

---

# DIGITAL COMMUNITY STORYTELLING AS A SOCIOPOLITICAL CRITICAL DEVICE

---

Carmen GREGORI-SIGNES<sup>1</sup>

María ALCANTUD-DÍAZ<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *This article analyses 40 community digital stories drawing upon the principles of corpus-based critical discourse studies (Baker et al., 2008). The stories are analysed with the intention of testing if they may be classified as examples of socio-political digital stories. Socio-political digital stories are described here as a tool that individuals may use in order to bring forward issues that may concern and affect democracy (Couldry, 2008), social welfare and social stability; and may serve to ease the communication, interaction and exchange of information about conflictive social practices. The stories analysed can be considered timid examples of what socio-political individual digital storytelling might do for society, thus helping, at least potentially, to democratise the exchange of ideas between the members of our society.*

*Keywords: digital storytelling, socio-political, Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis, appraisal.*

---

## 1. Introduction

Narratives are self-reflection processes which serve to interrogate the social and cultural (Riessman, 2008). According to Bamberg (1997, p. 90) stories can be interpreted as an example of an individual experience or as a means to frame and situate the self and others in common/uncommon social practices. This may bring forward aspects that are used to explore the social meaning of one particular activity. With the advent of the Internet as the main channel of communication and information, storytelling is going through considerable changes and thus giving birth to new modes of telling a story, one such new mode is digital storytelling.

Digital storytelling has now been present on the World Wide Web since the 1990s when the Center for Digital Storytelling— an international, non-profit, training, project

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Lecturer at the Dep. Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya, Universitat of València and member of IULMA (Institut Universitari de Llengües modernes Aplicades), Valencia, SPAIN. Email: carmen.gregori@uv.es

<sup>2</sup> PhD, Lecturer at the Faculty of Education at the University of València (Didactics of Language and Literature, English area) Valencia, SPAIN. Email: maria.alcantud@uv.es

development, and research organisation dedicated to assisting people in using digital media to tell meaningful stories from their lives— started to use digital stories with the “focus on building partnerships with community, educational, and business institutions to develop large-scale initiatives in health, social services, education, historic and cultural preservation, community development, human rights, and environmental justice arenas, using methods and principles adapted from their original Digital Storytelling Workshop.”

Since then, its presence in many different fields such as education, marketing, and social services (Dunford and Rooke 2014) has been increasing lately (cf. Alcantud-Díaz et al. 2014; Gregori-Signes, 2014; Nguyen and Robin, 2014) and is now reaching its peak, especially in education where digital storytelling is used at all levels— from primary to secondary school and at university level (cf. Jamissen and Holte Haug, 2014; Ramírez-Loyola, 2014; Yukse et al., 2014; Londoño Monroy, 2012; Ramírez-Verdugo and Sotomayor-Sáez, 2012; Reyes et al, 2012) – with impressive final results and classified by some authors as one of the most rewarding and motivating new tasks included in their syllabi (Brígido-Corachán, 2009; Gregori-Signes 2014; Lee, 2014). In turn, numerous websites (cf. McWilliam, 2009) report on the success of digital storytelling as a personal/individual mode of communication in which one chooses to relay on a more personal experience (Herreros Navarro, 2012; Rodríguez-Illera, 2014) which may help, in one way or another, to bring to life to unheard voices and memories (Dunford and Rooke, 2014).

Despite the variety of digital storytelling forms, their growth and expansion in the world (Brígido-Corachán and Gregori-Signes, 2014), their different contexts and many different purposes, still, as argued by Hartley and McWilliam (2009, p. 5), “there has been little of substance to analyse and situate digital storytelling in the context of new media studies” and analyse their content. It is in this respect that the present article seeks to make a contribution. The present article analyses community stories with the intention of testing whether they can be classified as examples of socio-political digital stories. That is, a critical tool that individuals may use in order to bring forward issues that may concern and affect democracy (Couldry, 2008), social welfare and social stability.

For the description of the genre socio-political digital storytelling, we draw upon the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) – this being understood as an approach rather than a method (van Dijk, 2001; Baker et al., 2008) – and on the principles of sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983, p. 10). Since, we believe in the importance not only of studying communication within its sociocultural context, but also in the need to find out the different sociopragmatic rules that may apply when denouncing situations which affect or may have affected someone’s life. Moreover, a pragmatic dimension is present when describing the relationship held between story-author-audience and context since this relationship has been significantly altered by digital storytelling in general. Consequently, in this paper the critical sociological dimension prevails amongst others in as much as we consider the sociological interface of pragmatics as essential for understanding socio-political digital storytelling. This involves the study of the communication of speakers’ and hearers’ beliefs, built on relevant social and cultural values expressed.

The present study is exploratory. It analysed a sample of 40 *Community Stories about people* downloaded from the website of the Australian Centre of Moving Image. The study hoped to shed some light on the role of community digital stories understood as a “broad social phenomenon” which may have social consequences and “democratic potential” (Couldry, 2008, p. 41). We are aware of the fact that digital storytelling is a genre in which the process of production, concrete instructions and the style of the workshops may have an influence on the stories. However, as an external audience we only had access to the product and not to the process itself. Therefore, in judging these stories, we are outsiders who adopt a critical perspective in trying to find out what the stories gathered under the umbrella of community stories may share. We assume however, that, ultimately, it comes down to the individual to consider the content of such stories as critical.

