

## THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN PUBLIC SPEAKING: APPROACHES AND IMPACT

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### Abstract

This paper explores the art of storytelling and how it can enhance the power and impact of public speaking. By analyzing academic literature and the opinions of professionals this text explores why storytelling resonates with the audience, establishes emotional connections and enhances the retention of the messages we sent to the audience. The paper looks into the fundamental components of storytelling such as narrative structure, audience identification and emotional connection. It also explores storytelling's unique ability to simplify abstract concepts, foster trust and inspire action. By using personal anecdotes, created narratives or shared experiences, the speakers can create memorable and engaging presentations that connect with their audience. The paper emphasizes that storytelling is not only an enhancement to public speaking, but it can be a transformative tool that can break down barriers, give empathy and foster deeper connections between speakers and listeners. Practical techniques for integrating storytelling into public speeches are also discussed, emphasizing its relevance in

contemporary communication. The findings underscore storytelling's potential to inspire, educate and leave a lasting impact on different audiences.

**Keywords:** storytelling, public speaking, audience

## Introduction

Focusing on a lecture for an hour can feel challenging, yet watching a long movie for four-hour like *Avatar 2* often feels effortless. Why is that? The reason is simple: storytelling captivates and holds our attention (Ameresekere 2023).

Throughout history, leaders, educators and notable individuals have used storytelling to effectively and persuasively communicate their ideas. Stories have always been used to inspire, educate and impart wisdom-from the myths and fables of antiquity to the current TED Talks. They have the power to influence audiences' opinions, foster trust and motivate audience to take action. The advantages of using stories in public speeches are becoming increasingly apparent to politicians, business executives, educators and students. Business executives are being advised more and more to switch the traditional approach of communicating vision and mission to a new form, the one that tells the company's story. Academic research highlights how teachers can help students in understanding and remembering material by using stories. Politicians have been taught to tell stories in their speeches for years. Also, Suzuki et al. (2018), found that from different perspectives, scientists find the topic of storytelling to be both fascinating and helpful to engaging in science (Suzuki et al. 2018). Storytelling proves to be a versatile tool, finding relevance across a wide range of fields and communication contexts.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the components and role of storytelling in public speaking. It seeks to highlight how storytelling captures audience attention, establishes emotional connections and enhances message retention. The objective of the paper is to identify the application of

storytelling, components of an effective story and the purposes for using storytelling in public speaking according to previous studies. The paper provides an overview of academic literature, expert opinions and relevant studies to examine the theoretical foundations and practical applications of storytelling in public speaking.

## **Defining key terms**

### *Public speaking*

Public speaking is essential for modern society, enabling individuals to articulate ideas effectively. Carnegie and Eesenwein (2005) define public speaking as the process of conveying information, ideas, or messages to an audience through verbal communication. The authors emphasized the importance of effective presentation, audience engagement, and building confidence in public speaking (Carnegie & Eesenwein 2005).

Stephen A. Lucas has defined public speaking as an “extended conversation” and as such has some similarities to conversations but also some major differences. As a conversation, it has elements of awareness and sensitivity to your audience; an exchange of explicit or less explicit information; a reliance on feedback to know if you are successful in understanding (usually nonverbal in public speaking, but still present). Public speaking is a structured, in-person interaction designed with the intent to inform, entertain, or persuade an audience, typically consisting of five or more individuals, using words, physical presence and occasionally visual or audio aids (Tucker et al. 2018: 3). Meanwhile, DeVito defines public speaking as any form of communication in which a speaker delivers a message in a

unique context to a large audience in a relatively continuous way. He discusses the concept of Contemporary Public Speaking where he emphasizes the importance of audience analysis, effective speech delivery, and ethical considerations that must be followed in public speaking (DeVito 2018).

The evolving role of public speaking in the 21st century underscores its importance for personal growth, professional advancement and leadership development. Additionally, public speaking facilitates personal growth, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving. It also helps increase visibility and recognition in professional networks, which often leads to new opportunities and partnership (Wankhade 2023).

We hear a lot of speeches where people tend to go beyond the theory and the point they are trying to make. Instead, the most memorable speeches are the ones that are filled with stories (Ameresekere 2023).

