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# Feels like Coming Home: Effects of Heimat Associations in Television Programs on Social Identity, Sense of Heimat, and Eudaimonic Entertainment Experience

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## ABSTRACT

Television programs with an emphasis on regional and familiar aspects related to individuals' cultural social identity can evoke Heimat associations and convey a sense of Heimat. Following a preliminary study ( $N = 100$ ) to develop an instrument to measure the sense of Heimat, a first experiment ( $N = 169$ ) found significant effects of Heimat associations in a television program on television viewers' Heimat-related social identity and, in turn, their sense of Heimat and eudaimonic entertainment experience. A second experiment in another region with a different sample ( $N = 147$ ) replicated these findings.

Globalization, digitalization, natural disasters, climate change, louder calls for professional flexibility and mobility, and – as if these shifts were not enough – a pandemic: Living in the 21st century not only offers diverse opportunities but also presents significant insecurities and psychological distress (e.g., Berman et al., 2014; Zeike et al., 2019). When individuals are confronted with an aversive feeling such as insecurity, they usually use specific strategies to cope with that feeling (McCrae & Costa, 1986). In the case of insecurity, an intuitive coping strategy is turning to things that stand for familiarity, attachment, and safety. Reflecting this reality, it is not surprising that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people in Italy (a nation hit particularly hard by the disease) increasingly searched for comfort in religion

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(Molteni et al., 2020). However, the need for familiarity, attachment, and safety is not served only by religion. The media industry also identified these needs and reacted with an enhanced airing of “*Heimat*-related” television programs (cf., Schramm et al., 2022). *Heimat*<sup>1</sup> is a German concept that translates directly as “home” but stands for more: the people one loves and likes, landscapes, languages or dialects, traditions and customs, and feelings of security and safety (cf., Schröter, 2016). *Heimat*-related television programs emphasize familiar and in most cases regional or national aspects related to individuals’ cultural and social identity that can evoke *Heimat* associations; they convey a good feeling – the feeling of home or, more precisely, the sense of *Heimat* (cf., Schramm et al., 2022).

The assumption that entertaining media content can elicit more than “just” pleasure is not new. Particularly during the last 15 years, research on entertainment media has increasingly extended its focus, from originally investigating media effects on mood improvement (cf., Zillmann, 1988) to incorporating a eudaimonic perspective by including more meaningful entertainment experiences (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Reinecke et al., 2012; Schramm & Wirth, 2008; Wirth et al., 2012). Given the nature of entertaining television programs that can evoke associations with one’s *Heimat*, it is plausible that, in addition to conveying feelings related to *Heimat* such as familiarity, safety, and belonging (cf., Schramm et al., 2022), these programs are also able to trigger eudaimonic experiences through elements such as social relatedness, the activation of central values, and purpose in life/self-acceptance (Wirth et al., 2012). Despite this potential and the growing presence of such elements in the media landscape, they have not yet been investigated empirically.

In this article, we aim to close this research gap by investigating the impact of *Heimat* associations in entertainment television programs on sense of *Heimat* and on eudaimonic entertainment experience. In the following section, we provide a more detailed introduction to the concept of *Heimat* and, more specifically, sense of *Heimat*. Next, we lay out our argument regarding the influence of *Heimat* associations in television programs on the salience of one’s *Heimat*-related social identity, as well as the implications of enhanced *Heimat*-related social identity for sense of *Heimat* and eudaimonic entertainment experience. We then describe a preliminary study conducted to develop a measure of sense of *Heimat*, before testing our hypotheses using a two-level experimental study (Study 1). We also describe the replication of Study 1 in another setting (Study 2), conducted to increase the explanatory power of this research. To conclude, we discuss the implications and limitations of our findings and offer suggestions for how future

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<sup>1</sup>As there is no equivalent to the German concept in English or in any other Latin-based or Eastern language, in line with Ratter and Gee (2012), we use the German term “*Heimat*” throughout the article.

studies can incorporate the concept of Heimat in research on media effects in general and on the entertainment experience in particular.

## Theoretical Background

### *Heimat – Definition and Clarification of the Concept*

The concept of “Heimat” has a long tradition stretching back to the early Middle Ages, when the term already stood for a homey, comfortable, and peaceful place (cf., Heller & Narr, 2011). Today, the word is still frequently used in the German language and is associated with positive connotations for many people of different ages, genders, and educational levels (e.g., the hashtag “#Heimat” was found on more than 3.3 million Instagram posts as of January 2022). However, diversity is found in the contextual use of the term “Heimat” (cf., Schröter, 2016). Whereas many people recall their birthplace or the place where they grew up when they think of their Heimat, others consider their current residence as Heimat, although this place may be located far away from their place of origin (cf., Mitzscherlich, 1997). Moreover, depending on a person’s perspective, they can use the term Heimat to describe a district, a whole region, or even an entire country (cf., Schramm et al., 2022).

Heimat, as a place to which one feels attached or where one has spent part of their life, also has an emotional component – *Heimatgefühl*, or sense of Heimat. Following Schramm et al.’s (2022) definition, sense of Heimat is a complex emotional construct that manifests itself predominantly through positive feelings of belonging, security, safety, and/or familiarity, with these feelings being triggered by different spatiotemporal and/or sociocultural associations with one’s Heimat. Such spatiotemporal associations encompass associations with a place of origin and its geographical surroundings (e.g., specific landscapes) and usually – but not always – refer to the childhood family environment (cf., Boltz, 2008). Sociocultural associations are associations with the culture of one’s Heimat, such as the spoken language, traditions, and lifestyle, as well as associations with social aspects such as involvement in relationships or communities. In line with this, cultural and political-ideological elements, including norms and values, are also sociocultural associations that add to the sense of Heimat. These spatiotemporal and sociocultural associations with Heimat are generally positive, but this is not necessarily the case (e.g., when someone has lost their Heimat because of war; Mitzscherlich, 1997); thus, although sense of Heimat has predominantly positive connotations, mixed or negative feelings are also possible. Based on individual experiences, bittersweet feelings of nostalgia might also arise as a consequence of Heimat associations, although Heimat and nostalgia differ in temporal orientation. Whereas nostalgia is understood

as “emotion that is elicited by remembering or re-experiencing media content and technologies from the past” (Wulf et al., 2018, p. 70), Heimat associations can also refer to contemporary elements. Furthermore, nostalgia-evoking stimuli (e.g., a movie set in the Middle Ages) do not necessarily have to be connected to spatiotemporal or sociocultural Heimat associations or to personal experiences (i.e., historical nostalgia; Natterer, 2014).

