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Investigating the impact of narrativity on the congeniality bias

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Abstract

Oftentimes, people preferably select information confirming their prior beliefs—they show the congeniality bias. Here, we investigate two possibilities about how narrativity relates to the congeniality bias: Narratives might either relate negatively (since they may lack a comprehensive account of reality) or positively (since they may evoke emotions) to the congeniality bias. In two preregistered experiments, participants self-reported on their attitude towards refugees, after which they selected either a fictional narrative, nonfictional narrative, or expository text, with all texts addressing migration. Results of Experiment 1 ($n = 548$) supported the second possibility, whereas those of Experiment 2 ($n = 1{,}023$) did not support either possibility. When effects of both experiments were pooled, results showed that narrativity was linked positively to the congeniality bias. Fictionality was consistently unrelated to the congeniality bias. Neither need for cognitive closure nor need for affect (assessed in Experiment 2 only) moderated the relation between narrativity and the congeniality bias. However, a positive association between the need for closure and a preference for fictional narratives emerged. In Experiment 3 ($n = 220$), participants selected either a nonfictional narrative or an expository text, after which they reported reasons for their textual choice. When the expository text was chosen, comprehensive information obtained greater approval as the selection reason than emotional experience. The opposite pattern emerged when the nonfictional narrative was selected. In sum, when audiences are to consider written content challenging their prior beliefs, providing the content in an expository rather than a narrative format may be helpful.

Keywords Narrative · Fiction · Congeniality bias · Confirmation bias · Selective exposure

Social and political polarization, along with diminished social understanding, represent significant challenges of our time. One factor contributing to this lack of understanding is the congeniality bias, understood as the tendency to preferably turn one's attention to belief-consistent as opposed to belief-inconsistent information and to select messages accordingly (Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009). The congeniality bias forms part of the broader confirmation bias: Whereas the confirmation bias represents the inclination to process information in a way that bolsters one's prior beliefs (del Vicario et al., 2017), and hence covers all phases of information processing, the congeniality bias is focused on the earliest phase during which information is selected. Possible consequences of this bias include reinforced misconceptions and stereotypes about outgroup members.

Although early research on the congeniality bias produced inconsistent or mixed findings—prompting Freedman and Sears (1965) to conclude that "experimental evidence does not demonstrate that there is a general psychological tendency to avoid nonsupportive... information" (p. 69)—more recent studies have converged on the conclusion that individuals tend to prefer attitude-consistent messages over attitude-inconsistent ones (Hart et al., 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Research on the congeniality bias has a long history (for an overview, see Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015), but has so far disregarded that much of the information people receive about others and about everyday social issues is communicated through narratives. Research accumulated over the last decades indicates that fictional narratives have the power to improve readers' social-cognitive abilities across various outcomes such as

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increases in empathy and theory of mind (Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017; Wimmer et al., 2024), but also reductions in prejudices and stereotypes (Johnson et al., 2013, 2014; Suzuki et al., 2024; Vezzali et al., 2015). Hence, reading fictional narratives can result in socially desirable outcomes. However, there is reason to assume that fictional narratives may have other—but so far neglected—effects at an earlier phase of information processing—namely, when people decide what information to turn their attention to. Therefore, narrativity, defined as the degree to which a text tells a coherent story, could possibly be associated with the congeniality bias.

In the present article, we report three preregistered experiments that investigated whether features of narratives (in particular, narrativity, but also fictionality) and recipient characteristics (need for cognitive closure and need for affect) are linked to the congeniality bias when people choose to read texts about human migration. Our focus is on cross-border migration, a topic that is not only central to current societal and political debates in many world regions (for instance, the USA; see Roy et al., 2024) but is also accompanied by increasingly polarized attitudes towards refugees and migrants (as, for example, seen in studies from European countries; Albada et al., 2021; Czymara, 2020).

Here, based on available theory and empirical evidence, we tested two opposing hypotheses about the link between narrativity and the congeniality bias. Experiment 1 investigated the hypothesis that people are more willing to read a belief-inconsistent text when this text is presented in a narrative rather than an expository format (i.e., assuming a negative relationship between narrativity and the congeniality bias), whereas Experiment 2 examined the contrasting hypothesis that people are more willing to read a belief-inconsistent text when this text is conveyed in an expository rather than a narrative format (i.e., implying a positive relation between narrativity and the congeniality bias). Experiment 2 also investigated whether the postulated link of narrativity with the congeniality bias is moderated by individual difference variables in terms of need for cognitive closure and need for affect. Furthermore, both experiments explored the role of fictionality, namely whether people are more or less willing to read a belief-inconsistent text when this text is presented as a fictional compared with as a nonfictional narrative. In Experiment 3 we tested assumptions regarding the reasons for selecting an expository versus a narrative text independently of the content's belief-consistency. We predicted that selecting an expository text is more strongly motivated by expecting comprehensive information about a topic than expecting emotional experiences. Selecting a narrative text was assumed to be more strongly motivated by anticipating emotional experiences than comprehensive information.

Narrativity and the congeniality bias

We understand narratives as portrayals of an event (Abbott, 2004) or a connected series of events (Onega & Landa, 2014) that happen to one or several characters (such as humans, person-like entities, animals, aliens, or anthropomorphized objects), unfold over time, and are causally interrelated (e.g., Dahlstrom, 2014). *Story* is a term we use interchangeably with narrative. E1 illustrates a narrative depiction of aspects of grief.

E1: "There had been days, during these months since the spring, when she had thought of letting the donkey go, selling it. After Ben's death, she had paid no attention to it, only stared, as she had stared at everything else, without interest, as it lumbered about the meadow, grazing.... When Jo came to see her, which had been almost every day, he would go down to the meadow, refill the water bucket, talk to the animal, so that it did not feel, as Ruth felt, completely bereft, completely alone" (Hill, 1974, p. 12 f.).

In contrast, expository texts describe facts or situations without putting them into the structure of a story (Graesser et al., 2003). E2 exemplifies an expository depiction related to grief.

E2: "From his observations of 101 recently bereaved patients he discovered similar patterns, which he described as the pathognomic characteristics of normal or acute grief:

1. Somatic or bodily distress of some type
2. Preoccupation with the image of the deceased
3. Guilt relating to the deceased or circumstances of the death
4. Hostile reactions
5. The inability to function as one had before the loss

In addition to these five, he described a sixth characteristic exhibited by many patients: they appeared to develop traits of the deceased in their own behavior" (Worden, 2003, p. 11).

In that regard, it is important to note that the concept of fictional narratives involves two empirically correlated but conceptually distinct aspects: narrativity and fictionality (e.g., Green & Appel, 2024; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). In brief, narrativity (i.e., whether a work is narrative or expository) addresses the way in which a text's content is conveyed (see Graesser et al., 2003), whereas fictionality is about the intended relationship between text content and the real world, typically indicated by pragmatic, more precisely paratextual information (for instance, through genre labels such as "novel"; see, e.g., Eco, 1994; Genette et al., 1990; Schreier, 2004). We regard

fiction as intentionally signaled invention in communication (see, e.g., Gjerlevsen & Nielsen, 2020). Authors of fiction signify that their work in its entirety is not thought to represent the real world so that audiences understand its decisively restricted connection to reality (see Currie, 1985). Works of fiction are usually imparted in a narrative format (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015), meaning that expository depictions are typically not only nonnarrative but also nonfictional. At the same time, not all narratives are fiction—namely, those that aim to represent a particular aspect of the real world, for instance, autobiographies, biographies, or journalistic reportages. Thus, whether E1 is a fictional or nonfictional narrative primarily depends on whether its author is claiming to tell a true story—then it is nonfiction—or whether the content's truth is of lesser interest—in this case, it is fiction. The author's intention is typically most clearly expressed through paratextual genre labels (see above).

In the following paragraphs, we outline how two perceived features of narratives—namely, that they signal low comprehensiveness or emotional turmoil, respectively—lead to two opposing assumptions about how narrativity is linked with the congeniality bias.

