

Reception and Interactive Storytelling Strategies

Ben Attous Fatma Zohra ¹, Smail Saadi ²

^{1,2} Department of Arabic Language and Literature – University Center of Barika, Amdoukal Road, Barika, Batna Province, 05001, Algeria

Laboratory of Algerian Poetics – University of M'sila

Email : fatmazohra.benattous@cu-barika.dz , Smail.saadi@cu-barika.dz

Received: 23/09/2025 ; Accepted : 24/04/2026 ; Published : 24/05/2026

Abstract

This study examines the nature of interactive storytelling as one of the narrative transformations generated by the digital environment, through exploring the new relationship established among the elements of the narrative process within modern interactive platforms. It focuses on reception strategies and the mechanisms through which audiences engage with interactive digital texts, as well as the resulting reconstruction of meaning and redirection of the narrative path.

The study also seeks to uncover the transformations affecting the role of the recipient, highlighting the diversity of reception strategies within the contemporary interactive environment. In addition, it investigates the contribution of interactive storytelling to breaking the linearity of narration and establishing a participatory relationship between creator and audience.

Keywords: Interactive storytelling – Reception – Strategies – Recipient.

Introduction

Narrative practices in the digital age have undergone profound transformations affecting the structure of the text as well as the mechanisms of its production and reception. The emergence of digital platforms has enabled new forms of communication and interaction; thus, the traditional relationship that positioned the author at the center of the creative process and the recipient in a limited receptive role no longer prevails. Instead, storytelling has become an open space for participation and reconstruction.

As a result, what is now known as interactive storytelling has emerged as a new narrative mode founded upon direct interaction between text and audience through various digital media. This raises the following questions: How does interactive storytelling contribute to reshaping the relationship between text and recipient within the interactive environment? And what are the strategies of reception in interactive texts?

Within the context of digital development, the literary field has witnessed clear transformations in the nature of texts and the methods of their reception. Modern media have provided new possibilities for interaction and participation that were previously unavailable in traditional narrative forms. This has led to the emergence of narrative patterns based on openness and exchange between creator and recipient. Consequently, the audience has become more actively present within the narrative process through commentary, interpretation, and direct interaction with the text. From here arises the need to ask: What is the concept of interactive storytelling?

The Concept of Interactive Storytelling:

Narrative discourse has shifted from its traditional linear form where the recipient remained passive and devoid of agency within the text to digital storytelling, which relies on electronic media (sound, image, video) to create a unique experience through the digital environment. Yet, digital

storytelling remained somewhat limited in its narrative pathways. The true revolution emerged later with interactive storytelling, in which the recipient became a producer of meaning and significance through the ability to intervene in the creation of the elements of the narrative process (events, plot, characters) by making decisions shaped by their cultural background and influenced by the reader's ideological dimension.

Interactive storytelling is a story not predetermined by the author; rather, it is constructed from a set of narrative possibilities under the guidance of the reader/player.

¹In addition, the digital medium offers choices that enable participation in narrating events and contributing to their development. Hence, interactive storytelling seeks to reconcile interactivity (freedom) with the user, granting the user (the recipient) a sense of narrative authority. This creates a challenge imposed by the new form of storytelling, namely, how to combine interactivity with the preservation of a coherent and meaningful narrative structure.

The concept of interactive storytelling approaches the idea of the ergodic text, which cannot be received passively but instead requires an operative effort that demonstrates the recipient's interaction in order to explore and reconstruct it.² The ergodic text emphasizes the reader's response as a more integrated figure, executing a semiotic sequence imposed by the interactive nature of the text, allowing the reader to navigate within the text without responsibilities beyond its scope all of which are placed upon the reader.³

The relationship between the ergodic text and interactive storytelling is formed through the liberated authority granted to the recipient in comparison to the traditional reader. Such freedom alters the very nature of storytelling according to the transformations of the text itself. Thus, interactive storytelling becomes the outcome of the recipient's choices, resulting in multiple pathways of narration and storytelling.

From another perspective, Saeed Yaqin reinforces this understanding by considering interactive storytelling as one of the manifestations of the hypertext, whose most significant characteristic is its rebellion against textual linearity. It enables the recipient to participate in producing significance and shaping meaning, thereby transforming from a mere receiver into an active participant in constructing the narrative structure.⁴ This means that the transformation of the reader into an effective contributor to the text constitutes the starting point of interactive storytelling. Once the mechanisms of interaction and participation are activated, interactive storytelling emerges through nonlinear mechanisms that permit multiple choices as a necessity generated by the evolution of text and creativity.

