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## **An Examination of Jenkins' Theory of Cultural Convergence in the Context of Audience Participation: A Study of Multimedia Storytelling in the Harry Potter Film Series**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores Jenkins' theory of artistic cultural convergence in the context of audience participation in multimedia storytelling within the Harry Potter film series. It examines the validity of Jenkins' theory by focusing on the ways in which audiences actively engage in participating and shaping narratives within the extensive multimedia ecosystem of this series. Through a comprehensive mixed-method research approach that combines previous studies and content analysis, it reveals patterns, themes, and compelling insights related to audience participation. The findings highlight the prevalence of fan-generated content, the significance of online media, and the transformative power of immersive experiences in fostering a participatory

culture. By aligning these findings with Jenkins' theory, it underscores the active role of audiences as collaborators in shaping narratives and challenges traditional notions of passive consumption. This study contributes to understanding audience participation in multimedia storytelling and emphasizes the importance of cultivating a participatory culture in media perspectives. It offers valuable insights for media creators, researchers, and practitioners, encouraging them to actively involve audiences in the storytelling process and unlock the full potential of participatory narratives. This article employs qualitative analysis and library research methods to analyze the subjects.

**Keywords:** Audience Participation, Transmedia Storytelling, Convergence Culture Theory, Harry Potter Film Franchise, Participatory Culture, Media Convergence

### **Introduction**

In today's media landscape, audience participation has become a vital element in the field of storytelling. The convergence of various media platforms, coupled with the emergence of digital technologies, has transformed the way audiences interact with narratives. This paradigm shift has given rise to multimedia storytelling, a phenomenon that encompasses multiple media forms to create a rich and all-encompassing narrative experience. Understanding the dynamic nature of audience participation in multimedia storytelling is key to unveiling the complex relationship between creators, texts, and audiences.

The theory of cultural convergence by Jenkins provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities inherent in this participatory perspective. Jenkins argues that convergence not only refers to technological integration but also to cultural and societal changes resulting from this convergence. He addresses the idea that audiences are not passive consumers but active participants who contribute to and shape the narratives they engage with. Using this theory as the foundation of our research, we delve into the world of the Harry Potter film series, an example of transmedia storytelling, to investigate the applicability of Jenkins' theory in this context. The Harry Potter film series, based on J.K. Rowling's book series, has engaged audiences worldwide through its multi-layered narrative universe. Beyond the boundaries of cinema, this franchise has expanded across various media platforms. The integration of these diverse media platforms provides a unique opportunity to explore the dynamics of audience participation in a multimedia environment. The primary objective of this study is to examine how Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence manifests within the Harry Potter film series, particularly concerning audience participation. By examining the interactions between the audience, the franchise, and its transmedia elements, our goal is to illuminate the ways in which audiences actively engage in the creation and dissemination of the Harry Potter narratives. To guide our exploration, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do audiences participate in the transmedia storytelling of the Harry Potter film series?
2. To what extent do the principles of Henry Jenkins' cultural convergence theory apply to audience participation within the transmedia ecosystem of Harry Potter?

By addressing these questions, an effort is made to enhance our understanding of audience participation in transmedia storytelling and, furthermore, provide insights into the broader implications of audience engagement in contemporary media narratives.

### Literature Review

Henry Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence has played a significant role in the field of media studies, offering valuable insights into the dynamics and audience participation in the digital age <sup>[1]</sup>. Convergence Culture explored the core concept of participatory culture. A participatory culture is one where there are relatively low barriers to engagement, where there's strong support for sharing what you create with others, where there's informal mentorship in which more experienced media producers help train those with less experience, where participants believe that their contributions matter (Jenkins, 2018: p. 14) <sup>[1]</sup>. Researchers have extensively examined Jenkins' theory and, based on it, have explored its applications across various media fields and formats.

Jenkins defines cultural convergence as a shift in the media landscape characterized by the blurring of boundaries between various media platforms and active audience participation in the production, distribution, and interpretation of media content. The core of his theory revolves around the idea that convergence is not merely a technological phenomenon but rather a cultural and social one <sup>[2]</sup>. For such new forms of storytelling associated with media convergence and expanding across multiple media platforms, Jenkins coined the (umbrella) term transmedia storytelling. The term refers to: 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 its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (schiller, 2018: p. 97) <sup>[2]</sup>. Jenkins, by examining the transformative impact of media convergence on audience behavior and interaction, provides a framework that emphasizes the active role of audiences as participants, collaborators, and co-creators in the storytelling process. Numerous studies have engaged with Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence, offering valuable insights into audience participation and its implications. Researchers have explored the concept of cultural convergence and investigated how audiences participate in content creation, fan communities, and online discussions. For example, <sup>[3]</sup> Gardner's comparison focusses on an issue that also constitutes a central aspect of Jenkins's concept of 'convergence culture': participatory culture. In fact, convergence culture's characteristic circulation of media content across different media platforms depends upon a blurring of the strict dividing line between media producers and media consumers, to the point where the two roles can no longer be clearly distinguished (Georgi, 2015: p. 95) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The Harry Potter film series serves as a rich backdrop for the examination of transmedia storytelling and audience participation. Researchers have recognized this series as a

