

# Study on the Transmedia Storytelling Construction of the Text of "Spider-Man"

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**Abstract.** The "Spider-Man" series of films construct intertextual structure by means of re-contextualization in the texts, and then bring strong sense of immersion to the audience with the projection of the world's empathy, finally shaping the classic "Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man" character image, and constructing successful transmedia storytelling expression.

**Keywords:** *transmedia storytelling, "Spider-Man", Marvel*

## 1. Introduction

Transmedia storytelling refers to the communication mode in which multiple target media cooperate to complete a communication plan. Transmedia storytelling is not a simple addition of media platforms, nor is it a means of commercial marketing, but a cultural transformation of media fusion. In short, it constructs an intertextual structure among media.

## 2. Intertextual Structure

From the Semiotics Theory of Saussure, Julia Kristeva put forward that "Intertextuality refers to the exchange of a certain symbol system. Any text is the absorption and transformation of other texts. They are interrelated and interdependent with each other, thus forming a vast network without boundaries". With the epoch-making promotion of media fusion, intertextuality in films in the new millennium has become more common, including three usual forms: Movement of mediated meaning in intertexts, generic intertextuality and re-contextualization. Re-contextualization was originally a concept in Bernstein's "Theory of Pedagogic Sociology"(1990), and then it was widely used in Discourse Analysis. Linell defined it as "the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context (the context being in reality a matrix or field of contexts) to another."

In the "Spider-Man" films, re-contextualization is the main method to construct the intertextual structure of the transmedia storytelling text. Based on the original comic works, the "Spider-Man" has undergone three series of film adaptations. Therefore, how to maintain its freshness without losing its original core and attract new audiences while pleasing old ones has become the primary problem. In particular, "Spider-Man: Homecoming", which is produced by Marvel Studios, needs to get rid of the shadow of the previous two series, but cannot completely stand on its own. Only by keeping the classic lines while retelling the story with the "re-contextualization" based on reconstructing the formulated context can the audiences' horizon of expectations be broken and the old works be revived in the new series.

For instance, the classic line "With great power comes great responsibility", which is given by the creator Stan Lee to Spider-Man, plays an important role in his mind-changing. It helps solve the problem of Spider-Man's motivation, and at the same time cleverly create a real hero, touching countless people. In the old series, the line is said by Uncle Ben, who is later killed by thieves. At first, Peter Parker is indifferent to what Uncle Ben says, but soon Ben's death startles him and motives him to be the hero of New York. By contrary, "Spider-Man: Homecoming" replaces the change of identity by the discussion of hero mentality. The text has changed, so the context of the formulated context needs to be rebuilt. So Uncle Ben does not appear, replaced by Iron-Man. Also, Spider-Man's shortcomings are no longer cowardice or indifference, but impetuous and pompous. The film still uses the classic Hollywood narrative of a small climax followed by a big one, but the

context is changed to one in which Iron-Man tells Spider-Man directly after the first battle, rather than teaching him as a child. Spider-Man's mindset changes with it. Instead of bereavement, he learns from his failures and finally grows into a real superhero.

### **3. Immersion Experience**

Transmedia storytelling uses intertextuality to finally couple each text into an interacting whole, in which the key to attracting audiences are elements called 4"I"s: Immersion, Interactivity, Integration, and Impact. Immersion and Interactivity guide the audience to deeply integrate into the narrative, while Integration and Impact extend the story from the screen to the real world. Ryan discusses that there are three types of construction of Poetics of Immersion: "Spatial Immersion-the expansion of the world constructed by the original text; Time Immersion-the flow of narrative process; Emotional Immersion-empathic effects, evoking emotional responses." In the "Spider-Man" films, the most prominent thing is to give the audience an immersive experience through empathy.

The role "Spider-Man" was almost denied in infancy. Surprisingly, the character that was nearly killed off has since become the most popular Marvel superhero all over the world, and is now on par with DC heroes such as Batman and Superman in diverse charts. It is not difficult to find that the popularity of Spider-Man is due to the audience's easy empathy for him, that is, to enter into the inner world of Spider-Man and put oneself in it to perceive and experience the emotions, feelings and experiences.

First of all, Spider-Man comes from a very ordinary background. He doesn't have the wealth of Iron-Man or Batman, nor the advantages of Superman's "son of god". Before he was bitten by the mutant spider, he was even a poor little boy who suffered from school bullying. Short and thin, he read like a lonely bookworm. Such image can easily arouse the sympathy of the audience. Different from Captain America's later "deification", spider-man is always an ordinary young boy, even with super powers. He also needs to complete his school work and do a part-time job for living, like every mediocre civilian. The vast majority of audiences are just ordinary people who work hard all day to earn a living. They will admire the superman with divinity, such as the Batman and Iron-Man as the upper elite, but more often they will be delighted to see their own images from Spider-Man. "The United States is the most thoroughly direct democratic grass-roots society in the world. The center of political power is not on the top( the president) but at the bottom. As a result, the audience choose Spider-Man, the most empathetic superhero, as their favorite one.

Secondly, the main audience and fans of superhero films are composed of teenagers. These teenagers, who are in an energetic and emotional period, have a natural affinity and curiosity for Spider-Man at their age, leading to watching the movie with an imperceptible affection, naturally capturing more details that can resonate. Take "the Amazing Spider-Man" series, which is produced by Sony Pictures, as an example. the relationship between Peter Parker and his girlfriend Gwen runs through the whole process, from secret love to mutual understanding, which is depicted beautifully in the films. Countless teenage audiences are attracted to it and even consume an action movie as a campus youth film. "Spider-Man" films not only satisfy the adolescent audience's fantasy of heroes, but also fully explore the empathy value of their campus background and guide the audience to carry out emotional projection in order to achieve box office success.

Finally, the "Spider-Man" series films have become a bridging agent for the spiritual gap in American audiences at a special time. The September 11 terrorist attacks in New York shocked the world, with 2,996 victims and more than 6,000 injured. Nearly 10,000 families in 15 countries, including the United States, were affected. After this incident, the American people feel insecure and the strong psychological security they once had in economy and politics has been severely weakened. It is at such a special historical period that Spider-Man has entered the vision of American audiences. In the film, the security of New York City is greatly threatened, with towering buildings destroyed and the public in a panic. All these are exactly in line with the real situation of the 911 attacks. Both the plot and the details convey to the audience a sense of reality. In such a

crisis, Spider-Man, dressed in crude homemade gear, comes out in force to take on the villains who seek to destroy the peace of New York City. In fact, the audience has been calling for such a hero to appear, so when watching this moment, the boundary between reality and fantasy is suddenly blurred. they cannot help but think: "Spider-Man is for the people of New York in the exercise of responsibility. He is the saviour and protector of New York."

#### **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, the Spider-Man series films undergoing three times of restarting and under the premise that the core of the story remains unchanged, link all the texts together to form a large-scale intertextual structure through re-contextualization. These films thus create an image of "Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man" with human weakness. The creators place the American people's spirit and the responsibility of the age on such a grass-roots superhero, making it virtually assume the social needs of the audience's emotional identity. He was born in a common family and has an ordinary personality just like everyone else, but was also capable of holding strong powers to help the weak and save people from danger. Such a character image of a common human can make every ordinary person identify with him or her. At the same time, it can also satisfy people's call for heroes and provide the audience with a supreme immersive experience at the emotional level. All in all, the Spider-Man series films perfectly combines the intertextual structure of narration with the immersive experience of the audience, becoming a classic case of transmedia storytelling expression.

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