



## Brand Storytelling As An Integrated Marketing Communication Tool: A Case Study Of “Levi’s The Greatest Story Ever Worn”

*Bütünleşik Pazarlama İletişimi Aracı Olarak Marka Hikâye Anlatıcılığı:  
“Levi’s Giyilen En Güzel Hikâye” Kampanyası Örneği*

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**ABSTRACT:** Marketing activities influencing customers’ purchasing behaviours have moved to a new dimension today. Businesses utilize innovative marketing strategies beyond traditional methods to promote their products or services. Nowadays, consumers consider not only the quality of a product but also the emotional bond they have established with it when making purchasing decisions. That is why businesses use a comprehensive communication strategy that combines advertising, marketing, sponsorship, fairs and exhibitions, and traditional marketing techniques to promote their products or services. As a result of this strategy, storytelling has become an essential tool in ‘integrated marketing communication’ activities. This study discusses Levi’s company’s campaign, ‘The Greatest Story Ever Worn’, in cooperation with the Droga5 advertising agency. The primary purpose of the research is to find out how storytelling is being used in terms of integrated marketing communication in this campaign inspired by true stories. In this context, 13 stories in the campaign were categorized using content analysis in terms of place, time, theme, and subject. The study’s findings suggest that this campaign emphasizes customer loyalty in a way that supports integrated marketing communication goals. The narratives touch on the themes of success, locality, subculture, loyalty, commitment, and happiness.

**Key Words:** *Integrated Marketing Communication, Storytelling, Levi’s*

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**Öz:** Müşterilerin satın alma davranışlarını etkilemeyi amaçlayan pazarlama faaliyetleri günümüzde yeni bir boyuta taşınmıştır. Günümüzde tüketiciler belli bir ürüne yönelik olarak satın alma davranışında bulunurken yalnızca o ürünün kalitesini değil aynı zamanda o ürünle kurmuş olduğu duygusal bağı da dikkate alarak hareket etmektedirler. Bu nedenle kurum veya işletmeler üretmiş oldukları ürün veya hizmetleri satmaya yönelik olarak geleneksel pazarlama tekniklerinin yanı sıra reklam, pazarlama, sponsorluk, fuar ve sergi gibi faaliyetleri de bir araya getirerek bütüncül bir iletişim stratejisi yürütmektedir. Bu stratejinin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan 'bütünleşik pazarlama iletişimi' faaliyetlerinde hikâye anlatıcılığı önemli bir araç haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmada Levi's şirketinin Droga5 reklam ajansı ile birlikte oluşturduğu 'The Greatest Story Ever Worn' adlı kampanyaya ele alınmıştır. Gerçek hikâyelerden esinlenerek hayata geçirilen bu kampanyada hikâye anlatıcılığının bütünleşik pazarlama iletişimi bakımından nasıl uygulandığını saptamak araştırmanın temel amacıdır. Bu kapsamda kampanyada yer alan 13 hikâye yer, zaman, tema ve konu çerçevesinde sınıflandırılarak içerik analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Yapılmış olan araştırma sonucunda bu kampanyanın bütünleşik pazarlama iletişiminin amaçlarına hizmet eder nitelikte müşteri sadakatini ön plana çıkardığı ve kampanyada yer alan hikâyelerin sadakat, bağlılık, yerellik, alt kültür, başarı ve mutluluk temalarını içerdiği tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Bütünleşik Pazarlama İletişimi, Hikâye Anlatıcılığı, Levi's*

## INTRODUCTION

Stories have been a part of human activity since prehistoric times. "Humans are essentially storytellers," as Fisher (1984) stated. Whether they are made up or factual, stories have been passed down from one generation to another since ancient times. The history of storytelling dates to the earliest periods of human history. Humans have been using storytelling for thousands of years to record history, build relationships, transmit values, and sustain inventiveness throughout every known civilization (Quance, 2020). Although early human storytelling relied on visual tales, over time stories were transmitted verbally (Mendoza, 2015). Throughout history, stories have accompanied people in various forms. Regardless of their shape or size, stories have always been an integral part of the human experience.

