



Mixed method research in narrative journalism: Use of journalistic narrative techniques in newspaper news stories

Author

Gideon Mamboleo 

Email: mamboleo@kisiuniversity.ac.ke

Kisii University, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper explores the centrality of the mixed methods approach in narrative communication research, the processes as well as challenges related to mixed methods in relation to the communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences. Implications of mixed methods in narrative communication research are also discussed. In recent times, studies have been conducted on journalistic narrative techniques under the realm of narrative journalism and communication with non-expert audiences in the fields of health sciences, political science, sociology, and technology, just to name a few. A majority of these studies have paid little attention to the research methodologies employed in the fields. These studies have employed either a quantitative or a qualitative approach. This paper discusses the use of mixed methods in the use of journalistic narrative techniques in selected newspaper news stories that communicate science and technology to non-expert audiences.

Key Terms: Mixed method, narrative communication, non-expert audiences.

INTRODUCTION

The genre of narrative journalism has received much scholarly attention over the past years concerning its promises and pitfalls (Van Krieken & Sanders, 2021; Ray, 2013). Narrative journalism, sometimes referred to as literary journalism or literary non-fiction, is a form of journalism that goes back to the first decade of the 20th century (Hartsock, 2007, p. 3) but is commonly associated with the New Journalism movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Lindgren, 2016). Since the 1960s and early 1970s, narrative journalism has steadily grown in popularity.

One cited reason for the increased popularity of narrative journalism is the ongoing decline in newspaper circulation (Hartsock, 2007; Shim, 2014). Shim (2014), for instance, argues that the rise of narrative journalism should be understood from the perspective of the hierarchical relationship between the journalistic paradigm and market ideology and that 'narrative journalism has been propagated to rejuvenate the declining paper business in the contemporary media market' (pp. 79, 90). According to Van Krieken (2019), the terms literary journalism and long-form journalism have all been used to refer to narrative journalism, a genre that employs narrative story-telling techniques to report upon real-world events and situations. However, it must be emphasised that these story-telling techniques alluded to by Van Krieken originate from literary fiction, and they include point-of-view writing, scene construction, event schedules, dialogues, thought representations, vivid details that may carry symbolic meaning, and the use of chronological event structure rather than an inverted pyramid structure. These techniques have been utilised in newspaper news stories to communicate content in specific beats, such as science and technology, health sciences and politics. Shim (2014) succinctly summarises that literary journalism came out of early newspaper work, emerging in the 1890s, from a maze of local publications in urban environments where reporters struggled to define their identity in the mass circulation press.

In the Kenyan context, relatively few studies have been conducted on journalistic narrative techniques in mainstream newspapers (Kioko, 2013; Mutisya, 2013). These studies have either taken a qualitative or quantitative dimension, with a small number using

mixed methods research but on other mass media genres such as radio, television and cinema (Ligaga, 2017; Odengo, 2018; Mungai, 2018 & Chepkwony, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mixed methods research dates back to 1985 and the 1990s, a time when several scholars founded this new methodology. These scholars came from various fields, such as evaluation, management, sociology, medicine and education (Creswell & Clarrk, 2018). In the mid-1990s, there came the realisation that more insight could be gained by combining or integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods in a study such that qualitative research explores phenomenon while quantitative research explains the results of tests of hypotheses or research questions (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Utilising a single methodology, either qualitative or quantitative, which obviously has its own weaknesses, limits our understanding of a holistic phenomenon being studied (Manaf & Azzman, 2017). Consequently, mixed methods provide insight of both exploration and explanation.

Doran et al. (2021) have established that it is possible for narrative sources to be used in the qualitative phase of the research and that these sources come from both written documents and oral statements such as oral histories and interviews. Furthermore, the written sources that the writers allude to, and in the context of narrative journalism, include news stories carried in any of the mass media genres. However, for purposes of the current study, we limit ourselves to the news stories in newspapers.

Elsewhere, Elliot (2005) argues that studying journalistic narratives can enhance the potential of combining qualitative and quantitative techniques for a better understanding of causal processes and for allowing a prominent place for the role of human agency in sociological explanations. Apart from integrating the human aspect in explaining sociological processes in narratives, mixed-method research in journalistic narratives helps a researcher explain the cause-and-effect processes in such research. This can be done when the researcher employs research hypotheses to test and explore the relationship among variables in the research hypotheses that inform any study in journalistic

narratives. This way, narratives are generally understood as stories [or text on the basis of Narrative Theory] that include both a temporal ordering of events and a purpose, such as sharing of experiences (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; McAlpine, 2016; Sandelowski, 1991). Put another way, narratives convey meaning to events (Elliott, 2005), especially in newspaper news stories in beats such as science and technology for the sake of non-experts in such fields.

