From Consumer to Collaborator:
How audiences are transforming storytelling

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Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

April 2012

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Abstract

In response to the disruptive effects on the Internet on the entertainment media production industries, this Major Research Project explores transformations in storytelling told across film, TV and related media as entertainment media industries transition from an age dominated by mass media technologies to one dominated by the Internet. This research employs a design thinking approach that draws on foresight research, horizon scanning and expert interviews to explore the problem space, frame the key issues and design a solution. Positing that the audience's innate desire to participate in the storytelling process is a driver of these changes, it asserts that today's audiences are increasingly taking on a collaborative role in storytelling. In light of this new and empowered role for audiences, this research project proposes a series of thinking tools to aid today's storytellers in engaging in sustainable conversations with audiences.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To Marianne Chandler, my mother and loudest fan.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This Major Research Project (MRP) was sparked by lingering questions from my experience working in cultural policy for the Canadian government. During my last years at the Department of Canadian Heritage (the Department responsible for policy related to the cultural industries[1] and the arts, among other areas), my co-workers and I were much preoccupied by the impact of the Internet on the cultural industries and what that would mean for our policies.

Since its first manifestations in 1849, cultural policy in Canada has been based on a number of key assumptions:

- Culture is important in fostering a sense of citizenship and identity among Canadians.
- Professional cultural producers and industries are best placed to produce works that express Canadian culture and disseminate cultural works to Canadian audiences.
- Investing in the viability of Canada's cultural industries asserts Canada's cultural sovereignty.

(Government of Canada 2005; Jeannotte, 2006)

As a film and video policy analyst in the mid 2000s, I understood that distribution and marketing were important to the success of Canadian films and TV shows and therefore the viability of those industries. Not only in Canada, but also around the world, the Internet was having a significant impact on how entertainment content was being created, produced, distributed and consumed.

There were clear signs that the Internet was disrupting the traditional film and TV production value chain, plunging the production sector into a new world. In the old world, the expense and risks associated with film and TV production were

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[1] In Canada, the Cultural Industries are generally understood to include: film, broadcasting, music, book and magazine publishing, and more recently the interactive digital media industries.

mitigated by exerting tight control over the distribution channels (Smith, 2012). However, the Internet has amplified the pre-existing trend toward the proliferation of distribution channels (Lyman, Whelan, Chodorowicz, Jack, & Roberts, 2012, p. 29). Where we once experienced films and TV shows in movie theatres and on a handful of over-the-air TV channels, we now have hundreds of ways of enjoying our favourite films and shows. In Canada, today's platforms include:

- Movie theatres – cinema chains and independents movie houses
- Conventional TV – broadcasters
- Specialty TV and pay-TV services – niche and movie channels
- Home video – DVD retailers, airlines, hotels
- Over the top (OTT) services – iTunes, Netflix
- Unauthorized online platforms – peer-to-peer file sharing and streaming sites (Lyman et al., 2012, p. 48)

Over the years in cultural policy, it was my observation that much effort has been made to develop a deep understanding of the industry from the perspectives of financing, production, and distribution, especially in light of Internet disruption. However, much less effort was made to understand audiences. Audiences, the ultimate customers of the entertainment industries, have changed over the years. Once considered to be passive consumers of "content" or "product," their activities were largely invisible to the industry. In recent years, they have blossomed into creative producers of their own content whose activities, on and offline, have changed the nature of storytelling in the film and television industries.

2. Approach & Methods

This research project started its life as an exploration of marketing and distribution issues related to the Canadian film and TV production sector. However, as is typical of a design thinking process, it has taken a non-linear journey that has included three main phases:

- *Problem Finding* – A divergent, exploratory phase that focused on developing a deeper understanding of the problem space;
- *Problem Framing* (and reframing) – A process of breaking from the traditional way of seeing the problem space and framing it in a new context to generate new solution ideas; and
- *Problem Solving* – A process of choosing a solution, testing it and refining it.

2.1 Problem Finding

A number of sources of information informed the problem finding phase of this research project. While an overview of these sources can be found in the paragraphs that follow, a summary of research findings from all sources can be found in Appendix C.

Culture and Technology Task Force

Initial exploration into this problem space can be traced back to research I conducted in 2007 as part of the Department of Canadian Heritage's Culture and Technology Task Force. That research explored how traditional cultural products (books, films, music CDs) appeared to be undergoing a transformation, from products into something distinctly different, as a result of the arrival of digital technologies and broadband Internet (Chandler, 2007).

2020 Media Futures

More recently, as a graduate student of the OCAD University's Master of Design program in Strategic Foresight and Innovation, I participated in several of the research projects at the University's Strategic Innovation Lab, including one that directly informed this research project. The **2020 Media Futures foresight project** was conducted over the course of 2010 and 2011 and examined what the book and magazine publishing, music, film, television and interactive digital media industries in Ontario might look like in the year 2020 (Van Alstyne, 2011). I participated in horizon scanning activities, which included analysis and development of key trends and drivers at play in the broader entertainment media ecosystem[2]. Several trends directly informed my understanding of the Internet's disruptive nature in this space, including: *Remix Culture, Attention Fragmentation, Hybrid Technologies, Atoms to Bits, DIY Distribution, Aggregation, Prosumers, DIY Technology, Transmedia, A Neutral Net or Not?, IP Challenges, Blurring Life and Work, Social Collectivity and Generational Differences* (Stein & Smith, 2010). For an overview of each of the trends that directly informed this research see Appendix A.

In conjunction with the **2020 Media Futures Implications for Action Camp**, I co-produced a series of video interviews with Sheridan College's Screen Industries Research and Training Centre at Sheridan (SIRT) and OCAD University's Strategic Innovation Lab (sLab) (*2020 Media Futures : Interviews*, 2011). These interviews explored how key 2020 Media Futures trends and drivers might play out in each of the project's four resulting, future scenarios. Participants' responses informed my understanding of opportunities and threats facing the cultural industries, in general, the film and TV industries in particular. They were also instrumental in shaping my thinking around audience engagement strategies.

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[2] Ecosystem: originally a term used to define biological systems, it is used here to describe the network of interactions among stakeholders in the film and TV production sector, and between these stakeholders and their environment.

Expert Interviews, Part 1

For the current project, in order to have a deeper understanding of the "lived experience" of stakeholders in the production sector, I interviewed a small number of experts in key roles within the sector. These included a director, a producer and a broadcaster. Not only were their perspectives important to gaining a more nuanced understanding of major challenges facing the sector, but they also served to confirm changes taking place within the industry.

Semi-structured in nature, these interviews were designed around discussion themes or topics so that conversation could flow to places that I had not anticipated. They highlighted how the Internet is changing the nature of the relationship between the film and TV production sector and the audiences who enjoy their works. Insights gained in the course of these discussions also led to an exploration of the different ways audiences are interacting with the content production process and what that might mean for the sector. Interviews confirmed that changes taking place across the sector are having a significant impact on how stories are being told and enjoyed.

2.2 Problem Framing

Expert Interviews, Part 2

A second round of expert interviews focused on discussion themes that probed my participants' own experiences dealing with and thinking about audiences. Throughout the process, I incorporated insights gained from previous discussions, finding discussions flowing into new and interesting places. The interviews confirmed that audiences are interacting in new ways with content creators as they develop and produce projects (Blinn, 2012; Lathwell, 2012; Tobias, 2012; Young, 2012). Where audiences once participated at the end of the film and TV production process, it became clear that they are interacting at earlier stages and in ways that are quite different from simple consumption (Lathwell, 2012; Tobias, 2012; Young,

2012). It was also clear that these new ways of interacting with storytelling in a film and TV context are having an increasingly important impact on how the sector functions and shapes itself (Margolius, 2012; Smith, 2012; Sheffer, 2012).

These insights were significant to the reframing of the research to focus more specifically on how new audience behaviours are having an impact on storytelling and the sector. Thus it was important to understand the nature of this impact and its implications for the sector. And, more specifically, if storytelling is traditionally an act that takes place between storytellers (creators and producers of these productions) and audiences, what are the implications for the creators of Canadian productions? For an overview of findings from the expert interviews, see Appendix C.

2.3 Problem Solving

While this research project is concerned primarily with film and TV production in an English-language, Canadian context, it recognizes that the Canadian industry is part of a global experience, even more so in light of the Internet. Increasingly, what affects international film and TV industries is similarly of concern in Canada. Both at home and abroad, the Canadian production sector competes for audiences' attention with productions from across the globe.

Implications

Throughout the research, significant findings have surfaced that indicate a transition from mass media model for content creation (storytelling) to a model that is shaped by the Internet. As a result, there are significant implications for Canadian content production industries, policy makers and storytellers that relate to shifting power within the content production ecosystem, the enjoyment and shape of future cultural content, and evolving relations between storytellers and audiences.

Exercises for storytellers

In response to the implications of this transition, I have outlined a series of exercises Section 7 to help orient thinking around personal/career goals, project aims and ways of connecting storytellers with audiences.

2.4 Reader's Guide

Section 1: Introduction serves to set the stage for the rest of the research project by presenting an overview of the factors that sparked this Major Research Project. **Section 2: Approach & Methods** presents the approach and methods employed to explore this problem space. **Section 3: Audiences are behaving differently** describes how audiences have participated in the storytelling experience traditionally, hand how that transformed during the age of mass media, and once again in the age of the Internet. **Section 4: The nature of storytelling is changing** explores how storytelling in the film and TV sector has undergone several changes as new technologies shape the way audiences experience and participate in storytelling. **Section 5: Audiences are changing the way we tell stories** details how audiences have been a driving force for the change in film and TV. It looks at how storytelling changed as a result of the arrival of mass media technologies and again with the arrival of the Internet. **Section 6: Implications** discusses the implications (for the sector, policy makers and storytellers) of the transition from mass media storytelling to storytelling in the Internet age. Drawing on the implications for storytellers and audiences, **Section 7: Tools for indie storytellers** presents a set of draft tools for film and TV storytellers to help them think about their personal and project-related goals and how these can shape strategies for engaging audiences. **Section 8: Conclusion** wraps up the research project and presents suggestions for future research. **Appendix A: 2020 Media Futures key trends & drivers** presents an overview of key trends and drivers that informed this research project. **Appendix B: Expert interviews** provides a list of interview

participants and interview topics and presents an overview table of the key insights and findings of this research.

