

# A Case Study of Canada's Story

A methodological technique to identify  
your brand's story | September 2017

*Sklar Wilton in conjunction with **System1 Research***

## What is your brand's purpose?

Implementing marketing strategies, communicating meaningful messages, and even creating appropriate products and services is next to impossible without a clear brand purpose.

But for people to have confidence in that brand purpose, it needs to be told in a believable way. Choosing a story that clearly reflects that brand purpose is what will motivate employees, partners, and ultimately consumers.

Historically, identifying a brand's purpose and story has been based on gut. It was rarely projectable nor generalizable. However, methodological techniques can help build a brand purpose based on more than just gut.

This case study demonstrates a quantitative, projectable framework for testing numerous narratives in order to determine 1) a brand's current story, and 2) the optimal story for the brand.

## Using stories to improve marketing

Every book, every movie, every play can be boiled down to seven archetypal plots, as described by Christopher Booker in his 2004 book called 'The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories.' Stories help us to better understand and process ideas, and people are hardwired to seek out stories and meaning, even where none exist.

But these seven plots can do far more than simply describe the story behind your favourite action movie. In the world of marketing, advertising, and branding, they are useful for understanding the narratives that do and don't align with brands. And once you know which plot aligns with your brand – which plot you want to align with your brand - you can use it to focus your brand story into compelling and impactful communications.

By using believable stories, people, consumers, and audiences can better understand and align themselves with the brand that best suits them. And when a brand finds the right story, it can reach more people, it can make people feel good about the brand, and it can demonstrate its distinctive assets.

So which one of these seven stories best reflects Canada?

## Case Study: Translating the Archetypal stories into Brand Canada

The seven archetypal stories can be written to reflect any concept, brand, or company, and in this case, they've been crafted to reflect seven versions of Brand Canada. The research described in this white paper will help us understand which story reflects how residents of Canada feel about their country right now, and which one reflects how they'd like to feel about Canada in the future.



### Comedy

Despite all its mistakes and problems, Canada will get back on track somehow.



### Journey & Return

Canada will thrive in the 21st Century by adopting the best ideas and people from around the world.



### Rebirth

Canada will thrive in the 21st Century by returning to the values that made it great.



### Rags to Riches

Canada has become a powerful nation by its own endeavours, and will keep on growing and prospering in the 21st Century.



### Quest

Canada in the 21st Century can truly become a land of liberty and opportunity for all of its people.



### Overcoming the Monster

Canada will thrive in the 21st Century by confronting and overcoming its enemies.



### Tragedy

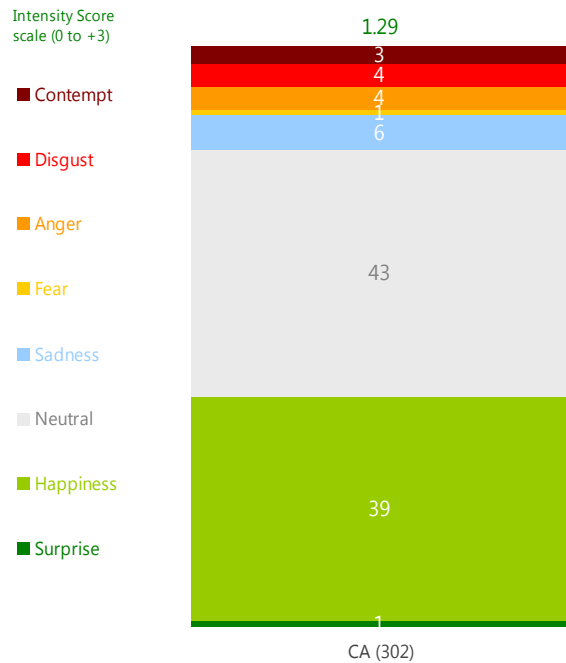
Canada has lost its way and the 21st Century will see it decline further.

## How do you feel about Canada right now?

Before diving into the stories, let's review how Canadians feel right now.

The good news is that the majority of people have positive or neutral feelings about Canada. When invited to choose a facial expression that best reflected their feelings about Canada, 39% of participants chose the happy expression and another 43% chose a neutral expression. Conversely, only 18% of people chose an overtly negative emotion.

