

## Chapter 23

# New Advances in Transmedia Storytelling in Spanish Fiction. Case Study of the Television Series ‘*El Ministerio del Tiempo*’

M<sup>a</sup> Isabel Rodríguez Fidalgo and Adriana Paíno Ambrosio

**Abstract** If there is one thing that characterises transmedia storytelling, it is without any shadow of doubt, making way to great creative potential. Essentially, it opens a door to all the possibilities connected with the part the spectator-user plays within the narrative. Fiction television series have not overlooked this new way of telling a story, and there are several examples which can be found both in national and foreign TV channels. The series ‘*El Ministerio del Tiempo*’ (Spanish for ‘the Ministry of Time’) which is broadcast in Spanish national TV (RTVE), is a clear example of the creation of a transmedia TV series. It offers innovative storytelling elements within a TV fiction series. This article, using the methodological structure of a case study, aims to analyse the narrative structure of this production, where the followers have become the new main characters of this elaborate fictional universe.

**Keywords** Transmedia · Prosumer · Entertainment · Fiction series · Fan phenomenon

### 23.1 Theoretical Framework

The number of devices that each person has access to when searching for media has multiplied, which means nowadays audiovisual products are both mobile and multi-screen. In addition, there is ‘the multiplication of filing and distribution channels which allow the download and view of contents after the moment of their airing’ (Rodríguez-Mateos and Hernández-Pérez 2015: 96). This frees the spectator to choose where and when they want to use said contents. The channel and screen multiplication has forced broadcasters to adapt and find new ways of transmitting the contents to a

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M.I. Rodríguez Fidalgo (✉) · A. Paíno Ambrosio  
University of Salamanca (USAL), Salamanca, Spain  
e-mail: mrfidalgo@usal.es

A. Paíno Ambrosio  
e-mail: adriana.paino@usal.es

public which is more geographically disperse each day (Canavilhãs 2011). However, not only are technology and the access to contents different, but all this change has created a new kind of spectator, one which wants to participate and interact. In this sense we can start speaking of the term ‘prosumer’, coined by Toffler (1980).

The ‘directed passivity’ denounced by Noam Chomsky (Fernández 2014) was predominant in the Web 1.0, however, it is improving as the users become more important and start interacting with the product, creating content themselves. As David Caldevilla points out ‘the new version (2.0) of the web offers an environment where you can participate, mixing authors and readers’. He also suggests an active recipient who searches, investigates, connects, hyper-connects, thinks, answers, compares and creates content from others that already exist’ (2009: 33).

From now onward, recipients-users will be offered experiences where they will have the opportunity to participate as co-creators of the story. ‘They all narrate and they all listen (to each other)’ (Costa 2013: 562). We are witnessing formation of a media-centered culture which puts the consumer in a position of prominence, thus reaching a new dimension. Therefore, there is a constant search for new digital material since the public no longer settles for only receiving information and entertainment, they want to participate and interact directly (Rodríguez and Molpeceres 2014; Rodríguez and Sánchez 2014). This brings us to the term ‘transmedia storytelling’.

The term was coined by Jenkins (2003), and has been defined by Carlos Scolari as ‘... a way of telling a fiction where the story spreads through multiple media and communication platforms and in which consumers play an active part in the expansion process’ (2013: 46). From this definition, Professors Rodríguez and Molpeceres (2014) have drawn two of the main features of transmedia storytelling. The first one is the idea of dispersing the story across multiple media and channels. During this dispersion each medium will provide typical characteristics of their format, varying and adding new information to the structure of the fictional world. Hand in hand with this expansion idea, is the second main feature: consumers play an active role in this process. However, as Professors Rodríguez and Molpeceres state ‘it isn’t enough with the active participation of the audience, there must be a creative dialogue with the foundation of the story, being able to change it in the process’ (2014: 318).

There are several examples of fiction series, such as *Breaking Bad* (Scolari 2013), *Game of Thrones* (Molpeceres and Rodríguez 2014), *Fringe* (Scolari 2013; Belsunces 2011), or the Spanish series *Isabel* and *Águila Roja* (Molpeceres and Rodríguez 2014; Barrientos-Bueno 2013), all of which have allowed spectators participate creatively in the story.

One of the main Spanish models of transmedia storytelling, as Varona and Lama point out, can be found in the different proposals that have been developed throughout the years in the RTVE.es Laboratory. Therefore, this ‘effort to generate different storytelling adds to the production of materials which will accompany television and radio broadcasts, since this is a field where transmedia experiences have had some prominence’ (2015: 209) within Spanish public broadcasting channels.

## 23.2 Methodology

In order to breach the subject of the planned study we have decided to take a qualitative methodology perspective, in particular the case study technique. Its first analysis will show which platforms and channels the *El Ministerio del Tiempo* uses to expand their storytelling and which contents travel through each of them. A second analysis will reflect on the role that the subsequent fan phenomenon has played in the series, since this element is of great importance to determine the profile of the true ‘transmedia consumer’.

## 23.3 Results

*El Ministerio del Tiempo* is a RTVE fiction series (2015). The combination of adventure and historical content as well as a tinge of humour used by the series had a good reception from the public and the critics since it began, even though it went through some changes in the day and time of broadcasting (which almost meant its cancellation). However, social media is where we can truly see *El Ministerio*’s success and the fan phenomenon that developed around the show.