2.4.1 Finding the right terminology

Throughout this research project, it has been a constant challenge to define adequately the forms referred to in this research. In recognizing their history within mass media industries, I make reference to the film and TV industries. Distinguished by medium of capture (in the case of film) and dissemination (in the case of TV) the differences between these forms becomes unrecognizable, a matter of convention, as we forge deeper into an Internet world. Whether our favourite stories traditionally came to us on celluloid, electromagnetic tape or ink and paper, they are all treated the same way by the Internet. They are merely bits and bytes to be moved from one place to another regardless of what form they once held. Thus, the most appropriate terms for content become less evident as the boundaries become blurred between forms of cultural expression. As a result, we tend to think of these combinations of "zeros" and "ones" in terms of "audio," "video" or "text," or some combination thereof. "Film" and "TV" begin to feel like clunky terms in an Internet environment as they fail to take into account that other forms also make use of video. Take for example, transmedia or cross media productions, alternate reality games, video games, role playing games, online magazines and newspapers, short films, commercials, animations, professionally produced and personal videos.

Thus, I will make reference in this research paper to "film and TV," as well as "video and related media" as appropriate.

3. Audiences are behaving differently

Understanding that there are many types of audiences helps to paint a clearer picture of how audiences participate in the experience of storytelling today. For the purposes of this research, it has been helpful to think about generations of audiences: traditional audiences that existed before the arrival of mass media technologies, those who grew up before the arrival of the Internet (at the height of mass media film and TV) and those who grew up in the "always on" and digitally connected world. The former, those who grew up in the age of mass media, are often referred to as Baby Boomers and Generation X. Born between the end of the second World War and the mid-1960s, they were raised on a diet of soap operas, game shows, sitcoms, blockbuster movies, music videos, multiplexes and VCRs/DVD players. In stark contrast, Generation Y (or the Millennials) and Generation Z (or Digital Natives), are the results of the Internet age (Howe & Strauss, 2000, Prensky, 2001). Often referred to as the "Net Generation," they have been exposed to mass media entertainment but have forged their own path when it comes to participating in cultural production (Tapscott, 2008). Fundamentally different in the way they view participating in storytelling, their expectations of the experience are also quite different.

In any given generation, there are also different types of audiences. There are those who are actively engaged and those who are happy to watch on. A Forrester Research report on *Social Technographics* (Li, 2007) studied consumer data to understand how consumers approached social technologies. The researchers group online audiences according to seven categories of participation as in Figure 1 below.

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.
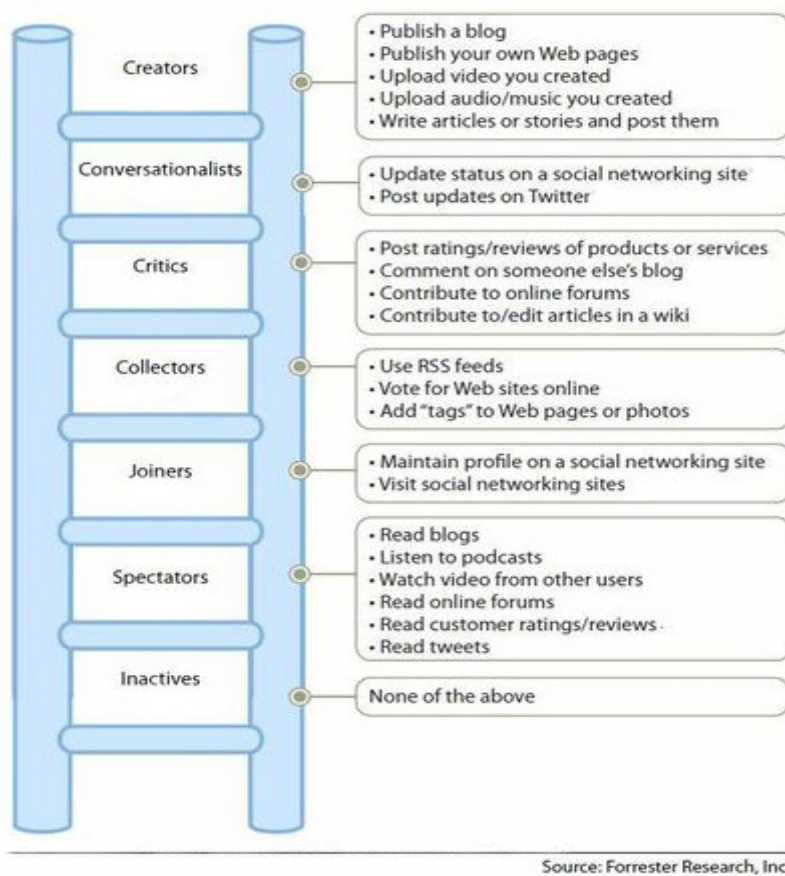
Figure 1: Categories of social participation in social technologies

This breakdown of audience participation categories was echoed in the expert interviews by the writers (Blinn, 2012; Young, 2012). Recognizing that audiences will enter a story with different motivations, Young stated that it was important, when designing stories, to try to satisfy "the needs of each level of audience". In this way, the range (from spectators to creators) can find can participate in the way of their choosing.

3.1 Traditional Audiences

It is the legacy of the mass media era that leads us to believe that audiences have always been passive consumers of content, stuffing themselves on a steady diet of films and television shows. In fact, in every village, town and city there are parents engaged in recounting fables, myths and other stories to their children. Stories that

they heard from their parents, who in turn heard them from their parents. At each retelling, the story takes on a different flavour, a different dimension, in order to engage and delight that particular audience. Even in the age of mass media audiences have been far from passive.
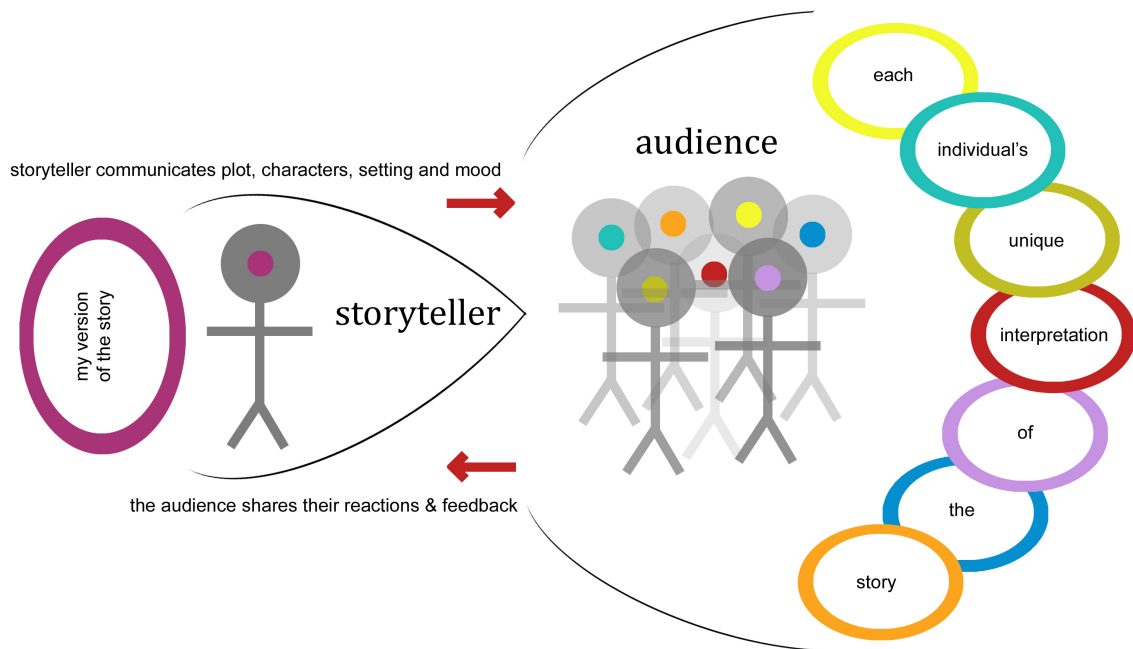
Figure 2: Storytelling – A participatory experience

Looking back at our long history of storytelling, it is clear from Figure 2 that audiences have always been active participants in the storytelling experience. They were listeners who, upon hearing the elements of the story as related by the storyteller, used their imagination to build the story in their minds. For storytelling to work, a teller and a listener are required. Without one or the other, a story cannot come into life. This bears repeating: storytelling is an ***experience*** in which both the teller and the audience ***participate*** in bringing a story to life. With each major technological innovation and each new generation of audience, this experience of participation takes on a different shape.

3.2 Audiences in the age of mass media

Over the last hundred years, the film and TV industries have finely honed the process of industrialized storytelling. Like widgets on an assembly line, stories with beautiful characters and locations, digestible story lines and predictable plot points have been crafted and squeezed out of story factories at regular intervals. With so much effort put into crafting the most broadly desirable story possible, little imagination is required on the part of audiences to bring it to life in their minds. All that is left for audiences to do is to sit back and consume.

