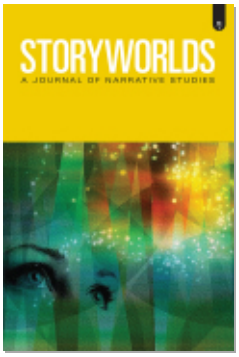
Social Media Narratives and Experiential Knowledge: A Few Hypotheses



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Social Media Narratives and Experiential Knowledge

A Few Hypotheses

Aurélien Maignant

Abstract: This article studies the nexus between social media narratives and the production of knowledge about a factual situation, using the example of an Instagram "story." First, I will observe how the specific narrative functions rely on a set of properties and can induce different types of knowledge. Then, I will underline a "cognitive bias" well known by media theories: individual narratives of personal experience can generate the feeling of a systemic knowledge about a sociopolitical situation. Finally, I will propose five hypotheses that help to problematize this cognitive bias as a "narrative effect." These hypotheses are based on considerations related to the plurality of narrative scales in world-modeling, the nature of the protagonist, the management of trust and identification by narrative intentionality, affective responses to the plot, and finally the cognitive satisfaction induced by live storytelling.

Keywords: narrative, social networks, media, knowledge, plot, configuration

Trigger Warning: *This article reproduces violent language (racism, xenophobia) posted on far-right Instagram accounts (page 9).*

Media studies have often seen violence through the prism of its effects on the audience. Media violence is said to have the capacity to shock, effect cognitive shifts, dehumanize the subjects represented and desensitize the audience (Cantor 2000), modify our moral beliefs and behaviors (Paik and Comstock 1994),[1] arouse hostile affects (Zillman and Weaver 1999),[2] reinforce oppressive structures (such as gender oppression; Mullin and Linz 1995),[3] or even exercise and impose ideologies (Biagini 2012). Such a diagnosis can be further nuanced with attention to the type of violence (psychological, physical, etc.) and the type of media (television news, written press, etc.). This article will question here the power of social media narratives in knowledge production. I will draw some hypotheses on narrative knowledge, illustrated by a case of narrated violence on Instagram. Undoubtedly, a part of the violence we are daily exposed to is given to our senses and our cognition in a narrative form—or it is, at least, within narrative structures that we can make sense of it. As shown by numerous experimental studies in social psychology, such as those by Rachel Shaw: "[We] express the need of narrative structures to make sense of violence. . . . Narrativity is the overarching skill in our quest to make sense of violence" (2004: 145).

Social media are oppositional zones for ideologies, representations of the social world, facts, and, naturally, narrative forms. Much attention has been drawn to the de-hierarchical nature of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, spaces whose partial self-regulation (Citton 2017) hosts words, experiences, and narratives that were once obscured by dominant social structures (which also leads to new phenomena of knowledge management, such as "epistemic bubbles" and "echo chambers"; Nguyen 2020). For example, from a narrative perspective the #MeToo movement can be seen as an assemblage of experiential narratives recounting lived violence, whose polynarrative structure has participated and still participates in a profound rescripting of our relationship to reality, implying various systemic types of awareness and an ever more global transformation of our knowledge of the social world (Citton 2010; Claisse and Huppe 2016; Zenetti 2018).

A certain critique of social media alerts us to the dangers of this newly conferred power to narrate and script one's reality (Spitzer 2019). I will elaborate on a specific phenomenon, sometimes described as a

"cognitive bias" (Watkins 2015): these kinds of short life stories (or "testimonies") that circulate on the media can kindle intuition of a systemic knowledge of narrated situations by paralyzing any sociopolitical understanding of a phenomenon. The example of #MeToo is of course enough to partially invalidate the argument: the assembly of tens of thousands of experiential narratives going in the same direction is the viable basis for systemic knowledge. However, the question of legitimacy through quantity falls outside the spectrum of narrative theory and individual reception, to which I will limit myself here.