successful example of transmedia narrative expansion, encompassing not only films but also books, video games, websites, theme parks, and more. This transmedia approach allows audiences to immerse themselves in the wizarding world of Harry Potter through various media platforms, providing an extensive and engaging experience. Researchers have examined the role of digital technologies and online platforms in facilitating audience participation in the media landscape <sup>[4]</sup>. Technological development for cinema indicates milestone with regard to style and content more than the developments on mobile phone models and internet infrastructure. The written or unwritten rules and unspoken habits which have been standardized, settled, unquestioned and taken for granted for nearly 100 years have become controversial topic (Ormanlı, 2019: p. 234) <sup>[4]</sup>. Online forums, social media platforms, and dedicated websites have become hubs for communication, collaboration, and idea exchange among fans. These spaces offer opportunities for fans to collectively produce, curate, and blur the boundaries between creators and audiences. In addition to Henry Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence, several other key theories and concepts are relevant to understanding audience participation in transmedia storytelling. These include theories of participatory culture, fan studies, narrative participation, and media convergence. Participatory culture theories examine ways in which audiences actively engage and collaborate within media ecosystems. As Henry Jenkins himself has noted, <sup>[5]</sup> My goal is to help ordinary people grasp how convergence is impacting the media they consume and, at the same time, to help industry leaders and policymakers understand consumer perspectives on these changes (Jenkins, 2008: p.12) <sup>[5]</sup>. Fan studies provide insights into passionate and dedicated fan communities that have emerged around popular media franchises like Harry Potter. As Bernard *et al.* explained, <sup>[6]</sup> Harry Potter has always been beholden to marketing. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the carefully orchestrated promotional activities that accompany the launch of each new title (2007: p. 180). Narrative participation theories explore the cognitive and emotional processes through which audiences become immersed in a narrative. Ultimately, media convergence theories go beyond technological integration, examining the socio-cultural changes resulting from the convergence of media platforms. These theories highlight the interconnectedness of media forms and the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers <sup>[7]</sup>. Marvel Super Hero Island is the section of the theme park that is themed exclusively based on Marvel comic books which includes the X-Men, Spiderman, and the Hulk, to name a few (Klaric, 2012: p. 12) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### Theoretical Framework

Henry Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of audience participation in the digital age. At the core of this theory, several principles elucidate the dynamic relationship between media convergence, participatory culture, and transmedia storytelling <sup>[8]</sup>. One of them is about: aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence-one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world,

consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience (Jenkins, 2008: p. 21) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Jenkins emphasizes that convergence is not merely a technological phenomenon but rather a cultural and social shift, characterized by the blurring of boundaries between media platforms, the democratization of media production and distribution, and active audience participation <sup>[9]</sup>. Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content (Jenkins, 2008: p. 3) <sup>[5]</sup>. The culture of convergence asserts that audiences are not passive consumers; instead, they are active participants who contribute to and shape the narratives they engage with. As the community enlarges and as reaction time shortens, fandom becomes much more effective as a platform for consumer activism. Fans can quickly mobilize grassroots efforts to save programs or protest unpopular developments. New fandoms emerge rapidly on the web - in some cases before media products actually reach the market (Jenkins, 2002: p. 5) <sup>[8]</sup>. This theory also encompasses the concept of participatory culture, in which audiences actively participate in the creation and dissemination of media content.

