

The Transformative Role of Interactive Narratives in Contemporary Art and Culture

Wuri Cahya Handaru
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Correspondent: cahyawuri@ub.ac.id

Received : January 2, 2025
Accepted : February 16, 2025
Published : February 28, 2025

Citation: Mohammad, W. (2025). The Role of AI Waifu Characters in Supporting Weaboos with Post-Traumatic Relationship Syndrome (PTRS). *Harmonia : Journal of Music and Arts*, 3(1), 1-14.

ABSTRACT: Cross-media storytelling has emerged as a pivotal practice in contemporary art and digital culture, redefining the boundaries of narrative creation and audience engagement. This review aims to synthesize existing literature on interactive narratives, focusing on how multimodality, interactivity, and participatory cultures reshape storytelling practices. A systematic literature review was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using targeted keywords to capture relevant studies, with inclusion criteria emphasizing cross-media narratives, audience engagement, and digital artistic practices. Findings reveal that interactive and multimodal approaches foster deeper audience immersion, enhancing memory retention and emotional connection, while digital platforms and participatory practices democratize authorship and support collaborative storytelling. Cross-cultural examples demonstrate how storytelling functions as a negotiation tool for identity and cultural heritage, while educational applications highlight its effectiveness in improving learning outcomes. Immersive technologies, particularly AR, VR, and AI, expand narrative experiences but also pose ethical challenges concerning authenticity, authorship, and misinformation. Systemic factors such as infrastructure, policy frameworks, and technology access critically shape the reach and inclusivity of these narratives. The review underscores the urgency of addressing methodological, ethical, and systemic barriers, recommending expanded infrastructure investment, supportive regulations, and interdisciplinary research. These strategies are vital for advancing cross-media storytelling as a transformative force in cultural dialogue, education, and creative innovation.

Keywords: Cross-Media Storytelling, Interactive Narratives, Audience Engagement, Digital Culture, Immersive Technologies, Participatory Culture.



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INTRODUCTION

Cross-media storytelling, often described as a narrative approach that transcends the boundaries of conventional storytelling by utilizing multiple media platforms, has gained substantial scholarly and artistic attention in recent years. This practice involves the creation of narratives that span

across diverse formats such as film, animation, digital media, podcasts, and social media platforms, producing interactive and immersive experiences for audiences (Lea, 2021; Pecheranskyi et al., 2023). Scholars argue that this form of storytelling is not only a method for enhancing audience engagement but also a transformative practice that challenges the traditional structures of linear narratives (Lea, 2021). Within the domain of contemporary art, cross-media storytelling has emerged as a critical tool for both creators and audiences, facilitating dynamic exchanges that reshape how stories are constructed, disseminated, and experienced (Halwani, 2022). The integration of multiple narrative threads across platforms allows for richer explorations of thematic complexity and character development, where the meaning and impact of the narrative can vary significantly depending on the medium through which it is encountered (Pecheranskyi et al., 2023).

The significance of digital technology in reshaping the landscape of interactive narratives cannot be overstated. Technological advances, particularly the proliferation of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mobile applications, have catalyzed the emergence of hyper-narratives that expand the scope of audience participation and agency (Rizvić et al., 2017; Rizvić et al., 2019; Schleser & Xu, 2021). These innovations enable audiences to transcend passive consumption and become active participants who influence the trajectory of the narrative itself. Scholars contend that such shifts have transformed audience expectations by encouraging deeper levels of involvement and personalization, thereby intensifying narrative immersion (Rizvić et al., 2019). Moreover, interactive frameworks embedded in storytelling are increasingly utilized in the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage, as they allow complex historical contexts to be rendered accessible and engaging to a broader public (Rizvić et al., 2017; Rizvić et al., 2019). This intersection of technology and narrative practice illustrates the evolving nature of art in the digital era, as artists experiment with new forms to reimagine the possibilities of narrative expression (Prager et al., 2015).

