

Introduction to the Special Issue

Guest Editors' Introduction

Visual Storytelling and Entrepreneurship: The Representations of Daily Life

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A symbolic story takes us back to ancient China during the Liang dynasty. A famous painter called Zhang Sengyou had painted four mesmerizing dragons on the walls of a temple. However, he did not fully paint their eyes, fearing they may come alive. Some of the monks of the temple told him to complete the painting and after refusing, he finally gave in and added the dots. As he feared, his painting came to life, and the mighty dragons flew away.

Wherever we look through the long threads of history, visual representations accompany cultural meanings that stay in our minds, even in our hearts. That this is relevant in a more economic dimension is perhaps at first less clear than it could be. But visual representations of products, customer journeys, entrepreneurial efforts, and so much more are part of our daily interactions. And entrepreneurs play a fundamental role here. In the words of Marguerite Yourcenar,¹ who wrote the memories of emperor Hadrian of Rome, merchants—one type of entrepreneur—were the first ambassadors of any culture, as they had the first contact when offering their products, ideas, and, of course, tales.

1. M. Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (Gallimard, 2019).

Entrepreneurs, ancient or modern, can be seen as storytellers. They are also agents of change that transform reality in ways that deserve to be told. They navigate uncertain environments that often require repurposing their business model and, therefore, the story they tell their surroundings.² Entrepreneurial journeys and their dynamic production of artifacts, whether it is products, services, concepts, new realities, etc., also have a visual dimension that sheds light on the character, setting, and plot of each story. In a context where artificial intelligence has become a powerful tool of visual dissemination—think about the creation of storyboards or AI-based imagery and videos—entrepreneurs will keep facing challenges but perhaps also resort to tools that help craft journeys in a way that does not deteriorate their creativity.

With this special issue, the *Global Storytelling* journal is honoring the incredibly rich reality of visual representations and moving images that pervade the world of entrepreneurship. The latter is a cultural engine of its own. If we think of the concept of how attractive a certain culture may be for a person who travels the world, part of the charm is linked to what entrepreneurs have invented and put out there in a market. Think about the beauty of third-wave coffee, which became popular at the turn of the millennium. In essence, the third wave asked people to see coffee beyond a drink or a quick need in the morning. One could track the origin, live the experience, test different methods and varieties, and imagine the whole supply chain along the myths that go all the way to ninth-century Ethiopia. But without entrepreneurs, we would not have the third wave, nor the beautiful machines or any of those neatly designed gadgets.

2. E. Behar Villegas, Z. Goh, and G. S. Horowitz, "Designing a Good Story for Better Policies: Entrepreneurship at the Crossroads of AI-Powered Visual Storytelling and Sensemaking," *Human Technology* 20, no. 3 (2024): 420–45, <https://doi.org/10.14254/1795-6889.2024.20-3.1>.

Works Included in This Special Issue

In this special issue, we present three research articles and three essays that discuss a rich variety of settings where visual storytelling and entrepreneurship come together. Rajat Sharma shares the compelling power of Bollywood, going deeper into the reimagination of representations in the film industry. With a particular interest for gender-related issues, his article provides some visual examples of how a world as immense as Bollywood is handling change. The impressive example that takes place in India, where homosexuality was decriminalized by the Supreme Court in 2018, portrays how a movie—in this case *Fire* (1998)—can become a catalyst of change, where the filmmaker acts an entrepreneur, naturally surrounded by risk and uncertainty.

In his article on influencer marketing, Max Beck addresses the symbolic power of verification badges, which have been trending on social media as a new way to represent trustworthiness. For him, however, the general-purpose verification that we are used to could benefit from more specialized verification symbols that operate as visual cues. One of the fundamental elements of this article is the role of micro-visual storytelling, which differs considerably from macro forms that we are used to in filmmaking, suggesting that trust also arises thanks to micro visuals that tell stories.

Using the example of Webtoon—a digital comics platform—Fernando García shows us how transmedia storytelling is transforming business models. The essential idea here is that creators are able to multiply the format of their story through technology, albeit in ways they normally would not have easily produced on their own. For example, take an artist who would love to create digital animations of their paintings but does not know where to start. They then use the platform and animate their own art, being able to work with other artists at the same time. The gist of García's article lies in the potential of “narrative expansion,” which lies at the heart of a noble goal: democratize storytelling and allow technology to help without losing the essence.

Ralf Ruthhart, a German entrepreneur and novelist, gives us some perspectives on the power of visual storytelling and B2B, a world that some may consider dry and technical while also imbued with the power of the visual. We believe that creators can learn from this essay by discovering the charm of B2B interactions, perhaps as a motivator toward an entrepreneurial journey that thrives on storytelling talent.

Lastly, together with two book reviews, we present a short essay on filmmaking through the power of silence in Ethiopia along with a critical essay on the importance of ecological narrative, a fundamental aspect in storytelling that can be seen as the context of the story beyond its setting. In the end, it is hard to fully grasp a story without understanding what narratives and metanarratives drive its meaning creation.

We hope that regardless of your background, whether you are a film expert or enthusiast, an entrepreneur, a physicist, or a painter, you will enjoy this special issue and think about how creativity shapes much more than markets but even our own cultural landscapes.