



Battle of the Story or Story of the Battle?

Crafting a successful campaign message requires analyzing and understanding the power of storytelling to structure information in a way that reaches and convinces people. Every campaign is inherently a conflict between the status quo power holders and change agents to control the framing of an issue.

In order to win a campaign we must make sure that we aren't just telling the Story of the Battle -- WHAT is happening -- but rather fighting the "Battle of the Story" by communicating WHY it is happening. The 'what' is certainly important; it is the "Story of the Battle" (how many people mobilized, nuances of negotiations with target etc.) and helps motivate people who already understand and support the campaign's core message. However the Story of the Battle is not what a campaign should be communicating to the unconverted. For instance, when the news covers a demonstration as "protester versus police", the framing fails to personalize events and the issue gets marginalized as someone else's fight. The Story of the Battle fails to challenge artificial dichotomies like jobs versus the environment or peace activists vs. patriots. The Story of the Battle relies too heavily on empirical examples that our adversaries can unscrupulously distort and dismantle as exceptions rather than rules. Look at the current right wing strategy of labeling every criticism "hate speech". Regardless of how preposterous it may be it has forced many progressives to use their limited airtime defensively.

To succeed our strategy must win the Battle of the Story. The Battle of the Story is the fight to frame the issue. It is the effort to communicate the 'why' – the interpretation of actions and issues – that helps a campaign message reach a broader section of the public by personalizing and explaining the relevance of the issue. The "Battle of the Story" is the larger struggle to determine whose stories are told, how they are framed, how widely these stories are heard, and how deeply they impact idea-space. The Battle of the Story shapes the perception of the majority of the public who are not already a part of social change movements.

Story of the Battle (Tactical)

- Relies on facts and data rather than values and narrative (these are assumed)
- Operates within specific identity categories (protestor, activist) often these are marginal.
- Lacks self-sufficient action logic (action can't speak for itself, larger context is assumed)
- Tactical vs. message ("protesters block I-5" vs. "Residents outraged at war take to the streets")
- Doesn't personalize issue or challenge spectator role (speaking to people who are connected already)

Battle of the Story (Strategy)

- Frames the conflict
- Tells the Future ("He is Finished" – Otpor's overthrow of Milosevic)
- Engages people's values/personalizes
- Speaks through sympathetic characters
- Shows rather than tells (Effectively uses imagery /symbols, anecdotes etc.)