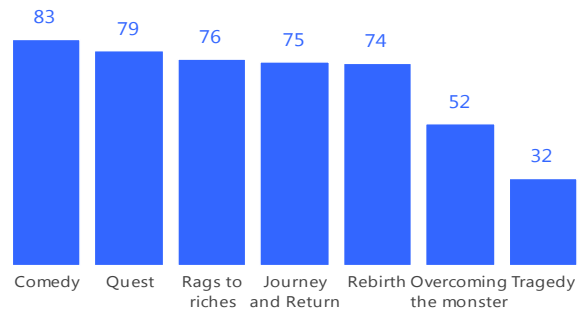
Knowing that the basic emotion about Canada is positive/neutral will help us to understand why the more negative archetypal stories came to be rejected.



## Which story is most believable?

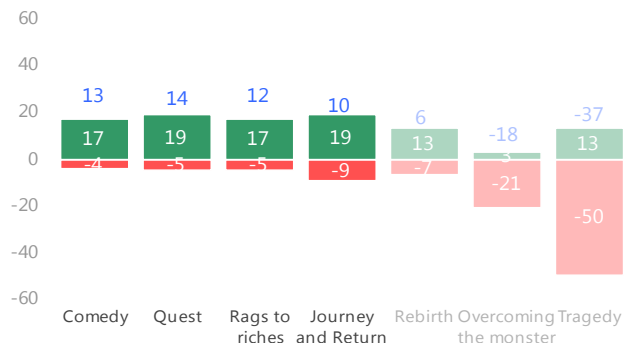
Of the seven stories, several were identified as believable. The more positive stories - Comedy, Quest, and Rags to Riches - generated high credibility and few people did not find them believable.

On the other hand, and in keeping with the overall positive views about Canada, there was strong pushback against the Overcoming the Monster and Tragedy stories. Only half of the group or less could see these stories coming true.



% saying story could come true

When asked to select the stories they found most and least believable, the results followed a similar pattern. Far more people considered Comedy, Quest, and Rags to Riches to be the most believable rather than the least believable story. Overcoming the Monster and Tragedy saw the opposite pattern, with far more people considering them the least believable. People simply could not fathom a negative future for Canada.



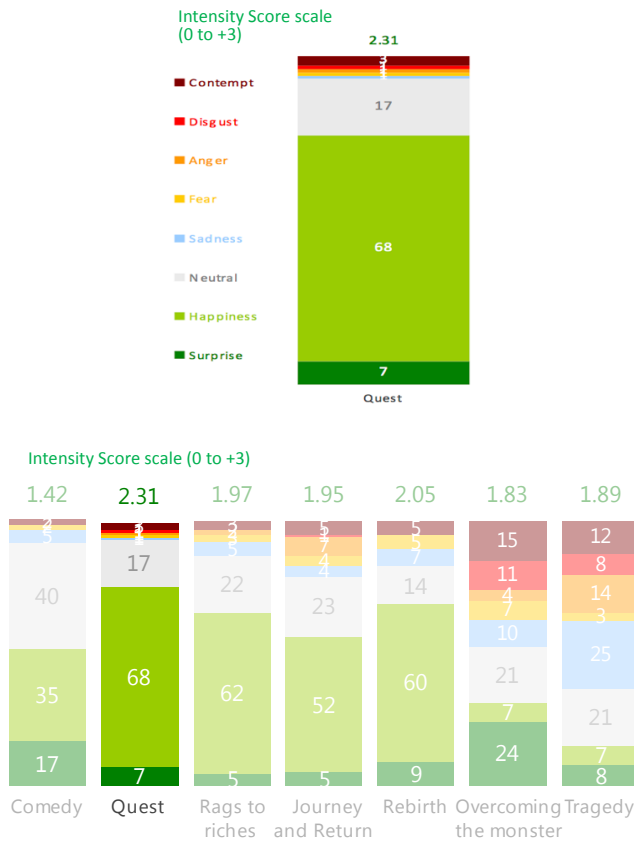
% most vs least believable

## What is Canada's Optimal Story?

What makes a story optimal? First, it must be believable, such as the case for Comedy. But, it also needs to have another component: a strong emotional resonance.

When asked to imagine each of the stories coming true, the Quest story generated an overwhelmingly positive response. Further, neutrality was minimum (which was the dominant emotion associated with Comedy), and here is the kicker: almost no negativity resulted!

Given all of these results, not only does Canada have permission to tell the Quest story about itself (i.e., people find it believable) but this story would also resonate with citizens the best.



