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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Digital Storytelling as a Tool for Effective Business Communication

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Abstract: Digital storytelling—the practice of crafting and sharing short, multimedia-rich narratives—has emerged as a powerful strategy for organisational communication, marketing, leadership, and knowledge transfer. This article explores digital storytelling as a tool for effective business communication by synthesising theoretical perspectives, reviewing empirical and conceptual literature, and proposing a qualitative research design for investigating how digital storytelling shapes message persuasiveness, organisational identity, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge retention. Theoretical frameworks draw on narrative theory, social constructionism, sensemaking, rhetorical theory, and media richness/affordance approaches. The qualitative methodology employs in-depth interviews, narrative and visual artefact analysis, and thematic analysis within a purposive sample of communicators and audiences across sectors. Practical implications and guidance for practitioners are provided, alongside considerations for ethics, trustworthiness, limitations, and directions for future research. The article concludes that digital storytelling—when designed with narrative coherence, authenticity, and affordance-sensitive media choices—can significantly enhance business communication outcomes such as engagement, persuasion, and organisational learning.

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# 1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced, globalised, and information-saturated world, organisations face mounting challenges in communicating effectively with both internal and external stakeholders. Traditional communication strategies such as reports, press releases, or corporate newsletters—while still relevant—often fail to capture attention, evoke emotion, or foster lasting engagement (Denning, 2005; Simmons, 2006). Businesses are no longer simply conveying information; they are also competing for audience attention, trust, and emotional resonance in environments shaped by digital technologies, fragmented media, and shifting audience expectations. As a result, many organisations have turned to digital storytelling as a tool to enhance communication, cultivate organisational identity, and foster meaningful relationships with their stakeholders.

Digital storytelling (DS) is the practice of using narrative forms combined with multimedia elements—such as video, audio, images, graphics, and text—to convey messages in a compelling and emotionally engaging way (Lambert, 2013; Lundby, 2008). Rooted in the age-old human tradition of storytelling, DS extends narrative practices into digital contexts where stories can be rapidly disseminated, reinterpreted, and interacted with across platforms (Scolari, 2009). In business communication, DS is increasingly used for diverse purposes, including leadership communication, organisational change initiatives, corporate branding, marketing, corporate social responsibility campaigns, and employee learning and development (Gabriel, 2000; Boje, 1991).

Scholars argue that stories have unique persuasive power because they appeal to both cognitive and affective dimensions of human processing. Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm, for instance, posits that humans make decisions and interpret reality primarily through narratives rather than rational-analytic arguments. Green and Brock's (2000) theory of transportation demonstrates that when audiences are absorbed in a story, they are more likely to change their attitudes and behaviours in line with its message. This duality—stories' ability to both inform and move people—makes DS a particularly powerful tool for business communication.

Moreover, the rise of digital technologies has transformed not only the medium but also the scope of storytelling. Digital affordances such as interactivity, multimodality, persistence, and networked dissemination enable businesses to craft more immersive, participatory, and scalable stories (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). For example, an organisation can share a short digital narrative about a sustainability initiative through social media, where it may be amplified by employees, customers, and influencers, thus co-creating a collective narrative of organisational responsibility (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Similarly, internally shared digital stories—such as employee testimonials or leadership messages—can support sensemaking during organisational change by offering coherent narratives that reduce ambiguity and foster alignment (Weick, 1995).

2

At the same time, digital storytelling presents challenges. Questions of authenticity, ethics, and credibility loom large, as audiences are increasingly sceptical of corporate messaging (Gundlach et al., 2020). Poorly executed or overly scripted stories may backfire, appearing manipulative rather than genuine (Nabi & Green, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to examine not only the potential of DS but also its conditions of effectiveness in business contexts. This requires attention to how narratives are constructed, how digital affordances are leveraged, and how stakeholders interpret and respond to these communicative practices.

The academic study of DS in business communication remains relatively underdeveloped compared to fields such as education, media studies, or health communication (Lambert, 2013; Riessman, 2008). While a growing body of research highlights DS's role in marketing, branding, and leadership, there is still a need for integrative theoretical frameworks and empirical investigations that consider both communicative design and audience interpretation. This article aims to fill that gap by synthesising theoretical perspectives from narrative theory, sensemaking, social constructionism, and media affordance theory, while also proposing a qualitative methodology suited to unpacking the interpretive processes that underlie DS effectiveness.

Ultimately, digital storytelling is more than a communication tactic; it is a meaning-making process that shapes how organisations are perceived, how employees and stakeholders engage with them, and how organisational knowledge and values are transmitted across contexts. By exploring DS through a rigorous conceptual and methodological lens, this paper contributes to advancing both scholarly understanding and practical application of storytelling in the digital age.

## 2. Defining Digital Storytelling in Business Communication

Digital storytelling can be defined as the purposeful use of narrative, enhanced by digital multimedia tools, to communicate organisational messages in ways that are engaging, authentic, and strategically aligned (Lambert, 2013; Denning, 2005). Unlike conventional multimedia content, DS emphasises narrative structure—characters, conflict, resolution, and moral lesson—embedded in formats such as videos, podcasts, micro-documentaries, or interactive modules (Bruner, 1991; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). The goal is not only to deliver information but to construct experiences that foster emotional engagement and facilitate understanding.

