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Citation for final published version:

Garner, Ross 2019. Finding Nemo's spaces: Defining and exploring transmedia tourism. JOMEC Journal (14) , pp. 11-32. 10.18573/jomec.195 file

Publishers page: <http://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.195>  
<<http://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.195>>

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**JOMEK Journal**  
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Published by Cardiff University Press

## **Finding Nemo's Spaces: Defining and Exploring Transmedia Tourism**

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### **Keywords**

transmedia

media tourism

film-induced tourism

intertextuality

convergence

*Finding Nemo*

## Abstract

This article proposes the concept of transmedia tourism as a term that can account for the ever-increasing intersections between the 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 2011), convergence culture (Jenkins 2006) and the tourism sector. Transmedia tourism therefore involves examining the variety of forms of spatialized experiences derived from media properties alongside the myriad ways in which digital media technologies is being incorporated into these practices. The concept arises out of and builds upon critiques of existing terminology for studying media tourism offered by Sue Beeton (2005) and Maria Månsson (2011). Key arguments include exploring the opportunities for world-building offered by different attractions and mapping the intertextual spread of transmedia content into the tourism sector across both virtual and physical spaces and official, unofficial and unsanctioned contexts. These arguments are developed further through a case study of the Disney-Pixar franchise *Finding Nemo* (Santon and Unkrich, 2003, Stanton, 2016) which addresses how this has spawned spatial experiences and intertextual references across multiple tourism-coded attractions. Arising out of this analysis, suggestions concerning avenues for future research are also identified. These include examining both the relationship between transmedia content flows and mediatization (Couldry 2014) and providing greater discussion of the relationship between copyright negotiation and tourism attractions which make either implicit or explicit references to media iconography. In summary, the article argues that studying transmedia tourism can enable hitherto overlooked issues such as the relationships between world-building, technology, intertextuality and ownership to be better understood in both transmedia and media tourism research.

## Contributor Note

Ross Garner is Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University. He has published research in edited collections by multiple international publishers and journals including *Popular Communication*, *Tourist Studies* and *Journal of Fandom Studies*. He is currently preparing the monograph *Nostalgia, Transmediality and Digital Television* for publication by Bloomsbury.

## Citation

Garner, Ross. 2019. 'Finding Nemo's Spaces: Defining and Exploring Transmedia Tourism'. JOMEC Journal 14, 'Transmedia Tourism', ed. Ross Garner, 11-32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.195>

Accepted for publication: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## Introduction

Using the *Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter* in Leavesdon, England as an example, Matthew Freeman (2019, 124) has asked, ‘What [...] is ‘the relationship between transmediality and leisure and tourism-based attraction[s]?’ Freeman’s question arises out of a concern that existing academic accounts of spatialized experiences of media properties have limited their analysis by foregrounding economic interpretations that position them solely as revenue-generating brand extensions (Freeman 2019, 124).

Such accounts close down alternative cultural readings concerning world-building and expansion as well as how experiences respond to ever-developing historical, technological and industrial contexts. Responding to these omissions by adopting a media and cultural studies perspective, this article offers a theoretical intervention into academic debates concerning media tourism by arguing for a shift in terminology and analytical focus to the concept of transmedia tourism. Via a case study of the Disney-Pixar franchise *Finding Nemo* (Santon and Unkrich, 2003, Stanton, 2016), the article argues in favour of discussing media tourism in combination with theories of transmedia content flows. Adopting this perspective allows for hitherto overlooked relationships between world-building, technology, intertextuality and ownership to be better understood.

The article thus proposes the concept of transmedia tourism. Transmedia tourism is a historical concept which arises out of intersections between the ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore 2011), convergence culture (Jenkins 2006) and

the tourism sector, where spatialized experiences of media properties are being offered with increasing frequency in a variety of forms which utilize myriad media technologies in a range of ways (see also Editor’s Introduction). The key elements of this approach are:

- 1) Investigating how the possibilities offered by digital technologies and platforms are harnessed by different tourism stakeholders. Within the parameters of this article’s case study, these include media organizations and tourism marketers (but can also include fans – see Williams, Booth, and Jones in this Special Issue). In other words, how do the opportunities that arise out of situated stakeholders appropriating digital technology work to enhance engagement with media franchises through offering mediated experiences in spaces which have been designated – officially or otherwise – as meaningful to an intellectual property?
- 2) Expanding upon foundational models of transmedia content flows by arguing for an intertextual understanding of the concept as developed by Colin B. Harvey (2015). This altered perspective de-centres individual sites as the focus of media tourism research by instead positioning the intertextual spread of an intellectual property at the centre of the research. By adopting an intertextual approach, issues such as media influence upon the design of tourist experiences and negotiations of copyright by differently-situated attractions can be addressed.

- 3) Building upon the second point, and responding to recent work on tourism and mediation which has noted the increasing overlaps between material and digital spaces (e.g. Robinson 2016), analysing physical sites (e.g. filming locations, themed spaces) alongside virtual and/or hybrid renderings of these to produce a holistic understanding of how cultural and technological developments contribute to trans-media tourism.

Transmedia tourism as theorized in this article therefore calls for less explicit focus upon the themes of authenticity and immersion that have dominated (media) tourism analysis (Williams 2018; also MacCannell 2013 [1976]; Buchmann et al. 2009). Instead, shifting the analytical focus to how aspects including (but not limited to) world-building, media technologies and intertextuality intertwine are identified as areas for future research.

