



## Unveiling Sustainable Advertising: A Case Study of Storytelling Strategies and Archetypes in Malaysian Telco Advertisements

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**Abstract.** The concept of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) was first introduced in September 2015 at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, which consisted of 17 main areas that need to be explored to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global concept took its prominence in 2020 due to many organisations' rampant application of the model due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This global effect can also be seen in Malaysia, as publicly listed companies have been advised by Bursa Malaysia to shift their focus, make sustainability part of their business goals, and for the companies to report their sustainability efforts in their annual report as evidence supporting these global efforts. This effect can also be seen in the academic research direction, where most researchers include this concept in their framework in one way or another to measure the effectiveness of the SDG item in the business. However, it has come to the attention of the researchers that there are significant knowledge gaps when it comes to the communication aspect of the concept. Limited research addresses the most effective way to communicate business sustainability efforts, particularly from the perspective of communication content. This research addresses this issue by examining how companies employ storytelling elements to communicate their sustainability efforts to target audiences. Focusing on Malaysia's leading telecommunication companies, the study conducts a qualitative content analysis of selected sustainability advertisements disseminated through YouTube. All the extracted content will later be sub-grouped using the thematic analysis method to identify the storytelling techniques, brand archetypes and dimensions of sustainability storytelling technique used by the marketers. This study contributes to the comprehension of effective communication practices within the context of sustainable development goals (SDGs), providing valuable insights into the strategic use of storytelling and brand archetypes in sustainability advertising campaigns. Moreover, this study lays the groundwork for future research endeavours in communication, content writing, and storytelling, enriching the broader discourse on sustainability communication within academic and professional domains. This research initiates future sustainability communication research, particularly in communication, content writing and storytelling.

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## 1 Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has emerged as a prominent framework for guiding global sustainability efforts. SDGs have affected various sectors around the world. The implementation of SDG has been shown to significantly impact governmental, non-profit organizations, private sectors, and civil society [1]. Since the private sectors are one of the most prominent players in the SDGs effort, the private sector comprises a big group of businesses with a unique co-dependent nature. Thus, looking into how SDGs affected them from the reputation and branding standpoint is worth it.

Most of the SDGs research so far has focused on integrating the SDGs elements, developing the implementation method in various sectors, and developing the measurement of the program through aggregate and weightage measurements. However, scholars need more efforts to investigate the efforts from a communication perspective, particularly by addressing the best method to communicate business efforts with their prospective customers, especially by applying the concept of storytelling in their branding and reputation management. Therefore, a critical research gap exists regarding the effective communication of business sustainability efforts, specifically in communication content and storytelling techniques.

Despite the widespread adoption of the SDGs, limited empirical research addresses the optimal strategies for communicating sustainability initiatives to stakeholders. This knowledge gap presents a significant challenge, as it hinders businesses' ability to effectively engage audiences and provide evidence of their support for global sustainability endeavours. Consequently, there is an urgent need to investigate the storytelling elements employed by organisations to communicate their sustainability efforts and analyse the strategies and methods employed in sustainability advertisements. By elucidating the dimensions of sustainability storytelling techniques utilised by marketers, this research seeks to advance scholarly understanding of effective communication practices within the context of the SDGs. Furthermore, it aims to lay the foundation for future research in communication, content writing, and storytelling disciplines, contributing to the broader discourse on sustainability communication in academic and professional domains.

Consumers expect companies to move beyond economic self-interest toward positive societal impact [2]. The expectation that companies exist to serve a broader societal purpose is manifested in various ways. New companies are forming with a social mission at their core. These companies have earned certifications (e.g., Certified B Corporation) for environmental and social transparency [2][3]. Other companies are turning to prosocial initiatives, programs, and products to deliver a positive societal impact.

Nearly one in every five packaged goods is now sustainably marketed, and these products are growing seven times faster than their traditional counterparts [4]. Over 85% of individuals worldwide indicate they have shifted toward purchasing more sustainable products [5][6]. As a result, sustainability has become prevalent in product branding and advertising, offering a strategic resource for competitive advantage [3][7]. These macro trends underscore the need for companies to communicate their sustainability initiatives effectively to consumers [8].

