

STORYTELLING

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TOWARDS COMPELLING AND
MEANINGFUL STORIES

MASTER THESIS

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CHAPTER 0: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Storytelling is not a new concept – it has been used as a medium to communicate throughout the history of mankind. Nowadays, storytelling is a recognized concept within business. However recent shifts in societal dynamics have created a gap between existing models within the storytelling field and practices currently employed by companies.

Inspired by the lack of concrete answers in current storytelling literature, this thesis seeks to explore the gap between literature and practice by constructing a framework, which seeks to take the first step towards developing a strategic approach to storytelling. Thus, the objective of this study is to develop a tangible framework for storytelling, and therein answer the research questions: From an organizational point of view, how can organizations create compelling and meaningful stories? Furthermore, how should organizations strategically approach storytelling in order to succeed in the ever-changing business dynamics?

Whilst answering the posed questions, the objective of this study is to develop a tangible framework for storytelling, which will be presented in the second part of this thesis. The framework presented is build through qualitative research in the form of semi structured interviews with experts in the area of storytelling, a review of existing models in the field as well as theories within communication, consumer-brand relationships and storytelling in general.

The conclusion of this study is that organizational storytelling is a process, which entails a *beginning, during* and *after*. If companies want storytelling to support their business goals on a strategic level, they need to understand that all three parts of the process are equally important. Furthermore, it is key to integrate the storytelling process into all areas of the organization to reach compelling storytelling efforts.

Further research needs to be done in collaboration with companies to validate the strength of the framework. Moreover, for a more holistic view, other interviews and insights are needed, i.e. the customer's point of view to fully understand the receiver-listener relationship.

Keywords: *storytelling, strategic approach, expert interviews, iterative process, framework*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ever since ancient times, stories have been used as a medium to communicate, share experiences and build social bonds (Sax, 2006; Fog et al., 2010). Baker and Boyle argue, “[...] *storytelling is one of the most human of activities. In fact, an individual’s history, their persona, their very identity is the sum of the stories they tell about themselves and others tell about them. [...] There are few things people love more than to hear a great story and pass it on to others*” (Baker and Boyle, 2009:80). In spite of the deeply rooted longing for storytelling in the evolution of mankind, a scientific explanation for the power of stories exists. Neuroscientists discovered that our brain does not store isolated facts or figures because it lies out of the brain’s capacity; instead, outstanding stories support our memory (Fleing, 2014; Schank, 1999 in Woodside, 2010).

These findings have gained foothold in today’s business world. As a matter of fact, storytelling has developed into a buzzword in marketing and branding over the past decade and triggered a great volume of academic articles, blog posts and books. The interest in the topic becomes apparent by just a quick look at Google Scholar and Amazon’s catalogue’s 176,237 hits on the search ‘storytelling’. It stresses the fact that storytelling is not just another fashion fad in business – it reflects societal changes and the way people interact with brands nowadays (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Mills, 2008; Escalas, 2004; Leung and Bougoure, 2008). Thus, the paradigm shift requires companies to develop a more strategic approach towards storytelling. But how do organizations know which approach to follow in order to successfully implement storytelling? This question triggered my interest in taking a closer look at organizational storytelling, its meaning and relevance, while at the same time trying to understand which elements are needed for it to have the desired outcome, these questions formed the topic of this thesis. In exploring this subject, my aim is to develop a fresh and simplified approach towards storytelling that fits into today’s business dynamics.

Storytelling as it is seen in the current business landscape carries many opportunities for improvement due to the fact that many companies do not utilize it to the fullest (Fog et al., 2010). Even though they are trying to close the gap between identity and image, their stories are far from being authentic. “[*The new storytelling economy does*] not [*use*] storytelling in the same linear fashion we use today; [...] linear thinking reduces new products, new technology, and new

solutions, to just another version of the same old thing" (Mills, 2008). I see an important challenge in storytelling being used as pure entertainment rather than communicating the core values of the company and brand. Thus, due to the lack of tangible, strategic approaches of storytelling (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Boje, 2008; Fenton & Langley, 2011 in Vaara and Pedersen, 2014), I believe a redefinition is needed. Moreover, I can see the field of storytelling benefitting from considering current trends in society as well as the current business landscape to be able to successfully implement storytelling and to make use of its benefits, such as increased consumer engagement (Fog et al., 2010).

1.1. THE NOTION OF STORYTELLING

As a notion, storytelling holds a spectrum of definitions due to various philosophical standpoints. In its original form, storytelling is a means of communicating information in a clear, meaningful and memorable way (Escalas, 2004). It is often referred to as the narrative technique (i.e. Denning, 2006), which has become increasingly popular and accepted within organizational studies (Barry, 1996). In fact, *"storytelling and narratives are generally seen as important parts of strategizing and strategic 'sensemaking' [...]"* (Vaara and Pedersen, 2014:2). Despite the recent hype in the marketing sphere, relatively few studies on strategic storytelling exist (Vaara and Pedersen, 2014:3). For this reason, the purpose of this study is to expand current literature by developing a more tangible approach towards storytelling.

Looking at the current storytelling literature, the primary focus lies on the iconic success stories of Coca Cola, Moleskine, Walt Disney, Nike, Apple, Starbucks etc., and what they have accomplished (Storch, 2013). However, few straightforward answers on how to create a compelling story are provided in the literature (Fog et al., 2010). This is a result of the ever-changing dynamics between consumers and brands (Burnett & Hutton, 2007) and coherent uncertainty. Hence, the majority of organizations need help to make use of the aforementioned human capacity for storytelling (Fleing, 2014; Denning, 2006).

Various scholars agree that *"concrete answers [to what makes a good story] are few and far between, and the debate for now is largely academic"* (Fog et al., 2010:17); and even though storytelling is not a new phenomenon, *"we are in desperate need of a new model, a new way of thinking, a new way of getting things accomplished. [...] Some call this new model for thinking the*

'New Creative Economy' [...], which at its core is a storytelling economy" (Mills, 2008). Mills' argumentation is based on the *"old linear way of doing things"* (2008), which no longer works due to the paradigm shift from one-way communication towards meaningful dialogues. Although it is argued, *"there is no single right way to tell a story"* (Denning, 2006), a framework for organizations, which helps develop the key aspects of their core story is essential to be able to make sense of it (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005; Mills, 2008).

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Storytelling has reached a point in academia, which allows reviewing how it has been addressed and, at the same time, possibly demands looking into how it can be improved from an organizational point of view. Since research on the building blocks for successful storytelling barely exists so far, this thesis aims to uncover them. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

From an organizational point of view, how can organizations create compelling and meaningful stories?

and

How should organizations strategically approach storytelling in order to succeed in the ever-changing business dynamics?

By evaluating the research question, the following sub questions will be assessed:

- *What is the meaning and role of storytelling in terms of consumer-brand relationship according to the literature?*
- *What are the crucial building blocks of a story in order to close the gap between the product/service and its audience?*
- *How can organizations better engage with their target audience through storytelling?*
- *What is the most important story of a company or brand?*

Whilst answering the posed questions, the objective of this study is to develop a tangible framework for storytelling, which will be presented in the second part of this thesis.

1.3. DEFINITIONS

The most important terms throughout the thesis are outlined and explained in this paragraph as a basis for the analysis and discussions followed at a later stage. It is important to keep in mind that the definitions are condensed but precise to be able to stay within the scope of my research questions.

BRANDING

In this thesis, it is essential to understand the difference between branding and storytelling, even though they developed from the same starting point: values and emotions. According to Kotler et al., branding is *“a seller’s promise to deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services consistent to the buyers”* (2001:188); whereas storytelling communicates values that speak to our emotions because it involves a conflict/challenge in most cases. Moreover, in distinction to branding, storytelling is able to strengthen a brand both internally and externally (Fog et al., 2010).

BRANDS AND COMPANIES

A brand has been defined in many different and broad ways. The classical definition of The American Marketing Association (AMA) from the 1960s regards the brand as *“a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”*. In this thesis, a brand is defined as the subsidiary of a company. For example, the Coca-Cola Company owns many different brands, such as Sprite, Fanta and Vitamin Water. Though, they differ in terms of stories and brand identity.

NARRATIVE

“Narratives help people interpret the world around them to create meaning, including meaning for brands. The structure of narratives provides the framework for causal inferencing about the meaning of brands and the meaning of consumers’ experiences with brands” (Escalas, 2004). To be able to harness storytelling to the fullest, the right narrative pattern for a certain purpose is necessary to achieve the preferred effect of the story (Denning, 2006).

PARADIGM SHIFT

Popularized by Thomas Kuhn and his book 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' (1962), a paradigm shift implies a fundamental change of certain disciplines, basic assumptions, beliefs or theories. Usually, over a period of time, certain ideas that scholars once agreed upon change. These are followed by new ideas that are more applicable or up to date with current societal principles and behavior. In this study, the term is used to refer to the recent shifts in marketing principles, consumer behavior and how consumers are interacting with companies or brands today.

PARTICIPATION AGE

The most important aspect of the Participation Age is active engagement of the participants, who are using the various technology tools available. In its core it consists of personal and real-time (online) connectivity. This challenges modern marketers in terms of evoking the desire of the customers to discover and learn more about their brands; and at the same time, empowering them to have a meaningful contribution to the brand, as well as to create an environment to connect and build relationships (Middleton, 2012).

STORY

A story is simply content that is communicated to an audience, whether in words or images (Shotter, 2006 in Adorisio, 2009). It involves a conversation between three elements: the storyteller, the story itself, and the storylistener (Mills, 2008).

1.4. THESIS OUTLINE

This research does not follow the traditional format or structure of a master thesis. Instead, it traces an exploratory journey, incorporates designerly elements (Cross, 2006) and merges existing theory with empirical data, from expert interviews, to develop a more relevant storytelling framework for the current business landscape. This approach has divided the thesis into two parts, where the first part covers the foundation of the framework, and the second part describes the actual framework design in a detailed manner. To fully understand the different aspects, a simplified overview (Figure 1) of the thesis follows below.

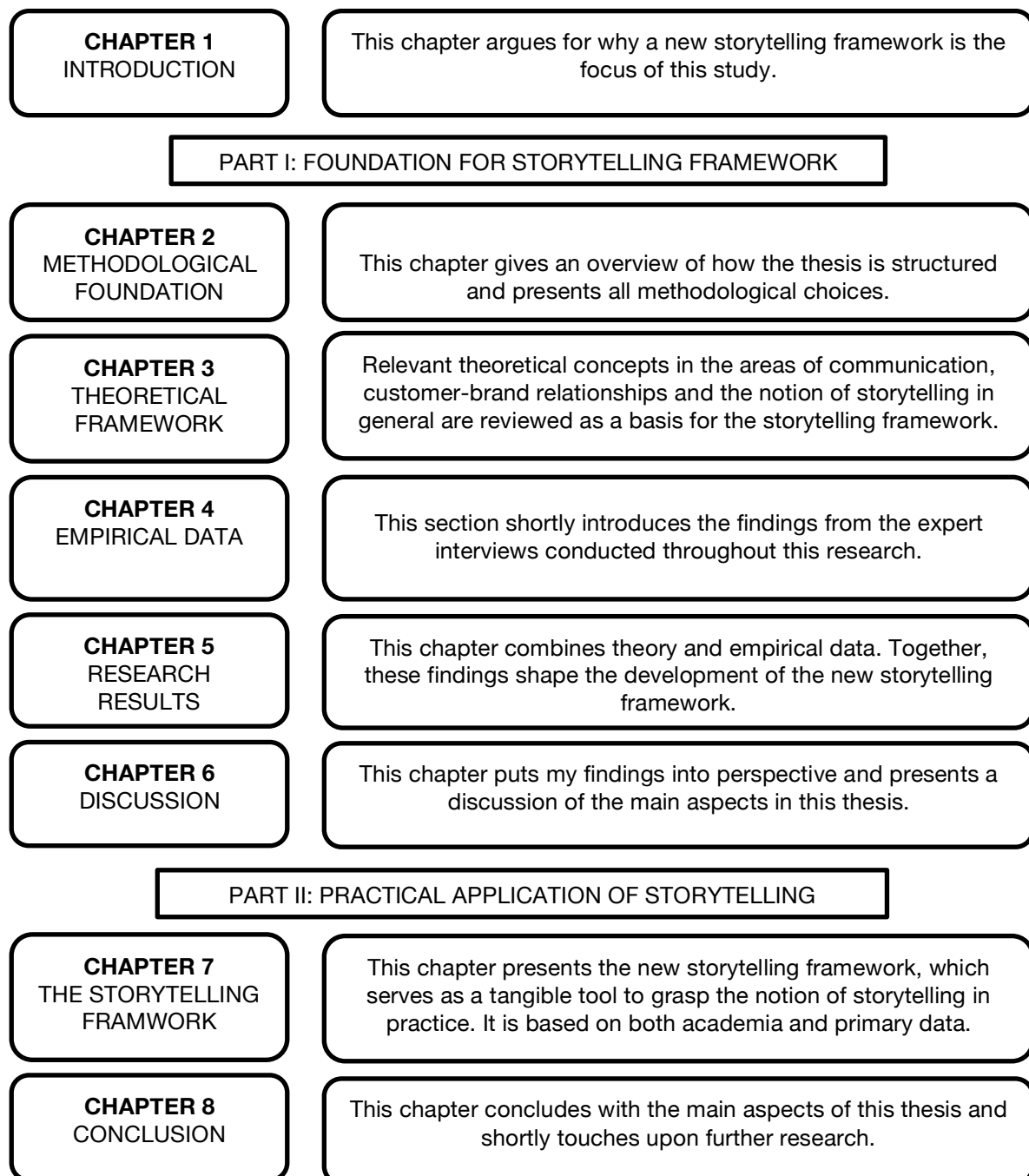


Figure 1: Thesis Overview

PART I

FOUNDATION OF STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The following chapter presents the research philosophy and methodology to ensure a full understanding of the development of knowledge in this study. In doing so, the reader will grasp how and why the storytelling framework is developed.

2.1. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The underlying philosophy of this research is constructivism. I found it to be the most suitable approach for the creation of knowledge in this thesis because constructivists assume that *“(1) the researcher is a part of what he or she sees, not apart from it; (2) facts and values are connected, not separated; and (3) views are multiple and interpretative, not singular and self-evident”* (Charmaz and Henwood, 2008:245).

Having examined existing literature in relation to storytelling and its implementation proves that a fresh approach towards this notion is necessary (read more under 1.1. The Notion Of Storytelling). Therefore, to be able to create a relevant and functional framework, different realities and perspectives of different actors are needed to gain a holistic overview of important elements for storytelling in general as well as for its application in daily business routines. Indeed, adopting a constructivist philosophy *“allows the focus of research to be on understanding what is happening in a given context”* (Carson, 2001:5) and to embrace the fact that *“knowledge is always knowledge-in-context [...and] intersubjective”* (Moses and Knutsen, 2007:194). Consequently, this research draws upon intersubjective constructions of meaning (Barry, 1996), not only between me as a researcher and the interviewees, but also the *“surrounding community”* as an influencer of *“how I perceive and understand the world”* around me (Moses and Knutsen, 2007:187).

2.1.1. ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Ontology, the study of being, revolves around the questions: *“what is the world really made of?”* (Moses and Knutsen, 2007) or *“what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of knowledge?”* (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) claim that being entirely objective during the research process is not realistic. According to them, all research is value bound and researchers cannot reach a complete objective standpoint

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). For example, the primary data collected during expert interviews is highly subjective as it is based on their self-constructed worldview. Their individual truth influences their values and opinions on what they claim important in terms of organizational storytelling. Moreover, I am aware that not only the subjective reality that is being created but also my own values have an influence on the research outcome and, primarily, on how the storytelling framework is designed. In addition, I am conscious of the fact that somebody else could assess the same information differently. This relates to Crotty (1988:8-9), who states, *“there is no meaning without a mind; meaning is not discovered, but constructed”*. I agree with his standpoint; only because there might be a definition on organizational storytelling, which is widely agreed upon does not necessarily mean that it holds the objective truth.

In epistemological terms, which means asking the question of *“what is knowledge?”* (Moses and Knutsen, 2007:4), constructivists claim, *“we have no way of knowing anything about the Real World”* (2007:172). For this reason, I focus on the details and the reality behind the details of different subjective meanings while interviewing people from different backgrounds as it constructs a more holistic picture of the notion of storytelling. In other words, unlike finding law-like generalizations, rich insights are generated when taking on a constructivist standpoint (Moses and Knutsen, 2007).

2.2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND PROCESS

After having presented the research philosophy, this paragraph clarifies the research approach and use of methodology in the process of answering the research question.

This study relies to a great extent on primary qualitative data, predominantly expert interviews to be able to design a relevant storytelling framework. A reason for this is that existing theory alone does not represent the reality. Rather, rich insights and multiple truths form the research process as an inseparable part of the constructivist approach (Moses and Knutsen, 2007). Indeed, *“constructivists embrace enthusiastically the idea that human knowledge has evolved, not through accumulation but through sudden shifts and bounds”* (2007:178). In this thesis, knowledge evolves through consistently examining existing knowledge as well as engaging participants (experts). As a result, iterative cycles of knowledge creation are characteristic for this thesis, as

“knowledge is not a substance that can be deposited like money in a bank and taken out when time for use arrives” (Freire, 1970 in Steinberg, 2014).

2.2.1. WORK CYCLES

The iterative learning process in this thesis generated several working cycles. In academic literature, this is referred to as action research. It has been argued that action research is becoming increasingly relevant for marketing research today due to its iterative nature and collaboration with research participants (Maklan, Know and Ryals, 2008). In total, this study is divided into five work cycles (see Figure 4 below) and each cycle generates new insights and inspiration for the next cycle. In the following, I will shortly touch upon the different cycles and present their main components. However, it needs to be kept in mind that these cycles are not as clear-cut as illustrated; some aspects merge, especially when one cycle ends and the next one begins. Furthermore, the work cycles have different time spans, depending on the importance for this research. For example, work cycle 4 has been spread over a long timeframe because it covers the development of the new storytelling framework, which is the main objective in this study. Consequently, various rounds of testing and iterating were necessary to develop the best version possible.

