

## Cracking the code of engaging campaigns: Effective storytelling in sustainable clothing campaigns on social media

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*Introduction:* Since the last decade of the twentieth century, fast fashion has often been portrayed as the second most environment-polluting source in the world and sweatshop practice ground (Rahman & Sayeda, 2016; Shen, Wang, Lo, & Shum, 2012). Stakeholders' insufficient actions keep the textile and apparel industry (TAI) concerned with various ethical and environmental issues including waste management, recycling, child labor, apparel donation, ethical consumption, and slow fashion (Phau, Teah, & Chuah, 2015). In recent years, social media plays a significant role in raising awareness among consumers regarding sustainable consumption and ethical business (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). In these circumstances, clothing businesses are taking initiatives in collaboration with nonprofit organizations (NPOs), government agencies, or other groups to monitor/implement voluntary initiatives in the form of sustainable clothing campaigns (SCCs) (Phau et al., 2015).

The *Ice Bucket Challenge* & *Giving Tuesday* are recent examples of successfully managed cause campaigns that created social media firestorms by engaging donors, volunteers, and the general public (Milde & Yawson, 2017). In designing campaigns, TAI-based organizations are facing challenges to make tangible differences for their causes along with the struggle of tight budgets (Milde & Yawson, 2017). Although economics and management scholars have begun to identify elements that are associated with successful campaigns, virtually not much research has taken lead on sustainable clothing campaigns (Lindenmeier, Lwin, Andersch, Phau, & Seemann, 2017). Besides, previous literature could provide a little knowledge of campaign narrative (Green, Crawford, Williamson, & DeWan, 2019; Van Laer, De Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2013). Campaign narrative can be illustrated as the storytelling with a sequence of prior events and future impacts along with the application of interesting plots, effective characterization, strong logical flow, and involved emotions (Dush, 2017; Guo & Saxton, 2018). In this regard, the main goal of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the campaign narrative and its influence on stakeholders' engagement.

*Literature and Framework:* According to the transportation-imagery model, the more transportation of any individual reported, the more story-consistent beliefs formed regardless of the factual status of the narrative which perfectly fits the social media and SCCs context (Green & Brock, 2002). Van Laer et al. (2013) developed the *extended transportation-imagery model (ETIM)* considering the antecedents of narrative transportation including identifiable characters, imaginable plots, and verisimilitude along with consequences inducing cognitive responses, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. *ETIM* will be used as the theoretical background in this study to explain how the SCCs narrative including campaign goal, narrator type, plot, and verisimilitude are processed and evaluated in persuading stakeholders to engage in campaigns effectively.

RQ1: *How sustainable clothing campaigns employ campaign narrative including (a) campaign goal, (b) narrator type, (c) campaign plot, (d) verisimilitude on social media?*

RQ2: *How does the campaign narrative influence stakeholders' engagement in terms of a) engagement ratio and b) sentiment index?*

*Method:* Considering broader predictive capability, this study applied content analysis to categorize campaign-generated content (CGC), specifically campaign narrative antecedents (i.e., campaign goal, narrator type, campaign plot, and verisimilitude) and assess stakeholders' engagement through corresponding stakeholder-generated content (SGC) including sentiment index (i.e., [no. of positive comments – no. of negative comments]/total no. of comments) and popularity metrics (i.e., total no. of views, likes, and dislikes/no. of subscriber). YouTube, a representative social media platform, was used in this study as it provides an appropriate platform for campaigners (Waters & Jones, 2011) and NVivo 12 was utilized for CGC content analysis and SGC sentiment analysis. The CGC content was comprised of 47 SCC videos collected from 9 YouTube channels based on the audience size (i.e., no. of subscriber), campaign relevance (i.e., sustainable clothing initiatives), and user engagement (i.e., no. of views). SCC video was the unit of analysis for CGC, corresponding popularity metrics were the unit of analysis of engagement ratio, and corresponding users' comments were the unit of analysis for sentiment index. For each video, its campaign goal (0 = innovation/practices, 1 = donation, 2 = advocacy, 3 = activism, 4 = brand promotion), narrator type (6 = self-narrator, 7 = observer-narrator, 8 = group-member narrator), campaign plot (10 = informational, 11 = testimonial), and verisimilitude (13 = fictional, 14 = reality/live-action) were coded by two graduate student coders with the initial inter-coder reliability of .66 (campaign goal), .67 (narrator type), .70 (campaign plot), .51 (verisimilitude). The researchers recorded the total number of subscribers for the campaigners' YouTube channel and the popularity metrics (i.e., number of views/likes/dislikes) for each video. Given the coding results, the two indices of stakeholders' engagement, (1) engagement ratio, (2) sentiment index, were calculated.

*Results and Discussion:* For campaign goal, SCC videos ( $f = 47$ ) analyzed in this study revealed a predominant focus on presenting activism (44.7%) and advocacy (38.3%), rather than on communicating innovative practices or brand promotion. For narrator type, SCC videos more frequently used an observer narrator (61.7%) than a self-narrator (25.5%) or group-member narrator (12.8%). For campaign plot, campaigners were slightly more often to employ an informational plot (53.2%) than a testimonial plot (46.8%), whereas reality-based videos (95.7%) got priority than fictional videos (4.3%). Due to low intercoder reliability (.51) and high bias of reality-based videos (95.7%), verisimilitude was dropped from the four campaign narrative antecedents. Analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to reveal the group differences for each of the three campaign antecedents on engagement ratio and sentiment index. ANOVA results revealed that campaign goal, narrator type, and campaign plot did not have any significant effects on engagement ratio. On the other hand, the narrator type ( $F_{2,42} = 5.52, p < .05$ ) and campaign plot ( $F_{1,43} = 5.71, p < .05$ ) yielded significant effect for sentiment index. However, the campaign goal yielded a non-significant effect for sentiment index ( $F_{3,41} = 2.31, p = .09$ )

*Conclusion and Implications:* This study introduces reflective second-order construct of SGC, engagement ratio, and sentiment index that measured the campaign's effectiveness in the context of SCC videos on YouTube. Drawing on the conceptual framework from Van Laer et al. (2013), the current research demonstrates a significant role of campaign antecedents on stakeholders' social media in generating sentimental value, thus leading to appropriate cause participation. This research results can help both business and campaign managers to better understand the cues of effective digital storytelling and ways to engage stakeholders in sustainable clothing campaigns.

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