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## Advertising as Modern Storytelling: Theory and Practice in the Marketplace

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### Abstract

In the modern marketplace, advertising has emerged as a powerful form of storytelling, blending commercial intent with literary expression. This paper examines advertising as modern narrative practice, where brands employ literary elements such as plot, character, symbolism, and emotional appeal to communicate value and build consumer relationships. Drawing from narrative theory and marketing management, the study highlights how storytelling transforms advertisements from transactional messages into meaningful cultural texts in and around the world. Through a conceptual analysis supported by selected advertising examples, the paper illustrates how narrative-driven campaigns enhance brand recall, emotional engagement, and consumer loyalty. Advertising narratives not only influence buying behaviour but also reflect social values, aspirations, and collective identities, similar to literary works. By aligning commerce with literature, advertising functions as a creative space where economic objectives coexist with artistic expression. The study emphasizes that storytelling is a strategic managerial tool as well as a literary practice, offering interdisciplinary insights for scholars in commerce, literature, and cultural studies.

**Keywords:** Advertising, Storytelling, Narrative Theory, Brand Communication, Commerce and Literature, Consumer Engagement

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### Introduction:

In the contemporary marketplace, advertising has evolved beyond its traditional function of promoting products and services to become a powerful medium of storytelling. As consumers are increasingly exposed to an overwhelming volume of commercial messages, conventional persuasive techniques often fail to generate attention or emotional connection. Advertising plays an important role in our everyday life. It determines the image and way of life. An advertisement lays a foundation of a company to build an image in the minds of the people and at the same time informs and educates potential consumers about products, services, ideas, goods and many more (Rashid 2018). Companies spend huge number of resources on advertising and promotional strategies. In response, advertisers now rely on narrative-driven communication that draws heavily from literary traditions, employing elements such as plot, character, imagery, symbolism, and emotion to convey brand meaning. This narrative shift positions advertising at the intersection of

commerce and literature.

From a literary standpoint, storytelling has long served as a fundamental means of constructing meaning, shaping cultural values, and expressing social identities. Similarly, in marketing and management studies, storytelling is recognized as a strategic tool that enhances brand differentiation, emotional engagement, and long-term consumer relationships. Social changes, big or small affect all companies marketing products and services to people. Marketing today is synonymous with Advertising as marketing communications have become quite important and vital for the buying of products and services (Subramanian 2017). By embedding products within relatable and compelling stories, advertisements move beyond transactional communication to create experiences that resonate with consumers' aspirations, beliefs, and lifestyles.

Advertising narratives not only influence consumer behavior but also function as cultural texts that mirror societal norms, values, and ideologies. Like literary works, they reflect collective identities and respond to changing social contexts. This paper explores advertising as a modern narrative practice by integrating narrative theory with marketing management perspectives, highlighting how storytelling operates simultaneously as a literary technique and a strategic managerial tool in contemporary brand communication.

### **Literature Review:**

**Kanojia & Rathore (2025)** explains that digital marketing helps small businesses grow and succeed. Using simple tools like social media, websites, email, and online ads allows businesses to reach more customers, understand their needs, and increase sales. Digital marketing is affordable and effective, helping small businesses compete better and build strong customer relationships making a close connection with the customer when used in a planned and smart way.

**Macru (2025)** explains that advertising as modern storytelling with different advertising formats communicate meaning and influence consumer choices in retail settings. Using a quantitative survey method, data were collected from 268 retail customers in Almaty to analyse the impact of online, broadcast, print, outdoor, and product placement advertising. Findings show that online advertising has the strongest influence on purchasing decisions, highlighting the power of interactive and engaging digital narratives. However, the study is limited to one city and focuses on advertising types rather than message storytelling quality. Future research can explore narrative-driven, emotional, and personalized digital advertising across broader markets to understand how storytelling enhances consumer engagement and loyalty.

**Sidorenko-Bautista et al., (2025)** in their study shows that advertising works as modern storytelling in the metaverse by using Fortnite to create fun and interactive brand experiences instead of traditional ads. Using a qualitative case study of 148 brands, it finds that activities like avatar customization, virtual events, and concerts help brands connect emotionally with young audiences. However, it does not study user opinions directly. Future research can explore how users feel about these brand stories and compare different metaverse platforms.