Given the significance of storytelling and brand archetypes in communicating sustainability efforts in communication campaigns, this research sought to explore how these utilise storytelling elements in shaping their brand narratives and the role of brand archetypes in communicating their sustainability effort advertisement campaign. Specifically, the study analyses the storytelling elements employed by the top three Telco companies in Malaysia and identifies the brand archetypes that align with their sustainability ad campaign. This paper provides a fresh perspective on advertising sustainability initiatives, practices, and products by asking the following questions: (a) to identify how the top three telecommunication companies in Malaysia use storytelling techniques in their sustainability advertisement campaign, (b) to identify the storytelling elements in top three telecommunication companies in Malaysia and (c) to identify the brand archetype of the top three telecommunication companies in Malaysia in their sustainable advertisement.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The sustainable development goal was first introduced in 2015 by the United Nations based on 17 main elements that were deemed important for the development of a better nation in the future. United Nation during the introductory phase of the programme explains the main objective of the program is to address the critical issues of humanity and the planet for at least in the next 15 years. Since then, with the global understanding of the efforts, the complexity of the programme continuously grew from 169 objectives to more than 230 indicators. However, the system is far from perfect as the complexity of the programme is far from perfect. The main challenges argued by many are the integration between those 17 elements and diversity of execution amongst nations that are highly dependent on their resources [9]. As mentioned, SDGs efforts have shown its prominence in various sectors, however, private sectors particularly business play the most significant role in supporting these efforts. According to Stewart, Fantake, Bjorn, Owsianiak, Molin, Hauschild & Laurent (2018) [10], the obvious co-dependency between SDGs effort and business can be seen clearly in Goal12 of the SDGs effort, which elaborate on sustainable consumption and production patterns. Some of the key role expected by SDGs from business are from the aspects of strategic planning in maintaining the relevancy of SDG in their company processes, the relationship of entrepreneurs to pursue SDG and the function of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in fulfilling SDG goal [1].

The Brundtland Commission Report introduced the sustainability paradigm, defining sustainable development as the fulfilment of present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [11]. Sustainability is characterized by its forward-looking nature and long-term temporal horizon, making it a distinct aspect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) [12][7]. From a business perspective, sustainability expands the focus beyond financial performance (shareholder view) to encompass environmental and social considerations (stakeholder view) [13]. This shift aligns with the triple bottom line of sustainability, which encompasses economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental preservation [12][14].

CSR encompasses a range of definitions, but a common thread is contributing to communities and society beyond legal requirements [15]. Within the realm of CSR, companies can enhance their environmental practices, engage in philanthropic initiatives, or collaborate with organizations to raise awareness about specific causes, as exemplified by cause-related marketing [16]. The concept of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) further adds measurable goals to CSR efforts [17]. While these initiatives may demonstrate a company's prosocial commitment, they can sometimes draw on future resources to achieve short-term benefits, ultimately rendering them unsustainable [18]. Thus, not all socially responsible initiatives are sustainable, although all sustainable initiatives are responsible.

The adoption of sustainability by organizations necessitates a long-term systems perspective across sourcing, production, distribution, and consumption [3]. Despite the differences, sustainability and CSR are often used interchangeably, leading to challenges in drawing straightforward empirical generalizations [12]. Sustainability advertising refers to explicitly promoting sustainable initiatives, practices, products, or behaviours.

### 2.2 Storytelling as a Communication Tool

In the digital economy, brands no longer have complete control over their messaging; customers shape brand engagement based on their needs, motivations, and goals [19]. Brand stories have shifted from focusing solely on consumerism to encompassing community and empowerment [20]. Brands are no longer viewed as objects but as identities that communicate with and captivate consumers through stories that align with their expectations and worldview. Brands should integrate into consumers' life stories, share values, and assist consumers in achieving their goals [21]. By adopting an engagement perspective, brands become integral to consumers' identities, moving beyond transactional interactions [22]. Traditional one-way advertising needs to catch up in this regard,

necessitating a new approach to storytelling.

The utilisation of storytelling as a strategic tool in corporate communication management has emerged as a significant phenomenon. This approach has enabled communication practitioners to effectively influence consumer perceptions and behaviours in a highly competitive business environment [23]. The objective of brand communication through storytelling is to be effective. Communicate a favorable brand image, as posited [24]. Before integrating a brand into a narrative, it is imperative for organisations to establish a clearly defined brand persona, as the potency of a brand is contingent upon its persona [25]. Like conventional narrative techniques, branding storytelling revolves around a protagonist that embodies the fundamental principles of the brand, known as the brand archetype. The iconicity of a brand is contingent upon the degree to which the brand archetype aligns with the unconscious desires or ideal selves of consumers.