Fatima Al-Buraiki's definition of interactive storytelling does not differ greatly from the previous definitions. She views it as the characteristic distinguishing the positive and rich branching text, granting the user procedural and selective authority within the text.⁵ This implies that activating the role of the recipient to intervene in the progression of the text necessarily leads to the generation of branching and multiple narrative pathways, thereby creating a unique experience that produces a flexible narrative structure capable of formation and development. Consequently, the text is transformed from an individual possession into a collective interactive narrative that enriches the literary text and adds layers of significance and experiences, making the text a continually evolving entity.

The relationship between the virtual world and the user thus represents an operative embodiment of an interactive reciprocal vision, because the system responds to the user's interactions, creating a circular process of influence and mutual effect.⁶ Communication between the two sides no longer occurs through a straight line; instead, it evolves into a sequence extending from the system to the

user and from one recipient to a circle of recipients. This takes place through a set of choices and decisions forming a cycle of exchange that begins with the user (their actions) and extends toward the recipient (multiple visual, auditory, and narrative responses), thereby embodying the highest stages of interactivity.

Within the context of interactive storytelling, this dynamic relationship shifts from being merely a technical interaction into a central narrative mechanism. Every intervention by the recipient becomes a narrative building block through which parts of the story are shaped. This development continues through the numerous interventions of recipients, driving the plot toward the generation of new meanings and implications while revealing renewed and varied presences of the characters. Ultimately, this confirms that the reader/recipient is a genuine and active partner in constructing the narrative vision.

Characteristics of Interactive Storytelling:

The text is no longer confined to a single, one-dimensional discourse; rather, it has become open to countless possibilities. Writing has transcended the boundaries of the traditional imaginary to become interactive, transforming the recipient from a passive observer into an active and constructive participant in shaping meanings and building the narrative world. Thus emerge the defining characteristics of this narrative mode, which constitutes a unique experience that moves from reception to participation, and from mere presence to influence.

The text no longer proceeds along one predetermined path; instead, multiple trajectories unfold, allowing the recipient to determine the direction of events and the development of the story through their experience. The authority granted to the recipient in this mode through freedom of choice and decision-making creates a multiplicity of perspectives and, consequently, a multiplicity of events and characters, leading to multiple endings. The nonlinearity of the text and the plurality of endings embody a technique of generating meaning collaboratively between author and recipient.

Interactive storytelling does not rely on a fixed narrative sequence as in the traditional novel; rather, it offers multiple possibilities for navigating events and selecting different paths within the story. Nonlinearity is considered one of the most prominent manifestations of the digital transformation in storytelling because it grants the text an open and multi-possibility character.

The nonlinearity of the text and the multiplicity of its endings are an inevitable consequence of a deeper characteristic: interactivity, which achieves simultaneity and immediacy of response. It also allows multiple forms of participation through numerous recipients. Without granting the recipient the authority to intervene effectively, it would be impossible to imagine the branching of paths and endings. Interactivity thus becomes the foundational cause that enables the plurality of perspectives through the recipient.⁷ This transforms the reader into an internal participant in dealing with the text. The interactive text grants the reader a practical role in traversing the text through interventions in the narrative course; the reader contributes to its construction through interactivity in addition to aesthetic taste.

Despite the branching of its paths and the multiplicity of media constituting it, interactive storytelling seeks to preserve narrative coherence by relying on a somewhat complex foundational structure. The designer carefully frames the narrative work while ensuring a tightly controlled structure.

If interactivity constitutes the driving force behind the essence of interactive storytelling, then the digital medium forms the structure and environment embracing this experience. In other words, it is

the inevitable result of a reciprocal relationship between the principle of interaction and the digital medium. This means that it is “the distinctive state of interactivity governing literary texts presented through the electronic medium.”⁸ Digital technologies do not merely create interactivity; they continuously seek to expand its horizons into new levels, thereby generating a distinct and renewed qualitative state each time. The digital medium is therefore not simply a carrier, but rather the very enabler of electronic interactivity and the source of its uniqueness and specificity.