**Baack et al., (2016)** in their study portrays that Business-to-business advertising has traditionally focused on rational, fact-based messages, unlike consumer advertising, which often uses creativity and emotional appeal. This study shows that business buyers also

respond positively to creative advertising. Using an online survey with managers exposed to real B2B ads, the research finds that creative messages improve attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. Creative advertising also strengthens behavioral intentions, challenging the belief that creativity is ineffective in B2B contexts.

**Terkan (2014)** examines creative advertising as modern storytelling by exploring how creativity, visuals, and persuasive messages influence consumer behavior, using 50 university students as the sample. Through a questionnaire-based quantitative method, findings show that creative advertising attracts attention, builds brand quality perception, reduces distance between businesses and consumers, and supports market growth. However, the limited sample and lack of digital storytelling focus reveal gaps. It suggests future research can explore digital, interactive, and narrative-driven advertising across broader audiences.

**Fogg-Meade (1901)** in the study supports the idea of advertising as modern storytelling by explaining how advertising educates consumers, shapes desires, and builds meaning around products rather than simply promoting sales. It focuses on consumer goods and middle-class buyers, using a conceptual and theoretical approach to show how repeated messages create familiarity, trust, and emotional connection. However, it does not address digital or interactive advertising methods, leaving a gap for future research on how modern digital platforms and data-driven storytelling enhance engagement, personalization, and long-term brand relationships in today's marketplace.

### **Objectives:**

The study aims to:

1. Examine advertising as a form of **modern storytelling** that integrates literary techniques.
2. Analyse how narrative elements (plot, character, symbolism, and emotion) communicate brand value.
3. Provide an **interdisciplinary perspective** combining marketing management and literary analysis.

### **Methodology:**

This study adopts a conceptual and qualitative approach, combining narrative theory with marketing management perspectives. The methodology includes:

**1. Conceptual Analysis**– Examining existing literature on narrative theory, marketing communication, and brand storytelling.

**2. Visual Case Study Analysis**– Selected Indian and international advertisements (Surf Excel, Cadbury Dairy Milk, Asian Paints, Coca-Cola, Nike) are analysed for narrative elements, symbolism, and emotional appeal.

**3. Comparative Analysis**– Investigating the intersection of literary storytelling and managerial objectives, highlighting how advertisements convey cultural meaning while driving consumer engagement.

The study relies primarily on secondary sources and visual textual analysis without direct primary data collection.

### **Narrative Storytelling in Advertising: Visual Case Analysis:**

Advertising narratives in India and abroad are often strengthened through visual storytelling, where images function alongside text to construct meaning, much like imagery

in literary texts. Advertising is important for every type of business irrespective of its nature and size. The purpose of advertisement is to let people know about the business. It is important to the business as a whole because it enables the business to attract more customers, thus boosting business (Ilyas & Nayan 2020). The following case examples analyse how selected advertisements employ narrative elements through visual and thematic representation.

### Surf Excel - "Daag Achhe Hain"

(Figure 1: Surf Excel Advertisement depicting a child helping others and getting dirty)



Source: Hindustan Unilever Ltd.

The Surf Excel "Daag Achhe Hain" campaign presents a complete moral narrative within a short visual frame. The advertisement image typically depicts a child engaged in an act of kindness helping someone in need resulting in stained clothes. Visually, the child occupies the central space of the frame, reinforcing the role of the protagonist, while dirt functions symbolically as evidence of moral action rather than carelessness. This visual symbolism parallels literary narratives where external marks signify inner virtue.

From a managerial perspective, the image shifts consumer focus away from detergent efficacy toward emotional and ethical values. The brand positions itself as an enabler of goodness rather than merely a cleaning agent. Culturally, the visuals resonate strongly with Indian ideals of selflessness and moral upbringing, making the advertisement both emotionally persuasive and socially reflective. This adds an emotional touch with the buyers.

### Cadbury Dairy Milk - "Kuch Meetha Ho Jaaye":

(Figure 2: Cadbury Dairy Milk Advertisement showing celebration and shared happiness)



Source: Cadbury

Cadbury Dairy Milk advertisements visually construct narratives of joy, celebration, and emotional connection. The images often portray ordinary individuals celebrating success or happiness through spontaneous acts, with chocolate serving as the emotional catalyst. The visual tone: warm colours, smiling faces, and shared moments creates a narrative

atmosphere similar to literary themes of nostalgia and collective joy.

Strategically, Cadbury uses these visuals to reposition chocolate as an everyday celebratory sweet within Indian culture, traditionally dominated by local confectionery. The narrative image thus serves a managerial function by expanding consumption contexts. At the cultural level, the visuals reaffirm the Indian tradition of sharing sweets during moments of happiness, blending global branding with local emotional practices.

