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Social Media for Good? A Survey on Millennials' Inspirational Social Media Use

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There is no doubt about the extensive use of social media by the millennial generation, but the study of the effects of such use is only in its infancy. Though most studies so far focus on the negative effects of overall time spent on social media, the current study investigated the relationship between exposure to a specific type of content on social media and well-being outcomes: namely, inspirational content. Results of an online survey with a total of 116 students revealed that inspiring social media and online video use, but not overall time spent on social media was related to everyday experiences of gratitude, awe, vitality, prosocial motivations and prosocial behaviors, but not connectedness. Self-transcendent emotions as elicited from inspiring social media mediated these relationships. Results are discussed in relation to the relevance of the content young people view on social media and their impact on well-being.

Keywords: social networks, well-being, inspiration, prosocial behavior, millennials

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Social media is now the mass media of the digital age. According to the Pew Research Center (Perrin, 2015), 90% of all 18-29 year old's in the U.S. use at least one form of social media and spend up to 6.19 hours per week on it (Casey, 2017). Thus far, mostly negative effects of social media on individual's well-being have been studied. For example, social media use has been associated with decreased life satisfaction (Kross, et al., 2013; McDool, Powell, Roberts & Taylor, 2016; Tromholt, 2016), poor sleep quality, anxiety and low self-esteem in adolescence (Woods & Scott, 2016), body shame (Hanna, et al., 2017), and depressive symptoms (Lin, et al., 2016; Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015). Some researchers, however, noted some positive effects as well. For example, research has indicated a positive relationship between image based social media (i.e., Instagram) compared to text based social media on users' perceived loneliness and life satisfaction (Pittman & Reich, 2016; Yang, 2016). Other research suggests an increase in social capital, including life satisfaction and social trust with increased Facebook group use (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). We wanted to extend this literature by investigating

the effects of social media and online video use on well-being indicators of prosocial intentions and behaviors, gratitude, awe, positive affect, vitality and connectedness; a set of well-being variables not investigated before in the context of social media usage. Additionally, whereas most studies so far focused on the effects of overall time spent on social media on well-being indicators (i.e., life satisfaction), the current study investigated the effects of exposure to a specific type of content on social media: namely, inspirational content.

A recent national representative audience survey on inspirational media use (Raney, Janicke, Oliver, Dale, Jones & Cox., 2018) found that the third most mentioned media 18-29 year old's indicated to ever have felt inspired by (after music and movies) was watching an online video (79.5%) or using social media (67.3%). The inspiring content people are inspired by in social media and online videos is very diverse. For social media posts people find inspiring, Raney et al. (2018) discovered themes of tragedies and human suffering (19.2%), compassion, hope and perseverance portrayals (16.4%) as well as posts about family and personal relationships (11.9%). For online videos it was portrayals of compassion, hope and perseverance (15.6%), videos portraying animals and children (12.4%), and tragedies and human suffering (11.9%) that emerged as inspiring themes. The "other" category was coded 24.3% for online videos and 18.1% for social media indicating a wide variety of themes people find inspiration in.

Inspirational media research is still at its infancy. Several studies have looked at the antecedents and consequences of exposure to inspiring traditional media (films, TV shows, i.e., Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012; Janicke & Oliver, 2016). However, research on inspiring social media and online videos is almost non-existent. Due to the importance of inspiration for well-being (i.e., Thrash, Elliot, Markuski, & Cassidy, 2010), the current study was an attempt to fill this gap in the literature. The results of the study are important to better understand the relationship between the type of content young social media users consume and its impact on their well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that one can feel inspired by depictions of for example, human virtues, extraordinary skills or grand vistas which are, more specifically, elicitors of self-transcendent emotions which include awe, elevation, admiration, gratitude, and hope (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003; Haidt & Morris, 2009; Oliver et al., 2018). Self-transcendent emotions have been defined as other-praising emotions that draw individuals out of their usual state of ego-centric self-consciousness and motivate them to look beyond their own needs or desires and consider the well-being of others (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003; Haidt & Morris, 2009). Self-transcendent emotions are different from hedonic purely pleasure oriented emotion in that that the former is outward orienting, whereas the latter focus on the self, more so than others. Research suggests that people colloquially understand self-transcendent media as inspiring media (Raney et al. 2018). For example, Janicke, Raney, Oliver, Dale, Jones, and Cox (2018) have shown that inspiring media predict everyday self-transcendent experiences for a nationally representative sample of Americans. Other survey studies have shown a relationship between participant defined inspiring films and TV shows and the experience of self-transcendent emotions (Janicke, Raney, Dale & Oliver, 2017; Janicke, Taylor, Raney, 2016). Consequently, we define inspiring media as content which is perceived as touching, moving and inspiring by audiences and as such elicits self-transcendent emotions (cf. Raney et al., 2018).