In conclusion, sense of Heimat is a complex construction of predominantly positive emotions that are triggered by spatiotemporal and socio-cultural associations with a place to which one feels a special connection or, more precisely, a place that one perceives as home. Although related concepts exist in the international literature in the form of place identity (e.g., Proshansky et al., 1983), place attachment (e.g., Lewicka, 2011), and sense of place (e.g., Williams & Stewart, 1998), sense of Heimat is distinct because it is the only concept that includes long-term connection to a place and individual social experiences generated in that place (cf., Ratter & Gee, 2012; Schramm et al., 2022).

### ***Salience of Heimat-Related Identity as a Predictor of Sense of Heimat***

Although one may feel deeply connected to one’s Heimat in general, sense of Heimat (as a state) can vary greatly depending on how salient Heimat is at a certain moment (cf., Schramm et al., 2022). Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987), which was developed within the scope of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), offers an explanation for this. An individual’s identity is a complex construct, and an essential part of this identity is shaped by affiliations to different social groups (Tajfel, 1979). Thus, an individual usually belongs not only to one group but to multiple groups at the same time. A young American woman who recently graduated from college, for example, might simultaneously feel that she is part of the following groups: *women*, *Americans*, *young adults*, and *novice workers*. Notably, her affiliations to these groups are not always present and relevant at an equal level (Turner, 1987). She sometimes identifies more as a young adult (e.g., when she moves into her first apartment on her own); at other times, she predominantly identifies as an American (e.g., when she travels to Europe). The group affiliation that is the most salient for an individual at a certain moment has the greatest impact on that individual’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior (cf., Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Reflecting this reality, sense of Heimat, as a feeling that a person experiences, should be particularly relevant when an individual’s Heimat-related social identity is salient.

The salience of a social identity can be triggered by diverse factors (e.g., Haslam et al., 1999; McLeish & Oxoby, 2011), including media content (Reid et al., 2004). For instance, Trepte (2004) argues that television content primes the salience of a social category, which, in turn, may enhance social

comparison processes (for an English summary, see, Trepte, 2006). Furthermore, the accessibility of a particular social identity can be enhanced if it is activated regularly (Hornsey, 2008), and the salience of an individual's Heimat-related social identity should be increased if Heimat-related associations, such as landscapes, dialects, or traditions, are generated by media content. As the presentation of elements such as landscapes, dialects, traditions, and lifestyles is very common in certain television programs (cf., Schramm et al., 2022), these programs should be particularly prone to trigger the salience of Heimat-related social identity in an individual – if the program presents the specific Heimat of this individual. With the repeated consumption of Heimat-related media forms, the media user's Heimat-related social identity should become more pronounced and more easily activated. However, different media formats that include Heimat associations should not be expected to have the same impact on everyone. Watching the New York St. Patrick's Day Parade on television can be expected to enhance the salience of Heimat-related social identity for someone who understands New York as their Heimat, whereas watching the television series *Hart of Dixie*, which is set in a small town in Alabama, should enhance the salience of Heimat-related social identity for someone who locates their Heimat in Alabama.

To summarize briefly, we assume a television program that presents an individual's Heimat or reminds an individual of their Heimat will enhance this individual's Heimat-related social identity. Reflecting the reality that a salient social identity shapes the way an individual processes information and reacts emotionally (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; McLeish & Oxoby, 2011), a salient Heimat-related social identity in an individual should enhance this individual's sense of Heimat. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1A: Sense of Heimat is stronger in individuals after watching a television program with associations to their Heimat than after watching a similar television program without associations to their Heimat.

H1B: The effect of a stronger sense of Heimat when watching a television program with associations to one's Heimat is mediated by enhanced salience of Heimat-related social identity.

### ***Implications of Television Programs with Heimat Associations for an Individual's Eudaimonic Entertainment Experience***

In addition to the mainly positive affect associated with sense of Heimat, research on media effects increasingly incorporates more meaningful eudaimonic entertainment experiences (Bartsch et al., 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Wirth et al., 2012). Wirth et al. (2012) created a differentiated and detailed description of the eudaimonic entertainment experience. They described it as

meaningful affect generated by media content through addressing the purpose of life or self-acceptance; conveying feelings of autonomy, competence/personal growth, or relatedness; and activating central values. It is especially important to analyze which types of media forms are able to elicit high levels of eudaimonic entertainment experience and for whom this is the case, as individuals have reported improved psychological well-being as a consequence of these experiences (Rieger et al., 2014). Earlier research has connected eudaimonic entertainment experiences to several different elements of psychological well-being, such as higher levels of media-induced recovery and vitality (Rieger et al., 2014), as well as the facilitation of coping abilities (Rieger & Hofer, 2017).

Eudaimonic experiences – such as feeling connected to others, having close social relationships, finding life meaningful, and living according to central, personally relevant values – are primarily socialized during childhood and early life, which explains why they are strongly linked to Heimat-related social identity for many people (Mitzscherlich, 1997). The activation of one's Heimat-related social identity is based partly on sociocultural associations with one's Heimat that include people to whom one feels related, norms and values, traditions, and lifestyles (cf., Schramm et al., 2022). These associations resemble meaningful media experiences, as defined by Wirth et al. (2012). Accordingly, we postulate that watching a television program with associations to one's Heimat increases not only an individual's sense of Heimat but also their eudaimonic entertainment experience by enhancing the salience of one's Heimat-related social identity.

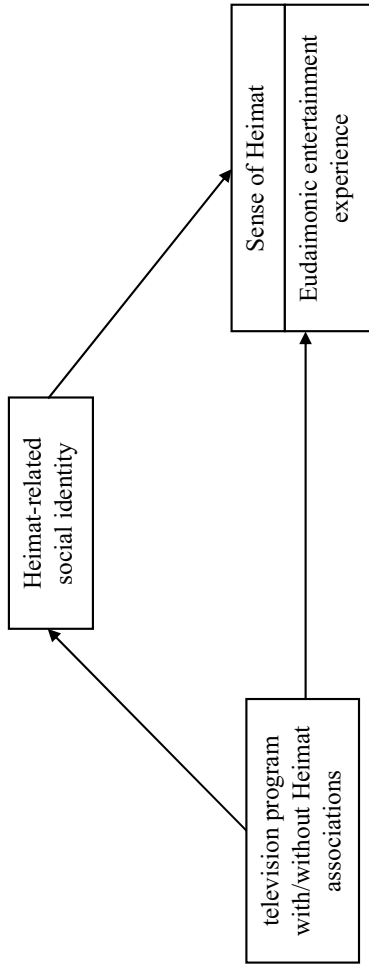
H2A: Individuals have a stronger eudaimonic entertainment experience after watching a television program with associations to their Heimat than after watching a similar television program without associations to their Heimat.

