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Abstract

Digital Storytelling (DST) is defined as telling stories using digital means. It has been initially applied for diverse purposes, including in community development, therapeutic benefits, and as an aid in teaching and learning. DST has recently been broadly used on social media platforms for marketing, running campaigns, journalism, and much more. However, no comprehensive systematic or thematic review of DST in social media has been conducted. Accordingly, this paper aims to provide a thematic review of DST in social media. The thematic review was carried out on 50 articles published from 2016 to 2021. These 50 discrete studies were selected because they met the inclusion criteria based on the research question of this review. The thematic review used ATLAS.ti as a tool to assist the review process. The results indicated that DST in social media was appropriate for marketing, including branding and advertising. Besides, using DST in social media over the years for education, training, professional development, community development and services, running campaigns, and therapy has significantly impacted these areas. Across the research articles, including case studies and essays, authors have reported several benefits of using DST in social media.

Keywords

digital storytelling, social media, thematic review, social media storytelling

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A Thematic Review on Digital Storytelling (DST) in Social Media

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Digital Storytelling (DST) is defined as telling stories using digital means. It has been initially applied for diverse purposes, including in community development, therapeutic benefits, and as an aid in teaching and learning. DST has recently been broadly used on social media platforms for marketing, running campaigns, journalism, and much more. However, no comprehensive systematic or thematic review of DST in social media has been conducted. Accordingly, this paper aims to provide a thematic review of DST in social media. The thematic review was carried out on 50 articles published from 2016 to 2021. These 50 discrete studies were selected because they met the inclusion criteria based on the research question of this review. The thematic review used ATLAS.ti as a tool to assist the review process. The results indicated that DST in social media was appropriate for marketing, including branding and advertising. Besides, using DST in social media over the years for education, training, professional development, community development and services, running campaigns, and therapy has significantly impacted these areas. Across the research articles, including case studies and essays, authors have reported several benefits of using DST in social media.

Keywords: digital storytelling, social media, thematic review, social media storytelling

Introduction

A story created using a digital tool can be referred to as a “digital story.” If it is presented in digital media, it is referred to as digital storytelling (henceforth, DST; Alexander, 2011). The term “Digital Storytelling” refers to a novel practice with several practical benefits for all aspects of life. When people view a story, either a conventional story or a digital story, they learn about other people from different facets. The story creators can also benefit from sharing the story with others by removing the distance between them (Yuksel et al., 2011). Further, storytelling would encourage user participation in various ways (Thöny et al., 2018).

Digital Storytelling (DST)

The use of digital devices such as digital cameras, smart mobile phones, digital tools, and various multimedia applications has facilitated the creation of digital stories by expert and non-expert people. The DST concept first appeared in 1980 through a center that Dana Atchley established (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). According to Atchley, digital tools such as images, films, and music were used in digital storytelling. Rossiter and Garcia (2010) states that digital stories are vignettes using digital tools. In contrast, Figa (2004) defined digital storytelling as “the usage of voice, music, and visual messages along with text in digital environments” (Figa, 2004, pp. 34-36). Chung (2007) emphasized that various digital tools are needed to create a

digital story (Conrad, 2013, p. 460). As per Armstrong (2003), digital storytelling made information and story transportation while employing media. In addition, it was seen as the representation of short movies created mainly through personal stories using digital tools (Armstrong, 2003, pp. 11-18). Furthermore, Robin (2008, p. 220-228) states, "Digital storytelling is the association of interaction of multimedia devices such as graphics, videos, and voices to create a narration about a specific theme."

Even though Atchley's center introduced DST in 1980, it was widely reported in the literature that Lambert (2010) introduced DST in the 1990s. Since establishing the Centre for Digital Storytelling, digital stories have rapidly expanded through various tools and applications (Malkavi et al., 2019; McWilliam, 2009; Sidhu, 2015). For instance, according to Kronenberg (2013), DST might include games, Twitter feeds, blog posts, or Facebook discussions. Similarly, Robin and McNeill (2019) also pointed out that digital stories were usually uploaded to the web, where they could be viewed using a web browser. As with traditional storytelling, digital stories revolve around a chosen theme, often contain a particular viewpoint, and are typically just a few minutes long. As a result, DST has allowed for fusing traditional blog spaces with social media platforms to create robust structures supporting the public (Johnson, 2018).

From the above definition and accounts of the development of DST, it can be concluded that there are various kinds of digital stories (Couldry, 2008). It has become successful because of the phenomenal growth of digital resources like blogs, YouTube, and other social media (Sandesh & Srinivasa, 2017). Lambert (2010) and Robin (2012) confirmed that digital stories could be defined as short stories between two to five minutes that combine traditional story narration modes with a wide variety of multimedia tools, such as graphs, audio, video, and animation. It was corroborated by the study of Sandesh and Srinivasa (2017), as digital stories use all the elements mentioned above to form a story. The literature review on the development of DST above has underscored the growing importance of DST in social media storytelling. DST has become more widespread through the development of social media, web-based tools, and digital devices.

Digital Storytelling in Social Media

The DST strategy extensively uses Web 2.0 tools and technologies to create stories. The growth of the internet has considerably influenced the creation of stories, especially on social media (Page & Thomas, 2017). The growth of Web 2.0 has significantly led to more user-generated content on the internet; hence, Web 2.0 has brought internet-enabled storytelling to the next level. Blogs, Twitter, Wikis, social images, and Facebook tell stories using different aspects (Alexander, 2011). In the meantime, the Web 2.0 platform has enabled a viewer of the stories to add content directly: editing a Wikipedia page, giving comments to a post, writing replies to Twitter tweets, posting a video on YouTube, and many more (Alexander & Levine, 2008). Snelson and Sheffield (2009) mentioned in a study about digital storytelling in the Web 2.0 world that YouTube could provide a context that has enabled various possibilities for creating a community around a meaningful digital story. As discussed above, Web 2.0 has encouraged digital natives to tell stories on social media. Almost all the current social media platforms let users tell stories in various ways. Scholars in different fields have conducted multiple studies on DST via social media from several perspectives. This thematic review summarises the literature on DST in social media under seven subjective themes.

The Objective of the Thematic Review

The objective of the thematic review is to comprehend the application of DST in social media. This review covers how DST has been used in social media to attain various goals, operationalizing it as an activity that generates new knowledge in practical applications of DST in social media. At the same time, we expect this review to give birth to new research domains on defined phenomena and themes on the topic. Furthermore, the objective covers how DST in social media is presented, analyzed, and reported in the literature from 2016 to 2021. A secondary aim of this thematic review is to find how DST has been employed to attain more latent outcomes in the defined themes. From the broader literature search, no comprehensive thematic review focusing on DST in the social media context was conducted from 2016 to date. This information will interest many researchers, practitioners, or professionals in the relevant field who use DST, specifically in social media.

Seeing that the application of DST in social media is booming, it is beneficial to get familiar with how researchers applied DST in social media and the trends in using DST in social media applications. As researchers in the field of DST, our main motto is to find the effectiveness of DST in social media. This review is a part of the leading project, which is about designing persuasive digital stories in social media and developing strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of DST in social media. As the first step of our main research project to get a firm stand, we strived to establish how DST is used in social media through reviewing relevant existing peer-reviewed articles. An initial systematic review has ended with a thematic review as it provides a better understanding using a critical topic of interest in the domain of DST in social media.

A thematic review of 50 recent research articles focuses on how DST is utilized in social media, by whom, where, and for what factual area of inquiry (themes). It also involves evaluating significant learning issues discussed by experts regarding using DST in social media. A thematic review of all selected literature was thus well fitted to our objective, which was to examine the application of DST in social media. The review will be of interest to researchers globally who are presently engaged in or considering engagement in applying DST to social media. It will also concern those involved in DST in social media in an academic context and those considering using it for real-world practical benefit. Consequently, the focal point of this thematic review is to examine the pattern and trends of DST in social media, as reported in the literature between 2016 and 2021. The following research question guided the thematic review process.

What are the patterns and trends of DST in social media discussed in the literature from 2016 to 2021?

