

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA**
*Blurring the Lines Between
Entertainment and Persuasion*
Second Edition

Contents

Preface	ix
About the Authors	xi

Chapter 1 What's So Special About Entertainment Media and Why Do We Need a Psychology for It? An Introduction to the Psychology of Entertainment Media.....	1
<i>L. J. Shrum</i>	

SECTION I Embedding Promotions Within Entertainment Media: Product Placement Effects and How They Work

Chapter 2 Product Integration: Current Practices and New Directions.....	11
<i>John A. McCarty and Tina M. Lowrey</i>	

Chapter 3 As a Backdrop, Part of the Plot, or a Goal in a Game: The Ubiquitous Product Placement.....	37
<i>Elizabeth Cowley</i>	

Chapter 4 Children's Processing of Embedded Brand Messages: Product Placement and the Role of Conceptual Fluency	65
<i>Laura Owen, Haiming Hang, Charlie Lewis, and Susan Auty</i>	

Chapter 5 Psychological Processing of In-Game Advertising and Advergaming: Branded Entertainment or Entertaining Persuasion?	93
<i>Michelle R. Nelson and Martin K. J. Waiguny</i>	

**SECTION II The Programs Between the Ads:
The Persuasive Power of Entertainment Media**

- Chapter 6** The Stories TV Tells: How Fictional TV Narratives Shape Normative Perceptions and Personal Values..... 147
L. J. Shrum and Jaehoon Lee
- Chapter 7** Flying With Icarus: Narrative Transportation and the Persuasiveness of Entertainment 169
Jordan M. Carpenter and Melanie C. Green
- Chapter 8** Seeing Is Believing: Toward a Theory of Media Imagery and Social Learning (MISL) 195
Karen E. Dill and Melinda C. R. Burgess
- Chapter 9** Alcohol Messages in Television Series: Content and Effects 227
Cristel Antonia Russell and Dale W. Russell
- Chapter 10** Selling Beauty: The Hidden Cost to Women's Self-Worth, Relationships, and Behavior 249
Erin J. Strahan, Vanessa M. Buote, and Anne E. Wilson
- Chapter 11** Learning Aggression Through the Media: Comparing Psychological and Communication Approaches..... 271
Julia A. Maier and Douglas A. Gentile
- Chapter 12** Paths From Television Violence to Aggression: Reinterpreting the Evidence..... 305
George Comstock and Jack Powers

1

What's So Special About Entertainment Media and Why Do We Need a Psychology for It?: An Introduction to the Psychology of Entertainment Media

L. J. Shrum

University of Texas at San Antonio

I started with the same question in the first edition: Is there anything unique about entertainment media that warrants such close scrutiny and scientific interest? Why is persuasion through entertainment media different from any other forms of persuasion, both in terms of effects and processes? If current theories of persuasion can just as easily (and accurately) account for effects that occur *within* entertainment media (e.g., TV programs, films) as they can for effects that occur *between* entertainment media (e.g., advertisements), Occam's razor would lop off the unneeded new theory devoted to entertainment media.

Although there are a number of theoretical constructs that can account for certain effects of entertainment media (e.g., situation models, source-monitoring, story schemas; Johnson, 2002), current dual-processing models have a difficult time accounting for some types of media effects, particularly those occurring during the processing of narratives. In fact, there is ample evidence that people process entertainment (narrative) and promotional (rhetorical) information differently. Thus, it is likely that the ways in which entertainment and promotion exert effects on audiences are correspondingly different. The purpose of this book is to highlight these differences by documenting the effects that entertainment media have on audiences and to illuminate how these effects occur. Both components are critical in making for a better-informed consumer and public, and this is particularly important when the effects are often unintended but also

unwanted (e.g., aggression, lower self-esteem, drug abuse, materialism, low impulse control).

The differences in processing between narrative and rhetoric are also what lead to *blurred lines* between what is entertainment and what is persuasion. In some instances, the lines are intentionally blurred by marketers who are interested in preventing some of the processes that may occur during the processing of rhetorical information (e.g., counterarguing). In other cases, the lines are unintentionally blurred because audience members do not understand the persuasive influence of entertainment media.

In sum, just as with the first edition, this volume attempts to understand (a) how is entertainment or narrative information processed? (b) is this fundamentally different from the processing of promotional or rhetorical information? and (c) if so, what are the consequences of these differences in processing on the persuasive impact of both the entertainment aspect and the promotional aspect?

