ual: ako storytelling institute

Impact Storytelling: the Ecosystem, the Evidence and Possible Futures

UAL AKO Storytelling Institute
May 2024

Acknowledgements

Support for this report was provided by the AKO Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation, or of interviewees, reviewers or the institutions where they work.

Special thanks go to those who agreed to be interviewed for this report, including:

- Beadie Finzi, Co-Founding Director, Doc Society
- Brett Davidson, Narrative Lead, International Resource for Impact Storytelling
- Dora Meade, Head of Messaging, NEON
- Erica Rosenthal, Director of Research, USC Norman Lear Center
- Felipe Viveros, Co-Founder, Culture Hack Labs
- Francesca Panetta, Director, UAL Storytelling Institute
- Francis Meyo, Vice President, Busara Center for Behavioral Economics
- Iain Dodgeon, Director, OKRE
- Jose Campi-Portaluppi, Director of Communications and Advocacy, Equimundo
- Ruth Mackenzie CBE, Artistic Director, Adelaide Festival
- Sandra Gaudenzi, Research Coordinator, UAL Storytelling Institute and Senior Lecturer UCL
- Tracy Van Slyke, Chief Strategy Officer, Pop Culture Collaborative

With thanks to the Storytelling Institute team and Institute Fellows, who provided feedback and guidance on the focus of the research. Our thanks also go to those who read, reviewed and gave feedback on initial drafts of this report, including:

- Alice Sachrajda, UK Programme Officer and UK Head of Cultural Strategy, Unbound Philanthropy
- Amanda Michel, Sustainable Business Development Consultant
- Bambo Soyinka, Professor of Story and Chair of the Research Centre for Transcultural Creativity and Education
- Beadie Finzi, Co-Founding Director, Doc Society
- Katerina Cizek, Co-Founder, Executive Producer and Artistic Director of the Co-Creation Studio at MIT Open Documentary Lab
- Luke Tryl, UK Director at More in Common
- Patricia Aufderheide, Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Media & Social Impact, American University
- Sue Tibballs, Chief Executive at Sheila McKechnie Foundation
- Zamzam Ibrahim, Co-Founder, Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK)

Suggested Harvard citation: *Mirzoyants, A., Eagle, R. and Sewell, H. (2024) Impact Storytelling: the Ecosystem, the Evidence and Possible Futures. London: AKO Storytelling Institute, UAL.*

About this report

In October 2022, with the support of the AKO Foundation, the University of the Arts London established a new 'Storytelling Institute'. Part of the University's Social Purpose Group, the Institute was launched with a mandate to 'to help artists and campaigners collaborate to lead change'.[1] Following a successful pilot season, in July 2023, the Institute commissioned an interdisciplinary group of researchers to complete a high-level survey and analysis of the 'impact storytelling' ecosystem in the UK and internationally.

Drawing on expert interviews, desk research and a literature scan, the research team set out to answer a few big questions: What's the history and current landscape of impact storytelling, in the UK and internationally? What is the structure of the ecosystem, who are the key players, and what are the live debates, current strengths and challenges? How do key players think about the idea of impact? What is the evidence that impact storytelling works? And where are the 'white spaces' for intervention and investment in the future?

The research was commissioned both to help inform, ground and guide the Storytelling Institute's long-term strategy, and to help inform and advance the work of the ecosystem overall. It follows the invaluable work of researchers across the impact storytelling landscape (our top recommendations of recent work, from which we drew indispensable insight, are here). We hope this research compliments, builds on and expands the lens of this body of work.

Who this is for and how to read it

We have attempted to cast a wide and expansive net for this work, spanning the arts, culture, media and entertainment industries, alongside the advocacy, communications and organising fields. It is written for those in the arts and creative industries who are new to concepts like 'narrative change', and for those working in campaigning who are new to ideas like 'socially engaged art'. It is written primarily for those working 'backstage' or 'in the wings' of this work (see Part 3) – in particular for strategists, researchers, conveners, commissioners and funders – but it is open to all.

It is, therefore, *physically* expansive (read: long). We hope you'll have a couple of hours to read the whole report, but if not, use our contents page to find the sections you'd like to really dig into and digest. We hope this report serves as a reference point that you can return to.

Principle Authors:
Dr Anastasia Mirzoyants, Dr Rob Eagle and Hannah Sewell

AKO Storytelling Institute Report Team:
Francesca Panetta, Dr Sandra Gaudenzi

Design:
Boyle&Perks

[1] (2022) 'UAL launches new AKO Storytelling Institute', UAL, [Link].

Methodology

Expert interviews

- At the outset of the project, we conducted 14 qualitative interviews with established experts (listed in the Acknowledgements). Experts were selected to provide a 'snapshot' of the breadth of the impact storytelling ecosystem.
- Interviewees were asked a range of standardised questions focusing on: 1) use and definition of key terms, 2) the make-up of the current ecosystem, its leading players, strengths and weaknesses, and areas for future investment, 3) the best-practice research, methods, theories, tools and evidence, their strengths and weaknesses, and areas for future investment in them.
- The reports, research, methods, theories and toolkits shared and identified by our expert interviewees formed the starting point for our desk research.

Desk research

- Building on the resources identified and shared by our expert interviewees, we conducted an initial high-level scan of existing reports, research, methods, theories and toolkits. We gathered a wide range of sources including academic research studies, scoping reviews, meta-analyses, reports, briefs, white papers, bibliographies of key articles, blogs, editorials, commentaries, tools, toolkits and existing mapping tools.
- We then worked to identify similar, recent efforts to explore and map the broad impact storytelling ecosystem and evidence, in the UK, US and globally. We identified 16 core resources as particularly useful, comprehensive and influential toolkits and guidebooks for storytellers, researchers, organisers and strategists.
- This project is intended to aggregate and build on, rather than replicate, this important work. At every opportunity, we have sought to highlight and echo 'best practice' within established and already influential work and practices – rather than generate new concepts, language or tools.

Literature review

- We also conducted a focused high-level literature review of the existing 'evidence' for the impact of storytelling for social change, taking a three-step process:
  - An umbrella review (or review of existing reviews) to identify and systematise methods used to collect, analyse and present evidence of impact.
  - A scoping review to describe the overall trends and debates related to impact and evidence and to define the potential scope of a future comprehensive, systematic literature review.
  - A 'systematic-like' review of the existing evidence (focusing on a specific tranche of research most aligned to the Storytelling Institute's approach to evidence generation), with the goal of finding, evaluating and synthesising the 'best' and/or most commonly used research methods and tools.
- Our criteria for inclusion of research in the literature review were:
  - literature published within the last 10 years (2013–2023)
  - publications offering analysis of the primary of secondary data or theoretical frameworks
  - publications written by authors affiliated with recognised institutions and/or programmes or publications appearing in recognised, preferably peer-reviewed, journals
  - publications originally written in or translated to English
  - academic/scientific publications, programme reviews and evaluation reports, white and briefing papers, academic literature reviews, books and book chapters, state-of-industry reports.
- The search for relevant publications was conducted (1) by extracting references from our 'core' resources and (2) using major digital libraries including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Elsevier, Science Direct and Academia.edu. The key terms listed in Part 2 of this report were used as the search terms.
- A total of 150 publications were selected and catalogued to form the basis for the Storytelling Institute's reference library. Of those, 20 publications were analysed in depth for the umbrella review and 60 for the systematic-like review. The final selection of the publications reflects the diversity of methodologies used in the ecosystem, covers a range of thematic areas, and includes examples of different levels of rigour, from theoretical debates to meta-analyses. The review presents a collection of complementary publications to create a holistic view of the state of evidence generation in the ecosystem.

Internal workshops

- This study was informed by periodic workshops with the Storytelling Institute team and one workshop with Institute Fellows, who provided feedback and guidance on the focus for the research, in line with evolving Institute strategy.

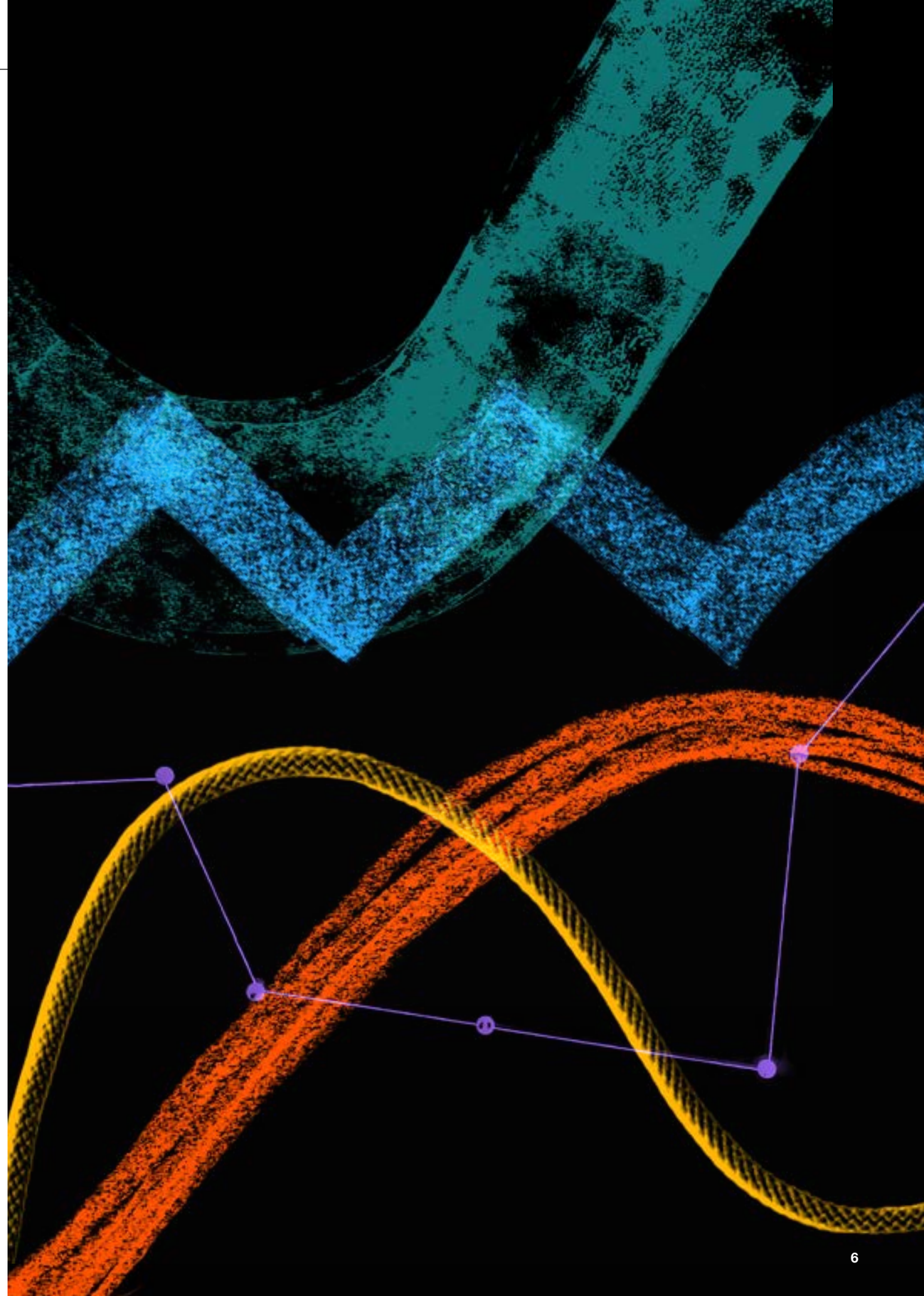
Some caveats

This research commission had a wide and potentially expansive scope. Our expert interviews, literature review and desk research constitute a relatively high-level 'scan' of a large ecosystem that draws on a wide range of academic disciplines and practices. We focused desk research and shaped our literature review around the guidance and views of our expert interviewees and internal advisors. As a result, we recognise that there are likely to be gaps and omissions in what we read. Discussion and analysis of social media and digital platforms, for example, is limited.

Our interviewees largely comprised people and organisations known to us or suggested to us by advisors. There was a much longer list of names suggested to us, but budget, timeframes and expert availability meant we were unable to include all of these. Again, we acknowledge that there are important gaps in our sample of interviewees and the range of views and ideas captured here.

Methodology

A Guide to Navigating this Report



Preface

I took up the role of Director of UAL's new AKO Storytelling Institute in October 2022, with the mission to 'enable storytellers and campaigners to make greater social impact through their work'. I came to the role with excitement – but also with a real dose of fear. Partly because it's a big role, and an ambitious brief! But mostly because I knew what we were up against.

I've spent 20 years in broadcasting and journalism, covering one crisis after another. But this moment feels different; we sit at a precipice, with ever-widening inequality, a terrifying climate emergency, an increasingly polarised world, and fracturing democracies.

In the last four years, I've been working in the space of artificial intelligence and disinformation. I am all too aware that as our news, media, and information ecosystems fragment around us, our work as storytellers is becoming harder than ever.

So, where to begin? First, by meeting as many of you as we could! We set out to talk to people working in impact storytelling in all its forms, in the UK and around the world. From funders and strategists, to artists, campaigners and researchers.

Second, we launched our inaugural fellowship on the theme of 'Truth and Lies'. The fellowship was designed to stimulate and surface the latest thinking on disinformation, and to trial and test the emerging frameworks, practices and methodologies across the impact storytelling ecosystem – in a truly interdisciplinary environment, with 12 fantastic practitioners.

Finally, we commissioned a team to conduct this research. We set out to answer a few big questions: what is the structure of the impact storytelling ecosystem in the UK? What is the evidence that impact storytelling works? And where are the spaces for intervention and investment in the future?

I write this nearing the end of my first full academic year at the AKO Storytelling Institute. We've met hundreds of brilliant people, been invited to fantastic convenings, conferences and workshops – and hosted a series of our own evening talks and salons. The fellowship is nearing its close, this research is finally ready to publish, and I am ending this term with a different feeling: hope.

Not the 'lottery ticket clutched in your hand' kind of hope. But the kind Rebecca Solnit says is located in the 'premise that we don't know what will happen … [but] in the spaciousness of uncertainty … we find room to act'. The kind of hope that comes from having a head full of all the brilliant, innovative and far-thinking people across the UK and around the world, who are hard at work telling new stories, and of all the case studies, evaluations and tools that show the impact we can have.

I also have a new, perhaps even more deep-seated conviction: in the vast and as-yet-untapped power and potential we hold to make real-world change – together. As our advisor and collaborator, Beadie Finzi, put it to us recently: 'It's easy to get knocked down in the details. At this moment in society and culture, we remain unabashedly, absolutely sure of the role of storytellers in society.'

This report charts the wide expanse of a *new* ecosystem that is only just beginning to form and emerge. It's an ecosystem that's rooted in centuries of research and practice – but that is, perhaps most exciting of all, only just getting started.

This report is designed to be an in-depth reference guide for everyone who funds, supports or works in impact storytelling in the UK. It's something we hope you keep coming back to. We don't sugar-coat the scale of the challenges we face, or the work that's left to be done. But I hope when you do come back here, to dig out a reference, or a link to a case study or toolkit, you'll find that hope and conviction too.

Finally, if you're a storyteller committed to driving big impact, do get in touch

Francesca Panetta,
Director
AKO Storytelling Institute

Executive Summary

Welcome! This report covers a lot of ground. It was designed to help answer some big questions, like: what is the 'impact storytelling' ecosystem? Who are the key players? What evidence is there that impact storytelling works? What are the gaps, and where should we be focusing our attention next? To help answer these questions we interviewed experts across the ecosystem, and conducted a high-level literature review of the existing 'evidence' that storytelling can drive change. This report is, therefore, long! We don't expect you to read it in one sitting, but we do recommend checking out the content guide to select the sections you want to read in detail now, and what you might want to come back to later. In the meantime, below are a few key take-aways to give you a sense of what we cover.

1 Impact storytelling: a new and growing ecosystem, in transition

- **Storytelling has a long history of impact.** From hunter-gatherers swapping stories round the campfire, to the campaign for equal marriage, storytelling is and has always been how we make sense of the world, and how we change it. Today, we track the impact of storytelling on three levels: personal, cultural and structural.
- **Impact storytelling is an emerging but distinct ecosystem.** Formal storytelling for change practices have been around for more than a century. But in the last decade, something new has formed. Encompassing a broad spectrum of fields and disciplines from arts, culture, organising, campaigning and media, we think it's most accurate to call it 'the impact storytelling ecosystem'. We don't all use the same terms or methods, but we do share a common purpose: to achieve long-term social good, through the power of story.
- **The impact storytelling ecosystem is at a transition point, from fluid to formalising.** As organisations across the ecosystem continue to network and collaborate, parts of this ecosystem are also beginning to *formalise.* That process is raising some debates and surfacing some key challenges; like the need to create alignment of terms and methods, how to address the barriers to large-scale fundraising, how to break issues silos, how to address skills gaps, and how to redress the uneven distribution of power – and ensure we live out shared values of equity and anti-racism as the ecosystem grows.

2 Proving impact: a persuasive evidence base at a crossroads

- **How do we prove that impact storytelling works?** This is the million-dollar question, around which a number of intersecting, pivotal debates and challenges emerge. Views on the role of evaluation span a wide and oftentimes divergent spectrum, where your perspective is dictated by the type of funder relationships you have and the ones you seek. Some argue for a renegotiation of trust-based philanthropic models and for a reduction of focus on end-line evaluation, while others rely on funding dependent on large-scale long-term studies that aim to build evidence of direct attribution. Every ecosystem can absorb a diversity of approach – but in places like the UK, with a limited funding landscape, finding alignment matters more.
- **Several types of persuasive evidence exist, but there are challenges.** Evidence ranges from the informal 'thought leadership' blogs, case studies and articles that showcase the collective power of narrative interventions, to the academic 'theoretical' texts on cognitive linguistics that underpin this work, to the practice studies that unearth 'the mechanics' of how storytelling interventions drive change, through to the emerging 'impact' evaluations that begin to establish contribution and attribution of storytelling interventions to measurable change. The range of evidence available builds a strong evidence base for this work, and confidence in the probability that large-scale, funded interventions can and will deliver impact in the long run and at scale. But (though we've made a start!) it's not currently organised, which makes it hard to learn from and to share. And the challenges of being an ecosystem in formation, without a consistent theory of change or terminology, pose real barriers to strengthening the evidence base.
- **There's a trend towards collective, pragmatic evidence gathering.** Recent evolutions in the ecosystem, including the development of innovative new measurement frameworks and cross-thematic research and trackers, suggest that there is an increasing focus on tracking practical infrastructure-building indicators as proxies for overall impact, and of measuring contribution rather than direct, individual attribution.

Executive Summary

3 Where next: conclusions and recommendations for the UK

- **Strengthen and build the UK ecosystem**. The practices might be centuries old, but the networked impact storytelling ecosystem in the UK is relatively new – even 'embryonic'. That's exciting – but it also means we have work to do to strengthen and build the basic infrastructure that will make our work possible. But, as the team at Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) remind us, that work shouldn't be business as usual. If we need new stories to help drive change, then we also need 'new spaces, strategies and ways of coming together to build those new narratives. Otherwise ... we're likely to be recreating the same old familiar patterns'.[2] As we build and strengthen ecosystem infrastructure and raise funding, we have lots of examples from the US and from Global Majority and indigenous communities to learn from. These take deeper leadership from people with lived experience of marginalisation, and embed core principles of co-creation, anti-oppression and decoloniality.
- **Advance collaboration and network building.** Research shows that the long-term success of impact storytelling depends on 'collaboration, trust and networks' between a wide range of organisations, spanning culture, advocacy, comms and organising. This means working to connect the further-removed fields of arts, news media, tech and distribution – as well to increase collaboration between researchers and creatives where siloing exists. But network-building work extends beyond seminars and panel events, to long-term strategy work, efforts to find alignment on arising debates, work to standardise shared practice and methods, and efforts to convene funders to scale collective investment across the ecosystem.
- **Increase skills and build capacity.** There's widespread demand for training and capacity building – from the specific, like the need for trained 'impact producers' for TV and film projects, to introductory training in the basics of narrative research methods, to investment in advanced training and coaching to enable senior leaders to run key organisations across the ecosystem.
- **Strengthen the evidence, research and evaluation base.** This work only scratches the surface. There is significant demand to further review, catalogue and organise existing research from across the ecosystem, in an accessible and user-friendly format – both to support fundraising efforts and to improve our collective practice. There are also significant gaps in our research base to fill, particularly in developing a suite of core assets, specific to the UK context, and in commissioning best-practice evaluations of large-scale, integrated and long-term projects.
- **It's only the beginning.** Our final take-away is simple: there is an abundance of energy, work, research, expertise and experimentation happening across the UK in this early-stage ecosystem. And it's only just beginning. This ecosystem of storytellers is, as strategist Liz Manne puts it, ready to 'go to the next level' – to collaborate more, learn from each other, and accelerate our growth and impact to meet the scale of the challenges we face. This report (and this summary!) is only the start too – check out our list of recommended further reading, tools and resources here. We hope they support you on your journey to unlocking the full force and impact of storytelling.

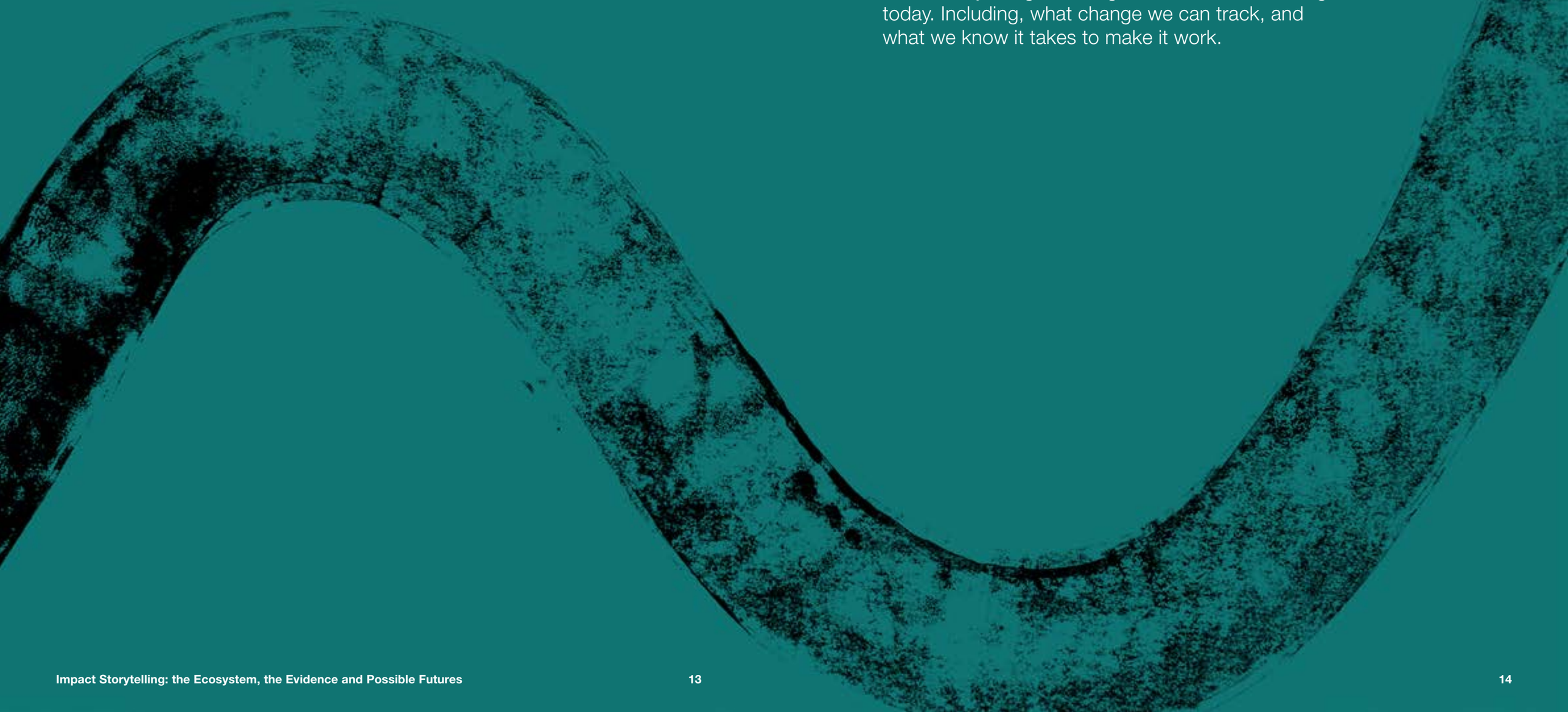
[2] Smith, H. (2022) Decolonising Narratives. PIRC. [Link].

1

The Basics: Storytelling and Social Change

In this chapter you'll find

- A introduction to the basics of storytelling for social change, including: The history behind storytelling and social change – from its ancient functions, to the emergence of a new ecosystem and new fields of practice over the last 10 years.
- A summary of the high-level 'theory of change' – how experts and practitioners are conceiving of the role of storytelling in driving audacious social change today. Including, what change we can track, and what we know it takes to make it work.



1.1
A brief history

The subject of this study embodies a paradox, because, as Jee Kim, Liz Hynes and Nima Shirazi of Narrative Initiative put it, it is 'both emerging and eternal'.[3]

The 'ancient' history

It is 'eternal' because, as our interviewees and much of the literature reviewed highlight, the relationship between storytelling and social change is in many ways 'innate and immutable'.[4] As Felipe Viveros of Culture Hack Labs put it to us in an interview, 'Storytelling is something that we have done since time immemorial … it's what we do to make sense of the world.'

Indeed, a diverse range of disciplines (explored in Part 3) from psychology and neuroscience to anthropology and cognitive linguistics agree that stories are the processing unit of our pattern-forming brains, and that the 'root' stories that cultures share from 'hunter-gather times to today's global civilisation … have affected the course of history'.[5]

This 'innate' power of storytelling in all its fields and forms, from art and theatre to campaigning and entertainment TV, has been formally researched and practised 'for more than a hundred years'.[6]

For example, the transformational potential of documentaries has been recognised since John Grierson's foundational film-making practice and writings. In 1934, Grierson advocated that the role of film in a democratic system is to persuade the public to feel impassioned about issues of social justice – with the hope of translating that passion into action.[7] In many ways, Grierson set the agenda for the investigative style and methods that pervade many mainstream documentaries more than a century later. In the same way, iconic works like Picasso's 1937 mural *Guernica* – which is widely credited with bringing international attention to the brutality of the Spanish Civil War – continue to inspire and shape the work of artist-activists today.

Since the 1950s, fictional radio, TV and film formats in the UK have been used to disseminate educational and social justice messaging. Radio programme *The Archers*, for example, began in 1951 with the explicit goal of increasing food production after the Second World War, by communicating the latest agricultural practices to Britain's farmers.[8] Similarly, the UK's public service fictional TV programming, like *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders*, has a long track record of shaping public attitudes towards minority groups and public health issues.[9] A further example is Ken Loach's 1966 TV play *Cathy Come Home* – a landmark piece of impact storytelling – which helped to raise awareness of the plight of homelessness in Britain and contributed to the establishment of the charity Crisis.[10]

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, as racial violence increased in the UK, radio, TV and film became powerful tools for anti-racist activism. Alex Pascall's weekly BBC Radio London news and culture programme *Black Londoners* (the first black daily show in mainstream British broadcasting) and Darcus Howe's Channel 4 magazine TV show *Black on Black* (1982) provided 'a voice for Black Britain' and became powerful focal points for community organising.[11] In addition, the Black Audio Film Collective (1982–1998) produced ground-breaking, award-winning documentaries and non-linear films,[12] credited with helping to transform how Black culture and politics were represented in British media.[13] Also established in 1982, the radical political British Black Arts Movement are seen as having played an instrumental role in 'de-imperialising' and 'changing the nature and perception of British culture'.[14]

As we'll explore throughout this report, there are hundreds of publications dedicated to collating, charting and tracking examples of the role that storytelling (through its many traditions and forms) has played in driving social change around the world over the last century.[15] This deep-rooted conviction in the ancient, eternal 'power' of storytelling to drive social change (a snapshot of which is captured here) strongly characterised our expert interviews and reviewed literature, forming the foundations of this study.

3 Kim, J., Hynes, L., & Shirazi, N. (2017) Toward new gravity: Charting a course for the Narrative Initiative. Narrative Initiative, [Link].

4 Kim et al., 2017

5 Lent, J. (2016) The Patterning Instinct: *A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning.* Prometheus.

6 Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change.* USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

7 Grierson, J. (1934) 'Propaganda: a problem for educational theory and for cinema', *Sight and Sound.* Winter 1933–34, pp. 119–121.

8 Armstrong, S. (2008) 'Soaps with a conscience', *The Guardian*, 8 September, [Link].

9 Bhebhe, A. (2022) 'Soap operas can deliver effective health education to young people – new research', *The Conversation*, 2 February, [Link].

10 Fitzpatrick, S., & Pawson, H. (2016) 'Fifty years since Cathy Come Home: critical reflections on the UK homelessness safety net', *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 16:4, pp. 543–555.

11 Gyimah, D. (2023) 'Black London (BBC GLR 1991-1993) the Importance of a BBC Radio Archive for Black British People and Scholars', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 30:2, pp. 570–586.

12 (2017) 'Black Audio Film Collective', *Tate*, [Link].

13 (2023) 'Looking back at The Black Audio Film Collective', *Darklight Digital,* [Link].

14 (2017) 'British black arts movement', *Tate*, [Link].

15 In this report, we draw frequently from: Grossinger, K. (2023) *Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together.* The New Press. and Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change.* USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link] among many others.

1.1
A brief history

The last ten years

How, then, can the apparently 'innate' and evidently long-established practice of impact storytelling be described – with almost equal consistency in our interviews – as 'emerging' or even 'embryonic'?[16]

As we've explored, the idea of storytellers driving social change isn't new. Formalised practices associated with impact storytelling have been in place for decades. Campaigners have been testing the impact of ads and messaging since the dawn of dial-testing in the 1980s. Creatives and cultural organisations in the UK have been filling in impact measurement forms to quantify the economic and social value of their work since political shifts in the 1990s brought renewed emphasis to the *instrumental* value of the arts (a topic of much debate and discussion).[17]

The early 2000s saw the rise of new practices like 'solutions journalism', the introduction of the 'impact producer' on documentary film sets and the publication of George Lakoff's seminal *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, which sparked a step change in how progressive campaigners in the US conceived of the effects of their messaging.

However, experts and key literature report that in the mid-2010s, the conversation about the impact of the stories we share, and the narratives we trust, reached a new peak. Crucially, they maintain, this period gave rise to something *new,* distinct and even 'embryonic'.[18]

In the UK and the US, the Brexit Referendum and Presidential Election had sparked an international debate about the rapid rise in disinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories, as concern grew about the increase in polarisation around the world. The full effects of social and digital media in transforming (and many argued degrading) our news and information environments had become more apparent than ever. In 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries named 'post-truth' the word of the year.[19]

Among creatives, this period saw a notable rise in artistic activism and, as Sofia Lindström Sol and others analyse, a commensurate increase in new methodologies, practices and research on the social impact of the arts.[20] Building on, and learning from, the decades of network-building and 'strategizing between advocates, creatives, organizers and others'[21] that preceded it, storytellers from the visual arts, music, film, literature and theatre increased their efforts to engage with social and political issues. These often centred around movements and upheavals like the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and the climate strikes – and were driven by a greater awareness of the influence of culture on issues like LGBTQ+ rights, inequality, racial justice and climate change.

