

Master Thesis

Rotterdam School of Management
MSc Global Business and Sustainability

Topic:

Researching Ocean Conservation NPOs and their storytelling strategies

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Executive Summary/ Abstract

The current study explores narrative strategies used by ocean NPOs in their blogs. The research is tied to the environmental communication, business and marketing strategies of non-profit organizations. It addresses the following research question: “*What storytelling strategies are most commonly used by ocean conservation NPOs in their blogs?*”.

This academic research uses a qualitative methodology within the scope of narrative analysis frameworks. It systematically examines 50 blog articles from 10 popular marine conservation NPOs. The methodology is based on a hybrid function of deductive and inductive coding framework which was operationalized through a detailed codebook mainly in a deductive form. The main theories employed in this study first include narrative typologies presented by De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) and Goyes (2023), emotional arcs presented by Reagan et al. (2016), character structures mentioned by Goyes (2023) and donor engagement theory by Bekkers and Wiepking (2010).

The findings of this research revealed that the *legacy/ success narrative type* was the most dominant storytelling *type* across the 50 through mainly *collaboration* and *data-driven technology awareness* solutions. The dominant narratives were respective of the categories in which they were coded, the other dominant narrative respective of its category *emotional arcs* was the *man in the hole emotional arc narrative*. NPOs were predominantly *heroes* followed by *animals* that allow the ecosystems to thrive. *Industrial fishing* and *corporations* were found to be the most recurring *villains* and marine *animals* and *ecosystems* were found to be the primary *victims*.

These results were obtained to contribute to the growing body of literature of communication, digital advocacy and non-profit strategy. Researching this topic can inspire societal adaptation and encourage communities to prepare for climate impacts. The narrative has the power to inform about the main threats and solutions driving adaptation and mitigation. This research attempts to understand the who, what, when, where of conservation stories. The overall goal is to help the ocean and its inhabitants.

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Acknowledgment

It is after almost 20 years of my life that I complete my education through the submission of this thesis. Of course, I am not done with learning and my education at EUR and RSM serves as a strong foundation for my survival in this new world I am entering. I thank my teachers who chose this path, to share knowledge and to create a more educated population for the sake of our human development, and of course mine. I thank my parents for supporting and understanding my decisions, my failures, and my successes. I thank my friends for sharing their knowledge and encouraging my self-development. Finally, I thank myself for waking up every morning and doing what I had to do to create this strong foundation. My journey is just starting.

Gen AI Statement

Generative AI tools were used solely for brainstorming ideas and occasionally for identifying potential academic sources. All sources cited in this thesis were independently verified for accuracy, credibility, and relevance prior to inclusion. Grammarly was used for grammar verifications which were underlined when a mistake was spotted and modified if it was found as a mistake or typo. The analysis, interpretation, and writing remain my own.

1. Researching Ocean Conservation NPOs and their storytelling strategies

Marine ecosystems are responsible for the survival of over 3 billion people as they provide food security, help develop medicines, and create coastal defense against natural disasters (UNSD, 2015). This very important ecosystem, responsible for our survival, is facing a great risk. Coral reefs are largely affected by mass bleaching events, representing a total of 80% of global reefs, from these 80%, 14% have totally disappeared (Thomson, 2025). Pollution and overfishing are major threats to this ecosystem. Species such as the hawksbill sea turtle and the great hammerhead shark are currently endangered (Save Our Seas, 2025). On 17903 species evaluated, around 1550 are at risk of extinction and placed on the IUCN Red list (Dallison, 2022). Global warming intensifies the warming of oceans (IPCC, 2019) and a rise of one degree can cause significant coral bleaching, which, added to ocean acidification and the rise of sea levels, creates a deadly cocktail for marine life and coastal populations (WWF, 2016). Another issue at hand is the increased dumping of plastic in oceans. Around ten million tons of plastic are annually discarded into oceans, which creates entanglement and accidental toxic ingestions, killing sea life (Plastic Oceans International, 2022).

All of this information is quite concerning, however it is crucial to be optimistic. The evolution of marine conservation efficiency in recent years gives hope for a more positive future for marine life. This marine conservation was defined by the WWF (2015) report on Marine Protected Areas as the preservation, restoration, and sustainable management of marine ecosystems, habitats, and species. This protection is done to assure biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, and long-term benefits for both Earth and its species (WWF, 2015). The grey seal, minke whale, and bluefin tuna, previously endangered species, are recovering, and this can be attributed to the efforts of NPOs who pushed forward the creation of marine protected areas (MPAs) as well as strict fishing regulations (Greenfield, 2025). This right here represents the essence of optimism, narrating the story of recovery, illustrating the progression of events, and instilling a general feeling of hope. This very story, which has an emotional appeal, reflects one of 6 techniques for emotional storytelling, the “*rags to riches*” story (Reagan et al., 2016). But there are many more, where one story can highlight the existence of a problem, while another can convey its resolution. Both stories possess the power to influence the reader’s perception and emotional response (Bortolussi, 2012).

Marine conservation is being spearheaded by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) as they can influence policy decisions and physically repair reefs piece by piece. These NPOs can be defined as organizations that are created and operated to fulfill societal and charitable duties without a commitment to grow their profits, only doing so for the sake of staying in business (Kenton, 2024). Nevertheless, their efforts would not be recognized if it were not for their effective storytelling. Additionally, the support from their donors would be nonexistent

without increasing the awareness of the NPO's impacts. This aligns with the first mechanism that drives charitable giving identified by Bekkers and Wiepking (2010) "*awareness of need*". It highlights that people are more likely to contribute to a cause if they first recognize the existence of the issue in the first place. Another mechanism identified by the researchers was the mechanism of "*efficacy*" which plays a crucial role in philanthropy as the donors become aware that their contribution can make a tangible difference in addressing the issue at hand. Blogs have been recognized as valuable in activating these mechanisms (Akinnubi et al., 2021). These blogs can raise awareness about marine conservation challenges by showcasing compelling narratives and the real-world impact of these efforts. This reinforces the donor's belief in a purposeful contribution. Saxton and Wang (2013) found that the growth of online platforms such as blogs has enabled NPOs to engage with larger audiences, foster community connections, and effectively mobilize donor support as they both increase the visibility of their cause, and the impact made. Jacques Cousteau, a world-renowned marine biologist once said, 'The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever.' (Jacques Yves Cousteau et al., 1977). The ocean isn't the only one casting spells, people and organizations dedicated to its preservation also carry out this spell. Through their compelling stories, NPOs want to evoke awe and inspire reactions. This reinforces the power of storytelling as a vital tool to carry out their mission. The connection between blogs, narration, and marine conservation leads to the following research question:

RQ: "What storytelling strategies are most commonly used by ocean conservation NPOs in their blogs?"

Storytelling can be defined as the strategic use of narratives to carry a message and create an emotional connection with the spectators (Bellie, 2022). The study is interested in uncovering the ramifications of strategic storytelling within the sustainability efforts of NPOs looking closely at their blogs. Blogs can be described as an online record of opinions that can be found directly on websites (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

The study tries to improve the current body of literature on the subject of digital advocacy, sustainable marketing for NPO's and storytelling strategies. It will attempt to understand how storytelling in blogs can influence public engagement with marine conservation campaigns. Research on the function of strategic narrative in NPO campaigns is currently lacking, and this study addresses this gap by providing fresh perspectives on how storytelling might influence audiences' attitudes, elicit emotional responses, and boost conservation initiatives.

From a societal perspective, this study aims to give significant information for non-profit organizations focusing on ocean preservation that may optimize narrative approaches to increase the effect of their digital campaigns. As marine conservation faces great threats,

the effective marketing of their campaigns becomes critical. The survival of these NPOs is also crucial for the defense of marine life, as these organizations function as businesses that require profits (Romero & Abril, 2023). This research serves as a strategic marketing guideline for the survival of NPO organization. It has the potential to raise awareness, inspire action, and secure the support of potential donors. The study will also help provide the main threats, solutions and actors present in the environment of marine conservation. It will offer practical recommendations to craft compelling strategic narratives that resonate with diverse audiences to improve outreach and support global conservation efforts.

The research will first review the existing body of literature on the current topic, furthermore, it will outline the research methodology, aiming to employ a qualitative approach with narrative analysis. Finally, the study will present the findings, followed by a discussion of these findings. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ocean Conservation research

Marine conservation can be viewed as the science and practice of protecting biodiversity and marine ecosystems. Protecting marine biodiversity also means protecting what it represents: a vital source of nutrition, an oxygen producer, a climate regulator, and a coastal protector from natural disasters (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024). The reason for the need to protect the marine environment is that it is currently threatened by numerous actors stemming directly from human activities.

2.1.1 Key Threats to Ocean Ecosystems

The main threats are overfishing, coral reef destruction, illegal practices, invasive species, mangrove loss, plastic and chemical pollution, and climate change. These threats all play a role in reducing marine populations and disrupting marine ecosystems, and humans will bear the heaviest cost (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024). Corals reefs for instance, are one of the ocean's most diverse habitats, hosting around 4000 species of reef fish, 840 species of corals and around one million species of other marine animals (Coral Reef Alliance, 2024). However, coral reefs are also extremely sensitive and vulnerable to bleaching, ocean warming, and pollution, and losing such an ecosystem endangers general biodiversity and destroys the livelihood of coastal communities that rely on this habitat for nutrition and tourism (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024).

2.1.2 Conservation Strategies

Academic literature reveals that conservation strategies need to be as diverse as the current threats facing marine biodiversity. The more traditional approaches range from the establishment of Marine Protected Areas, or MPAs, habitat restoration, and legal protection, such as bans on commercial whaling, which have actually shown positive and successful changes but also have shown additional challenges such as lack of enforcement, bycatch, and additional climate impacts (Munir, 2024). Recent research stresses the importance of ecosystem-based management, which includes science-based solutions and socio-economic factors, community engagement, and indigenous knowledge, for a shift towards a sustainable marine conservation approach (Munir, 2024). Technological and data advancements such as environmental DNA, satellite monitoring, and AI-driven species tracking are also increasing the possibility to monitor and implement adaptive and climate-smart solutions. Currently the knowledge gap is present and the real issue is the lack of understanding of cumulative impacts as well as ensuring long-term resilience for both the marine ecosystems and the communities

that depend on them.

Articles by Lotze (2021), Chatterjee (2017), and Munir (2024), stress the importance of marine conservation not only for the survival of marine biodiversity but also for humans' survival, and this protection requires global action, innovation, and working governance. Bennett (2016) discusses that effective marine conservation strategies are also not shaped only by scientific evidence and management strategies but also by how these initiatives are viewed and supported by local communities and broader public audiences. The audience needs to be engaged and have a positive perception of these efforts to support long-term conservation protection management. This allows the current research to explore different approaches, such as storytelling, to bridge the gap between marine science and public engagement.