Of course, audiences of this age have not been completely passive when it comes to enjoying their favourite production. Standing around the water cooler, over lunch and in elevators, fans have explored the themes, plots, and characters of their favourite TV shows since the beginning of broadcast television. For decades, TV networks have received viewer mail in response to cancellations, plot changes or the death of a favourite character. Fan fiction, broadly defined as stories about characters and settings written by fans of an original work, has had an active history in the science fiction world since the 1950s and 1960s (Coppa, 2006). A quick perusal of fanfiction.net will illustrate that fan fiction today covers an even broader canvas, including many other genres and categories of films, TV shows, books, play, musical, games, anima/manga, comics and other stories. ("FanFiction.Net," n.d.)

Film festivals have been a significant part of the film going experience as they bring fans, films and filmmakers together in one place. Dating back to the early decades of the 20th century, the first major film festivals to be launched were the Venice International Film Festival (1932) and the Cannes Film Festival (1939). While they have provided an important space for fans to immerse themselves in stories from around the world, they have also offered one of the few opportunities for filmmakers to interact directly with audiences. Festivals such as the Venice, Cannes and Toronto have developed into major events for the film industry. In additional to being a significant market for the buying and selling of film, each festival is an important event for the conversation around films. The dialogue that

has developed between critics, fans and the industry has played an important role in marketing and promotion of films (Skolnick, 2010).

Almost as old as film festivals, fan conventions also have a long history, with the first dating back to the 1940s. Conventions are events in which fans gather together to meet experts, famous personalities and each other. Such events often revolve around particular comic books, films, or TV shows. They can also represent entire genres of entertainment such as science fiction, anime or manga. For science fiction or comic book fans, conventions have provided opportunities to explore and participate in the worlds evoked by these stories (Coppa, 2006).

Unlike the generations that followed them, the participatory activities of mass media audiences were barely visible to the industries that spawned their fandom. It took the rise of the Internet, which provided the platform and the tools to connect these communities of shared interest across the globe, before the film and TV industries took notice of what their audiences were doing (Coppa, 2006).

3.3 Audiences in the age of the Internet

It is not that audience behaviours have been radically transformed by the widespread adoption of the Internet. Rather, the emergence of a globally distributed communications network has served to amplify long-established human desires, customs and activities. It is part of our DNA to tell stories, to create, to build on others' work and to share what we love. However, it is the speed of this amplification and the breadth of its reach that have reverberated across the film and TV industries with significant implications.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins describes participatory culture as "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others'

opinions of what they have created)." The combination of the Internet and digital tools lowered the barrier to participation in storytelling and returned us to a time of participatory cultural production (Jenkins, 2009).

Those raised on mass media diets tend to be more comfortable being served content they can consume. They appreciate having the convenience of accessing films and TV shows at a time and in a way that is convenient to them (Magid Generational Strategies, 2011; Reitsma, 2010). More recent audiences, by contrast, have a fundamentally different take on the experience of storytelling in the Internet age. They are less apt to see it through the lens of mass media technology. They understand the natural laws of this medium and are able to take full advantage of them, embracing a range of activities: from passive listening to sharing to modifying and creating.

The Net Generation and those who behave like them have embraced an environment where it is just as easy to create content as it is to consume it (Tapscott, 2008). They are used to moving about the Internet freely and accessing its riches free of charge. When describing the Internet, media scholar, Clay Shirky speaks of an environment where the same equipment is used for creating and consuming content (Shirky, 2009). For this generation, having been raised with the Internet, it is counterintuitive to restrict copying, remixing, extending, modifying or sharing. As a result, these activities are often fundamental to their lives as social beings. As social objects that afford opportunities to connect with others, music, photos, films, TV shows, games, etc are currency that make for smooth social relations in their world. While unauthorized modifying or sharing of someone else's intellectual property may be viewed as economically damaging by the Industry, not doing so can be equally socially detrimental to that industry's audience (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2012, p. 56). This highlights a fundamental difference in how transactional "value" is viewed or understood by industries built on mass media principles and audiences of the Internet Age.

In their forthcoming book, *Spreadable Media*, Henry Jenkins and his co-authors contrast commodity culture and gift economy as alternative systems for expressing the "value" generated in a transaction. They assert that it is important to recognize that "producers and audiences often follow different logics and operate within different economies." They refer to these economies as different systems for evaluating and ascribing value and point to two types of systems: commodity culture and the gift economy. Jenkins et al refer to Lewis Hyde's view of commodity culture and the gift economy as expressed in his 1983 book, *The Gift*. They tell us of Lewis' belief that gift giving is rooted in acts of generosity and reciprocity that, "reflecting social norms as opposed to contractual relations, serve to constitute social relations" (Jenkins et al., 2012, 55-56).

Commodity culture is focused on economic motives and illustrates the traditional basis of the entertainment business – the exchange of content for money. These transactions are seen to have "value" in relation to the money for which they can be exchanged (Jenkins et al., 2012, pp. 55–58). For example, moviegoers buy tickets to see a film or cable customers subscribe to new channels. The gift economy is focused on social motives and recognizes the important role gift giving plays in establishing and maintaining social relations. However, in a gift economy, commodity culture transactions are framed as having "worth," which can be seen as sentimental or symbolic value. For example, two friends maintain their social bonds by sharing news, information, funny videos and the digital equivalent of mix tapes. The Internet makes this simple, and an everyday experience. While these activities have social worth and serve to cement the friends' place within their mutual social sphere, they can also be related to experiencing content.

4. The nature of storytelling is changing

> "For most of the twentieth century, there were two quite distinct modes of
> storytelling: the personal and the professional…But where once there was a
> divide, now there's a blur. Blogger, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter—each one of them
> encourages us to express ourselves in a way that's neither slickly professional nor
> purely off-the-cuff." (Rose, 2011)

For the purposes of this MRP, I have interpreted the "nature" of film and TV
storytelling to mean the channels or technologies we use to tell stories and deliver
them to audiences, as opposed to the art or craft of storytelling. In essence, the
"nature" also speaks to how audiences participate in the act of bringing a story to
life in their own mind. It is well documented in media studies and other literature
that the way we have told stories has evolved over the millennia with the
introduction of new technologies (Rose, 2011; Sabia, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2012).

4.1 Traditional storytelling

Traditional storytelling is still practiced today. According to the American National
Storytellers Association website, it is:

> The live, person-to-person oral and physical presentation of a story to an
> audience…the teller's role is to prepare and present the necessary language,
> vocalization, and physicality to effectively and efficiently communicate the
> images of a story. The listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-
> sensory images, actions, characters, and events---the reality---of the story in
> their mind based on the performance by the teller, and on their past
> experiences, beliefs, and understandings. The completed story happens in the
> mind of the listener, unique and personal for each individual.
> ("What Storytelling is. An attempt at defining the art form.," 1997, sec. What
> is telling?)

The fundamental art and craft of storytelling have not changed. It is a collaborative dance in which the storyteller communicates the elements of a story and the audience engages their imagination to bring that story to life in their minds. In discussing the very nature of storytelling in the 1990s, the members of the American Storytelling Association agreed that "a central, unique aspect of storytelling is its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story" ("What Storytelling is. An attempt at defining the art form," 1997).

Over the millennia, the way we tell stories has taken many shapes:

- Ancient cave drawings
- Traditional oral storytellers (bards, griots, raconteurs)
- Writing and early theatre
- The printing press
- Motion picture cameras and the movies
- Broadcast television
- The Internet (and related services and devices)

4.2 Storytelling in the age of mass media

"Mass media" usually refers to broadcast and communications media. Broadcast media, such as television or radio, are defined by their ability to transmit information from one source to many recipients. This one-to-many mode of communication is exemplified by a TV station, which broadcasts a signal to television sets in hundreds of thousands of homes. Unlike two-way communications media such as the telephone, there is no way for the receiver of the signal to communicate back to its originator. This is the essence of storytelling in the mass media age. Stories are "broadcast" to many from one source, be that a TV or cable station or a movie theatre. The consequence is that there is no way for the audience to talk back to the storytellers or the stories' creators (Shirky, 2009).

The Film & TV Industry
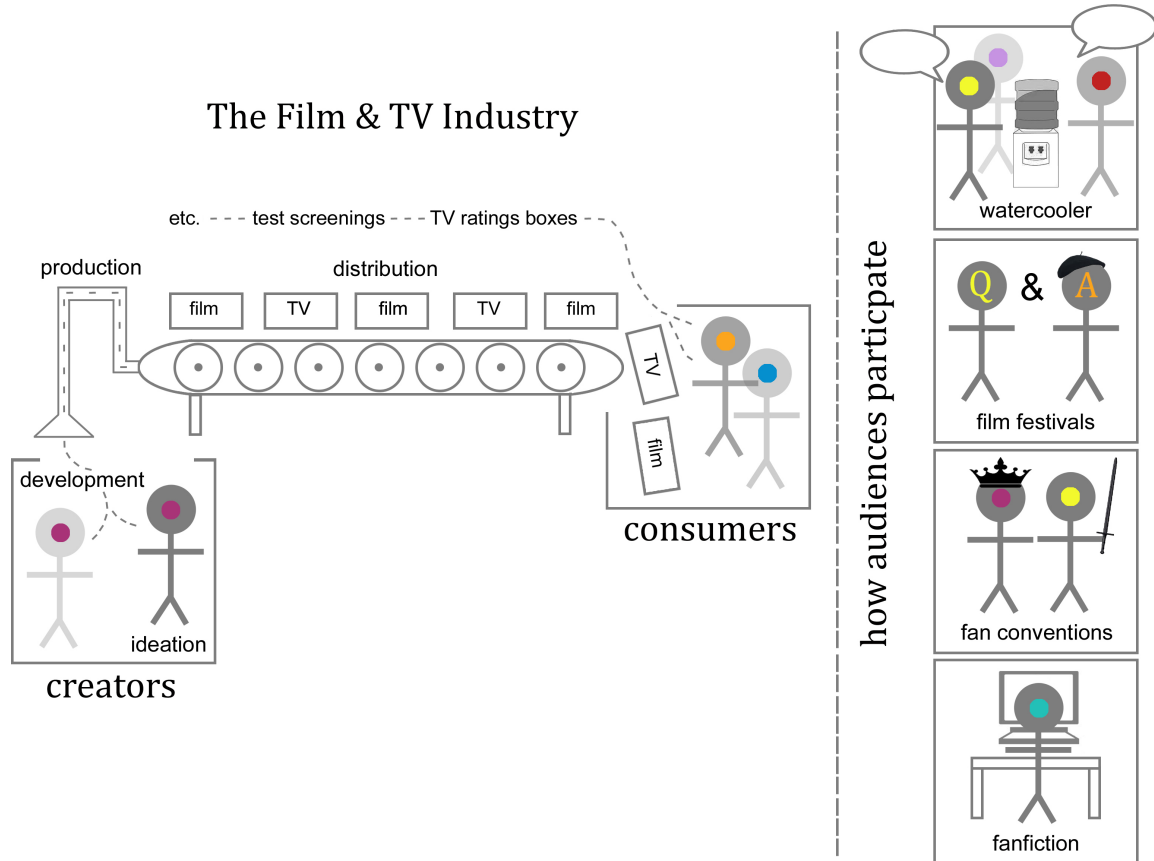
Figure 3: Mass Media Storytelling