Narratives signal low comprehensiveness

First, it could be assumed that the more belief-inconsistent a text's content, the more likely people are to prefer a narrative over an expository text. This is because narratives are per definition (see above) limited to reporting a bounded number of episodes: Narratives revolve around events that emphasize characters' actions, interactions, and development, with these events structured according to temporal order and causal relationships (Graesser et al., 1991; Tun, 1989; Zabrucky & Moore, 1999; Zabrucky & Ratner, 1992). This narrative structure is thought to mirror everyday human experience (Bruner, 1986; Graesser et al., 1991; for an overview, see Mar et al., 2021), which typically also consists of temporally ordered, causally linked events organized around personal goals. Taken together, narratives recount particular events, which may not necessarily generalize across individuals or situations. As a result, readers could dismiss narrative content as presenting a special case that diverges from the norm. Such an interpretation of narrative content could be used as a defensive strategy to protect one's beliefs when encountering belief-inconsistent information as part of a story.

Expository texts, in contrast, do not have to be based on specific events. Therefore, expository texts can aggregate the content of many episodes, so that peculiarities of individual episodes are averaged out. The resulting aggregate is then more likely to present a comprehensive account of a given topic than the content of a narrative on the same topic. In line with this reasoning, the primary purpose of expository texts has been defined as presenting information and ideas on a given subject, as opposed to providing entertainment (Decker, 1974; Graesser et al., 1991; Medina & Pilonieta, 2006; see also Mar et al., 2021).

There is no direct empirical evidence to suggest that audiences share these theoretical assumptions about stories and expository texts when they choose to engage with these types of media. However, constituting more indirect evidence, Wimmer (2015) showed that as distinct from (fictional and nonfictional) narratives, expository texts are valued by recipients if they provide an opportunity for knowledge acquisition, contain valid statements, and are written by professionally (as opposed to literarily) competent authors. This demonstrates that especially expository, but not narrative texts are usually considered as potentially trustworthy sources warranting an acquisition or change of beliefs.

To sum up, when participants are presented with summaries of narrative and expository texts, they might consider the narrative texts' content as a less comprehensive account of reality than the content of the expository texts. The lower the assumed comprehensiveness and therefore generalizability to real-world issues, the less one's prior beliefs regarding text content are threatened. In a nutshell, choosing a narrative instead of an expository text can be considered belief-bolstering when text content is belief-inconsistent.

Narratives signal emotional turmoil

A second line of reasoning suggests that the more belief-inconsistent a text's content, the more likely people are to prefer an expository over a narrative text. Belief-inconsistent expository texts may induce a lower degree of negative emotions than narrative ones: Stories regularly immerse or transport individuals into the events reported (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Appel, 2024), and, compared with expository texts, stories often tend to elicit a more intense emotional response (e.g., Mar et al., 2011, 2021). What is more, there is initial evidence to suggest that audiences appreciate emotional experiences whenever they engage with narratives as opposed to expository texts. Participants of a study by Wimmer et al. (2023) rated the importance of various experiences that can emerge during or after reading. Emotional experiences were considered more important for a subjectively valued reading of narrative compared with expository texts. As a result of such reading expectations, selecting an expository belief-inconsistent text may reduce the need to deal with unpleasant emotions.

Following this reasoning, expository texts may be especially attractive for people who have a high need for cognitive closure, that is, the desire to reach a quick solution to a question or problem, and avoidance of uncertainty and vagueness (Kruglanski, 1990). People with a high need for

closure and text-inconsistent prior beliefs may be especially disturbed by the narrative text content. Moreover, following this reasoning, belief-inconsistent narratives may be avoided more by people who have a low need for affect, that is, people's general motivation to approach situations and activities that are emotion inducing for themselves and others (Appel & Richter, 2010; Maio & Esses, 2001). People with a high need for affect might be upset by belief-inconsistent narrative content to a relatively small extent since the emotional experiences anticipated when engaging with narratives might still promise a considerable reward. People with a low need for affect, however, might be attracted by anticipated emotional experiences to a lower degree, which could make the belief-consistency of narrative content more salient. As a consequence, belief-inconsistent narrative information should be more aversive for people low rather than high in need for affect. Taken together, selecting an expository instead of a narrative text may better fulfill a low need for affect.

Fictionality and the congeniality bias

To avoid the widespread confounding of texts' narrativity with their fictionality (see above; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015), it is important to consider both characteristics separately. So, how might fictionality be linked to the congeniality bias? On one hand, fictionality could be assumed to serve a role similar to that of narrativity in that works of fiction are thought to not usually present true objects, persons, or events (for theoretical accounts, see, e.g., Eco, 1994; Friend, 2012; Winkler & Appel, 2025; for empirical evidence, see Appel & Malečkar, 2012). On the other hand, Appel et al. (2025) did not observe evidence supporting the view that fictionality is linked with the congeniality bias: Participants' interest in reading a narrative was not associated to a lower degree with their prior text-relevant beliefs when this narrative was presented as fictional than when it was presented as nonfictional. In sum, the inconclusive state of research indicates that fictionality's role within the congeniality bias should be explored further.

The present research

The experiments reported in this article aim to improve our understanding of the links between the congeniality bias, narrativity, and fictionality. In Experiments 1 and 2, we assessed whether participants' choice among three options (i.e., a fictional narrative, nonfictional narrative, or nonfictional expository text; see below for further details) was predicted by their prior beliefs that related to the texts' content. Zooming in on individual difference variables that may modulate narrativity's impact, Experiment 2 additionally investigated the need for cognitive closure and the need for affect as potential moderators.

In both experiments we used texts about migration as stimulus materials. For individuals whose existing beliefs conflict with the message of the text, negatively framed narratives can be particularly novel or informative. Since novelty and information utility are well known to enhance exposure (e.g., Canon, 1964; Frey & Rosch, 1984; see Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015), these aspects might outweigh the congeniality bias (Appel et al., 2025). As a result, all reading materials used in the current research were written in positive valence (i.e., the stories or expository information provided a positive picture of migrants).

Across Experiments 1 and 2, our research focus centered around whether participants' existing attitudes towards refugees predicted the selection of *narrative* versus *expository* texts. For that purpose, participants were provided not only with (fictional or nonfictional) narratives, but also with an expository text. Since expository fiction is very rare, the expository text was provided in a nonfictional version only. We started our project with the assumption put forward by the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view—namely, that belief-inconsistent text content is associated with a preference for narrative (vs. expository) texts. We gave priority to this view because it is slightly better supported by empirical evidence than the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view: In a comprehensive meta-analysis by Hart et al. (2009), only a single text feature emerged as a moderator of the congeniality bias—the quality of the information presented. Narratives' low generalizability to real-word issues, as postulated by the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view, is more clearly related to the quality of content in terms of its validity. This is because the coverage of a source, including its comprehensiveness, is thought to contribute to information quality, whereas the expected emotional impact of media engagement, as addressed within the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view, is not among known quality indicators of sources (e.g., Zhang & Duke, 2011).

Hence, given the positive portrayal of refugees within the stimulus texts, in Experiment 1 we tested the prediction that the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely participants are to prefer a narrative over an expository text. Reflecting the results of Experiment 1, Experiment 2 was guided by the alternative *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view and its assumption that the more belief-inconsistent a text's content (or, in other words, considering the positive depiction of refugees within the reading stimuli, the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees), the more likely humans are to prefer an expository over a narrative text. It is important to note that we do not regard the two alternative views under investigation as mutually exclusive but as potentially coexisting. So, the question at stake is not whether any of the views is empirically

supported (to approximate whether it is accurate) but which is *better* supported (to approximate which of the views dominates). In addition, we explored the degree to which fictionality is associated with the congeniality bias. To this end, we manipulated the narratives' ascribed genre: Fictional narratives were presented as fictional short stories, nonfictional narratives as nonfictional journalistic reportages.

Finally, Experiment 3 focused on genre-specific expectations about narrative versus expository texts that motivate people to turn their attention towards these types of texts. We predicted that the selection of expository texts is driven more strongly by an anticipation of comprehensive information about a topic than by an anticipation of emotional experiences. In contrast, the selection of narratives was assumed to be driven more strongly by an expectation of emotional experiences than by an expectation of comprehensive information.

