

New Media and Digital Storytelling: Mobile Stories

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Abstract. Finding the right stories to tell in today's day and age is challenging. Gone are the days of sitting around campfires or in living rooms lounging on lazy afternoons. Gone are the nights when parents would sit back with their children to read bedtime stories and share tales of old. With new media, modes of storytelling have evolved to a point in which not only is it digital but mobile as well. The manner in which stories are told are no longer limited to that of oral traditions but to a tradition that is independent, visually oriented and on-the-go. This paper addresses the manner in which storytelling and narratives through mediums and medias such as the smart phone and tablet have evolved and influenced the younger generation. Stories have been adapted in order to accommodate changing times as well as changing attitudes. Nevertheless it is believed that no matter how much stories conform to change, they remain a reflection of a given social cultural tradition.

Keywords: New Media, Digital Storytelling, Mobile Stories, Cultural Traditions.

1. Introduction

Visual media and visual mediums influence youngsters as it feeds on sensory that require immediate feedback and response. Effective stories emphasize this approach by ensuring that comprehension of stories and tales are also fast paced and instantaneous as youngsters absorb, digest and discard relevant and non-relevant information. Thus, the argument within this paper is how do social and cultural stories remain relevant to present day society? How are they made significant/important to a new generation of youngsters? Evolving visual culture is the current trend in which media companies zealously pursue to keep up with the frenzy. New forms of stories are told through web clips, web toons and animated series to cater for this new evolution into the mode of storytelling. The transference and change of this form of storytelling takes ground in that modern/mobile technology has changed the manner in which stories are told. The younger, more visually oriented generation Y and Z, come in contact with stories through a whole different medium. It is on that note that this paper attempts to identify the manner in which stories today are not only digital, but also mobile in its access to present society. The idea that stories are defined by its mobility of pace and lifestyle paves the way for a new form of storytelling. Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that this paper does not intend to address the new form of storytelling as a method of teaching and learning, but more as a process in which the continuation of the narrative is crucial as a means of representing social cultural values and traditions.

Stories that are passed down through generations are important and cannot be taken lightly. They function as a means of documenting a society's cultural history as stories of life and practices are told. Such is the situation as explained by Mohd Taib Osman (1989) in *Malay Folk Beliefs*, "Ironically, folk beliefs are in themselves a documentation of that history for as we look at the existing folk beliefs today, or at least as they are faithfully and ethnographically recorded, they are easily recognized as a conglomeration of disparate elements, and sometimes seemingly incongruently mixed and related to one another." Stories themselves provide the means of not only historical record, but depict the cultural representation of a given society. It identifies the nuances of a society's beliefs, fears, ideologies, and philosophies that form the foundation of a given community. While the idea of communal sharing of stories differs among cultures, its role is to ensure that the viewer or the listener understands the fundamental lessons or values that can be found in them. With reference to the works of Jan Harold Brunvand, James Danandjaja (1984) suggests that stories are "disseminated and inherited over the generations in collective societies of all kinds, in a traditional manner in different versions, be it oral or in patterns accompanied by gestures of mnemonic devices." Stories told by/within a given society are retained and continues to not only be relevant but also progressive with changing times. It is only due to the oral nature of these stories that causes them to continue being anonymous as they emerge in different versions and forms. These shared stories are of collective ownership

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of the society it belongs to. They are able to serve a social function of sharing, instructing and educating as they function as a form of entertainment when needed.

Mobile stories at this point refer to stories that youngsters can access while on the move, often online via the smart phone or tablet. Current internet trends inclusive of access to new media, online content and various forms of stories reveal an increasing number of users. Research obtained in 2012 reveals that in Asia alone, internet users account for 44.8% of the world's 2 billion internet users. The growing numbers indicate that with superior forms of mobile technology, the phenomenon is steadily growing with little chance of slowing down or turning back. Taking into consideration the pace of information access, the idea that any form of storytelling will cease to exist is unfathomable. The pace of information access changes the manner in which traditional oral stories are told leading into the notion of digital storytelling via a mobile medium. Mobile within the context of this discussion is two-fold in the sense that not only is it agile and in-motion, but also functions as a tool to tell these stories.

WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS						
June 30, 2012						
World Regions	Population (2012 Est.)	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration (% Population)	Growth 2000-2012	Users % of Table
Africa	1,073,380,925	4,514,400	167,335,676	15.6 %	3,606.7 %	7.0 %
Asia	3,922,066,987	114,304,000	1,076,681,059	27.5 %	841.9 %	44.8 %
Europe	820,918,446	105,096,093	518,512,109	63.2 %	393.4 %	21.5 %
Middle East	223,608,203	3,284,800	90,000,455	40.2 %	2,639.9 %	3.7 %
North America	348,280,154	108,096,800	273,785,413	78.6 %	153.3 %	11.4 %
Latin America / Caribbean	593,688,638	18,068,919	254,915,745	42.9 %	1,310.8 %	10.6 %
Oceania / Australia	35,903,569	7,620,480	24,287,919	67.6 %	218.7 %	1.0 %
WORLD TOTAL	7,017,846,922	360,985,492	2,405,518,376	34.3 %	566.4 %	100.0 %

NOTES: (1) Internet Usage and World Population Statistics are for June 30, 2012. (2) CLICK on each world region name for detailed regional usage information. (3) Demographic (Population) numbers are based on data from the [US Census Bureau](#) and local census agencies. (4) Internet usage information comes from data published by [Nielsen Online](#), by the [International Telecommunications Union](#), by [GfK](#), local ICT Regulators and other reliable sources. (5) For definitions, disclaimers, navigation help and methodology, please refer to the [Site Surfing Guide](#). (6) Information in this site may be cited, giving the due credit to [www.internetworldstats.com](#). Copyright © 2001 - 2013, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.

Fig. 1. World Internet Usage and Population Statistics (June 30, 2012), extracted from ©Internet World Stats.

2. Notions of Mobility

2.1. Background of study

In exploring notions of mobility, efforts to pass on stories via oral traditions have allowed stories to be told in various forms. While many early stories started through print media, it was not long before visual mediums such as the television became a household name. Children were introduced to narratives of various themes as visual mediums took over the twentieth century. However, the digital age of cyberspace has forced the telling of these stories to change. The fast paced and mobile lifestyle demands a change of not only pace but ease of accessibility to immense amount of information at any given time. Once sources were from books, books today are legible digital texts. For example, based on the latest survey by Media News Trends in June 2013, there is an estimated 17 million internet users in Malaysia alone. This number represents 60.7% of the total population of 17 million online Malaysians out of a population of 27 million people. Out of that, 11 million are between the ages of 15 and older, which as the survey discovered accessed the internet from home or work. Further research into the media trends of Malaysians indicate that YouTube is one of the top sites accessed by its users. A general survey identifies that traditional cultural stories produced for local television, such as the tales of the adventurous mouse deer, the Sang Kancil, are uploaded onto the YouTube website. The uploading of these stories allow for not only wider access but also the ability for the stories themselves to be virtually mobile to its users/viewers who are mostly young children. Young children with access to online information seek out stories and tales that are familiar to them. The visual and mobile medium of the smart phone or tablet allows them to select and identify preferred story choices, giving them options in their selection. The mobile nature of this access caters to the evolution in the manner in which traditional cultural stories are told and passed down to the next generation.

