



# EMPLOYEES TELLING YOUR STORY

The effects of employee testimonials and pictures in storytelling on several brand concepts

Master Thesis  
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**DURAVERMEER**

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UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

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## **Master Thesis**

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## PREFACE (DUTCH)

Het verhaal van mijn studietijd begint in september 2012, toen ik de Waaijer binnenstapte om het eerste college van 'Inleiding Communicatiewetenschap' te volgen. Communicatiewetenschap studeren, eigenlijk wist ik niet goed wat het in zou houden, maar het bleek een goede keuze! Een geweldige tijd met nieuwe vriendinnen, nieuwe kennis en nieuwe uitdagingen volgde. Nu bijna vier jaar later komt dat verhaal tot een einde met het afronden van de master Communication Studies. Mijn hele leven ben ik al geïnteresseerd geweest in het horen en vertellen van verhalen. Daarom was de keuze voor het onderwerp van mijn masterthesis uiteindelijk niet zo verrassend: storytelling. Ik had het geluk om een onderzoek te doen bij Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo, waar ik bijna zes maanden deel uitmaakte van de afdeling 'Klant & Markt'. Ik besef me heel goed dat ik deze afstudeertijd niet zo goed was doorgekomen zonder een aantal mensen.

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# ABSTRACT

Corporate storytelling can be used as a tool to influence how customers experience a brand (Lundqvist et al., 2003). Even though storytelling has a lot of advantages for marketing goals, there are also some challenges. The major issue is identifying the key elements of effective stories (Green, 2008). The aim of this study is to confirm that storytelling has a significant influence on brand concepts like brand experience and attitude, but also to find out whether two characteristics, employee testimonials and employee pictures, are effective on the same brand concepts.

This study had a 2 (with or without employee testimonial) x 2 (with or without employee picture) between subjects design, with one control condition where there was given a plain informative text instead of a story. The research was conducted in cooperation with Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo (DVBH). A total of 157 participants filled out the online questionnaire. They were equally divided over the five conditions of this study.

In contrast to what was expected, there was no significant effect for text type (story or information) neither for story characteristic (employee testimonial or picture). However, some results of the qualitative data showed that participants did like the employee testimonials, because these made the story more personal. The advice of this study is to further research the domain of storytelling and its characteristics, in order to establish guidelines for the most effective story content. But perhaps, stories are not effective at all.

**Keywords:** storytelling, corporate stories, story characteristics, brand experience, brand attitude, brand trust, memory of information, text appreciation.

## DUTCH VERSION

Het gebruik van corporate storytelling kan bijdragen aan hoe klanten een merk beleven en ervaren (Lundqvist et al., 2003). Hoewel storytelling veel voordelen heeft voor marketing doeleinden, zijn er ook uitdagingen. Het grootste probleem ligt in het identificeren van de belangrijkste elementen van effectieve verhalen (Green, 2008). Het doel van dit onderzoek is om vast te stellen dat storytelling een significante invloed heeft op merk concepten zoals 'beleving' en 'attitude', maar ook om erachter te komen of twee specifieke karakteristieken, quotes van medewerkers en foto's van medewerkers, effect hebben.

Dit onderzoek had een 2 (met of zonder medewerker quote) x 2 (met of zonder medewerker foto) design, met één controle conditie waar er een alleen informatieve tekst werd gegeven in plaats van een verhaal. Het onderzoek is uitgevoerd in samenwerking met Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo (DVBH). In totaal hebben 157 mensen de online vragenlijst ingevuld, waar zij gelijkwaardig verdeeld werden over de vijf condities van dit onderzoek.

In tegenstelling tot wat verwacht werd, was er geen significant effect voor tekst type (verhaal of informatie) noch voor verhaalkarakteristiek (medewerker quote of foto). Echter, sommige resultaten van de kwalitatieve data lieten zien dat participanten de quotes van medewerkers leuk vonden omdat het een verhaal persoonlijker maakte. Het advies van deze studie is om het domein van storytelling en de bijbehorende karakteristieken verder te onderzoeken, om in staat te kunnen zijn richtlijnen te ontwikkelen voor de meest effectieve verhaalinhoud. Maar wellicht zijn verhalen helemaal niet zo effectief als verwacht.

# 1 | INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 | Storytelling; what it is

When thinking about a story, one can come up with a lot of examples that have to do with entertaining people, such as reading a story to a child or reading a book while on vacation. Stories are not only entertaining; our whole life consists of stories. People think in a narrative way rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008). This enables people to relate to stories, understand them better and even remember stories in detail and more frequently (James & Minnis, 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising that stories are not only used to entertain people.

Telling a story may sound as an easy thing to do. We all tell stories about our lives, what we think is important and we use them as a tool to be persuasive and convincing. But what about organizations? Do they also tell stories? The answer to this question is simply yes, they do. The last couple of years, corporate storytelling has become an important and influential tool in the wide range of communication strategies. Storytelling is a vivid and memorable way to pass on an organization's history, values and vision (Jacobson & Beverly, 1999). To better explain what storytelling in organizational context means, a few examples of 'good' storytelling strategies can be given. When looking at the website of IKEA one can experience what an implemented storytelling strategy looks like. IKEA uses storytelling in all kind of ways, for example on their homepage. They highlight a certain aspect of their assortment and tell a story to their customers about that product. Take their garden furniture. They don't just introduce their furniture, but tell a story about it. It also appears on their social media channels. They don't just provide information; they tell their customers a story about their products and how the lives of customers can benefit by it.

Another example of storytelling can be found on the website of Tony Chocolonely. The history of the company is described in a typical storytelling way. From year to year they describe in a story how the company developed to where they are now. They provide that information in a way that grabs the attention of the reader and tries in an effective and entertaining way to inform them about the history of the company in an entertaining way.

The question arises if storytelling really helps organizations accomplishing their goals. Storytelling has shown to have a significant influence on various important factors for organizations. Storytelling can for example influence brand experience (Lundqvist et al., 2013). The concept of brand experience is important for organizations to take into account because it can be strongly related to brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009). Ultimately this is what organizations want to accomplish: loyalty and satisfaction. It means that consumers will come back to your company and make use of your products and services. Not only a concept like brand experience is important. The memory of information as told by the organization can be a communication goal.

Remembering important values of an organization can result in more brand associations, brand knowledge and brand awareness. Being familiar with an organization's core values or main objectives could make the consumer more loyal (Brakus et al., 2009). Research indicates that storytelling is a memorable way of content marketing. Green (2008) states that a story can grab one's attention and create memorable images.

Another question that now comes to mind is what story content must be used to be most effective in influencing brand experience and the memory of (core) information of the organization. Green (2008) also acknowledges this question. He says that the major issue with storytelling is identifying the key elements of corporate stories. This research tries to fill the gap in current knowledge on the effective characteristics in story text.

The practical relevance of this research lies in determining effective story characteristics that can be used in the marketing field. For marketing managers this research can offer knowledge on how to use corporate stories in their organization and what characteristics can be most effective in influencing brand experience and memory of information. Furthermore this study aims to confirm that using corporate storytelling can enhance consumer's brand experience and how consumers memorize the information that an organization wants to tell.

Also this research is scientifically relevant because it can fill the gap of what characteristics of storytelling must be used. There has been little research done regarding this topic. Research of Janssen et al. (2012) serves as a starting point for this research, because they identified five different textual story characteristics that were used most in corporate stories. Very little other research exists that particularly focuses on influential story text characteristics.

## **1.2 | Research goal**

The aim of this research is to identify the influence of storytelling characteristics on several important aspects, such as brand experience. If this influence can be determined, it can be a practical guidance for marketing managers. Also this research could contribute on filling the gap in literature about storytelling characteristics. Therefore the main research question is:

To what extent do storytelling characteristics influence brand experience, brand attitude, brand trust, memory of information and appreciation of the text?

## **1.3 | Content**

In this paper, first it will be explained what storytelling means and how it can be a persuasive and influential tool for organizations. The theoretical framework will also address knowledge on brand experience, brand attitude and the memory of information and will explain why these concepts are important for organizations to take into account.

Throughout the theoretical framework research questions and hypotheses will be introduced. Furthermore the framework will end with the research design that is used. After the framework, the methods used in this study will be introduced. Then the results section will show if the hypotheses of this research are supported or not supported. The last chapters of this research include the discussion and conclusion, where the general conclusion of this research will be given.



## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This framework offers an insight into what storytelling means (2.1) and how organizations can use storytelling as a tool (2.2). After having explained (corporate) storytelling, there will be a section about the characteristics of storytelling and what characteristics are more or less influential when a story is being told (2.3). In 2.4 there will be a focus on the story characteristics that will be used for this research. In 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 the dependent variables of this research will be further elaborated. Finally, a research design will be introduced (2.10).

### 2.1 | Storytelling

Stories have been told in our lives for as long as we can remember. Through stories, the history and cultural heritage of many societies have been preserved (Stein, 1982). It all started with telling history stories, to keep the cultural heritage of a society alive. Later on, stories were also used as a means of instructing others. Apart from the entertainment function of stories, it has been found that people use a story to recreate a version of their previous experience. A story can be described as *'emotionally and symbolically charged narratives; they do not present information or facts about 'events' but they enrich, enhance and infuse facts with meaning'* (Gabriel, 1998 as cited by Janssen, Van Dalen, Van Hoof & Van Vuuren, 2012). By retelling a story in their minds, people create a more elaborate structure of their personal knowledge of a situation (Stein, 1982). Retelling a story means that people think about the information they read or heard by repeating the story in their minds.

By repeating the story in their minds, people might better understand the information that is given in the text of the story. This implies that by reading or hearing a story, people can also make more sense of an organization or get a deeper understanding of the core values of an organization. In the definition of Gabriel (1998, as cited by Janssen et al., 2012) it is also explained that a story does not just present information, but enrich, enhance and infuse facts with meaning. The difference between plain information and a story lies in the fact that the information in a story is enriched with anecdotes, metaphors, symbols, emotions etc. By integrating these aspects into a text, information is enhanced with meaning (Gabriel, 1998).

Green (2008) indicates that stories can move someone into a narrative world. It is enjoyable to be taken away from the everyday reality and self-awareness. Stories can do this for people. When people move into a narrative world, the potential impact of this information increases enormously. Research from Mazzocco et al. (2010) confirms that a story can be more persuasive when someone is transferred into the story world. The reason for this as stated by Sood and Miller (2008) is: people think in a narrative way and relate better to stories than to just information. This impact is explained by stating that

stories can grab the attention of individuals, motivate them to act and create memorable images (Green, 2008). Having an image of something makes it easier to recall the relative information when there is no image formed of the information.