2.2 NPO and Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling or DS has become a primary tool for activism used by non-profit organizations to convey their message and mission. DS can also help stakeholders engage in a more captivating way and convey a call to action within their story. Yilmaz and Cigerci (2019) detail how storytelling evolved from primitive dances and oral chants all the way to the digital world, which showcases how such a form of communication is adapted through history. Storytelling in early society allowed the transmission of culture and values and developed through writing, theater, and now digital media. Storytelling became a tool to transmit but also to educate and persuade. Cinematic narratives, transmedia storytelling, and social media campaigns all use storytelling strategies to increase engagement in immersive manners (Yilmaz & Cigerci, 2019; Kenterelidou & Galatsopoulou, 2021). Nonprofits have leveraged the power of storytelling, which has become one of their main tools. Through various campaigns, storytelling has functioned as a powerful way to denounce and provide accountability; it has enabled members to express values, challenge opinions and actions, and create an organizational identity (Chen, 2012). Crisan and Bortun (2017) uncovered in their research that NGOs in Romania use DS to humanize their cause and create support, making the issue more relatable to the audience and therefore more emotionally impactful. Using digital storytelling in this way correlates with the study of Almog-Bar and Schmid (2013), who found that NPOs support exists on a wide scope, from ensuring their own survival to more daring initiatives for social change. NPOs have a focus on securing funding for their stability but this is only to fulfill their initial role of creating meaningful social change. This study shows that NPOs are operating the same way as businesses, which confirms the research by Maier et al. (2014), which stated that NPOs increasingly adopt business-like approaches as they integrate commercialization, managerialism, and marketization. NPOs use advocacy to not only serve their interest to survive but also to influence policy, challenge systemic inequalities,

and drive large-scale change. Smith and Pekkanen (2012) confirm the previous studies by uncovering how NPOs adapt their marketing strategies based on their structure and goals. They found that NPOs relying on government funding are generally very cautious in their messaging. On the contrary, NPOs depending on donations are bolder in their storytelling strategies. Overall, this research correlates with Kyalo's (2024) research and Almog-Bar and Schmid (2013) who found that NPO campaigns must have proper marketing and storytelling strategies to mold their financial models, goals, and audiences.

Hasenfeld and Garrow (2012), further demonstrated that advocacy campaigns framed around structural change, such as policy reform and institutional accountability, are 11 times more effective than those that primarily emphasize an organization's internal needs. The current findings align with the research by Bekkers and Wiepking (2010), who found that *efficacy* was a key reason for donations and that the donors were motivated by the fact that they could believe that their contributions would have an impact. Research by Kyalo (2024), explores public relations strategies in NPOs and highlights the crucial role of strategic storytelling, transparency, and stakeholder engagement to build credibility.

Digital platforms like blogs or social media enhance reach and donor loyalty, which was confirmed by the research of Seelig et al. (2018), who found that digital activism is more interactive and engaging with stakeholders compared to the classic one-way communication of traditional media channels. Mager (2021) highlights the strengths of cross-platform storytelling as it ensures that the narrative is transmitted across all digital mediums and increases the reach, confirming the study of Seelig et al. (2018). Posting on a combination of platforms helps the actual reach and enhances stakeholder engagement.

NGOs and NPOs notably use storytelling to humanize causes, mobilize follower support, and create an emotional bond between stakeholders and their organizations. The stories written by NPOs feature characters, resolution, and moral clarity, shaping current narratives around impact, transformation, and positive actions (Chen, 2012; Laufer & Jones, 2021).

Applying storytelling to wildlife and marine conservation plays a strategic role in its efficiency. Campbell (2002) showcases how conservation experts use counter-narrative strategies for ecotourism to oppose inefficient conservation models and attempt to promote a more community-based solution. These narration types are found to remain symbolic, but Goyes (2023) found that storytelling in wildlife management differs across stakeholders, as activists use primarily moral narratives, civil servants tend to lean more into scientific narrations, and politicians employ a wider range of authority and power narratives. Divergent narratives are somewhat of an issue as they blur the main messages and don't promote proper cooperation.

DS has increasingly been emerging in environmental communication. However, a study by Kenterelidou and Galatsopoulou (2021) found that Instagram is rarely or badly used by

conservationists such as UNESCO marine sites. This represents a missed opportunity, as these social media platforms offer visual and interactive tools to engage stakeholders. Even though some marine conservation sites fail to use social media in the proper way, others do, as they understand that providing visually and narratively captivating stories can help create curiosity and, therefore, interest in conservation. This is the case for tales about the Mariana Trench, a location filled with mystery that triggers curiosity. Eke and Bufumoh (2025) have found that curiosity and wonder are powerful hooks that can lead to environmental engagement.

Additionally, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) point out that narratives does not always take the form of classic long plots with a beginning, middle, and end. Narratives can be small moments of storytelling, especially in the digital context and these fragments can range from a single sentence to a brief comment, this shows the importance of recognizing minimal discourse to have a better grasp of the entire storytelling mechanism (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019). Denning's (2006) findings also introduced the concept of the springboard story, which was defined as a brief, optimistic narrative made to inspire change. These springboard stories became more common with the advent of social media and the short attention span it imposed, highlighting an increase in springboard storytelling (Supriya, 2017). DS allows for a feeling of inclusivity of the stakeholders and DS can simplify the story, according to Nicoli et al. (2021). A simplified story generally makes the story easier to understand for the audience, which helps with accessibility due to the complicated nature of sea life ecosystems. Building on narrative transformation, research by Yea and Chou (2019) uncovered that simplifying complex scientific data and findings helps make it more relatable for the audience and has a positive impact on awareness and mobilization efforts from the stakeholders. This research, therefore, showcases the advantages of human-centered storytelling. It was then found that blogs offered a unique space for in-depth storytelling, giving away a canvas with a richer opportunity to discuss conservation topics compared to short-form social media posts, according to Peek et al. (2015). Research by Denning (2006) also studied how narratives help shape the brand and the identity of the NPOs and also found that storytelling helps with conveying the main values of the NPO as well the actual impact they have made. These findings align with Kyalo's (2024) research on PR strategies for NPOs, which found that these strategies emphasize transparency and stakeholder engagement.

2.3 Storytelling and Ocean Conservation Blogs

Storytelling is very relevant to ocean conservation blogs, as narratives help raise awareness, inspire change, shape the perception of the audiences, and create a positive impact on ocean conservation. Blogs are also economically more viable for NPOs since an average of BBC Earth Documentary costs around 2.2 million dollars per episode to produce

(Nelson, 2016). Wildlife documentaries are unquestionably effective at raising public awareness about conservation issues and depict a diverse range of ecosystems and diversity to the public, however, they also have their issues. In the research by Howlett et al. (2023), wildlife documentaries have substantial production costs and include biases in their portrayal of nature. There is for instance, an overrepresentation of charismatic vertebrates like mammals and birds and an underrepresentation of invertebrates and plants. This can skew public perception and affect the reception of the message, affecting potential action. On the other hand, David Attenborough's new documentary "Our Ocean 2025" challenges this conception. The documentary highlights urgent ocean threats, showcases plants and single-celled life as well as a diverse range of species and praises stories of resilience and survival, earning great praise from the public (Lewis, 2025). Even with great documentaries, blogs remain a crucial and cost-effective tool for NPOs to showcase conservation stories with a wide public.

Research by Rai (2025) uncovered that traditional media content such as blogs enables efficient sustainable advocacy. This efficiency is also due to its perceived accessibility and wide reach, which can help create engagement and shape public perception more easily. Research by Lahey and Martel (2020) and Zhang and Cabage (2013) also helps prove that blogs can reach broader audiences online, as they are crucial strategies for search engine optimization, boosting viewership and visits of the website and the NGO/NPO. Silig et al. (2019) research adds to the body of literature that the integration of emotional storytelling with interactive digital content can increase engagement and activism. Bates's (2010) research helps to have a more comprehensive view of storytelling by researching social media marketing principles for ocean sustainability campaigns. The study highlights strategies such as audience segmentation, message, and channel design. His research has uncovered that successful conservation storytelling is not only an awareness campaign but a story that relates to the audience, with a call to action as well as leveraging all available channels, as Mager (2021) mentioned. The studies found that effective narration should include emotional appeals, narrative depth, and cross-platform distribution to have a bigger impact. The academic research specifically on the topic of marine conservation blogs is minimal which once again stresses the importance of carrying this very research.

2.4 Storytelling Strategies

2.4.1 Narrative Types

Marine conservation and wildlife conservation, in general, employ a wide range of storytelling strategies to promote action and engage stakeholders. First, it is important to look specifically at *narrative types*, which can be defined as broad categories of storytelling that can be told apart based on their structure, content, and contexts in which they are used (De Fina

& Georgakopoulou, 2019). The main *narrative type* is *moral storytelling*, also called ethos-building, which appeals to ethos and moral responsibility as it creates a deeper and more meaningful connection between nature and humans. This strategy is generally used by activists and indigenous communities (Goyes, 2023). Furthermore, the *narrative type* of *scientific storytelling*, also called institutional knowledge, allows for a more empirical and factual narrative that can help build credibility for conservation policies (Goyes, 2023; Campbell, 2002). As previously mentioned, the *counter-narrative type* helps challenge dominant beliefs and promote a community-based solution to conservation (Campbell, 2002). Another *narrative type* that is relevant not only to marine conservation storytelling but also to all storytelling is the *hero-villain* type which has always been used to position specific characters in various roles (Laufer & Jones, 2021). The *personal narration* highlights a more individual contribution, which generally creates an emotional connection. This is especially the case with volunteer-based organizations that employ individuals who ultimately tell their own stories and experiences (Chen, 2012). *Civil society narration types* generally promote a collective responsibility and participatory governance (Chen, 2012). The *multivocal storytelling* type uses a wide range of perspectives to tell one story. This *narrative type* provides authority to the story, especially if all perspectives lead to the same general conclusion (Chen, 2012). *Legacy or success* storytelling *narrative type* recounts a long-term successful impact; this therefore increases engagement and showcases that “*efficacy*” discussed by Bekkers and Wiepking (2010). Using this *narrative type* showcases optimism and proven success, making the actions not impossible or useless to the stakeholder's eyes (Laufer & Jones, 2021). *Visual storytelling*, on the other hand, is a *narrative type* relevant to social media platforms like Instagram, which leverages a form of storytelling that the eye can observe (Kenterelidou & Galatsopoulou, 2021). Additionally, the *Mythic and Indigenous narrative* type, which is often transmitted through oral communications and songs, showcases a deeper and ancient connection between nature and humans (Goyes, 2023). Conservation campaigns also use *participatory storytelling* to invite community members to co-author stories and enhance ownership, credibility, and authenticity (Chen, 2012). *Crisis narratives* are generally driven by urgency and impending disaster, they are used as persuasive tools to fundraise and mobilize engagement (Laufer & Jones, 2021). They also help showcase the “*awareness of need*” as Bekkers and Wiepking (2010) presented. NGOs or NPOs use *historical continuity narratives* that link the present action to past cultural and environmental heritage, which increases the validity of the story (Goyes, 2023). *Values-driven narratives* are used to place stories on widely accepted values such as justice, beauty, and relationships, especially ones with our children (Chen, 2012). Finally, the *voice as power* places storytelling as an act of asserting agency specifically among the most affected and marginalized communities (Goyes, 2023). All of these types are distinct from each other but can often intersect, creating strong narratives and allowing for a wider possibility of actions from key stakeholders due to the emotions, facts, and

authority.

2.4.2 Emotional Arcs

According to research, there are around 6 dominant *emotional arcs* that can shape how stories unfold (Reagan et al., 2016). The first story archetype is the “*rags to riches*” story, which showcases a slowly rising emotional feeling throughout the story. The “*tragedy*” or “*riches to rags*” shows a continuous decline. The “*man in a hole story*” showcases a normal situation a fall, then a rise. Additionally, the “*Icarus*” story, where a rise is followed by a fall, is showcased. A “*Cinderella*” story that rises, falls, then rises again. Lastly, the “*Oedipus*” contextualizes a fall, a rise, then another fall. These emotional stories were found in around 1300 fictional texts, which highlight the role of emotional pacing to engage the reader. A narrative sentiment is drawn throughout the story (Reagan et al., 2016). This can be relevant in the context of NGO/NPO storytelling, as a large number of donations come from an emotional trigger (Sanghyub John Lee et al., 2024). While these emotional arcs derive from fiction, they do suggest useful comparisons on how emotional strategies may be used in NPO storytelling.