The application of Henry Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence to audience participation in transmedia storytelling reveals the transformative impact of convergent media approaches on narrative interaction <sup>[11]</sup>. For example, Bloggers take knowledge in their own hands, enabling the successful navigation within and between these emerging knowledge cultures. One can see such behavior as cooptation into commodity culture in so far as it sometimes collaborates with corporate interests, but one can also see it as increasing the diversity of media culture, providing opportunities for greater inclusiveness, and making commodity culture more responsive to consumers (Jenkins, 2002: p. 13) <sup>[8]</sup>. Transmedia storytelling, with its multi-platform approach, provides a suitable context for examining how audiences actively participate in the creation and expansion of narratives <sup>[12]</sup>. As Daly said, we must teach communication comprehensively in all its forms. Today we work with the written or spoken word as the primary form of communication. But we also need to understand the importance of graphics, music, and cinema, which are just as powerful and, in some ways, more deeply intertwined with young people's culture. We live and work in a visually sophisticated world, so we must be sophisticated in using all the forms of communication, not just the written word (Jenkins, 2009: p. 89) <sup>[9]</sup>. Jenkins argues that transmedia storytelling allows for a deeper and more comprehensive narrative experience because each platform contributes unique and complementary elements to the overall narrative. Audiences engage with multimedia texts in various media formats, gaining access to additional storylines, character backstories, and world-building details that enhance their understanding and enjoyment of the narrative.

This theory also suggests that audience participation in transmedia storytelling involves not only reading texts but also active searching, interpretation, and connecting scattered narratives. This participatory process may encompass engaging in online discussions, creating fan-

generated content, speculating about future developments, and collectively deciphering narrative puzzles embedded within the transmedia world <sup>[13]</sup>. Storytelling is a method for eliciting requirements from stakeholders. It must be combined with a method for requirements documentation, in order to transform the free-text requirements resulting from Storytelling into a more formal specification (Bouilila *et al*, 2011: p. 4) <sup>[10]</sup>. In the context of the Harry Potter film series, Henry Jenkins' theory of cultural convergence provides a valuable perspective for examining audience participation within the transmedia ecosystem. The multimedia elements within the world of Harry Potter not only expand the narrative but also invite the audience to participate and co-create. Fans can explore the books, watch the films, engage with online communities, explore the Pottermore website (the official Harry Potter website), visit themed parks, and immerse themselves in various merchandise and ancillary content. This multifaceted approach allows fans to have a rich and immersive experience within the wizarding world and actively participate in the broader Harry Potter narrative <sup>[14]</sup>. The fan culture that has grown around Potter, Rowling's creation and continued direction of the storyworld, and the corporate entities invested in its legal protection and prolonged profitability make the text, in many ways, the ideal case study for examining convergence culture and spreadability in the 21st century (Firestone & Clark, 2018: p. 8) <sup>[11]</sup>.

### Research Method

This research employs qualitative analysis and library research methods to review the background and analyze content for the examination of audience participation in transmedia storytelling in the Harry Potter film series. Using these research methods, our aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of interactive patterns with the audience. Content analysis serves as the primary data collection method for this study, offering a systematic and objective approach to analyzing and interpreting content in various media forms, including texts, images, and videos. Within the framework of this research, content analysis allows us to investigate the facets of audience participation in transmedia storytelling within different media platforms. The choice of content analysis as the data collection method is suitable for several reasons. Firstly, it enables the examination of structured and systematic analysis of a large volume of media content, providing an overview of transmedia elements and audience participation. Secondly, it allows for the identification of themes, patterns, and recurring trends in audience participation, offering valuable insights into the nature and extent of audience involvement. Finally, it facilitates concrete data breakdown and minimizes potential biases and subjective interpretations.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from this research, using content analysis, provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of audience participation in transmedia storytelling within the Harry Potter film series. By systematically examining various media sources, including official websites, social media platforms, fan communities, and scholarly articles, it reveals a diverse spectrum of audience engagements across the narrative threads of this series. The analysis of patterns, themes, and convincing insights has demonstrated the multifaceted nature of

audience interaction in the transmedia ecosystem of Harry Potter. These findings not only confirm Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture but also broaden our understanding of specific ways in which audiences actively participate and contribute to narrative expansion [15]. Audiences, largely comprised of adults, have dedicated themselves to consuming Potter, and all of its fannish permutations, in order to grab ahold of that entertainment experience that is both desired and personalized (Firestone & Clark, 2018: p. 9) [11].

One prominent pattern that emerges from this analysis is the significant prevalence of fan-produced content across various media platforms. From fan fiction to fan art and fan-made videos, enthusiasts have seized the opportunity to enrich the world of Harry Potter beyond the confines of the original sources, reimagining and contributing to it. These works demonstrate a deep emotional connection and passion for the series, channeling fans' enthusiasm into creative expressions that further enrich the narrative world. Furthermore, our analysis has emphasized the significance of online communities and social media platforms as catalysts for audience engagement [16]. As Jenkins mentioned, Convergence requires media companies to rethink old assumptions about what it means to consume media, assumptions that shape both programming and marketing decision. (Jenkins, 2008: p. 18) [5]. Fans on platforms such as Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter come together and, in lively discussions, share their interpretations, collectively creating meaning. These online communities strengthen the sense of belonging and camaraderie among fans, providing spaces for them to freely express their enthusiasm, engage in discussions, and collaborate in analyzing and expanding various aspects of the collective. The presence of these online communities reinforces the idea that active audiences actively shape the narrative and contribute to its continuous evolution.

