The Social Experience of Entertainment Media

Effects of Others’ Evaluations on Our Experience

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Abstract. People often look to others for guidance when selecting narrative entertainment. Previous work has demonstrated that this social guidance forms the basis of people’s expectations and subsequently affects people’s experience. The current work extends previous research by exploring the influence of peer evaluations of a story, on enjoyment of and psychological transportation in the written narrative. In two experiments, participants read peer evaluations prior to reading the story. Results of Experiment 1 revealed that social influence guides readers’ expectations, attention to elements in the narrative, reported enjoyment, and feelings of transportation in the narrative. This influence was particularly apparent when readers were given unfavorable reviews of the stimulus. In the second experiment, readers were given peer evaluations that were either confirmed or disconfirmed by other readers. Results indicated that valence of peer evaluations influenced both transportation and enjoyment. Additionally, inconsistent evaluations increased feelings of transportation, but consistency alone had no effect on reported enjoyment. Implications for social media experiences and future directions in research on entertainment media are discussed.

Keywords: entertainment media, expectations, narrative, social influence, uncertainty

Introduction

The entertainment experience is often social: We watch films with others, discuss narratives with others, and seek others’ opinions of stories when making entertainment media selections. The world of entertainment media provides ample opportunity to observe people’s tendency to look to individuals around them as a source of information. Internet-based media retailers have capitalized on consumers’ desire for peer evaluations. For example, Amazon (www.amazon.com) provides editorial and customer reviews, with numerical ratings and essay evaluations. Access to such reviews is rooted in evidence that consumers will be more likely to seek out stimuli rated favorably by others (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lee, Cheung, Lim, & Sia, 2006). Given the influx of Internet search engines and Web 2.0-based applications providing information sharing and user feedback on entertainment media, it is worth understanding how such feedback impacts consumers’ experiences with entertainment media.

The present experiments explored how peer evaluations affect expectations for narratives and subsequently shape the entertainment experience. We focused our investigation on feelings of enjoyment and psychological transportation in the narrative. In so doing, we aimed in the present experiments to elucidate the cognitive and affective processes underlying the entertainment experience, by employing measurements of social informational influence. Thus, we first provide a brief review of the effects of social information on perception, laying the framework for how social influence transforms our experience. We then turn to the two elements of the entertainment experience of interest: enjoyment and transportation.

From Others’ Perceptions to Our Own

Perception is a constructive process (Bruner, 1992) shaped by expectations (Bruner & Postman, 1949). Expectations may be formed through previous experiences or, barring previous experience, information gained from others (i.e., social informational influence). As such, social influence can shape perceptions. For instance, Moscovici and Personnaz (1991) found that color perception (measured by reported afterimage color, a latent response believed to be an indication of true perceptual change) is subject to social influence. Additionally, Klaaren, Hodges, and Wilson (1994) found that participants who were told previous students enjoyed a film reported greater enjoyment of the film, even when watching it in an unpleasant environment (e.g., uncomfortable chairs; see also Hodges, Klaaren, & Wheatley, 2000). Clearly social influence, via expectations, shapes our actual experience.

Expectations hold what may be an underappreciated power to influence experience (Lee, Frederick, & Ariely, 2006; Wilson, in press). For instance, Snyder and Swann...
(1978) found that when participants were tasked with investigating whether a target person had a specific personality trait (e.g., extraversion), they searched for hypothesis-confirming behavior. In the social domain, Darley and Fazio (1980) suggest this effect occurs because expectations guide our behavior, which constrains the other person’s responses to those that support the expectation (see also Nickerson, 1998). Negative expectations appear to enhance this confirmation bias (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001), potentially because negative information draws disproportionate amounts of attention (Smith, Cacioppo, Larsen, & Chartrand, 2003), thereby highlighting flaws. This work suggests that participants who review peer evaluations about a narrative entertainment experience, such as a short story, may approach the stimulus with certain expectations, which will guide their attention to elements of the narrative that confirm the initial evaluations, particularly for unfavorable reviews.