Materials and Methods

Researcher Bias and Interest in DST

The author FM is a frequent social media user, and her current research is based on DST in social media. As a result, author FM is aware of the use of DST in social media. Furthermore, authors NI and HH sufficiently used social media, and their research interest covers the aspects of DST. Accordingly, we were all aware of what a DST on social media would entail. However, by using social media and researching DST in social media, author FM, who did the thematizing of articles, was somehow biased towards believing that DST is a beneficial strategy to achieve the intended target, mainly when applied through social media. However, the review had been designed to mitigate this in the review settings by including

quality research articles and adhering to strict inclusion criteria. Despite this, the themes and conclusions surfaced were favorable aspects of author bias.

The Rationale for Employing a Thematic Review

A systematic review generally helps synthesize key research outcomes in their entirety or on a substantive research topic and examines the research methods themselves (Noyes et al., 2008). However, rather than limiting what was discussed in the literature, we aimed to thoroughly review the pattern and trends of DST use in social media. Moreover, since the research question seeks answers using substantive topics regarding the application of DST in social media, a thematic review was well-suited to answer the research question comprehensively.

Search Strategy

As we intended to capture the articles about DST on social media, it was apparent that our search terms were necessarily broad. As a result, it was expected that the search would return many irrelevant articles. Our first challenge was to decide how stringent to make our inclusion criteria as we were interested in DST in social media. We did not restrict to check whether the article used any specific model for DST. A second consideration was to create inclusion and exclusion criteria that excluded the use of DST in a generic sense, meaning the use of any digital media which is not necessarily social media to tell a story. This comprehensive meaning could exclude transmedia storytelling as well. After a preliminary search, and bearing in mind our aim, the terms “digital storytelling,” “social media storytelling,” and “digital storytelling AND social media” were entered as search terms in eight databases: Scopus, Emerald Insight, Science Direct, ProQuest, Taylor and Francis, IEEE, ACM Digital Library, and Mendeley. The search was limited to peer-reviewed scholarly articles available in English. The number of articles found from the initial search is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Search Strings from Eight Academic Databases

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Social Media storytelling”) AND PUBYEAR > 2015 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “cp”) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)))	12 Results
	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Digital Storytelling” AND “Social media”) AND PUBYEAR > 2015 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “cp”) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)))	45 Results
Emerald Insight	“Social Media Storytelling”	03 Results
	“Digital Storytelling” AND “Social Media”	04 Results
Science Direct	“Social Media Storytelling”	06 Results
	“Digital Storytelling” AND “Social Media”	62 Results
ProQuest	“Social Media Storytelling”	12 Results
	“Digital Storytelling” AND “Social Media”	248 Results

Taylor and Francis	[All: “social media storytelling”] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2016 TO 12/31/2021)]	13 Results
	[All: “Digital Storytelling”] AND [All: “social media”] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2016 TO 12/31/2021)]	23 Results
IEEE	("All Metadata": " social media storytelling ")	01 Result
	(“All Metadata”: “Digital Storytelling”) AND (“All Metadata”: “social media”)	04 Results
ACM Digital Library	[All: “social media storytelling”] AND [Publication Date: Past five years]	03 Results
	[All: “Digital Storytelling”] AND [All: “social media”] AND [Publication Date: Past five years]	58 Results
Mendeley	“Social media storytelling”	14 Results
	“Digital Storytelling” AND “Social Media”	23 Results

Inclusion and Exclusion Strategy

The inclusion of research articles from the literature was performed according to the following limited criteria:

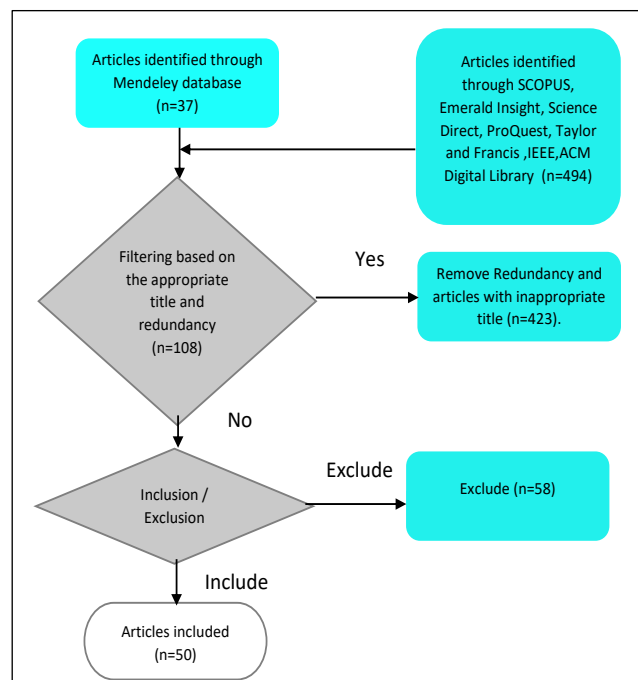
1. Published between 2016- 2021
2. Peer-reviewed research articles
3. Made use of digital stories in the context of any social media
4. Available in English

Along with it, the exclusion of returned articles was achieved in the following steps:

1. Exclusion based on the title.
2. Exclusion based on abstract.
3. Exclusion based on the diagonal reading of the article.
4. Exclusion based on a complete reading of the article.

Furthermore, the article's coverage was considered in step four to determine whether the article meets the review's objective. The total number of articles found using both keywords was 531. However, 423 articles were removed because the titles were considered inappropriate for the review topic. A comprehensive reading of the abstract was carried out on the remaining 108 articles. As a result, 58 articles were removed as their narratives were not discussing the exact storytelling process in social media. Some articles were also incomplete as they addressed the topic from a theoretical perspective without fitting into any theme. Therefore, the final number of articles to be reviewed was brought down to 50 after the fourth step (see Figure 1). The search queries in terms of search strings used in each scientific database were decidedly static. The phrases “social media storytelling” and “Digital Storytelling AND social media” were examined in most of the reviewed articles. For this reason, proceedings were also incorporated to assess the patterns and trends when uniquely identifying the articles on DST in social media. However, the articles were primarily about DST in social media, and the recorded journals and published articles varied in their treatment of the subject.

Figure 1
Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Articles.



The Thematic Review Process

The review process utilized a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) called ATLAS.ti to make it more efficient in managing the documents read and keeping track of the key points from each article for the later synthesis of results. Zairul (2020) introduced the concept of thematic review using ATLAS.ti. This review applies the steps for the thematic analysis procedure proposed by Zairul (2020), such as identifying research articles to capture the current state of academic insight concerning the review topic. The finalized articles were transferred to the Mendeley reference manager as prime documents, followed by a close checking of the author's name, title, journal name, and abstract. Afterward, the articles were exported as XML files and imported to ATLAS.ti. Then the 50 articles were transferred to ATLAS.ti as prime documents. The articles were grouped into (1) author, (2) issue number, (3) periodical, (4) publisher, (5) volume, and (6) year of publication. Thus, the articles can be examined corresponding to the year published and the different patterns discussed according to the year.

In ATLAS.ti, articles were coded into appropriate categories by closely reading the subject. Several groupings in the code group were automatically initiated in ATLAS.ti using the metadata (see Figure 2). The grouping and the categorization in ATLAS.ti have made it easier to manage the articles, for example, to refer to them and make additional notes. Then codes were created per the country of publication, year of publication, and theme. Then we grouped categories to define a set of themes. These steps were adapted from Zairul (2020).

Clarke and Braun (2013) pointed out that the thematic review sought to identify the patterns on a topic and build themes through a close reading of the subject. The present review has been carried out to determine the potential practices of DST in social media. The precepts of the review were to deeply analyze and explain the employment of DST in social media and the suggestions for future research in the field.

The outcomes of this thematic review were split into two parts: quantitative findings, where the numerical description of the results was explained, and qualitative findings, where the content coverage of the articles is critically described under each theme. Figure 3 summarises the level of the application of DST in social media through the generated word cloud from the selected 50 articles. Before identifying the themes, the keywords from the word cloud briefly depict that the usage of DST in social media was found across various themes, such as in education, marketing, therapeutic benefits, cultural aspects, and much more.

