Narrative and Transmedia Branding:
Storytelling in Macy's Inc. *Believe* Christmas campaign

Believe

IN THE MAGIC OF GIVING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Master of Research.

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Abstract

Transmedia storytelling techniques have been primarily used by the entertainment industry but have also been applied to the advertising campaigns designed by corporations, a concept known as transmedia branding. Transmedia storytelling requires a narrative to be told over a range of mediums with each working within its own capabilities of communication and interactivity. Meanwhile an all-encompassing storyline is created to keep all the threads within the same storyworld.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the narrative potential of campaigns specifically created via transmedia branding techniques is changing the way stories are being communicated and consumed. Previous studies in the use of transmedia branding have concentrated on their effectiveness as an advertising campaign while an analysis of the narrative techniques being employed was missing. Narrative studies into transmedia use have tended to focus on movies or television series that already have an inherent created storyworld.

A critical qualitative analysis has been applied to Macy Inc.'s *Believe* Christmas campaign to determine how they have created and maintained a nine-year evolving storyworld across multiple mediums. The study shows how the complexity of audience interactivity challenges the basic narrative concepts of story organisation, presentation and coherence. Discourse and visual analysis was also applied to user responses to discover how and whether they have understood and interpreted the storyworld being presented to them.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis: *Narrative and Transmedia Branding: Storytelling in Macy's Believe Christmas Campaign* has not previously been submitted for a degree nor as part of the requirements for any degree at another university or institution other than Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is original research and has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and thesis preparation have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Introduction

In 2010 a friend took me to watch *Eclipse*, the third film in the *Twilight* saga. At the time I had a casual interest in this multimedia entertainment franchise but had never read any of the four books nor watched the previous films. Despite this, I was able to follow along, though I noticed certain aspects of the plot required background knowledge of character interactions and relationships, as well as containing holes to presumably (hopefully!) be filled in later.

This started me thinking: just who was the film for? Surely the producers did not depend on the, admittedly large, *Twilight* fan group for the movie's success? But how do they create a project and a storyline that appeals to both the avid fan and the casual viewer?

In talking it over afterwards I discovered my friend received her information on the *Twilight* storyworld from online sources including fan forums and author interviews as well as the original books. Just how is all this information pulled together to create a consistent narrative and storyworld?

The phenomenon I was witnessing is called transmedia, a term that has applied to the distinct way stories are narrated over multiple platforms. I was interested to see how the role of the storyteller changed, as they needed to consider the characteristics of each platform available to them and the level of expansion of the narrative as they moved further away from the initial platform. The Internet has also had an impact, as users are able to interact and exchange information online with the producers and with each other. But I was most interested in knowing how these changes to the way stories are being told is affecting consumption and the understanding of how narratives are structured.

Aims of the study

This qualitative study aims to increase understanding about the relationship between the storyworld and narratives being created via transmedia storytelling and the actual consumption practices of the user. Through a critical textual and visual analysis of selected social media posts of a transmedia branding case study, I will shed additional light on what the user's perception of the storyworld is and discover whether even the most basic knowledge is enough to follow a deconstructed narrative.

This study draws on existing literature in the field of narrative theory as the groundwork and contributes to the growing interdisciplinary field of transmedia studies. The core concepts of transmedia project design both for entertainment and for marketing have been well defined and delineated by such media scholars and academics as Henry Jenkins and Burghardt Tenderich. From there, scholarly debates have been conducted on the exact parameters of what constitutes a transmedia project, how it should be defined and what affect the amalgamation of semiotic 'languages' and mediums is having on narrative theory.

In the introduction to his study on the history of transmedia, Matthew Freeman (2017) noted transmedia strategies are now commonplace in creative industries such as entertainment and advertising. And he only expects this to expand further into more creative fields. Accordingly, as researchers Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2016) have proposed, there should be a shift in thinking in transmedia research to looking at the personal or shared experiences users are constructing for themselves.

At a time when transmedia storytelling is on the rise, scholarship is needed to increase our understanding of how individuals engage with transmedial worlds and the practices they engage in in order to deepen their immersion (Klastrup & Tosca, 2016). Further analysis is also needed

to increase our understanding of how users are learning to read and comprehend how these storyworlds operate.

Assumptions of this study

A key assumption in this thesis is that a narrative – transmedia or otherwise – is intended to communicate a message created by the author or authors (the producer) via one or more media (mediums) to one or more readers/viewers (the users).

In this process, the author(s) encodes the message in one or more forms (words, images, video etc.) and transmits it via the mediums to the user. Upon receipt, the user decodes the message and extracts a meaning.

It is also assumed the transmedia narrative has been created by a single author or a team that uses a well-coordinated authoring process. While there are narratives written by groups in which the participants are free to contribute – known as collaborative narratives – that model of participatory authorship in creating a narrative is not considered in this thesis.

Definition of terms

This thesis draws on the basic concepts of narrative theory exploring it via the lens of transmedia storytelling principles as defined by Jenkins (2009a, 2009b) particularly in its emphasis on interaction and audience reception.

While attempts to define narrative are still being debated (Ryan, 2006), the basic notion of narrative as a sequence of events that take place in a relatively linear order based on a temporal succession remains a widely accepted idea (Page, Harper & Frobenius, 2013).

More basic definitions can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary that defines narrative as:

(noun) A spoken or written account of connected events; a story;
(mass noun) The practice or art of telling stories.
(en.oxforddictionaries.com, 2017).

This definition highlights the everyday practical sense of narrative as simply being how a story is told.

It further defines storytelling as:

"(mass noun) The activity of telling or writing stories, (adjective) Relating to the telling or writing of stories"
(en.oxforddictionaries.com, 2017).

Some researchers make a distinction between the two terms, with a story being a collection of facts of events and action, while a narrative is a particular way in which those facts have been arranged and presented to the audience (Wolff, Mulholland, Zdrahal & Joiner, 2007). By their definition, the same story can be presented as one or more narratives based on different viewpoints, different selection of facts or different media. But for the purposes of this study, the terms story and narrative will be used broadly as synonyms rather than employ restrictive distinctions.

The very term transmedia encompasses a variety of theories, concepts, methodologies, techniques, and tools drawn from transmedia, distributed narratives, cross-sited narratives and augmented reality games among others (Stackelberg, 2011). But for this study, the terms transmedia and transmedial adhere to the definition provided by Werner Wolf who simply said they are "phenomena that are nonspecific to individual media" (Wolf, 2005, p. 252).

Scriptwriter and new media specialist Carolyn Handler Miller (2014) said that no matter what the terminology, transmedia works adhere to the same principles:

The projects exist over more than a single medium;

Partially interactive;

Different components expand the core narrative;

The components are closely integrated;

One public point of entry (rabbit hole);

Contains spaces that are designed to encourage the audience to contribute content (cheese holes);

The story is not necessarily a game but gaming elements are contained. (p.163).

However, this thesis is specifically about the narratives and branding stories being told via transmedia techniques and needed a more specialised exposition. This was found in Jenkins's (2007a) definition of transmedia storytelling:

... it represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (para. 2).

However, Jenkins's use of the word fiction is somewhat problematic as transmedia narratives are not restricted to fiction, and non-fictional narratives and projects can also use transmedia techniques (Kerrigan & Velikovsky, 2016).

The issue of what constitutes fiction and non-fiction becomes even more blurred when a transmedia narrative integrates fictional settings, characters, and events with a real-life occurrence such as the case study used in this thesis. Because of these issues, transmedia storytelling in this study will refer to fiction, non-fiction and hybrid narratives.

Academics Tenderich and Jerried Williams's (2015) definition of transmedia branding built on Jenkins but placed a slightly different emphasis on the brand as the story:

> … a process where integral elements of a brand are dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated experience with each medium making its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (p. 27).

By replacing "story" with "brand" Tenderich and Williams highlighted the need for the brand itself take to place of a story and all the narrative qualities and connotations that implies. Thus transmedia branding requires the storyworld to be built up from scratch using the inherent values and ideals already associated with the brand in the user's mind via marketing, advertising and user personal experience (Granitz & Forman, 2015).

Finally, given that transmedia storytelling operates over various mediums requiring viewing, reading, participating and consuming and occasionally a mixture of these, each with different connotations, I decided to employ the word 'user' as an overall term to encompass all of these activities.

Chapter 1 − Literature Review

The use of stories as a means of artistic expression and communication is one of the fundamental ways in which the basic human experience is conveyed.

The branches of research such as narratology and inquiries into narrative structure that delve deeply into the manner and basic concepts of storytelling has had to undergo a fundamental shift over time as new contexts and genres challenge the very idea of what a narrative is. Meanwhile outside disciplines, among them media studies and new digital media, are bringing their own processes and practices to bear upon the research methods being used.

Narrative theorists study how stories help people make sense of the world, while also studying how people make sense of stories (Herman, 2009). As far back as Aristotle, debates over narration have revolved around what makes a good narrative, with the ancient philosopher deciding plot was the most important feature.

In a good plot, every occurrence results from the previous occurrence and if the plot has a beginning, middle and end, then it is complete. He also saw beginning and end at the opposite ends of the cause-and-effect chain with the beginning having no preceding event and the end having no further effect. This beginning, middle and end linear story structure appears very simple, but set the stage for the centuries of debates to come (De Jong, 2014).

Aristotle in Poetics 7:

> We have already laid down that tragedy is a representation of an action which is complete, whole, and of a certain magnitude […] By 'whole' I mean possessing a beginning, middle, and end. …The 'middle' involves causal connections with both what precedes and what ensues.

Consequently, well-designed plot structures ought not to begin or finish at arbitrary points … (De Jong, 2014, p. 3).

Diverse theories of narrative since then have included Russian formalist theories of narrative; dialogical theories; Chicago school, or neo-Aristotelian, theories; psychoanalytic theories; hermeneutic and phenomenological theories; structuralist and semiotic; Marxist and sociological theories; reader-response theories; and poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories, with each theory having major figures who either originated the theory or were the main practitioners of it (Miller, 1995). Each of these theories looked at the components that make up a narrative, discussing aspects such as time, space, worlds, progression, author-narrator and audience reception, and their varying importance to understanding narration, primarily in literary texts.

The context and medium in which the storytelling is taking place is a key aspect of this study. The very concept of transmedia implies a range of mediums is being employed, and the applicability, user response and interaction are vital to the way the narrative is being presented and received.

Scholars such as Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette laid out a structuralist agenda for a formal study of narratology moving it beyond traditional literary texts. But they did not take into account the contexts and mediums in which the storytelling was taking place, and how medium shapes the narrative and the reader experience cannot be ignored (Page & Thomas, 2011). Literary scholar and critic Marie-Laure Ryan (2004b) looked at medium in two ways: "a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment; and material or technical means of artistic expression" (p. 16). The first defines the technology being used and the second looks at how messages are encoded and decoded by the user.

Web 2.0 and the new media world

Social media theorists Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas (2011) considered the advent of Web 2.0 technologies in the late 1990s as

redefining the creation and reception of narratives in the new media world. The new technology that became available not only enabled and empowered users but also increased the number of mediums by which new types of stories could be told and extending the concept of narrative into uncharted areas. Online platforms such as Flickr, Youtube and MySpace were rapidly followed by Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and these, alongside personal blogs and community forums, allowed those with the textual resources and technical knowledge to tell new and hybrid stories across modes and genres.

These mediums also asked users to push past concepts of literary narrative and linear storytelling by one author, to approaching storytelling as a visual and audiovisual notion via Flickr, Instagram and Youtube, or as blogs using combinations of photos, videos and text such as those on MySpace, all the while receiving feedback. But Page and Thomas (2011) regard the arrival of Facebook in 2004 as truly allowing collaborative online storytelling to take off as users could narrate their life history in small 'episodes' via status updates and comments.

Facebook has several narrative advantages over other online platforms – unlike Twitter it does not impose a character limit and, unlike blogs, does not require a level of writing skill to keep the readers entertained. The Facebook user can be terse and ungrammatical and the message will still be understood and 'liked'. Photos and videos can be uploaded but are not necessary to the story being told, thus requiring a much lower level of technical knowledge compared to Instagram or Youtube which now have professional bloggers operating on both platforms. The platform also prompt users to answer questions regarding their status such as 'what are you doing now?' and 'what's on your mind?' Over time, these updates comprise an archive that documents an ongoing narrative of the user's life.

Page and Thomas (2011) dubbed this "digital narratology" and believed it played a significant role in transforming narrative theory and practice by providing new areas for analysis (p. 3). These include criticism and

research into various narrative concepts including plot development, event structure, temporality and issues regarding user participation such as interaction, immersion and agency (Aarseth, 1997; Landow, 1997; Murray, 1997; Hayles, 2001)

A lack of closure and multiple story paths also presented particular challenges to writers. Theorist Janet Murray (1997), who used the imaginative imagery of the holodeck from the *Star Trek* series to illustrate immersion into a storyworld, demonstrated how making every path available to the user actually was a storytelling advantage. Writers needed to consider every possible closure point rather than the traditional beginning, middle and end linear structure. Instead of writing one story they were, in essence, writing many. However, if plot is a function of causality then it is necessary to consider the role of the user and how crucial it is to reinforce the sense their choices have led to the movement of the story. The writer and the user needed to work together in a way never previously considered.

The methods being applied to studying the new digital narratives were stuck in the past of classical narratology. What was required was a pathway to extending narrative theory into the realm of providing contextually-oriented perspectives. Discourse analyst Alexandra Georgakopoulou's (2006) research into what she referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC) said the influential Labov and Waletzky's model of narrative structure produced in the 1960s relied on the presence of temporal ordering between events and sequence. The model was based on stories told in oral interviews and was meant to describe personal narratives and therefore were also being applied to the stories being told via new digital platforms. According to Georgakopoulou:

> Labov's structural definition of narrative resulted in a tendency to recognize as narratives only texts that appear to be well organized, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, that are teller-led and largely monologic … (p. 689).

Georgakopoulou (2006) also criticised the way the Labov model makes the teller the main producer of meaning rather than it being both the teller and user producing and placing their own meanings onto the text. Despite the criticism directed towards the model, research into data arising from narrative modes were still judged on how they conformed or departed from Labov's narrative structure.

But it was plain, as more narratives produced by digital media emerged, that the basic notions of plot as beginning, middle and end with events naturally arising from the one before with causal connections, no longer applied. Time and space were also thrown into disarray as users could now intervene in the narrative and follow it across various mediums at their own leisure and not necessarily sequentially.

Methods were developed to engage in close readings of these new texts and how the narratives being weaved through them meant the distinctive innovative nature of the storytelling modes became the focus (Page & Thomas, 2011). Among these have been research into personal histories conveyed via Facebook status updates (Page, Harper & Frobenius, 2013), political upheavals being followed on social media updates (Georgalou, 2015) and online consumer reviews on TripAdvisor (Vásquez, 2012). These are all characterised by their flexibility, versatility, being medium and context specific and containing high levels of interactivity.

As Georgakopoulou (2006) noted, CMC contexts challenged key aspects of narrative such as the linear sequencing of events by acknowledging they were a necessary part of the story, but were not definitional. Instead, what counts as a story, is what is done on particular occasions, in what setting and what the understanding is of what makes up a story within that context. For instance, a narrative told via the character limits of Twitter is conveyed in a vastly different manner to the image-heavy Instagram, and users trying to 'read' both in the same manner would be doing both mediums a disservice.

And, as Page and her fellow researchers (2013) discovered in their exploration of Facebook "small stories", the interaction between author and user is the most important aspect to the narrative being told:

> ... rather than multiple tellers working collaboratively within the same interaction of turns, the shared stories form a constellation of evaluations, retellings and reactions which may not directly be connected to each other within a single sequence (for example, as comments to a single post), but nonetheless are embedded in a wider aggregation of talk about a particular topic, which in turn constitutes a social narrative. (Page, Harper & Frobenius, 2013, pp. 209-210).

In other words, the comments and reactions are far more important to both the readers/writers, with the sequencing of events being of lesser consideration.

Theorists also delved into the importance and significance, or otherwise, of the impact of increased user interaction. Miller (2014) pointed out it would be absurd to believe that no interaction had taken place previously between author and user, but rather that digital media took it to the level of choice and control, rather than merely commenting. The user was no longer an abstract theoretical subject, but someone who could now manipulate, explore or influence the narrative and have an impact on how the story unfolds or ends.

There were also varying ideas on the importance and relevance of interactive narrative with Carolyn Handler Miller and Mark Stephen Meadows individually championing the need for the concept and highlighting the variety of interactive narrative texts already in existence. Computer graphics expert Andrew Glassner believed the purpose of interactivity was to be entertaining especially in games where he saw immense opportunities for story environments, while game designer Chris

Crawford believed the end result was the story often came second to animation and sound effects (Ryan, 2011).

While theorists agreed that user interactivity now existed on a different scale than ever before, debates over the level of importance it should be afforded are still ongoing. This is largely due to the vast differences between the interactive narratives being produced. For instance, a narrative created for storytelling purposes such as a hypertext fiction and one told for gaming purposes have distinct aims and motivations for both producer and user and therefore different levels of interactivity need to be present. Collaborative interactions, such as those on blog forums where users interact with the author and with each other, also need to be taken into account.

Ryan (2011) pointed out the basic narrative paradox of interactivity – how to provide both the push of giving freedom to the user versus the pull of producing a well-formed story along the lines of Aristotle's plot sequence with sequential causal events. The narrative theory that extolls an author-controlled top-down system needed to be flexible and allow for more user participation. However, allowing decisions to be made by the user means events will unfold at random rather than in a unified pattern. The interactive system therefore needs to present opportunities for plot development while not completely letting go of basic narrative construction.

Concepts of interactivity cannot be considered without looking the relationship between text, author and user and the interaction between users. Theorist Nick Montfort (2011) said the technological architecture now available allow users to change the time and order they wish to engage in, while networking capabilities mean users can engage with more than one text at one time as well as with each other. The study of storytelling via digital media has facilitated the ongoing work of reworking and extending classical, structuralist models of narrative.

It was not just the telling of digital narrative but the way they are being read, interpreted and understood by users has also come under scrutiny. The heavy level of interactivity which allows the user to intervene in the narrative even as the story is unfolding, only caused more confusion. This meant the Labovian approach with its dismissive attitude towards the user's active role in creating meaning in the story, was even more difficult to apply. Christian Hoffmann and Wolfram Bublitz (2010) in their research into stories in the age of new media said there was a need to move from looking at narratives in terms of content and structure towards considering them in light of a specific context and situation, as well as the communicative purposes for which they have been written.

