

RETROSPECTIVE IMAGINATIVE INVOLVEMENT AND STORY RESOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Retrospective imaginative involvement (RII) involves audiences reflecting back on narrative elements such as story characters, events and backstory after a story has ended. This study examines the impact of story resolutions on audience reactions, gratifications sought by them vicariously from a story and their long-term asynchronous engagement with the narrative. It also investigates the role of the fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist in affecting how satisfied audience members are with the story resolution. From time-to-time Hollywood directors have selected the ending for their movie on the basis of test audience reactions. This study provides a theoretical rationale exploring why certain story endings are more likely to be positively evaluated by the audience. It also explores the long-term appeal of a narrative content and why and how such narrative content is revisited by audiences. In other words, this study is a step forward in the direction of translating academic research into successful industry practices by providing theoretical explanations for such industry practices. With RII being a relatively new research domain, this research is also one of the few RII studies employing an experimental design. Alternate endings of the famous movie *First Blood* from the *Rambo* franchise were used for this experimental study to understand the impact of story resolution on enjoyment, appreciation, different RII behaviors and other long-term lasting effects of narrative engagement. Further results and implications are discussed in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Many books on screenwriting mechanisms and story structure talk about the typical three parts of a story: beginning, middle, and end. That's how we also conventionally perceive a story when we read it or watch it. We assume that it has ended after we finish reading that last chapter in a novel or watch the credits roll at the end of a movie or TV show. These signs instinctively signal the end of a story, but do we actually stop thinking about the story after it "ends"? Do we stop replaying the story in our mind or even reconstructing it by counterfactually changing the narrative elements the way we want to? Retrospective imaginative involvement (RII) encapsulates this phenomenon of the story continuing to unfold and play in our minds even after it has ended on screen. This asynchronous narrative engagement involves reflecting on the narrative elements (i.e., story characters, events, or backstory) or reconstructing the story after reading or viewing a narrative. Specifically, during RII audiences "engage imaginatively with story characters and situations after reading or viewing a narrative" (Slater et al., 2018, p. 330). Such asynchronous involvement may range from simply ruminating about and recalling one's favorite characters or events from a TV show or movie, or counterfactually changing any of these narrative elements. Also, it may further gravitate towards more elaborate fan behaviors such as writing fan fiction, engaging in cosplay (i.e., dressing up to represent a narrative character) or LARPing (i.e., live action role playing) (Ewoldsen et al., 2021; Sethi et al., 2021).

Fan culture studies examining cult American films and TV shows such as *Star Trek*, *American Idol*, *Survivor*, etc. explain how fans engage with the narratives asynchronously (Jenkins, 1992, 2003, 2006). These studies explore how fans reconstruct the story of their favorite TV show or movie by creating new visual materials based on their own interpretations of the narrative. This asynchronous engagement could involve simply using an existing

recording of a TV show or movie to study narrative structure and elements. Or it could also evolve into more complex forms such as creating a fanzine (i.e., fan magazine) or fan website, forming communities for rewriting a script for a popular TV show or movie (i.e., fan communities), writing fanfiction or reimagining a story by altering the story world and other narrative elements. For example, such narrative engagement could involve situating *Harry Potter* in the *Star Wars Galaxy* and reexamining how his magical powers play out according to the rules of this new fictional universe or creating a new story world by merging the *Star Wars Galaxy* and the *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*. Such fantasies might not only provide entertainment, but these may also translate to more meaningful experiences within the narrative world by empowering audience members to gain unique insights for a deep understanding of the narrative. Additionally, some research studies on fanfiction also indicate that sometimes audience members may associate some additional imaginary story events or character actions with the narrative that might have occurred before or after the main narrative (cf. Jenkins, 2003). Therefore, all such forms of fan behaviors suggest that audience members continue to process stories even after the conclusion of a TV series, movie, or a novel. These behaviors representing asynchronous forms of narrative engagement are related to RII.

Furthermore, some research studies concerning fan theories and spoilers have demonstrated how such asynchronous narrative engagement can affect enjoyment and other affective responses to the narrative. A very common assumption associated with spoilers is that watching spoilers ahead of reading or viewing a story generally decreases the enjoyment value and appeal of a story. However, some research studies indicate that perceptual fluency (i.e., the ease with which information is processed) can affect narrative engagement (Vaughn, Childs, Maschinski, Niño, & Ellsworth, 2010) and positive affect (Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001). Such

perceptual fluency associated with the foreknowledge of some narrative elements in the spoilers can not only enhance the overall viewing experience for audience members (Leavitt & Christenfeld, 2011, 2013) but also increase identification with narrative characters (Brookes, Cohen, Ewoldsen, & Velez, 2012). Unlike spoilers, fan theories are more speculative in nature making the viewers think about the story outcomes and decipher these based on the narrative elements as well as their own life experiences. Such interpretations are debatable and are usually confirmed or contradicted after the TV show or movie ends. In their study, Ellithorpe and Brooks (2018) demonstrated that spoilers and fan theories make the overall narrative experience more enjoyable for the audience and could also sometimes decrease the distress caused by parasocial breakup after the conclusion of a TV series. All this research clearly suggests that people do engage in narratives asynchronously adding to their entertainment experiences.

RII Research

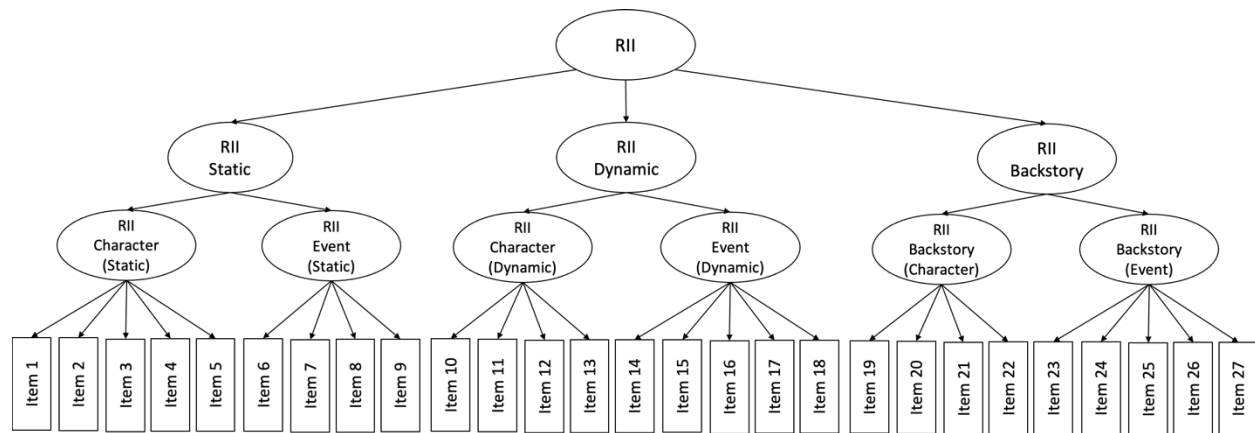
Even though historically most research studies on narrative engagement and media effects have focused on how people process narratives while they are watching a TV show or a movie, or reading a story, over the last few years RII has emerged as a new approach to studying narrative engagement. Initial forays in RII research involved Slater et al. (2018) developing an 8-item RII scale that primarily focused on narrative characters, their actions, interactions with other characters and behavioral traits. However, it failed to include other narrative elements associated with the situations and events in a story. So, a 27-item scale was developed for measuring RII that included narrative elements such as characters, fictional universe (i.e., the universe in which the story is unfolding), story events, and backstory (Sethi et. al, 2020; Sethi et al, 2022). In this scale, items related to story events focused on events affecting the overarching conflict, character arcs, outcomes, and timeline of the story. As demonstrated by research on fanfiction and fan

theories, sometimes audience engage in imaging situations or events that occurred prior to the actual narrative (cf. Jenkins, 2003). Such imaginary events that audience associate with the story events or characters in the same narrative chronology but before the actual story are referred to as backstories. In the 27-item scale, items related to backstory focused on imaging a backstory to aid in the understanding of story events, outcomes, characters and their actions, emotions and motivations.

