

Interchanging Aesthetic and Technical: The Digital Narratives in Higher Educational Pedagogies

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 9

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2020

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Impact Factor: 4.110

Received: 19.11.2020

Accepted: 10.12.2020

Published: 22.12.2020

Citation:

Varghese, Ashitha.

“Interchanging Aesthetic and Technical: The Digital Narratives in Higher Educational Pedagogies.” *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 9, no. S1, 2020, pp. 8–15.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v9iS1-Dec2020.3604>

Dr. Ashitha Varghese

*Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*

The role of learners and the process of learning have abruptly changed across the Nations and boundaries. Until yesterday, we lived in a Knowledge system with centuries old lecture-based instructional approaches, ensconced institutional biases and outdated classrooms. Today in a globalized context that is adopting quarantine and other individualised measures as major components of public health responses and lifestyle, a Digital approach to Learning and Humanities can help clarify the concerns of educators and academicians. The time requires a strategy that finds a balance between individual interests and public measures. But currently in a scenario where the learning would apparently alternate between home and portals, Learning should be considered as a habit, which would be integrated into daily routines.

An extended survey of digital initiatives in educational practices was undertaken by The Centre for Internet and Society on various academic and technical parameters. The data reported that Digital Humanities is an emerging area and is computationally communicative. It enables the users to access, locate and visualise information, universally fed on various servers at the most effective pace. The artists, academicians and other millennials across the globe can seamlessly turn data and access information into usable computational forms. Digital Humanities being a term, phenomenally used in academic circles, it almost sounds like an oxymoron. After all, digital and humanities have always been seen as a binary opposition, existing in distinct silos. In academia, Digital Humanities enforces interdisciplinary scope for the reinvention of old questions that has been the focus of humanistic enquiry since decades now.

Digital Humanities, otherwise known as humanities computing, is an emerging field of educational research, concerned with the intersection of computing in the philosophy of humanities. Apparently, it is methodological by nature and interdisciplinary in its scope. This includes examinations, analysis, synthesis and presentation of information in electronic form. It understands how the computation technologies affect the disciplines in the way they are perceived, and what these disciplines have to contribute to

our knowledge of computing. However, it is also a period, to reflect on how online courses are preparing students for the future practice of Digital Humanities with the acquisition of relevant skills viz. programming, methodological, multidisciplinary thinking, communication and so forth. Articulating the philosophy of human-computer interactions, the chapter reflects on the adoption of literary models and methods that would turn out to be the significant during the days of social distancing. The chapter is intended to examine

- The non-linearity and overlapping of facts and fiction in Digital Readings
- The digital attributes on the reading and cultural experiences
- The literary discourses through digital media and computational methods
- The case studies of computer applications in literary and cultural studies

From Aesthetic to Technical

One of the hardest yet unavoidable tasks for every academic discipline is to define its own nature and demarcate its boundaries. In the Twenty First Century, it is a serious question to pose, what aesthetics will become, in the combination of computational text-mining approaches and digital tools in the philosophical analysis of humanities. The chapter suggests that conjoining two different points of view may lead to a binary opposition, yet it gives a fuller perspective than excluding one or the other. Traditionally, well-informed conceptions of Aesthetics, (Language and Literature) have been formulated by reading and writing books and articles; teaching and following lectures; taking part in various academic discussions in conferences and learned societies. This was considered to be a normal and reasonable approach until yesterday, before the third of world population were confined to locked downs and the Colleges and Universities had a massive closure. Gone are those days where construction of Knowledge was collaboration at shared spaces, and learning took place in the freedom of search, movement from one place to the other. Today with billions of students out of institutions and hundreds of millions attempting to learn online, the outbreak will reshape the idea of education in the Twenty First Century. Of course now, multiple sources of information are more frequently digitized and available online more than ever before. Hence, it is easy for educators and learners to be creative, critical, and personalise the learning. The tech massive insights at scale on what human development and learning looks like, allowing it to potentially shift from technical aid, to content segregation, the freedom of decision making, personalisation and independence.

