

Lecture Notes in Educational Technology

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# Proceedings of TEEM 2024

The Twelfth International Conference  
on Technological Ecosystems  
for Enhancing Multiculturality



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# Lecture Notes in Educational Technology

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# The Influence of Argument Type in Reducing Prejudice Towards Stigmatized Groups in Entertainment-Education Fiction Messages

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**Abstract.** Entertainment-education fiction narratives have proven to be a powerful tool for social change, dialogues and character design could being key elements for the effect of these narratives. Thus, our project will analyse an element related to the configuration of protagonists in EE fiction narratives designed to reduce prejudice: the type of evidence (arguments) used to criticise a rumour against a stigmatised group. For this purpose, three online experiments will be carried out with a 2 (type of evidence or arguments) x 3 (type of rumour) factorial design with independent measures. The main independent variable will be the type of evidence used by the protagonist (a character in transition) to deactivate the rumour. The second independent variable will be the type of rumour (using three different rumours per experiment). Finally, we will use the participant's involvement with the topic as a moderating variable. In doing so, we attempt to contrast and extend the theoretical model proposed by the TRANCHAR project by applying it to three stigmatised groups (immigrants, LGTBIQ + people and people with disabilities). Therefore, our project aims to advance knowledge on the mechanisms that explain the impact of EE productions and the facilitating conditions, in the specific field of prejudice reduction.

**Keywords:** Prejudice reduction · entertainment-education · inspiring media

## 1 Introduction

Despite all the resources and efforts devoted to combating discrimination, lack of opportunities, ostracism and aggressions, these problems remain a daily reality for many groups [1]. It is therefore necessary to find more effective ways to reduce these vulnerabilities. According to the “Informe sobre la evolución de delitos de odio en España” [2] racism/xenophobia and sexual orientation and gender identity were the two main reasons for aggression against a victim, accounting for 68% of cases between these two groups alone. In addition to this, the report itself acknowledges the problem of under-reporting, estimating that only 1 in 10 crimes are reported. This is but one expression of the systematic discrimination suffered by immigrants and LGTBIQ + people. People with disabilities, although they do not suffer aggressions as frequently (according to the

Ministerio de Interior [2], they are victims of 1.28% of hate crimes), also face discrimination on a political and social level, as well as on an economic and interpersonal level [3]. Like the other groups mentioned above, this strong social exclusion has a direct impact on their social participation and health, preventing their full integration into society [4].

Entertainment-education (EE) is a communication strategy based on theory and research on narrative persuasion [5–8]. EE messages are usually fictional narrative pieces that intentionally incorporate educational and social issues, with the purpose of achieving (pro) social change [6, 9, 10]. These types of interventions have been shown to be effective in various systematic reviews of meta-analyses [11, 12], as well as being more effective in reducing prejudice than other persuasive methods or approaches [13, 14]. Dialogues shown in these (fictional) stories have also been shown to be relevant for inducing attitudinal change [15, 16]. In this context, a central element of fictional EE messages is character design [17, 18]. Three types of characters typically appear in EE fiction narratives: negative role model, positive role model, and transitional character. Characters who assume a negative role model are those who represent the attitudes and behaviours that are to be changed (e.g., the character is openly racist). In the same way, characters who represent positive role models consistently display favourable attitudes and behaviours towards the attitudinal object (e.g., the character displays positive attitudes towards immigration or regularly interacts with people with disabilities in their daily life). The character in transition, however, is one whose behaviour or attitudes change throughout the narrative plot in accordance with the underlying message [19]. In the context of EE research, transitional characters are those who evolve with the narrative, initially manifesting problematic behaviours or attitudes, but transforming their behaviour or attitudes according to the persuasive objective of the message [6]. Despite the relevance of transitional characters, there is hardly any research on how the configuration of these characters is linked to the effects that EE fiction narratives provoke in the reception processes and in the attitudes they are intended to change [18].

Hence, our project will analyse one element related to the configuration of protagonists in EE fiction narratives designed to reduce prejudice towards stigmatised groups (the effect of a character in transition's attribute): the type of evidence (arguments) that the protagonist of the narrative uses to criticise a rumour against a stigmatised group (immigrants, LGTBIQ + people and people with disabilities). In one version, the protagonist will use arguments based on statistical evidence (abstract arguments) and, in a second version, they will use arguments based on narrative evidence (telling a personal story in the first person). Then, we will link this approach to research in narrative persuasion [7, 8, 10, 20], with a focus on analyzing the mediating processes or mechanisms that are relevant to explain the effect of our independent variable (the type of evidence the protagonist uses to criticise a rumour against a stigmatised group) on the dependent variables considered (attitudes towards different stigmatised groups and measures of prosocial behavioural intention). Therefore, we will take into account the mechanisms of identification with the protagonist [21, 22], narrative transport [23] and cognitive elaboration [24]. In addition, based on the research on media entertainment [10] and the impact of inspirational messages [25], we will analyse the role of self-transcending emotions, such as meaningful affect and the process of psychological insight [6], which we define as 'a process of inner illumination or sudden understanding of a certain issue'.

