

# POWER OF LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY: VECTORS IN MARKETING AND COMMERCE

**Mahima Shree T A**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English*

*Lady Doak College, Madurai.*

*DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34293/blp.9789395659819.ch015>*

Most festivals in the world are narratocentric – centred on and sustained by narratives that shape their meaning – and mythopoeic. The collective effervescence, blended with clever pitching of scarcity mindset, allows festivals to serve as revenue-generating trade fairs. Unsurprisingly, most festivals are not always organically from a legendary tradition. Instead, the legends, tales and narratives were entwined with celebrations and rituals to gradually take the forms of lavish cultural, religious and psychosocial significance.

According to the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) in the UK, marketing is “*the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.*” Advertising and marketing, therefore, do not focus solely on meeting customer needs; rather it is about doing so in a manner that generates profit.

Naturally most advertisements are designed to persuade customers to take action. It is important to note that storytelling has always been one of the earliest and most pervasive forms of cultural transmission and contextualisation that human beings receive. The use of stories in promotional activities capitalises on the deep psychological appeal of narratives.

From a cognitive perspective, Schema Theory suggests that audiences process festival narratives by fitting them into pre-existing mental frameworks. This makes such stories instantly familiar and emotionally resonant, even when tied to commercial products. When a product is advertised through a story, the narrative itself often has no intrinsic link to the product. Instead, the story engages the audience’s emotional and psychological faculties. Rather, these narratives interact with the audience's emotional and psychological faculties, sculpting perception and influencing the way people understand desires, needs, and even scarcity. In relation to commodities and commerce, these stories become powerful tools that can impact demand, heighten perceived value, and sustain the cycle of commercial activity and transactions.

Human societies, as we know them today, are held together by deeply embedded structures – kinship ties, shared identity indicators such as religion and language, and inherited cultural practices. Human beings are fundamentally social animals, and it is this inherent sociability that shapes the meaning-making of festivals and celebrations. Festivals, particularly when they are recurring events, provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identity through shared emotional and communal experiences. Émile Durkheim’s concept of “collective effervescence” (1912) captures the heightened emotional atmosphere of festivals – whether sacred or secular – where elements such as shared singing, dancing, meals, and rituals bring about a visceral sense of togetherness and temporarily diminish individuality in favour of collective identity, thereby strengthening social cohesion and

reinforcing the group's shared beliefs. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further explains how such gatherings reaffirm the values, traditions, and narratives that defines a group, reinforcing both cultural identity and social boundaries in addition to deepening bonds between participants.

The cultural elements embedded within festivals reinforce an individual's role across multiple concentric social levels—from the intimate circle of family to wider community, cultural, and regional identities. Upon close observation, one finds that most festivals are tied to a legendary tale or origin myth. Despite being narratocentric, many festivals are—and historically have been—organized events deliberately orchestrated by governing bodies or community authorities.

Functioning almost like grassroots-level business conclaves, festivals have historically facilitated trade connections, nurtured specialised local industries, and established reputations for particular goods or services. In many cases, certain products become strongly associated with specific festivals, cities, or seasons—sometimes to the point where their perceived quality or authenticity is believed to be available only in that context. These connections eventually become cultural and economic identities, tying trade, location, and customs together in ways that still influence markets today.

Despite having their origins in centuries-old customs, these processes' dynamics nevertheless exist—and sometimes even get stronger—in modern settings. The human desire to celebrate is constantly expressed, whether through large-scale events like music festivals and athletic seasons or more intimate, unplanned events like flash mobs, public sing-alongs, and "happy streets." So deep-rooted is this impulse that societies continuously generate new occasions for festivity. These gatherings — characterised by collective enjoyment and the emotional atmosphere they cultivate — create scope for traders and marketers. Capitalising on the festive spirit, this encourages extravagant expenditure: establishing an illusion that festival purchases are special, framing discounts as uniquely advantageous, and fuelling the splurge mentality under the pretext that celebration itself justifies consumption. Marketers guarantee that the festival's emotional climax is rooted in the act of consumption itself by skillfully framing the festival's emotional peaks with major sales or closing deals.

