In the Warcraft Universe We Trust:
An Analysis of Transmedia Advertising Strategies
in the World of Warcraft Video Game Series
("Battle Chest 3.0," "Cataclysm," and "Mists of Pandaria")

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This study analyzes the transmedia strategies for the top-selling titles of the medieval-inspired video game saga World of Warcraft (WoW). We use a narrative analysis method that is applied to the phenomenon of video games whose narratives are built around historical and/or fictional—inspired by historical past—storylines. The outcomes and conclusions of this contribution describe a truly complex transmedia paradigm. Concepts such as transmedia storytelling, transmedia marketing, transmedia advertising, and transmedia branding or brand story, to name a few, help us to better understand a commercial, communicative, and experiential phenomenon whose success is based on the strategic management of the stories built around the brand WoW.

Keywords: transmedia, video games, strategy, advertising, history

In a scenario of media conglomerates and corporate synergies (Edwards, 2012), the constant evolution of the Internet is continually offering new opportunities and dissemination channels for interactive communication based on integrating and readapting messages (Marfil-Carmona, 2013), thus enabling people's active participation and the creation of self-produced material, according to Martínez-Rodrigo and

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Segura-García (as cited in Marfil-Carmona, 2013). The channels and social networks that have emerged under the impact of digitalization have allowed for the emergence of a communicative model based on the shared construction that overcomes the prevalence of traditional, unidirectional systems. This model is a trend of sociocultural consumerism that basically uses a well-known formula—that is, to promote an engagement with the recipient through a narrative, sometimes fragmented in many different platforms or media supports, that creates what Jenkins (2006), among others, called the storytelling phenomenon.

Without going into greater detail concerning the origins of such a phenomenon, suffice it to say that transmedia storytelling pulls together the fragmentary, multiplatform character and a common narrative. This is a sort of collective narrative that has its origins in the early 20th century through the promotion of new forms of mass media such as newspapers, comic strips, and magazines. Thus, as stated by Mizruchi (as cited in Freeman, 2014) advertisements, literature, photographic images, and paintings began to appear together as complementary products.

Following this pattern, Matthew Freeman raises (2017) two reasons why the boom of consumption culture was essential to the industrial development of something like transmedia storytelling. First, the new models of mass production expanded the range of products through the media and the public while, at the same time, intensified the importance of standardizing the differences among producs for consumers to identify and clasify them easily. Second, the massive distribution resulted in a business model on the part of the corporations based on the realization that there was a cost-effective way of setting their authorship— that is to say, their brand—in this kind of cultural-consumption product.

It seems obvious, from the principles of marketing and advertising, that to talk about transmedia storytelling is to talk of branding, that is to say, the use of different media becomes in a new message based on the collaboration between the brand itself and its recipients. That form of participation will be more effective if the connection among the brand/product, the story/narrative, and the consumer is built on the mutual influence of narrative and creative interests. As Giovagnoli states (2011, p. 10),

> Thinking transmedia doesn't mean just distributing parts of the story in different media, then strictly putting publishing restrictions and dealing with the shuffled parts on the table, as in a charming solitaire game. On the contrary. Conditio sine qua non for a transmedia tale is the continuous dialogue among the involved publishing platforms and the consideration of creative and consumer spaces that belong to each of them, necessarily starting from the audiences.

One of the keys to the success of the storytelling is that those who create the story allow users to contribute their own experiences and interpretations so that they feel part of it and see themselves as the protagonists of their own story (Raybourn, 2014). Following Scolari (as cited in Marfil-Carmona, 2013), transmedia narratives ensure real interactiveness that enables exploration by the user, making it possible to satisfy fans who want to know everything about the narrative universe and, at the same time, to retain those who are satisfied with having part of the story provided and imagining the rest. Most certainly, digital tools made it possible for spectators to choose links to share or send messages, tweets, or comments, multiplying the interlinking of opinions (Carrasco Molina, 2013). The result is the creation of a participative

fan culture in which users fill the gaps in the narrative elaborated by the narrative's creators in a way that goes beyond the expected.

In short, we can summarize the transmedia designs in four basic principles: (1) interaction: the development of a character and a role that can be interacted with in the game, in blogs, in videos, in photos, and on Twitter to trigger emotions and create a community of fans; (2) story: the narrative and setting that can be explored and created; (3) place: the construction of a world; and (4) audience action: the user participation and the emergence of a culture (Raybourn, 2014). The strategies to expand the narrative, moreover, concentrate on the following points: (1) creation of interstitial microstories to expand the period between the launch of one product and the next one forthcoming; (2) creation of parallel stories; (3) creation of peripheral stories; and (4) creation of content by users (Scolari, 2009).

