

When Stories Come Alive – The Common Arena of Fairy Tales and Brand Stories

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Abstract

The article investigates fairy tales and brand stories contrastively. It showcases the salient features of both genres and discusses the symbology, the linguistic, and communication means at their very basis. Universal archetypes emerge in the two fields; evergreen dilemmas, complications, and predicaments surface. The journey the protagonist embarks on is concrete yet transformational; it is induced by external factors yet is an inner necessity. It is magical and instructive; it entails hard work and self-work. Brand stories, as derivatives of fairy tales, capitalise on this rich heritage, and, along with figures of speech, morphological and syntactic constructions, and various communication tools, transmit values, infuse inspiration, and activate emotions.

Keywords: *fairy tales; brand stories; narratives.*



INTRODUCTION

Stories and, implicitly, fairy tales accompany our daily realities and are deeply rooted in humanity's collective unconscious. Generations worldwide have grown up with narratives, chronicles, myths, and legends, drawing on their rich heritage. Based on stories, societies have given an account of their existence and history and have defined their systems of values. Tales possess healing properties; they are capable of arousing a wide range of emotions and of discerning the complexities of life. They lead to knowledge and self-knowledge simultaneously, contribute to both understanding and self-understanding [1].

The present article studies fairy tales and delineates the salient features of this genre, in an attempt to draw a parallel between tales and brand stories. By shedding light on the hallmarks of the two fields, we investigate the extent to which marketing in general, and branding in particular, grips the prolific resources of fairy tales. We deem that brand stories capitalise on the colourful symbology, the linguistic tools, and the communication techniques of fairy tales.

In particular, the paper proposes an analytical framework for interpreting brand stories through the narrative structure of fairy tales, aiming to demonstrate the existence of a symbolic transfer between the two forms of discourse. Additionally, our objective is to highlight the correspondence between the identity-building and emotional functions of brand storytelling and the educational role and character cultivation inherent in fairy tales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is human nature to tell stories, to connect, and seek a justification for our existence, for the place we occupy in society, in a community, and in a culture. Likewise, it is a human particularity to explore the psychological depth of the self, to discover and define one's own identity and persona [2].

Over centuries, fairy tales have transported people through their evolution and have become a pivotal means in mankind's progress and maturation. Stories have provided the public with an invaluable, yet intangible tool, utilised in humanity's quest to examine and analyse life, to reconfigure and reconstruct obsolete and worn-out patterns, to find guidance, relief, and the necessary emotional resources when in distress. The secret ingredient of stories lies in their magic, in the extraordinary that, despite the odds, can become reality, in the marvellous and miraculous that can concretise [3].

Although multifaceted and different in content, fairy tales share several recurring elements. Broadly speaking, one of their common threads is the chain of events, with a development of the narrative usually resting on an invariable, foreseeable, and predestined script. Other ageless symbols, applicable to the multitude of narratives, comprise: a repertoire of magical weapons at the service of the protagonists, miraculous abilities, polarised characters, representing either the good or the villain, diverse challenges, taking shape in missions, adventures, and explorations, meant for them to overcome obstacles [4]. In stories, conflicts and impediments typically represent dual facets. On the one hand, they are of a physical manner, since the main heroes have to demonstrate valor and audacity relying on muscle power, vigour, and endurance. On the other hand, hardships can manifest themselves at a mental level; i.e., the story figures can only prevail as long as they fight with wisdom, ingenuity, and sharpness of the mind [5]. Therefore, the metaphoric journey the characters participate in is both external and internal, [4] physical and emotional, factual and spiritual, leading not only to conflict resolution but also to personal enlightenment and growth.

Not only do the characters undergo continuous development, but the storyline also follows an evolutionary curve. It commences with an introduction meant to set the scene, which then streams into a conflict. The next stage describes the trials and tribulations the protagonists



face, which reach a dramatic turning point and result eventually in problem-solving [5]. In this way, by triggering the inner self [1], fairy tales depict the metaphor of transformation, with the powerful promise that determination, endeavour, hard work, generosity, righteousness, honesty, respect for the apparently despised or marginalised, will bring about well-earned results, success, and happiness [6]. Philip [7] considers tales act as an intermediary “between the life we have and the life we want; between the world we inherit and the world we imagine.” [7], hinting at the magical realm of stories, where reality and fantasy intertwine.

