

# ‘THE SCHNEIDERVERSE’

## NICKELODEON, CONVERGENT TELEVISION AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Helena Louise Dare-Edwards

Art, Media & American Studies

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Norwich

NR4 7TJ

United Kingdom

[helena.de3@gmail.com](mailto:helena.de3@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This article will analyse the textual features of two recent and successful American-based Nickelodeon shows, both of which incorporate digital and social technologies into their sitcom-style format. Aimed at a tween-girl<sup>1</sup> audience, these ‘convergence comedies’<sup>2</sup> complicate traditional notions of media spectatorship and the distinctions between media producers and consumers as audiences are invited to participate in the processes of production. While media convergence is built into the visual style of both shows, the shows themselves converge to create a shared fictional world, dubbed the ‘Schneiderverse,’ which traverses the boundary between the real and the fictional. It will be considered how the audience’s media experience<sup>3</sup> could be enriched through immersion in the online spaces associated with the texts.

**Keywords:** convergence, transmedia storytelling, multiplatforming, Nickelodeon, performative participation, media experience

Since its inception Nickelodeon developed a strong relationship with their audience, particularly encouraging and accommodating children’s involvement in programming and fostering a spirit of participation, long before the participatory and social media landscape of the 2010s. Many of Nickelodeon’s earliest and most successful shows involved children as co-producers be it in front or behind the camera, thus offering them the chance to shape the kind

1 Tweens are approximately eight to twelve years old and as an age category it is highly gendered, usually referring to girls. Sarah Projansky, *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination & Celebrity Culture*, New York University Press, 2014, p. 18. Furthermore, targeting this audience is particularly key as girls in particular have embraced the social aspects of the web and are more likely than boys to be content creators. Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Veronika Kalmus, Pille Runnel, ‘Creating Content or Creating Hype: Practices of Online Content Creation and Consumption in Estonia,’ *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 2, 1, 2008, <http://cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclan-ku=2008060202&article=1>, Accessed 7 June 2014.

2 Ethan Thompson, ‘iWant My TweenTV: *iCarly*, Sitcom 2.0,’ *Flow*, August 2008, <http://flowtv.org/2008/08/iwant-my-tweentv-icarly-sitcom-20-ethan-thompson-texas-am-corpus-christi/>, Accessed 17 February 2012.

3 Barbara Gentikow, Exploring Media Experiences: A New Approach to Reception Theory and Empirical Studies. Paper presented at the First European Communication Conference. Amsterdam, November 2005 cited in Brita Ytre-Arne, ‘“I Want To Hold it in My Hands:’ Readers’ Experiences of The Phenomenological Differences Between Women’s Magazines Online and In Print,’ *Media, Culture & Society?*, 33, 3, 2011, p. 467–468.

of media they consumed. Children's opinions were privileged and their approval actively sought during the production process.<sup>4</sup> Continuing this tradition of participation, and updating it to align with contemporary media technologies, *iCarly* (2007–2012) and *Victorious* (2010–2013), both created by Nickelodeon veteran Dan Schneider, invite and promote further engagement with the texts through multimedia platforms, and make such participation visible within the texts themselves. Of course, just because such opportunities are offered does not mean that all audiences will embrace them.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is important to note that not all entry points to engage with the TV shows are equally available to European and/or non-English speaking audiences. These differences will be accounted for throughout the article.

The opportunities for audience participation structure the very nature of *iCarly* and *Victorious* and likely contributed greatly to their commercial success. The two series illustrate the ways in which “contemporary multiplatforming strategies accelerate encounters between audiences, television texts, and spaces of production.”<sup>6</sup> The representation and integration of multiplatforming practices within the two series reconfigures and enables closer proximity between the spaces of consumption, narrative, and production; heightening the potential for intense audience investments that can work with and enhance the ‘media experience’. In this way, TV “is no longer watched but performed,”<sup>7</sup> and the TV texts themselves and the online spaces that form part of the world of *iCarly* and *Victorious*, promote this very kind of performativity.

Through the use of multiplatformed elements, technological convergence is displayed within the shows’ diegeses through the media practices of the characters. Audiences are also encouraged to make use of convergent technologies themselves. In taking up this invitation, audiences can participate in the Schneiderverse – a fictional universe in which all shows created by Dan Schneider co-exist – as well as create and contribute their own content that can be featured within it. Audiences are also potentially drawn further into the Schneiderverse through a form of ‘spatial convergence’ that operates within the TV texts and their online spaces. Representing the “increasing collision of diegetic and tangible spaces”<sup>8</sup> the series’ websites exist within the Schneiderverse and can be accessed by TV audiences on the internet and are thus ‘digital extensions’ posing as ‘digital artifacts.’<sup>9</sup>

The online spaces created for *iCarly* and *Victorious* offer various opportunities for participation, each reflecting quite varied degrees of content production and content consumption. In her work on women’s magazines and their readers, Brita Ytre-Arne<sup>10</sup> utilizes the concept of media experiences in order to highlight the different ways the media is placed and experienced in people’s lives. It can also be considered a ‘substitute’ for media use or media consumption.<sup>11</sup> This concept is particularly useful here since the media experience offered by *iCarly* and *Victorious*, individually and together, cannot be strictly delineated between consumption and production. Examples of this can be seen most clearly in the online spaces of *iCarly* and *Victorious* which offer the means to create content – from commenting on a blog to producing a video – and also to consume and follow content made by other users and the characters themselves.