H2B: The effect of a stronger eudaimonic entertainment experience when watching a television program with associations to one's Heimat is mediated by the enhanced salience of Heimat-related social identity.

All hypotheses are summarized in [Figure 1](#).

## **Preliminary Study**

To test our assumptions empirically, measuring a person's sense of Heimat is of central concern. However, no such measurement has previously been developed. To fill this research gap, we conducted a preliminary study focusing on the measurement of sense of Heimat.



**Figure 1.** Predicted influence of television programs with Heimat associations on sense of Heimat and eudaimonic entertainment experience, mediated by Heimat-related social identity.



## Method

### Design and Procedure

As we wanted to take a broad foundation when operationalizing sense of Heimat in our preliminary study, we conducted an online survey with a combination of qualitative and quantitative elements. After an introduction during which the participants gave informed consent to take part in the study, we asked them to indicate their feelings associated with their Heimat. The participants responded to this open question by typing different feelings that came into their minds in a text box. Each participant decided how many feelings they wanted to list in this text box.

After the participants had indicated their feelings associated with their Heimat, we presented them with a spectrum of 34 different emotions and asked them to rate how much they experienced each emotion when thinking of their Heimat on a five-point Likert-type scale. Examples of these emotions are “longing,” “affection,” and “anxiety” (see, [Table 1](#) for all emotions presented). To present a broad range of possible emotional associations with Heimat, we included both negative and positive emotions. This approach was based on the Emotion Scales EMO 16 (Schmidt-Atzert & Hüppe, 1996) and the Early Memories of Warmth and Safeness Scale (Richter et al., 2009). We also added several emotions drawn from Mitzscherlich’s (1997) previous research on Heimat and sense of Heimat.

### Participants

The participants in the preliminary study were recruited via social media and e-mail using snowball sampling. This resulted in a final sample of 100 participants. The gender ratio of the participants was balanced (50% women), and the mean age of the final sample was 42.19 ( $SD = 17.74$ ) years, with a range of 16–84 years. With regard to the educational level of the participants, 28 had a college degree, and the other participants had lower levels of education. Although this was a convenience sample (as is evident from the recruiting method), the demographic characteristics of the participants indicate a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, and educational level.

## Results

When they were asked to freely list feelings that they associated with their Heimat, the participants indicated a great number of emotions. Emotional security ( $n = 57$ ), joy ( $n = 57$ ), and comfort ( $n = 22$ ) were the most frequently mentioned emotions. In the subsequent rating of the predefined listed emotions, participants assigned the highest scores to familiarity ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ), emotional security ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), the feeling of being in good hands ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ), and warmth ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). To create

**Table 1.** Emotions rated with regard to sense of Heimat.

Emotion	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Was the emotion listed independently from the participants?
<b>Affection</b>	<b>4.29 (0.94)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Anger	1.72 (0.81)	no
Anxiety	1.60 (0.97)	yes
Appreciation	4.20 (0.77)	no
Arousal	2.24 (1.14)	no
Attachment	4.31 (0.90)	no
Aversion	1.23 (0.57)	no
<b>Belonging</b>	<b>4.39 (0.79)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Boredom	1.71 (1.05)	no
Care	4.14 (0.89)	no
<b>Comfortable feeling</b>	<b>4.49 (0.66)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Consolation	3.75 (1.14)	no
<b>Emotional security</b>	<b>4.63 (0.69)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Empathy	3.40 (1.18)	no
Envy	1.49 (0.89)	no
<b>Familiarity</b>	<b>4.84 (0.40)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Feeling to be in good hands	4.61 (0.57)	no
Guilt	1.32 (0.63)	no
<b>Happiness</b>	<b>4.38 (0.78)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Informality	3.98 (0.93)	no
<b>Joy</b>	<b>4.44 (0.73)</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Longing</b>	<b>3.61 (1.15)</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Proudness</b>	<b>3.79 (1.26)</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Quietness</b>	<b>3.94 (0.92)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Reliability	4.17 (0.78)	no
Restlessness	1.56 (0.82)	no
Sadness	2.16 (1.10)	yes
<b>Safety</b>	<b>4.50 (0.70)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Shame	1.36 (0.76)	no
<b>Solidarity</b>	<b>4.46 (0.67)</b>	<b>yes</b>
Support	4.05 (1.00)	no
Surprise	2.51 (1.11)	no
Understanding	3.86 (0.92)	no
<b>Warmth</b>	<b>4.61 (0.67)</b>	<b>yes</b>

Note: Items that were included in the final measurement based on the selection criteria ( $M > 3.00$  and listed independently) are presented in bold.

a measurement of the sense of Heimat that was sufficiently wide but not disproportionately extensive, we used the overlap of the emotions that were freely listed and those with above-average ratings ( $M > 3.00$ ; see, Table 1) in creating our measurement instrument.

After using this approach to identify 13 emotions that reflect sense of Heimat, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis to investigate underlying subdimensions. We performed a principal axis factor analysis on the 13 items using oblique rotation (direct oblimin). All Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) values for individual items were 0.63 or greater, which is above the acceptable limit of 0.50 (Field, 2013), and the sampling for the analysis was adequate, as verified by the KMO value of 0.82 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). The analysis revealed three factors with an eigenvalue over 1.00 (Kaiser’s

criterion), with one factor being more dominant (eigenvalue<sub>1</sub> = 4.91) than the other two factors (eigenvalue<sub>2</sub> = 1.19; eigenvalue<sub>3</sub> = 1.07). The scree plot was ambiguous, and its inflections justified retaining only one rather than three factors (especially as the second and third factors, with eigenvalues near 1, explained only a little more than a single variable). As the one-factor solution matched our understanding of sense of Heimat well, we decided to view sense of Heimat as a unidimensional construct. On the basis of the findings of our preliminary study, we viewed sense of Heimat as a construct reflected by longing, joy, proudness, safety, warmth, comfort, quietness, affection, belonging, happiness, solidarity, familiarity, and emotional security in our subsequent studies.

