

# Storytelling in Brand Building

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**Abstract:** *As society advances and changes, its perceptions and behaviors also change. Product quality or service and its price are no longer the only determining factors in the purchase decision and the consumer demand for brands that have values that match theirs is increasingly evident. Thus, storytelling emerges as a persuasive technique that excels in transmitting emotional narratives that arouse feelings in the consumer. In this article is made a brief approach to the story and contextualization of storytelling and its concept is clarified. Finally, the narrative is analyzed in its relationship with the brand building.*

**Keywords:** Consumer, Storytelling, Narrative, Brand

## 1. Introduction

While society advances, the interaction manner and communication also develop, becoming a fundamental factor in the record and growth of civilization as we know it today [1]. In the past, engaging the consumer proved to be an more accessible and less laborious task through the constant application of the same persuasion techniques, but today, seducing that same consumer who has adopted a new profile in relation to consumption, proves to be an arduous and difficult task to achieve.

Faced with this new reality, there is a path that points to the development of a deeper and less objective relationship with the consumer. It is essential that the brand becomes useful to the public and that it offers an emotional reward before asking him for a rational response [2].

The consumer no longer cares only about the product/service quality but gives great importance to what the brand can add to it. As such, storytelling emerges, which proves to be a powerful device for the brand consolidation process, through the use of the company's experiences, perceptions and ideals to tell a story capable of persuading and impacting the consumer, thus capturing their attention [3].

Keeping this in mind, storytelling started to be a procedure and an opportunity that can easily, given its attributes, be used in a strategic way within the areas of branding, marketing, and advertising. It proves to be an effective tool to transmit, approach, disseminate and shape the brand image and message regarding the consumer [1].

The purpose of narratives built from storytelling techniques is to immerse the consumer in the story that the brand tells, to allow the creation of emotional connections beyond that the brand offers [4]. So, the brands no longer intend to just sell a product/service, but a lifestyle [5].

The efficiency of storytelling can be determined when brands, by adopting stories that generate public identification, are able to get closer to consumers' lives creating an emotional connection and becoming more human. This creates disparity in relation to the concurrence and distances itself from the old "buy, dress, use" concept,

returning to the consumer the characteristic feeling of purchasing power and choice [4].

It is possible that storytelling isn't always successful and that the consumer doesn't allow himself to be involved in the narrative, taking into account not only the narrative itself but also external factors, such as, for example, the previous bad experiences with the brand. However, the literature points that the application of storytelling result in more identification with the brand and can generate positive consumer associations with the brand.

## 2. Storytelling

### 2.1 Brief history and context

The practice of telling stories, considered the oldest of the arts, has been present in human culture since the most primitive societies [6]. This art form is considered to have been part of the history of human evolution for over one hundred thousand years, having started through the need to transmit and share information among primitive men [1].

In the early days of civilization, the narrative already existed, although with different outlines from those of today, even before speech development. The stories were told around the campfires, with symbols and cave drawings [7].

As a narrator of his own history as an individual, and of the world's history, Man used narrative as an essential resource for his existence as a rational being. Without this tool, the sociability so spoken today and the awareness of ourselves would not be possible [8], because the story results as a memory of Man as community and as social being.

With the appearing of the first civilizations, the concept of society also developed. The first societies emerge, new ways of being socially and new forms of commerce they become visible. With this evolution, the need to communicate and share information is increasingly fundamental, reason why storytelling, although not recognized as such, becomes an important requirement in more archaic societies [1].

With the evolution of society, the writing arises to represent oral language: thus, literature is born [7]. The birth of

literature makes it possible to meet the need of Man in come nearer to the human existential problematic more assertively, since until then the narrated stories spoke of human life more generally.

From this moment, society takes its development to a new condition and takes new steps at a social, cultural, and economic level. Storytelling is no longer just used to transmit stories for people's entertainment, but also to help with trade and the spread of ideologies. A new use for the narrative is created: to make the story transmitted something much more personal and fascinating, allowing those who read/hear it to participate in the narrative and fully experience it [1].

In the 20th century, great political leaders began to see the benefits of storytelling in the propagation of their ideologies [1]. It is widely speculated that some of the world's greatest leaders were the best storytellers.

