The role of scrapbooks and storyboards in propagating entrepreneurial value in family business settings

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Biography

Dr Robert Smith is a lecturer at Aberdeen Business School, Scotland. His research interests include the semiotics, social construction of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial narrative, rural entrepreneurship, small business and family business.

Abstract

Purpose: The concepts of entrepreneurial narrative and biography are an emerging field of entrepreneurship research, but there is more to entrepreneurial narrative and biography than words and entrepreneur stories. Consequentially, this research paper considers the use of scrapbooks and storyboards as active narrative tools for propagating value in family business narratives.

Methodology/Approach: The method used is the semiotic analysis of a storyboard displayed within a family business in rural Aberdeenshire. The resultant text forms a combination of researcher narrative, storyboard format and commentary. This active form of presentation helps illustrate the importance of semiotics and aesthetics to understanding entrepreneurial narrative.

Findings: The use of scrapbooks and storyboards are purposeful activities which form part of a biographical process imparting a sense of continuity linking history, possible futures and tradition. Thus entrepreneur stories are but a one dimensional example of the many possible types of business narrative.

Research limitations/implications: This study extends the analysis of entrepreneurial narrative by considering a different narrative dimension, namely that of scrapbooks and storyboards.

Originality/value of paper: This study makes a contribution to the extant literature of entrepreneurship and small business by highlighting the necessity of conducting empirical research into narrative forms such as storyboards and scrapbooks and their impact upon the biographical process in business.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial Narrative; Entrepreneurial Identity; Family Business; Storyboards; Scotland.

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1. Considering alternative forms of business narrative

Within the expanding field of entrepreneurship and family business research the related concepts of entrepreneurial narrative (Morrison, 2001; Smith, 2002: Down and Revley, 2004; Kontos, 2004; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Fillis, 2006; Down, 2006; Conway, 2007; Down and Warren, 2008; and Smith, 2009) and entrepreneurial biography (Jones and Conway, 2004; Goss, 2005; and Smith, 2005) are currently of interest. This expanding literature builds upon a growing appreciation of the importance of narrative mechanisms in propagating values associated with entrepreneurship and family business. For example, Smith (2002) refers to "Familial Fable"; O'Connor (2002) to "storied businesses"; and Steyaert & Bouwen (1997) to "great family stories" as a distinct category of entrepreneurial stories. Nevertheless, entrepreneur stories are but only a small part of the possible mechanisms through which entrepreneurial narrative can be channelled, such as entrepreneur jokes, or perhaps poetry. Granted, these examples are as under researched as scrapbooks and storyboards.

However, narrative is not a one dimensional medium and because of this entrepreneur stories and biographies are only one of many possible narrative forms for transmitting entrepreneur stories. Indeed, this paper considers the use of scrapbooks and storyboards as active narrative tools for propagating value in family business narratives. Scrapbooks and storyboards as purposeful activities form part of a biographical process imparting a sense of continuity linking history, possible futures and tradition. Nevertheless, the role of alternative narrative formats such as scrapbooks and storyboards

in the creation and propagation of value in family business narratives has yet to be fully explored despite the fact that there is ample evidence that the business community do use them. Using the qualitative methodology of semiotic analysis to analyse a storyboard displayed within a family business in rural Aberdeenshire this paper makes an important contribution to the discipline. This active form of presentation helps illustrate the importance of semiotics and aesthetics to understanding entrepreneurial narrative. In examining this novel phenomenon this paper contributes to a small but growing stream of research focusing upon the analysis of entrepreneur stories and the importance of narrative in entrepreneurship. This study extends the analysis of entrepreneurial narrative by considering a different narrative dimension, namely that of scrapbooks and storyboards. In the process it makes a contribution to the extant literature of entrepreneurship and small business by highlighting the necessity of conducting empirical research into narrative forms such as storyboards and scrapbooks and their impact upon the biographical process in business. This paper is also of interest in relation to entrepreneurial identity in that narrative and semiotics are elements of identity construction.

The genesis of this paper began in the summer of 2002 when the author encountered a storyboard made up from newspaper clippings mounted inside a shop for customers to peruse. This made an immediate and long lasting impression. During 2005 the author encountered another example of a storyboard in a family business setting which triggered this particular narrative study considering the impact of scrapbooks and storyboards as an alternative narrative format to traditional entrepreneur stories. Such stories with their visual element act as an entrepreneurial storytelling strategy. As such it

is of importance because as alternative mechanisms they permit the re-narration of personalised stories. The paper is of importance to scholars of entrepreneurship and small business because it expands appreciation of the repertoire of narratives which we as researchers can mine in an attempt to craft a narrative theory of entrepreneurship.

