

The Effects of “Happy” Media on Women’s Coping Tendencies

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ABSTRACT

Over the past years, there has been increasing emphasis on the roles of media in influencing people’s moods and emotions; however, there is limited research on social media’s role in providing access to “happy” media and how exposure to such content can help women cope with everyday stress. This research involved exploring the types of “happy” media women consumed to cope with their stress, an examination of the exposure to “happy” media on women’s emotion and stress management, and, finally, an investigation on the effects of “happy” media on women’s coping tendencies. Under the Mood Management Theory, six women were purposively sampled from lower-income (B40) background for semi-structured interviews. After analysing the data thematically, two themes emerged: “happy” media as a stress and emotional management tool, and as an effective coping tool. Our results suggest that women developed better emotional and stress management after consuming “happy” media content via social media platforms. Additional results also suggest that exposure to “happy” media inspired women to acquire new skills or improve their current skills, leading to positive emotional and coping outcomes. Overall, this research highlights “happy” media effects in fulfilling women’s cognitive, emotional, and desired coping outcomes through hedonistic and eudaimonic content.

Keywords: Consumption, media effects, social media, stress & coping, women

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of our everyday lives through its undeniable impact in revolutionising our normative ways of interacting, socialising, information and entertainment-seeking, as well as our ways of fulfilling our intrinsic needs. As years passed, social media has progressively evolved into providing diverse spaces for users' specific social and online environments (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021; Nabi et al., 2017). From visual-oriented platforms like TikTok, Facebook and Instagram to online discussion forums like Twitter and Reddit, social media provides innumerable content channels for social interaction, engagement, and sharing. Most significantly, the crux of social media lies in its ability to influence us (Graciyal & Viswam, 2021; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). When said influence can fulfil our intrinsic needs, it strengthens our relationship and dependency on the medium for hedonistic and eudaimonic outcomes, often during our individualistic desired coping outcomes when facing emotional turmoil or stressful environments (Hofer & Rieger, 2019).

Studying stress, especially coping, is significant when inquiring about the different approaches to media consumption for stress-coping (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021; Nabi et al., 2017). While searching for literature on media content/consumption for coping, we came across many emerging researches that had approached the effects of media consumption through the underlying phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these researches contributed to different aspects of the topic, we argued that there needs to be more perspectives relating individuals' coping tendencies via media consumption without any underlying influences of a particular phenomenon. Precisely, we believe that everyday environments and occurrences can also produce stress; therefore, it is essential to examine individuals' coping needs from these perspectives.

Secondly, empirical researches have suggested that social media adversely affects users' well-being as they described media as a "stressor" – a tool that influences our cognitive structures of stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), attributing it to cause media addiction and social media fatigue. Our concern with these research findings is their implications on measuring aspects of well-being rather than exploring the subjective meanings of well-being through users' experiences, which, in turn, produces a generalisation of social media consumption using uniform definitions. Bearing similar opinions to Seligman (2012), we believe that an experience should be understood from the users' subjective point of view: How do they make sense of the social media content they consume? What are their motivations for consuming said media content? What are the impacts of media consumption on their well-being?

Seeing that our interest lies in examining the effects of media consumption and its associations with women's coping tendencies, we aim to provide relating and integrating perspectives on this topic. More specifically, our perspectives contribute to (1) describing women's perceived stressors and coping tendencies in their everyday environments (e.g., work and home), (2) presenting women's perceptive meaning of happiness in "happy" media, (3) demonstrating "happy" media in catering to women's distinct emotion and stress-coping needs, and (4) reviewing women's coping outcome from selective "happy" media content.