We can therefore verify that storytelling does not appear as a novelty, that is, it already existed although with different contours. According to [7], this is an old art used to convey facts, fictional or not, that can be done verbally or in writing with the aim of affecting and informing large audiences and, even, entire generations.

With the evolution of the world and the introduction of new technologies within society, a new dimension is attributed to the power of narrative [9]. The act of storytelling therefore had to adapt and reinvent itself to meet the needs of this new reality in which man establishes interpersonal relationships through the sharing - just a click away - of his own stories [10].

Thus, the advertising world and brands see storytelling as an opportunity to add value. Using the company's experiences, perceptions and ideals - combined with its mission, vision and values - to create a narrative (tell a story) that creates an important impact on the consumer, proves to be a very strong asset in the consolidation process of a brand. This happens because the current consumer no longer follows the same values of the old consumer, not only cares about the quality of a product or service, but also with what the brand means for itself and for others [3].

The association of storytelling to a brand, according to [9], is called "Brand Storytelling" (the history of the brand). The "Brand Storytelling" is not just about the history of the brand itself, but enfold the set of several narratives around it: the brand's beginnings, its evolution, the values, mission and vision of the brand, what distinguishes it from others.

Storytelling is consequently no longer the simple act of storytelling. It begins to be noticed as an opportunity that, used in a strategic way in areas such as branding and marketing, can be efficient to transmit, disseminate and shape the image of the brands - of their products and services - and bring them closer to their target audiences [1].

## 2.2. The concept

Storytelling is considered an important business tool for

different organizational contexts, which can be implemented in different environments: the academic environment, entrepreneurship spaces, the corporate and business universe, among others. So, there are many areas that can benefit and develop using storytelling in a strategic way [11].

[9], with regard to the concept of storytelling, refers to it as "a compound word (story + telling) which, in a free translation, can mean the "act of telling stories", currently being the name given to strategic visual narratives told through new communication technologies and new forms of social interaction".

[5], in their turn, chooses to divide the storytelling concept in two directions: broad and narrow. In a broad sense, the author believes that storytelling is "the ancient art of transmitting facts, real or fictitious, in different types of support, verbally or not, in order to thrill and inform large audiences and even generations". Concerning the narrow sense of the concept, [5] sees storytelling as "updating of the post-modern multimedia phenomenon potential with different pragmatic objectives".

[12], in his book "Storytelling. Stories that mark", opts to approach the definition of storytelling through 3 aspects: pragmatic, pictorial and poetic. In the pragmatic aspect, storytelling emerges as the technique of creating and linking varied scenes with meaning, capable of capturing the public's attention and allowing the assimilation of a main idea; in the pictorial aspect, storytelling is assumed as the technique of molding and grouping the pieces of a puzzle (or puzzles) in order to create a remarkable picture; finally, in the poetic aspect, storytelling is a technique of "stacking narrative bricks" in order to build "imaginary monuments" full of meaning.

More focused on the advertising context, [13] believe that storytelling is not limited to the act of telling a story, but also serve to break some paradigms that are emerging in today's society and that become the key to reach the advertising goal. For the authors, it is important to remember that it is through reports, stories and testimonies that advertising has something to tell the client. In this sense, storytelling appears as an essential tool to emotionally connect the brand to the public and more easily convey the intended message.

Also, according to [14], what is meant by storytelling may depend on the approach and context in which this term is inserted. In this perspective, the strategies used must comply logic relevant to each communication process and considering the particularities of each media.

## 3. The narrative in construction of brand

Through the construction of a narrative, storytelling allows to share knowledge and experiences (real or imaginary) thus communicating values, lessons, ideas, and concepts. Stories often appear as a lite way to complement complex knowledge and concepts, making them more easily understandable [15].

Assumed as an asset, storytelling is an excellent contribution in the construction of a brand entity, however its use as well as the construction of an appropriate narrative for the brand capable of involving the public proves to be a challenge for organizations [2].

Not all examples of storytelling present a story capable of connecting with the consumer and contributing to the organization's image. This is because, if before when the consumer had little power and, consequently, stories could be created in a more intuitive way, the expansion of society has made the process of building a captivating narrative become more complex and challenging [3].

In this sense, it is considered proper to make a survey of the factors and / or techniques that are fundamental to the success of a narrative. Thus, before starting the process of creating a narrative, it is necessary to be able to identify the elements that are indispensable to it, to define the target audience (segmentation) and the content of the narrative [10]. A good storytelling is mainly governed by the construction of a fluid, stimulating and - very important - coherent story [1].