This scale was an advancement in explicating the RII phenomenon as it also examined the different RII behaviors ranging from enjoying veridical recall of narratives to more dynamic counterfactual play with narrative elements, or imaging a backstory associated with various narrative elements. It distinguishes between the three varied RII behaviors: RII -Static (i.e., recalling and remembering the narrative without changing any narrative elements), RII- Dynamic (i.e., entertaining alternative story outcomes by counterfactually changing the narrative during their continued engagement) and RII-Backstory (i.e., imagining a backstory related to the characters and events of the narrative that was not a part of the original narrative). The structure of RII as a multidimensional construct with the 3 main factors and six subfactors can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

RII measurement model by Sethi et al. (2020)



This scale was successfully replicated in other studies (Baldwin et al., 2020; Ulsoy et al., 2022) that furthered the advancement of investigating different facets of RII. Baldwin et al. (2020) replicated this scale with a specific media franchise such as *Star Wars* to examine the impact of familiarity and fandom on RII. Moreover, a follow-up study further tested the role of certain traits (e.g., curiosity, nostalgia proneness), entertainment experiences (e.g., parasocial relationships, identification), and content- or exposure-specific experiences (e.g., boundary expansion) in predicting different forms of RII (Ulsoy et al., 2022).

Theoretical Foundations of RII

The two main theories that provide initial forays for studying RII are the Temporary Expanding the Boundaries of the Self (TEBOTS) (Slater et al., 2014), and Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). TEBOTS focuses on the three fundamental intrinsic human needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) explained in the Self-determination theory (SDT) to elucidate how narratives function (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory explains why people seek out narratives by emphasizing that narratives can act as a mechanism for people to vicariously experience the satisfaction of their fundamental needs

(Slater et al., 2014). It suggests that narratives provide an avenue for people to step beyond themselves and vicariously experience transitory freedom from the limits imposed by self on one's autonomy, capabilities and relations. This tendency of people to temporarily step beyond themselves from the confines of self-imposed constraints is called boundary expansion. Findings of some research studies testing the TEBOTS theory suggest that daily stressors of everyday life posing a threat to any of the three fundamental human needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) can increase people's tendency to engage with narratives and experience transportation into the narrative world (Johnson, Slater, Silver, & Ewoldsen, 2016). This in turn, can result in heightened hedonic and eudaimonic responses to the narrative (Oliver & Raney, 2011).

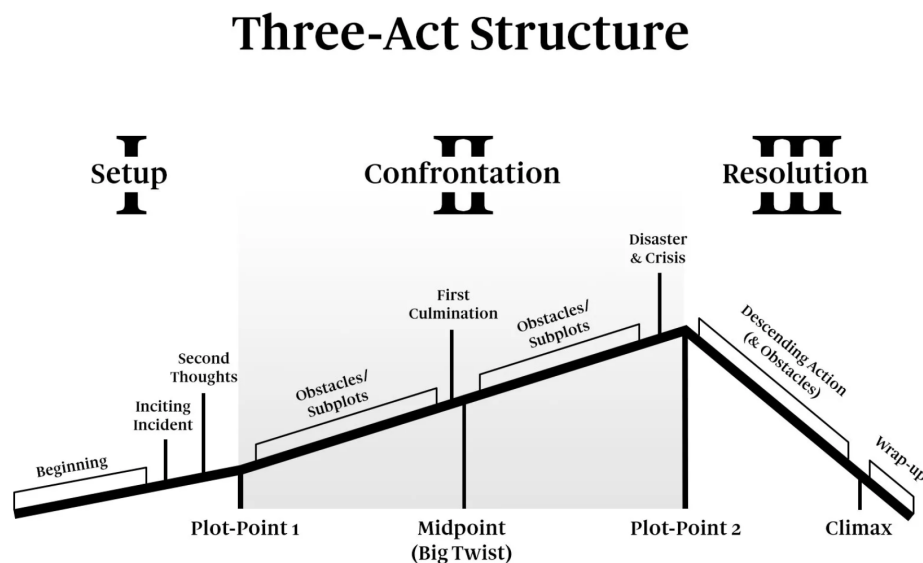
A second theory that informs the theoretical framework of RII is the Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). According to this model, people create three distinct mental representations of a story: character model, situation (or story events) model and the story world model. This model suggests that during asynchronous narrative engagement also people would most likely reflect on these narrative elements. However, this contemplative thinking is dependent on retrieving specific narrative elements from the memory that are then reflected upon. NCE is one the most clearly developed models of how narrative texts are comprehended and processed in our memory (Krcmar, Ewoldsen & Koerner, 2016). It provides a framework for understanding how the initial processing of the story can influence narrative engagement retrospectively, the specific narrative elements that audience are most likely to reflect on and other asynchronous entertainment experiences associated with these narrative elements.

Three-Act Structure of a Story

In line with all these studies on asynchronous narrative engagement, another interesting research question would be to explore how a specific part of a story can influence the tendency of audience to engage in different kinds of RII and form lasting impressions about the story. The conceptualization of a typical narrative structure dates back to how Aristotle (1947) defined the beginning, middle and end parts of a story representing the three acts of a narrative (i.e., Act I, Act II and Act III). Not only was this structure used by playwrights of his time, but it continues to be used till today for screenplays of Hollywood movies, TV shows and web series. This structure makes a narrative more meaningful and cohesive by unifying character actions and sequencing story events. Figure 2 shows how each act is structured and the key components in each act. In this structure, each act is a self-contained unit of dramatic action.

Figure 2

Three-Act Structure of a story. (Trübiger, 2022)



The first act (i.e., Act I) establishes the setup or exposition, main characters, goals of the protagonist and antagonist, and the story world (i.e., the fictional universe in which the narrative

is situated). The catalyst or *inciting incident* that leads to the main conflict is confronted by the protagonist in this act leading to the first plot point of the story. In the second act (i.e., Act II), stakes get higher as the protagonist confronts the antagonist and encounters many obstacles in multiple attempts to resolve the conflict. The third act (i.e., Act III) contains the resolution of the story and its subplots. It also features the *climax* or the sequence of events in which the overarching question is answered leading to character development by leaving the protagonist and other characters with a new sense of who they really are. In other words, Act III contains the solution to what resolves the storyline and can also aid as a setup for a potential sequel. Many twentieth-century scholars identified structures that segregate different parts of a narrative based on the character arc, events, subplots and the overarching conflict (Campbell, 1949; Frye, 1981). Even though scholars have debated about these variations of a narrative structure, there is a general consensus that sequencing of story events is based on the main conflict between narrative characters, that unveils in the story world according to the narrative timeline leading to a final climax and resolution (Graesser et al., 2002; Trabasso & Van Den Broek, 1985).