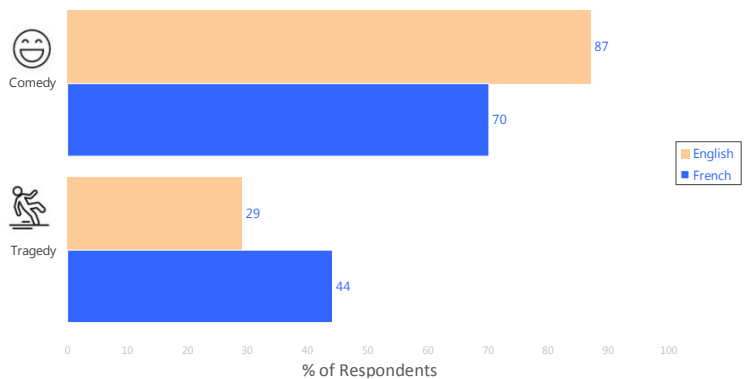
### Feeling about the story coming true

## How do English and French speaking Canadians differ?

Given the physical size of Canada and the range of cultures it embodies, it's not surprising that opinions were not uniform.

For instance, even though the Comedy story was highly believable for both English and French speakers, it was much more believable to English speakers. Similarly, although the Tragedy story was much less believable across the board, it was significantly more believable to French speakers than to English speakers.

And although both English and French speakers generally agreed on which stories were more and less believable, the rank orders were slightly different. In fact, the most believable story for English speakers was Comedy, but for French speakers, it was Quest.



## Implications for Brand Canada

A brand purpose is a clear definition of the difference a brand is looking to make in its target consumers' lives. Brands that get the purpose right and convey the story right have the ingredients to fuel a brand's momentum. Think of Pampers and its purpose of supporting healthy, happy child development versus just stating they make dry diapers. This perspective is not just a gut response but one we find in data: The top 50 Stengel brands<sup>1</sup> collectively outperformed the S&P 500 by almost 400 percent over the past 10 years.

With the storyteller findings in mind, we have a much clearer picture of how Canadians view themselves and their country. We can begin to lay out a plan for how the Brand Canada story could be told and marketed.

While choosing the Comedy route might be viable, it does not have the emotional resonance among Canadians that the Quest story does. Besides, the Quest story fits the zeitgeist that people around the world are looking to Canada's leadership for. This includes the full spectrum from political leadership (e.g., Prime Minister Trudeau and the Liberal Party, Jagmeet Singh, the newest leader of the NDP party and the first non-white leader of a federal party) to entertainment leadership (many of the top music acts today are Canadian, e.g., Justin Bieber, Grimes, The Weeknd, Arcade Fire, Drake, Shawn Mendes, Alessia Cara).

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<sup>1</sup> Stengel brands are classified as those that center their business on the ideal of improving people's lives.

## Implications for Brands

Storyteller is able to answer myriad questions a brand may have: What story will make consumers feel good about us? What makes a new competitor so appealing? Do people understand our brand's purpose? Should we change our tone of voice? Where do people feel our brand is going?

### How does the storyteller technique accomplish answering such questions?

To start, storyteller identifies the ideal stories brands have permission to tell. In addition, it provides a firm basis for writing brand purposes, creative and media briefs, and subsequently executing those strategies.

Second, it focuses on where a brand is going, not simply where it has been. It's consumer centric in that it understands that brands can influence, but not ultimately control, their narratives.

Third, it takes a qualitative framework – narrative analysis – and applies quantitative rigor.

Fourth, it informs business needs, whether those needs are short-term such as the tonality of communications or longer-term such as brand strategy and direction.

Last, but not least, storyteller is a tool that is not just for researchers. Rather, it is a tool that can be easily used by everyone from insights and marketing, to creative and sales teams.

## Methodology

Respondents for this survey (n=302) were selected from among people who registered to participate in online surveys. The sample was selected to reflect the demographic composition of Canadians based on age, gender, region, and language. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. All sample surveys are subject to multiple sources of error, including, but not limited to sampling error, coverage error, and measurement error. This research was conducted in cooperation with System1 Research (formerly Brainjuicer).

## About Sklar Wilton & Associates

Sklar Wilton & Associates helps their clients solve tough marketing challenges to unlock growth and build stronger brands. SW&A has worked for more than 30 years with some of Canada's most iconic brands and, in 2017, was the first place winner of the Best Workplaces in Canada for Small Companies as recognized by the Great Place To Work® Institute.

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