People are social beings, and it is in their nature to tell others about the events in their lives. While stories were used as a form of communication between people in the past, they are also used in marketing activities today. Storytelling is thought to have great power in the area of marketing because it is believed that narratives establish an emotional bond between a business, its goods, and its clients (Hattar, 2022). In this sense, brand communication includes stories that have the power to emotionally connect with the target audience, improve their lives, and create value (Akbayır, 2016, p. 69). According to a study conducted by the marketing agency Hill Holliday, the majority of consumers prefer advertisements that tell a story, as opposed to simply promoting a product or service. When ads take on the form of a story, they are more likely to grab people's attention and create a sense of connection with the brand (MyBrandPost, 2023). Thus, using stories in messages can be more engaging to the audience.

Storytelling is an effective branding tool, as consumers often create stories about brands based on their experiences (Woodside, 2010; Gensler et al., 2013; Granitz & Forman, 2015; Solja et al., 2018; Kao, 2019; as cited in Hong et al., 2022, p.1). That's why it is not only an effective way of conveying a message to the target audience but also a tool for collecting information and understanding them better (Papadatos, 2006, p. 383). According to Fog et al. (2010; as cited in Paquette et al., 2017), consumers can define themselves through a brand's story, and they can use the products to express their own stories. In this respect, brand storytelling is an essential tool that enables two-way communication between the target audience and the brand.

These days, customers may attach greater significance and a distinct meaning to the goods and services companies provide. When individuals buy brands, they purchase a way of life rather than just products or services (Yıldız, 2019, p. 81). That's why, consumers may purchase goods not only based on quality and price but also for psychological, social, and personal reasons. In this regard, while introducing a good or service to consumers, brands must continue to engage in multidimensional marketing communication.

Storytelling has evolved with the advances and changes in human history. The advent of social media, globalization, and new communication technologies have all made it easier for customers to promote and share their brand stories than in the past (van Laer et al., 2019; as cited in Hong et al., 2022, p. 2). In today's world, people can meet virtually on the digital platforms offered by the internet network. These developments not only

transformed the communication between people but also enabled the digitalization of storytelling. Within this framework, there are two distinct forms of brand storytelling: consumer-generated brand stories and brand stories created by firms. Brand stories can be derived from various sources such as the workplace, employees, the CEO's background, the brand's history, characters interacting with brands, and product stories. In addition to this, consumer-generated brand stories are structured with a plot, characters, causality, and chronology, as explained by Hong et al. (2022, p. 2). Thus, different elements can be included in brand storytelling.

The target audience is exposed to various information for many different reasons. E-mail, sponsorship, and advertising are just a few of the techniques that customers are exposed to these days, depending on firms' marketing efforts. However, we live in an era of information overload in the digital age. That is why most of the marketing content on digital platforms goes unnoticed. Marketers view this as challenging as it is getting harder to draw clients and sway their purchasing decisions. In order to tackle this challenge, storytelling has become a popular marketing technique used today. People not only buy a product but also choose to buy it by considering the emotional bond associated with that product. For this reason, storytelling is considered one of the most effective ways to establish a bond between a product or brand and the target audience. Compelling stories is a way to build long-lasting relationships with the target audience (Korzh & Estima, 2022, p. 5). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the target audience and incorporate stories that allow them to establish an emotional connection.

### **1. Storytelling and Integrated Marketing Communication**

Marketing is defined as a process or activity for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging goods and services that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society (American Marketing Association, 2024). Marketing is an essential tool that enables businesses to differentiate themselves in the competitive environment. From this point of view, companies try to influence their target audience's purchasing behaviour by integrating various communication tools and techniques into their marketing activities. However, today's intense competitive environment and developments in transportation, information, and communication technologies have changed the rules of marketing and increased consumers' knowledge levels (Erdem, 2011, p. 43). All these developments require marketing activities to be carried out from a holistic perspective. So, the necessity of using communication-based marketing tools together, such as consumer behaviour, advertising, public relations, sales development, personal selling, direct marketing, sponsorship, trade fairs, and exhibitions, has revealed the concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) (Erdem, 2011, p. 43). In this sense, all communication instruments used to attract customers' attention are included in integrated marketing communication.

