

Transmedia Activism as Story–Doing in the New Media Age: Case Studies of *The Swimmers* and *Don't Look Up*

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◆ Abstract

This paper proposed a novel conceptualization of transmedia activism, utilizing the analytical framework of “story–doing” to examine the manner in which digital narratives could effectively mobilize audiences beyond the realm of storytelling, thereby fostering tangible civic engagement. This study draws on films *The Swimmers* and *Don't Look Up* to develop a three–pronged analytical framework comprising emotional immersion, platform–linked action, and networked co–creation. Grounded in foundational theories of transmedia storytelling, this paper advances the field by exploring story–doing not as a corporate strategy, but as a cultural and political practice. It critically interrogates the efficacy of media–initiated activism and considers broader implications for participatory culture and ethical spectatorship in the digital era.

Keywords: transmedia activism, story–doing, *The Swimmers*, *Don't Look Up*, participatory media, new media culture

I . Transmedia Activism as Story-doing

The shift to a digitally converged environment has led to significant modifications in the culture we consume. Specifically, the cultural content industry, as a new industrial form based on creativity, has gained interest, and the mechanism of its production is evolving into a more organic and efficient form. One of the concepts that has gained prominence in cultural content production is Trans Media Storytelling, which builds on the original idea of One Source Multi Use (OSMU) that emphasizes content expansion through media transition. Trans Media Storytelling not only uses media transition as a means of expression, but also relies on the dissemination of the story itself to create new content. Henry Jenkins (2006) introduced the term “transmedia storytelling” to describe this approach. He defines transmedia storytelling as the practice of telling stories through multiple forms of media, with an emphasis on creating engaging entertainment experiences and a systematic distribution of content utilizing a variety of delivery channels. This approach prioritizes integrated and well-balanced storytelling across all media platforms to provide a cohesive and immersive experience for audiences.

Transmedia storytelling differs from traditional OSMU production in that it converges multiple media and content into an integrated story that extends beyond simple parallelism. And to achieve integration and linkage of stories across diverse platforms, the focus should be on the entity responsible for carrying out the expansion and integration activities. This phenomenon is referred to as bricolage. According to Henry Jenkins and Mark Deuze (Jenkins and Deuze 2008:5-12), users of transmedia content engage in active and participatory media use behaviors that connect various pieces of content and interact with the

content itself. The media-mix concept, similar to OSMU, is defined as the linking of multiple media forms leading to a network (Mizuko 2007:4). Jenkins posited a content network that focuses on the usage behavior of transmedia content consumers. He recommends that consumers actively seek supplementary content to fully grasp the breadth of transmedia content and participate in meaning construction. Jenkins proposes that effective use of the bricolage approach requires users to develop a comprehensive worldview that integrates the entire narrative. Such an approach generates a synergistic response that promotes cross-media reading and encourages continued behavioral engagement.

Meanwhile, people are continuously working to resolve various significant and minor grievances and issues around the world. These endeavors are categorized as activism, meaning the purposeful pursuit of social and political reform regarding controversial subjects. The increasing prevalence of media and technology has led to the adoption of various labels to describe activism. Furthermore, activism is linked to the notion of practice, a long-established belief. Practice aligns with theory and is imperative in contemporary settings. While ‘theory’ is constructed on a historical level, ‘practice’ builds upon it to progress it forward. Analogous to activism are intervention, movement, campaign, and etc. Cultural researchers frequently refer to ‘intervention’ as a concept that illuminates cultural practices and critiques underlying power relations present in certain cultural phenomena. Movement refers to the process of actively raising a social agenda and taking action on a particular issue.

The Greek and Latin terms *prattein* and *gerere*, meaning “to accomplish, attain, or complete something” and “to give birth to something,” respectively, are the origins of the English word “act.”

Hannah Arendt has proposed that according to this etymology, *prattein* indicates “an initiation by a single person,” while *gerere* refers to “an accomplishment that is carried out, completed, and fully realized with the participation of many people” (Arendt 1998:189). In other words, the terms refer to ‘the initiation of an act’ and ‘the fulfillment of an act,’ respectively. Activism can be conceptualized as a sequence of actions that individuals within a society undertake to promote positive change. It commences with an individual’s personal drive to instigate change, proceeds through processes of communication and collaboration with peers, and culminates in realized change through the execution of this drive. Alastair Fuad-Luke (2009) posits that ‘change’ lies at the core of activism, involving a shift from ‘state A’ within a system to ‘state B.’ “This may involve a transformation of the system and its target audiences or social groups, but often also involves the transformation of the individual activists too” (Fuad-Luke 2009:6). Thus, activism aims for societal transformation while also advocating for the personal transformation of the individual. Even if targeted activism fails to effect social change, the establishment of activism through individuals who share a critical awareness of the relevant issues is imperative. In essence, activism bears the hallmarks of cultural practices that critique modern-day issues based on historically constructed theories and move beyond the realm of theory into the realm of practical action.

Meanwhile, in 2013, Ty Montague, founder of the marketing firm Co:Collective, introduced the concept of story-doing, which emphasizes the implementation of the narrative initially devised during the storytelling phase. The fundamental objective of story-doing is to effect a transformation in the manner in which we experience and interact with stories. The advent of digital technology and the internet has precipitated

a paradigm shift in the dissemination and development of storytelling. In the domain of new media studies, both transmedia activism and story-doing emerge as innovative methodologies for leveraging narrative and digital platforms to catalyze social and political transformation.