Experiment 1

As Experiment 1 aimed to test the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view, we hypothesized that the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely they are to choose a (fictional or nonfictional) narrative over an expository text (Hypothesis 1a). Additionally, we investigated the nondirectional research question as to whether participants' attitude towards refugees is associated with the choice between fiction and nonfiction (i.e., whether participants choose the nonfictional narrative or the fictional narrative) and if so, whether the association is positive or negative (Research Question [RQ]1).

Materials and methods

This experiment was preregistered at AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/jpj2-7jdc.pdf). In accordance with the ethical guidelines of the German Psychological Society (DGPs), online studies of this type, involving questionnaire-based data collection and full anonymization, do not require formal ethical approval, provided that no psychological or physical harm is anticipated. All procedures complied with the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were adults and provided written informed consent. All measures, manipulations, and exclusions are reported. Materials are available at the Open Science Framework (OSF, https://osf.io/4md83). The experimental design involved one focal dependent variable (i.e., media choice) with three levels (i.e., fictional narrative vs. nonfictional narrative vs. expository text) and one continuous predictor (i.e., attitude towards refugees).

Participants

An a priori power analysis (using G*Power; Faul et al., 2007) indicated that a minimum of 334 participants were needed to detect a small effect ($OR = 0.643$; Cohen, 1988) in a two-tailed binary logistic regression (as warranted by our hypothesis about the relationship between the attitude towards refugees and the choice between narrative and expository texts) at the standard .05 significance level with a power of .95. The resulting $n = 334$ was multiplied by 1.5 to account for the fact that each participant chose between two narrative and one expository text. So, we aimed for a sample size of $n = 501$ to be used in analyses. Considering potential exclusions, we attempted to recruit up to $n = 570$ volunteers. In line with these considerations, a total of 566 participants took part. The data of 18 participants were excluded from analyses because they failed an attention check (i.e., an instructed response item interspersed within the Astley–Francis Scale of Attitude towards Theistic Faith; Astley et al., 2012), so that the final sample size was $n = 548$ ($M_{age} = 42.08$ years, $SD_{age} = 13.52$; 268 women, 277 men, three other genders or no gender stated; for an overview of further participant characteristics, see the OSF link referenced above). Respondents were recruited from Prolific Academic (UK or US residents with English as their first language), participated remotely via a SoSci Survey online questionnaire, and received GBP 1.20 as a compensation. The experiment lasted approximately 8 min.

Materials and procedure

First, participants were informed about the study, which included the following text about its procedure: "In this study, personal information will be asked (Prolific ID, age, gender). Then you will be asked about your attitude towards different topics. Afterwards you will read and evaluate a text. Some questions during the study aim to check your attention or understanding to ensure data quality." Upon providing informed consent to participate, participants completed the Attitude Towards Refugees Scale (Kotzur et al., 2022). Considering that attitudes towards refugees have often turned out to be less negative than attitudes towards migrants in general (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017; Steele et al., 2023), applying this scale instead of a measure of attitude towards migrants more broadly served to prevent an overestimate of the congeniality bias, so was meant to make our findings more robust.

Given that engaging with narratives can change audiences' attitudes and beliefs (Green & Appel, 2024), assessing this attitude early on within the experimental procedure was essential. Kotzur et al. (2022) suggested that their metric Attitude Towards Refugees Scale follows a hierarchical conceptualization in that cognitive, affective, and behavioral intentional components constitute

separate first-order factors that derive from one common second-order factor, a general attitude towards refugees. Confirmatory factor analysis, cross-validated across several independent samples, supported this conceptualization (Kotzur et al., 2022). The authors of this scale also provide evidence to suggest measurement equivalence over time as well as convergent and discriminant validity, for instance in terms of substantial positive correlations with positive contact with refugees and allophilia on the one hand, and substantial negative correlations with negative contact with refugees and political right-wing orientation on the other (see Kotzur et al., 2022). Each of the six items (e.g., "How likeable are refugees to you?") was responded to using a 5-point Likert scale. In line with Kotzur et al.'s (2022) recommendation to use a global second-order factor, a total sum score was utilized as dependent measure. Higher scores represent a more positive attitude towards refugees. In the present sample, reliability in terms of Revelle's omega total (McNeish, 2018) was $\omega_{RT} = .96$ (similarly, Kotzur et al., 2022, observed internal consistencies of $\omega > .95$ across three samples). Then, participants administered two filler questionnaires—namely, the ATTARI-12 (Stein et al., 2024), a measure of attitudes towards artificial intelligence, and the Astley–Francis Scale of Attitude towards Theistic Faith (Astley et al., 2012). These filler questionnaires were presented to participants at this stage so that any priming effects triggered by the Attitude Towards Refugees Scale (Kotzur et al., 2022) would have diminished until participants approached the subsequent, focal media selection task, for which the following instruction was presented: "In the next part of this online questionnaire, you will be asked to read one of three 1,000-word texts. Importantly, you can select the text yourself. To ease your decision, the next page will present summaries of the texts. Please click on the summary of the text you would like to read. You will be asked about your impressions of the text afterwards." On the next page, one of two stimulus sets (subject to random allocation; see above and Table 1) was displayed. The stimuli were summaries of texts, and the participants were asked to select the text they wished to read based on these summaries. These summaries varied regarding text genre. In particular, three conditions were implemented: fictional narrative versus nonfictional narrative versus expository text. Text genre was manipulated through the genre ascriptions appearing within summaries of the texts and related paratext. All texts addressed the topic of migration with positive valence. There was only one text and corresponding paratext/summary for the expository stimulus. For the narrative fiction and the narrative nonfiction stimuli, two versions (A and B) were constructed each (see Table 1). Summaries of version A are both about Emily, a compassionate photographer, and Hassan, a refugee fleeing from war; the two instances of version A summaries differ in ascribed genre (i.e., narrative fiction vs. narrative nonfiction) only. Summaries of version B are both about Tom, a bus driver, and Malik, a war refugee; the two instances of version B summaries differ in ascribed genre (i.e., narrative fiction vs. narrative nonfiction) only. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two stimulus sets: (fictional narrative A, nonfictional narrative B, expository text) OR (fictional narrative B, nonfictional narrative A, expository text). The screen location of the summaries was randomized. Upon clicking on a summary, the corresponding full text was presented on the subsequent page. The full texts to which the summaries refer have a length of approximately 1,000 words each. They were generated using ChatGPT. The texts and prompts presented to ChatGPT are provided on the OSF page referenced above.

The next two items—included for exploratory purposes—addressed participants' experience of the texts. First, participants' memory for the selected text's genre was assessed: They responded to "Thinking back of the descriptions of the texts, what type of text did you click on?" by choosing among the options "A fictional short story," "A nonfictional journalistic reportage," "A fact sheet," and "I don't know." Second, they rated the overall quality of the text on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*extremely low*) to 9 (*extremely high*).

Then, respondents provided demographic information in terms of gender, age, ethnic background, and highest level of education. Age was collected as a metric variable—participants typed their age in years in an open text box. Categorical response options for the remaining demographic variables are listed in the online supplement (see OSF page referenced above). Furthermore, participants were offered the option to share any problems with or comments on the study, which were to be typed into an open text box (no issues were reported; only a single participant expressed interest in why the experiment involved questions about AI and god, yet did not explicitly mention what they believed to be the research question or hypothesis under investigation). Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked for their participation, and reimbursed.

Data analysis and results

The data, coding book, and analysis script are available online (https://osf.io/4md83).

