

# THE FUTURE OF STORYTELLING°

PHASE 1 OF 2

THE FUTURE OF STORYTELLING: PHASE 1 is one installment of Latitude 42s, an ongoing series of innovation studies which Latitude, an international research consultancy, publishes in the spirit of knowledge-sharing and opportunity discovery for both established companies and emerging entrepreneurs.

Latitude°

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MEDIA+



# WE ASKED MORE THAN 150 EARLY ADOPTERS ACROSS THE WORLD, "HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPERIENCE STORIES IN THE FUTURE?"



In 2012, Latitude set out to understand audiences' evolving expectations for content experiences, their unmet needs, future desires, and the most promising areas of opportunity for storytellers.

Latitude conducted in-depth interviews with pioneers in the media space to discuss specific challenges and innovations, followed by an online survey<sup>1</sup> amongst 158 early adopters focused on generating new possibilities for interacting with stories. Participants were asked to play the role of producer, choosing a narrative (a book, movie, plot-driven video game, etc.) that they know well, and re-inventing the way that audiences might experience that story. Some of the ideas that participants suggested are possible

today, even if they don't exist yet—while others require technologies that are still several years coming.

Latitude then designed a reliable coding scheme to quantify various themes in participants' storytelling concepts.<sup>2</sup> Study participants were ages 12-65, 60% males and 40% females, residing in the United States (78%) and other countries, including Australia, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. More than 3/4 owned and regularly used a smartphone, while 50% were tablet owners (44% were dual owners).

Latitude is currently completing a large-scale-survey (Phase 2) to quantify future storytelling trends, opportunities, and target audiences.

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## METHODS OF STUDY:

**EXPERT INTERVIEWS**  
**GENERATIVE SURVEY**  
**NARRATIVA™ (NARRATIVE ANALYSIS)**

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<sup>1</sup>Findings from Phase 1 only are discussed in this report. Phase 2 findings will be published in the coming months (see p. 11 for more information).

<sup>2</sup>Reported frequencies for coded variables are based on the number of entries from the total 158-entry submission pool that were possible to code on a given variable.