Apart from the entertainment function, the potential of fairy tales resides in their instructive and therapeutic capabilities, allowing the storyteller and the audience to absorb and internalise the experience, to activate the self and partake in life itself [1]. Covertly, fairy tales restore people’s faith that aspirations can become real, dreams can materialise, and barriers can be surmounted [8].

The second section of the literature review contrasts fairy tales with brand stories and focuses on the prominent features of the latter. It also underscores the identity-forming and emotional particularities of brand stories with the aim of bringing together the concepts from the two different fields.

Correspondingly, brand stories and, implicitly, storytelling build on analogous properties. The pillars of successful brand stories are based on the message to be conveyed, the course of action to be presented, the confrontation of characters, and carefully-chosen protagonists who also act as advocates, supporters, or facilitators of the events [9]. Vincent, as quoted in Hancock, adds another constituent to this equation, “aesthetics”, the elements which can trigger the five senses of human perception [10].

Just as fairy tales do, brand stories also retrace familiar, repetitive models. They abound in archetypes of the hero, the helper, the mother, the magician, the explorer, etc. Several values are attributed to these roles, such as courage, fearlessness, boldness, and a daring spirit [11]. Likewise, the protagonist’s journey consists of four landmark stages: the departure, the initiation, involving the navigation through adversities, the defeat of the evil forces, and finally the return. All these junctures of development contribute to the figure’s inner transformation and personal growth [12].

Although implanted strategically, the power and effectiveness of brand stories rest in their ability to strongly appeal to customers’ emotions, to bind facts and information to feelings, to capture attention, to impress, and ultimately, to talk people into buying [13]. In this respect, Quesenberry and Coolsen speak about the importance of riveted, continuous attention, which can increase buyers’ emotional involvement by evoking their sympathy and empathy. Creating dramatic tension in the narrative can even further enhance the emotional response [14]. Green and Brock, as quoted in Allison, Beggan, and Goethals, refer to this process as “transportation” [11], a state of deep interest and fascination, with a total exclusion of the external distractions [11].

According to Moin, in the turmoil of contemporary society, in the era of the superfluous and the info dump, this can be attained by assigning an authentic meaning, core values, honest and transparent messages, and a personality to the brand. Therefore, the truthfulness, genuineness, and authenticity of the brand story can resonate with customers and ensure a memorable buying experience [15]. The latter is more recently coined as “immersive brand experience” [16], with a specific focus on establishing rapport with the customers [16]. Given the immersive singularity of brand stories, the target audience can more easily relive and recognise the brand without developing an overly judgmental attitude towards it. In other words, brand storytelling awakens curiosity, impresses, inspires, enchants [17], and entertains [18].



Consequently, the powerful promise of brand stories aligns with that of the fairy tales. Consumers are offered the possibility [19] to blend into the personality of the main heroes. They not only can truly relate to the characters but also strive to become their better selves [11]. Fairy tales and brand stories indicate strong congruence from symbolic, linguistic, and communicational perspectives. The metaphor of the journey accords with an adventure, a trial, a quest, and an inner transformation towards goals, aspirations, and dreams. The people and obstacles encountered represent important lessons and thus become milestones in self-reflection, soul-searching, and the identification of the inner voice. Linguistically speaking, fairy tales and brand stories incorporate a wide range of inspirational and impactful constructions meant both to elicit emotions and to trigger intense reactions. In the same manner, the communication channels employed in the two genres connect and empower, develop credibility and trust, and cultivate shared vision and values.

Fairy tales and brand stories interrelate; they stem from similar sources, possess equivalent symbolic density, utilise analogous narrative structures, and employ techniques to instruct, evoke emotions, appeal to the public, and convey timeless values.

PRACTICAL STUDY

The practical section aims at analysing brand stories from the aforementioned angles. In parallel with fairy tales, it scrutinises the symbolic depth of brand stories, records the coinciding emblematic elements, highlights the figurative representation of the most prevalent linguistic constructions, and finally elucidates the communication means intended to attract attention, appeal to emotions, and convey values.

