DIGITAL STORIES BY COCA-COLA

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ABSTRACT

We all tell stories. We tell stories to our children, to our friends and acquaintances. We need stories. Intimate stories have universal effects, they connect and bridge the gap between the sender and the receiver. People share their stories on social network platforms and nowadays more and more advertisements reach us in the form of digital stories. One of the biggest storytellers is Coca-Cola Company. The study aims to highlight the most effectual elements of storytelling in Coca-Cola advertisements and it also compares these stories with traditional tales: their characters and storyline, and the role of time and space. It also demonstrates how the iconic drink serves as a signal in the story.

KEY WORDS

Coca-Cola. Advertisements. Digital storytelling. Narrative.

JEL CLASSIFICATION

M3.

INTRODUCTION

Telling stories is in. Again. The primary reason for that is that since our childhood we all have been socialized on stories. Tales taught us what is correct and what is not. The role of tales in the personality development of children is significant in mental, emotional and emotional terms. "The lesson the children learn from the tales gives them power to identify with the positive tendencies of the world, not to mention that they know that in the end they will win, the smallest prince no-one thought about." (VEKERDY 2015)

Adults also need stories. As Tamás Vekerdy, a renowned Hungarian psychologist points out, tales are essential parts of our mental hygiene, since we have been telling stories for ages, ancient people were telling stories around the fire, stories about hunting, about ghosts and the deeds of the gods. Adults are telling stories to get to know the world around them and to measure themselves against what they have heard. Healthy adults require stories, either to read or to watching. Intimate personal stories have a universal impact, linking the sender and the recipient.

Nowadays, these stories are spreading at light speed on the web, and their most important feature is generating emotions in the recipient. As Kieran Gavin, creative director of The LivingRoom Media Ltd. states (2015), these stories do not have to be necessarily positive, they can speak about loss, desire, breakups, nostalgia or confusion – just there should be emotions. Controversial emotions can work the best: fear in combination with joy, laughter and cheerfulness are the real winning pairs (just think about the basketball players in the Guiness ad or the lost puppy in the Budweiser story). It is clear that people yearn for an emotional connection and storytelling can create and deliver that, hence the success of adverts that use the technique (GAVIN 2015).

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For some years now, most companies have been telling stories about themselves, their brands, their products. One of the greatest digital storytellers is Coca Cola. As Javier Sanchez Lamelas, the EMEA marketing director of the company says, brands have to be either logical or emotional (GHOSH 2015). And one of the best ways to create engagement with the brand is telling stories. To this end, in January 2016 Coca-Cola changed its "Open Happiness" campaign which had been running for six years then for its new "Taste the Feeling" campaign.

1.1 Basic structures

Stories are made up of a finite number of variants of finite number of components, each component or variant being reliably identifiable (LÁSZLÓ 2005). In the stories we are going to examine we can identify Propp's characters and functions (PROPP 1968: 79-80) and in their structure the six large structural units can be discovered (LABOV 1972):

1. Abstract – How does it begin?

2. Orientation – Who/what does it involve, and when/where?

3. Complicating Action – Then what happened?

4. Resolution – What finally happened?

5. Evaluation – So what?

6. Coda – What does it all mean?

According to the great story-teller, Carmine Gallo (2016: 319), based on the structure of the Pixar films, the structure of a good story consists of the following stages:

Step 1: Once there was a ………… (protagonist)

Step 2: Every day, he ………… (his life)

Step 3: Until one day ………… (challenge/conflict)

Step 4: Because of that, he ………… (the main part of the story, scenes are closely linked to together, each containing a scene that leads the audience to the next one)

Step 5: Because of that, ………… (consequences)

Step 6: Until finally ………… (climax, good overcomes the evil)

Step 7: Ever since then ………… (end of story, the moral).

These stages, although are somewhat more detailed in the storyline, largely correspond to the parts of the structure set up by Labov and Waletzky. The first two steps are the Abstract and the Orientation, the third is the Complicating Action, steps 4-5-6 are the Resolution, while the lesson outlined in step 7 is the equivalent of the Evaluation and the Coda. We will use the more concise Labov and Waletzky structure when analyzing the advertisements.

