

Storytelling with Verbal Anchoring and Its Impact on Audience Engagement and Emotional Connection: Toastmasters International Approach

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Abstract

Storytelling has become an important communication strategy in public speaking, as it enhances message delivery in a more engaging and meaningful way. This study aims to examine the effect of storytelling combined with verbal anchoring on audience engagement and emotional connection. A descriptive mixed-method design was used, involving 30 participants with experience in storytelling-based speeches. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The results show that 90.3% of respondents agree that storytelling makes presentations easier to understand, while 90% believe it helps clarify the speaker's message. Additionally, 96.7% of respondents state that storytelling helps them remember important information, and 87.1% agree that it makes presentations more interesting. Verbal anchoring was also perceived as effective, with 93.5% agreeing that repetition emphasizes key messages and helps audiences follow the story. In terms of engagement, most respondents reported that storytelling often (54.8%) or always (32.3%) increases their attention. Furthermore, the majority experienced strong (45.2%) to very strong (29%) emotional connections.

Keywords: Storytelling, Verbal Anchoring, Toastmasters International, Audience Engagement, Emotional Connection



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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has existed for centuries and is a common method of human communication that has developed into a vital technique for persuading others because of its remarkable capacity to captivate, motivate, and sway an audience. Within public speaking, storytelling is recognized not just as a form of amusement but as an effective tool to clarify complex ideas, build trust, and motivate listeners to take action. This trend is backed by psychological concepts such as "narrative transportation" and emotional involvement, which greatly improve how well messages are received and remembered by audiences. Nonetheless, the main difficulty faced by contemporary public speakers lies in keeping the audience engaged in a communication landscape that is increasingly scattered. Toastmasters International, a prominent organization focused on developing leadership and communication skills, consistently highlights the importance of compelling narrative techniques. One approach deemed highly impactful yet in need of further scholarly investigation is verbal anchoring. Verbal anchoring helps solidify the main message by strategically repeating important words or phrases associated with emotional high points in a narrative, thus creating a memorable "anchor" in the listeners' minds. This piece intends to examine how combining storytelling methods with verbal anchoring, particularly within the Toastmasters methodology, boosts audience involvement and nurtures more profound emotional bonds. This inquiry is essential because, although the overall impact of storytelling is widely recognized, the precise combination of organized verbal strategies and their effects on creating closeness with an audience requires additional empirical study.

Literature Review

The idea of storytelling is widely accepted as an essential element for effective communication among people. Lumturiye Mehmedi-Sinani (2025) claims that storytelling serves as a powerful instrument in public speaking, capable of dismantling barriers in communication, nurturing empathy, and enriching the bond between the speaker and the audience by utilizing compelling narratives and fostering audience engagement. This perspective is supported by Dr. Anna Neya Kazanskaia (2025), who explains that storytelling functions through a psychological process referred to as "narrative transportation." This process enables the audience to become emotionally invested, ultimately improving their openness to and memory of the ideas presented in persuasive talks. In the realm of personal skill enhancement, Dzulfahira Yusuf and Meity Suryandari (2023) refer to storytelling as a "hidden advantage" for public speakers. They contend that an effective story can encapsulate intricate ideas within captivating narratives, which makes it more probable for the message to resonate emotionally and motivate the audience. The mental and social functions of this approach are further highlighted by Mehreen Kanwal (2025), who clarifies that storytelling encourages creativity and fosters critical thinking and empathy by giving the audience the chance to consider different viewpoints through the characters presented in the narrative.

The power of storytelling in fostering engagement is further validated by empirical evidence. A study conducted by José Carlos Losada Díaz and Javier Almela-Baeza (2023) shows that content fueled by emotional stories repeatedly surpasses conventional institutional content, with interaction rates on multiple platforms sometimes doubling. This conclusion is backed by research from Yuni Ros Bangun et al. (2020), which demonstrated through experimental methods that the use of storytelling approaches (notably digital storytelling) significantly influences social support, the identity of organizations, and how individuals engage in their roles within a setting. Additionally, Allison Keith (2023) points out that the strength of narratives comes from their capacity to influence how the public views things and to foster identity through interpersonal relationships. In the context of marketing and brand communication, Dr. Sathyanarayana Gowda V and Dr. Archana H. (2024) describe that impactful storytelling transcends simply sharing details about a product; it intertwines concepts of values, purpose, and identity that bring forth feelings like trust and happiness, which are crucial for fostering enduring connections. From an educational and language acquisition standpoint, Sulastri et al. (2020) discovered that actively employing storytelling strategies enhances audience involvement and excitement in communication. They observed considerable advancements in fluency, understanding, and vocabulary when the audience participates in the storytelling experience. Ultimately, historical analyses reveal that since ancient times, narratives have served as the primary means of transmitting ethical principles and cultural heritages, demonstrating that narrative methods such as those utilized in the Toastmasters International framework continue to be the most potent basis for establishing emotional bonds and engaging audiences in contemporary times.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a mixed-methods descriptive survey approach, which combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, to explore how storytelling and verbal anchoring affect audience engagement and emotional connection during public speaking. The study included 30 participants who had prior experience in listening to speeches or presentations that incorporated storytelling methods. The participants were chosen to gain insight into how people view the role of storytelling and verbal emphasis in making a speech more interesting and emotionally moving. The data were gathered via an online questionnaire that was sent out using Google Forms. The questionnaire included both types of questions: those that required a