I will try to shed light on some narrative aspects of this supposed "cognitive bias." In other words, I will explain why individual narratives of experience can produce systemic knowledge about a sociopolitical situation. After discussing the links between narrative properties and knowledge modeling, I will propose five complementary hypotheses from different horizons of narrative theory to detail some factors that could help reinterpret a "cognitive bias" as a narrative effect of social media.

Narrative Knowledges

New media can host various shapes and scales of narratives, including the diversity of forms and contents shared on social media (these frequently blur the core concept of "narrative," but we will focus here on unambiguous examples; see Lits 2012). They share some properties with other narrative forms traditionally studied by scholars (mostly theorizing from culturally complex narratives, such as literary texts). A recent clarification by Raphaël Baroni (2018, 2021) states that two functions could summarize most of what we call "narrative effects": configuration and emplotment.

Since the work of Paul Ricoeur (1983), the function most widely attributed to narrative is the first one, namely, its capacity to *configure*—or, more precisely, to *re*configure—human experience (of time and space, but also of our sensory, affective, social, and conceptual relations to our environment). In this sense, it is implicitly admitted that ordinary experience presents itself to us as unorganized and that storytelling makes it possible to recapture it, to give it meaning, mostly via two

processes: the selection of narrative information (what I choose to tell and not to tell) and the construction of causality (the way I link events to one another). The notion of configuration already contains in itself the capacity of the narrative to generate structural knowledge.

The second function of narrative is to engage audiences in emplotment (through the presentation of story material). Narratives, especially on new media such as social media, have the capacity to make people relive a lived experience by inducing in the audience a state of attention that confers a mental immediacy to the narrated events (implying a specific engagement in the story and a focus on emotional responses; Romele 2014). To put it differently, the second function of narrative is to arouse in its audience a state of immersion, a cognitive plunge in a space-time not present at the moment of the narration. During this plunge, the audience is able to *experience* a localized storyworld, replicating in a way their experience of the real world. Most narratives on social media are plurimedial: their ability to combine oral and/or textual information with visual contents most probably increases audiences' emplotment. Most of them are also factual, and in this article I will consider knowledge production and reception outside of any fictional pact.

Drawing on Baroni's distinction, we can suggest that each function seems particularly tied to a kind of knowledge,[4] or at least that each favors knowledge production and reception in specific conditions. The configuring function, based on causal representation, favors a kind of knowledge I will call "systemic," whereas the plotting function seems to convey more of an "experiential" knowledge.[5] Systemic knowledge designates an epistemological and cognitive relationship with large-scale or supra-individual phenomena beyond the scale of one's sensorial experience. Naturally, systemic knowledge relies on modeling of an extended and collective space and time (thus past and future). It is generally associated with a capacity for complex causal arrangement (establishing causal links between large-scale phenomena—thus its link with the configuring function). Systemic knowledge is also characterized by its relative logocentrism, since it is based on a deliberation, often qualified as "rational," and a discursive distance with its object, such as a narrated situation. A last property, linked to this idea of a "distance," is the self-awareness of the relation between oneself and the narrativized object.

The characteristics of experiential knowledge are quite different, especially when it is produced by narrative. It seems to be situated at the nexus of deliberative reasoning and affective involvement, and to function on "mimetic"[6] resonances (imagination and mental engagement with the events simulated by the stories—hence its link with the plotting function). This mimetic dimension sometimes leads us to assume that social interactions can be both the origin and the moment of its implementation. In contrast, we must also consider that experiential knowledge does not necessarily rest on rational deliberation or on a complex causal relation. If it does not necessarily require self-awareness, it generally concerns a restricted time and space, accessible to the experience of a single individual.

These thoughts on narrative functions and types of knowledge bring in the third face of the problem: narrative properties. Even though narratives cannot control their reception, some properties could be seen as favoring one or the other function, such as story scales or focalizations. To identify the dynamics of narrative knowledge production and reception, I will try to sketch a few.