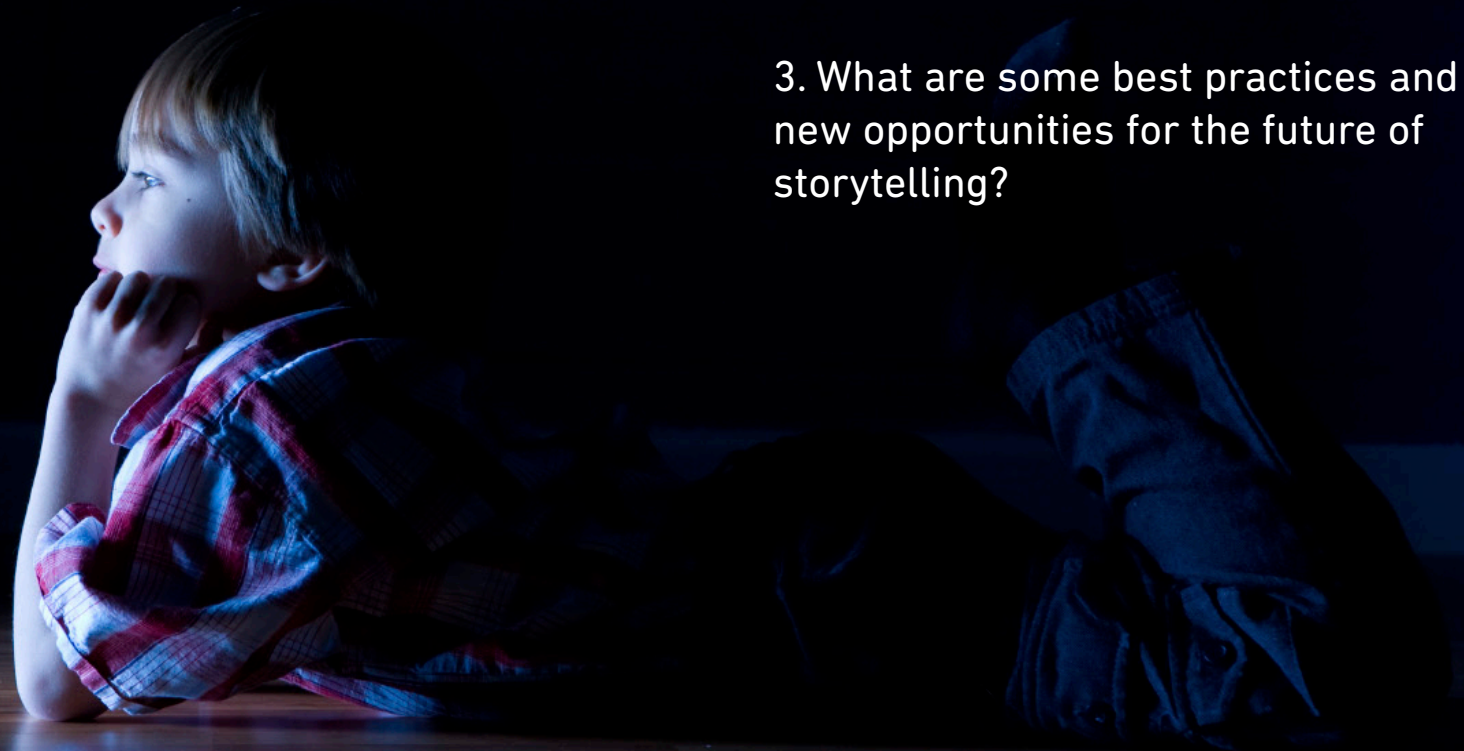
# OUR QUESTIONS

The future storytelling concepts imagined by our participants highlight audiences' growing appetite for experiences that not only allow them to delve deeper **into** stories, but that also bring stories **out of** the screen—both literally and figuratively—to mingle with our actual lives. Through an analysis of the themes present in our participants' concepts, we created the *4 I's of Storytelling* framework on the following pages to illustrate key dimensions of good storytelling experiences.

1. How are audiences' expectations around storytelling evolving as media experiences become more multi-platform, more customizable, and more participatory?

2. How can content creators and technologists make stories come alive, by allowing audiences to delve deeper into them or by bringing them out into the real world?

3. What are some best practices and new opportunities for the future of storytelling?



# THE 4 I'S OF STORYTELLING: *OUT*

## IMMERSION

Can I go deeper into the story-world, by learning more about it or by heightening my sensory experience of it?



“I wish there was an app that would give me information about the historical time period that the work took place during. **What else was going on in the world when Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy were falling in love? Who was the king or queen of England? What would the characters typically eat for breakfast? What type of music did they listen to? Immerse me in their world.**”

—Female, 29, Berkeley, CA, USA

## INTERACTIVITY

Can I change or influence elements of the story?  
Can I interact with other people around the story?



“I want to friend Bond and his other MI5 pals on Facebook. I want to get updates, images and videos from 007 as he tracks down the terrorist, saves the world and gets the girl. **The story would play out in real-time**, so I could check in on him while I’m waiting in line at the bank, and offer him some advice just before he rushes into a raid on the kingpin’s hideout. But—and this is key—I **don’t want to be a voyeur; I want to be a participant. I want to really friend Bond, and have him call me by name and listen to my advice. I want to change the story based on how I interact with Bond and what’s going on in my life.**”

—Male, 37, Santa Clara, CA, USA



# OF THE SCREEN, INTO MY WORLD

## INTEGRATION

Is a cohesive story being told across platforms?  
Can it interface with the real world in any way?



“I’d love to be a part of a real-world game, whereby, citywide, everyone is reading the same book. We are told a date by when we should have read to a certain point in the book; for example, we’d be told to read to the first ball held at the Wilkes’ plantation. Players would have received a formal invitation to the ball along with costume suggestions. **Then the players would get to engage with that real-world party as the action from the actual story plays out.** Not only would the players buy the book—they would pay for each experience with which they’d like to participate.”

—Female, 39, Brooklyn, NY, USA

## IMPACT

Does the story inspire me to take action in my own life, such as making a purchase or supporting a good cause?



“While reading Cinderella, I’d like if actions and recipes for the perfect scrubbing of floors or green window-washing could be accessed. Prince Charming could lead you to a dating service. The mice and birds would actually provide you with a pattern for sewing Cinderella’s dress. When the cat and dog are fighting, there could be pop-ins from the current adoptees at the local SPCA. The wedding would provide listings for local caterers, musicians, and event halls. After selecting a few preferences, your perfect glass slipper (read: high end shoe), and three runners-up would be provided.”

