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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Digital Storytelling in Entrepreneurial Marketing: Case Studies of Sri Lankan Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Storytelling has emerged as a vital communication strategy for entrepreneurs, enabling them to market their offerings more effectively and establish meaningful connections with stakeholders to enhance their competitiveness. With advancements in communication technology and the widespread adoption of the internet, digital storytelling has become an accessible and powerful tool for entrepreneurs. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the role of digital storytelling in the context of entrepreneurial marketing. A qualitative multiple case study method is followed to achieve this purpose selecting four Sri Lankan entrepreneurial organizations. Secondary data is gathered from documentary evidence and the primary data is collected using semi-structured interviews. The analysis of is undertaken using the thematic analysis.

As per the findings digital storytelling conveys the brand narrative of entrepreneurs and also it is a tool for connecting with target audience. Further, digital storytelling is playing an important role for communicating the uniqueness of the entrepreneurial business. Therefore, the paper contended that digital storytelling allows for more authentic, memorable branding that resonates with customers, differentiates from rivalry, and cultivates a growth mindset to create an innovative entrepreneurial culture. The paper concludes by presenting a conceptual flow that illustrates how digital storytelling functions as a strategic capability, leading to enhanced entrepreneurial marketing, ecosystem development, and societal outcomes.

Keywords: *Case study design, Digital storytelling, Entrepreneurial marketing, Stakeholders*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been a compelling way of communication for mankind over the years by transmitting knowledge, values and norms. In the modern world of business, it is being used as an effective communication tool to connect and related well with the marketplace. Kotler and Keller (2006) contended that storytelling is one qualitative measure in marketing research where people are prompted to tell personal stories about their consumer experiences. In today's crowded marketplace customers are bombarded with information overload. Therefore, organizations have to cut through the clutter to be successful. Storytelling can be accepted as one of the techniques to reach the customers more effectively during the clutter created by plethora of media penetration.

Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott (2001) pointed out that there are three facets in stories. Firstly, stories can be viewed as factual reports of events. Secondly, stories contain myths since those contain the story teller's interpretation of the event. Thirdly, stories can be seen as narrative as they can provide means to understand the events and to construct their reality. Moreover, Simmons (2002) contended that story contains emotional content as "… a story is a narrative account of an event or events – true or fictional. The difference between giving an example and telling a story is the addition of emotional content and added sensory details in the telling. A story weaves detail, character, and events into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts." (Simmons, 2002, p. 31). Therefore, storytelling needs to be constructed with an understanding in neuroscience, emotion and cognition rather than mere story spreading of a product or service.

Fog et al. (2005) mentioned that there are four components in storytelling namely message, the conflict, the characters and the plot. The message has to be credible and transparent. The conflict refers to the driving force of a good story, and it is important to note that in the absence of conflict a story cannot be developed. Further, the character in the story has to play specific roles and the plot can be explained as the progress of the story. In developing a story all these components are equally important to create the best story. Therefore, those who intends to craft stories have to have a proper understanding prior to embark on storytelling.

Storytelling has not been seen as a mainframe communication strategy among the entrepreneurs to market their offerings and operations for the stakeholders. However, some of the entrepreneurial organizations have started using digital storytelling as an effective mechanism to bring their story to the society and market and particularly to the global market (Haley & Boje, 2014). Entrepreneurial organizations do not much focus on scale and instead their orientation is on "Being different" from the rivals. Therefore, in modern marketing what is important is to share how a particular entrepreneur is different from the other counterparts by highlighting its unique and path dependent approach.

The integration of digital storytelling in entrepreneurial marketing (EM) is an emerging field of research that has gained increasing attention in recent years (Maharani & Setiawati, 2023; O'Connor, 2002). However, there are significant gaps in understanding how digital storytelling can be effectively employed to communicate entrepreneurial narratives and foster brand identity (Moss et al., 2011; Woodside, 2010). While traditional storytelling has been widely explored in marketing and organizational studies, the transition to digital platforms presents unique challenges and opportunities that remain underexplored (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Liguori et al., 2018). Specifically, there is limited empirical research on the methods involved in creating effective digital stories that resonate with entrepreneurial context. Present studies often focus on consumer perceptions and brand narratives in large corporations, overlooking the distinctive needs and characteristics of entrepreneurs and small businesses (Roundy, 2016; Santos et al., 2019). Addressing this research gap could provide valuable insights into the development of effective digital storytelling in entrepreneurial context. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of digital storytelling in the context of EM.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM)

The exploration of EM as a novel area of research gained momentum in 1982, with the organization of a conference by the International Council for Small Business and the American Marketing Association. The concept of EM has evolved to encompass the

marketing efforts of small and emerging businesses. It has emerged as a dynamic and promising area of research. While examining marketing practices in small and new ventures is crucial due to their significant economic impact, EM extends beyond this small and new venture context. Morris et al. (2002, p. 4) stated that "the term 'entrepreneurial marketing' has been used in various ways, and often somewhat loosely". The reason for this is the multiple interpretations for the concept of EM. Further, since entrepreneurship and marketing can be conceptualized in various ways, it's understandable that there are numerous explanations on EM.

