
UNIT 5 TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

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5.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces and develops the basic building blocks of transmedia storytelling and delves into the development of multimedia stories in a multi-planar form. An S-C-R-A-P approach is needed to develop a multimedia story. S-C-R-A-P stands for Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production. A basic understanding of multimedia story elements is also needed. Understanding different aspects of multimedia storytelling will help create powerful stories (Borum & Quinn, 2016).

“A listener must be led from the good to better by curiosity, liking and a growth of understanding,” John Reith (BBC: 1934).

21st Century media is all about personal, portable, participatory, connectivity, conversation, convenience, communities, creativity, convergence, content, and context. Any story combining these three Ps and eight Cs can influence public opinion and persuade them. Transmedia or multimedia storytelling is an approach where a story is written for different platforms in multiple media formats. This approach to a story is often more engaging and involves the audience directly in a story.

Society is driven by representation. If social machines manufacture representations, they also manufacture themselves from representations. The latter operates simultaneously as means, matter and condition of sociality: Jean-Louis Comolli (1980: 121).

Society or the social machine flourishes when producing and consuming images and depictions. Images, paintings, symbols, and visualisations are the binding factors of a society. Jean Baudrillard used hyperreality and simulation to support the idea that representation and reproduction are the key mechanisms in postmodern society.

According to Lindgren (2022), the visual turn in social and cultural sciences means that images and visuals, photos and videos, are having an increasing effect on the way we experience our culture and interact with each other. The 21st Century is also an era of visual explosion, where pictures and videos dominate.

Boyd (2009) discusses visual culture by stating that it refers to different ways the visual is part of social life. WJT Mitchell (1986) argues that images and language are intertwined, and modernity is ocular-centric. Visuals are at the centre of the postmodern world. Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998) claims that ‘postmodern is a visual culture’ and suggests that the relation between seeing and true knowing is broken in the postmodern world. In the postmodern world, we interact more with constructed visual experiences.

A story is an arrangement of words and images that try to recreate lifelike characters and events to gain the audience’s attention. To sustain the audience’s interest, stories are often presented as revolving around human needs such as feeling loved, being in control of one’s life and fate, avenging wrongs, overcoming obstacles, etc.

How to tell or narrate a story is as important as selecting a story topic. A good story goes beyond informing and adds value to the subject. Anything informative does not need to be relevant for a good story. A good story connects with the audience and impacts them, forcing people to take the time to watch the story due to its potential importance to them or their community.

5.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

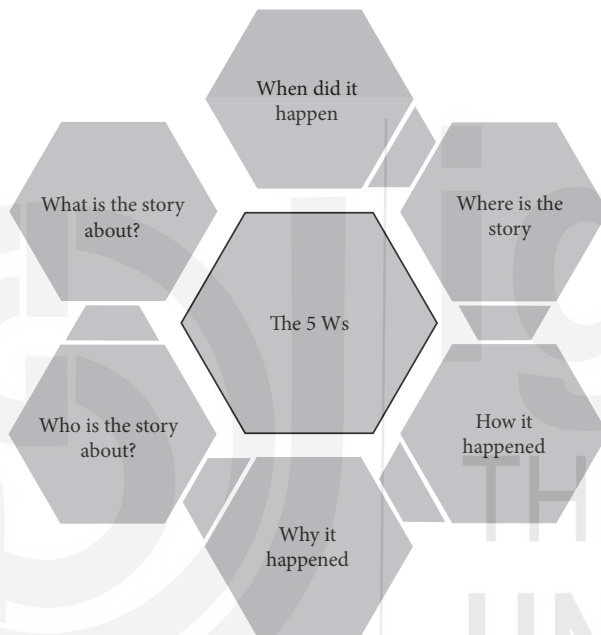
- Understand the importance of storytelling and the power of visuals;
- Identify the building blocks of storytelling to create multimedia stories; and
- Understand different aspects of multimedia storytelling to create impactful user-generated stories.

5.2 TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND ITS KEY ELEMENTS

The SCRAP approach—Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production—is needed to develop a multimedia story.