Data quality checks

Participants' selection was about evenly spread across the three different text genres. A cross tab comparing the text genre chosen by participants with the text genre as remembered by participants revealed that memory for text genre

Table 1 Summary of the texts participants were presented with during the media selection task

	Text genre		
Version	Narrative fiction	Narrative nonfiction	Expository nonfiction
A	Fiction **Short Story: Unseen Journeys of Migration** Emily, a compassionate photographer, meets Hassan, a refugee fleeing from war. Despite the language barrier, Emily is intrigued by the young man. She captures Hassan's poignant story through photography, aiming to raise awareness about the situation of refugees. The story illustrates how a photographer bridges the gap between the familiar and the foreign	Nonfiction **Journalistic Reportage: Unseen Journeys of Migration** This journalistic reportage is about Emily, a compassionate photographer and Hassan, a refugee who fled from war. Despite the language barrier, Emily is intrigued by the young man. She captures Hassan's poignant story through photography, aiming to raise awareness about the situation of refugees. The journalistic reportage illustrates how a photographer bridges the gap between the familiar and the foreign	Fact Sheet **Migration Today: Contact Helps Mutual Understanding** This fact sheet presents essential facts about migration. The fact sheet is based on scientific data and illustrates that the majority of migrants entering the U.S. within the last year left their home country for reasons of war. Many of them take on low pay employment. Without migrants, the economy would collapse. Research is reviewed that suggests that interpersonal contact with migrants benefits members of the host society
B	Fiction **Short Story: An Unlikely Friendship** Tom, a bus driver, wakes up Malik, who has fallen asleep in the bus. Tom learns that Malik is a refugee who was forced to leave his home country. Malik tells Tom about the shocking political reasons for his escape and the hardship he suffered on his journey. Tom is impressed by Malik's strong efforts to make a living and to build a future for himself and his family. The encounter in the bus is beginning of an unlikely friendship	Nonfiction **Journalistic Reportage: An Unlikely Friendship** This journalistic reportage is about Tom, a bus driver, and Malik, who one night had fallen asleep in Tom's bus. Tom learns that Malik is a refugee who was forced to leave his home country. Malik tells Tom about the shocking political reasons for his escape and the hardship he suffered on his journey. Tom is impressed by Malik's strong efforts to make a living and to build a future for himself and his family. The encounter in the bus is beginning of an unlikely friendship	N/A (= A)

By means of random allocation, participants were assigned to one of two stimulus sets: (fictional narrative A, nonfictional narrative B, expository text) OR (fictional narrative B, nonfictional narrative A, expository text). The screen location of the summaries was randomized. Immediately before the summaries were presented, participants received the following instruction: "In the next part of this online questionnaire, you will be asked to read one of three 1,000-word texts. Importantly, you can select the text yourself. To ease your decision, the next page will present summaries of the texts. Please click on the summary of the text you would like to read. You will be asked about your impressions of the text afterwards."

was generally good (i.e., accuracy was 87%, see the OSF page referenced above). The observed memory for text genre was significantly above chance (i.e., 25%), $t(527) = 42.18$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.84$. When the data of those participants misremembering the text genre were excluded from analyses, the pattern of significances reported below (see Preregistered Analyses) was preserved. Furthermore, on a descriptive level the quality of all texts was—on average—rated as being above the rating scale's midpoint (i.e., 5; expository text: $M = 6.68$, $SD = 1.74$; nonfictional narrative: $M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.36$; fictional narrative: $M = 7.17$, $SD = 1.49$).

Preregistered analyses

To test the hypothesis that narrativity is negatively associated with the congeniality bias (Hypothesis 1a), we carried out a multinomial logistic regression with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and media choice (narrative fiction vs. narrative nonfiction vs. expository nonfiction) as the criterion. The expository text was implemented as reference condition with which the two narratives (fictional and nonfictional) were compared. Kotzur et al. (2022) conceived their Attitude Towards Refugees Scale—utilized here to assess participants' attitude towards refugees—as a metric scale. Resonating with this notion, we treated this attitude as a continuous variable indicating gradual, relative variations rather than as a categorial variable indicating clear-cut, absolute differences. Hence, instead of restricting analyses to participants with a negative (i.e., text-inconsistent) attitude towards refugees, we included all participants. Results are shown in Fig. 1. In particular, the more positive (but not, as predicted, the more negative) participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely they were to prefer a nonfictional, $B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.11$, $OR = 1.50$, $p < .001$, or fictional narrative, $B = 0.39$, $SE = 0.11$ $OR = 1.47$, $p < .001$, over an expository text.

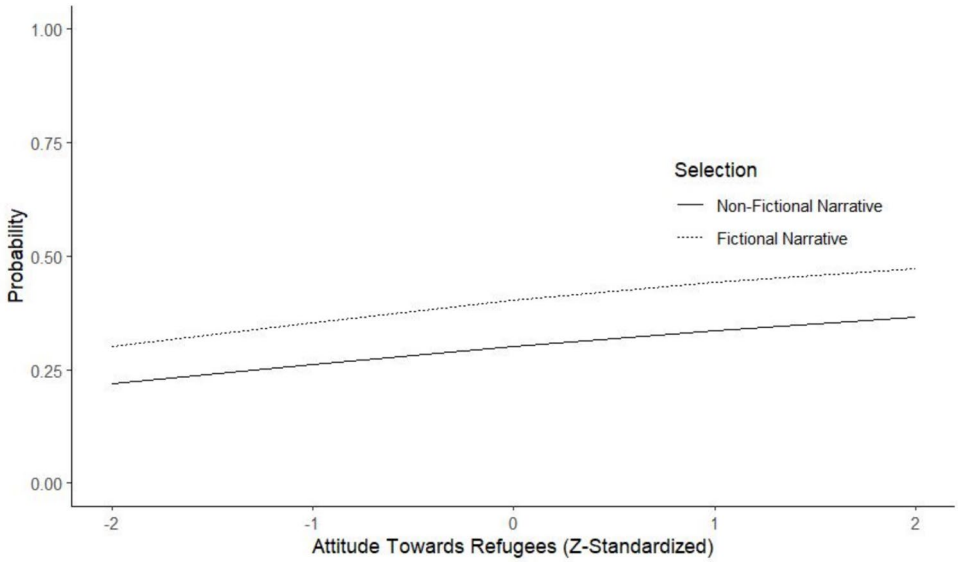

Fig. 1 Experiment 1: Predicted probability of media selection depending on the attitude towards refugees. Lines show how the predicted probability of selecting each type of narrative (fictional or nonfictional) develops as a function of participants' attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized). Note that people can choose between three options: a fictional narrative, a nonfictional narrative, and an expository text

To answer research question RQ1 about the link between fictionality and the congeniality bias, we conducted a binary logistic regression with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and media choice (nonfictional narrative vs. fictional narrative) as the criterion. Participants' attitude towards refugees was not linked significantly with the choice between a fictional and a nonfictional narrative, $B = -0.02$, $SE = 0.11$, $OR = 0.98$, $p = .882$.

Discussion

Experiment 1 presents the starting point for our investigation of the relationship between the congeniality bias and characteristics of narrative fictions. Our study was guided by the assumption that the content of narratives typically provides a less comprehensive account of the real world than that of expository texts. Hence, following the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view, Hypothesis 1a predicted that the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely they are to choose a (fictional or nonfictional) narrative over an expository text—with all available texts casting a positive light on refugees. In contrast to this hypothesis, the results showed that as participants' attitudes towards refugees became more positive and thus more aligned with the texts' message, the likelihood that they would select the nonfictional or fictional narrative over the expository text increased. Put differently, the more text content was inconsistent with participants' existing attitude, the more they tended to prefer an expository over a fictional or nonfictional narrative. So, participants were more likely to engage with attitude-inconsistent texts when they were presented in an expository rather than a narrative format. In sum, Hypothesis 1a was not supported, rather, the results were in line with the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* account.

In addition to narrativity, we considered fictionality as a further textual correlate of the congeniality bias. In particular, we aimed to answer research question RQ1: Is participants' attitude towards refugees associated with the choice between fiction and nonfiction (i.e., whether participants choose the nonfictional narrative or the fictional narrative) and if so, is the association positive or negative? The current results—even though they are based on a well-powered sample—did not suggest such an association and therefore resonate with Appel et al.'s (2025) findings. These showed that the congeniality bias is unrelated to narratives' fictionality (i.e., whether narratives were presented as fictional or nonfictional). Taken together, in Experiment 1 we did not observe empirical support for both the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view and the assumption that fictionality is associated with the congeniality bias.

