Narrative strategies to give sense to new technology: the case of Cisco's "Tomorrow starts here" campaign.

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Abstract

The acceleration of technological innovation and the magnitude of its potential impacts on business and society have increased exponentially. Sellers of technologies face the challenge to give sense and legitimise their offer in a context of uncertainty. Technology sellers construct narratives about their technology that often result in a "technological hype". Buyers and network partners try to read through the "hype" to avoid technological fads.

In spite of the importance of this phenomenon, research in industrial marketing has rarely studied narratives and even less so in the context of the adoption of technologies; their construction and appropriation remain an open question.

This paper analyses Cisco's campaign *tomorrow starts here*, with the aim to identify the narrative elements that Cisco uses to give sense to its innovations and the relations between actors and technologies. The examination of the data-set offers a specific description of five narrative strategies (deliberate or unintentional) used by Cisco in its endeavour to give sense, institutionalise and legitimise its offers.

The main contribution of the paper is to expand the understanding of the making of marketing strategies of technology companies, reducing the gap between the existent research in industrial marketing regarding narratives and business relationships.

Keywords: Narrative, Sensegiving, Technology adoption, Business markets.

Competitive paper

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INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of technological innovation and the magnitude of its potential impacts on business and society have increased exponentially during the last decade. For suppliers of technologies the challenge is to give sense and legitimise their offer in a context of uncertainty regarding the uses and benefits for their customers and/or the network (Ford et al., 2011). One recent attempt toward this aim is the use of stories especially via films, as recently done by IBM (for Watson artificial intelligence) or Cisco (for Internet of things). By spreading narratives, they try to help customers and networks to make sense of the future.

Narratives have long been recognized as one of the most fundamental mode of meaning construction, transfer and sharing, and conveys emotions. It is a specific form of knowing (Bruner, 1986). The field of organization has a well-established tradition in studying narratives (Weick, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004; Brown et al., 2008; Bartel and Garud, 2009; Fenton and Langley, 2011). But research on the topic remains scarce in marketing globally, in business to business specifically, and even more so in technological innovation in business contexts, despite several recent endeavours (see for example, Lowe and Hwang, 2012; Makkonen et al., 2012; Araujo and Easton, 2012; Gilliam and Flaherty, 2015).

Some of the key questions that remain open are about the production of these stories that circulate in the business environment: How are they produced? What narrative strategies are used by technology suppliers? By answering these questions we aim to contribute to the understanding of marketing practices, of the role of narratives in technological markets, and more generally in business markets.

In this paper, we present a detailed analysis of case of the Cisco recent *Tomorrow starts here* campaign. Our deconstruction of the narratives produced by Cisco shows that this campaign uses temporal structure, mythic archetype, cyclic narratives, metanarratives, documentary style, and articulations whose aims and main motivations are to transport viewers to a projected future, to give sense to this future and to legitimise new technologies offered by the company.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Research exploring the use of narratives in business marketing is scarce although it is a promising area of research (Lacoste and La Rocca, 2015). Recent efforts focused mainly on the sales side (e.g. Gilliam and Flaherty, 2015) have proved the relevance of using narratives in this context. Additionally, Lacoste and La Rocca (2015) highlight further avenues of research related to narratives in industrial settings and its effects in networks. Komulainen (2014) explores the use of narratives in interactive co-creation processes, due to the relevance that stories play in mutual learning and teaching in seller-buyer relationships. Likewise, Haas et al. (2012); Araujo and Easton (2012) assert that stories contribute to the construction of collective and participative sensemaking/sensegiving process that create value in business relationships.

Furthermore, research related to narratives and sensegiving/sensemaking has been explored in the organisational field, arguing that individuals think, analyse, learn and interpret the world

in a narrative way rather than in an argumentative or paradigmatically way (Weick, 1995; Iversen, 2014). Therefore, the role becomes a primordial element as a vehicle for meaning assignation and comprehension of the world.

In the first part of the paper, we present a brief review of the use of narratives in industrial marketing research. Then, we address the question of sensegiving in the the case of technological innovation.

NARRATIVES IN BUSINESS

Narratives can be understood as coherent and creative re-descriptions of the world which deal with specific situations. Bruner (1986) extends this definition, arguing the existence of a narrative mode of knowing, which focuses on the rich and detailed interwoven of human experience, that contributes to comprehend and give sense to the world in a discursive way, offering explanations based on "retroactively plotting sequences of actions and considering them in specific context to reveal their significance" (Cayla and Arnould, 2013). A remarkable importance of the narratives relies on the active participation of the actors involved who elaborate the narratives through the use of multiple and heterogeneous discursive resources available (Humphreys and Brown, 2008).

A structured story is primordial to develop a cohesive and appealing narrative, consisting of identifiable characters allowing the story receiver to empathise with the story. A plausible plot allows the recreation of mental imagery, where the narrator selects relevant elements and integrates them into an entire cohesive entity with a clear purpose (Czarniawska, 2004; Elliot, 2005; Polleta et al., 2011; Araujo and Easton, 2012). Therefore, the verisimilitude or the likelihood of story events is pivotal to grant transportation effect to narrative worlds (Van Laer et al., 2013).

A narrative account requires a story that raises unanswered questions, presents unresolved conflicts, or depicts a not yet completed activity; characters may encounter and then resolve a crisis or crises (Green and Brock, 2000). In Bruner (1986) words, "Narrative deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place".

The relevance of the narratives resides in the ability to resonate and transport the story receivers to narrative worlds (Green and Brock, 2000), where a process of interpretation is generated in the reader's mind based on prior experiences and knowledge. The capacity to empathise with the story is what produces a memorable and transforming narrative experience (Van Laer et al., 2013).

The increased interest in the narrative perspective appears in different social sciences as a response to the lack of knowledge regarding social and cultural aspects that affect adoption and diffusion of innovations. Narratives offer a new approach which encloses cultural aspects that

are embedded in the stories. Woodside (2010) asserts that "Stories are pervasive through life. Much information is stored, indexed and retrieved in the form of stories".

Therefore, the analysis of the role of narratives in technological adoption leads us to comprehend how narratives can serve as a tool to discern and give sense to innovations. Likewise, it shed lights on how narratives encircle expectations, experiences and articulate sequentially the multiple exchanges between buyers and sellers. Additionally, the use of narratives can enhance discursive leverages of the technology adoption between different actors embedded in business networks.

