

Design for Content Creation Support Application Based on TMS Method

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Abstract: In this research, we design a support application for Transmedia storytelling (TMS) content creation. The target of this application is the creators who are not familiar with TMS content creation. Developing a story with the different types of media and delivering a story experience to audiences is much more difficult compared to the content creation with a simple media platform. Therefore, we propose the application that enables users to create TMS content efficiently by following the provided flow from step1 to 8 through which they can create and combine the content elements; stories, characters, story worlds, and story experiences. Thus, this application makes it possible to create TMS content efficiently.

Key words: Transmedia storytelling, narratology, content creation, storytelling.

1. Purpose

Transmedia storytelling (TMS) has the advantage of expanding narrative content and engaging the audience by developing the content in multiple media. On the other hand, since TMS is a relatively new method, it is easily confused with “Media Mix” and “Cross-media”, and the complexity of producing TMS content is a problem to be solved. The purpose of this study is to improve the efficiency of TMS content creation tasks, which are complex and difficult. We design and propose a TMS content creation support application that features content visualization by utilizing a tree structure. It is possible to proceed with a TMS creation effectively by following the guided steps in the application. By visualizing a TMS project with a tree structure, creators can grasp the whole image of the project easily. We expect that the use of this application can contribute to the popularization of TMS content creation and to stimulate the content industry in the coming age.

2. Background

The diversity in Media is being more and more enriched with the development of the digital technology. This diversification of media has expanded the expression possibility regarding the methods. On the other hand, creators have a hard time to build relationship between media and audiences. In this situation, TMS upon which narrative content are developed here and there with multiple media, is gathering attentions as the effective approach to audiences in Europe and the United States. The audiences find the newness in a story that progresses across media boundaries. In most of the cases, TMS is used for promotion campaigns, media franchise and ARG. As the practicality of TMS has been demonstrated in academic papers, now TMS also starts to be adopted in the fields such as education and tourism. Audiences enjoy TMS as a new style of content. However, it is not easy for creators to create TMS content. Compared to creating and managing content for a single medium, it is much more difficult to develop a narrative in the complex interplay of multiple media, to predict audiences’ responses, and to control audience’s behavior. In our previous paper

([1] Aoki and Fujimoto 2021), it was verified that it is possible to visualize the entire project by fitting the stories and narrative experiences of TMS content into a tree structure exemplifying some successful cases. A tree structure is also utilized as a function of the proposed application in this paper.

3. Related Tool

In this chapter, we describe the features of existing tools to create a story and the application to manage information with a tree structure before we describe the proposed application to create a story world and the narrative of TMS content. In addition, we mention about the functions that can be also used for the designed application in this study and the functions that are not implemented in the existing tools but are essential to the efficient method for TMS projects.

3.1. Nola

Nola is the support software to create a base of the story; theme, plot, characters and story world, when a user writes a story. The user proceeds with each item for creation of a story. This software is for those who want to write works such as short story or short-short. At first, the user sets an approximate number of words for writing and starts a story. In the next step, the user fills out detailed information in the character and story world settings. It is fully capable of use for writing stories, but, by default, it is designed for writing literature such as novels, and the purpose, is different from developing stories in multiple media. Therefore, it does not cover the items; what kind of media to use and how to visually express.

3.2. XMind

XMind is one of the applications to manage information by organizing your thoughts and ideas. This application has the label function with which users can input notes in a tree structure. However, this is just a simple note function, and it is difficult to say that the function is sufficient for the creation of complicated stories and story experiences, and also for TMS project operations. Other than this, there are applications that use a hierarchical structure to organize information, in the same way as the file function of a computer. However, they do not visualize the structure using the illustration of a tree.

4. Application Functions for TMS Content Creation

In this chapter, we describe the application’s functions that creators can practically utilize when they proceed to a TMS project. To succeed in a TMS project, creators are required to deliver the ‘right content’ to ‘right targets’ with ‘right media’ at the ‘right timing’. The users create TMS content following the eight steps below.

4.1. Definition of Goals and Prerequisites

The first step to start TMS content creation is prerequisites definition. In this step, the user inputs prerequisites of their project: “What kind of value I want to give to targets,” “Goals of my project” or “whether there is any restriction.” As the users work on their projects, they need to keep in mind whether or not the content they have devised meets the prerequisites (Fig.1). This prevents the project content from deviating from the objectives set at the outset and it allows the user to proceed with the work efficiently. Next, the user inputs a title and selects the category and genre of the story from alternatives. The prerequisites for the project can be edited later in the project production process. This is because there is a great possibility that new concepts and ideas will emerge during the course of the project, which will eventually influence the theme and goals.

