Leveraging on Transmedia Entertainment Education to Augment Tourists' Awareness Towards Social Issues

Mara Dionisio[1,2]([✉]), Valentina Nisi[1], and Nuno Correia[2]

[1] Madeira-ITI, University of Madeira, Campus da Penteada,
9020-105 Funchal, Portugal
{mara.dionisio,valentina.nisi}@m-iti.org
[2] Faculdade de Ciencias e Tecnologia da Universidade Nova de Lisboa,
Campus da Caparica, Lisbon, Portugal
nmc@fct.unl.pt

Abstract. Stories are increasingly becoming an important technique to engage, inspire and gather audiences online and offline. Interactive technologies provide the tools to empower audiences to participate in new interactive storytelling experiences applied to tourism. We envisage that in this context transmedia entertainment-education experiences combining a compelling story with engaging technologies can expose tourists towards local pressing issues and social good while providing them with a rich entertaining and educating experience. We describe the research approach that leads to design and implementation of a bespoke transmedia entertainment education experience: *Fragments of Laura*. The experience was designed to encourage visitors to learn about Madeira's rich natural heritage and develop knowledge and awareness about its history and biodiversity.

Keywords: Transmedia Storytelling · Entertainment Education
Mobile technologies · Tourism experience · Research through design

1 Motivation and Objectives

Tourism is an activity within reach of millions enabling the travel and hosting industry to flourish globally, and destinations need to be able to offer for new innovative and compelling experiences [1, 2]. This research proposes to study the fields of Entertainment Education (EE) and story-driven entertainment such as Transmedia Storytelling (TS) in order to explore how they can be at the service of the tourism industry.

The overall research aim is, to analyze how can TS and EE approaches be combined into a unified framework that make tourists aware of concerns present in the destination's social context. By using a research by designing approach [3] our objective is: (1) To design tourist experience by using TS and EE approaches that conveys a socially responsible message regarding tourist destination; (2) Identify how to integrate and adapt current strategies and metrics to evaluate the impact of the designed experience. (3) Comprehensively study the tourist experience while engaging with the designed experience in the real-world context.

2 Building Blocks of the Theoretical Framework

2.1 Tourism and the Tourist Experience

The attitudes of people towards tourism as an experience and what to expect from it are continuously changing [1, 2]. Right now many tourists are in the quest for the "authentic experience", which has been widely debated within scholar community [4–6]. This quest is connected to "the modern discourse of anti-tourism" [7], translating into the desire of travelers to go beyond superficial tourism experiences and connect to locals and local knowledge [8]. The use of digital technologies has fostered a transformation of tourists experiences and expectations towards more meaningful complex and authentic ones [9–15]. Furthermore, in response to the tourist's quest for "authenticity" [1, 5] there is a current trend of applications and services designed to foster the connection between tourists and locals [7] where locals are turned into guides, offering travel experiences.

2.2 Entertainment Education and Transmedia Storytelling

Entertainment-Education (EE) is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue [16]. There is an opportunity to enhance the ubiquitous nature of entertainment to educate people [17] a subject that could contribute to this is Transmedia Storytelling (TS). Jenkins [18] defined it as: "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole." TS is becoming a popular genre and a populated playground for storytellers to act in and create world-changing experiences.

While EE programs have been following mostly a traditional media approach TS has been taking advantage of the power of ubiquitous technologies making today's urban spaces augmented with digital information. We envisage that EE and TS experiences can play a role in sensitizing tourists towards local issues while providing rich entertaining and educating experiences. PE and IEM are the first steps in laying common grounds for the TS field still they lack a systematic documentation and validation of projects following these models. Hence, the research conducted leads to the need of a creating an unified framework that lays grounds to guide the design of experiences that involve entertainment, interpretation, education, personal grown of tourists.

The term: Pervasive Entertainment (PE) emerge as: "Transmedia Storytelling evolved" [19]. According to Pratten, stories matter need to be told to the right people at the right time so that they can have an impact on their lives and on the lives of those around them. In 2014 Nedra Kline Weinreich presented a further evolution of Pratten's equation: the Immersive Engagement Model (IEM), see Fig. 3 [20], with the addition of a behavior change component. The IEM ultimate goal is to create an experience that leads the audience in taking some sort of action as a result of being engaged and motivated.

