

The Evolution Logic of IP Ecosystem in the Context of Transmedia Narratives: An Analysis Based on Game and Film/TV Cases

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Abstract. This research investigates the evolutionary principles of intellectual property (IP) ecosystems within the framework of transmedia stories, concentrating on the reciprocal adaptation processes between games and films/television. Compared to previous research which considers media adaptation as a unidirectional process, this study puts forward a dialogic model to describe how the narrative meanings and economic values are co-produced through each other's remediation in different forms, i.e., ludic and cinematic. By using a comparative case study method, the analysis compares two opposite directions: game to film/TV (as in "Arcane" and "Cyberpunk: Edgerunners") and film/TV to game (such as "Marvel's Spider-Man" and "Star Wars"). From the perspectives of textual-narrative, industrial-organizational and audience-market, the study finds that the successful transmedia transfer requires filling up the disconnected storyworlds with emotional continuity (in the case of game to film) or creating interactive gaps in the already existing canons (in the case of film to game). In addition, it discovers three major logics - technological (AIGC), platform (streaming integration) and cultural (localization versus globalization) which are affecting the development of IP. Theoretically, this study improves the transmedia storytelling by going beyond the single-directional adaptation studies and constructing a symbiotic and co-creation approach. In practice, it provides strategic advice for the global entertainment participants to deal with the convergence of gaming and streaming media.

Keywords: Transmedia Storytelling, IP Ecosystem, Game Adaptation, Film Adaptation, Narrative Remediation

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and topic

The contemporary cultural industry is changing from the production of one kind of medium to a complete intellectual property (IP) system. This change is based on Henry Jenkins' transmedia storytelling theory, which refers to spreading some parts of the story through various media to gain a total entertaining result [1]. At present, an IP not only represents a copyright asset but has developed

into a large-scale narrative world, appearing in many forms such as games, films and television series.

Game-to-film adaptations and film-to-game adaptations provide a useful case for the study of IP ecosystem development. Franchises such as *Cyberpunk 2077* and *Arcane* show both opportunities and challenges in transmedia expansion. Video games emphasize player's autonomy and realistic effects while films and television focus on sequential plots and emotional influence. Such media have distinct storytelling methods. These distinctions bring about difficulties in the translation from one medium to another. The major problem does not lie in maintaining the consistency of the story throughout the different media. The problem lies in the creation of values through various media forms. This investigation concentrates on the connection between video games and films. It applies the transmedia storytelling theory as an analytical tool. The study investigates the growth of Intellectual Property (IP) systems. Additionally, it investigates how producers, stories and viewers contribute values on different media bases.

1.2. Research aims and significance

This research establishes a two-directional model for the analysis of transmedia IP development. It investigates two kinds of adaptations. One is from games to films, and the other is from films to games. The research aims at three aspects. The first aim is to find out the narrative transformation techniques. These techniques comprise visual arrangement, alteration of the viewpoint of the story, and application of secondary characters. They enable the producers to change the scattered game scenes into consistent film stories. The second aim is to study the transmedia coherence in film series. Cooperation between industries is significant in this process. Sequence matching connects game stories with the already built film universe. Story boards also keep the consistency of the narrative. The third aim is to explore the overall pattern of IP system evolution. This investigation takes into account the influences of technical factors, medium factors and cultural factors. This study has theoretical value. The study expands transmedia research beyond one-way adaptation. The study proposes a dialogic model. In this model, narrative meaning and commercial value emerge through ongoing interaction between games and films. This study also has practical value. The study provides guidance for entertainment companies in a media environment shaped by gaming and streaming platforms. Cross-platform narrative consistency is an important capability. Medium-specific strengths are also important sources of competitive advantage.

1.3. Research methodology and structure

This study uses a comparative case study method. The analysis focuses on two directions of transmedia adaptation. One direction moves from games to film and television. The other direction moves from film and television to games. The study examines two groups of cases. The first group includes *Arcane* and *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*. This group allows a comparison between a planned transmedia project based on an existing game world and an adaptation developed to improve the reputation of a game franchise. The second group includes the *Spider-Man* franchise and the *Star Wars* franchise. This group helps explain how industrial coordination shapes the transfer of film narratives into interactive media. Key mechanisms include timeline alignment and formal review systems. The analysis follows three stages. The first stage examines narrative adaptation strategies. The second stage examines coordination among stakeholders and organizations. The third stage examines audience responses, market performance, and the process of value co-creation.

