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## Digital Organizational Storytelling on YouTube: Constructing Plausibility Through Network Protocols of Amateurism, Affinity, and Authenticity

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**Digital Organizational Storytelling on YouTube: Constructing  
Plausibility through Network Protocols of Amateurism,  
Affinity and Authenticity**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i>
Manuscript ID	JMI-15-0125-NT.R1
Manuscript Type:	Non-Traditional Research
Keyword:	Communication, Social Networks, Technology
Abstract:	<p>In this article we focus on 'digital organizational storytelling' as a communicative practice that relies on technologies enabled by the Internet. The article explores the dialogical potential of digital organizational storytelling and considers how this affects the relationship between online storytellers and audiences. We highlight the importance of network protocols in shaping how stories are understood. Our analysis is based on a case study of an organization which produces online animated videos critical of corporate practices that impact negatively on society. It highlights the network protocols of amateurism, affinity, and authenticity on which the plausibility of digital organizational storytelling relies. Through demonstrating what happens when network protocols are breached, the article contributes towards understanding digital organizational storytelling as a dialogical practice that opens up spaces for oppositional meaning making and can be used to challenge the power of corporations.</p>

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**Digital Organizational Storytelling on YouTube:**  
**Constructing Plausibility through Network Protocols of Amateurism, Affinity and**  
**Authenticity**

For Peer Review

## Introduction

Organizational storytelling is a powerful vehicle for constructing meaning that relies on conventions of plot and characterization, combined with the narrative skill of the storyteller, to ‘entertain, persuade, and win over’ (Gabriel, 2000, p.22). Research enabled by the narrative turn in organizational studies (Czarniawska, 2004) has demonstrated the importance of storytelling as a ‘central part of organizational life’ (James & Minnis, 2004, p.23). This has led to exploration of the role of organizational storytelling in shaping emotions, imagination and experiences and informing moral judgements (Brown et al, 2009; Gabriel, 2000; Gabriel & Connell, 2010; Rosile et al, 2013). Storytelling creates and sustains organizational identity (Czarniawska, 1998; Boje, 2011), is used to make sense of power relations (Smith & Keyton, 2001), and helps to generate organizational community through shared memories (Boje, 1991). However, much organizational storytelling research continues to focus on spoken or written communication (Rhodes & Pullen, 2009), despite the transformations in communication enabled by developments in digital technologies (Castells, 1996; Thrift, 2005). As a consequence, limited attention has been paid to investigating whether, and how, organizational storytelling practices enabled by the Internet differ from other types of organizational storytelling.

The growth of Internet enabled technologically-mediated communication opens up important issues for organizational storytelling researchers. This arises because the Internet acts as a ‘socialized communication realm’ (Castells, 2009, p.53) which is constructed around local-global networks. This enables individuals, as well as organizations, to distribute and exchange self-generated, multimodal content, comprising visual images as well as words, and interact with each other across geographical, spatial and temporal borders. Castells (2009)

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2  
3 argues that this has led to a shift from mass communication to ‘mass self-communication’,  
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5 where ‘the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential  
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7 receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World  
8  
9 Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected’ (p.55). This has resulted  
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11 in more ‘participatory’ (Jenkins, 2006) or ‘vernacular’ cultures (Burgess & Green, 2009) that  
12  
13 change the relationship between message producers and audiences as the distinctions between  
14  
15 these two categories become increasingly fluid (Jenkins, 2006; Burgess & Green, 2009). The  
16  
17 notion of the ‘creative audience’ implies that message senders and recipients are ‘collectively  
18  
19 the same subject’ (Castells, 2009, p.130), with the capacity to form their own communicative  
20  
21 codes and participate interactively in the construction of meaning. These communicative  
22  
23 structures have implications for message production, including the types of narratives that are  
24  
25 told and the voices represented within them. The primary purpose of this article is therefore  
26  
27 to explore to explore the *dialogical* potential of Internet communication technologies in  
28  
29 enabling the inclusion of more diverse voices, styles, logics, cultural influences and spatio-  
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31 temporalities than in traditional organizational storytelling (Boje 2008).  
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38 A further aim of the article is to analyse the effects of these communicative network  
39  
40 structures on the relationship between organizational storytellers and storytelling audiences.  
41  
42 As consciously created, goal directed networks have come to replace formal, vertically  
43  
44 integrated organizations as the primary institutional form in Western societies (Castells,  
45  
46 1996), networks have emerged not only as a primary basis for communication, but also as a  
47  
48 source of power (Castells, 2009). Networks made up of interconnecting nodes are comprised  
49  
50 of ‘consciously created groups of three or more autonomous but interdependent organizations  
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52 that strive to achieve a common goal and jointly produce an output’ (Raab & Kenis, 2009, p.  
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54 198). These socialized forms of communication rely on shared protocols of communication  
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3 that govern relationships between actors in the network and regulate the flow of messages.

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5 This communicative structure has the potential to lead to new forms of conflict, as networked  
6  
7 social actors compete to reach their target audiences and shape discourses that frame human  
8  
9 action: ‘power in the network society is communication power’ (Castells, 2009, p.53). We  
10  
11 suggest that communicative network power has important implications for organizational  
12  
13 storytelling, including for corporate actors who seek to represent brands through stories that  
14  
15 they tell (Mumby, 2016), as well as for individuals and social movements who tell stories that  
16  
17 challenge the inevitability and orientation of corporate globalization (Castells, 2009).  
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22 In this article we present the notion of ‘digital organizational storytelling’, defined as an  
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24 organizational storytelling practice that relies on communication technologies enabled by the  
25  
26 Internet. We highlight the importance of digital storytelling conventions, or ‘network  
27  
28 protocols’ (Castells, 2009) in shaping how a story is understood. To identify and illustrate the  
29  
30 importance of these protocols, we focus on what happens when digital organizational  
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32 storytellers with divergent power interests come into conflict. Our analysis of the dialogical  
33  
34 potential of digital organizational storytelling focuses on the video uploading and sharing  
35  
36 website, YouTube. We draw on a case study of a US-based organization, Free Range Studios  
37  
38 (FRS), which produces online animated videos that focus on negative effects of corporate  
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40 practice on societies. In addition to media sharing platforms such as YouTube, FRS make  
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42 use of social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter to disseminate their stories to  
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44 diverse, global audiences. The key research question that the article addresses is: how does  
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46 the dialogical potential of digital organizational storytelling affect the relationship between  
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48 online storytellers and audiences? In addressing this question, we begin by identifying the  
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50 features of digital storytelling that distinguish it from other kinds of organizational  
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52 storytelling practice. By analysing what happens when digital organizational storytellers with  
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3 divergent power interests come into conflict, we show that digital organizational storytelling  
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5 relies on particular conventions, or network protocols, that storytelling audiences apply as the  
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7 basis for determining plausibility. We conclude by discussing how digital organizational  
8  
9 storytelling has affected the ability of organizations to make and control meaning.  
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### 11 12 13 14 **The dialogical potential of digital organizational storytelling** 15

