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Special Session:
Narrative Consumption in a Digital World

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Jennifer Edson Escalas, Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University

Navigating Narratives and Altering Time: Consumption Practices in the Digital Age

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Dina Rasolofoarison, University of Southampton
Cristel Russell, Kogod School of Business, American University
Hope Schau, Eller College of Management, University of Arizona

Reviewing the Review:
A Text Analysis of Why Online Experience Reviews Receive Positive Feedback

Tom van Laer, Cass Business School, City University London *
Jennifer Edson Escalas, Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University
Stephan Ludwig, University of Westminster
Ellis A. van den Hende, Delft University of Technology

Brand Story-making and Digital Conversations

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Tom van Laer, Cass Business School, City University London

Transformative Digital Storytelling:
A Framework for Crafting Stories for Social Change Organizations

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SESSION OVERVIEW

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a time in history not permeated by stories (Van Laer et al. 2014a). As we move into the digital era, stories are more prevalent than ever. Narratives are traditionally defined as an account of an event or a sequence of events leading to a transition from an initial state to a later or end state, which a storyteller conveys to a story-receiver (Bennett and Royle 2004). Social media presents challenges this definition, as the demand for content rises and the modality of consumption changes. All four of the papers in this session explore the interaction of narrative communication in the digital era. In the first paper, the authors explore how the use of digital devices fundamentally affects how consumers navigate TV narratives. Two key dimensions emerge in how consumers navigate serial narratives: time and depth, both of which enable consumers to engage in either condensation or augmentation practices. The second paper looks at online consumer reviews: the narrative structure of experience reviews enhances positive feedback from consumers reading them, which is supported through the refinement of text analysis techniques and an automated text analysis of over 190,000 reviews on TripAdvisor.

Additionally, consumer research in this arena has focused primarily on two stages of: (1) 'storytelling' (i.e., the communicational provision of a story from the storyteller to the story-receiver, Escalas 1998) and (2) 'story-receiving' (i.e., the interpretation of a story by its audience and the transformative effects exerted on that audience, Green and Brock 2000). Thus, consumer research misses the 'story-making' stage, that is, the design of a story preceding storytelling and story-receiving. The two remaining papers in this session help to further fill this gap. In the third paper, the authors use a structural approach to narratology to develop a better understanding of story-making, putting forward a set of comprehensive guidelines to help consumer researchers understand how stories work and how they are conceived. Finally, the fourth paper provides an integrative framework to guide story construction for Social Impact Organizations (SIOs), focused around an SIO's metanarrative, an overarching mission-focused story about the SIO and why it exists.

Two questions that each paper in the session answers are:

- **RQ1:** How is the consumption or creation of stories affected by changes due to digital devices and social media?
- **RQ2:** How is digital storytelling conducted by those cast in the role of story-maker, that is, the stage prior to storytelling and story-receiving?

750-1,000 word EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

Navigating Narratives and Altering Time: Consumption Practices in the Digital Age

The digital era is fundamentally affecting how consumers watch TV. While for decades families would gather to watch TV in the living room, the TV set is now irrelevant in the eyes of many. Changing viewing habits mean that at least 63% of US consumers use digital devices more than once a week to stream videos or watch on-demand features (Crosett 2013). Consumers have always been able to control narrative pace when reading, a self-paced medium. Consumer control is now spreading to a wider range of media, including TV programming, movies, but also radio podcasts that, traditionally, were externally paced. Today's digital environment affords consumers navigational tools that open narrative possibilities for the receiver at all levels (Drucker 2008). A topical question is: How does greater ability to navigate narratives affect the temporal unfolding of the story receiver's experience?

Navigational devices affect the temporal unfolding of the narrative and thus alter how consumers experience it. From Genette's (1980) foundational work to Barthes' (1975) structural analysis of narratives, narratologists concur that basic structural elements of narratives affect how they are read or viewed. Genette's notion of narrative duration is particularly useful to understand the interplay between time and narrative consumption: Genette (1980) defines narrative speed as the "relationship between the duration of the story and its length" within a narrative and distinguishes between *narrative* time, i.e. the amount of time devoted to the representation of a scene and *narrated* time, i.e. the amount of time that passes within the diegetic scene. From the reader/viewer perspective, perceptions of time vary according to the narrative's inherent structure or speed: when a story unfolds slowly, narrative time expands in relation to narrated time and this extending of time due to "empty spaces" may create boredom (Tucker 2007). In contrast, when an interesting event happens, narrative time contracts (Tucker 2007).