Transmedia activism is defined as the practice of disseminating messages and mobilizing audiences through multiple media platforms to encourage participation in social or political causes. This approach acknowledges the distinct advantages offered by each medium and its capacity to resonate with diverse segments of the audience, facilitating a more immersive and impactful engagement. Transmedia activism employs a variety of platforms, including social media, websites, podcasts, videos, and interactive applications, to facilitate a more comprehensive exploration of complex social issues.

This strategy has been demonstrated to achieve two primary objectives. Firstly, it serves to broaden the reach of activist messaging. Secondly, it fosters connections with a more diverse and widespread audience. Consequently, it fosters a profound sense of solidarity, promoting collective engagement and action. As Chouliaraki (2013:96) observes, in the era of digital media, spectatorship has evolved into a form of indirect solidarity, wherein audiences engage with global crises through the medium of digital content, frequently without undertaking direct action.

Montague's concept of story-doing advances the idea of storytelling by emphasizing the significance of not merely narrating a story but actively engaging the audience as participants within the narrative itself. Unlike traditional storytelling, story-doing invites individuals to take part in the unfolding of the story, encouraging them to make meaningful contributions to a shared cause. This approach reflects the shift in the

digital era, where audiences are no longer passive recipients of content but active agents in the creation, exchange, and evolution of narratives. The potential of story-doing in activism is especially noteworthy, as it fosters a sense of responsibility and personal investment among participants. By involving individuals directly, it motivates them to take tangible actions in support of social or political goals. In this way, both transmedia activism and story-doing exemplify how storytelling and technology can be strategically combined to drive social and political transformation within the field of new media studies. These approaches highlight the power of transmedia to raise awareness, mobilize collective movements, and generate constructive societal change. Understanding and analyzing such concepts is crucial not only for grasping the shifting dynamics of media and activism but also for encouraging civic engagement and enhancing media literacy in the digital age. As Bennett and Buckingham (2021:78) observe, “In the digital era, social media platforms have become spaces where audiences not only consume content but actively engage in reshaping and disseminating the messages presented in films, often leading to real-world social action.”

The article adopts the concept of story-doing, recently developed around digital cultural theory and socially-driven messaging, as a central analytical framework to understand transmedia activism as a practice-oriented narrative performance that goes beyond mere storytelling. In the preceding discourse on transmedia narratives, the preponderance of scholars followed Henry Jenkins’ (2006) concept of “expandable and interactive story structures.” However, contemporary transmedia has undergone a transition, moving towards narrative practices that not only solicit participation but also facilitate ethical engagement and political intervention.

The concept of “story-doing” was initially introduced as a brand strategy within the corporate world. It refers to a model in which a brand implements its stated values through specific actions, with the objective of fostering trust among consumers (Bielenberg & Zinn, 2012). This concept has been reinterpreted and extended into various forms of media content that convey social messages, thereby linking narrative practices to social movements and actionable structures. In this context, story-doing can be regarded as a strategy that does not end with message delivery, but rather seeks to provoke ethical responsiveness and tangible action from the audience.

To sum up, the rapid convergence of digital media has transformed narrative communication, resulting in hybrid forms of storytelling that transcend the boundaries of individual platforms. Among these emergent forms, transmedia storytelling, transmedia activism, and story-doing have gained prominence. However, these terms are often conflated. This paper distinguishes the three concepts in order to clarify the theoretical foundation of our inquiry.

Concept	Definition	Key Source	Primary Context
Transmedia Storytelling	Narrative expansion across multiple platforms, each contributing uniquely to a coherent storyworld	Jenkins (2006)	Entertainment/ media studies
Transmedia Activism	Dissemination of activist messages across media to foster social participation	Srivastava (2011)	Media activism, civic media
Story-doing	Enacting narratives through performative action; transforming audience into participants	Montague (2013)	Corporate branding, extended here to cultural activism

This study adopts story-doing as a critical framework to analyze how transmedia activism bridges narrative affect with tangible social action. Unlike traditional storytelling, which often ends at awareness, story-doing insists on the ethical obligation to act. Accordingly, the present study analyses transmedia activism through the lens of three core story-doing strategies:

1. Immersive experience design based on emotional engagement:

Rather than simply “delivering” a story, this approach encourages the audience to internalize the emotional and ethical dimensions of the narrative. Through the emotional journey of its characters, the narrative fosters deep empathy with social issues.

2. Platform-linked action inducement: As the narrative unfolds, it incorporates mechanisms that prompt concrete actions—such as signing petitions, making donations, or participating in campaigns—often activated beyond the narrative platform itself. This structure extends the boundaries of storytelling and facilitates direct intervention in real-world social realities.

3. Networked co-production structures: Audiences do not merely consume content but become active participants who produce or disseminate parts of the story themselves. This participatory model enables the practical expansion of the narrative through tools like social media, community engagement, and crowdfunding.

This analytical framework will serve as a critical lens for interpreting how *The Swimmers* and *Don't Look Up* move beyond conventional narrative construction to actively generate real-world social action and engagement. It will also function as a valuable interpretive tool for

examining the political function and ethical responsibilities that transmedia activism performs in contemporary society.