The article has three sections which unpack, develop and layer the concept of transmedia tourism. Following a short discussion of the methodology used for generating the case study's data, the first marks out why the neologism transmedia tourism is necessary by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of current influential terminology provided by Sue Beeton (2005) and Maria Månsson (2011). This section argues that whilst these studies have produced useful observations for suggesting intersections between transmedia and tourism, they have foregrounded other debates including the environmental impact of tourism and demonstrations of tourist agency. The second begins building transmedia tourism conceptually by returning to foundational definitions of

both 'tourism' (Urry and Larsen 2011) and 'transmedia' (Jenkins 2006, 2011) and applies these to the case study of *Finding Nemo* examples to demonstrate why an intertextual understanding of transmedia expansion is useful for theorizing transmedia tourism. The final section then suggests future developments for researching transmedia tourism by addressing what I name as 'unsanctioned' examples as further evidence of *Finding Nemo's* intertextual spread across tourism-coded experiences. By addressing unsanctioned examples, transmedia tourism's ability to consider issues including mediatization (Couldry 2003) and copyright negotiation are highlighted.

## Methodology

The data collected for the case study primarily employs autoethnography to consider how spatially-based *Finding Nemo* examples and attractions intertwine arguments concerning 'transmedia' and 'tourism'. Autoethnography was used to analyse both physical examples and virtual equivalents, such as the *Disney Infinity 3.0 Finding Dory Playset* (Avalanche Software 2015) computer game. This method was deemed suitable due to its previous deployment in anthropological studies of both spaces (Roberts 2018) and computer game environments (Lamerichs 2018). In total the autoethnographic reflections are drawn from seven years of visiting Disney theme parks as a fan and tourist (comprising of five trips to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, three trips to Disneyland Paris in France, and one trip to Tokyo Disneyland in Japan) as well as approximately ten hours of game play.

Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2014, 15) argue that autoethnography 'provid[e]s a critical and innovative tool' for tackling 'what it means when people actually take up [...]. discursive practices and really live through them'. Their argument resonates with the article's aims as it posits taking seriously an individual's immersion within commercial media content such as regular visits to themed entertainment sites and playing computer games. Evans and Stasi (2014, 15) also argue that self-reflexivity is an essential part of autoethnographic study. It should therefore immediately be noted that this article's readings of transmedia tourism attractions are those of a white, British, 30-something male who is cisgender, heterosexual and, crucially given the economic capital required to regularly visit themed entertainment locations, middle class. Moreover, as 'an autoethnographic analysis is always constrained by a particular time and space' (Booth 2015, 107), it is also necessary to disclose that the analysis of physical *Finding Nemo*-themed attractions and experiences is drawn from the versions of these between 2012 and 2019. However, whilst many aspects of the parks that contain these rides have changed during the study's timeframe, the form and content of the *Finding Nemo* attractions have remained unaltered.

These (self-)reflections are supplemented in the final section by allusions to initial findings derived from continuing research into the websites of all major UK aquariums (37 in total) to consider how and if references to *Finding Nemo* are observable in the marketing of these attractions. Information concerning the frequency with which species specific to *Finding Nemo* appear on these websites was recorded alongside any copy or imagery that either implicitly or explicitly

referenced the two Disney-Pixar films. Screenshots were also taken of relevant imagery to provide a visual record of the websites at the particular point in time of data collection. The data that this preliminary inquiry has produced is referenced for the sole purpose of supporting transmedia tourism's conceptual development in terms of demonstrating *Finding Nemo*'s intertextual spread across the sector. Whilst engagement with the web-derived data in this article is therefore minimal, this is intentional as it is invoked to demonstrate the insights and questions that an intertextual mapping of a media product in the tourism sector can generate. Regrettably, any further analysis of this additional data set has fallen beyond the scope of this article.

### **'Film-Induced', 'Mediatized' or 'Transmedia' Tourism?**

Before setting up a new academic concept, it is useful to review existing terms to identify absences that a proposed neologism can address. Noëlle O'Connor and Sangkyun Kim (2016, 14) have noted that there have been a range of terms that academics have used to classify the study of tourism and leisure activities that are derived from media properties. As returned to at the end of this section, Maria Månsson's (2011) arguments concerning 'mediatized tourism' provide the greatest level of conceptual overlap with how this article defines transmedia tourism. However, it is Sue Beeton's (2005) term 'film-induced tourism' that arguably holds the greatest currency amongst scholars. This term offers a broad definition which covers 'visitation to sites where movies and TV programmes have been filmed as well as tours to production studios, including film-related theme parks' (Beeton 2005,

11) alongside attending movie premiers and film festivals or watching travelogue-style programmes on television. Beeton's is therefore an umbrella term which unites multiple types of embodied tourism experiences and has allowed scholars working in traditionally disparate disciplines to initiate dialogue (Williams, Hall and Lew 2014, 631; see Fernandez-Young and Young 2008; Karpovich 2010; Kim and Long 2012; Zhang and Ryan 2018 as examples).

Beeton's study pre-dates what Matthew Freeman and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato (2019, 1) name 'The transmedia phenomenon' in academia. This is where high levels of attention have been directed towards examining both digital media's cross-platform content flows and how different production contexts, national cultures and historical moments have appropriated these (see Clarke 2011; Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman 2014; Mittell 2015, 292-318; Freeman and Proctor 2018). Yet, if transmedia is understood as 'the idea of multiple media platforms' (Harvey 2015, 3) which content moves across, we can start to see the potential for the development of a theory of transmedia tourism in Beeton's work.