Narrative takes a postclassical turn

The limitations of the theory were clear by 1997 when David Herman contributed to the debate surrounding the need for narrative theory to be more inclusive in an article entitled "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology" in which he outlined the postclassical turn narrative theory would need to take. He cofounded and directed the Project Narrative initiative in 2006 and, in 2009, took this further by launching an annual publication, *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*. Both projects were designed to further the research being done in the field of interdisciplinary narrative theory (Biwu, 2011):

> Rethinking the problem of narrative sequences can promote the development of a postclassical narratology that is not necessarily poststructuralist, an enriched theory that draws on concepts and methods to which the classical narratologists did not have access … (Herman, 1997, pp.1,047-1,049).

The postclassical narrative theory allowed analysis to be enriched with methods and concepts from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and social and cognitive psychology. This approach led to using the field of linguistics to study the processes by which information about storyworlds is

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conveyed as well as expanding the very concept of what a story is into previously unexplored territory. This included the digital narratologies being looked into by the likes of Page, as well as the development of digital tools now available to everyone to convey their personal stories (Herman, 2009).

Herman (1997) said the postclassical approach still contained elements of structuralist theory but the older approach was now enhanced with research tools taken from other areas of inquiry. The end result, he believed, was not simply a new way of looking at old issues but a rearticulation of those issues, including the basic one of how to define stories. The original structuralist theorists failed to come to terms with two main areas of narrative that have become important – the ability to create a storyworld as an interpretation outside of that intended or implied by the text; and the medium within which the narrative is being delivered. But new emergent areas of research in the field were addressing these areas. These include digital narratology, narratives with multiple semiotic channels (such as comics, graphic novels) and unconventional narratives that challenge real-world understandings of space, time and causality.

Herman (1997) also led the way in developing a cognitively-based narrative theory in which the reader inserts their own interpretation in constructing the storyworld – "how readers and listeners process a narrative – and indeed whether they are able to process it at all – depends on the nature and scope of the world knowledge to which it is indexed" (p. 1,057).

Researcher Jan-Noel Thon (2016) said while few studies used the specific word storyworld the concept was still an established one with theorists agreeing there were common cores to the concept. These include the creation of specific worlds with characters, events and settings and the causal relations between them and the manner in which users apply actual and fictional world knowledge to fill in the gaps of narrative representations. The classical structuralist position of storyworlds was to

look at the three signifiers of event, character, and detail of setting; the neoclassical approach focused primarily on events; while cognitive narratology regards storyworlds as mental models of situations, characters and events.

But in order to understand how these mental models form, evolve and change requires more understanding of how users place themselves imaginatively within the text and what cues trigger simulation and immersion. In short, what makes users live the narrative and create the storyworld (Ryan, 2014b). Theorist Richard Gerrig (1993) discussed the difference between a narrative and the narrative world by starting with Labov's definition of a narrative as a recounting of related sequential events, with even two being enough to constitute a basic storyline. However, he believed, the structure and formal features of the narrative are not relevant to the ability of a storyworld to draw users in. Even poorly crafted stories, and this is a subjective concept anyway, can allow users to experience the narrative world.

So exactly how is this storyworld created? In his study of the works of American Gothic writer H. P. Lovecraft, Van Leavenworth (2014) said a shared mental agreement of specific themes and 'rules' of the world builds up an understanding of how it operates. Academics Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004) took this a step further by defining three core areas of 'worldness': the topos, which is the basic setting and physical laws including how time and space operates; the ethos, which includes ethics and codes of behaviour, and the mythos, which is the implied understanding of how things should turn out (p 4). Clearly this is flexible as settings will change and characters do not always follow the rules but, as long as the mythos remains consistent, users can use past knowledge to place the narrative within the 'world.' Mythos is also what allows a range of different mediums to be used to develop the narrative and still be identified as being part of the same storyworld.

Herman's willingness to assess aspects of narrative tradition and demonstrate how these concepts can be used in analysing narratives from other disciplines has helped bring ideas and researchers from other fields in ways the structuralist narratologists could not have envisioned. This was particularly necessary when exploring an area of narrative that was in danger of being ignored – that of immersion in a text. Ryan (2001) said immersion tended to be overlooked by theorists, as the job of the critic is to deconstruct the text and reinterpret it. Immersion and what it contributes to the narrative simply cannot be analysed. But the cognitive turn away from looking at literary texts as a system of signs held together by relations between signifiers, allows for different fields to contribute their knowledge.

Textual worlds are constructed in the mind of the user as a specific environment within a particular time and space with events and agents. In short, setting, plot and characters. As it happens within the mind as a result of interaction with the text, it would be natural to look to the fields of science and psychology as a starting point for ideas for analysis. Scholars on the sidelines of literary theory used ideas from cognitive psychology, empirical approaches to literature, or analytical philosophy – to address the issue of immersion in various ways including analysing the feeling of being 'lost in a book' and the concept of being 'transported' (Ryan, 2001).

But theorist Frederick Luis Aldama (2010b) who studies cognitive theories and narrative acts, warned against using moving too far over to the side of cognitive sciences and neurobiology. The work done by narratology theorists could and should be coupled with scientific research to help shed light on the processes involved in the making and consumption of narratives. However, abandoning the literary analysis in favour of the neurobiology one would be a mistake. Cognitive theories should be used to advance understandings of narratology, but the two aspects of science and humanities should be combined in producing that understanding.

Societal and cultural concerns

Wider concerns regarding a latent cultural and societal affect of new digital technologies and practices have also arisen. This is especially in the area of user engagement with digital media, limitations of the digital system and its affect on literature and critical analysis (Birkerts, 1994; Miall & Dobson, 2001). Meanwhile, the possibly negative impact on individuals in terms of identity construction and privacy and the subsequent consequences was also garnering research attention and critical scrutiny (boyd, 2011; boyd & Marwick, 2011; boyd, Ryan & Leavitt, 2011; Turkle 2011; Davis, 2013; Fox & Moreland, 2015; Long & Zhang, 2014; Murray, 2015).

While, on the surface, the ability to provide user interactivity within this participatory media seems to have a democratising affect, a closer look shows a marginalisation or even exclusion of social groupings (Page & Thomas, 2011). At its most basic form, having access to the relevant technology has led to broader debates regarding the global digital divide with wealthy, predominately Western nations, being on top. But the political and cultural ramifications of narration and storytelling go even deeper than this. Practices in the new interactive narrative world are heavily culturally hierarchical and produce an unequal gender balance. In her research into famdoms and storytelling systems, academic Suzanne Scott (2010) found a very controlled set of legal and ideological parameters within which users were allowed interact and create their own work.

Ryan (2004b) also pointed out questions of medium and how it is being studied needs to be looked at further. Media studies have tended to concentrate on the content of the messages being conveyed and the resulting societal impact especially on children. Research has tended to concentrate on how these individual mediums communicate rather than as a material means of expression and support for the form and content of the message. But as digital media is used to create new forms of narrativity, she believed the focus should be less on semantics but rather

on the presentational strategies, user involvement and relations between author and users.

This need has become even more important with the advent of transmedia storytelling that requires a narrative to be told over a range of mediums, both traditional and digital. In studying transmedial narratology, research has looked at how narrative gets transposed from one medium to another, what kinds of features are adapted or altered in this process, and how each medium encourages or prohibits specific ways of narration (Georgakopoulou, 2006). However, that can only be achieved if there is more understanding of how each medium presents narration and the limitations and opportunities each provides.

In an essay entitled "Will new media produce new narratives?" Ryan (2004d) pointed out that narrative and storytelling has survived in varying forms over the centuries and has adapted to every new technology as each one has shown theorists and practitioners where narratives can expand and grow. The survival of narrative theory is not dependant on its ability to adapt to a new media, but rather the question should be reversed as we consider what new narratives these new media are producing and how we plan on both producing and reading them.

Chapter 2 − Towards Transmedia Storytelling

For centuries, stories have been regarded as vital to understanding the human experience. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has discovered, the ability to formulate a narrative is central to human consciousness and the very growth of mind development.

Damasio (2011a) divides human consciousness into the proto, the core and the autobiographical, with each level building on the previous one. It is at the final stage that a narrative forms based on past memories and the anticipated future in order to create an identity and 'self'. In this way, the actual building blocks of narrative structure are inherent to the building of the human mind and development of self-identity. This knowledge is then used to make sense of the narratives encountered though life.

The human mind is also supple enough to cope when the narrative twists and turns, becomes fragmented and does not follow a linear structure. Essential to this understanding is the highly flexible nature of memory as the individual 'narrative' is culled from real events, imaginary events, and from past interpretations and re-interpretations of events (Damasio, 2011b). This fluidity of understanding structure is what allows transmedia narratives to push the boundaries of how a story can be told while knowing users will be able to follow along.

Transmedia storytelling requires narratives to be taken and extended across many different mediums with each of them interpreting and enacting the story according to its own ability. In order for this to occur, there must be at least a basic strategy in place by the producer, customers who are willing and able to utilise a variety of mediums and the industrial configurations in place for the product to reach a wide audience.

It would be logical to regard transmedia projects as a modern invention caused by digital platforms and the subsequent growth in mediums. However, transmedia historian Matthew Freeman (2017) considered the strategic alignment of media, industry, audiences and technologies which can spread a narrative across multiple media, as a particularly 20th century phenomenon which was caused by major developments in industrialisation.

Freeman looked at three models of production that occurred throughout the century each of which had an impact on media distribution and consumer market development. The first was during the 1900s and 1910s and was informed by major developments in industrialisation. In a general sense, industrialisation meant a change from an economy based on agriculture to one based on industry and commerce combined with a booming population. The second model in the 1920s and 1930s was driven by the rising consumer culture and the development of mass distribution. The third model in the 1940s and 1950s was underpinned by media regulations and corporate ownership policies.

Moving from Oz to Star Wars

Long before film or television, department store window displays were used to promote the products available in-store with bright, riveting arrangements designed to highlight a wealth of merchandise. A promoter called Lyman Frank Baum (L.M. Baum) studied these strategies and produced a series of trade journals on the art of window dressing. It was here Baum learned the basic concepts underlying transmedia which he would later use in promoting his fictional Oz works – create scenes within a 'world', engross with further product and create a desire for more (Freeman, 2014a).

Accordingly, Baum would later not only write books about the world of Oz but, from 1900 to 1914, also used comic strips, stage plays, films, games, mock newspapers and even a lecture tour to expand the narrative of the

magical realm. The multiple stories also interconnected and steered users to the next one in a way modern users would recognise as transmedia storytelling. The world of Oz was also exactly that, a place where many different characters congregated but there was no consistent star because the storyworld was the hero (Freeman, 2017). As with transmedia projects today, a user could miss out on one section of the narrative but the overall storyworld would remain stable.

While Baum created a world, over the 1940s and 1950s the character of Superman was developed across comics, radio, cinema and television as his storyworld expanded. This was the start of a different authorial model as DC Comics produced and showcased the character across mediums with texts that fed into others and built up audiences for the whole franchise:

> We recognize the familiar swoosh of Superman landing, red cape streaming behind him. … Though comic books and publicity pictures give us a visual image to start with, radio completes the process by providing the imagination's animation … Sparked by the words, the sounds, the intonations, and the silences, the radio creates the landscape for us and the action and the special effects of the heroic world. (Freeman, 2015b, p. 222).

Users were also required to act like hunters and gatherers if they wanted to capture the full mythology of Superman's history and character. The story content was available from many sources each specialising in different features, contributing different stories and each building different aspects of the storyworld and Superman's expanding mythology (Freeman, 2015b).

As far back as 1905 Baum foresaw the immersive possibilities of a theme park to bring his Oz world to life. But these ideas did not come to fruition until businessman Walt Disney opened his first Disneyland amusement park in 1955. This coincided with his television series that had started the

year before and eventually included themed segments based on the different lands. Integration and immersion was further enhanced by cross over attractions, elements and characters from the films and television being found in the parks. But the entire Disney franchise was based around the familiar smiling character of Disney himself who lent familiarity to the entire enterprise (Jenkins, 2014).

But it was the *Star Wars* franchise in the 1970s that was to take the concept of transmedia storytelling and expand it into the integrated, immersive, interactive storyworld experience that would set the standard for other entertainment franchises to follow. The expansion of mediums into home entertainment with videos, CDs and now DVDs, meant they were not only being used to expand the narrative but were also able to enter the user's everyday life, alongside video games, toys and costumes.

Figure 1: The *Star Wars* universe contains an expanded immersive storyworld

Just as users had to hunt around for information on the Superman mythology, they now had to piece together 'meta' knowledge regarding the *Star Wars* world, as information missing in one medium would appear on another. Television writer Lance Parkin (2009) referred to the appearance

of the ewok characters in the original third *Star Wars* film *Return of the Jedi* as an example. In the film, the word 'ewok' never actually appears, and the back-story of these creatures was only developed via spin-off toys, comics, cartoons and books.

Storytelling goes transmedial – theories and debates

Even though these activities that were clearly transmedial in nature if not by deliberate design were occurring, a clear understanding and definition of what transmedia should be, had yet to be developed. In 1991, in her study of children's media, Marsha Kinder coined the term "transmedia intertextuality" in describing the expanding world of franchised entertainment (p. 1). She used the term in relation to characters travelling between mediums without adding to the narrative – they were simply products under one umbrella to create a strong brand.

In 2003, in an article in *Technology Review* Jenkins first mooted his concept of transmedia storytelling. At the time he was looking at an entertainment industry where the movement of content across media was fragmented and he wanted a model for co-creation rather than basic adaptation. He took the idea of transmedia which Kinder introduced as many products under one brand and added the storytelling element to help unify them.

In 2006, in his seminal book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins improved the concept and published this definition:

> 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. (pp. 95-96)

Other theorists refined this idea with Carlos Scolari (2009) saying transmedia storytelling has "a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc). These different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world" (p. 587). Christy Dena (2009) said transmedia was about fictional worlds unfolding across media platforms and environments, while Geoffrey Long (2007) emphasised transmedia's role in worldbuilding. In summary, transmedia storytelling relates to using inter-related and integrated media experiences that tell one large narrative. It is not an adaptive experience in that it does not offer the same content on the different media platforms, but rather, it offers a worldbuilding experience.

But there was still a need to specify and differentiate it from similar concepts that were being used as synonyms. These terms included intermedia, multimedia, multi platform cross media, networked narratives and distributed narratives and enhanced narratives. As can be seen from these various terms, trying to reconcile the idea of many different mediums being used combined with the varying storytelling techniques each one has, added to what Scolari described as "semantic chaos" (Scolari, 2009, p. 587).

The combination of languages and mediums in an interactive environment also challenged traditional semiotic and narratological research (Scolari, 2009). In analysing transmedia, researchers needed to look at multimodality on both the communication level (verbal/non-verbal); on the construction level (use of platforms and mediums) and the interdependent relationship between producer and users who were responding by producing content themselves.

A more generic term and definition was needed to include the whole process of communication and interactivity that was not restricted to specific mediums and to place more emphasis on the narrative being

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produced. This caused Jenkins's definition to be streamlined to the one I have adhered to throughout this thesis:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins, 2007a, para. 2).

The definition sets out the structure of an 'ideal' transmedia project which requires 'unique contribution(s)' on each medium. This is a concept game designer Neil Young called "additive comprehension" to refer to the ways each text adds a new piece of information to the overall narrative (Jenkins, 2007a, para. 7). By concentrating on the end product, Jenkins also managed to abstain from entering the 'which mediums' and 'how many platforms' debate thus avoiding getting caught up in the endless discussion of just how transmedial does a project have to be in order to qualify.

Nonetheless, other theorists soon raised these questions. Dena (2009) highlighted the difference between transmedia projects that only involve mono-media and projects that use multimedia texts by defining them as intercompositional transmedia and intracompositional transmedia. She mentions projects such as alternate reality games (ARGs), which are multimodal in themselves by incorporating many different platforms to create one entertainment experience. Transmedia storytelling requires a story or world to be told across multiple media and multiple texts for a unified entertainment experience, while the ARG model assumes multiple media can contribute to a single entertainment experience. The question was whether they should be regarded as part of a larger transmedia narrative or as a standalone subsection of transmedia storytelling.

Jenkins's definition is more concerned with the relationship between the mediums and how they are being used rather than the actual number. A transmedia project can use multiple media to repeat the same story in adaptations such as the *Game of Thrones* franchise, and therefore it is multimodal but not necessarily transmedial. Alternatively, a project could use a mixture of one or more main mediums to expand the narrative while keeping the others for adaptive purposes. That is the normal format used for many entertainment franchises such as *Harry Potter*. It is the ability of the mediums to work together to add to the storyworld and extend the narrative that is key to whether the project is transmedial (Jenkins, 2011).

Jenkins (2011) acknowledged he dodged the question of ARGs in *Convergence Culture* by literally sidebarring it, but answered Dena's comments by saying in essence both models (intercompositional and intracompositional) could meet the criteria for transmedia as "both can deliver on the promises of additive comprehension" which he uses as a benchmark (para. 23). It is the end result and the impact on the overall narrative rather than the model being used that matters.

Another concern was the definition does not recognise adaptations, as the 'ideal' transmedia project requires each contribution to be unique in expanding on the overall narrative. If they don't, continued redundancy would set in across the mediums causing users to lose interest. Jenkins's definition clearly prefers elements that add to the narrative as does Long (2007) who agrees adaptations can serve a purpose in bringing in new users, but they are not distinct enough to be part of the narrative arc. Therefore, what the adaptation-extension distinction was intended to address was the degree each new text adds to the understanding and knowledge of the story.

The problem occurs because expanded narrative is the main criteria of "additive comprehension" rather than the holistic user experience. While this is understandable as expanded narrative is a fairly easy aspect to delineate, it is also inarguable that using different media also provides a

deeper experience and insight into the transmedia storyworld. So while enhanced user involvement is not narrative expansion – Harry Potter attends Hogwarts either way – watching the movie adaptation of the book provides a greater understanding of the atmosphere and look and feel of the world of Hogwarts.

Dena (2009) argued the difference in "design and experience of adaptations that are intended to work together to communicate meaning, and are equal points of entry for different audiences" (p. 99), and therefore the distinction between adaptation and expansion should not be so cut and dried. If an adaptation contributes new insight and understanding to the work then it should be regarded as part of extending the overall storyworld even if the narrative itself is not affected. Scolari said adaptations should be considered as a particular form of transmedia narrative and the different languages and semiotics used by the various mediums in their interpretations "is a process of text transformation" (Mungioli, 2011, p. 130).

Jenkins (2009d) admitted he perhaps overemphasised the "newness" element in his excitement of the potential for evolving digital media to extend narratives (para. 11). By 2011, he placed adaptation and extension "as part of a continuum in which both poles are only theoretical possibilities" (Jenkins, 2011, para. 13).

I would also argue it puts an inordinate amount of pressure on both the producer and user if every single element has to be a completely new story that adds more information to the storyworld. A strong adherence to this ideal is difficult to maintain and for users to understand how to follow. The definition highlights an ideal scenario and, in reality, transmedia projects tend to combine both new narratives and adaptations. Therefore the term "contribution" in the definition should also include the enhanced user experience adaptations can provide to the original narrative.

