Jane Austen, 1775 – 1817

Jane Austen’s novels have enthralled generations of readers and are studied extensively by scholars. Her best-known work, *Pride and Prejudice*, has sold more than 20 million copies. In recent decades Austen novels have inspired many print sequels and film adaptations, both traditional and modern. From books portraying characters as zombies to the 1995 movie “Clueless,” based on Austen’s *Emma*, audiences seem to love her stories in any form.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FFRK17vx5c&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FFRK17vx5c&feature=youtu.be)
Pride and Prejudice made a big splash in the digital world in April 2012 with the debut of The Lizzie Bennett Diaries, a modern adaptation of the novel. The vlog-or video blog-series concluded the following March with its 100th episode, each episode being five to seven minutes long. In the series, main character Lizzie is a graduate student in mass communications living at home with her family. She films the first 25 episodes in her bedroom—often with her best friend, Charlotte Lu, helping her portray other characters such as her parents.

Lizzie’s sisters, wild Lydia and sweet Jane, also often appear on camera. The story they tell reflects countless details of relationships, characters and events in Austen’s original novel. (The other two sisters from the original story were adapted as Kitty, the family’s cat, and Mary, a cousin of the sisters.)
My name is Jane Bennet, I'm a Merchandise Coordinator, I have two younger sisters whom I love, and I adore fashion.

Follow me on
- Lookbook
- Pinterest
- Twitter
- Facebook

The central narrative is augmented by hundreds of social media posts by the characters on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, Lookbook and Instagram. A total of 35 different social media profiles share the characters’ plot elements, perspectives and lives – such as fashion merchandiser Jane Bennet’s “Looks by Jane” Tumblr.

Henry Jenkins, author of *Convergence Media: Where Old and New Media Collide*, says on his Official Weblog, “Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.” Based on this definition, The Lizzie Bennet Diaries can be considered a transmedia franchise.
For example. Lydia Bennet’s own 34-vlog series is the most significant video presence outside the central narrative’s 100 vlogs. (Other characters also have some videos of their own.) Lydia’s vlogs and tweets detail her party lifestyle – including a New Year’s Eve celebration in Las Vegas, where she hooks up with Lizzie’s almost-flame, George Wickham. Her perspective develops as she discusses her deepening feelings for Wickham when the two begin dating. In the main vlog series, Lizzie knows nothing of any of this, until she hears of Wickham’s plan to post a video of himself and Lydia online.

In 2013 in The Atlantic magazine, Karen Swallow Prior described how the transmedia elements of the Lizzie Bennet Diaries provide “…multiple platforms (that) allow fan interaction to add zigzags and layers to the old linear story.” Prior also cites Lizzie Bennet Diaries executive producer Alexandra Edwards’ statement: “If a lot of fans are talking about something, I can and do tailor updates based on that. It's about having characters react in the moment.”
To varying degrees, all Lizzie Bennet Diaries characters interact with fans on their social media pages. Fan interaction also occurs via Lizzie’s periodic Q&A vlogs, in which she addresses fan questions posted on YouTube and elsewhere – sometimes alone and sometimes with other characters such as Jane’s love interest, Bing Lee.

The transmedia approach makes it possible even for fans who are uninitiated in the *Pride and Prejudice Story* to anticipate upcoming plot twists, as well as to learn more about the characters’ back stories and inner lives. For example, William Darcy’s sister, Gigi (based on Georgiana in the novel) posts frequently on Twitter about enjoying the Lizzie Bennet Diaries before meeting Lizzie, foreshadowing her interest in getting her brother and Lizzie together.
In Episode 59 of the main vlog series, Lizzie is meeting a class requirement by “shadowing” at the Collins and Collins media company. Her friend Charlotte now works there. Lizzie is also fuming about Darcy’s role in breaking up her sister Jane and Bing Lee – and is unaware that Darcy is about to make an unwanted declaration of love to her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anonymous asked: Get your fine ass over to the Bennet household while Lizzie's filming a kiss her. Don't say anything. You'll ruin it if you say anything beforehand. Just go, Darcy. The fandom's counting on you.</th>
<th>Fans following the series social media pages, however, could guess what is about to happen by reading fan posts to Darcy on his Tumblr, and by reading Twitter conversations between Gigi Darcy and fans.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@ggdarcy 14 Feb 2013</td>
<td>Nothing special but hopefully doing what I just suggested him to do. “@Arianaxo93: @ggdarcy so what's your bro doing for Valentine's day?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Starting with Episode 26, the vlogs depart from Lizzie’s bedroom, settings vary and other characters are introduced in person. In each location, the vlogs retain their strong production values and high-quality writing and acting. The quality of the series and its in-depth use of multiple media channels garnered the series several awards. In 2013, The Lizzie Bennet Diaries received the first-ever Emmy for *Outstanding Creative Achievement In Interactive Media - Original Interactive Program.*

