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The power of storytelling: How message type and media format affects consumers responses

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Dissertation written under the supervision of professor
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for
the MSc in Management with Specialization in Strategic
Marketing, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 05.01.2026.

Abstract

The power of storytelling: How message type and media format affects consumers responses

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In a media environment saturated with information, brands increasingly rely on storytelling to capture attention and forge emotional connections with consumers. This thesis explores how narrative (storytelling) versus informational advertising shapes consumer responses across affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, and whether these effects vary by media modality (text versus video). Drawing on theories of narrative persuasion, transportation, and emotional engagement, the research investigates not only whether storytelling is more persuasive than informational messaging, but also why it works.

A 2×2 between-subjects experiment (Message Type \times Modality) was conducted using carefully matched storytelling and informational advertisements for the same fictional brand. Participants ($N = 130$) completed scales measuring engagement, brand recall, brand attitude, purchase intention, narrative transportation and emotional response.

The findings reveal a consistent persuasive advantage for storytelling: narrative ads generated higher engagement, more favorable brand attitudes, and stronger purchase intentions than informational ones. These effects were largely mediated by emotional and narrative immersion, confirming the central predictions of the Transportation Imagery Model. However, modality did not significantly moderate these effects, indicating that the power of storytelling transcends format. Memory outcomes were more nuanced, storytelling enhanced recognition but not open recall, suggesting that emotional immersion aids associative rather than deliberate memory processes.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that storytelling influences consumers not simply through information, but by transforming brand messages into emotional and experiential journeys, reshaping how audiences connect, feel, and decide.

Keywords: Storytelling, Media modality, Message type, Advertising effectiveness, Narrative transportation, Emotional response

Resumo

O poder da narrativa: como o tipo de mensagem e o formato da mídia afetam as respostas dos consumidores

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Num ambiente saturado de informação, as marcas recorrem cada vez mais à narrativa (storytelling) para captar atenção e criar ligações emocionais com os consumidores. Esta tese investiga como a narrativa, em comparação com a publicidade informativa, molda as respostas dos consumidores nas dimensões afetiva, cognitiva e comportamental, e se esses efeitos variam conforme a modalidade mediática (texto vs. vídeo). Com base em teorias de persuasão narrativa, transporte e envolvimento emocional, o estudo analisa não apenas se a narrativa é mais persuasiva, mas também por que o é.

Foi conduzida uma experiência 2×2 entre sujeitos (Tipo de Mensagem × Modalidade), utilizando narrativas e anúncios informativos equivalentes para a mesma marca fictícia. Participaram 130 indivíduos, que preencheram escalas de envolvimento, recordação da marca, atitude em relação à marca, intenção de compra, transporte narrativo e resposta emocional.

Os resultados revelam uma vantagem persuasiva consistente da narrativa: os anúncios narrativos geraram maior envolvimento, atitudes mais favoráveis e intenções de compra mais fortes do que os informativos. Esses efeitos foram mediados pela imersão emocional e narrativa, confirmando as previsões do Modelo de Imagens de Transporte. A modalidade não moderou significativamente os efeitos, indicando que o poder da narrativa transcende o formato. A nível da memória, a narrativa melhorou o reconhecimento, mas não a recordação livre, sugerindo que a imersão emocional favorece processos associativos em vez de deliberativos.

Em suma, a narrativa transforma mensagens de marca em jornadas emocionais, remodelando como o público se conecta, sente e decide.

Palavras-chave: Narrativa, Modalidade de mídia, Tipo de mensagem, Eficácia publicitária, Transporte narrativo, Resposta emocional

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me throughout the development of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Cláudia Simão, for her guidance, availability, and valuable feedback throughout this process. Her insights, encouragement, and academic rigor were essential in shaping this work.

I am deeply grateful to my parents, my mother and my father, thank you for your unwavering belief in me, your patience, and your continuous motivation throughout my academic journey. To my brother, thank you for your support, perspective, and encouragement, which meant more than you may realize.

I would also like to thank my friends for their companionship, understanding, and support during this demanding period. Your encouragement, shared moments, and constant reminders to keep going made this journey both lighter and more meaningful.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge everyone who participated in the study and contributed their time to this research. Without their involvement, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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I. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the current digital era, audiences are exposed to an overwhelming amount of commercial messages every day (Basu et al., 2023). With attention spans shrinking and content constantly competing for visibility, marketers face the growing challenge of creating messages that do more than inform, they must engage, move, and stay memorable (R. Heath, 2012). The rise of social media and online video platforms has transformed how brands communicate, shifting the focus from delivering product information to building emotional connections and narrative experiences (Stephen, 2015). Modern consumers expect brands to speak to them in ways that feel authentic, relatable, and human. This shift has made emotion and storytelling central elements of contemporary marketing communication.

In contrast, traditional approaches often emphasized rational, information-based appeals, this means, ads that sought to convince through facts, logic, or product superiority (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). However, because of this shift in media consumption habits and cultural expectations, emotion has become a more decisive factor in influencing attitudes and behaviors (Basu et al., 2023). Therefore, advertisers increasingly design messages that make people feel something rather than simply think something. This transformation raises an important question: *what makes emotional and narrative messages so powerful, and under what conditions do they outperform more informational forms of advertising?*

Academic research over the past decades have explored this issue from various angles, comparing emotional and rational appeals and identifying contexts in which each performs best and much of the existing evidence focuses on the tone of emotion or the type of product being advertised, but fewer studies consider how organizing information within a story changes how people process and respond to it. On top of that, as advertising increasingly takes place in digital environments, the way audiences experience these messages depends heavily on the medium through which they are presented (Heeter, 2000). A message that works well in text form might not have the same impact when presented as a video or interactive post.

These gaps suggest that persuasion in digital marketing cannot be understood without examining the middle ground between message type and media format. Therefore, understanding how stories influence attitudes and emotions, and whether their impact changes between textual and audiovisual formats, is essential for both theory and practice.

1.2 Aim and Scope

The purpose of this study is to examine the persuasive effectiveness of storytelling compared to informational advertising within contemporary digital environments, and to clarify the psychological processes through which these effects occur. While storytelling has become an increasingly prominent strategy in digital marketing, empirical evidence explaining why and under what conditions it outperforms more informational approaches remains fragmented. This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing how consumers emotionally and cognitively respond to ads that differ in narrative structure and by assessing whether these responses depend on the modality through which the advertisement is delivered.

To achieve this, the study focuses on two core dimensions of digital advertising: the type of message (storytelling vs. informational) and the modality in which the message is presented (text vs. video). Storytelling is conceptualized as a message that conveys product-related information through a narrative featuring characters, conflict, and resolution, whereas informational advertising delivers equivalent content in a factual, feature-oriented format. By comparing these two structures, the study aims to determine which approach is more effective in generating engagement, improving recall, and influencing attitudes and behavioral intentions.

The scope of the research is defined by an experimental design that exposes participants to one of four controlled advertising stimuli. These stimuli are carefully matched in length, content, and brand cues, allowing differences in consumer responses to be attributed to variations in message structure and modality rather than unrelated factors. The study further investigates the psychological mechanisms underlying persuasion by examining two key mediators: narrative transportation, which reflects the degree to which individuals become mentally and emotionally immersed in the story world, and emotional response, which captures the affective reactions elicited by the advertisement.

By integrating these elements, the study seeks to provide a coherent and empirically grounded understanding of how narrative structure and media format jointly shape the persuasive impact of digital advertising. This contributes not only to academic discussions on advertising appeals and narrative persuasion but also to practical debates regarding how marketers can design more engaging and effective digital communication strategies.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Building on the theoretical background and the aims of the present research, the study focuses on three central questions that guide the empirical investigation. The first concerns whether storytelling generates stronger persuasive outcomes than informational advertising. Although narrative messages are widely believed to enhance engagement and emotional involvement, empirical evidence remains mixed, particularly in digital contexts where attention is highly fragmented. Understanding whether storytelling consistently produces higher levels of engagement, recall, and persuasion compared to a non-narrative, informational format represents an important contribution to current advertising research.

The second research question addresses the role of modality in shaping advertising effectiveness. Digital communication is inherently multimodal, and consumers frequently shift between text-based and video-based formats. Since modality influences the sensory richness, emotional intensity, and cognitive processing demands of a message, it is plausible that the relative advantage of storytelling depends on the format through which it is delivered. Investigating this interaction is essential for clarifying whether storytelling is universally superior, or whether its effectiveness emerges more strongly in certain modalities, particularly those that can amplify emotional expression and narrative immersion.

