Media Convergence and *Doctor Who*

University of Portsmouth | MA Media and Communication
Media Cultures and Industries | Module coordinator lincoln.geraghty@port.ac.uk
Presented by John Cable | up923733@myport.ac.uk

Digital Version

What is media convergence?

Media convergence refers to the relationship and flow of content across different media platforms. The content takes many forms, from television and film to video games and board games, but what is important is how all these different ways to experience a text converge into one location, be that on your television, computer, or games console.

Henry Jenkins (2006) outlines Convergence Culture as the "relationship between three concepts – media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence." (p. 2), noting how it "depends heavily on consumers' active participation." (p. 3).

These types of media are designed to allow an audience to feel connected to the text and to participate in a way that suits them most. One person may enjoy watching an episode on television whereas another may prefer to play a video game – when the text is involved this encourages participation in the other media formats. For fans who want to know everything there is to know about a text, it is an unwritten requirement that they participate in every form to ensure they keep their knowledge of the text as up to date as possible – a seemingly insignificant occurrence in a video game cutscene may prove to be critical context for part of a feature film, as was the case in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017) where Leia used a device previously found and explained in more detail by Luke within the narrative of the video game *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (DICE, 2017).

Jenkins notes that "Convergence doesn't just involve commercially produced materials and services traveling along well-regulated and predictable circuits. [. . .] It also occurs when people take media in their own hands." (p. 17). This may be in the form of writing their own stories (for example, copperbadge, 2008; kalima, 2012), or producing their own episodes (for example, DW2012, 2022). It may even go as far to merge different franchises into one, such as the merging of *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock* into *SuperWhoLock* (for example, TheKritty, 2012; Girl Done Waiting, 2014).

This close participatory connection can cause rights holders to "often [be] very nervous about things like [fanfiction]". (Hall, 2011, as quoted in BBC, 2011, para. 3), which encourages the rights holders to provide their own different types of media as to allow the audience participation whilst remaining in control of the intellectual property.

What is *Doctor Who*?

Doctor Who is a BBC science fiction television series which tells the adventures of The Doctor, a timelord from Gallifrey. Their time machine is called the TARDIS (An acronym of "Time and Relative Dimensions in Space") and is much larger on the inside than it appears from outside – from outside it appears as an old police telephone box.

When it's time for a new actor to be cast as The Doctor, the character will "regenerate" into the new body. Fourteen actors have played the doctor, with the fifteenth coming in 2024. The identity of the actor to play the new Doctor is often kept secret and a build up to the announcement of the new actor and the character's regeneration is hyped as a media event to welcome in the new chapter in the story.

Doctor Who originally ran for 26 seasons between 1963 and 1989 and was rebooted by BBC Wales in 2005 with Russel T. Davies at the helm. It quickly became one of the BBC's most valuable commercial products, and in 2022 the BBC partnered with Disney to allow the Disney+ streaming platform international streaming rights to the series. This partnership ought to increase the funding available to produce the series (Reynolds, 2023), though reports of a per-episode budget £10 million were debunked by Davis in an interview in the *Doctor Who* Magazine. (Sandler, 2023).

Doctor Who X *EVE Online* and other video games

In January 2022, the massively multiplayer online game (MMO) *EVE Online* (CCP Games, 2003) had its "First major crossover" event (CCP Games, 2022, para. 1) where players of the game could complete tasks and earn *Doctor Who* themed spaceship and character appearance items. Other games to have had similar crossovers are *Roblox* (Roblox Corporation, 2006), *Minecraft* (Mojang Studios, 2011), and *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017), though these were mostly in the form of purchasable in-game items themed around *Doctor Who*.

Magic: The Gathering expansion

In July 2023, the popular trading card game *Magic: The Gathering* (Garfield, 1993) saw a new expansion of *Doctor Who* themed trading cards to help celebrate *Doctor Who*'s 60th anniversary, "invoking the history of *Doctor Who*™ through the lens of *Magic*." (Finnegan, 2023, para. 2).

