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Audience Reception of Cross- and Transmedia TV Drama in the Age of Convergence

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Using a mixed-method approach, with TV diaries, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, this study of the audience reception of cross- and transmedia extensions to TV drama finds that most people consume only marketing-driven cross-media extensions and are not looking for a strong engagement with a fictional storyworld through transmedia extensions. The lack of enthusiasm for cross- and transmedia extensions might be explained by the mismatch between the expected viewing motivations of the producers of TV drama and the viewing motivations of the people watching. The TV producers seek an audience looking for immersion in a multiplatform narrative story, but the audience is mainly interested in being entertained by TV episodes.

Keywords: cross-media, transmedia, TV drama, extensions, convergence, audience engagement, audience reception

Introduction

Over the past decade, media convergence has been on the rise, with media companies releasing their content across different delivery channels. Television programs are evolving into multi-, cross-, and transmedia projects that are no longer restricted to the medium of television (Kompare, 2006). The increasing migration, integration, and interaction of television content across a range of platforms requires a new and broader definition of the television text—one that accounts for the broad range of experiences and activities that television audiences now might engage in (Caldwell, 2006, pp. 50–53). Through changes in television programs' form and content, and through the development of program-related content, activities, and social interactions, the practice of watching television has been transformed from a passive process that happens in front of the TV screen to an active, perpetual process that can happen anywhere at all times (Askwith, 2007). However, although research has examined TV programs being offered as multiplatform and transmedia projects (e.g., Askwith, 2007; Brooker, 2001; Jenkins, 2006; Perryman, 2008), few studies have investigated how audiences engage with this program-related content

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(with the exception of the work of Beddows, 2012, and Evans, 2008b). This article focuses on TV drama and analyzes to what extent, how, and why audiences engage with TV drama–related content.

Audience Engagement and Affective Economics

Much has been written recently about television's position in a changing multimedia landscape. As the mass television audience fragments into smaller niche audiences of a growing group of new media, and the emergence of digital media shifts control over the television experience from television producers to television consumers, the television industry has been experimenting with new ways to secure its central position in the media landscape. One of the discourses in this repositioning story is the recasting of television as an "active medium, capable of capturing and holding the audience's attention, and effective at generating emotional investment" (Askwith, 2007, p. 3). Jenkins (2006, pp. 20, 61–62) defines this strategy as "affective economics": a marketing logic that seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumers' decision making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions.

The aim of this strategy is, first, to stimulate emotional engagement and create loyal brand communities. The multimedia industry is transforming into an attention economy in which the public's attention has become a scarce and valuable good (Spigel, 2006). To attract the media consumer's attention, television not only needs to stand out in a proliferation of media but compete with an increasing number of other (digital) television channels. It has become key to capture and retain viewers' attention in an active or even interactive manner. Therefore, the television industry has been providing more possibilities for viewer engagement to keep viewers' attention long after a program has aired (Caldwell, 2006). These television text extensions, elaborated on below, all relate to a central story and invite the viewer to discuss the program with other viewers, interact with the main characters, or explore additional storylines (Gray, 2008). Ideally, all these elements should work together and invite the audience inside the brand community of the TV show. The television text extensions are thus about not only serving loyal viewers and fans but managing and protecting the brand value of a TV series, which Hills (2012) refers to as "fanagement."

Second, and linked to the first aim, this brand loyalty is then supposed to generate new revenues. During TV's era of scarcity (Ellis, 2000), which was characterized by a few channels broadcasting for part of the day only, programming was meant to aggregate an audience whose attention could be sold to advertisers. It was crucial for broadcasters to obtain a broad geographic reach while temporal scarcity had to be controlled (Shimpach, 2010). As broadcasting developed, the era of scarcity gave way to an era of availability (Ellis, 2000), where several channels and cable and satellite services competed for the fragmented audience's attention. This period saw increases in competition for the public's attention and advertising income. But it is in the third era, the era of plenty (Ellis, 2000), that the television industry is truly challenged to come up with new ways to secure advertising revenue. By making television content available through various screen technologies and releasing additional possibilities for viewer engagement, television companies attempt to attract and retain their viewers and advertisers. They try to acquire full ownership over every aspect of a television production and to become media franchises (Jenkins, 2003). By doing so, the expansion of a program across time and space can become a profitable business, because every aspect of this "overflow" (Brooker, 2001) can be sold to advertisers.

Media synergy allows a company to profit as much as possible from its core successful content, on as many platforms as possible (Gray, 2008, p. 82). Or, as Shimpach (2010) has noted, the commercial value of a TV program increases with its potential to migrate to new spatial geographies (different formats, distribution outlets, and screen sizes).

