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Transmedia Appropriation and
Socialization Processes Among German Adolescents

MAREN WÜRFEL

University of Erfurt, Germany

Recent scholarly discourse about convergence and media developments related to transmedia phenomena has focused on economic and media-centered perspectives. Much work has been done by gathering data about and analyzing innovative marketing strategies in the media industry. These efforts have provided insights into processes of media production and distribution in the age of digitization and under the conditions of convergence and the social Web. Drawing on this research, I develop a perspective on how to examine adolescents' appropriation of popular media. This article focuses on the perspective of young people who turn toward the media according to their media preferences and content-related interests. It is about their transmedia appropriations, which means—in simplified terms—how they deal with media content that is provided by a converging and highly commercialized media system. The article presents an approach to research in this field as well as some initial findings of an empirical study with German young people related to the role of convergent media and transmedia storytelling for socialization processes in adolescence.

Keywords: digital media, transmedia storytelling, convergence, audience studies, transmedia appropriation, media socialization

The past two decades have seen digital technology replace analog procedures in fields such as media production and media distribution as well as media reception and interpersonal communication. Digitization was the technological basis for most of the phenomena currently of interest in media and communication studies. Among the consequences of the digitization process are developments grouped under the umbrella term *convergence*. The core concept of convergence is based on the merging of formerly separate media (in all their forms). Another consequence of digitization can be grasped with the notion of Web 2.0 and all the Internet-related phenomena that are based on the changing roles of consumers (or users) to producers and entail new forms of communicative and participatory actions. In the next section, a closer look on these consequences of digitization will be taken.

Maren Würfel: maren.wuerfel@uni-erfurt.de

Media Convergence: Technological and Content-Related Processes

Media convergence is neither a single phenomenon nor a fixed relationship. Instead, it must be understood as an ongoing process marked by intersections between and the merging of different media (Jenkins, 2006). A closer examination of media convergence processes reveals at least two different (but interacting) aspects. We can differentiate between convergence in a technological sense and convergence in a content-related sense. Both are driven and determined by commercial interests and economic developments and are accompanied by processes of convergence in the media industry.

Technological Convergence

Technological convergence describes the merging of transmission paths due to digitization and the associated erosion of boundaries between formerly segregated media services and the development of multiservice terminals and devices (computers, including in their mobile forms). On the one hand, we can identify developments leading to parallel transmission of different data via one and the same "channel"—in other words, the merging of previously separate media services. This process led to the development of multiservice terminals, where different technologies and applications were packed together into single devices. This can be described as the dissolving of boundaries between previously separate single media. On the other hand, we can observe an ongoing process of uncoupling of media texts from their tangible carriers and an increasing fluidity of content, as described by Göran Bolin (2012, p. 147). The digitality of content plus transmission paths and (multiservice) terminals enabled for processing digital data led to this fluidity. Today, it usually does not make any difference whether the content is films, pictures, or graphic novels: The content or the text is mostly digital. Because of this, the digital film, picture, or graphic novel can be transmitted through the same channels and can be decoded by the same terminals. Conversely, this mechanism enables content to flow through different channels and delivery technologies and to assume different forms when it is finally received by the audience. Stated simply, the unique relationship that previously existed between a medium and its use is eroding.

Content-Related Convergence and Transmedia Storytelling

Convergence with regard to content—in its currently common format—is based on the technological convergence processes described above. The term *content-related convergence* points to narrative-oriented processes of delimitation and merging. Identical or similar content is presented within various media and through multiple channels, accompanied by complex processes that include cross-media advertising, franchise, promoting, referring, and commenting. The economic strategies behind this convergence aim at the development of media brands that offer synergetic effects (in terms of economy) through cross-media references and marketing of media suppliers, through adaptations and sequels, and so on. From this economic, content-related perspective, convergence can be described as extension, synergy, and franchise (Jenkins, 2006). In fact, cross-media has been with us for many decades: Movie soundtracks were released on vinyl, cartoons based on comics were produced, and movies were made by adapting novels, quite apart from all the conventional forms of advertising and cross-promotion.

Along with digitization and convergence, a considerable, ever-increasing, and industry-led convergence in the production, distribution, and promotion of media content can be observed. This increase results from the fact that the representations of one text or content in different media are equal

in one respect: their digital nature. Hence, it has become increasingly easier for the media industry to distribute across media platforms and to fabricate a variety of media forms that belong to one content. Popular examples of successful cross-media strategies are content-related global brands such as Spiderman, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Star Wars, and Lost. Typically, there is one initial media offering or one main media representation (or primary text)—mainly novels, movies, and, more frequently, computer games—and subsequent, additional offerings in different media.

A new level of convergence and cross-media strategies has been reached with the rise of transmedia storytelling strategies. A transmedia story, as defined by Henry Jenkins (2006), "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (pp. 95–96). Thus, the core concept of transmedia storytelling does not deal with something like a primary text or an *urtext* that belongs to one media form or representation (e.g., a movie or a novel). It is one single content that is presented within various media in a (from the beginning) strategically planned way. Transmediality is the likely result when media conglomerates calculate how to earn the highest financial benefits from a particular content or story.

As an ideal example of transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins analyzed the production and distribution strategies and processes of the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*. In his book *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2006) demonstrated that *The Matrix* was conceptualized as a universe, and not as a single media offering with supplementary offerings in other media forms. It was consequently conceptualized as storytelling across different media. To understand the movie in all its facets, one has to play the computer game (and vice versa), because, for example, background information or details one needs for a deeper and more complete understanding of the movie are only presented in the game.