Story Resolution

Sometimes at the end of a narrative, the audience might not be satisfied with the way the story is resolved. One of the recent examples of such a narrative would be Netflix's own production, *Bird Box*. The movie was criticized for its upbeat ending as the audience felt that such an ending for this post-apocalyptic thriller did not go well with the rest of the film leaving some plot lines unsatisfactorily resolved (Independent, 2019). Furthermore, a research study conducted by Oliver et al., (2020) sought to examine how the nature of the ending of a movie may encourage long-term involvement with the narrative. The findings suggested that both positive and negative affective responses to the story predicted a tendency of people to engage in

RII. Applying the logic of RII subdimensions (i.e., Static-RII, Dynamic-RII and Backstory-RII) explicated in the RII model (Sethi et. al., 2020), when negative affective responses occur to an ending, Dynamic-RII and Backstory-RII might be a natural response to narrative experiences that fail to satisfy audiences leading them to cognitively reconstruct the narrative or speculate about the backstory associated with the main story they viewed. Whereas positive affective responses to cinematic experiences with satisfactory story resolutions might lead audiences to engage in Static-RII by simply recalling or remembering their favorite story characters or events. The need to reimagine or reconstruct stories might stem from the tendency of audience members to use narratives as a means for need fulfillment and thus, seeking their desired gratifications. This is consistent with the TEBOTS theory also. Specifically, TEBOTS hypothesizes that narratives allow people to step beyond themselves and provide avenues through which audiences may vicariously satisfy these intrinsic needs (Slater et al, 2014). Therefore, in line with TEBOTS, we would expect that those who do not have these needs fulfilled would be more likely to engage in some forms of RII.

Furthermore, according to Zillmann (2000) enjoyment and appeal of a narrative are derived from the interaction of character liking and the outcomes that befall the character. Viewers anticipate and positively evaluate narrative resolutions that display positive outcomes for good characters (Eden & Tamborini, 2016; Weber et al., 2008). Therefore, extending this logic to the TEBOTS theory should imply that the fulfillment of three fundamental human needs (i.e., SDT needs) of the protagonist can affect how satisfied audience are with the resolution of story as well as their tendency to engage with the narrative retrospectively. This leads me to hypothesize:

H1: People are more likely to be satisfied with the resolution of a story if it fulfills the SDT needs of the protagonist.

The movie *First Blood* was released in the United States in 1982. It is an action film that features a troubled and misunderstood protagonist, *Rambo* who was a Vietnam war veteran. In addition to the mental trauma and horrors of PTSD, he bravely faces the challenges of adjusting to normal civilian life in the hope of being accepted by the society. This movie was a box office success, grossing \$156 million at the box office. Its success generated a franchise that included four sequels, an animated television series, a comic books series, a novel series, several video games, and Indian remakes as well. However, during the production of the movie *First Blood*, director Ted Kotcheff and actor Sylvester Stallone were unsure about how the story should end. So, they shot and put together two different cuts of the film ending (i.e., story resolution) for test audiences. In one of the versions, Rambo survives and surrenders to the authorities to bravely face life's challenges. In an alternate version, Rambo forces his commanding officer, Colonel Trautman to shoot and kill him (Hollywood Insider, 2020). The first version was preferred by test audiences and retained in the theatrical release of the movie. This preference is also consistent with Disposition theory (DT; Zillmann, 2000) which predicts that interaction of character liking and the outcomes that befall the character increase the enjoyment and appeal of a narrative. Each version of Rambo story ending differed in terms of fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist. For example, in the first version, where Rambo surrenders to the authorities, Rambo seems hopeful and competent enough to be able to face the challenges of adjusting to normal civilian life (competence). He feels independent and self-determined to take the decision of surrendering to the authorities (autonomy). Also, he trusts Colonel Trautman advice who cares about him and offers him a shoulder to cry on (relatedness). In the second version, Rambo asks

the colonel to shoot him as he has given up on the hope of leading a normal civilian life and being accepted by the society. He doesn't feel capable enough to overcome his mental traumas and survive. In this case, the choice made by him (i.e., choosing to die) is in a way dictated by his circumstances as he believes nothing is working out for him. He feels dejected and is let down by the people in his life. The Colonel also kills him at the end rather than giving him hope and encouraging him to bravely face challenges and fight another day.

Another example of an unsatisfactory story resolution would be the ending of *The Rise of Skywalker* movie from the *Star Wars* franchise. The final scenes of the movie received critical reactions from the audiences who felt that the story wasn't completely and satisfactorily resolved at the end (Ingolfsson, 2020). When such an event occurs, people might either (a) seek additional information about the narrative from other sources (such as watching a sequel if there is one, reading the book if the movie is based on a novel, going through fanzines, fan forums, looking for fan theories), or (b) reflect on the story and counterfactually change some narrative elements in an attempt to add more meaning to the unsatisfactory story ending. Alternate endings for Hollywood films may occur at the writing or storyboard stage when a story is conceptualized or even during the post-production or editing stage when a story is recreated into a coherent sequence. In fact, many Hollywood movie directors are known to choose the most suitable ending for their movie based on the test audience reactions who view the alternate endings of a movie before its theatrical release (Hollywood Insider, 2020). Entertainment scholars have tapped into the various facets of entertainment gratifications that audience seek from narratives to suggest a conceptual demarcation between entertainment content being enjoyed vs content being appreciated (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011). This multidimensionality of entertainment gratifications sought by audience suggests enjoyment to be associated with

transitory feelings of fun and pleasure, whereas appreciation is associated with more thought-provoking, contemplative and long-lasting entertainment experiences. Therefore, the following set of hypotheses were also theorized for this study:

H2: People who report satisfaction with the story resolution are more likely to (a) derive enjoyment from it and (b) engage in Static RII.

H3: Stories that leave lasting impressions on audiences are more likely to be (a) enjoyed, (b) appreciated by people and (c) increase their tendency to engage in RII (Static-RII, Dynamic-RII and Backstory-RII).

H4: People who report deriving enjoyment from a story, are more likely to engage in Static-RII.

H5: Appreciating a story, increases the tendency of people to engage in RII (Static-RII, Dynamic-RII and Backstory-RII).

METHODS

Sample

To compare the two types of story endings a between-subjects experiment was conducted in two parts. This study was set up as a multi-part study such that participants received the link for the second part of the study via email, 24 hours after completing the first part. For this study, approximately 142 students who were 18 years and older were recruited from a large Midwestern university in the United States. These students were given course credits in a communication course for participating in each part of the study. Five participants were dropped due to unresponsiveness, leaving a total sample of 137 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.89$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.56$, 65.7% female, 71.5% white/Caucasian). This sample was used for testing the first hypothesis that involved only the first part of the study. Out of these 137 participants, 82 participants had successfully completed both parts of the study. So, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were tested using the responses of these 82 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.02$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.82$, 65.9% female, 70.7% white/Caucasian).

