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Article

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Storytelling alchemy in marketing: unveiling future research directions with ADO TCM framework

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ABSTRACT

In the landscape of strategic branding, storytelling has persisted as a dominant approach since its emergence in the 1940s. Remarkably, even in the year 2024, brands continue to leverage this narrative strategy in their positioning and this elucidates the potential of this strategy. However, despite its evident efficacy, there is a notable scarcity of review papers in this domain, and hence this paper aims to study existing knowledge of storytelling in terms of its contribution to marketing. The core objective of this paper is to review and propose a future agenda for storytelling from a marketing perspective. Through a framework-based systematic review, this paper organizes and retrospectively analyses the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes (ADO) of storytelling within the realms of marketing. Furthermore, the paper also presents a concise summary of the theories, contexts, and methods (TCM) employed to understand storytelling and concludes with a constructive discussion on the existing knowledge gaps and how they could be addressed through pertinent ideas for future marketing research on storytelling.

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Communications

Introduction

Stories have existed ever since mankind learned to communicate. Humans subconsciously use storytelling to process the happenings around them. It is said that human nature is more suitable for understanding stories rather than facts (Zheng & Zhang, 2023). Stories are the most common way people use to communicate with each other. Parents tell stories to their children, teachers inspire students with stories, musicians hook people by singing stories, Delgado-Ballester (2020), and just like that brands use stories to communicate with their consumers. It is not just products and services that differentiate brands, each brand has its own identity and values that sets them apart from other brands. Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023) defines storytelling as a 'strategic branding concept and an operational communication tool, that is crucial in increasing product value, conveying brand values, communicating the firms' image, and developing an emotional connection with consumers'. Escalas (2003) further elaborates that storytelling's narrative structure consists of two key elements namely chronology (The arrangement of story events in a temporal sequence—beginning, middle, and end) and causality (Structuring the story's elements into causal inferences, enabling the receiver to establish causal relationships between these elements).

Building relationships with potential consumers has always been one of the purposes of branding. When brands become storytellers, they also become humanized and gain a personality, one that they can use to express themselves (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022). Consumers then identify similarities between their values and the brand values and use the brand's products as ways to define themselves. This elevates the brand from being a mere option to a favoured brand in the consumer's mind (Zheng & Zhang, 2023).

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Storytelling is a fundamental marketing tool, rather than popular (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022). The fact that brands continue to use storytelling, especially in their advertisements to date, explains the influence storytelling has in improving consumer-brand relationships. Brands coming from different industries and tiers, from small-scale businesses to luxury brands, employ storytelling in their advertisements. In fact, storytelling is said to be the heart of luxury brand marketing. This makes storytelling naturally superior in branding and marketing (Zheng & Zhang, 2023). Apart from the ability of storytelling to build strong emotional connections with potential consumers, there are several other perks attached to this approach. For starters, stories are considered to be an efficient way to initiate and enhance interaction between brands and consumers (Gensler et al., 2013). Not only that, a storyline, if executed well, can influence viewer's real-life beliefs and judgements (Zheng & Zhang, 2023), which means storytelling lowers the defence barriers in the consumer's mind, making it easy for brands to persuade them. It is also stated that stories are easier to memorize and recall and add to the positive experience with the brand (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022).

A storytelling advertisement differs significantly from an informative or argumentative advertisement, as it emphasizes the narrative structure rather than conveying product features (Coker et al., 2021). The art of storytelling might appear simple but it is way more intricate than it seems, encompassing various types. For instance, Brand storytelling delves into the brand's values and identity, whereas Consumer storytelling revolves around the consumer's experience with the brand (Hong et al., 2022). While constructing a story, brands must keep in mind that consumers cannot identify themselves equally with all brands and that it requires skills to construct a compelling story (Coker et al., 2021). Elements such as plot, characters, and verisimilitude must be considered in the process (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). This paper aims to demystify the intricacies of storytelling by employing the ADO TCM framework, to offer a more accessible understanding to researchers and marketers regarding the current state of storytelling as a strategy. The framework will serve as a guideline in unravelling antecedents, decisions, and outcomes of storytelling as a strategy. Additionally, it also outlines the theories, contexts, and methods that have been explored in understanding storytelling. The ultimate goal of this systematic review paper is to equip researchers and marketers with insights that contribute to shaping the future agenda for storytelling.

Need for this systematic review

Storytelling is a widely adopted strategy in contemporary branding practices, being continually explored by researchers who unveil various facets contributing to enhanced marketing efficiency. Despite being an extensively explored concept, there is a notable scarcity in comprehensive review papers consolidating these studies and charting a course for future exploration. Review papers have been documented in various contexts, for example (Sahni, 2016) studied storytelling with respect to organizations. Organizational storytelling refers to the practice of employing narratives within an organization to effectively communicate information, share experiences and foster employee engagement, influence cultural dynamics, and contribute to constructing the organization's identity and values. Subsequently, there are comprehensive review papers addressing the role of storytelling in the education system, specifically examining its influence on educational practices, and student engagement (Wu & Chen, 2020; Sarica, 2023). Moreover, there are review papers examining the practice of storytelling in health research as well (De Vecchi et al., 2016; West et al., 2022). In the domain of mental health and health research, storytelling is utilized to share individuals' health experiences to foster empathy. As of our current knowledge, there is a notable absence of a framework-based systematic review on storytelling within the field of marketing. (Júnior et al., 2023) conducted a review focusing on the impact of storytelling on purchase decisions, thereby narrowing the scope to a singular outcome among various outcomes studied. (Musfira et al., 2022) specifically addressed digital storytelling in their review paper, excluding consideration of consumer or brand storytelling, which again narrows down the scope of their study. Given the growing significance of storytelling as a strategy, coupled with the deficiency in existing review papers and the absence of future directions, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive review in this domain. Such a review would not only

pinpoint and address existing gaps but also significantly contribute to the expansion of knowledge on storytelling.

Contributions of this systematic review

This framework based systematic review on storytelling literature in marketing makes three significant contributions to the field.

Firstly, it addresses the notable gap in review papers focusing on the role of storytelling in marketing. Despite being a widely examined subject, the literature is dispersed, lacking cohesive guidance for researchers regarding the identified aspects of storytelling in marketing and this calls for reconciliation of the sheer volume of research (Paul & Criado, 2020). By presenting a structured framework, the paper serves as a roadmap for extensive future research opportunities within the realm of storytelling.

Secondly, the review facilitates researchers in gaining organized insights into the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes associated with storytelling in marketing. It also provides a synthesis of theories, contexts, and methodologies employed in storytelling research. This systematic approach aims to consolidate fragmented knowledge into a comprehensive and accessible source for researchers. The logically synthesized insights will equip researchers with a solid understanding of the current state of the literature, offering a foundation to build upon existing knowledge of storytelling in marketing.