**Conflicting Perceptions in the Social Environment**

As discussed above, social influence informs expectations and, consequently, perceptions. A high degree of consensus among peers creates an assumption that the portrayed position reflects objective reality and is thus valid (Mackie, 1987). As such, consensus among peer evaluations allows perceivers to construct clear expectations regarding unknown stimuli. Yet, when seeking opinions, perceivers often encounter inconsistent perspectives or additional information that disconfirms prior information (e.g., Gao, Gu, & Lin, 2006). This conflict might be especially prevalent in the domain of entertainment media, where an intriguing film to one person might be considered a boring film to another. The consequence of such discordant social information may drive viewers to resolve the dissonance (e.g., Festinger, 1957), thus creating a more cognitively effortful experience. Moscovici and Personnaz (1991) suggested that opinion conflict prompts perceivers to increase attention to the stimuli to evaluate “whether the deviant responses might contain a grain of truth” (p. 102). Accordingly, inconsistent evaluations should both reduce a perceivers’ ability to rely on peer evaluations to form their expectations and increase the cognitive attention given to the stimuli. As a result, disconfirmation of initial peer evaluations would weaken the impact of those evaluations on expectations and also have consequences for the entertainment experience. These consequences are elaborated on in the discussion below of enjoyment and psychological transportation.

**Enjoyment Versus Psychological Transportation**

Despite its prevalence in entertainment media research, a clear conceptualization of media enjoyment remains elusive (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Raney, 2003). Enjoyment has been described alternately as an experience (e.g., Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Vorderer, 2001; Zillmann, 2003) or as a response to an experience (e.g., Knobloch, 2003; Miron, 2003; Oliver, 2003; Raney, 2004; Zillmann, 2000). Nabi and Krcmar (2004) suggest that unlike liking, which may be limited to reactions to a stimulus, enjoyment may reflect both reactions to a stimulus and reactions to the experience with the stimulus, which can include situational factors present during exposure (see also Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004).

In line with lay intuition, enjoyment may be thought of as primarily a positive affective experience (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). Yet, viewers report enjoyment while watching sad (Oliver, 1993) and frightening films (Tamborini & Schiff, 1987). Zillmann (2003) proposes that enjoyment is derived from attaining a desired emotional state, positive or negative. In fact, one benefit of narrative worlds is the safety they provide for audience members to experience negative emotions without personal risk (Nell, 2002).

Of particular relevance to the present experiments, Denham (2004) argued that social norms are central to enjoyment. For instance, Hylton (1971) found that participants reported more positive evaluations of a speaker and message content when fellow audience member confederates displayed positive, nonverbal feedback. However, the effect may be moderated by perceived similarity between self and other (Wiegman, 1987). Additionally, Nabi and Hendriks (2003) found that when one source conveyed nonpositive feedback, the persuasive influence of positive feedback from others was negated. Together, this work suggests when others’ evaluations are favorable, individuals’ enjoyment of a narrative should increase, and when others’ evaluations are unfavorable, enjoyment should decrease. However, disconfirmed peer evaluations would attenuate the effect of social influence on enjoyment.

Enjoying a narrative may additionally be affected by feeling immersed, or psychologically transported, in that story, as suggested by Green and colleagues (2004). Psychological transportation extends Nell’s (1988) metaphor of feeling “lost in a book,” a state in which readers feel more attuned to events in the story than to events in their physical environment (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Green et al., 2008). In their transportation-imagery model, Green and Brock (2002) propose that transportation in a narrative may be influenced by characteristics of the story, such as quality (i.e., better quality leads to greater transportation; see also Gerrig & Prentice, 1991). Consequently, we hypothesized that favorable peer evaluations, which suggest a better quality story, would increase feelings of transportation.

Although the two concepts often work in tandem, enjoyment and transportation are two distinct components of the narrative experience (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Both enjoyment and transportation present desired mental states or experiences and involve affective and cognitive components (e.g., Green et al., 2004; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Raney, 2003). Both have been found to be sensitive to situational factors, such as distractions (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). However, the constructs are not identical.

