



## BOOK EXTRACTS

the power of data storytelling

*by sejal vora*

engage! co-creating organizational vitality  
and individual fulfilment

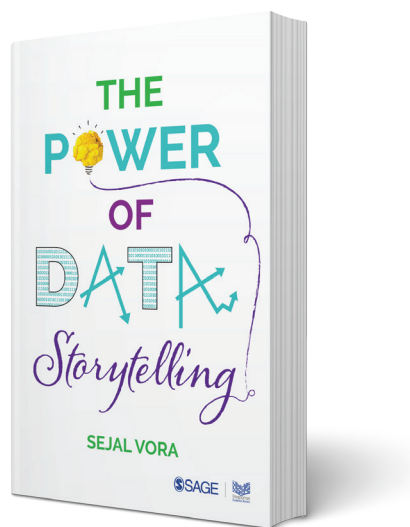
*by sunil maheshwari*

the third pillar

*by raghuram g rajan*

# the power of data storytelling

by sejal vora



**Sejal Vora**

SAGE Response  
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**T**he range of entrepreneur stories presented in Shark Tank has often left me amazed and inspired while also motivating young entrepreneurs to live their dream! Since its launch in 2009, Shark Tank has aired 9 seasons and 199 episodes, with an average of four start-up pitches per episode. And while the business proposal itself is key, there are only a few stories that find a deeper connect with both the audience and investors.

★★★★

Movies and books are our avenues to escape the real world and live the fictional story of another. All of us have stayed up nights while on a movie marathon or while reading a book which we just couldn't put down. An average person watches 20–30 movies and reads 4 books in a year. How many of these movies and books can you remember? How many you think have left a mark on you in some way?

## it needs a little polishing

Stories are all around us, but not all stories are equally effective and impactful. Some strike the right chord and hence leave a deeper mark on us than others do. And while every storyteller puts in his best effort to convey a great story, I have often found that the differentiating factor

between a good story and a great story lies in giving the last finishing touches while bringing it all together. The story wheel and narrative give us a strong story foundation whose true impact will be realized only when all parts fit together perfectly, with suitable angles adorning the right parts of the structure.

Often, I come across people who are genuinely good with their writing and also make high-quality charts. Naturally, they fail to understand why their stories don't leave a mark! A common answer I have in such situations: 'You have a good story, it just needs a little polishing to make it stand out', which is typically the last 5 per cent of our story-building process. It's like when painting the walls of your home, if you apply only one coat, it might suffice your current need, but there is no guarantee that it will stick until the end of the year. But when you give the second finishing coat, the deep colour shows better and you can be more confident about the colour lasting for a longer time.

*The last 5 per cent time spent on polishing the story can make all the difference.*

On most occasions, when people create data stories, their focus is only on getting the right 'characters' and 'events' that make the story, which by

itself does not guarantee a great story. While important, it is just like the first coat of paint; it isn't enough. How these characters and events unfold in the story makes all the difference. It is the second coat of paint which will determine how well and how long the story will stick.

A data story leaves a mark when it has the ability to engage and enable the desired audience. When it generates and maintains interest throughout the story while also providing new knowledge tools, it calls for a powerful and impactful data story. In this chapter, we discuss some simple and important aspects which once enveloped in our story can help us achieve just that!

The data analysis incorporated in the story wheel and narrative give the most compelling parts of the story. The factors discussed in this chapter ensure that those compelling aspects exert the power and impact we want them to.

### get them hooked!

It is every storyteller's dream to tell a captivating story. A smart three-pronged approach (Figure 6.1) can help sail through this feat with ease:

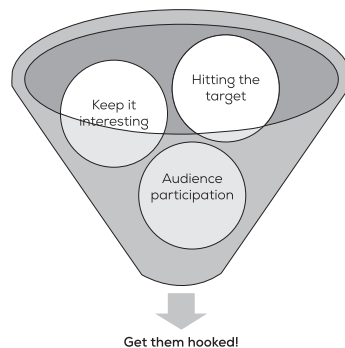
**1. Hitting the target:** A storyteller must cater to the audience's requirements, and this is a mandatory checklist for him/her. This helps in

making the audience curious about the theme of the story and what it has to offer.

### 2. Keep your story interesting:

Like a movie, you need to maintain the rhythm and continually surprise them with interesting insights.

**Figure 6.1 The Three-pronged Engagement Funnel**



### 3. Audience participation:

Dragging a point makes no sense, as your audience may just hang up to the boredom of your story. They should participate in the story by agreeing with the conclusions and start thinking from the storyteller's perspective.

### hit the bull's eye

*The simplest way to grab someone's attention is to give them what they are looking for.*

On a hot summer afternoon, after running around completing

some errands, you stop at one of the local stores and ask for a cold bottle of water. The shopkeeper, a very kind old gentleman, is about to start drinking his hot cup of afternoon tea and for some reason he hands it over to you. You are touched by his gesture, but you respectfully decline because all you can think of in that scorching May heat is a sip of cold water! Very politely, you ask him for a cold bottle of water; he again hands over the cup of tea. After trying another two–three times, you either drink the tea because you don't want to be rude or, irritated with the heat, you simply walk outside and towards the next store in the hope to find what you need so that you can finally quench your thirst!

*No matter how good or kind a certain person or their product is, if they don't understand your need and are unable to meet your requirement, they will not be able to get your interest or attention.*

The simplest way to grab someone's attention is to give them what they need. Identification of the story's purpose and the audience's understanding developed in the first stage of the story wheel come in handy here. We will have hit the bull's eye when we are able to align our data and story to the audience's need. ■

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Excerpted with permission from SAGE Response from the book *The Power of Data Storytelling* by Sejal Vora.