Within a short time span, digital approach to Humanities has been around in the Indian academic landscape. The duo has generated many discussions and debates about the changes in practice, scholarship and pedagogy that have come about with the digital turn in humanities. Hence it is significant to understand the spaces and roles of digital technologies in the humanities, and by its extension in the arts, media, and creative practices, today. It is apparent that technology has transformed objects and methods of study and practices in these arenas.

The Overlapping Facts and Fiction in Digital Readings

The digital stories are one of the main forms of communication in the contemporary literatures. Through blogs, videos-sharing websites, forums, or social networks, these are easily accessible. But, the line of distinction between facts and fiction can often turn blurred in the digital spaces. The accessibility to news stories, anecdotes, advertising, and radicalization, the real-life implications of digital stories are often questioned. In such a context, it is significant to provide awareness and empower students about digital storytelling practices.

The use of digital media to interpret day-to-day things is only a part of the complex network of practices, methods, ideas and disciplines that meet within the fluid boundaries of the term, Digital

Humanities. It can be stated as the digitization of texts, in the presence of hypertext and visual references that may further link to newer definitions and meaning makings. However, this is only a small part of the scope of ‘digital humanities’.

It is perhaps one of the greatest ironies of the digital age. Although, learning and information are more accessible than ever before, it often leads to non-linearity and overlapping of facts versus fiction. May be it is also essential to take a step away from humanities’ focus on the composition of text, and observe how digital technologies are changing relationships, identities and inferences. (Murai 2007). Today, the implications for society, culture, politics, communication, community, art and language from digital technologies are so great and yet far fetching. Thereby, in the Twenty First Century world, the way the information handled, is as important as the information itself.

Story-telling in the times, evolved as people found innovative ways to record, share, and consumes stories, as games and personal narratives. Today, modern technology has merged the visual with the auditory and the textual, while providing millenials the agency to become their own storyteller. It also helps one to use their digital environment for personal purposes. In the technology-driven society, the exchange of stories often occurs through popular culture or on informal websites that creates interactive spaces. The process is further exemplified by modern youth, who actively participate in digital storytelling on various social media platforms on a daily basis. The research statistics show that more than 94 percent of youngsters access digital media on a daily basis, viz. watching online videos, reading, sharing and interacting on social media; while only 28 percent of teens write stories, articles or blogs by oneself.

Although digital stories foster community building through narratives, the unawareness to distinguish between facts and fantasy in online spaces can lead to persuasion. Though the persuasion is not always intentional, propaganda can happen. The Internet is one the popular medium for propaganda activities where anyone can dilute the innocence, the absence of reason, and the emotional state of youngsters, suspending their disbelief and inciting them to overlook the limitations of a narrative (Coleridge 1982). To figure out, whether the information was manipulated or not can become a daunting task. Specifically, in the online spaces filled with stories and news, young users are particularly at risk.

A Brief History of Digital Discourses

From cave paintings to social networking sites, human beings have always enjoyed sharing the experiences of the world and of their social interactions through narrative forms such as anecdotes, songs, and tales. Such stories shape their lives, as much as they search for coherence in the face of perplexing aspects of life experiences and reveals knowledge that might not have been accessible otherwise. Stories transfers several fragments of life, and communicate for life purposes such as imparting knowledge, leaving behind a personal legacy, or simply entertainments,

In fact, we naturally think in narrative ways, which sometimes makes it difficult to realize how significant stories are to our human experience. Stories are considered to be an adaptation of humanity. The ability to understand tales is one of the earliest powers attributed to the human mind. It is considered as the most accepted and adopted mode of organizing human experience. The rich and diverse experiences embedded in narratives are integral to how one learns about his own world.

The human emotions are significant to an individual’s growth and are mediated by stories. In other word, individuals learn from stories, and constantly build through the various narratives that are present around them. The vivid experiences of individuals can be effectively communicated through stories of all kinds, whether real or fictional.

It is important to recognize that, even if imaginary, fiction plays an essential role in the cognitive and affective processes that influence the way a learner perceives. Both factual and fictional

information share similar goals such as transferring knowledge, connecting humanity, keeping the world entertained, and sometimes, even antagonizing others. However, while factual stories accomplish such goals with real life events, fictional stories present it all, without advancing claims of truthfulness. Nevertheless, overlooking this distinction can have consequences for individuals who accept fiction as facts.

