

# ***Social Media Storytelling***

## ***A New Zealand study of the use of narratives to engage with the public***

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication Studies.

## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

Storytelling is one of the most common ways to communicate and is, by far, one of the most common ways of engaging with your audience. With the rise of the internet in the 21st century, the way we tell stories and share them with the public has evolved and has significantly impacted the marketing field. Additionally, social media provided a revolutionary form of interaction that changed the way people communicate and how brands communicate with their customers. This study investigates how New Zealand marketing professionals use storytelling on social media to engage with the public and improve branding. The research began with a review of the storytelling and social media literature, and this led to a qualitative analysis of interviews with digital marketing professionals, addressing the process of creating digital campaigns. The study found differences in the branding process, where companies with social media as the primary focus do not have to adapt their content from other media, resulting in a more creative engagement. New media channels (like TikTok and Instagram) also prompted different storytelling formats, including photos and videos, bringing constant challenges to content creators. The findings suggest that digital marketing agencies use this technique extensively and that the public reacts positively to it. This study contributes to understanding digital branding and provides a framework for storytelling use in content marketing.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been a growing trend toward social media influence in society. As a result, social media has become a more significant way to reach a wider audience with its ease of use, flexibility, and value for promoting products, brands, and companies (Couldry, 2008).

When it comes to marketing campaigns, social media platforms have the potential to be an extremely valuable tool for retailers (Grönroos, 2009). The use of social media can be particularly beneficial when it is used to introduce new products, as it facilitates social interaction and word-of-mouth propagation, thereby broadening the reach of these products and accelerating their diffusion across a wider audience.

Up until the dawn of the 21st century, social media was a relatively new field of study in marketing. New content formats have become integral to brand communication as social media channels and the internet have evolved. Therefore, content creators are faced with an ever-increasing need to comprehend concepts, metrics, and parameters that can be used to justify, structure, and guide the content production process in order to achieve improved marketing results (Dholakia, 2009).

Consequently, smaller companies are able to compete effectively and dynamically with the largest companies in their fields. Further, the ability to compare and share content has made it easier for consumers to express their opinions regarding a product. The interaction between consumers and brands has been rapidly evolving as a result of this ability (De Fina, 2016). Consequently, it is more challenging for companies to understand and engage with the public in the digital environment.

Companies are constantly searching for new ways to connect and stand out in an age of globalisation and intense competition. Thus, brands use different techniques and narratives to communicate with target audiences due to their desire to get closer to the customer and stay relevant to them (Rodriguez, 2020).

According to Pulizzi (2014), storytelling is the most advanced stage a company can reach in the process of content creation. Based on this premise, rather than providing specific content for the product or its benefit, a brand's communication can be structured in a way that is similar to the way we regularly tell stories. Using a plot that evokes interest, engagement and emotions is much more potent than just providing information that is useful to us.

Content creators have faced a new challenge in adapting storytelling to new platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok. Through video and easy communication, members of the public have been able to expand their networks and reach out to share or seek their content worldwide.

This has created a wider channel for marketers to interact with their target market (Rodriguez, 2020).

However, research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of different campaigns and formats. Few studies have been published in this new digital environment on how marketing professionals have used storytelling techniques to engage customers (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to understand how professionals in the field use of storytelling in social media and how it has been implemented.

This new knowledge generated would be used to understand the social phenomenon better, give a holistic point of view of the information and comments created, and permit the development of study material for researchers, academics, and marketing professionals' purposes.

### **1.1 Aims of the Research**

This study aims to investigate how social media is establishing itself in New Zealand's consumer environment and how storytelling is used to engage in the online world.

By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, this study attempts to illuminate this topic and provide a reference framework to be used by content creators. It aims to integrate content marketing and storytelling into brand-building approaches, taking into consideration the transformations that have taken place in both the media and the relationship between brands and consumers in the last 20 years.

### **1.2 Questions**

The following research questions were formulated in order to investigate the process of branding creation and the application of narratives in user engagement:

- How are the marketing content and brand stories planned and developed?
- What are the procedures and techniques for implementing, optimising, and managing content marketing and storytelling?
- How effective, from the marketing professionals' point of view, is content marketing in building brands using storytelling?
- How significant is storytelling to the New Zealand advertising industry?

### **1.3 The organisation of the study**

The thesis consists of six chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the disciplines of communication, the reason the research is being undertaken and the research approach—observing the digital scenarios of advertising and the combined method of creating storylines to engage the public with the brand. This thesis uses the theoretical framework of strategic communication to analyse communication campaigns as practical applications of storytelling and advertising.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on social media campaigns, storytelling, and strategic communication. As strategic communication implies an integration between the disciplines, previous studies on integrating creative content and advertising are investigated. Prominent publications on digital marketing and advertising are then examined to provide an overview of the evolution of these disciplines, which aids in differentiating and defining the fields. Individual definitions produced by scholars and industry bodies are further analysed. Finally, material relating to storytelling in social media advertising is examined, as introducing new media technologies is perceived as a significant modifier to the disciplines and their integration.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design for the thesis. It begins by discussing the theoretical framework of strategic communication (Hallahan et al., 2007). It then outlines the qualitative case study methodology that employs mixed methods. Finally, it describes how thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) was utilised to analyse the data, using semi-structured interviews as a base for the unit of study.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis by first providing an overview of the findings drawn from interviews, and their similarities, providing illustrations of new models and ideas created to attract the public and determine successful campaigns.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings, analysing the three prominent themes of social media as a platform, creative ways of advertising in the digital world, and the New Zealand market. Finally, the chapter outlines the study's limitations and the challenges of this analysis.

**Chapter 6 provides an overview of the research findings and reflects on the research process. The chapter provides recommendations for future research.**

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background and theoretical base analysis for the study. Throughout this chapter, a detailed discussion is provided about past research conducted on strategic communication, customer management, content marketing, storytelling in marketing and social media use of storytelling. It provides insights from past literature to gain a deeper understanding of social media marketing. The chapter first examines the growth of content marketing. It then looks more closely at the evolution of digital marketing content. Following this, the chapter identifies the tactics digital marketers use on social media sites to influence the public. Next, the review discusses the storytelling formats used in social media. The literature review concludes by explaining why this study is needed and how it addresses a gap in the current research

### 2.2. Strategic Communication

The creation, distribution, and evaluation of communications for organisations are activities of several professional domains. These specialities include management, marketing, advertising, and public relations, among others. All these professions require a company, defined in its broadest sense, to communicate strategically to advance its purpose in various ways (Hallahan et al, 2007).

The goal of strategic communication is to engage in conversations that are vital to the success of an organisation. Among the entities carrying out such conversations are corporations, governments, non-profit organisations, social movements, and well-known individuals in the public arena. Communication can play a distinctive role in the formulation, revision, presentation, execution, implementation, and operationalisation of strategies. Hallahan et al (2007) identified six communicators' purposes, two of which are highlighted and illustrated here:

#### Table 1

*Hallahan's communicator's purposes*

<b>Marketing Communication</b>
--------------------------------

Personnel: Marketing and advertising staff
Purposes: To create awareness and promote sales of products and services. Also, to attract and retain users and customers, including intermediaries in distribution channels. Among nongovernmental organizations and other not-for-profit organizations, marketing communications incorporates fundraising and development communications.
<b>Information/Social Marketing Campaigns</b>
Personnel: Employees in nongovernmental, not-for-profit, and governmental agencies, as well as corporate staffs involved in social, psychological, and physical well-being.
Purposes: To reduce the incidence of risky behaviours or to promote social causes important to the betterment of the community.

*Note.* Reproduced from Hallahan et al, 2007, p. 24

In Table 1, Hallahan et al. (2007) shows that communicators have clear purposes in terms of bringing awareness to the public and strategically forming their message for this goal. In today's complex and technological world, marketing professionals are tasked with achieving their objectives through the use of strategic communication. The intention is to present how an organisation acts as a social actor to further its mission and the steps it can take to use communication strategically to accomplish this.

Neves et al. (2004) state that in an increasingly competitive business environment, in which companies fight for relative market positions in the supply scenario higher than the demand, marketing plays an essential role in the company's strategy. Not only at the corporate but in the operational aspects of the different business units that the corporation may own. However, the marketing function in this environment is not restricted to exploring markets or seeking to maintain them. Instead, the priority objectives become to find segments or niches with expectation growth through developing new products adapted to changing needs and defining the type of advantage defensible competition for each unit of strategic activity.

For Lambin (2000), strategic marketing contributes to the achievement of superior performance by guiding the company to existing opportunities or creating attractive options that are adapted to its resources and, at the same time, that have growth and profitability potential. The elements that characterise strategic marketing are market segmentation and positioning and together serve as a basis for conquering a market position distinct.

For Galao, Crescitelli & Baccaro (2011) conceptualise segmentation the market as the process of identifying and analysing subgroups of product-market buyers with similar response characteristics. Positioning is an act of shaping the company's offer and image to occupy a distinct and significant competitive position in the minds of target buyers, ultimately being how the company wants to be perceived by them.

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), positioning results from the company's segmentation strategy. The authors believe that every company should be built from the following processes: segmentation, selection of a target market, and positioning. This means that the company discovers different needs and groups in the market, defines its target market as the groups it will be able to serve with excellence, and positions the product and its image in a differentiated manner. Thus, positioning means presenting the brand and its image in a way that occupies a distinguished place in the minds of the target audience.

Similarly, Serravallo and Furrer (2008) describe positioning as an evaluation process that entails defining and implementing differentiated offerings whose attributes provide a sustainable advantage for the brand in comparison to the competition in a category from the point of view of the target audience's perception.

The communication strategies companies use are guided by the choices of the target market and the desired positioning. It is up to companies in this process to take their message of value to the market, which will play a role paramount in differentiating from competitors. Therefore, the communication process must be planned and integrated, considering the different possibilities that the promotional mix provides to capture the customer's attention (Gergeoura, 2007).

As Gergeoura (2007) explains, organisations may utilise various tools, techniques, and communication methods to create an adequate and valued space in customers' minds. Using these tools, you are pleasing your customers' evaluations and influencing their purchase decisions, ensuring their loyalty to your brand.

### **2.3. Customer Relation Management**

The strategic communication of customer skills is a neglected relationship in marketing strategy. Hennig-Thurau (2000) argues that, as part of the value production process, a company needs to establish strategies that view the customer as a partner. The term 'customer skills' refers to the sum of all product-related knowledge and skills relevant to the customer's post-purchase behaviour (e.g., the ability to use all product features). The communication of customer skills strategically may improve perceived relationship quality and customer retention as crucial relationship marketing variables.

In more recent studies, Grönroos (2009) argues that the idea of 'customer skills' developed into what they call 'customer relationship management' (CRM). CRM uses data analysis to study a large amount of data to administer the interactions with customers by a business or

other organisation. As a result of CRM, companies collect data from many different channels, including their website, telephone, email, live chat, marketing materials and, in recent years, social media.

However, in the new, enhanced, more virtual, interactive, and collaborative reality, it is more effective for businesses to consider customers as active participants in the value creation process. Marketing must create value in consumption to connect the company with its customers' daily activities and behaviours. A successful business can profit from this while building customer connections if it is done correctly (Grönroos, 2009).

Grönroos (2009) states that the marketing customer management process enables the brand's promises to meet the expectations produced by campaigns. However, he argues that there is a lack of understanding of how to create integrated marketing connections with customers to achieve customer relation management (CRM) goals.

The customer relation management (CRM) research field has evolved substantially since 2000. According to Verhoef et al. (2010), customer engagement has become a significant growth development in CM in today's increasingly networked society where customers can interact easily with other companies and customers. And an engaged customer extends beyond transactions in their relationship with a brand or company.

According to Lapolli & Lapolli (2021), customer management promotes customer loyalty by concentrating on retaining existing customers. Additionally, the authors argue that this type of marketing focuses on providing after-sales support through consumer information and gaining a better understanding of customers' demands, expectations, and needs. As a result, customer management focuses on existing customers rather than marketing the product for market gain. Companies seek to identify as many needs as possible from their users to establish a relationship with them. Therefore, this marketing approach aims to understand customers' personal needs, encouraging repurchases of other brand products (Crescitelli & Frendt, 2013).

For Graziano et al. (2011), customer management is focused on internal customers, requiring a cost/benefit search along with the investment in motivated employees and the ability to meet customers. One change that this marketing provided was the increase in competition between companies, expanding the development of technologies database, and expanding the relationship time with the customer. Therefore, the company needs to maintain a good relationship to avoid losing sales and revenue with a negative image for the consumer.

For Hawkins, Mothersbaugh & Best (2016), understanding consumer behaviour is essential for a good customer relationship. The study of consumer behaviour focuses on understanding

how people select, obtain, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, and ideas in order to satisfy their needs and wants. By understanding the consumer's value creation, marketers can promote customers' well-being through their marketing strategy.

## **2.4. Integrated Marketing Communications**

In response to developments in marketing and advertising practice, academics introduced the concept of IMC and embraced it (Caywood et al., 1991). Marketing and advertising managers were observed coping with the changing challenges of daily management, like the shift away from mass communications into an era with increasing pressures on mass media advertising, competition, and fragmentation with more individualist-oriented consumer audiences (Laird & Tedlow, 1991). Stimulated by observations of these marketing changes, such as media multiplication and technological advances in media and communication channels, academic writers have developed the academic theory of IMC. Intending to address, describe and explain current marketing communications practices that have not been captured by traditional accounts of mass marketing communications (Buttle, 1995).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) emerged in the mid-1990s and has attracted considerable attention in the literature. According to Schultz (1996), integration is moot because consumer messages are integrated across all organisations. The consumer will aggregate and combine information based on specific patterns, even though the organisation sent uncoordinated messages to the same consumer.

Consumer criteria chosen by the organisation may occasionally harm such integration. Therefore, the company must be able to manage the process according to its interests. IMC provides a new synergistic approach as competition increases in this saturated market environment. Since it is based on a consumer-oriented perspective and is focused on a relationship marketing approach based on communication, IMC can be used as a replacement for traditional marketing approaches focusing on transactions (Schultz, 1999).

Over the past two decades, academics and marketing professionals have debated this concept without agreeing on what it is and what the benefits it offers. Moreover, since IMC is a relatively new paradigm, the definition and application limits are still unclear. It is still necessary to conduct research on definitional issues in IMC at this time, says Kliatchko (2008), in order to consolidate a common understanding and practice of IMC based on the fundamental tenets of the concept. Kitchen (2010) called for a more precise definition and further research in specific areas: brand measurement and IMC relationship.

Considering that it is a recent topic, literature texts may question the IMC's significance and whether its influence will be temporary (Cornelissen, 2001).

As a result, the debates around it will likely remain on the authors' discussion agendas and the radar of marketing and communication researchers for a long time. According to Kliatchko (2008), this new approach to business and communications planning marketing has become an irreversible trend among academics and marketing professionals.

Shimp (2004) discusses an intriguing point about IMC considering all customer touchpoints as possible channels for delivering messages. Thus, we can conclude that not only the forms of traditional and innovative communications must be taken into account by the company in the communication planning; it is also necessary to integrate communication into other touchpoints.