Narrative Properties and Social Media

What kind of narrative properties should a story display to favor the configuring function and the development of systemic knowledge about the narrated situation? First, such a narrative may be polyphonic, because the multiplication of perspectives on an object or a situation favors the production of a collective knowledge on them. Also, it may be contradictory, or at least deliberative, which is often linked to polyphony, because the confrontation of contradictory perspectives is associated with the possibility of critical hindsight on the events narrated. Another property is the sequencing of events in an extended space and time, because setting up a large diegesis is obviously favoring the representation of complex situations. It may also recount group movements, or generally speaking collective dynamics, these groups being possibly understood as categories (social, psychological, etc.). Another property we can reasonably link with systemic knowledge is being narrated by multiple voices, even institutional ones, often disengaged from the

events narrated (with few narrative marks of intention), since one often associates external narration with the constitution of a critical and complex representation of the events narrated. Finally, on the rhetorical side, such stories probably develop strategies that appeal to rational thought and conceptual cognition (with an emphasis on logos).

On the other hand, the plotting function, as the production and reception of experiential knowledge, could be associated with other narrative properties, some, but not all, being on the opposite side of a continuum. For example, we could reasonably link experiential knowledge with monophonic narratives, because the presence of a single voice is often analyzed as intensifying adherence and immersion within a perspective, and thus a possible experience from which to evaluate one's own. Drawing from this idea, such narratives most likely contain non-contradictory or non-deliberative narration of facts, which is related to monophony. They might also sequence events in a limited space and time, because experiential knowledge is frequently described as a type of knowledge valid in a specific set of events (a specific scenario). For the same reason, the plotting function seems to be intensified in the narration of individual stories, possibly those of a small group of individuals, with few protagonists overall, placing its mimetic stakes "on a human scale" (Herman 2013). Of course, they are more likely to present intentionality marks, being stories in which the narrators are experientially engaged in the events (Korthals Altes 2014). On the rhetorical side, strategies involving affective reaction (pathos) and confrontation with the Other, or even identification (Phelan 2004), play an important role in the plotting function and can generate knowledge based on relation, on the understanding of the Other's experience of the world. Finally, narratives will more likely produce "systemic knowledge" by showing their (factual) characters as cohesive groups. The other way around, we could suggest that "experiential" narratives insisting on the individuality of their characters help apprehend them as virtually possible subjective experiences (Auyoung 2018), shaping emplotment as well as experiential recognition.

Such distinctions raise at least two remarks, the first one being theoretical, the second medial. Concerning theory, we should remember

that most, if not all, points stated above are an effect-driven model, ignoring the agency of the audience, its reaction to the narrative—I will correct these further, explaining a bias. In terms of media, we can follow various scholars in sketching out that the most common narrative formats hosted on social media present most of the narrative properties we attributed to stories inducing experiential knowledge. Instagram "stories," Facebook "posts," and the overall editorial setup of personal accounts encourage marks of individual enunciation, scenarizations of one's identity and narrative ethos based on the authenticity of the experience told (Zoppi Fontana 2022). Social media also abound in "micronarratives" relating small-scale situations (Delia 2019) and are characterized by the "fragmentation of classical narrative schemes" (Lits 2012), a fragmentation wherein the absence of clear causality (linked above to systemic knowledge) is balanced by affective strategies and a diegesis based upon the narrators' experience. So far, most of the social media narrative diversity seems to favor stories that generate emplotment and the sharing of experiential knowledge about the narrated situation.

This synthesis allows us to problematize more clearly a "cognitive bias" happening when the experiential narratives that abound on social media influence our global representation of a situation. We can thus reformulate the question outlined in the introduction as follows: How can we explain that experiential narratives (individual, monophonic, non-contradictory, with their restricted diegesis, few protagonists, marked intentionality, and affective strategies) can produce systemic knowledge (supra-individual, logocentric, meta-conscious, with large and collective space and time, and complex causal arrangements)?