Storytelling as a tool can be used to make an audience understand the message better, so that they will easily remember what they have been told or what they have read (Green, 2008). Another word that is often used for storytelling is a true narrative. A true narrative is described as a specialized story that includes an original state, an action and an outcome as well as involving actors, agendas and an influence (MacLeod & Davidson, 2007). A true narrative can be seen as a social interaction approach. It is a talk-in-interaction and a social practice. Storytelling focuses on its community-building functions: stories can build consensus, a common culture of shared meaning, and deeper ethics (Delgado, 1989).

It is important that stories appear to be non-coercive and personal, which means that the audience must feel free to interpret the message that is conform to their own mindset. This way stories can include personal elements enabling the presenter (narrator) to construct a meaning in line with the receivers' own ideas and goals, making the narration more captivating (Gill, 2011). Looking from this perspective, Gill (2011) defines storytelling as: *'a natural, engaging and deeper form of communicating across a diverse audience (often characteristic of organizations) as stories allow listeners to tap into their own personal elements and reach the same conclusion as the desired conclusion of the narrator'*. Later on it will be explained what other benefits, besides reaching the same conclusion, there are for organizations when they are using storytelling as a communication strategy.

## **2.2 | Corporate storytelling**

Corporate storytelling is the sharing of knowledge and experiences through narratives and anecdotes in order to communicate lessons, complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections (Sole & Wilson, 2002). To explain why corporate storytelling is an influential tool for organizations, it is useful to first look at why corporate communication is important. According to Dowling (2006) corporate communication important because it is designed to raise awareness and generate understanding and appreciation of the organization among stakeholders. It is also used to defend or explain a company's actions to gain more understanding. Thirdly it can be used to explain and reinforce the mission and morality of the organization. A story can be part of the whole communication strategy of the company, in which a story combines elements of its mission, morality, and behavior (Dowling, 2006).

### **2.2.1 | Different patterns of corporate stories**

According to Denning (2006) there are eight different objectives of corporate stories. A company can have different objectives, Denning (2006) states the following objectives:

sparkling action, communicating who you are, transmitting values, communicating who the firm is, fostering collaboration, taming the grapevine, sharing knowledge and leading people into the future. Transmitting values and communicating what the brand is, can have an impact on brand experience and other brand concepts (Schmitt, 2009). These different objectives could be both internal and external. Internal communication is often perceived as a synonym for intra-organizational communication. Internal storytelling is a medium for an organization to engage with staff on a more personal level and strengthen employee loyalty (Gill, 2011). The difference with external storytelling, is most clear when looking at the target group. With internal storytelling, employees of the organization are part of the target group; with external storytelling mostly customers are targeted.

When looking at external storytelling, sharing stories and messages with your customers, can be seen as a form of content marketing. Content marketing is the creation of a valuable, relevant and compelling context by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand (Pulizzi, 2012). Generating a positive behavior from a customer or possible prospects can be a very important goal for organizations. Content is not created to profit directly from the content, but indirectly by attracting and retaining customers (Pulizzi, 2012).

Besides the definition of Sole and Wilson (2002) in the beginning of this paragraph, Gill (2011, p. 19) also gives a useful definition: *“Corporate storytelling is the process of developing a message that creates a new point-of-view or reinforces an opinion or behavior by using narration about people, the organization, the past, visions for the future, social bonding and work itself”*. Both definitions are in line with the earlier mentioned content marketing. The way to create valuable, relevant and compelling content through storytelling, is by telling people memorable and vivid stories that result in “proper pleasure” (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008). Stories have a power to influence and inspire in such a way that a more traditional form of corporate communication lacks (Dowling, 2006). Not telling your stories in the right way, can result in a faceless company. The question arises of what a good corporate story consists of. Using stories as persuasion can be a very effective tool, but according to Green (2008) there are also some challenges. The major issue he discusses is identifying the key elements of effective corporate stories. Little research has been undertaken to study the effective characteristics of storytelling that an organization could implement in their strategy.

This paragraph has explained what corporate storytelling is and how organizations can use it in their communication strategies. To study the effects of storytelling on how people perceive the brand, one must look at the differences of effects of plain informative texts and stories. This study will look into the different effects of corporate storytelling.

### **2.3 | Storytelling characteristics**

Having stated what corporate storytelling is and what possibilities it can have for organizations, it is interesting to look deeper into the characteristics of storytelling that can

be more or less influential. Da Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008) state that storytelling has different types, which means there are ways of telling a story in specific settings and for specific purposes. Storytelling is no fixed supra-genre where there is one right way, but it can have dynamic and evolving responses in different situations and organizations. Research that also acknowledges this has been undertaken by Janssen et al. (2012). They defined five different categories of textual characteristics that can differ from situation to situation. These five categories are: stylistic characteristics, structure characteristics, content characteristics, genre and lay-out. Looking from the perspective that there are different categories of characteristics, literature on storytelling characteristics was reviewed.

**Genre** is the general way of formulating and structure and is probably the broadest characteristic of storytelling. Reviewing literature on storytelling genre produced no results. Janssen et al. (2012) also concluded with their content analysis that there was no specific genre found.

Another category that is defined by Janssen et al. (2012) is content. **Content characteristics** are for example the use of examples or metaphors in the story. The most used characteristics were according to Janssen et al. (2012): evidence with figures, mention of founders, identity stories, use of examples and mentioning of core activities. In line with what was mentioned previously, transmitting the identity and core values and activities of an organization can be done through the use of stories.

**Structure characteristics** that are used most frequently according to Janssen et al. (2012) are headings, titles and paragraphs. There was no other literature found on the structure characteristics that are most used or should be used.

Reviewing literature on **stylistic characteristics** gave more results. Janssen et al. (2012) found that stylistic characteristics that were most frequently used are: third person narration, no direct form of address, metaphors and positive adjectives. Other researchers also mention that a more personalized way of storytelling is more appreciated by the public (Huang, 2010; Vromen & Coleman, 2013). According to these researchers a more personalized way of storytelling is by using 'I', 'we' and 'our' in the stories. Another way to create a more personalized way of storytelling is through the use of employee testimonials (Magaard, 2014). There has also been some research about story styles. A style could for example be 'humor'. Eisend (2009) discussed the use of humor in advertising; he found that humor significantly enhances attention and has a positive effect. Another style could be 'anecdotal', which is addressed by Strange and Leung (1999). This study shows that anecdotal accounts about individuals can influence judgments about a situation. A story could also be authentic, which means when a story is believed to be a 'true story', with for examples links to the past, respect for traditions and links with culture (Huang, 2010). In line with the mentioned stylistic characteristics of stories, Chiu et al. (2012) distinguishes four style elements of a story that can have an influence. These are: authenticity,

conciseness, reversal and humor. Chiu et al. (2012) also conclude that humor in stories positively relates to brand attitudes.

The fifth and last category of characteristics that Janssen et al. (2012) discuss, is **lay-out**. Lay-out could be shaped through the use of different types of fonts or background. Their research showed that most used lay-out characteristics are: the use of photographs, black and white color of text and a background color that is compatible with corporate visual identity. Visualizing through for example the use of photographs can increase learning of a target group (Ploetzner, Bodemer & Neudert, 2008; Levin & Mayer, 1993). The use of visualizations could also stimulate the recall of information (Levin & Mayer, 1993). Solomon (2002) argues that visuals are essential for storytelling. Visuals and visualizations are keys to being persuasive. The use of visuals can support the visualization in the minds of the reader, which can make them understand the message better. The question arises of what type of visual should be used in the story text. Particularly situations involving “real-world” viewing environments lead to greater message processing (Miniar et al., 1991).

Concluding from this discussion of the most common characteristics of stories, it can be said that there are only scarce results on storytelling characteristics. The characteristics of storytelling have been described in literature, but not empirically tested. This research aims to study whether some characteristics of storytelling have a significant influence on how a brand is perceived. In the next paragraph, the characteristics selected for this research will be introduced.

## **2.4 | Employee testimonials & pictures**

For organizations it can be important to give a better insight of what the organization is and what their core values are. Lundqvist et al. (2003) conclude in their study that storytelling is an effective way of communicating brand values to consumers. Communicating brand values can excellently be done through employees that identify themselves with the core values of an organization. Therefore it is interesting to study whether a more personal insight into the employees of an organization can induce deeper understanding of the core values of the organization.

As mentioned before, the use of a more personalized way of telling your story is more appreciated by the public (Vromen & Coleman, 2013). Using employee testimonials in a corporate story can be seen as a more personalized way of telling your story, because it is told from the viewpoint of the employee. Maggaard (2014) defines employee testimonials as a text by a first-person narrator, attributed to an employee and conveying first-hand experience of life as a member of an organization. Other research claims that employee testimonials will induce higher levels of organizational attraction and information will be perceived as more credible (Walker et al., 2009). Braveman's research (2008) found that the use of testimonials is more persuasive than only summing up information. This was also found by Maagaard (2014) who undertook research regarding employee

testimonials. She found that the use of employee testimonials gives a more personal insight into the organization and therefore can be more persuasive.

Personalization of a message could also be accomplished with the use of photographs of employees. A more personal text is better appreciated by the public (Vromen & Coleman, 2013). Pictures lead to greater message processing because they are attention-getting devices and they enhance the memorability of other semantic information. Having employees say something in a text, video or in another medium could make the message more personal. Having this in mind, it can be explained why using pictures of employees is beneficial for the organization.

Concluding the discussed literature, this research will use employee testimonials and employee pictures in stories to give a more personal insight into the organization, which can have effects on brand concepts like brand experience and brand attitude.

## **2.5 | Text appreciation**

When thinking about what story characteristics are most influential for organizations, text appreciation comes to mind. Appreciation could for example mean when someone finds the text informative, good or attractive (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). When the reader appreciates a text, it is imaginable that the content will have a lasting effect in the mind of the reader. According to Oversteegen and van Wijk (2003) 'attractiveness' is part of text appreciation. If a text is found to be more attractive, one could process the information more in depth, because more attention is given to the text. This assumption is supported by the appraisal theory, which means in essence that emotions are elicited by evaluations of events and situations (Scherer, Schorr & Johnstone, 2001). Using this definition, one could also apply it to text appreciation. Kamalski, Lentz and Sanders (2004) propose that a subjective rating of a text could influence the cognitive learning and understanding of the text.