Furthermore, interactive storytelling contributes to the reshaping of roles. Through the digital medium, dialogue between recipient and author has become a possible option. By processing predesigned choices, the computer creates communication between two entities. Although the recipient’s freedom remains somewhat constrained by boundaries drawn by the author, the dynamic nature of this communication generates a sense of agency and participation, abolishing traditional boundaries and producing a different narrative experience. Thus, storytelling shifts from merely conveying the story to producing and participating in it.

Interactive storytelling is also characterized by multimedia integration. It is not limited to written language but employs sound, image, video, and visual effects, thereby creating a more vibrant communicative experience. In this context, Jean-Louis Weissberg affirms that digital media have contributed to creating a new presence for the text, one based on sensory interaction and continuous communication.⁹ This integration of media has broadened the horizon of reception and transformed reading into an emotional experience that combines viewing, listening, and interaction.

The multiplicity of media in interactive storytelling is closely connected to the openness of the text, as it constitutes one of the most significant factors contributing to the breaking of the closed structure of the traditional text and the rebellion against the components of narrative structure. When storytelling transcends written language to include new and innovative elements such as image, sound, video, and interactive links, the text becomes multilayered in both structure and significance. Its meaning can no longer be confined to a single reading or fixed interpretation; rather, it remains open to further possibilities of interpretation and reconstruction.

This broadens the reader’s horizon of reception, for meaning is no longer received from a single source but from a network of intertwined signs interacting within the digital text. Consequently, meaning becomes unstable, changing according to the mode of interaction with auditory, visual, and kinetic elements, as well as according to the differences among recipients and their contexts. In this framework, the openness of the text becomes a natural outcome of multimedia plurality, as it creates semantic gaps and interpretive spaces that the recipient fills through interaction and experience.

Reading and Reception Theory:

This theory focuses on the role of the reader in completing meaning and interpreting the text through reception. The recipient “is not separate from the text; rather, there exists a state of intimacy between them.”¹⁰ It is the recipient who generates the living meaning of the text through the interaction between the two. Reception is therefore not merely a passive act of receiving, but rather a creative process in which the recipient fills the gaps and explores the silences within the text by drawing upon personal experience, cultural background, and individual perspectives.

This integrated dialectical relationship grants the text multiple interpretations and perspectives, transforming it into a continually renewed entity with every reading, thereby establishing a genuine partnership between text and reader. This explains the multiplicity of interpretations that a single text may generate.

A change in medium inevitably leads to a transformation in both the general and specific characteristics of literature. The shift of the text from the printed page to the digital screen reshapes the very relationships underlying the communicative process itself. The interactive text, with its distinct features, rejects closure; instead, it continuously invites the recipient to interact and participate immediately in the creation of the text and the control of its elements. Although some may still consider this participation to remain within the authority of the author or designer, it nonetheless grants the recipient a sense of the value and effectiveness of participation and choice.

Such interactivity fulfills the core premise of reading and reception theory concerning the reader's role in completing meaning.¹¹ Consequently, the specificity of the literary experience changes from a simple relationship between text and reader into a unique social relationship capable of accommodating numerous interpretations expressed through the interventions of recipients. This gives rise to new literary forms characterized by flexibility and plurality, relying upon interpretation and participation as essential conditions, thereby dissolving the traditional boundaries between author, reader, and text.

From Reading to Production:

The recipient (reader) is no longer confined to analyzing what lies between the lines; rather, they now possess the ability to intervene in the course of events, shape the text, and modify narrative components by adding characters, employing them according to personal desires, intensifying the plot, and imposing an atmosphere of suspense and tension. Interactive storytelling “no longer leaves the recipient satisfied with merely following the text visually; instead, the recipient writes the text in their own way, moves through the body of the text according to personal choices and capabilities, and thereby creates a new text through the text being read.”¹²

This has led to the transformation and multiplicity of endings according to the freedom made possible by interactive media. Such collaborative creativity transforms the text from a finished and closed object into a work in progress, whose elements evolve with every new interaction and participation.

The transition from reading to production constitutes one of the most important foundations of reading and reception theory. It transforms the reader from a mere interpreter and participant in completing meaning an act once confined to the moment of reading into a genuine creator involved in the production of texts. The reader's transformation from a temporary consumer into an active partner explains the mechanism of interactive storytelling and the way it develops within the text itself. In other words, the recipient contributes directly, through suggestions and personal experiences, to shaping parts of the text across various electronic media (platforms, software, live broadcasting, etc.). This results in a dynamic and vibrant dialogue that transforms the original reading of the text into raw material open to development and collective participation.