ROADMAP FOR THE CHAPTERS

The chapters are divided into two parts. The first part pertains to intended effects of marketers, and focuses primarily on product placements embedded in entertainment programming, including television, film, and digital games. The second part pertains to unintended effects of the stories and games themselves.

PART I: EMBEDDING PROMOTIONS WITHIN ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA: PRODUCT PLACEMENT EFFECTS AND HOW THEY WORK

Part I focuses on what I think of as the epitome of blurred lines: product placement. Product placement generally refers to the deliberate inclusion of brands in stories, usually in television programs and films. However, as several authors note, other types of media, such as video games, are also fertile ground for product placements. McCarty and Lowrey (Chapter 2) kick off the first section with a comprehensive review of the marketing

practice of product integration. Product integration refers to the mixing of commercial messages with noncommercial messages. Integration thus includes not only product placements, but also other marketing practices such as sponsorships of entire programs. McCarty and Lowrey differentiate the various types of product integration, discuss a number of prominent examples (some likely to be familiar to readers, some not), provide a broad review of research on product integration effects, and discuss the future of product integration research and practice.

Cowley (Chapter 3) delves into the psychological processes underlying product placement effects. She looks at how placements are processed as a function of such factors as placement characteristics (e.g., prominence, plot congruity), viewer characteristics (e.g., involvement, connection with characters), and program format (e.g., fiction, reality programs), and integrates these different characteristics into existing persuasion theories (e.g., priming, persuasion knowledge). She also discusses the implications for public policy, how current public policy addresses concerns about consumer welfare, and the implications of current psychological theories (e.g., memory, persuasion) for the success of practices aimed at better informing consumers of placement practices. She concludes by discussing what we still don't know about placement processes and effects and avenues for future research.

Owen, Hang, Lewis, and Auty (Chapter 4) continue with a focus on product placement processing, but with a specific look at the effects on children. They review the public policy and ethical debates about product placement, and then relate these specifically to the effects of such marketing practices on children. They note that children's limited cognitive and executive functioning skills may make them particularly vulnerable to product placement effects. Owen et al. then discuss previous research, including their own, on the psychological processes underlying product placement effects on children, with a particular focus on implicit influences of product placement and the role of conceptual fluency. They conclude with a discussion of how we might teach children to understand the practice of product placement and suggestions for future research.

In the concluding chapter of Part I, Nelson and Waiguny continue the discussion of psychological processes and effects in product integration practices, but move the focus from television and film to digital games (video, computer, etc.), a fast-developing area. They look at two types of integration: in-game advertising, which is similar to product placement,

and what is termed *advergames*, which are games specifically designed by companies to promote their brands. Nelson and Waiguny provide a thorough discussion of the relationship between these forms of brand placement and cognitive processes such as activation and arousal, emotional responses, recall, attitude formation and change, and behavioral judgments. They review the emerging research in this area, including their own, and integrate this research into existing theories of persuasion.

PART II: THE PROGRAMS BETWEEN THE ADS: THE PERSUASIVE POWER OF ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

Part II makes the shift from intended effects by marketers to unintended effects of the story creators. In Chapter 6, Shrum and Lee address the different types of effects that viewing of narrative entertainment fiction has on viewers. They look at two different types of effects. The first is the effects of program narratives on normative perceptions. They discuss how television influences viewers' perceptions of what others have and do, and how the world works in general. They detail research showing that the more people watch television, the more they tend to think the world portrayed on television is indicative of reality. The second effect Shrum and Lee examine pertains to the attitudes, values, and beliefs that are cultivated by the television messages. Here, they detail research that shows that the more people watch television, the more their beliefs correspond to the dominant messages in the programs. Finally, along with detailing these effects, they articulate separate psychological process models for each and discuss research that supports those models.

Carpenter and Green (Chapter 7) delve further into the persuasive power of fictional narratives. They discuss their own research as well as that of others on narrative persuasion and the effects of narrative transportation on persuasion. Narrative transportation refers to the process of becoming completely immersed (transported) into the world of the story. They discuss the processes associated with narrative transportation, such as reduction in counterarguing, increased emotion, and the creation of vivid thoughts, and how these influence beliefs. They discuss research showing that transportation can increase persuasion, even when the narrative is fictional. They conclude the chapter with a discussion of research

on individual differences in narrative transportation and their associated effects.

