

How to make a story work: introducing the concept of narrativity into narrative persuasion

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*How to Make a Story Work:
Introducing the Concept of Narrativity into Narrative Persuasion¹*

Abstract

There is a substantial body of empirical evidence that narrative messages are influential in changing attitudes and beliefs of the audience. Narratives allow for a specific reading or viewing experience: They transport their recipients into the narrative world, involving them cognitively and emotionally. The role of the text, however, generally remains unclear: What attributes make a story interesting, immersive and persuasive? What are the specifics of processing stories? The goal of this paper is to theoretically develop a model of narrative persuasion, the Transportation Imagery Model by Green and Brock (2002) and extend it by integrating the concept of narrativity (Coste, 1989; Prince, 1982; Ryan, 1992). The extended model benefits from the respective strengths of the different disciplines that are merged into one model – the nature of the reader’s experiences from the psychological Transportation Imagery Model, and textual narrativity that roots in literature and narratology. This interdisciplinary perspective is useful to deepen the theoretical understanding of many fields in traditional communication research, e.g. news research, cultivation, and entertainment education.

Media are full of stories. Entertainment fare in television, for instance, mostly consists of narrative formats like feature films and series. Information programs like news or documentaries are often presented as stories as well (see Gurevitch & Kavoori, 1994; Hickethier, 2002; Kiener, 1999; Luginbühl, Schwab, & Burger, 2004). Similarly, newspapers, magazines and the radio make extensive use of stories (see Bell, 1999; Berger, 1997; Bird & Dardenne, 1990; Link, 1986). Finally, the traditional media for stories are, of course, books.

In general, stories are considered to be close to everyday life and thinking: „Stories are habitation. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart“ (Mair, 1988, p. 127). Stories may even be regarded as a basic communication mode: “Narration is a mode of communication. People tell stories to entertain, teach, and to learn, to ask for an interpretation and to give one“ (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 10). Stories are equally „a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation“ (Richardson, 1990, p. 118). Creating and understanding narrative is a basic human quality. Humans have an understanding of time that is organized in stories, which separates them from other species (Abbott, 2002), and, according to Fisher (1987), even constitutes a specific model of man – the human as a *story-telling animal*.

This extreme position need not be shared to acknowledge that stories have always been attributed great potential to affect individuals in their thinking and acting. The bible is a historic example of stories used to convey values and norms, just as folk tales are used for educational purposes. Also, the history of censorship reflects the belief of the authoritarian state and society that stories can influence, or, more specifically, harm the audience (see Schütz, 1990). This applies to factual accounts as well as fictitious texts.

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In the past years, there has been comprehensive empirical research on narrative persuasion in social science disciplines that aims at investigating this widely and intuitively accepted assumption of strong narrative influence (Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2002; Slater & Rouner, 2002).² The goal of this paper is to further develop a model of narrative persuasion that has been tested intensively in the past years, the Transportation Imagery Model (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). We will delineate the role of the narrative text and its characteristics for the persuasion outcome. The concept of narrativity (Coste, 1989; Prince, 1982; Ryan, 1992) serves as a framework to identify possible textual factors for persuasion. Narrativity indicates the qualities that stories must have in order to be perceived as good and interesting. In the paper, we will extract textual elements that increase the narrativity of stories. Hypotheses will be set up about the specific effects these narrativity elements have on narrative experience, and indirectly on persuasion. Finally, we will present research perspectives that are opened up by integrating narrativity into the Transportation Imagery Model and discuss various applications in media effects research.

Experiencing and processing stories

A story that is read, seen, or heard is the basis for the construction of a mental representation in the recipient. The term “story” requires specification. Traditionally, narratology distinguishes between “story” as the event sequence and “narrative discourse” as the specific representation of these events in a particular narrative; terms, however, differ according to author (Martinez & Scheffel, 2003, p. 26). Taken together, “story” and “narrative discourse” constitute what is commonly referred to as “narrative”. A narrative is a representation of events or a sequence of events that is independent of medium and form (audio, visual, symbolic, in real actions) (Abbott, 2002, p. 12).

Viewers and readers construct a version of the narrative in their minds, which may be different from the objective content. The constructed version is selective on the one hand, and enriched by inference and elaboration on the other (e.g., Graesser, Olde, & Klettke, 2002; Oatley, 2002). Ohler (1994) specifies the construction of a mental representation in his cognitive model of film processing. The model states that viewers create a situation model while watching a film, which represents the current state of affairs in the story, the characters and locations. The mental model is supplied by the film, and by different types of existing knowledge (general world knowledge; narrative knowledge on typical plots, roles, action sequences; knowledge on filmic means, e.g., music indicating imminent danger).