Narratives lie at the centre of the relational process where sellers and buyers make multiple attempts to convince and persuade their counterpart through narratives or discursive strategies to develop commercial trades beneficial for both parts. In industrial settings, the construction of long-term commercial bonds is expected in order to conceive a trustworthy exchange (Ford et al., 2011). Therefore, narrative constructions enable the creation, development and maintenance of long-term relationships based on prospective scenarios that promote benefits of the relationship in terms of profits, optimisation and innovation between both parts. Nevertheless, their use require a cautious management, otherwise could turn unfavourable for the advertised innovation. Wentzel et al. (2010) illustrate how an incorrect manipulation of the narratives becomes suspicious and for the story receiver, resulting in an analytical process to evaluate the narrative and the product advertised, losing their transportation and engaging style. Similarly, Sujan et al. (1993) suggest that narrative strategies could lead to forget the focus on the product information paying more attention to the story rather than the brand and, finally, Padgett and Allen (1997) explain that the use of narratives lead to multiple interpretations that increase the ambiguity of the product in the customer's mind.

Some attempts have been developed to comprehend the use of narratives in sales encounters, Gilliam and Zablah (2013) and Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) explored the usefulness of storytelling to establish bonds between sellers and buyers, finding that sellers that employ stories create a sense of knowledge and expertise of the product and reduce at the same time counter-argumentation. Similarly, Haas et al. (2012) examine the value of narratives within sensemaking processes in the development of sociocognitive constructions of value in business relationships. Furthermore, Araujo and Easton (2012) examine the value of narratives to negotiate uncertainty and provide stabilisation in innovation processes where multiple temporalities coexist in a continuous flow among the actors involved.

Lacoste and La Rocca (2015) suggest further avenues of research, advocating for the study of storytelling as a collective sensemaking process and its effects as an element of interaction in co-creation processes. Stories in this context play an important role in mutual learning and teaching in seller-buyer relationships in the context of new technological services in business markets (Komulainen, 2014) contributing, at the same time, to the construction of collective and participative sensemaking process (Haas et al., 2012).

In the same manner, narratives play an important role supporting legitimation discourses that validate the adoption of new innovations within organisations. Green (2004) argues that

the diffusion of managerial practices depends directly on the justification used by organisations to rationalise it. Using a rhetorical perspective the author illustrates the importance of discourse to shape beliefs, convince and lead to institutionalisation processes, suggesting that the most influential tool is language. According to Humphreys and Latour (2013) a comprehension of the dynamics of legitimation allow sellers to develop strategies to explain innovations and be able to navigate through complex regulatory environments. As a consequence, the use of multiple strategies of legitimacy is often the most effective form of legitimation (Vaara and Tienari, 2008).

Vaara et al. (2007) described five legitimacy typologies; normalisation, authorisation, rationalisation, moralisation and narrativisation. *Normalisation* is described as a category of authorisation to emphasise that events are constructed as normal or natural. *Authorisation* is related to legitimacy obtained through law or individuals who hold some kind of institutional authority. *Rationalisation* refers to legitimacy obtained through specific knowledge claims that are accepted in a given context. *Moralisation* is built around moral systems that grant validity and legitimacy. *Narrativisation* refers to the process of legitimating an action by placing it in a relevant and accepted narrative structure that relates the action to the past or the future. In other words, how telling a story provides a plausible and socially acceptable framework where actors involved can be dramatised in order to attract and entertain story receivers in a special way. The development of the story allows the entrance of an entire set of characters that draw upon the humanity's collective unconscious (Campbell, 1991), evoking implicit knowledge of situations presented into the narrative framework established. Using these strategies, sellers contribute to give sense to technological innovations by creating narratives of legitimation that enact processes of sensemaking in possible buyers offering a plausible sense of benefits, uses and impacts of the technology.

Narratives play multiple roles in the business context; having direct impacts between buyers and sellers and multiple effects in business networks. For example, on the one hand, sellers develop narratives that give sense to the novel technologies while explaining the benefits and try to persuade prospective buyers. On the other hand, buyers deconstruct those narratives to make sense of the technology and assign meanings to specific cognitive frames where embedded doubts and expectations to avoid technological fads. As a consequence, a new narrative is reconstructed, which is congruent with the organisation to gain legitimacy in the process of technology adoption among internal and external actors. Finally, narratives created by buyers and sellers are nurtured by multiple interactions among the actors of the business network in an ongoing process of giving and making sense of technology adoption in the network.

Narratives also provide other paths to achieve an understanding of sensegiving and sensemaking. Sonenshein (2001) argues that both sensemaking and sensegiving are closely related to narrative structures. Currie and Brown (2003) treated sensemaking/sensegiving as interchangeable with constructing narratives; for the authors, the process of sensemaking becomes evident and tangible through narratives which convey the sense they have made of events. Furthermore, narratives encompassed the sensemaking properties in a coherent and interactive piece of information that helps individuals to be able to interpret the world. Little as we know, there is a lack

of research regarding the narrative strategies that supplier companies are embedding within their marketing efforts to give sense to new technologies reducing uncertainty and contributing to the construction of collective and participative sensemaking process.

Sensegiving is considered as an interpretative process that has the purpose of influence the meaning construction in particular ways toward a preferred definition of organisational reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensemaking seeks for the comprehension of how individuals assign meaning to specific situations, structuring the unknown in a coherent piece of significance which become the material to construct collective views and understanding of the world (Brown et al., 2015; Weick et al., 2005). In other words, is the process by which managers guide organisational perceptions through persuasive discursive tools that grant make sense and assign meaning in an expected manner.

Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) emphasise that sensegiving is a social process enacted through a persuasive discursive ability that allows the actors implicated to build articulated interpretations of the world. It is promoted by organisational routines, practices and performance that provide time and the opportunity to engage in the sensegiving processes. Therefore, sensegiving can be considered as a key leadership activity that is always needed, especially in times of change, to provide a continuously understanding of the organisation agency.

Hitherto, the research in sensegiving is less explored rather than in sensemaking, few scholars paid attention toward meaning construction. The existent literature in organisational research is often focused on the role of the managers to shape the sensemaking of organisational members through the use of influence techniques (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014) to give sense to the managerial actions.

Rouleau (2005) explores the micro-practices employed by managers to give sense to organisational challenge in a clothing company, showing four micro-practices that act together in a permanent flux to give sense and to make sense of the events occurred in specific contexts, being reconstructed in daily experiences of agents. Similarly, Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) identify a set of conditions that lead to sensegiving process by organisational members. Their study reveals that sensegiving is triggered mainly by the perception or anticipation of a gap that required an interpretation of an issue that anyone else would provide. Nevertheless, the authors identify differences between the triggers for stakeholders and managers within the company. Lastly, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) study the sensemaking and sensegiving strategies under situations of strategic change, set up in an educational context that illustrates how new managers draw on sensegiving strategies to gain adepts to the changes proposed and obtain legitimacy and validation among the organisation members.