## **Study 1**

### **Method**

#### ***Design and Materials***

To test the hypotheses, an initial experimental study was conducted. The aim of this study was to examine the effects of television programs that include spatiotemporal and sociocultural Heimat associations on Heimat-related social identity, sense of Heimat, and eudaimonic entertainment experience. An online experiment with a two-level between-subjects experimental design was implemented, and the Heimat reference was varied by showing one of two videos. Two episodes of the German travel documentary “Wunderschön” [“Beautiful”] were chosen as the experimental stimuli and were edited by the researchers to ensure similar episode length. One episode presented the Franconia region of Bavaria (southern Germany; 40 minutes), and the comparison stimulus featured the Rhineland region of Germany (central Germany; 45 minutes). A presenter traveling through each region narrated the episodes. Both videos included landscape shots, depicted the lifestyle of residents, and featured social interactions, which were partially set in a traditional and cultural context. Some scenes also related to environmental issues, economic challenges, and social changes that are increasingly faced by residents of these regions. Thus, the episodes included spatiotemporal and sociocultural elements. Because only participants who considered Franconia to be their Heimat were allowed to participate in the study, the Franconia episode included notably more Heimat associations than the Rhineland episode.

#### ***Procedure***

Participants were recruited by an advertisement that promised €10 in exchange for participating in a scientific study lasting about 75 minutes. Diverse media channels, such as social media, online portals, and an online

panel (SoSci Panel; Leiner, 2016), were used to reach a heterogeneous sample. After a participant clicked on the link that was displayed in the advertisements, a first questionnaire was presented, asking about their demographic characteristics to screen the participants for age, gender, and level of education. The recruitment process aimed to achieve a balance of these characteristics. Furthermore, the participants were asked about their Heimat, and only those who perceived their Heimat to be Franconia were allowed to take part in the study. A follow-up e-mail that included a link to the main study was sent to those who passed the screening process.

After the participants accepted the invitation and gave informed consent, they answered additional questions regarding their demographic characteristics. They were then randomly assigned to watch either the Franconia or the Rhineland episode of “Wunderschön.” Immediately after watching this program, the participants were asked to answer three content questions that covered different parts of the episode they had viewed; to ensure that all participants watched the episode attentively, they were only allowed to participate further if they answered these questions correctly. The participants then indicated their sense of Heimat, level of Heimat-related social identity, and eudaimonic entertainment experience. Finally, they were asked about their previous Heimat-related media consumption so this information could be included as a potential covariate in our analyses.

### *Measurement<sup>2</sup>*

Five-point Likert-type scales were used in the questionnaire. Sense of Heimat was measured by 13 items (e.g., “belonging,” “warmth,” “familiarity”) from the scale constructed in our preliminary study (see, Table 1). To measure Heimat-related social identity concerning place (e.g., “While watching the episode, I had the feeling that my Heimat and the surrounding landscapes are a part of me”), traditions (e.g., “I felt strongly connected to the traditions of my Heimat while watching the episode”), and people (e.g., “While watching the episode, I strongly identified with the people who live in my Heimat”), we used four items for each subdimension, resulting in a total of 12 items (see, Table 2). The social identity scale was constructed by the authors and based on Williams and Vaske’s (2003) Place Identity Scale. Eudaimonic entertainment experiences were measured using 15 items (see, Table 2) from a scale developed by Wirth et al. (2012; e.g., “I have a good feeling because the film made me reflect on myself and my life,” “Altogether, I feel good because the people acted in a responsible way during the film,”

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<sup>2</sup>In the first draft of this manuscript, positive and negative affect, measured using the PANAS scale (Krohne et al., 1996), were also included as dependent variables. After conducting the factor analysis, we found that our sense of Heimat measurement was confounded with positive affect. To avoid reporting confounded findings, we decided to exclude participant’s positive and negative affect from this manuscript.

and “I feel good because this film has helped me to accept myself and my life”). To assess the participants’ previous Heimat-related media consumption, we asked how many days per week they usually watched Heimat-related media offerings, on average ( $M = 1.46$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ). Finally, a treatment check was conducted at the end of the questionnaire by asking participants how much the episode illustrated their Heimat in terms of places, traditions, and people (three items;  $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ).

To ensure that the three variables of interest (Heimat-related social identity, sense of Heimat, and eudaimonic entertainment experience) represented three distinct factors, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring. Bartlett’s test ( $\chi^2(780) = 5958.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO = .940$ ) confirmed that the variables were fit to conduct a factor analysis (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). As the dependent variables were expected to correlate with one another, an oblique rotation method was used. Although the analysis revealed six factors with an eigenvalue over 1.00 (Kaiser’s criterion;  $eigenvalue_1 = 18.91$ ;  $eigenvalue_2 = 3.49$ ;  $eigenvalue_3 = 2.10$ ;  $eigenvalue_4 = 1.50$ ;  $eigenvalue_5 = 1.19$ ;  $eigenvalue_6 = 1.00$ ), based on the scree plot, a three-factor solution that could explain 61.23% of the variance<sup>3</sup> was chosen. After dropping three cross-loaded items from the analysis, the final factor solution yielded three factors (see, Table 2), namely “sense of Heimat” ( $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ; 13 items), “Heimat-related social identity” ( $\alpha = .96$ ;  $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ; 12 items), and “eudaimonic entertainment experience” ( $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ; 12 items).

### Participants

The original sample consisted of 187 volunteers who perceived Franconia as their Heimat, passed the pre-screening, correctly answered the three control questions, and completed the questionnaire. However, several of these participants had to be excluded because of low levels of subjective attention ( $< 4$  on a five-point Likert-type scale;  $n = 6$ ) or unrealistic processing times ( $n = 12$ ). The final sample consisted of 169 participants. With a mean age of 38.43 ( $SD = 13.23$ ) years and with 50.9% women, the sample can be considered heterogeneous and well balanced. About half of the sample (50.9%) had received at least a high school diploma as their highest level of education, and the other half of the sample (49.1%) had lower levels of education. Some participants did not usually consume Heimat-related media offerings ( $n = 58$ ), and others indicated that they liked to watch Heimat-related programs once ( $n = 63$ ), twice ( $n = 21$ ), three times ( $n = 5$ ), or at least four times ( $n = 22$ ) per week, on average. The appropriate tests indicated no differences between the two

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<sup>3</sup>First, considering that a factor with an eigenvalue of 1 does not explain more than a single variable, we strived to exclude factors with eigenvalues near 1 and to include factors with eigenvalues near 2 or higher. Second, we aimed to include the same factors in Study 1 and Study 2.

