

The Evolution of Harry Potter: Analyzing Character Development Across Transmedia Platforms



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KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
Harry Potter, Character Development, Transmedia Storytelling, Film Adaptation, Literary Analysis.	The Harry Potter series, spanning eight films and multiple transmedia adaptations, presents a compelling case for analyzing character evolution over time. This study employs a literature review methodology to examine Harry Potter's character development across various platforms, including films, novels, and related media adaptations. By focusing on key moments of growth, transformation, and narrative progression, this research explores how different directors, screenwriters, and producers have shaped the character throughout the franchise's development. The analysis highlights major thematic shifts in Harry Potter's character, from his early years as an orphan discovering his magical identity to his evolution into a self-reliant hero confronting fate. By examining significant milestones in select films, the study identifies patterns in character growth, moral struggles, and psychological development, considering external influences such as mentorship, friendships, and adversarial relationships. Furthermore, this research investigates how transmedia storytelling—including spin-off works, digital media, and expanded universe content—contributes to the multidimensional portrayal of Harry Potter. The findings suggest that character consistency and audience engagement across different media platforms are key factors in sustaining the cultural impact of long-running franchises. Ultimately, this study provides insights into character development in long-term narratives, offering valuable implications for screenwriters, directors, producers, and researchers seeking to create compelling and evolving characters in transmedia storytelling. By understanding how Harry Potter's character arc has been constructed and adapted, this research contributes to broader discussions on cinematic storytelling, adaptation theory, and character continuity in global franchises.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Harry Potter franchise stands as one of the most influential and enduring narratives in contemporary popular culture (Brummitt, 2018). Originating from J.K. Rowling's novel series, the story has expanded into eight feature films, stage plays, video games, theme parks, and an extensive collection of transmedia

adaptations. The evolution of Harry Potter, both as a character and as a transmedia phenomenon, reflects shifting thematic concerns, audience engagement strategies, and cinematic storytelling approaches (Walmsley, 2019). Over the years, different directors, screenwriters, and production teams have shaped Harry's character, adapting his personality and growth trajectory to fit various



narrative needs (Adler et al., 2016). This continuous adaptation across media platforms makes Harry Potter an ideal subject for examining character development in transmedia storytelling.

Despite the extensive academic discourse on Harry Potter, many studies have primarily focused on the literary aspects of the novels, thematic analyses, or the sociocultural impact of the franchise (Rahman et al., 2025). However, a comprehensive examination of Harry Potter's character evolution across transmedia platforms remains underexplored. Previous research often analyzes individual films or books but does not extensively compare how different media formats contribute to his development. Furthermore, studies rarely address how transmedia storytelling affects character continuity and transformation, leaving a gap in understanding the relationship between adaptation, media platform, and character evolution. Given the increasing reliance on transmedia narratives in modern franchises, this study is urgent in addressing how character development is maintained, altered, or expanded when a single character is portrayed across multiple media formats over time.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of the Harry Potter series, including its narrative structure, thematic depth, and cultural significance. For instance, research by Gupta (2020) highlights the moral and psychological growth of Harry Potter in the novels, emphasizing his transition from childhood to adulthood. Meanwhile, Brown (2018) examines the impact of different directors on the film adaptations, noting subtle shifts in character portrayal, cinematographic choices, and tone. Additionally, Williams (2019) investigates fan engagement in Harry Potter's transmedia expansion, focusing on how digital media and

fandom contribute to character interpretation. Despite these contributions, existing studies have not systematically analyzed Harry's character development across different media formats, particularly in terms of how different directors, writers, and platforms shape his arc within the franchise.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach to character development, integrating literary analysis, film studies, and transmedia storytelling theories. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated aspects of character growth, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Harry Potter's character evolves across different media. By analyzing key moments of transformation and adaptation in selected films, spin-offs, and transmedia content, this research offers a new perspective on character continuity and audience reception within an evolving franchise.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the evolution of Harry Potter's character across transmedia platforms, with a particular focus on how different directors, writers, and media formats influence his development. Specifically, this research aims to:

1. Identify key character development moments across selected films and transmedia content.
2. Analyze thematic and psychological growth patterns in Harry Potter's character.
3. Examine the role of transmedia storytelling in shaping audience perception of the character.
4. Provide practical insights for screenwriters, producers, and media scholars on character continuity in long-term franchises.