Nevertheless, Rouleau (2005) argues that sensegiving and sensemaking are complementary and reciprocal processes that cannot be considered one without the influence of the other. To sensegiving concerns the attempts to persuade, creating a collective comprehension of the actions to obtain support from the actors involved. Differences between both concepts are clearly

distinguishable theoretically. Nonetheless, in practice, according to Søderberg (2003) "it is most often the case that people engage in sensegiving processes based on their sensemaking processes".

Regardless the conceptual differences each concept is permeated by the other (Hopkinson, 2001). Therefore, it become mandatory to explore both concepts, seeking to establish similarities and differences that can be useful to comprehend the phenomenon in an empirical setting.

Sensemaking refers to the processes by which individuals assign meanings to specific situations, structuring the unknown in a coherent piece of significance which becomes the material to construct collective views and understandings of the world (Brown et al., 2015). In this process, actors involved build meanings, filtering and framing them into specific cognitive structures that encompass knowledge and expertise creating plausible stories that need to be redraft several times, allowing the translation of the subjective unknown into a more tangible and social construction.

Sensemaking is an action oriented procedure that involves meaning assignation as a path to deal with uncertainty (Mills, 2003) in a construction of the unknown. This process is based in retrospective reflexions of cues and situations occurred that allow the rationalisation of them (Brown et al., 2015). Through sensemaking actors involved are able to create their social world, where negotiated positions take place in a collective construction of sense (Brown et al., 2008).

Furthermore, sensemaking can be seen as a continuous retrospective understanding of plausible images that grant the elucidation of an individual and collective agency. In an attempt to restate sensemaking to make it more future and action oriented, Weick et al. (2005) condense the seven properties of sensemaking proposed by Weick (1995) (Identity construction, retrospection, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy). Therefore, "sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances". Those properties serve us as a theoretical lens to examine the case in course.

The current literature on sensemaking in business marketing shed lights on the concept of *Network pictures* which explores how actors embedded in a business network make sense of their actions, relationships and the cognitive structures that rule and affect network outcomes and modify relationships (Ford et al., 2011). This concept is rooted in organisational research seeking to comprehend how organisational actors create cognitive structures to select, process and interpret relevant information as guidelines to take actions (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Likewise, Colville et al. (2012) study the network pictures effects as a tool to deal with complex environments and contextual uncertainty and its efficacy as a guide to their actions and to foresee possible outcomes.

A second field of exploration in inter-organisational sensemaking is approached by Medlin and Törnross (2014) who study adaptive processes of sensemaking within business networks,

showing that relationships are in a continuous flux of change, where managers make sense of the network structure with the purpose to obtain leverage and enhance the firm's interests. Notwithstanding and despite these efforts, sensegiving has not been widely explored in industrial marketing and research is insufficient in relation to sensemaking and sensegiving process towards technology adoption.

Rhodes and Brown (2005) affirm that narratives contribute to facilitate the comprehension of experiences, assigning chronological order to the events that embedded shared values and meanings, serving as guidelines for action and convey shared values and meanings. Likewise, Currie and Brown (2003) argues that individual and collective interpretations of the world become evident and tangible through narratives. In other words, narratives help humanity to give and make sense of the world that surround us.

METHODOLOGY

We resorted to a single-case design that seems more appropriate, as the purpose of this study is not to follow literal and theoretical replication but *to challenge or extend the theory* (Yin, 2011, p.48). Therefore, this paper examines Cisco's campaign *Tomorrow starts here* aiming to comprehend the use of narrative structures that grant the legitimacy of the Internet of Things solutions. Furthermore, we employed a narrative and documentary analysis. Creswell (2007) suggests that narratives can be both a method and the phenomena of study, providing an adequate account of the nature of human experience (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007) allowing to grasp clues regarding the sensegiving process.

The case was selected due to the narrative approach used by the company in the elaboration of its marketing strategy, which offers relevant insights in the construction of a new strategical approach in the business context. The data collected is compounded by a group of 26 commercial stories, divided into 4 sets of stories. Additionally, a documentary set of 57 files regarding different Internet of Everything solution, a semi-structured interview with a former Cisco employee and three second-hand interviews related to the strategical vision of Cisco were analysed.

The observations developed in Cisco and the data collected offer insights that allow us to detect regular patterns in the narratives used by the company. A documentary and narrative analysis were developed for the entire campaign and for each one of the story sets. The data collected was coded extracting elements of the narrative theory. Therefore, we looked for key protagonists, actions, events, narrative structures, temporal structures and the construction of the plot. Authors coded independently the data, then triangulated to revise the first coding scheme. We used a constant revision process to establish robust constructs that we here refer to as *Ambivalence in temporal structures, mythic archetypes, cyclic narratives, metanarratives and documentary style*. Figure 1 illustrates the codes and the aggregate levels developed throughout the analysis of the material.

We adopt the abductive research approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) going back and forth between reality and theory, seeking for theoretical explanations of what we observe in the

empirical world and exploiting different sources of evidence through different methods that contribute to the evolution of the theoretical framework.

Additionally, we position this research under critical realism perspective which is identified as a coherent, rigorous philosophical position that nurtures the insights obtained in a case study, offering guidelines regarding how theory can be fashioned and aligned with the aims of business networks research (Easton, 2010). This perspective allows us to identify the mechanisms that drive technology adoption and develop contributions in technology adoption and sensemaking theory obtaining the richness of a network perspective.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Between 2010 and 2011 Cisco was forced to redefine its business strategy after facing share losses across several markets (Duffy, 2009). Growth in its core business was reducing and the company also had to face that some of its ventures and acquisitions were not as profitable as expected. Therefore, Cisco's management team defined and implemented a turnaround plan including the redefinition of the business core, moving from being a product centred company toward a service centred company, in order to capitalise the emerging opportunities brought by new smart technologies.

This period was characterised by the re-invention of products and services offered, bringing adjustments in company's structure, the investments in R&D and new acquisitions. Notwithstanding, in this process the company struggled to explain its strategy to the world, making impossible to external stakeholders and clients to observe the company's vision. Therefore, the company choose to develop a new campaign. The first step was to rethink Cisco's brand. According to Blair Christie, CMO of Cisco, from a marketing perspective "the story has shifted toward the value of connections" (Hesseldahl, 2012).

Seeking for a differentiation of the competitors offer, the company opted to change the generic name Internet of Things for *Internet of Everything*, implying that all human and non-human actors will be connected to Internet in some fashion, *"from helmets to ambulances to traffic lights"*, achieving enhanced communications that improve decision time and productivity.