According to its strategic nature, the transmedia storytelling phenomenon proposes a way of making the brand visible, preventing the burnout and excessive use caused by conventional advertising formulas (Carrasco-Molina, 2013)—like the 30-second advertising spot. Transmedia advertising campaigns do not sell a product through a sole, repetitive message, on a certain platform or screen, not even through the search of a large number of *likes*. The new aims are more ambitious because they create symbolic universes of consumption, shaped and modified over time, always linked to the brand, and connected to entertainment, personal happiness, and emotions (Scolari, 2009).

Following Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson (2015), in the context of a new attention economy, the content is no longer about ratings and visits, but the scope for participation as well as interest and the feeling that audiovisual forms might inspire. That is why the new attention, as a principle of connection among the brand, the product, and their consumers finds a new essential active focus within the video games industry and culture. That relationship between users and products is materialized through marketing and advertising strategies based on giving meaning to the management and the organization of the video game as a transmedia phenomenon.

The niches in which this type of strategy is being applied are very diverse. Traditionally, it has been held that the fantasy and science fiction genre designed for the entire family is the one most likely to shine in the virtual settings visited by Internet users (Carrasco Molina, 2013; Edwards, 2012). However, at the present time, we are starting to witness how they are being applied to advertising campaigns that attempt to promote educational video games (Raybourn, 2014; Sangalang, Quintero Johnson, & Ciancio, 2013), military entertainment video games (Freeman, 2014), charitable actions (Marfil-Carmona, 2013), and sporting events (Goldschmitt, 2011), among others. It is precisely in this context in which we justify the need to gain a greater understanding of the transmedia phenomenon from a strategic and advertising perspective. Taking into account the great detail that the chosen video game genre provides for the study of such strategies, we have selected the medieval/fantasy-inspired titles of the World of Warcraft (WoW) video game saga.

Objectives and Methodology

The primary goals of this work are:

O1:   *Analyze the communication strategy used to generate an advertising transmedia communicative framework in which narratives, signs, and semantics from fantasy literature inspired by the medieval historical past come together.*

O2:   *Understand and explain the configuration of narrative threads that come together to create an individual semantic universe through different digital communication channels and platforms: narratives from the plot of each video game, narratives about the brand (WoW), and narratives from players or fans who reflect the game experience (with the product) and the experience with the semantic universe (with the WoW brand).*

To analyze the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic margins of the advertising discourses associated with the topic and the storylines of this set of video games from a transmedia perspective, we must begin from the following set of assumptions: Analysis of the promotional content is influenced by the cultural nature of the product itself. This is a product that consists of a set of stories starring various fictional characters, in which how the stories develop and end depends on direct intervention by the consumer. Thus, each story proposed in each video game is based on other stories or discourses and on the final meaning afforded by each player. The central narrative or story of the WoW saga draws on fantasy literature inspired by medieval literature, but it is reinvented to build WoW's own universe of signs and semantics. This is the setting from which transmedia advertising strategies are built through the content that, in turn, contributes to the creation of independent and participative stories.

The model used to study the phenomenon of transmedia marketing strategies has four dimensions, as described in earlier studies (San Nicolás Romera, Nicolás Ojeda, & Ros Velasco, 2015, 2018): (1) identification of the video game according to theme and technical data; (2) identification of the content, actions, media, and channels; (3) identification and analysis of signs, semantics, tales, and discourses; and (4) identification of the users and their roles.

The period to be taken into account in this study is January 2014 to January 2017. We have recorded and analyzed only the advertising and promotional content on the official online platforms for the video game and official social networks.

We chose this case study because of the popularity and success of the WoW commercial brand that underpins a series of video games within a common semantic or storytelling universe. To quantify popularity, the selection criterion consisted of sales volume. To explore this, we first determined that there was no specific ranking concerning the most attractive video games totally or partially contextualized in the medieval period. For this reason, we had to create our own ranking of medieval-inspired video games with the highest sales rates from 2012 to 2013. To obtain a sales ranking of medieval video games during the specified years, we visited the website of the Spanish Association of Video Games [Asociación Española de Videojuegos] (www.aevi.org.es) for the monthly ranking of best-selling video games. We checked the

ranking monthly to see which medieval-inspired video games were in the top 15. Then, we created a list with those medieval titles that had been on the list for 24 months. The result was a list comprising a total of five medieval video games that had garnered the highest sales rates in 2012 and 2013: "Diablo," WoW "Mists of Pandaria," "Guild Wars 2," WoW "Battle Chest 3.0," and WoW "Cataclysm." The WoW saga held three positions on the top 5 best-selling medieval video games list.