The Television Text Is Changing

This development of television content expanding across a range of platforms requires a broader definition of the television text—one that accounts for the broad range of experiences and activities that television audiences now might engage in (Caldwell, 2006, pp. 50–53). This evolution is not entirely new. Although the possibilities for engagement with TV drama might have increased significantly over the last decade, they were not radical to the point of revolution, as others have argued (e.g., Evans, 2011; Gray, 2010). For example, already in the 1930s, Disney recognized the opportunities of expanding content through different platforms and creating an all-encompassing consumer environment, described as "total merchandising" (Anderson, 2000). Similarly, Evans (2011, p. 20) explains how the first use of the term *transmedia*—often used to indicate the exploitation by the television industry of technologies other than the television set—referred to a primarily promotional practice, involving merchandising, adaptations, sequels, and franchising. This means that television episodes of TV drama become the jumping-off point that initiate a collection of additional possibilities for engagement. After watching the source program, the audience is invited to connect with the show and its characters through additional media extensions. Brooker's (2001) model of "overflow," Caldwell's (2003) theory of "second-shift aesthetics," and Örnebring's (2007) study of commercial alternate reality games describe how viewers move across different media outlets while still engaging with the same core text. And this last aspect is exactly what is characteristic about what is defined in this article as *cross-media TV drama*: TV drama episodes are the primary point of engagement for the viewer, and all the textual expansions across other media function "superfluously" (Evans, 2011, p. 23), merely promoting the core TV text or opening new revenue streams via merchandise.

Over the last decade, media convergence has facilitated this process of cross-platform expansion as it brings different media texts closer together. Some television producers have taken cross-media TV drama to a new level by creating a narrative universe, or a "hyper-diegesis" (Hills, 2002, p. 137), that systematically unfolds across multiple platforms. Such "transmedia storytelling," as Jenkins (2006, p. 95) defines it, distinguishes itself from cross-media TV drama by offering different content through different media, with each piece contributing to the creation of a unique final product. According to Jenkins (2006), each element needs to be self-contained so one does not have to see the TV episodes to enjoy the transmedia elements. Viewers can thus access the story from different platforms and in multiple fictional universes and enjoy a unified experience. This also means that the transmedia elements are not secondary to the TV episodes, but that they rise to the same level. The transmedia elements do not solely function as a marketing tool or merchandise spin-off for the TV episodes, but are part of the DNA of the story (Gray, 2010). Evans (2011, p. 27) states that "transmedia elements do not involve the telling of the same events on different platforms; they involve the telling of new events from the same storyworld." Ideally, all the aspects of the transmedia storyworld are conceived within the same media company so that there is a strong integration, coherence, and continuity among the individual elements, also referred

to as the "canon" of the transmedia franchise (e.g., Parker, 2010; Smith, 2009). In this article, we define this kind of textual extension *transmedia TV drama.*

Askwith (2007, pp. 55–98), summarizing the main evolutions in convergence and transmedia storytelling, has developed an elaborate model that considers all possible cross- and transmedia elements that can serve to expand a television text. Table 1 provides an abridged version of this model, describing its main categories. Additionally, the textual expansions are classified as a cross-media or transmedia element, following the descriptions and definitions provided above. This model will allow us to assess the degree and nature of the consumption of cross- and transmedia TV drama in our empirical audience research.

Table 1. Model for Expanded Television Text.

Type of extension	**Definition of the extension and subtypes**	**Label cross/ transmedia**
1. Repackaged content	Newly generated content as a variation of the core content, produced and distributed as repackaged program content. It gives access to information that was first provided during the TV episodes, it does not supply new information or content. Examples: character biographies, plot summaries, and episode guides (provided on the television program's official website or through unofficial fan sites).	Cross-media
2. Ancillary content	Content or information that goes beyond what was presented in the TV episodes. New material that supplements, extends, or expands the viewer's program knowledge.	
	2.1. Textual extensions provide further narrative developments and access to the fictional world of the program.	
	2.1.1. Narrative extensions: additional narrative content that complements or supplements the core narrative, relating new stories that are not depicted in the TV episodes. Examples: webisodes, books	Transmedia
	2.1.2. Diegetic extensions: additional narrative content presented as "diegetic artefacts" from within the fictional world of the program. These extensions require viewers to pretend they are interacting with objects and persons from within the fictional narrative	Transmedia
	2.2. Extratextual extensions provide background information and insider access rather than elaborating on the content of the program itself.	
	2.2.1. Industrial information: industrial, commercial, and technological information about the program's construction as a commercial and industrial product. Examples: behind-the-scenes clips, interviews with cast	Cross-media