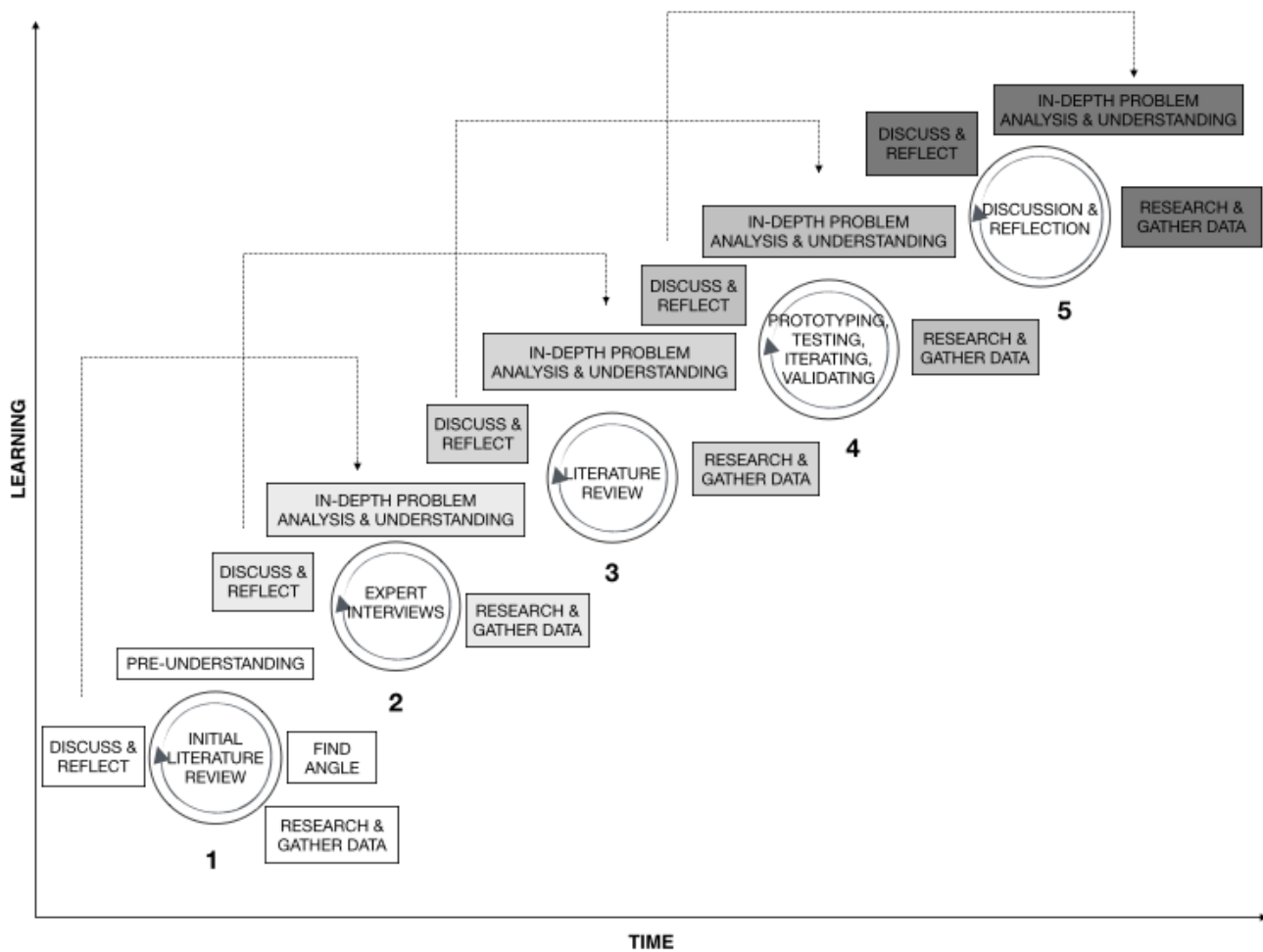


Figure 2: Work cycles, inspired by Maklan, Know and Ryals, 2008

WORK CYCLE 1: INITIAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The first work cycle marks the starting point of this thesis. It serves as an initial literature review to gain a pre-understanding of the notion of storytelling – not only as a human need but also as an important concept in the current business sphere. Academic journals and marketing blogs were my main inspiration to collect important keywords and concepts. In doing so, I discovered that a specific storytelling framework only exists to a limited extent. This increased my interest in developing a framework, which incorporates current societal dynamics and trends and, at the same time, better represents the gist of storytelling.

WORK CYCLE 2: EXPERT INTERVIEWS

As work cycle 1 ended with the need for an in-depth research to be able to understand how organizational storytelling works in practice, expert interviews had to be arranged. I decided to start off with experts on storytelling in the Nordic countries so that I could conduct face-to-face interviews because I wanted to meet as many as possible because Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill argue that *“the use of personal interviews achieve a higher response rate than using questionnaires”* (2009:324). Though, after finding relevant international-based storytellers, some interviews were done via email.

WORK CYCLE 3: HOLISTIC LITERATURE REVIEW

After passing the stage of initial literature review and the first round of expert interviews, an early comparison of theory vs. practical use in business was possible. This was a means to put the notion of storytelling into perspective. Nevertheless, the main focus in this work cycle was put on making an in-depth exploration of existing literature to be able to use it as a basis for designing the storytelling framework.

WORK CYCLE 4: PROTOTYPING, REDESIGNING, VALIDATING

These three elements define the fourth cycle as they are intertwined. At this point, existing theory and empirical data have been assessed, boiled down to relevant elements and discussed. Both are equally important sources for the design of the storytelling framework. Although it is not specifically pointed out, expert interviews reach into this phase as all interviewees were asked to give feedback on the design process/the actual design. A more specific evaluation of this process follows in Chapter 7: The Storytelling Framework. The reason for dedicating an entire chapter to the design process in the second part of the thesis stems from the fact that design is seen as having its *“own distinct ‘things to know, ways of knowing them and ways of finding out about them’”* (Cross, 2006). Thus, I believe it is necessary to guide the reader explicitly through the design process and different stages of knowledge creation as a consequence of the constructivist approach.

WORK CYCLE 5: DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

As indicated, this work cycle includes a discussion and reflection of all research findings, including the applicability and versatility of the new storytelling framework (the outcome of this study) in the current business landscape. Besides, final thoughts on the role and impact of storytelling in organizations are presented, along with a discussion of how storytelling can be

integrated in an effective manner. This cycle ends with further research recommendations to inspire new studies.

2.3. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DESIGN

The overall research design is exploratory with a focus on *“finding out what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light”* (Robson, 2002:59, in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The exploratory nature of the study is a result of the iterative nature and the fact that there does not exist a guiding framework towards the application of storytelling in daily business routines.

Only focusing on qualitative, in-depth expert interviews was a conscious choice and a means to detect current business trends and developments for the storytelling framework. This turns the final storytelling framework into a more relevant reflection of what is important in the business landscape at the moment. Thus, not including surveys or case studies at this moment of the study is intended as the main focus of this research is the design of a more relevant storytelling framework. Even though I consider such methods relevant and a logical step for following research studies, the scope of this research did not allow for such extensive investigation. Besides, many scholars argue that consumers have inconsistent patterns of attitude and behavior (Liebl and Rughase, 2002), making analyzing and *“interpreting survey-generated data challenging”* (Maklan, Know & Ryalsm, 2008). Moreover, as this study highlights storytelling from an organizational point of view, the customer’s perspective per se was out of focus; it only plays a role from a theoretical point of view. Nevertheless, the continuous interaction with experts, particularly in the design process of the storytelling framework, is a means to use multiple sources of evidence to ensure the creation of a sound framework.

2.3.1. DATA COLLECTION

The data in this research is a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data is the most valuable source in this study and was collected through expert interviews. Choosing interviewees with different backgrounds and expert knowledge on storytelling was a means to get a realistic picture of current trends and business dynamics. For example, the expert’s job titles

ranged from consultants and entrepreneurs to strategists. Although the experts differ in background, the majority covers the areas of storytelling and branding on a consultancy level. Choosing experts within these specific areas is a means to receive answers regarding the importance of storytelling from an organizational standpoint, as well as the building blocks of a successful story and the use of the proposed storytelling framework in this thesis. In total, eight interviews were conducted, including face-to-face interviews, email interviews¹ and Skype interviews² with primarily Denmark-based international professionals from both the B2C as well as B2B sphere. An overview of the interviewees and the actual order of the conducted interviews follow below:

INTERVIEWEE	COMPANY	MAIN CONSULTING FOCUS
Hjörtur Smáráson	Place Branding Strategist, Self-employed	Storytelling (B2B)
Mattia Abeni	Copenhagers	Storytelling (B2B), Creative Content Producer
Simon Stubben	Co-founder of Project Canvas	Canvas Design, Design Process, Conceptualization, Strategizing
Yann Girard	Self-employed Entrepreneur, Author	Entrepreneurship, Identity
Thomas Madsen-Mygdal	Angel Investor	Storytelling, Branding, Visual Identity, Entrepreneurship, Conceptualization
Jasenko Hadzic	Managing Director CPHFTW, Co-founder Nordic Startup Conference	Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Investment
Maike Gosch	Story4Good	Storytelling Consultant
Klaus Fog	Sigma A/S, Author	Storytelling Expert, Branding, Brand DNA

Table 1: Interviewees

¹ Examples of email interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

² The Skype interviews were recorded and can be found on the USB attached; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) argue that recordings are accurate and unbiased and can be re-listed at any given time.

It was not possible to directly interview everybody due to the geographic location. All face-to-face and Skype interviews were semi-structured to ensure a non-limiting interview process and to be able to adapt to the flow of the conversation as well as to topics that arise during the interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Although email interviews do not necessarily allow for a semi-structured approach, the majority of the questions were set up to be more openly to encourage the interviewees to reply as they wish (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Additionally, the majority of experts were involved in ongoing dialogues about the design of the storytelling framework, which generated continuous improvement and honest feedback.

To back up primary data on the current use of storytelling, I looked into peer-reviewed articles on storytelling as part of the constructed knowledge in this thesis. Even though the eight interviewees revealed different truths about storytelling in business, they cannot be taken for granted in the representation of meanings. Also, as part of the knowledge creation, the few already existing storytelling models or frameworks for implementation have been evaluated and taken into consideration for the outcome in this research. Specifically, by examining these storytelling models, I gained an understanding on what has already been done or considered and what can be improved according to existing studies or expert insights.

It is important to be aware of the fact that the knowledge gained is temporarily constrained and might become outdated or in need of further, in-depth research (Goulding, 2003). This factor has been accepted for this research because organizational storytelling and its importance in the current business landscape changes as a consequence of continuously altering (societal) trends.

2.3.2. FIELD NOTES AND VISUALIZATIONS

As a result of developing the new storytelling framework, I generated various field notes as well as visualizations during this thesis. Apart from the actual storytelling framework, I visualized the data different stages of knowledge creation to ease the analysis and detect categories and current trends. Personally, I prefer tangible paper notes because they exist in the physical real and free the researcher of both any cognitive limitations and the digital realm. This method enabled me to get a thorough overview of my observations during expert interviews and to connect different sets of knowledge. All of my notes and visualizations can be found in the appendix; throughout the thesis, I refer to them accordingly.

2.4. REFLECTION ON RESEARCH

Due to the exploratory and iterative research approach, I will not make use of a theoretical framework that guides the process. The theory that has been assessed as part of the groundwork for creating the storytelling framework serves to contrast and inspire, not as a guide in the analysis. In other words, a model like the SWOT analysis would not be applicable in this thesis as *“design is constructive and a behavior employed in inventing things of value, which to not exist yet”* (Gregory, 1966 in Cross, 2006:7). Further, taking different approaches from existing literature instead of focusing on a particular theory allows for a more focused investigation and, at the same time, a rich storytelling framework. Additionally, since the number of existing storytelling models are limited, I will use them as a starting point to discuss, compare and validate the findings.

As a result of the constructivist approach, there might have been other interpretations different from the one presented in this thesis – I do not claim to have found the one and only interpretation. Nevertheless, the framework I developed fits the empirical data and should therefore be considered as one possible interpretation.

2.5. DELIMITATIONS

The scope of this thesis, and the various aspects of storytelling do not allow me to focus on all details. For example, when arguing that storytelling is a means to create a strong brand, the concept of brand equity or the process of building a strong brand looks like in detail is not explained. Furthermore, internal processes of management in terms of implementing storytelling into all branches of the organization are not extensively highlighted because I regard this as a necessary subsequent step after what has been explored in this study. Furthermore, the view on employees and their role for successful storytelling (i.e. the effects of employee satisfaction) has not been included as a consequence of the limited scope.

Additionally, limitations in terms of the execution of research have to be admitted, resulting from my novice status as a researcher. Besides, this study is temporarily bound to dynamics in society with regards to marketing and communication. In the future, the importance of the different elements of the new storytelling framework can differ. This does not have an influence of the relevance of the framework now but should be taken into consideration for later use.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter provides an overview of selected literature to demonstrate how it has shaped the new approach for storytelling. As this study focuses on storytelling framework building, this chapter outlines what is known so far – in terms of existing related theory as well as academic studies. This includes aspects related to organizational storytelling such as organizational communication, storytelling theory in general as well as the relationship between consumers and brands. In doing so, the aim is to locate where important gaps and weaknesses are.

3.1. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Before examining the notion of storytelling, it is essential to highlight general aspects of communication theory because it forms the basis of creating a good story (Shotter, 2006 in Adorisio, 2009). As the objective of this thesis is to develop a new storytelling framework, I will use this literature as a basis for the design process; though, I will not put emphasis on all details due to the limited scope.

In today's business landscape, right communication – whether internal or external – is the key to success. According to Kotler et al. (2005) it requires more than simply developing good products and designing strategies; sending out the right message is crucial in order for companies to build and maintain stakeholder relationships they are dependent upon (Kotler et al., 2005; Cornelissen, 2008). Though, communication has become increasingly difficult because companies need to manage complex communication systems as a result of the Participation Age (Middleton, 2012). To communicate effectively, companies first need to understand how the communication process works. The figure below highlights the nine elements of the communication process according to Kotler et al. (2005).

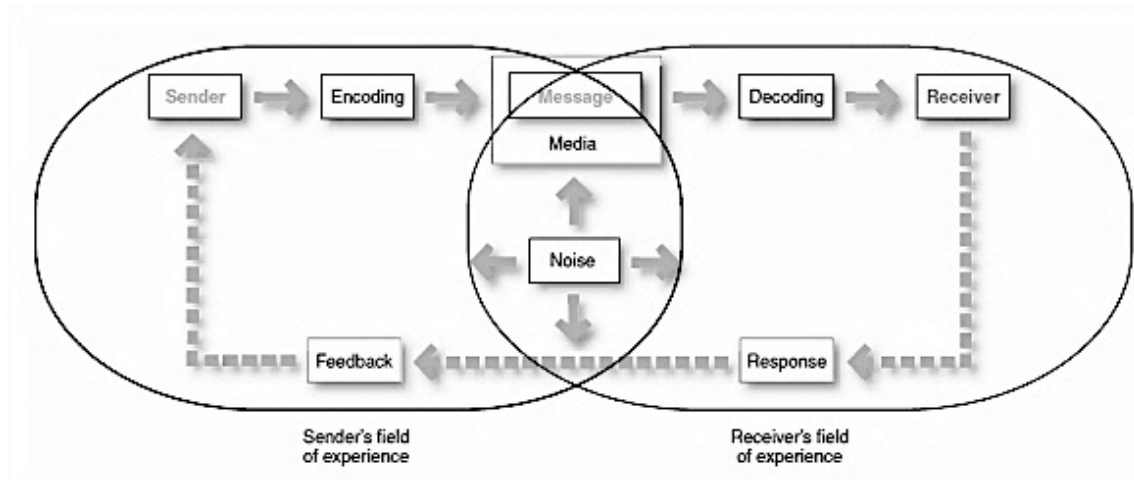


Figure 3: Elements of the communication process (Kotler et al., 2005)

The essence of this model is that a message can only be effective if the sender's (in this thesis the company or brand) encoding process goes hand in hand with the receiver's (in this thesis the external stakeholders) decoding process (Kotler et al., 2005). In other words, the more the sender understands the receiver and vice versa, the more effective the message will be. Though, the communication process only works straightforwardly if the sender has crafted a strong identity to be able to build a strong relationship with the receiver (Cornelissen, 2008).

3.1.1. IDENTITY, IMAGE AND CULTURE

"[...] Building, maintaining and protecting the company's reputation is the core task of corporate communication practitioners" (Cornelissen, 2008:3). This means that nowadays, communication is not focused on aggressive persuasion strategies or one-way messages anymore; rather, the focus has shifted towards coherent and trustworthy messages as a foundation for long-term relationship-building (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). Though, to be able to do so, effective communication requires the alignment between identity (or vision), image and culture (Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Cornelissen, 2008).

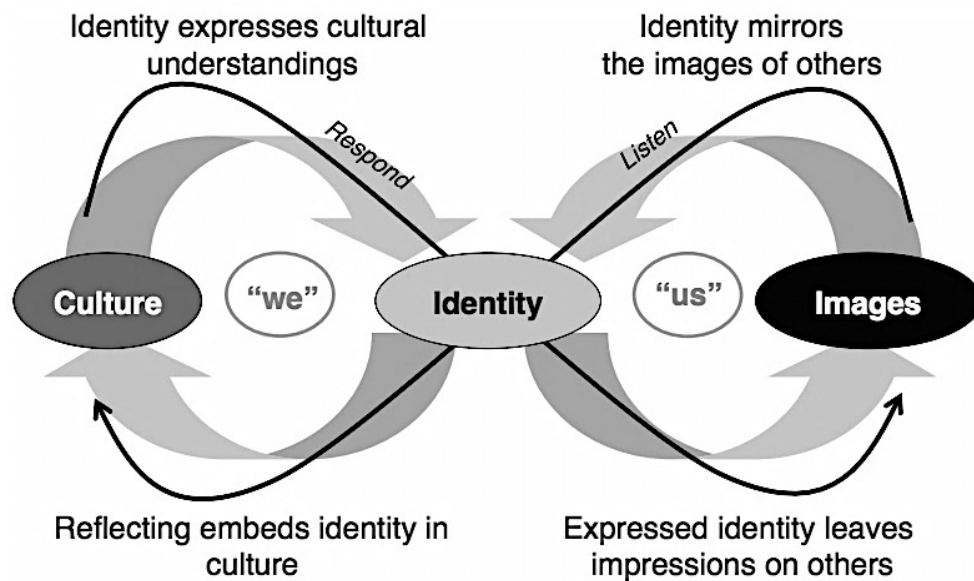


Figure 4: Based on Hatch and Schultz, "The Dynamics of Organizational Identity", Human Relations, 2002, 55(8), 989-1017

As illustrated in Figure 3, the identity (or strategic vision) is the most important asset because it sits at the center of the organization and, at the same time, has a strong influence on the internal culture as well as the image (both internally as well as externally) (Hatch and Schultz, 2008:68). Cornelissen (2008) describes the identity as *"the outward presentation of an organization through symbolism, communication and behavior; [it] should emerge from an understanding of the organization's core mission, strategic vision and the more general corporate culture of an organization"* (Cornelissen, 2008:67). Hence, having a good understanding of the identity – or the question of *"why should anybody care"* (Sinek, 2009) – creates a common ground in terms of core values and beliefs to establish long-lasting relationships by communicating from the inside out (Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Fog et al., 2010; Sinek, 2009). In doing so, achieving a positive reflection of the organizational image for external stakeholders proves the existence of a strong and transparent identity.

Nevertheless, companies or brands need to be aware of a potential misalignment. For example, top management might have aspirations that employees do not understand or support (Cornelissen, 2008). This can lead to confusion among external stakeholders as well. Hence, monitoring the alignment of identity, image and culture is a means to prevent organizations from having gaps between what the company communicates to the outside and what is actually being

valued internally (Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Fog et al., 2010).

3.2. BRAND-CONSUMER RELATIONSHIP

As illustrated in Kotler et al.'s (2005) model of the communication process, sender and receiver equally contribute to an effective and meaningful dialogue. Therefore, the following section further examines their relationship and how they influence one another. Later on, this will play a vital role for the development of the new storytelling model.

3.2.1. THE NOTION OF THE COMPANY OR BRAND (THE SENDER)

Since this thesis argues from an organizational point of view, the sender role is dedicated to the company or brand. As a consequence of the paradigm shift, marketers of today face challenges in the way they interact with their preferred target audience. The changing role of the consumer (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) has forever transformed consumer-brand relationships but, at the same time, empowered brands to take their potential to influence to the next level (Skibsted and Hansen, 2014). Brands do not possess absolute power in their relationship with consumers any longer. But despite the widespread claim that the power of brands would diminish with the increasing access to information and knowledge, past events have turned companies and brands into trust marks (Burnett and Hutton, 2007), which are *“providing meaning and satisfying emotional needs”* (Skibsted and Hansen, 2014:6). This confirms the fact that brands are not dead because they fulfill fundamental human needs (Skibsted and Hansen, 2014) and create consumer experiences (Fog et al., 2010). Prahalad and Ramaswamy add, *“the experience is the brand [...], the brand is co-created and evolves with experiences”* (2004:13). As a matter of fact, today brands *“succeed because they forge a deep connection with the individual”* (Burnett and Hutton, 2007:344).

Various scholars claim that the new role of the brand is about individual identity, meaning that brands should allow consumers to actively participate in the meanings and values they provide (Fog et al., Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Skibsted and Hansen, 2014; Escalas, 2004) as a response to what consumers looking for in brands nowadays. Indeed, brands take on personalities because consumers evaluate brands in the same way they evaluate humans. Therefore, companies need to understand their preferred target audience and what they care about to facilitate the creation of

deep connection and meaningful dialogues with the individual (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Escalas, 2004). *“Brands are living entities with personalities capable of communicating with consumers and having a meaning on their own”* (Aaker, 1997; Ballantyne, Warren and Nobbs, 2006 in Leung and Bougoure, 2008).