Thirdly, the paper also aids marketers and industry practitioners by offering insights into how storytelling can be effectively utilized in marketing. While (Da Costa, 2019) highlights that brand storytelling has the potential to be the future of marketing (Ryu et al., 2018) notes that many brands currently employ storytelling in an unstructured manner, which emphasizes the importance and need for this review paper. In an era where story ads are perceived as lacking meaning or motive, marketers can benefit from staying updated on research contributions to storytelling. By integrating findings on various aspects, the paper aims to guide marketers on how to approach storytelling and what outcomes to anticipate. In essence, this paper not only sheds light on the current state of storytelling in marketing but also outlines a future agenda for further exploration and development in this dynamic field.

Research questions answered through this systematic review

The research questions are categorized into three subsets based on the ADO TCM framework employed in this paper. This review aims to answer the following questions:

- What do we know: What are the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes of storytelling in marketing?
- How do we know: Which theories were adopted in marketing storytelling research? In what contexts have storytelling techniques been studied in marketing? What research methods characterize the study of storytelling in marketing?
- Where should we be headed: What are the existing gaps and potential areas for future research in the realm of storytelling?

Structure of this systematic review

The paper is structured as follows. The paper starts by discussing the potential of storytelling strategy in marketing and outlines the need for conducting this review. Then using the ADO framework, presents a structured assembly of what we know about storytelling antecedents, decisions and outcomes. The paper later employs the TCM framework and looks into theories, contexts and methods used by previous researchers to understand how we've come to know about storytelling's contribution to marketing. Finally, the paper suggests potential future research directions for storytelling in marketing, based on the insights from the ADO TCM framework, shedding light on where we should be headed in terms of storytelling.

Methodology

Systematic review

A systematic review is a scientific form of secondary research that uses reproducible methods to identify, select, and evaluate prior studies in response to a specific research agenda. They play a pivotal role in advancing the theoretical, contextual, and methodological aspects of future research beyond the current knowledge (Lim et al., 2021). The use of systematic or structured literature reviews has become a well-established approach in the management domain. Notably 90% of the systematic literature reviews published in the last decade contribute to the management domain (Sauer & Seuring, 2023). The purpose of systematic reviews is to provide up-to-date insights into on a relevant topic, highlighting inconsistencies and knowledge gaps that impede empirical generalizations in a specific domain. Similar to empirical papers, systematic reviews can be carried out in various ways. Generally, there are four main classifications of systematic reviews: domain-based, theory-based, method-based, and meta-analytical reviews (Paul & Criado, 2020). A domain-based review focuses on a specific topical domain within a given field of study. It aims to gather, analyze, and synthesize existing literature and research within that subject area. Theory-based reviews analyze the impact of a specific theory in a given field. Method-based reviews focus on analyzing the application of a specific method in a particular subject area. Meta-analytical reviews involve statistically assessing previous empirical research on a specific topic (Dhiman et al., 2023). This paper employs a domain-based systematic review with a framework-based approach to explore what is currently understood, how this understanding is derived, and where future directions should focus in the context of storytelling in marketing. The choice of a framework-based approach is driven by the absence of structured reviews in this particular domain.

Organizing framework

An organizing framework in a systematic review serves as a structure guiding the integration of distinctive elements from various streams of literature. The structure is a crucial element of a systematic literature review, setting it apart from regular reviews by systematically organizing information. This organization ensures that readers referencing the paper can easily locate specific details and understand where to find relevant information (Paul & Criado, 2020). Out of the various frameworks available for crafting systematic reviews, this paper specifically adopts an integrated approach, combining the ADO framework and TCM framework utilized by Lim et al. (2021).

The ADO framework was devised by Paul and Benito (2018) where 'A' stands for Antecedents, 'D' stands for Decisions and 'O' stands for outcomes. Antecedents are factors that lead to something or a certain behaviour, Decisions are actions taken towards that behaviour and Outcomes are what comes after a behaviour is performed, from which the success or failure of it is determined. ADO framework helps with breaking down the study into three main components to understand the concept in detail. On the other hand, the TCM framework was established by Paul et al. (2017), where 'T' stands for Theories, 'C' stands for Contexts and 'M' stands for Methods. Theories refer to the perspectives guiding scholars in their investigations. Contexts illustrate the circumstances involved in an inquiry, while methods shed light on the nature of empirical evidence that drives the investigation forward.

ADO and TCM are both effective frameworks for organizing a review paper, but individually, they have limitations. ADO excels in structuring past research findings but lacks guidance for future research, particularly in explaining theories, contexts, or methods. Meanwhile, TCM efficiently organizes the foundations of past research but doesn't cover topical content as comprehensively as ADO. Combining these frameworks in this study aims to address these shortcomings, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective for organizing and presenting the review paper (Figure 1).

Procedure

The development of a reporting protocol stands as a crucial aspect in the process of conducting a systematic review. This step ensures meticulous planning and documentation of the process, thereby

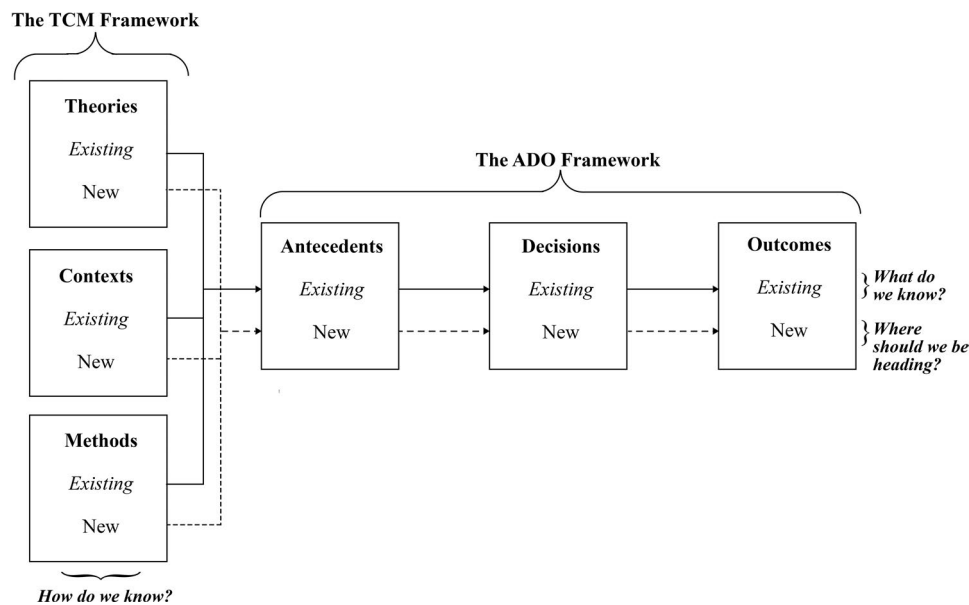


Figure 1. An integrated ADO-TCM framework (Lim et al., 2021).

contributing to the research's integrity and transparency. In this study, we adopt the well-established PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to enhance the clarity and credibility of our review. PRISMA guides the article selection process through four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, each of which is expounded upon in subsequent sections.