In turn, self-transcendent emotions as well as inspiration have been shown to predict a variety of well-being indicators. Research has both directly and indirectly linked inspiration with well-being. Directly, Thrash and his colleagues (Thrash, 2007; Thrash & Elliot, 2004; Thrash, et al., 2010) have shown a causal link between inspiration and multiple well-being indicators, including positive affect (but not negative affect), life satisfaction, vitality and self-actualization. Indirectly, Thrash et al. (2010) has linked inspiration with self-transcendent emotions, which, in turn, have been shown to impact well-being positively (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Keltner & Haidt, 2013). More specifically, research has shown a clear relationship between self-transcendent emotions as elicited from media and well-being outcomes of connectedness (Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Oliver, et

al., 2015), gratitude (Diessner, Iyer, Smith, & Haidt, 2013), prosocial motivations (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012; Erickson et al., 2017) and prosocial behavior (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Bailey & Wojdynski, 2014; Schnall, Roper & Fessler, 2010). For example, Bailey & Wojdynski (2014) found that people who watched a clip portraying human virtues were more likely to help similar and dissimilar others, compared to people who watched a non-inspiring video. Similarly, Janicke and Oliver (2017) demonstrated that people who experienced elevation from recalling a meaningful compared to a pleasurable film were more likely to say that the film experiences made them feel more connected to their families and motivated to help strangers.

Additionally, we assume that inspiring media would also predict the well-being indicator of everyday awe. The experience of self-transcendence from inspiring media could consequently make people more receptive for awe experiences in their everyday lives. That is, because inspiring media that elicits self-transcendent emotions has been shown to develop an outward orientation (Erickson et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2018) toward the beauties of nature, art, or moral and non-moral excellence in consumers, which are known elicitors of awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2013). Based on the theoretical understanding of self-transcendent emotions and research which has shown that videos indeed can elicit awe (Prade & Saroglou, 2016; Van Cappellen, Saroglou, Iweins, Piovesana, & Fredrickson, 2013) we predicted a relationship between the consumption of inspiring social media and the likelihood for people to experience awe in their everyday life, as well.

Overall, research has clearly established that gratitude, connectedness, positive affect, vitality, prosociality, and awe are all indicators of well-being (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Buchanan & Bardi, 2010; Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012; Rudd, Vohs & Aaker, 2012; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). That means that people who score high in all of those variables, generally lead a more flourishing life.

In sum, self-transcendent emotions assessed as a media experience have been shown to mediate the relationship between media exposure and well-being outcomes (i.e., Janicke & Oliver 2017; Oliver et al., 2012). On the other hand, awe and gratitude, for example, when assessed in a trait like fashion, are reflecting a person's overall state of well-being (i.e., Wood et al., 2010; Rudd et al., 2012). In the current study, we investigated the role of inspiring social media, its effects on self-transcendent emotions as a response to

the media on every day's well-being outcomes, including the prevalence of awe and gratitude experiences in everyday life, connectedness, vitality and prosociality. Specifically, we predicted that the relationships between self-transcendent emotions and well-being variables previously found for the exposure to online videos, movies, written narratives or the recall of movies and TV shows, hold true for the recall of inspiring social media and online video encounters as well:

H1: Exposure to inspiring social media and online videos will predict self-transcendent emotions.