—Female, 36, Penticton, Canada

An illustration of Alexander Graham Bell, an elderly man with a long white beard and hair, wearing a brown suit and a gold chain. He is holding a black smartphone in his right hand, with a white cord trailing down. In the background, a sign reads "BELL TELEPH" and a window is visible.

BELL TELEPH

## INSIGHT°

# THE REAL WORLD IS A PLATFORM, TOO

### Transmedia is More than Media-Shifting

Audiences now expect to shift seamlessly from one device to another—to pause a Netflix film on TV and resume watching later on a tablet. That said, content creators should seek to *deepen*, not just duplicate, experiences across platforms by leveraging each environment’s strengths (think: interactivity on tablets). The desire for differentiation is no longer niche, and soon it will become an expectation. Eighty-two percent of participants wanted more mobile apps that would complement, not just replicate, their TV viewing experiences, while fewer (68%) felt there should be more apps to help them access content they already watch elsewhere.

### Out of the Screen, into My World

Because we now have portable, sensor-laden mobile devices that go everywhere with us, audiences feel that content in those devices should get smarter, too: by becoming relevant to where we are and what we’re doing in the physical world (75%). When asked to develop a new way of interacting with stories, 52% of participants treated the real world as another “platform,” incorporating networked real-world objects, augmented reality, 3D projected environments, and other technologies that bridge the divide between digital and physical. Younger participants (24 and under) were significantly more likely than their older counterparts (35+) to desire content integration with the real world, ranging from location-aware games to discovering new products.

“It would be really cool to experience the world through ‘other people’s eyes.’ If I’m reading a biography of an influential person, I’d like to be able to use augmented reality or location-aware mobile apps to get a sense of how that person would look at things around me that I encounter and interact with. For example, I look at a phone and see a phone; Alexander Graham Bell would be amazed at how far we’ve come since the first voice-over-wire transmissions and would see that device in his mind’s eye.” —Male, 38, Newton, MA, USA

