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**“Affective News” & Attitudes:**

**A Multi-Topic Experiment of Attitude Impacts from Political News and Fiction**

Popular entertainment often involves political messages, and entertainment elements are now commonly used in politics coverage. This study examines how suspense drives impacts of narrative structure in political entertainment on attitudes, building on the “affective news” extended model. Hypotheses were tested with four texts on controversial political issues (within-subjects), presented in a *linear* or *inverted-pyramid* structure, either as *news* or *fiction*. The resulting 2x2x3x4 online experiment ( $N = 227$ ) showed linear texts produced greater suspense and attitude change than inverted-pyramid texts. Suspense mediated attitude impacts. Both news and fiction versions influenced attitudes, with impacts still detectable one day after exposure.

*Keywords:* political entertainment, suspense, political attitudes, “affective news” extended model, inverted pyramid

### **“Affective News” & Attitudes:**

#### **A Multi-Topic Experiment of Attitude Impacts from Political News and Fiction**

Entertainment messages that convey socio-political information or commentary have a long history (e.g., LaMarre, 2015). For example, in mediaeval times, the Christian church used theater to make its celebrations more appealing and communicate its moral values to illiterate audiences. Entertainment can convey political stances, and contemporary media entertainment often entails political messages, ranging from subtle allusions to explicit calls to action (Holbert, 2005). Importantly, political entertainment includes both fictional and factual accounts (Holbert, 2005), albeit using dramaturgical elements and narrative structures that are traditionally associated with fiction plots. For example, the TV format “60 Minutes” is known for reporting through individuals’ perspectives, wherein reporters take the role of a narrator. Many current news formats aim for entertainment appeal, i.e., through sensationalistic topics and presentation styles, to attract audiences (e.g., Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2012). Hence, the lines between traditional formats of political information (i.e., news) and entertainment formats become increasingly blurred (e.g., Holbert, 2005; Otto, Glogger, & Boukes, 2017).

Against the backdrop of a flourishing body of recent related research, the present investigation contributes to theorizing and understanding of impacts of political entertainment by extending and testing the affective news model (Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, & Hastall, 2004). It aims to disentangle how phenomena associated with entertainment experiences, specifically suspense, can funnel impacts from both factual (news) and fictional media messages on political attitudes. For this purpose, an experiment will compare attitude impacts of suspense-evoking linear texts with those of inverted-pyramid texts, while examining suspense and empathy as mechanisms driving attitude change. In the following, we briefly review political entertainment

research rooted in political communication and media psychology to situate the present study, introduce the affective news extended model to derive hypotheses on attitude impacts. As hypotheses pertain to immediate and persistent impacts, a multi-topic experiment will examine them with both immediate post-exposure and one-day follow-up attitude measures.

### **Political Entertainment Research**

The term political entertainment encompasses a wide variety of genres and includes both fictional and factual accounts (Holbert, 2005; Nitsch & Eilders, 2015). It ranges from reporting that uses narrative structures to fictional drama with plot lines that pertain to real-world political issues. In light of plenteous political drama, comedy, and satire, as well as soft news and political talk shows, numerous scholars successfully examined how these messages affect political knowledge, interest, efficacy, cynicism, attitudes, and other variables (Holbert, 2014). The diverse theoretical approaches used in this context have been structured into the realms of hedonism and eudaimonia (Weinmann & Vorderer, 2018).

Political entertainment that emphasizes humor—such as satirical news, parody, and late-night shows—has inspired many empirical investigations (e.g., Becker, 2014; Feldman & Young, 2008; Moy, Johnson, & Barthel, 2014). While these formats are associated with hedonic, fun-seeking motivations of media use, another recent strand of political entertainment research examined truth- and meaning-seeking (eudaimonic) motivations (e.g., Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). Accordingly, users who turn to political entertainment may not merely seek amusement but can also look for truth and learning as well as thought-provoking and moving experiences related to political issues, even in political satire (Young, 2013).

Hence, while hedonism (fun and amusement) and eudaimonia (appreciation) have been examined in the context of political entertainment, suspense as a third key dimension of

entertainment has been neglected thus far. Suspense drives much of the attraction to entertainment messages (Vorderer et al., 1996) and can be briefly defined as “a noxious affective reaction that characteristically derives from the respondents’ acute fearful apprehension about deplorable events that threaten liked protagonists” (Zillmann, 1996, p. 208). In operational terms, a commonly adopted suspense measure by Knobloch et al. (2004; with adjectives such as *gripping*, *thrilling*, and *suspenseful*) will be used in the study. Prior work with this measure established that the suspense items differentiated from other facets of message responses, curiosity and interest specifically.

Even though entertainment researchers have postulated that amusement, meaning, and suspense are the key aspects of entertainment experiences (see explications and empirical findings on this tripartite conceptualization presented by Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017, and Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), and suspense is a prevalent phenomenon in the realm of entertainment (Vorderer, Wulff, & Friedrichsen, 1996), little is known about the role of suspense for political entertainment and its impacts. Although both amusement and suspense are commonly subsumed under the broader term of hedonistic enjoyment (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), the greater prevalence of negatively valenced arousal during suspenseful experiences, compared to amusing experiences, will likely garner very different impacts (i.e., greater attention and more careful information processing; Frijda, 2007; Nabi, 1999). Thus, differentiating between funny and suspenseful political messages is arguably important.

Indeed, examples of suspenseful political entertainment come to mind easily, given that action and thriller movies may entail environmentalist messages (i.e., *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Avatar*), pertain to terrorism (i.e., *The Devil’s Own*), or healthcare access (e.g., *John Q*). Furthermore, it is plausible that political news, i.e., so-called “horse-race journalism” (Mutz,

1995), induces suspense regarding anticipated outcomes. A few studies examined how exposure to (non-political) news produces suspense (Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, & Hastall, 2004; Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2007), but there is arguably a void of research on suspense in political entertainment.

Based on the notion that suspense is a key driver of entertainment experiences and likely accounts for the attraction to certain popular political entertainment formats, the present study aims to address this gap in the literature. The next section will introduce a theoretical approach regarding how both news and fictional stories can induce suspense.

### **Affective News Extended Model**

The affective news model (Knobloch et al., 2004) postulates that certain discourse structures, in which events are presented, typically evoke certain affective responses in recipients. While the model accounts for different structures that predictably evoke suspense (linear structure) or curiosity (reversal structure), the present investigation will extend the model to focus on the attitude impacts of the suspense-evoking linear structure, to juxtapose it with an inverted-pyramid structure.

The affective news model (illustrated in Figure 1) describes the linear structure, which targets suspense as a response in recipients, as follows (Knobloch et al., 2004, p. 261):

To evoke suspense, a narrative must contain an initiating event and an outcome and must have a discourse structure that is parallel to the event structure [...]. The initiating event, presented early in the text, makes significant consequences for the characters very likely to happen in subsequent developments, thus, instigates onlookers' concern, resulting in suspense. [...] This piece of information indicates that some character is in danger [...], which creates suspense.

Further, the affective news model labels the inverted-pyramid news style, a landmark in the informational message formats, the “inverted” discourse structure. It presents the most important parts at the beginning of a text and less important aspects toward the end. The inverted pyramid structure places the outcome and the initiating event in the discourse’s beginning and other events toward the end. It is characteristic for the inverted discourse structure that it does not evoke much of an affective response per its structure, although topic relevance or inherently dramatic events may instigate emotions, regardless of structure.