This research will take text appreciation into account and will address whether text appreciation is higher or lower when participants read a story or plain information about the organization. It is expected that a story is appreciated more than plain information, because people can relate to a story more (Woodside, 2010) and therefore have positive feelings about the text. Besides, this research will look deeper into the characteristics: employee testimonials and pictures, to see whether they have a significant influence on the appreciation of the text. It is assumable that employee testimonials and pictures can have an influence on text appreciation, because these characteristics give a personal insight into the organization. As mentioned earlier, a personalized way of telling a story is appreciated more by the public (Magaard, 2014; Vromen & Coleman, 2013).

## 2.6 | Memory of information

Livo and Rietz (as cited by Larkey & Gonzalez, 2007) describe a story as a way of knowing and remembering information – a shape or pattern into which information can be arranged. This definition of a story indicates that a story can have effects on the memory of the reader. For organizations it is useful to know whether stories are more effective when it comes to remembering content than informative texts.

Research claims that a substantial amount of information stored in and retrieved from memory is episodic (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008). This means that people store information in the way a story is told. This could mean that telling a story evokes more memories than informative texts will have. Individuals remember people, places and events through stories; thus stories perpetuate awareness.

According to the ACT Theory (Adaptive Control of Thought) (Anderson, 1983) people's memory is structured in such a way as an associative network, where nodes are connected via links. When hearing a new story, existing nodes or links might be activated. Bruner (1990) states that ACT Theory explains how stories help individuals organize their experiences, evaluate actions and interpret outcomes. By organizing their experiences and evaluating actions through stories, the memory is expected to be more activated than through plain information (Granitz & Forman, 2015).

McLellan (2006) also argues that storytelling provides a convenient tool for remembering things. In Cullen's article (2006) is described how miners are educated through storytelling videos to make the job safer. Cullen (2006) concluded that information that is told through a story, engages the mind and makes the information much more memorable. Responses of the miners showed that the stories that were told, had a significant impact on the decisions they make about safety. This is explainable because Green (2008) claims that a narrative account can grab the attention, motivate to act and create memorable images. If a story can create a memorable image of the information that is told, it makes it easier for readers to recall this information.

However some research suggests that storytelling can have a positive influence on memory of information, there has been too little empirical research done regarding this topic. If a (potential) customer of an organization remembers information about important aspects of the company better, this can result in more brand associations, brand knowledge and brand awareness. This research aims to confirm that corporate storytelling has a positive influence on the memory of information relative to plain informative texts. Overall it is expected that more personal stories have positive effects (Vromen & Coleman, 2013), therefore it is plausible that the use of employee testimonials and pictures in a story (making it more personal) has a positive effect on the memory of information.

## 2.7 | Brand experience

Already mentioned, transmitting values and communicating who the brand is, can have an impact on brand experience and other brand concepts (Schmitt, 2009).

Brand experience is conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). Brand experiences are no general evaluations about the brand, but they include specific feelings, sensations and other consumer responses. According to Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience consists of four dimensions:

**Sensory dimension.** It aims at customer's sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch. It further shows the amount of brand attractiveness for consumer's senses and demonstrates its impact on his/her senses. This dimension is somewhat strange to apply to every organization. For example, a construction company that has business-to-business customers probably does not evoke smell, taste and touch feelings. With a construction company senses are not activated in the same way as for example with a perfume brand.

**Affective dimension.** It presumes consumer's internal emotions and feelings towards the brand.

**Behavioral dimension.** It presumes aiming at physical experiences of consumer's life. It shows the capacity of the brand involved in physical activities.

**Intellectual dimension.** It includes the creative thinking of the consumer. It shows how much a brand can stimulate feelings of curiosity, thinking and problem solution of the consumer.

Brand experience is formed when customers actually use the brand, by talking to others about the brand, seeking out brand information, promotions, and events, and so on (Ambler et al., 2002). Storytelling could also be seen as a form of using the brand by for example reading information about the brand. It is important for organizations to pay attention to brand experience because it has shown to have a positive effect on consumer satisfaction, consumer loyalty and brand personality. This statement is based on the findings by Brakus et al. (2009) and Sahin, Zehir and Kitapçı (2011). This positive effect could imply that when brand experience is perceived positive, consumer satisfaction, loyalty and brand personality would be positive.

Also Padgett and Allen (1997) suggest that brand experience is a useful concept for understanding service brand image because it represents the customer's perspective of a service and the symbolic meanings created during service consumption. Some studies even suggest that brand experience captures the very essence of branding much more than brand concepts such as brand equity, brand value, brand associations, brand attitudes and brand personality (Schmitt, 2009). Schmitt (2009) claims in his study that it ultimately matters to consumers whether a brand or company can provide attractive experiences to them.



Research on the influence of storytelling on brand experience is scarce; however Lundqvist et al. (2013) did a study regarding the influence of storytelling on consumer brand experience. They compared two groups where the one group was exposed to corporate information and the other group to a corporate story. Consumers that were exposed to a corporate story described the brand in much more positive terms than the consumers that were not exposed to the story. Their research not only suggests positive influence on brand experience, but also other positive effects of storytelling are discussed. Storytelling generates positive feelings in customers and is perceived as more convincing than facts; this can result in more trust, awareness about the brand and uniqueness. Storytelling also positively influences brand associations, which in turn influences positive consumer brand equity (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

This study aims to confirm that corporate stories have a positive influence on how consumers experience the brand. It is also interesting to take the discussed characteristics into account. It is assumable that when a story gives a personal insight in the organization, by means of employee testimonials and pictures, it has a more positive influence on brand experience than plain informative texts.

## **2.8 | Brand attitude**

In the previous section it was explained how brand experience is no overall evaluation of the brand. However brand attitude is. Attitude toward the brand is a relatively enduring, one-dimensional summary evaluation of the brand that could energize behavior (Spears & Singh, 2004). Summarizing, brand attitude is the individual's (overall) internal evaluation of the brand. Consumer attitude towards the brand is an important brand perception because it captures another aspect of the meaning consumers attach to brands in their memory; this can affect their purchase behavior (Low & Lamb, 2000).

Another explanation why attitude is an important factor comes from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior describes how behavior can be predicted. According to Ajzen (1991) intention is the best predictor of behavior; intention means the representation of one's readiness to perform a behavior. Intention is dependent on three things: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Given that attitude can influence the intention to do something, it is an important factor for organizations to take into account. It has to be mentioned that in the Theory of Planned Behavior it is about attitude towards the behavior, not general brand attitude. However, brand attitude and attitude towards behavior (of a consumer) can be seen as a somewhat similar concept, because it is both about the overall internal evaluation of a subject by a consumer.

As discussed previously, brand experience has shown to be influenced by corporate stories. There is no research yet that particularly focuses on how storytelling affects brand attitude. Nevertheless, brand attitude is a concept that is comparable to other brand concepts such as brand experience. When measuring brand experience, most of the time

other concepts are also taken into account because they represent different things but together could create a stronger image of the brand. It is expected that when brand experience is positively influenced by storytelling, positive brand attitude is also the case. For this research it will be a particular goal to investigate the influence of storytelling on brand attitude. Since brand attitude is an important concept for organizations, because it can influence purchase intention of customers, it is relevant to study the effects of storytelling on brand attitude.

## **2.9 | Brand trust**

Having discussed the possible effects of storytelling (characteristics) on remembering information, brand experience and brand attitude, another concept that will be introduced is brand trust. Brand trust is in line with brand attitude and experience, but puts more emphasize on the fact that trust be a substantial barrier to competitors (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Brand trust is defined as a feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, such that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Brand trust could make customers more loyal which is positive because it can create a substantial barrier to competitors and generates better sales. Also long-lasting and implicit trust is what distinguishes the great brands and protects them when it makes a misstep (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

It is clear that brand trust is something that should be a goal for marketing managers. The ultimate goal of marketing is to generate an intense bond between the customer and the brand, and the main ingredient of this bond is trust (Elliot & Yannopoulou, 2007). But the question arises if storytelling (characteristics) could influence brand trust among customers. Developing trust with brands involves the development of a consumer-brand relationship based on personal experience with the brand. This requires the brand to engage in a two-way communication with consumers to build a sense of intimacy. Research of Escalas (2004) also shows that a narratively structured ad is positively related to self-brand connections, which can have positive influence on brand attitude and intentions. These articles (Elliot & Yannopoulou, 2007; Escalas, 2004) suggest that using stories in your marketing strategy, may serve as an excellent way to create more trust in the brand. It is imaginable that when a more personalized way of storytelling is used, with the use of employee testimonials and pictures (Magaard, 2014), people might trust the brand more than when a story is not personalized. A personalized story may build a sense of intimacy that a 'normal' story can't do.

## **2.10 | Research design**

After discussing the current literature on the characteristics of storytelling, two characteristics of storytelling were selected to be tested through an experiment. These

characteristics are: the use of employee testimonials (or not) and the use of employee pictures (or not). These two characteristics were selected because in order to do this experiment, a case study will be used. The use of employee testimonials and pictures is most suited for the company in the case study. Besides, these two characteristics can be used at once and have a connection because they are both about the employee and giving a more personal insight into the core values of an organization. Furthermore, the use of employee pictures and testimonials can provide a more personal insight into the organization (Magaard, 2014; Vromen & Coleman, 2013), which is essential in transmitting core values of the organization (Lundqvist et al., 2003). In the method section the organizational context will be further elaborated.

The aim of this research is to identify whether employee testimonials and pictures in corporate stories are more effective influencers of brand experience, brand attitude memory of information and appreciation. Therefore this research consists of an experimental 2x2 design that will test the following hypothesis:

- H1:** Corporate storytelling has a more positive influence on the appreciation of a text (a), brand experience (b), brand attitude (c), brand trust (d) and the memory of information (e) than plain informative texts.
- H2:** Corporate storytelling with the use of employee testimonials has a more positive influence on the appreciation of a text (a), brand experience (b), brand attitude (c), brand trust (d) and the memory of information (e) than without testimonials.
- H3:** Corporate storytelling with the use of employee pictures has a more positive influence on the appreciation of a text (a), brand experience (b), brand attitude (c), brand trust (d) and the memory of information (e) than without pictures.

The research model below visualizes what relations this research aims to reveal.

