Proposing Transmedia Storytelling for Malaysian Film Industry: Thematic Considerations

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ABSTRACT

Media convergence is ultimately the result of the disruption in media technology, creating a new episteme that foregrounds the diverse and interlinked way a story travels across platforms. One crucial development of media convergence is transmedia. While media scholars argue that media convergence has resulted in ontological uncertainties, it ironically entrenches some recognisable functions of the traditional media. This enables traditional communication functions like storytelling to be incorporated within media convergence. Storytelling, as communication functions, has continued to challenge the spatial and temporal metaphors of messages, allowing cultural symbols to transcend traditionally held boundaries in communication. Indeed, much has been written about transmedia storytelling, less however, has linked transmedia storytelling with the Malaysian film industry. The main aim of this paper is to thematically review past studies on transmedia storytelling in order to propose the idea that transmedia storytelling can help the Malaysian film industry as it is a new form of communication that the industry needs in increasing production, creating and determining local and global consumption of Malaysian stories. The review of past studies on transmedia storytelling reveals five salient themes: 1) Transmedia and engagement; 2) Liberatory potential; 3) Hybridisation of producer and user; 4) Uniqueness of media genre, and 5) Media literacy. The themes found are used to problematise transmedia storytelling and the Malaysian Film industry; this leads to the proposal of how transmedia storytelling can help the Malaysian film industry prosper while contributing to the understanding of transmedia storytelling and its benefit for the Malaysian film industry.

Keywords: *Transmedia storytelling, Malaysian film industry, media convergence, digital technologies, themes.*

INTRODUCTION

A film is a world which organizes itself in terms of a story.
(Jean Mitry, in Lapsley and Westlake, 1996, p. 130)

Storytelling is as old as the world itself. History has recorded evidence of storytelling from cave drawings to cultural rituals; these indicate the existential needs that human beings have informing society and civilisation. Indeed, one of the earlier functions of storytelling is to impart cultural knowledge of one's society, to pass down values and symbols from one generation to another. Societal expectations, fears and taboos are central to these forms of storytelling as they

help control its members, but they are also instrumental in disseminating information about the society – as often embodied in religious rituals and even campfire stories. This echoes James W. Carey's proposition of two "alternative conceptions of communication", which are "a transmission view of communication and a ritual view of communication" (2009, p. 12). Carey further argues that while the transmission view of communication derives from the need to control, on the other hand, the ritual view of communication draws members of a society together via sacred practices. Therefore, for that reason, storytelling has been used throughout history as a communication tool that brings a community together and prepares people for their future.

The advent of communication technology further facilitates and escalates the dissemination of cultural symbols. As earlier human communication is the product of space and time metaphors that reflect the existential need for human connections, human beings are constantly pursuing inventions that facilitate such connections. Smoke signal, for example, is an early demonstration of how this space and time metaphor collides with human discovery of semiotic functions of fire. As exemplified by the primitiveness of smoke signals, any communication technology is of paramount importance in crossing the spatial and temporal boundaries that are often compounded by the biological limitations of a human. This is indeed the essence of Marshall McLuhan's contention that "The medium […] is the message", whereby "technical forms of media shape human perception"; thus, foregrounding communication technology's "ability to restructure social relations and perceptions" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 121). By this, the spatial and temporal metaphor is no longer a substitute for fear of closure in time and space. It importantly marks the blurring of the private and public spheres. In short, communication technology has opened up several possibilities for disseminating cultural symbols. This fundamentally alludes to Roland Barthes' observation that:

> To write about the narrative is also to chance writing a narrative, […], our culture is saturated in a narrative: myths, legends, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama, pantomime, painting, stained glass windows, films, news, conversation, even dispassionate exposition.
>
> (Lapsley and Westlake, 1996, p. 129)

