

NAVIGATING THE NEW NARRATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF “SNOW FALL”

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ABSTRACT

As newspaper organizations transition to an online environment the question of whether new digital communication methods enhance or diminish the ability of long-form narratives to convey their message coherently and meaningfully is increasingly relevant for both journalism and society. Using concepts related to framing theory, narratology, and medium theory, this case study of *The New York Times* Pulitzer prize-winning online presentation of “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek” analyzes the content, form, and context of its multiple media narrative—three basic structural properties of all communication—to discover how narrative coherence and meaning develop. Results indicate that joining competing media forms in accordance with fundamental narrative construction, presentation, and design principles aids semiotic potential and overall narrative coherence, and mitigates the disruptive effects of technology and interactivity; that the spatial relationships of multiple media constructions contribute to narrative’s ability to tell coherent and meaningful stories; and that a newsroom organizational structure that facilitates a collaborative editing environment enables multi-skilled journalists to produce engaging multimedia narratives despite multiple layers of complexity.

Keywords: convergence, framing theory, medium theory, nonfiction narrative, narratology, semiology