“Oswald Assinates Lincoln”: The Effect of Transportation on Misinformation

Introduction
Do readers pick up more inaccurate information from fictional texts when they find themselves lost in the story?

Readers rely on information from fictional texts, even if that information contradicts well-known facts. (Marsh, Meale, & Roseiger, 2001)

Reducing the plausibility of the overall story setting has been shown to be mildly effective in lowering rates of acquiring this misinformation from stories. (Kapp et al., 2014)

Individual differences in how readers emotionally and mentally engage with a text, via feelings of narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993), could uniquely influence the information that they acquire from stories.

Hypothesis: As individuals become more transported into fictional texts they will be more vulnerable to picking up misinformation.

Method
Participants (N = 101, 77 females) were asked to read six stories, all plausible or all implausible, that contained target information. These target statements presented facts of varied (easy or hard) difficulty in accurate, neutral, or misleading frames.

For each story, participants rated how transported into the text they felt (Green & Brock, 2004) before completing an open-ended general knowledge test with questions about the target information they encountered. Answers on those 36 target items were coded for accuracy and presence of misinformation.

Target Statement Example:
“Can you believe we are in London? I am from a fairly impressive city myself, the capital of Illinois. Springfield, / X000X / Chicago, - but compared to this – that’s nothing!”

Fact framing:
- Accurate: Springfield
- Neutral: Left blank
- Misleading: Chicago

Results
A set of two ANCOVAs was used to look at the effect of transportation, question difficulty, story context, and fact framing on rates of correct and misinformed answers. All results reported were significant at p < .001.

Basic results are shown in Figures 1 & 2 and were consistent with previous literature except that no effect for story plausibility was found.

Figure 3 shows that increased transportation was associated with greater vulnerability to misleading statements.

Discussion
So do readers pick up more inaccurate information if they are lost in the story?

Results suggest that individuals who are prone to high levels of narrative transportation were more likely to rely on the misleading information that they encountered in the stories.

Future research should look more directly at how the combination of text features and reader characteristics influences the evaluation and acquisition of knowledge.

References
See presenter for full list of references.
Questions? Contact Alyssa Blair, a.blair@uic.edu

Figure 1: Correct Answers
Participants gave significantly more correct answers for easy questions than hard questions [F(1,97) = 381.15] and for accurate frames than neutral or misleading frames [F(2,97) = 39.23]. There were also significantly more correct answers for easy questions when the information was presented accurately in the text [F(2,97) = 14.52].

Figure 2: Misinformed Answers
Participants gave significantly more misinformed answers when they were presented with misleading information in the texts [F(2,97) = 58.40].

Figure 3: Transportation
As individuals reported more feelings of narrative transportation, they were significantly more likely to rely on misleading information from the stories [F(2,97) = 4.11].

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