The third question explores the psychological mechanisms that may explain why storytelling influences consumer responses. The literature on narrative persuasion highlights narrative transportation and emotional responses as key pathways through which stories can affect beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Understanding whether these variables mediate the effects of message structure can provide insight into how and why storytelling shapes persuasion in digital environments.

These research questions are formalized into three main hypotheses:

H1. Storytelling advertisements will generate higher engagement, stronger brand recall, better brand attitude and more favorable purchase intention outcomes than informational advertisements.

- **H1a:** Storytelling ads will generate higher engagement outcomes than informational ads.
- **H1b:** Storytelling ads will generate higher brand recall outcomes than informational ads.
- **H1c:** Storytelling ads will generate higher brand attitude outcomes than informational ads.
- **H1d:** Storytelling ads will generate higher purchase intention outcomes than informational ads.

H2. The relative effectiveness of storytelling versus informational appeals will differ across modalities, such that the persuasive advantage of storytelling will depend on whether the message is delivered as text or video.

H3. The persuasive effects of storytelling will be mediated by narrative transportation and emotional response, with stories eliciting greater immersion and stronger affective reactions compared to informational messages.

Together, these hypotheses provide a clear analytical framework for the study. H1 addresses the fundamental comparison between narrative and informational structures; H2 introduces the moderating role of modality, acknowledging that digital formats may differentially enhance or constrain narrative processing; and H3 identifies the psychological mechanisms through which storytelling exerts its influence. This integrated approach enables the study to examine not only whether storytelling is more effective, but also how and under which conditions its persuasive impact emerges.

1.4 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on advertising effectiveness, digital persuasion, and narrative communication by integrating message structure, psychological mechanisms, and media modality into a single analytical framework. Although storytelling has become a dominant creative strategy in digital marketing, empirical

evidence explaining when and why it outperforms informational advertising remains dispersed across disciplines such as consumer psychology, communication, and media studies. By directly comparing narrative and informational message structures across different modalities, the present research offers a more coherent and systematic understanding of how these elements jointly shape consumer responses.

From a theoretical perspective, the study clarifies the conditions under which storytelling enhances engagement, memory, and persuasion. It extends existing work on narrative persuasion by demonstrating how transportation and emotional response operate within digital advertising contexts, in contrast to more traditional narrative settings such as long-form stories or entertainment media. Moreover, by examining modality as a contextual factor, the research highlights that the persuasive impact of storytelling is not uniform but may depend on the sensory and experiential affordances provided by different formats. This contributes to ongoing discussions on how message processing varies across text and video, and how multimodal communication influences both cognitive and affective responses.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for marketers and content creators seeking to design more effective digital advertising strategies. By identifying when storytelling provides a clear advantage over informational approaches, and by revealing the psychological pathways through which this advantage emerges, the study provides evidence-based guidance for crafting advertising that resonates emotionally and maintains consumer attention in competitive digital environments. Understanding how narrative structure and modality interact can help advertisers optimize creative decisions and tailor content to platforms that best support immersive and emotionally engaging experiences.

Overall, the study advances both theory and practice by offering a more integrated and empirically grounded account of how storytelling functions within modern digital advertising.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organized to provide a logical and coherent progression from theoretical foundations to empirical evidence and, finally, to practical and conceptual implications. Chapter 2 presents the literature review, exploring the

theoretical foundations of storytelling and informational advertising, as well as the psychological mechanisms underlying narrative persuasion. It examines how emotional and cognitive processes such as narrative transportation and emotional response influence consumer behavior and discusses the role of media modality in shaping message processing. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, describing the experimental design, sampling procedures, advertising stimuli, and measurement instruments used in the study. It also explains the rationale for the quantitative approach and the statistical analyses employed to test the hypotheses. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis, including manipulation checks, hypothesis testing, and mediation analyses. The chapter highlights key patterns and relationships observed between message type, modality, consumer responses and discusses the findings in the context of existing theory and research, emphasizing their theoretical and managerial implications for advertising and consumer psychology. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the main conclusions of the study, acknowledges its limitations, and offers directions for future research.

II. Literature review

2.1 Advertising Appeals in Marketing

Advertising appeals are among the most widely studied aspects of persuasive communication in marketing and consumer psychology, reflecting the strategic ways by which advertisers attempt to influence consumer attitudes and behavior (Yousef et al., 2021).

This study investigates the long-time distinction between emotional and rational appeals. Emotional appeals are designed to evoke affective responses such as happiness, fear, pride, or empathy. In contrast, rational appeals rely on factual arguments, product features, and logical reasoning to persuade consumers (Akbari, 2015). This dichotomy has guided decades of research, often with the aim of identifying which approach is most effective under different circumstances.

Similarly, research comparing these two types of appeals across different product and service categories suggests that their effectiveness often depends on what is being promoted and how people process the message (Bagozzi et al., 1999). For example, Zhang et al. (2014) found emotional appeals tend to be more persuasive for experience-based or hedonic services, where consumption is intangible and affective in nature, whereas rational appeals are more effective for credence-oriented services that rely on perceptions of expertise and credibility. Akbari (2015) further argued that emotional appeals engage consumers in low-involvement situations, where decisions are driven by gut feelings or quick impressions rather than analytical evaluation, while rational messages are better suited for high-involvement purchases requiring information-based justification.

Beyond the product itself, audience characteristics and psychological context also shape how persuasive a message is. While gender differences have often been cited in earlier studies of advertising effectiveness (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991), other work suggests that these differences are better interpreted as variations in cognitive and affective processing styles rather than fixed demographic traits (Ruiz & Sicilia, 2004). This shift highlights the idea that persuasion is not just about what is being said but also who is hearing it, and in what mindset.

The broader empirical evidence supports the idea that emotional appeals tend to outperform rational ones across various media environments. For instance, Yousef et al. (2021), in their systematic review of experimental studies, found that positive emotional stimuli, especially those eliciting joy, affection, or inspiration led to stronger emotional reactions and behavioral responses than information-dense messages. Similar conclusions emerge in research on digital advertising effectiveness: Nikolinakou and King (2018) reported that discrete positive emotions such as awe and affection drive greater engagement and virality in online video ads, while Tellis et al. (2019) observed that emotional narratives containing warmth, surprise, and dramatic elements were shared significantly more than informational videos. Berger and Milkman (2011) also found that emotionally arousing content, regardless of valence, increases online sharing because arousal motivates action, indicating that emotional intensity itself may serve as the key driver of virality.

However, these findings highlight other important nuances. The impact of emotional and rational appeals appears to depend on how they are executed and through which medium they are communicated (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). For instance, Tellis et al. (2019) showed that excessive brand prominence and overtly promotional cues can undermine the positive effects of emotional content, while the absence of narrative structure weakens viewer engagement. Similarly, Akbari (2015) noted that emotional appeals embedded in audiovisual formats are more persuasive than static print messages because video and sound can engage multiple senses and create a richer, more immersive experience. These studies collectively suggest that the success of emotional advertising depends as much on form as on content.

2.2 Storytelling in Advertising

Building on the broader debate between emotional and rational appeals, a growing body of research has examined storytelling as a unique and powerful advertising strategy (Woodside et al., 2008). Storytelling goes beyond merely evoking emotions or presenting facts, it relies on narrative structure to communicate brand meaning through characters, plots, and conflict–resolution arcs. This form of communication is thought to resonate with consumers because humans naturally process information in story form, making narratives easier to follow, more memorable, and more engaging than purely fact-based messages (Escalas, 2004). In marketing contexts, storytelling allows

consumers to situate the brand within a broader symbolic framework, creating opportunities for identification and meaning-making that extend beyond functional product attributes.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the persuasive advantages of storytelling compared to non-narrative or informational formats. For example, Escalas (2004) showed that narrative processing leads to stronger self-brand connections, as consumers mentally simulate themselves within the story and transfer affective meaning to the brand. An example of this is Kang et al. (2020), that directly compares storytelling and informational radio advertisements, finding that storytelling generated stronger positive emotions, increased narrative transportation, and enhanced word-of-mouth intentions.

Storytelling has also been theorized as a central mechanism through which brands build long-term relationships with consumers. Woodside et al. (2008) argue that consumers do not merely purchase products but also construct personal myths and identity narratives in which brands play symbolic roles. From this perspective, stories are not simply persuasive devices but part of how brands enter the consumer's cultural and psychological world. In this way, storytelling moves beyond the emotional vs. rational division by combining both elements into a unified, meaningful experience.