Presenting a prepared speech in front of an audience is one of the essential skills you need to function effectively in today's society. Also, it is important to mention that public speaking is necessary for almost every job. We promote such skills among colleagues to actively attend events and meetings, learn about the concept of participation and be open to sharing opinions and making any contribution. One needs to understand the components of communication and apply them in his presentations in order to communicate effectively, act professionally and effectively communicate with an audience (Parvis 2001).

The goal of public speaking is to pass information in the minds of your audience, and very effective way to do this is through the telling of a story. People are not ready to give attention to boring things. Telling a story is a way to engage the audience and help the ideas you are presenting come alive.

Presenters can make their speeches more interesting and memorable for the

audience by using storytelling to make them come to life. Speakers may emotionally engage their audience and effectively communicate their message by utilizing the power of storytelling. The audience can have a memorable and powerful experience if it is used a story in the public speaking.

### *Storytelling*

Storytelling has to do with the ability to create a narrative that accomplishes a goal for an audience (Brown-Grant 2022). The definition that the National Storytelling Network gives on storytelling is:

“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 2024).

Storytelling in public speaking refers to the art of using anecdotes, personal stories, or stories to engage and connect with an audience, deliver a message, and enhance the impact and remembering of the content. Storytelling is the art of organizing and presenting stories in a way that captures the audience’s interest and improves the presentation as an entire. Since public speaking is the formalization and expression of oneself, the first step in time and importance is to be, think and feel things that are worthy of being communicated (Carnegie & Esenwein 2005).

Lugmayr et al. (2017), discuss the concept of Serious storytelling and define it as:

“Storytelling outside the context of entertainment, where the narration progresses as a sequence of patterns impressive in quality, relates to a serious context and is a matter of thoughtful process” (Lugmayr et al. 2017: 3).

Storytelling is a skill that can be developed through practice and refinement, according to Goodman, storytelling is powerful because our brains are structured to hear and retain stories. When crafted properly,

stories often move make us take action. Today, there is an ever-growing list of platforms and content strategies vying for space in an already crowded scene. There have never been more ways to reach an audience, but it's harder than ever to truly capture their attention (Goodman 2023).

According to Ameresekere (2023), stories in public speaking are important for three main reasons: they increase credibility by sharing personal experiences, make the message memorable to the audience, and attract attention with the "What's next?" effect, keeping listeners engaged and intrigued (Ameresekere 2023). As communication tools, storytelling content offers numerous advantages, particularly in fostering shared interests and building connections with an audience. Storytelling may generate interest and increase the content's likeability and credibility (Taufiq & Amir 2020). According to Taufiq & Amir, storytelling is a powerful tool in public speaking, offering several key benefits when used effectively such as emotional connection with the audience, maintaining the interest of the audience, make the information more memorable and build trust. Emotional connection is one of its strengths, as stories can evoke emotions and deepen engagement with the audience through personal experiences, relatable characters, or dramatic elements. A well-structured narrative starting with an introduction, rising action and resolution in the end maintains interest and provides a satisfying conclusion. Authors discuss that to resonate with the audience, stories should align with the presentation's topic and purpose and illustrate the key points or offer context. Incorporating vivid descriptions and sensory details makes the story more engaging and memorable, while authenticity builds trust and credibility. Additionally, effective storytelling requires practice, with attention to delivery aspects like tempo, tone, gestures and facial expressions to maximize its impact (Taufiq & Amir 2020).

Mead distinguishes three main principles to storytelling. Effective storytelling engages the audience's rational and emotional centers, making

messages memorable and impactful. Additionally, it fosters critical thinking and action by sparking creativity and internal dialogue. Also, successful storytelling connects the narrative to a clear message, includes concrete details and it follows a structured plotline (Mead 2023).

### **Application of storytelling**

Sinusoid (2021) considers storytelling in public speaking can be effectively applied in three main ways. First, speakers can share personal stories, such as overcoming a significant challenge or achieving a remarkable success, to connect with the audience. Second, they can recount the experiences of others whether personal acquaintances, historical figures, or well-known personalities that align with the presentation's theme. Lastly, storytelling can highlight a product or brand, such as narrating the creative process behind a product's design during its launch. These approaches add relatability, depth and engagement to public speaking (Sinusoid 2021). According to Kent, every story follows a basic pattern: an opening, development and conclusion or ongoing thread (Kent 2015).

