



7. Transforming Awareness through Digital Storytelling: A Thematic Analysis of Cyberbullying, Mental Health, and Gender-Based Violence

1. Dr. Meenakshi Pandey

Post Doctoral Research Fellow- ICSSR

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Banaras

Hindu University, Varanasi, India

Mob: +91 8808066032

Email: meenakshipandeybhu@gmail.com

2. Prof. Anurag Dave

Professor

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

AnuragDave74@gmail.com

Abstract

Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful medium for social advocacy, effectively addressing critical social issues such as cyberbullying, mental health challenges, and gender-based violence. By merging narrative techniques with multimedia elements like visuals, audio, and interactive components, digital storytelling creates an immersive experience that engages audiences emotionally, fosters empathy, and drives behavioral change. This paper delves into the impact of digital storytelling on social awareness, focusing on its application in various campaigns aimed at raising awareness and influencing social attitudes. Utilizing narrative theory, social learning theory, and critical media literacy as theoretical frameworks, the study analyzes case studies to identify best practices, measurable outcomes, and strategies that enhance the effectiveness of digital storytelling in promoting social change.

The findings emphasize the transformative potential of digital storytelling in reshaping societal norms, increasing public understanding, and encouraging active engagement with pressing social concerns. However, the study acknowledges several limitations, such as the lack of longitudinal data to assess the long-term impact of digital storytelling campaigns and the limited scope of the campaigns included in the analysis, which may not fully represent the diverse applications of digital storytelling across various regions and cultures. To address these gaps, future research could explore a broader range of campaigns and investigate the sustained impact of digital storytelling on societal change.

Keywords:-Digital storytelling, social advocacy, cyberbullying, mental health, gender-based violence, multimedia narratives.



1. Introduction

We live in a digital age where stories are shared not only through books or words, but also through videos, images, sound, and online platforms. This new way of storytelling—called digital storytelling—is becoming a strong tool for social change. It mixes personal stories with media elements to create emotional, relatable, and powerful messages. These stories help people understand serious problems and motivate them to act (Robin, 2008; Couldry, 2008).

Today, many social issues—like cyberbullying, mental health struggles, and gender-based violence—are growing fast, especially among young people. These issues can no longer be solved only through traditional methods. Cyberbullying is a common problem for teenagers and can lead to sadness, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Kowalski et al., 2014). Campaigns like #BeKind have used digital storytelling to share real-life experiences of victims, which helps others feel empathy and behave better online (Livingstone, 2019).

Mental health, especially in young people, is another concern. Social media can both harm and help mental well-being. Digital storytelling projects like Time to Change and Silence Speaks use real voices to break stigma and encourage early help-seeking (Naslund et al., 2016; Lal, 2019; Chou et al., 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects people around the world. Survivors are using digital platforms to tell their stories and ask for change. Initiatives like Bell Bajao in India show how multimedia stories can break silence, inspire action, and change public thinking (WHO, 2021; Jha, 2018).

This study explores how digital storytelling is used to spread awareness and support change in these three important areas.

1.3 Aim and Objectives : This paper aims to examine the role of digital storytelling in fostering awareness and inspiring action against cyberbullying, mental health issues, and gender-based violence. The study focuses on how narrative strategies and multimedia elements enhance engagement, empathy, and advocacy in social campaigns.

1.2. Objectives: the objectives of study were to:

- analyze the impact of digital storytelling on raising awareness about cyberbullying, mental health, and gender-based violence;
- explore theoretical frameworks such as narrative theory, social learning theory, and critical media literacy in relation to digital storytelling;



- examine successful digital storytelling campaigns and identify key strategies for effective advocacy; and
- highlight the challenges and opportunities in using digital storytelling for social change.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The power of digital storytelling can be better understood through three key theories: **Narrative Theory**, **Social Learning Theory**, and **Critical Media Literacy**. These help explain how stories influence people's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Narrative Theory shows that storytelling is a natural part of human life. Stories shape how people see the world and how they behave. Digital storytelling adds images, sound, and voice to personal stories, making them more emotional and powerful. Lambert (2013) says that this multimedia form makes stories more engaging and easier to understand. By showing real-life problems in relatable ways, digital storytelling helps people connect emotionally and think deeply about social issues.