Doctor Who Magazine

Weekly (now monthly) magazine first published October 1979 to allow fans to connect further with the text. Some features: behind the scenes details, exclusive interviews, comics to continue the story or form new ones, free merchandise with each issue – fans can own a piece of the world of *Doctor Who*.

Time Lord Victorious and transmedia storytelling

The *Doctor Who* Magazine provided early examples of transmedia storytelling in the form of comic strips (for example, Claremont, 1979; McGregor, 1980). Other than these, various novelisations of episodes (for example, Whitaker, 1961) and new novels (for example, Peel, 1991), the narrative of *Doctor Who* existed entirely within only a small number of platforms.

The *Doctor Who* video and trading card game tie-ins didn't provide any new approach or continuation to the narrative; they simply existed within their respective universes.

Transmedia story telling is where "[a] story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole". (Jenkins, 2006, p. 97-98). It wasn't until *Time Lord Victorious* was announced when the *Doctor Who* story would be told "across audio, novels, comics, vinyl, digital immersive theatre, escape rooms and games!" (BBC Studios, 2020).

The first of these stories took the form of an escape room called *A Dalek Awakens*, enabling fans to "[feel] much closer to the Doctor's world . . ." (Fullerton, 2020) where participants must solve puzzles to *escape*.

Soon to follow were various webcasts, comics, short stories, merchandise, audio books and traditional features and animations, such as *Daleks!* (Doctor Who, 2020), which was released as an animated series on YouTube.

Conclusion

The BBC retains control over its intellectual property by providing a diverse selection of texts for audiences to consume. Episodes are available to watch on the BBC iPlayer within the UK, and Disney+ internationally. Books and games are also available digitally and it all can be consumed from a single computer or mobile device, but others are experiences or limited-run events within video games which must be consumed within their respective medium. The *Magic: The Gathering* expansion is not available as part of the digital version of the game (Magic Online, 2023) and you must be present to experience the escape room, but this enables an audience to form a close connection and sense of ownership with the texts.

Doctor Who "has actively embraced both the technical and cultural shifts associated with media convergence since it returned to our television screens in 2005." (Perryman, 2008, p. 36), using transmedia storytelling as a critical narrative delivery device across multiple mediums and forces fans to participate. The digitization of past editions of *Doctor Who* magazine and the video/trading card game crossover events are an example of the BBC attempting to expand their audience, but also of convergence where an older media meets a newer one. It is interesting to consider these methods of storytelling in relation to BBC guidelines: In 2005 Russel T. Davies explained an unexpected delay in publishing of a new novel, which was supposed to be released just prior to the new TV show, was because the title of the book implied "[the book] was a necessary purchase in order to understand the narrative of 'Rose' [. . .] If you had to buy a BBC novel in order to understand the plot as transmitted on BBC1, then we would be breaking the BBC's guidelines". (Davies, 2005, as quoted in Perryman, 2008, p. 34.). These restrictions could be the reason an episode of *Doctor Who* was not dedicated to the Time Lord Victorious narrative but is a clever example of using a popular text to both retain existing and reach out to potential new fans over a variety of different mediums.

What is clear, however, and requires further research, is that the BBC aims to keep as much control as they can over the production and distribution of their intellectual property. Although it still exists, there has been a shift from fan-created content as part of convergence to "officially produced" content designed to be consumed and to tell a story through a variety of methods. Henry Jenkins' book was written nearly 20 years ago: much has happened in the way we consume media since then. It would be fascinating to read an updated version.

