Tent-Poles of the Bestseller
How Cross-media Storytelling can spin off a Mainstream Bestseller

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Abstract
This article proposes a framework for understanding and analysing how the passive audience of a media event turns into active stakeholders. The starting point is the cross-media content quadrant (Jensen and Vistisen, 2012), which shows how the producer's control is distributed on social media platforms, while storytelling evolves around a tent-pole, for example, a bestseller or blockbuster. To further explain how the audience engages, a three-step rhetoric model largely based on Bitzer (1998) and Tolkien (1971) is developed and explained.

Keywords cross media, tent pole, fan fiction, cross media content quadrant.

Background
The article draws on the study of several fan fiction sites (fanfiction.net, adultfanfiction.net, archiveofourown.org and livejournal.com) and related social media platforms (Twitter and tumblr) since 2011

with the BBC television series 'Sherlock' as its fulcrum. The methods employed to collect data were mainly virtual ethnography (Boyd, 2008; Hine, 2003) and autoethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). The autoethnographic part of the research is conducted by reading, commenting, reviewing, and creating fan art as well as writing fan fiction. At the same time, the development of a given fandom is followed by logging the numbers of stories written in relevant fandoms (the top ten television series on fanfiction.net, as well as the top two book titles); and migration from one fandom to another is looked upon by following writers (their relevancy is determined through popularity [hits/story] and own preferences) as well as following several bloggers on tumblr.

The notion of the tent-pole is defined by '[o]ne big media experience that is successive enough to support a lot of other related media experiences' (Davidson, et al., 2010). Here, the tent-pole is further defined as the narrative which sets a co-creation process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) into motion, rising a new tent-pole to create a space in which new narratives as well as transmedia storytelling evolves both on the institutional level (for example, broadcasting companies) and the individual level (people on social media platforms).

While the audience has been seen as more or less passive recipients of the media content, using its narratives as a way of coping with daily life by identifying with the personal problems of the audience shown in Byerly and Ross (2006), this article proposes a view of the audience as co-creators, in which traumas and problems are processed by actively creating their own narratives, as also argued by, among others, Zubernis and Larsen (2012), Gray, et al. (2007), Jenkins (2006; 2008), and Lunenfeld (2000). Earlier findings on the audience as co-creators can be found in Jensen and Vistisen (2012), and Jensen (forthcoming).

From fan fiction to mainstream

When *Fifty Shades of Grey* became the 'best-selling book of all time' (Singh, 2012), it marked one of the first examples of a new media phenomenon. The book was originally written as a fan fiction of the *Twilight* series, a bestseller and blockbuster in its own right. *Fifty Shades* is the most prominent story to date which made the transition from the fan fiction world into mainstream publishing. It will not be the last since several

publishers have begun to search fan fiction sites for the next *Fifty Shades* (Morrison, 2012).

But fan fiction and *Fifty Shades of Grey* did not evolve in a vacuum. As a media phenomenon, the transition from fan fiction to mainstream publishing is the logical closing of a circle, starting with the 'original' story, here being *Twilight*, crossing media platforms by the help of an audience turned producer and finally developing into a new 'original' story, a new tent-pole to start the process all over. In other words, the audience turns into producers through cross-media, generating a spin-off tent-pole as a basis of a new blockbuster/bestseller phenomenon.

The cross-media content quadrant (CCQ) gives one possible clarification of the elements involved in the process as well as the amount of control and loss of control necessary to start and continue the transition.

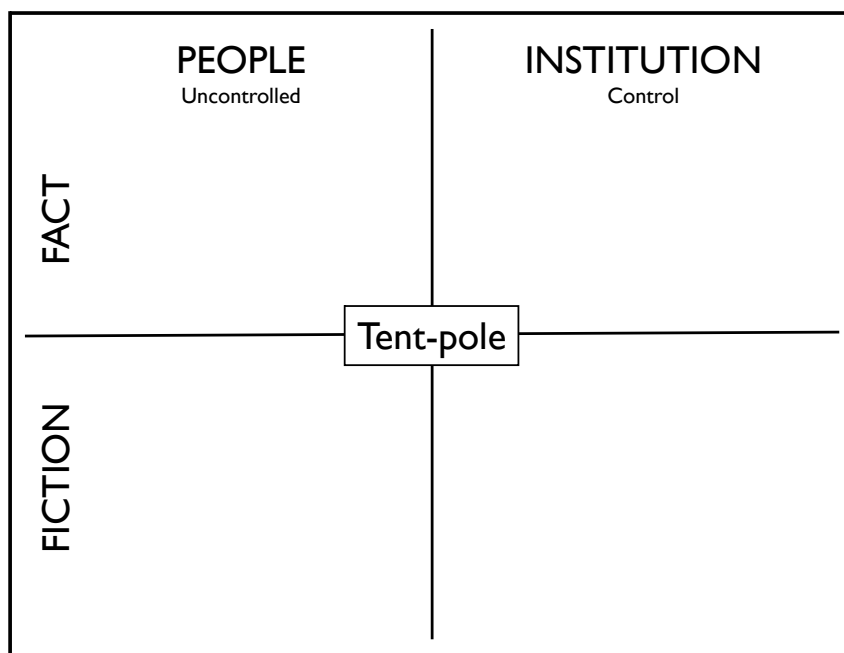| PEOPLE Uncontrolled		INSTITUTION Control	
FACT			
		Tent-pole	
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Figure 1: Cross-media Content Quadrant

