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On Think Tanks

Data based storytelling and the power to influence

An introduction

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Today's aim

Understand the key elements of data-based story-telling and how it can contribute to policy making at the highest level.

What is storytelling?

Story telling is a part of human existence.

- We hear stories as children, in school, with our friends and family.
- We tell our history through stories.
- They are the repositories of our experiences and our legends.
- They bring order into our confusing world.

And they can be fact or fiction.

What is data based storytelling?

- Narrative created around data.

- Part of a predetermined process of change – to convey actionable insights, and evoke emotions that will help stakeholders make decisions.

- Weaving stories or narratives around data to ensure that the insights from it are received, retained, and acted upon.

There is all the poetry in the world in a name.
Henry Thoreau

What did the video story exercise tell us about listening to and creating stories?

- Six minutes for group discussions.

- One and a half minutes for each group to provide their feedback.

A quick poll

How many of you:

- felt the stories humanised your fellow participants?
- felt some people were made more memorable by their story?
- identified with someone else's story?
- smiled after hearing someone's story?
- felt saddened or sympathetic?
- were left wanting to know more?
- feel their view of someone was affected by the story of their name?
- gained additional insights into the narrator from their story?
- were moved to get to know someone better, or ask follow up questions?

How many of you

were unmoved – no interest, empathy, humour, pleasure, sadness?

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What makes a story?

A beginning, a middle and an end

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- Character
- Setting
- Plot
- conflict/tension
- Resolution/conclusion

Know your audience

Knowing your audience's perspective is also critical. Their perspectives are shaped by many defining characteristics such as ideology, gender, profession, and race, to name just a few.

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Starbucks:

#WhatsYourName

Aimed to establish their shops as a safe space for transgender people to use their new names in public and raise awareness of the high-rate of attempted suicide in transgender teenagers.

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Data visualisation vs Data storytelling:

- The former involves creating a visual representation of data.

- The latter is about using human communication to help an audience develop a connection to that data.

Data based storytelling

Weaving stories or narratives around data to ensure that the insights from it are received, retained, and acted upon.

Data visualisation vs Data storytelling

Creates a visual representation of data

Uses human communication to help an audience develop a connection to that data.

A little data about story

- Stories make up at least 65% of the content of the most successful TED talks.

- In 2004, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University conducted a study using two variations of a brochure for Save the Children. The story-based version attracted 2x as many donations as the infographic version.

- At Stanford's Graduate School of Business, students were asked to give a 1-minute pitch. One in 10 students used a story. The others stuck to more traditional pitch elements, such as facts and figures. The professor then asked the class to write down everything they remembered about each pitch: 5 percent of students cited a stat, but 63 percent remembered the story.

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The credibility of data

Story-telling + data = a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

A quick review of data

- Primary and secondary
- Qualitative and quantitative

Qualitative provides the narrative/the story, but supporting quantitative evidence adds credibility.

Qualitative

Qualitative research usually involves:

- Direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis – individual interviews
- Or direct interaction with individuals in a group setting – focus groups
- Observations

Quantitative

Quantitative research:

- Used to find out how much, how many, how often, to what extent. It is data that can be counted.
- Aims to be objective and scientific in its approach.
- Includes factual surveys, attitudinal surveys, counting (e.g. the use of services), experiments.

Benefits of quantitative data

- Reliable and objective
- Can use the stats to generalise a finding
- Tests theories or hypotheses.
- Assumes the sample is representative of the population you're investigating

Secondary data

- Can be qualitative or quantitative
- Previous research
- Official statistics
- Mass media/social media
- Diaries
- Letters
- Government reports
- Web information (approach with care)
- Historical data and information

Collecting narrative data

Narrative researchers work with small samples of participants to obtain rich and free-ranging discourse. The emphasis is on storied experience. Generally, this takes the form of interviewing people around the topic of interest.

The rules of narrative research

Collecting narrative data is not an ad hoc process, and the research community is continually fine tuning its guidelines to inform quality control and credibility.