Experiment 2

Following the results obtained in Experiment 1, Experiment 2 was guided by the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view regarding narrativity's link with the congeniality bias. Thus, Hypothesis 1b predicted that the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely they are

to choose an expository text over (fictional or nonfictional) narratives. Further hypotheses affected the moderating role of need for cognitive closure and need for affect. In particular, Hypothesis 2a assumed that the relationship between participants' attitude towards refugees and media choice is moderated by need for cognitive closure such that high need for closure is accompanied by a stronger connection between participants' attitude and media choice than low need for closure. Hypothesis 2b predicted that the relationship between participants' attitude towards refugees and media choice is moderated by need for affect such that low need for affect is accompanied by a stronger connection between participants' attitude and media choice than high need for affect.

Additionally, as in Experiment 1 we investigated the nondirectional research question RQ1 as to whether participants' attitude towards refugees is associated with the choice between fiction and nonfiction (i.e., whether participants choose the nonfictional narrative or the fictional narrative) and if so, whether the association is positive or negative.

Materials and methods

If not otherwise stated, the method of Experiment 2 parallels that of Experiment 1. To follow international standards, this experiment was submitted to the ethics committee of the local university's relevant department even if this was not required based on national standards. Ethical approval was granted under Reference Number 251024, and the experiment was preregistered at AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/68z3-tdm2.pdf). Materials are available online (https://osf.io/4md83). The experimental design involved one focal dependent variable (i.e., media choice) with three levels (i.e., fictional narrative vs. nonfictional narrative vs. expository text), one continuous predictor (i.e., attitude towards refugees), and two continuous moderators (i.e., need for cognitive closure, need for affect).

Participants

To determine the target sample size, we first conducted an a priori power analysis (again using G*Power; Faul et al., 2007) to obtain the sample size required to detect an effect equal to the size of that observed in Experiment 1 (namely, regarding the relationship between the attitude towards refugees and the choice between the narratives and an expository text, $OR = 1.48$) in a binary logistic regression at the .05 significance level with a power of .95. The power analysis yielded a required sample size of $N = 420$. Second, based on this analysis and following Simonsohn's (2015) considerations regarding the statistical power of interactions (like the interactions involving need for closure/affect predicted here) relative to simple effects (as the effect of the attitude towards refugees on media choice observed in Experiment 1), we added 20% of this sample size target as a safeguard ($420 + 0.2 \times 420$), and multiplied the resulting $N = 504$ by two. In sum, we established that the target sample size to be used in analyses is $(420 + 0.2 \times 420) \times 2 = 1{,}008$. Expecting exclusions, $n = 1{,}052$ participants were recruited. The data of 29 respondents were not analyzed because they failed an attention check (i.e., an instructed response item embedded within the short form of the Need for Affect Questionnaire; Appel et al., 2012). Hence, the final sample size was $n = 1{,}023$ ($M_{age} = 39.61$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.97$; 448 women, 571 men, four other genders or no gender stated; for an overview of further participant characteristics, see the OSF page referenced above). Volunteers were recruited from Prolific Academic, took part remotely via a SoSci Survey online questionnaire, and were paid GBP 1.30 as compensation. Completion took approximately 10 min.

Materials and procedure

Like in Experiment 1, the survey started with the assessment of the continuous variables and proceeded with our focal media selection task. In the current sample, reliability was $\omega_{RT} = .96$ for the Attitude Towards Refugees Scale (Kotzur et al., 2022). After completing this questionnaire, participants responded to only one filler questionnaire, the ATTARI-12 (Stein et al., 2024), after which they took the short form of the Need for Affect Questionnaire (Appel et al., 2012). The ten items (e.g., "I feel that I need to experience strong emotions regularly") were answered using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. After reverse coding five items expressing affect avoidance, a total mean score was computed as a dependent measure. Higher scores represent a greater need for affect. In the present sample, reliability was $\omega_{RT} = .89$. Subsequently, participants answered the brief 15-item Need for Closure Scale (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). Items (e.g., "I don't like situations that are uncertain") were responded to using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *completely disagree* to *completely agree*. A total mean score, with higher scores reflecting a greater need for closure, served as dependent measure. We observed a reliability of $\omega_{RT} = .90$. All remaining procedures were as in Experiment 1.

Data analysis and results

The data, coding book, and analysis script are available at the OSF page referenced above.

Data quality checks

Participants' memory for the selected text's genre was accurate in 89% of the cases, suggesting a high accuracy (see the OSF page referenced above). The memory for text genre, as exhibited in the current sample, was significantly above chance (i.e., 25%), $t(922) = 60.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.00$. When the data from participants who did not remember the text genre accurately was removed from analyses, the pattern of significances described below (see Preregistered Analyses) remained unchanged. Also, descriptively, participants' ratings of text quality indicated that, on average, all texts were found to be good (expository text: $M = 7.30$, $SD = 1.47$; nonfictional narrative: $M = 7.55$, $SD = 1.29$; fictional narrative: $M = 7.51$; $SD = 1.31$).

Preregistered analyses

To test Hypothesis 1b (i.e., that narrativity is positively related to the congeniality bias), we carried out a multinomial logistic regression with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and media choice as the criterion. The expository text was implemented as the reference condition. Participants' attitude towards refugees was not found to significantly predict the choice between the expository and either of the narrative texts, expository text vs. nonfictional narrative: $B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.09$, $OR = 1.02$, $p = .835$; expository text versus fictional narrative: $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.08$, $OR = 1.03$, $p = .675$ (see Fig. 2).

To test Hypothesis 2a (i.e., that need for cognitive closure moderates the relationship between narrativity and the congeniality bias), the multinomial regression model carried out to test Hypothesis 1b was complemented by need for cognitive closure (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and its interaction with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized). Although higher need for closure was significantly linked with the preference for a fictional narrative over an expository text ($B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.08$, $OR = 1.23$, $p = .008$), the attitude towards refugees and need for closure were not found to significantly interact in predicting the choice between the expository and either of the narrative texts (expository text vs. nonfictional narrative: $B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.08$, $OR = 1.10$, $p = .212$; expository text vs. fictional narrative: $B = 0.05$, $SE = 0.07$, $OR = 1.05$, $p = .505$). The remaining simple effects of the predictors failed to reach significance (p values $> .46$; for full details see the OSF page referenced above).

To probe Hypothesis 2b (i.e., that need for affect moderates the relationship between narrativity and the congeniality bias), the multinomial regression model carried out to test Hypothesis 1b was complemented by need for affect (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and its interaction with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized). No significant simple effects of the predictors or interactions between them emerged (p values $> .79$; for full details see the OSF page referenced above).

To answer our additional research question RQ1 on the link between fictionality and the congeniality bias, a binary

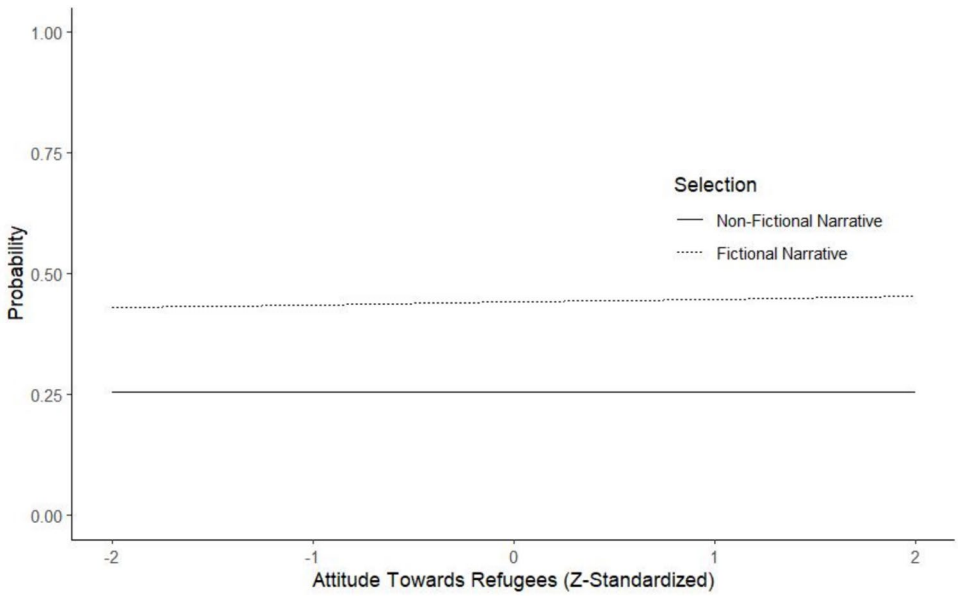

Fig. 2 Experiment 2: Predicted probability of media selection depending on the attitude towards refugees. Lines show how the predicted probability of selecting each type of narrative (fictional or nonfictional) develops as a function of participants' attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized). Note that people can choose between three options: a fictional narrative, a nonfictional narrative, and an expository text

logistic regression was carried out with attitude towards refugees (*Z*-standardized) as predictor and media choice (nonfictional narrative vs. fictional narrative) as the criterion. Participants' attitude towards refugees was not associated significantly with the choice between a fictional and a nonfictional narrative, $B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.08$, $OR = 1.02$, $p = .859$.