Stimuli

Two story endings from the movie *First Blood* were used as stimuli for the two conditions of this experimental study. Since, these story endings showcased drastically different story outcomes for the protagonist, they were appropriate for this study. Moreover, both the story endings were pretested by the director of this movie before its theatrical release and the story ending rejected by the test audience never made it to the theatres (Hollywood Insider, 2020). Both the endings start with Rambo confiding in his commanding officer, Colonel Trautman about his traumatic experiences, challenges faced by him due to PTSD and the cruel treatment received by civilians. He rages about the horrors of war and being forgotten by the country that

he sacrificed so much for. After this point, the two movie clips diverged; one showing Rambo surrendering to the authorities to bravely face the challenges of adjusting to civilian life in the hope of ultimately being accepted by the society and the other clip showing Rambo giving in to the mental trauma and forcing the Colonel to shoot him. Condition I included a brief synopsis of the entire movie including the story resolution of Rambo surrendering to the authorities followed by a short video of this movie ending that was 4 minutes 16 seconds long. Condition II also included the same synopsis as in Condition I but with the original ending replaced by an alternate ending (that wasn't retained in the final movie) of Rambo choosing to die. This was followed by a 4 minutes 39 seconds video clip featuring the visual rendition of this alternate ending.

Measures

Basic psychological need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Self-determination theory identifies three basic psychological needs of human beings: autonomy (i.e., the need to feel independent and self-determined for one's actions, behaviors and the resulting outcomes), competence (i.e., the need to feel capable and skilled and get recognition) and relatedness (i.e., the desire to relate to and connect with other people). The 21-item Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale (BNSG-S) (Johnston & Finney, 2010) contains items focusing on these needs. For this study, two items "I have been able to learn interesting new skills recently" and "I pretty much keep to myself and don't have a lot of social contacts" were dropped as these did not pertain particularly to the story ending. The rest of the 19 items were modified specifically in context of story ending for the movie *First Blood* to measure the autonomy, competence and relatedness needs of protagonist. The modified scale included items such as "At the end of the story, Rambo was free to decide for himself how to live his life" and "At the end

of the story, people in Rambo's life cared about him" (1 = Absolutely untrue, 7 = Absolutely true) (see Table 8).

RII Scale. The original 27-item RII scale includes items related to (1) narrative character(s): pertaining to the choices, experiences and interactions of the character(s); (2) events: referring to a sequence of incidents in the narrative that lead to the progression of story; and (3) backstory: referring to an imaginary story that happened before the beginning of the original narrative so that it gives audience more context about the situations, relationships and circumstances portrayed in the main narrative. This scale examines narrative elements in context of specific RII behaviors such as remembering a narrative as it is or counterfactually changing it. For example, retrospective imaginative involvement with a character could be thinking about and recalling a character, or it may involve cognitively reconstructing certain elements of a character, such as imagining alternate outcomes and realities (e.g., fanfiction). While both experiences focus on thinking about narrative characters, one explicitly involves counterfactually changing elements of the character such as traits, actions or their outcomes while the other does not. Therefore, as per the 27-item scale developed by Sethi et al. (2020), there are 3 main factors of RII: Static-RII (i.e., recalling the characters or events), Dynamic-RII (i.e., making counterfactual changes to various aspects of characters or events) and Backstory-RII (i.e., imagining a backstory associated with characters or events). Six subfactors of RII include Character (Static), Event (Static), Character (Dynamic), Events (Dynamic), Backstory (events) and Backstory (characters).

To understand the specific behaviors and experiences that viewers engage in when thinking retrospectively about the movie *First Blood*, the 27-item RII scale (Sethi et al., 2020) was modified by rewording the items to measure RII specifically in relation to *First Blood* and on a frequency scale from 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*. This scale included the three RII factors:

Dynamic-RII (character and event), Static-RII (character and event), and Backstory-RII (character and event). For the items related to Dynamic- and Static-RII, participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences reimagining *First Blood* after watching it. For example, a Dynamic-RII character item asked if the participant after watching the movie had ever “*Imagined a character(s) having conversations or other interactions different than the ones portrayed in First Blood.*” while a Static-RII character item asked if the participant ever decided to: “*Replay in your mind what one or more of the characters actually did in the movie First Blood.*” Similar distinctions were also probed in static and dynamic items about story events. For Backstory RII, the items were related to imagining a story associated with the *First Blood* character(s) or event(s) that happened before the beginning of the original narrative such that it gave them more context about the various aspects, traits and relationships of the character(s) or the situations, and sequence of incidents portrayed in the original story. For example, “To understand some of the significant events in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with those events?” and “To understand the actions of a character(s) in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with those actions of the character(s)?”. Recent research studies replicating this scale have also confirmed that this scale provides a conceptually valid and reliable RII measure (Baldwin et al., 2020; Sethi et al., 2020 and Ulsoy et al., 2022). RII scale items used in this study can be found in Table 6.

Satisfaction with the resolution of the story. To measure how satisfied audience were with the story resolution at the end, the 5-item satisfaction with the resolution of the story scale, was used. Recent research on the role of traits and specific content and entertainment experiences in predicting different forms of RII (Ulsoy et al., 2022) has demonstrated that this scale is consistent and reliable ($\alpha = .90$). An additional item “I was happy to see the fate of characters at

the end of the story?” that focuses more on the character outcomes at the end of the story was added to this scale in addition to the 5 items that were originally used in the scale (see Table 7).

Lasting impression. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) have identified lasting impressions to be a significant audience response in the field of media entertainment. Such responses predict the potential of the content and audience’s general agreement about the narrative leaving a notable impact on them. It also emphasizes the role of audience engagement in creating long-lasting impressions and thoughts about the narrative (Bartsch, 2012). Lasting impressions about the movie *First Blood* were assessed using Oliver and Bartsch’s (2010) 3-item scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). It included items such as “This story will stick with me for a long time”, “I know I will never forget this story” and “The story left me with a lasting impression” (see Table 9).

Enjoyment and Appreciation. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) predicted enjoyment derived from a media narrative to be associated with transitory feelings of gratification, fun and excitement, whereas appreciation of narrative was associated with greater levels of reflection and contemplation and also attaching a deeper meaning to the narrative content. Enjoyment and appreciation were measured with eight items on a 7-point Likert scale (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). This scale included items such as “It was fun for me to read and watch this story”, “The story was entertaining”, “I found this story to be very meaningful” and “The story was thought provoking” (see Table 10).

The descriptive statistics for all the measures used in this study along with reliability scales are available in Table 1. Correlations between all the measures are available in Table 2.

Procedure

This study involved an experimental design using the movie *First Blood* (1982). It was set up as a multi-part study and an online survey was administered in two parts. After completing the survey for the first part of the study, participants were sent a system generated email containing the survey link for the second part of the study which they had to complete within 24-48 hours. All procedures were approved by the university's institutional review board. At the beginning of the survey, each participant filled out a consent form indicating they were willing to take part in this study. Participants who gave their consent were then directed to the survey questions. At the beginning of the survey, demographic questions and questions pertaining to familiarity with all *Rambo* movies and other entities from the *Rambo* franchise (e.g., animated TV series, novels, comics and games) were asked. For the first part of this study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (i.e., Condition I and Condition II). In each condition, they had to read the story synopsis and watch a short video featuring the story ending. This was followed by instructions that explicitly asked participants to answer the upcoming questions only on the basis of the synopsis they had read and the video they had watched. Then, participants were asked general questions about the story such as "Who is the protagonist in this story?", "Who is the main antagonist in this story?", "Who was Rambo's former commanding officer?", etc., to gauge their general understanding of the story. This was followed by questions related to the SDT scale that had been modified in context of the movie ending and questions pertaining to satisfaction with the resolution of the story. In the middle of each survey (i.e., part 1 and part 2), an attention check question was included that asked participants to select the option "Somewhat disagree" as an answer to that question before proceeding further.