IMC is "the management process of integrating all marketing communications activities across relevant audience points to achieve greater brand coherence" (Broderick & Pickton, 2005, p. 26). It is a business marketing-focused strategy and unifies all of an organization's marketing and communication channels as a whole (Gordon-Isasi et al, 2020, p. 58). As a result, IMC is evaluated as a holistic concept in numerous research conducted by different authors (Tsai, 2005, p. 431; Erdem, 2011, p. 43; Daszkiewicz & Pukas, 2016, p. 21; Quesenberry & Coolson, 2023, p. 59). IMC combines various methods and disciplines that were once considered separate. These include advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations. With the rise of digital and social media marketing, personal sales, and alternative media, IMC has expanded to include the integration of these emerging disciplines as well (Quesenberry & Coolson, 2023, p. 59). From this point of view, it can be said that the marketing mix's promotion component has become more diverse and incorporates new digital activities.

The primary objective of integrated marketing communication efforts is to draw in the target audience. In today's world, people are exposed to various message content from various media, especially digital platforms. Many brands fail in their marketing and advertising activities because people avoid such content. That's why, in today's marketing communication campaigns, storytelling plays a vital role in effectively communicating with target audiences. Although people may dislike advertisements, they are often drawn to a compelling narrative, even if it is promotional in nature (Quesenberry & Coolson, 2023, p. 12). So, a key component of successfully communicating with the target audience is storytelling.

Numerous studies have shown that strong brands and brand loyalty can be developed through the use of brand storytelling because of its ability to entertain, persuade, and leave a lasting impression on customers

(Fog et al., 2005; Woodside, 2010; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Gensler et al., 2013; Freeman, 2014; Feng, 2018; as cited in Hong et al., 2022, p. 1). According to a Sprout Social study, 84% of consumers say they purchase products from businesses with which they have an emotional connection (Farinella, 2023). Brand loyalty and attachment are fostered when customers develop strong emotional bonds with the company. Customers who are emotionally engaged with a brand are not only more inclined to believe in it, support it, and stick with it over time, but they are also more likely to be willing to pay a premium for its goods or services (Farinella, 2023). Within this framework, storytelling has the potential to be a powerful tool for building brand loyalty.

## **2. Research Design**

### **2.1. Subject of The Research**

The research subject is the "The Greatest Story Ever Worn" campaign, conducted by Levi's, a global clothing brand. In this campaign, 13 real stories from different parts of the world were used. To learn more about the use of storytelling in integrated marketing communication, these stories were examined through content analysis.

### **2.2. Purpose of The Research**

This study's primary focus is to reveal the relationship between brand storytelling and integrated marketing communications. Therefore, this study examines brands' use of storytelling in integrated marketing communications.

### **2.3. Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows: What kind of elements of the marketing mix are included in brands' stories? What are the communication purposes of the brand stories in the campaigns other than marketing? What are the common themes highlighted in the stories? In what way do these themes affect the objectives of integrated marketing communications?

### **2.4. Methodology**

One of the most popular methods in qualitative social research is the case study (Priya, 2021, p. 1). According to Yin (2009, p. 18), a case study is an empirical investigation that examines a phenomenon in its actual setting. The campaign named "The Greatest Story Ever Worn" by Levi's is the case study investigated in the research. This campaign, consisting of 13 real stories, features a range of content released on several platforms. This study focuses on the contents from the corporate website of Levi's and Droga5 advertising agency regarding the campaign. In cases where direct interviews and observations are not possible, written and visual materials can be utilized to address the research problem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021, p. 189). For this reason, document analysis was used as a data collection tool in the study. After that, the content analysis method was applied to the collected data. As a qualitative research method, it is stated that content analysis can be used to assess various content, including ads, websites, newspapers, magazines, and transcripts (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Saldana, 2011; as cited in Sak et al., 2021, p. 236). In this case, content analysis was applied to the material found on the websites of Levi's USA and advertising firm Droga5.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1. The Campaign of Levi's: The Greatest Story Ever Worn**

In the campaign titled 'The Greatest Story Ever Worn' global and authentic stories were used with cinematic and thematic elements for Levi's 501 jeans model. Celebrating 150 years of Levi Strauss, the campaign covers iconic stories from the 1940s to the present. The campaign was carried out by Droga5, a company that claims to work with the principle of doing creative and non-noisy work with the slogan "We build and sustain the most influential brands of the 21st century" (Droga, n.d.a).