2. The transmedia upgrade of game IPs: from interactive entertainment to narrative universes

2.1. League of Legends-Arcane: narrative leap

League of legends is a famous multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game which was produced by Riot company in 2009. It quickly became popular all around the world, especially in China after the Tencent company launching it in 2011. Only 40 characters were created at the beginning, and there are more than 100 characters in this game for players to choose now. However, with the monthly update and more new characters added, questions came out from the players: where did these characters come from? Are there any relationships and stories among them? The player community has developed a corresponding need for a deeper world view and backstory. The designers were quick to spot the problem, and in a September 5, 2014 developer blog post [2], the reasons for giving up the Warfarecollege and setting out the direction of the League of Legends universe were explained. Such early and casual settings led to a repetition of the characters' story, and with the growth of League of Legends and the rise of e-sports, Warfarecollege was no longer deemed appropriate for the new world view. To be more specific, each character has his/her own lines, and they can be heard when players activate a skill or strike down a enemy who comes from the same hometown. But the connection is still too weak and dispersive for curious players to explore characters' stories, so finally in January 2017, the League of Legends Universe officially went live. Riot set up a dedicated portal on its official website, bringing together all the stories, and released a map of Runeterra. From here, players were able to search by character or region, through texts and short stories to understand the background story and various settings. They were also introduced to the region and its history and to associated characters. Each character has its own introduction page, including a biography and history, role positioning, camp, related characters, related CG film, art design information and other world experience content.

Although the sustainable revise of the backstory and the setting of official website truly provide more details about characters, the narrative universe still remain unclear and cannot be connected easily, which could contribute to the doubts and argument. That is why the idea of producing *Arcane* came up with: strategies to expand the content of the League of Legends IP from different media. *Arcane* is an animated series from Riot Games based in the League of Legends universe, produced by Riot Games Development and animated by Fortiche Production in France, and premiered on Netflix on November 6, 2021. *Arcane* distinguishes itself first through its arresting visual style—a hand-painted, painterly aesthetic that merges 2D textures with 3D animation, and a stark chromatic dichotomy: Piltover's gilded, neoclassical elegance versus Zaun's toxic, industrial decay. This visual style serves more than a decorative purpose. The style acts as a key storytelling tool. The series embeds political divisions and class conflict into the visual presentation of the world. Every frame reflects these tensions. The series also uses cinematic camera movement, dynamic lighting, and distinctive character design. These elements strengthen the emotional impact of the story. The narrative centers on the long-standing conflict between Piltover and Zaun. Geographic separation shapes this conflict. Social inequality also leads to this conflict. The relationship between Vi and Jinx gives these social tensions a personal dimension. The stories of Viktor and Jayce provide another perspective on the same issues. The series presents large social problems through individual experiences. This approach makes the characters vivid and easy for audiences to understand [3]. Compared to the Riot Game's former attempts at cross-game storytelling, *Arcane* is indispensable for the construction of the flow of League of Legends universe. Meanwhile, makers of *Arcane* use a similar visual style to the game's original artwork, which is usually called Steampunk [4].

Steampunk expresses its unique mechanical aesthetics and is suitable for the settings of Zaun and Piltover as they both live in the machines and technology industries.

2.2. *Cyberpunk 2077* -Cyberpunk: Edgerunners: animated redemption

Cyberpunk 2077 is one of its most famous representations of Cyberpunk games. Since the first trailer released in 2012, *Cyberpunk 2077* has earned tremendous attention. However, it is significantly criticized because of its severe bugs, optimization problems and fake advertising after the launch, reflecting the internal management issues. Through misleading promotion, CD Projekt RED committed to a narrative promise of an authentically open and coherent Night City. In practice, however, the gameworld relies on invisible walls, locked areas with misleading signs, and unmotivated restrictions.