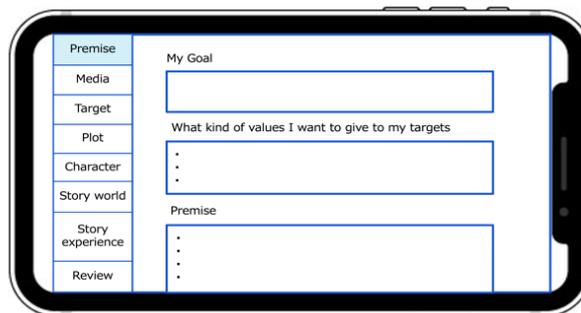


Fig. 1. Definition of goals and prerequisites.

4.2. Media Selection

In this step, the user selects media platforms used for the project. Since different age groups with different interests use different media, the user needs to be aware of the habits and behaviors particular to their target audience when selecting the most appropriate media. Depending on the purpose, the expected role for each media is different (Fig2). For instance, one user develops a romance story targeting teenagers and those in their 20s. When the user selects a Social Networking Service (SNS) as one of the media platforms used for the project, he or she needs to consider, the points; “which SNS to use”, whether the SNS is appropriate for the target group”, “the way how to guide the target from the main media to the SNS”, and “Expected affection by the use of the SNS.” In the last step of ‘Review’, the user confirms if the selected media is suitable.



Fig. 2. Media selection

4.3. Target Setting

Next, the user sets target information such as generations, habits, environments and scope in detail. It is important to check if the users’ ideas are appropriate for targets’ habits and interests when the user creates stories and narrative experiences, and when he or she select media platforms. If fine information about ‘target’ is not set in the beginning, the project would be disorganized and it would be difficult to maximize the true power of TMS (Fig. 3).

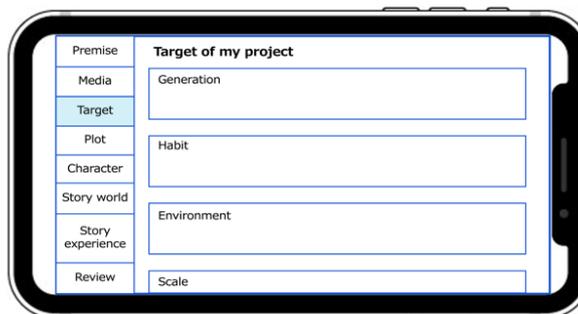


Fig. 3. Target setting.

4.4. Plot Creation

In the next step, the user creates plots as the core of the project based on the stages: ‘Introduction’, ‘Development’, ‘Twist’ and ‘Conclusion’. The amount of each plot depends on each user. By touching each plot, the user can edit more concrete content of the plot and insert pictures and illustrations. In addition, by tapping the tree-icon button in the upper right corner of the screen, the tree structure of the story will be displayed. With this tree structure, the user can grasp the balance of the story stages, the structure including the side stories and the relationships between the main story and the side stories (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Plot creation and tree structure function

In this way, the user can create not only a main story but also side stories and subsequent-stories. These stories are combined with the main story, making the story world expanding.

As an example, we pick “Cinderella”, which is known as one of Grimm Fairy Tales or Disney works. The story of Cinderella, from a Disney film work, can be categorized into four major stages : introduction, development, twist, conclusion, and, in total the following fourteen plots.

Introduction

1. Once upon a time, Cinderella, who had lost her mother was living with her father without any problems.
2. Even though her father got re-married for Cinderella, unfortunately, he passed away.

Development

3. Cinderella’s step-mother and two step-sisters revealed their actual nature and started to abuse her.
4. One day, Cinderella and her family receives an invitation to a ball to be held at the castle.
5. Although Cinderella was preparing for the ball, her step-mother and step-sisters teared her dress and she gave up going there.

Twist

6. Cinderella is sad. The Fairy Godmother appeared.
7. By the magic, Cinderella got glass shoes, a beautiful dress and a pumpkin carriage, then, went to the ball, on the promise of going back by midnight.
8. Cinderella caught Prince Charming’s eyes, and they danced together and fell in love.
9. However, the bell rings to inform ‘it is 12:00 am’, breaking the magic spell. Cinderella leaves one of the glass shoes and leaves the ball.
10. Prince Charming have people search for Cinderella.

