

**Don't lose Hope, there is Self-Transcendence Media.**

*Synthesis on the Effect of Self-Transcendence Media on experiencing Self-Transcendence Emotions.*

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Recently, media scholars' interest shifted from negative media effects to positive media effects. The positive media effects elaborated into investigating inspiring media content, especially when, in addition to eudaimonic (i.e. meaningful) media experiences, self-transcendence media experiences were presented. Self-transcendence media experiences are described as a flow of events, including consuming self-transcendence media and experiencing self-transcendence emotions. The newly introduced media experience approaches an experience beyond meaningfulness, such as inspiration, spirituality and transcendence (Oliver, Raney, Slater, Appel, Hartmann, Bartsch, Schneider, Janicke-Bowles, Krämer, Mares, Vorderer, Rieger, Dale & Das, 2018).

Several studies reveal self-transcendence emotions (i.e. elevation, awe, admiration, gratitude, and hope) as a result of consuming self-transcendence media (e.g. inspiring content) (Oliver et al., 2018). Experiencing self-transcendent emotions is important in one's life, due to contributing to psychological well-being, human flourishing, social engagement and happiness (Oliver et al., 2018). Particularly, the self-transcendence emotion, hope, is the strongest predictor to promote psychological well-being (Oliver et al., 2018). For this reason, is it societally and scientifically relevant to argue the potential for self-transcendent media to elicit self-transcendence emotions, such as hope, and contribute to humans' well-being. Therefore, in this synthesis, we focus on the positive effect of consuming self-transcendence media on experiencing self-transcendence emotions.

### Self-Transcendence Media

Although consuming self-transcendence media may result in desirable emotions, the definition of self-transcendence media cannot be provided without its audience approval. It is unlikely to measure self-transcendence emotions when the participant doesn't identify the self-transcendence media stimuli as 'inspiring'. However, inspiring media content is not a single 'thing' or even a specific genre but is rather a concept to refer to content that elicits responses that individuals identify as inspiring. Even though inspiring content might not be inspiring for another, several studies did try to conceptualize universal features of inspiring content and, therefore, identify self-transcendence media.

Firstly, when it comes to films, qualitative research demonstrates that movies including portrayals of moral virtue, the human condition, and purpose in life, illustrates inspiring content (Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017). In particular, Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2016) suggest that reality TV-shows with stories of personal lifestyle changes

representing moral lessons are considered more inspiring. Similar features are reported as inspiring, in a content analysis on inspirational YouTube video's (Dale, Raney, Janicke, Sanders & Oliver, 2017).

Secondly, non-visual media (i.e. news articles) seems to be reported as inspirational when containing more words related to self-transcendent emotions (Ji, Raney, Janicke-Bowles, Dale, Oliver, Reed, Seibert, 2019). Additionally, music is considered inspiring, when the number incorporates unexpected harmonies and a presentation of vastness (e.g. volume variety) (Ji, Janicke-Bowles, De Leeuw & Oliver, 2019).

Thirdly, social media content can also be captured as inspiring by users. For instance, Facebook posts contain inspiring content when users recognize elements of shared humanity, prosocial messages, expressions of transcendence related emotions and moral beauty (Dale, Raney, Ji, Janicke-Bowles, Baldwin, Rowlett & Oliver, 2019; Zhaoa & Dale, 2019). Especially, when looking at memes on social media, content analysis reveals that nearly half of the memes out there is characterized as inspiring by illustrating the topics: moral beauty, keeping the faith, appreciation for achievement, encouragement and hope (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019a). In contrast, quantitative research shows that social media users do not only describe memes on human connection topics as inspiring, but also other topics: including suffering, grief, tragedy and resilience (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019b). In other words, self-transcendence media is hard to identify when looked at different types of media, but overall media entertainment does contain inspiring content according to the audiences.

### Eliciting Self-Transcendence Emotions

In contrast with self-transcendence media, scholars seem to agree on the identification of self-transcendence emotions. It is measured as a group of positive emotions that are more focused towards others than towards oneself: elevation, awe, admiration, gratitude, and hope (Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak, 2016; Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017; Dale et al., 2017; Ji et al, 2019; Dale et al., 2019; Zhaoa & Dale, 2019; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019ab). Scholars argue that these emotions are elicited when consuming inspiring content. The effect can also be explained by the Mood Management theory. According to Zillman (1988), we select certain media to activate desired emotional states and to diminish undesired emotional states. Therefore, the theory demonstrates that consuming selective media, for example inspiring media, results in a modification of emotional experiences. By selecting self-transcendence

media, the consumer already desires to be inspired and is more likely to experience self-transcendence emotions, than by consuming other media.