It is crucial that in understanding how storytelling and stories can be communicated beyond the temporal and spatial limitations – a corporeal boundary -, an avenue to interpreting human's communicative use of storytelling should be explored. This reflects the main concern of this paper, how cultural symbols travel on different platforms. Therefore, one may ask, what are cultural symbols and are they transmittable from one culture to another? To answer this question, we would suggest that cultural symbols can best be understood by looking at Carl Jung's idea of the unconscious and its relations to archetypes. We believe that Jung's psychoanalysis offers an avenue for us to understand how certain symbols can travel across culture, or in short, the universality of symbols itself. Jung's idea finds its significance in interpreting dreams; in other words, how symbols reveal themselves via a dream. In his *Man and his symbol* (1964, 1988), Jung makes a clear distinction between sign and symbols in human communication, arguing that as "the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason" (1988, p. 21). This point is significant as it alludes to Jung's aesthetic linked

to epistemology and individual psychology (Lagana, 2016), which advances Carl Jung's thesis of a universal symbol. Of course, this idea also informs us of how our psyche is structured which allows us to interpret the world we live in via symbols subconsciously. Storytelling, we would argue, is formed by the need to make sense of such cultural symbols beyond the human's faculty of reason. Though often seen as culturally specific, this explains how cultural symbols carry universal resonance via archetypal images. Archetypes are templates in which such symbols can be understood, such as the hero-archetype, mother-archetype and journey-archetype. This archetype becomes a cultural symbol that expresses "eternal truth" (Lagana, 2016, p. 2). This "eternal truth" transcends time and space and is often expressed through storytelling, explaining why storytelling and stories can be communicated beyond temporal and spatial specificities. Nonetheless, this is the very premise of the transcendental character of symbols that film theorists have been suggesting to challenge.

Within cultural industries, communication technology, especially digital technology, positions storytelling in a new critical debate. For us, perhaps the point of departure of this debate is traceable in Frederic Jameson's seminal work, "The cultural logic of late capitalism", in which he questions whether or not "a new aesthetic of textuality or *ecriture*" may "imply a fundamental change or break" (stated in Nicol, 2002, p. 21). Jameson's thesis, propagating postmodernism conditions, highlights the shift in ontological dominance, destabilising the centre by constantly shifting the margin. If applied within the context of storytelling, such a shift in ontological dominance resonates well with Jenkin's conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling that:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it [sic] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html)

Jenkin's idea might be considered as a "problematic version of digital optimism" as it "enables participation and collaboration" of digital users (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 319); however, it is somewhat in line with the paradox of postmodernism, pointing out that the shift in ontological dominance subsequently results in "a unified and coordinated" narrative that would present multiple realities. It is arguably the natural germination of a story that grows to hold its own position within multiple platforms.

This is an idea akin to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of "rhizomatics", whichthat refers to a growth "without a centre" and "a model of the heterogeneous" (Mansfield, 2000, p. 143) that can help describe transmedia storytelling as "[i]ts multiplicities is part of its nature, not its by-product" (ibid). In another argument, David Hesmondhalgh posits the "importance of thinking about the cultural industries as producers of texts" (2013, p. 411), in which he argues that "[t]he cultural industries are those that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning because they make and circulate texts […] in relation toabout economic, political, social and cultural power" (ibid.). Storytelling is instinctively textual and is therefore, a carrier of such

meaning and malleable to the pattern of production and consumption purported by cultural industries. This essentially means is that each story grown out of each platform can multiply and consequently response to its own ecosystem. This debate about the lack of a centre of the narrative, particularly from the critical paradigm, would yield a new storytelling position in the transmedia context. This is exemplified by many Marvels comic franchises such as *Spiderman* and *Batman* in which "origin stories" came about after a character has already been introduced and developed in the main story.

Media convergence is ultimately the result of the disruption of media technology, creating a new episteme that foregrounds the diverse and interlinked way a story can be told. One crucial development related to media convergence is the concept of transmedia. As mentioned earlier, while media scholars argue that media convergence has resulted in ontological uncertainties, it ironically entrenches some recognizable functions of the traditional media. This enables traditional communication functions like storytelling to be incorporated within the media convergence context. Storytelling, as communication functions, has continued to challenge the spatial and temporal metaphors of messages, allowing cultural symbols to transcend traditionally held boundaries in communication. Indeed, much has been written about transmedia storytelling, less however, has linked transmedia storytelling with the Malaysian film industry. The main aim of this paper is to thematically review past studies on transmedia storytelling in order to propose the idea that transmedia storytelling can further help the Malaysian film industry and that it is a new form of communication that the industry needs to increase production and create as well as determine local and global consumption of Malaysian stories.