Identification

The identification stage involved categorization based on five criteria: source type, source quality, search engine, search period, and search keyword. Specifically, regarding source type, only journal articles were considered within the scope of this review, while non-journal articles, including book chapters and conference proceedings, were deliberately excluded. The decision to include only journal articles was motivated by the credibility and reliability that comes up rigorous peer review of such publications by field experts. In terms of source quality, exclusive consideration was given to articles from Scopus-indexed journals. The choice of Scopus over alternatives like ABDC (Australian Business Deans Council) or Web of Science is motivated by its comprehensive and multidisciplinary coverage, ensuring inclusivity in the selection process. Additionally, Scopus, maintained by Elsevier, is esteemed for its meticulous curation, enhancing the credibility and relevance of the chosen articles, in accordance with scholarly standards. Google Scholar was chosen as the search engine due to its accessibility and ease of use. Its comprehensive coverage of publications made it simple to locate the sources of the articles, enhancing the efficiency of the search process. The majority of articles included in this study were sourced from reputable publishers such as Taylor & Francis, Emerald, Elsevier, Sage, Wiley, among others. Regarding the search period, only articles published between 2013 and 2024 were considered. This timeframe was chosen to prioritize recent publications, as they are more likely to be relevant in capturing current developments, providing a foundation for a robust future agenda. Finally, for the search keywords, a set of terms including 'Storytelling', 'Brand storytelling', 'Narratives', 'Narrative advertisements', 'Consumer storytelling', 'Video storytelling', 'Digital storytelling', 'Brand story', 'Brand narratives' and 'Narrative transportation' were employed to identify articles. Zheng and Zhang (2023) stated that in marketing the terms 'storytelling' and 'narratives' are used simultaneously. 'Brand Storytelling' served as the primary keyword, and additional terms were derived during the literature review process while exploring articles on the topic of brand storytelling. A total of 1086 articles were discovered during the identification stage.

Screening

In the screening stage, we carefully narrowed down our article selection by excluding 272 articles based on four key criteria. First, non-journal articles, like book chapters, conference proceedings, and theses, were intentionally omitted to focus on peer-reviewed, scholarly content. Second, articles from non-Scopus indexed journals were excluded to maintain a high standard of quality. Third, to keep the study relevant, articles published before 2013 were left out. Lastly, we eliminated duplicate copies, ensuring accuracy. This thorough screening process resulted in 814 articles for eligibility assessment.

Eligibility

In the eligibility stage, a substantial reduction occurred, with 736 articles being excluded based on three specific criteria. Firstly, non-marketing articles were excluded, revealing a notable observation that the topic of storytelling is more commonly explored in fields such as education, health, theatres, or psychology, rather than in the context of marketing. This highlighted the limited attention given to storytelling within the marketing domain, with 528 articles identified as non-marketing related. The scarcity of studies in marketing-related storytelling became evident through this exclusion. Following this, non-empirical papers, such as conceptual or review papers, were further excluded. The emphasis on empirical papers was driven by the need for empirical evidence to support the variables outlined in the ADO framework. This criterion aimed to ensure a robust foundation for the study, grounded in empirical backing. Articles of languages apart from English and subscription based, non-accessible articles were excluded as well. Lastly, irrelevant articles that claimed to be about storytelling but focused on emotional branding were excluded, refining the selection further. Ultimately, this stringent eligibility assessment process resulted in a refined set of 76 articles that align with the study's focus on marketing-related storytelling.

Inclusion

In the final phase of the inclusion stage, all shortlisted articles underwent a countercheck to ensure their completeness and validity. This meticulous step serves as a quality control measure, aimed at identifying and rectifying any potential errors or oversights in the selection process. As a result of this thorough review, a total of 78 articles were ultimately selected for content analysis in the systematic review paper. The outcome of the content analysis is reported in the following sections (Refer [Figure 2](#)).

What do we know?

Researchers have extensively explored storytelling across diverse fields like psychology, health research, and education. However, comparatively less attention has been devoted to exploring storytelling within the realms of marketing and branding. The storytelling strategy continues to be actively used in advertising and branding, indicating its ongoing relevance. Despite its continued relevance, very less papers have been published on the subject of storytelling strategy in marketing. Regardless of the scarcity of research in this area, a meticulous examination of 76 papers has yielded captivating findings that hold significant potential for both marketers and researchers. For marketers, these insights provide valuable guidance on utilizing storytelling as an efficient branding strategy. On the other hand, researchers can leverage these discoveries to further explore unaddressed gaps on storytelling's role in marketing. Building upon the aforementioned insights, the subsequent section of this paper delves into the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes (ADO) of storytelling in marketing. By examining the components and antecedents of storytelling, the decisions prompted by these antecedents, and the subsequent outcomes of these decisions, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and implications of incorporating storytelling into marketing strategies.

Antecedents

Antecedents refer to the underlying factors shaping an individual's decision to engage or refrain from a particular behaviour (Paul & Benito, 2018). In the context of this review, when we discuss the antecedents of storytelling, we are essentially exploring the distinct components or features of