Carlos Scolari (2009) points out that "Economic subjects no longer try to sell a product or service by means of persuasive advertising. Now the objectives are much more ambitious; they aim to create a symbolic universe endowed with meaning: brands" (p. 599). According to Scolari (2009), brands have to be understood as narrative worlds, where the fiction is the brand and the fictional world is the commercial product. In transmedia storytelling, the brand or the storyworld is founded on and defined by a set of characters, topics, and an aesthetic style. Scolari describes this as a movable set of properties that can be applied to different forms of expression and adapted to different media and genres.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2004, 2013) emphasizes the narrative character of a *transmedia storyworld* (a convenient term coined by her) by defining it as a static component that precedes the story and a dynamic component that has to be understood as its unfolding, its narrative character (Ryan, 2013). That is why *transposition* (as well as *quotation)* can be considered a form of intertextuality but usually not of transmedia storytelling.

Web 2.0, the Social Web, and Dissolving Boundaries

The first phase of the Web, or Web 1.0, increased options for media reception and consumption in two ways: First, people obtained more power and more control over the conditions of reception. Along with the advancement of the Web as a platform for content, the possibilities for media reception independent of time (e.g., a TV program) and material carrier medium (e.g., via DVD) increased enormously. This aspect is negotiated by referring to individualization processes in media consumption

and use. Second, people could more easily access media content that may have been previously difficult to access. In the second phase, Web 2.0, users were enabled to use the Internet in a more active, productive, and creative way. The separation between senders and receivers blurred and boundaries dissolved. Publishing one's views and reaching a potentially larger audience became easier. This was proclaimed as an emancipation of the audience and the consumers—as claimed in the early 20th century by BertolT Brecht (1964) in his radio theory.

Thus, the technological developments—especially blogs, forums, and social media platforms—allowed users to become producers and distributors as well. Moreover, people's options for mediatized communicative action have enlarged and changed. As Jan-Hinrik Schmidt (2011) has noted, it is appropriate and necessary to differentiate between several forms of publicness or public presence in social media. In particular, there has been a rise of *personal publics* accompanied by the convergence of conversation and publication as well as an increasing importance of *issue publics* in people's everyday lives.

Along with blurring boundaries—not only between previously separate media but between media-related options for action—processes of converging and merging what people are really doing when engaging with the so-called social Web were identified. Axel Bruns (2008) captured the blurring of boundaries between industry-led content production and user engagement with the products by creating the portmanteau *produsage*. The term emphasizes that everyday Internet use often comprises elements of production; that use and production have become more inseparable and usually related to aspects of collaborative and cooperative user activities, enabled by Web 2.0 technologies.

Referring to big projects such as Wikipedia and platforms such as YouTube as well as to smaller communities and projects, a huge range of collaborative creative work exists, including remixing as well as referring, recommending, evaluating, and linking practices. Such projects also can be initiated and exploited by the media industry, within transmedia strategies (Bolin, 2012; Bruns, 2008).

With regard to convergence and transmedia processes and their relevance for adolescents' appropriation of popular media, these aspects are mainly negotiated in scholarly discussion with respect to fan-engagement and -participation processes. Transmedia storytelling strategies that integrate social Web strategies aim at the development and enhancement of fan engagement. This should lead not only to current commercial success but steady, enduring fan engagement and advanced fan participation. According to Bolin (2012), fan activities within projects initiated or supported by the media industry can be considered as "acts of wilful exploitation" (p. 157).

Digitization has resulted in an enormous expansion and diversification of media platforms and devices as well as options for mediatized communicative action. The media world has become increasingly complex. Fluidity of content—based on technological developments and driven by industry as well as by the users who create, manipulate, publish, interlink, and comment on content and, moreover, cooperate and collaborate in this regard—must be seen as the foundation of current content-related processes of convergence in general and transmedia storytelling strategies in particular as well as the related appropriation processes executed by its (prod)users.

Transmedia Phenomena from the Perspective of the Audience/Users

Turning from a media-centered perspective toward an examination of the phenomenon as a whole and in its relationships to the activities of and appropriation by the people, convergence can be appreciated as a cultural phenomenon. Jenkins (2006) proclaimed a "convergence culture," which is accompanied by elements of "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 1991; Jenkins, Puroshotma, Clinton, Weigel, & Robison, 2006). Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content. Jenkins (2006) points out that "convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others" (p. 3). The reader/viewer/listener brings the pieces together to make sense of a phenomenon that unfolds across various platforms, media forms, and genres. This leads us to concepts of intertexuality and intermediality.

Whereas transmedia (storytelling) is primarily understood as a production and distribution–related phenomenon, the concept of intertextuality is located between production and audience and repeatedly applied within audience studies. Following Walter and Ott (2000), who analyzed the use of the concept of intertextuality in contemporary media scholarship, two notions of the concept can be identified: (1) intertextuality as an interpretative practice of audiences and (2) intertextuality as a stylistic device consciously utilized by media producers. Whereas intertextuality as a stylistic device can be seen as means or resources, applied in transmedia storytelling, intertextuality as an interpretative practice of audiences refers to processes of meaning construction and sense making: The meaning of a text is produced by its readers in relationship to not only the text in question but the whole complexity of texts that are (consciously as well as unconsciously) relevant in the reading, decoding, or interpreting process (e.g., previous experiences with particular genres and the resultant genre knowledge) (Bachmair, 2000; Mikos & Wulff, 2000). But this complexity of texts includes much more than those texts or media offerings produced and provided within transmedia storytelling strategies as well as within what is generally meant by convergence. Thus, the concept of intertextuality is limited in its helpfulness for investigating transmedia appropriation.