Case Study

If the pluralization of experiential narratives may be a source of empowerment, it may also lead to oppression, as was the case with some of the narratives shared by the inhabitants of Calais that recounted the "violence" supposedly linked to migrants in a temporary camp. While "Le campement de la Lande" ("The Lande camp") has existed since the early

2000s, the intensification of migratory movements in 2010 amplified its importance and brought it intensive media coverage. This resulted in the multiplication of stories about the situation in Calais, published by institutions and dominant press as well as by residents on social media. Among the stories that proliferated on Facebook and Instagram were many narrated situations that conflicted with one another: those talking about the institutional violence suffered by refugees, for instance at the hands of the French police, or the general acts of brutality committed by common citizens, and those that talk of violence committed by the refugees themselves. I will focus on the latter stories, especially because they have been shared more frequently by French politicians (both the so-called liberals and the far right) and by neofascist and supremacist groups who have, in fact, orchestrated in the media discourse the "cognitive bias" that interests us. Indeed, these groups have used experiential narratives to try to bring about systemic knowledge of the situation, mobilizing the "testimonies" of inhabitants to draw attention to localized incidents while at the same time they render invisible institutional violence (a much more accurate representation of the Calais situation).

These experiential narratives have circulated widely across new media to the point where it is sometimes impossible to trace back their origin in order to separate real information from so-called fake news. However, their authenticity is not essential to the question at hand, insofar as we admit that they can only affect knowledge for people who receive them as factual news. Figure 1 displays some of the characteristics previously pointed out. This Instagram story, which circulated widely, is a good example of the kind of narratives that were actively "viral-ized" by far-right groups: allegedly told by a citizen without any partisan consideration, such an experiential narrative can be easily instrumentalized to produce systemic knowledge. One can observe in the text the different properties outlined before.

First, the whole story is a monophonic and non-contradictory narration. The whole diegesis relies on a single subjectivity. It shows clear marks of involvement by the narrative instance in the story told—"I have always lived in Calais"; "but I see them and I know it. Everybody can see it!"—and relies on the modeling of a restricted and individual space and time: "I know these streets"; "She came back from school like

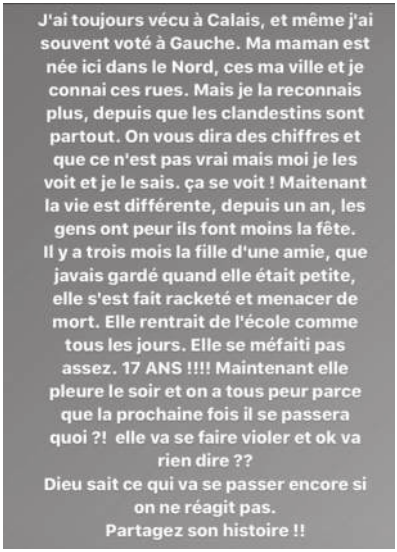

Fig. 1. An Instagram story shared on a far-right network. Screenshot and translation by the author. "I have always lived in Calais, and sometimes I even voted for left parties. My mommy was born here, in the North, this is my town and I know these streets. But I don't recognize it anymore, since those illegal immigrants are everywhere. They will tell you numbers, and that it is not true, but me, I see them and I know it. Everybody can see it! Now, life is different, it's been a year, people are afraid, they never really party anymore. Three months ago, my friend's daughter, who I took care of when she was little, she was robbed, and verbally threatened with death. She was walking home from school, like any other day. She wasn't suspicious enough. 17 YEARS!!!! Now she cries every night and we are all scared because what's going to happen next time?! she will be raped and nobody will say a word?? God knows what's next if we don't act. Share her story!!"

every day." We observe plotting strategies based on the virtualization of the next part of the story—"What will happen next time?"—and affective strategies playing on *pathos*: "people are afraid, they don't party as much"; "now she cries at night and we are all afraid." Of course, the narrative multiplies uses of self-legitimization (recourse to one's own point of view): "I know," and so forth.