One potential distinction between enjoyment and transportation may be the demand the latter experience puts on...
cognitive resources. Based on Green and Brock’s (2000) operationalization of transportation, the experience involves the use of cognitive resources to focus attention on the narrative events, construct vivid mental images (e.g., imagining alternate endings), and intensify emotional responses. Sharing this perspective, Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) propose that becoming absorbed in the narrative requires the individual to construct the meaning of the story, or as Oatley (2002) describes, the individual “becomes the writer of his or her own version of the story” (p. 43). Rather than a passive audience member, the transported individual becomes an active participant in the narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Taken together, transportation appears to involve expenditure of cognitive resources, as mental effort is exerted to attend to a narrative, comprehend its meaning, and contemplate its implications (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000; Oatley, 2002). Following this reasoning, we hypothesized that as readers exert effort in an attempt to make sense of inconsistencies in the previous evaluations of the story presented by the disconfirmed peer evaluations (Festinger, 1957; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991), they take a more active role as audience members and thus report increased transportation into the narrative world.

Overview of Current Studies

In the current studies, we explored the role of peer critiques on readers’ perception, enjoyment, and feelings of transportation in a short story. In Experiment 1, participants read peer evaluations of a narrative before reading the story themselves. After reading the story, participants wrote their own reviews of the narrative. In accordance with the confirmation bias, we hypothesized that readers would attend to, and thus write about, narrative elements that conformed to their expectations derived from the peer reviews. Moreover, given the well-documented negativity bias (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001), we hypothesized that this influence would be most evident for those with negative expectations. In so doing, readers’ expectations would guide information processing such that experiences would be assimilated into one’s expectations; thus, those expecting a good story should encourage greater enjoyment (Hodges et al., 2000; Klaaren et al., 1994) and greater transportation into the narrative world (Green & Brock, 2002).

In Experiment 2, we examined the influence of discordant social information on entertainment experience. Participants again received peer evaluations of a narrative before reading it themselves; however, in Experiment 2, evaluations were either confirmed or disconfirmed by another set of reviewers. We hypothesized that enjoyment and transportation may differentially be affected by discordant information. Given that discordant information encourages cognitive effort (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991) and that feelings of transportation may demand cognitive exertion related to the story, we expected a main effect of the conflicting reviews on transportation (i.e., disconfirmed evaluations would enhance transportation) but not enjoyment. However, we did still anticipate that conflicting reviews would attenuate the impact of positive or negative evaluations on reported enjoyment.

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, we examined how peer evaluations affected readers’ expectations and in turn guided attention to elements of a narrative that confirm the initial evaluations, in accordance with the confirmation bias (e.g., Darley & Fazio, 1980; Nickerson, 1998; Snyder & Swann, 1978). To best measure participants’ reliance on peer evaluations in directing their attention, evaluations focused on a single element of the narrative: either on the characters or on the plot of the narrative. The presented narrative (“Sunday in the Park” by Bel Kaufman) focused evenly among character and plot development. Accordingly, by focusing peer evaluations on character or plot, all participants were given critiques on a central theme of the narrative.

After reading the narrative themselves, participants wrote their own review of the narrative. Participant evaluations were coded for evidence of selective attention during reading. Specifically, we hypothesized that participants’ own evaluations would reflect the content of the peer evaluations received, suggesting that the initial evaluations guided participants’ attention during the exposure to the narrative. Moreover, we expected this effect to be more pronounced for unfavorable evaluations, in line with the negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Smith et al., 2003). Thus, we hypothesized that readers given unfavorable evaluations before reading a narrative would be most likely to notice (and thus comment about) the same features of the narrative that were criticized in the peer evaluations.

By shaping perceptions of the story, the peer evaluations would influence participants’ narrative experience. In accordance with previous research on the effects of social influence on enjoyment (Hodges et al., 2000; Klaaren et al., 1994), we expected that participants who read favorable peer evaluations of the narrative text would report greater enjoyment than those given unfavorable peer evaluations of the text. Similarly, because evaluations should affect perceptions of the quality of the text, we expected that participants who read favorable evaluations should report greater transportation than those who read unfavorable evaluations of the text (Gerrig & Prentice, 1991; Green & Brock, 2002).

Method

Participants and Design

Undergraduate students (35 men and 71 women), ranging in age from 18 to 37 years (M = 18.76, SD = 2.05), participated in exchange for partial course credit in an introductory psychology course. The experiment used a 2 (peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (evaluation focus: character...
or plot) between-subjects design, with participants randomly assigned to conditions. A control condition involved reading no evaluations before the story.