These arguments correlate with the recent approach in business regarding brand-consumer relationships: the H2H (Human to Human) approach. As argued by Kramer, being human is essential to be able to establish significant relations (Kramer, 2014). *“Ultimately we want the work that clearly is made by human beings for other human beings”* (Sagmeister, 2014). Using complicated marketing language from a company’s or brand’s perspective will not work in the long run because communication works best in its simplest form. In fact, unfamiliar business terminology will create distance as opposed to engagement. The truth is that businesses have been distant and non-human for a long while, which is the reason for the lack of engagement (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005) that needs to be restored (Mills, 2008).

3.2.2. THE NOTION OF THE CONSUMER (THE RECEIVER)

Throughout the 21st century, consumers have moved from being passive to deciding if, when, where and how they would like to actively engage with brands as a result of the Participation Age we currently live in (Metscher, 2014). Organizations no longer compete on reaching the largest potential market at the lowest cost anymore (Denning, 2005); instead, people’s attention and their engagement is a brand’s most important asset. However, it is difficult to manage consumers due to the unpredictable, fast moving landscape and the way it has changed the interaction between consumers and companies or brands.

During the last decades, the new consumer has gained sophistication and knowledge (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) due to technological improvements and open access with the rise of the Internet. These developments have led towards active engagement and the quest for authenticity while, at the same time, *“closing the gap between their real lives and ideal selves”* (Burnett and Hutton, 2007:343). In other words, consumers have included companies or brands in their self-identification processes as well as self-representation to themselves or others. Consequently, companies or brands are becoming a part of the new consumer’s identity and personality (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine and Allen, 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988 in

Escalas, 2004). In doing so, meaningful relationships can be created as consumers actively choose to participate in the meanings companies or brands provide (Burnett and Hutton, 2007).

Even though this desire to engage evidently exists, studies found that only 23% of the consumers claim to have a relevant relationship with a brand (Freeman, Spenner and Bird, 2012). This leaves a huge potential for brands to change how they communicate, interact and create experiences for their target audience in order for them to be willing to invest time and money into the relationship (Burnett and Hutton, 2007).

3.3. STORYTELLING

3.3.1. MEANING OF STORYTELLING IN BUSINESS

The fact that *“stories are the preferred sense making currency of human relationships”* (Boje, 1995) has gained recognition in the business environment; *“human memory is story-based”* (Schank, 1999 in Woodside, 2010). Boje characterizes the storytelling organization as a *“collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement the individual memories within institutional memory”* (Boje, 1991:106 in Boje, 1995:1000).

Every organization can make use of storytelling because *“every brand has its own story”* (Bruce, 2003). Scholars claim that stories are fundamental to the way we learn and communicate, both internally as well as externally (Fog et al., 2010; Gargiulo, 2006). Indeed, stories are *“the most efficient way of storing, retrieving, and conveying information [...], they are the most profoundly social form of human interaction and communication”* (Gargiulo, 2006:5). It is then the leader’s job to identify and nurture the story(-ies). Though stories are everywhere, not all stories are obvious due to the fact that some are not expressed in words (Gargiulo, 2006). The table below summarizes how organizations use stories:

When Are Stories Applicable in Business?	How Are Stories Used in Business?	Who Uses Stories in Business?
Presenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Animating talks and presentations * Anchoring a message * Potentiating a message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Leaders * Public Relations * Sales * Marketing
Imaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Product positioning * Appealing to an audience * Dialoguing with customers * Innovating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Marketing * Advertising * Sales * Customer Service * R&D
Connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pacing/ getting in sync with others * Recruiting * Discovering talents of employees * Problem solving * Finding the critical point in a system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sales * Market Research * Human Resources * Managers/ Leaders
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Training * Developing staff * Knowledge management * Change management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Trainers * Human Resources * Organizational developers * Managers/ Leaders
Leading/ Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Building and managing corporate culture * Mentoring and coaching * Engendering loyalty * Cultivating diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Trainers * Human Resources * Managers/ Leaders
Team Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Energizing employees * Creating synergy * Collaborating * Partnering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Team Leaders * Managers

Table 2: Gargiulo, 2006

According to the literature, there are two categories within storytelling. The first category touches upon proactive and controlled stories, including internal leadership and marketing communication; the second one includes occurring and uncontrollable stories by external stakeholders in general and as a cultural sensemaking process (Kruse, 2005).

3.3.1.1. STORYTELLING AS INTERNAL LEADERSHIP

Internally, storytelling is used to understand the company's own culture and to make the company's values more tangible for employees (Kruse, 2005; Fog et al., 2010). As a

consequence, these stories direct employees towards living these values in daily business operations (Kruse, 2005; Fog et al., 2010).

3.3.1.2. STORYTELLING AS MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Due to the technological progress of the past decades, organizational dynamics have become hyper-transparent towards all touch points of the brand (Fog et al., 2010). Hence, traditional branding tools (such as advertising, corporate identity programs, etc.) do not apply to the current business landscape anymore. In fact, persuasive messages and old-fashioned marketing techniques will not result in a positive bottom line any longer.

In truth, the majority of organizations are not able to draw clear lines between the different activities nowadays as information is freely available and consumers can instantly detect whether or not a company actually does what it says (Skibsted and Hansen, 2014). Skibsted and Hansen argue, *“products and services must be able to tell a story and communicate value without an extra advertising layer on top. As information is more and more available and the importance of brands increases, the ability to tell a meaningful story through actions and products, not words, is the only way to win”* (2014:8).

Even though there is still a lack of critical insight as to how storytelling is able to make a difference within marketing, it is what shapes human interaction (Fog et al., 2010). Denning (2006) argues that *“narrative is increasingly recognized as central in branding”* as customers nowadays buy into the experience. Hence, creating an emotional dimension through storytelling is essential to be able to attract the desired target audience (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Fog et al., 2010; Metscher, 2014). *“The only sustainable competitive advantage is knowledge of and engagement with customers”* (Content Strategy Studio, 2014) because *“the value is now in the end user”* (Cohen, 2014). Indeed, *“if you have created a piece of content and don’t have an audience, nobody will consume it”* (Cohen, 2014). Hence, understanding the customers and making them relate to a brand or a vision is key when using storytelling as a tool for consumer engagement.

3.3.1.3. STORYTELLING BY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Externally, storytelling is used as a strategic branding tool (Fog et al., 2010) to engage with the preferred target audience as well as to show how products or services differentiate from its

competitors. External storytelling is less controllable as opposed to internal because it does not only involve the company's communication to the external but also stories communicated by external stakeholders, i.e. media, competitors etc. (Kruse, 2005; Fog et al., 2010). The storytelling process becomes even more uncontrollable if it takes place online (Kruse, 2005).

3.3.1.4. STORYTELLING AS CULTURAL SENSEMAKING

In general, people create stories to relive their experiences (Bruner, 1986, 1990 in Escalas, 2004) and understand the world around them as a part of their self-realization process, including the construction of personal narratives (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Escalas, 2004). This revolves around the feeling of belonging or being a member of a certain group (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). Klein, Moon and Hoffman (2006) define sensemaking as an internal and personal process people go through unconsciously to understand connections and integrate their experiences as part of their worldview.

In relation to marketing, Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård (2004) describe sensemaking of storytelling as follows: *"marketing as story-telling is a form of narration where the company relates what it is and what it stands for; thereby making sense of activities and products"* (2004:225). Indeed, a *"brand becomes more meaningful the more closely it is linked to the self"* (Escalas, 2004:168). This has also been referred to as self-brand connections, where people process their experiences with brands and contribute to his or her psychological needs (Escalas, 2004).

3.3.2. THE EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING

Utilizing storytelling in business has positive implications on daily business routines (Fog et al., 2010). However, *"in incorporating storytelling into the world of business, it needs to be kept steadily in mind that storytelling is a tool to achieve business purposes, not an end in itself"* (Denning, 2006). This is an important aspect to remember because crafting the right or effective story is only a small fraction of what needs to be done - the perfect story is completely ineffective if it is not performed convincingly (Denning, 2006; Fog et al., 2010).

As addressed before, engagement plays a vital role in storytelling and is the preferred outcome of every storyteller. Mills argues *"[...] for a story to make an impact, it must be delivered in such a*

way as to create within the observer an emotional effect; [...] the observer becomes part of the story” (2008). Yet, the two parties and their willingness to engage are essential preconditions. If this is given, stories can be considered a form of social intelligence, where the storyteller and storylistener benefit from each other (Sax, 2006). Different studies have proven that it has a greater impact on people when stories touch upon their personal beliefs and interests. As aforementioned, people are also better at remembering the information when being emotionally involved (Bartlett, 1932 in Sugiyama, 1996; Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Denning, 2006).

Though, the only way to really engage people is to make sure to actually have an audience that listens (Cohen, 2014; Reed, 2014). There is no right or wrong when telling stories; however, a well-told story requires a certain mindset and the skill to choose the right narrative pattern for the particular purpose to be able to engage the audience (Denning, 2006). In fact, when a story gives rise to people’s emotions, the story then truly develops into the listener’s story (Mills, 2008). On this account, Woodside (2010) argues that retelling of the story by its listeners is a big indicator of successful engagement.

3.3.3. THE STORY

Boje claims that stories can be seen as a medium to exchange, make sense and interpret (Boje, 1995). Even though there is no fixed formula (Denning, 2006), *“speakers design their utterances such that the intended audience will understand the communication but bystanders and/or eavesdroppers will not”* (Bell, 1984; Clark and Carlson, 1982; Clark and Murphy, 1983; Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks et al., 1974 in Sugiyama, 1996).

There are four basic elements that determine the story: message, conflict, characters and plot (Fog et al., 2010). These elements are based on literary history and serve as checkpoints when developing a story. Additionally, Boje (1995) stresses actions as a vital part of the story. As these elements are very straightforward, I will not discuss every element in detail. In short, the message is crucial element because it has to be clearly defined, and at the same time reflect the company or brand. The conflict, or the driving force, is a means to get across the message; the characters and the plot support the other elements and complete the story (Fog et al., 2010). All elements need to be authentic because *“nothing turns off [...] more quickly than marketing-speak put into the mouths of actors”* (Bruce, 2003). In other words, the story being told has to use to right,

authentic tone and voice, as well as to correspond to reality (Denning, 2006) because technology enables the listener to easily reveal inaccurate or untrue stories.

According to Denning (2005), three kinds of stories exist: the story of the firm itself (i.e. the geeks in a garage story) or the core story, stories of the firm's products or services, and customers' own stories (also their stories as listeners) and their relationship to the firm. Fog et al. (2010) additionally add the journalist's story, employee stories, stories about milestones: successes and crises, stories from working partners, and stories from opinion leaders. Although different rudiments of stories exist, the core story of a company or brand is the most important one because it includes the differentiating values and worldviews and answers the 'why'-question (Fog et al., 2010; Sinek, 2009). No matter what story is being told, the essence or DNA of a company needs to be integrated at all times to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness (Fog et al., 2010). This in turn creates strong bonds with the target audience.

3.3.3.1. STORYLISTENING

Kotler et al. (2005) argue that the simple process of communication consists of a sender and receiver. In terms of storytelling, Liebl and Rughase (2002) confirm that the two sides are equally important. Especially because consumers are difficult to manage nowadays and generally do not know what they want (Liebl and Rughase, 2002), storylistening becomes even more substantial as an alternative to traditional approaches to understand 'world of the consumer', as well as to detect indications of a company's own positioning in the market (Liebl and Rughase, 2002). Hence, they argue that storylistening should be integrated as a pre-step to storytelling. Furthermore, *"neither is there absolute novelty, nor can be said that everything has already been seen before. Rather, it is the power of context, which shape perception, structure expectations and create new interpretations"* (Liebl and Rughase, 2002).

To fully make use of the storylistening concept, Liebl and Rughase present the full storylistening procedure. To begin with, from an organizational point of view is important to see customers as *"foreign, exotic tribes"* (2002) to be able to explore their culture and discover unexpected things. In doing so, cognitive and emotional patterns are revealed. The second step is the evaluation of these stories. By focusing on cross-case patterns, similarities as well as systematic differences, organizations are able to detect strategic competitive advantages. Further, the ultimate purpose in using storylistening is to develop a translation of what customers truly mean to be able to

integrate this information into an organization's overall strategy (Liebl and Rughase, 2002). An understanding of certain patterns and values can really make a difference for the organization as a means to unfold power. Knowing the imaginary world of the target audience provides the basis for a risk assessment in terms of for example new product launches etc. As such, storylistening clearly reveals that strategy and the strategic process cannot be separated from each other (Liebl and Rughase, 2002).

3.3.4. CRITIQUE AND CONCERNS TOWARDS STORYTELLING

Among famous storyteller critics is Sagmeister who claims, "*all the storytellers are not storytellers [...]*". According to him, everybody seems to be a storyteller nowadays and he dismisses this trend as "*bullshit*" (2014). Though, putting his statement into perspective, he directs his doubt towards the fact in the advertising and marketing sphere suddenly everybody mentions storytelling without fully knowing what stands behind this term.

Furthermore, there are a few aspects that need to be put into consideration regarding the use of storytelling. First and foremost, storytelling needs to be a part of the overall strategic goal as well as add value towards achieving an organization's objective (Harrison, 2007; Denning, 2006; Mohan et al., 2008 in Gill, 2011). Using storytelling in isolation will not be effective as corporate stories are not a standalone answer to improving a shared meaning for authentic, external communication. Rather, it involves careful planning and aligning it with the overall (communication) strategy. Internally, organizations have to be aware of the fact that face-to-face narration can be challenging as it includes the narrator's own interpretation of the message (Welch and Jackson, 2007; McKee, 2003 in Gill, 2011).

3.4. SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Combining different research approaches of existing literature has been necessary to be able to answer the research question and, at the same time, draw tangible conclusions for the new storytelling framework presented during the course of the following chapters. Effective communication is key for long-term relationships between the company or brand and their target audience. Though, the new consumer (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) is challenging communications

efforts in the current business environment as a consequence of the paradigm shift. Nowadays, consumers are empowered (Rédey, 2014) and, thus, more critical towards what is being communicated by organizations. Due to the fact that consumers are the most valuable asset (Aaker, 1997; Ballantyne, Warren and Nobbs, 2006 in Leung and Bougoure, 2014), they have the ultimate (buying) power in the 21st century. Therefore, it is vital to build a strong bond from an organizational point of view (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Escalas, 2004). Therefore, using storytelling in a more strategic way can leverage strong, interactive ties. As to now, only a small percentage of customers claim to have engaged in a meaningful relationship with a company or brand (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård, 2004). These developments indicate that the potential of storytelling as *“living performances”* (Boje, 1995; Adorisio, 2009) of the truth has not been tapped.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL DATA

This section shortly introduces the findings from the expert interviews conducted throughout this research.

In the following, the main findings of the different interviewees are listed and correspond to the chronological order in which the interviews³ were conducted. By doing so, I intend to provide an insight into how the interviewees are connected to the notion of storytelling and what they argue for.

INTERVIEW 1	
Interviewee	Hjörtur Smáráson
Position of Interviewee	Storyteller and Strategist at UP
Connection to Storytelling	In his work, Smáráson mainly focuses on place branding through storytelling (B2B)
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark/ Iceland

Smáráson has worked with storytelling in different industries for many years and primarily focuses on the B2B aspect. He argues that applying storytelling does not depend on the industry; what matters is creating experiences for your *“number one target audience: your employees”*. In his opinion, storytelling starts with the leaders being clear about their mission/their passion and passing it to the employees. He states that making the employees a part of the core story of the organization is essential as they are important representatives, even outside the office hours. The next step is then building a tribe around your brand and, simultaneously, finding loyal brand ambassadors by connecting them to the core story. He claims, *“you can’t expect people to buy your product without having a connection to it”*. With regards to what a good story entails, Smáráson stresses (a several times) the struggle, meaning the *“enemy of some sort that you [the*

³ To get an understanding of the main topics that have played a role during the expert interviews, an example of an interview guide can be found in Appendix 3.

company] are fighting against". Furthermore, the story has to be coherent and credible to be able to build long-term relationships with your target audience (both internally and externally).

INTERVIEW 2	
Interviewee	Mattia Abeni
Position of Interviewee	Founder of Copenhagers, a creative agency focusing on video production and content creation)
Connection to Storytelling	Abeni uses storytelling as part of the communication strategy
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark

Abeni specializes in media consulting and primarily focuses on telling the stories of his clients through video due to the fact that *"people want to associate a company/brand with a face"*. He believes that visually showing the people behind companies or projects, their passion and why they are doing certain things is the an important part of the current zeitgeist. The information overload in today's business landscape encouraged him to focus on true and authentic stories of the people in Copenhagen. *"People can read about your brand on the Internet; I wanted to offer a more personal and approachable solution to what is already out there"*. He claims that everybody has a story to tell, no matter what industry because *"there is always a backstory"*. In his opinion, a good story starts with thinking about what the target audience would like to hear and what has not been done before. *"Give your customers a treat"* because it fosters interaction.

INTERVIEW 3	
Interviewee	Simon Stubben
Position of Interviewee	Co-founder of Project Canvas
Connection to Storytelling	Stubben does not directly work with storytelling but recognizes it as an important element of the communication strategy of a brand; the main reason for the interview was his experience in framework development
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark

Stubben has been part of developing the Project Canvas – a framework for organizations to facilitate their project management process. Even though he is not an expert on storytelling, he argues that storytelling is becoming more and more important in today's society. Triggered from his own lack of professional experience with organizational storytelling, he believes that a framework for storytelling is a starting point for coherent story building throughout all branches of an organization. Inspired by Stubben's own work on the project canvas, it involves elements such as setting a clear goal and knowing your resources to really get the desired outcome from storytelling.

INTERVIEW 4	
Interviewee	Yann Girard
Position of Interviewee	Self-employed Entrepreneur/ Author
Connection to Storytelling	He tells his own stories and, therefore, values the power of storytelling
Position of Interviewee	Munich, Germany

Girard is an entrepreneur, who has started, advised and supported several startups in China, New York and Germany. Lately, he focuses on consulting by telling his own stories through blogging and public speaking events at entrepreneurship institutions, including both success stories and failures. As a matter of fact, he acknowledges storytelling as a medium to connect and share

experiences to be able to learn from another. He believes that only honest stories can foster emotional bonds between the sender and receiver.

INTERVIEW 5	
Interviewee	Thomas Madsen-Mygdal
Position of Interviewee	Angel Investor
Connection to Storytelling	He works in the field of visual storytelling in the startup scene
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark

Madsen-Mygdal is a well-known angel investor in the Copenhagen startup scene and has seen organizations in various stages: from being a startup towards scaling up and maturing, for example Podio, 23 and Holvi. With regards to storytelling, he points out the two levels a story runs on: the operational and strategic level. Based on his experience, having both a simple story on the operational level and a complex story (consisting of the paradigm product, people, ambition, creation) on the strategic level is essential. *“You always tell the simple story to the external; but the full story is also relevant because it shows why you ended up doing different things”. Though, depending on the position within the company, every employee has a different story, that should be acknowledged. This also applies for the external: “it is important to hear the stories around you, catch the societal trends, make it up to date, and know what your (potential) customers want to hear”. Even though in the beginning it is “usually just two crazy guys in their garage not knowing anything about business consultancy”, a storytelling tool can serve as a “shared artifact or reality” inside the organization.*

INTERVIEW 6	
Interviewee	Jasenko Hadzic
Position of Interviewee	Managing Director CPHFTW
Connection to Storytelling	He does not have a direct connection to storytelling though his opinion is interesting as he argues from an entrepreneurial point of view in terms of user engagement and organizational bottom line.
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark

From an entrepreneurial standpoint, Hadzic argues, “[...] *storytelling is great, but for me and other entrepreneurs who are starting, the focus is on the MVP, user feedback, iteration and pivot. Therefore, its more like a ‘nice to have’ instead of a ‘need to have’*”. He claims that there are two scenarios. Scenario 1 is not sustainable because “*if your product is bad and you are great at storytelling, you might be able to attract users/customers; but after a while, they will have tested the product and will leave*”. On the other hand, scenario 2 is sustainable because “*if your product is great, you can start focusing your efforts at storytelling. You will be able to attract users on the sole basis of the user experience and the great feedback...customer retention is the utmost important*”. Especially for startups, storytelling should not be the main focus since the product, the users and their feedback are the most essential elements from his point of view. Storytelling only gains significance when entering a market where products are similar and brands need to compete on price. “*Storytelling becomes more important when competition is on the rise or when you are a mature corporation, trying to distinguish yourself in the market*”.

