

Assessment of reading guides for transmedia environments

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ABSTRACT

The text addresses the reading of transmedia narratives, both fictional and non-fictional, and the need for reading guides for university students interested in this field. The question is raised as to whether these guides can help readers become "transreaders", capable of interpreting and connecting meanings across different media and platforms. The existence of several researches advocating a transversal model applicable to different transmedia texts is mentioned. The guides analyzed include criteria such as narrative, platforms, experience, audience and extratextual factors, seeking to determine which is most suitable for understanding and practical application in university transmedia environments.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, Transmedia storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

How to read a transmedia narrative, whether fiction or non-fiction?, what guide or reading model can help university students interested in NT to analyze these environments?, will this guide help the university reader to become a transreader?, to observe and explain the movement of textual meaning of the transmedia environment? There is research that raises the need for a model that is applied transversally to different texts (Masgrau-Juanola et al, 2024; Freire, 2020; Salado, 2019; Coiro, 2020; Hollebeek, et al, 2020; Baron, 2021; Leander, 2020). The premise is that the appropriate guide for the reading of transmedia narratives will be able to account for the movement of meaning between textual spaces, helping the reader to become a transreader, that is, to create meaning of the environment from textual plurality generating a common thread. This is done by the integral parts of the NT, as the music intervenes, or the participatory form of the NT, but not all of them together. By environment we mean not only the artifacts that make up the NT, but also the interplay with the platforms, the audience, the experience and the extratextual conjunctural relations such as copyright policies, intellectual influences, economic influences, among others. NT is a non-predetermined structure that can be fictional or non-fiction.

The objective is to carry out a comparative analysis between reading guides to evaluate which is the ideal one for reading transmedia environments. The purpose is not to find the causes that originated the reading guides but to evaluate the aspects they cover of the NT and what factors determine its applicability.

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In this sense, the methodology applied was the comparative one proposed by Charles Ragin (2007) in its qualitative cut. The stages were: selection of cases, use of analytical frameworks, use of comparative method, specification of conditions and results. Each of these stages is the course of this text. The reason for using the comparison is because before making the assessment, it is necessary to understand the objects of analysis, in their similarities and differences with respect to the NT in order to identify the elements covered by each guide. The purpose of comparing the guidelines is, in the words of Esser and Vliegthart (2017), to highlight those characteristics that should be evaluated in breadth (p.249) and to find the significance in them to contribute to the relativization of the guidelines and their application.

METHOD

To meet the proposed objective, a comparative analysis was carried out following the line of Charles Ragin (2007) in his qualitative section. The reason for using the comparison is to identify which features of the NT each guideline covers and what factors determine its applicability. The stages were: selection of cases, use of analytical frameworks, use of comparative method, specification of conditions and results.

Case selection. The reading guides to compare are the cases. The selection of these was made based on the following criteria: having a theoretical basis; have a practice-focused approach; be aimed at a student/university audience; be free of technicalities and be didactic (explain and apply its components). Four proposals were found: Lars Elleström (2021), Daniel Chandler (1998), Bill Cope-Mary Kalantzis (2020a, 2020b), Renira Gambarato (2020). Reading guides are available in the Annex.

Elleström (guide 1) elaborates his reading proposal based on the design of a communicative model focused on the media or media product. It has three elements: something that is transferred, two places where transference occurs, and an intermediate state that makes transference possible.

Daniel Chandler (guide 2) establishes seven sections of analysis: the identification of the sign, the paradigmatic axis, the syntagmatic axis, intertextuality, rhetorical figures, the social dimension and the benefits of analysis.

The transpositional grammar of Cope-Kalantzis (guide 3) is the description of movements between one form of meaning and another. The authors establish two fundamental axes: form and function. Form refers to the modalities of presentation of meaning: text, image, space, object, body, sound, and orality. The function adapts Halliday's metalanguages into: reference, agency, structure, context, and interest. The axis of function is vertical and the axis of form, horizontal, so the proposal develops each of these modalities in the different functions and subfunctions.