This transformation has been closely linked to the emergence of modern critical perspectives that restore the reader's status as a partner in the production of meaning. Within reception theory, Wolfgang Iser argues that the literary text is not complete except through reading,¹³ since the reader fills the gaps intentionally left by the text and thus contributes to the construction of its final meaning. Meaning, therefore, is not fully present within the literary work itself; rather, it emerges gradually through the interaction between the text and the recipient's experience and expectations.

The digital environment has further expanded this role, as the recipient now engages in a form of participatory production that surpasses the limits of traditional reading. Mechanisms of interaction

have become new forms of reproducing narrative discourse within electronic space. In this context, Henry Jenkins points out that modern digital culture is founded upon participatory culture,¹⁴ in which audiences are transformed into producers of narrative pathways. Through this perspective, Jenkins confirms that the process of reception has moved beyond the mere act of reading toward production itself, thereby enriching the narrative experience in a distinctive manner and challenging the traditional boundaries that literary texts have long suffered from. This dynamic grants literature a democratic dimension, transforming it into an entity born out of collective participation that allows everyone to contribute to its construction.

Participation Theory and Its Relationship to Storytelling:

Participation Theory was proposed by Denis McQuail in 1987.¹⁵ It focuses on the selection and dissemination of appropriate information, as well as the citizen's right to use communication media for interaction and participation. The theory rejects centralization and the domination of authorities over media institutions, while encouraging pluralism, interaction between sender and receiver, and horizontal communication that encompasses all sectors of society. Media institutions adopting this theory are expected to engage closely with social life, remain subject to the direct influence of their audiences, and provide opportunities for participation according to principles determined by the public rather than by any external authority.¹⁶

This theory constitutes a foundational framework for participatory practices within the contemporary digital environment. Its core principles have evolved from abstract theoretical foundations into tangible creative practices through the embodiment of participation and decentralization in innovative narrative forms that have redefined the relationship between recipient and author.

Starting from the principle of rejecting centralization and authoritarian control, interactive storytelling manifests this perspective through its rebellion against the authority of the author and its granting of the recipient's right to participate in constructing the narrative text. The recipient thus acquires tools of direct influence over the course of events, the construction of characters, and the development of the plot. Digital platforms, as the primary environments of interactive storytelling, have enabled users to exercise their right to active participation in shaping narrative structures, which aligns closely with McQuail's vision of the communicative process.

In addition, the principle of plurality is reflected in the diversity of narratives and perspectives within narrative works. The story is no longer confined to a single path; rather, it becomes a fabric woven from multiple viewpoints that enrich the narrative experience.

Through the reflection of the principles of Participation Theory in media upon interactive storytelling in literature, it can be argued that interactive storytelling represents the practical dimension through which the most important principles of this theory are realized. Through participation, narrative structures are formed, events evolve, and characters are constructed. Likewise, by restructuring the narrative communicative process from its traditional vertical form into the horizontal form advocated by this theory, the ideals of participation, empowerment, and interaction long championed by Participation Theory are effectively achieved.

Reception Strategies in Interactive Storytelling:

The process of reception represents the moment in which the reader encounters the text in order to generate meaning and interpretation. Since life is breathed into the text through its reception, the

text acquires its value and significance through the recipient's interaction with it. Within interactive storytelling, the principle of interaction has been reinforced through multiple forms and media, unlike traditional reception in which the recipient merely retains the meanings and implications generated by the text. Hence, reception strategies in ordinary texts differ fundamentally from reception strategies in interactive texts. These strategies constitute the intellectual tools and mechanisms through which the reader deciphers the codes of the text and its interpretations, while also functioning as the link between the signs of the text and the living experience of reading.

Reception strategies in interactive storytelling have assumed multiple forms related both to the nature of the digital medium and to the transformations in the relationship between text and recipient. Reception theories and modern digital studies have contributed significantly to uncovering these strategies, which reflect the transformation of reading from a consumptive act into a productive and participatory practice. Among the most important strategies employed by the recipient in interactive storytelling are the following:

1. Interpretive Reception

This is one of the most prominent mechanisms of interaction with the narrative text. Through it, the recipient constructs meaning based on cultural background and reading experience. Meaning is not extracted from the text as something ready-made; rather, it is formed through a continuous process of interpretation.¹⁷ Such interpretation differs from one reader to another, as each reader approaches the text according to a horizon of expectations that is, a set of prior conceptions and experiences influencing understanding and interpretation. Consequently, reading becomes a dynamic and renewable act that changes according to recipients and cultural contexts.