It is also worth noting that the narrative structure clearly shows the intertwining of the emplotment function and the configuring function. The structure is as follows: First, there is an iterative sequence in which

the narrative voice invokes its own memory, which allows a strong emotional relationship to be shared between the narrator and the past situation (life before the migratory crisis); this is often a sequence in which the narrative voice seeks to ensure belief by making itself trustworthy, here explicitly. Then follows a disruptive element (the arrival of the refugees) and the exposition of a new situation (a new life perceived as more violent), sometimes illustrated, as is the case here, by an interlocking small story (a racket situation). The emplotment function finally stands out in the questioning (what will happen next?) or projection that often concludes these narratives, also characteristic of political or activist discourse seeking to elicit ideological or circumstantial adherence by asserting the uncertainty of the future (by articulating narrative *curiosity*; Baroni 2017). Everything here participates in circumscribing this example—and many others that it is not possible to analyze in the space of this article—as an experiential narrative, in the sense that our working hypothesis gives to the notion: a narrative comprising properties likely to bring about experiential knowledge of a situation, here, of violence, but of course also to transform our systemic knowledge of the situation. Using narrative theory, we can try five hypotheses to detail some factors favoring the "cognitive bias," which, as we will suggest, could be more accurately qualified as a narrative effect.

Five Hypotheses of Cognitive Bias

BLURRING FUNCTIONS

The first point to be raised is that typologies of "expected narrative effects" (such as the one stated before) ignore the agency of audiences and the active part they play in hermeneutics: this common theoretical assumption will underline most of the following arguments. If the Instagram narrative analyzed here presents mostly experiential properties, its structure adopts punctually narrative properties likely to generate a systemic representation of the Calais situation. The diegesis models a restricted space (neighborhoods and streets), but the narrative voice sets up, notably in the iterative sequence, something akin to a life story, that is to say a narrative unifying the whole of a large individual time ("I have always lived [here]"). It should also be noted that the catego-

rization of the protagonists suggests a shift from the experiential to the systemic scale.

In Marco Caracciolo's terms, "all stories can become cultural scenarios to model our way through our social reality" (2014: 12). In our terms, this means that experiential narratives are always likely to be received and interpreted as cultural scenarios. This is a simple principle, but arguably one of the most fundamental to understand the epistemological and political issues at stake. That said, in view of the previous reflections, certain narrative forms can favor this mixing of functions, notably when sequences guide the emplotment toward a configuring effect. It seems that several of these can be identified in our example, most of them being relatively obvious, such as the use of the term "clandestins" (illegal immigrants), which, in addition to standardizing the legal situation of a whole community, stages a unified and coherent group of individuals, caught up in the same collective dynamic. One can speak of sociotyping *by the group*, insofar as a fantasized heterogeneity is used to give meaning to the behavior of an individual. In the rest of the text, when the story refers to "a 17-year-old girl" with the clear intention of referring to *young girls* in general, the opposite occurs, that is, a process of sociotyping *by the individual*: a group unified by two social properties (age and gender) is extrapolated from the condition of a single individual. Sociotyping is one of the aspects of the configuring function (the narrative qualifies the whole of a social condition), likely to produce a systemic knowledge, but from a brief narrative of experience, marked by the intriguing function. The intersection of these two functions is a factor favoring the cognitive bias. It simultaneously announces and relies on another instability: the nature of the protagonist.

NATURE OF THE PROTAGONIST

A second possible factor is the subject of constant debates in narrative theory and beyond. It concerns the "nature" of the character, or more precisely the different relations one can sketch with a character insofar as we receive him or her as a narrative protagonist. Rhetorical narratology proposes an effective model according to which narrative properties seek to guide our apprehension of three possible "components" of character (Rabinowitz et al. 2012):

- a mimetic component: narratives seek to elicit in us a believable simulation of the protagonist and to make us relate to them as if they were a real person;
- a thematic component: narratives show us that the characters are the spokespersons of discourse, embodying or representing, in an allegorical mode, an idea or a type;
- a thematic component: narratives show us that the protagonists have a precise function within the story.