MALAYSIAN CINEMA IN CRISIS

Much has been written about Malay or Malaysian cinema. Scholars such as Hatta Azad Khan (1997), William van de Heide (2002) and Hassan Muthalib (2013) have written intensively on this in their book *The Malay Cinema*, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Culture*, and *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle: A Century (and a bit more) of Wayang*, respectively. These books address some of the issues prevalent during their publications. For example, Hatta Azad Khan's seminal book investigates Malaysian cinema of the 80s and 90s by placing it within the discourse of the National Cinema debate. Meanwhile, van de Heide's book examines the cultural and socio-political conditions that shaped Malaysian cinema for half a century by focusing on cross-cultural and transtextuality aspects of Malaysian cinema within the context of the cinema of Asia. Hassan Muthalib's most recent book employs a critical historical approach to elucidate the development of Malaysian cinema including the effects of digital technology on filmmaking itself. These books accomplished what they set to achieve by analyzing some Malaysian films textually and therefore, distending the struggle to locate them within national identity and cinema narrative. Their appraisals, in short, pivot around the narrative and signifiers of identity that can be both a hindrance and a catalyst for a continuous attempt to tell Malaysian stories (Jamaluddin, Hasrul & Faridah, 2014).

Conterminous with the issue of finding and telling Malaysian stories is the dearth of global resonance and success, translated as global audience reception or festival wins. Indeed, this can be attributed to the lack of sufficient film exhibition channels explored by the Malaysian film industry. For example, Van de Heide (2002, p. 25) argued almost two decades ago that "[o]ne of

the major challenges […] is the lack of familiarity with or interest in Malaysian film worldwide and even within Malaysia itself". This issue is further compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic that has entrenched the cultural-economic gap in the global business model for film exhibitions that sees cinema as a place shut down. Globally, films that are designed to be exhibited on a large screen, such as Hollywood blockbusters such as Christopher Nolan's *Tenet* (2020), John Krasinski's *A Quiet Place Part II* (2021) and Cary Joji Fukunaga's James Bond's *No Time To Die* (2021). These are examples of spectacle films that should benefit from large projection and screen and are deemed unsuitable for OTT. Therefore, this article attempts to address Malaysian cinema trepidations by proposing transmedia storytelling to mitigate the bespoke crisis.

Transmedia storytelling is wont to offer significant opportunities for the industry players. As an illustration, we propose a brief look at one popular animation, *Upin dan Ipin*. *Upin and Upin* the series is a spin-off of the company's Les' Copaque Production Sdn Bhd, first animation feature entitled *Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula/Geng*: *The Adventure Begins,* released in the cinema in 2009 to record-breaking ticket sales. While the central character of the feature film is Badrul, the story of Upin and Ipin finds its own life as a tv series. This series has its own followers and Upin and Ipin antics become the main plot motivation. So popular is this series that in 2016, the feature-length *Upin & Ipin Jeng Jeng Jeng* was released. Although this feature is about Upin and Ipin's adventure, another central character that is being introduced is a lively character named Balqis. This shows how one story can travel from one platform to another and start its own trajectory while creating opportunities for other characters to be develop and introduce to a different audience. Indeed, *Upin dan Ipin the series* has not explored other prominent characters and other platforms that can help stories organically grow such as video games and social media branding. We argue that if the Malaysian film industry embraces transmedia storytelling, more well-crafted and developed stories can be produced and told in multiple platforms that appeal to diverse audiences.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSMEDIA AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Research on transmedia storytelling has gained momentum globally due to its parallel development in communication technology. According to Hall and Pasquini (2020), the changes in communication technologies have resulted in "consumer preferences for content consumption, which increasingly favour streaming video-on-demand (SVoD)". SVoD provides platforms that make transmedia storytelling desirable. In line with this development, the meanings associated with transmedia have expanded, resulting in several conceptualisations. This section discusses several definitions of transmedia and transmedia storytelling available in past studies to illustrate its usefulness.