Retrospectively, media is more than a medium for socialisation and information-sharing; it can also cultivate positive emotions like happiness, contentment, and joyfulness (Najmul-Islam et al., 2022; Costescu et al., 2021; Revathy et al., 2018). Media channels within social media can even enhance our access to professional services, social support, and

information related to stress management and coping processes (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021; Nabi et al., 2017), thus signifying social media's role in gratifying our various coping needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress & Coping

Stress is an intrinsic part of our everyday lives; it is an extent of our natural responses to protect ourselves against real and perceived danger. Stress also signifies a condition or the emotions we feel when overwhelmed by excessive demands beyond our internal or external conditions (Pearlin, 1989; Selye, 1982). While stress can occasionally be beneficial in encouraging adaptation and personal development (Maddi, 2006), excessive stress, if not coped with effectively, can negatively impact our physical and psychological health. Excessive stress is known to be the causative of several illnesses, such as high blood pressure, heart accidents, and nervous disturbances, as well as psychological effects like anxiety, depression, and insomnia (Carver, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Matud, 2004).

When we say that we feel stressed, we are usually referring to the everyday stressors related to employment, family, relationships, finances, or general health. Individual experiences in social contexts and social conditions can produce considerable stress, primarily when there is an unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and self-esteem within societal institutions (Pearlin, 1989; Selye, 1982). Moreover, the persistence of social roles and statuses could host interpersonal conditions that correlate with mainstream norms and societal expectations (Pearlin, 1989). Even today, traditional socialisation, such as traditional gender roles, is still apparent and widely practised in our society, hence signifying gender as a characteristic that influences the exposure of stress (Graves et al., 2021; Nortajuddin, A., 2020; Mayor, 2015). Women are still expected to be nurturing, emotional, and active in traditional female household chores (e.g., childcare or shopping), as opposed to men, who are expected to hold more domineering positions in their household (e.g., head of the family). Initially, it was concluded that stress is garnered through people's conflicts and resistance against their existing societal institutions, but it was later reflected that environmental adaptability could also produce stress.

Environmental variation creates varying stress experiences for men and women, which further explains why they behave dissimilarly when adapting to or mediating stress. Studies demonstrated that environmental variation carries internal and external health-related factors like behaviourism, social environment, and genetic factors (Mayor, 2015; Eagly et al., 2000), yet these aspects also disadvantage women's health. This is because women are most prone to experience higher chronic stress and perceive stress as life-threatening compared to men (Revathy et al., 2018; Matud, 2004). Constant stress experience would cause the body to release stress hormones (e.g., cortisol and catecholamines), triggering dysfunctions within the immune system and resulting in a plethora of illnesses (Carver, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007).

The ambiguity surrounding gender roles can also evoke stress, particularly when women assume non-traditional gender roles. This ambiguity is evident in discussions about gender roles in work environments. Historically, women tend to hold more clerical positions, whereas men generally hold leadership roles (Eagly et al., 2000). When women began to take part in non-traditional gender roles (e.g., leadership or high-ranking positions), they would become more likely to experience *role strains* and *ambient strains*. Role strains arise from the persistent societal expectations placed on men and women. When combined with

environmental variation, it creates ambient strains. Pearlin (1989) alluded that these strains are what further reinforce the connections of stress between our everyday lives, relationships or associations, experiences, and well-being. Although this is not to suggest that both genders do not experience such stressors in similar work environment, it is, instead, to emphasise the presence of gender roles in our lives. Nonetheless, the challenged of overcoming the lingering aftereffects of stress remain, especially when both men and women fail to distress or engage in healthy coping.

Coping, similar to stress, is also an intrinsic part of us. It is the instinctive response we take in attempts to avoid or diminish the impact of our stress. Typically, our acts of coping are distinctive and vary between the nature or context of our perceived threats. Studies have demonstrated that social attachments, whether interpersonal or intrapersonal, significantly reinforce our coping behaviour as such interactions help in problem-solving, emotional regulation, bolster self-esteem, and promote positive attributes (Kim et al., 2010; Pearlin, 1989). With the advent of digital technology, coping has become more accessible with social media, most notably through its diverse functionalities that enable us to connect with others, share our stories, and receive social support.

