ARE YOU GENUINE OR ACTING TO APPEAR MORAL? AN EXPERIMENT
APPLYING ATTRIBUTION THEORY TO INVESTIGATE THE IMPACT OF INSPIRING UGC MEDIA ON VIEWERS

A Dissertation in
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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to examine positive outcomes of morally inspiring media in comparison to enjoyment-focused media and to explore the effects of perceived authenticity of user-generated content (UGC) on media effectiveness (i.e., evaluation of media and behavioral intentions to promote the media) by applying Weiner’s (1985, 1986) attribution theory. Further, the study is particularly interested in discovering the potential of using UGC to stimulate the positive effects of prosocial messages on viewers.

A 2 (Media Theme: Moral Beauty vs. Enjoyment) X 2 (Media Type: User-Generated Content vs. Sponsored Content) between-subjects factorial experiment was employed to test viewers’ psychological responses to morally inspiring media and UGC. In terms of media themes, two video clips were used per condition (moral beauty vs. enjoyment). These media messages were presented with or without company sponsorship information to manipulate the type of media (user generated vs. sponsored).

A total of 389 participants were recruited from online crowdsourcing service Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The findings revealed that participants viewing portrayals of someone’s moral excellence showed greater levels of the moral emotion elevation than those viewing others enjoying themselves. Those elevated viewers reported high levels of prosocial motivations, and the motivations were positively related to behavioral intentions to promote the inspiring media such as recommending it to others to watch and sharing it with others. Additionally, the findings regarding UGC consumption support the idea that the psychological outcomes resulting from UGC can stimulate media effectiveness. The participants exposed to UGC reported greater levels of perceived authenticity—that media characters’ behaviors and interactions are motivated by their own values and reasons rather than by profit motives—than those viewing company-sponsored media. The perceived authenticity of UGC was positively associated with feelings elicited by the
media creator and the perceived message influence. These affective and cognitive responses to media were positively associated with viewers’ evaluation of media. Finally, viewers’ media evaluation was positively associated with their intentions to promote the media.

Additional findings highlighted the importance of perceived media authenticity in enhancing affective responses to elevating media. The study found that one’s positive feelings evoked by a media creator through perceiving media authenticity had a positive association with feelings of elevation. Although the findings of the study failed to obtain the interaction effect of perceived authenticity in the relationship between perceived moral beauty and feelings of elevation, the results approached conventional levels of statistical significance.
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INTRODUCTION

Diverse functions built within user-generated content (UGC) platforms allow users to create and publish their own media (e.g., photos, videos, text) and to freely exchange self-created content with friends and strangers alike (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, & Moon, 2007, 2009). This consumption of UGC offers users unique gratifications by allowing them to build social connectedness and share self-expressions with others (Shao, 2009). These gratifications have contributed to the growing popularity of UGC use by both general audiences (Burgess & Green, 2009; Cheong & Morrison, 2008) and professionals in fields such as advertising (Duffy, 2010), journalism (Wardle & Williams, 2010), and tourism (Burgess, Selitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2009).

Despite the rapid growth of UGC use, however, there has been little empirical research investigating why viewers appreciate UGC in spite of its often short duration, non-narrative structure, and frequent low-quality appearance—especially as compared to professionally generated content (PGC) (Cha et al., 2007, 2009). Recently, qualitative findings from diverse fields of study suggest that viewers ascribe a unique value to UGC due to perceived authenticity. Viewers perceive UGC as emotionally engaging, authentic, genuine, and representative (Burgess & Green, 2009; Burgess et al., 2009; Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Duffy, 2010; Paek, Hove, & Jeon, 2013; Wardle & Williams, 2010). These indications are similar to findings from a study on true story-based entertainment education (Guttmann, Gesser-Edelsburg, & Israelashvili, 2008): audiences are likely to engage in, and emotionally react to, media content when perceiving that a character’s situation and emotional state are genuine. Overall, previous research suggests perceived authenticity as a unique psychological aspect of UGC, which may contribute to intensifying audiences’ emotional reactions.

Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory helps to explain how audience perception of media characters’ authenticity would be associated with emotional and attitudinal responses to the media.
This theory posits that an individual intuitively responds with either favorable or unfavorable emotional reactions to a person’s actions based on attributional judgments of the person’s behavior, and the attributed emotions guide the individual to associate certain attitudes or behaviors toward the acting person. Typically, studies employing the theory have examined the issues of stigma and have demonstrated that viewers’ perceived attributions of portrayed stigmatized others in test scenarios influenced their emotional and behavioral responses toward the group of people (e.g., Corrigan et al., 2002; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Jeong, 2007; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). For example, viewers attributing homosexuality to controllable causes (e.g., personal lifestyle) tend to show negative emotions toward the group of people such as feelings of anger, which lead to either discrimination or avoidance against them. In contrast, those attributing homosexuality to uncontrollable causes (e.g., genetic reasons) reported more positive emotions such as feelings of pity or sympathy, and the feelings are associated with heightened motivations to help the group.

The pattern of findings in attribution-affect research can be applied to the context of UGC, assuming that viewers’ perceived authenticity of UGC—media characters’ interactions are genuine—may be associated with emotional and attitudinal responses to the media, and contributes to growing popularity of using UGC in diverse areas.

The unique psychological outcome of UGC, perceived authenticity, may be an essential factor affecting the underlying mechanism of elevation—the moral emotion defined as an emotional reaction elicited by witnessing others’ acts of moral virtue (Haidt, 2003). Positive psychology and media scholars have determined that elevated people are inclined to prosocial motivations (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Freeman, Aquino, & McFerran, 2009; Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012) and exhibit prosocial behaviors (Freeman et al., 2009; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011). Given the trend of elevation research—predominantly employing either true story-based stimuli (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Freeman et al., 2009; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012; Schnall et al., 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011) or user-
generated YouTube videos (Oliver et al., 2015), viewers’ perceived authenticity of media characters’ moral behavior may be related to affective responses to the moral exemplar; in other words, it seems reasonable to suggest that belief in the genuine portrayals of moral beauty may play a critical role in eliciting elevation.

Although qualitative research has suggested perceived authenticity to be a characteristic of user-generated content, there has not been a study as that provides a theoretical outline regarding the effects of perceived authenticity on viewers’ responses. To address this gap, this study employs attribution theory to illustrate the impact of perceived authenticity on viewers’ affective and behavioral responses within the context of morally inspiring media. Attribution theory has been explicitly applied to issues of stigma and attribution-linked negative emotions such as pity, shame, and anger (Weiner, 1986). But the theory can also elucidate how viewers’ emotional and behavioral reactions are shaped by attributional judgments of others’ moral behaviors (internal motives vs. external motives). The study hopes to demonstrate the underlying mechanisms of elevation through exploring the relationship between causal attributions of media creation and its psychological outcomes. Based on the findings, this study will further discuss UGC as a potential tool to stimulate prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions (e.g., sharing supportive thoughts and moral beauty).
Broadly speaking, UGC refers to content (e.g., information and media) that is created and published by non-professional, “regular” individuals on a voluntarily basis (Krumm, Davies, & Narayanaswami, 2008). Although there is no official definition of UGC, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggests that three requirements be met in order for content to be labeled UGC: (1) content should be accessible to either selected individuals, groups, or the general public and; (2) content must contain its own originality and creativity but; (3) creative efforts should be made without professional motives or practices (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Thus content that is exclusively placed on personal websites or copyright-protected materials (e.g., films, television episodes, advertisements) shared on Facebook, and content created expressly for paid professional or profit purposes should not be considered UGC.

In terms of functional and technological features, Cha and colleagues (2007) examined the distinctive characteristics of UGC production and format in a study of YouTube and Daum, a popular video-sharing service in Korea. Their findings indicate that UGC has a more rapid production rate than PGC. The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) listed 3,317,699 movies and television episodes as of June 2, 2015 (IMDb, 2015), whereas YouTube users upload 300 hours of videos every minute (YouTube, 2015). Assuming that each movie averages about 90 minutes and each television episode about 40 minutes, it takes YouTube users less than 10 days to match the total amount of professional content listed on IMDb.

A major reason why UGC is created so quickly is lower production standards (i.e., shorter, lesser quality products). Also, irregular and short length is one indicator of non-professional production. The majority of ‘long’ YouTube videos are unauthorized uploads of television
programs and films (Fisher, 2006). In response to these uploads, YouTube limited the length of uploaded videos to 10 minutes in 2006 (Fisher, 2006) but then increased the limit to 15 minutes in 2010 (Lowensohn, 2010). Yet users can also upload videos of 30 minutes or more, if they follow certain guidelines that YouTube provides. As of 2012, the average length of a YouTube video is 3 minutes and 53 seconds (Pew Research Center, 2012). A second reason for the lower production standards is the lessened visual quality of UGC, which varies widely due to YouTube’s broad range of upload options—from very low quality (240p) to high definition (1080p) (Needleman, 2009).

Perceived Authenticity: A Unique Quality of UGC

Due to its heavy emphasis on production-side technological features (Wardle & Williams, 2010), production of UGC has often been characterized in terms of increasing the user’s sense of agency (Dijck, 2009) and psychological empowerment (i.e., self-efficacy, the sense of competence and control) (Leung, 2009). UGC users not only consume media, they also interact with it, as well as with other users who share and watch similar content (Shao, 2009). YouTube users can interact with other users by leaving comments and sharing related videos or by directly evaluating videos by voting to like or dislike them (Leung, 2009; Shao, 2009). They consume UGC not only for information or entertainment purposes—the typical gratifications associated with traditional media consumption—but also in order to interact with it and evaluate it—building social connectedness and promoting self-expression (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Shao, 2009).

More recently qualitative research has begun to investigate the unique psychological reactions resulting from UGC consumption. The findings from various research studies on UGC have consistently demonstrated that audiences perceive the content delivered by ordinary people as more authentic, representative, genuine, and relevant than company-created messages including journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams, & Wardle, 2010), advertising (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012), and tourism (Burgess et al., 2009). These findings suggest that authenticity may be an important factor
in comprehending UGC-inspired perception, which has also contributed to an increased demand for the UGC aesthetic within professional media. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) received so many emails from its general viewing public that it created its own “UGC Hub,” which broadcasts news-based UGC submitted by audience members, in order to facilitate the perceived authenticity, representativeness, and reliability of BBC messages (Wardle & Williams, 2010). In advertising, there has been a similar increase in demand for UGC (Duffy, 2010; Ertimur & Gilly, 2012); advertisers such as PepsiCo, Budweiser, and Unilever have strategically integrated UGC into their messages to amplify their commercial reach (Duffy, 2010). Sui (2015) provided successful example cases in using user-generated content for advertising. In 2010, Target promised to donate $500 million to education. To participate in the campaign, customers were asked to create videos showing themselves opening their college acceptance letters. Target selected the best video and used it in a new commercial, which raised attention to the commercial as well as the company itself among audiences. Another good example was in 2011, when Coca-Cola promoted the “Share a Coke” campaign and asked customers to share pictures of their personalized bottle on social-media platforms. The strategy not only contributed to increasing awareness of the company but also raising sales in the United States. A more recent example is from 2013, when Belkin and Lego teamed up to develop customized iPhone cases and created a social-media platform where customers could share pictures of their new iPhone cases. Through the campaign, the companies were able to expand their business and allowed customers to benefit each other and the company. These diverse findings from various fields suggest that viewers appear to enjoy UGC because it is “more real,” “less mediated,” and delivers unique viewpoints on, and insights into, current events.

Although authenticity is a socially constructed concept that is perceived differently by different people (Peterson, 2005), a good definition of authenticity for the purpose of this study is something that is not acting or performing but rather displaying true emotions or behaviors (Aslama & Pantti, 2006). Montgomery (2001) determined that audiences perceive a person’s
communication to be authentic when (1) it does not sound rehearsed, but rather natural and spontaneous (i.e., not following a script); (2) it revolves around personal experience and; (3) it honestly projects the “true” self of the speaker (i.e., not acting). In short, viewers perceive UGC as credible, representative, real, and relevant on the basis of their perceived authenticity of ordinary people genuinely expressing and sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences via a non-mediated form of messages.

The concept of context collapse, introduced by Wesch (2009), however, explains how message producers maintain the appearance of an authentic self across a diversity of social media. Wesch (2009) states that diverse social media provide individuals with a new form of self-expression and self-awareness with regards to disclosing the way they appear, and relate, to others. People naturally alter the way they present themselves to others based upon contextually shifting social circumstances (e.g., interview, wedding, etc.). Individuals interacting via social media act in a similar fashion (Marwick & boyd, 2010). According to responses from Twitter users, Marwick and boyd (2010) determined that users establish their own respective practices of social media use, such as targeting different groups, adjusting levels of self-disclosure, and preserving authenticity (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Regardless of whether or not social media users are absolutely authentic in their messages, they use social media for different purposes to preserve authentic appearances in general (Burgess & Green, 2009; Marwick & boyd, 2010).

Although the previous studies presented perceived authenticity as a unique characteristic of UGC, some scholars may argue that people shown in UGC may not be displaying their authentic selves because of image management. People are inclined to create positive impressions of themselves to others by selectively choosing pictures and messages to share with others on their profile page (Chou & Edge, 2012). For instance, people can select specific photos that emphasize the ideal or physically attractive characteristics of themselves (Hancock & Toma, 2009), sociable personality traits and lifestyle (Zwier, Araujo, Boukes, & Willemsen, 2011), and successful
romantic-relationship information (Elphinston & Noeller, 2011). Because of these reasons, UGC may not reflect the authentic selves of creators because of their interests in image management. To avoid the conflicting views regarding perceived authenticity of UGC, this study is particularly interested in testing a subset of UGC that focuses on prosocial messages: users volunteering to share their prosocial values by helping others in need.

Taken as a whole, the overarching implications of the aforementioned studies suggest the following: the perceived authenticity of UGC has psychological and behavioral influence on viewers through motivating them to emotionally engage in media and initiate behaviors as a response. Though not all UGC provides the same level of authenticity, previous research strongly implies that perceived authenticity is a characteristic largely unique to UGC and that such perception may contribute greatly to the ever increasing consumption of UGC within both ordinary audiences and professionals (e.g., Burgess & Green, 2009; Burgess et al., 2009; Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Duffy, 2010; Paek et al., 2013; Wardle & Williams, 2010). Considering this growing significance of UGC in professional media, however, a critical question remains regarding how viewers’ judgments of perceived UGC authenticity are formed and how the perceived media authenticity impacts viewers’ affective and cognitive responses to the media message.

The purpose of the study is to present a theoretical outline regarding how perceived UGC authenticity affect viewers’ responses while viewing prosocial campaigns. To demonstrate the theoretical connections between elevation and UGC research, this study will detail the relationship in three sections. The first section will explain the effects of moral emotion elevation on prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions related to media use. The next section will employ attribution theory to elucidate the association between perceived UGC authenticity and its impact on viewers’ responses to the media including at affective and cognitive levels. Given these different theoretical concepts, the final section will elaborate on the connected relationships between feelings of elevation and unique psychological responses resulting from UGC.
Moral Emotion and Positive Outcomes in Response to Moral Beauty

Haidt (2003) first defined the other-praising, moral emotion elevation by describing a situation in which people become inspired by a moral exemplar displaying the better nature of humanity and moral beauty such as sacrifice, generosity, kindness, or benevolence toward others. In general, elevated individuals describe their feelings as being “moved,” “touched,” or “inspired.” The growing body of elevation research has demonstrated that exposure to media portrayals of someone’s moral excellence toward others elicits feelings of elevation among viewers (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2009; Oliver et al., 2012; Schnall et al., 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011). For instance, one study found that participants felt elevated after watching a clip about a young boy who built a shelter for the homeless in Philadelphia (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Another study reported audiences’ feelings of elevation related to watching a television news program about Amy Biehl, an American student murdered in South Africa. Participants felt moved when they witnessed her parents’ establishment of the Amy Biehl Foundation to continue their daughter’s effort to eliminate apartheid in South Africa (Freeman et al., 2009). A similar pattern was also demonstrated among participants reading the story of an Amish community’s forgiveness of Charles Roberts, who shot and killed multiple children attending an Amish school, before ultimately killing himself (Aquino et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2009). Consistent with these findings, media scholars recently investigated how meaningful entertainment media featuring portrayals of moral virtues stimulate feelings of elevation among audiences (Ash, 2013; Oliver et al., 2012).