Using Shimp's (2004) conceptual framework, we can understand IMC. Essentially, Integrated Marketing Communication is a communication process in which various forms (such as advertising, sales promotion, and events) are planned, created, integrated, and implemented over time to reach customers or potential targeted customers of the brand.

As Ferrell & Hartline (2005) explain, there are several reasons why the IMC is becoming more important. First, by coordinating all communication touchpoints with customers, the authors suggest that the company can foster long-term relationships with consumers. As a result, the company conveys an image that it cares and knows him well. Furthermore, Ferrell & Hartline (2005) argue that efficient promotional resources are used to reduce costs. The increased costs and unpredictable effects of mass propaganda are also reasons for the growth of Integrated Marketing Communication. Additionally, the authors state that technological development allows companies to contact their target customers directly by mail, email, etc. The marketing team must identify the appropriate communication tools and techniques when integrating a communication program, especially how to coordinate using these tools.

As Crescitelli & Ikeda (2006) note, competitiveness is vital for the growth and maintenance of companies in mature markets. During this stage, communication plays a crucial role since it fulfils a number of disclosure functions such as:

- Persuading the customer and informing them about the product/service.
- Reinforcing its position in the market and its image.
- Presenting it as a competitive advantage.

Based on Serralvo, Prado & Leal (2006), the communication process encompasses everything: advertising, sales promotion, merchandising, personal selling, public relations, product visuals, branding, and packaging. This positioning is achieved through the influence

of opinions and the beliefs of consumers (image generation) in order to instil a favourable attitude towards a brand in addition to the characteristics and benefits inherent to the product. In addition, the authors of the study state that positioning a brand in the market requires a very well thought-out communication plan, which integrates the product characteristics, the location, and the price into the communication plan.

Yeshin (2008) also comments on the generation of the image in the sense of favouring the creation of a favourable attitude of the company in the market. However, the author contextualises his idea by highlighting that, as consumers are dealing with the which they feel comfortable with, it is essential to ensure that the overall image projected by the organisation is received favourably. In these situations, there is a need for the development of a cohesive communication program within the organisation.

The articulation between the concepts of positioning and IMC is also made by Ogden & Crescitelli (2007). For the authors, a well-defined positioning is essential for the excellent performance of a brand, and for that, it is necessary to be recognised and remembered by the consumer. In that sense, the authors claim that the work of communication integrated marketing, characterised by the same concept being transmitted to the consumer through various media and at different times, can be considered a strong ally in building a solid positioning. Dahlen, Lange and Smith (2010) consider that the positioning successful branding involves consistency of messages sent to the market, and this consistency refers to communication with a single voice, integrated and consistent with the defined value proposition.

## **2.5 Digital Marketing**

In today's world, individuals and companies are increasingly connected. Through this virtual space, they can obtain information, communicate, interact, exchange knowledge, or any other product, regardless of time or space, thus transcending geographical and time limitations (Turban et al., 2015). However, the high degree of interaction that is possible through communication with these technologies allows the different participants in the value creation process - in particular consumers - to participate more actively in their relationship with the brand (Dholakia, Zwick, & Denegri-Knott, 2010). According to Copeland & Malik (2005), the new technology enables interactivity and connectivity between individuals and groups and facilitates social networking and information dissemination. With the advent of new

technology, people are moving from mere consumers to prosumers. Prosumers consume and produce media.

Because of technological advancements, social media have become increasingly popular for expressing and collaborating. (Botsman & Roger, 2010) Social media includes a wide range of platforms that allow consumers to share their ideas, entertain themselves, and consume other people's content. Social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok), Wikis (Wikipedia), and virtual worlds (Second Life) are common communication platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Several of these media platforms are well-known for generating, sharing and disseminating data, such as Web 2.0 (McAfee, 2006). Although social media and web 2.0 are often interchangeable, they are two completely different concepts and terms. Web 2.0 is related to online software applications; it is an Internet-based technology that allows them to be used to share information and sharing (Jara, Parra & Skarmeta, 2012). Considering that social media refers to the social aspects of using web 2.0 applications, these social uses include participation, transparency, interaction, conversation, community and connection (SpannerWorks, 2007).

People in all cultures and nations can generate and share knowledge, information, media, ideas, experiences, and opinions using social media tools. Unlike online and traditional media, social media is generated by users, and its content is more controllable (Tapscott, Williams & Herman, 2008). The use of social media also permeates all aspects of our lives. Many people worldwide and across cultures can interact with each other and form a global community based on their everyday experiences and interests (Edwards, 2011).

The three significant changes affecting the new social and economic context characterise the pillars of digital marketing: technology innovation, globalisation, and customer profiles. Through it, companies learn about community issues that impact their business, understand what they are, why they are in business, and what they hope to become: which means articulating their mission, goals, and vision as well as inviting consumers to participate in the brand development and organisational communication (Van Zyl, 2009). A company practising digital marketing that promotes good values and brings awareness to the consumers cannot do it independently. In the networked economy, they must work with their shareholders, channel partners, employees and customers. The trend of co-creation in marketing is significant and must be initiated with partners who share the same goals and values as the company (Hoyer et al., 2010).

However, cultural marketing is one of the main pillars of new digital marketing. It is an approach that focuses on the concerns and global citizens' desires. In order to succeed, companies should understand, and address community issues associated with their business

(Rindfleisch & O'Hern, 2009). Digital marketing should focus on performance rather than simple promotion, according to Kotler & Keller (2013). Information and communication systems must be upgraded to take the process digitally.

As digital marketing moves toward a more value-driven approach, guests are treated more like human beings, active, eager, and creative—presenting a significant challenge to consumer-brand relationships since consumers have their own opinions and experiences. In addition, they demand that brands address their deepest anxieties and desires and demand more participation in value creation. Consequently, it does not only address the needs and desires of traditional customers (Kotler et al., 2010). Creating personal relationships with customers, where they can discuss their feelings and experiences, is how brands humanise relationships with them. Customers interact through social media by sharing opinions and experiences, and consumers validate, confirm, and interact with each other in their purchasing decisions via social media (Ghemawat, 2007). Therefore, integrated with technology, digital marketing allows companies to connect with consumers and offer solutions based on an analysis of their preferences, opinions, and needs (Biswas & Roy, 2015).

Jara et al. (2012) claim that digital marketing is more than a continuation of traditional marketing. According to the authors, value-based approaches evolve toward brand-consumer integration through technology. However, Dunn (2015) argues that the latest approaches in digital marketing aim to transform business rules by changing customer interaction in time and space. As a result:

- Consumer perceptions of quality, satisfaction, and experience are the tools used to obtain marketing objectives of brand engagement, loyalty, retention, and recommendation (Sashi, 2012).
- Due to the consolidation of online sales, the market has begun to focus on two-dimensional web browser stores instead of three-dimensional brick-and-mortar stores. During the last decade, the single, always accessible mobile phone has replaced the points of discontinuous connections (residential telephone, business telephone, e-mail). As a result, network accessibility, universality, uniqueness, and consistency are outlined (Kurkovsky & Harihar, 2006).
- Technology is not just about human-computer interaction. There are various interconnected devices, and machines can communicate over a network without requiring human intervention. As a result, companies can access large amounts of information about brand-consumer relationships through multiple channels influencing their decisions (Vassileva, 2017).

Developing successful marketing strategies requires access to all of these data analyses if companies achieve a successful position in the market and high performance. Furthermore, to thrive in the digital age, brands must identify and analyse relevant information and create engaging content for their consumers (Wang, Wan, Zhang, Li, & Zhang, 2016).

## 2.6. Content marketing

Content marketing is one of the search terms that is expanding the fastest, according to Google Trends (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). The Content Marketing Institute (2014) claimed content marketing is:

*The art of communicating with your customers and prospects without selling. Instead of pitching your products or services, you are delivering information that makes your buyer more intelligent. The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty. (p. 32).*

Following the claim from the Content Marketing Institute (2014), content marketing is understood as a concept describing the creation of content with an approach intended to bring awareness and information about topics relevant to the consumer, and by providing consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, the belief is that through this content strategy we can ultimately earn customers' loyalty and business by providing them with value.

Pulizzi (2012) argues that all brands should think and act like media organisations to attract and keep customers, based on the concept of content marketing. Content marketing differs from advertising because it involves the brand creating compelling, worthwhile, and pertinent content to influence customer engagement (Rowley, 2008). Although content marketing has been used by the marketing field, we are still in the early stages of the process. Barathi et al. (2015) found that most brands have established themselves around a highly traditional marketing model based on years of mass media engagement.

As digital marketing requires content marketing, the success or failure of a company's online communication is highly dependent on the quality of its content marketing. For digital marketers to adapt their content and choose the right way to promote it, as well as promote a high quality of content, they must also analyse their target (Baltes, 2015).

According to Baltes (2015), each company's content marketing strategy is unique. Each brand needs to understand its public and create forms to interact with them. Furthermore, Rowley (2008) states that with digital content becoming increasingly important to business and society,

it is imperative to take a holistic approach to its definition and nature. For that, the following factors must be taken into account:

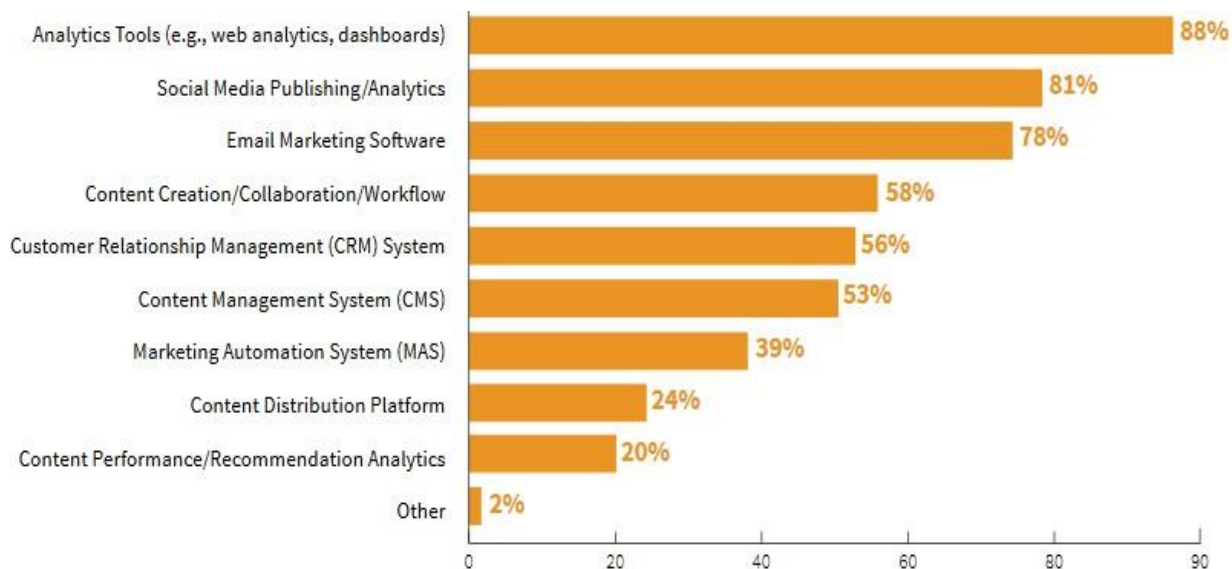
- Content marketing goals
- Target analysis
- Content marketing techniques
- Promotion channels
- Material marketing timetable (frequency)
- Metrics for gauging the effectiveness of marketing content

By taking those factors into account, businesses will improve the analysis of their public and provide a better content marketing that appeals to that public's interests. Content marketing engages and educates audiences as a means of establishing a special relationship with them and enhancing brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015).

There are multiple steps involved in the creation of a story. With the advent of the internet, marketers increasingly rely on analytical tools to help them make decisions. According to the Content Marketing Institute's 2020 annual report, the most effective tools organisations use for content marketing are analytics tools (88%), social media publishing and analytics (81%), and email marketing software (78%). These percentages are similar to the results of the exact measurement in the previous year's report, but with one notable exception: the use of content creation/collaboration/workflow technologies have increased from 48% to 58% (Content Marketing Institute & Marketing Profs, 2020). In addition, most respondents report that their marketing teams have remained the same or grown. However, due to the pandemic, companies have been forced to dedicate more resources to digital advertising, including content creation, as seen in Figure 1, below.

**Figure 1**

*Technologies business-to-business (B2B) organisations use to assist with content*



*Base: B2B content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.  
11th Annual Content Marketing Survey; Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2020*

*Note.* Base: B2B content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted. Source: 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Content Marketing Survey, Content Marketing Institute & Marketing Profs, 2020, p. 13.

The above figure shows several tools that are widely used, such as search engine analytics tools, social media posts, email marketing software, customer relationship management systems, and more. A paid ad option reduces the value of the content offered. In the opinion of marketers, social media platforms (89%) and corporate websites or blogs (87%) are the most effective ways to distribute organic content. Baltes (2015) argues that many companies are promoting low-value paid content in an effort to gain consumer attention.

The same report addresses how content marketing can be used to reach the respondents' goals for 2019, as shown in table 2:

**Table 2**

*Goals B2B marketers have achieved by using content marketing successfully in 2020*

	All Respondents	As Reported One Year Ago*	As Reported Two Years Ago**
Create brand awareness	87%	86%	81%
Build credibility/trust	81%	75%	68%
Educate audience(s)	79%	79%	73%
Generate demand/leads	75%	70%	68%
Build loyalty with existing clients/customers	68%	63%	54%
Nurture subscribers/audiences/leads	60%	68%	58%
Drive attendance to one or more in-person or virtual events	56%	52%	49%
Generate sales/revenue	51%	53%	45%
Build a subscribed audience	47%	45%	43%
Support the launch of a new product	45%	45%	40%

Note. 11th Annual Content Marketing Survey, Content Marketing Institute & Marketing Profs, 2020, p 15.

In Table 2, above, data shows that content marketing, especially that of the developer, builds brand recognition (87%), as well as trust (81%). There is a significant increase in building trust, reaching potential customers, and building customer loyalty.

This is consistent with Light (2014), who states that a growing number of customers expect personalised customer experiences that reflect their personal needs, attitudes, and situations. He says that customers want to feel like they belong to a group and are treated well as individuals, and that there is a need for “inclusive individuality”. Additionally, he says that consumers want to feel independent as well as interdependent. As individuals, they crave respect, and they seek to share this feeling with others (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

Content marketers must adapt marketing strategies to cater to individuality and inclusiveness as consumer behaviour changes. The use of online content marketing allows marketers to tailor their content to consumers more effectively. Furthermore, social media sites provide valuable, relevant, and up-to-date content beyond articles, videos, and blog posts. Online content viewers simultaneously seek quality and personalised experiences (Seymour & Blakey (2020.)). This allows them to respond to the content individually and privately, and share it with other members with a common interest. O’Reilly (2014) states that digital marketing enables marketers to produce rich, attractive content. As a result, organisations benefit from consumers’ heavy involvement in the internet. Compared with an audience that does not pay attention to the content, it is easier to influence the perceptions and behaviours of an engaged audience. Because customers realise, they are unique individuals with distinct demands, a standardised, inflexible brand message no longer affects them. Since the content is relevant to the audience, a customised message makes a company stand out from its competitors.