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18 Organizational research suggests that stories offer a means of disseminating a vision or  
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20 message (Gabriel, 2000; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), encouraging critical reflection on  
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22 management (Gherardi & Poggio, 2007; Watson, 2007), and sharing knowledge and  
23  
24 sensemaking (Gabriel & Connell, 2010). In addition to stories that are told *in* organizations,  
25  
26 stories are frequently told *about* organizations – including how they impact on society –  
27  
28 through narratives found in popular culture. This includes novels (De Cock & Land, 2006),  
29  
30 television (Rhodes, 2001; Buzzanell & D’Enbeau, 2014), and films (Hassard & Holliday,  
31  
32 1998; Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004). These fictional stories about organizations have the  
33  
34 potential to reach global audiences (Parker, 2002). They enable the expression of emotional  
35  
36 as well as intellectual aspects of organizational life, including humorous, violent or  
37  
38 sexualised dynamics that are generally hidden from view (Bell, 2008). Popular cultural  
39  
40 narratives can provide a ‘safe’ way of learning about organizations in different historical and  
41  
42 cultural contexts (Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994). The success of a  
43  
44 cultural narrative depends on whether it is plausible to an audience (Phillips, 1995;  
45  
46 Czarniawska, 1999), through resonating with their everyday lived experience of the  
47  
48 phenomenon explored (Buzzanell & D’Enbeau, 2013). While fictional organizational stories  
49  
50 do not correspond directly to the ‘real’ world (Czarniawska, 1999), they are inherently  
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52 theory-laden, encoding ‘pattern and explanation, suggesting hypotheses and establishing  
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3 causality' (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p.709). Through this they offer a mythic structure  
4  
5 through which we can achieve insight into our condition and place in the world (Panayiotou,  
6  
7 2010). They also shape how organizations are understood in society by providing a critical  
8  
9 commentary on collective anxieties and concerns about the negative effects of organizations  
10  
11 on society (Parker, 2002). However, existing organizational storytelling research tends to  
12  
13 focus on highly monological storytelling forms that offer a linear, one-way method of  
14  
15 communication, where a storyteller communicates experience, ideas and emotions to an  
16  
17 audience (Boje, 2001).  
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22 The purpose of this paper is to explore *digital* organizational storytelling, which we suggest is  
23  
24 inherently more dialogical. The type of digital organizational story on which we focus are  
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26 short, online videos distributed via the video uploading and sharing platform, YouTube.  
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28 Since 2005, YouTube has been consistently placed in the top ten most visited websites  
29  
30 globally and is argued to be the largest mass communication medium in the world. It is  
31  
32 suggested to be a potentially 'revolutionary' form of mass self-communication, bringing  
33  
34 individuals and organizations, including corporations, together to 'defend their interests, and  
35  
36 to assert their values' (Castells, 2009, p.57). However, sites like YouTube have also given  
37  
38 rise to new sources of potential organizational domination, including from global multimedia  
39  
40 business networks that seek to re Commodify Internet communication. These sites therefore  
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42 constitute a key location within which to observe unfolding power relations between digital  
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44 organizational storytellers and storytelling audiences.  
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51 Digital organizational storytelling shares similarities with other popular cultural storytelling  
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53 forms, while also manifesting important differences. Like other types of filmmaking  
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55 (Goodman, 2004), the power of digital organizational storytelling arises from the ability to  
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3 create a rich multimedia experience. Sites like YouTube provide a platform for *multimodal*  
4  
5 storytelling, using film, graphics, photographs and audio recording in combination. Each of  
6  
7 these communicative modes can be used to realise a different communicative purpose, but  
8  
9 together they constitute an integrated whole (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary & Van Leeuwen,  
10  
11 2013). In contrast to monological mass media organizational storytelling, digital  
12  
13 organizational storytelling involves stories being co-created by multiple participants. Stories  
14  
15 may be created simultaneously and in different variants, as people interact and add new  
16  
17 elements to the narrative. Digital storytelling can therefore be understood as more dialogical  
18  
19 because it involves more diverse voices, styles, logics, cultural influences and spatio-  
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21 temporalities than traditional storytelling. Boje (2008: 2) refers to dialogical stories as  
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23 ‘polypi’, to denote the dynamic, complex nature of their construction.  
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30 Like other types of organizational story, digital organizational storytelling relies on the  
31  
32 construction of ‘regimes of verisimilitude’ (Neale, 2000), a system of expectations accepted  
33  
34 by audiences that form the basis for determining what they consider to be truthful or real.  
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36 The concept of affordances (Hutchby, 2001) is important in drawing attention to the  
37  
38 constraining and enabling potential of social technologies, and the interrelationship between  
39  
40 technological artefacts and the social contexts of their use. The particular affordances of the  
41  
42 Internet mean that digital stories are inherently unstable, and plausibility is continually under  
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44 threat from counter-stories, online ‘comments’ and ‘play’ (Beer and Burrows, 2013, p.51), as  
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46 storytellers generate and create new narratives. Yet the success of alternative stories is also  
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48 constrained by the ability to conform to the network protocols on which plausibility relies.  
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50 We suggest, therefore, that the continual changeability of meaning making afforded through  
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52 digital storytelling challenges both traditional, monological understandings of organizational  
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54 storytelling and storyteller-audience relationships. Digital organizational stories can therefore  
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3 be understood as more ‘writerly’ texts (Barthes, 1977) than other kinds of organizational  
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5 storytelling, particularly those produced for mass consumption by large audiences like feature  
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7 films. In contrast to ‘readerly’ texts, which encourage audiences to remain passive in  
8  
9 accepting the meaning and the message the storyteller intended (Barthes, 1977), digital  
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11 organizational storytelling encourages writerly texts which invite a more active, dynamic  
12  
13 engagement with the story, and are open to continual (re)construction and (re)interpretation  
14  
15 (Shirky, 2008; Boje, 2008).  
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20 The online environment also offers a different and wider range of resources for  
21  