	and crew 2.2.2. Celebrity information: one-on-one interviews with the cast, humanizing the program's creative participants	Cross-media
	2.3. Relevant information: additional textual and intertextual knowledge, supplemental details, and expanded information that enhance the viewer's understanding of the program's core content.	Cross-media
3. Branded products	Objects not related to the content but to the brand the program stands for. Products that viewers can collect and own, affiliated with the brand of the program. Examples: desktop pictures, screensavers, ringtones, posters, and other merchandise items.	Cross-media
4. Related activities	4.1. Themed activities have no inherent relationship to the program, but are styled according to program's brand and theme (like merchandise). Example: an existing board game in the theme of the program.	Cross-media
	4.2. Experiential activities place participants in a specific role, which allows them to experience show-related adventures through their own actions. Example: a video in which the participant takes the role of a main character from the program.	Cross-/transmedia
	4.3. Productive activities give viewers the opportunity to act as authors or producers of "new" content (program-related user-generated content).	Cross-media
	4.4. Challenge activities to demonstrate show-related knowledge or program expert skills, gained through attentive viewing. Example: trivia quiz.	Cross-media
5. Social interaction	5.1. Horizontal connections between viewers of the same program (audience communities)	Cross-media
	5.2. Vertical connections between viewers and the actors of the TV program (celebrities)	Cross-media
	5.3. Diagonal connections between viewers and characters of the fictional storyworld (diegetic interaction)	Transmedia
6. Interactivity	Mechanical interaction, content activation, content interaction, and social interaction allow viewers to interact with the show and make acknowledged or influential contributions.	Cross-/transmedia

Method

After having established all the possibilities for engagement with cross- and transmedia TV drama provided by the television producers, we now turn to the consumption side to explore how the audience responds to these invitations for engagement. After all, true convergence—understood as the flow of content across multiple media platforms—depends not only on the cooperation between media industries but on the migratory behavior of media audiences, as Jenkins (2006) has argued. Similarly, Livingstone

(2004) and Evans (2011) have pleaded to include audience reception research in new media research to investigate how audiences are understanding and embracing the possibilities offered by the television industry. Do cross- and transmedia TV texts succeed in getting audiences more involved and becoming "transmedial consumers," as Scolari (2009, p. 597) defines them?

The research presented in this article is conducted in Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. Because this study focuses on the reception of opportunities for engagement of cross- and transmedia TV drama—in this study understood as serial TV drama, including soaps and sitcoms—the sample for this study consists of engaged TV drama viewers. Engaged TV drama viewers are defined as viewers who do more than just watch the episodes through live broadcast television; they are actively involved with TV drama by personalizing their viewing practices (when, where, and through which technology), by communicating about it, by consuming cross- and transmedia elements of TV drama, or by producing TV drama–related content. They are heavy or intense viewers of TV drama and early adopters of new TV and media technologies. In other words, they are "information-rich cases" (Creswell, 1998, p. 119) with regard to the object of study. This form of intensity sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) is useful for conducting audience research in a constantly changing media landscape. First, to explore the reasons behind new and emerging media practices, it is necessary to select respondents who are early adopters of these practices. Second, although these are only the initial uses of an unrepresentative group, these respondents might provide clues about future uses among a broader population (Barkhuus, 2009; Lotz, 2007).

To select our sample, we set up a preliminary online survey. The definition of "engaged TV drama viewers" was operationalized with seven closed questions, of which six are relevant for this study:

1. Which Flemish TV drama do you watch regularly? (list of 25 answer options)

2. Which other TV drama do you watch regularly? (list of 25 answer options)

3. Do you often consume other media related to these programs or their characters or actors? (list of 20 answer options)

4. Do you often do other things related to these programs or their characters or actors? (list of 11 answer options)

5. Have you ever produced something related to these programs or their characters or actors? (list of 11 answer options)

6. Do you often talk with others about these programs or their characters or actors? (list of 8 answer options)

Respondents could tick multiple answer options. The higher the respondents scored on the preliminary online survey, the more engaged they were according to our definition. The link to the online survey was posted on websites of drama series and soaps, national TV broadcasters, DVD and gaming

review sites, new technology and electronic gadget websites, and so on. Respondents with high scores were approached to participate in the research. A total of 1,169 people filled in the preliminary online survey, 157 of whom met the needs of the research and were interested in participating. In the end, 61 people (39 men and 22 women) completed the research process. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 55. The sample was selected via eight websites with a link to the online survey.[1] This selection procedure ensured that the sample was diverse in terms of gender, age, educational level, and family situation rather than relying only on easily accessible, young, university-educated respondents.