**Procedure and Materials**

Participants were told that they would read a story and then write a brief review of the story. Then, as examples of what they were expected to write in their evaluation, participants read three comments that were ostensibly written by previous participants who had read the same story the participants would be reading (see Appendix A). Comments were either uniformly favorable or uniformly unfavorable, and all three comments were focused on either the story’s characters (e.g., “Characters were not very real or interesting”) or plot (e.g., “And what was the deal with the story line? I just cannot imagine things would really happen that way”). Participants indicated their expectations for the story and then read “Sunday in the Park” by Bel Kaufman. Immediately after reading the story, participants wrote a brief description of what they liked and disliked about the story and completed measures of enjoyment and psychological transportation.

**Stimulus Story:** “Sunday in the Park” by Bel Kaufman describes an ordinary incident that occurred between two families during a playground altercation, and the interpersonal frustration between spouses that ensued afterward. The unimposing nature of the story and its quiet tension made it well suited as a story that could be reasonably interpreted as high and low quality by an undergraduate student audience.

**Dependent Measures**

**Coding:** Independent coders (n = 3) rated the valence of participants’ written reviews, ranging from -3 (strongly negative remarks) to 3 (strongly positive remarks); the mean rating was used for analyses (Krippendorff’s α = .83). Coders also indicated whether participants mentioned the characters and the plot; each variable was dichotomously coded as either absent = 0 or present = 1 (for examples of coded responses, see Appendix B).

**Expectations:** As a manipulation check for the peer evaluations, participants reported their expectations for the story’s quality using a one-item statement (i.e., “I expect this story to be:”) on a scale ranging from 1 (terrible) to 7 (excellent).

**Enjoyment:** Two items measured self-reported enjoyment (e.g., “I greatly enjoyed reading the story”; Cronbach’s α = .83). Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Psychological Transportation:** After reading the short story, participants completed the 12-item psychological transportation scale assessing cognitive attention, emotional response, and mental imagery (Green & Brock, 2000). For each item (e.g., “While I was reading the story, I could easily picture the events in it taking place”), participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Responses demonstrated acceptable inter-item reliability (Cronbach’s α = .73).

**Results and Discussion**

**Expectations**

A (peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (evaluation focus: character or plot) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine effects on expectations. Results found only a main effect of peer evaluation: As expected, participants who read favorable evaluations expected the story to be better (M = 5.30, SD = 0.90) than did those who read unfavorable evaluations (M = 3.09, SD = 1.36), F(1, 83) = 79.83, p < .001, r² = .49. The findings indicate that peer evaluations contributed to readers’ expectations of the story they were about to read.

**Written review**

A (peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (evaluation focus: character or plot) ANOVA was conducted to examine effects on participants’ comments. A main effect of peer evaluation indicated that participants who read favorable evaluations wrote more positive comments after reading the story (M = 1.10, SD = 1.68) than those who read unfavorable evaluations (M = 0.13, SD = 1.63), F(1, 83) = 12.98, p < .01, r² = .14. As hypothesized, this suggests that information gained from the peer evaluations guided participants’ perception of the story. According to the confirmation bias (e.g., Darley & Fazio, 1980; Nickerson, 1998; Snyder, & Swann, 1978), participants may have attended to elements of the story that supported the either favorable or unfavorable evaluations they had read previously. In a broader sense, the results suggest that perceived quality of the story may be shaped by social influence.

Second, we examined the coded content of the written reviews. To examine focus of attention, a 2 (peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (evaluation focus: character or plot) × 2 (type of comments made by participants: character versus plot) ANOVA was conducted to compare how the valence and focus of evaluations (between-subjects) affected
participants’ propensity to make comments about the story’s plot and/or characters (within-subjects). Results revealed a significant three-way interaction, $F(1, 83) = 4.51, p < .05$, $\eta^2_g = .05$ (Figure 1). In accordance with the negativity bias (e.g., Smith et al., 2003), participants who read unfavorable peer evaluations that were focused on plot were more likely to comment on the plot after reading the story ($M = .83, SD = .38$) than to comment on the characters ($M = .42, SD = .50$), $F(1, 23) = 9.75, p < .01, \eta^2_g = .30$. The opposite pattern was observed for those participants who read unfavorable peer evaluations focused on character, but the difference failed to attain statistical significance, $F(1, 18) = .39, n.s., \eta^2_p = .02$. Participants who read favorable peer evaluations, on the other hand, showed no reliable effect of focus, $F_s < 2.00, n.s.$ Fisher’s exact test revealed that participants who read unfavorable peer evaluations were more likely to mention the same elements that were in the peer evaluations (character versus plot) in their own evaluation (74.4%) than those who read favorable peer evaluations (59.1%), $p < .10$. The findings suggest that although participants who read favorable evaluations may have focused attention on positive qualities of the narrative, participants who read unfavorable evaluations were more likely to focus on those elements that were specifically criticized in the peer evaluations, thus confirming their expectations.