II. Features of Transmedia Activism in the New Media Age

The prefix 'trans' in transmedia refers to traversal, transformation, and transcendence. The word's multifaceted meaning serves as the primary indicator of the unfinished unity of the transmedia concept. It constitutes a verb family consisting of transgression, transformation, and transcendence. As the theories and objects related to transmedia are still developing, studying this concept results in inevitable confusion of terms and objects. When comparing transmedia to OSMU (One source Multi-use), which involves transforming content narratives across multiple media, the emphasis should be on the actions of transmedia consumers. The digital media environment is shaping public perception of cultural content, leading to a discourse that emphasizes 'participation and production.' As digital technology evolves, media formats and content are also changing. The coexistence of old and new media results in a process of collision, conflict, convergence, and acceptance, ultimately giving rise to the concept of transmedia content.

Mark Long (2009) emphasizes that transmedia content should be both cohesive and varied. Long outlines that transmedia necessitates a minimum of three media types, all with a shared goal, and crafted from the outset so that each has its distinct attributes, captivating the audience's attention to shift easily between movies, games, and comics. Lee Sang-min (2009) defined transmedia as the conveyance of abstract

and integrated meanings that cannot be expressed in a single medium across diverse and different media. It is not merely a concept of modifying or transforming content according to media characteristics but rather, a multifaceted view of a shared interest that embeds meaning across various media. Transmedia contents are expressed through multiple interconnected media to expand the breadth and depth of contents.

Here, we propose the equations “meaning equals content” and “utilization of multiple media equals transmedia.” Lee Sang-min emphasizes the distinction between transmedia and OSMU, clarifying that it is not merely a matter of adapting content for different media characteristics. OSMU, a prominent characteristic of cultural content, implies that successful original content is sequentially transferred to other media based on their respective characteristics. In contrast, transmedia content is simultaneously transferred. Although each piece of content expresses a distinct world, when viewed in unison, an integrated world is created. Transmedia content shares the trait of utilizing multiple media platforms, much like OSMU. However, they vary in how they are created concurrently, with verified content and rearranged characters. In contrast to OSMU, transmedia content features unique stories in each medium that are interlinked to form a comprehensive structure.

Transaction represents the next level of interactivity by embodying the concept of “trans,” meaning to move, traverse, or cross over. As transmedia consumers navigate various forms of media, they are encouraged to participate, share, and connect with others. Transmedia content recipients are more than just readers or viewers like users of legacy media; they are also users, players, and sometimes creators who actively participate in communities or content creation. Transmedia methods are an evolving mode of communication since they establish a

multi-layered user structure in which the “trans” of active role and the “trans” of experience occur.

Emphasizing the emergence of new forms of content in the era of media convergence, Henry Jenkins posits that “A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction... Media convergence makes the flow of content across multiple media platforms inevitable” (Jenkins 2006:95-96). At its core, transmedia storytelling involves the free flow and convergence of media. If we view transmedia activism through this analogy, it is a principle that generates and expands movements aiming for social and political transformation through the combination and integration of multiple media forms. According to Kim’s (2016:20) research, transmedia activism is linked to its fundamental features: scalability, participation, sharing, decentralization, and open structure. Transmedia activism is a system that expands, shares, and encourages participation across numerous media platforms to achieve a shared objective. Essentially, it focuses on spreading activism and promoting public involvement through transmedia. To incorporate transmedia into activism, various entry points must be established to address issues and develop an issue universe. This universe permits integrating individual methods of activism from each entry point to construct a more thorough and comprehensive narrative of activism (Kim 2016:xii-xiii).

III. The Impact of Transmedia Activism Shaping and Altering Cultural Norms

Transmedia activism disrupts biased narratives in mainstream media by creating interconnected messages and stories across diverse media platforms, including films, social media, websites, and podcasts. This establishes a network of participation that reaches audiences from various demographics. Transmedia activism's accessibility engages a broader and more varied audience than traditional forms of activism, promoting inclusivity in discourse. Its distinct feature is to challenge cultural conventions and prevalent narratives by exploring complex social and political issues from different angles. It provides a platform for marginalized perspectives which foster comprehensive and nuanced discourse. This multidimensional approach cultivates compassion, insight, and the ability to perceive the world from unique perspectives, aiding in the evolution of social conventions and principles. It fosters critical thinking and challenges prevailing standards, resulting in a culturally rich and diverse milieu. Transmedia activism not only presents alternative viewpoints but also dismantles stereotypes, encouraging open-mindedness and prompting viewers to question their preconceptions. Ultimately, it advocates for a reflective and dynamic approach to addressing social issues. Rooted in empathy and diversity, this process plays a key role in transforming cultural narratives and norms, leading to a more inclusive and compassionate society.

The profound impact of transmedia activism on changing perceptions and attitudes can be attributed to its ability to transcend traditional communication boundaries and foster deeper, personal connections between audiences and the issues being addressed. Unlike one-dimensional

narratives, transmedia activism engages audiences on multiple levels, immersing them in a multifaceted story-doing experience that spans multiple media platforms. This immersive approach encourages individuals to question their existing perceptions and attitudes, initiating a process of critical self-reflection. Transmedia activism is also unique in its ability to connect individuals to issues on a personal and emotional level. By engaging with a narrative or message across multiple media, the content is integrated into the individual's daily life, fostering a deeper personal connection. This connection acts as a catalyst for reevaluating beliefs and values. As individuals are exposed to different perspectives, they become more open to change and more willing to rethink their own attitudes and biases. As a result, transmedia activism fosters the growth of a more inclusive and empathetic society in which individuals are more receptive to new ideas and perspectives.

