

Exploring how storytelling can be used to shape the future of sports broadcasting

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ABSTRACT

Stories have been an important part of communication throughout human history. It is argued that storytelling is greatly interwoven with human cognition and perception. However, a lot of confusion around the term exists in the field of design. This article explores how storytelling can be used to shape the future of sports broadcasting. As a framework for viewer motivation the disposition theory is used as a model. Storytelling is used to ensure a better experience for the viewer in the future of sports broadcasting. Through a literature review, four themes for using storytelling in design are identified and discussed. Furthermore, factors for viewer motivations are presented and discussed. These motivations are analyzed, and possible design interventions identified. At the end, guidelines for using storytelling in shaping the future of sports broadcasting are presented and discussed.

KEYWORDS: Storytelling, Design Practice, Sports Broadcasting

1. INTRODUCTION

In designing the future of sports broadcasting, one has to consider the story that is going to be broadcasted. Sports broadcasting is all about communicating to an audience, and one important way in which this is done is through sharing stories. Therefore, in designing the future of sports broadcasting, the future of stories also must be taken into consideration.

According to Peng and Matterns, design practitioners have not yet fully utilized storytelling in design and that there also exists

some confusion about what storytelling in design actually is and how it should be used[1]. However, stories are one of the oldest way in which we communicate[2, 3] and is greatly interwoven with human cognition and perception of the world around us[3]. This article will investigate and clarify how storytelling can be utilized in designing the future of sports broadcasting by posing the research question: How might storytelling be used in designing the future of sports broadcasting?

At the end, some guidelines for how to utilize storytelling to improve sports broadcasting in the

future will be presented. The goal of this article is to show how storytelling can be of valuable use in design and contribute to faster and better development in the context of sports broadcasting.

1.1 Storytelling

Stories are one of the oldest ways of communicating between people. It is a structured way of communicating a series of events[1]. Donna Lichaw says it goes even deeper and postulates that stories are the way in which the human brain makes sense of events and situations[3].

Stories are usually structured with a beginning, middle and end [2, 4]. Usually a story consists of a plot. This plot contains a series of events in an order chosen by its storyteller[1].

There are many different types of stories. A story can have an intention of informing or entertaining. The intent of the story, as important as the story itself. In this article, many types of stories have been considered, but used in different types of situations. There is a difference between narrative research and storytelling as a communicative tool[2].

1.2 Sports broadcasting

According to the Cambridge Dictionary the term "Broadcasting" means: *"to send out a programme on television or radio" or "to spread information to a lot of people"* [5]. In this article broadcasting of sports will be the main focus.

For the sake of simplicity, throughout this article, the concept of a game, match or equivalent will simply be called a "match".

1.3 Design

Don Norman on Interaction Design: *"The focus is upon how people interact with technology. The goal is to enhance people's understanding of what can be done, what is happening, and what has just occurred. Interaction design draws upon principles of psychology, design, art, and emotion to ensure a positive, enjoyable experience"*, and on Experience Design: *"The practice of designing products, processes, services, events, and environments with a focus placed on the quality and enjoyment of the total experience"*[6]. Designing for sports broadcasting is a fusion of these two definitions, as it entails both the interaction and the experience.

2. METHODS

This article is based on a literature review. As there are few to no articles about how to use storytelling in designing the future of sports broadcasting, articles about storytelling in design, motivations for viewing sports and how sport is viewed were found and analyzed. The searches were conducted through databases such as The Design Journal and through Google Scholar.

In the review many themes are identified, and after analyzing these themes separately, guidelines for design of the future of sports broadcasting are discussed.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Using stories in design

Peng and Matterns argue that stories are very closely linked with the user. They both have a person, context, a series of events and emotional reactions to this[1]. They also point out that stories are used to grab the user's attention and affect them emotionally. As such it serves a good

purpose for entertainment. Stories also have deep roots in our cognition and comprehension of the world around us[3]. Therefore, they also serve a great purpose in communication.

Through the literature review, four main themes for using storytelling in design were identified. These themes are presented in the following subchapters.

3.1.1 Storytelling for interdisciplinary communication

A person with any culture or language can contribute in crafting a story[7]. Because stories are based on elements such as text, pictures and sounds there is no need for terminology or other domain knowledge. Therefore it is great for a team to construct a shared vision, because everyone can relate and understand[1].

3.1.2 Storytelling as insight

Stories can be a great way of starting a conversation with a user and make it easier for them to share. Sometimes people feel they are not the right person to answer questions on a particular subject, however telling a story of how they experienced a certain event lays no claims to expertise or knowledge and therefore lowers the pressure[7]. Stories also help root the design in actual human experiences instead of models. However, in order to have any research value D.C. Phillips argues that stories have to be true[8].

