

## ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION, ONLINE PRESENCE AND NARRATIVE PATTERNS

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### Abstract

*The communication of organizations (companies, communities, NGOs, heritage institutions, etc.) takes place in a complex and heterogeneous context, characterized in particular by the omnipresence of digital ecosystems (web, social networks, Internet of data, etc.) which should not, however, make us forget the requirements of multicultural communication at different scales. Digital Presences of Organizations highlight the communicative issues of organizations as they emerge, not only from their websites, but also from the construction of online narratives. This multi-faceted and multi-strategy digital presence of organizations is addressed through three main thematic axes. The first focuses on the **differentiated strategies** (of content, services, interaction) that can be identified according to the types of organizations and users. Then the second axis questions the **role of narrative** in the online communication strategies of organizations. Finally, the focus is on **the impact of narrative consistency** on online organizational presence.*

**Keywords:** *narrative patterns, social media, organizational communication*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 70 years, the image of an organization has evolved from being a mere machine to a socio-cultural system. This change in the image and characteristics of an organization has also led to change in the way communication strategies are created and deployed in organizations as the focus has shifted from systems to people.

Today it is believed that employees are the most important asset of an organization and communication systems is like the nervous system of the body connecting the people and the work. In a practical sense, communication cannot be defined by a simple model involving a sender, a receiver, and a message. This system involves the sender's and receiver's emotions and feelings and the way they interpret and act on the message as well. It is in this very subjective art of interpretation and conviction to action that storytelling excels over any other means of organizational communication.

### 2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

#### *2.1. Definition and areas of diffusion*

Organizational communication is an important element of any successful business. A company's organizational communication encompasses many different styles of communication between many different groups of people. All the representers of the organizational community must take part in the entire process of internal and external communication, even if, sometimes, it may seem impossible. One time, in one way, everyone dealing with the company can be a communicational element. Formal or informal, downward, or horizontal, oral, or written, internal or external communication, effective organizational communication must create a good and prosper environment for the organization development. Creating a brand, implementing organizational policies, better respond to unforeseen events, stay focused on the same goals, maintain a positive workspace, growing and changing together, composing and recomposing a public image for the company, all these can be the communication dimensions in an organization.

Communication scholars agree that organizations “are processes which create, maintain, and dissolve social collectives, that these processes constitute the work of organizing, and that the ways in which these processes are continuously executed are the organization” (Weick 1965, p. 1). Keyton (2011, p. 11) simply says that “organizations cannot exist without communication”. Communication is necessary in the organizing process. During organizational creation, staffing and hiring, and creating and developing the organization’s products and services, organizational members are **communicating** with one another and with stakeholders (customers, suppliers, and regulators, etc.). Thus, organizational communication involves a variety of communication activities between different types of senders and receivers - as individuals, groups, or teams- and the organization as a whole. McPhee & Zaug (2001) point out that communication is also tailored to interrelated and overlapping organizational functions. Through communication, an organization socializes or negotiates, structures or controls. Other communication dimension is designed for negotiating and coordinating work activities. Internal or external, the communication processes are role-related. Across these different functions, communication can be formal or informal; planned or unplanned; as well as verbal, nonverbal, written, or visual. Communication may be face to face or mediated. The processes of leading, supervising, decision making, managing conflict, and hiring and firing are unfolding, creating the day-to-day reality of employees and management.

### *2.2. Online organizational communication strategies*

In the first decades of the 21st century, because of the mutation in the field of publicity and organizational communication, communications departments decided to build an active online presence to inform their target audiences, After a period of relatively homogeneous strategies and parallel paths, companies with online communication departments chose **innovation** and **tactics** tailored to their specific situation as a strategic element. In parallel with this practical development, the academic literature has also followed and analyzed the evolution of online communication departments. A panorama of relative creativity has emerged, tending towards **multimedia content** and **hypertextuality**, but with smaller steps towards interactivity with the end user (Dader et al. 2014; Sánchez Duarte and Rodríguez Esperanza 2013).

