

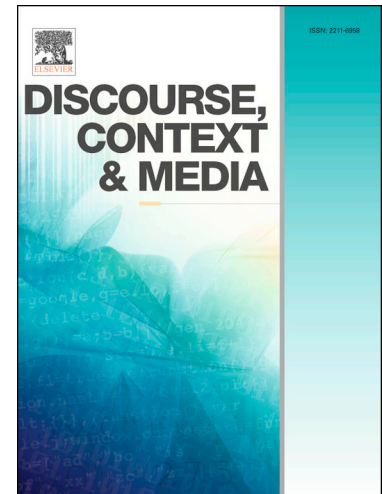
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Evolving Media Landscapes

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1. Introduction | Narrations and Expectations

Once upon a time, in 1977, Roland Barthes said that *narrative* was “simply there, like life itself”. Be it “in [...] legend, fable, [...] epic, history, tragedy,” or “comedy,” (Barthes 1977: 79), narratives are assumed to pervade our lives. Barthes proceeds by listing “paintings,” “stained glass windows,” and “comics” as communicative phenomena capable of showing narrative features. His enumeration could be extended further to comprise “video games,” “reality TV,” “wrestling,” (Bird & Dardenne 2009: 207), and *Lego* brick boxes (Hjarvard 2004). It indicates the narrative potential of semiotically complex multimodal texts integrating language, images, sound, gestures etc. While the omnipresence of narratives in communication is undeniable, not all communicative phenomena share the same degree of *narrativity*.

Popular science journalism has employed narrative strategies ever since its emergence in the mid-19th century (cf. Mussell 2009). An investigation of degrees of *narrativity*, i.e. the presence of particular amounts of narrative features or cues in a given multimodal text (cf. Alber 2005: 386), allows painting a more complex picture of emerging and developing journalistic practices between continuity and change. This article offers diachronic perspectives on narrativity in popular science journalism by the example of the *National Geographic* magazine (hereafter *NGM*), with a focus on one of its most traditional genres, the *feature article*. Ever since its launch in October 1888, the magazine has grown into one of the most prominent popular science publications on the market (Mendelson & Darling-Wolf 2009: 798; Lutz & Collins 1993: 16). The journalism offered by the *National Geographic*, a (non-profit but) commercial media institution, is likely to result from an attentive *audience design* (Bell 1997) that has always required editors to balance textual practices between tradition and innovation. I suggest that such editorial concerns can lead to a *stability*, often *strengthening*, of successful genre-‘native’ patterns, and may further comprise an *internalization* of patterns ‘native’ to other media and products targeting similar audiences.

In the course of the 20th century, *NGM* witnessed far-reaching material-technical developments such as the advent and evolution of photography,

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