ smaller communities and far less commercial cultures now make new and very different uses of transmedia, in some ways re-thinking transmedia by applying it to non-fictional projects as a socio-political strategy for informing and unifying local communities. There has been little attempt to track or understand such a socio-political idea of transmedia: Henry Jenkins famously theorised this phenomenon within a digital and industrial context, but what does it mean to examine transmedia from a *social* perspective?²

1 See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Cultures: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006; Carlos A. Scolari, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production,' *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 2009, 586–606; Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*, Routledge, 2011; Denise Mann, ed, *Wired TV: Laboring Over an Interactive Future*, Rutgers University Press, 2014; Matthew Freeman, 'Advertising the Yellow Brick Road: Historicizing the Industrial Emergence of Transmedia Storytelling,' *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 2014, 2362–2381.

2 Jenkins, *Convergence Cultures*, 2006.

In one sense, examining transmedia from a social perspective means thinking about it as a non-fictional engagement strategy that has ramifications in terms of people, leisure, activism, politics, and society itself. In Europe, for instance, transmedia can occupy the role of a promotion tool for independent filmmakers,³ or that of a site of construction for social reality games, or even serve as a means of political activism.⁴ The article looks at how digital media has informed the way that long-standing charity campaigns are promoted as transmedia campaigns in the UK, using Comic Relief and its popular Red Nose Day as an indicative case study.

The article begins with a discussion of what it might mean to analyse transmedia as a non-fictional phenomenon – discussing the significance of participation, documentary and community media. Specifically, this article aims to conceptualise transmedia through the lens of charity politics. To do so, I will use the Comic Relief charity campaign in the UK to trace how the social traditions, ways of life and sensibilities associated with Red Nose Day in Britain have been interlaced with and evolved into emerging digital technologies to shape and develop this charity campaign across the borders of multiple media platforms. This will offer an exploration of the relationship between non-fictional iterations of transmedia, changing digital media activism and social traditions, exploring how this contradictory intertwining of ‘tradition’ and ‘change’ has worked to develop non-fictional transmedia strategies in the UK. Embracing how social specificity informs non-fictional transmedia, then, I position the concept of ‘infotainment’ as a key conceptual logic of non-fictional transmedia, showing how audiences follow the ‘ethos’ of Red Nose Day across multiple media.

2 Conceptualising Non-Fiction Transmedia

Understanding the changing faces and functions of non-fiction engagement within our contemporary transmedia landscape first means conceptualising what it might mean for transmedia storytelling to manifest as a non-fictional or even social phenomenon. In its simplest sense, transmedia storytelling has been defined as ‘stories that unfold across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the [story]’.⁵ It is therefore ‘a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience’.⁶ In other words, transmedia storytelling has become a means and a source of exemplifying the flow of content across media, most typically in a digital and often commercial context.⁷ Or to put it another way, transmedia storytelling is ‘rather like building your Transformer and putting little rocket ships on the side’, as *Heroes* creator Tim Kring asserts.⁸ By providing audiences with more and more content, it is about appealing to those migratory audiences. Hence scholars including Alpert and Jacobs⁹ as well as Lemke¹⁰ theorise transmedia in terms of producing a ‘marketing assault’ that ‘maximises profits’ – the term ‘transmedia’ is now tied up with practices of digital marketing.

3 Indrek Ibrus, ‘What Is the Cultural Function and Value of European Transmedia Independents?’, *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 2014, 2283–2300.

4 Carlos Scolari, Paolo Bertetti and Matthew Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics and Pulp Magazines*, Palgrave Pivot, 2014.

5 Jenkins, *Convergence Cultures*, 2006, 334.

6 Henry Jenkins, ‘Transmedia 202: Further Reflections,’ *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, 1 August 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

7 Elsewhere, however, I have historicised transmedia storytelling, tracing its industrial rise to the turn of the twentieth century amidst the turn to industrialisation and related practices in modern advertising. See Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds*, Routledge, 2016.