Empirical work building on the affective news model (Knobloch et al., 2004) supported it, demonstrating that a linear structure induced greater suspense than an inverted structure, which was true across three stories presented either in a novel book formatting or in a news article formatting. Regardless of whether the messages were presented as news or fiction, the linear structure was always rated as more suspenseful, as well as enjoyable. Before testing hypotheses regarding attitude impacts, the present study aims to replicate the finding regarding suspense by Knobloch et al. (2004) per H1:

H1: A linear structure induces more suspense than an inverted pyramid structure.

Several related studies compared linear and inverted-pyramid versions of news stories regarding impacts on information processing and recognition (Emde, Klimmt, & Schlütz, 2016; Kleemans, Schaap, & Suijkerbuijk 2018), aiming to make news more attractive to young audiences. However, embedded in the context of political entertainment, the present study builds on the argument that emotional shifts during message exposure, and suspense in particular, are crucial for effects on attitudes to extend the affective news model (see Nabi & Green, 2015, for elaboration): Because narratives evoke emotions, which in turn increase message engagement and perceived relevance, they are thought to be particularly persuasive. Even though the

emotional impacts could possibly distract from the specific persuasive claims, the predominant view in the related literature is that narratives are also particularly persuasive because they reduce counterarguing (e.g., Slater & Rouner, 2006) and thus distract recipients from generating their own thoughts that would hinder persuasion. Nabi and Green (2015) noted that suspense is likely particularly effective in inducing emotional shifts that should foster persuasion, while calling for more research. Hence, this study will test the role of suspense for attitude impacts.

Indeed, several studies applied the affective news model to examine attitude impacts, albeit without considering suspense: Shen et al.’s (2014) experiment presented a news article on shale gas drilling to participants, with either a linear or an inverted-pyramid structure, as well as either economic or environmental aspects emphasized. The study tested if the linear version had a greater impact on shale gas drilling attitudes than the inverted-pyramid version, which was partially supported (only in the environmental frame but not in the economic framing condition). For the subgroup where attitude change occurred, it was mediated by empathy and cognitive responses (Shen et al., 2014). Furthermore, de Graaf and Hustinx (2011) presented participants with a shortened version of a text (originally based on a fiction story) that pertains to malaria cures in Africa, either arranged in a linear or inverted-pyramid structure. They found that the linear version not only induced stronger emotional responses but also induced beliefs more in line with the story message. However, the study did not clarify the mechanism of attitude impacts, as it did not yield mediation effects; in contrast to the focus of the present paper, the work by de Graaf and Hustinx (2011) also did not target political issues.

The present study extends the affective news model by Knobloch et al. (2004) beyond affective responses to derive the affective news extended model, applying it to the examination of attitude change. In the interest of robust findings that hold across issues, the present work will



use four established, controversial topics. To investigate whether attitude impacts are also robust in that they last beyond immediate responses, a one-day follow-up measure will be incorporated in the design with the following hypothesis:

H2: A linear structure (wherein events are presented in a linear format to induce suspense) has greater (a) *immediate* impact and (b) *persistent* impact on attitudes than an inverted pyramid structure.

In contrast to prior work, it will investigate the mediating role of suspense for attitude impacts. Suspense is not only critical for fiction enjoyment (Vorderer et al., 1996); it is also influential for news enjoyment (Kaspar, Zimmermann, & Wilbers, 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2007). The emotional shifts involved in suspense are of particular relevance when considering impacts of political entertainment media content on attitudes (Nabi & Green, 2015). Hence, the following hypothesis is posited:

H3: Suspense mediates the attitude impact suggested in H2.

When examining the development of suspense, empathy plays a central role per several relevant theoretical approaches, detailed in the following. While how recipients relate to characters is crucial for instigating emotional responses, it should be acknowledged that a variety of conceptualizations on related processes exist (e.g., Nabi & Green, 2015, mentioned the concepts of parasocial interaction and identification along with empathy, to make the point that how recipients respond to characters matters for the emotional impacts of narratives). The present study examines empathy because this concept has been defined and discussed in depth in Zillmann’s (1996) theorizing of suspense. Empathy is “any experience that is a response (a) to information about circumstances presumed to cause acute emotions in another individual and/or (b) to the bodily, facial, paralinguistic, and linguistic expression of emotional experiences by

another individual and/or (c) to another individual's actions that are presumed to be precipitated by acute emotional experiences, this response being (d) associated with an appreciable increase in excitement and (e) construed by respondents as feeling with or feeling for another individual” (Zillmann, 1996, p. 214-215). The operational definition to be used in the present study is adopted from Shen’s (2010) questionnaire.

Zillmann’s (1996) model on strategic evocation of emotions in suspenseful drama postulates that media users form anticipations regarding hoped-for positive outcomes and feared negative outcomes (i.e., suspense), which subsequently shape empathy for characters. Furthermore, Nabi and Green (2015) argued that empathy should foster persuasive impact. In fact, prior work (Shen et al., 2014) found that empathy mediated attitude impacts.

Based on the outlined theories and evidence, it is plausible that a linear structure is more persuasive than an inverted-pyramid structure (H2), due to the evoked suspense (H3) and possibly also due to empathy as mechanisms of relating with characters. Moreover, building on Zillmann’s (1996) postulation that viewers of suspenseful drama form anticipations regarding hoped-for positive outcomes and feared negative outcomes (i.e., suspense), which subsequently shape empathy for characters, and Nabi and Green’s (2015) argument that empathy fosters persuasive impact, a serial mediation will be explored in RQ1. RQ1: Do suspense and empathy serially mediate the attitude impact suggested in H2?

Because the affective news extended model is rooted in a perspective that suggests that both factual and fictional accounts have comparable emotional effects on recipients, the present work will extend this view to the current study. Knobloch et al.’s (2004) study found affective responses to be parallel for texts presented as fictional or factual accounts. The present study

extends the postulation of parallel effects to persuasive impacts, in keeping with a line of research that compared impacts of traditional news with political entertainment formats (e.g., Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007; Mutz & Nir, 2010) or examined attitude impacts of fiction (e.g., Mulligan & Habel, 2011, 2013). Overall, communication researchers should probably not be surprised to find fictional accounts to be as persuasive as factual accounts. After all, decades of cultivation research built on the argument that both fictional and news messages shape recipients’ worldviews (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2014). Accordingly, a null hypothesis will be tested (through a power analysis) in the present investigation:

H4: Factual accounts (presented as news) and fictional accounts (presented as short “flash fiction”) do not differ in their (a) *immediate* impact and (b) *persistent* impact on attitudes.

## Method

### Overview

Adult participants ( $N = 227$ ) were recruited for a two-session online study approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board. The 2x2 between-subjects experimental design varied both text format (*fiction vs. news*) and text structure (*inverted-pyramid vs. linear*) throughout four presented texts. To vary format, texts were shown either in a fiction book formatting style or news magazine formatting style (see Appendices A1 and A2 at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>) with minimal text edits to coincide with genres of news or fiction writing. To vary the text structure, the *inverted-pyramid* versions presented the most important events upfront in the typical journalistic “inverted pyramid” style, whereas the *linear* versions presented events in a linear structure, from an initiating event to an outcome, to induce suspense (based on Knobloch et al., 2004; see Appendices B1 and B2 at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>). Further, the experimental design featured two within-subjects factors: time (t0 attitudes measured before

text exposure and t1 measured after exposure, as well as a t2 delayed measure of attitudes captured one day after exposure) and text topics (immigration, abortion, healthcare, and the death penalty). Hence, the full setup featured a 2x2x3x4 design, wherein the three measurement points formed a three-step within-subjects factor and the four texts formed a four-step within-subjects factor, which aids statistical power of the research design and reduces the risk of a type II error (Charness, Gneezy, & Kuhn, 2012). Additionally, a control group read four texts that did not pertain to the targeted political issues, with two presented as “flash fiction” short stories and two as factual news reports. Otherwise the control group completed the procedure in the same fashion as the experimental groups.