The tent-pole in the middle of the model is the story. This is either a book, a movie, a television series, a poem or any other imaginable tale, which catches the imagination of the audience - as long as it can be defined as the primary focal point of the story universe (Davidson, et al., 2010). The tent-pole is necessary to start the process of transitioning the audience into producers. To create a tent-

pole, a certain amount of control is needed to ensure that the story is believable, with a possibility to cross over into the realm of sub-creation (Tolkien, 1971).

In the first place, this is ensured by the control exercised by the institution developing and distributing the original story. This institution can be a broadcasting company like BBC, a publishing company like Random House, or any given media company. Controlling the distribution and initial development of a given story guarantees both a return-on-investment, which, in turn, secures the development of new stories as well as a certain continuity of the storyline, and the distribution of the original material on different media platforms.

The institutional part of the model is divided into two quadrants: the factual and the fictional. Facts like airing dates, interviews with the actors, news from the set are to be found in the first. All of this is tightly monitored and controlled by the institution itself. The second quadrant develops the story further in a trans-media environment. The fictional quadrant makes it possible to develop the characters, explain potential plot holes, or lets the audience gain insight into the characters' thought processes. Even if the institution sometimes allows the audience to partake actively, for example, by way of surveys or through gamification, the control is kept by the institution, limiting possible interaction or relying on censorship.

If the tent-pole elicits a certain amount of engagement from the audience, the two quadrants under 'people' will come into use. Typically, the audience, people, will react to a given movie, television series, or the like by tweeting about it, blogging or sending updates about it. This will at first typically still be some kind of factual information about the tent-pole in question. Thus, the tweets will tell about the actors, airing time, and upcoming interviews. This part of audience participation is uncontrolled by the institution. The institution can ask the audience to not share certain information, which happened in relation to an impending leak from the Doctor Who set (BBC, 2013), but the institution cannot draw on laws or regulations other than what applies to copyright. If the audience wants to share information about upcoming set-locations or when the next episode will probably air, the institution cannot prohibit this.

While Facebook demands the use of the real name of the user, Twitter has the option to create an alias, thus giving the user ano-

nymity. With the possibility of anonymity, the user gets freedom to create outside of the boundaries of the institutionalised laws and regulations, at least to a certain degree. Thus, the alias can be used to create profiles which act like the characters in the tent-pole, giving rise to on-line role-playing games.

With this, the audience turns into co-creators, and the products become part of the fourth quadrant, the people-fiction. This quadrant is defined by the fictitious character of the products which, by and large, are created by the audience now turned producers. The social media platforms in use are typically tumblr, deviantart, fanfiction, archiveofourown, and the like. These platforms allow ali-
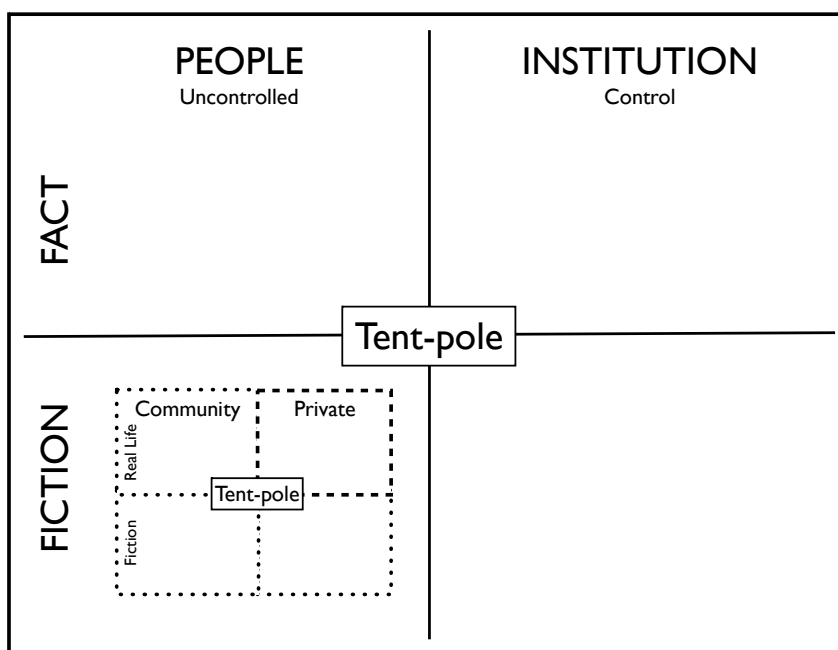