John Fiske (1987)—who merged the two mentioned notions of intertextuality, as Walter and Ott (2000) have argued—provides, at first glance, a helpful differentiation by introducing horizontal and vertical intertextuality. Horizontal intertextuality exists among primary texts that are explicitly linked—for example, in the form of remakes, citation, parody, or allusion in regard to genres, characters, actors, and directors as well as to specific content and its particular cultural traditions (Fiske, 1987; Mikos, 1994). Vertical intertextuality is related to other texts of a different type that refer directly to a specific (primary) text. Fiske further differentiates vertical intertextuality with secondary texts and tertiary texts, both of which refer to the primary text. Secondary texts are defined as texts that provide any kind of context information. Customarily, they are produced and distributed by a third party (e.g., TV guides, advertisements, press stories, criticism).Tertiary texts are defined as texts produced by the users/the audience themselves, as articulated results of their appropriation processes (e.g., letters to the editor, interpersonal conversation, gossip).

At a second glance, however, Fiske's differentiation loses a bit of its suitability for the transmedia phenomena under investigation. In particular, the differentiation between secondary and tertiary texts is no longer tenable in this respect. As mentioned, the separation between (professional) producers and

(amateur) users within a classical meaning no longer functions under the conditions of social Web and the associated increase of participatory culture (considering produsers). Moreover, as Kinder (1991) ascertains, "The conflation of these various forms of intertextuality into a single commercial system erases the boundaries between primary and secondary texts" (p. 46). So it seems necessary to ask which differentiations the audience, the users, and the consumers make and which differences they perceive in respect to complex convergent media structures.

If we observe only developments within the media industry and their strategies, we cannot say much about the actual use of media by the users and we can say much less about the media's influences on and relevance for their everyday lives and socialization processes. To examine how young people act within convergent media worlds, we have to do so from their point of view. It is necessary to apply a subject-oriented theoretical and empirical approach. Taking into account processes of media convergence as well as processes related to social Web and participatory media use, we must ask: What does transmedia mean for processes of appropriation of popular media content by young people?

The term *appropriation*—not *reception* or *usage*—is applied here to highlight the point that media reception/usage is an active, subjective, and complex process. Concepts of reception often suppose media to have more or less direct effects on the recipients and that such effects can be measured simply. The term *media usage* is often associated with the *uses and gratifications approach* or applied within this approach. The notion of usage does not cover the full meaning of what happens when people turn toward media. Usage does not include subjective processes of meaning construction and sense making while, for example, watching TV, listening to music, or communicating via Facebook.

Media are interpreted or decoded by people as well as meaningfully integrated into their everyday lives. Interpretation and integration of media occur against the background of a person's individual contexts, including current and enduring needs and interests, social affiliations, momentary problems, previous (media) experiences, and the interpretation of the situation as well as within interpersonal communication. Although this basic notion of media appropriation is widely applied in different strands of media and communications studies, the theoretical backgrounds as well as the specific definitions and applications the various (German) strands refer to differ. To simplify: One main strand, in the cultural studies tradition, refers particularly to Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, John Fiske, and to Michel de Certeau's notion of creative appropriation in the context of everyday practices and tactics and emphasizes the power of the active audience and/or the role of interpersonal communication in appropriation processes (*communicative appropriation*). Another strand, mostly situated in educational disciplines, refers to Marxist psychologists of the cultural-historical school, in particular to Lew S. Vygotsky and Alexej N. Leont'ev, who (among others) enhanced Vygotsky's theory by conceptualizing *activity theory* connected with processes of appropriation (and objectivation). In this tradition, appropriation is seen as a central and constitutive aspect of the socialization process and as mediated by cultural and societal signs and tools (mainly without perceiving and linking to the related international scholarly discourse, especially with respect to mediation; see, e.g., Erstad & Wertsch, 2008; Wertsch, Del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995).

These two core concepts of appropriation (as well as several appropriations and modifications of the concepts in different schools of thought) postulate individual, subjective, active, and social appropriation of an object as part of an external reality. I apply an understanding of appropriation that

considers appropriation as a circle of interacting moments within a complex active process: selection, perception, indication, evaluation, processing, and integrating into one's present knowledge stocks and schemata (related here to the understanding of intertextuality as an interpretative practice of the audiences) and thereby into the understanding of the world, culture, and society as well as into one's everyday life (Theunert & Schorb, 2010).

Adolescents' Appropriation Processes Regarding Convergence and Transmedia Storytelling

The empirical study aiming to answer these questions is built on the convergence studies conducted by the Institute for Media Research and Media Education in Munich, Germany (especially Wagner & Theunert, 2006). These studies investigated the processes of convergence-related media appropriation among children and adolescents and focused on determining the conditions under which the convergence-related appropriation process can be beneficial (or the opposite; i.e., narrowing of horizon and action repertoires). A qualitative substudy with 59 participants ages 11 to 17 (Wagner & Theunert, 2006) identified patterns of convergent media appropriation and showed, as one outcome, that media content-related preferences (e.g., favorite movie, computer game, or music) connected with a pronounced involvement and with reinforcing social support (by family and peers) is accompanied by strong motivation to engage intensively as well as extensively with convergent media. Knowledge about convergent media structures and technical skills could be identified as qualifications necessary for competent and participatory acting in complex convergent media. Another important outcome relates to the educational background of the participants. Adolescents with a higher educational background appropriated convergent media in a complex, reflexive, self-determined, and creative way. Adolescents with a lower educational background tended to stay close to the options for reception and gaming within the commercially provided beaten-track networks (although it has to be noted that the data were collected in 2005, when the social Web was in its infancy).