[16] Korobkova et al., 2023; Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* Heard, [Link].

[17] O'Connor, J. (2010) *The cultural and creative industries: a literature review.* 2nd edn, [Link].

[18] Korobkova et al., 2023.

[19] (2016) 'Oxford Word of the Year 2016', OUP.com, [Link].

[20] Lindström Sol, S., Gustrén, C., Nelhans, G. et al. (2022) 'Mapping research on the social impact of the arts: what characterises the field?' *Open Res Europe,* pp. 1–124, [Link].

[21] Jenkins, A. (2018) *Shifting the Narrative: What it Takes to Reframe the Debate for Social Justice in the US*, [Link].

As critic K Biswas wrote of this trend in the UK: 'The once marginalised … take centre stage, as youth-led movements – against racism, sexism and inequality, for LGBTQ+ and disability rights or environmental sustainability – who feel locked out of elite political and economic circles, see culture as their site of expression.'[22] In his recent book *Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together,* Ken Grossinger describes an 'upsurge of new alliances, fusing politics and culture. A wave of organizers and artists who are joining forces in movements for social change' in the US and around the world.[23]

At the same time, those working in the fields of advocacy and campaigning report that – among funders, researchers and practitioners alike – there was a new 'recognition' of the 'pervasive and systemic narratives that permeate every aspect of our daily lives'.[24] As strategist Brett Davidson put it in 2016: 'While we might win occasional policy battles, these wins are constantly under attack and in danger of being reversed. We win some battles, but we are losing the war. One of the reasons for this is that we are often working against powerful narratives that are embedded in the overarching culture. Thus we also need to look beyond the policy sphere, at the narratives embedded in the larger culture.'[25]

In 2016, a number of landmark new organisations launched in the US, including Narrative Initiative and Pop Culture Collaborative, endowed with multi-year philanthropic support and mandates to transform systemic narratives.[26] For example, the launch of donor collaborative Pop Culture Collaborative helped to 'supercharge' the 'path-breaking' work of established leaders like Ai-jen Poo of the National Domestic Workers alliance, and Rashad Robinson of Color of Change (see Part 4). It also provided seed-funding to emerging leaders like Crystal Echo Hawk of IllumiNative, and helped to build vital networking and funding infrastructure that has enabled culture change efforts in the US to scale.[27]

Despite a much smaller philanthropic pool, and earlier-stage ecosystem (explored in Part 3), there was a similar 'proliferation of narrative research, strategic communications initiatives and various attempts to form collaboration and learning' across the UK.[28] As The Norman Lear Center succinctly puts it: during this period, a previously distributed range of 'practitioners, funders and researchers' began to 'consolidate and organize itself' into a new 'nascent field,' most often referred to as 'narrative change'.[29]

[22] Biswas, K. (2021) 'Foreword', in Sachrajda, A. & Zukowska, M. New Brave World: The power, opportunities and potential of pop culture for social change in the UK.

[23] Grossinger, 2023.

[24] Kim et al., 2017.

[25] Davidson, B., cited in: Taylor, R. (2021) *Transforming Narrative Waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK.* Narrative Initiative, [Link].

[26] Both Narrative Initiative and Pop Culture Collaborative launched in 2016 in the US, both of whose work were cited frequently throughout our research

[27] Pop Culture Collab (2021) #MakingJusticePop: *The Story of the Pop Culture Collaborative's impact at 5 years,* [Link].

[28] Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

[29] Korobkova et al., 2023.

1.1
A brief history

The focus of this study

This ‘emerging’ new ecosystem of increasingly networked creatives, activists and researchers that Ken Grossinger describes (explored in Part 3), and the formation of associated new fields like ‘narrative change’, are the focus of this study.[30]

Although many different definitions are used to describe this emerging ecosystem (see Part 2), broadly: it brings together people from non-profits, philanthropy, media, the arts and culture, the entertainment industry and communications with researchers and movement-builders (see Part 3). At a high level, they are connected by two core shared ideas: [31]

1. The understanding that the stories we share shape our realities, influencing the way we think, feel, believe, act and relate to each other and the world.
2. The effort to achieve long-term, enduring social good, through the power of storytelling, in all its forms and mediums.

Organisations and practitioners across this varied ecosystem define ‘social change’ in different terms, with some natural variance depending on their disciplinary background and their politics. However, again, we found that broad alignment centres around shared ‘values’ including anti-racism, equity and social justice.[32]

The storytelling formats we focus on

Not every art installation, press release, tweet or speech is storytelling. For the purposes of this report, we are focusing on storytelling in time-based media and performance, alongside literature and written journalism. This reflects the weighting of currently available research.

As you’ll note, the examples and studies featured in this report are weighted towards moving image formats (like film and TV) and audio formats (like radio and podcasting). We include references to games, music and immersive and interactive media experiences (such as virtual reality) as well as visual art forms (like paintings, photography and sculpture) that are not time-based media, but in-depth study largely falls outside of the boundaries of this work. We acknowledge that the ‘storytelling’ of visual art is often constructed by media coverage, interpretation by curators or audience experiences.

[30] Ibid.
[31] Adapted from Korobkova et al., 2023.
[32] Korobkova et al., 2023.

1.2

How does storytelling create change? (the high-level theory of change)

Levels of impact and change

So, how does storytelling drive social change? There is not yet a single established or consistent 'theory of change' or measurement framework for this emerging and diverse ecosystem (though there are many efforts to create greater unity – see Part 4). However, as the USC Norman Lear Center puts it, 'convergence lies in the use of stories to drive changes in people that lead to broader, systemic changes in institutions and societies.'[33]

The Media Measurement Framework (below, left) is referenced frequently by a range of influential experts and reports[34] and serves as a helpful overview of both the direct and cumulative impacts (see x-axis) that storytelling interventions can have.

Fig 1. The Media Measurement Framework (Learning for Action (2013) Deepening Engagement for Lasting Impact: a Framework for Measuring Media Performance and Results, p.11. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.)

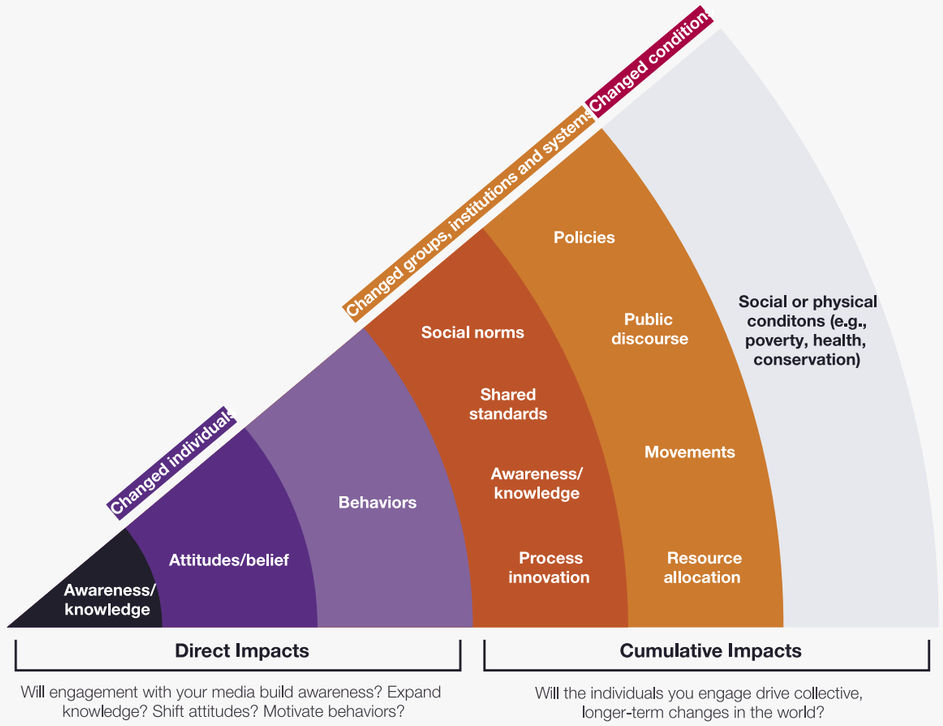
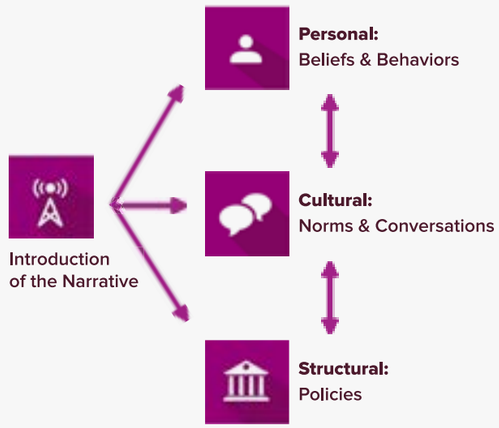


Fig 2. The three levels of impact (Manne, L., Potts, E. & Simon, E. (2022) Narrative Strategy: The Basics, p.17. Liz Manne Strategy)



The Media Measurement Framework also identifies three 'levels' of impact (see y-axis): 1) changed individuals, 2) changed groups, institutions or systems, and 3) changed conditions. These three levels of impact are also used by strategist Liz Manne (see above, right), who expresses them as: personal, cultural and structural. This way of thinking about and measuring the impact of storytelling and narrative has in turn been adopted by influential organisations including the USC Norman Lear Center and Doc Society.[35] Manne's model (above, right)[36] further highlights that the 'direction' of change goes both ways. For example, as the FrameWorks Institute highlights: 'the arrow can point in the opposite direction as well – as changes in policy can contribute to (individual and collective) mindset shifts.'[37]

An example: how this works in practice[38]

In 2016, BBC Radio 4's flagship soap *The Archers* ran a two-and-a-half-year storyline about coercive control, as part of a collaboration with the charity Women's Aid, who provided advice to ensure accuracy of representation. The show, which had an audience of 4.7 million listeners at the time, is credited with a range of 'direct' impacts. Firstly, it effectively increased awareness and understanding of coercive control as a form of domestic abuse, among its direct audience. This is evidenced through a 20% increase in calls to the Women's Aid and Refuge hotlines, attributed to the 'Archers effect' (also an indicator of individual 'behavioural' shift). Sandra Horley, chief executive of the charity Refuge at the time, said: 'I don't think it's too much to say that this storyline has saved lives as women reach out and seek help.' As a show with a national audience, the storyline has also been credited with a wide range of 'cumulative' impacts. The radio drama is credited with sparking a national conversation about coercive control, leading to hundreds of news articles and segments reporting on the storyline across mainstream media. This ripple effect of coverage went on to reach a larger audience, and is often linked to a change in *collective* public discourse and understanding about coercive control in the UK.

[33] Korobkova et al., 2023.

[34] Referenced and reproduced in: The Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment at UCLA (2019) *Mapping the landscape of social impact entertainment,* [Link]; Korobkova et al., 2023.

[35] (2022) 'Our Theory of Change', *Doc Society,* [Link].

[36] Manne et al., 2022

[37] FrameWorks Institute (2020) *Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?* [Link].

[38] Kerley, P. & Bates, C. (2016) 'The Archers: What effect has the Rob and Helen story had?' *BBC News,* [Link]; inspired by case studies by Heard & Dorrans, 2022 and Sachrajda, A. (2017) *Riding the Waves: How pop culture has the potential to catalyse social change in the UK,* [Link].

1.2

How does storytelling create change? (the high-level theory of change)

An audacious, systems-level approach

It is important to note that, at a high level, strategists, campaigners and advocates (particularly, but not exclusively, those working in the 'narrative change' field) view this emerging, increasingly networked ecosystem as part of an ambitious 'systems-level' strategy.[39]

Strategist Liz Manne describes the overall approach as an effort to learn from historic progressive wins (see Part 4) by proactively working to align and organise four historically siloed fields – strategic communications, grassroots organising, advocacy and culture – at scale, around broadly aligned storytelling or 'narrative' strategies.[40] (Further exploration of this ecosystem is in Part 3.) Manne calls it 'the ultimate integrated strategy: aligning four powerful ways to engage audiences and change the world'.[41]

As the USC Norman Lear Center summarises: 'research tells us that one story … can't change social norms or behaviour on its own … a multifaceted approach that pairs media content with … community organising, public engagement and policy work is more likely to succeed than any one strategy.'[42]

Of course, not everyone working in impact storytelling views their work in this way. An individual documentary-maker, comms officer in a charity, or TV commissioner, is unlikely to be thinking about their day-to-day work as part of a systems-level approach. Some might not even feel comfortable seeing their work as part of this wider ecosystem. As we explore in the next section, there is no homogeneous way of thinking or talking about impact storytelling. It's important to note however that in this report we tend towards a systems-level analysis.

Fig 3. The Ultimate Integrated Strategy (Manne et al. (2022) Narrative Strategy: The Basics, Liz Manne Strategy, p.10.)

The 'opposition' have been deploying this approach for decades

As outlined above, practitioners across this ecosystem define their vision for 'social change' in different terms – but broad alignment lies in values like anti-racism, equity and social justice.[43] However, it's important to note that the ideas, tools and strategies explored here are deployed, and can be deployed, by actors across the political and ideological spectrum.

In fact, experts we interviewed frequently highlighted that the 'other side' or the 'opposition' (those working against these shared values) have been working in this way for decades. As researcher Shelley Dorrans wrote in a 2022 report: 'We picked up a real sense of urgency in the literature and our fieldwork; the progressive sector's opponents (the populist and Far Right, and other extremist groups) are seen to have been quicker to grasp the importance of this work and to immerse people in narratives that serve their aims and maintain the status quo.'[44]

39 Korobkova et al., 2023.
40 Manne, L., Cheyfitz, K., de Vries, M., Lowell, D., Pariser, E., Potts, E. & Simon, E.W. (2022) *Narrative Strategy: The Basics.* Liz Manne Strategy, [Link].
41 Manne et al., 2022.
42 Korobkova et al., 2023.
43 Korobkova et al., 2023.
44 Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

1.2

How does storytelling create change? (the high-level theory of change)

What does it take for systems-level interventions to achieve impact?

A series of recent research reports[45] analysing expert interviews, theory and a suite of historic case studies provides us with a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, overview of some of the 'factors' associated with impact in integrated storytelling or narrative strategy interventions of the kind Manne refers to above. We have summarised and simplified these factors below (please note they are not in priority order, or weighted equally).

Factors associated with impact[46]

- **Long-term:** 3–20 year interventions.
- **Large-scale 'trust-based' funding:** Sufficient flexible, trust-based funding, to match the scale of the challenge and the change.
- **Entertainment value/skilled storytelling:** Audiences find story content entertaining and engaging, and/or compelling, transporting and relevant to their experiences.
- **Multi-pronged strategies:** Multi-pronged coordinated interventions across culture, organising, strategic communications and advocacy (e.g. direct advocacy and lobbying efforts continue).
- **Rigorous narrative insight:** Rigorous understanding of: 1) current narratives and how they are maintained and reinforced, and 2) tested counter or new narratives proven as effective at reshaping how people think, feel and act.
- **Audience knowledge & audience agency:** Deep, tailored audience understanding that recognises audience differentiation, audience agency and varied reactions to story content.
- **Message saturation:** Broad message alignment creating a sustained 'surround-sound' effect and cumulative exposure.
- **Responsiveness to context:** Ability to respond and organise campaigns in reaction to socio-political context and key events (e.g. COVID, BLM protests etc.).
- **Power & infrastructure:** Active systems and practices that facilitate an equitable distribution of power. For example, ensuring people with lived experience of marginalisation lead interventions and have decision-making power, and that core strategy, design and research methods are rooted in co-creation, anti-oppression and decoloniality,[47] so that marginalised groups are not just represented in storytelling but are 'creating and moving them in equal partnership'.[48]
- **Collaboration, trust and networks:** Strong trust-based relationships and networks between all fields and players.
- **Strong 'narrative infrastructure':** Established networks, training, research and practice expertise, effective sharing of resources and learnings.

While there are a great number of different frameworks, tools and measures, and no single tool is entirely comprehensive, we believe these 'factors' to be well sourced and reflective of best practice at a high level. Throughout the report, we use this list as an indicative set of high-level 'criteria' to analyse the strengths and challenges of the current ecosystem as a whole.

[45] Korobkova et al., 2023.

[46] Factors are compiled, adapted and inspired by: Korobkova et al. (2023); FrameWorks Institute, 2020; USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) *Narrative Change and Impact: Analysis of In-Depth Interviews with Experts, Practitioners, and Funders in the Narrative Change Field,* [Link].

[47] See *PIRC Strategy 2023–2026,* [Link].

[48] Soriano, J., Phelan, J., Brown, K.F., Cortés, H. & Choi, J.H. (2019) *Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power.* ReFrame, [Link].

Not all stories do good – a moment for the backlash effect

It's important to note that not all stories intended to drive positive change are successful. A series of excellent reports (we recommend 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change) gather evidence that even those well-meaning attempts to harness the power of story for good can backfire.

For example, the depiction of suicide in young adult TV drama *13 Reasons Why* has been extensively studied, particularly following reports that viewing the show led to spikes in online searches for suicide, a number of attempted suicides and heightened depressive symptoms among at-risk viewers. Due to the backlash, Netflix removed the suicide scene, and collaborated with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for its second season, incorporating storylines of hope and healing, and modelling characters seeking support from peers, parents and professionals.[49]

Extensive research by Color of Change underlines that not all *representation* is good news either. Their comprehensive report *Normalising Injustice*[50] shows that crime TV shows have a powerful influence on public perception of the criminal justice system, race and gender – often distorting portrayals of black people, people of colour and women, and enforcing misinformation about crime and the criminal justice system. They underline that the genre largely excludes writers of colour, with 81% of showrunners being white men.

More recently, Netflix's block-buster climate change satire *Don't Look Up* has provoked debate and analysis questioning whether the portrayal of climate denial may in fact have served to exaggerate, normalise and/or reinforce science denial and/or suppress optimism and trust in climate action.[51] These examples underline the need for rigour across impact storytelling; the need for shared resources and collaboration, aligned research, methods and tools, as well as to ensure people with lived experience have decision-making power at every stage of production – as outlined above.

[49] Korobkova et al., 2023.

[50] Color of Change Hollywood, USC Norman Lear Center (2020) *Normalizing injustice: the dangerous misrepresentations that define television's scripted crime genre,* [Link].

[51] Mede, N.G. (2022) 'Science communication in the face of skepticism, populism, and ignorance: what "Don't Look Up" tells us about science denial – and what it doesn't', *Journal of Science Communication,* 21(05), pp. C05–C05, [Link].

1.3

We approach impact differently

In the introduction to Grossinger's book he writes: *'Art Works* features organizers who brought artists to their strategy tables to contribute their ideas … and artists who deployed their art work in service of social movements. The book explores the challenges of these collaborations.'[52] Here, Grossinger surfaces a simple fact: artists and organisers think differently. As do journalists and researchers, script writers and comms officers.

Crucially, how we are trained to approach the ideas of story, of impact and of social change differ significantly. A (highly) simplified summary of the differences in approach we encountered throughout our research is expressed below:

Story-first e.g. journalist or artist	**Impact-first** e.g. campaigner or activist
seek to tell the best story possible	seek to tell the most impactful story
begin with the 'story' first	begin with a specific social-impact objective
unused to drawing on narrative or target audience research or recommendations, often reticent they might inhibit the storytelling or creative process	draw on insights and research to shape and inform the stories told – see research as the route to impact, and a core part of the creative process
led by core values perceived as 'neutral' from their training, like truthfulness or fairness, or duty of care to participants	led by core *and* political values, often seeking to *persuade* audiences of specific values or policies
think about impact *after* story production, e.g. in terms of audience reach, engagement or audience feedback and/or awareness, and public understanding	think about impact, measurement and indicators at the start of the storytelling process, e.g. deliberately targeting public awareness, attitude shifts or behaviour change and/or policy change or fundraising
likely to focus on the impact of their individual piece of work	more likely to think about the *collective* impact of multiple interventions and long-term campaigns

The effects of these differences in approach will crop up throughout the ideas and literature we address in this report. They have a significant impact on both the potential and the challenges facing this diverse ecosystem.

[52] Grossinger, 2023

2

Defining the Key Terms

In this chapter you'll find

- A summary of how the ecosystem is currently using its key terminology
- A set of 'defendable' definitions selected by our research team, which will be used throughout the report.

2.1

Use of terminology – alignment, convergence and how much it matters

Almost universally, the reports we reviewed and the interviews we conducted described a lack of consistency in the use of the key terms that define, describe and animate the work of this ecosystem. As the Sheila McKechnie Foundation put it, when cataloguing the wide variety of terms used to describe socially engaged art and practice 'this list is not exhaustive … and that can be exhausting'.[53]

For example, 'narrative' was the most common recurring term in the literature we reviewed, followed by 'story'. But the two terms were often used interchangeably, or the hierarchical relationship (described below) was not applied consistently. The Norman Lear Center reports the same inconsistency between ideas of 'narrative' and 'culture': 'Writings in this field rely on different frameworks,' they write, 'for instance, different visions of how culture and narrative are related to each other. In some organisations' views, narrative is a subset of culture and in others, culture is embedded in narrative.'[54]

This lack of consistency is to be expected. As the FrameWorks Institute puts it, 'knowledge' in this fast-emerging ecosystem is 'divided across disciplines and dispersed among practitioners, scholars, activists, policy experts, communications experts, creatives and organisers', each with their own deeply held pre-existing terminologies.[55]

In this context, however, it is important to note that significant progress towards alignment has been made. As Liz Manne emphasises, 'without any kind of official coordinating body' there is a 'wide-ranging, multidisciplinary community' that shares much 'common ground'.[56] While individuals might not use the same 'technical' definitions, we often found consistency in their broad application.

How much does the misalignment matter?

We found that experts were divided about how much the misalignment of terminology matters. These views split into three perspectives:

1 A major barrier to progress and a call for more technical alignment

Several interviewees and recent literature view the lack of consistency as a major barrier to progress and impact – and advocate for further work to create alignment. Indeed, some expressed strident rejection of use of selected terms or of emerging definitions of specific terms.

We found this to be particularly true among those used to operating within a more academic context, rather than a practice-focused environment. For example, the FrameWorks Institute – which has a deep rooting in academic disciplines like anthropology and cognitive linguistics – underlines the risks that 'discussions [in the ecosystem] are frequently unclear and imprecise. People use terms and concepts in different and often unspecified ways.'[57] As we explore in Part 3, perspectives on the importance of terminology are closely associated with views on how 'formalised' the field should become.

[53] Boyd, E. (2022) 'What can art teach us about social change?', *Sheila McKechnie Foundation blog*, [Link].

[54] Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

[55] FrameWorks Institute (2020) Mindset Shifts: *What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?* [Link].

[56] Potts, E., Lowell, D. & Manne, L. (2022) *Spotlight On Impact Storytelling: Mapping and recommendations for the narrative and cultural strategies ecosystem*, [Link].

[57] FrameWorks Institute, 2020.

This lack of consistency is seen as a barrier to collaboration, to sharing learnings, to training – and perhaps most significantly to building funder confidence. As Beadie Finzi of Doc Society put it, 'The sloppiness in language is undermining the entire field … in both financing [and] distribution.'

2 A major barrier to progress + a call for less jargon

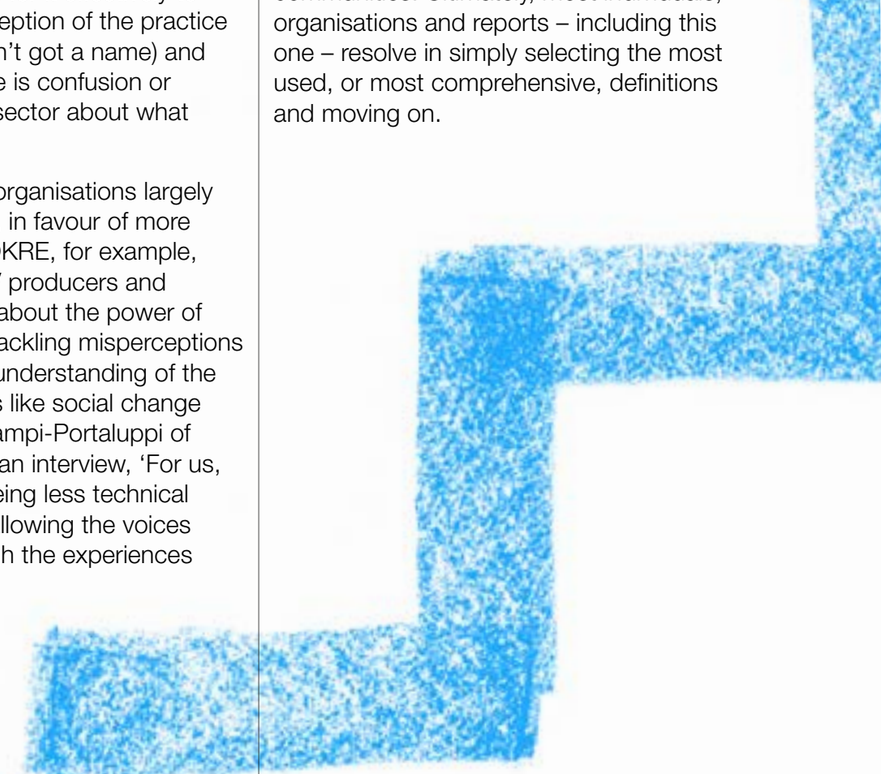
A number of our interviewees – particularly those working with the creative or entertainment industries, or in grassroots organising – argued that more accessible and less technical language should be used. As academic and artist Toby Lowe writes (of participatory art practices): 'If we do not have a common language to describe the work, then we cannot advocate for it effectively to raise the values and perception of the practice (we cannot sell what hasn't got a name) and it also suggests that there is confusion or disagreement within the sector about what practice is.'[58]

In practice, a number of organisations largely avoid technical language, in favour of more 'everyday' terminology. OKRE, for example, who work closely with TV producers and film-makers, talk directly about the power of entertainment media in 'tackling misperceptions and expanding people's understanding of the world' – rather than ideas like social change or narrative.[59] As Jose Campi-Portaluppi of Equimundo described in an interview, 'For us, it has been an effort of being less technical about what we say and allowing the voices of those who lived through the experiences to shape what we say.'

3 We have enough alignment = let's focus on doing the work at scale

We also found that several experts expressed frustration with the fixation on terminology inconsistencies. While they recognised it as a challenge, they were often more concerned that the focus on terminology might slow, obscure or halt efforts to *do* this work at scale.

Others were quick to highlight that it is normal to tailor language used for different target audiences. Just as doctors might use highly technical language when speaking to colleagues but accessible language when addressing members of the public, so too can we use technical language in strategy and academic contexts and accessible language when engaging creatives or organising among communities. Ultimately, most individuals, organisations and reports – including this one – resolve in simply selecting the most used, or most comprehensive, definitions and moving on.



[58] Lowe, T. (2011) *Audit of practice: 'Arts in participatory settings'*. ArtWorks North East, Helix Arts.

[59] See 'Our Mission', *OKRE*, [Link].

2.1
Definitions of key terminology

Throughout our interviews and literature review, we captured all the definitions, quotes and metaphors used to explain key terminology across the impact storytelling ecosystem. In the table below, we have attempted to summarise what we heard, alongside our proposed definitions. The definitions we've chosen are an attempt to reflect the recurring themes, elements and functionalities of the definitions we heard, to use simple (but not simplistic) language, to be dynamic (not fully settled, possible to nuance), and to work within the theory of change described in Part 1.

Term

Story

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
The smallest functioning unit. Could be used to describe a discrete unit or a piece of content (video, film, blog). Has specific structural features – characters, a plot, voice, development and a message.	Stories generally involve characters, setting and plot: something happens to someone somewhere.[60] They can be single-authored or participatory, use different media forms, be immersive or embodied, and they are always experienced by an audience.[61]	'Stories are like stars. Individual, shiny and bright, they move and inspire us.' – Chang, Manne & Potts (2018).[62]

Term

Narrative

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
A collection of stories linked together in a systematic way (e.g. by a pattern) or shared by a group of people or embedded in a particular culture. As part of a narrative, stories obtain new, deeper meaning. Narratives shape our social, cultural, political and ecological worlds. Narratives do not have a specific structure or timeframe. Narratives can be further described/nuanced as overt/subtle, dominant/secondary, public, values-based, etc.	Narratives bring together the values, beliefs and stories that shape how we see people and places, communities and cultures, ideologies and institutions. We use narratives to interpret and make meaning of the past and present, and to envision the future.[63]	'What tiles are to mosaics, stories are to narratives. The relationship is symbiotic; stories bring narratives to life by making them relatable and accessible, while narratives infuse stories with deeper meaning.'- Narrative Initiative[64] 'Just as our bodies are made of blood and flesh, our identities are made of narratives.' – Reinsborough & Canning (2010).[65]

Term

Deep Narrative or meta-narrative

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
A deeper layer of narratives that underpin and unite a collection of narratives. They are either not recognised/invisible or are accepted as 'unquestionable truths' by individuals, groups and communities. The term is mostly used by expert practitioners.	Deep narratives are the unquestioned 'truths' that have been normalised by society and feel like common sense. They structure how entire societies interpret the way things work.[66] Deep narratives sit beneath other more specific narratives and act as a lens through which we assess historical events, the present moment and possible futures.[67] They inform our basic concepts of identity, community and belonging and therefore could underpin numerous social and environmental causes at the same time.[68] Deep narratives are deeply embedded in a culture or society and are consistently repeated, reinforced and reproduced over time.[69]	'Deep narratives comprise what we view as "common sense" or "natural".' – Narrative Initiative (2019).[70] 'Deep narratives – often invisible, unconscious existential concepts – are like the roots of the tree, supplying the tree with the emotional nourishment it needs to grow. Filled with that resonance, narratives are like the trunk of the tree, infusing the leaves in the crown with the nutrients from the roots. Those narratives give life to stories – the individual leaves in the crown.' – Braithwaite.[71]

60 Manne, L. et al. (2022) *Narrative Strategy: The Basics.* Liz Manne Strategy, [Link].
61 Ibid.
62 Chang, J., Manne, L. & Potts, E. (2018) 'A Conversation about Cultural Strategy', *Medium,* [Link].
63 Lynn, J., & Kathlene, L. (2020) *Narrative change for health and racial equity: Exploring capacity and alignment.* The California Endowment.
64 (2019) 'Narrative Change: A Working Definition (and Some Related Terms)', *Narrative Initiative*, [Link].
65 Reinsborough, P., & Canning, D. (2010) Re:Imagining Change: *How to use story-based strategy to win campaigns, build movements, and change the world.* 1st ed. Center for Story-Based Strategy, [Link].
66 Lynn, J., & Kathlene, L. (2020) *Narrative change for health and racial equity: Exploring capacity and alignment.* The California Endowment.
67 Taylor, R. (2021) *Transforming narrative waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK,* [Link].
68 Kim, J., Hynes, L., & Shirazi, N. (2017) Toward new gravity: *Charting a course for the Narrative Initiative.* Narrative Initiative, [Link].
69 Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* Heard, [Link].
70 (2019) 'Narrative Change: A Working Definition (and Some Related Terms)', *Narrative Initiative*, [Link].
71 Braithwaite, M. Module 1: *The Narrative Change Ecosystem*. New Media Advocacy Project, [Link].