Furthermore, transmedia activism serves as a dynamic catalyst for discourse and social change by emphasizing public participation and engagement. It differs from traditional forms of storytelling or activism in its interactive and participatory nature, empowering individuals to become active stakeholders in the issues presented. By inviting audiences to engage with content across multiple media platforms, it stimulates dialogue, debate and discussion in both online and offline spaces, contributing to an enriched and diversified public discourse. The power of transmedia activism extends beyond storytelling to creating opportunities for real-world engagement. Through volunteering, fundraising, or other forms of support, transmedia activism motivates individuals to translate their newfound awareness and understanding into actual action. This multifaceted strategy has the ability to activate communities, raise awareness, and cultivate a sense of shared responsibility in addressing

immediate social and political concerns. It connects individuals with a collective purpose and a shared commitment to creating meaningful change. In sum, transmedia activism has a significant impact on social change because of its ability to combine storytelling with actionable engagement. By breaking down the barriers between content consumption and real-world engagement, it empowers passive bystanders to become proactive change-makers. The collective efforts of these individuals can lead to significant societal progress as they work together to address social issues, promote awareness and advocate for change, ultimately bolstering a more proactive and socially conscious society.

The theoretical framework of this paper can thus be summarized as follows.

From Storytelling to Story-doing: Transmedia activism is rooted in the participatory logics of new media culture. While Jenkins (2006) emphasized the interactive potential of transmedia narratives, later scholars (Chouliaraki 2013; Srivastava 2011) have examined how these narratives mobilize ethical responses. Building on this, we identify three operative strategies in story-doing:

- (a) Emotional Immersion: Affective engagement that fosters empathy and identification, often through realism and character-driven narratives.
- (b) Platform-linked Action: The inclusion of direct links, campaigns, or calls-to-action that extend the narrative experience into real-world participation.
- (c) Networked Co-Creation: Audiences contribute to the storyworld via user-generated content, fan-driven campaigns, or social media engagement.

This tripartite model serves as a lens for evaluating the selected case studies.

IV. Case Studies

1-1. *The Swimmers*: Emotionally Driven Design and Narrative Realism Based on a True Story

The Swimmers is a film that chronicles the real-life refugee journey of Yusra Mardini and her sister Sara Mardini. The film employs an immersive narrative strategy that aims to elicit more than mere sympathy from the audience. Instead, it seeks to foster emotional engagement and ethical resonance. The film's narrative is constructed on the basis of factual events, with the inherent affective intensity of these events being amplified to elicit a more profound viewer response. In particular, the early scenes depicting bombings in Syria are rendered with cinematographic compositions that recall actual news footage, enabling audiences to experience war not as an abstract geopolitical issue but as the destruction of ordinary, individual lives. By adopting this approach, the film reframes the discourse on refugees as a domain of personal sentiment, thereby evoking an introspective viewer response.

It is evident that one of the most powerful immersive sequences is the sisters' escape across the Mediterranean. Despite being dramatized for cinematic effect, the scene is grounded in real events and offers a synchronized sensory experience through the sound of waves, unstable lighting, and the characters' breath and dialogue. Yusra's internal monologue, encapsulated by the notion that the act of stopping to swim would result in the death of another individual, serves to elevate her physical struggle for survival to a level that encompasses a sense of moral responsibility. This moment not only deepens emotional involvement but also transforms affect into ethical action, illustrating a narrative strategy

that leads the viewer beyond empathy toward affective assimilation.

Moreover, the film borrows structural elements from sports dramas, setting itself apart from conventional refugee narratives. Yusra's journey to compete in the Olympics as a refugee is characterized by a convergence of themes, namely personal triumph and collective solidarity. This combination serves as a mechanism that serves to intensify the viewer's emotional energy. In this process, the film shifts focus from the protagonist's individual success to the communal story that made such success possible. This shift prompts the audience to establish a connection between personal perseverance and broader systemic issues, thereby facilitating the politicization of emotions rather than their mere consumption.

In conclusion, *The Swimmers* obscures the distinction between fiction and reality in its concluding scenes through the incorporation of authentic footage and postscript information regarding the protagonists. It is noteworthy that scenes depicting Yusra Mardini's role as a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador serve to underscore the notion that the film's emotional odyssey constitutes more than a mere dramatic narrative; it is, in fact, a component of an ongoing reality. This narrative technique encourages viewers to extend their emotional response beyond the cinematic moment, contemplating the potential for translating affect into action within their own lives. In this sense, *The Swimmers* can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of story-doing through immersive design, which establishes a linkage between emotional engagement and ethical responsiveness.

1-2. *Don't Look Up*: Cognitive Immersion Through Satire and Critical Distance

The film *Don't Look Up* employs a metaphorical representation of the climate crisis, fictionalizing it through the premise of a comet impact. The immersive design of the film prioritizes cognitive awakening and critical detachment over emotional absorption. The film does not progress in the conventional manner, adopting instead a structural approach characterized by the incorporation of satire and exaggeration. This results in a distortion of representations pertaining to politics, media and popular culture. This approach encourages the audience to refrain from an emotional identification with the narrative, instead prompting a re-examination of the absurdities of their own world from a defamiliarized perspective. This technique is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), which aims to create a space for intellectual intervention rather than emotional identification.

This strategy is exemplified by the scene in which Dr. Randall Mindy, portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio, becomes visibly agitated during a live television broadcast, voicing his concern that all human life is in jeopardy. This moment does not merely elicit empathetic resonance; instead, it highlights how the media trivializes crises and how scientific warnings are reduced to spectacle. While the audience may empathize with the protagonist, they are simultaneously made aware of the scene's meta-commentary on the real-world communication breakdowns surrounding global emergencies. The result is a form of "tense immersion," in which the viewer is pulled into a space of simultaneous emotional response and critical awareness. Immersion in this context

functions not as affective absorption but as a cognitive jolt that provokes reflective awakening.