The study also is built on substudies of the *Medienkonvergenz Monitoring*, a former long-term research project at the University of Leipzig (www.medienkonvergenz-monitoring.de). The substudies relevant for our topic comprise an online survey with more than 5,000 12- to 19-year-old German participants (Schorb, Keilhauer, Würfel, & Kießling, 2008) and an additional, qualitative in-depth interview study with selected participants (Keilhauer & Würfel, 2009; Würfel & Keilhauer, 2009).[1] Both data sets were collected in 2007. The studies focused on acceptance and use of current technological convergence-related developments as well as on the patterns of convergent media usage, based on media-related preferences or fields of interest (movies, music, TV programs, and computer games). Although the

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[1] The quantitative data were gathered mainly via the social network site *schuelerVZ*. The hyperlink to the online questionnaire was presented on the home page. This was made possible through cooperation with the German owners of the platform. In 2007 (indeed, until the end of the 2000s), *schuelerVZ* was by far the most used social network site among 12- to 19-year-old Germans (mpfs, 2013). The sample was characterized by a relatively high rate of broadband Internet access at home (94%) and a high level of Internet use at all.

findings (particularly the quantitative findings) are somewhat outdated, they are interesting and helpful for providing an overview.[2]

The studies found that music and movies are the fields of preference, most participants used two or more media devices to access them. In contrast, most participants obtained TV programs (particularly series) and especially computer games through only one or two devices to watch their favorite program or play their favorite game. These results corresponded, as expected, with differences between the respective fields of media preferences in terms of the range of available opportunities. Thus, even in 2007, most of the young German people surveyed were using more than one media device and/or technology to listen to, watch, or play their preferred media (content), so that they could benefit from each medium's specific advantage.

Regarding the use of other forms of media representations of the preferred content and the provision of additional information and associated options for action to appropriate their individual preferences, nearly all participants indicated that they used additional, directly related media offerings. For their favorite music (interest in a particular musician or band), the participants mainly used websites (64%), but also DVDs/videotapes (33%), TV programs (31%), and magazines (29%); for their favorite movies, they used soundtracks (48%), websites (31%), books (20%), and games (18%). The most popular convergent offerings belonging to TV programs were websites (30% of the 12- to 19-year-olds accessed websites related to their preferred TV program), followed by soundtracks (23%) and DVDs (17%). As expected, in terms of game preferences, websites (40%) were the preferred related media offerings, followed, to a much lesser extent, by movies, soundtracks, and magazines (all about 15%).

Already in 2007, a considerable proportion of German 12- to 19-year-olds accessed their favorite media stories across different representations and by using different media devices. In 2007, the Internet was the most important media for engaging with favorite media content or preferences, next to the primary texts themselves. Furthermore, the study found, interestingly, that participatory and partly creative actions such as communication via blogs and forums and file uploading were more popular with respect to individual media preferences than expected. Almost 30% of gamers, 20% of music fans, and more than 10% among those who were interested in movies or TV programs participated actively in online forums or weblogs that corresponded to their individual media interests and particular preferences. Uploading pictures, videos, music, or longer written texts was carried out by 5% to 10% of the participants, depending on their individual fields of preferences.

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[2] At least two aspects need to be considered when dealing with the quantitative data from 2007. First, in 2007, the use of social network sites and other social Web platforms was not as widespread as it was some years later or as it was in other countries, such as the United States. Thus, the commonly perceived options for productive and participatory actions provided by social Web tools were not very prominent. For example, in 2007, the German social network site schuelerVZ was the dominant social Web platform. But, in contrast to Facebook and Myspace, schuelerVZ was limited to text and pictures and did not include options for video uploading and reception. Second, in 2007, few 12- to 19-year-olds used their mobile phones to go online. Especially with regard to developments in the field of mobile technology we can observe a dynamic in recent years that has changed the media menu related to options for action within transmedia appropriation processes.

The Empirical Study: Research Questions, Design, Method, and Data Gathering

The current empirical study aims to answer the following questions: How do adolescents appropriate preferred popular media content by using different media? What role do convergent-related economic strategies of the media industry play within the appropriation processes by young people? What role does the social Web, with its user-generated content and its options for communicative as well as productive action, play within the appropriation process? To what extent and (if so) why do individual patterns of transmedia appropriation shift over time? What is the role of transmedia appropriation of popular media content in socialization processes, especially with respect to processes of identity formation and social integration?