The new Cisco strategy was denominated *Tomorrow starts here*, and it was globally released on December 2012 (Cisco, 2012). It combined print, web, social, podcast and augmented reality apps. The development of the new campaign served to align all the communication efforts with Cisco's strategy which centred its attention in Internet of Things, turning Cisco into a service company in the industrial sector. Table 1, presents the different stages of the campaign *Tomorrow starts here* specifying the set of stories that formed each stage and their date of release.

As a result of the campaign, the brand awareness of the company increased, showing the efficacy of the narratives used in the campaign *Tomorrow starts here*. Blair Christie, CMO of Cisco affirms that "our brand value per Interbrand has grown about 10%, it really impacted

the perception of Cisco as a trusted business partner" (Rooney, 2015). Not surprisingly, Cisco continues using narratives as an active and relevant part of its marketing strategy. A prove of the importance of narratives for the company relies on the hiring of marketing storytellers in 2016.

FINDINGS

Appealing stories are composed by a set of characteristics which requires elements outside the narrative structure that support the impact of the story and help to transport the story receivers to specific narrative worlds. In the set of stories featured in *Tomorrow Starts Here* we found three main elements.

The first element refers to the use of an omnipresent narrator. Using this resource Cisco makes an immediate reminiscence of storytelling, positioning the story receiver at a world in which his imagination is carefully guided through the different unveiled events in the presented universe. The second element is related to the role of music which is predominant in each story. It plays synchronously with the narrator, the narrative structure and the images presented, allowing the entrance of environmental sounds that make references to specific scenarios reinforcing the presented ideas. Finally, the third element refers to the tone of the colours used in the stories, playing an important part in the differentiation of temporal scenarios. This characteristic adds positive and negative connotations to the scenes, reinforcing the idea of binary oppositions.

These elements support the five key strategies that we found in the campaign *Tomorrow starts here*, allowing to place the audience in the bright and hopeful future proposed by Cisco. The strategies are embedded within the stories and will be described in the following paragraphs.

AMBIVALENCE IN THE TEMPORAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE TO UNDERMINE TIME REFERENCES

Cisco deconstructs linear time to facilitate transportation to a brighter utopic future. Time references are absent and present, past and future collapse. The utopian world described by Cisco becomes inevitable giving the story receiver a sense of natural and logical evolution, regardless of people's resistance.

Using this resource, Cisco is able to transport the story receivers to different alternative realities positioned in different times, playing with a brighter future that can be reached only in the present, or showing the past placed in a museum settled in the future. Using flashbacks and flashforwards the narrative is able to travel to the future and returns to the present or the past to illustrate the benefits of the adoption of technological solutions. Furthermore, this resource makes more attractive the narrative structure allowing to obtain a narrative hook.

Even when the entire story is set up in the future, the slogan of the campaign *Tomorrow starts here* brings the audience to the present, being able to position the story receivers in future

and present time simultaneously. The slogan emphasises the present as the only time where the story receiver has the power to take the decision to adopt Internet of Everything in order to reach the utopic future proposed.

By contrary, in the set of *Successful customer stories* Cisco uses a chronological time showing a temporal line that is easier to follow for the target audience. The past is used to establish a prior negative situation that requires a solution, which is offered in the present by Cisco and finally let the doors open to possible positive outcomes that technology will bring and new expectations of the future.

At a metalevel, the destructuration of the usual linear timeline places Cisco as a master of time, conferring the company magical and/or divine powers.

TAPPING INTO MYTHIC ARCHETYPES TO RETRIEVE COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

We observed in Cisco's marketing campaign the involvement of mythical resources in the narratives. The archetypes found are related to the creation of a new world and the humanity's relationship with natural and non-natural objects which are aligned with the fundamental concerns of human experience (Thompson, 1997). The use of these archetypes allows the audience to gather to humanity's collective unconscious (Campbell, 1991).

Archetypes featured in the films are Gaian (connection of human and nature) *"...Trees will talk to networks, will talk to scientists about climate change"*, Promethean (benefactor of humanity) *"...The ambulance will talk to patients records, will talk to doctors that are saving lives"*, Apollonian (who vanquished forces of evil) *"...Cisco is building The Internet of Everything for connected cities today that will confine the traffic jam to yesterday"* and even Sisyphean (absurdity of actions) *"This is the cat that drank the milk... the store reminded the man to buy the milk that was poured by the girl who loved the cat that drank the milk."* (Robert-Demontrond and Özcaglar Toulouse, 2011).

Villains and heroes are also part of the stories narrated by the company. The past is the villain, carrying the negative connotations and problems that humanity faces nowadays. Therefore, the colour of the advertisement that addresses this temporality is darker and the tone of the communication is pessimistic, evoking the evil of the current situation.

The heroic character is Cisco, who goes through the journey to save the world from all the issues that humanity confronts in order to reach the utopic future. In that journey, Cisco finds an ally in the connectivity offered by Internet and together jump into a search for the magical object that will provide the solution to all the problems. This magical object becomes the Internet of Everything, conferring "magical" powers to objects, allowing them to be interconnected and to think, decide and act without human intervention, making the world more automatised and leaving in the hands of the technology the solution of the problems that humanity could not previously solve. Cisco becomes the God who controls Internet of Everything and, therefore, the use of different temporalities in company messages is validated because time manipulation is a divine capability.

Furthermore, good and bad oppositions are used in the narratives as a resource provided to the audience to make sense of the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). The past incarnates the negative connotations showing a dark world which is at risk due to the multiple problematics that is facing. Instead, the future is bright and promising, and the stressful times of the past only remain as scenes exhibited in the museums. The past shows an inarticulate world with a lack of connection between human activities and devices that generate traffic jams, product recalls and long queue waits, problems that impact efficiency and steal time. On the contrary, the future is highly connected, allowing the communication between devices to anticipate human difficulties and provide an efficient response, having repercussions in the sustainability of the utopic future where everyone lives calm, without stress and is able to live together in an articulated way with the others, turning the problems of the past as a remembrance of other times.

EMBRACING CYCLIC NARRATIVES TO REVEAL A CHAIN OF EVENTS

Cisco uses a cyclic narrative structure in the second part of the set of stories of *Tomorrow starts here* composed of three stories (Circular story, Storm and Skater) that were released at the end of this set. Circular narrative refers to a story that ends in the same place where it began and this nonlinear structure is frequently used in mythology and fairy tales. Albeit the narrative beginning and end mirror each other, several events take place in the middle involving multiple short stories (Boje, 2014). The use of this resource grants more appealing stories that generate a sense of irony through repetition. Nevertheless, it provides a full perspective of a wide range of actions that occurs during one or more cycles.

This is the case of the story *Circular story*, where a girl at home pours milk for her cat, setting in motion a chain of events that illustrates a full interconnected utopic world. An omnipresent voice narrates the entire scene meanwhile images of this brighter future encompass a series of multiple scenarios that integrate Cisco's Internet of Everything solutions.