Digital Reading in a Period of Transition

In the literary context, reading is usually treated as interpretation of alphabetic text, including pattern recognition, decoding words, against a background of social and cultural understanding. In spite of to research in neuroscience, reading has been studied in several dimensions, such as literacy studies, book history, literary criticism, learning theories and various teaching pedagogies. There are plenty of models and perspectives about the process of literary readings. The early researchers had perceived reading in the most abstract dimensions. It is supposed to be an inward process of interpretation. Likewise, the text is also presumed to be a form of written communication or printed text. The evidences suggest that studies were undertaken on digital reading, often measuring the credibility and accuracy of texts presented on digital visuals.

The researchers focused on visual attributes and cognitive perception of reading, considering it as a mental activity, sometimes with an emphasis on socio-cultural bearings on the process. The perspectives in digital narratives enable to rethink the cultural facets about the nature of literary forms, and the nature of computer programs. The learners should be equipped to understand digital narratives in formal ways, as cybertexts and other digital projections. Parallel, it should also make certain, they are familiar with an interpretative mode to read the works in social, ideological, and historical contexts. Digital narratives are formally innovative literary forms, which necessitate effort on the part of the reader to reflect and ponder on human experience in the ways of interpreting any other literatures. The area of digital narratives also seeks conceptualizations of the inter-link between reader, writer, and media. The meaning making and decisions of the reader determine the outcome of the narrative. Meanwhile, digital plays its part in the process of interpreting information in a cognitive loop between the reader and the text.

However, uncertainties exist in the scope of literary culture in the age of Digital narratives. The decreasing attention given to print mediums by youngsters also have an effect on their reading practices. While digital technologies effect changes in the media ecology, it also influences the interactions between the people The Digital culture determines the ways in which cultural expressions are imagined, shared, and transfigured. The relativity between digital media, social practices and literary expressions has quite received attention.

The technology mediated textual practices are becoming popular in everyday communications. Undoubtedly, the digital narratives become important mode of textual and cultural expression. The field of cultural studies is also gaining attention, as getting integrated with computing technologies and practices.

The Digital Attributes on Reading and Cultural Experiences

In the present context of digital ecology, literary authorship and reading practices are stranded between print and digital mediums. There are plenty of uncertainties about literary practices in the future of academia. It is a concern, if the learners will be capable of developing new forms out of understanding digital technologies and practices, rather than limiting the meaning of every text to its literary interpretations. The Digital narratives imply the enduring ability of literature and aesthetics to adapt to digital media and the social practices, that they give rise to. Digital discourses gained attention, as it allows the integration of participatory responses that accommodate the user-

generated content. Yet, new approaches to imagining the perimeters of literature and electronic and digital media are needed.

Digital narratives contest the notion of a deep-seated incompatibility between literary expression and digital media. They are examples of how the challenge to reimagining literature is being established within global culture. Narrative traditions and media technologies have continuously evolved. This mutually constituting relationship has positive implications for the future of literary expression in the era of digital technology.

The Literary Discourses Through Digital and Computational Methods

Today the literary narratives and discourses are closely interlinked with social practices that are simultaneously predicated on digital culture. The discourses are constructed through the digital narratives, according to the changing patterns of technology and, in the level of readers' literacy. The emergence of the literature is becoming a digital and cultural outcome, rather than the literary explorations in writing practices. Literature and Digital media are connected by various social and cultural practices that in turn influence the content and patterns of its expression. In fact, the aforementioned impact change over time, and within and between National literatures.

In many respects, literature fosters and emerges out of productive relationships between the affordances of print and digital media. This fluidity in which discourses, culture and communication technologies mutually shape and influence one another, the literature certainly undergoes remediation. It endorses the potential for literary and cultural practices to further adapt to contemporary digital technologies. Many of the research works noted earlier demonstrate the capacities of literary discourses to adapt into the media culture. The field of electronic literature encompasses works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry that evince a marked attentiveness to the literary and aesthetic potential of digital media. These literary works adopt a broad range of digital strategies that share the characteristic of being truly born digital. Given the substantial integration of digital computing into the everyday narratives of the world, it impacts everything, from interpersonal communication and cinema models, to music consumption. However, the -digital literature holds little cultural influence in comparison to the traditional-born cultural discourses.