2.2
Definitions of the Key Terminology

Term

Arts and culture for social change
including: activist ('artivism'), participatory, socially-engaged and community-based art

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
At one end of the scale is artist-centred work with the intended impact on the viewer, often funded via major state-subsidised institutions (e.g. Ai Weiwei, Olafur Eliasson). On the other end of the scale is community-led (bottom-up) work where the impact is focused on the participants and community (usually non-professional) creators. Artivism, from visual art to performance, can be a combination of both; impact is intended on both the viewer and the activists/participants.	Different methods for creating and facilitating artworks, performance, interventions and activities (e.g. workshops) with an intention for social impact.[72] For some works, the *process* of creation is the intended impact; for others, the final *output* is intended to impact the audience, participants, social attitudes and/or legislation.[73] [74]	'Both participatory art and community art are important in connecting everyday cultural participation with the self-consciousness of contemporary art practice.' – Matarasso (2019, p. 19). Arts, cultural and community engagement 'contributes meaningfully to the development of self-governance and organic growth through egalitarian cross-sectoral alliances and cultural and social entrepreneurship.'– Mutibwa (2022, p. 1).

Term

Mindsets (strong associated to deep narrative)

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
Focuses on ways of *thinking* rather than changes in *discourse* – focuses on people, rather than media content. General in scope – broad ways of thinking that shape understandings of whole issues (not restricted to a single topic or issue). Durable part of culture – they persist over time, and are embedded in the content of our culture, often 'tacit' or unquestioned. This term is mostly used by more academic experts operating in psychology, cultural psychology, anthropology and cognitive linguistics.	Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we make sense of the world and what we do. They can alternately normalise or problematise aspects of the existing social order.[75]	'We use "mindsets" as a working term for shared ways of thinking … The term "mindsets" has limitations – for example, the idea of mindset shifts can be counterintuitive (if minds are set, this suggests they aren't changeable) – and we are not suggesting it is necessarily the best one for all purposes. Yet the term does have advantages. For example, it allows for clarity in distinguishing between changes in thinking and changes in discourse, and avoids the conflation of these that sometimes leads to imprecision in methodology and practice.'[76]

[72] Mutibwa, DH. (2022) 'The (Un)Changing Political Economy of Arts, Cultural and Community Engagement, the Creative Economy and Place-Based Development during Austere Times', *Societies*, 12(5):135.

[73] Matarasso, F. (2019) *A Restless Art: How participation won, and why it matters.*

[74] Duncombe, S. (2016) 'Does it Work? The Effect of Activist Art', *Social Research: An International Quarterly,* 83(1), pp. 115–134.

[75] FrameWorks Institute (2020) *Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?* [Link].

[76] ibid

Term

Narrative Change

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
Work designed to influence how large numbers of people think, feel and act over time. Rooted in deep insight to understand current or dominant narratives and tested narratives to maintain or replace them. Coordinated activity by a diverse range of disciplines, practices and organisations at scale – aligned around the same narrative strategy. Often implied to mean working towards social good and social equity – but there is recognition that the same strategies are used by opposition or 'bad' actors.	Narrative change is the concerted effort to challenge, modify or replace existing narratives that perpetuate inequality and uphold an unjust status quo, through the creation and deployment of new or different narratives.[77] It is an effort to 'tell a better story, move hearts and minds, and drive lasting policy and culture change'.[78]	'Narrative change work rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that in order to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to the ways in which this takes place.' – Davidson (2016).[79]

Term

Narrative Power

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
The power to change dominant narratives, social and organisational structures; the power to create system change. The ability to make the narrative so prominent that it can force debate, reflection and restructuring. Often associated with the engagement of people and communities with lived experience of an issue or narrative.	Narrative power is the ability to change the norms and rules our society lives by.[80]	'Narrative power is the capacity of narratives to produce effects by ascribing meaning and mobilising collective action.' – Hagström & Gustafsson (2019).[81] 'Narrative change should empower and give agency to those impacted by harmful narratives.' – Shelley Dorrans & Heard.

[77] USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) *Narrative Change and Impact: Analysis of In-Depth Interviews with Experts, Practitioners, and Funders in the Narrative Change Field,* [Link].

[78] Cornman-Levy, D. (2021) 'Narrative Change: A Vital Component of Advancing Gender Equity', *Medium*, [Link].

[79] Davidson, B. (2016) *The role of narrative change in influencing policy.* African Scholars for Knowledge (ASK) Justice, [Link].

[80] Robinson, R. (2018) *Changing Our Narrative About Narrative: The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power*, [Link].

[81] Hagström, L., & Gustafsson, K. (2019) *Narrative power: how storytelling shapes East Asian international politics*, [Link].

2.2
Definitions of the Key Terminology

Term
Narrative Infrastructure

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
A collection of organisations, people, networks and structures that support a particular narrative and give it 'power'. A network of agents/agencies enabling narrative change actors to create and disseminate new narratives.	Systems associated with narrative power including organisational resources, leadership development, coalition-building and engaging artists and communities to create and disseminate new narratives.[82]	'Narrative infrastructure is singularly about equipping a tight network of people organising on the ground and working within various sectors to develop strategic and powerful narrative ideas, and then, against the odds of the imbalanced resources stacked against us, immerse people in a sustained series of narrative experiences required to enduringly change hearts, minds, behaviours and relationships. In the end, we can define narrative infrastructure as the ability to learn, create, broadcast and immerse, and to do all four things strategically – both sequenced and integrated.' – Rashad Robinson.[83]

Term
Narrative oceans

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
Large-scale interconnected cultural and normative ecosystems that might be invisible to people but which predefine socialisation from early ages and "frame" the behaviours of adults throughout their lives.	Narrative oceans are the ecosystems of narratives, ideas, and cultural norms that shape the behaviours, mindsets, and worldviews of millions of people.[84]	'*Like Nemo, we are all swimming in a kind of ocean — except instead of water swirling around us, there are narratives. These narratives feel like reality to us — like the air we breathe. They are our world.' (Evans, 2022)*[85]

Term
Storytelling

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
A broad, natural human instinct. A way to connect with people emotionally, on a deeper level. A technique used in all parts of work and life. Advanced practitioners criticise the use of 'storytelling for social change' in place of 'narrative change', viewing storytelling as more general, less strategic or less rigorous than 'narrative change'.	Storytelling is a narrative exercise that aims to emotionally connect different audiences.[86] Strategic storytelling brings together stories that illustrate systemic solutions.[87]	'Narrative and storytelling are akin, they are related. I think of storytelling as the lightweight cousin of narrative.' – Felipe Viveros, interview.

Term
Culture Strategy

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
Sometimes used in place of or conflated with narrative strategy and narrative change. Culture is the prevailing beliefs, values and customs of a group. Culture is also the set of practices (including storytelling and artmaking) that contain, transmit or express ideas, values, habits, and behaviours between individuals and groups. Culture strategy is associated with a strategy focusing on culture and the arts, but not always including all elements associated with narrative change (e.g. advocacy, organising or strategic comms).	Culture strategy is a practice that leverages the catalytic and emotional power of culture and the arts to shift attitudes, behaviours, resources, narratives and power.[88]	'If systems are the bones of a healthy society, pluralist culture is its breath, heartbeat and muscles; one cannot flourish without the other. If we who believe in justice do not engage these [culture and narrative change] strategies, others will' – Bridgit Antoinette Evans. 'The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is – it's to imagine what is possible.' – bell hooks.[89]

Term
Frames

Important elements / themes	Proposed definition(s)	Supporting quote
Mental structures, sometimes unconscious. Help organise complex information and assign meaning. Help select and respond to patterns/issues/ language cues that are perceived as important. Subconsciously activated by devices like images, stories, stereotypes and slogans. Socially shared by members of the same group, culture, community, etc.	Frames are mental structures that help us quickly make sense of complex information. They are socially shared, persistent over time, are activated by communicative cues (language, images, stories, stereotypes and slogans), and generate unconscious, intuitive and emotional responses.[90] When frames are applied to a social problem, they lead to conclusions about the nature of that problem, the responsibilities of various parties, potential solutions, and the actions required.[91]	'The framing of a narrative is an intentional and strategic choice, determining who is in and who is out of the stories we tell and the approaches we propose. In this way, framing provides a "casting of characters" and impacts how audiences name movements and their actions.' – Szymanski (2021).[92]

[82] Kalra, N., Borges Farfan, C., Robles, L., & Stachowiak, S. (2021) *Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity.* ORS Impact, [Link] ; Wang, H. et al. (2021) 'Communication Infrastructure and Community Mobilization', *The Journal of Development Communication*, 32(2), pp. 73–86.

[83] Robinson, R. (2018) Changing Our Narrative About Narrative: *The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power*. Othering and Belonging Institute, [Link].

[84] Evans, B.A. (2022) 'To change the world, transform narrative oceans', *Medium* [Link].

[85] ibid

[86] Expert interview with Jose Campi-Portaluppi, Equimundo.

[87] Expert interview with Dora Meade, NEON

[88] The Culture Group. (2014). *Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy.* The Culture Group, [Link]

[89] hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Marging to Center.* Boston: South End Press.

[90] Lakoff, G. (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate.* Cited in Kim, J. et al. (2017) Towards New Gravity: Charting a Course for the Narrative Initiative.

[91] Apollon, D. et al. (2014) *Moving the race conversation forward: How media covers racism, and other barriers to productive media discourse.*

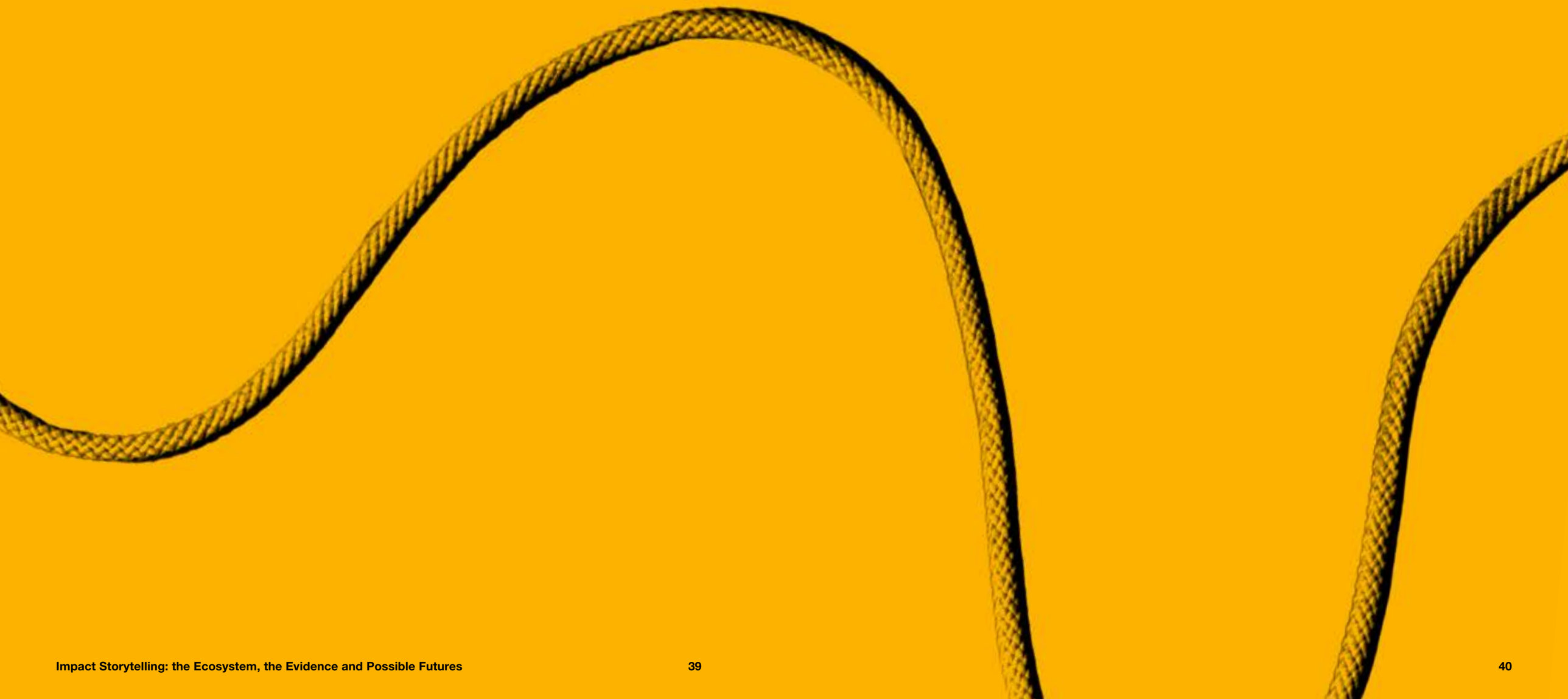
[92] Szymanski, A. (2021) *How to build narrative power and co-create a just future.* Resilience, [Link].

3

Understanding the Ecosystem

In this chapter you'll find

- an overview of the 'impact storytelling' ecosystem, how we define it, the disciplines that underpin it and the key fields of practice within it
- a high-level mapping of the key players within the global ecosystem and an in-depth look at the UK community today
- an analysis of the ecosystem's strengths, alongside the challenges and barriers to progress and impact.



3.1

Is this an ecosystem, a field or a discipline?

As we saw in Part 2, a wide range of terms are used to refer to the work of this ecosystem. Conversations and analysis of this work include reference to a dizzying array of terms, from 'artivism'[93] and 'cultural organising', to 'impact storytelling' and 'social impact entertainment', to 'framing' and 'narrative change'.

Unhelpfully, we often found significant inconsistencies in how these terms – and their relationship to each other – are explained and classified. In particular, the designations 'ecosystem', 'field' and 'discipline' are used fluidly and often interchangeably. We heard references to the 'field of the social impact of the arts',[94] to the 'embryonic distinct *discipline*' of narrative change and to a 'pop culture for social change *ecosystem*'.[95]

Technically, each of these taxonomies have distinct definitions, which shape how we should analyse them. We expect consistency of terminology, training and methodology from a 'discipline', while we are likely to accept much greater variance within an 'ecosystem'.

As we set out to analyse the vast networks of individuals and organisations associated with this work, we found it helpful to distinguish clearly between each of these categories as follows:

- **Ecosystem:** A model to understand the relationship between fields of study and practices. This ecological metaphor is often used to examine the contingent nature of relationships among actors in dynamic social networks.[96]
- **Field:** An expansive area of action, operation or investigation, a subject of activity or specialisation. A field is composed of researchers and practitioners who have been trained in various disciplines and professions but all focus on a common problem area.[97]
- **Discipline:** An area of knowledge generation with accumulated expertise, terminologies, research methods and recognised departments within higher education.[98]

[93] Portmanteau of artist-activism, coined in the 1990s in reference to the work of Chicana/o artists and the Zapatistas in Mexico. See: Sandoval, C., & Guisela, L. (2008) 'Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color', in Everett, A. (ed) *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 81–108, [Link].

[94] Lindström Sol, S., Gustrén, C., Nelhans, G. et al. (2022) 'Mapping research on the social impact of the arts: what characterises the field?' *Open Res Europe*, pp. 1–124, [Link].

[95] Sachrajda, A., & Youssef, S. (2023) *Building narrative and cultural change infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US.* Power of Pop Fund, [Link].

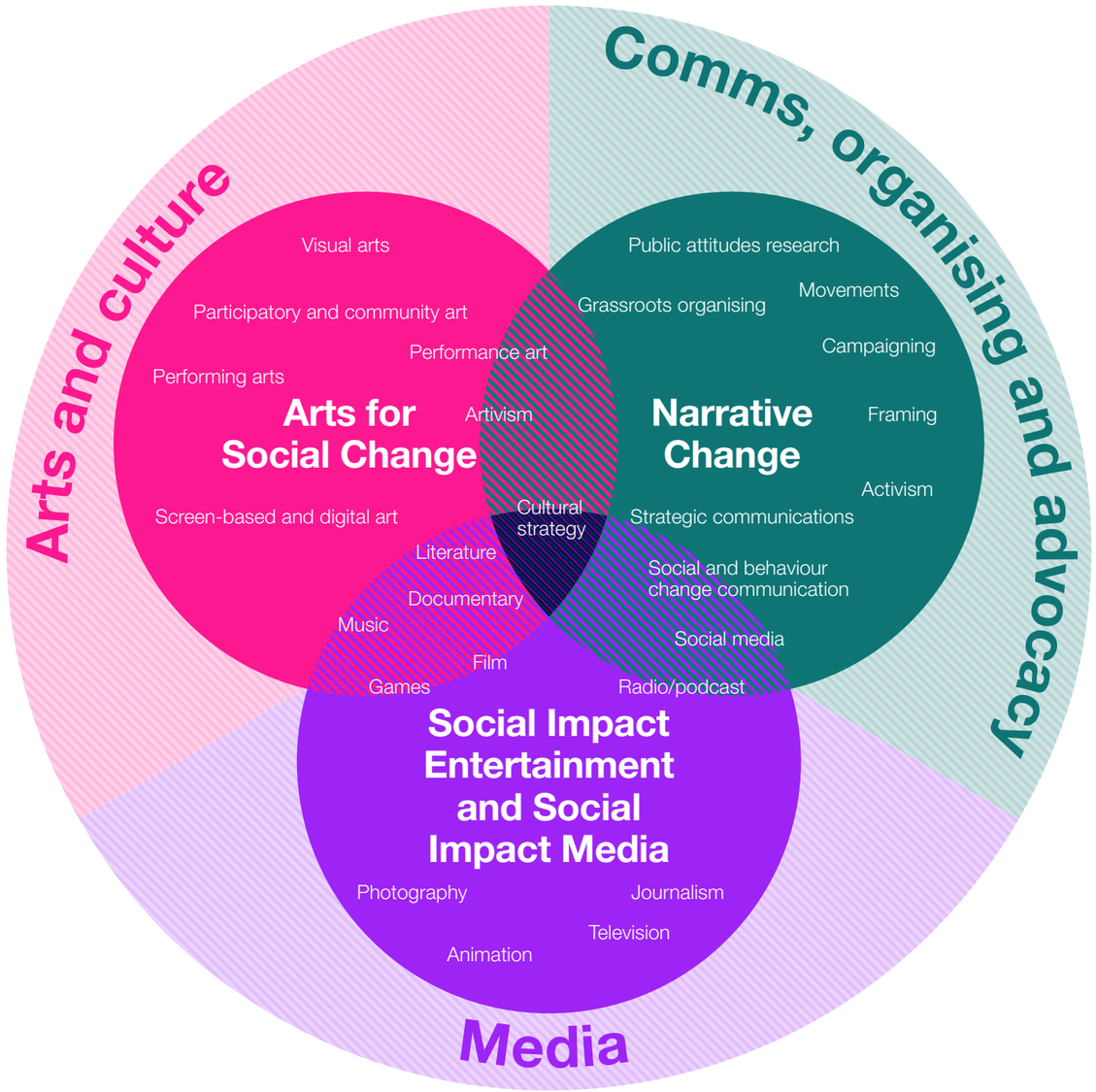
[96] Mars, M.M., & Bronstein, J.L. (2018) 'The Promise of the Organizational Ecosystem Metaphor: An Argument for Biological Rigor', *Journal of Management Inquiry,* 27(4), pp. 382–391.

[97] Sommer, R. (2000) 'Discipline and field of study: A search for clarification', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 20(1), pp. 1–4.

[98] Krishnan, A. (2009) *What are Academic Disciplines?* NCRM Working Paper Series 03/09. University of Southampton.

The Impact Storytelling ecosystem

Fig 4. This diagram provides a simplified map of the three key fields that comprise the emerging impact storytelling ecosystem: arts for social change, narrative change and social impact entertainment (SIE) and social impact media. We have singled out some of the main formats and practices that make up these fields, although we acknowledge there remains significant fluidity and overlap. However, we have also sought to reflect the significant remaining silos between the three fields. (Please note that while we hope this approach will be useful to our readers we recognise that it is one of many ways of describing this work and is not intended to be prescriptive.)



3.1

Is this an ecosystem, a field or a discipline?

Impact storytelling: an emerging ecosystem (in formation)

For the purposes of this report, we found it both most accurate and useful to conceive of 'impact storytelling' as a broad, inclusive *ecosystem* that encompasses the full spectrum of fields, disciplines, organisations and practitioners we came across.

Throughout our research, we found 'storytelling' was used by those referring to the most diverse range of work. Often this included a range of cultural actors, like visual artists, museums and festivals, and even athletes (who were more likely to be excluded from narrower studies), as well as strategic communications, grassroots organising and advocacy.

As explored in Part 1, we found that the players across this diverse ecosystem operate and focus on a wide range of areas, media formats and channels, utilising a vast diversity of methodologies, practices and terminology. However, they do share the same social purpose, and foundational belief in the power of story to 'shape our realities, influencing the way we think, feel, believe, act and relate to each other and the world'.[99] They can therefore be said to be connected in a common, emerging ecosystem.

Three key fields: 'narrative change', 'arts for social change' and 'social impact entertainment and media'

Again, for the purposes of this work, we found it useful to identify three broad 'fields' that sit within the impact storytelling ecosystem:

Narrative change

We found that 'narrative change' (see Part 2 for definition) is most accurately and usefully described as an 'emerging field'. While still an 'expansive area' of action, containing 'researchers and practitioners who have been trained in various disciplines and professions', a common 'focus' is shared.[100] As the Norman Lear Center describes, what used to be a distributed 'ecosystem' has become the 'nascent field' of narrative change.[101] As we've explored, as part of this 'field' formation effort, significant investment has been made to generate greater alignment of terminology (see Part 2), as well as to generate inclusive but broadly aligned methodologies, tools, frameworks and best practices (see Part 4).

This process of consolidation and formalisation is beginning to create greater unity of practice. For example, a few years ago, influential global non-profit Doc Society began to use the term 'narrative strategy' to describe its work as 'connected stories that forge, spread and reinforce beneficial narratives and counter harmful ones'.[102] Inspired and underpinned by the work of narrative change strategist Liz Manne, they have now adapted their theory of change and measurement frameworks in alignment with the latest methods in the narrative change field. In this way, narrative change appears to be emerging as a central 'field', within the broader impact storytelling ecosystem, which an increasing number of organisations are working to identify and align themselves with.

[99] USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) *Narrative Change and Impact: Analysis of In-Depth Interviews with Experts, Practitioners, and Funders in the Narrative Change Field,* [Link].

[100] Sommer, R. (2000) 'Discipline and field of study: A search for clarification', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 20(1), pp. 1–4.

[101] Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* Heard, [Link].

[102] (2022) 'Our Theory of Change', *Doc Society,* [Link].

Arts for social change

In the strategies of nearly all arts and cultural organisations, you will find some mention of an intent to 'benefit', 'impact', 'enhance' or 'challenge' the lives and mindsets of their audiences or visitors. In the broadest sense, you could say that *all* arts and culture for the public has *some* social impact.

Within our ecosystem mapping, however, we looked only for examples of arts practices and disciplines that employ both storytelling and an explicit intention for social change. We use 'arts for social change' as an umbrella term for this field.[103]

Social impact entertainment and social impact media

Like arts and culture, all media produced for audiences can be said to make some impression on their viewers. But the storytellers themselves do not always explicitly aim for impact. So for our mapping, we looked for examples of media practices and disciplines with an intention for social change; this we put under the umbrella field of social impact entertainment (SIE) and social impact media.

The term SIE is used by the Skoll Center for SIE at UCLA, a centre that aims 'to advance the role of entertainment and performing arts to inspire and drive social change'. We also add social impact media to our mapping, to incorporate forms like impact or solutions journalism that would not consider themselves 'entertainment' but are adjacent within the field.

The ecosystem is underpinned by a range of established academic 'disciplines'

Finally, we identified a number of established disciplines that underpin and inform the foundations of the impact storytelling ecosystem. Unlike the above fields, these are established and recognised within academic institutions with specialist terminology, training and often accredited undergraduate and graduate programmes at higher education facilities.

These disciplines include, but are by no means limited to:

- Social sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, cognitive science, political sciences and policy studies)
- Linguistics
- Theatre and performance studies
- Fine art
- Cultural studies
- Science communication
- Behavioural economics
- Marketing
- Media studies and journalism

[103] Belfiore, E. (2006) *The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?* London: Policy Exchange Limited.

3.2

To formalise or not to formalise?

Throughout our research phase, we noted a divergence in opinion over whether the broad impact storytelling ecosystem ought to be formalised into a field of its own. Would formalising as a field: developing greater consistency on terms, practices and methodology – benefit practitioners, researchers, funders and the myriad supporting organisations in the ecosystem?

We covered the debate around consistency and use of terminology in Part 2. Terminology forms part of the formalisation debate, but the latter encompasses more than just which words and phrases are used – it concerns practices, methodology and aims too.

Efforts to demystify and 'open up' the impact storytelling ecosystem

Several interviewees highlighted a trend towards opening up the impact storytelling ecosystem. For example, the Global Narrative Hive is a network working to connect everyone working across the broad ecosystem around the world – from artists and designers to researchers, organisers and marketing professionals. They conceptualise the ecosystem as open to all who share common 'visions of a more just world'.[104]

Many view the efforts to create a 'broad' and expansive ecosystem as a crucial component of success.[105] As identified in Part 1, the Norman Lear Center stipulates that investing in 'multi-pronged' intervention is essential to success. These efforts are not necessarily seen as in 'opposition' to efforts to formalise at an academic or technical level.

However, referencing the sudden proliferation of agencies and organisations labelling their work as 'impact storytelling', art/theatre/film-for-social-change, 'narrative change' or the many ambiguous variations of these terms, a few experts cautioned more broadly against sacrificing the rigour and consistency of methodology and practice. As Brett Davidson articulated in our interview with him, 'There is always a danger when a term becomes a trend because it starts to become a short-cut for thinking – a term without precision – where everybody thinks they know what it means, but nobody really does for sure.' Additionally, the lack of terminological and methodological consistency risks losing the confidence of funders.

Emerging efforts to formalise impact storytelling

The investment of university departments and research centres – led by American institutions like UCLA's Skoll Center for SIE, the USC Norman Lear Center and American University's Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) – reflect broader efforts to support and formalise the training, research methodology and creative practice development of those in the ecosystem.

Any kind of formalisation from a disparate ecosystem into a recognised field involves a process of gatekeeping, deciding what is included and what is not. We can see one example of this early gatekeeping in the Narrative Directory from IRIS. The organisers have intentionally included 'a wide range of entities who see impact storytelling and narrative change … as central to their work'. However, they have excluded 'content creators or media production companies, unless they are aligned with and working on impact storytelling and narrative change strategies in the service of social justice'.

[104] Logan, James. (2023) *Conditions to Flourish: Understanding the Ecosystem for Narrative Power.* Global Narrative Hive, [Link].

[105] Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change.* USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

UK university departments in the impact storytelling ecosyste

Within the UK, there is currently no dominant academic centre that acts as a hub of research or practice for impact storytelling. However, there is a growing number of university-based programmes and research centres that indicate an interest in the potential of greater formalisation of work on media, arts and culture for social change:

- **University of Westminster –** Media, Campaigning and Social Change MA
- **University of Loughborough –** Communication, Media and Development MA
- **Institute of Development Studies –** MA Power, Participation & Social Change
- **University of Sussex –** Media Practice for Development and Social Change MA and Power, Participation and Social Change MA (both programmes starting in September 2024)
- **Royal College of Art –** Social impact is integrated into teaching and research, such as the Digital Direction MA and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design
- **University of Leicester –** Postgraduate programme in Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries
- **University of Leeds –** The Centre for Cultural Value focuses on the evaluation of arts/media and culture. While its research and practice are industry focused, its outputs thus far have been limited.
- **Guildhall School –** Institute for Social Impact Research in the Performing Arts

All of the university courses and centres in the UK use slightly different language to describe their area or focus. The term most used seems to be 'social change', highlighting work in areas like social inequality, human rights, gender inequality and climate crisis.

As for a focus on social and behaviour change communications (SBCC), health messaging and policy change, there are several centres of excellence and programmes of study:

- UCL, Brunel and Bedfordshire, respectively, all have interdisciplinary research centres devoted to testing and evaluating behaviour change design and communication.
- A significant portion of the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is focused on the design of interfaces and devices used in health-related behaviour change (e.g. University of Bristol, UCL and the Open University).
- Specifically for the field of science communication, there is a handful of postgraduate programmes, although among SciComm practitioners, the MSc at Imperial College London is probably the best known and respected.

While the establishment of a field of study results in the professionalisation of practice and theory, it also involves processes of developing jargon106 and clearly defined terminology. As discussed in Part 2, the creation of technical language and aligned methodologies can advance impact and help to build funder confidence – but it can also reduce inclusivity.

[106] Becher, T. (1987) 'Disciplinary discourse', *Studies in Higher Education,* 12(3), pp. 261–274, [Link].

3.3

Mapping the Roles and Players in the Impact Storytelling Ecosystem

There are thousands of individuals and organisations working across the impact storytelling ecosystem in the UK. All of these players fulfil different roles in the ecosystem. While the diagram in 3.1 illustrates the three key fields that make up the ecosystem, the diagram on page 49 maps out the variety of roles that animate it. We have built on three categorisations of players in the impact storytelling ecosystem, designed by Liz Manne,[107] in the visual metaphor of a theatrical production: impact storytellers, support crew and backers. We have also added the other vital players, without whom there would be no one and nothing to impact: the audience.

[107] Potts, E., Lowell, D. & Manne, L. (2022) *Spotlight On Impact Storytelling: Mapping and recommendations for the narrative and cultural strategies ecosystem,* [Link].

3.3

Mapping the Roles and Players in the Impact Storytelling Ecosystem

Fig 5. This diagram employs the visual metaphor of a theatre to represent the different roles of the players in the impact storytelling ecosystem, as developed by Liz Manne.

Support crew

Research, Evaluation and Learning
Research
Evaluation and measurement
Content testing
Strategy

Trainers and Cohorts
Training and coaching
Cohorts
Fellowships
Leadership development

Conveners and Network Weavers
Convenings
Tables and hubs
Groups
Newsletters

Impact storytellers

Artists and Cultural Groups
Film-makers
Artists
Theatre creators
Comedians
Musicians
Podcasters
Writers
Game creators

Strategic Communications
Strategic comms writers/designers
Digital content creators
Paid advertising
Shared/social media creators
Earned media (press)
Owned (newsletters)
Rapid response

Grassroots and Field Organizing
Campaign designers
Direct action
Live event directors and instigators

Backers

Foundations and Primary Funders

Regrantors and Funding Distributors

Networks for Funders

Audience

Viewers, readers and media users
Participants in arts projects
Local communities
Online communities
Fandoms
Faith communities

Support crew
These players conduct research, provide training and convene networks within the ecosystem. They are vital in holding the ecosystem together, including providing evaluation of projects, maintaining and improving professional skills of storytellers and bringing other players together.