INTERVIEW 7	
Interviewee	Maike Gosch
Position of Interviewee	Storytelling consultant at Story4Good/ Author
Connection to Storytelling	She supports companies and people in shaping their stories in a clearer way to foster engagement and inspiration.
Position of Interviewee	Hamburg, Germany

Gosch defines storytelling as a dialogue and connection between two or more people. Both parties can open this dialogue: the company that is considering what story to tell to its target audience as well as customers who want the company to tell stories about their experiences with their product or service. Though, *“in general, storytelling starts with organizations and their interest in curating and collecting stories”*. The most important story is the founding story – the story of the ‘why’ – because it reflects upon the DNA of the organization, its character and values. The biggest challenge is incorporating the whole organization. From her experience, it is usually the communications department that is involved with storytelling but it is not what storytelling really means: *“it is about living, understanding and communicating the story in a way that reflects the values of the company or brand”*. However, she stresses that sometimes storytelling is not the best tool for a certain, strategic approach; it depends on the context of the situation.

INTERVIEW 8	
Interviewee	Klaus Fog
Position of Interviewee	Co-founder of Sigma/ Author
Connection to Storytelling	He is the author of the book “Storytelling: Branding in practice” and has worked as a consultant on storytelling and company DNA.
Position of Interviewee	Copenhagen, Denmark

As the author of the well-known book on storytelling, Fog has made in-depth investigations on this notion. He claims, *“The core story is the most important story because it is the story that made the company survive and [it highlights] the milestones of becoming successful”*; it is the *“raison d’être”* (the reason for being that answers the ‘why’). From his experience, Fog states, *“[only] if stories are routed in the DNA, stories are always going to survive”*. Even though there is no fixed formula, stories need to be authentic at all times because fictional elements harm the transparency. He believes, *“the basic principle in creating a story is how you solve the conflict (the interesting part is what you do and what you don’t do)”*. Moreover, *“Storytelling by itself is not of interest; it is the whole narrative approach [...] employees have to be brought into a situation where they decide on the story otherwise nothing will change”* (Fog, 2014). This statement refers

to the importance of establishing the story within all departments of the organization; otherwise the story will disappear.

4.1. REFLECTION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

The majority of interviewees agree on the importance of storytelling in today's business environment (Fog, 2014; Gosch, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Smáráson, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014) although their definitions and opinion on how to make use of it on the best possible way might differ. For example, the interviewees with an entrepreneurial background put emphasis on the different stakeholders involved, especially during the initial startup phase (i.e. investors, customers, partners) (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014; Hadzic, 2014; Stubben, 2014); whereas the interviewees looking at storytelling from a marketing or communications perspective focus on the audience (including customers and noncustomers) in general (Fog, 2014; Gosch, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Smáráson, 2014).

Only one interviewee is in discordance with storytelling and its potential of adding value to a company or brand (Hadzic, 2014). When reflecting on Hadzic's entrepreneurial-influenced worldview, it is understandable as to why the presented argumentation is completely product-driven. It is evident that he mainly puts focus on brand equity, a financial output measure. Indeed, when only focusing on the financial aspect, the arguments presented might be feasible. But in the context of storytelling and, more predominantly, when taking the customer-brand relationship into consideration, financial aspects should not be the main focus (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) because it does not create long lasting bonds. Due to his way of thinking, Hadzic is not able to realize the potential of the (emotional) value of a brand (Fog, 2014; Abeni, 2014), which is the basic building block of organizational performance (Osterwalder, 2010).

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the findings from academic literature as well as the empirical data, and functions as the groundwork for developing the new storytelling framework.

5.1. THE UNCONTROLLABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Due to the fact that communication has become increasingly difficult as a result of the Participation Age (Middleton, 2012), storytelling is progressively seen as means to shift away from one-way messages towards coherent and trustworthy messages as a foundation for long-term relationship building (Burnett and Hutton, 2007; Skibsted and Hansen, 2014; Escalas, 2004). Nowadays, the changing role of the consumer (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) challenges companies in managing complex communication systems. Furthermore, companies and brands need to accept that they do not possess absolute power in their relationship with consumers anymore. However, the change in dynamics also offers a few opportunities. The paradigm shift allows them to be trustmarks (Burnett and Hutton, 2007), which provide meaning and satisfy emotional needs of their target audience (Skibsted and Hansen, 2014; Leung and Bougoure, 2008).

This shift offers companies and brands the opportunity to create an emotional dimension and, therefore, build strong emotional connections with their target audience. By developing an understanding of potential consumers, companies and brands are able to foster their active participation in the meanings they provide (Fog et al., 2010; Skibsted and Hansen, 2014). Experts in the field confirm what academics argue for and add that nowadays the first step in relationship building entails being personal and approachable (Smáráson, 2014; Fog, 2014; Abeni, 2014). This coincides with Kramer's approach in relation to brand-consumer relationships in the current business landscape. He believes that the H2H (human to human) approach is the only way to establish a significant relationship (Kramer, 2014).

5.2. HOLISTIC VIEW ON STORYTELLING

After having assessed the ever-changing, uncontrollable dynamics between businesses and their audience, the following paragraphs give an overview of the more steady (controllable) aspects of storytelling from an organizational point of view.

5.2.1. DIMENSIONS OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is complex and entails various layers. Existing literature has extensively focused on breaking down this complexity into aspects such as strategy narratives (Vaara and Pedersen, 2013) or antenarratives (Boje, 2011) to be able to understand every dimension that plays a vital role within storytelling. During my research, Madsen-Mygdal (2014) suggested a very simplified view (Appendix 4) on the existence of stories within organizations. From an organizational point of view, he claims that two simple levels of stories exist: the operational and strategic. Inspired by his argumentation, the figure below gives a more detailed overview of what each level is composed of:

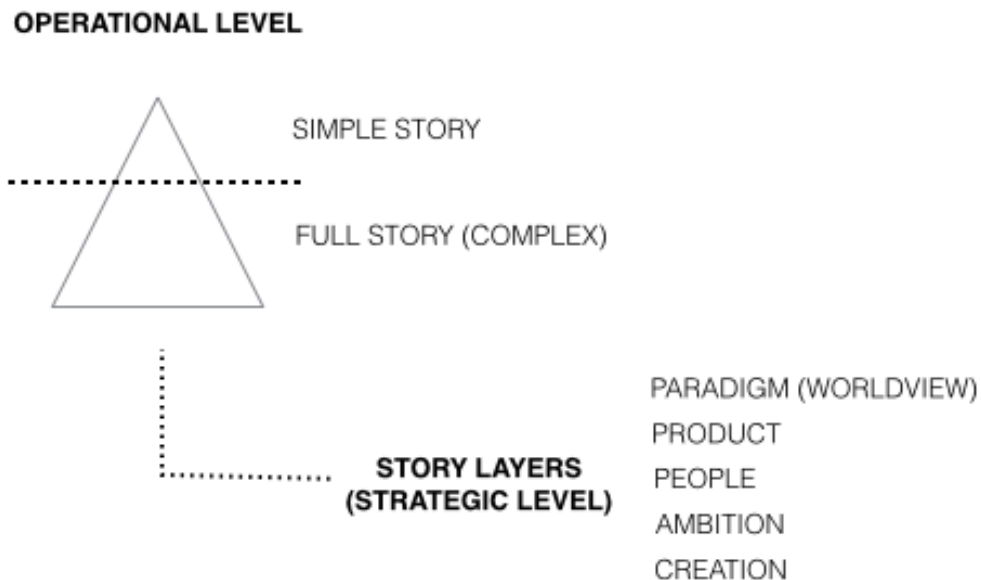


Figure 5: Levels of stories, inspired by Madsen-Mygdal, 2014

Based on Madsen-Mygdal's experience, having both a simple story on the operational level and a complex story (consisting of the paradigm product, people, ambition, creation) on the strategic level is essential. *"You always tell the simple story to the external; but the full story is also relevant because it shows why you ended up doing different things"* (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014). Though, depending on the position within the company, every employee has a different story, that should be acknowledged. This also applies for the external, as *"it is important to hear the stories around*

you, catch the societal trends, make it up to date, and know what your (potential) customers want to hear” (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014)

5.2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CORE STORY

Starting with academic references, Bruce argues, *“every brand has its own story”* (2003). This belief is also shared with Abeni, who claims *“no matter what industry, there is always a backstory”* (2014). In other words, regardless whether the focus lies on B2C or B2B, there is always an explanation for the existence (the ‘why’) of a company. Fog (2014) explains this aspect with the concept of *“raison d’être”* – the reason for being, which in turn answers the ‘why’. He claims, *“the core story is the most important story because it is the story that made the company survive and [it highlights] the milestones of becoming successful”* (Fog, 2014). Yet, to be able to communicate an engaging and credible core story, companies have to have a clear understanding of their values as well as their strategic vision (Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). *“If you do not have passion and an authentic story to tell, people will find out – very quickly”* (Fog, 2014) as a result of the aforementioned paradigm shift. *“[Only] if stories are routed in the DNA, stories are always going to survive”* (Fog, 2014). Additionally, not only core values are a means to actively engage the audience but also admitting failures or conflicts a company has faced in its existence of being (Fog et al., 2010; Smárason, 2014). This emotional dimension triggers self-brand connections of the target audience as a result of their narrative processing (Escalas, 2004).

5.2.3. ELEMENTS OF A STORY

Looking at basic characteristics of a successful story, it is clear that a great number of what interviewees point out actually coincide with what existing literature touches upon when emphasizing the different building blocks of a story.

Arguing from an organizational standpoint, the majority agrees that the most important element of a story is the listener/the target audience (Fog et al., 2010; Cohen, 2014; Reed, 2014; Escalas, 2004; Abeni, 2014). Hence, if organizations want their audience to consume not only their stories but also their products and services, the content (in other words the stories) they produce needs to be engaging and *“addictive”* (Cohen, 2014). Moreover, a certain amount of knowledge of the target audience is necessary to be able to hit the right message (Cooperstein 2014; Cohen 2014). This leads to the question of how to create emotionally engaging stories that function as a bridge

between the consumer and the brand. Research indicates there is no clear answer (Denning, 2006); however, there exist a few building blocks or guiding elements in order to compose a successful story.

Scholars put emphasis on the message, conflict, characters, plot (Fog et al., 2010; Boje, 1995) and actions (Boje, 1995), which correlate with the DNA of the organization. Furthermore, the substance of these elements is essential because only formulating a corporate claim is not sufficient enough to engage the target audience (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). Thus, to be able to formulate a successful story, a few anchor points (for example the emotional dimensions, the conflict/challenge) are key in today's business dynamics for the story to be interactive (Abeni, 2014; Fog, 2014; Smárason, 2014).

In addition, communicating a unified story to the external needs certain elements the whole organization needs to agree upon (Fog et al., 2010). *"But this is not enough; in order to penetrate the noise, be heard and remembered, you need to communicate intelligently"* (Fog et al., 2010:231). From his own experience, Stubben (2014) claims that in the strategic planning process, regardless whether it is for a certain project or communication a story, an overview of goals and resources has to be created.

5.2.4. OUTCOME OF STORYTELLING

Denning argues, *"storytelling is a tool to achieve business purposes, not an end in itself"* (2006). Fog et al. confirm this statement, as the perfect story is likely to be ineffective if it is not confirmed convincingly (2010). As a matter of fact, the evolution of technology and the consequent empowerment of the consumers (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) easily reveal insincere messages by companies and brands. Hence, putting emphasis on formulating engaging and credible stories is the key to be able to build meaningful relationships (Escalas, 2004). From their professional experience, an indicator for successful storytelling is when the target audience shows genuine interest (Smárason, 2014; Fog, 2014); though, what is more is when customers repeat the story (Smárason, 2014). This is a measurement for engagement and that the story has made an impact (Mills, 2008).

Hands-on experience from storytelling consultants show that employees need to be involved in the process of storytelling in order for it to have the desired effects because they represent the

organization at all times (Smárason, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014). In other words, arguing for the necessity of stories being routed in the DNA (Fog, 2014) means that, at the same time, employees have to be in accordance with it. *“Storytelling by itself is not of interest; it is the whole narrative approach [...] employees have to be brought into a situation where they decide on the story otherwise nothing will change”* (Fog, 2014).

5.2.5. CRITICISM ON STORYTELLING

Even though the majority of experts and scholars agree on the necessity of implementing storytelling, a few opponents can still be found. One of the biggest opponents of storytelling is Sagmeister, a New-York-based graphic designer and artist. According to him *“storytelling has taken on a mantle of bullshit”* (Sagmeister, 2014). Even though he accepts the concept of telling stories, he believes that the storytelling as a method in marketing has been misapplied and alienated by marketers and pseudo storytellers. In his opinion, everybody seems to be a self-claimed storyteller nowadays but in the end it is the target audience/ the listeners who define the actual storyteller (Sagmeister, 2014).

Looking at the empirical data that was generated in this thesis, Hadzic argues, *“[...] storytelling is great, but for me and other entrepreneurs who are starting, the focus is on the MVP, user feedback, iteration and pivot. Therefore, it’s more like a ‘nice to have’ instead of a ‘need to have’”* (2014). From his point of view there are two scenarios. Scenario one is not sustainable because *“if your product is bad and you are great at storytelling, you might be able to attract users/customers; but after a while, they will have tested the product and will leave”*. For scenario two, which is sustainable, he argues, *“if your product is great, you can start focusing your efforts at storytelling. You will be able to attract users on the sole basis of the user experience and the great feedback...customer retention is the utmost important”* (Hadzic, 2014). These statements clearly show that the product is always in the center of his argumentation as to why storytelling is not as important. Especially for companies in the initial stage, storytelling should not be the main focus since product, users and their feedback are the most essential elements from his point of view. It only gains significance when entering a market where products are similar and brands need to compete on price storytelling becomes important. *“Storytelling becomes more important when competition is on the rise or when you are a mature corporation, trying to distinguish yourself in the market”* (Hadzic, 2014); in any other case, it is a subsidiary matter.

When reflecting on his entrepreneurial worldview, it is understandable as to why the presented argumentation is completely product-driven. It is evident that he mainly puts focus on brand equity: a financial and output measure (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). Indeed, by only focusing on the financial aspect, the arguments presented might be feasible. But in the context of storytelling and, more predominantly, when taking the customer-brand relationship into consideration, financial aspects should not be the main focus (Burnett and Hutton, 2007) because it does not create long lasting bonds. Due to his way of thinking, Hadzic is not able to realize the potential of the (emotional) value of a brand (Fog et al., 2004), which is the basic building block of organizational performance (Osterwalder, 2010).

5.3. MAIN FINDINGS ON THE STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK

Existing literature does not state the need for a storytelling framework per se; however, the need for a new approach towards organizational storytelling and its application in business is expressed due to the lack of tangible, strategic approaches towards this notion (Mills, 2008; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Boje, 2008; Fenton & Langley, 2011 in Vaara and Pedersen, 2013; Ibarra and Lineback, 2005). During the majority of the conducted interviews, the storytelling framework played an important role. When presenting the idea of such a framework as a logical consequence of the existing gap within the literature, most interviewees seemed to be positive towards the existence of it. As to date, there is no accepted tool for organizational storytelling such as the Business Canvas Model by Osterwalder as a strategic template to develop and visualize existing business models.

Generally – whether being a startup or mature organization – *“it is very relevant to have a tool or framework for storytelling”* (Gosch, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014) because it is connected to the identity of a company or brand and, thus, the reason for existence (Fog, 2014). In other words, a clear understanding of the identity/company DNA is necessary to be able to frame a successful story, which communicates the company values. Even though in the beginning it is *“usually just two crazy guys in their garage not knowing anything about business consultancy”* (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014), a framework may assist in terms of story building (Stubben, 2014). Furthermore, *“a good and comprehensive storytelling canvas or toolkit can help employees; they are not dependent on consultation and it facilitates to structure stories in an efficient way”* (Gosch, 2014). At the same time, a storytelling tool can serve as a *“shared artifact or reality”* (Madsen-Mygdal,

2014) inside the organization. This is useful because the whole organization is able to live the story as opposed to the communications department only (Gosch, 2014).

5.3.1. CRITICISM ON THE FRAMEWORK

Any tool or framework has its limitations because it does not perfectly suit every company or situation and users should be aware of this. However, only one interviewee showed a critical standpoint towards the proposed storytelling framework in this thesis. Hadzic, who also does not believe in the value of storytelling in a business context, does not support the idea of a framework. In his opinion, *“models, tools, canvases are fine for first-time doers, but not used by more experienced people, especially not in startups”* (Hadzic, 2014).

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter puts my findings into perspective and presents a discussion of the main aspects in this thesis. Hereby, it should be kept in mind that I will argue from an organizational point of view.

6.1. STORYTELLING AS A PROCESS

As touched upon before, many different definitions on storytelling exist. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that businesses do not take full advantage of the benefits of storytelling (Denning, 2006; Fog, 2014; Mills, 2008). After combining both existing literature and primary data, I have assessed two reasons as to why. First, the majority of organizations leave the communications or marketing department with the task of implementing storytelling into the communication efforts (Gosch, 2014). Second, storytelling is viewed as pure entertainment and static method in business, which does not engage the preferred target audience in the long run. Rather, storytelling should be seen as a dynamic process. That is, a process consisting of a BEFORE (what needs to be certain before telling the story?), *DURING* (what attributes should the story entail?), *AFTER* (what happens after the story is created?). To get a thorough overview the process and the research findings have been assigned to the three stages accordingly in the table below (Table 3). This table also plays an essential part in developing the storytelling framework presented in the following chapter.

BEFORE: WHAT NEEDS TO BE CERTAIN BEFORE TELLING THE STORY?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A passion and a mission (everything starts with a passion and develops into a mission) (Smárasón, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Cornelissen, 2008) * An understanding of the target audience (Cohen, 2014; Smárasón, 2014) * An understanding of the DNA and brand values (Fog, 2014; Smárasón, 2014; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Kruse, 2005) * A clear goal (Smárasón, 2014; Gosch, 2014; Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008) * The willingness to risk something by telling the story (Fog, 2014) * The narrative angle (Fog, 2014; Denning, 2006; Fog et al., 2010)
DURING: WHICH ATTRIBUTES SHOULD THE STORY ENTAIL?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The hero (4 different types: CEO, the company/brand itself, employees, customers) (Smárasón, 2014; Fog, 2014) * A conflict/enemy/challenge (it does not have to be a person; the enemy also entails something you are fighting against) (Smárasón, 2014; Fog 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014) * Coherence/ Consistency (Smárasón, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Stubben, 2014; Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008) * Credibility/Authenticity (Smárasón, 2014; Stubben, 2014; Gosch, 2014; Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Escalas, 2004) * A human/personal touch (Smárasón, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014) * Reflecting upon mistakes (negative stories) (Smárasón, 2014; Fog, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014) * Transparency (Fog, 2014; Abeni, 2014; Hatch and Schultz, 2008) * Realistic elements (Fog, 2014)
AFTER: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STORY IS CREATED?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * It should become an established part of the company (Fog, 2014; Gosch, 2014) * Employees need to agree upon the values the story intends to communicate (Smárasón, 2014; Fog 2014) * Communication to the external in a coherent manner (Smárasón, 2014) * Build a tribe (Smárasón, 2014) * Evaluation on engagement (Smárasón, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014; Fog, 2014) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the story repeated by customers? (Smárasón, 2014) ○ Use storylistening as a means to find out if the story being told had the desired effect (Fog et al., 2010; Liebl and Rughase, 2002) ○ Recognition (Fog, 2014)

Table 3: Summary of findings (theory and empirical data)

To shortly elaborate on Table 3, *BEFORE* starts with determining the story (Bruce, 2003) by reflecting upon what the company or brand constitutes. Having an internal understanding of the DNA or core values (Fog, 2014; Smáráson, 2014; Kruse, 2005) is key to compose a successful story. In doing so, all internal stakeholders of the company need to be included (Fog, 2014) to be able to choose a coherent narrative pattern (Denning, 2006; Fog et al., 2010). Thereafter follows putting emphasis on the external. First and foremost, creating and knowing the audience is key (Cohen, 2014; Reed, 2014) to trigger long-term engagement. *DURING* puts focus on the story attributes. According to the experts, a story has to be composed of a hero (Smáráson, 2014; Fog, 2014), a conflict (Smáráson, 2014; Fog, 2014) and a defined, coherent message (Fog, 2014; Smáráson, 2014; Stubben, 2014; Abeni, 2014). At the same time, these elements have to be credible (Smáráson, 2014; Stubben, 2014; Gosch, 2014) and, therefore, should not entail fictional elements (Fog, 2014) because it harms the level of transparency (Fog, 2014; Abeni, 2014). *AFTER* stresses the evaluation of the storytelling efforts as an essential part to be able to spot strengths and weaknesses in the story that has been told.