## **Participants**

Initially, 261 adult American college students participated in session 1. Twelve were excluded due to a technical error in the online procedure when first launched, wherein one text page was not displayed. Preliminary examination yielded the duration of session 1 varied greatly: Seven individuals did not complete the whole session within 24 hours, while an additional six took between four to 15.5 hours, whereas nine spent less than ten minutes and most likely did not read the stimuli. To ensure that measures from session 1 indeed reflected responses to the stimuli texts, these inattentive 22 participants (8.8% of valid entries) were excluded because they spent less than ten minutes or more than four hours on session 1 (for discussion of methods to detect low quality data in online studies, see Buchanan & Scofield, 2018; Mason & Suri, 2012). The remaining participants ( $N = 227$ ) were included in all analyses of session 1; the average duration of session 1 was  $M = 34.3$  minutes ( $SD = 22.9$ ). Experimental cell sizes, defined by the 2x2 between-subjects factors, ranged between 41 and 51.

Of these participants, 45.8% ( $n = 104$ ) were male and 54.2% ( $n = 123$ ) were female.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 ( $M = 21$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). In regards to partisanship, 36.1% identified as Democrat, 31.3% as Independent, 24.2% as Republican, and 8.4% as “Other.”

Further, on a political ideology scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating “Very Liberal” and 7 indicating “Very Conservative,” participants averaged slightly more liberal than conservative ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ). For session 2, 215 individuals participated, and anyone who spent more than 45 minutes on the brief follow-up questionnaire was also excluded from any analyses that involved follow-up data, resulting in 187 participants used in analyses.

## Procedure

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited through an undergraduate research participant pool and via email through undergraduate communication classes at a large Midwestern university in the U.S. in fall 2017. They received course credit as incentive.

**Baseline measures (t0).** After providing consent, participants indicated their political attitudes regarding four target issues, embedded in distractor issues, as well as perceived importance of all issues. Participants also reported how much they enjoyed reading various text genres and their political partisanship and ideology.

**Stimuli exposure and text-specific measures.** After completing the baseline measures, participants were directed to the second section of session 1 where they were asked to read several texts very carefully. They were also told that they would be asked questions about their impressions of each text. Each participant was then randomly assigned to one of five conditions: news format with inverted-pyramid structure, news format with linear structure, fiction format with inverted-pyramid structure, fiction format with linear structure, or the control condition. They read four texts with the same formatting and structure, one at a time. The survey software tracked how long each participant spent on each text with no time limits imposed. The software

also ensured that the sequence in which the four texts about immigration, healthcare, the death penalty, and abortion was randomized across participants. After each text, participants responded to questions that captured empathy and suspense, as well as transportation<sup>1</sup>, for the specific text and the characters within the text.

**Postexposure measures (t1).** After reading the four texts and answering items specifically regarding each text, participants were directed to the third section of session 1 where they were asked to answer the same questions in the baseline survey regarding their political attitudes but to indicate their views “at this point.” They then answered manipulation checks of news vs. fiction perceptions, genre perceptions, and political stance perceptions of the stimuli and demographic questions. Finally, they were thanked and informed that they would be contacted via email for a brief follow-up session the next day.

**Follow-up session (t2).** One day after their completion of session 1, participants received a short follow-up survey. They answered items from the baseline and postexposure measures about their political attitudes and views of importance of political issues. Participants also answered questions regarding their political partisanship and ideology. Participants reported how closely they followed the news and reported the amount of time they spent consuming news the day before. Finally, they were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

### **Stimuli, Experimental Manipulations, and Manipulation Checks**

The following subsection reviews how stimuli were developed including political issues and stances of the articles, experimental manipulations (e.g., format and structure), and related manipulation checks.

**Political issues and stances.** Storylines were developed for each of the four controversial political issues: immigration, abortion, healthcare, and the death penalty with text structure

(inverted-pyramid vs. linear) and text formatting (news vs. fiction) manipulated, resulting in four versions of each text and 16 total texts. Each text was loosely based on actual news stories and featured a storyline with a clear protagonist and extensive dialogue/direct quotations. The storylines within each issue were the same, with only slight variances in wording to accommodate structure and format differences. They were exactly 600 words long with a 5-word title. Each text was accompanied with a byline featuring a gender-non-specific author name. For each of the issues, all four texts about that issue contained the same political stance, with the articles for two of the issues (immigration and the death penalty) implying a liberal stance on the political issue and the articles for the other two issues (abortion and healthcare) implying a conservative stance on the issue. Importantly, none of the texts contained an explicit statement of the stance.

Participants rated the political stances portrayed in the texts for each target issue, to assess that the manipulations functioned as desired, on a scale from -5 (strongly oppose) to +5 (strongly support) based on the prompts “banning abortion,” “death penalty,” “deporting illegal immigrants,” and “government regulated healthcare.”

For each text, the desired political stance regarding the issue was conveyed, reflected in a significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) from the scale mid-point of zero, per one-sample  $t$  tests. Specifically, the story in which a protagonist was wrongfully convicted to a death sentence received an average score of  $M = -3.13$  ( $SD = 2.39$ ) on a scale pertaining to the prompt “death penalty” from -5 (strongly oppose) to +5 (strongly support), where any negative scores indicate that the text opposed the death penalty. The abortion text was designed to convey a pro-life stance with a young mother reaching happiness with an originally unwanted child; its average rating based on the prompt “banning abortion” was  $M = 2.86$  ( $SD = 2.59$ ), suggesting it was

generally perceived as conveying a pro-life stance. Further, the healthcare text was designed to convey a stance in opposition to “government regulated healthcare,” as it described a patient death due to not receiving necessary treatment in the Canadian healthcare system; it was effective, based on the negative mean score for a prompt “government regulated healthcare” at  $M = -1.48$  ( $SD = 3.26$ ). The immigration text described the suffering of a deported immigrant mother; it was rated at  $M = -3.00$  ( $SD = 2.53$ ) based on the prompt “deporting illegal immigrants” and thus conveyed the targeted stance in opposition of deportation.

**Format.** Two distinct text displays were developed in order to differentiate between the news and fiction texts. For the news texts, a template labeled *The Star Gazette* framed texts as factual news, whereas for the fiction texts, a template called *Imagined World* with the subtitle “A Collection of Fictional Stories” framed the texts as fictional short stories (see Appendices A1 and A2 at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>).

To check the manipulation of *news* vs. *fiction*, the experimental groups rated the four texts based on the prompt: *Did the described events really happen and were the described individuals real people? Or were the described events and people all fictional?* Participants rated the texts on a scale from -5 for *real events/people* to +5 for *fictional events/people*. The texts on the four political issues were referenced with *Text about Leonard Curtis* (“*A Struggle on Death Row*”), *Text about Harry Sitwell* (“*Hitting Limits on Universal Healthcare*”), *Text about Ashley Williams* (“*Abortion Decision Weighs on Mother*”), and *Text about Maria Phillips* (“*An Undocumented Life: Maria’s Story*”).

