

# The Influence of User-Generated Eudaimonic YouTube Videos on Well-Being

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships of audience exposure to user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos with subsequent involvement, empathy, perceived depression, and happiness in two studies. This study adapted self-compassion as a moderated mediator to the models. In Study 1, 402 respondents participated in a survey. Results found that user-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube activated involvement but not depression reduction. Self-compassion mitigated the relationship between empathy and depression. In Study 2, with 189 respondents, a positive and significant indirect influence of eudaimonic YouTube video viewing on happiness through involvement and empathy was found. The results demonstrate that user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos have the potential to improve well-being when users are involved in and empathetic with the video content. The role of user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing in human well-being research was discussed. Future research directions were suggested.

## KEYWORDS

Empathy, Eudaimonic Video, Involvement, Well-Being, YouTube

## INTRODUCTION

Entertainment media have been the channels through which audiences expose, engage, empathize, and experience psychological effects intentionally or unintentionally. Recent development in entertainment media encompasses not only hedonic content but inspirational messages that change people's lives. Eudaimonic media channels in the digital environment afford the accessibility, diversity, and volume of meaningful and self-transcendent narratives. Users readily encounter inspirational content on social media and are affected by them for psychological needs (Oltra, Camarero, & San José Cabezudo, 2022; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). Eudaimonic media can be broadly defined as media narratives that enhance an individual's reflection on life meaning, virtue, value, purpose, and potential for coping and well-being (Dale, Raney, Janicke, Sanders, & Oliver, 2017; Ott, Tan, & Slater, 2021).

Audiences' frequent eudaimonic media experiences have ignited increased research attempts on their effects. From movies and television (Londoño-Proañó, 2022; Weinmann, Schneider, Roth,

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Bindl, & Vorderer, 2016) to the Internet to social media (Dale et al., 2020; Williams, & Krisjanous, 2023), how specific portrayals are responsible for self-transcendent emotional reactions has been conducted (Dale et al., 2017; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). Social media posts were inspirational for users in kindness and overcoming obstacles (Dale et al., 2020). Some scenes of self-sacrifice and nostalgia produced self-affirmation and self-transcendence (Watts, Bonus, & Wing, 2020). Other recent studies have examined the influence of eudaimonic narratives on moral engagement (e.g., Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2016), user comments on inspirational narratives (e.g., Möller & Kühne, 2019), eudaimonic media format on evaluations (e.g., Weinmann et al., 2016), person-specific inspiration (Valkenburg, Beyens, Pouwels, Driel, & Keijsers, 2022), and cross-cultural motivations of inspirational entertainment consumption (e.g., Odağ, Uluğ, Arslan, & Schiefer, 2018).

These studies, however, are limited in investigating audiences' psychological processes of the narratives and their consequences. The studies testing theoretical models are oriented toward traditional media exposure and the consequence of awe, elevation, admiration, or gratitude (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Dale et al., 2017) rather than improved well-being because of viewing user-generated eudaimonic videos on YouTube, the most widely used social video platform (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Few studies examined the relationships of user-generated eudaimonic content on YouTube with well-being in terms of engagement processing.

A theoretically posed model test for the information processing of eudaimonic YouTube video consumption in cross-sectional studies may verify whether the exposure to the content from algorithmic selections prompts human well-being. Grounded in self-determination theory and the mediated wisdom of experience perspective, the current study examined the relationships of audiences' exposure to user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos with subsequent involvement, empathy, and perceived well-being (depression and happiness) in two studies. As an additional factor that can intervene in the relationship between empathy and depression and happiness, this study adapted self-compassion as a moderated mediator to the models. Self-compassion is known to facilitate eudaimonic well-being (Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack, & Sabiston, 2015). As a result of user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing, audiences self-determine to involve, get emotionally embedded, and form well-being. With ubiquitous accessibility, this study can provide important implications as user-generated eudaimonic videos on YouTube may positively contribute to well-being enhancement.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Self-Determination and Mediated Wisdom of Experience**

Individuals are motivated to act in desired directions by both intrinsic and extrinsic value factors in life. External factors such as rewards, norms, or fear and internal ones such as interests and curiosity interchange to trigger psychological and behavioral engagement. Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a meta-interpretation of motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT assumes that people's sense of volition and well-being is determined by relational factors such as individual, social, and cultural interactions. Humans' essential need for relatedness aids in achieving the increase of positive (e.g., happiness) and the decrease of negative (e.g., depression) well-being factors. Using SDT, studies found supporting results. The need for connections resulted in positive psychological outcomes through social media use (Lin, 2016). Media participation with the goal of support-seeking engendered at-risk youth's achievement of well-being (Pienimäki, 2019). Therefore, self-determined experience and positivity can invoke involvement, self-control, empathy, mindfulness, and well-being, which is defined as a sense of meaning, purpose, and global judgment of feelings from joy to depression (Bernard, Martin, & Kulik, 2014). Social media use for information, inspiration, and escape from negative emotions reduces depression (Brailovskaia, Schillack, & Margraf, 2020). Social media influencers' sharing of inspirational media content with followers enhanced fundraising (Duvall, 2022).

SDT can be specified in a mediated experience context. Slater et al. (2016) explain the process of eudaimonic media exposure and increased maturity from the mediated wisdom of experience perspective. As SDT addresses, such social and cultural interactions through eudaimonic media can improve well-being. The mediated wisdom of experience perspective assumes that people benefit from eudaimonic media experiences by exercising the willingness to accept delayed rewards (Mazur, 1987) and tolerance of the human condition (Ott et al., 2021). In turn, mediated media narratives can facilitate one's ability to reframe positively and cope with life challenges. Mediated eudaimonic content can lead to a better state of endurance (Slater, Oliver, Appel, Tchernev, & Silver, 2018). When the experience is mediated, and the content is eudaimonic, one's cognitive and emotional connection with the narrative induces well-being. The intersection between self-determination theory and the mediated wisdom of experience perspective indicates that the motivated use of eudaimonic media on mediated channels undergoes involvement, empathy, and well-being.

Eudaimonia triggers subsequent psychological processing of the experience. Eudaimonic narratives generate involvement with related experience (Hayhurst, Hunter, & Ruffman, 2019), empathy (Bartsch, Oliver, Nitsch, & Scherr, 2018), compassionate feelings (Ferguson et al., 2015), and well-being (Saunders, Huta, & Sweet, 2018). Therefore, SDT and the mediated experience of wisdom perspective concomitantly share a proposition that mediated positive interactions lead to improvement in human well-being. Representative communication channels for eudaimonic content dissemination include YouTube (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019).