### **2.3 The Elements of Storytelling**

According to Bennet and Royle (2004) [26], stories are "series of events in a specific order, with a beginning, middle, and an end." "Message, conflict, character, and plot" are the four fundamental components of every story [24]. What brands want to say about their brands in advertisements is the brand message [24]. Having a message that elevates the brand from a business storytelling standpoint is crucial. Conflict and its resolution are how stories convey their messages [24]. The message should serve as the narrative's central theme [27].

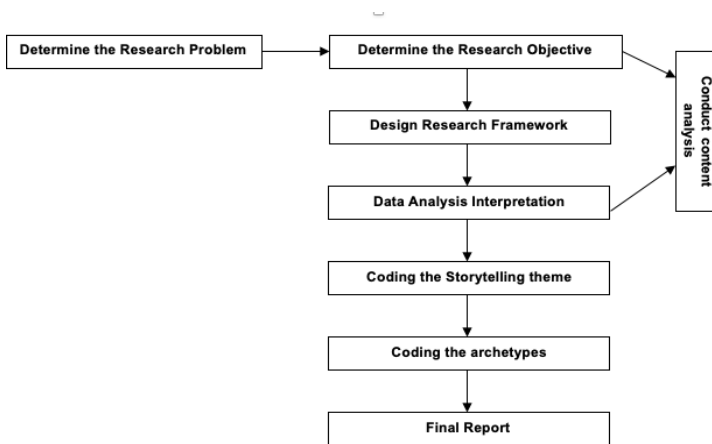
A good story needs conflict to move it forward [24]. Conflict in a corporate story might involve something that disturbs the central theme. Characters are the third element that must be present in a story for it to progress and the conflict to be resolved [27]. The plot is how the story should develop; the story must have a structure to keep the audience interested. A traditional story's beginning, middle, and end can generally be divided into these three sections [24].

### **2.4 Archetype in Communication Advertisement Campaign**

According to Jung (2014) [28], a human archetype is a primary subconscious form, an original pattern, or prototype ingrained in human psychology from birth and not learned or acquired. Archetypes are used in brand stories to present products and brands meaningfully and to help consumers connect with the brand and other consumers [29]. According to Mark and Pearson's study from 2001 [30], a brand's symbolic meaning develops when a company's good or service is connected to a particular brand archetype.

The role of storytelling and narrative frameworks in delivering archetypal meanings should be highlighted, especially in advertising. Stories strongly impact people and can elicit archetypal ideas and ideals in advertising campaigns [31]. Furthermore, the impact of cultural influences on archetype interpretation and effectiveness in various markets and countries should be recognised. Cultural differences in perception and understanding of archetypes may necessitate changes in communication tactics [32]. Finally, future studies might investigate the efficacy of archetype-based advertising campaigns, looking into customer responses, brand loyalty, and purchase intents as potential outcome variables [33]. A thorough knowledge of the role of archetypes in communication advertisement campaigns can be obtained by considering these additional factors.

### **2.5 Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

*Source: Data analysis method, 2023*

### 3 Research Methodology

This research is an exploratory study that utilises qualitative data analysis. The aim is to identify the content and structure of stories in sustainability-focused ad campaigns, understand their latent meaning, and determine the presence of storytelling elements in communicating sustainability. The primary objective is discovering the storytelling elements and archetypes in Malaysia's top three sustainability advertisements in the Telco category.

The research population comprises all brands that use storytelling in their sustainability advertisements. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select the three best sustainability advertisements from 2022, 2021, and 2020 for analysis. The content of their storytelling strategy and the methods organisations use to communicate their SDG efforts to their target audience will be examined. The sample was chosen by employing keywords such as "Iklan Hari Kebangsaan & Hari Malaysia 2022 Telco Malaysia", "Iklan Hari Kebangsaan & Hari Malaysia 2021 Telco Malaysia" and "Iklan Hari Kebangsaan & Hari Malaysia 2020 Telco Malaysia". The selection criteria for the advertisements were limited to those referencing "Hari Kebangsaan" and "Hari Malaysia" over the past three years, as this research is a case study.