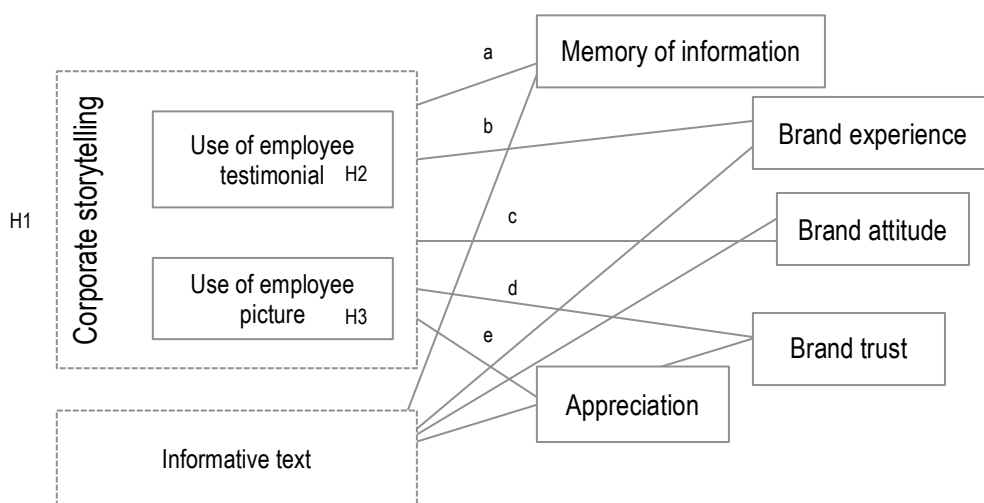


Figure 1 | Research model

## 3 | METHOD

In this method section first the design of the research will be further elaborated. Then there will be a section about the stimulus material and how this was formed. The preliminary research served as a starting point for creating the stimulus material in this research. After this, there is a section about the instrumentation in which the items and scales used in this research will be discussed. The reliability of the constructs will also be spoken about. This section ends with introducing the participants and procedure of this research.

### 3.1 | Design

The aim of this study was to reveal whether specific storytelling characteristics have a significant influence on several dependent variables. The dependent variables of this research are: memory of information, brand experience, brand attitude and text appreciation. The storytelling characteristics selected for this research and discussed in the theoretical framework are employee testimonials and employee pictures. Besides literature stating that employee testimonials and pictures give a more personal insight into an organization, these characteristics are most suited for the organization in the case study. To test the hypotheses and answer the main research question, an online survey among customers of the case company was executed. This study had a 2 (with or without employee testimonial) x 2 (with or without employee picture) between subjects design. The research also had one control condition where there was given information instead of a story.

There were no other differences in story content, besides the employee testimonials. All four stories are the same, except in the conditions with employee testimonials, quotes of employees were added at the end of a section. The table below displays the different conditions of this research.

Table 3.1 | Research conditions

Condition	Material
Control condition	Informative text
Condition 1	Story <i>without</i> employee testimonial, <i>without</i> employee picture
Condition 2	Story <i>with</i> employee testimonial, <i>without</i> employee picture
Condition 3	Story <i>without</i> employee testimonial, <i>with</i> employee picture
Condition 4	Story <i>with</i> employee testimonial, <i>with</i> employee picture

## **3.2 | Stimulus material**

Before the main study was conducted, first a preliminary research had to make clear what the content of the stories should be. This research was conducted in cooperation with Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo (DVBH). DVBH is an organization which core activity is construction. They provide in residential and utility constructions. Since a couple of years they have increasingly started thinking of the right way to make their relevant stakeholders aware of their core values. DVBH is particularly focused on increasing knowledge of their identity in their business-to-business context. They want to position themselves as an organization that is known for the following aspects: cooperating integral, creating strong neighborhoods, renovation and digitalization, and inspiring and renovating leadership. One of their communication goals is to communicate clearly to their customers what the core values of the company are and how they want to operate in future.

The materials used for this research consisted of stories that are about the four key aspects of DVBH. These aspects have to be told in the form of a story, instead of giving the reader just information about the four key aspects. The stories were formed in cooperation with DVBH and with the use of interviews.

In order to know what these core values mean in practice, the preliminary research existed of seven interviews with several employees and managers of the company. In paragraph 3.2 the procedure and results of the interviews will be discussed.

## **3.3 | Preliminary research**

In order to know what these core values mean in practice, the preliminary research existed of seven interviews with several employees and managers of the company. In this paragraph the procedure and results of the interviews will be discussed.

### **3.3.1 | Method**

Through interviews several employees of DVBH were asked how they see the four discussed aspects. A total of seven employees participated in the interviews. All seven employees are part of a different layer of the organization. This way it was made sure that a broad vision on the four important aspects was revealed. The goal of the interviews was mainly to gather employee testimonials that could be used in the stories of the main study. The interviews were conducted at the office of DVBH. For every interview, a private room was reserved where the researcher and the employee could talk in private.

The researcher used a topic list in the interviews that started with the following question: Could you first tell me something about your function at Dura Vermeer Hengelo? The employees were managers, advisors and directors. After this, the employee was asked if they see all four important aspects (cooperating integral, creating strong neighborhoods, renovation and digitalization, and inspiring and renovating leadership)

clearly in the work of Dura Vermeer. After this, all four important aspects were discussed separately.

### 3.3.2 | Results

The data of the interviews showed that the four aspects are not commonly known principles. Several employees were not familiar with the aspects and couldn't give relevant examples of the aspects in the work of DVBH. Other employees did know the four aspects and had clear examples of what these aspects mean in practice. The recorded interviews were first transcribed after they could be analyzed. The data were analyzed by selecting sentences from the answers of the questions about the core values of DVBH. After this, quotes were selected by clarity and relevance. The quotes that were processed in the stories are:

- Cooperating integral  
*“Together with our cooperating partners and the customer, we think about: How are we going to do this, so that you as client and we really have the feeling that we are open towards each other? We don't have secrets for each other anymore. You start looking at things from a whole different perspective and you are triggered to think about what is normal and what can be improved.” (#R2)*
- Creating strong neighborhoods  
*“If a neighborhood is not that strong yet, we certainly try to create one. For example you build a tunnel to the shopping center, so that the people have good connections. And also keep the environment in mind: a lot of green, beautiful areas where people can walk and exercise.” (#R1)*
- Renovation and digitalization  
*“We are open for all kinds of innovative ways. We are not a construction company that only thinks in brickwork and fixed structure.” (#R3)*
- Inspiring and renovating leadership  
*“You have to give the people that are still in the workplace a change to invent something. Give them freedom. You have to trigger people to do something and this way we can keep innovating.” (#R3)*

### 3.4 | Development of the stories

The stories were different, depending on which of the five conditions the participant was clustered in. Besides the difference in text, the stories consisted of the same sentences and information. The stories were about the key aspects of DVBH and consisted information about the vision of DVBH. These four key aspects were told in the form of a story. In order to compose the stories, advice out of literature was taken into account. A story should have a begin-middle-end structure (Hendriks & Schutte, 2007) and should contain around 600 words (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), both requirements were met with the composed stories.

In two of the five conditions, the previous mentioned employee quotes were added to be able to test if employee testimonials are a characteristic that should be added to stories. In two of the five conditions, pictures of three employees were added to be able to test if employee pictures are a characteristic that should be added to stories. In the other stories there was also a picture added, but this picture did not show employees, but the building of DVBH.

All the stories start with explaining what DVBH really finds important and how they want to accomplish that for their customers. A fragment of the story: *“At Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo we find it really important to not only make a building. We want to make buildings even better than you expected, we want to add something essential. We would like to make you a nice place to live, work and exist. But the construction branche is changing drastically.”* After this introduction the story explains how DVBH wants to be an added value for their customers and how they expect to do that. The key aspects of DVBH are part of the plan on being added value for their customers. A fragment of a key aspect in the story: *“First, we want to be of value by creating strong neighborhoods. A home is more than just a house; it is about the living environment. About the trusted area where you live, exist and make memories. We want to contribute to a place where people share everything, where people develop themselves and where beautiful memories are made.”* In the conditions with employee testimonials, quotes of employees are added at the explanation of the key aspects, in order to make the story more personal.

### 3.5 | Manipulation check

In order to check if the participant noticed the manipulations in the text, two questions were asked. In table 3.2 the means and standard deviations of the manipulation checks are outlined.

Table 3.2 | Means and frequencies manipulation check

	Information condition		Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3		Condition 4	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Story*	3.73 (1.76)		4.29 (1.51)		4.48 (1.59)		3.86 (1.69)		4.40 (1.55)	
Testimonial**	5	25	6	25	24	5	3	34	22	8
Picture**	7	23	2	29	2	27	27	10	24	6

\*“I would characterize this text as a story”, measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

\*\*“Above the text there were pictures of employees/in the text there were quotes of employees”, measured with ‘yes’ or ‘no’

A two-way ANOVA was executed to find out if the manipulation *story* was done correctly. The participant was asked to score on a scale of 1 to 7 to what extend they experienced

the text as a story. No significant effect was found for the manipulation *story*,  $F(4,156)=1.32$ ,  $p = .266$ . This non-significant effect indicates that the manipulation *story* was not noticed by participants.

A chi-square test was conducted to find out whether the manipulations *testimonial* and *picture* were noticed by the participants. The results of the chi-square indicate that both *testimonial* ( $p = .003$ ) and *picture* ( $p = .008$ ) were significant. This significant effect indicates that the manipulations were strong enough. When looking at the absolute numbers, there are still some participants that did not give the correct answer. For example when looking at the information condition, 5 participants thought there were quotes in the text and 7 participants thought they had seen pictures of employees. Overall the manipulation was strong enough, but it must be taken into account that not all participants saw and read the text or story correctly.

### 3.6 | Measures

This research used an online questionnaire as instrument. The use of this method was most suited for the company in the case study because it could save time and give access to unique populations (Wright, 2005). The target group of this research consisted of customers of DVBH, which is a very particular target group that could be more easily reached by e-mail.

The online questionnaire consisted of six components. In five components the five dependent variables of this research were tested. In the other component demographic data was gathered. In this section the measures of the dependent variables will be introduced.

#### *Memory of information*

To measure whether participants remember the core information that is given in the text, in this research one open question was used. The following question was formulated: "*According to the text you have just read, what are according to you the four most important key aspects of Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo?*" In order to create a reliable construct, a few more questions were formulated to measure memory of information. After the one open question, memory of information will be measured by asking if the participant read certain information subjects in the text. This recognition question will start with the following sentence: "*Did you read information about the following subject?*" Then eight subjects are shown to the participant. In order to find out whether the participant can recognize the right core values, also four incorrect subjects are added. These incorrect subjects were not spoken about in the story text.