The Transportation Imagery Model

Intense processing of a narrative includes a variety of phenomena such as suspense, curiosity, and surprise (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982). In recent research, it has been assumed that such intense processing might explain why narratives exert considerable influence on the readers’ and viewers’ attitudes and beliefs. Intensity of processing is at the heart of a recent approach to narrative influence, the Transportation Imagery Model developed by Green and Brock (2000, 2002). According to the model, transportation into the narrative (Gerrig, 1993) is central for the persuasive impact. In the course of reading or watching a narrative, readers and viewers become immersed in the events of the narrative and keep the focus of attention in the fictional rather than the actual world (Green, 2004). Transportation is a “convergent proc-

² In the field of narrative persuasion, persuasive effects are not limited to communications with a persuasive intent (e.g., advertising or campaigns). Rather, persuasive effects are more widely defined and denote the influence of *narrative* communication on story-consistent attitudes and beliefs (Brock, Strange, & Green, 2002; Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004).

ess, where all of the person's mental systems and capacities become focused on the events of the narrative" (Green & Brock, 2002, p. 324).

Reader or viewers generally expose themselves to fictional narrative in order to be entertained (Green, Garst, & Brock, 2004), which defines its basic purpose, or as Brewer (1980) termed it, the „discourse force“. In non-fictional formats such as newspaper articles, the discourse force lies in information. Among other factors, entertainment and enjoyment arises from the transportive experience (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Bilandzic & Busselle, 2006). As all mental capacity is focused on the narrative and recipients are motivated to be *entertained*, but not *informed*, they neither have the *ability* to process story content critically, nor do they have the *motivation* to do so (Green, Brock et al., 2004). Being critical hinders the flow of processing and pulls the recipient out of enjoying the story. As long as recipients are transported, it is unlikely that they counter-argue against the story and its message.

This idea is taken from theories of rhetoric persuasion that are often contrasted with narrative persuasion and that attribute persuasive effects to arguments and their strength, arrangement, and context (Dal Cin et al., 2004). Counter-arguing is an essential element on of the most important models in rhetoric persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty und Cacioppo (1986). It predicts that a message will not have persuasive influence if perceivers counter-argue, that is generate negative thoughts against the message. Similarly, Green and Brock (2002) elaborate that transported readers focus all their mental capacity on the narrative. Even if the message opposes their own beliefs, they should not be able to counter-argue, because they simply do not have mental resources for that. It is important to note that Green and Brock (2002) do not see this process as a wilful suppression of inconsistencies once they are recognized. Rather, they see it as an absence of inner counter-arguments, because the mental system is busy with the work load that transportation imposes.

Green and Brock (2002) point out a second possible explanation for narrative persuasion by stating that perceiving fictional events in a transported state comes close to personal experience. Readers or viewers feel as if they are part of the action and experience the characters' fortunes themselves. This might represent a more striking experience than merely understanding the rational argument.

Further, Green and Brock (2002) detail a third mechanism that might be responsible for narrative impact. They argue that transportation invokes strong feelings for the characters (such as friendship or hatred), and that these feelings might modify attitudes and beliefs.

These three mechanisms can be traced back to two basic aspects: First, the absence of counter-arguing means that the story and the message are being processed *uncritically*. Second, the illusion of personal experience and evoking strong emotions relate to an *intense* processing mode (see Figure 1).

Green and colleagues assume that these mechanisms are *consequences* of transportation. They argue that recipients are neither able nor motivated to counter-argue, *because* they are transported. Also, recipients react emotionally and have the impression of personal experience, *because* they are transported. However, these consequences may just as well be understood as *conditions* for transportation. Only if recipients do not counter-argue, if they react emotionally, and if they are under the illusion of personal experience, they can become immersed in the narrative. Rather, transportation will be terminated or will not even develop, if a media text does not allow for emotions. Similarly, flaws in the narrative may provoke critical thoughts, which weaken transportation, as Busselle, Ryabovolova and Wilson (2004) point out.

Thus, we propose an interactive relationship between transportation and uncritical / intense experience instead of a causal relationship that can capture reciprocal influence, either reciprocal reinforcement or reduction (see Figure 1).

