

Credocast

A publication of Credo Advisory

Vol. 2 Issue 5. May 2019

Change through Storytelling

3

What's in a story?

5

The storytelling process

7

Share the story

4

Storytelling in Nigeria

In Nigeria, storytelling is used to educate, preserve oral history and convey cultural norms.

5 The storytelling process

This section examines the process of storytelling and how stories can be designed to create empathy, communicate new insights and perspectives and/or solicit social change.

7

Share the story

The timing and channel affects how the target audience consumes and responds to the story.

About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communications initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

www.creadoadvisory.com



Introduction

Storytelling often conjures images of children sitting at the feet of elders enraptured with cautionary tales and stories of triumph and defeat. In many societies, these stories passed from generation to generation through oral history. In African society, the griot was a respected storyteller who traveled from village to village sustaining the oral history tradition by telling stories of the past, present and future. These stories were instrumental in shaping society and, ultimately, culture.

Today, stories come to us through a variety of mediated sources - books, the internet, the evening news, film, etc. Do stories have the capacity to change minds, influence beliefs and/or motivate people into action? Can the narration of an issue be crafted to elicit empathy that leads to social change?

In a world that constantly engages for the sake of entertainment and politics, where people have different ideals about the acceptable and unacceptable, individuals tend to cling to their beliefs. However, belief systems can change when new perspectives are introduced via storytelling.

This thought piece examines how storytelling can be an effective advocacy tool that makes people conscious and intentional about challenges confronting society.

What's in a story?



¹ Definitions of Literary Terms (2018) Literary terms. Available at: <https://literaryterms.net/story/>

² David Van Biema (2007) The Case for Teaching the Bible, Time Magazine. Available at: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1601845,00.html>

³ Guinness World Records (2019) Best-selling book of non-fiction. Available at: <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction>

“A story or narrative is a connected series of events told through words either written or spoken, imagery (still and moving), body language, performance, music, or any other form of communication.”¹ From time, stories have helped educate the masses around a particular topic. For example, the Holy Bible is a collection of sacred texts that records the relationship between God and man. According to the March 2007 edition of Time Magazine, the Bible ‘has done more to shape literature, history, entertainment and culture than any book ever written.’² It has singlehandedly transformed human civilization and continues to do so. With estimated sales of over 5 billion copies, it is undoubtedly the most influential best-selling storybook of all time.³

“*Storytelling is the art in which a teller conveys a message, truths, information, knowledge, or wisdom to an audience in an entertaining way.*”

According to Berice Dudley - former Vice-president of the Australian Storytelling Guild, “Storytelling is the art in which a teller conveys a message, truths, information, knowledge, or wisdom to an audience in an entertaining way, using whatever skills, (musical, artistic, creative) or props he chooses to enhance the audience’s enjoyment, retention and understanding of the message conveyed”.⁴ J.K Rowling is reputed as the most celebrated storyteller of all times with over 500 million sold copies of the Harry Potter series, becoming the best-selling series in history. As a storyteller, J.K Rowling captivated the world by weaving tales of good triumphing over evil against the backdrop of magic, wizardry and fantasy.

Storytelling in Nigeria



Photo Credit: www.nollymania.com

In Nigeria, storytelling is used to educate, preserve oral history, and convey cultural norms. The storyteller uses a combination of riddles, poetry, proverbs, myths, singing, facial expressions, body movements and acting to make stories memorable and interesting.⁵ Storytellers have historically developed narratives to teach respect, norms, and societal values for moral instruction and to preserve Nigerian history and culture.