Social Learning Theory, by Albert Bandura, explains how people learn by watching others. Digital stories often show real experiences. Viewers learn by observing how others deal with problems. For example, Koc and Barut (2016) found that digital storytelling helped teens understand mental health better. Stories can act as models, teaching people how to act or feel in certain situations.

Critical Media Literacy is about thinking deeply about media messages. It helps people understand how media shapes beliefs. Digital storytelling mixes text, pictures, and sound to deliver strong messages. Hull and Nelson (2005) highlight the value of using many formats together to share meaning. When people think critically about these stories, they can better understand and question what they see and hear in the media.

3. Conceptual Framework

This research focuses on how digital storytelling raises awareness and encourages behaviour change in issues like **cyberbullying**, **mental health**, and **gender-based violence**. It uses the following key ideas:

1. **Digital Storytelling** – Using multimedia to tell stories that educate and inspire change.
2. **Social Issues** – Problems like cyberbullying, mental health, and gender-based violence.



3. **Audience Engagement** – How much the audience connects with and feels the message.
4. **Behavioural Change** – How stories influence thoughts, feelings, or actions.
5. **Social Impact** – The long-term effect of storytelling on society and values.

This framework suggests that digital storytelling can emotionally connect with people and lead to real changes in how they think and act. The study will explore how these elements work together to promote awareness and positive social action.

4. Methodology: Narrative Review Approach

This study adopts a **narrative review approach** to examine how digital storytelling fosters social awareness around **cyberbullying**, **mental health**, and **gender-based violence**. A thematic analysis of freely accessible academic literature, digital campaigns, and case studies forms the foundation of the research.

4.1 Data Collection

Relevant literature was manually gathered from open-access academic platforms such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The search process involved using specific keywords including "Digital storytelling and social advocacy," "Cyberbullying prevention through narratives," "Mental health awareness campaigns using storytelling," and "Gender-based violence and digital media." These terms helped identify research and case studies specifically exploring the role of digital storytelling in social awareness initiatives.

4.2 Inclusion Criteria

Only freely accessible, peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports, and documented case studies were considered for inclusion. The selected materials focused explicitly on the application of digital storytelling in creating awareness around social issues. Particular attention was given to campaigns that demonstrated measurable impact and offered insights into audience engagement and response.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Category	Relevant References (APA Format)
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Personal Narratives(The impact of storytelling in humanizing cyberbullying, mental health struggles, and gender-based violence.)	Acosta & Carpenter (2020); Craig et al. (2015); Hull & Katz (2006); Jha (2018); Kosciw et al. (2018); Lal (2019); McInroy & Craig (2018); Meyer (2003); Naslund et al. (2016); Robin (2008); WHO (2021).
Multimodal Storytelling (The use of text, visuals, audio, and interactivity to enhance audience engagement.)	Alexander (2011); Hull & Nelson (2005); Koc & Barut (2016); Lambert (2010, 2013); Netflix (2019); Ohler (2013); Wang & Zhan (2010); Xu, Park, & Baek (2011).
Empathy & Behavioral Change(How digital storytelling fosters emotional connection and influences social attitudes.)	Chou, Gaysynsky, & Vanderpool (2020); Couldry (2008); Livingstone (2019); Meyer (2015); Russell & Fish (2016); Shen, Sheer, & Li (2015).
Call to Action(The effectiveness of storytelling campaigns in mobilizing public awareness and policy advocacy.)	Alexander (2017); Blackburn & Clark (2011); Green Stories Initiative (2020); Silverback Films (2019); The Climate Reality Project (2021); Thornhill (2020); White Ribbon (2020).