Stokes (2000) contended that EM focuses on innovations and the development of ideas in line with an intuitive understanding of market needs. Accordingly, EM highlights innovations which can differentiate an entrepreneur from others and also it implies the necessity of creativity in EM. Also, EM is characterized with agility and adaptability in order to be competitive without a structured approach available in large business corporations. Miles and Darroch (2006) mentioned that firms adopting EM processes, will engage in marketing processes emphasizing opportunity creation and/or discovery, evaluation and exploitation. Therefore, in comparison with traditional marketing, EM actively create and discover new opportunities with the intention of introducing new products and services. Hills et al. (2008) also provided a similar explanation on EM by highlighting it as a spirit, an orientation, as well as a process of pursuing opportunities and launching and growing ventures that create perceived customer value through relationships, especially by employing innovativeness, creativity, selling, market immersion, networking or flexibility. In this case, entrepreneurial marketers are seen as innovators who going behind opportunities and more importantly they capitalize on the relationships developed with numerous stakeholders which is practically followed by the entrepreneurs. Kraus et al. (2010) pointed out that EM is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders, and that is characterized by innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and may be performed without resources currently controlled. They have also highlighted the importance of generating value through EM by being innovative and more importantly

entrepreneurial marketers are in a position to create value even without owning their own resources.

In looking at the above explanations on EM, it can be identified as a phenomenon with the following characteristics.

- Pursue innovation: entrepreneurial marketers needs to generate innovative ideas throughout their business operations and convert those to products and services in the market place.
- Customer value creation: all most all the activities that the entrepreneurial marketers are undertaking need to focus on creating value for customers by enhancing the total benefits while reducing the costs for them.
- Proactive behavior: entrepreneurial marketers should be vigilant regarding the changes happening in the business environment and accordingly respond in advance prior to the rivalry.
- Networking with stakeholders: lack of resources is one of the main challenges encountered by EM and hence they need to closely work relevant stakeholders in capitalizing the opportunities

Moreover, some of the researchers looked into uncover the differences between EM and traditional marketing. Accordingly, Stokes (2000) summarized the differences based on four dimensions: business orientation, collecting information, tactical perspective, and strategic perspective. As per the business orientation, EM focuses on entrepreneurs and innovations, whereas traditional marketing is more customer-centric. In traditional marketing, the entrepreneur first identifies and evaluates market needs before developing a new product or service. In contrast, EM emphasizes generating a unique idea, transforming it into a new product or service, and then identifying a market for it. In terms of collecting information, entrepreneurial marketers mostly depend on informal methods for collecting information about the market place like personal observations and personal networking. With respect to tactical perspective, they adopt an interactive approach for marketing by heavily depend on

personal and direct contacts. In the case of strategic perspective, entrepreneurial marketers generally follow a bottom-up approach which is the opposite of top-down approach in traditional marketing.

2.2. Entrepreneurial Storytelling

Most of the research into storytelling focused on large and established organizations (Boje, 1991; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). However, there is an increasing concern regarding storytelling skills and storytelling opportunities for entrepreneurs (Middleton, 2013). Entrepreneurial storytelling has been defined as 'accounts that legitimate individual entrepreneurs to networks of investors, competitors, and visionaries, who make resource decisions and take strategic actions based upon what the stories mean to them' (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001, p. 545). Entrepreneurial storytelling focuses on entrepreneurial process through the analysis of entrepreneurial life stories and as a strategic element in the entrepreneurial toolkit for procuring resources. In the former, the focus is on the entrepreneur's life experiences related to recognizing opportunities and making the decision to start a business. This type of research emphasizes entrepreneurial processes, reflecting the broader shift from studying entrepreneurial traits to examining entrepreneurial behaviors that are aimed at establishing credibility, legitimacy, and managing expectations. Another element of the social context of identity is the social capital that entrepreneurs build during the process of establishing their business. It encompasses the numerous interconnected relationships that affect the dynamics of venture creation (Lee & Jones, 2015).

O'Connor (2002) contended a typology of entrepreneurial narratives including personal stories, generic stories, and situational stories. Personal stories highlight the entrepreneur's unique life and experiences that contribute to their qualifications as an entrepreneur. These stories play a crucial role in building personal credibility. They offer insights into the connection between an entrepreneur's background and their potential to access capital and market opportunities in a competitive environment, where various ventures contest for attention. Generic stories focus on the venture itself and its products or services, rather than on the entrepreneur. They are employed to position the business within the competitive landscape and to communicate its overall strategy and unique advantages. Situational stories

place a venture within a specific economic context, particularly concerning the current state of the industry in which the venture plans to operate. This includes both the recent historical and future potential states of the industry, the current market conditions and customer preferences, as well as any adaptations that may be necessary.

Key and Duening (2020) proposed a concept called "strategic entrepreneurial storytelling" (SES) to understand the entrepreneurial prospects and processes as depicted in table 1.

Table 1
Components in Strategic Entrepreneurial Storytelling

Context	Content	Execution
Socio/cultural knowledge Industry/market knowledge	Credibility Legitimacy Competence	Presentation skills Flexibility

Source: Key and Duening (2020)

SES views storytelling as a purposeful and strategic entrepreneurial tool, used intentionally to aid in the acquisition of resources. It is important to recognize that a compelling story cannot compensate for a flawed idea, weak market opportunity, or ineffective and inadequate leadership and management skills. A carefully crafted narrative can serve as a strategic competitive advantage in the race for limited entrepreneurial resources, such as startup capital. While many ventures may succeed without a deliberate focus on a strategic story, lacking a compelling narrative can imply poor planning or, at the very least, give the impression that the entrepreneur has not thoroughly considered the venture and its potential (Baker, 2007).