We selected this saga as our case study not only because the WoW is the sales leader but also because it is a great example of the potential of transmedia marketing strategies in this framework of medieval-inspired video games. As Tenderich (2014) states, the WoW exemplifies transmedia brands in the gaming world better than any other title, with its universe spread through a variety of media driven by a singular narrative. What makes this video game a perfect title for us to analyze the field of transmedia marketing in the video games framework is its massive multiplayer online way of playing, which consists of more than 10 million active subscribers; these subscribers not only consume the media but also engage and participate in it actively by sharing their videos on YouTube, reading and creating novels, attending and organizing conventions, and consuming movies.

Analysis and Results

The video games analyzed were developed and distributed by the same company, Blizzard Entertainment. A brief description of each video game follows.

The game WoW "Battle Chest 3.0" is a pack that includes the full game WoW together with the expansion sets "The Burning Crusade" and "Wrath of the Lich King". The game WoW "Cataclysm" is the third expansion set of the WoW video game. The plot is based on how the evildragon Deathwing returns to the world, triggering a great cataclysm that reshapes much of the world's lands. A new political conflict between the Alliance and the Horde begins after the cataclysm. The video game WoW "Mists of Pandaria" is the fourth expansion of the WoW video game saga. The plot tells how the new continent reveals itself to a world torn asunder when the Alliance and the Horde come close to starting a war that will consume all Azeroth.

Identifying and analyzing all the official digital media and channels demonstrated that there were at least two main online platforms that acted as the bases for shaping the communication strategies. (1) A corporate website by the developer/distributor of the video game, which is divided into specific sections for each of its video games. In other words, it acts as a catalog contributing mainly to promoting and selling. This one offers limited opportunities for interaction. (2) A specific website for each video game, with greater content diversity, that coexists on a special platform (www.Battle.net) created by the developer as an entertainment channel. Both are related to each other but meet different commercial and communicative objectives.

At least two of the three expansions of the WoW video game saga, "Cataclysm" and "Mists of Pandaria," have their own section inside the developer's corporate Web page. Conducting an analysis of the content structure and type, the internal hierarchy and organization, the development level, and the interactivity level enables us to identify the combination of the most visible content related to advertising and entertainment, which consists of trailers, cinematics, image captures from the game, commercial offers,

technical information, system requirements, ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) information, PEGI (Pan European Game Information), downloads, wallpapers, and community.

Some of the elements identified can be classified as *classic* content aimed at presenting and advertising the video games. However, we checked out how these elements were interlinked with other elements located in different sections. We can classify them as follows.

- Advertising or promotional content: videos, trailers, cinematics, ads, downloads and screenshots, headlines, texts, and slogans ("Unlock the mysteries of Pandaria," "A new age has begun. Cataclysm"). The persuasive texts present the video games and contain the advertising messages of the game, such as: "discover the dark secrets. . . explore ancient kingdoms. . . plunder vast treasures. . . rise to defend Pandaria. . . before it is too late," or "You have defeated the renegades . . . now. . . move further . . . to prevent . . . the world from shrinking."

- Content that broadens the product information and contributes to expanding the product narrative beyond the game—for example, the presentation of the WoW characters that is linked to the general guide of the game; information about possibilities offered by the game; new characters (linked to the general guide to the game); innovations in the game; recommendations; extensions of content; and updates ("Battle to level 90," "New race: Pandaren," or "Discover a lost continent").

- Mechanisms whose nature and location are designed to shape a transmedia communication strategy—for example, links to the community area located on the page Battle.com (owned by the developer). In this section, the players can access a wide variety of content that contributes to player interaction with the narrative of the WoW universe and acts as a launch for a transmedia strategy.

- Other mechanisms and content oriented toward marketing the product (e.g., online store or shopping and links to the developer's official store).

The data analyzed show that each section is managed as a corporate space, as structures with similar content for both video games. Both sections present content with narratives that share the semantics and syntax of the WoW universe, even though their arguments differ regarding the narrative style: persuasive and commercial in some cases, recreational or entertaining in others. All this content is presented in the same space, although it belongs to different times and aims. We consider the content presented at the initial level of accessibility to be of a commercial nature. Therefore, instead, cinematics or trailers are designed to play a commercial role, that is to say, they pertain to the phase in communication in which the product is introduced and perform a persuasive function. However, their characteristics make them a sought-after entertainment product that is extensively consumed by users through the official channels of the WoW saga.

As new content is incorporated into the Web page, it interacts with, modifies, and/or complements the narrative of the preexisting content. Thus, it expands or invites users to modify or experience the narrative inside and outside the game differently. We found messages that offer the consumers a twofold

promise: They (1) improve or modify the experience with the game's narrative and/or outside it; and (2) remind users that the player is the protagonist of the game's story and its semantic universe. The following messages are truly illustrative in this respect: "Now, your mission. . . " or "you must go into the plans. . ."