This idea is grounded in narrative processing theory, which holds that people naturally make sense of the world through stories rather than abstract logic (Green & Brock, 2000). Not only that but, Escalas (2004) introduced the concept of self-brand connections, showing that consumers use narrative processing to integrate brand messages into their own life stories. Later, Escalas (2007) demonstrated that narrative transportation and self-referencing enable consumers to connect brand messages to their self-concept, thereby forming self-brand connections. These connections arise because narratives allow individuals to mentally simulate experiences, placing themselves in the role of the protagonist.

Building on this, empirical research supports that storytelling elicits narrative engagement and emotional transportation, which in turn generate positive emotions such as empathy and inspiration, leading to more favorable brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions (Kang et al., 2020).

Finally, the relational dimension of emotionally charged content has been highlighted, as brand-related interactions on social media foster emotional attachments that enhance brand relationship quality and stimulate word-of-mouth behavior (Hudson et al., 2014). Storytelling thus not only persuades on an individual level but also cultivates relational outcomes, linking consumers to brands and to each other through shared affective experiences.

2.3 Narrative Persuasion Processes

The effectiveness of storytelling in marketing does not rely only on its structure or creative form but also on the psychological processes that explain how and why stories persuade. Previous research in psychology, communication, and marketing has shown that narratives influence people by transporting them into the story world, reducing resistance, and increasing emotional engagement (Green & Brock, 2000). This experience, known as narrative transportation, describes a state in which individuals become mentally and emotionally absorbed in a story, temporarily losing awareness of their surroundings while identifying with the characters and events.

Closely related to transportation is the role of emotional response in narrative persuasion. Stories often elicit affective reactions such as empathy, joy, sadness, or inspiration, which can become directly associated with the brand. Emotional responses not only enhance attention and memorability but also influence evaluation through affective transfer, whereby positive or negative emotions experienced during the narrative are projected onto the brand itself (Tellis et al., 2019). Research in digital marketing further demonstrates that emotionally arousing content is more likely to be shared, liked, and commented on, reinforcing the connection between emotion and engagement (Berger et al., 2023). Thus, both transportation and emotion are considered core mechanisms through which narrative advertising achieves its persuasive effects.

Alongside emotion, cognitive processes like mental imagery and simulation also contribute to persuasion. Tabbers et al. (2004) explained that stories engage both the verbal and visual systems of the brain, allowing information to be processed more deeply and remembered more effectively. This idea aligns with the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which states that people learn and retain information better when words and images are combined. Storytelling naturally uses this principle: by blending

verbal description, visuals, and emotion, it makes complex messages easier to process and recall (Mayer, 2024).

Another key mechanism is identification, the process of emotionally and cognitively adopting the perspective of a character (Cohen, 2001). When consumers identify with a character who reflects their values or who experiences a relatable transformation, they internalize that story as part of their own. Through identification and self-referencing, storytelling does more than persuade momentarily; it shapes how consumers think about themselves in relation to the brand. However, the social dimension of storytelling extends these effects beyond the individual level. For example, digital affective encounters are emotional exchanges that happen when consumers share and respond to emotionally charged content online (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2025). In this sense, storytelling ads not only persuade but also create shared emotional experiences that connect people to brands and to one another.

Still, narrative persuasion does not work equally in every situation. For example, persuasion knowledge and consumers awareness of advertising intent, may limit the impact of overly sentimental stories if they are perceived as manipulative (Tutaj & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). These factors highlight that while storytelling is a powerful strategy, its success depends on how well the story fits the audience and context.

Taken together, these studies show that by blending emotional and cognitive processes like transportation, identification, imagery, and arousal, that work together to draw consumers in, reduce resistance, and make brand messages memorable. However, the effectiveness of these psychological mechanisms can vary depending on the medium used to deliver the story (Grewal et al., 2021). Digital environments, in particular, introduce new challenges and opportunities because of their interactive and multimodal nature. The following section explores how media and modality affects shape the impact of storytelling and influence the way consumers emotionally and cognitively engage with advertising messages.

2.4 Media and Modality Effects

As mentioned previously in this study, the influence of storytelling on marketing does not depend only on the message itself, but also on the medium through which it is delivered. How people process and respond to a narrative can vary substantially

depending on whether it is presented as text, audio, video, or a combination of modalities (Shrum, 2003). This is particularly relevant in today's digital environment, where consumers encounter brand stories across different platforms and devices. Theories from cognitive psychology and communication, such as the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and the Media Richness Theory help explain why the form of media matters for persuasion (Mayer, 2024) (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Both suggest that richer media, those combining verbal, visual, and sometimes auditory cues, allow for deeper emotional and cognitive engagement. In advertising, this means that a narrative delivered through video, which combines images, sound, and storytelling, often elicits stronger emotional responses and better recall than the same story told through text alone (Ishii, 2019).

According to the dual-channel theory, humans process information through two main systems: one for verbal material and another for visual material. When these systems are activated together in a balanced way, learning and memory improve because information is encoded more deeply (Mayer, 2024). Storytelling in multimedia formats naturally takes advantage of this process, engaging viewers simultaneously through language, imagery, and sound. In contrast, when stories are presented in a single modality, such as text, they require greater cognitive effort and rely solely on the audience's imagination to generate mental imagery. Tabbers et al. (2004) found that well-designed multimedia presentations can reduce cognitive load by guiding attention and integrating information across sensory channels.

Media Richness Theory offers a complementary perspective. Originally developed to explain communication effectiveness in organizations, the theory proposes that richer media, those that provide immediate feedback, multiple cues, and personalization, are more effective in reducing ambiguity and increasing message clarity (Ishii, 2019). In a marketing context, this means that formats like video, interactive content, or immersive media such as augmented reality can convey both cognitive and affective information more effectively than static or text-based messages.

Emotional responses to stories are also shaped by modality. Research on online advertising has shown that video formats tend to elicit stronger emotional and behavioral reactions than static or text-based ones. Nikolinakou and King (2018) found that emotionally charged video ads were more likely to be shared and remembered,

especially when they triggered high-arousal positive emotions like awe and affection. Similarly, Tellis et al. (2019) analyzed large datasets of digital video ads and concluded that narratives with dramatic plots, emotional peaks, and audiovisual richness were significantly more likely to go viral than purely informational videos. These findings support the idea that the sensory and affective qualities of a medium interact with narrative content to amplify engagement. Berger and Milkman (2011) further demonstrated that the virality of online content is closely linked to emotional arousal, an effect that becomes even stronger in multimedia contexts where visuals and sound intensify feelings of excitement, joy, or inspiration (Heath et al., 2001).

However, not all effects of rich media are positive. High media richness can increase cognitive load when message elements are poorly integrated or overly complex (Sweller, 1994). Viewers may become distracted by visuals or sound effects that do not align with the core narrative, reducing comprehension and persuasion. This challenge is especially relevant in digital advertising, where attention spans are short and multitasking is common (Voorveld et al., 2018). The limited capacity model of mediated message processing suggests that audiences have finite cognitive resources available for processing media, and overstimulation can lead to superficial rather than deep engagement (Lang, 2000). Therefore, while video and interactive storytelling can be powerful, they must be designed carefully to guide attention and maintain coherence between narrative and emotion.

Another important factor in media effects is the social dimension of digital platforms. Emotionally rich brand stories shared through social media strengthen brand relationship quality and generate positive word-of-mouth (Dessart et al., 2015). As a result, narratives presented through audiovisual media do not just inform or entertain; they foster interpersonal and parasocial connections between consumers and brands (Russell et al., 2004). This social amplification effect reflects how emotional arousal elicited through vivid storytelling can enhance both the reach and engagement of advertising content in digital environments (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

2.5 Variables in Advertising Effectiveness

A central objective of advertising research is to understand how different message strategies influence consumer responses. In the context of this study, four dependent variables are examined: engagement, memory recall, brand attitude, and purchase

intention. These outcomes represent distinct but interconnected dimensions of advertising effectiveness.

Engagement is often conceptualized as a consumer's immediate attentional and motivational response to an advertisement, reflecting the extent to which the message captures interest and stimulates behavioral intentions such as liking, clicking, or sharing (Voorveld et al., 2018). Storytelling, with its narrative structure and emotional cues, has been shown to enhance engagement by creating a more immersive and affectively rich experience than informational appeals, which typically rely on factual claims (Kang, 2020).

