City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Uncovering the linguistic foundations of consumer stories

Tom van Laer

Agenda:

1. Consumer stories

2. The power of storytelling

3. Building consumer stories' structure

4. Text mining procedure

5. Results

6. Lessons learned and still to learn

Consumer stories

A review of Mystery Adventures, a real-life gaming experience:

"Great Fun..for a Puzzle Person"

●●●●● Reviewed May 28, 2011

This is definitely an unusual thing to do in Las Vegas, but can be a wonderful change of pace. If you are into CSI and like solving mysteries, this is for you. If you'd rather just kick back and enjoy the show, this might be a bit much. Max seemed nervous at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but warmed up quickly. The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and excitement as the night went on. And it did go on...from 7pm to well past 10pm. Very exciting and worth the effort we put into it.

Visited May 2011

Was this review helpful?   Yes 👍   2   ⚑ Report

Ask WhyWasteTimeWorking about Mystery Adventures

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

WhyWasteTimeW…
San Diego, California

Level 3 Contributor

10 reviews

11 helpful votes

Consumer stories

Relevance

Importance:

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TAKE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING FORMS OF ADVERTISING?

GLOBAL AVERAGE - PERCENT ALWAYS/SOMETIMES TAKE ACTION

FORM OF ADVERTISING	TAKE ACTION	TRUST	DIFFERENCE ACTION VS. TRUST
Recommendations from people I know	84%	84%	--
Consumer opinions posted online	70%	68%	2%
Ads on TV	68%	62%	6%

(Nielsen, 2013)

Consumer stories

Gap in research on consumer stories; Reviews in our research

Prior research solely provides a valid description of consumer stories of (hedonic and utilitarian) material purchases.

"Material purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good: a tangible object that is kept in one's possession"
(van Boven and Gilovich 2003, 1194)

My research focuses on

❖ Experiential purchases
  "those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience: an event or series of events that one lives through"
  (van Boven and Gilovich 2003, 1194)

❖ Narrative structure
  which describes the experience consumed and recounted by the reviewer

Consumer stories

Research objectives

1. Organize the relations among words within experience reviews, which are currently considered manifold and indeterminate, in a narrative structure

2. Provide an instrument for examining the role of change in emotions over sentences and whether there are intertextual differences in this shape

The power of storytelling

Key constructs: The source of the fountain

The conceptual building blocks of my work are four:

1. Identifiable characters

2. Imaginable plot

3. Genre

4. Narrative transportation

The power of storytelling

Key constructs: The source of the fountain

1. Identifiable characters are clearly pinpointed personas through which the consumer "speaks" to the consumer (Stern 1994).
   They play a role in the events and consumers can empathize with them (Slater and Rouner 2002).

2. Imaginable plot is the articulated sequence of events that happen to the characters in a described setting (Escalas 1998).
   It frames the temporality of the events, such that consumers feel as though they are experiencing the events themselves (Green and Brock 2002).

3. Genre is the different story shapes that emerge from culturally determined conventions in a given society in a given time (Genette 1979/1992; Plato 380BC/2008).
   It results from the modulation of the emotional intensity along the plot and make consumers experience suspended reality (Gergen and Gergen 1988).

The power of storytelling

Key constructs: The source of the fountain

Narrative transportation constitutes the vehicle for the power of storytelling:

4. Narrative transportation is the extent to which (1) a consumer empathizes with the story characters and (2) the story plot activates his or her imagination, which leads him or her to experience suspended reality during story reception (van Laer et al. 2014).

Building consumer stories' structure

1. **Narrative structure elements of identifiable characters**

a) Landscapes of affective and
b) cognitive consciousness

Definition: The extent to which the consumer story recounts an initial event about which a character expresses feelings or thoughts that, in turn, lead to a course of action by a character (Bruner 1986).

Proposed effect: Consumers make more inferences and exert more effort to identify characters when a story has well-developed landscapes of consciousness (Feldman et al. 2014).

c) Canonicity

Definition: The extent to which the consumer story explains how a course of action by a character results in a particular outcome (Pennington and Hastie 1988).

Proposed effect: More compelling stories consist of multiple goal-oriented action sequences (Stein and Albro 2010).

Building consumer stories' structure

2. Narrative structure elements of imaginable plot

a) Temporal embedding

Definition: The extent to which the consumer story is organized in a temporal sequence and provides causal links between the events that occur (Escalas 1998; Thompson 1997).