### 23.3.1 *The Transmedia Experience and the Inclusion of Recipient Discourse in ‘El Ministerio del Tiempo’*

The creators of the show were aware of its potential from the start; they even built a whole transmedia universe around it, including a ‘Making of’ which is broadcast every week after the series, profiles in social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), a WhatsApp exclusive group, an online programme for the show’s followers (*‘La Puerta del Tiempo’* or The Gate of Time) and an Official Forum where users can share their opinions.

The centre of all content is the series official website, where we can access all the episodes aired up to that moment *on demand*, in addition to a great deal of extra contents.

The following can be found on the website:

1. Cover: It’s the access point to whole episodes of the first season and includes information about the filming of the second season. There is also an area called ‘The transmedia universe of *El Ministerio del Tiempo*’.
2. The series: Here you can find a summary of the series and there is a short introduction of each of the three main characters, who comprise ‘the Patrol’. In addition, there are profiles for each cast and crew member.

3. Characters: There are three sections ‘*La Patrulla*’ (The Patrol), ‘*Los Pilares del ministerio*’ (The pillars of the ministry) and ‘*La experiencia es un grado*’ (Experience is a degree).
4. The Gate of Time: section centred in the programme ‘*La puerta del tiempo*’ (the gate of time), which is broadcasted exclusively in the website featuring interviews with the characters of the show. It also includes a section with additional videos called ‘*los extras de la puerta del tiempo*’ (The extras of the gate of time).
5. Complete episodes: here we can find all eight episodes of the first season as well as some additional content.
6. Videos: this link directs to the RTVE ‘*A la carta*’ section devoted to the series.
7. Forum: It has eight big debate sections organised by topic: ‘the Ministry’s cafe’, ‘Chapters’, ‘The characters’, ‘Ministry’s caretaker’s office’, ‘Audiovisual documentation’, ‘What would have happened if...’, ‘Ministry’s archives’ and ‘the Ministry’s library’.

### 23.3.1.1 The Dialogue with the Audience in Social Media

‘*El Ministerio del Tiempo*’ has more than 35,000 followers on Facebook, almost 36,000 on Twitter and near 3000 on Instagram.

The kind of messages they send in social media are informal, that is, besides offering information about the series, they use the official profiles to send gifs, collages, videos of the filming sessions and of course to retweet fans, actors and members of the crew.

After asking Twitter fans how they would like to be known, they answered the ‘*ministéricos*’ (which combines the Spanish words for ministry and hysteria). This started an internet phenomenon, called ‘*ministeria*’. It seemed to be frequent in foreign fiction, but up to this moment nothing of the sort had happened in any Spanish television production. Nobody questions how active the *ministéricos*’s participation is when taking a look at their creations: There are *Twitter* accounts for the characters of the series, blog entries, podcasts, *Facebook* groups. We would like to highlight two of these: ‘*Funcionarios del Ministerio del Tiempo*’ or Civil servants of the Ministry of Time and ‘*Ministerio del Tiempo*’ or Ministry of Time. As well as this, there is a blog in *Tumblr*, an automatic certificate generator, Amelia Folch’s diary on *Tumblr*, rol plays with educational purposes, a *Wikipedia* page about the series, *Youtube* content, *Sims* games, an app dedicated to the Ministry’s different doors, wallpapers, comics, gifs, drawings, posters, etc. It is even possible to find subtitles online created by fans so that the series can reach other parts of the world.

However, the transmedia element that stands out the most is ‘Basic training for civil servants and rookie patrol members of the ‘Ministry of Time’’, which is a fictional online course described as ‘Basic training course for new members of the civil servant corps of the institution’. It comprises four short videos (no more than one minute long each) which feature characters from the series. It is considered

transmedia because it prompted other content from the ‘ministéricos’, such as the already mentioned certificate generator.

## 23.4 Discussion and Conclusions

The above analysis allows us to determine that a change is taking place in the handling of television content, particularly in fiction series. For some time we have been appraising the potential of transmedia storytelling in this context, but to be able to find examples we had to turn to foreign fiction. ‘*El Ministerio del Tiempo*’ has been a qualitative leap in terms of ‘Spanish transmedia series’. Through the *ministéricos* and the *ministeria* movement, participation has ceased to be only active (fans who follow the content of the narrative universe in its many forms and formats) but it has transformed into ‘transmedia participation’ (where the fans not only follow the transmedia content designed by the series but they also create content which enriches the very narrative universe of the series). It has been thanks to this fiction’s fandom that the series has renewed the second season (with the hash tag #TVERenuevaMdt).

This fact poses an inherent debate, one connected to TV audience measurements; since examples like the one we have been analysing have highlighted the importance of social audience measurements. Moreover, all the great media groups know that the broadcast of audiovisual content has to be through a multiple-screen system; and that the spectators-users demand content they can interact with in social media.

The transmedia project behind the analysed series shows as innovative traits not only that it has been capable of providing its audience with contents in any form and format (from the aired episodes, the series official website with additional content, and different content for social media- mainly designed for phones and tablets, etc.) but also it has generated a social audience like nothing ever seen in Spanish television before. This allows us to speak of a ‘before and after’ of ‘*El Ministerio del Tiempo*’ in the context of Spanish fiction television series.

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