Impact storytellers
These are the practitioners leading the public-facing messaging. They range from the obvious (film-makers and artists) to the strategic communications practitioners in narrative change organisations to the grassroots organisers and campaigners.

Backers
These are the funders, distributors of funding and the networks that build communities of practice amongst public funders and philanthropic foundations. The backers provide the resources for the work in the ecosystem.

Audience
A performance without an audience is merely a rehearsal. The audience in the impact storytelling ecosystem take the messages of the stories forward; they act on calls to action and incorporate the lessons into their daily lives. Decades of audience studies have demonstrated how audiences are not passive consumers of media and stories; they are active and creative in participating in the practice of spreading stories. This dynamic has grown even more complex in the past decade or so of near-ubiquitous engagement with social media. Audiences now physically (literally) take stories with them everywhere they go.

3.4

Analysing the ecosystem: strengths

With reference to the 'factors associated with success' (see Part 1.2), we conducted a high-level analysis of the existing international impact storytelling ecosystem and narrative change field with a particular focus on what that means for the UK's ecosystem.

Ambition, shared values and motivation

Across our expert interviews and research review, we were consistently struck by the energy, ambition and conviction that spans the breadth and depth of this ecosystem. As Beadie Finzi of Doc Society articulated, 'It's easy to get knocked down in the details. At this moment in society and in culture, we remain unabashedly, absolutely sure of the role of storytellers in society.'

While there might be divergence in the 'detail' of methodology and practice, this shared conviction and motivation is the animating force this ambitious work needs to succeed. And, as many interviewees highlighted, the 'polycrisis' – from climate change to the rise of misinformation – is only fuelling that conviction and focus on the role of storytelling to drive systems-level change. In the UK, many cultural organisations reacting to recent events and shifts in society, including the pandemic and Black Lives Matter, have re-evaluated their purpose and their relevance to the communities in which they operate, leading to increased local engagement.[108]

[108] Walmsley, B. et al. (2022) Culture in Crisis: *Impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here.* Leeds: Centre for Cultural Value, [Link].

A growing, increasingly networked ecosystem

As outlined in Part 1, the success of long-term storytelling efforts depends heavily on 'collaboration, trust and networks', between a wide range of actors and fields. As outlined above, we observed a range of ambitious efforts to build and invest in those networks; from global efforts like the Global Narrative Hive and the Confluence Conference, to UK-based networks with international reach, including Doc Society, artist-activist group Platform, Inter-narratives, the Narrative Avengers community and the Narrative Working Group. Similarly, this year's COP28 in Dubai saw first-of-their-kind pavilions and conference spaces dedicated to storytelling, including the 'Entertainment + Culture Pavilion'[109] led by Climate Generation, and the Storytelling for Action Pavilion[110] – a partnership between BAFTA, Albert, creative agency Futerra, and Think-Film Impact Production.

Other more practice-focused networks in the UK include: The Media Trust, The Social Art Network, Good Stories, Social Spider, OKRE (Opening Knowledge across Research and Entertainment), Creatives for Climate Change, Creative Lives, ArtWorks Alliance, Network for Social Change, and NEON's (New Economy Organising Network) Communications, Media and Spokespeople Hubs. Established civil society networks like the CharityComms network are also embedding elements of storytelling and narrative change work in their programming.

This increase in collaboration is enabling a movement towards greater alignment on the definition of key terms, theories and models of change and research methodologies.

Enabling advances in technology

A few core reports also referenced the fact that advances in technology are helping to enable 'storytelling for social change' work – for example, unlocking new capacities to research, track and monitor narrative shifts in the public sphere.[111] This includes using 'corpus linguistics' in academic settings, as well as advanced audience-tracking and behaviour tools, like Harmony Labs' 'Narrative Observatory' in the US, which 'allows organisations to see how different values-based audiences consume media, where they spend their time online, what they watch and how we can best meet them where they are'.[112] Others highlight that advances in tech are opening up 'who can experience and create' media and storytelling content, creating greater inclusion and potential for the ecosystem.[113]

[109] Ahmed, S. (2023) *Beyond Borders: Entertainment + Culture Pavilion at COP28*, [Link].

[110] (2023) 'Storytelling for Action at COP28', *Futerra*, [Link].

[111] Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

[112] Potts et al., 2022.

[113] Sachrajda, A. (2017) Riding the Waves: *How pop culture has the potential to catalyse social change in the UK*, [Link].

3.5

Analysing the ecosystem: challenges (where to focus energy)

Our expert interviewees and a range of recent reports also highlighted a number of significant structural challenges in the impact storytelling ecosystem and the narrative change field, both internationally and in the UK. Fundamentally, as Shelley Dorrans expresses it, despite the upsurge in research, networking and practice across the ecosystem, 'there hasn't yet been a significant increase in the ability of the not-for-profit sector to shape and change narratives' and to drive social impact.[114]

Funding scale and structure

i. Scale of funding

Fundamentally, the scale of investment in impact storytelling in the UK is not adequate to match the scale of the social and environmental challenges the ecosystem is trying to address. As several experts underlined, the ecosystem is 'competing' with decades-long, large-scale investment in new right-leaning news outlets, organised disinformation and PR campaigns – which simply isn't matched by the scale of the 'progressive' sector's current funding and investment. At the same time, the arts more broadly have seen a significant decline in real funding (overall 21% from 2009/10 to 2019/20, with a drop of 35% for theatre).[115]

Speaking about the same trend in the US, Tracy Van Slyke said in an interview: 'We are at one of the most dangerous inflection points our country has ever experienced. Social justice philanthropy has a calling to invest in a range of narrative approaches and strategies… that can support our fields to supplant and become more powerful than the toxic forces polluting our narrative waters.' It is worth noting here that this is particularly true in the UK, where the scale of funding available differs significantly to the US, which has a much more developed ecosystem, enabled by a larger philanthropic sector.

ii. Structure of funding (H2)

A range of experts and reports also identified challenges in the structure of funding, notably the length of time funding is provided for. As outlined in Part 1.2, effective, systems-level storytelling interventions track change over long periods, often of minimum ten years – and therefore require ambitious, long-term funding models. In contrast, experts highlighted that funding for impact storytelling programmes remains relatively small-scale and short-term – making it challenging to achieve and report on impact, and therefore to build funder confidence. However, a number of reports and experts underlined the need for funding that enables a range of different 'speeds'[116] of impact storytelling work, allowing for longer-term, deep narrative work as well as rapid-scale 'responsive' programmes that can capitalise on news stories or sudden global events.

Silos and fragmentation of the ecosystem

The Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact's recent report defined a new 'framework for cross-sector collaboration' with the goals of driving 'new and existing partnerships toward a common goal and, hopefully, greater impact'[117]. Their report pointed to dozens of instances where cross-organisation collaborations led to measurable impact, including systems changes (such as infrastructural and policy changes). The conclusion? Collective ways of working across sectors result in a greater likelihood of successful impact storytelling interventions.

[114] Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

[115] (2023) 'A new deal for arts funding in England?', *Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre,* [Link].

[116] Ibid.

[117] Lynn, J. et al. (2018) *When Collective Impact Has an Impact.* Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact, p. 2, [Link].

However, particularly in the UK, while there is progress in network-building, we found consistent fragmentation, siloing and disconnection across the ecosystem.

i. Disconnection of media, arts and technology

In our expert interviews, many of our interviewees were only aware of their respective fields in the impact storytelling ecosystem. In particular, activists working on arts and culture projects were often entirely unfamiliar with the field of narrative change or established practices like 'framing'.

Overall, we found that the fields of strategic communications, advocacy and organising were increasingly well networked. But, despite their enormous reach and influence, the fields of media, arts and technology were less well networked within the wider impact storytelling ecosystem.

The art world has its own long-established practices of activist and participatory art and performance. Since the late nineties, with the emergence of what has become known as the 'creative industries', arts and cultural organisations have increasingly had to adopt language to argue for their *instrumental value* (i.e. 'usefulness') for society and the economy.[118] Particularly within the last decade, Arts Council England (led by work with Culture Counts) has developed metrics with arts organisations to measure their impact in the communities where they work. This has resulted in the Dimensions Framework, a tool that helps arts and cultural institutions measure the cultural, social, inter-community and environmental impact of their work. Despite multiple partnerships with academic institutions, such as the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Leeds, much of this work is still removed from the wider ecosystem, or from the practices and methodologies of the narrative change field.

In the US, Animating Democracy, a programme of the non-profit Americans for the Arts, has provided frameworks for understanding the impact of the arts. Perhaps the organisation that best brings together researchers, artists, funders and campaigners is the Center for Artistic Activism in New York. Unlike any arts or culture institutions in the UK, it is seemingly able to bring together resources for practitioners that also help them to communicate with the wider impact storytelling ecosystem and the burgeoning narrative change field.

Furthermore, we noticed very limited reference to, or inclusion of, those organisations, researchers and specialists working on the digital dissemination of storytelling content – for example, research into the changes in media landscapes, platforms and structures. Similarly, the significant work on misinformation, conspiracy theories and countering extremism were very rarely referenced or alluded to.

ii. Issue siloing

Brett Davidson has previously written about the problem of issue silos within the ecosystem, driven by funding structures.[119] 'Foundations and non-profits are deliberately set up to work within issue silos – and they budget accordingly,' Davidson writes. 'What results is a short-termist approach where practitioners and organisations work from campaign to campaign, project to project, funding pot to funding pot, without large-scale and longer-term strategies.'[120] Similarly, Ken Grossinger, looking at grant-making foundations, finds that even within a single foundation, departments focusing on siloed issues do not communicate on their strategies.[121] Consequently, arts and capital projects are viewed as separate from areas like science, advocacy and civic engagement.

[118] Campbell, P. (2019) *Persistent Creativity: Making the Case for Art, Culture and the Creative Industries*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

[119] Davidson, B. 'Blurring the Boundaries', *IRIS*, [Link].

[120] Ibid

[121] Grossinger, K. (2023) *Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together.* The New Press, p. 178.

3.5

Analysing the ecosystem: challenges (where to focus energy)

Signs of progress: small-scale UK organisations forging collaboration

Power of Pop (PoP) Fund – Supports the work of organisations working at the intersection of popular culture and social change in the UK with a particular focus on migration and racial justice. Through support, network-building and cultural production, the fund supports organisations that platform the voices of migrant, refugee and marginalised creatives, as well as those of colour. The fund encourages organisations to share knowledge and expertise while taking risks in their approaches and strategies.

Platform – Brings together campaigners, researchers, artists and communities in creative, collaborative projects across injustice and climate breakdown. Platform began in climate justice organising over 40 years ago, targeting the political, cultural and social conditions in which polluting industries operate. One project they host, Voices that Shake!, brings together young people, artists and organisers to develop community-led, creative responses to social injustice.

OKRE – Works to fund, research and bring together media producers and charities to focus on entertainment content that challenges misleading perceptions. The OKRE Network includes game developers, film and television producers, charities, funders, researchers and more. The aim is to platform stories that lead to social change, inspired by lived experience, informed by research and rooted in entertainment expertise.

Doc Society – Works worldwide with documentary makers, impact strategists, impact producers, journalists, media makers and funders to shape social and political attitudes. Putting independent documentary production and dissemination at the centre of its narrative strategy, it plays a pivotal role in impact storytelling by funding non-fiction media, connecting independent makers with partners (the Good Pitch), training impact producers (Impact Lab), educating makers about impact (Impact Field Guide), opening film distribution to schools (docacademy) and facilitating knowledge exchange within communities of practice, such as the impact producer community and independent documentary community (DISCO, Decentralised Independent Story and Culture Organisers).

According to campaigner and researcher Ruth Taylor, to change 'deep narratives', practitioners need to find mutual causes. Specifically for campaigning organisations, working in silos 'has made cross-cause collaboration difficult to achieve, due to competition for funding, influence and airtime'.[122] Those working on causes related to gender, climate, racial justice and health, for example, would have more impact longer term working *across* social and environmental issues. As Elena Blackmore at PIRC suggests, practitioners need to take 'an intersectional approach in designing and producing campaigns and communications, thinking through the relational and power dynamics intentionally or unintentionally promoted'.[123]

For Bridgit Antoinette Evans of Pop Culture Collaborative, 'it's not about the funding of specific stories. It's about the funding of coordinated narrative oceans of content and experiences that conspire together to create the sense of new reality … then individual projects or organisations can be released and liberated from the necessity to try and prove that they single-handedly can affect the ocean at scale.[124]

iii. Siloing of research and practice

As we found first hand in conducting this research, the broad impact storytelling ecosystem and the emerging narrative change field contain an overwhelming quantity of reports, tools, frameworks and research. There is no central database or resource to access this research to index by date, research methodology or type.

Further, the great majority of this content is written for specialists, strategists, researchers and academics – but not directly for organisers and impact storytellers. Research outputs are often viewed as jargon-filled and inaccessible by practitioners and this perpetuate the gap between research and practice.[125] This often happens when research and the researchers themselves are separate from practice (interventions and storytelling).[126]

Research and practice are especially detached when grassroots groups and their members are viewed more as 'end-product consumers of narrative', rather than 'essential creators and drivers'.[127] As PIRC highlights, of the UK: 'Projects are generally carried out by well-funded organisations "on behalf of" the rest of our movements (read: those with no financial resources and otherwise marginalised). It remains extremely rare to have groups and organisations rooted in lived experience leading a narrative project, rather than just being "messengers" or "storytellers".'[128] While the research on social justice might start with good intentions, current practices mean we ultimately risk replicating harmful, oppressive structures of knowledge and power.[129]

[122] Taylor, R. (2021) *Transforming Narrative Waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK.* Narrative Initiative, p. 38, [Link].

[123] Blackmore, E. (2023) *How can we decolonise narrative work? Decoloniality as queering.* PIRC, [Link].

[124] Sachrajda, 2017.

[125] Quoted in Sachrajda, A., & Youssef, S. (2023) *Building narrative and cultural change infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US,* p.12, [Link].

[126] *PIRC Strategy 2023–2026,* [Link].

[127] Soriano, J., Phelan, J., Brown, K.F., Cortés, H. & Choi, J.H. (2019) *Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power.* ReFrame, [Link].

[128] *PIRC Strategy.*

[129] Blackmore, E. (2020) *Narrative is fractal: Why we need more than words to truly face racism.* PIRC, [Link]; Moorthy, S. (2022) 'How we can better decolonise and shift power in our sector?' *NPC,* [Link].

3.5

Analysing the ecosystem: challenges (where to focus energy)

Skills, training & participation

i. Demand for training

We noted a widespread demand for training and capacity-building to upskill actors across the ecosystem. These ranged from the specific, like the need for trained impact producers for TV and film projects, to broader calls to train 'civil society teams' and artists.

As researcher Shelley Dorrans highlights of the narrative change field in particular: 'There is a growing interest in narrative change work across civil society … but people struggle to turn theory into practice or persuade colleagues to engage with it. Drawing inspiration from the States, and the range of mentoring and fellowship opportunities we came across, we feel that funders could usefully explore training and mentoring opportunities for those in the progressive sector in the UK.'[130]

There is a range of programmes for training in narrative change, targeting civil society organisations of various approaches, costs and accessibility in the UK, some of which have emerged since the publication of Dorrans' report. These include: NEON's Global Messaging Programme, Equally Ours' Strategic Communications Training, Common Cause Foundation's 101 Values Programme and PIRC's Getting Started with Narrative Change. However, these programmes often overlap, target similar entry-level audiences,and ultimately operate at a relatively small scale.

Among arts and culture practitioners, beyond the university programmes mentioned above, there are often ongoing skills-building and training resources offered mostly through networks, such as Social Art Network and ArtWorks Alliance. Most training happens on a localised scale, such as Collective Encounters in Liverpool.

Experts also highlighted the need for more formalised 'accredited' programmes for professionals to build the pipeline of deep specialists. Similarly, interviewees identified a lack of advanced research expertise required to conduct narrative research or to interpret existing research among civil society and campaigning organisations, usually led by people with humanities backgrounds.

In the US, Manne reported a 'staffing challenge' at the senior leadership level of narrative and culture change work, citing Bridgit Evans: 'There's really no professional development pipeline for leadership in this space, and we need to fix that. There aren't field-specific fellowships.[131] There aren't even executive coaches who are really well versed in this kind of strange hybrid environment that we're all working in. And so what we are arriving at is a breaking point where some leaders who have been in the space for a very long time are evolving their leadership … and there isn't necessarily a next gen of that.'[132]

Providing storytelling training is a skill, too

It is also worth noting that many storytelling for change and narrative change organisations provide 'training' and 'workshops' for civil society organisations, journalists, creatives and/or people with lived experience. However, some trainers reported struggling to handle 'rejection' and 'opposition' to narrative insights, methods and techniques during workshops and training sessions, or simply low adoption levels of recommendations. As explored in Part 1.3, this challenge is also borne out of the diversity in approaches to impact, and language used across the ecosystem – for example, how journalists view their job and their idea of impact differs vastly from an activist or artist. That poses a significant challenge. Put simply: impact storytelling facilitation, training, coaching and toolkit creation are themselves specialist skills, which need to be researched and invested in.

[130] Heard & Dorrans, 2022, p. 30.
[131] Potts et al., 2022.
[132] Ibid.

ii. Equity, power & diversity

While the broad ecosystem shares values of equity and anti-racism, these values are not consistently enacted in the structure and dynamics of this ecosystem's work.[133]

In particular, compared to the US, where impact storytelling work is reported to be more embedded in organising liberation movements (often led by people of colour), the UK ecosystem is 'largely occupied by white, middle-class, university educated, [and/or] professionalised NGO staff'.[134] While there has been some effort to increase inclusion across the space (e.g. PIRC's 'building our narrative power' programme), the UK ecosystem still lacks diversity, partly because impact storytelling and narrative change work have often operated outside of movement-building and community organising.[135]

As a result, 'behind the scenes, power is rooted where it always has been.'[136] Elena Blackmore of PIRC observes: 'We might see Black, brown, working-class, disabled and trans folks in focus groups, or as messengers in campaigns, but we're much less likely to be leading strategy, designing and analysing research, or presenting our recommendations for best practice to funders or at conferences.'[137]

The same dynamics are of course echoed across the arts and media industries in the UK. A 2018 report supported by Arts Emergency found that these industries are comprised of very few non-white workers. In museums, galleries and libraries, non-white employees made up just 2.7% of the workforce; for film, TV, video, radio and photography this figure was 4.2%; and for music, performing and visual arts it was 4.8%.[138] Unsurprisingly, an overwhelmingly white workforce in the creative industries contributes to perpetuating harmful racial tropes and stereotypes across the media.[139]

To some degree, the arts and media fields in the UK have begun to shift in recent years, thanks in great part to the work of activists and campaigners, researchers and the increasing platforming of more diverse impact storytellers. It is a slow, ongoing process that has been accelerated since the BLM uprisings in 2020.[140] The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity has been generating research to push for better representations of groups across society; some theatres have begun working more with Black communities and storytellers, such as in the example of the Change-makers programme at Leeds Playhouse; and many museums and collections have actively begun to decolonise their curation and activities (e.g. campaigns supported by the Museums Association). However, this work has only just begun.

Conclusion: the UK and Europe lag behind the US and Global South

In their 2023 report for the Power of Pop Fund, Alice Sachrajda and Saphia Youssef make the case for what the UK can learn from the US pop culture for social change field.[141] The report maps out and compares the two ecosystems, finding that, unsurprisingly, the field of pop culture for social change is far more established in the US than in the UK. When looking at the example of the Pop Culture Collaborative, we can see that the more developed field in the US has also resulted from investment in leadership, research and learning, and what the authors term 'field coordination'.

[133] Ibid.
[134] Taylor, 2021, p. 32.
[135] *PIRC Strategy.*
[136] Ibid.
[137] Blackmore 2023
[138] Huhn, A., & Anderson, A. (2021) 'Promoting Social Justice through Storytelling in Museums', *Museum and Society,* 19(3), pp. 351–368, [Link].
[139] Oteka, C. (2022) *Black in Fact – Beyond the White Gaze: The examination of black representation in documentaries for UK audiences.* Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, Birmingham City University.
[140] Sachrajda, A. & Zukowska, M. (2021) *New Brave World: The power, opportunities and potential of pop culture for social change in the UK.*
[141] Sachrajda & Youssef, 2023.

3.5

Analysing the ecosystem: challenges (where to focus energy)

Across interviews and desk research, we saw how the most exciting, dynamic impact storytelling work is often happening internationally, and especially among Global Majority communities. Beadie Finzi, director of Doc Society, in our interview reflected that the UK and Europe are falling behind in impact storytelling because they are 'very comfortable in the old rules and paradigms of the way things have always been done'.

Groups like Culture Hack Labs demonstrate how to centre and resource indigenous communities in leading their own high-impact campaigns.[142] Elsewhere, the transnational successes of the Green Wave movement for reproductive rights in South America is an example of joined-up campaigners, communities and storytellers, from which the UK impact storytelling ecosystem could and should learn.[143] Similarly, the field of social behaviour change communication (SBCC) has been pioneered in places like South Africa, where campaigns focusing on HIV/AIDS, sanitation and domestic violence have secured sustained, large-scale funding and saved lives over decades.[144]

It is worth highlighting that there is a 'live' discussion about the best structure for the UK impact storytelling ecosystem. The US ecosystem (which has an out-sized philanthropic sector) is anchored by a number of large-scale organisations with wide remits and long-term funding (for example Americans for the Arts, Narrative Initiative, Pop Culture Collaborative, Center for Artistic Activism). The UK's ecosystem, on the other hand, is characterised by a 'hub and spoke' model of smaller organisations working on focused remits, with corresponding funding levels. Some interviewees advocated for the formation of larger organisations, capable of pitching for and dispersing larger sums, whereas others viewed the distributed structure of the UK ecosystem as a strength.

[142] Culture Hack Labs (2022) *Transforming The Transition,* [Link].

[143] (2023) 'Latin America's Green Wave', *Center for Reproductive Rights,* [Link].

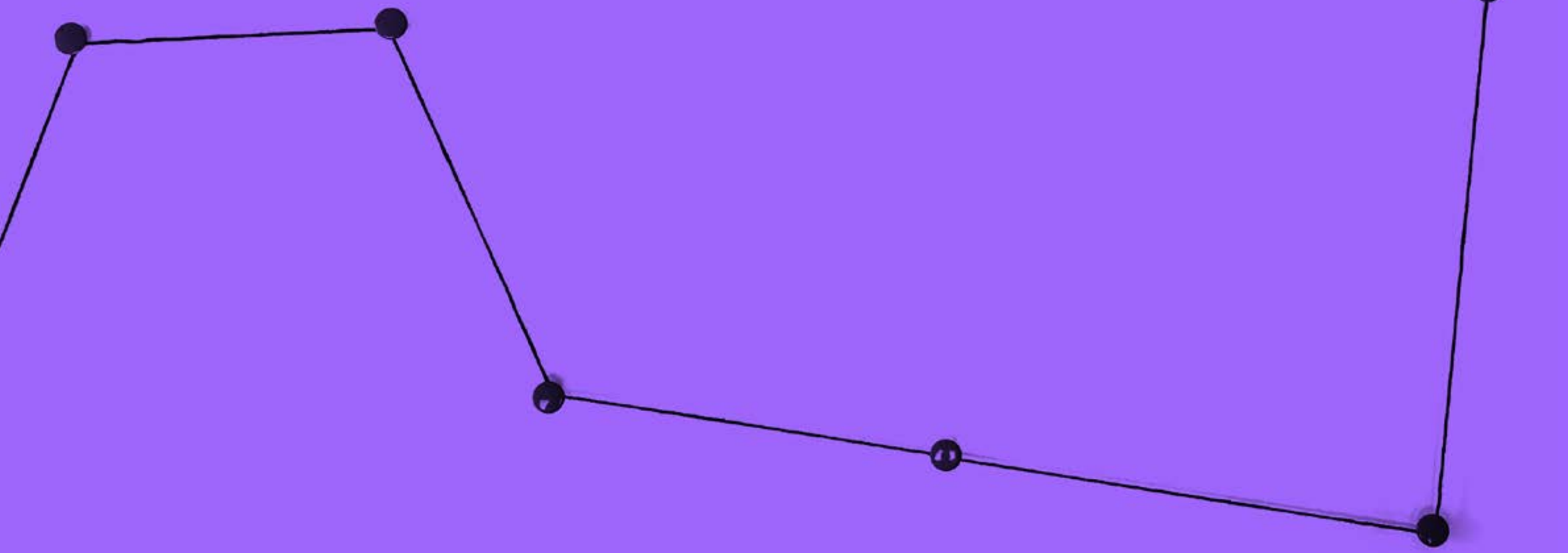
[144] Bose, D. L., Hundal, A., Singh, S., Singh, S., Seth, K., ul Hadi, S., Saran, A., Joseph, J., Goyal, K., & Salve, S. (2023) 'Evidence and gap map report: Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) interventions for strengthening HIV prevention and research among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)', *Campbell Systematic Reviews,* 19, e1297, [Link].

4

The Evidence and the Literature

In this chapter you'll find

- an overview of the existing evidence for the impact of storytelling and narrative change interventions, and their strengths and limitations
- an analysis of the current live debates and challenges that are shaping our approaches to evaluation, research, methodology and practice
- a selection of examples of the existing evidence, evaluation methodologies and tools currently available to strategists, researchers and storytellers across the ecosystem.



4.1

Where's the evidence? The 'million-dollar question'[145] – and whether we should be asking it

As we explored in Part 1, this field holds a central paradox – it's both new and ancient. When it comes to evidence, we found that almost all actors in the sector – from researchers to practitioners to funders – demonstrate a shared conviction in the 'innate' power of stories and narratives to 'shape our realities, influencing the way we think, feel, believe, act and relate to each other and the world'. And yet, funders continue to ask and experts continue to hear the same question: 'Where's the evidence?'

This paradox of conviction and uncertainty was captured clearly in our conversation with Doc Society's Beadie Finzi:

'Does the narrative change work? The answer is, yes. Last year in my grant applications, I referenced a massive study by Oxford University that cites that the single most influential source of information on climate change was non-fictional documentaries; [the evidence] was unequivocal. There are a lot [of similar studies] out there, and I am sort of wondering – what are all we waiting to find? We've demonstrated that complex, profound, individual and societal change happens from cultural strategy and narrative strategy; the results are so screamingly obvious and self-evident and repeated again and again! How much time are we going to spend looking for more evidence while the world burns? But it is tricky. We still have a lot of fairly generic analysis. There are better, slightly more interesting studies and case studies on specific thematic issues. And we know what works for other fields is not going to work for us – so all of our tools and assumptions need to be re-examined.'

This conversation has a profound effect – it shapes both dynamics within the field and external funding decisions. Fundamentally, there are a lot of 'live' debates remaining in the field: do we have enough evidence, or do we need more? What is the role of evidence? Is the role of evidence to win funding, or to support the most impactful storytelling? What levels of change should the field focus on? What counts as 'evidence' and who gets to decide? Is it even 'right' to measure the impact of storytelling? The terms of this debate are, of course, inextricably linked to funding sources, funder relationships and strategy. In this chapter we'll go on to unpack and analyse these key debates. But first, we'll explore the existing evidence and how best to understand it.

[145] Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change.* USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

A few quick caveats

In this chapter, we have attempted to include reference to research and methods spanning the diversity of the impact storytelling ecosystem. However, it's important to note that the overall weighting of the examples we explore tend to draw more heavily from the more 'formalised' and established 'fields' of practice (identified in Part 3). These include: social behaviour change communications (SBCC), social impact entertainment (SIE) and narrative change, with a weighting towards studies of the impact of moving image formats (film and TV). This reflects the examples most often cited during our expert interviews, and we believe it provides an indication of the weighting of currently available research.

We have highlighted some examples and studies of impact storytelling in arts and culture, but as we shall see, there have been fewer efforts to track long-lasting social change in these fields. It is also worth noting that the great majority of studies emerging from arts and culture focus on analysing the impact of an individual piece of media or art work. These often take the form of a case study. In contrast, impact studies from the campaigning and narrative change fields tend to be more collective, analysing the impact of multiple or long-term storytelling interventions on a particular issue or policy area. Again, this mirrors the differences in approach to impact across the disciplines and fields outlined in Part 1.3.

We address the challenges and debates shaping this evidence base in Part 4.3, and a summary of our methodology is in the introductory chapter. The examples gathered and analysed here are by no means exhaustive; this chapter is intended to be a high-level, indicative survey of the current evidence and research landscape. As we explore in Part 5, we hope it forms the foundation of a further systematic review.

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Before we begin, it's important to acknowledge that 'evidence' is not a homogeneous concept. When we began to review the available literature, we found it useful to organise and group the evidence into four types: 'thought leadership', 'theory', 'mechanics' and 'impact', which we'll explore in turn below.

In combination, these four types of evidence provide a strong basis for confidence that impact storytelling interventions in general, and narrative change interventions in particular, are and can be effective – and have been influential for a long time. In the following sections, we provide examples of research for each type of evidence, alongside an analysis of the contribution they make to the overall 'evidence' for the impact of storytelling and narrative interventions, alongside their limitations.

The 'thought leadership'

This type of evidence is conceptual rather than theoretical. Its focus is on presenting convincing case studies, to showcase the power of individual storytelling and collective narrative interventions to drive social and systemic change. This type of evidence is most likely to be published as a blog, an editorial or magazine article, or as 'grey' literature in a semi-formalised report. It is therefore, by nature, more opinion-led. In addition, this type of evidence is often authored by experienced practitioners, rather than academics or researchers.

This foundational thought leadership has helped to form and shape the field, raising awareness, winning early funder buy-in and helping to grow the ecosystem. Below, we have selected a range of examples of this broad 'thought-leadership' corpus, centred around a few of the recurring 'hero' case studies that were most frequently referenced in our expert interviews and research review – and often serve as the 'go-to' examples of the power of impact storytelling and/or narrative interventions.

Case study

Equal Marriage

Sobel, S. L. (2015) 'Culture Shifting at Warp Speed: How the Law, Public Engagement, and Will & Grace Led to Social Change for LGBT People', V89, N1, *St. John's Law Review,* [Link].

Summary

The article speaks of the role of pop culture and the competition of opposing narratives (pro-LGBTQI+ and anti-LGBTQI+) in creating an engaging story and making the debate visible to communities far beyond LGBTQI+ and the legislators engaged in the 'rule-changing' activities. The article also highlights the role of entertainment media (e.g. the *Will and Grace* TV series) as an important component of culture shift, which is less invasive and subtle than other advocacy initiatives, yet possibly one of the most powerful tools for culture shifts.[146] According to this article, culture shifts never automatically result from the changes in legal framework. They are not only slow but also require a lot of other inputs (from advocacy, to behaviour modelling, to community activism) for the shifts to happen – all due to how deep-rooted culture is in individuals and communities.

Case study

Legalisation of abortion (US)

Lanphier, E. (2020) *"How is the Truth to be Said?" Abortion Narratives in Feminist Activism, Politics, and Philosophy*. Rejoinder, [Link].