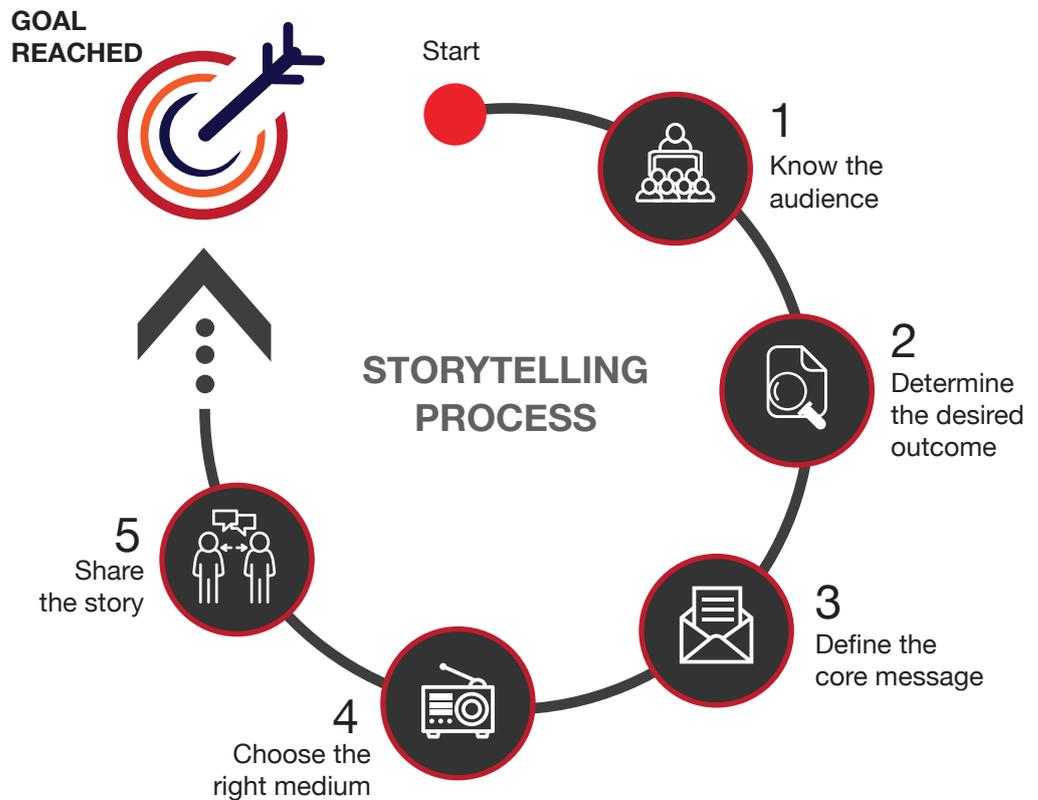
Many Nigerians fondly remember the 90s television programme *Tales by Moonlight*. The storyteller, “Aunty Nkem” would take kids on a rapturous journey with tales fused with proverbial sayings and nuggets of wisdom. After which, the children would highlight moral lessons learned from her stories. The stories were designed to help children identify principles of right and wrong behaviour as well as understand the key elements of human character. The *Tales by Moonlight* series became a celebrated programme that educated and guided young Nigerians along socially accepted ways of life.

⁴ Berice Dudley (1997) What is Storytelling? Available at: <http://www.australianstorytelling.org.au/storytelling-articles/t-z/what-is-storytelling-berice-dudley>

⁵ Namibia Information Platform (2018) The Beauty Behind African Storytelling. Available at: <https://www.namibia-adventures.com/the-beauty-behind-african-storytelling/>

“ There is an art to storytelling. Stories, no matter how unconventional, have structure – a beginning, middle and an end to communicate the messaging effectively. ”

The storytelling process



There is an art to storytelling. Stories, no matter how unconventional, have structure – a beginning, middle and an end to communicate the messaging effectively. This section examines the process of storytelling and how stories can be designed to create empathy, communicate new insights and perspectives and/or solicit social change.

1 Know the audience

Understanding the audience is the foundation of crafting an impactful story that can influence an audience to think in a certain way or take a particular action. Audience discovery can be done using Google analytics, audience surveys or information from a database. Trends determined from the audience discovery will aid creation of an audience profile which will help in writing with a particular audience in mind.⁶ A target audience predominantly of millennials would require a story infused with related topics around popular culture or topics that would resonate with them.

2 Determine the desired outcome

What kind of emotion or reaction should the story elicit from the audience? Do you want to prompt action?⁷ Convey a principle? Impart knowledge or educate? The #MeToo movement - a social media campaign addressing sexual assault and sexual harassment is credited for sparking a global movement. Millions of survivors were spurred into action based on the unique female stories and experiences shared. Many were empowered to break their silence and reject shame; some faced their accusers while others found healing in reading stories of survival. The outcome of their storytelling created a global coalition of women and spurred a global discourse on sexual harassment.

⁶ Vanessa Lockshin (2015) Why Knowing your Audience is your Most Important Knowledge Asset. Available at: <https://www.thestorytellingnonprofit.com/blog/why-knowing-your-audience-is-your-most-important-knowledge-asset-a-free-resource/>

⁷ Allie Decker (2019) The Ultimate Guide to Storytelling. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/storytelling>

“Stories must fit the overarching message or else they will be ineffective.”