8 David Kushner, ‘Rebel Alliance: How a Small Band of Sci-Fi Geeks is Leading Hollywood into a New Era,’ *Fast Company*, May 2008, <http://www.fastcompany.com/798975/rebel-alliance>.

9 David Alpert and Rick Jacobs, ‘Videogames and Licensing in the Hollywood Film Market,’ paper presented at the *Korea Games Conferences*, October 16, 2004.

10 Jay Lemke, ‘Critical Analysis Across Media: Games, Franchises, and the New Cultural Order,’ paper presented at the *First International Conference on Critical Discourse Analysis*, Valencia, 2004.

Importantly, however, Kerrigan and Velikovsky argue that non-fictional forms of transmedia bring ‘unique characteristics and terms to the scholarly debate on non-fiction transmedia, that is: ‘non-commercial’.¹¹ Indeed, transmedia may have much in common with the structured nature of an expanding commercial storytelling experience, but it is also characteristically epitomised by the participation of audiences. Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman posit the following formula as a way to conceptualise all participants in transmedia stories: ‘Media Industry (Canon) + Collaborative Culture (Fandom) = Transmedia Storytelling.’¹² Scolari et al. suggest that there are different levels of participation ranging from the consumer of a single media form, to the ‘prosumer’ who expands the storyworld by producing new content, which thus ‘represents the highest level of transmedia engagement.’¹³ Jenkins emphasises that the rise of new digital technologies and convergence culture have both worked to make this possible, empowering audiences by giving them the ‘right to participate’.¹⁴ For example, in a non-fictional arena, Grainge and Johnson have discussed how the **BBC’s transmedial coverage of the Olympic Games in 2012** helped the BBC to reinforce its ‘inform, educate and entertain’ mantra, since the added coverage of the sporting event available online – alongside its **non-fictional books** and **bonus historical documentaries on DVDs** – all served to enrich the ways that audiences were informed, educated and entertained about the Olympics precisely because it occurred across multiple media.¹⁵ In turn, a heightened sense of engagement across multiple media was seen to encourage more interaction from those audiences via online platforms such as social media, working to shape and re-shape how the cultural meanings of the Olympics circulate.¹⁶

Importantly, there is the sense in Grainge and Johnson’s example previously that the transmedia scaffolding of the BBC’s coverage of the Olympic Games is indeed very closely tied to conceptions of ‘information/education’ and ‘entertainment’ – as are many of the BBC’s documentary formats. Documentary is famously defined as the ‘creative treatment of actuality’¹⁷; as a form, documentary can sometimes embody a mixture of information and entertainment – or ‘infotainment’ – that Kerrigan and Velikovsky argue to be important to non-fictional transmedia.¹⁸ Daya Kishan Thussu perceives a ‘blockbusterization’ of the BBC’s documentary output, arguing that this ‘blockbuster mentality has employed formulas and sequels that guarantee a few global hits that can be marketed across different media outlets as opposed to many small projects with lower profit margins’.¹⁹ As we shall see, providing audiences with more information alongside a greater educational experience in a way that is entertaining can provide a key motivation for encouraging audiences to migrate across platforms and consume further pieces of a non-fictional transmedia project.

By way of an example, an exemplification of this form of infotainment documentary would be **Planet Earth Live**, another BBC output, which was a nature documentary broadcast in 2012. It featured real-time footage of young animals from five continents across the world. Alongside the main documentary that was broadcast on television, however – a documentary that was highly informative in tone – the BBC also produced transmedia extensions, most of which existed online. A **YouTube channel** enabled audiences to watch more entertaining clips that did not feature in the television series, as well as longer clips of the animals that deepened the educational potential. **Links on the main website** also provided more information about the animals seen on screen, such as their ancestry. All of these transmedia platforms thereby made use of an infotainment logic within the framework of digital media engagement and participation to encourage audiences to consume *Planet Earth Live* as a kind of non-linear story – or, perhaps more accurately, as a continuous daily experience – and migrate across multiple platforms. The rise of new digital platforms – including websites, mobile apps and games, e-books, e-comics, web-series, etc. all provide a new range of possibilities to invite active engagement and participation.