An ANOVA utilized the four manipulation check items for *real* vs. *fictional* perceptions (see method section) for the four texts as a within-subjects factor while applying both the *news* vs. *fiction* and the *inverted-pyramid* vs. *linear* conditions as between-subjects factors. The



manipulation was effective,  $F(1, 185) = 16.6, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .082$ , as the *news* condition yielded an average across all four texts of  $M = -1.50$  ( $SD = 2.54$ ) that was significantly lower than the average in the *fiction* condition,  $M = .12$  ( $SD = 2.82$ ). The impact of the *news vs. fiction* manipulation on the *real vs. fictional* perceptions was uniform across texts, as the interaction between this between-group factor and texts as within-subjects factor was not significant (*n.s.*). The *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* manipulation did not have a significant impact on the *real vs. fictional* perceptions (*n.s.*), attesting to the fact that the *news vs. fiction* manipulation worked independently from the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* manipulation.

To further assess the *news vs. fiction* manipulation, participants indicated to which extent the labels of *news reports* and *short fictional stories* (“*flash fiction*”) were applicable, on a scale from -5 (*not applicable*) to +5 (*definitely applicable*). Hence, an additional ANOVA used the two *genre perceptions* ratings as repeated measures and the same between-subjects factors as above. Demonstrating the effective *news vs. fiction* manipulation once more, only the interaction between the within-subjects factor for *genre perceptions* and the between-subjects factor for the *news vs. fiction* manipulation was significant,  $F(1, 163) = 46.6, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .22$ , as the *news* condition yielded an average of  $M = 2.17$  ( $SD = 3.03$ ) for *news reports* versus  $M = -.16$  ( $SD = 3.60$ ) for *short fictional stories* (“*flash fiction*”), whereas the *fiction* condition yielded an average of  $M = -.91$  ( $SD = 3.16$ ) for *news reports* versus  $M = 2.49$  ( $SD = 2.82$ ) for *fiction stories*. All pairwise comparisons (with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons) of these means showed they were significantly different,  $p < .001$ . The *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* structure manipulation did not have a significant impact on the *genre perceptions* (*n.s.*), which again demonstrates that the *news vs. fiction* manipulation worked independently from the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* structure manipulation.

**Structures.** The texts were arranged in an inverted-pyramid or linear structure (see illustrations in Appendices B1 and B2 at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>). The inverted-pyramid versions presented the most important events first, with the outcome of the story almost immediately evident. On the other hand, the linear versions presented an initiating event first and did not reveal the outcome until the end of the story, to induce suspense (per Knobloch et al., 2004). Besides the order of text segments, all other story elements were kept the same with only minimal variation in detail and wording for transitions. No related manipulation checks were performed, building on O’Keefe’s (2003) argument that intrinsic features of persuasive messages do not require manipulation checks. H1 (tested in the results section) pertains to expected impacts of this manipulation and reflects its effectiveness.

### **Dependent Variables and Covariates**

**Political attitudes.** Participants indicated their attitudes (adopted from Westerwick, Johnson, & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017), at three time points in the current study: before stimuli exposure (t0), immediately after reading (t1), and one day later (t2), see Appendix C at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG> for descriptives. The overall question read “How much do you personally oppose or support each of the issues below?” Specifically, participants reported how much they supported or opposed the four target political issues, with the prompts “banning abortion,” “death penalty,” “deporting illegal immigrants,” and “government regulated healthcare,” as well as five distractors on a slider that could be positioned between -50 and 50 with 0 as a neutral attitude. The slider scales were not labeled, providing no numeric feedback. Negative scores indicated an oppositional attitude whereas positive scores indicated a supportive attitude.

**Immediate attitude change.** For statistical analyses, a change score was created to examine attitude change between pre-exposure scores and scores immediately after reading. Pre-

exposure attitude scores for each target issue (t0) were subtracted from participants’ scores immediately after stimuli exposure (t1). The change scores for individual attitudes were recoded, depending on story stance and item prompt wording—to understand why this was necessary, it helps to think through an example: If a participant’s attitude regarding abortion shifted in line with the pro-choice article, this would be reflected in a *higher* support rating for “banning abortion” at t1 than at t0. However, if a participant’s attitude regarding death penalty shifted in line with the anti-death-penalty article, this change was reflected in a *lower* support score for “death penalty,” simply due to the wording of the item. To be able to compute an average attitude change score across all stories, the attitude change scores for three texts (healthcare, death penalty, immigration) were thus recoded. Hence, for the recoded change scores, a *negative* score indicated that a participant’s attitude changed in a direction that *contrasted* the text’s stance, while a positive score indicated an attitude change in line with the text stance. These scores were then averaged to create an attitude change measure (across experimental groups and control condition:  $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 9.74$ ,  $n = 227$ ).

**Delayed attitude change.** A change score to examine attitude change between baseline attitude scores and delayed scores was calculated by subtracting baseline scores (t0) from delayed scores (t2). Again, these scores were averaged to create a delayed attitude change measure (across experimental groups and control condition:  $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 10.21$ ,  $n = 187$ ). Again, the variables were recoded such that higher scores indicate greater attitude change in line with text stances.

**Empathy.** Participants responded to the following items (adopted from Shen, 2010) to measure empathy after reading, "I experienced the same emotions as the character when reading this message," "I was in a similar emotional state as the character when reading this message," "I

can see the character's point of view," and "I can understand what the character was going through in the message." The scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The average across experimental conditions and stories was  $M = 3.87$  ( $SD = 1.15$ ,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ). Appendix C reports descriptives at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>.

**Suspense.** For each individual text, participants completed items adopted from Knobloch et al. (2004) to measure suspense. Because these items had been translated, as this prior work was conducted with German stimuli and a German sample, the suspense measure was validated through a factor analysis, which yielded that suspense was distinct from other responses (see Appendix C at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>).

The specific suspense measures were the following: "How did you feel while reading?" on a scale labeled *in suspense* that ranged from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*absolutely*). "How much do the following characteristics apply to the text?" was the prompt for scales labeled *gripping*, *thrilling*, and *suspenseful* that ranged from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*). Including all 16 items across four stories, the overall descriptives across experimental conditions and stories were as follows:  $M = 5.09$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ,  $\alpha = 0.92$ . Appendix C reports details, accessible at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>. The analyses of variance in the results section used the individual items that captured suspense in a repeated-measures design, whereas mediation analyses used a condensed suspense measure averaged across the 16 items.

**Exposure.** While participants read the stimuli embedded in the online procedure, the software captured how much time they spent on reading each text in seconds. Each text was displayed on its own dedicated page. The average reading time, when excluding outliers with over 800 seconds on a page, summed across all four text pages, was  $M = 9.42$  minutes ( $SD = 6.24$ ) (see Appendix C at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG> for details).

## Data Analysis

An ANOVA served to test H1. Three items with which participants rated the texts—*suspenseful*, *gripping*, and *thrilling*—were adopted along with a question on the extent to which participants felt *in suspense* while reading. These four items for suspense served as repeated measures in this ANOVA (recall that these items yielded high reliability; a collapsed suspense measure produces the same ANOVA results), while the four texts were again incorporated as a within-subjects factor, which results in 16 repeated measures. The *news vs. fiction* and the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* conditions served as between-subjects factors.

Similarly, an ANOVA served to test H2a and H4a. It used the attitude measures before and after reading (*pre-post*) and the four political issues that the texts pertained to (*issue*) as within-subjects factors, while *news vs. fiction* and *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* served as between-subjects factors. The analysis controlled for biological sex as a between-subjects factor as well as exposure time and participants’ political ideology as covariates.

An additional analysis served to check whether these impacts may have resulted merely from sensitization effects. For this purpose, the ANOVA above was repeated with five experimental conditions to include the control group, news inverted-pyramid, news linear, fiction inverted-pyramid, and fiction linear groups. The same control variables were incorporated.