**Table 2.** Study 1 and Study 2: Exploratory factor analysis.

Measurement items		Factors					
		Study 1			Study 2		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>						
<b>Sense of Heimat</b> (based on the preliminary study reported in this paper)							
Affection	Liebe	.638			.738		
Belonging	Zugehörigkeit	.606	-.325		.769	-.321	
Comfortable feeling	Wohlbehagen	.777			.811		
Emotional security	Geborgenheit	.723			.783		
Familiarity	Vertrautheit	.671			.782		
Happiness	Freude	.608			.650		
Joy	Glück	.735			.767		
Longing	Sehnsucht	.627			.492		
Proudness	Stolz	.633			.445		
Quietness	Geruhsamkeit	.456			.548		
Safety	Sicherheit	.736			.583		
Solidarity	Verbundenheit	.626			.779		
Warmth	Wärme	.692			.634		
<b>Social Identity</b> (items based on Williams & Vaske, 2003)							
While watching the episode, I had the feeling that my Heimat and the surrounding landscapes are a part of me.	Ich hatte während der Sendung das Gefühl, dass meine Heimatregion ein Teil von mir ist.			-.777			-.782
While watching the episode, I strongly identified with my Heimat and the surrounding landscape.	Meine Heimatregion war mir während der Sendung besonders wichtig.			-.814			-.862
I felt strongly connected to my Heimat and the surrounding landscapes while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung stark mit meiner Heimatregion identifiziert.			-.843			-.871
My Heimat and the surrounding landscapes were especially important to me while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung emotional sehr stark mit meiner Heimatregion verbunden gefühlt.			-.763			-.813
While watching the episode, I had the feeling that the traditions of my Heimat are a part of me.	Ich hatte während der Sendung das Gefühl, dass die Traditionen meiner Heimat ein Teil von mir sind.			-.797			-.846
While watching the episode, I strongly identified with the traditions of my Heimat.	Die Traditionen meiner Heimat waren mir während der Sendung besonders wichtig.			-.857			-.810
I felt strongly connected to the traditions of my Heimat while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung stark mit den Traditionen meiner Heimat identifiziert.			-.828			-.870

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (Continued).

Measurement items		Factors					
		Study 1			Study 2		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>						
The traditions of my Heimat were especially important to me while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung emotional sehr stark mit den Traditionen meiner Heimat verbunden gefühlt.			-.858			-.857
<b>Social Identity</b> (items based on Williams & Vaske, 2003)							
While watching the episode, I had the feeling that the people who live in my Heimat are a part of me.	Ich hatte während der Sendung das Gefühl, dass die Personen, die in meiner Heimat wohnen, ein Teil von mir sind.			-.807			-.757
While watching the episode, I strongly identified the people who live in my Heimat.	Die Personen, die in meiner Heimat wohnen, waren mir während der Sendung besonders wichtig.			-.762			-.773
I felt strongly connected to the people who live in my Heimat while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung stark mit den Personen, die in meiner Heimat wohnen, identifiziert.			-.839			-.761
The people who live in my Heimat were especially important to me while watching the episode.	Ich habe mich während der Sendung emotional sehr stark mit den Personen, die in meiner Heimat wohnen, verbunden gefühlt.			-.804			-.797
<b>Eudaimonic entertainment experience</b> (Wirth et al., 2012)							
I feel good because now that I have seen this film I recognize my life as fulfilled and meaningful.	Ich fühle mich gut, da ich nach dem Schauen der Sendung wieder erkennen kann, wie erfüllt und sinnvoll mein eigenes Leben ist.			.455			.670
I feel good because this film has helped me to accept myself and my life.	Ich fühle mich gut, da die Sendung mir geholfen hat, mich selbst und mein Leben besser zu akzeptieren.			.596			.632
I feel good because now that I have seen this film I feel that I am in charge of my own life.	Ich fühle mich gut, da ich nach dem Schauen der Sendung das Gefühl habe, mein Leben im Griff zu haben.			.532			.711
The film leaves me in a good mood because I became aware of the fact that I am in charge of my own life.	Die Sendung hinterlässt bei mir positive Gefühle, weil mir bewusst geworden ist, wie sehr ich selbst über mein Leben bestimmen kann.			.529			.813

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (Continued).

Measurement items		Factors					
		Study 1			Study 2		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>						
The film leaves me in a good mood because I realized that I am free and independent.	Die Sendung hinterlässt bei mir positive Gefühle, weil mir bewusst geworden ist, dass ich frei und unabhängig bin.			.612			.794
I have a good feeling because the film has made me reflect on myself and my life.	Ich fühle mich gut, da mich die Sendung zum Nachdenken gebracht hat und ich mir so Gedanken über mich und mein Leben mache.			.524			.654
It felt good and right to feel empathy for the people during the film.	Es fühlte sich gut und richtig an, während der Sendung so viel Mitgefühl für die Menschen in der Sendung zu verspüren.			.769			.672
It felt good to feel compassion for the people during the film.	Es hat mir gutgetan, während der Sendung mit den Menschen in der Sendung mitzufühlen.			.663			.660
Precisely because the film was so distressing I had the feeling that the film delivered central values of life in an authentic way.	Ich hatte das Gefühl, dass die Sendung auf sehr glaubwürdige Art und Weise wichtige und zentrale Werte im Leben vermittelt.			.706			.708
Altogether, I feel good because the people acted in a responsible way during the film.	Insgesamt verspüre ich ein gutes Gefühl, da die Menschen in der Sendung auf vorbildliche Art und Weise gehandelt haben.			.924			.776
It makes me feel good to see that the people in the film deal with their lives' trials and difficulties in an exemplary manner.	Es gibt mir ein gutes Gefühl zu sehen, wie vorbildlich die Menschen in der Sendung mit ihrer Lebenssituation umgehen.			.823			.716
I have a good feeling because the film has shown me how content I can be with my own life.	Ich fühle mich gut, da die Sendung mir gezeigt hat, wie zufrieden ich mit mir und meinem Leben doch eigentlich sein kann.					-. <sup>a</sup>	.702
It felt good to be captivated by the events around the people during the film.	Es war ein gutes Gefühl, während der Sendung ganz bei den Geschehnissen um die Menschen in der Sendung zu sein.			.732			-. <sup>b</sup>

(Continued)



**Table 2.** (Continued).

Measurement items		Factors					
		Study 1			Study 2		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>						
I have a good feeling because the emotions that I felt during the film challenged me in a positive way.	Ich habe ein gutes Gefühl, weil die Emotionen, die ich in der Sendung verspürte, mich auf eine positive Weise herausgefordert haben.			.. <sup>a</sup>			.. <sup>b</sup>
It felt good to expose myself to the theme of the Film.	Es hat mir gutgetan, mich mit der Thematik der Sendung auseinanderzusetzen.			.. <sup>a</sup>			.. <sup>b</sup>

Note: Pattern matrix; <sup>ab</sup>Three items that loaded on two factors were removed from the eudaimonic entertainment experience in the first<sup>a</sup> and the second<sup>b</sup> studies.

experimental groups in terms of the distribution of gender ( $\chi^2_{(1, N = 169)} = 0.283, p = .595$ ), age ( $t(167) = -0.158, p = .875$ ), education ( $\chi^2_{(4, N = 169)} = 3.047, p = .556$ ), or earlier Heimat-related media consumption ( $t(142.37) = -1.15, p = .253$ ).