"This is the cat that drank the milk", it starts, *"and let in the dog that jumped on the woman who brewed the coffee that woke the man who was late for work and drove the car that found the parking spot that alerted the door that opened the control room that secured the data that directed the turbines that powered the sprinklers that watered the grass that fed the cow that made the milk that went to the store that reminded the man to buy the milk that was poured by the girl who loved the cat that drank the milk"*.

As we can see, each phrase is its own scene, a collapse of micro narratives that loops back to itself, becoming part of a metanarrative that depicts an interconnected future where everything belongs and makes part of a cycle, featured by smart houses, driverless cars, distant control and also smart farms that are involved in a connected and responsive farm-to-fridge supply chains. The use of this structure gives the audience a complete view of the story trough a series of cause and effect scenarios that combined form a full narrative. Therefore, using this resource, Cisco shows the idea that everything is interconnected in a world ruled by Internet of Everything in a brighter and harmonic future.

Additionally, the music has a playful rhythm that goes in a continuous loop reinforcing the idea or the circular construction, returning at the end to where it began. In this spot, the sound is crucial to give the sense that all the devices are interconnected and talk to each other.

CONSTRUCTING METANARRATIVES TO LEGITIMISE NEW TECHNOLOGY

The concept of metanarratives was introduced by (Lyotard, 1992) and refers to the set of stories that combined constitute a master narrative that legitimises the main idea, or in this case, the message. An antenarrative encompasses a double meaning (before and bet): before narrative coherence sets as a fixed narrative, and bet on a range of future, one of which collapses into a chosen course of action (Boje, 2014). Additionally, Bartel and Garud (2009) introduce the idea of structures and provisional narratives which interact over time.

The goal of the use metanarrative is to build a master narrative that encompasses multiple perspectives and provisional stories and antenarratives helping to elucidate identities and interests. In this case, each one of the stories contains multiple micro stories that are interrelated in one story that also belong to a bigger set of stories. All those sets are interrelated, creating a master narrative (metanarrative) of a future guided by smart technology. Throughout time, the campaign maintains a coherent line where new stories add meaning or actions to a bigger picture that frame this alternative reality.

The *Banana* story is a clear example of the use of short narratives that forms a whole metanarrative. It presents the journey of a banana from the beginning (a plantation) until the end (used in a recipe). A series of statements are presented within the commercial to introduce the solutions featured: *"The banana anticipated the early harvest"* illustrates the use of smart sensors in farms, *"...which told the server to alert the truck and they arrange the new delivery time with the supermarket chain"* shows the interconnected smart transport systems and *"Which put the current stock of bananas on sale, so the shopping cart just to be extra helpful suggested a delicious dessert recipe"* exemplifies how smart stock can be managed. The story finalises with a conclusive phrase that demonstrates how a global futuristic supply chain works: *"And that is how Cisco is connecting the Internet of Everything to get supply chains perfectly link"*.

The sequence presented in this story is created by provisional structures that allow the entrance of different characters, concepts and smart solutions in an articulated way, showing the tale of a supply chain from start to end exemplified in the journey of a banana. Additionally, the story shows skillfully how smart technologies touch consumers and everyday life, making an abstract technology concept relevant to the consumer. The spot is itself just a small narrative within the universe created under *Tomorrow Starts Here* campaign. Each one of the advertisements represents a part of the interconnected world presented by Cisco. Therefore, we could assume that the grand metanarrative is the futuristic world depicted in all the narratives produced.

USING DOCUMENTARY STYLE TO PROVIDE REALISM

Between the two set of stories *Tomorrow starts here and The museum of the lasts*, Cisco released a set of nine *Successful customer cases* related with the implementation of smart city solutions. The cases were documented in white papers and videos, resorting to a documentary style, that allows Cisco to reconstruct the present, positioning the story receiver in real and contemporary spaces where the technology seems to be fully implemented. Through this resource, the campaign returns from the fictional world and establish a discursive narrative that intends to document realistic aspects of the solutions. In order to achieve this, the narrator uses a serious tone, guiding the narrative that shows the uses and benefits of the implementation and provides statistical data that justify the actions taken by the city. *As the world continues to urbanise with 180.000 people at day moving into cities..., It is estimated that 40% of traffic in city centres is caused by....*

Two main arguments are recurrent in this set of cases. The first one is related to competitiveness between cities *the competition between cities will continue to growth... the cities that embrace technology will surfer as the winners..., they are very well known as the second largest port in Europe, we have to go and be the first.* The second aspect is related to quality of life, emphasising that technology will improve the level of life in the city *... so that the city becomes a more livable place, We have to make it possible for people to understand that Internet may be changing their daily lives, to improve it, Hamburg is very keen with smart city concept to improve quality of life for the citizens... .*

On the other hand, the presence of multiple representative characters that interact in the narrative provides support and creates a legitimacy of authorisation about the actions taken to adopt this technology in order to become a smart city. This narrative style allows to obtain first-hand information from the different internal and external actors involved in the process such as *Cisco's EVP & chief globalisation officers and the president of smart+connected communities*, the *CIO of the municipality of Milan*, the *CEO of Hamburg port authority* and the *Deputy mayor from the Barcelona city council* which validate the partnership with Cisco to develop and co-construct "now" the concept of smart cities.

In summary, we consider that the combined use of the strategies shown granted Cisco the development of robust narratives that illustrate the scope, uses, applications and relationships involved in the use of the new technology, giving the opportunity to the audience to comprehend and give sense to the futuristic scenarios proposed. Therefore, in the following section we expand our analysis to understand how the campaign gives sense to smart technologies.

GIVING SENSE THROUGH DIFFERENT STAGES TO PROVIDE CONTINUITY

Within Tomorrow Starts Here campaign, Cisco's sensegiving process is supported not only by the several legitimacy and narrative elements that have been previously presented, but also by four main moments that lead continuity and create a coherent piece that allows the story receivers to make sense of the future depicted by Cisco. The relationships between these elements are illustrated in Figure 2.

Creating the future (December 2012 - June 2014). It includes 12 stories and the start of the campaign, which additionally used augmented reality. The stories are positioned in a near future and, through time, they end in a more distant future.

Being part of the initial set of the campaign, the function of this set of stories is to set the tone for the future. Therefore, the first story *Anthem*, starts with the quote "What is the big next thing?" complemented with an image of the universe, making an analogy to the big bang, an appearance of a new kind of universe. Through this statement, Cisco delineates a clear image of an alternative future of interconnectedness between human and non-human actors, being able to establish a master narrative that is able to embed multiple stories. Each commercial is constructed through multiple provisional narratives that are arranged harmonically to create one short story that is simultaneously part of the metanarrative of the future depicted by Cisco.