Results and Discussions

The 50 articles were reviewed through an iterative process. The comparisons for resemblances and variations have been made to achieve consistency. The thematic review's core results are comprehensively recounted in this section in qualitative and quantitative findings. Quantitative findings discuss the number of articles identified for each theme, the number of articles published per year, and the number and publication trends according to the geographical location. In contrast, qualitative findings describe the outcomes of each identified research article under seven themes according to the patterns and trends of DST in various social media.

Quantitative Findings

The search strings mentioned above in table 1 were referenced in the identified 50 articles through several periodicals, comprising journals and conference proceedings (see Table 2). The journals and periodicals from various disciplines initially show the acceptance of the research potential of DST in social media. The review's findings are reliable because the articles were published in reputable indexed journals and proceedings. It is noted that most of the articles were published in journals, and only two were published in proceedings.

Table 2

Articles Reviewed Based on Types of Journals

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
American Journal of Management				1		
Asian Journal of Management						1
Canadian Journal for Studies in Discourse and Writing/Rédactologie				1		
Children and Youth Services Review				1		
Digital Creativity		1				
Digital Journalism					1	
Discourse, Context & Media		1				
Expert Journal of Marketing				1		
Fashion Theory						1
Fisheries			1			

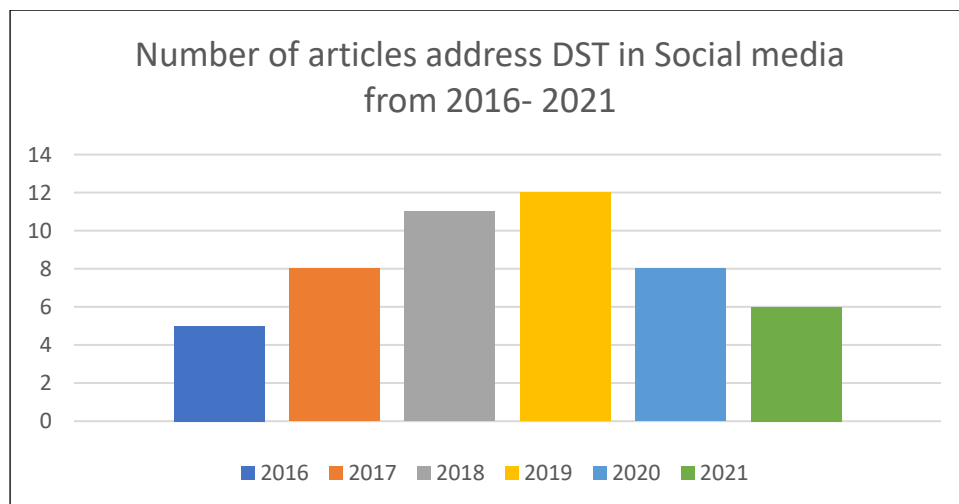
Forum Journal	1		
Information, Communication & Society			1
Information, Communication & Society	1		
International Journal of Business and Society		1	
International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching			1
International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies	1		
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship		1	
International Journal of Strategic Communication			1
IUP Journal of Brand Management			1
Journal of Computer Information Systems			1
Journal of Destination Marketing & Management		1	
Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing		2	1 1
Journal of Documentation		1	
Journal of Global Marketing			1
Journal of Management Inquiry		1	
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice		1	
Journal of Museum Education	1		
Journal of Paramedic Practice			1
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing			
Journal of Services Marketing			1
Journal of Social Work Practice			
Journal of Technology in Human Services			1
Management Dynamics in the Knowledge-Economy	1		
Media and Communication	1		

Place Branding and Public Diplomacy		2
Procedia CIRP	1	
Proceedings of Science		1
Psychology & Marketing	1	
Public Relations Review	1	
Qualitative Research in Psychology		1
Research in Drama Education	1	
The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language		1
The Breast	1	
The Journal of Social Media in Society Spring		1
Tourism Review		1
Tourismos	1	

From the data displayed in Figure 4, it is seen that the publishing trend seemed to be increasing from 2016 to 2019.

Figure 4

Breakdown of Published Articles According to the Year of Publication



In 2020, the number of publications had decreased when compared to 2019. It might be the consequence of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Various reports indicated that many research activities were primarily delayed in 2020, other than those on COVID-19-related issues and further crucial research projects (Radecki & Schonfeld, 2020). Moreover, around 4% of the global research in 2020 was devoted to coronavirus and pandemic-related research (Else, 2020).

As per Figure 5, the USA and UK were at the peak in research on DST in social media. According to Byrom (2020), three-quarters of early career researchers suffered from the adverse effects caused by the lockdown, which seriously affected their ability to accumulate data, confer ideas and findings with associates and co-workers, and propagate research outcomes. It might cause a decrease in publications other than those on COVID 19-related articles from the UK. Besides, when this article was written in 2021, publications related to DST research in social media recorded only six. It could also be because some articles were still a work in progress. The data displayed in Figure 4 shows that the topic seems to be getting trendy yearly. It seems to suggest that research on DST in social media has a high potential for development in several aspects.

Figure 5
Breakdown of Publications According to Country

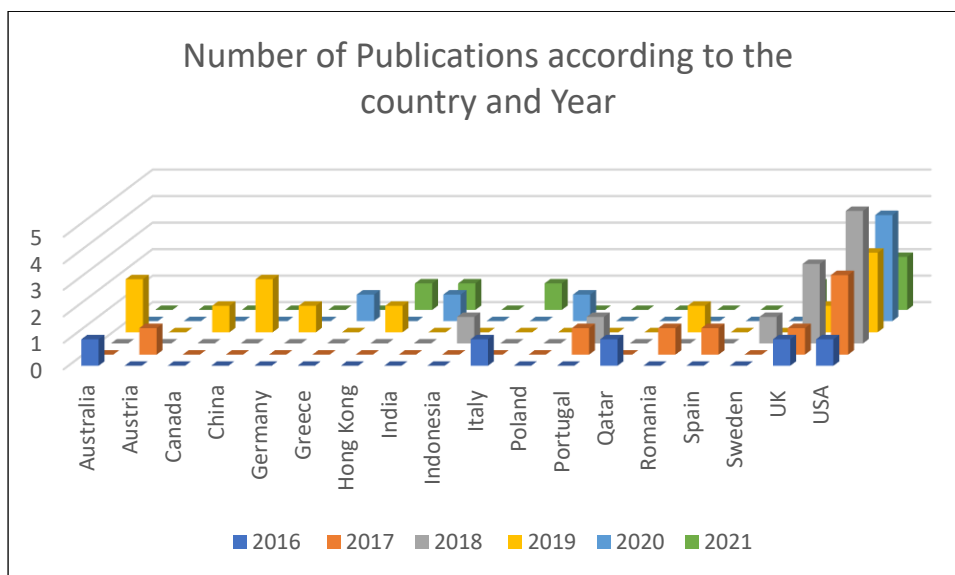
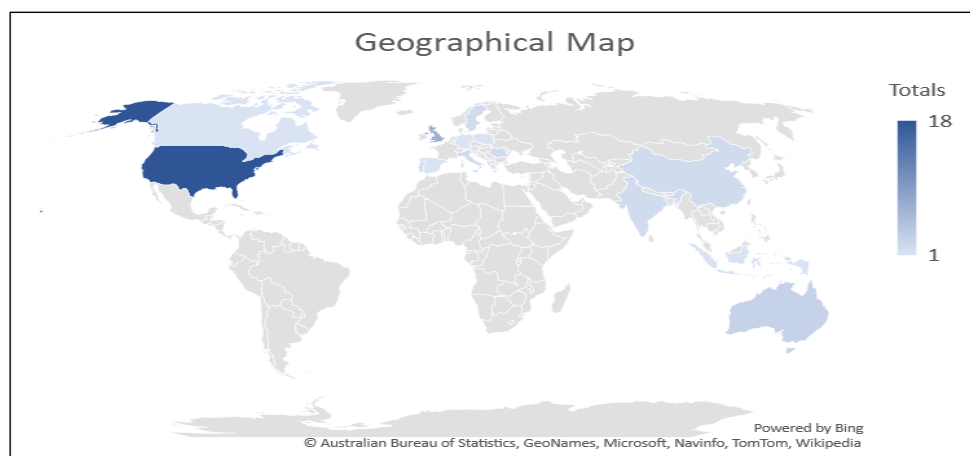


Figure 6
Geographical Map



Social media for DST has become relatively widespread in emerging South Asian countries such as India and China. There were also publications on the topic reported in other countries, such as Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. Figure 5 and Figure

6 show that DST using social media platforms has been progressing steadily in the USA and the UK. It might be the case that technological advances and social media usage are high in both these countries.