Fortunately, *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners* proved to be a monumental boon to the game's reputation. The anime series, based on CD Projekt Red's *Cyberpunk 2077* and produced by Studio Trigger, debuted on Netflix in September 2022. It became an instant global phenomenon, amassing over 191 million hours viewed within its first month and securing a spot in the Top 10 across more than 80 countries. Critically acclaimed, it holds a stellar 100% critics' score on Rotten Tomatoes and an 8.3/10 user rating on IMDb. Set within the cyberpunk universe crafted by Mike Pondsmith, it serves as a prequel to the game, unfolding roughly a year prior to the events of "*Cyberpunk 2077*" [5]. The series tells the story of a man called David Martinez, who lives in a low-income neighborhood with his single mother. After his mother's death, David has to implant a prosthetic limb into his body to survive, which grants him the ability to move at high-speed, with the side effect of cyber psychosis. In the end, David dies to protect his friend Lucy. In this story, the victory of traditional heroic narrative is completely suspended, and replaced by the established failure for *Edgerunners*. In conventional heroic narratives, the protagonist's strength often signals victory. But in *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*, every "evolution" accelerates the mental breakdown. Cyber psychosis is not just a pre-set disease, but also a metaphor: edgerunners are forced to constantly "upgrade" themselves under the pressure of capitalism and technology, ultimately heading toward self-destruction. This perspective sets the show apart from the philosophical heroic narratives of "The Matrix" or "Ghost in the Shell", leaning more toward a socio-realistic cyberpunk approach—it no longer asks, "what is real", but rather "how can a society that cannot accommodate the weak face its own collapse"?

The anime achieved strong artistic recognition. The anime also improved the commercial performance of the game. The release of the series attracted a large number of players to *Cyberpunk 2077*. The game returned to the top position on Steam's global charts. More than 100,000 players were active at the same time in October 2022. This figure was more than ten times higher than the average level before the anime. The rise in player participation contributed to the continuous increase in sales. By the beginning of 2026, the total sales reached more than 30 million copies all over the world. This achievement made the game rank among the top sellers of role-playing games in history. The improvement of *Cyberpunk 2077* is an outstanding instance of the revival of a franchise in the gaming field.

The achievement of the anime is based on accurate market data. CD Projekt Red sold about 2 million copies of the game from July to September 2022. The anime was shown on Netflix in September, 2022. By October 2022, the total number of game copies sold exceeded 20 million. Such a large increase happened within a short time. The players' opinions have also become more favourable. The approval rate on Steam rose from about 73% to 85%. All these indicate that the anime has contributed to the commercial revival of the game. Besides, it has also changed the public opinion of the franchise. This effect is due to a special choice in the plot line. In the game, the player

controls the main character. However, the anime focuses on the everyday life of some marginal mercenaries. It stresses their reliance on cybernetic improvements and gradually reveals their mental decline. This kind of plot provides more emotion to the theme of cyber-psychosis in the game. According to Steinberg, the Media Mix strategy can help in developing the motivations and emotional relations of the characters [6]. The audience establish emotional ties with characters like David and Lucy. Many of them come back to play the game with these emotions. Thus, the players see the game from a new angle. Positive reactions were seen on various social media websites and Steam reviews. New players joined the game with these emotional feelings. Most of them expressed favourable comments which benefited the game's general reputation. Therefore, the success of the anime is not accidental. It arises from a planned cross-media storytelling plan. This plan enhances the emotional involvement in the field where the original game received negative criticism.