Moreover, since entrepreneurs are working with multiple stakeholders, researchers enquire whether a story that interests one audience might appeal to others (Fisher et al., 2016). Early research assumed that stakeholders would have the same or similar expectations of the entrepreneurial story (Überbacher, 2014). However, more recent perspectives suggest that as audiences evolve, their expectations are likely to change as well. For example, Fisher et al. (2017) highlighted how different audiences are likely to use varying evaluative criteria when assessing ventures. In addition to shifting audience expectations, existing research emphasizes the importance of exploring how entrepreneurs adapt their storytelling to meet the needs of new audiences. Understanding how entrepreneurs revise their narratives is crucial

because, as Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) noted, storytelling should "align with audience interests". On the other hand, if a story fails to connect with key audiences, it can reduce their "interest and commitment" (Navis & Glynn, 2011).

According to Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) entrepreneurs find it difficult to differentiate them from the rivalry and in this case storytelling can be used as a powerful way to emotionally connect with the relevant stakeholders. Specially, storytelling is important for building a brand identify for the entrepreneurial businesses by developing a compelling narrative focusing on the purpose while resonating with the target audience. These narratives can be used to foster the authenticity and trust among the stakeholders and to differentiate the business from the competition (Moss et al., 2011). Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) pointed out that consumers tend to remember and engage with brands which are using storytelling than traditional marketing promotions methods. More importantly capitalizing on the emotional aspect will lead the customers to relate the brand to a personal level. In this case, entrepreneurs have a greater opportunity to share their personal experiences regarding successes and failures to connect and relate strongly with the target audience. Moreover, one of the frequent challenges for entrepreneurial organizations is the access to capital. Therefore, developing compelling stories showcasing the entrepreneur's purpose and impact can also be a powerful method to attract the interested investors to the business (Martens et al., 2007). More importantly, entrepreneurs can look into the problems broader socio-economic problems, potential solutions and the impact can be generated by the business and this can be crafted through a convincing story. Therefore, storytelling is a strong persuasive communication strategy to effectively disseminate the entrepreneurs' narrative to make their businesses more competitive.

2.3. Digital Storytelling

The penetration of internet has enabled businesses to sell their products by breaking the geographical boundaries and 24 hours a day. More importantly, the customers are not only purchase products but also, they have become more active in online by creating, sharing and discussing the content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Also, companies were able to precisely target their products to the customers through electronic marketing and avoided the traditional

marketing promotions which are high costly. However, the electronic marketing has expanded the available choices and it led to generate a higher competition in the market. Hence, it is imperative for small businesses to be more proactive and need to thoroughly engage with the customers in online platforms. The content that the businesses have to develop in these platforms should be interested to the customers and need to generate a psychological attachment towards the product. Organizations started to use storytelling to create personal connections and engage with customers in online environments (Anaza et al., 2020). Also, organizations encourage their stakeholders to share their stories mainly in the form of user-generated content (UGC). UGC is any media-related content produced and distributed by the public online (Rajamma et al., 2019). As the internet lowers the costs of marketing and purchasing, small businesses can greatly benefit from its expanding capabilities, allowing them to focus on engaging both prospective and existing customers through story-driven content.

According to Alexander (2011) a story presented a digital media is referred to as digital storytelling. Digital storytelling can provide people with significant benefits with regard to several aspects of life. Accordingly, digital stories allow people to learn about each other, reduce the distance between people (Yuksel et al., 2011) and encourage user participation in numerous ways (Thöny et al., 2018). The use of digital stories has been expanded due to the increasing use of digital cameras, smart mobile phones, digital tools and multimedia applications. More importantly the user friendliness of these tech devices has enabled non-experts also to engage in digital storytelling as content creators. As pointed out by Rossiter and Garcia (2010) the concept of digital storytelling was firstly appeared through a center that Dana Atchley established in 1980. Dana Atchley contended that digital storytelling can use digital tools like images, films, and music.

Rossiter and Garcia (2010) mentioned that digital stories are vignettes using digital tools. On the other hand, Figa (2004) defined digital storytelling as “the usage of voice, music, and visual messages along with text in digital environments” (Figa, 2004, pp. 34–36). Chung (2007) emphasized that various digital tools are needed to create a digital story. According to Armstrong (2003), digital storytelling made information and story transportation while employing media. Further, he mentioned that digital storytelling can be seen as the

representation of short movies created mainly through personal stories using digital tools. Furthermore, Robin (2008, pp. 220–228) mentioned that, "Digital storytelling is the association of interaction of multimedia devices such as graphics, videos, and voices to create a narration about a specific theme." Therefore, digital stories can be developed through numerous tools and applications such as games, Twitter feeds, blog posts, or Facebook discussions as pointed out by Kronenberg (2013). Lambert (2010) stated that there are seven elements in digital storytelling which serves as a useful starting point to initiate working with digital stories. The seven elements namely are the point of view of the author, the emotional content, a dramatic question, a narration or voice, economy of the length, a soundtrack to support the story and the pacing of the story.

In the current context, marketers of business organizations are making an effort to build up their brand and corporate reputation with the use of digital storytelling. According to Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016), the opportunity to promote a brand through a story has grown rapidly due to the increased use of social media and content marketing. However, Steffens (2018) explained that there are obstacles for digital storytelling: difficulty of collecting information from both the internal and external stakeholders, inability to remain consistent across different digital platforms in terms of narrative structure and voice of the story, and optimal delivery of the digital story.