Figure 3 illustrates how, in the age of mass media, storytelling has transformed from a collaborative dance involving storyteller and audience to an industry governed by the economics of supply and demand. Over the years, the film and broadcasting systems have refined processes and technologies in order to optimize production and distribution, while mitigating as much risk as possible. Along the way, developing an assembly line, augmented by ancillary industries, that is devoted to finding the right cast, crew and strategies for enticing the broadest possible audiences (Margolius, 2012). In addition to increasing overall production values, the industrial model has brought scale to storytelling, making it financially possible to bring bigger and better stories to larger and larger audiences. A consequence of this industrialized storytelling process has been the separation of storytellers (filmmakers and TV producers) from their audiences. There has been few ways for

audiences to participate in the storytelling experience beyond activities such as participating in test screenings for upcoming movie releases and providing ratings data. Not willing to simply consume, audiences have found other outlets to participate in the experience of their favourite stories. Creating fan fiction, attending conventions, and gathering around the office water cooler are just a few examples of ways in which audiences have kept favourite stories alive in their minds.

4.3 Along came the Internet

4.3.1 Challenging the mass media model
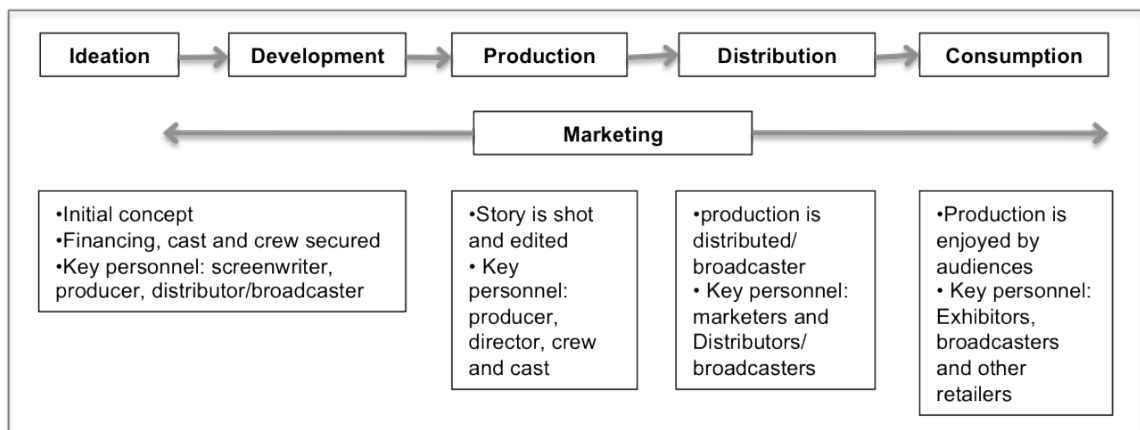
Figure 4: Content production process

As Figure 4 illustrates, film and TV production is based on a multi-stage process, executed by a series of teams with specialized skills. Whether independently produced or through large studios or networks, films and TV shows are conceived, developed, produced, distributed and then consumed. Film and TV production is an expensive and highly risky business, which has until recently been made manageable by the economics of scarcity of product and tight distribution control. In general, the business model is expressed as a sequence of transactions, where value is extracted as the product proceeds from one point to the next in the value chain. Tight control over distribution enables exploitation to be maximized (Margolius, 2012; Smith, 2012). The closer to the beginning of the production

process an investment is made, the more potential risk involved in recouping it, due to distance (in terms of control and time) from the customers and their payment (Bloore, 2010, p. 8).

The Internet is a giant copying machine, the core function of which is to copy digital bits and send them elsewhere within the digital communications network (Kelly, 2008). It is also a communications network that enables multiple modes of communication. Like the telephone, it can be used in one-to-one communications. Similarly, it can broadcast a message from one-to-many, as is the case for radio and television broadcasting. However, the Internet has transformed the media environment by providing an environment that incorporates previous modes of communications and introducing us to a new one: many-to-many or group communication. Just an importantly, it is also a platform for both consuming content and producing it (Shirky, 2008). These new capabilities have sparked a revolution in communications, cultural consumption and social participation.

If any content that is introduced into our global digital communications network can be copied infinite times (without loss of quality) and shared anywhere across the network, then this poses huge problems for any industry that has based its business model on limiting supply and tightly controlling distribution.

The music industry was the first to feel the impact of this form of communications technology. Within a few years of broad adoption, Internet whiz kids had figured out how to upload digital music files and share those files with their friends. Music files are very small, compared to video files (moving images and sound), and are easily distributed by peer-to-peer (P2P) technologies, which distribute small chunks of each file across multiple computers to be reintegrated once all chunks of the file have been downloaded. With this technology, the more "peers" participating in the sharing, the faster the files can be downloaded.

Despite loud declarations from the film and television industries that there was no threat to their business, it didn't take long for compression technologies and storage capabilities to make films and TV shows targets for unauthorized

digitization and sharing. Distributors and broadcasters have tried to control the dissemination of their content by applying digital locks but eventually any lock can be broken. Despite many expressions of moral outrage on the part of intellectual property rights holders in the entertainment industries, some are coming to view this issue of unauthorized access as a service problem, a failure to provide customers with what they want to enjoy in a way that is appropriately priced and convenient (Tassi 2012; Masnick, 2012).

Over the last 50-60 years, mass media industries have been experiencing a fragmentation of audiences across an ever-increasing number of platforms (Webster, 2005; Nelson-Field, 2011). For broadcasters and distributors this represents a challenge to traditional business models, which have been based in aggregating large numbers of viewers. Audiences spread out over many distribution channels are more difficult to monetize via advertising, as no single avenue can gather sufficiently large audiences to garner the revenues of old.

Attention economics is an approach to the management of information that treats human attention as a scarce commodity, and applies economic theory to solve various information management problems ("Attention economy," 2012). The attention of any given audience member is limited, in terms of both time available to consume entertainment content and interest or willingness to sort through less relevant content to find what they want. With each decade introducing more entertainment content and more avenues for enjoying, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract and maintain the attention of audiences. Competition for film and TV audiences today is increasing and comes from multiple sources – other more passive entertainment forms such as music, books and newer more interactive pastimes such as gaming, social media, blogging and photo-sharing.

Traditionally, Canadian film and TV producers' most important relationships are those with funders/financers, distributors and broadcasters. It could be said that these stakeholders have been the primary audiences for Canadian films since

they are the gatekeepers whose hearts must be won over before a project can go into production.

While mass media industries have been trying to figure out how to impose a pre-Internet paradigm on the new digital world, audiences have taken advantage of the large array of tools at their disposal to explore their creativity and connect with those who share their interests. Inexpensive digital video camera and post-production equipment have fostered a new wave of video makers. The technology sector responded by providing these "amateur" creators with platforms to present and distribute their works. Some have attained the status of "professional," discovering that attracting substantial audiences from across the global can help them to gain the attention of film and TV industry movers and shakers. Others were content to stay in the realm of the personal and enjoyed connecting with communities of interest around the world.

