

I-LanD Journal – Identity, Language and Diversity
International Peer-Reviewed Journal

Call for papers for the special issue (1/2021)

***Narrating and communicating business ‘stories’-
multifaceted approaches to corporate communication***

This special issue of the *I-LanD Journal* will focus on narratives aimed at asserting and promoting corporate identities. It will be edited by Paola Catenaccio (University of Milan, Italy), Stefania D’Avanzo (University of Campania ‘L. Vanvitelli’, Italy), Geert Jacobs (Ghent University, Belgium).

Submission of abstracts

Authors wishing to contribute to this issue are invited to send an extended abstract of their proposed article ranging between 600 and 1.000 words (excluding references) in MS Word format to the three editors by the 20th October 2020. Proposals should not contain the authors' name and academic/professional affiliation and should be accompanied by an email including such personal information and sent to: paola.catenaccio@unimi.it; stefania.davanzo@unicampania.it; geert.jacobs@ugent.be. Please put as subject line “I-LanD Special Issue 1/2021 – abstract submission”, and include the Journal e-mail address – ilandjournal@unior.it – by using the Cc option.

In order to meet the editorial process, the most important dates to remember are as follows:

- Submission of abstracts: October 20, 2020
- Notification of acceptance/rejection: November 10, 2020
- Submission of chapters: March 10, 2021

Description

As a central feature of human experience and understanding, storytelling plays a central role in all areas of human activity. Since the so-called “narrative turn” (Smith 1981; Bruner 1987, 1991; Labov /Waletzky 1997; Hyvärinen 1997, 1998; Ryan 2005; Meretoja 2014) in the last decade of the past century, narrative inquiry has been used across a variety of disciplines, ranging from anthropology to psychiatry, to politics, to healthcare, where storytelling has been both an object and a method of research. A field that has particularly benefited from the growing interest for storytelling has been that of corporate discourse, where one of the key functions of storytelling is argued to be that of constructing and maintaining corporate collective identity. Such collective identity [...] “‘resides’ in the collective identity stories that, for example, people tell to each other in their conversations, write into corporate histories, and encode on websites” (Brown 2006: 734). More specifically, from

a narrative perspective, organizations' identities are identified as discursive linguistic constructs constituted by the multiple identity-relevant narratives that their participants author about them, and which feature, for example, in documents, conversations and electronic media (Brown 2006). Thus, narratives can be performative, as they are "speech acts 'bringing into existence a social reality that did not exist before their utterance' (Ford and Ford 1995). This conceptualisation of storytelling has a long history, and derives from social constructionist and critical studies which have suggested that narratives are the products of particular contexts (Gabriel 1995), that fragments of narrative intertextually dialogue with, quote from and anticipate other narratives (Fairclough 1992), and that organizations literally are narratives (Cooren 1999) or antenarrative networks of dynamic and unfinished stories (Boje 2001).

Corporate narratives can therefore emerge from individual narratives, but also exist in their own right, as institutionalized stories which can play key roles across a broad range of corporate functions and communication activities (Clifton / Schnurr / Van De Mieroop 2020). The uses of corporate narratives besides and beyond identity building and maintenance have been attracting considerable interest in recent years. For instance, a recent study by Riviezzo et al. (2015) has shown the close connection existing between the orientation of the personal storytelling of Italian family firm owners and the persuasive strategies enacted in the companies' promotional discourse, suggesting that storytelling plays a role – however indirect – in defining marketing strategies and constructing promotional identities.

Storytelling has also been shown to be crucial in the construction of corporate ethos and the communication of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement. For instance, transmedia storytelling has been analysed as a lens for understanding and guiding the use of various social media channels in the distribution of CSR communication (Coombs 2019), and CSR storytelling has been explored as a strategy to shape stakeholders understanding of social responsibility and manage impressions about CSR conduct (Paynter / Halabi / Tuck 2019: 205).

The above-mentioned studies also bring to the fore the changing nature of corporate storytelling. Traditionally conceived as entrusted to sequential narrative forms, often in exclusively verbal mode (albeit frequently accompanied by supporting images), storytelling has progressively become less linear as digitalized forms of communication have gained importance. For instance, the innovative use of storytelling in social media, especially on Twitter, resulted to be extremely effective in legitimacy diffusion as the storytelling elements, specifically cognitive, pragmatic and emotional elements influenced the extent on diffusion as well as network density and eigenvector centrality (Phillips / Rutherford / Moore 2019). Finally, storytelling is currently conceived as a publishable, screenable and sharable digital resource, often involving multimodal features (Gachago 2015). Thus, the multimodal dimension, defined as the employment of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, along with the way in which these modes are combined (Kress / van Leeuwen 2001) can provide us with novel insights into the narrative effects of the interplay of the multiple semiotic processes (Kress / van Leeuwen 2001) employed on corporate websites in order to assert or promote corporate identity.

In this scenario, this issue aims to present a variety of approaches and methodologies to be applied to storytelling and narrative analysis in corporate communication from both corporate and discourse studies perspectives.

The editors are particularly interested in bringing to the fore the possible 'encounters' between linguistic and corporate studies in terms of investigation of promotional strategies and corporate identity through a variety of methodological lenses. The questions contributors are called upon to consider, analyse and debate include, but are not limited to, the following:

- To what extent do narrative approaches contribute to corporate identity and promotion?
- What are the relevant features characterizing storytelling in corporate communication?
- How has corporate storytelling evolved due to its application to social media?

Possible areas of inquiry may include, but are not limited to:

- Narratives in corporate communication
- Corporate discourse communication
- Corporate Storytelling & Social media
- Multimodal approaches to business communication
- CDA & Corporate Discourse
- CSR communication & Corporate Storytelling
- Appraisal approaches to business communication

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