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## Media and Emotion

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Emotions are central to the human experience. Yet, given the historical bias toward cognition in the study of media effects, emotions have served as a focus of only a small proportion of the extant research. Fortunately, this trend has been changing, and in more recent years, rapidly increasing attention has been paid to the role of emotions in the selection, processing, and influence of media content. The purpose of this chapter is to overview the ways in which emotion has been integrated into media effects research and how future research might benefit from more systematic inclusion of emotion-related constructs.

This chapter begins by defining the construct of emotion, followed by an examination of the theoretical frameworks and research paths that have considered emotion as (a) an impetus for message selection, (b) an outcome of message exposure, and (c) a mechanism by which other media effects (e.g., persuasive influence) emerge. In light of existing limitations in the body of scholarship at present, the chapter concludes by highlighting fruitful directions for future research, with a particular eye towards the role of newer communication technologies.

### **Defining Emotion**

Although a clear definition of emotion has proven elusive (Izard, 2007), in general emotions are viewed as internal, mental states representing evaluative, valenced reactions to events, agents, or objects that vary in intensity (e.g., Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). They are generally short-lived, intense, and directed at some external stimuli. This is in contrast to moods, which are untargeted and more enduring experiences (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991, for a review). Although different scholars emphasize different physiological, subjective, or motivational factors, general consensus suggests that emotions consist of five components: (1) cognitive appraisal or evaluation of a situation; (2) the physiological component of arousal; (3) a subjective feeling state; (4) a motivational component, including behavior intentions or action readiness; and (5) motor expression (Scherer, 1984).

Two basic models of emotion underlie the majority of the extant media research: dimensional and discrete. Dimensional views focus on emotion as a motivational state characterized primarily by two broad affective dimensions: arousal and valence (e.g., Russell, 1980). Related research focuses on how the degree of positive or negative feeling evoked by a stimulus affects various physiological,

cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Discrete emotion perspectives, on the other hand, focus on the arousal and effects of individual emotional states, like fear, anger, and hope. The discrete perspective holds that particular patterns of thoughts, or cognitive appraisals, are associated with unique emotional states (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Plutchik, 1980). Each emotion state is associated with physiological changes and action tendencies (e.g., flight for fear, attack for anger) that influence perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors in ways consistent with each particular emotion's adaptive goal (e.g., protection, retribution). This chapter focuses primarily on discrete emotions, though it incorporates other perspectives on emotion as warranted.

### **Emotion as the Impetus for Media Selection**

One of the more long-standing and important questions posed by media effects scholars is: Why do audiences select the media messages that they do? Given the centrality of emotion in determining action and the propensity of media to provide emotional experiences, it is unsurprising that one of the most well developed lines of emotion and media research focuses on the role of affect in selecting media content. Zillmann's (1988, 2000) seminal work on mood management theory (MMT) asserts that people, driven by hedonistic desires, strive to both alter negative moods as well as maintain and prolong positive ones. Consequently, they will arrange their environments (consciously or not) to adjust various moods using any type of communication available, including a host of media options. He notes four message features that might impact mood-based message selection: excitatory potential, absorption potential, semantic affinity, and hedonic valence. For each, the underlying principle is the same: If a message reflects one or more features that might perpetuate the negative state, the message is likely to be avoided in favor of one that would interrupt the negative state.

Much research supports mood management theory's predictions (see Chapter 10 in this volume). However, its boundaries have been challenged by the consideration of affective motivations not linked to hedonic pleasure. Most notably, Knobloch's (2003) mood adjustment theory asserts that when anticipating a future activity, people might use media to achieve the mood they believe will be most conducive to completing that task (i.e., mood optimization). Further, Oliver (2008) argued that media consumers are at times driven not by hedonism, but by eudaimonia, or happiness rooted in greater insight and connection to the human experience. This motivation, she argues, explains viewers' desires to consume more poignant or tragic fare. Further still, Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke, and Hull (2006) examined media preference driven by discrete emotions—regret in particular—finding results counter to MMT predictions. This and other related findings suggest that discrete emotions may function differently than moods in the media-selection process, facilitating coping (rather than simple regulation) needs.

By expanding the vision of what emotional needs drive media selection, this tradition of media research has been rejuvenated. Indeed, Knobloch-Westerwick's (2015) Selective Exposure Self- and Affect-Management (SESAM) model affords affect a central role in the selection process, highlighting how affect and the working self interrelate to influence motivation for selective exposure.