Communication strategy in the digital age performs plural roles and tries to keep up with the changes that characterize the information age. The information age is characterized by **interactivity** in the production and consumption of digital information, leading to the dominance of **interactive media**, which have been developing at an increasingly high speed and introducing **new communication rules, strategies and routines**. Due to fast exchange of information, messages have become **shorter** and new communication signs have been developed (e.g. **emoticons**), thus making communication even faster. **Science** and **art** became the source of creative ideas for the organizational communication. The proliferation of social media and information communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed the communication landscape for the organizational communication too.

## **3. NARRATIVES PATTERNS IN ONLINE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION**

### *3.1. Narratives*

The use of social media in organizations has advanced from experimentation to mainstream level implementation (Pillet and Carillo 2016), with the aim of increasing competitiveness and gaining business value for organizations (Bughin and Chui 2013).

Most people have a preconceived notion of what it means to tell a story. Communications professionals supplement this colloquial understanding of narrative by articulating some factors that distinguish narrative as a form of communication. Narratives follow a particular structure that describes cause-and-effect relationships between events that occur over a period of time and impact certain participants. Narrative communication is often identified by its reliance on causality, temporality, and characters as key elements (Norris, Guilbert et. al. 2005). These factors provide a consistent definition of narrative communication that transcends specific content, allowing narratives to be present in various forms of

communication across different platforms. While conversations between people, television programs, and news profiles are obvious examples of narrative communication, narratives can also appear in broader contexts through testimonies, examples, case studies, or eyewitness reports.

Conversely, narratives are often compared to illustrative or argumentative communication and to different types of explanation, such as descriptive, deductive, or statistical methods (Norris, Guilbert et al. 2005). In addition, narrative is often contrasted with logical scientific communication, which underlies most scientific disciplines. The difference between logical science and narrative forms lies mainly in three things: the direction of generalization, the dependence on context, and the criteria of validity.

### *3.2. Narrative Strategies for Enhancing Organizational Communication in the Digital Era*

In the digital era, where communication channels are rapidly evolving, organizations can employ various narrative strategies to enhance their organizational communication. These strategies help organizations effectively (1) convey their messages, (2) engage their audiences, and (3) build meaningful connections. These narrative strategies can help organizations adapt to the digital era's communication landscape and gaining visibility and why not, profit. By embracing these strategies, organizations can foster stronger connections, build trust, and achieve their communication goals more effectively.

In online organizational communication, various narrative patterns can emerge depending on the purpose and context of the communication. Here are some narrative strategies for enhancing organizational communication in the digital era:

**(1) Storytelling:** Storytelling remains a powerful narrative strategy in the digital era. Organizations can use stories to communicate their mission, values, and brand identity. By crafting compelling narratives, organizations can captivate their audiences, create emotional connections, and make their messages more memorable. Storytelling can be done through blog posts, videos, social media campaigns, and other digital platforms.

**(2) Multimedia Communication:** With the rise of digital media, organizations can leverage multimedia elements such as videos, images, infographics, and interactive content to enhance their communication. These elements can make complex information more accessible, engage different senses, and increase audience engagement. Multimedia communication can be used in presentations, online training, social media posts, and websites.

**(3) User-Generated Content:** Organizations can involve their employees, customers, and stakeholders in the communication process by encouraging user-generated content. This strategy empowers individuals to share their experiences, opinions, and stories related to the organization. User-generated content can be in the form of testimonials, reviews, case studies, or social media posts. It not only strengthens engagement but also fosters a sense of community and authenticity.

**(4) Personalization:** Personalization is an effective strategy to enhance organizational communication in the digital era. By tailoring messages and content to individual preferences, organizations can make their communication more relevant and meaningful. Personalization can be achieved through targeted email campaigns, customized landing pages, interactive chatbots, and personalized recommendations based on user data.

**(5) Real-time Communication:** Digital platforms enable real-time communication, which organizations can leverage to enhance their responsiveness and engagement. Live streaming, webinars, social media chats, and instant messaging allow organizations to interact with their audiences in real-time, answer questions, and address concerns promptly. Real-time communication builds trust, encourages dialogue, and fosters a sense of transparency.