TV diaries and in-depth interviews were used for the data collection, which took place in 2010. Following the recent developments in television viewing practices, an online action-based—instead of time-based—TV diary was designed. Because of the processes of digitization and convergence, it is no longer sufficient to chronologically list the programs watched during an evening of TV viewing to study one's TV consumption practices. It is also necessary, especially with regard to the aim of this study, to chart how viewers engage with a TV show and its cross- and transmedia extensions through different media platforms. Therefore, each day for an entire month, the participants reported all their actions (viewing, downloading, gaming, talking, shopping, reading, etc.) related to TV drama in their online TV diaries. For each TV drama–related action, they created a new entry in the TV diary. The online TV diary consisted of six pages, each page containing three to five open questions related to one theme. The answers to questions concerning four themes were used in this analysis:

- *Media extensions* included the following questions: Did you consume media extensions related to the storyline or fictional world? Did you consume media extensions related to the actors? Did you consume media extensions related to the "making of"?

- *Other extensions* included the following questions: Did you consume other products related to the storyline or fictional world? Did you consume other products related to the actors? Did you do any activities related to the program?

- *User-generated content* included the following questions: Did you write something about the program or the actors? Did you make audiovisual material about the program or the actors? Did you make something else about the program or the actors?

- *Communication* included the following questions: Did you interact with other viewers? Did you interact with the program's characters? Did you interact with the program's actors? Did you interact with the program's producers?

[1] The eight websites were www.2be.be, www.followmy.tv, www.tv-visie.be, www.9lives.be, www.dvdforum.be, www.interactieve-digitale-tv.be, www.facebook.com/thuisopeen, and http://blog.ellievranken.be.

To retrieve the best data possible from the TV diaries, the participants were contacted by telephone to guide them through their first entry in the TV diary. Afterward, we followed up with participants through online communication. After the TV diary month, the research process concluded with an in-depth interview, which took place at the participant's home, in which the reasons behind the various engagement practices were explored. During the interview, a copy of the completed TV diary was used to recall the participant's actions throughout the month.

In addition, to collect specific information about cross- and transmedia engagement with TV drama, we conducted six focus groups with five to eight fans of the drama series *Lost*, *Stargate Universe*, *True Blood*, and *Gossip Girl*, and two focus groups were conducted with fans of the Flemish daily soap *Thuis*. Interacting with one another, fans more openly shared their experiences about engaging with the show than they might have when talking to an interviewer, who was usually not a fan and sometimes not even a viewer of the program. Most of the participants for these focus groups were selected from the database from the preliminary online survey, while others were contacted via already selected participants based on recommendations of study participants.

All in-depth interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using QSR International's (2010) NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software. The TV diary entries were also analyzed qualitatively through NVivo. A quantitative analysis was done by counting and cataloging the data from the interviews and the TV diaries into Askwith's (2007) model for the expanded television text.

Results

Consumption of Cross- and Transmedia TV Drama

To understand the results of this empirical research, it is important to note that all TV drama watched by the participants in this study offers possibilities for cross- and transmedia engagement, although these opportunities remain quite basic for some drama series and are quite elaborate for others. Our analysis begins with the main research question of this article: To what extent, how, and why are possibilities for cross- and transmedia engagement with TV drama adopted by engaged viewers of TV drama? The analysis of the reception of cross- and transmedia elements as reported in the TV diaries and the interviews revealed that the large majority of participants, both in the in-depth interviews and in the focus groups, consumes (some of) the elements that are offered with TV drama they watch. This happens both with international (mostly U.S.) TV drama and with Flemish TV drama. To gain better insight into the kind of cross- and transmedia extensions that are consumed by the viewers, we listed them in Askwith's (2007) model for the expanded television text.

Table 2. Consumption of Cross- and Transmedia TV Drama Extensions.

Type of extension	**Participants' activities**	**Label cross/ transmedia**
1.Repackaged content	Checking the official website of the program, reading character biographies (on the official website), plot summaries (in case of a missed episode or to look up what is going to happen in future episodes), official or unofficial episode guides (trailers on YouTube, spoilers on fan forums), reading books on which the series is based, checking www.imdb.com for information about the show, liking and checking the program's Facebook profile	Cross-media
2.Ancillary content	2.1. Textual extensions	
	2.1.1. Narrative extensions: watching *Lost* webisodes, playing a *Lost* computer game, listening to a radio show related to *Thuis*	Transmedia
	2.1.2. Diegetic extensions: reading and interacting on the blog of Ellie, a character from *Thuis,* checking the corporate websites of companies in *Thuis*	Transmedia
	2.2. Extratextual extensions	
	2.2.1. Industrial information: behind-the-scenes information, looking up specific songs and soundtracks, watching bloopers, interviews with cast members	Cross-media
	2.2.2. Celebrity information: reading interviews with actors in gossip press, a book written by an actor (not related to TV drama), following actors on Twitter, looking up actors on www.imbd.com	Cross-media
	2.3. Relevant information: looking up extra medical information after watching medical TV drama, broadcasting hours, on which network a show is broadcast in the United States, downloading possibilities	Cross-media
3.Branded products	LEGO® toys from *Stargate Universe*, drinking soft drink from series (*True Blood* cola), ringtone from *Gossip Girl*, poster of *Friends*	Cross-media
4.Related activities	4.1. Themed activities: participation in yearly organized themed activity day of *Thuis*	Cross-media
	4.2. Experiential activities: playing a *Lost* computer game, participating in murder quest at the yearly *Witse* day	Cross-/transmedia