Moreover, marketers are required to enhance the quality of digital stories to make a meaningful impact on the target audience. Accordingly, Barrocks (2023) emphasized that content creators focus more in the "Digital" component and they forget to refine some of the fundamentals of storytelling. Therefore, they always need to make their stories more human-centric since no one wants to care about a story which they cannot relate to their own life. The story needs to focus on human experience where someone can relate to feelings like joy, happiness, hurt, and pain etc. This enables the storyteller to ground the story to the reality and make it more relatable to the audience. From a marketing perspective this phenomenon is crucial since customer value creation consists of generating psychological value from a product or service to the customer.

3. METHODOLOGY

The philosophical assumptions in this study can be explained with respect to three stances: ontology, epistemology and axiology. First, from the ontological stance researcher has adopted a "subjective viewpoint" regarding the study. The reason for selecting the subjective viewpoint is that the interpretations are based on the respondents' knowledge, experience, understanding, and assumptions and therefore this study has adopted an interpretivist ontological stance. Second. under epistemological stance, researcher has developed a close connection with the respondents to collect rich data. Third, is the axiological stance where the researcher concern with evaluating the contribution of the his own values at all phases of the research procedure. Accordingly, research is undertaken in a value-free way, where the researcher ensure to be independent from the data and maintains an objective stance by emphasizing the responses of the respondents. In line with these philosophical assumptions, the study has conducted using the inductive approach where it starts with data and then end up with generating themes to address the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Moreover, researcher adopted a case study approach in conducting this study since it can be used to generate an in-depth understanding on storytelling within a real EM context (Yin, 2018). Particularly, this study has used a multiple case study design since it is useful for increasing the external validity (generalizability) and internal validity (accuracy of findings) by examining the storytelling across different cases. According to Merriam (2009) multiple case studies allow researchers to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena, as they encompass multiple viewpoints, variables, and contexts. Therefore, this study adopted a multiple case study design by selecting 04 entrepreneurial organizations in Sri Lanka which are focusing on sustainable business practices while adopting storytelling in their communication with stakeholders. The number of cases selected for this study is in line with Yin (2018) where he recommended 3 to 10 as the sample size for multiple case study design. Accordingly, the four case studies selected for this study are briefly explained (Figure 1) while maintaining the anonymity due to ethical considerations and to maintain confidentiality. In selecting these case studies, criterion sampling method is used. Patton (2002) mentioned that criterion sampling is a purposeful strategy that allows

researchers to select cases that meet specific characteristics essential for answering the research question. Accordingly, in selecting these entrepreneurial organizations the pursuit of sustainable marketing practices and sharing those with storytelling are considered to ensure the information richness.

Figure 1
Profiles of Case Studies

Organization A This is a local entrepreneurial organization started in 2013 for manufacturing handmade crafts, pencils, handicrafts, bowls, bins, bags and packages using used papers. Most of their employees are working from home and this arrangement empower women employment and rural youth. The entire production process of this organization is eco-friendly and labor intensive while designing unique Sri Lankan designs. Further this organization share its uniqueness with the global market place using the storytelling method.
Organization B This is a local entrepreneurial organization started with a personal desire to capitalize the founder's design and creative skills in 2012. This organization is working on "Upcycling" concept where they collect pre-consumer waste from the apparel manufacturers and covert those to designer clothes with the support of rural ladies. More importantly, this organization follows a zero-waste approach and commits to sustainable practices and they communicate this to stakeholders using storytelling.
Organization C This is a local entrepreneurial organization offers stylish, sustainable vegan bags and accessories handcrafted in Sri Lanka using natural materials like *hana* canvas. They work with local artisans in making their products who have abandoned their

jobs due to lack of opportunities. This has enabled the local artisans to upgrade their economic, social and cultural wellbeing. Therefore, this organization follows a sustainable marketing practices and they communicate those using the storytelling method.
Organization D This is a Sri Lankan entrepreneurial organization started in 1997 for manufacturing handmade paper and value-added products using elephant dung and other waste matter. The whole production process of is eco-friendly and the production process is labor intensive by using local talents. Also, they work on wildlife protection, elephant conservation, rural empowerment and production of aesthetically pleasing gifts and share those using storytelling with the local and global marketplace.

According to Silverman (2000), qualitative research can employ various data collection methods. Therefore, the secondary data was collected using organizations' webpages, social media pages, YouTube videos, journal articles, books, magazines, and newspaper articles. Moreover, researcher employed semi-structured interviews in collecting primary data. The process of data analysis was started by developing the transcripts of interviews. In analyzing the data, the thematic analysis method is used as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Also, to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor, researcher has researcher focused on prolonged engagement with both the research environment and participants, kept thorough record of all research activities, and practiced reflexivity by recognizing and reflecting on personal biases, assumptions, and perspectives.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