Instances of Digital Mediations in Literary and Cultural Discourses

At this juncture of the present analysis, it is important to discuss, how does literary and narrative transportation function in an age where stories are widely shared online. Hence, the following case instances would share how digital literary and story-telling spaces could have real-world implications.

Cross-Media Adaptations

The interaction between the society and humans affords them the opportunity to perform various desired actions. In the present scenario, the affordances of the multimedia and technologies provide a digital outlook to narratives that allow individuals to share their stories through text, images, videos and audio sources. The affordances are certainly a fancy to growing number of youngsters. The quick access to technology have made the present day youth, avid consumers of digital stories in all their forms. With new digital resources, literary adaptations can spread across multiple media platforms, which help maintain transportation into narratives (Rian 2011).

Technology and Narrative Transportation

There are early examples where, every generation creates its own monsters. Likely, the present generation gets its monsters from Digital world. Slenderman is an absolute by product of Twenty

First Century electronic media. He appears in places where people rarely frequent, these days – abandoned, dark and dreary pathways, deep woods, a playground with weird and wobbly jungle gyms. He is a suburban ghoul with his own history and methodology. The Slenderman storyline is a perfect case example of the interaction between the digital and narrative transportation. Slenderman was created in a 2007 Photoshop contest, later turned out to be a popular meme in YouTube videos, horror stories, and games. (Gilber 2014) The performance of such digital born fictional characters can hold and transmit the emotions of readers into parallel world portrayals.

The Propoganda

The affinity spaces exhibit readers' deep passion for a common interest, an endeavour, or a character that transports them to a parallel world, even though fictional. Although it fosters digital transportation and active youth interferences, the Internet may diminish the visible boundaries between reality and fiction. The increasing amount of entertaining portrayals like memes and trolls in social media, converts even a serious encounter into fun and minimalistic, thereby rendering the accuracy between factual and fictional information more difficult (Fichs 2007). This blurriness creates propaganda, the process in which content, entertainment, and persuasion are integrated to influence individuals' interests and opinions. This may be perplexing for youngsters, who may not have critical knowledge to realise the propaganda and thereby, get carried away by the untruth of the story. For instance, the blend of digital discourses through technology has facilitated the creation of genres as docudramas, entertainment albums and other digital genres.

The Activism

Today the social media have become platforms for activists to express opinions and create awareness on various issues among the public. The Kony2012 campaign in central Africa was brought by Joseph Kony with an aim to help stop brutalities. The Lord's Resistance Army was another social endeavour often referred to as case of slacktivism. The term is becoming quite popular buzz in social media. It indicates the process in which millennials post status and comments about various issues on social media. The hash tag campaign video of StopKony on Twitter has reached fifty million views and attained thousands of donations on the first day. The campaign depicted narrative activism with trans-media mobilization. Today groups of activists are attaining popularity because of such narratives across Internet. The instances demonstrate how a plot or documentary can transport the digital users and set for action in real life context.

Digital Advertising

The practice of digital storytelling deliberately adopts the influence of narrative transportation to canvas people for the promotion of commercial products, as well. The online advertising using sponsored content promotion is quite trending in social media. The promotional messages are tailored into fancy narratives and captions. These discourses are seen to have a positive impact on the users and often fancy them, further leading to affective responses, and reducing critical thinking. The actor Zach Galifianakis' Funny Die interview series was a celebrity interview entitled, Between Two Ferns, featuring President Obama in an episode. The White House had attempted to reach wide audience, further promoting a health insurance before the enrolment deadline. By blending persuasion with fun and popular culture, the video gained views and huge traffic on the Healthcare.gov website

The Pedagogic Implications of Digital

With the user-friendly blend and cross-media accessibility of content, the adaptation for

developing shared digital literature is limitless. In the background of popularized, pedagogies in practice, the chapter proposes a deliberate attention to literary (aesthetic) and digital (technical) based pedagogy. Such an amalgamation will help to increase students' media and information literacy skills through a focus on the cognitive, affective, and social domains actualized through digital mode of teaching and learning. These practices facilitate learners to develop cognitive awareness and rhetorical practices.