Prior work has identified that storytellers and readers can control narrative pace at three levels: story, discourse, and narration (Baetens and Hume 2006). When consumers have control over the calibration, as is the case with digital devices to view TV narratives, they can alter the temporality between the real world and the narrated world. In this research, we explore how navigational practices affect narrative and narrated time and how the pace of delivery alters the narrative experience, taking note of the inherent characteristics of narratives as containing 1) the temporal unfolding of events, 2) the structural and material fact of texts, images, etc. and 3) the narrativizing, the action taken by the story receiver (Drucker 2008). Prior work in the cyber-literature borrowed the term noema developed by Husserl (1962) to distinguish between noematic and extranoematic efforts (Aarseth 1997). While noematic efforts allow the reader to participate in the unfolding of the story but not modify how it develops, extranoematic efforts reflect when the viewer is able to alter the narrative rather than simply being guided by it.

Method

In line with recommendations about using contexts to extend theory (Arnould, Price, and Moisio 2006), we use TV series viewing as an empirical context. We conducted 36 interviews with TV series watchers using a mix of grand tour questions and floating prompts (McCracken 1988) to yield first-person accounts of participants' viewing practices and experiences of serial narratives. An initial identification of themes was developed, and theoretical categories were elaborated on during open and axial coding procedures. We then

began a process of dialectical tacking, moving back and forth between our findings and the literature to deepen our understanding of the practices associated with TV series consumption.

Results

We find that consumers navigate the temporal unfolding of the narrative by engaging either in noematic practices, i.e. actively choosing not to transform the narrative, or extranoematic practices i.e. altering the narrative. We categorise extranoematic practices into two categories: 1) condensation and 2) augmentation practices. For instance, one informant reports using extranoematic augmentation practices by piling up episodes of his favorite series to watch several episodes in a row, in order to create a more immersive viewing experience, which would be hindered by having to wait one week in between episodes. Contrarily, other extranoematic practices condense time. For example, an informant reports saving time by reading online summaries of the second season of Homeland before watching selected scenes only, as well as skipping all scenes featuring a specific character from the series 24, because it is perceived as unrelated to the main storyline. Interestingly, these two strategies lead to opposite outcomes: While the first strategy triggers a reduced pleasure from viewing the series and an inability to evaluate its quality, the second strategy is a gratifying experience, as skipping the side story of a character he reports hating enables the informant to devote himself to the main storyline. Therefore, while Genette (1980)'s semiotic work studies narratives as linguistic objects, detached from production and reception, we intend to examine how consumers navigate and transform the narrative, and to disentangle the outcomes derived from such actions. After delineating the narrative navigational practices viewers engage in when watching TV series, we identify the impact on emotional outcomes, along with boundary conditions including the social viewing context.

Implications

We also discuss the implications of our work for our understanding of narrative consumption in the digital age, and develop recommendations for the construction and release of serial narratives. In particular, our analysis suggests that TV writers targeting digital natives should be wary of using a slow narrative pace, as young viewers are likely to fast forward through slow scenes which may lower their enjoyment. Moreover, we find that releasing a full season on-demand enables viewers to monitor their viewing pace. If the channel broadcasts the episodes weekly, many viewers wait until several episodes are available to watch them in a row to avoid the frustration of having to wait one week in between each episode. Broadcasters could avoid this by releasing all episodes in one go.

Reviewing the Review:
A Text Analysis of Why Experience Reviews Receive Positive Feedback

Seventy percent of consumers indicate that they base purchase decisions on consumer online reviews, thus marking these reviews as the highly influential form of word of mouth (WOM) (Nielsen 2013). Most hosting sites offer consumers the option to submit a second-order review, which evaluates the focal review. This positive feedback raises a review's ranking and visibility on the site, thus increasing its influence on consumers' purchase decisions (Moore 2015). In this article, we propose and find support for an overlooked feature of reviews that helps generate positive feedback from consumers.

Prior research provides a valid description of positive feedback on reviews of (hedonic and utilitarian) material purchases. "Material purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good" (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). In contrast, "experiential purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience" (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003).