Consequently, this makes it possible to use narrative techniques such as viewpoint, event schedules and scene construction in newspaper news stories to communicate science and technology to non-expert audiences. It must, however, be emphasised that how effectively mixed methods research is used in narrative research varies according to the mixed methods design, for example, whether convergent, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, or even embedded (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For instance, narratives in convergent designs have been used to complement, provide context to and enrich the quantitative findings (Beletsky et al., 2016; Vaughan Dickson et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2017). Moreover, narratives have been used in convergent designs to complement, provide context, and enrich the quantitative findings (Beletsky et al., 2016; Vaughan Dickson et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2017). In explanatory sequential designs, inferences drawn from narratives have been used to support survey findings (Carpentieri et al., 2016; Shamma, 2017) and answer questions raised by the quantitative phase (McCrudden & McTigue, 2019; Zeng et al., 2012). Finally, in exploratory sequential designs, the qualitative phase of the research is used to develop the quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Therefore, when using narratives in an exploratory sequential mixed method design, the important constructs and variables to be explored in the quantitative phase of the research are defined by the findings from the qualitative narratives (Doran et al., 2021).

Narrative Techniques in Newspaper News Stories to Communicate Science and Technology to Non-Expert Audiences

The study on the utilisation of journalistic narrative techniques in newspaper news stories to communicate scientific and technological information

to non-expert audiences was conducted in 2019. This study aims at determining whether there is a relationship between journalistic narrative techniques used in newspaper news stories and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences. The study hypothesised that:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between journalistic narrative techniques used in Newspaper news stories and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences

The study explored the journalistic narrative techniques first and then proceeded to determine how the narratives are used in newspaper news stories to communicate science and technology information to non-expert audiences. The study was conducted in the North Rift Region, Kenya, a region comprising seven counties: Nandi, Uasin Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot, Turkana, Elgeyo-Marakwet and Baringo. Two key aspects of the study were to establish the journalistic narrative techniques used in newspaper news stories and whether there was a relationship between the journalistic narrative techniques and the communication of scientific and technological information to audiences not specialised in matters of science and technology. The study focused on Kenya's four leading national newspapers, *The Nation*, *The Standard*, *The Star* and *The People Daily*. A mixed-method research approach was used in this study.

METHODOLOGY

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology was employed to determine the relationship between the journalistic narrative techniques and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-experts. The qualitative method was used to explore the use of journalistic narrative techniques in newspaper news stories across the four newspapers, while the quantitative approach was used to establish the relationship between journalistic narrative techniques and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-experts. Besides, the quantitative approach was used to generalise the qualitative findings on the population so as to draw conclusions from the findings. The mixed methods approach was deemed relevant since the study was descriptive and

exploratory in nature. Therefore, some of the common mixed methods designs that have been used in this respect are parallel, sequential exploratory and sequential explanatory mixed-method designs (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The choice of any of these designs is, however, determined by the purpose and nature of the study.

According to Manaf and Azzman (2017), parallel mixed-method design is commonly used when both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are given an equal emphasis in a study, while sequential mixed-method design is used when either qualitative methodology or quantitative methodology is given more emphasis over the other. This study adopted a sequential exploratory design where the qualitative data was first analysed, and its findings were used to inform and support the quantitative findings and make generalisations on the entire study. The researchers used focus group discussion findings to develop the items of the questionnaire that collected the survey data.

Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions formed part of the qualitative method used to obtain in-depth information and inside perspectives to gain more information on the use of journalistic narrative

techniques in newspaper news stories and what constitutes a non-expert audience with respect to science and technology information. For this study, a non-expert audience is used to refer to an audience without specialist skills in science and technology.

The focus group results were then tested on a larger sample through a survey. In addition, the quantitative method (survey) was carried out to examine the respondents' patterns of journalistic narrative techniques, the composition of science and technology information and the nature of the non-expert audience in a larger population. The survey findings allowed researchers to get a glimpse of the overall population with respect to journalistic narrative techniques and the nature of the non-expert audience with respect to matters of science and technology information. In total, seven focus groups corresponded to the seven counties of the North Rift Region. Each researcher was assigned to moderate two focus group discussions, while the last focus group discussion was a joint moderation by all three researchers. The number of respondents in each group ranged from five (05) to ten (10). In total, the number of respondents for the focus group discussion was 40. The focus group discussions were conducted within two weeks, from February 4th to 18th, 2019. The focus groups were structured as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Focus Groups by Location

County	Number	Total
Uasin Gishu	10	10
Nandi	05	05
Trans-Nzoia	05	05
West Pokot	05	05
Turkana	05	05
Elgeyo-Marakwet	05	05
Baringo	05	05
TOTAL	40	40