4.3.2 New ways of telling stories
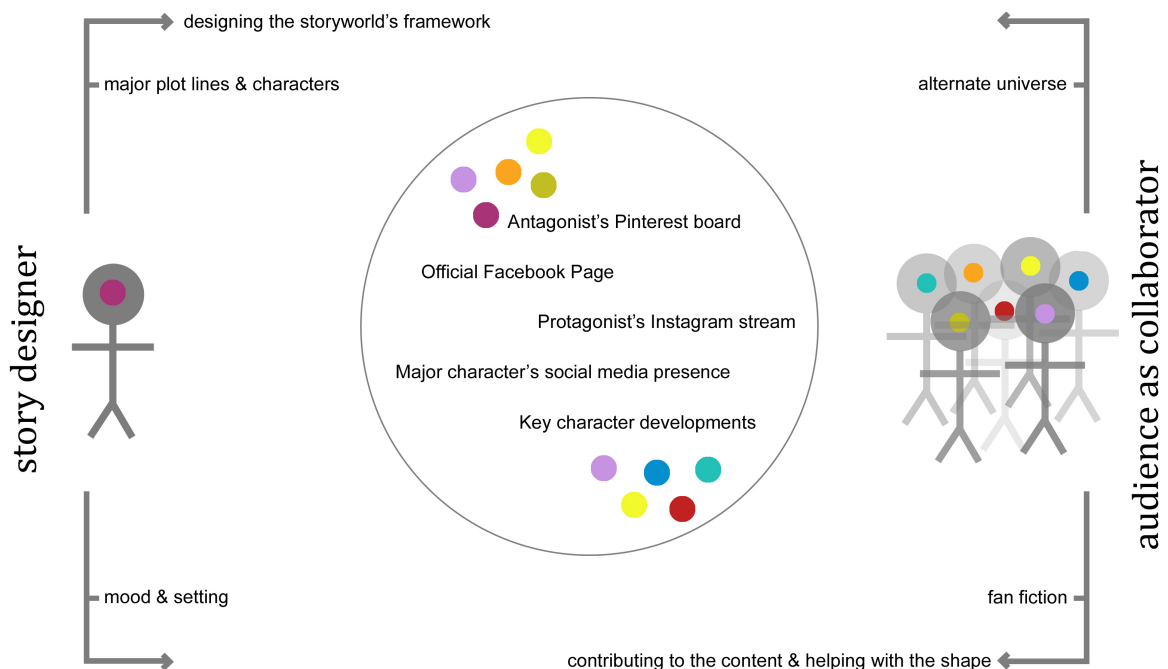
Figure 5: Storytelling in the Internet Age

From the moment that the Internet became deeply embedded in our lives, innovative creators have explored new ways of telling stories in this medium. Many within the film and TV industries tried to port mass media formats into this new medium, effectively treating the Internet like another broadcast medium. Those with less to lose by exploring new ways of working have tried to understand the laws governing a many-to-many digital communications environment and apply them creatively to storytelling. Figure 5 presents a representation of storytelling in the Internet age. It suggests a space where both creators and audiences collaborate in the storytelling process, each contributing valuable material to the content and the process. This was expressed by all transmedia producers who participated in the interview process (Lathwell, 2012; Tobias, 2012; Young, 2012). It recognizes the increasing participation of some audience members today, enabled by new tools and technology. It also recognizes that a shift is taking place in terms of the role of storytellers. As audiences move into a more co-creative role where they contribute content and help to shape the story, creators transform into story designers who determine the shape and function of a story experience and set the stage for audience contributions to that story world. As expressed by Young, storytelling forms such as transmedia "are greatly about designing for audience experience" (2012).

Telling stories across multiple platforms

The Internet has enabled storytelling to evolve from one discrete platform or medium to multiple platforms. Looking back, it is clear that this trend had its origins before the dawning of the Internet. Popular franchises such as the *Star Wars* movies ("StarWars.com," n.d.) and *Transformers* ("Transformers," n.d.) might not have been conceived as multiplatform productions but they evolved along this path by expanding their stories into other formats and platforms. In the case of *Star Wars*, the films were joined by toys (1977), books (1977), additional films, and an animated series (2008). There were even recreated performances of classic scenes in Second Life. The *Transformers* franchise started out as toys in 1984 and then

morphed into an animated TV series (1984) and recently into a series of blockbuster films (2007). These properties are often cited as early examples of **Transmedia Storytelling**, cross platform and multiplatform production, terms, which are very popular terms in film and TV circles at this moment. Defined differently by various industry professionals, they all represent ways of telling stories on platforms beyond traditional film and broadcast. While Transmedia is not uniformly defined, it is generally recognized as "storytelling across multiple forms of media, with each element making distinctive contributions to a user's understanding of the story universe, including where user actions affect the experience of content across multiple platforms" (Screen Australia, 2012).

Transmedia productions can be found across the entertainment media production industries and also include content related to *The Matrix (1999)*, *Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Heroes* ("*Heroes* (TV series)," 2006), *Lost* ("*Lost* (TV series)," 2004), and many more. Transmedia storytelling has been embraced by the marketing world as a way of creating an enticing experience for the potential consumers of films, music and even cars. At times, the distinction between transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing is quite blurred.

Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) are interactive narratives that make use of the real world as a platform for engagement. Inspiring intense player involvement, they also make use of transmedia strategies for delivering a story (across multiple platforms). Importantly for audiences of the Internet Age, ARGs take place in real-time and may be influenced by participants' ideas and actions. Blurring the lines between the real and the virtual, they often resemble a paper chase that takes place on the web and in real life. While often-cited ARGs were those created in connection with the impending release of the film, such as the *Why So Serious* ARG ("Why So Serious," 2007) which was created in support of *The Dark Knight* (2008)and *Year Zero* (2009), which introduced fans to the world of the new Nine Inch Nails concept album of the same name, serious games scholar, Jane McGonigal explores how these games can impact the real world (McGonigal, n.d.).

Given that the Internet fosters group communication, it is not surprising to find a growing trend toward collaboration between creators and audiences in the storytelling experience. This trend is an expression of our inherent desires to participate fully in the storytelling experience facilitated by enabling technologies. While we have seen this expressed in a limited manner in the past in the form of fan fiction, the Internet and fandom studies have raised the profile of fan fiction considerably. Whereas fan fiction used to command a small audience, the Internet now connects a global community of fans who are eager to experience content related to their favourite entertainment properties, whether created or sanctioned by the original author or not. The increase in this activity has caught the attention of intellectual property right holders in general, some of whom have chosen to pursue fans for copyright infringement.

Collaborative storytelling

In sharp contrast to the practice of suing fans, **Shared Story Worlds** are "entertainment properties designed to allow audiences/fans/consumers to collaborate and participate in the creation of content in the entertainment property" (Walker, 2012). As co-created story worlds, they represent the nexus of "collaborative world building, participatory storytelling and distributed narratives". Non-fiction storytelling is also exploring collaborative storytelling. Media and communications scholar Jenny Weight refers to participatory documentaries as a way to tell "stories about a community using the community's own words"(2012). In the age of the Internet, that story is then reflected back to the community with the use of social media. For Weight, participatory documentaries are an integral part of her pedagogy, so much so that she created a how-to book for community producers (2012). Outside the media and communications schools environments, this form of collaborative and participatory storytelling is also emerging. Two recent and well known examples include Kevin Macdonald's *Life in a Day* (2011) and Jeff Deutchman's *11/4/08* (2010). Compiled from over 80,000 YouTube submissions by contributors in 192 countries, *Life in a Day* presents a single day on planet Earth.

Making use of film and interactive technology to capture a moment in time, *11/4/08* captured the experiences of friends and strangers on the day of Barack Obama's election. Both films were curated by professional filmmakers who created the framework to incorporate video contributions from the broader community.

These and other examples demonstrate how storytellers are increasingly combining traditional production tools with interactive technologies to tell stories with the help of their audiences.

From "story product" to "story world experience"

Despite Academy Award winning screenwriter William Goldman's assertion that, before a movie is released, "nobody knows anything" about its box office potential, movie industries around the world have tried to duplicate the success of previous films (Goldman, 1989). Indeed, in recent decades, we have witnessed the launch of several film franchises with sequels, prequels and origin stories striving to repeat the box office success of the original film. Many have been highly successful, including: *Batman* ("Batman franchise media," 1939), *Twilight* (*The Twilight Saga (franchise)*, 2008), *James Bond* (*James Bond (franchise)*, 1962), *Harry Potter* (*Harry Potter (franchise)*, 2001) and *Indiana Jones* (*Indiana Jones (franchise)*, 1981). ("Movie Franchises - Box Office History," 2012). That these films have been so successful is often attributed to studios' ability to repeat the success of the original. However, equally important is how franchises foster greater immersion in the story by providing their fans with more time and material (plots lines, characters, events etc.) to explore in that franchise's story world.

This trend has also been echoed in television programming. In recent years, TV networks have loosened their ties on episodic TV, where each episode is a contained story) and have explored serial television. Television writers have long preferred to unfold a story over the course of a season (Epstein, 2009). When discussing the experience of storytelling, film writer and director Denise Blinn expressed that "TV today can have more room to be creative than feature film…with its diversity of topics and time to explore stories" (2012). Clearly, based on the success of series

such as *Lost* ("*Lost* (TV series)," 2004), *Battlestar Galactica* ("*Battlestar Galactica* (TV series)," 2004), *Dexter* ("*Dexter* (TV Series)," 2006), *Mad Men* ("*Mad Men* (TV series)," 2007)and *Downton Abbey* ("*Downton Abbey* (TV series)," 2010), audiences have also embraced broad story arcs of this form of storytelling.

This trend toward immersive forms of storytelling, which unfold over multiple platforms and foster deep engagement, starts to look less like a discrete "story" or a "product" and very much more like an "experience" (Young, 2012). Requiring an investment of time and energy on the part of fans, Young asserts that "storytelling is the audience's journey."

5. Audiences are changing the way we tell stories

> "In the command-and-control world, we know who's telling the story; it's the author. But digital media have created an authorship crisis. Once the audience is free to step out into the fiction and start directing events, the entire edifice of twentieth century mass-media begins to crumble." Frank Rose, *The Art of Immersion*

5.1 New behaviours, old expectations

It is tempting to see the Internet and digital technologies as drivers of the change in the ways in which we tell and deliver stories. In fact, the deep driver of this change is the innate desire to create, to tell stories and to share what we love (Van Alstyne, 2011, p. 34). The Internet has acted as an enabler of this human activity. Human creativity and participation has flourished and become more visible in this medium. It is the collective impact of this activity across the globe that is changing how content creation industries tell and deliver stories.

By the time the Internet became widely adopted, audiences had already grown used to having access to an ever-increasing number of TV channels and movie screens. When it came to seeing films, they could go out to a movie theatre or stay at home and watch on DVD or any number of conventional or specialty TV channels. Similarly with TV, if they were unable to catch their favourite show during the scheduled broadcast, they could catch it in a repeat broadcast, watch another time zone's broadcast, catch up with their recording on their personal video recorder. If they were willing to wait for a while, they could rent or buy the DVD and catch up on the whole season.

