

# Storytelling your research

How to position a paper at leading journal level

Tom van Laer

# What is the story here?

## Positioning and highlighting contributions

- ❖ **Describe** a new idea in a paper
- ❖ **Do** this without denigrating the literature
- ❖ **View** instead the existing literature as “the story thusfar”
- ❖ **Extend** the story
- ❖ **Add** (complexity/clarity) to the story
- ❖ **Illuminate** part of the story that has not been written yet
- ❖ **Remember** that a new episode depends on the previous episodes; rarely are they wrong

# How to craft a position?

1. Set the scene

2. State the art

3. Promise solutions

4. Set 3 objectives that make 3 contributions

**To take our learning further,  
we will analyse this article.**

# **What Happens in Vegas Stays on TripAdvisor? A Theory and Technique to Understand Narrativity in Consumer Reviews**

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Many consumers base their purchase decisions on online consumer reviews. An overlooked feature of these texts is their narrativity: the extent to which they tell a story. The authors construct a new theory of narrativity to link the narrative content and discourse of consumer reviews to consumer behavior. They also develop from scratch a computerized technique that reliably determines the degree of narrativity of 190,461 verbatim, online consumer reviews and validate the automated text analysis with two controlled experiments. More transporting (i.e., engaging) and persuasive reviews have better-developed characters and events as well as more emotionally changing genres and dramatic event orders. This interdisciplinary, multimethod research should help future researchers (1) predict how narrativity affects consumers' narrative transportation and persuasion, (2) measure the narrativity of large digital corpora of textual data, and (3) understand how this important linguistic feature varies along a continuum.

# 1. Set the scene

a) What is the practical phenomenon?

Sixty-nine percent of consumers indicate that they base their purchase decisions on online consumer reviews (Nielsen 2015), such as the above review of *Mystery Adventures*, a live action role-playing game organized in Las Vegas. These texts are therefore one of the most influential forms of word of mouth (henceforth WOM). In reviews, ordinary consumers (i.e., reviewers) write about purchases, and web hosting sites aggregate these evaluative texts into an organized format (McQuarrie, McIntyre, and Shanmugam 2015). Most hosting sites offer consumers the

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## b) Who should care?

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## 2. State the art

a) What is known about this phenomenon from prior research?

The literature on WOM language explores how reviews persuade consumers (Berger 2014). According to this literature, persuasion can stem from two sources outside of the consumer: (1) contextual cues or (2) the review text: its claims, arguments, and explanations (Moore 2015). If consumers rely on contextual cues, whether they give positive feedback may depend on the review's age (Chen and Lurie 2013), eloquence (Vásquez 2014), extremity (Ludwig et al. 2013), length (Pan and Zhang 2011), and readability (Ghose and Ipeirotis 2011), as well as the reviewer's expertise (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). If consumers scrutinize the review text, their evaluation tends to be more positive if they feel certain about their attitude toward the reviewed purchase. As Moore (2015) shows, consumers give more

## 2. State the art

b) What is unknown—the theoretical gap—and why is that a problem?

ence consumer behavior. Yet narrativity, or the extent to which a text tells a story (Sturges 1992), remains an overlooked feature of reviews. Given this, we aim to explain

However, as Jurafsky et al. (2014) maintain, many review texts do not (only) contain contextual cues, overt claims, and arguments; instead, they are “overwhelmingly focused on narrating experiences. . .rather than discussing.”

# 3. Promise solutions

a) How will your paper fill the theoretical gap?

Integrating previous literature on narrative content, discourse, transportation, and persuasion, we build a conceptual framework in which linguistics and cognitive psychology cross-fertilize this field of inquiry. Doing so facilitates both the emergence of our implicit assumptions and the elaboration of a theory of narrativity that is broader in scope than the various perspectives in the field.

# 3. Promise solutions

b) How will your paper help understand the practical phenomenon?

looked feature of reviews. Given this, we aim to explain how reviews' narrativity leads them to engage and persuade consumers.

# 4. Set objective 1...

...that makes contribution 1

First, extant empirical findings essentially remain limited to narrative content, while the broader notion that narrative discourse pervades and patterns stories as bodies of texts is thus far merely theoretical. That is to say, the narra-

events will be mentioned. We wish to establish what and how narrative elements predict the persuasiveness of consumer reviews. Therefore, the first objective of this research is to verifiably test whether stories' emotional shapes (genre) and event orders (drama) are crucial components of transporting and persuasive reviews.

# 4. Set objective 2...

...that makes contribution 2

Second, where recent advances in automated text analysis provide new, more efficient ways of gauging consumers' behavior from their use of natural language (Kacewicz et al. 2014)—these approaches do not allow the assessment of narrativity. Consumer researchers could depend on such a technique to indicate this linguistic feature time and again. Therefore, the second objective of this research is to develop a computerized technique that reliably determines a text's degree of narrativity and validate it with two controlled experiments.

## 4. Set objective 3...

...that makes contribution 3

Third, the body of research comparing nonnarrative with narrative texts and finding mean-level differences in narrative transportation and persuasion between experimental conditions (for a meta-analysis, see van Laer et al. 2014) raises a natural level of concern about the external validity of these effects. The virtue of these experiments is that

continuum. Therefore, the final objective of this research is to externally validate these prior substantial contributions with a rigorous field study of nearly 200,000 online reviews in consumers' own words.



MIND THE GAP

Now let's try  
this at home!

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