This study is significant for various stakeholders. For film directors and screenwriters, it provides valuable insights into how character development can be adapted across multiple media formats while maintaining continuity. For researchers in film and media studies, it contributes to discussions on transmedia storytelling and adaptation theory. Finally, for fans and literary scholars, it offers a deeper understanding of the narrative complexity behind one of the most beloved characters in modern literature and film.

By filling the existing research gap and providing a fresh perspective on transmedia character evolution, this study seeks to contribute to broader academic discussions on film adaptation, franchise storytelling, and character development in media studies.

2. METHOD

Research Type

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review methodology to analyze the character development of *Harry Potter* across various transmedia platforms. A qualitative approach is appropriate for examining narrative structures, thematic evolution, and character transformation, allowing for a deeper understanding of how different media adaptations contribute to shaping Harry Potter's character. The literature review method is used to synthesize existing academic discussions, theoretical perspectives, and media analyses to construct a comprehensive understanding of character evolution within the franchise.

Data Sources

This research relies on secondary data sources, including:

1. Primary sources – *Harry Potter* novels by J.K. Rowling, film adaptations produced by Warner Bros., and official transmedia extensions such as spin-off books, digital media, and stage adaptations (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*).
2. Academic journals and books – Studies on character development, transmedia storytelling, and adaptation theory, retrieved from scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest.
3. Film and media analyses – Critical essays, reviews, and scholarly critiques focusing on the cinematic and transmedia adaptation of Harry Potter, including insights from directors, screenwriters, and media theorists.
4. Fandom and audience reception studies – Analysis of fan engagement, audience interpretation, and cultural impact from media studies research and online archives related to fan theories, blogs, and digital discussions.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process follows a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, which involves:

1. Keyword-based search – Using specific keywords such as "*Harry Potter character development*," "*transmedia storytelling in Harry Potter*," and "*film adaptation character evolution*" to retrieve relevant literature.
2. Selection and screening – Filtering studies based on relevance, credibility, and contribution to the discussion of character development and transmedia adaptation. Studies published within the last 20 years are prioritized to ensure alignment with the franchise's historical timeline.
3. Thematic categorization – Grouping literature into key themes, such as narrative progression, directorial



influence, psychological growth, and transmedia expansion to structure the analysis effectively.

Data Analysis Method

The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the collected data. The analysis process consists of:

1. Thematic Analysis – Identifying key patterns of character development across different media adaptations, including psychological growth, moral dilemmas, and narrative transformations.
2. Comparative Analysis – Comparing Harry Potter's portrayal in novels, films, and transmedia content, focusing on how different media formats influence his characterization.
3. Conceptual Synthesis – Integrating insights from film adaptation theories, transmedia storytelling frameworks, and audience reception studies to construct a cohesive discussion on character continuity and evolution.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The evolution of Harry Potter's character across transmedia platforms, particularly within the eight-film adaptation produced by Warner Bros., illustrates a dynamic and multi-dimensional development shaped by narrative demands, directorial vision, and audience expectations. Over the course of a decade, from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011), Harry's character undergoes significant transformation, influenced by the different creative choices of the four directors—Chris Columbus, Alfonso Cuarón, Mike Newell, and David Yates—who brought their unique storytelling styles and cinematic approaches to

the franchise. This evolution is further extended through transmedia adaptations, including spin-off works, digital media, stage plays, and interactive content, which collectively contribute to the broader portrayal of Harry Potter beyond the original literary text.

Chris Columbus, who directed the first two films, established Harry Potter's character as a wide-eyed, innocent child, capturing the wonder and excitement of his discovery of the magical world. His adaptation remained faithful to the tone of J.K. Rowling's early books, emphasizing the childlike optimism and sense of adventure that defined Harry's initial experiences at Hogwarts. This approach was effective in building audience engagement, particularly among younger viewers who could identify with Harry's sense of amazement. However, as the series progressed, the necessity of exploring deeper psychological and emotional complexities in Harry's character became evident, prompting a shift in directorial vision.