Table 1: Mapping of References to Thematic Analysis Categories

A thematic coding framework was applied to analyze the collected content. Four major themes emerged from the analysis. The first was Personal Narratives, which highlighted how first-person storytelling helps humanize issues such as cyberbullying, mental health, and gender-based violence. Campaigns featuring lived experiences and testimonial-based formats exemplified this approach. The second theme was Multimodal Storytelling, emphasizing the use of text, visuals, audio, and interactivity to create engaging and immersive experiences. Examples included digital campaigns employing videos, infographics, or interactive storytelling platforms. The third theme, Empathy and Behavioural Change, focused on how emotionally powerful stories cultivate empathy, influence attitudes, and promote positive social behaviors. This was supported by research linking emotional engagement to social transformation. Finally, the fourth theme, Call to Action, explored how storytelling serves as a catalyst for mobilizing audiences, influencing policy decisions, or sparking social movements—illustrated by impactful campaigns like #MeToo and mental health advocacy efforts. By organizing the studies under these thematic areas, the review underscores best practices and strategic insights that reveal the transformative capacity of digital storytelling in shaping public consciousness and driving social change. This thematic categorization



provides a comprehensive understanding of how digital storytelling has been utilized across different domains, guiding the synthesis of insights for this study.

4.4 Limitations of the Methodology:

The study acknowledges several limitations in its methodology. First, the scope of literature is restricted to freely accessible sources, potentially omitting influential studies that require paid access. Second, subjectivity in case selection may introduce selection bias, as the study relies on available and accessible case studies, possibly overlooking significant digital storytelling campaigns. Third, the lack of primary data limits the study to secondary sources, preventing direct data collection or original evaluation of digital storytelling initiatives. Lastly, language barriers pose a challenge, as most reviewed articles are in English, which may exclude valuable insights from non-English-speaking regions.

5. Findings: Thematic Review of Literature

5.1 Digital Storytelling and Environmental Awareness:

5.1.1 Digital Storytelling Techniques

Digital storytelling techniques offer a dynamic and educational approach to addressing environmental issues. As Lambert (2013) notes, combining visual and auditory elements with structured narratives enhances engagement and helps convey complex concepts more effectively. These methods are especially valuable in reaching younger audiences, making topics such as climate change, pollution, and conservation more relatable and accessible. Tools commonly employed in digital storytelling include animated videos, interactive graphics, and personal stories. For instance, organizations like The Climate Reality Project leverage digital storytelling to showcase the impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems. By focusing on the personal experiences of individuals affected by environmental issues, these narratives not only educate but also inspire viewers to take actionable steps toward sustainability and environmental justice (The Climate Reality Project, 2021).

In educational contexts, digital storytelling is increasingly being integrated into curricula. An example of this is the Green Stories Initiative, which encourages students to explore local environmental issues and document their findings through digital stories. By combining observations with multimedia content, students raise awareness about pressing environmental topics such as deforestation, pollution, and water conservation. This approach produces educational tools that resonate with both local communities and global audiences. Additionally, popular digital projects such as Netflix's *Our Planet* demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling in environmental communication. The series blends high-quality footage with compelling narratives, highlighting the beauty and fragility of nature. These



techniques foster a deep emotional connection with viewers, encouraging greater awareness and action regarding environmental conservation.

5.1.2 Case Studies

Several case studies illustrate the successful application of digital storytelling to raise environmental awareness. Our Planet is one prominent example, employing stunning visuals and powerful storytelling to educate audiences about biodiversity and conservation. Through engaging narration and breathtaking natural scenes, the series has significantly raised global awareness about the importance of protecting ecosystems and combating climate change.

Similarly, the Green Stories Initiative offers a grassroots approach, where students document local environmental issues through digital stories. These student-generated narratives not only provide valuable insights into conservation efforts but also help increase public awareness. This dual focus on education and outreach exemplifies the power of digital storytelling in effecting change.