Moreover, empirical research reveals that inspiring content in all its forms elicits self-transcendence emotions: elevation, awe, admiration, gratitude, and hope (Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak, 2016; Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017; Dale et al., 2017; Ji et al, 2019; Dale et al., 2019; Zhaoa & Dale, 2019; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019ab). In addition, Dale et al. (2017) demonstrate that watching inspiring YouTube video's elicits mainly hope accompanied by elevation, awe, admiration, gratitude, due to the conceptual overlap.

Contradictorily, hope is weakly experienced and elevation, admiration, awe strongly, when social media users encounter expressed self-transcendent emotions in Facebook posts (Zhaoa & Dale, 2019). The opposite result could be explained by the context of the post. The analyzed Facebook posts were mainly a reaction on a charity event, instead of encountering inspiring messages on ones' feed.

In other words, consuming inspiring content embedded in different media types has been tested and resulted in experiencing awe, elevation, admiration and hope. These emotions are experienced as well, when encountering social media content including the expression of self-transcendence emotions and contribute to an upward spiral of inspiration, elevated mood, prosocial behavior and improved psychological and social well-being offline and online (Zhaoa & Dale, 2019; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019ab). Overall, self-transcendence media identified by the audience as inspiring does elicit self-transcendence emotions and promotes well-being.

### Individual differences

As mentioned before, what is inspiring for one person might not be for another, therefore it is important to consider the individual differences with the effect of consuming self-transcendence media on experiencing self-transcendence emotions. Several studies mention a moderator for this effect: personality traits (Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017; Raney, Janicke, Oliver, Dale, Jones & Cox, 2018; Oliver et al., 2018). This means that persons' characteristics predict what type of content would be considered as inspiring for them.

Furthermore, certain individual differences also predict experiencing self-transcendence emotions. According to Raney et al. (2018) women are significantly more likely to report self-transcendence emotions when consuming inspiring content than men. Gaining inspiration from television increases with age, whereas gaining inspiration from

online videos and social media decreases with age. Single persons and those most satisfied with their lives generally reported experiencing hope by more media than married people and those less satisfied. The personality traits; the need for affection, empathy, and universality all predicted significantly if a person experience self-transcendence emotion when consuming inspirational content.

Moreover, an individual with a need for affection is more likely to seek content that provides connection. Likewise, someone with need for inspiration is more likely to feel inspired, when knowing where to seek inspiration. Some may find inspiration by consuming a type of media and some by doing other activities (e.g. out-door activities). In short, the same emotions are elicited from inspiring content, but it depends on individual difference to what extent these emotions will be experienced.

## Discussion

Thus, inspiring media content does elicit self-transcendence emotions (i.e. elevation, awe, admiration, gratitude, and hope), however, personality traits predict whether (self-transcendence) media is described as inspiring content. Furthermore, self-transcendence media is not explicitly identified, due to the many forms of media. Therefore, it is not valid to suggest that self-transcendence media elicits self-transcendence emotions. Nevertheless, we can assume that personally indicated inspiring content provided by preferable media channels, does elicit self-transcendence emotions. One may experience hope by watching their most inspiring movie and achieves psychological well-being.

However, films, YouTube video's, music, news articles and social media posts can be reported as inspiring and elicits self-transcendence emotions, but these concepts have only recently been explored and therefore needs more detailed research. Especially, when conceptualizing self-transcendence media there need to be more tailored research. Due to new technologies, several new media sources have been developed. Therefore, media entertainment is embedded in different settings, for example, watching a movie on a smartphone using a video-streaming app instead of in the cinema. Also, new media, such as mindfulness-apps, which provide meditation exercises, life-style insights and inspiring quotes. When discussing inspiring content and their effects, new media developments such as apps, should be taken into account. Further research should be focusing on the exploration of

mindfulness/meditation/life-style apps and its possible relationship with self-transcendence emotions and well-being.

## Literature

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