4 Henry Jenkins, ‘Interview with Geraldine Laybourne,’ in Heather Hendershot, eds, *Nickelodeon Nation: The History, Politics and Economics of America’s Only TV Channel for Kids*, New York University Press, 2004, p. 134-155.

5 For instance, many older (than the target demographic) *iCarly* fans in a Live-journal community were ambivalent about character blogs and their canonical status.

6 Derek Johnson, ‘Inviting Audiences In: The Spatial Reorganization of Production and Consumption in ‘TVIII,’’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 5, 1, 2007, 61.

7 Kurt Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan Performances in a Media Universe*, University of Texas Press, 2001, p. 32.

8 Johnson 2007, p. 73.

9 Ivan Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium*, MA Thesis, Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, 2007, <http://cmsw.mit.edu/television-2-0-tv-as-an-engagement-medium/>, Accessed 13 September 2014, p. 64-5.

10 Gentikow, 2005 in Arne 2011a; Brita Ytre-Arne, ‘Women’s Magazines and Their Readers: The Relationship Between Textual Features and Practices Of Reading,’ *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14, 2, 2011b, p. 213–228.

11 Gentikow 2005 in Arne 2011a.

## 1 'Transmedia Storytelling' and Schneider-as-Author

First coined by Henry Jenkins,<sup>12</sup> transmedia storytelling represents the integration of entertainment experiences and the threading of a narrative across multiple platforms. In crafting a single story, or 'world-building',<sup>13</sup> using multiple media that together present a comprehensive and synchronized experience of the complex story, the audience can be immersed in a fictional universe via a number of diverse entry points. In a criticism of Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling, Matthijs P. Baarspul<sup>14</sup> explains that most cases referred to as examples do not in fact adhere to the rules that Jenkins describes. Rather than different texts forming a singular (grand) narrative, there are instead a multiplicity of narratives that share a referential framework. Together, the various texts create a greater sense of meaning as they heavily refer to each other, but they only link on an intertextual, rather than a narrative level. Thus, Baarspul refers to this as 'transmedia intertextuality'.<sup>15</sup> In *iCarly* and *Victorious* transmediation finds interesting ways to switch between social networks, television, and the internet. Convergent technologies provide the various platforms through which the storyworld can exist across and between. This convergence of technologies also structures the TV texts, both visually and narratively. While the two shows each utilise a range of mediums and formats to construct and enrich their stories, they also share the same narrative universe and bleed into each other's narratives, essentially expanding the range of platforms that both series touch upon and the number of spaces which they occupy.

Over the last decade, in conjunction with technological advances, transmedia storytelling/intertextuality has gained momentum and become more pervasive. It has, however, not always been successful, as television networks have misunderstood what constitutes meaningful online content and misjudged its value to audiences.<sup>16</sup> Although world-building may work to sustain franchise development, the content that exists outside the TV text itself is not solely conceived as part of a marketing strategy. Instead, each part is created to contribute to the storyworld in various distinctive ways as part of a 'synergistic whole'.<sup>17</sup> Evans suggests that transmedia texts have become less about promoting a central media text, and more about creating a coherent and enriched multi-platform narrative experience, engulfing the audience in a 'paranoid mist'<sup>18</sup> that obscures the boundaries between reality and fiction.

The online content associated with *iCarly* and *Victorious* frequently crosses over into reality itself, bursting the fictional bubble. The Schneiderverse consistently makes use of the internet (within the diegesis and the 'real world' internet) to circulate and distribute content related to Nickelodeon and Schneider. Furthermore, Schneider-as-author is referenced and promoted within the TV texts and hence must exist as a brand within the Schneiderverse itself. This crossover of the series creator raises a set of important questions: is this merely shameless self-promotion, or does this knowledge add layers of meaning for audiences? Does it contribute to the media experience or does it only disrupt the boundaries of the fictional world?

Schneider-as-author was certainly made apparent from the early days of *iCarly*, his particular brand of comedy instantly recognisable to those familiar with his earlier works. As the seasons progressed, extra-textual references to Dan Warp – his production company and online avatar – became more frequent and more brazen, coinciding with Schneider's increased online interaction with the *iCarly* fanbase.<sup>19</sup> In one prominent display of self-promotion, Sam (Jennette McCurdy) is seen wearing a T-shirt that urges audiences to follow Schneider on Twitter (Figure 1).

12 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006.

13 Jeffrey Sconce, 'What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries,' in Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds, *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 95.

14 Matthijs P. Baarspul, *Where Transmedia Storytelling Goes Wrong: A Preliminary Exploration of the Issues with Transmedia Storytelling*, BA Thesis, 2012, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/253186>, Accessed 13 September 2014.

15 Ibid, p. 26.

16 See for example, Ivan Askwith, 'When Transmedia Goes Wrong: Studio 60 and DeFaker,' *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, October 2006, [http://henryjenkins.org/2006/10/when\\_transmedia\\_goes\\_wrong\\_stu.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2006/10/when_transmedia_goes_wrong_stu.html), Accessed 13 September 2014.

17 Evans 2011.

18 Jason Mittel 'Lost in an Alternate Reality,' *Flow*, June 2006, <http://flowtv.org/2006/06/lost-in-an-alternate-reality/>, Accessed 7 June 2014.