D'Souza in 2013, based on Cinderella, describes the recipe of great stories and points out three basic elements which exists in all enjoyable tales: the sequence, the suspense, the roller coaster. The first ingredient is the logical sequence of events building into each other here. But a good story must have some drama, some suspense. Dramatic tension in the story urges the viewer to move on to the story, while the roller coaster provides the swing of emotions. The story does not have to swing wildly, but it helps to have contrast, because contrast changes the pace of the storyand keeps up the level of interest.

The same pattern is illustrated in the W-plot (Figure 1), which is a safe pattern to follow if someone wants write a bestselling romantic story:
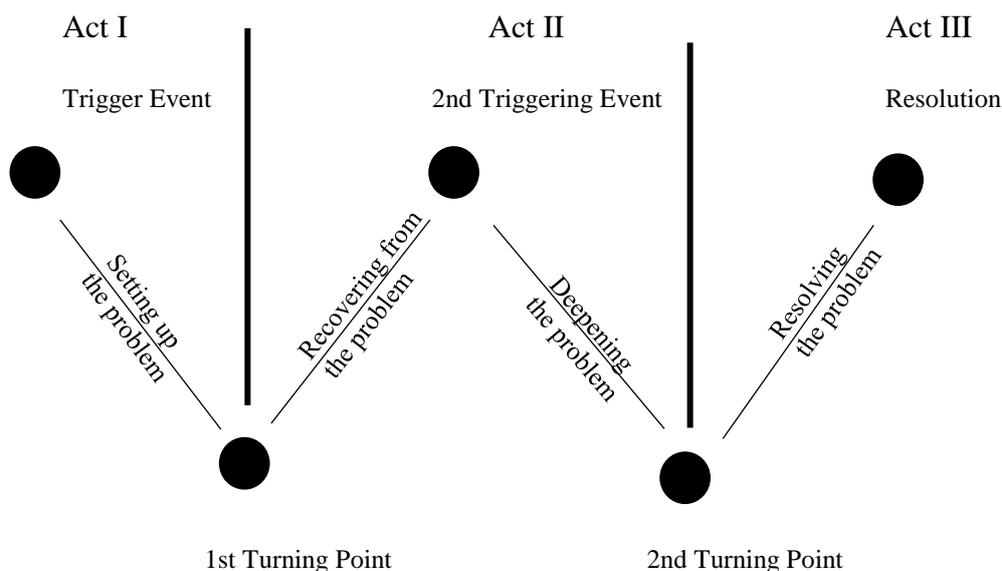

Figure 1 The W-Plot

Source: MOORE 2011

1.2 Basic plots

"There are indeed a small number of plots which are so fundamental to the way we tell stories that it is virtually impossible for any storyteller ever to break away from them" states Booker (2004: 6). These are as follows:

1. Overcoming the Monster – the hero must venture to overcome a monster and escape.
2. Rags to Riches someone who is quite ordinary or downtrodden suddenly steps to the stage and reveals to be unexceptional
3. The Quest – the hero sets off on a long hazardous journey for a priceless goal and overcomes all the perils and diversions until the objective has been finally and triumphantly secured.
4. Voyage and return – the hero (or heroine) travels to a strange world which is first enchanting then threatening and the hero must escape from this abnormal world and return home.
5. Comedy – a community divided by frustration, selfishness, confusion, lies, etc. must be reunited in love and harmony and everything will be miraculously sorted out.
6. Tragedy – a character, tempted into an action which is some way dark or forbidden, falls from prosperity to destruction because of a fatal mistake.
7. Rebirth – in which a dark power or villain traps the hero in a living death until he/she is freed by another character's life-giving power of love.

The story of Cinderella, for example, is a typical "rags to riches" story, "where our main interest lies in seeing some initially humble and disregarded little hero or heroine being raised up to a position of immense success and splendor" (BOOKER 2004: 5).

1.3 Basic characters

In his book (1968), where he examined the basic characters of Russian folk tales, Propp identified the following dramatis personae:

The Villain – usually an older, manipulative male, who fights against the hero

The Dispatcher – sends the hero off on his quest

The (Magical) Helper – helps the hero in their quest, usually less good-looking or clever, but essential to their success

The Donor – prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object to help them

The Princess (or prize) – the hero deserves her throughout the story, but is unable to merry her because of an unfair evil, because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, who is beautiful and good natured, but ultimately weak and passive.

The Oracle – an older wise figure, usually male, who provides essential wisdom, information or clue to aid the hero.