Due to the temporal position, the narrative resources tend to enhance the fictional aspect presented by near and distant futures. Mythic archetypes are used to illustrate the benefits that the technology will bring in a near future in terms of connection between humanity and nature (Gaian), working as a benefactor of the humanity (Promethean) and vanquishing the forces of evil (Apollonian) leading us to a brighter and utopic distant future where everything is interconnected and free of problems in the hands of the heroic character embedded in Cisco. Likewise, the cyclic resource recreates the Sisyphean myth and it is used to illustrate the entire process of each one of the solutions presented (smart cities, smart grid and manufacturing) allowing the story receiver to see the relations between multiple technologies and how they work in an interconnected further future.

The narrative of this set of stories is linear with a clear beginning, medium and an end. However, the hashtag of the campaign *#Tomorrow starts here* creates a micro-collapse of time, inviting to the action to adopt smart technology in the present, breaking the futuristic temporal continuity established in each story of this set.

According to Vaara et al. (2007) and Vaara and Tienari (2008) the use of multiple strategies of legitimacy is often the most effective form of legitimation. The authors established five types of legitimacy strategies which serve as guidelines in this paper. Cisco resorts to the use of a narrativisation strategy that sets up the mental and cognitive imaginary of the story receiver in a plausible narrative framework that related actions from the past, the future and the present, allowing, at the same time, to establish a normalisation strategy were the events and actions taken in the story seem to be constructed as natural. Applying all those elements from narratives and legitimacy strategies, Cisco is able to convey and give sense of the new technology, its uses, impacts and benefits addressed in an appealing and engaging way embedded in the narratives.

Using these narrative strategies, this set of stories is able to create an alternative and plausible reality in different temporalities, travelling through near to distant futures, allowing the development of an identity towards the future guided by smart technologies. The use of short stories and multiple images in each micro story offers multiple visual cues to the story receiver that grant a participatory cognitive experience where the audience elucidate the future and it is invited to be part and take action in the present to reach the utopian scenario presented.

The elaboration of a long-term marketing strategy allows to develop an ongoing process of sensegiving through time and multiple sets of stories and other pieces of information developed by the company. Likewise, the use of a multichannel campaign and non-common technologies such as augmented reality grants the viralisation of the content in a socialisation process that invite to discover the technology and also interact with it.

Reconstructing the present (January 2014 - October 2014). It includes a series of four videos, more than twenty white papers and other documentation regarding successful implementations of Smart cities solutions.

Here, Cisco positions the story receiver in the present time in familiar scenarios (Barcelona, Chicago, Milan and Hamburg), resorting to a more realistic style and distancing from the fiction used in previous and subsequent sets of stories. Each one of the cases works as a provisional story where multiple actors are involved and recreates the present of the technology, anchoring the futuristic scenarios to the reality of the present time, in an attempt to convince the story receiver that the adoption of Internet of Everything is happening now.

As a consequence, this set of stories resorts to a linear temporal structure that shows the past as a bearer of issues that need to be resolved in the present through technology and leads to a brighter and expected future, which is not explicitly implied in the cases.

The documentary style grants the use of statistical data that supports the adoption of technology in a more traditional way. It also enables the entrance of multiple internal and external characters that endorse the adoption of the technology, generating a legitimation process of authorisation, where representative characters, that hold some kind of institutional authority, validate the adoption of smart cities solutions. Similarly, a rationalisation strategy of legitimacy is incorporated through the actions taken based on specific and relevant knowledge.

Finally, the reconstruction of the present grants the story receiver to make sense through retrospection by the analysis of real examples where Cisco illustrates multiple solutions offering cues that allow the audience to comprehend (enact) the scope and the usefulness of the technology and take action.

Leaving the past behind (January 2015 - April 2015). It is comprised of four stories placed in *the museum of the lasts*, a futuristic exhibition that contemplates the most difficult issues that humanity and companies face nowadays.

Going back to the future implies the use of fictional stories that provide a context of the scenario where they take place. In this case, the stories are supported by micro-collapses of time, showing a museum placed in a near future exhibiting present situations which are familiar and close to the problems that societies confront each day (traffic jams, problems with products, long queues), and that, in the plot, are confined to the past. However, none of these stories show explicitly the time when they are positioned, so the narrative plays with the imagery of the audience to recreate a pretended future that it is evoked by the museum.

Additionally, the stories use the resource of binary oppositions to emphasise the differences that bring the adoption of the technology. One side of the opposition is represented by negative connotations that are explicitly embodied in each one of the problems that are presented in the exhibition, making a direct relation to the past, an era where the world was not interconnected. The other side of the opposition is performed by the positive connotations that are implicitly personified in the future where technology presumably solved all the issues, making possible to remember negative connotations as part of the past, making a retrospective of the problems of prior ages.

Similarly to what occurs in the set of stories of *Tomorrow starts here*, each one of the exhibitions on *the museum of the lasts* works as a part of the metanarrative of the construction of the future, where humanity lives in the utopic world where all the problems have been relegated to a distant past that only can be seen in a museum as part of the collective memory. Also, each one of the exhibitions presented in this set is centred on one big problem, being the main structure where micro stories can be positioned. For example, *The last traffic jam* is focused on problems related to transportation. Nevertheless, the narrative includes multiple scenarios that are affected by the traffic such as supply chains, contamination and stress, allowing in that way the use of provisional micro-narratives.

This set of stories appeal to two legitimation strategies; a narrativisation strategy that frames the story receiver in an implicit future where they can examine the past, that is a reflection of our present. And a normalisation legitimacy strategy that shows as a natural act the exhibitions presented in the museum of the lasts.

Finally, *the museum of the lasts* presents a closer reality that is easily approachable in a plausible scenario where the story receiver is placed in the future. At the same time, the story pretends to generate in the story receiver a sense of retrospective by the analysis of the most recurrent problems that society confronts day by day in a museum that embodied the characteristics of the future. The use of short phrases and the images presented serves as cues to comprehend the implications and ramifications of a bigger problem. Lastly, the stories invite to the action in an enactive process where Cisco is constructing the smart solutions to confine these problems to the past.

Answering to specific concerns (June 2015 - September 2015). These stories have the goal to answer specific concerns of the adoption of smart technologies and Cisco presents precise solutions to solve the problems that carry the new era of Internet. This set leaves apart the slogan *Tomorrow starts here* and starts to talk about the new wave of Internet.