Sullivan (2013) describes content marketing as story marketing. He states that to raise brand awareness or change audience perceptions, an organisation must provide solid content to inform and persuade the audience. He adds that customers can become loyal and even spread the word about products and services with better content. Furthermore, content marketing can build and maintain relationships by distributing valuable content to the target audience. According to Odden (2013), It enhances the purchasing process and customers' added value.

With the current trend of marketing practice evolving, content marketing transforms marketers into publishers. However, Pulizzi (2012) argues that even though it is difficult for marketing experts to drastically change their way of marketing products, more prominent brands are gradually implementing this transition.

## **2.7. Storytelling in Content Marketing**

Content marketing has become popular in online business marketing. The purpose of content marketing is to tap into consumers' emotional needs by providing a solution. Everything in the online world revolves around content. The content must be valuable, relevant to the brand's needs, and convincing. This is done by attracting and retaining customers with storytelling. The brand's story enables it to be a virtual brand of happiness, and the story encourages consumers to seek happiness consciously. For the brand story to work, there must be a positive impact on the customer's behaviour, and the brand should have a sense of meaning. (Bagozzi & Natarajan, 2000). Regardless of the tool used to market – search engine optimisation, potential customer generation, or social media – convincing storytelling is the key to success (Pulizzi, 2012).

Digital storytelling is widely used in today's world. Consumers are interested in information based on real stories or fiction, which transfers their consciousness from a state of need to one of satisfaction. Storytelling motivates action. Inclusion and communication are enhanced by people connecting through interests and forming communities. Stories about products and brands are often central to these stories (Woodside et al., 2008).

Marketing departments are evolving into publishing departments as content marketing and storytelling become more central to their organisations (Pulizzi, 2012). Even though this process is not easy, and the challenge has only just begun, some larger brands have already successfully adapted to this new reality. Despite low entry barriers and the abundance of possibilities for developing valuable and compelling content, the most significant corporate challenge is creating engaging content.

Storytelling gives brands the ability to make a strong impression on their audiences, unlike standard presentations, which do not have the same impact. Due to this, many famous brands have used a compelling storytelling approach to increase sales (De Fina, 2016). To have an authentic customer relationship, the digital content should not exploit rational or emotional communication in an attempt to manipulate the customer but rather use it to connect with the customer on a deeper level using the power of storytelling. An authentic story invites customers on a journey that transforms them by delivering a rational message infused with emotion. A captivating tale captures the interest of listeners, holds their attention in suspense, and rewards them with a meaningful emotional experience (McKee & Gerace, 2018).

An engaging brand story allows the customer to see the world through the eyes of the character and empathise with them. This makes the character more relatable, from the customer's point of view. By demonstrating their customers' day-to-day challenges, brands act as mentors rather than heroes in their showcases (Donald, 2017). In addition, storytelling can bring consumption to an organisation by bringing emotional involvement and loyalty through the way its stories are told (Allen, 2005). Developing a story or narrative to strengthen a product's brand follows the same criteria and techniques as storytelling in other media, such as film and literature.

Like other media, digital stories often follow a sequence of events over time (Laer et al., 2013). The descriptions of the series of events affect the mindset and psychology of those directly connected with the customer's purchase decision. Through the connection individuals make with the brand, their loyalty toward the brand will immediately increase the respect it receives (Laer et al., 2013). For example, 'Nike', a very famous brand in the field of producing and selling sports products, is always trying to connect with the audience viewers by telling them short stories that may connect with a particular event of the life of the person (Gensler et al., 2013). Communicating events also play a crucial role in making the brand popular. If the events are liked by most of the customers, they will have a good impact on the company's customers.

Fog et al. (2010) state that storytelling is successful if the storyteller can make the listener identify with one or more characters and worry about their future. Essentially, the story described is similar to the function of a fairy-tale. Using this simple structure, organisational stories can also be mapped to identify the role of the hero, the benefactor, the supporter, the adversary, the beneficiary, and the company goal that was accomplished. There is a difference between a plot and a story. Throughout the story, the plot unfolds through the generation and resolution of controversy; it is the temporal structure of the narrative. Fog et al. (2010) describe a story conflict having the following elements:

- An introduction
- A point of no return
- An increase in the conflict
- A climax
- The resolution or fading of the story

For Denning (2019), a story is one of the most potent forms of marketing communication. According to marketing theories, a brand's benefits can be enhanced through stories. In addition to persuading consumers, effective use of stories adds positive associations to brands (Keller, 1993). Brands can also use storytelling to convey an authentic image through storytelling. To build positive brand associations, it is crucial to maintain consistency between brand identity and brand image (Fog et al., 2010). Authenticity is key to achieving positive effects since consumers tend to be sceptical about manipulative marketing. For consumers to perceive a story as real, it must be based on actual events. When the characters are relatable, consumers are also interested in made-up tales. Therefore, entertainment stories need not necessarily be true to be entertaining. The story should, however, not be deceptive since pretending that fiction is reality may reduce brand trust (Mossberg, 2008).

Wertsch (1991) points out that when we examine narratives through the lens of sociocultural theory, it is necessary to recognise how individuals and their environments are interconnected. The individual's experiences are not independent of their circumstances. Wertsch says that, on the contrary, it is crucial to recognise that the person has a social, cultural, and institutional context in addition to their individual characteristics. Consequently, narratives raise questions about a person's identity by capturing both their own identity and their surroundings. Based on this context, Pushkar et al. (2020) state that digital content has an inherent necessity to manage the social responsibility of an enterprise through its reasonable creation, taking into account potential negative impacts.

Danilova (2019) argues that content has a social impact on society through its influence on lifestyles, priorities, behaviour patterns, tastes, and preferences. As a result of interactivity with digital content, socioeconomic processes emerge which require recognition of the social responsibility of the subjects of marketing activities. Increasingly, multimedia publishers are supplying digital content to enterprises that deliver products and services, contributing to the creation of the information field.

Literature on branding has long recognised storytelling as a powerful tool for creating meaning for a brand and building relationships with customers. Only a few studies have examined storytelling from a managerial or strategic branding perspective. Aimé (2021) found that digital

technologies have also further undermined the brand's narrative by multiplying touchpoints and possibilities for interactions with consumers such as websites, blogs and e-mail. Co-creating the brand's storytelling with consumers forces the brand to rethink its communication strategy.

The consumer is increasingly playing an active role in co-creating marketing content with companies and their brands. Consequently, organisations and companies are turning to online social marketing programmes to reach consumers where they interact online (Hanna et al, 2011). However, despite recognising the importance of social media, Kaplan and Haenleim (2010) found that many companies have difficulty understanding how to do it effectively, what performance indicators to measure, and how to measure them. Furthermore, companies often treat platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter as stand-alone approaches rather than integrated pieces of their social media strategies. Instead, companies must consider both social media and traditional media as part of an ecosystem in which all elements work together toward a common goal: whether it is to launch and promote a new product or service, communicate a new company initiative, or simply communicate with customers (Hanna et al., 2011).

## **2.8. Social media use of storytelling**

Social media are changing storytelling in many ways; they are more interactive, cross-media, participatory, exploratory, and unpredictable than the stories told in more conventional methods (Alexander & Levine, 2008). According to Alexander (2014), in terms of storytelling for strategic purposes, one of the social media practices that lend stories all these qualities is *serialisation*. This refers to telling a story in sequential order with a time delay between sections like episodes. As social media posts are limited in time and space, part-whole segmentation, and sequenced instalments, for example, are considered key elements of extended and high-quality.

Social media allows organisations to engage stakeholders through sequenced storytelling constantly. This can be achieved by continually appearing with new episodes of an overarching narrative in their Facebook newsfeed over a more extended period. However, there is a lack of research on how effective this form of storytelling is or whether there are conditions limiting its use. According to Facebook IQ (2015), a sequenced storytelling approach to advertising on Facebook can be more effective than conventional advertising strategies. However, this result is unclear when applied to advertising contexts where different objectives, messages, and comparison conditions are used in comparison with advertisement

content. Using social media to tell an innovation story with specific objectives is the simplest strategy, as it allows for telling a complete story in one go or as a 'nonseries'.

Page (2012) argues that there is usually a collaboration and dialogue among different authors and participants in social media interactions. A form of emergent communication is also defined as something that develops over time with no specific beginning or end. There is no linear continuity to social media content. Hence, entries and exchanges revolve around specific instances and moments. Furthermore, it is highly personalised in that the content is tailored to the individual user through pictures, personal details, and marketing decisions. As a result of these characteristics and the affordances that each medium provides, social media narratives and their interactional management are clearly affected.

On Facebook updates or Twitter, narratives often recount trivial and everyday events and encounters. They are short and elaborate, do not have a canonical structure, and are based on recent events. However, the same cannot be said for many other social media narratives. Personal blogs, for example, are sites for telling stories that are very close to the canonical form. The same can be said of narratives told on the internet or shared by communities with social or political objectives. One genre in which canonical stories are commonly used is digital stories, which have been well studied in the fields of pedagogy and community studies (Elia 2007; Norton & Early 2011; Porto & Belmonte 2014). This is the reason De Fina (2016) argues that social media storytelling differs from traditional storytelling in how narratives are shared, recontextualised, commented upon, and continuously reconfigured, and how they are often recounted through multimodal resources, in addition to how they are produced and circulated. Rather than the characteristics of the text used, such environments are distinguished by dialogic and open storytelling practices. Despite the fact that online narrative types range from autobiographical and biographical stories to personal narratives, anecdotes, and short stories, differences between face-to-face and online communication lie in the storytelling practices rather than in the story structures themselves.

Only in the past 10 years have marketing studies addressed how narratives are created in social media and how different techniques are used to engage the public. It has been noted by De Fina (2016) that technology is becoming more and more prevalent in our lives and is affecting the types of stories we tell and how we create and receive them. One of the most important findings is that participants are much more engaged with the storytelling world than the tale world, resulting in greater reflexivity in their comments. In this research, a lot of attention has been focused on identifying and evaluating the forms of narratives created on social media platforms. Still, there has been no attempt to include the marketing view in the discussion.

There is a narrative technique known as transmedia storytelling in which a story is told across different platforms or communication channels using various media (Gürel & Tıǧlı, 2014). Although this definition offers a general framework regarding transmedia storytelling, there is still a lack of clarity about its nature, extensive and non-estimative content, relation to the outside world, and strategic importance as a marketing and communication tool in general. Furthermore, even though the authors acknowledge that social media are increasingly participatory and productive storytelling tools, they do not present any applications or, features for narratives relating to these media.

Studies have shown that storytelling is important in social media for promoting tourism awareness and influencing decisions. Destination management organisations face a distinct challenge in the new reality where destination brands are more likely to be created through people's shared tourism experiences and stories on social networks than via marketing strategies (Lund et al., 2018). Studying storytelling in destination branding practice and the measurement of its impact, researchers looked at the conceptualisations of storytelling within branding literature. Both studies suggest all stakeholders in the destination brand must be involved in the co-creation process of place associations to sustain tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Ben Youssef et al., 2019). The authors agree that storytelling should rely on many communication channels and involve all stakeholders in the co-creation process of place associations. Both pieces of research could contribute to identifying specific strategies and patterns of use of narrative in social media. Such studies, however, remain focused only on destination branding and do not offer a holistic approach to how to create and generate content for different brands and themes.

Increasing consumer control over social media content has led marketers to seek ways to engage consumers with videos. Content engagement challenges can be overcome by focusing on the video execution style. Coker et al.'s (2017) study examines the role of video storytelling in social media using the narrative processing framework. Respondents were exposed to YouTube ads that followed a straight-sell or storytelling approach. Consumers responded better to storytelling video ads than straight-sell videos on several measures, including attitude toward the brand, positive word of mouth, sharing, promoting, and viewing (rather than skipping). Depending on the style of video execution, additional effects may occur based on order and social media usage. Additionally, these studies have not fully explored other formats of video storytelling longer than 30 seconds or provided an understanding of how to tell stories, even though they provide key insights into aspects of using video as a form of storytelling in social media.

## 2.9. Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature related to five areas of marketing and the use of storytelling techniques. Firstly, the research has addressed elements of strategic communication, an essential component of today's marketing thinking. Concepts such as recognising the speech's focus and developing a strategic approach to creating content and building relationships with customers.

Secondly, it has discussed a field that is important in marketing, which is constantly evolving, the customer relation management. The new need for the public to feel heard and recognised created a unique synergy between companies and the public.

Thirdly, it has highlighted the importance of integrated marketing communications, where the consumer will combine all the brand's messages and create a profile on their own, and not necessary can be favourable to the brand. This concept emphasises the necessity of the unity of content of all media when creating a brand campaign.

Fourthly, it has discussed how technology and increased internet users have transformed marketing and its format. The new technologies enable social networking and information dissemination between individuals and groups, as well as interactivity and connectivity among them. Additionally, it introduces social media and the importance of creating engaging content for consumers.

Fifthly, literature relating to content marketing as a tool for improving relationships has been addressed. In essence, content marketing is the one that tells the story to the public. In addition, it is the first to create content using multichannel resources. Industry reports (B2B) show a series of data that content marketing received outstanding responses from the public, while social media became a valuable tool for engaging people.

Sixthly, it has discussed how storytelling can be used in content marketing and how narrative formats can have the same structures as traditional media, like television. It also emphasised the importance of maintaining the brand's identity and not compromising its values. Due to the enormous power of influence generated by those media nowadays, publishers must assume responsibility for creating a relevant and responsible discussion. As online activists, the public has a role in expressing their feelings and what they want to see from their brands. Customers can contribute by generating their own content and co-design the stories of companies through this new interaction.

Seventhly, social media is essential in interacting with the public and their brands since it has continuously evolved over the past decade. Content serialisation has been identified as an area of movement in a few studies. It is when you tell your story in stages, not all at once. It has also been observed that brands interact with the public and take advantage of real events to create stories. It is recognised that social media has been used for storytelling in different formats and revolutionising the way we construct narratives. Despite this, there are relatively few historical studies on storytelling in social media, especially those focusing on marketing.

In summary, the literature review demonstrates that storytelling plays an essential role in the digital era. There is strong evidence that this engaging technique is an effective tool for marketing communication, and many researchers have provided data that suggests this is the case. However, while this technique is proving successful, there are still questions about how marketing professionals use of storytelling in social media. And a clear gap of research identified that brings questions around the use of it, how storytelling can be shape in different platforms, and the endorsement of this technique for different target customers. This study sought to answer these questions and provide a framework for further applications and studies.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological approach and research design that are most appropriate for studying the research questions presented in the previous chapter. A multi-method design is proposed to address the research questions. An overview of the research design then follows, beginning with an outline of the key method employed: semi-structured interviews. Given the importance of design and validity in selecting research instruments, each method is justified. The subsequent section includes an understanding of the specific process of data collection, followed by an overview of methods used for data analysis. In addition, ethical issues concerning the research process are clarified. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the preceding sections.