E Define the core message

With the desired outcome determined, the core message is central to the story itself. Stories must fit the overarching message or else they will be ineffective. Every story needs a message to be successful and the message is what should drive the telling of the story.⁸ Serena Williams’s ‘Dream Crazy’ Nike advert is 90 seconds of premium visual storytelling with a powerful message. Its core message was a call-to-action to girls and women to dream big and dream ‘crazy.’ It is an empowering message to women to overcome social inhibitions in order to achieve their own greatness using the unique stories of trailblazing female athletes to deliver the message.



Photo Credit: Ebony Magazine

4 Choose the right medium

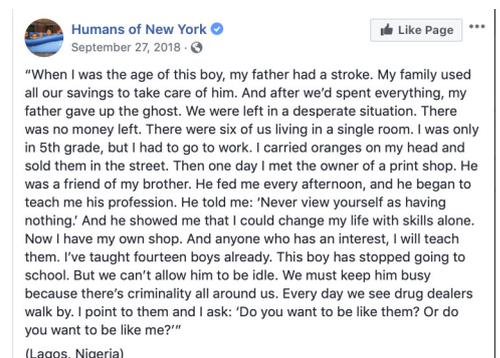
Stories can take many shapes and forms. Some stories are read, some are watched, and others are listened to.⁹ The medium is just as important as the message itself and can determine impact or success.

Written stories

Written stories are told through articles, blog posts or books. These are mostly text and may include some images. Online journals and blogs like Linda Ikeji and *BellaNaija* use written stories to celebrate, expose or condemn events and news in Nigeria. The Humans of New York website and social media platforms house written stories that help people identify with the battles and triumphs of everyday life around the world.

Spoken stories

Spoken stories are told in person, in form of a presentation, pitch, or panel. The “live”, unedited nature of spoken stories typically require more practice and skill to



⁸ Vanessa Lockshin (2015) Creating your Core Message. Available at: <https://www.thestorytellingnonprofit.com/blog/creating-your-core-message/>

⁹ Allie Decker (2019) The Ultimate Guide to Storytelling. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/storytelling>

¹⁰ Allie Decker (2019) The Ultimate Guide to Storytelling. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/storytelling>

“Millions of stories are told daily but only a few are memorable or impactful based on how the story is shared.”

convey messages and elicit emotions in others.¹⁰ Dike Chukwumerije is a spoken word poet who tells stories about Nigeria. He is popularly known for his spoken word tour “Made in Nigeria” which he uses to entertain and educate people about Nigerian history, culture and life. His spoken word performances are credited to have awakened Nigeria’s national consciousness.¹¹

Audio stories

Like spoken stories, audio stories are also spoken but are differentiated through recording. Audio stories are usually podcasts or radio programmes which seek to enlighten and inspire.¹² An example of an audio story is the *Breketete* family radio programme; a human rights programme hosted by veteran broadcaster Dr. Ahmad Isah. The programme provides a platform for people to share stories of injustice and oppression as well as discuss real life issues and events regarding human rights and contemporary societal issues.

Digital stories

A digital story is told through a variety of media, like video, animation, interactive stories and games.¹³ Digital stories are effective because they are engaging and interactive. Comedienne and content creator Gloria Olorunfemi (popularly known as *Maraji* on Instagram) uses videos to explore issues ranging from societal attitudes to spinsterhood and feminism in a humorous and satirical way. In one of her skits, ‘When your Mum brings prophecy from man of God,’ she portrays the importance African mothers place on daughters getting married on time and the lengths they go.

5 Share the story

Millions of stories are told daily but only a few are memorable or impactful based on how the story is shared. The timing and channel affects how the target audience consumes and responds to the story.

Timing

According to French novelist - Victor Hugo, “nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come.” *Surviving R.Kelly* - a six-part docu-series detailing allegations of sexual assault by R&B singer Robert Kelly is a perfect example.¹⁴ Accusations against him spanned over 18 years without a court conviction. According to Jesse Daniels, executive producer of *Surviving R.Kelly*, “if we told the story five years ago, we might not have been able to gather as much momentum as we have now.”¹⁵ The rise of the #MeToo and #Time’sUp movement created opportunities for survivors to tell their stories, for the world to listen and, more importantly, for the launch of a federal investigation.

Influencers

As the storytellers of today, influencers use their brand and various platforms to amplify a story by sharing it to create as many connections as possible or lending their ‘voice’ to deliver the message. Influencers can be celebrities, brand ambassadors or individuals with a large fan base or following. The influencer uses their social currency and followership to highlight a story or cause.

