PROJECT TITLE: Access, Fandom and Transmedia

FIELD OF RESEARCH CODE: 2001

PROJECT SYNOPSIS:

The Digital Inclusion and Media Access program is a hub for interdisciplinary research located within the Centre for Culture and Technology. The program brings together researchers working on understanding the potential of digital media in the context of redesigning and reimagining a more inclusive world.

The program is divided in two key areas - access and representation. The Access stream aims to leverage the potential of digital technologies to improve access to and engagement with entertainment, education and everyday life while the representation stream aims to positively influence social attitudes towards people with disability by both improving and increasing representations in media and popular culture.

We seek a PhD candidate to work at the intersection of these two streams by researching access as representation and the ways this could be used by television fans. The project
focuses on the transmedia potential of television accessibility features such as captions and audio description. Transmedia here does not just mean diverse forms of media and storytelling within specific narrative worlds, but also how particular (often small) changes can significantly alter the experience, understanding and pleasure of those narrative worlds. Fan-created subtitles, audio descriptions and other additions or interventions can significantly change the accessibility, and meaning, of specific narrative experiences in televisual and other formats.

Our television experiences are increasingly characterised by ‘binge’ watching. Audiences however are discovering that that the more television they watch, the more television they miss. Research at Curtin University has demonstrated that accessibility features such as captions and audio description, designed to make television accessible to audiences with disabilities, offer vital tools for multitasking audiences seeking to improve their comprehension of texts. Multiple layers and the inclusion of additional textual, audio and other elements often enhance the viewing and listening experience for a wide range of audiences.

These features offer a transmedia affordance for fans seeking additional content and new ways of engaging with television. For example, Sense 8 viewers reportedly use the audio description track to aid in comprehension as the series moves quickly between locations and subjectivities. For many, captions have been identified as essential to television viewing due to both second screen distractions and viewers’ desire to access as much information about a narrative as possible. This is particularly the case with the advent of so-called prestige television which involves complicated storylines and unusual character names – for example, fans of both Twin Peaks and Game of Thrones report using captions to follow the detailed plots. Fan cultures often produce their own subtitles, far more rapidly than are officially released, aiding in the popularity of shows across language barriers. Equally, fan ‘subbing’ can also introduce extra layers of meaning and engagement. Moreover, fan practices can normalise viewing and listening experiences with subtitles and audio description.

To date, there has been no in-depth study of the transmedia affordances of these features. Yet these features have much to offer fans by offering another point of entry into the story. Equally, fandom, or fan communities, can often be unsung producers of additional elements which can enhance, or even alter, both the accessibility, and meaning, of televisual narrative worlds.

FEASIBILITY AND RESOURCING – DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT THIS PROJECT WILL RECEIVE:

The project is aligned within CCAT’s broader priorities into scaling up audio description and captioning research to consider diverse audiences. We have already received funding from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Echo360 and the ARC on these topics. Further support for this project will be factored into an ARC linkage grant currently in development with the Centre for Inclusive Design, ACCAN and the ABC. Screenwest and Stan have also expressed interest in this project.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT/ PROGRAM FOR THE ENROLLING SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION:

Curtin is committed to embracing new technologies and valuing diversity in its Strategic Vision 2020. The project also aligns with

- The Faculty’s focus on technology,
• MCASI’s research priority Media, Culture and Technology
• The work of The Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT).

The proposed project traverses CCAT’s research priority areas of Digital Inclusion and Media Access and Digital Culture and New Media. CCAT research across these fields demonstrates that the study of culture, with its emphasis on identity, meanings, relationships, power and values, needs to be better integrated with the study of media and digital technologies, especially the internet.

Students must express interest in this scholarship opportunity by emailing the Project Lead listed below. Please provide a copy of your current curriculum vitae and detail your suitability to be involved in this strategic project.

PROJECT LEAD CONTACT:

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