### Asian Paints - “Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai”:

(Figure 3: Asian Paints showing love and affection)



Source: Asainpaints

Asian Paints’ “Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai” campaign presents homes as narrative spaces that carry emotions, relationships, and life stories. The visual storytelling focuses on everyday moments—family interactions, transitions, and memories—transforming walls into silent narrators. This narrative technique parallels literary symbolism, where settings reflect inner emotional states.

Managerially, Asian Paints successfully differentiates its product by emphasizing emotional value over technical features. The campaign demonstrates how storytelling can humanize utilitarian products and create long-lasting emotional bonds with consumers.

### Coca-Cola - “Share a Coke”:

(Figure 4: Each bottle carries a name)



Source: Coco-cola

The “Share a Coke” campaign uses personalized labelling as a narrative device. Each bottle carries a name, prompting consumers to participate in a small but meaningful story of sharing and connection. This approach employs interactive storytelling, where the audience co-creates the narrative with the brand.

Managerially, the campaign increases consumer engagement, encourages purchase frequency, and enhances emotional attachment. Literarily, it demonstrates **symbolism** (the

bottle as a vessel of personal connection) and narrative participation.

### **Nike - "Dream Crazy" (featuring Colin Kaepernick):**

(Figure 5: featuring Colin Kaepernick confront adversity and achieve symbolic victory)



Source: Nike

Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement narrates stories of athletes overcoming social, physical, and psychological barriers. The narrative is visually and emotionally charged, following multiple characters with personal challenges. From a literary perspective, the advertisement reflects **heroic storytelling**, where protagonists confront adversity and achieve symbolic victory.

From a marketing standpoint, the campaign aligns the brand with values of courage, social justice, and perseverance, reinforcing emotional loyalty among consumers. Culturally, it engages in contemporary social discourse, showing how brand narratives can carry ideological weight beyond product promotion.

### **Discussion:**

Across these five case studies, advertising images operate as narrative texts that combine visual symbolism, emotional appeal, and cultural meaning. Surf Excel employs moral storytelling, Cadbury focuses on emotional celebration, Tata Tea uses social awakening as its narrative core, Nike uses its ideal figure to show confidence and never give up attitude and Coca-Cola shows the bond of sharing love and care. Together, these examples illustrate how advertising adopts literary storytelling techniques while fulfilling strategic managerial objectives. The integration of narrative visuals enables brands to move beyond transactional communication and establish deeper emotional and cultural connections with consumers.

### **Conclusion, Limitations and Future Perspectives:**

Advertising has evolved from simple product promotion to a sophisticated form of narrative-driven communication, combining commercial objectives with literary storytelling techniques. It conveys and connects through plot, character, symbolism, and emotion, advertisements create experiences that resonate with audiences. Case studies such as Surf Excel's "Daag Achhe Hain," Cadbury's "Kuch Meetha Ho Jaaye," Asian Paints' "Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai," Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke," and Nike's "Dream Crazy" demonstrate how storytelling builds emotional connections, reinforces cultural values, and enhances brand loyalty. Advertising narratives influence consumer behaviour while reflecting societal norms, aspirations, and collective identities, bridging commerce with culture. Storytelling is the kingpin between creative literary practice and a strategic managerial tool, strengthening brand differentiation and long-term consumer

relationships.

Despite its insights, the study has limitations. It is primarily conceptual, relying on secondary sources and visual case analysis without primary empirical data or direct audience feedback. The case studies are selective, focusing on a few Indian and international advertisements, which limits generalizability across industries, regions, and cultural contexts. Digital and interactive advertising is only partially addressed, leaving emerging platforms like social media and metaverse campaigns underexplored.

Future research can address these limitations by incorporating empirical methods, such as surveys, interviews, or experiments, to measure audience perceptions, emotional engagement, and behavioural impact of narrative-driven advertising. More Studies could explore digital and interactive storytelling on social media, mobile apps, and virtual platforms to understand personalized narrative effects. Cross-cultural comparisons can reveal how storytelling techniques vary globally, while integrating quantitative metrics alongside qualitative analysis would provide a robust assessment of advertising effectiveness. Such research would further illuminate the evolving role of storytelling in contemporary marketing and its interdisciplinary relevance across commerce, literature, and cultural studies.

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