Challenge to researchers, societal and cultural concerns

Even as the exact definition and parameters of transmedia were being argued out, the newness of the concept was also posing a problem for researchers. In the area of political economy, while there are plenty of studies looking into traditional broadcasting financing strategies, researchers are still devising appropriate strategies for transmedia models (Scolari, Bertetti & Freeman, 2014b).

A societal cultural concern transmedia theorists and practitioners are coming to consider is the impact these immersive story universes could have on the user. The question of how far transmedia should be allowed to take immersion and the resultant audience reaction needs to be considered further as practitioners have, by and large, been left to police themselves.

A panicked public reaction to mediums that aspire to realism is not a new phenomenon as the 1938 radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* showed. At the time, despite repeated announcements that the broadcast was fictional, newspapers reported mass panic among the people who had believed the broadcast to be true (Minchew, 2011). Transmedia's use of multiple platforms, some of which intrude on user's personal lives such as receiving text messages, live action pranks and ARGs, goes one step further as fictional content can be mixed in with actual events causing ethical boundaries to be crossed.

Most transmedia projects, such as the creators of the movie *Zootopia* designing 'fake' posters from real films and placing them into their world (Lee, 2017); or the creators of the television show *Dexter* placing the character's face on the cover of fake magazines in racks along with fountains that spewed 'blood' (Miller, 2014), are clearly gimmicks to promote a particular product and make them topical.

Figure 2: *Zootopia* and *Dexter* producers spread their storyworld into the real one with fake posters and magazine covers

But the campaign for the movie *A Cure for Wellness* campaign went a step further by creating fake news websites and articles that took advantage of the climate of uncertainty in a time of alternative facts. While an advertisement for the film was placed close to the article, the 'news' itself did not highlight its fraudulent nature relying far too much on the intelligence of the user to make the connection. The fake news spread to real news sites and even a fact-checking website did not realise it had been duped (Dibdin, 2017; Solomon, 2017). While the creators of the campaign were simply taking advantage of the cultural trend of fake news (the film itself was about a fake cure that actually made people sicker) it showed how transmedia's deliberate mix of fiction with reality forces users to move back and forth between the two. Sometimes they simply do not recognise the difference.
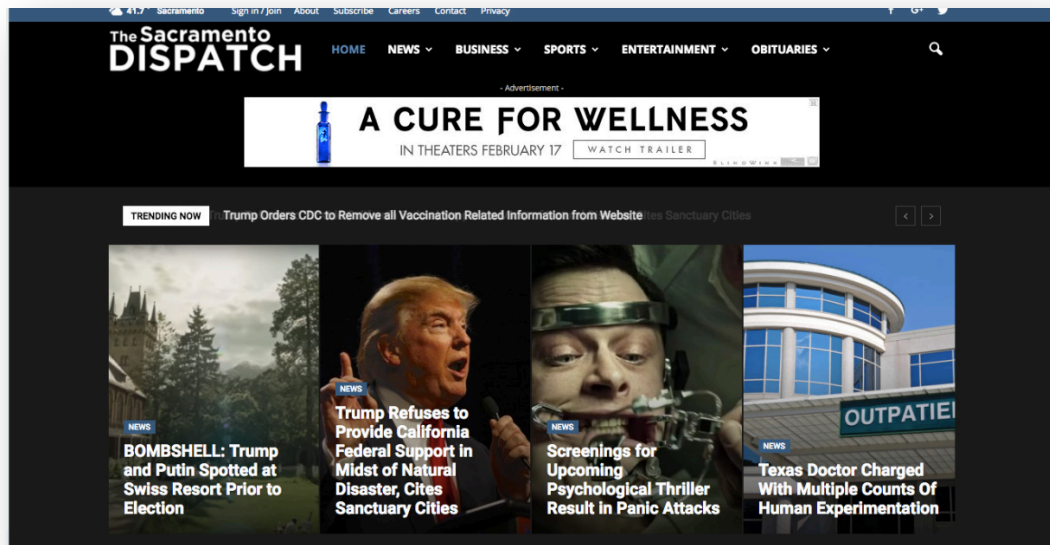
Figure 3: *A Cure for Wellness* used fake news as part of its transmedia campaign

In an interview with Jenkins (2015c), Tenderich said the use of sarcasm, parody and humour in storytelling means the ethical standard is not whether the content is truthful or not but whether it has the potential to be deceptive. Therefore, whether it is a fictional or non-fictional form of transmedia storytelling, designers have the ethical responsibility to not deliberately deceive. At the same time it is also up to the user to know when the storyworld has become too immersive and take a step back.

Transmedia narratives are also proving a challenge to media scholars who are used to using monomediatic approaches and analysing the specific semiotics of individual media. The usual method of looking at how individual mediums convey information in a comparison competitive relationship is not applicable to multi-modal narratives that are textually fragmented across different platforms. As this convergence looks set to continue, it is no longer possible to analyse different media in isolation from one another (Scolari, 2013; Ryan, 2004b).

In his research into the transmedia practices of the television series *Lost*, Scolari (2013) also discovered several of the new digital formats were not receiving the same level of attention from academics as others:

> … both narratological and semiological approaches should get to work on a deeper analysis of the new formats, … Unfortunately, nanotextualities have only been recognized as a scientific object when they have been published in a book, while short audiovisual formats like mobisodes or Twittering often remain out of academic sight (p. 64).

It is not possible when studying transmedia projects to only look at certain aspects of it. To fully comprehend how these narratives are created and meaning is constructed there needs to be a greater understanding of how this integrated effect by different semiotic languages and mediums is being communicated.

Writing in a transmedia environment

But the question remained of exactly how transmedia storytelling projects were being developed and the affect it was having on basic narrative concepts, such as linearity and closure. With almost every entertainment franchise including transmedia strategies as a norm (Mittell, 2014), an evolution was occurring in the way narratives were being designed and able to develop. Instead of having to think in terms of traditional linear sequential storylines with a specific end goal in mind, interactivity has opened up a network of possibilities that can veer off in many directions. The comfort of closure has also vanished replaced with endless possibilities and the ability to interact with the producer and other users.

Looking closely at Jenkins's definition and its affect on the narrative being told, several things stand out. The story is fragmented yet must retain a level of linearity so as not to confuse the casual user, while simultaneously create enough interest across the mediums to excite and immerse the

involved user. The individual stories are told via different mediums – words, audio/visual, photos, games – over a variety of platforms, with the stories themselves possibly only having a tenuous connection with one another but adding to the overarching narrative in a ever-spreading web-like structure. There is also an assumption that one medium is not to take precedence over another with all the fragments of the narrative being equally important in contributing to the overall story, an ideal that is difficult to build and sustain.

The seven core concepts and why they matter

Jenkins's ideas for transmedia storytelling were explained in a chapter entitled "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and Transmedia Storytelling" (2006). The name came from the director's cut of the film *Blade Runner* where the discovery of an origami unicorn changed the perception of a character. To Jenkins, this was an emblem of the core principles shaping understanding of transmedia storytelling – a twist in the tale that might contradict or change the arc of the main narrative.

In 2009, he used the same idea to explain seven core concepts for theorists and practitioners to use when designing and analysing transmedia projects. While he wrote them to evaluate transmedia storytelling for entertainment franchises, they are still relevant when applied to a range of transmedia projects, especially transmedia branding.

Below are the seven core concepts Jenkins outlined over two blog posts (2009d, 2009e):

1. *Spreadability v drillability*

Spreadability refers to the ability of a project to attract users and engage actively with the content even on the most basic level. However, Mittell (n.d.) proposed a countervailing principle that he called "drillability" – projects which have been designed to encourage viewers to dig deeper to

understand a complex story. Spreadable media encourages horizontal engagement, while drillable media provides more depth for users willing to put in the effort.

2. *Continuity v Multiplicity*

Continuity helps user's frame the coherence and plausibility of the storyworld by maintaining the same look and feel, and characteristics across the multiple mediums. Multiplicity allows either the producer or the users the freedom to explore and expand on ideas the main narrative would probably not touch.

3. *Immersion v extractability*

These concepts relates to the relationship the user has with the fictional world and their everyday reality. Immersion refers to the cognitive ability of the user to build up a storyworld in their own mind, as well as real life engagement, such as visiting a theme park. Extractability describes the desire to take parts of the storyworld into the user's own life such as by collecting merchandise.

4. *Worldbuilding*

This concept was raised in the literature review as the ability of the user to cognitively build up a storyworld as opposed to simply building up a narrative. However, Jenkins looks at it from a producer's point of view referring to the way they provide minute details about the storyworld which users enjoy finding out about. This concept is linked to what theorist Murray (1997) called the "encyclopaedic impulse" behind interactive narratives – the desire of users to map and master as much as they can know about such universes and being rewarded by finding out more (p. 111).

5. *Seriality*

Seriality is the ability to lead the user across multiple mediums and multiple instalments. Users have the cognitive ability to piece together what Marc Ruppel (2012) referred to as "migratory cues". These are prompts that allow the user to "process, internalize and project the narrative information of one site and blend it with the information found in another site" (p. 62).

Information design issues in seriality include how to reward users who sought out more content while not penalising those who did not; understanding what motivates users to 'drill' around more information; and conceptualising each element as both an individual narrative and a promotion for the larger storyworld (Freeman, 2017).

6. *Subjectivity*

The use of multiple mediums allows for exploration of more dimensions of the storyworld including the experiences and perspectives of secondary characters and broadening timelines to include backstories. These activities have a double aim – provide more content that could not fit into the main narrative and whet user appetite for more.

7. *Performance*

This aspect looks at how users can actively engage with the storyworld as they move from basic engagement to sharing their experiences and emotions with other users. This includes interacting with other users online and fan-made extensions such as videos and memes.

The rise of the mothership

Among all this analysis of what transmedia storytelling projects need to include and how they should engage users, the basic question remains of

just how many narratives need to be told at any one time. I believe this depends on the motivation, aim and the value being placed on the narrative throughout the project. Projects can have separate disjointed stories placed over individual mediums that then need to be pieced together or there can be one overarching storyworld with information provided about it on every medium. This means the producers either creates one linear narrative and makes it fit into a non-linear framework or have one main narrative platform and let the others 'feed' off it. Jenkins's definition, rather interestingly, makes it an either/or proposition.

While much is made of the non-linear nature of transmedia storytelling the sequential nature of storytelling is so deep rooted the demands of narrative may push transmedia narratives to a more linear structure (Stackelberg, 2011). But this is not referring to reading one long story in the wrong order and the subsequent confusion, but looking at individual aspects of a story where technically each element is one narrative in its own right.

As Freeman's (2017) analysis of the impact of industrial and media practices on transmedia storytelling showed, narratives can also gradually develop and expand across mediums as the market warrants. This has led to what Jenkins called the "mothership approach" – one core platform as the foci of the narrative that is then extended into other platforms according to user response (Jenkins, 2014, p. 246).

On the surface, the mothership model looks like a viable one as it does not demand too much of the audience while building and rewarding user engagement regardless of the level of commitment. The concern is having user response as the reason for how and why extensions are produced leading to any extensions being marketing opportunities rather than a chance to expand the narrative. This is despite the fact transmedia storytelling should be about providing additional content rather than as part of a promotional strategy.

While not ideal for franchises that are more concerned with providing a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience" I would argue the mothership format is perfect for transmedia branding which focuses on emphasising the core elements of the brand rather than providing entertainment.

Advent of transmedia branding

Transmedia storytelling research has primarily concentrated on analysing entertainment franchises but transmedia concepts and ideas are also present in the world of marketing and branding. While providing an entertainment experience compared to a branding one requires differing aims and motivations, the way in which corporations are doing transmedia storytelling deserves closer examination as they take techniques perfected in the creative industries and adapt them to their own needs.

If transmedia branding is about imbuing the brand with values then, from a semiotic perspective, the brand itself is a discourse and a narrative (Scolari, 2009). The depth of the narrative also needs to be considered as transmedia storytelling's intertextuality is not necessarily required, as one core brand narrative needs to be hammered home with constant repetition. At the same time, the spreadability factor needs to be high as various entry points are used to entice different audiences.

So rather than users being bombarded with many brand messages, one main message is used to engage them via participation, direct interaction, content creation or becoming part of the story themselves. Participation is a vital aspect of this as brand loyalty is deepened by something users have invested time and resources in (Tenderich, 2014).

One challenge however goes to the heart of what transmedia narratives should provide. The nature of transmedia is to allow users to engage as little or as much as they want without missing out on key aspects, but this jars with the point of branding which is to spread the word as far and wide

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as possible. This goes back to Jenkins's spreadability vs drillability concept. With transmedia branding spreadability is key. If the brand narrative is strong enough, the project can afford to have a low drillability factor. So while the narrative surrounding the brand value must be deep-seated and strongly recognised, the project itself does not need to be. In the same way migratory cues allow users to absorb prompts from one narrative and blend them with another, they can also take the values of the brand across campaigns.

The role of narrative and storyworld development in transmedia branding, how deeply the brand needs to be entrenched to achieve proper spreadability and, in particular, the way users are understanding and interacting with these brand narratives, will all be looked at via a case study in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 − Macy's Inc. *Believe* Campaign

In this chapter, I analyse user participation in a transmedia branding campaign as well as conducting a critical textual and visual analysis of selected user-made extensions and comments connected to it. The case study was chosen as a prime example of transmedia branding as, according to Tenderich's definition, it uses multiple delivery channels for the evolving narrative in a coordinated fashion in order to provide different user experiences. At the same time, a separate storyworld with a strong emotional narrative was developed and has continued to evolve over the years.

US-based department store Macy's Inc. began its *Believe* Christmas campaign in 2008 and has sustained and gradually included more storytelling elements over different mediums in the nine years since then. At the centre of the campaign is the 1897 letter written to the *New York Sun* (a prominent New York newspaper at the time), by eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon asking about the existence of Santa.

Figure 4: Virginia's story provided the core narrative for the *Believe* campaign

The answering editorial, written by Francis Church, extolling the need for belief in the unseen and a universal recognition of the importance of faith, has become the most reprinted English-language newspaper editorial and popularised the phrase "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" (Vinciguerra, 1997).

Macy's has consistently referenced the ideals laid out in the editorial throughout *Believe's* nine years as the inspiration for the campaign. I think the heart of the editorial, and therefore the campaign, can be found in the following paragraph which equates Santa with love, generosity and devotion and how these attributes enrich life:

> He (Santa Claus) exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! ... There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence.

The letter and editorial are reproduced in full in Appendix 1.

Believe's 2008 launch began with newspaper advertisements showing reprints of the letter and the reply along with blank forms for children to use to write their own letters to Santa. Special in-store *Believe* stations for children to write and post their letters alongside *Believe* Meters accompanied these. A $1 donation (all amounts in this study are in US$) was made to the Make-A-Wish charity for every letter posted (Ramirez, 2008).

In 2009, a 30-minute animated film was created telling Virginia's story (Macy's, Inc. 2009a) with the company managing to incorporate aspects of the *Believe* campaign in the form of a *Believe* Meter and images of the original Macy's store which Virginia visits (Parpis, 2009). While the New York store itself was around in 1897, *Believe* certainly was not, so its

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incorporation is there to build awareness and help users tie it to the campaign. Since then the film has been broadcast every Christmas in what is a clear effort to invent a tradition and turn it in a holiday classic.

While a *Believe* sitelet had been set up in 2008, the campaign only went truly digital from 2010. This included a Facebook game in 2010 and a Believe-o-Magic app in 2011 that allowed users to include a virtual Virginia in their photos taken at the *Believe* letter writing station (Macy's, Inc. 2010a, Macy's, Inc. 2011a). In 2013, the campaign set up #macysbelieve for users to share their images or videos taken at the letter writing stations with selected ones being used in a Macy's television commercial (Macy's, Inc. 2013a). But it was not until 2014 the mechanism to write and 'send' letters to Santa online via the sitelet was created (Macy's, Inc. 2014b). In 2015, an interactive stylus and app was launched alongside a three-minute film that was primarily shown on the sitelet (Macy's, Inc. 2015c) and 2016's *The Santa Project* was conducted solely via online platforms (Macy's, Inc. 2016a).

Offline events have included an annual National Believe Day and Santa tour, a programme for schools to put on their own *Yes, Virginia The Musical* and related in-store merchandise. But one constant fixture throughout the years has been the letter writing activity and the in-store *Believe* stations. This highlights the importance of the original narrative from which the campaign was inspired and the immersive worldbuilding and performance aspects which the stations provide.

Overall, the campaign has included more than 15 different mediums to develop and communicate the *Believe* narrative showcasing a variety of touch points and reaching out to different users. A full timeline of the mediums used and the main activities engaged in is in Appendix 2.

Methodology and limitations of the study

Given transmedia storytelling is so heavily dependant on user participation, the methodology employed explored two aspects – how the storyworld and narrative was created and developed, and the way users have chosen to consume the storyline.

As neither definition highlights audience interaction, an aspect which I think is vital to both the telling and consumption of narratives, a qualitative analysis of the campaign's evolution was conducted based on Jenkins's seven core concepts of transmedia storytelling, a methodology which has been employed in examining transmedia branding campaigns as well as a real-life transmedia project (Tenderich & Williams, 2015; Kerrigan & Velikovsky, 2006). A critical analysis of Christmas folklore and the depiction of Santa particularly in the late 19th century are also included to show how Macy's has used these cultural tropes and ideas to develop *Believe's* storyworld and narrative.

In order to show what aspects of *Believe* users have engaged with and how they have chosen to consume the campaign, I have conducted a qualitative critical textual and visual analysis of online data. This included images, videos and comments taken from the #santaproject Twitter account, the #macysbelieve Instagram account, and the video and photo album section of the official Macy's Facebook page. I summarised what Macy's itself says are the values of the *Believe* campaign and analysed whether the user response reflects this understanding and to what depth of drillability.

I realise the consumption aspect is highly subjective as it is impossible to know whether users lacked interest or simply lacked the resources to engage, as it is clearly easier to 'like' a Facebook page than to produce an entire school play. However it was possible to discover the level of basic user engagement being undertaken by analysing specific fan-made extensions and comments. I also included the numbers of "expressions of

belief" where possible (Macy's Inc., 2016c, para. 4). These include the number of comments, likes and shares for videos and images, the number of Instagram and Twitter posts and the number of Youtube views of relevant videos placed on the official Macy's channel.