**Results**

For the treatment check, an independent *t*-test was conducted using SPSS, Version 25 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA), which validated that the Franconia episode ( $M = 3.67, SD = 0.95$ ) included significantly more spatio-temporal and sociocultural Heimat associations than the Rhineland episode ( $M = 1.70, SD = 0.93; t(167) = 13.58, p < .001, d_{Cohen} = 2.10$ ).

To test H1A and H2A, we performed two separate ANOVAs, with sense of Heimat and eudaimonic entertainment experience as dependent variables. As predicted, the participants who saw the Franconia episode reported a stronger sense of Heimat ( $M = 3.69, SD = 0.68$ ) compared with participants who saw the Rhineland episode ( $M = 3.02, SD = 0.79$ ), supporting H1A,  $F(1, 167) = 35.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .176$ . We then conducted a simple mediation analysis to test H1B using the PROCESS 4.0 macro introduced by Hayes (2018). The bootstrapping method was applied ( $m = 5.000$ ), and all reported regression coefficients (see, Table 3) were unstandardized. The indirect effect was considered significant, confirming Heimat-related social identity as a mediator of the effect on sense of Heimat ( $b = 0.55; 95\% CI [0.37, 0.74]$ ).

As predicted by H2A, participants who saw the episode that included Heimat associations reported higher levels of eudaimonic entertainment experiences ( $M = 3.44, SD = 0.72$ ) compared with participants who saw the

**Table 3.** Study 1: Mediation analysis on sense of Heimat based on Hayes (2018), with unstandardized regression coefficients and bootstrapping ( $m = 5.000$ );  $N = 169$ .

	b	SE b	t	p
Outcome: Heimat-related social identity				
Constant	2.52 [2.32, 2.73]	.10	24.74	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	1.15 [0.87, 1.43]	.14	8.09	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .28$				
Outcome: Sense of Heimat				
Constant	1.82 [1.54, 2.10]	.14	12.90	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	.13 [-0.08, 0.34]	.11	1.21	$p = .230$
Heimat-related social identity	.47 [0.38, 0.57]	.05	9.58	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .47$				

**Table 4.** Study 1: Mediation analysis on eudaimonic entertainment experience based on Hayes (2018), with unstandardized regression coefficients and bootstrapping ( $m = 5.000$ );  $N = 169$ .

	b	SE b	t	p
Outcome: Heimat-related social identity				
Constant	2.52 [2.32, 2.73]	.10	24.74	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	1.15 [0.87, 1.43]	.14	8.09	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .28$				
Outcome: Eudaimonic entertainment experience				
Constant	1.76 [1.43, 2.08]	.17	10.61	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	-0.19 [-0.44, 0.06]	.13	-1.50	$p = .136$
Heimat-related social identity	0.51 [0.40, 0.63]	.06	8.80	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .35$				

Rhineland episode ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ),  $F(1, 167) = 9.58$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .054$ . Participants' Heimat-related social identity was confirmed as a mediator of the effect ( $b = 0.59$ ; 95% CI [0.39, 0.81]), supporting H2B (see, Table 4).

## Discussion

Both hypotheses were validated. The inclusion of spatiotemporal and sociocultural Heimat associations triggered the participants' Heimat-related social identity, which positively influenced sense of Heimat. Furthermore, participants who reported higher levels of Heimat-related social identity indicated higher levels of eudaimonic entertainment experience. Before discussing the results in more depth, we present a second study, which was meant to replicate the findings of the first study. The sample for Study 1 consisted only of people who perceived Franconia, a specific region in Bavaria (southern Germany), as their Heimat, which reduces the representativeness and transferability of the results. Thus,

the second study included participants who perceived northern Germany as their Heimat to replicate the findings using another sample and a different stimulus.

## Study 2

### *Method*

#### *Design, Materials, and Procedure*

To generalize the results, the second study was meant to replicate the findings of the first study using a sample from a different geographical region. Consequently, the design, materials, and procedure of the second study closely resemble those of the first study and will thus be described only briefly. Because the first study used participants from southern Germany, the second study included participants who considered the northern part of Germany as their Heimat. Again, an online study with a two-level between-subjects experimental design was implemented, and two different videos were used – one with and one without spatiotemporal and sociocultural Heimat associations. In line with the first experiment, two episodes of the travel documentary “Wunderschön” were edited for inclusion – one that featured a presenter traveling through northern Germany (44 minutes) and one in the Rhineland region in central Germany (45 minutes). The Rhineland episode had already been successfully used in the first study. The episodes both depicted typical landscapes and regions, as well as traditions and social interactions and, again, some scenes related to environmental issues, economic challenges, and social changes that increasingly confront residents of these regions. Because only participants who considered northern Germany their Heimat were allowed to participate in the study, the episode that featured northern Germany was expected to include more Heimat associations for the participants compared with the Rhineland episode.

Again, participants were recruited online using an advertisement that promised €10 in exchange for participating in a scientific study (75 minutes), and they were pre-screened concerning their perceptions of Heimat and their demographic characteristics. Participants who passed the pre-screening received a follow-up e-mail and were asked to take part in the study. The questionnaire and items were identical to those in the first study and thus will not be described more thoroughly at this point. The participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on five-point Likert-type scales throughout the questionnaire and had to correctly answer three questions regarding the video content to successfully complete the study. After the participants had given informed consent, they answered initial questions about their demographic characteristics before being randomly assigned to watch either the episode featuring northern

Germany or the one focusing on the Rhineland region of Germany. After they had watched the episode and correctly answered the control questions, they were asked questions regarding their sense of Heimat, perceived Heimat-related social identity, and eudaimonic entertainment experience (Wirth et al., 2012). Before the aim of the study was disclosed, the participants were also asked to indicate their previous Heimat-related media consumption (i.e., how many days per week they usually watched Heimat-related television shows,  $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ) and a treatment check ( $\alpha = .88$ ;  $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was conducted.

In line with the first study, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring and an oblique rotation method. Based on Bartlett's test ( $\chi^2(780) = 5277.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO = .933$ ), the variables were fit to conduct a factor analysis (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). The analysis revealed six factors with an eigenvalue over 1.00 (Kaiser's criterion; eigenvalue<sub>1</sub> = 17.96; eigenvalue<sub>2</sub> = 4.45; eigenvalue<sub>3</sub> = 2.66; eigenvalue<sub>4</sub> = 1.25; eigenvalue<sub>5</sub> = 1.23; eigenvalue<sub>6</sub> = 1.05). On the basis of the scree plot, we again chose a three-factor solution, which was able to explain 63.46% of the variance. After dropping three cross-loaded items from the analysis, the final factor solution yielded three factors (see, Table 2): "sense of Heimat" ( $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ; 13 items), "Heimat-related social identity" ( $\alpha = .96$ ;  $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ; 12 items), and "eudaimonic entertainment experience" ( $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ; 12 items).

