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Need for Narrative

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Abstract

What is a useful story from the perspective of its consumer? Through semi-structured interviews with 55 Eurostar passengers from 14 countries, this film documents how consumers define stories, distinguish between different reasons to need narrative, and experience the effects of need for narrative.

1. Defining What Is a Story

Scholars offer various but clear definitions (e.g., Van Laer et al. 2014) and types of stories (e.g., Levy 2006). However, all these definitions and types of stories are etic since they reflect what scholars think of stories. What is a story, then, from the perspective of its consumers?

Through semi-structured interviews with 55 Eurostar passengers from 14 countries, this film first documents the extent to which consumers can define stories and do so in similar ways. We show that from an emic perspective, story consumers, though hesitant to define “story”, are creative and comprehensive in their categorisation (e.g., they include paintings, music, and other preferred media).

2. Types of Need for Narrative

The prevailing viewpoint in consumer psychology may be characterized as follows: Consumers have a need for narrative because they have a need for the hedonic—the seeking of pleasure, amusement, and entertainment. Interpretive consumer researchers emphasize the instrumentality of need for narrative. However, do story consumers distinguish between hedonic and instrumental reasons to need narrative?

We show that consumers do not make a distinction between hedonic and instrumental needs for narrative. To them, a story always has considerable instrumental importance. Yet, in order to serve its instrumental purpose, a story has to be entertaining. Thus, finding entertainment is a prerequisite for satisfying consumers' instrumental need for narrative.

3. Effects of Need for Narrative

Whether a chronic condition of consumers' personality or a situation-induced temporal state, need for narrative is generally conceptualised as a need *for*, not against. However, are the effects of need for narrative indeed that black-and-white according to story consumers? We show that story consumption can result from reliance on need for narrative or from careful evaluation of the level of emotional risk-taking that certain stories require.

4. Conclusion

Stories seem to empower people to self-prescribe narrative therapy. Not only do story consumers know which narrative they like, but they also know which narrative they need in order to escape from reality as well as transform it.

References

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