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries also grew an enormous fandom. More than 2.5 million viewers have watched Episode 1 on YouTube, with an audience of 807,255 carried through to Episode 100.
The success of the series came with tough questions and issues, however.

In 2014, creator and head writer Bernie Su shared concerns on Motherboard. A primary challenge was having a small team of writers maintaining 35 social media accounts synched to the main narrative, and presenting an authentic character voice on each one. Long-term, Bernie Su worries that some of the social media platforms used with his narratives could disappear or decline.
On his Tumblr, Bernie Tumbles, Bernie Su commented on financing of transmedia projects:

“I’m pretty sure I’m one of those at the front lines of these multi-platform shows and I’ve never had someone in the business go, ‘We should make that show because the transmedia/social campaign will be amazing.’ They always go, ‘We’ll make that show because it’ll be a great show. We’ll figure out all that ‘transmedia’ stuff later.’ The transmedia/multi-platform stuff always comes 2nd.”

Su also addressed the percentage of the Lizzie Bennet Diaries audience that follows the social media components: “I strongly believe The LBD does this better than most, but I don’t think it’s more than 33 percent.” While acknowledging that this means the social media aspect may not enhance return on investment, Su feels it is worthwhile because, “The social stories make the story world more enriching and immersive.”
Pemberley Digital is the name of the entertainment corporation owned by William Darcy in the Lizzie Bennet Diaries, and is also the name of the series’ production firm. With subsequent projects, Pemberley Digital has experimented with varying approaches to addressing the financial and practical concerns noted by Bernie Su.

As The Lizzie Bennet Diaries concluded its vlog series, Pemberley Digital was planning future projects thanks to digital studio Deca TV having signed on to provide infrastructure and financial support. Hank Green, Bernie Su’s co-creator, initially funded the Diaries from his own pocket. As the series gained popularity, YouTube ad revenue helped financially.
Pemberley Digital also developed its commercial side by using a Kickstarter campaign to raise more than $462,000 to produce a boxed set of DVDs of the Lizzie Bennet Diaries and DVDs of the next series, Welcome to Sanditon. Later products included books: *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*, by Bernie Su and Kate Rorick, and *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet*, by Kate Rorick and Rachel Kiley. Both books are sold on Amazon.

T-shirts and other assorted merchandise are available via the Pemberley Digital website.

In subsequent projects, Pemberley Digital further broadened its approach to producing revenue. The company also introduced more innovative transmedia applications that replaced some of the large-scale social media narrative of the Lizzie Bennet Diaries. Each series has its own formula for balancing artistic content needs with financial viability while providing a unique entertainment experience for fans.
The next Pemberly Digital adaptation, Welcome to Sanditon, is a small-scale sequel to the Lizzie Bennet Diaries. It replaced the main character of Jane Austen’s unfinished novel, Sanditon, with Gigi Darcy. Employed by her brother’s entertainment company, Pemberley Digital, Gigi launches the firm’s Domino Beta Portal in Sanditon, California.

In conjunction with the series launch, Domino Beta was introduced as a real-life tool for audience members to use to join the story. Fans used Domino to upload videos of themselves as characters residing in the town, actively participating in the story and helping to create the story world. Fans populated the town with their own businesses, especially bookstores and ad agencies. Fans joined scripted characters in arguing with the mayor about his plan to convert the town to a health mecca.
As predicted, @MissyLambe stayed in the game much longer than I did!

Gigi continued her interaction with other characters and fans on Twitter. Welcome to Sanditon ran with 27 episodes from May 13, 2013 until August 12, 2013, typically attracting between 100,000 and 200,000 views per episode. With the series, Pemberley Digital also initiated an option for fans to click through to learn about or purchase characters’ clothing. Bernie Su noted on his Tumblr that the company makes money when fans click on clothing links, and that the idea came about because many Lizzie Bennet Diaries fans asked about the characters’ clothes.