The list of publications and their categorization into themes is reflected in Table 3. It resulted in the identification of six distinct standpoints, which were as follows: six articles discussed the significance of using DST for the campaign in social media; seven articles discussed the use of DST for community development and services; seven articles addressed the application of DST for education, training, and professional development; three articles about the new arena of journalism through DST in social media; 22 articles evidenced the massive advantage of applying DST for marketing, inclusive of branding and advertising (Henceforth Marketing) on the social media platforms; two articles discussed the possibilities for using the DST strategy in social media for the preservation of culture and heritage; and finally, six distinct articles addressed the benefits of applying the techniques of DST through the medium of social media to attain various therapeutic benefits.

Table 3
Thematic Mapping of the Publications

	Campaign	Community Development and Services	Education, Training, Professional Development	Journalism	Marketing inclusive of Branding and Advertising	Preservation of Culture, Heritage	Therapeutic Benefits
(Hemantha, 2021)	1					1	
(Hudak, 2019)						1	
(Laurell & Söderman, 2018)						1	
(Papacharissi, 2016)			1				
(Chan & Sage, 2021)			1				
(Madenga, 2021)					1		
(Li et al., 2019)						1	
(Myers et al., 2016)			1				
(Lund et al., 2018)						1	
(Karpinska-Krakowiak & Modlinski, 2020)						1	
(Gupta, 2020)							1
(Vinerean & Opreana, 2019)						1	

(Crişan & Borţun, 2017)			1	
(Cotton et al., 2019)	1			
(Hood & Reid, 2018)				1
(Bell & Leonard, 2018)	1			
(Barry & Girona, 2018)			1	
(Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020)		1		
(Allagui & Breslow, 2016)	1			
(Guglielmino et al., 2017)				1
(Giaxoglou, 2017)		1		
(Alexandrakis et al., 2020)				1
(Canella, 2017)	1			
(Chan, 2019)				1
(Peralta, 2019)			1	
(Pera & Viglia, 2016)			1	
(Orth, 2018)		1		
(Spruce & Leaf, 2017)				1
(Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017)	1			
(Romo et al., 2017)			1	
(Scotti, 2021)		1		
(Johnson, 2018)	1			
(Brahmana & Vivaldo, 2018)			1	
(Pettengill, 2020)	1			
(Yeh & Mitric, 2020)		1		
(von Wachenfeldt, 2021)			1	
(Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019)				1
(Obiedzinski, 2018)			1	
(Carlton, 2020)			1	
(Tiago et al., 2017)			1	
(Tiago et al., 2018)			1	
(Conejo, 2018)			1	
(Yeh & Mitric, 2019)		1		
(Jacobsen & Barnes, 2019)			1	
(Hemantha, 2020)	1		1	

(Kemp et al., 2021)		1	
(Nycyk & Mack, 2019)	1		1
(Zammit et al., 2016)		1	
(Weber & Grauer, 2019)		1	
(Mitchell, 2019)		1	

Table 4 depicts the evolving patterns of themes as they emerge, organized by year.

Table 4
The Themes According to Year

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Campaign	1	2		1	1	1
Community Development and Services	2		2	1	1	1
Education, Training, Professional Development	1		1	3	1	1
Journalism		1			1	1
Marketing inclusive of Branding and Advertising	1	3	7	5	3	3
Preservation of Culture, Heritage		1	1			
Therapeutic Benefits		1		3	2	

Various choices were used to analyze the pattern, such as year and country of publications, publication and theme, and year and theme. We found that in 2016 the research focused more on community development and services, with two research items. The remaining themes, namely campaign, education, training, professional development, and marketing, had one research per the theme. The number of research increased gradually from 2016 to 2019. However, it shows a decrease from 2020 onwards. As previously stated, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could explain the lack of research in 2020 and 2021. The leading theme was marketing, which had most of the research items, followed by the “Education, Training, Professional Development” theme. The least frequent theme was “Preservation of Culture, Heritage,” which was included twice in 2017 and 2018. Tables 3 and 4 show that some research articles covered more than one theme. The subsequent section discusses the qualitative findings of the thematic review.

Qualitative Findings

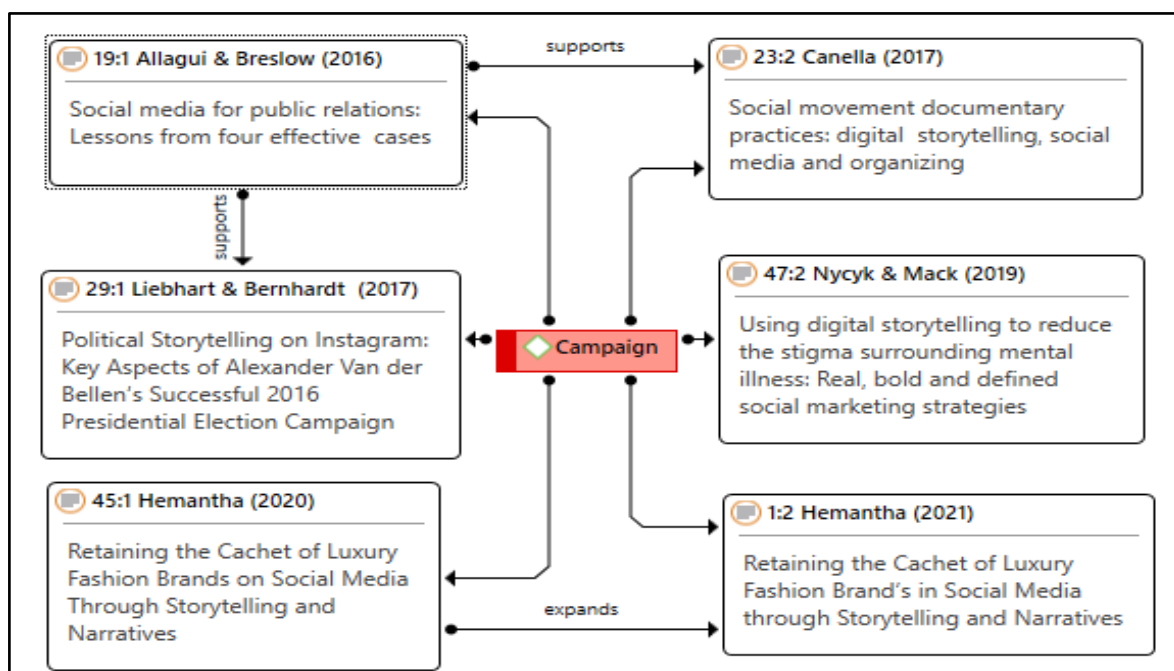
This section describes the qualitative findings of the thematic review. Each article was examined according to the identified theme. The key findings of each research article are conveyed under each theme by closely monitoring the supportive and extended work of the articles. Figure 6 is the visual representation of the thematic review's holistic categorization of articles.

Theme 1: Campaign

Social media have become the preferred channel for engagement with the target audience and service providers. Social media campaigns are one of the channels which can reach a massive audience compared to offline campaigns. Figure 7 shows the network view of the six research articles that discussed the DST application pattern in social media under the campaign theme. According to the Oxford dictionary, “Campaign” refers to an organized course of action designed to achieve a specific objective. Given that, the articles were meticulously classified according to whether the primary objective of the action taken in the article used DST based on the campaign’s strategy, despite the article’s unique substantive themes such as marketing, education, therapeutic benefit, etc.