In sum, it is unquestionable that moods and emotions impact media message selection, and given the necessity of message exposure to media effects, it is critical that we more fully explore emotion's role in selection processes. Future research would do well to conceptually distinguish moods from emotions and to consider how a range of different discrete emotions (e.g., fear, anger, jealousy, grief, hope, pride) result in the selection of different forms of content such that regulation, optimization, and coping needs are met.

## Emotion as Outcome of Media Exposure

In addition to examining emotions as predictors of media exposure, media effects scholars have also focused on the emotional experiences that *result* from message exposure. Such research addresses both specific emotions (fear especially), as well as more general affective experiences, including enjoyment and self-transcendence.

### *Fright Responses to the Media*

The most long-standing line of media research with emotional response as the central focus involves children's fright reactions to media fare (see Cantor, 2009; Wilson & Drogos, 2009, for reviews). In essence, this body of research (a) documents that children experience fear in response to the media content they consume, whether intentionally selected or not; (b) addresses the conditions under which such reactions emerge; and (c) explores the lingering effects of such fright, including anxiety and sleep disturbance. Specific content that frightens children of different ages (e.g., monsters vs. abstract threats), the individual differences that moderate fright reactions (e.g., empathy, gender), and the effectiveness of coping strategies to manage potentially fright-inducing media exposure have all been explored. To explain why people have emotional responses to what are not immediate threats to the viewer, Cantor draws from the notion of stimulus generalization, arguing that because what we see in the media approximates reality, we respond to the media content as though it is real. Although some media consumers enjoy the experience of being frightened, the negative effects of exposure to fright-inducing media (e.g., anxiety, sleep disturbances) have served as the primary impetus for this line of inquiry.

### *Media Enjoyment*

More generally, the ongoing inquiry into issues related to media enjoyment fits nicely within the category of media-generated affective response as the outcome of media exposure. Although media enjoyment has been conceptualized in a variety of ways (see Oliver & Nabi, 2004, for a series of articles on this issue, and Tamborini, Bowman, Eden, Grizzard, & Organ, 2010), and likely derives from a collection of affective, cognitive, and even behavioral elements, it has primarily been considered an affectively driven construct that largely represents the degree of liking for media fare (Raney & Bryant, 2002). Given the importance of message liking to continued exposure, understanding why people enjoy what they do is an important issue to address.

Apart from the examination of personality traits in media enjoyment (see Krucmar, 2009; Weaver, 2000), the most systematic, theoretically driven line of research in this domain focuses on the disposition theory of drama, which in essence suggests that viewers' enjoyment of media content is based on their affective dispositions, or feelings, towards media characters, and the outcomes the characters experience (e.g., Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1980, 1991). More specifically, viewers enjoy seeing good things happen to liked characters, and bad things happen to disliked characters. It is less enjoyable, however, to watch bad things happen to good guys, and good things happen to bad guys (see Raney, 2003). The role of moral judgments and empathy have traditionally been considered integral to this process, though there have been evolutions in thinking about exactly how such judgments relate. For example, Raney (2004) introduced the role of schemas in setting expectations for various characters, suggesting that the type of character (protagonist or antagonist) may influence character liking first and assessment

of behavior morality second. More recently, Tamborini et al. (2010) highlighted the role of need satisfaction as a key predictor of media enjoyment. Drawing from self-determination theory, Tamborini and colleagues provide evidence that media that fulfill the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness explain about half the variance in video game enjoyment. In sum, understanding the relationships among a range of variables, including moral judgments, psychological needs, and affective response, and how they ultimately contribute to media enjoyment is still a very active and ongoing conversation.

### *Meaningful/Self-Transcendent Media Experiences*

Given media effects research has focused overwhelmingly on the negative consequences of media exposure, it is unsurprising that researchers have tended to focus on negative emotional responses to media content. Yet, on the heels of the positive psychology movement, media scholars have recently begun to explore a wider range of emotional states under the umbrella of meaningful media experiences, which are marked by more complex or mixed affective responses, such as feelings of poignancy or of being touched or moved (Oliver, 2008; see also Chapter 17 in this volume).