The first component can be safely described as likely to support the production of experiential knowledge; it is not unreasonable to associate the second component with rhetorical strategies aiming to produce a more systemic kind of knowledge. James Phelan (2004) shows that the narrative, put in to balance these two first components, tries to regulate the reader's affective investment and the distance needed to reconstruct messages that the protagonists carry or decipher of the concepts they symbolize.

However, the narrative cannot hope to exert a radical control over this balance, and many interpretative divergences can be explained by a "thematic" relationship to characters who were mainly "mimetic" and vice versa. This is a constructivist position that was also defended by Aruand Welfringer (2013) in a study showing that figures which are *a priori* thematic, such as animals in fables, can always be apprehended mimetically, as characters whose experience is shared. That the protagonist is "an authentic co-construction in which the reader plays at least an equal part" (2013: 14) makes this an essential instability of the narrative-knowledge nexus. To put it succinctly, any protagonist in an experiential narrative is likely to be seen as allegorizing a condition, as symbolizing a broad situation that can be understood as recurring and therefore potentially systemic. Whatever the narrative management of these "components," the story studied here could become a fable, could be interpreted as symbolizing in a relevant way a stereotypical situation associating refugees in general, and not only the protagonist of this story, with street harassment. One could even argue that in the case of factual stories, dominant on social media, the mimetic component is

immediately de-problematized since the audience will mostly assume that the protagonists are real people.

INTENTIONALITY, TRUST, IDENTIFICATION

The third way in which narratives affect our beliefs is related to the issue of intentionality. Several researchers have shown that our cognition of narratives relies heavily on the intentionality we reconstruct from the act of storytelling. Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2014) specifically emphasizes the idea that the audience is compelled to reconstruct the context within which the act of storytelling occurs. This necessity essentially involves forming a rhetorical image (defining an *ethos*) of the person responsible for the narrative act, on the basis of elements provided by the narrative (which the narrative voice presents as certain) or inferred from it (which the reader assumes)—and then attributing intentions to him or her.

In the example studied here, as in many other stories circulating on social media, the narrative offers little information about the narrative context, even if we observe an effort toward self-characterization by the narrative voice (conscious of the political stakes of her story, the author takes the time to explain *where she's situated*). Some details allow her to guide her *ethos*, first her political positions ("even I often voted for the left"), but especially the reliability of her story ("I know these streets"). These two points actually lend credibility to two strategies of knowledge assignment. The first piece of information (she sometimes voted left) seeks to offer credibility to the specific sequence of street violence, since it is implied that a left-wing-oriented person is aware of the implications of reporting such an event on the agora of Instagram and thus invites us to believe her because she is aware of those implications. The second piece of information (she has always known these streets) seeks to lend credibility to the narrative of a profound transformation in the overall way her neighborhood lives.

These trust-generating strategies result in a pact that exists implicitly in many other experiential narratives and proves quite effective: *I have lived the experience I am recounting*. And it should be noted that the increasingly "streaming" arrangement of content on social media

tends to arrange experiential narratives in a way that reveals less and less about the narrative context. Linked as much to the intrinsic properties of experiential narratives as to the materiality of the media in which the stories circulate, this absence of contextual information generally prevents us from reconstructing a clear intentionality. Here again, one must recognize the active role of the recipients; admittedly, the absence of decipherable context will favor questioning and critical distance, or, on the contrary (which seems more plausible to me), will simply contribute to invisibility. Following the theory of narrative points of view, one can assume that the absence of context and intention tends to make one forget not the intention, but its complexity. Intention is never unambiguous; one naturally questions the intention behind the narrative act, especially when it is made explicit, but also because, as the work on "untrustworthy" narration has shown, the narrative is capable of embedding several levels of intentionality (e.g., I tell you that I want you to believe this because I want you to think that I want you to believe this for a particular reason). Since new media rarely sketch narrative contexts (Lits 2012) allowing the reconstruction of complex intentional arrangements, they favor an epistemological loss that forces the audience to put their trust more quickly in the narrative voice itself. The specific narrative intentionality of social media is thus a third factor that can be assumed to bias the narrative-knowledge nexus, notably because of the pragmatic absence of a complex context of enunciation on Instagram, and to tend to favor the transformation of experiential stories into cultural scenarios—of experiential knowledge into systemic knowledge.