With the prevalence of user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos (e.g., speeches, interviews, and readings), this study focused on users' experience with inspirational videos posted by other users rather than entertainment video episodes professionally edited. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos can refer to users' video narratives that present value, perseverance, endurance, resilience, and life meaning for facilitating well-being. YouTube videos such as "Believe in yourself again" (<https://youtu.be/LUkomfxoJdQ>) or "Believe it. The changes start with you" (<https://youtu.be/SM25PBE9B2w>) are some examples of eudaimonic content produced by individuals or organizations. Such media experience on YouTube is assumed to influence improved well-being.

## **YouTube and Involvement**

Social media, including YouTube, has been a driver of involvement at varying levels. Personal involvement is the degree to which an individual participates in activities when they are relevant to them (Greene, 2013). With multimedia components from text to images and 360-degree videos, these social media experiences ignite involved media use, eventually leading to offline participation (e.g., Li & Xie, 2020). Users rely on multiple social media cues, such as the number of views, likes, subscribers, and comments, to shape their attitudes and intentions (Vinales & Thomas, 2021). Video viewing in social media is a social engagement process because audiences watch it with the motives of affinity, involvement, preference, innovativeness, and interpersonal interaction (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). Therefore, YouTube video exposure is an involved behavior that may foster the viewing circumstance of social engagement.

YouTube is a sphere of involvement with other users and prosumers. Viewers and subscribers increase the popularity of video influencers who present themselves and influence users. With the influence through participation in the YouTube interface, users form a bond with the influencers and obtain their intended or unintended goals from viewing (Rihl & Wegener, 2019), and build spiritual well-being (Radwan & Giffone, 2022).

## **YouTube, Involvement, and Empathy**

Exposure to likable media personae engenders empathy and outcome expectations (Robinson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017). That is, involvement with the stories or characters can play a narrative persuasion role in igniting empathetic feelings. Empathy is defined as other-oriented feelings (Li & Kim, 2021). Audience involvement with mediated figures and messages is a positive predictor of

empathy toward delivered narratives. Empathetic experiences could lead to prosocial action and goal attainment through mediated technology channels such as virtual reality (Foxman, Markowitz, & Davis, 2021) and YouTube (Prestin & Nabi, 2020). In turn, media exposure can invoke empathetic feelings that draw subsequent actions. In particular, selective exposure to media content was highly predictive of empathy toward social affairs such as race and immigration (Kaufhold, 2019).

Empathy plays a role in mediating media exposure and caring for stigmatized group members (Castelán Cargile, 2016). As organizations perform empathetic listening to the public on social media, such exercises foster dialog between organizations and their online public (Maben & Gearhart, 2018). Social media enables to engage marginalized individuals ethically, embody an ethic of care emphasizing compassion and respect, and forge trusting relationships with the clients (Place, 2021). These empathetic practices through social media can advance care-based outcomes. The degree to which the empathetic bystanders for those struggling with cyberbullying felt was positively related to the willingness to intervene (Wang, 2021).

Other studies address a positive relationship between involvement and empathy. Mediated involvement enforced participants' empathy and donation of winter coats for homeless people (Bartsch & Kloß, 2019). In the relationship between involvement with an advertisement and intention, empathy played a more important role in persuasion than sympathy (Wirtz, Sar, & Duff, 2016). Cognitive involvement with micro-films for branding on YouTube moderated the relationship between empathy and brand attitude (Yu & Chang, 2013). The storytelling power embedded in micro-films was intensified by viewer involvement and empathy. As audiences feel a sense of presence in the mediated content, they are more likely to be involved and empathetic toward the narrative (Hasler et al., 2021). This study presumes that user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos may trigger involvement and empathy as audiences share their feelings in the video content (Tomasena, 2023).

## **YouTube, Involvement, Empathy, and Depression**

Audiences' positive experiences with prosocial content and supportive interactions in the media foster improved well-being. Depression, notable negative well-being, is mitigated by selective media diets. Depression is defined as a feeling of sadness and loss of interest that negatively affect people's feelings and activities (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021). Social media use for support led to a lower level of depression when the use presented high involvement (Lee & Cho, 2019). Support group use on YouTube positively predicted trust in the media channel (Paige, Krieger, & Stellefson, 2017). Private Facebook interactions were predictive of boys' and girls' perceptions of social support, contributing to a relative decrease in girls' depression (Frison, Bastin, Bijttebier, & Eggermont, 2019). With the use of social media for seeking support and motivation, the audience tends to reach the planned goal of use. In turn, involved social media use influences well-being. If the media exposure is eudaimonic, improvement in positive well-being is expected (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019).

When media consumption is involved, the experience turns out to be empathetic and supportive (Lee et al., 2019). In turn, the involved use of mediated messages invokes empathy and influences emotional traits. Online support groups on social media were satisfied with the experience and improved depression when the communication was both supportive and informative (Chon, 2022; Nimrod, 2013). Therefore, the strength and quality of supportive communication experience may determine the reduction of depression. The motivated seeking and involved use of inspirational videos on YouTube may ameliorate depression in this sense.

In another approach, the predictability of empathy for depression varies depending on the context and tested variables. Emotional empathy positively predicts depression, whereas cognitive empathy does not predict depression (Gambin & Sharp, 2018; Schreiter, Pijnenborg, & aan het Rot, 2013). A similar study also found that college students' affective empathy was positively associated with high depressive symptoms (Zhang et al., 2021). Overall, empathy itself is likely a facilitator rather than an oppressor of depression. Audiences' exposure to user-generated inspirational videos on YouTube

may play a role in abating the relationship between empathy and depression because exposure to motivational videos may buffer the correlation.