Together with this type of content, the structure fosters a clear space, which encourages interaction with the other channels, principally in social media. From the point of view of developing a transmedia communication strategy, identifying which content is linked from this section and which channels are those most clearly projected is key. In the case of the WoW video game saga, it is remarkable how Blizzard determines the media framework starting from its corporate Web page. For this developer, it is essential to base the strategy on the existence of the Battle.net website. On the latter website, each video game from the WoW saga has its own space, which acts as the central system for promoting the game and projects a network of media and channels that contain and disseminate content with diverse narratives and aims.[2] It is a hybrid setting for finding, experiencing, consuming, and disseminating content created both by the developer and the users.

Blizzard creates different spaces inside its Battle.net platform. In general, it creates specific spaces for each video game the company develops. In our case, we observed that just one of the three, "Mists of Pandaria," had its own space to hold specific content. The rest is contained in the Web page of the WoW brand, which brings together the common narrative for all the video games belonging to the same saga. Battle.net offers similar structures for each video game, though it is tailored to the specific characteristics of each product and life cycle. In this analysis, a common space has been found for the WoW saga, with specific sections and content according to each game.

The collected data, shown at the beginning of the study, identify how the content is organized according to the following structure: (1) promotional multimedia content, such as trailers and cinematics, that match the content identified in the developer's official website and that, in turn, are those occupying the most visual space; (2) content that contributes to prolonging the narrative experience beyond the website, such as links between media and platforms that foster interaction among media; and (3) spaces intended for users to interact with new content and with each other, such as the Forum, the Artzone, and the Community sections.

This study's most recent review of these spaces, performed in January 2017, revealed that the WoW saga website had been restructured and had evolved toward being a space where interaction between users and the narrative that gives meaning to the video game, rather than classic promotional content, such as trailers and cinematics, constituted the central pillar of the promotional material. It is a space where the WoW universe is constructed: Its narrative is written by the producers and the players together. It is a space designed to foster the experience around consumption and construction of the WoW symbology and semantics. These are platforms designed to prolong the user experience with the product and generate communities of fans or consumers who are interested in and capable of modifying the original narrative outlined in the video game and to disseminate it—thus fostering the existence of transmedia narratives. These narratives are not subject to a product launch advertising strategy or aimed at encouraging its

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[2] http://eu.battle.net/wow/es/; https://worldofwarcraft.com/es-es/story/timeline

purchase; instead, they are aimed at generating a community of fans to prolong the product, the brand experience, beyond what the game can offer. To this end, the website divides the content into five sections: Game, Story, News, Forum, and Shop.

The Game and Story sections describe the WoW universe, narrate the story of the different video games that make up the saga, define characters, include player guides, and offer the developers' updates or *patches* for players. The News section reports on the latest developments in the WoW universe. Players are updated on what will happen in the game universes. This section is clearly aimed at maintaining direct contact with players. It is a space in which experiences that will happen while users play are offered. These include new gaming options in the video game interface that modify the initial meaning of the narrative to foster a new consumer experience outside the purposes of the game. It opts for the creation of a *WoW world* that is parallel to the *real world*, adopting its customs and modifying them according to its own semantics. Thus, for example, on December 31, players were informed about the activities in the WoW world to celebrate New Year's Eve (WoW, ca. 2016):

> NEW YEAR'S FIREWORKS! [DECEMBER 31–JANUARY 1] Ring in the new year in Azeroth by heading to your favorite capital city to watch the fireworks displays which will begin at 6 pm PST and reoccur every hour on the hour. If you're up for a little extra PvP, you may want to head toward Booty Bay where the guards have eschewed the town rules for the night.

The use of social media as part of the strategic management of the transmedia narrative advertising of the video game reflects that there is no official blog to back up these actions in conjunction with the Web platforms and that the three most notable social networks are YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

In the case of YouTube, the data show that the types of content with the highest number of views for the "Cataclysm" and "Mists of Pandaria" video games were the trailer, the cinematics, and the advertisements, while no references were found for the "Battle Chest 3.0" video game. This is the same audiovisual content as that situated in the preferential visual spaces on the Web pages of the video games. In the case of the "Cataclysm" trailer, it is the most viewed video in the entire WoW saga on the YouTube portal, with more than 20 million views. The data on views for each element of the advertising content created by the advertiser show a very large difference compared with other, less conventional content based on entertainment, such as specific Web series for each video game, events, interviews, and soundtracks. After reviewing the data, we can state that even though this channel includes different kinds of audiovisual content, the less interactive, *classic* formats, which focus on the product's own narrative, are those best received among users. This is the content preceding and accompanying the commercial launch of the product and therefore part of a classic advertising strategy.