Discussion

Following the results of Experiment 1, this experiment was guided by the assumption that people are more willing to read a belief-inconsistent text when this text is conveyed in an expository rather than a narrative format (*narratives signal emotional turmoil* view). This draws on theory and research proposing that narratives invite stronger emotions than expository texts (e.g., Mar et al., 2011, 2021). Thus, Hypothesis 1b assumed that the more negative participants' attitude towards refugees, the more likely they are to prefer an expository text over (fictional or nonfictional) narratives when offered a choice between texts offering a positive view of refugees. Because a more negative attitude towards refugees was not found to be associated significantly with a preference for expository texts over (fictional or nonfictional) narratives, the data obtained in Experiment 2 did not support Hypothesis 1b.

Furthermore, we looked at interindividual difference variables that could moderate the relationship put forward in H1b. In particular, negative emotions evoked by belief-inconsistent texts about migration should be particularly disturbing for persons with a high need for cognitive closure and those with a low need for affect. So, Hypothesis 2a predicted that the relationship between participants' attitude towards refugees and media choice is moderated by need for cognitive closure such that high need for closure is accompanied by a stronger connection between participants' attitude and media choice than low need for closure. However, analyses failed to reveal an interaction between need for closure and the attitude towards refugees, so that Hypothesis 2a was not confirmed. Beyond this, need for closure was found to be positively correlated with a general preference (i.e., a preference independent of one's attitude towards text content) for fictional narrative (vs. expository) texts.

In terms of the role of need for affect, Hypothesis 2b proposed that the relationship between participants' attitude towards refugees and media choice is moderated by need for affect such that low need for affect is accompanied by a stronger connection between participants' attitude and media choice than high need for affect. As need for affect was not found to predict media choice, either on its own or in combination with participants' existing attitude towards refugees, this hypothesis was rejected.

To disentangle the roles played by narrativity and fictionality, we included fictionality as a further potential factor linked to the congeniality bias. As in Experiment 1, we sought to provide an answer to research question RQ1: Is participants' attitude towards refugees associated with the choice between fiction and nonfiction and if so, is the association positive or negative? In line with the findings of Experiment 1, again we did not detect a significant association between the attitude towards refugees and the selection between fiction and nonfiction.

Empirical synthesis of Experiments 1 and 2

Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 showed the consistent result that fictionality is not related to the congeniality bias. The results were less equivocal when it comes to the role of narrativity. Whereas Experiment 1 suggests that narrativity is positively associated with the congeniality bias, no such effect could be found in Experiment 2, although the descriptive pattern of results was in line with this relationship. Theoretically, results of empirical studies are samples of population effects and observed empirical results are expected to vary due to chance. Meta-analytic procedures can provide an estimate of the population effects (Hedges, 1992).

Thus, to obtain an aggregate effect regarding our central research goal, we meta-analyzed the results of both experiments—in particular, the difference between narrative and expository selections depending on the attitude towards refugees—using fixed effects (Goh et al., 2016), in which effect sizes (i.e., odds ratios) were weighted by their inverse variance. We first logarithmized our odds ratios for ease of analyses (as is common practice; see, e.g., Harrer et al., 2021). These were converted back to odds ratios for presentation. Overall, the effect was significant, aggregate $OR = 1.19$, $Z = 2.92$, $p = .004$ (see Fig. 3), such that a more negative attitude towards refugees was linked with a preference for the expository text (vs. both narrative texts). Thus, the bulk of the evidence reported within this article gravitates towards supporting Hypothesis 1b.

Still, this support for the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view is rather indirect, as participants' motives for their text selection, in particular genre expectations, were not assessed. Recall that one of our manipulation checks demonstrated that participants of Experiments 1 and 2 remembered the text genre by far more accurately than what would be expected had participants guessed the correct answer. Thus, we can assume that participants overall ascribed genres to the summaries as intended by stimulus design. However, based on the data we collected, it is impossible to determine participants' specific genre expectations and whether they were in line with the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* or *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view. Similarly, although we observed that on average participants evaluated the full texts' quality as relatively good across genres, we did

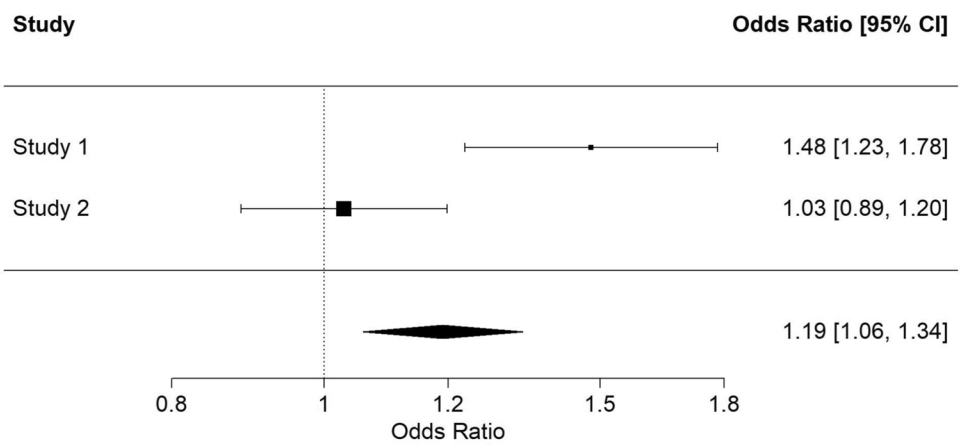

Fig. 3 Forest plot depicting results of the mini-meta-analysis. The more odds ratios deviate positively from 1, the stronger the connection between a decrease in the attitude towards refugees and a preference for expository (vs. narrative) texts

not assess the quality participants expected of the full texts based on their abstracts. Assessing these variables was the aim of Experiment 3.

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 was carried out to test the central presuppositions of the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* and the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* views: Readers are more likely to expect emotional experiences as a result of engaging with a narrative rather than an expository text, and they are more likely to expect comprehensive information about a topic as a result of engaging with an expository text rather than a narrative. In addition, these expectations are assumed to motivate readers to select narrative or expository texts, respectively. In line with this Hypothesis 3a postulated that participants who have selected an expository text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner rather than due to expectance of emotions. Hypothesis 3b predicted that participants who have selected a narrative text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of emotions rather than due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner.

These hypotheses were tested using a reduced version of the media selection task employed in Experiments 1 and 2. Since the current predictions affected just narrativity, but not fictionality, we kept fictionality constant in that participants could choose only between two nonfictional texts, in particular an expository (i.e., nonfictional non-narrative) text and a nonfictional narrative. In default of established measurement instruments, the strength with which people acquiesce specific genre expectations—particularly those related to comprehensive information and emotional experience—as motives of their text selection was assessed using a custom scale (for further information, see below and Table 2).

Materials and methods

The study was approved by the local ethics committee (Reference Number 220126), and preregistered at AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/m27nx5.pdf). Materials are available at the OSF (https://osf.io/4md83). All measures, manipulations, and exclusions are reported. The design consisted of one quasi-experimental between-subjects factor (i.e., selected genre) with two levels (i.e., nonfictional narrative vs. expository text), one within-subjects factor (i.e., type of reason) with two levels (i.e., comprehensive information vs. emotional experience), and one continuous dependent variable (i.e., reason strength).

