



Review Article

Narratives and Identity Formation: Exploring Personal, Social, and Digital Dimensions

Christopher Rosario, Sinclair Lindsey*

Department of Strategy and Management, Norwegian School of Economics, Bergen, Norway

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Correspondence to: Sinclair Lindsey, Department of Strategy and Management, Norwegian School of Economics, Bergen, Norway.

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Abstract

Identity emerges through the stories individuals and communities create to interpret experiences, relationships, and social realities. Rather than serving solely as a means of communication, narratives provide a framework for constructing, expressing, and reshaping the self across changing cultural and technological environments. This article examines the relationship between narrative and identity by integrating perspectives from philosophy, linguistics, communication studies, psychology, and translation studies. Attention is given to digital platforms, where online participation has transformed identity into an ongoing and interactive process. Social networking environments such as X and Facebook enable users to present, revise, and negotiate multiple identities through posts, conversations, and shared content, while simultaneously contributing to broader collective narratives. The study also considers the methodological complexities associated with investigating fragmented, multimodal, and rapidly evolving digital narratives, highlighting the need for research approaches that capture their dynamic nature. By bringing together contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship, the article demonstrates that narratives remain fundamental to understanding how personal and collective identities are continuously constructed, interpreted, and redefined in both physical and digital contexts.

Keywords: Narrative Identity; Identity Formation; Digital Storytelling; Online Identity; Social Media Narratives; Collective Identity; Digital Communication; Identity Negotiation; Narrative Discourse.

Introduction

Narratives have long served as a fundamental means through which individuals and societies interpret experiences, communicate values, and create meaning. Beyond recounting events, narratives organize human experience into coherent forms that connect the past, present, and future. Through storytelling, people explain their actions, justify their decisions, and establish connections with broader social and cultural communities. Consequently, the study of narrative has become an important area of inquiry across disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, linguistics, communication studies, and cultural studies [1].

Identity is similarly understood as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon rather than a fixed personal attribute. Contemporary scholarship suggests that identity develops

through continuous interaction between individuals and their social environments. Personal experiences, cultural traditions, educational backgrounds, professional roles, language, and social relationships all contribute to the ongoing formation of identity. As people encounter new experiences and changing circumstances, they continuously reinterpret who they are and how they wish to be recognized by others. This perspective positions identity as an adaptive process shaped by both individual agency and collective influences.

The relationship between narrative and identity has attracted increasing scholarly attention because narratives provide the interpretive framework through which identities are constructed, maintained, and transformed. Personal stories enable individuals to connect life events into meaningful sequences,

while collective narratives strengthen shared values, memories, and social belonging. In this sense, narratives do more than describe identity; they actively participate in its formation by influencing how people understand themselves and how communities define their common experiences. The interaction between storytelling and identity therefore represents a significant area of interdisciplinary research [2].

Digital communication technologies have introduced new dimensions to this relationship. Social networking platforms have expanded opportunities for individuals to present themselves, interact with diverse audiences, and participate in public conversations that extend beyond geographical boundaries. Unlike traditional narratives, digital narratives are frequently multimodal, interactive, and continuously revised through comments, reposts, images, videos, and hyperlinks. Identity in these environments is negotiated through ongoing participation rather than through a single, stable representation. As users engage with online communities, they simultaneously construct personal identities and contribute to collective narratives that influence public opinion, cultural discourse, and social movements.

These developments highlight the need to examine narrative and identity from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines insights from the humanities and social sciences with emerging research on digital communication. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how storytelling practices operate across offline and online environments and how technological platforms reshape the ways identities are expressed, interpreted, and negotiated [3].

Literature Review

The concepts of narrative and identity have been examined across a wide range of academic disciplines, resulting in a diverse body of literature that reflects different theoretical perspectives and research traditions. Although the development of these concepts has evolved over time, the existing scholarship does not follow a single chronological pattern. Instead, studies from various disciplines have contributed unique viewpoints that complement one another rather than forming a continuous historical sequence. For this reason, the present review adopts a thematic approach instead of a chronological one [4].