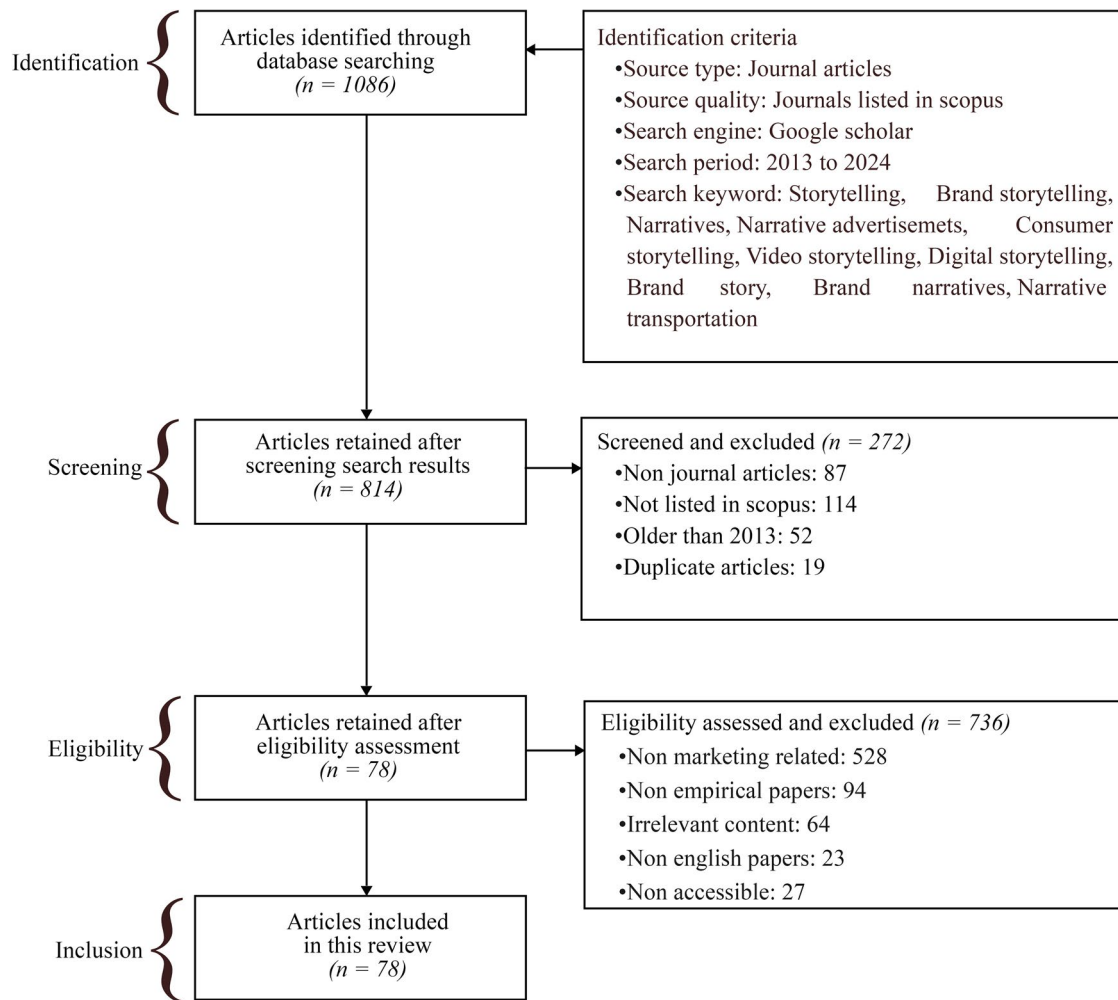


Figure 2. Flowchart of article selection process using the PRISMA protocol (Source: Author).

storytelling that influence the choices made by consumers or viewers. These antecedents are systematically classified into three categories: story-based elements, brand-based elements, and consumer-based elements. This categorization aims to break down the antecedents in a structured manner to enhance its comprehensibility.

Story based elements

In this section, we concentrate on story-based elements, specifically delving into the characteristics and components that define a compelling narrative in the context of advertising. The discourse centres around identifying and understanding the essential features that contribute to the effectiveness of a story in marketing.

The fundamental elements of a story, as studied by Pera and Viglia (2016) and a few others are plot, characters and verisimilitude. These researchers stated the need for an imaginable plot and identifiable characters. For instance, Glaser et al. (2023) stated that celebrity characters strengthened relationship with the audience compared to unknown characters. Ryu et al. (2018) also stresses on emplotment and referred to twenty master plots in their study. Nicoli et al. (2022) added on to that saying a simple universal plot that is understandable and simple characters that are relatable can make the story more engaging. Dessart (2018) notes that human characters lead to better transportation compared to animals portrayed in the story which adds on to the need for identifiable characters. Pera and Viglia (2016) discusses the significance of climax in stories to which (Hamby & Brinberg, 2016) added on stating how the story ends is important and that happy endings are easier to process.

Story plots must adhere to a certain theme and as (Zhang & Liu, 2023) asserts that the story's theme and framing can significantly influence consumers perception and engagement with the brand. For instance Delgado-Ballester (2020) examines underdog (brand portraying itself as less privileged) vs Topdog (brand portraying itself as the leader) themes in stories and found that underdog stories to be more influential. These themes, also termed archetypes in some studies (Delgado-Ballester & Fernández-Sabiote, 2016) are crucial in storytelling, as discussed by Rossolatos (2020) who advocates for using metaphors aligning with archetypes to imbue stories with deeper meaning. Van Laer et al. (2018) suggests that stories should have a specific genre with humour being particularly effective. Ganassali and Matysiewicz (2021) also explored the impact of archetypes (hero, explorer, caregiver etc) and introduced the CLAMP model which stands for character, location, action, message and plot.

Regarding storytelling techniques, Young et al. (2020) and Kao (2019) emphasized that the manner in which stories are told enhances their usefulness. Kang et al. (2020) and Ryu et al. (2019) added on saying that the storyteller's identity (founder, consumer etc) also influences consumer preferences. Huang et al. (2018) further added on to it saying comprehension and imagery fluency of message giver contribute to creating a positive effect.

The importance of advertising features and quality is highlighted by Zheng and Zhang (2023), who reveal that the quality of products/services displayed in ads influences consumption intentions. Deng et al. (2022) and Tsai (2020) stress the significance of the story's length with longer videos yielding better results. Dhote and Kumar (2019) also listed the consideration of duration, flow, frequency, informativeness, relevance and placement of the ad. Emotional appeals in storytelling are also deemed crucial by Gross et al. (2023) and (Nicoli et al., 2022).

Visual storytelling is another area of exploration, with studies indicating that snapshot-type pictures drive higher transportation compared to standard pictures due to their authentic nature (Lim & Childs, 2020). Farace et al. (2017) stated that photographic style, narrative perspective and portrayed action play significant roles in visual storytelling.

In addition to basic elements, stories possess characteristics such as authenticity, conciseness, humour, and reversal (Lee & Jeong, 2017; Granitz & Forman, 2015). Kasilingam and Ajitha (2022) stated that humour in storytelling ads is more impactful than dramatic stories. However, Sharma and Meena (2022) note a shift during COVID, with less humour used in ads focusing more on consumer safety. It is essential to align story framing with trends and situations accordingly. Lim and Puspita (2020) added on to the need for the story to align with reality.

Krause-Galoni and Rucker (2023) proposed blending product arguments into storytelling, termed product storytelling, which has shown increased elaboration and intent to use. Glaser and Reisinger (2022) also highlights the importance of portraying a product in a story since it is linked to have a positive influence on persuasion. Additionally, the development of a story should align with the product being pitched as indicated by Yang and Kang (2021). For instance, Kim et al. (2016) and Gurzki et al. (2019) said luxury brands use dominant themes and implicit or subtle messaging technique in their stories.

Several other elements and characteristics of storytelling were discussed as well such as educability, enjoyability, descriptiveness (Kim et al., 2020), anthromorphism and symbolism (Huang & Guo, 2021), interactivity, vividness and entertainment (Ching et al., 2013), novelty (Seifert & Chattaraman, 2020), relevance, concreteness, antithesis (contrasting situations causing tension), positive values (Li et al., 2019), topic, timing (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015), character, classification, content (Mitchell & Clark, 2021), narrative structure, transparency (McGinnis & Glibkowski, 2019), mobility (spread of story), performance (engaging ability), performativity (expressing identity) (Lund et al., 2018) and use of 360° ads (Feng, 2018).

Furthermore, while developing a story, it's crucial to integrate STP (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) before planning (McDougal et al., 2021), ensure complete development of the story for effectiveness (Quesenberry & Coolsen, 2019), avoid exaggeration (Harris et al., 2016), choose between affective and cognitive stories (Hamelin et al., 2020), consider including product history (Kamleitner et al., 2019), and understand the brand's objectives (Granitz & Forman, 2015).

Brand based elements

Within this section, we delve into brand-based elements, specifically examining fragments of the brand incorporated into the narrative, such as brand values. Our exploration centres on understanding the

significant role that these brand-based elements play in shaping a story. This discussion sheds light on the key aspects influencing the storytelling process, emphasizing the importance of incorporating brand identity into the narrative structure.