For example, Beeton (2005, 23) notes that stakeholders such as tour group providers or restaurants may piggy-back on to the associations between a media text and a specific geographical location. This observation is useful for two reasons. Firstly, Beeton's examples imply how issues such as rights ownership and affiliation with media organizations might be a key area of negotiation as differently-situated tourism service providers attempt to capitalize on the association between a particular tourist destination and the popularity of a media property

(also Beeton 2005, 94). Secondly, it suggests how the process of a commercial media property moving into the tourism sector constitutes a form of mediation through being translated to a physical site, attraction or experience (Beeton, Yamamura and Seaton 2016, 148). Not only is the deep-rooted association between (media) tourism and embodied experience made explicit but how individual tourism sites, attractions and services constitute 'media' in their own right is also suggested (also Freitag 2016). Yet as the next section argues, rigid distinctions between physical spaces and electronic media cannot be sustained due to how spatialized experiences of media properties utilize virtual platforms and screen technologies in myriad ways.

Film-induced tourism's conceptual parameters cannot account for either technological changes or content dispersal because it leans too heavily on two different inflections of discourses of effect. The first concerns the term's prioritizing of the effects of visitor behaviour on geographical locations and populations. Beeton (2005, 13) argues that 'it is important to be concerned [...] with the overall effects of media tourism within the community over time, particularly from the aspect of changing attitudes and social representations'. Prioritizing these issues is understandable if contextualized within disciplinary norms. As C. Michael Hall, Allan M. Williams and Alan A. Lew (2014, 15) argue, 'The idea of sustainability has been a major research theme in tourism studies and was eagerly adopted from the late 1980s onwards'. Sensitivity to the impact of human populations upon environments speaks not only to either sociological or geographical concerns, however. Xavier Matteucci and Juergen Gnoth (2017, 50) argue that because

Tourism can forcefully shape natural landscapes and social relationships [...] It is urgent that the power of tourism be deployed to do good for communities, tourists, and the natural environments where people and other species – sometimes endangered – live'. The continued focus upon the effects of tourism and tourist behaviour upon geographically situated populations and locations has therefore arisen due to tourism studies' foundational disciplinary underpinnings.

These issues remain pertinent and should not be jettisoned. Relating to *Finding Nemo*, popular press reports have highlighted that 'real world' locations similar to those seen in the franchise such as coral reefs are being permanently harmed by overtourism (Shrikant 2019). Yet, foregrounding (media) tourism's multiple impacts on geographical locations produces limitations upon research agendas by necessitating a site-centric approach (see Beeton 2005, 97-169). This has led to the current situation outlined by Joanne Connell (2012, 1012) where 'case studies of films and destinations have dominated the literature'. If, however, 'Tourism research does not exist in a vacuum' (Hall, Williams and Lew 2014, 15) and constitutes a 'subject of cross-disciplinary academic study' (Connell 2012, 1007), I would argue that it should be open to addressing arguments developed in satellite disciplines such as those concerning transmediality in media and cultural studies. Responding to such external developments is necessary to ensure that knowledge generated about media tourism remains timely.

The second way that film-induced tourism overemphasises discourses of effect concerns assigning too powerful a role to

screen imagery in its understanding of the relationship between media and individual tourist motivations. Beeton (2005, 20) argues that media 'motivate travellers, create new images, alter negative images, strengthen weak images, and create and place icons'. This positions media tourists as inert since the direct influence of spectacular images on their behaviour is implied (also Curtin 2016; O'Conner and Kim 2016). As Maria Månsson (2011, 1635) has argued about the assumptions underpinning film-induced tourism:

tourists are perceived as having a desire to see these media images as they are localised in space [...] In this perspective the tourist becomes a rather passive media consumer who is seen only as a user of media products. This is limiting, as it neglects tourists' agency in creating new media products and their active participation [...] In contrast, it can be argued that tourists are both consumers and producers of media products, making them highly influential

Countering assumptions of passivity by highlighting both individual tourist agency and the spreadability of official and user-generated content across digital platforms (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013), Maria Månsson (2011, 1635) has argued for a shift in terminology to 'mediatized tourism'. Indebted to Henry Jenkins's (2006) arguments about convergence culture, Månsson (2011, 1635) defines mediatized tourism as how

Media products accordingly converge and float around in people's awareness without demarcation in an ongoing circle of references. Hence, it is limiting to study a single media product – such as film – and its influence on tourists in isolation because content in film, novels and other media products continuously intertwine.

As individuals consume media across platforms, Månsson posits that isolating influence to a single media form misrepresents the range of technologies, content, and outlets which affect how (media) tourism destinations are mediated and selected by tourists. Taking this position results in the production, circulation and formation of participatory cultures (Jenkins 2006, 26-58) linked to the mediation of (media) tourism locations taking precedent when defining her concept, as Månsson's (2011, 1635) call for 'focusing on tourist created media products' evidences. Adopting this altered perspective enables Månsson (2011, 1645) to argue that 'Media consumers therefore become producers and [...] these practices occur on multiple loops' such as reading, reacting to and then posting their own comments about tourist destinations on sites including blogs, YouTube and TripAdvisor. Rather than being overwhelmed by the power of screen media imagery, Månsson (2011) argues that 'mediatized tourism' foregrounds exploring how (media) tourists continually demonstrate agency by embracing the affordances made possible by convergent platforms and technologies.

In-depth examination of technology, nevertheless, requires moving beyond the over-prioritization of (media) tourist agency that 'mediatized tourism' conceptually suggests. Mediatized tourism has less to say about the transmedia component of convergence culture, and so it is my argument that 'transmedia tourism' can conceptually address this imbalance by retaining the focus on technology and its appropriation by audiences whilst expanding the parameters to incorporate an industrial and/or textual focus. Månsson (2011,

1637) provides useful foundations for these aims by highlighting that 'One way for producers to use media convergence is intertextuality: media products' interrelationship through either hidden or open references'. Like film-induced tourism, mediatized tourism conceptually alludes to how intertextual references become forged between intellectual media properties and tourism service providers who occupy different positions in the tourism sector.