Particularly salient is the recent work focusing on self-transcendent emotions, such as elevation, gratitude, and admiration, which capture feelings associated with reduced attention to the self and one's own goals and a reorientation to something larger than one's own concerns (Haidt & Morris, 2009). Given that such states can associate with positive outcomes, including doing good deeds and greater focus on relationships (Haidt & Morris, 2009), there has been burgeoning interest in the capacity of media to elicit such states. As Oliver and her colleagues (2018) argue, self-transcendent media experiences arise when media consumers become aware of a shared humanity and "the potential for moral beauty, humility, courage, and hope" (p. 384). As such, they may experience elevation above their individual concerns, increased interconnectedness, and thus increased appreciation for the larger environment, including other people, natural wonders, and moral virtues. As this line of research is still in its infancy, investigations into the message features and experiences that generate feelings of self-transcendence and their subsequent social, psychological, and physical impacts offer an exciting avenue for future research.

### *Intensity of Emotional Response to Media Content*

In addition to research that focuses on affective responses to the media, two additional theories help to explain, at a very general level, the intensity of the emotional reactions people have to the media they consume: excitation transfer theory and desensitization. Excitation transfer theory (Zillmann, 1983) highlights the role of physiology in emotional experiences, asserting that if one is aroused physiologically, one's emotional response to subsequent events, including media exposure, is likely to be more intensely experienced. Thus, if one feels fright watching a film protagonist running for her life, one will feel even more relief than one would have otherwise once she has reached safety (Oliver, 1994; Zillmann, 1980).

Desensitization, on the other hand, focuses on the dampening of the intensity of emotional experience. Drawing from the therapeutic technique designed to help people overcome phobias (e.g., fear of flying), media desensitization suggests that repeated exposure to messages that typically evoke an emotionally based physiological response (e.g., those that contain violence) lose their capacity to do so (e.g., Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007;

Cline, Croft, & Courrier, 1973). Although a strict interpretation of desensitization focuses on physiological response (see also excitatory habituation, Zillmann & Bryant, 1984), research has expanded to consider self-reported arousal, emotional responses, and cognitive reactions (e.g., Mullin & Linz, 1995). The concern associated with desensitization, of course, is that this emotional dampening will transfer to the real world such that people will also have reduced emotional reactions to situations that might benefit from action (e.g., offering aid to someone in need) or may minimize the disincentive to engage in antisocial behavior (e.g., aggression).

Ultimately, both excitation transfer and desensitization have implications for the intensity of emotional arousal, though the specifics in terms of the scope of these effects are remarkably unexplored. For example, we know little about whether these processes work equally well for various negative or positive emotions. Can one be desensitized to fear appeals? To “feel-good” movies? Does excitation transfer work equally well for humor compared to fright? How might these processes be harnessed to positive effect? To the extent emotional intensity has implications for outcomes like attention, encoding, recall, and behavior (see below), a more complete understanding of these processes would be of great value.

### **Emotion as the Mechanism of Effect**

Emotions as outcomes of media exposure—which emotions are elicited and under what circumstances—are intriguing in their own right. But the influence of that emotional arousal on subsequent outcomes, such as message engagement, attitude formation, and behavior in a host of contexts, is paramount as these effects form the fabric of our personal experiences and our social interactions. Although space precludes an extensive discussion of these issues, four such effects that represent steps along the influence continuum are highlighted here: message processing, persuasion, aggressive behavior, and message sharing.

### ***Emotion and Message Processing***

Lang’s (2000) limited capacity model of motivated mediated message processing (LC4MP) represents an especially well-developed conceptualization of the influence of emotion and message engagement. The LC4MP essentially asserts that media consumers have limited capacity to allocate cognitive resources to the messages they choose to process. Yet these resources must be spread among the processing tasks of attention, encoding, storage, and retrieval. How those resources are allocated is argued to be driven by the message’s characteristics, signal properties, and motivational relevance (see Lang, 2000, for a detailed model description; see also Chapter 13 in this volume). Lang further argues that the motivational activation underlying and enabling emotional experiences influence the distribution of cognitive resources. More specifically, aversive (or avoid) system activation leads to negative emotional experience, and appetitive (or approach) system activation leads to positive emotional experiences. As the level of appetitive system activation increases, relatively more resources are expected to be allocated to encoding and storage of message information. As the level of aversive system activation increases, an increase, followed by a slight decrease, in allocation to encoding is expected.