In parallel, the transformation of storytelling practices alongside digital development has raised significant cultural and theoretical questions concerning authorship, narrative authority, and representation. The proliferation of mobile storytelling and transmedia narratives has contributed to the democratization of authorship, where diverse voices and communities actively participate in co-creating and reshaping narratives (Schleser & Xu, 2021). Social media, in particular, has emerged as a critical conduit for interactive storytelling, where users contribute to the narrative process through sharing, remixing, and commenting, thereby blurring the boundaries between producer and consumer (O'Meara & Murphy, 2023). This collaborative form of narrative construction signifies not only a technological transformation but also a broader cultural shift toward participatory art, where the storyworld is continually reconstructed by its participants. The impact of these developments has prompted renewed scholarly attention toward the implications of digital storytelling practices, particularly their ability to challenge established norms while fostering inclusivity and dialogue (Singer, 2016).

Recent surveys of audience behavior reveal that engagement with cross-media storytelling is highly dynamic and multifaceted. While some reports have suggested that upwards of 85% of users interact with cross-media narratives on digital platforms in 2023, these claims remain unsubstantiated by rigorous empirical data. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that audiences are more likely to share and discuss cross-media projects compared to traditional single-platform

narratives, reflecting the participatory and communal dimensions of these practices (Pecheranskyi et al., 2023). The collaborative nature of cross-media storytelling has become particularly evident in online communities, where narratives spanning film, gaming, and social platforms prompt active discussion and reinterpretation. These trends underscore the growing recognition of storytelling as not only a creative act but also a social practice that shapes collective identity and discourse.

Despite these positive trends, the measurement of audience engagement in cross-media storytelling remains a persistent challenge for researchers. The diversity of platforms across which narratives unfold complicates the development of uniform metrics, leading to inconsistencies in the assessment of engagement levels (Rizvić et al., 2019). Traditional benchmarks of engagement, such as view counts, likes, and shares, fail to capture the depth and quality of interactions that reflect more meaningful audience involvement (Bublitzky, 2020). Moreover, the transient nature of social media interactions, which often dissipate quickly, further limits the ability to assess sustained interest and emotional investment (Rizvić et al., 2019). This methodological complexity necessitates a combined approach, integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights to better capture the richness of audience experiences (Moin, 2020). Researchers are therefore challenged to innovate new evaluative frameworks that account for both transactional and affective dimensions of engagement.

Another significant difficulty lies in distinguishing between superficial metrics of audience behavior and deeper levels of cognitive and emotional investment. For instance, likes and shares can signal interest but may not adequately reflect transformative engagements where audiences are critically and emotionally invested in the narrative (Lea, 2021). Current assessment tools often underestimate the effectiveness of cross-media storytelling, particularly when narratives resonate on symbolic, cultural, or emotional levels that are not easily quantified (Rizvić et al., 2019). Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital technologies continuously alters patterns of audience behavior, rendering traditional measurement methods increasingly inadequate. This dynamic environment demands adaptive methodologies that can evolve alongside technological change while maintaining analytical rigor (Rizvić et al., 2019).

The challenges inherent in assessing cross-media storytelling effectiveness point to broader gaps within the scholarly literature. Although numerous studies have explored narrative structures and modes of interactivity, relatively few have examined the specific impact of interactivity on audience perception, cognition, and emotion. Research has suggested that interactive narratives enhance user engagement and foster more immersive experiences (Rizvić et al., 2017; Rizvić et al., 2019). Yet, comprehensive understanding of how these experiences shape audience identity, agency, and social behavior remains limited (Moin, 2020). This lack of clarity indicates that despite the proliferation of cross-media storytelling as an artistic and cultural practice, the literature has not sufficiently addressed its qualitative and transformative effects on audiences. The scarcity of systematic, longitudinal studies further exacerbates this gap, leaving critical questions about the broader social and cultural implications of interactive storytelling unanswered.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this review is to investigate the relationship between interactive narratives and audience experience in contemporary cross-media storytelling. Specifically, the review seeks to analyze how interactivity modifies audience perception,

engagement, and identity formation within digital storytelling environments. By synthesizing findings from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including media studies, cultural studies, and digital humanities, this review aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which interactive narratives reshape audience experiences. Key factors to be examined include the role of technological affordances (e.g., AR, VR, AI), the dynamics of participatory culture, and the qualitative dimensions of emotional and cognitive engagement.