This paper is organised as follows. Section one conducts a review of narrative mechanisms as mediums for propagating values, traditions and business identity to customers and the wider community whilst section two links business narrative to entrepreneurial identity by discussing the role of scrapbooks and storyboards as alternative narrative mechanisms for propagating entrepreneurial narrative. Section three discusses methodological considerations whilst section three examines a story of a matured business that utilises the storyboard methodology. Section four reflects upon and discusses behavioural aspects. The paper concludes with suggestions for further research.

2. Entrepreneurship, small business and narrative.

Entrepreneurship can broadly be defined as "the creation and extraction of value from an environment" (Anderson, 1995) and it is paramount that narrative renditions and stories are all used by entrepreneurs to create value. In reading many entrepreneur stories and entrepreneurship texts one particular storyline is of the entrepreneur as a youthful, rebellious loner, overcoming adversities and battling the establishment. However, Schlesinger (2002) dispels the myth of a 'jean-clad boardroom hotshot', replacing it with one of a family orientated, hard worker, driven by a desire for autonomy. Indeed, a study

of 400 owner-managers by Merson (2004) found that the majority of entrepreneurs were middle-class, middle-aged, well-educated, married males with children. Most came from entrepreneurial families, with over a third having parents who ran their own businesses. These disparate examples demonstrate the breadth of entrepreneur stories thus there is no reason why the socially constructed template of how entrepreneur stories are told cannot be varied to accommodate the personal circumstances of individual entrepreneurs leaving second and third generation entrepreneurs free to narrate mature narratives of entrepreneurship. Cramton (1993) also questions the legitimacy of privileging certain types of accounts of business stories over other types. But how can a second generation entrepreneur operating in a family business setting narrate a story of entrepreneurial endeavour? And more importantly, what avenues are available for broadcasting such narratives?

Entrepreneur stories as a genre are predominantly drawn from first generation founders of business and do not generally take cognizance of the lifespan approach. Indeed, the accepted ontological basis for viewing entrepreneurship is as a narrative of becoming, although narratives of being and belonging are emerging. Traditionally, entrepreneurship is associated with nascence and academic research pays scant attention to the social processes of becoming established. Yet, established businesses mature and take on a different countenance, generating different stories mirroring the process of aging and maturity. Down and Revley (2004) refer to the very themes of generational conflict and maturity and explore how entrepreneurial identity is shaped by generational encounters within a small organization context. Although maturing business owners may continue to create value for society they are seldom considered as entrepreneurs albeit

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adhering to accepted conventions and traditions is an entrepreneurial strategy within established businesses.

2.1. The biographical impulse.

The alternative narrative presented in this paper form part of a wider biographical framework. An analysis of biographies of fabled entrepreneurs (Smith, 2005, Smith, 2006) revealed that throughout history famous entrepreneurs such as Sir Thomas Lipton, Enzo Ferrari and Robert Maxwell took an active part in authoring their own legends by writing, crafting and editing, informal accounts of their business achievements. According to their biographers, Lipton, Ferrari and Maxwell were assiduous collectors of press-clippings relating to their exploits (Mackay, 1998; Yates, 1991; Haines, 1995). Indeed, Mackay (1998) documents Lipton's obsession with his scrapbook. In a similar vein, Haines (1995) writes of Maxwell's devoted wife lovingly and painstakingly documenting his achievements in voluminous scrapbooks. According to Katriel and Farrell (1991) scrap-booking is primarily a marginalized activity carried out by women in the role of memory makers. Nevertheless, this illustrates the importance of active narrative mechanisms as propagators of value.

2.2. Scrapbooks and storyboards as active narrative mechanisms for propagating value.

Scrapbooks and storyboards as active narrative mechanisms assist entrepreneurs to tell and present their stories. Scrapbooks are familiar to many from childhood and are a method for preserving a legacy of ephemeral, written history in the form of photographs, printed media, and memorabilia pasted into an albums. Historically, scrap-booking is a tradition linked to storytelling. However, the emphasis is upon the visual and tactile,

rather than oral element of the story. Many business scrapbooks start of life as a bulletin or pin board where staff post public messages, advertise, buy or sell, announce events, or provide information. They can become a public extension of the scrapbook when newspaper cuttings and photographs are placed there. Storyboards are graphic organizers presenting a series of sequential illustrations or images.