Gambarato's model (guide 4) has five foundations: the world of the story, premise, extensions, audience and structure. The guide is structured into questions to be applied.



An analytical framework is the establishment of the points of interest of the cases (Ragin, 2007, p.189). In this analysis, two frameworks were used as instruments to collect information that correspond to the objective: to identify which characteristics of the NT are covered by each guideline and what factors determine its applicability; therefore, two different analytical frameworks were used, which in the end were contrasted.

The first framework, to identify the characteristics covered by each guide the aspects of NT, employed the characteristics of NT proposed by Robert Pratten (2011): storytelling, platforms, experience, audience, and business-execution plan. Narration is understood as a plot composed of characters, timeline and spaces, people, culture, religion, language, economy, science, rites. Storytelling employs at least two platforms in which a portion of the narrative is told, how long each element has on a particular platform, how continuity is provided across the platforms, i.e., the journey that the audience takes. Experience (engagement) includes curiosity, involvement in the narrative, maintaining surprise, creating rewards for the audience. The audience is who the NT is addressed to and what is required of them. The business plan and execution is the business model of the NT, related to financing; here it is considered in a general way, since they imply the extra-narrative relations of which the NT is a part.

The second framework, to determine the applicability factors of the guidelines, was based on a scorecard (Annex) that was answered in a focus group. The focus group was held from January 15 to 17, 2024 on the Zoom platform from 4 to 8 pm. The participants were nine people, including four teachers and five second-semester students, all from the Specialization in Reading Promotion of the Universidad Veracruzana Córdoba-Orizaba unit. The focus group followed Cohen's (2017) guidance on interviewer preparation, the writer of these lines, purposes, informed consent, and data collection. The dynamics of the focus group was to explain each model, apply it in the NT of "The Ghost Writer" by María Luisa Zorilla (2018) and at the end of the presentation of the four models the Appreciation Sheet was filled.

The appreciation sheet was a Google form available at: <https://forms.gle/FJeewhtra5xXc7Rr6>. The assessment was structured with five questions referring to the characteristics of the guide (clear, complex, elaborate, effective, applicable) and six questions referring to the performance of the guide in practice, if it helps to: identify the common thread, make associations between texts, relate texts, understand the relationships between texts, integrate texts (generalize), interpret the NT. The type of response was predetermined: they had to assess the characteristics and performance of the guide by means of a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the simplest.

The procedure of comparison follows the route of Ragin (2007), examining through analytical frameworks the combinations of conditions that distinguish each case and the configuration of determinations (p.196) to which the analysis leads us. The analysis will be kept within each analytical framework and will be supplemented in the following section 3.3.

Table 1 shows the combination of storytelling and platforms as strong associations and the rest as weak associations. The strong associations are that the guides employ Pierce's triangle in the narrative, have the aspect of intertextuality, and take into account the reading experience. Weak associations are located in the last two elements of the NT, in the audience, that is, in the response of the public and the business plan and execution, as such only guide 4 possesses.

Table 1. Emptying of guides due to absence 0 and presence 1. Own elaboration

Guides/Frame	Narration	Platforms	Experience	Audience	Business Plan Execution
Elleström (guide 1)	1	1	1	0	0
Chandler (Guide 2)	1	1	0	1	0
Cope-Kalantzis (guide 3)	1	1	0	0	0
Gambara to (Guide 4)	1	1	0	1	1
Finds	Strong partnership	Strong partnership	Weak association	Weak association	Weak association

The guidelines cannot be compared only in the presence/absence of characteristics, but among them there is presence/absence in degrees. Table 2 shows greater differences between the guides.

In the narrative comparison unit, guide 1 approaches it in terms of the spatiotemporal, semiotic, and material modality of the text; it does not delve as deeply as guide 3 which has more specific elements such as structure, agency and reference and multiple modal changes; guide 3 has the section Identifying the sign, the paradigmatic axis and part of the syntagmatic; Guide 4 defines the narrative only by the spatiotemporal and the definition of characters, it provides a new element that is the premise that is related to the objective of Guide 3. An element of the narrative that served as a strong association was the presence of the Piercean triad which, despite the fact that it is mentioned in guide 4, does not take it up as an element of analysis in its guide.