yes or no answer and those that allowed for a more detailed response. The closed-ended questions were created to gather numerical information about how participants viewed storytelling and verbal anchoring in speeches. At the same time, the open-ended questions gave respondents the chance to share their own experiences and views on how these techniques affect their level of involvement and emotional bond as audience members.

The data that was gathered was examined through the use of descriptive statistical methods and qualitative content analysis. The numerical data were examined by determining the frequency and percentage of each response, and these findings were displayed using charts and tables. The qualitative responses were examined to find shared themes about how well speeches using storytelling and verbal anchoring engage the audience, create an emotional connection, convey messages clearly, and are remembered. The study's findings are presented using charts and detailed explanations to show the trends in participants' responses and to better explain how storytelling and verbal anchoring improve audience involvement during public speaking.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 30 respondents who participated in a survey about the use of storytelling and verbal anchoring in speeches. The results were collected using a questionnaire distributed through a Google Form. The following section presents the findings based on each survey question.

1. Storytelling helps make a speech or presentation more engaging for the audience.
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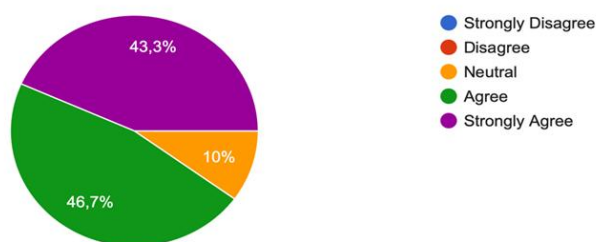


Figure 1. Storytelling Helps Make Presentations Easier to Understand

Based on the responses shown in Figure 1, the majority of respondents believe that storytelling helps make presentations easier to understand. The results show that 48.4% of respondents strongly agree (13 respondents) and 41.9% agree (15 respondents) with the statement. Meanwhile, 9.7% of respondents (3 respondents) selected neutral, and none of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that most respondents have a positive perception of storytelling in presentations. The high percentage of agreement (90.3%) suggests that storytelling is considered an effective communication technique that helps audiences understand information more clearly.

2. I understand a speaker's message more clearly when storytelling is used in a presentation.
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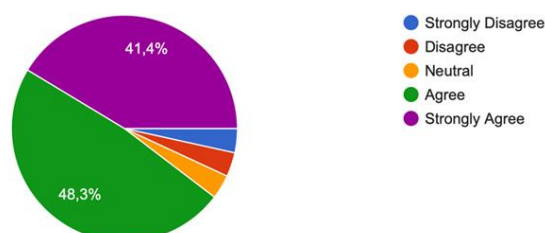


Figure 2. Understanding the Speaker's Message Through Storytelling

Figure 2 shows respondents' perceptions of whether storytelling helps them understand a speaker's message more clearly. From 30 respondents, 50% (15 respondents) agreed and 40% (12 respondents) strongly agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 3.3% (1 respondent) chose neutral, 3.3% (1 respondent) disagreed, and 3.3% (1 respondent) strongly disagreed. These results show that 90% of respondents expressed agreement that storytelling improves message clarity. This suggests that storytelling helps audiences better understand the speaker's ideas during a presentation.