Although moral behaviors in many examples of media might not be as salient as those examples described above, individuals viewing any type of video clip that depicts individuals displaying moral behaviors toward others should still show feelings of elevation (i.e., moved, inspired, and touched) as an emotional response to moral beauty. Therefore, this study expects that
H1: Those viewing moral beauty of others will report greater levels of elevation than those viewing others enjoying themselves.

Previous research consistently demonstrates that elevation has a positive association with prosocial motivations (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2012). Algoe and Haidt’s (2009) study examined that elevated participants showed a strong inclination to improve themselves morally. They wanted to become kinder, better people and perform more good deeds than those who were simply amused. Aquino and other researchers (2011) observed similar motivations among individuals witnessing others’ moral excellence. Elevation inspires people to be more open, and it stimulates their motivations to become better people and do something prosocial for others (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Similar findings have also been obtained in entertainment studies. Oliver and her colleagues (2012) witnessed that elevation elicited by moral portrayals in films positively predicted people’s intentions to behave in an altruistic way. Hence, this study hypothesize that elicited feelings of elevation in response to moral beauty should be positively associated with prosocial motivations.

H2: Elevation will be positively associated with prosocial motivations.

The feelings of elevation should affect not only motivations to be a good person but also inclinations to perform behaviors in a way to benefit society. Previous research from positive psychology has examined that feelings of elevation generate prosocial behaviors beyond mere prosocial motivations (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, Freeman et al., 2009; Schnall et al., 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011). An experiment study (Freeman et al., 2009) investigated that individuals elevated by reading a story about White people’s moral excellence toward Black people donated more to a Black-oriented charity than did those reading a neutral story. Another elevation study (Schnall et al., 2010) reported that prosocial behaviors were formed toward nonspecific groups of people, examining that elevated student participants reported greater intention to help voluntarily with subsequent studies—without any class credit—than students in a control condition (Schnall et al.,
2010). As a result, such intentions manifested as actual helping behaviors in a subsequent experiment. Individuals in the elevating condition spent nearly twice as long working on tedious tasks to help the researcher than did individuals in other conditions.

It is reasonable to assume that these behavioral findings may be consistent with regards to audiences’ responses to elevating messages. Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory elucidates the possible connection between one’s prosocial motivations and behavioral responses to the media inspiring the viewer. The theory posits that individuals have the intrinsic drive to uphold consistency (or harmony) over their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, which motivates them to manage ways to reduce negative states resulting from inconsistency. Thus, those individuals who are motivated to behave prosocially might want to perform behaviors related to supporting the message as a way to fulfill the motivations, maintaining the consistency between motivations about the self and behavioral intentions to carry out the drives. On the basis of the reasoning, it is predicted that elevated participants may show behavioral intentions to promote good values through various actions—motivations to share and recommend, and to create such messages in the future. Thus, it suggests the following relationship that

H3: Prosocial motivations will be positively associated with behavioral intentions to promote elevating media messages.

In summary, those exposed to moral portrayals of others should experience greater levels of elevation than those viewing others enjoying themselves, and the elevated individuals are more likely to show prosocial motivations such as being a good person. Subsequently, those with prosocial motivations will show higher levels of behavioral intentions to promote morally inspiring messages.
Figure 1: Model for Hypotheses Associated with Elevation Research.

Causal Attributions, Emotional, and Behavioral Responses to Elevating UGC

Recent scholarship in media psychology and positive media has begun to recognize the importance of inspiring UGC on platforms such as YouTube (e.g., Oliver et al., 2015). Consistent with the hypothesized model, millions of YouTube users have viewed elevating UGC and have shared their feelings with other users. For example, an Australian man, Juan Mann, initially started the Free Hugs Campaign that involves offering free hugs to strangers in public to make others feel warm and better (Mann, 2006). This act of kindness campaign originated from a user-generated video on YouTube and became internationally popular in 2006. As of 2015, the video was viewed by 22 million YouTube users and subscribed by more than 2.5 million people. Specifically, viewers have responded to the video with comments such as “true love and compassion”, “hugs all around”, “It is nice to be in the awesome part of YouTube”, and “I always get tears in my eyes”. In spite of the relatively short duration and low quality of UGC videos, viewers often appear to be truly emotionally engaged with elevating content and express great appreciation toward the messages and those creating the message.

Given these successful examples of elevating UGC, a critical question remains in regard to the specific aspects of UGC that promote diverse responses from users and whether these aspects of UGC could influence positive outcomes of elevating media. As a unique psychological outcome of UGC, perceived authenticity—the perception that people in the video are truly motivated by their own values and reasons—is introduced in the following section. In addition, attribution theory is employed to illustrate how the perceived UGC authenticity might be associated with viewers’
affective and cognitive responses to media. Specifically, this study manipulated the levels of perceived authenticity by comparing UGC with company-sponsored content. To elicit the high level of perceived authenticity condition, UGC was presented as content created by ordinary people who volunteered to share their own ideas and experiences with others. In contrast, the low level of perceived authenticity condition used company-sponsored content. Finally, the study examines how perceived authenticity and psychological outcomes resulting from videos having perceived authenticity might influence affective responses to elevating media and even intensify the emotion.

**Attribution Theory**

To understand attribution theory, one must first explore appraisal theory. The crux of appraisal theory is that an individual’s emotions are elicited or differentiated by subjective evaluation—or the perceived significance—of events and situations (Scherer, 1999). The most common process of appraisal occurs effortlessly, and subsequent emotions are provoked automatically. In brief, the appraisal process plays a key role in generating emotional, physiological, and behavioral changes (Roseman & Smith, 2001). Regarding the mechanism underlying this appraisal process, one dominant theoretical approach, proposed by Weiner (1985, 1986), attribution theory emphasizes the relationship between causal attributions and emotional responses, and how attributed emotions affect attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Scherer, 1999).

According to Weiner’s (1985, 1986) attribution theory, causal attributions consist of three dimensions: locus of control (i.e., internal/external), stability, and controllability. The locus of control refers to the ability of individuals to consider the consequences of specific causes on an internal-external continuum. Stability refers to the extent to which both internal and external causes fluctuate. For example, individuals’ success or failure is ascribed either to internal causes—one’s ability or effort—or to external causes—task difficulty or luck. It should be noted that ability and task difficulty are more stable causes than effort and luck (Weiner, 1986). Controllability refers to the extent to which causal attributions originate from an individual’s own behavior. Poor aptitude is
considered uncontrollable, whereas laziness or apathy is considered controllable (Weiner, 1986).

Attribution theory thus posits that individuals’ judgments or beliefs about causal attributions are associated with emotional responses, which in turn lead to behavioral intentions, or responses, to an emotion-triggering event on the basis of attribution judgments (Weiner, 1985, 1986). This line of scholarship has exclusively examined issues pertaining to social stigma (e.g., obesity, homosexuality, and mental illness). Previous research has investigated the relationship between an individual’s causal attributions toward stigmatized others and various emotions (i.e., pity, anger, sympathy) projected onto groups of stigmatized others. For example, individuals’ beliefs that a person’s obesity is caused by his or her lack of control or bad eating behavior are associated with feelings of anger. Yet those who attribute being overweight to uncontrollable factors such as genetic reasons or social influences tend to show more positive emotional reactions toward the obese such as feelings of pity and sympathy. Consequently, the emotions elicited by causal attributions of stigmatized others affect one’s willingness to help or avoid the group of people (Weiner, 1985, 1986).

**Causal Attributions and Perceived Authenticity of UGC**

Although attribution theory studies commonly examine issues of stigma and the associated positive and/or negative emotions, the findings can extend to issues pertaining to perceived authenticity of UGC and viewers’ responses toward media creators. Related to attribution theory, Kelly’s (1972) discounting principle postulates that viewers are likely to infer that a certain behavior is inspired by inherent motivations when possible external causes are absent. Conversely, people are prone to attribute causes of other behaviors to external factors once possible external motives are present. In short, the presence of external factors could guide viewers to perceive that others’ behaviors are motivated by external reasons over their own internal values.

Applied to the context of media types, audiences are likely to attribute UGC to the media creators’ internal causes (i.e., inherent quality), believing that the actors’ interactions and behaviors
in media represent the actors’ true selves. Yet once an indication of company sponsorship is salient, audiences should attribute ulterior motives (i.e., commercial profit) for the content, perceiving that characters’ representation is designed and planned by others, thus the media are lacking in perceived authenticity.

Recently, research has begun to investigate perceived authenticity as a unique psychological reaction resulting from UGC consumption. Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2010) investigated how audiences perceive news-based UGC, including audience commentary and experiences, and unedited footage of ordinary people. Their findings indicated that interviewees perceive UGC as authentic, emotionally engaging, fresh, immediate, and even democratizing, although some audiences expressed concern about credibility. Advertising research also demonstrated that consumer-generated advertisements are perceived as more engaging and authentic than company-generated advertisements (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Consistent with these findings, a study about tourism demonstrated that UGC created by tourists—blog posts sharing personal opinions, views, experiences, and recommendations—serve as word-of-mouth marketing, providing users with the perception of greater credibility and relevance (Burgess et al., 2009). These findings from various areas suggest that regardless of content, consuming UGC provides viewers with perceived authenticity, the idea that people in media genuinely share their thoughts and feelings.

Consistent with attribution theory and Kelly’s (1972) discounting principle, however, audiences’ perceptions that media messages are intentionally designed, structured, or controlled by companies with commercial motives result in lower levels of perceived authenticity. An advertising study found that audiences maintained skepticism when processing potentially misleading claims in advertising, even though the overall message was positive toward the environment (Mohr, Eroglu, & Ellen, 1998). Even for UGC, individuals carry doubt and suspicion toward the media if commercial motives are perceived within UGC. Duffy (2010) conducted in-depth interviews with
participants in the Dove Body Wash Ad contest, which said, “the ads are created by and chosen by real women” (p. 39). Although the characters in the user-generated advertisements would be thought as of real, the study’s findings showed that commercial motives diminished the perceived authenticity of the ad. More than half of the participants perceived the company-selected advertisement as not authentic because the White, thin, youthful “winner” did not represent an average American female. Another study conducted by Ertimur and Gilly (2012) reported similar responses to user-generated commercials. The viewers were skeptical about the purpose of creating user-generated commercials, especially when they were created for company advertisements. One viewer recognized the media creators’ external motivations in creating the advertisements such as earning money and joining the advertising industry.

These studies provide evidence that viewers are likely to attribute UGC to a media creator’s inherent motives in sharing a media message, whereas they are inclined to attribute a sponsored media message to a media creator’s commercial motives, being suspicious about real representations of media characters. Thus, this study predicts that perceived authenticity would be enhanced when consuming UGC, and it would be hampered when the media is incorporated into company sponsorship.

H4: UGC will elicit greater levels of perceived authenticity than company-sponsored content.

**Affective and Cognitive Responses Resulting from Perceived Authenticity**

Prior attribution research has demonstrated that an individual’s attributional judgments of a person’s state or behavior are associated with emotional reactions to the person, and the attributed emotions guide to certain attitudinal or behavioral responses toward the acting person. Attribution research on social stigma indicated that attributing a stigmatized person’s situation to controllable factors was associated with greater feelings of anger (negative emotions) and avoidance, whereas those attributing stigmatized situations to uncontrollable factors heightened feelings of pity or
sympathy (relatively less negative or positive emotions) and a desire to help (Corrigan et al., 2002; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Jeong, 2007; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). For instance, Haider-Markel and Joslyn’s study (2008) found that individuals who interpreted homosexuality as controllable (learned, an individual life choice) expressed anger toward homosexuals and were disinclined to support policies that helped homosexuals. By contrast, individuals believing homosexuality to be uncontrollable (biological, genetic) showed greater acceptance of homosexuals and greater support for policies to aid homosexuals. These findings have been consistent across diverse social stigmas, including obesity (Jeong, 2007), poverty (Zucker & Weiner, 1993), and mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2002). These findings show that the levels of unfavorable emotions—pity or anger—differ based on individuals’ perceptions of whether actors are responsible for consequences of the difficult states in which they exist.

In the context of media consumption, perceived authenticity can be interpreted as viewers’ judgments of a media creator’s motivations for delivering a media message. In other words, perceived media authenticity represents the degree to which viewers attribute a media message to the internal motives of the media author. An individual with high levels of perceived authenticity—a media message believed to express a media creator’s thoughts and feelings genuinely—is linked to his or her attributional judgments of a media message to the media author’s own values (internal causes). Conversely, a person with low levels of perceived authenticity—a media message was created based on commercial interests—reflects his or her attributions of a media message to a media creator’s profit motives (external causes).

In this regard, viewers’ high rating of perceived authenticity could be thought of as a form of self-disclosure considering that viewers are likely to believe that the media content reveals a media creator’s personal opinions (Wheless, 1976; Wheless & Grotz, 1976). The notion of social penetration theory posits that one’s self-disclosure and others’ reactions to it contribute to the development of close interpersonal relationships with intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Taylor &
Altman, 1987). An individual feels closer and more attached to a partner who disclosed personal information (Manne et al., 2004) and feels more favorable toward the person through interactions (Vittengl & Holt, 2000). Thus, viewers with the high levels of perceived authenticity might elicit positive emotions unless the media is purely negatively perceived (e.g., authentic depictions of someone’s badness). People are likely to have positive feelings when witnessing the person who displays authentic goodness of human nature or one’s true self in media, even if the media could be seen as neutral.

Consistent with this reasoning, previous advertising and marketing studies presented the potential positive connection between perceived authenticity and feelings toward a media creator. An advertising study examined how consumers’ reactions to a sponsor differ depending on their attributional judgments of a advertising claim (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004). In the study, customers attributing a virtuous message, “good citizenship” to the sponsor’s altruistic motives showed greater levels of sponsor credibility and favorable attitudes toward the sponsor. However, even if a message intends to promote virtuous themes, consumers attributing the message to the sponsor’s profit motives still generated less perceived credibility and unfavorable attitudes toward the sponsor. A similar pattern of findings was found in advertising and marketing research, presenting that viewers showed negative reactions to sponsoring businesses when attributing firm-serving motivations to company-sponsored content (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; Webb & Mohr, 1998). This might have been due to viewers attributing firm-serving motives to the perceived media strategies, believing them to be deceptive and misleading for profit-making (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Consistent with these findings, previous UGC studies showed a similar pattern of audiences’ reactions toward media creators. For example, a study on anti-smoking messages demonstrated that viewers felt close to common individuals creating the videos and left more favorable responses to both media creators and created messages, and also more positively
evaluated UGC-themed videos than professionally generated content (Paek et al., 2013). Another study of child abuse prevention public service announcement (PSA) videos also revealed that UGC prevention videos created by peers were more positively perceived than professionally created videos (Paek, Hove, Jeong, & Kim, 2011). Although these studies did not particularly assess viewers’ perceived authenticity, it is reasonable to infer that viewers’ perceived perceptions—that the UGC-themed videos reflect creators’ true thoughts and opinions—could make them feel more favorable toward creators over professional PSA message designers.