Our research will also analyse the role of issue involvement as a moderating variable of the effect of the type of arguments used by the character in transition on the processes of reception (in particular, on identification and narrative transportation).

This work is linked to the TranChar project (Transitional characters in entertainment-education narratives designed to reduce prejudice against immigrants: Attributes, boundary conditions and explanatory mechanisms), which proposed and is now verifying this model.

## 2 Hypothesis and Principal Objectives

The main objective is to contrast and expand the theoretical model proposed by the TranChar project by applying it to three stigmatised groups (immigrants, LGTBIQ + people and people with disabilities). It will connect research traditions that, to date, have not been combined in a single theoretical proposal, in particular: narrative persuasion [26–28], media entertainment [29], inspirational messaging [25] and entertainment-education [5, 8, 13, 16, 19]. Therefore, our project aims to advance knowledge on the mechanisms that explain the impact of EE productions and the facilitating conditions, in the specific field of prejudice reduction.

O1: Analyse the effect of the type of arguments used (based on statistical or abstract evidence vs. or based on narrative evidence) to defuse negative rumours towards a stigmatised collective or group (immigrants, LGTBIQ + people, people with disabilities), as a strategy to reduce prejudice towards these groups from Entertainment-Education narratives.

O2. Analyse the effect of the participants' involvement with the addressed topic as a moderating variable that may condition the effect of the type of arguments used in the Entertainment-Education message on reception processes (such as identification with the protagonist) and the indirect effect on attitudinal measures.

O3. Propose and empirically contrast a theoretical model on the effect of variables related to the type of arguments of the EE fiction message developed to reduce prejudice towards stigmatized groups, which includes, as mediating mechanisms, identification with the protagonist, narrative transport, meaningful emotions (meaningful affect), cognitive elaboration (eudaimonic appreciation) and psychological insight.

In this context, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H1: The EE message whose protagonist uses narrative evidence to criticise a negative rumour towards a stigmatised group will elicit greater identification (H1a) and narrative transportation (H1b) than a message whose protagonist uses statistical or abstract evidence, but these effects will only occur among people with low involvement with the topic of the message (immigrants, Study 1; LGTBIQ + people, Study 2; and people with disabilities, Study 3).

H2: Identification (H2a) and narrative transportation (H2b) will be associated with greater cognitive processing and greater experience of meaningful emotions.

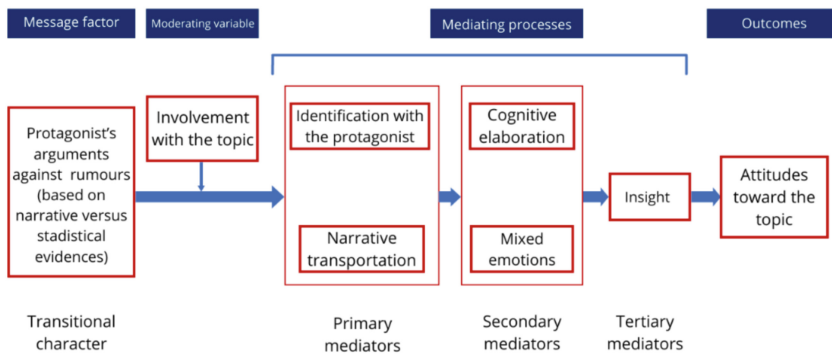
H3: Cognitive elaboration (H3a) and the experience of meaningful emotions (H3b) will be associated with a greater experience of psychological insight.

H4: Exposure to the message whose protagonist uses narrative evidence to criticise negative rumour (or a negative stereotype or attitude) towards a stigmatised group, (compared to exposure to the message whose protagonist uses statistical or abstract evidence),

will lead to an indirect effect on attitudes and prosocial behavioural intention. This will be explained by the activation of a serial mediation process involving as mechanisms: identification and narrative transportation (primary mediators), cognitive processing and meaningful emotions (secondary mediators) and the experience of psychological insight (tertiary mediator), but such an indirect effect will occur only among people with low involvement with the topic.

By achieving these objectives, it will be possible to make significant progress in the creation of fictional EE messages, which have proven to be useful as persuasive tools [11, 12].

