

## Longitudinal sociolinguistic projects as brands

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Since March 2020, sociolinguists have creatively adopted remote data collection techniques to replace face-to-face methods (e.g. Hall-Lew et al 2021, Leeman et al 2021). Our research group has turned from gathering regional speech recordings via sociolinguistic interviews to collecting self-recorded audio ‘diaries’ via a mobile app. However, the opportunities afforded by this change—such as greater geographical reach—have been counterbalanced by challenges (Sneller 2022). For our longitudinal project, MI Diaries, primary challenges included making potential participants aware of our project, gaining their trust, and encouraging them to remain with the project. Fortunately, these challenges are not unique to sociolinguists. Companies and non-profit organizations must also recruit and retain customers/donors, and they have established many successful strategies in this regard. We therefore took a cross-disciplinary approach and envisioned our project as a *brand*.

MI Diaries needed to build a brand of safety and honesty, so participants would feel comfortable sharing stories from their lives with a non-visible researcher. To address this, we constructed a social media strategy, defined our mission, vision, and values, created a visual identity, managed our press and publicity, and utilized promotional incentive programs. As a result, we are successfully recruiting, retaining and engaging participants. Over the last 18 months, we have received more than 2,000 submissions from over 250 participants, adding up to 375+ hours of audio.

In this presentation, we provide an overview of branding theory (Sammuto-Bonnicci 2015) and its application to public sector brands, including research projects (Boenigk & Becker 2016). We propose that longitudinal sociolinguistic projects can benefit from brand management practices to meet their research goals. Further, as we discuss with reference to our own community outreach activities, a strong brand can support the broader mission of sociolinguistics to educate the public about social and linguistic diversity.

### References

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