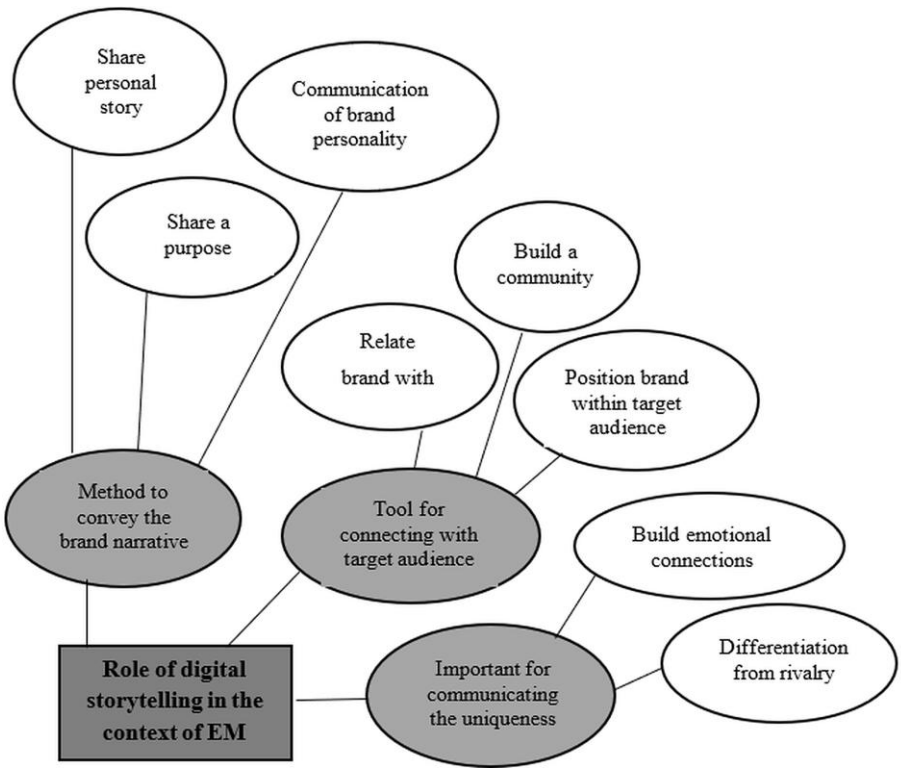
The findings of the study, derived through a systematic thematic analysis, are illustrated in Figure 2 as a thematic map. This map visually represents the analytical progression from initial codes to more refined categories and ultimately to the broader, overarching themes that

emerged from the data. As per the findings, the role of digital storytelling in the context of EM can be presented with respect to following themes.

Theme 1: Method to convey the brand narrative

In the context of EM, digital storytelling facilitates the entrepreneurs to share their personal stories in a more meaningful manner. Particularly, they can highlight how their product or brand is originated in a creative manner including the path and process that was involved. More importantly, entrepreneur can highlight the challenges that they overcame during their entrepreneurial journey while highlighting the uniqueness. Further, the digital stories reflect the pivotal moments in their life which contributed them to be unique entrepreneurs. Excerpt 1 provided by the founder of organization A points out how his personal story contributed to develop a brand through storytelling.

Figure 2
Thematic map of the Role of Digital Storytelling in the Context of EM



Source: Compiled based on the analysis

Excerpt 1:

"I started by entrepreneurial journey in a humble way by making greeting cards from papers and I used my creativity to produce a good product from the beginning. Mainly my sister and other family members contributed me a lot to start this business. Prior to starting this business, I was a photographer but I realized that I cannot achieve a greater success in my life by being a photographer and as a result I was searching for a different opportunity to start my entrepreneurial work where I can use my creative skills".

In looking at the above excerpt, it is clear that the entrepreneur was very keen in creativity but he didn't have much resources. Further, he attributed his success to his family members who supported him in the beginning. Therefore, we can see that digital storytelling is a platform where an entrepreneur can share their unique stories in a creative manner. So that, it can be an effective source for entrepreneurial development in the future as well. Specially, for a country like Sri Lanka where the number of entrepreneurs is around 2% from the total population at the moment, digital storytelling can be a good source to inculcate the entrepreneurial mind set among the youngers due to its ability to share the personal narratives of successful entrepreneurs.

Almost all the entrepreneurs have a specific purpose behind their entrepreneurial journey. As per the findings it is clear that digital storytelling can be used as a platform to share those purposes with the target market and society. This was found in interviewing the founders of both organizations A and B as presented in excerpts 2 and 3 consecutively.

Excerpt 2:

"I had fashion for creativity. Also, I wanted to do some business which can create value for the society around me. Even I include this idea in my business model which looks like social entrepreneurial in nature. Therefore, I share this through all the stories that I develop with respect to my business"

Excerpt 3:

"Upcycling is something that I passionate with and I find there are many Sri Lankans who value this concept. So, I like build my business around conscious lifestyle keeping both people and planet at heart. I always try to communicate this idea for everyone".

Both of the above statements reflect that the two entrepreneurs have distinguished purposes in their lives which are crafted based on their life experiences and values overtime. Then, they have built their businesses based on the relevant purpose which they are communicating to the relevant stakeholders through storytelling. Therefore, storytelling can be identified as a communication mechanism to share the personal purposes of entrepreneurs.

In the meantime, digital storytelling can be identified as a mean for communicating the personality behind the entrepreneur's brand. As per the findings the entrepreneurs have referred to responsibility, authenticity, environmental consciousness, being optimistic and community-focus. In summary, the focus of each entrepreneurial brand is presented in table 2 which are communicated through their digital stories.