Furthermore, The Climate Reality Project demonstrates how digital stories can highlight the urgency of environmental challenges like plastic pollution, deforestation, and global warming. Featuring the voices of individuals and communities tackling these issues, these digital stories encourage audiences to join sustainability efforts, emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility and collective action in combating global environmental crises.

Therefore, digital storytelling is a potent tool for engaging diverse audiences and raising environmental awareness. By merging narrative techniques with multimedia elements, digital stories make complex environmental issues more relatable and impactful. As environmental challenges evolve, the power of digital stories to create emotional connections and inspire action will continue to play a crucial role in environmental education and advocacy.

5.2 Mental Health in Adolescents

Mental health issues among adolescents have become a significant concern, with increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and other psychological challenges. Adolescence is a critical period for mental health development, and early intervention is essential for effective management and support. Traditional educational approaches often fail to engage young people fully or address mental health issues comprehensively. As a result, innovative methods are needed to foster understanding and reduce stigma surrounding mental health (Koc & Barut, 2016).

5.2.1 Curriculum Development



Digital storytelling has proven to be a valuable tool in developing curricula aimed at improving mental health awareness among adolescents. Koc and Barut (2016) describe a digital storytelling-based curriculum designed to enhance mental health education in schools. This curriculum incorporates multimedia elements and personal narratives to create engaging and educational content that resonates with students.

The curriculum developed by Koc and Barut (2016) includes digital stories created by mental health professionals, educators, and adolescents themselves. These stories address various mental health topics, such as coping strategies, recognizing symptoms, and seeking help. By presenting mental health information through relatable and engaging narratives, the curriculum helps normalize discussions about mental health and reduce stigma.

5.2.2 Impact Analysis

The impact of digital storytelling on mental health awareness is supported by empirical evidence. Studies have shown that students who engage with digital stories about mental health are more likely to develop a better understanding of mental health issues and exhibit positive changes in attitudes and behaviors (Koc & Barut, 2016). Adolescents who participated in the digital storytelling-based curriculum demonstrated increased awareness of mental health issues and greater willingness to seek help when needed. Additionally, digital storytelling can facilitate open discussions about mental health, providing a safe space for students to share their experiences and support one another. By creating an environment where mental health is openly discussed and addressed, digital storytelling helps foster a more supportive and informed community (Koc & Barut, 2016).

One notable example of digital storytelling's impact on mental health awareness is the "It Gets Better" project. This initiative uses digital stories from LGBTQ+ individuals who have faced mental health challenges to provide hope and support to young people experiencing similar issues. The project's success highlights the effectiveness of personal narratives in creating a sense of connection and providing valuable resources for mental health support (It Gets Better Project, 2020).

So, in conclusion Digital storytelling offers a dynamic and engaging approach to mental health education. By incorporating personal narratives and multimedia elements, digital storytelling helps improve mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage positive behaviors among adolescents. The evidence supports the integration of digital storytelling into educational curricula and mental health programs as a means of promoting mental well-being and providing essential support to young people.

5.3 Digital Storytelling for Gender-Based Violence Awareness:



5.3.1 Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses a range of harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. It is a pervasive issue affecting people across various demographics but disproportionately impacts women and marginalized groups. Despite its prevalence, GBV often remains underreported and inadequately addressed due to stigma, fear, and lack of awareness. Effective intervention requires comprehensive education and advocacy to address and prevent GBV (Acosta & Carpenter, 2020).

5.3.2 Social Justice through Storytelling

Digital storytelling serves as a powerful tool for social justice by raising awareness about gender-based violence and advocating for change. According to Acosta and Carpenter (2020), digital storytelling allows survivors and advocates to share their stories in a compelling and relatable manner. These narratives not only highlight the personal experiences of those affected by GBV but also challenge societal norms and injustices.