Table 2. Emptying of elements by guide. Own elaboration.

Guides/Frame	Narration	Platforms	Experience	Audience	Business Plan
Elleström (guide 1)	Basic (material, spatial-temporal and semiotic modalities)	Heteromedia and transmedial relationship Competent, contextual and operational	Sensory modality Cognitive sense	Preceptor only	N/A. It is product-centric

Chandler (Guide 2)	Identifying the sign as a broad description of text as to what it is, what it is about Syntagmatic analysis Paradigmatic	Intertextuality Rhetorical figures Shared Phrase	Relationship between text and one's own values (weak)	Benefits of semiotic analysis other contributions, other analyses of that text state of the art of that text as others have participated	Social Semiotics/Benefits Not as such. Who creates the text, who is involved in the process Who is it for? Influences only by interpretations, dominant readings It does not consider distribution networks, survival and influences
Cope-Kalantzis (guide 3)	Structure Agency Reference	Structure (ontology, design, relationship) Context (partnership, materialization)	N/A	Context (participation) Interest (rhetoric, program, sociability, transformation)	N/A Focused on Text and Reader
Gambara to (Guide 4)	History (summary, characters, time, expansion strategies, migration) Premise	Extensions on gender, devices, design, enrich the story Non-intertextuality	N/A	Audience Participation Type of Mechanism of interaction User-generated content	Audience Type of business model Type of project

The platform comparison unit is also one of strong association between the guides, due to the presence of intertextuality. This is a very technical feature in guide 1 that establishes the types of hetero and transmedial relationship along with their different types of transformations. Guide 2 focuses on establishing the relationships of the text with others, including the phrases they share with other texts. Guide 3 also has the feature of intertextuality by associating the content, both guide 2 and 3 consider rhetorical figures as important elements of the narrative and of the relationship with other texts. Guide 4, although it manifests the relationship between the text and its extensions, does not inquire into the relationships with other texts, it maintains only the intratextual approach.

In relation to the reader's experience, guide 1 is the one that most emphasizes the reader's perceptions and cognitive sense; while guide 2 has them insofar as it justifies the choice of the text by the values that the reader shares or not; Guidelines 3 and 4 have this feature absent.

The audience analysis unit has three connotations, it can be the reader who makes a critical reading of the text to whom guides 1 and 3 refer; it can be a group of people who have already read that text and what they have thought of it (metatextual), guide 2; and it can be a pre-designed element in the text, i.e. where in the text participation will enter and what type of participation will be admitted, as in guide 4. Thus, this item is possessed by the four guides in different nuances.



The business plan and execution are part of the text circuit, the reason that guide 1 and 3 lack this aspect is because they are text-centric; Guide 2 and 4 have a broad perspective to place it in context. Guide 4 takes up only the type of business model and the type of project. Guide 2 is a little more elaborate by taking up who are the ones who create the text, from where they create it, for what and for whom, the influences, the dominant readings. The distribution networks and survival of the text are not considered.

Although Ragin is not inclined to compare cases because each one has its own history and identity (2007, p.10), I carried out the exercise since the comparison with the NT analytical framework pointed to differences in degree between them.

The comparison of the guides with each other emphasized their configuration. The guide of 1 privilege the text and its relationships; to the reader and his perceptions, introduces new vocabulary in order to demarcate the components of analysis, his guide is centered and delimited.

The guide of 2 stands out from the rest because it considers the social dimension in its analysis, promotes a detailed identification of the text and its text structure. Also, a contribution of this guide is a self-evaluation of the analysis of the limitations of the list of the groups represented, of the dominant readings. On the other hand, guide 2 questions the motivations of the authors, which can hardly be investigated if it is a fictional text, the issue of the copy/original is no longer a differentiating aspect of the text. Care should be taken when comparing guide 2 with guide 1 since both use syntagmatic and paradigmatic with different meanings.

