

The book and new media technologies – interactive book applications for children

Anita Has-Tokarz

Institute of Libraries and Information Science, Faculty of Humanities, University
Maria Curie-Skłodowska, Pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 5, 20-031 Lublin, POLAND,
E-mail: ahastokarz@poczta.umcs.lublin.pl

Abstract – The paper investigates the issue of the use of new technologies in the context of the reading activities of the Net Generation. It discusses the phenomenon of interactive book applications intended for the youngest users of mobile devices, and presents producers operating on the Polish market of interactive book applications as well as characterizes the products in question.

Keywords – convergence culture, digital natives, interaktive media, multimedia, net generation, social communication, the book application for children

I. Introduction

Technologically advanced devices and services have become just as necessary in our life as food and clothing. Advanced technologies satisfy many of consumer's needs: from enhancing social status, to provision of entertainment, to saving time. This tendency is, in particular, a feature of the generation of the youngest consumers, today's several-year-olds and teenagers, for whom the computer and Internet are natural systems of social communication, identity building, work, and play. For that reason they are called "digital natives", the hypermedia- or Net Generation. This group is characterized by their growing independence of the desktop computer (cloud-computing) and by storage of the increasing amount of data directly on the Net: mail, documents, pictures, films, music, books, etc. This is accompanied by the so-called cross-platformness, or the use of the Internet by means of many mobile devices as the need arises, and depending on time and the place where one is staying. One of technological solutions that is becoming increasingly popular with the youngest users are book applications.

II. The Book Application

The book application (the app) is an interactive multimedia application utilizing the features of the traditional book (mainly the picture book because of the great importance of the picture and the co-presence of text) intended for use in mobile devices with a touchscreen such as the tablet, smartphone, iPad, or iPhone. The book application has the properties of intuitively motivating the reader/user: it enables constructing the narrative, maintaining it (for example to lead the main character, by using the finger, from place to place in the two- or three-dimensional space, to perform some action together with the main character), it allows the use of video and audio functions in order to record one's or another user's voice or image necessary to create narrative, and acting in real time. It is an interactive medium – a conglomerate of game elements that stimulate thinking and understanding, usually associated with its content. This kind of

application can include jigsaw puzzles, memo games, seek-differences games, coloring picture books etc., which makes it closer to the convergent book concept.

Different names are suggested to define the phenomenon of book applications for children. One of them is the term augmented book, which denotes a book that makes full use of interactivity and permits real-time immersion in the virtual world, i.e. the book which engages an individual user through its multiple interactivity, and others with him/her, for example childminders. The persons reading the book to children are actually co-authors of the narration and action in book applications. Another name is the term app picture book. It links multimedia applications with the rich current of different varieties and exemplifications of the picture book, and it relates the idea of the phenomenon to this tradition of writing addressed to the young audience.

III. Examples

It should be emphasized that book applications, particularly the original ones, is one of the least represented categories in the App Store. In Poland the market of book applications for children began to develop dynamically over the last several years. A major producer in this industry is the British company Nosy Crow, known for the most complete and highest-standard setting versions of fairy-story classics. There are also smaller publishers like DADA Company, which set the standards of the level and quality of applications in general. Worth noting, because of the use of interactivity and original artwork created in the Gothic aesthetics, is the Polish firm Oh Noo Studio. An interesting example is the applications by the firm Big Rabbit.

An extremely interesting offer is the Ipad and Iphone application released by the company CrocoLabel – “Halo, Rozalia!”, a fully interactive, perfectly designed book for the youngest children, which is at the same time an application supporting a child’s emergent literacy – acquisition of language awareness and communication skills before they ever read or write. We should also mention the Polish publishers Wydawnictwo Watercolour Media Ltd., which, owing to the National Audiovisual Institute’s subvention, produces apps presenting the classics of Polish and world children’s literature.

Conclusions

The foregoing examples do not exhaust the subject of exemplification; they show, however, that the market for interactive apps for children is dynamically developing in Poland. This segment is dominated by both Western producers and domestic companies that offer aesthetically sophisticated, high-quality products which provide good entertainment and education to the youngest consumers immersed in the digital world.

References

1. Jenkins H., “Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide”, New York Univeristy Press, New York-London 2006
2. Tapscott D., “Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World”, McGraw-Hill 2008