[16], in his book "5 Lessons from Storytelling, Facts, Fiction and Fantasy" (2014), explains that there is no effective formula for a story to be able to captivate, but there are ingredients capable of to guide a story to a successful conclusion. The secret is, above all, in the existence of a character with whom the consumer feels empathy, who tirelessly strives to overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable, finally reaching a satisfactory goal - going through a process of personal transformation [16].

Obstacles are factors that complement a narrative, essential to make it stronger and more captivating. These are not just physical, they can also be emotional, such as internal or external conflicts that cause a atmosphere of tension and mystery in the course of the narrative [16]. According to the author, for the construction of a good narrative it is crucial to establish a well-defined goal (an end where the character intends to reach) and, consequently, an element of conflict (which prevents the character from reaching his goal) because makes the narrative more engaging and emotional [16].

For [1] and [17], a story capable of captivating must be based on three fundamentals. The first is the scenario: it helps the consumer to situate himself in the story and connect with the place - or world - where the narrative takes place. The second crucial foundation is the protagonist: real, fictional, or even the target audience. The protagonist is a fundamental piece for the feeling of empathy and identification to arise in the public. Good protagonists are usually responsible for the success of the narrative, as they bring the consumer closer to the story and reinforce the impact and emotional appeal of the narrative. Last (and not least), the success of a narrative also depends on the script: it is responsible for the smooth running of the narrative and for its consistency in space and time to help the audience to follow and understand the development of the story. Without a good script capable of defining the narrative's timeline, the

story can become confused and lead to a failure in communication with the target audience [17] [1].

To be a good story, a narrative must have an interactive, visual character and have an apogee - climax - that suggests a point where the story changes and arouses feelings and emotions in consumers [10]. As already mentioned by [16], [10] reinforces the importance of having a character capable of bringing together and creating empathy, as well as a coherent dialogue and a conflict that is resolved at the end of the narrative.

Although for [16] it is not possible to write a perfect scene, it is possible to write a scene that is perfectly structured. Therefore, the author divides the basic structure of a scene into two parts: action scene and reaction scene. The action scene it unfolds in 3 points: the objective, mentioned above, which must be very clear and introduced in the narrative as soon as possible; the obstacles: essential to the narrative because they generate tension and suspense, they can be created by the main character or by an antagonist; and disaster: a time when the character's problems get worse. The reaction scene is also divided into 3 points: reflection, where the protagonist reflects on the course of history and the problems that have happened until then; the dilemma, in which the protagonist finds himself at a crossroads and must choose a course; and, finally, the decision: the protagonist is forced to choose a path.

The narrative structure is also known as the "Hero's Journey" and has proven to be a resource widely used by storytelling professionals as it reveals a structure with very favorable results [1].

The "Hero's Journey" (eternalized by Joseph Campbell) is about the organization of the methodological stages of narrative, created from the group of narrative bases used since the beginning of humanity, taking into account the psychoanalysis of important figures such as Sigmund Freud [2].

This narrative structure has been applied to several successful stories. Some examples are stories of books adapted later to the cinema like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*, also films like *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones*, or even video games like *Tomb Raider* and *Warcraft* [1].

At the end of 2019, the video game *The Witcher* also became very popular with consumers, having seen its script adapted for a series on the Netflix streaming platform [18].

The structure of the narrative is extremely important for the creation of a good story, but not only: the formulation of an idea that captivates the target audience is essential to a good storytelling.

[19] present 6 principles that, applied to an idea, can make it memorable. These principles are simplicity, surprise, palpability, credibility, emotion, and description. The principle of simplicity suggests that an idea must be essentially simple to be assimilated and understood. The authors [19] realize that the golden rule is the model of simplicity revealed in the statement of a sentence so intense

that anyone would take a lifetime to pursue the underlying concept. The principle of surprise is simple: it is necessary to surprise the public by exceeding or contradicting expectations. About palpability, it is suggested that the idea should be as concrete as possible to facilitate the understanding of the target audience, using descriptive and/or sensory factors for this purpose. The principle of credibility makes an individual choose a product/service/idea instead of another, makes the reality presented to him more acceptable. Emotion, in turn, leads the target audience to be involved in the idea presented. Finally, the description, because to tell stories inspires, motivates, and captivates those who listen to them, proving to be a great contribution to the success of an idea.