19 Initially Schneider communicated with only a small dedicated community of fans on Livejournal, many of whom had grown up with his previous shows. He then migrated to Blogspot, an open forum that could be publicly promoted to a wider range of fans, and which he had greater control over, and later joined Twitter.



Fig. 1 Sam's 'PennyTee' promoting Schneider's Twitter handle. Screenshot taken from iCarly episode, 'iWas a Pageant Girl', 3. 11.

This hyper-intertextual reference crosses the boundary between the real and fictional as it relates to the production of the show. It thus disrupts the diegetic bounds of the text, or what Matt Hills has referred to as the 'hyperdiegesis,' the consistent continuity that makes the narrative cohere as an ontologically secure world.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, these 'disruptive' references not only impart meaning to the two texts, individually and in their crossovers, but they also connect the audience with the series creator, offering possibilities for participation and production. Such participation is limited however. For non-English speaking audiences, there do not appear to be provisions for facilitating Twitter engagement with Schneider, nor are there official series-specific accounts. Instead, there are only generic Nickelodeon Twitter accounts for European audiences, mostly comprised of promotional tweets for all branded programming.

The websites directly concerned with the individual series function to blend the narrative world(s) into the real world of the internet. Schneider-as-author and Danwarp are entirely absent from these Nickelodeon owned websites and therefore in-text references would be the only way to promote Schneider's online presence. Through the text, audiences are invited to interact with Schneider online, which has the potential to intensify the media experience in three ways. Firstly, while the series websites are strictly one-way, i.e. they do not 'talk back' to the user, **Schneider's website** directly addresses audiences, and his presence on Twitter suggests the possibility of receiving comments in response.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the online spaces associated with Schneider offer audiences additional perspectives of the storyworld, such as characters back-stories or 'inside' information to plot developments. Rather than eroding the illusion of a fictional, yet inhabitable world and disrupting the audience's continuous space within it on the shows' sites, audiences can gain a deeper understanding of the Schneiderverse, its fictional construction, and the characters within it via Schneider's blog. Thirdly, audiences can also learn about the production of the two shows, for instance how they are produced and constructed or in what ways they relate to the broader history of television sitcoms. As an 'engagement touchpoint',<sup>22</sup> Schneider's blogspot offers ancillary content, i.e. new information which supplements or expands overall knowledge, as well as extratextual information, which functions as a 'mediating text'<sup>23</sup> that helps shape audience perceptions of the TV producer. Once more however, there do not appear to be mirror websites for European audiences.

20 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, Routledge, 2002.

21 When *iCarly* and *Victorious* were first aired, Schneider's blog allowed audiences to comment on his posts, much like a message board. This function and the archives, and thus potential engagement with Schneider's new shows was removed in 2014.

22 Askwith 2007, p. 59.

23 John Caldwell 'Critical Industrial Practice: Branding, Repurposing, and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts,' *Television & New Media*, 7, 2, 2006, p. 113.

## 1.1 *iCarly* and Audience Participation

On September 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, *iCarly* premiered on the Nickelodeon channel and has since been described as one of the biggest success stories of 'convergence comedy',<sup>24</sup> deftly uniting TV screen with computer screen. Considered '**the only kid's show plugged seamlessly into the online world**',<sup>25</sup> *iCarly* was initially positioned as "**a bold embrace of the future**"<sup>26</sup> to prospective advertisers who were likely to be interested in the potential that cross-platforming would hold. A (web)show-within-a-(TV)show format, *iCarly* features tween-age<sup>27</sup> girl Carly (Miranda Cosgrove), her best friend Sam, and her neighbour Freddie (Nathan Kress) who together produce their own successful webshow and inadvertently become internet celebrities. Most episodes revolve around the production of the webshow that they broadcast directly from a makeshift studio in Carly's loft. In addition to generating narratives, the show-within-a-show format functions in two other key ways; to invite audiences into the production of the TV show and to involve audiences in the 'series architecture'<sup>28</sup> via web 2.0 applications.

Within the webshow segments, Carly routinely invites viewers to create and upload videos of themselves to the *iCarly* website. This may be a somewhat predictable stunt, yet it is reflective of Nickelodeon's history of encouraging audience participation, and works to capture the attention, and reflect the behaviours of the so-called '**YouTube generation**.' Furthermore, the web show segments themselves resemble the irreverent and comedic tone of some of the most popular YouTubers<sup>29</sup> amongst teen audiences.



Video 1. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*iCarly*: "iCook: Spaghetti Tacos".

24 Thompson 2008.

25 Denise Martin, 'iCarly': Ruler of the Tweens,' *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/28/entertainment/et-icarly28>, Accessed 17 February 2012.

26 Jonathan Dee, 'Tween on the Screen,' 8 April 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/magazine/08NICKELODEON.t.html?\\_r=2&oref=login&ref=magazine&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/magazine/08NICKELODEON.t.html?_r=2&oref=login&ref=magazine&pagewanted=all), Accessed 17 February 2012.