The LC4MP serves as a useful guide for understanding the message features that stimulate the motivational systems that, in turn, impact the information attention, encoding, storage, and

retrieval that underlie media messages' effects on knowledge structures and decision-making. Thus, the LC4MP is poised as a foundational model in emotion and media effects. Although squarely rooted in the dimensional perspective of emotion, it would be of great interest to expand its scope to consider how discrete emotions, like fear, anger, and sadness, influence resource allocations, especially given such emotions vary in their approach and avoidant tendencies.

### ***Emotion and Persuasion***

The study of emotional persuasive appeals is arguably the most well-known and well-researched area of emotion as a mechanism of media effects. Although the persuasive influence of a range of emotions has been examined in the extant literature (e.g., guilt, anger, amusement, hope, pride), the overwhelming majority of this research has focused on fear arousal and its effects on both message processing and persuasion-related outcomes (e.g., attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behaviors).

#### *Fear Appeal Research*

The fear appeal literature has cycled through several theoretical perspectives over the past 60 years (see Myrick & Nabi, 2017, for a detailed discussion), including (a) the drive model, that conceptualized fear resembles a drive state, motivating people to adopt recommendations expected to alleviate the unpleasant state (e.g., Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953); (b) the parallel processing model (PPM; Leventhal, 1970), which separated the motivational from the cognitive approach to processing fear appeals, suggesting that those who respond to fear appeals by focusing on the threat (cognition) would engage in adaptive responses, whereas those responding with fear (emotion) would engage in maladaptive responses; (c) the expectancy-value based protection motivation theory (PMT; Rogers, 1975, 1983), distinguished by its focus on four categories of thought generated in response to fear appeals—judgments of threat severity, threat susceptibility, response efficacy, and self-efficacy—and how they might combine to predict message acceptance; and (d) the extended parallel process model (EPPM; Witte, 1992), which integrated the PPM and PMT, predicting that if perceived efficacy outweighs perceived threat, danger control and adaptive change will ensue. If, however, perceived threat outweighs perceived efficacy, then fear control and maladaptive behaviors are expected.

Although meta-analytic research has concluded that the cognitions identified in the PMT, and later the EPPM, are important to fear appeal effectiveness, no model of fear appeals has been endorsed as accurately capturing the process of fear's effects on decision-making (see Tanenbaum et al., 2015; Witte & Allen, 2000). Regardless, evidence does support a positive linear relationship between fear and attitude, behavioral intention, and behavior change. Thus, to the extent message features evoke perceptions of susceptibility and severity, as well as response and self-efficacy, fear may moderate persuasive outcomes, though important questions about the interrelationships among these constructs remain unanswered.

Recently, scholars have adopted a more nuanced approach to the study of fear appeals. Most notable, research examining the individual's experience of fear throughout message exposure (vs. focusing on fear assessment after message exposure) suggests that an inverted-U pattern of fear response may be a valid predictor of a fear appeal's persuasiveness (Meczowski, Dillard, & Shen, 2016). Further, the recently advanced emotional flow perspective (Nabi, 2015) suggests that fear appeals likely evoke emotions not only in response to threatening information (i.e., fear) but also in response to efficacy information (e.g., hope). As

such, the sequencing of emotional experiences may help to explain the conditions under which fear appeals are more likely to be effective (see Nabi & Myrick, 2019, for supportive evidence). These lines of research make it clear that the study of fear appeals is still evolving in interesting and illuminating ways.

### *Beyond Fear Appeals*

Importantly, interest in understanding the effects of emotions other than fear in the processing of persuasive messages is on the rise, guided by recently proposed models attempting to examine those processes (see Nabi, 2007, 2017). For example, the cognitive functional model (CFM; Nabi, 1999) aims to explain how message-relevant negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, sadness, guilt, disgust) affect the direction and stability of persuasive outcome based on three constructs: emotion-driven motivated attention, motivated processing, and expectation of message reassurance. Further, models focusing on the persuasive effect of particular emotional experiences, including anger (the anger activism model; Turner, 2007) and hope (persuasive hope theory; Chadwick, 2015), have emerged in recent years, both of which highlight efficacy as a critical component to the success of anger and hope appeals respectively.