The empirical study follows the principles of corpus assisted discourse studies outlined by Baker et al. (2008), thus combining qualitative with quantitative analysis and both computerised and ‘manual’ linguistic analysis for the analysis of the data. This combination will hopefully provide a more comprehensive view of the digital stories analysed here and, by extension, of the genre itself. Due to space limitations, the study focuses on the verbal rather than on the multimodal elements of the stories, although these are commented upon, if they are necessary to interpret the text of the stories themselves.

In view of the exposed above, this article is organised as follows. First, we present a brief overview of the genre digital storytelling. Secondly, we provide a working definition of socio-political storytelling, the main focus of this article. Thirdly, we present the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of 40 digital community stories adopting a Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) approach as described by Baker et al. (2008), thus combining different methods traditionally associated with corpus linguistics (CL) with others associated to critical discourse analysis (CDA). The two final sections correspond to the results, discussion and conclusion derived from the analysis.

## **2. Digital storytelling vs. More traditional means of narrative**

Digital storytelling (DS) is a versatile and flexible mode of communication, due, among other factors, to the simplicity of the software used to create it. In designing the story, the author personally selects the elements that will grow to be part of the narrative (old photographs, videos, graphics, animations and other multimedia elements that they may feel adapt to their message). The story can be generated by using basic tools/technology and one’s own voice. The final product can be instantly made available by publishing it on the World Wide Web.

Consequently, one of the main differences between traditional storytelling in the mass media and digital storytelling lies in the medium itself and the possibilities that its digital aesthetics offers, compared to other media. Handler-Miller (2004) affirms that while traditional personal oral stories are told via a single medium such as the spoken word,

or the printed page, digital storytelling encourages the use of a number of different media, all tied together, to serve the core story.

Digital storytelling allows a great variety of discursive practices, among those, the possibility of using storytelling with a critical spirit that aims toward transmitting political and social commitments, denouncing individual as well as group actions against a particular group, community or person. In this article, critical is used in a broad sense as argued by Krings et al. (1973, p. 808), denoting “the practical linking of ‘social and political engagement’ with ‘a sociologically informed construction of society’ (cited in Wodak and Meyer, 200, p. 2).

### 3. Towards a definition of socio-political digital storytelling

It has been long accepted, that as argued by Chandler (1999) “texts often exhibit the conventions of more than one genre and that “the same text can belong to different genres in different countries or times”. In this regard, socio-political DS is by no means a unique genre but shares characteristics with other kinds of narratives, and other types of digital stories. The model of personal DS promoted by the *Center for Digital Storytelling* which started in 1997 lists seven elements that have been accounted as common to all digital stories (cf. Lambert, 2010): a personal point of view, a dramatic question, emotional content, the gist of the author’s voice, the power of soundtrack, economy, and pacing. Prominent in the genre is the presence of the narrator’s voice (cf. Barret, 2006) since it is key to understanding their personal dimension. A personal digital story is a user-led media product created by ordinary people who include personal information, or at least their point of view, on a particular topic by mixing words with multimedia effects; all within a two to five-minute product. This allows an instant availability of personal socio-political statements unmonitored or censored by publishers, editors, company owners and governmental sources, amongst others. These characteristics differentiate personal digital stories from other genres. Socio-political storytelling is one of the many possible varieties of the genre itself. Following Swales (1990), this section provides a working definition of socio-political digital storytelling which may be used to create an initial characterisation of this genre for others to be able to use, modify or reject as they see fit (cf. Swales, 1990, p. 45). Thus, a socio-political digital story may be defined as:

- a) One that fits the generic conventions of a digital story, in which features from the most traditional expressions of written and spoken discourse combine with any available multimedia effect (sound, music, images, videos etc.). The final product is a digital movie told within 2-5 minutes, narrated by the same author/s.
- b) One that includes a critical point of view on their participation in a potentially conflictive social action or a social practice.
- c) One that may denounce injustice, abuse of power, domination and social inequality.

The above definition situates socio-political digital storytelling in a general theory of social structure, i.e., “a means to frame and situate the self and others in common or uncommon social practices that will bring forward aspects which may be used to explore the socio-political meaning of a particular theme” (Bamberg, 1997, p. 90) or issue which, in turn, may have affected the lives of the individuals who tell their story; and which may, somehow, influence social welfare. The underlying intention of using socio-political digital stories for that purpose is to inform the public and raise awareness on controversial issues and ultimately promote changes in society for the better.

#### 4. Data Description

The selection of stories analysed in this article were at the time of access (2011) gathered under *Community Stories about people* on the website of the Australian Centre of Moving Image. 40 community stories were randomly selected for the analysis, following primarily availability criteria. As described on the web site, these stories were completed during one workshop programme organised for people who belonged to the same community. Today, some of those stories have been moved to a website named *CultureVictoria* and thematically classified (sportlife, immigration, historical themes, immigration). This did not exist when the present research started.

The data collection process and analysis follows the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) where “data collection is a not a phase that must be finished before analysis starts but might be a permanently ongoing procedure” (Meyer, 2001, p. 18); thus the analysis is informed not only by the 40 stories analysed in detail but by a larger reference corpus which includes digital stories from *MAP Engaging men as partners*, *Sonke gender justice network*, *Queensland Digital Library and Engender Health Project*, among others.