Figure 7

Network View of the Research Articles on the “Campaign” Theme



The analysis of the articles under the theme of “Campaign” justifies using DST in social media as a valuable component and an effective strategy for achieving the campaign’s goal. Studies related to luxury branding campaigns by Hemantha (2020, 2021) and marketing by Nycyk and Mack (2019), election campaigns by Liebhart and Bernhardt (2017), and social documentary campaigns by Canella (2017) all demonstrated the potential of DST-based social media campaigns. Furthermore, Allagui and Breslow (2016) studied the strategies for leading an award-winning campaign. These articles, under the common theme of DST campaigns in social media, demonstrate the potential of DST campaigns in social media while also opening many doors to research campaigns using DST as a tool. Even though it was shown that DST was an excellent way to run a campaign, it was surprising that no studies were found that showed different ways to use DST in terms of its technological, technical, or communication parts.

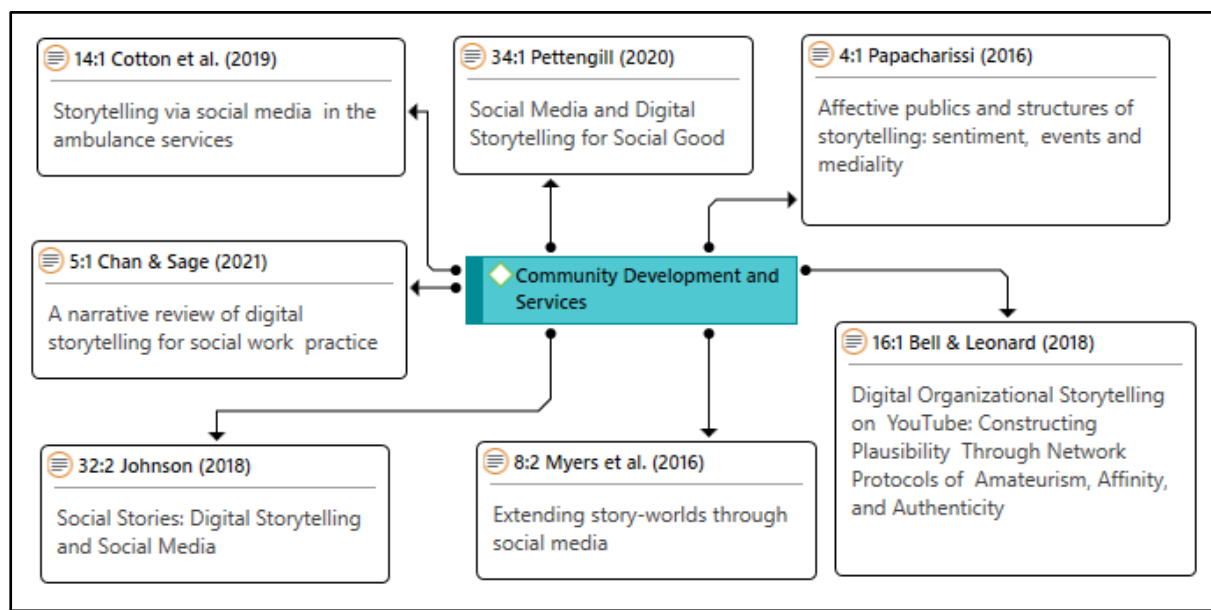
Theme 2: Community Development and Services

Social media is open to being used for various purposes. It is not limited to any predefined use. Indeed, how social media is used, and its features are evolving rapidly. It is just

a matter of the creativity of the users and a consequence of the specific needs to seek the right solution. Figure 8 depicts the network view of the articles selected under the theme of Community Development and Services. Using social media for community development is fashionable now. It has been popularized along with the growth of the storytelling culture in social media.

Figure 8

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme “Community Development and Services”



It has been proposed that DST be viewed as a canopy term for digital media storytelling activities (Chan & Sage, 2021). Johnson (2018) illustrated how a Twitter blog could use features such as stories and hashtags to convey a message. The article analysis revealed that digital stories could change community perception, shape personal politics, manage adversity, and promote wellness (Bell & Leonard, 2018; Cotton et al., 2019; Myers et al., 2016; Papacharissi, 2016; Pettengill, 2020). Although the article in question did not mention any specific research methods, it covered all the essential aspects of social media storytelling, such as using Web 2.0 tools like Twitter and blogs to better yourself and your community. We discovered through a literature review that proper guidance on sharing digital stories on social media could benefit storytellers and the public (Cotton et al., 2019). The presence of community development projects and case studies published as research articles demonstrates that DST through social media has its roots in community development and services. Thus, it opens several possibilities for further investigation of current case studies and projects in the context of DST in social media as a contribution to academic literature.

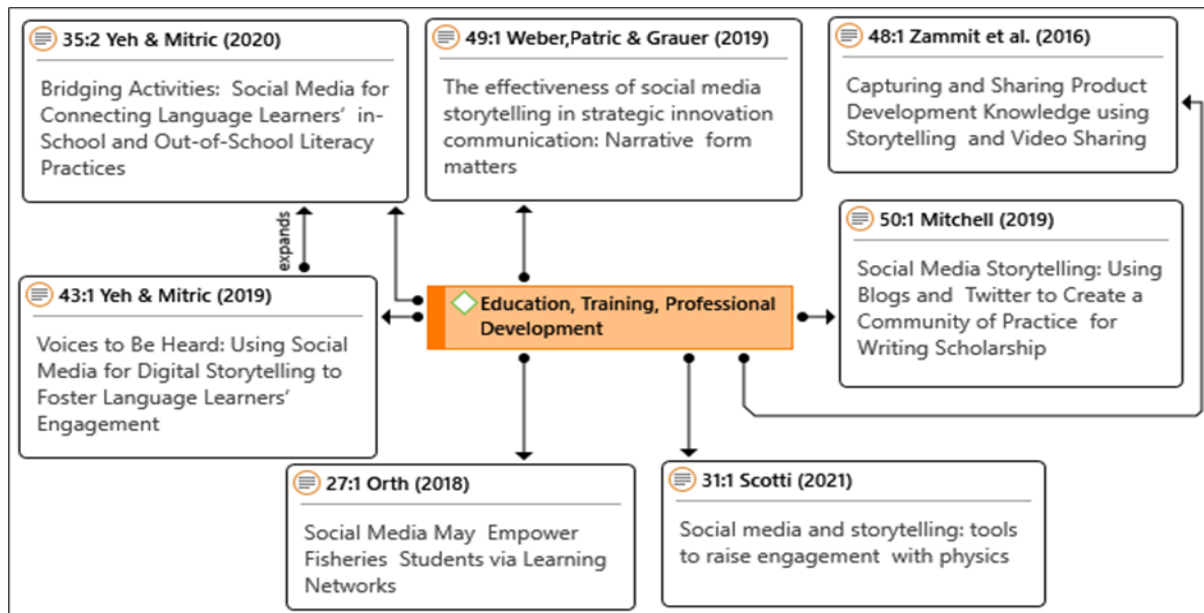
Theme 3: Education, Training, and Professional Development

It has become common to use social media for educational purposes. There are a lot of examples available that can validate the statement. For instance, thousands of profiles exist on various social media platforms that can help educate people on diverse aspects. For example, one can learn a language, subject, or skills using static content accessible through social media. Alternatively, social media can be used as a channel to provide education or training dynamically. Telling a story on social media is an intelligent strategy for educating the target group more efficiently than any other online bespoke medium. Figure 9 illustrates the network

view of the articles that discussed the pattern of DST use of social media in Education, Training, and Professional Development.

Figure 9

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme “Education, Training, and Professional Development”



According to the literature, social media can be a learning tool. For example, it was discovered that Instagram could be used as a multimodal DST tool to increase the engagement of college-level English Language Learners (ELLs; Yeh & Mitric, 2019). They also investigated how students could use social media to share their stories and promote their work outside of the classroom. Investigations on effectively using social media in teaching (Orth, 2018) and learning are done, acting as a model for social media storytelling's voice, tone, and literary strategies. Similarly, Zammit et al. (2016) investigated storytelling and video-sharing techniques in social media to capture engineering knowledge by knowledge experts. However, the technical aspects of creating and sharing digital stories on social media for various target groups are yet to be researched.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that storytelling can increase audience attention, making researchers' findings more accessible to the public. The literature has thus proven the positive effects of DST on social media. Nonetheless, aside from the benefits of DST in social media, it was discovered that the current view of storytelling's potential was overly optimistic and that using high-quality narratives could have negative consequences under certain conditions (Weber et al., 2019). As a result of the analysis, it is assumed that high-quality storytelling can have adverse effects under certain conditions, which opens numerous areas for future research.