Six guidelines

Narrative research may include one or more of the following activities:

- Story gathering (e.g. collecting stories that have already been told or written for a
- different purpose)
- Story eliciting (asking participants to tell a story)
- Story interpreting or analysis (drawing meaning from stories)
- Story collating (selecting and combining stories)

These activities should be classified as research for the purposes of ethical approval if they are undertaken with the explicit intention of furthering a body of knowledge (e.g. through an academic paper, conference presentation, or book)

Narrative research must meet the general criteria of high-quality research. These would generally include:

- The originality, clarity and importance of the research question
- The appropriateness of the study design to the research question
- The size and representativeness of the sample chosen
- The robustness of the data collection process, including choice of instruments or
- tools, experience, and training and supervision of research staff
- The rigour and transparency of the analysis (including the coherence of the
- theoretical framework and an identifiable unit of analysis)
- The logic and coherence of the links made between findings and conclusions
- The researcher's awareness of the possibility of error and the steps taken to
- minimise or take account of this throughout the research process

Storytelling is an art, not a science. The storyteller uses rhetoric and other literary devices to give a version of events from his or her own perspective. In narrative research, the story should therefore be anchored in some way, for example, by:

- Collecting multiple stories about the same event or comparable experiences
- Linking the story to other sources of empirical data
- Linking the story to a thorough review of the literature

Storytelling is a communicative act, involving inter-subjectivity (i.e. an overlap in 2 people's individual understandings of something held in common) In story-eliciting research, the inter-subjective role of the researcher should be acknowledged and commented upon, usually as part of a more general statement of reflexivity

When a story is sought as (or becomes) research material, the researcher takes on ethical duties towards the storyteller. These include:

- Honesty: to be explicit and transparent about the purpose of the work Non-maleficence: to do no harm (unless the potential harm is balanced by a greater benefit)
- Consent: in relation to the story, to undertake only those activities to which the storyteller has consented
- Confidentiality: to protect the identity of the storyteller if that is his or her desire

Group discussion

One guideline per group

Six minutes group discussion

1.5 minutes feedback from each group

- To what extent do you agree with the statement before you and why?

- Would you add to or remove any part of it and why?

- And then give a ranking from 1-9, with 1 being maximal disagreement and 9 being maximal agreement.

Ethics

- Voluntary participation
- Informed consent
- Risk of harm

Group discussions about ethics

Can we regroup with the aim of looking at how, why and in what ways ethical issues might manifest in narrative research.

Six minutes group discussion

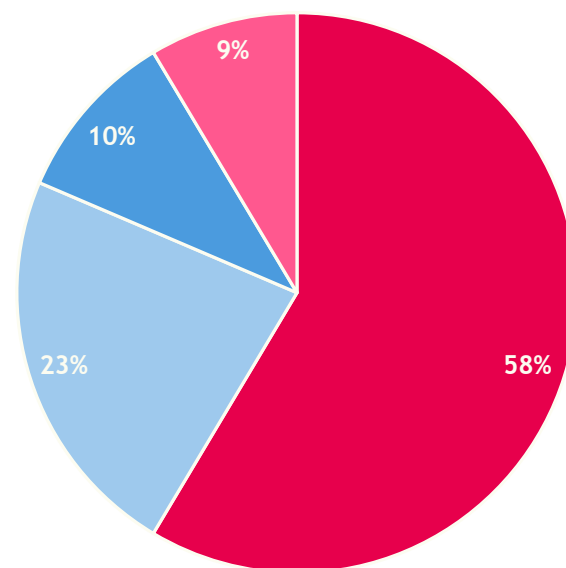1.5 minutes feedback from each group

Putting it all together: a case history

Pregnant school girls in Sierra Leone

- By 19 years old, 45% of our girls are bearing children
- During the Ebola outbreak, more than 14,000 teenage girls became pregnant, including 11,000 who were in school before the outbreak

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Government policy banned pregnant girls from school

Introduced in 2015

Overturned 5 years later by the ECOWAS court on human rights grounds

First person stories

Providing a powerful platform for girls impacted by the ban to make their stories heard.

Hawa's story

Stories were heard from girls, parents and teachers who had found ways to push back against the ban and show us all that another way is possible.

Some thoughts

- Knowing your audience's perspective is critical.
- The individual stories were supported by quantitative data.
- A cross-functional team is an advantage.

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