

What makes telenovelas so popular?

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A particular type of consumer enjoys stories with plots, characters, and imagery that allow them to get lost in the narrative, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Stories have the power to change people's behavior," write authors Tom van Laer (ESCP Europe Business School), Ko de Ruyter (Maastricht University), Luca M. Visconti (ESCP Europe Business School), and Martin Wetzels (Maastricht University). "Contemporary examples include the persuasive power of Latin American telenovelas, which influence family planning choices and enrollment in adult literacy programs, as well as Internet users sharing written stories, photos, and videos about themselves and their market experiences."

The authors wanted to understand what kinds of stories allowed consumers to mentally enter a story, a phenomenon called "narrative transportation." They also wondered which kinds of consumers were more likely to identify with the narratives. They reviewed articles written in five different languages that dealt with the theme of narrative transportation and tested consumer reactions to those stories.

They found that [consumers](#) were most likely to engage with realistic stories with identifiable [characters](#) and plots that easily lead to mental imagery. They also identified five characteristics that made participants more able to be transported: familiarity, attention, ability to fantasize, higher education, and female gender.

"Consumers who are 'transported' are changed by their experience."

People who lose themselves in a story accept the story is true and relate to the characters," the authors write. "As the Hopi proverb goes, 'The one who tells the story rules the world,' and now we know how."

More information: Tom van Laer, Ko de Ruyter, Luca M. Visconti, and Martin Wetzels. "The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model: A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2014.

Provided by University of Chicago

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