Theme 4: Journalism

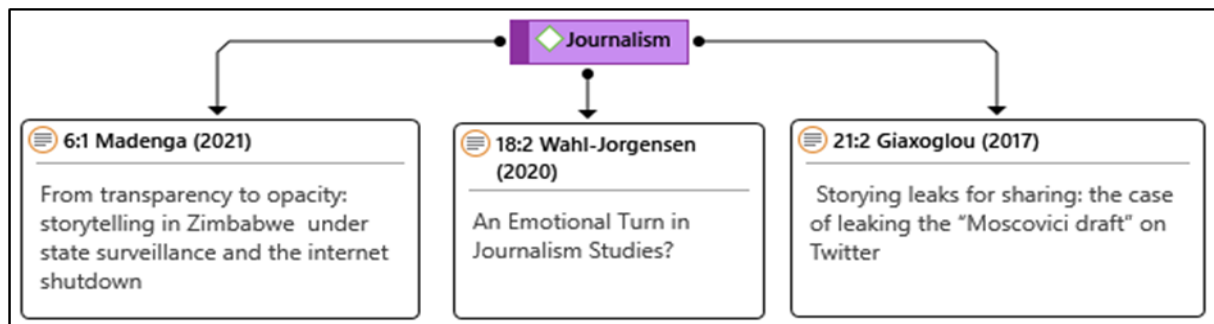
The “age of digital media” is endorsing innovation, and dramatic change has occurred across all aspects of journalism (Franklin, 2014). Furthermore, the extensive acceptance of social media, especially Twitter, offers an additional development of consequence for the future of journalism (Hermida, 2013). Hence, social media and journalism have become tightly

coupled these days. Statista (2020) states there were 4.2 billion social media users as of January 2021 (59.5 % of the global population).

Conversely, almost half of the population in the world relies on social media as a news source. As a result, Twitter has become a prominent news reporting tool, enabling immediate streaming of breaking news and establishing a public forum for discussing global events, such as natural disasters, sports events, and political kinds of stuff (Vis, 2013; Weller et al., p. 201). Figure 10 shows the network view of the categorized articles under the theme of Journalism.

Figure 10

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme “Journalism”



Considering the findings supporting the journalism theme, we discovered that a sense of transparency and opacity are actively blended with storylines when conveying a message through digital stories on social media (Madenga, 2021). We also found out that social media storytelling about the concept of journalism is deeply rooted in localized identities and languages. Giaxoglou (2017) conducted research based on small story insights and the empirical framework of sharing of Georgakopoulou (2016). His research has provided an understanding of the possibility of using DST in social media for journalism and the serious attention that journalism through social media storytelling merits.

Furthermore, according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2020), technological changes have reshaped the role of emotion in journalistic digital storytelling on social media. On top of that, the digital era and the advent of social media have enabled ordinary people to participate in news production. It allows for a more dynamic approach to information dissemination. It opens a path for communication and media researchers to delve deeper into how news is created into digital stories by ordinary people and its impact on the community. Furthermore, Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) emphasized the importance of an emotional turn in journalism using DST in social media. This statement emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary research on DST in social media in terms of journalism.

The review of articles on the theme of journalism provided insight into the possibility of using DST in social media for journalism. Furthermore, the review of the three articles identified potential pathways in the journalistic use of DST in social media. For example, a lack of conceptualization on transforming online news into a digital story (Giaxoglou, 2017). Further, news development, such as digital stories in social media, requires a more systematic conceptualization and a more open-ended and flexible analytical lens.

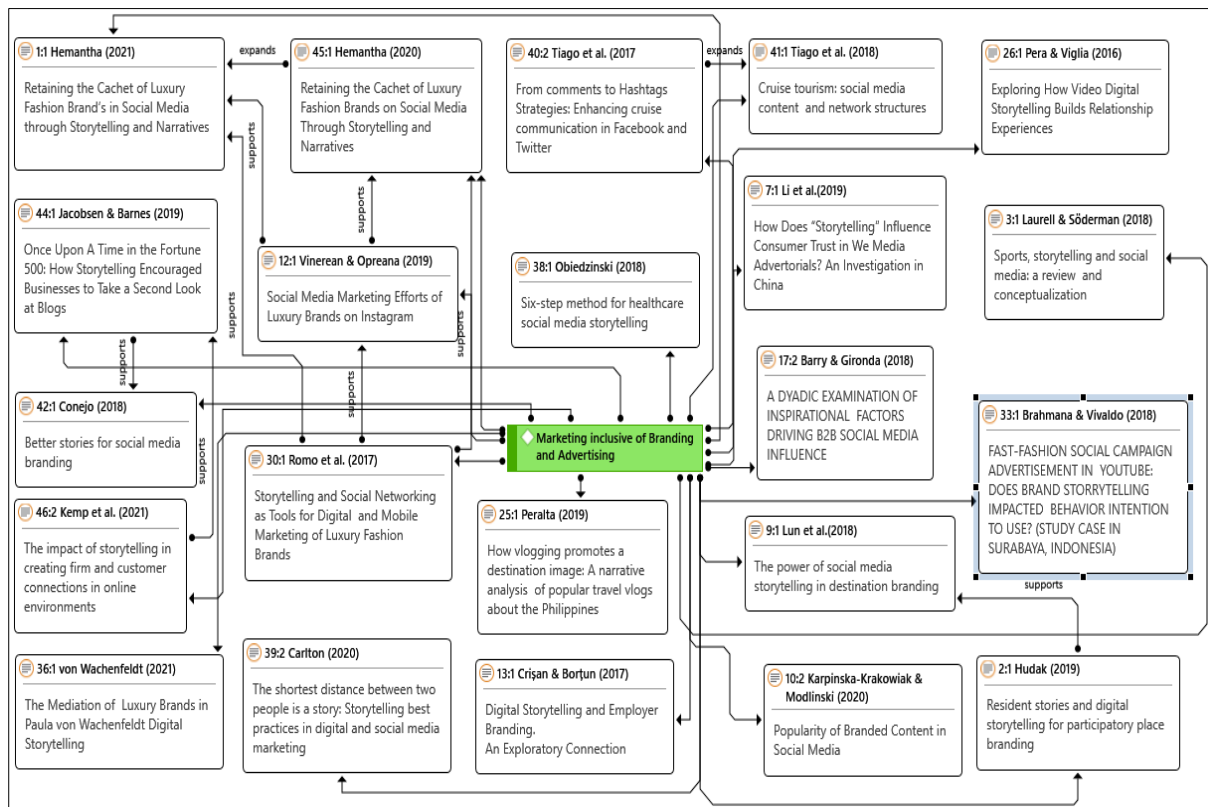
Theme 5: Marketing Inclusive of Branding and Advertising

Social media will play a vital role for consumers in decision-making, such as preparing for a purchase or re-purchasing. As a result, marketers are devoted to developing social media strategies intended to create, preserve, and enlarge their customer base. As a social media

marketing strategy, storytelling has become a widespread methodology for marketers, advertisers, and brand promoters, helping them create unique and appealing content that can resonate with the target audience. In line with this belief, numerous researchers have been conducted to delve into the topic. As an outcome, it was the theme with which more articles ($n = 22$) were identified.

Figure 11

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme “Marketing inclusive of Branding and Advertising”



Luxury brands have always showcased the philosophy and heritage of the brand (Hemantha, 2020, 2021; Romo et al., 2017; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). Studies proved that how marketers tell stories in a captivating and meaningful way on social media could make a massive difference between success and failure in business (Carlton, 2020). Most studies focused on DST as a social tool that can impress others via social media (Hemantha, 2020, 2021). Nevertheless, the focus was also on the essential social media marketing strategies and practices while applying DST.