	Five Ws	Description
Story	What is the story?	The focus of the study is the purpose of the story.
Characters	Who are they?	This is the starting point of a story. A storyteller needs to focus on characters, places, and events.

Resolution	Knowing the beginning, middle and end is knowing <i>why</i> .	If your story is current, it will evolve and take shape as you cover it. You can research a structure and provide the form and scope to plan the day. This will provide a flexible approach for the story to develop naturally.
Actuality	4Ws of the film, including where, what, when and who will I film?	Actuality means the story's development in its natural course on the site and cannot be set up. It helps in creating story dynamics.
Production	How will I make the story?	Know all the characters in a story, what needs to be captured, and when the deadline is.



Key elements of a good story:

1. Good stories capture emotions

Emotion commands attention and creates a relevancy of shared feelings between the character and the reader. Therefore, one must manage one's emotions objectively while integrating sentiment into a story and avoid excessive emotion or misinformation to produce a desired emotion. Emotions are important as they catch attention and help create shared feelings between the character and its audience.

2. Good stories provide context.

A storyteller must ask various questions, such as, What does my audience need to know? What background would a newcomer need to know? What do people need to know so that they care?

3. Good stories surprise the audience

Surprise in a news story can take several forms: information you did not know or something you did not expect. In a story, a storyteller plans and strategically places the surprise.

4. Good stories empower the audience

A good social story aims to inform people about an issue so they can make better decisions. Journalism, for instance, is supposed to empower the audience, and empowering the audience involves anticipating how the information might be used and what questions readers might have. A good storyteller must view their reader as a decision-maker instead of just a consumer.

5.3 ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES

Producing content in the social media landscape involves new processes that change how news stories are written and broadcast (from sourcing to distribution). Instant, interactive, and freely available production processes are evolving. The change in the output voice and construction depends on the producer's intent and objective.

Using social media's power in storytelling involves thinking creatively about news production by integrating broader voices and tools that are much needed now.

Social media storytelling

Storytelling in social media spaces has several characteristics. A single output created from a range of multimedia multi-voice elements becomes infinite. A storyteller's founding skills are very important.

Social media has added new dimensions and values to storytelling. Journalists must grasp these values to survive in the new media landscape.

The five I's of social-media storytelling that include the non-linear nature of content creation are:

1. Infrastructure
2. Inform
3. Immerse
4. Interest
5. Interact

1. Infrastructure

It is important to understand that journalism is a process, not a product (Cook, 2013). The content creation and distribution process is fluid. There are no boundaries to start the storytelling process, as it depends on the audience's needs. The audience's approach to consuming the story is based on the values in each part.

Journalists cannot decide the starting point for audience needs and wants. Users consume the content as they like, and the parts of the story that they consider valuable. However, as a storyteller, one must think about the trigger and explain why you are discussing it. The reasons are explained through analysis, the latest trends, public opinions, etc.

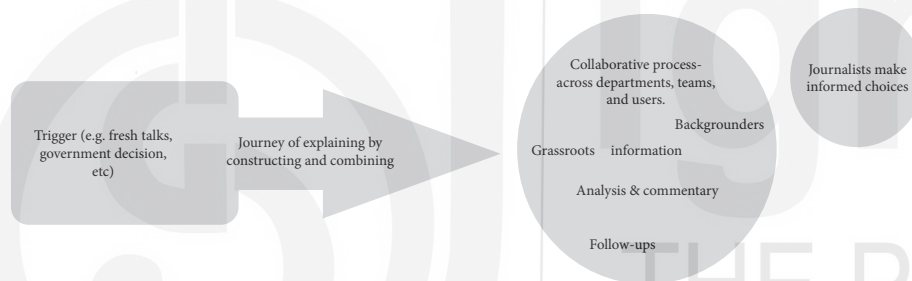
In present times, the Internet is the infrastructure that connects computers around the world. The World Wide Web technology interlinks hypertext documents. Therefore, storytellers must think about how to layer and chunk the content.