More precisely, it offers a descriptive analysis of the brand stories and storytelling practices of the Swedish company “IKEA”, based on the founder’s biography, the brand communication techniques, and the official website. A preference for this organisation can be justified by the existence of an extensive array of linguistic constructions in the corporation’s materials, which allows for a better understanding of the linguistic devices in our investigation.

The study employs qualitative research methods to identify rich resources from semiotic, discursive, and narrative angles. The criteria for pinpointing the elements of brand stories rely on the following aspects: the specific symbols and archetypes imported from fairy tales, the prevalent linguistic means and communication tools, and, finally, the narrative storyline of brand stories, traceable also within tales.

At the symbolic level, we can detect the following suggestive patterns:

- the symbol of the hero, the founder of the company, having a modest background with an unpretentious start [20];
- the symbol of the ordinary figure, who accomplished their dream [22];
- the archetype of the explorer, adventurer, creator, and helper, who, driven by curiosity and a genuine interest in learning, seeks new modalities for the development of the business [20];
- the archetype of the quest, as the protagonist finds himself in a long search for better and more effective approaches to customers [20];
- the symbol of obstacles and difficulties, i.e., the founder has to commit himself to jobs and duties, diverting him from the direct path [20];
- the symbol of sacrifice, hard work, persistence, and ambition, bringing out, finally, the envisioned results [20];
- the symbol of mistake, due to the protagonist’s lack of experience [20];
- a magical, miraculous ability, i.e., the founder was able to learn from the mistakes and correct them [20];
- the archetype of the wicked, i.e., bad business deals and competitors [20];



- the symbol of the forest, representing the unknown and the mysterious, which turns out to be the source of inspiration and a way of reinventing the self [20];
- the symbol of assistance, mentoring, and emotional support (on the part of the family), which works as a powerful reinforcement in the founder's determination and endeavour [21];
- the symbol of magic items or tools, at the service of the protagonist, i.e., the registration fee received as a gift for starting his company [21];
- the figure of the mother and grandmother, as a positive, nurturing, encouraging, and propelling force [21];
- the symbol of the fight and struggle despite drawbacks, incommmodity, and hindrances [21];
- the symbol of a unique and pioneering solution meant to overcome difficulties and gain a competitive advantage [21];
- the symbol of "happily ever after", a wonderful, joyous, fulfilling, and heartwarming closure for the story [21].

Similar to fairy tales, in IKEA's brand story, the main protagonist steps onto the scene and sets out on his own personal journey. With modest baggage but with genuine curiosity, he confidently leaps into real life despite difficulties, trials, and tribulations. He has the necessary courage and endurance to pursue his dream. The company founder moves forward, embraces challenges, and devises a plan of action beneficial for both the organisation and its customers. The probability of making mistakes lurks at every corner, unfavourable business decisions and mischievous rivals are to be expected on the route. As shown, although these archetypes are predominant in fairy tales, they find a proper place within the confines of the brand story, thus liberating strong feelings in the public and honestly connecting them to the brand.

At the linguistic level, we can locate a series of figures of speech as well as a set of morphological and syntactic structures that add colour, emphasis, and create a unique imagery:

- metaphors: "far cry from the furniture company we know today", "learning the ropes of purchasing", [20], "meagre soil" [21], "a perfect playground for a young boy – a hardware store", "store was a paradise" [21], "final journey from the factory to the customer" [21], "people starting off with two empty hands" [21], "adventure began" [21], "Our low prices – by far the lowest in the land" [22], "High costs were [...] constant thorns" [22];
- similes: "It was as if the streamlining at the factory suddenly vanished" [20], "If granddad [...] had been a warm, playful friend, grandma [...] was far more stern and strict." [21];
- repetitions: "[...] from the factory to the customer. His customers are [...]. He communicates with his customers [...] Customer care [...] customer register [...] Country folk are still his customers.", "People whose everyday lives [...] People who have grown up [...]" [20], "By now he has concluded [...] He communicates [...] He also pays personal visits" [20], "[...] his childhood, which was filled with love and imagination. A childhood in which" [21], "prices could be kept so low. "Our low prices – by far the lowest in the land – are possible thanks to [...] low overheads." [22], "a low price and good quality [...] in addition to price and quality" [22];
- hyperboles: "was in tears", "the handshake had meant nothing" [20]; "People who have grown up with little money, where every penny counts." [20], "the bureaucracy [...] was problematic, if not impossible" [20];
- rhetorical questions: "But what is it he's selling?" [20], "Surely he too could import goods from abroad?" [20], "If manufacturing was so cheap, why did products become