6.1.1. STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF STORYTELLING

Scholars argue that organizations do not make full use of storytelling (Denning, 2006); in other words, they do not leverage the full potential in terms of user engagement. Thus, for storytelling to be engaging, the first step is to strategically implement it into all business processes and to acknowledge that the two parties (sender and receiver) are equally important (Cornelissen, 2008; Kotler et al., 2005; Greimas, 1966). With this in mind and from an organization's perspective, the question is to what extent is the story being told also the customer's own story.

By nature, people are both storytellers and storylisteners due to the way in which humans, or more specifically, human behavior is shaped (Fog et al., 2010). Although my research indicates that a few people are familiar with the concept of storylistening (Liebl and Rughase, 2002; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014), it needs to be stressed even more because it corresponds to the current dynamics in the business landscape. It is a fact that stories cannot be unilaterally managed (Liebl and Rughase, 2002) as a result of the paradigm shift. As such, storylistening becomes even more substantial as an alternative to traditional approaches of customer analyses. What really matters hereby is that a company engages with the right people that like and support their products or services. A high demand (in numbers) does not necessarily have to result in brand loyalty. What

happens if a better product/service of the same kind is invented? The answer is that *“uniqueness does not lead to differentiation unless it is valuable to the consumer”* (Porter, 1980). Furthermore, the truth is that *“neither is there absolute novelty, nor can be said that everything has already been seen before. Rather, it is the power of context, which shape perception, structure expectations and create new interpretations”* (Liebl, 2011). Hence, applying storylistening to organizational activities triggers a more straightforward way of interaction because companies are able to detect what consumers actually want to be emotionally engaged. Moreover, storylistening increases the likelihood of stories being repeated, which is an indicator for successful storytelling (Smárason, 2014).

The figure below (Figure 6) is based on what I have investigated so far and aims at visualizing the flow of storytelling (in a simplified manner) with a strong emphasis on storylistening, including aspects such as storythinking and storyselling. All elements are equally important in the flow of storytelling. Moreover, it is important to state that storylistening and storytelling do not necessarily have a certain order due to their dynamic and intertwined nature even though it seems that way in the illustration. It depends on the company's needs and state of maturity to decide how and when to use storylistening (e.g. as a pre step of storytelling, as a strategic tool for customer analysis, as an evaluation of the story told). Nevertheless, this strategic listening approach needs to be carefully judged because sometimes consumers miscalculate their own preferred worldview, which then can cause misjudgment of a company's own competitive position (Liebl and Rughase, 2002). As the figure indicates, the storytelling process should also entail an evaluation to be able to really dive into the effects of storytelling and to gain an understanding the attitudes towards the stories being told. Also, it reveals strengths and weaknesses of the organizational communication and engagement efforts and, thus, brings to light what needs to be optimized for customers to be emotionally connected. This evaluation allows companies to compare if their storytelling is reflected in their actions as well

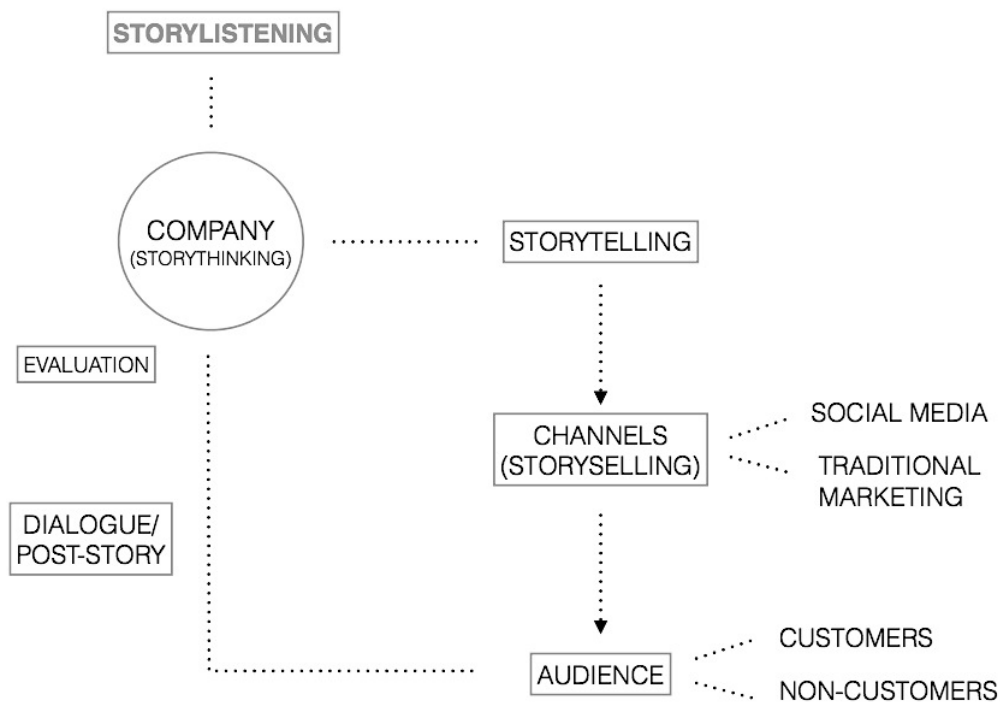


Figure 6: The flow of storytelling, inspired by Kotler et al.'s communication process model, 2005

6.2. CHALLENGES OF STORYTELLING

From an organizational point of view, storytelling cannot be fully controlled (Kruse, 2005), especially due to the uncontrollability of the target audience. A common misconception of storytelling is that is easy to implement. Though, it is a rather complex and lavish process, which takes time as well as a sense for community management. One of the biggest challenges is establishing a flow and managing internal as well as external processes of storytelling at the same time. Finding a balance might probably be the most difficult task in order to curate authentic stories. Looking inside the organization, it is quite common that the same story might be different depending on the experience of a certain employee; sometimes they do not only differ but also tend to adapt. In fact, a story is never finished; it always develops, which can only be seen over time. Furthermore, organizations have to accept the fact that stories are being told, whether they are created by the organization itself or not.

PART II

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF STORYTELLING

CHAPTER 7: THE STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the new storytelling framework, which serves as a tangible tool to grasp the notion of storytelling in practice. It is based on both academia and primary data and applies the insights that have been mentioned and discussed before. In addition, the development process of this framework is linked to work cycle 4 (Figure 4), which was presented in Chapter 2. Further, this chapter is the concluding element of this thesis, showing how organizations can create compelling and meaningful stories.

7.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the new storytelling framework is to develop a tool that organizations can use to understand their core story by visualizing their central values and important story attributes. This visual presentation helps to shape a common, internal direction that connects the company (the employees) holistically around one position or meaning, one goal, as well as their core values, which are anchored in the culture and identity (Cornelissen, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). In doing so, authentic and trustworthy stories can be created and communicated to the external, which in turn fosters brand positioning.

Inspired by the format of Alex Osterwalder's influential *Business Model Canvas* (2010), the storytelling framework functions as a strategic planning tool with a focus on narrative-based communication efforts. For example, the different stories within the organization (within the different departments) and the different layers of the stories can be identified in using the framework. However, it does not have the goal to generalize how storytelling should be applied for all companies. As stated throughout this study, there is no right or wrong in terms of creating stories (Denning, 2006) or how to use the developed framework. Rather, the ambition is to inspire companies to strategically include storytelling into business routines as well as to help them to get an overview of both internal and external stories. In doing so, these stories are a means to triggering user engagement and creating strong, long-lasting brand-customer-relationship.

Putting emphasis on creating a visual tool stems from Tergan and Keller's (2005) visualization theory. Studies have proven that visualization of information engages people and produces knowledge learning (Tergan and Keller, 2005). Furthermore, Forsberg et al. (2005) argue that

visual models are able to provide the big perspective and create a common frame of reference. This makes knowledge more useful and valuable (Forsberg et al., 2005). Nevertheless, visualization alone should not be taken for granted; having a simple and well-designed model is crucial. Related to this, general criteria for visual models are (Forsberg et al., 2005):

- An explicit and operationally defined structure and relation of the elements
- Obviously reasoned and intuitive for easy use and understand
- Applicability throughout the project environment
- Validated empirically in real life projects
- Easy to remember and effectively applied

7.2. DESIGN PROCESS

The specific design process of the storytelling framework is characterized by an iterative sense making process, also referred to as synthesis (Kolko, 2010) as part of the overall action research. Applying this method is a means to draw conclusions from existing literature and empirical data, and to combine them to find a balance between market needs, technology trends as well as business needs (Kolko, 2010) (look at Appendix 6). This process of continuous learning and repetitive ideation has been used to prototype and experiment with the different versions of the storytelling framework that have been developed throughout the scope of this research. The storytelling framework has undergone the following phases: redefining the problem and needfinding, ideation, prototyping and evaluation (HSG, 2005).

7.2.1. REDEFINING THE PROBLEM AND NEEDFINDING

Based on the principles of design thinking (HSG, 2005; Curedale, 2013) and its human-centered approach, innovation at the intersection of business, [technology] and people is able to trigger radical services or business models (Kolko, 2010). This mindset coined the starting point for the design of the storytelling framework as an innovative solution to integrate storytelling into daily business routines of organizations.

For inspirational purposes, I started off by looking at the business tools, which were part of my five-year education at CBS. In doing so, I quickly observed that the majority of existing tools are

very complex and not realistic for actual organizational routines. Hence, from a user experience perspective and keeping in mind Forsberg et al.'s (2005) criteria for visual tools, I mapped out several characteristics for the framework, which I deem most important to make the framework as applicable as possible:

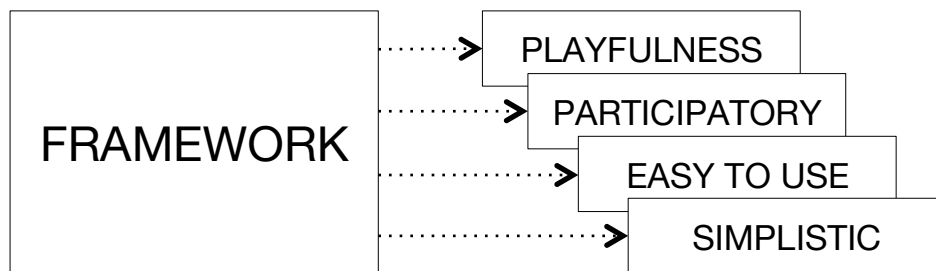


Figure 7: Characteristics of storytelling framework

7.2.2. IDEATION

Based on the expert's specific areas of knowledge, different potential elements for the storytelling framework have been identified from the very early creation process to be able to develop a tangible prototype that can be tested and refined at a later stage. The elements have constantly been revised and compared with existing literature. Furthermore, keeping on-going dialogues for feedback with the experts as part of the constructivist approach (Barry, 1996) even after the interview has been conducted, allowed for continuous improvement. As the synthesis process is frequently performed privately (Kolko, 2010) and difficult for the reader to comprehend, I applied various methods of visualizing the synthesis process. These methods include elements of concept mapping and insight combination. For better comprehension, they are shortly described below. Further, a visualization of these methods can be found in Appendix 6.

First, concept mapping has been used as a means to process the discoveries from existing literature and empirical data. It facilitated to structure these insights visually and thereby shape the groundwork for the actual storytelling framework. Furthermore, concept mapping inspired me to think about the storytelling process holistically and to find answers for the research questions by creating semantic connections between elements such as Brand DNA, consumer-brand relationships and the basic communication process (Kolk, 2010).

Second, while putting these mental models of knowledge onto paper, the process of insight combination has been unconsciously present and intertwined with concept mapping. By consciously using insight combination, I developed different versions of frameworks for storytelling. Also, building on semantic connections generated design insights, which can be *“thought of as the additive of problem-specific observation (“I saw this”) and personal and professional experience (“I know this”); this grounds an insight in both the subjective and general knowledge of the specific practitioner and in the objective data of the design problem itself”* (Kolko, 2010).

7.2.3. PROTOTYPING AND EVALUATION

The prototyping process of the storytelling framework is based on three sources of inspiration: existing literature, few already existing frameworks and the empirical data gathered in this research. The last source of inspiration also entails the continuous feedback from the interviewees as an important reality check (Curedale, 2013) of the prototypes. In doing so, the learning curve was never put on hold and, therefore, the best version possible of the storytelling framework can be developed. It is important to mention that the framework design was not a separated and static part of the study; instead, making use of different design thinking methods overlaps with the literature review and the conduction of expert interviews. After having found the two existing storytelling frameworks, I investigated why particular elements were chosen. Although the developers of the canvasses did not agree on in-depth interviews, existing literature and the primary data gathered helped to reveal the meaning of the different building blocks.

The first framework, developed by American strategist Lina Srivastava, is called *“The Project Model Canvas for Social Impact/Narrative Design”* and is inspired by Osterwalder’s Business Model Canvas:

narrative statement		change statement		
partners	activities	themes and issues	audience engagement	audience segments
	resources		distribution channels	
costs		revenue streams		

Figure 8: The project model canvas for social impact/narrative design by Lina Srivastava

For better understanding, she adds the following questions when introducing the canvas on her own blog (Srivastava, 2013):

How to Use the Canvas:

Be as specific as possible in your answers. Move through the canvas in a clockwise direction, starting in the upper right.

1. "Change Statement": What change in situation is the goal of the project being mapped?
2. "Audience Segments." Who is consuming your media or strategy? Who is interacting with it?
3. "Audience Engagement": This is akin to community engagement in other realms. What are you asking your audiences to do? What are you providing? How can you interact with your audience, digitally or in the real world?
4. "Distribution Channels": Where are you finding your audiences? How will you distribute your content to them?
5. "Partners": This is akin to stakeholder analysis in other realms. Remember that beneficiary populations can and should be included in your analysis as partners, not as recipients. (a) Who are your core partners, who will help you co-create your project and content? (b) Who are your amplification partners, who will spread the word? (c) Which populations are you serving with this project? (d) Who are your beneficiary partners?
6. "Activities": What is your "to-do" list? What do you need to do to succeed in the project?
7. "Resources": What do you have and what do you need in order to succeed?
8. "Themes and Issues": What are the social impact issues you're working on? How does your project align with larger social issue themes in the world? What is your value proposition to add to those issues with this project?
9. "Narrative Statement": What is the story you are telling? How does that support the "Change Statement"?
10. Check the Change Statement and Narrative Statement against each other to make sure each represents what is appropriate to your partners, audiences, and desired change.

(Optional to some projects)

11. "Costs": What is your budget?
12. "Revenue Streams": (a) Where will you source the money to realize this project? (b) Will you generate revenue from the project?

The second framework revolves around the core story and is developed by a German, now defunct agency called Three Headed Monkeys (original image below in German⁴):

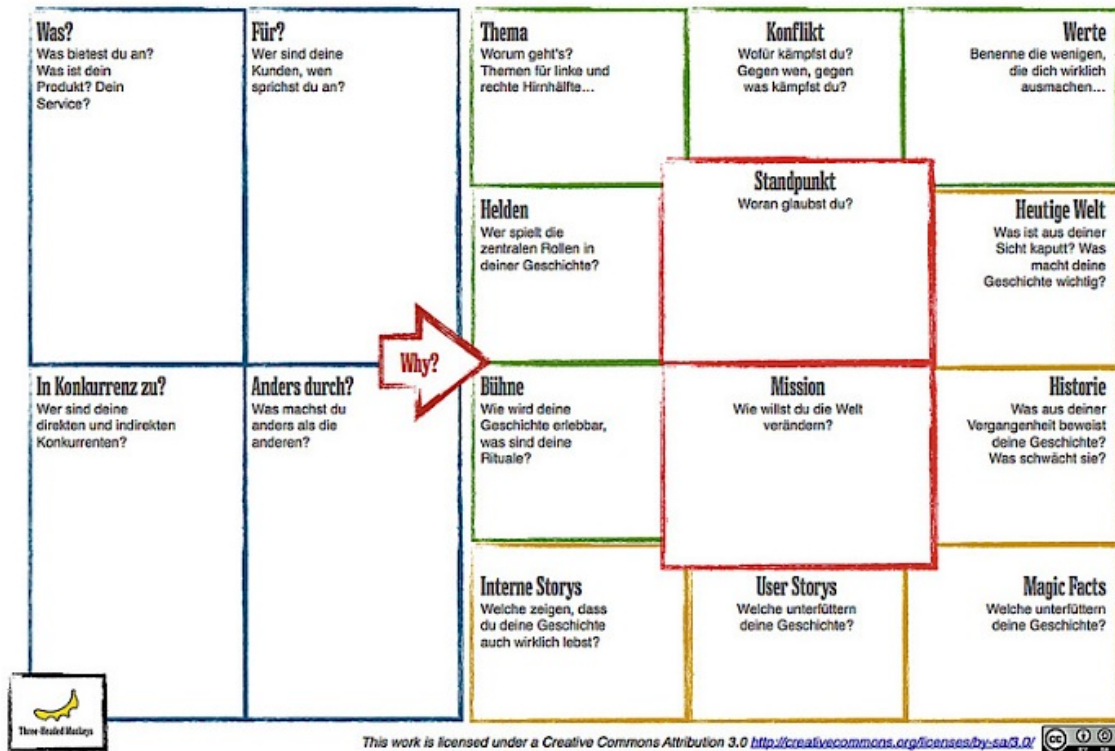


Figure 9: The core story canvas by Three Headed Monkeys

Although the limited scope of this thesis did not allow me to test both frameworks in practice, I will briefly analyze them in terms of their ease of use. The main difference between the two existing frameworks is that the first one complies with the general criteria by Forsberg et al. (2005) to a certain extent; compared to the second framework, it seems easier to use at first glance due to its clear, simplistic design. The different colors schemes make the second framework seem less intuitive, which immediately creates a barrier. Though, after closer investigation, the second framework gives more information of what to look out for in the different sections, whereas the first one does not include descriptions of the different divisions. Thus, it can be stated that there is room for improvement for both frameworks; that is to say, the advantages of both frameworks should be integrated into one framework for usability purposes.

⁴ Blue: What?, For what?, Competition?, Differentiator?; Green: Topic, Conflict, Values, Heros, Stage; Red: Why? Standpoint, Mission; Yellow: Internal stories, User stories, magic facts, history, today's world

7.3. FINAL DESIGN BRIEF

After several rounds of feedback and iterations (Appendix 7), I decided on a final storytelling framework based on the criteria mentioned before (Table 3). The components are in accordance with what I found important in academic literature, practical insights during the expert interviews as well as the knowledge I gained through prototyping and continuous feedback.