11. Cinderella’s step-mother confines her in the attic not to make her meet the prince.

Conclusion

12. Cinderella succeeded in escaping from the attic with the help of mice.
13. The grass shoe fits Cinderella’s foot.
14. Cinderella went to the castle and again, met Prince Charming and got married with him.

When above "Cinderella" is created as the main story (Story A) upon the application, to create a new story, the user can select one plot that composes the story and apply the plot to any of the stages: introduction, development, twist, conclusion, of the new story. However, detailed information about Fairy Godmother is not described in the original work. Seventy years after the Cinderella film was released in 1950, a live-action film that features “The Fairy Got Mother” was produced and released in 2020. This is the story of Eleanor

(Fairy Godmother is a common name), who appears in “Cinderella”, and the work shows how she becomes a full-fledged Fairy Godmother before she meets Cinderella. In chorological order, regarding the character that appears in plot A6 in the main story, she becomes a full-fledged Fairy Godmother and then appears in front of Cinderella. The live-action movie "The fairy Got Mother" is positioned as a side story (Fig. 5).

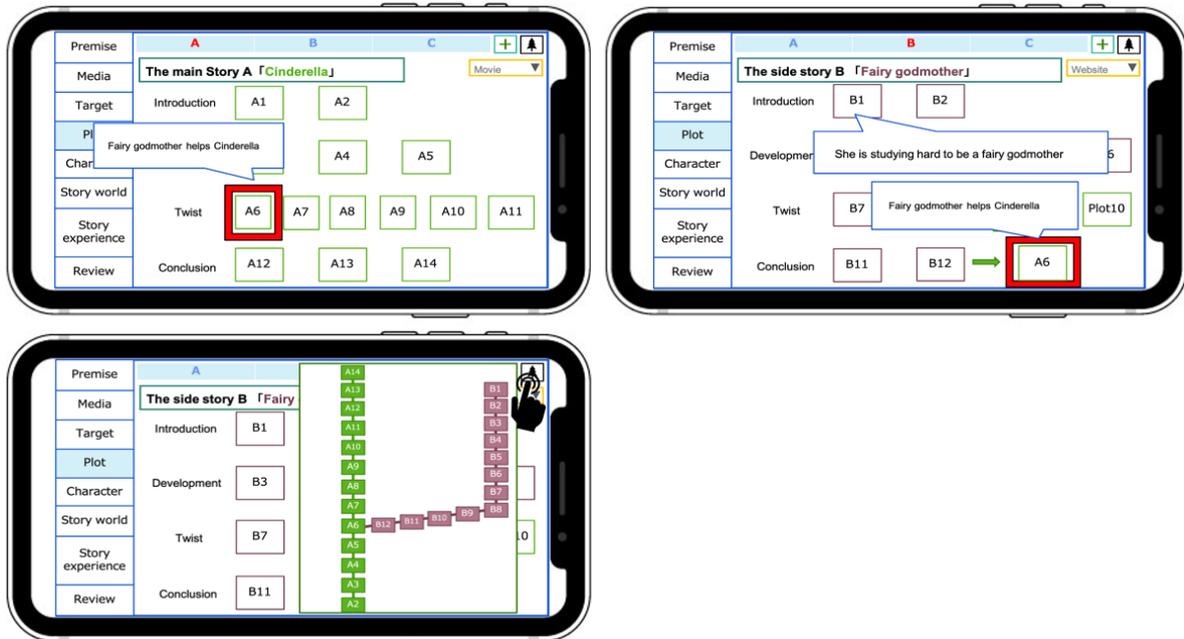


Fig. 5. The story “Cinderella”

4.5. Character Creation

In order to create plots, it is necessary to create characters. Characters’ actions in the story influence the story greatly. It is required to set character’s personality, growth environment, and interests in detail. Even though not all of the character’s personality elements are portrayed in the story, setting them in advance makes the story more consistent and it also leads to the efficient story production. In a TMS projects, sub-characters would play a role as main characters in side stories. Therefore, even if a sub-character’ has only few opportunities to appear in the main story, the user needs to set the character’s information in detail. Also, the character created upon “Character” will reflected to “Relationship.” The user can reduce a risk of confusion and inconsistency by visualizing the relationship of characters; editing each relationship between characters, completing the relationship diagram (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Character creation.

