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## Abstract

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health and well-being have been a serious concern for researchers. Studies have shown that social isolation brought on by lockdowns and social distancing have led to increased feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness (Giallonardo et al., 2020; Pancani et al., 2021). Researchers have also discovered that self-transcendent media and eudaimonic media experiences generate positive feelings of inspiration, relatedness, awe, and connectedness (Oliver et al., 2019). The purpose of this mixed methods study is to explore the relationship between self-transcendent social media video consumption and feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness attributed to social isolation. In a qualitative study, RQ1 asked what types of social media video content produce eudaimonic media experiences, and RQ2 asked what factors influence an individual to consume self-transcendent social media video content. A list of social media video types reported to foster eudaimonic media experiences was generated and the motivations for consuming self-transcendent social media video content is discussed. A quantitative study was then conducted, hypothesizing that (H1) the more self-transcendent media is consumed, the fewer the feelings of loneliness associated with social isolation will be reported, and (H2) the more self-transcendent media is consumed, the fewer the feelings of social disconnectedness associated with social isolation will be reported. Both hypotheses were partially supported. The thesis concludes with a discussion that outlines the implications of this research, and proposes new directions for the future exploration of self-transcendent media and the eudaimonic media experience.

Searching for the Good Vibes: Examining the Relationship Between Self-Transcendent Social  
Media and Social Isolation

By

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B.A. Maryville College, 2019

B.A. Maryville College, 2019

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Media Studies.

Syracuse University

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## Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Tables and Figures</i> .....	<i>vii</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i> .....	<i>6</i>
Eudaimonic media experiences .....	<i>6</i>
Self-transcendent media .....	<i>11</i>
Self-transcendent Social Media .....	<i>13</i>
Social Isolation and Loneliness.....	<i>15</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Methods</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>Chapter 4: Phase 1</i> .....	<i>21</i>
Design .....	<i>21</i>
Recruitment.....	<i>22</i>
Data .....	<i>23</i>
Sample .....	<i>24</i>
Results .....	<i>25</i>
Animal Videos .....	<i>26</i>
Inspirational Videos .....	<i>30</i>
Good Deed Videos .....	<i>35</i>
Call-to-Action Videos .....	<i>39</i>
Funny Videos.....	<i>42</i>
Discussion .....	<i>45</i>
<i>Chapter 5: Phase 2</i> .....	<i>51</i>
Design .....	<i>51</i>
Sample and Data .....	<i>51</i>
Measures and Variables .....	<i>53</i>
General Demographics: .....	<i>53</i>
Loneliness: .....	<i>54</i>
Social Disconnectedness: .....	<i>58</i>
Social Media Video Consumption .....	<i>60</i>
Self-transcendent Social Media Video Consumption .....	<i>60</i>
Results .....	<i>62</i>
Discussion .....	<i>64</i>
<i>Appendix A</i> .....	<i>70</i>
Interview Questions and Scales .....	<i>70</i>
<i>Appendix B</i> .....	<i>72</i>

Survey Questions.....	72
De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale .....	73
The adapted UCLA loneliness scale.....	73
Social Disconnectedness Scale .....	74
<i>Appendix C</i> .....	75
Self-transcendent Video Types .....	75
<i>References</i> .....	77
<i>Vita</i> .....	85

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 1 <i>Definitions of the Dimensions of Eudaimonic Well-Being</i> .....	8
Table 2 <i>Participant Demographics</i> .....	24
Table 3 <i>Demographic Frequencies</i> .....	53
Table 4 <i>De Jong Gierveld Scale for Loneliness Means and Standard Deviations</i> .....	55
Figure 1 <i>Distribution of Loneliness by Frequency (De Jong Gierveld)</i> .....	55
Figure 2 <i>Distribution of Loneliness by Frequency (UCLA)</i> .....	56
Table 5 <i>UCLA Scale for Loneliness Means and Standard Deviations</i> .....	57
Table 6 <i>Social Isolation Means and Standard Deviations</i> .....	58
Figure 3 <i>Social Disconnectedness by Frequency</i> .....	59
Table 7 <i>Hours of Social Media Video Consumption per Day</i> .....	60
Table 8 <i>Self-transcendent Social Media Video Consumption frequencies</i> .....	61
Table 9 <i>Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables</i> .....	62



## Chapter 1: Introduction

The ability of media to impact mass disposition is currently under intense scrutiny as many scholars examine media's role in mental health and well-being during turbulent political times and the COVID-19 pandemic (Trevisan, 2020; Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Braghieri, Levy, & Makarin, 2021; Jones, Mougouei, & Evans, 2021). Over the past few years, mass media have shown an unwavering ability to dishearten and induce fear (Kumar et al., 2020), polarize and subjugate (Wu & Shen, 2020), and contribute to a collective feeling of hopelessness (Shaw, 2020), during a time when mental health and well-being are a major concern (Girdhar et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). To compound the situation, the lockdowns and social distancing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased feelings of loneliness associated with social isolation, despair associated with fear of death, and depression (Qiu et al., 2020; Giallonardo et al., 2020; Pancani et al., 2021).

Content creators have slowly begun trying to swing the pendulum back towards equilibrium by creating positive media alternatives to the barrage of bad news flooding social media platforms. For example, Some Good News is a social media channel created by actor John Krasinski for the sole purpose of sharing videos that inspire and encourage hope and a feeling of connectedness around the globe (Strout, 2020). Heart-warming viral videos of people helping other people have begun to appear more consistently on social media platforms, and in 2020 the world came together to show gratitude through various forms of media to those on the "frontlines" of the Pandemic.

Fully understanding the prosocial benefits of certain media types becomes extremely important when considering the harmful effects of social isolation and demoralizing media consumption. There is what some might interpret as a disproportionate amount of research conducted on adverse media effects, with relatively very little on the positive psychological

effects of eudaimonic media experiences (Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Eden, et al., 2020). Without a comprehensive understanding of the positive potential for certain types of mass media, there can be no incentive to create more helpful, prosocial content. If at least some of media's positive aspects are not illuminated through research wherever possible, media as a whole will continue to be demonized. Some scholars have begun to focus on the good vibes that certain media afford with the exploration of self-transcendent media (e.g., Rieger & Klimmt, 2019) that can elicit eudaimonic media experiences.

In the research, eudaimonic media experiences are generally defined as meaningful media experiences associated with positive psychology that promotes well-being and provides greater insight into the human condition (Oliver et al., 2019). These experiences are produced through the consumption of media that encourages contemplation and reflection that "transcends" the mere hedonic needs of the self (pleasure) to a more significant consideration of society and humanity (Haidt & Morris, 2009; Oliver et al., 2019).

Studies that examine eudaimonic media experiences elicited by self-transcendent social media have focused on the ability of this type of media to create "meaningful and authentic" experiences (Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019), that might help users cope with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eden, et al., 2020) through portrayals of human kindness (Dale, et al., 2020) that inspire hope. No studies have explored the relationship between the eudaimonic media experiences and the effects of social isolation.

Global lockdowns and stay-at-home orders issued to help stop the spread of COVID-19 have heightened concerns about the negative effects of social isolation during this period. Some of the psychological problems associated with social isolation are "poor life satisfaction" which can lead to an increased feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness (Krendl & Perry 2021; Van

Tilburg et al., 2020), domestic violence (Miller et al., 2020), substance abuse and a higher risk of suicidal behavior (Clair, et al., 2021). There are also physical concerns associated with social isolation like high blood pressure, diabetes, and ailments due to self-harm (Hwang, et al., 2020).

The deficiency in studies that examine feelings of social isolation from a psychological perspective is that these studies only outline the problems associated with social isolation without suggesting practical solutions to ease the burden of a stressful and scary experience. One might be hard-pressed to find a psychological study that advocates social media consumption as an answer to mental health problems. However, it is estimated that social media consumption worldwide recently rose to more than two hours per day, per individual (Clement, 2021), and if more media is going to be consumed, a look at the types of media that may produce positive psychology is warranted. There are studies that explore media use and support-seeking behavior for mental health issues caused by the pandemic (e.g., Lisitsam 2020; Saud, et al., 2020), though these studies outline prosocial benefits of social media that apply only to the small fraction of individuals who typically actively seek support for mental health issues in the traditional fashion (e.g., support groups and behavioral therapy).

The purpose of this thesis is to (1) understand what types of social media video content can be considered self-transcendent, and what motivates individuals to consume such media in order to 2) examine the relationships between self-transcendent social media video consumption and feelings of social disconnectedness and loneliness attributed to social isolation. This thesis is comprised of two parts. Phase 1 employed qualitative methods to explore what types of social media video content participants have consumed that led to eudaimonic media experiences, and what motivated these individuals to consume self-transcendent video content on social media. Findings indicate that, among other possible motivations discussed in that section, a large portion

of participants reported being drawn to content that made them feel connected and related in order to manage feeling socially isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, Phase 2 employed quantitative practices to examine the relationship between self-transcendent social media video consumption and social isolation. While Phase 1 of this research casts a broad net, the primary focus of phase 2 was much narrower, focusing only on the relationship between the attributes of social isolation, loneliness and social disconnectedness, and self-transcendent media consumption.

The study of self-transcendent media effects and eudaimonic media experiences is commonly referred to in relevant literature as a "new" focus (e.g., Dale et al., 2020; Janicke-Bowles et al., 2021), implying that there is still much to be discovered about this phenomenon. Researchers examining eudaimonic media experiences associated with social media have explored very little of the potential for positive psychological effects in relation to the struggle of feeling socially isolated during worldwide mandatory lockdowns and social distancing. In a study on eudaimonic social media, researchers suggest that understanding "whether, how, and when social media users can overcome the emotional challenges of social media to their benefit remains a key question for the field" (Meier & Reinecke, 2021, p.18). With the exponential rise in media consumption, a better understanding of the relationship between positive psychology, mental well-being, and eudaimonic experiences elicited by social media consumption is essential. It is important to keep in mind that feelings of social isolation and the subsequent negative effects on mental health and well-being are not confined to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many studies have indicated that other demographics like the elderly (Donaldson & Watson, 1996; Tomaka et al., 2006) and those living abroad for work or education (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Mitchell, 2004) often struggle with the effects of social isolation. Though this research is prompted by current

events related to the pandemic, social isolation is not an isolated issue that will fade away when concerns for COVID-19 begin to ease.

The following chapters provide a comprehensive exploration of the predominant literature, conceptual definitions of self-transcendent media and eudaimonic media experiences, and the motivations for this type of media selection. The literature review also includes recent articles examining the effects of social isolation and the pandemic, and research questions and hypotheses are defined. The methods chapter provides the justification for a sequential mixed methods study and discusses how the fusion of both qualitative and quantitative research can lead to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Both phase 1 and phase 2 are presented in their entirety including in-depth discussions about their findings and their implications. Lastly, the Conclusion discusses the interpretation of the data from both studies as a whole and provides a summary takeaway from this research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to several key concepts that are vital to this research. A general overview of the theory of eudaimonic media experiences provides historical context related to the development of the theory, ways in which researchers have conceptualized phenomenon, and an overview of recently added dimensions to the theory. Literature defining self-transcendent media and eudaimonic motivations for media selection are explored along with studies that examine self-transcend media in relation to social media platforms. Finally, the concept of social isolation is explicated, and studies are discussed that explore the relationships between social isolation and social media consumption, and feelings of loneliness, and disconnectedness.

### Eudaimonic media experiences

There is an abundance of research that explores why individuals choose certain types of media. Zillmann's (1998) mood management theory theorizes that individuals consume certain media types to alter their mood to maintain an enjoyable state of mind (Zillmann, 1998). Raney & Bryant's (2002) work on the affective disposition theory of drama explores the idea that individuals select certain media because they enjoy seeing justice served, and their favorite characters prosper (Raney & Bryant, 2002). Knobloch-Westerwick's (2015) selective exposure of self and affect-management model (SESAM) posits that much like their moods, individuals use media to help regulate their beliefs and feelings (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). These are just a few of the central concepts and theories in the study of media selection that aim to provide insight into the logic and reasoning of why and how individuals select media.

According to Oliver (1993), studies like these fail to answer the “paradoxical question” of why media users find gratification or enjoyment in media that do not exhibit the traditional tenets of pleasure-inducing content like tear-jerker films (Oliver, 1993; Oliver et al., 2019). Some researchers have suggested that certain media’s ability to help facilitate coping (Nabi et al., 2006) or to allow individuals to “participate in downward social comparisons” (Mares & Cantor, 1992) might provide an answer to the paradox question by indicating to why individuals might seek out “sad” media. Oliver et al. (2019) suggests theories like the those listed above have “assumed and explored the hedonic motivations” for selecting media while providing little insight into the effects of and motivations for consuming self-transcendent media (Oliver et al., 2019 p.258).

The general desire to seek out temporary pleasure through media is often categorized as a hedonic motivation. In contrast, eudaimonic motivations can be categorized as motivations to find answers to existential questions through media consumption, gain greater insight into the human condition, and be inspired or awed (Oliver & Raney, 2011). These motivations draw consumers to self-transcendent media that encourages contemplation and reflection that “transcends” the mere hedonic needs of self (pleasure) into a more extensive consideration of society and humanity. Users “may experience elevation above their personal concerns” and “become aware of a shared humanity and the potential for moral beauty, humility, courage, and hope” (Oliver et al., 2019, p.166). There are prosocial benefits for the viewer and society when self-transcendent media exposure elicits emotional responses that can lead to positive real-world outcomes like “doing good deeds and a greater focus on relationships” (Haidt & Morris, 2009; Dale et al., 2017).

To better understand the complexities of the multidimensionality of the eudaimonic media experience it is helpful to briefly explicate the concept of eudaimonic well-being.