Participants

Our sample-size rationale was based on a power analysis, again using G*Power. We aimed for a power of .95 to detect a small-to-medium sized ($f = .22$) between-within interaction in a mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA; as put forward by our hypotheses about reasons for selecting an expository vs. a narrative text) at the standard .05 significance level, assuming that the correlation between comprehensive information and emotional experience is − .50. This indicated a required total sample size of $n = 204$. Expecting exclusions and a potential imbalance regarding genre selection, data was collected from $n = 221$ Prolific Academic workers. The data of one respondent were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check (i.e., an instructed response item interspersed within the reason strength scale), so that the final sample size was $n = 220$ ($M_{age} = 43.22$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.95$; 100 women, 116 men, four other genders; see the OSF page referenced

Table 2 Items used to assess comprehensive information and emotional experience as subscales of reason strength

Comprehensive information	Emotional experience
I expected the text to cover the topic in a comprehensive way	I expected to get emotional when reading the text
I expected to encounter information about the topic as a whole	I expected to respond emotionally when reading the text
I expected that the text provides a wide-ranging picture of the topic	I expected to get on an emotional rollercoaster ride while reading
I expected to read information and arguments about the state of affairs	I expected to feel real emotions when reading the text
I expected that the text provides everything I need to know about the topic	I expected to have an emotional experience when reading the text
I expected to read something written by a domain expert	I expected to get immersed into the world of the text
I expected to gain knowledge	I expected that the text affects my mood

above for further information about the sample). The study was realized as a 10-min SoSci Survey online questionnaire. Participants received GBP 1.30 as compensation.

Materials and procedure

Having provided informed consent to participate, respondents performed a media selection task. This differed from the media selection task used in Experiments 1 and 2 only in so far as just the two nonfictional texts were available—in particular, the fact sheet (representing an expository text) and the journalistic reportage (representing a nonfictional narrative) about Tom, the bus driver, and Malik, the war refugee. The screen location in which the summaries were displayed was randomized. Upon clicking on a summary, participants were asked to rate its overall quality on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*extremely low*) to 9 (*extremely high*).

Next, participants completed a scale assessing the strength with which they acquiesce specific expectations as motives of their text selection, henceforth referred to as *reason strength* scale (instruction: "Why did you choose the text you just clicked on?"). The two 7-item subscales are *comprehensive information* and *emotional experience* (see Table 2 for item wordings). Each item was responded to using a five-point rating scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5). Mean scores served as dependent measures reflecting comprehensive information ($\omega_{RT} = .92$) and emotional experience ($\omega_{RT} = .96$), respectively.

Subsequently, participants were presented with the full text they selected, after which they provided demographic information and could comment on the study (no issues were reported), as in Experiments 1 and 2. The experimental procedure concluded with a written debriefing and remuneration of participants.

Data analysis and results

The data, coding book, and analysis script are available at the OSF page referenced above.

Data quality checks

The expository text was selected by 84 (38%), the nonfictional narrative by 136 (62%) participants. On a descriptive level, participants' ratings of the summaries' quality suggested that both summaries were evaluated as good overall (expository text: $M = 6.46$, $SD = 1.24$; nonfictional narrative: $M = 6.61$, $SD = 1.39$).

Preregistered analyses

To test Hypothesis 3a (Participants who have selected an expository text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner rather than due to expectance of emotions) and Hypothesis 3b (Participants who have selected a narrative text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of emotions rather than due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner), we ran a mixed ANOVA, with selected genre (nonfictional narrative vs. expository text) as between-subjects factor, type of reason (comprehensive information vs. emotional experience) as within-subjects factor, and reason strength as continuous dependent variable. This revealed a significant interaction of selected genre by type of reason, $F(1,218) = 100.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$. According to Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons, reason strength was significantly higher for comprehensive information ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.66$) than emotional experience ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.14$) when the expository text was selected, $t(436) = 9.10$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, reason strength was significantly higher for emotional experience ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.95$) than comprehensive information ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.84$) when the nonfictional narrative was selected, $t(436) = -3.81$, $p < .001$ (see also Fig. 4). There was also a significant main effect of type of reason, $F(1,218) = 25.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, in the sense that reason strength was higher for comprehensive information ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.87$) compared with emotional

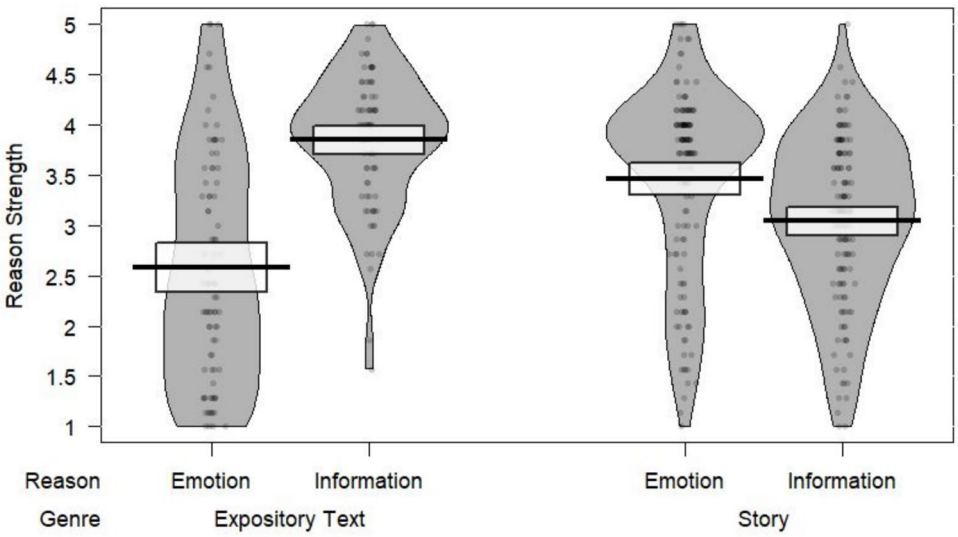

Fig. 4 Experiment 3: Pirate plots depicting reason strength by selected genre and type of reason. Plots show raw data points, a horizontal line reflecting the mean, a rectangle representing the 95% confidence interval, and a bean representing a smoothed density; genre = selected genre; reason = type of reason; emotion = emotional experience, information = comprehensive information

experience ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.11$). The main effect of selected genre was not significant, $F(1,218) = 0.19$, $p = .67$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$.

Discussion

Experiment 3 was meant to test essential presuppositions of the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* and the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* views. Hypothesis 3a postulated that participants who have selected an expository text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner rather than due to expectance of emotions. Hypothesis 3b predicted that participants who have selected a narrative text are more likely to report that they chose this text due to expectance of emotions rather than due to expectance of being informed in a comprehensive manner. The two hypotheses were examined using a media selection task during which participants could choose between an expository and a narrative nonfiction text based on summaries of these texts, after which they reported reasons for this choice.

As predicted, when participants selected the expository text, they acquiesced more strongly expecting comprehensive information than emotional experience as reason for their text selection. Conversely, when participants chose the nonfictional narrative, they agreed more strongly to anticipating emotional experience than comprehensive information as reason for this textual choice. Additionally, participants evaluated both summaries as similarly good. Hence, the observed differences in reason strength are very unlikely to trace back to imbalances regarding the summaries' perceived quality. In sum, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported. An integrative view of the pattern of findings from Experiments 1, 2, and 3 thus suggests that the observed positive link between narrativity and the congeniality bias could indeed be related to the phenomenon that narratives are expected to evoke emotions, as put forward by the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view. Even though expository texts are anticipated to provide comprehensive information on a topic, this expectation does not seem to be linked to the congeniality bias, at least not to the same extent as the expectation regarding narratives' emotional impact.