Table 2
Focus of Entrepreneurial Brands

Organization	Brand Personality Focus
A	Authentic, innovativeness, community-focus
B	Environmental consciousness, community-focus, responsibility
C	Innovativeness, community-focus, empathetic
D	Environmental consciousness, community-focus, optimistic

Therefore, in looking at the brand narrative, entrepreneurs have gone beyond the product that they offer to the marketplace. So, they have referred to themselves, their purpose and also to the personality of the brand. The notion of conveying a brand narration through digital storytelling is also contended by Koll et al. (2010). They mainly highlighted that storytelling has the capability to tap into a wide array of brand knowledge that is unconscious to the consumer from the procedural and episodic memory. As per the literature review entrepreneurial storytelling is built on trust, credibility, and social capital (Gilliam & Flaherty,

2015; Moss et al., 2011). The findings provide concrete examples for this, where entrepreneurs use digital storytelling to emphasize creativity, sustainability, and community-driven values and these are core elements behind their brand narrative. Moreover, Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) discussed that storytelling differentiates brands from competitors and this is supported by the findings where the entrepreneurial brands have developed their brands based personality traits such as authenticity, innovation, and environmental consciousness.

Theme 2: Tool for connecting with target audience

Digital storytelling can be used as a platform for collaboration by the entrepreneurs with respect their own stories as well as the products with the target audience including customers and the society. Accordingly, entrepreneurs use their personal story and journey behind the product to relate with the target audience. The founder of organization C share her personal experience with the target audience as presented in excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4:

"I always wear the clothes that I made by myself which are made from pre-consumer waste in the apparel factories. Therefore, I feel more comfortable and responsible towards the environment".

Moreover, the founder of organization C shares her experience in numerous networking events such as conferences and workshops and she always relate her business with her own behavior and personality. These kinds of activities humanize the entrepreneurial organization and it makes the entrepreneur more approachable to the audience which connect the entrepreneur at a deeper level with the customer base.

Entrepreneurs use digital storytelling for the purpose of building communities around the business. In this case, they can connect with multiple stakeholders including suppliers, customers and other influencers. Particularly, organization A is currently working with foreign tourists and they are building brand community by sharing its story with the prospective customers and its founder explained it in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5:

"We introduced a special tour package called "Paper village tour" for the tourists who visit our factory. So, we allow them to visit our factory and also our nearby artisanal community who manufacture our products. Thereafter, we share those as stories in our digital platforms where the tourists actively comment on those with their own photographs".

It seems that the development of brand community through storytelling facilitate the brand story to be more dynamic and evolving with the trends in the market place. Also, the entrepreneur is in a greater position to capitalize on collective impact through the brand community to enable the future growth.

Moreover, the digital storytelling is also used for positioning the brand within the target audience. This is mainly happening since the entrepreneurs are able to develop and communicate their value proposition through digital stories. Entrepreneurs can create unique and memorable brands which are resonating with their target audience at a deeper emotional level. Organization D has clearly developed its brand positioning on the concept of "Handmade elephant dung paper" and it has properly communicated in webpages and social media platforms as a story. Moreover, they are working under the theme of "Conservation through innovation" in popularizing its entrepreneurial journey by sharing its unique story.

Also organization B, came up with a positioning theme called "An art with no name" and this was explained by its founder as presented in excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6:

I looked back the history of my business during the pandemic and I realized that a unique identity was developed. I really focused on environmental sustainability in my story and we didn't focus on numbers to generate more income. I focused on the value set of my business as fashion designer. Also, we strengthened the idea of 'Upcycling' which not much not known to people. Therefore, we came through the positioning of 'An art with no name' to develop the story of our business".

As per this theme, entrepreneurs are working on creating a unique, engaging and relatable brand through digital storytelling. These stories tend to be more authentic and emotional in nature to foster connections with the target audience and also to differentiate the brand in a cluttered market place. Entrepreneurs use digital storytelling to engage with audiences, build brand communities, and position their businesses uniquely. Moreover, the findings reinforce the importance of innovation, personal branding, and stakeholder engagement which are the core EM principles explained in the literature (Kraus et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2002). Also, findings demonstrated how entrepreneurs share personal experiences and brand missions to connect with stakeholders. This validates the facts in the literature review where storytelling is considered as a strategic tool for entrepreneurs to build credibility, legitimacy, and emotional connections with stakeholders (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Moreover, this theme illustrates how entrepreneurs leverage digital storytelling for audience engagement, community building, and brand positioning. Organization D, for instance, build its brand story on "Handmade elephant dung paper," to differentiate itself. Organization B employs the theme "An art with no name" to reinforce its unique identity and commitment to sustainability. These cases represent how digital storytelling helps entrepreneurs craft distinct brand identities in competitive markets.

Theme 3: Important for communicating the uniqueness

Digital storytelling is important for communicating entrepreneur's uniqueness which is coming from the entrepreneurial background, products, services and the story behind the products. The stories have to be resonated with the interests of the target market by communicating the purpose of the entrepreneur. Digital storytelling facilitates the entrepreneur to share his or her challenges, successes, and personal journey which can create a bond with the target market. Therefore, target market will understand the entrepreneur as a person in the society rather than as a pure businessmen. This will enhance the connectivity between the entrepreneur and the society. The founder of organization A pointed out how he was able to build up the connectivity with the neighboring community and it was properly communicated to the global market place using digital stories (refer excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7:

"From the beginning of my entrepreneurial journey, I heavily depended on my neighboring community since some of them became artisans for making products. They were able to benefitted in the means of earning an income and it added numerous values for those who were unemployed in the surrounded community. Specially, they were benefitted during the Covid pandemic time since they produce our products by staying at home. Then, I shared this connectivity between our business and community by developing a video as a story and it was gone viral in the social media. Most of the buyers really admired our effort in helping the community during a difficult time".