Advances in Internet speed and compression technologies have facilitated easier access to films and TV shows thereby placing even more choice and control in the hands of audiences. In recent years, we have witnessed the emergence of several Over-The-Top (OTT) services and devices that piggyback on an existing wireless network, pull video content from the Internet and deliver it to a screen (TV,

computer, tablet, etc.). Many of these services have appeared in reaction to unauthorized file sharing websites, such as The Pirate Bay or isoHunt, which provide access to thousands of items - music, books, films, TV shows and more – with more being added daily.

The Internet is a medium of carriage for older media (films, music, TV shows, books etc.) (Shirky, 2009). Since the Net Generation is already accustomed to accessing information via the Internet however and whenever they choose, it is not surprising that they would have different customs and expectations with regard to interacting with entertainment content. Having grown up with the Internet, they are comfortable using it to serve their own needs in terms of creation and consumption activities. They flow from being a passive consumer to active participants to creator whenever it suits their purposes (Tobias, 2012).

Members of the Net Generation are adept Internet users and prolific generators of content: from tweeting, to blogging, to photo and video sharing, to remixing/mashing-up, designing games, curating content, to creating fan fiction. They expect to do what they like with stories, whatever their imagination may conjure - commenting on, sharing, extending, modifying and more. They expect to experience their favourite content on any platform, on any device invented or not yet invented. They care little for the entertainment industries' insistence on distinguishing between films, TV, web video, games, personal, amateur professional - it is all digital content that can be accessed via the Internet. They are not tied to the concepts of TV, movie theatres, books or computers, the story goes with them and they go to the story. That they increasingly expect to influence the shape of the story, and its telling, is evidenced by the rise in participatory storytelling experiences such as transmedia storytelling, alternative reality games and shared story worlds (Lim, Walker, & Williams, 2011)

5.2 Industry tries to respond

In an interview with media scholar Henry Jenkins, US media scholar Frank Rose states "We've spent the last hundred-plus years with a strict delineation between author and audience--you read a book, you watch a movie, and that's it. You're a consumer." In fact, we now recognize that the "natural order" of mass media (the one-to-many mode of communication) was just a function of the limitations of the technology. There was no mechanism for participation, except limited, after-the-fact feedback until the arrival of the Internet (Rose, 2011). This limiting version of storytelling is of course a completely foreign concept to those who grew up with the Internet. Creators today have the means to engage audiences at any point of the storytelling process. They have at their disposal the tools to reach audiences of millions. However, they must be prepared to have the audience reciprocate.

Clearly, the entertainment industries are trying to adjust to the changing landscape. Where they once maintained complete control over the development, production and distribution of their content properties, they now find that control is continually challenged as power shifts in the direction of audiences. Will control shift completely? That is not clear. In the meantime, in an attempt to retain some control, some industry players have been trying to address the needs of audiences.

Over the decades, broadcasters have tried to respond to the preferences of different audiences by offering them specialized content channels (Webster, 2005; Nelson-Field, 2011). This practice, launched by the arrival of cable TV, has served to fragment audiences into increasingly focused niches and has been exacerbated by the arrival of the Internet (Babe, n.d.).

Social TV is a general term for the technology that supports audiences' social interaction while viewing TV or related content. Recognizing that social media such as Twitter and Facebook have replaced the office water cooler as the site of audience interaction regarding their favourite stories, many industry players have tried to develop services to harness and monetize this activity (Nathan et al., 2008; Blinn, 2012). The broadcast industry recognizes that viewership for live TV

broadcasts have been in general decline for many years. However, events such as the Olympic Games or the Grammys that can draw large global audiences attracted more viewers and buzz. This is in part due to audiences making use of social media to text, tweet or update their statuses with comments about characters, celebrities and commercials" (Bulkeley, 2010).

Tony Wang, Twitter's General Manager for the United Kingdom reminds us that "Broadcasters are not the ones to choose whether to have social TV. It happens whether they like it or not. But they have a choice about how to harness that social TV energy" (Dredge, 2012).

6. Implications

In Canada, the cultural sector is an interconnected web of creators, cultural industries and government bodies, where culture is intricately interwoven with issues of identity and sovereignty. In as much as the entertainment content production context has informed the development of Canada's cultural policy framework, that framework has in turn shaped the functioning and the outputs of Canada's content production industries. However, the foundation upon which these business models and policy frameworks have been based has shifted as a result of the disruptive forces of the Internet.

Business models (and the cultural policy instruments that support them) have been designed to control the creation and distribution of cultural products. The twenty-first century Internet environment puts great pressure on this foundation by challenging notions of Canadian content, distribution control, markets (and the boundaries that separate domestic from foreign), copyright as a revenue regime, professional versus amateur status, culture as a product versus an experience, and much more. All of these factors play an important role in how content is created, financed, distributed and consumed today, or will likely be in the future.

6. 1 Shifts in thinking

During the problem finding and framing aspects of this Major Research Project, a number of key shifts were identified that represent a spectrum of change taking place as we transition from a mass media model of storytelling to an Internet one. In order to help storytellers better navigate the changes taking place in the entertainment content production ecosystem, I have synthesized the major shifts that may have an impact on the way they conceive, develop, finance and produce their works and presented them in the form of a table.

Table 1: Shifts in the content production ecosystem

Shifts	From	To
Ecosystem powerbrokers	Funders, distributors	Story designers, audiences
Distribution control	Industry - top down distribution	Audience - bottom up circulation
Revenues	Products (individual transactions	Experience (access fees/subscriptions)
Value generation	Aggregation of isolated eyeballs	Collectives of people who interact
Revenues	Mainly distribution, licensing	Diverse activities that may also include sponsorship, crowdfunding, private investors etc.
Value	Exchange for $$	Investment, engagement in the property/experience
Storytelling	Story as product	Story world as experience
Platform	One main platform, with derivatives	Multiple integral platforms
Audience behaviour	Consumption	Collaboration/co-creation
Points of entry into a story	Few defined by author	Multiple determined by audience
Role	Teller of stories	Designer of story experiences
Storytellers' key relationships	Funders and distributors	Fans and collaborators

6.1.1 Restarting the conversation with audiences

Perhaps, the greatest impact of mass media entertainment systems is the distancing of storytellers (creators of films and TV shows) and audiences in the collaborative dance of storytelling. This separation is most profound in independent production situations such as Canada, where creators and producers have a weakened position in the production ecosystem, vis-à-vis intermediaries such as distributors and broadcasters. However, the Internet now presents a "space" where creators and audiences can reconnect, converse and co-create. Creators with strong connections to audiences gain more power as they can mobilize fans to support and promote their works, even at early stages this support can tip the balance in terms of funding or distribution decisions.

In light of the evolving nature of the Internet and the ways in which audiences will play an increasingly important role in the creation of compelling stories, it appears critical that independent filmmakers and TV producers invest in developing and sustaining these relationships.

Science fiction author Cory Doctorow has declared that "Conversation is king. Content is just something to talk about" (2010). In his article, *The Attention Economy and the Net*, Michael Goldhaber explains that in a given conversation it is the exchange of attention that is primary. Less important are the words, which merely serve to capture or demonstrate attention. He goes on to assert that in order to maintain the conversation the exchange must be balanced (with no party dominating) or one or other of the parties will lose interest and disengage. However, while the contents of that message are less important, the conversation still needs to remain relevant to those participating (1997).

Bearing in mind the importance of initiating and maintaining conversations with audiences, there are a number of aspects to consider when embarking on a new relationship with audiences and turning them into fans. These include inviting them to converse and interact with you to having something interesting and relevant to convey. In order to effectively do this, it is important that storytellers understand their goals – personal or corporate, as well as their projects. Appendix A offers a series of questions that are designed to help storytellers reflect on their personal and projects goals, and then offers some strategies to help them reach their goals.

6.1.2 From Storyteller to Story Designer

The future for filmmakers and TV producers lies in making the transitions from maker of films and TV shows to designers of story experiences. The future is collaboration between those who initiate and guide the design and development of a story experience and those who choose to participate and contribute to that experience. Content creators will need to recognize that moving into the territory of

designing a story experience requires a shift in thinking and calls for a deep understanding of experience design and their audiences.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Sector Implications

- New business models for cultural production in the Internet age - innovative, early adopters are imagining possible futures and exploring new ways of engaging audiences and telling stories.
- Relationships with audiences are changing. Will the cultural sector be able to build businesses around collaborators versus consumers of content?
- Audiences are proving to be powerful allies in the dissemination of content. How will the sector find ways of leveraging audience-facilitated circulation?
- Changes to the ecosystem do not appear to be slowing, how adaptable will content creation companies be?
- New skills will be necessary to thrive in the future of this digital world.
- The new Internet environment requires building of new skill sets. How prepared is the cultural sector to take on new challenges?

6.2.1 Policy Implications

- The boundaries between film, television, interactive digital media and other forms of cultural production are blurring. How will current policy silos adequately reflect and serve new forms of cultural production? How will policy deal with the blurring of boundaries between professional and amateur status?
- Traditional mass media distribution strategies are increasingly insufficient for media projects born of the Internet world. Effective distribution strategies for this space will not resemble traditional ones. Present policies in support of distribution were devised in the age of mass media and will need to be reexamined for future relevance.

- Some audience members are taking on new roles including: collaborator, financer, marketer and distributor, among others. How will policies and programs treat their involvement in the development of projects? Will independent producers be penalized for designing projects for future audiences?

6.2.2 Implications for storytellers

- The shift in storytelling from a mass media model to an Internet one has introduced a shift from the production of cultural products to the creation and design of cultural experiences. This raises the question of the need for storytellers to shift their mindset from creator to designer.
- The foundations of the entertainment content production system have shifted significantly, and will continue to do so. How well equipped are storytellers to adapt with the constantly shifting ground of this new Internet world?
- The new active role of audiences in storytelling challenges established roles for ecosystem players, including storytellers. How will storytellers engage today's audiences? What new relationships will they forge to ensure a viable future?