To address H2b and H4b, the analyses outlined above were then repeated with three attitude measurement points: pre-exposure (t0), immediately after exposure (t1), and one day after exposure (t2). The manipulations of *news vs. fiction* and *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* served as between-subjects factors. Since not all participants completed the follow-up questionnaire, the sample for these analyses is smaller. To assess whether the impacts merely stemmed from sensitization, once more, as for the immediate attitude impacts, the ANOVA model was repeated

with the five experimental conditions that resulted from the *news vs. fiction* and the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* manipulations plus the control group. To examine persistent attitude impacts, three attitude measurement points were used--pre-exposure (t0), immediately after exposure (t1), and one day after exposure (t2).

H3 was examined with a mediation analysis (Model 4) from PROCESS version 2.13 (Hayes, 2013). A point estimate for an indirect effect (total or specific) was considered significant if zero was not included in the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. Political ideology, exposure time, and biological sex served as control variables. For H3 specifically, a mediation analysis with the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension as independent variable ( $X$ , 1 = *inverted-pyramid*, 2 = *linear*), suspense (condensed in an average score across 16 individual items) as mediator ( $M$ ), and participants' immediate attitude change score as dependent variable ( $Y$ ) was conducted. An exploration of serial mediation regarding RQ1 applied model 6 in PROCESS version 2.13 (Hayes, 2013).

## Results

### Impact of Structure on Suspense

H1 suggested that a linear structure induces more suspense than an inverted pyramid structure. The hypothesized impact of the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* versions was evident in an ANOVA (outlined in Data Analysis section),  $F(1, 179) = 6.32, p = .013, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .034$ : The suspense indicators were consistently higher in the *linear* condition than in the *inverted-pyramid* condition. Using an average score across all measurement items and across the four texts, the *linear* condition induced significantly higher levels of suspense,  $M = 5.38 (SD = 1.42)$ , than the *inverted-pyramid* condition,  $M = 4.56 (SD = 1.71)$ . No other impacts in this ANOVA were relevant, as the *news vs. fiction* between-group factor had no significant impact (*n.s.*), and effects

were uniform across text. While supporting H1, the results further establish that the experimental manipulation regarding *inverted-pyramid* vs. *linear* was successful. [Upon reviewer request, this analysis was rerun without the exclusion of inattentive participants, which still supported H1 with an effect significant at  $p = .010$ .]

### Immediate Attitude Impacts

H2a suggested a greater immediate impact on attitudes from the *linear* text versions compared to the *inverted-pyramid* versions. A significant interaction between the *pre-post* within-subjects factor and the *inverted-pyramid* vs. *linear* factor,  $F(1, 172) = 5.08, p = .026, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .029$ , supported H2a. As expected, the *linear* condition changed participants' attitudes more in line with the text stances than the *inverted-pyramid* condition. However, in both conditions, significant change over time occurred, as subsequent significance tests revealed. In other words, both the *linear* and the *inverted-pyramid* versions were persuasive, but the former more so than the latter. This finding supports H2a, as illustrated in Figure 2. Importantly, this effect was robust across the different texts pertaining to different issues, as the related three-way interaction was not significant (*n.s.*). [Upon reviewer request, this analysis was rerun without the exclusion of inattentive participants, in which the H2a effect fell just short of significance at  $p = .064$ .]

H4a postulated that factual and fictional accounts do not differ in their *immediate* impact. As expected, no significant impact emerged, supporting the H4a null hypothesis. The relevant interaction failed to yield a general impact on attitude change because the interaction between the *pre-post* within-subjects factor and *news* vs. *fiction* manipulation was not significant at  $p = .15$ . To avoid a Type II error where a test fails to detect a difference that exists, a power analysis was conducted with G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), which determined the test

was sufficiently powered to draw this conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

An additional analysis served to check whether these impacts may have resulted merely from sensitization effects (see Appendix D, accessible at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>). It showed that the control did not change significantly regarding attitudes on the target issues that were addressed in the texts that the experimental groups read, which demonstrates that the changes in the experimental groups were not a result of sensitization from the measurement. The only other group that did not exhibit a significant attitude change was the *news inverted-pyramid* group, which resulted from the fact that men in this condition did not show a significant attitude impact from reading news inverted-pyramid texts, whereas women did. [This conclusion also applied when inattentive participants were included in the analysis.]

### **Persistent Attitude Impacts**

While H2a and H4a pertained to immediate impacts, H2b and H4b postulated persistent impacts, which were captured with one-day follow-up attitude measures. The ANOVA that addressed H2b and H4b again yielded a significant impact from the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* manipulation. A greater impact on attitudes resulted from the *linear* text versions, compared to the *inverted-pyramid* versions, which held up even a day later. Hence, H2b was supported.

The interaction per H2b between the *pre-post-delayed* within-subjects factor and the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* factor was significant,  $F(2, 276) = 4.23, p = .016, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .030$ . With this smaller sample, attitude change over time was only marginally significant in the *inverted-pyramid* condition ( $p = .063$ ) when comparing pre- and post-exposure, but the comparison between pre-exposure and the delayed measure was also significant ( $p = .016$ ). For the *linear* condition, the impact on attitudes was significant when comparing pre- and post-exposure ( $p < .001$ ) as well as when comparing pre-exposure and delayed measurement ( $p <$



.001). Thus, persistent attitude impacts existed both for the *inverted-pyramid* and the *linear* group but were stronger in the *linear* condition (illustrated in Figure 3). This finding supports H2b. Importantly, this effect was robust across the different texts pertaining to different issues, as the related three-way interaction was not significant (*n.s.*). [Upon reviewer request, this analysis was rerun without the exclusion of inattentive participants, which still supported H2b with an effect significant at  $p = .024$ .]

Regarding H4b, which suggested that factual and fictional accounts do not differ in their *persistent* impact, the relevant interaction was once more not significant when considering the *delayed* attitude measures, as expected. Hence, the null hypothesis in H4b was supported.

To assess whether the demonstrated persistent effects merely stemmed from sensitization effect, an additional analysis included the control group. The attitude impacts found for the linear news version, inverted-pyramid fiction, and linear fiction conditions held up even a day after exposure, whereas no attitude change materialized for the inverted-pyramid news condition and the control group (see Appendix E at <http://bit.ly/2S29NGG>). Thus, the impacts were not merely sensitization phenomena. [This conclusion also applied when inattentive participants were included in the analysis.]

## Mediation Analyses

**Suspense as mediator.** For H3, the mediation analysis first examined the direct effects (see Figure 4). The *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) influenced participant suspense (M; coeff. = .69,  $SE = .23$ ,  $p = .003$ ). In this model, the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) did not directly affect participants' immediate attitude change score (Y, coeff. = 2.17  $SE = 1.53$ ,  $p = .16$ ) [note that the repeated measures ANOVA yielded an effect here, drawing on issue-specific and pre-post measures]. However, suspense (M) had an impact on participants'

immediate attitude change (Y; coeff. = .95,  $SE = .49$ ,  $p = .04$ ). The indirect effect of the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) on immediate attitude change (Y) through suspense (M) was significant since the confidence intervals did not include zero, with a point estimate of .65 and a 95% BCa (bias-corrected and accelerated) bootstrap confidence interval of .12 to 1.72 (see Figure 4). The indirect effect is positive, indicating that the *linear* condition reported greater attitude change through increased suspense while reading. Thus, H3 was supported based on immediate attitude change measures. Given that the direct effect was not significant but mediation was, full mediation was observed. [The hypothesized mediation effect was also significant when inattentive participants were included in the analysis.]