The above excerpt highlights the entrepreneur's efforts for creating value for the society and it was communicated using digital storytelling to the stakeholders. As a result of that a greater connectivity was developed between the entrepreneurial organization and stakeholders.

Moreover, digital storytelling contributed as a platform to differentiate the particular entrepreneurs and their efforts from the rivalry. In this case, they worked on one or few criteria including their entrepreneurial background, unique business approach, differentiated products of services, innovativeness and contribution to the society and environment. For example, in looking at the organizations in the study they have used the following several criteria to maintain the differentiation from the competition (refer table 3).

Table 3
Criteria Used by Entrepreneurs for Differentiation

Organization	Differentiation Criteria
A	Eco-friendliness, labor intensity and use of waste materials
B	Upcycling, conscious lifestyle
C	Conscious craftmanship, contemporary fashion, vegan fashion
D	Recycling, conservation, innovativeness

The founder of organization C mentioned how they use conscious craftmanship at the village level to differently position their fashion items in excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8:

"We connected with handwoven artists under a cooperative style structure with the support of several stakeholders. This craftmanship was under extinction since there is no demand for traditional craft of *Dumbara Hana*. Therefore, we developed cohesive group for generating a new commercial opportunity and for introducing new techniques to enhance the socio-economic wellbeing of the rural artisans".

Organization C has shared this idea as a story in their webpage and social media platforms by highlighting how the traditional artisans were able to get back to the modern market place by being part of their business network. Moreover, this has enabled them to adopt an ethical marketing approach for promoting their brands in the global market place. Therefore, the unique positioning created through storytelling enable entrepreneurs to enter into new markets which are uncontested by others. O'Connor (2002) contended a typology of entrepreneurial narratives including personal stories, generic stories, and situational stories and these can be used for differentiation in the marketplace. It is evident that the case study organizations have adopted these different types of stories to differentiate them from the rivalry.

As per the literature review storytelling helpful for entrepreneurs to gain legitimacy, credibility, and resources (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Middleton, 2013). Also, it emphasizes the strategic nature of storytelling in differentiating businesses and fostering authenticity and trust (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Martens et al., 2007; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The findings reinforce these insights by illustrating how entrepreneurs communicate their connection to local communities and sustainable practices through digital storytelling. For example, organization A leveraged its social impact narrative to build emotional connections with stakeholders, while organization C emphasized conscious craftsmanship and ethical marketing. Therefore, these findings align with the literature by proving that storytelling enhances brand identity and market positioning through emotional engagement and differentiation.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper explored the role of digital storytelling in the context of EM. Digital storytelling serves as a powerful tool for conveying a brand's narrative, allowing entrepreneurs to share their personal journeys and the purpose behind their businesses. It also plays a crucial role in establishing brand positioning by emphasizing authenticity in storytelling. Entrepreneurs often use digital stories to connect their businesses with broader societal issues, making their narratives more relatable and trustworthy for their target audience. This approach not only helps differentiate their brands from competitors but also fosters a deeper emotional connection with consumers. Additionally, digital storytelling allows entrepreneurs to humanize their brands by showcasing brand personality, making them more approachable and relatable. Beyond simply promoting a product, digital storytelling enables entrepreneurs to share the story behind their offerings, including the production process and their personal motivations, creating a more meaningful engagement with their audience.

Digital storytelling is a powerful tool for entrepreneurs to connect with their audience on a deeper, more personal level. In this case, entrepreneurs can share their personal stories, values, and unique business journeys, and also they can humanize their brands, which facilitated them to be more relatable and engaging. Moreover, digital storytelling contributes to build a strong community around the brand but also enables entrepreneurs to position their businesses effectively in the marketplace, fostering emotional connections with their target audience. Further, entrepreneurs can convey their values, highlight their commitment to sustainability and innovation, and differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace. More importantly, digital storytelling allows for more authentic, memorable branding that resonates with customers, strengthens loyalty, and supports long-term business growth.

Digital storytelling plays an important role in conveying the unique value propositions of entrepreneurs, allowing them to communicate their personal journeys, challenges, and societal contributions. The sharing of stories fosters entrepreneurs to develop deeper connections with the target markets, transforming from mere business personality to socially-conscious individuals that resonate with the community. Also, digital storytelling

differentiates entrepreneurs from their rivalry by highlighting distinctive features including innovative business models, sustainable practices, and social impact.

The use of digital storytelling to share the personal journeys of successful entrepreneurs can serve as a powerful source of motivation for aspiring business owners. By presenting real-life experiences, these stories make entrepreneurship appear more attainable, even for individuals facing challenges such as limited resources or a lack of experience. In particular, digital storytelling resonates strongly with younger audiences, especially Generation Z, who are more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Beyond inspiring new entrepreneurs, digital stories also play a crucial role in educating society about the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and its broader impact on individuals and communities. Additionally, they facilitate connections between entrepreneurs and key stakeholders, strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem and addressing socio-economic challenges. From an institutional perspective, digital storytelling can help attract government attention to entrepreneurship, influencing funding opportunities, educational initiatives, and policy development. By sharing authentic and relatable narratives, digital storytelling fosters a growth mindset and contributes to building a dynamic and innovative entrepreneurial culture within the country.