	4.3. Productive activities	Cross-media
	4.4. Challenge activities: playing online trivia quiz of *Thuis*	Cross-media
5.Social interaction[a]	5.1. Horizontal connections: chatting with other viewers on the blog of Ellie (*Thuis*) or on (un)official fan discussion boards and Facebook	Cross-media
	5.2. Vertical connections: talking with actors at themed activity day (*Witse*, *Thuis*)	Cross-media
	5.3. Diagonal connections: chatting with Ellie on blog of *Thuis*, becoming friends with characters on Facebook (*Thuis*), reading and reacting on tweets from characters on Twitter	Transmedia
6.Interactivity	Voting for favorite plotline on online poll on the official website of *Thuis*	Cross-/transmedia

As shown in Table 2, participants consumed cross- and transmedia extensions from different categories in Askwith's model. First, they made the most use of repackaged content, looking up character biographies and plot summaries on official and unofficial websites and searching for episode guides and trailers of future episodes. Some participants had read books on which a series was based. Second, ancillary content was also quite well received by participants. With regard to textual extensions, participants mentioned the use of both narrative extensions (e.g., playing a *Lost* computer game or listening to a radio show of *Thuis*) and diegetic extensions (e.g., reading the blog of the character Ellie of *Thuis*). Some participants sought extratextual information (industrial and celebrity information) and other relevant ancillary information (such as practical information on broadcasting hours or downloading possibilities) offered alongside TV drama. Only a few participants mentioned the use of branded products related to TV drama (e.g., a *Stargate Universe* LEGO® toy or a *True Blood* soft drink). Only four participants had taken part in a themed TV drama activity in the past. Several participants referred to interaction with other viewers, actors, or characters of TV drama through cross- and transmedia extensions. They chatted with other viewers or fictional characters through the TV drama's (official) Facebook pages or blogs. Some of them had spoken with the actors of the Flemish soap *Thuis* at the yearly end-of-season gathering organized by the production company. For the last category, interaction, we noted only some kind of (acknowledged) interaction with the Flemish daily soap *Thuis*: Two participants had voted on a poll that was made available on the official website of the show and through which viewers could choose from a set of possible plotlines.

One might get the impression that the study participants were very active consumers of the cross- and transmedia extensions offered with TV drama, using various opportunities to fully engage with their favorite drama series. However, this does not correspond with the impression conveyed during the interviews and focus groups, especially among TV drama viewers who—although being passionate about TV drama, whether it is local or international—all consumed in a fairly traditional manner and who were for the most part unaware of cross- and transmedia extensions. For example, Katrien (female, age 22), a

participant in the *Thuis* focus group, said: "Those extensions, I was not really aware of them. I don't understand how I cannot know about this. I'm completely taken aback."[2]

Two explanations may account for this. First, in most cases, the use concerns the consumption of purely practical, informative, or promotional elements (such as looking up broadcasting hours, checking www.imdb.com for other work of the cast, reading interviews or gossip about the actors), which do not really add value to a viewer's perception of the fictional story. For instance, Iris (female, age 22) explained: "Sometimes I look up an actor, if I know him from somewhere else. Or I look up a nice song that was played in the episode. But that's about it." These elements are also often consumed as a replacement for (in case of having missed an episode) rather than a supplement to an episode. The consumption of cross-media extensions, as we defined these marketing-driven elements, does not offer something new to the story and does not contribute to a stronger engagement with the fictional storyworld. Yet this engagement and loyalty is what television companies are hoping for when they produce such extensions. Second, the mere listing and counting of these uses and activities hides the overall disinterest expressed by the participants when asked about the consumption of TV drama extensions. Although a minority of the participants (viewers of international TV drama as well as viewers of Flemish TV drama) referred to a stronger involvement, a deeper immersion, and a better insider knowledge as reasons to engage with cross- and transmedia extensions—"It's almost as if they are family, because you get a look into their world," stated Helena (female, age 17) about her participation on Ellie's blog—most of the participants indicated that they indeed do consume these elements but that it does not provide any added value to their overall perception of TV drama. The reasons to consume the extensions varied: out of boredom, curiosity, or habit (routine), to bridge a commercial break or a series hiatus, and so on. Most of the participants stressed that they do not actively search for these extensions; they usually find the extensions while surfing the Internet or reading magazines. It was evident during the focus groups that many participants were not aware of the large offerings of cross- and transmedia extensions. Whereas the participants of the focus groups on the Flemish soap series *Thuis* could not give a particular reason for being unaware of the cross- and transmedia extensions, the participants of the focus groups on U.S. TV drama series (*Lost, Stargate Universe, True Blood, Gossip Girl*) stated that the extensions get lost due to the distance (although most cross- and transmedia elements are online extras) or the time lapse between the original moment of broadcasting and the Flemish broadcast (for the viewers who do not download):