The link to the second part of survey was emailed to participants 24 hours after completing the first part of the study. It contained instructions specifying participants to answer the upcoming questions based on the synopsis read and video clip watched during the first part. This survey included questions related to different types of RII behaviors and experiences when retrospectively thinking about the story, lasting impressions about the story and enjoyment and appreciation derived from the story of *First Blood* movie.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check and Preliminary Results

Most of the participants (81%) hadn't seen any of the films from the *Rambo* franchise whereas, only 1.5% of the participants had seen the movie *First Blood* (i.e., the Rambo movie used in this study) earlier. In general, participants were also not very familiar with other entities from the Rambo franchise such as movies, animated TV series, novels, comics and games ($M_{\text{familiarity}} = 1.85$).

For the manipulation check, an independent samples t-test was conducted to see if participants correctly identified how the story ended (i.e., the resolution of story) in each condition. In Condition I, participants were more likely to answer, "Rambo surrenders to the authorities and is arrested" whereas for Condition II, the correct answer was "Rambo forces Colonel Trautman to shoot him and Rambo dies". There was a significant difference in the answers of participants in Condition I ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .54$) and Condition II ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .65$); ($t(135) = 4.92$, $p < .001$, $d = .61$).

Also, t-tests were conducted to see if the two groups differed across 2 conditions in terms of satisfaction with the story resolution and fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist. It was found that participants in Condition I ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.46$) were more satisfied with the resolution of story than the participants in Condition II ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.21$). There was a significant difference across the two groups in terms of being satisfied with how the story was resolved at the end ($t(135) = 7.68$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.32$). Moreover, it was found that SDT needs of the protagonist were fulfilled more in the story ending in Condition I ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .71$) than in Condition II ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .64$); ($t(135) = 3.80$, $p < .001$, $d = .65$).

RII, Story variables, Enjoyment and Appreciation

Since, H1 pertained to the first part of study, it was tested on a sample of 137 participants who had completed the first part of the survey successfully on the first day. To test H1, a regression analysis was conducted between satisfaction with the resolution of a story and fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist ($R^2 = 0.12$, $F(1, 135) = 18.31$, $p < .001$). Fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist positively predicted satisfaction with story resolution ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) supporting H1 for this study.

For testing H2, H3, H4 and H5, a sample of 82 participants was used after excluding the participants who had failed to complete the second part of the survey successfully. For the analyses, Condition I (i.e., Rambo surrenders) was coded as .05 and Condition II (i.e., Rambo dies) was coded as -.05 in the Condition variable. To test the relationship between Condition, story variables (i.e., SDT needs of the protagonist, satisfaction with story resolution and lasting impressions variables) and outcome variables such as enjoyment and appreciation, regression analyses were performed (see Table 3 for details). It was found that, satisfaction with story resolution significantly predicted enjoyment ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$), supporting H2(a), whereas lasting impressions positively predicted enjoyment ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$) and appreciation ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$) supporting H3(a) and H3(b) respectively.

Furthermore, to examine the relationship between story variables, condition and RII dimensions, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with each of the three factors of RII (i.e., Static-RII, Dynamic-RII and Backstory-RII) as dependent variables (see Table 4 for details). The first step included Condition and story variables (i.e., SDT needs of the protagonist, satisfaction with story resolution and lasting impressions) as the predictor variables and RII dimensions as outcome variables. The results indicated that Lasting impressions

significantly predicted all three RII dimensions: Static-RII ($\beta = .40, p < .001$), Dynamic-RII ($\beta = .45, p < .001$), and Backstory-RII ($\beta = .43, p < .001$), supporting H3(c). However, satisfaction with story resolution did not significantly predict any RII dimension. Therefore, these results did not support H2(b). Also, SDT need fulfillment of the protagonist negatively predicted Dynamic-RII. In other words, stories having resolutions where SDT needs of the protagonist are not fulfilled, are more likely to increase the tendency of people to counterfactually change narrative elements when they think about it retrospectively (i.e., engage in Dynamic-RII). The second step in the regression model explored the extent to which participants' enjoyment of the story predicted their tendency to engage in different forms of RII. It was found that deriving enjoyment from the narrative, increased the tendency of people to engage in Static-RII ($\beta = .43, p < .001$) supporting H4. Moreover, the results also indicated that enjoying the narrative increased the tendency of people to engage in Dynamic-RII ($\beta = .28, p < .05$) as well as Backstory-RII ($\beta = .48, p < .05$). The final step in the regression model involved adding appreciation as one of the predictor variables in the third step of the hierarchical regression analysis. The results were partially consistent with H5 as appreciation of the narrative positively predicted Static-RII ($\beta = .34, p < .01$) and Backstory-RII ($\beta = .39, p < .01$) but, wasn't significantly related to Dynamic-RII (See Table 5 for a summary of all the hypotheses tested in this study).

DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings and Implications

This paper advances the research on asynchronous narrative engagement by not only studying RII within a specific narrative context (i.e., *Rambo: First Blood*) but, also by examining how narrative structure, more specifically story resolutions, can impact long-term narrative engagement and rumination. It also integrates theoretical findings of TEBOTS emphasizing on the gratifications audience are seeking vicariously from a story and how this can impact their satisfaction with story resolutions (Slater et al., 2014).

The first goal of this study was to examine story resolutions within the purview of fulfillment of needs that audience members are vicariously seeking from the story. More specifically, this study sought to explain how fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist in a story can impact ways in which audiences cognitively process narrative content as well as their consequent affective responses. This study was designed to see if alternate story endings of a movie (differing in SDT needs fulfillment of the protagonist) could impact the satisfaction levels of the audience with the resolution of the central conflict of the story at the end. As discussed in this paper earlier, story resolutions have played a pivotal part in how audiences process and react to the overall stories. Movies such as *Bird Box* and *The Rise of Skywalker* have failed to draw positive responses from the audiences due to unsatisfactorily resolved story endings (Independent, 2019; Ingolfsland, 2020). In the past also, story endings for many popular movies such as *Fatal Attraction*, *Blade Runner*, *Final Destination (2000)*, *Escape Room*, etc. were altered after the original ending failed to draw positive reactions from the audience during the pre-release test screenings (Hollywood Insider, 2020). Even though Hollywood movie directors are known to choose the most suitable ending for their movie based on the test audience

reactions, it is essential to examine the specific components in these endings that make such story resolutions resonate more with the audience. Alternate endings from the movie *First blood* of *Rambo* franchise were selected for this study as these endings featured dramatically different resolutions of the central conflict in the story and consequently distinctive story outcomes for the protagonist. The data presented in this study clearly demonstrate that people are more likely to be satisfied with the resolution of a story if it fulfills the needs of the protagonist. This finding is also consistent with the theoretical framework of TEBOTS that explains how narratives can vicariously satisfy the intrinsic needs of audience (Slater et al, 2014).