Bibliography
BBC. (2011, August 3). *Government drops website blocking*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-14372698
BBC Studios. (2020, April 27). *COMING SOON: Time Lord Victorious*. Doctor Who. https://www.doctorwho.tv/news-and-features/coming-soon-time-lord-victorious
CCP Games. (2003). *EVE Online* (Windows, macOS) [Video game]. Simon & Schuster Interactive; CCP Games; Atari. https://www.eveonline.com
CCP Games. (2022, January 13). *EVE Online X Doctor Who*. EVE Online. https://www.eveonline.com/now/doctor-who
Claremont, C. (1979, October 17). Tales from the TARDIS featuring War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells. *Doctor Who Weekly* (1), 12-16.
copperbadge [Username] (2008, May 19). *Second City Torchwood*. Archive of Our Own. https://archiveofourown.org/works/916007/chapters/1776889
DICE (2017). *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (Playstation 4, Windows, Xbox One) [Video Game]. Electronic Arts. https://www.ea.com/en-gb/games/starwars/battlefront/star-wars-battlefront-2
Doctor Who. (2020, November 12). *01: The Archive of Islos | Daleks! | Doctor Who* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-JgrEDffk
DW2012 [Username] (2022, April 30). *Doctor Who FanFilm Series 5 – Episode 1: How Time Flies* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Sla9u32HR5g
Epic Games. (2017). *Fortnite* (macOS, Windows, Playstation 4, Xbox One, iOS, Nintendo Switch, Android, Xbox Series X/S, Playstation 5) [Video game]. Epic Games. https://www.fortnite.com
Finnegan, J. (2023, July 28). *A first look at Magic: The Gathering® - Doctor Who™*. Magic the Gathering. https://magic.wizards.com/en/news/announcements/a-first-look-at-magic-the-gathering-doctor-who
Fullerton, H. (2020, March 12). *Doctor Who's new escape room helped me live my deadly Dalek fantasy*. Radio Times. https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/sci-fi/doctor-who-dalek-escape-room/
Garfield. (1993). *Magic: The Gathering* [Trading card game]. Wizards of the Coast.
Girl Done Waiting [Username]. (2014, February 8). *The Girl Who Counted*. FanFiction.net. https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10091626/1/The-Girl-Who-Counted
Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
Johnson, R. (Director). (2017). *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures; Lucasfilm; Ram Bergmen Productions.
kalima [Username] (2012, June 18). *Psycho Savior, qu'est-ce que c'est?* Archive of Our Own. https://archiveofourown.org/works/437787
Magic Online. [@MagicOnline]. (2023, October 26). MTGO will not have the upcoming Doctor Who set at launch, but we will provide updates to the community if that changes. [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/MagicOnline/status/1717556854950342968
McGregor, D. (1980). Tales from the TARDIS: The First Men in the Moon. *Doctor Who Weekly* (29), 11-16.
Mojang Studios (2011). *Minecraft* (Windows, macOS, Linux) [Video game]. Mojang Studios; Xbox Game Studios; Sony Interactive Entertainment.
Peel, J. (1991). *Timewyrm: Genesys*. VirginPublishing.
Perryman, N. (2008). *Doctor Who and the Convergence of Media. A Case Study in 'Transmedia Storytelling'*. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. 14(1), 21-39.
Reynolds, R. (2023, November 24). *Doctor Who: The BBC Did Not Sell Out to Disney+*. MovieWeb. https://movieweb.com/doctor-who-bbc-disney-plus-partnership-not-sell-out/
Roblox Corporation. (2006). *Roblox* (Windows, iOS, Android,m Xbox One, Meta Quest 2, Meta Quest Pro, Playstation 4) [Video game]. Roblox Corporation.
Sandler, S. (2023, January 9). *Russell T. Davies Clarifies The £10 Million Budget Per Episode Of The New Season Of 'Doctor Who'*. CultureSlate. https://www.cultureslate.com/news/russell-t-davies-clarifies-the-10-million-budget-per-episode-of-the-new-season-of-doctor-who
TheKritty [Username]. (2012, August 12). *There's A Boy*. FanFiction.net. https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8420890/1/There-s-A-Boy
Whitaker, D. (1964). *Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure with Daleks*. Frederick Muller Ltd.