There are four distinct forms of coping: (1) approach coping; (2) avoidance coping; (3) problem-solving coping; and (4) emotion-focused coping (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). Approach coping is described as seeking strategies that reduce, eliminate, or manage our stressors. Contrarily, avoidance coping refers to ignoring, avoiding, and physically or emotionally withdrawing from our stressors. Problem-solving involves seeking strategies to change or eliminate our stressors, while emotion-focused coping comprises strategies that reduce or manage the emotional consequences of our stressors (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). These approaches are frequently combined to manage any given stressful event.

Media use serves our coping needs well, mainly through its vast ability of information-sharing and entertainment channels (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021; Nabi et al., 2017). For instance, we may use social media to find information or solutions related to our stressors (problem-solving coping, approach coping), or we may use it to seek entertaining, unrelated content to suppress the impact of our stressors (emotion-focused coping, avoidance coping). Sometimes, problem-focused coping could also involve avoidance coping; similarly, emotion-focused coping could involve approach coping. For example, we may avoid media content related to our stressor to control its impact on our lives (problem-solving coping, avoidance coping) or seek emotional reassurance from others on social media (emotion-focused coping, approach coping).

Emotion & Stress Management

Emotion management is crucial to our physical and psychological health, from helping us respond to opportunities and challenges with vigour to prompting us into thinking or acting in self-destructive ways (Selye, 1982). Besides, emotion regulation can be done intrinsically through self-control, or extrinsically through others' intervention in our emotional tendencies, making it a ubiquitous concept (Gross, 2015). This literature review focuses on two commonly used emotion management strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Cognitive reappraisal refers to the cognitive alteration process of our emotional experiences, whereby it enables us to produce re-interpretations of our emotional events (Gross, 2015). This strategy usually occurs in the early stages of our emotional experiences.

Even though our moods and emotions can be contagious to ourselves and others (Nezlek & Kuppen, 2008), they can simultaneously be an explicit attempt to control our emotional experiences. Studies have shown that frequent reliance on cognitive reappraisal can lower stress levels and enhance mental health outcomes, including improving memories of emotional stimuli (Sun & Nolan, 2021; Kim & Hamann, 2012).

Expressive suppression refers to the act of suppression in emotional activities (e.g., facial expression) that would or are occurring when regulating our emotional experiences. Unlike the prior, this strategy occurs in the later stages of our emotional experiences (Gross, 2015). In literature, even though some researchers argued that expressive suppression hinders the communication process by creating a lack of expressive behaviour and responsiveness within the social context, ultimately resulting in a faltering sense of relational sense of closeness and connectedness (Butlers & Egloff, 2003), others suggested that it carries positive effects too. For example, expressive suppression has been shown to help us manage intense emotions during an emotional event, prevent the production of memory errors, and preserve social relationships and harmony (Mata-Greve & Torres, Sun & Nolan, 2021; Moore & Zoellner, 2012).

Managing our emotions positively and naturally impacts our physical and psychological well-being. As we have mentioned, emotions and moods are contagious, and social media plays a vital role in spreading emotional contagion. Emotional contagion can happen with or without direct interactions or verbal/non-verbal cues (Kramer et al., 2014), meaning our emotions can simply be influenced by the media content we consume. Numerous studies have indicated that engaging with social media can contribute to positive moods like happiness, satisfaction, and amusement (Graciyal & Viswam, 2021; Yang, 2016). Social media can serve as a beneficial tool for emotional support and well-being by providing information-sharing channels for solutions and entertainment channels for restoring positive emotions. Overall, social media can effectively stimulate our emotions by providing content and interactivities that benefit appropriate, healthy emotion management strategies.