22 organizational storytelling. This includes greater ease and facility of production, increased  
23  
24 flexibility in choice and use of semiotic resources, and enhanced audience visibility  
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26 (Domingo et al, 2014). Digital storytelling is an inexpensive yet powerful way of sharing  
27  
28 stories about individual lives and personal experiences via social networks across the globe  
29  
30 (Lundby, 2008; Robin, 2008; Lambert, 2013), a ‘bottom-up’ activity whereby people of all  
31  
32 social backgrounds are able to represent themselves (Lundby 2008). Digital storytelling also  
33  
34 has great democratic potential by giving voice to people and subjects that are conventionally  
35  
36 overlooked or silenced. These practices rely on an ethos of ‘prosumption’ - a combination of  
37  
38 production and consumption that conforms to the democratic ideals of citizen participation  
39  
40 and sharing that are central to the use of contemporary digital media (Lupton, 2015).  
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45 Interaction often relies on intertextuality, as users draw on popular culture, including  
46  
47 mainstream media texts and commercial films, appropriating them and re-circulating them in  
48  
49 the co-construction of a new story (Jenkins, 2006). Digital organizational storytelling  
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51 audiences can comment positively or negatively on content, suggest ideas, post clips or  
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53 engage in ‘redaction’ (Hartley, 2009), engaging in the production of new material through  
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55 editing existing content.  
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5 Digital organizational storytelling thus forms part of a new and more complex circuit of  
6 communication (Hall, 1980) involving the storyteller, the story and the audience who may  
7 interpret the story or edit the text in a way that diverges from the original storyteller's  
8 intended meaning. While this dialogism can also arise in other types of organizational  
9 storytelling, the greater plasticity of digital organizational stories means that the distinction  
10 between audience and storyteller is more blurred, and the ability of audiences to  
11 communicate their rejection of a story is intensified. An example that illustrates this  
12 dialogical potential concerns car manufacturer, Chevrolet, which used YouTube to invite  
13 audiences to use animated clips of a new sports utility vehicle to create their own  
14 commercial. YouTube users deliberately parodied the vehicle's design features to tell a story  
15 about its negative environmental impact.<sup>1</sup> This was an oppositional reading (Hall, 1980) to  
16 the storytelling message that the organization had intended to communicate.  
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34 However, not all digital organizational storytellers have equal status within the cultural  
35 circuits of capital (Thrift, 2005) enabled by Internet communication. Internet sites like  
36 YouTube are characterised by tensions between content generated by amateurs, including  
37 non-profit and community organizations, and professionals driven by institutional and  
38 commercial interests (Consalvo, 2003; Kim, 2012). Digital organizational storytelling takes  
39 place in a context where amateur, grassroots and corporate storytellers 'converge' and  
40 intersect (Jenkins, 2006). Some scholars are critical of 'celebratory' (Fuchs, 2014, p.65)  
41 accounts that position Internet audiences as democratically engaged and continually resisting  
42 (Dean, 2009), as this tends to overlook the importance of capitalist interests that rely on the  
43 creation of shareholder value through exploitation (Terranova, 2000; Fuchs, 2014).  
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3 In addition to these characteristics, we argue that digital organizational storytelling can be  
4 distinguished from other types of organizational story through its reliance on particular  
5 communicative codes, or ‘network protocols’ (Castells, 2009), that make shared meaning  
6 possible. The first of these we term *amateurism*. Stories on YouTube that have a home-made  
7 or unprofessional character are more highly valued than those which display professional,  
8 corporate characteristics (Burgess & Green, 2009). This arises from YouTube’s reputation as  
9 a place for displaying and sharing images that represent mundane experiences of ordinary  
10 people (Kim, 2012). A further protocol that characterises digital storytelling and connects  
11 storytellers to others in the network is the value of *affinity*, which we suggest involves  
12 ‘feelings of membership in a social network, and feelings of attraction to people, things or  
13 ideas’ (Lange, 2009, p.71). The construction of affinity relies on establishment of  
14 communicative connections between people and can involve large organizational networks  
15 operating alongside smaller, personal ones. Establishing and maintaining affinity requires  
16 continuous attention to ensure that connections and relationships are captured and kept. This  
17 is achieved by encouraging ‘viewers to whom the video is addressed’ to respond in order to  
18 ‘maintain a field of connection between creator and viewer’ (Lange, 2009, p.73).  
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41 The third protocol which we suggest determines participation in the digital organizational  
42 storytelling network is *authenticity*. This involves evaluation of the ‘reality’ and sincerity of  
43 the story, as well as the intentions of the storyteller. Yet the authenticity of a digital  
44 organizational story can be extremely difficult to ascertain. The creative affordances  
45 associated with digital Internet communication result in frequent contestation of authenticity  
46 (Kaare & Lundby, 2008). In a hybrid physical-virtual space like YouTube it can be difficult  
47 to ascertain the verisimilitude of user-generated content. Violations of authenticity may arise  
48 from the ease with which digital identities and images can be manipulated. Trying to  
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3 establish whether content is authentic, including whether it is produced ‘bottom up’ by  
4 amateurs or ‘top down’ by corporate interests, has thus become part of the participatory  
5 cultural repertoire of ‘YouTuber’s (Burgess & Green, 2009). Authenticity can be  
6 demonstrated through individual self-expression, such as by using the technique of  
7 ‘vlogging’, delivering an autobiographical video diary straight-to-camera. Concerns about  
8 inauthentic digital organizational storytelling can arise when corporations engage in digital  
9 organizational storytelling in a way which obscures their identity as storytellers. This is  
10 referred to as ‘astroturfing’, and involves the production of ‘fake grassroots media content...  
11 by commercial media companies and special interest groups’ which is ‘passed off as coming  
12 from individual amateurs’ (Jenkins, 2009, p.122). One prominent example of this involves  
13 the YouTube video ‘Al Gore’s Penguin Army’<sup>ii</sup>, a satirical parody of the popular  
14 documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) which features former Democratic Vice  
15 President of the United States, Al Gore, talking about the effects of climate change.  
16 Originally thought to be the work of an amateur, ‘Al Gore’s Penguin Army’ was posted on  
17 YouTube in June 2006 and to date has generated over 600,000 views. The video was later  
18 exposed as having been produced by public relations and lobbying firm the DCI Group  
19 whose clients include ExxonMobil and General Motors,<sup>iii</sup> thereby undermining the  
20 authenticity of both the storyteller and the story. Establishing authenticity thus relies on  
21 assessment of the social authority of the storyteller, including whether or not they understand  
22 and observe the protocols that determine inclusion within the network.  
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On the basis of this review, we suggest that while other forms of organizational storytelling are *potentially* dialogical, the affordances of digital communication heighten this in interesting and important ways. This results in stories where meaning is more pluralistic, in terms of the voices that are heard, and open to question to a greater extent, in terms of the

