

## Story Telling as a Method of Health Education

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### ABSTRACT

Storytelling is one approach of many that can make it more likely that someone will take action. It can happen face-to-face, through books, videos, audio, comics and any of the other myriad ways people communicate with each other. When you combine different media, and tell stories from alternate points of view, it gets even more interesting. Storytelling is a powerful tool to bring about health and social change, when it is combined with proven behavior change models-social marketing and entertainment education principles, it has the potential of radical transformation of social norms with the help of transmedia approach i.e., using different platforms for telling different parts of a story rather than the same story told over and over again via various media. Social media has offered lot of scope and opportunity to incorporate story telling in public health education.

**Keywords:** *Story Telling, Health, Education*

Storytelling has been around since cavemen sat around the fire telling each other about the mammoth that got away. Story telling is imbibed in our culture and inherited from our ancient forefathers to learn and propagate knowledge. Story telling has its roots in hymns, poetry, songs and drama and hence entertainment to instill lasting memory. *Bhagwadgita*, the repository of Hindu way of life has its origin in the word '*gitam*' which means song in Sanskrit. These songs have different forms according to their comprehension and understanding by different people with different intellectual capacities. For advanced scholars (*vidvans*) they are hymns (*slokas*), for a person with moderate expertise they are poetry with proper rhyme and rhythm and rules of grammar, for ordinary people they are *lokgeet* (local songs).

In the ancient times, when there was no record of ideas on paper, important truths in daily walks of life were composed in hymns, *mantras* and propagated by word of mouth from one generation to other. These hymns again translated into poetry with proper rhyme and rhythm. The poetry ultimately translated into folk songs in different dialects for common man usage. In this way the complex idea of *vidvans* was rolled out to the common man in a most simplified manner. The same pattern can be traced to the tenants in the bible translated from hymns to fairy tales in the

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Christian religion and Quran in Islam. With the development of civilization and advancement of technology i.e., writing, painting, printing, photography, motion pictures and audio-recording etc. different forms of storytelling emerged to suit different media.

### WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

**Good Storytelling** starts with a good story; without which the rest of the things will remain empty. A good story does not just mean an issue that is important for people to know about. It calls for rigorous thought as to who the key characters are, what the conflict is, how the story will play out, and how best to present different parts of the narrative form for maximum effect. Whether to create a fictional world or a nonfiction series about real people, the elements of what makes a good story don't change. The story is your opportunity to create characters that the audience can relate to and put them in situations where they are supposed to take decisions with respect actions to be taken as a consequence of those decisions.

### How it works in our minds?

Our brains are wired to respond to stories, and they can influence our thinking and behaviors in several different ways. When we read someone else's story, we vicariously experience their challenges and learn by seeing the consequences of how they try to resolve the problems -- both positive and negative. Research has found that our brains light up in the same spots as the actions taking place in the story! When the character runs, the brain's "running center" is activated; when someone is in danger, our own brain is becomes more alert.

This means that characters modeling positive behaviors in the story and being rewarded for it, or overcoming common setbacks, can be very effective. Stories can also establish or reinforce social norms that support the behavior you are promoting; if the characters make healthy food choices or practice physical activity in the course of the story, this can create the feeling that this is just what people do and so they should too. This is especially effective when the reader/viewer feels that the characters are very similar to themselves.

### Immersive engagement for change:

In explaining how best to use this approach within the context of health and social change, Robert Pratton, used the term "immersive engagement" in pervasive entertainment. This model can be best described with the help of behavior change model, Good story telling, pervasive media, participatory experience and real world action. Our ultimate goal is to create an experience that leads our audience to take some action as a result of being engaged and motivated, whether it's adopting a healthy or pro-social behavior, changing how they treat other people, helping the environment or actively joining a movement that aims to solve a social challenge. Awareness and education are necessary, but usually not sufficient by themselves to create real change. In addition to spreading messages and interventions across multiple media or platforms, it is also essential to find a way to grab the audience attention through the clutter.

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In a long-term story-centered project, you can follow the Sabido Method, which has been used successfully for decades to drive development of entertainment education content and brings together behavioral, communication and learning theories. We can use other simpler models, such as social cognitive theory or the Fogg Behavior Model, but the crucial point is to understand the pieces that need to be in place in our story and in the structure of our project for change to happen. Start by identifying what you need to accomplish and how you intend to get there, by understanding what you need to include in the experience to effectively motivate the adoption of the key action(s).