7. Tools for Indie storytellers

> "There has never been a more exciting time to be a storyteller. We are sitting on the brink of a whole new art form. We don't know what it's going to look like when it goes up. But that means we can try just about anything that we want. Take a deep breath and jump into it. You won't regret it." Andrea Phillips, Transmedia Creator, 2012

As we have seen, the entertainment content creation landscape is in flux with no clear indication of when or if it will become predictable. As a result, there is no clear formula for success in the future. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to become resilient. Resiliency comes from understanding that the environment is changing, what your long-term goals are (and why) and being able to adapt how you achieve those goals to suit varying circumstances. In order to help build your resiliency, the tools that follow are designed to help you think about where you are now and where you want to be in the future. They explore your career or corporate goals and the goals you establish for your projects, with a view to helping you recognize the difference and plan strategies accordingly.

The first section, *You – the creator/storyteller* – explores important questions about your career or corporate goals. They probe the underlying motivations for your work as a storyteller, and what you hope to achieve in the future. The second section – *Your project* – explores important questions for your projects that are designed to uncover project goals and identify key audiences. The third section – *Strategies for engaging audiences* – focuses more strategically about on engaging audiences or fans, both for you as a storyteller and for your individual projects.

Answering these questions will help you understand your underlying motivations and goals while suggesting appropriate strategies for engaging audiences. For example, if your goal is to raise awareness of an important issue, you may find it more important to increase the spreadability of some of your content by loosening control over it in order to reach as broad an audience as possible.

7.1 You – creator, storyteller

Consider the following questions and possible answers. This is not an exhaustive list of possible answers but rather a jumping off point. Which answers apply to your situation? Which answers are most important? Which ones the least? Do you understand why this is the case? Then consider the strategy outlined at the end of this section. How might these work for you?

Why did you become a filmmaker or producer?

To make money? To create art? To tell stories? To change the way people see the world? To become famous? Some other reason?

What do you hope to achieve over the course of your career?

Develop a substantial body of work? Perfect your craft? Mentor other filmmakers? Change filmmaking on a fundamental level? Push the boundaries of the art form? Build a long-term, sustainable fan base? Some other reason?

What does success look like for you?

Financial security? Ability to influence others? A deeply engaged fan base? Freedom to take risks in your work? The respect of your peers? Other?

Part of understanding what success means for you, is being clear about what you believe in strongly or what core values are at the heart of everything you do?

- How would you articulate your core values?
- How are they expressed in the films you make?
- How do they influence your choice of subject matter or the way you make films?
- Who shares your core values, what you stand for?
- Where can you find these kindred spirits?
- What can you teach them? And what can they teach you?

Goal: Autonomy

Strategy: Control

Illustrative tactics:

- Maintain as much control as possible over how your content is developed and how at reaches audiences
- Keep/Hold as many exploitation rights as you can (don't give them all away)
- Find partners with expertise in the areas you need (distribution, experience design, etc)
- Loosen control over content to enable it to reach as many people as possible
- Explore emerging funding/financing options (e.g. crowdfunding, sponsorship)
- Explore self-distribution where appropriate

Goal: Trust

Strategy: Clear brand

Illustrative tactics:

- Understand your vision, mission, your reasoning for telling stories
- Identify your/your company's values
- Guide your actions by your brand

Goal: Longevity

Strategy: Adaptability/flexibility

Illustrative tactics:

- Understand how the entertainment content production system works and how it is changing
- Keep informed of industry issues
- Keep abreast of the trends and drivers that might affect the future

- Develop a solid understanding of the issues affecting the content creation business

Goal: Adaptability

Strategy: New roles/skills

Illustrative tactics:

- Diversify your value propositions: consult, design, teach, learn about other platforms
- Let go the label of filmmaker, TV producers and start thinking of yourself as storyteller or story designer

7.2 Your Project

While the reasons for embarking on each project may be related to your personal vision, it is worthwhile exploring your specific goals for each project. Understanding what you want to achieve with each project can shed light on how to engage audiences. Each project may serve your overall goals in a different way.

What are your goals for your present or upcoming project?

To make money, the greatest amount possible? To be highly recognized for the work you do? To be recognized as a star? To launch a career? To practice your craft?
To raise awareness of an issue/population/situation? To have the most eco-friendly release as possible? To push the boundaries of storytelling, technically, artistically?
Some other reason?

What does success look like for <u>your project</u>?

Breaking even financially? Making a profit? Critical success? Great reviews and/or awards? Building or expanding a fan base? Raising awareness of an important issue?
Fostering societal change? A deeply engaged and entertained fan base? Enough clout to leverage financing for another aspect of your project? Some other reason?

What do you know about your project?

What is its theme or topic? Why is it important to tell this story now?

What are the best ways of telling this story? As a film, in another medium or format, or on a different platform? A combination? Who are natural collaborators? Who are natural champions of the topic or format? Who is your core audience? Who might be other audiences?

Goal: New Platforms and formats

Strategy: Embrace new storytelling platforms

Illustrative tactics:

- Explore and understand how storytelling works in other platforms (what stories work best and leverage what's natural about that platform
- Tell stories for whatever platform or interaction mode is appropriate
- Consider rolling out different components of your story at different times and in different ways (e.g. web series or graphic novel first to build fan base and leverage financing for longer form content)
- Collaborate with storytellers who work in other disciplines and on other platforms

7.3 Audiences and Fans

What do you know about your audience/fans?

Who would be your core audience? What do you know about your core audience? Where do they play/hang out online, in the real world? What do they do when they play? What might they be giving up to play with your project? Who influences them? Who do they influence? How might your audience want to interact with you and your project?

Goal: Fans

Strategy: Deep/broad fan engagement

Illustrative tactics:

- Identify and get to know your fans
- Identify how your fans are finding you
- Understand demographic differences. Mass media versus Net Generation. Some want to design, others influence, others consume"
- Involve audiences early in your story design/development process
- Incorporate analytics tools for every element of your online presence to understand the different avenues people take to get to your content
- Converse with fans online (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, whichever social media tool is appropriate for your fan base)
- Turn your fans into your collaborators
- Encourage fan fiction based on your story and its characters – link to the good work, hire or collaborate with the producers of great work
- Encourage remixes of your content

Goal: The right audience for your project

Strategy: Identify and target your core audience for your project

Illustrative tactics:

- Get clear on your project's topic, themes, genre, etc.
- Know who the core audience of your project is, and who peripheral audiences might be
- Know where they play, who influences them and who they influence
- Target those who influence your target and peripheral audiences

8. Conclusion

This Major Research Project has explored the transformation of storytelling as it has experienced two major periods of innovation - mass media technologies and the Internet. Storytelling, at its core, is an experience that requires the participation of both the storyteller and the audience. The storyteller interprets and communicates the core elements of a story (characters, plots, setting and environment) and the audience builds their own version of that story in their minds.

Over the latter half of the 20th century, mass media industries have flourished, introducing innovations to the storytelling process that improved the quality of productions, marketing and distribution activities and business models. However, in industrializing a creative, interpretive and social process, mass media technologies had the unintended consequence of attenuating the important connection between storytelling's core participants – the storytellers (creators) and their audiences. Despite having been transformed from participants into consumers, and having been unable to participate fully in the storytelling experience due to the limitations of mass media's one-to-many broadcast model, audiences created new ways to enter into their favourite stories and extend their enjoyment.

Clearly the content production world has changed and continues to change, with important consequences for storytellers. The emergence of the Internet and social media has provided a platform that brings the two core constituents of storytelling back together in new and exciting ways. Audiences today have the means to create their own stories, personal and professional, and extend, share and comment on others. Audiences (of the Net Generation particularly) have embraced these new capabilities and are pushing the boundaries of storytelling. As a result, their participatory (and potentially value generating) activities have been rendered more visible, affording them a more powerful position (relative to during the mass media age) within the entertainment content production ecosystem.

Additionally, storytelling today has moved from traditional products such as books, films and TV shows, to include networked, multiplatform, interactive, collaborative experiences that blur the boundaries between art forms, work and play, and online and offline life.

The impact of these shifts within the entertainment media ecosystem landscape will likely continue to reverberate for some time. In order to thrive in such an environment, industry stakeholders, but particularly storytellers, will need to shift their thinking about their role in the ecosystem, their relationships with audiences and the way they tell stories.

8.1 Further research

This research project has explored the transformations taking place in the broader content production ecosystem and has placed an emphasis on identifying implications stakeholder in the Canadian context. Section 7 presents the early stage thinking for a set working tools that are designed to help Canadian storytellers navigate the future and think about engaging audiences. As the entertainment environment is in constant flux, it will be important to continue to probe what is relevant, new and changing.

Bibliography

This Major Research Project has drawn on sources that cover a broad range of categories. As a result, this bibliography has been presented in three sections. The first treats textual sources such as books, journal articles and web pages. The second groups sources that are film, TV and other media-based. The third and final section of this bibliography refers to those expert interviews, which were conducted for this research project, that were cited in the body of this document.

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Expert Interviews

As part of this Major Research Project, I conducted a series of expert interviews, the transcripts of which are unpublished. The following list refers to the interviews that were cited in body of this document. The full listing of interview participants, topics and findings can be found in Appendix B.

Blinn, D. (2012, January 26). Personal Interview.

Lathwell, C. (2012, February 1). Personal Interview.

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Appendix A: Key trends & drivers - *2020 Media Futures*

Trends

The 2020 Media Futures project defines trends as "patterns of change that indicate significant, directional shifts across the spectrum of lived experience and observation...that have potential for growth and significant long-term impact." Strategic Foresight projects achieve breadth by scanning across a range of categories - Social, Technological, Economic, Ecological, Political, and Values (or STEEPV).