3. The gamified return of film and TV IPs: from one-way output to two-way empowerment

3.1. The *Spider-Man* franchise

3.1.1. The pros and cons of individual universe for *Marvel's Spider-Man*

Insomniac Games adopted an independent approach instead of continuing the movie series directly, in order to avoid legal and commercial conflicts. If they had followed the MCU plot, it might have led to misunderstanding about the copyright of the intellectual property and the revenue distribution. For example, using Tom Holland's picture may cause people to regard the game as a film. This might result in the implementation of the profit-sharing agreements in the film contracts. This example illustrates the relationship between creative activities and legal norms in modern media franchises. By creating an independent world, Insomniac Games were able to maintain greater creative flexibility and reduce the potential contractual discrepancies. Secondly, Spider-Man in MCU needs to coordinate with major events throughout the Marvel Universe. If the game take example by the MCU, then the storyline must accommodate the movie's timeline: for instance, if Iron Man dies in the movie, he cannot appear in the game. Insomniac would like to develop a long-term series of games; thus, it needs to have control of plots independently. Thirdly, different fans have different needs. For those wild Marvel fans, they want to be immersed in a world like comics with rich details. In *Marvel's Spider-Man*, there are more than 50 collections, such as Uncle Ben's driver license, the draft of first spider web emitter and the Herald Daily newspapers, which carry on decades of reading memories for comics fans and can quickly get acception from these fans. At the same time, for common players who did not read comics or watch movies before, the independent universe is easier to understand and play. Last but not least, Insomniac extracts core emotional relationships and rearrange them in the independent universe, which could prevent "movie fatigue". Although there are many benefits, this strategy still faces risks and challenges. Some veteran players who played *Spider-Man 2 (2004)* may feel the oscillating system in the new game less real, and fans of MCU would feel disappointed because of the absence of other avengers. Anyway, the adaption is novel and successful.

3.1.2. Loose coupling between games and movies

While the universes between the games and the movies are self-reliant, they still have some linkage. When a new film of the Spider-Man franchise releases, there would be the same suits as the one in the movie through free updates or DLC. For instance, two days before the premiere of *Spider-Man:*

No Way Home, both *Marvel's Spider-Man* and *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales* update for free and add two suits which are worn in the movie, the Black & Gold Suit and Integrated Suit. Meanwhile, whoever buys or has owned the games mentioned would get a raffle for prizes like film tickets, Sony gift cards or limited Spider-Man-themed PS5 case. The official Twitter account of PlayStation also upload a short video and caption with "Your friendly neighborhood suit drop". Sony Pictures' official account reposted it, adding the note: "Watch the movie tonight, go home tomorrow and keep playing". These linkages are continuous strategies. During 2022 and 2023, purchasing any Marvel's Spider-Man series game on the PS Store means half-price renting or purchasing the digital versions of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *Far from Home*, and *No Way Home*. Conversely, purchasing the above films at Sony Pictures' official digital movie store (Movies Anywhere / PlayStation Video) will grant a 20% discount coupon for the *Marvel's Spider-Man*. Sony has put its two largest entertainment divisions (film&games) together by using a "suit update + cross-promotion + social topics" approach, avoiding creative coercion while achieving commercial mutual support.

3.2. The Star Wars franchise

3.2.1. Changes of IP ownership from Lucasfilm to Disney

Star Wars is one of the most famous movie series directed by George Lucas, and he sets up the Lucasfilm in 1975 for the franchise. From the start, he firmly controlled the IP ownership by retaining rights to sequels, merchandise, and special effects technology. Though the first *Star Wars* was released by 20th Century Fox, and in return Fox permanently holds the distribution rights for the film. Except for this right, the development rights for the Star Wars IP and all its characters, worlds, sequels, spin-offs, games, and merchandise are 100% owned by George Lucas through Lucasfilm until 2012. On October 30th, 2012, Disney announced the acquisition of Lucasfilm, and the transaction was officially completed in December 2013. As Disney bought the whole shares of Lucasfilm, it now holds the *Star Wars* IP ownership including all movies, series, characters, stories, names, tags, those finished and unfinished scriptwriting and planning, and also the Industrial Light & Magic. After acquiring the Star Wars IP, Disney significantly tightened its control over transmedia content, shifting from the previously loose and diverse "derivative universe" model to a highly centralized, unified "canon" management system. Before the change, Lucas organizes the "Holocron" and divides it into several levels of canonicity:

George or G-Canon: the most recent versions of films Episodes I – VI, the scripts, movie novelizations, radio plays, and Lucas' statements.

TV or T-Canon: The Star Wars: Clone Wars television series...

Continuity or C-Canon: The Expanded Universe

Secondary or S-Canon: RPGs such as Star Wars: Galaxies.