3. Storytelling helps the audience remember important information from a presentation.
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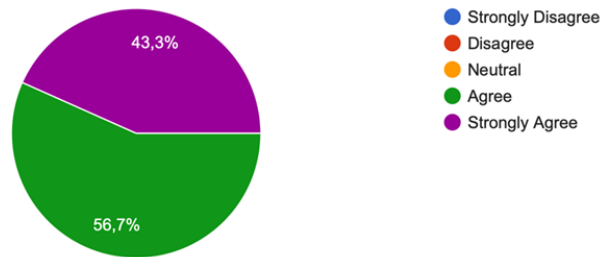


Figure 3. Storytelling Helps the Audience Remember Important Information

As illustrated in Figure 3, the majority of respondents believe that storytelling helps audiences remember important information from a presentation. The results show that 54.8% of respondents strongly agree (17 respondents) and 41.9% agree (13 respondents). Meanwhile, 3.2% of respondents (1 respondent) selected neutral, and none disagreed. These findings indicate that storytelling plays an important role in helping audiences retain key information presented during a speech or presentation.

4. Presentations that include storytelling are more interesting than presentations that only present facts or data.
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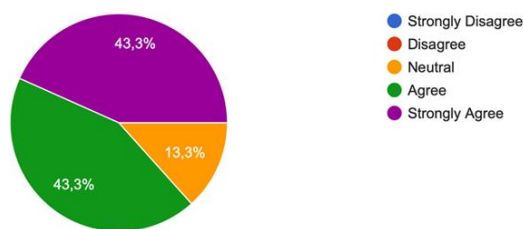


Figure 4. Storytelling Makes Presentations More Interesting

Figure 4 presents respondents' perceptions of whether storytelling makes presentations more interesting than presentations that only present facts or data. The results show that 45.2% of respondents strongly agree (13 respondents) and 41.9% agree (14 respondents). Meanwhile, 12.9% of respondents (4 respondents) selected neutral, and none disagreed. These results suggest that storytelling significantly increases the attractiveness of presentations and helps maintain audience interest.

5. Repetition of key words or phrases helps emphasize the main message of a speech.
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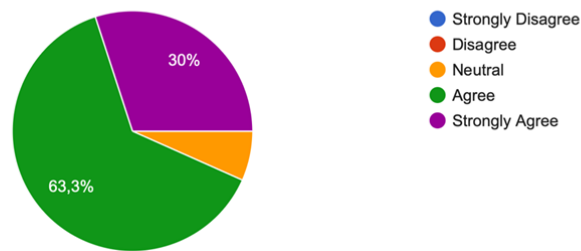


Figure 5. Repetition of Key Words Helps Emphasize the Main Message

Based on Figure 5, respondents generally agree that repetition of key words or phrases helps emphasize the main message of a speech. The results show that 64.5% of respondents agree (20 respondents) and 29% strongly agree (9 respondents). Meanwhile, 6.5% of respondents (2 respondents) selected neutral, and none disagreed. These findings suggest that repetition is perceived as an effective technique to highlight important points during a presentation.

6. Verbal anchoring (repeating key ideas or phrases) makes it easier for the audience to follow a story.
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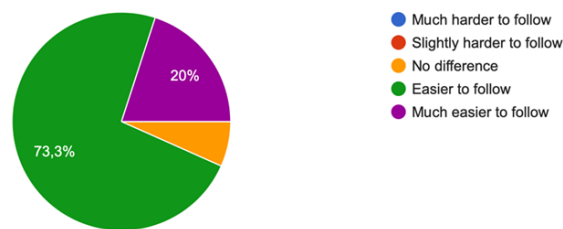


Figure 6. Verbal Anchoring Makes Stories Easier to Follow

Figure 6 shows respondents' opinions about whether verbal anchoring makes it easier for the audience to follow a story. The results indicate that 74.2% of respondents (23 respondents) stated that verbal anchoring makes the story easier to follow, while 19.4% (6 respondents) stated that it makes it much easier to follow. Meanwhile, 6.5% (2 respondents) reported no difference, and none indicated that it makes the story harder to follow. These findings suggest that verbal anchoring helps audiences better follow the structure of a story during a speech.

7. Verbal anchoring helps highlight the most important points in a presentation.
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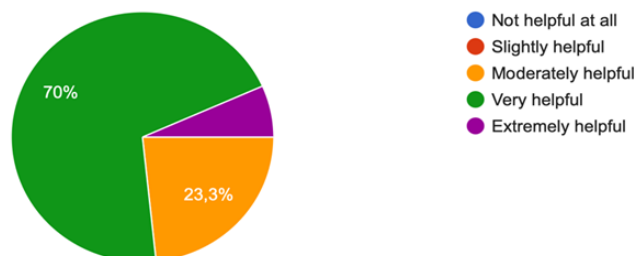


Figure 7. Verbal Anchoring Highlights Important Points

As shown in Figure 7, respondents generally perceive verbal anchoring as helpful in highlighting important points in a presentation. The results show that 67.7% of respondents (21 respondents) considered it very helpful, 25.8% (8 respondents) considered it moderately

helpful, and 6.5% (2 respondents) considered it extremely helpful. This indicates that verbal anchoring plays a significant role in emphasizing key ideas during a speech.