### Enjoyment and Psychological Transportation

As expected, transportation and enjoyment were positively correlated, $r(106) = .75, p < .001$. To investigate the effect of the evaluations on participants’ response to the narrative, a 2 (peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) $\times$ 2 (evaluation focus: character or plot) multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine effects on enjoyment and transportation. Results revealed only a main effect of valence of evaluation on both dependent measures. Favorable evaluations produced greater enjoyment ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.62$) than did unfavorable evaluations ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.39$), $F(1, 83) = 8.47, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .09$. The influence of prior information on enjoyment replicates the work of Klaaren and colleagues (Hodges et al., 2000; Klaaren et al., 1994) and extends the findings to illustrate that unfavorable evaluations hinder enjoyment.

Similarly, favorable evaluations produced greater transportation in the story ($M = 4.70, SD = 0.88$) than unfavorable evaluations – transportation: $M = 4.22, SD = 0.85, F(1, 83) = 7.13, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .08$.$^3$ The present findings provide valuable evidence supporting Green and Brock’s (2002) claim that high-quality narratives improve transportation. Certainly previous evidence offered preliminary support of this proposal (Gerrig & Prentice, 1991); however, it relied on the use of two narratives with objectively different levels of quality. The current work demonstrated that perceived quality could be manipulated using a single story, and that perceived quality had reliable effects on both feelings of enjoyment and transportation.

### Experiment 2

Our initial experiment revealed that peer evaluations impact the reading experience. However, participants in the study were given peer evaluations that were either uniformly favorable or unfavorable. In real-world feedback situations, consumers often face variable ratings for the same product (Gao, Gu, & Lin, 2006). In Experiment 2, we explored the effects of disconfirmed peer evaluations. To do so, after reading initial peer evaluations, participants read that a second group of their peers either agreed (confirmed) or disagreed (disconfirmed) with the initial evaluations. Confirmation of the initial evaluations should indicate that those evaluations were consensually shared and thus valid, and disconfirmation should suggest that the initial feedback was inaccurate (Mackie, 1987). Accordingly, based on previous work (e.g., Nabi & Hendriks, 2003), we expected that reading disconfirmed evaluations should attenuate the effect of initial evaluations on participants’ expectations and enjoyment. Moreover, encountering disconfirming information motivates perceivers to resolve the discrepancy, requiring exertion of cognitive resources (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991). Given the claims that transportation requires use of cognitive resources (e.g., Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008) and that inconsistencies prompt effortful processing (e.g., Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991), we hypothesized that the disconfirmed evaluations should enhance the experience of transportation felt when reading the narrative.

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Undergraduate students (77 men and 86 women), ranging in age from 18 to 53 years ($M = 19.83, SD = 3.33$), participated

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$^3$ The control condition reported enjoyment ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.69$) and transportation ($M = 4.28, SD = 0.98$) between the favorable and unfavorable evaluation participants. Tukey post hoc analyses revealed, however, that for both measures, neither was statistically different from this control condition, $ps > .20$. © 2011 Hogrefe Publishing
in exchange for partial course credit in an introductory psychology course. The experiment used a 2 (initial peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (meta-evaluation: confirmed or disconfirmed) between-subjects design with participants randomly assigned to conditions. A control condition involved reading no evaluations before the story.

Procedure

After entering the lab, participants were led to believe that the present experiment on short stories had collected data over multiple academic terms, involving three rounds of readers:

(a) the first round merely read and evaluated a target story (“initial evaluation”);
(b) the second round read the “initial evaluations” and the story and reported how well the initial evaluations described the story (“meta-evaluation”); and
(c) the current round of readers (i.e., the research participants of this study) would receive both sets of comments before reading the story.