27 See endnote 1.

28 Sconce 2004.

29 See for instance [Jenna Marbles](#) and [Tyler Oakley](#).



Viewer-generated content can be featured in an episode of the webshow within the TV show, during the TV show's closing credits, or featured on the website that is doubly constructed as that for the webshow and TV show. Although the request is issued to the audience of the webshow within the narrative world, this offer of (brief) fame traverses the fourth wall (the invisible boundary between a fictional world and the real world) and is extended to the real world audience. Unfortunately, the invitation to participate in this way is restricted to American audiences and therefore the user-generated content featured in the show is only created by American users. Outside America, online content associated with *iCarly* is greatly reduced – there is no option for users to learn how to create and submit videos and there are far fewer videos available for consumption. Furthermore, the overall appearance of the *iCarly.com* website alters for those outside America as users will be redirected to their own domestic Nickelodeon website within which the *iCarly* content will be embedded. In this way, online content is unmistakably 'Nickelodeon' as opposed to appearing as diegetic artifacts that exist within the narrative world.

## 2 Technological and Spatial Convergence

*iCarly* consistently blurs the line between the real and fictional via its convergence of various platforms, intertextuality and its existence in both the Schneiderverse and the real world. Convergence is built into the visual style of the show through the use of transition sequences between scenes such as a laptop screen displaying an editing program used to produce the webshow, and the *iCarly.com* website featuring clips to be selected that then open up into the next scene. The symbiotic and intertextual relationship of webshow, website, and TV show allows audiences to switch between, and occupy multiple viewing positions through different media formats. During any given episode, audiences watch *iCarly* the webshow, at various stages of its production and through multiple cameras, computer screens and interfaces both within and outside the diegesis. Watching from various spaces and via different technologies reflects, if not romanticises the real world behaviour of the TV audience who "commute rapidly between multiple platforms, genres and devices"<sup>30</sup> and likely watch the TV show and its additional content on various media platforms.

Within the diegesis audiences may watch the webshow as it is filmed through the camera lens or as it is streamed online on a PearPad (the Schneiderverse's version of an iPad) or a laptop. In this way, audiences (regardless of geographical location) are invited in to the diegesis and occupy a privileged position in which they are granted access to 'behind the scenes' of the webshow or can watch it 'live' alongside the characters. Sometimes audiences watch the characters watching the webshow, and other times point-of-view shots enable the audience to watch the webshow as though they are the character. Either way, the audience occupies an honoured space that breaks down and peeps through the fourth wall.

The cameras the audiences 'look through' alternate between diegetic and pseudo-diegetic. Diegetic are those that belong to the fictional world of the series that the characters themselves use to film their webshow. These shots therefore operate as/through a characters' point-of-view such as a shot through Freddie's viewfinder (Figure 2), allowing audiences to both identify with the character and to become a part of the production process.

The **pseudo-diegetic** cameras are those that belong to the Nickelodeon filmed television show and allow the audience to inhabit the narrative realm as though watching behind the scenes. The majority of an episode's action then occupies **extra-diegetic** space: that which is concerned with the series as a television programme and filmed by cameras that do not exist within the fictional world.

Such is the structure of the show, the transitions between the various spaces and 'ways of looking' are relatively seamless, effectively drawing the audience into the narrative world as onlookers and co-producers.

30 Ranjana Das, 'Digital Youth, Diversity and Heterogeneity: A Report on the LSE POLIS Silverstone Panel on Digital Natives,' *Journal of Media Practice*, 11, 3, 2009, 293.



Fig. 2 Live recording of iCarly the webshow. Screenshot taken from iCarly episode, 'iWas a Pageant Girl', 3. 11.

## 2.1 iCarly.com and Webisodes

While the webshow is central to the narrative of the TV show, functioning as a catalyst for the episode storyline, the iCarly.com website is equally important and as such becomes like a (transmedia) character itself, one which exists within the real world and the Schneiderverse. The website is heavily referenced throughout the show, usually via characters urging the audience to log-on during a webisode or by various members of the cast during the closing credit sequence. In 'iWant More Viewers' 1: 02 the characters themselves are seen employing various creative tactics to attract more viewers to their webshow, offering audiences a 'backstage' glimpse of the strategies of promotion (Figure 3).

The push towards the *iCarly* website is also evident within the opening credit sequence.

The sequence begins with the image of a web browser as iCarly.com is typed into the address bar. Beneath this, the names and logos of fictional websites, posing as bookmarks are prominently displayed. Each of these sites are parodies of popular websites, for example, 'SplashFace' (YouTube and Facebook) and 'Zaplook' (Google). If typed into a real web browser (otherwise known as '**logging onto the fourth wall**') each of these, along with any others mentioned by the characters in the narrative instantly re-direct to iCarly.com,<sup>31</sup> thus providing extra hits for the website. Of course, encouraging audiences to visit the website is a strategic and self-promotional move, yet because the website is both real and fictional, the persistent references to it seem more subtle than direct extra-textual promotion.