In addition, the effectiveness of DST in social media for marketing has been explored by several researchers (Carlton, 2020; Crisan & Bortun, 2017; Jacobsen & Barnes, 2019; Karpinska-Krakowiak & Modlinski, 2020; Kemp et al., 2021; Laurell & Soderman, 2018; Peralta, 2019; Von Wachenfeldt, 2021). Those studies proved that DST could become a compelling resource that would open new dimensions of understanding and participation in place branding. Moreover, conceptualizing storytelling in social media advertorials and consumer experience through social media stories related to branding and marketing and revising literary theory to address storytelling fundamentals have also been done (Barry & Girona, 2018; Conejo, 2018; Hudak, 2019; Li et al., 2019; Lund et al., 2018; Pera & Viglia,

2016; Tiago et al., 2018). However, as with previously explored themes, there is a lack of articles investigating the technical aspects of DST in social media.

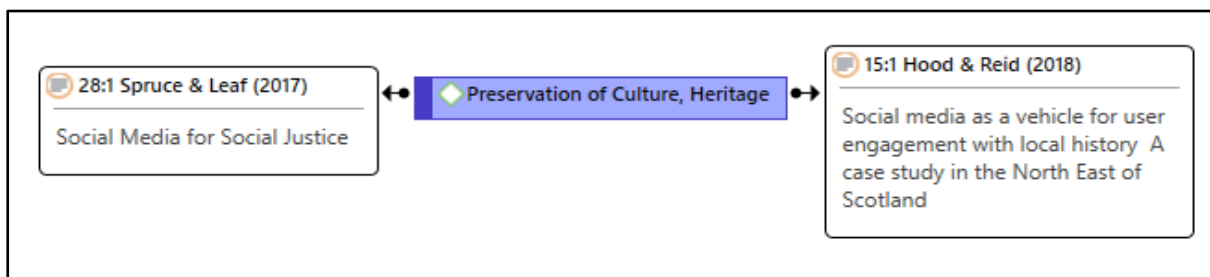
The analysis of all the articles under the themes showed that a content-oriented strategy must be followed to maximize engagement on social media. However, the literature lacks a comprehensive content-oriented strategy regarding a digital story's narrative and technical content. Tiago et al. (2017, 2018) supported the potential need for technical research on the application of DST in social media, stating that one could maximize engagement in social media by sharing multimedia content that supported storytelling values. In addition, that content could be used on multiple platforms. As a result, focusing on the technological aspects of applying DST to any theme can bring more value to the community.

Theme 6: Preservation of Culture and Heritage

The least number of two articles raised the theme of preserving culture and heritage (see Figure 12). There was confusion when thematizing articles regarding these two, whether to include them in the theme of community development and services or not. However, when we took a closer look at the two articles, we found that they were very different from the definition of the theme of community development and services. Instead of focusing on community development or service, these articles were more about preserving history through museums.

Figure 12

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme "Preservation of Culture and Heritage"



The critical instinct from both studies says that museums have become more visible in the quest for inclusion and equity, and people are migrating to the internet, specifically on social media. Spruce and Leaf (2017) have claimed that all museums could participate in online conversations on race and social justice. It also opens pathways to more research on museum studies using social media to increase access for visitors to tell their own stories. Meantime, exploring the significance of the methodology of the image and the photo-elicitation while also exploring how DST and user engagement could contribute to the documentation of local communities that might contribute to research on the local history also proved by Hood and Reid (2018). In addition, the study has demonstrated new prospects in employing users and presenting historical content through the community heritage organizations by clearly showing the value of photo-elicitation in obtaining exhaustive quality engagement and interaction with the community.

Theme 7: Therapeutic Benefits

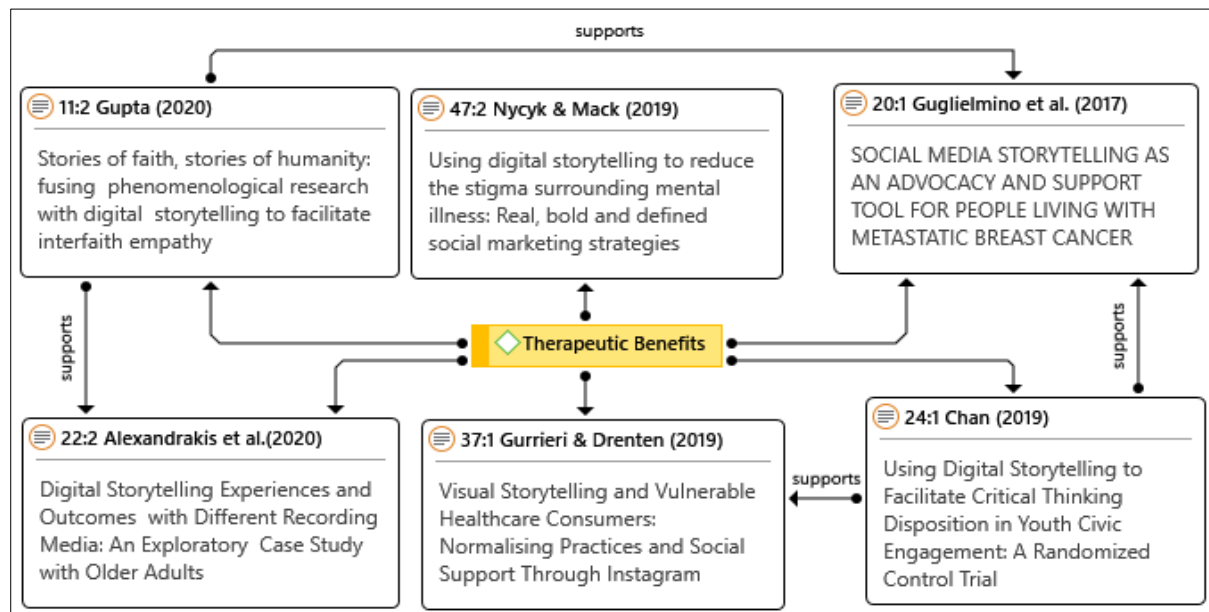
Another theme in which DST has been actively used in social media is the question of therapeutic benefits in various aspects. We have evidence that social media can aid in solving

various physical and mental health issues through DST. It has been broadly proved by the chosen literature discussed below.

Figure 13 shows the network view of the articles under the theme of therapeutic benefits.

Figure 13

Network View of the Research Articles on the Theme “Therapeutic Benefits”



The chosen six studies have proved the benefits of posting stories online. The sharing of intimate stories on social media positively impacted the traditionally isolated group of cancer patients, increased self-esteem and critical thinking, and reduced mental illness stigma (Chan, 2019; Guglielmino et al., 2017; Gupta, 2020; Nycyk & Mack, 2019). These confirm that digital stories helped people feel empathically heard, validated, and normalized by another person through DST strategies in social media. Further, it focused on the storyteller’s perspective and revealed that using DST in social media was therapeutically beneficial for storytellers in various ways.

DST can enhance mental power by improving self-esteem and critical thinking ability. Gurrieri and Drenten (2019) have provided evidence that image-based social media could provide a platform for visual storytelling through a framework. They have developed a framework for visual storytelling for vulnerable healthcare consumers on Instagram. Research has led to a new phenomenon of using DST in social media to normalize weak healthcare consumption. According to the research findings of Alexandrakis et al. (2020), posting stories online had many benefits similar to those of writing stories on paper, such as targeting memories to be stored and providing time to think about the story. It was revealed that the storytellers were anxious upon receiving comments as feedback. This observation was also supported in the findings from Brewer and Piper (2016) and Olsson et al. (2008), who pointed out that “sharing memories and thoughts online generates a feeling of community.” Furthermore, the analysis of six articles has proven the trends of demonstrating the benefits of DST in social media studies through a specific group, leaving the gaps for further studies to be carried out on using DST practices in social media for therapeutic benefits.

Findings and Discussion

The following findings were noted based on the number of themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of how DST was used across diverse research projects.