User engagement was categorised and identified using transmedia practitioner Steve Coulson's pyramid model of "skimmers, dippers and divers" which he used to define the level of user interaction and the propensity to engage (Hassler-Forest, 2016 p. 688). According to his model, I have identified "skimmers" as having minimal contact such as visiting a writing station and taking a photo. "Dippers" take further action such as designing a photo montage, while "divers" go one step further by creating their own narratives such as shooting a video or creating a meme. Fanmade extensions by "divers" were analysed based on Tenderich's scrutiny of similar extensions of how they expanded the original narrative and brought it into the user's world (Tenderich, 2014).

I have used critical textual and visual analysis to conduct the analysis on the basis of a long history in media and cultural studies that argue it is an effective way to identify how meaning is created and how certain 'realities' are perpetuated. While understanding that no single interpretation of a text can reveal a universal truth (McKee, 2003) I also drew on the field of semiotics to strengthen my analysis of the signs and symbols within each visual.

I was particularly interested to discover where and when users were propagating alternative narratives. Transmedia research has predominately regarded interactivity as a positive concept because of its inherent audience empowerment ability. This has led researchers Scolari and Indrek Ibrus to believe this indicates not enough has been done to analyse how users "approach, use, and consume transmedia texts and how the complex interactions between audiences, texts, technologies, and institutions shape the evolution of contemporary media systems" (Scolari & Ibrus, 2014, p. 2,196). As transmedia branding projects rely heavily on inculcating a

positive feeling towards the brand, the interactivity exists in order to support the dominant narrative. So one of the components of the analysis looked at the way negative comments are treated – whether they are regarded as outliers, ignored or subsumed into the dominant narrative.

Over the nine years *Believe* has been running, the campaign has involved millions of users and it is clearly only possible for this study to do a qualitative analysis of a small number of the user interactions it has generated. Identifying a representative sample of *Believe* users via a quantitative survey would require prohibitive logistics and resource support. The data such a survey would provide was also unlikely to be useful as what this study analysing is the quality of user engagement rather than the quantity.

Therefore, this study does not provide a representative sample of these millions of users. Rather, it gathers a carefully prepared snapshot of key moments, visuals and comments throughout the nine years.

Mythmaking of *Believe*

In order to understand *Believe*, it is first necessary to understand the background to both the Macy's brand and the myths and ideas the campaign is based on. Macy's itself has developed a reputation for philanthropy by sponsoring fundraisers such as the annual Shop for a Cause event. It was natural for *Believe* to not just be a Christmas campaign but an opportunity to raise money for a well-known charity. But *Believe* also feeds into the concept of Macy's being a socially responsible company that sponsors annual charity events as well as long-standing community and national traditions such as the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, Fourth of July Fireworks and animated window displays for Christmas (Macy's, Inc., 2017). All of these help to promote Macy's in a positive light as a socially aware company.

The core narrative of writing letters was inspired by Virginia's story but Macy's itself has expanded the overarching theme and narrative of *Believe* into a greater idea of what Christmas should be about. By analysing the press releases issued by Macy's from 2008 to 2016, several main themes emerge: encouraging acts of kindness and goodwill particularly during the festive season, the virtue of generosity and keeping faith in the continuance of the Christmas spirit (Parpis, 2009; Elliott, 2012; Macy's, Inc., 2015b, 2016b).

Church's editorial was also used as inspiration:

> More than 115 years after that famous essay was penned, Church's words (love, generosity and devotion) still resonate and remind us all to believe in the power of childhood wonder, hope and generosity – cornerstones of the *Believe* campaign (Macy's, Inc., 2013a, para. 3).

But these concepts are quite esoteric and difficult to define. While the concept of sowing love, generosity and devotion is admirable, it is hardly a tangible one. The overriding narrative of a little girl posting a letter was used as the starting point for the letter writing stations, but it was difficult to see how and where it could be extended. So the 2016 campaign included another element – encouraging belief in Santa especially in the younger generation. In *The Santa Project* users were asked to "fill the Internet with positive affirmations of belief" by posting photos, messages or videos on official Macy's social media channels to "show their beliefs" (Macy's, Inc., 2016a, para. 1). Rather than just believing in a vague unseeable concept, the campaign was expanded to expressing belief in a specific entity, albeit not a real person.

By including Santa, Macy's now had a proper entity on which the cornerstones of the *Believe* campaign could be pinned as the mythology of the Santa figure also depicts him as the embodiment of kindness and generosity. And by believing in Santa, you believe in the ideals set out in

Church's editorial. Instead of telling users they should believe, Macy's also issued a call to action by asking users to express that belief in a palpable fashion. During my analysis, particularly of items on *The Santa Project* Twitter feed, I was interested to see how users interpreted that request.

Folklore of Santa and Christmas

Macy's also drew heavily on traditional ideas of Christmas and the Santa myth that are already inherent in the US culture in developing the underlying mythos of *Believe*. The lyrical words and imagery evoked by the 1823 poem by Clement Clarke Moore called *A Visit from St. Nicholas* inspired many of the ideas associated to the atmosphere of Christmas (See Appendix 3 for the full poem). Also known as *The Night Before Christmas*, the poem contains the Christmas traditions of excited anticipation by hanging stockings by the fire, sleigh filled with presents and happy children. Most importantly for this study, the portrayal of Santa Claus was also established as a twinkling, rosy-cheeked jolly man in the red suit rather than the saintly image of St Nicholas (Weinstein, 2005). The Santa myths the poem establishes, such as the present leaving and a reindeer-drawn sleigh, last to this day.

By the end of the 19th century when Virginia wrote her letter, the comforting ideas of Santa Claus, Christmas, family and gifts, would have been an established trope. This gives her letter added poignancy and led to Church's railing against the "scepticism of a sceptical age" which has caused a little girl to question something which instead should be enriching her childhood and imagination. Macy's links back to this idea in *The Santa Project* when they refer to the rise of negativity on the Internet and, similarly, said it affects children the most. In this way, Macy's has developed an idea of what *Believe* is about by associating it with the original editorial and giving it the same attributes of positivity, happiness and a childlike faith in the unseen.

Believe storyworld and narrative grows

While users are encouraged to immerse themselves in the _Believe_ world by writing a letter and taking virtual photos with Virginia and her friends, it is difficult to see where there is area for the narrative to develop. Instead the storyworld relies on a shared mental image or emotion to create a shared feeling of worldness. Klastrup and Tosca's (2004) idea of a common mythos ie heritage or myth, can be seen in the way Macy's has appropriated common ideas associated with Christmas and Santa Claus.

Storyworlds also create their own explicit rules and implicit ethics, what Klastrup and Tosca (2004) refer to as an ethos. This is a moral code of behaviour which characters in the world are supposed to follow, and helps users understand how they should behave themselves when they become immersed in the storyworld. _Believe_ has developed a strong ethos and set of 'rules' such as believing Santa delivers gifts at Christmas and users can write to him and he answers these requests. And this even includes where he lives as Gadget the Elf journeys to the North Pole to 'deliver' a wish list. Without these established ideas, and users buying into them, _Believe_ would simply fall apart.

The _Believe_ storyworld also works on the user's knowledge of seminal Christmas myths and the overall atmosphere evoked by the traditions and heritage of the festive season. Even if the user has no real mental image of the world of 1897 or understanding of the Virginia story, a basic knowledge of Christmas traditions is all that is required to follow the storyworld.

The basic 'action' narrative is very simple – a little girl posted a letter that inspired a famous newspaper editorial. However from there, I believe, Macy's developed an 'emotional' narrative which allowed them to include the feelings, atmosphere and spirit that Christmas is meant to inspire. While the 'action' narrative has barely been extended, it is in the

'emotional' narrative where the expansion of the campaign has really progressed. Christmas feelings, atmosphere and spirit are impossible to specifically define, so Macy's is free to provide their own interpretation. Macy's is technically not selling a product but rather a concept of Christmas. As long as the campaign does not stray too far from these concepts, they are free to create new storylines, projects and characters that can expand and exist alongside Virginia. These include *The Santa Project*, National Believe Day and Gadget the Elf's journey to visit Santa.

They sustained the storyworld by including a different emotional element each year with on and offline interactive elements, while maintaining the main storyline of the Virginia letter and the *Believe* stations. This helped keep the universally important nostalgic old-time look and feel of Virginia's time period. This is possibly why users were not able to send e-letters until the world record attempt in 2014. Once the campaign had been established using more traditional print and television advertisements and in-store events, it was safe to expand it online. More technology aspects were included with social media contests, apps and a special writing stylus. Ironically, the 2015 commercial to promote the Wish Writer Stylus lamented the use of technology instead of talking to one another (Pasquarelli, 2015).
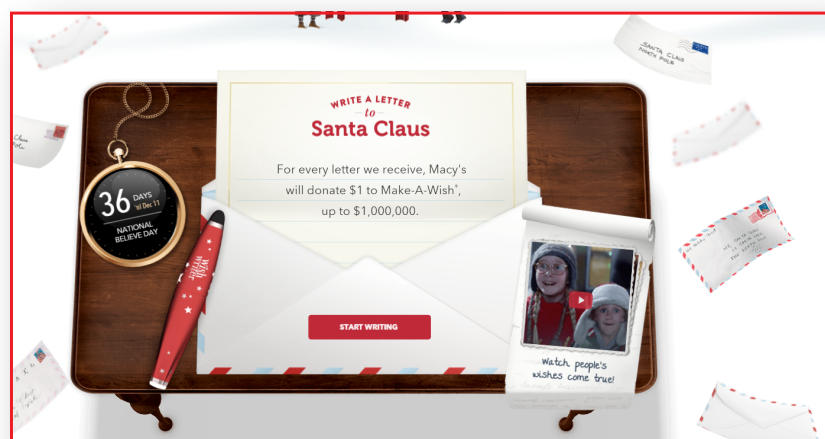
Figure 5: *Believe* finally utilised more online platforms from 2014 onwards

Jenkins's 'mothership' medium (the core platform for the narrative) is the letter writing stations, with adaptations being used to expand the storyworld. These include an animated special in 2010, a *Yes, Virginia The Musical* in 2012 to encourage schools to stage their own productions and a *Yes, Virginia in Concert* in 2013. Transmedia branding campaigns have the challenge of needing to sustain a heavy level of spreadability so any extension to the narrative must be easy to access, consume and understand.

But any additional information must also fulfil a core condition of successful transmedial storytelling: they must reward users who consume them without punishing those who do not. Macy's achieves half of the objective – users who only take part in selected aspects are not disadvantaged. But nor is there any reward for following every medium and taking part in every activity.

Figure 6: *Yes, Virginia The Musical* adapted the core narrative to expand the overall storyworld

Unlike entertainment franchises where knowledge communities share and build up their knowledge of storylines, *Believe* does not have a similar fan

community or, frankly, the complex narrative required for discussion. What it relies on is user participation, immersion and spreadability to help the campaign along.

It also needs to create a delicate balance between being a marketing campaign complete with commercials and merchandise, and keeping the magical atmosphere of the storyworld. Anything that takes advantage of user's belief system by being too commercial, such as charging to send a letter, would impinge on its integrity. Instead, Macy's is regarded as generous for donating to the Make-A-Wish charity for every letter. The question of what actually happens to the millions of letters being sent every year is also never addressed – the point is to send the letter with belief in your heart, not to actually wonder where it ends up.

Believe's core concepts

The core concept of storyworld building for *Believe* has previously been mentioned, so the remaining six are mentioned below:

1. *Spreadability v drillability*

Spreadability is about expanding the number of users or at least the number of people who know about the campaign. This criterion is satisfied through traditional advertising via print and television, *Believe* sitelet and other social media presence, the airing of the *Yes, Virginia* animated special and the in-store promotion.

Users can drill down into the campaign by downloading the activity guide, using the Believe-o-Magic app to include a virtual Virginia in personal photos, or taking part in the school programme by producing a *Yes, Virginia The Musical*.

Figure 7: The Believe-o-Magic app was introduced to allow users to include a virtual Virginia in personal photos

2. *Continuity v multiplicity*

Continuity is maintained by the same aesthetic look and feel across the mediums including the letter writing stations that are replicated in every Macy's store. But this also includes the school musical programme that requires users to download the script, songs, backdrops, and even acting videos to ensure constancy in every production.

Multiplicity ie looking at the same issue from differing points of view, is almost non-existent. Only one point of view, Virginia's, is given and even Church's editorial, which is recited in full in the animated special, is heard in her voice.

3. *Immersion v extractability*

Visiting the *Believe* letter writing stations and sending a letter creates immersion. Taking a photo at the station and downloading the Believe-o-Magic app to include a virtual Virginia in this photo, takes this one step further as she 'appears' alongside the user.

Figure 8: A range of *Believe* merchandise allows users to expand the storyworld into their home

Extractability can be seen in the merchandise on offer including the book and DVD of the animated special, a Virginia doll, Christmas tree ornaments and stocking. These mementos allow users to bring aspects of the *Believe* world into their Christmas celebrations and link their own festivities to the campaign.

4. *Seriality*

There is very little seriality of the main Virginia narrative as the basic 'action' storyline has nowhere to expand. However, by allowing an 'emotional' narrative to evolve there is more room for the story to be dispersed. This requires the extensions to no longer be part of the main storyline but simply work to expand the emotional aspects of *Believe*. These include 2016's *The Santa Project* and Gadget the Elf's journey in 2014, which shows the letters being taken to Santa's home.

5. *Subjectivity*

Believe attempts very little subjectivity as the main narrative with Virginia has to stay prominent throughout. Only the main emotional narrative of

Believe allows for some secondary points of view, such as the television ads featuring children providing their perspectives on Santa, going to Macy's to mail letters and learning about the power of granting wishes. These perspectives all highlight the core emotional narrative of *Believe* – encouraging acts of kindness and generosity and believing in the spirit of Christmas.

6. *Performance*

Macy's has provided several active opportunities for user participation including online contests, a Facebook game and requests for photos/videos for chances to appear in Macy's promotions. Even without being actively asked, users engage of their own accord by posting photos of visits to the letter writing station. But Macy's also helps this along by providing special hashtags for these images to be grouped together, and the company even ask if they can use images in their advertising.

Figure 9: Macy's engages with users by requesting photos for advertising

Performance can also be seen in the literal sense via the school musical programme, but also in the act of visiting the *Believe* stations where users can mimic the same letter writing and sending act Virginia did in 1897.

So whilst it is true that each medium used in *Believe* may not present a totally different narrative within the story universe, each one extends and expands the scope of the storyworld by introducing different overlapping characters and events. These overlaps are necessary to maintain consistency but also help to keep continuity by providing new ways of accessing the story universe. While it is obvious the mediums do not offer separate unique contributions to the narrative, they do work to expand the scope of the storyworld and add some depth.

***Believe* data and analysis**

In the next section I have analysed the user feedback on the main social media platforms Macy's has used to promote *Believe*. These are Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, with two hashtags – #macysbelieve and #santaproject – being heavily used to post comments, images and videos. A full breakdown of the user feedback is available in Appendix 4.

I have also used the data to conduct a critical analysis from a purely transmedia storytelling point of view using Jenkins's core concepts as a guide. While *Believe* follows Tenderich's definition of a transmedia branding project, I also wanted to discover just how well it had performed in delineating its storyworld to the user.

Firstly, I analysed the information Macy's itself was willing to provide on the outcome of the campaign. For this aspect I had to rely on publically available data such as press releases. The only statistic the company has provided every year so far is the announcements of the Make-A-Wish donation. So far, the campaign has reached its $1 million goal every year (Macy's, Inc., 2008b, 2009a, 2010a, 2011b, 2012d, 2013a, 2013b, 2016b).

However, the annual donation is *up to* $1 million. The yearly amount also includes special promotions on National Believe Day, with additional funds

also being donated from the sales of the Believe-o-Magic app and the Wish Writer stylus. This makes it impossible to use the donation amount as an accurate reflection of the number of letters written.

The only number that is definite was the 2014 Guinness World Record attempt for the longest wish list to Santa that consisted of wishes collected via online letters. This was officially recorded at 121,138 (Lynch, 2015). At no other time did Macy's issue a statement providing a specific number of the letters written.

In 2016, the company said "nearly $13 million had been donated through the *Believe* campaign" (Macy's, Inc., 2016b, para. 2). Averaged out over the previous eight years, this means $1.6 million had been raised annually, easily surpassing the goal of $1 million.

So it can be seen the basic goal of writing and posting letters to Santa has been understood and absorbed by users. However, as will be shown later on, the connection with the Virginia narrative is not so clearly understood.

#macysbelieve Instagram analysis

URL: www.instagram.com/explore/tags/macysbelieve/?hl=en

I chose to analyse the #macysbelieve Instagram feed as this hashtag was used to distinguish the posts from ones related to general Macy's or *The Santa Project*. Though overlap did occur as users used multiple hashtags on their posts, *Believe* campaign imagery was evident throughout.

Because the #macysbelieve Instagram feed has 9,416 items, date parameters were applied to make the analysis more manageable. I chose the date of the 2016 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade the 25 November as the starting point up to the most recent one on 12 July, 2017 (as of 1 August, 2017). During that period, 693 posts were added to the Instagram feed.
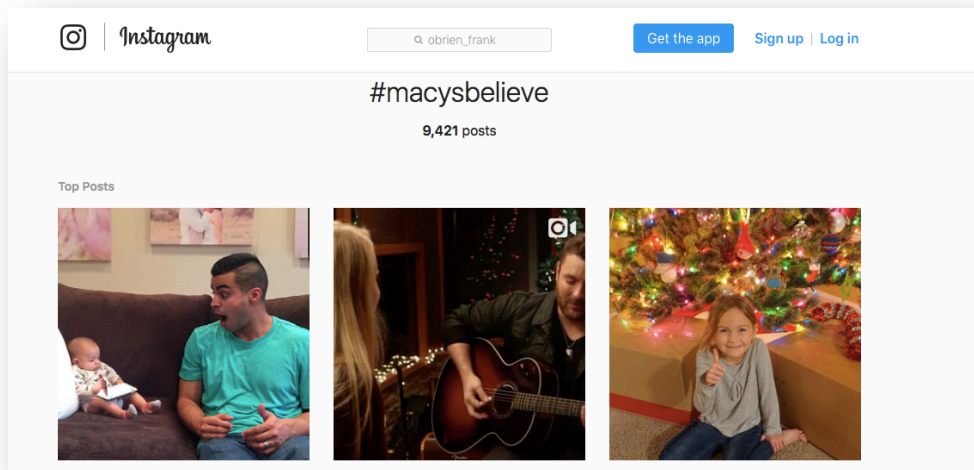
Figure 10: Macy's provides platforms for users to engage with each other such as the #macysbelieve Instagram feed

The posts were then categorised twice over: according to basic content and the amount of effort the user had put into preparing it. In deciding content I looked at whether a *Believe* element had been added such as the logo or the writing station, whether they were non-*Believe* but festive such as a Christmas tree, contained neither element or were deliberately subversive against the *Believe* campaign.