Participants were informed that as part of the third and final round, their task during the study would be to read data collected from previous participants in both rounds, read the story, and assess the descriptions written by previous participants. Participants were told the overall goal of the study was to understand how people form different opinions when reading the same story.

After participants understood the purpose of the study, they read three initial evaluations that, as in Experiment 1, were either uniformly favorable or uniformly unfavorable, and ostensibly provided by participants in round one of the study. Participants then read the meta-evaluations from the “second round” readers, either confirming or disconfirming the initial evaluations they just read (see Appendix A). After providing their expectations, participants read the short story “Sunday in the Park” by Bel Kaufman (as in Experiment 1), completed measures of enjoyment and transportation, and were debriefed. A control condition was included in which participants received no previous evaluations of the story.

Results and Discussion

Expectations

A 2 (initial peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (meta-evaluation: confirmed or disconfirmed) ANOVA was conducted to examine effects on expectations. A main effect revealed that, as in Experiment 1, when participants read favorable initial evaluations they expected the story to be better ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.09$) than when they read unfavorable evaluations ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.41$), $F(1, 122) = 317.26, p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. The main effect was qualified by the expected interaction, indicating that expectations were most influenced by initial evaluations when such evaluations were confirmed by the meta-evaluation, $F(1, 122) = 110.54, p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .48$ (see Figure 2). Tukey post hoc analyses revealed that participants who read favorable initial peer evaluations with disconfirmed meta-evaluations reported expectations ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.06$) that were similar to those of participants in the control condition who received no prior information about the story ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.83$), $p = .10$, Cohen’s $d = 0.50$.\(^4\) However, participants given unfavorable evaluations that were similarly unsupported by meta-evaluations reported expectations ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.94$) significantly lower than those of participants in the control condition, $p < .05$, Cohen’s $d = 0.79$.

In line with research on the negativity bias (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin, & Royzman, 2001), it appears that negative expectations were not as readily adjusted after disconfirming evidence as were positive expectations.

Enjoyment and Psychological Transportation

As observed in Experiment 1, transportation and enjoyment were positively correlated, $r(163) = 0.64, p < .001$. To first consider how our manipulated variables affected participants’ experience of the narrative, we conducted a 2 (initial peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (meta-evaluation: confirmed or disconfirmed) MANOVA on enjoyment and transportation. Replicating the findings of Experiment 1, valence of the initial evaluation produced a main effect on both measures. Participants who read favorable initial evaluations reported greater enjoyment ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.29$) than those who read unfavorable evaluations,

\(^4\) A control condition, where participants received no peer evaluations reported expectations ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.83$) that were higher than either unfavorable evaluation, $p < .05$, and lower than the favorable, confirmed condition, $p < .001$; the mean expectation of those in the control condition was relatively similar to that of those in the favorable, unconfirmed condition ($p > .10$).
The main effect of valence on enjoyment, however, was qualified by a significant interaction of initial evaluation and meta-evaluation, $F(1, 122) = 5.36, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .05$. Tukey post hoc analyses revealed that the interaction was driven by responses of participants given confirmed, unfavorable evaluations of the story, who provided ratings that were significantly lower than those of participants in all other conditions ($p < .01$, Cohen’s $d > 0.35$; see Figure 3).

Turning to transportation, results of the MANOVA revealed that participants who received favorable initial evaluations reported greater transportation in the story ($M = 4.69, SD = 0.77$) compared with those who read unfavorable evaluations (transportation: $M = 4.37, SD = 0.67$), $F(1, 122) = 5.71, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .05$. Moreover, as predicted, results revealed a marginally significant effect of meta-evaluation, suggesting that participants given disconfirmed feedback were more transported ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.70$) than those given confirmed feedback ($M = 4.43, SD = 0.76$), $F(1, 122) = 3.61, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .03$.