#### *Brand experience*

Brand experience is a concept that was researched by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). Through their research they validated a scale that can be used to measure brand



experience. This scale consists of 12 items that should be answered by means of a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1) totally disagree to 7) totally agree. The brand experience scale includes items like: 'Customers do not have strong emotions for [insert brand]'. The scale used in this research is slightly different from the scale of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). The scale used in this research was adjusted by deleting some items that were used in the original scale. Some of the items of the existing scale were not suited for a construction company like DVBH. For example items like: 'This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses'. Statements like this are applicable to service companies, but not for a company like DVBH. This means that the scale in this study is shorter than the original scale of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). The concept brand experience was reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .758.

#### *Brand attitude*

Measuring this concept means measuring the overall appreciation of the brand. Therefore the validated items of Spears and Singh (2004) were used to measure brand attitude. Their original scale consists of 33 brand attitude items, but this research only used five. The scale of 33 items is very extensive, while the five items used in this research summarize all the items of the original scale. The items that were most general were selected to be part of the questionnaire. This resulted in the following adjectives: pleasant/unpleasant, good/bad, enjoyable/unenjoyable, valuable/useless, positive/negative. The concept brand attitude was reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .754.

#### *Brand trust*

To measure brand trust, six validated items of Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Almán (2000) were used. The items are measured with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1) totally disagree to 7) totally agree. The brand trust scale includes items like: '[insert brand name] is interested the satisfaction of her customers' and '[insert brand] value their customers of its products'. Also three items of Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002) were added to measure the construct. One of these items is for example: 'Customers trust [insert brand]'. The difference between the two scales has to do with the main subject of the scale. The first scale measures if people trust the products and the quality of the company, while the second scale measures if people really trust the brand and can count on the brand. The concept brand trust was reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .938.

#### *Text appreciation*

This concept was measured using the validated scale used in the research of Kamalski, Lentz and Sanders (2004). They state that text appreciation consists of four dimensions: attraction, acceptance, accessibility and consistency. These dimensions are measured by

11 bipolar adjectives with a seven-point semantic differential scale. This resulted in for example the following adjectives: clear/vague, difficult/easy, reliable/unreliable. The concept text appreciation was reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .904.

*Text appreciation (2) - Hot spot test*

Text appreciation was not only measured through a scale, but also with a hotspot test. The hotspot test enables participants to show their likes or dislikes in the text. This is done by green and red markings in the text. The participant can like (green) or dislike (red), or leave the area neutral (white). The text was divided into different paragraphs that could be liked or disliked, also participants could like or dislike the picture at the beginning of the text. After the hot spot test, there was the ability to explain the likes or dislikes in the text by means of an open answer.

Table 3.3 | Scale construction

	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Memory of information	7	Open answer	
Brand experience	7	7-point Likert scale	.758
Brand attitude	5	7-point semantic differential scale	.754
Brand trust	9	7-point Likert scale	.938
Text appreciation	11	7-point semantic differential scale	.904

In order to test whether the scales that were used in this are reliable, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were calculated. In table 2 the alpha's are presented. According to Santos (1999) an  $\alpha$  that is .7 or higher can be seen as reliable. It can be concluded that the four quantitative constructs of this study are reliable.

### 3.7 | Procedure

All participants were approached via e-mail. The mailing list of DVBH was used to select customers that could participate in the research. First, the entire mailing list of DVBH was scanned and certain email addresses were deleted, because these were email addresses of partners instead of customers. The final mailing list for the research existed of approximately 800 email addresses. A total of 157 respondents filled out the online questionnaire, which makes the response rate 19.6%.

The e-mail contained a brief note that invited the receiver to participate in the research, where they could click on a link to go to the online survey. Before the research started, participants first read an introductory text in which was explained what was expected from the participant. The text also concluded information about anonymity, expected time to fill in the questionnaire and the email-address of the researcher. The

participants had to agree with the statements in the introduction, where after the questionnaire would start. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the five conditions, in order to have an equal distribution. After reading the (story)text, the questionnaire followed with five different sections containing questions about: brand experience, brand attitude, text appreciation and memory of information. Section number five asked the participant to fill in some demographic data. After filling in the demographic data the participant had to confirm their answers by clicking on the final button.

### **3.8 | Participants**

A total of 157 participants filled out the online questionnaire. The aim was to collect 30 respondents per condition, which indicates that the aimed number of participants of this research was 150. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions, which should make sure that all conditions could be equally tested.

The gender distribution was 131 men (83.4%) and 26 women (16.6%). This unequal distribution of gender is explainable when looking at the field of work in which this study took place. The construction work field is generally known as a 'men's world'. There are increasingly women working in this field, but still the men are in the majority. Therefore it is not surprising that the distribution between men and women in this study is unequal. The average age of the participants is 48, with the youngest participant being 26 and the oldest 68. The lowest level of education was high school (3.1%) and the highest level university (35.7%). The demographic data also consists of information about the function of the participants. Of the total 157 participants, 39 were directors, 80 managers, 3 executors and 35 had a different function that was not mentioned in the multiple choice answers.

The demographic data also showed that all participants were familiar with DVBH. Most of the participants have indicated that they know DVBH for more than ten years (57.3%). Others are familiar with DVBH for five to ten years (21%), or for two to five years (17.2%). There were only seven participants that know DVBH since zero to two years. This data indicates that most participants have a relative long history with DVBH.

In table 3.4 the demographic data per condition is outlined.

Table 3.4 | Demographic data per condition (N=157)

	<b>Information condition</b> <b>N=30</b>	<b>Condition 1</b> <b>N=31</b> No testimonial/no picture	<b>Condition 2</b> <b>N=29</b> Testimonial/no picture	<b>Condition 3</b> <b>N=37</b> Picture/no testimonial	<b>Condition 4</b> <b>N=30</b> Testimonial & picture
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	25 (83.3%)	27 (87.1%)	23 (79.3%)	30 (81.1%)	26 (8.67%)
Women	5 (16.7%)	4 (12.9%)	6 (20.7%)	7 (18.9%)	4 (13.3%)
<b>Mean age</b>	51.2	46.9	46.5	47.7	47.7
<b>Education</b>					
High school	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.5%)	-	2 (5.4%)	-
College education	16 (53.3%)	21 (67.7%)	20 (69.0%)	18 (48.7%)	21 (70.0%)
University	13 (43.3%)	8 (25.8%)	9 (31.0%)	17 (45.9%)	9 (30.0%)
<b>Years of experience with DVBH</b>					
0-2 years	-	1 (3.2%)	5 (17.2%)	1 (2.7%)	-
2-5 years	2 (6.7%)	8 (25.8%)	6 (20.7%)	5 (13.5%)	6 (20.0%)
5-10 years	8 (26.7%)	6 (19.4%)	4 (13.8%)	11 (29.7%)	4 (13.3%)
>10 years	20 (66.7%)	16 (51.6%)	14 (48.3%)	20 (54.1%)	20 (66.7%)
<b>Function</b>					
Director	10 (33.3%)	4 (12.9%)	7 (24.1%)	16 (43.2%)	2 (6.7%)
Manager	13 (43.3%)	15 (48.4%)	15 (51.7%)	16 (43.2%)	21 (70.0%)
Executor	-	3 (9.7%)	-	-	-
Other	7 (23.3%)	9 (29.0%)	7 (24.2%)	5 (13.5%)	7 (23.3%)

## 4 | RESULTS

In this section, the results of this study will be presented. The first analyses measured whether the type of text (information or story) had any significant effects on the dependent variables of this study. The second analyses measured whether specific characteristics in stories (employee testimonial or picture) had any significant effects.

### 4.1 | Effects of information vs. stories

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to test whether there is a difference in effect on the dependent variables when people are exposed to information or to a story. This test was performed by comparing the information condition with the total of condition 1 to 4.

Levene's test was non-significant on a level of  $p < .05$  for all dependent variables, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. In addition, Box's M (4.11) was not significant,  $p (.952) > \alpha (.001)$ , which indicates that there are no significant differences between the covariance matrices. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of covariance across groups is not violated and Wilks's Lambda is an appropriate statistic to use in this case. The results of the MANOVA (table 4.1) showed no significant effects of the type of text on the dependent variables (Wilks'  $\lambda = .993$ ,  $F(1, 155) = .255$ ,  $p = .906$ ). Due to the lack of significant effects, no further tests were performed.

Table 4.1 | Multivariate analysis of variance, independent variable type of text (N=157)

	SS	df	MS	F	p	Hypotheses
Text appreciation	.00	1	.00	.001	.974	H1a – not supported
Brand experience	.05	1	.05	.06	.811	H1b – not supported
Brand attitude	.006	1	.006	.008	.927	H1c – not supported
Brand trust	.81	1	.81	.79	.374	H1d – not supported

### 4.2 | Effects of employee testimonials and pictures

After looking into the effects of stories on the dependent variables, the second analyses were conducted to examine the different characteristics in stories. A MANOVA was conducted to investigate the effects of *employee testimonials and pictures*. First, two dummy variables, testimonial and picture, were created in order to test the effects.

Levene's test was non-significant on a level of  $p < .05$  for all dependent variables, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. In addition, Box's M (28.25) was not significant,  $p (.646) > \alpha (.001)$ , which indicates that there are no significant differences between the covariance matrices. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity

of covariance across groups is not violated and Wilks's Lambda is an appropriate statistic to use in this case. The results of the MANOVA showed no significant effects of the characteristic *employee testimonial* on the dependent variables (Wilks'  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F(3, 123) = .299$ ,  $p = .878$ ). Neither there were found significant effects of the characteristic *employee picture* on the dependent variables (Wilks'  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F(3, 123) = .331$ ,  $p = .857$ ). A comparison of the means of the different conditions show the insignificant effects of characteristics on the dependent variables (table 4.2)

Table 4.2| Means (SD) of dependent variables in the different conditions

	<b>Information condition</b>	<b>Condition 1</b>	<b>Condition 2</b>	<b>Condition 3</b>	<b>Condition 4</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>
		No testimonial/ no picture	Testimonial/ no picture	Picture/no testimonial	Testimonial & picture	
Text appreciation*	3.92 (.52)	4.03 (.72)	3.90 (.52)	3.81 (.67)	3.95 (.61)	H2&3a – not supported
Brand experience**	4.57 (.81)	4.63 (.85)	4.47 (.88)	4.45 (1.01)	4.57 (.96)	H2&3b – not supported
Brand attitude*	4.66 (.73)	4.64 (.84)	4.96 (.84)	4.6 (.95)	4.50 (.79)	H2&3c – not supported
Brand trust**	5.55 (.92)	5.37 (.89)	5.37 (1.19)	5.32 (1.08)	5.39 (.99)	H2&3d – not supported

\*Measured on a seven-point semantic differential with bipolar adjectives (1 = negative attributes, 7 = positive attributes)

\*\*Measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

### 4.3 | Memory of information

Memory of information was measured different from the other dependent variables. In order to measure memory of information, participants had to fill in two types of question. The first question consisted of an open answer in which the participant had to answer correctly to the question: Keeping the text in mind, what are the four key aspects of DVBH? This question is the 'recall' part of the variable memory of information. The second question asked the participant to check subjects as being a key aspect of DVBH. This question is the 'recognition' part of the variable memory of information.

