Current perspectives on narrative persuasion using TV fiction

Juan-José Igartua
University of Salamanca
jigartua@usal.es
Narrative impact

• **Narrative:**
  • “A representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, is bounded in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed” (Kreuter et al., 2007, p. 221).

• **Meta-analysis:**
  • Narratives have significant effects on attitudes, beliefs, behavioral intention and behavior (Braddock & Dillard, 2016).

TV series may provide more than entertainment. Audiovisual narratives are powerful tools for changing people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Audiences learn from TV fiction

- **Cultivation theory** (Appel, 2008; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Shrum et al., 2011).

- **Narrative persuasion** and TV series (e.g., Müller, 2009; Hust et al., 2015; Slater et al., 2006).

“According to one survey, **26%** of the public cited entertainment television as being one of their top sources of health information, and over half (52%) said they consider the health information contained in these programs to be accurate” (Murphy et al., 2011, p. 407)

“Entertainment-education (E-E) is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior” (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 5).

Entertainment-education and audiovisual communication

- Soap opera “Hum Log” (We People), in India, to promote the social status of women.
- Radio soap opera in Tanzania “Twende na Wakati” (Let’s go with the Times), to prevent AIDS.
- In the US, telenovelas (Ladrón de Corazones) or TV series (ER, CSI, Dr. House, The OC, Desperate Housewives, Sex and the City, and Grey’s Anatomy) to prevent cancer, to prevent teen pregnancy or to promote organ donation.
- Soul City TV series (http://www.soulcity.org.za) in South Africa.

More than 125 entertainment-education productions worldwide designed to improve public health.
Example of entertainment-education

Prevention of cervical cancer in the United States

Empirical evidence shows that (audiovisual) narrative formats are more effective than non-narratives (like traditional didactic approaches featuring doctors and health experts and showing evidence provided through charts and figures) to deliver information and change attitudes in health issues (e.g., Murphy, Frank, Chatterjee & Baezconde-Garbanati, 2013).

“The Tamale Lesson”

Narrative Persuasion vs. Rhetorical Persuasion

- Narratives (such as television series or movies) are processed differently than traditional rhetorical persuasive messages (such as commercial advertising).
- Different mental process may be involved when a person encounters a narrative versus an argument.

**Narrative persuasion** investigates how exposure to the information located within narratives produces story-consistent change in beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviors (Green, Strange & Brock, 2002).

Traditional persuasive messages versus narratives

**Persuasive messages**

- Contain list of **arguments** (reasoning, claims, evidence) in an explicit way.
- Show a clear educational or attitudinal goal.
- **Processing goal**: to develop a correct attitude.

**Narratives**

- Illustrate through the presentation of **events**. Action is focused on the main **characters**.
- Designed for **enjoyment**.
- **Processing goal**: to become involved in the story and with the characters.
Theoretical models in narrative persuasion

• Transportation-Imagery Model (TIM, Green & Brock, 2000).

• Extended-Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

• Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model (EORM, Moyer-Gusé, 2008).
Explanatory processes (mediating mechanisms) of narrative persuasion

Narrative involvement: absorption, transportation, engagement, immersion.

Involvement with characters: Identification with characters, wishful identification, perceived similarity (homophily), liking e parasocial interaction (Cohen, 2001; Igartua, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

(Narrative) Transportation

**Attentional focus** ("I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it")

**Visual imagery** ("While reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the protagonist")

**Emotional-affective process** ("The narrative affected me emotionally")

## Transportation Scale Items (Green & Brock, 2000)

Circle the number under each question that best represents your opinion about the narrative you just read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. After the narrative ended, I found it easy to put it out of my mind.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I wanted to learn how the narrative ended.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The narrative affected me emotionally.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I found my mind wandering while reading the narrative.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I had a vivid mental image of [character name].</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Video Transportation Scale (Williams et al., 2011)