Memory recall is a fundamental indicator of message processing depth. Advertising that facilitates narrative transportation or emotional arousal tends to generate stronger memory traces, because emotional and narrative content enhances elaboration and improves retrieval cues (Green & Brock, 2000). Storytelling may lead to superior recall compared to informational messaging, which often communicates product claims in a more abstract or decontextualized manner.

Brand attitude reflects a consumer's overall evaluation of the brand following message exposure. Research indicates that emotional and narrative content can positively influence brand attitudes by creating affective associations and fostering empathetic connections with characters or situations depicted in the story (Escalas, 2004). In contrast, informational appeals may shape brand evaluations through cognitive assessments of product attributes. Understanding which approach is more effective in digital contexts remains an open empirical question.

Finally, purchase intention captures a consumer's likelihood of considering or choosing the product. While both emotional and informational approaches can influence this outcome, narratives often operate indirectly by eliciting positive emotions and enhancing feelings of identification, whereas informational messages rely on perceived credibility and relevance of the featured attributes (Basu et al., 2023). Examining how message structure affects purchase intention in digital environments is essential for evaluating practical effectiveness.

In combination, these dependent variables allow for a comprehensive assessment of how message type (storytelling vs informational advertising) influences key stages of

the persuasion process, from attention and emotional involvement to attitude formation and behavioral intentions.

Also, in digital advertising research, modality refers to the format through which a message is delivered, most commonly text or video. Modality functions as a contextual factor that shapes how consumers process message content, influencing emotional intensity, cognitive load, and engagement levels (Heeter, 2000).

Video formats provide dynamic sensory cues, including motion, sound, facial expressions, and visual storytelling, which can enhance emotional arousal and facilitate transportation into the narrative world (Ishii, 2019). In contrast, text-based advertisements rely on the reader's cognitive processing and imagination, potentially leading to less vivid emotional experiences but sometimes enabling more reflective elaboration.

Because storytelling depends heavily on immersion, emotional resonance, and narrative coherence, its persuasive impact may be amplified in video formats but attenuated in text. On the other hand, informational messages may benefit less from audiovisual enhancement, as their effectiveness relies more on argument strength and clarity than on emotional delivery.

Thus, modality is expected to moderate the relationship between message type and persuasive outcomes, shaping when and how storytelling yields advantages over informational advertising.

In addition, narrative transportation and emotional response represent two well-established mechanisms through which storytelling exerts persuasive effects.

Narrative transportation describes a state of cognitive and emotional immersion in a story, characterized by focused attention, mental imagery, and reduced counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000). When consumers experience high transportation, they are more likely to accept implicit messages, form positive brand associations, and recall narrative details. Storytelling naturally fosters this immersion by presenting characters, conflicts, and resolutions that structure the message in a meaningful and relatable way.

Emotional response refers to the affective reactions elicited by the advertisement, such as inspiration, warmth, or uplift. Emotional content enhances persuasion by increasing

message memorability, promoting positive affect that transfers to the brand, and facilitating heuristic processing (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). Stories often evoke emotion more effectively than informational messages, because narrative elements enable viewers to empathize with characters and experience events vicariously.

Together, transportation and emotional response are expected to mediate the relationship between message type and the dependent variables. Storytelling should increase both mechanisms, which in turn should enhance engagement, recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

2.6 Overview of the literature

Overall, the literature indicates that advertising effectiveness emerges from the interaction between message structure, psychological mechanisms, and media modality. Storytelling appears particularly promising because it strengthens emotional responses and facilitates narrative transportation, two processes shown to enhance memory, attitude formation, and behavioral intentions. Yet, the extent of storytelling's advantage over informational advertising is shaped by modality. Video formats typically provide greater sensory richness and emotional intensity, which can deepen immersion and amplify narrative effects, whereas text-based formats may constrain these mechanisms and lead to more limited persuasive outcomes.

These insights reveal that message structure alone cannot fully explain advertising effectiveness; rather, its impact depends on the psychological processes it activates and the format through which it is delivered. This integrated understanding directly motivates the research questions and hypotheses that guide the present study:

H1. Storytelling advertisements will generate higher engagement, stronger brand recall, better brand attitude and more favorable purchase intention outcomes than informational advertisements.

- **H1a:** Storytelling ads will generate higher engagement outcomes than informational ads.
- **H1b:** Storytelling ads will generate higher brand recall outcomes than informational ads.
- **H1c:** Storytelling ads will generate higher brand attitude outcomes than informational ads.

- **H1d:** Storytelling ads will generate higher purchase intention outcomes than informational ads.

H2. The relative effectiveness of storytelling versus informational appeals will differ across modalities, such that the persuasive advantage of storytelling will depend on whether the message is delivered as text or video.

H3. The persuasive effects of storytelling will be mediated by narrative transportation and emotional response, with stories eliciting greater immersion and stronger affective reactions compared to informational messages.

III. Methodology

3.1 Sample description

The final sample consisted of 130 participants who completed the experiment after data cleaning procedures were applied. The age distribution of the sample was relatively young, ranging from 18 to 50 years old. The largest proportion of respondents fell between 22 and 26 years old, with age 24 representing the modal category (21.5% of the sample).

Regarding gender, the sample was composed of 56.2% male participants ($n = 73$), 42.3% female participants ($n = 55$), and 1.5% who preferred not to disclose their gender ($n = 2$). This distribution reflects a reasonably balanced gender composition and does not indicate any strong demographic skew that would limit the general interpretation of the findings within the context of young adult consumers.

Educational levels varied but were generally high. Half of the participants (50%) reported completing a college degree, while 29.2% had attained a postgraduate qualification (e.g., master's degree or PhD). An additional 17.7% reported having a high-school education or below, and 3.1% selected "other."

3.2 Research design and rationale

This study employed an experimental research design to examine how different types of advertising messages influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Specifically, a 2×2 between-subjects experiment was conducted to test the effects of message type (storytelling vs informational) and media modality (text vs video) on several persuasion-related outcomes. The design was chosen because it allows for direct causal testing of how each independent variable, as well as their interaction, influences dependent variables such as emotional response, narrative transportation, and purchase intention.

The study used a between-subjects structure, meaning each participant was exposed to only one of the four possible experimental conditions. This approach minimized carryover effects such as familiarity or fatigue that could occur if participants viewed multiple advertisements. It also replicated real-world exposure, where individuals

typically encounter a single version of an ad at a time rather than making side-by-side comparisons. Random assignment to conditions ensured that any differences in responses could be attributed to the manipulations rather than pre-existing participant characteristics.

Four versions of an advertisement were developed for a fictional brand named *Evoqua*. A fictional brand was used to eliminate potential bias from pre-existing attitudes. The ads were created to reflect the two independent variables: message type (storytelling vs informational) and media modality (text vs video). This produced four conditions:

1. Storytelling in text format
2. Storytelling in video format
3. Informational in text format
4. Informational in video format

All four ads were identical in visual identity and overall tone to ensure that message type and format were the only differences. The informational versions focused on factual descriptions of the product's features and benefits, written in a clear, logical style. The storytelling versions embedded the product information in a short narrative about a relatable character, designed to evoke empathy and emotional engagement.¹²

The video stimuli were short clips of approximately 30 to 40 seconds, featuring a consistent voice-over narration and visuals that paralleled the text versions in content but added sound and imagery for richer emotional appeal. The text stimuli were formatted as short online ads or sponsored posts, matching the word count and content of the video narrations.

The experiment was conducted online using Qualtrics, which allowed for random assignment and consistent delivery of stimuli. After accessing the survey link, participants were first presented with an informed consent form describing the purpose of the study, expected duration, and their rights. Those who agreed proceeded to the experiment, where Qualtrics automatically assigned them to one of the four conditions.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lyqb6VaEoYk> – Narrative advertisement

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sYYCtQG0IA> – Informational advertisement

Participants first viewed their assigned ad stimulus, either the text or video version of the storytelling or informational advertisement. Immediately afterward, they completed a post-exposure questionnaire measuring emotional response, narrative transportation, brand attitude, behavioral intention, and demographic information. The survey took approximately 8–10 minutes to complete. No identifying information was collected, and participants could withdraw at any time.

3.3 Variables

All constructs in this study were assessed using established or adapted self-report scales commonly employed in advertising and consumer psychology research. Unless otherwise specified, all items were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the construct. The following section details the operationalization and theoretical basis of each variable included in the study.

The independent variables were message type and media modality, both of which were experimentally manipulated. Message type distinguished between storytelling and informational advertising: participants were randomly assigned to view either a narrative-based advertisement or an informational advertisement for the same fictional brand. Media modality was manipulated to test whether the persuasive impact of message type varied by presentation format. Participants viewed either a written (text-based) version or an audiovisual (video-based) version of the same advertisement, allowing for comparison of narrative processing across media formats.