4.6. Story World Creation

By developing a story with multiple media, the story world can be expanded. Compared to a story world of the content that is completed with one media platform, it can be said that a story world of TMS project is far more huge and complicated. The user arranges a story world likewise character creation. Specifically, the user enters the composing elements of the story world (from politics, religions, laws, customs to physical laws and

natural resources). The user makes audiences cross multiple media in a huge frame named a “story world.” If some elements of the story world are missing or contradictory, it may cause confusion to the audience. “Story world” can play an important role regarding how deeply the story can give audiences the sense of immersion (Fig. 7).

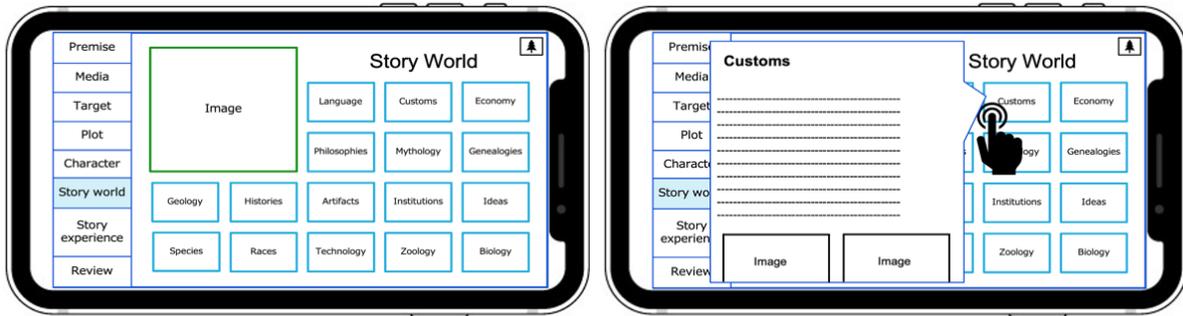


Fig. 7. Story world creation.

4.7. Narrative Experience Creation

Narrative experience can be said to be a unique feature of TMS and is a very important factor that determines how interesting the TMS content is. The user taps the "Trick" column of the plot to provide the story experience. There, the user enters an outline of the narrative experience; how it works, what makes it interesting and valuable, and how it attracts the target audiences’ interests. In addition, the user can tap the "Target" column at the bottom of the screen and enter the target's emotional changes and the expected behaviors for each plot and narrative experience. If a narrative experience is to be provided involving some plots, the user can specify the relevant plots. The information about the narrative experience that the user has input is reflected to the tree structure. The plots with which the narrative experience is set, are put in a red box, and the relationships with the relevant plots are also displayed. In this way, the relationship between the storyline and the narrative experiences of the TMS project can be understood by visualizing it as a tree structure (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Narrative experience creation.

4.8. Review

that he or she has created. The user puts check marks next to each complicated items such as "Does the project align with the goals and assumptions? ", "Is the media appropriate for the target audience and

effective in providing a narrative experience?” and “Are there any inconsistencies or missing information in the story, story world, or story experience?”. In this process, the user can check what he or she has noticed, and points to be improved. By repeatedly reviewing and from Step 1 to Step 7 and brushing up the content, the user can produce higher-quality finished form of the content.

5. Consideration

We have described the application functions and creation steps by far. This application covers the general production process of TMS content creation, which is more challenging than developing a story in a single medium. Also, it can be said that it serves as an instructions template for TMS projects for those who are totally unfamiliar with TMS, in respect of that the users can get a general idea of TMS by simply following the systematized functions and procedure. Up to the present, several articles and textbooks about TMS have been written, but currently there is no system that can assist the actual TMS content creation or serves as a steppingstone to the successful TMS content creation. From this, it can be said that the application proposed in this research is novel.

6. Summary and Future Work

In recent years, when it comes to TMS, a lot of attention is paid to Hollywood TMS productions with huge budgets and TMS promotions by global consumer-packaged-goods manufacturers. For individuals and the companies that cannot spend much money for promotions, creating their own content using TMS would be difficult, because generally its cost is too high. It is hoped that such people will actually produce TMS content utilizing this application, even on a trial basis, and the TMS projects will become more popular among the general public. In the future, we aim to build and implement the application designed in this research. Then, we will conduct an experiment with people who are totally unfamiliar with TMS, to verify the effectiveness of this application. Based on its results, we will make improvements and work on increasing the perfectibility of the application.

In this research, we propose to reflect the characteristics of the ming smarter’ from various perspectives, besides folders on computers, and propose a variety of approaches.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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