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3 claims that are made. Yet, as we have argued, participation in digital organizational  
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5 storytelling relies on observing and respecting the network protocols that determine a social  
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7 actor's ability to influence the decisions of other social actors in the network in ways that  
8  
9 favour their own interests and values. This raises important questions about the nature of  
10  
11 organizational power relations, the patterns of social interaction between storytellers and  
12  
13 audiences, and the conventions that successful digital organizational storytellers co-construct.  
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15 In the section that follows, we introduce our empirical case before interpreting the data to  
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17 show how digital organizational storytelling affects the ability of corporations to make and  
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19 control meaning.  
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### 25 **Studying a digital storytelling organization**

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30 FRS is a US-based branding and design company that, since 2003, has specialised in digital  
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32 organizational storytelling by producing online animated videos on behalf of non-profit third  
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34 sector organizations and small to medium-sized businesses. Most of the organizational  
35  
36 campaigns for which online videos are produced relate to environmental and social or  
37  
38 political issues, from the protection of endangered species to American healthcare reform.  
39  
40 Table 1 provides a summary of the two most popular animated online video series produced  
41  
42 by FRS. The organization describes its mission as being '*to sell revolutionary ideas and*  
43  
44 *products that build a more just and sustainable world*' and positions itself in contrast to  
45  
46 traditional creative branding or marketing agencies that '*just work to sell stuff*' (FRS website,  
47  
48 2011). Storytelling is seen by organization members as crucial in enabling effective  
49  
50 communication of complex issues in a context which is characterised by excessive noise and  
51  
52 information overload (Sachs, 2012). FRS has received national media attention in response  
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54 to its activities, from TV networks *Fox News* and *CNN* and newspapers such as the *New York*  
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3 *Times, Washington Post and LA Times.* In 2008, FRS co-founder and CEO, Jonah Sachs,  
4  
5 was named by *Fast Company* magazine as one of 50 people who might save the planet, and  
6  
7 in 2010 a video produced by FRS was nominated for a National Design Award by the  
8  
9 Smithsonian Institution. FRS videos are also widely used as an educational resource in  
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11 schools and universities, including in business schools (Heaton, 2010).  
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16 [TABLE 1 HERE]  
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21 Our rationale for the focus on this case was instrumental (Stake, 2005), to examine a well-  
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23 known and successful digital storytelling organization in order to understand the dynamics of  
24  
25 its practice. It was also intrinsic (Stake, 2005), driven by a desire to understand digital  
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27 organizational storytelling theoretically through close engagement and rich description.  
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29 Access to the organization was negotiated via email and telephone, building on a successful  
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31 collaboration with a senior member of the organization to run a workshop at an academic  
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33 conference in 2010. Our dataset comprises semi-structured, one-hour interviews with five  
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35 senior members of the 24-member organization and two key informants from a client  
36  
37 organization.  
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42 The interviews were conducted using Skype. Online interviewing represents a new  
43  
44 'methodological frontier' (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014, p.605) enabling interviews to be  
45  
46 conducted over large geographical distances without travel, and in a way which  
47  
48 accommodates busy schedules and different time zones (Hanna, 2012). It was a naturalistic  
49  
50 method for respondents who were already comfortable using Skype and other digital  
51  
52 platforms in their working lives. Questions focused on the communication strategies used to  
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54 engage with audiences and the networked relationships between FRS, commissioning clients  
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3 and digital storytelling audiences. Interviews were carried out over a nine-month period and  
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5 were recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim<sup>iv</sup>.  
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10 A second data source involved downloading and watching all FRS videos, and making  
11  
12 detailed notes on the narratives, semiotic resources and emergent themes. A third aspect of  
13  
14 the dataset comprised ‘user-generated data’ (Hardey, 2011) in the form of online posts and  
15  
16 comments in response to the videos which we collected by regularly visiting organizational  
17  
18 websites, Facebook pages, blogs and Twitter feeds. As Amit (2000) argues, the vastness of  
19  
20 online space means that the fieldwork site must be ‘constructed rather than ‘discovered’. We  
21  
22 visited these online platforms once a month for nine months to monitor form (design) and  
23  
24 content (changing narratives). This data was multimodal, including words (captions,  
25  
26 headings, paragraphs), images (icons, videos, photographs) and customized web platform  
27  
28 resources. Our dialogical interest in multiple voices and styles meant that we approached the  
29  
30 data not as static textual artefacts, but as cultural resources that bloggers shape (Domingo et  
31  
32 al, 2014). The construction of this innovative dataset enabled investigation of online cultures  
33  
34 of organizational storytelling which have tended to be overlooked by social science  
35  
36 researchers (Beer and Burrows, 2007). Finally, we engaged in qualitative textual analysis of  
37  
38 two single-authored books (Leonard, 2010; Sachs, 2012) and a co-authored book chapter  
39  
40 (Sachs & Finkelpearl, 2010) written by founding members of the organization. This  
41  
42 generated additional insight into how digital organizational storytellers present their activities  
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44 to external audiences.  
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52 Rather than focusing solely on the content of the stories, our interest extends to the processes  
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54 and practices of digital organizational storytelling and the relations between storytellers and  
55  
56 audiences that enable story production and circulation. We therefore analysed the accounts  
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3 of storytellers, including how they made sense of storytelling activities and the cultural  
4 context in which stories were told. This enabled us to explore the affordances of YouTube as  
5 a site of meaning, and to understand how certain stories come to be seen as plausible in this  
6 context, while also considering the process through which other stories are perceived as  
7 lacking in verisimilitude. We began by reading all the transcripts carefully and identifying  
8 recurrent terms in the interview accounts. As interpretive, qualitative researchers (Yanow &  
9 Schwartz Shea, 2012), we looked for accounts of specific incidents and descriptions of  
10 relationships between members of the organization, their clients and audiences, focussing  
11 particularly on the language used. We then engaged in iterative cycles of analysis and  
12 discussion, looking at the structure, content and context of the participants' narratives  
13 (Mishler, 1986), searching for patterns in the interview, social media and documentary data  
14 which formed the basis for development of analytical themes. These were informed by our  
15 research objectives: to explore the dialogical potential of digital organizational storytelling  
16 and consider how this affects the relationship between online storytellers and audiences; to  
17 analyse what happens when digital organizational storytellers with divergent power interests  
18 come into conflict; and to elucidate the network protocols that determine how a story is  
19 understood. In the following section, we discuss how FRS conceptualise and employ digital  
20 storytelling before exploring the responses that their stories have provoked.  
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#### 45 Moral stories of organizational change

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49 Storytelling as a medium was held in high regard by FRS, seen by members as a key resource  
50 that can be used *'to change social behaviour... [and] drive a new set of values that would*  
51 *lead to the lifestyles and political changes necessary to confront today's ecological crises'*  
52 (Sachs & Finkelpearl, 2010, p.151). This apparent potential was viewed as arising from the  
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3 ability of stories to reach audiences at an emotional level. According to FRS, facts and  
4  
5 information alone are insufficient as a basis for stimulating social change, because '*humans*  
6  
7 *tend not to be rational actors*' (Sachs & Finkelpearl, 2010, p.154). Hence the purpose is not  
8  
9 simply to entertain audiences, but to pose a challenge to their current viewpoints and  
10  
11 practices by encouraging emotional investment in the characters and the story itself.  
12  
13