Circle the number under each question that best represents your opinion about the narrative you just watch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Attentional focus</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. While I was watching the story, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was mentally involved in the story while watching it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The story affected me emotionally.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I found my mind wandering while watching the story.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The events in the story are relevant to my everyday life.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Items 1, and 4 are reverse-scored]

Identification with the characters

**Emotional empathy** or sharing the feelings of the character (“I felt emotionally involved with X’s feelings”)

**Cognitive empathy** or sharing the perspective of the character (“I tried to see things from X’s point of view”)

**Merging** or the experience of becoming the character (“I felt as if I were X”)

Identifying with characters is an **imaginative process** that involves the temporal replacement of own identity with that of a character from an affective and cognitive point of view (Cohen, 2001).

Identification with the character scale (Igartua & Barrios, 2012)

In the movie [TV series, narrative] you have just seen [read] different characters are involved. On this occasion we would like you to answer the following questions in relation to the main character, X [replaced by the character name], indicating to what extent have you experienced the following. Answer by circling the number that best reflects your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I felt emotionally involved with X’s feelings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I felt “as if I were X”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I imagined how I would act if I were X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was concerned for what was happening to X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understood how X acts, thinks and feels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I myself experienced X’s emotional reactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I tried to imagine X’s feelings, thoughts and reactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I had the impression of living X’s story myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I understood X’s feelings or emotions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I tried to see things from X’s point of view</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I identified with X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identification, narrative transportation and cognitive processes (predictions)

Two possible relationships between identification and transportation with cognitive processes: **cognitive elaboration** (*reflection on the contents of a persuasive message*) and **counterarguing** (*the generation of thoughts that explicitly refute a message’s intended persuasive theme*).

① Identification (**empathy dimension**) and transportation (**emotional-affective dimension**) can **stimulate the cognitive elaboration** of messages which, in turn, increase their potential persuasive effects.

② Identification (which also involves a temporary loss of self-awareness, **merging dimension**) and transportation (**attentional focus dimension**) most likely would lead to a **less critical reading** of the message which, in turn, increase their potential persuasive effects.
BUT, empirical research into this topic is in its early stages (e.g., Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).
A case study

https://www.youtube.com/user/REVELADOSDTP
“Revelados, desde todas las posiciones”

• RDTP is a **television series** addressed to young people between the ages of 12 and 19, produced by the **Fundación Imaginario** in Colombia.

• The making of this fictional melodramatic series was based on research into entertainment-education carried out by Soul City (South Africa).

• **Educational contents:** sexual relations, gender violence and sexual diversity.

• First season: **20 episodes** lasting about **15 minutes** each and presents a story with continuity from one episode to another.

The **main characters:** Camila, Juan Carlos, Vanessa and Sebastián.
RDTP: Episodes and topics

Episode 8: Adolescent sexuality: this episode attempts to reinforce positive beliefs about sexual decision-making. **Camila** is the main character of the episode transmitting the educational message.

Episode 10: Gender violence: to reinforce negative attitudes towards gender violence. **Vanessa** is the main character of the episode transmitting the educational message.

Episode 17:Expressing homosexual feelings: to reinforce a positive attitude toward gay men who decide to openly express their sexual orientation. **Juan Carlos** is the main character of the episode transmitting the educational message.
Even though narrative formats (e.g., TV series) do not explicitly present arguments from an external source, these can appear in dialogues taking place among characters during certain moments of the story (Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014; Igartua & Vega, 2016; Igartua, Cheng & Lopes, 2003).

Fictional narrative formats (entertainment-education productions) designed to bring about positive social change show a clear educational component.
Method

• N = 208 participants (age 14-20, mean = 15.85; 51.9% women).
• Quantitative reception study (in Colombia, 2013).
• TV series “Revelados, desde todas las posiciones” (RDTP):
  • Participants were randomly divided in three groups (each group a different RDTP episode).
  • The impact of viewing the episodes was assessed though a questionnaire containing scales to measure reception processes and attitudinal impact.
Instruments and variables (examples of items)

- **Identification with characters:**
  - “I myself experienced the emotional reactions of Camila”.