2.4.3 Narrative traits

Storytelling should in all cases be able to answer the fundamental questions of the story, the “who”, “what”, “when” and “where” through the core narration. The Dramatistic Pentad by Kenneth Burke helps categorize this structure by outlining the five main components of every story. First the Act (what), the Scene (when/ where), the Agent (who), Agency (how) and the Purpose (why). This framework helps to understand how narrations are made to give context, clarification, and reasoning for the reader (Communication Theory, 2024). After observing a number of narrative tools, the available body of literature transitions to additional fundamental elements of narrative analysis, such as characters and temporality. These elements help answer the fundamental questions of stories. The characteristics could be referred to purely as the narrative structure. The narrative structure can be defined as the sequence of events in the storyline with a three-part structure, *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*, with generally first the setup, then the confrontation, and then the resolution, while the characters are the central agents of this structure (Abbott, 2008). Characters don’t only represent actors but also embody ideological standpoints embedded in the story. In Goyes’ (2023) study on wildlife management narratives, there can be found clusters of stakeholder groups within the narrative, such as activists, civil servants, and governments. Each of these characters has a role in the story representing their moral standpoints, like moral or scientific. This is a reflection of greater purpose, as activists in the story become moral guardians of nature, and governments can be represented as bystanders unresponsive to emergency situations. These character typologies have been described by De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) who argued that characters

place themselves in a discourse to influence identity and social relations. Their placement offers the construction of characters and showcases the importance of analyzing their role to uncover values, roles, and responsibility within the story.

2.4.4 Discourse features

When leaning into the narrative, a reader needs to move past the simple sequencing of events, such as the beginning, middle, and end, and pay attention to the discourse features that also aid in shaping how the stories are told, understood, and to whom they are dedicated. Scholars have argued that features such as *voice* (the perspective), *audience targeting* (for whom the story is crafted for) and *location* (place and space mentioned) all help craft a detailed narrative frame. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015), stress that narrative analysis must account for the context of stories and that the narratives are shaped by the interaction between the writer and the reader. Examining how the writer places themselves and others within the story, how they use space and time, and how they adhere to the *audience* can help comprehend the story to a different depth. It is crucial to distinguish the story (events) from the narrative discourse (how the story is told) which highlights a complicated interconnection of the events, the way they are represented, and how the audience can be involved (Abbott, 2008). By looking at discourse features such as the *voice*, the *target audience* and *location* of the story, researchers can be more equipped to understand the underlying ramifications of storytelling.

3. Methodology

The current study employs a qualitative analysis approach to understand the storytelling strategies of marine conservation non-profit organizations (NPOs). Focusing on a narrative approach enables an in-depth investigation of patterns, themes, and structures found within the blog articles narration. Using purposive sampling of blogs from prominent NPOs. The research attempts to combine both a deductive and inductive approach to enable the comprehension of storytelling strategies. Through a systematic approach, the research attempts to observe how these organizations construct meaning and engage their audiences through their storytelling. The methodology ensures rigor and relevance to the field of marine biodiversity protection, storytelling, narrative analysis, and sustainability marketing.

3.1 Research Method and Sampling

The current research at hand employs a qualitative narrative analysis methodology, as it was deemed the best approach to analyze the narrative strategies of marine conservation NPOs. Qualitative methods are extremely effective when exploring complex, context-dependent cases such as storytelling. This approach enables a thorough comprehension of the underlying meaning patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A set number of articles will be used for the secondary data sample, ensuring a more comprehensive and integrated representation of the data for the study. This sampling strategy provides a targeted, rich data representation for the study and ensures the data is relevant (Palinkas et al., 2015).

A total of 50 articles were selected as secondary data with a minimum word count of 300 words per article, which ensures a complete dataset with sufficient depth and content to allow for a narrative analysis. The selection process of the NPO involved cross-referencing multiple reliable sources (Charity Charge, 2024; DipnDive, 2021; Miller, 2006; Wormald, 2023). This was done to identify the top 10 most successful or respected marine conservation NPOs which in the end include; *Oceana*, *Sea Sheperd Conservation Society*, *Coral Reef Alliance*, *Blue Marine Foundation*, *WWF*, *Ocean Conservancy*, *Oceanic Society*, *Reef Check*, *Innoceana*, *Mission Blue*. Precisely five blogs from each website's NPO were collected to gather a genuine sample of organization-generated content. A great amount of international NGOs or NPOs play a very important role in saving our oceans and each of these organizations contributes to oceans with special care and focus. *Oceana* has offices across Europe, North America, and South America and is one of the largest organizations of its kind dedicated solely to ocean conservation. This organization focuses on science-based policy to rebuilt marine ecosystems and put an end to overfishing (Oceana, 2025). *Sea Sheperd Conservation Society* has similar traits. It was founded in 1977 and uses direct action

campaigns to confront illegal fishermen and crimes affecting marine ecosystems across international and national waters (Sea Shepherd, 2025). The *Coral Reef Alliance* on the other hands takes a more science-community approach to the fight for marine conservation and works in regions such as Hawaii and Western Caribbean to specifically support coral reef resilience (Coral Reef Alliance, 2025). The *Blue Marine Foundation* which was founded in the UK, addresses specifically issues of overfishing and advocates for marine protected areas and more sustainable fishing solutions (BLUE, 2025). Another big player in the fight for the protection of marine ecosystems is the *World Wildlife Fund (WWF)* which operates in nearly 100 countries and integrates marine conservation into one of their primary missions to protect ecosystem sustainability (World Wildlife Fund, 2024). *Reef Check* Foundation is also a key player and operates in over 40 countries to empower citizens to keep track of coral reefs and kelp forests, which helps link local communities to monitor and fight for coral health (Reef Check, 2025). Similarly, *Ocean Conservancy*, with their headquarters in Washington, D.C, help with conducting science-based initiatives targeting the reduction of ocean plastic, developing better sustainable fishing strategies and other marine protection-related solutions (Ocean Conservancy, 2025). The *Oceanic Society*, another organization that is America's oldest marine conservation nonprofit, helps bridge scientific knowledge with ecotourism efforts and drives the public to help with conservation through actions and behavior changes (Oceanic Society, 2025). Other NPOs like *Innoceana* help protect marine ecosystems in Costa Rica, Spain and Southeast Asia and assist in combining research, awareness, and technology to engage coastal communities in leading marine conservation efforts (Innoceana, 2025). Finally, *Mission Blue* is another organization engaging in a similar drive to help marine life. It is led by oceanographer Sylvia Earle and advocates for ecologically important marine protected areas (Mission Blue, 2025). All of these NPOs help build an essential network of actors that contribute in their own way to the shared responsibility of protecting our oceans. The inclusion of globally recognized NPOs such as *WWF*, *Oceana* and *Ocean Conservancy* with regional focused organizations such as *Innoceana* and *Coral Reef Alliance* allows the analysis to capture a broad array of narrative strategies.

The 50 articles were collected on the 24th of March and all articles were published in a 2 week bracket. For some NPOs, like for instance, *Sea Shepherd*, a more selective method had to be done to retrieve blogs, as a significant amount of blogs were short articles about operational updates and new fleet additions. Some websites also merged their blogs with news releases, which made the selection more tedious.

3.2 Operationalization

The analyses of the narrative strategies used by marine conservation NPOs' storytelling need to be systematic. For this reason, the following study operationalizes

previously understood key narrative elements and places them within observable categories for the purpose of creating a clear codebook for the analysis.

Based on previous research on narrative analysis and wildlife and marine conservation storytelling academic literature, four overarching codes were operationalized. The first was *narrative types*, which were conceptualized as a broader storytelling category distinguished by the structure, how the events are sequenced, and the themes they convey (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Goyes, 2023; Laufer & Jones, 2021). The second overarching code was the *narrative structure*, which is defined as the way events are sequenced in the story following a progression from *beginning* to *middle* to *end* and this structure also embodies the agents of the story (Abbott, 2008). Thirdly, the *emotional arc* was coded and refers to the emotional trajectory of the storyline shaping audiences' engagement (Reagan et al., 2016). The fourth was the *discourse features*, which incorporate style and communication traits, guiding how the story is written, including *voice*, *audience*, and situating the story within a space or *location* (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Abbott, 2008). It is important to note that within each overarching code, specific subcategories were further defined, which will draw on emergent patterns from the data.

Narrative types were operationalized based on their structure and thematic characteristics and their literature origin. The following were placed in the codebook (see Appendix A) after proper operationalization; *moral narrative*, *scientific narrative*, *crisis narrative*, *participatory narrative*, *counter-narrative*, *personal narrative* and *legacy/success narrative* (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Goyes, 2023; Laufer & Jones, 2021). To allow for clarity of the concepts under study as well as analytical coherence, several modifications were done to the initial coding framework. The codes were evaluated based on their function and their overlapping factors with other codes as well as their overall relevance. Codes were reclassified, merged, or completely deleted as to provide a streamlined and in-depth codebook without repetition; The *hero-villain-victim narrative* type was removed from *narrative types* and placed under *narrative structure* as it provides a more precise categorization to specific characters in the story and answers the “who” question. The overarching code for narrative structure *villain*, *victim*, and *hero* had sub-codes incorporated based on previous literature on marine conservation. More precisely, within the *villain* category, distinct sub-codes were included, such as *overfishing*, *pollution*, *climate change*, and *corporations*, to identify the main threats to the ecosystem (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024). The “*victim*” code subcategories were also included, such as *communities*, *animals*, and *ecosystems*, to present the actors impacted by the threats (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024). Additionally the *hero* code was operationalized to include sub-codes for *NGOs*, *communities* and *animals* which reflect a long list of agents responsible for the protection of marine biodiversity (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024). These added codes are based on previous information on marine conservation “villains”, “heroes”, “victims” and the rest of the subcodes are expected to be found inductively. The

previous *narrative type*, *mythic and indigenous narrative*, was merged with *personal narrative* as both were correlated with identity-rooted and culturally embedded perspectives. It was also expected to be categorized later on within the *hero-victim narrative traits* under an *indigenous* character. Distinguishing indigenous *voice* will also be addressed within *discourse feature*. The *voice as power narrative type* was removed as a standalone code and repositioned within the *discourse features* elements, as it will be more reasonable to analyze them as narrative authority and speaker identity. The *historical continuity narrative type* was taken away due to its similarity to *Legacy/ Success Story narrative type* code, both emphasize time progression, past, present or future solutions and impacts. The *legacy/ success story narrative type* was refined with subcodes to capture solutions emphasized in the blogs such as *Marine Protected Areas, habitat restoration, policy making* and emerging approaches like *science-based management, tech and data innovation and community engagement* (Munir, 2024). The *visual storytelling type* was removed as the study does not engage in visual/ image analysis but rather a pure textual or narrative analysis. Additionally, the *civil society narrative type* was also absorbed to limit repetition into *personal testimony* and expected to be present in *voice*, or *hero-villain-victim structure* code. The *bystander character code* was added and serves as the characters who are seen as having no agency in the story even though they should be taking action.

The *value-driven narrative type* was also removed as it overlapped with the *moral narrative type*, as both centered around moral responsibility and ethics. Finally, the *Multivocal narrative type* was merged with *participatory storytelling*. The former code emphasized the use of multiple voices and the latter analyzed collaborative efforts of multiple actors both served a shared narrative goal, which was to construct collective engagement storytelling. Prioritizing *participatory storytelling* allows for a more concise approach to coding collective narration practices.

The following element of *narrative structure* was coded using the Dramatistic Pentad of Burke to identify who is acting (Communication Theory, 2024). As mentioned previously, the *narrative trait of hero-villain-victim* was operationalized in these characters to determine the agents present in the storyline. The literature also included what is happening or the story acts from the storyline (Abbott, 2008). They were coded as *BME* or *beginning, middle, and end*, part of a three-part structure. This code resembles the *emotional arc code*, which will be discussed later; however, this code solely provides the main temporal sequences within the narration (Appendix A).