11 Susan Kerrigan and J. T. Velikovsky, ‘Examining Documentary Transmedia Narratives through *The Living History of Fort Scratchley Project*,’ *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2015, 14 (DOI: 10.1177/1354856514567053).

12 Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology*, 2014, 3.

13 Ibid.

14 Jenkins, *Convergence Cultures*, 2006, 23.

15 Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson, *Promotional Screen Industries*, Routledge, 2015, 88–90.

16 Ibid.

17 John Grierson, ‘The First Principles of Documentary,’ in Hardy Forsythe, ed, *Grierson on Documentary*, Faber and Faber, 1966, 147.

18 Kerrigan and Velikovsky, ‘Examining Documentary Transmedia Narratives,’ 2015.

19 Daya Kishan Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, SAGE Publications Ltd., 2008, 36.

It is these themes of active engagement and participation via documentary formats that encapsulate the purpose and form of much non-fictional transmedia right now, especially around the world. For instance, if one were to look at transmedia in Colombia, what becomes apparent is the extent to which themes of non-fiction, participation, documentary and – in particular – community have come to define the meaning of transmedia in that country. Kevin Howley defines community media in terms of tradition²⁰ and ‘access ... and public participation’.²¹ And for many Colombians right now, transmedia is not a commercial practice of promotion, fiction or digital marketing; it is not about the media-crossing adventures of *Batman* or *Star Wars*. Instead, it is a political system funded by education, state and charity sectors, and is understood as pivotal to developing social change in local communities via access and tradition; for them, transmedia is about reconstructing lost memories and rekindling a sense of Colombian community.²²

Though documentary has for many decades played a vital role in Latin America’s media ecology, independent producers and universities are indeed the key drivers in the country’s current transmedia trend. At EAFIT University, for example, transmedia projects are underway that aim to fulfill the promise of developing social change and reconstructing lost, local memories – working across government, museums, the Web, newspapers and people. For one project, transmedia is being used as a tool for gathering and articulating the emotional fallout of the people from Medellín who have been displaced from their homes. The aim is to document the citizens of Medellín, and indeed of Colombia, and show what it is like to be displaced in your own city, reconstructing an entire generation of historical memories concerning victims of internal displacement via the use of non-official stories and the representation of these stories across platforms. In other words, in Colombian culture, transmedia is not just a tool for social change – it is understood by many as a blessing born out of a long history of cultural tradition that can help Colombians to reconstruct the country after more than 50 years of armed conflict. As one of the postgraduate students enrolled at EAFIT asserts, ‘I strongly believe that transmedia in Colombia can contribute to creating processes of memory, recognition and solidarity for the victims of the Colombian armed conflict. I think that using and developing transmedia with local communities can be the clue to starting real processes of reconciliation in the country’.²³ The key, it seems, lies in the way that transmedia can enable not just the spreading of messages across multiple media, but equally the creation of a social fence around those messages, inviting participation and building a stronger community.

Again, then, it is the formula of presenting socially impactful information via an array of public entertainment formats (games, museums, web-series, etc.) that serves to educate its community and invite active engagement and a sense of participation. How, though, have these themes of participation, documentary and community media all informed the UK *charity* events like Red Nose Day as a transmedia ecology?

3 Red Nose Day

In 1985 Richard Curtis – ‘shocked by the famine he saw in Ethiopia in which a million people died, and inspired by the fundraising efforts of Band Aid – set out for Africa to see if there was anything similar he and his fellow comics could do to help’.²⁴ Since then **Comic Relief** has helped millions of people all over the world, using money raised through **Red Nose Day**, **Sport Relief** and other partnerships to help poor, underprivileged and vulnerable people both in the UK and across Africa. The campaign hinges on a biennial evening of entertainment – comedy sketches, live performances, celebrity guest, etc., known as the ‘telethon’ – broadcast on BBC One.