Eudaimonic well-being should be regarded not as an outcome of an action like consuming a certain type of media or performing a certain task, but rather a “process” that one might engage upon over the course of a lifetime (Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012). It is important to note that the term eudaimonic or eudaimonia comes from the ethical teachings of Aristotle (4th century B.C.) and its translation from ancient Greek (eu) meaning “good” and (daimon) meaning “spirit” (Joseph, 2019) is used to describe a type of happiness or well-being (OED, 2021) that stands apart from hedonic (pleasure seeking) happiness. Eudaimonic well-being is “conceptualized in terms of personal expressiveness, self-realization, and personal development” (Oliver et al., 2019, p. 259). There are seven distinct dimensions of eudaimonic well-being: “positive relations with others/relatedness,” “purpose or meaning in life,” “autonomy,” “environmental mastery/competence,” “self-acceptance,” “personal growth,” and “living according to central personal values” (Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012; Ryff, 1989). Table 1 outlines the definitions of the dimensions of eudaimonic well-being as it was first proposed by Ryff (1989) and later adapted by Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm (2012) who added the seventh dimension “living according to central personal values” based on Aristotelian idea that true happiness is only achieved through the expression of one’s virtues (Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012)

**Table 1**  
*Definitions of the Dimensions of Eudaimonic Well-Being*

Source	(Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012)	(Henn et al., 2016)	Ryan et al., 2008, p. 153).
1. Self-acceptance	“The acceptance of multiple aspects of one’s self, including both good and bad qualities”	“To have a realistic perception of the self, including both good and bad qualities, and still be able to accept oneself”	



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2. Positive relations with others		“To be able to form warm, caring relationships with others; the capability to develop intimacy and to show empathy with others”	“Feeling connected to and cared about by others”
3. Autonomy		“The ability to make one's own decisions without relying on, or waiting for, the approval of others; the ability to measure oneself according to one's own beliefs and not the beliefs of others”	“A sense of choice and volition in the regulation of behavior”
4. Environmental Master/competency		“The ability to manage the environment and to mold environments, or to choose environments, which align with one's needs and values”	“A need for challenge and a feeling of effectance”
5. Purpose in life	“Beliefs that give one the feeling that his or her life is meaningful, and is directed toward certain goals... being productive and creative, or achieving emotional integration”	“Having goals in life and a sense that one's life has purpose and meaning; living intentionally and with clear direction”	
6. Personal growth	“The development of one's potential and the expansion of one's abilities”	“To continuously grow and develop as a person; working towards optimizing one's full potential”	

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 7. Living in according to central personal values | “Personal expressiveness, the actualization of human potentials, and activities that are congruent with deeply held values” |
|---|---|
- 

The dimensions of eudaimonic well-being are a mixture of higher order needs, practices, and skills that when met and when practiced allow an individual to feel a sense of eudaimonia, or happiness and fulfillment that is not otherwise reached throughout our lives (Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012).

Eudaimonic well-being is a process because it something that is practiced and achieved over the course of a lifetime. Eudaimonic media experiences, however, are considered a state, occurring when a piece of media content elicits feelings associated with these needs and motivations. When certain media leaves the consumer with feelings of connectedness or elevation, they enter a “complex state of intense elaboration and mixed-affect” due to powerful emotions associate with the fulfillment of higher order needs (Klimmt & Rieger, 2021). When certain media content leaves the consumer feeling moved or touched, these feelings associated with the practice of self-acceptance and personal growth stir something beyond the temporary pleasures and must be categorized differently than fleeting feelings of momentary happiness. This state is achieved through the consumption of self-transcendent media that “portrays fundamental life themes and the human condition” (Oliver et al., 2018). What type of media transcends individuals to the eudaimonic media experience is dependent upon each individual consumer’s biographic resonance (Klimmt & Rieger, 2021).

Biographic resonance theory states that because each individual’s construction of meaning is subjective based on personal biographies, media impact is unique to each consumer (Klimmt &

Rieger, 2021). For example, consider person A and person B are both viewing a piece of media content that depicts a child's struggle and perseverance to find a lost puppy. Person A finds the story particularly moving because they themselves had a puppy as a child and can relate to the feelings depicted in the story. Person A may find the meaning behind the story to be centered on hope and perseverance which resonates with their psychology more than person B who may not have ever had a puppy as a child, or maybe even had a bad experience with a dog at some point. That is not to say that person B is not affected by the themes of hope and perseverance, rather this depiction does not represent hope and perseverance adequately for that individual. Therefore, a scale for the consumption of self-transcendent media is difficult to derive, and conclusions must be made based on the type of media content rather than the specific media narrative presented in social media video content (e.g., videos that exhibit themes of hope and perseverance). Phase 1 of the study addresses this issue with the following research question, leading to a list of self-transcendent social media video types needed to measure self-transcendent media consumption.

RQ1: What types of social media video content produce eudaimonic media experiences?

### **Self-transcendent media**

To review, self-transcendent media encourages contemplation and reflection that "transcends" the mere hedonic needs of self (pleasure) into a more extensive consideration of society and humanity. Traditional, or hedonistic gratifications might include temporary mood management when a certain piece of media cheers you up or makes you laugh. Whereas the gratifications for consuming self-transcendent media like "self-development" and "personal growth" are achieved through a broadened understanding of life through depictions in media.

Self-transcendent provides tools to help find meaning, feel connected, and help one navigate the absurdity of the human condition (Oliver & Raney, 2011).

In one of the most cited studies examining the eudaimonic media experience, Oliver & Raney (2011) surveyed 268 undergraduate students to explore the differences between hedonistic and eudaimonic motivations for media selection. This project was conducted in two phases in which the first phase used open-ended questions and interviews to generate a sample of 40 items that “reflected a variety of affective and cognitive motivations associated with film preferences” (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Findings in this study revealed that hedonistic motivations were associated with "fun" and "diversionary" media, while eudaimonic motivations were associated with "meaningful," "serious," and "thought-provoking" entertainment (Oliver & Raney, 2011). This is an important study because it clearly differentiates motivations for media selection between the hedonic and eudaimonic.

Clayton et al. (2021) measured the psychophysiological responses of 327 undergraduate students when watching a set of 30 pieces of video content. Researchers asked the students to rate videos as humorous, inspirational, interesting, or informative. The videos that individuals labeled as inspirational elicited themes of “beauty and excellence, gratitude, or hope” and were considered the self-transcendent content. Compared to all other categories, the self-transcendent videos produced a larger cognitive load, more skin conductance and “a negative-to-positive emotional trajectory shift wherein negative emotion remained statistically the same but positive emotion increased” (Clayton et al., 2021). This experiment provides evidence that consuming self-transcendent videos elicits a stronger psychophysiological response among viewers than other forms of media.

## Self-transcendent Social Media

A study investigating the relationship between social media use and eudaimonic well-being suggests there is a growing need for research that explores the prosocial benefits of self-transcendent social media (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). A conclusion offered by this study posits that future research should explore the "potentially positive effects of social media" and whether self-transcendent social media "affords or constrains opportunities to find meaning, live authentically, and grow as a person" (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). There may not be an abundance of literature examining these two concepts in conjunction yet, but a few key studies do provide valuable data on the existence of self-transcendent social media.

In their study exploring online video content and transcendent media, Krämer et al. (2017) determined that online videos that exhibit "portrayals of human kindness" and the "unity of humankind" elicited "greater elevation, more universal orientation, and prosocial motivation" than comedic content (Krämer et al., 2017). Studies of this nature leave little room for doubt regarding the effects of self-transcendent social media. In fact, Frischlich, Hahn, & Rieger (2021) explored the notion that not only does self-transcendent social media elicit positive effects, but the influential emotional response associated with self-transcendent social media can also be a manipulative tool used for political gain or social control (Frischlich, Hahn, & Rieger, 2021). Data indicating that certain types of content can lead to "prosocial behavior" is important to consider but understanding what draws individuals to this type of social media video content is a pivotal piece of the puzzle. Consider some of the attributes of the eudaimonic media experience, feeling connected, moved, elevated, and purposeful, in relation to the higher-order psychological needs of nurture, achievement, reproduction, social acceptance, and social engagement (Murray, 1938).

Individuals are rewarded when these higher-order needs are met via reinforcers (Rolls, 2001) in the brain through “the stimulation of the orbitofrontal cortex,” accounting for things like a pleasurable taste or texture or the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction (Rolls, 2009). There appear to be connections between some of these higher-order needs and attributes of the eudemonic media experience. For instance, the higher-order needs of “social engagement” and “social acceptance” are akin to feelings of connectedness and relatedness. Also, the higher-order need for “achievement” appears very similar to feelings of purposefulness. Feeling fulfillment and satisfaction when these psychological needs are met is part of (but not all of) eudaimonia associated with eudaimonic well-being and the eudaimonic media experience. The following research question is designed to investigate the drive to consume certain types of media to meet higher-order psychological needs. This research question was explored through qualitative methods because of the subjective nature of the inquiry.

RQ2: What factors influence an individual to consume self-transcendent social media video content?

A study exploring the frequency and extent to which self-transcendent emotions appear in Facebook posts examined how individuals engage and react to this type of content, what self-transcendent social media looks like, and how it differs from other self-transcendent media types (Dale et al., 2020). Researchers analyzed Facebook posts collected using the search keyword "inspiring," and through a quantitative content analysis they discovered that over 80% of the content returned in their search parameters elicited self-transcendent emotions and that a positive and significant regression showed that self-transcendent emotions were modified by emotional reactions in the form of "likes" and "reactions" (Dale et al., 2020), meaning that if more individuals engaged with the content, the more the content had meaning for the viewer. This

study suggests that “social media content may be a common source of inspirational content in the daily lives of users” emphasizing the need for further investigation of beneficial effects of self-transcendent social media content. One such possible benefit is reducing loneliness and social disconnectedness.

### Social Isolation and Loneliness

Researchers in the 1960's surmised that the term "social isolation" is two-dimensional in that it can refer to an individual's isolations from "wider society" or isolation of an individual from friends, family, or "primary social groups" (Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2009). As one might expect, generally agreed upon social isolation attributes are "loneliness," "living alone," "low levels of social contact," "feelings of separateness," and "isolation and loneliness" (Hawthorne, 2006; p. 526). Psychologists have theorized the extent to which someone is socially isolated can make a notable difference in the conceptualization of social isolation. For instance, social isolation may refer to "the absence of relationships other people" (Gierveld et al., 2006), or it may refer to "the absence of contact from other people" (Wenger & Burholt, 2004 as cited by Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2009).

For this study, measuring the degree of social isolation was conducted by measure the degrees of its attributes, loneliness and social disconnectedness. Loneliness associated with social isolation “reflects the subjective feeling that results from inadequate social connections and feeling disconnected from others” (Johnson et al., 2021; Hajek & König, 202). Feelings of social disconnectedness and loneliness are often measured together, and researchers have suggested that there is a positive correlation between the two similar negative emotions (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008).

The lockdown orders and social distancing regulations of the COVID-19 pandemic have isolated individuals from both the wider society and primary social groups. Early predications of a "parallel pandemic of acute stress disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional disturbance, sleep disorders, depressive syndromes and eventually suicides" (Mucci, Mucci, & Diolaiuti, 2020) have prompted researchers to take matters very seriously regarding mental health research since the pandemic began. A good portion of that research focuses on the effects of social isolation and loneliness. As research on mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic continues to emerge, many scholars have noted that the pandemic has afforded an unprecedented opportunity to study mental health and well-being on a global scale (e.g., Qiu et al., 2020; Mucci et al., 2020; Girdhar et al., 2020). However, it is difficult to separate the effects of social isolation from other risk factors for mental health occurring during the pandemic. Recent research has indicated social isolation caused by lockdowns and social distancing during the pandemic has led to increased "loneliness" (Krendl & Perry 2021; Van Tilburg et al., 2020), "panic disorders," "anxiety," and "insomnia, and emotional exhaustion" among large populations around the globe (Qiu et al., 2020; Giallonardo et al., 2020; Pancani et al., 2021). The fear of the pandemic, pre-existing mental health issues, domestic and unique environments, and loss of friends or loved ones also play a significant role in mental well-being during this unique time (Pancani et al., 2021) further indicating the need for a focus on psychological well-being.

In a study that measured the "impact of the digital world" on feelings of loneliness associated with social isolation, researchers found that internet use either increases or reduces feelings of loneliness depending on how it is used (Nowland et al., 2018). If an individual is prone to feelings of loneliness and uses the internet to avoid "the pain of real- word interactions," then the feelings of loneliness increase with internet use, but if an individual is using the internet "as a way station



on the route to enhancing existing relationships and forging new social connections" it can reduce feelings of loneliness (Nowland et al., 2018).

Although pre-pandemic studies provide information regarding social isolation and internet use, it is essential to remember that how individuals used the internet evolved during the pandemic (Bowden-Green, Hinds, & Joinson, 2021). Interestingly, researchers have recommended a 'take the good, leave the bad' approach to using the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic. To reduce stress, fear, and feelings of social isolation, scientists have suggested limiting the intake of negative information found on the internet and social media sites (Girdhar et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). Conversely, scientists have suggested that using the internet and electronic media has a "stress management device" to help ease the burden of uncertainty during troubling times (Girdhar et al., 2020) by "increasing the use of the ICT [information and communication technology] to reduce the feelings of anxiety and social isolation" (Alheneidi et al., 2021; Mucci et al., 2020). But these recommendations end here without any guidance or instructions as to how to use the internet to help with negative emotions.

What the research tells us is that social isolation during the pandemic can lead to feelings of "loneliness" and "disconnectedness," while self-transcendent social media content can elicit feelings of "connectedness," "relatedness," and "hope" by way of a eudaimonic media experience. Further research is needed to understand the dynamics of this intersection. Therefore, the following hypotheses are derived from the literature above and was be tested quantitatively to explore the associations among variables.

H1: The more self-transcendent media is consumed, the fewer the feelings of loneliness associated with social isolation will be reported.

H2: The more self-transcendent media is consumed, the fewer the feelings of social disconnectedness associated with social isolation will be reported.

This chapter has outlined the relevant literature pertaining to the key concepts of this study, self-transcendent media in general and as it pertains to social media, the eudaimonic media experience, social isolation, loneliness, and social disconnectedness. Based on gaps in the literature, two research questions have emerged that ask what self-transcendent social media videos look like, and why consumers watch them. Based on the hypothesized effects of consuming self-transcendent media and the eudaimonic media experience—feelings of awe, inspiration, connectedness, and relatedness—and the known effects of social isolation—feeling lonely and socially disconnected—two hypotheses were posited that suggest consuming self-transcendent social media might fewer the feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness attributed to social isolation. The following chapters will outline the approach to studying these relationships using a mixed methodology, the need for both a qualitative and quantitative phase, the execution of both in-depth interviews and a survey, and their results.

### Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter outlines the historical and practical applications of the mixed methods approach to research, and the necessity for the implementation of both methodologies in this project. Additionally, this chapter discusses the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research by highlighting how phase 1 informed phase 2 methodology.

