

# Narrative entertainment programming can lead to persuasive outcomes

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Entertainment-education is a common strategy for incorporating health and other educational messages into popular entertainment media. Its goal is to positively influence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in viewers. Examples include a video game that teaches children conflict resolution skills, or a television show that presents an embedded message regarding condom efficacy. A new article in the journal *Communication Theory* examines the involvement with narrative storylines and characters that is fostered by entertainment programming and presents a framework for explaining its persuasive effects.

Emily Moyer-Gusé of The Ohio State University builds on various theories that address the role of involvement in the processing and effects of entertainment-education messages. Her research advances a preliminary framework regarding how narrative entertainment programming may lead to persuasive outcomes.

Persuasive communication is often perceived as a threat to one's freedom, even if the message recommendation is in one's best interest. This results in message rejection as a way to reassert independence. Moyer-Gusé contends that different types of involvement in the narrative, such as engagement with the plot or identification with characters, may help to overcome resistance, thus resulting in persuasive effects.

The narrative format can allow viewers to become "sucked in" to the world in which the drama takes place, reducing viewers' perception that

the message is persuasive in nature. The enjoyment associated with transportation into a narrative may allow individuals to process messages they would otherwise find too threatening.

Using peers to deliver persuasive risk messages can be an effective strategy because peers are often seen as less authoritative and controlling, thus arousing less reaction. When viewers identify with characters, they may be more willing to consider dissonant perspectives and to imagine themselves doing, thinking, or feeling something they ordinarily would not, because they are experiencing it vicariously through the character. Also, perceived similarity with a character who is portrayed as vulnerable to the harmful consequences of a risky behavior may increase viewers' perceived vulnerability to the behavior.

Source: Wiley

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