STORRYTELLING MARKETING
ONCE UPON A TIME….

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has brought a complete transformation of the marketing that is practiced in companies. 2020 really changed the face of marketing. Marketers less talk about traditional marketing, and more about experiential, societal, interactive, humanized, personalized, inclusive, content, omnichannel marketing. Traditional marketing uses the „one to many" approach where radio, TV, newspaper campaigns broadcast to a passive and unified audience. The plot lays in the hands of corporate narrators. The new marketing model uses „multi-way communication" approach where consumers are in control of what they see and how they respond to company's commercials. They are active, involved, interactive, empowered in the process of buying. The new marketing tries to be more humanized and „come closer" emotionally to the consumers. The most suitable way to make people believe in companies' promises is storytelling.

Storytelling as a part of content marketing, that aims through stories, fables, folklore, tales, short interesting events to touch the senses of consumers, to reach their soul, to involve them in the buying process and to encourage them to buy products and services. Everyone loves stories. Everyone has a story. Everyone believes in stories. Marketers use storytelling to give life to brands and motivate consumers emotionally to react to brands. People easely understand stories, memorize them, retail them, spread them.

However, this sales technique is not a new concept, but it is a new opportunity to commnucaite marketing initiatives. Many factors and circumstances have led companies to use this technique. People all over the world face uncertainty, poverty, pandemics, economic crisis, isolation, quarantines. In this cruel time, everyone needs warmth, love, joy, a little happiness, friendship, kind words, comfort. It is these feelings that companies „use" to get closer to consumers, and sell them their products and services. Storytelling is the process of making a connection with the customer first, and selling a product second. Storytelling is a powerful marketing strategy that creates an emotional link between producer and consumer.

KEYWORDS

Storytelling, Content marketing, traditional marketing, emotional connection, stories

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES

M31, M37

1. INTRODUCTION

For the importance of stories today, the best illustration gives тhe movie director Steven Spielberg: "Once upon a time it was a small gathering of people around a fire listening to the storyteller with his tales

of magic and fantasy. And now it's the whole world. In Japan and in Finland, in the heartland of America, in Italy and Spain, in Singapore and France . . . still they gather to hear the stories. But now they gather in multiplexes in Britain, Germany, Spain, Australia . . . or giant movie places in Mexico. That's what has thrilled me most about Jurassic Park phenomenon. It's not "domination" by American cinema. It's just the magic of storytelling, and it unites the world. And that is truly gratifying (Woodside A, Sood S, Miller K,2008).

People really love stories! People love great stories! (Bet-David, 2019). That is why people go to movies, read books, watch TV, visit friends and gather in the family. They do this because they enjoy in listening, talking about, and sharing stories. Stories are us! Everyone has heard the stories from his/her parents or grandparents. And the time of storytelling is a magical, presenting a world without pain, sorrow, sadness and full with fun, entertainment, love, joy, happiness and excitement. Stories are magic, they can create other worlds, emotions, ideas and make the everyday seem incredible. Stories are in our blood! They talk about our tradition, culture, habits, language, and learn us about the difference between good and bad, sadness and happiness, darkness and light. They can teach us empathy and take us on terrific journeys. According to David there are several types of stories, such as: stories that inspire, stories that persuade, stories that launch revolutions and movements, those who tap into the people's potential and those who manipulate.

But, when people start to tell stories? People are telling stories from the same beginning, but things were changed in:

- 1450 – when the printing press was invented and stories were written and distributed more quickly,
- 1890 – when camera was born and motion picture was there,
- 1925 – when TV came and later radio appeared and especially
- Today – when there are social media, blogs, Internet where people everyday shares stories.

Story is an **emotional investment**. Stories are about emotions of people that are an integral and indispensable part of the daily organization of life. People, on a daily basis, have different feelings, like sadness, joy, commitment, fear, thrill, excitement, and so on. There is no fix formula for creating an ideal story. But stories play a great part in people's life. Gottschall (2012) rightly points out that humans have the need to tell stories, to explain themselves and make sense in the world around them. Stories are basic in all human cultures and because of their structure, content, share and understanding people build common experiences. Telling a story makes information way more **memorable.** Psychologist Jerome Bruner found that "we are 22 times more likely to remember a fact when it has been wrapped in a story". (Attest blog, 2019) This feature of stories is used by companies to sell their products and services to people. Today brands have modified the way they interact and communicate with their customers. Companies find out that a good story creates a positive emotion that inspires people to take an action, i.e. to be interested and to buy their goods and services.