As narrative mechanisms, scrapbooks and storyboards (and their modern equivalent the business website) act as focal points, allowing entrepreneurs an opportunity to narrate their stories because self-narration requires a reflective context in which the tale can legitimately be told. Such stories are told for a purpose and form part of a wider business master-story, the purpose of which is to present oneself and ones business as being of value to self and others. Business master stories transcend and overlap stories of the individual as they incorporate elements of the entrepreneur's own story, their family history and collective corporeal endeavour.

All these narrative forms require active presentation - the key word being '*active*' because the progenitor takes the initiative instead of passively waiting for the story to circulate. The progenitor need not be the entrepreneur, but a family member or employee. Items pasted into scrapbooks, placed on bulletin boards, storyboards or on websites are placed there for a pro-active purpose. Figure 1 represents the relationship of the narrative mechanisms discussed to a business master-story as told, demonstrating generic strengths and weaknesses.

Insert figure 1 here

It is helpful to discuss the mediums to outline their value to storytelling and to the paper. The most widely cited academic work relating to scrapbooks is Katriel and Farrell (1991)

who examined scrapbooks as cultural texts of memory-making. Furthermore, Crampton (1993), Aronoff, Astrachan and Ward (1996) and Downs (2006) all document the use of scrapbooks in family business. Indeed, Cramton (1993) examined materials in family and business archives, including scrapbooks, newspaper articles and newspaper advertisements. Such materials often form the basis of later biographical rendition. Downs (2006) examined how women business owners seamlessly integrate traditional femininity into the business world via scrapbooking. For Downs scrapbooking presents an idealized version of family life. Notwithstanding this, scant research has been carried out into the use of scrapbooks as an active narrative mechanism in the entrepreneurship literature.

Notwithstanding this, studies of how storyboards relate to entrepreneurship theory are rare. One exception is the study by Wade, Smith and Anderson (2004) who examined the use of storyboards at Babson College to exhibit famous entrepreneurs in their Hall of Fame. Another exception is the study of Klamma, Spaniol and Renzel (2009) relating to web 2.0 technologies as storytelling tools. The compilation of scrapbooks has a place in the formation of business histories, because it acts as a pictorial and narrated data base. Scrapbooks are a very private form of marking business achievements in a memorable collage of text and images. Each press clipping, photograph, rosette, certificate of merit act as stand alone mementoes, which when collated capture the memories of a continuing business adventure. Scrapbooks possess a chronological, narrated quality - a rich source of raw data from which the master business story emerges.

Storyboards are a form of institutional communication that presents a display of codes providing the reader with information of how an institution (a business) sees the world. There are two basic formats of storyboards – the formal presenting an image with a text box underneath it; and a collage of press clippings that collectively tells a story. This research concentrates on a combination of the written text and photographic image considering the relationship between text and image. Photographic images are endowed with historical and cultural meanings (Trachtenberg 1989). Storyboards are powerful because photographic images present an authentic reality (Tagg, 1988). Yet, photographs are but representations of reality which authenticate narratives particularly when interpreted using cultural codes. As such it is a subjective and complex interpretation of meaning.

This analysis of storyboards considers the meaning they have to the businesses themselves. To scrutinise the storyboards we borrow from traditional techniques of analysing visual images and artefacts. Methods of visual interpretation arise from the disciplines of sociology and cultural communication theory. Indeed, Hall (1997) contends that all visual images contain internal symbolic meanings. An interpretation of these received meanings aids understanding of what these images signify to people in everyday life. Interpretation of a storyboard requires a set of pre-understandings (Sturken and Cartwright 2001). The visual images communicated definite ideologies as understood by Sturken and Cartwright (2001) who define ideology as "*the broad shared values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations to a range of social structures*". Ideologies are belief systems that exist within all cultures, and can be observed in communications like storyboards, film and photographs (Sturken and

Cartwright 2001). Thus the ideological content of a storyboard persuades an individual to share or reject certain values. These images are produced within a dynamic of social power and ideology. Hence, storyboard ideologies inform the everyday life of entrepreneurial behaviour in subtle and unbulletinable ways, often taken for granted making the ideology appear natural. Storyboards communicate the values of established business presenting an ideology of established ways of doing business and are an excellent medium for presenting tradition and family values within a narrative of transformational change. Storyboards present moments and momentous occasions in the history of the business captured as mementoes. In (re)presenting stories and images these active narratives embody the goodness and vitality which characterise their business.