Alfonso Cuarón, taking over for Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004), introduced a darker, more introspective portrayal of Harry. Under Cuarón's direction, Harry is no longer merely the wide-eyed protagonist but a character beginning to grapple with trauma, identity, and personal agency. The cinematography and visual tone reflect this transformation, employing muted colors, shadowed lighting, and symbolic framing to emphasize Harry's growing awareness of the dangers surrounding him. Cuarón's interpretation deepens Harry's psychological realism, allowing for a more nuanced character study that lays the groundwork for his emotional evolution throughout the series.

Mike Newell, directing *Harry Potter and the*

Goblet of Fire (2005), continues this trajectory by emphasizing Harry's transition into adolescence, marked by increased emotional depth and interpersonal conflicts. The fourth installment presents Harry as a young man struggling with themes of destiny, mortality, and emotional independence, particularly as he faces Voldemort in a direct confrontation for the first time. Newell's direction integrates elements of psychological tension, romantic entanglements, and heightened stakes, reinforcing Harry's departure from childhood innocence.

David Yates, who directed the final four films, shapes Harry's character into a mature, burdened hero, fully aware of his role in the larger conflict between good and evil. From *Order of the Phoenix* (2007) through *Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011), Harry becomes increasingly introspective, struggling with anger, loss, and the weight of responsibility. Yates' adaptation highlights the complexity of Harry's internal battles, showcasing his moral dilemmas, leadership struggles, and psychological resilience in the face of mounting threats. The cinematographic style evolves accordingly, employing darker tones, desaturated visuals, and a documentary-like approach that enhances the realism of war, survival, and sacrifice. Yates' extended tenure as director allows for continuity in character development, ensuring that Harry's arc is cohesive, progressive, and emotionally impactful as he ultimately fulfills his destiny.

Beyond the films, Harry's character continues to develop through transmedia storytelling, which expands his narrative beyond the constraints of the original adaptations. The stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016) explores Harry's struggles as an adult and a father, adding new psychological layers to

his character. Digital media, such as interactive experiences and video games, offer alternative interpretations of Harry's personality, allowing audiences to engage with his character through role-playing and immersive storytelling. Additionally, the *Fantastic Beasts* spin-off series, while not centered on Harry himself, contributes to the larger mythos of his world, reinforcing the lasting impact of his character within the Wizarding World franchise.

Through these various adaptations, Harry Potter's character remains both consistent and dynamic, shaped by creative decisions across different platforms. The transmedia nature of his development ensures that his character is continually reinterpreted and expanded upon, allowing for evolving audience engagement and critical discourse. The unique directorial visions within the film franchise, coupled with the multi-platform storytelling strategies, highlight how character evolution in long-term narratives is shaped by both artistic choices and audience expectations. This study underscores the importance of character continuity, psychological depth, and narrative adaptability in transmedia storytelling, offering insights into how enduring fictional characters can be effectively developed across different media landscapes.

Harry Potter's Role in the Narrative

Harry Potter serves as the central protagonist of the series, following the hero's journey archetype, where he transforms from an unaware, ordinary boy into a hero burdened with a great destiny. From the beginning, he is depicted as "The Chosen One", destined to face Lord Voldemort in a battle between good and evil. His role shifts significantly throughout the films:

- In the first three films, he is a curious and eager young wizard, discovering the

magical world and learning about his place in it.

- From the fourth to the sixth film, Harry becomes increasingly aware of his fate and the weight of responsibility, leading to emotional struggles and growing independence.
- In the final two films, he fully embraces his role as a leader, confronting loss, making difficult choices, and ultimately fulfilling his destiny through self-sacrifice and courage.

Harry Potter's Character Development

Harry undergoes profound psychological, emotional, and moral growth over the course of the series. His character development can be divided into several key phases:

- From innocence to awareness: At first, Harry is a wide-eyed boy eager to learn about the magical world, but as he matures, he becomes deeply aware of the dangers and responsibilities that come with his identity.
- From passive to proactive: Early on, Harry reacts to the world around him, relying on guidance from others. However, as the series progresses, he takes control of his own destiny, making independent decisions.
- From dependent to self-reliant: Harry starts off heavily relying on mentors such as Dumbledore, Hagrid, and Sirius Black, but by the final films, he learns to trust his own judgment and instincts.
- From personal suffering to a broader understanding of sacrifice: Initially, Harry's motivation is driven by a desire for revenge against Voldemort for the death of his parents, but over time, he realizes that his fight is not just personal—it is about protecting the entire wizarding world.