3.1.3 Storytelling as framework

By having a story as a base and reference for the design, it is easier to check if something is worth adding or improving[9]. It is also easier to make sure the design is cohesive and sound and makes the design easier to understand. This is because it is based on the foundational structure of the story. For solutions where the user might not fully understand the concept from the start, it

also makes it easier to communicate that new concept[3].

3.1.4 Storytelling in prototyping and testing

Stories can be a great tool for quickly testing if a solution is going to work. By writing stories, the designer can more easily find contradictions in, and points that are going to hinder the flow of the user. It is a cheap and fast way to check if your users understand the concept early[9].

Stories can help the designer see how reality is experienced by people and therefore getting a greater understanding of how their solutions affect people[2]. This means that stories can help designers evaluate their prototypes or existing solutions.

3.2 Motivations for watching sports

There are many different reasons for why people choose to watch sports. In the literature review several critical factors were found. These factors are mainly based on the disposition theory of entertainment pioneered by Zillmann and Cantor[10]. Other good theories and models exist, but due to the scope and format of this article one was chosen.

Raney argues that you are never guaranteed a pleasurable experience while watching sports, you anticipate or at least think it is possible. However, you are never guaranteed it since sports is a live event is not scripted[11]. But the viewer goes into the experience expecting to be entertained. And he further states that, "Entertainment lies in the eyes of the beholder"[11]. This illustrates the individuality in sports spectatorship.

Raney asserts three main themes out of the research done the last decades. Emotional reactions to competitors and outcomes, content

features and fulfilling social and cognitive needs[12].

The level of excitement felt by a viewer can be traced to the disposition that individual has towards the team or athletes involved. This means that they are affected simply by the outcome of the match between two competitors they already knew of[12].

The second theme is based on the match itself. Content features during the match greatly affects the enjoyment of the viewer[12].

The third theme is cognitive and social fulfillment. For many viewers the act of watching sports with other people is the most motivating factor. Many also feel the comradery of physical contact like high-fiving to be a major contributor into watching sports[12].

Through the literature review other important factors into enjoyment of sports broadcasts were found. These are examples of what affects viewer enjoyment, but the reason it affects the viewer can be traced back to the three main themes.

3.2.1 Suspense

Suspense and anticipation prove to be of the most important factors for enjoyment in watching sports[13]. Anticipating a positive event and then experience that gives possibly the best enjoyment. Also, the closer the final scores are and the longer they are close[13] the more suspenseful and joyful the experience. Expecting to experience an enjoyable outcome.

3.2.2 Violence

It is shown that there is a correlation between violence and the viewers enjoyment. Especially for men, a higher perceived violence is generally rated as a more enjoyable match[14, 15]. And the more violent, the better the match is reported. Perceived violence is also affected by the suspected outcome and the perceived rivalry

between teams or athletes. However, viewers that perceived higher levels of violence reported greater enjoyment than people that not, regardless of inter team rivalry or not [16].

3.2.3 Sports commentators

It is sometimes hard to follow what is happening in fast paced sports, or when you are not an avid fan (even then it could be hard). Commentators are important facilitators for directing focus in sports. How a sports commentator frames the action on the screen directly affects the suspense and enjoyment of the game[17]. Indicating how important this win will be and shifts the affection of the viewer[18].

3.2.4 Acquired knowledge

Another important factor that affects the viewers enjoyment is their knowledge of the sports in which they are watching[12]. This knowledge makes it easier to understand what is going on. It is also an important social factor.

Being able to talk about sports and using knowledge in social settings does seem to acquire a sort of "social capital", and is a positive contribution to enjoyment[18]. This could be knowledge about the league, players, teams and the like. There is also a proven correlation between enjoyment and learning[12].

3.2.5 Beauty in performance

One of the most interesting things about watching sports is the effortless and graceful execution of the most difficult task. Watching someone else perform such a feat can prove greatly entertaining for those watching [19].

3.2.6 Team and athlete identification

Identification with athletes and teams are a really strong factor for watching sports[20]. People identify themselves by who they follow. People

also make social connection based on sharing opinions and knowledge.

3.2.7 *Watching with others*

The act of watching sports together with other people is an important social event for many[18].

3.2.8 *Betting*

The act of betting on the outcome of sports, heighten the risk and therefore the suspense, giving a stronger emotional connection with the sport[12].

3.3 How do we watch sports?

A story contains a character, plot and motivation, but it does also contain a context. Through the literature review some interesting things about how we watch sports and where we watch it were found.

3.3.1 *Second screening and social tv*

One of the more prevalent themes of sports broadcasting today, or just television in general is the concept of second screening. As technology gets more embedded in our lives, our use of it to augment the viewing experience. Second screening is simple what it states, to use a second screen while watching the main event[11].

There are many problems and challenges second screening and the viewing experience however. Second screening makes the user not only judge the entertainment experience based on the content on the television, but rather as a sum of that and the interpersonal connection experienced on the second screen[11]. People who second screen know of others who also partake in this activity and use the opportunity to communicate with witty comments and the like while game is on. Raney and Ji conclude that

second screening aids and compliments the viewing experience[11].