Positive Media

Positive media psychology, also known as positive media, refers to media that promote and enhance our well-being by producing positive outcomes and processes. These media contents not only impact positive health outcomes but also can evoke positive emotions, engagements, relationships, and meanings (Keener, 2012). In media studies, positive media is associated with feelings of happiness and improved well-being since it can encourage positive behaviours while inducing negative emotions (De Leeuw & Van Der Laan, 2017). Positive media are also observed to lower stress levels and motivate the desire to obtain more information for stress-coping, including raising awareness on societal issues (Revathy et al., 2018; Nabi et al., 2017). In general, there are four characteristics of media messages that can potentially impact our moods. Firstly, media messages can increase our sympathetic arousal, making us more emotionally intelligent. Secondly, media messages allow us to process or rehearse aspects of our negative moods cognitively; simultaneously, these messages can also help us to process our pre-existing moods with re-interpreted meanings/messages. Finally, positive media messages can rouse our negative moods and generate positive well-being outcomes (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009; Zillmann, 1988).

However, the term “happy” media should not just revolve around emotional gratifications (Farouk, 2019; Hofer & Rieger, 2019). Instead, it should also focus on our pursuit of happiness through both traditional and contemporary media, specifically, through our consumption of positive media content through *hedonistic* and *eudaimonic* approaches.

According to Zillmann (1988), a hedonistic approach is emphasised through our motivations of selecting certain media stimuli related to negative mood regulation, namely negative moods with too high or too low intensity (e.g., feelings of stress or boredom). Arguably, the comprehension of motivational circumstances does not necessarily cognizant with our reasons for media selection since media selection often happens unconsciously (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009; Zillmann, 1988). The term enjoyment is repeatedly used by scholars when describing our experiences during or after exposure to media entertainment (Vorderer et al., 2004; Bosshart & Macconi, 1998). In their regard, relaxation, diversion, joyfulness, and fun are the core components of media entertainment and are essential for enjoyment. A more recent conceptualisation of enjoyment describes it as the result of immediate and intuitive reasoning that occurs when one or more intrinsic needs are satisfied (Tamborini et al., 2010). For instance, comedic content may satisfy our need for relevancy and humour.

Additionally, enjoyment can influence our disposition towards the characters in a story and their outcomes, hence developing effects of humour and moral assessments of the characters’ actions (Raney, 2006). When we approve of a character’s actions, we begin liking them, whereas characters we disapprove of lead to dislike. Here, enjoyment can emerge when the characters we like have positive outcomes and those we dislike have negative outcomes. Yet, enjoyment may also unexpectedly emerge when the characters we like experience negative outcomes, as is often the case in sad, tear-jerking, or tragic films (Hofer & Rieger, 2019).

Known as the *sad film paradox*, this phenomenon refers to individuals who would select entertainment that elicits sad and sombre moods, while still seemingly enjoying such content (Hofer & Rieger, 2019). Studies suggest that this enjoyment stems from a *motivational* and *experiential* component. In the motivational component, scholars suggested that people who seek higher levels of sensation are more likely to watch sad movies because they enjoy the possibility of intense negative arousal; besides, it also provides an opportunity for downward social comparison and an experience of empathy (Zuckerman, 2006; Mills, 1993; Mares & Cantor, 1992). In other words, people consume such content because they can relate to the tragic fate of the characters and draw comparisons with their own situations. The experiential component comes from the conceptualisation of *meta-emotions*, which are emotions that arise from assessing our own emotions. Studies found that when people assess their sadness as compatible with the moral values portrayed in a sad film, their negative emotions can transform into positive meta-emotions (Hofer & Wirth, 2012; Schramm & Wirth, 2010). To this extent, enjoyment can be regarded as the positive experience of our emotions when consuming sad or emotional content.

While the hedonistic approach focuses on seeking enjoyment, the eudaimonic approach is about finding meaningfulness, most specifically, to provoke us into seeking the understanding of life’s significance through media messages (Park & Folkman, 1997). Meaningful media can give us a deeper understanding of our lives, values and virtues, as well as our social relationships. The eudaimonic approach encourages introspection into life’s complexities, leading to cognitive-intellectual and social-emotional growth (Hofer & Rieger,

2019). Consuming media content under the eudaimonic approach can also elicit emotions like appreciation, inspiration, melancholy, relevancy, autonomy, competence, and self-acceptance (Wirth et al., 2012; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010).

