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Sala de Grados - Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Edificio FES, Universidad de Salamanca

Conference

The influence of the social and physical environment surrounding viewers on their viewing experience

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Abstract

In the past decade, media psychology has increasingly focused on the psychological processes involved in consuming media narratives, particularly identification with characters and narrative transportation. Most research on the antecedents of these processes has examined factors related to the narrative and the audience, such as character descriptions, viewer personality, and character-audience similarity. The current research shifted focus to a relatively underexplored factor: the environment in which the narrative is consumed. Through a series of experiments, I explored how the social and physical viewing or reading environment influences narrative involvement.

Specifically, I examined how co-viewers and environmental factors, such as temperature, affect identification with characters and narrative transportation.



About Prof. Dr Nurit Tal-Or

Dr Nurit Tal-Or is a visiting scholar at the Observatorio de los Contenidos Audiovisuales (www.ocausal.es) of the University of Salamanca and the keynote speaker for the conference. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Haifa, Israel. During her stay, she is collaborating with Professor Juan-José Igartua, Director of the Observatorio de los Contenidos Audiovisuales, on a cross-cultural research project between Israel and Spain. This project focuses on narrative persuasion—her area of expertise and a key research line of the Observatory. She joined the Observatory on October 1 and will remain until the end of February.

Dr. Tal-Or adopts an experimental approach to explore the factors that influence viewers' perceptions, the processes behind these influences, and their outcomes. In her career, she has contributed the knowledge on areas such as third-person perception, identification, and interactive effects. Currently, her work focuses on narrative persuasion, particularly examining how social and physical factors in the reception context -company, temperature, disclaimers, identification with concordant or discordant characters...- shape the viewing experience.

For instance, Dr Tal-Or found that a match between the viewer's physical sensations and the on-screen narrative enhances both identification with the protagonist and narrative transportation, as well as the enjoyment of the film. Another key area of her research involves the effects of co-viewing—how consuming media with others differs from watching it alone. To achieve this, she has studied the influence of the coviewer's ethnicity, gender or even their reactions. This work led her to propose a comprehensive model of co-viewing effects on narrative experiences, which she published in 2021.

In this conference, Dr Tal-Or will discuss this line of research, highlighting why the environment in which media is consumed plays a crucial role and what we currently understand about its impact.



Selected Key Publications

- Cohen, J., Tal-Or, N., Mazor-Tregerman, M. (2015) The tempering effect of transportation: exploring the effects of transportation and identification during exposure to controversial two-sided narratives. *Journal of Communication*, 65(2), 237–258.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12144>
- Lewis, N., Pelled, A., & Tal-Or, N. (2019). The effect of exposure to thin models and digital modification disclaimers on women's body satisfaction. *International Journal Of Psychology*, 55(2), 245–254. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12572>
- Razpurker-Apfeld, I., & Tal-Or, N. (2024). Concreteness and abstractness as causes and effects of identification with media characters. *Media Psychology*, 27(4), 558–581.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2023.2256214>
- Tal-Or, N. (2016). How co-viewing affects attitudes: the mediating roles of transportation and identification. *Media Psychology*, 19(3), 381–405.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2015.1082918>
- Tal-Or, N. (2019). The relationship between viewing environment, narrative environment, and involvement with narratives: the case of temperature. *Human Communication Research*, 45(4), 395–426, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqz007>
- Tal-Or, N. (2021). The effects of co-viewers on the viewing experience. *Communication Theory*, 31(3), 316–335. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz012>
- Tal-Or, N., & Cohen, J. (2010). Understanding audience involvement: conceptualizing and manipulating identification and transportation. *Poetics*, 38(4), 402–418.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2010.05.004>
- Tal-Or, N., & Cohen, J. (2016). Unpacking engagement: convergence and divergence in transportation and identification. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 40(1), 33–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2015.11735255>
- Tal-Or, N., & Mazor-Tregerman, M. (2015). Self-disclosure and the liking of participants in reality TV. *Human Communication Research*, 41(2), 245–267.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12047>
- Tal-Or, N., & Razpurker-Apfeld, I. (2021). When the physical coldness in the viewer's environment leads to identification with a suffering protagonist. *International Journal of Psychology*, 56(3), 394–406. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12722>
- Tal-Or, N., & Tsfati, Y. (2016) When Arabs and Jews watch TV together: the joint effect of the content and context of communication on reducing prejudice. *Journal of Communication*, 66(4), 646–668. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12242>
- Tal-Or, N., & Tsfati, Y. (2018). Does the co-viewing of sexual material affect rape myth acceptance? The role of the co-viewer's reactions and gender. *Communication Research*, 45(4), 577–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215595073>