### **3.2 The Research Purpose**

This research study aims to investigate the branding creation process and identify how storytelling can be applied as a part of the user engagement process. The study proposes four research questions:

1. How is it plan and develop the marketing content and brand stories?
2. What are the procedures and techniques for implementing, optimising, and managing content marketing and storytelling?
3. How effective, from the marketing professionals' point of view, content marketing is in building brands using storytelling?
4. How significant storytelling is to the New Zealand advertising industry?

### **3.3 Research Design**

According to the researcher's proposal, four key questions are outlined, and the research purpose is discussed to answer the proposed research questions. The five factors that helped the researcher conduct this research were epistemology, theoretical background, qualitative methodology, triangulation, sampling, data collection and analysis.

Firstly, to understand the types of knowledge that exist, epistemology is used as the conceptual foundation of this study. Secondly, it is essential to understand the theoretical background of the current research proposal to answer it correctly. Thirdly, the choice of methodology will determine the design, techniques, and methods that will shape the study

moving forward. In order to rationalise method choices, the researcher used the qualitative research method for the research.

Fourthly, after determining the methodology, it was determined was the most suitable method that would allow the researcher to explore the subject in question. For that matter, the researcher chose the purposeful sampling method, where a group of participants with similar profiles was invited to participate in the study.

Additionally, semi-structured online interviews were used for the data collection in this study, and thematic analysis helped the researcher to organise and understand the data deeply.

### **3.4 Epistemology**

This study aims to understand the process of branding and how the storytelling technique is applied in social media campaigns. It is, therefore, essential for the researcher to know the philosophical basis for deciding what knowledge is available and how the theory of knowledge can help to divide thoughts and positions about specific knowledge. Philosophical foundations of epistemology enable researchers to evaluate the genuineness of knowledge based on the kind of information available. This theory of knowledge includes research methods, validity, scope, and differentiation between belief and opinion.

The researcher has decided to use constructivism as their epistemology for this research. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism refers to the notion that knowledge cannot be derived from reality but is constructed from human practices. Therefore, due to constructivism, people construct and create their own beliefs and experiences regarding the influence of objects and interactions in social contexts.

In this regard, participants' beliefs and meanings reflect on their constructivism paradigm due to how their behaviours and social interactions affect their constructed opinions and experiences.

### **3.5 Theoretical background**

Methodologies have a theoretical background or view underlying them. In this view, the researcher's assumptions are explained as the basis for their decisions. It is believed that there is an established relationship between the researcher and the respondents or participants during the study. Researchers adopt interpretivism according to their epistemology. Furthermore, this study is exploratory as the participants' experiences,

opinions, and knowledge about storytelling in social media are limited to their own experiences. Additionally, it appears that the interpretivism paradigm is the most appropriate paradigm for this study since it focuses on values and experiences held by participants. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviour that the participants demonstrate, the researcher must enter their frame of understanding and meaning of the presented activity.

According to Giddings & Grandt (2002), interpretive paradigms are used to better understand human inquiry within a phenomenological framework. And for the purpose of understanding the behaviour, a social context is needed. The interpretive paradigm offers a method for investigating this research question because the researcher interacts with respondents by conducting semi structured interviews to understand their experiences. In this perspective, researchers gain insight and knowledge by focusing on the participants' explanations of their experiences and views of storytelling in social media campaigns. As a result, a theoretical perspective helps to provide a more descriptive and meaningful overview of this study, enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the branding process and the value of storytelling in social media.

### **3.6. Methodology**

This study will use a qualitative method for the design of the research. Researchers carrying out qualitative research take an interpretive, cultural perspective on phenomena, meaning they study phenomena in their natural setting, looking for meanings that people attribute to them. This approach is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2006) as an interpretive, cultural perspective on research. Qualitative research involves observing and understanding phenomena in a social context through the perception and understanding of individuals within that context. To continue in this line of reasoning, Hammersley, and Atkinson (1996) argue that an assessment is a continuous process throughout, which implies that the design process is also a reflexive one. In qualitative research, the researcher is aware of reality's social construction and is involved in the process of collecting the data, the research setting, and the participants (Yates & Leggett, 2016).

As mentioned above, qualitative studies differ from quantitative studies in that the researcher is the primary instrument of investigation, both for collecting data and analysing it, using his tacit knowledge - intuitive or felt, to produce interpretations on the topics involved (Creswell, 2010). Qualitative research aims to understand how people think and process knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the qualitative approach views reality and meaning as subjective. Based on Stacks (2011), the method illustrates and in-depth analyses a specific issue. In this way, qualitative research can assist in

comprehensively describing complex problems and discovering local and personal meanings and intentions. For detailed analyses of how organisations respond to a particular public relations issue, Stacks (2011) recommended qualitative research.

Yates & Leggett (2016) recommend using quantitative methods to examine how variables, and attitudes related to one another. In other hand, qualitative research provides the best answer to questions such as how and what questions to ask. As a result, the researcher has chosen to conduct and use qualitative research instead of quantitative research. Statistical methods are insufficient for collecting and providing a deep perspective on human experience, choices, and decisions. In contrast, qualitative research provides researchers with the ability to choose from a variety of research techniques based on the research question, making them more flexible. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research methods limit the researcher's insight and abilities to contribute to the study (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Considering the researcher is in a social context, the researcher chooses qualitative research methods in order to gather information and data from respondents. Methods of data collection will enable the researcher to approach the investigated phenomenon and enter the context in which the phenomenon occurs. Through a qualitative research approach, this study will examine the four digital marketing professionals from different sizes and markets in Auckland. By conducting semi-structured online interviews with respondents in this study, the researcher will interact with them to understand and examine their use of storytelling in their campaigns according to the interpretive paradigm.

In the specific case of this study, the researcher drew on her 15 years of experience in the field of communication to carry out the research. As part of people engagement, she conducted a series of interviews and conducted analyses of the data in an objective, critical, and sensitive manner, seeking to appreciate the subtle nuances and particularities present in the various interviewees' narratives.

As suggested by Creswell (2010), a protocol was developed for the interviews, which detailed all the instructions that should be followed in conducting them, together with a script to guide the discussion.

It is intended that the content that will be generated will be based on Structured Interviews as a qualitative research design. Specifically, Oakley et al. (2006) describe qualitative interviews as a type of methodology where methods and principles recorded are challenged and strengthened in order to make them more applicable and meaningful. Structured interviews consist of a controlled poll, in which a rundown of foreordained questions is posed, with next

to zero variety and with no extension for follow-up inquiries to reactions that warrant further elaboration. In this way, the study of the data has typically proven to be more straightforward because the researcher can compare the different answers to the same question.

As the data collection was performed during a pandemic, we had to contact all interviewees via email since the Pandemic was ongoing. Therefore, in the interest of everyone's safety, the interviews were conducted in the participants' offices/workplaces using Zoom's online video conferencing application. As part of the choice to use Zoom to conduct the interview, the company also considered the convenience, the comfort, as well as the compatibility with the interviewee's taste in technology. Furthermore, the few guidelines given regarding the choice of location were intended to ensure privacy for participants.

Afterwards, a question known as an "icebreaker" was asked (one of low complexity), which was meant to make the interviewee more relaxed and comfortable about the interview. Therefore, it was asked of him to speak about his professional experience in the world of branding.

In line with the exploratory intention of the study, the script followed the recommendation presented by Marconi and Lakatos (2005), providing open questions that would allow the participants to form their own reasoning from their own premises in order to provide a conversation with a permeability that could identify and explore ideas and thoughts that had not been addressed in the theoretical framework. Among the topics that were discussed were:

1. An overview of the evolution of brand communication.
2. What is the general perception of content marketing and storytelling.
3. Describe the process involved in producing content for New Zealand's brand stories.
4. The application of best techniques and practices in the development of a brand.

5. Assess the impact of content marketing and storytelling on brand building and the effective use of social media.

### **3.7. Collecting Data**

In this section of the study, the procedures, and techniques for collecting primary data from semi structured online interviews are described.

#### **3.7.1 Sampling method**

The fact that the study is qualitative limits the sample size to a smaller number thus allowing the researcher to gain a greater depth of knowledge and insight on the research topic (Huberman & Miles, 2002). A deliberate sample will be selected by the researcher to indicate a similar and particular characteristic among the participants. It was the most appropriate sampling method for this research since it was relevant to the phenomena of interest. Samples can be collected in a variety of ways, but this research primarily uses purposive sampling, as well as homogeneous sampling. A homogeneous sampling approach emphasises the importance of identifying participants who have similar or specific characteristics in helping to understand and examine the research problem more precisely.

#### **3.7.2 Participants selection**

The researcher used phenomenological research criteria for selecting participants for this study, following the above section on sampling. The fact that the use of content marketing and storytelling is not accounted for, evaluated or audited by any institution made the selection of participants a little more complex. However, in the absence of data to identify its practitioners by their budget, results or awards, the difficulty was circumvented by the researcher's arbitration by consulting professionals working in leading companies in the area.

Research Ethics Committee of AUT determined that each interview was always preceded by the registration of the Consent Term, which informed the participants of the ethical commitment of the research project, as well as the possibility of reporting any irregularities that may have occurred throughout the research process. In some cases, its application may cause discomfort to the user (Appendix 1).

The research participants consisted of four interviewees, intentionally selected, currently occupying management or creative producers positions, responsible for brand communication coming from communication agencies and/or social media content consultancies.

The requirement for the management position was due to the study's proposal to be based on the opinions and experiences of professionals with sufficient references and critical sense to be able to assess the different facets of the discipline.

The profile of the interviewees is described in table 3.

**Table 3**

*Profile of interviewees*

<b>Company profile</b>	<b>Interviewee code</b>
Award social media content company	Participant 1
Social Media content consultancy	Participant 2
Large multimedia company	Participant 3
Pasifika/Māori brand content consultancy	Participant 4

### **3.7.3 Interviews**

A consent form was provided to the participants before the interview to familiarise them with the researcher and the research setting. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted online so that participants could feel comfortable. As a result of the atmosphere in which the interview took place, the participants felt at ease and relaxed. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the interview questions were informal and that participants had time to think about and answer them. The researcher, throughout the research, encouraged participants to talk and elaborate to gain an understanding of their experiences through curiosity (McCracken, 1990). Participants were able to reflect on their experiences in a more comfortable setting during semi-structured interviews. Researchers and participants also discussed their own experiences during data collection. The interviews were conducted inductively, starting from more concrete questions, such as routine practices related to content

marketing, and evolving to more abstract reasoning that could lead to relevant insights related to the study themes.

During the interview process, the researcher asked the participants questions to gain their emotional and intellectual experiences. In addition, a sub-question referring to the research theory and the theoretical lens was also included in the script. Thus, the following topics were addressed: methodologies, research use, co-creation of stories with consumers, use of archetypal narratives, selection of means for storytelling, execution considerations and comparison of content marketing and storytelling with other techniques. The researcher conducted the interviews in a manner that focused solely on understanding the participants and ensuring they were comfortable answering the research questions directly.

The interviews were video recorded with the participant's knowledge, and notes taken during the conversations were added to the database to facilitate transcription and analysis. In order to capture, reflect on and describe what the interviewer heard, saw, and experienced, the researcher recorded, reflected, and described.

To validate the collected data, we followed the recommendation of Creswell (2010) and adopted multiple strategies, namely:

- Triangulation of data sources.
- Verification of notes during interviews.
- Use a dense description of the results.
- Clarification of the researcher's bias.
- Sharing of discrepant or negative information.

#### **3.7.4. Transcribing the data**

The researcher transcribed the audio files that had the recordings for the four interviews taken from Zoom platform. At that time, the researcher had difficulty finding a professional transcriber due to time constraints. Therefore, a Microsoft Word document was created for the purpose of analysing the interviews. Four transcripts of each interview, each eleven to twelve pages long, were then reviewed with accuracy and checked against the audio files again. The researcher edited the transcripts by identifying the participants by their names for accuracy.

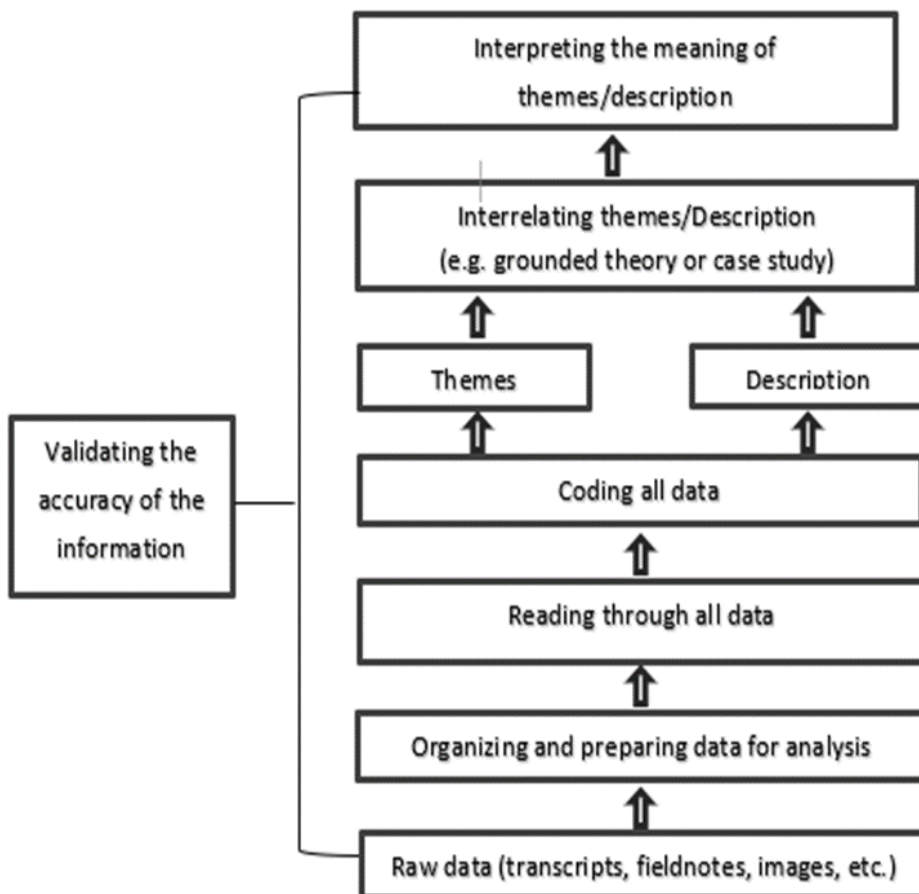
### 3.8. Data Analysis

A multi-method data analysis strategy was the grounded theory, which seeks to explain the data from a theoretical model - in this case, the construction of brands through the use of content marketing, storytelling and archetypes in marketing, following systematic steps: organization, reading, coding, interrelationship and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2010).