> I think it's difficult here in Belgium, because you always miss the whole merchandise around the launch to create the hype. I think it would be different if I would live in the U.S. (Sebastian, male, age 25, *True Blood* focus group)

> You can never watch American TV drama live, so you will lose the link between drama and reality. By the time we can watch or download it, the tweets and live comments of the characters will be out of date already. (Boris, male, age 17)

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[2] All the participants' quotes in this article are literal translations by the author. Participants' names are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

The participants thought that they would know, and maybe consume, more extensions if there were more advertising about U.S. TV drama in European or Flemish media. The most important reasons mentioned to not consume any cross- and transmedia extensions were no interest in or need for extra information and no interest in active involvement through other media.

> For me, the episodes are the most important, what I get to see on television. I watch to relax and I'm not really looking for engaging with it afterward. Unless I want background information about the actors or something. (Rik, male, age 23 years old)

Many participants admitted that they do use extended elements with other genres of TV shows (such as reality programs), but that they are not interested in doing so with TV drama. Overall, we sensed a feeling among participants of looking down on and laughing at people who would fully immerse in a fictional world through different types of media.

> Lea: I think I'm too down to earth for that; you've got to have a special state of mind to get in to that [fictional world]. [laughing]
>
> Sandra: Do these people [who consume transmedia extensions] actually believe that they can partake in this [fictional] world? [laughing]
> (Lea, female, age 55, and Sandra, female, age 22, *Lost* focus group)

Converged TV Drama?

As noted, media synergy has become a common industry practice, and television is expected to expand into various directions (Lotz, 2007). Some producers even tend to consider themselves *content* producers rather than *television* producers (Caldwell, 2006). Comparing this vision of the television industry with how the audience thinks of TV drama converging with other media platforms, we see a noticeable difference. Most of the participants in this study considered the episodes of TV drama as the main, and often only, element of TV drama: "TV drama has to stay *television* drama," argued Lukas (male, age 21, his emphasis). Although some participants expressed an interest in the idea of prolonging the feeling of immersion in a fictional world through transmedia extras, most of them clearly stated that the episodes of TV drama are the most important. The feeling of immersion and empathy is very difficult to achieve through another medium than television, according to some participants. Furthermore, even if the TV episodes are watched on a computer or laptop screen, viewers are still very hesitant to engage with online cross- and transmedia extensions. The water between different media is still very deep, at least in the opinion of our participants:

> No, I would not read a blog of a fictional character. TV drama is something audiovisual for me. Engaging with it through, for example, a blog or website is a change in style that would not work for me. I cannot imagine that I would get the same feeling [as I get while watching the episodes]. (Ellen, female, age 29)

However, the participants predicted that this will change in the future: TV drama will evolve into a converged, multiplatform genre, but the possibility to just watch the episodes will also stay (at least they hope so). A few participants already thought of TV drama as consisting of much more than just the episodes, although for them, too, the episodes are the core of the fictional universe. However, these few (a dozen) were aware of the fact that they are a minority and that only dedicated viewers and fans engage with TV drama on multiple levels. They were convinced that, for the large audience, TV drama will stay purely televisual content, and therefore the episodes will remain the main product:

> I think of [TV drama] as content on multiple platforms. I watched *Heroes* and went online looking for extensions. There were characters writing stuff, on Twitter and Facebook. It's not only TV, it's accessible through multiple media. And these boundaries [between media] will become even more blurred in the future, I think. But, I mean, there will always be people who just want to watch the episodes. (Manuel, male, age 22)

Active Viewer Participation?

One of the ways to generate audience engagement and loyalty is to attract the viewer's attention in an active or even interactive manner (Turow, 2006). Many of the offerings for viewer engagement with TV drama not only involve the consumption of cross- and transmedia extensions but ask for viewer participation and production, which Jenkins defined as "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006). Although these extensions encourage viewer involvement, not all audience-produced texts are considered part of the official TV drama canon. Official texts, produced by copyright holders, and audience participations in these texts, are understood as the "canon" of a franchise, while unofficial texts, such as user-generated content on one's own initiative (e.g., fan fiction), can be said to constitute the "apocrypha" (Parker, 2010). When we asked participants about making contributions to TV drama, most claimed to have never produced their own content related to TV drama, regardless of the TV drama format (multimedia formats of single-mode forms). Their reasons varied from "no interest," "no time," "no need," and "no creative skills" to "TV drama is time to relax, not to make an effort" and "I'm too lazy." Overall, the participants perceived watching TV drama as a moment to sit back and relax, not as a moment to make an effort and be creative, even though the making of user-generated content does not usually happen while watching episodes. Apparently, most of our participants found it difficult to conceptualize the act of "consuming TV drama" as something that can consist of various activities, and that can happen at different times and through multiple media, as stated by Askwith (2007). The production part of TV drama is something most of them would rather leave to the professionals, who are familiar with the official discourse of canon and continuity (Parker, 2010): "TV drama, that is supposed to be watched as created by the screenwriters or producers" (Sebastian, male, age 25, *True Blood* focus group).