The digital-narrative pedagogy fosters to situate teaching and learning as activity in real world communities of practice. The teaching and learning in the real world of student experiences enforce the momentum of language, and culture. The pedagogy promotes students involvement in democratic youth-initiated activities. It helps them to enhance media literacy that could reinforce power relations in the classroom.

Informational and cultural flows circulate together and permeate the learning and communication practices of digital society. For this reason, understanding narrative expression within digital communication networks requires analytical tools that can straddle students' inquisitiveness and traverse different information scapes and cultural genres.

Conclusion

In a time of a pandemic, an alarming outbreak and quarantine theories, the necessity for digital literacy and interference is more pressing than ever. Students need the ability to access themselves to Digital reading spaces, and educators need to be able to teach these skills. The world is moving through an unfriendly and unfamiliar phase where, educators need to move the discourse beyond the stage of text messages and whatsapp interactions and help the students to focus energy on effective digital literary participation. Today, the world finds its shift from teaching with media and technology, to learning inside media and technology. Countering narrative transportation through digital-based pedagogies that reinforce students' media literacy is an effort that needs to be undertaken at the outset in our educational system- particularly in present times of political and social unrest.

References

1. Applebee, Arthur N. *The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. 1978.
2. Birkerts, S. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The fate of reading in an electronic age*. New York: Faber and Faber. 2006.
3. Boyd, Brian. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2009.
4. Bruner, Jerome. *The Narrative Construction of Reality*. *Critical Inquiry* 18(1): 1-21. 1991.
5. Coleridge, Samuel T. *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1984.
6. Damasio, Antonio R. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York, NY: Putnam. 1994.
7. Dill, Karen E. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. New York, NY: Routledge. 2007.
9. Gleason, Benjamin. "New Literacies Practices of Teenage Twitter Users." *Learning, Media and Technology*: N.p: 1-24. 2015.

10. Gottschall, Jonathan, and David Sloan Wilson. *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 2005.
11. Greenfield, Susan. *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving their Mark on Our Brains*. London: Random House. 2015.
12. Green, J. *Late postmodernism: American fiction at the millennium*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2005.
13. Gretter, Sarah, Aman. Yadav, and Benjamin. Gleason. *Walking the Line between Reality and Fiction in Online Spaces: Understanding the Effects of Narrative Transportation* : *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 9(1). 2017.
14. Gretter, Sarah. *From the Novel to Digital Storytelling: Dialogue, Identity, and the Fictionalization of Reality*. *Letras Hispanas* 11: 2015. 212-221
15. Johnson, Ted. *How Funny or Die got President Obama on Zach Galifianakis' 'Between Two Ferns'*. 2014
16. Jowett, Garth S., and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda & Persuasion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2014.
17. Kavanagh, Sarah, Ojalvo, Holly E., & Schulten, Katherine. *Activism or Slacktivism? The 'Stop Kony' Campaign as a Teachable Moment*. 2012.
18. Lundby, K. (2008). *Mediatized stories: Mediation perspectives on digital storytelling*. N.p: *New Media & Society*. 2008.
19. Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.
20. Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps. *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2009.
21. Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narration in Various Media*. In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn et al. Hamburg: Hamburg University.
22. Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. *Fictional vs. Factual Narration*. In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn et al. Hamburg: Hamburg University. Retrieved from: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/fictional-vs-factual-narration>. 2012.
23. Trammell, Aaron and Gilbert, Anne. *Extending Play to Critical Media Studies*. *Games and Culture*, 9(6): 391-405. 2014.
24. Turner, Mark. *The Literary Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1998.
25. Zipes, Jack. *Creative Storytelling: Building Community/Changing Lives*. New York: NY: Routledge. 2013.