Furthermore, the film *Don't Look Up* employs a deliberate stylistic approach, characterized by the intentional exaggeration and caricature of its primary characters. This technique serves to prevent the audience from forming an emotional connection with any specific individual within the narrative. Instead, it aims to foster a broader perspective, emphasizing the examination of the systemic forces that underpin societal structures. It is evident that characters such as the President, her chief of staff, and the tech mogul serve as satirical representations of power alliances and vested interests that are prevalent within American society. The apparent indifference or incompetence of the characters in the face of existential threat can be interpreted as inviting viewers to engage in mockery and critique similar figures in real life. Consequently, the concept of immersion is not established through an emotional connection with the characters, but rather through a more detached response that facilitates critical reflection on systemic deficiencies.

As the film reaches its conclusion, the final dinner scene, in which the protagonists share a final meal with family, appears to momentarily reintroduce emotional intimacy. However, within the context of the film's prior satirical tone, this emotional expression serves to accentuate the irony that "emotion without action is powerless." As the characters confront imminent disaster, the world responds with indifference and fragmentation. The film thus provides a metaphorical critique of the failure to translate affect into action, thereby underscoring a fundamental dilemma in contemporary climate discourse. In this regard, *Don't Look Up* employs an immersive design that blends satire with cognitive insight, revealing the political nature of emotion not by expressing it

directly, but by exposing its ineffectuality in the absence of action.

In conclusion, the film *Don't Look Up* employs a distinctive immersive strategy that fosters indirect awareness and reflective thinking through the medium of distance, as opposed to emotional identification. This approach functions as an ethical provocation within the affective detachment that is central to the story-doing framework. In this film, emotion functions as a mirror, thereby revealing the impotence of unacted feeling. This concept is one with which the structural challenges currently being faced in the discourse on climate change are profoundly associated.

2-1. *The Swimmers*: A Netflix-Based Humanitarian Engagement Strategy

The Swimmers was released simultaneously in over 190 countries through Netflix, enabling the dissemination of a humanitarian narrative strategy rooted in global empathy, rather than merely the distribution of a piece of content. The film was marketed by Netflix as both a dramatized account of actual events and a platform for activism, with the objective of raising awareness of the refugee crisis. Following its release, Netflix collaborated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide a diverse range of supplementary transmedia content, including authentic interviews with Yusra Mardini, curated documentaries focusing on refugees, and live Instagram conversations. This transmedia expansion enabled the film to exert an affective influence that transcended the limitations of a single narrative, thereby establishing a conduit between cinematic emotion and real-world engagement.

A particularly noteworthy strategy was the integration of donation links and awareness campaigns featuring the Mardini sisters across both Netflix's official platform and UNHCR's global pages. This approach provided a direct channel for viewers to transform their emotional response – whether compassion or inspiration – into immediate action. In this sense, it can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of the story-doing approach. The structure of the film was meticulously crafted to sustain the emotional momentum generated by the narrative, channeling it towards social participation rather than allowing it to dissipate. Features such as real-time clickable links, automatic multilingual subtitles and interactive interfaces have been incorporated into the Netflix platform, creating an accessible channel for activism that embodies the core principle of story-doing, defined as the transformation of stories into action.

Furthermore, Netflix employed the technique of Story-doing by repurposing the life story of Yusra Mardini to create educational content, including documentaries, interviews, and refugee rights materials produced in multiple languages. These materials have been utilized in educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and local community events, transforming the viewing experience into a space for ethical discussion and civic education. Specifically, videos of Yusra's public speeches were incorporated into significant UN campaigns, including World Refugee Day, thereby underscoring the interconnectedness of media content, public campaigns, education, and social action. In this manner, story-doing redefines the distribution infrastructure of streaming platforms, no longer perceiving them as passive conduits, but rather as active facilitators of ethical engagement.

In conclusion, while *The Swimmers* itself is a potent source of

emotional affect through its storytelling, Netflix's strategy focused on transforming this emotional resource into a multiplicity of social actions and commemorative practices. The moment at which observing a film becomes synonymous with providing assistance to another individual signifies a shift in the conventional passive role of the viewer, who is then positioned as an active ethical agent. This shift can be considered an ideal realization of transmedia activism through story-doing. It is evident that Netflix has triumphed in establishing a novel paradigm of narrative citizenship by eschewing an exclusive emphasis on the intrinsic content in favor of a consideration of its extrinsic consequences.

2-2. *Don't Look Up*: Linking with the Climate Action Platform "Count Us In"

Don't Look Up was conceived not merely as a disaster comedy, but as a transmedia activism project that directly critiques the global apathy towards the climate crisis. Following the release of the film, Netflix collaborated with "Count Us In," a global climate action coalition comprising over 30 environmental organizations worldwide, to establish a platform that directs viewers towards concrete post-viewing actions. This collaboration can be regarded as an institutionalized model of the Story-doing principle, which involves a transition from narrative and affect to action. It thus demonstrates the practical viability of platform-based activism.