8. Storytelling encourages the audience to pay more attention to the speaker.
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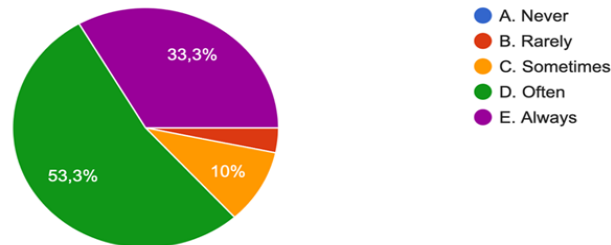


Figure 8. Storytelling Encourages Audience Attention

Figure 8 presents respondents' perceptions of whether storytelling encourages them to pay more attention to the speaker. The results show that 54.8% of respondents (17 respondents) stated often, 32.3% (10 respondents) stated always, 9.7% (3 respondents) stated sometimes, and 3.2% (1 respondent) stated rarely. No respondents selected never. These results suggest that storytelling helps increase audience attention during speeches and presentations.

9. I tend to pay more attention to speakers who use storytelling techniques.
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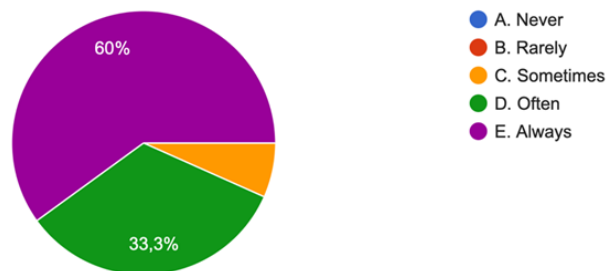


Figure 9. Attention to Speakers Who Use Storytelling

As shown in Figure 9, many respondents pay more attention to speakers who use storytelling techniques. The results show that 58.1% of respondents (18 respondents) stated always, 35.5% (11 respondents) stated often, and 6.4% (2 respondents) stated sometimes. These findings indicate that storytelling techniques significantly influence audience focus during presentations.

10. I feel more emotionally connected to a speaker when they use storytelling during a speech.
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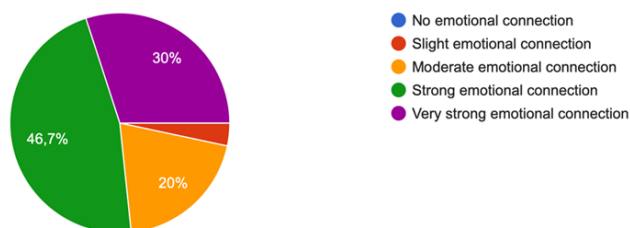


Figure 10. Emotional Connection Through Storytelling

Figure 10 shows respondents' perceptions of emotional connection when storytelling is used during a speech. The results indicate that 45.2% of respondents (14 respondents)

reported a strong emotional connection, 29% (9 respondents) reported a very strong emotional connection, 19.4% (6 respondents) reported a moderate emotional connection, and 6.5% (2 respondents) reported a slight emotional connection. None of the respondents reported having no emotional connection. These findings suggest that storytelling helps create emotional engagement between the speaker and the audience, making the message more meaningful and impactful. In addition to the quantitative results, respondents were also asked to share their opinions about storytelling and verbal anchoring in their own words. Many participants explained that storytelling makes speeches more relatable and emotionally engaging. Some respondents also stated that verbal anchoring helps highlight important messages so that audiences can remember them more easily.

These responses support the survey results, indicating that both storytelling and verbal anchoring contribute significantly to effective communication in speeches. The open-ended answers offer valuable insights into how storytelling and verbal anchoring affect audience engagement and emotional ties during a speech. In general, the majority of respondents conveyed positive views regarding these methods, asserting that they enhance the engagement factor, facilitate comprehension, and aid in making speeches more memorable. To begin with, numerous respondents indicated that storytelling contributes to making speeches more captivating and engaging. Narratives enable the audience to visualize the situation being portrayed and follow the storyline more effectively than passive reception of mere facts. One participant noted, "storytelling makes a speech feel more personal and engaging as it allows the audience to engage with a narrative instead of just absorbing information." This reflects that storytelling can capture the audience's focus and encourage sustained attention on the speaker. Furthermore, many participants pointed out that storytelling fortifies the emotional link between the speaker and the audience. By articulating experiences and scenarios through stories, the audience can connect with the message and foster empathy toward the speaker. One respondent stated that stories "engage the audience and foster empathy," thereby making the speech appear more significant and relatable. These insights indicate that storytelling is essential for enhancing emotional involvement in public speaking.