Two types of stories were found. An initial story called *competitor* that shows a young girl that represents the future competitor of any company and invites the story receiver to be prepared to the next wave of competition. This story uses a micro-collapse of time where a series of images shows the young girl as a grown up woman in a business environment, making a prospective representation of the future competitor and finishing with an open ending. The second set is related to security. Four stories are part of the set *Hackers* that shows how hackers act and call upon to take actions to face security threats.

Both sets are placed in realistic scenarios in a present time, where implicitly Cisco affirms that the next wave of Internet is already here, so companies must act right now to solve specific issues. If we consider that the next wave of Internet is already here, this set of commercials is part of the metanarrative of the future, being positioned as the first steps that humanity took to reach that expected utopic scenario. Therefore, is comprehensible that there are still flaws that need to be corrected and regard attentive to security menaces.

Multiple legitimacy strategies are used; they appeal to a narrativisation that frames the issue and create a character that personified the threat, for competition or security. Likewise, a rationalisation strategy is used through the idea that the new wave of Internet is here, therefore, companies must be prepared for this change. The idea of a new wave of Internet represents a normal evolution act of the technology, using implicitly a normalisation strategy. And finally, a moralisation strategy is illustrated in the new ideals embedded in the business, showing companies that are interconnected in the cloud where employees have flexible works and can work from everywhere in a more productive way.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study of the Cisco campaign helped us identifying narrative structures embedded in the marketing strategy of a technological company with the aim of giving sense to the solutions related to Internet of Things. The goal of our research was to understand the production of narratives by company and to identify the narrative strategies that they use in their endeavour to given sense to novel technology solutions.

The deconstruction of the Cisco campaign allow us to examine individually each set of stories and the whole campaign as a metanarrative that incorporates each story as part of the development of the futuristic scenario. Using elements of narrative theory we were able to found the narrative structures used by the company in its endeavour to give sense to the novel solution of Internet of Things. Through the abductive approach new findings were validated through theory and back again.

Our analysis shows how narratives enhance the elaboration of marketing strategies developed to reach business customers. The use of the narratives and their coherent and interconnected construction were able to depict a metanarrative of the brighter future that humanity can reach if they embrace the use of Internet of Things solutions. Therefore, the cohesive structure of the narrative contributes to reduce the uncertainty inherent to innovation, helping to give sense to the technological solution.

It appears that strategic sensegiving process in the technology industry is set up to a complex set of four stages that recreate and construct the metanarrative of a future that co-exists with technology in a symbiotic way in every facet of human lives. By addressing how a technology company position its marketing strategy for the novel market of Internet of Things solutions this paper improves our understanding of the usefulness of narratives in four ways.

First, the deconstruction of a temporal line allows to the developer of the narrative to create multiple fictional scenarios that can arrange in the future, the present or the past. The use of a futuristic scenario grants a transportation to the narrative world, where technological solutions can show their full potential and their interconnections between actors, technologies and final users. Likewise, the futuristic scenario is interrelated with a fictional creation of the situations permitting the use of more complex narratives structures.

Second, the paper demonstrates that narrative structures work in conjunction with legitimacy strategies, providing to the story receiver a robust story that appeals to collective consciousness that aim to validate and legitimate the fictional scenarios and the technological innovations presented within the story. Therefore, the legitimacy strategies frame the narrative adding elements that rationalise and normalise the use of the innovation both in the fictional and the realistic scenario proposed. This combination between narratives and legitimacy allows the creation of a more plausible narrative that creates rational and emotional bonds with the technological innovation and with the brand.

Third, the development of a metanarrative created by multiple stories offers an ongoing understanding that permit the meaning assignation in the customer mind. Each one of the set stories construct individually metanarratives of their own temporal line, that works as blocks that are built through time with the incorporation of new stories and new set that define the metanarrative of a futuristic and bright scenario where technology is the magical tool to overcome humanity problems. The entire metanarrative is exemplified in each one of the sensegiving stages that incorporate not only narrative elements but legitimacy strategies that work together as a unit. Each one of the stages can be used to answer specific purposes. This study provides a stronger picture of the sensegiving process, proving the effectiveness of narratives embedded into marketing strategies that lead to a higher rate of technological adoption.

Fourth, this case shows how the narratives are able to create fictional network pictures of the actors and the technologies involved, having the ability to guide the construction of initial mental representations in customers minds in benefit of the company purposes. In that sense, this paper opens a door for a vast territory that has been left almost unexplored.

In summary, this study has proven the use of the narratives in marketing strategies in two fronts. In the first front this case illustrates the use of different narrative elements to give sense of the new technological innovation which has the goal to reduce the uncertainty and solves possible questions in the customer mind. In the second front, the narratives in the campaign contribute to comprehend multiple relationships that need to be developed in order to achieve the potential benefit proposed by the technological innovation. The use of the narratives in the creation and maintenance of relationships is less evident in this case, but research from Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) has proved their usefulness to develop and strong bonds and long term relationships with customers.

The findings offered by this study have implications both for researchers who wish to decipher strategic sensegiving processes for technological innovations and for practitioners who

want to improve the construction of marketing strategies through the use of narrative structures. This paper extends the knowledge of the use of narratives in the development of marketing strategies in industrial marketing research and proves their usefulness to give sense to technological innovations. More empirical evidence is required to confirm, refine and extend the use of narratives in strategic sensegiving in different industries and diverse innovations. Likewise, we advocate for the development of research that study sensemaking processes to comprehend how customers and partners re-create meaning from these stories and the effects of the narratives in business networks as an element of leverage in commercial exchanges.

For practitioners, these findings provide useful insights about the relevance of the narratives in the construction of marketing strategies in the business-to-business context. As we saw, the correct use of the narratives allows the entrance of legitimacy elements that enhance the marketing strategy being able to give sense to the innovation and reducing the uncertainty levels, while creating emotional and rational bonds with the story receiver. Practitioners should regard attentive how their marketing strategies give sense to their actions, their innovations and their relationships with other actors in the business network in a long-term perspective.

Moreover, companies should recognise the evolution and the shifts in the way business markets are interacting. The structuring of marketing campaigns that resort to narrative structures and other narrative elements such as irony, humour, time, is evidence of the attempts of companies to resonate at individual level with other companies, creating emotional connections with the brand with the objective of developing commercial relationships and achieve the adoption of innovations.

Finally, we emphasise that the selection of this case illustrates the usefulness of the narratives in the high-tech industry. Albeit, their use is not exclusive from technology industries and can be applied to another kind of industries and innovations.