In deciding what is a skimmer, dipper or diver, I considered the amount of thought and effort that had gone into preparing the image or video. For instance, a photo taken at the *Believe* writing station is a skimmer, a photo of someone who has dressed up in Christmas gear to take the photo or created a montage would be a dipper while a user who had created a video or meme would be a diver. While content was important here it was not the main consideration as a post that was deliberately incorrect or subversive could also have required a great deal of effort and preparation. The "neither" category included those with no festive or *Believe* content but were not deliberately subversive.

A breakdown of the number of posts and the categories are below:

Category	Number
Posts with *Believe* component	404 (58.2%)
Posts with Christmas/festive component but no *Believe* element	198 (28.5%)
Posts with neither element	91 (13.1%)
Posts deliberately incorrect/subversive	0
Skimmers	588 (84.8%)
Dippers	67 (9.6%)
Divers	38 (5.4%)

Analysis:

The majority of skimmers took photos of themselves at the letter writing station, writing or posting letters, the *Believe* logo outside the store or the Make-A-Wish logo. As was expected, the vast majority are skimmers who took and posted photos of *Believe*-related activity and material, as that is the easiest action to take. The storyworld simply does not have enough material to provide room for narrative expansion.

Dippers were mainly montages of photos while divers primarily did videos of children posting their letter. The divers also include promotional videos done by the Make-A-Wish charity that obviously has a vested interest in the campaign being a success.
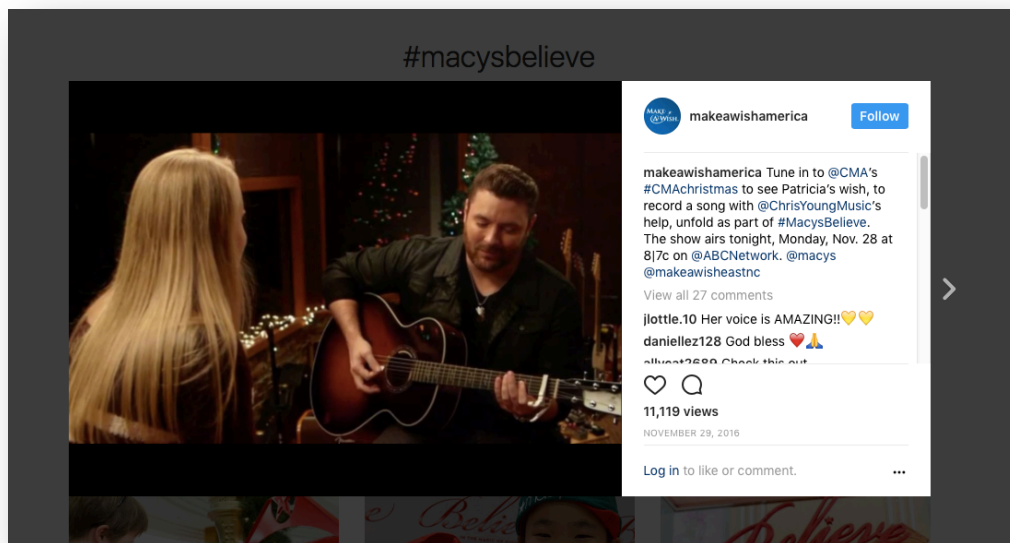
Figure 11: Deep immersive activity by users includes videos from the Make-A-Wish charity

How this fits into the narrative:

As 86% of the posts relate to *Believe* or contain a festive element it is clear the Santa letter writing element of the narrative is understood. However, the connection with Virginia has been completely bypassed as she does not appear.

The question is whether users understand the nostalgic old-fashioned look and feel of the stations themselves as coming from the Virginia narrative, or simply think it is part of the idea of letter writing itself as being an antiquated idea. Macy's could simply have set up the stations without the Virginia context and users would still have taken part.

#santaproject Twitter analysis

URL: twitter.com/hashtag/santaproject?lang=en

I chose to analyse the #santaproject Twitter feed as the hashtag was promoted by Macy's as part of the launch of *The Santa Project* campaign in 2016 (Macy's, Inc. (2016a).
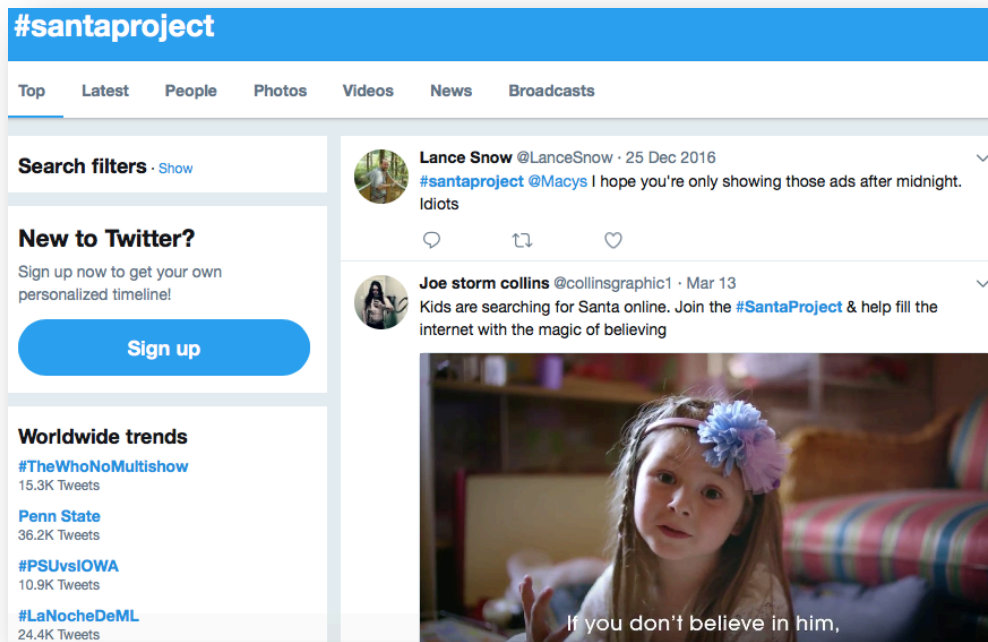
Figure 12: #santaproject Twitter feed is a platform for users to interact and exchange views

Once again I applied date parameters to make the analysis more manageable, so only posts from 14 November, 2016 (the date *The Santa Project* was launched) to the most recent post on 13 March, 2017 (as of 1 August, 2017) were included in the analysis. During that period, 2,292 posts were added to the Twitter feed.

As with the #macysbelieve Instagram account in deciding what was a skimmer, dipper or diver, I considered the amount of preparation, thought and effort that went into preparing the image or video. Retweets or shares, regardless of content, were categorised as skimmers as this is a basic action and the user had not actually prepared the post in question.

Companies and organisations also took part by posting links to advertisements and products and I decided to include them in the count. This is because some highlighted the importance of believing in Santa such as a video by IBM Watson, as well as Macy's *The Santa Project*

advertising. If the advertisement was irrelevant they were included under the wrong category.

A breakdown of the number of posts and the categories are below:

Category	Number
Posts with *The Santa Project* component	1,853 (80.8%)
Posts with Christmas/festive component but no *The Santa Project* element	165 (7%)
Posts with neither element	71 (3%)
Posts deliberately incorrect/subversive	203 (8.8%)
Skimmers	2,117 (92%)
Dippers	56 (2.4%)
Divers	119 (5.1%)

Analysis:

There is a higher percentage of subversive posts and I believe this is because *The Santa Project* issues a specific call to action – "fill the Internet with positive affirmations of belief" (Macy's, Inc., 2016a, para. 1). This provided users with the opportunity to either go along with the idea or push back against it by using subversive comments or memes. Critical comments were largely about the affect of the campaign on children, the alternative narrative of the religious aspect of Christmas and the deceptive aspect of Santa.

The majority of the divers are videos of users explaining why they believe in Santa and are basically an adaptation of the Macy's commercial. As users have been provided with something they can mimic as an example, it meant they seldom bothered to explore the storyworld beyond those boundaries.

How this fits into the narrative:

The majority of users buy into the ethos of believing in Santa and keeping that belief alive for children. They also manage to make the connection that even if Santa is not real, what he stands for – the Christmas spirit of kindness and generosity – should be kept alive.

Macy's uses *The Santa Project* to push two narratives. It asks users to "fill the Internet with positive affirmations of belief" and later on the same press release defines that "belief" as "Santa and the Christmas spirit" (Macy's Inc., 2016a para. 1, para. 4). The introduction commercial has children speaking about believing in Santa as a *real* person. To those who reject that idea, Macy's has also created the narrative of Santa as a symbol of festive values of kindness and generosity. So Santa can either by real or he can be a symbol.

However, users who think the campaign is about lying are clearly not able to understand the secondary narrative. This is a constant theme throughout the critical comments I found across all the social media platforms. While the symbolic narrative is harder to convey, it needs to be given more emphasis to appease those who think 'Santa as a real person' is a lie.

The more problematic concern of bringing together a mythical figure and the religious aspects of the Christmas is also raised several times. This is an aspect Macy's deliberately avoids. This is understandable as the campaign is a secular one and needs to appeal to people of all faiths or no

faith. By not responding, the user has room to reject the campaign's ideas, accept both the religious and Santa concepts or accept one or the other.

The deep divers – fan-made extensions

Fan made extensions – videos

1.
URL: https://twitter.com/TUCBIDG/status/805769419376967680

Message from user: "We worked with @Macys to play something special for Santa! Now post your Santa song with #santaproject youtu.be/eV91zpKIOjM #WithPride"

Figure 13: University of Cincinnati Bearcat Bands spell out their belief in Santa

Analysis:

The University of Cincinnati Bearcat Bands play *Jingle Bells* while 'spelling' out "We Believe" which then morphs into "We (heart) Santa".

71

This video originated on the UC Bearcat Bands Twitter and Instagram feeds as well as being posted on the official Macy's Facebook video feed page where it received 8,000 reactions and 658,753 views. The 176 comments were predominantly positive but extolling the ability of the band rather than the campaign or Macy's.

2.
URL: https://www.instagram.com/p/BOcf76EBu3o/?hl=en&taken-by=frankiethefuturemayor

Message from user: "frankiethefuturemayor Disclaimer...if you don't #believe you will now. @nattymali heard something last night and caught this amazing footage. #santa #christmaseve #macysbelieve"
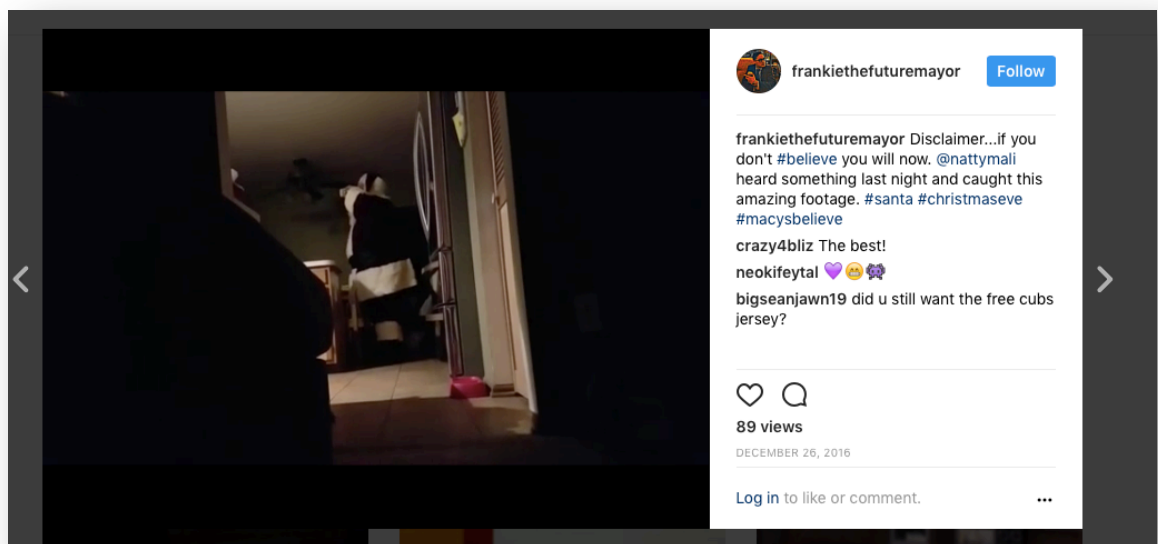
Figure 14: User video encourages belief in Santa

Analysis:

The video shows Santa entering the kitchen and helping himself to the cookies and milk that have been left out for him. He takes his time to look around and does not flinch even when a dog barks. The video is shot from the perspective of someone 'hiding' in the cupboard next to the kitchen to

catch images of Santa visiting. There are only 89 views and three comments left.

3.
URL: https://twitter.com/MattBarry55/status/801834651279048704

Message from user: "He is real! We caught him on camera! @Macys #santaproject"

Figure 15: User video expands the Santa myth of visiting homes

Analysis:

The video shows a hidden camera catching Santa in the act of putting presents under the tree. He spots the camera goes up to it and waves. It shows the humour of 'pretending' to catch an intruder who turns out to be a welcome guest who leaves presents. There are no retweets or comments and only one 'like'.

4.
URL: https://twitter.com/IBM/status/810910153394503680

Message from user: "What does @IBMWatson think about Santa Claus? #SantaProject #MacysPartnership"

Transcript: "Hello my name is Watson. I can analyse billions of facts about holidays. I have learned that the central themes of Christmas are joy, kindness and giving. And that Santa Claus is the embodiment of these sentiments. I would like to let him know that I have been a very good cognitive system this year. Ho, ho, ho."

Figure 16: IBM Watson video provides a technological twist on Santa

Analysis:

This is an interesting take on the narrative as IBM Watson scientifically analyses what Santa should mean and comes up with a conclusion. While it is similar to the other videos expressing belief, it is clever and amusing and showcases the point of view of a cognitive system.

This fits neatly into Macy's narrative of superimposing the Christmas spirit onto Santa Claus, but it ends by buying in to the delivering presents myth, by emphasising IBM Watson has been a "good cognitive system".

How this fits into the narrative:

The majority of the fan-made videos were imitations or adaptations of the Macy's commercial with children saying what Santa means to them. The divers who took the Macy's narrative and put their own spin on it were few and far between, as the clear boundaries of acceptability within the storyworld made adaptations the easiest things to do.

Of the videos mentioned above, the 'visit' ones fulfils the requirement of moving beyond adaptation to bring the narrative into their own world. They are both taken at the user's house, are shown from the user's perspective and show a level of humour based on what the user wishes to show is at the heart of their belief in Santa.

Both users show their understanding of the entrenched myth of a Santa visit and they do not feel the need to explain what Santa is doing as they both assume viewers also share this knowledge. User comments on both the Instagram and Twitter feed following the same ideas of Santa eating the food left out for him and leaving presents under the tree, confirm this is true.

But the videos also build on the childhood wish of seeing Santa as in the *A Visit from St Nicholas* poem. The children in the Macy's introduction video and user comments referencing hearing bells, seeing reindeer prints in the snow or even a glimpse of Santa as he flies across the sky, all link back to this wish. Again, these are well-known concepts related to the Santa myth and is well understood by other users.

The marching band uses their musical talent to fulfil the call to action to create a positive vibe on the Internet. *Jingle Bells* is a well known non-denominational festive song and the two messages "We Believe" and "We (heart) Santa" come directly from Macy's marketing material. Macy's also thought this was an ideal fan-made extension as it was placed on the official video section of the company's Facebook page.

The two Santa visit videos extend the narrative slightly but still stay well within the Macy's parameters of belief in Santa, while the marching band is a textbook example of how Macy's would like to see the storyworld being extended into real life. The *Believe* storyworld is simply not expansive enough to incorporate more ironic user-made extensions such as parodies or even subversive videos. While, as will be seen with the memes, some subversive extensions were created, they were very sporadic.

In their analysis of the "Old Spice Guy" campaign, Tenderich and Williams (2015) consider the company's followup to the initial commercial. These included the 'guy' appearing in 186 videos responding to the messages he had received. This led to users also making parodies of these videos and this extension happened because:

> The Youtube response ads developed their own storylines as subsets of the overall brand story, and jumped back and forth between different types of media (p. 28).

While Macy's did include fan-made extensions in follow up television commercials and indeed, invited users to post images for possible inclusion, the main storyline was consistent and did not allow for divergence. Any images that did not follow the *Believe* narrative were clearly not going to be included in the commercial. Old Spice not only encouraged development of separate storylines but also egged them on. While Macy's did not delete the parodies or subversive images, nor did

they highlight them, leaving them to be swallowed up and ignored in the ocean of positive images.

Fan made extensions – memes

1.
URL: https://twitter.com/CoronatusRBX/status/803074678424211456

Message from user: "Macys supports lying to our children! RT if you value the trust of your children! #santaproject #lyingproject

Message on the meme: #LYINGPROJECT

Figure 17: Meme highlights the deceptive nature of *The Santa Project*

Analysis:

"Lying Santa" is winking and holding a finger to his lips in the pose of someone telling you to keep a secret. Though he is 'lying', he does not look menacing and this is deliberate as a mean-looking Santa would

detract from the point being made. Anyone, Coronatus is saying, can dress up as Santa and trick you into believing him.

This meme is linked to critical comments such as the ones in Figure 18 made by users who think *The Santa Project* is about spreading "fake news":

The greater truth of narrative. conspiracy theory = narrative. fake news = narrative news. #pizzagate = #santaproject (@dmy3rs, 6 December 2016)

Why is nobody getting on the #santaproject's case for spreading fake news? (@gnmerritt, 11 December 2016)

Anyone else think the #santaproject is kinda funny given role fake news played in electing psycho liar as next POTUS (@bfeldman89, 30 November 2016)

IMO, this @Macys #santaproject – encouraging people to spread misinformation online – is in poor taste given the fake news issue. #humbug (@CommFox, 5 December 2016)

Figure 18: Example of Twitter comments that think believing in Santa is the equivalent to providing misinformation (Original spelling and grammar retained)

These comments all think believing in and telling children about Santa Claus is deceptive with one literally equating a fake controversy ("pizzagate") with the campaign. Both fake news and Santa are, in essence, lies and it is becoming increasingly hard to tell the difference.

2.
URL: https://twitter.com/ms_ledet/status/800770102975074305

Message from user: "#santaproject Join #macys and the #believe campaign #makeawish"

Message on the meme: SHARE IF YOU BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS

Figure 19: Belief in Santa is worth sharing

Analysis:

"Believe Santa" shows a fully kitted out Santa during a visit on Christmas Eve as he holds the treats that have been left out for him. A stocking and tree can be seen next to him and the feel is 'homey'. The scene exemplifies a common belief of the Santa myth – he leaves presents and he's the only home intruder you would deliberately leave out food for! Unlike the other Santa, the face is round and jolly, red cheeked and the expression is benevolent.