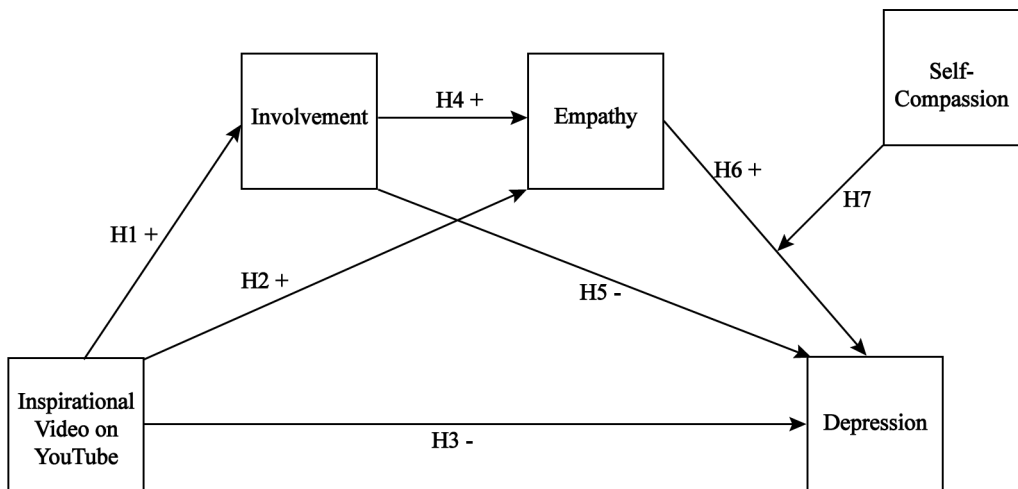
### Self-Compassion as a Moderator

In eudaimonic experience, self-driven forgiving feelings are activated by comfort. Self-compassionate people tend to have greater eudaimonic well-being (Ferguson et al., 2015). Therefore, this study posits self-compassion as a facilitator between engagement and well-being. Self-compassion is defined as benevolence to one's self-instances of suffering and negative experiences (Neff, 2003). Past research reports that the relationship between an individual's psychological factors, such as experiences and well-being, is facilitated by self-compassion. As a moderator, self-compassion mitigated the influence of stress on depression among cancer caregivers (Hsieh et al., 2019). A negative feeling such as cyberbullying victimization interacted with self-compassion to predict anxiety and depression (Chu, Fan, Liu, & Zhou, 2018).

### STUDY 1

Eudaimonic media likely induce involvement with the mediated content and encourage overcoming challenges people face. Past research suggests that supportive media exposure enhances involvement with the content and empathy toward others. However, high empathy tends to elevate depression. The mediated experience of wisdom perspective assumes that eudaimonic media exposure enhances enduring life (Slater et al., 2016). In addition to the direct effects of user-generated eudaimonic video exposure on YouTube, reviewed literature indicates that involvement and empathy mediate the relationships between exposure and depression. Finally, self-compassion can moderate the mediated relationships of involvement and empathy between exposure and depression (Egan et al., 2022) and well-being (Marshall, Ciarrochi, Parker, & Sahdra, 2020). These hypotheses are presented in Figure 1. The variables are interlinked because motivated exposure induces involvement, leads to empathetic states, and affects well-being. The consideration of self-compassion moderates the relationship between empathetic feelings and depression.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model of eudaimonic video viewing influencing depression



## Method and Procedures

Study 1 requested a survey company to collect data. From a respondent pool consisting of U.S. adults, the survey was distributed to them and offered compensation for participation. Upon the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, this study opened a survey link from September 20 to 21, 2021. A total of 458 U.S. adults over 18 who reported that they viewed user-generated eudaimonic videos on YouTube (i.e., encouraging, hopeful, motivational, and religious videos for self-transcendence) participated in the survey. This study excludes professional video content from television episodes or films and includes only user-generated eudaimonic videos. A few examples of eudaimonic YouTube videos are a professional who shared a life-changing moment in a video interview ([https://youtu.be/4p5286T\\_kn0](https://youtu.be/4p5286T_kn0)) and a share of motivational speeches (<https://youtu.be/48Ck9GE4Muo>). Data sorting by removing incomplete surveys yielded 402 final responses, with a completion rate of 87.7%.

## Measurement Instruments

### *Eudaimonic Video Viewing on YouTube*

The operational definition of eudaimonic YouTube videos is the audience's exposure frequency of user-generated inspirational videos such as motivational, inspirational, and life-changing stories filmed by individuals or organizations. Drawn from past research on social media use (Ali, Danaee, & Firdaus, 2020; Naab, Karnowski, & Schlütz, 2019), this study measured four items, a) years of viewing user-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos (from 1 = never to 7 = more than nine years), b) how often they viewed eudaimonic YouTube videos for the last six months (from 1 = never to 7 = always), c) how often they view the videos a week (from 1 = never to 7 = always), and d) how often they watch the videos a day (from 1 = never to 7 = always).

### *Involvement*

This study garnered the measurement from social media involvement (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Involvement was assessed with the degree to which the audience thinks, processes, and shares the experience with others. The four items about viewing inspirational videos on YouTube are, "During or after you watch inspirational videos on YouTube, how much do you do the following? a) I talk about the videos, b) I pay attention to the videos, c) I post messages about the videos, and d) I relay the videos" (from 1 = not at all to 7 = always).

### *Empathy*

Adopted from a communication empathy scale (Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim, & Sleight, 1988), this study asked respondents to evaluate 14 items about their empathetic behaviors toward others. The variable measured the extent to which respondents were open to others when communicating with them. Sample items include a) Before I criticize somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place and b) If I'm not sure I'm right about something, I listen to other people's arguments (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) (See Appendix for the complete list).

### *Depression*

Using a past social media study's depression scale (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016), this study measured an individual's degree of problematic feelings and daily experiences. A total of nine items were used. Sample items are "In the past 6 months, how often have you been affected by each of the following problems? a) Little interest or pleasure in doing things and b) Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much" (from 1 = never to 7 = always) (See Appendix for the complete list).

### *Self-Compassion*

This study assessed a total of 26 self-compassion items adopted from Neff's (2003) scale. The scale measured the extent to which individuals loved themselves even in challenges and pains. Sample

items are a) I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain and b) When I fail at something important to me, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy (reverse coded) (from 1 = never to 7 = always) (See Appendix for the complete list).

### Control Variables

For sample distribution information, this study collected respondents' gender, age, income, education, and other media use. Other media use asked respondents (Li, 2014) about using the media for the last six months: a) reading newspapers, b) reading magazines, c) reading books, d) listening to the radio, e) using the Internet, f) playing video games, and g) using cell phones for information or entertainment (from 1 = not at all to 7 = always).