Proposed effect: Temporally embedded stories determine why consumers translate stories into transporting past-present-future narratives (Adaval, Isbell, and Wyer 2007; Adaval and Wyer 1998; Barthes 1975).

b) Spatial embedding

Definition: The extent to which the consumer story focuses on and explains particular events (Escalas and Bettman 2000).

Proposed effect: Especially transporting stories usually pay attention to setting the scene of the narrative world by repeatedly offering illustrations (Gerrig 1993).

c) Drama

Definition: The extent to which the canon is breached (Burke 1962).

Proposed effect: If consumers strive to understand and explain these breaches, they may experience narrative transportation because more effort leads to more narrative transportation (Nielsen and Escalas 2010).

Building consumer stories' structure

2. Narrative structure elements of genre

❖ **Progressive genre**
Definition: Events continuously improve for characters over the course of the storyline (Gergen and Gergen, 1988).

❖ **Regressive genre**
Definition: Events decline over the course of the storyline (Gergen and Gergen 1988).

❖ **Stable genre**
Definition: Events neither improve nor decline over the course of the storyline (Gergen and Gergen 1988).

❖ **Romantic comedy**
Definition: Events start out favorable, deteriorate, and end on a positive note (Gergen and Gergen 1995).

❖ **Tragedy**
Definition: Events start out unfavorable, ameliorate, and end on a negative note (Freytag 1863/2003).

Proposed effect: Emotional story shapes that change over the course of a storyline are more engaging than those that do not alternate in sign (Vonnegut 2005).

Text mining procedure

Identifiable characters:
n-gram operationalisation, representative words, and words in dictionary entry

Elements	Operationalisation	Representative words	Words in dictionary entry
Landscape of affective consciousness	Presence of trigram: motion–affective process–motion	arrive, car, go abandon, cried, happy	168 915
Landscape of cognitive consciousness	Presence of trigram: motion–insight–motion	consider, know, think	195
Canonicity	Presence of bigram: motion–space and/or motion–time in the last two sentences	down, in, thin end, season, until	220 239

Text mining procedure

Imaginable plot:
n-gram operationalisation, representative words, and words in dictionary entry

Elements	Operationalisation	Representative words	Words in dictionary entry
Temporal embedding	Presence of unigram: time/ causation	end, season, until because, effect, hence	239 108
Spatial embedding	Ratio of unigram: space	down, in, thin	220
Drama	Ratio of unigram: surprise	amazed, astonished, shocked, startled, stupefied	32

Text mining procedure

Genre:
D-gram operationalisation, representative words, and words in dictionary entry

Elements	Operationalisation	Representative words	Words in dictionary entry
Genre	Presence of sentence-level *D*-gram: absolute difference of positive emotion unigram and negative emotion unigram	love, nice, sweet hurt, nasty, ugly	406 499
Progressive	Presence of linear degree of increase of *D*-gram shape		
Regressive	Presence of linear degree of decrease of *D*-gram shape		
Stable	Presence of a rate of change near zero for *D*-gram shape		
Romantic comedy	Presence of negative curvilinear degree of *D*-gram shape (i.e., u-shape)		
Tragedy	Presence of positive curvilinear degree of *D*-gram shape (i.e., inverted u-shape)		

Results

The review of Mystery Adventures as an example

❖ **Landscape of (affective) consciousness**

(WhyWasteTimeWorking, TripAdvisor, 29 May 2011)

This is definitely an unusual thing to do in Las Vegas, but can be a wonderful **change** of pace.

If you are into CSI and like solving mysteries, this is for you.

If you'd rather just kick back, this might be a bit much.

Max seemed **nervous** at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but **warmed** up quickly.

The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and excitement as the night went on.

And it did go on...from 7pm to well past 10pm.

Very exciting and worth the effort we **put** into it.

Results

The review of Mystery Adventures as an example

- ❖ **Canonicity**
- ❖ **Temporal embedding**

(WhyWasteTimeWorking, TripAdvisor, 29 May 2011)

This is definitely an unusual thing to do in Las Vegas, but can be a wonderful change of pace.

If you are into CSI and like solving mysteries, this is for you.

If you'd rather just kick back, this might be a bit much.

Max seemed nervous at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but warmed up quickly.

The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and excitement as the night **went** on.

And it did go on...from 7pm to well **past** 10pm.

Very exciting and worth the effort we put into it.

Results

The review of Mystery Adventures as an example

- ❖ **Canonicity**
- ❖ **Temporal embedding**

(WhyWasteTimeWorking, TripAdvisor, 29 May 2011)

This is definitely an unusual thing to do in Las Vegas, but can be a wonderful change of pace.