In simple words, storytelling marketing means using a narrative to communicate a message. The aim is to make the viewer/ listener feel something – enough that it'll inspire them to take action. Storytelling in marketing helps consumers to understand why they should care about something, and it works to humanize the brands. Storytelling in marketing is not limited to film, stories can be told in pictures, verbally or in written form. And they can be told across all channels – from social media to billboards.

Dan Lok (2019) talks about the importance of storytelling in marketing. He believes that the future of marketing lays in storytelling. He shares three secrets to brilliant storytelling that companies need to have in mind in order to attract more audience:

- **Setting the stage, time and location**: the best way to draw people in the company's story is not to tell them what to do, what to buy, whom to listen to, but to transfer them into the fairytale that starts as every story with "once upon a time, once upon a time…". Companies need to touch the imagination of people and visualize the better place, timing and scene they want to be. Companies need to set the stage, the mental image that people can visualize and forget the reality for few minutes.
- **Specific story**: Companies need to be specific about their stories. They can use the dialogues with the audience and put them in the middle of the stage, or the action.

- **Moral of the story:** Why companies are telling the stories? What is the moral of the story? What is at least one take away that audience want to have out of stories? What people need to do to feel the magic of the transformation? Companies need to teach them how to become better by using their goods and services. Companies need to persuade consumers that only their products will help them to live in a magic world.

Storytelling is the key to win the hearts of the customers and clients and is the future of the marketing. Storytelling is the art and science of using a fictions or non-fictions narrative, characters and plot to convey a message indirectly to consumers to buy a product. Storytelling is an important pillar in the content marketing because it makes the content more engaging and compelling as opposed to traditional marketing communication that is based strictly on facts and figures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stories are the oldest form of passing knowledge from one to the other generation. They learnt us a lessons about our identity, traditions, culture, folklore, and also the differences between good and bad, positive and negative, right and wrong, about heroes and villains.

The Cambridge dictionary defines stories as: "a description, either true or imagined, of a connected series of events". Google gives a similar definition that story is "an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment". The Oxford dictionary says that "story is a description of events and people that the writer or speaker has invented in order to entertain people". The more precise definition is given by McKee (2018), in his book "Storynomics", that" a story is a dynamic escalation of conflict-driven events that cause meaningful change in a character's life". In this definition two things are important, **change and conflict**. Without them there is no story. Meaningful change is what happens when the core value at stake changes from negative to positive, from failure to success. Conflict is about intentions and obstacles that a character needs to overcome in order to obtain their object of desire. The bigger the obstacle, the more heroic the action to overcome.

There are also lot of **definitions for storytelling**. Storytelling is generally defined as the art of telling stories, although it can be said that it is a technique that manages to convey much more than just story. It is also about creating and taking advantage of a fantastic world to connect emotionally with the receiver through the story (David, 2019). Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination. (National Storytelling Network). Storytelling is the act of sharing a tale or a series of events.

Story marketing is a marketing technique in which writers use journalist-style storytelling techniques on behalf of a company to attract customers through relative and helpful information. Storytelling marketing allows you to present your brand narrative in story form — allowing you to resonate with customers. (Carter, 2020). Storytelling marketing is using narrative techniques to engage with an audience and shape a brand's identity beyond traditional marketing approaches. Storytelling gives businesses a valuable opportunity to connect with customers and promote their values and beliefs without using overtly sales-driven techniques. Storytelling is an essential element in an ambitious marketer's tool belt in an age where consumers demand authenticity.

Storytelling contains the ability to capture the attention of the viewer and to make him/her feel an emotion towards the brand this makes it a tool that can also be applied in marketing and advertising. Consumers not only demand a product or service, but they also want to communicate and feel identified through the content and messages of the brand. That is why the implementation of storytelling is necessary, due to the emotional nature that the stories present and that can serve to connect with the client (Muller, 2016).