#### 4.3.1 | Recall

In table 4.3 is outlined how many correct answers were given per condition.

Table 4.3 | Frequency of correct answers – key aspects

	<b>Information condition N=30</b>	<b>Condition 1 N=31</b> No testimonial/no picture	<b>Condition 2 N=29</b> Testimonial/no picture	<b>Condition 3 N=37</b> Picture/no testimonial	<b>Condition 4 N=30</b> Testimonial & picture	<b>Mean</b>
No key aspects	17 (56.7%)	8 (25.8%)	4 (13.8%)	13 (35.1%)	8 (26.7%)	10
1 key aspect	6 (20.0%)	12 (38.7%)	13 (44.8%)	14 (37.8%)	14 (46.7%)	11.8
2 key aspects	3 (10.0%)	3 (9.7%)	6 (20.7%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (3.3%)	3.2
3 key aspects	3 (10.0%)	2 (6.5%)	4 (13.8%)	4 (10.8%)	1 (6.7%)	2.8
4 key aspects	0 (0%)	3 (9.7%)	2 (6.9%)	2 (5.4%)	3 (10.0%)	1.4
No answer	1 (3.3%)	3 (9.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (6.7%)	1.6

The results of a two-way ANOVA showed no significant difference in correctly answered key aspects ( $F(4,156)=1.24, p = .297$ ).

In general, the key aspects were not very well remembered. In mean, 31.6% of the participants recalled no correct key aspects, where only 8.0% recalled all four key aspects. When looking at means over all the conditions, one key aspect was correctly recalled 11.8 times, while four key aspects were correctly recalled 1.4 times.

Overall the results show no major differences between conditions in the correct recall of key aspects. However, there is a difference that stands out. Looking at the information condition, it can be concluded that this condition has the highest percentage of no correct key aspects. Besides, the recall of 1 correct aspect was much lower compared to the other conditions.

#### 4.3.2 | Recognition

In table 4.4 is outlined how the eight subjects in the recognition instruction were reviewed.

Table 4.4 | Frequency of recognition of key aspects

	<b>Information condition N=30</b>	<b>Condition 1 N=31</b>	<b>Condition 2 N=29</b>	<b>Condition 3 N=37</b>	<b>Condition 4 N=30</b>
		No testimonial/no picture	Testimonial/no picture	Picture/no testimonial	Testimonial & picture
Cooperating integral*	28 (93.3%)	28 (90.3%)	29 (100%)	33 (89.2%)	29 (96.7%)
Creating strong neighborhoods*	12 (40%)	13 (41.9%)	19 (65.5%)	19 (51.4%)	17 (56.7%)
Renovation and digitalization*	25 (83.3%)	27 (87.1%)	25 (86.2%)	32 (86.5%)	24 (80%)
Inspiring and renovating leadership*	23 (76.7%)	15 (48.4%)	24 (82.8%)	24 (64.9%)	20 (66.7%)
Safety in construction	16 (53.3%)	13 (41.9%)	7 (24.1%)	17 (45.9%)	16 (53.3%)
Building in developing countries	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.7%)	0 (0%)
Being inexpensive in construction	2 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.4%)	1 (2.7%)	3 (10%)
None of the previous key aspects	0 (0%)	4 (12.9%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.7%)	1 (3.3%)

\*Note: these are the actual key aspects of DVBH, others are false subjects

Looking at the frequencies of correct recognition, it can be concluded that there are differences between the key aspects. Some of the key aspects are more frequently recognized than others. Overall there are no major differences between the conditions.

Concluding from these results, it can be concluded that H1,2,3d are not supported.

#### 4.4 | Text appreciation

Besides measuring text appreciation through a scale, participants also had the opportunity to mark parts of the text that they liked or disliked. This appreciation could be done by marking certain areas red (negative), green (positive), or white (neutral). In table 4.5 the results of this marking are outlined.



Table 4.5 | Frequencies of likes and dislikes of the text

	Information condition N=30		Condition 1 N=31		Condition 2 N=29		Condition 3 N=37		Condition 4 N=30	
	like	dislike	No testimonial/no picture		Testimonial/no picture		Picture/no testimonial		Testimonial & picture	
			like	dislike	like	dislike	like	dislike	like	dislike
Picture building	5 (16.7%)	-	2 (6.5%)	1 (3.2%)	3 (10.3%)	-	-	-	-	-
Picture employees	-	-	-	-	-	-	4 (10.8%)	2 (5.4%)	4 (13.3%)	1 (3.3%)
Whole text	3 (10.0%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1st key aspect	11 (36.7%)	5 (16.7%)	8 (25.8%)	7 (22.6%)	10 (34.5%)	4 (13.8%)	16 (43.2%)	6 (16.2%)	7 (23.3%)	1 (3.3%)
2nd key aspect	16 (53.3%)	1 (3.3%)	17 (54.8%)	1 (3.2%)	15 (51.7%)	1 (3.4%)	20 (54.1%)	2 (5.4%)	13 (43.3%)	-
3th key aspect	5 (16.7%)	4 (13.3%)	11 (35.5%)	3 (9.7%)	11 (37.9%)	-	16 (43.2%)	5 (13.5%)	7 (23.3%)	-
4th key aspect	13 (43.3%)	2 (6.7%)	7 (22.6%)	7 (22.6%)	12 (41.4%)	1 (3.4%)	17 (45.9%)	7 (18.9%)	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)
Paragraph 1	-	-	9 (29.0%)	5 (16.1%)	11 (37.9%)	2 (6.9%)	15 (40.5%)	7 (18.9%)	7 (23.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Paragraph 2	-	-	14 (45.2%)	7 (22.6%)	8 (27.6%)	4 (13.8%)	17 (45.9%)	5 (13.5%)	10 (33.3%)	1 (3.3%)
Conclusion	-	-	11 (35.5%)	5 (16.1%)	7 (24.1%)	3 (10.3%)	14 (37.8%)	1 (2.7%)	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10</b>
Testimonial Danielle	-	-	-	-	10 (34.5%)	6 (20.7%)	-	-	5 (16.7%)	4 (13.3%)
Testimonial Gerard	-	-	-	-	12 (41.4%)	3 (10.3%)	-	-	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)
Testimonial Jules 1	-	-	-	-	14 (48.3%)	1 (3.4%)	-	-	6 (20.0%)	2 (6.7%)
Testimonial Jules 2	-	-	-	-	14 (48.3%)	1 (3.4%)	-	-	6 (20.0%)	2 (6.7%)
<b>Total</b>					<b>50</b>	<b>11</b>			<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>

The results of the green and red markings of the text show that there are no major differences between the conditions. Participants had the possibility to like the manipulated characteristics in the text, pictures and testimonials. A result that stands out has to do with the employee testimonials. In condition 2, the average likes of the testimonials is 12.5, in condition 4 the average likes of the testimonials is 5.5. The difference between the conditions can be found in the added employee picture in condition 4.

The other added characteristic of this study, employee pictures, does not seem to have a positive influence on the appreciation of the text. The employee pictures were only liked 8 times, where the picture of the building was also liked 8 times.

Even though the statistical results show no major differences between the conditions, some quotes of participants indicate that the added characteristics were positively noticed. For example one participant marked the testimonials of employees green and explained: *“Green = employees adding more meaning to the text”* (#R91). Or another participant that said: *“Explanation by the employee of Dura Vermeer makes the story more personal, otherwise it is just a long text with a lot of words, but these examples make it concrete”* (#R93). Another quote that supports the previous quotes: *“Green (employee testimonials) make the text personal”* (#R29). This qualitative data suggests that employee testimonials actually do influence people’s opinion on the story. Unfortunately, the statistical data does not support this positive influence.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was two folded. First, this study aimed to confirm that stories are a more successful way to influence several brand concepts than plain informative texts. Second, another aim was to find out to what extent some storytelling characteristics influence brand experience, brand attitude, brand trust, memory of information and appreciation of the text. Through literature study it was expected that certain elements of stories, in particular employee testimonials and pictures, would have a significant effect on how customers perceive the brand. The results however show, there are few differences between the conditions and there was no effect found for the story characteristics: employee testimonials and pictures.

### 5.1 | Effects of information vs. stories

Previous research has shown that storytelling can influence consumer brand experience (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Also there is literature suggesting that storytelling can be an asset for organizations because it can grab an audience's attention (Green, 2008), improve memory of information (McLellan, 2006; Cullen, 2006) and have the power to influence and inspire in a way that more traditional forms of corporate communication lack (Dowling, 2006). However all these positive effects of storytelling are suggested and proven through research (Lundqvist et al., 2013), the results of this study show that there are no significant differences between the information condition and the story conditions. It must be said that there has not been a lot of research on identifying the effects of storytelling. There are articles that suggest a positive effect, but there's a lack of empirical research regarding this topic. Lundqvist et al. (2013) concluded in their research that there are positive effects on how consumers perceive the brand, but there is no other research to support their findings.

The lack of the significant difference between the information condition and the story conditions implies that regardless if the participant read a story or the plain informative text, their brand attitude, brand experience and brand trust was equally positive. Also the appreciation of the text was not higher for the participants that read the story about DVBH. The last dependent variable of this study, memory of information, also did not show differences between conditions. All the hypotheses of this research were not supported. The results of this study are mainly the same as the study conducted by Scheerder (2015). She also found that there were no major differences between the information condition and the story conditions. It is interesting to look for an explanation for these insignificant effects. It is imaginable that the target group of this research, customers of DVBH, has influenced the results of this study. The target group was very familiar with DVBH, most of the participants have indicated that they know DVBH for more than ten

years (57.3%). The effects of stories might have been insufficient because all the previous experiences participants had with DVBH play a larger role in how the brand is perceived.