If you are into CSI and like solving mysteries, this is for you.

If you'd rather just kick back, this might be a bit much.

Max seemed nervous at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but warmed up quickly.

The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and excitement as the night went on.

And it did go on...from 7pm to well **past** 10pm.

Very exciting and worth the effort we put into it.

Results

The review of Mystery Adventures as an example

❖ **Spatial embedding**

(WhyWasteTimeWorking, TripAdvisor, 29 May 2011)

This is definitely an unusual thing to do **in** Las Vegas, but can be a wonderful change of pace.

If you are into CSI and like solving mysteries, this is for you.

If you'd rather just kick back, this might be a bit much.

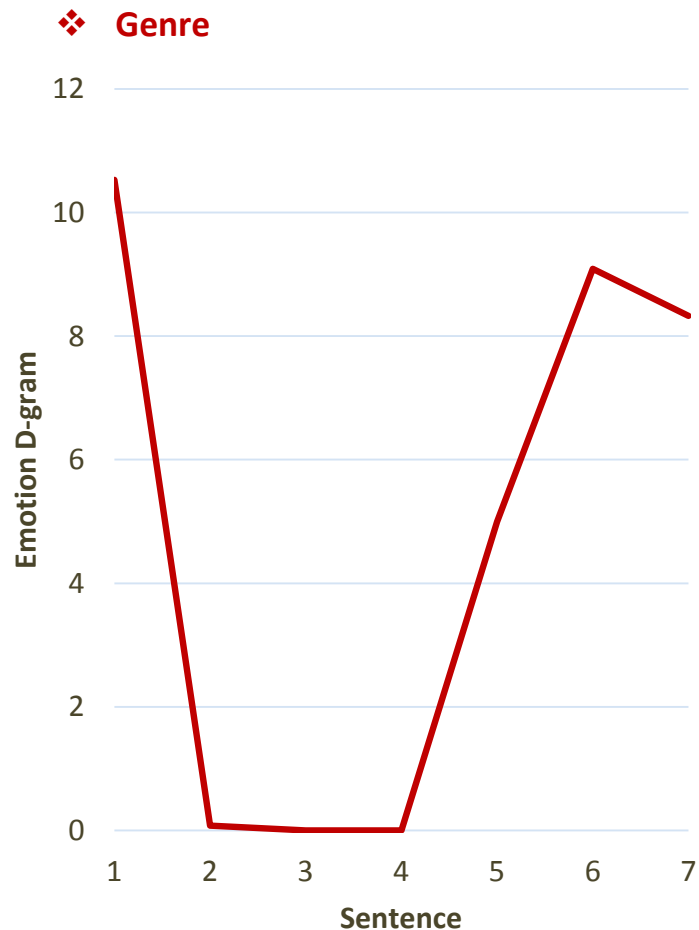Max seemed nervous at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but warmed up quickly.

The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and excitement as the night went on.

And it did go on...from 7pm to well past 10pm.

Very exciting and worth the effort we put into it.

Results

The review of Mystery Adventures as an example

❖ **Genre**

(WhyWasteTimeWorking, TripAdvisor, 29 May 2011)

This is **definitely** an unusual thing to do in Las Vegas, but can be a **wonderful** change of pace.

If you are into CSI and **like** solving mysteries, this is for you.

If you'd rather just kick back, this might be a bit much.

Max seemed **nervous** at first with lots of 'uhhh's and ummmms, but **warmed** up quickly.

The mystery started out slow..which might be natural, but picked up pace and **excitement** as the night went on.

And it did go on...from 7pm to **well** past 10pm.

Very **exciting** and worth the effort we put into it.

Lessons still to learn

Future research

I detect three trajectories for future research:

1. (Re-)defining narrative structure: The preciseness of the story definition can be challenged. The increasingly popular flash fiction and the Twitter effect (Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, and Feldhaus 2015) support the notion of very short stories.

2. Effects on conversion: Empirical work on the conversion effects of narratives is scant (van Laer et al. 2014). However, recent developments in digital libraries indicate that there is ample opportunity to investigate conversion as an additional consequence of a narrative structure (e.g., Google Books, the Internet Archive, and Project Gutenberg).

3. Effects on brand public: A line of research into possible brand public creation or strengthening as a consequence of consuming narratives, which violate economic principles, can be initiated (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2015, McQuarrie, McIntyre, and Shanmugam 2015).