H2: Overall exposure to social media will not predict self-transcendent emotions. Self-transcendent emotions will be predict H3) connectedness, H4) awe in everyday life H5) state gratitude, H6) vitality, H7) positive affect, H8) prosocial motivations, H9) and prosocial behavior.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypotheses.

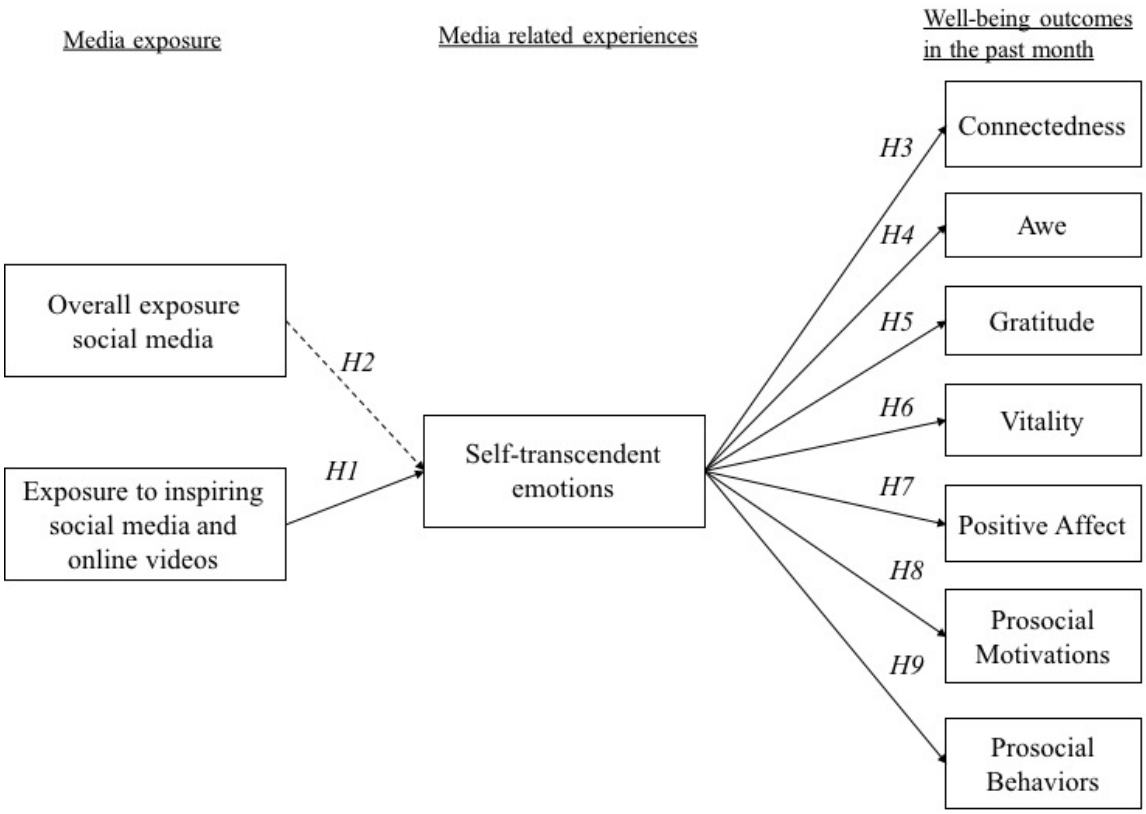

Figure 1. Model of all Hypotheses.

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

Overall, 146 student participants were recruited from a subject pool at a private university in the western U.S. to participate in the online survey for the exchange of extra credit. After examining the original data, 30 participants were excluded due to incomplete or inattentive questionnaire completion. Thus, the final sample consisted of 116 participants, with a mean age of 19.95 years (*SD* = 2.11), 76.7% females and a race distribution of 70.7% White, 3.4% Black, 18.1% Hispanic/Latino, 13.8% Asian, 2.6% Native Hawaiian, and .9% American Indian. An online survey was constructed using Qualtrics that took approximately 20 minutes to complete. First, demographic variables, and personality variables unrelated to the current study, were assessed, followed by questions about participants social media use, self-transcendent emotions and well-being indicators.