Also, in the original model, uncritical and intense processing appear to be distinct mechanisms. However, it seems plausible that it should be the *combination* of uncritical and intense reception that makes narratives influential. If a reader or viewer processes intensively, but critically, he or she is in the mode of counter-arguing, which makes persuasion difficult. If the reader or viewer processes uncritically, but not intensively, a single reading will not have a huge effect. In this case, a cumulative effect of several low-involvement exposures seems more probable (in more detail, see Bilandzic, 2006).

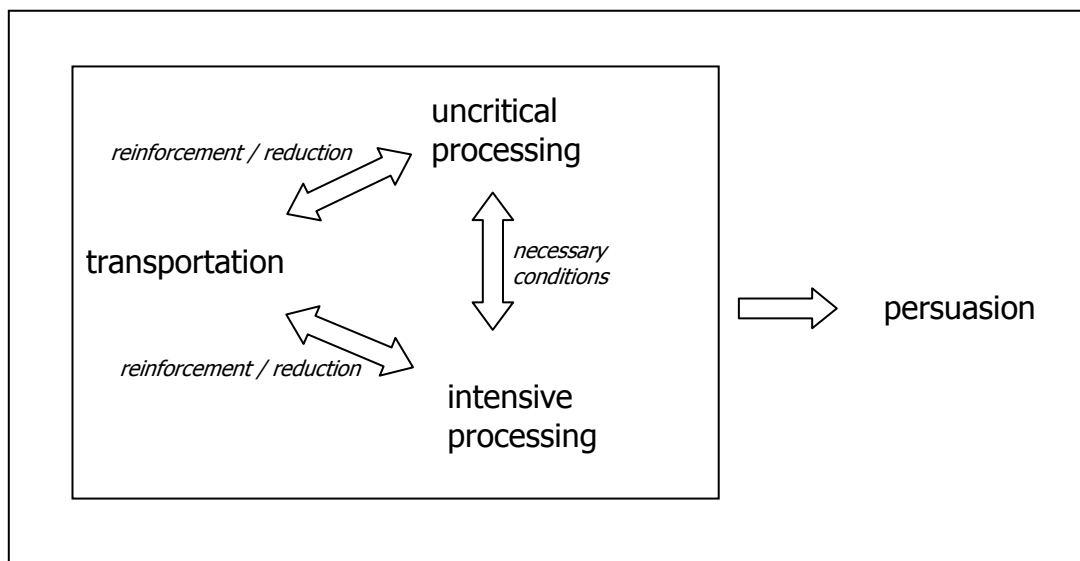


Figure 1: Modified Transportation Imagery Model (adapted from Green 2004): Interactive relationship between transportation, uncritical und intense processing

Some factors that influence this triad – transportation, uncritical and intense processing – are known, such as reading strategies, previous knowledge, reader personality, perceived realism or text quality (Green, 2004). Although the media text is the basis for the reader’s realization of the story, the role of the text remains rather marginal in the Transportation Imagery Model, and is restricted to text quality. Empirical results regarding text quality relate to the fact that texts from bestselling fiction and classic short stories are more transportive than texts that are written by psychologists for the purpose of the experiment (Green & Brock, 2000).

To make the model more precise on the textual side, we now want to incorporate the concept of narrativity into the Transportation Imagery Model.

Extending the Transportation Imagery Model with the concept of narrativity

The simple statement that not every story is a good or catchy one is mirrored by the narratological insight that narratives are characterized by varying degrees of narrativity. Academic disciplines in literature and narratology agree that a *narrative* may simply be defined as representation of how a situation is transformed from an earlier to a later state, interrelating causally (e.g., Prince, 1999). This simple definition that focuses on a sequence of events