Non or N-Canon: 'What if?' stories such as Star Wars Infinities [7]

However, after the announcement on April 25th, 2014, except for the six movies and Clone Wars series, thousands of published derivative works are categorized under the N-canon and all newly created content (movies, TV series, novels, comics, games) is at the same level of canon, and have to be strictly coherent with each other. Specifically speaking, Disney set up Lucasfilm Story Group, which is composed of seasoned Star Wars experts, writers, and editors, to review all Star Wars projects—from mainline movies to short-lasting animated clips, from novel plots to theme park locations [7]. Meanwhile, Disney reclaimed the copyright of the books and gave it to Drue Books and Marvel Comics. Game licensing has been significantly tightened, too. Only Electronic Arts

(EA), Ubisoft Entertainment and Quantic Dream are allowed to make games with strict regulations. Lastly, Disney has brought all Star Wars series and future movies (excluding theatrical releases) to its own Disney+ streaming platform. This gives Disney absolute control over content release pace and cross-linkage between episodes (such as *Ahsoka* connecting the *Mandalorian*).

3.2.2. EA & Respawn's collaboration with Lucasfilm

EA is the one who holds exclusive rights to Star Wars game adaptations for a long time, while Respawn is one of EA's most successful Star Wars game developers, having produced the critically acclaimed Star Wars Jedi series. Although Respawn enjoys relatively highly creative freedom, as an official Disney production under strict regulation, every setting of the protagonist Cal Kestis must undergo thorough review by the Lucasfilm Story Group. In particular, Respawn initially wanted Kal to use a dual-bladed lightsaber, and the story team agreed to this idea but requested an explanation for why a apprentice would use such a rare type of lightsaber. In the end, the game justified this choice by having players "discover dual-bladed accessories in ancient tombs", and it was designed so that using a dual-bladed lightsaber made the character's movements appear clumsy, indicating that the character was not proficient in its use. Also, Respawn once considered having Carl briefly encounter Obi-Wan Kenobi or Yoda in the game, but the story team rejected this, citing that "the whereabouts of these characters are clearly defined and cannot be crossed over at will". Admittedly, through these rigid strategies, the Star Wars franchise is able to establish its firm position within the official canon. Carl's story has been officially recognized by the developers, and it is even possible that it may appear in future live-action series. However, as a result of this process, Respawn lost a great deal of the freedom to adapt the IP and many fans complained about the sacrifice of those "Legends" [7].

4. Trends and proposals for future IP development

4.1. Technology-driven: new methods help reduce costs and increase efficiency

In the past, transmedia production used to be labor-intensive and capital-intensive. Stages from screenwriters to storyboards are disconnected, which leads to extremely high communication costs. The new-developed technology AIGC brings fresh trends to IP processes. With this tool, individual creators can independently complete the entire process from text to visualization, dynamic, and even interactive forms. And at the same time, different media platforms can be used to create novels, cartoons, games and even real-time interaction. Traditionally, from text to image requires hiring artists and model engineers. Now, text-to-image and text-to-3D model tools can directly convert novel descriptions into concept design drawings, saving 50%-70% art costs [8]. Also, AI is effective in translation and localization, which helps achieve global simultaneous distribution. But it is worth noting that AI cannot replace artists and writers, which means human beings still need to lead the whole production. The barrier is not in production, but in selection and adjustment. Human creators who can harness AI to produce highly emotionally charged content will become super players in the IP industry.

4.2. Platform strategies: the integration of streaming platforms with distribution channels

Following AIGC's cost reduction and efficiency improvement across media production, streaming platforms should be concentrated and precise. Traditional distribution channels are fragmented.

Cinema chains, TV stations, video websites, short videos, social platforms and game stores need different schemes to advertise, which contributes to high cost. But nowadays, top streaming platforms, such as Netflix and Disney+, have already had the ability to create home-made animation, publize in diverse media, and use algorithm-based recommendations to draw user profiling [9]. Meanwhile, streaming platforms have complete user viewing behavior data, like when to pause, when to watch again, when to fasten and which character is shared most. With the data, creators can add or renew the content at any time. For example, when a supporting character is unexpectedly popular in an episode, AI can immediately generate a personal-edited short video for that character and pushes it to highly interested users. So, at the beginning of making characters and worldview, creators need to consider the significance of IP derivability.