Even though there are no significant differences, there is an interesting difference that could serve as a starting point for future research. In the recall of information, it was found that the participants in the information condition had the highest percentage of 'no correct key aspects', which means that in this condition the key aspects were recalled the least. This result is in line with literature that states stories create a memorable image of abstract information (Green, 2008) and can be a convenient tool for remembering information (McLellan, 2006).

## **5.2 | Effects of employee testimonials or pictures**

Even though there were no effects of stories on the dependent variables, another aim of this study was to find out whether story characteristics have a significant influence on how people perceive the brand. It was expected that a more personalized way of telling your story is more appreciated by the public (Vromen & Coleman, 2013). Therefore employee testimonials and employee pictures were added to the stories to make the story more personal (Magaard, 2014; Braveman, 2008; Walker et al., 2009). Other than what was expected, employee testimonials and pictures did not seem to have a significant effect on the dependent variables. There were no significant differences between the four versions of the stories and their influence on brand experience, brand attitude, brand trust, text appreciation and the memory of information. This result does add knowledge to the literature. There has been no research done regarding these particular storytelling characteristics. In addition, there has not been a lot of research that focuses on other storytelling characteristics or elements. Taking into account the manipulation check, it can be concluded that the manipulations in the text were strong enough to be seen as significant. Therefore it can be stated that even though the manipulations testimonials and pictures were done correctly, there are no effects that can be attributed to it. This implies that adding the characteristics 'employee testimonials' and 'employee pictures' does not have effects on how people perceive the brand. Even though this research shows that there are no effects of employee testimonials and pictures, there still is a possibility that the two characteristics do have effects. It is imaginable that even though the manipulation for both employee testimonial and picture were successful, participants were not influenced by the content of the testimonials and pictures. Perhaps the characteristics would have had a significant effect if the quotes and pictures were different. It should be taken into account that the employee testimonials and pictures in the stories are subject to taste of the participant.

Although there were no significant effects found, some results of text appreciation do indicate that the added characteristics were perceived as positive. Some quotes of participants show that they perceived the employee testimonials as useful additions to the text. It was also mentioned that the quotes added more meaning to the text, which leads

to better understanding of the information in the text. This finding is in line with expectations based on research of Maggaard (2014) where it is concluded that employee testimonials give a more personal insight into the organization and can be more persuasive.

### 5.3 | Limitations & future research

This research has its limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Even though there were a lot of steps taken to make sure that the study was validated and reliable, there are some limitations.

Firstly, it should be taken into account that the population of this research existed of only customers of DVBH. For this case study, it was advantageous because all participants were familiar with DVBH. Therefore they could relate to the company in the case study better than with a imaginary company. Unfortunately this was also a disadvantage. Because of the years of experience the participants had with DVBH, it is possible that this experience was an influencer of the dependent variables. It could be that all previous experiences that customers had with DVBH had a negative influence on for example their trust in the brand. This means that the effect of the story was not strong enough, because other factors were stronger.

Secondly, it is a limitation that the study was done in one particular branch. It is a possibility that storytelling has a larger influence in other branches of communication than the construction branch. Besides, it could be that people in the construction branch do not appreciate stories as much as people in other branches (such as health care or non-profit) do. Therefore this study highly recommends being aware of different fields of communication when a study like this one is executed again.

For future research it is advisable to write the stories in cooperation with a professional. The manipulation check of this research showed that the manipulation 'story' was not significant, which means that the participants did not rate the stories more as a 'story' than the informative text. This is explainable because interpretation is different for all participants. One participant might perceive everything as a story, while others are more critical when it comes to deciding whether something is a story or not. The manipulation check in the study of Scheerder (2015) gave the same result. Participants did not indicate the stories more as a 'story' than the informative text. An advice for future research is to reformulate the question of the manipulation check of 'story'. The fact that participants did not see the difference between the informative text and the story could indicate that they need examples of a real story, in order to determine whether a text is a story or not. An example of a better manipulation question could be: *"A story has a beginning, middle and an end, with a main character. To what extent would you indicate this text as a story?"* Perhaps in cooperation with an experienced storyteller, the manipulation 'story' will be clearer and therefore significant.

Another recommendation for future research can be found in the fact that there was a slight difference in the conditions with employee testimonials regarding the appreciation of the text. The quotes of participants imply that the employee testimonials were appreciated and add value to the story. Therefore it is a suggestion that employee testimonials are further tested as a characteristic of stories, to find out whether they can have a significant influence on how people perceive a brand. For example this characteristic can be used in research in other branches, such as health care or non-profit.

Something that should be taken into account when explaining the findings, is the branch in which this research was conducted. As previously mentioned, it is imaginable that in another branch, storytelling is more appreciated than in the construction branch. Also the research took place in a business to business environment. Customers of DVBH exist of businesses that had for example their offices build by DVBH. The results showed that the stories, with or without employee testimonials and pictures, had no significant effects on how customers perceive the brand. It is possible that the form of target group, business to business, has something to do with the results. Future research should focus on other branches and target groups, for example health care and business to consumer, to study whether other branches and environments do experience positive effects of storytelling.

Finally, this research only used two specific characteristics in the stories, however there are numerous other characteristics that could be incorporated into a story. For future research it is advisable to use more characteristics, to be able to create a more realistic version of a story. Also for future research it can be useful to further elaborate on the characteristics in this research. Although there was no effect found, it is still assumable that employee testimonials could evoke more positive feelings, looking at some quotes of participants.

## 6 | CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

Based on this study, it can be concluded that either you tell your target group a story or you provide them with just information about your organization, their brand experience, attitude, trust, appreciation of the text and memory of information are not significantly different. This research is in contrast with what is concluded in other articles, where it is expected that stories and more personalized texts have a significant influence on how people perceive a brand. Because of this contrast it is difficult to give a clear advice on storytelling and what characteristics should definitely be used. Based on extensive literature research it can be said that storytelling as a tool should certainly be a part of the communication strategy, but future research has to explore the field of storytelling characteristics. At this time, literature on specific storytelling characteristics is very scarce; therefore the advice of this study is to further research the domain of storytelling and its characteristics. It is assumed that storytelling as a strategy has positive effects on the perception of an organization, but future research should show if organization characteristics or the branch in which storytelling is used, has any influence on the effects of storytelling. In order to be a successful storyteller, an organization needs research that provides guidelines concerning the story content that should be used.

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# APPENDIX A | STORIES

## Information condition



Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo heeft een aantal kernpijlers opgesteld om voorop te blijven lopen in de bouwsector. Deze kernpijlers zijn:

- Integraal samenwerken  
Voorbeelden hiervan: ketensamenwerking, BIM, levensduur denken, circulariteit
- Creëren van sterke wijken  
Voorbeelden hiervan: organisch en klant gestuurd ontwikkelen
- Vernieuwing en digitalisering  
Voorbeelden hiervan: databeheer en analyse
- Inspirerend en vernieuwend leiderschap  
Voorbeelden hiervan: nieuw organiseren en ruimte voor innovatie

## Condition 1 | story without employee testimonial, without employee picture



Bij Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo vinden wij het belangrijk om niet alleen een gebouw af te leveren. We willen gebouwen nog beter maken dan u verwacht, we willen er iets essentieels aan toevoegen. We willen graag een fijne plek om te wonen, te werken en te leven voor u maken. Maar de bouwsector verandert ingrijpend. Opdrachten zijn de laatste jaren steeds complexer geworden, omdat steden meer

van binnenuit getransformeerd moeten worden. Niet alleen het vraagstuk is veranderd, maar ook de klant. Mensen weten beter wat ze willen en wat er mogelijk is door de ruime keuze die het internet biedt. De klant is gewend geraakt aan maatwerk en dat verlangt hij ook van ons. En een belangrijke verandering is ook de technologische ontwikkeling, technologie helpt om productiefaciliteiten zoals 3D-printing toegankelijker te maken, waardoor het ontwerpen van productiefaciliteiten alleen niet meer onderscheidend genoeg is.

Willen we echt van toegevoegde waarde zijn in deze wereld, dan zullen we meer moeten doen dan bouwen alleen. We willen denken vanuit mensen, oplossingen creëren en maatwerk leveren. Maar hoe kunnen we van toegevoegde waarde zijn in het creëren van een fijne plek om te wonen, te werken en te leven? Om een antwoord op deze vraag te kunnen geven, hebben we een aantal stippen op de horizon bepaald. We hebben kernpijlers geformuleerd die bepalen waar wij naar toe willen in de toekomst.

Ten eerste willen wij toegevoegde waarde leveren door het creëren van sterke wijken. Een thuis gaat verder dan het huis alleen, het gaat om de leefomgeving. Om de vertrouwde buurt waarin je woont, leeft en ervaringen opdoet. We willen bijdragen aan een plek waar mensen lief en leed delen, waar mensen zich ontwikkelen en waar mooie herinneringen worden gemaakt.

Ten tweede werken we in al onze projecten integraal samen met de klant, maar ook met partners, adviseurs, overheidsinstanties etc. Als we het beste resultaat willen leveren voor wat de klant vraagt, dan moeten we verder kijken dan de dag van vandaag. Bij het ontwerp denken we al na over het gebruik, het doel, de toekomstverwachting. Als we hier alles op afstemmen en iedereen vanuit hetzelfde doel laten werken, kunnen we zelfs bij de meest complexe werken een oplossing op maat realiseren.

Een derde kernpijler in ons werk is vernieuwing en digitalisering. Dit is van groot belang in een wereld die razendsnel verandert. We zijn vooruitstrevend door niet alleen vernieuwend mee te denken met onze klanten, maar ook door nieuwe technologie te gebruiken in het contact met onze klant en de uitvoering. Digitalisering en BIM maken het mogelijk om beter samen te werken, de kostprijs te verlagen en tegelijk betere oplossingen te leveren voor klanten en eindgebruikers.

Tot slot zijn we ervan overtuigd dat inspirerend en vernieuwend leiderschap een van de sleutels is tot succes. Door elkaar te blijven inspireren, kunnen we de klant blijven bieden waar hij naar verlangt. Door de complexe opdrachten is het belangrijk dat leiders medewerkers inspireren om zo tot inventieve oplossingen te komen.

Wie de klant echt begrijpt en voorop loopt in de technologische vernieuwing, die wint. Daarom willen wij voorop lopen in de bouwsector.

*Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo*

## Condition 2 | story with employee testimonial, without employee picture

[Quotes are marked yellow]



**DURA VERMEER**  
Waarmaken van ambities

Bij Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo vinden wij het belangrijk om niet alleen een gebouw af te leveren. We willen gebouwen nog beter maken dan u verwacht, we willen er iets essentieels aan toevoegen. We willen graag een fijne plek om te wonen, te werken en te leven voor u maken. Maar de bouwsector verandert ingrijpend. Opdrachten zijn de laatste jaren steeds complexer geworden, omdat steden meer van binnenuit getransformeerd moeten worden. Niet alleen het vraagstuk is veranderd, maar ook de klant. Mensen weten beter wat ze willen en wat er mogelijk is door de ruime keuze die het internet biedt. De klant is gewend geraakt aan maatwerk en dat verlangt hij ook van ons. En een belangrijke verandering is ook de technologische ontwikkeling, technologie helpt om productiefaciliteiten zoals 3D-printing toegankelijker te maken, waardoor het ontwerpen van productiefaciliteiten alleen niet meer onderscheidend genoeg is. Maar wij zijn ervan overtuigd dat we aan deze opgave kunnen voldoen omdat wij echte vernieuwers zijn.

Willen we echt van toegevoegde waarde zijn in deze wereld, dan zullen we meer moeten doen dan bouwen alleen. We willen denken vanuit mensen, oplossingen creëren en maatwerk leveren. Maar hoe kunnen we van toegevoegde waarde zijn in het creëren van een fijne plek om te wonen, te werken en te leven? Om een antwoord op deze vraag te kunnen geven, hebben we een aantal stippen op de horizon bepaald. We hebben kernpijlers geformuleerd die bepalen waar wij naar toe willen in de toekomst.

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Ten tweede werken we in al onze projecten integraal samen met de klant, maar ook met partners, adviseurs, overheidsinstanties etc. Als we het beste resultaat willen leveren voor wat de klant vraagt, dan moeten we verder kijken dan de dag van vandaag. Bij het ontwerp denken we al na over het gebruik, het doel, de toekomstverwachting. Als we hier alles op afstemmen en iedereen vanuit hetzelfde doel laten werken, kunnen we zelfs bij de meest complexe werken een oplossing op maat realiseren. Gerard Siemerink (hoofd financiën en administratie vertelt hierover: "Samen met onze samenwerkingspartners en de klant denken we na over: hoe pakken we dit nu aan, zodat jij als opdrachtgever en wij het gevoel hebben dat we echt open zijn naar elkaar? We hebben geen geheimen meer voor elkaar. Je gaat zo dingen heel anders bekijken en wordt getriggerd om na te denken over wat normaal is en wat juist beter kan."

Een derde kernpijl in ons werk is vernieuwing en digitalisering. Dit is van groot belang in een wereld die razendsnel verandert. We zijn vooruitstrevend door niet alleen vernieuwend mee te denken met onze klanten, maar ook door nieuwe technologie te gebruiken in het contact met onze klant en de uitvoering. Digitalisering en BIM maken het mogelijk om beter samen te werken, de kostprijs te verlagen en tegelijk betere oplossingen te leveren voor klanten en eindgebruikers. Jules Aarnink (bouwplaatsmanager) legt uit: "Wij staan open voor allerlei vernieuwende manieren. We zijn niet het bouwbedrijf dat alleen maar denkt in metselwerk en in een bepaalde structuur."

Tot slot zijn we ervan overtuigd dat inspirerend en vernieuwend leiderschap een van de sleutels is tot succes. Door elkaar te blijven inspireren, kunnen we de klant blijven bieden waar hij naar verlangt. Door de complexe opdrachten is het belangrijk dat leiders medewerkers inspireren om zo tot inventieve oplossingen te komen. "De mensen die nog op de werkvloer zijn moet je de kans geven om iets te bedenken. Geef ze de vrijheid. Je moet mensen gaan triggeren om iets te doen en zo blijf je vernieuwen." (Jules Aarnink, bouwplaatsmanager)

Wie de klant echt begrijpt en voorop loopt in de technologische vernieuwing, die wint. Daarom willen wij voorop lopen in de bouwsector.

*Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo*

### Condition 3 | story with employee picture, without employee testimonial



Jules Aarnink, bouwplaatsmanager

Danielle van der Neut, kopersadviseur

Gerard Siemerink, hoofd financiën & administratie



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*Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo*

#### Condition 4 | story with employee testimonial & employee picture

[Quotes are marked yellow]



Jules Aarnink, bouwplaatsmanager

Danielle van der Neut, kopersadviseur

Gerard Siemerink, hoofd financiën & administratie



**DURA VERMEER**  
Waarmaken van ambities

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Wie de klant echt begrijpt en voorop loopt in de technologische vernieuwing, die wint. Daarom willen wij voorop lopen in de bouwsector.

*Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo*



# APPENDIX B | QUESTIONNAIRE

## Introduction

Beste deelnemer,

Hartelijk dank dat u de tijd neemt om deze vragenlijst over Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo in te vullen. Voor de masterstudie Communication Studies aan de Universiteit van Twente ben ik bezig met mijn afstudeerscriptie. Ik voer een onderzoek uit dat gaat over hoe u als klant denkt over Dura Vermeer Hengelo.

Ik wil u vragen om de vragenlijst compleet en zo eerlijk mogelijk in te vullen, zodat de resultaten betrouwbaar zijn. Alle resultaten worden volledig anoniem verwerkt. Deelname is geheel vrijwillig en u kunt te allen tijde stoppen wanneer u de vragenlijst invult.

U krijgt nu eerst een tekst over Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo te lezen. Daarna wordt u een aantal vragen gesteld. Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal 5-10 minuten in beslag nemen.

Ik wil u alvast hartelijk bedanken voor uw deelname!  
Bij vragen en/of opmerkingen kunt u via e-mail contact opnemen.

Marjon Hengeveld  
m.hengeveld@duravermeer.nl  
m.hengeveld-1@student.utwente.nl  
Master Communication Studies  
Universiteit Twente

Ik heb bovenstaande tekst gelezen en ga hiermee akkoord

## Part 1 – text appreciation

Hier begint deel één van de vragenlijst. Hieronder volgen woorden die van toepassing kunnen zijn op **de tekst die u zojuist heeft gelezen**. Geef aan in hoeverre een woord van toepassing is op de tekst die u heeft gelezen.

Helder	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Vaag
Duidelijk	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Onduidelijk
Prettig leesbaar	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Niet prettig leesbaar
Geloofwaardig	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Ongeloofwaardig
Deskundig	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Ondeskundig
Betrouwbaar	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Onbetrouwbaar
Moeilijk	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Makkelijk
Kost veel moeite	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Kost weinig moeite
Eenvoudig	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Complex
Samenhangend	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Niet samenhangend
Stokkend	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Vloeiend

## Part 2 – brand experience

Hier begint deel twee van de vragenlijst. Het is de bedoeling dat u **op basis van de tekst** die u heeft gelezen een standpunt inneemt over de stellingen. Geef bij de volgende stellingen aan in hoeverre u het met de stellingen eens bent.

Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo wekt gevoelens en sentiment op bij haar klanten

Helemaal mee oneens ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Helemaal mee eens

Klanten hebben geen sterke emoties bij Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Klanten vinden Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo een emotioneel merk

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo is niet actiegericht

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Klanten denken veel over het merk na als zij Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo tegenkomen

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo zet klanten niet aan het denken

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo stimuleert de nieuwsgierigheid en het probleemoplossend vermogen van haar klanten

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

### Part 3 – brand attitude

Hier begint deel drie van de vragenlijst. Het is de bedoeling dat u **op basis van de tekst** die u heeft gelezen een beoordeling geeft over Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo. Geef aan in hoeverre een woord van toepassing is op uw algemene gevoel over Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo.

Aangenaam	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Onaangenaam
Goed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Slecht
Prettig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Onprettig
Waardevol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Waardeloos
Positief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Negatief

### Part 4 – brand trust

Hier begint deel vier van de vragenlijst. Het is de bedoeling dat u **op basis van de tekst** die u heeft gelezen een standpunt inneemt over de stellingen. Geef bij de volgende stellingen aan in hoeverre u het met de stellingen eens bent. U vult een 1 in als u het ergens helemaal niet mee eens bent en een 7 als u het helemaal eens bent met de stelling.

Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo....

.... biedt haar klanten een product met een constant kwaliteit niveau

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... helpt haar klanten met het oplossen van eventuele problemen bij het proces/eindproduct

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... biedt haar klanten nieuwe producten/oplossingen die zij nodig hebben

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... waardeert haar klanten

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... adviseert haar klanten over hoe het project het meest succesvol zal zijn

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

Klanten....

.... vertrouwen Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... rekenen op Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

.... vinden het handelen van Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo veilig

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

### Part 5 – memory of information

Afgaande op de tekst die u zojuist heeft gelezen, wat zijn volgens u de vier belangrijkste kernpijlers van Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo?

[open answer]

<next page>

Wat zijn volgens u de vier kernpijlers van Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo? Kruis de pijlers aan die volgens u behoren bij het werk van Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo.

- Integraal samenwerken
- Goedkoop zijn in de bouwwereld
- Inspirerend en vernieuwend leiderschap
- Vernieuwing en digitalisering
- Bouwen in derde wereld landen
- Veiligheid in de bouw
- Creëren van sterke wijken
- Geen van de bovenstaande pijlers

### Manipulation check

De volgende vragen gaan over de inhoud van de tekst die u heeft gelezen. Geef hierbij aan of u het eens bent met de stelling.

- |  |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| Bovenaan de tekst waren foto's van medewerkers te zien | Ja | Nee |
| In de tekst zaten quotes van medewerkers               | Ja | Nee |

Geef hieronder aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de volgende stelling:

Ik zou de tekst karakteriseren als een verhaal

Helemaal mee oneens        Helemaal mee eens

### Part 6 – demographic data

U bent bijna klaar met de vragenlijst, tot slot vragen wij uw demografische gegevens en uw ervaring met Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo.

Wat is uw geslacht?

Man

Vrouw

Wat is uw leeftijd?

.....

Wat is uw hoogst genoten (afgeronde) opleiding?

VMBO  
Havo  
VWO  
MBO  
HBO  
WO

Hoelang bent u al bekend met het merk Dura Vermeer Bouw Hengelo?

0-2 jaar  
2-5 jaar  
5-10 jaar  
>10 jaar

Wat is uw functie?

Directie  
Manager  
Uitvoerder  
Receptioniste/secretaresse  
Anders