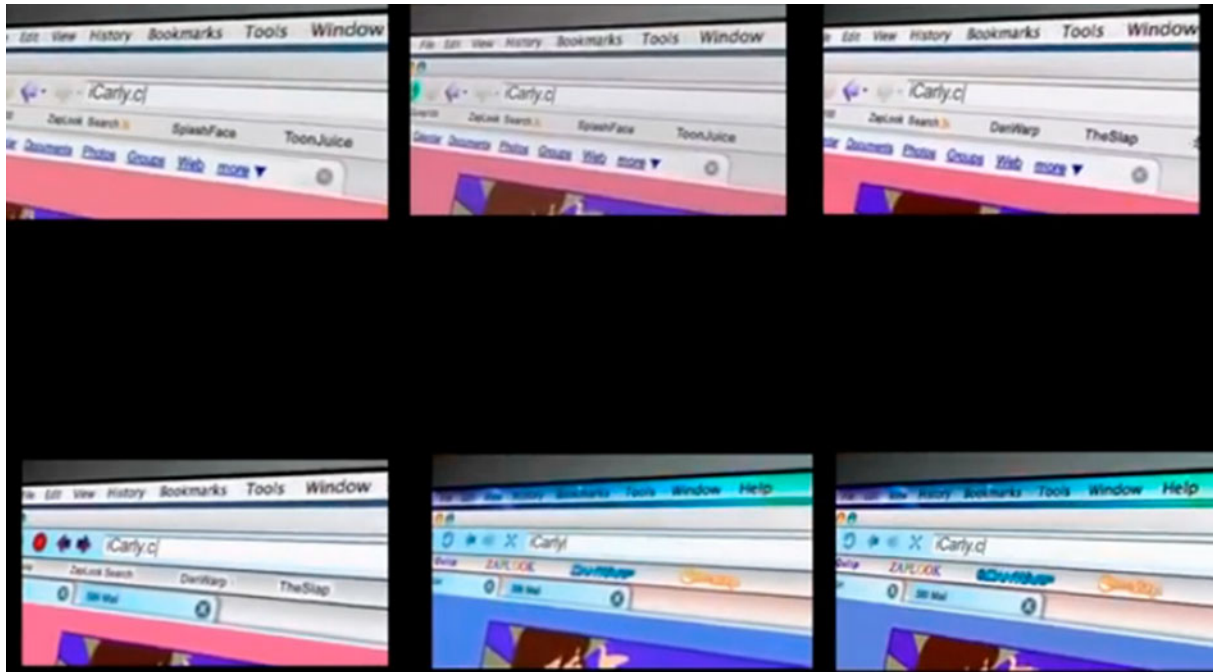
In terms of online content, the iCarly.com website hosts various series of short webisodes. Some series, for example iCarly: iHave a Question, are relatively unrelated to the narrative world or the series' plot development but they are believable diegetic extensions,<sup>32</sup> in that they pose as content that the characters would post on the webshow's website.

These adopt an episodic video blog style, with characters reading audience questions and addressing the camera directly. Within this series the iCarly gang remain in character, although there are special guest appearances from the *Victorious* cast who inconsistently appear as themselves or their characters.

In contrast, the iWake Up Spencer series was supplementary, extending the narrative and further exploring the characters' relationships in ways that many fans desired and considered otherwise constrained by the 23-minute sitcom

31 Users in Europe will be redirected to their country's own iCarly Nickelodeon website.

32 Askwith 2007, p. 131.



Video 2. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
iCarly Opening Credits [Season 1–6].

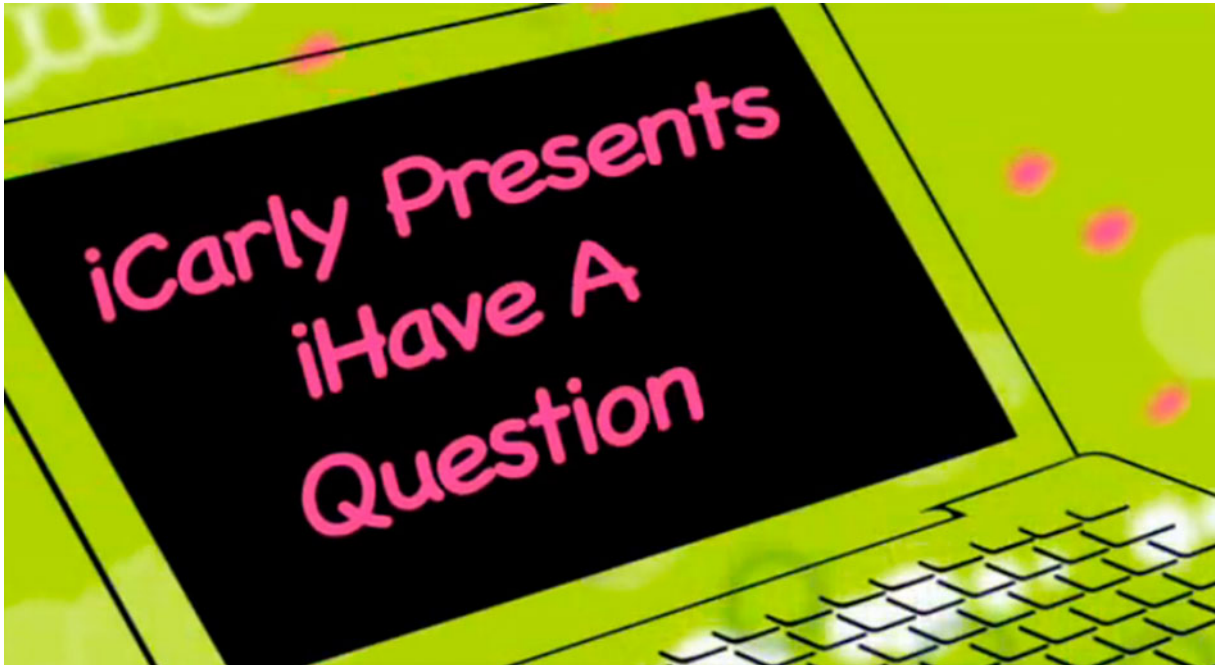


Fig. 3 Promotion for iCarly.com with an illuminated roadside billboard. Screenshot taken from iCarly episode, 'iWant More Viewers' 1: 02.

format. According to Ivan Askwith<sup>33</sup> the most effective touchpoints enhance the intrinsic pleasures that draw viewers to the show. In the case of this webseries, it was most effective/popular for enhancing a specific fan pleasure that was borne out of their established and sustained engagement with the show.