**(6) Data-driven Communication:** In the digital era, organizations have access to vast amounts of data. By using data analytics and insights, organizations can tailor their communication strategies to better understand their audience's preferences, behavior, and needs. Data-driven communication allows organizations to deliver targeted messages, measure the impact of their communication efforts, and continuously refine their strategies for better results.

**(7) Collaborative Communication:** Digital platforms enable collaboration and co-creation. Organizations can leverage this by involving employees and stakeholders in the communication process. Collaborative communication strategies, such as internal discussion forums, project management tools, and virtual collaboration spaces, encourage participation, foster innovation, and enhance organizational cohesion.

**(8) Success Stories:** Organizations often share success stories or case studies to highlight achievements, milestones, or positive outcomes. These narratives typically emphasize the organization's capabilities, expertise, and the benefits of their products or services. Success stories may feature customer testimonials, quantitative results, and a clear narrative arc that showcases the organization's problem-solving abilities.

**(9) Change Narratives:** When organizations undergo significant changes such as mergers, restructuring, or implementing new strategies, they often communicate these changes through narratives. Change narratives typically include the reasons behind the change, the envisioned future state, and the benefits or positive impacts expected from the change. These narratives can help create a sense of purpose and alignment among employees and stakeholders.

**(10) Personal Journeys:** Organizations sometimes use personal narratives to connect with their audience on a more emotional level. These narratives may feature individual employees, customers, or community members sharing their personal experiences related to the organization's products, services, or social initiatives. Personal journeys highlight the human aspect of the organization and can be effective in building trust, empathy, and loyalty.

**(11) Historical Narratives:** Organizations with a rich history often leverage narratives that highlight their heritage, milestones, and significant events. Historical narratives can be used to establish a sense of credibility, tradition, and longevity. They may include stories about the organization's founding, key figures, and notable achievements throughout the years. By connecting the present with the past, historical narratives can help reinforce the organization's values and identity.

**(12) Problem-Solution Narratives:** In communication related to products or services, organizations often use problem-solution narratives. These narratives typically present a common problem or challenge faced by the target audience and then propose the organization's offering as the solution. The narrative may outline the problem's impact, demonstrate an understanding of the audience's pain points, and present the organization's unique value proposition as the resolution.

**(13) Vision and Mission Stories:** Organizations often share narratives that articulate their vision, mission, and core values. These narratives aim to inspire and engage employees and stakeholders by providing a compelling story about the organization's purpose and the impact it seeks to achieve. Vision and mission stories often emphasize the organization's aspirations, the values it upholds, and the positive change it aims to create in the world.

It's important to note that these narrative patterns can overlap and be combined in various ways. Additionally, the specific narrative patterns used in online organizational communication can vary greatly depending on the industry, organizational culture, target audience, and communication goals.

Graesser and Ottati (1995) suggest that narratives hold a "privileged status" in human cognition. It is important to note that these advantages do not stem from simplicity, as coherent narratives require a high level of sophistication in terms of internal complexity and conformity to cultural and social expectations. Rather, narratives are thought to offer inherent advantages through four key stages of information processing (motivation and interest, allocation of cognitive resources, elaboration, and transition to long-term memory).

Therefore, narrative cognition is believed to serve as the default mode of human thought, imparting structure to our understanding of reality and forming the fundamental basis for memory (18). This reliance on narratives is thought to be evolutionarily advantageous, as narratives offer a framework for comprehending and simulating possible realities. This capacity enables individuals to better anticipate cause-and-effect relationships and to model the thoughts and behaviors of other humans within the intricate social interactions that characterize our species.