AFFECTIVE RESPONSE AND PLOT ENGAGEMENT

The emplotment fosters the audience's trust in the narrating voice, and thus in the credibility attributed to the narrated facts. As narrative theory has extensively proved, the audience's engagement with the plot also promotes their affective responses and emotional involvement in the events. A factual account of events (e.g., a chronological unfolding of facts), situated in several conflicting points of view, seems more likely to elicit systemic knowledge. Sequences that accentuate the audience's plot engagement (announcement effects, narrative arrangements that promote suspense or curiosity; Baroni 2017) are described as accentuating

the audience's affective engagement, as they promote mental projection in the immediacy of the narrated world (Schaeffer 1999). This immersive activity is considered to shift the experience of the storyworld onto that of the extratextual world, neutralizing for a time the critical distance of the audience (who *no longer sees* the artifact and/or the medium, such as the words conveying the narrative, the visual device supporting the Instagram story, etc.), paving the way for an increased affective investment, albeit regulated by the empathetic strategies of the narrative.

Some hypotheses defend the idea that the audience of the story identifies much more spontaneously with the narrative voice than with the external protagonists (Jouve 1998) because of a double immediacy (between the audience and the voice, between the voice and the narrated world). Experiential narratives on social media tend to present a small number of external protagonists and to leave room for a mainly monophonic narration (which is the case in our example). It has also been pointed out several times that the affective response seems to be favored, not by the narrative of directly experienced violence, but by the use of an "empathy relay" character (Lavocat 2016) who seems more likely to constitute him- or herself as a "witness" and thus attract the audience's trust. This hypothesis, on its own scale, could help to explain why direct words of victims seem to be much more often questioned (especially on social media), but also why accounts of violence seen and not self-experienced (as is also the case in our example) might elicit stronger affective adherence.

We could also suggest, contrary to intuition, that it is not the fullest characters, those whose psychology is developed with complexity, who elicit the most affective responses (Keen 2006). In a rather simple formula, the more the audience knows about the victim, the more they recognize him or her as an alterity, and the less they know, the more likely they are to self-project into him or her. To put it more precisely, the less the audience knows, the more an identification bias will push them to attribute to the other values and beliefs that are their own, increasing both their trust in the version of the story proposed and their affective commitment. Now, of course, a property of social media narratives is their brevity, which almost never allows for the development

of complex characters and, if we follow this hypothesis, favors the multiplication of "empty shell" characters that audiences will fill with their own worldviews.

Considering all of these factors, but especially the powerful relationship between immersion and personal investment, we can hypothesize that digital experiential narratives, like the example mentioned, tend to favor engagement in the plot and therefore affective responses. That affective responses constitute in turn an effective support for imagining oneself in the narrated situation, recognizing the possibility of a shared experience, and finally generating systemic beliefs could logically follow, and is even one of the main driving forces of the narrative-knowledge nexus in general (Pelletier 2016).

COGNITIVE SATISFACTION AND LIVE STORYTELLING

If encounters between narrative theory and cognitive sciences are still in an exploratory phase (Ryan 2015), some studies problematize narrative forms in terms of "cognitive satisfaction" (Phelan 2004; Zunshine 2006). This refers to a set of mental states, sometimes very differently defined, activating reward circuits, when the brain performs specific operations or confronts specific environments. In the narratological field, many hypothesize that experiential narratives intersecting with the characteristics attributed earlier to small stories produce a particular cognitive satisfaction "because human mental dispositions and capacities are optimally suited for navigating situations and events that are encountered at a particular spatiotemporal scale or degree of resolution" (Herman 2013: 77). Considering the knowledge-narrative nexus, high cognitive satisfaction seems to explain in part our attraction to narratives of this type, the pleasure and interest they elicit, but it might also justify that we allow them greater authority over the formation of our structural representations of reality. The cognitive satisfaction created by individual narratives could very well participate in the shift between experiential and systemic knowledge.