Guide 3 emphasizes the modalities and the movement of meaning between them. Guide 1 differentiates between medium, modality and mode, while guide 3 considers that modes and modalities are means, for example, sound and speech share the auditory, sound waves, music can also be spoken, there is a juxtaposition, which can be confusing when analyzing, between the modes of representations, representation tools, interface, medium and modality. The Shape axis of guide 3 corresponds to the technical means of guide 1.

Another difference is that the idea of multimodality is convergent, that is, when someone expresses an idea, they converge in the creation of their discourse, of their meaning, several artifacts that have multimodal characteristics. In this way everything is multimodal, the task of multimodal grammar is to trace the process of transpositions in each case that is involved. The limitation I find in guide 3 is that it is taken for granted that transpositional grammar and transpositions are carried out by the same subject, who varies his discourse by incorporating textual artifacts that diversify and mobilize the created meaning. However, they do not take into account how there are different transpositions made by different actors/actants in a single artifact.

Guide 4, despite the fact that it has most of the aspects to be evaluated in the framework, are recommendations and presents a crack with respect to the Piercean theory on which it is based, since it does not take it up in its guide.

Table 3 shows the dominant values for each of the guides answered in the focus group appreciation sheet. It should be remembered that the answers on the appreciation sheet were answered using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was the least and 5 the most appreciated. Pink cells are qualities of the guide, and beige cells are aspects of the guide's applicability.

Table 3. Results of focus group appreciation. Own elaboration.

Case	Egg white	Complex	Elaborated	Applicable	Effective	Thread	Associated	Savvies	Integrates	Interprets
Elleström (guide 1)	5	1	2	4	3	1	5	4	3	2
Chandler (guía 2)	2	1	5	3	4	4	1	3	2	5
C-K (Guide 3)	3	5	4	1	2	2	4	5	3	1
Gambarato (guide 4)	4	1	2	5	3	5	2	1	3	4

In the table, several conditions are manifested between the characteristics of the tables and their applicability. Three were found, the first condition being that if the guide is clear and applicable then it is not elaborate (specific) or complex. Guidelines 1 and 4 were accepted for being clear and applicable and their minor pair was that they were complex and elaborate. This corresponds to the reverse in the guide of 3, which was the most complex and elaborate, this did not make it clear in its entirety and was appreciated with few ways to be applicable and effective. The midpoint between guideline 1-4 and 3 was guideline 2, which was considered elaborate and applicable but not clear. The presence of this third element means that the assessment has different spectrums of acceptability depending on the condition of clear-applicable; not elaborated-not complex.

The second condition is that if the guide is applicable it is because it helps to interpret and build a thread, so it does not associate the texts or integrate them. That is, there is a relationship between applicability and the help to interpret and build a common thread and that operates at the general level, while the association and integration of texts seems to be something specific. The applicable guidelines were 2 and 4 and those that are not considered applicable 1 and 3. There is a correspondence of characteristics of those suitable for NT interpretation and construction of the common thread in 2 and 4; while in the unsuitable 1 and 3 those of text association and understanding of relationships predominate. This correspondence is inverse in the unacceptable assessment, the characteristics of NT interpretation and construction of the common thread were the least appreciated in 1 and 3; while those of association and comprehension were the least appreciated in 2 and 4.



The third condition is that if the guide is drawn up then it is not applicable. Guide 4 was considered too elaborate and incapable of helping to interpret NTs and build the common thread. Reaffirming the condition, guide 4 was considered to be poorly elaborated and applicable.

There is an apparent contradiction in guide 2 that was considered to be elaborate but applicable. This relates to the before and after analysis. Before it was described as unclear or complex, I interpret the appreciation because it uses concepts that require further explanation. Although they can be understood, they are confused with other terms outside the field of semiotics. At the time of the analysis, guideline 2 was well appreciated, probably due to the way in which the guideline is structured.