In terms of definition, past studies have relied on Jenkins' definition of transmedia, but with added variations. This is apparent as the term transmedia storytelling was first coined by Henry Jenkins in 2003, who defines it as "represent[ing] a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (2010, p. 944). Here, Jenkins focuses on a fiction narrative that could travel through different channels such as a novel, to television, radio, and the Internet. To be able to do this systematically, Sanchez-Martinez and Albaladejo-Ortega elaborate that Jenkins proposes the use of "different system of meaning (verbal, iconic,

audiovisual, interactive etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, videogames, theater etc." (2018, p. 53).

While variations in definitions of transmedia have been used, the combination of different systems of meaning and media become the quintessential idea of what transmedia has understood. Most of the variations are often used in the context of entertainment. However, the literature has shown that transmedia storytelling rapidly permeates the world beyond providing entertainment and has been applied in another field such as education. This paper adopts a similar idea of transmedia as proposed by Jenkins as it is flexible enough in thinking about transmedia storytelling and Malaysian cinema itself.

TRANSMEDIA AND ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is central to the invention of new media technology. It sets it apart from the traditional media that are largely non-interactive. Therefore, the new media are characterised by providing an avenue for engagement between users and the platform itself. Indeed, many past studies on transmedia storytelling reveal a body of research that focuses on its ability to prioritise engagement. Therefore, the first theme of past research on transmedia writing focuses on transmedia engagement, especially at the structural and practical levels (Edmond, 2014; Weedon & Knight, 2015; Malik, Chapain & Comunian, 2017; Brusk & Engstrom, 2020). The nature of transmedia as participatory is the most salient contention being made by past researchers in this context. Edmond (2014), for example, investigates how radio practices and radio-originated cross-media productions present a challenge to the existing current understanding of transmedia engagement. He discovers that transmedia engagement in radio-originated cross-media production allows for multi-directional storytelling rather than a "top-down", creating media participation and engagement with the audience that is more immersive. Engagement, hence, helps edify transmedia as a fertile ground for storytelling to exist or take place as it is able to feed each other.

Likewise, Weedon and Knight (2015, p. 405-406) stress that "transmedia storytelling is participatory, often soliciting creative contributions, it is user-led and engenders community". This research highlights a sense of communal belongings that helps define transmedia storytelling as rooted in plural voices. By the same token, Malik, Chapain and Comunian, (2017), in their research on the UK film industry, finds that "Community filmmaking contributes to 'diversifying the creative' by both allowing filmmakers to support the participation of communities who rarely, if ever, have a voice within mainstream cinema in what they call a more authentic way and broadening access to knowledge and skills related to film processes". A clear benefit of this for the UK film industry is that it becomes more inclusive as it allows the community to decide what, how and whose story needs to be told. Therefore, there is no denying that this level of engagement can benefit both filmmakers and the community it serves. For the UK film industry, community-driven filmmaking has also helped define what being British. At the same time, this addresses the issue of national identity. It also significantly contributes to the creative imagination of diverse communities living together in an increasingly multicultural Britain. For us, engagement as an inherent trait of transmedia storytelling answers the old age question of whose voices should be privileged in a story as germinations of stories render the question no longer valid.

Another study that cashes on transmedia ability to create engagement was done by Sanchez-Matinez and Albaladejo-Ortega (2018). Using Problem Based Learning, the study uses literary text to provide the "point of origin" that transmedia storytelling needs (2018, p. 52). They argue that while "transmedia narrative is not a new phenomenon [...] active use of media has elevated a once privileged method of storytelling [...] into highly participative user experience" (2018, p. 53). By the same token, Evans (2008) also argues that audience engagement has a lot to do with audience power to create meaning. This engagement shows nuances in how the audience interacts with different platforms or media.

Despite the fact that transmedia storytelling can be a product of multiple engagements, it is not without its own problems. For instance, a study by Brusk and Engstrom highlights common structural and practical issues. Brusk and Engstrom argue in their study that the overarching issue with regards to engagement in the transmedia environment is "challenges related to cross-media and inter-organisational collaborations", and this is especially true in the context of "dealing with rights and legal issues [...] " (2020, p. 16). Their study illuminates and foregrounds the oft-tricky issue of ownership and copyright. In many cases, the issue of ownership is solved by the acquisitions of rights, both vertical and horizontal business models that provide companies with the opportunities to determine the pattern of production, distribution and consumption of their products. Therefore, it is clear that a body of past research on transmedia storytelling pays attention to both structural and practical engagement.