Figure 2: CCG model including the emerging tent-pole

ases, multiple profiles, as well as the creation of material which originates from a given tent-pole. Some of the platforms also allow links between the platforms, enabling the producers to co-create and mash-up different media types in the fan products. The quadrant is likewise defined by the relative freedom to use and re-use material from the original tent-pole, as well as create original material by using the tent-pole as a starting point.

While the people-factual quadrant can give rise to new fan groups and organisations, like Sherlockology in the case of the BBC's TV-series 'Sherlock' (Sherlockology), which started with a website and a Twitter-account, the people-fiction quadrant can give rise to new tent-poles, which in turn create a fan group or fan works in their own right. Such a tent-pole would give rise to a smaller cross-media content quadrant with slightly different quadrants. This tent-pole would create a private and a community space. The private quadrants would contain a private-fiction quadrant, in which the creator has her stories or fan works. Once published, the creator has a minimum of control over her products since they can be redistributed, downloaded, copied, and so on by other users of the different platforms. Some control is issued by some platforms, like adultfanfiction.net which does not allow plagiarism (adultfanfiction). Aside from that, the creator has to rely on other users conduct in regard to her creations and on the communities help if her copyright is violated.

The other quadrant under the private column is real life. The term 'real life' does not entirely cover the concept of this quadrant since its intention is to describe the relations between creators, readers, and users on the different platforms involved. Those relations are maintained outside of the actual tent-pole and can stretch beyond the virtual spaces on the Internet. This quadrant can re-enter the 'people fact' quadrant, for example, when the community decides to organise a meet-up or a conference. Likewise, the 'community-real life' quadrant can stay inside the 'people-fiction' quadrant, for example, when the community decides to organise an auction of fan fiction authors, who will be prompted by the winner of the auction to write a certain story.

The 'community fiction' quadrant consists of the communities reactions to a given fan work. This includes commenting, reviewing, recommending, as well as co-creating by co-writing, translating, beta-ing, podificing, or developing videos (see also, for instance, Karpovich, 2006). In this way the community reiterates the process which happened to the original tent-pole.

The tent-pole is embedded in the 'people fiction' quadrant, creating its own 'tent inside the greater tent of the original tent-pole'. Thus the process of creating a new tent-pole is not an instance of osmosis, that is, the content of the embedded tent-pole 'leaking'

through to the original tent-pole. The embedded tent-pole might be recognised by the producers or institution of the original tent-pole, but will not be put to use in the original tent-pole.

Yet, it is possible for a new tent-pole to emerge inside the 'people fiction' quadrant and through the support and feedback from the community enable the producer of the embedded tent-pole to transition into a new tent-pole. An example of this is *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which originated in the fan fiction universe of Twilight, where the author received feedback and support enabling her to publish the story as an original novel, which by now has created its own fan base including fan fiction and the like. The cross-media content quadrant shows how material is spread from the original tent-pole through different media platforms, creating new fan groups, organisations, and new stories and fan works in its wake. Ultimately giving rise to new original stories, which start the process all over again.

The three-step rhetoric model

But why does an audience turn into co-creators, subsequently producers and stakeholders? The following three-step rhetoric model shows one possible explanation by taking the rhetorical situation as described by Bitzer (1998) and the notion of sub-creation and Secondary World as explained Tolkien (1971) into account.
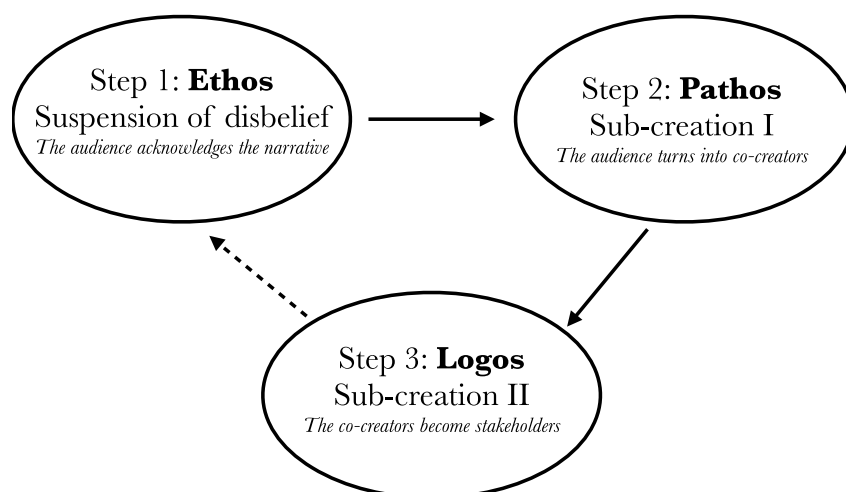

Figure 3: Three-step rhetoric model

The first step in the model takes its starting point in the suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. To accomplish this, the mediated story must be able to draw the audience into the universe the story's producer has created. 'Suspension of disbelief' is the first step since the audience must allow itself to believe in the premises of the set-up. If this is accomplished, the audience lends the story ethos and credibility.