Layering is how stories are built on the web. It is a method that understands users' different start points and needs. Journalists, too, have a range of content. The story that is being read is called the top layer. Each time a link is added, it acts as an additional layer to the content.

On the other hand, the chunking approach or technique to storytelling is a non-linear way of storytelling. Chunking involves splitting the story to tackle different aspects of the issue. E.g. answer the who with the help of an image, analyse the big data with the help of a graphic, and describe the location with the help of a map.

Bullet points, sidebars, pull quotes, subheadings, images, maps, graphs, audio, comments, video, etc., help break long blocks of text.

Stories are created by building units together. A composite story comprises units; each unit works independently, and a whole piece can be repurposed to compose other stories.



2. Inform

The core of the reporting process is to inform or communicate with people about what is happening. This key role of a journalist is becoming complex in the social space. A social media storyteller must approach content to create rich content on social spaces that use various digital interactive media.

Therefore, a social media storyteller must know that a story's success depends on how viral it goes on social networks. The level of engagement and interaction between audiences also decides the success of a story. Besides, a social media storyteller always negotiates between being right and being fast, but accuracy cannot be compromised for speed.

In today's fast-paced world, future social media storytellers must quickly get a reliable story to their audience on time. A social media storyteller must be mindful of legal and ethical implications and attribute wherever necessary. It is important to produce balanced content that is objective in nature.

3. Immerse

The audience wants different experiences from each story. Some want full immersion in the ever-increasing sophistication of rich media. Some just want surface information. Unlimited space on the Internet offers deep and broad storytelling experiences. However, a deep understanding of the audience is crucial to produce an effective social media story. The vocabulary, phrasing

or length of the news story package will change due to the time spent. The active social media audience expects to participate, comment or discuss ideas to address them. According to Boyd (2009), social media audiences consume information peripherally, mostly in the workplace. Currently, news providers use gamification, which involves the integration of game mechanics, to offer a more immersive storytelling experience.

4. Interest

Interest is expressed in different ways. As a storyteller, one must consider the news story's reception from the consumers' point of view and how they will reach the story, whether through social media or a regular online search. Accordingly, a storyteller must adapt their writing and production techniques. In the age of social media, social stories are rated through web analytics, so journalists must understand how to drive search and social traffic to their stories. A social media storyteller must optimise articles with keywords and allow them to be shared on social media platforms such as Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Vimeo, etc.

Social traffic is the way social networks contribute to finding/ sharing content. A social media storyteller must consider what readers want to search for and use specific keywords or phrases that best summarise a story. They must be used in headlines, picture captions, subheadings, and introduction (the most read parts of the story). Tagging is the best technique for categorising content (broad topics) with keywords that help sort content as needed. When a tag is clicked, it will take the reader to all the content under that term. Hashtags are also a crucial part of social media ecology as they help in creating links around groups of threads or themes.

Visualising a news story for social media

Visualising a story using the latest media technologies will allow us to show that different stages of content production can be written and constructed in different ways. In the age of social media, a story can be built using different elements as mentioned below:

Instant updates and raw news coverage: Instant updates became popular due to the microblogging site Twitter. They are used across various outputs, like tickers (which appear as a rolling feed across broadcasts, text messages, status updates, alert emails, and feeds). A raw feed of an event or conversation across social platforms is simply the outpouring of data and material of events, unedited, unverified, and raw. At this stage, immediacy and audience participation are key.

Some Twitter jargon includes a post to Twitter, which is known as a tweet. An RT is a re-posting of someone else's tweet. To direct a tweet to someone, you use the @mention functionality. A DM is a private message exchange between two people who follow each other. Following people means their updates will appear in your feed. #ff is a recommendation of someone worth following.

Interpretations on how to use networks like Twitter are vast. From using it as a fourth broadcasting wire service, crowdsourcing, and curating content

to drawing journalistic stories around themes are based on the organisation's personal choice. Brevity and simplicity are the key factors. Be aware of mistakes, which can be recorded as a permanent snapshot.