LIBERATORY POTENTIAL

One important function of the new media is that it affords new space for marginalized voices to be heard. In business terms, multiple platforms are readily available and seeking new content; this reduces the monopoly of content distributions and exhibition channels as they are no longer dictated by conglomerates; thus, creating an economic environment that is more oligopoly in status. Nonetheless, according to Lindgren (2017, p. 177), while it is possible to think of the possible "unlimited democratization connected to the internet"; however, "we cannot escape hierarchies". Bearing this in mind, past studies on transmedia storytelling have revealed some degree of liberation. Indeed, conterminous with the theme of transmedia engagement, the second theme is the liberatory potential of storytelling afforded by transmediality.

Such studies are done by Pamment (2015), Hancox (2017) with Li and Prasad (2018). Pamment's research, for instance, focuses on the possibilities of using transmedia in diplomatic studies. He finds three themes, "digitization and convergence, collective intelligence and co-creation, and the role of norms and values in shaping the conditions of participation" (2015, p. 11). He concludes that transmedia platforms "do not represent a surrender or sharing of power, but rather exhibit new modalities of power drawing upon transparency, co-option and collective accountability" (2015, p. 13). This, he argues, consequently results in a more affective communication campaign. In short, these studies support the idea that transmediality allows multiple stories to be diversified and validated.

Meanwhile, Hancox (2017) explores the effect of transmedia platforms on personal narrative in social research and discovers that collaborative and personal narratives within a transmedia setting provide a unique opportunity for social researchers to reexamine their positions of authority. As a result, this allows personal narratives to gain significance in bringing

about social change. This liberatory potential afforded by transmedia is also the concern of Li and Prasad's investigation on the use of transmedia platforms among Palestinian refugees. Their study on writing graffiti among the disenfranchised Palestinians reveals that they have used transmedia to mould their political discourse by moving from the physical wall to the different media platforms in social media; this has provided new spaces "for undertaking writing as an ideological act of resistance and recognition in support of the cause" (2018, p. 15). Importantly, this makes their writing more permanent and empowering. In short, these past studies reveal the different ways in which transmedia storytelling can provide a sense of liberation to its users.

HYBRIDIZATION OF PRODUCER AND USER

Related to the theme of liberatory potential storytelling afforded transmedia, the third theme is the hybridization of the producer and the user (du Plessis, 2018; Guerrero-Pico, Masanet & Scolari, 2018) that marks the ontological shift in understanding the process, delivery and consumption of creative productions. For instance, a study done by du Plessis (2018) investigates the use of transmedia story making within the contemporary branding environment. In this case, du Plessis argues that in the context of transmedia story making and storytelling, "the practice of allowing prosumers to shape brand messages signifies an important shift in consumer empowerment while connecting on a deeper emotional level" (2018, p. 14). By the same token, the term produser is a portmanteau for "producer" and "user", foregrounding the centrality of users/audience in the transmedia ecosystem.

A study done by Guerrero-Pico, Masanet and Scolari (2018) constructs the typology of young produsers, arguing that transmedia empowers young people as it provides spaces for inspiration. Their findings point to the development of more relevant abilities and that "Some of these abilities revolve around narrative and aesthetic appreciation, but they can also include abilities related to observing and reflecting on the ideology and values promoted by corporate media products and their own contents" (2018, p. 15). These two studies exemplify that via transmedia, producer and user form hybridity and create a new form of liberatory potential that is the result of an ontological shift that changes the process, delivery and consumption of creative production.

UNIQUENESS OF MEDIA GENRE

The fourth theme is the uniqueness of each media genre within transmedia ecology (Fast & Ornebring, 2015; Brusk & Ensgtrom, 2020). Fast and Ornebring argue that "there is a need to study transmedia properties from different epochs as well as types [taking into consideration] cases that contain disjunctions and contradictions" (2015, p. 13). For them, storytelling in transmedia is influenced by the nuances in different media genres and the cultural context. This resonates well with Brusk and Engstrom's study that reveals the importance of paying attention to individual genres, arguing that "a transmedia producer needs to understand the different production cultures and logics of each medium" (2020, p. 17). These studies reveal that the uniqueness of each media genre permits different intersectional levels, while still maintaining their essential logic.