Against all elements essential to the construction of the idea and structure of the narrative, [20] identify 5 fundamentals of storytelling that lead to engagement with a narrative. These are: protagonism, tension, teaching, meaning and human truth. These fundamentals are identified with all the principles already mentioned by [19], except, apparently, the human truth. The foundation of human truth may seem like a new concept, but it is, substantially, the empathy that history is able to generate in the consumer through their identification with the narrative. In other words, he experiences the reality that is happening in history, which leads to the creation of an affective relationship with the protagonist. [20] explain the existence of this connection/empathy with the knowledge that humans feel the same range of emotions throughout life and that is why they feel empathy with other humans. Thus, human truth proves to be extremely important for a narrative to work. [12] reinforces this same idea because he believes that a good narrative must prove to be true and authentic even if it is the result of the writer imagination.

Therefore, alongside the development of the world and the impositions of a new consumer - more informed and demanding - brands must also develop through the use of innovative strategies and techniques that are capable of drawing the attention of their target audience. It is in this sense that the narrative emerges as an important factor in building a brand.

[21] believe that as brand builders the insertion of techniques such as the use of narrative, as well as narrative arcs (continuous use of the same narrative line in episodes/advertising spots, posts on social networks, etc.), in order to project brand experiences, values and positioning, going beyond the product-price ratio, is an asset when it comes to reaching the hearts of the target audience.

In the classic advertising model, the brand has always been the focal point. Communication - in this model - is carried out around the brand and the content created by the agencies aims to make it attractive and add value to it.

However, over the years, specialists in semiology, psychology and motivational research have worked to add symbolic characteristics, unattainable values to the brands, and emphasize their personality and style. This form adapted to the classic advertising model proved to be extremely important. It became evident that the exclusive focus on the

brand and the product is no longer as convincing as it once was [22]. It is no longer as easy to make the consumer pay attention to brands as before, but now is possible to involve, interest, inspire and entertain the target audience with stories that prove to be attractive [21].

Narrative is also effective in building brands with a rich and/or meaningful history. It is, therefore, used by brands as a tool that allows them to tell the story of its heritage, involving the consumer in a journey that contemplates the details inherent to the origin and concept of the brands [21]. Although all brands can make use of its history, some do so in a way that everyone knows where it came from, adding - naturally - value to it. For example, most consumers know the history of brands like HP or Apple, as they made a big bet on storytelling for their construction, so that even consumers who do not buy products from these brands will recognize them, as well as their stories and routes. This reality does not apply to all brands, reason why it is difficult to find consumers who can talk about the origins of brands like Samsung or Lenovo, for example [21].

Apple is an excellent example that storytelling when applied to building brands is a fundamental tool. Steve Jobs, founder of the brand and the "image" of it, was already a natural speaker. His product presentation conferences were a journey through a dazzling history that did not present the characteristics of the products alone, but the incredible experience that this could provide to the consumer.

[3] as well as [12] tell us about it: through an advertising spot that passed the Super Bowl XVIII, which aimed at the presentation of the Macintosh (predecessor of the current MacBook), the brand made use of storytelling as archetypal, generating a resounding impact on consumers.

Consumption becomes part of the narrative, insofar as each consumer has his role, which generates identification by the brand and triggers loyalty to it. Thus, the consumer starts to defend the brand, to review itself in the stories that it tells, being part of its representation groups. When this happens, one of the most important strategic objectives of an advertising campaign of this nature was achieved [23]. It is in this way that the narrative is gaining space in the construction of brands, striving for effectiveness in the communication strategy, as the consumer essentially seeks meaning and a deep and subjective relationship in contact with the brand.

#### 4. Conclusion

In fact, more than a method for telling the story, storytelling is an effective tool to attract consumers and a way to establish a close relationship with them and create an attractive platform for the brand.

Storytelling can humanize the brand image and make easy a relationship with the consumer, involving them in their trajectory.

Stories, being an activity that has followed the evolution of society, bring together qualities necessary to create the value of a brand. In this scenario, the use of storytelling strategies



is a possible competitive advantage for brands and should not be ignored.

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