Neil (2019) talks about three steps of a good marketing storytelling:

- **Companies need to define their core message**: the story needs to has a point. People will not be "hooked" if they listen to a story that a company needs more money, more profit, more sales, more numbers

and facts, more conversions or requires greater number of followers. If the story has no point, people will not see a point of paying attention to the company or its products and services.

- **Companies need to decide what kind of story they will tell:** one version of storytelling is **inciting action**, i.e.to make people to want to do something, to take action, to be motivated and be involved in the process of buying. Another way of storytelling is to tell people about the company. Company has its own unique story, its ups and downs and sharing them with people can be motivational and inspirational for people to visit or follow the company on the web. **Personalized story** can be an amazing tool because when people know more about the company they are inclined to relate more and more likely they will connect with the company. **Conveying value** is another way of telling a story that gets people's attention. If people believe in the same values as company does, they are more likely to relate with the company and follow it as well. And the last way for company storytelling is to **educate people and pass on the knowledge**. People want to be engaged, to learn new things, to explore and to get new knowledge and be able to execute on it in the future.
- **Companies need to establish a call for action**: when people hear the story, they can be "hooked" to it, they are all about the company, they are all about the brand, they are all about the business, but they don't know what to do next. Companies need to tell them what to do or what they expect them to do. Companies can ask people to join their e-mail list, to follow them on the social platforms, to visit their website. And it doesn't have to be a major commitment or a "pressure" to people to buy the products right away. Sometimes doing something little, without huge effort is more appreciated by the people. By building the relationship, people in time will convert to customers.

Bhargava (2020) mentions **six things** that makes a story good for marketing:

- **Featuring a relatable protagonist**: the central character must be someone, fictions or not, that people can relate with. People have to empathize with the character. The story is simply as good as the relatability of the protagonist.
- **The story needs to be real and authentic**: the worst advice in marketing that one can give is "Fake it till you make it!". Being fake or unauthentic is absolutely not an option. Today's consumer isn't fooled by brand's that are inauthentic or unoriginal. Company has to have a fresh idea and a unique perspective. Companies need to stay true with their brand values and principles. Also, it not recommendable to use jargon, clichés and complex words in the story. It has to be short and simple to get people's attention.
- **Usage of emotions to connect with the audience**: this could be anything-fear, anger, joy, thrill, surprise or any other emotion that motivates, moves or makes people feel something to connect with company's brand. Emotions make the story real and humane.
- **Stick to the point and avoid digressing**: the story shouldn't be huge and long fairytale where consumers have to wait a lot to get the point. Storytelling in marketing works only when the story is succinct and absolutely to the point, without digressing even a bit. The audience is not supposed to lose the interest. Craft the story that simply grabs the peoples' attention, make them feel something and leave them thinking about it. In the end, company wants the people to imagine themselves in the shoes of the protagonist and think about how using goods and services could actually turn their lives around and not be left with a narrative that leaves them confused, bored or unmoved.
- **Throw some facts and figures to support the story**: when a company uses a storytelling it doesn't mean that it can completely ignore the hard facts. Data can support the story and add to its credibility.
- **Worthy cliffhanger:** After storytelling the company needs to leave people wondering and wanting more. This has to intrigue people and leave them with something to think about and to ensure they come back to find out more.

According to Patel (2019), any story has to possess **three elements**: **character(s), a conflict and resolution**. Having characters in the story allows people to see themselves in the story and be part of it. Without characters there will be a disconnect between the company and the persons who are listening to the story. Characters need to be there, in the story and be relatable. Also, without a conflict there will not be that hook that gets people in their waiting to figure out what is happening next. If everything is in a

harmony, perfect, rosy, then the story becomes boring. And finally the story needs to has a resolution. Every conflict needs the resolution to go with it.

In this line, Bhargava (2020) states that the main elements of stories are the **protagonist, a conflict** (problem that a protagonist is faced with or "pain points") and **solution** they discover (closely tied to the goods and services that company offers).