2.2. Current methods

The first story a child is introduced to is at home in an enclosed and controlled environment. Tales told are of daily affairs and events, and shared with the family. As children's social structures expand, their

exposure, involvement and experience with the environment begins to evolve. They meet and make friends in which stories are exchanged. The older the children become, the more stories they hear as well as create. It is the type of stories that are passed on or told if not retold that differs. The environment at this point in time is no longer isolated to the small family and social nucleus but expands to include a wider public as mediums of information transference becomes available and accessible. Hence the evolution of oral traditions begins to make its journey. Most cultural stories begin with folktales that are told by elders. Children become familiar with these stories and are able to recite them based on this familiarity. The stories are then represented in the form of print, to read. From print, the stories take on new forms through visual and audio mediums such as the television and radio. It is in this new age of digital information that folktales are not only visualized but also animated in nature. Digitally animated folktales in turn pave the way for these new forms of stories to be easily shared and accessed. As a result, the amount of stories that cater to this new digital form becomes infinite.

Early sampling of how children comprehend stories is that no matter the circumstance, stories all begin as oral tales. It is in the creation of the imagination of the children's minds that they begin to formulate their own 'limited' mental images to associate with the stories they hear. As children listen to more stories and experience life, they begin to formulate their own stories based on their surroundings and the influences within that surrounding. While oral traditions are a dominant fact of everyday life, children's surroundings through digital mediums such as the smart phone and tablets, recreate, reformulate and re-form their imagination into a (somewhat) structured, if not instructed framework. Children's interest in these stories is then given life through the visual forms created as mobile technology allows children to access any story of interest at any given time. For example, stories such as Cinderella or adapted modern tales such as Disney's *Rapunzel* in the animated film, *Tangled* (2010) is given a new lease in its new story form.



Fig. 2. "Sang Kancil dan Pemburu," (trans. Sang Kancil and the Hunter), *Pada Zaman Dahulu* (TV Series), producers TV AlHijrah, published online 12 January 2013 (308, 035 views)

On a more localized and cultural note, stories told within the context of the animated series such as the earlier mentioned Sang Kancil stories successfully attract the attention of young children. The stories/programmes created are able to retain the original context of the stories in a new form. For example, the programme usually begins within the context of the modern. It introduces young characters that are seen occupied by modern gadgets such as the smart phone and tablet. The image suggests that these children are wasting time with insignificant activities. The programme then sets the pace by offering a transition, in which the children are faced with a problem or predicament that they need to resolve. At this stage, an elder (in the form of their grandfather) appears on hand to offer guidance and advice. The elder proceeds to offer suggestions through the animal folktales that he begins to tell. Once the tale is told, the children sum up the lessons learned and attempt to solve their earlier predicaments. The popularity of the Sang Kancil series arises from the programmes ability to attract the children's attention as well as their interest in the tales told. The narrative structure of the tales and the animated form of the stories allow children to easily comprehend the values within them. Most of these programmes are online, allowing children to have immediate access to the content/programme not only via the computer but also through the mobile phone and tablets.

Mobile stories are thus an extended form of storytelling as once children's interests in the tales are generated they will independently seek out these tales to watch again, or out of curiosity, search for new stories. The mobility of smart phones and tablets caters towards not only an independence displayed by these young users of modern technology but also a confidence in making choices and selections. While the initial

stages of storytelling is by parents or teachers within a controlled and enclosed environment, the familiarity of the tales themselves allows for children to seek them out in their various forms, making mobile technology the fastest and easiest access on hand. The mobility of access to these stories creates a new mode of storytelling as the children in turn, share the stories with their friends whether orally or via digital means.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that storytelling has evolved into a faster and mobile form. Ease of access is critical to whether a story will succeed in being told or otherwise. The virtual nature of the tales themselves allow for information within these digital stories to be transferred and passed on. In addition, the ability for digital stories to be retained in virtual forms allows for an unlimited database of tales that can be shared across various cultures and societies. The ease in which children today have on hand access to these stories reduces gaps with regards to time (when they access the stories), or when they hear of or are told these stories by others. Children's experiences are heightened with the stories that are told within a short period of time. The nature of stories and their narratives will continue to evolve from being oral in nature to that of mobile forms that are either technology driven, or one that is made accessible to the public. No matter what form stories take, they remain stories that are told from one generation to another.

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