In Chapter 8, Dill and Burgess continue with the focus on narrative (story) processing and persuasion, but look specifically at the persuasive power of social imagery and its powerful contribution to the narrative. They argue that social imagery in the media tells very powerful stories, ones that are in fact very persuasive, and that “seeing is believing,” even if what is seen may be within the context of a fictional narrative. They review research to support their theorizing, and synthesize this research by proposing their theory of media imagery and social learning (MISL).

Beginning with Chapter 9, the focus shifts from general theoretical accounts of media effects to discussions of particular types of media effects. Russell and Russell (Chapter 9) address alcohol consumption portrayals in television series. They first review findings from content analyses. Using much of their own work as examples, they document the modalities of presentation and level of plot connection of alcohol messages, and distinguish between those messages that portray alcohol positively and those that portray alcohol negatively. Next, they provide a thorough review of the empirical evidence regarding how embedded alcohol messages are processed and the impact they have on audiences’ alcohol beliefs and attitudes. A particularly intriguing finding is that audience connectedness moderates the cognitive processing and persuasive impact of messages about alcohol. Finally, they discuss the implications of this research for public health and public policy, particularly for younger audiences.

Strahan, Buote, and Wilson (Chapter 10) examine another unintended effect of both program and advertising portrayals: the effect of the media’s idealized portrayals of women on women’s feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. The authors note that the media’s portrayal of women is very consistent: young, thin, and beautiful. Although the intended consequences of such portrayals are understandable (create audience liking, associate beauty characteristics with products and lifestyles), the unintended consequences resulting from the inability of audience members to attain those ideals are troubling. The authors provide a thorough discussion of research showing that exposure to idealized media images is linked to body dissatisfaction and the basing of self-worth on appearance, which in turn influences eating behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Finally, the last two chapters look at a long-debated effect of media exposure, its effect on viewer aggression. Maier and Gentile (Chapter 11) focus on theoretical issues of how viewers may learn from the media, and how these apply to the media exposure–aggression link. They first provide a theoretical examination of psychological theories of learning, and in particular the General Learning Model. They offer the General Learning Model as a metatheory that accounts for learning at multiple levels that may interact, and in doing so, incorporate both short- and long-term processes. They also discuss uses and gratifications theory and its focus on individual differences in motivations for media consumption, and its utility for understanding media effects research. They conclude by presenting the results of an experiment aimed at merging the psychological and communication theories to make predictions about media effects on aggression.

Comstock and Powers (Chapter 12) conclude the volume with a thorough review of the research on the link between exposure to television violence and aggression. In doing so, however, they make several important departures from most reviews of this type. First, they discuss a number of meta-analyses, including some of their own, that clearly show a positive correlation between media exposure (television, movies) and aggression or antisocial behavior. They address issues of causal direction, and suggest that the case for television viewing being the causal factor is quite strong, given that both correlational and experimental research yield very similar results. Comstock and Powers also make one additional point that is important. They argue that, from their analysis of past research, dispositions such as attitudes, norms, and values are not a necessary link between exposure to television violence and aggression. Although the link has been found in a number of studies, it is also the case that direct relations between exposure to television violence and aggression have been observed. They conclude with a discussion of the implications of this reformulation for the processes underlying media effects on aggressive behavior.

Entertainment Media Is Special

As with the first edition, the primary purpose of this volume is to address at least the first part of the question posed in the title to this introductory chapter: What is so special about entertainment media? All of the chapters in this book provide a perspective on the nature of entertainment media

and how it often blends with overt persuasion attempts such as promotions. And virtually all in some manner speak to the issue of how entertainment media is processed, with the conclusion that media consumers do in fact tend to process entertainment (narrative) and promotional (rhetorical) information differently. This, if nothing else, is what makes entertainment media so special. And it is the premise of at least some of the chapters that this is also what makes entertainment media so potentially powerful. It should come as no surprise, then, that marketers would be interested in becoming part of that special processing, rather than separate from it.

Perhaps that is fine. This book does not take a position as to whether the blurring of the lines between entertainment and promotion is necessarily good or bad. But in the interest of the free flow of information and making informed decisions, hopefully the chapters in this book can at least contribute to more informed consumers who might then decide whether to provide their consent to be persuaded.