### Analysis Plan

Each concept was used as a composite variable for model testing. This study employed Process Macro 3.5 (Hayes, 2018) to test serial and moderated mediation. The model equations representing the relationships are as follows.

$$\text{Depression} = \text{Constant} + b_1 \times \text{Involvement} + b_2 \times \text{Empathy} + b_3 \times \text{Self-Compassion} + b_4 \times \text{Empathy} \times \text{Self-Compassion} + c' \times \text{YouTube}$$
$$\text{Involvement} = \text{Constant} + a_1 \times \text{YouTube}$$
$$\text{Empathy} = \text{Constant} + a_2 \times \text{YouTube} + d_1 \times \text{Involvement}$$

Where  $b_1$  is the direct path from involvement to depression;  $b_2$  from empathy to depression;  $b_3$  from self-compassion to depression;  $b_4$  from empathy  $\times$  self-compassion to depression;  $c'$  from YouTube to depression;  $a_1$  from YouTube to involvement;  $a_2$  from YouTube to empathy; and  $d_1$  from involvement to empathy.

## FINDINGS

The sample consisted of 235 (58.5%) males, 166 (41.3%) females, and 1 (0.2%) third gender. The average age was 38.84 ( $SD = 10.95$ ). The mean income range of the sample was 2.96 ( $SD = 1.41$ ) (between \$50,000 and \$74,999) out of seven categories from less than \$25,000 to \$200,000 or more. The majority of the sample were college graduates ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). In the use of other media in the last six months, the Internet was most frequently used ( $M = 5.88$ ,  $SD = 4.71$ ), followed by cell phones ( $M = 5.52$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ), and book ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ). Table 1 presents correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas of the composite variables. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing was positively associated with involvement ( $r = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), empathy ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and depression ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Involvement was positively related to empathy and depression but negatively to self-compassion ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis tests were conducted using Process Macro's (Hayes, 2018) Model 87 for serial mediators and a moderated mediator (Table 2, Figure 2). With 5,000 bootstraps at the 95% confidence level, the variables were centered to control the multicollinearity of the independent variables. The moderated mediation effect was tested with three moderation groups (-1 SD, Mean, and +1 SD). H1 predicted a positive relationship between inspirational YouTube video viewing and involvement. The relationship was positive and significant, supporting H1 ( $\beta = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). H2 predicted a positive association of eudaimonic YouTube video viewing with empathy. The hypothesis was not supported ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $p > .05$ ). H3 negatively predicted the relationship between YouTube viewing and depression. H3 did not receive support ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p > .05$ ). H4 predicted a positive relationship between involvement and empathy. The results confirmed H4 ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). H5 predicted a negative association between involvement and depression. H5 did not receive support. The significant

Table 1. Correlations among testing variables, means, standard deviations, and alphas

	YouTube	Involvement	Empathy	Depression	Self-Compassion
YouTube	1				
Involvement	.50***	1			
Empathy	.18***	.42***	1		
Depression	.22***	.53***	.37***	1	
Self-Compassion	0.05	-.18***	-.01	-.53***	1
<i>M</i>	4.00	4.85	5.19	3.99	4.09
<i>SD</i>	1.28	1.52	0.97	1.75	0.68
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.76	.87	.95	.96	.81

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

relationship was the opposite ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ). H6 predicted a positive relationship between empathy and depression. H6 received full support ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ). H7 assumed a moderated mediation effect of self-compassion on the mediated relationships among YouTube viewing, involvement, empathy, and depression. As seen in the index of moderated mediation, self-compassion moderated the mediated relationship ( $\beta = -.03, CI: -0.07 \sim -0.01$ ), indicating that as self-compassion elevates, empathy is affected by YouTube viewing and involvement mitigates depression. Therefore, self-compassion buffered the positive relationship between empathy and depression. H7 was supported.

## DISCUSSION

Study 1 was designed to examine the relationships between eudaimonic YouTube video viewing and depression mediated by involvement and empathy. The direct, indirect, and moderated mediation effects suggest that user-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube activates involvement (H1) but is not sufficiently intensive to influence empathy (H2) or depression reduction (H3). Viewers' ratings of inspirational videos after exposure are significantly higher than pre-exposure (Dale et al., 2017). Another recent study tested the influence of eudaimonic film viewing on understanding, acceptance, and motivation (Ott et al., 2021). Those who watched eudaimonic films experienced an increase in the ability to make sense of difficulties, the acceptance of obstacles, and the motivation to be moral. Involved users felt high empathy with the video content (H4). As an example, the comments on the user-generated inspirational video, "It's time to believe in yourself" (<https://youtu.be/48Ck9GE4Muo>) agreed that they could relieve stress and wished all other viewers the best in their lives, an empathetic narrative. One indirect effect of user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video use on depression through involvement (H5) was significant and positive, which was opposite to what was hypothesized. When people are deeply involved with the content, their depressive feeling is activated rather than dissipated. Inspirational videos on YouTube may play a certain role, but it is not at a significant level to reduce depression.

Past research on eudaimonic media tended to test the relationship between motivation and involvement (Williams & Krisjanous, 2023). Study 1 went further than the motivational level by testing the consequence of exposure in a cross-sectional survey. The significant relationship between video viewing and involvement is congruent with a past study on moving film exemplars and involvement (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). The positive influence of empathy on depression (H6) is predictable due to the nature of the empathy concept. Empathy likely contains both positive and negative emotions within the concept. When it is affective, empathy worsens depression (Gambin & Sharp, 2018), whereas cognitive empathy tends not to affect depression. The research that predicted the influence



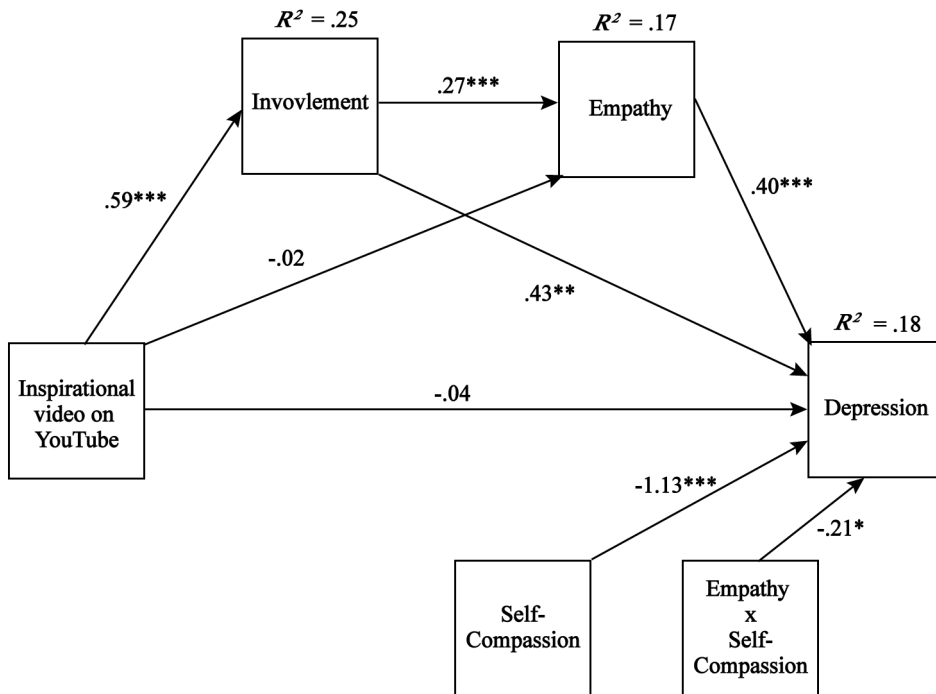
Table 2. Direct, indirect, mediation, and mediated moderation effects