#### 5. Analytical frameworks

The hypotheses operating in the analysis can be stated as follows: a) whilst it is probable that each story displays its own idiosyncrasies, the result of the quantitative analysis should shed some light on the genre itself and its characteristics; and on the other hand, b) it may also inform on which social issues are of interest to the members of certain communities, and by extension, to society in general. Even though the participants may not all fit the same pattern regarding age, time, and motivation to write the story and may not coincide in their physical, intellectual, linguistic, social, cultural and emotional development. The claim sustained here is that once instructed in the genre itself and immersed in the process the participants may produce stories that will somehow express the social representations (van Dijk, 2001, p.113), the knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values which are the product of the social order which they abide. If that were the case, these stories could be considered as examples of the same genre, in this case examples of socio-political storytelling.

The methodological approach is based on the principles established by Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) (Baker et al., 2008) and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CADS integrates methodologies traditionally associated with corpus linguistics (CL) and CDA. Consequently, the study of discourse will always be critical when interpreting the results obtained from using methodologies developed within corpus linguistics, since it involves compiling specialised corpora, analysing word-clusters frequency lists, comparative keyword lists and concordances, among others.

Accordingly, the study of community stories in this paper combines quantitative research (e.g. wordlists and concordance obtained from the 40 stories) with qualitative research, always bearing in mind a critical perspective. The analysis of the corpus will sometimes consider texts as individual items while others as one unique item, both are necessary and complementary in order to compare how similar topics are approached by individuals, and by all the stories, as examples of socio-political stories. Finally, due to the multimodal nature of the corpus itself; the analysis, although centred in the verbal elements of the story, takes into account the multimodal content of the stories only when is necessary to clarify the interpretation of the verbal component.

### 5.1. *Lexical choices*

White (2001) describes appraisal theory as the approach which analyses the way language is used to evaluate, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positionings and relationships. Appraisal explores how attitudes, judgements and emotive responses are explicitly presented in texts and how they may be more indirectly implied, presupposed or assumed. Eggins and Slade (1997) propose to look at the different lexical items (adjectives, nouns, verbs and adverbs), identify those that indicate appraisal and classify each appraising item according to four semantic categories of appreciation, emotion, judgment and amplification. In turn, White (2001) proposes the category of *attitudinal positioning*, which expresses a positive or negative assessment of people, places, things, happenings and states of affairs through the use of nouns (... is a masterpiece), adjectives (high and good profit vs. greedy), verbs (“I would adore her as a friend”) and adverbs (“perfectly judged”) which are associated with either. The approach here takes ideas from both works in order to analyse evaluation in the corpus, since a key factor in a critical analysis of the digital stories is whether authors value their experience or the content of the story as a positive or negative experience.

As argued by White (2001) there are various ways to convey a positive or a negative attitude: “the most straightforward cases involve the use of individual words or phrases which overtly indicate the attitudinal position being taken by the writer or speaker”. In order to find out whether that was the case in the corpus selected, each of the 428 different items that resulted – after eliminating the non-function words from the 15.428- were manually and contextually classified as belonging to different parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives etc.). A manual check of the context in which the words appear was necessary in order to avoid confusions with certain items, e.g., *like*, as a discourse marker, preposition or as a verb. In some cases, only by looking at the context and the co-text could we find the real meaning and value (positive or negative of the word). The results comment in detail on the first ten to fifteen instances of the most frequent items in order to find out possible coincidences between the 40 stories.

Quantitative results were proved to be insufficient, since, as White (2001) comments, attitudinal position can also be conveyed by the interaction of multiple elements in the utterance, thus the meaning is not inferred by individual words but through word combinations (White 2001, p. 2; Stage 1 attitude). White (2001) describes this fact as an example of 'implicit' or 'evoked' attitude, which stands in contrast to 'explicit' or 'inscribed' attitude." White (2001, p. 3) concludes that attitudinal meanings are better seen as "carried by utterances, by complete propositions rather than individual lexical items." Consequently, he suggests the (contextualised) proposition/s as the unit of analysis. Thus, I propose an analysis of the topics and subtopics of each story as a way to complete the quantitative analysis of individual words.

### ***5.2. Topic analysis***

In his proposal of a theoretical framework to carry out multidisciplinary CDA, van Dijk (2001, p.100ff) lists as his two first analytical choices topics or semantic macrostructures and local meanings. As for semantic macrostructures, he argues that "for discursive, cognitive and social reasons, the topics of discourse [...] represent what a discourse "is about" globally speaking (cf. van Dijk, 1976 p. 57):

The analysis involved looking at the macrostructure of each story individually (see the results section below) and then elaborating a wordlist first, using Antconc, and analysing the results of tagging the corpora using the UCREL CLAWS7 to see if there were any significant patterns or coincidences in the topics dealt with. As stated by Pérez de Ayala (1996, p.174) apart from one main discourse topic, which covers the whole passage within it, one may find "more Local Topics, or Sub-topics, which are related to the Discourse Topic" (1996, p. 174). This notion of multi-topicality will be taken into account when analysing the data.