The *Count Us In* platform offered an interactive website that enabled viewers to select from twelve distinct action steps designed to minimize their carbon footprint in daily life, pledge to these steps, and monitor their progress. The seamless transition between the viewing experience

and actionable engagement was achieved by embedding links to this platform across the film's official website, social media, and the Netflix main interface. A particularly noteworthy feature of the platform was its personalized approach, whereby action plans were tailored based on the user's location, language, and consumption habits. This approach consequently resulted in the viewer being repositioned from a passive recipient of visual information to an active agent within the broader context of the planetary crisis.

The platform was also tightly integrated with the film's promotional campaign. Videos of appeals for climate action by prominent actors Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, and Mélanie Laurent, along with online petitions and the #JustLookUp hashtag challenge, functioned as tools for amplifying digital activism. DiCaprio, in particular, utilized his Instagram and Twitter accounts to repeatedly encourage his followers to participate in *Count Us In* initiatives, with his messages reaching millions directly. This network of collective action, forged between actors and audiences outside the film, illustrates how Story-doing can evolve from storytelling subjects into action-oriented communities.

Finally, the story-doing strategy of *Don't Look Up* is significant in how it connects audiovisual experience and social engagement across the boundary between fiction and reality, particularly regarding the complex global issue of climate change. The film's function is not to provide emotional catharsis, but rather to induce feelings of discomfort and a sense of urgency. These sensations are then channelled into structured opportunities for action in the real world. In this manner, the apocalyptic vision of the text transcends the realms of mere narrative speculation, thereby serving as a conduit for political and ethical intervention. The integration of the film *Don't Look Up* with the *Count*

Us In platform serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it functions as a cautionary narrative, offering a warning about an impending crisis. Secondly, it provides a detailed plan for how to address the crisis, thereby transforming it into a tangible opportunity. This dual function of the film establishes it as a prominent exemplar of a Story-Doing model in the realm of transmedia activism.

3. Networked Co-Creation Structure: Active Audience Expansion of the Narrative

A fundamental aspect of transmedia activism is the networked co-creation structure, whereby audiences do not merely consume content, but actively participate in expanding the narrative. As a film's message disseminates through digital media and social networks, and as audiences engage in fandom activities that reconfigure or extend the story, the film's social impact is significantly amplified. This networked co-creative structure plays a vital role in enabling audiences to disseminate the film's message through digital participation, thereby generating broader social discourse in the process.

The existence of such a structure facilitates fan-driven dissemination and the creation of user-generated content (UGC), thereby fostering an environment in which the film's political and social messages can be voluntarily reinterpreted and circulated. As Evans (2011:102) notes, "Transmedia narratives offer the potential for audience engagement that extends beyond the television screen, where viewers can interact with and contribute to the ongoing story through various digital platforms." This dynamic interaction has been shown to engender a shift in the conventional passive viewer role, transforming audiences into active

collaborators in the production of narratives. This process facilitates the integration of activism within the narrative, thereby rendering it both participatory and sustainable.

3-1. *The Swimmers*: Hashtag Campaigns and Fan-Driven Dissemination

The Swimmers serves as a compelling case study of how fans can spark broader social conversations beyond the film itself through hashtag campaigns and digital participation. This phenomenon exemplifies the manner in which audiences assume a pivotal role in the dissemination of the film's message. The #WithRefugees campaign, initiated in partnership with the UNHCR, played a pivotal role in disseminating the film's core message concerning the refugee crisis to a global audience. As Marra (2018:3) observes, “hashtag activism allows for the mobilization of global audiences, turning social media platforms into arenas for collective action, where viewers can not only share their opinions but also engage in grassroots movements.” The campaign effectively utilized the emotional resonance of the film to raise awareness about refugee issues, thereby encouraging tangible expressions of support, including donations and volunteering. This is a salient illustration of how audiences play an active role in the dissemination of a film's message across digital platforms, contributing to broader societal initiatives for change.

Yusra Mardini amplified the film's message in digital spaces by actively engaging with fans through her social media presence. Utilizing the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter, she disseminated her personal experiences as a refugee and exhorted her followers to provide support for related donation campaigns or volunteer initiatives. Her

outreach functioned as a potent catalyst, inspiring supporters to transcend the boundaries of passive spectatorship and embark on tangible, real-world endeavors. This form of fan interaction on social media did not simply consist of the sharing of film content; it evolved into a meaningful conduit for direct activism. This serves to illustrate how a film can leverage fandom to catalyze social transformation.

Following the viewing of the film, a significant proportion of the audience adopted the role of agents responsible for the dissemination of the message, thereby instigating continuous discourse on the subject of refugee concerns. This transformation was facilitated by digital platforms and the creation of fan-driven content. As fans reinterpret and reconstruct the characters and narratives in their own creative ways, the film's message continues to expand and evolve. In this process, the audience assumes an active role in the creation of the narrative, contributing to the elevation of the film's social message to a subject of global discourse.

3-2. *Don't Look Up*: Meme Culture and User-Generated Content as Social Discourse

Don't Look Up offers a notable illustration of how meme culture and user-generated content can catalyze the development of social discourse, showcasing the innovative and critical reinterpretation of the film's message within digital environments. The dissemination of meme content on social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter has been shown to facilitate the rapid propagation of ideas, in this case amplifying the film's core message about the climate crisis through satirical and critical means (Jones, 2023). The utilization of memes in

the context of film offers a simplified medium through which to consume and share complex themes, thereby expanding the scope of public engagement with pressing social issues. The utilization of humor and satire in the context of memes serves to convey political messages and offer novel interpretative perspectives on the film within the broader context of popular culture. As Lambrecht (2020:160) observes, “Memes facilitate the expeditious and extensive propagation of political ideologies, as they are readily shareable and re-contextualizable, thereby empowering users to engage in the political discourse in a more engaging yet impactful manner.”