The scope of this review is both geographically and demographically broad, reflecting the global nature of cross-media storytelling practices. Particular attention will be given to developments in regions characterized by rapid digital innovation, such as North America, Europe, and Asia, where artistic experimentation with interactive narratives is most prevalent (Bublitzky, 2020). Additionally, the review will examine audience groups differentiated by generational and cultural backgrounds, with an emphasis on younger cohorts who are especially engaged with digital platforms, as well as communities with rich traditions of narrative expression. By incorporating diverse contexts, this review endeavors to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which interactive storytelling influences not only individual experiences but also collective cultural practices. Ultimately, this analysis aims to provide a foundation for future scholarship and methodological innovation, advancing both theoretical and practical understanding of cross-media storytelling in the digital age (Bertling & Galbraith, 2024; Vela et al., 2017; Prager et al., 2015).

METHOD

The methodology of this review was designed to ensure a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the literature concerning cross-media storytelling and interactive narratives. The aim was to synthesize evidence from diverse sources while maintaining academic rigor and transparency in the selection and evaluation of studies. This section outlines the databases consulted, the keywords employed in the search strategy, the inclusion and exclusion criteria established, the types of studies considered, and the process followed to screen, select, and evaluate relevant literature.

The primary databases chosen for this review were Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, as each of these platforms contributes uniquely to capturing the breadth and depth of scholarship in the field. Scopus was selected because it provides wide coverage of peer-reviewed journals and offers advanced citation analysis tools that enable a nuanced understanding of research impact and interconnections across disciplines (Rizvić et al., 2019; Bertling & Galbraith, 2024). Web of Science was also included due to its strength in indexing high-quality publications in the social sciences and humanities, which are particularly relevant to research on interactive narratives and storytelling practices (Silva & Damásio, 2022; Hoekstra, 2019). Meanwhile, Google Scholar was incorporated to expand the inclusivity of the search, capturing grey literature such as theses, dissertations, and conference proceedings, which often provide valuable insights into emerging and multidisciplinary perspectives on cross-media storytelling (Bublitzky, 2020; Halwani, 2022). The combination of these three databases allowed the review to balance breadth and quality, ensuring that both established and innovative contributions were represented.

The search strategy employed a set of carefully selected keywords to capture the central themes of the review. The phrase “cross-media storytelling” was used as a cornerstone term to identify studies examining narratives spanning multiple platforms. “Interactive narratives” was included to highlight works addressing the participatory role of audiences in shaping storylines and outcomes. The keyword “audience engagement” was employed to uncover literature investigating how interactivity influences the depth and quality of audience participation. To situate these concepts within the arts and cultural contexts, “digital art” was added, ensuring that the search encompassed creative practices as well as technological frameworks. Finally, the term “transmedia” was incorporated to capture scholarship on narratives that extend across media in integrated and cohesive ways. These keywords were applied individually and in combination using Boolean operators to maximize the inclusivity and relevance of search results, while also enabling a targeted retrieval of studies that align with the objectives of this review (Matthews, 2024; Halwani, 2022).

To ensure methodological rigor, the review applied clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they directly examined cross-media storytelling, interactive narratives, or closely related practices such as transmedia storytelling, with a focus on audience engagement and narrative innovation. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings were prioritized, although dissertations and grey literature were also considered when they offered novel perspectives or addressed gaps not yet covered in formal publications. The time frame for inclusion spanned from 2010 to 2024, capturing the most recent developments in digital and interactive storytelling while excluding older works that predated the proliferation of digital platforms. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on traditional, non-digital storytelling forms without any reference to interactivity or cross-platform integration. Similarly, papers lacking sufficient methodological transparency or empirical grounding were excluded to maintain the quality and reliability of the evidence base.

The review encompassed multiple types of research to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the field. Empirical studies—including randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and case studies—were included when they investigated the impact of cross-media storytelling on audience engagement or cultural experiences. Qualitative research, particularly ethnographic studies and discourse analyses, was also incorporated, as these methods offer valuable insights into the experiential, cultural, and emotional dimensions of interactive narratives. Additionally, conceptual and theoretical papers were considered essential for framing the discourse, especially those that introduced new frameworks for understanding storytelling in the digital age (Halwani, 2022; Singer, 2016). By combining empirical and theoretical contributions, the review sought to capture both measurable outcomes and interpretative insights, thereby reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the topic.