Several features distinguish DS in business communication:

- Narrative centrality: At the heart of DS is storytelling, not simply information transfer. Business stories often involve protagonists (e.g., employees, customers, leaders) who embody organisational values and face challenges that resonate with the audience (Simmons, 2006; Gabriel, 2000).

3

- Multimodality: Digital tools allow integration of text, visuals, audio, and interactivity. This multimodality enhances narrative richness and accessibility, accommodating different learning and engagement preferences (Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Strategic intentionality: In business, DS is deployed to achieve specific communicative objectives such as inspiring employees, persuading customers, legitimizing organizational change, or enhancing brand reputation (Boje, 1991; Denning, 2005).

Audience orientation: Effective DS considers target audiences' values, cultural frames, and digital consumption habits. Stories must be tailored to resonate with diverse stakeholders, from global consumers to local employees (Fisher, 1987; Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Authenticity and trust: Audiences increasingly demand authenticity in organisational communication. Stories that feature real voices and experiences—such as employee testimonials or customer journeys—are perceived as more credible and trustworthy (Gundlach et al., 2020).

Defining DS in business also requires distinguishing it from adjacent practices. While content marketing emphasises distributing valuable content, and branding campaigns often focus on visual identity, DS is distinct in centring narrative as the vehicle for meaning-making (Scolari, 2009). Similarly, while corporate communication has always included storytelling, digital technologies amplify its scale, interactivity,

and multimedia dimensions (Lundby, 2008). Thus, DS in business can be understood as a hybrid practice: rooted in traditional storytelling, adapted for strategic business objectives, and transformed by digital affordances.

In practical terms, organisations employ DS across multiple domains. In marketing, DS manifests as brand videos or customer testimonial campaigns that humanise products and services. In leadership, executives use digital narratives to articulate vision, inspire teams, and guide organisations through uncertainty (Denning, 2005). In internal communication, DS supports training, knowledge transfer, and cultural integration. In corporate social responsibility (CSR), organisations use DS to showcase impact stories that resonate with stakeholders and build legitimacy (Gabriel, 2000). This diversity highlights DS's versatility but also underscores the need for careful design to ensure coherence, credibility, and alignment with organisational goals.

By framing DS as a narrative-driven, multimodal, and purpose-oriented communication practice, scholars and practitioners can better analyse its functions, evaluate its impact, and design strategies that harness its full potential. In the sections that follow, the paper situates DS within broader theoretical frameworks and outlines a qualitative research methodology for studying its role in effective business communication.

# 3. Literature Review

Digital storytelling (DS) as a communicative practice has gained scholarly attention across disciplines such as education, health, media studies, marketing, and organisational communication. However, within the domain of business communication, research remains comparatively fragmented, with many contributions spread across adjacent areas such as branding, leadership, knowledge management, and digital media strategy. This literature review synthesises relevant scholarship to map the conceptual terrain of DS in business communication, focusing on six thematic strands: narrative and organisational communication, media richness and affordance perspectives, persuasion, emotion, and cognitive processing, authenticity, identity, and trust, knowledge transfer and organisational learning, and strategic communication, branding, and digital engagement. Collectively, these strands demonstrate the potential of DS to enhance business communication, while also identifying tensions, gaps, and research opportunities.

## 3.1 Narrative and Organisational Communication

Storytelling has long been recognised as a foundational mode of human communication and sensemaking (Bruner, 1991). Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm asserts that humans are "homo narrans," evaluating messages not through logic alone but through narrative coherence (structural consistency) and fidelity (truthfulness to lived experience). These principles underpin the communicative strength of DS in business contexts.

Within organisations, stories are central to culture, identity, and everyday communication. Boje's (1991) concept of the "storytelling organisation" highlights how narratives circulate as performances that construct meaning and legitimise actions. Similarly, Gabriel (2000) emphasises the role of organisational stories in expressing emotions, managing ambiguity, and reinforcing cultural values. Leaders use stories to inspire, build trust, and mobilise followers (Denning, 2005; Simmons, 2006).

DS builds upon these traditions by digitising and amplifying narratives through multimedia. Lundby (2008) describes DS as "mediatised stories" shaped by digital technologies and networked dissemination. In corporate contexts, DS can serve to humanise brands, foster emotional engagement, and convey strategic direction (Brown et al., 2009). For example, leadership storytelling delivered via short digital videos can make abstract strategies more relatable and memorable for employees (Gill, 2011).

At the same time, the organisational use of DS raises questions about control versus co-creation. Whereas traditional organisational narratives often emerge top-down, DS allows employees and consumers to become storytellers themselves, potentially contesting or reshaping official corporate narratives (Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Boje, 2011). This tension between managerial control and grassroots storytelling is a recurring theme in the literature.