Renowned writer Chimamanda Adichie wrote “Dear Ijeawele” in true storytelling manner to raise awareness and educate people about raising strong independent women. It is a powerful letter about feminism and what it means to be a woman today. Adichie leveraged her tremendous fanbase and influence and, ultimately, started a global discussion about how to raise daughters.

¹¹ Wikipedia (2018) Dike Chukwumerije. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dike_Chukwumerije

¹² Allie Decker (2019) The Ultimate Guide to Storytelling. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/storytelling>

¹³ Allie Decker (2019) The Ultimate Guide to Storytelling. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/storytelling>

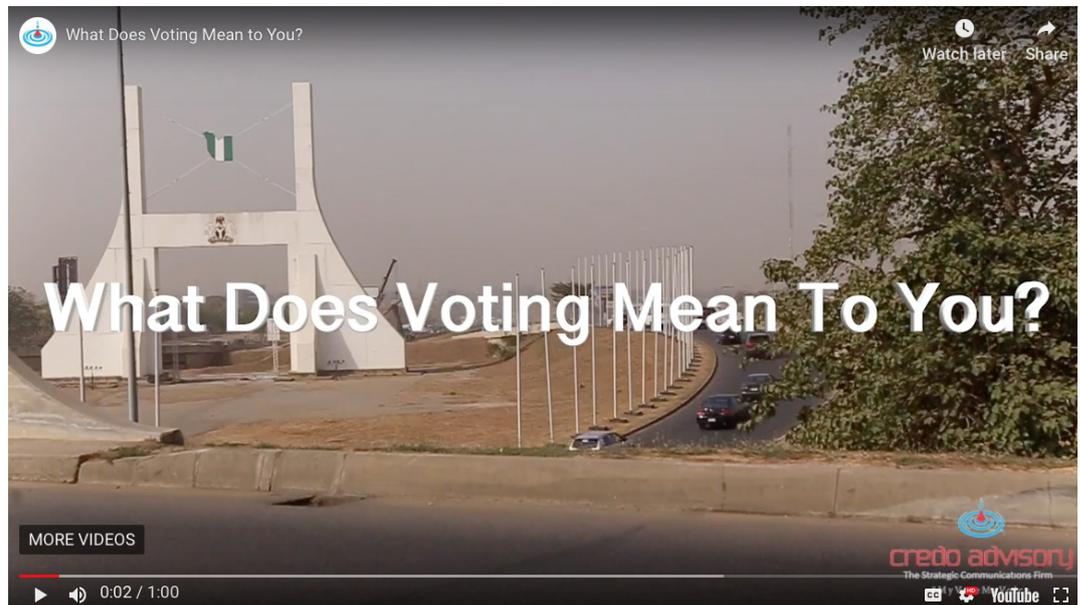
¹⁴ Constance Grady (2019) Lifetime’s *Surviving R. Kelly* and it’s Explosive Reception, Explained. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/1/30/18192932/lifetime-surviving-r-kelly-documentary-sexual-abuse>

¹⁵ Constance Grady (2019) Lifetime’s *Surviving R. Kelly* and it’s Explosive Reception, Explained. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/1/30/18192932/lifetime-surviving-r-kelly-documentary-sexual-abuse>

“Stories go where data cannot - the heart. Effective storytelling is simple, emotive and authentic.”

Credo Experience

At Credo Advisory, we use the storytelling process to develop and narrate stories in a timely, relevant and authentic manner that sparks conversations and, ultimately, drives change. Leading up to the 2019 Nigerian presidential elections, we developed a “What does voting mean to you?” one minute [video](#) to highlight the importance of voting. The video is a digital story that features a montage of Nigerians from all walks of life sharing their unique views. In just one word, each subject shared what voting means to them. Through their “word” stories, the video becomes a call-to-action for Nigerians to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming elections. The [video](#) was shared and boosted on various social media platforms to promote a national conversation on voting.



Conclusion

Social change is about creating empathy in the hope of changing the belief systems of the audience. Stories go where data cannot - the heart. Effective storytelling is simple, emotive and authentic. Today, we use various tools, platforms and influencers to communicate stories that resonate with people. In the words of renowned poet, Maya Angelou, “*people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*” Storytelling for social change strikes at the very heart of making people feel compelled enough to act or change their set of beliefs.