3   Research Questions

The overall research goal of this work is: To understand if **TS and EE** approaches when combined into a **unified framework** improve the tourists **awareness** of issues present in the **destination's context**. To achieve this and based on the state of the art this research proposes an adaptation of the Pratten/Weindrech models into a new unified framework, called Transmedia Entertainment Education Experience Framework, see Fig. 1. The framework differences are justified by the special target audience, tourists. People when traveling for leisure purposes search for specific experiences [21] therefore the framework takes this into account aligning its offer with the tourists needs and expectations. Finally, the experience should take into account and reflect the destination social context challenges in order to achieve awareness.
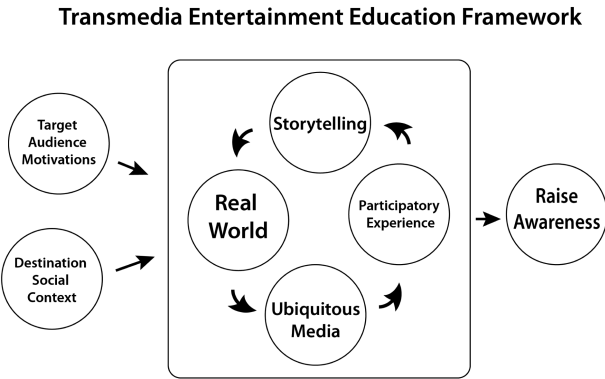
Transmedia Entertainment Education Framework

Fig. 1. Proposed framework for designing a transmedia entertainment education experience

The following research questions and objectives stimulate and underpin this enquiry:

RQ1 – What is the impact of a TEE Experience in the tourist experience?
RQ2 – Can a TEE Experience deliver a memorable tourist experience while raising awareness towards issues resent in the destination's context?
RQ3 – What current strategies and metrics can be adapted to evaluate a TEE tourist experience?

4   Case Study: Fragments of Laura a TEE Experience

A research prototype of a TEE experience was designed and implemented following the proposed framework, see Fig X called "Fragments of Laura" (FoL) it was shaped by Madeira's natural heritage - the Laurisilva Forest, which holds 'great importance for its biodiversity conservation' [22] that many tourists overlook. The design of FoL is currently composed by two interconnected components: mobile location-aware story

and an online web platform. With mobile application, the goal is to engage the audience with its narrative, which invites the audience to embark on a quest to follow its heroine, Laura Silva with a unique talent and passion for taking care of nature. At the end of each plot point, an interview clip, synthesized from in-depth recorded conversations with local scientists and local knowledge holders, is proposed to the participant, who can choose to watch or save it for later viewing. The full version of the interviews is available in the web platform, which collects a variety of scientific facts about the island natural heritage, collected and edited as video clips and available online. The web platform is designed to deliver scientific and information while fostering a connection to the local community, creating empathy and respect regarding Madeiran heritage (Fig. 2).
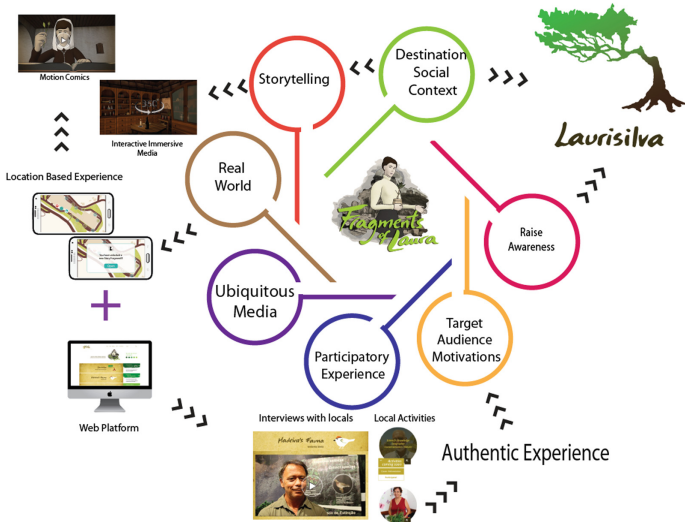

Fig. 2. FoL TEE experience components

4.1 Proposed Evaluation of TEEE Prototype

We plan to study the experience of at least 50 tourists interacting with the designed TEEE. Firstly, we'll conduct a pilot study to validate and refine the protocol. The protocol will involve a mixed method approach involving interviews, observation, pre and post-experience questionnaires that will address the role of the different TEE components contribution to the overall experience. Questionnaires that build upon current and established scales will be used such as:

Narrative Transportation Scale (NTS)
That Assess Participants' Ability to Be Transported into the Experience's Narrative [23].

Memorable Tourism Experience Scale
A reliable and valid instrument that touches upon ten experiential dimensions of the tourism experience: e.g. authentic local experiences; novel experiences; self-beneficial experiences; significant travel experiences; serendipitous and surprising experiences; fulfilment of personal travel interests and affective emotions [24].

AttrakDiffTM Questionnaire
That Can Assess FoL in Terms of the Overall User Experience [25].

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