Live reporting: A range of live reports can include streaming video/ audio, Q&A sessions, interviews, webinars, reporters on the scene or coverage of an event, and everything published live as it occurs. Several short updates can be combined to form a flowing commentary, e.g. court proceedings, an event, a press conference, or a crisis. Maintain elements of journalistic practice like verification of sources. Hyperlinks allow us to navigate around the web. There are two variables with links- words highlighted and the destination content you link to. The words you choose will become blue and underlined, so choose them carefully to maximise scalability and indicate what the hyperlinked page contains.

Live blogging is a record of an event published live as it occurs. It is a written commentary online, the textual equivalent of a radio report. A single automatically refreshing web page is created with material added to a running narrative. Journalists can add to the page as events progress, incorporating material from other sites or news organisations, comments, links, audio, and video.

Draft posts and blogs: You can write in draft form on social media and blogging sites. They include posts like articles, entries, and pages. At this stage in content production, output has moved from raw or short-form updates. It offers a development from unedited information flows, but lacks the formal structure of the news packages. It can be an overview or reflection on something that has happened- an interview, an event, a review, or a summary. A snapshot of incomplete or open discussions or open thoughts.

Basic news units: The news unit writing is the right choice when the voice becomes more formal. The journalist interprets events for the public. He/she may work within defined formats. The level of editing has shifted towards balance and objectivity with professional reporting. Many news consumers rely on formal news articles to help them understand what is newsworthy. Editorial decisions make a more formal output, distinguishing the topic from the infinity of the Internet. Verify the sources, give both sides of the story, etc.

In-depth packages in text and broadcast: Fully researched stories with comments and interviews from experts and bystanders. They are also called long-form journalism, features, or packages. They take time as they pull in a much wider range of voices. The in-depth package aims to offer a formal, objective voice, a combination of voices which explain and analyse. More scope to offer immersion or interactivity in the production process.

A broadcast package combines multiple techniques, such as a voice-over, images, a piece to camera, interviews, and graphics. Broadcast news packages work well to combine the visual stimulation and immediacy of video in a polished, more formal journalistic output. The technique is writing to pictures—adding information and context to what the viewer can already see, not repeating it. A slideshow of images combined with text can also provide a compelling story.

Features: There are specific writing techniques for reviews, travel, comments, and long-form features. A backgrounder develops the basic news units with more insight and analysis. What are the other angles, the areas of interest, the questions that need more reflection, etc.?

Usability refers to the ease with which your content can be consumed on different platforms. Consider breaking up an article into small paragraphs. A few paragraphs can be combined under a subtheme with bold subheadings, bullet points, or breakouts to make it easier to view on print, mobile phones, etc.

Echo chamber: The same vocabulary is repeated in different story elements. Story elements should be made to complement one another across platforms and not repeat themselves.

Social media has opened the production process and allowed creativity by including who and what can be included. Stories can be conveyed using short-form updates, drafts and packages, text, video, audio, images, blogs, microblogs, maps, infographics, and games, and this whole process is evolving. Good reporting will involve adapting to choices to best communicate events by selecting the right tool at the right time for the right audience.

Social media and online / mobile production allow limitless possibilities. Journalists must thus learn to navigate these new relationships and opportunities. Citizen journalism offers a rich and diverse addition to previous work. The foundational skills of a journalist’s work are as important as ever. Journalists must combine these elements to tell the story and add value.

The five ‘I’s of social media storytelling help embrace the non-linear nature of content creation - Infrastructure, inform, immerse, interact and interest.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1. Define transmedia or multimedia storytelling. What are its key elements?

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- 2. What are the three Ps and 8 Cs of a story that hold the power to influence public opinion?

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3. What approach is needed to develop a multimedia story?

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5.4 NARRATIVES ACROSS DIFFERENT MEDIA PLATFORMS

“A story is not a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of anarchy of existence” (McKee, 1997).