This finding is in line with Elizabeth Jane Evan's study of audience agency and transmedia drama about two decades earlier. Evans observes that "despite the moving together of televisual and gaming texts, the two formats still offer different forms of engagement and this argument is

also applicable to a player's engagement with character" (2008, p. 7). This observation highlights the nuances of different media genres that relate to how the audience interacts with transmedia stories. What Evans has observed is actually part of the definition of media convergence itself, that according to Simon Lindgren (2017, p. 207), is "an ongoing process that continually alters the relationship between existing technologies", while not changing the individual media genre itself. In short, the individual features of each media genre create a sense of familiarity that in turns helps storytelling retain its main features.

MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy offers a sense of empowerment as it allows media users to be critical of the content they are exposed to. For an active audience engagement to take place, the audience must be critically involved in the production of media content and in the context of transmedia storytelling, should possess enough ingenuity to connect the dots. Hobbs argues that media literacy constitutes both "empowerment and protectionist paradigms underlie the measurement of digital and media literacy competencies" (2018, p. 254). Therefore, media literacy becomes integral to transmedia storytelling, both as a way to empower and at the same time protect users from online negativities.

Some past studies on transmedia storytelling reveal that the fifth theme is the media literacy aspect of transmedia (Weedon & Knight, 2015; Burwell & Miller, 2016). Weedon and Knight (2015, p. 406) aver that "Transmedia storytelling and other forms of mobile audio-visual media require users to have the ability to understand meaning across multiple visual and aural literacies". Their finding is linked to the need for researchers to keep revisiting media ontology and theories. Burwell and Miller, moreover, explore the literacy practices of a hybrid digital game and video. Their studies reveal that an understanding of literacy practices contributes towards "the pedagogical potential of gaming paratexts, and take seriously the significant role of games in young people's everyday lives, learning and literacies" (2016, p. 14). Media literacy, these studies reveal, is an important aspect for transmedia storytelling to thrive.

LINKING TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND MALAYSIAN FILM INDUSTRY

Importantly, literature on transmedia storytelling reveals some salient themes, which are transmedia engagement, liberatory potentials, hybridization of producer and user, distinct media genres and media literacy. These themes reflect the significance of further research on transmedia storytelling outside of the Western hemisphere since the literature also reveals the dearth of research on transmedia storytelling in a Malaysian context. Research on Malaysian transmedia is rather somewhat limited, especially related to transmedia storytelling. For instance, Santano and Thwaites (2018) explored the use of augmented reality in transmedia storytelling in the context of culture and heritage. This research is limited to experiencing augmented reality and does not contribute directly towards transmedia storytelling in creative industry scholarship. Similarly, such limited application is also present in a study done by Perry (2020), who researches on transmedia storytelling as part of an undergraduate project, limiting her research to a classroom application. Likewise, Umar, Md Azalanshah and Runnel (2020, p. 14) focus on transmedia storytelling within the Malaysian animation industry only. By looking at how local culture is embedded in commercial products, they argue that "the strength lies in the

aspiration to insert local elements (cultures, languages, popular references, values and mannerism) in the animated content as the by-product between the private sector and government incentives and policy guidelines". These past studies only prove that there is a gap in transmedia storytelling research involving several transmedia platforms and genres in the Malaysian creative industry.

By the same token, the Malaysian film industry, for instance, has been struggling with both the quality of films and a workable business model. As an example, Herwina and Zarith Delaila (2012) argue that the Malaysian film industry needs to invest in other platforms of production to remain competitive globally. Although they did not use transmedia terms in their research, the different platforms connote the same idea. This theme is foregrounded in research done by Jamaluddin, Hasrul and Faridah (2014) that issues of quality storytelling and technology adaptations in the Malaysian film industry coalesced into problems of telling a national story. They argue further that "the idea that the quality of scriptwriting, storytelling and narrative becomes a great challenge to them (filmmakers) as it is seen from not only the filmmaker's but also the audience's perspectives" (2014, p. 42). Other scholars such as Asiah (2006), Jamaluddin (2014), and Wong, Pillai with Ong (2018) all discussed the notion of national cinema as an amorphous industry that is in constant need of renewal as the notion of cohesive national identity is continuously contested. This is emblematic of the fragmentations of identities mediated via our creative industry. This fragmentation has hamstrung the effort to provide creative products that travel globally. This constant need for renewal, as suggested by these scholars, if not implemented, will leave the Malaysian creative industry behind; this is the problem identified in this study via the review of the literature. Therefore, as this review of past studies has proven, more studies that focus on several media platforms in the Malaysian creative industry will reveal that transmedia storytelling enables the creation of a cohesive narrative that helps not only to promote the production of local contents but also local identities through its ability to engage with different stakeholders and to intersect with each other.