Considering media appropriation and socialization as processes, the study is designed as a panel study. The panel comprises 13 German adolescents (born 1990 to 1992), who were one age group of the previous *Medienkonvergenz Monitoring* studies. In this respect, the current panel study can be seen as a focused elaboration as well as a long-term continuation of the qualitative part of the former *Medienkonvergenz Monitoring* studies. The data included in the current study were gathered in qualitative face-to-face in-depth interviews. The focus was on the concrete complex appropriation processes when turning to convergent media, motivated by an interest in or a preference for particular media content. The data gathering took place annually from 2007 to 2011 (in a total of four waves). The data analysis comprises empirical material representing nearly 50 interviews (including a secondary data analysis of the interviews conducted in the former project) and additional context material (short questionnaires about media use; short profiles on individual interests, hobbies, social affiliations, style, wishes, current problem situations, and career aspirations; and selected self-representations and uploaded content in social Web platforms). The study contributes to ongoing academic debates about convergence and transmedia storytelling by presenting and discussing findings from an audience perspective on the mentioned phenomena. Although the data analysis is not finalized, some selected initial findings are highlighted.

The Character of the Empirical Data

To illustrate the character of the gathered data and to sketch the underlying subject-oriented research approach, the data are exemplified by a single case, the participant Susan (born 1990; higher educational background).

As shown in Figure 1, Susan used several media to appropriate her preferred media content *Harry Potter* in 2007.

1. Susan used several forms of representation of the *Harry Potter* narrative provided by the media industry, in particular through franchise (novels, audio books, movies, and computer games). In doing so, she executed different options for mediatized action (reading, listening, audiovisual watching, and gaming). For Susan, the novels were not the only point of entry into the Harry Potter world but the most preferred form of representation of Harry Potter content, followed by the audio books. Susan preferred the novel (also in its audio version) to the movies. Her Harry Potter preference started with the novel, and she criticizes any reduction of complexity in forms of representation that she thinks should carry the same story:

> The movies are always so much abbreviated, or the scenes have been rewritten. . . .
> That gets my goat, when this is so extremely shortened.

Despite this criticism, Susan likes the movies' visualization of the story and particularly the cast of characters, which matches with her previously novel-led imagination

2. Susan used the official soundtrack as a form of representation, which in fact, belongs to the Harry Potter franchise but does not carry the narrative. For her, the soundtrack is a supplementary offering that is good for processing the emotional impact. The soundtrack reminds her of particular passages of the movies and of her related emotional experiences while doing other things within her daily routine:

> Particularly when I hear this special tune I always immediately must think of Hedwig
> flying through Hogwarts. . . . It feels a bit mystic.
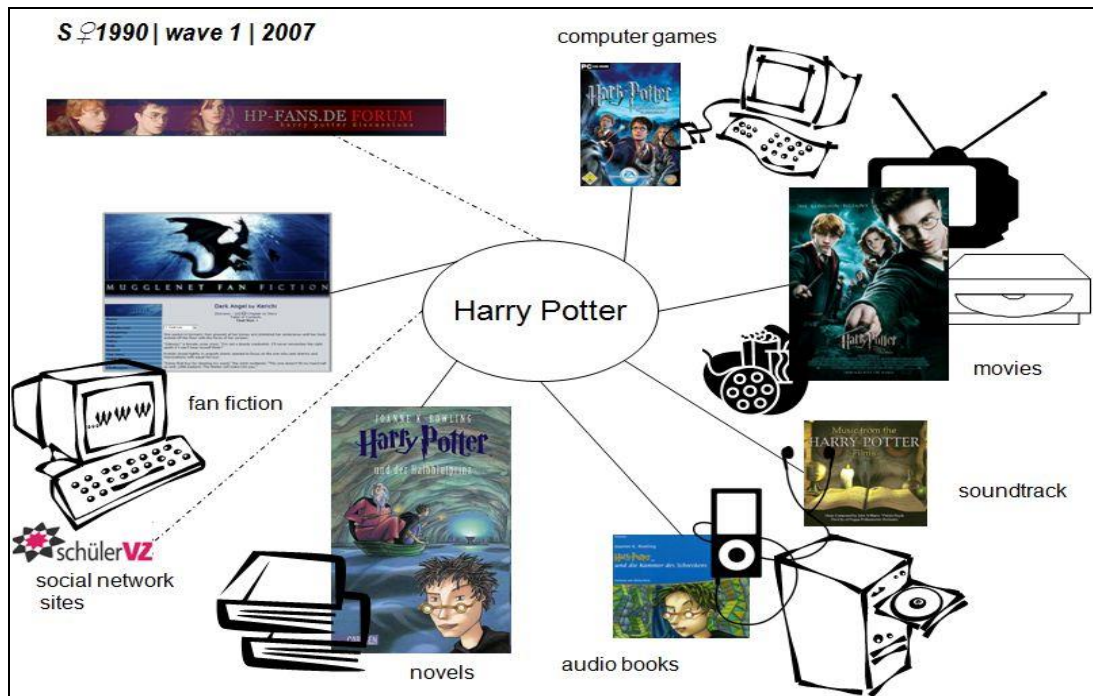
Figure 1. Pattern of transmedia appropriation: Media Susan
used in context of her Harry Potter preference in 2007.

3. Susan used different media devices and platforms related to different reception situations to receive the Harry Potter storyworld (e.g., watching the movies time-dependent on TV, watching them time-independent via DVD on a computer or DVD player, going with friends to the movie theater, or listening to the soundtrack while at the computer and via an MP3 player on her way to school). She used

several options for engaging with the content in different ways, which allowed her to enrich her everyday life with her Harry Potter preference.