Digital storytelling projects focused on GBV often feature first-person accounts from survivors, providing an intimate and impactful perspective on the realities of violence. By presenting these stories through multimedia formats—such as video, audio, and text—digital storytelling engages audiences on an emotional level, fostering empathy and understanding. This approach helps bring visibility to GBV issues and encourages collective action to address and prevent violence (Acosta & Carpenter, 2020).

5.4 Digital Storytelling and LGBTQ+ Awareness

5.4.1 Challenges Faced by LGBTQ+ Individuals

LGBTQ+ individuals face challenges related to identity, discrimination, and mental health. Studies show LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of bullying, depression, and anxiety due to stigma and exclusion (Meyer, 2003), which affects self-esteem, academics, and overall well-being (Russell & Fish, 2016). Addressing these issues through education and advocacy is vital. Digital storytelling amplifies LGBTQ+ voices, enabling them to share personal experiences and foster greater understanding (Alexander, 2011).

5.4.2 Impact of Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling effectively raises awareness and builds empathy. By blending personal narratives with multimedia, it conveys complex emotions and lived experiences (Hull & Katz, 2006). Alexander (2011) notes its power to humanize LGBTQ+ issues by offering



relatable, first-person perspectives. The It Gets Better project, for instance, shares video testimonials from LGBTQ+ individuals and allies, offering hope to those facing discrimination. Studies show such narratives improve attitudes and support for inclusive policies (Craig et al., 2015), while also fostering community and belonging, especially for isolated youth (McInroy & Craig, 2018).

5.4.3 Educational and Advocacy Applications

In schools and advocacy efforts, digital storytelling promotes LGBTQ+ inclusion through anti-bullying programs, diversity training, and mental health initiatives (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). It helps reduce prejudice and boosts empathy among students (Kosciw et al., 2018). Collaborations between LGBTQ+ individuals, educators, and media professionals ensure authentic, high-quality content (Alexander, 2017), offering vital resources that empower youth to face social and emotional challenges (Meyer, 2015).

In conclusion, digital storytelling is a powerful tool for LGBTQ+ advocacy. It amplifies marginalized voices, fosters empathy, and promotes change. Projects like It Gets Better highlight the impact of digital media in combating discrimination and supporting LGBTQ+ individuals. As technology evolves, its integration into education and advocacy remains essential for building an inclusive society.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

This review highlights digital storytelling's key role in raising awareness and driving change on social issues like LGBTQ+ rights, environmental protection, mental health, and gender-based violence. By blending personal stories with multimedia, digital storytelling makes complex topics relatable and impactful. It bridges gaps in understanding, challenges stigma, and fosters empathy, showing storytelling as a powerful tool for advocacy, education, and support.

Digital storytelling has proven effective in education and social advocacy. Campaigns like It Gets Better have helped reduce stigma around LGBTQ+ issues, while projects like The Climate Reality Project raise environmental awareness through emotional narratives. Mental health initiatives use digital stories to encourage help-seeking and reduce stigma, especially among youth. Similarly, storytelling around gender-based violence, such as One in Three, amplifies survivors' voices and inspires social action. These examples demonstrate digital storytelling's ability to shift attitudes and behaviors and empower communities.

Despite its benefits, digital storytelling faces challenges. Many narratives lack diverse, intersectional representation, missing perspectives on race, class, and disability. There is also limited research on the long-term impact of these stories on attitudes and policy.



Furthermore, technological barriers prevent access for people with low digital literacy or poor internet connectivity, limiting the reach and effect of storytelling campaigns.

6.3 Future Directions

Future research should focus on expanding the reach and inclusivity of digital storytelling. Emerging technologies like AI and VR can create immersive experiences that deepen empathy and engagement, especially in LGBTQ+, mental health, and environmental advocacy. Collaboration among educators, activists, and creators will ensure stories remain authentic and relevant. Utilizing platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube can broaden audience engagement, especially among youth. Finally, supporting community-driven storytelling and digital skills training can empower marginalized voices and enhance storytelling's role as a catalyst for social change.

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