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Title:

Neurons on narratives - Brain patterns reveal why storytelling ads persuade.

Abstract:

Storytelling is key to effective marketing communication. The persuasiveness of stories is often attributed to the multi-faceted concept of 'narrative engagement', which involves an attentional and emotional focus, transportation, imagination, and identification with story characters (e.g. Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Hamby et al., 2018). However, due to challenges associated with self-report, the exact mental processes underlying narrative engagement remain elusive. In this talk, I present recent work in which we use neuroscientific methods to study the persuasiveness of storytelling advertisements. We combine two functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) datasets and investigate brain responses of consumers processing stories in video commercials. We first identify brain activity mediating the effect of stories on advertisement liking, and subsequently use meta-analytic decoding to interpret the mediating brain patterns, revealing which mental processes drive the effect of narratives on ad liking. Our findings suggest that for video advertisements, the act of interpreting and understanding a story's plot and characters seem more important for persuasiveness than other aspects of narrative engagement.