The study included four dependent variables: engagement, brand recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Engagement captured participants’ immediate attention and behavioral inclination toward the ad, measured using two items adapted from Hollebeek et al. (2014): “I found the ad interesting” and “I would be likely to click, like, or share this ad.”. Higher mean scores indicated greater engagement.

Brand recall was measured through two complementary indicators reflecting both spontaneous and assisted memory. The first, recall performance, was an open-ended task in which participants wrote down everything they remembered about the advertisement. Responses were coded on a 0–3 scale based on the number of key elements correctly recalled, including the brand name, message theme, product benefits,

and contextual details. The second measure, recognition accuracy, was a recognition-based recall task in which participants selected correct statements describing elements of the ad from a mixed list. Scores again ranged from 0 to 3, reflecting the number of accurate options selected.

Brand attitude was measured using a single evaluative item, “How would you evaluate this brand overall?”. Although brief, prior research demonstrates that single-item brand attitude measures can be both reliable and valid when the construct is clearly defined and unidimensional (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007).

Purchase intention was assessed with three items adapted from Spears and Singh (2004): “I would consider purchasing this product,” “I would be likely to try this product in the future,” and “The product seems like something I would use.” Responses were averaged to form a purchase intention index, a widely validated measure in consumer research demonstrating strong internal consistency in prior studies.

Two mediator variables were included: narrative transportation and emotional response. Narrative transportation was assessed with two items adapted from Green and Brock’s (2000) Narrative Transportation Scale, “I was mentally involved in the story of the ad” and “I could relate to the emotions shown in the ad”, capturing both cognitive and affective immersion in the narrative. Emotional response was measured using four items adapted from the Holbrook and Batra (1987) affective response scale: “The ad made me feel positive,” “I felt inspired,” “The ad made me feel uplifted,” and “I was emotionally affected by the ad.” These items captured positive affect and emotional arousal in response to the advertisement.

Finally, modality functioned as a categorical moderator embedded in the experimental design. Because participants were directly assigned to one of the two formats, no measurement scale was required. The moderator tested whether the relative persuasive effects of storytelling varied according to the sensory richness and emotional cues provided by different media formats.

IV. Results & Discussion

4.1 Data cleaning

Before conducting any statistical analysis, the dataset was examined for completeness and data quality. The initial dataset contained all responses collected through the online questionnaire; however, some cases displayed issues that compromised data integrity. These included incomplete submissions and missing values in key variables. Following standard data-screening procedures, such cases were removed prior to analysis.

After this screening process, the final sample consisted of 130 valid participants, and all subsequent analyses were conducted using this cleaned dataset. No cases were removed due to outlier responses on the main dependent variables, as all values fell within acceptable ranges and did not compromise normality or model stability.

Composite scores were then computed for all multi-item constructs. Reliability analyses were performed using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. The narrative transportation scale showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .74$), indicating adequate coherence among its items. Emotional response demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$), suggesting that the items effectively captured participants' affective reactions to the advertisement. Engagement also showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .71$). Finally, purchase intention exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = .89$), supporting the computation of a single composite score.

Several measures in the study were not multi-item and therefore did not require reliability testing. Brand attitude was assessed using a single item, making internal consistency analysis inappropriate. Additionally, the two memory-related variables, brand recall and brand recognition, did not represent unidimensional latent constructs. Brand recall was assessed through a combination of an open-ended question and a factual selection task, while recognition was measured through a "select all that apply" format. Because these measures rely on accuracy rather than latent trait consistency, Cronbach's alpha was not applicable.

Overall, the data cleaning procedure ensured that the final dataset was complete, reliable, and appropriate for inferential statistical analyses. All variables retained for

subsequent analyses demonstrated adequate psychometric properties, and no major violations of data quality were identified.

4.2 Descriptive impact of the advertisements

Descriptive statistics indicate a moderate overall level of engagement with the stimuli, with scores ranging from 1 to 7 ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.40$). This distribution shows that while the advertisements elicited engagement across the full-scale range, most responses clustered around the midpoint, suggesting that participants were neither highly disengaged nor uniformly immersed in the ads.

Related constructs that reflect how participants processed the advertisements were also examined. Emotional response scores ranged from 1.60 to 6.60 ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.15$), indicating that the ads generally elicited a moderately positive affective reaction. Narrative transportation, another indicator of psychological engagement, ranged from 1 to 7 ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.45$), reflecting a similar level of immersive involvement. Together, these patterns suggest that although the advertisements varied in format and message type, participants experienced a consistent degree of personal involvement across stimuli.

Participants also evaluated the advertised brand following exposure. Brand attitude produced a mean evaluation of 5.19 ($SD = 1.20$), indicating that impressions of the brand were generally positive. Furthermore, participants reported moderate purchase intention ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.17$), suggesting that the advertisements successfully generated some degree of behavioral motivation.

Finally, participants' memory performance provides an additional indicator of engagement with the content. Recognition accuracy ranged from 0 to 3 correct answers ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.77$), while recall performance ranged from 0 to 3 ($M = 1.55$, $SD = 0.95$). These results indicate that, although the advertisements did not produce exceptionally high levels of memory retention, participants generally recalled and recognized a moderate amount of brand-related information.

Taken together, these descriptive findings show that the advertisements generated meaningful but not extreme levels of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. The consistency across the various engagement-related indicators supports the

suitability of these measures for the inferential analyses presented in the following sections.

4.3 Overview of Message Type and Modality Effect

It is important to understand how the two experimental factor-message type (storytelling vs. informational) and modality (text vs. video) were distributed across the sample and whether any patterns emerged in how participants experienced the stimuli. Participants' descriptive responses help illustrate initial trends related to message type and modality. Affective and cognitive indicators, such as emotional response ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.15$), narrative transportation ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.45$), and engagement ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.40$), show enough variability to suggest that the ads elicited different levels of involvement depending on format and message characteristics. Similarly, brand-related outcomes, including brand attitude ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.20$) and purchase intention ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.17$), indicate that participants reacted differently to the ads even before conducting the formal hypothesis tests.

Memory outcomes also presented variability that is relevant to the experimental conditions. Recognition accuracy ($M = 2.34$, $SD = .77$) and recall performance ($M = 1.55$, $SD = .95$) suggest that modality or message type may influence how effectively participants encoded and retrieved information from the ads. These descriptive patterns align with theoretical expectations from narrative persuasion and multimedia learning research, which predict differences between storytelling and informational formats and between video and text modalities.

These observations support the suitability of the dataset for examining the combined and independent effects of message type and modality. The variability in participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses indicates that the experimental manipulations were capable of producing measurable differences.

4.4 Participants' Perceptions of the Advertisements

Before testing the main hypotheses, participants' perceptions of the advertisements were examined to ensure that the experimental manipulation functioned as intended. Four manipulation-check items assessed whether respondents interpreted the ads in line with

the storytelling or informational conditions. Independent samples t-tests were conducted with Message Type as the independent variable.

First, no significant difference was found in the extent to which participants reported paying close attention to the advertisement, $t(128) = -1.13$, $p = .26$. This indicates that attention levels did not differ between conditions, suggesting that any differences observed in later analyses cannot be attributed to unequal attentiveness.

As expected, participants in the storytelling condition perceived the ads as significantly more focused on a character or situation than those in the informational condition, $t(128) = 6.68$, $p < .001$. This confirms that the storytelling ads were recognized as narrative driven. Conversely, participants exposed to informational ads strongly agreed that the ad mainly listed product features and facts, with scores significantly higher than those in the storytelling condition, $t(128) = -7.40$, $p < .001$, confirming that the informational manipulation was effective.

Finally, participants in the storytelling condition reported significantly higher perceptions of narrativity compared to those in the informational condition, $t(128) = 7.67$, $p < .001$, confirming that the manipulation effectively distinguished between narrative and non-narrative advertisements.

Overall, these results demonstrate that the stimuli were perceived in accordance with their assigned conditions. Storytelling ads were evaluated as more narrative, character-focused, and story-based, while informational ads were recognized as more feature-oriented and factual. The absence of differences in self-reported attention further reinforces the validity of the manipulation, ensuring that subsequent differences in emotional response, engagement, brand attitude, memory outcomes, or behavioral intentions can be attributed to the message type manipulation rather than to differential attention.