In effect, the aim of Red Nose Day is to use comedy to raise money and change lives, with a mission statement that seeks ‘to drive positive change through the power of entertainment.’ But its ethos lies in notions of clean-living, of fun, of joining in, of a common cause, of not taking oneself too seriously, and yet remembering that not taking oneself too

20 Kevin Howley, *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 121.

21 Kevin Howley, ed, *Understanding Community Media*, SAGE Publications, 2010, 83.

22 Matthew Freeman, “‘Real’ Transmedia: Cultures and Communities of Cross-Platform Media around the World,” *Antenna: Responses to Media and Culture*, 27 January 2016, <http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/2016/01/27/real-transmedia/>.

23 Ibid.

24 Paul Vallely, ‘Richard Curtis: Twenty-five Years Of Laughing In The Face Of Tragedy,’ *The Independent*, February 3, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/richard-curtis-twenty-five-years-of-laughing-in-the-face-of-tragedy-8478499.html>.

seriously is in the name of something quite serious – something that is social, and far bigger than the individual. As a reporter for the *Birmingham Post* once characterised, also, ‘Red nose people have big hearts and want poverty and starvation to end right now. The political problems which are often the root cause of such suffering interest them less than the thought of doing something good’.²⁵ Red Nose Day has long been an advocate of the utopic idea that doing a good deed for someone else will be ‘passed down a goodwill chain and hit the trouble spot because generosity and being good can really change the world’.²⁶ Red Nose Day promotes the message that when you smile, the world smiles with you.

How, then, do these aforementioned themes and money-donating dynamics of Red Nose Day manifest transmedially and evolve alongside the rise of emerging digital technologies? In particular, what are the parameters of how audiences participate in the Red Nose Day campaign across media – and which forms of participation are encouraged the most, and has this changed in line with new digital technologies?

4 Participation

A key point of Red Nose Day is that its audience participates rather than simply donates money. As Paul Vallely explains, ‘Just a third of the money raised comes from telethon donations. Another third comes from the sale of red noses and other merchandise. But the remainder is from activities supporters undertake in the five weeks of the run-up to Red Nose Day, which takes place every other year.’²⁷ That, Curtis believes, is what makes Comic Relief distinctive: ‘If you involve people in an activity they become more engaged with the issue’.²⁸ Of course, the very premise of charity is based on the participation of people. For a charity campaign to be successful, it has to engage people enough so that they feel persuaded to express opinions and, crucially, to be active enough to donate money or resources to a cause. And Red Nose Day’s participation has never relied on media – ‘from sponsored sweet eating and holding cake sales to fancy dress football matches and paying to dress red for the day, the fundraising possibilities are endless’.²⁹

In this sense, furthermore, the participatory parameters of Red Nose Day remain not only traditional, i.e. based on small local activity or on old media, but share important overlaps with strategies used by more commercial transmedia industry formations. Much of Red Nose Day’s brand recognition is based on merchandising (selling a red nose), which has informed fictional systems of transmedia for many years. Elsewhere, for instance, I have shown how strategies of merchandising Tarzan in the 1930s enabled the stories of Tarzan to be expanded further across media.³⁰ Jonathan Gray, too, has explored how toys can reshape a transmedia narrative, pointing to examples such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *District 9* (2009).³¹ Similarly, as host Davina McCall proclaimed of Red Nose Day, ‘we spend the week leading up to [Red Nose Day] buying every Red Nose Day piece of merchandise that we can get our hands on. We’ve got T-shirts, noses and things happening on my car. We just basically pimp our lives out to Red Nose Day and do something silly on the day itself, which is really good fun’.³²

In another sense, however, and as was hinted earlier, in the contemporary media landscape digital media has been hailed as successfully blurring the lines between producers and consumers, in turn creating a heightened participatory transmedia culture.³³ And this heightened participation has had an impact on Red Nose Day. Krystle Lampshire, a member of Comic Relief’s Digital Marketing team, discussed recently how they are now ‘developing tactics to inspire

25 ‘What A Relief That The Comedy’s Over,’ *Birmingham Post*, March 15, 1999, 33.

26 Ibid.

27 Vallely, ‘Richard Curtis,’ 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 ‘Red Nose Day Is Back,’ *South Wales Echo*, March 1, 2011, 6.