A second analysis used the same mediation model but the delayed attitude change score was dependent variable (Y). Regarding direct effects, once again, the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) influenced participants' suspense (M; coeff. = .68,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Furthermore, the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) marginally influenced participants' delayed attitude change score (Y; coeff. = 2.80,  $SE = 1.51$ ,  $p = .075$ ). The impact of suspense on persistent attitude change was not significant, coeff. = 0.02,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .713$ . Finally, the indirect effect of the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension (X) through suspense (M) was not significant since the confidence intervals included zero. Thus, H3 was not supported for delayed attitude impacts, presumably due to the smaller sample and some dissipation of impacts over time.

**Serial mediation through suspense and empathy.** To address RQ1, a serial mediation model examined impacts from the *inverted-pyramid vs. linear* dimension as independent variable (X, 1 = *inverted-pyramid*, 2 = *linear*), suspense as first mediator (M1), empathy as second mediator (M2), and participants' immediate attitude change score as dependent variable (Y). The

serial mediation path derived from Zillmann (1996) and Nabi and Green (2015) was significant, as illustrated in Figure 5.

The same mediation model using the delayed attitude measure as outcome variable did not yield significant mediation, presumably due to the smaller sample and some dissipation of impacts over time.

### Discussion

In light of wide popularity of political entertainment in its diverse forms and flourishing related research, the present experiment examined responses to different types of political entertainment, including news and fictional stories, with a focus on suspense and impacts on political attitudes. While a growing body of research has examined humorous and thought-provoking types of political entertainment, the phenomenon of suspense has been neglected in this context. However, suspense may be the key attraction and experience when people attend to certain media content with political references. Recent anecdotal examples of how political discourse can induce suspense include the Kavanaugh-Blasey hearings (Gay Stolberg & Fandos, 2018) or the U.S. government shutdown over border protection disputes (Collins, 2018); fiction with political references is often suspenseful as well (i.e., the novel “*The President is Missing*” by Bill Clinton and James Patterson, or movies like *The Post*).

The current investigation built on the affective news model (Knobloch et al., 2004) extending it beyond affective impacts to attitude change, considering suspense as a mediator of attitude impacts of political content. Additionally, it compared how attitudes are influenced by factual versus fictional accounts. Indeed, texts with a linear structure instigated greater suspense impact than texts with an inverted pyramid structure (H1), supporting the original affective news model by Knobloch et al. (2004). Hence, earlier findings based on non-political content were

replicated for political messages in the present study. The findings lent solid support to the attitude impacts hypothesized per affective news *extended* model. They yielded that text versions with a linear structure produced greater attitude change in line with text stance than texts with an inverted pyramid structure (supporting H2), suggesting that the more entertaining text structure was indeed an important asset. This attitude impact was still detectable one day after reading the texts.

When examining what mechanism facilitated the greater attitude impact of the linear texts, only suspense emerged as a mediator (supporting H3). This mediation was significant for the attitudes measured right after reading but not one day after reading the texts. Building upon Zillmann’s (1996) model on strategic evocation of emotions in suspenseful drama, a serial mediation model was examined and supported (addressing RQ1). Accordingly, the linear structure produced greater suspense, which in turn increased empathy, and thus ultimately, attitude change. This important insight clarifies how suspense fosters emotional impacts that then enhance persuasion. Importantly, many studies in the realm of narrative persuasion have been seeking to identify how narratives should be designed for persuasive purposes. The present findings show that the strategic evocation of suspense is effective through empathetic responses.

Interestingly, the results demonstrate that merely reading a short text with a clear stance about a political issue affected political attitudes. Even though participants spent only a bit over two minutes on average on each text, they showed a detectable attitude impact, even on the following day. By and large, the texts exerted persuasive impacts. Given that this attitude impact came about regardless of whether the texts were presented as fictional stories or fact-based news (H4a and H4b supported), political communication as a field needs to pay much attention to the political messages conveyed in fictional entertainment, even though historically the field has

focused on news and fact-based formats. Recipients are apparently open to persuasion from fiction, and entertaining experiences can drive persuasion even during news exposure. In an era of much debated fake news concerns (Titcomb & Carson, 2018), this observation might provide some context. After all, communication scholars have long discussed how fiction and low-credibility sources influence perceptions of the real world (Mares, 1996). Decades on related research relied on cultivation theory (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2014), while recently narrative persuasion theories garnered more attention (Nabi & Green, 2015).

Results from the current study offer some interesting implications for journalists in the real world. With interest in print news declining in Western Europe (Matsa, 2018) and news consumption declining across all news formats in the U.S. (Barthel, 2018), incorporating entertainment elements into news programming is one way news organizations can increase attention and interest in the news. In fact, this phenomenon has been labeled “entertainization” of the news, and creating news stories in a linear format is one way to enhance their entertainment value. Based on the current study’s results, writing news stories in a linear format increases suspense which subsequently influenced attitudes more than suspense generated from the inverted pyramid format, highlighting some ethical considerations for journalists before they decide which news story format to utilize. Journalists should first consider the purpose (e.g., informative or persuasive) of their article before selecting a story format. If the purpose of the news story is to inform the public of an event, an inverted pyramid format may be more suitable since linear stories with elements of suspense may be particularly persuasive based on the current study’s results. A reporting bias could potentially result from suspenseful linear news stories.

The current study utilized a college student sample, limiting the generalizability of findings since the sample was younger and more educated. The participants in the present study

possibly had less well-formed political opinions and greater cognitive capacity than the general population. As a result, they may have been more or less persuadable. A more diverse sample and a longer time span for delayed impacts are important for a future replication study. It should be acknowledged that a specific condition, in which participants read the fictional version in an inverted-pyramid style, featured a message that did not read like a typical short story; however, in the interest of a complete experimental design, and to contrast the journalist news versions, this version was incorporated. In terms of considering alternative interpretations of the present findings of how suspense mediated the persuasive impacts, it should be noted that the items “interesting” and “thought-provoking” had considerable loadings on the suspense measure; thus it could be argued that the phenomenon that drove the impacts was somewhat broader than just suspense and included aspects of interest and cognitive involvement. On the other hand, such a broader construct had been measured through transportation but was not statistically relevant<sup>1</sup>. Future research should attempt to further examine the relationships between these concepts and how they influence attitudes.

In addition, the use of a single item measurement for attitudes is less than ideal. On the upside, the use of a control group established that attitude change did not merely result from sensitization through the measurement, since the control group did not change in attitudes while treatment groups did. The experimental design presented the same format and structure to individual participants, which allows for a relatively straightforward between-subjects design, but future work could apply different experimental setups. For instance, when individuals read different texts with both linear and inverted-pyramid structure, the linear structure might be even more effective in evoking suspense, due to a contrast effect with the comparatively bland inverted-pyramid text. However, the format manipulation could be less effective when presented

sequentially, as participants might suspect that texts are not fictional or factual. If participants are randomly assigned to specific stimuli versions, the statistical analysis would require more complex multi-level approaches, as experimental cells and within-subjects measurements would not be balanced in size and frequencies. The present design features a particular strength in that multiple stimuli and topics were included (Slater, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015). The fact that attitude impacts were robust across four different controversial, well-established topics for which people tend to hold strong opinions, and detectable in a delayed measure speaks to the strength of model’s predictions.