4.5 Correlation between main variables

To explore the relationships among the main study variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the mediators (Emotional Response and Transportation) and the key dependent variables (Engagement, Purchase Intention, Brand Recall, and Brand Attitude). Brand Recall was measured using two indicators: Recognition accuracy and Recall performance.

Table 1 - Correlation between main variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emotional Response	4.21	1.15	-					
Transportation	4.37	1.45	.77**	-				
Engagement	4.46	1.40	.38***	.27**	-			
Purchase intention	5.01	1.17	.49**	.44**	.41**	-		
Recognition accuracy	2.34	0.77	.23**	.19**	.25**	.30**	-	
Recall performance	1.55	0.95	-.03	.09	.09	.01	.07	-
Brand attitude	5.19	1.20	.53**	.49**	.39**	.51**	.21*	.16

As shown in the table above, emotional response was strongly correlated with narrative transportation ($r = .77, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who reported stronger emotional reactions also experienced higher immersion in the advertising narratives. Emotional response was also positively associated with engagement ($r = .38, p < .001$), purchase intention ($r = .49, p < .001$), and brand evaluation ($r = .53, p < .001$). These results align with previous findings showing that affective reactions enhance message involvement and attitudinal outcomes (Escalas, 2004).

Narrative transportation was further correlated with engagement ($r = .27, p = .002$), purchase intention ($r = .44, p < .001$), and brand evaluation ($r = .49, p < .001$). These relationships indicate that individuals who were more immersed in the story reported higher engagement with the ad, greater willingness to purchase, and more positive evaluations of the featured brand.

Engagement, in turn, was significantly related to both purchase intention ($r = .41, p < .001$) and brand evaluation ($r = .39, p < .001$), suggesting that engagement functions as a psychological bridge between emotional and cognitive processing and more behavioral or attitudinal outcomes.

Recognition accuracy was modestly but significantly correlated with emotion ($r = .23, p = .008^*$), engagement ($r = .25, p = .004^*$), and purchase intention ($r = .30, p < .001^*$).

These results indicate that participants who felt more emotionally and cognitively involved with the ad were also more likely to correctly recognize the advertised brand.

By contrast, Recall performance did not correlate significantly with any of the psychological or behavioral variables ($p > .05$). This absence of correlation is not uncommon: free recall is a more cognitively demanding task and less sensitive to the emotional and narrative aspects of message processing (Green & Brock, 2000). Recognition, on the other hand, requires less retrieval effort and is more directly affected by emotional engagement and narrative involvement.

Finally, brand evaluation was positively correlated with all key predictors, emotional response, transportation, engagement, and purchase intention, supporting the idea that emotionally rich and narratively immersive advertising experiences lead to more favorable brand attitudes and stronger purchase intentions.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing

Testing H1: Main Effects of Message Type

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that storytelling advertisements would be more effective than informational advertisements across four key outcomes: engagement (H1a), brand recall (H1b), brand attitude (H1c), and purchase intention (H1d). A series of two-way ANOVAs with Message Type and Modality as between-subjects factors were conducted to evaluate these predictions. The results reported below focus on the effects of Message Type relevant to H1.

For H1a, results showed a significant main effect of Message Type on engagement, indicating that storytelling advertisements generated higher engagement than informational ones, $F(1, 126) = 15.96, p < .001$. Participants exposed to storytelling ads reported stronger involvement and attentional absorption, consistent with the idea that narratives naturally foster deeper cognitive and emotional processing than factual messages. Consequently, H1a is supported.

Turning to H1b the analysis revealed a mixed situation in which the effect on recall score was not statistically significant, $F(1, 126) = 0.64, p = .43$, indicating that storytelling advertisements did not enhance unaided brand recall relative to informational ones. However, when considering recognition accuracy as a

complementary indicator of memory, the effect of Message Type was significant, $F(1, 126) = 12.53, p < .001$. This suggests that storytelling improved recognition-based memory but not open recall performance. These results provide partial support for H1b, indicating that storytelling facilitates recognition rather than free recall.

The pattern for H1c also aligned with expectations. Participants who viewed storytelling ads reported significantly more positive brand attitudes than those who viewed informational ads, $F(1, 126) = 7.29, p = .01$. This suggests that narratives do not merely influence how people process the advertisement but also shape global evaluations of the brand. Story-based messages produced fuller, more affectively rich impressions, and these impressions translated into more favorable brand judgments. These findings support H1c.

Finally, H1d showed a significant main effect of Message Type on purchase intention, $F(1, 126) = 4.56, p = .04$, indicating that participants exposed to storytelling ads were more likely to express willingness to purchase the brand than those who viewed informational ads. This finding suggests that the positive cognitive and affective responses elicited by storytelling can extend to behavioral intentions, even within a single-exposure context.

As a whole, the results indicate that storytelling advertisements are more effective than informational ones in shaping engagement, recognition-based recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention, whereas their impact on unaided recall remains limited. Thus, H1a, H1b (partially), H1c, and H1d are supported. This overall pattern suggests that the advantages of storytelling lie primarily in fostering deeper processing, facilitating recognition, improving brand evaluations, and strengthening purchase intentions, even if spontaneous brand recall is not significantly affected.

Testing H2: Interaction Between Message Type and Modality

The second hypothesis (H2) proposed that the effectiveness of storytelling versus informational messages would differ depending on the modality in which the advertisement was presented, anticipating a significant interaction between Message Type and Modality. The hypothesis assumed that storytelling would be particularly effective in video format, where audiovisual cues could enhance immersion, while informational messages might perform relatively better in text format. To evaluate this,

two-way ANOVAs were conducted for each dependent variable. Across the outcomes, the results did not support H2.

For engagement, the Message Type \times Modality interaction reached statistical significance, $F(1,126) = 4.04$, $p = .047$, but storytelling wasn't especially effective in video compared to text. Therefore, although statistically significant, this interaction does not provide evidence supporting H2.

For brand recall, the two recall-related measures were examined separately. For Recall performance, the interaction between Message Type and Modality was not significant, $F(1,126) < 1.00$, $p = .98$, indicating that the ability to freely recall brand information did not differ across text or video formats for either message type. For Recognition accuracy the interaction reached statistical significance, $F(1,126) = 4.497$, $p = .04$. Recognition accuracy did not peak in the video-storytelling condition; instead, the pattern across conditions was inconsistent with the predicted modality-dependent narrative advantage, meaning that this significant interaction also fails to support H2.

Brand attitude similarly showed no evidence of an interaction, $F(1,126) = 0.73$, $p = .39$, demonstrating that the positive effect of storytelling on brand evaluations was stable across modalities rather than amplified in video format.

The same was true for purchase intention, where the interaction was non-significant, $F(1,126) = 0.05$, $p = .82$, indicating that modality did not alter the persuasive effect of message type.

These results offer no support for H2. While two interactions (engagement and recognition accuracy) reached significance, neither aligned with the theoretical prediction that video would strengthen the impact of storytelling relative to informational content. Instead, the findings indicate that the persuasive advantage of storytelling operates similarly across textual and video formats, and modality alone does not substantially modify the relative effectiveness of narrative versus informational advertising.

Testing H3: Mediation Effects

It was stated in H3 that the persuasive effects of storytelling advertising would be mediated by narrative transportation and emotional response. To test this, a series of

simple mediation analyses were conducted in PROCESS (Model 4), using Message Type as the predictor, transportation or emotional response as the mediator, and each key outcome variable, engagement, brand attitude, purchase intention, brand recognition and brand recall, as the dependent variables. Indirect effects were evaluated with bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals; mediation is considered present when the confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero.

For engagement, both mediators behaved as expected and provided strong support for H3. Storytelling significantly increased transportation (*a*-path: $b = 0.74, p = .003$), and higher transportation, in turn, predicted greater engagement ($b = 0.19, p = .03$). The indirect effect of Message Type on engagement through transportation was significant, $b = 0.14$, BootSE = 0.08, 95% CI [0.01, 0.32], indicating that part of the engagement advantage of storytelling over informational ads operates via increased immersion in the narrative. Emotional response showed a similar pattern: storytelling produced stronger emotional reactions ($b = 0.96, p < .001$), and emotional response positively predicted engagement ($b = 0.37, p = .001$). The indirect effect of Message Type on engagement through emotional response was again significant and somewhat larger in magnitude, $b = 0.35$, BootSE = 0.14, 95% CI [0.12, 0.66]. When emotional response was included in the model, the direct effect of Message Type on engagement dropped to marginal significance ($p = .06$), consistent with substantial mediation. Together, these results indicate that storytelling enhances engagement primarily because it makes participants feel more immersed and emotionally involved in the ad.