From ancient times to the present, large-scale festivals have followed a remarkably consistent pattern. They draw people to a specific locality, creating both cultural concentration and economic opportunity. Many of these festivals — even in their earliest forms — were deliberately organised by governing bodies or influential figures, structured around stories, symbols, and seasonal markers that gave them meaning. Alongside their ritual significance, they generated revenue and forged associations between particular seasons, icons, and commodities. Foucault's notion of governmentality is useful here, highlighting how governance extends beyond laws and policies into the subtle management of people's conduct through culture, space, and ritual. Festivals function as the liminal space that feeds governance: they create established spaces, shape the rhythms of social life, and direct affective energies into forms that reinforce both civic identity and economic patterns. By framing regulation in the language of customs and festivities, governing bodies reconcile

personal preferences with business and administrative goals – achieving compliance not through coercion, but through the engagement and enactment of cultural narratives. This aligns with Foucault’s observation of how modern governance often works most effectively when it channels pleasure and desire, rather than enforcing obedience through prohibition. In the context of festivals, the celebratory atmosphere becomes the very medium through which civic order and economic participation are performed.

Over time, these associations become embedded in the cultural memory, gradually transforming into customary practices and expectations within the community. Eventually, the festival and its symbols become so deeply woven into collective identity that they are perceived as inherent to the culture itself, shaping behaviour across generations. As Adorno and Horkheimer argue in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, cultural expressions, regardless of the authenticity of their origin, evolve into systems of mass production and consumption. Festivals, while grounded in shared heritage, inevitably become part of this cycle, with their narratives and symbols reproduced for both cultural affirmation and economic gain.

This trajectory is visible in long-established traditions such as Christmas in the West or the Chithirai Thiruvizha in Madurai, as well as in modern commercial spectacles like FIFA and the IPL. From the Great Exhibition of England to contemporary creations such as Vilnius’s Pink Soup Festival – launched by *Go Vilnius*, the city’s official tourism and business development agency, to celebrate Lithuania’s beloved cold beetroot soup *šaltibarščiai* – the pattern holds. While honouring culinary heritage and fostering national pride, the Pink Soup Festival also strategically boosts tourism, strengthens the city’s cultural brand, and stimulates economic activity. In each case, festivals present themselves as natural expressions of human sociability, while their form and timing are deliberately shaped to sustain economic motion and perpetuate the cycle of trade.

And that is why festivals function as the vernacular of business conclaves and global summits – in fact, often as a more vigorous and dynamic econo-commercial tool than a formal, structured gathering. A conclave depends on significant planning and controlled execution, while a festival can draw large footfalls, generate public engagement, and naturally create brand ambassadors through shared experience and organic publicity. For these reasons, festivals stand as one of the most effective and adaptable business ventures, flexible to be reinvented repeatedly into new forms while retaining its impact. Through strategic employment of narrative psychology, festivals retain a powerful emotional hold, binding cultural memory, social identity, and commerce into a self-perpetuating enduring cycle. This interplay of affect, identity, and economy demonstrates how cultural practices transmute as vehicles of meaning-making and engines of economy at the same time, ensuring their endurance across time.

## Works Cited

1. “What is marketing?” *CIM*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.cim.co.uk/content-insights/articles/what-is-marketing>

2. Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (1991). The Foucault effect. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226028811.001.0001>
3. Durkheim, É. (2009). Introduction. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/owc/9780199540129.003.0002>
4. Durkheim, É. (2009). Central totemic beliefs (Continued). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/owc/9780199540129.003.0010>
5. Glassner, B., & Tajfel, H. (1985). Social identity and intergroup relations. *Contemporary Sociology*, 14(4), 520. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2069233>
6. Lemke, T. (2019). *Foucault's analysis of modern Governmentality: A critique of political reason*. Verso Books.
7. McAdams, D. P. (2019). "First we invented stories, then they changed us": The evolution of narrative identity. *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, 3(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.26613/esic.3.1.110>
8. Minami, M. (1991). Acts of meaning. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1(2-3), 253-254. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.1.2-3.11act>
9. Natorina, A. (2024). Leveraging AI technologies in retail in a resilient economy: Theory and innovative practices. *Journal of Management and Training for Industries*, 11(1), 12-32. <https://doi.org/10.12792/jmti.11.1.12>
10. RHOADS, K. V., & CIALDINI, R. B. (2002). The business of influence: Principles that lead to success in commercial settings. *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice*, 513-542. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976046.n26>
11. To, C. K., Chau, K., & Kan, C. W. (2020). The logic of innovative value proposition: A schema for characterizing and predicting business model evolution. *Journal of Business Research*, 112, 502-520. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.023>
12. Turner, V., & Abrahams, R. D. (2017). Liminality and Communitas. *The Ritual Process*, 94-130. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134666-3>
13. Van Gennep, A., Kertzer, D. I., Vizedom, M. B., & Caffee, G. L. (2019). *The rites of passage*, second edition. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226629520.001.0001>
14. Wallenstein, S. (2024). Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1947) 'The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception'. *Classics in Media Theory*, 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003432272-4>