Summary

The author analyses 10 contemporary abortion narratives that comprise the current iteration of the Tennessee Stories Project, an online Planned Parenthood project aimed at addressing abortion stigma. The article highlights the nuanced emotional and moral landscape of choosing to not be a mother and how storytelling is central to advocacy efforts, doing the work of consciousness-raising from rallies to contemporary internet hashtags. The author also underscores a feminist methodological divide requiring further exploration, and ideally reconciliation, with regards to storytelling and abortion experience across activism and scholarship.

Case study

Legalisation of abortion (Ireland)

Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* [Link].

Summary

A case study from Heard's report discusses the successful campaign to repeal the constitutional ban on abortion in Ireland in 2018. The campaign was based on a five-year plan that focused on personal stories and medical facts, rather than legal and religious arguments. The campaign used effective branding, communication, technology and social media to mobilise the public, especially women, who shared their experiences and emotions. The authors of the text argue that this was the key factor that led to the victory of the campaign.[147]

[146] Sobel, S. L. (2015) 'Culture Shifting at Warp Speed: How the Law, Public Engagement, and Will & Grace Led to Social Change for LGBT People', V89, N1, *St. John's Law Review,* [Link].

[147] Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Case study

Black Lives Matter (US)

Ray, R. (2022) *Black Lives Matter at 10 years: 8 ways the movement has been highly effective.* Brookings, [Link].

Summary
This article discusses the impact the Black Lives Matter movement has had on policing in the United States. It charts how the movement's campaigning strategies have been instrumental in bringing about policy and organisational changes to policing, including implicit bias training, body-worn cameras and bans on no-knock warrants. The movement has also helped to illuminate the inordinate amount of money spent on policing and civilian pay-outs for police brutality that come out of taxpayer pockets financially and organisationally.[148]

Case study

Black Lives Matter (US)

Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* [Link].

Summary
Another case study from Heard's report exploring the Black Lives Matter movement, which started in the US in 2013 and became global in 2020 after the death of George Floyd. The movement 'successfully linked police violence to other areas of historic racial injustice in, for example, housing and education, highlighting the systemic nature of oppression.' The movement mobilised millions of people, while the 'true impact' of the movement is impossible to quantify, it 'undoubtedly' raised awareness of systemic racism in society.[149]

Case study

Abolition of the death penalty (US)

The Opportunity Agenda Narrative shift and the death penalty, [Link].

Summary
This report explores the essential and replicable elements of past successful efforts to change the big story. The report highlights six case studies, including one on the death penalty, which explores a narrative shift that transpired over a period of almost 50 years from 1972, a time when the death penalty was widely supported by the American public, to the present, a time of growing concern about its application and a significant drop in support. The case study tells the story of how a small, under-resourced group of death penalty abolitionists came together and developed a communications strategy designed to raise doubts in people's minds about the system's fairness, which would cause them to reconsider their views. The report underscores the importance of research, patience, persistence and diverse voices in bringing about narrative shift.

[148] Ray, R. (2022) Black Lives Matter at 10 years: *8 ways the movement has been highly effective.* Brookings, [Link].

[149] Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* [Link].

Case study

Seatbelt laws (US)

Westly., E. (2022) 'The history of seat-belt laws shows public health doesn't have to be partisan', *The Washington Post,* [Link].

Summary
This article traces the evolution of the seatbelt narrative from 'seatbelts are unconstitutional because they restrict our freedoms' to 'buckle up to save lives'. It highlights the success of two alternative narratives: the public health narrative focusing on protecting children and the narrative promoting seatbelt obedience as a responsibility of the US citizens who respect the Constitution (i.e. 'nobody is above the law, and seatbelts are the law').

Case study

The designated driver campaign (US)

USC Norman Lear Center (2023) *Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change*. Media Impact Project with Beth Hoffman, [Link].

Summary
This case study reports on the joint efforts of Hollywood studios, the main television networks, writers, and health and behavioural experts to design and incorporate in entertainment media drunk driving prevention messages. ABC, CBS and NBC donated $100 million-worth of TV airtime to the campaign and at least 77 primetime shows, including hits like *Cheers*, *Dallas* and *L.A. Law*, integrated dialogue that encouraged the use of designated drivers (DDs). The designated driver campaign has been credited with a number of social, behavioural and cultural shifts: bringing national attention to the risks of drunk driving, creating widespread cultural recognition of the concept of DDs, increasing uptake of DDs among Americans and reducing traffic fatalities in the 1990s.

Case study

Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and Standing Rock protests

Reclaiming Native Truth (2018) *Lessons learned from Standing Rock*. Reclaiming Native Truth, [Link].

Gran, B. (2016) *Paste. An Explainer on Everything That Happened at Standing Rock, From Start to Finish*, [Link].

Summary
This article charts the story of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, who opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) because it would go under the Missouri river – the tribe's main source of drinking water – and through the tribe's sacred lands. The article charts the widespread protests, which resulted in many people, including celebrities and political leaders, travelling to North Dakota as a sign of solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux. The tribe also took legal action to stop the construction of DAPL. In December 2016, the US Army Corps of Engineers halted the project pending an environmental review. However, the decision was subsequently reversed and the pipeline was completed before the end of 2017. Despite DAPL being completed, the Standing Rock Sioux protest is considered a victory for indigenous people and for the US community at large. As the article charts, the events have had a lasting impact on the discourse around the rights of indigenous people, environmental activism, and the fossil fuel industry. They also highlighted the power of peaceful protest and the importance of respecting sacred lands and water sources.[150]

[150] Reclaiming Native Truth (2018) *Lessons learned from Standing Rock.* Reclaiming Native Truth, [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Case study

Domestic violence and abusive relationships

'Why people are showing Solidari-tea for Helen and real life women in similar situations by tweeting #FreeHelen', *BBC Radio 4*, [Link].

Samuels, H. (2020) *The Archers, the Radio, Violence against Women and Changing the World at Teatime*. Feminists @ Law, [Link].

Denham, J. (2016) 'The Archers: "Realistic" domestic abuse storyline praised by charities as Helen Titchener fund donations flood in', *The Independent,* [Link].

Summary

BBC Radio 4 show *The Archers* has been widely credited for raising public awareness of domestic abuse, through a two-and-a-half-year storyline about coercive control, as part of a collaboration with the charity Women's Aid who provided advice to ensure accuracy of representation. The show, which had an audience of 4.7 million listeners at the time, is credited with a range of direct impacts. Firstly, it effectively increased awareness and understanding of coercive control as a form of domestic abuse, among its direct audience. This is evidenced through a 20% increase to the Women's Aid and Refuge hotlines, attributed to the 'Archers effect'. As a show with a national audience, the storyline has also been credited with a wide range of cumulative impacts. The show is credited with sparking a national conversation about coercive control, leading to hundreds of news articles and segments reporting on the storyline across mainstream media. This ripple effect of coverage went on to reach a larger audience, and is often linked to a change in collective public discourse and understanding about coercive control in the UK.

Case study

Hamilton's impact on perceptions of American history (US)

Major, M. (2016) '7 Ways "Hamilton" has Impacted America', *PBS*, [Link].

The Broadway Collection (2024) *Hamilton's Impact on Historical Education Internationally: How the Musical Influences Perception of American History*, [Link].

(2017) 'Patriotism on Broadway', *The Economist*, [Link].

Summary

When *Hamilton* premiered on Broadway in 2015 to rave reviews and sold-out performances, its impact was not felt only in the theatre world of New York. The album broke records for a musical, winning 12 Tony Awards and the Pulitzer for Drama, and became a major pop culture phenomenon in America. The success of the show prompted the US Treasury to keep Alexander Hamilton on the ten-dollar bill and has influenced perceptions American history. This influence extends to how history is taught in schools through the Hamilton Education Program, a partnership with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Case study

Mr Bates vs the Post Office: social and political change, justice for all

'Mr Bates vs The Post Office: why docudramas have the power to inspire real social and political change', *The Conversation*, 17 January 2024, [Link].

Summary

This article traces the social impact of the drama series *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* as evidence of the ability of docudramas to ignite real social and political change. Between 1999 and 2015, over 900 sub-postmasters faced prosecution by the Post Office due to faulty software that inaccurately recorded missing money from branches. *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* has played a pivotal role in bringing this issue to the forefront of public consciousness. The four-part drama has been watched by over 16 million viewers, highlighting its ability to engage and inform the public. This surge in attention, the article claims, has prompted ministers to expedite the justice process for those wrongly accused. The drama has also led to significant consequences. Paula Vennells, the former chief executive of the Post Office (2012–2019), returned her CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in response to the revelations. Additionally, Fujitsu, the company responsible for the faulty system, has acknowledged that their staff likely knew about glitches in Post Office accounts years before the prosecutions ceased. They have taken responsibility for providing compensation.

Analysis

These pieces of evidence are not intended to be scientifically rigorous in methods or analysis. They are, like much of the evidence in the field, often retrospective. They often describe individual, collective or structural changes and trace them back to storytelling and narrative interventions that *might* have contributed to those changes. As is often true for this type of content, they often include logical 'leaps' of attribution that are not entirely evidence backed.

They might make reference to theoretical frameworks, but rarely in depth or with 'scientific' rigour. Put simply, publications like these are not designed to stand up to the scrutiny of social scientific methods or scientific validation. They do not provide a rigorous study of the change in question – their goal isn't to *prove* impact. The fluidity of use of terminology, methods and frameworks between these materials may contribute to wider challenges of building longer-term field formalisation and funder confidence. In particular, there is a risk that this type of work might build unrealistic expectations among funders of the time, funding level and capacity required to drive observable changes.

However, this founding 'thought leadership' is critical to the progress of the field, and has a range of benefits; it is prolific, persuasive and written in a more accessible yet professional form. As Braddock and Dillard highlight, these publications about the 'power' of storytelling and narrative change interventions have increased exponentially over the last decade,[151] as this ecosystem and nascent field has begun to form. Collectively, they have stimulated broad interest in the work among different actors in the ecosystem (including academia, researchers and M&E professionals) and helped to establish – and thus helped to grow – the impact storytelling ecosystem and the narrative change field.

The 'theory'

This type of evidence provides the theoretical grounding that underpins the whole ecosystem. The 'theory' consists of seminal, theoretical works by experts from the core established disciplines (see Part 3) that have informed the development of the ecosystem.

Each of these disciplines has decades of accumulated knowledge, peer-reviewed papers and published theoretical frameworks. However, there are several theoretical frameworks that are referenced fairly consistently in a number of publications. The table below offers a selected sample of a few key theories, organised by the discipline they sit within.

[151] Braddock, K., & Dillard, J.P. (2016) 'Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors', *Communication Monographs*, [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Discipline

Social sciences (psychology, sociology, political sciences and policy studies)

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Theory of narrative identity Social cognitive theory	McAdams, D.P. (2001) 'The Psychology of Life Stories', *Review of General Psychology*, [Link]. McAdams, D.P. (2011) 'Narrative Identity', in Schwartz, S., Luyckx, K., & Vignoles, V. (eds), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. New York: Springer, [Link]. Bandura, A. (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Bandura, A. (1991) 'Social cognitive theory of self-regulation', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, pp. 248–287. Bandura, A. (1999) 'A social cognitive theory of personality', in Pervin, L. & O.P. John, O.P. (eds), *Handbook of Personality* (2nd ed), New York: Guilford Press.	The theory of narrative identity claims that individuals construct their identities by 'integrating their life experiences into an internalised, evolving story of the self', which informs individuals' sense of uniqueness, unity and purpose.[152] This 'internalised story' is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going.[153] Social cognitive theory stipulates that an individual does not learn new behaviours through a trial-and-error approach but rather by observing how other people exercise the behaviours and what consequences they experience (e.g. rewards/ encouragement or sanctions/ punishment). Based on their observations, individuals make a choice on whether to adopt specific behaviours. The theory emphasises the role of external influences in creating spaces for such observations, including social interactions, personal experiences, and (mass) media.	The theory of narrative identity places a story at the centre of human identity. The stories are routinely 'formed' in an ad hoc manner as a result of a cacophony of purposeful and accidental influences. A well-planned and executed storytelling intervention can motivate individuals to modify or replace stories forming their identity – stimulating changes in identity and all associated attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Social cognitive theory suggests that the identity-forming stories are a direct result of an individual's interaction with/learning from others, i.e. a result of external influences, including stories about the experiences of others – stories of the events and consequences. This cognitive learning process is a life-time process, which means an individual can change their identity-forming stories at any point in life if and when there is a powerful enough external influence, i.e. exposure to new powerful stories. Together, these theories stipulate that an individual's attitudes, norms, beliefs and behaviours are manifestations of stories that form their identities. To change attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, one needs to change identity-forming stories by offering an individual powerful alternative stories that guide the formation of the new identity stories.

[152] McAdams, D.P. (2001) 'The Psychology of Life Stories', *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 100–122, [Link].

[153] McAdams, D.P. (2011) 'Narrative Identity', in Schwartz, S., Luyckx, K., & Vignoles, V. (eds) *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research.* New York: Springer, [Link].

Discipline

Anthropology

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Feminist anthropology	hooks, B. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Marging to Center*. Boston: South End Press. Cassar, C. (2023) 'Exploring the Evolution of Feminist Anthropology', *Anthropology Review*, [Link]. Lewin, E., & Silverstein, I.M. (eds) (2016) *Mapping Feminist Anthropology in the Twenty-First Century*. Rutgers University Press, [Link].	'Feminist anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that focuses on the role of gender in human societies and the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class and sexuality. It emerged in the 1970s as part of the broader feminist movement and seeks to challenge traditional anthropological assumptions and methodologies that have historically ignored or marginalised women's experiences and perspectives. Feminist anthropologists use ethnographic research methods to study gender relations across cultures and to examine how power operates within these relationships.'[154]	Feminist anthropology provides an example of how the absence of stories, voices and perspectives of marginalised women resulted in the absence of such women from the global narrative, which led to the absence of support mechanisms for such women in society as well as the confused identity experienced by marginalised women and their difficulty of integrating into society. Feminist anthropology highlights the importance of a given story being present in the overall narrative or external story (see cognitive learning theory) to which individuals are exposed throughout their lives. The absence of stories/ voices/characters results in the perception of 'otherness', which results in rejection, fear, etc.

Discipline

Gender studies

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Intersectionality	Crenshaw, K.W. (2017) *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings.* New York: The New Press.	'Drawing on black feminist and critical legal theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept of intersectionality, a term she coined to speak to the multiple social forces, social identities, and ideological instruments through which power and disadvantage are expressed and legitimized.'[155]	The introduction of intersectionality – similar to gender equity and equality – as a new theoretical and philosophical concept led to the emergence not just of a new lens for storytelling and its impact but also of a new 'language' necessary to describe and operationalise these concepts and tell impactful stories.

[154] Cassar, C. (2023, March 12). Exploring the Evolution of Feminist Anthropology. Anthropology Review. [Link]

[155] Crenshaw, K. W. (2017) On intersectionality: Essential Writings. New York, NY: The New Press

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Discipline

Linguistics

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Cognitive linguistics, functional linguistics, usage-based theories	Taniguchi, K. (2019) 'Language Acquisition: A Systemic View from Cognitive Linguistics', in Tajino, A. (ed), 'A Systems Approach to Language Pedagogy', *Translational Systems Sciences,* vol 17. Singapore: Springer, [Link]. Tseng, C.I. (2013) 'The Application of Functional Linguistics to Film' in *Cohesion in Film*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, [Link]. Altobbai, A.A.S. (2020) 'The Paradox of Cultural Decolonization through the Colonizer's Language in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart', IJSELL*, vol 8 (5), pp. 8–12, [Link]. Lakoff, G. (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate –The Essential Guide for Progressives*. Chelsea Green Publishing Company, [Link]. Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1981) *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, [Link].	Cognitive linguistics explores the use of language to reflect the image of self and a person's own perspective on the world. Functional linguistics assumes that 'all semiotic activity is intrinsically social and that meaning occurs only through interaction, fulfilling functional purposes'.[156] Usage-based linguistic theory claims language evolution reflects the context in which the language is used as well as the purpose and the audience of such usage.	All three linguistic theories highlight the fact that language is not just the means of storytelling – it is an important, functional tool, which reflects the experiences, character and intentions of the storyteller. As language does not exist outside a social context, it is also never free from social influences. Language is never merely a vessel for a story, it is a critical component of the story and has direct impact on the outcomes of any storytelling intervention. Hence, language should always be a part of the strategic planning in storytelling-for-change initiatives.

Discipline

Cultural studies (Interdisciplinary academic field)

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Poststructuralist and deconstructive approaches Post-colonialism	May, T. (2012) 'Poststructuralism', pp. 546–553, in Chadwick, R. (ed) *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*. 2nd edn. Academic Press, [Link]. Vives, L., & Mohabir, N. (2020) 'Postcolonialism' pp. 289–295, in Kobayashi, A. (ed) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. 2nd edn. Elsevier, [Link].	Post-structuralist and deconstructive approaches to morality and ethics share a discomfort with traditional moral discourse, which they believe fails to respect important phenomena that deserve respect. Post-structuralism is concerned with the failure to respect multiplicity and particularity, while deconstruction is concerned with uncategorisable otherness. Both approaches seek to develop action-guiding views that do not come in the form of universal prescriptions, and thus to connect their views with our lives without falling into the trap of traditional moral discourse. Post-colonialism is an interdisciplinary field focused on exploring the impact of colonisation on the representation, identities, knowledge and discourse of colonised people before, during and after colonisation. Among other topics, post-colonialism touches on the race and power narratives and human geography	Post-structuralism and post-colonialism – similar to feminist anthropology – explore the impact of the dominant discourse/narrative/story on the representation (misrepresentation, absence) of non-dominant 'others' and the reflection of such representation on different aspects of their lives from identity to culture and social dynamics. All three approaches (including deconstructivism) showcase a profound negative impact that the dominant narrative (delivered through exposure to multiple stories at different stages in life) has on those who are mis- or under-represented. The value of these approaches for the storytelling for change ecosystem is two-fold: (1) they showcase the power of stories in effectively forming new social structures filled with individuals with transformed identities, and (2) they warn about the consequences of such mis-/under-representation.

[156] Tseng, C.I. (2013) 'The Application of Functional Linguistics to Film', in *Cohesion in Film*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Discipline

Science communication

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Reception theory (or the theory of encoding and decoding) The contextual model	Xie, Y., Yasin, M.A.I.B., & Alsagoff, S.A.S. (2022) 'An Overview of Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding Theory with Film Communication', *Multicultural Education*, 8(1), pp. 1–10, [Link]. Brossard, D. & Lewenstein, B.V. (2009) 'A critical appraisal of models of public understanding of science: Using practice to inform theory', in *Communicating Science*. Routledge, pp. 25–53.	Reception theory stipulates that content producers typically 'encode' their 'preferred or dominant' message into the content, but message recipients might and do read or 'decode' the message in an alternative/different way based on their background and the context in which the message is delivered. The contextual model, in alignment with reception theory, acknowledges that individuals and groups/communities 'process information according to social and psychological schemas that have been shaped by their previous experiences, cultural context, and personal circumstances'.[157]	Reception theory and the contextual model both talk about the importance of alignment between the messenger and the recipient. Any story and the message in it is both encoded by the creator and decoded by the recipient in a preconditioned way based on their unique identity (informed by stories), their previous experiences (based on the stories they've been previously exposed to), and the external context (the story that is currently unfolding around them). Many interventions fail because the creators do not recognise/understand the differences between their own and their recipients' experiences/exposures. Therefore, any storytelling intervention should start with a deep dive into the recipients' experiences to ensure the new story/storytelling offer is interpreted as it is meant to be.

Discipline

Social and Behavior Change Communication, Behavioural Economics, edutainment

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Behaviour change theories such as the health action process approach	Schwarzer, R. (2016) 'Health Action Process Approach (HAPA) as a Theoretical Framework to Understand Behavior Change', *Actualidades en Psicología*, 30(121), pp. 119–130, [Link].	The health action process approach explains how behaviour change happens through a combination of psychological constructs and mediator mechanisms (e.g. risk perception, outcome expectancies, self-efficacy, intention, planning, perceived action control), setting and pursuit of goals, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and the quality of the context (supportive or oppressive/restrictive).	The important contribution of behaviour change theories is the detailed description of the actors and the process of behaviour change. For example, theories of behaviour change highlight the role of mediators – hindrances and enablers – in the velocity and depth of change. In storytelling for social change, transportation has been proven as an important positive mediator of impact, but few storytellers use it intentionally. Moreover, little is known about other mediators, such as enjoyment. Hence more research and applied use are necessary to improve storytelling practices.

[157] Brossard, D. & Lewenstein, B.V. (2009) 'A critical appraisal of models of public understanding of science: Using practice to inform theory', in *Communicating Science.* Routledge, pp. 13–14.

Discipline

Strategic communication, political campaigning

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Functional theory of political campaign discourse	Benoit, W.L. (2014) 'The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Communication', in Kenski, K. & Jamieson, K.H. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, [Link].	The functional theory stipulates that a political campaign is a means to an end, e.g. an electoral campaign is a means to getting more votes. Each campaign uses three approaches – acclaim, attack, defence – to frame a narrative around two key topics, e.g. candidate's policy and character.	Many theories in strategic communication focus on the persuasive power of 'framing' an issue/story, which is another powerful element of storytelling, in addition to the use of mediation, etc.

Discipline

Media studies, journalism

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Muted group theory	Wall, C. J. & Gannon-Leary, P. (1999) 'A Sentence Made by Men: Muted Group Theory Revised', *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol 6. London: SAGE Publications.	Muted group theory claims that as a medium created by men, language is not a neutral tool – it is designed to support men's expression of self and construction of reality. As a result, marginalised groups – such as women and racial minorities – have difficulty using language to relay their experiences and stories and become in practice 'muted'.	Muted group theory is well aligned with most linguistic theories that present language as an active, functional element of a story rather than an empty vessel ready to deliver a story in a neutral, unbiased manner. Muted group theory adds an overarching concern that because most languages were created and used primarily by men, women cannot fully express themselves in this language. More women are needed in the storytelling industry – creating their own language to tell their stories in an unbiased manner.

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Discipline

Marketing, Advertising

Theory	References	Summary	Why is this theory important?
Cognitive and persuasion theories	'Persuasion Theory Explained', *The Business Professor,* [Link]. Dainton, M. (2011) 'Theories of Communication', in Littlejohn, S.W. & Foss, K.A. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE Publications, pp. 1007–1012, [Link]. 'Theories of Persuasion', in *Public Communication: An Introduction*. Kell School of Communication, [Link].	Persuasion theories describe how messages embedded in mass communication can gradually stimulate changes in the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the recipients of these messages. The core premise of persuasion theories is that 'information is provided to influence recipients' behaviours'. There are several theories of persuasion, including social judgement theory, cognitive dissonance, and the elaboration likelihood model. Social judgement theory explains how people are persuaded by appeals to their ego, or how important an issue is to them. Cognitive dissonance theory explains how people are persuaded by reducing the discomfort of conflicting beliefs. The elaboration likelihood model explains how people are persuaded by the quality of arguments presented to them. Each theory explains the conditions, consequences and strategies for effective persuasion in different contexts and scenarios.	The value of cognitive and persuasion theories is in offering proven pathways for creating change. According to cognitive theories, an individual cannot be compelled to change their 'internal stories' unless they stop working for them, i.e. unless an individual experiences a confusion or, a cognitive dissonance, because an identity story they used to rely on contradicts their current experience. Such cognitive dissonance opens the door for a new story, because an individual will be seeking it to resolve the dissonance and regain comfort. Persuasion theories then offer guidance on creating stories that introduce such cognitive dissonance and also resolve it using diverse techniques. Overall, a story aiming to create change has to have elements of conflict/dissonance, followed by a resolution, to be impactful.

Analysis

These foundational theoretical texts make a powerful contribution to the 'evidence' of narrative change work. They are theories that have been tested and rely on extensive empirical evidence. They have been widely recognised by respected academic institutions and funders alike. Their insights, frameworks and methods provide the field with a strong basis from which to design purposeful narrative change interventions, and the ability to predict outcomes, within theoretical reason.

The main challenge is their diversity; some overlap, duplicate or in rare cases contradict each other. The central limitation of the theoretical 'patchwork' that underpins the nascent field is that each theory only explains partial elements of the overall theory of change. Taken together, they offer a strong probability, or theoretical grounding, for the impact of narrative change work – but not a comprehensive one. On a practical level, they are also dense, academic materials, often written for peer-reviewed journals or for use by academics and specialists. Applying them in earnest would require the advice of an academic. This makes them inaccessible for many practitioners.

The 'mechanics'

In the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of researchers and organisations exploring the 'mechanics' – the *how to* of impact storytelling and associated fields of practice like narrative change, social impact entertainment and social behaviour change communications.[158] This type of evidence includes practice studies that focus on deconstructing, describing and testing components of successful interventions, campaigns and movements, to help develop practical 'how to' tools and processes for storytelling and narrative interventions.

Key approaches used by these studies include content, discourse, media and language analysis and performance measurement. This includes, for example, measuring an audience's engagement with written documents versus video content, or testing an audience's emotional response to climate change documentaries where climate change is framed as a social justice dilemma versus a public health issue.

As per the examples in the table below, this type of evidence has focused largely on studies analysing harmful or effective narratives featured in mass media and communications formats, alongside field-testing new narratives, frames, messages and content to measure their effectiveness at generating emotional responses and increases in awareness and knowledge, and their reported intention to change behaviours. Most of these studies remain part of the so-called 'grey' literature, published by practice journals or self-published by the organisation that funded the research – as opposed to being published for peer-reviewed journals.[159] Two recent summative overviews of this type of research include a key learnings summary by Davidson[160] and one by Fadlallah et al.[161] Below, we have selected a series of illustrative examples.

[158] Davidson, B. (2017) 'Storytelling and evidence-based policy: lessons from the grey literature', *Palgrave Communications*, 3, 17093, [Link].

[159] Davidson defines 'grey literature' as literature which is produced by all levels of government, academics, business and industry, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers.

[160] Davidson, 2017.

[161] Fadlallah, R., El-Jardali, F., Nomier, M. et al. (2019) 'Using narratives to impact health policy-making: a systematic review', *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 17, 26, [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Study

AIDS Memorial Quilt by NAMES Project

Reference
Hinkley, D. (2003) *Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt: A Rhetorical Study of the Transformation of an Epidemic Through Social Movement*, [Link].

Summary
This study uses social movement, rhetorical and dramatist theories to prove that the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is the rhetorical centrepiece of the AIDS movement. Often referred to as the AIDS Quilt, it was conceived in 1985 by human rights activist Cleve Jones. Its purpose was to memorialise individuals who had died of AIDS, raise awareness about the devastating impact of the disease, and ensure that their lives were never forgotten. The quilt is an extraordinary piece of community folk art. It weighs an estimated 54 tons and has now about 2,000 panels. As of 2020, it remains the largest community arts project in the world. In its first 20 years, the quilt was viewed by more than 15 million people and has raised more than $3 million for AIDS service organisations.

In this report, social movement theories explain how the quilt mobilised thousands of people to fight AIDS. Rhetorical theories explain how the quilt transformed the belief that AIDS was just killing 'gay perverts' to an honest understanding that AIDS does not discriminate. Dramatist theories explain the emotionalism at work within the quilt. Finally this study looks at the future use of the quilt as an information tool to be used in the prevention of the spread of AIDS

Study

Theater of the Oppressed NYC

Reference
Kelly-Hoffman R. *The Impact of Theatre of the Oppressed NYC Legislative Theatre on New York City Policy and Civic Engagement*. Supported by David Rockefeller Fund, [Link].

Summary
This report is a holistic review of Theatre of the Oppressed NYC. The report aims to (1) outline the background of Theatre of the Oppressed's methodology and the creation of Theatre of the Oppressed, (2) share the policy impact of Legislative Theatre events from 2013 to 2016, (3) outline the changes in form and impact during the 5th Annual Legislative Theatre Festival in 2017, and (4) share big-picture take-aways.

Study

Interactive theatre project for sex workers in Malawi

Reference
Middleton-Lee, S. (2013) *End-of-Project Evaluation: 'Interactive Theatre and Legislative Theatre for Sex Workers and their Clients'*. Theatre for a Change, Malawi, [Link].

Summary
This is one of the very few studies to examine (and evidence) multiple forms of change of a theatre project on both performers and audience – systemic, community-wide and individual. The project directly resulted in a reduction in HIV infections and an increase in sex workers accessing legal services. The project enabled 1,017 sex workers to have knowledge of their gender and sexual rights and 217 reported a reduced level of violence from the police.

Study

Radio Savia

Reference
(2023) *A Climate Story Unit Grantee Project: Radio Savia Video Case Study,* [Link].

Summary
'Radio Savia is a narrative bimonthly podcast that features diverse (indigenous, black, farmers) Latin American women activists and healers. They believe in the transformative power of storytelling from a feminist, decolonial, regenerative and antiracist perspective. Providing a bridge that communicates diverse struggles and territories, they seek to create solidarity and resonance between social movements going through similar situations and to amplify these powerful voices among urban contexts. In every episode the listener dives into an immersive sound experience where the guests share their personal journeys about healing and their relationship with themselves, their communities and the planet. Each episode explores the local meaning of 'cuerpo-territorio' (body-territory), a concept crafted by indigenous communities all over Latin America to express the deep bond between humans and the planet.'[162]

Study

Color of Change Hollywood, the USC Norman Lear Center

Reference
Color of Change Hollywood, USC Norman Lear Center (2020) *Normalizing Injustice: The Dangerous Misrepresentations that Define Television's Scripted Crime Series*, [Link].

Summary
This report examines how crime TV shows shape public perceptions of race, gender and justice. It reveals how these shows often reinforce harmful stereotypes, glorify law enforcement and ignore systemic issues. The report also highlights the lack of diversity in the writers' room and showrunners of these shows.

Study

Define American, the USC Norman Lear Center

Reference
Lowe, S.E. & Jimenez, C.J. in collaboration with Reed, D.J. & Valencia, D. (2022) *Change the Narrative, Change the World: The power of immigrant representation on television*, [Link].

Summary
This report examines the portrayal of immigrant characters on 79 scripted television shows that aired between July 2020 and June 2022. It reveals how these shows can shape public perceptions of race, gender and justice, and how they often reinforce harmful stereotypes, glorify law enforcement, and ignore systemic issues.

Study

FrameWorks Institute

Reference
Hendricks, R., L'Hôte, E., & Volmert, A. (2018) *Reframing Hunger in America. FrameWorks Message Brief*. FrameWorks Institute, [Link].

Summary
This research highlights that simply stating that poverty exists and is rising doesn't dislodge deep – and unhelpful – assumptions. FrameWorks' research reveals the need to unlock people's desire for justice. Explaining how poverty works helps get around the belief that people simply need to try harder. By leading with shared values and explaining causes and solutions to poverty, we can engage audiences, rather than prompt them to switch off or blame people experiencing poverty. (The FrameWorks Institute has similar reports on a very wide range of topics in their resource library, which underpin much narrative strategy work in the UK and US.)

