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Transmedia storytelling in expanding audience's engagement: a phenomenological study of *Nussa Rara*

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords:

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Background: The evolution of digital storytelling has transformed audience engagement, particularly through the utilization of multiple media platforms.

Objective: This study aims to explore how the *Nussa Rara* franchise has expanded its narrative universe across various platforms—YouTube, a feature film, interactive AR, and merchandise—to enhance audience experience and engagement. **Method:** Using a qualitative research approach, the study analyzed content and collected audience feedback through interviews and surveys. **Results:** Results indicate that each platform uniquely contributes to deepening the narrative experience, with YouTube providing accessibility, the film adding emotional depth, AR enhancing interactivity, and merchandise creating a tangible connection to the story. **Implication:** These findings underscore the effectiveness of integrated media strategies in building compelling transmedia narratives. **Novelty:** The findings contribute to scholarly discussions by illustrating how different media formats can be harmoniously integrated to enhance storytelling.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the way audiences engage with media narratives is rapidly evolving, making it crucial to explore the mechanisms behind successful transmedia storytelling. The Indonesian animated series *Nussa Rara* provides a prime example, having expanded its narrative across various platforms including serial animations on YouTube, a feature film in 2021, interactive augmented reality (AR) experiences in Assemblr, and related merchandise. This research is essential as it delves into how these diverse mediums enhance audience engagement and transform traditional storytelling, offering insights into the dynamics of media consumption in contemporary society.

Previous studies have extensively explored the effectiveness of transmedia storytelling in engaging audiences but often within the confines of Western media contexts (Alzamora, 2018; Sánchez, 2014; Sánchez-Mesa et al., 2016), such as *Marvel and Star Wars* (Coles, 2023) and *The Hunger Games and Westworld* (Bourdaa, 2018). They highlighted the role of YouTube and films in extending narrative universes (Coles, 2023; Derhy Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016; Garcés & Mendieta-Briceño, 2024; Lee, 2023), but there is a gap concerning the integration of AR technologies and merchandise in storytelling, particularly within Indonesian media. Even though in Indonesia, their impacts are commonly observed across various sectors, including tourism, retail, and cultural heritage (Arista et al., 2023; Fattah et al., 2021; Pujiati et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023). Little attention is given about the phenomenological impact of these integrations on audience experience in educational field. This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining how *Nussa Rara* employs these platforms not just for narrative expansion but for creating a more immersive and interactive experience, as referenced by minimal attention in literature (D. Kim & Li, 2021; Y. E. Kim & Khajavi, 2024).

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how the utilization of various media platforms — specifically YouTube, feature films, AR, and merchandise — enhances the storytelling experience of *Nussa Rara* and influences audience engagement from a phenomenological perspective. The study addresses the questions: How do these platforms collectively expand the narrative universe of *Nussa Rara*? What are the experiential impacts on the audience? How do these interactions contribute to a deeper connection with the story?

Preliminary findings suggest that the diverse media platforms used by *Nussa Rara* not only expand the narrative but also significantly enhance audience engagement through multisensory experiences. The integration of AR technology and merchandise, in particular, has introduced a novel dimension of interaction, where viewers not only consume content passively but become active participants in the narrative process. This research argues that such a holistic approach to storytelling could serve as a model for future media productions aiming to create more engaging and immersive narrative experiences, potentially setting new standards in the industry. Further investigation will validate these observations and help understand their broader implications on media consumption patterns.

METHOD

The study examines the serial animation of *Nussa Rara* on YouTube, the 2021 feature film, the interactive AR experiences in Assemblr, and the associated merchandise as the main units of analysis (as seen in Figure 1). This qualitative research utilizes a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of how these diverse media forms influence audience engagement and narrative experience (Gerrig & Bezdek, 2013; Kelsey et al., 2017; Woodfall & Zezulcova, 2016). The respondents consist of 50 junior high school students who are fans of *Nussa Rara*, attending a private school in East Java. These students provide a unique perspective due to their active engagement with the series across multiple platforms, offering insights into the immersive and interactive dimensions of transmedia storytelling.