### **Components of storytelling**

The key components of storytelling include *plotment* (the type of story being told), narrative theory (the act of telling the story), identification (establishing a connection with the audience), and form (structuring a compelling story) (Kent 2015). *Plotment*, refers to organizing events into a cohesive narrative with a plot that conveys meaning; Narrative Theory, views storytelling as an inherent human activity that uses symbolic actions to influence and connect with others; Identification, which focuses on creating



a bond with the audience by emphasizing shared values, experiences or beliefs; and Form, which structures the story to satisfy the audience's expectations and resonate on a deeper, memorable level. Each element works together to craft impactful and relatable stories (Kent 2015). According to Fisher, every story must resonate with its audience (Fisher 2009).

### **Purpose of storytelling**

Stephen Denning in the work related to storytelling for business purposes defines storytelling as "Narrative, often referred to as storytelling, encompasses a variety of techniques, each tailored to serve distinct business objectives" (Denning 2006). He distinguishes eight objectives of storytelling; sparking action, communicating who you are, transmitting values, communicating who the firm is – branding, fostering collaboration, taming the grapevine, sharing knowledge and leading people into the future. He elaborates how each type of storytelling is designed for a specific purpose. For instance, "Sparking action" involves sharing stories of past successes to motivate change, while "Communicating who you are" uses personal stories to show your strengths or even vulnerability, making you more relatable.

Denning argues that storytelling can be a powerful tool to connect with people and achieve different goals, whether it is building trust, inspiring action, addressing rumours or achieving other goals. It depends on choosing the right kind of story for the moment and telling it in a way that resonates with your audience, so that the audience feels engaged and motivated. Each pattern can be used for specific purpose, such as sparking action, transmitting values, fostering collaboration, or branding an organization. For example, "Sparking action" leverages stories of past success to inspire the audience to present their own potential solutions, while "Transmitting values"

uses relatable characters or situations to present shared principles. See T-1 for an illustration of Denning’s (2006) categorization of narrative patterns.

**T-1: Eight Narrative Patterns for Storytelling (reproduced from Denning 2006)**

<b>Exhibit 1</b> 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!"

All these patterns provide a structured approach to storytelling, allowing communicators to choose the most appropriate narrative style for their goals, ensuring engagement and impact.

According to Kent, the key to good storytelling is to focus on visualizing the plot in terms of its narrative rather than relying on its imagery. Also, it is important to keep details focused and ensure the story matches your values, along with examples of how people might respond to these stories. He argues that public relations use storytelling to express a more

profound message than marketing and advertising, which encourage viewers to consume visual content (Kent 2015).

Stories help us connect with the event/topic, help us connect with the speaker, and entertain us. Effective communication in essence enables individuals to articulate their thoughts, share knowledge and express ideas with clarity and confidence. Storytelling when properly used, can help achieve effective communication in public speaking. Wankhade states that mastery of public speaking not only enhances career prospects by enabling individuals to lead meetings, pitch ideas, negotiate and present projects, but also builds self-assurance, as overcoming the fear of speaking in public leads to increased confidence in diverse situations. Moreover, strong public speaking skills empower individuals to influence and inspire others, creating positive change in personal and professional circles. For leaders, it is indispensable for motivating teams, communicating vision, and fostering collaboration (Wankhade 2023).

## **Conclusions**

Storytelling is a powerful tool that can be used during public speeches we have. The speaker has the ability to engage, motivate and make a lasting impression on the audience by using storytelling. The ability of storytelling to go beyond boundaries, establish a connection between the speaker and the audience and create an impression that lasts for a very long time, has been demonstrated by a number of writers and specialists who study storytelling in different contexts. By aligning narratives with specific purposes, such as sparking action, fostering collaboration or communicating values the storytelling can be used to create meaningful and lasting connections with audiences. The identified components, including the choice of story type,

appropriate details and strategic delivery underline the importance of creating stories that resonate emotionally and intellectually with the listeners.

Moreover, the practical applications of storytelling extend across a wide range of contexts starting from professional branding and knowledge sharing to leadership and organizational change. By incorporating these narrative patterns into communication strategies, individuals and organizations can inspire engagement in shared values and provoke action. Ultimately, storytelling has the ability to not only convey messages effectively but also to shape the future by connecting past experiences with forward-looking aspirations.

This exploration of storytelling offers us insights into the purpose, key components and practical applications of storytelling in public speaking. By considering this information we can make informed decisions on how to effectively integrate storytelling into our public speaking opportunities, ensuring our messages are purposeful, engaging and with impact.

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