There are several content items whose characteristics support the existence of a transmedia communication strategy. We can reveal the strategies designed to be rolled out not during the launch phase, but during a maintenance phase, that focus on the entertainment and the evolution of the narrative of the product outside the technical space designed for the game. This content consists of two Web series based on the "Cataclysm" and "Mists of Pandaria" video games, which take the communication strategy to a mixed

setting between advertising and entertainment. The narratives are not designed to promote a product. In itself, it can be categorized as nonadvertising audiovisual entertainment content. They are products interlinked with the game narrative, which contribute to expanding it in different directions by focusing on the personality or the history of a character, a scene, or an event. For example, the video of the series "The Burdens of Shaohao Prelude: The Vision" recreates an adventure in "the time of the last Pandaren emperor, a golden age before the land was enveloped by mist" (WoW, 2013, August 3). Another type of mixed content, once again closer to the advertising and launch of the product—although offered as entertainment—is the story of how the cinematic of the "Cataclysm" video was made—that is to say, the videos that resume the events that Blizzard rolls out for the launch of its video games and the interview with the director of Blizzard Entertainment before the commercial launch of "Mists of Pandaria."

One of the keys to understanding the strategic management of the advertising of these video games is that they are situated inside the semantic and narrative universe of the WoW, which makes it possible for the narratives of both the video games and the advertising and entertainment content to expand toward the new formats. Thus, instead, we found several elements of this content in the official WoW channel on YouTube (Table 1), including the "Azeroth Choppers" episodes of the television program in which the personalized-motorbike designer Paul Teutul Jr. brought together two teams to design bikes inspired by the rival factions of the WoW.

Table 1. Content with the Largest Number of Views on the Official YouTube Channel.

Video game	Typology of content with a greater number of views	Other promotional content with high view rates developed to generate experiences or actions of a branded content nature
WoW: Cataclysm	Cinematic trailer of the third expansion of WoW: Cataclysm. 20,228,491 views (WoW, 2010, October 17)	Web series Cataclysm recap video: Legendary Rogue (Part I of IV). 393,886 views (WoW, 2012, April 11)*
	Official trailer for patch 4.2: Rage of the Firelands, WoW. 2,600,835 views (WoW, 2011, June 14)	Making-of Cataclysm cinematic. 722,978 views (WoW, 2010, November 16)
	Official trailer for patch 4.1: Rise of the Zandalari. 1,713,018 views (WoW, 2011, April 22)	Event: Cataclysm launch event tootage. 285,163 views (WoW, 2010, December 15)**
WoW: Mist of Pandaria	WoW: Mists of Pandaria cinematic trailer. 17,845,863 views (WoW, 2012, August 16)***	Web series The Burdens of Shaohao Prelude: The Vision. 672,756 views (WoW, 2013, August 3)****
	Mists of Pandaria–Patch 5.4 Cinematic: Siege of Orgrimmar. 4,518,778 views (WoW, 2013, August 15)	Event: The European Digital Launch Event–Mists of Pandaria. 314,568 views (WoW, 2012, September 25)*****
	TV commercial WoW: Mists of Pandaria "Best Expansion" TV Commercial WoW.	Interview Blizzard Devs Discuss the Mists of Pandaria Release. 138,856 views (WoW, 2012, September 24a)******

| 4,576,735 views (WoW, 2012, November 19) | Music Guardian Spirits of Pandaria Composed by Neal Acree. 93,476 views (WoW, 2012, September 21) |

Gaming channel on YouTube Gaming: This is a specific video game video section that is part of YouTube. Video game developers post specific videos related to the playability of the video game. It is a space for users and players whose videos are mainly scenes from games that players upload. The videos are classified into categories: live games, videos recorded to be tutorials for other players, videos of special matches, etc. These channels enable the developers to get to know the gamer YouTubers whose content is generating the most interest among users. Finally, it also contains a space where the developer can upload his or her own videos (https://gaming.youtube.com/game/)

Documentary: World of Warcraft: Looking for Group Documentary. 3,821,457 views (WoW, 2014, November 28)*******

Web series: Lords of War Part One–Kargath. 2,148,844 views (WoW, 2014, August 14)

Web series: Azeroth Choppers. 2,599,111 views (WoW, 2014, April 17)********

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* "Amid the turmoil of the Cataclysm, a shadowy figure known as Wrathion sought to cleanse his fellow black dragons of corruption . . . by wiping them from the face of Azeroth. Crucial to his quest was a world-renowned rogue—a hero of unparalleled courage, who helped vanquish Deathwing himself. This video series recounts the mortal champion's secret dealings with Wrathion for those who may have missed it, and hints at where the cunning black dragon may be headed next. . ."

** "This video features footage from the official World of Warcraft: Cataclysm Southern California launch event, which kicked off the North American expansion release at midnight PST on December 7."

*** "This is the official cinematic trailer for World of Warcraft's fourth expansion set, Mists of Pandaria, originally debuted at gamescom 2012 on August 16 in Cologne, Germany. . ."