### Participants

Several participants had to be excluded from the original sample because of low levels of attention ( $<4$  on a five-point Likert-type scale;  $n = 7$ ) or unrealistic processing times ( $n = 18$ ). The final sample consisted of 147 participants, with a mean age of 41.50 ( $SD = 16.28$ ) years. Because about half of the participants were women (52.4%) and about half had earned a high school diploma or higher as their highest level of education (54.4%), the pre-screening process was successful, and the sample can be considered heterogeneous and well-balanced. Some participants did not usually consume Heimat-related media offerings ( $n = 33$ ), and others indicated that they liked to watch Heimat-related programs once ( $n = 44$ ), twice ( $n = 23$ ), three times ( $n = 13$ ), or at least four times ( $n = 34$ ) a week, on average. The appropriate tests showed no differences between the two experimental groups in terms of the distribution of gender ( $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 3.11$ ,  $p = .078$ ), age ( $t(145) = -1.17$ ,  $p = .246$ ), education ( $\chi^2(3, N = 147) = 0.78$ ,  $p = .855$ ), or previous Heimat-related media consumption ( $t(143.20) = -0.88$ ,  $p = .376$ ).

**Table 5.** Study 2: Mediation analysis on sense of Heimat based on Hayes (2018), with unstandardized regression coefficients and bootstrapping ( $m = 5,000$ );  $N = 147$ .

	b	SE b	t	p
Outcome: Heimat-related social identity				
Constant	2.28 [2.07, 2.50]	.11	20.70	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	0.91 [0.59, 1.23]	.16	5.69	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .18$				
<i>Simple mediation analysis on sense of Heimat</i>				
Outcome: Sense of Heimat				
Constant	2.10 [1.81, 2.40]	.15	13.99	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	.28 [0.04, 0.52]	.12	2.34	$p = .021$
Heimat-related social identity	.37 [0.25, 0.48]	.06	6.42	$p < .001$
$R^2 = .34$				

## Results

As expected, the episode that featured northern Germany ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) was perceived to include more spatiotemporal and sociocultural Heimat associations than the Rhineland episode ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ;  $t(145) = 6.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d_{Cohen} = 1.09$ ).

An ANOVA was performed to validate H1A. Previous Heimat-related media consumption was correlated with eudaimonic entertainment experience and was therefore included as a covariate in an ANCOVA to validate H2A.<sup>4</sup> As predicted, participants who saw the northern Germany episode reported a stronger sense of Heimat ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) compared with participants who saw the Rhineland episode ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ), supporting H1A,  $F(1, 145) = 24.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .146$ . We then conducted a simple mediation analysis to test H1B (see, Table 5), which confirmed Heimat-related social identity as a mediator of the effect on sense of Heimat ( $b = 0.33$ ; 95% CI [0.18, 0.52]).

As predicted by H2A, participants who saw the episode that included Heimat associations reported significantly higher levels of eudaimonic entertainment experience ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) compared with participants who saw the Rhineland episode ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $F(1, 144) = 3.52$ ,  $p = .032$ ,  $\eta^2 = .024$ . A mediation analysis with previous Heimat-related media consumption as a covariate confirmed the positive indirect effect of Heimat associations on eudaimonic entertainment experience mediated by Heimat-related social identity ( $b = 0.44$ ; 95% CI [0.26, 0.66]). Consequently, H2B was supported (see, Table 6).

<sup>4</sup>In Study 1, previous Heimat-related media consumption was not correlated with the dependent variables and thus was not included as a covariate.

**Table 6.** Study 2: Mediation analysis on eudaimonic entertainment experience based on Hayes (2018), with unstandardized regression coefficients and bootstrapping ( $m = 5,000$ );  $N = 147$ .

	b	SE b	t	p
Outcome: Heimat-related social identity				
Constant	2.17 [1.90, 2.45]	.14	15.52	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	0.93 [0.61, 1.24]	.16	5.79	$p < .001$
Earlier Heimat media consumption	0.05 [-0.03, 0.12]	.04	1.31	$p = .193$
$R^2 = .19$				
Outcome: Eudaimonic entertainment experience				
Constant	1.74 [1.38, 2.10]	.18	9.65	$p < .001$
Heimat associations	-0.17[-0.44, 0.11]	.14	-1.19	$p = .236$
Heimat-related social identity	0.48 [0.35, 0.61]	.07	7.28	$p < .001$
Earlier Heimat media consumption	0.08 [0.02, 0.14]	.03	2.57	$p < .05$
$R^2 = .32$				

## Discussion and Conclusion

The second study replicated the findings of Study 1. Perceptions of spatio-temporal and sociocultural Heimat associations in television programs triggered Heimat-related social identity among the participants. This activation of Heimat-related social identity, in turn, significantly increased sense of Heimat and eudaimonic entertainment experience. Both studies validated that television programs offering Heimat associations can elicit not only positive Heimat-related feelings such as familiarity, safety, warmth, and solidarity, but also eudaimonic experiences like being connected to others, having close social relationships, finding life meaningful, and living according to central, personally relevant values. In earlier research, eudaimonic and meaningful entertainment experiences have been found to positively influence individuals' psychological well-being, which is a desirable effect (e.g., Rieger et al., 2014). As mentioned above, our findings can be considered new and relevant because of the current trend to use Heimat elements in diverse media settings. Consuming media offerings that offer Heimat-related associations may be a good possibility for coping with the personal insecurities and current challenges discussed in the introductory section of this article, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The development of a measurement for sense of Heimat can be considered another relevant contribution of this article. As a predominantly positive and also social affect, sense of Heimat comprises a mixture of different emotions that may not be triggered by any media offering with the same probability. Picture a comedy television show, for instance. Although this kind of media program might trigger fun, joy, and relaxation, it is unlikely to elicit emotions such as emotional security, quietness, and belonging; however, it is also not impossible that such a show would elicit these emotions, as every comedy television show is hypothetically able to evoke Heimat associations in some viewers (e.g., if some of the jokes take place in a social context

that reminds the viewers of their childhood). The scale developed in the preliminary study and successfully employed in both experimental studies here can be viewed as a first measurement instrument to operationalize the positive emotional state elicited by the depiction of one's Heimat.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although the two studies presented here provide valuable insight regarding the occurrence of eudaimonic entertainment experience because of enhanced Heimat-related social identity, they have neglected to consider the participant's psychological well-being after watching the Heimat-related episode. Because eudaimonic entertainment experiences have already been identified as a precursor to psychological well-being, it would be very interesting to explore the impact of Heimat associations in television programs on elements of psychological well-being such as recovery and vitality (Rieger et al., 2014) in future studies. In this context, it would also be highly relevant to investigate the relation between eudaimonic entertainment experiences and feelings of Heimat, and to clarify the impact of these factors on psychological well-being.