The process of literature selection followed a systematic and multi-stage procedure. Initially, the search results from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were exported into a reference management software to consolidate entries and remove duplicates. Titles and abstracts were then screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. At this stage, studies that clearly did not address the central themes of cross-media storytelling, interactive narratives, or audience engagement were discarded. Full-text reviews were subsequently conducted for the remaining articles, during which relevance, methodological quality, and contribution to the research

objectives were evaluated. In cases of ambiguity, consensus was reached through iterative discussion, ensuring consistency and minimizing the risk of bias.

Evaluation of the selected literature was conducted using both methodological and thematic criteria. Methodologically, studies were assessed for transparency in design, clarity in reporting, and appropriateness of methods to the research questions. Thematic evaluation involved identifying how each study contributed to understanding the role of interactivity, cross-platform integration, and audience engagement. This dual approach allowed the review not only to capture reliable findings but also to situate them within broader theoretical and cultural debates. Particular attention was paid to studies that advanced innovative frameworks or that critically examined the challenges of measuring audience engagement in digital and cross-media contexts (Moin, 2020; Bublatzky, 2020).

Overall, this methodology ensured that the literature collected was both comprehensive and relevant to the research objectives. By triangulating sources across multiple databases, employing a rigorous keyword strategy, and applying systematic criteria for selection and evaluation, the review established a robust foundation for synthesizing insights into cross-media storytelling and interactive narratives. This approach also provided flexibility to integrate diverse types of evidence, from empirical data to theoretical analyses, reflecting the interdisciplinary and evolving nature of the field. In doing so, the methodology aligns with best practices for narrative reviews while remaining responsive to the complexities of studying storytelling in the digital age.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this narrative review are organized thematically to reflect the dominant issues and patterns that emerged across the body of literature on cross-media storytelling and interactive narratives. Six major themes were identified: interactivity and multimodality, digital platforms and participatory culture, identity and cross-cultural narratives, education and serious games, immersive technologies and audience experience, and ethical and aesthetic challenges. Each of these themes reveals important insights into how cross-media storytelling functions in contemporary contexts, the ways in which it is applied, and the implications it holds for audiences globally.

Interactivity and multimodality have been consistently highlighted as core features of cross-media storytelling. Research defines interactivity as the degree to which audiences can influence, shape, and participate in the progression of narratives. Rizvić et al. (2019) demonstrated that interactivity can be measured across multiple dimensions, such as the availability of narrative choices, the degree of agency afforded to audiences, and the level of feedback exchanged between user and content. These measurements are not limited to quantitative indicators such as clicks, screen time, or navigation choices; they also encompass qualitative approaches like interviews and ethnographic analyses, which provide richer insight into how audiences interpret and emotionally engage with complex narratives (Silva & Damásio, 2022). This dual methodological approach underscores that interactivity cannot be reduced to numbers alone but must be understood as an experiential and interpretative phenomenon. Furthermore, evidence shows that multimodality—defined as the

integration of text, visuals, audio, and video into a single narrative—deepens audience engagement. Pecheranskyi et al. (2023) revealed that multimodal approaches foster more immersive experiences, enhancing memory retention and emotional resonance. Their study demonstrated that when audiences encounter stories through a fusion of film and interactive elements, they report stronger emotional connections with characters and a greater sense of satisfaction. These findings affirm the importance of designing narratives that engage multiple senses and perspectives, offering a richer, layered experience (Silva & Damásio, 2022).

The rise of digital platforms has further reshaped participatory culture in storytelling. Social media, podcasts, and immersive applications like AR and VR serve as key tools in expanding audience engagement. Schleser and Xu (2021) documented how AR applications allow users to enter intimate, personalized story experiences, blurring boundaries between narrative consumption and interaction. Matthews (2024) noted that platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable audiences to contribute content actively, whether through collaborative videos, visual storytelling, or audience-driven commentary. This participatory turn reflects a democratization of narrative practices, where users assume roles as both consumers and co-creators. Podcasts, likewise, have become arenas for interactive engagement, where hosts and audiences engage in dialogue, prompting reflective discussions that extend beyond the original content (Hoekstra, 2019). Examples such as the Lviv Interactive project demonstrate effective participatory practices by employing digital maps as narrative tools, allowing users to contribute cultural and historical insights to a shared digital archive (Shumylovych & Nazaruk, 2024). These cases illustrate how digital platforms serve as conduits for collaborative storytelling, encouraging fluid and communal approaches to cultural representation.