The Hero – young, brave and strong, traditionally almost always male, quick to accept his task and commence his quest, wins and weds the princess.

False Hero – takes credits for the hero's actions or tries to merry the princess.

As Propp states, different functions are distributed among them, many functions logically join together into certain spheres. These spheres correspond to their performers.

Booker, however, (2004: 306), uses Jung's principles, to classify the characters. In our analysis we will refer to the classification by Propp, since Booker's typology follows a rather psychology-centered approach.

2 OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

From the short story-based ads made by Mercado-McCann, Santo, Sra. Rushmore and Ogilvy&Mather we understand what "Taste the Feeling" refers to and the iconic drink appears in the narrative only when it has got a special meaning or function, when it has got something to say. These advertisements follow the above described structure and plot types of tales and narratives with precision and the character are also easily identifiable.

In many cases, space is also important, in a real or metaphorical sense, which expresses the emotional rapprochement or distancing of the protagonist. The representation of space plays a great role in films, literature, but also in narrative psychology: Mikhail M. Bakhtin, for example, depicts the chronotope of romance with the pattern of repetitive motifs: lovers meet, obstructions prevent them from being together, and then they break apart, but eventually find each other again – the same pattern can be depicted in The Elevator.

At the same time, since this paper is about commercials, it is worth examining at which points of the story Coke, its iconic bottle appears and the role it plays. The drink and its bottle can also be interpreted as signals that indicate or mark the relationship between the characters in the communication process. In the next part of the study five digital stories – ads by Coca-Cola – will be examined based on the aspects outlined above.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Elevator

The „Elevator" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rb13iRpGL0) is a typical modern Cinderella story. The two main characters are the tired maid and the famous DJ. At the outset

we can see their opposing worlds, spaces differ greatly from each other, which will play a symbolic role in the narrative later: the girl is an everyday working women, with limited resources and possibilities. The man is a celebrity, with huge prospects and adored by his fans. In the Orientation part the man goes to the hotel from the open street, the girl pushes her cart on the narrow hotel corridor. They meet in the elevator, in a small, limited space. And this is where the Complicating Action takes place: they got stuck there. The Resolution comes when she opens two Cokes, and play music with the empty bottles. And although the ending does not correspond with the ending of Cinderella, in the Evaluation part the girl receives her 21st century reward: a selfie with the celebrity.

The drink first appears at about the third of the story, when she takes two bottles and hands one over to him. This is when their relationship changes. The previously limited and rather cold relationship turns into warm, relaxed atmosphere. They start to smile, dance and play music, so apparently they are having a good time. In the next scene the bottle is almost empty, indicating that good times are over, they will be rescued. In the closing scene the circle is closed, the girl, just like in the opening part, is pushing her cart again. This is when she gets the message with the photo. If we are watching it on YouTube, we can choose a button, which floor we would like to go to and get a peek into the elevator: how the girl and the DJ are having fun there. This is a great way to involve us into the story and make us watch it again and again.

3.2 Brotherly love

This story is the story of the youngest prince, in a modern version, which deals with a contemporary problem: bullying at school (overcoming the monster). Even his older brother is always annoying him. If we look at the spaces and characters, we can see that the story starts at home, during Orientation we get acquainted with the two protagonists in their own environment (apartment, street where they live). The Complicating Action takes place in a park, when the bottle of Coke is taken away from the hero. And this is where the roller coaster starts: can the boy protect himself from the bullying bigger schoolmates? The Helper (his older brother) arrives at this point (Resolution). However, his role is not obvious: previously he was also vexing his younger brother. And the emotional roller coaster starts here. Will he help the boy? And when he frightened away the bullying boys, will he give the bottle back to his brother? (Of course yes.) And the story ends with a flick: he gently knocks the bottle while the young one is drinking. As we can see, the story works with good and evil characters (the young boy can overcome the monster with aid from the helper) and the structure and the plot meets the

requirements of a good story. The product appears three times during the ad. First at home, in a safe environment, when the boy is playing, then at dinner, and finally in the street, when it becomes the object to fight for (prize).