Brands leverage storytelling as a means to communicate their values, a subject extensively explored by few researchers. Glover (2018) emphasized the importance of incorporating brand essence, while Ryu et al. (2018) stated the need to include brand vision, mission, history and values in a story. Furthermore Riskos et al. (2022) suggested integrating nostalgic aspects in the brand storytelling contributes to perceived brand heritage. Grigsby and Mellema (2020) argued that brands must be authentic and mention discourse labels in native ads and that the placement of these labels play a key role in ad recognition. Additionally Pfannes et al. (2021) proposed portraying people, i.e. founder and their family, highlighting the unique technological processes of the brand, specifying the place and date of foundation, and emphasizing the struggle to achieve success in a story, as these factors significantly impact consumer perceptions of brand heritage. McGinnis and Glibkowski (2019) also emphasized the importance of brands remaining true to their core values, as any inconsistency between a brand's public portrayal and real-life actions could erode consumer trust, as noted by Chen and Eriksson (2019).

Moreover, it's crucial for ads not to solely focus on the brand, as Yıldız and Sever (2022) pointed out that brand prominence, the extent to which the brand is featured throughout the ad, should be low for the story to be more engaging. While high prominence may enhance recall, it can negatively affect attitudes toward the ad. Overall, integrating brand elements into storytelling enhances the credibility of the narrative and enables the brand to establish an emotional connection through its brand persona (Ryu et al., 2018).

Consumer based elements

Here, our focus shifts towards consumer-based elements, specifically exploring aspects from the consumer's perspective that exert influence on storytelling. These elements encompass the consumer's attitude, values, feelings, and opinions, all of which have emerged as pivotal factors in storytelling research. Our examination aims to illuminate the crucial role these consumer-centric elements play in the storytelling process.

Regardless of how well a story is executed, certain personal factors on the consumer side also influence their reaction to the narrative. Firstly, consumers must feel the need for effect to be open to be transported into a story (Huang et al., 2018). Consumer preferences vary; some prefer meaningful stories (informative), while others favour happy (fun-intended) stories (Carnevale et al., 2018). Kao (2019) further explains that consumers with malicious (negative) envy prefer underdog stories, while those with benign (positive) envy prefer topdog stories.

Additionally, perceived attitude towards the brand shapes consumers' attitudes (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Self-brand congruity the synchronization between brand values and consumer values, is another studied variable. Zheng and Zhang (2023) assert that the crafting of an ad enhances self-brand congruity and brand perception, ultimately influencing consumption intentions. Delgado-Ballester (2020) also highlights that the level of immersion and empathetic feelings a consumer experiences directly impacts their identification with the brand, referred to as self-referencing by Ching et al. (2013).

Some authors advocate for co-creation, involving consumers in the storytelling process. Bansal et al. (2023) and Lund et al. (2018) stress the importance of co-creating storytelling by engaging consumers, suppliers, and employees to enhance brand experience and consumer engagement. Feiereisen et al. (2021) mentions that the social network of the consumer affects how they perceive storytelling ads. They also discuss different consumption paces of consumers, such as devouring, savouring, nibbling, garnishing, sampling, gorging, feasting, and swallowing, illustrating that some consumers quickly consume content while others immerse themselves over time.

Demographic differences have been studied as well. Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020) found that older respondents tend to share stories about nostalgic brands more than younger generation. Hamelin et al. (2020) asserts that women are more influenced by affective stories compared to men.

Furthermore, other consumer elements play a significant role. Karampournioti and Wiedmann (2021) stated that implicit(unconscious), explicit(conscious), hedonic(emotional) and pragmatic(functional) information processing of consumers influences behavioural intentions of consumers. Ma et al. (2023)

indicated that the arousal level of viewers while exposed to storytelling also has an impact on consumer's recall ability. Anaza et al. (2020) suggests that when storytelling is used in b2b supplier ads, c suite consumers show more trust compared to non c suite consumers. This section underscores the importance of consumer elements in storytelling.

Decisions

Decisions within the ADO (Antecedents-Decisions-Outcomes) framework encapsulate the behaviours individuals exhibit or refrain from exhibiting following exposure to antecedents. These decisions occur sequentially following antecedents and precede subsequent outcomes in the framework (Paul & Benito, 2018).

The study by Sun et al. (2024) revealed that narrative advertising is not only more impactful than factual ads, but can also positively influence consumer engagement, behavioural intentions and reduces the awareness of advertisers' persuasive intentions. Storytelling possesses the ability to influence consumers' behaviour. For instance, Coker et al. (2021) and Quesenberry and Coolsen (2019) noted that narrative ads positively influence intentions to view, share and promote. Furthermore Kang et al. (2020), Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020) and Solja et al. (2018) emphasized that storytelling influences consumers to spread positive word of mouth.

Lee and Jahng (2020) highlighted the benefits of using storytelling during times of crisis. In their study it was noted that the use storytelling as a crisis response strategy had a significant impact on perceptions of crisis severity and reduced sense of crisis responsibility.

According to Zheng and Zhang (2023) storytelling ads lead to high elaboration, indicating increased engagement with narrative elements in the story. Gross et al. (2023) and 6 others stated that storytelling elevates consumer reactions and engagement. Karampourioti and Wiedmann (2021), Kim et al. (2020) and 9 others also underscore the influence of storytelling on behavioural intentions, particularly purchase intentions. Ultimately, engagement and purchase intentions emerge as pivotal decisions influenced by storytelling.

Outcomes

Outcomes within the framework denote the consequences arising from individual choices, and their positivity or negativity is contingent upon antecedents and decisions. This section delves into the discovered outcomes of storytelling gleaned from existing research, shedding light on the varied impacts and implications that storytelling can have on individuals (Paul & Benito, 2018).

The most widely discussed outcome of storytelling in marketing is brand attitude with 18 papers including Zhang and Liu (2023), Kasilingam and Ajitha (2022), Hong et al. (2022) and 15 others. Although the self-brand connection has been categorised under consumer based elements, Delgado-Ballester (2020) and 2 others stated that this variable is also an outcome of consumers being exposed to storytelling. Additionally, several other positive outcomes have been highlighted, such as brand love (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022), brand perception (Lundqvist et al., 2013; Pfannes et al., 2021), memorability and recall (Ma et al., 2023; Brechman & Purvis, 2015), brand experience (Bansal et al., 2023), brand loyalty (Yang & Kang, 2021), brand differentiation (Mitchell & Clark, 2021), brand trust (Kim et al., 2020) and 3 others, ability to evoke emotional connection (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2021), sales rate (Kemp et al., 2021), brand image (Tsai, 2020), brand identity (Ryu et al., 2019), brand advocacy (Anaza et al., 2020), brand desirability (Gurzki et al., 2019), increased demand (Kamleitner et al., 2019), long term returns (Ben Youssef et al., 2019), positive emotions (Solja et al., 2018), enjoyment and credibility (Kim et al., 2017), and increased persuasion (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). It's evident that storytelling yields numerous positive outcomes for both the brand and the consumer, making it a win-win strategy to employ.

How do we know?

The exploration of storytelling in marketing has spanned over a decade. While the preceding section extensively covered the ADO framework, the ensuing section will delve into the TCM framework, placing

particular emphasis on the theories, contexts, and methodologies underpinning the study of storytelling. This section aims to elucidate the foundations of our knowledge, providing a robust groundwork for the ADO framework to stand upon by addressing the question of how our understanding of storytelling in marketing has been acquired.