**** "In a new series of six dramatic shorts, we travel back to the time of the last Pandaren emperor, a golden age before the land was enveloped by mist."

***** "The show brings you all the best of the launch events which took place on September 24th in Paris, London, Madrid, Milan, Moscow, Cologne and Stockholm with insights from the game's developers, live entertainment and much more. . ."

****** "As we approach the World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria worldwide release, we want to share with you some final insights and development reflections from Blizzard Entertainment Chief Storyteller Chris Metzen and World of Warcraft Art Director Chris Robinson."

******* "An all-new documentary celebrating 10 years of adventure, camaraderie, and dancing on mailboxes all around Azeroth. Explore the history of WoW with its creators, and journey into corners of Blizzard and the WoW community you've never seen before."

******** "The ultimate road showdown! Legendary custom motorcycle designer Paul Jr. has assembled two handpicked teams of bike experts to bring to life a pair of asphalt-kicking chopper designs inspired by World of Warcraft®'s two warring factions. . . . In the end, only one chopper will reign supreme as the undisputed king of Azeroth's roads in a winner-takes-all showdown voted on by World of Warcraft players around the globe" (http://us.battle.net/wow/en/choppers/)

An analysis of the social network profiles that Blizzard developed for its games reflects that Facebook and Twitter[3] act as its most important channels. The most noteworthy content is that aimed at accelerating the connection between the content located on the websites and the video and gaming channels. In other words, they channel the promotional content to interact with players and make it possible to measure the interest they show in it. Although the content is of an advertising nature, its function is to entertain and encourage interest in current developments, and not so much in the product. This is the case in content reporting on real or virtual events being held on Facebook or YouTube channel, created specifically to introduce or celebrate the launch of a new WoW video game or an update of an existing game (WoW, 2012, September 24b):

> Join Blizzard in the launching official event and celebrate Mists of Pandaria! Join your colleagues' Horde and Alliance in the official event of the last expansion of World of Warcraft in Webhallen, Stockholm, on September 24, at 8 pm. Be one of the first to get the Collector's Edition.

Analysis of the content, signs, and semantics (Tables 2 and 3) makes it possible to identify and classify the advertising, informational, entertainment, and participative content. The resulting analysis confirms the difficulty of drawing a clear line separating content whose narrative complements the narrative of the video game through entertainment from content whose main objective is to promote the product or provide information about it. Thus, we understood that content that is not originally designed to be of a promotional nature can be deemed content that broadens the semantics of the product and contributes to expanding its narrative.

Table 2. Syntactic Elements of the Video Game Displayed
Through the Official Websites of the Game.

Title	Signs	Characters	Settings	Objects
WoW: Battle Chest 3.0	Corporate logos (WoW and Blizzard).	Dwarfs. Dwarfs with guns. Humans. Night elves. Warriors with armor. Warrior orcs. Undead beings.	Ruins. Undetermined religious sanctuaries-temples. Woods.	Bracelets. Capes. Epaulets. Helmets. Rifles and shotguns. Statues with warriors with swords. Stone chest with undead creatures. Treasures. Tunics.
WoW: Cataclysm	Fire. Stone circle with inscription. WoW: Cataclysm and Blizzard logo.	Black Dragon/Devil. Elves. Night Elf. Orcs. Undead. Warriors. Wizard.	Castle. Castle indoor. Caves. Caverns. Coasts. Fortified town. Hamlet. Inside temple. Religious sanctuary-temple. Rocky country. Sea.	Axes. Battering ram. Bow. Catapults. Clubs. Dagger. Full armor (epaulets, breastplate, belt, brassard, etc.). Helmets. Jewels. Make-up. Pikestaff. Sticks. Swords.

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[3] https://es-es.facebook.com/Warcraft/?ref=page_internal; https://twitter.com/warcraft

			Seaport. Ruins. Woods.	
WoW: Mists of Pandaria	WoW: Mists of Pandaria and Blizzard logos.	Human warriors. Humanoids: wizards and warriors. Orcs. Panda bear. Warriors.	A mountainous region with an Eastern settlement Village/Hamlet. Coasts. Ruins. Seaport. Woods.	Bamboo leaves. Belt. Book with oriental symbols. Bracelets. Breastplates. Cape. Clubs. Epaulets. Gloves. Swords. Wands.

In this case, the Story menu of the Battle.net website has a significant amount of this type of content. Among other things, we found animation content, comics, novels, short stories, music, character histories, and gaming guides. All of these (and their narratives) are related to different degrees and contribute to making the semantic universe of the brand and its story, as well as the history of its products, grow. Managing it like this expands the experience of the video game beyond the technical, time, and space constraints restricting its entertainment potential. This interpretation implies understanding the product as being the sum of the game and the expansion of its original narrative through new entertainment content. This reality conditions the strategic focus of the advertising for the video game. Therefore, the advertising activities' design is based on the product, its nature, and semantics, but the activities are conditioned by the symbology of the WoW brand, its plots, its narratives, and the entertainment function in a dynamic, transmedia strategy.