[162] (2023) *A Climate Story Unit Grantee Project: Radio Savia Video Case Study*, [Link].

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Study

Frameworks Institute

Reference
FrameWorks Institute (2020) *Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?* [Link].

Summary
This report outlines that shifting how people think about social issues – such as justice, equity and equality, and rights and responsibilities – often involves understanding and shifting mindsets or people's worldviews, which guide the way people see, perceive and act in the world. The report goes over the challenges of identifying common mindsets and their origins (which are influenced by factors outside a strategist's preview or power) and offers a collection of the most effective strategies to encourage continuous, sustained mindset shifts.

Study

Montana State University

Reference
Wolters, E.A., Jones, M., & Duvall, K. (2022) 'A Narrative Policy Framework Solution to Understanding Climate Change Framing Research', in Jones, M., McBeth, M. & Shanahan, E. (eds) *Narratives and the Policy Process: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework*. Bozeman, MT: Montana State University Library, [Link].

Summary
This book chapter discusses the importance of framing research in a way that is accessible to the general public. The author argues that the way in which scientific research is presented can have a significant impact on how it is received. The chapter suggests that by framing research in a way that is more accessible and understandable, scientists can help to bridge the gap between scientific research and the wider public. It also discusses the importance of using storytelling as a way to communicate scientific research. Finally, the chapter compares audiences' reactions and responses to different framing approaches when talking about climate change and suggests a selection of frames that are most effective.

Study

Race Forwards and the Butterfly Lab

Reference
Race Forward (2022) Butterfly Lab Year 1 Full Report, [Link].

Summary
This report offers an overview of the conflicting narratives portraying migrants/immigrants in the US, which range from victimisation to criminalisation and inform confusion and anxiety surrounding policy- and decision-making on the issues of immigrants. The report looks at the range of tools and communication strategies that might be effective in countering and potentially replacing the existing narratives.

Study

MTV Shuga/Staying Alive Foundation

Reference
Baker, V. et al. (2023) *'It is guiding us to protect ourselves': a qualitative investigation into why young people engage with a mass-media HIV education campaign*. Cult Health Sex, [Link].

Summary
This study explores effective Social Behaviour Change Communications strategies used by the MTV Shuga mini TV series to create effective HIV edutainment. According to viewers, MTV Shuga offered relatable, tolerant and complex stories about young people navigating HIV and relationships. Furthermore, MTV Shuga initiated conversations among peers, partners and some families about HIV that made them feel supported and equipped to tackle problems in their own lives. Overall, complex, relatable, non-judgemental and youth-centred storylines can make HIV edutainment engaging to youth audiences. This approach allows space for reflection and inspires discussion and debate, turning young people from passive recipients of HIV messaging to active decision-makers.

Study

Reclaiming Native Truth

Reference
Reclaiming Native Truth (2018) *Research findings: Compilation of all research*, [Link].

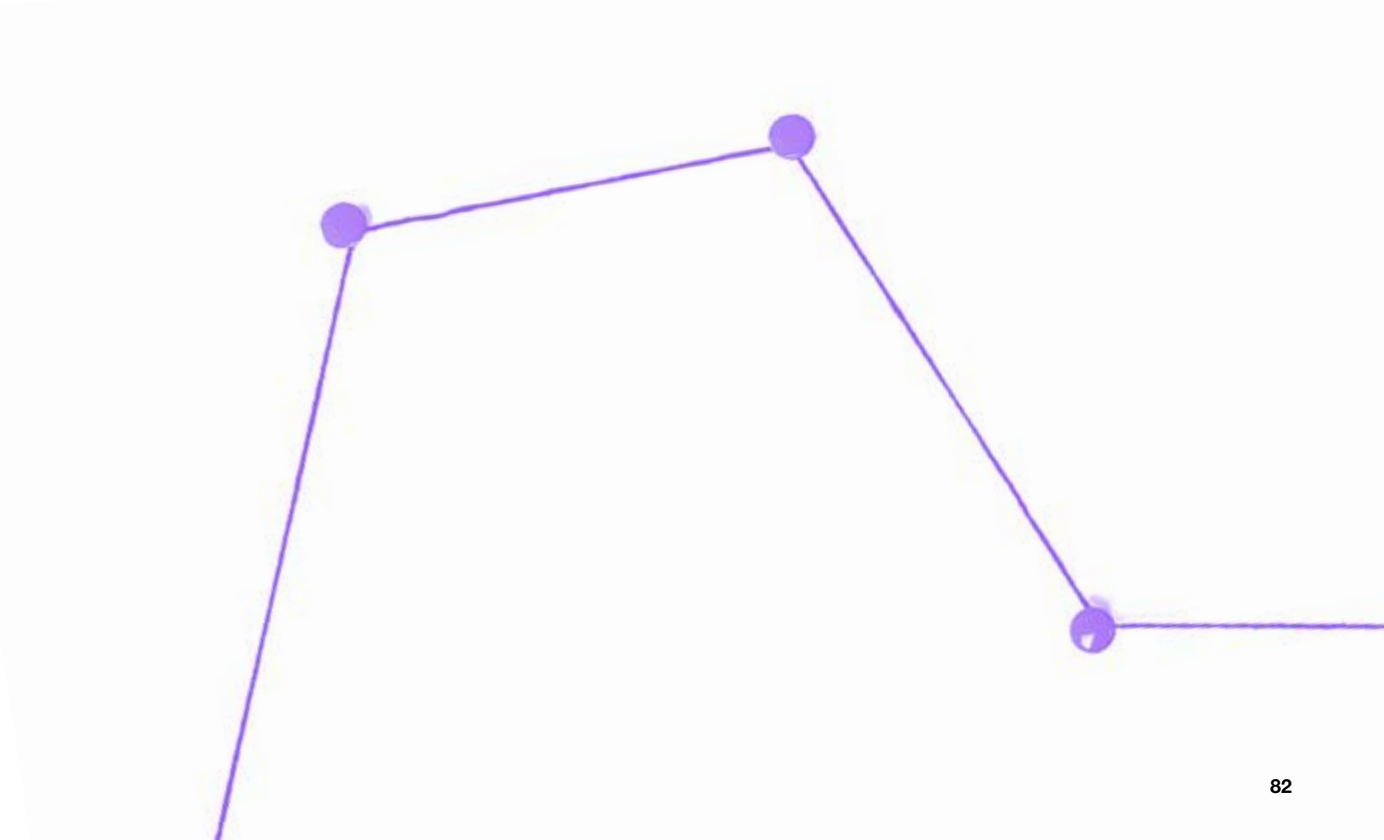
Summary
This report summarises multiple qualitative and quantitative studies by Reclaiming Native Truth aimed at understanding what different subgroups of Americans (by age, gender, socio-economic background and cultural background) know about Native Americans and the issues Native Americans stand for. In addition, the report explores and provides recommendations on the type of narratives, stories and messages that can catalyse change.

Study

Blackfish and SeaWorld: A Case Study in the Framing of a Crisis

Reference
Waller, R.L., & Iluzada, C.L. (2020) 'Blackfish and SeaWorld: A Case Study in the Framing of a Crisis', *International Journal of Business Communication*, 57(2), pp. 227–243.

Summary
This article focuses on the crisis that the documentary *Blackfish* precipitated at SeaWorld. The three issue-related, transformative frames embedded in the text/video of *Blackfish* are identified and analysed, then the three main counter-frames deployed by SeaWorld are identified and analysed. The conclusion discusses how and why *Blackfish* prevailed in this high-profile framing contest. It does so by discussing the resonance, coherence and credibility of the documentary's anti-captivity narrative and its superiority over SeaWorld's counter-framing campaign. In addition, the conclusion briefly examines how the tectonic shift in late-20th-century public opinion regarding animal rights – the kairotic backdrop of this crisis – forced SeaWorld to fundamentally change its business model in order to meet the dictates of this new ethos and to re-establish its post-crisis legitimacy.



4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Analysis

Again, this type of evidence is not consistently academically rigorous. As 'grey' literature, it is not held, nor intended to be held, to the standards of a peer-reviewed journal. As a result, some of these papers might feature a lower quality of data, lower methodological quality, or an inconsistent application or use of key theories or disciplines. In addition, as 'self-published' resources, they are more likely to avoid naming negative or unexpected outcomes of interventions. Some examples featured above explore unique interventions, set within unique circumstances and context, which makes them difficult to replicate. This type of 'evidence' is not intended to act as 'proof' of short or long-term impact. While sometimes referred to as 'impact' studies, it is more appropriate to reference them as practice studies, field-tests or performance tracking.

Together, however, they are incredibly valuable to the field. They provide evidence-based contributions to support the development of narrative strategies and tactics, and tools to support and inform the design of effective narrative change interventions. They also provide useful tools for measuring performance and immediate outputs of interventions. Overall, they can help strategists and storytellers to understand what type of stories – from themes to format and genre – resonate with intended audiences and stimulate engagement, which if sustained long-term can result in measurable impact. Simply put, the mechanics studies provide a further basis from which to design this work at scale – and the ability to predict and accurately measure outcomes and impact within theoretical reason.

The 'impact'

This last group could be thought of as encompassing 'traditional' impact evaluations, which use rigorous academic approaches to attempt to establish 'contribution' or 'attribution' between an intervention and measurable changes in individuals, communities, systems or the environment overall.

The tradition of impact evaluation in the fields associated with impact storytelling, and the narrative change field, is (like the ecosystem itself) relatively nascent. As a result, the available impact studies mostly still use the terms and methods of an associated, more established discipline (e.g. sociology) or a narrower, more established associated field of practice (e.g. social behaviour change communications).

Again, as a nascent field, most of the current impact papers are only able to evaluate impact at the early stages of the theory of change – e.g. changes in behaviours, norms and attitudes at an individual level rather than at the level of communities or systems, which require a more complex approach to evaluation. Crucially, collective and systemic changes take a long time. They are multifaceted and require thorough planning to identify all aspects of change. Such studies would require researchers to consider all other content and messages the audiences are exposed to daily in addition to the intervention itself, and would therefore require significant human and financial resources to sustain the intervention and impact measurement activities long-term. They would also demand consistent management of the quality of the materials, audience engagement and audience retention. As we'll go on to explore, at this stage in field development the funding required for such analysis is not available.

For the same reason, the field is currently focused on evaluating the impact of *individual* storytelling and narrative change interventions rather than the impact of creative collectives or group initiatives. As discussed in the previous chapters and earlier in this chapter, people are never exposed to one individual story or one individual intervention at a time; there is always a polyphony of 'voices' and imagery, many competing with each other. Tracking the impact of a collection of interventions over a period of time requires a nuanced understanding of the impact of each individual intervention, the interactions among the interventions, and the interactions between the interventions and the external environment and context – as well as a robust statistical model encompassing these factors.

Currently, the ecosystem is focusing on understanding the features, outcomes and impact of individual interventions; the studies of relationships between multiple interventions and/or interventions and their context are rare and more exploratory than affirmative. Hence, long-term impact evaluations of collective efforts of storytellers and narrative change practitioners are more of a future aspiration than a reality for today's field.

Current impact evaluations could be tentatively grouped into:

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies that measure the state of individuals' attitudes, norms and behaviours before the intervention (baseline) and after the intervention (endline). Depending on the length of the intervention, there might be a midline/intermediary assessment of the changes. The studies typically compare changes in individuals exposed to the intervention (treatment group) and those not exposed to the intervention (control group). Such studies include simple evaluations with data collected before (baseline) and after (endline) the intervention, alongside longitudinal qualitative/quantitative surveys and occasionally randomised control trials.

These studies vary in quality and rigour, but their approach is similar: compare changes between individuals exposed and unexposed to the intervention to establish the likelihood of the intervention being the cause of projected/desired changes versus other factors, internal or external to the individual.

Unless carefully planned and executed, most evaluations are only able to establish *contribution* of the intervention to the change, not to solely *attribute* the change to the intervention.

Meta-analysis: Quantitative studies aimed at systematically assessing a collection/pool of previous studies using similar methods, from multiple impact studies of a similar type, to 'derive conclusions about that body of research [and offer] a more precise estimate of the effect of the intervention … than any individual study contributing to the pooled analysis'.[163] Again, we have selected a series of illustrative examples of this type of study below.

[163] Haidich A. B. (2010) Meta-analysis in medical research. Hippokratia. 2010 Dec;14(Suppl 1):29-37, [Link].

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Title

Storytelling for Social Change: Leveraging Documentary and Comedy for Public Engagement in Global Poverty

Borum Chattoo, C., & Feldman, L. (2017)
Journal of Communication, 67(5), pp. 678–701, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
School of Communication, American University School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University	Experimental study: pre- and post-intervention measurement	This study highlights 'entertainment value', i.e. the positive emotions resulting from consuming content created to advance social change, as an important 'persuasive' and motivational factor. By comparing the immediate impact of non-fiction comedy and a traditional, 'sombre' documentary about the same issue – global poverty – the researchers discovered that people exposed to the comedy reported positive emptions accompanied with increased knowledge, awareness and intent to act, while awareness and the desire to act in people exposed to the 'sombre' documentary were negated by the negative emotions they experienced after watching the film. In other words, an entertaining, positive and engaging documentary creates better, deeper and faster impact versus a documentary designed to stimulate negative emotions.

Title

Story Movements: How documentaries Empower People and Inspire Social Change

Borum Chattoo, C. (2020)
Oxford: Oxford University Press, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Oxford University Press	Analytical review	This book explores how documentaries disrupt dominant cultural narratives through complex, creative and often investigative storytelling. Featuring original interviews with award-winning documentary film-makers and field leaders, the book reveals the influence and motivations behind the vibrant, eye-opening stories of the contemporary documentary age.

Title

Mapping research on the social impact of the arts: what characterises the field?

Lindström Sol S. et al. (2022)
Open Res Europe, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
The Swedish School of Library and Information Science (SSLIS) University of Borås	Meta-analysis	This article explores the broad and undefined research field of the social impact of the arts. Using a co-word analysis of over 10,000 articles published between 1990 and 2020, the authors found that since 2015 this research field has expanded and consists of different epistemologies and methodologies, summarised in largely overlapping subfields belonging to the social sciences, humanities, arts education, and arts and health/therapy. This article can therefore inform discussions on the social value of culture and the arts.

Title

Deepening Engagement and Learning Impact through Virtual Reality Activations

Plass J. et al. (2023)
Case Study Project: On the Morning You Wake (to the End of the World). [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Games for Change XR for Change	Experimental study with multiple data-collection activities and a quasi-control group exposed to 2D vs VR experience.	The VR documentary *On the Morning You Wake (to the End of the World)* captures the voices of Hawai'i residents who faced the imminent threat of nuclear weapons due to a ballistic missile notification. Games for Change led a long-term impact campaign around this documentary, involving screenings, surveys and discrete activities tailored to different audiences. The research reveals that when best practices are followed, VR activations can be successful in impacting and engaging audiences in varied venues and at many different events. The research also shows that content screened in a VR headset has a greater emotional impact on participants than when screened on a 2D interface. These findings are significant as they highlight an important affordance of virtual reality: VR can affect emotions more strongly than flat screens, and participants experience more positive emotions in VR than in a 2D experience.

Title

Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors'

Braddock, K. & Dillard, J.P. (2016)
Communication Monographs, 83:4, pp. 446–467.

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University	Meta-analysis	This study analysed aggregated data for other studies that tested the impact of narrative interventions on the subjects' attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviours. The results suggested positive relationships between exposure to a narrative and narrative-consistent beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. The study also suggested the presence of unidentified moderating factors (factors that amplify the effect of the main intervention, e.g. fictional techniques, delivery channels, etc.), but the researchers were not able to identify these factors.

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Title

Before and After The Day After Tomorrow: a U.S. study of climate risk perception

Leiserowitz, A.A. (2004a)
Environment, vol 46, no. 9, pp. 23–37, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Yale University, Environment Science and Policy for Sustainable Development The Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Environment journal	Experimental study: pre- and post-intervention measurement	Leiserowitz's study examines the impact of the film *The Day After Tomorrow* on climate change risk perceptions, conceptual models, behavioural intentions, policy priorities, and even the voting intentions of moviegoers. The study found that the movie led viewers to have higher levels of concern and worry about global warming, to estimate various impacts on the United States as more likely, and to shift their conceptual understanding of the climate system. The movie also encouraged watchers to engage in personal, political and social action to address climate change and to elevate global warming as a national priority. This study tries to 'stretch' the impact beyond individuals and assess whether the movie stimulated viewers to engage in an action aimed at changing the community/culture around them via a legislative or an activist approach. Reusswig's response study replicates the Leiserowitz approach in the UK, Germany and Japan. In his paper, Reusswig not only explains Leiserowitz's methodology in detail, but also details how the study used the cultural theory to describe myths about the environment and assess belief in these myths before and after watching the movie. Reusswig's study also confirms the significant impact of the movie on risk perceptions, conceptual understanding of climate change and intent to act. Neither study was able to account for all socio-demographic, environmental and contextual factors that could also have influenced viewers, although the differences in observed movie impact on people from different countries/socio-cultural backgrounds clearly demonstrate that the background also played a significant role in the observed impact.

Title

Empowering youth for social change through the Shujaaz multimedia platform in Kenya'

Hutchinson, P., Mirzoyants, A. & Leyton, A. (2019)
International Journal of Adolescence and Youth. [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Shujaaz Inc and Tulane University	Experimental study: longitudinal quantitative survey panel	This study evaluates the impact of Shujaaz multimedia on the lives of Kenyan young people aged 15–24 years. Shujaaz media content seeks to improve the lives of Kenyan young people by normalising and stimulating positive health behaviours, and incentivising income-generation activities. The study found that Shujaaz analogue media were associated with intermediate outcomes, while digital media were associated with an 18.1-percentage-point increase in ever using condoms and a 19-percentage-point increase in recommending the use of condoms to friends and partners. Additionally, both analogue and digital media were associated with improved income-generating outcomes. Exposure to digital media was associated with a KSH 2,096 ($20.90) increase in monthly income. The study concludes that Shujaaz multimedia has the potential to empower young people to bring about social change in Kenya.

Title

You need to be able to stand up for what is right

Hutchinson, P. et al. (2023)
MTV *Shuga Naija's transformative impact on youth attitudes towards sexual violence in Nigeria*, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
MTV Shuga, Staying Alive Foundation, Coston University, Tulane University	Experimental study: panel survey of Nigerian young people aged 15–24 (574 females, 317 males) with data collected before and after the airing of MTV Shuga Naija programming	This article evaluates the impact of MTV Shuga Naija, an entertainment education programme that aims to promote gender equality and challenge sexual violence norms in Nigeria. The authors used a panel survey of Nigerian young people before and after the airing of the programme to measure changes in attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and the disclosure of sexual violence. They found that MTV Shuga Naija had significant effects on reducing victim-blaming attitudes and increasing disclosure of sexual violence among young people in programme areas compared to comparison areas. However, the authors also noted that more work is needed to improve communication and dialogue within families, schools and communities, as well as to support victims of sexual violence.

4.2

Analysing the evidence that storytelling drives change

Title

Effectiveness of arts interventions to reduce mental-health-related stigma among youth: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Gaiha, S.M. et al. (2021)
BMC Psychiatry, 21, 364, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
Indian Institute of Public Health London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Stanford School of Medicine, Stanford University	Meta-analysis	Based on the review and meta-analysis of 57 studies gathered from 13 different medical and scientific databases, this study concludes that arts interventions are effective in reducing mental-health-related stigma to a small degree. Interventions that employ multiple art forms together compared to studies employing film, theatre or role play are likely more effective in reducing mental-health-related stigma.

Title

Impact on public attitudes of a mental health audio tour of the National Gallery in London

Riches, S. et al. (2022)
Early Interventions in Psychiatry, [Link].

Organisation(s)	Type	Summary
The National Gallery, London	Experimental study: pre- and post-intervention measurement	This study explored the effectiveness of visual arts in shifting attitudes and reducing stigma about mental health illnesses among visitors to the National Gallery in London. The participants were visitors who took a guided tour through the gallery's exhibits devoted to mental health. All participants completed a short survey pre- and post-tour and were offered an opportunity to provide a narrative feedback. According to the results, the tour increased positive attitudes towards people with mental health illnesses, indicating the feasibility of arts-based interventions at major venues to reduce stigma.

Analysis

Collectively, these early impact studies build a strong body of evidence confirming that storytelling and narrative change interventions can have a discernible and significant impact on individuals (knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values, norms and behavioural intent, etc.). They also suggest the possibility of impacts on groups of individuals who are exposed to the same interventions.[164]

In addition, these studies help us to identify the gaps in existing studies, which can guide further evidence gathering. Overall, Braddock and Dillard (2016) conclude that 'although narratives are often credited with the capacity to change opinions, empirical tests of this prediction have produced mixed results', and more research and data are necessary to fully understand the 'whether', 'how' and 'to what degree' narrative affects attitudes, beliefs, intent and behaviours.[165]

Further areas for potential future study include:

- the need to account and control for internal and external/contextual factors that might be enhancing or hindering the impact of the intervention
- the need to understand the relationships between multiple narrative/storytelling interventions that exist or overlap in the same space or environment
- the need for longitudinal tracking of impact to understand the sustainability and diffusion of impact (e.g. does impact on individuals truly accumulate to impact on communities, culture, systems?), etc.

In the sections that follow, we will further describe the challenges with existing evidence of impact and the live debates that are shaping the field's approach to future evidence gathering.

[164] van Laer, T., Feiereisen, S., & Visconti, L.M. (2019) 'Storytelling in the digital era: A meta-analysis of relevant moderators of the narrative transportation effect', *Journal of Business Research*, vol 96, pp. 135–146, [Link].
[165] Braddock & Dillard, 2016.

4.3

The structural challenges of gathering evidence for impact storytelling

Overview: a strong grounding, but is it enough?

As outlined above, the four types of evidence available provide a strong body of evidence for storytelling for social change and narrative change interventions. They provide confidence in the theoretical and historical grounding of the work, enabling practitioners to design interventions and predict outcomes within strong theoretical reasoning. This is supported by early, encouraging evidence that this work can have direct and discernible impact on individual knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural intent. This amounts to strong confidence in the probability that large-scale, sufficiently funded impact storytelling interventions can deliver impact in the long run and at scale.

However, even this combination of evidence types will not amount to unequivocal robust 'proof' for sceptics, funders and researchers, particularly those used to operating in more traditional social change fields (for example, public health) where direct attribution is much easier to prove whether at an individual, collective or systems level. Crucially, while in combination the evidence is plentiful (the 'impact' studies), studies looking beyond individual-level effects or tracking changes beyond a 3–5-year period are still in shorter supply. Below we outline the structural challenges and barriers that make this type of impact evaluation study challenging.

In the next section, we will go on to explore the live debates about how the ecosystem should approach evidence gathering in the future, including the *type* of evidence it will seek to gather and the funding models it will require to do that effectively.

Impact storytelling is an emerging *ecosystem* – not a coherent *field* or a *discipline*

As we explored in Part 3, at present, impact storytelling is best classified as a diverse, emerging ecosystem, and 'narrative change' is best described as a 'nascent field', with early signs of formalisation. Neither can be thought of or evaluated as an academic discipline. For example, Doc Society, Narrative Initiative and Pop Culture Collaborative – influential organisations within the ecosystem – only launched in 2005, 2017 and 2016 respectively. The structural debates and challenges discussed in Parts 2 and 3 have a significant impact on the quality, approaches and methodology of the current research.

The key barriers to evidence gathering include:

An emerging ecosystem: As an emerging ecosystem, lots of the 'founding' research and case studies pre-date its formation, and the formation of fields of practice like narrative change and its core conventions and approaches. Foundationally, none of the existing theories of long-term, multi-pronged narrative change (see Part 1.2) have ever been tested for the 10+ year time spans that the narrative change field in particular is aiming to work at. At this point, all long-term evaluations are retro-active, i.e. they hypothesise about potential links between particular narrative change strategies used in the previous decade and the changes we are observing today. Because of the challenges and uncertainties of such retro-active evaluations, most research in the ecosystem is focused on measures of short-term individual-level change, and often of individual interventions – rather than on coordinated collective, long-term change.

Diversity of disciplines: The impact evaluation tradition has not yet formed for the storytelling for change ecosystem and in the narrative change field it is still relatively new. Individual papers are therefore likely to be associated with one of the wide range of contributing disciplines. This means papers apply different methodologies, tools and approaches – making it hard to catalogue and compare them. However, recent research from Jones and McBeth,[166] as well as the USC Norman Lear Center,[167] offers early approaches to creating a framework that would unify different schools of thought and disciplines in the field of narrative change and offer value to the broader storytelling for change ecosystem.

Inconsistent theory of change & terminology: There is not yet one aligned theory of change, but rather a 'patchwork' of theories drawn from the diversity of academic disciplines and practices that inform the ecosystem. As we've discussed at length, there is therefore no alignment on the terms used to describe the process for change, the outcomes or the end impact (although most theories use similar concepts). Experts who we interviewed and whose works we reviewed highlight 'a need for shared research ethics and standards of practice', reflecting that 'both the challenge and the opportunity in this work lie in drawing from multiple sectors that contribute to the practice'.168

Training & skills gaps: There are no 'academics' trained specifically in the field of, for example, narrative change (although there are academics trained in the individual sectors of the ecosystem, e.g. film analysis, SBCC, etc.). Instead, there is a collection of specialists trained in a range of the disciplines that have underpinned the work. In the meantime, there are not enough researchers with existing expertise connected to and embedded within the wider ecosystem or field. At the moment, the work is largely being led by practitioners, most of whom don't have a background in research.

External factors: Large-scale impact storytelling interventions are subject to a range of extrinsic, external factors that are challenging to control for. These include the influence of other media and storytelling content, as well as more structural challenges, like the lack of control of project timelines when working with the entertainment industry. Few of the studies we reviewed contained sufficient analysis of this range of extrinsic factors.

As we'll go on to explore, despite these challenges, the majority of the literature we reviewed is optimistic about the potential of the field to drive measurable impact.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Rosenthal, E.L., Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Jung, E.J., Jauriqui, V., & Rogers, A. (2023) *A strategic framework to guide investments in narrative change: Best practices for media and beyond.* USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

[168] Skippings, I., Dessaury, M., & Boykin, A. (2022) *Field Guide: Narrative Research Methodologies.* Spitfire Strategies & Narrative Initiative, [Link].

4.4

The live debates challenging and shaping evidence gathering and evaluation

Actors across the impact storytelling ecosystem are grappling with a number of important open questions, about the role, objectives and methods of gathering evidence. The list below is not exhaustive, but reflects the primary questions and tensions that arose throughout our interviews and literature scan.

What type of funding and funder relationships should we be seeking and brokering?

Many of the debates and challenges surrounding impact evaluation are closely associated to, and oftentimes dictated by, the type of funding and funder relationship practitioners are engaged in and seeking to attract.

The shortage of funding in the ecosystem, alongside the restrictive funding models tied to evaluation of impact, emerged as one of the foundational challenges of impact evaluation.[169] Impact evaluation has been a major debate the art and culture sector in Britain for over two decades.[170] The Cultural Value Project argues that 'evaluation in the cultural sector has been too closely tied to meeting the accountability needs of funders, which has had the effect of weakening its ability to inform and support cultural practitioners and organisations.' [171] [172] Writing of the narrative change field in particular, Shelley Dorrans pinpoints that, currently, most funding is directed towards producing research/insights and evaluation, while not enough money remains for actioning those insights.[173] The concern that the weighting of funding is too heavily focused on evaluation and learning, rather than on the intervention or storytelling production itself, was widespread in our interviews. Other practitioners report that adherence to measurement 'often at the request of funders … inhibits organisations' ability to experiment.[174]

Recent USC Norman Lear Center publications underline that long-term, flexible and trust-based funding (defined as a partnership model focused on the needs and capacities of all stakeholders, often including multi-year flexible grants) is strongly associated with the success and impact of this work. USC Norman Lear Center researchers proposed less restrictive, or even unrestricted, funding commitments that allow for and enable experimentation – that is responsive to the scale and type of intervention that large-scale narrative change projects reflect.[175] Similarly, in the UK, Heard has called for innovations in funding models that allow for funds to be allocated separately for research/insights, strategies and evaluation. Heard has also suggested that a more flexible approach be taken to evaluation – one which is less deeply rooted in timebound evaluation and does not impact the release of funding for strategy implementation.[176]

The desire to renegotiate the funder-grantee relationship is of course being led by the sense of urgency among the ecosystem. As Felipe Viveros of Culture Hack Labs put it to us: 'Because of the polycrisis, funders are aware that we are entering uncharted territory, and therefore we need to mobilise resources in a different way.'

[169] Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) *What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK?* Heard, [Link].

[170] Etherton, M., & Prentki, T. (2006) 'Drama for change? Prove it! Impact assessment in applied theatre', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance,* 11:2, pp. 139–155; Balfour, M. (2009) 'The politics of intention: looking for a theatre of little changes', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance,* 14:3, pp. 347–359; Belfiore, E., & Bennett, O. (2010) 'Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making', *Journal for Cultural Research,* 14:2, pp. 121–142.

[171] Crossick, G., & Kaszynska, P. (2016) 'Part 3: Methodologies', in *Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project.*

[172] USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) *Narrative Change and Impact: Analysis of In-Depth Interviews with Experts, Practitioners, and Funders in the Narrative Change Field,* [Link].

[173] Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

[174] Potts, E., Lowell, D. & Manne, L. (2022) *Spotlight On Impact Storytelling: Mapping and recommendations for the narrative and cultural strategies ecosystem,* [Link].

[175] Norman Lear Center, 2023.

[176] Heard & Dorrans, 2022.

What level of impact should we focus on?

i. Individual, collective, structural

Throughout our research, we encountered a wide range of approaches to notions of change and impact. Referring back to the Media Measurement Framework (featured in Part 1.2), organisations and fields of practice focus their strategies and evaluation efforts across the spectrum – from individual to cultural and structural. Others focused on different *types* of change – from awareness to norms and behaviours. This plurality of approaches and focus areas was particularly pronounced in the review of the 'impact' studies, and throughout our expert interviews. Of course, as an ecosystem, some organisations can focus efforts at different stages of the theory of change – but clarity of alignment is still required to enable this approach.

ii. Direct infrastructure-building vs outputs

Some organisations suggested a pragmatic approach, focusing on targeting and measuring indicators of what might be called 'narrative infrastructure', such as individuals engaged in networking efforts, attendance at meetings, or training. This is sometimes in place of attempting to measure impacts of storytelling on individuals, communities or structural change.

iii. Long-term vs short-term

As we explored in Part 3, a number of experts underlined the need for long-term research that matches a theory of change that could span a decade. To date, funding, practice and research have not yet aligned to be able to measure an intervention of this scale. However, even if such alignment were in place, conducting a robust longitudinal study of this sort would be challenging – from the barriers to maintaining a control group, to attempting to control for external factors. The ecosystem must work together to 're-imagine' metrics and methodologies that respond to the scale and complexity of interventions of this type. As Manne put it: 'In searching for alignment around what we should be measuring, everyone – practitioners, researchers, and funders alike – agreed that we have to lengthen our measurement process to match the decade it may take to achieve measurable narrative and cultural change.'[177] In contrast, a number of reports called for the need for short-term responsive programming and research that enables the field to respond to a fast-changing news cycle.

iv. Individual attribution & topic-specific interventions vs collective deeper contribution

Proving direct attribution between any single impact storytelling intervention and a measurable shift in individual, collective or structural outcomes is incredibly challenging in interventions of this kind. As a result, some expert practitioners are moving away from focusing on evaluating individual interventions or attempting to focus on direct attribution to specific changes. Tracy Van Slyke of Pop Culture Collaborative noted that this process was leading to duplication of efforts and unproductive competition for funding.