Theoretical Foundation

Zillmann and Bryant (1985) developed the Mood Management Theory (MMT) on the assumption that people would rearrange their stimulus environment to help improve their negative emotions to positive emotions. MMT suggests that media messages, specifically entertainment, can change moods. Moreover, it assumes that selective exposure to specific media content can regulate mood (Zillmann, 1988). For instance, media can improve users' moods by boosting positive emotions and reducing negative emotions (Revathy et al., 2018).

According to scholars, MMT predicts that people can be conscious and unconscious of their motivations when selecting media messages (Farouk, 2019; Reinecke, 2017). Therefore, this theory is relevant to studies that examine mood and analyse any type, kind, and genre of communication and media (Zillmann, 1988; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985).

There are four dimensions of MMT: excitatory potential, absorption potential, semantic affinity, and hedonic valence (Reinecke, 2017). Excitatory potential refers to the arousal level of media users, while absorption potential refers to the users' consumption ability. Thirdly, semantic affinity refers to the relationship between media content and users' mood; and finally, hedonic valence is the general tone of whether media content is positive or negative (Farouk, 2019; Reinecke, 2017).

In literature, MMT is widely used in research related to selective media and its impact on individuals' affective states. Evidence suggests that engaging with energetic and joyful music (Sleigh & McElroy, 2014) or heavy-metal music (McFerran et al., 2015) can reduce stress and improve mood. Additionally, studies have revealed that watching comedic or comforting content can elicit positive emotions (Herring et al., 2011).

The implications of MMT in our research align with its fundamentals of individuals selecting media content that they believe will evoke positive moods and emotions. Here, we should also consider the individual differences within the variables, particularly in women's coping tendencies to consume "happy" media for coping. Following this, MMT is also relevant in examining how "happy" media affects women's emotion and stress management through their perceived hedonistic and even eudaimonic valence in media content.

Conceptual Framework

Coping Tendency. The Coping Orientation Analysis (Table II) was used to analyse participants' coping tendencies. This framework was derived from the Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) and the Coping Dimensions Derived Theoretically by Carver et al. (1989). Both frameworks conceptualised a single coping strategy's distinctive function while also implementing complementary approaches. Depending on the intrinsic needs or objectives, people may use more than one coping tendency, so the combination and separation within the coping orientation can vary in coping practices and outcomes. Most importantly, this framework helps the researcher systematically analyse participants' coping tendencies and effects across the four coping orientations (approach, avoidance, problem-solving, and emotion-focused coping). So, instead of focusing on a

singular coping orientation or stress outcome, the researcher can capture participants’ tendencies through their varying coping strategies.

Table II. Coping Orientation Analysis

| Coping Orientation | Definition |
|--|---|
| Problem-solving coping | |
| Active coping | Process of taking active actions to eliminate / avoid the stressor or improve its effects (e.g., direct action) |
| Planning | The thoughts of how to cope with a stressor (e.g., planned action) |
| Suppression / Restraint coping | Putting the stressor aside, and waiting until an appropriate opportunity to act presents itself |
| Seeking social support | Seeking advice, assistance, or information |
| Emotion-focused coping | |
| Seeking social support for emotional reasons | Getting moral support, sympathy, or understanding |
| Positive reinterpretation & growth | Construing a stressful transaction in positive terms |
| Acceptance / Denial | Learning to accept / refuse the reality of a stressful situation |
| Turning to religion | Tendency to turn to religion in times of stress |
| “Less useful” coping | |
| Focus on and emotion-venting | Tendency to focus on whatever distress one is experiencing and to ventilate those feelings |
| Behavioural disengagement | Reducing one’s effort to deal with the stressor, even giving up their attempts to attain goals of which the stressor is interfering |
| Mental disengagement | Attempts to distract oneself from thinking about the behaviour dimension or goal of which the stressor is interfering |
| Additional coping | |
| Humour | Dealing with negative emotions through humour |
| Substance use | Using substance to disengage from a stressor or to feel better |