might be useful to place emphasis on one crucial feature that distinguishes narratives from other sorts of text – most of all from arguments and descriptions (Chatman, 1990, pp. 6-21; Fludernik, 2006, p. 119). However, it categorizes a wide number of texts as narratives, ranging from the single sentence “Joe goes to the library to return a book” to a complete novel or film. To capture what makes a good story, or what makes readers and viewers recognize a series of events as a story, a definition of narrative is not enough. Prince (1999) argues that narrativity is needed to determine “what in a text underlies its possibly narrative nature, what emphasizes the presence and semiotic role of narrative structures in a textual economy, what makes a given narrative more or less narrative” (p. 44). The idea to distinguish between a narrative as a series of events and “good or bad” stories is highly plausible. The definition of *narrativity*, however, is hard to substantiate. Abbott (2002) even refers to narrativity as a „vexed issue“ (p. 22), mainly because narrativity can be conceptualized as both a perception („the degree to which one feels a story is being told or performed“, Abbott, 2002, p. 193; see also Prince, 2003, p. 65) and as an attribute of the text (Prince, 1982, p. 148-162; 2003, p. 65; Nünning, 2004, p. 483). Keeping apart these two dimensions might be useful in order to clear up the concept. Thus, we define narrativity as an attribute of the text (which, however, has consequences for processing). Extending the definitions by Prince (1999; 2003) and Nünning (2004), we define narrativity as the presence and interaction of a set of textual elements that distinguish narrative texts from non-narrative texts and that constitute the potential of a text to create a rich mental representation of the story and to generate transportive experiences. Narrativity is not a dichotomous characteristic – a text is not either narrative or non-narrative –, but a continuous attribute that can be found in almost any text – but to a varying degree (Grimm, 1996; Prince, 1982, 1999, 2003). Several lists of narrative elements have been identified by narratology scholars for fictional stories (Coste, 1989; Prince, 1982, 1999; Ryan, 1991, 1992; Fludernik, 1996, 2006). In the next sections, we will integrate their work to receive a coherent list of narrative elements. We will refer to those narrative elements as “narrativity factors”. In addition, we want to provide hypotheses about the possible effects of the narrativity factors on narrative processing. Narrativity factors on the textual side constitute the narrativity of a text, and may result in increased perceived narrativity on the reader’s side and, consequently, enhance transportation, intense and uncritical processing. By improving transportation, narrativity factors might ultimately influence persuasion. Of course, our hypotheses about the possible effects have yet to be tested. As of now, they have the status of plausible deductions.

In order to provide a more structured overview of the narrativity factors, we will arrange them according to the three layers of narratives as they were summarized by Martinez and Scheffel (2003): First, the story level describes events in a specific chronological order and a causal connection, which forms a reasoned and coherent unit (with beginning, middle and end). Second, at the discourse level, presentation matters. For example, the event sequence can deviate from the chronological order, specific modes (such as “distance” or “point of view”), voice (regarding the role of the narrator) and style (referring either to the language or to visualization) can be varied (Martinez & Scheffel, 2003). Third, at the *structure* level, “story” and “discourse” form a network. Plots, characters, and settings mostly base on established narrative patterns that include story elements as well as presentation features. The more a text incorporates narrative structures, the more it is likely to be genre fiction (Martinez & Scheffel, 2003).

The triad of “story”, “discourse” und “structure” is used to give a structured account of narrativity factors.

Narrative level: „story“

Concerning the „story“ of a narrative, narrativity tends to increase, if incisive events are described that change the development of the story fundamentally (Prince, 1982, p. 153). The *lasting consequences* of an event seem to be an important narrativity factor. Moreover, the uniqueness or *singularity* of an event tends to make a text more narrative than a permanent replication of similar events (Coste, 1989, p. 62). Describing a *conflict* should also increase narrativity, compared to describing no conflict. Especially an initial situation suggesting the possibility of a conflict seems to be an important device. Prince (1982) illustrates this: „’The cat sat on the mat’ is certainly not without interest but ‚The cat sat on the dog’s mat’ may be the beginning of a good story“ (p. 147). Furthermore, clues for factual rather than a fictional story (*factuality*) advance narrativity³ as well as the *specificity* of the presented events by indicating the precise location of time and space in the story (Coste, 1989, p. 60; Prince, 1982, p. 149). By accentuating lasting consequences, singularity, conflict, (pretended) factuality, and specificity, the story gains a particularity which – we presume – stimulates recipients to attribute more relevance to the story and makes them curious about its outcome. An intensive processing of the narrative should be facilitated (which is important for transportation, as we argued before).

Narratologists assume that narrativity is also affected by a *multiplicity of possible storylines* (Prince, 1999, p. 46; Coste, 1989, p. 61f.). If a character can decide between different courses of action, this might not only increase suspense and the uncertainty of the outcome, but also advance understanding the (main) character’s actions. Taken altogether, a more intensive reception is to be expected.