A small minority of participants (viewers of international TV drama as well as viewers of Flemish TV drama) answered positively the question about whether they had ever produced something related to TV drama. This is usually a low-involvement activity such as writing a review or synopsis; reacting on a blog, fan forum, or through Twitter; or providing Dutch subtitles. But a few viewers had also made photo collages, video compilations, Tumblr, Facebook, and other web pages and had written fan drama. These viewers like to be creatively involved because it connects them more closely to the series. Ellen (female,

age 29) reported: "Because I have this website [about an actress], I kind of know her personally. We talk through Twitter, we send e-mails. If you see her on screen, it's a different experience, because I know a lot about her." The pleasant feeling of engaging with TV drama is prolonged by connecting with the fictional world in different ways.

Interestingly, some participants had no interest in producing user-generated content, although they were in favor of the idea of being consulted about the storyline. These participants all have the profile of real drama lovers, and they saw themselves as "experts by experience." In this respect, they felt as if they could give valuable input on plotlines and on how the general public would like to see the story evolve: "The public knows the story and the characters. So giving my opinion on how things should evolve, I would love to do that" (Lea, female, age 55). However, they also expressed a concern: The idea of being involved in the unfolding of the storyline gets their approval if it is sustainable in practice, but not if it is only for the sake of appearance. The impossibility of bringing the idea of viewer involvement into practice was one of the reasons mentioned by the many participants who were not keen on the idea of giving input in the storyline. However, the most important reason is related to the perception of TV drama: Most of the participants feared that viewer involvement would hamper a proper immersion in the story. It would become difficult to be surprised by plot developments, and this is exactly what triggers the emotions and feelings that viewers seek in TV drama:

> I'm a fan of science fiction and those kind of series, and it's nice to not know how the story is going to develop. It's more fun to just let it come to you, instead of being involved beforehand. It's nice to be surprised by the storyline, or even not agree with it! Such excitement is exactly what you want, right? (Jaro, male, age 27)

Instead of considering themselves the experts, these viewers stressed that the screenwriters are the professionals and that there should be no need for audience input if they have a strong concept in mind.

Motivations to Engage With Cross- and Transmedia TV Drama

To find an explanation for participants' lukewarm reactions to cross- and transmedia extensions of TV drama, we analyzed their motivations for watching TV drama. The television producers' intent is to generate audience loyalty and brand communities by offering cross- and transmedia extensions that stimulate engagement and immersion, but is the viewer motivated for such an engagement?

When asked to describe their main motivation to watch TV drama, all the initial reactions indicated entertainment-related motivations. The participants in this study watched TV drama because it is fun, a moment to relax: "For me, it's a moment to relax and just watch, think about nothing else" (Tony, male, age 20, *Lost* focus group). Only when they were asked about secondary motivations (often probing for motivations that were suggested in the literature—for example, by Askwith (2007)—participants named reasons such as routine and immersion. The fact that entertainment or routine comes to mind first when thinking of motivations to engage with TV drama might indicate that escaping and immersing in a fictional world were not that important to our participants. Some noted that episodes of TV drama are too

short to fully immerse themselves in the story, and others stated that a deep immersion can only be achieved when they are actively involved in the fictional story:

> Most of the time TV episodes are a bit too short to fully immerse in the story. It's easier with movies. (Victor, male, age 28)

> Immersion or escapism? I get that while doing role-plays or video games. Because you're really involved then, and have a say in what's happening. For me, [watching] TV is only pure entertainment. (Sebastian, male, age 25, *True Blood* focus group)