Both studies presented here had diverse and heterogeneous samples that were well balanced in terms of age, gender, and level of education. Furthermore, most of the participants regularly watched Heimat-related media offerings and could therefore be considered a target audience for such media programs. However, because the studies focused on finding an overarching impact of such programs, the influence of individual factors was not considered or further analyzed. Demographic characteristics and other potentially relevant personal characteristics, such as the individual's need to belong, nostalgia proneness, or conservatism, might also be interesting factors to include in future research (Lammers & Baldwin, 2018). Participants who score high on these characteristics might be more inclined to use their Heimat-related social identity and thus might be more strongly influenced by Heimat associations.

As mentioned above, the sense of Heimat scale developed in this article can be regarded as a first potential measurement tool. We developed the scale in a specific context by asking the participants what "Heimat" meant to them and what kind of emotions they connected to the concept. The result was a specific mixture of 13 emotional aspects. The question now is whether a certain combination of the emotional aspects measured by the scale is sufficient to qualify a feeling as "sense of Heimat," or whether a feeling must be consciously associated with the individual's Heimat for it to be full-fledged "sense of Heimat." The scale should be validated in other contexts, and another measurement solution might be to simply ask people for their *Heimatgefühl*/sense of Heimat using one item instead of presenting them 13

items to assess 12 separate emotional aspects. Future studies should further examine this idea.

Another interesting point is the question of whether viewers are capable of developing a sense of Heimat to places where they have never actually been except for being transported there through the experience of media content. This is a media phenomenon of high relevance in the context of research on immersion, transportation, presence, and narrative engagement, but it would be a very special case that is not covered by the original concept of Heimat. Similarly, can programs that depict places of personal or family significance (e.g., ancestors' places of origin) evoke a sense of Heimat, even if viewers have never been to the depicted locations? Both of these cases are covered by our definitions when we speak of associations with a place to which one feels a special connection or associations with a place of origin, which usually – *but not necessarily* – refer to the childhood family environment.

Future studies should also include cross-cultural content analyses that analyze which types of television programs include Heimat-related associations to validate the anecdotal observations made in the introductory section of this article. The participants in our studies watched television shows that intentionally offered strong Heimat associations for a specific target group, and it would also be interesting to analyze to what extent individuals in other countries are also avid watchers and producers of these types of media.

Although the findings of the two studies deliver important insight concerning the effect of television programs with Heimat associations, the occurrence of the concept of Heimat in the media is by no means limited to entertaining television programs. Political actors, for instance, have used sense of Heimat in their campaigns, concerning both regional (e.g., “Heimat – preserving our Bavarian way of life,” a slogan proposed by the German party Christian Social Union) and national (e.g., Trump’s “make America great again” slogan) campaigns (Schramm et al., 2022). If individuals experience a strong Heimat-related self-identity because of spatiotemporal and sociocultural Heimat associations that are integrated into political campaigns, it is likely that they are highly involved in issues that concern their Heimat. Therefore, environmental communicators might also want to use Heimat associations in their campaigns to activate individuals’ Heimat-related social identity, especially for individuals (e.g., conservatives) who would normally be more skeptical about environmental issues, such as global warming (Baldwin & Lammers, 2016). The integration of Heimat elements into political and environmental campaigns could be especially successful and should be carefully analyzed in persuasive communication studies, as eudaimonic and meaningful media experiences have been found to positively affect persuasion. For instance, meaningful media has been shown to stimulate reflective thoughts (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; De Ridder et al., 2021). Commercial forms of persuasive communication, such as marketing



communication and advertising, have also been found to use the term “Heimat” in their appeals (Schramm et al., 2022). For instance, product advertisements have employed spatiotemporal and/or sociocultural Heimat associations in their campaigns, for instance, through depicting local landscapes or social traditions. The sense of Heimat and the positive affect elicited by these elements might be transferred to the advertisement, resulting in pronounced persuasive effects.

Although this article mainly focuses on the positive impact of Heimat-related television programs, one should also consider the possible negative effects of these programs. The activation of participants’ Heimat-related social identity was repeatedly confirmed as a mediator of the effects. However, social identity theory has often been used to explain negative effects concerning how outgroups are perceived (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If specific parts of peoples’ social identities are activated, they tend to perceive their ingroup as more positive to enhance their self-esteem, while relevant outgroups are devalued (i.e., ingroup bias; Tajfel et al., 1971). For instance, a study by Branscombe and Wann (1994) found that the self-esteem of a group (Americans) was enhanced by disparaging a threat-relevant outgroup (Russians). Consequently, the activation of Heimat-relevant social identity might improve perceptions about people who are believed to be part of the ingroup (i.e., those who have the same understanding of Heimat) and simultaneously cause negative biases toward people who are considered part of the outgroup. Biases might be exhibited toward other cultures in general or toward outgroups that are perceived as a threat to one’s Heimat, such as immigrants or refugees who want to move to that specific region. If an increase in negative bias toward other cultures, immigrants, or refugees is a consequence of Heimat-related television programs, this is clearly very problematic and might increase intergroup conflict. Future studies should also analyze these possibilities to identify potential negative effects of such programs. Studies exploring negative effects would enable us to empirically challenge a meta hypothesis of the highest societal relevance: Heimat-related media content may be psychologically beneficial for many individuals in a society, while simultaneously being socially dysfunctional and a segregating force for individuals who are still not part of the society and are in search of the feeling of coming home.

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The data and stimuli underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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## Appendix

**Table A1** Study 1 and Study 2: Zero-order correlations between the dependent variables, the mediator variable, and the covariate (Pearson's  $r$ ).

Variable	Study 1				Study 2			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
(1) Heimat-related social identity	1	.68**	.59**	.15	1	.56**	.53**	.07
(2) Sense of Heimat	.68**	1	.70**	.05	.56**	1	.66**	.12
(3) Eudaimonic Entertainment Experience	.59**	.70**	1	.03	.53**	.66**	1	.22**
(4) Earlier Heimat-related media consumption	.15	.05	.03	1	.07	.12	.22**	1

Significant correlations ( $p < .01$ ) are marked with \*