Variable	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Involvement)</b>						
Constant	2.46	.21	11.42	.000***	2.04	2.89
YouTube	.59	.05	11.66	.000***	0.49	0.69
$R = .50, R^2 = .25, F(1, 400) = 135.96, p = .000***$						
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Empathy)</b>						
Constant	-1.24	.16	-7.22	.000***	-1.57	-0.91
YouTube	-.02	.04	-0.59	.554	-0.10	0.05
Involvement	.27	.03	8.19	.000***	0.20	0.34
$R = .41, R^2 = .17, F(1, 399) = 41.94, p = .000***$						
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Depression)</b>						
Constant	2.03	.24	8.28	.000***	1.55	2.51
YouTube	-.04	.05	-0.74	.455	-0.14	0.06
Involvement	.43	.05	8.63	.000***	0.33	0.53
Empathy	.40	.06	5.96	.000***	0.27	0.54
Self-Compassion	-1.13	.09	-12.22	.000***	-1.31	-0.95
Empathy $\times$ Self-Compassion	-.21	.09	-2.24	.025*	-0.39	-0.02
$R^2 \text{ Change} = .01, F(1, 396) = 5.04, p = .025^*$						
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Involvement <math>\rightarrow</math> Depression)</b>						
	.26	.04			0.18	0.34
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Empathy <math>\rightarrow</math> Depression)</b>						
Self-Compassion (-1 SD)	-.01	.02			-0.06	0.03
Self-Compassion (Mean)	-.01	.01			-0.04	0.02
Self-Compassion (+1 SD)	-.01	.01			-0.03	0.01
Index of Moderated Mediation	.01	.01			-0.03	0.01
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Involvement <math>\rightarrow</math> Empathy <math>\rightarrow</math> Depression)</b>						
Self-Compassion (-1 SD)	.09	.02			0.05	0.13
Self-Compassion (Mean)	.06	.01			0.03	0.10
Self-Compassion (+1 SD)	.04	.01			0.01	0.07
Index of Moderated Mediation	-.03	.01			-0.07	-0.01

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

of empathy on support for depressed people found a positive relationship between them (McKeever, 2015). Therefore, similar studies on eudaimonic media effects measured targeted and specific concepts rather than general psychological symptoms. In turn, the impact of eudaimonic media on psychological improvement may need to test directly related concepts such as inspirational videos for helping those with depression and their effects on the intention to support others with depression. Further, most past studies on eudaimonic media effects conducted experiments rather than cross-sectional surveys. In a more controlled setting, the effect could be more predictable.

Figure 2. Model test results of eudaimonic video viewing influencing depression



The negative moderated mediation role of self-compassion (H7) found in the analysis suggests that generosity to oneself helps the mediated effect of involvement and empathy on the relationship between user-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube and depression reduction. For instance, those who viewed “See yourself with love” ([https://youtu.be/np\\_u1jimp4Q](https://youtu.be/np_u1jimp4Q)) commented that they were able to find themselves and had peace. The concept of self-compassion in facilitating well-being can be further investigated in future eudaimonic media research.

## STUDY 2

Study 1 found that user-generated inspirational video viewing on YouTube was significantly predictive of involvement but not depression reduction. Self-compassion was a negative moderated mediator on the paths from YouTube exposure through involvement, empathy, and depression.

The purposes of Study 2 are to retest the relationships in another sample and use a positive well-being concept of rewarding life, happiness, as a resulting variable. Related research reports that social media use without comparing with others would make users happier (Chae, 2018). Positive experiences with social media explain happiness via self-esteem (Marengo, Montag, Sindermann, Elhai, & Settanni, 2021) and via rewarding emotionality (Bossetta & Schmökel, 2023). Exposure to eudaimonic and entertainment dramatization content may elicit audience interest in prosocial attitude change toward people with difficulties. Involved audiences become empathetic to others and have behavioral intentions to support people with disabilities mediated by feelings of closeness and elevation (Bartsch et al., 2018). Therefore, Study 2 assumes that user-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube leads to involvement, empathy, and happiness. In the relationship between empathy and happiness, self-compassion may play a moderator role. Young adults’ self-compassion positively predicted subjective happiness (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019). Self-compassion as unselfishness buffered

against negative effects of empathic distress on benevolent minds, implying that self-compassion moderates the relationship between empathy and well-being (Marshall et al., 2020).

As the concept of empathy reflects both positive and negative aspects of feelings, the direction of mediated moderation may be determined by analysis results. The hypotheses are displayed in Figure 3. The model expounds that the mediated experience through eudaimonic video exposure on YouTube engenders involvement, empathy, and happiness. As predicted in Study 1, self-compassion is positioned as a moderator between empathy and happiness.

**Method and Procedures**

A sample was drawn from the same survey company’s respondent pool as Study 1 on October 12-13, 2021. Upon IRB approval, the survey was posted for respondents to complete with compensation. A total of 212 respondents participated in the request. After removing incomplete questionnaires, 189 analyzable responses were compiled for final analysis, representing a completion rate of 89.15%.

