Storytelling and Storydoing in Political Messaging

FELO ALEJANDRO JIMÉNEZ PÉREZ



A guide to understanding storytelling and storydoing.

The art of telling stories.

1. Narrative and Action

Storytelling is the narrative a campaign crafts: what it says, how it frames it, and the story it wants to tell. Storydoing is when that narrative is backed by visible, verifiable action.

A political message is strongest when narrative and action go hand in hand. Either one alone can work for a while, but the result is fragile. A narrative without action risks being heard as empty words, which signaling theory calls *cheap talk*: messages that cost nothing to send. In politics, that cost comes later: a politician's word is on the record, it gets checked against what they do, and when it is not kept, it can come back to haunt them. And actions without a narrative never become a message. The narrative gives meaning its shape. Action makes it credible.

In practical terms, storytelling answers one question: what do we want people to understand about who is speaking and what they are proposing? Storydoing answers another: what do we do, visibly, to make that true? When the two answers match, the message holds. When one is missing, the message is incomplete.

2. When There Is Narrative but No Action

A well-built narrative can be clear, appealing, and easy to remember. The trouble starts when there is no action to back it up. Then the message risks being dismissed as mere marketing.

Audiences may start asking whether it can be verified. In an interview, in a speech, in a crisis, in a social media post or video, or in day-to-day follow-through, the lack of action undermines the narrative. It is not that the message is false; it is that it is hard to prove.

Building a narrative takes less time and fewer resources than backing it with action, which is why it is the most tempting shortcut in a campaign. The cost shows up with the first contradiction or the first uncomfortable question: with no action to support it, the narrative has nothing to fall back on, and the whole weight rests on words.

Hypothetical example: a candidate who talks about being close to the people and listening at all times. The narrative is consistent. Yet the candidate's public actions do not reflect that contact on a regular basis. Over time, the message sounds more like campaign talk than real practice.

3. When There Is Action but No Narrative

Visible actions build momentum. Visits, gestures, public works, or a presence on the ground can be real and sustained.

The problem is that without a narrative to tie them together, those actions may never reach people.

It is not that they do not exist; it is that people either do not know about them or do not grasp what they mean. The action is there, but it never gets communicated.

There is also a cost that is not immediately visible. An action that goes unexplained is experienced as an isolated event and never adds up to an idea. And whoever fails to explain their own actions lets others do the explaining, whether the media, opponents, or rumor. What is done but never told is open to readings that no one controls.

Hypothetical example: a team that regularly tours communities and carries out concrete gestures. The actions are real. But there is no clear message explaining the why or the purpose. Many people never find out, and those who do not connect those actions to an idea or a direction.

4. When There Is Narrative and Action

The message gains credibility because it can be confirmed. What is said and what is done point in the same direction. The narrative gives the action meaning. The action backs up the narrative.

In an interview or in the day-to-day, it is harder for anyone to push back on a message when consistent action stands behind it.

Hypothetical example: a candidate who makes public safety a priority. At the same time, the candidate shows verifiable, consistent action on it: a presence in specific areas, public tracking of commitments, and ongoing communication about what is being done. Narrative and action reinforce each other.

Getting the two to reinforce each other does not happen by accident. It takes choosing a few core ideas, making sure each one has visible actions that repeat regularly, communicating them through a clear message, and leaving a trail anyone can verify, such as dates, places, and results. It also takes consistency: a one-off action counts for little, while a sustained practice is what eventually becomes reputation.

Nor is it a matter of waiting for perfect results before communicating, or of turning every action into propaganda. What matters is proportion: the narrative should not promise more than the action can back up, and action should not go unexplained. When the narrative gets ahead of the facts, the message becomes overblown; when the facts get ahead of the narrative, they go to waste.

5. A Clarification

Relying on narrative alone or on action alone is not an error in itself, but it weakens the message.

When there is only storytelling, there is a risk that it will be seen as marketing or as empty words. It may sound good, but it is hard to verify.

When there is only storydoing, there is a risk that the action never reaches anyone. The action took place, but it never turns into a message: many people do not find out, and the action stays where it happened.

In both cases, the message falls short of its full strength. Without action, the narrative stays in words; without a narrative, the action stays an isolated deed. Each component needs the other to complete the message.

6. Questions for Reviewing a Message

Before launching or adjusting a political message, it helps to run it through a few simple questions.

What is the core idea the message is meant to convey?

What concrete, verifiable actions back it up today?

Do those actions repeat regularly, or were they a one-time episode?

Do people know about those actions, and do they connect them to the core idea?

What would happen if someone asked for proof in an interview or in the middle of a crisis?

If any answer is weak, that is where the work remains: the narrative is missing, the action is missing, or the two are not connected.