Based on James Gibson's work in cognitive psychology on the ecology of human experience (1979) and Harry Heft's work on the organic scale (2001), David Herman (2013: 79) lists several narrative properties

(and operations) that characterize the experiential level and that can produce cognitive satisfaction, including the following:

- formulating the intention to perform an action in a context
- attributing action intentions to a third party
- expressing a particular point of view on an event
- recounting a strong emotional reaction to an event
- relating a sensitive (sensory) experience of one's environment
- producing a normative or axiological evaluation of an event

We can measure how much an experiential narrative, especially the example of the Instagram story used, ticks these boxes, models such a mental environment, and performs "cognitively satisfying" operations. There is no doubt that the brevity of social media narratives amplifies the affect, notably because it implies (or largely hides) the motivations of the protagonists and their mental activities, as shown before. Yet, as I have also outlined, narratives that say nothing about the minds of their protagonists seem particularly likely to activate our cognitive interest, inviting us to engage our natural ability to "read" the minds of others (Vermeule 2009). This operation, which Herman calls "attribution of intention to a third party," is often seen as producing the "cognitive satisfaction of intentional interpretation" (Zunshine 2006).

By finally considering these digital narratives in their particular context, which is often studied as central but remains auxiliary in a narrative approach, one can easily extend the hypothesis of narrative-induced cognitive satisfaction by including device-induced satisfaction. The *live* aspect of Instagram, even if mostly a convention of reception (the absolute live does not exist, the experience is always mediated) has been much studied in media theory. Due to the supposed immediacy, the audience feels like sharing a temporal position identical to the narrator's (whether this is true or not, Instagram stories encourage such a pact). This community of position is also often considered to increase the audience's narrative involvement, as they logically share with the sender the same knowledge of the situation and, above all, the same ignorance of the events to come, hence, more precisely, an intensified engagement with the plot (the consequences of which we have seen for the

narrative-knowledge nexus). Instantaneity could undoubtedly appear as another factor that increases cognitive satisfaction, at least according to the dominant hypotheses in the field (Citton 2010), though the precise functioning of narrativity in this hypothesis would deserve further analysis.

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Notes

1. A correlative meta-analysis of approximately two hundred studies found that exposure to media violence encourages not only violent behavior but also, and especially, its integration into personal ethical systems (notably its acceptance as a viable solution to interpersonal problems).
2. This experimental study argues that exposure to media violence encourages spontaneous hostility toward others, regardless of their behavior toward the subject, including social hostility (the subject tends to gratuitously thwart others' plans for personal pleasure).
3. According to this experimental social psychology study, repeated exposure to scenes of domestic violence in factual media and fictional movies significantly decreases subjects' empathy for victims and their ability to recognize and evaluate gender violence as such.
4. One of the main interests of narratological reflection on knowledge (from Ricoeur to cognitivist narratology) is that narratives (in their two functions) convey knowledge, but that narrativity is also a form of knowledge. This is probably one of the reasons why, "despite all the old books on narrativity and all the recent essays on storytelling, no one has yet managed to determine what a narrative can do" (Citton 2010: 256). We can also wonder about the way in which our moral and political knowledge is woven from narratives, because ethics is understood in a narrative way (Astruc and Ebguy 2018; Mäkelä 2018), or simply because we always have a reservoir of cultural scenarios that help us

decide how to live a situation (having power over others, witnessing an abuse of power, etc.).

5. I will try to converge different definitions of "experiential" knowledge and "systemic" knowledge, coming from perspectives as diverse as social psychology or legal ethics. For an effective update on the recent state of theories of knowledge, see in particular the work of Lehrer (2018).
6. Research to date has emphasized the role of narrative as an instrument for shaping human experience, intuitively associating it with a kind of knowledge often described as "mimetic" (Schaeffer 1999), "practical" (Nussbaum 2015), "human-scaled" (Herman 2013), or, most often, just "experiential" (Caracciolo 2014; Laugier 2006).

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