Within overall positive media themes, previous literature related to attribution theory and other relevant research provide one potential explanation for how viewers will display different feelings elicited by a media creator as a result of perceived authenticity related to attribution judgments. Viewers with high levels of authenticity—attributing a media message to internal motives—are likely to form positive feelings toward a media creator. As this study employs overall positive media themes, the researcher predicts that

H5: Perceived authenticity will be positively associated with feelings elicited by a media creator.

Some research present a possible positive relationship between audiences’ feelings evoked by a media creator and evaluation of media. A study on UGC revealed that participants expressed greater trust and more carefully considered the information created by other consumers over those created by manufacturers (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Regardless of either positive or negative information, a majority of the participants appreciated a personal experience with a product more than only the information created by a company (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Consumers were inclined to consider UGC before making purchase decisions in order to benefit from honest and personal opinions, recommendations, and experiences about commercial services and products (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). The results imply that one who has positive feelings about a media creator who shares his or her personal experiences and opinions is inclined to positively evaluate a
media product created by the author.

However, such positive evaluation toward a media product did not always occur among those having critical views or negative reactions toward a media creator. A study with in-depth interviews reported that those participants who joined the Dove Body Wash Ad contest by creating their own ads showed unfavorable attitudes toward the advertisement selected by a company (Duffy, 2010). The critical and unfavorable comments were made not only to the company, but also the media creator featured in the selected advertisement. Although a regular person created the advertisement, participants showed skeptical and critical views of the media creator rather than upbeat and favorable reactions to the selected person. Considering these findings, this current study proposes that

H6: Viewers’ feelings elicited by a media creator will be positively related to evaluation of media.

In addition to the affective responses toward a media creator, perceived media authenticity will also influence the cognitive reactions to the media message. In this study, perceived message influence was examined as a modified concept of argument strength. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) scholars defined the concept of argument strength as audiences’ subjective perceptions that a message delivered by media is strong and influential as opposed to weak (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Strong arguments were described as messages that are “logically sound, defensible, and compelling” whereas weak arguments were designated as messages that are “open to skepticism and easy refutation” (Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1981, p. 435). The concept of argument strength has been dominantly tested in persuasion research such as advertising, marketing, and health communications. Considering the media themes this study employs (moral beauty and enjoyment), argument strength was modified as perceived message influence, whether a media message is influential and strong.

The findings from various research seem to suggest that audiences perceive a media
message as more influential when they perceive that people’s interactions in the media are genuine. A study on a reality program (Hall, 2009) investigated that the program’s perceived authenticity—members in the program are genuine in their interactions and behaviors—were associated with the audiences’ reported cognitive involvement and then the involvement was strongly associated with media enjoyment. Similar findings were also revealed in another study on entertainment education. Researchers studied the effects of adolescent audiences viewing a “real story-based” anti-drug abuse drama and reported that the anti-drug story was more influential among those participants who believed that both the actors and story were real (Guttmann et al., 2008). Another experiment study on health campaigns showed that peer-created child abuse prevention PSAs were more convincing than expert-created PSAs. The participants viewing peer-created messages reported greater perceived importance of issues and behavioral intentions to help abused children (Paek et al., 2011). These findings indicate that viewers are likely to perceive a media message influential and strong when perceiving that representations of others in media are authentic.

By contrast, the lack of the perceived media authenticity—people’s interactions and behaviors depicted in media are manipulated based on external motives—may negatively affect perceived message influence. Overall, individuals are likely to resist advertising claims because of the persuasive intent behind of advertising claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), believing that advertising is purposely designed to persuade consumers to purchase products that they might not need. Regardless of promoting an overall positive message, a study on environmental advertising found that audiences were skeptical about advertising claims (Mohr et al., 1998). This skeptical view has a negative influence on belief in advertising claims. Findings of the empirical study demonstrated that people with high skepticism are apt to not only pay less attention to advertising but also to reject advertising claims (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). In short, viewers’ perceptions that media are intentionally designed for profit motives may prevent them from perceiving media as influential and convincing because of the existing skeptical views
regarding the purpose of media creation. Given previous findings and reasoning, this study hypothesized that

H7: Perceived authenticity will be positively associated with perceived message influence.

This cognitive evaluation of a media message, perceived message will influence audiences’ overall evaluation of media. A study on advertising found that the participants rating an advertising claim strongly showed greater levels of positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand promoted in the advertisement than did those perceiving the claims as weak (Escalas, 2004). Another study on word-of-mouth (WOM) communication found the positive connection between the perceived message strength and attitudes toward the WOM information (Kempf & Palan, 2006). In the study, participants were assigned into the high and the low argument strength conditions in which they were asked to read a conversation between two people. The high and the low conditions were created based on the evaluation of the WOM information by answering the measures such as “believable”, “convincing”, and “influential”. The findings showed that those in the high argument condition reported greater levels of positive perceptions of the WOM information than those in the low perceived argument condition (Kempf & Palan, 2006).

Although there has been no specific study investigating the impact of message influence on media evaluation within more general types of media, consistent with the findings from other studies this study expects that audiences who perceive a media message strong should positively evaluate media given the previous findings.

H8: Perceived message influence will be positively associated with evaluation of media. This study also suggests the positive association between one’s overall evaluation of media and his or her behavioral intentions to promote media distribution such as sharing the media with others, recommending it to others, and showing interests in creating that type of media. According to the theory of planned behavior, one’s attitude toward social issues causes his or her behavioral intentions, which in turn results in particular behaviors toward diverse social issues (Ajzen, 1991).
Psychology research investigated that individuals’ positive attitudes toward stigmatized groups predicted a positive connection with behavioral intentions to benefit that group whereas those with negative attitudes toward stigmatized groups showed lower levels of behavioral intentions to perform behaviors to help that group (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Oliver, Dillard, Bae, & Tamul, 2012).

Consistent with these findings in psychology research, media scholars explored the positive relationship between one’s attitudes toward media—overall evaluation of media—and behavioral intentions regarding media use within diverse contexts. The behaviors and behavioral intentions included consuming, sharing, recommending, and even creating media. A study demonstrated that users’ evaluations of instant messaging were positively associated with their behavioral intentions to use it in the future (Lu, Zhou, & Wang, 2009). Similarly, in another survey study, an individual’s evaluation of viral messages has a critical connection to receiving/forwarding behaviors (Camarero & San José, 2011). Those with positive attitudes toward viral messages were more willing to receive the messages and forward them to others than those with negative attitudes toward viral messages. Further, a study on UGC examined that the positive evaluation of UGC went beyond behavioral motivations to consume it or share it with others, such as creating UGC (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008).

These findings of media research studies supporting the theory of planned behavior propose that a viewer’s evaluation of media will be positively associated with his or her intentions to perform behaviors distributing and creating the media including consuming, sharing, recommending, and creating.

H9: Evaluation of media will be positively associated with behavioral intentions to promote distribution of the media.

To summarize, the proposed relationships in this section suggest greater effectiveness of UGC in comparison to company-sponsored content. Based on attribution theory, people viewing
UGC will have greater levels of perceived authenticity than those watching company-sponsored content. Subsequently, perceived authenticity will be positively associated with feelings elicited by a media creator and perceived message influence. These affective and cognitive responses to media will have a positive relationship with media evaluation, and the evaluation will be positively related to behavioral intentions to promote the media.

Figure 2: Model for Hypotheses Associated with Attribution Theory.

The Relationship between Perceived Authenticity of UGC and Feelings of Elevation

The perceived authenticity of UGC might not only lead to positive psychological outcomes contributing to the growing popularity of UGC but also amplify affective responses that media promote. In terms of media theme, the particular interest of this study is examining the role of perceived authenticity in amplifying feelings of elevation elicited by viewing morally inspiring media. Exploring such a role of perceived authenticity is meaningful in regards to the positive outcomes of elevation, inspiring audiences to have prosocial motivations and behave altruistically.

As described earlier, previous elevation research has found that individuals exposed to others’ moral beauty—displays of sacrifice, benevolence and kindness toward others—showed greater levels of elevation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2009; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012; Schnall et al., 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011). The studies have demonstrated that only those elevated people reported greater levels of feelings of being moved,
touched, and inspired as affective responses to portrayals of someone’s moral excellence. Audiences viewing either emotionally positive or neutral media did not show these affective indicators of elevation. Further, elevated participants showed greater levels of prosocial motivations and behaviors toward others in altruistic ways.

However, it is uncertain whether audiences would respond to moral portrayals at the same levels of affective responses regardless of perceived authenticity. Previous studies suggest that viewers’ levels of emotional responses will vary depending on perceived authenticity. When audiences perceive that media represent others’ true selves, they not only emotionally engage in the states that media characters are engaged in (Guttman et al., 2008; Hall, 2009) but also appreciate those sharing honest and genuine opinions and expressions (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Paek et al., 2011, 2013). As a good example, a study on reality television concluded that viewers’ perceptions that media characters are representative of ordinary people who behave genuinely were positively associated with audience involvement in the programs they viewed. Those believing that the media content was real, were more likely to engage with the emotional states portrayed in the program (Hall, 2009). Yet those viewers lacking in perceived authenticity could negatively react to the media because they could cognitively evaluate the media and consider it as deceptive and misleading information (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Given the positive relationship between perceived media authenticity and viewers’ emotional engagement in media, it is probable that individuals may display greater levels of elevation when perceiving that depictions of moral goodness are genuine and interactions between people are natural than they would when perceiving that moral portrayals of others are designed by profit motives. This might be a good explanation why a majority of elevation research has employed either true story-based stimuli (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2009; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012; Schnall et al., 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2011) and user-generated videos (Oliver et al., 2015).
Consistent with previous findings in elevation research, this study predicts that audiences will be elevated after viewing someone’s moral beauty in a video clip. However, the levels of elevation might vary depending on the perceived authenticity of moral depictions of others in the media.

H10: Perceived authenticity functions will moderate the relationship between viewing moral beauty of others and elevation.

Additionally, viewers’ positive feelings elicited by a media creator through perceiving media authenticity might have a positive association with elevation. Dillard and Nabi (2006) proposed that audiences show different levels of a desired emotional state that a media message intends to promote depending on how they evaluate a media message. In other words, a viewer’s feelings evoked by a media creator represent his or her attributional judgments of a media creator’s motives and the judgments might have a positive relationship with feelings of elevation while viewing morally inspiring media.

Although there has been no study testing how viewers’ evaluations of morally inspiring media affect elevation, previous research on gratitude and reciprocity illustrate the potential that individuals might process moral situations differently depending on the perceived authenticity of a benefactor’s generous behaviors, and their evaluations of the moral situation could influence levels of elevation while viewing a moral exemplar. Specifically, studies on gratitude found that individuals showed different levels of gratitude feelings toward a benefactor depending on how they felt about the motivations of help-giving behaviors—whether or not one’s helping behaviors are truly motivated by his her own values (Graham, 1988; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968; Weiner, 1985, 1986).

The findings of the studies have showed a pattern that the participants attributing a helping behavior to a benefactor’s internal motives expressed greater levels of thankful feelings toward a help giver than those attributing the moral behavior to a benefactor’s external benefits (Graham,
1988; Tesser et al., 1968; Weiner, 1985, 1986). In a study, participants were given different scenarios about a benefactor and asked how grateful they would feel in the described situations (Tesser et al., 1968). The findings showed that participants reported greater levels of gratitude in the circumstance in which a benefactor’s gift was given to benefit the receiver than in the situation in which the gift was also intended to improve the reputation of the benefactor. Another study on reciprocity explored a similar pattern of reactions among beneficiaries (Goranson & Berkowitz, 1966). The participants in the study were more likely to help the previous benefactor when the previous aid was given voluntarily rather than forcibly. These findings suggest that despite being in the positive state (i.e., receiving help from another), a receiver evaluates the experienced situation differently depending on the perceived authenticity of the helping behaviors, which then affects the levels of gratitude feelings toward the giver. Receivers showed greater levels of gratitude when perceiving that a benefactor’s help is truly voluntary and sincere, whereas they felt somewhat less grateful when perceiving that a benefactor’s help is not inherently motivated (Tesser et al., 1968; Weiner, 1985, 1986).

Applying these findings to elevation research, viewers’ feelings of elevation might be related to how a viewer feels about a media creator’s intent of sharing moral messages in a video clip. The reported positive feelings elicited by a media creator might reflect how positively viewers feel about a media creator’s reasons (internal vs. external motivations) for creating a message. Then, it is plausible that one’s positive feelings have a positive association with feelings of elevation. It should be noted, however, that no elevation research has tested a specific relationship between feelings toward a media creator and elevation; hence, this study suggests the following research question:

RQ1: How are positive emotions elicited by a media creator related to feelings of elevation?
Overall, the study hopes to explore the critical role of perceived media authenticity in stimulating media effectiveness in the context of elevating media. The proposed relationship predicts perceived authenticity as a moderator in the relationship between viewing moral portrayals and feelings of elevation. Additionally, it suggests the research question regarding the relationship between feelings evoked by a media creator and elevation.

Figure 3: Full Hypothesized Model.
Chapter 2

METHOD

This study employed a 2 (Moral Beauty vs. Enjoyment) X 2 (User-Generated Content vs. Sponsored Content) between-subjects factorial design experiment that included two video clips per condition (moral beauty vs. enjoyment). These media messages either displayed or did not display company sponsorship information. This study refers to video clips with sponsorship information as sponsored content. The purpose of these media message manipulations was (1) to investigate positive outcomes of viewing others’ moral excellence in comparison to observing others enjoying fun times, (2) to theoretically examine the impact of perceived authenticity resulting from UGC consumption on positive evaluation of the message, and (3) based on the findings to extend the findings of previous elevation studies, validating UGC as an effective tool to amplify positive outcomes of consuming morally inspiring media. Specifically, this study explores how the affective and cognitive outcomes resulting from UGC’s perceived authenticity stimulate positive effects of elevating media. Further, this study examines whether viewers’ affective responses to elevating media increase through feelings of perceived authenticity when media is created by ordinary users rather than a company.

Recruitment

Conducting an experiment has both positive and negative aspects. The best benefit is providing good evidence of causality between variables which of course requires minimizing the effects of confounding variables. Given the main interests of the study, other aspects of media stimuli were identically edited across conditions by controlling for other variables (e.g., content length, screen size, etc.). Despite these advantages, too much control over conditions can create a high level of artificiality in experimental settings that negatively influences external validity, which
is the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied across “different groups of people, settings, treatment, and measurement variables” (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, p. 21).

To mitigate one of the negative influences that controlled experiments have on external validity, participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing service that provides users with research participation opportunities in exchange for small monetary compensation. This service allows researchers to apply experimental conditions across “different groups of people” rather than using a convenience sample of undergraduate students (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 21). According to previous research, MTurk participants are demographically diverse, and their responses are as reliable as those obtained via traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). To recruit participants through MTurk, the researcher posted an advertisement explaining the purpose of the study. The advertisement also contained a URL for an online questionnaire. MTurk participants read the instructions and volunteered to participate in the study. After completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide a completion code on the MTurk Human Intelligence Tasks (HIT) page where they read an advertisement about the study, and they received $1 upon approval of the study participation.