Instead, practitioners are speaking and working in broad collective terms. Bridgit Antoinette Evans, CEO of the Pop Culture Collaborative, expressed the shift as follows:

'As a broad sector, we need to challenge our impulse to change "the narrative" on a particular issue, and instead embrace the work of transforming whole narrative oceans – that is, the ecosystems of narratives, ideas, and cultural norms that shape the behaviors, mindsets, and worldviews of millions of people. Efforts to change the narrative often result in specific one-directional communication plans, message frames, campaigns, or story projects that may have a short-term effect, but do not measurably transform cultural norms. These tactics are akin to squeezing a drop of red food coloring into a vast ocean of blue water and expecting the ocean to turn purple.'[178]

[177] Potts et al., 2022.

[178] Evans, B.A. (2022) 'To change the world, transform narrative oceans', *Medium* [Link].

4.4

The live debates challenging and shaping evidence gathering and evaluation

This sentiment was echoed by Dr Erica Rosenthal of the USC Norman Lear Center during our interview. Having talked about interconnections and interdependencies of many negative narratives (e.g. gender norms and intersectionality, poverty and racism, climate change and economic inequality, etc.), she also concluded that, in particular, the field of narrative change has to move away from focusing on specific social issues and start identifying and addressing cross-cutting, deep narratives through coordinated, purposeful effort. This shift, among other benefits, can help improve relationships and alignment with funders and attract more/better support for the sector, including financial support.

'I would say another trend in this space is to think less about specific, concrete topics and more about the overarching narratives that cut across multiple topics. There are very few funders that think in terms of the broad narratives of equity, or justice, or belonging. Funders are typically funding one specific topic at a time, like gender-based violence, or climate change, or mental health. The field is very siloed by topic. And I think what needs to happen is that funders who are interested in the overarching mindsets come together to fund the narratives on these broader topics in which the broader mindsets subsume narrower topics.'

A range of interviewees expressed similar views, with one expert suggesting that investing in long-term 'deep-narrative' or 'cultural models' trackers, similar to the FrameWorks Institute Culture Change project, could provide the whole field with measurement tools – not to generate direct attribution, but field-wide contribution and impact.

What counts as evidence and who gets to decide?

There is also a live, foundational debate about the nature of evidence in this emerging ecosystem. This debate intersects with broad efforts to decolonise impact storytelling interventions.[179] For example, in his review of grey literature, Brett Davidson[180] cites Da Costa,[181] who argues that in the field of international development, scientific evidence generated by out-of-country, established Western experts is often perceived as superior, more robust and more valuable than qualitative evidence generated by local resources, including through gathering stories, lived experiences and anecdotes. Yet ignoring first-hand or lived experience knowledge, especially in narrative-focused programmes which rely on nuanced understanding of the roots and the context of existing narratives, might lead to 'tragic and expensive' failures.[182]

Other actors argue on practical grounds that 'scientific' approaches, like those used to analyse the success of a traditional public health intervention, are simply not applicable to impact storytelling work. Direct attribution, they argue, will never be possible. These experts argue for a more balanced, pragmatic approach to 'evidence' within the field, which accepts evidence of 'contribution' and privileges a range of quantitative and qualitative data, as well as measures of narrative infrastructure-building, as valuable indicators of success and probable impact.

[179] Logan, James. (2023) *Conditions to Flourish: Understanding the Ecosystem for Narrative Power.* Global Narrative Hive, [Link].

[180] Davidson, 2017.

[181] Da Costa, P. (2014) '"Research To Policy?" Reflections on a Persistently Intriguing Debate', OTT, [Link].

[182] Davidson, 2017, p. 4.

In addition, a range of USC Norman Lear Center publications raise the question of authority over the value assigned to different types of evidence (e.g. qualitative/anecdotal and quantitative) among the key actors within the ecosystem: the funders versus creatives, and the audience.[183] For example, while funders require 'impactful examples' to overcome organisational 'resistance' to investing in 'innovative and time-intensive narrative change work', creators feel constrained by static evaluation frameworks and call for trust-based funding that would enable and encourage experimentation and iterative learning.[184]

Overall, the debate revolves around defining evidence from a holistic point of view to ensure that the nature of the evidence reflects that nature of the work.

Do we need more evidence?

As we've addressed throughout this report, several practitioners feel that the long history of this work and its broad-based disciplinary grounding means that further evidence gathering is not necessary. Instead, they advocate for research to be focused on action and learning to inform long-term interventions. Similarly, Potts et al. claim enough effort has been invested in the theoretical framing and impact evaluation of storytelling for change and a lot is known about 'what works'. The main goal now, they argue, is to translate this accumulated technical knowledge into actionable insights and develop performance and measurement tools.[185]

Reflecting on the wide variety of views on the role of research, Viveros summarised as follows: 'There is a mix of people who are very informed and grounded in social movements – the thinkers and what we call "mystical anarchists". On the one hand, we are inspired by Karen Barad. On the other hand, we like the classics at the edge of Western epistemologies as well as traditional ecological knowledge akin to the knowledge driving indigenous movements.'

Is it 'right' to evaluate the impact of art or storytelling?

While we found some emerging resistance to the focus on evaluation and impact among campaigners, activists and advocates, the most concerted resistance to any notion of evaluation was present among artists and creatives.

Questions of what purpose arts and culture serve in society have evolved significantly since the post-war period. When the UN's 1948 Declaration of Human Rights included the universal 'right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts', the Arts Council of Great Britain was established to make arts and culture more widely accessible. Socially and politically, there was a consensus on the intrinsic value of art (or 'art for art's sake') – the existence of art in itself is of value to society.

By the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, as Conservative governments labelled arts and cultural organisations as elitist and a drain on the public purse, public funding was slimmed down. However, starting in 1997, the New Labour government built policies around the quantifiable economic and social value (or the instrumental value) of the arts.[186] Extending this logic, to justify their funding, publicly subsidised cultural organisations increasingly had to argue for the impact they would make (starting with impact on their immediate communities) and what benefit they could provide the local and national economy.[187] In other words, arts and culture had to serve a purpose; merely existing as art for art's sake was not enough. Since

[183] For example: USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) *Exploring Factors Associated with Impact in Entertainment-Driven Narrative Change: A Case Study in Hollywood, Health & Society Projects, 2012-2021*, [Link].

[184] Ibid.

[185] Potts et al., 2022.

[186] O'Connor, J. (2010) *The cultural and creative industries: a literature review*. 2nd edn, [Link].

[187] Belfiore, E. (2002) 'Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: Does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK', *International Journal of Cultural Policy,* 8 (1), pp. 91–106, [Link].

4.4

The live debates challenging and shaping evidence gathering and evaluation

the late 1990s, major publicly subsidised cultural organisations have had to continuously measure and demonstrate how they create social and economic impact.

Critics point out that 1) the emphasis on evaluating social and economic impact deepens the crass instrumentalisation of art, reducing the value of culture simply to quantifiable 'usefulness',[188] and 2) in the era of austerity (since 2010), British cultural organisations are increasingly pressured to plug the gaps of a broken system of rising inequality and the breakdown of communities. The government, say critics, should invest in social infrastructure (such as libraries, civic spaces and youth centres), rather than forcing cultural organisations (and artists) to provide care in communities.[189]

However, leaders and practitioners in cultural organisations, as well as scholars, increasingly view the debate over the intrinsic versus instrumental value of culture as outdated and unnecessarily polarising.[190] Great art can also have social and economic benefits, they argue. As Ruth McKenzie emphasised in her interview with us, excellence is 'not divorced from social purpose'. McKenzie argues that there is a 'false divide' between what is viewed as high art, which centres the voice of the artist, and 'community art', which serves a social purpose.[191] In fact, high-calibre art can also contribute to social change. According to McKenzie, the arts ought to borrow from the model of sport, where there is a gradient from the amateur to the elite, wherein all forms, abilities and levels of sports activity can exist. Similarly, we should think of art (and artists) on a gradient serving different purposes, not of more or less value but of different levels of training, skill and accomplishment.

Summary: approaches and perspectives on evaluation and research across the ecosystem

A high-level summary of the current spectrum of viewpoints and approaches to evaluation and research is provided on the next page. This is indicative only, based on our impressions from interviews and the literature.

[188] Belfiore, E. (2004) 'Auditing culture: The subsidised cultural sector in the New Public Management', International Journal of Cultural Policy, 10(2), pp. 183–202, [Link].

[189] Rimmer, M. (2018) 'The art of survival: community-based arts organisations in times of austerit y', *Community Development Journal*, 55 (2), pp. 295–312, [Link].

[190] Belfiore, 2002; Knell, J., & Taylor, M. (2011) *Arts Funding, Austerity and the Big Society: Remaking the case for the arts?* Arts Council England, [Link].

[191] Newman, T., Curtis, K., & Stephens, J. (2003) 'Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of the literature', *Community Development Journal*, 38 (4), pp. 310–322, [Link].

Level of investment in evaluation and attitude to evidence gathering	Light – Reimagine		Mid-weight – Pragmatists		High – Enthusiasm	
Perspective in a sentence	We don't need formal evaluation – we need to invest at scale, with flexibility to enable innovation and impact	We have decades of evidence already – now we need to invest in scaling interventions	If we pre-test narratives, frames and content that's sufficient. After that we need scale. Direct attribution isn't practical for this work	Research and evaluation are crucial to success. But direct attribution isn't possible – we need practical methods that work.	We should do large-scale, long-term granular studies to generate water-tight evidence of impact and attribution	The role of our interventions is to develop deep learnings about how and whether narrative change interventions are effective
Approach to funding relationships	We need to reimagine funder relationships and build unrestricted 'trust-based' philanthropic models	We need to invest in funder education, to share more about the field, and build models that reflect its reality. Together, we can design models that work	Funders can take a more flexible approach and trust the disciplinary rooting of this work	We can collaborate with funders to provide rigorous work, and tailor measurement frameworks to this work	Funders will only invest in this work if our evidence is as strong as traditional interventions	Funders should see our work as their method to evaluate the ROI of narrative change vs other interventions
Associated evaluation methods	Tracking evidence of 'narrative infrastructure' Focus on qualitative insights Deep-listening models	Greater focus on qualitative measures Use of measures of reach, engagement and network-building as proxies for impact and strategy evaluation interested in collective tools like deep-narrative trackers, that enable contribution measures, if not attribution – and support the overall ecosystem	Performance monitoring approaches (e.g. tracking reach and engagement with content); user-experience and user-acceptance studies; discourse, content, and text analysis Focus group testing, dial-testing Field-wide tools like deep narrative/ mindsets and big listening tracking tool	Mixed-method studies, case studies	Randomised control trials, cost-benefit analyses (return on investment, cost effectiveness, cost efficiency), longitudinal quantitative studies	Lab experiments, randomised control trials, cost-benefit analyses

4.4

The live debates challenging and shaping evidence gathering and evaluation

A trend towards a collective pragmatic approach to evidence gathering?

At the close of this project, a new ‘Beta Framework for Narrative Change Evaluation’ was launched by the influential US-based Pop Culture Collaborative and the USC Norman Lear Center.[192] The framework focuses almost exclusively on measures of ‘narrative infrastructure’ building, with indicators like ‘organisational capacity’, network ‘engagements’ and ‘field growth’. Narrative indicators are focused more on ‘content production’, ‘distribution’ and ‘reach’. This approach aligns with similar models used by organisations like OKRE and Color of Change, which focus on more localised, practical indicators as proxies for overall impact.

Recent projects like the influential US-based FrameWorks Institute Culture Change project,[193] which provided trackers on topic-agnostic, national-level mindset shifts (though in a much more technical and academic way), also reflect a more ‘collective’ approach and attitude to evaluation and evidence gathering. This approach moves from direct attribution towards collective contribution. As Tracy Van Slyke put it in our interview: ‘Evaluation and impact shouldn’t be about justifying if it’s worth funding narrative change. Instead, we must focus on the learnings and insights that inform and evolve a strategy towards long-term, transformational change. For example, at the Pop Culture Collaborative, we have learned the best approaches for organisational capacity-building; how to support partnerships and collaborations that scale and expand narrative power; and how to best cultivate narrative networks that can seed new.’

[192] Van Slyke, T., & Watson-Currie, E. (2023) ‘How Do We Know If We Have Transformed Narrative Oceans?’ *Medium*, [Link].

[193] (2020) ‘Culture Change Project Resource Hub’, *FrameWorks Institute*, [Link].

4.5

Sample cases of evidence gathering done right

Below, we have selected a range of best-in-class evidence. We've selected these pieces because they reflect a global scope, and use mixed-method approaches to enable a combination of statistical rigour and sensitivity to the value of qualitative insights for narrative work. We've also tried to choose studies we believe to be practical and replicable by a range of fields of practice within the narrative change field and broader storytelling for change ecosystem.

Organisation(s)

Color of Change Hollywood, the USC Norman Lear Center

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
Color of Change Hollywood & USC Norman Lear Center (2020) *Normalizing Injustice: The Dangerous Misrepresentations that define Television's Scripted Crime Series,* [Link].	'Mechanics'	Content analysis	This report examines how crime TV shows shape public perceptions of race, gender and justice. It reveals how these shows often reinforce harmful stereotypes, glorify law enforcement and ignore systemic issues. The report also highlights the lack of diversity in the writers' room and showrunners of these shows.	This is a comprehensive and robust analysis with various levels of quality control, from coding against a robust codebook, to intercoder validity, to the random selection for episodes from different crime series for analysis. The analysis was co-created by several types of narrative change actors – creatives, show-producers, writers and researchers.

Organisation(s)

Society and Natural Resources journal

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
McBeth, M.K., Shanahan, E.A., & Jones, M.D. (2005) 'The Science of Storytelling: Measuring Policy Beliefs in Greater Yellowstone', *Society and Natural Resources*, 18(5), pp. 413–429, [Link].	'Mechanics'	Mixed method: narrative policy analysis, content analysis, content coding and quantification for statistical analysis	This paper explores the use of narratives in public consumption documents to measure policy beliefs of interest groups in Greater Yellowstone. The study uses a mixed methodology that addresses methodological criticisms of narrative policy analysis and content. It analyses 75 public consumption documents from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Blue Ribbon Coalition for policy beliefs. The results indicate statistically significant differences between the two groups for all three policy beliefs: federalism, science, and the relationship between humans and nature.	The study offers a way of taking content analysis further by coding the themes and analysing them statistically. This allows it to not only show that two competing groups differ on which narratives they use, but also on how they differ on the same/common narratives – overall offering richer and more actionable insights.

Organisation(s)

International Journal of Sustainable Development, University of Edinburgh

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
Howell, R.A. (2014) 'Using the transtheoretical model of behavioural change to understand the processes through which climate change films might encourage mitigation action', *International Journal of Sustainable Development,* 17(2), 137, [Link].	'Mechanics' and 'impact'	Content analysis using an established theory (transtheoretical model) as theory of change	This study analyses the content of four different movies (one fiction film, two documentaries and one sci-fi/documentary film) to assess if and by what means each movie progresses its audience along the stages of change defined by the transtheoretical model (TTM) from awareness to attitudinal change to behavioural change. The study identified the potential for TTM to support more purposeful design and evaluation of narrative change interventions and strengthen the power of narratives to inspire behaviour change in individuals.	This study attempts to use an established theoretical model as a theory of change for designing and assessing narrative change interventions. By setting TTM as a theory of change, the study takes content analysis to the next level by assessing how far along the behaviour change journey a particular film can take an individual. This is a potentially good model for testing a field-specific theory of change once the narrative change field arrives at it.

Organisation(s)

Liz Manne Strategy, FrameWorks Institute

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
Green, J. & de Vries, M. (2021) *Measuring the Impacts of Poverty Narrative Change: Research Framework & Survey Questions*. Liz Manne Strategy with FrameWorks Institute, [Link].	'Mechanics' and 'impact'	Randomised control trial	This report aims to help practitioners and researchers who are working towards changing the narrative on poverty in America. The authors developed and tested survey questions to measure the early impact of such work. The set of metrics they created are meant to facilitate learning across organisations and help develop a cohesive narrative change strategy.	The study takes a reader on a step-by-step journey on how to design and implement a purposeful narrative change intervention and evaluate its early impact – going from defining the hypotheses and theory of change to developing an evaluation approach and tools. The report is written in easy, accessible language; it is detailed enough without being repetitive.

4.5

Sample cases of evidence gathering done right

Organisation(s)

Communication Monographs journal

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
Braddock, K. & Dillard, J.P. (2016) 'Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours', *Communication Monographs,* 83:4, pp. 446–467, [Link].	'Impact'	Meta-analysis	This study analysed aggregated data from other studies that tested the impact of narrative interventions on subjects' attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviours. The results suggested positive relationships between exposure to a narrative and narrative-consistent beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. The study also suggested the presence of unidentified moderating factors (factors that amplify the effect of the main intervention, e.g., fictional techniques, delivery channels, etc.), but the researchers were not able to identify these factors.	Meta-analysis enables the researchers to look beyond a single incidence of impact and establish common impact trends across multiple incidences, which makes the argument for narrative change impact stronger. In addition, the study lists and systematically tests various moderators (amplification factors), e.g. delivery channels and persuasive/narrative techniques; hence it also looks at the effectiveness of selected practices.

Organisation(s)

School of Communication, American University
School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University

Reference	Type of evidence	Approach, methods	Summary	Why we like it
Feldman, L. & Borum Chattoo, C. (2019) 'Comedy as a Route to Social Change: The Effects of Satire and News on Persuasion about Syrian Refugees', *Mass Communication and Society,* 22:3, pp. 277–300, [Link].	'Impact'	Pre-post experimental design with delayed recontact and a serial mediation analysis	This study examines shifts in US public attitudes about Syrian refugees after watching a topical satirical news segment on *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, compared with a CNN news segment. To investigate synergistic effects between satire and news, the design varied whether the news and comedy segments were viewed alone or in sequence (news before comedy or comedy before news). The results show that all four treatments (news only, comedy only, news-comedy, comedy-news) significantly increased support for refugees from pre-test to post-test, and these effects were maintained after a two-week delay. However, the effects were significantly greater in the three comedy conditions relative to news only. In addition, the study demonstrated that perceived entertainment value is a positive mediator of comedy's persuasive effects and serves as a buffer against negative indirect effects through message discounting and rgument quality.	This study goes beyond assessing the immediate impact of comedy versus news media. It also looks at the relationships and impact of integrated interventions (i.e. two experimental groups watched both the news segment and the comedy segment), the conditions of such integration (news before comedy or comedy before news), and the sustainability of the impact over a longer period of time (immediate versus two weeks). We believe this is the direction in which the impact evidence in this field should be developing, to accumulate robust, long-term proof of impact of collective storytelling for change initiatives over time.

5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1
Overview: strengthening the UK ecosystem

As we've explored, a number of reports call for further strengthening the UK impact storytelling ecosystem. This means not just more funding but more joined-up approaches among the disparate groups and fields within the ecosystem. Experts underlined that the UK can learn from the US ecosystem in which artists and storytellers are (sometimes, though not always) better integrated with campaigners, organisers, strategists, media platforms and funders.

Crucially, as the team at Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) remind us – if we need new stories to help drive change, then we also need 'new spaces, strategies and ways of coming together to build those new narratives. Otherwise … we're likely to be recreating the same old familiar patterns'.[194] Right now, it's far too rare in the UK to have groups and organisations rooted in lived experience leading narrative or storytelling for change projects. 'This has to change because throughout history we have seen how movements driven by the people most affected are the ones that create deep and lasting narrative change.'[195]

In their interviews, Viveros, Finzi and Davidson reminded us that some of the most effective, cutting-edge work is happening among indigenous and Global Majority communities. We can learn from the transnational successes of the Green Wave in South America and the decades of praxis in places like South Africa, as we build more effective ecosystem infrastructure and systems that take deeper leadership from people with lived experience of marginalisation – embedding core principles of co-creation, anti-oppression and decoloniality. Crucial to this ecosystem-building process will be convening people across fields of practice to generate greater alignment on the live debates that continue to shape this work (in particular, surrounding approaches to impact evaluation and subsequent funder relationships).

Convene funders to help scale funding

As individual organisations are often focused on their own demands for funding, the ecosystem as a whole would benefit from large-scale funder convening to support long-term, large-scale impact storytelling. Some of our interviewees confirmed the current short-termist approach as a barrier to achieving joined-up initiatives resulting in longer-term success.

PIRC in particular emphasises the need for cross-issue work to tackle the roots of interconnected injustices.[196] This requires linking organisations to work cross-movement toward a common goal. When success is only measured through a single campaign and not on deeper narrative change, true change may only be temporary or short-lived. For Ken Grossinger, this is where the foresight of funders is needed to support a wide swathe or variety of approaches: perhaps a film, alongside an exhibition, along with a strategic comms push across news media, etc.[197]

[194] Smith, H. (2022) *Decolonising Narratives*, PIRC, [Link].
[195] See *PIRC Strategy 2023–2026*, [Link].
[196] Ibid.
[197] Grossinger, K. (2023) *Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together*. The New Press.

We see in commissioned research, such as the recent report from Luminate,[198] that funders want to ensure that organisations (like strategic communications specialists) and change agents, such as non-profits, activists and community groups, work effectively together. There is a recognition that access and further training in the field is required (and demand for this from funders themselves), so that arts/culture, charities and all the support crew needed to create deep, long-lasting change on an issue can be better supported, as seen in the examples in Part 4.

Prioritise pitching for investment in production and distribution over research

As Part 4 of this report demonstrates, according to a variety of methodologies and metrics, we can see how storytelling leads to social change. In our expert interviews and in recent leading reports across the ecosystem, we have heard the pleas to invest in action as well as theory and research, particularly in the UK. As we've explored, some voices go so far as to say that, at this point, the ecosystem does not need more evidence that storytelling leads to social change. We already see that it does and how it does. What we need now is investment in large-scale action, incorporating the arts, community organisers, strategic comms specialists and the media. A recent report from Heard[199], strategy findings from Liz Manne[200] and impassioned pleas in our interviews with Felipe Viveros of Culture Hack Labs and Beadie Finzi of Doc Society all confirm a need (at the moment) for more storytellers and better content, not more 'evidence' of impact.

[198] Luminate (2023) Winning Hearts & Minds: How Change Agents, Funders, and Creative Agencies Can Harness the Power of Strategic Communications, [Link].
[199] Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK? Heard, [Link].
[200] 'Projects', Liz Manne Strategy, [Link].

5.2
Advance collaboration & network-building

Almost unanimously, we've seen calls for greater cohesion, networking and sharing across actors already working in the ecosystem.[201] The findings of the 2018 report from Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact further provide evidence that, when organisations with different remits and focuses work collaboratively, their overall impact is greater.

Connect arts, news media, tech and distribution to the ecosystem and the emerging field

As we demonstrated in the ecosystem mapping section in Part 3, much of the social change-driven work in areas like the arts and journalism is far removed from the work of social movement organisers and the wider narrative change field. This is a finding backed up by several of our interviewees as well as Grossinger's Art Works. In short, the impact of the work of both storytellers/artists and organisers would benefit from greater collaboration. So, what is needed?

Firstly, more in-depth mapping of these fields, starting with arts and cultural institutions. Ask questions, such as:

- What are their missions or remits in being catalysts for social change?
- What kind of language and frameworks do they use to conceptualise social change
- What is their role in community organising?
- How do they work with other institutions, charities and funders in the ecosystem?
- How do they assess and monitor social change?
- What additional tools and resources do they need to maximise their impact strategies?

Secondly, get artists/storytellers in the same room with organisers and narrative change strategists. Storytellers often have the best intentions for their work; they want to have an impact in the real world. But they are often unaware of the community organisers and strategists. *Everyone* in the ecosystem would benefit from a more structured approach to learning about and connecting with each other.

Collaboration means co-creation – connecting practitioners and research

As we have seen through our survey of reports and ecosystem maps, there is already a plethora of materials and toolkits aimed at experienced organisers/campaigners and those who speak the language of the narrative change field. As we saw in Part 3 of this report, the jargon of the field contributes to materials that only benefit those already active in the field.

Ruth Taylor's report emphasises that there are already too many reports targeted at specialist practitioners. Likewise, Liz Manne's *Spotlight on Storytelling* points out that there are too many resources and materials targeted at what she calls the 'behind the scenes' crew – the expert practitioners and researchers. This is often alienating to storytellers and artists.

What is the solution? Both OKRE and Doc Society propose practices of co-creation. OKRE has created its own theory of change and used what it views to be common, non-jargonistic language to speak to its audience of storytellers. Doc Society, on the other hand, has harnessed the strengths of strategic comms and narrative change language, models and practices. It provides a much-needed bridge between the narrative change field (including the funders) and storytellers. Likewise, organisations like Heard are pioneering co-creative practices for developing messaging and guides with communities with lived experience and playing an *intermediary* role between technical framing and messaging research and scriptwriters, producers and journalists.

[201] For example: Taylor, R. (2021) Transforming Narrative Waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK. Narrative Initiative, p. 38, [Link]; Heard & Dorrans, 2022; Sachrajda, A., & Youssef, S. (2023) Building narrative and cultural change infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US, p.12, [Link].

Support efforts to formalise an inclusive ecosystem & narrative change field

As we explored in Part 3, there is a divergence in opinion over whether the broad impact storytelling ecosystem ought to be formalised into a field and indeed whether the narrative change field should formalise further into a discipline. However, to some degree, this process of formalisation is already happening; there are multiple initiatives focusing on developing and refining the nascent field's theory of change, terminology, methods and frameworks. The emerging consensus appears to be that as long as the broader ecosystem maintains the commitment to inclusivity and flexibility of approach, further formalisation will advance credibility for funders, build internal capacity through accredited degrees and training programmes, and ultimately advance and increase impact.

Academic institutions could provide credibility to strengthen the ecosystem

We asked our expert interviewees what they would like to see from a university institute working in the impact storytelling ecosystem. Many said that, with so many disparate institutions, charities, artists and storytellers and others working parallel to but not always *with* each other, the best thing a university can do is give a sense of unity (formalisation), credibility and support to existing networks in the UK and EU. This would require more than one-off seminars or networking panel events. It would involve a joined-up effort with a longer-term strategy for facilitating the process, from bringing practitioners and researchers together, to supporting production and distribution, to delivery and evaluation.

An academic institution working in this ecosystem is not without its challenges, however, as many academic texts and the outcomes of research projects (even the best-intentioned community-based projects) often stay within academia and only speak to fellow academics. But when done well, a standardisation of frameworks, language and practices helps provide legitimacy to a field – and that contributes to confidence for funders (both philanthropic and public, such as UKRI) to invest in research and practice.

Currently, no university in the UK has all the expertise or institutional vision to create a centre of excellence focusing on storytelling for social change. Such an undertaking would require cross-institutional collaboration, bringing together the research strengths and methods of established disciplines. There would need to be collaboration across areas like the arts, design, journalism and media studies, with centres specialising in complementary areas like social psychology and public policy.

Interdisciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration is essential to develop frameworks and tools for both practitioners and academic researchers. This collaborative endeavour would help to formalise a currently disparate ecosystem into more of a recognised field of study.

5.3
Skills training & capacity-building

Further training & accredited courses across the ecosystem

As explored in Part 3, there is widespread demand for further training and capacity-building across the ecosystem – from the specific, like the need for trained 'impact producers' for TV and film projects, to broader calls for grassroots training, and investment in training and coaching to enable senior leaders to run key organisations across the ecosystem.

We also noted calls for accredited, university-led training as part of the wide formalisation of the field. While there are courses and postgraduate programmes related to media, campaigning and social impact, no department in the UK or internationally has a programme focused specifically on the practice of the narrative change field. Further, no UK university works as a convenor of practitioners, a centre of research *and* a pedagogical centre of excellence. A university could help with standardising the language and frameworks of current practitioners (i.e. via MA programmes, MOOCs and CPD courses) and train the next generation of practitioners working across storytelling and organising.

5.4

Strengthening the evidence, research & evaluation base

Create an online, user-friendly catalogue of research

Several of our expert interviewees mentioned that the storytelling for change ecosystem is lacking a comprehensive catalogue (or an online library) of available literature, including grey literature, published reports and literature reviews, peer-reviewed publications, blogs, editorials, magazine articles and other seminal documents important for understanding the field and contributing to it. The result of this gap is a widespread misconception that the field does not yet have a substantial body of documented knowledge to share. Aside from undermining the value of storytelling-for-change contribution, this misconception leads to (1) repeated questioning about the existence of the evidence of impact, and (2) duplication of efforts among funders, researchers and activists, who make a literature review a persistent feature of all their projects.

Our literature review further highlighted the above-mentioned misconception and duplication of efforts. We saw multiple reports collecting, organising and presenting very similar data, insight and information and presenting them to the same audiences. We also saw multiple studies conducting literature/desk reviews afresh, albeit most in their own sub-section of impact storytelling. Finally, we only found a few studies that were building on and expanding previous evidence and impact-generating work. Most impact papers focused on original and isolated research, even in situations where the same topic or intervention had been studied by multiple researchers – the analysis/impact evaluation of the film *The Day After Tomorrow* being a perfect example. Overall, it appears that the lack of a coherent 'library' accessible to any and all actors in the impact storytelling ecosystem is slowing down the knowledge-generating process via duplication of efforts and diffusion of resources.

Address research and evidence gaps by commissioning original research

As we explored in Part 4, taken together, the four types of evidence available provide a strong body of evidence and theoretical grounding and practice for the field.

As we've outlined, some practitioners argue that there is 'enough' research and that the most pressing job is in organising and making more accessible the existing evidence.

However, taking a balanced viewpoint, many practitioners also support the finding that there are some significant gaps and challenges remaining. Tackling these could make major contributions to building funder confidence and filling gaps in learning and insight.

For example, among the four types of evidence we explore in this report, UK examples and examples from the wider arts and creative industries are still significantly under-represented. Taking as models and templates some of the best-in-class examples highlighted in this report, investment in a suite of 'thought leadership' and practice ('mechanics') studies focusing on UK-based examples, with a focus on integrating the more often siloed contribution of arts and news journalism to narrative change work, would be valuable.

As mentioned above, this could include projects similar in style to the recent suite of studies from the USC Norman Lear Center.