The second goal of this study was to investigate how satisfaction with a story resolution and lasting impressions of the story could impact the enjoyment of a story as well as lead to more long-term appreciation of the story. This study further probed the impact of these on the tendency of people to engage in RII and associated behaviors of rumination, veridical recall and counterfactual play with narrative elements. The results implied that satisfactory story resolutions increased the enjoyment appeal of narratives and stories forming lasting impressions on audience members are more likely to be enjoyed and appreciated by them. This is consistent with the findings of earlier research studies (Eden & Tamborini, 2016; Weber et al., 2008) emphasizing that story endings featuring positive outcomes for good characters are more likely to be well-received by audience members. Entertainment scholars have conceptually demarcated entertainment gratifications to suggest differences in media content being enjoyed vs content being appreciated. Appreciation is typically associated with more meaningful, reflective, and long-lasting entertainment experiences, and genres such as drama, documentaries, or art films. On the other hand, enjoyment is associated with content evoking short-term transitory feelings of fun and pleasure, relaxation, and diversion, and genres such as comedy (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010;

Oliver & Raney, 2011). The stimuli used for this study (i.e., two versions of synopses and videos of alternate endings for action movie *First Blood*) featured dramatic and reflective content that could be enjoyed as well as appreciated. The results of this study indicated that stories that leave lasting impressions on audiences are more likely to be retrospectively enjoyed and appreciated by them. Retrospective enjoyment and appreciation of such lingering thoughts about the narrative, influences the asynchronous narrative engagement behaviors and experiences. Audience members may appreciate such stories by simply recalling the narrative and its various elements such as characters or story events (i.e., engage in Static-RII) or by contemplating and adding more meaning to it by imagining a backstory to give more context to certain character actions, situations and relationships portrayed in the main story (i.e., engage in Backstory-RII). However, appreciation did not significantly predict Dynamic-RII. This could be due to the fact that deep appreciation of a story might restrain the audiences from making any counterfactual changes to the narrative and may lead them to simply ruminate and reflect on the narrative or give more context to it by imagining a backstory. While it was hypothesized that enjoyment of a story positively predicted Static-RII, the results of this study indicated that enjoyment appeal of the story could increase the tendency of audience members to engage in all forms of RII. This suggests that when audience members derive enjoyment from a story, they might want to recall it (i.e., Static-RII), recreate it counterfactually in their minds (i.e., Dynamic-RII), or give more context to some narrative elements (Backstory-RII). Also, the results implied that satisfaction with story resolution did not significantly predict RII. A possible explanation for this can be from the TEBOTS perspective that elaborates on the mechanisms governing the functioning of narratives. Prior research suggests that the stressors of everyday life can motivate people to engage in narratives so that they can fulfill their intrinsic needs vicariously (Johnson, Slater,

Silver, & Ewoldsen, 2016). Consequently, when any of the three fundamental human needs are threatened, people will be more motivated to engage in narratives which in a way may provide an escape route from this threat. Conversely, if SDT needs of the audience members are being fulfilled vicariously by the protagonist and they are satisfied with the resolution of the story, they are less likely to be motivated to further engage in narratives (Johnson et al., 2018).

Theoretical and Applied Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical framework of RII and research on media effects by examining the role of narrative structures and gratifications audience are seeking from narratives in affecting the tendency of audience to ruminate about stories. It unpacks reasonings about what motivates audience to like a story and engage in the narrative outside the bounds of initial exposure. While, selecting suitable ending for their movie based on the reactions of test audiences is a common industry practice used by Hollywood directors, this study uses theoretical explanations to shed light on why certain story endings will be more positively evaluated by the audience. It also pursues an inquiry into questions pertaining to how and why narrative content is revisited by audience. In other words, by deconstructing the reasons for such successful industry practices, this study could be a step forward in integrating what is learned in theory into actual industry practices.

The theoretical foundations of RII are informed by the TEBOTS theory that focusses on the primary motivations for audiences to seek narratives and NCE model that emphasizes on important narrative elements such as characters, events, and backstory. These aspects are essential for not only having a thorough understanding of all kinds of narratives but, also for understanding the psychological processes governing the creation of three distinct mental representations of a story: Mental models of characters, the story world, and plot-driven

situations and events. This study integrates the findings of such models to predict the long-term appeal of narrative content and explains positive evaluation of a story in context of providing avenues for audiences to vicariously fulfill their intrinsic needs by long-term narrative engagement.

Having worked in the media industry as a TV producer, my colleagues and I, while working on a project during various stages of production (i.e., conceptualization, pre-production and post-production) often anticipated how the audience will react towards or interpret a particular narrative whether it's a 10 second teaser, 30 seconds trailer or 1-hour long TV show. This consideration is particularly important for creating marketing material that is aimed at leaving strong and lasting impressions on its target audience. Whether it's long form production (such as episodes for TV shows or documentaries) or short-form content (such as promos, teasers, trailers, etc.), research during conceptualization and pre-production stage involves studying audience responses to previous similar advertising campaigns or the ongoing story arc of a TV show to anticipate how audiences will interpret related content in future. Likewise, while conceptualizing a sequel or prequel of a movie, studios leverage the success of an initial film into adding to the brand value and extending it to the newer related projects to create a successful media franchise such as *Star Wars*. Combining plots, repeating actors and directors, connecting story worlds, or creating backstories are some strategies for connecting the new projects with the previous successful film from the same franchise (Keller, 1998). Research studies concerning some other asynchronous forms of engagement such as fan theories (Jenkins, 2003) and spoilers (Leavitt & Christenfeld, 2011) demonstrate how such narrative engagement can affect enjoyment and other affective responses to the narrative such as identification with narrative characters. These responses can create lasting impressions about the narrative which in turn can help

audience members develop long-term association with the media content. Such asynchronous engagement and associated RII behaviors are obviously desired by content creators because it may contribute to the longevity of the success of different kinds of media content such as a TV show, movie, media franchise, ad campaigns, etc.

In this era of converging media landscape, consumers are tuned in and connected to narrative messages almost all day via some form of traditional media and/or digital media. Therefore, content marketing and influencer marketing have evolved to be powerful marketing strategies engaged in catering to the curiosity of consumers. These marketing strategies involve relating marketing research with consumer behavior (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019; Wong & Kee, 2015). Content marketing employs storytelling tools for sharing valuable information with target audience whereas, influencer marketing uses key individuals, called influencers, who endorse the brand values usually on social media by connecting with their target audience and positively affecting their attitudes and behaviors to maintain a consistent brand image (More & Lingam, 2017). In a way, these marketing concepts are connecting brands more personally with their target audience by reflecting on their personal needs, attitudes, and situations and thereby, merging the reel and real worlds (Light, 2014). More specifically in context of marketing a TV show, these marketing strategies are shedding the boundaries between the story world and audience world which in turn, could help audience connect more strongly with the narrative. A classic example of this would be the successful marketing campaign of Amazon Prime Video India's show, *The Family Man* (season 2) that leveraged the benefits of influencer and content marketing to garner 7.4 million views (Wilson, 2019). This show focuses on the life of protagonist who works for the National Intelligence Agency and tries to protect the nation from terrorist attacks while balancing his simple middle-class family life. The strategists for this