**Participants**

To participate in the study, each MTurk user had to be at least 18 years old and have a prior approval rating of 95% or higher. The 95% rating means that the participants have earned a 95% approval rating for their work on previous studies. A total of 389 participants volunteered for the main study. The gender of the participants was generally balanced (female = 43.7%) and a diversity of age groups was represented ($M = 34.18, SD = 11.46$), with ages ranging from 18 to 71. In terms of race, a majority of the participants were Caucasian (74.6%), followed by Asian (14.4%), African-American (9.8%), Hispanic (6.2%), and other (0.5%). Regarding educational level, most participants had completed a four-year college degree (31.4%), followed by those who attended some college degree (30.6%), had a two-year college degree (11.3%), high school degree (10.8%),
graduate or professional degree (10.0%), attended some graduate school (4.4%) and some high school (1.5%). This demographic information confirms that MTurk participants are often more demographically diverse than typical samples of American college students (Buhrmester et al., 2011).

In addition, participants reported the amount of time spent using YouTube, and their activities involving YouTube use and types of media content to watch using a 7-point scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much). Participants spent about 1.5 hours during weekdays and 2.5 hours during the weekend on YouTube. The majority of people have watched videos ($M = 6.33, SD = 1.18$). However, they were less actively engaged in other activities on YouTube including clicking like or dislike ($M = 3.60, SD = 1.99$), sharing videos ($M = 2.73, SD = 1.63$), or leaving comments ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.64$). The reported responses also showed that participants are interested in diverse content. The most popular content was user-generated funny videos ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.68$) and tutorials ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.55$), followed by comedy-related news and information videos ($M = 4.15, SD = 1.70$), entertaining media taken from the original television shows ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.80$), traditional news and information videos ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.55$), user-generated prosocial campaigns ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.57$), and others ($M = 3.31, SD = 2.53$).

**Treatment of Participants**

Upon logging into the questionnaire, participants read a consent form approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The consent form informed participants of the following: (1) the study monitors audience response to media content; (2) there is no penalty for withdrawing from the study at any time; (3) the researcher’s contact information is available to all participants; and (4) participants will not be identified and their responses will be kept confidential and stored in a safe place. The consent form also provided information about the benefits and risks of participating in the study, while also mentioning that participants may learn about themselves and their habits while responding to media content that does not contain any risks.
Procedure

After giving consent, participants answered questions about their general YouTube use. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: user-generated elevation (25.4%), user-generated enjoyment (24.9%), sponsored elevation (25.3%), or sponsored enjoyment (24.4%). Then participants viewed a short video and rated their perceptions and feelings about the video in a subsequent questionnaire. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study and were given the information regarding the purpose of the study and the researcher’s contact information in case they had further questions or concerns. Overall, participation in the study took about 25 to 30 minutes.

Stimuli Selection

Three pretests were conducted with potential media stimuli to ensure that the selected media met the requirements outlined herein. The first pretest was conducted to select two effective media examples for each elevation and control condition. Upon completion of the first pretest, the second and third pretests were conducted with the selected media from the first pretest to test the sponsorship manipulation. Participants for both pretests were recruited via MTurk and offered $0.50 upon approval of the study participation.

Media Themes

To demonstrate the causal relationship between the main variables of interest and expected results, this study included a control condition. One of the main variables of interest, elevation, refers to the impact moral emotion has on viewers’ responses to media. Previous studies have compared elevation conditions with control conditions. For example, Algoe and Haidt (2009) compared elevation (helping others and moral beauty) with control conditions wherein people watched happiness-focused media (joy and amusement) or emotionally neutral conditions. Accordingly, this study used content related to enjoyment in order to eliminate the potential to confuse elevation with other, similar emotional responses.
One of the main challenges when conducting an experiment is selecting the proper stimulus to test a hypothesized model. Ordinarily, an experimenter carefully edits stimulus materials such that only the independent variables of interest vary between experimental conditions. However, this approach is often not feasible in media-related studies where video stimuli representing different conditions (e.g., elevating vs. non-elevating) differ on a host of potentially relevant variables. Under these circumstances, stimulus sampling is a beneficial approach that allows the researcher to employ naturalistic stimuli while simultaneously accounting for potential confounds. Using this approach, the researcher employs more than one instantiation or example within each experimental condition such that the multiple instantiations in each condition, though varying on a host of variables, share the same independent variable of interest (Slater, 1991). Thus, for this study, the researcher decided to select two media examples per condition (elevation vs. enjoyment) in order to manipulate the media message.

Six potential YouTube videos were tested (three for each elevation and control condition) in order to select the two most effective media examples per condition. The elevating videos presented portrayals of others helping homeless people or strangers, whereas the enjoyment videos showed portrayals of others having fun moments and enjoying their lives. All other aspects of the media content were carefully controlled to have identical conditions across both conditions: duration, background music, screen size, video settings, and topic. Videos were edited to three minutes in length, and each condition used identical instrumental background music, which was pretested in previous research on elevation (Oliver, Kim, Shade, Hoewe, & Cooke, 2013). In the condition designed to elicit feelings of elevation, an emotional piano performance soundtrack was used, and in the enjoyment condition, a smooth instrumental jazz soundtrack was used.
Pretest 1

In the first pretest, 52 MTurk participants (females = 58%; $M_{\text{age}} = 37$) watched all six videos in random order and rated their emotional responses to each video using abbreviated elevation items on 7-point scales (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much). The elevation emotions were assessed based on three items: compassionate, moved, and touched ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.57$, $\alpha = 91$). Positive emotions were evaluated with two items: happy and entertained ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.66$, $\alpha = 88$). First, a series of repeated-measures ANOVAs using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons were employed to compare the reported responses on each individual item. Next, independent-samples two tailed t-tests were employed to evaluate differences within the selected video stimuli for each treatment condition. Specifically, a combined single index of elevation emotion was tested for the selected video clips in the moral beauty condition, and a single index of positive emotion was tested for the chosen videos in the enjoyment condition.

An analysis of the repeated-measures ANOVA revealed significant differences in terms of eliciting feelings of compassion, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .21$, $F(5, 47) = 35.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .79$. Post hoc analysis indicated that the reported scores were significantly higher for videos in the moral beauty condition compared to other three enjoyment videos ($M = 2.42$, $SE = .23$; $M = 2.77$, $SE = .24$; $M = 2.83$, $SE = .25$). However, post hoc analyses showed that the reported feelings of compassion were significantly lower for video clip 1 ($M = 4.31$, $SE = .26$) than video clips 2 and 3 ($M = 6.04$, $SE = .15$; $M = 6.10$, $SE = .19$) in the moral beauty condition. The results from additional repeated-measures ANOVAs were consistent for the other two elevation measures (moved and touched). Video clip 1 rated significantly lower for feeling moved and touched ($M = 4.89$, $SE = .22$; $M = 4.77$, $SE = .25$) than video clip 2 ($M = 6.12$, $SE = .14$; $M = 6.19$, $SE = .11$) and video clip 3 ($M = 6.10$, $SE = .19$; $M = 6.15$, $SE = .19$) (see Table 1). These results provided convincing evidence for selecting video clips 2 and 3 for the moral beauty condition.

Additionally, two repeated-measures ANOVAs were conducted for the “entertained” and
“happy” items. Findings demonstrated that there was a significant difference in terms of feeling entertained, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .49$, $F (5, 47) = 9.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .51$, and bonferroni post hoc comparisons indicated that enjoyment video clip 1 was significantly lower ($M = 3.90$, $SE = .24$) compared to enjoyment video clips 2 and 3 ($M = 4.38$, $SE = .26$; $M = 4.64$, $SE = .23$). However, the reported scores for enjoyment video clips 2 and 3 did not differ compared to those selected videos for the moral beauty condition ($M = 4.98$, $SE = .21$; $M = 4.79$, $SE = .25$). An additional repeated-measures ANOVA examined a significant difference regarding the reported scores on happy item, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .48$, $F (5, 47) = 10.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .52$. Although three enjoyment videos did not differ in this score ($M = 3.85$, $SE = .26$; $M = 4.21$, $SE = .25$; $M = 4.37$, $SE = .25$), the reported responses were significantly lower than the moral beauty videos ($M = 5.65$, $SE = .22$; $M = 5.46$, $SE = .18$; $M = 5.29$, $SE = .24$). Of the enjoyment videos, video clips 2 and 3 were selected for the enjoyment condition based on the high scores on both items (entertained, happy).

To test the differences within the selected videos for each condition, two separate independent-sample t-tests were conducted for each condition. The results indicated that reported feelings of elevation did not differ for the selected video clips in the moral beauty condition ($M = 6.12$, $SD = .89$; $M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(102) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$, and showed no differences in positive emotion for the selected videos in the enjoyment condition ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.77$; $M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.62$), $t(102) = -0.61$, $p = 0.55$.

In summary, elevating video clips 2 and 3 were selected for the moral beauty condition, and enjoyment video clips 2 and 3 were selected for the enjoyment condition. The media conditions differ in terms of elevating measures, but not for feeling entertained. In addition, there were no differences within treatment conditions. The pretest results are presented in Table 1 and the bold numbers in the table represent the selected videos for each condition. Details about the four selected videos are explained in the section describing the independent variable.
Table 1: Affective Responses to Six Videos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moral Beauty</th>
<th></th>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
<th></th>
<th>Univariate F</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>4.31$_a$</td>
<td>6.04$_b$</td>
<td>6.10$_b$</td>
<td>2.42$_c$</td>
<td>2.77$_c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>4.89$_a$</td>
<td>6.12$_b$</td>
<td>6.10$_b$</td>
<td>2.46$_d$</td>
<td>3.19$_c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touched</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>4.77$_a$</td>
<td>6.19$_b$</td>
<td>6.15$_b$</td>
<td>2.37$_{cd}$</td>
<td>2.83$_{cde}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertained</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>5.77$_a$</td>
<td>4.98$_{abc}$</td>
<td>4.79$_{bc}$</td>
<td>3.90$_d$</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>5.65$_a$</td>
<td>5.46$_a$</td>
<td>5.29$_a$</td>
<td>3.85$_{bc}$</td>
<td>4.21$_{bc}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01. Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, within rows, means with no lower case subscript in common differ at $p < .05$. The bold numbers are selected videos for each media condition.
Media types

The second variable of interest is user-generated content and its impact on viewers’ affective and cognitive responses to media stimulus in comparison to a company-sponsored message. For the user-generated content, the UGC video clips were downloaded from YouTube and they were edited in order to shorten the length of videos. In the sponsorship condition, the sponsorship message was created to depict a fictional health and life insurance company and the message was displayed at the end of videos. A company was used because for two reasons: to counteract participants’ preexisting attitudes toward a certain company and to prevent possible legal issues.

Pretest 2

The videos for the both moral beauty and enjoyment conditions were edited to create three versions: front sponsorship (sponsorship message placed at the beginning of the video), back sponsorship (sponsorship message placed at the end of the video), and user-generated conditions (no sponsorship message). Seventy-four MTurk participants (females = 40%; $M_{age} = 34$) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: front sponsorship (37%), back sponsorship (30%), or user-generated content (33%). After watching the video, participants reported whether the clip was sponsored or not by answering yes, no, or maybe.

A 3 X 3 chi-square analysis was employed to examine the differences in the answers regarding sponsorship as a function of the three video conditions. The analysis revealed a significant finding in the video sponsorship condition, $\chi^2(4, N = 74) = 30.94, p < .001, V^* = .46$, with a larger percentage of people in the back sponsorship condition (77.3%) reporting that the video clip was sponsored than those in the front sponsorship condition (48.1%) and those in the user-generated condition (0%). Additionally, a smaller percentage of people in the back sponsorship condition (13.6%) responded that the video was not sponsored than both the front
sponsorship (29.6%) and user-generated (44.0%) conditions. These findings suggest that there might be a recency effect—individuals are more likely to recall the information or experiences that are most recently presented. Therefore, it is believed that back the sponsorship message is more effective in activating sponsorship awareness. The results of the second preset are presented in Table 2.
Table 2: Participants’ Answers to the Question Regarding Video Sponsorship with No Embedded Logo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsorship</th>
<th>UGC</th>
<th>Front Sponsorship</th>
<th>Back Sponsorship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ²(4, N=74) = 30.94, p < .001, V* = .46.
Pretest 3

However, other pretest findings raised concerns that this message manipulation might not be effective. A large percentage of people in both sponsorship conditions (approximately 30% in the front sponsorship and 10% in the back sponsorship) reported that the message was created without sponsorship. These data demonstrated the potential that participants might completely miss the one-time sponsorship message while viewing the video. Thus, the sponsorship conditions were modified to include a visible company logo in the upper right corner of the screen throughout the entire video in addition to a sponsorship message either at the beginning or the end of the video.

In the third pretest, 64 MTurk participants (females = 35%; $M_{age} = 36$) were randomly assigned to one of the three modified conditions: front sponsorship (33%), back sponsorship (33%), or the user-generated condition (34%). After watching the video stimulus, participants were asked to answer whether the clip was sponsored and to report whether they perceived the clip as UGC using a 7-point scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much). Consistent with the second pretest results, a 3 X 3 chi-square analysis demonstrated that the reported answers differed significantly as a function of sponsorship condition, $\chi^2(4, N = 64) = 41.20, p < .001, V^* = .57$. A larger percentage of people in the back sponsorship condition (86.4%) reported that the video was sponsored by a certain company than those in the front sponsorship condition (81.0%) and in the user-generated condition (0%). Additionally, a smaller percentage of people in the back sponsorship condition (4.5%) reported that the video may be sponsored in comparison to in those in the front sponsorship condition (14.3%) and those in the user-generated condition (42.9%). The result of pretest 3 is presented in Table 3. Based on the findings of the second and third pretests, the researcher decided to have a company logo visible throughout the clip and a sponsorship message appearing at the end of the videos in the sponsorship condition.

Additionally, a one-way ANOVA with bonferroni post-hoc comparisons was employed to test the difference in terms of participants’ perceptions of the video clip. The analysis revealed no
significant difference in perceiving the video as UGC, \( F(2, 61) = .88, p = .42 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .03 \)
among the front sponsorship (\( M = 4.19, SE = 4.40 \)), the back sponsorship (\( M = 4.36, SE = 0.39 \)),
and the user-generated conditions (\( M = 4.91, SE = 0.40 \)).
Table 3: Participants’ Answers to the Question Regarding Video Sponsorship with A Embedded Corporate Logo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsorship</th>
<th>UGC</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ²(4, N = 64) = 41.20, p < .001, V* = .57.
Independent Variables

Media themes (moral beauty vs. enjoyment)

The four types of videos represented either the moral beauty condition or enjoyment condition (control condition) (See Appendix A for all video stimuli). As previously stated, two videos were selected per condition and were identical in terms of characteristics such as duration, screen size, musical soundtrack, and characters in the video. The edited versions of videos did not have any dialog and have only serious of images with the background soundtrack music selected from a previous study (Oliver et al., 2013).

Giving to the homeless. In this video, two White college students give fruit and bottled water to homeless people. The edited version of this video shows multiple scenes of the students’ generosity and kindness in giving the homeless free food. The original video can be found on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqbik-92Oxg.

Acts of kindness caught on film. This video consists of multiple scenes of car drivers’ random acts of kindness. For example, a driver gets out of his car to help an elderly pedestrian safely cross the street. Another driver tows a car that is stuck in the snow. Similar acts of kindness are presented throughout the video. The original video can be found on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeph_eX_pVw.

Traveling to foreign countries. This video is a summary of four White college students’ trip to Southeast Asia, showing them having a fun time with friends. The video contains multiple images of exciting activities, including a party on a boat, biking on a road, jumping into water, and scuba diving. The original video can be found on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk5IUkLL1nU.