The consolidation and expansion of these advances will improve interventions based on fictional EE audiovisual messages to reduce prejudice towards stigmatised groups [11, 12]. In addition, the innovative nature of this research could serve as a basis for future work, whether directed towards other stigmatised groups or other social and health issues (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Hypothesized parallel-serial moderated mediation model

### 3 Methodology

In order to develop this project, 3 online experiments will be carried out with Qualtrics, and all of them will be set up in a similar way. Study 1 of the Doctoral Thesis project will be carried out in the framework of the TranChar project and will explore the influence of the type of argument (statistical or narrative) used to combat a rumour.

For this purpose, an online experiment will be carried out with a 2 (type of evidence or arguments) x 3 (type of anti-immigration rumour) factorial design with independent measures. The main independent variable will be the type of evidence used by the protagonist of the EE story (a character in transition) to deactivate the anti-immigration rumour. The second independent variable will be the type of anti-immigration rumour, since, in order to increase the external validity of the study, we will use three anti-immigration rumours [30, 31]. Finally, we will use as a moderating variable the participant's involvement with the topic of immigration, that is, the level of interest and concern about the topic. In total, 6 stories (in video format) will be created with the typical characteristics

of EE inspirational narratives, so that they have the capacity to stimulate attitude change processes by activating a process of psychological insight. The questionnaire will contain a series of self-report measures to be completed immediately after viewing the EE video. The pre-test measures will contain socio-demographic information (gender, age, place of birth, parents' place of birth and political self-positioning) and a scale to assess involvement with the immigration issue. The post-test measures will include scales to assess identification with the protagonist [22], narrative transportation [32], significant emotions [33], cognitive elaboration (eudaimonic appreciation or thought-provoking experiences) [16, 34], a measure of the psychological insight process [6] and different measures to assess attitudes towards immigration and prosocial behavioural intention. In addition, we will include measures to contrast the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation and to control the quality of the fieldwork.

Studio 2 will have a similar design as the previous one but will focus on the LGTBIQ + community. Therefore, the narratives (in written format) will be modified to contain anti-LGTBIQ + rumours such as: 'LGTBIQ + people are sick', 'LGTBIQ + people are paedophiles' or "there is a LGTBIQ + dictatorship that tries to indoctrinate society" [35]. The level of involvement with the LGTBIQ + community will be taken as a moderating variable, measured with the scale of concern proposed by Freestone and Peter [36]. Finally, the measures of attitudes towards immigration will be replaced by measures of attitudes towards the LGTBIQ + group [e.g. 37].

Finally, Study 3 will focus on people with disabilities. The narratives (in written format) will be modified again to represent enabling rumours such as: 'people with disabilities exaggerate their problems/needs', 'people with disabilities are immature/cannot make decisions' or 'people with disabilities cannot have sex' [38, 39]. As in the previous studies, the degree of involvement will be used as a moderating variable, measured with Freestone and Peter's scale [36]. Attitudes towards people with disabilities will be assessed using scales measuring ableism [e.g. 40, 41].

## 4 Foreseeable Results

In the results of this work, we hope to find important innovations in the creation of narratives that contribute to the reduction of prejudice towards discriminated groups. By connecting research traditions that, to this date, have not been combined in an articulated theoretical proposal (narrative persuasion, media entertainment and EE), we will lead to an improvement of the interventions based on EE fictional messages.

We expect to find that, among people with low involvement in the subject matter, arguments based on narrative evidence will lead to a higher degree of narrative identification and transportation (as primary mediators), which will be related to greater cognitive processing and the experience of meaningful emotions (secondary mediators), thus contributing to greater psychological insight (as a tertiary mediator). Not only that, but we expect this process to be consistent regardless of the subject matter (in this case, racism, lgbtphobia or ableism). By achieving this, we will open the door to both the in-depth development of EE narratives focused on these topics, as well as the study on other stigmatised groups.

Finally, we trust, and will try to ensure, that the results of this work will result in the development of interventions to reduce prejudice. We believe that it is relatively easy

to include critical incidents with significant dialogues between the main character and a screen character (the one who confronts the protagonist's point of view) to address issues related to stigmatised groups. This could lead to substantial changes on the attitudes toward vulnerable groups or to treat other social problems (such as gender violence or health issues, for instance).

## 5 Conclusions

In summary, we aim to study how (by which mechanisms) the impact of EE productions happens. In particular, we are going to study the effect of the type of argument used to defuse a hate rumour, while taking into account, as a moderating variable, the effect of the participant's involvement with the topic and, as mediating mechanisms, the effect of identification with the protagonist, narrative transportation, meaningful affect, cognitive elaboration (eudaimonic appreciation) and psychological insight. By applying this model, proposed by the TranChar project, to multiple demographics (immigration, LGTBIQ + and people with disabilities), we intend to contrast and expand it, achieving a better understanding of how it works and, therefore, of its possible applications as prejudice reduction method.

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