The films were shot by filmmakers Melina Matsoukas and Martin de Thurah. Besides directing commercials, Melina Matsoukas is also a film and television director (Kelly, 2023). She won two Grammy Awards for directing the music videos for Rihanna's 'We Found Love' and Beyonce's 'Formation.' He directed episodes of Issa Rae's HBO show *Insecure* and AppleTV's *The Changeling*. After becoming known for her music videos, his first feature film, *Queen and Slim*, was released in 2019, starring Daniel Kaluuya and Jodie Turner-Smith as a couple on the run after shooting a police officer (Black women directors, n.d.). Her adventure, which started with the meaning she added to the video clips of Beyonce and Rihanna's songs, has reached the 'big screen' and has been

considered a success story (Davis, 2019; Okeowo, 2017). Another director, Martin de Thurah, is a Danish film director, screenwriter, cinematographer, and music video director (“Martin de Thurah”, n.d.). He is known for his video work with musicians/bands such as Feist, James Blake, and Fever Ray. With his films “The Man Who Couldn’t Slow Down,” which he made for the “Hennessy” brand in 2013 (Directors Guild of America, n.d.a), and “Machines,” which he prepared for the StubHub firm in 2017 (Directors Guild of America, n.d.b), he won the ‘Commercials category prize at the ‘Annual DGA Awards.’ In the same category, he received nominations in 2018 for his film “Space Station” for Macy’s (Directors Guild of America, n.d.c) and in 2023 for Levi’s 501 Jeans for “Fair Exchange” and “Legends Never Die” (Directors Guild of America, n.d.d).

A total of 13 stories were included in the campaign, and three of the 13 stories were made into short films (Levi’s US., n.d.). The stories filmed as short films are ‘Precious Cargo’, ‘Fair Exchange’, and ‘Legends Never Die’. Other stories are ‘No Way Nurse’, ‘Extra-Curricular Chemistry’, ‘A Crisp Crease’, ‘East Bay Dragons’, ‘Blue Fever’, ‘Skate’, ‘Black Tie’, ‘Blue Denim’, ‘Love Affair’, ‘Happily Ever After’, ‘Lady Levis’. Droga5, the campaign’s organizer, referred to this campaign as a global anthology. To create this anthology, the internet, and Levi’s archives were scanned and converted into stories. These stories were then used in the film, print, social, OOH, 3-DOOH, radio, and in-store displays (Droga5, n.d.b). In the context of integrated marketing communication, it is crucial to communicate with customers consistently and efficiently without overwhelming them with excessive messaging as the influence of traditional advertising media diminishes and web/computer-based environments become more significant (Odabaşı & Oyman, 2010, pp. 68-69). In this campaign, internet technology was used both to create an anthology and to circulate the stories on the internet. Additionally, applications such as 3-DOOH based on computer technology have been used in advertisements. In this regard, the ‘Greatest Story Ever Worn’ campaign of Levi’s brand blended traditional advertising strategies with computer and web-based advertising strategies and used real stories to create a consistent image of the brand and to increase customer loyalty and commitment to the brand.

The campaign’s “Greatest Story Ever Worn” website (Levi’s US., n.d) opens with the words, “The following is based on a true story,” emphasizing how true the tales are. In addition, there is a statement highlighting the “incredibility” of the stories and brief annotations regarding them. The stories are also available on Levi’s official YouTube channel and social media pages. Table 1 below provides details on the campaign’s stories.

**Table 1: Stories in Levi’s greatest story ever worn campaign**

Type	Title	Location	Time	Plot
Short Film, Social Media, OHH, 3-OOH, radio, in-store displays	Precious Cargo	Kingston, Jamaica	1970	“This is the true story of some very precious cargo. Of fishermen importing 501® jeans to the docks of Kingston in the ‘70s, and Jamaicans exporting their style back to the world by the metric ton. And that’s one influential island in the greatest story ever worn”
Short Film, Social Media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Fair Exchange	Tbilisi, Georgia	1982	“This is the true story of some very precious cargo. Of fishermen importing 501® jeans to the docks of Kingston in the ‘70s, and Jamaicans exporting their style back to the world by the metric ton. And that’s one influential island in the greatest story ever worn”