Past studies on transmedia storytelling in the Malaysian context are very limited in focus (Santano & Thwaites, 2018; Perry, 2020; Umar, Md Azalanshah & Runnel, 2020) that they exposed the gap that needs to be filled by more future study. The literature also points to the idea that transmedia provides different intersections in the storytelling process, and permits a cohesive one. As mentioned earlier, scholars who studied Malaysian cinema (Asiah, 2006; Jamaluddin, 2014; Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018) argue that Malaysian cinema is in constant need of renewing its narrative of national identity that is often fragmented by multi-ethnic Malaysia, which is the problem that we argue future study should be addressing via transmedia storytelling. Transmedia storytelling, in short, offers new possibilities on engagement, liberation, and hybridized platforms for Malaysian cinema to thrive.

TRANSMEDIA AND MALAYSIAN CULTURAL INDUSTRIES DIRECTION

Apart from reviewing the past studies on transmedia storytelling, the present study also points out that efforts to establish and develop platforms for Malaysian transmedia storytelling are relevant to Government Policies. This is especially related to policies and acts under the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (Communications and Multimedia Acts 1988 and Finas Act 244) and Ministry of Arts, Tourism and Culture (National Creative Industry Policy) as they focus on current policies within a transmedia creative industry ecosystem. Apart from the said policies,

the use of digital platforms creates an opportunity for the Malaysian film industry to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 8, which is, Decent Work and Economic Growth. Transmedia storytelling platforms can promote and cement more equal opportunities as they rely on multiple platforms to survive. By the same token, what this essentially means is that intersections afforded by transmedia storytelling will affect the production, delivery and consumption of Malaysian creative products; hence promoting transparency, equality and economic empowerment.

In addition, the framework is in line with Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, as it addresses insufficient technology adaptation and diversification in sources of growth. In particular, as this transmedia storytelling framework pays attention to social-cohesion narrative, this echoes the objective of creating a United, Prosperous and Dignified Nation. This also parallels the development of material cultures that will help Culture, Arts and Tourism as one of the ten Social Economic Drivers as outlined by the 10-10 MySTIE framework. Via advanced technology systems such as faster and more reliable internet services, transmedia platforms can be smoothly run and expanded. Digitized creative products result in Augmented Analytics and Data Discovery such as visual data mining to form predictions about users/audience's future expectations of creative productions. This culminates in addressing knowledge gaps among media users and film audiences in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The review of past studies on transmedia storytelling reveals five salient themes: transmedia and engagement, liberatory potential, hybridization of producer and user, uniqueness of media genre and media literacy. These themes reveal the benefits of using transmedia storytelling as integral germination of media convergence, and it is interesting to note that past studies on transmedia storytelling in the Malaysian context are very limited in focus that they exposed the gap that this review of past studies have addressed and proposed to be filled by transmedia storytelling. This finding resonates well with findings of research done by Santano and Thwaites (2018), Perry (2020), and Umar, Md Azalanshah with Runnel (2020).

The literature also points to the idea that not only transmedia provides different intersections in the storytelling process, it also permits a cohesive one. This is proven by scholars who studied Malaysian cinema such as Asiah (2006), Jamaluddin, (2014), and Wong, Pillai with Ong (2018), who argue that Malaysian cinema is in constant need of renewing its narrative of national identity that is often fragmented by multi-ethnic Malaysia, which is the problem that this present review manages to address via transmedia storytelling. For that reason, the themes found are used to problematize transmedia storytelling and the Malaysian Film industry; this leads to the proposal of how transmedia storytelling can help the Malaysian film industry to prosper while contributing towards the understanding of transmedia storytelling and its benefit for the Malaysian film industry.

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