A mixed methods research design systematically “integrates” quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study to “obtaining a fuller picture and deeper understanding of a phenomenon” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). This process allows the researcher to ask open-ended and closed-ended questions through the use of the rigorous methods of both quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Mixed method research as we know it today was developed in the late 1980’s to early 1990’s by researchers from various social and behavioral science fields. However, this approach is far from fully developed, as procedures and practices associated with mixed methods research “continue to evolve” as more and more “discipline-specific discussions about mixed methods” appear in journals like the *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, and the *Journal of Research Methodology* (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 215).

There are many reasons one might choose to employ a mixed methods approach to conducting research as it draws on the strengths of multiple methodologies to bring added value to any study. Furthermore, mixed methods research affords the “useful strategy” of “comparing different perspectives drawn from quantitative and qualitative data” that allows for additional insight and more perspective than a single method study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 216; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Concerns regarding threats to validity in the convergent mixed methods approach are not without warrant. Researchers often find it hard to justify unequal sample sizes between the quantitative and qualitative phases, and difficulties sometimes arise when converging or comparing dissimilar results. To compensate for these types of pitfalls, researchers approach each phase separately, aiming to establish quantitative and qualitative validity in the traditional manner according to the method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 221). For qualitative research, triangulation is often used to establish validity. To establish validity in phase 1, a triangulation practice was used as described by Carter et al. (2014) called method triangulation which includes the use of face-to-face interviews along with observation and field notes to triangulate data (Carter et al., 2014). For quantitative research, construct validity “has become the overriding objective for validity” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 153), and establishes whether “measures of a construct sufficiently measure the intended concept” (O’Leary-Kelly & Vokurka, 1998). Phase 2 demonstrated construct validity using multiple concept perspectives in the synthesis of measures, and by testing for convergence and divergence among the key measures.

What type of social media video content moves individuals to transcendence, and what motivates individuals to consume such media was first established through qualitative face-to-face interviews before a survey could measure self-transcendent media consumption. This type of mixed methodology is referred to as explanatory sequential mixed methods design and in which the data from the exploratory qualitative research led to the development of a list of media types that informed the sampling procedure of a quantitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 223).

## Chapter 4: Phase 1

This chapter includes the methodology and execution of the qualitative side of this research project. First, a discussion about the design, recruitment, data collection and analysis, and a description of the sample are presented, followed by a results section that explores the data through the theoretical lenses of the self-transcendent and eudaimonic media theories. Finally, a discussion section provides interpretation of the findings, and discussing the implications of the study.

### *Design*

According to Creswell (2016), “In-depth interviews should be used when the personal perspectives of participants are needed and are not likely to share these perspectives in a group setting” (Creswell, 2016, p. 127). The nature of this research not only called for personal perspectives, but for participants to provide insight into their feelings and emotions regarding certain types of media content. Semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews implemented in this study allowed respondents to share “feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their deeply nuanced inner worlds” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002a, p. 75 as cited in Brennon, 2017, p. 28) to help provide answers to RQ1 and RQ2.

Interviews were conducted over the internet using ZOOM to ensure the safety of both the interviewer and the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the internet to conduct video interviews also eliminates any geographical limitations that might have infringed upon sampling and recruitment. Brennen (2017) provided an outline for developing the interview protocol and a total of 15 interview questions were synthesized using the theoretical lens of self-transcendent and eudaimonic media as described by Oliver and Raney (2011), Haidt & Morris (2009), and Meier & Reinecke (2021). The strategy for the number of interview participants in this

study employed two methods to ensure an ample amount of data is collected. Charmaz (2006) suggests data collection should cease when the data becomes saturated, and no new themes or insights emerge. Additionally, Creswell & Creswell (2017) propose that around 20 interviews is optimal for qualitative grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Based on these insights, the goal for this project was set at 20 interviews or saturation, whichever came first. Before data collection began, approval for this phase was obtained the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board.

### *Recruitment*

Recruitment was conducted on social media platforms on Facebook and Instagram using a Google Form recruitment letter. Social media posts including a brief description of the project and a link to the Google Form was shared with my personal social network. I also asked the participants of this study to share the post on their social media platforms. The recruitment material described the nature of this project and asked for a small amount of information via a brief three question survey that was used to establish contact information and employ purposive sample selection.

Purposeful selection is a method used in qualitative research that allows the researcher to select the participants based on their value to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). For the purposes of this study, it is important that respondents watch enough video content on social media to recall and discuss what they've seen in depth and report any potential perceived media effects. The Google Form recruitment tool allowed for the selection of only those who indicated that they meet these requirements and were a good fit for the study. Each participant was at least 18 years of age or older. There were no other specified demographic stipulations of ethnicity, age, gender, occupation, or income level.

## *Data*

To collect data, Zoom interviews were recorded (audio and video), and the interviewer took field notes and observed the respondent's moods and behavior. In order to establish what type of social media video content should be regarded as self-transcendent media, interview questions were designed to identify specific media effects. For instance, the question "can you tell me about any videos that you've seen on social media that remind you that there is still good in the world?" is based on premise that self-transcendent media often depicts moral beauty that reminds the viewer that there is "still good in the world" (Oliver et al., 2019). If the respondent described a video of someone helping an elderly person across the street or a firefighter rescuing a child's cat from a tree, this might indicate that videos depicting people helping other people are a type of self-transcendent video content found on social media. Another important question, "can you describe a time that you've seen a video on social media that sparked big ideas about the world or society?" is intentionally vague. The use of the word "big" is not limiting and allowed for subjective reasoning and responses that provide greater insight into what resonates with each individual respondent. Other key questions include "what kind of videos on social media make you feel moved?" "Have you ever cried after seeing a video on social media that wasn't sad or scary?" and "can you tell me about a video that you have shared with friends or family because it made you feel good and wanted them to feel good too?" In addition, participants were asked to provide demographic information of age, race, gender, country of origin, highest level of education and annual income. The full list of questions is provided in the interview protocol Appendix A.

Transcription was assisted by a transcription software called Descript. Descript automatically transcribes audio files into text, and while close monitoring is necessary to ensure

the accuracy of the transcription, the overall process is much faster than manual transcription. Coding was conducted using NVivo. NVivo is a qualitative data tool that allows users to organize and analyze many forms of data including manuscripts, transcripts, photos, and websites. Coding for this portion of the project aimed to identify themes and establish a list of self-transcendent social media video content types. The first round of descriptive coding identified and categorized the data according to topic, and the second round of elaborative coding examined the data in relation to the eudaimonic media experience and self-transcendent theories.

### *Sample*

A total of nineteen (n = 19) semi-structured interviews were conducted lasting on average 43.9 minutes. Participants varied in ages from twenty-four to forty-six with a mean age of 36.1. The sample consisted of eight female (42.1%) and 11 male (57.8%) participants including individuals from the Philippines, India, South Africa, Lebanon, and the United States. The identity of each participant in this study is protected using pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Table 2 shows the pseudonyms and demographics for each participant.

**Table 2**  
*Participant Demographics*

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Country Born in	Highest Level of Education	Hours on SM per Day
Bontle	Female	39	Black	South Africa	Bachelor's Degree	4
Jamie	Female	35	White	United States	Master's Degree	2
Louise	Female	27	White	United States	Some College Degree	1
Liz	Female	64	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	3
Jane	Female	43	White Pacific	United States	Some College	2
Alice	Female	41	Islander	Philippines	Bachelor's Degree	2
Laurel	Male	32	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	1
Rabih	Male	25	Arabic	Lebanon	Bachelor's Degree	1



Dimitri	Male	24	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	2
Nicholas	Male	25	White	United States	Master's Degree	1
Bill	Male	63	White	United States	Some College	2
Ori	Male	24	Indian	India	Bachelor's Degree	1
Timothy	Male	56	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	3
Christian	Male	40	Black	United States	Some College	2
Dylan	Male	31	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	1
James	Male	32	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	1
Allison	Female	27	White	United States	High School	4
Jenny	Female	26	White	United States	Bachelor's Degree	4
Brendon	Male	33	White	United States	Associate's degree	3

### *Results*

Throughout the interviews, participants provided many examples of social media video content that reportedly fostered feelings of inspiration, awe, connectedness, relatedness, and mixed-affect, aligning with the hypothesized effects of self-transcend media consumption and the eudaimonic media experience. Based on the literature, these target emotions are the best way to determine which types of videos recalled by participants should be considered self-transcendent. Out of the examples provided by participants that generated the target emotions, a list was created and organized into five types of social media video categories: *animal*, *inspirational*, *good deed*, and *funny*. For a full list of the videos described by participants according to these categories please see Appendix C.

To gain a better understanding of the motivations for consuming this self-transcendent social media video content, participants of this study were asked *why* they appreciated certain types of video content more than others. Often, their response revealed an admitted need or desire to feel certain target effects like being inspired, connected, or related. These motivations are discussed throughout the following section and then again in the discussion section below.

## Animal Videos

Eighteen of the 19 participants in this study spoke at length about the positive emotions they associated with consuming animal-related video content on social media. Among these participants, the effects of seeing these types of videos manifested feelings of appreciation for displays of moral good and feelings of connectedness. The feeling of connectedness associated with these video types was described in a few interesting ways. Louise, a yoga instructor who lives in rural Pennsylvania, reflected on how watching videos of animals makes her feel that there is a “common bond” between people who care for animals similarly.

I think in general, animals are something that everyone sort of cares about, um, you know, everybody kind of has their own lanes of things that they're passionate about, but animals are cute and they are, you know, helpless. So, you want to see them win, and you want to see them survive. And again, that's just for the most part, there are some people who don't care at all [about animals]. But it's like, there's a common bond that animals can bring amongst people who *do* care, and I feel that bond when I see it [in a video].

Throughout the interviews, participants shared the sentiment “this video made me realize there are more people like me in the world” many times regarding several types of social media video content discussed. Sometimes, this phrase was expressed like a revelation, sometimes like an affirmation, and sometimes it came with a slight sigh of relief. Whether unconscious, or consciously aware of the need to feel connected, participants frequently spoke of a desire to know “there are more people like them in the world” which may provide insight into what motivates individuals to consume self-transcendent content. Nicholas, an engineer earning his doctoral degree while studying the possibilities of electric aviation, initially stated that he didn't

often “feel much” from the videos he watched on social media. Later in the interview, however, he realized that watching videos of animals fosters feelings connectedness in him:

I guess it makes me feel like, uh, there's people out there who like, feel the same way I do about animals and stuff, and I think this was all subconscious because I've never really thought about why I love those videos or vocalized that. Like, it's just nice to know that other people out there are just like obsessed with their cats and get enjoyment out of them and love them like the same way I love my pets or whatever.

When I asked my participants if they “ever see videos on social media that remind them that there is still good in the world,” more than a few recalled seeing videos of humans rescuing animals. No matter the type of rescue, whether it be the rescuing of a pet from a shelter, or a wild animal that had fallen through ice on a frozen pond, or a deer with antlers stuck in a farmer’s fence, the sentiment was the same. The actions of the actors in these videos reminded participants that human beings can sometimes be selfless, and that there still is good in the world. Jane, a waitress from Seattle and avid animal lover, discussed why she thinks that rescuing an animal is a wholesome representation of “true good in the world”:

These [animal rescue] videos are the most moving because there is no, uh, there can be no, uh, nobody thinks they're going to get paid back by doing the right thing. There's no quid pro quo in helping a deer out of a fence, right? . . .nobody's going to pay you for being a good person. People don't do that thinking there's going to be something in it for them.

Several participants recalled being “being moved to tears” when watching videos in which animals were rescued from certain death. For these participants, animals are associated with a form of natural innocence and were often perceived as “helpless.” Bill, a retired army master sergeant who lives in rural Tennessee also brought up the scenario of a deer stuck in a farmer’s fence. For Bill, videos that depict humans helping a wild animal represents the idea that there are still good-hearted people in the world, and he finds that very inspirational.

With wild animals, you know, with our expansion into the world, and our expansion of our communities and stuff, there's less for them [less habitat/space for wild animals]. You know, they've got to adapt to it. And oftentimes that adaption leads to problems for them. And, you know, if they can't overcome and stuff, sometimes, often, they need our help to overcome those problems like the fences. They are helpless and it is our fault most of the time. So, when somebody does something that helps these animals, it shows that some of us still care about the wild animals, and nature, and that some people are still good-hearted out there. I think those videos are the best part of Facebook.

Apart from the animal rescue scenario, a few participants described animal videos that would be consider silly or humorous, though its obvious that the effects of consuming this type of content transcended above merely entertainment. Timothy is a life/business coach who lives in the Sonoma Wine Region of Northern California. Timothy described to me what he considers to be “anthropomorphic animal videos” as videos that show animals doing human-like things like surfing or skateboarding, wearing human clothes, standing upright on two legs, or videos that exhibit animal video that has been dubbed with human voices. To him, these videos offer more than just a cheap laugh, something deeper, a reminder of goodness that exists in the world:

I think anthropomorphic animal videos, if I could just basically narrow that down, uh, I watched those a lot. I think in my human condition, I see animals as being really, uh, innocent and pure and loving. And when we anthropomorphize them, it makes me feel like that there are more people like that in the world. And that gives me hope as well. I want more people to be like the animals.

The notion that animals represent a form of innocence was commonly presented by participants, and I think it is important to note that this frame originated organically. None of my interview questions asked participants about the innocence of animals and many of the times it was discussed was in response to my follow up question of “why do you believe you are drawn to animal videos on social media?” Dylan, a delivery driver and theological student living and studying in central Tennessee, provided a unique perspective. As a delivery driver who deals with the dangers of protective pets, and an animal lover himself, Dylan had a lot to share about how he thinks we feel about pets in general, and why he thinks individuals are drawn to this type of video content:

It's funny [be]cause you know, dogs can be, I'm a delivery guy, like dogs can be vicious, you know, I'm often concerned about angry dogs on my job. But for the most part, like our idea of a lot of, a lot of animals are pretty much like [they are] kind of untainted by evil. Like anything they do, they don't necessarily do out malice or hatred. There's no like premeditation about activities that are meant to be bad. They're just sort of react and the way that most of us view, like, you know, dogs in particular, is that they are very sweet and very kind, and in a sense, like very innocent and very caring. And so, I think that's kind of it, like, there's sort of

this guileless nature to them that kind of draws us to them, and to watching videos of them.