General discussion

Human communication often occurs in a narrative format (e.g., Green & Appel, 2024). Here, we have focused on a potential role of narratives at a hitherto neglected early phase of information processing—that is, at the stage of information selection, linking research on narrative processing with that on the congeniality bias. In three experiments, we have investigated two views that yield alternative hypotheses about the relationship between narrativity and the congeniality bias. According to the *narratives signal low comprehensiveness* view, narratives are thought to be linked negatively to the congeniality bias since their content is typically assumed to provide a less representative account of the real world than that of expository texts. The *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view, in contrast, leads to the prediction that narratives are positively associated with the congeniality bias due

to their greater anticipated emotional impact. The results of Experiment 1 provide support for the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view, whereas those of Experiment 2 did not support either view. However, when the effects of both experiments were pooled, the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view was again supported. This pattern of results might potentially go back to a positive association between narrativity and the congeniality bias in the population, as suggested by the results of our mini meta-analysis. However, the results further indicate that the association is small in size and of large variance in the population. In this case, samples drawn randomly for the population are likely to diverge from each other to quite some extent, resulting in a wide range of *p* values obtained in inferential tests (Cumming, 2012). To quote Lindsay (2015): "A big *p* value does not show that the null hypothesis is true. Under the conditions of the typical psychology experiment, *p* values are noisy" (p. 1829 f.).

Experiencing strong emotions is a consequence of being immersed, or transported, into narrative worlds (Gerrig, 1993). Transportation, in turn, is positively associated with persuasion (e.g., Appel & Richter, 2010; Green & Brock, 2000, 2003). Thus, the overarching support for the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view might possibly reflect readers' knowledge that transportation can lead to being persuaded by belief-inconsistent assertions, and a preventative step against any such effect. Indeed, Experiment 3 demonstrated that readers expect to experience emotions when they engage with narratives. Nevertheless, we cannot provide empirical evidence to suggest that the current participants actually knew about narratives' persuasive effects, rendering this a rather speculative attempt at explanation. In sum, the present findings suggest that narratives are positively linked to the congeniality bias: The stronger participants' attitude is in contrast with a text's main message, the more likely participants choose an expository text over a fictional or nonfictional narrative. Given that narrativity's role within the congeniality bias has not been researched before, this presents novel evidence. Nevertheless, the aggregate effect is small.

To avoid the widespread confounding of narrativity with fictionality, we also examined the relationship between fictionality and the congeniality bias. The evidence in this regard consistently did not demonstrate a link between the two phenomena. Since the current experiments were well-powered and participants remembered the texts' genre accurately overall, the present evidence indicates that fictionality is unrelated to the congeniality bias. This is further underpinned by Appel et al.'s (2025) results, where participants' prior beliefs about a topic predicted their interest in reading a narrative about the same topic regardless of fictionality labels (i.e., whether the narrative was labeled as fiction or nonfiction).

Furthermore, support for the *narratives signal emotional turmoil* view is lessened in so far as in Experiment 2 neither need for cognitive closure nor need for affect were found to moderate the link between the attitude towards refugees and media choice. If narratives were expected to evoke strong emotions by readers, then we should find that people high in the need for cognitive closure and those low in the need for affect respond to the expectation of such an experience through their media choice. That no moderation effects of these individual difference variables emerged may be due to the fact that no significant association between narrativity and the congeniality bias was obtained in Experiment 2 in the first place—in other words, there was no total effect to be moderated.

Although we did not observe evidence in support of a moderating role of need for cognitive closure, this personality trait was found to be associated with a preference for fictional narratives (vs. expository texts), and that independently of the relationship between one's prior attitude towards refugees and the texts' content. In other words, people with a high need for closure seem to generally favor fictional narratives over expository texts. On the one hand, narratives—also fictional ones—seem to provide an ideal means for achieving cognitive closure. This is because from a theoretical point of view, narratives are thought to generally adhere to a formal structure or framework composed of interconnected components, such as a setting, an initiating event, escalating events, a climax or resolution, and a conclusion (e.g., Rumelhart, 1975; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985). If audiences are aware of this "narrative grammar," they might see stories as a relatively easy path to cognitive closure.

On the other hand, across a series of experiments Wimmer (2015) demonstrated that readers typically expect narratives to be in principle open to alternative interpretations, whereas expository texts are usually thought to support a single unambiguous reading. Hence, the relationship between need for closure and genre preference that emerged in Experiment 2 seems to conflict with early evidence linking a high need for closure with a quick and automatic style of processing information (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996), as supported by prototypical expository—and not narrative—texts. However, Kossowska et al. (2018) argued that individuals with a high need for closure—who aim to achieve cognitive certainty—tend to adopt whatever strategies seem most effective in reaching that goal. Therefore, if their past experiences or current context suggest that using simple mental shortcuts will help them achieve closure, they will likely use that approach. On the other hand, if a more detailed and effortful thinking style appears to be more effective in achieving closure, those with a high need for closure are expected to adopt that more complex processing style instead. Perhaps people who are high in need

for closure are happy to put up with the initial openness of narratives as long as they arrive at a subjectively satisfactory interpretation in the end. Future work could take a closer look at the association between the need for closure and genre preferences, including the underlying mechanisms.

Limitations and future directions

The present findings are limited by a number of factors. Several of them concern our reading stimuli. These were used to investigate the congeniality bias related to a single theme: migration. Even though migration has been a topic of public debate over many years, audience responses to this topic may not represent those to all societally relevant issues. For instance, positive attitudes towards refugees are not equally distributed across the political spectrum but are related to a liberal (rather than conservative) political stance (Cowling et al., 2019).

Furthermore, our operationalization of media choice draws on only two sets of stimuli, with each of them providing three response options (i.e., fictional narrative, nonfictional narrative, expository text) with a reference to migration. Although this method provides strong experimental control, it limits participants to selecting from content curated by the researchers, rather than giving them access to the vast array of options found in real-world (particularly online) settings. This constraint may heighten selective exposure effects, since participants are restricted to choosing between information that either supports or opposes a particular viewpoint under investigation. They cannot engage with unrelated content, which might otherwise influence their decisions. Research shows that selective exposure is influenced by how many and what kinds of choices are available (see Feldman et al., 2013). It is also important to note that the content of the three types of abstracts was not fully comparable; in particular, only the abstract of the fact sheet—but not the ones summarizing the journalistic reportages or fictional short stories—addressed migrants' economic contributions. Hence, the abstracts did not only differ in ascribed genre, but in content-related aspects as well. Future work needs to clarify whether such a bias is evitable or a confound inherent to defining features of narrative and expository texts. For instance, Mar et al. (2021) have put forward that narratives, as distinct from expository texts, are typically about social content; still, this assumption should be investigated in depth.

Beyond this, although all three experiments were well powered, samples were drawn from Prolific Academic workers who live in the UK or US and speak English as their first language. This means that we only included participants whose first language corresponds to their country of residence's official language. This reduces the probability that our samples included individuals from an immigrant background, which may have skewed the attitude towards refugees slightly. In sum, replication studies that work with further topics, more varied reading stimuli, and more diverse samples are required to place the current evidence on the role of narrativity and fictionality within the congeniality bias on a firmer foundation.

Finally, the research reported here focuses on narrativity and its relation to the congeniality bias. Future work could consider downstream effects of this bias, such as improved understanding of attitude-consistent versus attitude-inconsistent information. This so-called text-belief consistency effect has been demonstrated before using nonnarrative stimuli (e.g., Abendroth & Richter, 2021; Maier & Richter, 2013, 2014; Pilotek et al., 2024). Related to this line of research, an attitude change might result from reading attitude-consistent or attitude-inconsistent information. Research on the allied confirmation bias has shown that people treat attitude-relevant information often in a way that bolsters their existing attitudes, which can result in even more extreme attitudes—in other words, opinion polarization (Lord et al., 1979; Taber & Lodge, 2006). From both theoretical and practical perspectives, it would be important to learn whether narrativity is linked with more distal outcomes of this kind, too.

Conclusion

Here, we find an overarching tendency that narrativity is associated with an increased congeniality bias and a consistent pattern that fictionality is not associated with this bias. This suggests that when audiences are to engage with content that opposes their prior beliefs, presenting the content in an expository rather than a narrative format may be helpful.

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Data Availability The data and materials for all experiments are available online (https://osf.io/4md83) and all experiments were preregistered (Experiment 1: https://aspredicted.org/jpj2-7jdc.pdf; Experiment 2: https://aspredicted.org/68z3-tdm2.pdf; Experiment 3: https://aspredicted.org/m27nx5.pdf).

Code availability Analysis scripts are available online (https://osf.io/4md83).

Declarations

Conflicts of interest The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Ethics approval All reported research was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent to participate Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Consent for publication Not applicable.

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