4. Susan's appropriation of *Harry Potter* included the reception of user-generated content—in particular, fan fiction (via www.fanfiction.mugglenet.com), which she had found on the Internet accidentally via Google. The fan fiction allowed her to engage more deeply with her subjectively preferred characters and aspects of the story. Thus, Susan turned toward the love story of Tonks and Lupin in particular, who were minor characters in J. K. Rowling's story but were more extensively treated within the huge fan fiction universe.

5. Susan used several Internet sources for information about media offerings belonging to the Harry Potter (franchise) universe (e.g., information about releases) as well as about the perception and appropriation of *Harry Potter* and its several forms of representation, by both media professionals (e.g., criticism) and amateurs (especially fans), which she usually accessed via Google, fan forums, or social network sites.

6. Finally, Susan used forms of articulation. In particular, she employed the Harry Potter brand for purposes of self-presentation in social network sites and, by doing so, in an effort to present a facet of her (fan) identity. Furthermore, she interacted with peers face-to-face and via social Web platforms, in particular in computer-mediated interpersonal and semipublic communication about *Harry Potter* via related user-generated (fan) forums (www.fanfiction.mugglenet.com as well as the German social network site *schülerVZ*).

Figure 2 shows Susan's preference-related media appropriation one year later. The preferred content changed from *Harry Potter* to *Twilight*, but the pattern of media use was similar. (The figure does not show the media devices she used, which remained similar.) Two relevant differences regarding the patterns of use can be identified: First, Susan used YouTube as a source for representations of *Twilight*. In particular, she accessed via YouTube both user-generated online videos—which can be seen as manifest forms of expression of other *Twilight* fans and therefore as their perspectives of the storyworld and the results of their appropriation processes—and videos that originated from the mass media but had been uploaded by users (e.g., movie trailers and TV interviews with the author of the novel). The user-generated content produced by other fans played an important role in Susan's appropriation process. The reception of the videos (mainly clips made of pictures and movie cuttings with romantic music, slide shows, and remixes) supported Susan's emotional experiences of the *Twilight* love story:

> I love that music the videos are underlaid with. If there are such wonderful ballads underlaid, fantastic! I don't know how they are doing this! I'm always hopelessly excited. My favorite loving couple accompanied with a beautiful song and those scenes and so. At those moments I'm always thinking, "Oh that was this scene! That was so awesome!" I like watching the videos very much.

Susan admired the technical and aesthetic skills of other fans' video production as well as the efforts they made to produce the clips. Overall, the social Web with its user-generated content belonging to her media preference (fan fiction, fan videos) and its options for interacting with other fans made Susan feel that she was part of a community of like-minded people.
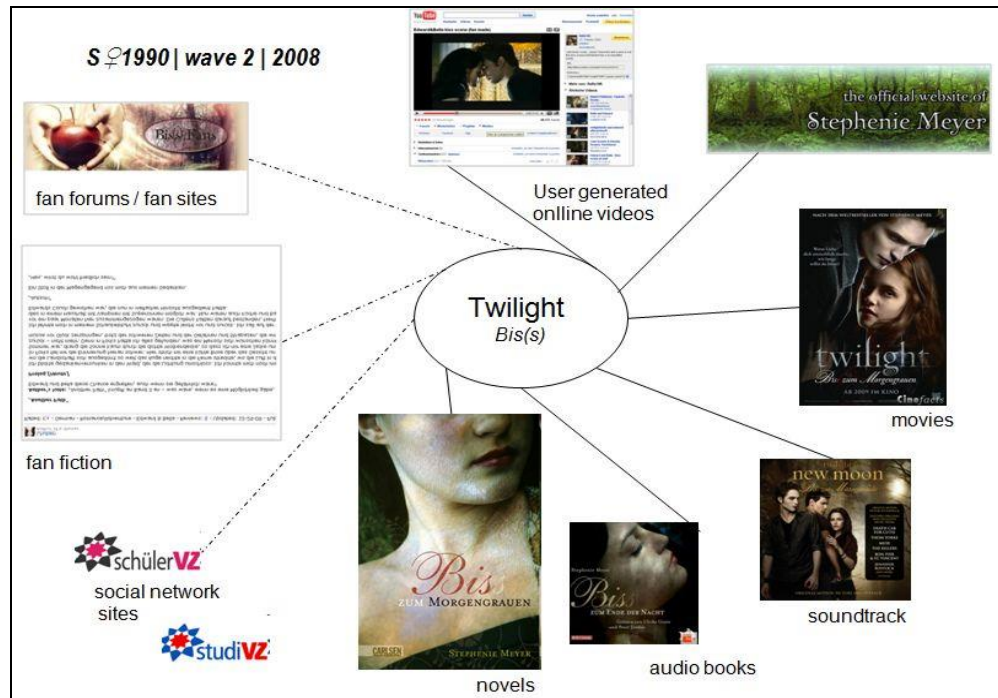
**Figure 2. Pattern of transmedia appropriation: Media Susan used
in context of her Twilight preference in 2008 (without related devices).**

Because it's simply great that you . . . can share things, you can talk and swap information . . . with more people than only those two knowing the novel you have in your circle of friends. Thus, you have someone . . . you can get to know other people, even more people who also think the novel is awesome.