For brand attitude, the results were again clear. When emotional response was entered as the mediator, storytelling significantly increased emotional response ($b = 0.96, p < .001$), and emotional response strongly predicted more favorable brand attitudes ($b = 0.55, p < .001$). The indirect effect of Message Type on brand attitude through emotional response was significant, $b = 0.49$, BootSE = 0.13, 95% CI [0.26, 0.78]. Importantly, the direct effect of Message Type on brand attitude became non-significant once emotional response was controlled ($b = 0.02, p = .923$), indicating full mediation: storytelling improves brand evaluations entirely through the emotional reactions it elicits. Transportation also played a mediating role for brand attitude. Storytelling increased transportation ($p = .003$), transportation positively predicted brand attitude ($b = 0.39, p < .001$), and the indirect effect via transportation was significant, $b = 0.29$, BootSE = 0.10, 95% CI [0.09, 0.50]. In this case the direct path from Message Type to

brand attitude was already relatively weak and remained non-significant when transportation was included ($p = .15$), again consistent with a primarily indirect storytelling effect.

A similar pattern emerged for purchase intention, where both mediators carried the effect of Message Type on participants' willingness to consider buying the product. In the transportation model, storytelling increased transportation ($p = .003$) and transportation strongly predicted higher purchase intention ($b = 0.34, p < .001$). The indirect effect of Message Type on purchase intention through transportation was significant, $b = 0.25$, BootSE = 0.11, 95% CI [0.07, 0.49]. Once transportation was included, the direct effect of Message Type on purchase intention was not significant ($b = 0.16, p = .39$), suggesting that storytelling's persuasive advantage operates largely through increasing immersion. The emotional-response model showed an even stronger pattern: emotional response was strongly predicted by Message Type ($p < .001$) and strongly predicted purchase intention ($b = 0.51, p < .001$), yielding a substantial and significant indirect effect, $b = 0.49$, BootSE = 0.13, 95% CI [0.25, 0.77]. Again, the direct effect of Message Type on purchase intention became non-significant ($b = 0.07, p = .725^*$), consistent with full mediation via emotional response.

By contrast, no evidence of mediation was found for the memory outcomes, brand recall and brand recognition. For recall, neither transportation nor emotional response significantly predicted recall performance once Message Type was included in the model (all p 's $> .12$), and the corresponding indirect effects were not significant: for transportation, $b = 0.06$, BootSE = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.15]; for emotional response, $b = 0.00$, BootSE = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.14, 0.15]. Similarly, for recognition accuracy, the paths from the mediators to recognition were non-significant, and the bootstrapped indirect effects again included zero: for transportation, $b = 0.05$, BootSE = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.14]; for emotional response, $b = 0.09$, BootSE = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.24]. Although storytelling did directly improve recognition (Message Type \rightarrow recognition: $b = 0.39, p = .007$ in the transportation model and $b = 0.35, p = .02$ in the emotional-response model), these memory benefits were not statistically explained by either transportation or emotional response.

The mediation analyses provide partial support for H3. For the evaluative and persuasive outcomes, engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention, both narrative

transportation and emotional response consistently mediated the effect of storytelling versus informational advertising, often rendering the direct effects of Message Type non-significant when the mediators were included. This pattern suggests that storytelling works primarily by immersing audiences in the message and eliciting stronger emotional reactions, which in turn foster more favorable attitudes and greater purchase intentions. However, H3 was not supported for the memory outcomes: although storytelling improved recognition (and did not harm recall), these effects were not carried by transportation or emotional response. In summary, narrative mechanisms appear to be central to the attitudinal and behavioral impact of storytelling ads, but less important for basic memory for brand-related information.

4.7 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how storytelling versus informational advertising influences consumer responses across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and whether these effects differ depending on the modality of presentation. Additionally, the study tested whether two central narrative mechanisms, emotional response and narrative transportation, mediate the persuasive impact of storytelling. Overall, the findings provide robust evidence that storytelling holds a persuasive advantage over informational messaging, though not in all domains, and that this advantage operates largely through audience immersion and emotion. At the same time, the results highlight important boundary conditions, particularly regarding memory and the role of modality.

The first hypothesis predicted that storytelling advertisements would outperform informational ads across four key outcomes: engagement, brand recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention. This expectation was grounded in extensive prior research suggesting that narrative formats foster deeper psychological involvement (Green & Brock, 2000) and shift cognitive processing away from counterarguing and toward experiential simulation (Escalas, 2004).

Consistent with prior work, the present results strongly support the persuasive advantage of storytelling. Story ads produced significantly higher engagement, indicating that narrative structure more effectively captured and sustained attention. Storytelling also generated significantly more positive brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions, consistent with theories suggesting that narratives create affective

bonds with characters, thereby increasing feelings of identification, warmth, and liking that transfer to the brand (Escalas & Stern, 2003).

However, the findings for brand recall were more nuanced. While recognition was significantly higher for storytelling compared to informational ads, open-ended brand recall did not differ across message types. This aligns with the argument that narratives, while emotionally compelling, may sometimes reduce the salience of factual brand information embedded in the story (Krause-Galoni & Rucker, 2023). In other words, narratives improve recognition of brand elements that are passively encoded during exposure, but they do not necessarily enhance the ability to actively retrieve those details from memory later.

The second hypothesis proposed that the effectiveness of storytelling would depend on whether the content was presented in text or video format. The theoretical justification stemmed from modality-specific arguments: video should theoretically enhance narrative immersion due to the richness of audiovisual cues (Green & Brock, 2000), whereas text might benefit informational messages by reducing cognitive load and allowing for more controlled processing.

Contrary to the initial expectations, the findings did not provide evidence for H2. Across nearly all dependent variables, the interaction between Message Type and Modality was non-significant. This pattern indicates that, within the context of this study, the persuasive advantage of storytelling appears to operate similarly in both text and video formats. Rather than being shaped by modality, the effects seem to stem primarily from the narrative characteristics of the message itself.

The third hypothesis posited that narrative transportation and emotional response would mediate the relationship between message type and all outcome variables, also, the findings provide strong support for H3 on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Storytelling significantly increased both transportation and emotional response, and each mediator significantly predicted engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention. In several cases, the direct effect of Message Type became non-significant once transportation or emotional response was included, indicating full mediation. This reinforces the central premise of narrative persuasion: what makes storytelling effective is not merely its structural difference from informational messages, but its ability to draw people into the narrative world and make them feel something.

However, transportation and emotion did not mediate the effects of storytelling on memory. The indirect paths for both recall and recognition were non-significant, suggesting that the mechanisms that shape affective and evaluative outcomes do not similarly influence cognitive retrieval processes.

The strength of the mediation results strongly reinforces the transportation-imagery model and related frameworks. The fact that emotional response and transportation consistently predicted the “soft” variables (attitudes, engagement, intention) but not the “hard” memory variables suggests that narrative persuasion primarily operates through affective and experiential channels rather than enhancing informational encoding.

Then, regarding the broader interpretation of modality, the absence of interaction effects suggests that, in this particular sample and stimulus set, modality did not noticeably strengthen or weaken narrative processing. Although prior research often highlights the immersive potential of audiovisual formats, the present results indicate that textual narratives can also be effective in engaging consumers. This should not be taken as a contradiction to existing literature but rather as evidence that narrative impact may depend on multiple factors, such as storyline quality, familiarity with the topic, or individual differences in processing preferences, which can sometimes minimize differences between text and video.

Finally, the partial effects on memory point to a broader understanding of dual processing: narratives may shift cognitive resources toward emotional and experiential processing at the expense of detailed information encoding. This does not imply that storytelling is less effective, only that its persuasive strengths lie in engagement, emotion, and attitudes rather than factual memory.

V. Conclusion and Limitations

From a managerial standpoint, the results underscore storytelling's value as a strategically powerful and adaptable communication tool. Across both text and video formats, narratives consistently outperformed informational messages in generating consumer engagement, positive brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. This indicates that the persuasive strength of storytelling lies in the emotional and experiential connection it creates, rather than in the specific medium of delivery.

Marketers and advertisers can therefore confidently employ storytelling across diverse digital channels, from social media posts to video campaigns. The key lies not in technological sophistication, but in crafting authentic, emotionally resonant stories that encourage consumers to identify with characters and immerse themselves in the narrative. However, the findings also caution that storytelling may not be ideal for objectives centered on detailed factual recall or information-heavy communication. In those cases, a more informational approach may yield stronger memory retention.

