

The Effect of Digital Storytelling on Online Brand Perceptions: An SLR Study

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Abstract

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This study examines the effect of digital storytelling on online brand perceptions through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of peer reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2022. The findings reveal that narrative driven communication plays a crucial role in shaping consumer responses by fostering narrative transportation, building authenticity, and ensuring story product fit. Narrative transportation was found to enhance cognitive and emotional engagement, leading to more favorable brand attitudes. Authentic storytelling, particularly when delivered by influencers or consumers, was shown to strengthen trust and long-term brand love. In addition, user-generated storytelling demonstrated stronger effects than firm produced narratives, highlighting the importance of consumer participation in brand communication. At the same time, story product coherence was identified as a critical boundary condition that amplifies immersion and brand evaluations. Despite these positive outcomes, the literature remains fragmented across advertising, consumer behavior, and digital marketing domains, underscoring the need for further integrative research. This review contributes by consolidating existing evidence and offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital storytelling influences brand outcomes in online environments.

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1. Introduction

Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful approach in shaping online brand perceptions, particularly in an era where consumer attention is fragmented and brand communication must resonate emotionally. Narrative-driven communication has been shown to “transport” audiences, fostering deeper engagement and generating more favorable brand attitudes and evaluations (Kim et al., 2016). Beyond simple advertising, storytelling embeds affective and symbolic meanings into brand interactions, which can strengthen brand attachment and even create brand love (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2021).

In digital platforms, the effectiveness of storytelling depends on the coherence between the narrative and the product being promoted. Research demonstrates that strong product story links improve brand attitudes by enhancing subjective comprehension and narrative transportation (Chen et al., 2022). Empirical studies further reveal that storytelling marketing significantly enhances consumer perceptions of brand value and attitude formation (Hong et al., 2018). At the same time, consumer-generated storytelling has emerged as a distinct form of brand communication, creating favorable evaluations through emotional and cognitive pathways that differ from firm-generated narratives (Park, 2022).

Despite its increasing popularity, the literature on digital storytelling and online brand perceptions remains fragmented across advertising, social media, and consumer behavior research. A thematic review on digital storytelling in social media highlights its broad potential for driving participation and brand meaning, but calls for more systematic synthesis of evidence (Musfira et al., 2022). In this context, a

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is needed to consolidate existing findings from 2016-2022, identify underlying mechanisms such as authenticity, transportation, and product story fit, and map the conditions under which digital storytelling most effectively shapes brand perceptions.

2. Literatur Review

Digital storytelling has gained recognition as an effective means of shaping online brand perceptions by creating emotional connections and narrative engagement. Prior studies emphasize that narrative transportation the extent to which consumers become absorbed in a story significantly enhances brand attitudes and evaluations in digital contexts (van Laer et al., 2019). Storytelling does not merely convey information but embeds symbolic and affective meanings into brand interactions, which can strengthen attachment and foster long-term brand love (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2021).

On social media, user generated storytelling has emerged as a powerful driver of brand perceptions. Evidence suggests that consumer-created stories generate stronger cognitive and emotional responses than firm-produced narratives, leading to more favorable brand evaluations (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2016). At the same time, authenticity plays a central role: when brand stories are perceived as genuine and transparent, they are more likely to build trust and enhance brand attitudes (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of storytelling depends on the fit between the story and the product. Research shows that when product cues are coherently

integrated into narratives, consumers experience greater comprehension and narrative immersion, which in turn strengthens brand attitude (Chen et al., 2022). Despite its promise, the literature remains fragmented across advertising, consumer behavior, and digital marketing research, highlighting the need for systematic reviews to map underlying mechanisms such as transportation, authenticity, and story product fit in shaping online brand perceptions.

3. Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize existing knowledge on the effect of digital storytelling on online brand perceptions. The review was designed to provide a structured and comprehensive understanding of how narrative-driven communication influences brand outcomes, while identifying gaps for future research.

The scope of the review was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2016 and 2022, with a specific focus on studies that examined digital storytelling in relation to brand-related constructs such as brand attitude, brand love, brand trust, and brand equity. Only articles written in English and indexed in major academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science were considered.