### *3.3. The Role of Narrative Patterns in Shaping Organizational Communication Strategies*

The role of narrative patterns in shaping organizational communication strategies is significant, as they can greatly enhance the effectiveness of communication with stakeholders. By incorporating narrative patterns into their online presence, organizations can create engaging, memorable, and impactful communication experiences. Here are some ways organizations can effectively incorporate narrative patterns in their online presence to enhance communication with stakeholders:

- (1) **Define Clear Objectives:** Before incorporating narrative patterns into their online presence, organizations should clearly define their communication objectives. Whether it's to inform, persuade, inspire, or build relationships, having clear objectives helps shape the choice of narrative patterns and ensures alignment with overall communication goals.
- (2) **Understand the Target Audience:** To effectively incorporate narrative patterns, organizations must have a deep understanding of their target audience. By knowing their preferences, interests, and communication preferences, organizations can select narrative patterns that resonate with the stakeholders and effectively engage them.
- (3) **Craft Compelling Stories:** Narrative patterns thrive on compelling stories. Organizations can identify relevant stories from their history, successes, challenges, or individual experiences within the organization. These stories can be crafted to align with the narrative patterns and convey the desired message to stakeholders in an engaging and relatable manner.
- (4) **Consistent Branding and Messaging:** Incorporating narrative patterns in online communication should be done in a way that maintains consistent branding and messaging. The narratives should align with the organization's brand identity, values, and tone of voice. Consistency helps stakeholders recognize and connect with the organization's narrative and builds trust over time.
- (5) **Utilize Different Media Channels:** Organizations should leverage various digital media channels to incorporate narrative patterns effectively. Blogs, social media posts, videos, podcasts, infographics, and interactive content can all be utilized to deliver narratives in engaging and diverse formats. Different media channels provide opportunities to reach a wider audience and cater to different communication preferences.
- (6) **Encourage User Engagement:** Incorporating narrative patterns in online communication should encourage user engagement and participation. Organizations can invite stakeholders to share their stories, opinions, and experiences related to the organization. This fosters a sense of community, strengthens relationships, and adds authenticity to the narrative.
- (7) **Measure and Refine:** Organizations should continuously measure the effectiveness of their narrative patterns in online communication. Metrics such as engagement rates, feedback, and audience response can provide insights into what works and what needs improvement. This data can be used to refine the narrative patterns and communication strategies over time.
- (8) **Adapt to Feedback:** Feedback from stakeholders is invaluable in shaping organizational communication strategies. Organizations should actively listen to the feedback received, understand the needs and expectations of stakeholders, and adapt their narrative patterns accordingly. This iterative approach ensures that the communication remains relevant, resonates with the audience, and meets their evolving needs.

By effectively incorporating narrative patterns in their online presence, organizations can enhance their communication with stakeholders. These narrative patterns make communication more engaging, memorable, and relatable, helping organizations build stronger relationships, foster trust, and achieve their communication objectives.

### *3.4. The Impact of Narrative Consistency on Online Organizational Presence*

Maintaining a consistent narrative across different online channels is crucial for establishing a strong and cohesive organizational presence. Consistency in narrative helps organizations convey a clear and unified message to their stakeholders, enhancing their understanding, recognition, and perception of the

organization. Here are some ways in which narrative consistency impacts online organizational presence:

- (1) **Brand Identity:** Consistency in narrative ensures that the organization's brand identity is effectively communicated across different online channels. A consistent narrative helps stakeholders recognize and associate the organization with specific values, qualities, and characteristics. This contributes to building a strong and recognizable brand identity.
- (2) **Coherence and Clarity:** When the organization maintains a consistent narrative across online channels, it promotes coherence and clarity in its communication. Stakeholders encounter a cohesive message that is easily understood and absorbed, regardless of the channel they engage with. This consistency eliminates confusion, reinforces key messages, and enhances overall comprehension.
- (3) **Trust and Credibility:** A consistent narrative builds trust and credibility among stakeholders. When stakeholders encounter consistent messages across various online channels, it demonstrates reliability, authenticity, and professionalism. Consistency fosters a sense of reliability and trustworthiness, which is vital for establishing and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders.
- (4) **Differentiation:** In a crowded online landscape, consistency in narrative helps organizations differentiate themselves from competitors. By maintaining a distinct and consistent narrative, organizations can highlight their unique value propositions, core strengths, and strategic focus. This differentiation helps stakeholders understand what sets the organization apart and why they should choose to engage with it.
- (5) **Emotional Connection:** Consistency in narrative contributes to establishing an emotional connection with stakeholders. When the organization consistently communicates its values, mission, and purpose, it resonates with stakeholders on a deeper level. This emotional connection fosters loyalty, engagement, and a sense of belonging among stakeholders.
- (6) **Reinforcement of Key Messages:** Organizations often have key messages or central themes they want to convey to their stakeholders. Maintaining a consistent narrative across online channels helps reinforce these key messages effectively. When stakeholders encounter consistent messages repeatedly, it increases the chances of those messages being remembered, internalized, and acted upon.
- (7) **Alignment with Offline Presence:** For organizations with both online and offline presence, narrative consistency is crucial for ensuring alignment between the two. When stakeholders experience a consistent narrative online that aligns with the organization's offline activities, events, and communications, it strengthens the overall organizational presence and reinforces a unified image.
- (8) **Long-term Relationships:** Consistency in narrative contributes to the development of long-term relationships with stakeholders. When stakeholders consistently encounter a coherent and consistent narrative over time, it fosters a sense of familiarity, trust, and loyalty. This long-term relationship-building is essential for organizations to establish a strong and enduring presence.

By maintaining a consistent narrative across different online channels, organizations create a cohesive and compelling organizational presence. This consistency reinforces brand identity, promotes clarity and trust, differentiates the organization, establishes emotional connections, reinforces key messages, aligns online and offline presence, and fosters long-term relationships with stakeholders.

### *3.5. Measuring the Effectiveness of Narrative-Based Organizational Communication*

Measuring the effectiveness of narrative-based organizational communication is essential for organizations to understand the impact of their online presence and communication efforts. While evaluating the impact of narrative patterns can be subjective to some extent, there are several metrics and indicators that organizations can utilize. Here are some examples:

- (1) **Engagement Metrics:** Engagement metrics provide insights into how stakeholders interact with the organization's online content. Metrics such as likes, shares, comments, retweets, and social media

followers can indicate the level of engagement and interest generated by the narrative-based communication. Higher engagement typically suggests that the narrative resonates with the audience.

- (2) **Website Analytics:** Website analytics tools can provide valuable data on the effectiveness of narrative-based communication. Metrics like page views, time spent on pages, bounce rate, and conversion rates can indicate the level of interest and engagement with the organization's narratives. Analyzing these metrics can help identify which narratives are driving traffic and generating desired actions on the website.
- (3) **Reach and Impressions:** Reach and impressions metrics reveal the extent to which the organization's narrative-based communication is reaching its target audience. This can include metrics such as the number of unique visitors, reach on social media platforms, and the total impressions of posts or content. High reach and impressions indicate that the narratives are effectively reaching a wide audience.
- (4) **Brand Awareness and Recognition:** Organizations can assess brand awareness and recognition as indicators of the effectiveness of narrative-based communication. Surveys, brand recall studies, or social listening tools can be utilized to gauge how well stakeholders recognize and recall the organization's narratives, key messages, and brand identity.
- (5) **Qualitative Feedback:** Gathering qualitative feedback from stakeholders can provide valuable insights into the impact of narrative-based communication. Conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups can help understand stakeholders' perceptions, emotions, and attitudes towards the narratives. Qualitative feedback can reveal the resonance, clarity, and relevance of the narratives.
- (6) **User-generated Content:** User-generated content related to the organization's narratives, such as testimonials, reviews, or stories shared by stakeholders, can serve as an indicator of the impact. Analyzing the volume and sentiment of user-generated content can provide insights into how stakeholders are engaging with and responding to the narratives.
- (7) **Conversion and Action Metrics:** Depending on the organization's goals, conversion and action metrics can indicate the effectiveness of narrative-based communication. These metrics can include the number of downloads, sign-ups, registrations, purchases, or other desired actions that result from stakeholders' engagement with the narratives.
- (8) **Long-term Relationships and Loyalty:** Assessing the development of long-term relationships and loyalty among stakeholders can indicate the effectiveness of narrative-based communication. Monitoring metrics such as customer retention rates, repeat purchases, or stakeholder satisfaction surveys can help gauge the impact of narratives on building strong and enduring relationships.