Insert figure 2 here

Figure 2 demonstrates the relatedness of visual media demonstrating how they are socially (re)constructed from each other, the environment and from individual actions which reinforce each other. The diagram suggests a circularity of social constructionism in action. In analysing why entrepreneurs such as Lipton, Ferrari and Maxwell actively document their achievements it is apparent that their authorial activity serves a deeper psychological purpose of engaging in active narration as a sense-making activity. For entrepreneurs, constructing storyboards may be a self-defining activity because storyboards and other forms of self-constructed media are external representations of internal mental assessments of a changing-self[1].

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[1] Business can be stressful and this therapeutic process (Hellstrom *et al.* 2002) thus storyboarding may ease the process of reconciliation from old-self to new-self (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003).

3. Methodological considerations

Methodologically, this study concentrates upon the research context and the narrative mechanisms involved and not upon answering research questions. The methodology used is novel in that semiotic analysis and presentation are used to (re)present an already lived and published narrative fashioned in the form of a storyboard. The methodology is therefore primarily a narrative based one relying on the 'active presentation' of a storyboard and associated images. The primary methodology used in this study is that of narrative analysis. A narrative or story in its broadest sense is anything told or recounted (Denning, 2000). Narrative approaches are becoming more common in management studies since the work of Czarniawska (1997) and Polkinghorne (1988) but becoming more common in entrepreneurship studies. Crucially as noted by Labov (1997) the discussion of narrative and other speech events at a discourse level rarely allows us to prove anything.

Storytelling in any format is a complex activity that relies on the words of the text and associated images to entertain, educate, inform and place events in context. Stories work at a natural, instinctive level because they resonate with shared cultural experiences and thus trigger emotions. Keen (2007) suggests that readers often have an emotional resonance, or narrative empathy, for stories. Such stories possess "fidelity" (Fisher, 1989). For Fisher narrative fidelity relates to whether or not the stories that people experience correlate to what they know to be true from experience. Fisher held that narrative rationality is underpinned by the fact that people are essentially storytellers. This is important because people possess a cultural framework for telling stories and life narratives. Labov (1997) differentiated between stories (which need not be true) and

personal narratives (which must convey credibility) and concerned himself with narratives of ordinary people attempting to convey simply and seriously the most important experiences of their own lives. For Labov, the credibility of a narrative is the extent to which listeners believe that the events described actually occurred in the form described (or in this case presented) by the narrator. In this paper narrative is used in a more limited role as a heuristic device through which to develop a greater understanding of how an entrepreneur actively sought to present himself to others in everyday life (Goffman, 1959).

A semiotic analysis of the words contained in the storyboard is then conducted. Semiotic analysis is a rare research methodology in a business setting (Fiol, 1989; Smith and Anderson, 2007). For a fuller explanation of the methodology see Chandler (2009). There is obviously an aesthetic element to the visual component of the storyboard because such devices operate by invoking resonance or rejection of the images and text in that the power of the visual element of the narrative brings the story of the respondent to life. The narrative and images presented report on the story of the family business - Bert Fowlie Butchers, 26-28, High Street, Strichen, Scotland. In particular we concentrate upon the story board created by Mr Hebbie Fowlie a second generation businessman and entrepreneur[2]. This purposeful activity enabled Mr Fowlie to engage in the biographical process thereby imparting a sense of continuity linking history, possible futures and tradition.

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[2] The author has obtained permission from the respondent Hebbie Fowlie to research his business story and to name him in published research. He also gave permission for the storyboard and photographs presented herein to be published.

4. Presenting the Fowlie family storyboard.

The storyboard created by the respondent Hebbie Fowlie began life as a newspaper article in the Fraserburgh Herald. It was turned into a storyboard by Mr Fowlie when he laminated and mounted it on a board in his shop.

Insert figure 3 here please.