show's marketing campaign rekindled the intrigue and curiosity around the first season and build on the viewership created by it by bringing the entire journey of the protagonist to the audience. They capitalized on the existing fandom by creating social media conversations focused on building curiosity about the gnawing unanswered questions from the previous season just in time for the launch of the second season. All the marketing strategies were centered on showcasing the protagonist's attempts to juggle his dual life, that of being an outstanding intelligence agent and his contrasting simple middle-class family life. Therefore, they promoted various characters from the show by focusing on their traits and behaviors and making these relatable for the target audience. The marketers also tried to build on the recall factor by creating marketing content intriguing audience about the whereabouts of the protagonist in the upcoming series. The idea was to explore the storyline of protagonist in his pursuit of finding a new job to appease his wife who didn't approve of his old job due to the risks associated with it. To kickstart this campaign, the performer playing the role of the protagonist took to social media asking for a corporate job. This activity was followed by a plethora of social media interactions with brand influencers who offered to interview him for a job opening. The makers also bridged the gap between the story world and real world by providing viewers with an opportunity to be a part of the quest by urging them to dial a phone number to help them find the protagonist. On dialing this phone number, the caller would hear the protagonist's voice sharing with them that he's busy but will hopefully meet them soon. At the end of the phone call, caller would receive a link, redirecting them to the show's trailer on Prime Video's YouTube channel. Prime Video continued to build on the reach of this campaign and shared similar social media posts featuring the quest for finding the protagonist. Such asynchronous narrative engagement was achieved by creating engaging

marketing materials that built on the recall value of the previous season's story and focused on the character traits and gratifications that audience could relate to.

The study of RII can provide us mechanisms to explore the appeal of some important attributes related to narrative elements such as character traits and actions (in context of SDT needs) and associated story outcomes, narrative structures and narrative devices used by writers, producers as well as marketers. It explains how subsequent story outcomes for the protagonist could influence the perceptions of story being satisfactorily resolved. Such findings can also provide theoretical explanations useful for efficient screenwriting processes that can be instrumental in effectively developing character arcs and overarching story arcs. Understanding these mechanisms could improve the storytelling skills of content producers as it will help them comprehend the screenwriting principles in context of these psychological processes governing character motivations, likability of protagonists. This in turn, can help them create likable protagonists which is an important requisite for any screenplay (Snyder, 2005). It will also help them create story resolutions that can satisfy the audience members who tend to receive vicarious reward or punishment by seeing the needs of liked or disliked protagonists satisfied or thwarted (Eden & Tamborini, 2016). Most importantly, such studies that focus on the processes governing the audience responses to entertainment will help content creators understand the process of storytelling not only from the writer/creator's perspective but also from the perspective of their target audience. Therefore, studying such models that focus on psychological mechanisms governing long-term media influence processes can help screenwriters, producers and even the marketing personnel to effectively understand the audience psychology. This in turn, could provide them insights for creating engaging content that strongly resonates with their target audience and helps their audience stay connected with the narrative even after it has ended.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any research, this study also had some limitations that could possibly provide future directions. One of the main limitations of this study was a small sample size. Even though the number of participants who had answered the attention check question incorrectly was miniscule, these participants were not excluded from the sample analyzed for this study due to the small sample size. In this study, the time gap between the first and second part of the study was 24-48 hours. Future work involving a longitudinal design should test the effect of a longer time gap between exposure to the stimulus and ruminating about it to see if time gap affects rumination behaviors and related experiences. In both parts of this study, there were more females than male participants. Even though Rambo is an action movie, the story endings used as stimuli featured scenes that were more dramatic and emotional. Therefore, it is possible that the findings of this investigation might differ across different populations, genres and different entertainment content and franchises depending on the gratifications they are seeking and tendency of participants engaging in RII to temporarily escape the daily stressors. Further tests and replications could probably reveal the role of some other intervening variables. This study examined the differences in story endings in context of fulfillment of SDT needs of the protagonist and categorized these as satisfactory and unsatisfactory story resolutions. Future studies could warrant further investigation by examining other parameters such as happy versus sad endings, hopeless versus hopeful and complete versus incomplete ending.

Fan behaviors such as LARPing (i.e., live action role playing), writing fan fiction or coming up with speculative fan theories could also be manifestations of the cognitive play involved in RII (Sethi, 2021). Therefore, future research should consider examining the role of RII in influencing fan behaviors. Another interesting dimension to explore in the narrative world

would be the role RII might be playing in influencing how a text is read and interpreted. It could influence the salience and retention of specific narrative elements which in turn, could influence affective and cognitive responses to future texts (i.e., sequels, spin-offs, etc.) related to the narratives. Likewise, character liking and fandom could also influence how related future texts are read and interpreted. Furthermore, it will be interesting to examine if RII is only retrospective or if it also involves developing future expectations from the story. Other asynchronous narrative engagement experiences such as fan theories, teasers, trailers and spoilers that introduce narrative elements to the audience before they view the actual story also involve similar experiences of rumination, speculation and predicting future developments in the story. This cognitive play might influence the long-term appeal and gratifications audience is seeking from the narrative.

CONCLUSION

Retrospective imaginative involvement provides a promising avenue to examine how audiences process, ruminate and elaborate on narrative experiences and related behaviors outside the bounds of initial narrative exposure. Since, RII is a relatively new research domain, not many experimental studies have been conducted examining the various aspects of this multidimensional construct. This study is certainly a step forward in that direction by advancing our knowledge about the behaviors and entertainment experiences associated with asynchronous engagement. It contributes to the theoretical foundations of TEBOTS by exploring the role of narrative structure and SDT need fulfillment of the protagonist in context of how audiences process and evaluate story resolutions. This in turn, affects the long-term appeal and asynchronous entertainment experiences associated with a story.

It's a fairly common practice for Hollywood directors to select an appropriate ending for their movie based on the evaluations and reactions of test audience members. This study provides theoretical explanations about why some story endings are more likely to be positively evaluated by the audience. It is certainly an initial foray in deconstructing the reasons for such successful industry practices and thereby, in future can contribute towards integrating what is learned in theory into actual industry practices. As demonstrated by this study, people are more likely to be satisfied with story endings that fulfill the SDT needs of the protagonist. Moreover, stories that leave long-term lasting impressions on the audience are more likely to be enjoyed and appreciated by them. Such retrospective appreciation can manifest in different RII behaviors such as rumination, recalling the narrative, reconstructing the narrative by counterfactually changing it or imagining a backstory to give more context to character actions or situations portrayed in the main narrative. These findings can provide insights about the kind of content

that will resonate with audience and draw positive affective and cognitive responses from them. It can also help predict the long-term appeal of narratives and its potential to engage people in RII and associated behaviors.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for All Measures

	Scale point	n items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>a</i>
Retrospective Imaginative Involvement (N = 82)					
Static-RII	1-7	9	3.69	1.22	.92
Dynamic-RII	1-7	9	3.36	1.32	.93
Backstory-RII	1-7	9	3.92	1.33	.96
Lasting Impressions (N = 82)	1-7	3	3.75	1.41	.86
Enjoyment & Appreciation (N = 82)					
Enjoyment	1-7	4	4.68	1.39	.92
Appreciation	1-7	4	5.04	1.25	.89
Satisfaction with Story Resolution					
N = 82	1-7	6	3.59	1.62	.92
N = 137	1-7	6	3.66	1.59	.93
SDT Need Fulfillment for the protagonist					
N = 82	1-7	19	3.93	.41	.65
N = 137	1-7	19	3.96	.71	.72