Twitter, in particular, became a focal point for user-driven critical reinterpretations. Tweets that re-framed the film's treatment of climate change from various political perspectives circulated widely, often transforming the movie's message into a focal point of political discourse. The recontextualization of the film's satirical elements by audiences on social media platforms such as Twitter has been identified as a key factor in galvanizing support for social change. Consequently, the film's themes of anxiety and urgency were transferred into political discourse, thereby reinforcing its objective of mobilizing action on the climate emergency.

Furthermore, user-generated content proved instrumental in the transformation of the film's message into a medium for political discourse. By remixing characters, quotes, and visuals into meme formats or critical reinterpretations, users contributed to a dynamic space of discourse. These forms of secondary creation transformed the film from a consumable cultural product into a catalyst for civic engagement. This process of reconfiguration within digital environments is an exemplification of transmedia activism.

4-1. The Social Impact of Transmedia Activism:

The Swimmers and Don't Look Up

The Swimmers and *Don't Look Up* serve as two notable illustrations of how transmedia activism can influence public perception of social issues. Each film in the series demonstrates the transformative potential of cinema to raise awareness and prompt action around global challenges. The objective of both films is to encourage active participation on the part of their audience, delivering urgent calls to action on a global scale. Nevertheless, there are notable discrepancies between these two approaches. *The Swimmers* focuses on the refugee crisis and encourages audiences to engage in immediate and concrete relief efforts, while *Don't Look Up* addresses the climate crisis, urging viewers to adopt long-term, sustainable behaviors in environmental protection. Through the implementation of transmedia strategies, both films contribute to the dissemination of social consciousness and the aspiration of achieving tangible change.

The Swimmers under scrutiny here is the notion of “communal solidarity,” which is conveyed through platforms designed to facilitate direct audience participation. The narrative of Yusra and Sara Mardini offers audiences a chance to gain emotional insight into the experiences of refugees and to consider ways in which they can make a positive contribution. In collaboration with Netflix and the UNHCR, the film encourages viewers to participate in real-world initiatives such as donations and volunteer work. This approach is emblematic of the fundamental principles of transmedia activism, illustrating how a dynamic narrative can transcend the screen to promote tangible and sustainable social engagement. It is therefore evident that the film is

recognized as a significant exemplar of how storytelling can function as a catalyst for civic action.

In contrast, *Don't Look Up* addresses the broader and more complex issue of the climate crisis, with the objective of engendering long-term behavioral change through collective action. By leveraging platforms such as “Count Us In,” the film endeavors to encourage its viewers to reduce their carbon footprints and adopt lifestyle changes that support sustainable living. In contrast to the refugee relief, which can be addressed through direct individual action, the climate crisis necessitates a coordinated global effort. The film is notable for its ability to stimulate social discourse and to effect a transformation in the behavior of its audience members. Moreover, external campaigns conducted via social media and digital platforms draw audiences into interactive digital spaces, thereby bridging the gap between cinematic narrative and real-world action. As Zogby (2022:45) notes, “In *Don't Look Up*, the filmmakers use satire to highlight the apathy surrounding the climate crisis, and the film's messages resonated across social media, where audiences continued to debate its implications for real-world political action.”

The two films under scrutiny utilize transmedia activism in disparate ways, thus exposing fundamental discrepancies in their structuring of audience participation. *The Swimmers* has been shown to motivate audiences to act on the issue of refugee relief through the medium of personal storytelling (Jones, 2019). In contrast, *Don't Look Up* places emphasis on sustainable environmental advocacy and mobilizes viewers to act collectively and proactively in response to the climate crisis. The following illustrations demonstrate the capacity of transmedia activism to adapt its strategies in accordance with diverse social issues, thereby

emphasizing the potency of cinema as a medium for social influence and transformation.

4-2. Critical Reflection: Structural Constraints and Challenges of Transmedia Activism

Despite the growing prominence of transmedia activism as a cultural strategy for social change, its transformative potential remains significantly constrained by several structural and practical limitations. While emotional energy and networked engagement have been demonstrated to mobilize audiences in the short term, the translation of such affective responses into sustained civic action or structural change is far from guaranteed.

A primary concern is the persistent discrepancy between awareness and action. Films such as *The Swimmers* and *Don't Look Up* have been shown to elicit emotional resonance and inspire symbolic gestures, including the sharing of hashtags and temporary pledges. However, empirical evidence regarding long-term behavioral change remains scant. For instance, viewership metrics do not directly correlate with measurable outcomes such as increased donations, policy influence, or substantive political engagement. This observation highlights a key limitation of affect-driven activism, namely the phenomenon of “slacktivism,” where audiences misconstrue emotional engagement or symbolic participation as meaningful action. While such gestures may indicate an alteration in sentiment, they frequently lack the durability or strategic coherence required for authentic social transformation.

Furthermore, the dissemination of messages within transmedia ecosystems is constrained by the limitations of digital infrastructure,

algorithmic visibility, and audience attention spans. Transmedia campaigns have been shown to benefit from platform diversification, however, the reliance on short-form media, real-time virality, and emotionally charged storytelling often favors immediacy over depth. Complex issues, such as the climate crisis and forced displacement, necessitate sustained public engagement and systemic intervention; however, transmedia strategies often result in brief periods of empathy, rather than long-term commitment. The challenge, therefore, lies not in reaching audiences, but in retaining them beyond the moment of affective activation.