The Value of Digital Storytelling in Social Media

Across the identified studies, practitioners and ordinary people broadly practice the value of applying DST in social media for various purposes. At the same time, focusing on DST in social media to generate knowledge about a phenomenon was evident by eliciting richer data. It was mainly found that the significance of DST in social media arises in terms of the reachability of the audience and the facile way to develop and share a story compared to other digital mediums to carry a digital story to people. Through the identified trends from the analysis, it is evident that in all the themes, social media was used as the medium for information dissemination, and the strategy was DST. Thus, research focusing on DST in social media requires that researchers invest the effort in developing a more strategic conceptualization of the topic specific. Indeed, relationship building, stress relief, branding, and collaboration were reported as the benefits of DST in social media, which again opens doors for more comprehensive research on the ethical consideration of DST in social media.

Discussion

This article reviews patterns and trends in the use of DST in social media from 2016 to 2021. The findings from the code-to-document analysis in ATLAS.ti showed that there were seven main themes in the patterns and trends in the use of DST in social media, which comprehensively covered the practical and theoretical aspects of the topic.

It was found that, under the campaign theme, social media storytelling features had been widely used to obtain a competitive advantage over other approaches to advertising or political campaigns. Regarding advertising campaigns, researchers noticed that fashion brands used marketing campaigns for their products the most. At the same time, presented case studies proved that the campaigns were used to persuade public members for various reasons. It has become clear from the different patterns of use in social media storytelling, referred to as DST in social media, that it has excellent potential for running campaigns to reach massive audiences quickly.

Next, on the theme of community development and services, the research articles mainly utilized various social media platforms to tell stories digitally to a larger audience about different problem. The researchers used social media platforms for storytelling to achieve their research goals. Subsequently, Chan and Sage (2021) conceptualized DST practices in social media. There was no specific pattern identified in the theme, except that DST in social media could be used for various unique purposes in community development.

Regarding education and training, it is worth noting that social media has been embraced as an excellent medium for pedagogical practices. It was because stories have been taken as a capsule of content shared with the target group through social media. Most of the identified research articles under this theme have utilized DST through social media for the abovementioned purpose. However, in some research, for instance, Weber et al. (2019), the concern was whether the precise recommendations for using storytelling in innovation communication found in the literature were empirically warranted. The results showed that high-quality storytelling could also have adverse effects under certain conditions, opening many doors for further research.

The next noteworthy theme was journalism, in which storytelling via social media got extensive acceptance in conveying news as stories through various social media, primarily through the Twitter platform, which offered an additional development of consequence for the future of journalism. No specific pattern has been identified from the articles under the theme of journalism, except that journalism using DST in social media proved that social media and journalism had become tightly coupled these days.

Subsequently, more significant articles ($n = 22$) were identified in the marketing theme. A few articles under this theme overlapped with the articles from the theme of “Campaign” as well. The review of the articles found that the use of DST in social media could be used in a different pattern for marketing and advertising purposes. The two leading social media platforms used in marketing were Facebook and Instagram, which most researchers under the theme identified with. In the present article’s review, various patterns were identified in using the social media platform for DST. Most of the articles identified covered to what extent the use of DST in social media could be utilized for marketing, branding, and advertising purposes. The technique used in the research was a content analysis of the exploratory research on the sample stories.

Furthermore, other recognized patterns under the marketing theme were proposing models for assessing marketers’ capacity, analyzing storytelling fundamentals through literary theory, and designing models related to using DST in social media. These findings suggest that different firms can apply DST to enhance social media activity. Moreover, the researchers experimented with the developed model. This model was then validated through further experimental research in various firms. Thus, all the research articles under the theme of “Marketing inclusive of Branding and Advertising” validated the idea that firms could increase the value of their products and services by telling the brand story on social media using good content, emotion, imagery, and narrative.

Preservation of culture and heritage was the theme in which only two research articles were identified. Both articles analyzed how to apply DST in social media to marginalize the voices of a museum in the digital sphere to embrace visitors to the museum. More specifically, the study by Hood and Reid (2018) was insightful in that it valued photo-elicitation for obtaining exhaustive quality engagement and interaction with the community towards using DST in social media.

The seventh identified theme was “therapeutic benefits.” All the six identified research articles under this theme tested the effectiveness of the use of DST in social media, more specifically concerning the goal of attaining various therapeutic benefits. Again, the researchers followed a pattern, from arranging training programs where participants could share personal stories. It motivated other participants to develop a framework for using DST in social media for vulnerable healthcare consumers.

Implications and Paths for Future Research

This paper has analyzed patterns and trends of DST in social media. It extensively identified the subject themes in research papers published from 2016 to 2021. However, based on the findings of this study, most themes leave numerous practical and theoretical research gaps. Every corner of today’s modern world is immersed in the digital age. The widespread impact of the online phenomenon is evident in every discipline. Therefore, using DST in social media could be widely applied in all aspects of life and reach many audiences, no matter how large or small. With the rapid technological advancements, it has become imperative that the future of education, healthcare, marketing, and every other field will ultimately have to migrate onto the online platform. Considering all the positive impacts of applying DST to social media,

there will be new practical and theoretical strategies to use DST in social media for education, marketing, health care, or even the discovery of new themes on the topic.

While the reviewed articles highlight some promising aspects of DST, it is also essential to highlight some potential drawbacks. Although the authors of the reviewed articles claimed that DST had been successfully implemented in social media, generalizing these results to other contexts, populations, or locations where the digital divide may be more pronounced is uncertain. In this regard, most of the reviewed literature leaves a population gap. Meanwhile, this study analyzed content published between 2016 and 2021, during which time the researchers did not extensively cover the “Stories” feature of social media. The “Stories” feature has become popular on almost every social media platform, like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Thus, DST can be expected to have remarkable outcomes when this feature gets researched for its consequences. According to Lambert (2013), DST can be categorized into nine types: character stories, memorial stories, adventure stories, accomplishment stories, the story about a place in my life, the story about what I do, recovery stories, and love stories that are usually personal. As we investigate stories, it is obvious to come through the stories of these types. Meanwhile, it was noted that the literature did not cover the different kinds of personal stories and their significance for the story viewers, how digital stories are created, and what makes a digital story achieve the target of the story. Additionally, the body of knowledge looks for a promising prototype for evaluating the level of social media influence yielded through DST to reflect social media influence more accurately.

In addition, researchers need to be aware of the unavoidable differences between themselves and the research participants and be willing to take action to mitigate any possible discrepancies. For example, most of the reviewed articles focused on how researchers view the application or usage of DST in social media using a real-life scenario. Researching how decisions are made when participants view a digital story on social media and participant experiences in different settings of applying DST to various social media can, however, help to ensure a solid contribution of knowledge to the field of DST in social media. It has been acknowledged by Crişan and Borţun (2017) as well.

Besides, the identified articles fail to adequately address any potential ethical concerns that may arise from using DST social media. For example, since most digital stories are typically user-generated content, as it might be an issue confronting those who create content for the internet, there is always the possibility that someone will steal or copy the story’s content. In this sense, tech researchers could open many doors to investigate how to circumvent this. In addition, concepts, and strategies for categorizing, thematizing, and characterizing user-generated content also benefit the DST field. It is proposed by Laurell and Söderman (2018) as well. An analysis of how business organizations use digital stories for marketing themselves and how other people, such as influencers through plain folk advertising, help create stories would help to show how stories are translated and changed in the digital setting of social media. More research in this area would help various organizations figure out how to handle digital stories that are being translated. However, the move towards entirely using the storytelling approach will undoubtedly require a considerable investment of time and effort to study the actual effects on a different group of people. Based on this thematic review, the future of DST in social media needs new conceptual models, application frameworks specific to the field, and research on the topic of DST in social media through the lens of technology. So, it is vital to encourage research into the possibilities of using DST in social media, improving how DST works in various social media and for different people from different locations.

Contributions and Benefits of Study

This thematic review has analyzed the use of DST in social media by identifying the emerging themes. It also studied the trends in the publications on the topic from 2016 to 2021. The findings will benefit the future research direction as it has helped to identify the gaps in the current understanding of the use of DST in social media.

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