- so expensive [...]”, “Why was the final journey from the factory [...]?””, “Was [...] the product of a matriarchy?”, “Or was it his playful maternal grandfather [...]?” [21];
- antithesis: “the main efforts [...] focused on efficient production, but very little effort [...]” [20], “If they could be manufactured so cheaply, why did they become so expensive” [21], “Our low prices – by far the lowest in the land – are possible thanks to a high turnover” [22];
 - alliteration: “other dimensions [...] function, form” [22];
 - adjectives in the superlative to add emphasis: “Our low prices – by far the lowest in the land” [22];
 - fronting for a heightened effect: “Surely he too could import goods from abroad?” [20], “it was these very qualities that enabled her” [21], “And it was money well invested.” [21], “And so it was that on 28 July” [21];
 - simple sentences to amplify details: “You had to be thrifty and inventive to make ends meet. And Berta was.” [21];
 - simple sentences introduced with coordinating conjunctions as “but”, “or”, “and” to chop up longer messages and place force on them: “But as we know, nothing in life is free” [20], “But what they had in common was” [21], “But nets were expensive,” [21], “And perhaps it was around then,” [21], “And it was money well invested” [21], “Or was it his playful” [21], “And somewhere in all this” [21], “But in the grocery store” [21], “And so it was that” [21], “Or as we often say,” [22];
 - ellipsis to raise the intensity of the message: “A kind, resourceful woman who,” [21];
 - the voice of the narrator: “But as we know, nothing in life is free” [20], “If you wanted to be a successful businessman, you had to figure out the simplest,” [20], “And perhaps it was then, [...] that he felt he wanted” [21], “We sometimes talk about people starting off with two empty hands.” [21], “And somewhere in all this, [...] ideas of efficient distribution and smart production gradually began to take shape.” [21], “[...] and the years that followed” [21], “But that’s not what [...] did” [21], “Or as we often say, it’s tough” [22].

As evidenced, IKEA’s brand story is permeated with eloquent linguistic devices, i.e., metaphors, similes, repetitions, hyperboles, rhetorical questions, alliterations, ellipses, but also the use of the superlative degree of adjectives, fronting, and simple sentences adorn the story, paint it with additional nuances, and thus entertain the public. The narrator is omnipresent and plays a vital role in adding credibility to the epic, in constructing brand identity, and in establishing a dialogue between himself and the readers/customers.

At the communication level, we can observe the patterns below:

- means to activate deep, unconscious emotional response: the description of the company founder’s route from early beginnings, through hardships, until triumph; the confrontation with rivals and adversaries; the capacity to discover hidden potential; admiration and gratitude towards local people and places; solidarity and kinship with the family [20], [21];
- means to develop close bonds to customers: the display of deep and true care for customers; the constant endeavour to offer concrete solutions to clients’ purchase; focus on personal roots, on family and background; honest sympathy towards fellow countrymen and consumers [20], [21];
- means to arouse sympathy and empathy: the course of action destined to forge the path towards long-term success; the uniqueness of the business ideas; will-power; the ability to be different, daring, and to take initiatives; persistence and resilience; wisdom, modesty, and far-sightedness; adaptability, continuous learning, and embracing the new [20], [21];



- means to ensure sustained attention: the captivating and poignant modalities of storytelling; the calming, soothing yet electrifying voice of the narrator [21];
- means to transmit values, authenticity, and an “immersive brand experience”: simplicity; honesty in admitting mistakes; transparent communication; rhetorical questions and simple formulations permitting the undisturbed absorption of events and happenings; the use of a descriptive and figurative language; the creation of a special imagery to ensure the immersive experience [21].