The Pemberley Digital adaptation of Jane Austen’s Emma debuted October 7, 2013 and ran until August 23, 2014 with 72 vlogs. The main character, Emma Woodhouse, was updated to a lifestyle coach and event planner who also plays matchmaker. The series streamlined its social media content in comparison with the Lizzie Bennet Diaries. Instead, the focus was on Emma’s lifestyle and fashion blog, also called Emma Approved. The blog and the separate “Harriet’s Music Club” also featured music from character Harriet Smith.
Step 1: Express Gratitude

It was a long road getting here but it’s finally over! I’ve completed all the steps of recovery and now, inspired by Harriet’s journey, I’m going to try for a happy and fulfilling life. The first step is gratitude. I have so much to be thankful for, have so many wonderful people in my life that it makes me feel free, simple, and easy. This outfit captures all that and more.

Emma was very active on Twitter during the series, but most of the Tweets promoted her blog content. Emma’s Tumblr functioned as more of a transmedia element by tying together her personal perspective on the story and the fashion advice and ideas on her blog.

Fans took time to warm up to Emma Approved. Eventually, Episode 1 obtained more than 700,000 views and has retained over 300,000 views as the series concluded. The series continued the characters’ clothing click-through option, producing income for Pemberley Digital. Additional revenue from product placements, including Samsung Mobile, Galaxy Gear watches and Note 3 smart phones.

Emma’s Look - http://pbly.co/EA_el71
Emma’s Top - http://pbly.co/EA_t71
Harriet's Look - http://pbly.co/EA_hl38
On August 19, 2014, Pemberley Digital launched Frankenstein, MD, an update of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The main character is updated as soon-to-graduate medical student Victoria Frankenstein. The 35-episode series concluded October 31, 2014 and was produced in partnership with PBS Digital Studios. Characters’ social media accounts launched before the show premiered and the characters began interacting with fans.

**V. Frankenstein**
@VFrankMD
5 May 2014

**The world is a secret I want to uncover.**

---

Victoria and her assistant, Iggy, continue to interact with fans via Twitter during the series. Non-fictional science and medicine become part of the transmedia world as Victoria addresses scientific and medical questions from fans on her Tumblr account and Twitter feed. Some of the vlog episodes feature Iggy responding to fans’ medical and scientific questions. The characters also use Tumblr to re-blog items from science blogs - some of which relate to the series plot.

**Frankenstein MD**
Medical student, scientist, seeker of knowledge.

Between all the headlines about Ebola and the surprising results of my recent experiment, I thought I’d revisit the basics of infection. Read about the basics of infection [here](http://to.pbs.org/frankensteinmd).
The series was recommended and made available to teachers by PBS Learning Media, which noted that despite its fictional nature, the series includes “...many principles of research, anatomy, and scientific discovery (that) are as real as ever.” Aided by the addition of PBS Digital audience members, the series’ first episode obtained nearly 327,000 viewers and retained about 66,000 through concluding Episode 35.

Since Frankenstein, MD concluded, Pemberley Digital has not created another series, but did distribute one on behalf of Cherrydale Productions. The March Family Letters, an update of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, ran from December 2014 – June 2015 and included a strong presence for each of the main characters on Twitter and Tumblr, where they interact with fans and share their perspectives on plot elements. With about 140,000 views of Episode 1, the March Family Letters attracted a smaller audience than any Pemberley Digital-created series except *Welcome to Sanditon.*
Pemberley Digital has not announced plans to create and launch a new transmedia adaptation of its own since Frankenstein, MD ended. Having retained more than a third of the fan count it had at the end of the Lizzie Bennet Diaries, rebuilding and expanding the fan base would likely require a high-visibility project and expanded marketing. With the experience of completing four innovative series, however, Pemberley Digital seems well-qualified to be a major player in the transmedia world going forward. Its artistic methods and its business model may still be experimental - but it seems unlikely the experiment will turn out as disastrously as Dr. Frankenstein’s.

REFERENCES


Buenneke, Katie. LA Weekly (2014). “Why Emma Approved Didn’t Work as Well as the Lizzie Bennet Diaries Did.” Retrieved from:


Harris, Lon and Register, Brett/PBS Digital Studios (2014). YouTube. Youtube LLC. “Frankenstein, MD.” Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_ePOdUb3xfXgHhpBm1Ao8TDawkZJLKi