However, Månsson (2011, 1638) limits her industrially-focused analysis to solely commercial terms by arguing that such experiences can 'enhance their media companies product reach through joint ventures with companies across industry borders, including tourism'. What is therefore missing from current media tourism research is a concept that understands how a media property extends across tourism contexts whilst also studying the negotiations of content that variously situated invested parties partake in. Rather than foregrounding social impacts (Beeton) or audience participation (Månsson), transmedia tourism analysis can combine these elements with both a technologically- and content-orientated focus.

The use of the term 'mediatization' also has limitations since it is a loaded expression for media and cultural studies scholars studying (media) tourism. Mediatization connotes a set of long-standing debates initiated by Nick Couldry (2003) to account for 'the *changed dimensionality of the social world* (Couldry 2014, 58; original emphasis) as a consequence of the media becoming 'an irreducible extra dimension of all social processes' (Couldry 2014, 58). Ideas derived from understanding mediatization as media influence can be integrated into

transmedia tourism analysis, as this article's final section demonstrates. Yet, whilst 'mediatized tourism' provides relevant observations concerning intertextuality and intellectual properties that can be developed further, the term connotes ambiguity because of its entanglement with other scholarly debates. As the next section argues, 'transmedia tourism' can sidestep these problems.

### ***Finding Nemo* as Transmedia Tourism**

This section introduces transmedia tourism as a concept through reference to examples from the *Finding Nemo* franchise. Transmedia tourism is intended to be a wide-reaching term that addresses the different ways that commercial media properties become appropriated as spatialized attractions by various groups of cultural agents including (but not limited to) media organizations, tourism service providers and marketers. The concept foregrounds the flow of media content across platforms, technologies and sites within the tourism sector and prioritizes how industrial, cultural and media convergence has enabled these processes through technological developments. Moreover, as will also become evident, transmedia tourism analysis necessitates replacing site-specific case studies with mapping how intellectual media properties spread out to generate tourism-coded experiences which span and combine both physical and virtual spaces. Understanding transmedia tourism in this way subsequently enables reflections upon how spatialized mediations of media properties stimulate, enhance and develop attachment to a media property as well as accounting for the

contributions of historically determined technological contexts, forms and platforms in enabling, creating and engaging with these experiences.

To illuminate these ideas, it is necessary to return to foundational definitions of 'tourism' and 'transmedia' separately to evaluate how existing knowledge on both topics applies to *Finding Nemo*-themed examples. David Crouch, Rhona Jackson, and Felix Thompson's (2005, 6) cautionary advice about fusing existing concepts from external disciplines to analysis of the tourism sector motivate this decision as they argue:

there cannot be a straightforward reconciliation between central concepts developed in [...] two different disciplines. There are many aspects of critical discourses used in media studies which have been developed in relation to different objects and therefore cannot be unproblematically transferred to discussions of tourism.

The current article assumes that tourism practices 'involve the notion of 'departure', of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's sense to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and mundane' (Urry and Larsen 2011, 3). This understanding of tourism has frequently appeared in academic literature – whether media-derived (Couldry 2000; Beeton, Yamamura and Seaton 2016, 148-9) or otherwise (Shaw and Williams 2004; Tressider 2011) – and so provides a valid basis to build from.

The variety of *Finding Nemo*-themed attractions located within Disney theme parks around the world demonstrates how this property has generated multiple spatialized experiences that offer tourists temporary occupation of the intellectual

property's narrative world. In terms of attractions, these include *The Seas with Nemo and Friends* at EPCOT Centre and *Finding Nemo: The Musical* at Disney's Animal Kingdom Park, both located within Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. Beyond the USA there is also the *Nemo and Friends SeaRider* simulator at the DisneySea theme park in Tokyo, Japan and the high-speed rollercoaster *Crush's Coaster* in Walt Disney Studios Park at Disneyland Paris, France. Alongside these attractions, visitors to Disney's Art of Animation Resort at Walt Disney World have the opportunity to stay in *Finding Nemo*-themed family suites that feature furniture, fixtures and fittings that denote the brand. Taken together, paying visitors are allowed to temporarily inhabit these spaces for leisure purposes, whether that be the duration of their stay at the hotel, the cumulative time spent queuing for and riding an attraction, or occupying a theme park's spaces more generally.

Postmodernist accounts of either media tourism or themed spaces and attractions that are indebted to the writings of Umberto Eco (1995 [1986]) and Jean Baudrillard (1994) might question the legitimacy of these spaces to provide 'authentic' tourist experiences. *Finding Nemo*-themed spaces and experiences would instead be dismissed as evidence of a shared condition of subjugation to an image-driven society populated by simulation and commercial media. However, writing on the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* at Universal Studios' Islands of Adventure Park in Orlando, Florida, Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reijnders argue that within this themed space tourists 'are encouraged to think of themselves as leaving their mundane existence behind them' (2018, 181). Furthermore, they posit that 'visitors do what would if they were visiting any other

urban tourist destination: they buy things, they wander the streets, get something to eat or drink, perhaps see a performance or people-watch'. (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018, 183). By taking a themed space derived from an intellectual media property on its own terms and exploring audience responses, Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018) demonstrate that tourists respond to *Wizarding World* through the same criteria and behaviours that separate non-(trans)media-derived tourism from everyday experiences. Although *Finding Nemo*-themed experiences are largely more time-limited than those of *Wizarding World* (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018, 174), they do offer opportunities to engage in similar practices such as exiting an attraction through a gift shop stocking themed goods or observing anticipatory tourist behaviour in queue areas. These factors make the spaces readable as genuine 'tourist' encounters with the media property despite the more limited duration (also Lukas 2007).