This user, LadyBinVegas, also includes the Make-A-Wish hashtag that, interestingly, Coronatus leaves out. This could be because the user does not know about the charitable aspect of the campaign or a deliberate act. As there is a call to action ("RT") if the #makeawish was included, it would confuse the issue. By asking followers to not support *Believe*, Coronatus is, by implication, asking them not to support Make-A-Wish and does not want to draw attention to that fact. LadyBinVegas has no such concerns.

3.
URL: https://twitter.com/TeamPie1/status/805849924004937728

Message from user: "An excellent point Santa #Christmas #santaproject"

Message on the meme: "If you think it's childish to still believe in Santa Claus remember there are adults who still believe the Daily Mail"

Figure 20: Santa makes a valid point

Analysis:

This Santa shares the same red chubby cheeks of "Believe Santa" and appears to be sitting by a fire in a 'homey' scene. The meme is humorous but the reader also needs to know the reputation the *Daily Mail* newspaper has – it is a tabloid and is, by implication, untruthful. It scolds those people who think belief in Santa Claus is childish, but cannot see the irony of simultaneously being fine with being lied to by a newspaper. It links back to "Lying Santa" who says *Believe* is supporting lying to children, by pointing out adults are being lied too via the *Daily Mail* every day, and they accept it. But whereas the Santa story is clearly a myth, the *Daily Mail* presents their articles as truth.

How this fits into the narrative:

I chose these three memes because they all show images of Santa with the difference in perception only arising via the accompanying words.

"Believe Santa" meme slots straight into the narrative as the image sums up the main ideas of Santa as well as being the very spirit of the idea of Christmas. The comment encourages readers to display their belief by sharing. "Daily Mail Santa" meme also supports the narrative but in a more humorous manner. It also pushes back against the accusations *The Santa Project* is about lying to children.

The "Lying Santa" meme pushes hard against the narrative by stating emphatically the entire campaign is about lying to children. But it is also obvious the user and the 'fake news' commenters are taking the campaign too literally. As mentioned, Macy's pushes two narratives with *The Santa Project* – the real person and the symbolic. If they were willing to accept the symbolic narrative, hopefully they would agree the ideals Santa represents of kindness and generosity, is not 'fake news'.

However, the meme producers also clearly understood the aims and motivations of Believe well enough to satirise it successfully. Their interpretations are important contributions to the narrative as differing opinions provide an interesting alternative for users to discuss and consider, especially in counteracting the dominant narrative being promoted by Macy's.

Fan made extensions – composite image

1.
URL: https://twitter.com/PaulaJaneJensen/status/802332377187893248

Message from user: "I believe #santaproject"

Figure 21: Combining the Santa myth and religious story into one narrative

<u>Analysis:</u>

I found this to be the most interesting interpretation of the *Believe* narrative as it shows a hybrid of two main ideas of Christmas – the religious and the secular.

It shows a typical Christian manger scene of the Virgin Mary, Joseph and the baby, with light shining down from the window in streaks as from heaven. But instead of the shepherds or the Wise Kings, Santa and reindeers are in the worshipping pose.

<u>How this fits into the narrative:</u>

The user has embraced a multiple interpretation that combines Santa being an integral part of the Christmas message of hope and faith with the Christian religious message of the birth of a baby.

The accompanying comment – "I believe" – simply tells readers the user thinks it is possible for the two concepts to sit side by side. She understands Santa is supposed to typify the Christian values of kindness, generosity and love that Christmas is meant to exemplify.

But in trying to reconcile the secular and the religious, it also has the potential to offend both. Santa is obviously not part of the Christian Christmas story and nor is the religious message part of the Santa myth, and the image is jarring to adherents to both. It therefore must to be seen as purely symbolic rather than literal.

Facebook videos and albums

There is no special Macy's *Believe* Facebook page with all posts being channelled onto the main page. This is understandable given the high brand recognition of the Macy's brand especially in the early years when

Believe was being introduced. This also makes it easier to regulate and monitor the posts and comments and avoids having to duplicate the work.

However this also means it is impossible to separate statistics and results as part of the *Believe* campaign. Therefore I only looked at photo albums and videos related to the campaign from within the specific sections on the Facebook page.

Facebook photo albums

Analysis:

There were only three photo albums related to *Believe* on the Macy's Facebook page – National Believe Day 2015 launch, *Believe* 2015 and *Believe* 2014 kick-off weekend countrywide.

The 2014 album had the most number of photos loaded at 10. *Believe* 2015 received the most number of likes on the main photo album feed with 11,000. The average number of likes across the three albums is 7,100 while the average number of comments is 107.
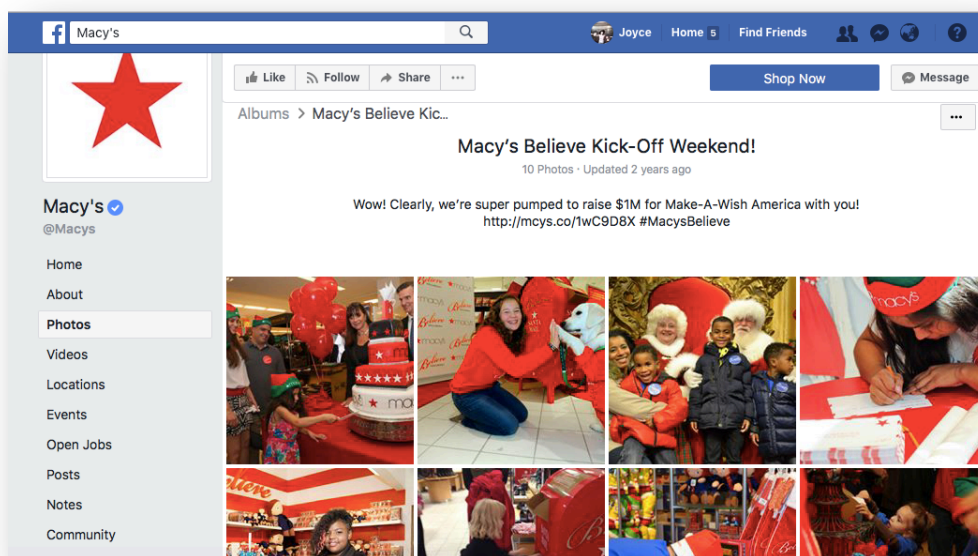
Figure 22: Facebook photo album from the *Believe* 2014 kick-off weekend

How this fits into the narrative:

Overall, the photo album comments are positive regarding the campaign and the shopping experience. The narrative of posting letters at the writing station is well understood but does not go any deeper than acknowledging the festive spirit of the campaign. The album with the highest number of comments was *Believe* 2015 with 198, 19 of which were photos of visits to the *Believe* station.

While the number of likes reaches the thousands but there are comparatively few comments. It is simply easier to press 'like' and there is almost nothing to comment on – either the user likes the photo or they don't. The one time an attempt is made by a user to change the narrative by complaining about Macy's service, other users pushed back, showing users prefer to keep with the dominant *Believe* narrative.

Facebook videos

Analysis:

As of 1 August, 2017, there were 267 number of videos on the Macy's Facebook video feed of which 23 are related to *Believe* or *The Santa Project*.

The total number of views is not possible as views were not available for three videos in 2009-2010. The number for the remaining 20 videos is 13,898,703 views, with an average of 694,935. The video with highest number of views is "Chloe and Halle Bailey are helping to keep the magic of Santa alive" with 1,887,747. The total number of reactions is 79,364, at an average of 3,450.

I have chosen two videos to analyse closely as they both attracted negative comments despite similar videos not being treated in the same manner.

1.
Title: Iris Apfel hopes Santa stays with us forever. Together, we can keep his magic alive—share your #SantaProject picture or video and tell the world why you believe.

URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/videos/?ref=page_internal

Transcript: "I believe in Santa Claus because I think he is the last embodiment we have left of imagination, spirituality, creativity, curiosity, fun, humour, joy, the art of loving one another, of peace and all these wonderful things that are slowly slipping away from us. So it's very very important we keep him and he stays with us forever. Then he does all the wonderful things for children. My goodness, he's a busy beaver. I like that because I like people to be busy. I think he's older than I am so I like that too."
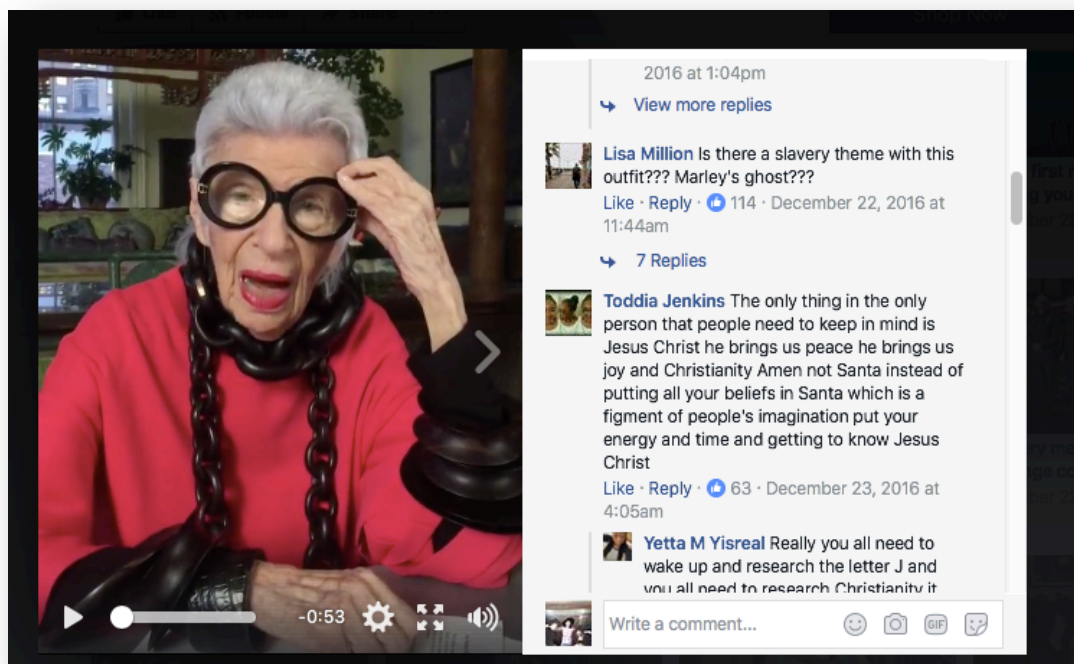
Figure 23: Iris Apfel's *The Santa Project* video.

Analysis:

This video by fashion 'icon' Iris Apfel received 6,400 reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis), 867,272 views and 704 comments. The majority of the comments are critical focusing on the religious aspect of Christmas such as the ones in Figure 24:

The only thing in the only person that people need to keep in mind is Jesus Christ he brings us peace he brings us joy and Christianity Amen not Santa instead of putting all your beliefs in Santa which is a figment of people's imagination put your energy and time and getting to know Jesus Christ. (Toddia Jenkins, 23 December 2016, 4.05am)

No I don't want to lie to my children- About a fat magical mythical man that brings opulent presents, designed and perpetuated by capitalistic cooperate America! I require three task in the spirit of Christmas and in memory of baby Jesus. My kids donate their money(what they can), we give a family money donation, donate time to volunteering, and donate a material item like a favorite toy ext...then on Christmas they get three gifts in memory of Christ and for what they gave up in the spirit of Christmas: I'll shower them with presents and material things on their birthday. But Christmas in America is a joke and frankly an affront to Christ ...who spoke out against nearly everything the holiday stands for now! Material acquisition, (having false gods) =Santa , etc I mean dang ! It's time to kick the fat man to the curb and learn to love and be human again. (Joshua Davis Nicholson, 24 December 2016, 11.52pm)

Figure 24: Examples of critical comments left on the Iris Apfel video (Original spelling and grammar retained)

The top comment by Toddia Jenkins relates directly back to Iris's message by saying it is belief in Jesus Christ and Christianity that bring peace and joy, not Santa. The second comment by Joshua Davis Nicholson also mentions the religious meaning of Christmas as well as the commercialisation surrounding the holiday. Clearly the commercialisation aspect is more of a concern with him as he ties belief in Santa Claus with material acquisitions and, instead, highlights the traditions (donating) he is trying to instil in his children.

Neither user is disagreeing with the positive attributes Iris mentions such as humour and joy, simply the fact she is placing them onto the persona of Santa, whom they both regard as fake.

2.

Title: Chloe and Halle Bailey are helping to keep the magic of Santa alive — want in? Just use #SantaProject to share a picture or video!

URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/videos/?ref=page_internal

Transcript: "I'm Chloe and I'm Halle and we believe in Santa. Happy Holidays."
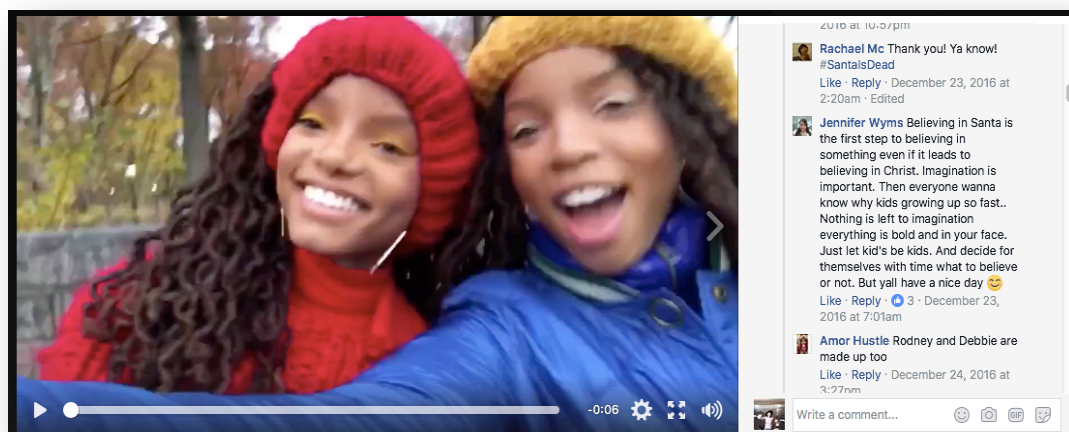
Figure 25: Chloe and Halle Bailey's *The Santa Project* video

Analysis:

This video by two young female entertainers received 14,000 reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis), 1,887,747 views and 612 comments.

As with Apfel's video, the critical comments were regarding the religious aspect of the holiday and the 'real' meaning of Christmas as well as asking why they are promoting a fake character.

However, the comment below in Figure 26 has bought straight into the *Believe* narrative by mentioning the importance of imagination in children and how the religious aspect of Christmas can be intertwined with Santa:

Believing in Santa is the first step to believing in something even if it leads to believing in Christ. Imagination is important. Then everyone wanna know why kids growing up so fast.. Nothing is left to imagination everything is bold and in your face. Just let kid's be kids. And decide for themselves with time what to believe or not. But yall have a nice day. (Jennifer Wyms, 23 December 2016, 7.01am)

Figure 26: Example of positive comment left on the Chloe and Halle Bailey video (Original spelling and grammar retained)

<u>How this fits into the narrative:</u>

The comments on both videos are not regarding the actual existence of Santa as noone makes the argument Santa is a real person, but rather whether belief in him is beneficial, especially to children. Joshua Davis

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Nicholson equates Santa to the commercialisation of the festive season while Jennifer Wyms thinks it helps children's imaginations to grow.

It is interesting all the comments mentioned here make reference to Christ, as the religious meaning of Christmas is clearly important to all three users. However the manifestation of that importance is shown differently – the critical users think believing in Santa diminishes belief in Christ while the positive user thinks it actually enhances it. She clearly does not think believing in a mythical person would have any impact on believing in someone Christians regard as a deity.

It is interesting the negative comments were posted under videos done by real people. While Apfel's message delves into the attributes she thinks belief in Santa provides, the message from the Bailey girls is much more basic. Regardless, both attracted negative comments related to the real religious meaning of Christmas.

A comparable video by the puppet Miss Piggy did not attract a similar negative reaction. Users appear to be annoyed by having real people talking about a fake identity and telling them they should believe in him as well. A distinction is being made between the views of a puppet and the views of a real person who should know better than to push belief in a mythical figure.

Overall, *The Santa Project* narrative of connecting Santa with the festive spirit of generosity and kindness, rather than seeing him as a flesh and blood person, has completely bypassed users. The narrative has failed to bridge the disconnect of the attributes being applied to a 'fake' Santa with the 'real' meaning of Christmas.

Macy's Youtube channel

As of 31 August, 2017, there were 229 videos on the feed of which 24 were related to *Believe* or *The Santa Project*.

The total views were 5,386,705 at an average of 224,446. However, the numbers are heavily skewed because of one video that received 4,803,028 views. Once that video is removed, the average for the remaining 23 videos drops down to 25,377. The total reactions (likes, dislikes) were 2,822, at an average of 117.

I chose to analyse *The Santa Project* introduction video as it received the most views, and therefore the most reactions and comments.

Title: The #SantaProject: Our Movement to Keep The Magic of Santa Claus Alive

URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTnMGBOuJb4
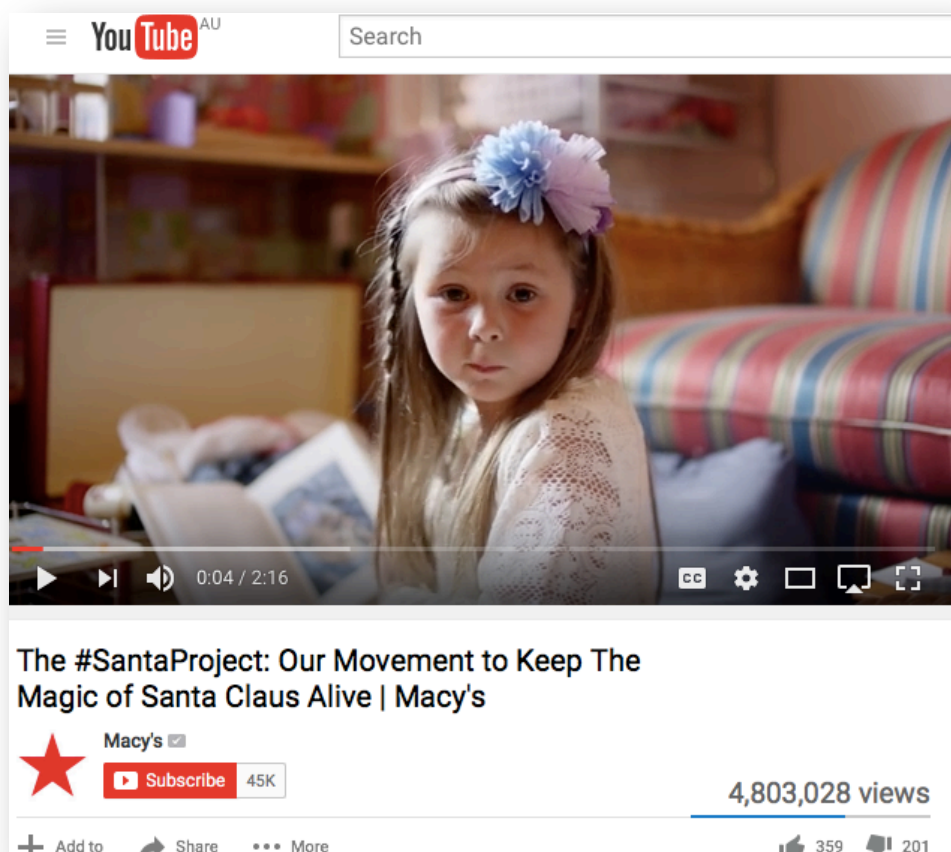
Figure 27: *The Santa Project's* introduction commercial received 4.8 million views on Macy's Youtube channel

<u>Analysis:</u>

The video begins with children talking about who and what they believe Santa is, proceeds to say they asked "the Internet" whether Santa is real only to be disappointed by the replies and ends with the call to action for viewers to showcase their own belief in Santa. This was the most popular video on the Macy's Youtube channel with 4,803,028 views, 359 likes, 201 dislikes and 123 comments.