2. Filling the Gaps

This strategy refers to stimulating the recipient to fill what the text intentionally leaves empty, such as incomplete choices or unanswered questions. It is achieved through "engagement with the components of the text and the activation of its gaps in a way that enriches and contributes to the production of a new meaning different from that which another reader might produce."¹⁸ This enhances the reader's intellectual interaction and grants a sense of partnership in construction. The strategy becomes even more present in interactive storytelling because the digital text is characterized by its open nature, which allows multiple possibilities for interpretation, navigation, and reconstruction.

3. Emotional Reception

This strategy is based on the recipient's emotional immersion in the narrative world. Such immersion becomes more powerful in interactive storytelling due to the use of multimedia elements such as sound, image, and visual effects, which enable the recipient to experience the narrative in a deeper sensory manner. Marie-Laure Ryan points out that digital media create a form of immersion that grants the recipient a sense of participation within the imaginary world.¹⁹ This raises the idea of simulation in interactive storytelling, whereby the recipient, through emotional interaction with the narrative content, becomes capable of entering the fictional universe of the story.

4. Reaction-Based Reception

This strategy reflects the recipient's response to the text through emojis, quick comments, and various forms of digital interaction. Although this type of interaction may appear simple on the surface, it nevertheless plays an important role in measuring the impact of the text within digital platforms.

5. Selective Reception

This strategy is based on the recipient's selection of the parts that correspond to personal interests within the digital text. Such selection is closely related to the nature of electronic reading, which depends upon browsing and navigating between hyperlinks and different sections. The digital reader no longer adheres to the linear sequence of the text; rather, they construct their own reading pathway according to personal preferences.

6. Collective Reception

Collective reception constitutes a direct result of the nature of the digital environment, where reading takes place within virtual communities that continuously exchange interpretations and impressions. This confirms that the recipient is no longer isolated during the reading process but is influenced by the reactions of others. Such interaction contributes to the collective construction of meaning within the text, which Pierre Lévy associates with the concept of collective intelligence,²⁰ founded upon the production of knowledge through shared interaction within the digital space.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that interactive storytelling is no longer merely a technical evolution in narrative forms, but rather a transformation that affects the very structure of narrative discourse, its functions, and its mechanisms of reception. The integration of literature and technology has led to the emergence of new narrative spaces founded upon textual openness, interaction, and plurality. This, in turn, has altered the traditional narrative relationship between text and recipient, giving rise to reception strategies fundamentally different from those associated with conventional forms of storytelling.

The process of reading within the digital environment has become more complex and multilayered, as it no longer relies solely on the individual understanding of the text. Instead, it is increasingly connected to collective interaction within digital platforms, where interpretations, impressions, and reactions intersect to produce a shared meaning.

Interpretive reception, gap-filling, interactive reception, and participatory reception all reveal that meaning is no longer fixed or closed, but rather continuously renewed according to the nature of interaction with the text. In addition, multimedia elements have contributed significantly to broadening the experience of reception, enabling the recipient to live the narrative experience in a more profound and immediate way.

Reception strategies have thus reinforced the openness of the text and the multiplicity of its significations, transforming it into a flexible space capable of continuous reconstruction and interpretation. On the other hand, the digital environment has revealed a clear transformation in the concept of authority within narrative works: authority is no longer confined to the author alone, but is now distributed among the writer, the recipient, and the digital platform itself.

Accordingly, it may be argued that interactive storytelling has contributed to shifting the narrative process from its traditional linear model to an open participatory model founded upon continuous dialogue between text and audience. The study of reception strategies therefore becomes essential for understanding the transformations experienced by literature in the digital age, since it reveals how technology has reshaped the concepts of reading, creativity, and cultural communication.

Based on this, interactive storytelling represents a new and distinct stage in the evolution of literary discourse. It is a phase that transcends traditional boundaries and establishes a mode of collective creativity grounded in participation, openness, and continuous interaction. Consequently,

the interactive digital text becomes a living and ever-renewed entity, constantly revitalized through the ongoing interaction of its audience.

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