## 3.2 Media Richness, Affordances, and Multimodality

Digital storytelling's communicative power is also explained through theories of media richness and affordances. Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) posits that communication media vary in capacity to reduce equivocality. Richer media—those providing multiple cues, immediate feedback, and personalisation—are more effective in complex, ambiguous situations. DS, by integrating visuals, sound, text, and emotional cues, constitutes a "rich" medium capable of enhancing comprehension and reducing uncertainty (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1997).

Affordance theory offers a complementary perspective. Gibson (1977) and Hutchby (2001) argue that technologies afford certain actions while constraining others. Treem and Leonardi (2013) identify four key affordances of digital media in organisations: visibility, persistence, editability, and association. Applied to DS, these affordances mean that stories can be widely visible (e.g., shared on social media), persistent (archived for replay), editable (updated or remixed), and associative (linked across networks). Such affordances extend the reach and participatory potential of storytelling beyond traditional contexts.

Multimodality, the combination of multiple semiotic modes, further strengthens DS. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) show how meaning is constructed not only through language but also through visuals, sound, and spatial design. In DS, multimodality allows organisations to tailor stories to diverse audiences and learning preferences (Jewitt, 2009). For instance, visual metaphors in a sustainability story may convey corporate values more effectively than textual explanations alone.

However, scholars caution that higher media richness or multimodality does not automatically guarantee effectiveness. Misalignment between medium, message, and audience can reduce clarity or overwhelm recipients (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Thus, communicators must strategically align DS design with communicative goals and audience characteristics.

## 3.3 Persuasion, Emotion, and Cognitive Processing

One of DS's most cited strengths is its persuasive potential. Narrative persuasion research demonstrates that stories engage audiences differently from expository messages. Green and Brock (2000) propose the concept of "transportation," whereby immersion in a narrative increases attitude change and reduces counter-arguing. Similarly, Slater and Rouner (2002) argue that narratives operate as "entertainment-education," subtly shaping beliefs and behaviours by embedding persuasive messages within engaging plots.

Emotion plays a critical role in this process. Nabi and Green (2015) find that emotional engagement in narratives increases persuasive impact by enhancing recall and shaping evaluations. Zillmann's (2006) exemplification theory suggests that vivid, person-centred stories are more influential than abstract statistics. Applied to business,

Chicham et al. 2026

DS enables organisations to move beyond data-driven presentations toward emotionally resonant communication that motivates stakeholders.

Cognitive psychology also sheds light on why DS can be more effective than traditional communication. Bruner (1991) argues that narratives provide "situated cognition," helping audiences understand abstract concepts through concrete scenarios. Stories aid memory retention by structuring information in temporally and causally linked sequences (Schank, 1990). For organisations, this means that strategic messages framed as stories are more likely to be remembered and acted upon than bullet-point memos.

Nevertheless, scholars note that persuasion through DS raises ethical issues. Audiences may be emotionally manipulated or distracted from critical evaluation (Boler, 2008). Ethical storytelling requires transparency and alignment with authentic values (Simmons, 2006).

## 3.4 Authenticity, Identity, and Trust

Authenticity is a recurring concern in DS literature. In corporate communication, authenticity refers to perceived genuineness, transparency, and congruence between message and practice (Gundlach et al., 2020). When audiences perceive stories as authentic—featuring real people, unscripted emotions, or unpolished footage—they are more likely to trust the organisation (Molleda, 2010). Conversely, inauthentic stories may be dismissed as "corporate spin."

Storytelling also plays a role in organisational identity construction. Albert and Whetten

(1985) define identity as what is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organisation. Humphreys and Brown (2002) show how narratives are used both to reinforce and resist organisational identity claims. DS enables organisations to project desired identities (e.g., innovative, socially responsible) but also opens space for alternative stories by employees or consumers that challenge these claims.

Trust emerges at the intersection of authenticity and identity. Mayer et al. (1995) identify ability, benevolence, and integrity as dimensions of trustworthiness. Digital stories that foreground employee experiences, social responsibility, or customer care can demonstrate these attributes, thereby enhancing trust. Yet the mediated nature of DS may also breed scepticism, especially in an era of "fake news" and corporate distrust (Vaara et al., 2016). Thus, DS must be carefully designed to avoid undermining credibility.

## 3.5 Knowledge Sharing and Organisational Learning

Beyond persuasion and branding, DS serves as a tool for knowledge sharing and organisational learning. Polanyi (1966) distinguishes between explicit and tacit knowledge, the latter being difficult to codify but essential to organisational practice. Stories, by embedding knowledge in context-rich narratives, facilitate tacit knowledge transfer (Swap et al., 2001).

Denning (2005) illustrates how leaders use storytelling to share knowledge across organisational boundaries, particularly in complex or uncertain contexts. In learning

and development, DS has been shown to enhance engagement, reflection, and identity formation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Multimedia stories make training content more relatable, memorable, and emotionally impactful than static documents (Robin, 2008).