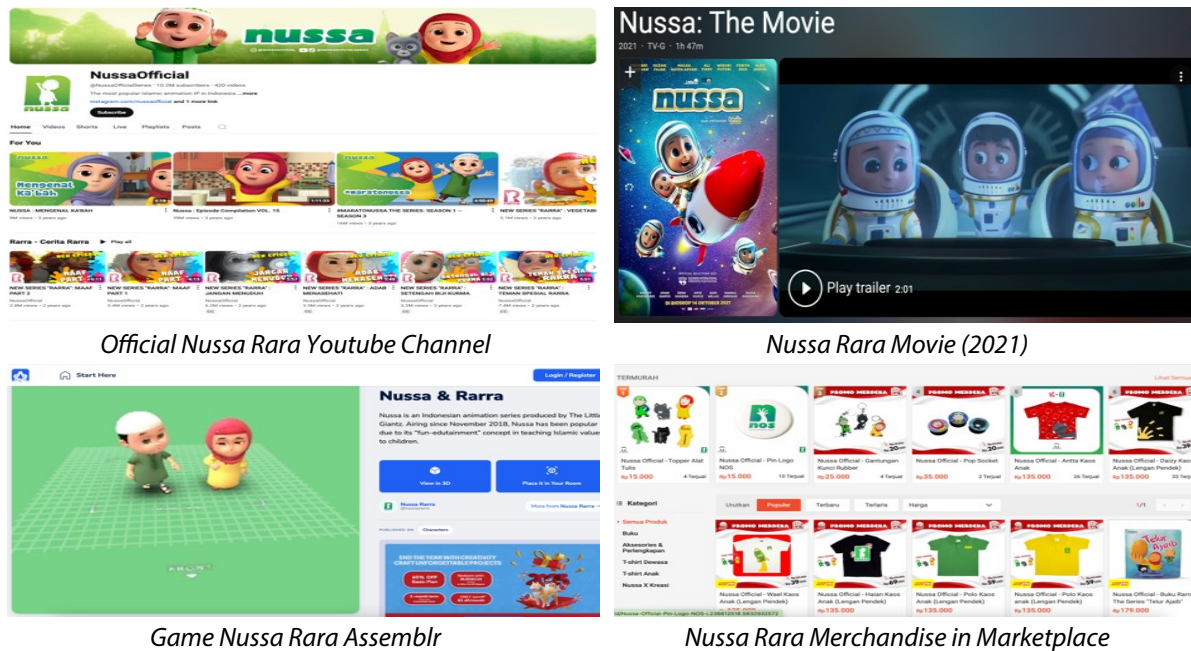


Figure 1. Some transmedia platforms of Nussa Rara

The primary sources of information for this study are collected through in-depth interviews and documentation of their interactions with the *Nussa Rara* media. The data collection process focuses on understanding their personal experiences and emotional connections with the narrative (Pandey, 2024; Shashank & Devi, 2021). The analytical stages include data reduction, where irrelevant information is filtered out; data display, where the remaining data is organized systematically; and verification, to confirm the findings (Palilonis, 2022). The method of analysis used in this research is meta-analysis, which involves synthesizing data from various sources to create a comprehensive understanding of how transmedia storytelling elements contribute to expanding the audience's narrative experience (Aoki & Fujimoto, 2020; Coles, 2023). This method helps in identifying common themes and patterns that emerge from the diverse data sources, providing a robust basis for the study's conclusions.

RESULTS

The roles of transmedia platforms in expanding the narrative universe of Nussa Rara

The transmedia narrative of *Nussa Rara* exemplifies how storytelling can transcend traditional media boundaries to create a richer, more immersive universe that captivates diverse audiences. By deploying multiple platforms—each with its unique method of engagement—*Nussa Rara* not only entertains but also deepens the connection between its characters and the audience. This multifaceted approach reflects a sophisticated understanding of contemporary media consumption patterns, where audiences seek various entry points into and interactions with the narrative, depending on their individual preferences and technological accessibility. Table 1 shows the roles of *Nussa Rara* transmedia platforms which possibly impact on the audience's preferences to the media and, consequently, create the diverse spectrum of the storytelling.

Table 1 illustrates a clear pattern of incremental engagement and narrative complexity across platforms. Starting from passive consumption via YouTube animations, the audience is drawn into a more emotionally engaging experience with the film, which offers deeper narrative layers. The progression continues with the interactive AR, which transforms audience engagement from passive to interactive, allowing users to explore and experience the narrative universe in real-time. The merchandise further capitalizes on this engagement by materializing the narrative into everyday objects, which serve as constant reminders of the story, thus maintaining a connection with the audience even outside of digital consumption.