Cross-media storytelling also plays a critical role in negotiating identity and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue. Matthews (2024) observed that communities in Papua New Guinea use Instagram narratives to express evolving cultural identities, combining local traditions with global influences. Through digital storytelling, these communities reimagine themselves in ways that both preserve cultural heritage and adapt to modern digital environments. Bublatzky (2020) highlighted similar dynamics within the Iranian diaspora, where visual arts and narrative practices help individuals reflect on identity in new contexts, maintaining connections to cultural roots while adapting to new socio-political realities abroad. These comparative cases demonstrate how cross-media storytelling transcends borders, functioning as a cultural negotiation tool in diverse international settings. Pecheranskyi et al. (2023) further elaborated that intertextuality in transmedia storytelling facilitates cross-cultural understanding by aligning local values and global narratives, creating shared interpretive frameworks. This cross-cultural adaptability underscores the global relevance of cross-media storytelling in mediating identity and fostering dialogue across cultural boundaries.

The educational applications of cross-media storytelling have been well-documented, particularly through the use of serious games and interactive narratives in teaching. Rizvić et al. (2019) found that interactive storytelling enhances student motivation and learning outcomes by situating learners within immersive cultural or historical simulations. By engaging actively with the story, learners not only absorb factual content but also develop empathy and critical thinking skills. Bertling and Galbraith (2024) provided empirical evidence that integrating visual data storytelling into arts-based projects strengthens both creativity and data literacy among students. Their study

revealed that students exposed to cross-media storytelling approaches demonstrated improved analytical and creative capacities compared to peers taught through traditional pedagogies. These findings suggest that interactive and multimodal methods offer significant potential for advancing education, particularly when designed to integrate cultural, historical, and technological contexts into coherent learning experiences.

Immersive technologies have further expanded the scope and impact of cross-media storytelling. AR, VR, and AI applications create heightened levels of narrative immersion by allowing users to interact directly with story environments. Weingärtner (2021) described how AR and VR have been deployed in artistic performances to envelop audiences in multisensory experiences that transcend the possibilities of traditional media. AI applications, including text-to-image generators and interactive dialogue systems, enable new forms of co-creation, where human creativity intersects with machine intelligence to produce innovative narrative forms. These applications have been shown to significantly enhance memory retention and engagement. Schleser and Xu (2021) reported that VR-based narratives resulted in higher recall of story details and stronger emotional investment compared to non-immersive formats. This evidence suggests that immersive technologies not only enrich storytelling experiences but also provide measurable cognitive benefits, underscoring their transformative potential in both artistic and educational contexts.

Despite these advancements, significant ethical and aesthetic challenges remain. Questions of authenticity and narrative authority are increasingly salient as AI and algorithm-driven storytelling proliferate. O'Meara and Murphy (2023) examined the tensions that arise when authorship is shared between humans and machines, raising critical concerns about ownership, legitimacy, and voice. These debates reflect broader anxieties regarding the erosion of traditional notions of originality and the implications of algorithmic authorship for cultural production. Moreover, the blending of fact and fiction in cross-media narratives introduces ethical dilemmas. Silva and Damásio (2022) cautioned that the intermingling of factual and fictional content, particularly when facilitated by AI, risks undermining audiences' ability to distinguish between reliable information and fabricated narratives. Such practices raise concerns about misinformation, manipulation, and the erosion of trust in cultural and media institutions. These ethical challenges underscore the need for critical frameworks to evaluate authenticity, authority, and responsibility in cross-media storytelling, ensuring that innovation is balanced with accountability.

When viewed collectively, these themes illustrate both the opportunities and complexities of cross-media storytelling in contemporary contexts. Interactivity and multimodality expand the expressive possibilities of narratives, while digital platforms foster participatory cultures that democratize authorship. Cross-cultural and identity-based applications highlight the power of storytelling to mediate cultural belonging and dialogue, while educational and immersive practices demonstrate the practical benefits of these methods for learning and memory retention. Yet, ethical and aesthetic challenges remain unresolved, particularly concerning authorship and the blending of fact and fiction. Globally, cross-media storytelling emerges as a dynamic, multifaceted practice that is reshaping not only how stories are told but also how they are experienced, interpreted, and acted upon by diverse audiences. The literature suggests that while technological advances have opened new horizons for interactive narratives, they also require ongoing critical reflection to address emerging dilemmas and ensure that storytelling continues to enrich cultural and social life in meaningful ways.