Another notable gap, and potential area to invest in, involves evaluating collective, large-scale integrated arts and media-based impact storytelling and narrative change projects. These would be projects with multi-pronged, multi-type interventions, ideally with secured investment for 10+ years, designed in alignment with a defensible theory of change and measurement framework. Potential areas for this sort of work could examine how impact storytelling in the arts and media contributes to shifting mindsets or changing deep narratives. The types of studies in this case would be mixed-method studies, which would include as a minimum a combination of a longitudinal quantitative panel surveys (with at least two subgroups of people – exposed and not exposed to a planned intervention) and annual or bi-annual qualitative interviews with the respondents of the panel to understand if and how their 'stories' or lived experiences are changing and what factors (within the programme and externally) might be responsible for this change. The qualitative part of the work could include traditional data gathering methods (focus group discussion or in-depth interviews) or more innovative approaches (e.g. arts-based methodologies and participatory formats).

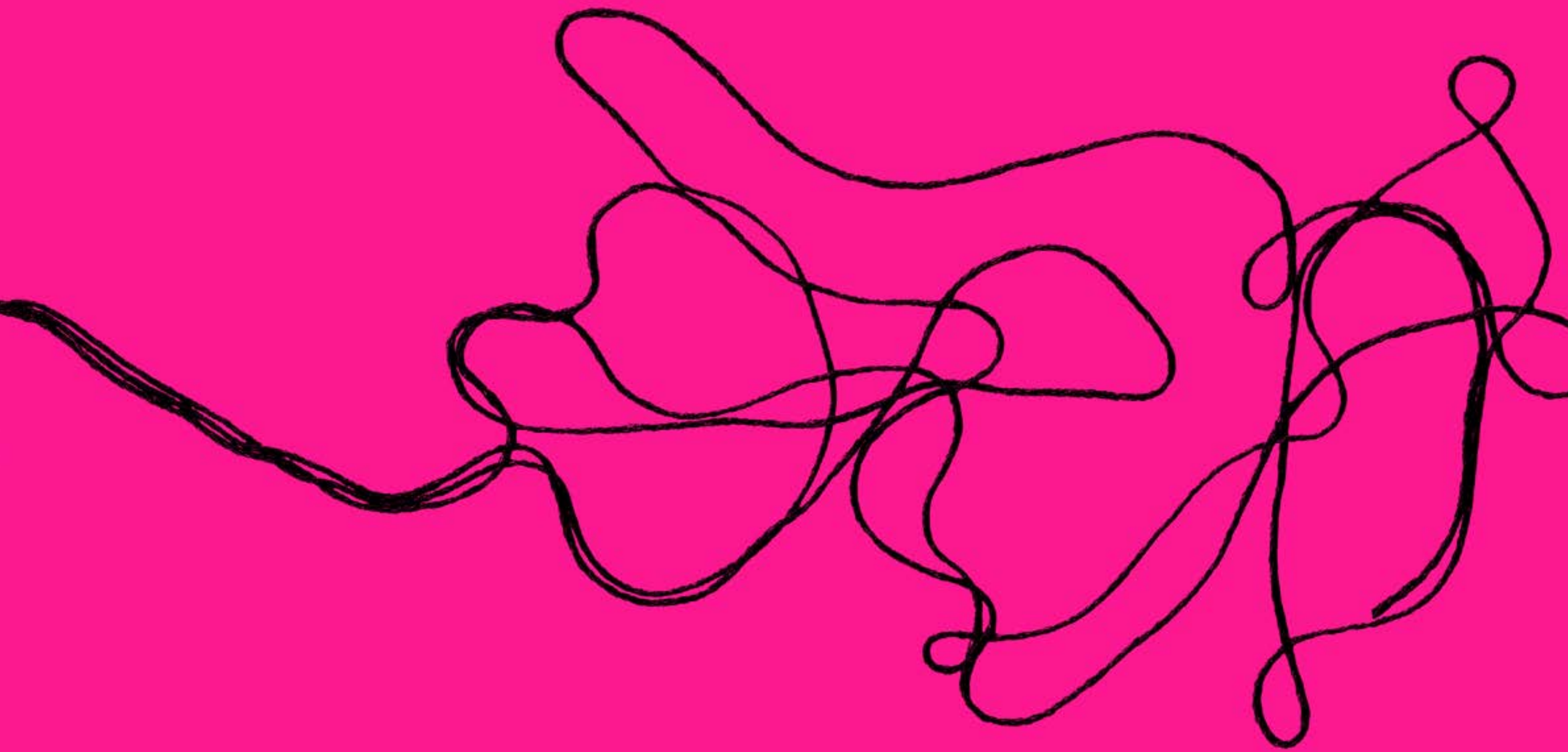
A final note: this is only the beginning

We hope this report has provided you with a clear and comprehensive picture of the emerging new ecosystem of impact storytelling, especially of how much energy, work, research, experimentation and creative collaboration is happening around the globe and here in the UK. We also hope it's evident that this ecosystem of storytellers is ready to, as strategist Liz Manne puts it, 'go to the next level'[202] – to collaborate more, to learn from each other and to accelerate our impact to meet the awesome scale of the challenges we face. We hope this report helps to chart part of that journey forwards.

However, this report is only part of that journey. This study draws on the invaluable work of researchers across the impact storytelling ecosystem, whose work we strongly recommend reading and exploring. In the following, final section we've compiled a selection of essential further reading and a range of toolkits. These are designed to support all of you, from researchers and funders to storytellers and creatives, on your journey towards unlocking the full force and impact of storytelling.

[202] Potts, E., Lowell, D. & Manne, L. (2022) Spotlight On Impact Storytelling: Mapping and recommendations for the narrative and cultural strategies ecosystem, [Link].

Resources



Resources

Essential Reading

- (2022) 'Our Theory of Change', *Doc Society*, [Link].
- 'Impact and Insight Toolkit', Counting What Counts, [Link].
- Abounza, B. et al. (2019) The State of SIE: Mapping the Landscape of Social Impact Entertainment. Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment, [Link].
- Borum Chattoo, C., & Das, A. (2014) Borum Chattoo, C., & Das, A. (2014) *Assessing the social impact of issues-focused documentaries: Research methods & future considerations*. Center for Media and Social Impact, School of Communication at American University.
- Crossick, G., & Kaszynska, P. (2016) 'Part 3: Methodologies', in *Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project*.
- Davidson, B. 'How can foundations and nonprofits support culture change in a divided media landscape?' *The Communications Network*, [Link].
- Doc Society (2024) The Impact Field Guide & Toolkit, [Link].
- Evans, B.A. (2022) 'To change the world, transform narrative oceans', Medium [Link].
- FrameWorks Institute (2021) The features of narratives: A model of narrative form for social change efforts, [Link].
- FrameWorks Institute (2020) Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen? [Link].
- FrameWorks UK (2023) Talking about poverty, [Link].
- Grant, R., & Wakeman, V. (2023) '"City by city:" reclaiming people of color voices through the Narrative Justice Project', *Human Communication Research*, 49 (2), pp. 218–226, [Link].
- Grossinger, K. (2023) *Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together*. The New Press.
- Heard & Dorrans, S. (2022) What would it take for narrative change work to have more real-world impact in the UK? Heard, [Link].
- Kim, J., Hynes, L., & Shirazi, N. (2017) Toward new gravity: Charting a course for the Narrative Initiative. Narrative Initiative, [Link].
- Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project.
- Lindström Sol, S., Gustrén, C., Nelhans, G. et al. (2022) 'Mapping research on the social impact of the arts: what characterises the field?' Open Res Europe, pp. 1–124, [Link].
- Manne, L., Cheyfitz, K., de Vries, M., Lowell, D., Pariser, E., Potts, E. & Simon, E.W. (2022) Narrative Strategy: The Basics. Liz Manne Strategy, [Link].
- Moore, M., & Sen, R. (2022) Funding narrative change, an assessment and framework by the Convergence Partnership. The Convergence Partnership.
- Mughal, R., Polley, M., Sabey, A., & Chatterjee, H.J. (2022) How Arts, Heritage and Culture can support health and wellbeing through social prescribing. NASP.
- Potts, E., Lowell, D. & Manne, L. (2022) Spotlight On Impact Storytelling: Mapping and recommendations for the narrative and cultural strategies ecosystem, [Link].
- Reason, M., & Rowe, N. (eds) (2017) Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in Theatre, Music and Art. London: Bloomsbury.
- Robinson, R. (2018) Changing Our Narrative About Narrative: The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power. Othering and Belonging Institute, [Link].
- Sachrajda, A., & Youssef, S. (2023) Building narrative and cultural change infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US. Power of Pop Fund, [Link].
- Sachrajda, A. & Zukowska, M. (2021) *New Brave World: The power, opportunities and potential of pop culture for social change in the UK*. Unbound Philanthropy.
- Snyder-Young, D. (2018) 'No "Bullshit": Rigor and Evaluation of Applied Theatre Projects' in Freebody, K. et al. (eds) *Applied Theatre: Understanding Change, Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education*. Springer International Publishing, pp. 81–94.
- Taylor, R. (2021) Transforming Narrative Waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK. Narrative Initiative, [Link].
- The Center for Artistic Activism (2018) Assessing the Impact of Artistic Activism. The Center for Artistic Activism: New York.
- USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project (2023) Exploring Factors Associated with Impact in Entertainment-Driven Narrative Change: A Case Study in Hollywood, Health & Society Projects, 2012-2021, [Link].
- Van Slyke, T. (2022)' Want Narrative Power? Invest in Narrative Infrastructure.' Medium [Link].
- Van Slyke, T., and Watson-Currie, E. (2023) 'How Do We Know If We Have Transformed Narrative Oceans?' Pop Culture Collab and USC/Annenberg's Norman Lear Center. Medium [Link].
- White, T.R., & Hede, A.M. (2008) 'Using narrative inquiry to explore the impact of art on individuals', *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, 38 (1), pp. 19–35.

Tools, Toolkit & Guides

This section contains a collection of toolkits and individual tools designed to enable practitioners engaged in the impact storytelling ecosystem to create more impactful stories and be able to assess the effectiveness of their stories at least at a high level. Throughout our ecosystem and literature review, we have repeatedly highlighted that 'storytelling needs to be approached strategically',[203] because the process of change is 'complex and rarely linear or logical'.[204] In addition, impact evaluation, even if in its simplest way, should be embedded into a storytelling initiative from the very beginning as a strategic tool for guiding the creative process through anticipating and planning for the desired impact/outcomes.

The tools and toolboxes assembled here are meant to help individual artists and creators to get started on their storytelling-for-change journey, guided by the previous work of established authorities in the field. To compile this list, we drew from *ORS Impact Report 1.0*,[205] USC Norman Lear Center's *Lights, Camera, Impact*[206] and *A Strategic Framework to Guide Investments in Narrative Change*,[207] and Counting What Counts' *Impact and Insight Toolkit*,[208] among many others.

Tools for creating impactful stories

There are dozens of creator-centred toolkits, methods and approaches in use across the ecosystem. We have filtered these down to 20 best-practice examples as a 'starter toolbox' for practitioners. These are the tools and resources most referenced by experts or identified by us as most comprehensive and accessible, which capture the core approaches on how to create impact through storytelling.

[203] Davidson, B. (2017) 'Storytelling and evidence-based policy: lessons from the grey literature', Palgrave Communications, 3, 17093, p. 4, [Link].

[204] Young, J., & Mendizabal, E. (2009) Helping Researchers Become Policy Entrepreneurs: How to Develop Engagement Strategies for Evidence-Based Policy-Making. Overseas Development Institute.

[205] Kalra, N., Borges Farfan, C., Robles, L., & Stachowiak, S. (2021) Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity. ORS Impact, [Link].

[206] Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E.L., & Blakley, J. (2023) Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

[207] Rosenthal, E.L., Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Jung, E.J., Jauriqui, V., & Rogers, A. (2023) A strategic framework to guide investments in narrative change: Best practices for media and beyond. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project, [Link].

[208] 'Impact and Insight Toolkit', Counting What Counts, [Link].

Organisation

Americans for the Arts

Field
Art for social change

Category
Strategy guidebook

Title & Link
Storytelling and social change: A guide for activists, organizations and social entrepreneurs (2015)

Summary
Guide designed to help campaigners understand storytelling, produced by Americans for the Arts

Who it's for
Campaigners/activists, strategists

Organisation

Animating Democracy

Field
Art for social change

Category
Strategy, evaluation

Title & Link
Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change (2017)

Summary
Animating Democracy, part of Americans for the Arts, has created a handful of toolkits and frameworks for enacting and assessing 'arts for change work'. This is their latest

Who it's for
Arts and culture organisations, artists, researchers

Organisation

Center for Artistic Activism

Field
Art for social change

Category
Workbook

Title & Link
Art of Activism Workbook (2022)

Summary
Possibly the best centre for training and building capacity for arts activism. This guide provides case studies and best practices, based on the organisation's longer book, *The Art of Activism*

Who it's for
Arts and culture organisations, artists

Organisation

Collective Change Lab

Field
SIE; strategic comms

Category
Guidebook

Title & Link
Storytelling as meaning-making

Summary
Collective Change Lab a number of thoughtful publications on systems change. Informed by practices from indigenous and Global South voices, this report looks specifically at the process of storytelling in social change

Who it's for
Storytellers

Organisation

Counting What Counts (for Arts Council England)

Field
Art for social change

Category
Strategy, evaluation

Title & Link
Impact & Insight Toolkit: *Dimensions Framework* (*explainer*)

Summary
Counting What Counts has developed *several toolkits* to make impact evaluation easier for arts and culture organisations. This is useful for reporting back to funders

Who it's for
Arts and culture organisations, artists, researchers

Organisation

Culture Hack Labs

Field
Narrative change

Category
Training

Title & Link
Culture Hack Labs

Summary
Series of strategy and training courses to help indigenous and Global Majority storytellers and activists 'hack' culture through their work

Who it's for
Campaigners/activists, storytellers

Tools, Toolkit & Guides

Organisation

Doc Society

Field
Social impact entertainment
Category
Strategy, evaluation
Title & Link
Impact Field Guide
Summary
Doc Society's Impact Field helped to set the standard for impact strategising for documentaries
Who it's for
Documentary storytellers

Organisation

Harmony Labs

Field
Narrative change, strategic comms
Category
Strategy, audience evaluation
Title & Link
Narrative Observatory
Summary
Data-driven guides to help strategists and storytellers maximise the impact of their messaging
Who it's for
Strategists, storytellers

Organisation

Narrative Initiative

Field
Narrative change
Category
Guides and worksheets
Title & Link
Resource Library
Summary
Narrative Initiative has a number of excellent guides and toolkits
Who it's for
Strategists, researchers, evaluators

Organisation

Liz Manne Strategy

Field
Strategic comms
Category
Overview toolkit
Title & Link
Narrative Strategy: The basics
Summary
All of Liz Manne's publications are excellent resources for understanding strategies for storytelling that leads to cultural and narrative change. The latest report lays out the process in clear language
Who it's for
Storytellers, strategists

Organisation

Neon

Field
Strategic comms
Category
Toolkits
Title & Link
Support and resources toolkits
Summary
Media and comms messaging toolkits.
Who it's for
Storytellers, strategists

Organisation

Pop Change

Field
Pop culture for social change
Category
Strategy
Title & Link
Riding the Waves: How pop culture has the potential to catalyse social change in the UK (2017)
Summary
Excellent intro guide to using pop culture for social change. This is Pop Change's first report with a general UK slant. It was followed by a 2021 report, *New Brave World: The power, opportunities and potential of pop culture for social change in the UK*
Who it's for
Storytellers, researchers

Organisation

Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC)

Field
Strategic communications
Category
Strategy, impact evaluation
Title & Link
PIRC publications
Summary
A series of toolkits to understand strategy and impact
Who it's for
Campaigners, researchers

Organisation

Purpose

Field
Narrative change
Category
Toolkit
Title & Link
Racial Justice Storytelling in 2020: Stories to Uplift, Messengers to Mobilize, and How to Spread the Word
Summary
Toolkit focused on how organisations can use storytelling to counter narratives of racism 'to create a fundamental cultural shift that lasts far beyond the current news cycle'
Who it's for
Storytellers, campaigners

Organisation

Sheila McKechnie Foundation

Field
Campaign networking and training
Category
Strategy, impact evaluation
Title & Link
Changemakers' Toolkit
Summary
Series of toolkits for campaigners and organisations, funders and researchers, including a Social Change Grid to analyse the process of impact
Who it's for
Campaigners and organisations, funders, researchers

Organisation

Skoll Center for SIE (UCLA)

Field
Social impact entertainment
Category
Guidebook
Title & Link
The State of SIE
Summary
A major overview of the field of social impact entertainment with insights for maximising the impact of storytelling through the joined-up strategies of storytellers (mostly film-makers), campaigners, researchers and funders
Who it's for
Storytellers, campaigners, researchers, funders

Organisation

Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education

Field
Art for social change
Category
Toolkit
Title & Link
Arts Activism Toolkit – disruption, disobedience and creativity
Summary
Toolkit of workshop activities and case studies, designed for artists and facilitators. Comes from participatory arts practice in South Africa
Who it's for
Artists, activists, arts and culture organisations

Organisation

Documentary Australia

Field
Documentary film-making for social change
Category
Collection of resources
Title & Link
Filmmaker Resources
Summary
A collection of resources covering a wide range of activities involved in creating impactful documentaries, from creative activities, to mental health and wellbeing, to fundraising and M&E.
Who it's for
Documentary film-makers, finders and researchers

Organisation

Collective Change Lab

Field
Storytelling as a way to transform social systems
Category
Guidebook
Title & Link
Storytelling as meaning making
Summary
A compilation of learnings about and approaches to using storytelling to create meaningful relationships aimed at generating systematic transformation
Who it's for
Storytellers, campaigners, researchers, funders

Organisation

First Nations Development Institute

Field
Political activism, justice, voting
Category
Guidebook
Title & Link
Changing the Narrative about Native Americans: A guide for Native People and organizations
Summary
A research-driven guidebook on how Native Americans can confront the false dominant story about themselves by creating a new positive story and working with allies to make the new story dominant
Who it's for
Social justice activists, BIPOC creatives and activities, campaigners, storytellers

Tools, Toolkit & Guides

Toolkits and tools for evaluating the impact of stories and storytelling

Below, we have selected a range of measurement and evaluation frameworks and toolkits. We've selected frameworks that include rigorous, academic approaches as well as more accessible and user-friendly toolkits.

Overall toolkits

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

***Measuring Narrative Change: A Guide for Developing an Effective Strategy* (2019)**

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
ORS Impact	https://www.orsimpact.com/Directory-Attachments/7182019_123705_659_Measuring_narrative_Change_FINAL_rev_17July2019.pdf	Practitioners, researchers, funders and content creators in the narrative change field

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

***Lights, Camera, Impact: 20 Years of Research on the Power of Entertainment to Support Narrative Change* (2023)**

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
USC Norman Lear Center, Media Impact Project	https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/NormanLearCenter-Narrative-Change-Research-Review.pdf.	Entertainment media producers and finders

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

***A Strategic Framework to Guide Investments in Narrative Change: Best Practices for Media Contexts and Beyond* (2023)**

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
USC Norman Lear Center, Media Impact Project	https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/Norman+Lear+Center+Narrative+Change+Investment+Framework.pdf	Practitioners in the Narrative change field, grantmakers and grant-seekers

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

***Impact and Insight Toolkit* (2023)**

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
Counting What Counts	https://impactandinsight.co.uk/	Artists, creators

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

The Impact Field Guide and Toolkit: From Art to Impact

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
Doc society	https://impactguide.org/	Film-makers aiming to create impactful documentary films, artists and creatives

Name of the Guidebook or Toolbox

Narrative Infrastructure for Narrative Immersion: A Strategic Grantmaking Framework

Organisation	Link	Who it is for
Pop Culture Collab	https://popcollab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PCC-Narrative-Infrastructure-for-Narrative-Immersion.pdf	Mostly funders interested in supporting the narrative change field, but also researchers interested in understanding current gaps in the field

Resources

Tools, Toolkit & Guides

Focused methods and approaches

Method

Contribution analysis

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CONT_ANAL_PAGES_081221.pdf	A non-experimental impact evaluation method, contribution analysis is a process-oriented evaluation methodology, which acknowledges that many factors influence a given outcome. Rather than trying to prove attribution, contribution analysis seeks to identify the contribution of the main intervention to the impact/outcome, while also giving credit to other influencing factors. The credibility of its findings emerges from the thoroughness of how a theory of change is described, tested and revised over multiple iterations, and the rigour with which an evaluation team identifies, tests and validates contribution claims. This makes it a good fit for complex initiatives, including narrative change.	Intervention designers/strategy teams and evaluators

Method

Process tracing

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/how-to-do-process-tracing.htm	Process tracing is an evaluative methodology that aids understanding of how a particular large-scale change happens within a complex, dynamic context. Relevant large-scale changes include policy changes, systems changes and cultural shifts, planned or unexpected. Importantly, the story of how the change happened includes both steps taken intentionally to achieve the change (e.g. a programme) and other contributing events, forces or factors in the larger context. Process tracing collects and interrogates stories of change, affirming explanations that are consistent with the facts and rejecting those that are not.	Professionals working in dynamic social innovation spaces with agile programmes and limited evaluation budgets

Method

Public polling

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gc_vps-7mz733D5SRM-jahnCB-M7cuaOyX0QvZthANI8/edit#heading=h.tobgxh-9d3vdt	An opinion poll is a quantitative survey designed to capture general public opinion on a particular issue, topic, idea, current event, etc. The survey can be carried out in person, online or by phone (via a call or a text message). If the sample of the surveyed people is designed to be representative, a poll should provide the research team with reasonably accurate opinions of a cross-section of the selected society with a mix of demographic, socio-economic and psychographic characteristics. However, with new safeguarding regulations and policies, obtaining a representative survey might not be easy. This report goes over important tips, limitations and step-by-step guidelines on how to design and implement an opinion poll and translate its findings into actionable insights.	Strategists, *policy-makers* and content developers wanting to get a quick understanding of the public opinion on a particular issue to inform their work, the design of an intervention, etc.

Method

Focus groups

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1U5GmAl2f1s_g4jP-5JbeeFLca3nQAV20BiCbI-R2OS40A/edit#heading=h.otnywz6q3gb4	Focus group discussions are discussions traditionally carried out in a face-to-face setting with a pre-selected group of people who are most likely to be the consumers of particular content or a target audience for an intervention. More recently, these groups have been transitioning to the digital space, which allows inclusion of remote/hard-to-reach populations but also introduces a range of challenges associated with moderating a dynamic conversation online. This guide provides a detailed overview of the challenges, limitations, advantages and use cases for focus group discussions, together with a step-by-step guide for setting this type of study.	Content, product and intervention producers who would like to either get a deeper insight into deep-rooted narratives, norms and opinions or would like to gain feedback on the content already created for a specific audience

Method

Outcome harvesting

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/outcome-harvesting https://reliefweb.int/report/world/outcome-harvesting-best-practices-learning-reflection#:~:text=Outcome%20harvesting%20is%20an%20evaluation,intervention%20has%20contributed%20to%20thes	Outcome harvesting is an evaluation approach that allows us to retrospectively identify emergent impact by collecting examples of what has changed in 'behaviour writ large' (actions, relationships, policies, practices) and then work backwards to determine whether, and how, an intervention has contributed to these changes. Outcome harvesting collects ('harvests') evidence of what has changed ('outcomes') and then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.	Creative, NGOs and development scientists who are interested in understanding retrospectively the events and interventions that might have contributed to a particular change they are observing

Tools, Toolkit & Guides

Method

Most significant change

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/most-significant-change	The most significant change (MSC) approach involves generating and analysing personal accounts of change and deciding which of these accounts is the most significant – and why. There are three basic steps in using MSC: 1. Deciding the types of stories that should be collected (for example, about practice change or health outcomes or empowerment). 2. Collecting the stories and determining which stories are the most significant. 3. Sharing the stories and discussion of values with stakeholders and contributors so that learning happens about what is valued. MSC is not just about collecting and reporting stories but about having processes to learn from these stories – in particular, to learn about the similarities and differences in what different groups and individuals value.	All narrative change and storytelling-for-change actors interested in learning about their audiences' lived experiences and various competing factors affecting these experiences

Method

Empowerment evaluation

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/empowerment-evaluation	Empowerment evaluation is a stakeholder involvement approach designed to provide groups with the tools and knowledge they need to monitor and evaluate their own performance and accomplish their goals. Empowerment evaluation focuses on fostering self-determination and sustainability. It is particularly suited to the evaluation of comprehensive community-based initiatives or place-based initiatives. In addition, it is inexorably bound to the pursuit of social justice.	Leaders and creators engaged in participatory formats of narrative change and storytelling for change initiatives, e.g. festivals, movements, public activism

Method

Photovoice

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://www.methodspace.com/blog/photovoice-an-introduction-to-the-method-and-analysis-tips	Photovoice is a qualitative, participatory research method which involves participants taking photos of relevant people/situations (or generating other types of visual clues) and then creating stories about particular photos. Typically, photovoices culminate in a sort of 'reveal event' – a manifesto writing, an educative event, etc. The method generates abundant data that can both inform intervention strategies and be the foundation of extensive research or evaluation. Since participants are part of generating the data and findings, they will also typically express greater buy-in for a potential intervention and/or support for other follow-up activities.	Evaluators and content creators working in art spaces or with sensitive subjects

Method

Human-Centred design in research

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://mhealth.jmir.org/2021/12/e28102	Human-centred design (HCD) is a problem-solving technique that helps create solutions for products and services, including in research, that resonate with the audience and seamlessly integrate with their habitual routines/behaviours/interests. The article in this table provides an extensive analysis of the use of HCD in healthcare research and product/process innovations. However, HCD is actively used in products/services and research across multiple areas, from behavioural economics to finance, policy-making and more.	Leaders and creators engaged in participatory formats of narrative change and storytelling for change initiatives

Method

Participatory research

Link	Summary	Who it is for
https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/13244-participatory-research-methods-choice-points-in-the-research-process	Participatory research (PR) encompasses research designs, methods and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the purpose of action or change. PR engages those who are not necessarily trained in research but belong to or represent the interests of the people who are the focus of the research. Researchers utilising a PR approach often choose research methods and tools that can be conducted in a participatory, democratic manner, which values genuine and meaningful participation in the research process.	Leaders and creators engaged in participatory formats of narrative change and storytelling for change initiatives

Players in the UK's impact storytelling ecosystem

One of the aims of this report has been to map out how the impact storytelling ecosystem functions. In Part 3.3, we examined the different roles within the UK's ecosystem and how each type of player operates in relation to each other. In line with the calls from a number of recent reports, we began an initial indicative mapping of those working within the UK's ecosystem. Below is a table of some examples of those currently instrumental in creating, supporting and funding impact storytelling in the UK. This is only the beginning of mapping the players as of 2024. There is potential to create a more live, dynamic and interactive visualisation online in future, along the lines of The State of SIE map, created by the Skoll Center for SIE at UCLA, or the Narrative Directory from IRIS.

UK-based impact storytellers

Artists & Cultural Groups	Strategic Communications	Grassroots & Field Organising
Film-makers	Strategic comms planning	Campaign designers
Artists	Digital content creators	Direct action
Theatre creators	Paid advertising	Live event directors and instigators
Comedians	Shared/social media creators	
Musicians	Earned media (press)	
Podcasters	Owned (newsletters)	
Writers	Rapid response	
Game creators and story developers		
Some examples	**Some examples**	**Some examples**
198	89 Up	2269
Artists	Black Equity Organisation (BEO)	AbleGamers
Belarus Free Theatre	Breakthrough Media	Access All Areas
BOM Lab	Civil Society & Charity Sector (e.g. Charity Comms, & funder-convening networks)	Candour Productions
BrightWolf	Creatives for Climate	Fingerprint Content
Chocolate Films	FrameWorks UK	Good Chance
Chouette Films	Futerra	On Purpose Group
Collective Encounters	Glimpse	POCC Studios
Eternal Media	hope-based comms	Sisters Uncut
Flying Tiger Productions	Nice & Serious	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
High Tide	Platform	
Inside Job Productions	Possible	
Lung Theatre	Purpose	
Open Planet	Rubber Republic	
Platform	Uncommon	
Silverback	YouTube Creators for Change	
StoryFutures		
Teatro Vivo		
The Lowry - Arts for social change		
Together Films		
Together TV		

UK-based support

Research, Evaluation & Learning	Trainers & Cohorts	Conveners & Network Weavers
Research	Training & coaching	Convenings
Evaluation & measurement	Cohorts	Tables & Hubs
Content Testing	Fellowships	Groups
Strategy	Leadership Development	Newsletters
Some examples	**Some examples**	**Some examples**
Albert	ArtWorks Alliance	AdFree Cities
Common Cause Foundation	Beatfreeks	ArtWorks Alliance
Equally Ours	Choose Love	Beacon Collaborative
FrameWorks UK	Climate Spring	Black Equity Organisation (BEO)
Global Cause	Collective Encounters	Campaign for the Arts
hope-based comms	Common Cause Foundation	Creative Lives
Larger Us	Counterpoint Arts	Creatives for Climate
More in Common	Culture Counts	Centre for Investigative Journalism
NEON	Culture Hack Labs	Climate Spring
OKRE	Doc Society	Doc Society
Platform	Equally Ours	Global Narrative Hive
Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC)	Forward Institute	Intercultural Roots
Runnymeade	FrameWorks UK	Inter-Narratives
Birmingham City University - *Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity*	Futerra	Network for Social Change
Institute of Development Studies - *MA Power, Participation & Social Change*	Future Narratives Lab	OKRE
Royal College of Art – *Digital Direction MA and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design*	Global Action Plan	NEON
University of Leeds - *Centre for Cultural Value*	Global Dialogue	Narrative Working Group
University of Leicester – *MA Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries*	Heard	People & Planet
University of Loughborough - *Communication, Media and Development MA*	Intercultural Roots	Social Art Network
University of Oxford - *Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship*	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Solidarity with Refugees
University of Sussex - *Media Practice for Development and Social Change MA and Power, Participation and Social Change MA*	Julie's Bicycle	The Narrative Avengers
University of Westminster - *Media, Campaigning and Social Change MA*	Larger Us	
	Media Trust	
	More in Common	
	NEON	
	New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)	
	Oxfam	
	Purpose Disruptors	
	Purposeful	
	Sheila McKechnie Foundation	
	Sisters Uncut	
	Social Change Initiative	
	Social Film Drama	
	The Culture Group	

Players in the UK's impact storytelling ecosystem

UK-based backers

Foundations & Primary Funders	Regrantors And Funding Distributors	Regrantors And Funding Distributors
Some examples	**Some examples**	**Some examples**
Arts Council England	ARTCRY	New Philanthropy for Arts & Culture (NPAC)
ArtSocial Foundation	Big Give	Luminate
Ashley Family Foundation	Churchill Fellowship	
Bertha Foundation	Creative Debuts	
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - UK	Comic Relief	
BFI Doc Society	Help Musicians	
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	Impact Arts	
Carnegie UK	Outset	
Comic Relief	Pop Fund	
CIFF	PRS Foundation	
City Bridge Trust	Unlimited	
Dulverton Trust		
Esmee Fairbairn		
Garfield Weston Foundation		
Jerwood Arts		
Joseph Rowntree Foundation		
Nesta		
Oak Philanthropy - UK		
Open Society Foundations - UK		
Paul Hamlyn Foundation		
Rothschild Foundation		
Shears Foundation		
The Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts		
Unbound Philanthropy		
Wolfson Foundation