Meta-evaluation did not significantly impact reported enjoyment, $F(1, 122) = 1.74, p > .10, \eta^2_p = .01$. Despite the strong relation between enjoyment and transportation, the main effect of meta-evaluation appeared to differentially affect the two experiences of the narrative. Thus to compare the effects on transportation and enjoyment, a 2 (initial peer evaluation: favorable or unfavorable) × 2 (meta-evaluation: confirmed or disconfirmed) × 2 (type of experience: enjoyment versus transportation) ANOVA was conducted to compare how the peer evaluations (between-subjects) differentially affected the entertainment experiences of enjoyment and transportation (within-subjects). Results revealed a significant three-way interaction, suggesting that the social information provided by the evaluations and meta-evaluations did differentially affect transportation and enjoyment, $F(1, 122) = 4.69, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .04$ (Figure 3). The different effects of evaluation and meta-evaluation on transportation compared with enjoyment suggest that the two entertainment experience concepts, though related, are indeed distinct. It appears that transportation is enhanced when readers are required to give additional attention to resolving cognitive inconsistency, but there is no comparable effect observed with the experience of enjoyment. Together, these findings suggest that transportation benefits from expenditure of cognitive resources.

**General Discussion**

In light of people’s tendency to look to other individuals around them as a source of information, particularly in the domain of entertainment media (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lee et al., 2006), the current experiments explored the effects of others’ opinions on people’s entertainment experience. Social influence can shape expectations, which in turn guide perception (Bruner, 1992). Armed with expectations for a narrative, a confirmation bias (e.g., Darley & Fazio, 1980; Nickerson, 1998; Snyder, & Swann, 1978) may guide readers’ attention during their exposure to a narrative, particularly when expectations were formed based on unfavorable social information (Experiment 1), as suggested by the negativity bias (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Smith et al., 2003). Moreover, expectations and feelings of enjoyment did not appear to recover from initial unfavorable social information, even when it is disconfirmed (Experiment 2).

The current studies examined enjoyment and psychological transportation, which previous researchers have suggested are related but distinct components of the entertainment experience (Green et al., 2004). Indeed, the valence of the initial evaluations had similar effects on both enjoyment and transportation. However, when those evaluations were disconfirmed, the effects diverged. Confronting an inconsistency may prompt individuals to exert cognitive efforts to resolve the discordant information (e.g., Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991). Investing cognitive resources into the narrative while reading appeared to translate into greater transportation, suggesting that the experience of transportation (but not enjoyment) benefits from considerable cognitive effort focused on the narrative experience (e.g., Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings regarding the impact of negative social information on expectations, perceptions, and experience suggest that unfavorable reviews may actually create evidence supporting the negative publicity. Additional studies should consider the limits of the impact of social information, such as source credibility. For instance, participants in Experiment 2 were told...
that both the evaluations and meta-evaluations were written by similar others (i.e., participants from a previous part of the study). Following Wiegman (1987), we might expect an attenuated effect if dissimilar others produced the meta-evaluations. In a similar fashion, directly asking participants to report their expectations may exaggerate the effect peer evaluations had on participants’ experience.

Experiment 2 also provided evidence for the involvement of cognitive resources, specifically invested in the narrative itself, in the transportation experience. This element of transportation may be meaningful in the context of narrative persuasion, in which transportation is suggested to be a mechanism of belief change following narrative exposure (Green & Brock, 2002). Accordingly, future studies should examine additional means of increasing cognitive effort during narrative exposure as well as consider the limitations of cognitive exertion. Indeed, there seems likely to be a point at which exerting cognitive resources becomes distracting to the transportation experience. Just as the Yerkes-Dodson law proposes an optimal level of arousal that may boost performance, transportation likely requires an optimal level of cognitive resources.

Although the current results have intriguing implications for social media, it is also important to note that the findings are limited to indirect measures of our variables, such as attention or use of cognitive resources. In Experiment 1, the measure of attention is based on participants’ description of story elements in their own written evaluation. It is possible that participants’ own evaluations were simply modeled after the initial evaluations they read. However, there is no prior evidence to suggest that modeling behavior is more likely to occur in the circumstances of negative behavior, as we observed in Experiment 1. Similarly, it is possible that in Experiment 2 the disconfirmation information produced a sense of controversy surrounding the narrative, which sparked participants’ curiosity, driving the transportation effects. The conceptual replication of these transportation effects can address this remaining ambiguity.

Conclusions

Building on previous research in social influence, perception, and entertainment experience, the current experiments provide a new examination of the consequences of gathering others’ opinions in our own entertainment experience. Clearly the prevalence of Internet search engines and Web 2.0-based applications providing information sharing and user feedback on entertainment media does more than direct our media choices (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lee et al., 2006). In fact, just as expectations shape our perception of the world (e.g., Bruner & Postman, 1949), so too can the opinions of others mold our experience of the world.