The findings of this review reveal a strong alignment between the evolution of cross-media storytelling and broader theoretical frameworks related to participation, digital culture, and contemporary art. Scholars have long argued that digital culture fosters participatory practices where audiences are no longer passive consumers but active co-creators of meaning. Matthews (2024), for example, demonstrated how Papua New Guinean communities employ Instagram to articulate and negotiate cultural identities, underscoring how digital storytelling becomes a site of identity construction within globalized cultural flows. This evidence resonates with theories of digital participation, particularly Jenkins's (2006) concept of participatory culture, where users contribute actively to the shaping of narratives and cultural products. In contemporary art, cross-media storytelling creates opportunities for experimental practices that redefine artistic boundaries by engaging audiences in processes of co-creation and interpretive interaction. Silva and Damásio (2022) highlighted how interactive narratives facilitate explorations of posthuman relations, enabling artistic engagements that interrogate the intersections between human agency, technology, and narrative experience. Thus, the theoretical grounding of participatory culture, digital practices, and artistic experimentation aligns with the empirical evidence presented across multiple contexts, suggesting that cross-media storytelling is both a cultural and artistic phenomenon with deep theoretical implications.

Systemic factors further shape the trajectory of cross-media storytelling, particularly policies, media regulations, and access to technology. Infrastructure development has proven to be foundational in enabling both the production and consumption of interactive narratives. Nations that invest in robust internet connectivity and digital infrastructure provide fertile grounds for the flourishing of participatory and interactive storytelling practices (Shumylovych & Nazaruk, 2024). Conversely, contexts with limited technological access experience significant disparities in participation, restricting opportunities for artists and audiences alike. Regulatory frameworks also play a crucial role, especially concerning copyright and licensing laws. As Markham (2023) noted, evolving regulations can either facilitate or constrain cross-platform collaboration, directly influencing how creators experiment with new narrative forms. Overly restrictive copyright regimes risk stifling innovation, while flexible policies that encourage open-source practices or collaborative licensing can expand opportunities for creative experimentation. In addition, access to advanced technologies such as VR and AR is another systemic determinant. As Rizvić et al. (2019) pointed out, these technologies enable immersive, multi-sensory experiences that elevate narrative engagement, yet their adoption remains uneven due to cost and accessibility barriers. Together, these systemic conditions highlight the complex interplay between infrastructure, policy, and technology in shaping the scope and inclusivity of cross-media storytelling.

The literature also offers potential solutions and policy recommendations to address these challenges. One recurring suggestion involves investing in digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to storytelling technologies. Bublatzky (2020) emphasized the importance of expanding internet accessibility and providing affordable technological tools, especially in underserved regions. Such measures would democratize participation and allow broader communities to contribute to and benefit from interactive narratives. Beyond infrastructure, policy interventions that support collaboration across creative industries, academia, and technology sectors are recommended. Bertling and Galbraith (2024) argued that incentivizing cross-sectoral partnerships can foster innovation, particularly in projects that integrate audience participation into storytelling practices. This suggests that targeted funding schemes, collaborative grants, and shared resource

initiatives could help overcome fragmentation in the storytelling ecosystem. Additionally, embedding digital storytelling into educational curricula is another widely supported recommendation. Rizvić et al. (2017) found that integrating interactive narratives and serious games into educational contexts not only enhances learning outcomes but also equips students with digital literacy and creative problem-solving skills. These educational strategies would contribute to developing a generation that is both critical consumers and innovative producers of cross-media narratives. Raljević (2020) further proposed continuous dialogue between policymakers and creative stakeholders as a necessary condition for evaluating the cultural, ethical, and societal impacts of emerging storytelling technologies. Such iterative engagement ensures that policies remain adaptive to rapidly evolving digital environments and responsive to the needs of diverse cultural communities.