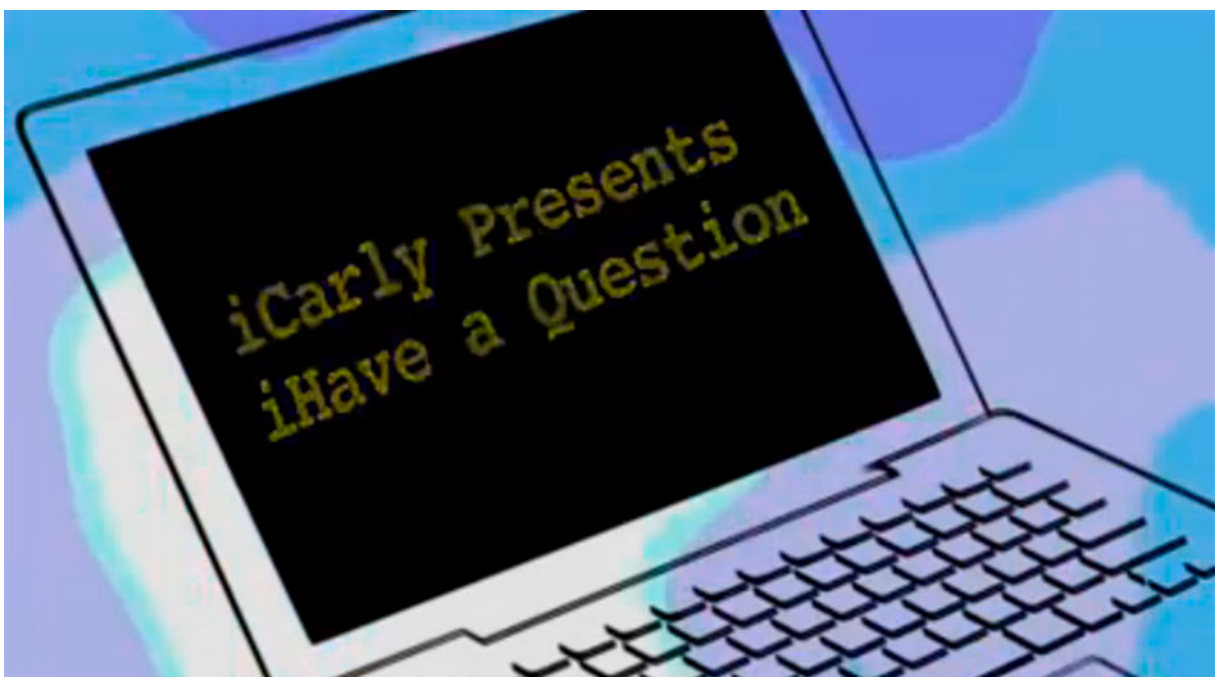
<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 56.





Video 3. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*iCarly iHave a Question: What's under the Table???*

Broadly speaking, *iCarly* fans were deeply divided between 'ships', i.e. those invested in the pairing of Sam and Freddie (Seddie) and those who supported the potential relationship of Carly and Freddie (Creddie). This series features Sam and Freddie comically awakening Carly's brother Spencer in the early hours of the morning. For 'Seddie shippers,' this additional content was considered promising, as a potential hint from Schneider towards their future relationship. Many of the comments posted to Schneider's website and tweets sent to him over the course of the show's run consisted of



Video 4. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*iCarly iHave a Question: Victoria Justice!*



Video 5. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*iCarly Wake Up Spencer: Sound FX!.*

pleas to unite one of the pairings and thus this series was considered by some as a response to the barrage of requests made of him.

There are also other series and sporadic episodes within other series' that combine members of the *iCarly* and *Victorious* cast and refer to them by their real name and thereby work to promote the actors. While some of these offer



Video 6. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*A Random Debate With iCarly and Victorious!.*



Video 7. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*iCarly*. Segment of the Baby Spencer series.

extratextual information, others blur the line between character and actor insofar as they seem to suggest inherent similarities between the two.

Both *iCarly* and *Victorious* play with, draw attention to, and even break, the fourth wall by referring to it directly. In one particularly interesting example, as part of the Baby Spencer series, Freddie questions Carly's brother Spencer (Jerry Trainor) about Jerry Trainor – the actor himself. Remaining in character, Spencer explains how he is adamant that they should not be breaking the fourth wall, admitting: "It violates everything I believe in!" and later adding: "Baby don't like shameless self-promotion."

Although such instances would seem to disrupt the bounds of the webshow's website, *iCarly.com* does not strictly maintain the pretense that it belongs to the fictional world since it contains links to Nickelodeon's generic website. Furthermore, in this instance at least, the blurring of reality and fiction is played to comic effect.