The *emotional types* discussed by Reagan et al. (2016) will be coded using the six dominant archetypes. These archetypes are *rags to riches, tragedy, man in a hole, Icarus, Cinderella, and Oedipus*. The stories sequencing, inflection points, and emotional highs/lows will be meticulously observed to assign one of the following emotional arcs to each article. This will allow the research to observe how these strategies can mobilize audiences and create

emotional build-ups (see Appendix A).

The study operationalizes the key *discourse features*, firstly the *voice* or whose perspective or authority is spearheading the story and this can be either institutional, multiple, or first-person. However, these subcodes will be uncovered inductively while analyzing the articles. The code section of the key *discourse features* will also analyze the *audience* being targeted in the story, whether they are global citizens, expert citizens, or governmental or policy makers, which will also be uncovered inductively. Finally, another critical *discourse feature* answers the question “where?” is the *location code*, which can range from a global perspective to a storyline based solely in South Africa for instance. The mode of delivery, which is a key code found from existing theory, was taken away as all secondary data was in the form of blogs, as mentioned prior.

The present coding will follow a deductive approach that draws on the definition of the main overarching categories, originally found in academic literature and operationalized. The research will also rely on an inductive refinement if new subcategories are found within the articles' analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019). This operationalization ensures that the analysis of the 50 articles is done systematically and identically to assess *narrative traits*, *narrative structure*, *emotional arcs*, and *discourse features*. This analysis will enable the understanding of the overall strategies used in marine conservation NPOs as objectively as possible. Appendix A presents a table with the overarching code, its definition, its link to relevant academic literature, and a citation found within the article.

3.3 Data Analysis

The narrative analysis will use *Atlas.ti* to sort and analyze the 50 blogs and properly code their narrative content. Hwang (2007) indicates that *Atlas.ti* is a valuable tool for qualitative analysis as it supports systematic coding of patterns and thematic analysis.

The current study at hand combines mostly a deductive approach that coded main overarching narrative strategies as well as an inductive research approach that mostly identified sub-codes belonging to the main overarching codes. This approach was done to respect previous literature carrying similar methodologies but also to allow a grounded theory approach as to not avoid the possibility of discovering new codes within the analysis. Grounded theory, as mentioned by Glaser and Strauss (2017), was particularly relevant to the study as it allows for the researcher to generate theories based on real-world observation rather than fully using imposed pre-existing literature. However, the deductive coding framework was applied based on the pre-identified narrative strategies to employ a hybrid structure of analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is important to note that narratives don't need to be full, cohesive stories, as De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) mentioned; narratives can appear as brief, fragmented moments, and even single lines can be coded. Many narrative *techniques* and *traits* were collected prior to the research and helped develop

an initial codebook before the data analysis. As mentioned previously, the codebook presented in Appendix A draws on a synthesis of established narrative theories (Abbott, 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Herman, 2009), as well as applied narrative analysis in conservation research (Goyes, 2023; Campbell, 2002) and, more particularly, storytelling strategies in NPO's (Chen, 2012; Laufer & Jones, 2021). Theories from Reagan et al. (2016) and Lee et al. (2024) were also used to provide a more accurate content for the codebook (Appendix A).

The analysis of the blog article was done through a systematic and iterative process that was pursued until theoretical saturation was achieved, which meant that no more data collected could have yielded new themes or additional knowledge (Morse, 2015). The dataset is available upon request to obtain more detailed verification from external parties if needed.

3.4 Validity & Reliability

The study aims to ensure reliable and valid findings and to do so, many strategies were employed. The use of purposive sampling was effective due to the targeted selection of the data which increases the study's validity, reliability, and analytical flexibility (Palinkas et al., 2015). To increase the thoroughness of the narrative analysis, *Atlas.ti* was used, as it is a widely recognized tool that allows for the systematic coding of recognizable patterns to code and to interpret (Hwang, 2007). Established methodologies and literature were followed to minimize the subjectivity of the researcher in interpreting the data, which strengthens the credibility of the findings. A pre-test was conducted to confirm the original coding matrix derived from the literature, which will be applied to three sample blog texts from three NPO websites. This step ensured that the coding matrix was well-founded and adapted to the research, increasing overall validity. Using the first round of coding and the pre-test, a code cleaning process was done especially for the subcodes found within the article inductively. The codes were reviewed for redundancy, merged where they overlapped and even deleted or reclassified to increase clarity and coherence for the codebook. This process of gradually clarifying the codes was done to improve inter-reliability without having an additional researcher reviewing the data. Campbell et al. (2013) note that refining the coding book and merging unreliable or repetitive codes as well as clarifying definitions can have that very impact.

The consistency of the analysis is also key to maintaining intercoder reliability, assuring that any researchers employing the same method would obtain the same findings. The research also included strict secondary data criteria with a defined time frame and document length, which contributed to a more reliable study with a consistent and duplicable dataset. However, even with methodological rigor, purposive sampling can expose biases. For instance, if the data selection lacks diversity, the findings may not be reliable. To avoid this, the researchers carefully selected sources and ensured a balanced representation.

Employing the previous methods guarantees a high degree of reliability and validity to ensure that the findings are correct and replicable.

3.5 Ethics

In this study, ethical considerations were a priority. Since the study aimed at understanding publicly available blog content, there were no direct ethical concerns related to human subjects, which can be the case for interviews. The research maintains a commitment to represent with full accuracy and objectivity, the narratives and the intentions of the NPOs. Any misinterpretation or oversimplification was avoided. The goal is to understand the styles of narration and their reason for use, to enhance the effectiveness of environmental campaigns using storytelling as a tool for positive and sustainable change.

4. Results

The current results section will discuss how ten marine conservation NPOs use storytelling in fifty blogs. The section reviews the dominant storytelling strategies identified, the dominant narrative roles constructed within the storyline, as well as the main problems and solutions framed within the narrative. The section uncovers the main findings on the use of *emotional plot arcs* as well as the *narrative types*, *narrative traits*, *discourse features* for which the story is tailored. Every dominant code will be addressed per respective overarching code category. It will also present the codes that emerged inductively during the analysis, as most of the codes were operationalized deductively. Differences between various organizations and their use of storytelling strategies will also be observed, and explained within the context of the existing research. The results will be situated within the context of this study on the existing research on non-profit storytelling strategies, narrative framing and environmental marketing.

4.1 Main findings

After carrying out the research, the current findings of the dominant narrative from each overarching category are the following: The dominant *narrative type* was *legacy/success narrative* ($n = 235$), emphasizing stories of long-term impact and achievement. For *emotional arcs*, the prevalent pattern is the *man in the hole* ($n = 24$). In *discourse features*, the texts mainly use an *institutional voice* ($n = 47$), target an *expert public* ($n = 31$), and adopt a *global perspective* in terms of *location* ($n = 14$). Regarding *narrative traits*, *heroes* are often *NPOs* ($n = 88$) or *animals* ($n = 50$), *villains* are usually the *fishing industry* or illegal fishing practices ($n = 54$), *victims* are *animals* ($n = 82$), *bystanders* include *governments* ($n = 17$), and the dominant *structure* or *BME* follows a *problem-solution* format ($n = 22$).

4.1.1 Dominant storytelling type

The analysis of the fifty articles revealed a total of 90 codes and 974 citations all collected and analyzed using *Atlas.ti*. The dominant type pattern refers to the most frequently found pattern found within the text which sets the prevailing tone of the NPOs narrative. They are mutually respective from their category notably, one dominant type for the *emotional arc*, *the discourse feature*, *narrative type* and *narrative traits*.

The analysis of the blogs from the ten prominent ocean conservation organizations revealed that the use of the *code narrative type*, *legacy/success narrative* was the highest across all articles. It was found a total of 235 times and was followed by the *scientific narration type* with around 222 instances across all articles. These findings demonstrate a strong emphasis on empirical credibility and science and evidence base advocacy within their storytelling. The *moral narrative type* was also widely used, and was found 161 times and

helped highlight the ethical responsibility and stewardship of marine conservation environments. The *crisis narrative type* was found 153 times and was used to underscore a sense of urgency and threat which the ocean and its inhabitants currently faces. The *narrative type, participatory narrative*, which provided a motivation to the readers and communities to take action was observed 134 times. Lastly, the *narrative types of counter-narrative and personal narrative* were found each 86 times which allowed for an interpretation of a not prioritized but still present form of storytelling that challenges dominant views and promotes individual perspectives.

The Sankey Chart and the Case Quantity Chart can be seen Appendix B and C for further visualization of the narrative strategies found in the 50 articles. These charts help identify proportional quantities of codes according to the number of articles. It recognizes dominant and compares them to pathways of codes to understand code allocation directly to the articles (Riehmman et al., 2005). The identified dominant *narrative type* codes can be viewed in the following table presented with citations recovered from the articles analysis.

4.1 Table

Findings of Narrative Types in the blogs (most found to least found)

Narrative Type	Amount of code found (<i>n</i>)	Example
Legacy Success narration	235	“Faced with these alarming trends, Reef Check teamed up with local community members and commercial fishers to implement a restoration strategy of early intervention of targeted urchin removal.”(Subcodes Collaboration + Science Based) (Reef Check)
Scientific narration	222	“Seafood carries a significantly lower carbon footprint compared to dairy, meat, and even soy. This is due to the fact that seafood uses less space and freshwater resources than land-based foods. However, the specific fishing methods and practices used are key, as they greatly influence the overall environmental impact of seafood.” (Oceanic Society)
Moral narration	161	“People and the planet need them, and we must protect them and reframe their story.” (WWF)

Crisis narration	153	For nearly five decades, Sea Shepherd has gone where others won't, from the frigid waters of Antarctica to the remote islands of West Africa, from illegal shark finning operations to overfished marine reserves. We operate on the frontlines because the oceans can't wait for change—they need defenders now." (Sea Sheperds)
Participatory narration	134	"Although these species are not currently under threat, it's up to us to keep it that way. Learn more about these creatures on Oceana's Marine Life Encyclopedia, or by learning about how" (Oceana)
Counter narration	86	"Tourism, when implemented ethically and sustainably, can help communities derive revenue from nature without destroying it – a central principle of Oceanic Society's travel model." (Oceanic Society)
Personal narration	86	"In January, my colleague Rodrigo Beas Luna, a marine ecologist working in Baja California, Mexico, and I traveled to Chile to collaborate with OCEANA Chile" (Reef Check)

These results indicate that ocean conservation NPOs most commonly rely on storytelling strategies that showcase past successes (Laufer & Jones, 2021) and scientific credibility (Campbell, 2002; Goyes, 2023), while also invoking moral appeals (Goyes, 2023) and urgency (Laufer & Jones, 2021). The results show a strong use of *scientific narration* in NPO blogs, often through simplified data and clear ecological explanations. This supports Yea and Chou's (2019) finding that making science more relatable boosts public awareness and stakeholder engagement, suggesting that *scientific storytelling* helps bridge knowledge and action. In contrast, more individualized or oppositional *narrative types* play a relatively smaller but still important role in their blog communications (Chen, 2012; Campbell, 2002).

4.1.2 Dominant legacy/ success narration

Leaning more closely within the *legacy/ success narration type*, *collaboration* success was the most frequently subcoded solution ($n = 79$), reflecting a consistent emphasis on multi-actor engagement and the creation of partnerships in achieving positive marine conservation outcomes.

The use of *data and technological innovation* ($n = 62$) and *science-based solutions* ($n = 32$) were also commonly highlighted, demonstrating the centrality of empirical and technical approaches communicated in conservation achievements as well as a need for awareness to properly acts on the threats and data-driven solutions. Other frequently cited solutions included *sustainable fishing practices* ($n = 30$), the establishment of *marine protection zones (MPAs)* ($n = 28$), and *policy interventions* ($n = 26$), underscoring the importance of institutional and regulatory action. Notably, a sense of *optimism* ($n = 18$) was often embedded within these narratives, alongside references to *indigenous traditions* ($n = 9$), as well as calls for *enforcement* and *donations*, though the latter appeared less frequently than anticipated. The subcodes for the *narrative legacy/ success narratives* were found through deductive and inductive analysis and can be found in the following table along with their assigned citations uncovered within the articles.