Short Film, Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Legends Never Die	California, USA	2022	"This is the true story of hundreds of dearly departed who've requested to be buried in their 501® jeans. And the one unliving legend that requested all attendees wear them, too. Most funeral directors don't get it, but we definitely do. Because that's just going out in style in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	No way, nurse	Oregon, USA	---	"This is the story of broken bones. Of a man in Oregon who snapped his tibia like a toothpick but refused to let the nurse cut off his 501® jeans. They don't teach it in medical school, but that's definitely some intensive care in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Extra- curricular chemistry	California, USA	1954	"This is the true story of a blue jean ban. Of school principals in the 1950s who outlawed 501® jeans. And the students who bought a bucket load of bleach, turned their jeans white and wore them to school anyway. And that's one extracurricular chemistry lesson in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	A crisp crease	---	1960s	"This is the true story of the crease that never wrinkled. Of crisp 501® jeans, pressed and carefully ironed down the center. And the Chicano style that started it all. A uniform everyone has tried to copy. A culture only one can claim. And that's not a trend but a heavily starched truth in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	East bay dragons	Oakland, USA	1959	"This is the true story of Oakland's oldest all-Black motorcycle club still in existence today. Beginning in a time when a Black man riding a motorcycle was a revolutionary act in and of itself. When Papa Joe and the East Bay Dragons rode in wearing Levi's® 501® jeans, the rest was history. And that's some serious mileage in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Blue fever	Canada	---	"This is the story of desperation and denim. Of committed Canadians plastering wanted ads for vintage Levi's® 501® jeans on street poles, billboards, car bumpers, and yes, even the back doors of dive-bar bathrooms. Because real heroes search high and low in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3- DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Skate	New England, USA.	---	"This is the true story of an East Coast carpenter from central Maine. A beast from the east in his 501® jeans rolling out of rural New England and into skate history. You'll find him in magazine spreads and video parts, but also on walls by your local double set. And that's just one of many local legends in the greatest story ever worn."

Social Media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Black tie, blue denim	---	---	"This is the true story of blue jeans at a black-tie affair. Of a state dinner, and one particular guest who broke the dress code with his beloved 501® jeans underneath. A true mixed-media masterpiece created for comfort. And that's artistic integrity in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Love affair	---	---	"This is the true story of a husband and the love of his life. The one he wakes up with each and every day, and so desperately desires—especially on his birthday. A 35-year strong relationship with none other than his favorite 501® jeans. And that's just one long-standing love affair in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Happily ever after	---	---	"This is the true story of a couple who said, "I do" in their 501® jeans. But this is also the story of countless couples who have done the same. Of ditching the dress code, and exchanging vows to who you love, while wearing what you please. And that's what happily ever after looks like in the greatest story ever worn."
Social Media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store displays	Lady Levi's	Paris, France.	1947	"This is the true story of Parisian runway takeover in 1947. A time when couture gowns dominated the fashion floor, the Emery twins stepped onto the runway in Levi's® denim and brought the world to its knees. Back then, they were dubbed the 701® jean. Today, they're known as the 501® jean. And that's the 411 on Lady Levi's grand entrance in the greatest story ever worn."

Source: (Levi's US., n.d.; Droga5, n.d.b)

The first story to be filmed as a short film, "Precious Cargo," went viral online with the tagline "One Influential Island in the Greatest Story Ever Worn" (Levi's, 2023c). The movie's opening note makes it clear that the story takes place in 1970 in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. The reggae song '54-46 Was My Number' by Toots and the Maytals, a Jamaican band, starts playing at the movie's opening. A boat approaches the quay, loaded with Levi's 501 pants in box barrels. The crowd waiting on the quay opens these boxes with excitement and enthusiasm and chooses the 501 that suits them. As night falls, young people in Levi's 501 pants go to a party and enjoy their cultural dances.

'Fair Exchange' is another story made into a short movie. The story takes place in 1982 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The story was shared online under "One Fair Exchange in the Greatest Story Ever Worn" (Levi's, 2023b). A Georgian teenager was browsing a magazine in his room when he saw an advert for Levi's 501. The young man lives with his mother and sister in a traditional Georgian house. Sideboard with shelves covered with lace, A dining table in front of the buffet, a classic chandelier, a lace curtain, and, next to them, a television. His mother and sister are sitting in front of the television. The young man takes an animal from his stables and sets off. With difficulty, he brings the animal to another house in the town through the meadows. A young man wearing Levi's 501 waits in front of the house. The man takes off the 501, gives it to the young man, and takes the animal. Thus, an animal is given in exchange for a 501 jeans model. The young man walks confidently through the city streets in his 501 jeans. And a woman passing by smiles at him, unable to take her eyes off him.