Table 2*Pearson Correlations between Measures*

	SDT	Story Resolution	Lasting Impressions	Enjoyment	Appreciation	Dynamic RII	Static RII	Backstory RII
SDT		.393**	-.063	-.079	-.173	-.167	-.163	-.114
Story Resolution	.393**		-.156	.076	-.028	.029	.014	-.056
Lasting Impressions	-.063	-.156		.574**	.601**	.439**	.378**	.431**
Enjoyment	-.079	.076	.574**		.737**	.469**	.510**	.555**
Appreciation	-.173	-.028	.601**	.737**		.438**	.466**	.511**
RII-Dynamic	-.167	.029	.439**	.469**	.438**		.714**	.618**
RII-Static	-.163	.014	.378**	.510**	.466**	.714**		.671**
RII-Backstory	-.114	-.056	.431**	.555**	.511**	.618**	.671**	

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 3*Regression Analysis of Story Variables on Enjoyment and Appreciation*

	Enjoyment	Appreciation
	β	β
Condition	-.18	-.03
SDT	-.14	-.19*
Satisfaction with Story Resolution	.33**	.16
Lasting Impressions	.59***	.61***
ΔR^2	.39	.40
$F(81)$	12.51***	12.64***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4*Regression Analysis of Story Variables, Enjoyment and Appreciation on Dimensions of RII*

	Static RII	Dynamic RII	Backstory RII
	β	β	β
Step 1			
Condition	.00	-.05	-.01
SDT	-.20	-.21*	-.11
Satisfaction with Story Resolution	.15	.21	.06
Lasting Impressions	.40***	.45***	.43***
ΔR^2	.18	.24	.04
$F(81)$	4.28**	6.11***	4.81**
Step 2			
Condition	.08	.01	.07
SDT	-.14	-.17	-.04
Satisfaction with Story Resolution	-.01	-.12	-.10
Lasting Impressions	.14	.28*	.15
Enjoyment	.43***	.28*	.48*
ΔR^2	.29	.29	.34
$F(81)$	6.29***	6.20***	7.71***
Step 3			
Condition	.01	-.04	-.00
SDT	-.13	-.217	-.03
Satisfaction with Story Resolution	.10	.18	.00
Lasting Impressions	.19	.32*	.20
Appreciation	.34**	.22	.39**
ΔR^2	.25	.40	.29
$F(81)$	5.06***	5.63***	6.10***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5
Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationships	β	Supported?
H1	Satisfaction with Story Resolution → SDT Needs Fulfillment		Yes
H2(a)	Satisfaction with Story Resolution → Enjoyment	.33**	Yes
H2(b)	Satisfaction with Story Resolution → Static-RII	.15	No
H3(a)	Lasting Impressions → Enjoyment	.59***	Yes
H3(b)	Lasting Impressions → Appreciation	.61***	Yes
H3(c)	Lasting Impressions → Static-RII	.40***	Yes
	Lasting Impressions → Dynamic-RII	.45***	Yes
	Lasting Impressions → Backstory-RII	.43***	Yes
H4	Enjoyment → Static-RII	.43***	Yes
H5	Appreciation → Static-RII	.34**	Yes
	Appreciation → Dynamic-RII	.22	No
	Appreciation → Backstory-RII	.39**	Yes

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6*RII scale items (Sethi et. al., 2020)*

Items
RII (Character - Dynamic)
• Imagined being one of the characters from this story as you went about some activity from your own life. • Imagined a character(s) having conversations or other interactions different than the ones portrayed in this Rambo story. • Imagined one of the characters is different from the way that character is portrayed in this Rambo story. • Imagined characters in a different situation than in the original story. • Imagined changing significant character actions leading to the resolution of this story to understand the resolution of a story better.
RII (Character - Static)
• Remember the interactions between two or more characters. • Replay in your mind what one or more of the characters actually did in this Rambo story. • Replay a specific dialogue from this story in your mind that reminds you about Rambo story characters. • Thinking about the motives of one or more characters in this story
RII (Event - Dynamic)
• Imagined your favorite event(s) in this Rambo story as events and situations you could encounter personally in real life. • Imagined the events in this story are events and situations you know and care about in real life. • Imagined how story event(s) in this Rambo story can be related to real-life events. • Imagined that one of the events in this story happened in your own life.
RII (Event - Static)
• Remember one or more of the events from this Rambo story exactly as they happened. • Remembering the sequence of events in this story. • Remember what actually happened in this Rambo story. • Remember critical events in this story. • Remembering significant event(s) leading to the resolution of the story exactly as they occurred in this Rambo story.
RII (Backstory - Character)
• To understand a character(s) in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with that character(s).

- To understand the motivations/choices made by a character(s) in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with those motivations of the character(s)?
- To understand certain challenging circumstances faced by a character(s) in this Rambo story, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with the formation of those circumstances?
- To understand the crucial relationships of a character(s) with other story characters, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with the formation of those relationships?

RII (Backstory - Event)

- To understand a situation(s) in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with that situation(s)?
 - To understand the conflict in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with that conflict?
 - To understand some of the significant events in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with those events?
 - To understand the resolution of this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with some significant events leading to the resolution of this story?
 - To understand the circumstances portrayed in this Rambo story better, do you ever imagine a backstory associated with those circumstances?
-

Table 7*Satisfaction with the resolution of the story (Ulsoy et al., 2021)*

Items
• I was satisfied with how the main conflict in this Rambo story was resolved. • I liked how the conflict at the resolution of the story was presented. • I enjoyed how the characters resolve the story conflict at the resolution. • I was happy to see how the characters ended up at the resolution. • I was happy to see the fate of characters at the end of this Rambo story. • I was satisfied with how this story ended.

Table 8*SDT scale items (Johnston & Finney, 2010) modified for the story ending*

Item
• At the end of the story, Rambo was free to decide for himself how to live his life. • At the end of the story, Rambo really liked the people he interacted with. • At the end of the story, Rambo did not feel very competent. • At the end of the story, Rambo felt pressured in his life. • At the end of the story, people Rambo knew told him that he was good at what he did. • At the end of the story, Rambo got along with people he came into contact with. • At the end of the story, Rambo generally felt free to express his ideas and opinions. • At the end of the story, Rambo considered the people he interacted with to be his friends. • At the end of the story, Rambo had to do what he was told. • At the end of the story, People in Rambo's life cared about him. • At the end of the story, Rambo felt a sense of accomplishment from what he did. • At the end of the story, People Rambo interacted with took his feelings into consideration. • At the end of the story, Rambo did not get much of a chance to show how capable he was. • At the end of the story, there were not many people that Rambo was close to. • At the end of the story, Rambo felt like he could pretty much be himself in his daily situations. • At the end of the story, the people Rambo interacted with did not seem to like him much. • At the end of the story, Rambo often did not feel very capable. • At the end of the story, there wasn't much opportunity for Rambo to decide for himself how to do things in his daily life. • At the end of the story, people were generally pretty friendly towards Rambo.

Table 9

Lasting Impressions (Oliver and Bartsch, 2010)

Item
• This story will stick with me for a long time. • I know I will never forget this story. • The story left me with a lasting impression.

Table 10*Enjoyment & Appreciation (Oliver and Bartsch, 2010)*

Item
• It was fun for me to read and watch this story. • I had a good time reading and watching this story. • The story was entertaining. • I found this story to be very meaningful. • I was moved by this story. • The story was thought provoking. • I enjoyed this story. • I appreciated this story.