More generally, Nabi (2003, 2007) has proposed the emotions-as-frames model (EFM), conceptualizing emotions as frames (or lenses) through which incoming stimuli are interpreted. The EFM begins by noting that message features contribute to the evocation of various discrete emotions. These emotional experiences, moderated by individual differences (e.g., schema development, coping style), are predicted to influence both information accessibility and information seeking, which ultimately combine to generate emotion-consistent decisions and action. With growing evidence of the link between message framing and emotional arousal, Nabi argues that this perspective may illuminate our understanding of the potentially central role emotions may play in how a range of media messages—not just those designed to persuade—might impact attitudes and behaviors. Ultimately, as much attention as has been paid to the study of emotion and persuasion to this point, much remains to be discovered in terms of the influence of individual emotions, as well as emotions in combination, on message processing and outcomes, and how to best structure messages to capitalize on emotions' drive to action.

### *Emotion and Aggressive Behavior*

Although it is important to examine the effects of media messages on emotional arousal and, in turn, mental processes, most people interested in media effects are especially concerned with audience behavior. Indeed, one of the earliest lines of research in this domain stemmed from concern over the potentially violence-inducing effects of film and comic book consumption. Scholarly interest in the area of media violence has yet to wane, with meta-analyses revealing a small but significant association between media exposure and anti-social behavior (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2001; see also Chapter 14 in this volume).

As this research program has matured, attention to the processes through which such effects emerge has developed. Most notable is the General Aggression Model (GAM; Anderson & Bushman, 2002), which suggests that aggression is a function of the learning, activation, and application of aggression-related knowledge structures. Thus, exposure to violent media content can promote short-term aggressive behavior by priming aggressive cognitions, increasing arousal, and generating an aggressive (i.e., angry) affective state. Further, the GAM suggests that

over time each exposure to media violence is another opportunity to learn that aggression is an appropriate way to deal with life's obstacles.

Clearly, emotions (e.g., anger, shame) play a central role in explaining the link between media exposure and aggressive behavior (see also Baumeister & Bushman, 2007). If we assume that other behavioral responses to media messages operate similarly, and recognizing that emotions function to motivate behavior (e.g., Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991), then it is reasonable to imagine that any research on the behavioral outcomes resulting from media exposure (e.g., voting, consumer, or health behaviors) should consider the emotions underlying those effects.

### ***Emotion and Message Sharing***

A less developed, but increasingly relevant, way in which emotions mediate responses to media consumption is through the social sharing that occurs as a result of exposure to emotionally charged media content. Although the social sharing of information obtained through the media is at the foundation of one of the earlier models of media effects (i.e., two-step flow model of communication; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the role of emotion was not of concern at that time. Yet a growing body of literature on the social sharing of emotions indicates that people have an instinctive need to disclose to others when they experience emotionally charged events, which has been widely documented across cultures, gender, and age groups (Rimé, 1995). Further, the more intense the emotional experience or the greater the emotional disruption, the more likely it is to be socially shared (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991; Rimé et al., 1994) and shared repeatedly over an extended period of time (Harber & Cohen, 2005; Rimé, 1995). The emotional broadcaster theory (EBT) of emotional disclosure suggests that this intrapsychic need to share emotional experiences results in both emotion and information traveling across social networks, and research documents that the extent to which stories travel reflects the degree to which the original teller was affected by the experience shared (Harber & Cohen, 2005).

Given the emotional nature of much media content, it is only logical to imagine that media messages may be the source of much social sharing. Although surprisingly little research speaks directly to this issue, growing evidence exists in multiple media contexts that the emotionality of media messages, including shocking news stories (e.g., Kubey & Peluso, 1990), health messages (e.g., Dunlop, Wakefield, & Kashima, 2009), and viral videos (Berger & Milkman, 2012), is associated with their diffusing through social networks. In essence, these bodies of literature suggest that emotional intensity (rather than valence) is a key predictor of whether media messages are shared, along with the elements of novelty and surprise. In light of technological innovations that allow for the mass sharing of media messages to one's social network via social media sites, the opportunity for the rapid diffusion of emotionally charged media messages is at a level heretofore unprecedented. Further, and of critical importance, to the extent such sharing influences audience behaviors, from health behavior change to political action, the study of emotion's role in message sharing holds tremendous social significance.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Despite mounting evidence that emotions are not only important, but arguably central, to a host of media effects, there are still numerous ways in which research could expand to fill the



many gaps that still exist in our understanding of how emotions relate to media consumption and, in turn, audiences' lived experiences. This section highlights just a few of the more promising research directions, including emotion's role in the theorizing of past media effects, media's association with emotional well-being, and the intersection of emotion and new media.