# INSIGHT°

## WAIT, WHO'S THE AUTHOR?



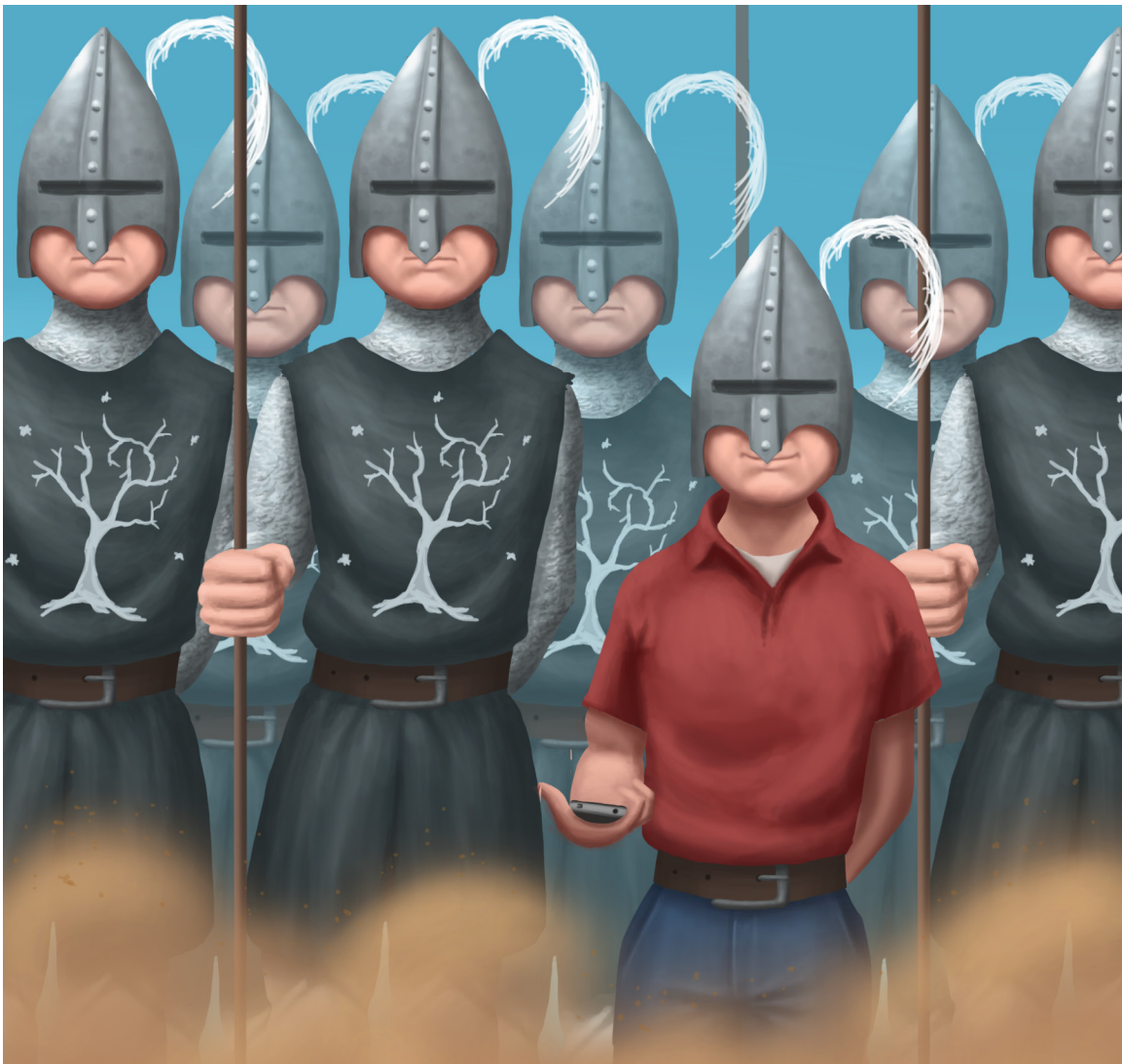
### **Audiences Crave More Control**

As the Web becomes more interactive and real-time, audiences want increased control over their individual content experiences; 79% envisioned interactions that would allow them to alter a storyline—by influencing or becoming a character themselves (56%) or by manipulating plot events directly (37%).

### **Collaboration Extends Beyond the Story**

Taking narrative control to the next level, audiences are willing to build and support a story that recognizes their ideas. Donating creativity (over money or professional skills) holds the widest appeal, with 93% of participants expressing interest in submitting possible story ideas to producers. Still, two-thirds are willing to help fund stories they're interested in (e.g., on a platform like Kickstarter), and 79% would leverage their social networks or create promotional materials to help get the word out.





**“I would like to interact with the story as if I were an ordinary person to whom the story is occurring. I would like to be able to experience the story as if I were a citizen of one of the grand cities which are involved in the story, such as a guardsman of the city of Minas Tirith or the escort of the elves in their journey to the Grey Havens. A constantly-evolving world would envelop the player, allowing him to choose his own path, but not emphasizing how the player is a ‘hero’ or ‘chosen one,’ which, I feel, would increase the sense of immersion for the player experiencing the game.” —Male, 21, Easton, PA, USA**

## BEST PRACTICES<sup>o</sup>

### THE PERFECT STORY WOULD...

**MEET BASIC INFORMATION NEEDS.** Audiences desire instant access to information that deepens their experiences of a narrative, such as added historical or cultural context for a story’s setting (e.g., “how did people actually live back then?”).

**OFFER A NEW VANTAGE POINT.** Allow audiences to explore different perspectives—by seeing things from a certain character’s point-of-view or by becoming a character themselves who is *not* a main character. Because works of historical fiction tend to have richer, more “novel” story-worlds, they’re ripe for these types of off-the-beaten-path interactions.

**OFFER A SOMEWHAT ACTIVE EXPERIENCE.** Only 12% prefer completely passive media experiences, while more than half crave “a lot” of interactivity when it comes to making plot decisions, interacting with or influencing characters, and so on.

**CONVERSE WITH THE REAL WORLD.** Audiences want their actions in the physical world to impact the larger narrative. For example: contribute to battle efforts against another side by having your smartphone register when you’re near a particular location or another participating fan, or by importing an object into the story-world by scanning a real version of it with your phone. Not surprisingly, real world integration is popular for sci-fi, fantasy, and other epic stories.

**BE LONG-RUNNING.** Forget flings; today’s audiences want to commit to long-term media relationships. Thirty-eight percent thought the perfect story would be 4+ installments, while 31% felt never-ending would be just the right length.