A reading of the text on the board, tells the story of the entrepreneurial, small firm growth of the family business and tells a tale of transformation. The article also permits a platform for business testimonials of other local companies in support of Fowlies. Mr Fowlie in turn used the adapted storyboard as an entrepreneurial marketing strategy and thereby created and extracted value from his environment (Anderson, 1995). It created a talking point for customers within the busy village shop whilst it remained topical.

The semiotic aspects of the storyboard complement the narrative form and make fascinating viewing whilst acting as sense-making and sense-giving mechanisms. This should be of importance to entrepreneurship scholars and researchers because the visual aspects of how a business is presented to the community are seldom considered.

5. Making sense and sense-making.

Although a sample size of one storyboard precludes generalisations, the story presented illustrates the importance narrative engagement. Engagement is clearly a key concept in that Mr Fowlie had an objective in mind when he acted upon his biographical impulse. He collected the press clipping and exercising editorial; control edited them into a storyboard to mark the achievements of the family business and cleverly turned it into a marketing tool. Despite making active use of the storyboard, Mr Fowlie does not make

active use of internet to sell self and business. Like many small business owners he makes use of the internet and email to increase sales. In other respects he excels at selling self and business.

Storyboards as heuristic and semiotic mechanisms transmit important cultural issues such as values, tradition and heritage that traditional forms of written and aural narration cannot. The use of a storyboard to present a family business narrative is an entrepreneurial strategy through which traditions and values important to the established are accommodated alongside the transformational nature of change, which permeate and characterise all forms of entrepreneurial narratives.

This paper makes a contribution to entrepreneurship research in considering the use of active narrative tools such as scrapbooks and storyboards in propagating value and adds another dimension to the narrative which communicates a sense of value associated with maturity that traditional entrepreneur stories often lack. The paper uses a novel method to illuminate an unseen connection between ideology and visuality in entrepreneurship and makes a contribution to the extant literature of entrepreneurship and small business by highlighting the necessity of conducting empirical research into narrative forms such as storyboards and scrapbooks and their impact upon the biographical process in business. The use of narrative text and semiotics in conjunction with case story methodology contributes to its originality.

Moreover, this study makes a contribution to the extant literature of entrepreneurship and small business firstly, because it highlights the necessity of conducting empirical research into these important phenomena, and their impact upon the biographical process in business. Secondly, it considers neglected narrative tools and

active human behaviours. Compiling scrapbooks and storyboarding are all examples of purposeful activities which form part of the biographical process. Such mediums impart a sense of continuity because they allow one to link historical data and possible futures to tradition. Thirdly, this study acknowledges the limitations of traditional entrepreneur stories to the wider business community, highlighting the importance of history to our understanding of entrepreneurship. In participating in such businesses and stories one is also carrying on family traditions and paying homage to the founder of the business whist of course serving a practical purpose of selling self and business! Finally, the presentation of 'pictorial images' illustrates the importance of semiotics and aesthetics in narrating business stories. It is hoped that this paper will pave the way for further research into alternative narrative mechanisms used to propagate value in family business settings.

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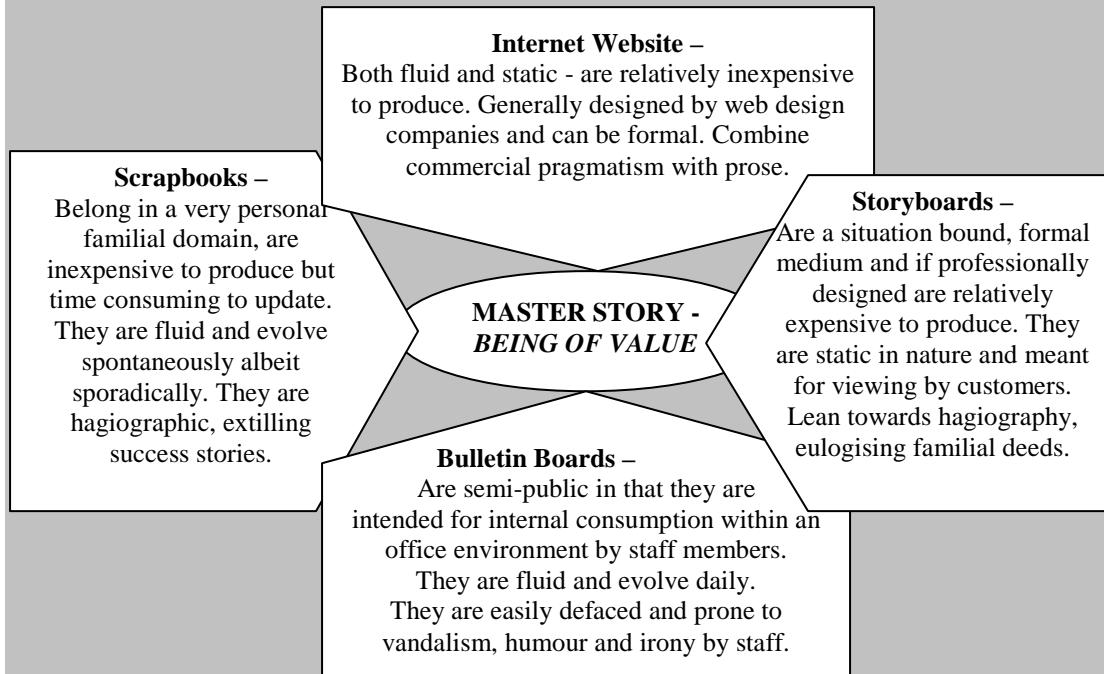# FIGURE 1 – THE RELATIONSHIP OF NARRATIVE MECHANISMS TO THE BUSINESS MASTER STORY