### ***5.3. Critical dimension***

Crucial to the concept of socio-political stories is the inclusion of criticism in the story itself. This may be expressed either through an implicit or explicit evaluation of the topics under discussion, thus adopting a sociopragmatic approach to criticism, since it implies the study of the many forms of indirect meaning which can be inferred from the text (implicatures) related to "underlying beliefs, [that] are not openly, directly, completely or precisely asserted" van Dijk (2001, p. 104) in the story (cf. Grice, 1975; Carlston, 2004)

## **6. Results**

The analysis of the topics and macrostructures of the 40 selected digital stories is summarised in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1.** Example of the analysis of topics/ macrostructures

<p><b>Story 1. Australia: Per Forza e Per Amore</b></p> <p>M1. Forced to emigrate to Australia</p> <p>M2. Painful separation from their family</p> <p>M3. Bad experiences on the way to Australia</p> <p>M4. Working to improve the situation of immigrants</p> <p>M5. Politics made him suffer: not allowing to visit his family</p> <p>M6. Suffering but doing the right thing</p> <p>M7. Getting a citizenship</p> <p>M8. Occupying a post in politics. Defending a multicultural society</p> <p>M9. Making a place for himself in the history of the country: Australia</p> <p>M10. Migrating to Australia- he didn't want to</p> <p>M11. Working to improve the situation of immigrants / society</p> <p>M12. Not forgetting his origins</p>	<p><b>Story 2. Dad I made it!</b></p> <p>M1. Immigrant. Leaving his country</p> <p>M2. Forced to leave his country</p> <p>M3. Parents (father) wish to leave their home.</p> <p>M4. Immigrant goes to university: family happy</p> <p>M5. Father dies</p> <p>M6. When they arrive in Australia. Poor.</p> <p>M7. People in Australia welcome them</p> <p>M8. First years in Australia. Homesick</p> <p>M9. They find a job</p> <p>M10. She studies and becomes a teacher</p> <p>M11. The family is still together</p>
<p><b>Story 3. Feeling the felt</b></p> <p>M1. This story is about women</p> <p>M2. Her life</p> <p>M3. Mother dies</p> <p>M4. Lila becomes her grandmother's favourite confident</p> <p>M5. A secret; her uncle is her brother</p> <p>M6. Her mother had been raped</p> <p>M7. Women who keep silent</p>	<p><b>Story 4. Jidi</b></p> <p>M1. Grandfather: Lung cancer</p> <p>M2. Finding out about their grandfather's life</p> <p>M3. Immigrant from Lebanon</p> <p>M4. Leaving his country. What was it like?</p> <p>M5. Losing memories about his country</p> <p>M6. Not forgetting their origins</p>

As the main premise for the analysis, we agree with van Dijk (1976, p. 61) in that a sentence may have a topical phrase which summarises the previous passage/sentences or of the story as a whole. As observed in the wordlist obtained from the 40 stories, the topics of the stories show a clear tendency of the narrators to focus on personal matters, since the majority of stories seem to focus on family members, friends or acquaintances. However, it is the implicit content of the stories what turns them into a criticism to social welfare and socio-political issues. Thus, for example, Story 1 and 2 both evaluate immigration as a somehow traumatic negative experience that will always be with them (separating from the rest of their family, finding a job, and coming to terms with their new life and their new identity). A parallelism can be established with those stories that are about illnesses or traumatic experiences (Story 4), since they also imply having to readapt to their new social status and new identity in a society that more often than not does not welcome illness.

Let us first discuss the quantitative results obtained from a wordlist elaborated using Wordsmith 6.0. This is the list of the most common 25 words.



**Table 1.** Frequency wordlist of the 40 digital stories

Word	Freq.	%
I	511	3.25
MY	316	2.01
IT	170	1.08
WE	167	1.06
HE	162	1.03
IS	108	0.69
ME	105	0.67
YOU	96	0.61
THEY	94	0.60
HIS	89	0.57
SHE	79	0.50
HER	73	0.46
OUR	67	0.43
LIFE	63	0.40
FAMILY	60	0.38
ALL	56	0.36
THEIR	52	0.33
TIME	45	0.29
YEARS	44	0.28
STORY	42	0.27
YOUR	42	0.27
THERE	40	0.25

The result in table 1 above indicates that individuals focus on themselves, their relatives or people close to them to start with. Afterwards, however, many stories relate those personal experiences with certain historical moments, facts, or even with the exact dates in which a social event influenced his/her life. A common denominator to all of them is that authors always provide an implicit or explicit evaluation of that social event, as illustrated in example 1 below in which he tells us how he stopped being an alien and became part of his new country, Australia.

Example 1.

It wasn't until 1973 after the elections of the White labour government that I was granted citizenship at the big ceremony at the corporate tenners hall. Nearly 70 I was one of the founders of FILEF, The Italian federation for Italian migrants and their families in Australia and the first president of community camps Victoria. (*Australia per forza*)

No doubt, stories are triggered by individual and personal experiences and this shows in the prevalence of personal pronouns and words which describe their personal environment "life, family, time and story." These results do confirm in fact, one of the characteristics of the genre itself: digital stories are always an example of the personal

point of view of the narrator of the story (Centre for Digital Storytelling 1997). They are the result of personal expression (*I, me, my, you they, she*).

A keyword analysis using the lists obtained using the British National Corpus, The Brown Corpus and the AM06 and Be06 the Brown<sup>1</sup> as reference corpora. Table 2 illustrates that they are, since the same words stood out as characteristic of the corpus analysed here.

