



# The Development of a Research Project as a Brand

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## Background

### Remote Sociolinguistic Research?

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to social factors. Researchers usually build rapport with speakers by spending time in their communities and sitting down in person to audio-record informal conversations.



Dr. Betsy Sneller doing traditional sociolinguistic work with a child participant pre-pandemic.

The MI Diaries project is a sociolinguistic project collecting 'audio diaries' from anyone ages 3+ living in Michigan. But due to COVID-19, MI Diaries couldn't do in-person rapport building.

**Problem 1:** How do we record people during the pandemic and get them to talk **openly** and **informally** without meeting and getting to know them? (see also Moore, 2021)

**Problem 2:** How do we make the project **visible** to potential participants, plus **engaging** and **trustworthy** enough to retain them?

### Solution: MI Diaries as a Brand

- MI Diaries formed a **Brand Team** and charged it with building and managing the project as a brand.
- **Brand Strategy & Brand Management** have been critical to MI Diaries' success.

## Brand Strategy

### Mission, Vision & Values

The essential building blocks of a brand consist of mission, vision, and value statements. Through collaborative team initiatives such as word association, critical thinking and guiding questions, we were able to establish these final statements:

#### Mission:

To document changes in the lives and language of Michiganders, while fostering an inclusive community and a sense of connection in a time where neither are easy to experience. We aim to provide a place for diarists to confidentially share their true selves, while also contributing their stories to a larger historical archive of life during and after the pandemic.

#### Vision:

We are committed to providing people who live in Michigan with an active platform to express valuable insights into life during and after the pandemic. These insights are made more valuable by ensuring a diverse community of diarists. The audio diaries we collect will also contribute to new knowledge about how language changes. We believe that MI Diaries will foster a continuous opportunity for researchers of multiple disciplines to develop professional skills and continue an ongoing archive of Michigan speech.

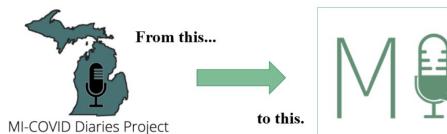
#### Values:

- **Authenticity:** To provide participants with a space to share their stories where they can be open and authentic and be heard for who they are.
- **Trustworthiness:** To incorporate a code of professionalism in our work that assures diarists, scholars, and the public of the high ethical and scholarly standards that we adhere to.
- **Mentorship:** To encourage students to further their professional development skills through research, project management and engagement with the community state-wide.
- **Research Longevity:** To recognize the historical value of this project by continuing to develop as a research opportunity for Michiganders by Michiganders.

## Acknowledgements

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## Visual Identity



#### The reason:

- After deciding to change the project name and put a more concerted effort into developing the MI Diaries project as a holistic brand, it became clear that the visual identity should be redesigned to reflect these changes and to be visually representative of the brand's values.
- Fonts and colors were chosen to create a consistent and professional brand image across all the different platforms the MI Diaries project used to engage with participants.

#### The impact:

- The MI Diaries social media pages have consistent branding across multiple platforms with a visual identity that brings feelings of pride and confidence to team members regarding the project's online presentation.
- Having a deliberate visual identity has helped craft a cohesive aesthetic for the MI Diaries website, [www.mi-diaries.org](http://www.mi-diaries.org), which has led to an experience that is more pleasing to website viewers.



- The weekly and monthly emails that are sent to participants now have the look and feel of a professional organization. Participants have provided unprompted positive responses to the new logo in their audio submissions.

#### The process:

- The preplanning of the visual identity consisted of a brand team discussion of the values that were important to the project and should be reflected in the logo, such as "communication", "Michigan focused", and "introspection". Aesthetic guidelines were developed by the brand team to help represent these values in a visual way, such as "clean", "modern", and "trustworthy".
- The initial draft of the visual identity was brought to the entire MI Diaries team, who provided feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the draft, in a collaborative process. Every team member was given an opportunity to voice their opinions and the process of group critique was instrumental in the final components of the visual identity.

The establishment and development of the MI Diaries visual brand has since guided the project's decisions on how to put together engagement elements, such as presentations (like this one!) and recruitment flyers.



## Social Media, Website, & Press

Our branding included updating our **website** and creating **Instagram**, **Facebook**, and **Twitter** accounts. In part because of our visual identity, we were able to build transparency and community-building in our project by regularly sharing:

- Weekly audio diaries from several kid, teen, and adult participants.
- Team member audio diaries which promotes project values **Trustworthiness** and **Authenticity**.
- Promotional announcements (e.g., time-limited recruitment incentives)

Our branding has helped make the project **more visible** to press interest

- Press articles, radio shows, or news features that we have been featured in, to date:



Having a routine of posts for participants or those who visit our social pages frequently allows for impactful familiarization with our brand and a continuous sense of belonging and trust in who we are and the community we've created for Michiganders by Michiganders.

#### Find us here:



## Case Study

### Great Lakes Women's Business Council

The mission, vision, and values created for MI Diaries are useful guiding principles, not only for organizational decisions within the project, but for external decisions as well – especially for building potential community partnerships with external organizations.



#### Before we had a brand strategy:

- The team was looking for ways to increase the public recognition and credibility of MI Diaries.
- One consideration was to put an emphasis on quantity of partnerships, e.g., taking every available opportunity to forge partnerships with businesses and organizations, everywhere from local frozen yogurt shops all the way up to the Linguistic Society of America.

#### After we developed a brand strategy:

- Mission, vision & values statements guide our partnership decisions.
- The Brand Team identified several necessary characteristics an organization must have for the project to partner with them: (1) focused on serving Michigan in some way, (2) have an ethical background and practices, and (3) have goals relating to reflection, authenticity, mentorship, or making connections.
- Organizations that fit these characteristics are **brand-strengthening ties**.
- Based on these criteria, a careful vetting process of the Great Lakes Women's Business Council was done to verify that they aligned with the brand strategy of MI Diaries.

#### In the future:

- This process sets MI Diaries up for future success with building community partnerships.

## References

Photo Credits: Selena Van Klompenberg, 2018  
 Moore, Lindsay. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR7IKwnwiMM&feature=youtu.be>