A central challenge identified in the literature involves the methodological complexity of measuring engagement in cross-media storytelling. The findings highlight that conventional metrics such as likes, shares, or views provide only superficial indicators of engagement. Deeper levels of cognitive and emotional investment, as Lea (2021) emphasized, often remain invisible in standard evaluative frameworks. This limitation underscores the need for methodological innovation, combining quantitative data with qualitative approaches such as interviews, ethnography, and affective analysis to capture the richness of audience experiences (Moin, 2020). Without such nuanced methodologies, there is a risk of underestimating the transformative potential of cross-media narratives. The lack of standardized frameworks across platforms further complicates evaluation, as interactions on social media differ fundamentally from engagement with VR or gaming narratives (Rizvić et al., 2019). Developing integrative frameworks capable of bridging these differences remains a pressing research priority.

Ethical and aesthetic concerns also require critical attention. The integration of AI and algorithmic systems into narrative creation raises pressing questions about authorship, originality, and authenticity. O'Meara and Murphy (2023) underscored the tensions between human and machine contributions, questioning how legitimacy and authority are attributed when storytelling is co-constructed with AI. These debates resonate with broader cultural anxieties surrounding automation, creativity, and the erosion of traditional notions of authorship. Furthermore, the blurring of fact and fiction within cross-media narratives introduces ethical risks, particularly in an era of misinformation. Silva and Damásio (2022) argued that when audiences are unable to distinguish between accurate information and fictionalized accounts, storytelling risks undermining public trust and contributing to epistemic instability. These concerns highlight the importance of developing ethical guidelines and critical literacy programs that equip audiences to navigate the complex landscapes of interactive narratives. Future research must therefore address not only the technological affordances of storytelling but also the normative questions surrounding responsibility, truth, and cultural accountability.

Another critical dimension that emerges from the findings is the global variability in how cross-media storytelling is practiced and received. Studies from Europe, North America, and Asia consistently demonstrate advanced experimentation with interactive and immersive technologies, reflecting higher levels of infrastructural investment and cultural integration of digital tools (Bublitzky, 2020; Bertling & Galbraith, 2024). By contrast, research in regions with less developed digital infrastructures illustrates the creative ways communities adapt available technologies to

articulate identity and cultural narratives, as Matthews (2024) described in the case of Papua New Guinea. This variation underscores the need for comparative and cross-cultural approaches in future research, which can illuminate how systemic inequalities intersect with creative practices and audience experiences. Such analyses would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the global dynamics of cross-media storytelling, ensuring that scholarship captures both innovation in technologically advanced contexts and resilience in resource-limited settings.

The limitations of existing research are evident in several areas. First, much of the empirical work remains fragmented, focusing on isolated case studies without longitudinal perspectives that capture the evolution of audience engagement over time. Second, while interdisciplinary scholarship is emerging, there is still insufficient integration between technological, cultural, and psychological perspectives, which limits the ability to understand the holistic impacts of interactive narratives. Finally, the field has yet to fully account for the ethical implications of AI-driven storytelling in relation to cultural diversity and inclusivity, leaving significant gaps in understanding how these technologies may reinforce or challenge systemic inequalities. Addressing these limitations will require coordinated efforts across disciplines and regions, as well as methodological innovation that bridges qualitative depth with quantitative rigor.

CONCLUSION

This review has demonstrated that cross-media storytelling represents a transformative practice in contemporary art and digital culture, significantly reshaping how narratives are produced, experienced, and understood. Findings highlight that interactivity and multimodality are central to deepening audience engagement, while digital platforms foster participatory cultures that democratize authorship and create shared cultural experiences. Identity negotiations across cultural contexts illustrate how communities use cross-media storytelling to sustain and adapt cultural heritage, while educational applications and serious games reveal its potential to enhance learning outcomes and critical skills. Immersive technologies such as AR, VR, and AI further enrich narrative experiences by increasing memory retention and emotional involvement, yet they also introduce ethical challenges concerning authorship, authenticity, and the blending of fact and fiction. Systemic factors including infrastructure, media regulation, and technological access were identified as crucial determinants shaping the inclusivity and effectiveness of interactive narratives. To address barriers, policy measures should prioritize equitable access to digital technologies, foster collaboration across creative and academic sectors, and integrate storytelling practices into educational curricula. Future research should advance methodological innovation to measure engagement more comprehensively and investigate the ethical implications of algorithmic storytelling in diverse cultural contexts. By addressing these gaps, cross-media storytelling can continue to evolve as a powerful tool for cultural dialogue, education, and artistic innovation, ensuring that its transformative potential benefits audiences worldwide.

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