Road trip. In this video, a White heterosexual couple takes a road trip to many different places across the U.S. and parts of Canada. The video has various scenes showing the couple driving around and enjoying many activities including camping, hiking, rock climbing, and taking
pictures. The original video can be found on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_HQd4Xm9HY.

**Media types (user-generated vs. sponsored content)**

The other variable of interest in this study is user-generated content and its impact on viewers’ responses in comparison to sponsored content. In the user-generated content condition, participants viewed one of the four videos described above; those in the sponsored condition saw a sponsorship message delivered by a health and life insurance company in the upper right corner of screen (company logo) throughout the video and at the end of the video.

**Measurement**

Before exposure to one of the stimulus video clips, participants completed a questionnaire regarding general YouTube use. Later a questionnaire was also administered after participants viewed the video. The second section consisted of nine sections including affective responses to the video, perceived authenticity, feelings elicited by a media creator, perceived message influence, evaluation of media, prosocial motivations, and behavioral intentions. Finally, the questionnaire also included questions on the manipulation check and demographic information (See Appendix B for questionnaire items).

**Mediating/Moderating Variables**

This study posits a causal relationship between moral portrayals, user-generated content, and the subsequent impact on positive social outcomes (e.g., consumption of inspiring media to promote the distribution and sharing of prosocial messages). Based on previous research, this relationship may be mediated by six variables: feelings of elevation, prosocial motivations, perceived authenticity, feelings elicited by a media creator, perceived message influence, and evaluation of media. Additionally, this study predicts that perceived authenticity may also function as a moderator in the relationship between moral portrayals and feelings of elevation.

_Elevation and positive emotion_. Elevation affective response was evaluated using seven
items associated with meaningful affect and positive emotion was measured using three positive affect items from Oliver, Hartmann, and Woolley’s (2012) study. Meaningful affect factor included seven items (e.g., touched, meaningful, inspired, and tender) and positive affect included three items (e.g., upbeat, amused, entertained). All items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much). The first seven items evaluating meaningful affect were averaged to make a single index of elevation (\(M = 4.28, SD = 2.03, \alpha = .97\)) and the second three items evaluating positive affect were averaged to create a single index of positive emotion (\(M = 3.97, SD = 1.75, \alpha = .86\)).

**Prosocial motivations.** Prosocial motivations were measured using six items from previous studies (Aquino et al., 2011; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012). These items were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree (e.g., “I want to be a better person for others” and “I have a desire to care for someone in need”). All items were averaged to create a single index (\(M = 4.14, SD = 1.90, \alpha = .94\)).

**Perceived authenticity.** Perceived authenticity was measured using six items regarding candidness and manipulation modified from Hall’s (2009) study on reality shows. In the study, candidness is defined as perceptions that the media program depicts media characters as they truly are, and manipulation refers to feelings that the show may be manipulated by the producers for certain purposes (Hall, 2009, p. 521). For instance, original items included the following statements: “The behavior of the people on this show is not affected by the cameras” and “You get to see people as they really are on this show.” In the current study, participants were asked to report how they felt about people’s behaviors and interactions on the video by indicating their levels of agreement with each of the following statements: “When I think about the people in the video clip, I feel like I saw them as the people that they really are”; “The people’s behavior and interactions in the video are genuine”; and “I am skeptical that the people in the video reflect their own values or reasons (reversed)” on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). All six measures
were averaged to create a single index ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.37$, $\alpha = .90$).

*Feelings elicited by a media creator.* Feelings elicited by a media creator were measured with five positive emotion items from Richins (1997). Research applying attribution theory typically asks participants to read a certain scenario and answer how they feel about a particular person involved in the story. Applying the theory to the context of media types (UGC vs. company-sponsored content), participants were asked to indicate how they feel when thinking of the media creator (user vs. advertiser) who created the video clip. They reported the extent to which they experienced each of the emotion items in response to the video creator (e.g., happy, pleased, good). These items were measured using a 7-point scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much), and the items were averaged to create a single index ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.78$, $\alpha = .96$).

*Message influence.* Message influence was measured using two argument strength items modified from previous research (Kempf & Palan, 2006). The original measures included the following measures (good, bad; persuasive, unpersuasive; informative, uninformative; strong, weak; believable, unbelievable). Considering the media themes this study employs (moral beauty and enjoyment), two items were measured on a 7-point semantic-differential scale (strong, weak; influential, not influential). Participants were asked to indicate how they evaluated the message delivered in the video clip. All items were averaged to create a single index of perceived message influence ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.83$, $\alpha = .94$).

*Evaluation of media.* Overall positive evaluation of media was measured using four items associated with attitudes toward an advertisement from Muehling (1987). Participants were asked to answer how they evaluated the video clip overall by answering each of the four items on a 7-point semantic-differential scale (e.g., unappealing, appealing; unfavorable, favorable). The items were reversed and averaged to form a single index of media evaluation ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.64$, $\alpha = .97$).
Dependent Variables

Behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions were measured using four items associated with blog advertising, modified from Zhu and Tan (2007). These items were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree (e.g., “I would like to learn about how to create this type of video” and “I would like to recommend this video to others”). All items were averaged to form a single index of behavioral intentions ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.59$, $\alpha = .84$).

General YouTube Use and Demographic Information

General YouTube use. Participants reported their general YouTube use in terms of (1) amount of time spent using YouTube, (2) activities involving YouTube use (e.g., watching videos, leaving comments, and sharing videos), and (3) types of media content to watch. These items were adopted from Haridakis and Hanson’s (2009) study on YouTube. The second and third sets of questions were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much).

Demographic information. At the end of the post-questionnaire, the participants were asked to provide demographic information regarding gender, age, and education level with the following options: (1) some high school, (2) high school degree or GED equivalent, (3) some college, (4) two-year college degree (A.A., A.S., or equivalent) or vocational certification, (5) four-year college degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent), (6) some graduate or professional school, (7) graduate or professional degree (M.A., Ph.D., J.D., M.D. or equivalent), and (8) I prefer not to answer this question. Finally, participants selected all of the ethnic groups with which they identified from a list of the options including (1) American Indian, (2) Alaska Native, (3) African-American, (4) Asian or Pacific Islander, (5) Caucasian, (6) Hispanic, and (7) Other.
**Preliminary Statistical Analyses**

Before testing the proposed models, both descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation analyses were employed to identify any potential issues with univariate or multivariate normality of the data. Descriptive analysis indicated that there was no issue with the values including means, standard deviations, minimum, maximum, reliability, and Kurtosis. However, descriptive analysis revealed that responses on evaluation of media were slightly negatively skewed. Additional descriptive analysis was conducted to report the aforementioned statistics for each experimental condition. In terms of the evaluation of media, tests showed similar findings across conditions. Particularly for the elevation condition, however, some of the measures were slightly negatively skewed including elevation, prosocial motivations, and perceived message influence. The overall statistics for the study are described in Table 4 and the specific statistical information for each experimental condition is described in Table 5.
Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Mediating and Dependent Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elevation</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>2.03</td>
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<td>7.00</td>
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<td>-1.27</td>
<td>0.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prosocial Motivations</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
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<td>-1.11</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity</td>
<td>5.22</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.76</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<td>Feelings Elicited by a</td>
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<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>0.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Creator</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Influence</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.89</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.94</td>
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<td>Evaluation of Media</td>
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<td>7.00</td>
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<td>0.97</td>
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<td>-1.12</td>
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Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Each Experimental Condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>α</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Beauty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevation</td>
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<td>7.00</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.97</td>
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<td>Prosocial Motivations</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.55</td>
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<td>7.00</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
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<td>Perceived Authenticity</td>
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<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings Elicited by a Media Creator</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.70</td>
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Subsequently, biivariate correlation analysis was conducted in order to examine any potential issue with multicollinearity and to explore the patterns of hypothesized relationships between variables. According to Kline (2011), bivariate correlations above 0.85 between any two variables have potential problems with multicollinearity, indicating that these variables might be redundant and test the same concept. Biivariate correlation analysis showed that there was no correlation greater than 0.85 (see Table 6).

Furthermore, the direction and strength of correlations were examined to assess the hypothesized relationships between variables. Regarding the hypothesized relationships relating to elevation research, feelings of elevation are positively associated with prosocial motivations \((r = 0.85, p < .01)\) and behavioral intentions \((r = 0.68, p < .01)\). For the proposed model associated with attribution theory, perceived authenticity is positively related to feelings elicited by a media creator \((r = 0.52, p < .01)\), perceived message influence \((r = 0.48, p < .01)\), evaluation of media \((r = 0.58, p < .01)\), and behavioral intentions \((r = 0.45, p < .01)\). Finally, the relationships between outcomes of each model were examined. As predicted in the full-hypothesized model, one’s feelings elicited by a media creator were positively associated with elevation \((r = 0.64, p < .01)\), and the evaluation of media was positively associated with participants’ behavioral intentions to promote the media \((r = 0.68, p < .01)\). The results showed significant relationships between variables consistent with the proposed model.
Table 6: Bivariate Correlations for Mediating and Dependent Variables.

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*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01.*
Chapter 3

RESULTS

To explore the relationships among variables, the present study evaluated ten hypotheses and one research question. After manipulation check, the first three hypotheses are associated with elevation research, explaining how viewing a moral exemplar affects prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions to promote the idea. In the following section, the hypotheses related to attribution theory were tested to examine unique psychological effects of user-generated content in comparison to company-sponsored content. Lastly, the combined full model connected relationships among outcomes from each study, explaining the idea of how the affective and cognitive outcomes resulting from UGC may stimulate the impact of elevating media on positive outcomes.

Manipulation Check

Both media themes and media types were successfully manipulated. Two separate independent-sample t-tests were employed to test the differences within different theme conditions in eliciting feelings of elevation and positive emotion. Dummy codes were used for the analysis: the “moral beauty condition” was coded as 1 and the “enjoyment condition” was coded as 0. The results showed that the moral beauty condition ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.60$) elicited greater levels of elevation than did the enjoyment condition ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.66$), $t(387) = 14.75, p < .001$, whereas the enjoyment condition ($M = 4.49, SD = 1.75$) elicited greater levels of positive emotion than did the moral beauty condition ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.61$), $t(387) = -5.96, p < .001$.

Additionally, a 2 X 3 chi-square analysis was employed to examine the differences in the responses regarding video sponsorship of two media types conditions: user-generated condition (49.7%) and sponsorship condition (50.3%), in which participants reported whether the clip was sponsored or not by answering yes, no, or maybe. The analysis showed significant differences in
reported responses about video sponsorship, $\chi^2(2, N = 389) = 111.56, p < .001, V^* = .76$. A significantly larger number of people in the video sponsorship condition (75.1 %) reported that the video clip was sponsored than did those in the UGC condition (2.6%).

**Exploration of Main and Interaction Effects Associated with Elevation Research**

Prior to testing the proposed models, a series of 2 (Moral Beauty vs. Enjoyment) X 2 (User-Generated Content vs. Sponsored Content) multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of media themes (moral beauty vs. enjoyment) and media types (user-generated content vs. company-sponsored content) on variables associated with each proposed model.

To verify the relationships in the proposed elevation model, a 2 (Moral Beauty vs. Enjoyment) X 2 (User-Generated Content vs. Sponsored Content) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to explore respondents’ feelings of elevation, prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions. The MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of media themes, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .55, F(3, 383) = 104.98, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45$. However, the reported results failed to show a main effect of media types, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99, F(3, 383) = 1.16, p = .20, \eta_p^2 = .01$, nor an interaction effect, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99, F(3, 383) = 1.57, p = .20, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

**Elevation.** The univariate analysis for elevation examined a significant main effect for media themes, $F(1, 385) = 218.43, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .36$, reporting that the participants viewing a moral exemplar ($M = 5.48, SE = 0.12$) reported greater levels of elevation than did those viewing others having fun times ($M = 3.04, SE = 0.12$).

**Prosocial motivations.** The univariate statistics also explored a significant main effect of media themes on prosocial motivations, $F(1, 385) = 157.41, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .29$. Those viewing others’ moral behaviors reported greater levels of prosocial motivations ($M = 5.12, SE = 0.11$) than did those watching others having enjoyable moments ($M = 3.11, SE = 0.12$).
Behavioral intentions. Finally, tests revealed greater levels of behavioral intents to promote the message for elevating media ($M = 4.27, SE = 0.11$) than for enjoyment media ($M = 3.59, SE = 0.11$), $F(1, 385) = 18.74, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$.

Exploration of Main and Interaction Effects Associated with Attribution Research

Perceived authenticity. Perceived authenticity did not differ as a function of media themes, $F(1, 385) = 1.75, p = .19$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Participants in the moral beauty condition ($M = 5.31, SE = 0.10$) did not differ from those in the enjoyment condition ($M = 5.13, SE = 0.10$) in terms of perceived authenticity. Analysis revealed a main effect of media types on perceived authenticity, $F(1, 385) = 6.76, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The participants in the user-generated condition ($M = 5.40, SE = 0.10$) reported greater levels of perceived authenticity than did those in the sponsored condition ($M = 5.00, SE = 0.10$).

Feelings elicited by a media creator. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of media themes on positive feelings elicited by a media creator, $F(1, 385) = 13.49, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Those viewing elevating media showed more positive feelings generated by a media creator ($M = 4.82, SE = 0.12$) than did those watching enjoyment-focus media ($M = 4.17, SE = 0.13$). Also, the reported positive affect levels differed for different types of media, $F(1, 385) = 6.76, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The results showed that participants had greater levels of positive feelings evoked the user-generated content creator ($M = 4.72, SE = 0.12$) than toward the company-sponsored content creator ($M = 4.26, SE = 0.13$).

Message influence. Results revealed significant main effects for both media themes and media types on perceived message influence. Specifically, the reported message influence was greater for the elevating condition ($M = 5.87, SE = 0.12$) than the enjoyment condition ($M = 4.31, SE = 0.12$), $F(1, 385) = 85.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. Additionally, the participants viewing user-generated content ($M = 5.26, SE = 0.12$) reported greater levels of perceived media influence
than did those viewing the sponsored content \( (M = 4.91, SE = 0.12), F(1, 385) = 4.70, p < .05, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .01. \)

**Evaluation of media.** Results showed that the responses on evaluation of media varied for different media themes, \( F(1, 385) = 27.06, p < .001, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .07. \) Those in the moral beauty condition \( (M = 5.99, SE = 0.11) \) evaluated a video clip more positively than did those in the enjoyment condition \( (M = 5.12, SE = 0.12). \) However, the reported evaluation of media was not significantly different between those in the user-generated condition \( (M = 5.68, SE = 0.11) \) and those in the sponsored condition \( (M = 5.45, SE = 0.12), F(1, 385) = 2.01, p = .15, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .01. \)

**Behavioral intentions.** Finally, analysis also showed a significant main effect of media themes on behavioral intentions related to media use, \( F(1, 385) = 18.74, p < .001, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .05. \) Specifically, those watching an elevating media message \( (M = 4.27, SE = 0.11) \) showed greater interests in promoting the media than did those viewing those having fun moments \( (M = 3.59, SE = 0.11). \) However, there was no evidence supporting the main effect of media types on behavioral intentions.

Overall, the results were consistent with the proposed paths in the models. The findings demonstrated the main effects of the media themes on the following outcomes: feelings of elevation, prosocial motivations, feelings elicited by a media creator, message influence, evaluation of media, and behavioral intentions to promote the media. Findings also demonstrated there were significant main effects of media types on perceived authenticity, feelings about a media creator, and message influence. In terms of interaction effects, however, there was no supporting evidence.