The analysis of the interviews was done in a descriptive way since the data were expressed through words, and emergent, considering that their conclusions were born from the negotiation with the research about the interpretations and meanings present in their speech, in order to try to reconstruct from coherent way to their reality (Creswell, 2010).

**Figure 2**

*Creswell's model of qualitative data analysis*



*Note.* Reproduced from Creswell's Model of Qualitative Data Analysis (2009)

Another used method of analysis was Thematic Analysis. This method has characteristics similar to procedures traditionally adopted in qualitative analysis. Aspects such as the search for patterns, recursion, flexibility, internal homogeneity in the categories/themes and external heterogeneity between the categories/themes are fundamental characteristics of qualitative analyses. This section has been organized into subheadings so that the reader pays attention to all aspects that need to be known and mastered before carrying out the Braun and Clarke (2006) and also any other type of content analysis.

Thematic analysis is an inductive approach is one in which data are used without starting from a pre-existing grid of categories or themes in order to analyse the data, while a deductive approach is one in which categories or themes are already established. As TA can be used in almost any type of qualitative analysis, it contributes to its practicality and wide applicability. The novice, as well as the experienced researcher in qualitative data analysis, can benefit from TA. TA provides novices with an opportunity to develop fundamental skills that will support other qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. For this reason, TA is considered independent of theories or epistemologies.

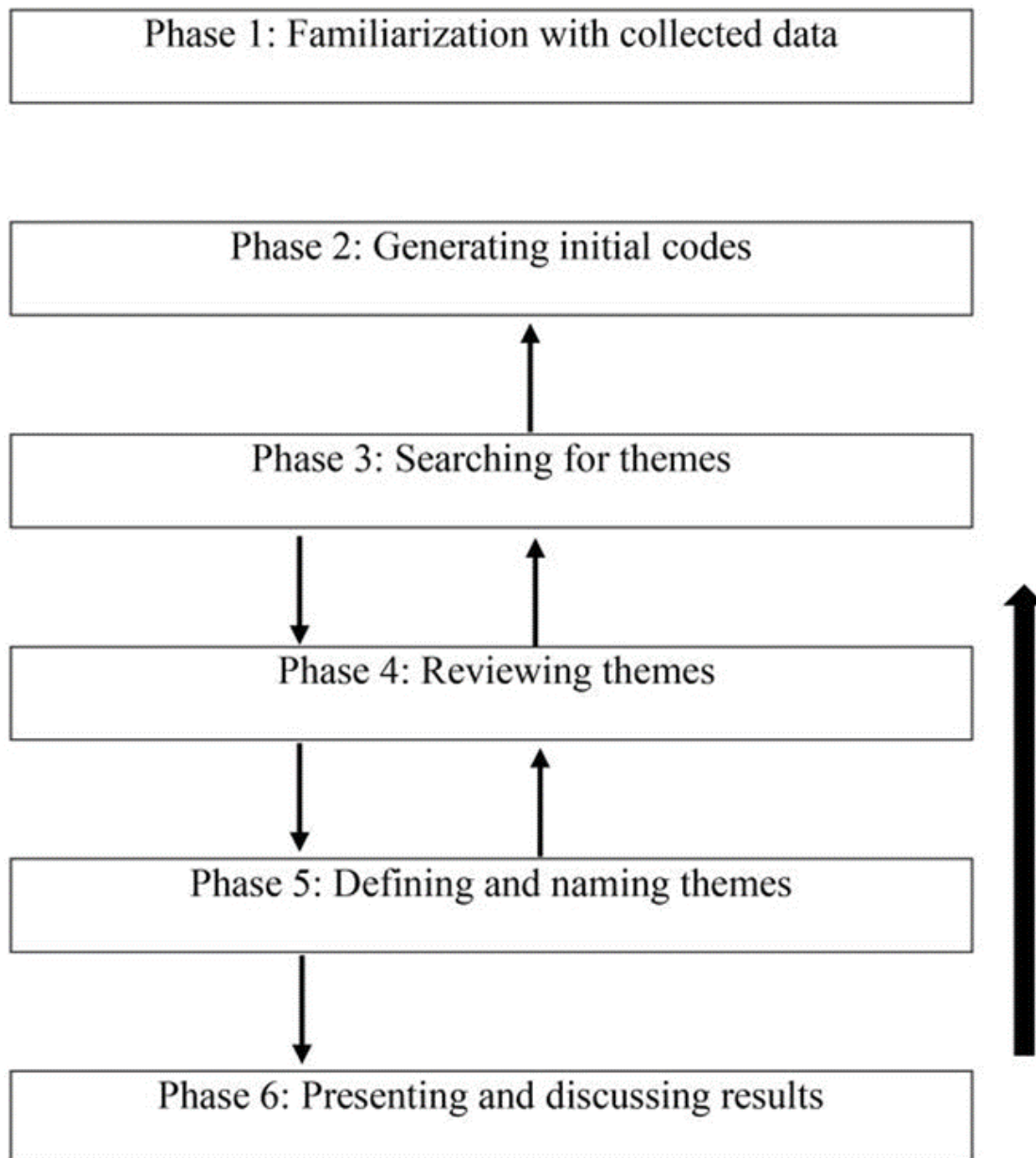
Recently, Clarke (2017) proposed three TA groups, which will be presented in their original language. There is the Coding Reliability AT type, the Codebook type and the Reflexive. He also classified these types as "small q qualitative research" - qualitative research with a small q - or "Big Q Qualitative Research" - Qualitative Research with a capital Q. In the first case, the research uses a qualitatively based technique, but its underlying reasoning is fundamentally positivist; in the second, both philosophy and technique have a qualitative root. This time, the Coding Reliability type AT is small q, the Reflexive AT is Big Q, and the Codebook type is tending towards Big Q, but with small q traits - that is, a mixed approach.

The six stages summarize the method of Braun and Clarke (2006) in Table 3. And by reading Table 3, it can be concluded that there are no fixed rules to conduct a qualitative analysis but broader guidelines. Therefore, flexibility - a fundamental aspect of qualitative research - remains vital in applying the TA steps and understanding the research questions (Patton, 2015). This also confirms that the analysis process is not linear, moving from one phase to another. As mentioned at the beginning of the text, it is a process that demands a recursive attitude, with back-and-forth movements, as necessary, through all the phases. Ultimately, it

is a process that takes time and should not be rushed. Therefore, a TA is not conducted in an afternoon, as if it were just another task to fulfil.

**Figure 3**

*Six stages summarising the method of Braun and Clarke*



*Note.* Reproduced from Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 43

### Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data

The beginning of the analysis presupposes a previous contact with the data since some of the following actions, if not all, involved the researcher: data collection, transcription, and review. Thus, first ideas or analytical interests may already be present. It is vital that the researcher performs an immersion in the data to familiarize himself with its contents in depth and breadth. This immersion means repeated readings of the data. More than that, it is a reading carried out in an active way, one that searches for meanings and patterns. The value of reading and rereading as part of familiarization also generates new ideas and the identification of possible patterns that are shaped as reading develops. As previously mentioned, despite the intention to conduct a detailed analysis, the search for themes through a theoretical-deductive or data-inductive approach ends up guiding the process of active reading.

### Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The purpose of this phase is to produce initial codes based on the data collected. Codes identify an aspect of the data (either latent content or semantic content) that seems interesting to the data analyst. Quoting Boyatzis (1998), the code is “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data that can be meaningfully evaluated with respect to the phenomenon” (p. 63). The coding process is part of the analysis because the data are organized into groups that bring together meanings. However, coded data differs from units of analysis (themes), which are usually more comprehensive. Themes, which begin to be generated in Phase 3, are where the interpretive analysis takes place. And it is in relation to this analysis that the arguments about the phenomenon being studied are developed (Boyatzis, 1998).

### Phase 3: Searching for themes

This phase adjusts the focus of the analysis to the broader level of themes. It is about classifying the different codes in potential themes, in addition to grouping all the relevant extracts in these themes that are being built. In essence, the researcher is starting to analyse the codes and considering how different codes might combine to form an overarching theme. It is at this stage that the researcher begins to think about relationships, whether between codes, between themes or between different levels of themes (e.g., overarching themes and their sub-themes). Some initial codes may form main themes, while others may form sub-themes, and others may even be discarded. At this stage, the researcher may have a set of codes that do not seem to belong to any of the themes under construction. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to create a theme named "miscellaneous" to make room for these codes. It is possible that this theme will be temporary since the analysis is not finished.

Phase 3 ends with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes, and all data extracts have been coded against them. At this point in the analysis, one begins to get a sense of the significance of each of the themes. However, nothing should be abandoned at this stage because without viewing all the extracts in detail (which will happen in Phase 5), it is still not certain that the themes will hold where they are at the moment or if some of them will need to be combined, refined and separated, or even discarded.

#### Phase 4: Reviewing the themes

The main characteristic of this phase is the refinement of the themes. It will become evident that some candidate themes are not themes at all. This occurs when there is not enough data to support them or if the data is too heterogeneous. It can also happen that two apparently separate themes can form a single theme. Other themes may still need to be divided. By the way, it is worth revisiting Patton's (2015) two-way criterion for judging categories – internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Thus, the data contained in the themes must combine in a pattern that shows something in common between them, while there must be clear distinctions between each separate theme

#### Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Phase 5 begins with a satisfactory thematic map of the data. The themes that will be presented as results of the analysis have already been defined and refined. Defining and redefining means identifying the essence of what each theme is about, and also the set of themes, and determining which aspect of the data each theme captures. It is important not to try to make a given topic cover too many aspects or make it too complex and diverse. To avoid this, one must go back to the extracts of data gathered under each theme and organise them into an internally consistent and coherent whole. It is vital to paraphrase the content of extracts and identify what is interesting about the data and why.

It is necessary to write a detailed analysis for each topic. As well as identifying the story that each theme is about, it is important to consider how it fits into the larger story being told about the data in relation to the research question or questions, to ensure that there is no overlap of themes. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the themes separately and each theme in relation to the others.

As part of the refinement, one should identify whether a theme actually contains sub-theme(s). Subthemes are essentially themes within a theme. They can be useful for structuring a larger and more complex theme, as well as for demonstrating the hierarchy of meanings within the data. However, the finalized themes and their sub-themes result from a process of refinement of preliminary themes and sub-themes.

#### Phase 6: Producing the report

Phase 6 begins with the final analysis and writing of the report. The task of reporting a TA, whether for a scientific article, research report, or dissertation, encompasses telling the complex story of the data to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis performed. It is important that the analysis (the researcher's writing, including data extracts for illustrations) offers a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting description of the story the data tells – within and across themes (i.e., intra-themes and inter-themes). The report must provide sufficient evidence of the themes in the data – that is, sufficient data extracts to demonstrate the theme's prevalence. It is important that the researcher selects vivid examples or extracts that capture the essence of the argument they are trying to illustrate, and avoid unnecessary complexities. Extracts should be easily recognisable as examples of the theme. The report should provide more than just data. Extracts need to be understood within an analytical narrative that attractively illustrates the story being told about the data. Furthermore, the analytical narrative needs to go beyond the description of the data and build an argument in relation to the research question.

### **3.9. Ethical issues**

Privacy and confidentiality were respected throughout the research process according to the ethical guidelines issued by the university's Ethics Committee. An email was sent to participants a week before the study began, outlining its purpose and nature. They were asked to participate in the interviews on a voluntary basis. At this point, they were also asked to participate in audio and video interviews. Participants were assured that their participation or non-participation would not adversely affect the privacy of their work with their clients. On the same day, they received Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and Consent Form (Appendix 3) to review before deciding whether or not to participate. A signed Consent form was obtained from each participant before the study began. A unique number protected each participant's identity. Individuals were assured that their personal data would not be disclosed by the researcher. Also, all participants were assured that the information they provided would only be used for the purposes of research, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the data analysis.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discusses and explains the methodological decisions for this study. Data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's paradigms were detailed and examined in a detailed manner. For this qualitative research, semi-structured online interviews were used as the primary method. The researcher designed open-ended interview questions to allow participants to feel relaxed and to be able to respond freely. Furthermore, the interviews were undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, and they were conducted online at the participant's home office. Therefore, the participants were comfortable as the researcher wanted to ensure they felt at ease when answering the interview questions. The researcher then underwent thematic analysis to identify and categorise the data into the most appropriate or suitable themes suited to the participant's data. The next section of this research examines the findings in a detailed manner. It explores storytelling's role in social media campaigns and the value of this technique in branding from a marketing professional's perspective.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the results gathered during the field research are presented. These results are organised to demonstrate the findings that have been obtained by the marketing field in developing brand strategies based on the use of content marketing and storytelling.

It is through this discussion that the two significant vectors of change in the last two decades are reconstituted: the technological framework of the internet and the use of mobile phones; and the maturation of millennials as consumers. It is important to understand the effects these have on the formation of brands and the way brands are built.

In response to the increased use of the internet, appropriate marketing techniques are becoming more widely recognised. Their industry-specific expertise allows them to play a vital role in using marketing tools adapted by companies from various sectors and targeted at heterogeneous audiences around the world (Couldry, 2008).

As a result of this research, a framework of storytelling techniques has been created for use in social media. By creating this framework, this study answers the main questions regarding the marketing applications of storytelling and, with that, the following: why it is being conducted (goals and metrics), who will do it (talents, competencies), to whom (target audience), how will it be carried out (formats, plots, tones, execution), and how will marketing professionals react to the temporal movements in society (trends, events, occasions, and behaviours).

As the study was intended primarily for an audience in the communication industry, it incorporated the digital marketing lens to focus on not only the storytelling component of social media but also the ultimate goal of marketing: how to sell a product or service.

The proposed objective was to examine a theoretical framework applied by senior workers and leaders in the communication and marketing industry and illustrate the form of use of storytelling as the main tool for engagement with the public.

## **4.2 Introducing the Interviews**

Initially the researcher had expected that a selection of participants as subjects would allow access to a host of content producers including advertising firms as well as agencies that produce digital content. However, as the researcher did not possess an insider profile in the marketing sector, the researcher had to send emails directly to the top companies in the market in New Zealand.

In the few instances of refusal, the reason was the lack of specific knowledge of the subject. However, these people worked in companies that ostensibly used content marketing and storytelling to build brands. Consequently, to circumvent this situation, new professionals were invited until the initially planned number of four respondents was reached, maintaining the precise criteria for recruitment of digital creation leaders with experience in storytelling.

Participants' responses to the questions enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of social media content creation and the engagement methods used during this process. Through a deeper understanding of these experiences, the research could be focused on areas that impact an individual's life, their significance in terms of modern methods of communication, connectivity, information dispersal, global news, awareness of important social issues, etc. Furthermore, in the age of social media, where it has become an indispensable tool in many people's lives, it is imperative to recognise the evolution in the mindset, behaviour, and patterns of users.

The purpose of this section is to discuss in detail the personal experiences, preferences, and opinions shared by study participants according to the appropriate research question. Based on the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter begins by providing insights into the data collected.

### **4.3 Developing a campaign**

When designing a promotional campaign, the marketing companies need to raise awareness and sales for a product or service. In addition, it will also be necessary to create an identity for the brand and build loyalty among its users and customers (Hallahan, 2004).