Measures

Social Media Use. Participants were asked how many minutes per day they spent on 11 different social media platforms by freely estimating the time they spent on each platform using it for personal purposes (*SUM* = 246.98 minutes, *SD* = 176.75 minutes; Min=45.00 minutes, Max 1410.00 minutes), as well as for what reason (see Table 1 and 2).

Inspirational Media Experiences. Additionally, an inspirational media scale from Raney et al., (2018) was adapted to measure how often participants generally felt personally moved, touched or inspired in the last month consuming a piece of music (*M*=4.29, *SD* = 1.26; 4 = a few times a week), social media (*M*= 3.47, *SD* = 1.25), watching an online video (*M* = 3.43, *SD* = 1.20; 3 = once or twice a week), reading a news story (*M*=3.29, *SD* = 1.10), watching a TV show (*M* = 3.22, *SD* = 1.20), and watching a movie (*M* = 2.98, *SD* = 1.05). Answer options were assessed on a 6-point Likert-type scale with the following anchor points: Never, seldom, once or twice a week, a few times a week, almost every day, at least once a day. Because using social media and watching an online video were not significantly different from each other, they were combined for the analysis (*M*=3.45, *SD* = 1.10) to form one social media and online video inspiration score. That is because including them separately in the analysis would result in multicollinearity as the measures were also highly correlated (r=.630, p<.001). That is, participants indicated to feel inspired by social media and online videos equally often.

Table 1

Time in Minutes Spent on Social Media Platforms Per Day

Type of social media used	Total usage	Male (*n*=36) *M* (*SD*)	Female (*n*=89) *M* (*SD*)	*F* (1,114)	*p*
Instagram	63.55 (54.95)	56.15 (68.66)	66.20 (50.61)	.669	.415
Snapchat	60.92 (51.27)	52.20 (46.12)	63.58 (52.88)	.915	.332
Facebook	55.65 (75.63)	76.73 (144.87)	49.44 (36.63)	2.63	.107
Youtube	33.73 (59.89)	54.15 (93.86)	24.78 (34.27)	6.06	.015
Twitter	15.39 (27.64)	10.58 (15.7)	16.97 (30.27)	1.07	.303
Pinterest	6.66 (12.29)	1.54 (6.12)	8.22 (13.26)	6.19	.014
Tumblr	5.04 (14.48)	4.62 (16.31)	4.89 (13.83)	.007	.933
Google Plus	4.69 (13.78)	--	6.08 (15.43)	3.85	.052
Reddit	1.85 (12.69)	8.08 (26.23)	.06 (.530)	8.49	.004

Note. Two participants indicated non-binary for gender.

Table 2

Reasons for Social Media Use

How much do you use social media for the following activities?	Total (n = 116) M (SD)	Male (n = 36) M (SD)	Female (n=89) M (SD)	F (1,114)	p
Entertainment	4.28 (.643)	4.12 (.711)	4.33 (.617)	2.18	.143
Being connected with friends/family	4.04 (.936)	3.62 (1.26)	4.16 (.782)	7.11	.009
To feel up to date (not left out)	3.91 (.875)	3.50 (1.03)	4.02 (.797)	7.53	.007
To gain knowledge	3.29 (1.02)	3.31 (1.12)	3.29 (1.00)	.005	.946
News	3.26 (1.04)	3.46 (1.03)	3.21 (1.04)	1.15	.285
To express myself	3.18 (1.13)	2.88 (1.17)	3.25 (1.09)	2.16	.145
To organize group meetings/events	2.91 (1.13)	2.54 (1.21)	3.02 (1.11)	3.79	.054
To get likes	2.88 (1.17)	2.38 (1.13)	3.03 (1.15)	6.43	.013
To be part of something bigger	2.68 (1.09)	2.35 (.977)	2.76 (1.11)	3.01	.085

Note. Two participants indicated non binary for gender. Answers ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time).