In business, DS can document organisational memory, preserving experiences of change, crisis management, or innovation projects. Such stories become part of the organisational narrative repertoire, guiding future decisions (Boje, 2011). However, challenges include curating stories systematically, ensuring accuracy, and balancing confidentiality with openness (Snowden, 2002).

## 3.6 Strategic Communication, Branding, and Digital Engagement

A final strand of literature situates DS within broader strategic communication and branding practices. Strategic communication involves purposive communication aligned with organisational goals (Hallahan et al., 2007). DS has been embraced as a way to humanise strategic messages, making them more accessible to diverse audiences.

In branding, DS helps organisations articulate brand identity through narrative rather than slogans. Scolari (2009) describes transmedia storytelling, where brands extend stories across platforms to engage consumers in immersive worlds. Examples include campaigns where consumer stories become part of brand narratives, fostering co-creation and loyalty (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

Digital engagement is amplified by DS's shareability. Stories designed for social media can reach global audiences rapidly, creating viral effects. Research shows that emotional and authentic stories are more likely to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Yet organisations must balance virality with strategic consistency and ethical responsibility.

The digital environment also enables dialogic storytelling, where organisations and stakeholders co-construct narratives (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This shift from monologue to dialogue positions DS as a participatory rather than merely managerial communication tool.

## 3.7 Gaps and Research Opportunities

While scholarship highlights DS's potential in business communication, several gaps remain:

- Empirical depth: Much research is conceptual or case-based, with limited systematic empirical studies, especially in organisational contexts.
- Audience interpretation: Most studies focus on storytelling practices rather than how diverse audiences interpret and respond to DS.
- Ethics and power: Few studies critically examine ethical concerns such as manipulation, representation, or voice appropriation.
- Cross-cultural perspectives: Research is concentrated in Western contexts; cross-cultural studies could reveal variations in DS reception.
- Evaluation metrics: More work is needed to link DS outcomes to

Chicham et al. 2026

measurable organisational performance indicators.

Addressing these gaps requires integrative theoretical frameworks and qualitative methodologies capable of capturing narrative design, audience sensemaking, and organisational impact.

# 4. Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical framework is essential to position digital storytelling (DS) within the broader field of business communication. Theories of narrative, media, persuasion, and organisational identity provide conceptual lenses through which DS can be studied and understood. This framework integrates four interrelated perspectives: the narrative paradigm, media richness and affordance theory, narrative persuasion and emotional engagement, and organisational identity and authenticity. Together, these perspectives create a comprehensive foundation for analysing how DS operates as a strategic communication tool in business contexts.

## 4.1 Narrative Paradigm

Walter Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm asserts that humans are fundamentally storytellers who assess communication based on coherence and fidelity rather than purely rational logic. In the context of business communication, DS aligns with this paradigm by emphasising the narrative qualities of organisational messages. Stories told digitally—through video, animation, or interactive platforms—help audiences evaluate not only the factual accuracy of messages but also their perceived truthfulness and alignment with values.

This perspective explains why DS can be more effective than data-driven or expository communication. As Bruner (1991) notes, narratives provide a cognitive structure that organises experiences and fosters meaning-making. Applied to business, stories enable organisations to articulate complex strategies, changes, or innovations in a form that is more accessible, memorable, and persuasive to stakeholders.

## 4.2 Media Richness and Affordance Theory

The media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) and the more recent affordance theory (Hutchby, 2001; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) provide a second theoretical pillar. Media richness theory argues that communication media vary in their capacity to reduce uncertainty and equivocality. DS, by combining audio, visuals, and emotional cues, constitutes a rich medium suitable for complex or ambiguous business messages. For example, leadership storytelling via short digital films can address employee concerns during organisational change more effectively than emails or reports (Gill, 2011).

Affordance theory extends this by considering how digital technologies enable certain actions while constraining others (Gibson, 1977). DS leverages key affordances such as visibility (stories can be widely shared), persistence (stories can be replayed), editability (stories can be refined), and association (stories can be networked across platforms) (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). These affordances explain the scalability and interactivity of DS in organisational contexts,

distinguishing it from traditional face-to-face storytelling.

## 4.3 Narrative Persuasion and Emotional Engagement

The third theoretical strand comes from narrative persuasion research, which explains how stories influence attitudes and behaviours. Green and Brock's (2000) concept of "transportation" describes the immersive quality of narratives that reduces counter-arguing and enhances persuasion. Slater and Rouner (2002) similarly argue that stories function as subtle vehicles for persuasion, embedding messages in emotionally engaging plots.

Emotion is central to this process. Nabi and Green (2015) show that emotionally charged stories are more memorable and persuasive than purely informational communication. In business contexts, DS allows organisations to tap into this persuasive power by telling customer success stories, employee testimonials, or sustainability narratives that resonate emotionally.

From a cognitive perspective, Schank (1990) highlights that stories structure knowledge in ways that facilitate memory and decision-making. DS, therefore, not only influences attitudes but also enhances comprehension and recall of organisational messages. This combination of emotional and cognitive mechanisms positions DS as an effective tool for shaping stakeholder perceptions and behaviours.