16 In spite of the contemporary nature of the digital technological medium used to tell their  
17  
18 stories, members of FRS describe their storytelling approach as reliant on '*ancient*  
19  
20 *mythological formula*' which has '*persisted in the human consciousness, across the world for*  
21  
22 *millenia*' (Sachs, 2012, p.4). A dominant plot is that of the '*hero's journey*', where a  
23  
24 character in pursuit of '*higher-level values*' meets a mentor who gives him/her courage to  
25  
26 enter an unfamiliar world in order to pursue a goal and eventually leave with the 'treasure'  
27  
28 that will '*heal her broken world*' (Sachs, 2012, p.163). This mode of storytelling typically  
29  
30 ends with communication of a moral purpose (Gabriel, 2000). A key feature of these stories  
31  
32 is their intertextuality: the use of iconic visual images from popular mainstream media which  
33  
34 are appropriated in vernacular style. This can be seen in one of FRS's earliest digital stories,  
35  
36 *The Meatrix* (2003), released pre-YouTube. *The Meatrix* draws on the cult science fiction  
37  
38 film *The Matrix* (1999), which in turn refers intertextually to earlier mythological narratives,  
39  
40 including the Judeo-Christian Messiah myth and Homeric epics to depict a battle between  
41  
42 machines and humans (Jenkins, 2006). These intertextual references form the basis of a  
43  
44 parody which is used to entertain audiences through critique (Kenny, 2009). *The Meatrix* is  
45  
46 an epic story that involves a struggle for victory involving a heroic but naive character, 'Leo  
47  
48 the pig', who is advised by a wise cow called 'Moopheus', who educates the former and  
49  
50 encourages him to exercise agency in facing adversity and maintaining the values he  
51  
52 promotes (Gabriel, 2000), by exposing the evils of factory farming and liberating its victims.  
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3 The poetic trope of attribution of motive is used to construct the corporation as an evil villain,  
4  
5 symbolically represented by men in black suits, a common visual metonym used to represent  
6  
7 corporate interests (Bell, 2008), while the animals destined for slaughter are portrayed as  
8  
9 defenceless victims. The story also contains a strongly moral dimension through this  
10  
11 juxtaposition of good and evil (Gabriel, 2000).  
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16 The moral dimension of FRS's approach to, and use of, digital organizational storytelling is  
17  
18 also evident in The Story of Stuff (TSOS). This video series features a single narrator, TSOS  
19  
20 Project founder Annie Leonard, who speaks directly to the camera and is supported by simple  
21  
22 black-and-white line drawn cartoon drawings to represent key protagonists. The mode of  
23  
24 storytelling conforms to the documentary genre, through claiming to present factual  
25  
26 information about the world beyond the story, and using visual aids to communicate evidence  
27  
28 in support of an argument (Bell, 2008). The narrators' argument is that 'most environmental  
29  
30 deterioration is a result of systemic failures of the capitalism that we have today... long-term  
31  
32 solutions must seek transformative change' (Leonard, 2010, p.xxi) and that therefore  
33  
34 'business as usual is unsustainable' (Heaton, 2010, p.554). The story conforms to the  
35  
36 rhetorical documentary form, by addressing the audience directly and 'trying to move them  
37  
38 towards a particular intellectual position, emotional attitude, and/or action' that will affect  
39  
40 their everyday life (Bell, 2008, p.189-190). The images act as fixed signifiers of  
41  
42 corporations, government, employees and consumers. They also rely on juxtaposition of  
43  
44 opposites, through which the qualities of each become exaggerated. The stories rely on  
45  
46 attribution of unity, constructing corporations as an undifferentiated entity that is responsible  
47  
48 for causing significant negative impact on society and the natural environment. This enables  
49  
50 clear attribution of blame and credit, giving the storyteller, Annie, 'a means of determining  
51  
52 right and wrong and assigning them to appropriate agents' (Gabriel, 2000, p.38). The poetic  
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3 tropes associated with traditional organizational storytelling are thus enhanced through the  
4  
5 use of visual symbolism which enables the clear attribution of agency, turning passive,  
6  
7 inanimate or conceptual categories (such as animals reared for human consumption or  
8  
9 corporations), into purposeful, conscious and characterful beings (see Table 2).  
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14 [TABLE 2 HERE]  
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18 For FRS, digitalization is a medium by which simple yet strongly moral stories about  
19  
20 organizational change can be disseminated to a global audience. The storytellers' aim is to  
21  
22 achieve a behavioural change in audiences through the moral critique of corporate practices  
23  
24 that have a negative impact on societies. However, as the next section argues, successful  
25  
26 digital organizational storytelling also relies on following and negotiating specific network  
27  
28 protocols on which these practices rely.  
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### 32 33 34 Network protocols of affinity, authenticity and amateurism 35 36 37

38 A key feature that distinguishes digital organizational storytelling is the reliance on electronic  
39  
40 networks that enable collaboration and co-construction between storytellers and audiences  
41  
42 across geographical boundaries, on a scale and at a speed greater than that enabled by  
43  
44 traditional storytelling methods. As we discussed above, this relies on building a network of  
45  
46 followers that shares an affinity. Networks of affinity enable rapid, purposeful distribution of  
47  
48 digital organizational stories in a way that does not rely on paid advertising or direct access to  
49  
50 mass broadcasting (Wolfe, 2009). Techniques used by FRS to cultivate communities of  
51  
52 affinity include multiple, related online activities (e.g. message boards and listservs, blogs,  
53  
54 email, Facebook and Twitter), and longer established offline technologies (video screenings,  
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3 radio and journalistic features). These are used in combination to encourage audiences to  
4  
5 respond to stories and participate in conversation with the storytellers and with each other, as  
6  
7 this respondent explained:  
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10  
11 We have a very engaged audience. I mean we call them typically a community instead of an  
12  
13 audience because they really do... You know, it was really interesting with this last Story of  
14  
15 Citizens United film that we did. We had folks complete some survey questions for us and  
16  
17 we had them watch a series of videos both for and against the decision and then give us some  
18  
19 feedback around what messages were coming through... to try and get a sense from them in  
20  
21 terms of like what information would be useful as we tried to tell the story. It's [also] a very  
22  
23 diverse audience... it's very popular with Catholic nuns in the Mid-West and here in Oakland  
24  
25 there's like a youth group of colour that has adopted Story of Stuff into like a hip-hop poetry  
26  
27 dance...  
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29

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32 Community building takes place offline as well as online, for example by encouraging  
33  
34 network members to meet face to face, or '*throw house parties*', following the launch of a  
35  
36 new online video:  
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41 It was a way to publicise... people like to be given very clear things to do and ways to  
42  
43 participate. So they said they were going to have a screening party on the launch date and we  
44  
45 gave them directions to download the movie and gave like a discussion guide and then I  
46  
47 created this Google form so that after people had had their parties they could give us  
48  
49 information and it's actually geo-tagged which means it integrates with Google maps... So  
50  
51 they could drop a little pin where they put their party, how many people attended and, you  
52  
53 know, was there some funny story they wanted to share?  
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3 FRS deliberately cultivates a multiplicity and diversity of voices to interact with their stories.  
4  
5 This encourages a blurring of the boundaries between storytellers and audiences by inviting  
6  
7 audiences to actively participate in digital organizational storytelling. As a consequence, the  
8  
9 origin of meaning migrates from the storyteller and the story to the audience who themselves  
10  
11 become storytellers, rather than remaining simply audiences to whom stories are told.  
12  
13 Through this, the story not only becomes polyphonic, but is dialogized with multi-stylistic  
14  
15 expressions, diverse configurations of time and space, and multiple interplays with varied  
16  
17 social and cultural discourses (Boje 2008). While Boje (2008:3) describes such stories as ‘a  
18  
19 rare and endangered species’ in organizations, we suggest that in the context of digital  
20  
21 organizational storytelling they are a relatively common feature. This arises as a result of the  
22  
23 power that resides in networks, as communicative structures that rely on protocols of  
24  
25 communication to process flows of messages (Castells, 2009).  
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32 A final protocol on which successful digital organizational storytelling depends is the  
33  
34 evaluation of authenticity. Interviewees drew repeatedly on discourses of authenticity to  
35  
36 describe their storytelling practices. When asked to explain further, one respondent  
37  
38 associated authenticity with the moral purpose of storytelling in enabling distinction between  
39  
40 right and wrong in the evaluation of corporate social responsibility:  
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44