A thematic organization allows the literature to be examined according to shared concepts, research interests, and theoretical contributions. This approach is

particularly appropriate because narrative and identity are explored in disciplines including linguistics, language education, psychology, sociology, communication studies, translation studies, media studies, and organizational research. Grouping studies by themes provides a clearer understanding of how these concepts intersect across different academic contexts and highlights the multiple ways in which narratives contribute to the formation, expression, and negotiation of identity in both offline and digital environments [5] (Figure 1).

The literature search was conducted using a systematic keyword-based strategy. Search terms included *narrative*, *identity*, *narrative identity*, *identity construction*, *definition of identity*, *narrative structure*, *online narratives*, *collective narratives*, and *collective identity*. These keywords were used to retrieve relevant scholarly publications through widely recognized academic search platforms, primarily Google Scholar and JSTOR. Reference lists of influential publications were also examined to identify additional relevant sources. Furthermore, recommendations from researchers and colleagues working in related fields helped identify studies that were significant to the objectives of this review [6,7].

The selection of literature emphasized studies that have made substantial theoretical or empirical contributions to the understanding of narrative and identity. Preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and well-established academic sources that have been widely recognized within their respective disciplines. During the screening process, several publications were excluded because they focused on contexts unrelated to the objectives of this review, duplicated findings already reported by other studies, lacked sufficient methodological rigour, or offered limited relevance to the research's interdisciplinary focus (Table 1).

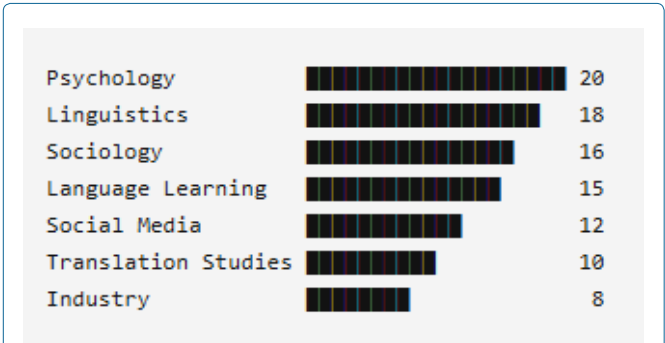


Figure 1: Distribution of Literature Reviewed by Discipline.

Table 1: Summary of the literature review methodology adopted in the present study.

Stage	Description	Purpose
Research Design	A thematic, interdisciplinary literature review was adopted instead of a chronological review.	To synthesize perspectives across multiple academic disciplines.
Search Strategy	Keywords related to narrative and identity were identified prior to the literature search.	To ensure a focused and systematic search process.
Search Keywords	Narrative, Identity, Narrative Identity, Identity Construction, Narrative Structure, Online Narratives, Collective Narratives, Collective Identity.	To retrieve relevant scholarly publications.
Data Sources	Google Scholar, JSTOR, reference lists of published studies, and recommendations from academic colleagues.	To obtain comprehensive and credible literature.
Inclusion Criteria	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and influential scholarly publications relevant to narrative and identity.	To include high-quality and theoretically significant studies.
Exclusion Criteria	Studies unrelated to the research objectives, duplicate findings, publications with weak methodological quality, and sources with limited relevance.	To improve the quality and relevance of the review.
Data Organization	Literature was grouped into thematic categories across different disciplines.	To facilitate cross-disciplinary synthesis and comparison.
Expected Outcome	Development of a comprehensive conceptual understanding of narrative and identity.	To establish the theoretical foundation of the study.

The Concept of Identity

Identity has long been recognized as a complex and dynamic concept that has attracted attention across disciplines including psychology, sociology, linguistics, education, and cultural studies. Rather than viewing identity as an innate or permanent characteristic, contemporary scholarship generally regards it as an evolving process shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts. Consequently, identity is increasingly understood as something that is continuously constructed, interpreted, and reconstructed throughout an individual’s life [8].

One of the central questions in identity research concerns whether identity is inherited or developed through experience. Addressing this issue, Ahn (2011) argues that identity should not be understood as a fixed attribute but as a developmental process that unfolds through everyday experiences and narrative practices [9]. According to Ahn, children gradually develop a sense of self by engaging with stories, participating in social interactions, and reflecting upon their experiences. Narratives therefore become an important means through which children interpret their surroundings and construct meanings about themselves. Through repeated engagement with family, school, and community, individuals continually reshape their identities in response to changing circumstances [9] (Figure 2).