Participants of this study reflected on a few other types of animal videos not mentioned above, though the effects of appreciation for displays moral good and feelings of connectedness were similarly evident in those conversations. Videos that include narratives revolving around themes like *animals with disabilities happily living their best lives*, or *animals helping humans with disabilities to live their best life*, were deeply impactful and inspiration for some participants. More than a few times, while describing various animal videos participants said, “I’m going to cry just thinking about it.” This phrase was also used a few times when describing what I have categorized as *inspiration videos*.

### Inspirational Videos

Over the course of nineteen interviews, participants recalled a wide variety of video types that inspired them in several different ways. One example of a feeling independently shared by many participants in this study is the idea that certain videos on social media made them feel like “we’re all in this together.” Often, this sentiment was shared when interviewees were recalling videos they had watched during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic and lockdown periods, representing a motivation for consuming self-transcendent content and providing one possible answer to RQ2. Jamie, a social worker, and mother of three young children, recalled her reaction to seeing videos about doctors, nurses, and frontline workers battling the pandemic to try and save the sick:

During COVID when, uh, you know, early on when we were all at home and you would see the videos about the nurses and the doctors and, and, um, that it was like, we're all in this together. I think it was like an unofficial catchphrase and it was

like the entire world at the same time was in this whole thing together. And that was definitely a connected feeling. And I definitely remember watching several of those videos, crying thinking "we *are* all in this together."

For participants, the videos that reminded them that they are not alone in their struggles often foster the feeling of hope and connectedness. Bontle is a South African film student studying in United States far from any immediate family. Bontle recalled videos she sees that are posted by a social media influencer on Facebook who exhibits, discusses, and comments on stories of people doing great things throughout history. The particular video that Bontle is discussing below features the work of a man who had risked his life to rescue a large number of Jewish children during World War II:

Things like social distancing [make] you kind of feel very isolated and I live alone in an apartment, and I feel very isolated often. Um, and I will, you know, rely on social media platforms like Facebook to, um, engage with people, which is sad, but then that video, um, I think showed that, um, no, we don't necessarily have to be alone, we're all kind of in this together, and that's a hopeful thought. Actually, what she [the social media influencer] reminds me of in another video [is that] we, we all *need* to be together. We're all having [the] same, um, uh, you know, issues. If something bad is happen to one group of people, it's bad for all groups of people.

This is an example of the type of video that participants recalled leading them to consider their role in history or society. Often, videos that made participants feel particularly connected were inspirational videos that cultivated feelings of great appreciation for the "absurdity or our existence" and the grandeur of nature and life "finding a way through the ages, leading to who we are now." One participant reflected on how certain videos he consumes on social media invite

him to ponder big questions about where we're going as a species and the tenants of human nature. James, a student from New York State studying message therapy, described a video that helped him with what he called "positive perspective":

It [the video] starts with the cell structure and then molecules, and then it just keeps zooming out and then eventually it gets, you know, from our environment out to the, um, and then you're just seeing the earth and it's slowly zooming out and the earth becomes a speck, and then it just disappears, you know? You see how small we are, and it can be very humbling and very scary for people, but it brings up a kind of appreciation. Like, we're all here on this tiny speck together. What's there to fight over? Nothing but a speck.

In less existential ways, other participants recalled nature themed videos as a source of inspiration with a few remarkable examples. Timothy, that life coach from Northern California, described being "in complete awe" when watching a Ted Talk on YouTube about "the planet's ability to regenerate itself and how it did exponentially during the first round of the COVID shutdown around the world." The connection and relationship between humans and nature and/or the environment was outlined by another participant as well. Alice, a nutritionist, and personal health consultant living in Long Beach, California, was inspired by an uncommon type of naturalist social media video:

[The video is from] somewhere in Asia, in either Vietnam or Thailand where a woman would literally go out into the yard and pick vegetables or fruits, with like with a machete, and then they would walk back to the huts and cook, cook it from scratch, you know, on this huge aluminum wok over an open fire. These videos have no words and no music just, like, the natural sounds of like digging dirt or



chopping and frying things. The videos posted by this person just documents their simple life, and it was just nice to kind of see that, it was beautiful um, you know, uh, back to basics sort of thing and the simplicity of humans living with nature instead of destroying it. You know? This is what life was like for thousands of years and for some reason now it is really inspiring.

It is easy to understand or assume the inspirational element of testimonial stories that are examples of human beings overcoming great adversities or hardships. It is important to recall, however, that the theory of self-transcendent media describes an effect that invites contemplation that rises above hedonic considerations of the self. Therefore, special care was taken when considering the effects recalled by participants to only list video examples that fostered self-transcendent considerations. Among participants, the testimonial videos that depict human beings overcoming life obstacles discussed below have generated feelings of awe and appreciation for the abilities of all human-kind and the human spirit in a general sense, rather than feelings of inspiration that related specifically to the life of the viewer and their personal abilities.

James, the message therapy student from New York State explained that watching video testimonials created by motivational speakers like Tony Robbins and David Ramsey remind him of the power of perseverance strength that “all humans are capable of mustering:”

Motivational videos, again, especially if you, um, really absorb uh, what’s being said, um, a lot of those, uh when you see one of these motivational videos its empowering and they are like a reminder of the strength that we all have within us. Usually there is like, some kind of, uh, inspirational music in the background

and, and the speaker is in on a stage or something talking about how they used to be a crackhead or homeless and it is really powerful.

Brendon, a forestry and surveying student from New York State's Southern Tier Region, also shared how certain types of testimonial videos inspire him to think deeply about society and the human spirit. The video Brendon described was produced by a Youtuber who documents his incredible feats of endurance while swimming long distances with no thermal protection in ice water:

There's a guy, I think he's known as the Iceman, um, hearing about like his journey through, uh, through becoming more spiritual through physical pain. That's pretty interesting stuff. The words on the video tell the story about how the guy lost his entire family and challenging himself in this way is healing for him. Uh, we don't know a lot about what we [humans] are capable of and this kind of video tells a larger story.

Finally, the inspirational videos that depict families or friends reunited with soldiers or service members coming home from deployment was mentioned by more than a few participants. These reunion videos have no rigid format. Sometimes they're filmed in an airport, sometimes in a home or a school. A majority of these videos described by participants depicted surprise reunions in which the family member reactions are very "genuine" and emotional. The videos are often centered around the reunion of a parent and child, spouse, or even a reunion of a person and their beloved pet. A few times participants were almost brought to tears when describing these videos. Liz, a recent retiree and empty-nester from Central Pennsylvania, discussed how the surprise factor played into what draws her to watch the videos.

Um, and then I'm a sucker for like the surprise reunion. Like somebody coming home from the military and they're surprising their kid or their, or whatever. I can't pass those up. . . I think initially I go in for them to see how they trick the person, like how or what the circumstance was like, what they were doing to make this reunion take place. Cause there are, it's all, it's pretty varied. Um, and then I cry like a baby at the end, even though I know I'm going to do it every time, you know, this is going to be, this is like a very happy occasion. It just makes me cry to be happy.

There are several examples of video types that participants reported enjoying because they like to see good things happening for people. These reunion videos are a good example of that sentiment, when the reunion represents something *good* happening for the people in the video. There are several videos examples that exhibit similar circumstances reported by participants in which good things happen to people in the videos because of some sort of action performed by another person. I called these types of videos *good deed* videos because the common theme outlines some form of humans helping other humans.

### Good Deed Videos

During each of the interviews I asked participants to describe videos that they've seen on social media that "made them feel good about the world." Interestingly, every participant described at least one video that depicted people helping other people in some capacity. The depictions and scenarios exhibited in the content described by participants varied greatly, but there was centrality in the simplicity of a human being doing something kind for another human being.

Jamie, the social worker and mother of three young children, described a video she had seen on Facebook in which a police officer rescued a woman and child from a burning vehicle. When I asked her why she liked to see that particular video she responded that “it ties into the concept of hope” and that reminds her that “we're not just base humans, fulfilling base requirements.” Jamie explained that the videos on Facebook that inspire hope are particularly important to her media selection habits because “to [her], when a video shows that when you go out of your way, or even put yourself in danger. . .to help somebody out, that's like a different level of humanity.” Jamie went on to describe several types of videos that draw her attention simply because they produce mixed affect and feelings of hope through the depiction of people helping other people:

[I like] Human interest stories, like stories about people helping each other, especially when we have like natural disasters and things like that happened. You see these stories come out and you, it kind of makes me think I'm still, I'm glad there are still good people in the world kind of, and like hopeful.

Depictions like the one discussed above often produce mixed affect when feelings of sorrow associated with something like a natural disaster, or fear, associated with images of people trapped in a burning car, mix with feelings of inspiration and hope that come from depictions of people helping other people. Mixed affect is an attribute and key indicator of the eudaimonic media experience. Hedonic motivations for media selection “may be characterized largely in terms of pleasure and positive valence,” whereas “eudaimonic concerns may instead reflect greater introspection, seeking of insight, and more mixed affective reactions that likely accompany contemplations of life profundities” (Oliver & Rainy, 2011). Feelings of mixed affect were commonly discussed during most of the interviews conducted for this study. Liz, the recent

retiree from Central Pennsylvania, summarized how it feels when she watches videos of people helping other people:

I guess I just like to see people, um, have something good happen to them [people in the video], and to be able to, you know, you almost feel like you are a part of it. And it, it makes, I mean I'm crying, but I feel good.

The video content Liz was describing depicted a group of YouTubers helping an elderly man who was experiencing homelessness by providing him with housing, a haircut, clothes, and a job interview. Though a majority of the participants in this study described videos of individuals helping other individuals, some participants recalled videos in which groups of individuals helped other groups. Ori was a participant who agreed to meet with me during a particularly bad period when COVID-19 was spreading very quickly and taking many lives in his home country of India. When I asked Ori what type of video content on social media he felt shows that there is still good in the world, he described a few videos about large organizations providing aid to India during that time of crisis:

[videos of] like people in India, like different organizations, NGOs, and even private organizations, trying to help out with, uh, medical supplies and resources to help the sick, that has been, that shows [me] that there is still good in the world.

This is a good example of how biographic resonance plays a part in the eudaimonic media experience. Ori recalls the media examples that are particularly meaningful in correlation with his personal biography and concerns for his home country of India. The feelings of hope elicited by video depictions of people helping other people were described by the participants of this study as hope for humanity to overcome obstacles that were particularly salient to each individual participant. During our interview, Dimitri, a transgender man who lives in the American south,

discussed the disheartening realities of living in a generally conservative region of the bible-belt, and how he sometimes finds hope about the future through the videos he watches on Facebook. The types of videos that Dimitri recalled were videos of children being “accepting” and “helping” other people who might be different than themselves. When Dimitri said, “It's nice to see that there are still people out in the world who will do the good,” he was alluding to the idea that when it is hard for him find hope about the future in the actions or attitudes of people in his immediate geographical vicinity, he sometimes turns to social media video content to fill that need.

Jamie described how videos like the one about the burning car and the police officer who helped remove a woman and child from the wreckage inspired hope about overcoming racial inequalities:

I remember that, you know, the captions talking about, um, racism and things like that. But when it matters, race, it doesn't matter. You know, in that moment, nobody cared what color anybody was. They were humans [the people in the burning car] and they were in need, and that guy [police officer] helped them out. And I just want to cry thinking about it.

Often, the hopeful feelings and ideas elicited by this type of video content represent the antithesis of what we know social media content can do: divide. Bill, the retired high-ranking military veteran from Tennessee, described how the videos that depict people helping other people prompted questions in his mind about the goodness of human nature.

Sometimes they [the videos on social media] make me think that as human. . . maybe we're genetically programmed to help one another survive and unconsciously, you know, avoid the, you know, harming others and stuff.

Bill provides a good example of how certain types of media can result in considerations that *transcend* concerns for the self or pleasure (hedonic) to eudaimonic concerns for ultimate truths and a greater understanding of the human condition. This data shows that one of the motivations to consume self-transcendent media is the search for hope. Videos of people helping other people on social media have the ability to inspire hope where and when hope is needed. Seeing humans helping other humans by being kind to one another is very powerful. Participants described a similar type of video in which humans make powerful gestures through their actions for the sake of social change and social good.

### Call-to-Action Videos

I categorized certain types of videos that participants recalled during interviews as *call-to-action* videos because they often depict people performing an action for the benefit of others while motivating social change. It was seeing the depictions of individuals answering the call-to-action that inspired the participants of this study. Videos concerning the Murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests across the United States was recalled by many participants as both inspirational and motivating. Christian, a social media marketing expert living in Long Beach, California, expressed how the videos about George Floyd made him feel as a young Black male:

I would say the Georgia Floyd video, you know, it really, it really, it, it, it, it really did a number on black people in general, you know, everyone's highly effected by that video. Um, and it just, you know, I mean it made me feel very emotional and angry it made me almost like irrational and then I see how it affected other cultures [other marginalized groups], and other cultures will say that that video affected them for different reasons, you know? We're [other marginalized groups]

connected in that way, that motivation. So, so, let's stand together, you know?

Against racism.

Christian didn't report positive effects from watching the George Floyd video itself, but inside his message was a theme of connectedness between historically marginalized groups, and the call-to-action to "stand together." For Christian, seeing historically marginalized groups stand gather was one of a few motivations for watching this type of content. This example is not dissimilar to the feelings of "were all in this together" described above by Jamie. The circumstances are quite different, but the feelings associated with the content are comparable when both participants were deeply moved by knowing that they we're not alone in facing obtrusive issues.

Racial diversity was often central to the discussion of connectedness with many participants recalling how videos depicting the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests made them feel. Louise, the yoga instructor from Pennsylvania reflected how the videos depicting current events related to the Black Lives Matter movement made her feel about the protest participants:

A lot of things with the Black Lives Matter and whatnot started to pop up [on social media] like a year or so ago. Um, there were more videos out there that were more about unifying people. So, people of all walks of life, you know, coming together just to stand for each other, to have each other's back. . . .it makes me think about those people, and what I know about them, and how they're kind and caring and would give anything for anybody and that they could be discriminated against just because of how they look.