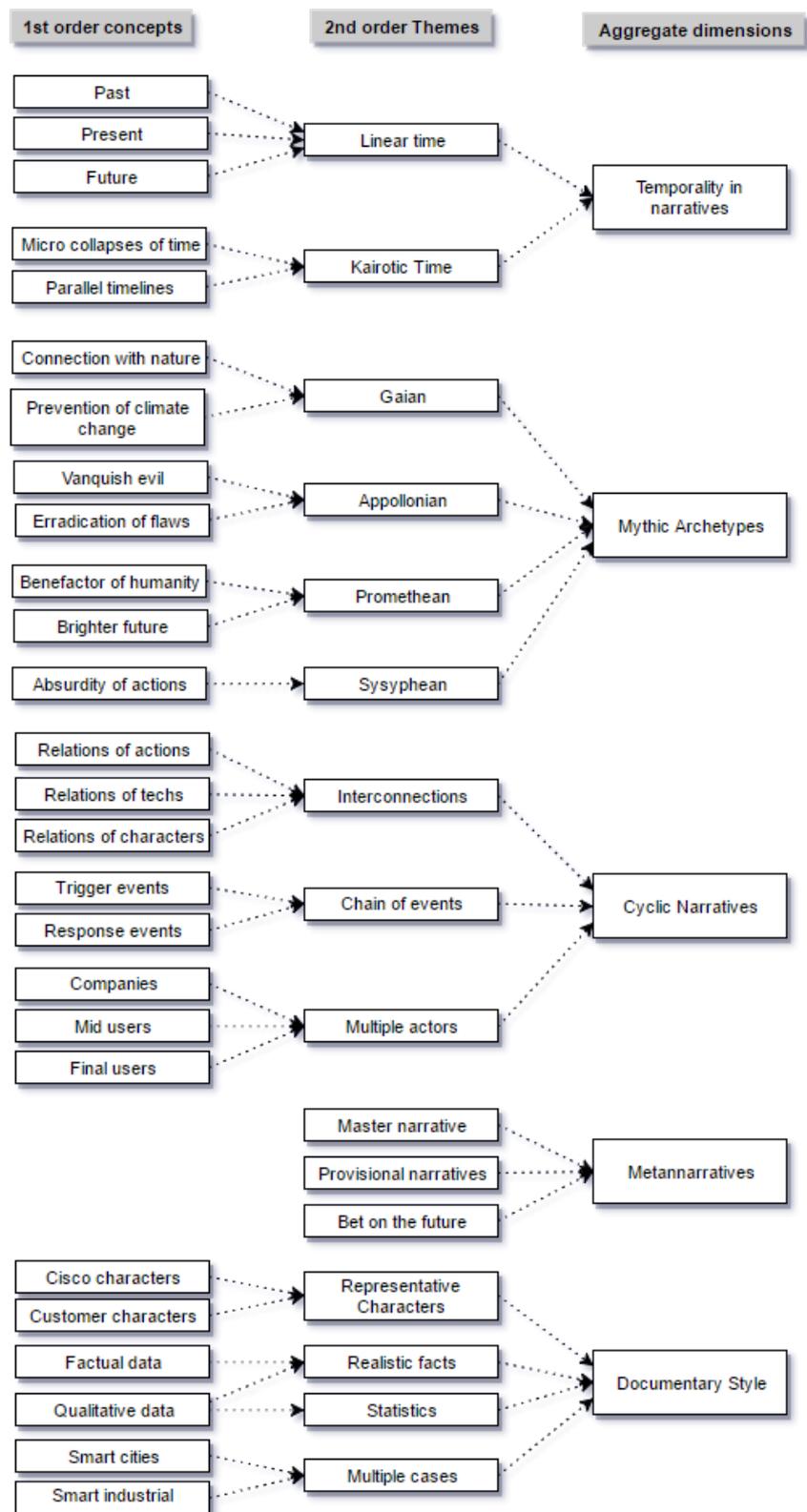| Tomorrow starts here campaign			
Stories set	Name of the video	Release	date
Tomorrow starts here	Anthem	December	2012
	Typical day	May	2013
	Banana	May	2013
	Weekend warrior	June	2013
	Wired The connective	June	2013
	Concert	August	2013
	Circle Story	January	2014
	Storm	April	2014
	Skater	June	2014
	Let's build tomorrow today	February	2015
Successful Customer Cases	Barcelona	January	2014
	Chicago	September	2014
	Milan	October	2014
	Hamburg	October	2014
The Museum of the lasts	The last traffic jam	January	2015
	The last product recall	April	2015
	The last long queue	April	2015
	The last missed delivery	April	2015
The next wave of the Internet	Competitor	June	2015
	Hackers	June	2015
	Online factory	June	2015
	Work from anywhere	June	2015
	Launch the app	June	2015

Table 1: Timeline of story sets developed by Cisco

Figure 1: Coding tree

	Creating the Future	Reconstructing the Present	Leaving the past behind	Answering to specific concerns
Sensegiving	· Use of alternative and plausible realities · Identity construction of the future · Using cues to show small aspects · Cognition that invite to action · Ongoing process of give sense throughout the campaign · Multichannel campaing that invite to socialization	· Explicit retrospective through analysis of real examples · Use multiple cues to show the posible benefts · Use representative characters to gain explicit legitimacy leading to convience the story receiver	· Implicit retrospective being positioned in the future · Keywords that serve as cues of nowadyas problems · Use of a plausible reality · Invite to the action	· Explicit retrospective through realistic situations · Plausible stories placed in daily scenarios · Offer an identity to the bigger issues encarnated in hackers · Invite to the action · Prospective representation of the future competitor
Legitimacy	Narrativisation Normalisation	Authorisation Rationalisation	Narrativisation Normalisation	Narrativisation Normalisation Rationalisation Moralisation
Narratives	(+) Fiction · Non Linear temporal structure · Mythical archetypes · Metanarratives & Antenarratives · Cyclic narratives	Reality · Linear temporal structure · Documentary Style · Metanarratives & Antenarratives	Fiction · Non linear temporal structure · Mythical archetypes - (Binary opposition) · Metanarratives & Antenarratives	(-) Fiction · Binary opposition · Non linear temporal structure · Metanarratives & Antenarratives
Set time	Future	Present	Future	Near Future
Campaing	*TOMORROW STARTS HERE*			
Set of Stories	Tomorrow starts here	Successful customer stories	The museum of the lasts	The next Wave of the internet
	Anthem | Typical day | Banana | Wired | Weekend Warrior Concert | Circle story | Storm | Skater | Build the future	Barcelona | Chicago | Milan | Hamburg	Traffic jam | Product recall | Long wait | Missed delivery	Competitor | Hackers | Online factory Work from Anywhere | Launch an app
Release date	Dec 2012 -------------- Jun 2014	Jan 2014 --------------- Oct 2014	Jan 2015 --------------- Apr 2015	Jun 2015 --------------- Sept 2015

Figure 2: Narratives, sensegiving and legitimacy strategies embedded in Cisco's campaign

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