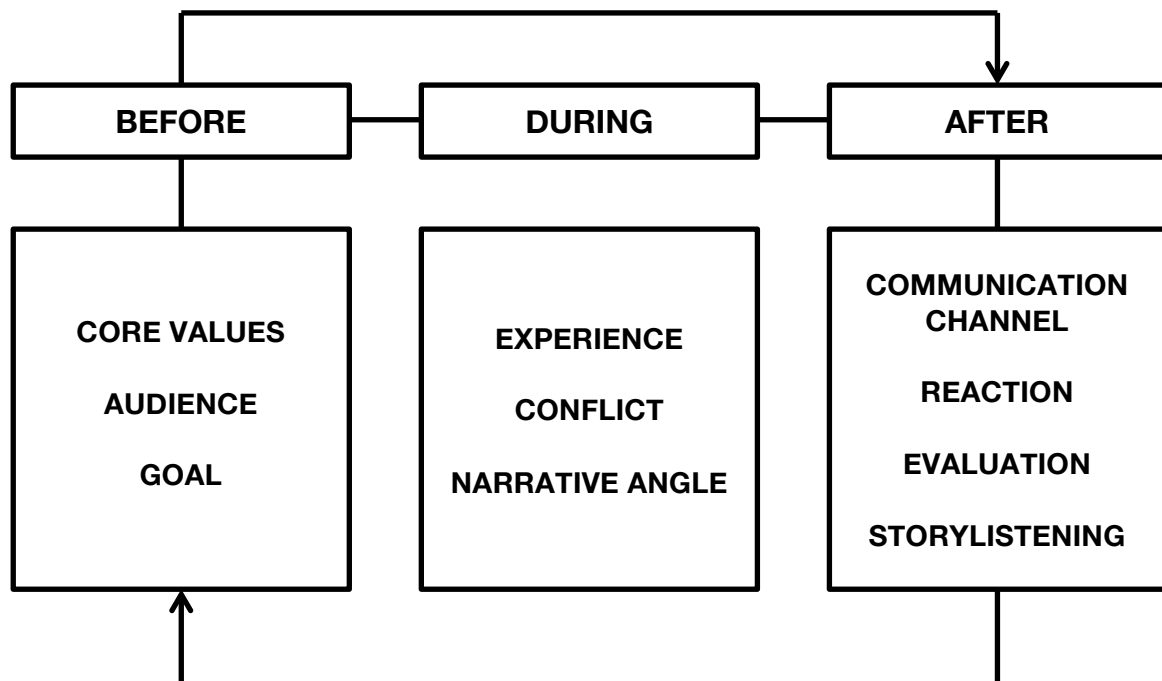


Figure 10: The new storytelling framework

7.3.1. BUILDING BLOCKS

The storytelling framework is composed of different building blocks, which are divided into *BEFORE*, *DURING* and *AFTER*. This corresponds to the fact that storytelling is not static but a dynamic process, as already presented in Chapter 6: Discussion.

7.3.1.1. BEFORE CREATING THE STORY

To be able to create meaningful and compelling stories, a few elements need to be certain before.

CORE VALUES

This is key for storytelling because these values capture the main drivers of a company (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Further, they are important for both internal and external communication (Cornelissen, 2008). Internally, it (re-) connects people through purpose and vision and it eventually becomes the people's (the employees') story. In terms of external communication, these core values emotionally connect the preferred target audience with the people inside the organization around the same experience and create a common understanding (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Questions such as 'who do we want to be' and 'how would we like to be seen' play a significant role in assessing the core values (Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

AUDIENCE

From an organizational standpoint, knowing the audience is essential (Cohen, 2014; Smárason, 2014) because they have gained ultimate (buying) power during the 21st century (Middleton, 2012). Organizations need to start with imagining the people that are most likely to use their product or service and map how these users arrive, engage and show interest for long-term interaction. Further, envisaging possible opponents and analyzing how to emotionally engage them is part of this exploration process as well (Cohen, 2014). A technique to gain knowledge is, for example, a customer journey map, which visualizes the different touch points of interaction. There exist a variety of other techniques, depending on what organizations what to find out (Arts Council England, 2013).

GOAL

In every strategic setting, it is important to set a goal to be able to evaluate the results afterwards and create room for improvement (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014; Stubben, 2014). The most common techniques are setting KPI's (key performance indicators) or OKR's (objectives and key results). In terms of storytelling, it is connected to how many times the story gets repeated (Smárason, 2014) or how much response it gets online (Hallam, 2013).

7.6.1.2. DURING THE STORY CREATION

After having defined the necessary elements as a pre-step towards the actual story creation, the following building blocks frame the actual story.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is part of the goal-setting process. It touches upon the experiences a company wants to create for the user or preferred target audience (Escalas, 2004). Some questions for inspiration are for example: How can you build a new way to make your audience even more engaged, what user needs do you satisfy, do you deliver something unique and how can you create a delightful experience or even maximize pleasure. (Arts Council England, 2013).

CONFLICT

As part of the experience of the (core) story, the conflict plays a vital role in the engagement process of the target audience (Smárason, 2014; Fog, 2014; Madsen-Mygdal, 2014). In other words, the target audience does not sympathize as much with success stories as with conflicts or challenges because it makes the organization seem more approachable (Abeni, 2014). This is due to the fact that the human approach in the current business landscape triggers a higher customer engagement (Kramer, 2014). It is a fact that nowadays the consumers want something made by human beings (Sagmeister, 2014), meaning that complicated marketing language coming from the organization will not trigger engagement in the long run (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005).

NARRATIVE ANGLE

The narrative angle is connected to the experience a company wants to create. This includes, amongst others, the tone of voice, point of view and the angle of the narrator. As mentioned

before, “the structure of narratives provides the framework for causal inferencing about the meaning of brands and the meaning of consumers’ experiences with brands” (Escalas, 2004). In figuring out the right narrative pattern, Denning (2006) provides an overview, depending on the experience an organization wants to set (Appendix 8). Connected to this, the use of realistic, non-fictional elements is important to create a credible story (Fog, 2014).

7.6.1.3. AFTER THE STORY HAS BEEN CREATED

After the most vital elements of the story have been determined internally as well as have become an established part of the organization (Fog 2014; Gosch, 2014), the focus on the external follows.

COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

Choosing the right communication channel is key for storytelling. As already indicated in Figure 6, there are multiple channels to choose from, depending on the goal and the experience a company has set beforehand. Regardless of the communication channel, the story needs to be told in a coherent manner (Smárason, 2014; Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

REACTION

Depending on the industry or story being told, the participation of the target audience might differ. As a direct effect of the Participation Age, organizations have to be able to react immediately (Madsen-Mygdal, 2014), especially for online communication efforts. If organizations are able to react and interact with their target audience in the right way, they might be able to build a tribe (Smárason, 2014).

EVALUATION

The evaluation of storytelling is closely connected to the goal determined in the first part of the process: *BEFORE*. Organizations should be able to answer ‘has the goal been met?’ and detect strengths and weaknesses accordingly. In doing so, they can refer back to the different building blocks of the actual story and evaluate if these triggered the desired outcome. Smárason (2014) argues that an indicator for successful storytelling is the repetition of the story by the target audience as it shows the emotional connectedness (Burnett and Hutton, 2007).

STORYLISTENING

This element is part of the evaluation process of organizational storytelling. It connects the BEFORE and AFTER as it is a means to find out if the story being told also had the desired effect (Fog et al., 2010; Liebl and Rughase, 2002). Further, it can be used to detect the user stories, which are important to be able to strategically interact with the target audience in terms of relationship building (Madsen-Mydgal, 2014).

7.3.2. HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK?

As touched upon before, visualization of scenarios for communication haven proven to be effective instead of relying on verbal communication (Tergan and Keller, 2005). Considering this aspect, I suggest the storytelling framework should be used offline or analogue to clarify thoughts and develop ideas. This makes the process more 'real' and allows less distraction by only focusing on the important as opposed to using digital tools or services. However, I am not focusing on presenting a specific guide for usage because there is no right or wrong in terms of storytelling (Denning, 2006). Rather, my framework should inspire organizations in their storytelling process but at the same time be adaptable to any situation. Priorities on certain building blocks might differ due to the different industries or areas companies operate in or the story that the organization wants to communicate. However, the framework should not feel like an extra tool that needs to be implemented into workflows or business routines. The main goal of this framework is that is easy to use and, therefore, straightforwardly be combined with how organizations already work.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates storytelling from an organizational point of view and its point of departure in relevant theories regarding organizational communication, brand-consumer relationships as well as storytelling.

Storytelling has always been an important medium of communication due to its emotional dimension. Nowadays, businesses have realized the potential of implementing storytelling into daily business routines because it has a direct influence on consumer engagement. This is a result of the paradigm shift, which has had a great impact on the interaction between businesses and their audience during the past decade. Old-fashioned marketing approaches of the 20th century (i.e. persuasive one-way message) do not apply anymore – today, audiences do not want to be brand followers; they want to be brand participants (Middleton, 2012). Storytelling is a means to foster this change in interaction.

During my research, I found that both scholars and experts in the field agree on the importance of storytelling in the business sphere. Even though they have different opinions on how to use storytelling in the most effective way, they agree on the fact that businesses today need to reflect upon what they stand for to be able to emotionally connect with their target audience.

The main challenge is that the majority still associates the meaning of storytelling to pure entertainment purposes; that is, a single, pleasant event passed down from organizations to consumers. This perspective indicates that, for most people, storytelling only seems to be relevant for the marketing and communications department. However, to foster consumer-brand relationships, a company needs to have a clear narrative that is not only conveyed through communication by marketers but through action by every single employee to both internal and external stakeholders.

That said, stories constructed by management only are most likely to be unsuccessful in the long run. A more strategic or holistic approach needs to be undertaken for storytelling to have the desired outcome: high engagement rates. Based on my findings, I conclude that storytelling needs to be seen as a process with a *beginning*, *during* and *after*. If companies want storytelling to support their business goals on a strategic level, they need to understand that all three parts of

the process are equally important and that one or two cannot be left out. It is the coherence between the beginning, during and after, which is key to compelling storytelling. I also found, that this process needs to be integrated into all areas of the organizations in order for companies and brands to create compelling and meaningful stories. It is crucial that stakeholders on all levels engage in the process and that employees as well as management understand and acknowledge the core story of the company or brand. This is because the core story entails both the strategic vision and the reason for being (*raison d'être*).

As existing literature did not provide concrete answers to the building blocks of a story, I merged theory on communication, consumer-brand relationship and storytelling in general with the empirical data gathered throughout this thesis as a basis for developing a storytelling framework. Even though a basic formula for telling compelling stories does not exist, the different building blocks of the framework correspond with current business dynamics and what experts deem important for storytelling to trigger engagement. Finally, this framework is seen as the practical application of what has been found and serves as a shared artifact for organizations.

8.1. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

I consider the findings of this thesis to have filled a void in the existing storytelling literature, especially in the strategic implementation of storytelling within businesses. However, there is still a need for detailed, empirical work in this area to really understand the complexity of storytelling and its impact on consumer-brand relationships. Also, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to test the framework, a longer testing and evaluation period in collaboration with companies needs to be undertaken to fully, empirically reinforce the arguments stated throughout this thesis. As mentioned throughout this thesis, some limitations of the research need to be accepted, for example the presented findings are a limited presentation of opinions from different backgrounds and only correspond to current business dynamics.

For a more holistic view on the storytelling framework, other interviews and insights are needed. Since the customer's point of view has not been included in this study, follow up research could be the next step to fully understand the receiver-listener relationship. Also, an in-depth investigation of stakeholder standpoints and their reactions towards certain storytelling practices

by companies or brands can be interesting in terms of testing the engagement rate of different stories (for example best- and worst-case scenarios).

As the focus in this research has mainly been on external communication, investigating all internal processes of storytelling is a natural next step, as stories told within the organizations tend to flow outward and also have an impact on reflecting the persona of the organization to clients and partners. For example, questions regarding the management and documentation of internal stories can be answered.

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CHAPTER 10: APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: EMAIL INTERVIEW EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1:

INTERVIEW WITH MAIKE GOSCH, 26.06.2014

Conducted in German (native language) to avoid language barriers

Wo fängt Storytelling an - beim Unternehmen oder bei den Kunden?

Das lässt sich schwer so pauschal beantworten. Denn eigentlich ist Storytelling ein Dialog und die Verbindung zwischen zwei Menschen oder mehreren Menschen. Das kann beim Unternehmen anfangen, dass sich überlegt, welche Geschichte es seinen Kunden erzählen will. Das kann aber auch bei den Kunden anfangen, die entweder dem Unternehmen Geschichten von ihren Erfahrungen mit dem Produkt oder der Dienstleistung erzählen wollen oder ihre Probleme und Bedürfnisse schildern, auf die das Unternehmen reagieren kann. Diese Geschichten kann wieder das Unternehmen sammeln und veröffentlichen. In der Regel fängt Storytelling aber beim Unternehmen an, da dort ein Interesse am Sammeln und Kuratieren der Geschichten besteht.

Muss eine Story regelmässig upgedated werden? (z.B. auf Grund von gesellschaftlichen Trends etc.?)

Das kommt darauf an. Es gibt Geschichten, die „dynamisch“ über einen längeren Zeitraum erzählt werden, während sie passieren (wie eine Fortsetzungsgeschichte) und zum Beispiel auf einem Blog oder bei Facebook wie in einem Newsticker die Geschichte erzählen. Es gibt aber auch Geschichten (Gründungsgeschichte, Geschichte der Entwicklung eines Produktes etc.), die in der Vergangenheit abgeschlossen sind und die auch als solche erzählt werden können.

Was ist der Unterschied zwischen Storytelling und Campaigning?

Campaigning ist eine sehr strategische Kommunikationsform. Hier gibt es ein ganz klares Kommunikationsziel (die Veränderung einer Situation, eines Verhaltens, einer Einstellung in der Zielgruppe oder beim Ziel-„Gegner“ der Kampagne)

Hat eine Story mehre Schichten? Wenn ja, wie viele?

Eine Geschichte hat viele Schichten. Das ist auch von Geschichte zu Geschichte unterschiedlich. Aber ganz grob kann man sagen: Es gibt die Handlungsebene, also das, was passiert, welche Personen agieren. Dann der Kontext oder Hintergrund, also: In welcher Zeit spielt die Geschichte, was sind die Umstände, wie ist der Ort, die Atmosphäre, die gesellschaftlichen Begebenheiten. Das kann auch (wenn es relevant ist) z.B. das Land sein, die Jahreszeit, in der die Geschichte spielt. Dann gibt es den „Ton“ der Geschichte: Also, ist es lustig und leicht oder traurig und schwer. Ironisch oder ernst, sachlich oder verspielt und phantasievoll. Krimi oder Liebesgeschichte, Road Movie, Abenteuer, Forscher Ehrgeiz etc. Und dann kommen die tieferen Schichten der Geschichte: Die Aussage und das Thema. Was bedeutet die Geschichte? Was für eine Weisheit steckt in ihr? Was kann man aus ihr lernen? Was daran ist universell und ein Teil aller menschlicher Erfahrung?

Wer übernimmt die Rolle des Storytelling im Unternehmen laut deiner Erfahrung?

In der Regel ist dafür die Kommunikationsabteilung zuständig, die sich ja darum kümmert, wie ein Unternehmen nach außen dargestellt wird. Storytelling betrifft aber alle Mitarbeiter und sollte daher nicht komplett an die Kommunikationsabteilung delegiert werden wie klassische PR- oder Marketingarbeit. Denn Storytelling bedeutet, die eigene Geschichte zu leben, zu verstehen und zu erzählen. Und das kann am besten jeder Mitarbeiter und insbesondere auch die Gründer und die Geschäftsführer selbst. Sie sind die Menschen, die die Geschichten erleben und die sie daher auch erzählen sollten, um mehr Authentizität und eine stärkere Wirkung zu erreichen.

Ist es eine Herausforderung Unternehmen von der Wichtigkeit oder Relevanz des Storytelling zu überzeugen?

Das kann sicher eine Herausforderung sein in Unternehmen, die sich der Kraft und Wichtigkeit von Storytelling noch nicht bewußt sind. Ich habe in meinem beruflichen Alltag das Problem in der Regel nicht, da mich nur Vertreter von Unternehmen oder Einzelpersonen kontaktieren und mich engagieren, die sich für dieses Thema interessieren und, die glauben, dass Storytelling ihnen helfen kann. Wobei man auch sagen muß, dass Storytelling nicht immer das richtige oder beste Tool für eine bestimmtes strategisches Anliegen eines Unternehmens ist. Da sollte man als Beraterin sehr klar und ehrlich sein und auch mal sagen: „Hier bringt ihnen Storytelling nichts. Machen Sie lieber eine bessere Marktforschung, stellen die Personalstruktur um, ändern die Strategie, etc.“

Fehlt es Unternehmen an Tools für das entwickeln einer Story? Wenn ja, wäre ein Storytelling Canvas oder Toolkit eine Lösung/Möglichkeit?

Sicher fehlt ihnen das teilweise. Es gibt natürlich UnternehmerInnen die geborene Storyteller sind und ganz instinktiv (oder gesteuert) ihre Geschichten wunderbar und effektiv erzählen. Und es gibt auch Kommunikationsmitarbeiter, die entweder ein ähnliches Talent haben oder eine solide Ausbildung im Bereich Kommunikation oder Journalismus. Da gilt es meistens nur mit einem dramaturgischen Blick von außen die Aussagen, Themen und Kanäle zu ordnen und zusätzlichen kreativen Input zu liefern. Aber sicher kann ein guter und umfassender Storytelling Canvas oder ein Toolkit den Unternehmensmitarbeitern helfen, auch ohne persönliche Beratung oder danach im laufenden Geschäft, Geschichten zu finden oder besser zu strukturieren.

Gibt es eine wahre Story oder ist sie immer ein wenig verschönert?

Das ist eine philosophische Frage :). Ich denke, auf einer spirituell-religiösen Ebene gibt es die Wahrheit schon (das ist meine persönliche Überzeugung). Auf der Ebene der Menschen ist jede Geschichte über diese Wahrheit oder die „Realität“ geformt und editiert. Es gibt keine Objektivität.

Welches ist die wichtigste Story in einem Unternehmen?

Auch das schwierig, pauschal zu beantworten. Und es hängt sehr vom Unternehmen, der Branche etc. ab. Fast immer wichtig ist aber die Gründungsgeschichte, also die Geschichte davon, wie das Unternehmen überhaupt entstanden ist, über die Persönlichkeit der Gründer, die erste Idee für das neue Produkt oder die neue Dienstleistung, besonders dabei auch die Schwierigkeiten und Umstände in der Zeit vor der Gründung und in den ersten Wochen und

Monaten. Denn hier zeigt sich oft, die „DNA“ des Unternehmens, ihr Charakter, was es ausmacht, welche Werte es leiten, welche Ideen es geformt haben.

EXAMPLE 2:
INTERVIEW WITH JASENKO HADZIC

First email: 15.07.2014

Hej Monique!
Thank you for the information you provided.

I can tell you that I storytelling is not my expertise, but I have been reading more and more on it. Furthermore, I have used a canvas once, but in the end (for me - and probably other more knowledgeable entrepreneurs), a canvas is too overrated.

I'm not trying to kill your idea or your thesis, but I'm just trying to be very honest, from an entrepreneur angle - and I assume that an honest opinion is what you are looking for.

Personally, I'm all about execution and product. If there isn't focus on the product, you can tell any story you want and it will still not work.

Its the same as writing a business plan - it is often unnecessary and its something of the past (in my eyes). You can easily tell a story with 25 slides and even get investment on it.

With that being said, yes, storytelling is great, but for me and other entrepreneurs who are starting, the focus is on the MVP - user feedback - iteration - pivot. Therefore, its more like a "nice to have" instead of a "need to have" in my world at least.

Scenario 1: Not sustainable: If your product is bad and you are great at storytelling - you might be able to attract users/customers, but after a while, they will have tested the product and they will leave.

Scenario 2: Sustainable: If your product is great, you can start focusing your efforts at storytelling - you will be able to attract users on the sole basis of the user experience and the great feedback (naturally, not as fast as scenario 1, but here it will be sustainable growth, which is key - customer retention is the utmost importance)

I am perfectly aware that storytelling is essential, especially when you are entering/operating in a market where products are similar and you compete on price, but in the end, startups need to focus on product, users, feedback, pivoting.

I'm kind of realizing that I'm talking about a lot of things here, but my ultimate point is that storytelling is a "nice to have" feature in the startup world. I see it is a great sidekick partner to the product, but the ultimate and most important thing is your product. Now you have my view on it and that is strictly from an early-stage entrepreneurs world.

Later: Storytelling becomes more important when competition is on the rise or when you are a mature corporation, trying to distinguish yourself in the market.

Lastly, just letting you know that I am involved with a lot of activities in the startup world and right now my mission is to try to map it out, by talking to many different stakeholders.

Therefore, I'm not sitting with startups on a day-to-day basis, trying to map out certain criteria and my feeling is that canvases are used by first-time entrepreneurs and not serial entrepreneurs, which I am often dealing with. So, that might explain why I am seeing things the way I do.