We live in a transmedia world. information, stories, marketing come at us from all sides - from the radio news waking us up in the morning our lunch box describing the state of the *chapatis*; emails, texts and tweets with the latest updates from family, friends and co-workers; the billboards we see on the way to work; in-person meetings with our colleagues using the inevitable PowerPoint slides; our favorite TV show... We are bombarded with data that we constantly process on our course to create a coherent picture of our world. People we are trying to reach also live in this transmedia world. We need to reach people where they are, and where they are practically everywhere. Of course, your particular audience is more likely to spend their time in certain places than others, but don't assume that reaching them on one platform is enough to make an impression. The transmedia approach uses multiple platforms to convey different parts of a story (as opposed to the same story told over again via various media).

By posting the message in the places where the audience already spending their time, the story can seamlessly integrate into their daily routine. These touchpoints could be their mobile phone, their Twitter or Facebook stream, a link to a website, YouTube, email, snail mail, a comic book or location-based markers. The audience should encounter the content--whether fiction or nonfiction-based--alongside the other chunks of information to which they have chosen to pay attention, rather than making them go out of their way to find it. These selected platforms must work together to support the story strategically and synergistically based on their strengths and weaknesses, and how your audience uses them

A story should offer sufficient opportunities for the audience to go beyond just reading/watching/hearing what has been created, to enable them to participate by interacting with our content or - the Holy Grail - creating their own. While it's unrealistic to expect a majority, or perhaps even ten percent, of your audience to devote time to writing something or creating a video, be sure to offer ways to participate for those who are most enthusiastic about the story or project. This could be anything from playing an online game or solving a puzzle that moves the narrative forward, to interacting with characters on Twitter, role-playing a character in the story, connecting with others via a discussion forum to talk about the story or project, sharing their own real-life stories, attending a live (or virtual) event, entering a contest or other activities that bring people deeper into the story.

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### **Real world experience:**

There is no point in a social change project engaging people with stories that don't appeal their real world. Pervasive entertainment blurred the line between real-world and fictional world." (Pratten). This might mean having a character from the story send a text message to a participant's mobile phone, bringing the story off the page (or out of the computer) and into their real life. To take it a step further for social change, we also want the audience to draw the lessons from the story world (real or fictional) and apply them within the real world. If the story includes a young woman who models effective negotiation skills with her boyfriend when he doesn't want to wear a condom, we'd like to see the young women in our audience learn and apply those skills in their own lives. If the story highlights the problems faced by a village that does not have access to clean water, we can provide ways for our audience to get involved in providing clean water to others in a similar situation through supporting a particular nonprofit or joining a movement working toward solutions. The immersive context of the story means that it touches people's lives wherever they may be.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA & STORY TELLING**

**Social media** has opened up many storytelling opportunities, particularly for health education, because of its ease of use and low cost. Social media sites provide a variety of features that serve different purposes for the individual user. These include blogs, social networks, video- and photo-sharing sites, wikis, or a myriad of other media, which can be grouped according to purpose, serving functions such as:

- Social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, Twitter)
- Professional networking (LinkedIn)
- Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr)
- Content production (blogs [Tumblr, Blogger] and micro blogs [Twitter])
- Knowledge/information aggregation (Wikipedia)
- Virtual reality and gaming environments (Second Life)

Participation in social media by the general public has increased sharply over the past few years. Social media have been linked to highly significant political events, such as the Arab Spring revolution, as well as to widespread societal trends, including the shortening of individuals' attention spans and the decline of print news media.

Social media provide Health Care Professionals (HCP) with tools to share information, to debate health care policy and practice issues, to promote health behaviors, to engage with the public, and to educate and interact with patients, caregivers, students, and colleagues. HCPs can use social media to potentially improve health outcomes, develop a professional network, increase personal awareness of news and discoveries, motivate patients, and provide health information to the community.

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Health Care Professionals most often join online communities where they can read news articles, listen to experts, research medical developments, consult colleagues regarding patient issues, and network. There they can share cases and ideas, discuss practice management challenges, make referrals, disseminate their research, market their practices, or engage in health advocacy. A growing minority of physicians also uses social media to communicate directly with patients to augment clinical care.

When used wisely and prudently, social media sites and platforms offer the potential to promote individual and public health, as well as professional development and advancement.(2)

### CONCLUSION

Storytelling is one approach of many that can make it more likely that someone will take action. It can happen face-to-face, though books, videos, audio, comics and any of the other myriad ways people communicate with each other. When you combine different media, and tell stories from alternate points of view, it gets even more interesting. Storytelling is a powerful tool to bring about health and social change, when it is combined with proven behavior change models-social marketing and entertainment education principles, it has the potential of radical transformation of social norms with the help of transmedia approach i.e., using different platforms for telling different parts of a story rather than the same story told over and over again via various media.

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