**Measurement Instruments**

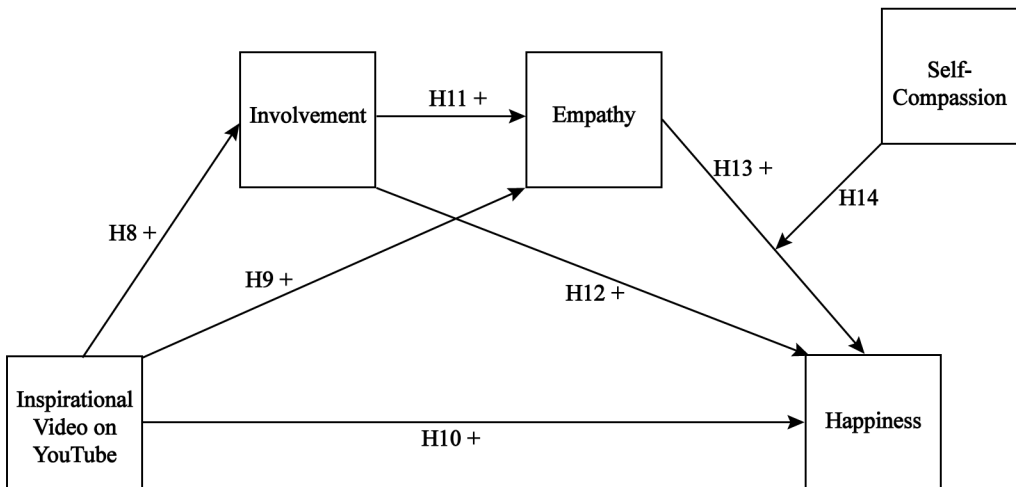
User-generated inspirational video viewing on YouTube, involvement, empathy, and self-compassion measures were identical to those of Study 1. The only two differences were the happiness scale and response options for the testing variables.

*Happiness*

Happiness was measured with a short form of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002). The scale asked respondents’ level of agreement with life happiness and satisfaction in seven items. Sample items are a) I feel that life is very rewarding and b) I am well satisfied with everything in my life (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Study 2 revised the 7-point scale of Study 1 to a 5-point scale to test the reliability between the two studies. A 5-point scale may increase respondents’ interest and decrease their fatigue level (Dawes, 2008). As control variables, respondents’ gender, age, education, income, and other media use were asked.

Figure 3. Hypothesized model of eudaimonic video viewing influencing happiness



## Analysis Plan

Process Macro 3.5 (Hayes, 2018) was used to test the variables' direct, indirect, and moderated mediation effects. The model equations representing the relationships are as follows.

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Constant} + b_1 \times \text{Involvement} + b_2 \times \text{Empathy} + b_3 \times \text{Self-Compassion} + b_4 \times \text{Empathy} \times \text{Self-Compassion} + c' \times \text{YouTube}$$

$$\text{Involvement} = \text{Constant} + a_1 \times \text{YouTube}$$

$$\text{Empathy} = \text{Constant} + a_2 \times \text{YouTube} + d_1 \times \text{Involvement}$$

Where  $b_1$  is the direct path from involvement to happiness;  $b_2$  from empathy to happiness;  $b_3$  from self-compassion to happiness;  $b_4$  from empathy  $\times$  self-compassion to happiness;  $c'$  from YouTube to happiness;  $a_1$  from YouTube to involvement;  $a_2$  from YouTube to empathy; and  $d_1$  from involvement to empathy.

## FINDINGS

There were 121 (67.2%) males and 62 (32.8%) females in the sample. The mean age of the sample was 36.2 years of age ( $SD = 9.37$ ). The income level indicated that the mean score was 3.07 ( $SD = 1.13$ ) (between \$50,000 and \$74,999) (range 1-7). The mean education level was 3.95 ( $SD = 0.67$ ) (College graduates) (range 1-5). Respondents used the Internet most ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ), followed by cell phones ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) and newspapers ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) (range 1-5).

Table 2 displays correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas of the tested variables. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing was positively correlated with content involvement ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and empathy ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (Table 3). No correlations were found between YouTube use and happiness and self-compassion. Involvement was significantly associated with empathy ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and happiness ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Empathy was positively related to happiness ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Happiness, however, was negatively associated with self-compassion ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis tests were conducted using Process Macro's Model 87 as done in Study 1. At the 95% confidence level, 5,000 bootstraps for accurate sample estimates and centered means for multicollinearity solution were set. The moderated mediator was categorized into three groups (-1 SD, Mean, and +1 SD) (Table 4, Figure 4).

H8 predicted a positive relationship between YouTube viewing and involvement. H8 was supported in the direct effect ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). H9 looked at a positive relationship between YouTube

Table 3. Correlations among testing variables, means, standard deviations, and alphas

	YouTube	Involvement	Empathy	Happiness	Self-Compassion
YouTube	1				
Involvement	.37***	1			
Empathy	.20***	.49***	1		
Happiness	.13	.48***	.65***	1	
Self-Compassion	-.04	-.22**	-.02	-.18*	1
<i>M</i>	3.37	3.98	3.85	3.93	3.01
<i>SD</i>	1.05	0.70	0.61	0.58	0.33
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.89	.73	.93	.71	.63

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

viewing and empathy, which was not supported ( $\beta = .01, p > .05$ ). H10, which predicted a positive association between YouTube viewing and happiness was not supported ( $\beta = -.03, p > .05$ ). H11 predicted a direct relationship between involvement and empathy. H11 received support ( $\beta = .42, p < .001$ ). H12 predicted a positive association between involvement and happiness. H12 also received support ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ). H13 predicted a direct relationship between empathy and happiness and the relationship was supported ( $\beta = .52, p < .001$ ). The moderated mediation of self-compassion on the relationship among YouTube viewing, involvement, empathy, and happiness was significant, which supported H14. The index of moderated mediation was negative ( $\beta = 0.05, CI: -0.12 \sim -0.01$ ), indicating that high self-compassion decreased the mediation effect of empathy through YouTube viewing and involvement on happiness. As self-compassion increased, the relationship among YouTube viewing, involvement, empathy, and happiness attenuated. Nonetheless, user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing influenced happiness via involvement and empathy.

## DISCUSSION

Study 2 examined the relationship between eudaimonic YouTube video viewing and happiness mediated by involvement and empathy. The results demonstrated a similar pattern with those of Study 1 in direct, indirect, and moderated mediation. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing did not directly influence empathy (H9) and happiness (H10). Instead, a notable finding is the positive and significant indirect influence of eudaimonic YouTube video viewing on happiness through involvement and empathy (H8, H11, H12, and H13). As past research affirms, when viewers were involved with motivational and benevolent videos, they felt hopefulness and happiness in the end (Hample, 2022; Prestin, 2013).