**Testing the Proposed Models**

Three proposed models were separately evaluated using AMOS version 18. Prior to structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were initially applied to the test measurement model considering the relationship among variables consisting of a latent variable and the factor structure between a set of latent variables in the model. The researcher
made some items’ error terms covary if they were methodologically (e.g., reversed items) related. Based on the information of the residual covariance matrix and modification indices, the researcher also made some error terms covariate and provided explanations for the decision. After making one modification, the study subsequently conducted an additional CFA and applied a chi-square difference test to see if the change made a significant improvement.

The overall model fit was evaluated based on the following information: model chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square residual (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Approximately, CFI values greater than .95 indicate a good fit, and any values between .90 and .95 indicate a reasonably good fit (Kaplan, 2000). In terms of RMSEA, any values below .05 imply a good model fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) and for SRMR, values less than .08 are generally considered good (Hu & Bentler, 1999). If the results of any those indicators represent a poor fit, modification indices were considered for improving a model fit based on theoretical relationships. After establishing a good/acceptable model fit, the coefficients of each path were examined to evaluate hypothesized relationships between variables. Finally, multiple group analyses were employed in order to verify differences in model fit and path coefficients across different groupings (gender, media themes, and media types).

Dummy codes were used for testing the hypothesized models. First, in evaluating the hypotheses associated with elevation research (Figure 1), the “moral beauty condition” was coded as 1 and the “enjoyment condition” was coded as 0. The theoretical relationships between variables were analyzed through comparing the impact of viewing portrayals of moral beauty with seeing portrayals of others enjoying fun moments. Next, for exploring proposed relationships associated with attribution theory (Figure 2), “user-generated content (UGC)” was coded as 1, and “company-sponsored content (CSC)” was coded as 0. After testing two models, the study evaluated the proposed-linked relationships between variables resulting from each model (Figure 3).
Evaluating the Model Associated with Elevation Research

*Measurement model.* The initial run of CFA indicated that the measurement model has an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 734.82$, $df = 132$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .09, 90% CI = .09 to .10. The modification indices implied that the errors of two measures on elevation items (touched, compassionate) appeared to be highly related. An exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction was employed to examine the factor loading of elevation items, and the analysis demonstrated one-factor loading of the items. Although the elevation items present a unidimensional concept of elevation, it seems that the two measures are highly related since the items particularly focus on a viewer’s feelings about the portrayals of moral excellence displayed in the video clip and other items measure more general feelings about the depicted moral situation (e.g., meaningful, emotional, etc.). After the modification, the model fit significantly improved ($\chi^2$ difference = 108.76, $p < .001$) and showed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 626.06$, $df = 131$, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .09, 90% CI = .08 to .09. In total, one pair of items was correlated after running a series of CFAs. As a result, the residual covariance matrix and modification indices reported no issue with error terms among variables.

*Model fit.* Consequently, SEM was employed with bootstrapping procedures and bias-corrected confidence intervals to verify the hypothesized direct and indirect paths in the proposed model. SEM analysis indicated that the proposed paths were statistically significant, consistent with predictions with an acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 = 847.08$, $df = 149$, $p < .001$, CFI = .92, SRMR = .07, RMSEA = 0.09, 90% CI = .08 to .09 (see Figure 4).
Figure 4: Model for Testing Hypotheses Associated with Elevation Research.

\[ \chi^2 = 847.08, \ df = 149, \ p < .001, \ CFI = .92, \ SRMR = .07, \ RMSEA = 0.09, \ 90\% \ CI = .08 \text{ to } .09. \]

Note: * \( p < .05, ** \ p < .01, *** \ p < .001. \) Media theme was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = enjoyment, 1 = moral beauty.

Hypotheses H1-H3 associated with elevation research. Consistent with the findings in previous elevation research, the results of this study also revealed a causal relationship between the moral beauty condition and feelings of elevation. The path of the model indicated that individuals witnessing others’ moral beauty reported greater feelings of elevation than did those watching others enjoying fun moments (\( \beta = .64, \ p < .001 \)) (H1). The sense of elevation was positively associated with prosocial motivations such as being a good person and helping other people (\( \beta = .87, \ p < .001 \)) (H2). Finally, prosocial motivations were positively related to behavioral intentions to promote the media message such as sharing the video with others (\( \beta = .75, \ p < .001 \)) (H3).

Bootstrapping procedures using 2000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence interval of 95% revealed significant indirect paths from the moral beauty condition to prosocial motivations (\( \beta = .56, \ p < .001, \ CI = .49 \text{ to } .62 \)), and to behavioral intentions to promote media, (\( \beta = .42, \ P < .001, \ CI = .35 \text{ to } .48 \)).

A critical question was raised regarding whether behavioral intentions to promote media reflect prosocial motivations. To clarify the proposed relationship, additional bivariate correlation analysis was conducted for the enjoyment condition, prosocial motivations, and behavioral intentions. The analysis results showed the enjoyment condition was negatively correlated with both prosocial motivations (\( r = -0.54, \ p < .01 \)) and behavioral intentions (\( r = -0.21, \ p < .01 \)). However, prosocial motivations were positively correlated with behavioral intentions to share a video clip with others (\( r = 0.70, \ p < .01 \)).
Lastly, two separate multiple group analyses were conducted to test the invariance of the structural weights in the final model across gender and media types (UGC vs. company-sponsored content). Prior research has demonstrated that gender differences affect feelings of elevation, indicating that females reported greater levels of elevation and susceptibility to elevating emotion than males (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Freeman et al., 2009). The analysis showed significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained models, $\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 8.05, p < .05$, and the results of pairwise parameter comparison reported one significantly different path across gender. Consistent with the previous research findings, female participants viewing moral portrayals reported greater levels of elevation ($\beta = .72, p < .001$) than did male participants ($\beta = .57, p < .001$). An examination of additional analysis, however, showed no difference between the UGC condition and company-sponsored condition, $\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 1.69, p = .64$. The participants responded to the elevating media in a similar way regardless of media types.

**Evaluating the Model Associated with Attribution Theory**

*Measurement model.* The results of the initial CFA reported that the measurement model has an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 672.06$, $df = 199$, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .08, 90% CI = .07 to .08. Additional CFA was conducted after correlating the error terms of three authenticity measures because of the methodological artifact of reverse-coded items. The result of the second CFA reported a good fit with a significant model improvement ($\chi^2$ difference = 178.08, $p < .001$), $\chi^2 = 493.98$, $df = 196$, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .06, 90% CI = .05 to .07.

*Model fit.* In a subsequent step, the second proposed model was tested using SEM with bootstrapping procedures and bias-corrected confidence intervals. The findings indicated that the predicted paths were statistically significant with an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 748.53$, $df = 222$, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, SRMR = .10, RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI = .07 to .08. (see Figure 5).
Hypotheses H4-H9 associated with attribution theory. The reported responses demonstrated evidence supporting the proposed relationships among variables. User-generated content leads to higher perceived authenticity in comparison to sponsored content ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) (H4). Viewers’ perceptions that media characters’ behaviors are motivated by their own values (authenticity) were associated with positive feelings elicited by a media creator ($\beta = .65, p < .001$) (H5), and with perceived message influence ($\beta = .59, p < .001$) (H7). Both positive feelings generated by the media creator ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) (H6) and the perceived message influence ($\beta = .66, p < .001$) (H8) were associated with positive evaluation of media. Finally, the positive evaluation of media was related to participants’ intents to promote the media ($\beta = .70, p < .001$) (H9).

Furthermore, bootstrapping procedures using 2000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence interval of 95% further demonstrated the indirect paths from perceived authenticity to participants’ evaluation of media ($\beta = .60, p < .001$, CI = .49 to .69), and from user-generated content to behavioral intentions to promote the media ($\beta = .05, p < .05$, CI = .01 to .10). All of this information is presented in Table 7.
Table 7: Total Indirect Effects in Hypothesized Model Related to Attribution Theory.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. UGC</td>
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<td>2. Authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Feelings Elicited by a Media Creator</td>
<td>.08*</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Message Influence</td>
<td>.07*</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Evaluation of Media</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.60***</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Behavioral Intentions</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.49***</td>
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*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*
Finally, a multiple group analysis was conducted in order to evaluate the invariance of the structural weights in the final model across different media themes (moral beauty vs. enjoyment). The analysis demonstrated significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained models, \( \Delta \chi^2 (6) = 16.14, p < .05 \), indicating that the model operated in a different way for different media themes. The results of pairwise parameter comparison reported three significantly different paths across different media themes. For those in the moral beauty condition, viewers’ feelings elicited by a media creator were positively associated with evaluation of media (\( \beta = .16, p < .001 \)), but the relationship significantly increased among those watching enjoyment-focused media (\( \beta = .36, p < .001 \)). For those in the moral beauty condition, viewers’ reporting of perceived message influence was positively associated with evaluation of media, (\( \beta = .80, p < .001 \)), but such a connection was significantly weaker among those viewing enjoyment media (\( \beta = .57, p < .001 \)). Additionally, the direct effect of media evaluation on behavioral intentions was greater for the moral beauty condition (\( \beta = .98, p < .001 \)) than for the enjoyment condition (\( \beta = .71, p < .001 \)). Although some paths operate in a different way for different media themes in terms of the strength of the relationships, the direction of the paths are consistent with the proposed model.

**Testing the Hypotheses in the Full Proposed Model**

In analyzing the hypotheses in the combined full mode, SEM used the modified measurement structure resulting from a series of previous CFAs. Specifically, the hypothesized full model was tested by employing two methods: SEM with bootstrapping procedures and bias-corrected confidence intervals and Hayes’s PROCESS utility (Model 1 with 2,000 bootstrap resamples) to assess the role of perceived authenticity as a moderator in the relationship between morality and perceived authenticity. This particular analysis was employed since AMOS does not accommodate testing for interactions using latent variables.

**Model fit.** The initial run of SEM analysis demonstrated that the relationships among variables are statistically significant and reported an acceptable model fit, \( \chi^2 = 2264.79, df = 619, p \)
< .001, CFI = .90, SRMR = .16, RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI = .08 to .09 (see Figure 6). However, modification indices suggested model improvement through covariating elevation with message influence. Theoretically, on the one hand, affective responses to media could positively influence the perceived media influence. Previous research has shown that emotions can promote deeper cognitive processing of a media message (Nabi, 2010). On the other hand, one’s high levels of information processing can also positively influence his or her emotional responses that a media message is designed to elicit. Given that the researcher believes that these two concepts are highly related, the researcher decided to covariate these two variables and to include it in the final model, resulting in an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 2194.38$, $df = 618$, $p < .001$, CFI = .91, SRMR = .13, RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI = .07 to .08 (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: Initial Full Model.

$\chi^2 = 2264.79$, $df = 619$, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, SRMR = .16, RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI = .08 to .09

*Note:* * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Dummy codes were employed for each independent variable. Media theme was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = enjoyment, 1 = moral beauty. Media type was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = company-sponsored content, 1 = user-generated content.
Figure 7: Modified Full Model.
\[ \chi^2 = 2194.38, \text{df} = 618, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .91, \text{SRMR} = .13, \text{RMSEA} = 0.08, 90\% \text{ CI} = .07 \text{ to } .08 \]

Note: * \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \), *** \( p < .001 \). Dummy codes were employed for each independent variable. Media theme was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = enjoyment, 1 = moral beauty. Media type was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = company-sponsored content, 1 = user-generated content.

**Hypotheses in the full model.** Although the numbers were slightly different, the findings of the relationships among variables in the predicted full model were consistent with findings of previous analyses. Individuals witnessing someone’s moral beauty toward others led to greater levels of elevation in comparison to seeing others having fun (\( \beta = .51, p < .001 \)) (H1). The sense of elevation was positively associated with their prosocial motivations to help others (\( \beta = .84, p < .001 \)) (H2), which then was positively related to their behavioral intentions to promote the media message such as sharing it to others and recommend others to view (\( \beta = .48, p < .001 \)) (H3).

Regarding the psychological outcomes of user-generated content, those viewing user-generated media reported greater levels of perceived authenticity than did those watching sponsored media, indicating that people in the video are seen as representing their true selves (\( \beta = .13, p < .05 \)) (H4). The perceived authenticity of media was associated with both positive feelings evoked by the media creator of the video they watched (\( \beta = .63, p < .001 \)) (H5) and the perceived message influence delivered by the media (\( \beta = .51, p < .001 \)) (H7). The feelings generated by the
media creator (β = .35, p < .001) (H6) and the perceived message influence (β = .65, p < .001) (H8) were positively related to participants’ evaluation of media. As a result, the media evaluation was positively associated with their intentions to promote the media (β = .42, p < .001) (H9). The results further detailed the interconnected relationships between psychological outcomes resulting from consumption of media portrayals of morality and user-generated content. Individuals’ feelings elicited by the media creator were positively associated with feelings of elevation (β = .52, p < .001) (RQ1).

Bootstrapping procedures using 2000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence interval of 95% were employed to test the modified direct and indirect relationships among variables. The findings showed a significant direct path from positive emotions toward a media product to feelings of elevation (β = .52, p < .001, CI = .41 to .60), and revealed a significant indirect effect of the perceived authenticity on viewers’ behavioral intentions to promote the media (β = .36, p < .001, CI = .23 to .45). Finally, the reported statistics supported the proposed indirect paths from both the moral beauty condition (β = .20, p < .001, CI = .15 to .27) and the user-generated condition (β = .05, p < .05, CI = .01 to .10) to behavioral intentions. All statistics of indirect relationships are reported in Table 8.
Table 8: Total Indirect Effects in Full Hypothesized Model.

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Moral Beauty</td>
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<td>2. UGC</td>
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<td>3. Elevation</td>
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<td>.04*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prosocial Motivations</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Perceived Authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Feelings Elicited by a Media Creator</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Message Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Evaluation of Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Behavioral Intentions</td>
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<td>.36***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
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</table>

*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*
Subsequently, this study tested the role of the perceived authenticity as a moderator in the relationship between moral beauty and elevation by employing Hayes’s PROCESS utility (Model 1 with 2,000 bootstrap resamples). The result showed no interaction effect in the relationship between moral beauty and elevation. However, there was a pattern that participants’ reported feelings of elevation differed depending on the perceived authenticity of media, the interaction effect closely approached conventional levels of statistical significance, \( t(389) = 1.85, p = .06 \) (see Figure 8). The reported feelings of elevation were greater for those perceiving a high level of authenticity than for those perceiving medium or low levels of authenticity. All statistics of the process analysis were reported in Table 9.

Figure 8: Moderation Analysis.

\[ t(389) = 1.85, p = .06 \]

*Note:* *p* < .05, **p** < .01, ***p*** < .001. Media theme was coded as a dichotomous variable: 0 = enjoyment, 1 = moral beauty.
Table 9: Conditional Effect of the Moral Beauty on Elevation at Levels of Perceived Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Authenticity</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: CI = 95% confidential interval. Values for the perceived authenticity are the mean and plus/minus one standard deviation from mean.*
Although the current study does not focus on the impact of enjoyment media on positive emotion, an additional analysis was employed to verify the perceived authenticity as a potential moderator in the relationship between media portrayals and affective responses to the media. The same analysis was employed and the result revealed a significant interaction effect of perceived authenticity in the relationship between enjoyment and positive emotion. The reported positive feelings varied depending on the perceived media authenticity, $t(389) = 3.61, p < .001$. The greater levels of positive emotion were found for those perceiving a high level of authenticity than for those perceiving medium or low levels of authenticity. All statistics of the process analysis were reported in Table 10. The detailed explanation of these findings is described in the discussion section.
Table 10: Conditional Effect of the Enjoyment on Positive Emotion at Levels of Perceived Authenticity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Authenticity</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>LL</th>
<th>UL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CI = 95% confidential interval. Values for the perceived authenticity are the mean and plus/minus one standard deviation from mean.
To summarize, the findings of the study provided evidence supporting previous research on moral emotion, elevation, and attribution-affect theory. Individuals exposed to media depicting others’ moral excellence reported greater levels of elevation, which were then positively associated with prosocial motivations such as helping others in need. These motivations were associated with the greater levels of behavioral intentions related to the media use such as sharing and recommending the media to others.