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Haylee DeLuca is a graduate of Ohio State University, completing her BA in psychology and English. She worked as an undergraduate research assistant in Robert Arkin’s lab, conducting research broadly related to the self in social contexts. Specifically, she worked on projects related to transportation in narratives, self-concept clarity in narratives, and self-handicapping and overachievement.

Bob Arkin is professor of social psychology at Ohio State University, where he has been undergraduate dean and social psychology graduate program coordinator, associate editor of the Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, and editor of Basic and Applied Social Psychology. He is editor of the recent (2011) volume Most Underappreciated: 50 Prominent Social Psychologists Describe Their Most Unloved Work (Oxford University Press) and the 2009 Handbook of the Uncertain Self (Psychology Press). His research is centered on the self in social interaction, with special reference to issues of motivation and achievement and social perception. Current research interests include self-handicapping, overachievement, the core construct linking these two (self-doubt), and personal security in the post-9/11 era.

Appendix A: Manipulations

Experiment 1

Excerpts of Opinions from “Previous Participants”:

Unfavorable – Character:

1: Characters were not very real or interesting.
2: And what was the deal with the characters? I just cannot imagine people would actually act that way.
3: Maybe it would’ve been better if the dad in the story had done something differently. But the mom was pretty lame, too, so I guess the characters just need to be scrapped.

Favorable – Plot:

1: The plot was realistic and interesting.
2: And the storyline was really cool. I could easily imagine things would really happen that way.
3: I really liked the part in the sandbox. The fighting was fascinating. I guess all of the events in the story were very well done.

Experiment 2

Initial Peer Evaluations

Unfavorable

1: The story was terrible. I didn’t enjoy reading it at all and thought it was awful writing. The author is not at all creative, and I didn’t like the characters at all.
2: I am usually a big fan of short stories, but this was the worst one I’ve ever read. It was not interesting and not fun to read. I cannot imagine anyone enjoying it.
3: It was a totally lame story. I hated it. There is no way I would read something like this again. Definitely a lousy story.

Favorable

1: The story was excellent. I greatly enjoyed reading it and thought it was written really, really well. The author is incredibly creative, and I loved the characters.
2: I am not a big fan of short stories usually, but this one was awesome. It was really interesting and fun to read. I imagine anyone could enjoy it.
3: It was a totally cool story. I liked it a lot. Certainly something I could read again and still enjoy. Definitely a great story.

Meta-Evaluations

Disconfirmed

1: I would say it was pretty inaccurate feedback.
2: I thought the critiques were bad. I feel they gave me the wrong idea about what the story would be like.

Confirmed

1: I would say it was pretty accurate feedback.
2: I thought the critiques were good. I feel they gave me the right idea about what the story would be like.
### Appendix B: Participants Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Sample participants’ comments</th>
<th>Mean valence rating&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Coded as discussing plot?</th>
<th>Coded as discussing characters?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable – Character</td>
<td>“I thought this story was not that interesting; the story is rather sad to me. I didn’t like how the father didn’t reason with the other boy’s father, he could at least put in a few words even though he would get interrupted. I thought the mother was useless too and at the end of the story she repeated what the other boy’s father said which showed that she is a follower and imitate people.” (P146)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-2.67</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable – Plot</td>
<td>“I didn’t really understand the point of the story. I mean maybe had they replaced the sandbox scene with something else, and I didn’t really know what to think of the little boy crying the whole way home. The story just didn’t really keep me interested it was kind of boring.” (P182)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-2.33</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable – Character</td>
<td>“I enjoyed this story. It kept my attention and made me interested in what would happen. The scene created a lot of anger in myself, as I wanted there to be justice. I felt like the family had a right to tell the other little boy not to throw sand. Overall, this was a good story and I would like to read the rest!” (P141)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable – Plot</td>
<td>“I thought the story was well written. I could imagine the characters and what was happening as I continued to read. I think the plot was developed and well-created, and I enjoyed the story.” (P168)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Scale: -3 = strongly negative comments, to 3 = strongly positive comments.  
<sup>b</sup>Refers to the Participant ID Number.

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