Defining tourism as a symbolic break from the routines and environments that characterise day-to-day life also allows for both physical and virtual experiences derived from an intellectual property to be analysed alongside each other. Analysing the *Finding Dory* playset, which was a purchasable add-on for the toys-to-life computer game *Disney Infinity 3.0*, supports this proposition. One of the playset's recurrent gameplay modes takes place within a three-dimensional rendering of the fictional Marine Life Institute's (or MLI's) surrounding waters where semi-structured play is possible. Players can interact with this environment by either completing short adventure missions, partaking in time-limited tasks (e.g. races), or exploring the virtual coral reef setting at the same time as

customizing this by adding different multi-coloured flora. The latter set of affordances encourage 'a sense of wonderment and exploration' (Lamerichs 2018, 178) in the player as through their aquatic avatar they occupy the 'figure of the flâneur [...] [who] leisurely stroll[s] through cyberspace, and enjoy[s] the scenery'. (Lamerichs 2018, 181). In other words, the exploratory opportunities provided to players are akin to how tourists are understood to navigate embodied (themed) space (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018, 182). Engaging with the *Disney Infinity 3.0 Finding Dory* playset therefore provides players with tourism-coded opportunities such as embodying the unfamiliar avatar of a tropical fish and touring around virtual renderings of colourful coral reef environments. Although players do not physically travel to this exotic location, the *Finding Dory* playset allows players to imaginatively engage with an unfamiliar and spectacular environment for the limited period of the gameplay session (also Evans 2011, 103).

Equating physical experiences with virtual equivalents may seem objectionable due to the deep-rooted association between tourism and physical embodiment highlighted in the previous section (also Hills 2016; 2017, 214). In contrast, theories of 'post-tourism' have started addressing how technologies such as the Internet have meant that travellers 'do not have to leave their houses in order to see the objects-to-be-seen' (Heitmann 2011, 55). Additionally, Lamerichs (2018, 179) argues in relation to the virtual environments of computer games that 'Now that we have reached an era of 'media life' (Deuze 2012), in which mobile and connected technologies affect all our practices, we need to rethink how tourism can be reconceptualized'. As tourism

experiences increasingly intertwine with media platforms, forms and technologies, understanding the 'tourism' component of transmedia tourism requires moving beyond rigidly entrenched distinctions that separate physical spaces from virtual equivalents. Transmedia tourism recognizes these developments by embracing how technological developments now frequently intersect and interact with each other when experiencing mediations of space derived from media properties (also Heili, Xu and Crane 2019; Purzycki 2019).

In contrast with 'tourism', 'transmedia' is an academic concept with a shorter, albeit no less complex, history (see Harvey 2015, 17). Despite the term's academic origins lying in Marsha Kinder's (1991) analysis of early-90s children's media culture, Henry Jenkins's (2006) popularization of the term in the twenty-first century provides the mandatory starting point. For Jenkins (2006, 95-6),

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa.

Via a case study of *The Matrix* franchise (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999, 2002, 2003), Jenkins's is a narrative-orientated definition of *transmedia storytelling* which assumes that an intellectual property owned by a capitalist media

conglomerate constitutes a nucleus from which multiple developments of the story world disperse across diverse media platforms. The emphasis is therefore upon audiences gaining sustained exposure to and engagement with previously unknown elements of the story world, which enhances both their knowledge of and emotional attachment to that property.

Jenkins's (2006) definition can be aligned with how 'tourism' is understood in this article on two counts. Firstly, he identifies that both spatially-based experiences (e.g. computer games) and geographically located attractions (e.g. themed spaces) can be components of transmedia storytelling's narrative strategies. Although treating these as discrete entities, this recognition supports my assertion that physical and virtual examples of transmedia tourism should be analysed alongside each other. Secondly, Jenkins implies that a hyperdiegesis, or 'vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text' (Hills 2002, 137), is an integral part of transmedia storytelling. Transmedia storytelling therefore aligns with tourism as both concepts emphasise spatiality, exploration and knowledge expansion. Providing audiences with opportunities to continually (re-)visit a favoured imaginary world and find something unique within each act of consumption is one of the narrative mode's pleasures.

The *Finding Nemo*-themed experiences I have discussed here exemplify transmedia tourism to different degrees. The *SeaRider* employs expansionist transmedia storytelling as riders board a construction of the fantastic titular craft – a new addition to the diegesis – that shrinks riders down to the size of a fish

(Figure 1). Visitors are then taken on an originally-sequenced tour which combines locations from both *Finding Nemo* films (e.g. Nemo's coral reef home, the waters outside of the MLI) at the same time as encountering familiar characters (e.g. Mr. Ray, the whales Bailey and Destiny) and new threats (e.g. being pursued by a menacing squid). Alternatively, *Crush's Coaster* develops hitherto unseen areas of the hyperdiegesis by focusing on seagulls and a marina area in its indoor queuing spaces. Opportunities for narrative expansion are slender in both of these cases, but each attraction deepens attachment to *Finding Nemo* as an intellectual property by combining familiarity with the ability to temporarily and imaginatively engage with a themed rendering of the narrative world in previously-unachievable ways. For example, *Crush's Coaster* encourages riders to imagine 'being' Marlin and Dory by the innovative ride car design where patrons sit on a sea turtle's back whilst the *SeaRider* mimics hypothetical interactions with the franchise's characters through the simulator's physical movements (e.g. being hugged by a group of otters). Recurrent across both of these examples, is how the expansion of *Finding Nemo* in to tourism contexts derives pleasure by harnessing media technologies to provide increased imaginative proximity to the property's world and characters.