30 Matthew Freeman, ‘Author-as-Franchise-Product: Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc. and Tarzan and Historical Branded Entertainment,’ in Jose Martí-Parreño, Carla Ruiz-Mafé and Lise Scribner, eds, *Engaging Consumers through Branded Entertainment and Convergent Media*, IGI Global, 2015, 53–73.

31 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, New York University Press, 2010.

32 Justin Holman, ‘Red Nose Day Is A Big Deal,’ *The Express on Sunday*, March 9, 2013, 55.

33 Jenkins, *Convergence Cultures*, 2006.

their social media audience to take on active fundraising or increase their overall engagement with the campaign on social media'.³⁴ Part of that heightened engagement now manifests as the ability to follow particular strands of information (or particular threads of plot) from television to the Web and back again, granting audiences the choice over which aspect of the Red Nose Day telethon they follow. For example, in 2015 presenter **Dermot O'Leary danced for 24 hours** without stopping, and comedian **Mark Watson embarked on a 27-hour comedy marathon**. The way in which audiences can therefore follow ongoing narratives across multiple media is not only indicative of the way in which Jenkins' fictional model of transmedia storytelling continues to pervade multiple sites of media production, distribution and consumption in the twenty-first century, but is also reflective of what Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson discuss as 'connected viewing' – 'a multiplatform entertainment experience [that] relates to a larger trend across the media industries to integrate digital technology and socially networked communication with traditional screen media practices'.³⁵ But whereas important technological shifts towards connected viewing may have led in such cases to 'the migration of media and our attention from one screen to many', in the case of non-fictional Red Nose Day content one observes how the infotainment on offer has become increasingly long-form in ways emblematic of the constant stream of digital media.³⁶ In fact, even compared to the BBC's transmedia production surrounding *Planet Earth Live* a few years ago, content has evolved from predominantly short clips for consumption (YouTube, web links, etc.) into sites of continuous participatory engagement that both pervade daily life and reflect daily life via a focus on everyday themes such as dancing, comedy and so on. How, though, does this continuous stream of participatory infotainment infuse with documentary aesthetics when Red Nose Day continues to sprawl across multiple media?

5 Documentary

Bill Nichols argues that 'a documentary practitioner should be able to debate social issues such as the effects of pollution and the nature of sexual identity and explore technical concerns such as the authenticity of archival footage and the consequences of digital technology'.³⁷ But whereas a transmedia documentary project maintains the theoretical underpinning of the documentary form, Siobhan O'Flynn argues that, by definition, 'a transmedia documentary distributes a narrative across more than one platform, it can be participatory or not, can invite audience-generated content or not, tend to be open and devolving, though not always'.³⁸

Nevertheless, a key point to observe is that, somewhat characteristic of how UK media industries are now approaching digital platforms, transmedia does not always equate to storytelling. Elizabeth Evans discusses how 'what is most noticeable about the emerging strategies of both Channel 4 and the BBC is their clear attempt to realign the comparative status of broadcasting and digital technologies, with the digital positioned as equal to linear broadcasting'.³⁹ As Evans elaborates, here:

Transmedia strategies operate not just at the level of the text; it is also happening at the level of the *channel* or at the level of the broadcaster themselves ... There is increasingly an emphasis on constructing different story forms that may be bound together by an overarching single transmedia estate – guided by a channel or broadcaster's brand identity and, in the case of BBC, a single, coherent online space.⁴⁰

In the case of Red Nose Day, the digital estate surrounding the event seeks similarly to distribute the meanings and messages of the campaign, and to connect particular platforms with particular themes that create an overarching single

34 'Case Study: Comic Relief,' *Brandwatch*, 2015, https://www.brandwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Comic-Relief-Case-Study-2015_v7.pdf.

35 Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson, eds, *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming and Sharing Media in the Digital Age*, Routledge, 2014, 1.

36 Ibid.

37 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press, 2001, 25.

38 Siobhan O'Flynn, 'Documentary's Metamorphic Form: Webdoc, Interactive, Transmedia, Participatory and Beyond,' *Studies in Documentary Film*, 6, 2012, 144.