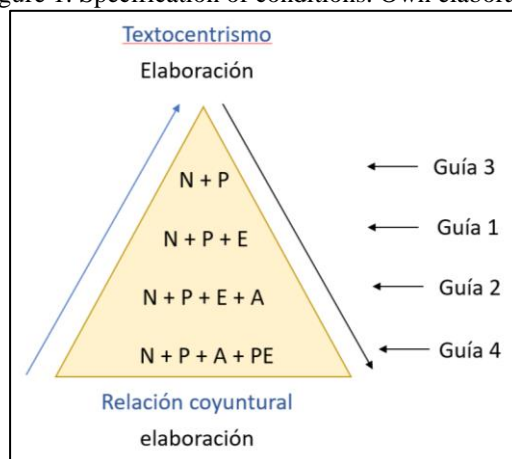
Guide 1 was considered clear and applicable at the beginning, but when it was used to analyze transmedia narration, it was considered that it did not help the interpretation of this text or the construction of the common thread. This result might seem contradictory, but he explained it by Elleström's simple, to some extent, model that contrasts with its applicability, it is easy to confuse the terms and identify each one in the analysis.

Once the comparative analysis of the guidelines has been carried out using the analytical framework of the NT and the assessment of the focus group, it is necessary to contrast both to find if there is a type of relationship and to unify the analysis. Figure 1 capitalizes the first letter of the analytic framework: N is narrative, P is platform, and so on.

It was found that there is a relationship between textcentrism based on the presence of units of narration and platform versus conjunctural relationship, the circuit of extratextual relations. The greater the focus on storytelling and platforms, the guides behaved very elaborately with highly specified tasks. On the other hand, when integrating other textual elements such as audience, experience, business plan, the degree of elaboration of the guide decreased and became very general with basic questions. Phrased in another way, the greater the characteristics focused on the text, the lower the appreciation of applicability in NT environments.

This relationship between the guidelines is complementary to the strong and weak associations shown in Table 1.

Figure 1. Specification of conditions. Own elaboration



RESULTS

Four factors were identified that influence the assessment of the applicability of the guidelines.

The degree of elaboration of the guide determines that it can be applicable in NT. This correspondence is observed in guide 2 and its counterpart in guide 1. Paragraph 2 was described as elaborate-applicable to NT; and guide 3 was drafted- not applicable; Guide 4 not elaborated-applicable; Guide 3 not elaborated-not applicable. The relationship between these factors underlies the degree of development of the guide. Guide 2 is a balance between theory and practice; Guide 3 is highly structured by the function and content axes, by the components, subcomponents and the different forms they have. This accumulation of elements complicates the applicability of an artifact that is composed of different texts. Guide 4 suffers from generality and although it has been assessed as applicable, the elementary of its questions can be a limitation, especially if the reader is new to NT topics. The result of guide 1 was due to the appreciation at first sight of the guide and its practice, at the beginning it was appreciated as simple and not elaborated, however, when applied to a transmedia text the participants realized that it required greater attention to the use, discrimination of terms and objects of analysis.

The format of the guide influences its applicability. The preference given to guides 2 and 4 is because they are structured in systematized questions, which must be answered by the readers. This presentation facilitated the analysis in comparison with guides 1 and 3, whose presentation was tables and points to be analyzed.

The intertextual approach complicates the applicability of the guides. The characteristics of association between the texts and the understanding of the relationships between them point to the intertextuality of the transmedia artifact. Each of his texts can potentially be related to others external to the transmedia environment and obviously related to each other. The emphasis on the relationships between the texts of guides 1 and 3 was an impediment to the fact that the branches of the tree in the foliage were seen, as Ragin writes, the narrative arc, the common thread under which they were united,



was lost. Guide 1 gives importance to the transformations that users can make of the text, this could further complicate the analysis. Guide 4 lacks the intertextual analysis component, it maintains the common thread due to its premise and objective component; The lack of meaning of the narrative seems to be remedied by the relationship between the central text and its extensions. Guide 4's focus on the generality of the text is what made it valued. In relation to guide 2 there was a balance with the intertextual approach, although it does not address the issue of the transformations that users can make of the text or that the text can be one type of transformation of another.