Prime among the official spaces offering the most regarding development and dissemination of content created by users (user-generated content) is the Forum section of the Battle.net platform. Here, the developers offer users options according to categories or the interests of the users: forums to answer questions or solve technical problems; community forums where users can role-play and create and read new stories from the WoW universe; spaces to create player associations; and spaces for users to create and portray new content, such as illustrations or stories of their activities in the Warcraft universe. There are also forums about characters, gaming experiences, and the realms that make up the WoW narrative. A review of the content of the forums reflects uneven use by the players. Questions that raise queries about specific aspects of the game intermingle, while particular concerns of the players are also raised that contribute to the expansion of the original meaning of the product—see, for example, a user request to organize a charity run by gnomes inside the game itself (Sérmar, 2016, October 5):

> Second edition [Dwarfs' race against cancer]. . . . The only requirement would be to be pink hair dwarfs to preserve the spirit of the U.S. race. If your account is in mode Starter. . . . IT'S OK! It is necessary a level 1 dwarf to participate in the race (although if you have a high-level dwarf you can use it. OF COURSE, with pink hair). The route is the same as the original (images from the WoW Guides).

Table 3. Most Remarkable Semantic Elements Used in the Advertising.

Video Game	Slogan or title	Body of text	Storytelling of the commercial	Promises
WoW: Battle Chest 3.0	What's your game?	Reference to the media phenomenon caused by the parodies published on YouTube in which famous figures and users discussed the characters in the WoW (Tomberry, 2009, October 13/Brad Kim, 2010, May 2)	–	–
Wow: Cataclysm	A new age has begun. Everything will burn under the sauna of my wings.	"You've toppled the undead armies of the Lich King and brought Arthas to his knees. Now the breaker of worlds, Deathwing, has burst forth from the heart of the Maelstrom and unleashed his rage upon the land and sea" (WoW, n.d.). "Azeroth has been changed forever, and you must enter the elemental planes in an epic quest to stop the Destroyer from shattering the world itself" (Frazberry, 2015, June 15).	Images about the rebirth of a powerful dragon that will threaten the peace of the world as it is known. It is a short version of the most viewed trailer on the official YouTube channel.	Evil is reborn out of its ashes and everything will go up in flames (fire as a fundamental element of the game). The WoW will be different from how it has been known up until now.
WoW: Mists of Pandaria	Unlock the mysteries of Pandaria. Join the fight. Preorder it now at www.warcraft.com	On the one hand, it presents texts that describe the semantics of the product regarding two terms: mystery and union. On the other hand, it presents texts aimed at awakening the consumer's concern given the imminent launch of the product: being one of the first and not being left without a copy.	A short adaptation of the cinematic presenting the video game, including fight sequences in Pandaria involving mainly Pandaren against Mogu, giving foreshadowing of the battle that will develop in the video game.	Join the fight against evil and preorder your game.

This example of transmedia storytelling created by users is not associated with product advertising. It is an action within the lines of the forums, initiated by users and reflecting a particular interest in an issue, in principle, but it raises a semantic link with the narrative of the product and the brand. It is an example of how contributions by users help to expand the semantics of the game and the WoW universe and are apparently not created or directed by the advertiser. The knowledge and leveraging thereof condition the strategic management of the communication of the brand and its products.

Conclusion and Discussion

This work contributes to understanding the role of the advertising strategy that takes place within the complex process of transmedia storytelling and its relationship with the marketing strategies of the video game industry. We depart from the assumption that "the marketing of experience gives way to the marketing of the story" (Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 23). Advertising content analyzed here, present in the different channels and official media of the WoW video game, allows us to explain and give examples of how the video game narratives are complemented and transformed, and how they evolve in connection with informational, entertainment, and commercial content that is created to promote the video game, enlarge the experience beyond the game itself, and foster a community of users who are able to enhance the narrative in scenarios different from those supported by the *official* channels.

As far as we are concerned, the concept of transmedia storytelling becomes a complex phenomenon of creation, dissemination, and commercialization of stories of products and brands. It is about not only different stories of the same product or some linked products that go through various media, but also a strategic framework that has direct effects on product development and promotion. It forces marketing professionals not to work alone in their departments, but as part of the video game developing process and its evolution. From a commercial point of view, we can safely assume that the transmedia marketing strategy is built on the strategic management of the narratives of the WoW video games and its content.