Timothy, the life/business coach from Northern California provided another example of this type of inspirational video when he recalled seeing a video about the 2021 Aids Lifecycle in California. The Aids Lifecycle is an annual charity bicycle ride from San Francisco, California to Los Angeles, California. Riders raise money for aids and HIV related causes:

I recently got a video from the producers of the California Aids Lifecycle, uh, demonstrating arrivers [arriving in Los Angeles at the end of the ride] and what they hope to achieve in their, in their quest to, uh, battle HIV and aids stigma. Um, basically it was just snippets of the, uh, of the riders, uh, during their week-long trip down California, and it was set to inspirational music, showing people, having an amazing time, having a blast, having fun and, uh, and the amount of money that they were able to raise to help people. It was truly an inspiring piece of media.

Another example of what I considered the *call-to-action* video wasn't necessarily about a certain social cause or injustice as much as it was about positively engaging with those who are different from oneself. Jenny, a new mother who lives in East Tennessee, recalled a video about a traveler "who danced with people from all over the world:"

There is a video that I saw on YouTube, and I'm trying to remember the name of it. It's like, where the hell is Brendon? Or, where the hell is Adam? It was this, it was this video that was sponsored by stride gum, and it was this guy, and he traveled the world, and he did these like silly little dances. And then at the end of the video, like all these different community groups come together and they do this dance with him. And so. Um, that was like the first video that ever like made me cry on YouTube was this, yeah, this video of this guy just like dancing all over the world.

Jenny went on to compare this video with another video she had previously discussed showing several “random strangers” who were interacting with a child with autism in a Halloween costume while trick-or-treating.

I think like the common thread between those kinds of videos is just like people coming together, um, for good things and looking past the differences that they have. Um, so either, you know, come together for dialogue or just, um, just engage in humanness together and I really like that kind of content.

According to the data, there is a wide variety of video content that participants described as fostering the target feelings connectedness and relatedness. Interestingly, some participants described feeling these and other target emotions when consuming certain types of humorous or comical videos.

### Funny Videos

Traditionally, humorous content is not considered to be self-transcendent because individuals often select this type of media for mood enhance, affect management, and enjoyment, which are hedonic motivations rather than eudaimonic motivations (Oliver & Raney, 2011). A study conducted by Oliver and Raney (2011) draws a distinction between motivations for media selection for hedonistic and eudaimonic affective responses. How we select media, or rather, how media is presented to us on social media has evolved since the study conducted by Oliver and Raney (2011), and I believe the data shows that the inclusion of a few very specific types of funny content is warranted when the subject of such content can elicit both joy from humor and serious contemplation about life and humanity simultaneously.

Many participants in this study explained that certain types of comedic videos on social media help them “feel connected” to other humans when the joke is about something that most

people experience and is related to the absurdity of life. This motivation is similar to scenarios discussed above in which participants described their motivations in terms of feeling connected and related. Jenny, that new mother from Tennessee, recalled why she loved to watch stand-up comedians on social media:

Uh, for a lot of us, life kind of sucks or there are sucky aspects of our life. And so, um, I think a lot of us are just also like really emotionally overwhelmed and so to be able to connect with people over humor, I think it helps us forget, at least for a moment that things are hard, and things suck. Um, but we can experience that together and laugh about it together.

Jane, the waitress from Seattle, also spoke to me about how much she loved to watch stand-up comedians on social media because sometimes they elicit a very real and emotional response that rises above simply “being amused:”

Like you could watch a, you know, a Jim Gaffigan special and be amused and, you know, pleased all the way through, but it's not necessarily going to stick with you, but every once in a while, you know, a comedian, they'll just, they'll just do or say something so very right. Um, you know, there's a physical response, it elicits a physical response that you couldn't stop if you wanted to. You're prompted to laugh or something, but not always because it is something born from a bad experience that you recognize. But there is something about it that is different, or that is shocking, not, “oh my God” shocking, but shocking in the true surprise sense of the word, um, you know, catches you off guard that is, um, that makes it memorable and lasting.

Another way in which comedic video content on social media generates the target effects is by reminding the consumer of existing real-world relationships. When a certain joke or video reminds the viewer of a person in their social network it activates those positive feelings of connectedness and relatedness. Nicholas, the engineering student from Maryland, described how funny videos about the actor Brandon Frasier remind him of old friends that no longer live close to him. He described how his group of friends often share these videos with each other and it helps them feel and stay connected with one another. This sentiment of sharing funny videos that are inside jokes or that reminded the participant of a person they know was also mentioned by Jane from Seattle, and James from New York, and Brendon, the forestry and survey student. Brendon provided some insight into who and why he shares these types of funny videos with loved on social media:

I would share those [funny videos] more like, you know, private message send that off to the girlfriend or show my mom or something. I do that a lot. A lot of, you know, funny dog animals and cat animals are always going to make me smile and reminds me of them [his girlfriend or mom].

When a piece of media acts of as a reminder of real-world relationships and connections it helps to generate the target emotions of relatedness and connectedness in a broader sense when participants consider how many people across the world appreciate this type of media content.

Finally, several participants in this study reflected on how watching videos of children being silly or funny in certain ways reminded them that there is still good in the world. Participants often remarked about the “innocence” children being “ridiculous” or “absurd” in a comedic way. When regarding these types of funny videos, the target feelings of inspiration for hope and genuine human goodness were most prevalent.

## *Discussion*

RQ1 asks what types of social media video content produce eudaimonic media experiences. According to the literature, the eudaimonic media experience is achieved through the consumption of self-transcendent media. The list of video types generated in this study through qualitative interviews provides an answer as to some of the types of social media video content that generate the self-transcendent media effects among these participants. The answer to RQ2, however, is not as straightforward, requiring a bit more fleshing out.

RQ2 asks what factors influence an individual to consume self-transcendent social media video content. To answer this question, it might be helpful to consider the data in a larger context. Within the videos presented for discussion were certain traditional narratives outlining *the strength of the persevering human, people caring for others more than for themselves, love overcoming hardship, and the creation and/or exhibition of something extraordinarily beautiful and good*. Many of these themes seem monomythic, universal, ancient, and reminiscent of folklore. One of the ways in which social media has changed our view of the world is that it has allowed some of these inspirational narratives a rebirth in the modern age. We no longer need to follow the hero's journey to be inspired by their return. There are thousands of videos on social media of the modern soldier coming home from some far-off place, weeping, and collapsed in embrace on the floor of an airport, holding tight their children, spouses, and/or even their pets. We no longer need to imagine in our heads the rich cultures of faraway places to be awestruck by their beauty, because the images are being shot on a cellphone camera in three-minute segments and instantly distributed to the world. We no longer need to wonder what the surface of an asteroid looks like when the footage of an autonomous vehicle landing on the asteroid Bennu was broadcast live on Facebook and Instagram. The real-life renderings of what humans have been

writing about since before the dawn of mass communication can be very powerful when naturally occurring. Much like the effects of consuming traditional epic stories, or folklore, participants reported that inspirational videos on social media have the power to generate awe, hope, appreciation, and relatedness through a better understanding of the human condition.

In one sense, to ask why participants chose to consume self-transcendent social media video content is to ask why individuals have *always* chosen to produce and consume these stories, depictions, and narratives. Perhaps it might be helpful to briefly consider the functions of folklore for a better understanding of what scholars believe draws us to these types of narratives.

According to Bascom (1954) folklore is not just a representation of culture or history, nor is it simply entertainment, but something meaningful with uses that stretch beyond amusement:

It should be clear that folklore cannot simply be dismissed as a form of amusement. Amusement is, obviously one of the functions of folklore, and an important one; but even this statement today cannot be accepted as a complete answer, for it is apparent that beneath a great deal of humor lies a deeper meaning (Bascom, 1954, p. 343)

Folklore has many significant cultural and psychological functions, among them is the notion that the depictions and narratives presented in folklore provide us with “social context” and helps us “make sense of our world” and our personal lives (Bascom, 1954; Wilson, 1988).

This may provide a partial answer to RQ2, but I believe there are other factors beyond the need for social context or the need to make sense of one’s world that influenced these participants to consume self-transcendent social media video content.

Another conceivable factor that influences individuals to consume self-transcendent social media video content appears when the data is examined in terms of subject matter, certain

themes emerge that are consistent with typical issues on the public agenda; like concerns for the environment and the effects of industrialization on the planet, the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests and racial injustices, and political polarization.

Additionally, many participants expressed having issues with the “doom and gloom” of traditional and new forms of news media. I did not ask participants about their politics or news viewing habits, though these topics often emerged organically when discussing social media content. Interestingly, almost all participants mentioned their intention or techniques to avoid news on social media. Allison, a bar-tender from a little Appalachian college town, repeatedly voiced her concern about the negative effects of news media:

So, I think that honestly, what you view on social media is what you make it.

If you only watch like doom and gloom on the news, and the aliens are coming or everybody's going to die of Corona [COVID-19 virus], then that's all you're going to see. That's all that's going to pop up. That's what's going to be fed to you because that's what you react to. I avoid that type of stuff, uh at all costs, because I'm tired of it. Other people should avoid it too.

Participants often described the media they don't like to see when asked about media that made them feel good. This provides a clue into another factor that might influence media selection among participants in this study. Media researchers hypothesize that a “multitude of recipient characteristics and circumstances” determine media selection and attention for affect management, including “cognitive, affective, motivational, dispositional, developmental, and social influences” (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). According to a recent study conducted by Pew Research Center, two-thirds of Americans suffer from news fatigue (Gottfried, 2020). Due to the onslaught of terrifying COVID-19 news updates and political drivel that bombarded social media

platforms in the months prior to this study, participants were showing signs of not just news fatigue, but news traumatization. Louise, the yoga instructor from Pennsylvania, explained how she simply can't handle the news on social media anymore:

For me, ignorance is bliss. There's so much turmoil right now, and I'm a very middle of the road person. . . If I see something that's from one extreme or the other, I get overwhelmed and I get really stressed out. So, I choose to just kind of block it out, um, for my own sake. Like I said, I like my bubble to be happy. I try to do what I can every day to be kind and see kind things.

Unsurprisingly, Louise wasn't the only person who shared the opinion that consuming news on social media was having an adverse physical effect on their body. Bill, the retired military veteran described how political news media on social media was causing his body to react negatively:

For a long time, it [news on social media] was a lot of politics and stuff, but my blood pressure was going up too much every night. I had to cut back [from watching political news] and, you know, stay away from it basically. There's too much misinformation out there and it was just aggravating and frustrating.

Overall, the general feeling disclosed by participants is that news content on social media depicts a world that is "going to hell in a handbasket." According to Jamie, the social worker, and the mother of three small children, "there is not enough room for that kind of negativity in [her] life" when concerns about the pandemic and the safety of her family are "draining." Alice from Long Beach relates consuming video content on social with consuming food:

I'm very conscious of what I consume, whether it be social media stuff or like real food. So, I, um, I try and choose things that are either helpful or that are



inspiring, not like bad news, or the news in general. Stuff that brings a smile to my face. You know, good stuff for my body and spirit.

Participants of this study choose to avoid the news on social media as a form of self-care or affect management in response to some negative effects of news consumption. For Timothy, the dolphins returning to Venice, Italy, represent the concept that the earth *can* rejuvenate naturally in some ways if given the chance. This is conceptually contrary to the messages about climate issues that are often framed in a way that invokes fear of the “point of no return,” a term recently coined by journalists reporting on climate change.

Among participants, the need for inspiration and the need for hope is generated when the need for orientation drives an individual to consume news media that negatively impacts their affective state. Participants seek out media that might positively impact their affective state, in doing so, they sometimes consume self-transcendent media that provides more than affect management, but a better understanding of the human condition. Future research should examine the need for inspiration and the need for hope independently from other factors of affect management to fully understand how positive media can help balance affective states that are negatively influenced by news media.

Finally, this phase of the thesis was conducted during a time when COVID-19 travel precautions and social distancing drastically increased the amount of time participants spent alone in their homes. Some participants reported working and going to school from their homes. The international students participating in this study reported that travel restrictions limited their ability to return to their home countries during breaks from school. The two empty-nesters shared with me their impatience for the pandemic to end so that they can once again travel to see their children and grandchildren.

Out of all the target effects of self-transcendent media fostered by the videos discussed in these interviews (*inspiration, awe, connectedness, relatedness, and mixed-affect*), feelings of connectedness and relatedness were discussed the most, which indicates powerful motivations for affectual response to social isolation in their media selection. The data shows that the need to feel connected and related when socially isolated was universal among participants. In this way Phase 1 has highlighted a need for further exploration that was addressed directly in Phase 2.

To better understand the relationships between media selection and social isolation, the following chapters (Phase 2) will examine the amount self-transcendent social media video content in relation the attributes of social isolation, loneliness, and social disconnectedness. Out of all the possible future studies examining the effects of self-transcendent social media video consumption, their effect on social isolation is perhaps the best place to start because many scientists consider social isolation during this time seriously concerning (e.g., Qiu et al., 2020; Giallonardo et al., 2020; Pancani et al., 2021).

## Chapter 5: Phase 2

This chapter includes the methodology and execution of the quantitative side of this research project. Phase 2 is designed to test whether consuming self-transcendent social media video content effects feelings of loneliness (H1) and social disconnectedness (H2) is associated with social isolation. First, a discussion about survey design, recruitment, data collection and analysis, and a description of the sample demographics are presented along an overview of the scales used to measure feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness, social media consumption, and target social media consumption. The results section presents the statistical findings of this study, and the discussion section provides an interpretation of those findings, the limitations of this study, and their implications for future research.

### *Design*

Phase 2 employed a cross-sectional online survey designed and distributed on Qualtrics. One rationale for using Qualtrics to design an online survey is that the software allows for live data analysis, which is useful to ensure the survey is functioning properly during the data collection campaign. Furthermore, an electronically distributed survey also offers an unmatched ease of accessibility for respondents, increasing the likelihood of a more representative sample. For a full list of survey questions sorted by scale, please see Appendix B. Before data collection began, approval for this phase was obtained the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board.

### Sample and Data

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), a pilot study is an important element of quantitative research because it facilitates “establishing the content validity scores of an instrument; to provide an initial evaluation of the internal consistency of the items; and to improve questions, format, and instructions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 154). For this research,

a pilot study was created on Qualtrics and distributed on Facebook to assess how long the survey took to complete, to test scale validity, and to perform preliminary statistical analysis. A convenience sample of 60 submissions was generated, and reliability tests were satisfactory for all scales.