Theories

Theories act as a roadmap for researchers, aiding in the development of research questions and hypotheses. Referring to well-established theories strengthens the credibility and reliability of scholarly work (Paul et al., 2017). Researchers have constantly used theories in understanding and explaining relationships between variables in the realms of storytelling in marketing.

Numerous theories and frameworks have been referenced in the study of storytelling in marketing, but one theory has garnered extensive attention. Coker et al. (2021), Sun et al. (2024) and 24 others have studied narrative transportation theory. Narrative transportation refers to a mental state induced by consuming a story, resulting in detachment from the real world and immersion in the narrative world through empathy with story characters and mental imagery of the plot. Narrative transportation is believed to mediate the relationship between storytelling and consumer reactions. Another framework discussed repeatedly is the information processing model by Hong et al. (2022) and 2 others. The information processing model focuses on the cognitive, affective and conative responses of consumers. In this model, the cognitive stage encompasses thinking and processing information, while the affective stage influences emotional attitude, and the conative stage relates to intended or actual behavioural responses. It has been observed that these responses vary for each story element and across different cultures. Table 1 outlines several other theories that have been explored in the context of storytelling.

Contexts

In this review, contexts pertain to the specific circumstances or conditions under which the study has been conducted (Paul et al., 2017). The classification of contexts in this review comprises five distinct parts: stimulus, population, platforms, industries, and types. Each of these components aims to shed light on different aspects of the study. For instance, they delineate the nature of the stimulus studied, specify the targeted population, identify the platforms where storytelling has been investigated, outline the industries covered, and categorize the types of storytelling explored in the existing body of research.

Stimulus:

Video as a stimulus has received extensive study from researchers such as Coker et al. (2021) and 21 others because video is considered more popular than image or audio stimulus (Zheng & Zhang, 2023). Storytelling in written format has been investigated by Hong et al. (2022) (Krause-Galoni & Rucker, 2023) and 12 others. Picture or image storytelling has been examined by Lim and Childs (2020), Seifert and

Table 1. Theories discussed in marketing storytelling.

Theory	Author(s)
Mental imagery processing	Zheng and Zhang (2023)
Extended transportation imagery model	Delgado-Ballester (2020)
Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory	Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023)
Social exchange theory	Gross et al. (2023)
Fisher's narrative paradigm	Lim and Puspita (2020)
Theory of narrative rhetoric	Huang and Guo (2021)
Persuasive knowledge model	Gilliam and Flaherty (2015)
LC4MP theory	Feng (2018)
Burke's dramatic pentad theory	Li et al. (2019)
Freytag Gustav's theory of dramatic structure	Quesenberry and Coolsen (2019)
Theory of narrativity	Van Laer et al. (2018)
Construal level theory	Young et al. (2020)
Cognitive effective theory	Kasilingam and Ajitha (2022)
Taylor's message wheel	Deng et al. (2022)
Narrative structure theory	Riskos et al. (2022)

Chattaraman (2020) and 2 others. Additionally, storytelling in radio has been explored by Kang et al. (2020). Overall video stimulus has been the subject of significant study.

Population

Storytelling in marketing has been extensively studied across various countries, with a predominant focus on the United States by researchers such as Sun et al. (2024), Hong et al. (2022) and 12 others. Many of these authors used Amazon mechanical Turk platform to gather respondents. The second most studied region is China by Zheng and Zhang (2023), Huang and Guo (2021) and 3 others. Table 2 provides coverage of other regions explored by researchers in the field of storytelling.

Platforms

Storytelling has been predominantly studied on social media platforms by researchers like (Nicoli et al., 2022) and 10 others covering platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. However, Feiereisen et al. (2021) and Granitz and Forman (2015) studied transmedia, which involves storytelling across multiple platforms. Additionally (Sun et al., 2024) conducted a unique study on narrative ads on chatbot platforms. Zhang and Liu (2023) focused on storytelling on e-commerce platform, while (Karampournioti & Wiedmann, 2021) investigated how storytelling could be integrated into websites and online shops. Traditional media platforms like television have also been the subject of study (Sharma & Meena, 2022).

Industries. It's noteworthy that some studies, including those by Zhang and Liu (2023), Riskos et al. (2022) and 7 others have opted to examine fictitious brands instead of existing ones to mitigate potential consumer bias towards established brands. However, Hong et al. (2022) argued that using real but unfamiliar brands would yield real time data and chose gender neutral products for their study. Table 3 outlines the types of brands or industries covered in storytelling studies thus far.

Types. Storytelling in marketing is categorized into different types. Brand storytelling involves narratives that depict brand elements and stories created by brands themselves. This aspect has been studied by Zhang and Liu (2023), Zheng and Zhang (2023), Dias and Cavaleiro (2022), and 21 others. Consumer storytelling, on the other hand, pertains to stories shared from a consumer's perspective based on their experiences with the brand. This type of storytelling has been explored by Hong et al. (2022), Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020), and Young et al. (2020). Digital storytelling, studied by Nicoli et al. (2022) and 3 focuses on storytelling on digital platforms. Visual storytelling as investigated by Lim and Childs (2020), Chen and Eriksson (2019) and 2 others emphasizes storytelling through visual elements, primarily pictures. Bansal et al. (2023) and Kamleitner et al. (2019) examined product storytelling, conveying product value over its features. Lastly native advertising studied by Yıldız and Sever (2022) refers to sponsored storytelling.

Methods

Methods encompass the systematic and structured approaches adopted by researchers in their studies for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of empirical data (Paul et al., 2017). Researchers in marketing storytelling have used qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods to explore this concept.

Table 2. Countries covered in storytelling research in marketing.

Country	Author(s)
Tunisia	Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023)
France	Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023), Kim et al. (2016)
Greece	Riskos et al. (2022)
Turkey	Yıldız and Sever (2022)
Austria	Glaser and Reisinger (2022)
South Korea	Kim et al. (2020)
	Kim et al. (2016)
Poland	Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020)
Denmark	Lund et al. (2018)
United Kingdom	Solja et al. (2018)
Australia	Kim et al. (2016)
India	Bansal et al. (2023)

Table 3. Industries covered in storytelling research in marketing.