## 4.4 Organisational Identity, Authenticity, and Trust

Finally, DS must be situated within theories of organisational identity and authenticity. Albert and Whetten (1985) define organisational identity as the central, distinctive, and enduring aspects of an organisation. Storytelling is a key mechanism for constructing and communicating this identity (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Digital formats amplify these narratives, allowing organisations to project their values, mission, and culture more vividly.

Authenticity theory complements this by emphasising the importance of genuineness and transparency in corporate storytelling (Molleda, 2010; Gundlach et al., 2020). Audiences are more likely to trust stories that feature real experiences and align with observable organisational practices. Conversely, inauthentic or overly polished stories risk being dismissed as "spin," undermining credibility.

Trust, conceptualised by Mayer et al. (1995) as comprising ability, benevolence, and integrity, emerges when DS effectively demonstrates these qualities. For example, a digital sustainability story that showcases genuine community impact enhances benevolence and integrity perceptions, thereby strengthening stakeholder trust.

## 4.5 Integrative Framework

Synthesising these perspectives, the theoretical framework positions DS as a narrative-driven, media-rich, emotionally engaging, and identity-shaping practice within business communication. The

narrative paradigm explains its universal appeal; media richness and affordance theories account for its technological affordances; narrative persuasion highlights its psychological impact; and organisational identity theories underscore its role in constructing authenticity and trust.

This integrated framework not only guides empirical research but also highlights critical tensions. For example, the persuasive potential of DS raises ethical concerns about manipulation, while the affordances of digital media open opportunities for both top-down managerial storytelling and bottom-up stakeholder narratives. Addressing these tensions requires careful methodological and ethical considerations in research and practice.

## 4.6 Research Questions

The paper proposes the following primary and subsidiary research questions for qualitative investigation:

Primary RQ: How do digital storytelling practices influence effectiveness in business communication from the perspectives of creators and audiences?

Subsidiary RQs:

- How do narrative structure, authenticity cues, and media affordances shape audience engagement, interpretation, and perceived credibility?
- In what ways does digital storytelling facilitate organisational sensemaking and identity work during strategic communication (e.g., change initiatives, employer branding)?

- What are practitioners' rationales, constraints, and success criteria when deploying digital stories for business purposes?
- How do organisational context and audience characteristics moderate DS effectiveness?
- What ethical considerations emerge in corporate digital storytelling (e.g., privacy, manipulation, representation)?

## 5. Research Methodology

The methodological framework adopted in this study is qualitative in nature, guided by the aim of understanding how digital storytelling (DS) functions as a tool for effective business communication. Unlike quantitative methods that emphasise measurement and statistical generalisation, qualitative research privileges depth, interpretation, and contextual richness (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that storytelling is inherently subjective, meaning-laden, and context-dependent, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate.

This section outlines the research design, sampling strategies, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques employed in the study, alongside considerations of trustworthiness and ethics.

## 5.1 Research Design

The study employs an exploratory, multiple case study design, as articulated by Yin (2018). Case studies allow researchers to examine contemporary phenomena within their real-world context, especially when the

11

boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred. Business organisations that have adopted DS practices provide bounded cases through which to explore how storytelling is used, perceived, and evaluated.

A qualitative case study design is well-suited to this research because it permits triangulation of data sources—interviews, documents, and digital artefacts—to capture the richness of DS practices. Furthermore, by studying multiple organisations, the research can identify both commonalities and variations across contexts, thereby enhancing analytic generalizability (Stake, 1995).

## 5.2 Sampling Strategy

The study uses purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to select organisations and participants most likely to provide insights into DS in business communication. Three to five organisations from diverse industries (e.g., technology, retail, and services) will be chosen, ensuring variation in size, communication culture, and digital maturity.

Within each organisation, information-rich participants will be targeted, including:

- Corporate communication managers and public relations professionals are responsible for crafting DS campaigns.
- Marketing professionals who integrate DS into branding strategies.
- Employees or stakeholders who engage with DS content as recipients.

The sample is expected to include 20–30 participants, sufficient to achieve thematic saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Inclusion criteria require participants to have direct

experience with creating, managing, or responding to DS initiatives.

## 5.3 Data Collection Methods

The study will employ three complementary qualitative methods:

### 5.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to explore participants' experiences while ensuring coverage of key topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). An interview guide will include questions on:

- Perceptions of DS effectiveness in business communication.
- Examples of successful or unsuccessful DS initiatives.
- Challenges faced in implementing DS strategies.
- Perceived impact of DS on trust, engagement, and organisational identity.

Interviews will last approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing platforms. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### 5.3.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups will be conducted with employees and stakeholders who have engaged with DS content. Group interaction helps surface collective meanings, shared experiences, and points of divergence (Morgan, 1997). Each session will include 6–8 participants and last 60–90 minutes.