Table 4.2

Findings of Legacy/ Success narrative type subcodes in the blogs (most found to least found)

Narrative SubCodes (overarching: Legacy/Success narrative)	Amount of code found (n)	Example
Collaboration	79	“WWF will continue collaborating with the WCPFC and other RFMOs to implement and strengthen these groundbreaking industry regulations that support the long-term well-being of tuna stocks and the communities they sustain” (WWF)
Data and Tech Innovation	62	“To this end, we were able to place satellite tags on ten scalloped hammerhead sharks and four pelagic thresher sharks, allowing us to track their movements.” (Mission Blue)
Science-based solutions	32	“This success story shows that early intervention can work, even if urchin populations aren’t reduced to the theoretical level of 2 per square meter, which has been cited in much of the

		restoration work as needed for the reversal of urchin barrens to kelp forests.” (Reef Check)
Sustainable Fishing Practices	30	“By supporting diverse catches, you encourage responsible fishing practices across the board. Think of it as diversifying your portfolio, but for the ocean.” (Oceanic Society)
Protection Zones (MPAs)	28	“To mitigate these threats, the Aliwal Shoal (MPA) was established in 1991 and later expanded in 2018. This MPA includes no-take zones and restricted areas to safeguard its rich ecosystems.” (Mission Blue)
Policy	26	“International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling internationally to protect several whale species, including humpbacks, from extinction.” (Oceanic Society)
Optimism	18	“But we can turn the tide by drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and allowing our oceans to do what they do best – sustain life.” (Oceana)
Indigenous Traditions	9	“The Tongan people, who have ancient cultural ties to the whales, had for centuries practiced subsistence whaling, where one whale would feed an entire community.” (Oceanic Society)
Donations	4	Bob Barker’s unwavering commitment to animal welfare has been instrumental in advancing Sea Shepherd’s mission. His generous support began in 2009 with a \$5 million donation that enabled the acquisition of our first vessel bearing his name. (Sea Shepherds)
Enforcing	4	“Our tactics are bold but always non-violent. Whether

		we are blocking harpoons from striking whales or cutting illegal fishing nets from the ocean, we act directly to defend marine life in ways that make a real impact.” (Sea Shepherds)
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These findings show that conservation stories that promote a *legacy/success narrative type* first promote a collaborative solution, followed by a science-driven and sustainable approach to the problem which is then followed by a policy and MPA approach. These findings do corroborate with the literature and mention the effectiveness and importance of science-based management strategies (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024). The findings also showcase the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships and that a good advocacy campaign requires community engagement (Munir, 2024; Campbell, 2002). There was also an inclusion of optimism and indigenous knowledge which proves a requirement for emotionally resonant and culturally grounded approach within storytelling strategies (Yea & Chou, 2019; Goyes, 2023). The lower frequency of donations as a solution, however, can be interpreted as a strategy to showcase tangible and proven impact instead of asking directly for fundraising action (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010).

4.1.3 Main characters from Narrative Traits

The identification of the main characters or agents, using the narrative analysis and the overarching deduced code *narrative structure* yielded interesting results and showcased the complex environment of narrative roles. First the main *villains* will be reported. The *industrial/illegal fishing villain* were unanimously the highest *villains* mentioned in the articles ($n = 54$). The next *villains* were the *companies/corporations* ($n = 27$), *climate change* ($n = 18$), *general human activity* ($n = 18$) and *government actors* ($n = 11$) which was often mentioned in the case of regulatory failure. *Plastics* were also considered a threat to marine ecosystems ($n = 5$) as reflected by the literature. On the contrary the primary *victims* were *animals* ($n = 82$), followed by *ecosystems* ($n = 35$) and *communities* ($n = 27$) who also were reported as suffering from environmental harm from the *villains*. *Fishermen* ($n = 12$) and *indigenous groups* ($n = 2$) were also depicted as *victims* to a lesser extent but this still showcased the broader consequences of marine environmental harm. *Bystanders* were also taken into consideration within the *narrative structure* code and were less frequent but showcased *government bystanders* ($n = 17$) and *public bystanders* ($n = 8$) showcasing their inaction faced with environmental harm and threats. The *narrative structure* code also presented the role of the *hero* and it was mostly mentioned as *NPOs* ($n = 88$) which underscored their self-entitlement in their cause as well as the ones from other NPOs that collaborated with them, *animals* ($n = 50$) also played a key role as *heroes* within the ecosystem as regulators of biodiversity. *Experts*

($n = 36$) and *communities* ($n = 26$), *governments* ($n = 13$), *indigenous groups* ($n = 9$), and *small-scale fishermen* ($n = 8$) were also represented as active *heroes* in the fight against the main *villains* and towards marine biodiversity recovery.

The results on the main characters from the *narrative structure* corroborate with existing literature which state that conservation storytelling often mentions extractive industries and economic actors as the principle threat or *villain* within the conservation narrative (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024). It is important to note that the *plastic villain code* can also be interrelated with *companies*, and this could explain why it was found a very few times. *Animals* and *ecosystems* on the other hand are always the primary *victims* which creates empathy and urgency for the readers (Lotze, 2021; Coral Reef Alliance, 2025). The depiction of *NPOs* as *heroes* does align with the academic literature which states that this particular use legitimizes organizations seeking authority and leadership in protecting marine life (Laufer & Jones, 2021; Campbell, 2002). The inclusion of communities, indigenous people, small scale fishermen does showcase a growing narrative that stresses inclusivity and collaboration across all marine actors (Munir, 2024; Goyes, 2023). The mention of the government and the public as *bystanders* and *villains* at a low frequency suggests a nuanced narrative strategy demonstrating that marine conservation relies on policy and public support but is also harmed by them. However, their presence as *villains* isn't frequent enough that it doesn't directly criticize and blame them consistently during the whole article. This showcases a possible desire to mobilize and lightly criticize rather than alienate the broad audience and government bodies completely (Smith & Pekkanen, 2012; Bennett, 2016).

4.1.4 Dominant emotional and structural arcs

Research by Reagan et al. (2016) helped us identify the main emotional arcs from a story. Through the analysis of these emotional arcs in the blog narratives, the following research observed a clear predominance of the *man in hole arc* ($n = 24$), characterized by stories in which an initial situation is positive, becomes a problem or a setback and is ultimately followed by recovery or hope. The *tragedy arc* ($n = 10$), depicting stories of steady decline or irreversible loss, was the next most common *arc*, followed by more complex or uplifting structures such as *Cinderella and rags to riches* ($n = 6$) and *Oedipus* ($n = 3$). There was only one occurrence where no actual emotional arc could be coded within an article.

The current findings concur with the narrative theory that explained that stories using adversity and an eventual recovery like the *man in the hole emotional arc* are effective in creating engagement and possible hope among the audiences (Reagan et al., 2016; Sanghyub John Lee et al., 2024). The presence of *tragedy* and other *emotional arcs* highlight the need for the *NPOs* to also take an urgency angle in their storytelling and balance it with optimism (Laufer & Jones, 2021; Coral Reef Alliance, 2025). The partial lack of tragic or

cyclical *emotional arcs* within these blogs does support the reasoning that NPOs intentionally use narrative strategies to foster hope, efficacy and positive psychological benefits to the audience instead of pushing a tragic and negative storyline. This resonates with the research by Bekkers and Wiepking's (2011) which stated that inspiring action and highlighting the efficiency of donations had more impact than pushing despair and tragic narratives. The reduction of tragic or crisis narrative can be partially due to the fact that repeated negative framing leads to compassion fatigue and therefore donor fatigue which causes people to withdraw from the cause rather than take action (Patel & Weberling McKeever, 2014). This lack of narrative despair can also be attributed to the current feeling of compassion fatigue from other sources of despair in the world such as humanitarian crisis, land wildlife and endangered species poaching, war, genocide so it is possible that the public's mind requires more positive reinforcement.

4.1.5 Narrative Traits: Beginning, Middle, and End

The *narrative structure of BME (beginning, middle, end)* attempts to understand the overall architecture and evolution of the story, almost in accordance with the *emotional arc structure*. The analysis of this structure allowed for the following findings to be observed; The *problem-solution BME* was the most prevalent *BME structure* subcode, which was found 22 times inductively. In this substructure of the *BME*, a problem is introduced, the impact explored, and a clear solution is presented, concluding the article and offering a clear motivation and installment of hope for the reader. The *awareness-threat-action* and the *temporal/transformation arc* were both found 9 times. This former code is defined as a story that starts with raising awareness and disseminating information, which is then followed by a threat to this information, culminating in a call for advocacy or action. The latter code traces a temporal journey over time, moving from a past that is positive and pristine, followed by present challenges that impacted the pristine past state, the story then follows a hopeful and optimistic future. A less common code was the *process/ action narrative (n = 4)*, which encompassed the actual steps and fieldwork done by the individuals or NPOs. Finally, there were *non-progressive or unresolved narratives (n = 6)* found within the articles, which were found in blogs with a static, unstructured structure, or intentionally left open-ended.

The current results showcase that marine conservation blogs generally employ action-oriented structures that carry the reader through the storyline, from the recognition of a problem to a found solution. This current structure reflects the best narrative practice to carry out for increased engagement and mobilization (Reagan et al., 2016; Yea & Chou, 2019). This structure being the most common also help concur with the findings of the *emotional arcs of man in the hole* that also have common resemblances which increases reliability of this research. The presence of these temporal arcs helps the audience contextualize this change,

inspiring them to commit to the cause through the depiction of a temporal journey (Lotze, 2021; Campbell, 2002). The fact that static or unresolved/ unstructured narratives were less frequent could suggest that NPOs prefer clear and purposeful arcs to maximize the impact on their audience (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010).

4.1.6 Dominant discourse features

The examination of the blogs' *discourse features* revealed a diversity of approaches in targeting and framing conservation narratives. The most commonly addressed *audience* was the *expert public* ($n = 31$), indicating frequent use of technical or specialized language designed to engage informed stakeholders and those with scientific or policy expertise. This was followed by messages directed at *global citizens* ($n = 24$), aiming to foster a sense of universal responsibility and collective action, and at *voters, policymakers, or government officials* ($n = 15$), reflecting advocacy efforts tailored to decision-makers and institutional actors. In terms of *narrative voice*, the *institutional perspective* dominated ($n = 47$), positioning the organization as the authoritative narrator, while *first-person* accounts ($n = 19$) and *multiple voices* ($n = 9$) provided more *personal storytelling*. Regarding *location*, a *global context* was most common ($n = 14$), followed by more localized narratives centered in places such as *South Africa* and *California* ($n = 5$ each), with individual mentions of other specific sites, often reflecting the operational focus or home base of certain NPOs. Analysis of code co-occurrence reveals distinct patterns in how *narrative voice* is matched to *audience type* in marine conservation blogs. When addressing *expert audiences*, NPOs were more likely to use a *general institutional voice* ($n = 25$) but also combined this with a *first-person* perspective in a substantial number of cases ($n = 10$). This suggests that, as observed in the literature, even technical or specialist communication often benefits from blending institutional authority with a degree of personal engagement to increase credibility and relatability (Kyalo, 2024; Denning, 2006). The frequent overlap between *first-person voice* and *personal narrative* ($n = 7$) highlights the power of storytelling grounded in individual experience for building authenticity and emotional resonance, particularly with broader audiences (Chen, 2012; Yea & Chou, 2019). By contrast, first-person narration was rarely employed when the intended *audience* consisted of *governments or voters*, indicating a preference for a formal, collective *institutional voice* when seeking to influence policy or mobilize civic action, which was an approach recommended for organizational legitimacy and advocacy impact (Denning, 2006; Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). These patterns reinforce the idea that NPOs strategically tailor their narrative style, voice, and perspective according to both the target *audience* and their broader communication objectives.