4.3. Cultural plus: localized narrative and global IP value

Traditional globalization of IP involves one-way dissemination, such as Marvel movies being released in China. Localization mainly relies on translation and minor modifications, but this approach is costly and often fails to resonate effectively with local audiences. This can lead to cultural discount. Cultural Discount refers to a program's decline in appeal overseas because viewers are unfamiliar with its values, language, and behavioral patterns [10]. However, in the future, with the development of AIGC and streaming platforms, any country's local narrative can quickly generate multilingual and multicultural versions using AIGC tools, and then directly promote them globally via streaming platforms, creating a wave of global localization. A particular group ought to be established to collaborate with the AIGC system, considering the danger of cultural assimilation and discovering possible IP in the developing areas in order to avoid overmodification of AIGC. When AIGC overcomes the technical obstacles for localization and the streaming channels eliminate the distribution barriers, the localized IP stories will no longer become a burden but a distinctive source of value.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the evolution of IP ecosystems through two directions of transmedia adaptation between games and film and television. The analysis focuses on four cases: *Arcane*, *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*, *Marvel's Spider-Man*, and the *Star Wars* franchise. The study identifies three main findings. The first finding concerns game-to-film and television adaptation. Successful modifications can give rise to more emotional intensity in divided plots and character systems. The objectives are accomplished by maintaining visual uniformity, altering narrative viewpoints and concentrating on minor characters. The cyberpunk-themed TV series "*Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*" is a good illustration. Through the eyes of an edgerunner, the world of *Cyberpunk 2077* is shown. This method enhances the viewers' interest. Moreover, it improves the game's fame and benefits the sales increase. Another finding relates to the conversion from films and television to video games. Successful adaptation needs room for player involvement in a pre-existing story environment. Intellectual property management is still significant. Insomniac Games constructed an independent universe for the video game "*Marvel's Spider-Man*". This method lessens creative and legal restrictions. In contrast, Lucasfilm Story Group of the *Star Wars* franchise kept strict control over the canonical content. This way increases coherence but restricts creative liberty. The third finding involves the overall progress of multi-medium intellectual property ecosystems. There are three aspects gaining more influence. The first aspect is technology. Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) tools can decrease production expenses. The second aspect is platforms. Streaming

services integrate content distribution with user information. The third aspect is culture. Local storytelling can help global IPs communicate with various audiences. These results indicate a transition from one-directional adaptation. Video games and films become co-entrance channels into the same narrative universe. Each medium can enhance the worth of the other.

This investigation possesses some restrictions. The chosen samples are mainly from Western markets. Eastern Asian instances are given less consideration. For example, China's comprehensive entertainment intellectual property system and Japan's Media Mix model are included. This restriction limits the cross-cultural aspect of the results. The examination is mainly based on narrative texts and industrial processes. The audience research is still insufficient. The study does not thoroughly investigate how the fans interpret the coherence of the narratives. Moreover, it does not sufficiently analyze how the fans generate values by means of their fan works and online activities. The discussion on AIGC reflects the present industry conditions. The quick development of technology might decrease the lasting significance of these observations.

Future investigations should carry out more cross-cultural case studies. Moreover, the range of IP ecosystems needs to be expanded. The researchers must adopt more audience-oriented approaches. These include surveys, netnography and digital trace analysis. It is important to study the impact of generative AI on transmedia production. The research should focus on the narrative authorship, storytelling techniques and the potential of uniform creativity. Future research should investigate the IP ecosystems over a longer period. The researchers should apply computational models to analyze the relationships among different participants in these ecosystems. Such measures may improve the understanding of the long-term development trends. The relationship between games and films is becoming closer. Thus, both scholars and practical experts should use a dialogue approach in developing transmedia values. This approach should consider the functions of both media forms. At the same time, it should ensure the continuity of the stories and fully exploit the individual advantages of each medium.

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