Conforming to fairy tales, IKEA’s story is richly packed with communication techniques, serving to bring emotions to the surface, elicit compassion, intrigue, impart values, share personal wisdom, and create emotional attachment. These elements substantially contribute to the corporation’s identity formation, as well as to consistent and cohesive communication, imperative for raising brand awareness and recognition.

From a structural point of view, the story also encompasses the four stages of the narrative framework existing within tales. The introduction sheds light on the living circumstances of an average family and of an everyday boy. However, the plot’s debut implies that an imminent change will occur, opening the way for further developments. The story arc then dives into the conflict phase, where the protagonist encounters various problems and temptations, meant to stray him off the safe path. Although the antagonist is not portrayed directly, it is depicted as a rival, a competitor, or a risky business move. There follows the climax marked by the hero’s persistence, intuition, creativity, and emotional strength, when he brilliantly manages to convert obstacles into opportunities and, in the end, emerges victoriously. Several moral lessons are, therefore, conveyed by the story: there is room for magic in the mundane; setbacks are invaluable learning moments; hard work can lead to a breakthrough eventually.

By means of the narrative structure, brand stories closely follow fairy tales; the introduction, the conflict, the journey, the culmination of events, and the resolution gradually develop the brand identity. The progression of events actively participates in shaping the brand personality and in sustaining a strong connection with the target audience.

The brand story dissected above follows the conventions of fairy tales from multiple perspectives. The symbolic, linguistic, and communication means are closely interwoven and complement each other in the rendering of the storyline. Timeless symbols surface, namely, the archetype of the hero, the ordinary character (“an enterprising boy who hoped to be able to create a better life for people everywhere” [22]), the adventurer, the quest, the helper, and the hostile. Other symbols include the low start, the hindrances (“Hardship bred tough, resourceful people” [22]), the mistakes, the wonderful abilities, or the magic tools at the main character’s disposal. A multitude of linguistic devices are engaged, such as metaphors, repetitions, similes, hyperboles, rhetorical questions, ellipses, fronting, the use of simple sentences, and the frequent use of coordinating conjunctions at the beginning of sentences. Also, the narrative voice plays an essential role in intensifying the plot and, in a direct, almost dialogue style, addressing the listeners or readers. At the communication level, the brand story evokes values, care, concern, sympathy, empathy, and indispensable life lessons (“original idea [...] is alive and well to this very day and has become a cornerstone of the [...] culture and identity” [22]). Besides these, numerous tools entertain, engage, leverage emotions, spark curiosity, and inhale inspiration. Not only does the narrator share a compelling story, but he also creates a tranquil atmosphere in which readers can easily flow.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has hypothesised that fairy tales and brand stories closely interact in that both genres reproduce universal symbols and archetypes. The apparently unimportant



protagonist decides to embark on a search for solutions, faces diverse obstacles that attempt to deter him from the sure route, counteracts the challenges of life, and finally reaps the benefits of his actions. Endowed with clear insights, bravery, determination, and a visionary mind, the hero listens to his call and crafts his way through the unknown, the hidden, the mysterious, or the hostile. No matter the dissuasions, he obeys the inner voice, ultimately fulfils his dream, and asserts himself. This is only the outer layer of fairy tales and brand stories. At the core, with the help of linguistic and communication means, stories and implicitly brand stories can impart eternal values, can guide and inspire, and can become life and business lessons in maturity and growth.

As demonstrated, fairy tales and brand stories share numerous common characteristics. By and large, brand stories can gain from the archetypes, symbols, and timeless wisdom of fairy tales. They can extract a wide variety of linguistic devices and figures of speech to evoke emotions and transmit more meaningful and transparent messages to their audience. They can communicate values and articulate the voice of the company. With their narrative structure, such stories add emphasis to the brand's identity and self-expression.

Through this symbolic, linguistic, communication, and structural transfer, brand stories and storytelling methods can expand their boundaries by crafting personality and bringing customers closer to the brand.

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