In contrast with reviews of material purchases, we define positive feedback on reviews of experiential purchases as a vote for reviews that are narratively structured, which describes the experience consumed and recounted by the reviewer. Not all reviewers are equally capable of narratively structuring their reviews, and this inequality is likely to contribute to additional variance in positive feedback. Organizing an experience review around a narrative structure is likely to increase positive feedback. By investigating the content of experience reviews, this research aims to contribute to the narratology and WOM language literature streams by fulfilling three objectives: (1) organizing the relationships among words in experience reviews, which are manifold and indeterminate, in a narrative structure; (2) empirically demonstrating novel links between narrative structure elements and positive feedback; and (3) providing an instrument for determining the development of emotions over sentences and examining whether there are intertextual differences in this shape.

Method

We highlight seven narrative structure elements: (1) landscape of affective consciousness, (2) landscape of cognitive consciousness, and (3) canonicity, (4) temporal embedding, (5) spatial embedding, and (6) drama, and (7) genre. In social psychology, Gergen and Gergen (1988) develop a genre taxonomy that allows for the elaboration of a specific, testable hypothesis on story genre. Their genre taxonomy's five basic types are progressive, regressive, stable, comedy, and tragedy.

The corpus stemmed from TripAdvisor. Our procedure mined 190,461 reviews of 989 experiences consumed in Las Vegas. The reviews averaged 89 words (SD = 89.74; ranging from 3 to 2,335 words), seven sentences (SD = 4.56; ranging from 1 to 148 sentences), and .77 positive feedback (SD = 2.01; ranging from 0 to 103 votes).

In support of our automated text analysis, we relied on the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software program. LIWC measures the intensities with which word categories, classified in dictionary entries, are used in a given text. We used validated LIWC dictionary entries as a starting point from which to operationalize our narrative structure elements, except for drama for which we developed a dictionary from scratch.

Results

To account for the excess number of zero positive feedback (Vuong's $Z = 41.45$, $p < .001$), we conducted zero-inflated Poisson regression analysis. The first model consists of control variables, which explain 14.20% of the variance in positive feedback (Wald's $\chi^2_{(24)} = 20694.75$, $p < .001$). In the second, third, and fourth model, we entered the landscapes and canonicity (Model 2: Wald's $\chi^2_{\text{Change (2)}} = 3137.17$, $p < .001$), temporal and spatial embedding, and drama (Model 3: Wald's $\chi^2_{\text{Change (2)}} = 2595.16$, $p < .001$), and genre (Model 4: Wald's $\chi^2_{\text{Change (2)}} = 93.94$, $p < .001$). These explain additional significant proportions of variance in positive feedback (14.82%, 15.32%, and 15.37%, respectively).

For the narrative structure elements, we find that landscape of affective consciousness ($\beta = .15$, SE = .02, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.17), landscape of cognitive consciousness ($\beta = .11$, SE = .02, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.12), canonicity ($\beta = .09$, SE = .01, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.10), temporal embedding ($\beta = .31$, SE = .01, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.36), and spatial embedding ($\beta = .04$, SE = .01, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.04) have significant, positive effects on positive feedback. Furthermore, reviews coded as comedies ($\beta = .07$, SE = .02, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.07) or tragedies ($\beta = .09$, SE = .03, $p < .01$, IRR = 1.10) receive more positive feedback than reviews with a progressive ($\beta = .01$, SE = .06, $p = .950$), regressive ($\beta = –.06$, SE = .03, $p = .068$), or stable shape; thus, we find support for hypothesis 3. However, a significant, negative effect emerges for drama ($\beta = –.02$, SE = .01, $p < .05$, IRR = .98).

Implications

Our newly developed instrument helps extend current knowledge of how to analyze corpora of big data. When the World Wide Web was made available to the general public, it

was heralded as “the Great Equalizer” (Dugan 1996) because it democratized communication: Everyone could share information and tell stories. Today, making sense of the millions of words posted in review form 24/7 (http://www.internetlivestats.com/) is critical to understanding the effect of narratives on consumers. For any (collection of) digital text(s), our tool can construct between-sentence emotional change to determine the development of emotions over sentences and examine whether there are intertextual differences in this shape.

Brand Story-making and Digital Conversations

Recently, Intel and Toshiba (2012) developed “The Beauty Inside”, a film about a man who wakes up every day with a new body and a new face. Its distribution on social media gave audience members the opportunity to film themselves and play the main character throughout the narrative, which resulted in many storytellers producing the narrative. Google is another company that has overcome the idea of simply being an information provider to claim its ability to deliver stories in a digital world. While remaining true to their business, many more brands have turned their communication from analytical (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) to narrative persuasive messages (Van Laer et al. 2014a).