<u>How this fits into the narrative:</u>

The comments are split evenly between those who say they believe in Santa and those who don't and questioning why Macy's has created a campaign that requires lying to children.

As mentioned, Macy's tries to push two narratives of who and what Santa is, but as the commercial begins with a little girl saying, "he's a real life person", the secondary narrative gets lost. It simply cannot sell both narratives without thoroughly confusing viewers. As the commercial stays with the "Santa is real" narrative, the number of 'dislikes' and critical comments rises.

It was also interesting to see a number of comments mentioning the exploitative nature of using children in the commercial. This is despite the fact the entire point of the campaign is to show the impact disbelief and negativity are having on children. That point is lost in the overall dislike of seeing children being used in this manner.

Extension of the storyworld

Gadget the Elf was introduced in the 2014 *Believe* campaign as part of the Guinness World Record attempt for the longest wish list to Santa. The wish list was then taken by Gadget to Santa's house and users could

follow his journey on special Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Youtube feeds (Macy's Inc., 2014a).

Analysis:

The Twitter feed contained 40 tweets, 113 followers and only five likes. The Youtube account had 35 videos posted with a total of 10,701 views (average of 305). The video with the most views (834) was the first one posted when Gadget leaves for New York to pick up the wish list and start his journey. Despite this, no comments were left. The Facebook page was the best received with 58 items posted, 524 followers and 533 likes.

Figure 28: Gadget the Elf was given his own social media presence such as a Twitter account

How this fits into the narrative:

Gadget has almost no social media impact with views and likes in the hundreds, compared to the thousands even millions of views for items related to *Believe* or *The Santa Project*.

Gadget's narrative was simply not strong enough when separated from the main better-known brands of Macy's and *Believe*. This is possibly why the

character was not repeated as well as why *The Santa Project*, which received millions of views and responses in comparison, was not given a separate feed but promoted via the main Macy's platforms. *The Santa Project* also asks for a specific action users can do to become involved in the campaign. Once the letters were written, user participation in Gadget's campaign ended. While they were invited to watch, share, like or comment on his journey, it was seldom done.

As mentioned, the character of Virginia was already not understood as being part of the *Believe* storyworld even though the initial storyline is based on her actions. The introduction of another character in the seventh year of the campaign might have been an effort to expand the storyworld and inject some new life into the campaign, but Gadget simply does not have enough of a presence outside the *Believe* storyworld to exist on his own. The only character that has had any resonance with users is Santa, and that is based on the myths surrounding the character that were inculcated in the culture long before *Believe*.

If Macy's is to extend the storyworld of *Believe* by including more characters, it must be clearly linked to the main narrative and allow for extension in a way which allows users to participate.

Transmedia narrative analysis

While aspects of all of Jenkins's seven core concepts are displayed in the user interaction, only three have a continued presence and impact:

1. *Worldbuilding*

As can be seen in the number of photos of people posting and writing letters at the stations, the narrative of writing letters is understood. But the connection to the Virginia narrative is not. This means the storyworld of the letter and editorial is not understood enough even though Macy's

heavily promotes Virginia via the animated special and school musical programme.

The emotional response to the narrative of *Believe* and *The Santa Project* is much stronger with almost every positive comment feeding off the idea of belief, love, generosity and kindness. But that also makes drillability difficult as these are intangible concepts. Consequently, many users highlighted the Make-A-Wish connection as that is easier to explain and understand.

The user-made videos purely connected to *Believe* are mainly children writing and mailing letters. Unlike *The Santa Project*, there is no real question to answer, so the videos tend to be less focused. There is high spreadability but the drillability tends to spread out in all directions as the narrative of *Believe* is simply too weak for sustained expansion.

The Santa Project has a slightly different narrative in that it is more specific in asking users to show positivity in believing in Santa and this makes drillability much easier. Users recount stories of the time they 'saw' Santa or evidence of a visit such as the cookies being gone or reindeer prints in the snow. More importantly, users have bought into the overall narrative of needing to believe in Santa and especially not taking that moment of innocence away from children. As expected there is strong spreadability and what drillability there is, is highly positive.

2. *Immersion and extractability*

User images show the letter writing and sending is deeply entrenched. Even after online letter writing was introduced, the moment of visiting the store and physically sending the letter is still important.

However, I was unable to find any user-generated images taken using the Believe-o-Magic app. This may simply mean the users preferred not to load these images but, given the eagerness to share other photos, this

seems unlikely. It would appear the app was simply unsuccessful in providing the immersive experience users wanted.

3. *Performance*

The requests for photos/videos for chances to appear in Macy's promotions were well received as was *The Santa Project* asking for shared expressions of belief.

The total number of times the Virginia school musical has been performed is not available. However, the very positive comments placed under the video of the Stagedoor production show that the people who took part in a production have fond memories and enjoyed the experience.

Other than that, users almost never mention Virginia and the connection between letter writing and posting and her letter is non-existent. This is disappointing given the *Believe* narrative is so heavily based on her story. Users have managed to separate the two ideas – Virginia's story has no resonance with them as they write and post letters.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between the storyworld and narratives being created via transmedia storytelling and the actual consumption practices of the user. A critical textual and visual analysis was applied to selected user feedback to a transmedia branding case study to discover how much of the deconstructed narrative was comprehended and re-interpreted by users.

The case study analysis shows users understand the basic performance aspect of *Believe* in writing letters to Santa, but Macy's attempts to move beyond this have largely failed. If Virginia's story was the starting point, what this analysis shows is the core narrative of *Believe* has not become entrenched even after nine years.

The analysis also sought to discover what users think *Believe* is actually about and, in this area, users have resorted to the same level of ambiguity Macy's itself has indulged in. While "I believe" or "We believe" were common user comments, *what* they actually believe in is left vague. The user leaves it to the reader to understand that the concepts of a 'festive spirit' or the atmosphere of Christmas are so well known that they do not need to be defined.

An unanticipated outcome was discovering the manner in which transmedia project producers have failed to convince users to passively accept the storyworld and narrative they have created. The fact the core narrative is seldom mentioned shows users either refuse to associate or do not care about Virginia's letter writing activities. But users also consistently expressed concern with the campaign by highlighting their religious beliefs as an alternative narrative or the need to lie to children about Santa. This shows Macy's has failed to fully convey the emotional narrative of Santa as a *symbol* of Christmas rather than a real person, or incorporating religious faith as part of the opaque concept of *Believe*.

It was also interesting to see the mediums users chose to engage with. Of the mediums looked at in this study, users mainly interacted with three core platforms – the writing stations and the Instagram and Twitter feeds – and showed little interest in moving outside these main 'mothership' mediums. This was shown in the lack of interaction with Gadget the Elf and the absence of photos taken using the Believe-o-Magic app. Users would appear to choose platforms that are easiest, accessible and most enjoyable for them, regardless of how important other ones may be to extending the *Believe* storyworld.

Both Jenkins's and Tenderich's definitions mention the need for all the mediums to work together to create an integrated narrative that users can identify as being part of the same storyworld. But this requires users at the very least to show an interest in interacting with all the mediums involved. With *Believe* this is clearly not happening. It would appear the migratory cues that encourage users to move across the different mediums and learn more about the entire storyworld, are simply not compelling enough. This highlights the need for more research into the role all the mediums play in conveying the narrative in a relevant manner. It is not that multiple mediums are not required but, as Virginia's lack of presence outside the specially-created animated special and musical show, they are not managing to fulfil the purpose of creating an overall integrated, immersive storyworld.

Users are now experiencing input from many different places that allows them to engage with transmedial worlds. This often takes place simultaneously on several platforms rather than unfolding as a linear progression from platform to platform. Social media sharing has also added a key component of engagement with the transmedia world and other users. With information on storyworlds being conveyed in multiple ways, further research needs to be done on how users are actually applying the information gained via each medium. As transmedia branding becomes the

norm, producers cannot just assume the storyworld being created is understood and accepted.

Since its inception, transmedia storytelling has pushed against the idea of linear narrative and invited and assumed an interaction that allows people to approach it in different ways. It allows users to experience the storyworld in a variety of ways that is then pulled together into a single narrative moment. The beginning, middle and end structure can no longer be imposed on users who are deciding for themselves the order they wish to follow the story and the level of interaction they want to have. The emergence of new story structures that create complexity by expanding the range of possibilities continues to challenge both the methods of narrative production and the way we choose to read them. A greater understanding of these aspects will show both theorists and practitioners how narratives will continue to evolve in the future.

Appendix 1

Virginia Letter and Church Editorial

Dear Editor – I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says "If you see it in The Sun it's so." Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?

– Virginia O'Hanlon, 115 West 95th Street

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not

there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

(Source: http://www.newseum.org/exhibits/online/yes-virginia/)

Appendix 2

Macy's *Believe* Christmas Campaign
– Main Activities and Timeline

Activity	*Description and Medium Used*	*Year Started*
Million Reasons to Believe	Television commercial with celebrities reciting lines from the famous editorial.	2008
Yes, Virginia letter and editorial reprinted	Print advertisement setting out the basis of the campaign. Blank forms were put next to the reprinted letter and editorial for users to write letters to Santa.	2008
Macys.com/believe sitelet launched	Special sitelet for users to download information and activities related to *Believe* campaign.	2008*
Believe letter writing stations	In store event in Macy's stores where users can write and post letters to Santa. Each station has a writing table, *Believe* Meter and a letterbox.	2008*
Link with Make-A-Wish charity	$1 donation made for every letter 'posted' up to $1 million annually.	2008*
Country wide Santa Tour	In store event to meet Santa.	2009*
Virginia name giveaway	People named Virginia were given a special holiday gift when they visited the *Believe* letter writing station.	2009

| *Yes, Virginia* television special | Airing of a 30-minute animated film of the Virginia story.

It was shown on National Believe Day on CBS. | 2009* |
|---|---|---|
| National Believe Day | Macy's street teams patrol cities to reward random acts of kindness.

Double donation for letters posted that day. | 2009* |
| The Trek | Television commercial starring Queen Latifah and a little girl who journeys to Macy's to mail her letter to Santa. | 2009 |
| Tell Us Why You Believe | Essay and video contest on *Believe* sitelet for users to win a trip to New York for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. | 2009 |
| *Believe* activity guide | Users can download the *Believe* Activity Guide (in English or Spanish) from the *Believe* sitelet

This is a special toolkit of activities for teachers and students. | 2009* |
| *Believe* Challenge Game | Facebook game called The *Believe* Challenge with $1 donated to the Make-A-Wish charity for every win. | 2010 |
| Celebrities *Believe* | Celebrities *Believe* page on sitelet, showcasing celebrities expressing thoughts on the importance of the 'believing'. | 2010 |

Macy's Believe-o-Magic	App for download that allowed users to 'interact' with animated versions of Virginia and friends including adding them to personal photos.	2011*
Celebrity ornament collection merchandise and tree auction	In store merchandise of 14 celebrity 'inspired' ornaments. Unique Christmas trees, also celebrity 'inspired' were auctioned.	2011
Believe fan of the week	Users could upload photos taken with the Believe-o-Magic app at the *Believe* letter writing stations, to the Macy's Facebook page. Every week a different image was voted to be the profile picture on the page.	2011
Merchandise	In store sales of *Yes, Virginia* animated special available as a DVD and book, holiday ornament and snow globes.	2011*
Another Miracle on 34th Street	Television commercial incorporating Kris Kringle from the original black and white movie with modern celebrities.	2012
Yes, Virginia The Musical	Musical programme for schools to put together a production of the Virginia story. Macy's provided financial grants, an interactive, digital toolkit with scripts, scores and production material.	2012*

Firefighter letter collection	Request for firefighters to collect as many letters as possible in their community and drop them off at the *Believe* letter writing station.	2012
Photo contest	#Macysbelieve set up for users to share photos or video of the visit to the *Believe* letter writing stations. Selected photos were shown in a Macy's television commercial.	2013
Yes, Virginia in Concert premieres	Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra perform a semi-staged adaptation of the Virginia story.	2013
World's Longest Wish List to Santa	Guinness World Record attempt with longest wish list to Santa via letters received online. Set a new record with 121,138 letters received.	2014
Santa Wish List Adventure with Gadget the Elf	Users were able to track Gadget's trip to Santa via Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Youtube.	2014
Online letter writing	Users can design, write and 'send' a letter to Santa via *Believe* sitelet. These letters are added to overall annual letter count.	2014*
Macy's Wish Writer interactive stylus and app launched	The interactive stylus and app featured a series of games and a 'magical' way to write letters to Santa.	2015

Wish Writer short film	Three-minute film showing two children using the spirit of the Wish Writer to learn more about kindness. Was shown on the *Believe* sitelet and as a 90-second television advertisement.	2015
The Santa Project launched	Users asked to post a photo, message or video with #SantaProject via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Youtube expressing their belief in Santa. Selected items were shown in a Macy's television commercial.	2016

*The event has continued on an annual basis since it began with additional materials/activities being included.

(Source: Macy's press release material from 2008-2016)

Appendix 3

A Visit from St. Nicholas
Clement Clarke Moore, 1779 - 1863

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,

Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow

Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,

But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!

On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,

When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;

So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of Toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,

Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,

And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;

A bundle of Toys he had flung on his back,

And he looked like a pedler just opening his pack.

His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow

And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,

And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;

He had a broad face and a little round belly,

That shook when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,

And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;

A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,

Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,

And laying his finger aside of his nose,

And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle,

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

(Source: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/visit-st-nicholas)

Appendix 4

Case Study Complete User Feedback

#macysbelieve Instagram feed

URL: www.instagram.com/explore/tags/macysbelieve/?hl=en

Date parameters for posts: 12 July, 2017–25 November, 2016. During that period, 693 posts were added to the Instagram feed.

Category	Number
Posts with *Believe* component	404 (58.2%)
Posts with Christmas/festive component but no *Believe* element	198 (28.5%)
Posts with neither element	91 (13.1%)
Posts deliberately incorrect/subversive	0
Skimmers	588 (84.8%)
Dippers	67 (9.6%)
Divers	38 (5.4%)

#santaproject Twitter feed

URL: twitter.com/hashtag/santaproject?lang=en

Date parameters for posts: 13 March, 2017–14 November, 2016. During that period, 2,292 posts were added to the Twitter feed.

Category	Number
Posts with *The Santa Project* component	1,853 (80.8%)
Posts with Christmas/festive component but no *The Santa Project* element	165 (7%)
Posts with neither element	71 (3%)
Posts deliberately incorrect/subversive	203 (8.8%)
Skimmers	2,117 (92%)
Dippers	56 (2.4%)
Divers	119 (5.1%)

Macy's Facebook page

URL: www.facebook.com/Macys/

Facebook *Believe* game 2010

URL: www.facebook.com/Macys/posts/171554506206444

Number of likes: 612
Number of comments: 33

Analysis:

Though the game itself has now been deleted and can no longer be played, the comments remain and can even be added to. The majority of the comments refer to the fact that users were in the process of, or had just finished playing the game. Three comments refer to supporting the Make-A-Wish charity.

Facebook Believe Photo albums:

There were only three photo albums related to *Believe* on the Macy's Facebook page – National Believe Day 2015 launch, *Believe* 2015 and *Believe* 2014 kick-off weekend countrywide. All albums were viewed on 15 August, 2017.

1.

Title	National Believe Day 2015 (URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/photos/ ?tab=album&album_id=10153364266398037)
Number of photos	5
Average number of likes	239
Average number of comments	5.8
Number of likes on the main photo album feed	6,600
Number of comments on the main photo album feed	74

Analysis:

Mixture of praise regarding the campaign and complaints regarding customer service some of which Macy's responds to. But other users told the 'complainer' it was not appropriate place to put their comment. Range of comments praising or questioning the work of the Make-A-Wish charity. Overall, positive comments outweigh the rest.

2.

Title	*Believe* 2015 (URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/photos/ ?tab=album&album_id=10153298177068037)
Number of photos	4

Average number of likes	164
Average number of comments	5
Number of likes on the main photo album feed	11,000
Number of comments on the main photo album feed	198

Analysis:

The comments section contained 19 pictures uploaded by users of the *Believe* station or children posting the letter. Macy's reply to eight posts either of complaints or thanking the user, but then the replies stop abruptly. One complaint about Macy's criticism of Donald Trump but overall the comment praise regarding the campaign and Make-A-Wish connection.

3.

Title	*Believe* 2014 kick-off weekend country wide (URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10152512668218037)
Number of photos	10
Average number of likes	63
Average number of comments	1.6
Number of likes on the main photo album feed	3,700
Number of comments on the main photo album feed	49

Analysis:

Majority of comments are praise for the campaign and the company. One comment criticising Macy's support of Sea World that the commenter believes is imprisoning and hurting animals.

Facebook Believe Videos:
URL: www.facebook.com/pg/Macys/videos/?ref=page_internal

As of 1 August, 2017, there were 267 number of videos on the Macy's Facebook video feed of which 23 are related to *Believe*. All videos analysed below were viewed on 15 August, 2017.

1.

Title	Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus
Date posted	17 November, 2009
Likes, Shares	490, 1
Views	n/a
Comments	69

Analysis:

Introduction video to the *Yes Virginia* animated special which aired for the first time in 2009. The comments are mainly positive regarding how much they like the look of the special.

2.

Title	Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus
Date posted	2 December, 2009
Likes, Shares	596, 63
Views	n/a
Comments	75

Analysis:

Second introduction video to the *Yes Virginia* animated special which aired for the first time in 2009. Comments were mainly positive regarding the special and how much they are looking forward to watching it.