So far, the audience stays passive, merely acknowledging the story and its contents, and viewing or reading it. To take the next step, the audience must become co-creators. Taking Bitzer's rhetorical situation into account, a rhetorical situation demands a certain kind of response, rhetoric in itself always being persuasive (Bitzer, 1998, p. 219). Bitzer defines three contingencies for a rhetorical situation: exigence as an 'imperfection in the situation marked by urgency' (Bitzer, p. 220). It is something 'waiting to be done' (Bitzer, p. 220) and thus persuades the audience as the second step of the rhetorical situation into action. On account of the constraints (Bitzer, p. 222) given by the situation, the audience is urged to respond if the orator, entering the rhetorical situation, is able to present and create a discourse which is fitting to the presented situation. The constraints of the rhetorical situation ensure an appropriate action from the audience as well as the orator.

The discourse is presented as the tent-pole, the story, which is the fulcrum of the situation, in the three-step rhetoric model. Exigence should persuade the audience into engaging with the story. Fan fiction is thus just one way of expressing how the story could take different turns, how the characters could develop, or how any possible plot hole could be explained. It is the narration and its characters' relationship which prompts the audience into action, into co-creation.

Step two is entitled 'Pathos' since the transition from audience into co-creator involves a passion for the material presented in the tent-pole. This passion changes the passive audience into active co-creators, who try to express their passion through various means of products. The world-building which takes place through the widening of the original tent-pole means that the co-creator is involved in a form of sub-creation as described by Tolkien. He explains sub-creation to be more than merely a '*literary belief*' in the story (Tolkien, 1971, p. 36, original emphasis). Sub-creation is seen as a

'Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he [the story-maker] relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed' (Tolkien, p. 36).

By using the tent-pole as the origin for a fan work, the co-creator has to work inside given parameters. The worst review any fan fiction can receive is that 'the character is behaving out-of-character'. Changing Sherlock Holmes into a were-wolf, a vampire or zombie can be accomplished, as long as the world-building is credible and Sherlock Holmes is still in character, still believable as the original character displayed in the television series.

The passion arises because the co-creator sees the story as a secondary world in which she is able to express her feelings, her ideas, her traumas, and other elements of her life. If the 'magic' is broken, if the co-creator feels cheated by the producers or by the actors, the passion changes into more than just disbelief or disappointment (Zubernis and Larsen, 2012). With the rise of social media, the passion then turns into hatred and 'shit-storms', giving voice to disappointed fans that feel bereft of 'their' creations. Thus, the producer of a tent-pole always walks a fine line between giving the audience material to engage in without disappointing and creating new incentives to actively partake in the fandom and helping to spread material and passion for the tent-pole.

The problem of this passion is further intensified in the third step, entitled 'Logos'. As soon as the co-creator creates and publishes her product, she becomes a stakeholder in the original tent-pole. By publishing her creation, by becoming part of the surroundings of the original tent-pole and going public anonymously, she wants the tent-pole and her own product to succeed. Only the continued passion for the original tent-pole makes this possible, until the co-creator becomes the producer in her own right. When she publishes her first original story in an official institution, she herself tries to create an original tent-pole, leaving the first tent-pole behind - and probably tries to distance herself as far as possible from the original tent-pole. And the whole journey starts all over again, with a new set of audience, which has to suspend its disbelief to be able to give the story credibility.

Conclusion

The abovementioned models show one of the ways the how and the why of the transition of a passive audience into active co-creators can take place. They also show how little control the producers of the original tent-pole have over the development of the story through the different contexts of social media. The producers must walk the fine line between passion and hate on behalf of their consumers to ensure a willing co-creation and through this a further dissemination of the original material. However, when balanced and nurtured the right way, these fan-created tent-poles, which draw new audiences and create new spaces for storytelling, can in the end produce high quality material, and even a spin-off to become a new mainstream blockbuster phenomenon in its own rights. This conclusion raises new research questions for further studies, especially with respect to how the fine balance between control, ownership, and collaboration can be managed when an institutional producer wants to spin off the user-generated content into a mainstream media.

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