Descriptive Survey

A descriptive survey was conducted immediately after the focus group discussions. The purpose of the survey was to follow up and crosscheck the focus group discussion findings using a larger sample. The survey was deemed appropriate to allow a researcher to reach a large number of respondents in the population and obtain comparative information on the

nature of variables of interest (De Vaus, 2002; Babbie, 2010). The variables of this study were journalistic narrative techniques, which were all independent variables, and communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences, which was the dependent variable. The study employed a cross-section survey to collect data from 64 journalists from the four newspaper establishments

dispersed across the seven counties, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Sampling Frame

Newspaper/ Town	Eldoret	Nandi	Trans Nzoia	West Pokot	Turkana	Elgeyo- Marakwet	Baringo	TOTAL
Daily Nation	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	17
The Standard	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	17
The Star	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15
People Daily	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15
TOTAL	16	08	08	08	08	08	08	64

The seven counties represent the entire North Rift region which is considered the hub of news stories on science and technology ranging from the Lake Bogoria geysers, the discovery of rare fossils, the breakthrough of open-heart surgery at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret-the second largest referral hospital in Kenya; technological innovations and inventions at universities and middle-level colleges in the region; which were all captured as soft news stories in the four leading newspapers. The news stories were obtained from the databases of each newspaper company through a systematic search using subject content and date. The search yielded a total of seven news stories on science and technology as the beat for the year 2019.

The survey questionnaire was designed based on feedback obtained from the focus group discussions. The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections: demographic background (age, gender, working experience, and education level), journalistic narrative techniques (viewpoint, event schedules, and scene construction), aspects of science and technology and descriptive operators of non-expert audiences. The items on the questionnaire were ranked on a Likert scale, from 1 being the lowest scale to 5, the largest scale of measurement.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A qualitative analysis of the sampled newspaper news stories revealed that newspaper news stories'

commonly utilised journalistic narrative techniques to communicate science and technology to non-expert audiences are viewpoint techniques, scene construction techniques and event scheduling techniques. These techniques were used in each of the seven sampled news stories across the four leading Kenyan newspapers. The reasons for the use of these techniques were to capture mood through the scenes of the story, provide more or additional information on science and technology events and situations through the story scenes, digest and simplify complex scientific and technological information for non-expert audiences, help contextualise the story events and situations; enable the non-expert audience's visualisation of the story setting and thus provide an avenue for the reader to get immersed in the story. The narrative techniques also enable the reader to locate the viewpoint of the source of events in the story. Finally, the techniques also enable the reader to identify with the events in the stories.

The efficacy of these journalistic techniques was gauged against their ability to relay scientific and technological information to a non-expert audience. This was done through a quantitative analysis to ascertain whether there was a relationship between each of these techniques with the communication of scientific and technological information. In addition, multiple regression analysis was done.

Table 3: Multiple Regression^a

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.538 ^a	.289	.253	.855

a. Predictors: (Constant), Event Scheduling, Viewpoint Techniques, Scene Construction Techniques

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.844	3	5.948	8.128	.000 ^b
	Residual	43.906	60	.732		
	Total	61.750	63			

a. Dependent Variable: Communic_Scient_Technol_Info

b. Predictors: (Constant), Event Scheduling, Viewpoint Techniques, Scene Construction Techniques

The Regression Model summary thus established that scene construction techniques, viewpoint techniques and event schedules statistically and significantly predicted scientific and technological information communication, $F(2,53) = 8.128$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis that: *There is no significant relationship between journalistic narrative techniques used in newspaper news stories and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences* was rejected, and the alternate hypothesis was adopted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between journalistic narrative techniques used in newspaper news stories and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences. This implies that when effectively used in newspaper news stories, journalistic narrative techniques can communicate scientific and technological information to non-expert audiences.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: Based on our experiences throughout this study, the mixed methodology has been particularly useful in narrative research, and in particular, the journalistic narrative techniques that can predict the communication of scientific and technological information to non-experts. From previous studies employing the use of mixed methods,

it is also apparent that the mixed method approach allows for a deeper understanding and a more comprehensive picture of the study of journalistic narratives in narrative research based on narrative theory and other theories relevant to narrative research. With the continuous evolution of narrative research, especially in the context of media studies, it may be necessary to adopt the mixed method approach in studying narrative communication across various contexts within and outside media studies using the designs in mixed method research such as sequential exploratory design, sequential explanatory design, convergent design and embedded design.

Recommendations: This paper's analysis was only confined to journalistic narrative techniques and the communication of scientific and technological information to non-experts. Besides, the study only adopted the exploratory sequential design. Moreover, the survey of one region in Kenya, the North Rift Region, may not be adequate to represent other regions in Kenya and the rest of the world. As such, further analysis could be applied in different contexts, regions and countries. Finally, we suggest the use of a mixed method approach with other designs such as sequential explanatory, convergent design and embedded design.

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