Below is a selection of the key trends from the 2020 Media Futures foresight research that directly related to this research:

Social Trends

Remix Culture: Remix Culture describes the emergence of cultural artifacts and processes created to include recombination of other works, enabled by the digitization of media, as well as the availability of knowledge about others' creations provided by open, global networks.

Attention Fragmentation: The fragmentation of content into smaller bits, consumed rapidly and frequently, has both been driven by and is causing further shifts in cognitive patterns, toward shorter attention spans.

Technological Trends

Hybrid Technologies: Powerful new platforms are beginning to emerge through the hybridization of two or more technologies or media, such as Internet TV, portable video, or mobile messaging, creating new possibilities to modify and extend media in new ways.

Atoms to Bits: More and more content is being converted from both physical or non-digital formats to digital ones for easier distribution online.

Portability and Mobility: Mobile devices are permeating more and more areas of our lives, strongly shaping the consumption and communication behaviours of society, changing how we interact with location and each other.

Economic Trends

Agile Vs. Formal Production: Traditional top-down models are increasingly running up against agile bottom-up approaches on the Web, creating a clash of cultures, but also driving innovation.

DIY Distribution: Digital tools and processes have enabled independent producers and creators to use the Internet as a distribution channel to directly connect with consumers and audiences in the process circumventing some of the cultural industries' traditional intermediaries.

Aggregation: The vast amount of content on the Internet provides ample opportunities to become an aggregator, helping users navigate and curate consumption.

Prosumers: Inexpensive digital production tools, digital storage, the proliferation of free online social platforms, increasing broadband speeds, and computer processing power have made it easy and inexpensive for non-professionals to create content.

Transmedia: The creators of properties in one medium are repurposing the their story, their characters and any other aspects of their IP in other media.

Political Trends

A Neutral Net or Not?: Governments and private interests continue to explore the necessity of tiered Internet access to provide differential quality of service based on the status of the consumer.

IP Challenges: P2P technologies, remixing, and hacker culture's cycle of rapidly breaking technological protections is steadily eroding the position of IP protection of content worldwide. Some commercial entities have responded by altering business models to reflect this change.

Values-based Trends

Blurring Life and Work: The 24-hour nature of always-on access, availability of networks, and demand for productivity, mean we are losing the ability to keep work and personal consumption and behavior compartmentalized.

Social Collectivity: Online access to millions of other individuals and the ease with which networks of like-minded people connect, has created the foundation for new forms of technology-enabled collaboration.

Generational Differences: Differing technology uptake patterns among different generations are creating a generational divide in demand, which will further shape the delivery channels we use in the future.

The full package of trends that was prepared by Suzanne Stein and Scott Smith for the 2020 Media Futures project can be found at http://2020mediafutures.ca/Trends.

Drivers

The 2020 Media Futures project defines drivers as the "underlying causal forces at work within systems, which lead to more visible manifestations of change, such as trends and signals."

Below is a selection of key drivers from the 2020 Media Futures foresight research that directly related to this research:

- Accessibility as a Right
- Continued Government Funding
- Democratization of Tools
- Empowerment of the Collective
- Evolving Business Models
- Explosion of Creativity and Self Expression
- Interoperability
- Need for Human Connection
- Net Neutrality

- Public as Experts
- Social Connectivity
- Unmet Cross-platform Opportunities

The complete list of drivers explored as part of the 2020 Media Futures foresight project can be found at

http://2020mediafutures.ca/Drivers&structure=Findings.

Appendix B: Expert interviews

As part of this Major Research Project, I conducted semi-structured expert interviews with 14 stakeholders in the film and TV production sector. Interviews took place during the winter of 2011/2012 in Toronto, with the exception of one interview, which took place in Vancouver, BC. Provided below is a list of the participants, the areas of the entertainment content production sector they represent, the research topics covered with the interview participants, and the key insights and findings from those sessions.

List of Participants

1. Mark Bishop – Executive Producer, TV & Digital media sectors
2. Denise Blinn – Writer and Director, Film sector.
3. Victoria Hirst – Producer, Film & TV sector.
4. Catherine Lathwell – Transmedia producer, Film & digital media sectors.
5. Sarah Margolius – Film Marketer, Film Sector.
6. Caitlin O'Donovan – Director of Interactive, TV sector.
7. Andra Sheffer – Executive Director of an independent production fund for Canadian digital media and cross-platform projects, TV & digital media sectors.
8. Robin Smith – Distributer, Film & TV sector.
9. Chris Sumpton – Documentary producer, TV sector.
10. Louis Taylor – Writer, Director and Producer, Film & TV sector.
11. Tony Tobias – Transmedia Producer, Cultural Industry Consultant, Film, TV & digital media sectors.
12. Carrie Young – Transmedia Writer and Producer, Film, TV & digital media sectors.

Interview Topics

The topics covered in the semi-structured expert interviews revolved around 4 key discussion areas.

The film and TV production landscape

- Changes in the landscape (globally and locally) as a result of Internet disruption;
- Major challenges to getting productions financed, produced and distributed today;
- The blurring of boundaries between filmmaking, broadcasting and interactive digital media production;
- Emerging marketing and distribution trends;
- Each participant's experience with new technologies and emerging digital media production platforms.

The changing role of audiences

- The changing role of audiences in light of the Internet and social media;
- The extent to which and the point at which audiences are considered in the development, production and distribution of film and TV productions and how this affects these areas;
- The challenges posed by incorporating audience concerns and interaction;

Film and TV production value chain

- The traditional film and TV production value chains (including major roles and responsibilities) and changes to this as a result of Internet disruption;
- The impacts on traditional business because of the Internet;
- The roles/responsibilities that have been most affected.

The future

- Industry and audience trends that are likely to have an impact on film and TV production in Canada in the coming years;
- The future of audiences for film and TV production in Canada, and across the globe;
- The ways in which audiences might play a role in the future development, production and distribution of film and TV productions;
- Future fixes for today's most pressing issues that affect film and TV production in Canada.

Key insights/findings from interviews

Insights and findings from the expert interviews can be found below and have been grouped into the following categories:

Changes in the film and TV production landscape

- Content producers are in a relatively weak position within the ecosystem compared to distributors and broadcasters.
- In addition to being triggers for public funding, distributors and broadcasters are the intermediaries who have controlled access to audiences
- Content creators distanced or separated from audiences
- Content creators' are direct clients distributors/broadcasters and funders, Audiences have been direct clients of retailers, exhibitors, cable TV providers
- Traditional distributors are being circumvented by authorized and unauthorized digital platforms
- Value chain is transforming into a web - value from audience interaction can be derived a multiple points in the web, not just at the point of consumption

Changing role of audiences

- Audiences participating in more stages of production process and make use of different types of participation (less to more active)
- Audiences are shifting from consumer to prosumer and collaborator
- Audiences have and want more control over the content they enjoy
- Audiences are increasingly important in getting a project off the ground
- Web community is the new water cooler
- Gaming and TV creators are in dialogue with their audiences – it's a feedback loop
- Extraordinary fans should be hired and/or consulted - not prosecuted
- Increase in audience collaboration – e.g. shared story worlds, some transmedia stories
- Engaging audiences is about inspiring community - there are other roles for audiences than consumer

Business models

- Business models are in flux – there is no predictability
- Value generation is more complex, sources of revenues have multiplied and generate less revenue individually
- The audience is an important part of a producer's/creator's value proposition
- Sometimes it is necessary to loosen control over content in order to increase its spreadability
- How a work has spread is an indicator of success (but you can't always monetize this)

Distribution issues

- Distributors sometimes not well versed on distribution strategies for a digital age

- There is concern about lack of transparency with regard to how distributors spend money on their projects and complaints that they might not always fulfill their obligations
- Some producers have chosen to self distribute in order to maintain distribution rights
- Problems with distributors understanding interactive world led to desire to self-distribute
- Broadcasters are often seen as aggressively going after all the
- Exploitation rights they can get, while license fees are diminishing
- Broadcasters' request for all digital rights, leaving little room for producers to promote their projects
- Content producers/creators increasing want to maintain rights to choose best distribution methods
- More industry education is necessary with regard to costs and opportunities of an interactive or a multiplatform approach
- Distribution is about control and enforcement – of content and ideas
- Distributors welcome active participation of content creators – if they are not available at key points in the distribution chain, decisions get made for them
- To be successful today, producers need to be actively involved in distribution and find opportunities to market and distribution avenues
- Producers should have a distribution plan before they sign up with a distributor and be clear about what rights are being kept
- Social media strategy is absolutely imperative for any production
- Theatrical release of Canadian films is often a loss
- While there may be an audience for certain types of projects, storytellers are unable to reach them by going through gatekeepers. They have been forced to circumvent

Storytelling

- Creators have entered the business to be storytellers, they need to have a solid concept that they believe in personally
- TV today has more room to be creative than feature films – diversity of topics and time to explore stories
- TV is more character-driven
- Storytelling is not a product, it is an experience
- Transmedia storytelling is greatly about designing audience experience
- Storytelling is community based experience and is centuries old
- TV, film, games, ARGs etc are all tools for storytelling
- Storytelling is the audience's journey

Connecting with audiences

- Knowing your reasons and goals for making content/telling a story is very important, as well as knowing what success looks like
- Build audiences early in the process
- Create a Wikipedia entry for each project – important part of search engine optimization
- Find potential audiences early and start connecting with them, especially with documentary works
- Involve audience members in the production when possible/appropriate
- Core audience can provide key research and be instrumental in promotion
- Transmedia storytelling is the best way of telling certain stories – multiple media/platforms and audience involvement
- Analytics, search and key words are important tools
- Understand what subjects pique interest of different audiences
- Documentary producers appear to understand audiences better
- Audiences can be collaborators

Skills

- Industry needs to re-skill
- Blurring of boundaries between industries makes new skills important to content creators – e.g. distribution/marketing, digital media, social media, community management, design etc