To sum up, we are facing a narrative structure expanded through different languages (e.g., iconic, verbal) and media (e.g., cinema, comics, television, and video games). According to Eco (as cited in Scolari, 2009; see also Jakobson, 1959), the content is not constructed under the premise of adapting what appears in one medium to another, that is to say, inter-semiotic translation or transmutation in the sense that this occurred in traditional marketing. Transmedia marketing strategies go beyond this, developing a multimodal narrative world expressed in said media and languages. The story varies in each of them, and at the same time, each medium contributes something that is unique, due to its nature, to the story as a whole (Raybourn, 2014) creating spaces where advertising and promotional content achieve the category of product and are as much in demand as the product itself. In this way, an entire world or universe ends up being established around the campaign: The content can be viewed from anywhere at any time, and the story is reached via several entry points and through many media. These narrative structures, explains Freeman (2014), keep audiences alert to anything new that is about to emerge: They are attracted through the first medium and continue to be hooked through the other, related products; it leads them to want to continue exploring the pieces of the puzzle.

The case analyzed exemplifies a sample of the management of transmedia marketing. Particularly, we consider that this work clarifies how advertising content is managed within this complex transmedia strategy. Each animatic, trailer, commercial, headline, paragraph, image, video game, book, character, comic, song, event, and user experience is part of a framework of content that circulates and connects in a single network of media and users. In this respect, the analyzed online platforms form the core of the aforementioned network, the main space where the content is located that is later resituated and circulated among the brand's own channels—as well as by others who do not belong to the brand but are owned by users, players, and fans of both the product and other video games. It is, ultimately, a cultural practice that transforms consumers into a group regardless of their demographic characteristics and class (Jenkins, 2006).

Among the audiovisual content analyzed, the animatics, trailers, and commercials occupy a preferential position when building what we call transmedia advertising strategy. From its part, the narrative nature of the animatics makes them a key element in the strategic construction of the WoW semantic universe. In addition, they imbue the product with meaning before the gaming experience. It is not the script for the game but the story based on which it begins. It lays out the plots and the emotions that invite the player not only to play but also to consume fiercely, as it contextualizes and personalizes the mission the player must tackle—that it is to say, it invites players to construct their own stories inside the WoW semantic universe. To some extent, "the aim of the primer is to give to the audience a valid and specific reason to interact with the narrative" (Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 28).

Because of its linguistic structure and esthetics design, it is highly consumed entertainment content, as demonstrated by the viewing figures on the YouTube platform. The stories act as independent stories while they are also connected to each other and to the game. They are comprehensible for almost all audiences, not just for players, because they do not require audiences to understand the narrative of the game but creatively reuse signs and concepts that we universally associate with medieval fantasy literature: Dragons, orcs, inscriptions, religious temples, wizards, warlocks, dwarfs, knights, weapons, and ships, among other things, make up a universe based on a story that tackles the struggle between good and evil based on mystery, enigmas, the unknown, fear, and war.

After the analysis, we can state that the case presented here reflects how the current digital communicative context conditions the management of the advertising strategy for brands and products. The WoW saga exemplifies the management of a framework of narratives present in interlinked content that constantly evolve to keep the persuasiveness plot of the WoW narrative active. This management results from the space belonging to the brand itself and its direct relationship with the narrative proposed in the product, in the physical/technical space of the video game, but passes through different states and levels of action and coordination, among which we can find creation of content for marketing, presenting, or promoting the product; creation of content to promote entertainment; design of tactics that foster interaction with content; involvement of the users in the creation and dissemination of content; and projection of the identity of the user in the media framework, among others.

Despite the advantages that such strategies can bring to the audience, we have to acknowledge, as Eileen Meehan does (as cited in Edwards, 2012), that this is a purely corporate-driven trend. Transmedia

strategies make economic sense, because the bigger the audience drawn, the better (Scolari, 2009). For corporations, it is an excellent way to extend their target audience, because transmedia narratives reach everybody: one text can interest some, and another text interests others. Actions promoted by the audiences can contribute to modifying original signs and meanings and including new ones. The users' own proposals act as new stories that are born out of the original narrative, which they themselves use to involve other users, and construct a parallel story where the WoW universe offers its syntactic structure and whose signs switch meanings or adopt new meanings that lend sense to new stories.

Finally, concerning the strategies of the WoW, the stories should be understood and explained from the concepts of transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing. Moreover, they should be seen as well from those of transmedia branding or brand story, because of the strategic and communicative management of the stories and content (advertising, commercial, entertainment, informational). In doing so, we can appreciate to what extent this switching builds the brand and its relationship with the user community. All of these relationships between brands and users must be based on a commercial, cultural, and narrative bond of trust, at least on the part of users, toward the brand. As Tenderich (2014) claims, "media and entertainment brands are the story, and their transmedia nature enables them to engage with pre-existing fan communities and cater to the culture of these communities" (p. 32).

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