BBC correspondent Alan Little emphasised that anything can be expressed properly with the help of the right selection of words. Print and video production have something in common, like selecting the right words and tone of the story, following a proper structure, and the script narration must be simple and clear. Similarly, writing for the web means the story’s main message must be conveyed in the first few paragraphs. The writer must begin by writing what they want to say, followed by knowing the media they must work with. Besides being clear about the story’s moments and key highlights, as a storyteller, one must be clear regarding the emotions, drama, information, and genre that the story belongs to. Narration will be the key to sync with the video that strikes an emotional or dramatic story appeal.

Journalists bring stories to life using a variety of production techniques. In present times, it is common practice to write instant updates followed by short-form storytelling and then edited packages in a non-linear way.

Importance of Narration

Media content is produced within a cycle of sourcing and distribution. Journalists must produce content for mobile and blogs, forums and social networks, TV, print and radio. New and social-media technologies have changed the format and shape of news. Changes are seen in pyramid-shaped stories and how TV journalists explain their Piece-To-Camera. Thus, producers need to adapt to the changing expectations and functions in the news environment.

Visual Persuasion in Advertising and Public Relations

Media critic Everette Dennis states that advertising is “any form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor.” He feels that advertising benefits society because it funds media, provides information to consumers through public service announcements, and thus stimulates the economy. Lester (2011) states that the average TV viewer spends three years watching commercials. Visual messages, therefore, are important communications. For an advertisement to be effective based on the words, images and situations, the consumers make assumptions about the impact the advertisement content will have on their behaviours.

5.5 ROLE OF AUDIENCE INTERACTION IN TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

From 1995 onwards, the Internet became a public tool for communication. Ordinary people could now easily tell and publish stories. Today, user-generated content producers are using digital tools to make their content. They are using smartphone technologies to create YouTube and other social media content.

The free and unlimited Internet space acts as a boon for user-generated content. With the miniature technology boom, with the help of smartphones, users can now record, edit and publish high-quality video and audio at a far greater speed at a lesser rate. Citizen storytellers find it tempting to use YouTube, a ready-made publishing platform. According to Professor Philip Napoli, head of Journalism at Rutgers University, “audience living in a multimedia world consumes a variety of content that promotes attention to a diversity of views. Media critic Robert McChesney, however, believes that new technologies are acting as the new central nervous system in a society that has been waiting to witness a change for a long time.

The art of story is the dominant cultural force in the world. Films largely serve as a dominant medium of this grand enterprise. Stories are all about originality and no duplication. Renowned filmmaker Ken Burns feels that how technology spreads and takes control of our lives means we are losing touch with the real story (Stubbs, 1989). With the expansion of media reach, we can share stories beyond borders and languages with millions of people across the globe. However, due to the availability of cheap technology, there are quality concerns regarding the craft and originality of stories (McKee, 1997).

Therefore, we must fully understand the potential of using technology, skills, and smartphones to tell more relevant and diverse stories.

5.6 CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING NARRATIVE COHESION ACROSS PLA FORMS

According to BBC correspondent Alan Little, all writing begins with saying something right with the right choice of words. In video production, one must be careful of the right modulation and tone, ensuring the structure and narration of the script are clear and simple. Web writing involves writing the main highlight of the story in the first few paragraphs so that the story can be used on multimedia platforms. The writer must begin by writing what they want to convey, followed by a thorough understanding of the media with which they wish to work. Besides, one must also be aware of the moments and bounce in the story. Is the story informative, dramatic, or emotional, based on which the script narration will be developed?

Narration is important in moving the story from one structure to another. It acts as a binding factor that brings together all the elements of a story to help create a bounce and sync.

A different technique is applied when writing a text story. One must leave gaps for quotes in the text. When writing for the video, one considers the

pictures or chooses sync voice grabs like quotes. Like a written script, video narration links the major story elements and drives the narrative. A good narration highlights major milestones in a story. Since mojo is a picture medium, the narration in the mojo script does not need to state the obvious. The narration script should be written in active voice. A voice is the form of a verb that can be passive or active. It is an indicator of the subject's performance and reception. Active voice helps in keeping the story less clumsy and quickly drives the reader into the story. When you want to emphasise the receiver, you can use passive voice.