The findings related to attribution-affect theory explained the effectiveness of user-generated content in comparison to company-sponsored content. The perceived authenticity that media characters’ behaviors are truly motivated by their reasons was associated with viewers’ positive feelings about the media creator and high levels of the perceived message influence. The affective responses elicited by the creator and the cognitive evaluation of a media message were positively associated with the evaluation of media. Subsequently, the media evaluation was positively associated with viewers’ behavioral intentions to foster the media consumption and distribution.

Additional findings demonstrated the potential that the perceived authenticity resulting from user-generated content consumption may amplify positive outcomes of elevating media. The study examined that viewers’ feelings about the media creator was positively related to elevating responses to media. Additionally, the reported media evaluation resulting from viewers’ feelings evoked by the media creator and the perceived message influence was positively related to behavioral intentions to promote the media. Although the study found the pattern that the feelings of elevation differed depending on the levels of perceived authenticity, this interaction was not significant.
Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

The primary interests of the present study are to demonstrate a close relationship between a viewer’s affective response to moral portrayals and its impact on positive outcomes—namely, prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions to promote the media—and to examine the theoretical outline explaining the impact of perceived media authenticity on media effectiveness. Additionally, the study is aimed to investigate the in-depth mechanisms that might explain how perceived media authenticity resulting from UGC can amplify the positive effects of morally inspiring media on viewers. This chapter will discuss the main findings of this study regarding theoretical and practical implications and will consider some limitations and future research directions.

Theoretical Implications

Consistent with previous elevation research, the findings of this study examined how feelings of elevation elicited by morally inspiring media have persuasive outcomes beyond the formation of a general attitude toward the media (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2012). In their theoretical paper, Dillard and Nabi (2006) demonstrated that media messages can provoke diverse affective responses, which can either enhance or hinder persuasive outcomes that the message promotes. To produce an influential message effect, a desired affective state should be caused by the message. In other words, although both morally inspiring and enjoyment-centered media were able to elicit positive emotions among viewers, people without feelings of elevation in the enjoyment condition showed lower levels of prosocial motivations compared to those in the moral beauty condition. These findings confirm a critical role in moral emotion, elevation—that encourages viewers’ motivations to behave toward others in an altruistic way.
Another interesting finding is that elevation has an impact not only on behavioral motivations about the self, but also on behavioral intentions related to the media that elicited the feelings of elevation. Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory posits that individuals have the intrinsic desire to maintain consistency in their values, attitudes, and behaviors to reduce feelings of discomfort. According to this theory, those who were motivated to prosocially behave also wanted to use media in a way to satisfy the motivations. In this study, elevated participants demonstrated behavioral motivations to be a good person to others which were positively associated with behavioral intent to promote the moral message by involving diverse activities: learning how to make that type of video, recommending it to others, and sharing it with others. This finding is identical to a previous study using a data set from New York Times in which the researchers examined that news content eliciting either high-arousal positive (awe) or negative (angry and anxiety) emotions was more viral than other content (Berger & Milkman, 2012). These research findings suggest that viewers’ experience of elevating media can stimulate a wide range of diverse media use-related activities beyond mere media consumption.

Consistent with the previous research findings, the study investigated that types of source attributes (UGC vs. company-sponsored content) affected the perceived authenticity of the media. Regardless of whether the UGC format is used across conditions (i.e., non-narrative, overall low-quality, and short duration), knowing if media have an indication of sponsorship or not had a significant impact on individuals’ judgments about perceived authenticity. An experimental study conducted by Sundar and Nass (2001) examined how participants’ perceptions of online news stories vary according to four different source attributions: news editors, computer channels, other audience members, or the individual user (self). Their findings indicated that the participants perceived online news to be more likable, representative, and higher in quality when other audience members were perceived as the source than when news editors or the self were perceived as the source. Similarly, this study also found that attributions to different types of media sources
(ordinary other people vs. sponsored company) affected perceived media authenticity—whether people in the media are real and genuine. Even for evaluating the same content, participants reported lower levels of perceived authenticity when a sponsored company was believed to be the media source than when other users were perceived as the media source.

Although source attributes (UGC vs. sponsored content) have a significant impact on behavioral intentions to promote media, viewers’ evaluation of motivation attributes resulting from perceived source attributes—regardless of whether people’s interactions and behaviors depicted in media are motivated by their internal values or forced by external motives—seems to have a bigger influence on behavior-related outcomes regarding media use. The findings reported stronger indirect effects of the mediating variable (i.e., perceived authenticity) on behavioral intentions than the types of media on the psychological outcomes. Thus, perceived media authenticity elicited by different types of media consumption seems to be an influential element in affecting media effectiveness. In other words, this finding indicates that UGC may or may not be more effective than company-sponsored content if it is poorly designed and failed to elicit good levels of perceived authenticity.

Consistent with attribution theory, the perceived authenticity resulting from UGC consumption was positively associated with audiences’ feelings elicited by a media creator. Weiner’s (1985, 1986) attribution theory explains that individuals’ judgments about causal attributions are associated with certain emotional responses (e.g., anger, guilt, and pity), which lead to behavioral intentions or behaviors toward an emotion-triggering situation. Applying the theory to media consumption, this study examined how viewers’ judgments about motivation attributions to overall positive media messages (enjoyment and prosocial media) are associated with more or less positive emotions elicited by a media creator. Considering that media creators are identical to media characters depicted in UGC, viewers can deem the content as a form of media creators’
self-disclosure when perceiving great levels of perceived media authenticity. According to the social penetration theory one’s self-disclosure positively affect the development of close interpersonal relationships with intimacy, feeling close and favorable toward the person disclosing the personal information (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Taylor & Altman, 1987). Likewise, when media messages are perceived as being generally positive, viewers’ favorable feelings are likely to be evoked by a media creator who genuinely shared his or her personal experiences and values through a media message.

In addition to the affective responses to a media creator, the study also illustrated the influence of perceived media authenticity on viewers’ cognitive processing of a media message—namely, message influence. Participants with a strong belief in the authentic portrayals of media characters perceived the media message to be more influential and stronger than those with a skeptical view of media characters’ behaviors and interactions depicted in the media. This relationship might be as a result of the lack of perceived authenticity stimulating a counter-argument processing of the information. Many previous research studies have provided consistent findings regarding the negative impact of advertising skepticism on the evaluation of advertising claims (e.g., Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). Similarly, viewers who think the media are designed by external motives may be more likely to form more skeptical views regarding the purpose of media portrayals. This perception could prevent them from actively cognitively processing media; in other words, their suspicious views regarding the purpose of media creation could lead to their lower levels of perceived message influence.

Given the observations of the connected relationships between elevation research and attribution research, this study also examined the potential of UGC to promote positive outcomes of elevating media. The data indicated that audiences who deemed the characters to be highly authentic were likely to have positive feelings evoked by a media creator; consequently, these positive emotions were consequently associated with greater levels of elevation. Although it is
plausible that elevated audiences after viewing moral portrayals in media have positive feelings elicited by the media creator, previous research has demonstrated that perceived motivation attributes of an acting person affect how the receiver/viewer reacts to the satiation performed by the actor regardless of the overall positive situations/media messages. For instance, previous research on gratitude and reciprocity found that individuals reported different levels of gratitude toward a help giver depending on how they evaluated the giver’s intent to help him- or herself (Graham, 1988; Tesser et al., 1968; Weiner, 1985, 1986). A study on advertising also demonstrated that viewers attributing a prosocial message to a sponsor’s altruistic motives generate more favorable attitudes toward the sponsor than did those attributing the moral message to a sponsor’s profit motives (Rifon et al., 2004). These findings show that the participants’ levels of positive emotions elicited by a media creator represent their evaluations of a creator’s intent to create the moral messages. Even when evaluating overall prosocial-focused messages, audiences’ emotional reactions vary depending on how they perceive motivation attributes of the media creator. The favorable evaluation might inspire viewers to naturally express elevating emotions.

Although the study failed to obtain a statistically significant result regarding the interaction effect of perceived authenticity in the relationship between moral beauty and feelings of elevation, the reported elevating responses showed a pattern in that elevating responses differed according to the levels of perceived authenticity. Specifically, feelings of elevation were greater for those perceiving a high level of authenticity than for those perceiving medium or low levels of authenticity. An additional analysis with positive emotion showed a significant interaction effect of perceived authenticity in the relationship between enjoyment media and positive emotion. These findings demonstrate the critical role of perceived authenticity in evoking affective responses to media. Given the finding and the trend of prior elevation research—predominantly employing either true story-based stimuli or UGC content—there might a certain level of perceived authenticity that has to be met in order to successfully elicit elevating emotions among viewers. In
addition, the role of perceived authenticity seems to be less significant in eliciting affective responses for the moral beauty condition than for the enjoyment condition. It indicates that viewers are more willing to emotionally engage in the media messages as being socially desirable, and attributional judgments are less critical for those messages.

**Practical Implications**

Given the critical role of perceived authenticity in affecting perceptions of media, this study recommends that media creators should ensure good levels of perceived authenticity for media effectiveness. Based on this study results, when ordinary people are perceived as the media source, this does not guarantee high levels of perceived authenticity. In several studies, scholars have found that audiences were suspicious of UGC selected by a company (Duffy, 2010; Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Videos lacking in perceived authenticity of media characters could fail to elicit the psychological outcomes that a media intends to stimulate. A survey study on reality television found that audiences who believed that media characters were real were more likely to engage with the emotional states portrayed in the program, whereas those who were skeptical about people’s interactions and behaviors in the show were less likely to engage in the show regardless of having regular people on the reality show (Hall, 2009). Given the current findings, the researcher suggests that media creators carefully consider the aspects of media that may hinder the perceived authenticity of media characters.

Additionally, the examined results related to the attribution theory present insights into designing effective PSA messages using UGC. The perceived authenticity resulting from UGC consumption is associated with psychological outcomes affecting media effectiveness, including positive feelings elicited by a media creator and cognitive evaluation of a media message. Similar patterns have been investigated in studies on health-related campaigns. For instance, some scholars found that peer-created child abuse prevention PSAs were more effective than expert-created PSAs; those viewing peer-created messages reported greater perceived importance of issues and
behavioral intentions to help abused children (Paek et al., 2011). Entertainment-education scholars also explored the effects of adolescent audiences viewing a “real story-based” anti-drug abuse drama. The anti-drug story was more influential among those participants believing that both the actors and story were real (Guttman et al., 2008). Further, these positive evaluations were associated with evaluation of media. Other than health campaigns, the findings can be applied to creating other PSA messages such as anti-bullying, anti-stereotypes, and anti-suicide messages. Based on the current study, creators of professional prosocial media messages need to consider adopting UGC format and having ordinary people sharing their own stories in order to effectively deliver the message.

Finally, the results of the study imply that advertisers should be careful in terms of creating seemingly UGC-like advertisements. The current findings suggest that when audiences do not perceive a sponsoring company to be authentic, they may negatively evaluate both the advertisers and advertisements. Sufficient empirical findings have already suggested common negative attitudes toward advertising, showing that a majority of consumers perceive advertising claims to be untruthful, manipulating, and misleading (Calfee & Ringold, 1994). People tend to resist the advertising claims because of the persuasive intent (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). These findings indicate that using seemingly UGC-like advertisements can even worsen such negative reactions to the advertisements when a target group of audience members has high levels of advertisement skepticism and advertisement knowledge. Those audiences can easily capture advertising strategies in using seemingly UGC-like advertisements and consider these tactics as deceptive information. Accordingly, the findings of this study suggest that advertisers using UGC-like messages for profit motives might experience unexpected negative outcomes.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

*Sharing inspiring media as a prosocial behavior.* Based on the notion of Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory—namely, an individual’s tendency to eliminate an inconsistency
among beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to reduce feelings of discomfort—the current study revealed a positive relationship between prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions to share inspiring media with others. While this appears to be a socially desirable outcome, it raises a critical question regarding whether the sharing of inspiring media is more about prosocial motivations or more about the transmitter’s emotional state. In other words, maybe audiences are immediately inclined to share a video because of their post-viewing emotional state, not because they have developed a more deeply rooted desire to help others. The current study did not consider whether video sharing was an appropriate final measure or whether different behaviors follow.

This concern presents a prime opportunity for future research regarding how individuals would perceive video sharing in terms of prosocial behaviors and their motivations behind sharing morally inspiring content. Future research needs to explore whether people who simply share videos feel that they have fulfilled their prosocial duties or they still seek to extend their good works after the sharing videos (i.e., deciding to perform good works in their physical communities as well).

Underlying mechanism in forming perceived authenticity. As with other studies, conducting an experimental study is not without limitations. The weak connection between types of media sources and perceived authenticity of media messages might be due to the media-type manipulation. All four conditions in the current study employed UGC, in which the participants were asked to evaluate perceived authenticity about media content—namely, whether or not media characters’ interactions or behaviors are seemingly motivated by themselves. Although the study used a sign of company sponsorship, the participants could still believe that other ordinary users created the content and their judgments of perceived authenticity could rely on that perception. As supporting evidence, the second pretest results indicated that participants in the sponsorship conditions still perceived a video clip as UGC. This might lead to the relatively weak positive relationship between media types and perceived authenticity. This weak relationship raised a
critical question regarding the underlying mechanism in forming the perceived authenticity of a media message—namely, how significantly the perception is shaped based on viewers’ judgments on motivational attributes of media creators and media characters depicted in media, respectively. Future researchers should consider exploring how the perceived authenticity of media can be formed based on media sources as well as media characters in order to better explain this.

Perceived authenticity as an amplifier of emotions elicited by media content. The patterns of study findings suggest that perceived authenticity might intensify emotional responses that the media content intends to elicit. For instance, when perceiving media characters as genuine and real, audiences might feel greater levels of a sense of humor when watching a funny portrayal. Likewise, perceived authenticity might stimulate audiences to feel greatly inspired and touched when viewing a drama. Considering that emotions are key elements that can affect not only media enjoyment (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2011) but also attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Aquino et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2012), future researchers are encouraged to explore the role of perceived authenticity in amplifying affective responses to media content and its positive impact on other psychological responses.

Perceived authenticity as an indicator of media engagement. Given the study’s findings, the researcher proposes that perceived authenticity might be an indicator of high levels of media engagement, such as identification and transportation. Identification is defined as being in a cognitive and emotional state in which an audience becomes a media character rather than an observer (Cohen, 2001). Similarly, transportation is used to understand the process of being immersed in narrative-based media in which an audience expands self-perceptions with a balanced combination of concentration, imagery, and feelings (Green & Brock, 2004). Previous studies’ findings suggest that perceived authenticity might reflect a sign of these immersive experiences when watching media. In studying UGC PSA messages, Peak and her colleagues (2013) claimed that audiences might react to peer-produced videos more positively than expert-produced videos.
because of perceived similarities to the peer creators, which allows the audience to engage in and adopt a message presented by their peers. Another study on reality television shows indicated that audiences with higher levels of perceived authenticity showed greater levels of audience involvement in the programs (Hall, 2009). This study also found that perceived authenticity helped both the cognitive processing of and affective responses to media messages. Although the findings suggest the potential of perceived authenticity as an indicator of media engagement, to my knowledge, no research has elucidated the role of perceived authenticity in immersive media experiences. Accordingly, the researcher recommends that other scholars examine the theoretical relationship between perceived authenticity and media engagement.