Mediated self-transcendent emotions. Seven items, adopted from previous research (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Janicke et al., 2017) measured self-transcendent emotions as related to the inspiring media encounters, including: admiration, inspired, awestruck, compassionate, hopeful, grateful, and elevated (α = .872). Items were assessed on a 6 point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much) asking participants how much they felt any of the emotions in the past month when they watched online videos or used social media. Social media and online videos were combined in the instructions, because conceptually social media includes online videos and online videos are hosted on social media platforms (i.e., YouTube, Vimeo).

Connectedness toward others. To assess peoples' connectedness experiences two separate scales were used. First, the inclusion of the other in the self-scale (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992), including two separate items measuring people's feelings of closeness to a) their friends and b) people in general were employed. The inclusion of the other in the self

scale asked participants to select from a series of increasingly overlapping Venn diagrams to indicate how close they felt to each of the aforementioned groups, in the last month.

Second, four items from the identification with all humanity scale (McFarland, Webb & Brown, 2012) were employed to assess peoples' feelings of connectedness toward humanity as a whole (α = .791). An example item of the identification with humanity scale is: "How much would you say you have in common with people all over the world?" (1) Nothing in common, (5) very much in common.

Awe. Six items from the Dispositional Positive Emotions Scale (Shiota, Keltner & John, 2006) were adopted to measure how often people felt awe or wonder toward the world in the past month (α = .828). Items were assessed on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely false) to 6 (absolutely true). Example items are: "In the past month, I felt wonder almost every day," and "In the past month, I had many opportunities to see the beauty of nature."

Vitality. Overall feelings of vitality in the last month were assessed with 7 items (α = .896) from the vitality scale by Ryan and Frederick (1997) Some sample items are: "Overall, last month, I was looking forward to each new day," and "Overall, last month I felt energized." Items were assessed on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much).

Gratitude. The 6-item state gratitude adjective scale by McCullough, Tsang and Emmons (2004) was used to assess how grateful, content, fortunate etc. participants felt in the past month (α = .912). Even though this was a state scale, with the anchor for the evaluation of gratitude experiences in the last month we wanted to assess gratitude in a trait like fashion. Again, items were assessed on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much).

Positive Affect. To assess peoples' general positive emotions in the past month, 5 items from the 20-item PANAS scale (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) were adopted (excited, enthusiastic, active, attentive, inspired, α = .843) and assessed on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much).

Prosocial Motivations. To assess peoples' motivations to be more prosocial after exposure to inspiring social media and online videos, 6 items from Oliver et al. (2012) were

adopted (α = .872). Example items are: "In the past month, after using social media or watching online videos I felt motivated to: "do good for others", or "help others in need"". Participants indicated how often they experienced any of these motivations on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (all the time).

Prosocial Behavior. To measure how often participants have recently performed altruistic acts, 10 items (α = .794) from the altruistic personality scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981) were adopted following a previous media related study (Raney et al., 2018). Participants had to respond how often, on a scale from 1 (have not done this in the past month) to 6 (nearly every day), they performed various altruistic acts in the past month. For example: "held the door open or held the elevator for a stranger" or "sent a personal note to someone expressing support for them."

RESULTS

First, a stepwise regression procedure was applied to analyze the prediction (H1) that exposure to inspiring social media (and online videos), but not overall time spent on 11 different social media platforms per day (H2) predicts self-transcendent emotion. The final model was significant ($F(2,113) = 31.84$, $p < .001$, Adj. $R^2 = .349$) showing that overall time spent on social media was not significant ($\beta = .009$, $SD = .000$, $p = .901$). In contrast, inspiring social media exposure was significant ($\beta = .599$, $SD = .071$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 and H2 were supported.

The remaining hypotheses were investigated via path analysis with *M*Plus 5.2 statistical software, using the maximum likelihood estimation method. As per the correlation results (Table 3), connectedness was not significantly correlated with inspiring social media use, leaving H3 unsupported. We therefore excluded all connectedness variables from the path analysis. Additionally, to avoid multicolinearity in our model, we excluded positive affect in our analysis as it greatly overlapped with the vitality measure (see Table 3).