The *Finding Dory* playset best demonstrates transmedia storytelling. It offers a new scenario that occurs after the events of *Finding Dory* where the movie's lead characters return to the MLI following a flood that threatens to flush the aquarium's aquatic life into the surrounding waters and the waiting jaws of a flock of seagulls. Players therefore

experience narrative and hyperdiegetic expansion by undertaking two-dimensional side-scrolling and goal-orientated levels to rescue inhabitants from the MLI's pipes and tanks. These levels also introduce new secondary characters such as cuttlefish that assist the player in completing their tasks.



Figure 1: A Model Replica of the Sea Rider ride car from the *Nemo and Friends Sea Rider* attraction at DisneySea Park, Tokyo. Source: the author.

However, I would argue that the *Finding Dory* playset's pleasures are derived less from transmedia expansion and more from what I would name *transmedia reaffirmation* where the franchise's brand meanings are consistently reaffirmed through each spatialized encounter. For example, the playset's mission-based levels gamify *Finding Nemo* by foregrounding brand values of protection and (presumed) reunion by positioning the player's avatar as a heroic guardian figure who must save the MLI's smaller species of fish. The three-dimensional reef environment then asserts alternative

brand values including playfulness and fun (as signified by being able to use Dory's 'whale speak' function) alongside appreciation for aquatic environments (as signified by customizing the reef). The pleasures derived from this transmedia example therefore differ to what Jason Mittell (2012, 7) names "playing for the plot" in relation to computer games derived from media properties. Mittell (2012, 7) classifies this mode of transmedia storytelling as 'creating ludic moments of engagement that are primarily motivated by the promise of narrative information'. The *Finding Dory* playset does not provide moments of ever-expanding narrative revelation; on the contrary, the mission levels offer repeated goal-orientated scenarios rather than a continually-evolving storyline. The *Finding Dory* playset instead provides ludic pleasures that reaffirm the property's brand meanings through its gameplay modes. Rather than solely offering narrative development, intersections between 'transmedia' and 'tourism' in this instance provide users with opportunities to temporarily occupy a construction of a familiar fictional world. At the same time, there is the chance to imaginatively engage with the diegesis in ways that have previously been denied.

In summary, each of these examples generate tourism-esque experiences by harnessing the possibilities of digital media and technology to mediate *Finding Nemo* into spatialized experiences of the brand. At the same time, none of these virtual, physical or hybrid experiences require prior familiarity with either of the Disney-Pixar movies. However, each example arguably offers an enhanced experience for more knowledgeable audience members due to the storylines, characters or parts of the storyworld that are introduced. They therefore combine

transmedia and tourism elements by using such digital forms as gaming platforms, computerized ride technologies, video projections, lighting and sound effects to allow temporary-yet-additional engagement with a specific narrative world.

However, other examples of *Finding Nemo*-themed transmedia tourism test the limitations of how the transmedia component of transmedia tourism has been defined and so suggest the need for conceptual refinement. Such modifications are arguably to be expected as Jenkins's initial definition has been widely debated. Responding to calls for greater precision in defining transmedia, Jenkins (2011, para. 9; original emphasis) has argued that:

Transmedia, used by itself, simply means 'across media'. Transmedia, at this level, is one way of talking about convergence as a set of cultural practices [...] Transmedia storytelling describes one logic for thinking about the flow of content across media. We might also think about transmedia branding, transmedia performance, transmedia ritual, transmedia play, transmedia activism, and transmedia spectacle, as other logics.

Following this argument, refinements addressing the specific ways that media content moves across platforms and into cultural spheres such as tourism are to be expected.

*The Seas with Nemo and Friends* provides a useful example for these purposes. This attraction is officially-promoted as follows:

Board a 'clamobile' and descend slowly below the waves, where Nemo's friends flit through brightly colored coral reefs and gently swaying anemones. Dodge

stinging jellyfish, underwater mines, a toothy anglerfish and an even toothier Bruce the shark.

Catch a ride on the righteous East Australian Current with Crush the sea turtle and his little dude, Squirt. But where's Nemo? (Disney n.d., n.p.)

Whilst paratextual discourse utilises the language of transmedia storytelling by stating that the ride 'finds Nemo lost again' (Disney n.d., n.p.), the experience's content largely adapts established character and plot beats from the original *Finding Nemo* movie to a slow-moving dark ride. Nemo is separated from Marlin (voiced by Albert Brooks) and Dory (voiced by Ellen DeGeneres), and creatures such as jellyfish and turtles are encountered before the inevitable reunion occurs at the conclusion. *The Seas* therefore demonstrates brand fidelity by reasserting the property's values of family separation, adventure, bravery and reconciliation alongside offering mimetic recreations of its colourful characters in both computer-generated and material form. In addition, the bright colour palette which characterizes both the film's aesthetic (Cotta Vaz 2003; Disney Enterprises, Inc. and Pixar Animation Studios 2016) and popular tourist imaginings of coral reef environments is present (Merchant 2016). In terms of offering transmedia expansion though, additions to the hyperdiegesis only occur through the design and introduction of the clamobile ride vehicle. If, as Jenkins (2011, para. 11) argues, 'transmedia represents a structure based on the further development of the story world through each new medium', then how can *The Seas* be read as *transmedia* tourism?