45 Authenticity to me means it’s not just greenwashing. So you’re not just slapping a sticker on  
46  
47 something to make it appear as if it were more environmentally or people friendly, you know,  
48  
49 as if it’s more sustainable... if you’re just slapping a sticker on a product or if you’re just  
50  
51 glossing over the yukky stuff and pulling out a few highlights that are good, then that’s not  
52  
53 authentic in my mind. Authentic is sincerely trying to have a product or a cause that is good  
54  
55 for people, planet and profits... As more and more companies want to reach into this kind of  
56  
57 authentic sustainability world space, then we have to decide whether or not we’re going to be  
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3 willing to work for them and there's a wide range of opinions about Free Range about who  
4 you work for and how authentic they have to be... It's really a slippery slope of authenticity.  
5  
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8

9 The importance of evaluations of authenticity also encompasses audiences who are described  
10 as '*agents of authenticity*' (Sachs, 2012) through their engagement with the negative impact  
11 of corporate practices on society. This includes participating in conversations about the  
12 authenticity of digital stories, as illustrated by these user generated comments on the FRS  
13 website:  
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23 'The truth about the consumption system!'  
24

25  
26 'This is great! I believe in this message!'  
27  
28

29  
30 'This is a great video that was homework in my financial literacy class. It is so true!!!!!!'  
31

32 People should really watch this video!!!!'  
33  
34  
35

36  
37 Thought for food #ownmyidentity #authenticman #authenticearth  
38

39 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLBE5QAYXp8>)  
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43 However, respondents were also aware of the writerly character of digital organizational  
44 storytelling and the consequent instability of stories. An illustration of how this was used to  
45 undermine authenticity involved online political activist Lee Doren who posted critiques of  
46 TSOS on his online channel HowTheWorldWorks<sup>v</sup>, where he accused Annie Leonard of  
47 indoctrinating children through use of the TSOS videos in schools. The authenticity of her  
48 story was also undermined through parodies of TSOS videos which include a mocking video  
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3 of Leonard dressed a Nazi uniform accompanied by music from the German national anthem.  
4

5 Website comments were also used to refute authenticity:  
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9  
10 This video is nothing but propaganda - full of so many lies and half truths I can't even begin  
11 to address them all. Look past the cute little animations and the woman who speaks to you as  
12 if you were a kindergartener and it's nothing but a plea to bury the government tick even  
13 further into your flesh. The drive to control you never stops...  
14  
15

16  
17  
18 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLBE5QAYXp8>)  
19

20  
21 Thus the fluidity of meaning associated with digital organizational storytelling may be used  
22 to undermine the storyteller's attempts to control how the story is interpreted. However,  
23 conversely, writerly engagements that draw on communities of affinity can enhance the  
24 perceived authenticity of the storyteller and the story, as this interviewee noted:  
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32  
33 One of the great things about the teenagers who are talking is that actually you can YouTube  
34 their response. I think it's hysterical, smart... they got on and they said "Hi, we're here to  
35 talk about The Story of Stuff. My name's Annie," and then they had people kind of pop out  
36 from the side that said "But Annie, what's a toxin?" and "What about this?" and "What about  
37 this?"... [they asked some] tough questions and that kind of ability... [to] respond and ask  
38 those is a totally different dialogue than just Free Range broadcasting something out... all of a  
39 sudden you're having one to many and many can come back to one, and many can go to each  
40 other and so it's a whole new game, which I think it's just really exciting from a creative  
41 standpoint.  
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3 A further protocol identified as crucial in maintaining authenticity in digital organizational  
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5 storytelling is amateurism, as this respondent's explanation of the rationale for the TSOS  
6  
7 videos illustrates:  
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10  
11 Annie had been working on these issues for a long time, but she had always kind of  
12  
13 communicated it in a bit kind of nerdier way. You know, talking about parts per billion and  
14  
15 toxics in the materials flow and she did a year-long workshop with a bunch of other activists  
16  
17 and leaders and they just gave her a lot of really authentic feedback about how she could  
18  
19 make her kind of rap, so to speak, more accessible and she really took it to heart...she was  
20  
21 super frustrated by her inability to communicate the information in a way that resonated with  
22  
23 people, so almost as a joke, when she was giving her presentation she started putting up these  
24  
25 stick figures and these little kind of line drawings to tell her story and it immediately became  
26  
27 apparent that that was such a better way to tell the story and she started getting invited places  
28  
29 to go and give her talk using the stick figure drawings and everyone kept saying to her like  
30  
31 "You should make a film of this!"  
32  
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36 These network protocols of affinity, authenticity and amateurism are used by digital  
37  
38 organizational storytellers to establish and maintain a successful storytelling tradition. The  
39  
40 success of these digital organizational storytelling practices, and the importance of these  
41  
42 protocols in maintaining them, is exposed by looking at what happens when these protocols  
43  
44 are breached, as the following section illustrates.  
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#### 49 Breaching the protocols of digital organizational storytelling

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54 The *Story of Bottled Water* (2010) traces the environmental and social impacts associated  
55  
56 with drinking bottled rather than tap water. Within weeks of its release the International  
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3 Bottled Water Association in association with Bottled Water Matters (IBWA)<sup>vi</sup> produced a  
4  
5 response in the form of an online video entitled *Conflicted Consumer* (2010)<sup>vii</sup> that  
6  
7 highlighted the consumer health and safety benefits associated with drinking bottled water  
8  
9 and promoted the industry's commitment to sustainability (e.g. in bottle recycling). This  
10  
11 online video tells the story of a day in the life of a bottled water consumer as she struggles  
12  
13 with her devilish doubts about drinking bottled water and eventually sides with the angel on  
14  
15 her shoulder in realising its benefits. However, the story 'boomeranged' (Lazarsfeld,  
16  
17 Berelson & Gaudet, 1968), as its meaning was turned around by audiences who read it in a  
18  
19 way that reversed the message intended by the storyteller, as illustrated by comments posted  
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21 on YouTube in response to the video:  
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27  
28       Wow... what an excellent video... It tells you exactly WHY you SHOULD NOT be drinking  
29  
30 bottled water. How ironic that the angels is selfish - after having seen this, I too am going to  
31  
32 continue polluting because my convenience is WAY more important than common good!!!  
33  
34 ([http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=eklg6j2G2pk](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=eklg6j2G2pk))  
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36