By establishing a content marketing strategy, brands can attract and retain customers (Pulizzi, 2012). A better content strategy can encourage customers to become loyal and spread the word about your products and services. The distribution of valuable content to the target audience can also contribute to the building and maintenance of relationship (Sullivan, 2012). So, delivering a good briefing and establishing the base of the content for the campaign can developed tuned strategies focus on the right medias (Hallahan et al., 2009).

In this initial moment of creating a campaign, the differences between big marketing companies (where is created multimedia campaigns) and small digital agencies (focus only in internet campaigns) were apparent when it came to getting the briefing and developing social media content. Participant 3 argues that there are two ways to do it: the media content is created from the beginning, which usually happens in a small digital agency. The second difference, is what happens in big advertising companies, where social media is used only as an extra tool to engage with the public, and the content is made later during the campaign:

*The issues there are that an idea gets briefed as a TV ad, or it gets briefed as something else. And then all of a sudden, whether it's the client or whether it's the agency or whether it's the media agency, it doesn't really matter where it comes from, but someone will go: "We need this to be in social". And then what you do is look at the assets you have got, and then try and make it work. So*

*you go, okay, well, here is the creative thought, and we have got this shot here, and then we just sort of weave a storyboard together, which isn't ideal, as I'm sure you can imagine, versus what we try and do more often than we are. So, I would say it happens more often than we get a creative idea that's concepted right from the beginning across all those different channels.*

Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) noted that companies disregard social media platforms rather than integrating them into their marketing plans. They argue that the company must instead consider both social media and traditional media as a part of the same ecosystem. This involves all elements working together in order to achieve a common goal, whether it is releasing and promoting a new product or service, communicating a new initiative for the company, or communicating with customers.

In the case of the same content on different platforms, the 'language' of the branding needs to be the same. Maintaining a consistent relationship between brand identity and brand image is very important for developing successful marketing campaigns (Fog et al., 2010). It is important for marketers to establish authenticity if they want to achieve positive outcomes (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) since consumers are suspicious of manipulative marketing.

According to all interviewees, it is effective to use the same keyword across all platforms to ensure that the message is captured homogeneously across all media. Participant 3 also adds that the element of link between the medias can be a series of characters or a design element to connect the content.:

*We also try and look at what is the best way to bring that platform to life in each of those different channels. Because, as you know, social is very different from Tv, and we have more opportunities to retarget and use different messages at various times to tell a story versus Tv. You have got one shot in the 30 seconds you have to convey your message, and then you are done. So, we use the channels in different ways, which sometimes drives the idea in different ways.*

According to Participant 3, social media platforms allow more than one way to engage, create messages and rethink the target audience in comparison with other medias, like television. Same concept was present in literature when has highlighted the importance of integrated marketing communication. The positioning of successful branding involves the constancy of messages to the market, according to Dahlen, Lange, and Smith (2010). A consistent message is communicating with one voice, integrated and aligned with the brand's value. Participant 4 also emphasises that social media marketing is not about perfect videos or

photos but about telling a story through social media. For an engagement story to be successful, it needs to be strategically portrayed in the appropriate media.

The study found that the process of creating new content and gaining a better understanding of the public can take several months. According to Participant 1, it takes at least a month to identify the audience and the type of content they enjoy. Participant 1 refers to the process of *“throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks”* where, in general, for new brands entering the market, primary content is produced, and then alternatives are explored over time. The marketers then select which social media platform and format to use and analyse the data that comes through.

As a result of this evolving context of creating a campaign, relationships between companies and customers are enhanced not only on the business side but also on the consumer side. The internet enables dialogues, organisations, movements, collaborations, and transactions, and the information asymmetry that characterised the world up until that point is reduced (Grönroos, 2009). In this way, all agents are more empowered to act lucidly and efficiently in favour of their interests. As noted by Participant 2, there have never been so many resources to build brands, establish consumer relationships and change behaviours.

#### **4.4 Using data to create campaigns**

The dominance of digital media as part of people’s routines has produced an intention and an effective decision on the part of the corporate market to invest and increasingly participate in these media (Seymour, 2014). The rearrangement of budgets and advertising efforts that this scenario causes leads to the restructuring of media companies and communication providers due to the change in the size of their business, but mainly due to the urgency of developing new competencies that respond to it. For Participant 2, it is clear how the effectiveness of social media in creating loyal consumers has been improved, which highlights that:

*Tv ads are not that effective. In social media, that is a direct link to purchase, and you can share contents with others.*

The content marketing industry must adapt its strategies to cater to the individuality and inclusiveness of consumers as their behaviour changes. The use of online content marketing helps marketers create content that is more personalised for consumers. Social media sites provide customers with valuable, relevant, and up-to-date content in addition to articles, videos, and blog posts. To find quality and personalised content on the internet, users seek

both a high standard of quality and a unique experience (Seymour, 2014). More than adapting to new media and their formats, communication and marketing professionals need to learn to drive a new dynamic of brand building: direct, uninterrupted, collaborative, and interactive. As Participant 1 reaffirmed:

*Marketing will always be a race against your audience being a bit too aware that you are marketing to them, basically. And so, it's just getting faster and faster with social media being an issue now and the internet in general.*

For all this, the work of brand communication, responsible for making brands known, positioned, considered, preferred, and regularly purchased, has never found an environment so conducive to being viable at a high level, justified by objective metrics and tangible results. However, it has never been so complex and competitive.

#### **4.5 Creating a message**

The fact that people are educated from their earliest childhood on the basis of stories, developing in themselves mechanisms that allow the processing and decoding of their more or less explicit meanings, and retaining what concerns them most, often results in a more significant memory of the brand content, promoting consumer engagement and the sharing of the content with others by the user (De Fina, 2016).

De Fina (2016) argues that new facts observed in relation to these techniques are their adoption by more brands and the elevation of their importance within the marketing arsenal, based on two main premises:

- Relevant content and stories are more efficient for brand communication than other communication formats.
- The universal use of the internet and social networks is an opportunity for brands to conduct more extended conversations with their consumers – whether they are stories or relevant content.

Interviewees, however, disagreed with De Fina (2016) that brand and content stories are naturally sought after, saying they are often avoided, except when they are in sync with consumer demand. Instead, content marketing and storytelling aim to engage people and communicate a brand's positioning in the process by providing useful, thrilling, or enjoyable content. As a result, these techniques have increasingly adopted the language, aesthetics,

and distribution methods of journalism, arts, and culture. Once well executed, they become capable of sensitising and engaging the target audience.

Increasingly, customers expect personalised customer experiences based on their individual needs, attitudes, and experiences (Light, 2014). It is important for customers to feel that they belong to a group and are treated well as individuals. Individuality should be inclusive. The desire for independence and interdependence is also common among customers. Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) state that individuals crave respect and want to share this feeling with others. The message to be passed on about your brand is really important, and agencies are trying to bring a humanistic side to the business. Participant 4 argued that people like to follow things that they resonate with, that they connect with. And it is no different in content marketing. So if one is looking at trying to increase one's followers or trying to target sales on social media, there always has to be a narrative. For Participant 4, those stories help to connect with people, and it is important to bring the values and the principles into the space of social media as well.

According with Participant 3, the language used in the narrative is a vital tool for engaging with the public. Being too casual can cause disbelief, an idea that what is said is not true. Participant 3 reminded us that one must to be able to make sure that the brand is approachable, warm, and engaging. But at the same time, people do not want to be talked to like the brand is their best friend.

#### **4.6 Using storytelling as an engagement technique**

The research found that there is no universal process for story development that repeatedly leads to good brand communication. The results, in general, are very dependent on the sensitivity and intuitive thinking of the team involved, making the quality of the marketers a critical factor for achieving communication goals, a point confirmed by Participant 1.

It was also identified that the skills necessary for achieving these goals are changing, which invites professionals with different profiles to participate in this process, stimulating a renewed discussion of the relationship between advertisers and their suppliers and about the business model that links them, according with Participant 2.

The difficulty in proposing performance metrics and goals in communications fields is a latent fragility since the work is influenced by uncontrollable external variables and has an unknown maturity period. As a result, Participant 4 highlighted that the corporate culture of short-term results interferes with executive discretion, making them less risk-averse.

This can leave many out of the most stimulating discussions on the subject of consumer participation in corporate narratives, as it is also the riskiest approach, which suggests to its managers a closer and more humanised posture and dynamics of communicating, in contemplating the dialogue and fallibility in its essence, as assessed by Participant 3:

*It is more that there's a brand in my world doing things in my space, and therefore I feel more affinity to that. So, yeah, I think it is an important technique. And because social is a little bit more cost-effective and cost-efficient to produce, then we can do that.*

Participant 3 suggested that storytelling is a technique that has been used before as a low-risk method to 'humanise' the brand. Furthermore, the fact that the strategy has been implemented in social media contributes to its effectiveness and low production cost.

#### **4.7 Defining what kind of story to tell**

The research revealed that advertising agencies appreciate stories in which people identify issues that concern them and address them in a positive and constructive way. In this sense, Participant 2 understood that the bias that is applied to the content is a determining factor for the success of communication, as it leads to inclusive, happy, or comforting sensations.

In response to a consumer who is more critical of brand promises, but more understanding of the limitations of the other, the opportunity arises for brands to assume a more humanised attitude, which awakens empathy in their consumers and, possibly, trust – a fundamental element for building brand preference and loyalty. According to Participant 4, it is observed today that many companies have moderated the tone of their communication, making it less pretentious, less arrogant, and even more humble. And Participant 4 stressed:

*I think storytelling is important. And I guess a good example of when you can actually expand that story is when you're actually doing like a good story, for example, testimony or the journey of a business, why we started, why our purpose, that sort of stuff.*

Even if it is partial and provisional, the achievement of this status will demand that brands assume a commitment to truth and authenticity in the stories they tell and in the dialogues they establish with a more educated society that has more access to information and discernment in detecting exaggerations and untruths embedded in the marketing discourse, as stressed by Participant 1. This should not inhibit the use of fantasy in brand communication. On the contrary, people are eager to receive good quality content and advertising that excites, informs, entertains, and generates content. What is no longer tolerated is lies, deceit, and schemes to manipulate or deceive the consumer.

## 4.8 Which format to tell the story

The content of social media is often episodic, i.e., it does not follow a linear progression but can revolve around specific instances and moments, and it is personalised since it can be tailored to the individual user through photos, personal details, and marketing choices (as with Facebook). As social media evolve, storytelling has become more interactive, multi-media, collaborative, innovative, and unpredictable than ever before (Alexander & Levine, 2008).

A significant finding of this research is the response to the new trends that have emerged, and how brands have been adopting a new form of communication through digital media. Presently, new social networking applications are aiming to provide the best possible experience to the consumer, achieving preference, fidelity, and opportunities. Such is the case with the social network TikTok.

TikTok offers a duration in its video content of 15 seconds as a minimum and 60 seconds as a maximum, achieving greater interest and greater attention due to the intensity of the video. That is to say, a publication of a brand appeals to an individual's senses through passion by including dynamic animations, colours or images in the post.

Research finds that this platform has been taking the creation of stories and branding to a more visual approach and trying to bring new consumers from Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) as a leading public target. that Participant 3 talked about an interesting perspective on this:

*We were talking with TikTok the other day, and it's astonishing to think how much of that is that sort of Generation Z target audience. I think something like 70% based in New Zealand is Gen Z, which is amazing because that's like an audience in a box that you can talk to and just do an excellent job of that.*

According to Participant 3, Generation Z is TikTok's main user group. While the target public will be defined by the company during the briefing, other media like Facebook or Instagram might bring more Millennials and members of Generation X as consumers.

Furthermore, it is crucial to adapt the language and message to the target audience of each platform. Storytelling on social media differs from conventional storytelling in several ways. This is seen not just in the sharing, recontextualising, commenting, and constantly rearranging narratives but also in how they are created and distributed, along with the methods used to

share and reframe them (De Fina, 2016). Participant 2 stressed that each brand has its own voice, and the media chosen will determine how the format of storytelling will be created.

According to Danilova (2019), content impacts society by influencing lifestyles, priorities, behaviour patterns, tastes, and preferences. Digital content produces socioeconomic processes requiring social responsibility from those engaged in marketing activities. Digital content is increasingly being provided by multimedia publishers to businesses that deliver products and services, contributing to the growth of the information industry. The insertion of content into the context and the responsiveness of the content to that context are critical factors for success, argued Participant 5. The coexistence and interaction with its environment are what will provide the brand story with relevance to its audience.

To live this era fully, brands need to ensure that they have mastered two new skills: listening to their consumers and engaging in a productive marketing dialogue with them. Most brands, fearful of the risk involved in the process, are frightened by the idea of losing control over what gets published. As a result, there are few companies that invest in the free participation of the user in their brand communication, concluded Participant 2.

Due to the shattering of the ideal of perfection pursued by brands since the beginning of the modern age, Participant 3 believes that this presents a great opportunity for brands to establish real connections with their customers, by accepting their fallibility, apologising when necessary, and allowing their management to be influenced by third parties.

Throughout all of these cases, the close and permeable management of what is happening in the brand ecosystem is crucial for achieving the necessary reactions and interactions that can be tailored to fit both the positioning of the brand and the sensitivity of its managers.

Based on the consensus of the interviewees, the pace of content creation will always be faster on social media platforms. It is also important to remember that the specialisation of professionals on each platform will determine the level of service provided to the end user. Furthermore, Participant 3 believed that in spite of the fact that social media provides a short format for passing messages, new platforms will explore even more extended forms of digital storytelling.

## **4.9 Summary**

In sum, the findings of this study recognise the increasing development of social media as an essential tool for engaging with the public, specifically with the Millennials and Generation Z.

It is necessary to include the platform as part of the communication strategy from the beginning of the campaign.

Many techniques and methods, such as storytelling, are widely used by brands and marketers. This is because it is a method that establishes a connection between the brand and its audience, thereby increasing brand awareness. Additionally, new storytelling formats, such as videos and photos, have influenced how content is created. This evolving communication format is also developing rapidly. There is no linear continuity in social media content. Consequently, exchanges and entries are shaped by specific instances and moments. In addition, pictures, personal details, and marketing decisions are tailored to the individual user's preferences (Page, 2012).

Based on the combination of these findings, it is possible to draw valuable insights into how social media can intensify this type of interaction compared to other media. We can do this, in part, due to the fact that social media is interactive and enables the cost-effective production of target content. In addition, it is creating a change in how storytelling is presented.

#### **4.10 Key findings summary**

Based on the data collected, the following are the key findings and themes:

- Companies that create content focused on social media, rather than adapt content from other media, are more creative.
- To create similar message between different platforms, it is essential to use same design elements and series of characters.
- A mix of experimentation and data analysis is the way to understand the target public.
- Better understanding of the public leads to more chances of effectiveness in creating loyal customers.
- Bringing stories that resonate in peoples' lives creates identification.
- Branding messages need to be approachable, warm, humble, and more humanised.
- There is no universal form for story development that leads to good brand communication – each branding message is unique.
- Skills are changing and that is because of the need for a variety of content creators.
- The members of Generation Z are the main focus public in social media and they are demanding new story formats.
- Storytelling in social media is primarily visual, using the resources of video and photos.
- The faster pace of content creation in social media requires a quick response to the users.