The third short film is 'Legends Never Die' (Levi's, 2023a). This story is about a deceased old man who wants to be buried with his 501 jeans. The story takes place in California in 2022. The film opens with a photograph of the deceased man wearing 501 at the venue where his funeral was held. Then, only the upper body of the participants appear at the funeral. They are dressed appropriately for a funeral in black, formal attire. However, it is later shown that all the participants are wearing model 501 jeans. The majority of the guests are elderly people. The movie ends with a body on a coffin wearing 501 model pants and shoes. Additionally, the following words are projected on the screen in the movie: "Many have requested to be buried in 501, only one requested all attendees wear them, too".

Apart from the three stories explained above, ten more stories were also included in the campaign. These stories were not shot as short films but were placed in other types of advertisements (social media, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio, in-store showcases). The first of these stories is called 'No way, nurse'. The story is set in Oregon and is titled "This is the Story of Broken Bones". It is about a man who refuses to let a nurse cut the 501 jeans of a man with a broken tibia.

Another story is called 'Extra-curricular chemistry'. It is the story of pupils who bleached their trousers and went to school against the headmasters who banned 501 jeans in the 1950s. The story is summarized with the phrase, "And that's one extracurricular chemistry lesson in the greatest story ever worn." The story of 'A crisp crease' revolves around 501 jeans that have been ironed, pressed, and crease-free. It is based on the Chicano style, which originated as a Mexican American subculture in America (Estiler, 2017) and is described as a look that not everyone embraces but that everyone strives to imitate.

The story, called 'East Bay Dragons', is based on the history of an all-black motorcycle club in Oakland that still exists today. So the story is about a motorcycle club of black people and about the 501 jeans that its members wear. The 'Blue Fever' story is based on the vintage Levi's 501 wanted story that Canadians hung on street poles, car bumpers and the back doors of bar toilets. 'Skate' is the story of an East Coast carpenter in central Maine. 501 is about a legendary person who skateboards in rural New England with his jeans. In magazines and videos, the story of this skateboarder is presented as "And that's just one of many local legends in the greatest story ever worn." 'Black Tie, Blue Denim' is about a guest at a state dinner who breaks the dress code with his 501 jeans. 'Love Affair' is the story of a husband and the love of his life. The narrative centers on a man with a 35-year robust marriage and a cherished pair of 501 jeans. "Happily Ever After" tells the tale of a couple who wore 501 jeans to their wedding, as well as the tale of all other couples who follow them. It is based on the freedom to break the dress code and wear whatever you want when getting married.

In 1947, when couture dresses ruled the fashion world, the Emery twins made their mark with their style by stepping to the podium wearing Levi's jeans. This is the story told in "Lady Levi's." As a result, the 501 pants -known as the 701 at the time- took over Paris catwalks.

### **3.2. Themes of the Stories in the Campaign**

The campaign consists of 13 stories covering a variety of themes, characters, locations, and periods. Each theme plays a role in brand image and customer integration with the brand. Throughout its 150-year history, the Levi's brand and the 501 model have had a global impact, which is a prevalent theme highlighted in various stories. Actual tales were used to highlight the globality and acceptance of the 501 model, which was blended with regional themes from around the globe. The themes of the stories make it evident that building brand loyalty and the persuasive process with these clients are crucial components of integrated marketing communication (Erdem, 2011, p. 44). In this sense, the stories demonstrate that customers don't simply wear regular jeans; instead, they prefer Levi's 501 model jeans, with which they develop a close emotional attachment.

Many of the stories are about loyal customers who wear the 501 model jeans with remarkable passion and enthusiasm. In these stories, 501 jeans are an indispensable model that has become a part of daily life, allowing people to create their own style. Such is the desire for these jeans that the characters in the stories refuse to take them off and do not want them to be harmed. One of these stories, "Legends Never Die," tells the tale of a man who desires to wear his 501 pants even after passing away and who wants them to be seen on his corpse



during the funeral. It's not simply a beloved pair of pants for the man who wants everyone at his funeral to wear 501 jeans, it's a product he is loyal to. Similarly, the story 'No way, nurse' describes a man who refuses to have his jeans cut by the nurse before surgery. The man who does not want his jeans damaged, even in a difficult situation, has a sense of sacredness about his 501 jeans. In both stories, the emotions emphasized towards 501 jeans are passion, protectionism, and loyalty.