37  
38 The meaning of the story was turned around by audiences who read it in a way that was  
39  
40 contrary to the purpose of the initial storyteller. By '*trying to speak the language of a*  
41  
42 *subculture*' that it did not belong to, the storyteller '*set off the alarm bells of insincerity in the*  
43  
44 *audience it most wanted to reach*' (Sachs, 2012, p.44). Members of FRS, TSOS and their  
45  
46 communities of affinity saw this as an indication of their success as storytellers:  
47  
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51  
52       You know a project is a success in the viral model, you know, if it starts being talked about  
53  
54 and if it starts to create a bit of a [buzz]... if something initiates a debate or really sparks a  
55  
56 conversation, you know, lots of good, heated conversation, we like that.  
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3 That was such a funny video that they made, my goodness. So with the Story of Bottled  
4 Water – kind of much as you would expect – we got some push-back from the industry and  
5 they actually attempted to make their own video to kind of counter ours and talk about the  
6 ‘real’ story of bottled water and how bottled water’s so good for you and blah, blah, blah, but  
7 it was so tragically badly done that it really just made us look a lot better... On some level,  
8 you know, we can wear it as a badge of honour that our work is meaningful enough and  
9 powerful enough that... people are paying attention to it.  
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19 It was awful and it was hilariously bad... The production value was terrible. The message  
20 was so transparently bad. It was... it was grasping at straws and anyone with half a brain  
21 could see right through it... If we receive backlash on what we’ve done, then we’ve done our  
22 job.  
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29  
30 The industry coalition’s failure to conform to the protocols of the digital storytelling network  
31 resulted in the story being deemed inauthentic. To emphasise this, for several weeks FRS  
32 included a link to *Conflicted Consumer* on its website. IBWM made several similar online  
33 videos<sup>viii</sup> but their success never approached the *Story of Bottled Water*.<sup>ix</sup> While the IBWM  
34 stories appeared to conform to the norms of digital organizational storytelling on YouTube, in  
35 that they cultivated a home-made appearance, involved cultural redaction,<sup>x</sup> and contained an  
36 element of playful humour rather than critical-rational debate, they failed to do so  
37 convincingly. Such organizations and the corporations that fund them are caught in a double-  
38 bind: if they reveal their storytelling identity, they risk transgressing the amateur identity of  
39 the culture and alienating its members. Alternatively, if they produce stories that claim to be  
40 vernacular, they risk being paradoxically positioned negatively as inauthentic and the  
41 audience may choose read the story in ways that are oppositional to those intended by the  
42 storyteller (Hall, 1980).  
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## Discussion and Conclusion

This article has explored the dialogical potential of digital organizational storytelling through analysis of the relationships between storytellers and storytelling audiences. It has focused on what happens when digital organizational storytellers with divergent power interests come into conflict. Based on case study analysis of an organization that produces online animated videos to tell moral stories about corporate practices that impact negatively on society, the article has identified the network protocols of affinity, authenticity and amateurism, that frame how a story is understood, and whether or not it is deemed plausible. Through this, the article has generated insight into the particular characteristics of digital organizational storytelling. Our analysis suggests that storytelling practices on the Internet are more dialogical than traditional linguistic, including oral and textual, forms of organizational storytelling. It further suggests that digital organizational storytelling opens up the possibility for oppositional practices of meaning making which challenge the power of corporations. We conclude by summarising the conceptual implications of our analysis for organizational storytelling researchers, and indicating directions for further study.

Digital storytelling is both similar to, and different from, traditional forms of organizational storytelling. On the one hand, there are similarities in the way that stories are initially told. As our analysis illustrates, FRS follows traditional storytelling conventions, relying on well-established mythological or folkloric formulae such as simplicity of plot and symbolic characters, to deliver a strong moral message (Gabriel, 2000). There are also similarities in the purposes that stories serve, both as a means of interpreting the world as it is, and as a way of articulating a desired future. As Küpers et al. (2013, p.96) argue, the power of stories lies

1  
2  
3 in their ‘capacity to encompass thinking and feeling about issues and thereby to compel  
4  
5 people to take certain actions and avoid others’. The practices analysed here suggest that the  
6  
7 purpose of serving as a stimulus towards action is common to digital organizational  
8  
9 storytellers, as well as to storytellers in organizations. However, the plasticity of meaning  
10  
11 making afforded through digital storytelling challenges both traditional understandings of  
12  
13 organizational storytelling and the relationships between storytelling organizations and  
14  
15 storytelling audiences. Development of online digital technologies that enable and encourage  
16  
17 audiences to respond immediately and directly in communicating their acceptance or  
18  
19 rejection of a story has led to storytelling practices being enacted in the context of distributed,  
20  
21 networked power relations. Power in this context is less a pre-existing, stable or reified  
22  
23 quality and more of a fluid resource which is worked out through practice.  
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29 Digital organizational storytelling is also characterised by increased indeterminacy of  
30  
31 meaning. Hence, rather than using stories for ‘the legitimization of dominant power  
32  
33 relationships’ (Küpers et al, 2103, p.96), FRS and TSOS set out to deliberately encourage  
34  
35 dialogism, by opening up stories to multiple narrators and interpretations. Where contestation  
36  
37 emerged in online contexts, this took the form of increasing the plurality of voices, styles and  
38  
39 discourses. As a consequence, our analysis suggests that even if the plausibility of a digital  
40  
41 organizational story is limited, the potential for co-creation, in the form of ongoing story  
42  
43 development through wider distribution to digital storytelling audiences is greater than in  
44  
45 traditional oral and textual organizational storytelling contexts. This dialogical potential is  
46  
47 also greater than with other popular cultural storytelling forms, including film and television,  
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49 where communication is mainly one-way and top-down.  
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3 Digital organizational storytelling also makes it more difficult for organizations to control  
4 meaning making. There is greater unpredictability associated with digital stories and how  
5 they are interpreted, in comparison to the more monological character of mass media forms  
6 of storytelling enabled by film and television. There is therefore much greater opportunity  
7 for oppositional readings, i.e. interpretations that run counter to the message that the  
8 storyteller intended (Hall, 1980). This poses difficulties for organizational storytellers who  
9 attempt to shape and control meaning in relation to their brand (Mumby, 2016). The protocols  
10 of amateurism, affinity and authenticity define participation in digital storytelling networks.  
11 These protocols can also be invoked to undermine organizational meaning making. This  
12 generates spaces for critical, minority, grassroots, and individual voices that tend to be  
13 marginalised by corporate structures of communicative power (Mumby, 2016). Digital  
14 organizational storytelling thus enhances the possibility for ‘polypi’, or extreme dialogical  
15 stories, where meaning making remains fluid, thereby displacing narrative monologism.  
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34 As our analysis has highlighted, this opens up possibilities for digital organizational  
35 storytellers who are critical of the orientation of corporate globalization to engage in  
36 oppositional meaning making practices that challenge these established power interests.  
37 Conflicts are fought between networked digital organizational storytellers and storytelling  
38 audiences who engage in dialogical meaning making in order to assert their values. Network  
39 power has thereby created opportunities for new organizational storytelling actors to  
40 construct meaning through digital storytelling in ways that challenge the power of  
41 corporations to construct meaning in ways which promote and further their interests. We  
42 suggest therefore that there is a need to revisit the theoretical foundations of organizational  
43 storytelling in order to appreciate the significance of these communicative structures. Our  
44 analysis provides an exemplary illustration of the relational nature of power networks and the  
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3 importance of network protocols in determining the success of stories. Further study of  
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5 organizational storytelling in online contexts is needed in order to appreciate the potential of  
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7 digital organizational storytelling, including those that rely on video diaries (Mason, 2012)  
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9 and blogs (Schoneboom, 2009, 2011).  
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14 However, it is important not to overstate the potential for democratization and social change  
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16 that is associated with new forms of organizational storytelling enabled by the Internet. The  
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18 practice of digital organizational storytelling can be critiqued as a form of ‘slacktivism’ or  
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20 ‘clicktivism’ that has little or no political or social impact on the offline world (Gladwell,  
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22 2010). According to Dean (2009), online speech, opinion and participation can become  
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24 fetishized, arising from the participant’s own belief that their contribution means something  
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26 and matters independently of whether it has any material or practical impact or efficacy. This  
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28 gives rise to a neoliberal fantasy in which political struggles in local and institutional settings  
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30 are displaced and ‘doing is reduced to talking’ (Dean, 2009, p.32), enduring political  
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32 solidarity being replaced by momentary spectacle. The challenge for digital organizational  
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34 storytellers like FRS and TSOS is to find ways of leveraging the meaning making potential  
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36 associated with stories in order to bring about ‘real’ world change by translating narratives  
37  
38 into action. For organizational storytelling researchers, the challenge is to find ways of  
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40 gaining access to these practices, and to begin to systematically explore digital organizational  
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42 storytelling as a dialogical practice that tacks between online and offline social worlds.  
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24 <sup>i</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oNedC3j0e4> (accessed 19/03/14). See also Mike Wesch's, Library of  
25 Congress lecture, *An Anthropology of YouTube*