Future research developments could disentangle the role of prominence and explicitness of persuasive messages embedded in political entertainment, with regard to how these dimensions may moderate persuasion. Specifically, Holbert (2005) argued that political entertainment varies in how explicit the particular persuasive claims are and how prominently they are portrayed in a message. For the present stimuli texts, they did not feature any explicit statements on policies (i.e., at no point did the abortion story include a statement that abortion should be prohibited), even though the portrayed events implied a particular policy preference. Furthermore, the political issue (i.e., abortion) was very prominently featured in the storylines, but the overall genre categorization per Holbert’s (2005) typology would likely be “reality-based programming/documentaries” for the news versions and “lifeworld content” for the fiction versions, which are both categories in which the political issue is secondary and individuals’ experiences are highlighted. Hence, the present stimuli clearly pertained to political issues but neither offered clear commentary on policy nor were they situated in the context of political institutions or actors—in that sense, the political aspects were subtle. In fact, the effect sizes of the manipulation checks were moderate for experimental treatments, suggesting these variations

were not overly blatant and arguably ecologically valid. It would be of great interest to study in future research how the demonstrated processes change when explicit political statements are featured or when the persuasive intent (Frazer, Robinson, & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2019) is clarified upfront. Would suspense along with empathy still carry persuasive impact?

Results from the present study highlight how the affective news extended model can contribute to theorizing and understanding of political entertainment effects, along with other recent developments of theoretical frameworks on political narratives (McLaughlin, Velez, & Dunn, 2019). As it stands, both news and fiction have important implications for political attitudes and even conflict (McLaughlin, in press). It’s about time to tackle the gap in the literature regarding suspenseful political entertainment.



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**Event Structure** (chronological order of events)

Initiating Event	Exposition	Complication	Climax	Outcome
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**Discourse Structures** (order in media presentation)

**Primary Affective Response**

**Linear Type**

Initiating Event	Exposition	Complication	Climax	Outcome	➔ Suspense
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**Inverted Type**

Initiating Event	Outcome	Exposition	Complication	Climax	➔ None
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Figure 1: “Affective News” Model Illustrated with Schema of Event Structure, Types of Discourse Structures, and Associated Affective Reactions (simplified, from Knobloch et al., 2004)

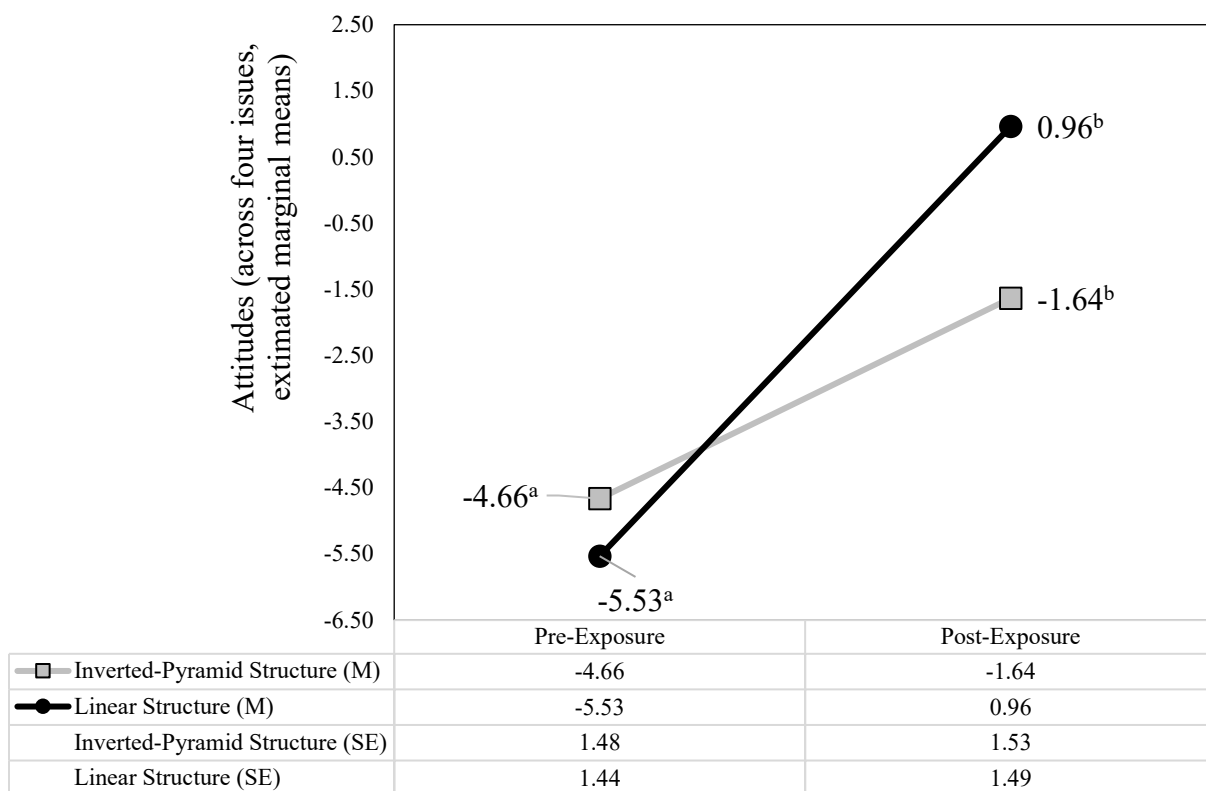


Figure 2: Impact of inverted-pyramid vs. linear structure on attitude change (pre-post exposure comparison)