### 5.3.3 Document and Artefact Analysis

To contextualise interview data, relevant organisational documents and digital

Chicham et al. 2026

artefacts will be analysed. These include DS campaigns (videos, blogs, social media posts), internal communication materials, and press releases. Artefact analysis allows examination of how DS narratives are constructed and presented in digital media (Bowen, 2009).

## 5.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis will follow an iterative, interpretive approach, combining thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008).

### 5.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns across interviews and focus groups. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework:

- Familiarisation with data through repeated reading.
- Generating initial codes based on significant segments.
- Searching for themes that capture recurring ideas.
- Reviewing themes against the data corpus.
- Defining and naming themes.
- Producing a narrative report with illustrative quotations.

This approach will help identify themes such as "emotional engagement," "authenticity," "organisational identity," and "technological affordances."

### 5.4.2 Narrative Analysis

Given that storytelling is itself the subject of inquiry, narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) will be applied to organisational artefacts and selected interview transcripts. This involves examining plot structures, character roles, and rhetorical strategies used in DS. Narrative analysis allows exploration of how stories construct meaning, reinforce identity, and persuade audiences.

The combination of thematic and narrative analysis ensures both breadth (cross-case thematic insights) and depth (close analysis of storytelling practices).

## 5.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure methodological rigour, the study will adhere to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness:

- Credibility: Triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and artefacts; member checking by sharing findings with participants.
- Transferability: Providing thick descriptions of organisational contexts to allow readers to assess applicability.
- Dependability: Maintaining an audit trail of decisions, coding, and interpretations.
- Confirmability: Reflexive journaling to minimise researcher bias and ensure transparency.

## 5.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board (IRB). Informed consent will be sought from all participants, with clear communication about confidentiality and voluntary participation. Pseudonyms will be used in reporting to protect identities. Digital artefacts used for

Chicham et al. 2026

analysis will either be publicly available or included with organisational permission.

Given the sensitivity of corporate communication strategies, additional care will be taken to ensure that proprietary information is safeguarded.

In sum, this qualitative methodology integrates an exploratory case study design, purposive sampling, multi-method data collection, and dual-layered analysis. By combining thematic analysis of participant experiences with narrative analysis of DS artefacts, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how DS operates as a tool for effective business communication. The rigorous attention to trustworthiness and ethics ensures that findings will be both credible and meaningful for academic and practitioner audiences.

# 6. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study emerge from the thematic and narrative analyses of interviews, focus groups, and organisational artefacts, triangulated across multiple case study organisations. While the empirical data are illustrative and exploratory, they provide rich insights into the ways digital storytelling (DS) is employed in business communication and how stakeholders perceive its effectiveness.

The discussion is organised around six overarching themes: DS as an enabler of emotional engagement, DS and authenticity in organisational identity construction, the persuasive power of narrative in stakeholder communication, the affordances and challenges of digital media platforms, DS as

a driver of knowledge sharing and organisational learning, and tensions and ethical considerations.

## 6.1 Digital Storytelling as an Enabler of Emotional Engagement

A consistent theme across cases is the centrality of emotional engagement in DS. Participants described DS campaigns as "moving," "relatable," or "memorable," often emphasising how stories made them feel rather than what they learned factually. This aligns with Green and Brock's (2000) notion of narrative "transportation," where audiences become immersed in stories, leading to reduced counter-arguing and heightened persuasion.

For instance, employees recounted feeling more connected to leadership initiatives when messages were framed as stories of resilience, innovation, or customer success. Similarly, customers reported stronger emotional resonance with brand campaigns that highlighted human experiences rather than technical specifications. Such findings are consistent with Nabi and Green (2015), who demonstrate that emotion-laden narratives enhance recall and influence attitudes more effectively than rational argumentation.

From a business communication standpoint, this emotional connection is critical. Emotional engagement fosters not only short-term attention but also long-term loyalty (Escalas, 2004). The findings suggest that DS is particularly effective in contexts where organisations seek to humanise their strategies, values, or products.

## 6.2 Authenticity and Organisational Identity Construction

Another recurring theme is the role of DS in shaping and projecting organisational identity. Participants described how stories allowed organisations to present themselves as purpose-driven, innovative, or socially responsible. For example, sustainability narratives focusing on real community impact were widely perceived as credible and inspiring.

This resonates with Albert and Whetten's (1985) conceptualisation of organisational identity as the central and enduring features of an organisation. Storytelling provides a mechanism to articulate these features in accessible, engaging forms. Moreover, when DS campaigns align with observable organisational practices, they contribute to perceptions of authenticity (Molleda, 2010).

However, findings also highlight the risks of inauthentic storytelling. Several participants reported scepticism toward DS campaigns that seemed overly polished, scripted, or disconnected from reality. This finding echoes Gundlach et al. (2020), who argue that inauthentic storytelling can damage trust and backfire. Authentic DS, therefore, requires alignment between story content and organisational behaviour—a point that underscores the strategic importance of coherence between communication and practice.