## 2.2 Victorious and The Schneiderverse

Joining the Schneiderverse several years later in March 2010, *Victorious* is set in Hollywood Arts, a performing arts school in Hollywood and centres around Tori Vega (Victoria Justice), an aspiring young singer working towards her dream to become a famous pop star. *Victorious* was created by Dan Schneider especially for Victoria Justice to showcase her acting and singing talents, just as *iCarly* was for Miranda Cosgrove, both of whom had appeared in earlier Schneider sitcoms, *Zoey 101* (2005–2008) and *Drake and Josh* (2004–2007) respectively. Indeed, Schneider is known for 'recycling' actors from his various creations and spawning new shows from his previous shows, thereby creating a 'family tree' of sorts. Although this manoeuvre can be seen to contribute to the world-building practices of the Schneiderverse, it is not a coherent or entirely fictional universe. Fans are often left to devise elaborate theories in order to make sense of the various inconsistencies that arise within this fictional world, such as Drake Parker (Drake Bell) from *Drake and Josh* appearing in an episode of *Victorious* after *Drake and Josh* is established as a TV show in the *Victorious* universe. *Victorious* also further illustrates the Schneiderverse's habit of referencing reality, for example





Video 8. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
*TheSlap Hollywood Arts' Victorious - Robarazzi.*

the character's name is an abbreviation of the actresses name and the title of the show an anagram, ensuring that it is not forgotten by audiences. This is then further highlighted by the **logo** designed for the series.

### 2.3 The Slap.com: Social Media Sites and Performative Participation

*Victorious* foregrounds multiplatform digital entertainment and is semi-narrated through Tori's status updates on '**The Slap**' – a social networking website that resembles Facebook. Although the website is central to the storyline of several episodes, including the **concept-driven** 'Robarazzi' 1: 07 in which Robbie (Matt Bennett) transforms his Slap blog into a TMZ-style gossip 'vlog,' the social network is primarily used as a transmedia storytelling device.

Narrating the show in this way imitates the online behavior of the young audience as well as providing a point of identification with the show's protagonist.

It also further encourages social media-type activity as The Slap is a fully-functioning website (accessible only to American audiences unless utilising the address prefix<sup>34</sup>), constructed as a community of Hollywood Arts students that audiences can also join. Once more then, the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred as the audience and the characters converge in one space.

On The Slap, the audience can interact with the characters online as through they were real people: read their blogs, watch their videos and check their updates between episodes via their **profile page**. Immersion and participation in this online space is limited; while users can create their own profile, they cannot upload personal content, and although they can post comments on the characters profiles, only a select few are displayed. The Nickelodeon owned website must

<sup>34</sup> In this article I have provided links to the American websites with the prefix 'origin' in the web address. Without this one would be redirected by Nickelodeon according to location.





Video 9. Click [here](#) to watch it.  
Tori's status updates in *Victorious*.

be suitable for young children and thus it is closely monitored for inappropriate language or comments. The limits posed on the feedback mechanism are of course also favourable for the producers since any negative feedback can be withheld from public view to protect the brand image.

The opportunity to participate in this way may be enjoyable and empowering for young people, offering the sense that their voices are heard and their opinions considered important, yet as Martens<sup>35</sup> notes in her discussion of user-generated content and teenage girls' affective labour, their agency is not a consideration. Corporate-owned websites are highly manipulated in order to best market and maintain the brand. Feedback, both negative and positive, is merely another aspect of production to be measured and taken in. Audience comments may be taken into account, but it is less likely for the benefit of the audience and their realised influence over the development of the series than it is commodifying their labour in order to sell it back to them. As Murphy explains, "these '**networked publics**' of the new media sphere are more than simply points of convergence – they are readymade marketing focus groups, volunteering and self-publishing their feedback in communities that serve multiple purposes."<sup>36</sup>

For a social media-type website, the opportunity to be social in the form of fan-to-fan interaction is not actually possible on The Slap. The website gives the appearance of community but actually denies communication between members. Since for many, fandom is coterminous with community, *iCarly* and *Victorious* fans communicated on Tumblr and Livejournal and created unofficial message boards outside the corporate-created websites that failed to provide a space for social interaction. On The Slap, participation is performative rather than fully interactive or integrated into the structure of the social network. In this way, the focus remains exclusively on the characters and the audiences interaction with them, although this interaction is only one-way since the characters do not interact with the audience. Instead, audiences merely view the content, or more specifically, navigate their way around various character profiles and learn about them from afar; this is particularly key as *Victorious* is comprised of an ensemble cast. Within the limits of a twenty-three minute sitcom it is difficult to get to fully know six central characters and thus the online material likely

35 Marianne Martens, 'Transmedia Teens: Affect, Immaterial Labor, and User-Generated Content,' *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17,1, 2011, 65.

36 Sheila C. Murphy, *How Television Invented New Media*, Rutgers University Press, 2011, p. 70.

deepens audience knowledge and identifications/relations with the characters. More than this, The Slap invites audiences to immerse themselves in the fictional realm, as though they too attended the performing arts school, via a social network that is also referred to in *iCarly*, thereby covertly encouraging and directing audiences to participate in the series architecture<sup>37</sup> and the Schneiderverse more broadly.