Internet Website –
Both fluid and static - are relatively inexpensive to produce. Generally designed by web design companies and can be formal. Combine commercial pragmatism with prose.

Scrapbooks –
Belong in a very personal familial domain, are inexpensive to produce but time consuming to update. They are fluid and evolve spontaneously albeit sporadically. They are hagiographic, extilling success stories.

MASTER STORY - *BEING OF VALUE*

Storyboards –
Are a situation bound, formal medium and if professionally designed are relatively expensive to produce. They are static in nature and meant for viewing by customers. Lean towards hagiography, eulogising familial deeds.

Bulletin Boards –
Are semi-public in that they are intended for internal consumption within an office environment by staff members. They are fluid and evolve daily. They are easily defaced and prone to vandalism, humour and irony by staff.
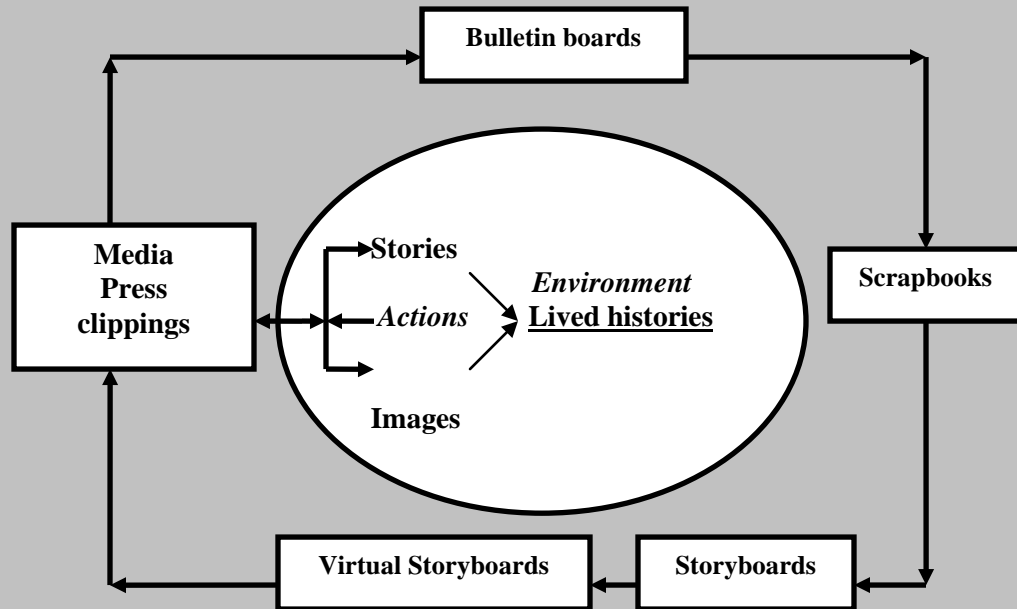
FIGURE 2 – NARRATIVE CONNECTEDNESS ACROSS MEDIA

Bulletin boards

Media
Press
clippings

Stories

Environment
Lived histories

Actions

Images

Scrapbooks

Virtual Storyboards

Storyboards

FIGURE 3 – THE FOWLIE FAMILY BUSINESS STORYBOARD