Additionally, respondents highlighted the critical role of verbal anchoring in reinforcing the key concepts of a speech. Verbal anchoring encompasses the use of repeated phrases, emphasized terms, or vocal stress that underscore essential points within the message. As noted by one participant, verbal anchoring assists in "highlighting the most crucial aspects of the story, making the message more memorable." This demonstrates that verbal anchoring aids the audience in discerning and retaining the primary message delivered by the speaker. Lastly, many respondents acknowledged that the integration of storytelling with verbal anchoring cultivates a more effective communication experience. Storytelling draws the audience's focus and builds emotional connection, while verbal anchoring guarantees that the fundamental message remains distinct and memorable. Combined, these methods enable audiences to comprehend the message more thoroughly and sustain their interest throughout the presentation. In summary, the qualitative feedback reinforces that storytelling and verbal anchoring are viewed by audiences as powerful techniques that bolster engagement, deepen emotional connections, and enhance message retention in public speaking.

Discussion

The results of this research reveal that the use of storytelling and verbal anchoring is crucial for enhancing audience engagement and emotional ties during a speech. According to the survey data, a majority of participants indicated that storytelling contributes to making a speech more captivating, simpler to comprehend, and emotionally compelling. When speakers share stories, it allows the audience to visualize the scenarios being described, fostering a

deeper connection to the conveyed message. This implies that storytelling can elevate a speech from merely presenting facts to delivering a more profound communication experience. These results are consistent with earlier research reviewed in the literature, emphasizing the effectiveness of storytelling in the realm of communication. The principle of narrative transportation illustrates that when audiences become engrossed in a narrative, they are more inclined to feel emotionally connected and devote greater attention to the message presented. Numerous respondents also noted that storytelling aids them in visualizing events and linking the message to their own real-life experiences. Consequently, storytelling not only captures the audience's interest but also fortifies the emotional relationship between the speaker and the listeners.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that verbal anchoring significantly aids audiences in grasping and retaining the main ideas presented in a speech. Several participants pointed out that recurring key phrases, emphasized vocabulary, or variations in the speaker's tone help them pinpoint the most crucial aspects of the message. Verbal anchoring serves as a reinforcement method that brings attention to essential points, ensuring that the audience stays focused on the core components of the speech. Moreover, the integration of storytelling and verbal anchoring appears to form a more effective communication approach. While storytelling draws the audience's focus and builds emotional resonance, verbal anchoring enhances the clarity and memorability of the information shared. Together, these strategies empower the speaker to convey information in a manner that is both engaging and meaningful for the listeners. Thus, this study's conclusions indicate that blending storytelling and verbal anchoring in public speaking can greatly improve audience engagement, emotional connection, and information retention. These strategies can assist speakers in delivering their messages more effectively, ensuring that their communications leave a significant impact on the audience.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this research, storytelling and verbal anchoring are powerful methods that enhance audience engagement and emotional connection in public speaking. The survey results indicate that a large majority of respondents recognize storytelling as an effective strategy, with 90.3% agreeing that it makes presentations easier to understand and 90% stating that it helps clarify the speaker's message. In addition, 96.7% of respondents reported that storytelling helps them remember important information, while 87.1% agreed that it makes presentations more interesting. Moreover, verbal anchoring plays a crucial role in emphasizing key ideas during a speech. The findings show that 93.5% of respondents agree that repetition of key words or phrases helps highlight the main message and makes the story easier to follow. This demonstrates that verbal anchoring contributes significantly to clarity and audience comprehension. In terms of audience engagement, most respondents reported that storytelling often (54.8%) or always (32.3%) increases their attention to the speaker. Furthermore, storytelling also fosters emotional connection, with 45.2% of respondents experiencing a strong emotional connection and 29% reporting a very strong emotional connection. Additionally, the combination of storytelling and verbal anchoring creates a more effective communication strategy. While storytelling captures attention and builds emotional engagement, verbal anchoring ensures that key messages remain clear and memorable. Together, these techniques enhance the overall impact of a speech by improving audience attention, emotional connection, and message retention. Consequently, this research highlights the importance of integrating storytelling and verbal anchoring in public speaking, particularly in communication development programs such as Toastmasters. By applying these strategies, speakers can deliver messages in a more engaging, clear, and impactful way.

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