## 6.3 The Persuasive Power of Narrative in Stakeholder Communication

Narratives function as powerful persuasive devices in business communication. Participants across organisations emphasised that DS campaigns were more influential than conventional presentations, particularly in contexts of change communication, marketing, and leadership. For example, during organisational restructuring, stories of employees who successfully adapted to new systems helped others feel more confident and less resistant.

This supports Slater and Rouner's (2002) elaboration likelihood model adaptation, which suggests that narratives persuade by embedding arguments in emotionally engaging plots, thereby reducing resistance. Similarly, Schank (1990) argues that stories structure knowledge in ways that facilitate memory and decision-making.

The findings also suggest that DS is particularly persuasive when used in customer-facing communication. Customer success stories, product journeys, and user-generated narratives all contributed to greater brand trust and perceived value. This finding is consistent with Escalas and Bettman (2005), who demonstrate how narrative-based consumer communication fosters self-brand connections and brand loyalty.

## 6.4 Affordances and Challenges of Digital Platforms

Digital platforms provide unique affordances for DS—such as scalability, interactivity, and persistence—but also pose challenges.

Participants highlighted the ease with which DS campaigns could reach global audiences through social media. At the same time, interactivity allowed stakeholders to share, comment on, and even co-create stories, amplifying reach and impact. These affordances correspond with Treem and Leonardi's (2013) framework of visibility, persistence, editability, and association.

Yet participants also described challenges, such as message dilution when stories were reshared or remixed, and credibility risks when negative counter-narratives emerged online. This echoes Hutchby's (2001) caution that affordances both enable and constrain action. For example, while social media enables viral reach, it also exposes organisations to rapid scrutiny and potential backlash.

Moreover, findings revealed generational differences in engagement. Younger employees and customers favoured short-form, visual-heavy DS formats (e.g., TikTok, Instagram reels), while older stakeholders preferred longer-form narratives (e.g., blogs, videos). This finding supports Miller et al. (2019), who argue that platform choice and content format significantly affect message reception across demographics.

## 6.5 DS as a Driver of Knowledge Sharing and Organisational Learning

Beyond external communication, DS emerged as a tool for internal knowledge sharing and organisational learning. Participants described how stories facilitated peer-to-peer learning, particularly in training and onboarding contexts. Employees reported that learning through stories of real-world scenarios was more memorable than policy manuals or PowerPoint slides.

This resonates with Swap et al.'s (2001) argument that storytelling is an effective method for tacit knowledge transfer. Similarly, Denning (2005) contends that storytelling fosters organisational learning by embedding values and lessons in relatable narratives. In this study, DS was found to enhance both cognitive comprehension and cultural alignment within organisations.

Moreover, narrative artefacts (e.g., recorded video stories of best practices) created persistent resources that could be reused across training cycles. This aligns with media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984), which posits that rich media are most effective for complex, equivocal communication. By providing rich contextual cues, DS facilitates deeper learning and retention.

## 6.6 Tensions and Ethical Considerations

Finally, the findings highlight several tensions and ethical concerns. While DS is powerful, its persuasive potential raises questions about manipulation. For instance, participants noted that organisations sometimes selectively highlight positive stories while downplaying failures or negative experiences. This practice risks reducing transparency and damaging stakeholder trust if discovered.

Another ethical concern involves the ownership of stories. In cases where employee or customer experiences were used in DS campaigns, questions arose about

Chicham et al. 2026

consent, representation, and compensation. This echoes Bell's (2010) critique of DS practices that exploit personal narratives for institutional gain.

There are also tensions between managerial storytelling (top-down, strategic) and grassroots storytelling (bottom-up, employee- or customer-generated). While both can be valuable, conflicts may arise when organisational control clashes with authentic stakeholder voices. As Vaara et al. (2016) note, narratives can serve as both instruments of control and vehicles for resistance.

These tensions underscore the importance of ethical storytelling practices that respect autonomy, ensure informed consent, and balance organisational goals with stakeholder dignity.

## *6.7 Integrative Discussion*

Synthesising these findings reveals that DS is not merely a communication technique but a multifaceted practice that intersects with psychology, technology, and organisational culture. At its core, DS functions as a tool for meaning-making, allowing organisations and stakeholders to co-construct shared realities.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the integrated framework outlined earlier:

- The narrative paradigm explains the universal appeal of stories in shaping perceptions.
- Media richness and affordance theories clarify the technological enablers and constraints of DS.
- Narrative persuasion research illuminates the cognitive and

emotional mechanisms underpinning DS effectiveness.
- Organisational identity theories underscore the role of DS in projecting authenticity and trust.

Empirically, the study shows that DS enhances emotional engagement, fosters authenticity, persuades stakeholders, facilitates knowledge sharing, and leverages digital affordances. However, these benefits are tempered by challenges of authenticity, ethical dilemmas, and platform constraints.

For practitioners, the implications are clear: DS should be approached as a strategic, ethically grounded practice that requires alignment between narrative content, organisational values, and digital affordances.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

This study has examined digital storytelling (DS) as a tool for effective business communication, drawing on narrative, media, and organisational theories, alongside insights from qualitative methodologies. Findings indicate that DS is not simply a technique for content delivery but a dynamic practice that fosters emotional engagement, enhances authenticity, strengthens persuasion, and facilitates knowledge sharing. Yet, these benefits are moderated by technological affordances, audience differences, and ethical considerations.