3.

Title	Together we'll collect a million reasons to Believe!
Date posted	11 November, 2010
Likes, Shares	1,100, 23
Views	n/a
Comments	68

Analysis:

Commercial of 2010 campaign of animated Virginia and friends going to the Macy's store to post her letter. Possibly done to capitalise on the animated special from 2009 that was then rebroadcast that year. Overall, the comments are positive and reference the letters writing campaign.

4.

Title	What an amazing day of granting wishes! Remember: your letters to Santa = $1M for Make-A-Wish America! #MacysBelieve
Date posted	18 December, 2014
Likes, Shares	6,700, 346
Views	641,134
Comments	91

Analysis:

Shows the result of the *Believe* campaign on the children Make-A-Wish help. Mainly positive comments on the work Make-A-Wish does and photos of children the charity has helped.

5.

Title	Our Wish Writer is here & dreams are coming true everywhere
Date posted	10 November, 2015
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	521, 93 shares
Views	17,187
Comments	18

Analysis:

Did not attract the same level of attention as previous videos possibly due to the fact it was simply too far out from Christmas for users to want to get into the festive spirit. The lack of Macy's or *Believe* branding may also have meant users did not link the two campaigns together. There are more positive comments than negative ones primarily commenting on how touching the commercial is.

6.

Title	Believing is important. Join us and show the world you believe in Santa by posting a video or photo tagged with #SantaProject! http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	1 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	652, 174 shares
Views	42,135
Comments	54

Analysis:

Video has child experts commenting on the importance of fostering young imaginations, children talking about what Santa means to them and then how bad they feel when they meet people who tell them he is not real. Outlines *The Santa Project* mission to fill the Internet with belief in Santa. Comments are mainly negative asking why Macy's would have children saying Santa is not real and air it at a time when other children are watching.

7.

Title	We're on a mission to keep the magic of believing alive across the Internet. Sarah McLachlan showed she believes + you can too! Share a video or pic with #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	2 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	3,400, 458 shares
Views	780,090
Comments	602

Analysis:

Sarah McLachlan shares her belief in Santa and Macy's adds *The Santa Project* tagline at the end asking viewers to also show they believe. Predominately critical comments regarding the religious meaning of Christmas, arguments over what Christmas means to different people, a few supportive comments for the campaign.

8.

Title	Join our movement to keep the story of Santa Claus alive! Show you believe like Grace VanderWaal with a video or pic tagged #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	4 December, 2016

Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	558, 39 shares
Views	66,742
Comments	30

Analysis:

Grace VanderWaal simply says she believes in Santa and Macy's adds *The Santa Project* tagline at the end asking viewers to also show they believe. Critical comments about *The Santa Project* introduction video being shown on television the same day with users saying their own children are now upset because the commercial has children saying Santa is not real. No personal mention of the person in the video.

9.

Title	Laurie Hernandez is helping to keep the magic of Santa alive! Want in? Share your video or pic showing the world that you believe with #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	5 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	3,300, 112 shares
Views	1,022,946
Comments	107

Analysis:

Laurie Hernandez simply says she knows what belief can accomplish. There is a mixture of supportive and critical comments on the religious aspect of Christmas as well as photos of other users meeting Santa. No mention of the identity of the person in the video.

10.

Title	Your #SantaProject vids + pics are seriously amazing! Get inspired and keep sharing to help fill the internet with the magic of believing. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	7 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	1,700, 252 shares
Views	393,322
Comments	704

Analysis:

Unnamed person talking about the joy and generosity that Santa brings at Christmas. Predominately critical comments talking about the religious aspect of Christmas and how fake Santa is. No positive comments on Santa or Christmas.

11.

Title	The LaVigne Life thinks believing in Santa is important for families everywhere! Help keep the magic alive—share your video or pic now with #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	8 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	1,400, 56 shares
Views	1,207,849
Comments	87

Analysis:

Silent video of the family putting up and decorating the tree while wearing matching pyjamas. Critical comments regarding Macy's customer service

and Macy's dropping support for Planned Parenthood association. Some positive comments showing the user's own trees.

12.

Title	Chloe and Halle Bailey are helping to keep the magic of Santa alive — want in? Just use #SantaProject to share a picture or video!
Date posted	12 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	14,000, 570 shares
Views	1,887,747
Comments	612

Analysis:

Two young female entertainers telling users why they believe in Santa. Again, this video also attracted comments regarding the religious aspect of the holiday and the real meaning of Christmas as well as asking why they are promoting a fake character.

13.

Title	Holiday traditions are the best. And we absolutely love yours, Mónica Fonseca! Share a video or pic with #SantaProject + help us keep the magic of Santa alive. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	14 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	3,200, 137 shares
Views	666,635
Comments	70

Analysis:

Mónica Fonseca talks about family tradition of donating presents to less fortunate children and encourages viewers to share their traditions as well. Because she is next to a tree some users post images of their own tree or comment on their own donation efforts. There are also critical comments on Macy's customer service.

14.

Title	Cookies gone. Milk finished. Presents under the (tree emoji). That's how Kelsea Ballerini knows (Santa emoji) is real! How about you? Tell us with #SantaProject http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	17 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	1,100, 101 shares
Views	597,719
Comments	91

Analysis:

Kelsea Ballerini outlines why she believes in Santa (presents in front of the tree and the cookies were gone). Comments about Macy's bad customer service though a few support her belief in Santa. Users also took issue with the fact she says her gifts from Santa were unwrapped.

15.

Title	When Santa requests a #mannequinchallenge, you gather the elves! Get in on the magic and show off your holiday spirit with #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	17 December, 2016

Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	836, 135 shares
Views	63,345
Comments	34

Analysis:

A camera pans around shopping centre with shoppers, Santa and shop staff turning into mannequins when the camera reaches them. There are critical comments regarding the customer service at Macy's and a few festive greetings. No comments related to the content of the video – perhaps it is too clever compared to a similar fireman video that was clearly amateur. This is more professional in comparison and possibly why it is not appreciated as much.

16.

Title	Santa's coming so soon! Are you as excited as Tammin Sursok and her adorable daughter? Show us with #SantaProject!
Date posted	18 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	1,900, 60 shares
Views	1,827,650
Comments	82

Analysis:

The actress dances with her child as they excitedly wait for Christmas to arrive. There were comments complaining about waiting for customer purchases, and the 'dancing' in the video. For so many views, it seems strange to have so few comments and none referencing the actress by name as she seems superfluous to what is happening in the video.

17.

Title	Your videos are making (wave emoji)! Together, we're filling the internet with the magic of believing in (Santa emoji). Share your video or pic now with #SantaProject. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	19 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	2,800, 284 shares
Views	433,163
Comments	58

Analysis:

Surfers dressed as Santa and elves go surfing and ends with #Santaproject being written in the sand. Comments are positive talking about the skill of the surfers, wishing other users a Merry Christmas and posting images of Santas they have encountered. Two negative comments on the 'fake' Santa.

18.

Title	We adore Santa, too Miss Piggy! Tell us why YOU believe—just share your video (or pic!) with #SantaProject to join the movement. http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	19 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	2,200, 445 shares
Views	385,862
Comments	92

Analysis:

Miss Piggy talks about how 'close' she is to Santa and how he always knows what gifts to bring her. Predominately positive comments on how much the users love Miss Piggy.

19.

Title	Help us fill the internet with the magic of believing! Share a pic or vid using #SantaProject and tell us why you believe! Need some inspo? See what Ryan Seacrest has to say about the big guy http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	20 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	611, 38 shares
Views	242,086
Comments	63

Analysis:

Ryan Seacrest says he believes in Santa because he means giving and sharing the warmth of the holiday season. He then encourages viewers to participate in *The Santa Project* challenge to them him why they believe in Santa. There are comments complaining about orders or service at Macy's which the company responds to occasionally by asking for the user to private message them. Comments about Seacrest lying to children, but some also support his request and outline what they believe about Santa and what he represents to them.

20.

Title	This adorable big sis wants to make sure her little brother believes in (Santa emoji) …and it looks like she's doing a great job. (thumbs up emoji) Share a video or pic of your little ones with #SantaProject
Date posted	21 December, 2016

Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	2,900, 131 shares
Views	952,145
Comments	66

Analysis:

Little girl says "I believe in Santa." Comments are positive, presumably because users do not want to criticise a little girl, or they post their own pictures related to belief.

21.

Title	One very merry mannequin challenge comin' in hot! Lathrop Manteca Fire District joined our mission to spread the magic of Santa and you can, too. Share a pic or vid with #SantaProject now: http://social.macys.com/believe/
Date posted	22 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	15,000, 2,387 shares
Views	1,144,921
Comments	368

Analysis:

Firemen at a station take part in the Santa-themed mannequin challenge (pretending to be mannequins.) Comments were positive wishing other users Merry Christmas, the quality of the mannequin challenge and other fire stations posting pictures of their own staff.

22.

Title	Iris Apfel hopes Santa stays with us forever. Together, we can keep his magic alive— share your #SantaProject picture or video and tell the world why you believe.

Date posted	22 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	6,400, 1,787 shares
Views	867,272
Comments	704

Analysis:

Fashion icon Iris Apfel tells users why it is important to believe in Santa. As she is talking about the importance of believing in Santa, there are many comments regarding the religious aspect of the holiday and the real meaning of Christmas. Overall, the number of negative comments is higher.

23.

Title	The University of Cincinnati Bearcat Bands played a lil' tune for Santa to show they believe. Share a pic or video with #SantaProject to prove you do, too!
Date posted	24 December, 2016
Reactions (includes likes, comments, shares, and other emojis)	8,000, 2,138 shares
Views	658,753
Comments	176

Analysis:

Marching band playing Jingle Bells while 'spelling' out "We Believe" which then morphed into "We (heart) Santa). The majority are positive comments but about the ability of the band rather than the campaign or Macy's.

Macy's Youtube Channel

URL: www.youtube.com/user/macys

As of 15 August, 2017, there were 229 videos on the feed of which 24 were related to *Believe* or *The Santa Project*. All videos were viewed on 15 August, 2017.

1.

Title	Macy's kicks off *Believe* 2011 on CBS' The Early Show (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqg9XuuY6mM)
Date posted	7 November, 2011
Likes (dislikes)	8 (1)
Views	3,741
Comments	3

Analysis:

Interview with Macy's executives prior to the official kick off of the 2011 campaign. Comments related to CBS show rather than *Believe*.

2.

Title	Macy's Believe-o-Magic (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvzRXy3J0Z0)
Date posted	7 November, 2011
Likes (dislikes)	72 (26)
Views	50,115
Comments	4

Analysis:

Introducing the Believe-o-Magic app. The comments are all positive about how much they like the video.

3.

Title	Macy's Believe 2011 (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=PWUpA3uguxg)
Date posted	7 November, 2011
Likes (dislikes)	15 (7)
Views	14,030
Comments	2

Analysis:

The comments are positive liking the video.

4.

Title	Macy's and The Make-A-Wish-Foundation® make wishes come true this holiday season (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=GlcStgEBtK8)
Date posted	21 November, 2011
Likes (dislikes)	85 (15)
Views	22,477
Comments	16

Analysis:

CBS story on how the *Believe* campaign is working with Make-A-Wish to help a teen become a chef. Comments are all positive regarding how touching the story is.

5.

Title	Justin Bieber grants wishes with Macy's Believe and The Make-A-Wish Foundation (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=UqQ24OxjOAU)
Date posted	21 November, 2011

Likes (dislikes)	933 (56)
Views	118,116
Comments	933

Analysis:

Justin Bieber joins Macy's *Believe* campaign to fulfil 90 wishes with The Make-A-Wish charity. The video is an interview with Bieber discussing what the charity means to him. This video attracted more views and comments predominately because of the celebrity of the person being featured. Comments are split between those who like the singer and those who don't. No comments related to the campaign or Make-A-Wish.

6.

Title	Macy's Yes Virginia The Musical – Stagedoor Manor (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=UgfZx4_cYxY)
Date posted	23 August, 2012
Likes (dislikes)	453 (146)
Views	135,878
Comments	132

Analysis:

Overall very positive comments from users talking about how they put the play on a school, how excited they were to appear in the play and who they were in the play. Macy's and the connection to the *Believe* campaign were not mentioned.

7.

Title	Macy's Yes, Virginia The Musical (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=UPldtMIksGs)
Date posted	23 November, 2012

Likes (dislikes)	11 (4)
Views	7,222
Comments	4

Analysis:

Introduction to the *Yes, Virginia The Musical* school programme. The video shows the story was turned into a musical production and highlights the website where teachers can download the information they need. Users commented about the time they appeared in this play.

8.

Title	Macys Believe Mobile App (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=3G9G1KIsfDA)
Date posted	9 December, 2012
Likes (dislikes)	35 (6)
Views	15,895
Comments	5

Analysis:

Introducing the *Believe* mobile app to users. Comments are irrelevant to the video.

9.

Title	Yes Virginia (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=CC1fIBU0IPs)
Date posted	12 December, 2012
Likes (dislikes)	58 (13)
Views	20,264
Comments	5

Analysis:

30-second ad for the *Yes, Virginia* animated special. Comments on how much they love the video.

10.

Title	Let's Believe Together (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=xvvmWvH1QKE)
Date posted	22 December, 2013
Likes (dislikes)	21 (6)
Views	7,041
Comments	1

Analysis:

Video of activities showing Macy's helping kids from the Make-A-Wish charity. Positive comment thanking Macy's.

11.

Title	#MacysBelieve (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=qUJFYDiS_aY)
Date posted	24 December, 2013
Likes (dislikes)	77 (5)
Views	11,253
Comments	2

Analysis:

Both comments were irrelevant to the video.

12.

Title	A million thanks! Macy's Believe campaign raises another million dollars for Make-A-Wish (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRsriO7kGEM)
Date posted	24 December, 2014
Likes (dislikes)	48 (21)
Views	16,966
Comments	5

Analysis:

Thank you video from Macy's Chairman and CEO Terry Lundgren and Macy's staff to the people who wrote letters. The comments are irrelevant to the video.

13.

Title	How to play the Macy's Wish Writer App (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_meYtlt-HaU)
Date posted	2 November, 2015
Likes (dislikes)	276 (101)
Views	71,097
Comments	19

Analysis:

Introduction to the Macy's Wish Writer App and what it provides users. Despite the high number of dislikes, only positive comments from users saying they want a Wish Writer.

14.

Title	The #SantaProject: Our Movement to Keep The Magic of Santa Claus Alive (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTnMGBOuJb4)
Date posted	14 November, 2016

Likes (dislikes)	361 (201)
Views	4,803,028
Comments	123

Analysis:

Most watched video on the site. Introductory commercial to *The Santa Project* with children talking about their belief in Santa but then being told he doesn't exist. Ends with the Macy's request to put user's own affirmation of belief on the Internet. The comments are split evenly between those who say they believe in Santa and those who don't and questioning why Macy's has created a campaign that requires lying to children.

15.

Title	The #SantaProject Mission (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=veX7K4WYTLs)
Date posted	29 November, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	72 (21)
Views	9,559
Comments	9

Analysis:

Compilation video of children talking about belief in Santa, experts talking about the need to foster imagination in children, and users taking up the challenge to talk about their own belief in Santa. Comments are negative saying children shouldn't be made to believe in something that is fake.

16.

| Title | Experts weigh in on the benefits of Believing – A #SantaProject Study (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iUZHjoGMp0) |

Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	19 (12)
Views	3,243
Comments	1

Analysis:

Only one comment was left. It is supportive of the campaign and inspiring kid's imaginations by letting them believe in Santa.

17.

Title	Why Do You Believe In Santa? #SantaProject (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=ZpoYfF5tO0w)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	9 (3)
Views	2,617
Comments	0

Analysis:

Little girl talks about why she believes in Santa.

18.

Title	How Does Santa Get Into Your House? #SantaProject (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=ccynbb7eKM0)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	20 (9)
Views	3,142
Comments	2

Analysis:

Little girl talks about why Santa entering your house is not a robbery. The comments are about how cute the little girl is.

19.

Title	How does Santa visit everyone in one night? #SantaProject (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JrI9tdRg9w)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	8 (3)
Views	2,310
Comments	3

Analysis:

Kids talk about how fast Santa needs to travel to get round the world in one night. Comments about the speed limit being broken.

20.

Title	How Does Santa Deliver His Presents? #SantaProject (URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8WRzfzMq7E)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	7 (2)
Views	1,711
Comments	1

Analysis:

Girl talks about how Santa enters her house without a chimney being present. Comment was irrelevant to the video.

21.

Title	What Sound Does Santa Make? #SantaProject

	(URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=1hclnstjsO0)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	7 (4)
Views	1,957
Comments	0

Analysis:

Little kids imitate Santa.

22.

Title	The #SantaProject: Believing Is Magical (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=jnbKJYgAGAs)
Date posted	6 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	30 (6)
Views	8,488
Comments	2

Analysis:

Compilation video of children talking about their belief in Santa.

23.

Title	Macy's Presents: Yes, Virginia (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=gCEjPinn2gE)
Date posted	13 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	111 (32)
Views	24,347
Comments	18

Analysis:

Video shows the entire 2009 21-minute animated special of Virginia's story. The comments are predominately positive regarding how much the user loves the movie.

24.

Title	A Very Merry #MannequinChallenge (URL: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=9kJK3H_tjRc)
Date posted	16 December, 2016
Likes (dislikes)	100 (41)
Views	32,208
Comments	3

Analysis:

Mannequin challenge performed at Macy's Santaland in New York. Comments are irrelevant to the video.

Gadget the Elf 2016 campaign

Twitter – URL: twitter.com/gadgettheelf?lang=en

Viewed on	15 August, 2017
Number of tweets	40
Number of followers	113
Number following	68
Number of likes	5

Analysis:

The entire account is simply Gadget's tweets. The tweets have been retweeted but all in the single digits, except for one tweet which received 22 retweets and shows Gadget climbing on board a UPS truck.

Youtube – URL:

www.youtube.com/channel/UCCxWmpZeNDDgGTsI89GcVVw

Viewed on	15 August, 2017
Number of subscriptions	37
Number of videos	35
Number of views	10,701 (average of 305)

Analysis:

The most popular with 834 views was the first video when Gadget leaves for New York to pick up the wish list and start his journey. Despite this, no comments were left.

Facebook – URL:

www.facebook.com/Gadget-The-Elf-910867382292035/?ref=br_rs

Viewed on	15 August, 2017
Number of likes	533
Number of followers	524
Number of posts	58 (from 12 December, 2014 to 24 December, 2014)

Analysis:

The most viewed video at 290 was an 8-second shot of a fun interaction with a toy soldier posted on 21 December, 2014. A few positive comments are left under the videos about how cute Gadget is but there is little or no interaction overall.

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