**Table 2.** Keyword analysis

<b>AM06</b>	<b>BNC</b>	<b>BR06</b>	<b>BROWN</b>
my	my	my	my
i	i	i	i
australia	australia	australia	australia
	me	we	we
we	family	family	me
family	story		family
me	we	story	story
mum		me	melbourne
story	melbourne	melbourne	mum
melbourne	life	life	dad
life	stories	stories	
gareth	dad		life
	our		
		our	stories
		nursing	
		dad	

Undoubtedly, some of the titles themselves, anticipated these results, since 57.5% of those included references to human entities (e.g., *A Writers legacy, An Immigrant Filmmaker*, see appendix). The protagonists are introduced either by name or making reference to their profession, and the proliferation of pronouns (*his, her, our, their, your*) indicates that they are all relatives or people they feel or felt close to for positive or negative reasons.

<sup>1</sup> The Brown University Standard Corpus of Present-Day American English (or just Brown Corpus) was compiled in the 1960s by Henry Kucera and W. Nelson Francis at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island as a general corpus (text collection) in the field of corpus linguistics. It contains 500 samples of English-language text, totalling roughly one million words, compiled from works published in the United States in 1961.

The BE06 Corpus is a one million word corpus of published general written British English. It has the same sampling frame as the LOB and FLOB corpora. This consists of 500 files of 2000 word samples taken from 15 genres of writing. The AmE06 Corpus is a one million word corpus of published general written American English, also using the same sampling frame as the LOB and FLOB corpora. This consists of 500 files of 2000 word samples taken from 15 genres of writing. The vast majority of the texts were published in 2006. The corpus is also available via CQPweb, and the wordlist is available below.

The syntactic structures in the titles are mostly noun phrases and verbless structures, with the exception of 20% (8 stories) which include a verb form (curiously 5 of them appear in the therapeutic stories of recovery from people who were diagnosed with illnesses that changed their life forever). Example 2 below shows an extract of one of them.

#### Example 2

After helping so many people, it was frustrating for Margaret to find herself in such a helpless situation. [...] permanently attached to an oxygen concentrator. With the aid of her laptop, she continued to participate in nursing and health teleconferences. (*Margaret Living with LAM*)

Some of the stories are about difficult situations, sometimes illnesses, which change and in fact destroy their lives forever and most of them relate how the authors have come to terms with it (although some may implicitly denounce the lack of social support and their loneliness) and that they have a more positive attitude towards the whole situation now (*I have stability now, a place to be still*). Example 3, illustrates this fact.

#### Example 3

To most people Melbourne is a place of business, of busyness, but for me Melbourne is the first place I have found stillness in my life. A place to rest my head, a place of my own. [...]. Soon I will be able to handle someone being dependant on me. Lasting friendships are possible; I have stability now a place to be still. (*Running to a stand still*)

The rest of the stories include inanimate objects such as possessions (*My car, my place*) or places (*Australia, the airport*) or anticipate the genre itself (*Camping legends, bushfire stories*). Other stories are given titles which are more explicitly social but still their content revolves around individuals and their personal experiences and how they were affected by a particular social even or situation (e.g. *New life new country, Running to a stand still, Australila per forza e per amore*).

Quantitative analysis, however, needs to be complemented with qualitative analysis and a multimodal awareness of the elements that accompany the stories if we want to find out what is behind the literal meaning of texts (Dascal, 1987; Gibbs, 1989). As Lambert (2010) himself anticipates, very often the story is not about the object, not even about the place itself but about how the narrator felt about the events/s and how these affected the author. In some of them the socio-political references are more explicit than others, as in example 4 below.

#### Example 4

We escaped communist Hungary for Vienna, leaving behind my mother and two sisters. For me, to be able to be to represent him and also our family, to see like my sister is in Hungary and I sent it to her, she it was an experience for her to see all this. It was erm, it was such a good feeling I could do it for not only our family, but perhaps for the history of our land. (Agnes Karlik. *The Story of an Immigrant Filmmaker*)

Example 4 is part of a story by Agnes Karlik in which she tells us about her experience when they left the country and more importantly how proud she feels of having survived the experience. So much that she considers herself an example not only for her family but for her country.

The analysis of the lexical choices can give us more information about the attitude and feelings of the authors towards a situation that affected them. To this aim, each word was classified according to the eight parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, determiner, verb, adverb, conjunction, preposition, and the interjection). The table below presents the ten most frequent words for adjective, lexical verb and adverbs, since nouns and pronouns as we have seen in the wordlist in table 1, usually refer to the topic or character/s that appear in the story itself.

**Table 3.** Wordlist of Adjectives in the corpus

Adjectives	
NEW	31
YOUNG	21
OLD	21
HAPPY	20
LITTLE	19
GREAT	16
BIG	15
LONG	13
PROUD	12
HARD	12
GOOD	12
NEXT	11

Quantitatively speaking, there seems to be a predominance of positive adjectives (*happy, proud, good, little, great*). However, the classification of most of the examples should be checked within the context (White 2001) and the co-text in which the adjective occurs, since the adjective may adopt positive or negative connotations in relation to the whole story.