It's important to note that the choice of metrics should align with the organization's specific goals and objectives. By analyzing these metrics and indicators, organizations can gain insights into the effectiveness of their narrative-based communication, identify areas for improvement, and refine their online presence and communication strategies.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

In today's digital era, the convergence of organizational communication, online presence, and narrative patterns has become increasingly relevant and impactful. This comprehensive analysis delves into the dynamic relationship between these three key components, examining their influence on organizational (1) success, (2) stakeholder engagement, and (3) brand perception.

Furthermore, the analysis delves into the role of narrative patterns in organizational communication and online presence. Narrative patterns refer to the storytelling techniques and structures employed by organizations to shape their messages, engage audiences, and create a cohesive brand identity. The paper examines how narrative patterns can facilitate the construction of compelling narratives that resonate with stakeholders and enhance organizational credibility.

Narratives possess inherent persuasive qualities. Unlike general truths, narratives rely on describing specific experiences, eliminating the need for explicit justifications of their claims. The story itself serves as evidence for the claim being made. Additionally, the structure of narratives establishes a cause-and-effect relationship among events, creating a sense of inevitability in the narrative's conclusion, even though multiple possibilities could have unfolded. This sense of inevitability, combined with the absence of a requirement for justification, allows narratives to incorporate normative elements, such as defining what is good or bad, without explicitly articulating or defending them. By effortlessly imparting values to real-world objects without the need for argumentation, narratives become challenging to counter.

The field of narrative persuasion delves into the persuasive aspects of narratives, investigating how audiences tend to accept normative views presented in narratives and the underlying mechanisms that facilitate such persuasion. Findings generally indicate that audiences are more inclined to accept normative evaluations conveyed through narratives compared to logical-scientific arguments, and that various factors mediate and moderate this tendency.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this study investigates the impact of organizational communication, online presence, and narrative patterns on key organizational outcomes, such as reputation management, employee engagement, customer loyalty, and organizational performance. It explores the interplay between these components, considering how effective organizational communication strategies influence the development and implementation of narrative patterns across digital platforms. Overall, the integration of narrative patterns into organizational communication and online presence can provide a powerful means of conveying messages, building connections, and shaping perceptions. By leveraging the inherent storytelling nature of narratives, organizations can establish a compelling online presence that resonates with their audience, promotes their values, and drives their desired outcomes.

This short analysis provides a multidimensional perspective on the interrelationship between organizational communication, online presence, and narrative patterns, offering valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and organizations seeking to optimize their communication strategies and digital presence.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Online presence plays a crucial role in organizational communication, as it serves as a platform for engaging with stakeholders, building relationships, and shaping public perception. Through websites, social media platforms, blogs, and other digital channels, organizations have the opportunity to tell compelling stories, share experiences, and create meaningful connections. By understanding and harnessing narrative patterns, organizations can craft narratives that resonate with their target audiences, evoke emotions, and drive engagement.

However, it is important to recognize the ethical considerations and potential risks associated with utilizing narratives in online organizational communication. Misinformation, the spread of false narratives, and the potential for manipulation highlight the need for responsible and transparent communication practices. Organizations must maintain authenticity, credibility, and integrity in their online narratives to build trust and foster positive relationships with their stakeholders.

In conclusion, the intersection of organizational communication, online presence, and narrative patterns presents significant opportunities and challenges for businesses and institutions in the digital age. The power of narratives in shaping perceptions, engaging audiences, and conveying messages is evident in the online realm. By strategically utilizing narrative patterns, organizations can enhance their online presence and effectively communicate their values, brand identity, and messages.

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