# OPPORTUNITIES°

“For a long time, the transmedia space has seemed to be really big on comic book characters and science fiction and spies and conspiracies and cults. I think we could just as easily have a blockbuster romance transmedia narrative, and it **hasn’t happened because the people creating these projects are the early adopter geek community; it’s less because audiences today wouldn’t do it.**”

—Andrea Phillips, Author of *A Creator’s Guide to Transmedia Storytelling*

## FOR WRITERS: BRING CHARACTERS OUT OF THE SCREEN TO DEEPEN LOYALTY

New forms of storytelling aren’t *just* about inundating audiences with hoards of great information about the characters or the setting; that is, they’re not just about delving deeper into a story-world. They’re also about bringing the story out of the screen, into the audience’s actual world. Stories should capitalize on how an audience member relates to characters or situations, and how that carries over into his or her own life—and across platforms, keeping in mind that characters can be created with multi-platform or transmedia experiences in mind. Characters can motivate a person to learn, to live healthier, to form and foster relationships, to support a worthy cause, and so on—an effect which may be magnified by certain characters more than others.

## FOR NON-FICTION PRODUCERS & BRANDS: TRANSMEDIA IS MORE THAN FANTASY

The common assumption that “transmedia is just for sci-fi” still prevails, leaving a major opportunity unexplored for the non-fiction space, including news reality media, and advertising. Audiences crave immersive experiences with news content, and material like this—with a variety of perspectives and authors, formats, “layers,” and so on—is ripe for expansion into a larger news “story-world.” Successful branded entertainment creators will be asking the next question: “How can we leverage multiple platforms, including the physical world, to tell a holistic, compelling narrative?” Retailers, for instance, would do well not to overlook physical assets (e.g., stores, kiosks, etc.) as another viable platform to tell a 360° brand story.

## FOR INTERACTION DESIGNERS: OFFER MULTIPLE MODES OF INTERACTIVITY

People want to put varying levels of effort into their content experiences—not surprisingly, how active or passive one wishes to be varies from person-to-person, and across different genres and situational contexts. Content creators can overcome the “how do we make transmedia mainstream-accessible?” challenge by allowing audiences to choose their desired tier of interactivity at the outset, optimizing engagement for a group of individuals with different and changing need states. Creators of transmedia experiences, like author and game designer Andrea Phillips, have established that creating the “illusion of interactivity” for even the most involved audience members isn’t necessarily difficult—so why not create customized tiers of engagement to attract a broader fan base?