- **Narrative transportation:**
  - “I felt very involved with the narration while watching the series”.

- **Cognitive elaboration:**
  - “I have thought about the situation and the motivations of the characters”.

- **Counterarguing:**
  - “I found myself looking for flaws in the way information was presented in the program”.

- **Attitudinal measures:**
  - “Teenagers have the right to decide when they want to have sex”.
  - “A man must not tell his partner what to do”.
  - “Gay men who have ‘come out of the closet’ should be admired for their courage”.

Data analysis strategy

• The focus is on the mechanisms by which narrative messages exert persuasive effects.

• Macro PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2013).

• A mediation model with two mediating variables (model 4).

• The indirect effect was calculated using 10,000 bootstrap samples for bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals.

• An indirect effect is considered statistically significant if the confidence interval established (CI at 95%) does not include the value 0.
Mediation models: Episode on adolescent sexuality

**Indirect effects**
Identification -> Cognitive elaboration -> Attitudes
\[ B = .28, SE = .16, 95\% CI [0.08, 0.64] \]
Identification -> Counterarguing-> Attitudes
\[ B = -.04, SE = .05, 95\% CI [-.19, .03] \]

**Indirect effects**
Transportation -> Cognitive elaboration -> Attitudes
\[ B = .25, SE = .13, 95\% CI [0.03, 0.55] \]
Transportation -> Counterarguing-> Attitudes
\[ B = -.02, SE = .03, 95\% CI [-.15, .01] \]

+ p < .10, * p < .05, *** p < .001
Mediation models: **Episode on gender violence**

**Indirect effects**

**Identification** → **Cognitive elaboration** → **Attitudes**

\[ B = .33, SE = .13, 95\% CI [.10, .66]\]

**Identification** → **Counterarguing** → **Attitudes**

\[ B = -.08, SE = .11, 95\% CI [-.37, .09]\]

**Indirect effects**

**Transportation** → **Cognitive elaboration** → **Attitudes**

\[ B = .37, SE = .12, 95\% CI [.14, .64]\]

**Transportation** → **Counterarguing** → **Attitudes**

\[ B = -.05, SE = .08, 95\% CI [-.24, .09]\]

*** \( p < .001 \)
Mediation models: Episode on sexual diversity

**Indirect effects**
- **Identification -> Cognitive elaboration -> Attitudes**
  $B = .18$, $SE = .12$, 95% CI [0.02, .52]
- **Identification -> Counterarguing -> Attitudes**
  $B = .05$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI [-.05, .40]

**Indirect effects**
- **Transportation -> Cognitive elaboration -> Attitudes**
  $B = .16$, $SE = .09$, 95% CI [0.01, .39]
- **Transportation -> Counterarguing -> Attitudes**
  $B = .07$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI [-.02, .31]

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$
Conclusions

• This study confirm the important role of **identification with characters** and **narrative transportation** as mechanisms of narrative persuasion.

• **Counterarguing** did **not** play a significant **mediating role**.

• Identification with the main character and transportation were associated with a greater **cognitive elaboration** which, in turn, lead to prosocial attitudes.

Entertainment-Education TV fictions: **characters make explicit the arguments** supporting the prosocial or preventive message through their **dialogues**.
• We need to analyse the **media exposure conditions** (e.g., motivation to media consumption, beyond *hedonism*) and the **characteristics of the E-E narratives** (e.g., perspective, narrative voice) and **characters** (e.g., similarity between characters and message recipients) that **increase** identification and transportation (Tukachinsky, 2014).

• We need a **psychophysiological approach** to study identification and transportation as processes that change **during** watching TV series (Sukalla, Bilandzic, Bolls & Busselle, 2016; van Krieken, Hoeken & Sanders, 2017).
Thank you for your attention!

Juan-José Igartua (*)
University of Salamanca

(*) Contact: jigartua@usal.es