Industry/ Brand/ Products	Author(s)
Automobiles	Coker et al. (2021) Kasilingam and Ajitha (2022)
Agriculture	Zhang and Liu (2023), Yueh and Zheng (2019)
Hospitality	Zheng and Zhang (2023)
Jewellery	Dias and Cavalheiro (2022)
Footwear	Lim and Childs (2020), Tsai (2020)
Sportswear	Feng (2018)
Hotels	Lee and Jeong (2017), Ryu et al. (2018) Huang et al. (2018)
Cosmetics	Lundqvist et al. (2013)
Tourism	(Ma et al. (2023), Van Laer et al. (2018), Lund et al. (2018), Ben Youssef et al. (2019)
Heritage brands	Pfannes et al. (2021), Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020)
Non-Profit Organizations	Mitchell and Clark (2021)
Sustainable brands	Huang and Guo (2021)
Petroleum	Hamelin et al. (2020)
Financial services	Kao (2019)
Celebrity brands	McGinnis and Glibkowski (2019)
Food	Chen and Eriksson (2019)
Cycling	Glover (2018)
Luxury brands	Gurzki et al. (2019), Kim et al. (2016)
Personal care	Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023) Dessart and Pitardi (2019)
Electronics	Lim and Puspita (2020)

1. Quantitative: Quantitative methods involve collecting, analysing and interpreting numerical data in order to understand patterns and relationships. While there are various types of quantitative methods, experiments and surveys have been predominantly utilized in storytelling research. Sun et al. (2024), Krause-Galoni and Rucker (2023), and 20 others have employed experimental methods in their study. Zhang and Liu (2023), Zheng and Zhang (2023) and 19 others utilized structured surveys.
2. Qualitative: Qualitative methods aid in understanding a phenomenon using non-numerical data. Storytelling research has employed various qualitative methods. For instance, McDougal et al. (2021) and 3 others used the grounded theory approach, Dias and Cavalheiro (2022), Lundqvist et al. (2013) and 4 others utilized interviews, Ryu et al. (2018), Lund et al. (2018), and Pera and Viglia (2016) followed case study approach, Nicoli et al. (2022) and Chen and Eriksson (2019) employed digital discourse analysis, Dessart and Pitardi (2019) used netnography Mitchell and Clark (2021), Lim and Puspita (2020) and 5 others engaged in content analysis, and lastly (Glover, 2018) utilized narrative inquiry method.
3. Mixed: Mixed methods incorporate multiple approaches to data collection. Researchers have employed mixed methods as well in storytelling. For instance, Gross et al. (2023), Kemp et al. (2021), Grębosz-Krawczyk (2020), and 6 others used a mixed method approach (Figure 3).

Where should we be headed?

In light of the comprehensive examination of antecedents, decisions and outcomes, theories, contexts and methods within storytelling research, it is important to consider what lies ahead for storytelling in marketing. This section will discuss future research directions, shedding light on potential avenues for exploration in storytelling.

Findings

In our review, storytelling research within marketing has traversed diverse domains and contexts. Through ADO framework we have identified various brand-based, consumer-based and story-based antecedents that significantly influence consumers' behavioural intentions. Additionally, we examined various decisions and outcomes of using storytelling strategy in marketing, revealing a predominantly positive correlation across identified variables. Our exploration also delves into various theories used. Contexts were

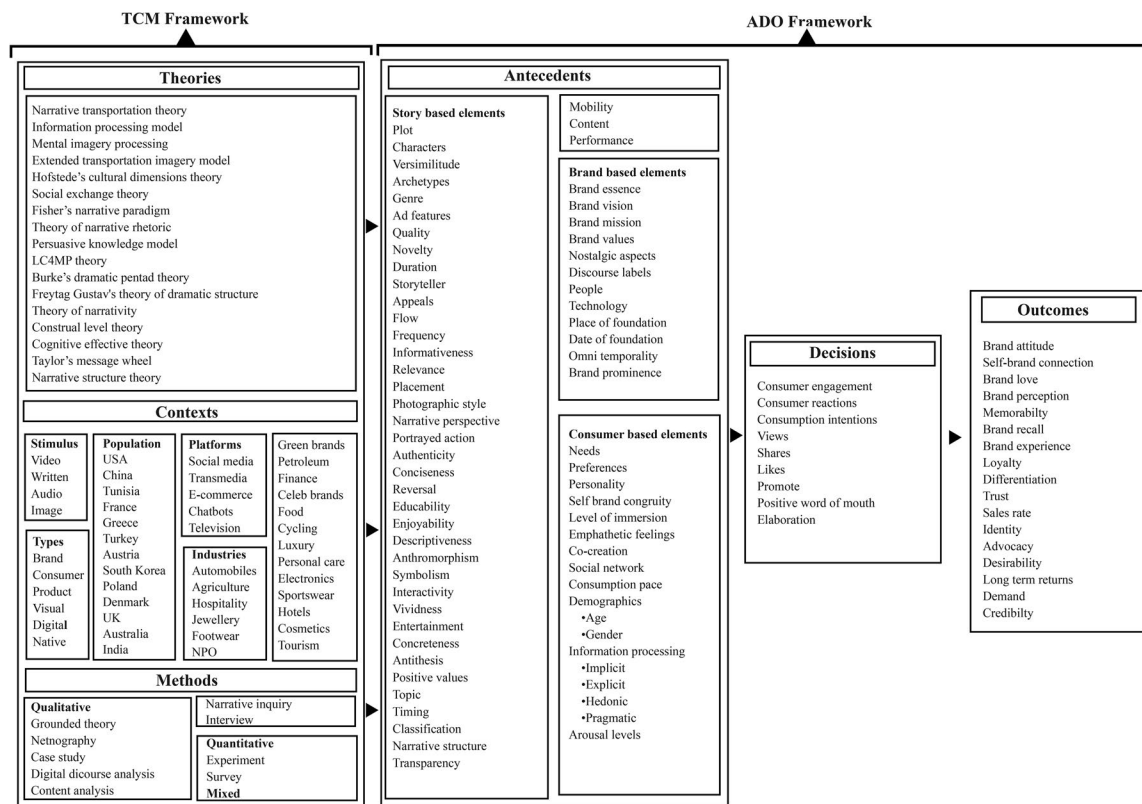


Figure 3. ADO TCM framework of storytelling in marketing (Source: Author).

thoughtfully classified into stimulus, population, industry, platforms and types to make it more comprehensible. Furthermore, we scrutinized the methodologies employed, noting a balanced utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Through this research, we observed several key trends. Storytelling as a strategy or concept in marketing was particularly prominent among researchers from 2019 to 2021, with approximately 65% of the identified papers published during this period. The majority of these studies were conducted in the USA and China, offering valuable insights into the field. Nearly all the papers extensively used the terms 'Storytelling' and 'Narratives'. While each study was unique, brand attitude emerged as the most frequently examined outcome variable, with multiple authors noting that storytelling had a positive impact on brand attitude.

However, amidst our comprehensive findings, several noteworthy patterns emerged. Firstly, there appeared to be a disproportion in research focus, with more emphasis on story-based elements compared to brand or consumer-based factors. This observation contrasts with the presumed prevalence of brand storytelling over consumer or product storytelling. Secondly while studies addressed outcomes and decisions related to storytelling, many failed to directly engage with the actual consumers of the products or services under scrutiny, thus potentially compromising credibility. Thirdly, despite the prominence of narrative transportation theory, opportunities abound for exploring alternative theories and frameworks to yield fresh insights. Lastly, we observed a disparity in the exploration of traditional advertising and marketing channels versus digital media platforms. Moving forward, researchers could benefit from embracing mixed-method approaches to glean even more nuanced insights into the complex dynamics of storytelling in marketing.