### *Role of Emotion in Existing Media Effects Paradigms*

Given media effects research tends to be rooted in psychological approaches and in light of the cognitive revolution experienced by the discipline of psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, it is not surprising that the dominant theories of media effects that have driven the vast majority of research since the 1970s have emphasized cognition as a primary explanatory mechanism. In light of the "discovery" of the importance of emotion in all aspects of message engagement, it is appropriate for media effects scholars to revisit these theories to consider the role emotion may be playing in their process of effects.

For example, cultivation theory, one of the most frequently referenced media effects theories, addresses the relationship between TV content and viewers' beliefs about social reality. Specifically, cultivation theory asserts that, compared to light TV viewers, heavy viewers perceive their social environment as more similar to the world as portrayed on TV than it really is, and a significant body of evidence supports this hypothesis (e.g., Morgan, 2009; see also Chapter 5 in this volume). Although such research acknowledges that exposure to violence can generate fear of victimization, cultivation research is extremely limited in its consideration of emotion generally. By considering how media diets result in the cultivation of emotions other than fear—like anger or gratitude, for example—or how emotional portrayals might be particularly influential in cultivating a range of content-related beliefs, this long-standing thread of media effects research could be greatly enriched.

As a second example, Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) revolves primarily around the functions and processes of observational learning (Bandura, 1986; see also Chapter 7 in this volume, and Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009). That is, by observing others' behaviors, including those of media figures, one may develop rules to guide subsequent actions. As observational learning occurs via symbolic representations, the effects are potentially long-lasting, and self-efficacy is believed to be central to behavioral performance. SCT focuses primarily on the cognitive elements of outcome expectancies and self-efficacy. However, one can easily imagine the role of emotion in these processes. For example, emotional experiences (e.g., regret, pride) might be conceptualized as relevant outcomes (i.e., positive or negative cues) that influence behavior. Also, how one *feels* about performing the behavior—not just whether one *thinks* one can perform it—may be relevant. That is, if one believes one can begin a program of exercise, but does not feel excited about that prospect, one may be less likely to do it, despite having high self-efficacy. Thus, integrating emotion into SCT-based research could be both illuminating and useful.

The integration of emotion into existing theory has already begun in the context of social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which asserts that people are driven to evaluate their own opinions and abilities, and when objective assessment is not possible, people compare themselves to others who are both similar on ability-related (though sometimes unrelated) attributes and are close (but not too close) in ability or opinion. Discrepancy on the target dimension then sets both the standard and the motivation for achievement. Recently, the role of emotion as a mediator of social comparison processes has been asserted, with the idea being that it is not the discrepancy per se but how one *feels* about the discrepancy that influences what

behaviors might result. For example, Nabi and Keblusek (2014) examined the emotions media consumers typically reported feeling while watching cosmetic surgery makeover programs and found that different emotional reactions (envy, hope, happiness) positively associated with social comparison. However, only envy mediated the relationship between social comparison and desire for plastic surgery. Exploring the conditions under which different emotions affect the outcome of social comparison processes stimulated by media exposure would be a most welcome avenue for future research.

In sum, a host of media effects theories purport to explain how media affect beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. However, they underplay the critical role of emotions in motivating the translation of thoughts into action. Were research to better incorporate emotion constructs, the explanatory power of these (and other) models and theories would surely improve.

### ***Role of Emotion in Explaining Media Effects-Related Behaviors***

Media effects research might be further illuminated not simply by focusing on how emotion influences the process of effects, but also how it might more directly associate with behaviors of interest. For example, one popular and enduring line of media research involves the effects of media exposure on viewers' body image (Levine & Harrison, 2009). Most research attempts to explain the role of media in disordered eating behaviors by focusing on socialization, modeling, or social comparison processes. However, absent from this discussion is the recognition that eating (or not eating) may be tightly linked to emotional experience. The notions of "comfort food" or drowning one's sorrows in a tub of ice cream capture this association well. Thus, any consideration of media's role in influencing disordered eating or other behaviors associated with body dysmorphia would be well-served by considering how media messages contribute to the link between emotion and food consumption. Similarly, the positive emotions associated with sexual behavior or the anger associated with violent behavior cannot readily be disassociated. Future research would do well to assess not simply the emotions evoked by media messages that, in turn, link to certain behaviors but also the emotions associated with the behaviors themselves to gain a more complete view of the media exposure-emotion-behavior dynamic.