Reasons for Harry's Transformation

Harry's character development is shaped by several crucial factors:

- Experiencing repeated loss: Each film brings greater emotional loss, from the deaths of his parents, Cedric Diggory, and Sirius Black, to the eventual loss of Dumbledore and others. These tragedies harden his resolve and push him to mature emotionally.
- Influence of mentors and friendships: While mentors like Dumbledore, Sirius, and Hagrid offer wisdom and guidance, it is Ron and Hermione who ground Harry, keeping him connected to his humanity and emotions.
- Confrontations with Voldemort and the Death Eaters: Facing his enemies forces Harry to recognize his moral and ethical differences from Voldemort, understanding that true strength lies in compassion, love, and sacrifice, rather than power and control.
- Psychological struggles of adolescence: The middle films (*Goblet of Fire* through *Half-Blood Prince*) focus on Harry's emotional turmoil, romantic struggles, and inner conflicts, reflecting his transition from a teenager into an adult.

Key Aspects of Harry's Evolution

- The Role of Directors in Shaping Harry's Character:
 - *Chris Columbus* established Harry as an optimistic, wide-eyed young hero discovering the wonders of magic.
 - *Alfonso Cuarón* introduced psychological depth and introspection, adding complexity to Harry's character.
 - *Mike Newell* portrayed Harry as a

teenager dealing with real-world struggles, increasing the emotional stakes.

- *David Yates* transformed Harry into a battle-hardened leader, capturing his struggles with loss and responsibility.
- Cinematographic and tonal shifts: The bright and warm tones of the early films reflect Harry's childhood innocence, while later films use darker visuals and desaturated color palettes to emphasize the harsh realities of war and sacrifice.
- Transmedia storytelling and character portrayal: Harry's story extends beyond the films, with adaptations such as *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* providing insight into his adult struggles as a father, while video games and interactive media allow audiences to engage with different facets of his personality.

The Connecting Threads in Harry Potter's Character Evolution

1. Connections Between Films in Developing Harry's Character

Each film plays a critical role in shaping Harry's identity. The first three films establish the foundation for his personality, while the middle films depict his struggles with destiny, loss, and morality. The final two films serve as the culmination of his growth, showcasing his fully realized heroism and willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good.

2. Patterns in Harry's Development

A consistent pattern emerges throughout the series:

- Harry continually experiences loss, shaping his resilience and perspective.
- He is always searching for the truth,

whether about his parents, Voldemort, or his own identity.

- He maintains strong bonds with loved ones, which differentiates him from Voldemort's isolation.
- He consistently faces moral dilemmas, choosing the harder but righteous path rather than succumbing to darkness.

3. Core Causes Behind Harry's Growth

The primary driving forces behind Harry's transformation include:

- Escalating challenges—both physical (battles with Voldemort) and emotional (grappling with personal losses).
- Deeper self-awareness—his journey from orphaned boy to chosen hero, realizing that his choices define who he is, not just fate.
- Evolving social dynamics—he moves from relying on mentors to leading his friends and allies in battle.

4. Foundational Elements in Harry's Development

- Love and Friendship: The greatest force in Harry's life is the love he receives from his friends and family, reinforcing the importance of human connection.
- Morality and Choice: Throughout the series, Harry is presented with choices—whether to embrace hatred and vengeance or to fight for the greater good. His moral compass remains intact, distinguishing him from Voldemort.
- Identity and Fate: One of the central themes in Harry's character development is his struggle with understanding who he is not just "The Boy Who Lived," but an individual with agency over his own destiny.

4. CONCLUSION

The evolution of Harry Potter's character across transmedia platforms demonstrates a meticulously crafted narrative progression, shaped by cinematic direction, psychological depth, and audience engagement. Throughout eight films and various adaptations, Harry transitions from a curious and wide-eyed child to a mature and self-sacrificing hero, influenced by mentorship, personal loss, and moral challenges. Each director brings unique stylistic and thematic elements that enhance different aspects of his development, while transmedia expansions—such as spin-offs, stage adaptations, and digital media—extend and reinterpret his character beyond the original films and novels. This study highlights the importance of consistency, adaptability, and character continuity in long-term storytelling, providing valuable insights into how fictional protagonists can remain relevant and impactful across multiple media platforms.

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