Built on extensive literature review and the authors’ former research, this conceptual paper aims at fostering scant academic works providing guidance about does, don’ts, and risks of brand story-making in digital conversations. Since the definition of narrative transportation (Gerrig 1993), rich academic works, mostly grounded in cognitive psychology, have investigated the profound mechanisms of story reception. Such works help understand the need behind story consumption (Van Laer, Visconti, and Feiereisen 2014b), how an audience receives a story (Escalas 2004), what variables are likely to transport it (Van Laer et al. 2014a), and the engrossing effects of transportation (Green and Brock 2000; Phillips and McQuarrie 2010). Yet, these contributions are often too theoretical to be directly applicable to digital brand conversations, which remain mostly grounded on a ‘trial and error’ approach. As an illustration, though consumers check their smartphones dozens of times per day, a lot of brand content online remains unobserved due to a lack of storytelling (Vigneaux 2015).

Conceptual Development

To date, academic works have been mostly focused on two stages of brand digital conversations: (1) ‘storytelling’ (i.e. the communicational provision of a story from the storyteller to the story receiver, Escalas 1998) and (2) ‘story-receiving’ (i.e. the interpretation of a story by its audience and the transformative effects exerted on that audience, Gerrig 1993; Levy 2006). However, research on the ‘story-making’ stage—the design of a story preceding storytelling and story-receiving—is scant. Through story-making, story providers decide strategically and practically on issues as varied as: which audience is likely to be persuaded through a story; what are the key structural components of a story to design; how should these components be designed to prove effective; and what principles can guide these decisions? This paper aims to advance current understanding of the story-making stage and provide comprehensive answers to similar questions. These answers will contribute to our understanding of the function of digital marketing more broadly.

Implications

Four questions lead to corresponding contributions. First, in line with Barthes’ (1975) structural approach to stories, we question the structural components for successful digital brand stories and discover four: (1) identifiable characters (i.e. characters whose thoughts, feelings, and behavioral motivations are clearly understandable, Van Laer et al. 2014a); (2) imaginable plot (i.e. a spatially embedded sequence of events thematically and symbolically interconnected, Thompson 1997); (3) climax (i.e. an emotional and narrative construction

leading to a key turning point, which may result from rhetorical deployment of different story genres, Stern 1995); and, (4) outcome (i.e. a clear learning favoring appraisal of a brand's contract and memorization, Stein and Albro 2010). Second, we question the guiding principles for strategic story-making in a digital world and discuss four of them: (1) historical fit with ongoing acute social contradictions (Holt 2004); (2) connectivity between the online story text and offline texts (intertextuality, Kristeva 1986); (3) gestaltic storytelling (Diamond et al. 2009) derived from a concerted use of multiple storytellers through social media; and (4) usefulness versus entertainment as the two main content types that online consumers are likely to consider (Vigneaux 2015). Third, by observing how brands successfully engage online customers, we unveil the different inspirational sources brands exploit for their story-making: (1) brand heritage; (2) brand's charismatic leader; (3) existing myths and famous stories; (4) consumers' narratives; (5) brand characters; and (6) distinctive product ingredients. Fourth, we inspect limits and risks of adopting brand stories in the digital world. In particular, we identify three pitfalls of brand stories online: (1) content strategies; (2) temporary campaigns by the latest hotshot; and (3) influencer marketing programs. We comment on possible drifts that stories are susceptible to take online whenever brand managers lose control of story-making and/or contradict an established brand contract. Finally, we identify ethical risks related to story-making and -telling.

Acknowledged as art within the precincts of literature and philosophy, story-making is not requested to stand as art within the precincts of the digital world. Yet, it demands way more than current 'bricolage'. This paper is meant to improve theoretical understanding of how stories work and how they should be conceived, particularly for an online audience.

Transformative Digital Storytelling: A Framework for Crafting Stories for Social Impact Organizations

Building from the rich interdisciplinary literature on narrative processing, we provide a framework to guide authentic communication for Social Impact Organizations (SIOs) including non-profit organizations, public policy entities, and enterprises engaged in solving important social problems such as poverty, hunger, homelessness, sustainability, and racism. For SIOs to alleviate these complex and multi-layered social problems, it is crucial for them to engage their many audiences including clients, donors, volunteers, and the community. Storytelling is a powerful and creative tool SIOs can use in their efforts to address pressing social problems. Additionally, recent advances in social media offer a growing opportunity for SIOs to tell and share stories, creating pressure to ensure the stories they propagate are engaging, memorable, and strategically consistent with their mission and objectives.