Second email: 18.07.2014

Quotation from you: *"And especially in the beginning (as a startup) when you are trying to get investment, the product pitch is as important as the creator's story and the paradigm story of your product. Does that make sense?"*

- **My answer (again my opinion):** Things are not that easy. First and foremost your story is told based upon the market segment, the product features and the overall vision. This can change very fast as the Value proposition, the product features, the team and the vision may not be what is correct. Your assumption is based upon the fact that entrepreneurs will get everything correct from the beginning, which is inconsistent with reality. The truth is that investors might say "I will only invest if you do this and this or if you get somebody more senior here and here...". Furthermore, they might want you to enter a different market or they might guide you and tell you that your product is completely wrong and needs to be tweaked.

All in all: Storytelling is important, but on a very basic level. Entrepreneurs are not expected to know everything and storytelling first becomes important at a later stage. Everything is dynamic and needs to be dynamic in the first stages in order to find the right market fit etc. Yes, canvases can be too narrow just like any other tool. Ask yourself, how many startups use a SWOT?.. Right now there is too much focus (especially in DK) on using various tools to get started, but how many of the big companies ever used these things? Its very corporate and it will only stall you.

Everything is execution and needs to be pushed much more fast than it is at the current stage in DK. Therefore, I don't use business plans nor some of the other tools as you can't know everything and YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING. Its very CBS/University/Institution-like to have to use various models, but many of them are not very execution focused and are time-stalling from a startup's point of view.

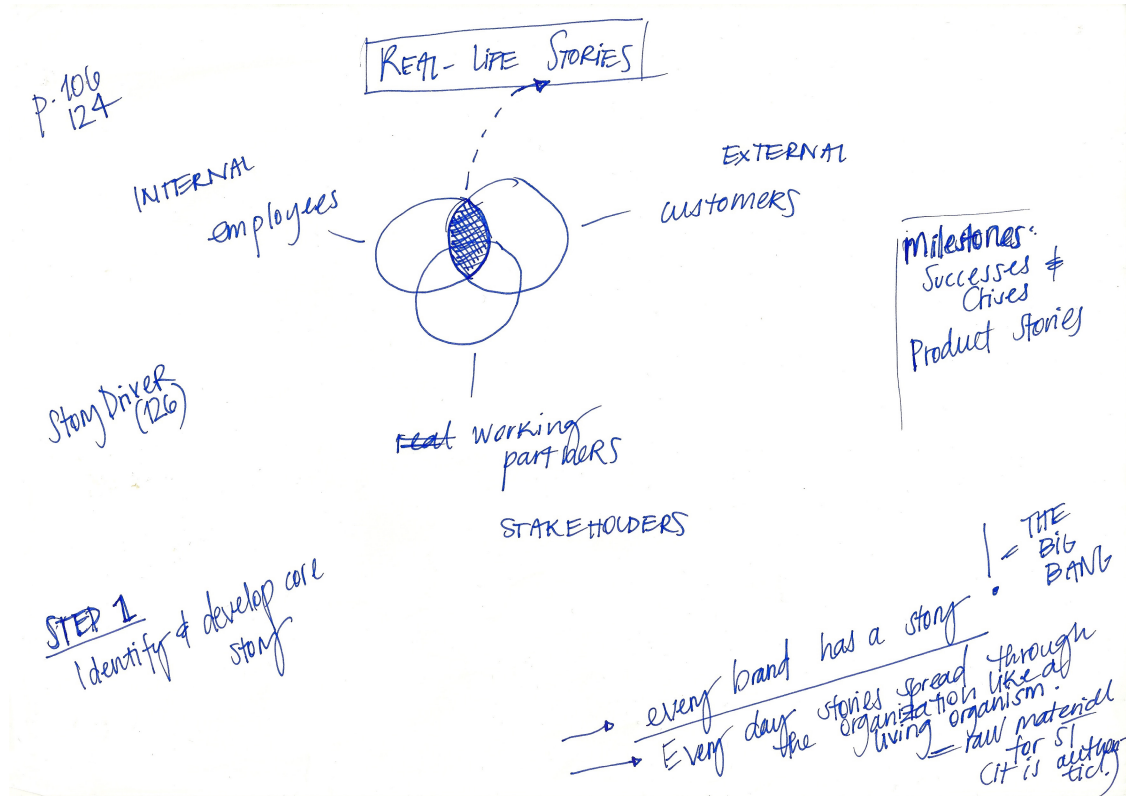
This is something I will personally take and plan to take up with the institutions, as there is a huge gap between what corporations are doing and what students are taught in school for example. Shouldn't we be educated and prepared for the job market? Isn't that the purpose of an education? Apparently not for many of the studies.

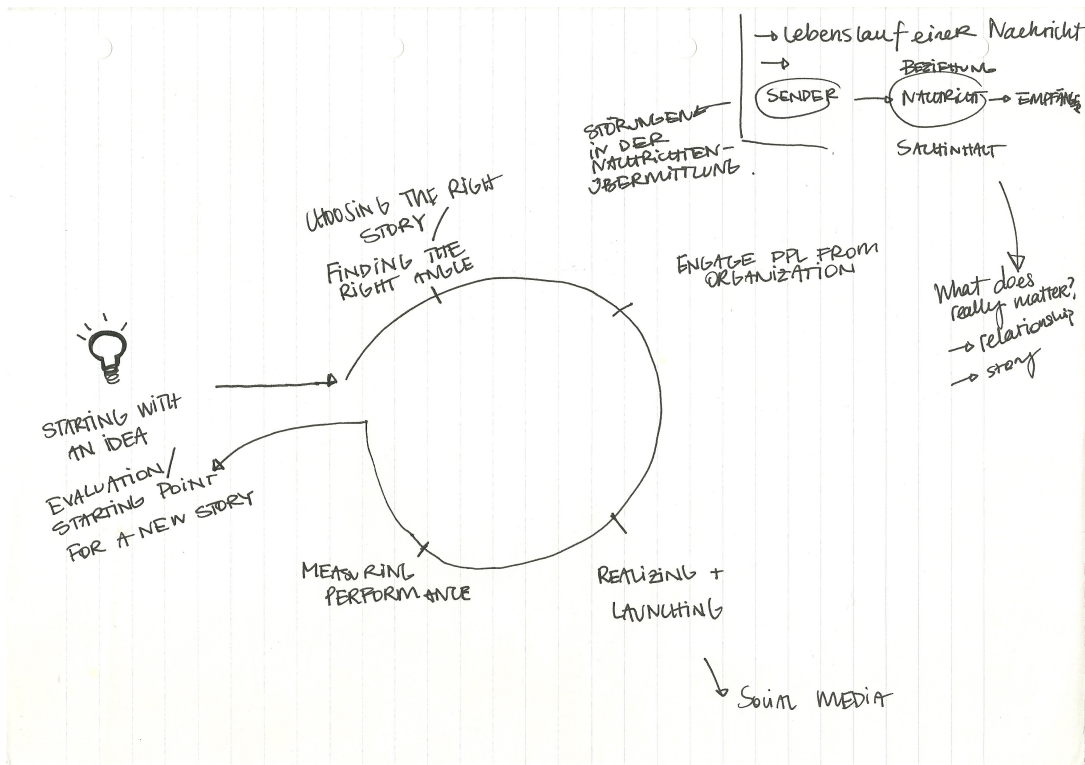
Again, I am very direct in my communication and I know that I am covering a lot of things, but I am just saying that models, tools, canvases are fine for first-time doers, but not used by more experienced people. Especially, not in startups.

And yes, a factor here is intuition. learning, knowledge, experience, connections, network etc., but this is not something that various tools take into account (again my experience).

Correction to fourth paragraph: Yes, canvases can be too narrow just like any other tool. Ask yourself, how many startups use a SWOT? Right now there is too much focus (especially in DK) on using various tools to get started, but how many of the **(now big) startups** every used these things? Its very corporate and it will only stall you.

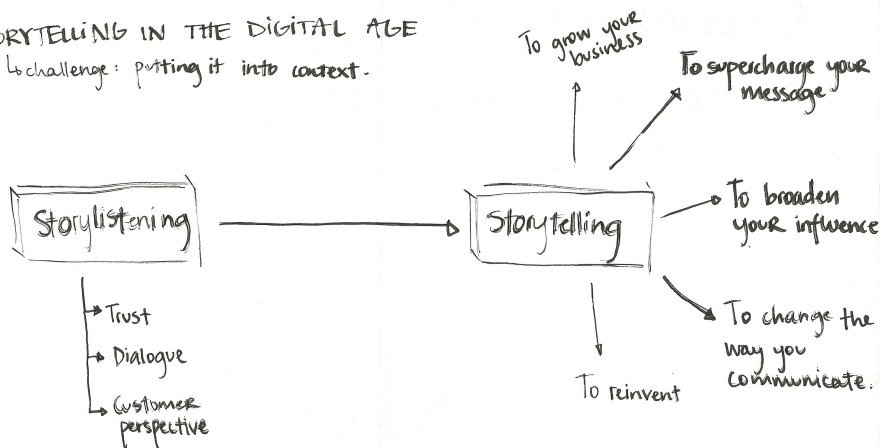
APPENDIX 2: FIELD NOTES AND VISUALIZATIONS





In today's globalized business world, companies no longer compete on only price for customers and talented employees, but on differentiation, relevance & value. 31/3

↳ STORYTELLING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
↳ challenge: putting it into context.



It is about having the right story, not just any story.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE EXAMPLE

INTERVIEW KLAUS FOG

HOW TO MANAGE ALL STORIES?

↑ FOR BRANDS,

1) WHAT STORY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?
AND HOW MANY STORIES DOES A COMPANY HAVE?

2) HOW DO YOU WORK WITH STORYTELLING
AT SIGMA
AND WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE
WITH IT IN TODAY'S BUSINESS
LANDSCAPE? (E.G. CHALLENGES.)
DO ORGANIZATIONS HAVE THE RIGHT TOOLS?)

3) WHAT ARE THE PROCESSES OF
STORYTELLING? (E.G. WHAT ARE
THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS
BEFORE - DURING - AFTER.)
WHERE DOES IT START (COMPANY OR CONSUMER?)

4) HOW IMPORTANT IS STORYLISTENING?
AND HOW TO MAKE PEOPLE LISTEN TO YOUR
STORY?

5) I AM WORKING ON THIS FRAMEWORK,
WHICH EMPHASIZES THE DIFFERENT
BUILDING BLOCKS - COULD YOU GIVE
YOUR FEEDBACK ON IT?

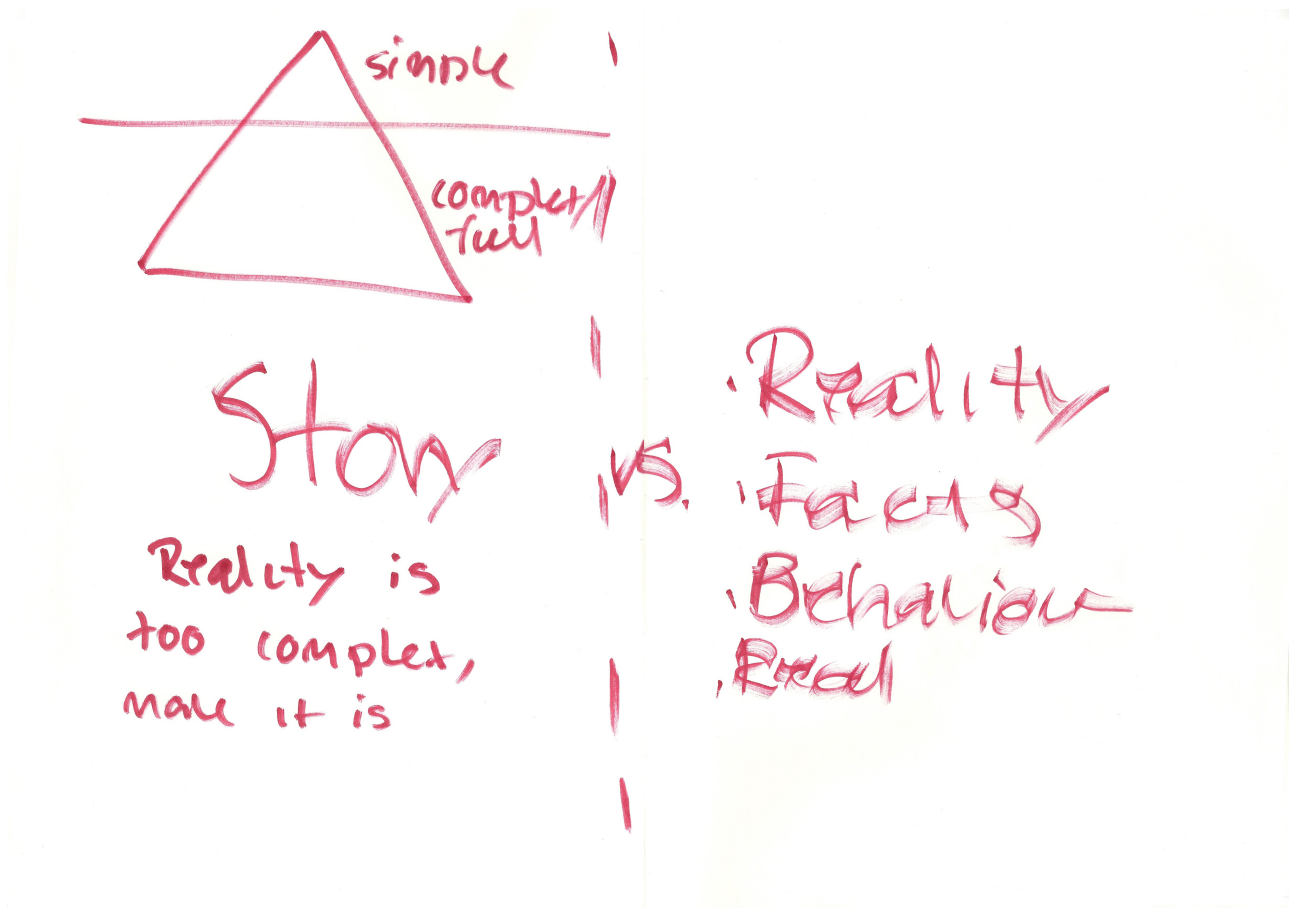
6) (RELATED QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE
MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF ST?)

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
BRANDING & STORYTELLING?
7) WHAT ARE IMPORTANT THINGS WITH REGARDS TO ST THAT

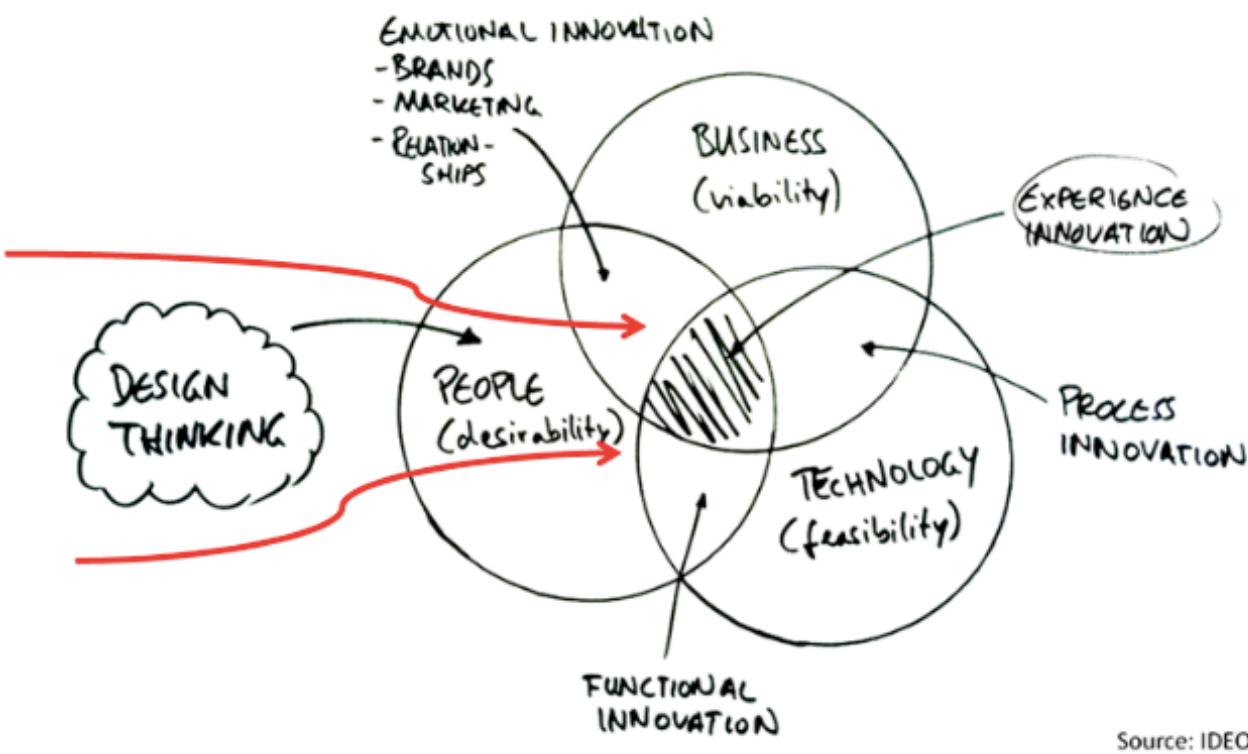
YOU WANT TO ADD?