- Storytellers are adapting the narratives to social media and turning storytelling into a more interactive process.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this qualitative research, interviews were conducted to obtain information from four participants, digital marketing professionals based in New Zealand. In analysing the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, a thematic analysis method was used and six key themes were identified:

- developing the campaign,
- using data to create campaigns,
- creating a message,
- using storytelling as an engagement technique,
- defining what kind of story to tell, and
- which format to use in telling the story.

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the key research findings presented in Chapter 4, and references each research question. The study results are also discussed in relation to previous research studies in the areas of social media, content marketing, and storytelling.

In the following sections, each of the main questions asked in the semi-structured interviews is discussed as they follow the sequence of planning, implementing, and managing content marketing, storytelling's effectiveness, and its significance to the New Zealand marketing industry.

#### **5.1.1 Questions**

In order to understand the branding creation and to identify how narratives can be applied as a part of the user engagement process, the following research questions were formulated:

- How are the marketing content and brand stories planned and developed?
- What are the procedures and techniques for implementing, optimising, and managing content marketing and storytelling?
- How effective, from the marketing professionals' point of view, is content marketing in building brands using storytelling?
- How significant is storytelling to the New Zealand advertising industry?

## **5.2 Discussion of the research questions**

Based on the answers to the questions outlined above, the researcher has been able to determine a complete understanding of how the participants plan on using storytelling in their digital creative process. As a result of understanding these experiences, future research can be better oriented towards defining areas of influence in the marketing field, identifying its importance in modern forms of communication, connectivity, information dissemination, branding, awareness of relevant social issues and so on. Moreover, it is extremely important that we become aware of the changes in mindsets, behaviours, and patterns of social media users, especially as this platform continues to gain popularity and becomes an increasingly integral part of our everyday lives.

The following sections are devoted to disseminating insights gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The approach is to focus briefly on the participants' responses across all interview questions, followed by an overarching conclusion on the key findings of this study.

### **5.2.1 First question**

- **How are the marketing content and brand stories planned and developed?**

The first research question investigated the relationship between brands and marketing companies. The question relates to providing some conceptual insight into creating a campaign, which is commonly referred to as a briefing, when the client requests that advertising campaigns be created.

As can be seen from the interviews, there are significant differences between large marketing companies producing multimedia campaigns and small digital agencies specialising in internet campaigns. All participants from large companies expressed concerns about the briefing process. Most of the time, clients begin this kind of project by supplying ideas for other media, which the team of digital communicators then adapt to the social media platform that the client provides. The companies that specialise in digital content, on the other hand, are typically smaller, and they are able to develop their content freely while focusing on the virtual space as their primary focus.

Likewise, Rowley (2008) also acknowledges the importance of digital campaigns. The author states that the creation, distribution, and consumption of digital content is now becoming increasingly important to both business and society, so it is imperative that a comprehensive approach is taken to understand both its definition and its significance in order to make the most of it.

The findings indicate that it is imperative to establish the intention to create digital content at the start of a campaign, and acknowledged the need to give digital content creators the freedom to think and design campaigns with specific formats and messages for social media. As each platform comes with specific tools and techniques, they may be better utilised if they combine their freedom of creation with the format it is designed for.

Also, findings show that, during the process of building the brand campaign, it is crucial for the consistency of the multimedia content to be maintained throughout the entire process. According to interviewees, it is important to ensure homogenous messaging across all platforms. The same keyword should be used across all platforms to provide a consistent message. Additionally, Participant 3 suggested that there is the possibility of connecting the various media pieces by using a series of symbols or a design element to create a visual link.

According to the participants, it takes several months for new content to be created and for public awareness to increase because of the new content. Participant 1 reported that it takes at least a month to identify the type of audience and what type of content they like in order to create it. For participants 1 and 2, “throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks” is the process by which new brands often develop primary content and then explore alternate options to establish what seems to work. Once the data has been collected, marketing professionals will choose which social media platforms and formats to use and analyse the results.

The findings also lend support to Patrutiu-Baltes’ (2015) acknowledgement of the importance of the target public analysis to provide successful digital content. As part of the content marketing process, a brand engages its audience and educates them in an effort to establish a special relationship with its target public and enhance brand loyalty.

Furthermore, according to the 2020 annual report by the Content Marketing Institute, data analytics tools (88%) and social media publishing and analytics (81%) are the most effective tools used by companies in content marketing. Allied with the perceptions of interviewees, the effectiveness of digital analysis and ‘throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks’, which can be named as publishing and using analytics, are the main methods for understanding the audience, their needs, and behaviours.

### 5.2.2 Second question

- **What are the procedures and techniques for implementing, optimising, and managing content marketing and storytelling?**

The second research question aimed to understand the processes that follow after the briefing, the implementation techniques and managing the content with narratives to engage the audience.

It was discovered from the interviewees that, after the process of understanding the public and creating an analysis of content, social media strategies are established and can be incredibly powerful for measuring campaigns and assessing ROI. The measurement of search engine results can be done using several tools, such as social media posts, email marketing software, and CRM software. Analytics dashboards are available on websites and apps, and are an important source of analysis of results on the engagement of viewers and customers. Based on the data collected, marketers can see public trends, selling performance, and any form of interaction of the platform user. Clicks and comments can provide the profile of the customer and shape the content to better attend to their needs.

Participants did not agree with De Fina (2016) that brand and content stories are always sought after, except when they are in sync with consumer demand. According to the participants, the format can be created beforehand with analysis of previous interactions and can be the basis for the storytelling campaign. It is more effective to use content marketing and storytelling to engage people and convey a brand's positioning by providing interesting, helpful, or entertaining content. Due to their adaptability, journalism, arts, and cultural techniques have increasingly been adopted for their language and aesthetics. The brand's target audience becomes more engaging and sensitive once these strategies are executed well.

All interviewees agreed with Sullivan (2013) that information and persuasion are key components of raising brand awareness and changing audience perceptions. By providing customers with better content, it is possible to gain their loyalty and even encourage them to spread the word about the company's products and services. Furthermore, content marketing can also help build and maintain relationships between the company and its target audience by sharing valuable content with them.

The study has revealed that digital creators are being exposed to a society that is more educated, better equipped with information, and more able to distinguish between truth and exaggeration as a result. Participant 1 emphasised the need for brands to deliver authentic dialogues and tell true stories. Despite this, the use of fantasy should not be restricted or

hindered brand communications. In reality, people are eager to receive good quality content and advertising that provides information, entertainment, and creativity. However, consumers will no longer tolerate lies, deceit, or schemes that manipulate or deceive them.

### **5.2.3 Third question**

- **How effective, from the marketing professionals' point of view, is content marketing in building brands using storytelling?**

The third research question investigated the marketing professionals' point of view (based on their analysis of data) on the effectiveness of storytelling's engagement with the public.

The research revealed that no universal approach to story development consistently produces effective brand communication. For communication objectives to be achieved, the quality of the marketers is a crucial factor since the results are highly dependent on their sensitivity and intuition.

However, a few methods have been observed by participants as being effective. In response to this question, Participant 3 suggested storytelling was a low-risk method of 'humanising' a brand. The creation of messages with the same language and slang as the public can show a closeness between the brand and the main target public. Further advantages of this strategy are its effectiveness and low production costs due to its implementation through social media.

It is possible for brands to adopt a more humanised attitude when they are able to respond to consumers who are less critical of brand promises but who are also better equipped to understand the limitations of the other. This way of delivering campaigns allows them to build trust with their customers, eventually leading to brand preference and loyalty. According to Participant 4, many companies have moderated their tone today, delivering more positive messages.

Interviewees argued that new values and behaviours in society influence brand stories. The way a company responds to these values and behaviours determines whether they pose a threat or an opportunity for the brand. While this is in contrast to what Godin (2009) thinks about these worldviews, these perspectives will not replace storytelling.

A significant finding of this research is the response to the new trends that have emerged, and how brands have been adopting a new form of communication through digital media. Presently, new social networking applications are aiming to provide the best possible experience to the consumer, achieving preference, fidelity, and opportunities. Such is the case with the social network TikTok. Another important finding is how the platform has been taking

the creation of stories and branding to a more visual approach and trying to make new consumers from Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) a leading target public.

According to Participant 3, Generation Z is TikTok's main user group. While the target public will be defined by the company during the briefing, other media platforms like Facebook or Instagram might bring more Millennials and members of Generation X as consumers.

However, the present study supports De Fina's (2016) conclusion that social media storytelling differs from traditional storytelling in that narratives are shared, recontextualised, commented upon, and continuously restructured. Additionally, narratives are often recounted using multimodal resources, in addition to the production and distribution methods used. These environments are distinguished by dialogic and open storytelling practices rather than the characteristics of the text used.

#### **5.2.4 Fourth question**

- **How significant is storytelling to the New Zealand advertising industry?**

The fourth question focuses on the broader conversation around storytelling in advertising in the local context of the discussion. It asks a question about how local marketing uses storytelling as part of its branding process, and how effective it believes it is.

In this study, storytelling was identified as a method well explored by marketing companies in New Zealand, one that is increasingly used on social media platforms. In many cases, the need to send a message arises from interactions with users who already use storytelling to express themselves. Whether they are reading real stories or fiction, consumers prefer information that moves them from a state of need to a state of satisfaction. People are more likely to connect through interests and form communities when they are told stories about products and brands. These stories motivate action. Inclusion and communication are enhanced by telling stories about products and brands.

The research found that advertising agencies valued stories that provided constructive and positive solutions to people's problems. For them, communication success depends on the understanding of social bias because it creates messages that cultivate feelings of inclusion, happiness, and comfort through content.

The findings also derive from a common perception between all interviewees that content creation on social media platforms will always be faster. In addition, the level of expertise of professionals on each platform will affect the quality of service they provide to end users. Also, Participant 3 believes that despite social media's short format, new platforms will explore even longer forms of digital storytelling.

### **5.3 Summary of the discussion**

In this chapter, the present study's results have been summarised and discussed in reference to each of the research questions. Earlier studies have also been taken into account to provide an understanding of the findings.

The study confirmed that storytelling is a well-used technique that allows digital marketers to engage their target audience more effectively. Social media has been recognised for using storytelling to generate stories in different formats and revolutionising the way we construct stories. Brands are able to interact with the public and make use of real events to produce stories.

It suggested that the consistency of multimedia content should be maintained throughout the entire branding process. Key phrases and the same design can be tools for maintaining the same message on all platforms.

A number of factors were identified in this study that participants consider when developing strategies and understanding their target audiences. It is possible to measure search engine results using a variety of tools, including social media analysis, content analysis, and CRM.

In this study, it was found that digital creators are experiencing a society that is more educated, more equipped with information, and better able to discern between truth and exaggeration. Those brands that can respond to consumers who are less critical of brand promises but who also have a better understanding of their limitations can adopt a more humanised attitude.

According to the research, there is no universal approach to brand communication that consistently produces effective results. Every campaign and brand are unique and needs a particular form of message or communication. It is crucial for marketers to be of high quality to achieve communication objectives since their sensitivity and intuition greatly contribute to the success of communication campaigns.

Furthermore, narratives have often been recounted using multimodal resources, in addition to the production and distribution methods. These developments can be distinguished by dialogic and open storytelling practices rather than specific characteristics of the text.

Research shows storytelling is becoming increasingly important to New Zealand marketing companies and is used significantly more often on social media platforms. In general, it is believed that content creation on social media platforms is faster than that on traditional

platforms. Quality of service will be determined by the level of expertise of professionals on each platform.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1: Introduction**

This chapter presents, firstly, a summary of the key findings of the research, followed by a framework of recommendations for creation of storytelling in the social media field. The limitations of the study are assessed and some further research is suggested. The chapter concludes with a summary of the preceding sections.

### **6.2 Summary of the key findings**

Brands play a crucial role in postmodern society, not just because they are economically relevant. The purpose of brands is not only to represent and create value propositions but also to fulfil their customers' desires and needs, both conscious and unconscious. As a result, the creation of a brand involves large budgets and impacts a significant part of people's lives. Therefore, researching the techniques and processes that continuously lead to the improvement of this process is essential.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the branding process has become more complex because of two different vectors: the emergence of new media such as the internet and smartphones, which have been able to facilitate direct and instantaneous interaction between individuals, companies, ideas, and institutions; and the advent of a new generation of consumers with a conscience, values, and behaviours distinct from those of their predecessors.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the importance of storytelling in social media from the marketing professionals' point of view. The secondary aim of the study was to examine how advertising companies are creating narratives and implementing them in the digital world.

The study was carried out online, by digital call meetings using the Zoom platform. The researcher and participants were in Auckland, although because of the pandemic, that was the safest data collection method possible at that stage. In order to analyse the semi-structured interview transcripts, a thematic approach was used for better understanding of comments and discussions.

A preliminary finding from this research was that the intention to create digital content at the beginning of a campaign is essential, as well as recognising that digital content creators need the freedom to think and design campaigns that fit specific social media formats and

messages. Further, each platform has its own tools and techniques, which can be better utilised if they combine their flexibility with their specific set-up.

The use of storytelling on social media has revolutionised the way users share stories in different formats. Storytelling is one of the most effective ways social media users share stories in different formats and revolutionise storytelling. Using actual events as a basis for storytelling, brands can interact with the public and create stories that engage them.

Secondary findings show that multimedia content must remain consistent throughout the entire branding process, and keyword phrases and the same design can be used as tools to align messaging across multiple platforms. Furthermore, the study found that digital creators live in a society where education, information, and the discernment of truth and fakery are more prevalent.

A more humanised attitude can be adopted by brands that can respond to consumers who are less critical of brand promises but also have a better understanding of their limitations. The research found that there is no universal approach to brand communication that is consistently effective. Consequently, each campaign and brand are unique and require a distinctive method of communication or messaging.

The sensitivity and intuition of marketers play a crucial role in the success of communications campaigns, so it is important that they are of high quality so they are able to accomplish communication objectives. Aside from production and distribution methods, narratives are often told using a series of diverse resources.

Social media has become increasingly important for New Zealand marketing, and storytelling has become more prevalent than ever. However, the effectiveness of campaigns will be determined by the level of expertise of the professionals on each platform. Social media platforms have a faster content creation process than traditional platforms. Still, it is easier to alter new narratives by analysing publishing data and modifying it at a low cost.

With this in mind, the use of archetypal stories could serve as an excellent guide for the creation of brand narratives that would be able to be materialised in the best possible way based on their adaptation to the peculiar characteristics of their target audience, using the combination of skills, media, formats and tones, and evaluated based on tangible metrics, while considering the available financial resources. In order for a brand narrative to be successful, its management must be responsive to the inevitable participation of consumers in the narrative, changes to the market environment, and the emergence of new behaviours and perceptions as a result.