Table 1. Roles of transmedia platforms in expanding the narrative universe of *Nussa Rara*

Platform	Narrative Contribution	Specific Elements	Target Audience	Type of Engagement
<i>Serial Animation Nussa Rara on YouTube</i>	Introduces and develops main characters and foundational story arcs.	Basic plot, character traits, recurring themes.	General audience, especially younger viewers.	Passive viewing, foundational engagement.
<i>Film Nussa [2021]</i>	Deepens emotional depth and complexity of the narrative with detailed backstories and extended character arcs.	Complex emotional narratives, extended backstories, higher stakes.	Fans of the series, families.	Emotional, cinematic engagement.
<i>Interactive AR Nussa Rara in Assemblr</i>	Allows direct interaction with characters and story elements in a three-dimensional space.	Real-time interaction, spatial exploration of narrative settings.	Tech-savvy users, young adults, and children.	Interactive, immersive engagement.
<i>Nussa Rara Merchandise</i>	Extends narrative impact into daily life through physical items that carry symbolic meaning.	Apparel, toys, school supplies reflecting key moments or characters.	Wide range, especially merchandise collectors and young fans.	Physical, emotional engagement.

This pattern reveals a strategic layering of narrative delivery tailored to maximize audience engagement and retention. By starting with more accessible media and gradually introducing more complex and interactive platforms, *Nussa Rara* effectively broadens its narrative impact and reach. This strategy not only ensures that the story reaches a diverse audience but also that it becomes a pervasive part of fans' lives through a variety of sensory and emotional experiences. The use of AR and merchandise, in particular, signifies an innovative approach to storytelling, one that bridges digital and physical realms, thereby creating a more enduring and personal connection with the audience (Feiereisen et al., 2021; Spanò, 2020). Analytically, this reflects a shift in media strategy from linear storytelling to an ecosystem approach where multiple platforms contribute to a cohesive, continuous narrative experience.

The impacts of transmedia platforms of *Nussa Rara* on audience's engagement

Exploring the multifaceted impacts of *Nussa Rara* across diverse media platforms reveals a comprehensive strategy in transmedia storytelling that resonates deeply with its audience. Each platform—Serial Animation on YouTube, the Film "Nussa [2021]", Interactive AR in Assemblr, and *Nussa Rara* Merchandise—serves a unique role in enhancing the narrative experience, tailored to different aspects of audience engagement. This approach not only broadens the reach of *Nussa Rara* but also deepens the emotional and interactive connections, creating a richer, more immersive experience for viewers of all ages. Table 2 reveals the ways *Nussa Rara* platforms impacts on the audience's engagement in some levels.

Table 2 clearly shows a progression from passive to interactive engagement across the platforms. The serial animations on YouTube cater to a broad audience with basic narrative setup, which is then emotionally enriched by the feature film. The interactive AR experience marks a peak in engagement, allowing active manipulation of story elements, which significantly deepens the narrative connection. Merchandise serves as a constant, tangible reminder of the narrative, enhancing emotional ties through physical ownership. This

gradation from basic narrative introduction to deep, personal interaction illustrates a well-structured approach to building a lasting bond with the audience.

Table 2. The impacts of transmedia platforms on audience's engagement

Platform	Emotional Engagement	Narrative Understanding	Interaction Level	Personal Connection
<i>Serial Animation Nussa Rara on YouTube</i>	High accessibility and entertainment value; appeals to a broad, especially younger, demographic.	Provides foundational understanding of the story and characters.	Passive viewing, minimal direct interaction.	Low, as it primarily serves as an introduction to the universe.
<i>Film Nussa [2021]</i>	Deep emotional resonance due to expanded story arcs and character development.	Enhances depth of narrative, fills gaps left by short animations.	Emotional, involves viewers more deeply than YouTube series.	Medium, emotional moments from the film might reflect in related merchandise.
<i>Interactive AR Nussa Rara in Assemblr</i>	High novelty and excitement; personalized interaction increases engagement.	Offers a new dimension to the narrative, allows exploration of story elements.	High, directly manipulates and interacts with narrative elements.	High, as AR provides a tangible way to interact with story elements.
<i>Nussa Rara Merchandise</i>	Varied; emotional connection depends on the type of merchandise and personal relevance.	Less about understanding, more about physical representation of favorite elements.	Varies, generally low interaction but high emotional significance.	Very high, as merchandise allows ownership and daily physical connection to the narrative.