APPENDIX 4: INSPIRATION FOR DIMENSIONS OF STORYTELLING

Dimensions of storytelling that were discovered during the interview with Madsen-Mygdal (2014)

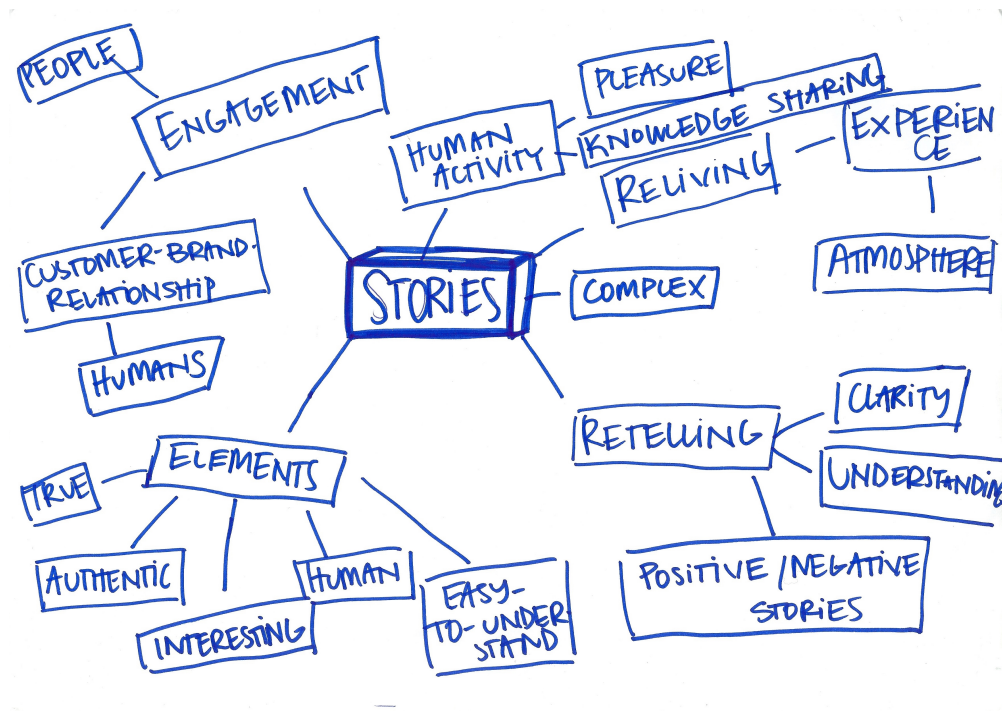


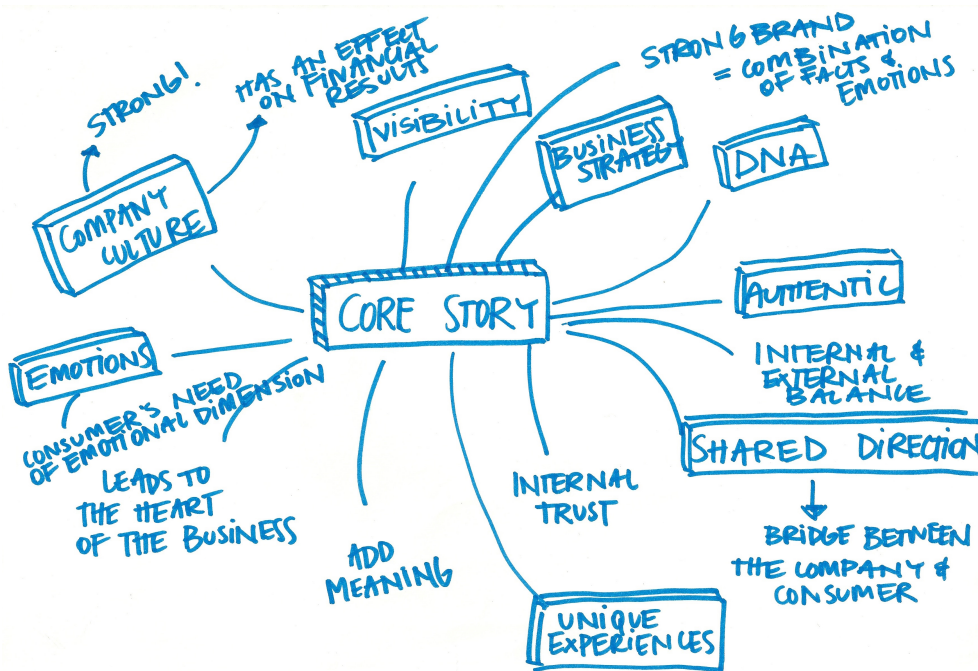
APPENDIX 5: ILLUSTRATION BY IDEO



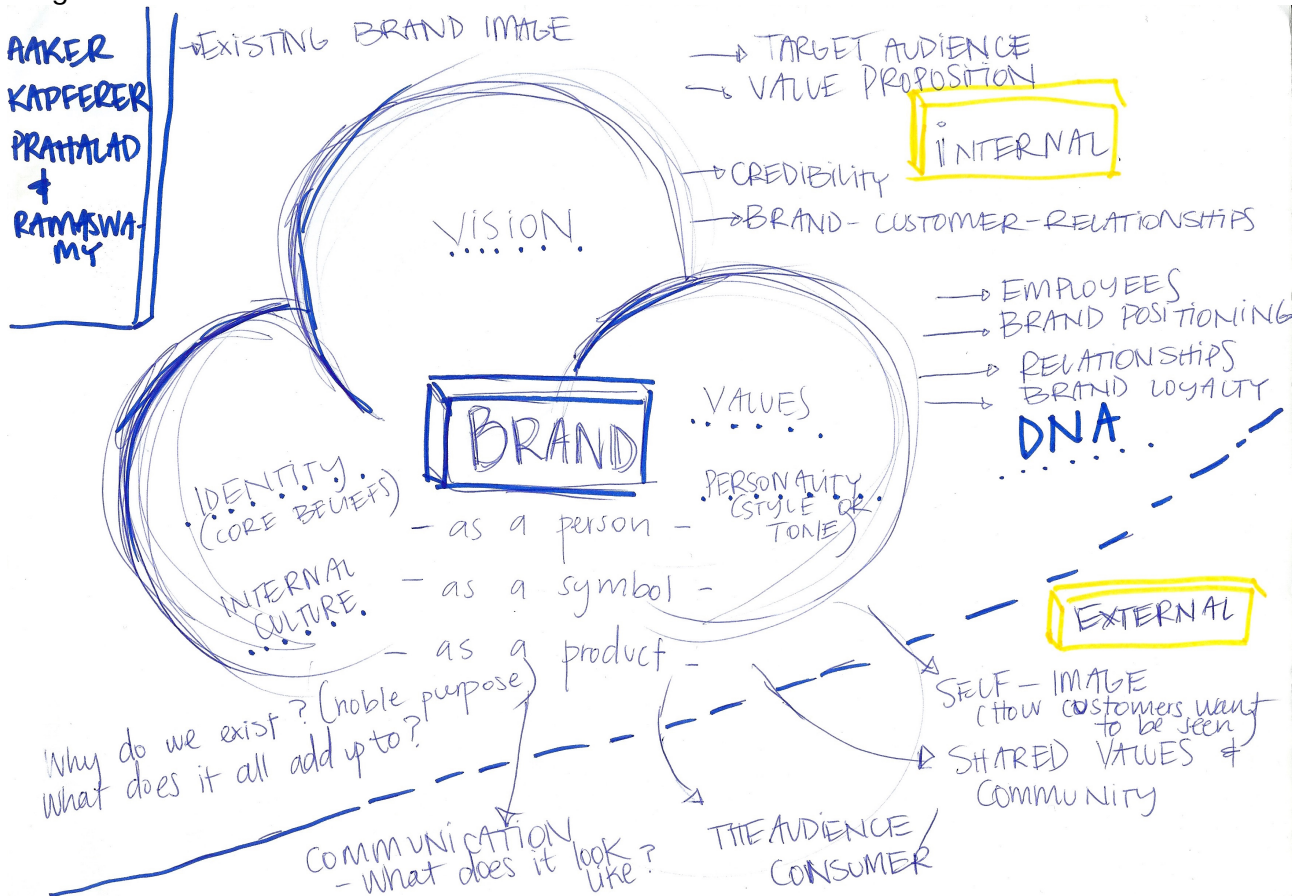
APPENDIX 6: EXAMPLES OF IDEATION PROCESS

Concept mapping



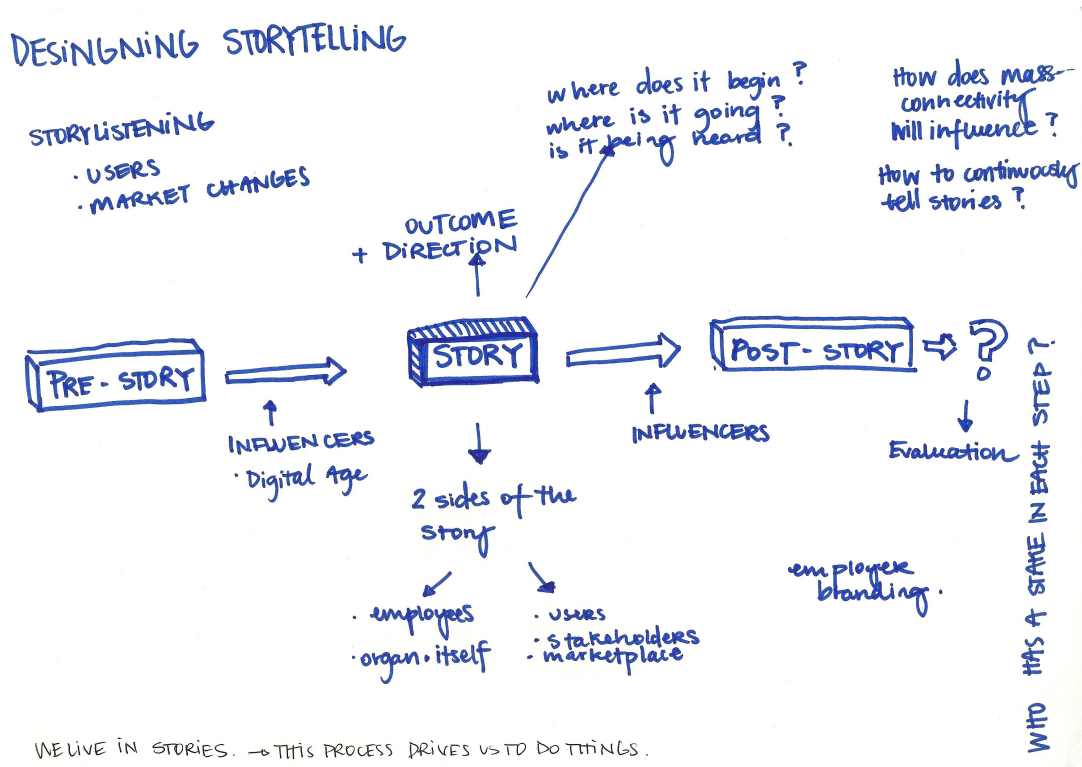


Insight combination

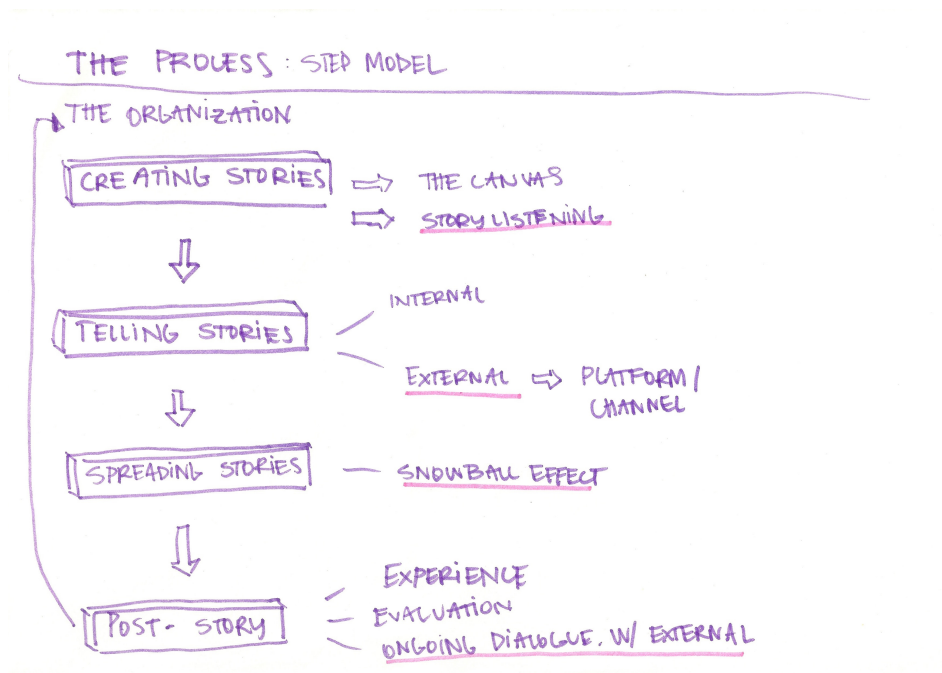


APPENDIX 7: ITERATIONS ON STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK

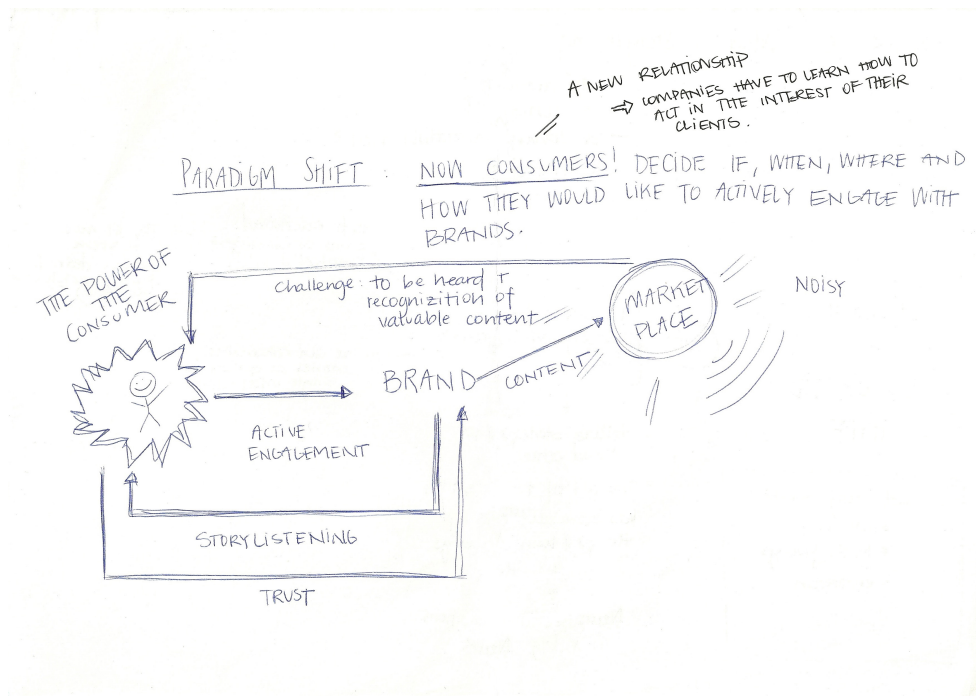
Draft 1



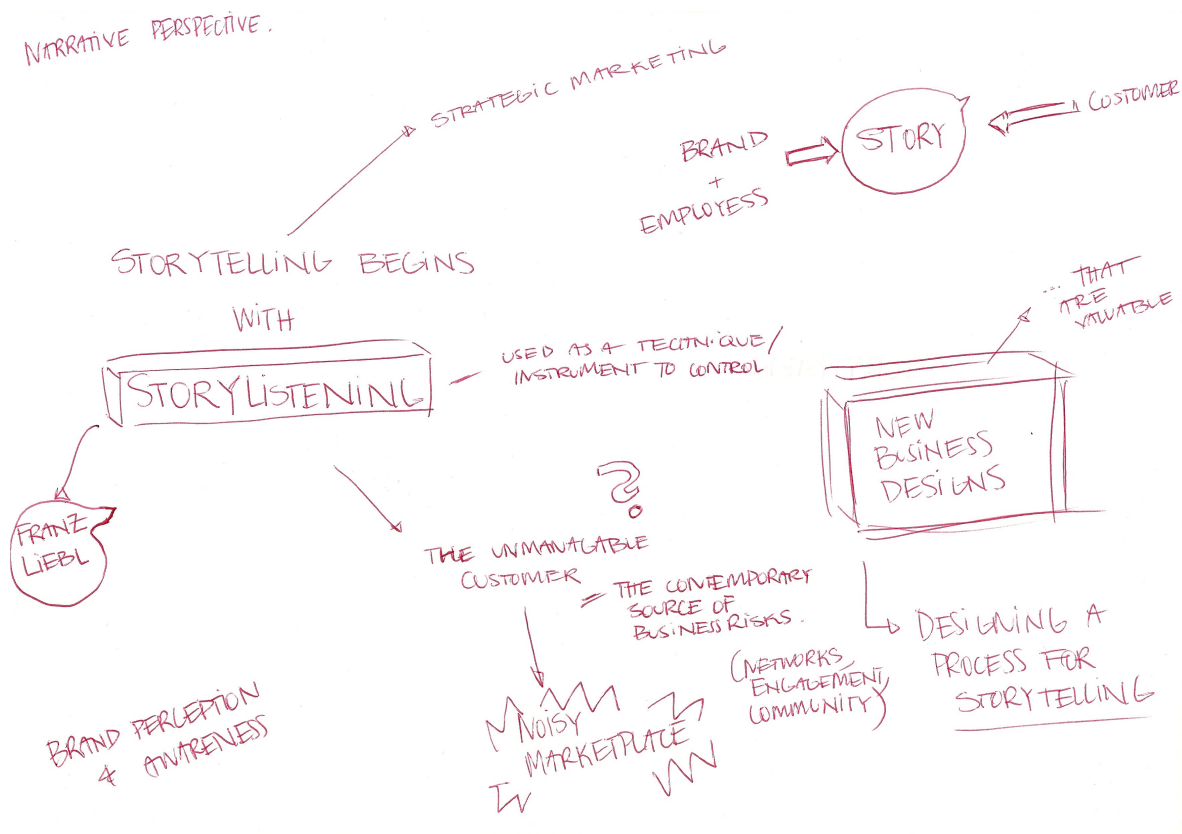
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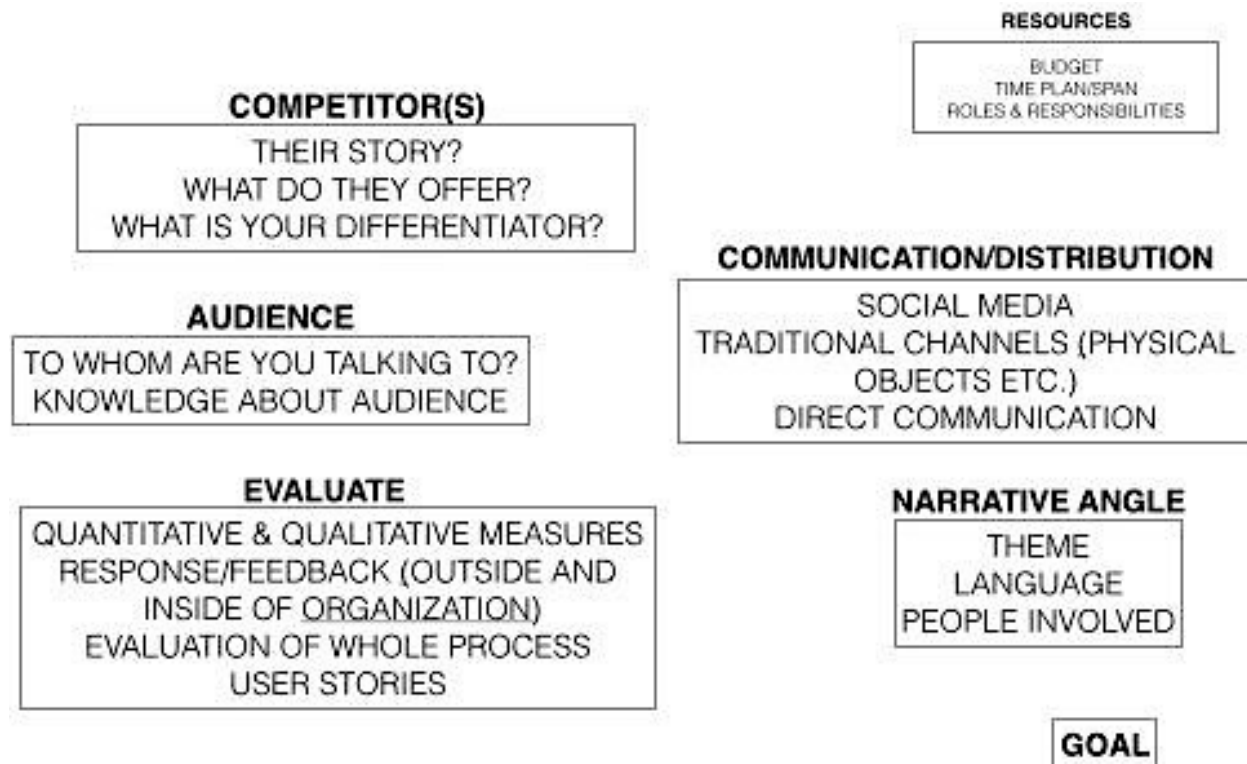


Draft 3



Draft 4





APPENDIX 8: Narrative Patterns

Denning, 2006

Exhibit 1 Eight different narrative patterns

<i>If your objective is:</i>	<i>You will need a story that:</i>	<i>In telling it, you will need to:</i>	<i>Your story will inspire such phrases as:</i>
Sparking action (springboard stories)	Describes how a successful change was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation	Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge	"Just imagine . . ." "What if . . . ?"
Communicating who you are	Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past	Provide meaningful details but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story	"I didn't know that about him!" "Now I see what she's driving at!"
Transmitting values	Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted	Use believable (though perhaps hypothetical) characters and situations, and never forget that the story must be consistent with your own actions	"That's so right!" "Why don't we do that all the time!"
Communicating who the firm is – branding	Is usually told by the product or service itself, or by customer word-of-mouth or by a credible third party	Be sure that the firm is actually delivering on the brand promise	"Wow!" "I'm going to tell my friends about this!"
Fostering collaboration	Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic	Ensure that a set agenda doesn't squelch this swapping of stories – and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction	"That reminds me of the time that I . . ." "Hey, I've got a story like that."
Taming the grapevine	Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unreasonable	Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited – and be sure that the rumor is indeed false!	"No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like that before!"
Sharing knowledge	Focuses on mistakes made and shows, in some detail, how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked	Solicit alternative – and possibly better – solutions	"There but for the grace of God . . ." "Gosh! We'd better watch out for that in future!"
Leading people into the future	Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turn out to be wrong	Be sure of your storytelling skills. (Otherwise, use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future.)	"When do we start?" "Let's do it!"