These findings suggest that marine conservation blogs strategically adjust their *narrative voice* and *audience* targeting to maximize credibility, reach, and policy impact, practices widely recommended in environmental communication literature (Kyalo, 2024; Seelig

et al., 2018; Denning, 2006). The predominance of *institutional voice* aligns with research indicating that organizational authority enhances trust (Kyalo, 2024), while the use of *first-person* and *multi-voiced storytelling* is associated with greater emotional resonance, wider reach, and perceived authenticity (Chen, 2012; Yea & Chou, 2019). Geographical localization of stories serves to contextualize conservation issues and make global challenges relatable, as noted in studies on narrative framing and *audience* engagement (Mager, 2021; Peek et al., 2015).

4.2 NPO Comparison

It is important to note that the comparative analysis of narrative strategies between NPOs in this study is exploratory rather than a primary research objective, as such, these comparisons should be interpreted with caution and investigated further in future research. These findings are consistent with the calls in the literature for more systematic, organization-level studies in non-profit communication (Denning, 2006; Chen, 2012; Kyalo, 2024). Given the limited sample and scope, this section of the research does not guarantee definitive findings regarding inter-organizational differences.

4.2.1 Dominant narration usage compared

A comparative analysis of the ten sampled NPOs revealed notable differences in their preferred storytelling strategies. *Blue Marine* emphasized *crisis narratives* ($n = 40$), reflecting a focus on urgency and mobilization, an approach often highlighted as effective for prompting action (Laufer & Jones, 2021). *Coral Reef Alliance* relied most on *scientific narration* ($n = 42$), consistent with literature noting that evidence-based storytelling builds credibility and authority (Campbell, 2002; Goyes, 2023). *Innoceana* and *Mission Blue* both favored *legacy/success narratives* ($n = 29$ each), aligning with research suggesting that showcasing positive outcomes can inspire optimism and trust from stakeholders (Laufer & Jones, 2021). Similarly, *Ocean Conservancy*, *Oceanic Society*, *Reef Check*, *Sea Shepherds*, and *WWF* predominantly used *legacy narratives*, while also incorporating scientific or moral appeals, reflecting a blend of solution-oriented and ethical storytelling (Goyes, 2023). *Oceana* stood out for its *scientific* ($n = 22$) and *crisis* ($n = 17$) *narratives*, emphasizing the integration of empirical evidence and urgency in advocacy efforts (Campbell, 2002).

These differences suggest that while most organizations prioritize *legacy* and *scientific storytelling* to demonstrate impact and build trust (Laufer & Jones, 2021; Campbell, 2002), others such as *Blue Marine*, strategically use *crisis narratives* to generate urgency and engagement (Laufer & Jones, 2021). This reflects broader trends in conservation communication, where narrative selection is tailored to organizational mission, target audience, and desired outcomes (Goyes, 2023; Denning, 2006).

4.2.2 Dominant Characters

Across the ten NPOs analyzed, distinct character patterns emerged in narrative construction. *Blue Marine*, *Mission Blue*, *Ocean Conservancy*, *Oceanic Society*, *Reef Check*, *Sea Shepherd*s, and *WWF* most frequently portrayed NPOs themselves as *heroes*, reflecting the self-positioning and legitimacy-building identified in previous research (Laufer & Jones, 2021; Campbell, 2002). In contrast, *Coral Reef Alliance*, *Innoceana*, and *Oceana* often depicted animals as *heroes*, emphasizing the agency and inspirational power of charismatic species (Lotze, 2021). *Villain* roles were most commonly assigned to industrial fishing and related activities, particularly in *Blue Marine*, *Mission Blue*, *Oceanic Society*, *Reef Check*, *Sea Shepherd*s, and *WWF*, echoing findings that extractive industries are frequently framed as primary threats (Chatterjee, 2017; Munir, 2024). Other NPOs such as *Coral Reef Alliance* and *Innoceana* both varied in their portrayal of villains based on the specific challenges highlighted in their campaigns. *Animals* consistently emerged as the dominant *victims* across nearly all NPOs, underscoring their narrative role as symbols of vulnerability and drivers of empathy (Lotze, 2021; Coral Reef Alliance, 2025). *WWF* also frequently referenced communities and ecosystems as *victims*, signaling a broader scope of harm.

These findings reinforce the literature indicating that marine conservation narratives strategically employ *hero*, *villain*, and *victim* roles to frame responsibility, highlight threats, and foster audience identification. These practices are generally linked to increased engagement and support (Chatterjee, 2017; Laufer & Jones, 2021; Lotze, 2021). The dominance of NPOs as *heroes* and fishing as *villains* demonstrates alignment with established communication strategies in the conservation sector (Campbell, 2002; Munir, 2024).

4.2.3 Dominant emotional arc used by particular NPO

The analysis of emotional arcs across NPOs revealed several patterns. The "*man in hole*" arc characterized by initial adversity followed by recovery, was the most prevalent, serving as the dominant or joint-dominant arc for *Coral Reef Alliance*, *Innoceana*, *Ocean Conservancy*, *Oceana*, *Reef Check*, *Sea Shepherd*s, and *WWF*. This arc is recognized in the literature as particularly effective for fostering hope and motivating engagement (Reagan et al., 2016; Sanghyub John Lee et al., 2024). *Blue Marine* and *Oceana* also used the *tragedy arc*, focusing on loss and irreversible decline to convey urgency, a strategy known to heighten the perceived importance of conservation issues (Laufer & Jones, 2021). Some organizations, such as *Mission Blue* and *WWF*, incorporated *Cinderella* or *rags to riches arcs*, highlighting stories of transformation, resilience, and optimism (Lotze, 2021). *Oceanic Society* primarily employed the *rags to riches arc*, aligning with literature that shows the motivational impact of narratives centered on recovery and success (Coral Reef Alliance, 2025).

These findings are consistent with narrative theory and conservation communication

research, The theories suggest that blending arcs of adversity and recovery or transformation enhances both emotional resonance and audience mobilization (Reagan et al., 2016; Laufer & Jones, 2021; Lotze, 2021).

4.2.4 Best solutions according to individual NPOs

The analysis showed distinct preferences in the *legacy/success narrative type* emphasized by different NPOs. *Blue Marine* prioritized *policy* interventions ($n = 9$), while *Coral Reef Alliance* and *Innoceana* foregrounded *science-based* solutions ($n = 9$ and $n = 6$, respectively), echoing the importance of evidence-driven approaches in conservation (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024). *Mission Blue*, *Ocean Conservancy*, and *Reef Check* most frequently highlighted *collaboration* ($n = 12$, $n = 11$, $n = 13$), aligning with research that underscores the value of partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement (Mager, 2021; Campbell, 2002). *Oceana* and *WWF* emphasized a combination of *data/technology* and *policy* (*Oceana* $n = 4$; *WWF* $n = 9$), while *Oceanic Society* led in the total number of solutions presented ($n = 48$), with *sustainable fishing* ($n = 14$) as the most common. *Sea Shepherds* stood out for their focus on *enforcement*, along with the use of data, technology, and collaboration ($n = 8$).

These results reflect broader trends identified in the literature, with NPOs promoting a range of solutions from science-based management and technological innovation (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024) to collaboration and policy action (Mager, 2021; Campbell, 2002), in order to address the multifaceted challenges facing marine conservation.

4.2.5 Audience Catering between NPOs

The analysis revealed variation in the primary target *audiences* across the NPOs' blog narratives. *Blue Marine* most often addressed policymakers, voters, and government actors ($n = 4$), highlighting an advocacy strategy focused on institutional change (Denning, 2006; Kyalo, 2024). *Coral Reef Alliance*, *Oceana*, and *Ocean Conservancy* frequently targeted global citizens ($n = 6$, $n = 3$, $n = 3$), aiming to inspire broad public engagement and collective responsibility (Seelig et al., 2018; Mager, 2021). In contrast, *Innoceana*, *Mission Blue*, *Oceanic Society*, *Reef Check*, *Sea Shepherds*, *WWF*, and also *Ocean Conservancy* most often directed their communication toward the expert public (ranging from $n = 3$ to $n = 5$), using technical language and emphasizing scientific authority to engage informed stakeholders (Campbell, 2002; Chen, 2012).

These patterns align with the literature on environmental communication, which stresses the importance of tailoring narrative strategies to both specialist and general audiences for molding to their own "brand" creating greater credibility, reach, and policy impact (Almog-Bar and Schmid, 2013; Denning, 2006; Kyalo, 2024; Seelig et al., 2018). Future

research can investigate the main financing methods of these NPOs and see if they correlate with their audience targeting.

5. Discussion

5.1 Dominant narrative strategies

The prevalence of the *legacy/success storytelling type* in the analyzed blogs suggests that marine conservation NPOs are intentionally highlighting their achievements to demonstrate efficacy. By showcasing successful outcomes, these organizations not only present themselves as effective agents of change, but also appeal to potential donors' desire to see tangible results from their contributions. This strategy resonates with the findings of Bekkers and Wiepking (2010), who identified perceived efficacy as a crucial factor motivating charitable giving; donors are more likely to give when they believe their support leads to concrete impact. Additionally, Denning (2006) found that storytelling plays a critical role in shaping an NPO's brand and identity by communicating core values and highlighting organizational accomplishments. Thus, the use of *legacy/success narratives* in blogs serves both to reinforce organizational legitimacy and to inspire confidence among supporters. Ultimately strengthening the NPO's ability to mobilize resources and advocate for marine conservation. The recurrent presence of the *crisis narration type* and *villain-victim* narrative traits also help confirm that NPOs provide an explanation of the essential problem within the marine ecosystem. This coincides with the findings by Bekkers and Wiepking (2010) that states that readers are more likely to contribute to a cause if they recognize that there is an issue in the first place. This "*awareness of need*" is reflected through the heavy usage of urgency narration with the *crisis narrative type* and the main *villains* identified creating harm to the *victims* of the main storyline. This allows the public to identify what the main problem is and who is affected.

The predominance of *scientific narration* as a storytelling type across the analyzed marine conservation blogs plays a crucial role in translating complex environmental issues and their real-world consequences to a broad public audience. This focus on empirical credibility is not only reflected in the narrative itself but also in the solutions most frequently highlighted by leading NPOs such as the increasing use of technological and data-driven innovations like environmental DNA, satellite monitoring, and AI-driven species tracking. As identified in recent academic research, these advancements are rapidly expanding the capacity to monitor marine ecosystems and to implement adaptive, climate-smart management strategies (Lotze, 2021; Munir, 2024). However, as both Lotze (2021) and Chatterjee (2017) emphasize, a significant knowledge gap persists, particularly regarding cumulative impacts and the long-term resilience of both marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. This gap points to a critical challenge. While *scientific narration* and technological innovation are essential for progress, they must be coupled with broader efforts to communicate the interconnected nature of marine threats and to foster a deeper, more holistic understanding among all stakeholders.

As Eke and Bufumoh (2025) have found, the strategic use of *scientific narrative*, especially when it evokes curiosity and wonder, serves as a powerful hook that can draw diverse audiences into environmental engagement. Bridging the existing knowledge gap is thus vital not only for effective conservation outcomes, but also to ensure the lasting resilience of ocean-dependent communities.

While *moral storytelling* was the third most common narrative frame in the analyzed blogs, its use was not limited to activists and indigenous communities. Instead, the appeal to moral responsibility and ethical stewardship was a prominent technique across a variety of marine conservation NPOs. Using the *moral narration* type aims to foster a deeper, values-based connection between humans and nature, resonating with Goyes (2023), who noted that such strategies are often favored by activists and indigenous groups, but the findings here suggest that mainstream NPOs have also widely adopted *moral narrative type* to strengthen public engagement and legitimize their conservation goals. The use of moral narratives speaks directly to the main culprits.