Basically, it is possible to describe a change in situations without involving characters. Our definition of a narrative covers these (environmental) changes as well. But “*transactiveness*” – the emphasis on character actions – increases narrativity – especially if main events are not restricted to a single character’s actions and experiences, but include the description of *interactions* between different characters (“*transitiveness*”) (Prince 1999, p. 46; Coste 1989, p. 50f.). According to Ryan, narrativity is mainly based on the constellation of characters in the narrative world - especially on the personal *development of characters* and the *change of their relationships* (1991, p. 156; 1992, p. 271). It can be assumed that all the aspects that are tied to characters (transactiveness, transitiveness und development of characters) allow the recipient to emotionally respond to characters. These emotional responses can become manifest in parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956), identification (Oatley, 1994) or emotional reactions in general (Polichak & Gerrig, 2002). Basically all these responses can intensify narrative experience.

Narrativity is also increased, if a *coherent world* is created with the help of a complex *net of causally determined relations* (Prince, 1982, p. 153; Ryan, 1992, p. 371). A coherent story is characterized by the absence of unconnected and dispensable events. Every event that is told should have its function with respect to the meaning of the whole story (Prince, 1982, p. 152).⁴ What concerns reception, a coherent presentation should prompt the recipient to per-

³ It is still unclear to what extent factuality affects transportation. On the one hand it can be argued that a reader or viewer is more transported by a „true“ story because he or she gets the opportunity to sympathize with a “real” person. Moreover, it is harder to escape from the suspenseful and fateful development of the story, because the reader or viewer cannot retreat to the attitude “it’s only fiction”. On the other hand, there is some empirical evidence that neither fictionality nor factuality affect the processing and the persuasive impact of a story (Green & Brock, 2000; Prentice, Gerrig, & Bailis, 1997; Strange & Leung, 1999).

⁴ The importance of coherence produced by causality is also mentioned by Bordwell (1985) and by Wuss (1999). In his model of film analysis, Wuss identifies – apart from the causal chain of a film – repeated motifs (topic lines) and common story schemes (narrative stereotypes) as essential for the coherence of a film.

ceive the whole story to be plausible and realistic. Inconsistencies that could provoke criticism are missing and an uncritical processing might be supported.

Table 1 summarizes the narrativity factors, different ways of narrative experience, and finally the consequences for a critical or intense reception.

Narrative level: structure

A similar effect could be evoked by another narrativity factor which is located on the level of structure. A narrative that is presented as *autonomous whole* (including a clear and complete structure with a beginning, a middle and an end) is more likely to be narrative (Prince, 1982, p. 152) and, in addition, more easily understood. This simple structure of a narrative can be traced back to Aristotle, and has been specified by structuralist approaches in narratology several times (Martinez & Scheffel, 2003, pp. 134-144). Especially the simple structural scheme of Labov und Waletzky (Labov, 1977; Labov & Waletzky, 1973) is used to capture the structure of different narratives (see also Bell, 1999; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982; Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, & Hastall, 2004). It distinguishes six phases: 1. Abstract, 2. Orientation, 3. Complicating Action, 4. Evaluation, 5. Resolution, 6. Coda. More identifiable and correctly sequenced phases lead to more narrativity.⁵ If *well-established archetypical schemes* of action, characters, situation, and setting are respected, classifying the *genre* of a narrative is facilitated. An explanation might be that genres generate expectations, and if a text does not conflict with these expectations, an undisturbed and uncritical processing can evolve.⁶

The discourse structure of a narrative – the sequential arrangement of events – can be designed to evoke affective reactions. Basically, we have to distinguish between the chronological sequence of events (the order in which the events happen in the ordinary world) and the sequence in which events are told. According to Sternberg (2001), narrativity has to be defined primarily as an “interplay between temporalities”, and, therefore, modelling the *affective* component of discourse *structure* is essential to increase narrativity. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1982) identified three major discourse structures that underlie the structure of a large proportion of narratives from Western culture: surprise,⁷ suspense⁸ and curiosity.⁹ It is remarkable that empirical research on these different discourse structures could provide some evidence for the effectiveness of discourse structures (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981, 1982; Knobloch et al., 2004). Most of all, a structure that creates suspense seems to be particularly efficient (Knobloch et al., 2004).

⁵ Note that Labov’s and Waletzky’s (1973) phases parallel Aristotle’s story structure whereby a story is firstly characterized by the existence of a beginning (~Abstract/Orientation), a middle, and an end (~Coda), and moreover by a complication (~Complicating action), a turning point and a resolution. The innovation of Labov’s and Waletzky’s approach lies in the integration of the evaluative aspect, which means that the reason why a story is told has to be mentioned (Bruner, 1991, p. 12). According to Martinez and Scheffel (2003, p. 147) a story without evaluation is not satisfying.