3.3 Subway

The story is a "rag to riches" variation. The hero is first seen going down on the escalator going (it is a rather symbolic travel - Orientation) listening to his voice mail message. (This is one of the few stories where verbal communication also appears, but from his facial expression we can guess that he got bad news even if we do not speak the language). In the Complicating Action part he is still looking at his cell phone, worried. In the meantime viewers meet "Cinderella", a busker singing in the subway. The next shot is her, buying Coke from a vending machine then she goes back to sing. This is when she crosses his way (a symbolic movement again). The Resolution comes when he also buys a Coca-Cola, hears her singing and realizes that he has fond the star he was looking for. In the final scene we can see her on stage and him drinking a Coke among the audience. The three main elements D'Souza identified can be found in this story too: the sequence, the suspense and the roller coaster. We can worry for the hero and the heroine

3.4 Pool Boy

The Pool boy is a bit different from the other narratives. However, this difference does not manifest in lacking the essential elements (the Quest plot, the competing characters, obstacles, etc.), but because of the main characters. One of them is homosexual – not this being in the center, but this gives the story a sweet humorous turn. In the opening scene (abstract) we can see a handsome man, cleaning the pool. During the Orientation a girl is shown, behind her desk, supposed to be studying, but instead she is looking lovingly at the pool boy. There is bottle of Coke in front of her. The next shot shows her brother, with a similar look in his eyes. During the Conflicting Action the Quest begins. Both siblings – holding each other back – are trying to get a Coke to the pool boy. They arrive to the pool at the same time, and here comes the funny twist. There they find their mother (Resolution) who has already given him a Coke.

Compared to the other films, space has less role here in representing the relationship between the characters, but Coke plays a greater part (a magical object which helps win the quest) and it practically almost always present.

3.5 Break up

Break up is the most complex ads when it comes to analysis. It presents the story of a relationship from the first sight to the break up. Orientation is set in a bookstore, and the iconic bottle already appears here. Next the hero and the heroine drink their own bottle of Coke. Here we can guess that the drink and its bottle will play an essential role in the narrative and indicates the relationship between the main characters. A sequence of rapidly changing scenes indicate time passing (we can see them partying, walking, etc.). Sometimes they share a bottle of Coca-Cola, another time there are two individual bottles standing close next to each other – but bottles are always full. The Confliction Action shows an angry quarrel between them and finally the bottle falls and breaks. The drops running on the bottle symbolize the teardrops of the girl. Finally we see the hero and the heroine, separated, an empty bottle in front of both. The Resolution is also brought by Coca-Cola: he calls her, they meet (instead of the rooms we see them outside, where space is unlimited, symbolizing freedom and new chances to improve their relationship); the boy offers her a Coke. And the roller coaster sets off again: will she take it? Will she wipe the mouth of the bottle indicating that she does not want a relationship with him again? Finally we can relieve: she accepts the drink and does not wipe the bottle.

CONCLUSION

Good stories always focus on fundamental human truth, regardless of what the medium that conveys them is: the voice of a single narrator, a book, a billboard, a movie, or a website. To create a powerful piece of communication, you have to have insight. "Insights are nothing else than observations about life that are self-evident in retrospect. They are the base of all good creativity" –says Lamelas (GOSH 2015). The best way to tell a story about a brand is to create a story that resonates with the recipient. Lamelas likens it to a form of seduction. "Most people do not fall in love with someone's physical attributes, but rather their point of view and attitude to life"- says he. "In the same way, creating a campaign that sells a product's attributes is less interesting than one that tells a story."

Nowadays, campaign designers are challenged by the fact that digital media is a fairly fragmented and multi-platform, and the "Skip" button is very easily pressed by viewers while watching an ad.

Coca-Cola's stories featured here have been watched on YouTube by 3-400 thousand (Subway, Brotherly love) and 5 million (Pool boy) viewers. The Elevator has several versions,

each featuring a celebrity in the target country or culture (think global, act local). The one starring Deepika Padukone in India has been watched by 13 million people.

The company continued its digital storytelling activities outside the world of TV ads, their JourneyxJourney campaign ran the roads in the United States equipped with cameras, drones and a van turned into a studio. Two presenters, Megan and Emily created stories in collaboration with their audience – stories which are linked to the brand (about food, sport, music, culture). The route could be followed on the company website and the videos could be watched on YouTube. As Doug Busk, former Global Group Director of Digital Communications and Social Media of Coca-Cola said, this enabled them to step out of the digital box into the real world, where the best stories are. "It is not the stories that come to us, we are going to the stories to release new, fantastic Coca-Cola stories ..."

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