Addressing this question requires expanding how 'transmedia' relates to

transmedia tourism beyond Jenkins's ideas. Rather than representing narrative redundancy, I would argue that *The Seas* requires understanding transmedia storytelling from an intertextual perspective where intellectual properties constitute amalgamations of narrative, iconography, aesthetics, and characters that disperse across media forms, platforms and technologies. This perspective retains the intellectual property's centrality (following Jenkins) but adjusts the analytical focus to consider 'expansion' beyond the purely narrative level. Understanding transmedia from an intertextual perspective can provide a better understanding of how the elements of an intellectual property spread out across different attractions. At the same time, the motivations behind what and which elements of the property feature in mediated spaces can be discussed. This interpretation of transmedia content flows is indebted to Harvey's (2015, 34) definition:

What intertextuality is discussing is a process of remembering, and indeed the role of memory can be understood as central to transmedia storytelling, in which the invocation of ideas, characters, plot points or audiovisual imagery between elements of a franchise are central to the project's success.

An intertextual definition of transmedia content dispersal permits *The Seas* being read as an invitation to recall previous encounters with the *Finding Nemo* franchise and to transfer pre-established affective responses to the immediate experiential context(s) (also Tosca and Klastrup 2019). This process is especially significant to analysing *The Seas* given how riders exit the attraction. *The Seas* ends by superimposing *Finding Nemo's* animated characters over 'real life'

aquarium tanks and specimens. After disembarking, patrons are thus expected to continue engaging with the marine wildlife exhibits, with the contextualizing information about these being provided by displays and interactive screens which also utilise *Finding Nemo's* characters and colour palettes. Visitors are therefore encouraged to transfer their affective memories of *Finding Nemo* and the immediate experience of riding *The Seas* over to the marine wildlife exhibits, meaning that these become an additional component of the attraction's storyworld. Thus, whilst *The Seas* does not offer narrative development, its intertextual strategies are consistent with how 'transmedia world-building envisions a balance between fantasy and reality, between imaginary and real' (Freeman 2019, 126). In other words, *The Seas* employs narrative, character and iconography from *Finding Nemo* to encourage transferring the values, memories and affect associated with the intellectual property across on to 'real world' tourist-coded exhibits of marine ecology. By doing this, the storyworld and 'reality' become collapsed together under the assumption that visitors to the attraction will continue to associate the two spheres with each other after their visit to EPCOT has ended. This association and extension of *Finding Nemo* takes place in part due to aspects of convergence culture including the cross-media migration of intellectual properties into tourism contexts and the role of media technologies in mediating the experience.

Approaching transmedia tourism from an intertextual perspective therefore requires that the spread of an intellectual property occupies the centre of the research process. From a methodological perspective, this approach is useful as

mapping the visibility of an intellectual property across platforms and technologies where tourism and media properties intertwine can offer a comprehensive understanding of how (trans)media tourism operates. For example, mapping a property's intertextual spread moves away from the aforementioned problem of a 'large number of destination and film case studies' (Connell 2012, 1025) within (trans)media tourism research. This change in approach not only means that the intertextual expansion of an intellectual property across virtual and physical spatialized experiences can be analysed alongside each other. It also requires that the analysis should consider the span of officially branded, unsanctioned and user-generated examples. As the next section demonstrates, mapping the intertextual spread of *Finding Nemo* also allows for alternative research trajectories relating to mediatization and copyright negotiation to be developed.

### ***Nemo* and Beyond: Mediatization, Copyright and Future Research Trajectories**

Having mapped transmedia tourism's intertextual spread(s), one way of connecting the data generated with perspectives in media and cultural studies would be to analyse this through theories of media influence and mediatization. As previously mentioned, mediatization seeks to understand 'the effects of media institutions' existence on *the space of the social*' (Couldry 2014, 54; original emphasis). Regarding transmedia tourism, mapping intertextual connections between different tourism-coded experiences and a particular intellectual property could provide a

launchpad for discussing the extent to which the characters, iconography or narrative of a media property have come to structure the social space that multiple tourism stakeholders servicing specific market segments occupy. Alternatively, tourist expectations for specific attraction types, such as aquariums in this instance, could be solicited to highlight the role of popular media franchises in generating these.

Similar arguments have already been developed regarding *Finding Nemo* in areas such as marine biology. Species of tropical fish like Clownfish (Nemo and Marlin) and Blue Tangs (Dory) now constitute what Alan J. Clark and Robert M. May (2002, para. 7) name 'charismatic species' which generate public support and sympathy whilst also skewing funding for research in marine biology. This status afforded to Blue Tangs and Clownfish has also resulted in both species becoming loci for cultural processes of anthropomorphisation (Root-Bernstein et al. 2013) as well as conservation drives and the collecting practices of home aquarium owners (see McClenachan et al. (2012) and Militz and Foale (2017) respectively). These processes speak to the presence of a specific "media " (Couldry 2014, 63) operating within fields of marine biology and ecology as the popularization of the species featured in *Finding Nemo* has impacted upon this area of social space in terms of both academic research agendas and public sympathies.