The frequent use of *participatory narratives*, together with the emphasis on *collaboration* as a core solution in marine conservation blogs, reflects an important shift toward more inclusive and community-centered communication strategies. By actively inviting community members to contribute their voices and experiences, these organizations foster a sense of ownership and shared purpose around conservation initiatives. This *participatory* approach is not only effective for building local credibility and authenticity, but also for empowering stakeholders to become active co-authors of the narrative and, by extension, the movement itself. As Chen (2012) has shown, campaigns that embrace *participatory storytelling* are better able to establish trust and engage diverse audiences, ultimately making their messages more impactful and resilient. The findings of this study therefore underscore the value of collaboration as a narrative strategy that enhances the legitimacy and reach of marine conservation efforts.

Although *counter-narration* was less frequent than other dominant *narrative type* code, its notable presence ($n = 86$) highlights the strategic use of alternative storytelling by marine conservation NPOs. As Campbell (2002) illustrates, conservation experts often employ *counter-narrative narrative type*, particularly in the context of eco-tourism, to challenge inefficient or exclusionary conservation models and to advocate for more community-based, participatory solutions. In this study, the use of *counter-narration* supports the notion that NPOs actively work to contest dominant narratives, offering alternative perspectives that emphasize sustainability, equity, and local engagement. "Tourism, when implemented ethically and sustainably, can help communities derive revenue from nature without destroying it – a central principle of *Oceanic Society's* travel model." (Oceanic Society Blog). As previously mentioned, the *counter-narrative type* is often used to challenge dominant beliefs and promote community-based solutions to conservation (Campbell, 2002). In this analysis, co-occurrence coding

revealed that blogs employing *counter-narratives* also referenced community-based (legacy) solutions in 17 instances, further supporting the notion that *counter-narration* and local engagement are frequently linked within NPO storytelling practices (Campbell, 2002).

5.2 Codes found less frequently

Personal narratives were among the least frequently observed codes in the blog sample for *narrative type*. One possible reason for their limited use is that, although personal stories can be effective in motivating donations, their effectiveness is deprioritized when selecting other narrative styles that can also create emotional responses. This is the case for *moral narrative*. One code which was rarely found within the text and was associated with the overarching code *legacy/ success code* was the *donation* code. This was a surprise as most of the NPOs rely on donations to survive and this meant that they don't make it explicit in the text. The explicit donation requests were typically placed outside the narrative, often as clickable links rather than integrated into the main text. This suggests that NGOs may favor less direct fundraising tactics within storytelling, perhaps to maintain narrative flow or avoid donor fatigue. Interestingly, the code for *collaboration* which was commonly found as a solution may indicate an indirect strategy to drive donations and shape it as a means to collaborate. By emphasizing collective action and community success within their stories, NGOs can foster a sense of shared responsibility and efficacy, which may encourage readers to support the cause financially even if the direct mention for donations is not present in the narrative itself.

The relatively low frequency of indigenous themes in the analyzed blogs may be attributed to the scientific and policy-focused nature of most articles. While indigenous cultures have deep and longstanding connections to marine ecosystems, such perspectives may be underrepresented due to editorial choices or an emphasis on technical solutions over cultural narratives.

Plastics were barely mentioned as a primary villain in the narratives, possibly because this issue is often subsumed under broader critiques of companies and corporate practices. As a result, references to plastic pollution are more likely to appear within the context of corporate responsibility, rather than as a standalone narrative thread.

5.3 Other observations

A closer look at the narrative strategies used by *Blue Marine Foundation* and *Mission Blue* reveals a pattern of villainizing governmental or institutional actors, which often positions government either as a *villain* or *bystander*, while celebrating policy successes and structural change through *legacy storytelling* (with $n = 27$ and $n = 25$ mentions, respectively). Notably, these organizations rarely foreground their own internal needs or resource

constraints in their storytelling. This strategic narration suggests an acute awareness of the greater persuasive power found in advocating for systemic transformation rather than seeking support for internal operations. As Hasenfeld and Garrow (2012) have shown, advocacy campaigns that center on structural change, such as policy reform and institutional accountability, are up to eleven times more effective than those that primarily emphasize organizational needs. This *policy* solution was found 26 times along with the MPAs solution which was found 28 times and also can be seen as a policy to protect marine life. In this context, the deliberate emphasis on overcoming institutional inertia and delivering policy change not only enhances the public's perception of efficacy and impact but also aligns the organization with broader societal goals, thereby strengthening both legitimacy and engagement.

Most of the blogs analyzed were concise and to the point. This is a structural choice that appears well-suited to the communication environment of social media, where attention spans are limited. The frequent presence of *optimism* within *legacy narratives* as well as the lack of tragic endings investigated in the *emotional arc* codes further echoes Denning's (2006) concept of the "springboard story," defined as a brief, hopeful narrative intended to spark action or inspire change. Denning (2006) observed that such springboard stories became increasingly common with the rise of digital media, reflecting the need for impactful storytelling within restricted formats. This trend is further supported by Supriya (2017), who noted an uptick in springboard storytelling as organizations adapted to the demands of online platforms and audience preferences for brevity. Thus, the short and optimistic blog format observed in this study is not only relevant, but also aligns with best practices in contemporary nonprofit communication and can also be seen as the cheapest option (Howlett et al., 2023).

The prevalence of emotionally charged narratives, particularly those centering on *victims*, *personal narration*, *crisis narration*, or explicit *emotional arcs*, coincides with research highlighting the importance of emotional pacing in reader engagement. As Reagan et al. (2016) note, the emotional sentiment of a narrative is drawn out across the story to maintain audience involvement. This is especially relevant in the context of NGO and NPO storytelling, where emotionally resonant content has been shown to be a significant driver of donor behavior; as a substantial proportion of donations are triggered by emotional appeals (Sanghyub John Lee et al., 2024). Supporting this, the present analysis identified 17 instances of co-occurrence between *crisis narration* and *personal narration* codes, underscoring the strategic use of affective urgency and personal storytelling to inspire empathy, reactivity and mobilize support for marine conservation causes.

Another important point of reflection investigates how marine conservation narratives may differ from those employed by other types of non-profit organizations, such as those focused on humanitarian aid. While this study highlights the prominence of scientific and legacy-based storytelling in marine conservation blogs, it is plausible that humanitarian-

focused NPOs may prioritize different narrative elements. For instance, where marine narratives often rely on ecological data and scientific authority, humanitarian organizations may instead draw on anthropological, sociological, or historical frameworks. All of this to contextualize their interventions. The focus on human subjects in humanitarian storytelling may also result in a more frequent use of crisis or urgency narratives, reflecting the immediacy and gravity of human suffering as opposed to ecosystem-level degradation. This distinction suggests a potential boundary to the generalizability of the findings presented here. While the narrative strategies observed in marine conservation NPOs are tailored to their specific subject matter which is, non-human life, ecosystems, and biodiversity, they may not translate seamlessly to domains where human vulnerability is foregrounded. Future research would benefit from a comparative analysis that examines how storytelling strategies vary across different sectors, such as marine conservation, terrestrial wildlife protection, and humanitarian relief. Such a comparative approach could offer valuable insights into how narrative choices are shaped not only by organizational goals and audiences but also by the moral, cultural, and natural status of the subjects being represented within the stories.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Implications

As stated in the introduction, this study contributes to the academic literature on digital advocacy, nonprofit marketing, and storytelling strategy within the context of environmental communication and sustainable business. It specifically addresses the underexplored use of strategic narrative by marine conservation NPOs, focusing on blog-based content. The study's primary aim is to identify dominant storytelling patterns, such as narrative types, emotional arcs, and the characterization of heroes, villains, and victims. By operationalizing these components through a systematic narrative analysis, the research builds on and extends narrative theory into the realm of digital environmental advocacy. The analysis further demonstrates how narratives are constructed to shape meaning, invoke moral responsibility, and communicate urgency. In doing so, the research provides a structured framework that can be used in future academic inquiries focused on digital storytelling, conservation rhetoric, or nonprofit communication strategies. Although audience perception was not a primary focus, the findings also set the groundwork for future studies that may examine reception, emotional response, or behavioral outcomes linked to narrative types.

From a societal standpoint, this study offers practical insights for marine conservation organizations seeking to increase the effectiveness of their public communication efforts. As the ocean faces accelerating threats such as climate change, overfishing, and pollution, NPOs must mobilize awareness and support through impactful storytelling. This thesis identifies the most frequently used narrative strategies and emotional arcs, particularly the use of success-based and science-driven storytelling, which can be leveraged to craft persuasive, optimistic messages that appeal to both public and expert audiences. Additionally, the research highlights the primary *villains* (e.g., industrial fishing, corporations), *victims* (e.g., animals, ecosystems, coastal communities), and *heroes* (e.g., NPOs, communities, scientists) used in advocacy messaging. This allows organizations to reflect critically on their narrative practices and consider whether they are reinforcing inclusive, empowering, and solution-oriented narratives. It also raises awareness for the public and allow them to gain the knowledge needed to fight for marine conservation.

It is also vital to carry out this research because effective narratives can inspire societal adaptation and encourage communities to prepare for climate impacts by knowing the main threats and solutions. It can also drive mitigation by promoting actions and solutions that actually can decrease the harm made to marine ecosystems.

The findings also touch on issues of representation and inclusivity, revealing to what

extent marginalized voices, such as indigenous groups and small-scale fishers, are acknowledged in conservation discourse. While the study did not explore audience reception in depth, it emphasizes the importance of aligning narrative choices with the values and perspectives of those most affected by marine degradation.

Ultimately, this research may serve as a marketing guide for marine NPOs aiming to raise awareness, foster emotional engagement, and secure sustained public and donor support for conservation initiatives based on what has been written by successful marine conservation NPOs.

6.2 Limitations

This study holds valuable insights in the field of storytelling strategies in ocean conservation, however it is crucial to note that it also holds limitations that need to be addressed. By looking at the sample size of 50 articles and 10 marine conservation organizations, we can determine that additional add-ons to the sample would have helped represent a more diverse NPO landscape on marine conservation. It is always relevant to note that a higher sample yields more accurate results (Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, only English blogs were included which potentially excludes culturally specific narrative forms and storytelling practices. This means that it is important to acknowledge a possible bias linked to a Western approach due to the researchers language limitation to English and French (Yilmaz & Cigerci, 2019). Even though this was the purpose of the research, the limitation of blogs as the main secondary data narrows the scale of storytelling strategies which does allow space for future research to also include different mediums of storytelling for ocean conservation (Mager, 2021; Seelig et al., 2018). Another key limitation that is important to point out is the inherent subjectivity of qualitative coding and interpretation. The methodology presented a deductive an inductive approach and while having a systematic coding procedure as well as a pre-test of the codebook, all of this to increase reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). However, even with this in mind, the research was carried out by a single researcher which may introduce bias and limited inter-coder reliability. A last limitation that this research addresses is the research strictly analyses narrative strategies and their use but does not investigate the reaction or interpretation of the audience on their engagement and donations. T simply bases this knowledge of audience engagement using previous academic research. This leaves some space or future research to evaluate consumer perception of these narrative strategies and can help draw a conclusion on the effectiveness of these storytelling strategies on audience engagement (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010).

6.3 Future Research

While this study provides a focused examination of storytelling strategies used by marine conservation NPOs in their blog communications, it also opens several avenues for future research.

First, a key area for further investigation involves examining the impact of narrative strategies on audience engagement and donor behavior. While this study identifies the dominant types of narratives used by marine conservation organizations, it does not assess their effectiveness in mobilizing support or triggering concrete actions such as donations, volunteering, or policy advocacy. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis with survey data, behavioral experiments or interviews, to evaluate how different narrative forms influence perception, emotional response, and pro-environmental behavior among various audience segments.