Unobtrusive data collection methods were employed in this study to avoid interfering with the subjects being examined. Secondary data was utilised, referring to information previously collected by others for different purposes. The researcher obtained data from the YouTube channels of selected sustainability advertisements. Text analysis, a form of unobtrusive research, was employed to collect and analyse data. Content analysis was used to answer questions about the communicators, messages, audiences, motivations, methods, and impacts. This empirical and exploratory method allows for the prediction or inference of meaning based on analysing a message's form, content, and purpose. By studying texts and their underlying meanings, content analysis enables reliable and valid inferences from meaningful materials within their respective contexts of use.

This paper studies the top three sustainability advertising of Telco companies that exemplify brand communication. Advertising is recognised as a method of brand communication, and therefore, the selected sustainability ad campaign stories will be coded based on the researcher's independent selection. Furthermore, this study acknowledges that advertising and brands can be interpreted as texts.

### 3.1 Content Variable

The coding process starts with ensuring that the ad campaign meets Fog et al. (2005) [24] criteria of basic storytelling elements. Once the stories had been transcribed, content variables were coded. The coding process begins by ensuring that the ad campaign aligns with the storytelling elements criteria established by Fog et al., [24]. Once the stories are transcribed, we code the content variables.

First, we establish codes to identify the theme story of Telekom #KembaliTeguh Bersama in the year 2020, Teladan by Digi in the year 2021 and Turning point by Axiata in the year 2022 of sustainability advertisement. We developed ten codes (Table 1) based on the most prominent theme in each sustainability advertisement. These codes help determine the dominant themes of the ads, allowing us to identify the message and conflict within the ad campaign. Once the dominant themes of Telekom, Digi and Axiata are identified, we use Jungian archetypes (Table 2) to identify the characters embedded in the story. Lastly, we identify the plot (Table 3) using [34] seven basic plots.

## 4 Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Subtheme Presence in the Axiata, Digi and Telekom Sustainability Advertisement

Table 1 provides an overview of the content analysis conducted on the sustainability advertisement themes of the top three Telco companies in Malaysia, namely Telekom's "#KembaliTeguh Bersama," Digi's "Teladan," and Axiata's "Turning Point" campaigns. The analysis reveals that the most prevalent subthemes in these ad campaigns include challenge, community, caring, and hard work.

In Axiata's "Turning Point" ads in 2022, the storytelling technique incorporates themes such as passion, courage, challenge, community, caring, self-improvement, creativity, hard work, and satisfaction. Digi's "Teladan" campaign in 2021 utilizes storytelling techniques centred around encountering challenges, community engagement, caring, self-improvement, and hard work. Similarly, Telekom's "#KembaliTeguh Bersama" ads in 2020 revolve around themes of courage, challenge, community, caring, and hard work.

These findings highlight the consistent presence of key storytelling elements across the sustainability advertisements of these Telco companies. The emphasis on challenges, community, caring, and hard work reflects the companies' commitment to promoting social responsibility and sustainable practices. By employing storytelling techniques that evoke these themes, Telco companies effectively engage their target audience and convey the values and aspirations associated with their sustainability efforts.

Overall, the analysis underscores the strategic use of storytelling techniques in these Telco sustainability ad campaigns, which help create emotional connections with viewers and enhance brand perception. These companies aim to inspire, motivate, and foster a sense of collective responsibility towards sustainable development by aligning their narratives with themes that resonate with their audience. The incorporation of storytelling techniques in these advertisements strengthens the brands' reputations and contributes to the broader discourse on effective communication strategies for promoting sustainability initiatives.

Subtheme Presences	#KembaliTeguh, Bersama by Telekom (2020)	Teladan by Digi (2021)	Turning Point by Axiata (2022)
Passion			✓
Encountering		✓	
Courage	✓		✓
Challenge	✓	✓	✓
Community	✓	✓	✓
Caring	✓	✓	✓
Self-Improvement		✓	✓
Hard Work	✓	✓	✓
Creativity			✓
Satisfactions			✓