Conceptual Development

A story must contain three essential elements: Characters, Chronology, and Causality (Bruner 1990; Stern 1995). Stories contain characters that interact with each other and serve as agents of cause and effect (Zwaan, Langston, and Graesser 1995). Chronology or time is configured in stories as episodes, each with a beginning, middle, and end, providing a temporal sequence for events (Schank 1995). Finally, causality refers to the relationships among story elements that allow for inference making; i.e., the characters' goals lead to actions that result in outcomes (Pennington and Hastie 1986). Given the important, often emotional, issues faced by SIOs, their stories may be powerful and emotionally charged. But, for a SIO's stories to be compelling and effective, they must also communicate strategic content about the SIO and its mission.

We propose that SIOs can best leverage the power of individual stories when these stories are linked to a broader, overarching mission-focused story about the SIO and why it

exists. We term this overarching story the organization's *metanarrative*. Stephens and McCallum (1998) define a metanarrative to be a story about a story, encompassing, explaining, and uniting other "little stories" into an integrated whole. An SIO's metanarrative serves as a guide for the construction of each story the organization uses in its outward facing communications program, which are intentionally crafted with a specific audience in mind and designed to yield a specific behavioral outcome, for example, an increase in program attendance.

A mission-focused metanarrative is itself a story and thus must possess character, chronology, and causality. The main character, the protagonist, of the metanarrative is the organization itself. In a metanarrative, the organization is treated as a protagonist that has a history, undertakes actions, and hopes to achieve future goals. A metanarrative also has chronology, conveying the organization's past, present, and future. The organization's past may encompass its history, founder's story, or the societal issues that the organization addresses. The organization's present consists of the SIO's mission, values, programs, and strategic objectives: what the organization does and why. Finally, the metanarrative includes the organization's long-term vision for the future, the road map of how the SIO hopes to achieve its organizational objectives and goals. The third component of a compelling metanarrative is causality, or plot. A metanarrative should present characters with goals who follow a course of action to achieve those goals, resulting in a final outcome. The mission-focused metanarrative should highlight the most important challenges facing the organization, including a few critically important past failures and successes.

We recommend that SIOs develop a rich metanarrative in order to anchor and guide the stories they construct to reach the multiple audiences they serve and hope to rally into action. Our conceptual framework also provides detailed advice for crafting these stories, because stories vary in the extent to which they are engaging, compelling, and memorable. Certain features of stories contribute to capturing the audience's attention, engaging them in the story, and calling an audience to action (Green and Brock 2000; Van Laer et al. 2014a). Specifically, we explore several important story features: a hook, character development, a climactic plot, a mission motivated message, and crafting the story.

Implications

Our framework offers a strategic structure for the practice of SIO storytelling, beginning with the crafting of a mission-focused metanarrative. The metanarrative becomes the point of connection for each individual story crafted by the SIO, which must also be cognizant of the key features of a good story including a hook, character development, and a climactic plot.

One challenge SIOs may face in implementing this storytelling framework is deciding which stories to tell. While it may seem wise to craft stories that illustrate an SIO's success, stories that lead directly from a problem to a solution may not paint an authentic portrayal of many SIOs' history and experiences. Further, if only success stories are told, it may undermine the SIO's ability to portray challenges in a way that is relatable to others who struggle or demonstrate an ongoing need for support.

A second practical consideration in crafting a story for SIOs is selecting the appropriate length. Due to consuming information on digital technologies, consumers' attention span for longer stories appears to be waning. Thus, many stories crafted by an SIO will need to be relatively short. However, consumers have shown a renewed interest in longer form drama, but on their own terms, such as binge watching streaming content. Thus, storytellers need to assess the audience's attention span as well as the best media for communicating an engaging story.

In sum, our transformative story framework is a tool that bridges academic research on narrative construction to enrich SIO practice. Although not the focus of this research, other

entities, such as government agencies, that might also benefit from our framework, which promotes authentic communication of pressing social problems and seeks to move people to action— such as volunteering and engaging in desired behavioral outcomes. We will end our presentation with directions for collaborative research by consumer researchers and SIOs to refine storytelling best practices, so that we may develop a broader set of tools to guide SIOs as they unlock the transformative power of storytelling.

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