The review process consisted of three main stages. First, a systematic search was conducted using keywords including “digital storytelling,” “brand perception,” “narrative transportation,” “authenticity,” and “brand communication.” Second, all identified records were screened based on titles and abstracts to exclude irrelevant

studies, duplicates, and non-academic sources. Third, the remaining articles were evaluated for eligibility through full-text reading, and those meeting the inclusion criteria were analyzed.

The selected studies were categorized based on publication year, research context, methodology, and reported outcomes. A thematic analysis was then performed to identify recurring concepts and mechanisms, such as authenticity, story product fit, and narrative transportation, as well as their influence on brand perceptions. This systematic approach ensures transparency and replicability, while allowing the synthesis of findings across diverse research contexts.

By following this method, the study aims to consolidate fragmented literature and present a clear framework of how digital storytelling shapes consumer perceptions of brands in online environments.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this systematic review demonstrate that digital storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping online brand perceptions through several recurring mechanisms. Narrative transportation consistently appears as a key factor, as consumers who become absorbed in brand stories show higher engagement and more favorable brand evaluations. Research confirms that such immersion strengthens both cognitive and affective responses, making storytelling more persuasive than traditional advertising formats because it reduces counter-arguments and increases emotional involvement (van Laer et al., 2019).

Another important finding relates to authenticity, which has emerged as a central determinant of consumer trust in digital narratives. Studies show that authentic and transparent storytelling, particularly when delivered by influencers or consumers themselves, enhances credibility and builds stronger emotional bonds with audiences. Authenticity is therefore not only instrumental in fostering trust but also in nurturing long-term connections such as brand love (Portal et al., 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020).

The review also highlights that user generated storytelling has stronger effects compared to firm-produced brand narratives. Evidence suggests that consumer-created stories trigger deeper cognitive and emotional responses, which ultimately result in more favorable evaluations of the brand (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2016). This indicates that encouraging consumers to participate in storytelling can be a more effective strategy for brands than relying solely on top-down marketing messages.

At the same time, the effectiveness of digital storytelling is highly dependent on story–product fit. Research demonstrates that when narratives are coherently aligned with the product, consumers experience greater comprehension and immersion, which directly strengthens brand attitudes. Conversely, when stories fail to integrate product elements effectively, they risk distracting audiences and weakening brand associations (Chen et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings reveal that digital storytelling enhances online brand perceptions primarily through the mechanisms of narrative transportation, authenticity, and story–product fit, while user-generated content often outperforms

brand-driven narratives in effectiveness. However, despite the growing body of research, the literature remains fragmented across advertising, consumer behavior, and digital marketing studies. This fragmentation highlights the need for more systematic synthesis to build a comprehensive framework of how storytelling influences brand outcomes. Recent thematic reviews have already pointed in this direction, emphasizing the importance of integrating evidence across contexts to better understand the conditions under which digital storytelling most effectively shapes brand perceptions (Musfira et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

This review concludes that digital storytelling has become a powerful tool in shaping online brand perceptions by fostering emotional engagement and strengthening consumer brand relationships. The synthesis of studies highlights three key mechanisms narrative transportation, authenticity, and story product fit that consistently drive positive outcomes such as enhanced brand attitudes, trust, and even long-term attachment like brand love. Importantly, findings also reveal that user generated storytelling often outperforms firm produced narratives, suggesting that consumer participation plays a crucial role in building credible and relatable brand experiences in digital environments.

Despite these positive effects, the existing literature remains fragmented across advertising, social media, and consumer behavior domains, limiting the development of a unified framework. This fragmentation underscores the importance of further systematic research that integrates evidence across contexts,

platforms, and cultures. Future studies should also investigate how storytelling effectiveness is moderated by message formats, cultural differences, and platform affordances, ensuring that digital storytelling strategies remain adaptive and impactful. Overall, the review affirms that well designed and authentic storytelling is not merely a marketing technique but a strategic approach that can significantly shape consumer perceptions and sustain brand equity in the digital era.

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