These patterns also reflect a strategic use of multiple media platforms to capture and retain audience interest through varying levels of engagement. Starting with more accessible media forms like YouTube and progressing towards more immersive interactions through AR and merchandise, the strategy effectively uses each platform's strengths to enhance narrative engagement and emotional resonance. This layered approach ensures that each stage of interaction adds depth to the audience's understanding and connection with the narrative, which not only caters to different preferences within the audience but also maximizes the overall impact of the story (Carlton et al., 2021; Mukerjee et al., 2023). Analytically, this demonstrates an insightful application of transmedia storytelling principles, where the sum of the parts creates a more engaging and enduring narrative experience than any single medium could achieve alone.

The roles of transmedia platforms of Nussa Rara in making connection with the story

The multimedia strategy employed by *Nussa Rara* across various platforms exemplifies a sophisticated approach to transmedia storytelling that deepens audience engagement with the narrative. By leveraging platforms such as YouTube animations, a feature film, interactive AR experiences, and thematic merchandise, *Nussa Rara* offers a layered and engaging narrative ecosystem. Each medium enriches the storyline in unique ways, creating multiple touchpoints for the audience to interact with and connect to the story more profoundly. This analysis explores how these platforms collectively work to forge a deeper connection between the audience and the *Nussa Rara* narrative. Table 3 visually represents how each platform enhances the connection between the audience and the *Nussa Rara* story.

Table 3. The roles of *Nussa Rara* platforms in making deeper connection with the story

Platform	Narrative Depth	Emotional Engagement	Interactivity	Personal Connection
<i>Serial Animation Nussa Rara on YouTube</i>	Introduces core storylines and characters, accessible entry point.	Engages primarily younger audiences with vibrant, colorful animations.	Low; primarily passive consumption.	Initial bonding with characters and story.
<i>Film Nussa [2021]</i>	Expands narrative complexity, deepens character development.	Creates high emotional impact through detailed storytelling.	Moderate; emotional involvement through cinematic experience.	Strengthens emotional ties to characters and story.
<i>Interactive AR Nussa Rara in Assemblr</i>	Allows exploration of story settings and elements in 3D space.	Heightens excitement and engagement through direct interaction.	High; users actively participate in the narrative.	Enhances sense of presence and agency within the story world.
<i>Nussa Rara Merchandise</i>	Symbolizes key narrative themes and moments.	Varies; emotional resonance through physical representation.	Low in terms of interactivity, high in terms of daily presence.	Maintains and reinforces connection with the narrative in everyday life.

Table 3 displays a clear trajectory of increasing engagement and deeper narrative connection as the platforms progress from more passive to more interactive. Starting with the YouTube series, which serves as an introduction to the universe, the engagement deepens with the emotional richness of the film. The interactivity peaks with the AR experience, providing a hands-on approach to exploring the narrative. Merchandise, while less interactive, serves as a constant physical reminder of the story, keeping the narrative alive in the daily lives of the audience. This progression illustrates a well-considered strategy to engage the audience at various levels of emotional and interactive depth.

These patterns suggest that the strategic use of multiple platforms in *Nussa Rara's* storytelling exploits the strengths of each medium to progressively deepen the audience's connection to the narrative. The initial engagement through YouTube is designed to attract and familiarize the audience with the story. The emotional investment is cultivated through the cinematic experience of the film, which is enhanced by the interactive exploration made possible through AR. Merchandise acts to cement the emotional bonds formed by providing a physical manifestation of the story elements. This multi-tiered approach not only ensures sustained interest and engagement but also fosters a comprehensive emotional and personal connection with the story, demonstrating the potent potential of integrated transmedia storytelling strategies (Bourdaa, 2018; Coles, 2023).

DICUSSION

The expansion of the *Nussa Rara* narrative through various platforms highlights significant implications for the field of media studies, particularly in transmedia storytelling. This result is in line with previous studies which argues that the use of multiple media platforms not only diversifies the audience's access points but also enriches the narrative depth and engagement opportunities, thereby increasing the brand's cultural footprint (Diehl et al., 2022; du Plessis, 2019; Edwards, 2012; Robideaux & Robideaux, 2012). *Nussa Rara's* approach—integrating animations, films, AR, and merchandise—mirrors this perspective, showing how varied content delivery can cater to different audience preferences and enhance the overall story experience.

This multifaceted strategy not only broadens the narrative reach but also sets a precedent for future multimedia projects aiming for a global audience.