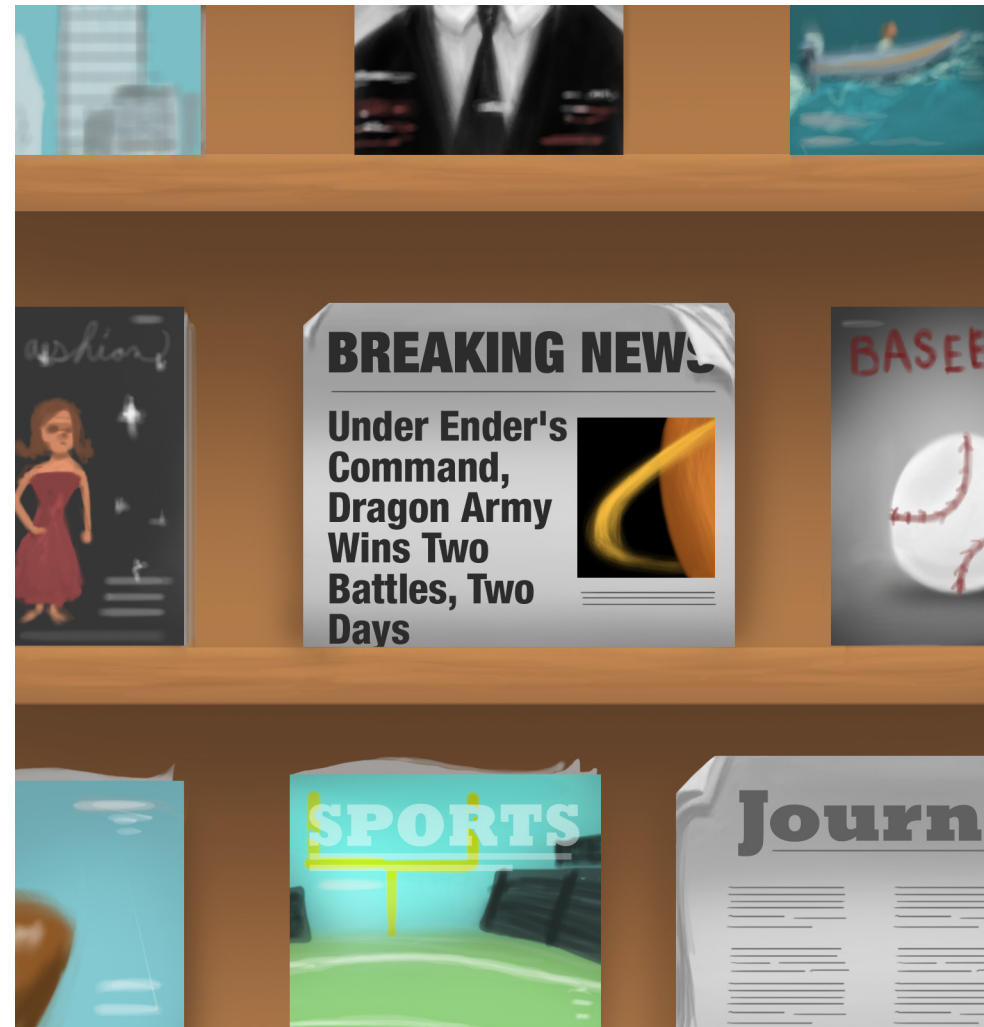
# CHARACTERS IN CONTEXTS



“I want to be able to hear, read, touch, and feel the story in different languages and cultural contexts. **How would my character look, talk, and behave in this situation if she was Indian vs. Mexican? Rich vs. poor?**

What if it was 1800 and the woman decided to leave her husband just because she was unhappy? **I'd want to swap characters in and out of situations to see how the story unfolds and how he or she reacts.** This kind of cross-cultural adventure could also teach language (e.g., click on an object or sentence for a translation) or offer more information about different cultural artifacts (e.g., click on a food and have the recipe sent to your smartphone).” —Female, 33, Santa Ana, Costa Rica

# ONGOING STORY-WORLDS



“It would be amazing if my e-reader kept track of days I read and days I didn't. For example, if I had just read a part of *Ender's Game* where Ender was about to engage in a big battle, and then I stopped for a few days, it would send me a 'news' email telling me about the victory—or about the loss. In the same vein, **I could see 'news updates' about big events in the story unfolding as they would if there was actual, real-time press coverage.** They might tell me what happened to a minor character after he lost a big battle that he was projected to win, from an ESPN-type 'source.'”

—Male, 20, Milton, MA, USA



# THE FUTURE OF STORYTELLING: PHASE 1 OF 2°

## Latitude°

Latitude is an international research consultancy helping clients create engaging content, software and technology that harness the possibilities of the Web.

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Latitude Studios, a branch of Latitude Research, reimagines the way research is traditionally communicated through an emphasis on storytelling and highly visual, interactive ways of conveying knowledge and insights. We tell stories, from the perspective of individuals and groups of people across the world, about how the Web can continue to change the way we live for the better.

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Illustrations by Gregory Hartman for Latitude

### Coming Soon: The Future of Storytelling (Phase 2 of 2)

The next and final installment of Latitude's *The Future of Storytelling* study is a large-scale, international exploration focused on quantifying trends, opportunities, and key audience targets for second screen and transmedia storytelling across genres—including both fiction and non-fiction. Latitude is currently completing this phase of the study, and it will be published in Fall 2012. Sign up to be notified by e-mail when Phase 2 findings are available: <http://latd.com/clients-us/#maillist>

### Coming Soon: Next-Gen Shopping: Mobile & Beyond

Access to digital information, especially via mobile devices, is drastically uprooting the traditional retail experience, both online and in-stores. We are always just one alert or email away from our next discovery or purchase; we expect increasingly personalized, real-time, and streamlined experiences, and we now follow an extremely complex path to purchase even if we don't always realize it. Currently in progress, Latitude's *Next-Gen Shopping: Mobile & Beyond* study is investigating shoppers' mindsets and motivations, current behaviors, unmet needs, and appetites for new ways to shop and make purchases—providing valuable insights for retailers, brands and marketers, technologists and mobile app developers, and everyone in between.