Second, future studies could conduct comparative analyses across different types of NPOs. The findings presented here are specific to ocean conservation, a domain characterized by ecological focus, scientific framing, and human impact. In contrast, humanitarian aid organizations which deal directly with human suffering and social injustice, may rely more heavily on crisis or moral narratives and anthropological or historical narrative. Similarly, terrestrial wildlife conservation efforts may foreground charismatic megafauna or landscape preservation, resulting in different narrative constructions and emotional arcs. Comparative research across these sectors could offer valuable insights into how narrative strategies vary according to the subject of protection (human vs. non-human), the urgency of need, and the visibility of the issue.

Third, an important methodological extension would be to analyze narratives across different communication platforms. This study has focused solely on blog content due to its depth, structure, and accessibility for analysis. However, marine conservation organizations increasingly use a variety of platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and video-based content including documentaries and YouTube, to disseminate their messages. Future research could examine how narrative elements are adapted across these media, particularly comparing long-form narratives (blogs, documentaries) with short-form and visually driven storytelling (social media posts, reels). Such research could explore how platform affordances shape narrative structure, voice, and emotional appeal, and how these differences impact reach and engagement.

Together, these new research could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of environmental communication and nonprofit storytelling and marketing, while also offering practical guidance for organizations seeking to refine their advocacy strategies across audiences and platforms.

6.4 Final Conclusion

The analysis of the blogs from the ten prominent ocean conservation organizations revealed that the *legacy/success narrative type* was the most frequently employed, with this code appearing a total of 235 times across all articles. For *emotional arcs*, the most prevalent code was the *man in the hole* ($n = 24$). In *discourse features*, the texts mainly use an *institutional voice* ($n = 47$), target an *expert public* ($n = 31$), and adopt a *global perspective* in terms of *location* ($n = 14$). Regarding *narrative traits*, *heroes* are often *NPOs* ($n = 88$) or *animals* ($n = 50$), *villains* are usually the *fishing industry* or illegal fishing practices ($n = 54$), *victims* are *animals* ($n = 82$), *bystanders* include *governments* ($n = 17$), and the dominant *structure* or *BME* follows a *problem-solution* format ($n = 22$).

Based on these findings, a common narrative pattern used by marine conservation NPOs in their blogs can be summarized as follows: these organizations prioritize highlighting past and present successes, often showcasing collaborative initiatives or data-driven solutions as evidence of progress. Their storytelling blends scientific information with a sense of urgency, complemented by elements of participatory, counter-narrative, and personal narration to a less frequent occurrence. Within these narratives, the primary heroes are depicted as the NPOs themselves and marine animals, while the main villains are commercial fishing interests and corporations, which are portrayed as responsible for harming the main victims: marine animals and their ecosystems. The government frequently appears as a bystander, illustrating perceived inaction or insufficient intervention. The predominant narrative structure follows a problem-solution typology, paired with the “man in the hole” emotional arc, which moves from equilibrium to crisis and ultimately to a hopeful resolution. This structure is typically presented using an institutional narrative voice, targeting an expert public audience, and situated within a global context to emphasize the universal importance of marine conservation.

While this research underscores effective communication strategies for inciting engagement and support, it is disheartening that such extensive efforts are necessary to motivate meaningful action. Ideally, humanity would transcend self-interest and greed and collaborate proactively to protect the oceans, recognizing that in safeguarding marine ecosystems, we ultimately secure our own survival. The extinction of key marine species could trigger a collapse of natural systems, at which point research, collaboration, research and donor contributions alone may prove insufficient to avert irreversible consequences. We must act now.

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Appendix A:

Appendix Table 1

Overarching Code: Narrative Types

Code	Description	Example from Articles	Academic Literature
Ethos-building / Moral Appeal narrative	Appeals to moral responsibility, often emphasizing duty or connection to nature	“People and the planet need them, and we must protect them and reframe their story.” (WWF)	Goyes (2023); Laufer & Jones (2021); Chen (2012)
Scientific narrative	Uses data, evidence, and institutional language to build credibility and factual grounding	“Seafood carries a significantly lower carbon footprint compared to dairy, meat, and even soy. This is due to the fact that seafood uses less space and freshwater resources than land-based foods. However, the specific fishing methods and practices used are key, as they greatly influence the overall environmental impact of seafood.” (Oceanic Society)	Goyes (2023); Campbell (2002); Dahlstrom (2014)
Counter-Narrative	Challenges dominant discourses (e.g., industrial solutions), often proposes local/community ones	“Tourism, when implemented ethically and sustainably, can help communities derive revenue from nature without destroying it – a central principle of Oceanic Society’s travel model.” (Oceanic Society)	Campbell (2002); Goyes (2023)
Personal Testimony narrative	First-person stories and lived experiences, often emotional	“In January, my colleague Rodrigo Beas Luna, a marine ecologist working in Baja California, Mexico,	Chen (2012); De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2019)

		and I traveled to Chile to collaborate with OCEANA Chile” (Reef Check)	
Legacy / Success narrative*	Showcases past and future wins to inspire belief in outcomes. How they plan to succeed, what has been done	“Faced with these alarming trends, Reef Check teamed up with local community members and commercial shers to implement a restoration strategy of early intervention of targeted urchin removal.” (Subcodes Collaboration + Science Based) (Reef Check)	Laufer & Jones (2021); Goyes (2023)
Participatory narrative	Invites the community to co-create or co-own the story	“Although these species are not currently under threat, it’s up to us to keep it that way. Learn more about these creatures on Oceana’s Marine Life Encyclopedia, or by learning about how” (Oceana)	Chen (2012); De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2019) Campbell (2002)
Crisis Narrative	Urgency and impending disaster are emphasized to drive action	For nearly ve decades, Sea Shepherd has gone where others won’t—from the frigid waters of Antarctica to the remote islands of West Africa, from illegal shark nning operations to overshed marine reserves. We operate on the frontlines because the oceans can’t wait for change—they need defenders now.” (Sea Sheperds)	Laufer & Jones (2021); Chen (2012); Campbell (2002)

Appendix Table 2

Overarching Code Narrative Traits

Code	Description	Example	Academic Literature
Hero	Central actor taking action in the story (often the NPO or a local figure)	“Coastal communities are central to driving conservation solutions that address local problems and protect marine ecosystems.” (Subcode Hero: Communities) (WWF)	Laufer & Jones (2021); Goyes (2023); Abbott (2008)
Villain	Source of destruction or threat (e.g., corporations, governments)	“Industrial whalers who slaughtered them off the coast of Antarctica as they fed on krill.” (Subcodes Villain: Industrial Fishing/Illegal) (Oceanic Society)	Chatterjee (2017); Munir (2024); Goyes (2023)
Victim	Who or what is being harmed	“Currently, corals are in danger, and there is a real risk that by the end of this century, coral reefs, as we have been fortunate enough to know them, may no longer exist. Future generations will pay the price for the failings of previous ones who did not preserve” (Subcodes Victim: Animal/ Victim: Communities) (Reef Check)	Chatterjee (2017); Munir (2024); Lotze (2021)
Bystander	Silent or inactive character that may be complicit	“Laws exist to protect marine life, but too often they go unenforced.” (Subcode Bystander: Government) (Sea Shepherd)	De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2019); Abbott (2008)

Beginning–Middle–End (BME)	Temporal progression showing problem, response, outcome	Structural: identify beginning/ middle/ end	Abbott (2008); Reagan et al. (2016); Communication Theory (2024)
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Appendix Table 3

Overarching Code: Emotional Arcs

Code	Description	Narrative Flow	
Rags to Riches	Gradual improvement; hope through action	Low → High	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)
Tragedy	Steady loss, irreversible decline	High → Low	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)
Man in Hole	Problem then recovery	High → Low → High	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)
Icarus	Rapid success then failure	Low → High → Low	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)
Cinderella	Rise, struggle, rise again	Low → High → Low → High	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)
Oedipus	Rise followed by a fall	High → Low → High → Low	Silig et al. (2019) Reagan et al. (2016)

Appendix Table 4

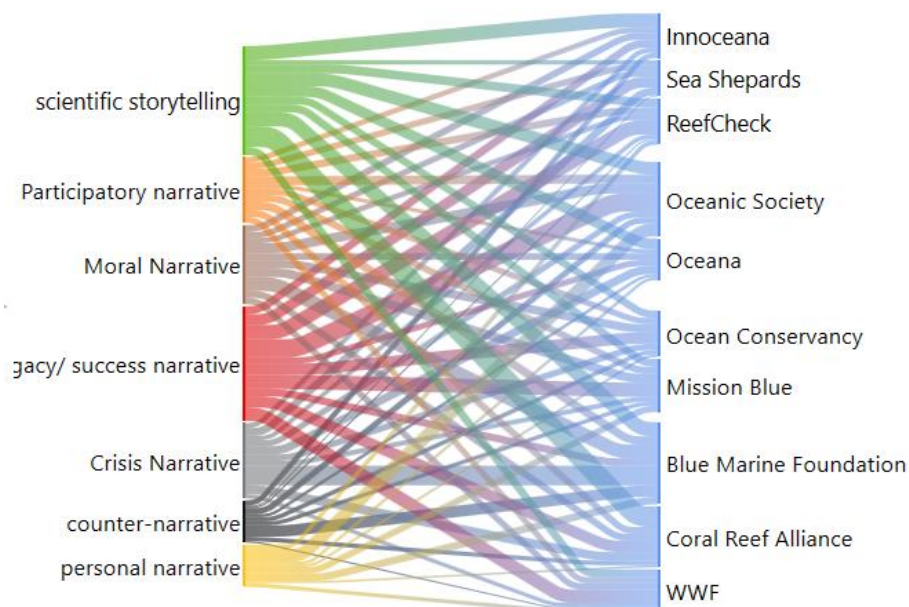
Overarching code: Discourse features

Code	Description	Example	Academic Literature
Audience Targeting	Who the story is meant to move: policymakers, donors, public	“By supporting CORAL, you help advance projects like Andrea’s that not only protect coral reefs but also bolster the well-being of the coastal communities that depend on them. Together, we can create a healthier ocean and a more sustainable future. Join us in making a lasting impact.” (Subcode: Global Citizens:	Kyalo (2024); Denning (2006); Seelig et al. (2018)

		Audience) (Coral Reef Alliance)	
Voice / Author	Whose voice is dominant: NPO, individual, community	<p>“As an engineer, former mariner, and ocean conservationist I know that decarbonizing our ports requires cross-sector partnerships. The discussions throughout the National Working Waterfronts Network Conference reinforced how essential it is to bring together experts from engineering, policy, and workforce development to drive meaningful change towards port decarbonization.”</p> <p>(Subcode general voice: first person) (Ocean Conservancy)</p>	Chen (2012); De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2019)
Location	Answers the “where” aspect of the story	<p>“In the Bering Sea, Alaska Native Peoples tell their story through photographs”</p> <p>(Subcode Location: Alaska) (WWF)</p>	De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2015); Mager (2021)

Appendix B

Appendix Table 1:
Sankey Chart comparing NPOs use of narrative types



Appendix C

Appendix Table 1:
Case Quantity Chart: The main four overarching code presented with the 10 main NPOs

	Blue Marine... 5 186	Coral Reef... 5 126	Innoceana 5 99	Mission Blue 5 86	Ocean Cons... 5 84	Oceana 5 78	Oceanic So... 5 126	ReefCheck 5 79	Sea Shepards 5 51	WWF 5 59
Contextual... 74	24	8	5	6	6	4	5	6	5	5
Emotional... 51	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Narrative T... 760	135	95	76	66	68	59	108	65	41	47
Narrative T... 425	59	42	41	45	38	46	45	33	38	38
Totaux	224	150	127	122	117	114	163	109	89	95