⁶ Empirical evidence for the influence of well-established narrative structures is given by Shapiro und Chock (2003), who showed the influence of stereotypical courses of events on the recipient’s perception of plausibility.

⁷ In a surprise structure the author withholds a critical information without letting the recipient know. At the end, the author reveals this information, and the recipient is surprised. The surprise is resolved when the recipient successfully reinterprets the event sequence in the light of the unexpected critical information (Brewer, 1985, p. 169).

⁸ An event structure that evokes suspense starts with an initiating event that causes the recipient to become concerned about the potential outcome of the story. Usually an initiating event is an event that leads to significant consequences for one of the characters. Then the discourse typically contains some additional material to extend the suspense. And finally the outcome is given resolving the suspense for the recipient (Brewer, 1985, p. 169f.).

⁹ Curiosity is created when the significant event is withheld, but enough information is provided to let the recipient know that there is information missing. The recipient’s curiosity is instigated.

Narrative level: discourse

With respect to the narrative level of discourse, two narrativity factors have to be emphasized: First, it is the *dramatic mode* that increases immediacy: Action and dialogue of the characters are shown, not narrated. As a result, proximity between the narrative and the recipient is created, and the recipient is not only likely to witness what is happening in the story, but also to gain the illusion of a first-hand experience.

The last narrativity factor on the level of discourse refers to the style of a text and can be described as *craftsmanship* (Prince, 1982, p. 160). It stands for the technically sound employment of means of presentation, not for the cultural value of a text. We propose that a stylistically well made text advances an undisturbed and intense processing.

Story

<i>narrativity factor</i>	<i>experience of reception</i>	<i>Processing</i>
lasting consequences singularity conflict factuality specificity	attribution of relevance	intense processing
multiplicity of possible storylines	uncertainty, curiosity, suspense	
transactiveness	close perception of events	
transitivity development of characters changing relationships	(emotional) responses to characters (empathy, parasocial interaction, identification)	
coherent word/ profound causality	plausibility, (perceived) realism	uncritical processing

Structure

<i>narrativity factors</i>	<i>experience of reception</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
autonomous unit/ clear structure	intuitive understanding	uncritical processing
narrative schemata/ genre typicality	accordance with expectations	
affective structure	suspense, surprise, curiosity	intense processing

Discourse

<i>narrativity factors</i>	<i>experience of reception</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
dramatic mode	(perceived) closeness	intense processing
craftsmanship	undisturbed processing	uncritical and intense processing

Table 1: Narrativity Factors and their assumed effects on processing experience

Discussion: Connecting narrativity, transportation, and persuasion

This paper proposed a theoretical development of the Transportation Imagery Model by Green und Brock (2002) with the concept of narrativity. This model of narrative persuasion assumes that narratives capture the mental capacity of their readers or viewers to the ex-

tent that they lack resources for a critical scrutiny of the story content. Transportation is influenced by two main processes: First, by intense processing - supported by mental imagery that the narrative evokes and strong emotions – and second, by uncritical processing. Empirically, the model has received support in several studies (e.g., Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Most notably, factors originating in the reader or viewer have been under investigation, like the level of transportation or perceived realism. Our goal was to specify the side of the text in the model. For that purpose, we have first considered the relationship between transportation, uncritical and intense processing. While the original model sees uncritical and intense processing as consequences of transportation, we argued that it is useful to dispose of the unidirectional causality. Rather we suggest that it makes sense to see transportation as *interdependent* with intense and uncritical processing at the same time, thus assuming an interactive relationship rather than a causal one. Transportation is only possible if perceivers process intensely *and* uncritically.

Then we looked for factors in the text that enhance or interfere with intense and uncritical processing, thus indirectly enhancing or lowering transportation. The concept of narrativity was used to systematically determine the potential of a media text for intense and uncritical processing. Building on that, we set up hypotheses about the specific reception experiences narrativity elements might evoke in the readers or viewers. They were then connected to transportation and persuasion.

In the original Transportation Imagery Model (Green & Brock, 2002), transportation is a concept that may assume different levels of intensity, while the textual side either is or is not a narrative. A narrative is conceived of as a dichotomous characteristic of the text. The advantage of using narrativity to describe texts is that levels of transportation correspond to degrees of narrativity. We assume that elements that intensify narrativity (= narrativity factors) produce enhanced uncritical and intense processing. This enhances transportation. Our hypotheses thus connect narrativity factors that we extracted from existing narrative theories to specific reading and viewing experiences and uncritical and intense processing (see Figure 2).