The discussion is grounded in theory of narrative identity,

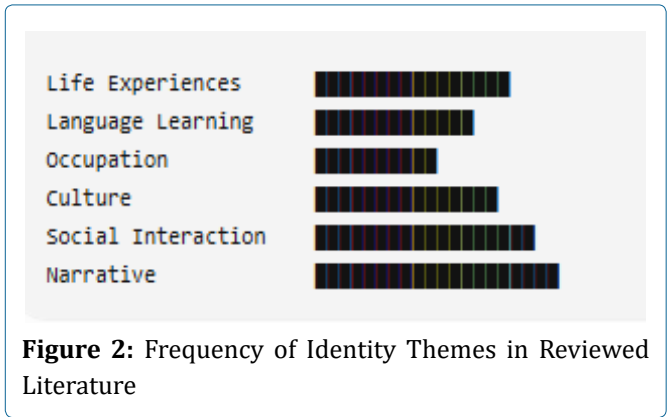


Figure 2: Frequency of Identity Themes in Reviewed Literature

which distinguishes between permanence and change in the development of the self. It suggests that identity emerges through the continuous interpretation of lived experiences rather than remaining stable across time [10]. The self develops in relation to others, making identity fundamentally relational and socially situated. From this perspective, narratives provide coherence by connecting past experiences, present realities, and future aspirations into an ongoing life story. This understanding also resonates with Arendt’s view that human life acquires meaning through the stories individuals tell and share within society [10].

Language learning represents another important dimension of identity construction. It demonstrates that acquiring a new language involves more than developing

Table 2: Summary of influential studies on identity construction through narratives. The information is synthesized from the reviewed literature.

Author(s)	Year	Research Focus	Main Contribution to Identity Concept
Ricoeur	1992	Narrative identity	Identity develops through the interpretation of lived experiences and narratives, combining continuity and change.
Ahn	2011	Children's identity construction	Identity is gradually constructed through narratives, social interaction, and everyday experiences.
Gandana & Nissa	2021	Language learning and identity	Learning English promotes cultural awareness and the development of hybrid identities.
Taylor & Kay	2015	Occupation and identity	Occupational narratives help individuals construct and express personal identity.
Bamberg	2011	Narrative and self	Identity is socially performed and continuously negotiated through everyday storytelling.
Freeman	2011	Big and small stories	Personal identity emerges through the integration of both everyday experiences and major life narratives.

linguistic competence; it also influences cultural awareness and self-understanding. Their narrative inquiry illustrates how learning English enabled an Indonesian learner to negotiate multiple cultural affiliations and reconstruct her personal identity. Exposure to different cultural values encouraged the participant to reinterpret her own experiences while developing a hybrid identity that incorporated elements of both local and global cultures. Their findings suggest that language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a resource through which individuals negotiate belonging, cultural membership, and personal identity [11-15].

Occupation also contributes significantly to the formation of identity. It emphasizes that people often construct meaningful identities through the stories they tell about their work and leisure activities. Their study shows that occupations provide individuals with opportunities to express personal values, demonstrate competence, and establish social recognition. Narrative accounts of occupational experiences help individuals organize important life events and explain who they are within particular social settings. Through these narratives, occupational roles become integrated into broader understandings of the self. Summary of Key Studies on Identity Construction (Table 2).

Conclusion

This review demonstrates that narrative and identity are closely connected concepts for understanding how individuals and communities construct meaning and interpret human experience. Across psychology, sociology, linguistics, communication, translation studies, and media research, narrative is increasingly understood as more than a means of storytelling. It provides a framework through

which people organize experiences, interpret events, and communicate personal and collective meanings. At the same time, identity is recognized as a dynamic and socially negotiated process shaped by language, culture, relationships, experiences, and institutional contexts.

The literature further highlights the growing influence of digital environments on narrative and identity construction. Social media enables individuals to create, modify, and share narratives through text, images, videos, hashtags, and interactive communication. Consequently, digital identities may be fluid, fragmented, and continuously reconstructed through audience responses, platform features, and networked interactions. This development challenges traditional understandings of linear narrative and stable identity.

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