The adjective *new* (31) is the most frequent because most authors chose new experiences as the topic for their story (e.g., from *Elderly Woman*. “... so Melbourne became our new home. I was lucky that I had so much support and help”). Nevertheless, one cannot be sure of the connotations of *new* until we look at the context. In the case of a new home, in many stories the connotations would be negative since “a new home” meant emigrating to a new country and leaving behind valuable things (e.g., “We were excited because we were going to a new country. We were sad because we were leaving our loved ones”). In *Australia per Forza*, for example, *new* seems to pick some of the negativeness of the word *censorship* and perpetuate it: “Because I was involved in politics the conservative government of the day refused me new censorship and re-entry visa”.

The next two most common adjectives also reflect a common characteristic of the stories: most of them focus on a certain period of their life “old (21) vs. young (21).” The same can be said of *little* (19), which in most of the cases is used as a diminutive, indicating something pleasant rather than small in size (“...it’s brought us all a little closer together and it was a hell of a lot of fun too I think which is really important”). The adjectives *proud* (12) and *hard* (12) are also somehow complementary in relation to the whole corpus. The stories are about something that may have been hard at a certain point but also makes them feel proud the fact that they have overcome it. That is why they introduce adjectives such as *big* (15), *great* (16) and *long* (13) to describe their feelings. Although it may have been *long* and *hard*, they are *happy* (20) now and they feel *great* (16) about their experience and the way they handled it.

As for the adverbs, *never* (33 examples) *now* (26) *always* (23) *down* (22) *here* (17) the three first adverbs of frequency and the two last ones of place. However, they also need a contextualised description. *Never*, for example, can be used to indicate a wish or a fact that never took place (e.g., *The Black Nun*. They never mentioned their names, never said who they were); but these facts may be negative if, as in the example, they indicate a lack of something basic: to know about the name and origins of those you share your life with. *Never* is also used with statements indicating a decision taken (...to the Atherton gardens one Wednesday afternoon and never looked back. *Running to a stand still*) or serves the purpose of reinforcing a wish (The road of your past will never be travelled again. From now on, you must plan a new direction. A new adventure awaits. *The Navigator*).

Finally, regarding verbs the most common are *go* (66), *move* (26), *come* (34) since most stories are about travelling or involve someone moving from one place to another, often for *work* (36) reasons. It was necessary to check the context in which they occurred so as to differentiate, for example, between the use of *go* as a lexical verb and as a future auxiliary form “going to”. *Love* is the next most common lexical verb. This result also reflects a common characteristic about digital storytelling: it is often the love we feel for others what makes us do things, acting as a prompter to tell stories.

## 7. Discussion

The question that remains now is whether these type of stories can really be considered as examples of socio-political digital stories, as defined above. To answer this question,

we should go back to the way in which stories were selected and to the results of the analysis.

The 40 stories were chosen at random, without knowing about their content, and with the intention of exploring if it was likely that people from the same community would choose to denounce or be critical about an aspect of their life or of society in general. It is certainly true that workshops following the model initiated by the Center for Digital Storytelling favour outcomes such as the one described here, in which participants are encouraged to reveal and make an almost therapeutic use of digital stories. Almost consistently, to start with most stories tell us about extreme circumstances (having to emigrate and leave everything behind), or no-choice and often painful situations. However, in the end, all the stories- without exception- show that they conform and that somehow they feel proud of being able to cope one way or another with their “new” situation (those who are ill have found a way to deal with their illness, those who emigrated are now happy in Australia, so judging from a sociological perspective, the stories give a positive vision of Australia. Australia gave most of them good opportunities that they would not have had otherwise: mainly studies and work opportunities).

The stories, no doubt, make explicit and/or implicit reference to social situations, and factors that have affected the storyteller: *Australia: per forza per amore*, explicitly outlines how the choice of a political career had negative consequences for the narrator, although the situation was solved and he finally reached a good position in politics. *Feeling the felt*, for example, is about rape and women’s silence and suffering as a result of social conventions. *The Black Nan* denounces how “the missionaries of Christianity destroyed our language and culture and identity” and *Sins of the father* condemns the negative consequences of taking active part in a war. Along the same lines, implicit and explicit evaluations are combined in *The Story of an Immigrant Filmmaker* (see example 4 above). Even those that describe illnesses felt obliged to leave their job, and start a new life- some of them died in the process.

A counter argument to their classification as socio-political stories may be the fact that the individual stories may contain too weak a form of criticism to be considered as examples of socio-political stories, since the criticism is not that explicit and not that strong either. One of the weakest points of the stories that may cause this impression is related to the use of multimodal elements, what we refer to as de-synchronisation between text and images, i.e., an imbalance between the text and the other multimodal elements, which are sometimes perceived as irrelevant or mere fillers accompanying the story while the audience listens to the spoken words (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2014). This de-synchronisation is the result of several factors. For example, in digital stories which try to reconstruct an event in the past coincide the author often lacks the pictures corresponding to those events in particular. If, for example, the story is about someone’s grandfather and how he fought in the war, the author probably includes some pictures of his grandfather (e.g. a close up, a picture with the whole family) but nothing that situates him in the scenario in which the war took place. Thus, the final digital story includes images and even sound that is mostly irrelevant for the story itself (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2014) except for the fact that the pictures are of the person/s or

places described or representative of the political situation at the time. Some authors try to compensate this by including pictures from the internet (e.g., pictures of those events or places in a different period of time, or other types of pictures which are abstract representations of the ideas s/he wants to transmit).