Table 1: Subtheme Presences in the Advertisement Campaign

#### 4,2 The Brand Archetypes of Axiata, Digi and Telekom Sustainability Advertisement

The content analysis of the Axiata sustainability ad shows that Axiata embodies the brand archetype of ‘The Creator’. The Creator archetype, characterized by its core values of empathy, humanity, and a strong desire to help others, resonates strongly with Axiata’s messaging and brand identity. The ad showcases Axiata’s commitment to positively impacting society and highlights its endeavours to create sustainable solutions that benefit individuals and communities. By embodying ‘The Creator’ archetype, Axiata strives to inspire and uplift others, aligning its brand with the values of empathy, social responsibility, and meaningful contributions. Through its initiatives and actions, Axiata aims to bring about positive change and improve lives, positioning itself as a compassionate and purpose-driven organisation

Meanwhile, the analysis of Digi’s sustainability ad reveals that Digi effectively portrays the brand archetype of ‘The Hero’. As ‘The Hero’ archetype symbolizes a saviour figure, Digi demonstrates its commitment to inspiring and leading others through their actions and bravery, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The ad showcases Digi’s unwavering determination to positively impact individuals and society, positioning itself as a reliable and empowering force in the lives of its customers. By embodying ‘The Hero’ archetype, Digi seeks to instil hope, resilience, and a sense of unity during challenging times, aligning its brand with the values of courage, compassion, and overcoming adversity. Digi aims to be seen as heroic through their efforts, driving positive change and supporting their customers through their journeys.

Finally, the analysis of Telekom’s sustainability ads confirms that Telekom embodies the brand archetype of ‘The Explorer’. The Explorer archetype, characterized by its core attributes of being an adventurer, aligns well with Telekom’s messaging and brand identity. The ads effectively convey

Telekom's commitment to embracing broadened perspectives, fostering a sense of wonder, and sharing newfound knowledge. By embodying 'The Explorer' archetype, Telekom seeks to inspire curiosity and encourage a thirst for discovery among its audience. The ads showcase Telekom's dedication to uncovering hidden knowledge, whether through innovative technologies or new opportunities for exploration. Through its adventurous approach, Telekom positions itself as a catalyst for exploration, inviting customers to embark on a journey of discovery and embrace the excitement of new experiences.

Sustainability Ads	Archetypes
<b>Turning Point by Axiata (2022)</b>	<p><i>Creator</i></p> <p>Desire: Creative, innovation process and inspiration            Goal: To provide help to others            Fear: Challenges            Strategy: Persistence and giving back to others            Trap: Self sacrifice            Gift: Empathy and humanity</p>
<b>'Teladan' by Digi (2021)</b>	<p><i>Hero</i></p> <p>Desire: To achieve greatness</p> <p>Goal: Overcoming challenges            Fear: Failure and letting others down            Strategy: Perseverance and determination            Trap: Succumbing to self-doubt or becoming arrogant            Gift: Inspiring and leading others through actions and bravery</p>
<b>#KembaliTeguh, Bersama by Telekom (2020)</b>	<p><i>Explorer</i></p> <p>Desire: To discover and explore new territories</p> <p>Goal: Uncovering hidden knowledge or experiencing adventure            Fear: Being trapped or confined            Strategy: Curiosity, adaptability, and embracing uncertainty            Trap: Becoming too reckless or losing sight of safety            Gift: Broadened perspectives, a sense of wonder, and sharing newfound knowledge</p>

**Table 2: Axiata, Digi and Telekom Brand Archetype**

### 4.3 The Story Plot of Telekom, Digi and Axiata Sustainability Advertisement

The result of the content analysis conducted on the sustainability advertisement campaign revealed the presence of four distinct plot types that were prominently featured. Among these plot types, three were identified as the most common: *The Rags to Riches*, *Rebirth*, and *The Quest and Voyage and Return*.

The Rags to Riches plot archetype depicted narratives showcasing individuals or communities overcoming challenging circumstances and rising from poverty or hardship to achieve success or prosperity through sustainable initiatives. These stories aimed to inspire and instill hope by demonstrating the transformative power of sustainable actions and their positive impact on lives and communities.



The Rebirth plot archetype was prevalent in the sustainability advertisements, representing a narrative of transformation and renewal. This plot type symbolizes the shift towards a more sustainable future and adopting environmentally conscious practices. It conveyed the idea of shedding old habits or practices and embracing new, sustainable approaches to positive change.

Additionally, the ad campaign frequently observed The Quest and Voyage and Return plot archetype, illustrating a journey towards sustainability. This plot type portrayed individuals or organizations embarking on a transformative quest, seeking sustainable solutions, and returning with newfound knowledge, insights, and experiences. It emphasized the importance of exploration, discovery, and learning in pursuing sustainability goals.