26 <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZSqXUSwHRI> (accessed 19/03/14)

27 <sup>iii</sup> Regalado, A. and Searcey, D. 'Where Did That Video Spoofing Gore's Film Come From?', *Wall Street*  
28 *Journal*, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, [http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB115457177198425388-](http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB115457177198425388-0TpYE6bU6EGvfSqtP8_hHjJJ77I_20060810.html?mod=blogs)  
29 [0TpYE6bU6EGvfSqtP8\\_hHjJJ77I\\_20060810.html?mod=blogs](http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB115457177198425388-0TpYE6bU6EGvfSqtP8_hHjJJ77I_20060810.html?mod=blogs) (accessed 05/05/11)

30 <sup>iv</sup> Information about individual interviewees' such as their job roles, is not provided in the analysis since  
31 providing this information would compromise individual anonymity.

32 <sup>v</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/HowTheWorldWorks> (accessed 19/03/14)

33 <sup>vi</sup> See <http://www.bottledwatermatters.org/> (accessed 19/03/14)

34 <sup>vii</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eklg6j2G2pk> (accessed 19/03/14)

35 <sup>viii</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL2VzMI0M0g> (accessed 19/03/14)

36 <sup>ix</sup> 'Conflicted Consumer' currently shows 4,722 YouTube views (19/03/14).

37 <sup>x</sup> 'I am Bottled Water' is a reference to the 'I am Windows' marketing campaign.

38 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISkkZj5xFRw> (accessed 19/03/14)  
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Table 1: Digital organizational stories

Title	Release date and duration	Sequels and related titles	Commissioning client	Focus of story	Audience reception
<i>The Meatrix</i>	2003, 3.46 minutes	<i>Meatrix 2</i> (2006) and <i>Meatrix 2.5</i> (2006); <i>Grocery Store Wars</i> (2005)	Global Resource Centre for the Environment (GRACE Communications Foundation)	Factory farming; animal cruelty; unethical employment practices; pollution; poor food safety	Over 25 million views; translated into over 40 languages
<i>The Story of Stuff</i>	2007, 20 minutes	<i>The Story of Bottled Water</i> (2010); <i>The Story of Electronics</i> (2010); <i>The Story of Cosmetics</i> (2010); <i>The Story of Broke</i> (2011); <i>The Story of Citizens United v. FEC</i> (2011); <i>The Story of Change</i> (2012)	The Story of Stuff Project, Tides Foundation, Funders Workgroup for Sustainable Production and Consumption	Commodity culture, the materials economy; hyper-consumption; global supply chains; corporations	Over 15 million views for <i>The Story of Stuff</i> ; follow-up in the form of a <i>New York Times</i> bestselling book (Leonard, 2010); 200,000 Facebook fans; shown in 1,500 classrooms; distributed across over 220 countries and territories; 2 million views for <i>The Story of Bottled Water</i> ; reached number seven in the viral video chart <a href="http://viralvideochart.unrulymedia.com/">http://viralvideochart.unrulymedia.com/</a> in March 2010

Table 2: Modes and tropes of digital organizational storytelling

Title	Key protagonists	Mode	Poetic tropes	Symbolic tropes and intertextual references
<i>The Meatrix</i>	Naive apprentice (Leo the pig); wise hero (Moopheus the cow); evil villain (Agri-Corp and agents of <i>The Meatrix</i> ); hapless victims (the animals)	Epic story of a heroic character who exposes the illusion of family farming and seeks to 'liberate minds' so they know where their food comes from. Fights evil villain and saves animal victims from impending death.	<p><i>Attribution of motive:</i> the factory farming industry as responsible culprit</p> <p><i>Attribution of emotion to central characters:</i> evil deeds committed by men in suits</p>	<p>Corporation represented by Agri-Corp a multi-limbed robot and agents of <i>The Meatrix</i> - men in black suits</p> <p>Release coincides with the final film in <i>The Matrix</i> trilogy (1999 - 2003); human enslavement to machines translated into animal enslavement to machines. A related narrative of good versus evil forces is used in <i>Grocery Store Wars</i> which draws on the <i>Star Wars</i> film franchise</p>
<i>The Story of Stuff</i>	Narrator (Annie Leonard); evil villain (greedy, out-of-control corporations); other protagonists (the government; the Third World; factories; Big Box Mart; employees; consumers)	Documentary story (rhetorical form), a narrator tells the story simply but passionately and builds a persuasive argument. Story ends by proposing a solution to the issues raised.	<p><i>Attribution of motive:</i> corporation as responsible for unethical and destructive social, environmental and health effects; government responsible related to failure to control the corporation</p> <p><i>Attribution of causal connections:</i> multiple incidents in narrative linked together in cause/effect relationship</p> <p><i>Attribution of unity and fixed qualities:</i> corporation as an undifferentiated, unified category signified as having fixed characteristics (e.g. inherently greedy)</p>	<p>Hand-drawn, black and white stick figures denote childlike simplicity;</p> <p>Narrator, Annie Leonard, dressed plainly in shirt and slacks, is represented in front of a whiteboard, as though teaching;</p> <p>Inflated stick figure with dollar sign on body and top hat to represent the corporation;</p> <p>Pictorial arrows and flows used to indicate causality and attribute responsibility</p>