According to Truelson (2018), the marketing storytelling needs to have four elements, such as:

- **Message:** Storytelling as a branding tool is not about telling stories just for the sake of it. In marketing, stories are told in order to convey messages that reflect positively on the brand. That is why the essential for the company is to develop a clearly defined message. Without it, there is no reason to tell stories.
- **Conflict:** Conflict is the driving force of a good story. No conflict, no story. But why is this the case? The answer lies in human nature. As humans we instinctively look for balance and harmony in our lives. So, as soon as harmony is disrupted we do whatever we can to restore it. When faced with a problem – a conflict – we instinctively seek to find a solution. Conflict forces us to act. As storytellers, we get our message across through conflict and its resolution.
- **Character:** Another basic element is the character(s). We have seen how conflict marks the turning point in the story, but in order for this conflict to play out, you need a cast of interacting and compelling characters. In order to get personally involved with a story, we must be able to identify with the characters. Here it is important to keep your target audience in mind. The audience must be able to identify with both the hero and the problem. Based on our need to have balance in our lives we will usually emphasize with a person faced with a conflict.
- **Plot:** Once your message, conflict and cast of characters are all in place, it is time to think about how your story should progress. The flow of the story and its events are vital to the audience's experience. Given the fact that we can only tell one thing at a time, and that a story exists only as a progression of events within a given time span, the sequence of events needs careful consideration. It must have a precise structure to propel it forward and maintain audience interest.

Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette (2010) argue that there are basic elements, such as the message, the conflict, the characters and the plot; that should not be lacking in the use of storytelling in any discipline. These elements can be varied or applied differently depending on the recipient, the context or situation in the story and its purpose. The message works as a central theme throughout the story. In the message there must be conflict, an element that is very important due to its relationship with human nature. To captivate the public, the story must not be completely chaotic nor be in complete harmony, it had to be a balance. The characters are the ones who give the story the emotion that is needed to captivate the audience. It refers to the hero, who pursues a goal and has the support of one or more characters. It also has an adversary, the traditional villain, who tries something contrary to the hero, thus establishing the conflict. The argument is the events that occur and how they progress in it are very important for the viewer's experience, that is why there must be a precise structure to boost the story and maintain the interest of the public. The fight of good against evil. Or the idea of overcoming adversity are arguments that always hook the story consumers.

Sedej (2021), in her presentation talked about the following **seven components** of a great storytelling:

1) **Detective approach to storytelling**, making a complete research on what the story will be about,
2) **Find and answer the key questions**: why should customer care about your story?
3) **Tell stories in connection to values**-positive feelings about the brand
4) **Create a conflict** – problem, enemies, no harmony and predictable events that are boring,
5) **Create a captivate characters**: powerful characters, one or more, real or imaginative,
6) **Use humor**: fun, entertainment, engaging, that makes sense and it is not offensive,
7) **Stimulate curiosity**: interesting facts, discovering unknown, making people wonder

For Godin (2006) there are some **guidelines** that every story should follow to capture the imagination and conquer a large part of the audience. The story to tell must **be true,** it does not mean that it is real, but that it is consistent and authentic. It must generate confidence, since the story will not succeed if the credibility to tell it is not worked before. **Being subtle**, you must leave room for the recipient to draw their own conclusions, so it will be more effective, a good story engages the audience from the beginning. Do not appeal to logic, but to the senses, you can say more in a second than with a long explanation. **Do not direct to anyone,** a story cannot be diluted to satisfy everyone in general, because then it will not attract anyone's attention.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this paper only secondary sources are used: data and information from relevant existing literature on content marketing and storytelling, like journals, statistical data, reviews, e-books, published presentations, blogs, FB statuses and YouTube vloggers. A combination of YouTube videos on the art of storytelling from different experts, marketers, practitioners are used. Mainly online sources were used. Even though content marketing (storytelling) is not a new term, lately it is becoming a hot topic for marketers, probably because it is powerful and easily can relate to consumers. Secondary sources provide a lot of data from qualitative and quantitative research, historical reviews and method of comparisons.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For the purpose of this paper, analysis of a case study is used. Many companies are using storytelling. The biggest mistake that companies are making nowadays related to the storytelling is that they tell stories that hardly connect to their products and services. When companies use storytelling it must relate to their goods and services and how they help people to become better, to live better, to have more qualitative life or overcome their problems.