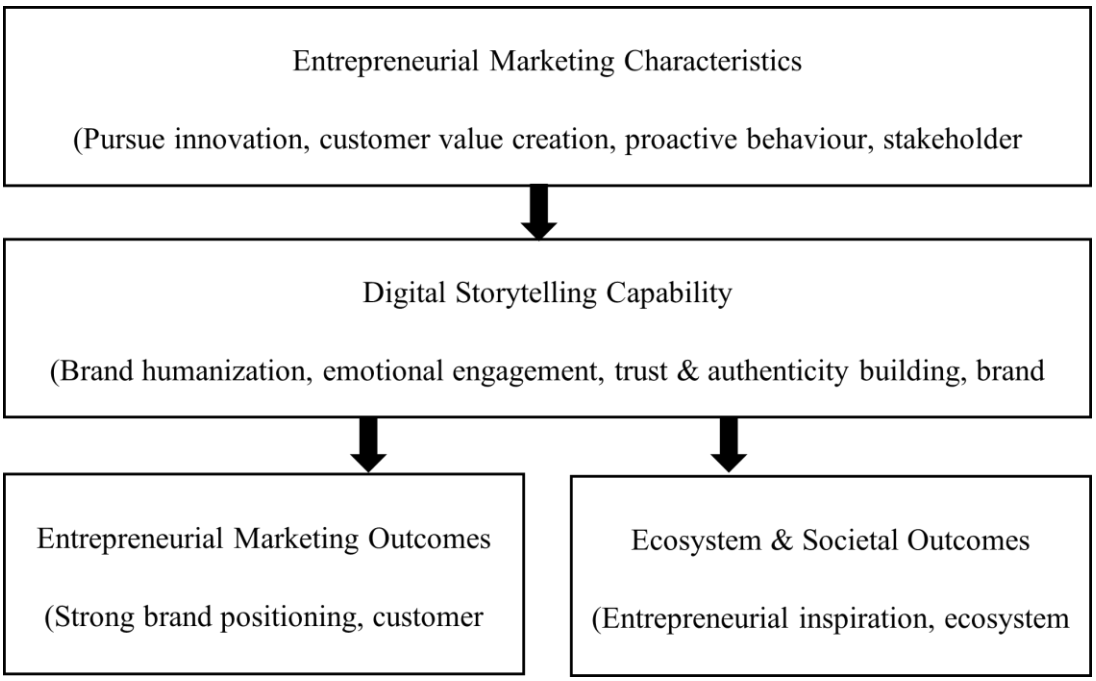
Therefore, entrepreneurs should embrace distinctive brand storytelling to communicate an engaging and authentic narrative. They can achieve this by sharing the motivations behind their entrepreneurial journey with strong justifications, helping others connect with their mission. Additionally, their personal story should align with the core purpose of their business. Transparency and honesty are essential in this process, as stories should feel genuine rather than overly artificial. Moreover, the narrative should be closely linked to the business's operations and stakeholders to ensure its relevance and credibility. To enhance engagement, entrepreneurs should incorporate novelty into their digital content by leveraging emerging technologies such as interactive videos and virtual reality (VR).

Further, entrepreneurs need to view digital storytelling as a strategic tool for building the long-term competitiveness of a business. To achieve this, stories should foster a sense of reliability by conveying trust and credibility to the target audience. They should authentically reflect the entrepreneurial journey while maintaining consistency across all digital platforms—any

discrepancies can create confusion and diminish credibility. Regular updates are also essential, as they reinforce transparency, demonstrate business growth, and showcase continuous engagement with stakeholders. Additionally, entrepreneurs should use storytelling as an educational tool, sharing valuable industry insights without a sales-driven approach. Positioning themselves as thought leaders in their field will further enhance trust and credibility.

Engaging stakeholders in digital storytelling is essential for building trust and enhancing brand credibility. Their involvement adds depth and authenticity to the narrative, reflecting a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent approach. Entrepreneurs can incorporate stories from suppliers to highlight material sourcing, craftsmanship, or sustainability efforts, positioning their brand as part of a larger ecosystem and fostering deeper trust with the audience. Collaboration should also be extended to like-minded entrepreneurs, creating a network of shared values. Featuring employees in digital storytelling humanizes the business, strengthening emotional connections with the audience. Showcasing employee stories helps highlight company culture and reinforces business values. Additionally, entrepreneurial organizations need to have strong ties to their local communities. Sharing how their business contributes—through job creation, empowerment, and capability-building—can enhance their reputation and deepen target audience engagement. Entrepreneurs should also partner with social media influencers, bloggers, and YouTubers who align with their brand values and leveraging these influencers' established audiences helps strengthen brand equity and expand reach. Accordingly, a new conceptual flow can be presented based on the findings which position digital storytelling as a strategic capability in EM as given in figure 3.

Figure 3
Proposed Conceptual Flow for Digital Storytelling as a Strategic Capability in EM



Source: Compiled by researcher based on the findings

Therefore, based on figure 3, it can be concluded that digital storytelling functions as a strategic capability that enables brand humanization, emotional engagement, trust & authenticity building, brand differentiation, and community formation. At end, it leads to enhanced EM outcomes and also contributes to broader ecosystem and societal outcomes.

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