To sum up, we set up the hypothesis that uncritical processing is enhanced, if the narrative

- is self-contained, therefore can be understood with the information that is given by the story, does not require additional knowledge (autonomous unit),
- represents a coherent world with plausible causalities that does not provoke questions or critique (profound causality, coherent world),
- adheres to typical genre conventions and confirms expectations, at least does not contradict them (adherence to genre),
- represents appealing handicraft (craftsmanship).

These factors result in smooth processing of the story and prevent inconsistencies that might induce the perceiver to question the story. We assume that an intense processing of the story is enhanced, if

- the presented events and actions are lasting, unique, specified and contain conflict,
- various courses of action are possible (and the solution is uncertain),
- the narrative is action focused – as opposed to description focused (transactiveness),
- many interactions between characters are shown (transitivity), and if the characters themselves as well as their relationships change (character change, relationship change)

- the narrative contains direct dialogue and interaction (dramatic mode), and finally,
- is constructed with craftsmanship.

These factors aim at making the story richer and more vivid. Good craftsmanship is important for both uncritical and intense processing – a hypothesis that finds empirical support in Green and Brock’s (2000) finding that bestselling stories are more transportive than homemade ones. Craftsmanship might look counterproductive for the goal of identifying textual factors of transportation as it seems to be a fairly subjective evaluation about the text. We would like to emphasize that craftsmanship does not express cultural superiority about a text – books by John Grisham can be just as captivating as books by Fjodor Dostojewski. Craftsmanship is more about creating a skilful point of view, believable conflict and emotion and vivid descriptions. Of course, these are no objective aspects of the text.

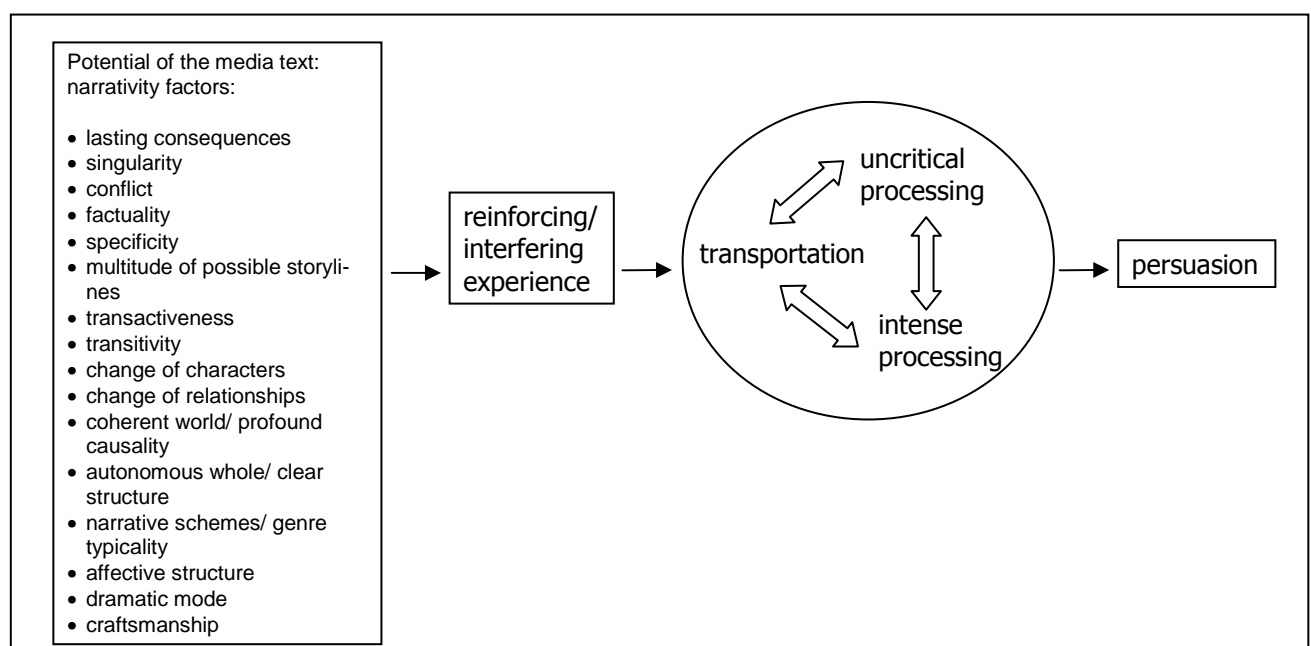


Figure 2: Narrativity factors in the Transportation Imagery Model (adapted from Green 2004)

The extended model (see Figure 2) opens up interesting research perspectives. The basic idea is to test the effectiveness of the narrativity factors to actually influence transportation. In a similar study, Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, and Hastall (2004) investigated how changes in affective structure influence reception experience. A similar approach is reasonable for narrativity.