The heroes of the stories see the 501 model as indispensable and continue to use the product in various environments, taking the risk of being "marginal". The short story 'Black Tie, Blue Denim' portrays a man wearing Levi's 501 jeans to an official state dinner, as well as others like him. The story features a man in a mixed style who breaks the dress code and cares about comfort instead of formality. In this respect, the style emphasized in the story is expressed as "artistic integrity". The plot revolves around the artistic style that develops due to a person's devotion to the product. The 'Happily Ever After' narrative is another story of someone who defies the dress rule. This story is about the couple(s) who got married wearing Levi's 501. The story draws a link between the marriage ritual of swearing an oath of allegiance and the commitment to Levi's 501 jeans, emphasizing that these jeans can be worn anywhere, anytime. The story 'Extra-Curricular Chemistry' is also about young people who are too loyal to the 501 model. In the 1950s, school principals had imposed bans on Levi's 501 jeans, which led a group of young people to bleach their jeans white as a way to subvert the rules and show their commitment to this model. This act became a symbol of young people creating their own unique style and rebelling against the restrictions imposed on them. The heroes of the campaign's stories consist of loyal customers who do not give up 501 even under the most difficult conditions and who use the product regardless of time and place.

The stories have a global impact and aim to demonstrate the acceptance of the 501 model -which has been in use for 150 years- in many local identities and cultures. The story of 'Precious Cargo' takes place in 1970 in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. A boat is bringing the Levi's 501 model to Jamaica, where excited Jamaicans await the product to arrive at the wharf. Although the global appeal of 501 -a product of the American fashion industry- is emphasized, so is the product's cohesiveness with regional themes. One of the elements in the film that accentuates local motifs is the playing of '54-46 Was My Number (Toots and the Maytals - 1968),' a reggae song that originated in Jamaica in the 1960s and eventually gained international recognition. This music, which is a non-diegetic sound, is combined with the young people's dances in line with the song at the film's end. Jamaica's vibrant and lively structure has produced a distinctive look when combined with the product. This American product, combined with Jamaican local motifs, has kept up with the global style without compromising its local ties. The story 'Fair Exchange,' which took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1982, is another story with local motifs. The fact that the house in which the young man in the story lives was chosen to be a classic Georgian house, and that the house is in a town rather than a city centre, shows that the product is suitable for any geography. In the movie, the two young people who make the exchange are dressed appropriately for a Georgian town. One is dressed in a jumper and classic shoes under a jumpsuit, the other in boots and a hat under 501. The young man who gave his animal for 501 walks proudly in the town after wearing it. These stories demonstrate that the "globalization" aspect of the campaign was considered. In this direction, the 501 model, a global product, is combined with local motifs to underline that the product belongs everywhere. Companies can create global brands by leveraging expanding information technologies in today's world. However, competition with other brands is also becoming global, and many communication problems are arising. Global brands now prioritize both global integration and local markets through multi-focus organizations in the context of integrated marketing communications due to competition and communication problems (Odabaşı & Oyman, 2010, pp. 66-67). In this respect, storytelling is a significant component of multinational brands' integrated marketing communication efforts.

The Levi's 501 campaign features different local cultures and subcultures to emphasize the suitability of the jeans for diverse identities and cultures. The story 'A Crisp Crease' describes how the 501 model was adapted to the Chicano style with an iron mark in the middle. Chicano, a subculture formed by Mexicans in America, is expressed in the campaign as a style that everyone tries to have, but only a certain segment of people embraces and practices. The story highlights the adaptability of the 501 model to various subcultures and local cultures. Pictures of Mexican people dressed in the Chicano style were shared on the campaign website and Levi's official Instagram account. These posts aimed to showcase the versatility of the 501 model and its ability to fit different styles and cultures. Another subculture story, 'East Bay Dragons', is a story revolving around motorcycles and the

black people who ride them. The story, which tells about the oldest African-American motorcycle club with the same name, provides an example of the subculture. The East Bay Dragons are a great illustration of the revolutionary spirit of their time. The band's sense of belonging, commitment to freedom, and African-American identity made them stand out. They used Levi's 501 jeans to create their unique style, transforming the model into a symbol of the revolutionary culture.