Participants for the main study were recruited using an online crowdsourcing service called Prolific. Prolific crowdsourcing service claims to have the most reliable participant pool among all crowd-sourcing services because they use “non-VOIP” phone numbers to track the geo-IP locations of their account holders (Prolific, 2022). This process eliminates the risk of “bot” responses and provides a high degree of validity regarding the identity and demographics of the individuals who provide data. For an extra fee Prolific offers researchers what they advertise as nationally representative data (UK & US) based on respective national census surveys. Another advantage offered by Prolific is the ability to recruit only those participants who report to use social media to view video content. While the risk to validity when using an online crowd sourcing software can never be absolutely abolished, these practices of participant verification embedded within the software allow for a higher degree of scrutiny to obtain quality data. A total of 300 participants were paid a fair and ethical rate \$20.01 per hour on average. Prolific allows for the rejection of survey submissions payment based on how long it took for the respondent to complete the survey. These rejections do not count towards the overall number of requested respondents. A total of 17 responses were rejected due to completion too quick (under two minutes) or completion too long (over 15 minutes). Finally, respondents of this survey used the completion code provided by Qualtrics to request funding, meaning that only those who completed the survey in its entirety were able to request compensation. A total of 21 partially completed responses were culled from the sample before data analysis began.

## Measures and Variables

### General Demographics:

Participants were asked to report their gender, age, income, education, and race. The final sample is comprised of 50.7% males and 47.7% females with a median age of 33.17. About half the respondents are college graduates (60.3%) with a median yearly income of between \$50,000 and \$100,000. The sample was fairly diverse in terms of race with 62.3% Caucasian, 11% African-American, 12.3% Asian 6% Latino or Hispanic, 6% two or more races, 1% Native American and 0.3% preferred not to say. Table 3 provides further details of the sample demographics and frequencies.

**Table 3**  
*Demographic Frequencies*

	Frequency	% of Total
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	152	50.7
Female	143	47.7
Non-Binary / Third Gender	4	1.3
Prefer not to say	1	.3
Total	300	100
<b>Race</b>		
African American	33	11
Caucasian	187	62.3
Latino or Hispanic	18	6
Asian	37	12.3
Native American	3	1
Two or More	18	6
Other	3	1
Unknown/Prefer not to say	1	.3
Total	300	100
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
Some high school	4	1.3

High school	34	11.3
Some College	107	35.7
Bachelor's Degree	108	36
Master's Degree	36	12
Ph.D. or higher	8	2.7
Trade School	1	.3
Prefer not to say	2	.7
Total	300	100

**Annual household income**

Less than \$25,000	50	16.7
\$25,000 - \$50,000	77	25.7
\$50,000 - \$100,000	95	31.7
\$100,000 - \$200,000	49	16.3
More than \$200,000	13	5.3
Prefer not to say	16	5.3
Total	300	100

**Loneliness:**

Loneliness was measured using De Jong Gierveld (2010) scale for loneliness, and the revised UCLA loneliness scale as implemented by Hughes et al. (2004). Because loneliness in the general sense is a broad term with many factors associated with the psychological stages of the emotion, it was hoped that the use of two scales provided some added accuracy and clarity to the measure. In conjunction, these two provide a strong representation of loneliness that is more generalizable and representative.

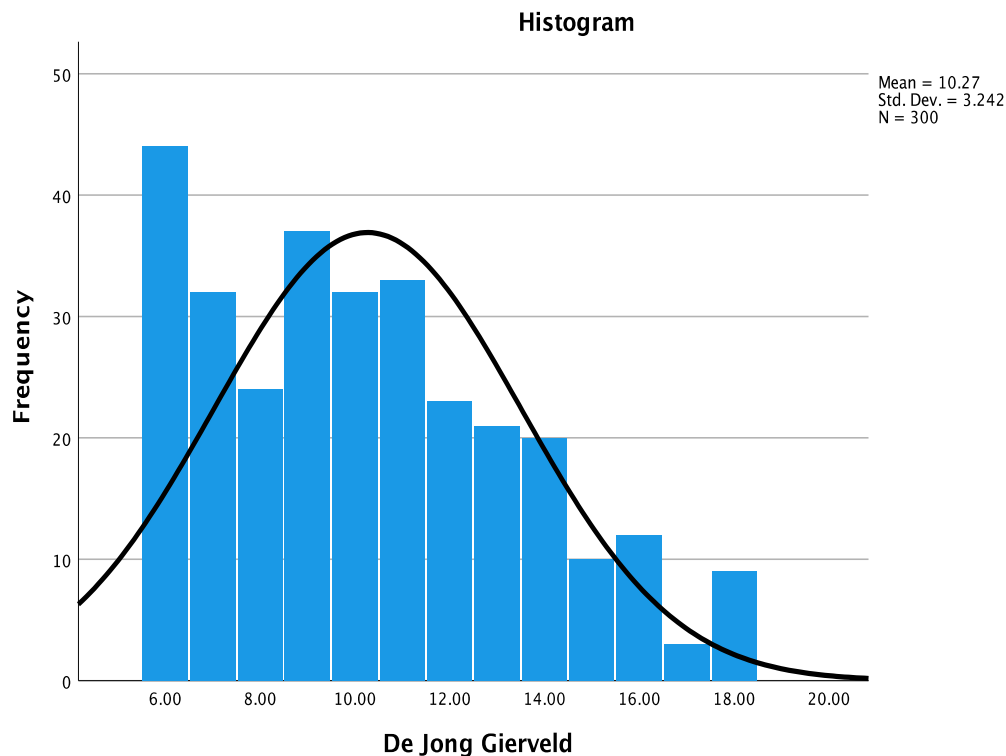
The De Jong Gierveld scale for loneliness is comprised a total of six items with three negatively formulated and three positively formulated statements. Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement with each statement by choosing one of three responses, "no," "more or less," or "yes" (Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2010). Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for each item in the scale.

**Table 4***De Jong Gierveld Scale for Loneliness Means and Standard Deviations*

	M*	Std. Deviation
I experience a general sense of emptiness	1.61	.744
I miss having people around	1.78	.772
Often, I feel rejected	1.59	.751
There are plenty of people that I can lean on in case of trouble	1.71	.740
There are many people that I can count on completely	1.84	.782
There are enough people that I feel close to	1.73	.777

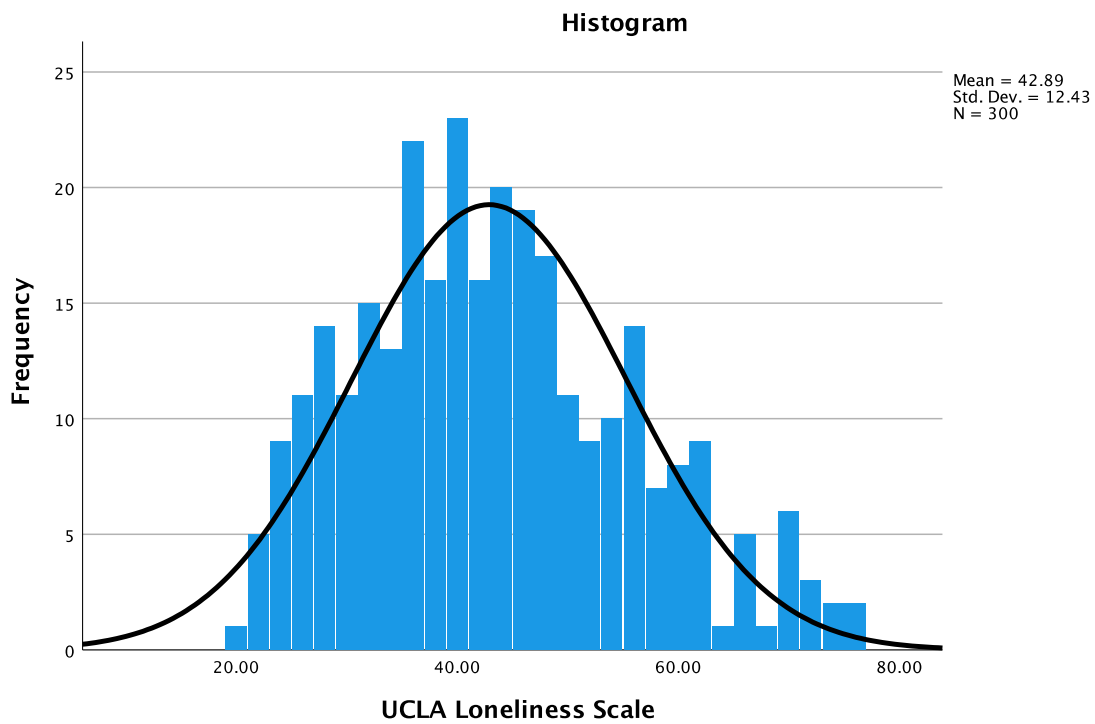
Note: \*Values of survey responses are: “no” (1) “more of Less” (2) “yes” (3). Positively worded questions required reverse coding.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of loneliness across the sample according to the De Jong Gierveld scale. Reliability of this scale was calculated with a Chronbach’s Alpha equal to .80.

**Figure 1 Distribution of Loneliness by Frequency (De Jong Gierveld)**

The adapted UCLA loneliness scale implemented by Hughes et al. (2004) includes a three-factor approach to represent loneliness as a construct. The three factors, “I feel left out,” “I feel isolated,” and “I lack companionship,” are derived through a series of 20 statements to which the participants provided one of four responses, “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” or “often” (Hughes, et al., 2004). Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for each item in this scale.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of loneliness across the sample according to the UCLA scale. Reliability of this scale was calculated with a Chronbach’s Alpha equal to .94.



**Figure 2 Distribution of Loneliness by Frequency (UCLA)**



**Table 5**  
UCLA Scale for Loneliness Means and Standard Deviations

	M*	Std. Deviation
I feel in tune with the people around me	1.61	0.74
I lack companionship.	1.78	0.77
There is no one I can turn to.	1.59	0.75
I do not feel alone.	1.71	0.74
I feel part of a group of friends.	1.84	0.78
I have a lot in common with the people around me.	1.73	0.78
I am no longer close to anyone.	2.08	0.73
My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.	2.42	0.96
I am an outgoing person.	1.88	0.94
There are people that I feel close to.	2.07	0.96
I feel left out.	2.26	0.89
My social relationships are superficial.	2.22	0.85
No one really knows me well.	2.04	1.06
I feel isolated from others.	2.02	0.93
I can find companionship when I want it.	2.44	0.88
There are people who really understand me.	1.71	0.77
I am unhappy being withdrawn.	2.44	0.89
People are around me but not with me.	2.24	0.91
There are people I can talk to.	2.4	0.96
There are people I can turn to.	2.43	0.97

Note: \*Values of survey responses are: “never” (1) “rarely” (2) “sometimes” (3) “often” (4). Positively worded questions required reverse coding.

### Social Disconnectedness:

A social disconnectedness scale was adapted from research on social disconnectedness conducted Cornwell & Waite (2009) comprising of factors like social participation, social support, and loneliness. A total of 14 questions were posed to participants with varying response formats. When measuring social participation, respondents were asked to indicate how often they “attended meetings of an organized group,” or “socialized with friends and relatives” by selecting either “never,” “sometimes,” “about half the time,” “most of the time,” or “all the time.” Similarly, when measuring social support, individuals were asked how often they “open up to family members” or “rely on family members” by selecting one of three response categories, “never,” “sometimes,” “about half the time,” “most of the time.” To measure loneliness as a factor of social disconnectedness, individuals are asked how often they “feel they lack companionship” or “feel left out” by select one of three response categories, “never,” “sometimes,” “about half the time,” “most of the time.” (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations for each item in this scale.

**Table 6**  
*Social Isolation Means and Standard Deviations*

	M*	Std. Deviation
Attending religious services	1.99	1.12
Attending meetings of an organized group	3.11	1.13
Socializing with friends and relatives	1.6	1.03
Socializing with neighbors	1.72	0.89
Volunteering	1.68	0.85

Open up to family members	2.88	1.20
Rely on family members	3.24	1.30
Open up to friends	3.21	1.20
Rely on Friends	3.13	1.12
Open up to your spouse or partner	3.35	1.60
Rely on spouse or partner	4.76	1.43
Fell that you lack companionship	3.81	1.17
Feel left out	3.74	1.10
Feel Isolated from others	3.64	1.17

Note: \*Values to survey responses as follows: “never” (1), “sometimes” (2), about half the time” (3) “most of the time” (4) “all the time” (5). Negatively worded questions required reverse coding.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of social disconnectedness across the sample. Reliability of this scale was calculated with a Chronbach’s Alpha equal to .87.

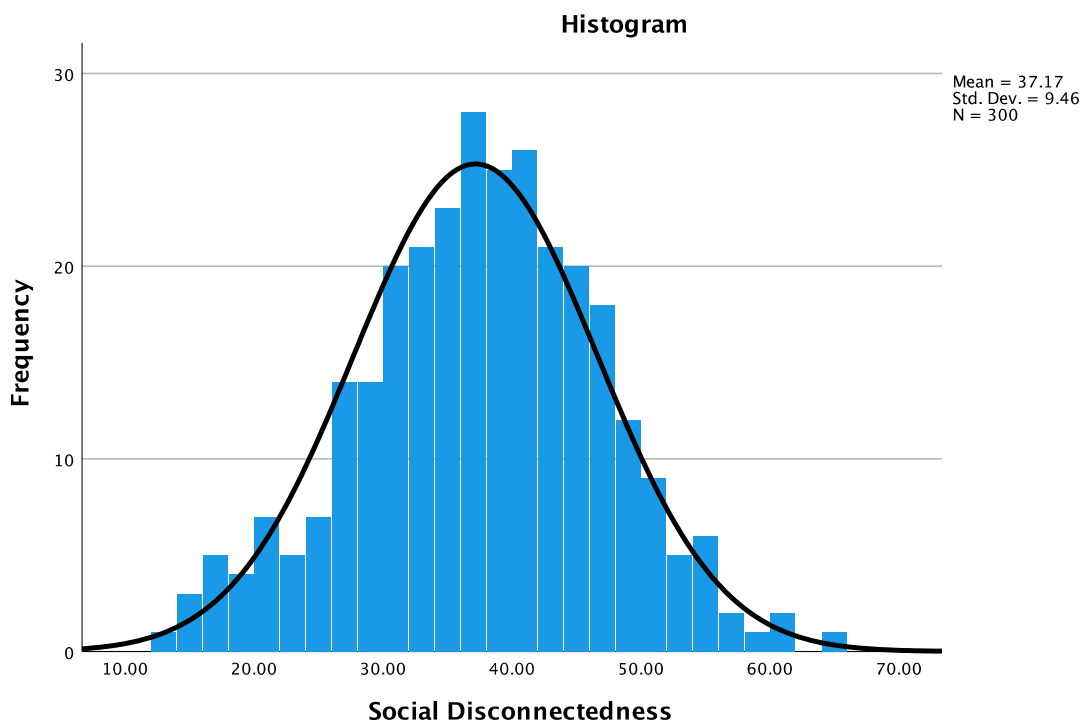


Figure 3 Social Disconnectedness by Frequency

## Social Media Video Consumption

To measure general social media video consumption, participants were asked “how much time do you spend in a day watching videos on social media?” with five possible responses, “more than 4 hours,” “around 3 hours,” “around 2 hours,” “around 1 hour” and “less than 1 hour.” Interestingly, just over 45% of the sample reported spending between two and three hours a day watching social media video content, which falls in line with the projected world-wide average of one-hundred and forty-seven minutes (or, 2.43 hours) per day of social media consumption, per person, in 2022 (Clement, 2022). Table 7 shows the frequencies of social media video consumption per day reported by respondents.