The results indicate that the stories do share a critical perspective on the situation described, which affected their lives (e.g., Nazis, the war). The criticism, however, is mild and not strong enough in most cases and that more explicit information and stronger claims would be necessary in order for them to be considered as an example of strong socio-political criticism.

## 8. Conclusions

This article has tried to provide and justify the existence of the genre socio-political digital storytelling. I have first provided a working definition which can be summarised as follows: socio-political storytelling exists as an emerging genre devoted to denounce social injustice with the intention of promoting changes for the better.

By applying a CADS approach to the analysis of the data, we have proved that the stories share common topics and even common views on how different events affected their life. Most of these events are rooted in social history and have affected directly or indirectly the author's life, thus justifying their classification as examples of socio-political digital stories. The perspective can be in the past, present or future and may be the result of scientific research, a historical perspective or a mere transmission of personal experiences. However, they all have in common that they are personal testimonies of those who have in actual fact participated in the social practice either as observers, victims, helpers, organisers, etc. Their stories can help to improve social relations and to promote a better understanding of the problems that other people may be going through.

These stories can therefore, at least potentially, help alter not only the relationship of author-audience when dealing with controversial issues, but also the relationship between the spread of socially critical discourse and society in general; thus helping to democratise the exchange of ideas between the members of our society.

Socio-political digital stories produce socially critical multimodal texts where several issues- whether from an individual, group perspective, or institutionally oriented point of view- reflect and transmit the struggle that there is between certain social practices and the individuals who experience them. This makes socio-political digital storytelling the ideal candidate to become a mediator and ease the communication, interaction and exchange of information about conflictive social practices. Examples such as the ones analysed are timid examples of what socio-political individual digital stories might do for society.

Socio-political stories could provide a new global form of discourse that would transmit unheard voices- since authors usually create theirs bearing in mind a wider audience than with more traditional forms of media, such as the printed word. By using this tool the cultural heritage of different cultures could add an alternative voice for the

development of education and individuals in general; since being critical and providing a universally accessible tool to do so is one of the possible ways to engage in “a sociologically informed construction of society” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2).

## References

- Alcantud-Díaz, M. & Gregori-Signes, C. (eds) (2013) *Experiencing Digital Storytelling*. Valencia: JPM Ediciones.
- Alcantud-Díaz, M., A Ricart-Vayá, C. Gregori-Signes (2014). Share your experience. Digital storytelling in English for tourism. *Iberica*, 2014, 10, 185-204.
- Baker, P, C. Gabrielatos, M. Khosravi-Nik, M. Krzyżanowski, T. McEnery & R. Wodak (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society*, 19: 273-306, doi: 10.1177/09579265080888962.
- Bamberg, M. (1997) A constructivist approach to narrative development, In *Narrative development*, M. Bamberg (ed.), Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 89-132
- Barrett, H. C. (2006) Digital Stories in ePortfolios: Multiple Purposes and Tools. Accessed 1 April, 2007. <http://electronicportfolios.com/digestory/index.html>.
- Brígido-Corachán, A. M. (2009). From the Virtual Forum to the Classroom: Developing Cognitive Engagement and Critical Thinking Skills through Online and Face-to-Face Student Discussions. *Lenguaje y Textos*, 29,141-153.
- Brígido-Corachán, A. M., & Gregori-Signes, C. (2014). Digital Storytelling and its expansión across educational contexts. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*. Valencia: PUV, 13-29.
- Carston, R. (2004). Explicature and semantics, In S. Davis and B. Gillon (eds.), *Semantics: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 817-845.
- Chandler, D. (1999). An Introduction to Genre Theory. <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/intgenre/intgenre1.html>
- Center for Digital Storytelling (2006). . <http://www.storycenter.org/index1.htm>. Accessed, 1 June, 2006.
- Australian Centre for the Moving Image (2011). Community stories about people. Accessed December 2011. [http://www.acmi.net.au/video\\_community\\_people.htm](http://www.acmi.net.au/video_community_people.htm).
- Couldry, N. (2008). Digital storytelling, media research and democracy: Conceptual choices and alternative futures. *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representations in New Media*, K. Lundby (eds). New York: Peter Lang, 41-60.
- Dascal, M. (1987). Defending literal meaning. *Cognitive Science*, 11: 259-281.
- Dunford, M., & A. Rooke (2008). Extending creative practice. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*, Valencia: PUV, 189-204.
- Eggs, S., & D. Slade (1997). *Analyzing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell.
- García Gómez, A. (2001). Disembodiment and Cyberspace: Gendered Discourses in Female Adolescents' Personal Information Disclosure. *Discourse and Society*, 21, 2: 131-165.
- Gibbs, R. (1989). Understanding and literal meaning. *Cognitive Science*, 13, 243-251.
- Glaser, B. & A. Strauss (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Gregori-Signes, C (2008). Integrating the old and the new: Digital Storytelling in the EFL Classroom, *GRETA*, 16, 1 &2: 29-35. [http://gretajournal.com/http://gretajournal.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/file/2008\\_9.pdf](http://gretajournal.com/http://gretajournal.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/file/2008_9.pdf)
- Gregori-Signes, C., & Pennock-Speck, B. (2012). Digital Story as a genre of self-mediated representation: an introduction. *Digital Education Review*, 22, 1-8.
- Gregori-Signes, C. and Alcantud-Díaz, M. (eds.) (2013). *Experiencias con el Relato Digital*. Valencia: JPM Ediciones.
- Gregori-Signes, C. (2014). Digital Storytelling and Multimodal Literacy in Education. *Porta Linguarum: revista internacional de didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras*, 22, 237-250.



- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. Cole, P., & J.L. Morgan (Eds.) *Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 41–58.
- Gubrium, A. & K.C. Nat Turner (2011). Digital Storytelling as an emergent method for social research and practice, In *The Handbook of Emergent Technologies in Social Research*, S. N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), Oxford: OUP, 469-491.
- Handler-Miller, C. (2004). *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*. New York: Focal Press.
- Hartley J. McWilliam K., (eds.) (2009)., *Story Circle. Digital Storytelling Around the World*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Herreros, M. (2012). “El uso educativo de los relatos digitales personales como herramienta para pensar el Yo (Self)” , *Digital Education Review*, 22, 68-79
- Huffaker, D. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2005). Gender, identity, and language use in teenage blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10, 2, Accessed March 2011. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/huffaker.html>.
- Hull, G. A., & Nelson, M. E. (2005). Locating the semiotic power of multimodality written communication. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 222, 224-261.
- Jamissen, G. & K. Holte Haug (2008). Towards the digital storytelling university. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*, Valencia: PUV, 93-114.
- Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 321, 241-267.
- Kaare, B.H. & Luntby, K. (2008). Mediatized lives: autobiography and assumed authenticity, In *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: Self-representations in new media*, K. Luntby (ed.), 16-29, New York: Peter Lang.
- Kohler Riessman, C. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kress G. & van Leeuwen T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse. The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold.
- Lambert, J. (2010). *Cookbook for Digital Storytelling*. New York: Digital Diner Press.
- Lambert, J. (2014). Digital storytelling at a crossroads. Historical context for an ever-emerging genre, In Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.). *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*, Valencia: PUV, p. 31-40.
- Lee, L. (2014). Empowering learners with digital news stories: an exploratory study of a college Spanish course, In Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*. Valencia: PUV, 135-152.
- Leech G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Londoño-Monroy, G., 2012, “Aprendiendo en el aula: contando y haciendo relatos digitales personales”, *Digital Education Review*, 22, 19-36
- Luntby, K. (2008). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: Self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McWilliam, K. (2009). The global diffusion of a community media practice. Digital storytelling online. *Story circle: digital storytelling around the world*, J. Hartley & K. McWilliam (eds), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 37-76.
- Meyer, M., (2001). Between theory, method, and politics: positioning of the approaches to CDA. Wodak, R. & M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Michigan: Sage Publications, 14-31.
- Nguyen, A. & B. Robin (2014). Sharing the experience of creating a digital story: an inquiry into the knowledge community of digital storytellers and its educational implications. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*. Valencia: PUV, 115-134.
- Perez de Ayala , S. (2004). FTAs and Erskine May: Conflicting needs? Politeness in Question Time, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 2, 143-169.
- Ramírez-Verdugo, M.D. & M. V Sotomayor- Sáez (2012). El valor de una historia digital en el contexto europeo de aprendizaje integrado a través de lengua y contenido (CLIL) *Digital Education Review*, 22, 52-67
- Ramírez Loya, M. (2014). Digital storytelling beyond the eSL classroom. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*. Valencia: PUV, 153-172.

- Reyes Torres, A., E. Pich Ponce & M<sup>a</sup> D. García Pastor (2012). Digital Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool within a Didactic Sequence in Foreign Language Teaching. *Digital Education Review*, 22, 1-18.
- Riessman, C. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, CA, USA: Sage Publications.
- Rodríguez-Illera, J. L. (2014). Personal storytelling in the digital society. In Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*. Valencia: PUV, 41-58.
- Robin, B. R. & Sara G. McNeil (2012). What Educators Should Know about Teaching Digital Storytelling. *Digital Education Review*, 37-51
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity. *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, R. Wodak, R. & M. Meyer (eds.). London: Sage Publications, 95-121,
- White, P. (2001). The Language of Attitude, Arguability and Interpersonal Positioning. *The Appraisal Website*. Accessed 2009. <http://www.grammatics.com/appraisal/>
- Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK Press. *Discourse and Society*, 193, 273-306.
- Wodak, R. & M. Meyer (2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Michigan: Sage Publications.
- Yuksel, P., B. Robine., & S. Yildirim (2014). Digital storytelling activities ein kindergarten. Gregori-Signes, C. & A. Brígido-Corachán (eds.), *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts*, Valencia: PUV, 89-204.

## Appendix: List of stories (from <http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/>)

A Writers legacy; Alzheimer; An Immigrant Filmmaker; Australia per forza; Beautiful boy; Bushfire Stories; Busty; Camping legends; Carmel Storyteller; Dad I made it; Feeling the felt; Gillians's story; Gungarri Woman; Jidi; Life and learning; Margaret and living with LAM; Me do; My car my place; My grandfather the spy; My beautiful schwesters; New life country; Next generation; Passionate pursuits; Running to a stand still; Sins of the father; Space in between; Strong woman; That dreaded phone call; The airport; The Black Nan; The little Frenchman; The Navigator; The shoemaker; The old man; Time delay; To Sevek; Training for the last run; Western Cahnces; Whatever beame of Cahrлие; Yeni Hayat