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Between All Independent and Dependent Variables As Used In the Path Model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Overall time spent on SM	1										
2. Time spent on inspiring SM	.309**	1									
3. Self-transcendent Emotions	286**	.600**	1								
4. Connectedness to Friends	-.037	-.089	-.019	1							
5. Connectedness to People i.g.	.008	-.039	.094	.515**	1						
6. Connectedness to Humanity	-.070	.077	.130	.036	.024	1					
7. Awe	.034	.435**	.495**	.146	.100	.210*	1				
8. Gratitude	.074	.310**	.346**	.143	.132	.213*	.487**	1			
9. Vitality	-.040	.303**	.299**	.164	.095	.064	.441**	.611**	1		
10. Positive Affect	.022	.412**	.423**	.170	.132	.095	.427**	.667**	.711**	1	
11. Prosocial Motivations	-.030	.445**	.601**	.149	.152	.205*	.476**	.356**	.345**	.444**	1
12. Prosocial Behaviors	.106	.188*	.240**	.228*	.165	.274**	.362**	.350**	.217*	.304**	.305**

Note. SM= Social Media. Connectedness to People i.g. = Connectedness to people in general. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

The predicted model fit the data very well without further specification (χ^2= 6.476 *df* = 5, p = .262, RMSEA = .050, 90% CI [.000 .146], CFI = .994, SRMR =.039). As predicted (H1), the amount of exposure to inspiring social media and online video content predicted the experience of self-transcendent emotions, which in turn predicted the well-being indicators of awe, gratitude, vitality, prosocial motivations and prosocial behaviors, supporting H4-H6, H8 and H9 (see Figure 2 for the final path model results). Because positive affect strongly correlated with gratitude and vitality in our model, we had to eliminate it from our model to avoid multicolinearity. However, as per the correlations analysis, positive affect was significantly correlated with the amount of inspiring social media exposure and self-transcendent emotions, partially supporting hour hypothesis (H7).