3.3.2 *Watching with others*

There have also been observed social norms and rules for how to behave at public place like sports bar while watching sports. Strangers communicate and control what they say and how they react based on the people around them[11].

3.4 Analyzing motivation to find possible design interventions

3.4.1 *Framing the action*

In subchapter 3.2 we saw that commentators, suspense and violence are important for viewer enjoyment. From that we see that one of the most important elements for ensuring viewer enjoyment is framing of the action. One way as were shown is that chapter was through play-by-play commentary.

An important way of framing the action is through visualization. Carefully choosing what you show on screen or say will greatly impact how the viewer feels about what is going on.

Another factor is the perceived rivalry and violence. As stated before, perceived violence was greatly affected by the disposition viewers had towards teams and athletes.

Raney also points out that we find beauty in watching athletes perform incredible tasks seemingly with ease. However, knowing how difficult the task is, has to be communicated beforehand if the viewer is not already aware. Communication and visualization are vital in getting the viewer to get this[12].

3.4.3 Context affects motivation

Another important factor to consider is that context affects motivation for enjoyment. For some, watching with others is among the most important factors. Others use second screening to fill that need. Either case has different implications on the enjoyment of watching.

3.4.4 Identification/ Story of team

Identification is a big motivator in sports spectatorship. Fans have a big tendency to define their own identity through who they are fans of. Building up a story of the team

3.4.5 Athlete specific storytelling

Likewise of the identification through teams, people also identify themselves through athletes. However, they might also just find the athlete simply amusing to watch. This can be because they stick out or are unconventional.

3.4.6 Tailored content

Different people have different motivations for viewing sports, and therefore it might be useful to think “smaller” in terms of concepts. Maybe creating a story that gets everyone’s attention is not possible and you have to tailor specific content to a specific viewer group. Maybe some groups are more interested in the story behind rather than the competition itself.

3.5 Guidelines for storytelling in sports broadcasting

Every sport is different, and therefore every story and every concept will also be different from sport to sport. The next subchapters are guidelines to guide the development of sports broadcasting using storytelling.

3.5.1 The story is most important

The story is very valuable to consider when designing the future of sports broadcasting. It should serve as the foundation.

Having a story as the foundation, will greatly improve communication. Broadcasting sports means a lot of people from a lot of different backgrounds are going to be involved. The story ensures everyone has the same vision for what the viewer should be experiencing and therefore helping the broadcaster achieving this.

It is important to think about who the main character of the story is. Having the viewer as the main character or the athlete. In the viewing experience, the main character of the story is the viewer and the broadcaster is helping the viewer achieve its goal of being entertained.

3.5.2 Find suspense in different sports

Mapping the sporting event over time can be a invaluable help. Finding how the story evolves during the broadcast will help mapping the moments of suspense. Having mapped out when the most crucial events take place and when the duller moments happen, will tell you how to pace the broadcast.

As the story has such strong roots to human cognition and also affects how we interpret the world seems apparent through the factor of framing. How commentators affected user enjoyment by framing the action, indicates that the perceived suspense can be greatly influenced through storytelling.

3.5.3 Visualization and explanation

As shown in earlier in this chapter, knowledge acquisition is key in ensuring viewer enjoyment. Key in showing the action in the most suspenseful moments, to make it even more suspenseful.

3.5.4 Strategic learning

To ensure a good experience, the user needs to understand what is going on, they also need to learn. The viewer must learn before the suspenseful moments in order to understand and feel the suspense. Finding out when information should be presented and in what order proves highly important.

4. DISCUSSION

In this article many different factors for viewer enjoyment has been presented. It is apparent that this is a complex issue and not fully explored solely by one literature review. However, interesting moments have been identified. It is shown that how the viewer has many underlying motivations for viewing sports.

In designing entertainment, especially sports which is so dependent on the story, it seems that considering the story in the design is very valuable. A story can be a great framework on which to build a sport broadcast in an effective and precise manner.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This literature review shows that there is great potential for the use of storytelling in shaping the future of sports broadcasting. It also shows how the broadcaster can greatly affect the viewers enjoyment. This underlines that there still is great potential for sports broadcasting to grow as a form of entertainment.

It would be highly interesting to try theory of this article out in practice. Like design, things always are different when they are first tried. Finding out what is beneficial and what only looks good on paper.

As the work of Zillmann et.al. and the disposition theory was the basis for this review, it would also be interesting to see if it yields other results doing the same process with other theories.

This research in this review mainly stems from the USA. An article from Melnick and Wann highlights that peoples have different views on sports, and motivations towards sports vary immensely depending on if you are from USA or Norway[21]. Therefore, a more thorough study on how sports spectatorship is affected by demography would be interesting.

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