## 2.4 Crossovers and 'Spatial Collisions'<sup>38</sup>

Within both shows it is made clear that they share the same fictional world and the same author. They share the same technology: in a parody of Apple, these characters own 2-ft long **Pearpads**, compose their status updates on **Pearphones** and even get a job at the **Pear Store**. Characters also adopt the same slang terms that are particular to the Schneiderverse, often clearly sanitized versions of expletives that would otherwise be too strong for Nickelodeon. There is also character movement and actor crossover between the two shows which paves the way for an array of intertextual references and 'inside' jokes. As with the web series on iCarly.com, these are not always coherent or in keeping with continuity, and yet this very lack of logic is acknowledged and played with for comic effect. For example, Victoria Justice appears as Shelby Marx, a female boxer, on the season two finale of *iCarly*. Later, in the made-for-TV movie entitled *iParty with Victorious*, a crossover episode aired during season four of *iCarly*, Carly and friends find Tori Vega's profile on the Slap.com. Browsing her pictures Sam notes how much she resembles Shelby Marx; to which Freddie agrees but ironically claims that Tori is "much hotter" than Shelby.

During the crossover episode the two casts appear side by side. While the students of Hollywood Arts are unknown to the iCarly team, Tori and friends are fans of the iCarly webshow and are very excited when they meet the cyber-celebrities. The characters eventually meet at a party hosted by Kenan of *Kenan and Kel* (1996–2000), a popular sitcom also created by Schneider, who further references Schneider's history within the narrative when he mentions *All That* (1994–2005) which Tori also claims to be a fan of.

Although both *iCarly* and *Victorious* are no longer in production, the Schneiderverse lives on and has, arguably paid more attention to issues of continuity. Rather than moving an actress from one show to another and recasting them, as with Cosgrove and Justice, Schneider instead created a double spin-off with a popular character from each sitcom entitled *Sam and Cat* (2013–2014).

## 2.5 Convergence and the 'Media Experience'

Digital media is central in the lives of many young people, with digital activities occupying a greater share of their time in everyday life.<sup>39</sup> *iCarly* and *Victorious* illustrate the centrality of the media in young people's lives, as both shows revolve around the characters' consumption and creation of internet content. They also make use of their young audiences' online presence and provide them with content that mimics their most common modes of online participation: writing and commenting on blogs and communicating via social media.<sup>40</sup> Further to this, afforded by the opportunities that convergence presents, audiences are also invited to participate in both the world of the television text and the processes of its production by consuming online content that elaborates on, and exists in, the 'Schneiderverse.' In this way then, the 'media experience'<sup>41</sup> offered by the two shows is multifaceted, and combines opportunities for content, consumption, and production. That being said, with the exception of repackaged content, such as short clips and

37 Sconce 2004.

38 Johnson 2007, p. 73.

39 Sonja Kangas, 'Introduction to Communication Acrobatics and Social Tipping Networks,' in Sonja Kangas, eds, *Digital Pioneers. Cultural Drivers of Future Media Culture*, Nuorisotutkimusseura, 2011, <http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/julkaisuja/digitalpioneers.pdf>. Accessed 7 June 2014, p. 5-7.

40 Eliisa Vainikka and Juha Herkman, 'Generation of Content-Producers? The Reading and Media Production Practices of Young Adults,' *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 10, 2, 2013, p. 118.

41 Gentikow 2005 in Arne 2011a.

character bios, and a variety of games and cast pictures, most of the content that is structured to invite audiences in to the narrative world are inaccessible to audiences outside America. Although many of the web-only videos are (unofficially) available on YouTube, as with Schneider's Twitter there is no provision for non-English speaking audiences. The convergent media experience that is offered within and between the core TV programmes is therefore the main source of engagement and transmediality for European audiences.

Explicitly sharing the same fictional universe, *iCarly* and *Victorious* converge and collide with intense frequency that, when watched together, audiences can potentially enjoy a heightened and enriched experience. As with the multiplicity of texts that Baarspul<sup>42</sup> describes as part of transmedia intertextuality they do not form one grand singular narrative. They standalone narratively but combine to create a more expansive world – the Schneiderverse – that exists across various platforms. The 'spatial collisions'<sup>43</sup> that enable one TV series to be watched from within the hyperdiegetic space of another also further complicate and blur the boundaries between the real and the fictional, the diegetic and the tangible spaces. By using the connectivity of the online spaces, *iCarly* and *Victorious* allow the textual and the everyday to merge. The multiplatforming practices of the ideal audience, combined with the representation of multiplatform communication within the series' diegesis, illustrate the ways in which the spatial relationships between audiences, television networks/producers, and the hyperdiegetic world of the television series have been altered within convergence culture.

The at-once fictional and real online spaces have restructured the relationship between audiences and production, allowing for the possibility of consumers becoming producers, while they also invite performative participation in the narrative universe. Although both shows systematically disperse elements of their storyworlds across multiple media platforms, each medium enriching the story and the media experience in different ways, the numerous crossovers/spatial collisions of the two shows combine to provide a more immersive interface. Yet, just as the effectiveness of transmedia elements rests on the extent to which the audience engages with them, immersion in a fictional storyworld, such as the Schneiderverse, depends on audience awareness and understanding of the intertextual references that structure it. For audiences that do not watch both shows, or are unable to engage with additional content due to their geographical location, *iCarly* and *Victorious* still offer a transmedia-esque experience via their very narrative and visual structure and their foregrounding, if not encouragement, of young people's use of convergent technology.

## Biography

Helena Louise Dare-Edwards is a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Art, Media and American Studies at the University of East Anglia. Her thesis, titled 'Interrogating Tweenhood Online: Fangirls, Gender, and *iCarly* Fandom' explores fandom from a gender/age perspective. Combining fan studies and girlhood studies it considers the much disparaged and marginalised fangirl identity across three fan spaces.

<sup>42</sup> Baarspul 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson 2007, p. 73.