The myth of success is one of the prominent elements in the stories of the campaign. One of these stories is 'Skate'. It tells the story of a skateboarder who left the countryside in the state of Maine and made skateboarding history. The Levi's 501 model has played a significant role in the success story of this skateboarder. It can be seen in magazines, video sections, and walls. It has become an essential element of the style he created, contributing to his success. The sentence "And that's just one of many local legends in the greatest story ever worn" is added to the end of the story, indicating that there are more success stories. 'Lady Levi's' is another campaign success story. It is about a fashion success in Paris. The Emery twins, who broke the dominance of couture dresses with the Levi's 501 model, achieved significant success on the catwalks. The fact that this success story is linked to the world of fashion is an additional factor in the 501 model's worldwide success.

In the stories, 501 Jeans has witnessed its customers' happy moments and has been a part of these moments of happiness. The story of 'Love Affair' is about a happy marriage that has been going on for 35 years and Levi's 501 model being with them in this marriage. This example illustrates the connection between Levi's 501 jeans and happiness and peace. The story 'Happily Ever After' broke the clothing stereotypes by discussing couples wearing 501 jeans during the wedding ceremony.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Stories from the beginning of time have surrounded humanity. Narratives, a valuable tool for connecting the past to the present and future, are now employed in integrated marketing communication (Odabaşı & Oyman, 2010, p. 72). Harmony with the brand's image is crucial in integrated marketing communication, which connects numerous techniques like public relations, direct marketing, personal selling, and advertising rather than utilizing them separately (Yolaç, 2004, p. 191). Businesses that seek to build long-term relationships with their clients seek to achieve this balance by highlighting both the emotional and tangible aspects of their goods and services, such as content, price, and quality. Businesses don't just focus on selling their products or services, but also on creating a marketing strategy to build a loyal customer base worldwide. So, storytelling is one of the communication tools often used by companies to develop strong relationships with customers and keep them loyal to the brand. In particular, the attractiveness of true stories, the inclusion of elements that customers can identify with in the stories, and the fact that they are qualified to appeal to individuals' emotions can be effective in creating and/or maintaining the brand's image.

'The Greatest Story Ever Worn' campaign, specially organized for the 150th anniversary of 501 jeans, the iconic product of Levi's provided an important example of 'storytelling' produced from real stories. The campaign includes 13 true stories that were presented in a variety of media/formats such as film, print, social, OHH, 3-DOOH, radio and in-store displays. These stories are not about the structure of the product, but about the personal and emotional bonds that customers have formed with Levi's 501 jeans throughout its 150-year history. It was determined that these stories were selected in accordance with the objectives of integrated marketing communication and that they covered the themes of customer loyalty, local motifs, subcultures, success and happiness. Through these themes, it is endeavoured to build an emotional bridge between the product and the customer. In addition, by creating a consistent image of the product, it is aimed both to gain new customers and to transform existing customers into loyal customers. A connection between the product and its customers has been formed throughout history, and the messages in the stories aim to strengthen this bond. Examples of elements found in the content of the stories include customers who break the rules and cannot leave the product under any circumstances, or who persevere and never give up. These examples also show how the product is suitable for a variety of times, places, and cultures, and subcultures. In addition, the inclusion of a queer love story underlines the importance given by the brand to different sexual identities and reveals the effort to strengthen the bond with individuals with these sexual identities. In this way, the campaign's use of storytelling fosters a cooperative relationship between the customer and the brand by incorporating them into the narrative and delivering heartfelt, real stories about the company rather than overpowering them with messaging.

The campaign's narratives have been rewritten to fit the platform's organizational structure. Short films for television commercials; posts, reels, short videos, etc. for social media platforms; OHHs and 3-DOOHs for outdoor advertisements; content consisting of visuals and text for printed publications; and audio narratives for radio. In all of them, the same stories took on different forms, emphasizing their reality. The literary power of the stories was utilized by using text alongside the visuals/videos.

In recent years, a communication process based on establishing relationships and cooperation with the target audience has come to the fore instead of traditional communication methods. In this context, storytelling is an essential tool in creating a positive image of brands and protecting the existing image and reputation. In addition, the variety of stories in digital formats will likely increase due to the development of computer-based technologies and internet networks. In this respect, it is expected that businesses will frequently include storytelling in their campaigns in the future, as stories can easily take on different forms and structures.

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