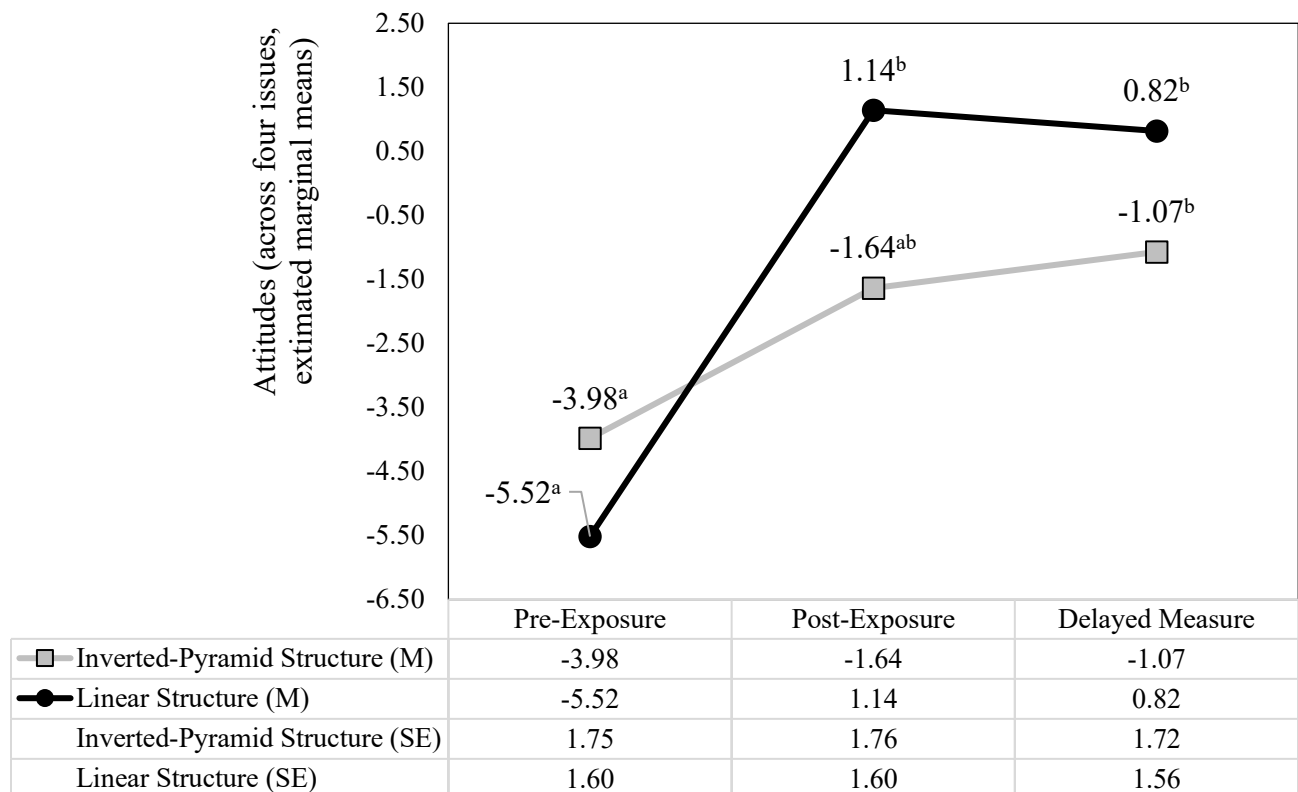
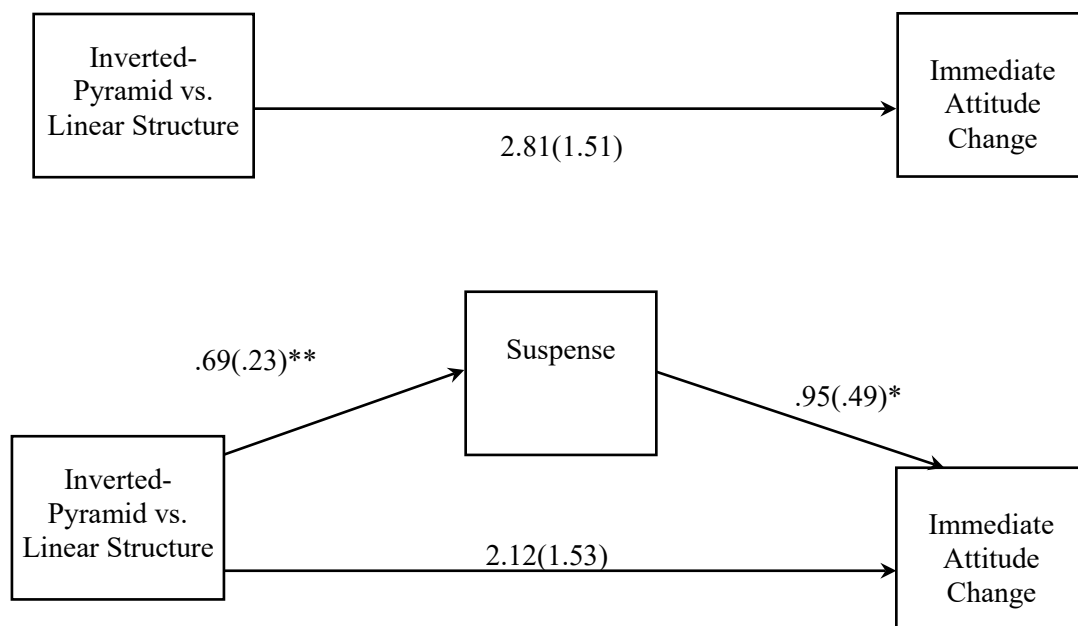


Figure 3: Impact of inverted-pyramid vs. linear structure on attitude change (with three measurement points)

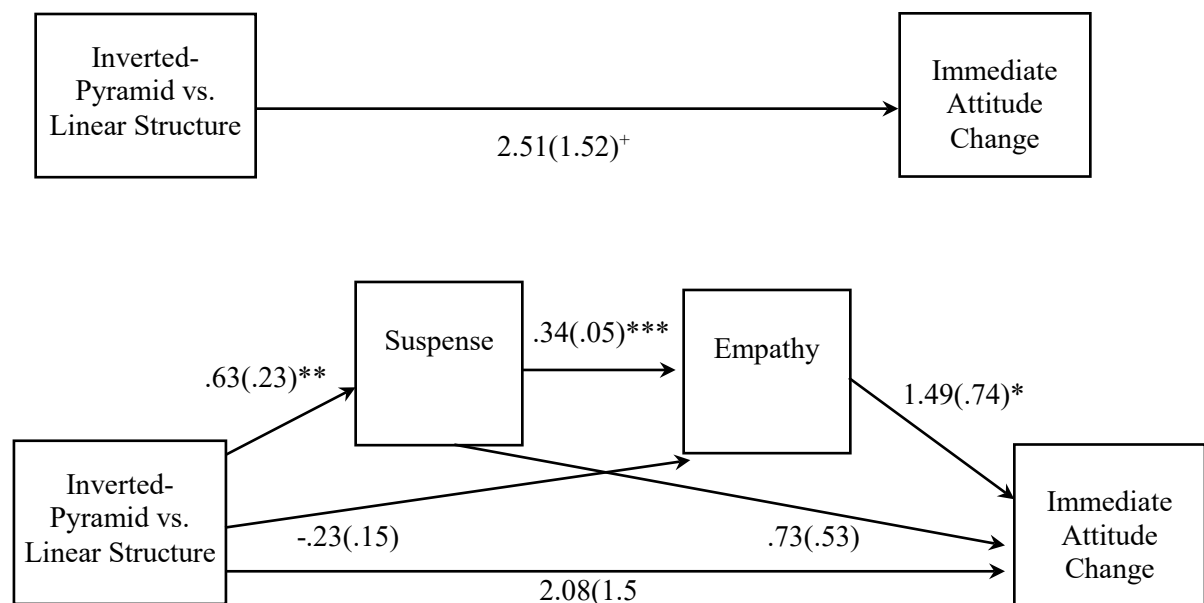
*Note.* Means with different superscripts within a data series differ at  $p < .05$



Inverted Pyramid vs. Linear Structure → Suspense → Immediate Attitude Change  
 .65 (.39), 95% CI [.12, 1.72]

Figure 4: Impact of inverted-pyramid vs. linear structure on participants’ immediate attitude change via participants’ suspense.

*Note.* Two asterisks indicate  $p \leq .005$ , one asterisk indicates  $p \leq .05$ .



Inverted Pyramid vs. Linear Structure  $\rightarrow$  Suspense  $\rightarrow$  Immediate Attitude Change  
 $.46 (.35)$ , 95% CI  $[-.01, 1.40]$

Inverted Pyramid vs. Linear Structure  $\rightarrow$  Empathy  $\rightarrow$  Immediate Attitude Change  
 $-.35 (.29)$ , 95% CI  $[-1.27, .02]$

Inverted Pyramid vs. Linear Structure  $\rightarrow$  Suspense  $\rightarrow$  Empathy  $\rightarrow$  Immediate Attitude Change  
 $.31 (.17)$ , 95% CI  $[.03, .94]$

Figure 5: Impact of inverted-pyramid vs. linear structure on participants' immediate attitude change via participants' suspense and empathy.

*Note.* Three asterisks indicate  $p < .001$ , two asterisks indicate  $p \leq .007$ , one asterisk indicates  $p < .05$ , a plus sign indicates  $p < .10$ .

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Transportation was captured as well with six items (from Appel, Gnambs, Richter, & Green, 2015); however, the hypotheses did not target transportation, and the concept is neither central in any theorizing on suspense nor did it yield any significant effects in the present study. In light of space restrictions, further details are not reported here but are available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> A post-hoc power analysis for a within-between interaction in an ANOVA with repeated measures yielded power ( $1 - \beta$  err prob) = .997, thus above the commonly accepted threshold of .80, with an effect size  $f = .11$  (based on partial  $\eta^2 = .012$ ),  $\alpha = .05$ , total sample size = 188, number of groups 2, number of measurements 2, correlation among repeated measures .80, and nonsphericity correction 1.