Audiences in varying social sectors access user-generated content to pursue personal well-being and experience growth as well (Cuomo, Tortora, Giordano, Festa, Metallo, & Martinelli, 2020). The significant indirect relationship between user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing and happiness through involvement and empathy also indicates that eudaimonic videos trigger positive and hopeful feelings when deeply engaged with mediated content. The viewers of a YouTube video, “The secret of real happiness” (<https://youtu.be/FMQnP23rkvA>), mentioned that they were motivated, felt alive, and became empathetic with family.

The moderated mediator role of self-compassion raises the question of whether self-compassion reduces the influence of empathy on happiness (H14). Empathy is likely a multifacetedly interpreted concept depending on the context. User-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube did not predict empathy (H9) or the indirect relationship through empathy with happiness. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing predicted happiness only when both involvement and empathy were activated. Therefore, if users actively engaged with the eudaimonic videos on YouTube, they could feel happiness. Overall, the results imply that eudaimonic YouTube video viewing leads to happiness if audiences are involved in and empathetic with the video content.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Both studies found similar results in predicting the relationship between eudaimonic YouTube video viewing and depression and happiness. User-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube seems to invoke both depression and happiness when involved with the content. However, the positive prediction from involvement to depression in Study 1 is unexpected. A probable interpretation is that if mismatches between what viewers are looking for from the inspirational YouTube video and the actual videos occur, alternate emotions might erupt. These emotions may come from cultural differences, jealousy, or over-expectations of the video itself. High involvement with the user-generated eudaimonic video content may also make viewers compare the video with themselves, leading to an unsatisfactory feeling of self. Therefore, when discrepancies in the YouTube video take place, the social aspect of the YouTube video-watching process may be lost, possibly resulting in alternate emotions.

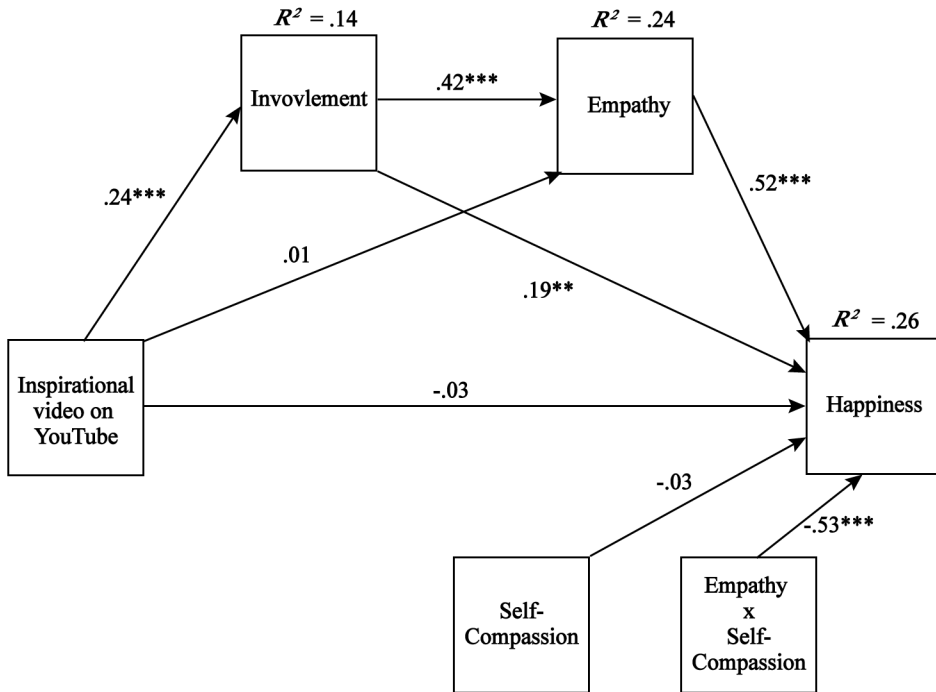
Table 4. Direct, indirect, mediation, and mediated moderation effects

Variable	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Involvement)</b>						
Constant	3.14	.15	19.07	.000***	2.83	3.46
YouTube	.24	.04	5.52	.000***	0.16	0.33
$R = .37, R^2 = .14, F(1, 187) = 30.51, p = .000***$						
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Empathy)</b>						
Constant	-1.74	.22	-7.63	.000***	-2.19	-1.29
YouTube	.01	.03	0.27	.783	-0.06	0.08
Involvement	.42	.05	7.17	.000***	0.30	0.54
$R = .49, R^2 = .24, F(2, 186) = 30.81, p = .000***$						
<b>Direct Effects (Dependent Variable: Happiness)</b>						
Constant	3.24	.21	15.10	.000***	2.82	3.67
YouTube	-.03	.03	-0.97	.331	-0.09	0.03
Involvement	.19	.05	3.56	.000***	0.08	0.30
Empathy	.52	.05	9.00	.000***	0.40	0.63
Self-Compassion	-.03	.11	-0.30	.760	-0.25	0.18
Empathy $\times$ Self-Compassion	-.53	.17	-3.05	.002**	-0.88	-0.18
$R^2$ Change = .02, $F(1, 183) = 9.34, p = .002**$						
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Involvement <math>\rightarrow</math> Happiness)</b>						
	.05	.02			0.01	0.09
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Empathy <math>\rightarrow</math> Happiness)</b>						
Self-Compassion (-1 SD)	-.01	.03			-0.06	0.07
Self-Compassion (Mean)	-.01	.02			-0.04	0.05
Self-Compassion (+1 SD)	-.01	.01			-0.02	0.04
Index of Moderated Mediation	-.01	.03			-0.06	0.05
<b>Indirect Effects (YouTube <math>\rightarrow</math> Involvement <math>\rightarrow</math> Empathy <math>\rightarrow</math> Happiness)</b>						
Self-Compassion (-1 SD)	.07	.02			0.03	0.12
Self-Compassion (Mean)	.05	.01			0.02	0.09
Self-Compassion (+1 SD)	.03	.01			0.02	0.09
Index of Moderated Mediation	-.05	.02			-0.12	-0.01

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

User-generated inspirational video consumption on YouTube is likely a role player in influencing viewers' depression and happiness. The significant indirect path from user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video use to involvement, to empathy, and to well-being when self-compassion moderates implies that audiences perform engagement and an empathetic emotion to experience well-being. Future research will need to categorize video genres on YouTube systematically. Broad categories of YouTube include entertainment, news and information, gaming, education, sports, and people (Bärtl, 2018). User-generated eudaimonic videos as an independent YouTube genre can be defined clearly to examine their influences. In this study, empathy highlights an ambivalent nature in concept.