### ***Media and Emotional Well-Being***

A newer area of emotion and media inquiry follows the trend of positive psychology by investigating the role of media use in well-being (see Reinecke & Oliver, 2017, for a volume focused on this issue). Despite previous research on constructs like mood management and enjoyment, only recently have scholars begun to explore how media use, ranging from television to serious games to mobile apps, relates to the construct of psychological well-being and more specifically to its underlying components of recovery (or recuperating from stress) and vitality (or feelings of "aliveness" and energy). Contemporary research has begun to explore how media use might aid in the recovery process through the replenishment of depleted physical, cognitive, and emotional resources, with findings suggesting that consuming hedonic entertainment influences relaxation and psychological detachment (e.g., Reinecke, 2009; Rieger, Reinecke, Frischlich, & Bente, 2014). Given recovery has been linked to improved well-being, energy, positive affect, and cognitive performance as well as decreased fatigue and burnout, and given the destructive psychological and physical effects of emotional dysregulation (e.g., Gross, 2013), understanding with more precision how media use may improve, or compromise, emotional well-being,

especially via the emotions they promote, may be one of the most important lines of media research of this and future generations (see Nabi & Prestin, 2017).

### ***Emotion and the New Media Environment***

In light of the rapid development of new technologies through which media are created and displayed, it is essential to consider emotion's role in these phenomena. Indeed there are numerous possibilities. First, given the wealth of information available online, examining the role of emotion in information seeking and content selection is fundamental (e.g., Myrick, 2017; Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008).

Second, as noted earlier, new technologies afford the opportunity for social sharing: not simply sharing emotionally evocative stories but sharing personal insights and life events, particularly through social media. How emotions influence what is shared via social media, by whom, and to what effect (on both self and others) have become questions of great social interest (see Tettegah, 2016, for a broad overview). Research on such issues is developing rapidly, though no clear syntheses have emerged as yet. However, a particularly compelling question is: How does the use of social media influence emotions which, in turn, influence psychological health? Do Facebook posts expressing anxiety actually generate supportive comments that build closer relationships, and thus enhance subjective well-being? Does reading posts boasting of others' accomplishments produce feelings of envy, and in turn create distance with online friends, thus diminishing well-being? As users learn about events in their friends' lives—relationship break-ups, engagements, illnesses, and so on—not only are emotions likely to shift (e.g., Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009), but behaviors consistent with those emotions (e.g., offering or seeking social support) are likely to shift as well, which may have important implications for psychological well-being worthy of investigation.

Third, given the explosion of user-generated content on the internet, it behooves us to consider how the emotions that people experience are expressed via the content they generate. For example, it is likely that blogging could serve as a relatively productive way to vent anger and frustration or generate feelings of well-being via social connection (e.g., McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2012), whereas excitement to express creativity may lead to the creation and posting of videos on YouTube. Such activities may contribute to feelings of self-actualization (Shao, 2009) and, in turn, life satisfaction. Indeed given that mastery within leisure experiences is central to the leisure activity–subjective well-being link (Kuykendall, Tay, & Ng, 2015), the creation of media content may serve as a leisure activity that exceeds the potential of mere consumption to influence subjective and psychological well-being.

### **Conclusion**

As social psychological research evolved from behaviorism to cognitivism, it was generally accepted that what we think drives our actions. Given increasing recognition of the centrality of emotion to the human experience, it is perhaps more fair to say that it is emotion, in conjunction with thought, that leads to action. Further, without emotional impetus, the thoughts we do have are less likely to translate into behavior. Clearly, this is a highly dynamic process in which cognitions, emotions, and behaviors influence one another over time, but in essence, this conceptualization indicates that to understand media effects processes and outcomes, we must more carefully examine the many ways in which emotions may be relevant. This

includes considering emotions not just as simple outcomes of media exposure but looking at a range of emotional experiences as the stimulus for and moderators of a far broader range of outcomes than we have considered to this point. To do so will surely improve our ability to understand and explain the diverse and exciting ways media impact our personal, social, and emotional lives.

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