This research has highlighted the role of immersive experiences in enhancing audience engagement in the world of Harry Potter. For instance, wizarding world theme parks provide fans with the opportunity to physically immerse themselves in the world of Harry Potter, traverse iconic locations, and interact with the enchanting environment. This blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, intensifies emotional connections, and deepens audience interaction.



**Fig 1:** [17] Right: The Making of Harry Potter, London, Uk/[18] Left: The Making of Harry Potter, Tokyo, Japan

Interactive websites, such as [19] Wizarding World, offer additional layers of content, quizzes, and interactive elements that encourage audience participation. They allow fans to delve deeper into the narrative world, explore hidden

details, and engage more deeply with the story.

## Discussion

Our findings, in light of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture in media, underscore the credibility and relevance of this theoretical framework in understanding audience engagement in the multimedia storytelling of the Harry Potter film series. Jenkins' theory, emphasizing the active role of audiences in shaping narratives and recognizing the transformative impact of media convergence, aligns with the patterns and themes we have identified [20]. They care about what others think about the stuff that they've created that creates a climate where all kinds of groups for all kinds of reasons are producing media, circulating it often through digital networks, producing the media through whatever tool is available to them, whether it is the recording function of their mobile phone, camera or microphone for podcasting, or tape recorder, or the camera that I have pointing at me right now—all are devices which allow us to produce and share media with each other all over the world (Jenkins, 2018: p.14) [1]. This participation extends beyond mere consumption, as fans become collaborators and actively engage in the continuous development and expansion of the narrative world. Furthermore, our analysis indicates that the diverse multimedia elements in the Harry Potter series provide an appropriate backdrop for engaging with the audience, allowing them to interact with the story in various meaningful ways. This aligns with Jenkins' argument that transmedia storytelling offers audiences a more pervasive and expansive narrative experience, enriching their understanding and emotional connection with the story.

The implications of our findings extend beyond the specific context of the Harry Potter film series and shed light on a broader understanding of audience engagement in transmedia storytelling. The active and creative participation of Harry Potter fans demonstrates the potential of audiences to become active participants in the creation and expansion of narratives. These challenges traditional notions of passive audiences and highlights the significant role that audiences play in shaping contemporary media landscapes. Furthermore, according to this research, media creators and structures can enhance a sense of ownership and empowerment among fans by recognizing and valuing audience participation, fostering stronger connections, and nurturing vibrant fan communities. Attracting audiences as active contributors can lead to increased fan loyalty, enthusiasm, and deeper engagement with the series.

## Conclusion

In this study, audience participation in the transmedia storytelling of the Harry Potter film series was examined through the lens of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture. By employing a comprehensive research approach that combines previous research and content analysis, valuable insights were uncovered regarding the ways in which audiences actively engage with and contribute to the narrative world. This investigation showcases the relevance and application of Jenkins' theory in understanding audience participation within the apparent transmedia landscape. Jenkins' theory, emphasizing a participatory culture, the blurring of media boundaries, and the transformative impact of convergence, provides a robust framework for comprehending the active role of audiences as co-creators



and collaborators in shaping narratives. Throughout our analysis, significant patterns, themes, and insights related to audience participation in the Harry Potter transmedia ecosystem were identified. The promotion of fan-generated content, the importance of online communities, and the multifaceted experiences offered by various media franchise elements all contribute to a vibrant and engaging participatory culture. These findings demonstrate that audiences are not passive consumers but active participants who actively extend the narrative beyond its primary sources and contribute to its enrichment. Our findings underscore the importance of a participatory culture, the transformative impact of media convergence, and the active role of audiences in shaping narratives. The proliferation of fan-generated content, the vitality of online communities, and the comprehensive experiences provided by transmedia elements all contribute to a participatory narrative landscape. This study contributes to the comprehensive analysis of audience participation and explores its application within the framework of Jenkins' theory in the Harry Potter transmedia ecosystem. By highlighting the active and creative contributions of audiences, it challenges traditional concepts of passive audience consumption and emphasizes the value of participatory culture in contemporary media landscapes. These findings offer valuable insights to creators, researchers, and media professionals, enabling them to understand the significance of audience participation and their efforts in transmedia storytelling.

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