Figure 4. Model test results of eudaimonic video viewing influencing happiness



On the one hand, empathy serves as a prosocial emotion that is altruistic. But on the other hand, maladaptive empathy triggers a depressive feeling because empathetic people tend to share others' pain and concerns (Alluri, Mittal, SC, Vuoskoski, & Saarikallio, 2022).

Self-determination theory and the mediated wisdom of experience perspective partially contributed to answering the hypothesized models through the current study's results. The present study showed the potential to test conceptually interconnected models in examining user-generated eudaimonic videos on YouTube. The results suggest that YouTubers' inspirational videos, albeit indirectly, may affect viewers' well-being.

The original intention of this study was to apply user-generated inspirational video viewing on YouTube to the perceptive and attitudinal change of audiences in general populations. This study is similar to cultivation research on television viewing. The current study applied a survey to YouTube in which viewing amounts were predicted to influence real-world feelings. As the segmented viewing of user-generated YouTube videos is commonplace, continued research with cross-sectional surveys to examine the relationship between eudaimonic media consumption of a certain genre and its consequences is called for. Inspirational videos on YouTube mark high viewing frequencies as well as impact viewers' mindsets and behavioral intentions. User-generated inspirational videos (e.g., Focus on yourself not others, [https://youtu.be/eBSeCp\\_\\_xhI](https://youtu.be/eBSeCp__xhI)) encouraged viewers to exit dark thoughts and enter a new life. Viewers agreed on the narrative and iterated change intention. As a genre, user-generated eudaimonic videos on YouTube possess the potential to influence viewers' lives.

### Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research, and Conclusion

Measuring general tendencies of psychological aspects might need updates in future research. More targeted variables related to tested eudaimonic videos on YouTube are suggested. The effectiveness

of social media use for support depends on individual status (Zaher, 2020). Therefore, taking into consideration of socioeconomic differences may yield moderator effects.

There can be predispositions the audience has about the YouTube channels and/or creators when they evaluate their experience with eudaimonic video viewing. Such prejudgment would influence their responses to this study.

In a similar vein, self-reporting is often prone to reporting bias. There might be response bias in which respondents tend to provide socially desirable answers and responses the researchers intend. This tendency may deter study reliability in this self-report survey. The bias may attenuate the predictive power of the results. In addition, this study did not choose a theme of inspirational videos on YouTube to test their specific influence on well-being. As a result, the findings' clear direction and implications were not concretely secured. Choosing a social affair or an inspirational theme for this type of study may provide logically sound and predictable results. Longitudinal studies can add to accounting for the role of eudaimonic media in audiences' real-life behaviors. Most eudaimonic media studies conduct experiments in controlled settings to examine the effects of exposure on related emotions and attitudes (e.g., Bartsch et al., 2018; Dale et al., 2017). Experimental research may verify clinical symptoms as consequences as it can ensure causality.

The influence of user-generated eudaimonic YouTube video viewing on happiness may be drawn from a targeted population (Bartsch et al., 2018) rather than a general population. A better consequence of inspirational video viewing may be individual fulfillment, personal growth, meanings (Mugel, Gurviez, & Decrop, 2019), self-acceptance, and feelings of competence (Howe, Lingrui Zhou, Dias, & Fitzsimons, 2023; Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2016; Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012).

In conclusion, the current two studies suggest that user-generated eudaimonic video viewing on YouTube leads to involvement and empathy, which also predicts well-being. This study's results warrant a further investigation of connections between genre-specific eudaimonic video viewing and well-being. Given the results, YouTube has the potential to be a eudaimonic media channel that can influence people's well-being. User-generated eudaimonic YouTube videos can play a role in contributing to positive well-being.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Questions

Involvement (from 1 = not at all to 7 = a great deal)

During or after you watch inspirational videos on YouTube, how much do you do the following?

1. Talk about the videos.
2. Pay attention to the videos.
3. Post messages about the videos.
4. Relay messages about the videos.

Empathy (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

Please respond to the following statements by choosing an option between strongly disagree and strongly agree.

1. Before I criticize somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place.
2. If I'm not sure I'm right about something, I listen to other people's arguments.
3. I believe there are two sides to every question and I try to look at both of them.
4. I sometimes find it easy to see things from the other person's point of view.
5. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
6. When I am upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her "shoes" for a while.
7. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.
8. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes feel much pity for them.
9. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
10. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.
11. Other people's misfortunes usually disturb me to some degree.
12. I am often touched by the things that I see happen.
13. I often find that I am excited too when other around me are excited.
14. I tend to lose control when I am bringing bad news to people.
15. I am worried too when those around me worry.
16. I cannot continue to feel O.K. if people around me are depressed.
17. I get upset too because a friend is acting upset due to a problem.
18. I become nervous too if others around me are nervous.
19. The people around me have a great influence on my moods.
20. I usually have a knack for saying the right thing to make people feel better when they are upset.
21. I usually respond appropriately to the feelings and emotions of others.
22. Others think of me as a very empathic person.
23. I am the type of person who can say the right thing at the right time.
24. My friends come to me with their problems because I am a good listener.

Self-Compassion (from 1 = never to 7 = always)

R: Reverse coded

Please respond to the following statements by choosing an option between never and always.

1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies. R
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong. R
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through. R
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world. R
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy. R
7. When I'm down, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself. R
9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.

10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. R
12. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am. R
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition
16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself. R
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
18. When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it. R
19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings. R
21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering. R
22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.
23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.
24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion. R
25. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure. R
26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Depression (from 1 = never to 7 = always)

In the past 6 months, how often have you been affected by each of the following problems?

1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things.
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.
3. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much.
4. Poor appetite or overeating.
5. Feeling tired or having little energy.
6. Feeling bad about myself, feeling that I am a failure, or feeling that I have let myself or family down.
7. Trouble concentrating on things such as using the media.
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed OR the opposite being so fidgety that I have been moving around a lot more than usual.
9. Thoughts that I would be better off dead or of hurting myself in some way.

Happiness (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

R: Reverse coded

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement below.

1. I feel that life is very rewarding.
2. I am well satisfied about everything in my life.
3. I don't think I look attractive. R
4. I find beauty in some things.
5. I can fit in everything I want to.
6. I feel fully mentally alert.
7. I do not have particularly happy memories of the past. R

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