**Table 7**

*Hours of Social Media Video Consumption per Day*

	Frequency	% of Total
<b>How much time do they spend in a day watching videos on social media?</b>		
More than 4 hours	57	19
Around 3 hours	61	20.3
Around 2 hours	77	25.7
Around 1 hour	57	19
Less than 1 hour	48	16
Total	300	100

## Self-transcendent Social Media Video Consumption

Self-transcendent social media video consumption was operationalized based on a list generated in phase 1 of the types of videos that participants reported to have fostered feelings of inspiration, awe, connectedness, relatedness, and mixed-affect, aligning with the hypothesized effects of self-transcend media consumption and the eudaimonic media experience. Please see Appendix C for a full list of video types reported by participants in phase 1.

Respondents were asked to indicate “how often they watch animal videos on social media” with a brief explanation that stated “these might include cats or dogs being silly, people adopting or rescuing an animal, animals dubbed with a human voice, etc.” Six possible responses included “daily,” “2-3 times a week,” “about once a week,” “2-3 times a month,” “Less than once a month,” or “never.” Respondents were asked similarly designed questions about how often they see *inspirational videos*, “that might include topics such as real-world heroes, family reunions, human selflessness, the connectedness of humanity, the beauty of nature, etc.,” *call-to-action videos* “that might include topics such as people coming together for a good cause, individuals overcoming major life obstacles, people helping the homeless or neighbors, etc.,” *good deed videos* “that might include topics such as police officers saving people or children from car accidents, people helping others in tough times, being kind to the elderly, etc.,” and *funny videos* “that might include stand-up comedians whose jokes remind you of close friends, clips from childhood movies, jokes about the absurdity of life and society, children being funny or silly, etc.” The design of these questions is modeled after a scale developed by Myrick (2015) in which they explore the relationship between individual emotional regulation and social media video consumption of “feel-good” content (Myrick, 2015). Reliability of this scale was calculated with a Cronbach’s Alpha equal to .84, though in many analyses, each video type was also considered independently. Table 8 shows the frequencies of each scale item for all five self-transcendent video consumption questions.

**Table 8**  
*Self-transcendent Social Media Video Consumption frequencies*

		Animal Videos	Inspirational videos	Call-to-Action Videos	Good Deed Videos	Funny Videos
“Daily”	%	4.7	10.7	16	13.7	3

	n	(14)	(32)	(48)	(41)	(9)
"2-3 Times a week"	%	16	23.7	30.3	22	6.3
	n	(48)	(71)	(91)	(66)	(19)
"About once a week"	%	14	17	17	20.7	13
	n	(42)	(51)	(51)	(62)	(39)
"2-3 times a month"	%	11.7	16.7	16.7	22	9.7
	n	(35)	(50)	(50)	(66)	(29)
"Less than once a month"	%	27.3	22.7	16	15.3	25
	n	(82)	(68)	(48)	(46)	(75)
"Never"	%	26.3	9.3	4	6.3	43
	n	(79)	(28)	(12)	(19)	(129)
Total	%	100	100	100	100	100
	n	(300)	(300)	(300)	(300)	(300)

## Results

Table 9 shows the initial bivariate correlation tests. Not surprisingly, both the UCLA and the De Jong Gierveld scales for loneliness were significantly correlated with each other ( $r(298) = .84, p < .001$ ), as well as with social disconnectedness ( $r(298) = (.72)(.80), p < .001$ ).

**Table 9**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. De Jong Gierveld	300	37.17	9.46	—							
2. UCLA	300	42.89	12.43	.84**	—						
3. Social Disconnectedness	300	10.27	3.24	.72**	.80**	—					
4. Animal	300	4.20	1.58	0.07	.01	.00	—				
5. Inspirational	300	3.45	1.54	-0.01	.01	.06	.43**	—			
6. Call-to-action	300	2.98	1.46	0.07	.06	.03	.38**	.68**	—		

7. Good deed	300	3.22	1.46	-0.02	-.04	.07	.44**	.73**	.69**	—
8. Funny	300	4.76	1.43	-0.03	-.03	.02	.48**	.44**	.37**	.46**

Note: \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

As illustrated in Table 9, no initial significant correlations were found between target media consumption and loneliness. However, H1, which predicted that was partially supported with significant negative correlations found between feelings of loneliness and those who reported watching *animal* and *funny* social media videos more frequently, either “daily” or “2-3 times a week.” For these more frequent viewers, consuming *animal videos* was significantly negatively correlated with (UCLA) loneliness  $r(50) = -.27, p = .026$ , and consuming *funny* videos was significantly negatively correlated with (De Jong Gierveld) loneliness,  $r(50) = -.25, p = .036$ .

No initial significant correlations were found between target media consumption and Social Disconnectedness. However, H2 also partially supported with significant negative correlations were found between those who reported to frequently watch *animal* videos, either “daily” or “2-3 times a week,” and feelings social disconnectedness,  $r(50) = -.25, p = .035$ .

Race, and gender had no effect on the results of correlations between target media consumption and feelings of loneliness or social disconnected. However, age was negatively correlated with daily media usage,  $r(298) = -.36, p = <.001$ . Aligning with the literature on social media usage loneliness (Nowland et al., 2018; O’Day & Heimberg, 2021), general daily social media consumption was significantly correlated with the De Jong Gierveld scale for loneliness  $r(298) = .16, p = .003$ , and the UCLA scale for loneliness,  $r(298) = .11, p = .035$ .

## Discussion

Overall, the results show that those who watched *animal* and *funny* videos often, either daily or 2-3 times per week, felt less lonely and less socially disconnected. To understand why this was the case among only frequent viewers of animal and funny videos, a deeper look at the opposing powers of negative emotions and the eudaimonic media experience helps to understand these findings.

Loneliness can be described as a “universal experience” and a “consequence of the universal human need to belong” (Rotenberg, 1999). It might be easy to consider social disconnectedness as a similar or even coupled manifestation of that same human need. More importantly, feelings of loneliness may vary greatly in intensity dependent on whether an individual is experience chronic or temporary loneliness, and *which* stage of loneliness one may be experiencing (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). According to Rokach (1998), there are six stages of loneliness: (a) Pain and awareness, (b) denial, (c) alarm and realization, (d) searching for a cause and self-doubt, (e) acceptance, and (f) coping (Rokach, 1998). This means that accurately measuring such complex emotions with a survey—even with the most popularly used and refined scales—may be like trying to hit a moving target. The emotional ups and downs associated with the continued pandemic and COVID-19 variants adds additional difficulties when trying to measure loneliness and social disconnectedness. This issue was anticipated during research design, and an attempt to overcome this obstacle was implemented with the use multiple scales for loneliness, which might have offered a better representation of respondent’s feelings loneliness due to a method similar triangulation than the use of a single scale. Furthermore, perhaps only during certain stages of loneliness can media effects be powerful enough to influence and individual’s affective state. For instance, it might be the case that during the



*acceptance* and *coping* stages individuals become more responsive to self-transcendent media messages.

Researchers have suggested that negative emotions are simply much more powerful than positive emotions (Baumeister et al., 2001; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008; Jordan et al., 2011), and that prolonged social media usage can lead to increased feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness (Nowland et al., 2018; O'Day & Heimberg, 2021). At no point does this study, nor the theories of self-transcendent media or the eudaimonic media experience argue that social media video consumption is any sort of cure for loneliness or social disconnectedness. Rather, certain types of media can foster feelings of connectedness and relatedness among consumers that may negatively impact feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness. The partially supported hypotheses of this study might be easily explained by the sheer power of negative emotions when compared to positive emotions. Or perhaps the power of social media to generate feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness is much stronger than the power of a few select types of video content to generate feelings of connectedness and relatedness. Which could also explain why general daily social media consumption was significantly correlated with loneliness. Additionally, the power of social media to generate feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness may have been intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic when individuals were spending more time on the platform than average and feeling the emotional effects of physical isolation.

Why significant negative correlations were found only among frequent viewers of *animal* and *funny* videos needs to be examined further. It may be the case that certain types of self-transcendent social media videos are more likely to lead to a eudaimonic media experience than others. The biographic resonance element of the eudaimonic media experience theory posits that

media will impact individuals differently based on the individuals' unique biography (Klimmt & Rieger, 2021). However, this premise emphasizes the uniqueness of an individual's biography, when in reality, there are many cultural and natural tenants common to our individual biographies that tie large populations together, such as a learned love for animals as pets or the development of a certain sense of humor. This may indicate a dynamic at play between certain types of self-transcendent media that mimics the in-group/out-group identity building theory (Isaacs, 1989). According to the theory, "Humans seem to have a deep-rooted propensity to respond emotionally to symbolic representations of members of their in-group by exhibiting spontaneous joy, pride, and so on," (Ben-Ner et al., 2009). It may be the case that like the ability to generate emotional response, certain narratives are more centrally resonant and therefore self-transcend because they represent the values of larger in-groups. Meaning what media is deeply resonant and self-transcendent is contingent not only on individual biographies, but shared in-group values as well. This may provide an answer to why significant negative correlations were reported among certain types of self-transcendent social media videos and not others.

There is another influential element to consider when discussing this power dynamic of media effects and emotions. According to the literature, the eudemonic media experience is described as a "complex state of intense elaboration and mixed-affect" (Klimmt & Rieger, 2021) achieved through the consumption of self-transcendent media that "portrays fundamental life themes and the human condition" (Oliver et al., 2018). There are no defining theoretical boundaries of this "state" in terms of lasting effects. This represents another moving target. How long the feelings of connectedness, relatedness, inspiration, awe, or mixed-affect associated with the eudaimonic media experience linger makes a great deal of difference when researchers try to measure the power of these effects. Researchers have studied the lasting effects of news media

priming (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2016) and advertising (Mela, Gupta, & Lehmann, 1997), but these studies are longitudinal, and address the power of persuasion and information utility over long periods of time with repeated exposure, not temporary affective states. A smaller subset of studies that do examine media effects in terms of affective states also mainly focus on the long-term ramifications of emotional overload (e.g., Anderson & Dill, 2000; Foa & Kozak, 1986).

The findings of this thesis suggest that feelings of loneliness and social disconnectedness may be too powerful to measure against the positive media effects of a select type of social media video content. Furthermore, the effects of prolonged social media use may also be too powerful, inhibiting any discernable positive effects afforded by a select few types of video media content.

A possible limitation of this study is how self-transcendent media consumption was operationalized. Items such as asking individuals “how often they watch animal videos on social media” with a brief explanation that stated “these might include cats or dogs being silly, people adopting or rescuing an animal, animals dubbed with a human voice, etc.” may not have been effective at priming or activating memories associated with consuming self-transcendent media. It could be that the way this question is worded fell short in reminding respondents of video content they may have consumed that led to eudaimonic media experiences. It is also possible that the phrasing of these items falls short in priming respondents of the emotional state these types of videos may have fostered, which could have impacted their response to loneliness questions. Of course, it is also possible that survey research is not the most effective method to capture the phenomena studied.

One deduction based on the results of this study is that there is room for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between loneliness and social disconnectedness and media effects. More specifically, future research should examine media effects in relation to

the many stages of loneliness to determine if certain stages allow more affectual media influence than others. Another interpretation of these results states might be that there is a need for future research to examine the time boundaries of positive affective states attributed to the eudaimonic media experience and media consumption in general. Implementation of a survey to measure media effects that may not last very long, and their impact on feelings that vary from day-to-day is a serious limitation of this study. A key takeaway highlights the need for future research to methodologically expand the exploration self-transcendent media and the eudaimonic media experience.

Future research should explore self-transcendent media consumption and the eudaimonic media experience in a laboratory setting that allows experimental designs in which individuals can monitor immediate changes in affective states. This setting would also allow for psychological evaluations, biographic and personality mapping, and control of media stimuli which would greatly increase the researcher's ability to measure potential positive media effects. Future studies should also consider employing the use of fMRI imaging in order to determine if self-transcendent media consumption activates the same regions of the brain as traditional media consumption. Use of an fMRI would also allow researchers to determine if the eudaimonic media experience activates areas of the brain that are typically active when processing loneliness or depression.

This research was conducted during an interesting time in history. When data collection began in the spring of 2021, precautions to help stop the spread of COVID-19 were still prevalent. Students at universities across the United States were attending classes virtually, most restaurants still weren't allowing in-person dining, and traditional social activities were limited. Since that time, restrictions have begun to ease, and life has gradually started to return to pre-

covid normalcy. Though the concern for effects of wide-spread social isolation may be easing in the minds of psychologists, this thesis is no less relevant. Understanding the potential for positive media effects will remain an important area of study for as long as individuals are still consuming large amounts of media in their daily lives.

Phase 1 helped to provide a glimpse at what types of social media video content participants reported to be self-transcended. At the same time, this research also outlines some of the possible motivations for consuming self-transcendent social media video content. These possibilities include motivations to gather social context and make sense of the world around us, to feel connected and related when socially isolated, and to offset the affective influences of consuming scary, sad, or otherwise negative news media. Phase 2 found significant negative correlations between frequent consumption of *animal* and *funny* self-transcendent social media videos, and loneliness and social disconnectedness. Phase 2 also highlighted the fact that future research should examine self-transcendent media and the eudaimonic media experience in a controlled environment to better understand the lasting effects of the “state” of affective response hypothesized in these theories.