These different plot types in the sustainability advertisement campaign demonstrate the strategic use of storytelling techniques to engage audiences, evoke emotions, and convey the message of sustainability in impactful ways. By incorporating diverse plot archetypes, the campaign aimed to captivate viewers, foster a deeper connection with the sustainability message, and inspire positive action towards a more sustainable future.



**Figure 2: Axiata, Digi and Telekom Story Plot**

*Source: Data Processing, 2023*

## 5 Recommendations

Based on the findings mentioned above, researchers strongly recommend that companies adopt storytelling methods in their communication of sustainability efforts to customers, as it is believed to be a more efficient and effective way to ensure customers' comprehension of these efforts [35] [36]. Moreover, storytelling is a powerful tool for businesses to create positive brand reputations by implementing emotional attachment techniques [37][38].

In light of the analysis conducted earlier, advertisers should consider the thematic elements, such as The Rags to Riches, Rebirth, and The Quest and Voyage and Return, in their communication of SDG efforts, as suggested by previous advertisements [39] [40]. By incorporating these themes, advertisers can evoke emotions, engage viewers, and effectively convey the message of sustainability.

Additionally, advertisers must determine the brand archetype of their advertisements before embarking on the planning process. Based on the results obtained, advertisers should emphasize empathy, humanity, and the desire to help others in the content creation of their advertisements [41] [42]. The chosen brand archetype must align with the intended brand

personality to ensure consistency and avoid discrepancies or miscommunication that may affect brand reputation and consumers' trust [43][44].

Another practical implication and recommendation from this research are directed towards the government, particularly Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), urging them to educate Small Medium Enterprise (SME) business owners on the importance of storytelling techniques. This education would maximize the promotional efforts of SDG initiatives, enabling Malaysian SMEs to reach their full potential while fostering consumers' trust in their brands [45] [46]. Furthermore, researchers believe that educating Malaysian SMEs on storytelling will enhance their social media strategies and minimize promotional costs [47] [48].

As for Malaysia's publicly listed companies, researchers encourage broader participation across various sectors and brands in implementing storytelling techniques in their advertisements, as this approach has proven to be prominent and is likely to remain relevant for at least the next 20 years. It offers the ability to differentiate advertisements, communicate brand personality, and build a positive reputation [49] [50]

This research's theoretical contribution includes providing a strategies as a reference for participants in the advertising industry, particularly those involved in producing SDG advertisements. This strategies serves as a fundamental guideline and a pioneer for future storytelling research in Malaysia. It is expected to spark more productive discussions on storytelling concepts. Future researchers are encouraged to explore cultural elements within the strategies, such as languages, semiotics, content, and discourse. Furthermore, expanding the measurement to analyse the potential relationship between the proposed strategies, model and other marketing constructs, such as audiences' emotional appeal, purchase intention, satisfaction, reputation, and loyalty, would be beneficial [51].

One limitation of this study is the absence of responses from consumers' perspectives, as the main focus was on understanding the methods and content ideation process of storytelling techniques in sustainable advertisements. Further investigation should be conducted to assess the proposed model's effects on relevant marketing constructs and include consumers' viewpoints to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

In conclusion, this research has successfully achieved its objectives by laying the foundation for effective storytelling techniques that advertisers should incorporate in their advertisements. The findings of this study shed light on the importance of storytelling from a communication perspective and provide a concrete model that can assist brands in enhancing their market value and establishing stronger reputations. By utilizing storytelling techniques, brands can engage their customers on a deeper level, foster trust, and cultivate meaningful relationships. This research catalyses further discussions and exploration of storytelling techniques, paving the way for future studies to delve into more specific aspects and applications of storytelling in advertising and brand communication.

The results of this research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on storytelling in sustainability branding and advertising, emphasising the significance of storytelling in creating impactful and persuasive brand messages. By recognizing the power of storytelling, brands can leverage this approach to effectively communicate their values, differentiate themselves from competitors, and foster long-lasting connections with their target audience. Marketers, researchers, and practitioners must continue examining and refining storytelling techniques to adapt to evolving consumer preferences and market dynamics. Ultimately, the integration of storytelling into advertising strategies can lead to enhanced brand recognition, customer loyalty, and overall business success in the ever-changing landscape of the modern marketplace

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