Second, an important change took place with regard to the role of fan fiction. In the second wave, Susan not only read fan fiction she obtained via the Internet (www.fanfiction.net), but she created fan fiction herself. Especially by appropriating fan fiction related to *Harry Potter* (which she had read in the past a lot) she had developed the skills and competencies that she then applied practically. Susan evaluated the writing and styles of fan fiction authors whose stories she had read. She developed an understanding of what are good written stories and what are bad written stories. And Susan had given her preferred authors feedback in the form of commenting on their stories. Some of the authors answered Susan and explained their underlying thoughts and considerations, which offered Susan new perspectives: There are some [fan fiction authors] with whom I'm writing who always write back to me and sometimes also give reasons why they have written it that way.

Additionally, by dealing with *Harry Potter* fan fiction in English via fanfiction.mugglenet.com, Susan improved her English language skills:

> I've read the Tonks and Lupin stories. That was the first I've really properly read in English. They have only been available in English! Yes, there are some in German, too. But they are boring. Thus, you have to read it in English!

Susan's preference for *Harry Potter*—and, in particular, her special interest in Tonks and Lupin—encouraged her to read texts in English and, by doing so, improved her English skills. These aspects of transmedia appropriation can be regarded as a kind of cultural capital that Susan appropriated by dealing with preferred novels and especially with *Harry Potter* fan fiction.

The first three waves focused on the individual spectrum of media content preferences and deepened the most important preference and its appropriation by using different media (in the third wave, Susan still preferred *Twilight* most). The last wave was designed as a biographical interview. The previous waves were retrospectively evaluated for their meaning for the participants and their socialization and identity construction processes.

Proposed Empirical Approach for Researching Transmedia Appropriation

From the perspective of the young audience, the appropriation of the convergent media world, based on particular media preferences as points of entry into the related convergent world, can be described, on a first level, by employing the terms *forms of appearance* and *forms of articulation*. Both terms are close to the perception of convergent media among young people. *Forms of appearance* are all types of media content young people encounter by turning toward the convergent media world and by perceiving themselves as belonging to the particular storyworld they are interested in. *Forms of articulation* can be seen as objectivations of (momentary) results of appropriation processes. At the same time, they are forms of appearance that will be integrated in the appropriation process within the framework of a circle of self-objectivation and self-reflection. In this sense, articulations are objects that can be (re)appropriated not only by other people but by oneself. Usually, forms of articulation are related to aspects of self-expression and self-representation. The proposed points or categories are analytical differentiations, which can blur in particular individual appropriation processes.

Transmedia appropriation is defined as a process, including the appropriation of a content by using *forms of appearance* of that content (as means). It includes the appropriation of:

- the same, identical content (with regard to the storyworld) by using different forms of representation within the media, whereby the content is modified due to the different media forms. These forms of appearance carry the transmedially told story in a narrower sense.

- content-related offerings that are directly linked to the storyworld but do not carry the transmedially told story in a narrower sense. These forms of appearance (potentially presented across different forms of representation) do not explicitly belong to the brand but present narratives related to the storyworld (e.g., fan fiction).

- additional or supplementary content-related media offerings that are either part of a media brand and a franchise or externally produced by fans and other suppliers. These

forms of appearance do not carry the story in a narrower sense but may enhance experiences and influence understanding.

- content-related information offerings in the media, which are either part of professional (mass) media and more often part of the brand promotion and transmedia storytelling strategies or produced by fans and other (possibly critical) amateur suppliers.

The appropriation of the content by accessing forms of appearance occurs potentially via the use of different media devices and platforms and thereby in different social situations and under different conditions that influence the appropriation process and its results. The reception situation varies depending on the carrier medium, the technical device used, the related social situation, and cultural practices. Conversely, reading a story across media can be executed by using only a single device: an Internet-connected personal computer, including mobile forms, which provides access to multiple related forms of appearance.

Transmedia appropriation processes also include the appropriation of a content by using *forms of articulation*. It includes options for:

- mediatized interpersonal communication, which comprises all those communicative actions that are addressed to concrete counterparts (individuals as well as groups).

- creation and production as well as publication of content-related media products in personal publics and semipublics (e.g., issue publics). These forms of articulation are manifest and do not primarily address concrete counterparts but are more closely related to produsage processes.

Finally, transmedia appropriation embraces appropriation processes in regard to an *(infra)structural dimension*. This concerns moving through the convergent media world with its content-related and technological conjunctions. By pursuing a particular content across media, existing conjunctions must be perceived and/or one's own connections must be created.

Appropriation is an ongoing process that is marked, on the one hand, by the use of different (connected) media forms of appearance and articulation and, on the other, by all those intrapersonal and interpersonal communicative activities. Both transform and influence the—always temporary—results of media content appropriation due to new information, experiences, and perspectives (with reference to Friedrich Krotz's, 2001, *cascade of reception acts* model).

Selected Initial Findings on the Socialization Processes

In each wave of the study, every participant included several forms of appearance of the particular preferred media content in the appropriation processes. And in each wave, every participant appropriated the preferred media content by using different media devices in different social situations and under different conditions. Within the transmedia appropriation processes, young people connect several forms of media-related communicative actions according to their personal media preferences and everyday practices: receptive, interpersonal or semipublic communicative, game-related, information-related, and creative-productive options for action.