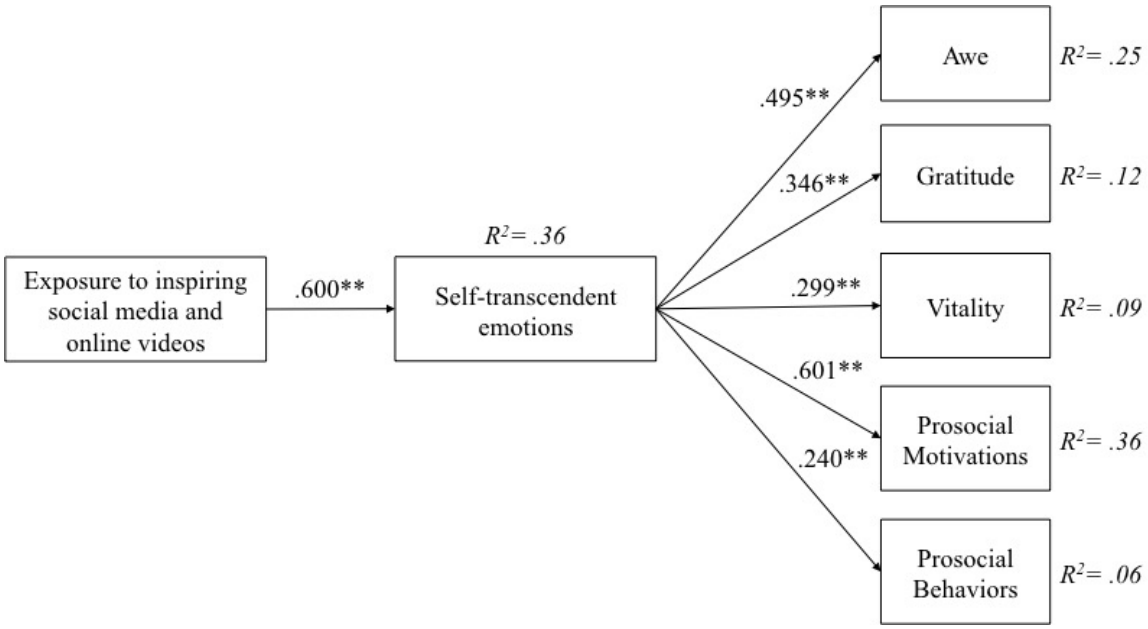

Figure 2. Final path model (N= 116) for the well-being indicators and inspiring social media and online video exposure. Only significant standardized paths coefficients (*p < .001) are represented. Model fit was based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) recommended fit indices: CFI >.95, RMSEA <.06, SRMR <.09.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the study was to investigate the relationship between the use of inspiring social media and online videos among the millennial generation and well-being variables. To the best knowledge of the authors, this is one of the first studies that investigated these relationships. The current study adds to the literature on the effects of social media usage, by pointing out that the content people consume, rather than the sole amount people spend on social media is important to consider when making inferences about its effects on well-being.

The sample of the millennial generation that was investigated in the current study spent approximately 4 hours and 11 minutes on their different social media platforms daily, mostly using Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook. They felt inspired by social media or online videos more than the midpoint of the 6-point scale used, indicating an approximate use that ranged between the scale points: once or twice a week and a few times a week (M=3.45, SD = 1.11). The results on the amount of inspiring social media and online video use support previous nationally representative survey data by Raney et al. (2018) which showed that the millennial generation felt inspired by social media and online videos more often than any other generation. In the present sample, inspiring social media and online video use was named as the second most often encountered inspiring media experience after feeling inspired by a song or piece of music.

Even though the encounter of inspiration twice a week via social media or online videos is not very much, Raney et al. (2018) indicated that the majority of Americans (68.1%) comes across inspiring media content by chance and not intentionally. Thus, coming across inspiring content twice a week seems to be an accurate reflection of that chance encounter. Additionally, participants used their social media mainly for the purpose of entertainment, connection and feeling up-to-date (see Table 2), which are all activities that could elicit self-transcendence tangentially but are likely not considered inspiring media encounters per se by the participants. This explains the rather low encounter with inspiring content compared to the overall amount of time the millennial generation spends on social media platforms. Future research on the specific opportunities that social media provides for the millennial generation to feel inspired

would be important, considering the detrimental effects that research has observed from social media use in general (McDool et al., 2016; Hanna et al., 2017).

In line with the hypotheses, the results indicated that inspiring social media and online video use, but not the time spent on social media in general, is related to the experience of self-transcendent emotions, supporting findings by Thrash et al. (2010) that linked inspiration to self-transcendence. The study further supports previous research that outlines a general understanding of the lay audience for inspiration media content, which more specifically is related to self-transcendent emotions.

Moreover, the self-transcendent experience elicited from inspiring social media content predicted a range of well-being indicators in young people's lives, including the amount of wonder and natures' beauty they saw in their everyday lives (awe), their feelings of gratitude, their sense of aliveness, enthusiasm and energy (vitality), their motivation to do good for others and help others in need (prosocial motivation) and the amount of actual prosocial behaviors they enacted in the last month. Additionally, it was predicted that inspiring social media is also predicative of generally greater positive affect in consumers. However, due to multicollinearity in the model, conclusions could only be drawn from the correlations analysis. Positive affect as assessed with five items from the PANAS scale overlapped greatly with the used vitality measure (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), measuring not only the valence of affect but also the arousal component (i.e., enthusiastic, attentive). Future research would benefit from using a sole valence measure of positive affect (i.e., mDES by Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh and Larkin, 2001) to further describe the benefits of inspiring social media use on positive affect.

Research has shown that people who are more grateful in life are happier, feel more connected to others, sleep better and visit the doctor less often (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Furthermore, people who experience awe reported higher life satisfaction, humility and better physical health (Rudd et al., 2012; Ruberton, Kruse, & Lyubomirsky, in press; Stellar, John-Henderson, Anderson, Gordon, McNeil & Keltner, 2015). People who generally experience more positive emotions in life report greater well-being as well as better health (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Prosociality has been associated with greater positive affect, meaningfulness and vitality (Martela, & Ryan, 2016). Consequently, the power of inspiring social media may be a crucial mechanism

through which the millennial generation can develop greater well-being that manifests mentally, physically as well as socially. Future studies may focus on the experimental exploration of using social media for inspiring reasons in specific, to investigate how purposeful exposure to content that elicits self-transcendent emotions predicts well-being from social media use in the long term.