39 Elizabeth Evans, 'Building Digital Estates: Transmedia Television in Industry and Daily Life,' paper presented at the *ECREA TV in the Age of Transnationalisation and Transmediation Conference*, Roehampton University, June 22, 2015.

40 Ibid.

transmedia estate. In 2013, Richard Curtis argued that the key to Comic Relief's success lies in the way that audiences feel engaged towards comedy: 'Part of it may be the opposite of human sympathy. If you think a person who's asking you for money is over-earnest, deeply political and po-faced, you will probably disengage,' he says. 'But by surrounding this stuff with comedy you are saying: "Look, the people who are asking you for money are irreverent, disrespectful and foolish like you." So you are willing to have a look at what they are saying'.⁴¹ However, in the transmedia age, the **Comic Relief Facebook page** is filled with content that is either entertaining or educational, but rarely both. Characteristically, it is the former that is prioritised in the build-up to Red Nose Day. Short comedic videos, typically fronted by celebrities, including teaser clips of many of the sketches to be seen in full during the telethon, function much like commercial promos in the same way Jonathan Gray characterises as media paratexts. Gray's concept of the paratext – typified by DVDs, online teasers, trailers and promos – sits in between products and by-products, between content and promotional material.⁴² For Gray, these promotional materials for texts operate not exclusively as apparatus for selling but rather for selling *via* 'advancing and developing [the] narrative' of a text.⁴³ But in the case of non-fictional transmedia such as Red Nose Day, it is not so much a narrative as it is an *ethos* that is being advanced and developed across platforms, with the meanings of Red Nose Day (fun, clean-living, joining in, not taking oneself too seriously, etc.) not located solely within the broadcasted television event but also extended across multiple promotional forms.

Following the end of Red Nose Day and the telethon, however, it is primarily the role of social media to uphold the documentary aspects of Red Nose Day. Specifically, it is Facebook that works to strengthen the key purpose behind Comic Relief, and does so by reinforcing the sustained poverty in countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, making use of its status as a perpetual platform – one that more easily pervades audiences' lives every minute of every day – to keep the cause in the public eye long after the telethon has ended. **These appeal films** are extracted from the telethon broadcast, but stripped of the comedy trappings that would bookend them on television and re-published online with a phone number to donate clearly emphasised. More than this, the 'storytelling' of Red Nose Day across television and Facebook thus lies in the juxtaposition between entertainment and education, between comedy and poverty: Audiences are engaged every day with snippets of the former online, watch a mixture of both during the telethon, and then continue to be persuaded online with powerful messages of the latter, each characteristically fronted by a famous British celebrity in a way that continues to hint at entertainment via the entertainments for which they are known. Importantly, then, the 'story' of Red Nose Day always retains its ethos of clean-living, of fun, and of a common cause, even when it does not. That is to say that the discourse often emphasised in the documentaries about poverty in third-world countries is one of loss, focusing primarily on that which is missing from peoples' lives. We hear of absent parents, for example, of the struggle to find clean water, of the lack of laughter, or of the constant pressure to survive. In other words, it is the presence versus the absence of clean-living and fun that juxtaposes between the scenes of comedy and poverty in the overall Red Nose Day media experience.

Meanwhile, the role of the **Red Nose Day Twitter page** is partly to document the aftermath of the donations during the telethon. Twitter is used to post stories of the local communities that have benefitted from Comic Relief, with links to interviews and newspaper articles that showcase the good that is now being accomplished. In this way, at least, one might detect a clear linearity to the storytelling experience of Red Nose Day across platforms: Whereas Facebook focuses on the 'before' (the lead-up to Red Nose Day itself and the sorts of fundraising under way), and live television represents the 'present' (the main act, as it were), then Twitter showcases the 'future' of the story (telling the tales of what happened after the television event). In other words, the documentary of Red Nose Day – and to some extent various forms of non-fiction transmedia in the UK – is now about forging a balance between the spreading of thematically grouped information and the strategic organisation of that information in a way akin to storytelling. Or as Evans puts it, 'understanding transmedia in terms of UK television is as much about distribution as it is about storytelling.'⁴⁴ How, though, does this transmedia distribution work alongside aforementioned themes of community? Let's now trace how the traditions and ways of life in Britain have been interlaced with transmedia platforms to maintain the Red Nose Day community.