Moving through the convergent media world is part of young people's everyday life, and this movement is not limited to the pursuit of connections and references given by the market. They also construct their individual connections. The preferences for certain movies, music, TV programs, computer games, novels, and mangas/animes (as fields of media content the participants of the study were interested in) guide their movement through convergent media and their media appropriation (Wagner & Theunert, 2006). Thus, a natural question is what impact transmedia appropriation has on the socialization processes and identity construction of young people. Media socialization (and identity as its subjective-oriented category) is understood as a complex interdependency between society, the media, and the subject. Media appropriation is the "place" where media socialization occurs. Considering digitization, convergence, transmedia storytelling, and the social Web as media-oriented aspects of the metaprocess of mediatization (Krotz, 2009), it is plausible to assume that the role of transmedia within socialization processes is increasing. The metaprocess of mediatization, following Krotz (2009), captures the interrelating processes of media change and of social and cultural change.

Based on this discussion, I sketch three selected points with regard to the initial empirical outcomes.

Individualized Media Use, Expertism, and Processes of Reintegration

Media environments characterized by convergence and transmedia storytelling support increasingly individualized patterns of media use. Considering options for reception independent from time and place as well as various forms of one content, fragmentation phenomena in regard to the audience(s) have to be assumed (and were repeatedly observed and described). Among the young people who participated in our study, highly individualized patterns of (trans)media use could be identified. At the same time, however, we also observed processes of reintegration, shaped and influenced by convergent media.

Expertism (in correspondence with fandom) functions as a mediating element in this interrelation. To be an expert in one's field of interest is an important aim for many young people. Expertism is a resource in terms of social recognition, sense of self-worth, and experiences of self-competence, which are preconditions of successful processes of social integration, identity construction, and personal agency. Within the preference-related transmedia appropriation process, adolescents tend to accumulate a huge range of information about their preferred storyworld (and beyond) and build a considerable knowledge stock as well as special skills. For successfully employing the appropriated expert knowledge and skills (as cultural capital), the social Web provides a convenient (deterritorialized) space concerning the reintegration processes.

Especially by using social network sites, fan forums, or other special interest websites, platforms, or user-generated content, young people can develop the feeling of being a part of a larger translocal (fan) community in two ways: by appropriating forms of appearance made by other fans (e.g., fan videos, recommendations, and comments) and in particular by employing forms of articulation (e.g., conversations with like-minded people). Although not all young people can be characterized as experts in a particular field, facets of these interrelations were identified by the vast majority of the participants. The engagement young people show in this respect can be seen as an aspect of commodification, as priceless peer-to-peer marketing (e.g., Martens, 2010). But none of the participants in our study addressed this

aspect as a critical point. Rather, they tend to appreciate such effects of peer-to-peer marketing as promotion (within a positive connotation) of their beloved media content.

Forms of Articulation and Social Integration

For most of the study participants, forms of articulation in transmedia appropriation are highly relevant only in contexts of self-representation (e.g., pictures and posts on social networking sites). They employ their media preferences for the purpose of the presentation of identity facets in social settings. Media preferences seem to be adequate means (as tools) for those purposes because of the high degree of (brand) awareness within youth cultures and their associated widely shared symbolic character (e.g., affiliations to youth cultures, personality traits, or current orientations). Aspects of engaging with the media by producing manifest forms of articulation are highly relevant options for action within transmedia appropriation only for some participants. Thus, in other words, only some of them engage with the convergent media world in a participating way in a narrower sense.

The study finds that young people who are searching for new contacts to other people and to like-minded peers, and especially those who are searching for social recognition, engage in that way with convergent media. Transmedia universes make it easier to appropriate knowledge and to achieve the status of an expert in one particular field of interest. With the background of expertism, one's turning toward convergent media worlds and especially to social media platforms integrated in these worlds in the mentioned participating way can be understood with respect to two points: First, media preferences can function as sources or given reasons to communicate with unknown people because they are shared fields of interest. They are shared matters, independent from local boundaries, which can provide orientation for social interaction and relations in the vast world of the Web. Second, within a translocal mediatized fan community, one can earn social recognition on the basis of expertism in one special field. Forms of mediated articulation are (more or less) the only option for interaction within these media-based community forms. Because of this, a profound knowledge stock enables (and can be seen as a premise for) participation on equal terms and forms the basis for obtaining social recognition.

Convergence, Transmedially Told Stories, and the Durations of Content-Related Preferences

Adolescents evaluate their current as well as previous media content preferences by referring to the duration of their preference. The duration of a particular preference depends on: (1) the duration of (high) presence in the media (serial character, subsequently ongoing storytelling, refresh period, etc.); (2) the range of (subjective interesting) content-related media offerings (forms of appearances); (3) the (maybe changing) image of the brand and its use among the (maybe changing) friends and relevant others; and (4) the fit between individual current identity issues, needs for orientation, and other requirements, on the one hand, and the transmedially provided material and options for action, on the other hand. Adolescents turn toward the media amid individual and age-related questions and uncertainties, and they are searching for answers (e.g., role models, patterns of appropriate behavior, examples for goals in life). If the transmedia storyworld does not provide suitable material (e.g., the story is told from another perspective, expansions of the story, such as side stories with formerly minor characters), the preferred content can lose its attractiveness. Thus, it has to be assumed that the range

and set of convergent preference-related offerings has a considerable influence on the subjective relevance of a media preference and on socialization and identity construction processes.

Conclusion

The study reveals that, under the conditions of digitization and a convergent media world as aspects of mediatization, young people can follow their preferences and deal with their favorite media content more extensively as well as more intensively. Independent of whether the story young people read is really transmedially told in a narrower sense, young people read their preferred stories in a transmedial way, though to different extents. Convergence and transmedia storytelling have considerable impacts on socialization and identity construction processes in adolescence.

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