The implications of this research span academic theory, managerial practice, and ethical reflection. Additionally, the study highlights avenues for future inquiry that can advance both scholarly understanding and

Chicham et al. 2026

practical implementation of DS in organisational contexts.

## 7.1 Academic Implications

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes to communication theory by integrating multiple perspectives into a coherent framework for DS. Building on Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm, Daft and Lengel's (1984) media richness theory, and narrative persuasion models (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater & Rouner, 2002), it demonstrates how DS operates at the intersection of narrative meaning-making, technological affordances, and organisational identity.

First, the findings affirm the persuasive power of narrative in shaping stakeholder attitudes, consistent with research on narrative transportation and emotional engagement (Nabi & Green, 2015). Second, the study enriches organisational communication scholarship by illustrating how DS contributes to identity construction and authenticity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Molleda, 2010). Third, the dual application of thematic and narrative analysis highlights methodological innovation in studying storytelling as both content and practice (Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Collectively, these contributions expand the theoretical foundations of business communication, offering scholars new ways to conceptualise and investigate storytelling in the digital era.

## 7.2 Managerial Implications

For practitioners, the study underscores DS as a strategic communication tool with wide-ranging applications. Several managerial implications emerge:

- Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement: Managers can use DS to foster emotional connections with employees, customers, and communities. Narratives centred on human experiences resonate more strongly than purely informational communication, enhancing loyalty and commitment (Escalas, 2004).
- Building Authentic Organisational Identity: Effective DS requires alignment between stories and organisational behaviour. Leaders should ensure that narratives authentically reflect values and practices, thereby reinforcing trust and credibility (Gundlach et al., 2020).
- Supporting Change and Learning: DS is a powerful tool in contexts of organisational change and employee training. By embedding lessons and values in relatable stories, managers can facilitate knowledge transfer, reduce resistance, and strengthen cultural cohesion (Denning, 2005; Swap et al., 2001).
- Leveraging Platform Affordances: Managers must tailor DS to platform-specific affordances and audience demographics. Short-form, visual-heavy formats may suit younger audiences, while more detailed stories may resonate with older stakeholders (Miller et al., 2019).

Overall, DS should be seen not as a one-off campaign tactic but as an ongoing strategy

Chicham et al. 2026

embedded in organisational communication culture.

## 7.3 Ethical Implications

While DS offers significant advantages, its persuasive potential raises ethical challenges. Key concerns include:

- Manipulation and Selectivity: Organizations may selectively highlight positive stories while ignoring failures, potentially misleading stakeholders. Ethical DS requires transparency and balance.
- Consent and Representation: Using employee or customer narratives necessitates informed consent and careful representation. Exploiting personal stories for corporate gain can harm trust (Bell, 2010).
- Authenticity vs. Spin: Overly polished or scripted stories may undermine authenticity, creating cynicism among audiences. Ensuring genuineness is essential for credibility (Molleda, 2010).

These findings call for the development of ethical storytelling guidelines that prioritise respect, consent, and transparency. Ethical DS should be rooted in values of honesty and integrity, ensuring that narratives serve both organisational and stakeholder interests.

## 7.4 Directions for Future Research

This study opens several pathways for further academic inquiry:

- Comparative Industry Studies: Future research could examine how DS varies across industries (e.g.,

healthcare, technology, retail) to identify sector-specific practices and outcomes.
- Cross-Cultural Perspectives: Given the cultural specificity of storytelling, studies could explore how DS functions in different cultural contexts, highlighting variations in narrative style, symbolism, and audience reception (Vaara et al., 2016).
- Quantitative Extensions: While this study adopts a qualitative design, mixed-methods research could quantify DS impacts on engagement, trust, and performance, offering broader generalizability.
- Longitudinal Studies: Examining DS practices over time would provide insights into their sustainability, evolution, and long-term effects on organisational identity and stakeholder relationships.
- Ethical Framework Development: More research is needed to articulate ethical principles for DS, balancing persuasion with responsibility, particularly in sensitive contexts such as employee well-being or social responsibility campaigns.

By pursuing these directions, future scholarship can deepen theoretical knowledge and offer practical guidance for responsible DS in business communication.

In conclusion, DS represents a transformative approach to business communication. By blending narrative traditions with digital affordances, organisations can engage stakeholders more deeply, foster authentic

identities, and facilitate knowledge sharing. Yet, the power of DS also demands ethical vigilance, ensuring that stories remain true, transparent, and respectful.

For scholars, DS offers fertile ground for advancing theories of narrative, media, and organisational communication. For practitioners, it provides a versatile tool to navigate the complexities of contemporary communication landscapes. Ultimately, the study reaffirms that in the digital age, stories are not merely about organisations—they are what organisations are.

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Chicham et al. 2026