Future research directions

While storytelling research in marketing has covered various domains and contexts, several gaps have been identified through this review. For instance, Grigsby and Mellema (2020), Zhang and Liu (2023), and 2 others emphasized on the need for longitudinal studies. No research employing a longitudinal approach

has been identified as of our knowledge. Although (Ben Youssef et al. (2019) has stated that storytelling has an impact on long term returns, a longitudinal study to back up that claim could benefit. Zhang and Liu (2023) suggested exploring storytelling from different cultural and regional perspectives. Building on the findings of Ben Aicha and Bouzaabia (2023), who highlighted the varied responses to narrative ads across cultures, exploring populations that have not yet been studied could uncover novel insights. For instance, exploring the impact of storytelling in the Indian market presents a promising opportunity for future research. Additionally, Van Laer et al. (2018) advocated for the examination of narratives in various languages, further emphasizing the importance of considering linguistic diversity in storytelling research.

Coker et al. (2021) recommended examining advertisements that utilize characters as direct or metaphorical representations of the brand. For instance, celebrities (Kasilingam & Ajitha, 2022) or brand mascots in storytelling ads could be studied. By comparing the use of different characters, researchers could identify which types of characters best align with the brand and enhance their stories.

Dias and Cavalheiro (2022) highlighted the potential application of storytelling to individual products, an aspect that warrants further investigation, as it was noticed that the incorporation of a story for each product could provide deeper insights into product storytelling. Hong et al. (2022) suggested comparing different product categories, such as experiential versus utilitarian versus hedonic, to gain insights into their respective storytelling strategies. Riskos et al. (2022) also proposed studying negative storytelling, an area that has been relatively overlooked compared to the predominant focus on positive emotions by researchers. Additionally, investigating which emotions, such as amazement or pleasure, contribute to better brand perception, as suggested by Gross et al. (2023), presents an intriguing avenue for research. Furthermore, interactive storytelling also has scope (Bansal et al., 2023), for instance, Feng (2018) studied the use of 360 degree ads, indicating the potential for studying storytelling in virtual reality settings.

Storytelling across various industries can be analyzed to determine which sectors derive the greatest advantages from this strategy. According to Yang and Kang (2021) the impact of storytelling varies depending on the type of product. It is possible to compare different product categories to identify which ones storytelling is most suitable for. Karampournioti and Wiedmann (2021) proposed examining storytelling in FMCG, which offers considerable potential. Additionally numerous variables (Li et al., 2019) such as brand equity and brand awareness remain unexplored.

One of the least explored areas is understanding the role of demographics in shaping consumers' perceptions of storytelling (Ma et al., 2023). Investigating how different genders, (Dhote & Kumar, 2019) and ages (Grigsby & Mellema, 2020) respond to storytelling ads holds significant potential.

Kasilingam and Ajitha (2022) proposed examining various themes of storytelling beyond humour and drama. While themes and plots have been studied, comparing them could yield interesting insights. For instance, femvertising as a theme of storytelling has been increasingly prominent in both research and advertising, presenting significant opportunities for further exploration (Kordrostami & Lacznia, 2022). Additionally, Yueh and Zheng (2019) also suggested exploring different advertising appeals in the context of storytelling.

Lee and Jahng (2020) were among the first researchers to explore the use of storytelling as a crisis communication strategy, opening up new avenues for investigation. Their pioneering work has sparked interest in understanding the role of storytelling during crises. They suggested studying psychological processes of storytelling as mediators in crisis communication and Escalas (2004) noted that self-brand connection is a psychological outcome of storytelling. These two aspects could be interconnected and studied further. Sharma and Meena (2022) also observed a notable increase in storytelling-based advertisements during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the potential of storytelling in crisis contexts. Exploring how storytelling can effectively support crisis management remains a crucial and intriguing area of study.

Although co creation has been addressed in storytelling research, there are still numerous contexts waiting to be explored (Carnevale et al., 2018). Another intriguing aspect is storytelling in personal selling, which (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015) have studied, noting the need for further research to generalize the findings. While most papers have predominantly focused on Business-to-Consumer (B2C) scenarios, there is a notable gap in exploring storytelling within Business-to-Business (B2B) settings. Anaza et al. (2020) underscored the necessity for a storytelling scale tailored specifically for B2B contexts. Additionally Ben Youssef et al. (2019) proposed the need for more comparative studies, such as examining storytelling in

well-known versus lesser-known brands. Furthermore Hamby and Brinberg (2016) recommended investigating and contrasting story endings and their effects on consumers. With considerable future potential for exploration, the field of storytelling studies in marketing is poised for significant growth in the coming years.

With numerous unexplored gaps in storytelling, researchers have ample opportunity to conduct compelling studies to uncover new insights into contemporary advertising. By addressing these gaps in future research, scholars can unlock the true potential of storytelling, enabling marketers to implement it more effectively. Both qualitative and quantitative or hybrid studies offer substantial scope for investigation. What researchers can anticipate from this exploration is the identification of storytelling's impact on consumer perceptions, in different contexts or its effectiveness as a competitive strategy, and its influence on brand trust, brand recognition and recall, brand love and beyond. These studies can encompass various markets, consumer segments, and industries, indicating that future research in this area remains largely unexplored and offers significant potential for discovery.

Conclusion

Based on this review paper and the ongoing use of storytelling strategy in marketing, along with its associated positive outcomes, it can be inferred that storytelling strategy is enduring. Storytelling serves not only to establish brand image but also proves valuable during times of crisis for mitigating damage. According to Deng et al. (2022) and (Sharma & Meena, 2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of advertisements adopted storytelling formats, highlighting how advertisers responded to the crisis to engage with their consumers. Given the high success rate of this strategy, brands now utilize storytelling across various occasions. Therefore, future research on this influential and pertinent topic could greatly benefit the entire marketing sector.

Limitations and future scope

While this review paper provides a comprehensive coverage of all storytelling papers published within the marketing domain, there are several limitations to consider. Firstly, we chose to include only empirical papers because their tested variables and established relationships make them more reliable. However, conceptual papers, despite being excluded, may contain valuable insights as well. Secondly, we restricted our selection to papers published after 2013 to ensure the study's relevance. Nevertheless, storytelling research has been conducted since the late 1990s, and older papers could provide additional context. Thirdly, we limited our scope to Scopus-indexed papers to uphold the credibility of the study. Lastly, certain papers were omitted due to their inaccessibility. Future review papers could address these limitations to enhance the comprehensiveness of the study.

Authors contribution

The first author of this study is G Shruthi Priya, a PhD Scholar at VIT Business School and the corresponding author is Dr. A. S. Sathish, Professor at VIT Business School.

Shruthi Conceptualised the topic for the systematic literature review, both authors contributed to finding relevant articles for the review equally, all the articles were reviewed for quality by Dr. Sathish before finalising them for the study. Shruthi typed the whole rough draft of the paper, which was later corrected and revised thoroughly by Dr. Sathish. He has also guided Shruthi throughout the work to ensure the paper follows all ethical standards required. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript to be published and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Data availability statement

As this is a review article, no original data were collected or analysed. All articles referenced in this review were obtained from Scopus indexed journals, ensuring reliability. However, the authors commit to providing access to any supplementary materials or sources used upon reasonable request. G Shruthi Priya is responsible to provide the data mentioned in the statement.

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