Reflecting on the intertextual spread of *Finding Nemo's* characters and iconography to aquariums in the UK, similar processes are observable in the tourism field (see Garner 2017). For example, twenty-seven of the thirty-seven aquariums in the UK with websites feature

combinations of both Clownfish and Blue Tangs as part of their marketing strategies. This trend is especially prominent for aquariums that are owned by large commercial tourism companies. Both the Aspro Parks group (who own aquariums at multiple sites throughout the UK) and the Merlin Entertainment Group (who own the UK's SeaLife Centre attractions) appropriate iconography connoting *Finding Nemo* across the websites for each of their attractions (Figure 2). These preliminary findings suggest that future research into aquariums as sites of transmedia tourism should explore these intertextual strategies in greater depth. These inquiries could employ a variety of qualitative methodologies: textual analysis of promotional material could, for example, consider how and for what purposes intertextual references to *Finding Nemo* are constructed. Alternatively, interviews with various stakeholders could be sought to elucidate how and why service providers choose either to employ or avoid *Finding Nemo's* iconography. Analysis could also explore how *Finding Nemo's* aesthetics and iconography intersect with other marine-based media franchises such as *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975; <https://www.skegness-aquarium.uk/>). Each of these trajectories would assist in providing a better understanding of the relationship between mediatization and transmedia tourism in relation to the marketing, provision and consumption of popular marine tourism.



Figure 2: Blue Reef Aquarium, Tynemouth in the UK utilising the iconography and aesthetics of the *Finding Nemo* franchise in its online marketing.

Source:

<https://www.blureefaquarium.co.uk/tynemouth/>

Exploring the intertextual spread of an intellectual property across tourism sites also alludes to how negotiating copyright constitutes another relevant area for future research. Copyright enforcement has become a key point of tension within convergence culture due to how content production has now become 'both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process' (Jenkins 2006,18). The topic has subsequently attracted analysis pertaining to transmedia storytelling with regard to who can derive revenue from user-generated suggestions for the future development of an intellectual property if these are solicited through official websites (Martens 2011, 62-4). These positions mirror broader debates concerning what equates to 'fair use' of media properties and iconography in digital culture (Postigo 2008; Edwards et al. 2012).

Examples of *Finding Nemo*-associated transmedia tourism fall between poles of sanctioned and unsanctioned practice. Whilst officially-branded attractions like *The Seas*, the *SeaRider* and *Crush's Coaster* occupy the sanctioned end of the spectrum, user-generated recreations of *Finding Nemo's* hyperdiegesis are located at the other. However, the aquariums

owned by Merlin Entertainment and Aspro Parks are more ambiguously positioned. Attractions like SeaLife Centres are for-profit organizations but compete with companies like Disney for market share in specific geographical areas of the tourism sector (e.g. attracting UK-based tourists). As Lies van Roessel and Christian Katzenbach (2018, 9) argue regarding character design, rigid applications of copyright law are questionable 'As soon as the original image or sound is slightly altered, as occurs in the case of fan art or stylistic inspiration'. Intertextually referencing Disney-Pixar's recognisable character designs and aesthetics in the marketing strategies of unsanctioned locations therefore connects with this article's definition of transmedia content flows. Although unofficial for-profit aquariums may employ either cartoonish or photorealistic reproductions of Clownfish and Blue Tangs, such strategizing targets potential visitors by appropriating *Finding Nemo's* iconography. Further research is therefore needed which works alongside relevant stakeholders such as attraction marketers to understand how they negotiate copyright within the context of unsanctioned transmedia tourism. By doing this, a better understanding of the strategies employed for negotiating intellectual properties across the different sites of transmedia tourism can be gained.

## Conclusions

This article has undertaken a case study of the *Finding Nemo* franchise's development as spatial experiences with the intention of setting up the concept of transmedia tourism and indicating some of the insights that this approach can provide. Rather than recapping previous

arguments, I would like to use this section to open out the discussion to reaffirm areas where future research into transmedia tourism can develop. These are:

- 1) **Technology** – transmedia tourism as a concept is indebted to the historical, cultural, social, industrial, technological and media contexts of convergence culture. As media forms, platforms and technologies increasingly intertwine with both each other and the forms of mediation that constitute tourism services, opportunities arise for stakeholders including rights owners, tourism service providers and others. It is therefore essential that transmedia tourism analysis demonstrates sensitivity towards how convergent technologies and platforms are deployed and integrated in spatialized experiences of media properties, whether physical, virtual or a combination of these.
- 2) **Intertextuality** – media tourism research has been constrained by the primacy of site-specific case studies. In contrast, transmedia tourism analysis involves understanding transmedia content flows intertextually. This means studying the expansion of intellectual properties into the tourism sector beyond the purely narrative level. Consequently, the spread of elements including characters, aesthetics and iconography which either denote or connote associations with a media property should be positioned at the analytical centre. Scholars can then examine how and why this element spreads out across different forms of

tourism attraction. By doing this, seemingly disparate examples can be grouped together and analysed. Further research can therefore be conducted across different intellectual properties, popular figures, and beyond to consider how popular media franchises impact upon and structure tourism provision.

**3) Copyright negotiation** – convergence culture has challenged top-down processes of media power and production. Consequently, the intertextual spread of intellectual properties generates multiple examples which span from 'official' contexts (e.g. Disney's theme parks) through to unsanctioned commercial tourism and user-generated content. How therefore do various tourism stakeholders negotiate copyrighted material, iconography and aesthetics

(examples such as dinosaurs, zombies, astronauts and pirates provide immediate touch-points here)? How does this relate to audience demand and expectations? How, why and in what contexts might tourism stakeholders choose to resist copyright? Each of these are relevant questions which transmedia tourism analysis should engage with.

These are only some questions that have arisen out of this article's case study – there are undoubtedly more. For example, further interrogation and critique of the blind spots, omissions and limitations of this article's conceptualisation of transmedia tourism are required. Nevertheless, it is time for scholars of media tourism to turn to theories of transmedia, incorporate these into their understanding of media tourism and, hopefully, begin to ask questions similar to those that have been proposed throughout this article.

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**This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal***

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

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