41 Vallely, 'Richard Curtis,' 2013.

42 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 2010.

43 Ibid., 5.

44 Evans, 'Building Digital Estates,' 2015.

6 Community

Most broadly, community media refers to ‘locally orientated media access initiatives ... dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity’.⁴⁵ Paradoxically, the Red Nose Day telethon continues to hold a status as both ‘event television’ (where audiences are enticed to watch a programme live because of its unique cultural importance and sense of rarity) and ‘tradition’ (which speaks of a sense of sameness and ritual). However, what unites both concepts of ‘event television’ and ‘tradition’ is *community* and the notion of bringing together a nation – a theme that has long remained important to the perceived value of Red Nose Day. For instance, in one sense, Comic Relief establishes a clear sense of community via its emphasis on distributing money from the Red Nose Day Community Cash fund to small communities across the country. As the *South Wales Echo* reported in 2015, the ‘Community Cash grants of £500–£1,000 are available to small organisations that are working to help local people living tough lives’.⁴⁶

But there is often a tension in the discourse of Comic Relief between its focus on the macro and the micro, between the international and the local. As Victoria Southwell, UK Grants Manager, claimed: ‘We have funded some truly fantastic work in the local area and are looking forward to seeing some new groups applying. Thanks to the hard work of these groups, money raised through Red Nose Day can get right to the heart of the local community and make a real difference where it is most needed’.⁴⁷ But during the telethon event, community is established at the national level, with the role of celebrities and comedians to prescribe a clear sense of ‘Britishness’ in its look and tone. Memorable scenes over the years, for example, include **Dawn French kissing Hugh Grant** and **Billy Connolly dancing naked around Piccadilly Circus**. Parody performances, too – typically of well-known Hollywood blockbusters like *Titanic* (1997) and *Spider-Man* (2002) – have also lent a sense of community during the telethon by drawing on the audiences’ common points of cultural reference.

When conceived of through the lens of transmedia storytelling, moreover, Red Nose Day becomes partly about continuing the extra-textual narratives of films, television programmes and their personalities beyond the confines of those films and television programmes, essentially extending those narratives onto another platform but in ways that draws attention to the comedic artifice of their construction and thus reinforces themes associated with the British sensibilities of Red Nose Day. For example, the sketches of *Little Britain* (2003–2006) continued over onto a **special DVD edition** of Comic Relief, with self-aware guest appearances from Kate Moss, Jonathan Ross and Patsy Kensit. Previous Red Nose Day telethons have even established themselves as platforms for reviving beloved British sitcoms: 2014 saw a one-off return of **Only Fools and Horses** (1981–2003) starring Sir David Jason and Nicholas Lyndhurst alongside an incongruous cameo from David Beckham, while in 2015 **Mr. Bean** (1990–1995) was brought back almost two decades after the television series ended.

Consider, too, how the story of the judges relationships seen on **Britain’s Got Talent** (2007–) were used to engage Red Nose Day viewers in 2015: ‘Simon Cowell and David Walliams have taken their bromance up another level after Simon showed off his face-painting skills to make David’s face funny for **Red Nose Day**,’ reported *South Wales Echo*.⁴⁸ ‘Author and comedian David said: “I feel absolutely beautiful. Simon’s been hard at it all evening and he’s even chosen colours that complement my eyes – I suspect this isn’t the first time Simon has picked up a makeup brush!”’.⁴⁹ If one were to think of *Britain’s Got Talent* and its judges as an ongoing story akin to an amusing soap opera, then it was the role of Red Nose Day to extend the non-fictional story of that soap opera, using this story as a way to engage audiences and point them across platforms.

