



When you hear the word 'Fantasy'... do you think of dragons, magic and white walkers invading Westeros, or do you picture four children stepping into a wardrobe to a snow-filled Narnia? *Game of Thrones* is modern adult entertainment, and C. S. Lewis wrote *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* for children almost seventy years ago. The enormous popularity of both novel series, worldwide, and to this day, suggests that fantasy can cut across time, space, age and cultural group ... in fact every social divide.

Imagination is our capacity to mentally create images in our minds that we do not actually experience. Or do we? We can imagine real, as well as unreal things. As such, I would argue that the world we imagine is no less important than the 'real' one. In fact, the fantastic is simply the real world, in exaggerated form. What is more, as social marketers we need to 'tap into' the fantastic, to walk in another person's shoes, in order to consider the needs of a potential social marketing audience. A person can, for instance, imagine a potential conflict at home or work, which may be possible. Alternatively, the person can imagine themselves throwing 'the one ring to rule all others' into the fiery pit of Mount Doom, which is impossible. The latter is more fantastical, and we might therefore be tempted to reduce it to the realm of self-amusement. Imagining oneself 'throwing the ring', however, is symbolic of resolving the conflict at home or work, and it can be incredibly liberating ... and powerful. What a person imagines, then, can be just as real to the individual as what *actually* happens. In fact, what we imagine in the fantasy realm is often a precursor to what happens in the real. That is, human beings often imagine something first, before it is created in tangible form. As an added bonus for social marketers, tapping into the fantasy world, immersing ourselves in it for a while to come up with 'novel' ideas and strategies to market a

product or concept, is not only fun, but it can also be quite therapeutic!

#### **Fantasy's allure**

George R. R. Martin, C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling and other popular mythic/heroic fantasy writers have a dream-like quality to their writing. With undeniable appeal, the spin-off from the novel series extends to the movies we watch, the clothes we wear, the merchandise we purchase and the games we play. We immerse ourselves, knowingly, in a world we know does not exist. Why? People like Carl Jung, the eminent Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist, claim it is because fantasy is reality: 'Everything you do here, all this, everything, was fantasy to begin with,' says Jung, 'and fantasy has a proper reality' (Carl Jung, *Evans Conversations*, page 22).

Some individuals claim to dislike fantasy because they think it involves play, is not real, or occurs only in the imagination and is therefore frivolous and unimportant. Yet, the same individuals may become mesmerised by Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, or contemplate Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Einstein's space theories were no less fantastical to his 1905 audience than humans settling on Mars, and yet now we talk about Mars One and a human settlement in 2023! Einstein's space theories and Michelangelo's paintings are works of overwhelming creativity — a manifestation of their fantasies. The fantastical imaginations of creative people such as these propel us forward ... as a nation, as a culture, as a species. Fantasy brings us new ideas, expands our world and enlightens us to new possibilities. The result can be inventions, discoveries, and new ways of 'tapping into' our social marketing audience by taking us, and our audience, to an alternate reality, to another time and place, and therein lies its power.

## Fantasy as an alternate space

Sometimes the real world — the world Heraclitus called 'logos' around 500 BCE — gets overwhelming. Fantasy (otherwise known as mythos), can help us to escape this reality ... if only for a while. Too much living in the fantasy world, attempting to live in it permanently, can be detrimental; but humanity's desire to find an alternate space is what makes us human. As social marketers, we need to capture this space. Throughout history, people have sat around a campfire or table, swapping fantastic stories and ingesting food, or some other mind-altering substance. Sadly, today some individuals attempt to enter this alternate reality through drugs, alcohol, and gambling — often at immense personal and social cost. Others enter an alternate time/place through more effective methods, such as reading a book, drawing and listening to music. Even movies not categorised as 'fantasy' (with traditional giants, dwarves and other magical or mythical creatures), enable us to become immersed in an alternate space to escape, or to make meaning of our world. Social marketers can also consciously (or unconsciously) escape to a fantastical place to experiment with new ways of doing or seeing things, or to act like another person, and see if it fits.

## Fantasy for ideas and overcoming problems

### About the author



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Fantasy is escapism. The perfect getaway, it is also a seamless gateway to where the next thought, or idea can grow and be nurtured. What is more, fantasy (including dreaming, drawing or another creative process) is the portal to where we can truly know ourselves. It is also the portal to knowing how to create, or promote, a socially empowering product and/or program. All good fantasies, whether they are written, oral, or digital, are fundamentally stories about ourselves. As we consciously think about Harry Potter battling against the death eaters taking over his soul, we are reminded of a painful relationship break-up, or a potential addiction we are trying to overcome. Harry's battle is reminiscent of our own — and I would encourage all social marketers to consider Harry's story when trying to surmount a social marketing dilemma. Harry was aware, just like us, that there is no easy solution to a difficult problem. We also know that we, like Harry, have to keep faith that we too will emerge triumphant. The 'larger than life' fantasy veneer of an alternate mythic/heroic Universe, like the Marvel cinematic universe, holds the key to our own self-understanding. By extension, fantasy also holds to the key to propagating ideas and overcoming potential social marketing obstacles. We just have to allow ourselves to enter the Universe.