*Perceived authenticity in fictional portrayals.* The current study findings present an interesting question regarding how perceived authenticity plays a role when viewing fictional media incorporating media portrayals that audiences know to be fictional. The researcher suggests that perceived authenticity might be an element stimulating audiences’ media experience to move from perceived fictionality to perceived reality. Audiences’ reluctance to suspend disbelief in fictionality can hinder media engagement, thereby negatively affecting viewing experiences. However, well-designed fictional media content could help audiences maintain good levels of perceived authenticity, feeling that media characters’ reactions and feelings effectively represent someone under such circumstances in reality. The perception could either compensate for the negative impact of perceived functionality on media experiences or facilitate audiences’ suspension of disbelief in reality. Viewing experiences of diverse reality shows are good examples of the role of perceived authenticity in stimulating perceived reality. Most audiences acknowledge that reality shows are intentionally designed by a director and the depicted situations do not represent reality. However, audiences are still greatly engaged in the media content by perceiving that media characters’ behaviors and reactions are real and genuine. Understanding this role of perceived
authenticity in affecting fictional media enjoyment can be a fruitful exploration in entertainment research.

Other elements of media affecting perceived authenticity. Although this study suggested a connection between media source attributions and perceived media authenticity, this is likely not the only determining factor. Future researchers should explore the other elements of the media that could alter perceived authenticity. As previously mentioned, UGC content is created by non-professionals and shared with others. Considering these qualifications as UGC, it remains questionable about how other media elements can influence the perception of the qualifications. Specifically, the perceived authenticity might be either hampered or enhanced depending on such variables as the quality of the content, how it is shared and via which medium. Future studies can extend the current study by exploring other factors affecting perceived media authenticity.

Perceived authenticity and feelings elicited by media creators. This study examined whether the participants’ perceived authenticity was associated with positive feelings elicited by media creators. However, this might be limited to situations in which participants view media messages that are mostly positive. The connection might not be true when audiences witness authentic depictions of others’ wrongdoings or controversial behaviors. It is reasonable to infer that viewers would have hostile feelings about others who performed a truly bad deed. However, when it comes to controversial subjects, it is uncertain whether viewers’ perceived authenticity intensifies their negative feelings about others having opposing views on the topic. The levels of negative emotions toward others might vary depending on viewers’ issue involvement. For those with low levels of issue involvement, the perceived authenticity might help improve their understanding of others’ different viewpoints, and negative feelings toward them may diminish. Yet, for individuals with high levels of issue involvement, the perceived authenticity might amplify negative feelings toward others holding an opposing viewpoint on the topic. Future research should test the
relationship among perceived authenticity, types of emotions evoked by media creators, and issue involvement to answer this theoretical question.

*Individual differences.* The present study did not consider important individual differences, including (1) empathic concerns and moral identity centrality, (2) cynicism, and (3) advertising skepticism. First, findings related to elevation might differ depending on individuals’ levels of empathic concerns and moral identity centrality. Previous psychology research has demonstrated that people with greater empathy tend not only to engage emotionally with others in need, but also to help those people (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Related to this personal trait, another elevation study examined those with a higher level of moral identity—the degree to which morality is a central characteristic of the self—showing greater levels of elevating emotion when viewing others’ moral virtue (Aquino et al., 2011). In brief, those with high levels of empathic concerns or moral identity centrality might be more elevated than those lacking such personal qualities.

Conversely, viewers with high levels of general cynicism—a tendency to distrust others and believe that unethical acts and behaviors are common (Andersson & Bateman, 1997)—are less likely to emotionally engage in moral media messages than those with lower levels of cynicism. Abraham (2000) stated that this general cynicism is related to how individuals interact with various entities in society. As a member of society, an individual is expected to understand his or her role in society and develop reciprocal relationships with others. However, a cynical individual tends to be disconnected from the social system and become opportunistic, focusing on self-serving interests. A study on management examined that workers’ cynicism predicts their unethical intentions and decision-making at work (Nair & Kamalanabhan, 2010). Related to these findings, a study on news revealed that one’s cynicism can lead to mistrust of news media (Lee, 2010). These research findings suggest that cynical viewers may be less inspired by moral media portrayals than other viewers.
Advertising research has also investigated that audiences possessing high levels of advertising skepticism have a greater tendency to engage less emotionally in the content and negatively evaluate advertising messages. Furthermore, prior research has explored consistent findings regarding the negative impact of advertising skepticism on advertising evaluation. For instance, one focus group found that advertising skepticism was a critical factor in forming a negative view on advertising, highlighting a distrust of advertising in general (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Similarly, an experimental study found that individuals with high levels of skepticism are more likely to reject advertising claims than those with low levels of skepticism (Obermiller et al., 2005). Therefore, people with high levels of advertising skepticism could be more negative toward advertisements using the UGC format than those with low levels of advertising skepticism. Scholars should explore the relationship between preexisting attitudes toward advertising and perceptions of different types of media (i.e., UGC vs. sponsored content).

Conclusion

Despite the growing popularity of using UGC in many communications areas, only recently has academic research demonstrated that perceived authenticity is a relevant psychological trait. The current study suggested the theoretical mechanisms underlying the effect of perceived authenticity on media effectiveness within the topic of elevation research. Specifically, the findings elucidated how perceived media authenticity is possibly related to both emotional and cognitive responses to media, resulting in greater levels of positive feelings elicited by the media creator and of perceived media influence. Considering the positive outcomes of elevating media—namely, prosocial motivations and behavioral intentions to spread ideas in society—the current study suggested that a well-designed UGC and high levels of perceived authenticity can enhance the positive outcomes of the media. However, this study did not manipulate authenticity directly; rather, it was manipulated by using different types of media (UGC vs. sponsored content).
Therefore, future researchers should consider directly manipulating authenticity to better explore the impact of authenticity on its psychological outcomes during media viewing.
References


Appendix A

Stimuli Videos

1. User-Generated Content and Moral Beauty Video 1
   http://view.vzaar.com/3279131/video

2. User-Generated Content and Moral Beauty Video 2
   http://view.vzaar.com/3279127/video

3. User-Generated Content and Enjoyment Video 1
   http://view.vzaar.com/3279138/video

4. User-Generated Content and Enjoyment Video 2
   http://view.vzaar.com/3279132/video

5. Sponsored Content and Moral Beauty Video 1
   http://view.vzaar.com/2720289/video

6. Sponsored Content and Moral Beauty Video 2
   http://view.vzaar.com/2712704/video

7. Sponsored Content and Enjoyment Video 1
   http://view.vzaar.com/2720318/video

8. Sponsored Content and Enjoyment Video 2
   http://view.vzaar.com/2720307/video
Appendix B

Measurement Instruments

Introduction of the Study

Welcome to the YouTube Video Study! I truly appreciate you taking the time to participate in the study on YouTube. Please help me out with my study by telling us what you think about some videos that have been posted on YouTube. Your honest and sincere responses will be greatly appreciated.

The next page is the formal consent form, and then you will be asked to answer some questions about your YouTube use. Then, you will watch one short video (3 minutes) and tell us your perceptions of the videos. Please do complete watching the video without clicking it through before rating. This will really help me to find valid results from this study.

This study will take about 25-30 minutes of your time! Please do not begin until you have an adequate amount of time.

I appreciate for your participation!

Post-test Questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire asks you some basic questions about your general use of YouTube.

YouTube Use

1. On a typical weekday, how many hours per day do you spend watching YouTube videos?
   ______(e.g., 1 hour and 30 minutes)
   (    ) hour(s)
   (    ) minutes

2. On a typical weekend, how many hours per day do you spend watching YouTube videos?
   ______(e.g., 1 hour and 30 minutes)
   (    ) hour(s)
   (    ) minutes

3. How often do you engage in each of the following activities while using YouTube?
   (1 = Never; 7 = Very often)

   1) Watching videos.
   2) Sharing videos.
   3) Leaving your comments on the shared videos.
   4) Clicking “Like” or “dislike” if you like the video.
   5) Other (please specify here)
4. How often do you watch YouTube videos falling within each of the following categories?  
   (1 = Never; 7 = Very often) 
   1) Traditional news and information videos (e.g., CNN, ABC or local newscasts)  
   2) Comedy-related news and information videos (e.g., The Daily Show, the Colbert Report)  
   3) Entertaining media taken from the original programs (e.g., The Simpsons, movies, sport etc.)  
   4) Funny videos created by other YouTube users (e.g., funny UGC videos, Prank)  
   5) Tutorial or instructional videos created by other YouTube users  
   6) Social campaigns created by other YouTube users (e.g., promoting pro-social messages)  
   7) Other (please specify here)_____________  

Introduction of the Stimulus Section  
In the next section of the questionnaire you will be presented with a video that has been posted on YouTube. 

The video is about 3 minutes in length. After viewing, you will be asked some questions. Please watch the video and then answer the brief set of questions that follow. You can adjust the volume while viewing if you need to.  

Post-test questionnaire  

5. Video Reactions (open-ended question)  
   In the space below, please describe your reaction to the video. Please write as many thoughts as you can think of. What did you experience when watching this video? What did you feel? What did you think? How would you describe the message in this video? Please be as detailed as possible.  

6. Affective Responses to Moral Beauty  
   This section asks you about how the video made you feel. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following emotions as a response to the video.  
   (1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much)  
   1) Upbeat (positive emotion)  
   2) Entertained (positive emotion)  
   3) Cheerful (positive emotion)  
   4) Compassionate (elevation)  
   5) Inspired (elevation)  
   6) Moved (elevation)  
   7) Tender (elevation)  
   8) Touched (elevation)  
   9) Meaningful (elevation)  
   10) Emotional (elevation)  
   11) Sad (negative emotion)
12) Melancholy (negative emotion)
13) Gloomy (negative emotion)

7. **Prosocial Motivations**

How did the video affect your motivations? Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following in response to the video.

(1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much)

1) Care for someone in need
2) Develop my relationships with others
3) Donate money to a charity
4) Help others in need
5) Do good things for other people
6) Be a better person
7) Enjoy what I have in my life
8) Make others around me happy

8. **Perceived Authenticity**

How do you feel about people’s behavior and interactions in the video? Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

(1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

1) When I think about the people in the video clip, I feel like I saw them as the people that they really are.
2) The people’s behavior and interactions in the video are genuine.
3) I have feelings that the people in the video are truly motivated by their own values or reasons.
4) I feel that the people’s behaviors in the video clip are phony because their interactions seem to be made based on profit motives (reversed).
5) I am skeptical that the people in the video reflect their own values or reasons (reversed).
6) My feelings that the video is a commercial cause me to think that the people in the video are not truly motivated by their own values or reasons (reversed).

9. **Positive Affective Responses Elicited by a Media Creator**

How do you feel when thinking of the YouTube user (or the advertiser) “creating” the video clip? Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following emotions in response to the video creator.

(1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much)

1) Happy
2) Pleased
3) Joyful
4) Good
5) Positive
10. **Perceived Message Influence**

Please indicate how you evaluate the message delivered by the video clip?

1) Weak (1) ------ Strong (7)
2) Not Influential (1) ------ Influential (7)

11. **Evaluation of Media**

How do you evaluate the video clip overall? Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

1) Bad (1) ------ Good (7)
2) Not likeable (1) ------ Likable (7)
3) Unappealing (1) ------ Appealing (7)
4) Unfavorable (1) ------ Favorable (7)

12. **Behavioral Intentions**

How did the video affect your behavioral intent regarding the video? Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

(1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

1) I would like to learn about how to create this type of video.
2) Learning more about creating this type of video is useless (reversed).
3) I would like to recommend this video to others.
4) I would like to share this video with others.
5) I would like to watch this video again in the future.

13. **Manipulation Check for Media Themes**

This section asks you about how the video made you feel. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following emotions as a response to the video.

(1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much)

1) Upbeat (positive emotion)
2) Entertained (positive emotion)
3) Cheerful (positive emotion)
4) Compassionate (elevation)
5) Inspired (elevation)
6) Moved (elevation)
7) Tender (elevation)
8) Touched (elevation)
9) Meaningful (elevation)
10) Emotional (elevation)
14. **Manipulation Check for Media Types**

Was the video sponsored by a certain company?

1) Yes  
2) No  
3) Maybe

**Demographic Information**

To help us understand the group of people who participated in the study, the next few questions ask about your age, gender, race/ethnicity, and year in college.

15. First, please tell us your gender.

1) Male  
2) Female

16. Please fill in your age in the space below.

__________

17. How would you best describe your racial/ethnic group? (Please check all that apply)

1) American Indian  
2) Alaska Native  
3) African American  
4) Asian or Pacific Islander  
5) Caucasian  
6) Hispanic  
7) Other (Please describe below)__________

18. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

1) Some high school  
2) High school degree or GED equivalent  
3) Some college  
4) 2-Year college degree (A.A., A.S., or equivalent) or vocational certification  
5) 4-year college degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent)  
6) Some graduate or professional school  
7) Graduate or professional degree (M.A., Ph.D., J.D., M.D. or equivalent)  
8) I prefer not to answer this question
Debriefing

Despite the growing popularity of user-generated content (UGC) use in processional areas (e.g., advertising, news) in recent years, no explicit study investigating the unique effects of UGC on viewers’ psychological responses has yet been conducted. In an effort to fill this gap, the goal of this study is to explore the effects of perceived authenticity on audiences’ responses to viewing UGC.

Specifically, this study examined whether or not audiences react to UGC in a different manner when lacking perceived authenticity; in other words, when the actions displayed in the content are not authentic or genuine, but rather artificially created in order to elicit a desired response. As a means to manipulate perceived authenticity, some of you were given a deceptive message in association with the video clip you watched, stating that the video content was sponsored by a certain company. In reality, non-commercial media users created the video for non-profit purposes. The researchers conducting this study anticipate that viewers shown the deceptive message will react to the same content viewed by non-prompted participants differently, since their expectation of UGC has been altered. The findings of this study will help both media professionals and general audiences better understand media perceptions.

Individuals who feel uncomfortable after taking this study are strongly encouraged to visit counseling websites or call hotlines. If you live in the United States, you can visit American Psychological Association (APA) at http://locator.apa.org/ to find a psychologist near your location or call a depression hotline (National Suicide Prevention Helpline) at 1-800-273-8255. If you live outside of the United States, please find hotlines for help in your country at http://www.befrienders.org/. Additionally, please feel free to contact Keunyeong Kim at kvk5170@psu.edu if you have any questions, concerns, and problems regarding the study.

At this point, you have now read the debriefing information about the deception used in this study and understand the reasons of using such manipulation. You have a right to withhold the use of your data due to the use of the deception.

Thanks for your participation.
KEUNYEONG (KARINA) KIM

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Mass Communications, The Pennsylvania State University 2015
M.S. in Journalism and Mass Communications, Kansas State University 2010
B.S. in Economics and Business Administration, Ajou University 2008

RESEARCH INTERESTS

The social and psychological effects of media creation (e.g., user-generated content, customization) and its consumption within emerging media (e.g., online games, online television platforms, and social media), specifically:

• Persuasion
• Media and Emotion
• Positive Media Psychology

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Book Chapters


Journal Articles