This discrepancy between the expected viewing motivations of the people producing TV drama and the viewing motivations of the people watching TV drama might explain the lack of enthusiasm for trans- and cross-media extensions. The viewers who did mention immersion as a reason to watch usually experienced the feeling of immersion only while watching the episodes. Cross- and transmedia elements do not add to a stronger engagement with TV drama, according to these participants. On the contrary, for some, such triggers have the opposite effect: "Sometimes you can really see that it is to sell the series. When you can really tell that [the cross- and transmedia extensions] are purely marketing driven, then I give up" (Sam, male, age 23). When asked what can lead to a stronger engagement with a fictional world, most participants mentioned things that are related to the way of watching the TV episodes, such as making the circumstances to watch as pleasant as possible (big TV screen, comfortable sofa, no disruptions) or watching several episodes in one sitting (imitating a movie experience). A few participants mentioned the consumption of trans- and cross-media elements when thinking of immersion and involvement with TV drama. They explained that these extra elements are particularly helpful to keep in touch with the story and the characters between episodes or in between seasons. These extra dimensions to the fictional story blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, which leads to a deeper involvement, according to these participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the media landscape becomes more crowded and more converged due to the emergence of digital media, it becomes more difficult to attract and retain the audience's attention. Television companies are branching out to other media, attempting to involve the audience through various engagement opportunities to create loyal brand communities. Increasingly, TV drama no longer consists of TV episodes; the fictional storyworld has evolved into a multiplatform experience, offering viewers a variety of (interactive) forms of engagement within the same coherent narrative world (Evans, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore how viewers of TV drama are embracing these changes: To what extent and how do viewers engage with the cross- and transmedia extensions that are offered with TV drama?

Using Askwith's (2007) model for the expanded TV text, we listed our participants' consumption of cross- and transmedia extensions to TV drama. TV drama's cross- and transmedia extensions were quite well received by the participants, although the marketing-driven cross-media elements were consumed much more than the transmedia aspects. Combined with the overall disinterest in opportunities

for engagement with TV drama through other media platforms, we can conclude that the participants in our study were not waiting for what the television industry is producing. Although the television producers are hoping for strong viewer engagement and involvement through (often interactive) transmedia extensions, the viewers in our study were quite hesitant about engaging with TV drama in any other way than by watching the episodes. Most of them considered TV drama purely as a TV program, not as a narrative storyworld that can be accessed from different media platforms and through different activities, contrary to what some scholars have predicted (e.g., Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). Most of them are not really interested in contributing to the story or giving input for plotlines. They think that this, first, does not correspond to the idea of "watching TV drama"; second, does not add any value to their immersion in the story; and, third, would not be sustainable in practice. Participants' lukewarm reactions to cross- and transmedia extensions might be explained by the motivations for watching TV drama. Almost all the participants watched in the first place for entertainment and were not looking for a deep immersion in a fictional world, as presumed by the creators of the cross- and transmedia engagement opportunities. In addition, the viewers who were interested in a strong engagement with TV drama thought that these extensions do not really contribute to a stronger immersion with a fictional world.

From these results we can conclude that the "(inter)active TV drama engagement," on which the whole idea of the production of cross- and transmedia extensions is based, is probably not as widespread as the television industry assumes or hopes. Despite specifically selecting a sample of engaged TV drama viewers—that is, viewers who are more actively involved with TV drama than the average television audience—we could not find many real transmedia drama enthusiasts. Similar to what Evans (2008a) found, the viewers in this research considered the TV drama extensions in terms of that what they already know: the episodes. The TV episodes remain central in their drama experience; new opportunities for engagement are judged in relation to this established form of engagement and do not usually get equal status. According to the participants in this study, Jenkins' (2006) vision of a true transmedia text does not (yet?) exist, and the medium of television is certainly not dead, contrary to what some have suggested (e.g., Gripsrud, 2010; Katz, 2009; Ross, 2008; Turner & Tay, 2009).

Although this study offers valuable insights on cross- and transmedia TV drama, as it sheds light on the audience reception of cross- and transmedia extensions—an aspect that often has been neglected (for an exception, see, e.g., Evans, 2011, or Beddows, 2012)—we also need to consider a number of limitations. First, this study considers the reception of the extended text of only TV drama and might thus not apply to the consumption of cross- and transmedia extensions with other TV genres (e.g., reality programs or talent shows). Second, the results here are based mainly on a qualitative study of a specific group of engaged TV drama viewers, which is not representative of the broader population of TV viewers in Flanders or Belgium. However, this group of lead users is being studied because they might provide insight into some future practices of the broader population (Barkhuus, 2009; Lotz, 2007). Third, this study is conducted at a specific time. The media landscape producing cross- and transmedia TV drama is constantly changing, and so are the audience practices in this landscape. However, the snapshot this study gives about the consumption of cross- and transmedia TV drama at this particular moment in time might serve as a reference point in the future. Last, this study is conducted at a particular place. Differences in reception between Flemish and U.S. transmedia TV drama, such as the lack of knowledge about and consumption of cross- and transmedia extensions for U.S. TV drama, might be the result of the

delay in broadcast transmission and the much smaller-scale marketing campaigns of U.S. TV drama (Catania, 2010). Or, as Tay and Turner (2010) have argued, the future of television and its reception might go in very different directions in different countries because of national, regional, political, and cultural differences.

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