In contrast to the hypothesis, and previous research (Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Oliver et al., 2015), the current study revealed no relationship between inspiring social media use or self-transcendent emotions and connectedness to friends, people in general, or humanity as a whole. One explanation for this result may be that the participants had to recall a specific inspiring social media content or online video, which might have been to unspecific to elicit any results of connectedness. Even though, cued recall of a media event is a common method used in media effects research (Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Oliver et al., 2012; Erickson et al., 2017) previous research that did find a relationship between inspiring media and connectedness experiences asked participants to recall a complete film or exposed them directly to a video. These methods may lend themselves to stronger subsequent effects due to a) the longer narrative format of a film that may enhance recall, as opposed to a short social media post that may also follow a different narrative format, or b) the emotional reactions elicited from direct media exposure as opposed to recall of such an event.

Additionally, the current study measured offline rather than online connectedness. Grieve and his colleagues (Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan & Marrington, 2013) found that Facebook use provides opportunities to develop and maintain connectedness online, but not necessarily offline. With the unique purpose of social media to interact online, inspirational content may only foster online relationships and not transcend the boundaries of the medium.

Another explanation is that generally research has shown that the use of social networking sites mainly increases contact with weak ties, rather than strong ties (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Consequently, our connectedness measure was not focusing on such ties and therefore yielded the nonsignificant results. Future studies are needed to substantiate these explanations.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the novelty of our study to explore inspiring media in the context of social media, it comes with some limitations. First, the study did not capture any personality traits that could further impact the tendency to consume inspiring media content and consequently it's effects. For example, Oliver, Ferchaid, Raney, Janicke, and Dale (2017) found that empathy predicted exposure to inspiring videos for a sample of mid aged adults (M = 46 years). Other research suggests that need for affect, need for cognition and spirituality, as well as several demographic variables are significant predictors of inspiring media exposure and inspiring media experiences (Raney et al., 2018; Oliver & Raney, 2011). Future research on a variety of predictor variables would be important to better understand the millennial audience that seeks out inspiring content and the potential differentiating effects that are due to those personality differences.

Second, the study only investigated a small subsample of the millennial generation from one university in one state of the U.S. More geographically diverse samples are needed to make generalizations about the millennial generation's uses and effects of inspiring social media on well-being.

Third, we want to point out that our results may be limited in their specificity when it comes to the role that social media versus online videos play in predicting well-being outcomes. Since participants indicated no difference in the frequency with which they experienced inspiration from social media or online videos, the two items were combined for the analysis. However, it may be that online videos, due to their particular vivid nature have a stronger effect on well-being then social media that is text based. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the effects of social media and online videos separately for well-being.

Fourth, due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot make any causal inferences about the relationship between inspiring social media use and well-being. In fact, well-being may also predict greater inspiring social media use. However, based on the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) we would assume an upward spiral of positivity from self-transcendent emotions. That is, due to the outward focusing effect of self-transcendent emotions inherent in inspiring media content (see Oliver et al., 2018, for an overview), participants could develop greater well-being, and an orientation toward the

good, which in turn may shape their selective perception to seek out inspiring social media in the future. An experimental or longitudinal design would help to explore the directionality of this relationship further.

CONCLUSION

Future research in this area is important, considering the research that has shown various negative effects from social media exposure for the millennial generation (i.e, Kross et al., 2013; Tromholt, 2016; Woods & Scott, 2016). However, consumption of inspiring media content may counter those negative outcomes. As this study indicates, inspiring social media is not only heartwarming and positive in nature it is also energizing and fosters social good. Whereas some research already points toward the importance of empowering social media consumers to manage their social media consumption to elicit positive effects (i.e., abstain from social comparison, consume more image based social media, see also Yang, 2016; Pittman & Reich, 2016), the current study stresses the importance of the content consumed and potentially marketed to the millennial generation. Social media companies as well as content creators could benefit from fostering inspiring content to engage the millennial generation *and* increase their well-being.

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