5.7 LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING COMPLEX TRANSMEDIA PROJECTS

A transmedia story is shared across various platforms. Each time a new layer of content is added by the different platforms, including a comic script, novel, TV, film, documentary, social media, gaming or shared as an experience by people for interaction, it adds value to the entire content package. The beauty of this layering is that each platform adds a complete, independent self-sustenance to the story so that the audience can enjoy a complete package from whichever platform they pick up the story. Reading across the media provides depth to the story and thus enhances consumption. However, in case of repetition, the audience might lose interest and not consider that platform honest. Therefore, there is pressure on the platforms to add value to the content to retain customer loyalty.

A single company, with roots across different media sectors, dictates the flow of content across media. Each medium has a different type of audience. For instance, films and TV have a diversified audience, whereas graphic novels and comics serve the interests of a few. Popular artists working closely with the media industry understand that working in the new economic shift needs more ambitious content that can be developed in collaborative efforts with their customers.

Storytellers in present times are, therefore, developing collaborative models of content creation with artists from different backgrounds.

However, Jenkins (2008) argues that, so far, no aesthetic criteria exist to evaluate work shared across multiple media.

Immersive content

Any story can be depicted realistically. Immersive storytelling uses virtual reality and 3d technology. Virtual reality transforms the storytelling experience. The participants become part of the story content and better understand things.

Therefore, modern-day journalists need not use everything all the time or shout at everyone every minute. They must understand that in the new media ecology, they must adapt to social media culture and select the right tool at the right time for the right audience. Stories can be told using text, video, audio, images, blogs, microblogs, maps, infographics, etc. Therefore, the choice of a journalist plays an important role in integrating different voices. Gone are those days when journalists alone were telling stories. In the present

digital times, there is competition from the users as well. In the modern news ecology, online media, including social media, mobile production, etc., has expanded the possibilities of inclusion, and a journalist also needs to know what best to offer by combining elements from eyewitnesses and audience comments, sitting with experts in discussions or editing packages. Combining communication tools and methods and using different styles for different audiences can help build fluid content.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. Name the five ‘I’s of social-media storytelling.

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2. Explain the role of social media as a platform to distribute transmedia stories.

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3. Examine the role of audience interaction in transmedia storytelling.

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5.8 LET US SUM UP

Social media provides a new opportunity in the emerging media, where local is the new future, and attention is the new currency. The audience’s engagement with the content will decide its consumption, and conversations will decide its future course. Content will remain the king, and the user of the content will remain the emperor.

5.9 FURTHER READINGS

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5.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. Transmedia or multimedia storytelling is an approach where a story is written for different platforms in multiple media formats. This approach to a story is more engaging and involves the audience directly in the story. The key elements of a story are:
 - a. Good stories capture emotions
 - b. Good stories provide context
 - c. Good stories provide text
 - d. Good stories surprise the audience and empower
2. Media today is all about personal, portable, participatory, connectivity, conversation, convenience, communities, creativity, convergence, content, and context. Any story that combines these three Ps and 8Cs has the power to persuade public opinion.
3. To develop a multimedia story, a SCRAP approach is needed. SCRAP stands for Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. The five 'I's of social-media storytelling, which include the non-linear nature of content creation, are:
 - a. Infrastructure
 - b. Inform
 - c. Immerse
 - d. Interest
 - e. Interact

Social Media and Society

2. Producing content in the social media landscape involves new processes that are changing the way news stories are written and broadcast (from sourcing to distribution). Instant, interactive, and freely available production processes are evolving. The change in the output voice and construction depends on the producer's intent and objective.
3. User-generated content producers use digital tools to create their own content. They are using smartphone technologies to create YouTube and other social media content. Free and unlimited internet space is a boon for user-generated content. With the miniature technology boom, smartphones allow users to record, edit, and publish high-quality video and audio at a far greater speed at a lower rate. Citizen storytellers find it tempting to use YouTube, a ready-made publishing platform.



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