The degree of analysis of the movement of meaning strengthens the applicability of the guides. The guides can be sorted by the degree to which they help account for this movement of meaning from major to minor guides: 2, 3, 1, and 4. Guide 2 has a balance of the movement of meaning in relation to the text, the other texts, the metatext and the context. Chandler breaks down the text into very small parts, his guide seems to be endless as it is based on the paradigmatic and the absent combinations made by the author. The inclusion of contextual aspects also makes the guide seem very laborious, as it considers several elements to create the common thread and understand the transmedia environment.

Guide 3 allows us to account for the movement of meaning at the level of modalities centered on the textual artifact, which can cause it to be perceived as a guide with information overload. The challenge, if this guide is applied, is to maintain a fixed course and to be able to integrate the different textual analyses under an arch. In the same way, limits and units of analysis must be established, determine if the text in general will be the unit or if it is one of its components.

Guide 1 focuses only on the product of the medium or text, emphasizing the reader's perception only insofar as it establishes and allows an intracommunicational bridge. The context is included by the choice of medium, but not the relationships that the text maintains with the environment that produces it and to which it is addressed.

Guide 4 is quite general and only sketched when compared to the rest of the guides. Even so, he paints a clear outline of the relationship between the text and its readers and its environment. The more elements of movement of meanings are included in the analysis, the more it will be strengthened, with the danger that it can be abandoned.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The selected reading guides are part of the discussion around textual convergence. First, because there is a transmediation of the transmedia bible on the different platforms on which the narrative spreads. Second, because many times the primary text of transmedia narration belongs to another semiotic system, to illustrate, a long-winded written text that is transmediated into an NT. Third, because of the intertextual game in which constant transmediations are generated, for example, memes or other derivative texts



created by the audience, for example, memes and other transmediated texts of the NT that are derived from it. Fourth, the very transversal nature of the NT promotes transpositions, for example, fictional characters go from not engaging in a dialogue with their audience, to characters with social media accounts with whom their fans chat.

Although different aspects converge in the NT, as seen in the guidelines, it also makes them diverge. Translinguistics is related to reading guides because it raises the need that if the narrative arc crosses different semiotic systems, there must also be a corresponding one to be able to analyze them. Finally, textual convergence is appreciated in the guides because it maintains its divergent pair. The guides not only focused on the narrative part or the interaction between the platforms but also included other elements with which the text relates.

This essay sought to answer the question: how to read a transmedia narrative? A comparative analysis of four reading guides was carried out using two frames of reference. The first framework employed NT features to identify which aspects of it each guide covered. It was found that they all covered the unit of narration and platform, as they incorporated other elements the guide became more generic. The second framework was an assessment of the characteristics of the guide and its applicability, the assessment was carried out by teachers and students of the Specialization in Reading Promotion. It was found that the applicability of the guides depends on: their degree of elaboration, their degree of analysis of movement of meaning, their intertextual approach and presentation.

Since Ragin urges that a prediction be made about the results of the comparison, it can be pointed out that guidelines 2 and 4 were more accepted to be applied in the reading of fiction and nonfiction NT. Two focus group participants shared something similar, "These guides are not for college students, they are for graduate students and I am not sure they can apply them" (Siggy). I return to this quote because it can be seen that the guidelines are complicated even though the theoretical dimension was not addressed in the focus group. Another element in the commentary is the academic degree of the readers. The guides were proposed for undergraduate students. The variance of guideline 2 is that it was developed to be applied by university students, while the focus group indicates that it is for postgraduate studies and for those who are exclusively interested in NT. The variance of guideline 4 is that it has been applied to diverse population profiles in both developed and developing countries. Either of the two guides requires that they be adapted to the Mexican university student public; o Maintain the guidelines so that they are applicable at the graduate level.

I believe that the four guides help the reader to address NT, however, guide 2 is the one that has the most elements to analyze the textual movements of the transmedia environment, not only of the narrative and platforms, but also of the audience, experience and context. Guide 2 allowed the texts to be analyzed from different angles; also because it avoided the technicalities used by semiotics, to a lesser



degree; It has a simple guide that can be accessible to any student by presenting it in a questionnaire. It is hoped that this model can be replicated in transmedia fiction narratives and in the various texts that readers assemble in a transmedia way, by means of a common thread.



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