

Abstract

We study the generation, transmission, and effects of causal narratives - narratives which describe a (potentially incorrect) causal relationship between variables. In a controlled experiment, we show that exogenously generated causal narratives manipulate the beliefs and actions of subjects in ways predicted by behavioral theory. We then show how to 'grow' these types of narratives organically by asking subjects who observe a dataset to advise future subjects about action choices. Homegrown causal narratives are more likely to be shared and more influential than other types. Finally, we show that factual, statistical information does not eliminate the power of causal narratives.