The next step would be to further investigate the narrativity factors that proved to be influential for uncritical and intense experience in a content analysis of different media. In this way, the “transportation potential” of media content might be determined, each specific for different types of stories and different media. Transportation potentials indicate how likely it is that recipients are transported by a particular type of media message.

Determining transportation potentials is particularly relevant for effects analyses. There is little doubt that narratives have short term persuasive effects on knowledge and attitudes (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000; Strange & Leung, 1999; Tal-Or, Boninger, Poran, & Gleicher, 2004; Wyer, Adaval, & Colcombe, 2002).

Transportation is an important factor in the persuasive process. Therefore, in further investigation of persuasive effects, the independent variable “media content” should not only be investigated regarding its message (such as the arguments and their contexts) or its formal presentation (e.g., genre), but also regarding its narrativity and transportive potential.

Furthermore, we must assume that regular exposure to transportive media content has long term persuasive consequences too. Especially when looking at long term persuasive effects, the transportation potential might be more predictive than mere media exposure, even genre-specific exposure.

Another field traditionally dealing with narrative persuasion is entertainment education research that strives to find strategies to incorporate prosocial messages into media content (e.g., Singhal & Rogers, 1999). In this area of research, comparisons between narrative and non-narrative are common. Extending the focus to degrees of narrativity appears to be a logical continuation of existing research. Looking at narrativity might be especially insightful as many formats that are typically used, such as television spots or advertisements in print media, do not allow for complex action to develop. In contrast, many of the narrativity factors described above can be integrated into short narratives as well.

Also, the concept of narrativity may be useful in news value theory (see Schulz, 1976; Staab, 1990; Eilders, 1997; Ruhrmann, Woelke, Maier, & Diehlmann 2003) where a similar concept - news factors - is used. News factors are characteristics of a news item that determine whether the news item is worth to be published and memorized. Taken together, the news factors of a message constitute the news value. In part, news factors and elements of narrativity overlap (e.g., conflict). However, in other parts, the list of news factors may be completed or specified. A reasonable starting point might be a comparison of news values and narrativity in single media messages. Additionally, understanding and retention on the part of the audience might be investigated. Both parts might provide insights into news writing and presentation. Such a study can be understood in the wider context of a research tradition on news and narrative rooted in cultural studies.¹⁰

Narrativity might also be useful in the context of long term media effects. Recently, narrative theory has entered cultivation research. Busselle, Ryabovolova and Wilson (2004) point out that transportation might be an important factor in the cultivation process. This is in line with a greater trend in cultivation research to go beyond the amount of exposure and the content of media messages to explain television’s impact, and take the mode of processing into account (see Bilandzic, 2006). A possible conclusion might be that media content that is high in narrativity and thus has a strong transportation potential, might influence beliefs to a greater extent than low narrativity content. It is even conceivable that long term persuasive effects are not rooted in a multitude of contacts but in few exposures with a large transportation potential. There is some evidence that single motion pictures or serials like „Schindler’s List“ or „Holocaust“ have influenced the development of individual views on the Third Reich, as studies about the construction of family history have shown (Welzer, Moller, & Tschuggnall, 2002).

The presented extension of the Transportation Imagery Model is by no means an exhaustive elaboration of the theoretical potential in combining transportation and narrativity. First, we are presently lacking insight into the nature of the interactions of the narrativity factors. Are they complementing each other, or do they function additively? Is there a threshold indicating the minimum number of narrativity factors that have to be present in order for the recipients to be transported? Do particular narrativity factors represent necessary conditions without which no transportation ever occurs, while others may enhance transportation but are

¹⁰ See for example Bell, 1998; Bird & Dardenne, 1990; Bleicher, 2006.

not necessary? Second, the interplay between narrativity and characteristics of the audience (such as preferences, prior knowledge, mood, motivation) has to be explored.

These two aspects do not merely relate to the conceptual level, but are in need of empirical study – just as the extended model presented here opens up a tangible research perspective by setting up the two-fold step of reception and effects analysis described above.

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