Another structural constraint pertains to the superficial scope of behavioral change that many transmedia campaigns promote. It is evident that such initiatives frequently depend on universally accessible symbols and simplified messages. Consequently, they have the potential to obscure the underlying structural causes of the issues they address. For instance, while *The Swimmers* effectively employs a humanizing approach to the refugee experience, thereby mobilizing solidarity, its direct impact on addressing root causes such as geopolitical instability or policy reform is minimal. In a similar manner, *Don't Look Up* employs satire to dramatize the issue of climate inaction, yet it offers little in the way of actionable frameworks for political advocacy. These cases demonstrate the necessity for transmedia activism to evolve beyond emotional identification and towards strategic structural critique.

Moreover, the interplay between commercial interests and activist intentions presents a paradoxical dilemma. The majority of transmedia activist projects are disseminated through commercial platforms, such as Netflix, and are therefore subject to market imperatives, sponsorships, and audience appeal. This dual orientation has the potential to compromise the integrity of their messages. For instance, *Don't Look*

Up, despite its explicit critique of capitalist indifference to climate catastrophe, is itself a product of a commercial entertainment industry. The potential pitfall in this scenario is the commercialization of critique, which occurs when activism becomes entrenched within the very systems it aims to subvert. This integration can potentially erode the credibility and efficacy of the activist movement. The authenticity of the message may be called into question by audiences, who may perceive it as having been appropriated for brand value rather than as genuine advocacy.

Finally, the Western-centric origins and production contexts of many transmedia activism models – including both case studies analyzed – raise questions about their applicability in non-Western or digitally less integrated environments. The frameworks of participatory media and civic action may not easily translate to societies with limited access to digital tools or constrained civil liberties. This underscores the necessity to cultivate models of story-doing that are both globally adaptable and locally contextualized, attuned to the variegated cultural and infrastructural conditions that prevail.

In light of these challenges, future research must adopt a more empirical, comparative, and critical lens, incorporating data such as post-viewing behavioral metrics, longitudinal campaign impact, and audience interviews. A nuanced understanding of both the promises and pitfalls of transmedia activism is essential for evaluating its real-world impact and for designing more effective, ethically sound, and globally inclusive activist media practices.

V. Conclusion

The present study has examined the transformative potential of transmedia activism through the analytical lens of story-doing. In doing so, it has focused on how narrative, technological, and participatory elements converge to mobilize ethical reflection and civic engagement. By analyzing *The Swimmers* and *Don't Look Up*, it was demonstrated that transmedia campaigns have the capacity to influence public discourse and cultural perception in a significant manner, thereby transforming audiences from passive spectators to active co-creators of meaning. The case studies presented here demonstrate the efficacy of transmedia activism in fostering inclusive dialogue and emotional resonance across global platforms, provided that the design is sufficiently robust.

Nevertheless, despite the evident potential, the practical translation of narrative affect into sustained action remains inconsistent. For transmedia activism to evolve into a scholarly field and a sociopolitical strategy, it must progress beyond the realm of inspirational storytelling and embrace empirical rigor, critical self-awareness, and contextual sensitivity. Ethical concerns, platform biases, and commercial entanglements must be addressed with transparency and analytical precision.

It is recommended that future research endeavors focus on further refining this inquiry. This should be achieved by developing robust frameworks for measuring behavioral impact, incorporating longitudinal audience studies, and expanding the scope beyond Western-centric models. It is imperative to examine how marginalized communities can not only be represented but also empowered as producers within activist media ecologies.

In conclusion, transmedia activism has been demonstrated to hold

significant promise as a dynamic force for cultural transformation in the digital age. The efficacy of social media lies not only in the dissemination of information, but also in the co-construction of meaning and the promotion of ethical engagement. However, recognizing this potential necessitates a reflexive, data-informed, and globally inclusive approach — one that aligns narrative innovation with sustained responsibility in an increasingly interconnected media environment.

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❖ 국문초록

뉴미디어 시대의 스토리-두잉으로서의
트랜스미디어 액티비즘:
《The Swimmers》와 《Don't Look Up》 사례 연구

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본 논문은 트랜스미디어 액티비즘을 새롭게 개념화하며, ‘스토리-두잉(story-doing)’이라는 분석 틀을 통해 디지털 내러티브가 어떻게 단순한 이야기 전달을 넘어 관객을 능동적으로 참여시키고 실질적인 시민 행동을 이끌어내는지를 살핀다. 분석 대상은 영화 《The Swimmers》와 《Don't Look Up》이며, 본 연구는 감정적 몰입, 플랫폼 기반 행동, 네트워크 협업이라는 세 가지 축을 중심으로 이들을 해석한다. 이 논문은 트랜스미디어 스토리텔링 이론을 바탕으로 하되, 스토리-두잉을 기업 전략이 아닌 문화적·정치적 실천으로 재조명함으로써 이론적 지평을 넓힌다. 아울러 미디어 중심의 액티비즘이 실제로 어떤 효과를 발휘하는지 비판적으로 검토하며, 디지털 시대의 참여 문화와 윤리적 관객성에 대한 폭넓은 함의를 제시한다.

주제어: 트랜스미디어 액티비즘, 스토리-두잉, 《The Swimmers》, 《Don't Look Up》, 참여 미디어, 뉴미디어 문화

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