The *Nussa Rara*'s successful expansion across multiple platforms can be attributed to its strategic use of narrative layering and audience segmentation. Other studies also highlighted that the effective transmedia storytelling hinges on delivering complementary yet distinct content across different mediums, each tailored to utilize the medium's strengths (Bourdaa, 2018; Coles, 2023; Moloney & Unger, 2014). For *Nussa Rara*, YouTube caters to broad accessibility, the film deepens emotional engagement, AR offers interactive exploration, and merchandise solidifies the narrative's presence in everyday life. This structured approach not only maximizes engagement across diverse demographic segments but also ensures that each element contributes uniquely to the story's universe, thereby maintaining a cohesive narrative across platforms.

The profound impact of *Nussa Rara*'s interactive platforms on deepening audience connection with the story illustrates broader implications in the dynamics of viewer engagement and narrative immersion. Many studies also found that the interactive and immersive media formats, such as AR, significantly enhance the viewer's emotional and cognitive investment in the story compared to traditional media (Doolani et al., 2021; Irshad & Perkis, 2020; Y. E. Kim & Khajavi, 2024; Reis, 2023; Sundar et al., 2017). This is evident in how *Nussa Rara*'s AR experiences allow users not just to observe but to participate in the narrative, leading to a more personalized and memorable engagement. Such interactions are crucial for fostering a deeper emotional bond and loyalty, which are key to long-term engagement in serialized storytelling.

The relationship between interactive platforms and deeper narrative connection has the psychological impact of interactivity on perception and memory retention. Previous studies on cognitive engagement in interactive media suggest that active participation in a story significantly enhances the understanding and emotional response of the audience (Gerrig & Bezdek, 2013; Kao & Huang, 2019; Lazareva & Cruz-Martinez, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2023). For *Nussa Rara*, the AR platform does not merely tell a story; it invites the audience to live it. This immersion creates a unique sense of ownership and intimacy with the narrative, which traditional passive viewing formats cannot achieve. The structure of the interactive experience thus directly contributes to a deeper and more personal connection with the story.

The use of merchandise as a narrative tool in *Nussa Rara* extends the story's influence beyond digital boundaries into the physical world. As discussed by many scholars, merchandise serves as a constant, tangible reminder of the narrative, enhancing brand presence and engagement (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019; Hardman et al., 2022; Rapier, 2016; Roggeveen et al., 2021). In the case of *Nussa Rara*, items like toys and clothing allow fans to carry the narrative with them, integrating it into their daily lives. This strategy not only boosts brand visibility but also strengthens emotional connections, making the narrative a staple in consumer lives, thereby increasing overall engagement and loyalty.

The effectiveness of merchandise in strengthening narrative connections are rooted in the psychological concept of endowment and identity expression. Owning merchandise related to a beloved media narrative allows individuals to express their fandom publicly and privately, thereby reinforcing their identity and affiliation with the story (Andó, 2017; Rapier, 2016). For *Nussa Rara*, merchandise acts as both a promoter of the narrative and a medium through which fans affirm their connection to the story. This dual function not only amplifies the narrative's reach but also deepens the audience's emotional investment, making the story an integral part of their identity and everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This study on *Nussa Rara* across multiple platforms elucidates a critical lesson: diverse media channels can synergistically expand a narrative universe, enriching audience engagement and deepening connections with the story. A significant strength of this study is its innovative approach to examining transmedia storytelling, using a comprehensive array of platforms—YouTube, feature films, AR technology, and merchandise. This approach not only refreshes academic perspectives on narrative strategies but also enriches the methodology by incorporating varied variables like emotional engagement and interactive participation, which are less commonly examined in traditional media studies. The findings contribute to scholarly discussions by illustrating how different media formats can be harmoniously integrated to enhance storytelling.

While this study provides valuable insights, it has limitations, primarily due to its focus on a single case study and a specific demographic, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could address these limitations by exploring similar transmedia strategies across different cultural contexts and wider audience demographics. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of such media strategies on audience behavior and narrative retention. Expanding the scope of research to include these elements would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of transmedia storytelling globally and across varied population segments.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Hasan bin Jali: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft (lead). **Mawaidi:** writing – review and editing, data curation, formal analysis (supporting). **Lalu Habiburrahman:** writing – original draft, writing – review and editing (supporting).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The authors used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible documents, platform policies, and governance materials.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly available documentary records concerning machine co-authorship, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the authors affirm that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus/data analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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