Even though there are plenty of examples of good and bad storytelling, this paper elaborates the principles of storytelling based on one example, given in the following video:

Video 1: The Art of Business Storytelling (08:00 – 09:45 minutes)



Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77FUr6ZsWjY

In the video above, an example of storytelling is given. Namely, a blind man is sitting on the ground, with his money box and cardboard with the inscription: “I am blind, please help!” People pass by, do not pay attention to him and rare passers-by left him little money in his can. Until a lady appears who will change the inscription on the cardboard and his life literally! After that change of the cardboard, many passers-by left more money in his can. At the end of the day, the lady comes and is satisfied with the money passengers left to the blind homeless man. He recognizes her by walking and asks her what she wrote on the cardboard that made him so happy and “rich” that day. She read him "It's a beautiful day and I cannot see it”!

This example shows that the **rules and principles of storytelling** work. Namely,

1) **Companies should not use a lot of facts and figures** and point out WHAT they are doing. They should not say that THEY are the best, THEY have needs, THEY have products and services, THEY have profits, THEY require this and that, and so on.

2) **Stories should touch and connect with consumers emotionally**. Or as McKee says: “At their most basic, stories are about conflict and resolution – the basic tenets of life: man suffers difficulty and gets through it: we can all relate to this. We are attracted to the human strength to overcome”.

3) **Stories should contain conflict or build a contrast** between good and bad, poor and rich, heroes and villains. At the heart of every story is to have a contrast, a problem, a conflict, a difference between where the consumer is and where he would be by using a particular product or service.

4) **Stories should be credible, true and related to the products and services offered by companies**. They must be authentic and based on real events. Facts can also be used, but only to support the truth and objectivity of the story.

5) **Companies should use storytelling to call for action**. Calling for action means motivating people to buy their product or service. They need to convert people into their regular customers.

6) **The best stories should be retold and shared** with friends, acquaintances, colleagues, family members. Word-of-mouth marketing is the essence of a storytelling who helps companies to sell products and services.

Hence, **the important steps of each story are:**

1) **A disruption of the status quo,** ie issue or problem that needs to be solved,

2) **Conflict or struggle** between two opposing forces: good with bad, hero with willian, right or wrong, darkness and light, and

3) **Resolution**, ie return to a new normal, which is better than the previous state.

Companies need to offer resolutions and help their characters to solve problems with their products and services. In this sense Godin is saying that “Either you are going to tell stories that spread or you will become irrelevant”.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper can be concluded with the American native proverb that “Those who tell the stories rule the world”. With today’s digital technology, people are exposed to around 30.000 commercial messages per day which is huge having in mind that this number was 500 in 1970-es. There is a major shift from traditional to a new marketing model. Traditional old marketing model is based on “one to many approach” when radio, TV campaigns broadcast to a passive and unified audience. The plot lay in the hands of corporate narrators. The new marketing model is about multi-way communication. Here consumers are in control of what they view and how they respond to commercial messaging. They are active, empowered agents in the media production process. They can choose what to read, watch, share or ignore corporate messages.

Storytelling is not a new concept, but it is a new opportunity to communicate marketing initiatives. People are storytellers by nature. Storytelling is an important marketing tool for brands in order to get in touch with the main audience.

Companies are using storytelling because it is an efficient way to come closer to the audience. The main reasons are that:

- People remember stories! Stories are memorable!
- People relate to stories because stories are about beautiful experiences, not just about empty words!
- Storytelling is about coming brands back to life!
- It is a great way for brands to say…remember me, connect with me, think about me, buy me, retail about me!
- Stories inspire actions!

Storytelling is the future of the marketing because it connects emotionally with consumers. It uses the different emotions that people have, such as anger, joy, thrill, sadness, sorrow and implies goods and services that can overcome the problem and offer a solution for consumers. And it would be really good to finish this paper with the words of Steve Jobs: "The most powerful person in the world is the story teller. The storyteller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation that is to come."

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