Importantly, too, non-fictional narratives such as *Britain’s Got Talent* embody the ethos defined by Red Nose Day. Like Richard Curtis’ charity, Simon Cowell’s talent show aims ‘to drive positive change through the power of entertainment’,

45 Kevin Howley, *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 2.

46 ‘A Host of Famous Faces Are Made Up For Red Nose Day,’ *South Wales Echo*, January 26, 2015, 22–23.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

prioritising notions of clean-living, fun and joining in – all in the common cause of finding national talent to show to the Queen during the annual Royal Variety Performance. And, in that sense, one can argue that underpinning the maneuvering of Red Nose Day audiences across media is not necessarily the narrative of the Red Nose Day campaign itself, or the elaboration of its different fundraising skits across platforms in the way that might be theorised of fictional transmedia storytelling. Instead, the transmedia logic of Red Nose Day follows a kind of ‘transmedia ethos’ – that is to suggest that audiences are encouraged to migrate to titles and to other pieces of media that share similar underlying beliefs and values.⁵⁰ In this case, the Red Nose Day media experience continues across television, newspapers, websites and social media via other programmes that adhere to the values of life-changing spirit and British fun that have already been ascribed to Red Nose Day. And in so doing, Red Nose Day shares the same community built by the likes of *Britain’s Got Talent*, *Little Britain* and a host of similarly themed British television shows.

7 Conclusion

Since I have shown throughout this article that the characteristics, styles and formats underpinning non-fictional transmedia extend across other non-fictional media forms, such as documentary and community media, it might well be necessary to theorise a different conceptual model for examining non-fictional transmedia, rather than trying to apply its present fictional characteristics to its non-fictional counterpart. In a media landscape marked by consolidation, audience fragmentation as well as rapid technological innovation, something like Comic Relief and its popular Red Nose Day campaign typifies the role of transmedia as a non-fictional social enterprise right now. Red Nose Day invokes Britain as a long tradition of social activism, and digital platforms work not to transform tradition but to reinforce tradition by using different media platforms to convey different parts of the overall campaign ethos.

The concept of story is still applicable to non-fictional transmedia, but typically in relation only to people, such as following the entertaining activities of television presenters and charity cases across additional platforms to gain more information. Otherwise the concept of *ethos* is perhaps more useful for characterising the way audiences navigate non-fictional transmedia projects, with people following beliefs, values, themes, philosophies and meanings (rather than stories) across media. And in that sense, non-fictional transmedia emerges as a means of building continuous daily experiences around audiences; with non-fiction, after all, the story need never end. But the case of Red Nose Day suggests that non-fictional transmedia tends to manifest in some ways as a general form of media-traversing infotainment and yet in other ways as highly unique works that infuse the specific ethos of the individual project with the affordances of particular media platforms. For example, the ethos of Red Nose Day is in part about immediacy (believing that poverty should end now) – an immediacy that is reflected in the instant, active engagement of social media itself.

On the other hand, there is an argument to be made that this function of providing a space for previously side-lined voices and encouraging people to be more actively engaged with media content overlaps closely with Jenkins’ original definition of transmedia storytelling. While a term like ‘prosumer’ sounds too commercial to be used in relation to discussions of charity campaigns, I have shown how audiences actively expanded the Red Nose Day campaign by contributing to its social impact, suggesting that non-fictional transmedia – itself somewhat synonymous with the non-commercial⁵¹ – inherently represents what Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman described previously as ‘the highest level of transmedia engagement,’ perhaps even more so than with fictional iterations.⁵² But regardless of whether we understand transmedia as fictional storytelling, as digital marketing or as social activism, the notion that transmedia is really a strategy for *generating impact on the public sphere* may well be what underpins all meanings of transmedia, be it for both fiction and for non-fiction.

50 Charlotte Taylor-Ashfield, ‘#CarolCorps: Interrogating the Utopic Potential of Transmedia Storytelling for Female Superhero Fans, paper presented at *Console-ing Passions: An International Conference on Television, Video, Audio, New Media and Feminism*, University of Notre Dame, June 17, 2016.

51 Kerrigan and Velikovskiy, ‘Examining Documentary Transmedia Narratives,’ 2015.

52 Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology*, 2014, 3.

Biography

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