Considering that stories play a major part in the human encounter, it is only natural to consider them as part of the entire customer journey. As a whole, brand storytelling should be viewed as a strategic process that not only helps create and convey a narrative, but also serves as a continuous way to illustrate the journey that a client takes from start to finish, whether within or outside of the organisation.

There are a number of angles on any specific brand that were unintentionally woven together as a rich embroidered artwork of that brand story this very day. It may have been in the form of an advertisement, an email, or a meeting with a sales representative or a client benefit agent. It is important to note that these are all parts of the company's story within the client's mind, and in the event that they are not intentionally planned to be coherent, there is an excellent chance of losing the customer somewhere along the brand interaction journey.

### **6.3 Framework**

Marketing and advertising strategies are no longer applied according to ready-made formulas. With the advent of the internet, digital platforms and, finally, social networks, this sense of impermanence became even more substantial. As a result, advertising companies face the constant challenge of building an effective and long-lasting marketing strategy in a world that is constantly changing.

It may seem unsettling to ask about how to create valuable engagement strategies. Still, all of them have one thing in common: the understanding that telling a story to consumers is what makes a marketing strategy valuable. However, as consumers have access to almost unlimited information and entertainment, marketing battles not only for their purchasing power but also for their attention.

Having an engaging story that seduces and captures the attention of any interlocutor is the best way to engage their interest. As a result, narrative and storytelling play an important role in advertising strategies intended to capture the attention of consumers.

Creating a good story is, however, not an easy task, but there are some steps you can take to make the task easier. In order to understand your interlocutor's worldview, you need to know who your ideal customer is. Identify your desires, pains, goals, and main challenges, and then decide where to set your story, which should reflect the experiences of your target audience. After understanding your persona's challenges, it is time to develop the conflict and propose a solution, conveying this message in the most relevant way you can: ideally, your consumer undergoes some transformation after consuming your content.

There are a few techniques that have been observed and described by the interviewees in this research, as examples of the use of storytelling:

- Make posts that are sequential and speak to one another.

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But the format of most social media (for example, a Facebook post, an Instagram story, or a tweet) does not allow for a narrative to emerge. In order to convey the full story to the reader in a single publication, instead of simply creating a long text that tells everything at once, it is more efficient to create sequential posts that interact with one another and that unfold the story little by little. This increases message retention, user interaction, and engagement with the message as a result.

- Humanise your feed's content.

A narrative about a person moves and engages much more than a narrative about a brand or product. On social media, whenever it is possible, convey your message through the eyes of people by using photos, videos, and testimonials. There is a powerful tool that is very efficient for introducing a company through its employees: showing their faces, their stories, their dreams, and victories. This will help to generate much more empathy from followers.

It is also important that customers are encouraged to share their experiences on the brand's social network, showing how the product or service has been valuable to them and how it has improved their lives. There are two methods of achieving this, either by using user-generated content or by using posts made by the company itself. In both cases, the important thing is for the audience to feel that the message was created by "people like us" and that it brings a life story beyond the social network into the conversation.

- Tell the story of the brand's development with the help of a narrative.

Make sure you use storytelling techniques on social networks to narrate your brand's story. This includes a look at the past, the challenges the brand has faced, the present, and what the future holds. The use of narrative elements such as protagonists, conflicts, resolutions, climaxes and turning points can help make your company's journey an engaging and exciting one.

Making your brand more human by telling its story is a valuable strategy: showing that your brand is human, has values, faces challenges, and has life goals and plans, just like all of us. When your company's networks demonstrate people-oriented behaviours, the more likely it is that the audience will be able to feel a sense of closeness, identification, and commitment to the company.

In addition to creating a good story, it is also necessary to deal with the different languages supported by the numerous platforms that today can – and should – be used in your marketing strategy, especially digital platforms. There is no doubt that all your customers (or at least most of them) are present on social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. These potential buyers are also always roaming around with their smartphones. They watch television, read newspapers and magazines, and consume content in different ways.

It is therefore necessary that, after creating the narrative of your marketing strategy, you can tell it through all these platforms. And it is not just about adapting the format: each channel needs to be used with a specific objective. Each media platform plays a role within the communication universe, including different audiences. It is impossible, in this sense, to tell the same story within LinkedIn and YouTube, for example. Each specific channel must be used for a purpose.

- Using videos as a tool to tell stories.

Social media has been a great place for videos, and this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There are many benefits associated with audio-visual content:

- It holds the user's attention for a longer period of time.
- The video can tell a complex story in a matter of minutes (or even seconds).
- The way it transmits sensations and stimulates feelings in a unique fashion to the viewer generates empathy on a deeper level.

Rather than just telling the story, the video shows how the story is being lived.

In addition, this research also provided proof that content marketing and storytelling are emerging techniques for building brands and establishing relationships. Companies from different segments should increase the percentage of investments made in these technologies as technological resources will increase their capacity to create high-impact narratives through the use and allocation of these technologies in the coming years. It is also important to raise consumer expectations for even higher quality content, as well as to develop a theoretical and practical framework that enables its effective operation.

From the perspective of the interviewees, they are considered effective alternatives since they offer the brand the opportunity to attract the attention of the target public, engage them with the storyline, and communicate its positioning to the audience.

To implement a transmedia storytelling marketing strategy, you will need a team of professionals with a variety of skills, as well as an investment in advertising. The golden tip is to use creativity to publicise your work, at the very least, by telling a true story – and here it is:

sell your truth. In a world filled with spam and endless advertisements, finding an honest, human, and relevant story is like finding a pot of gold; it generates empathy and connections and makes the eye sparkle.

In every step of your marketing actions, it is important to consider whether the public will remember the brand because of coming into contact with the content material. The best stories are the ones that leave a lasting impression and a desire to revisit them. Further, this is why brands should become stories so compelling that the public cannot wait to engage with them again.

## **6.4 Limitations**

In this study, the period of pandemic limited the research process of data collection, and while stimulating recall was a valuable introspective online method, the lack of face-to-face interaction had a negative effect on the stimulation and accuracy of the engagement of the participants.

There was a general perception from interviewees that content marketing and storytelling are effective techniques for building brands, and that companies should make more use of them. But there is still a lack of academic studies that provide measurements of the effectiveness of storytelling, justify investments in storytelling, and ensure their impacts of storytelling as a marketing tool for branding.

Although impressions and views are still relevant parameters of digital media participation, they should not be regarded as the main indicator of communication effectiveness, which still needs to be aligned with data collection analysis and content trials. Advertising agencies and advertisers alike lack a better understanding of the potentials and limitations of social media platforms.

## **6.5 Suggestions for further research**

The results have provided further evidence confirming the high use of storytelling as a technique in content marketing in New Zealand. However, due to its small sample size, the present study cannot make any clear generalised statements about the role of storytelling in social media from a global perspective. In this study, there were not enough participants to provide adequate answers to the research questions or to make generalisations beyond the study's scope. Any discernible differences would almost certainly have emerged in a larger sample that included more participants from different cultural backgrounds. Still, the small

population does not negate the recognition of the importance of the local marketing field and their understanding of the New Zealand public target.

The study found that storytelling and content marketing are emerging tools for building brands. However, more research is needed to help companies from different segments use and allocate more resources to these techniques. Furthermore, a deep understanding of the rise in consumer expectations for qualitative content will likely accompany the improvement of technological resources to make it easier for brands to produce high-impact narratives. In addition, conducting longitudinal studies is also recommended in order to document the new trends of the market with regard to the use of storytelling, as well as the perceptions of marketing professionals in this area.

This study will serve as a starting point for more specific and conclusive investigations on the subject due to the exploratory nature of this research model. The method also has limitations when it comes to formulating definitive generalisations. Other possibilities will allow a deeper understanding of the opportunities provided by technological progress and a greater capacity to adapt to the uniqueness of each market and audience.

## **6.6 Final summary**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the importance of storytelling in social media from the perspective of marketing professionals. It was also intended to examine how advertising companies have invented narratives and how they have implemented these narratives in the digital world from a branding perspective across different companies. A total of four marketing professionals representing different sizes of companies in Auckland were selected based on their senior level of skills in the area and their experience with digital campaigns. Online semi-structured interviews were conducted in an effort to collect data from the participants.

One of the most interesting conclusions that came out of the study was that companies had embraced storytelling as a way of engaging with their digital audiences. Stories can resonate with people's lives, help them identify with those stories and, thus, lead to them becoming loyal customers. The study provided important empirical evidence that the effectiveness of marketing campaigns can be attributed to a deeper understanding of the public, as well as the creation of methods for engaging with them.

The results of this investigation into storytelling suggested that marketing professionals are willing to make narratives a key part of their social media engagement strategies. However, the field is still in its early stages, and the professionals are creating experiments, but there is

still a lack of understanding of how to implement stories on social media platforms more broadly. Combining the different responses from the interviewees focussed attention on the necessity of combining those experiences and provides a framework of guidelines to promote deeper information about the implementation of stories on digital platforms and increase awareness of brands' narratives. According to the guidelines, narrative posts should follow sequential steps, creative content should be more humanised, storytelling should be used to tell a brand's story, and visual narratives should be better tailored to each platform.

The study suggested further research into storytelling in social media from a global perspective. If the study had been conducted with a larger sample of participants from different cultural backgrounds, any discernible differences would almost certainly have emerged due to the factors identified as being of importance in their impact. However, as the present study collected only a limited data set, no clear generalisations about other countries are possible. Longitudinal studies were also recommended in order to document the new trends in the market and the perceptions of marketing professionals related to the use of storytelling.

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## **Appendix**

21/308 Ethical approval granted by the AUT University Ethics Committee on 26 November 2021



## Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

**AUT**

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

26 November 2021

Danielle Mulrennan  
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Danielle

Re Ethics Application: **21/308 Social Media Narrative – Making the public love your brand**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 26 November 2024.

### Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. If the interviews are to be conducted online please update the Information Sheet advising participants how Consent will be evidenced.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

## Consent Form

Project title: *Social Media Narrative – Making the public love your brand.*

Project Supervisor: **Danni Mulrennan**

Researcher: **Marina Mueller Correa**

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- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that the contents of audio recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- I understand that the audio recordings will be transcript by the researcher, and it will be confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself from this project at any time prior to completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that If I choose to withdraw from the study, I will be offered the choice between having any identifiable data belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. If I choose to withdraw completely, all relevant information including video recordings and consent forms, or parts of thereof, will be destroyed. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research. I wish to receive a copy of the written summary report from the research (please tick one):
  - Yes
  - No

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **type the date on which the final approval was granted** AUTEK Reference number **type the AUTEK reference number*****



## Participant Information Sheet

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

November 2021

### Project Title

Social Media Narrative – Making the public love your brand

### An Invitation

Kia Ora,

My name is Marina Mueller Correa, and I am currently undertaking a research project to complete my master's in communication studies. This research aims to identify new engagement methods in social media and the possibility of using narratives to connect with the public. As a senior marketing professional, you are invited to be part of this project. I acknowledge that the nature of this study is to be neutral, academic and non-commercial. Accordingly, whether you choose to participate or not will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to generate new knowledge about narratives in social media, give a holistic point of view of the information and comments created, and permit the development of study material for researchers, academics, and marketing professionals' purposes. The results of this research project will be written up and submitted as a thesis as part of the Master in Communication Studies at AUT. The findings will also be featured in presentations to colleagues and likely to feature in academic conference proceedings and academic journals.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

After identifying campaigns in New Zealand that used Narrative/Storytelling as a technique in social media to promote brands. You have been recognised as one of the key people who contributed to creating one of the campaigns.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

You are invited to agree to meet in person or online with me for the interview and agree with the confidentiality agreement (attached with this document).

### What will happen in this research?

I will book an hour of your time (it can be working hours or after work). Then, I can either come to your workplace, a nearby cafe or do the interview online. I will ask questions related to your previous experiences and projects related to the topic. The interview will be recorded using an audio recorder (online or cell phone), and this will be transcribed and analysed for the thesis. All recordings, transcripts and interview data will only be used for the purposes for which it has been collected.

### What are the discomforts and risks?

You might feel that you don't know or don't want to answer a question. Or, since we are during a global pandemic, you might not want to meet in person.

### How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Any discomfort or risk that you may feel will be alleviated by the fact that this research is voluntary. And you are able to decide not to answer a question.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be offered the choice between having any identifiable data belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

In case you feel unsafe meeting in person, the research can be conducted via Zoom, Teams or Skype.

### What kind of questions I need to answer?

The main questions will be:

-What are the new trends to attract the public to a social media platform?

-How is/was the process of deciding to use a narrative in Ads?

- Why use a storytelling technique to engage with the public?
- What are the challenges to this technique?
- How to use a narrative in social media? What's the difference between a Tv ad?
- What do you feel about the New Zealand public and their engagement in those Ads with narrative?
- Do you feel that it's relevant in continuing the use of this technique?
- Do you feel storytelling will still be used in the future? Will it create a new format?

**What are the benefits?**

The aim is to create new knowledge in an area of profound interest: narratives. I'm particularly interested in new methods of engagement in social media and the possibility of using narratives to connect with the public. The main reason for this research was the perceived shortfall of studies about narrative methods in social media in New Zealand. The study will uncover new knowledge about the subject and increase a better understanding of new media. The findings of this research will also assist me in obtaining a Communication Studies Master's degree.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Your identity will remain confidential between myself and my Project Supervisor, Danni Mulrennan. Your details and workplace will be anonymised within the findings and writing up this research project. Consideration that limited confidentiality only can be offered given the campaigns being analysed. Any audio-recording will not be available to anyone other than the Researcher and the Project Supervisor. Because the research is to be conducted in your workplace environment, colleagues may be aware of your participation in this project. If any interactions which occur with your colleagues become relevant to this project, I will seek their consent to be featured as an "incidental participant" whose privacy will also be protected.

The privacy of your clients will remain during the research. The names of the brands and characters presented in the campaign won't be mentioned in any part of the research. The campaigns will only be used as a material for analysis in the interview context.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

It is expected that the costs you may incur will be in relation to your time.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Consent to participate is required by XX November. The research period will occur in XX November 2021.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You can review your transcript after the data collection. And you are invited to receive feedback on the findings of this research at the conclusion of this project.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Danni Mulrennan*, [danni.mulrennan@aut.ac.nz](mailto:danni.mulrennan@aut.ac.nz), phone (09) 9219999 ext 8007

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Marina Mueller Correa – [marina.filme@gmail.com](mailto:marina.filme@gmail.com)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Danni Mulrennan – [danni.mulrennan@aut.ac.nz](mailto:danni.mulrennan@aut.ac.nz)

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

## **Semi-structure questions for the Research Interview**

- What are the new trends to attract the public to a social media platform?
- How is/was the process of deciding to use a narrative in Ads?
- Why use a storytelling technique to engage with the public?
- What are the challenges to this technique?
- How to use a narrative in social media? What's the difference between a Tv ad?
- What do you feel about the New Zealand public and their engagement in those Ads with narrative?
- Do you feel that it's relevant to continue using this technique?
- Do you feel storytelling will still be used in the future? Will it create a new format?