Therefore, this study reinforces the central tenet of narrative persuasion: that stories persuade by transporting audiences and eliciting emotion, not by overwhelming them with facts. Storytelling thus represents a uniquely human form of brand communication, one that transforms information into experience. By demonstrating that its effects transcend modality and operate primarily through emotional and cognitive immersion, the present research advances both theoretical understanding and practical application of narrative advertising. By harnessing the emotional and immersive qualities of storytelling, brands can move beyond persuasion to create lasting consumer relationships built on meaning, identification, and trust.

However, despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the study employed primarily a sample of students, which limits the generalizability of results. Future research should replicate these findings with diverse and demographically varied samples, including consumers of different ages and cultural backgrounds, to assess the universality of the observed effects.

Second, the stimuli set was necessarily constrained. The use of a limited number of narrative and informational advertisements means that specific content features, such as

story quality, character relatability, or visual appeal, may have influenced outcomes. Future studies should use a broader range of stimuli and pretest for narrative quality, involvement, and emotional tone, ensuring that observed effects are driven by structural message type rather than by individual ad characteristics.

Third, the absence of significant interactions between message type and modality does not necessarily imply that modality is irrelevant. It may reflect the specific characteristics of the stimuli, both the text and video versions were relatively simple and comparable in informational content. Future research could systematically vary media richness or sensory intensity to determine whether more vivid or cinematic formats amplify narrative immersion and emotional response.

Collectively, these limitations point to productive directions for future research, particularly in examining how individual differences, narrative quality, and emerging media contexts (e.g., short-form video platforms, interactive ads, or virtual reality storytelling) may further moderate or strengthen the persuasive mechanisms identified here.

Use of AI in this work:

Individual prompts were entered into *ChatGPT* to assist in improving the linguistic quality of this thesis. The tool was used exclusively for proofreading and language refinement, including grammar, spelling, phrasing, and overall readability. It was not used to generate new ideas, conduct data analysis, review literature, or contribute to the theoretical or conceptual development of the study. The AI served purely as a language support tool to help ensure that the writing met academic standards of clarity and fluency. The following type of prompt was typically used during the editing process: “I am writing a thesis on the following topic: ‘The Power of Storytelling - How Message Type and Media Format Affect Consumer Responses.’ I would like you to act as a proofreader and edit my text for better readability, focusing on grammar, spelling, and phrasing. Use only the information from my text without adding content from other sources and maintain a neutral academic tone suitable for scholarly writing. Ensure that all citations remain in place and do not alter quotations.”

All suggestions provided by the AI were reviewed and selectively adopted by me. The final version of this thesis, including its ideas, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions, fully represents my own academic work and intellectual contribution.

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VII. Appendices

7.1 Survey

The power of storytelling

Start of Block: Introduction

Q0 Dear participant, this research is part of a dissertation project at Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics. The purpose of the study is to understand how people perceive and respond to advertising messages. Your participation is voluntary and completely anonymous. The study will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. You may withdraw at any point by closing the browser window. The survey will show you one advertisement and then ask a few questions about your reactions and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be used for research purposes only. No identifying information will be collected. By continuing, you confirm that you are at least 18 years old, understand the information provided above, and consent to participate in this study. Any questions, please contact me at: s-hapfferreira@ucp.pt. Thank you!

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Stimulus exposure

In this part of the study, you will be introduced to a fictional company called **Evoqua**. **Evoqua** is a brand created for research purposes only, it is not a real company or product currently on the market. You will now view an advertisement that represents how the brand communicates its message to consumers. The ad was designed to reflect the tone, visuals, and language used in real-world advertising campaigns. Please take your time to go through the ad carefully and pay attention to the details, including what it says about the product, how it makes you feel, and what message it seems to communicate. After you have viewed it fully, you will be asked a series of questions about your impressions, understanding, and reactions. Please do not skip ahead until you have reviewed the ad in its entirety.

End of Block: Stimulus exposure

Start of Block: Narrative text

Narrative text

Please view the advertisement below carefully. Continue with the survey when you finish.

Water is with you. When you wake, it starts your day fresh. Through long hours of work, it keeps your focus steady. When the world slows down, it brings calm. At the gym, it helps you push further. When the heat rises, it gives you relief. And when you need to pause, it's the breath between moments. Because water isn't just something you drink, it's what keeps you moving, every single day. **Evoqua** is there for it all. A reminder to refresh, to reset, to keep going. Wherever you are, whatever the day brings, **Evoqua is there.**

End of Block: Narrative text

Start of Block: Informative text

Informative text

Please view the advertisement below carefully. Continue with the survey when you finish

Your body runs on water. Even a small decrease in hydration, just one to two percent, can affect focus, mood, and performance. That's why Evoqua is made to do more than refresh. With advanced filtration that preserves essential minerals, Evoqua helps your body rehydrate naturally so you stay sharp, steady, and energized through every part of your day. Clean. Balanced. Reliable. Hydration that keeps up with you. **Evoqua — water for everyone**

End of Block: Informative text

Start of Block: Narrative Ad

Narrative ad

Please view the advertisement below carefully. Continue with the survey when you finish.

End of Block: Narrative Ad

Start of Block: Informative ad

Informational ad

Please view the advertisement below carefully. Continue with the survey when you finish.

End of Block: Informative ad

Start of Block: Dependent variables

Q0 Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ad you saw previously in the survey.

Q1 I was interested in what the ad was showing or saying.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Somewhat disagree (3)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (4)
 - Somewhat agree (5)
 - Agree (6)
 - Strongly agree (7)
-

Q2 I would be likely to click, like, or share this ad if I was it online.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Page Break

Q3 Please write down everything you remember from the ad you just saw — including any product names, visuals, or messages that stood out to you.

Q4 Which of the following statements were mentioned or shown in the ad? (Select all that apply)

- Evoqua connects hydration to focus, energy, and performance throughout the day. (1)
- The ad shows water as part of daily life, at work, at the gym, and in hot weather. (2)
- The product can be purchased by subscription. (3)
- Evoqua is portrayed as an energy drink alternative. (4)
- The ad connects hydration to the idea of resilience and movement. (5)
- The product helps reduce plastic waste. (6)

Page Break

Q5 Please rate your overall evaluation of the brand featured in the ad.

- Extremely bad (1)
- Moderately bad (2)
- Slightly bad (3)
- Neither good nor bad (4)
- Slightly good (5)
- Moderately good (6)
- Extremely good (7)

Q6 I would consider purchasing this product.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q7 I would be likely to try this product in the future.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Somewhat disagree (3)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (4)
 - Somewhat agree (5)
 - Agree (6)
 - Strongly agree (7)
-

Q8 The product seems like something I would use.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

End of Block: Dependent variables

Start of Block: Manipulation checks



Manipulation check Please, read each one of the following statements and indicate to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I paid close attention to the ad (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ad focused on a character or situation rather than just product information. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ad mainly listed product features and facts. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ad told a story or described a personal experience (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Manipulation checks

Start of Block: Mediators



Please, read each one of the following statements and indicate to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The ad was very vivid. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was mentally involved in the story the ad told. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was emotionally affected by the events in the ad. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ad made me feel positive. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt inspired while viewing the ad. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ad made me feel uplifted. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could relate to the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

emotions
shown in
the ad. (7)

End of Block: Mediators

Start of Block: Demographics

Age What's your age?

Gender What's your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Education level What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or below (1)
- College (2)
- Postgraduate degree (Master's, PhD, etc.) (3)
- Other (4) _____

End of Block: Demographics

7.2 Narrative text

Water is with you.

When you wake, it starts your day fresh.

Through long hours of work, it keeps your focus steady.

When the world slows down, it brings calm.

At the gym, it helps you push further.

When the heat rises, it gives you relief.

And when you need to pause, it's the breath between moments.

Because water isn't just something you drink, it's what keeps you moving, every single day.

Evoqua is there for it all.

For the moments that test you, and the ones that lift you.

For early mornings, late nights, and everything in between.

A reminder to refresh, to reset, to keep going.

Wherever you are, whatever the day brings, **Evoqua is there.**

7.3 Informational text

Your body runs on water.

Even a small drop in hydration — just one to two percent — can affect focus, mood, and performance.

That's why Evoqua is made to do more than refresh.

With advanced filtration that preserves essential minerals, Evoqua helps your body rehydrate naturally — so you stay sharp, steady, and energized through every part of your day.

Clean. Balanced. Reliable. Hydration that keeps up with you.

Evoqua — water for Everyone