The central takeaway of this research is that certain social media video content can foster positive affective states for the consumer, and much more work in this area needs to be done to fully understand these media effects. Studies that explore social media effects become more important as consumers continue to spend more and more time on social media sites each year.

Appendix A  
*Interview Questions and Scales*

***Qualitative Interview Protocol with Interview Questions***

*Time of Interview:*

*Date:*

*Place:*

*Interviewer: David Peters*

*Interviewee:*

*Interview Location: Zoom*

*Recording Identification Number:*

***Interview Start Instructions:***

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Obtain informed consent and make it known that the interview is being record and how.
3. Discuss the purpose of the study.
4. Provide structure of the interview.
5. Ask if interviewee has any questions.
6. Define any terms necessary.

***Interview Content Questions (Ice breakers)***

7. How are you today?
8. Have you ever participated in a study about social media before?
9. (Various other small talk)

***Factual/Filter Questions***

10. How much time do you spend in a day watching video content on social media?
11. How often do come across a video on social media that makes you feel hopeful about the future?
12. What type of videos do you normally watch on social media?

***Demographic Questions***

13. *How old are you?*
14. What is your race?
15. What Gender do you identify as?
16. What country were you born in?
17. What is your highest level of education?
18. What is your annual income?

***Opinion Questions***

19. Can you describe a time that you've seen a video on social media that sparked big ideas about the world or society?
20. Can you tell me about any videos that you've seen on social media that remind you that there is still good in the world?
21. What kind of videos on social media make you feel moved?
22. Do you enjoy watching videos on social media that involves humans helping other humans or animals in a dangerous situation?
23. Have you ever cried after seeing a video on social media that wasn't sad or scary?
24. How would you describe the state of the world represented in videos on social media?
25. Do you believe videos exist on social media that could change a person's perspective on a subject like race or equality?
26. Can you tell me about a video that you have shared with friends or family because it made you feel good and wanted them to feel good too?
27. Can you tell me about a "feel good" video that you have shared with friends or family?
28. What have you learned about yourself from watching video content on social media?
29. Do you find more enjoyment in user-created or big budget video content on social media?
30. Do videos on social media make you "feel good" make you feel good about yourself, the world, or life in general?
31. What are some of the social media channels or pages that you subscribe to for "feel good" content?

***Probes and Follow-ups***

32. Tell me more.
33. Please explain.
34. That's very interesting, can you describe that feeling more?

***Closing Instructions***

35. Thank the individual for participating.
36. Assure individual of confidentiality.
37. If needed, request further interviews.
38. If asked, comment on how interviewee will receive results of the study.

Appendix B  
*Survey Questions*

**Demographics:**

What is your age?

(Numerical response)

What is your race?

1. Caucasian
2. African American / Black
3. Latino or Hispanic
4. Asian
5. Native American
6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
7. Two or More
8. Other / Unknown
9. Prefer not to say

What gender do you identify as?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (short answer space)
2. Prefer not to say

What country were you born in?

\_\_\_\_\_ (short answer space)

What is the highest level of education you have received?

1. Some High School
2. High School Graduate
3. Some College (no degree)
4. Associate Degree
5. Bachelor's Degree
6. Master's Degree
7. Doctorate Degree

What is your annual income level?

1. Less than 20,000
2. Between 20,000 and 40,000
3. Between 40,000 and 60,000
4. Between 60,000 and 80,000
5. Between 80,000 and 100,000
6. More than 100,000



*De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale*

Directions: Please indicate how your agreement with the following statements

<i>Statement</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>More or less</i>	<i>Yes</i>
1. I experience a general sense of emptiness	1	2	3
2. I miss having people around	1	2	3
3. Often, I feel rejected	1	2	3
4. There are plenty of people that I can lean on in case of trouble	1	2	3
5. There are many people that I can count on completely	1	2	3
6. There are enough people that I feel close to	1	2	3

*The adapted UCLA loneliness scale*

Directions: Indicate how often you feel the way described in each of the following statements.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>
1. I feel in tune with the people around me	1	2	3	4
2. I lack companionship.	1	2	3	4
3. There is no one I can turn to.	1	2	3	4
4. I do not feel alone	1	2	3	4
5. I feel part of a group of friends.	1	2	3	4
6. I have a lot in common with the people around	1	2	3	4
7. I am no longer close to anyone.	1	2	3	4
8. My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.	1	2	3	4
9. I am an outgoing person.	1	2	3	4
10. There are people that I feel close to.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel left out.	1	2	3	4
12. My social relationships are superficial	1	2	3	4
13. No one really knows me well.	1	2	3	4
14. I feel isolated from others.	1	2	3	4
15. I can find companionship when I want it.	1	2	3	4
16. There are people who really understand me.	1	2	3	4
17. I am unhappy being withdrawn.	1	2	3	4
18. People are around me but not with me.	1	2	3	4
19. There are people I can talk to.	1	2	3	4
20. There are people I can turn to.	1	2	3	4

### *Social Disconnectedness Scale*

Directions: Indicate how often you feel the way described in each of the following statements.

Statement	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	All the time
<b>Social Participation (How often do you..)</b>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attending religious services	1	2	3	4	5
2. Attending meetings of an organized group	1	2	3	4	5
3. Socializing with friends and relatives	1	2	3	4	5
4. Socializing with neighbors	1	2	3	4	5
5. Volunteering	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Social Support (How often can you..)</b>					
6. Open up to members of your	1	2	3	4	5
7. Rely on your Family Members?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Open up to your friends?	1	2	3	4	5
9. Rely on your friends?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Open up to your spouse or partner?	1	2	3	4	5
11. Rely on your spouse or partner?	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Loneliness (How often do you..)</b>					
12. Feel that you lack companionship?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Feel left out?	1	2	3	4	5
14. Feel isolated from others?	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C  
*Self-transcendent Video Types*

**Animal Videos that show:**

1. Cats or dogs being silly.
2. Animals dubbed with human voices in a funny way.
3. Animals with disabilities happily living their best life.
4. People adopting a neglected animal.
5. People rescuing animals from fires or dangerous situations.
6. How people's pets have changed their lives.

**Inspirational Videos that:**

1. Talk about the meaning of life.
2. Talk about the connectedness of humanity.
3. Include inspirational speeches about strength and perseverance.
4. Include a TedTalk about something important to you.
5. Exhibit dialogue between disjointed social groups.
6. Show the beauty of a foreign culture.
7. Discuss real-world heroes throughout history.
8. Show elderly people living their best life.
9. Show people overcoming mental or physical illness.
10. Show people creating beautiful works of art.
11. Tell of drug-addicts or alcoholics turning their life around.
12. Show Surprise family Reunions like soldiers coming home.
13. Depicting the beauty and magic of nature.
14. People giving away cars, houses, and money to families in need.

**Call-to-Action videos that show:**

1. People doing big gestures for a cause they believe in.
2. People coming together to protest a social injustice.
3. Overweight individuals losing large amounts of weight.
4. People publicly coming out about their sexuality and or trauma.
5. People who walk long distances/march for social change.
6. People helping the homeless.

**Good Deed Videos that show**

1. Police saving individuals or children from car accidents, choking, or drug overdoses.
2. Police performing CPR to save a life.
3. Police being kind to others.
4. Motorcycle gangs accompanying abused children to courts or school.

5. Non-government Organizations helping communities after natural disasters.
6. Nurses and frontline workers fighting to save lives during the COVID-19.
7. Individuals being kind to the elderly who are in need.
8. Countries sending supplies and aid to other countries in need during times of crisis.
9. Communities coming together for a good cause, like finding a lost child or supporting a family in need.
10. People caring for the earth by planting trees.
11. Teachers going above and beyond for students in need.
12. Science or new technologies being used for good.
13. People who do good things while they think nobody is watching.

**Funny videos that show**

1. Stand-up comedians whose jokes remind you of close friends.
2. Funny clips from movies that are nostalgic of your childhood.
3. Comedy videos that joke about the absurdity of life and society.
4. Children being funny (acting funny or being absurdly funny).

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## Vita

### David Peters

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**Address:** 409 N. Washington St. Carthage, NY 13619 **Website:** <https://davidpeters.love>

### Education

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Syracuse University

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Master of Arts in Media Studies

Thesis – Searching for the Good Vibes: Examining the Relationship Between Self-Transcendent Social Media and Social Isolation

GPA: 3.9//4.0

Expected Graduation: May 2022

Maryville College

Bachelor of Arts in Writing Communication

Thesis – Adverse Digestion (manuscript)

GPA: 3.8/4.0

Graduation: May 2019

Maryville College

Bachelor of Arts in Design

Thesis – Adverse Digestion (magazine design)

GPA: 3.8/4.0

Graduation: Dec 2019

### Research Interests

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Media Effects

The Eudaimonic Media Experience

Self-Transcendent Social Media

Media Psychology

Media Sociology

Media and Diversity Issues

Cognitive Architectures

Performative Diversity

Media and Popular Culture

### Teaching Interests

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Media Effects

Media Sociology

Communication Theory

Theory of Advertising  
Design

Social Media Marketing

Ethics of Marketing and  
Design

## Research Experience

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Newhouse School of Public Communications, June 2021 – present

*Research Assistant, Dr. Carol Liebler*

- Collected, organized, and coded large datasets for various research projects.
- Used SPSS to run statical analyses.
- Built and organized data tables for research manuscripts.
- Co-authored paper on missing children representation in the news media.

Newhouse School of Public Communications, August 2021 – present

*Research Assistant, Tully Center for Free Speech*

- Maintained the center’s social media accounts
- Promoted special events sponsored by the Tully Center
- Participated in legal research focused on free speech issues
- Assisted the center’s director in researching and selecting the recipient of the annual Tully award.

Newhouse School of Public Communications, July 2021 – August 2021

*Research Assistant – ‘Cuse Grant - Dr. Kyla Garrett-Wagner and Dr. Rebecca Ortiz*

- Researched public health messaging pertaining to sex and COVID-19.
- Developed strategies and processes to collect data.
- Compiled all health messaging documents pertaining to sex and COVID-19 throughout all 50 states.

## Teaching Experience

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Newhouse School of Public Communications, January 2021 – May 2021

*Instructional Assistant, Dr. Brad Gorham, Communications and Society*

- Assisted with all class functions.
- Graded exams and writing assignment.
- Hold office hours to work individually with students.
- Keep track of attendance and classroom management, specifically related to university COVID-19 protocols.

## Professional Experience

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714Web, Knoxville, August 2015 – Present (as needed per contract while in school)

*Marketing, design, and copy manager*

- Provided copy, content, and technical writing for client projects
- Conducted marketing research for client projects
- Worked directly with clients to create and maintain company identity and branding solutions
- Created logo and graphics for web and social media
- Managed the storage and archival of all assets created by vendors for clients

Maryville College, August 2017 – May 2019

*Editor-in-Chief, The Highland Echo newspaper*

- Coordinated between department editors regarding content, creation, and distribution of the paper.
- Final review of all content before print.
- Recruited and hired all staff.
- Trained new department heads regarding policy and protocol.

Northwest Athletics Advertising, Seattle, August 2010 – 2015

*General manager, sales department*

- Coordinated with graphic and billing departments to serve clients.
- Managed staffing of 25 sales agents.
- Trained sales staff on sales techniques and company policies.
- Continually exceeded monthly sales quotas.
- Directly contributed to the company's overall growth and expansion.

Bay Ridge Toyota, Bay Ridge Brooklyn, August 2007– 2009

*Online advertising, early social media marketing*

- Provided copy, content, and technical writing for client projects
- Conducted marketing research for client projects
- Worked directly with clients to create and maintain company identity and branding solutions
- Created logo and graphics for web and social media
- Managed the storage and archival of all assets created by vendors for clients

## **Research in Review**

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**Peters, D.**, Searching for the Good Vibes: Self-Transcendent Video Content on Facebook and the Eudaimonic Media Experience

*(Submitted to ICA Conference November 2021)*

Liebler, C., **Peters, D.**, Powers, A., Policing the media agenda: News sources and missing children

*(Submitted to ICA Conference November 2021)*

## **Research in Process**

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**Peters, D.**, Searching for the Good Vibes: Examining the Relationship Between Self-Transcendent Social Media and Social Isolation (*Graduate Thesis*)

**Peters, D.**, Powers, A., Exploring Motivations According to Age for Social Sharing Political News on Social Media (*Conference Submission AEJMC 2022*)

## **Leadership/Volunteer**

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*Vice President, AIGA (Maryville Chapter)* May 2018—December 2019

*Board Member, Student philanthropy Advisory Board (Maryville College)* May 2018—May 2019

*Department Chair, Study Abroad Ambassadors (Maryville College Chapter)* May 2017—May 2019

*Food Distribution Coordinator, North Seattle Food Helpline* August 2016—January 2017

*Mentor, Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization* April 2014—October 2016

## **Awards**

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**David Rubin 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Prize** *for demonstrating understanding, support, or defense of the First Amendment* (2022)

**Exemplary Thesis (Maryville College)** <https://indd.adobe.com/view/980b44fe-bb60-4554-90ca-84d747c0c9dd> (2019)

**The Clark Family Prize** *for excellence in artistic achievement in Graphic Design* (2019)

**Charlotte Cook Hensley Memorial Award** *for outstanding academic achievement and significant involvement on the staff of The Highland Echo campus newspaper.* (2018)

## **Additional Skills**

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**Research:** Qualitative and Quantitative research methods, Nvivo, SPSS, R studio, database optimization, Endnote, MaxQDA, Zotero

**Design:** Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, Lightroom, CRM Portal creation, WordPress, Microsoft Office suite

**Social Media:** Google AdWords certified, Facebook advertising, Pinterest business account management, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter business account management



## **Relevant Media Studies Course Work**

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**Communications Theory** – Dr. Brad Gorham

**Quantitative Research Methods** – Dr. Kyla  
Garrett Wagner

**Qualitative Research Methods** – Dr. Carol  
Liebler

**Theories of Media Content** – Dr. Carol  
Liebler

**Media Law** – Professor Roy Gutterman

**Research Project Design** – Dr. Brad Gorham

**Media and Diversity** – Dr. Carol Liebler

**Media and Elections** – Dr. Lars Willnat

**Ethics of Emerging Technology** – Dr.  
Johannes Himmelreich

**Advanced Cognitive Psychology** – Dr. Lael  
Schooler