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the types of “happy” media do women consume when coping with stress?
2. Does the exposure of “happy” media affect women’s emotion and stress management?
3. What are the effects of “happy” media on women’s coping tendencies?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research paper aims to identify the impact of "happy" media on women's coping tendencies through these three objectives:

- (a) **Explore the Types of "Happy" Media:** This objective explores the types of "happy" media content women consume during stress-coping. Through participants' inputs, we will determine their preferred genres or subjects of content, including the platforms on which they are most likely to consume these media.
- (b) **Examine the Extent of Exposure on Women's Emotion and Stress Management:** This objective focuses on examining the effects of "happy" media exposure on women's emotional and stress management. Here, we will look into how women process and apply the emotional and psychological gratifications of "happy" media (e.g., meaningfulness, values, enjoyment) when managing themselves expressively and cognitively.
- (c) **Investigate the Effects on Women's Coping Tendencies:** This final objective investigates the effects of "happy" media on women's coping tendencies. By analysing their media consumption patterns, this objective aims to provide an overview of the significance of "happy" media in influencing varying coping strategies across the four distinct forms of coping.

METHODOLOGY

Samples

Six women were purposively sampled from a diverse group (Table I) to gain various perspectives on their stress experiences and consumption practices. Our selection includes three married and three unmarried women aged 25 to 30, classified under the B40 group. The "B40" classification refers to the Malaysian household income group with a month-media income of RM4,850 and below. Table I provides a summary of the demographic characteristics and work-related information of the samples.

Qualitative studies frequently face challenges in extracting data when the sampling is too large, resulting in problems like data saturation, theoretical saturation, and information redundancy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Previous research has shown no significant differences between having four to six samples or 12 to 15 samples, with little variations in results after conducting ten interviews (Muellmann et al., 2021). Likewise, other researchers have observed data saturation after their first 12 interviews, with 92% of codes identified when examining data saturation in 60 in-depth interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Contrastingly, yet another study found that code saturation was achieved after only nine interviews (Francis et al., 2010). Our research applies small-scaled sampling to ensure that our primary and secondary variables are well-controlled before the data reaches a state where no further nuances or dimensions can contribute to our overall findings.

Table I. Participants' Demographic

| | Category | Married | Unmarried |
|-------------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| Age | 25 – 30 | 3 | 3 |
| | | | |
| Ethnicity | Malay | - | 1 |
| | Chinese | - | 2 |
| | Others (e.g., Bidayuh, Iban, Kadazan-Dusun, etc.) | 3 | - |
| Working Status | Paid Employment (Full / Part Time) | 2 | 3 |
| | Unemployed (e.g., Freelance) | 1 | - |
| Household Members | 1 – 3 | - | 3 |
| | 3 – 5 | 2 | - |
| | More than 5 | 1 | - |
| Income | Below RM1,000 | 1 | 1 |
| | RM1,000 – RM2,000 | 1 | - |
| | RM2,000 – RM3,000 | - | 2 |
| | RM3,000 – RM4,850 | 1 | - |
| Total | | 3 | 3 |

Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually through face-to-face or online meetings (e.g., Google Meet or Webex). Before the interview, participants were given a summary of the research, its objectives, and a consent form for a recorded interview. Interview questions included inquiries about participants' stress experiences at work and home, their consumption patterns, preferred genres of "happy" media, and their coping tendencies. Participants also had the opportunity to report on the current effects of their stress.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interview data, the researcher analysed, decoded, and verified all the information to understand each participant's perspective and compare it with other relevant data. Through this process, the researcher identified specific themes that emerged from participants' responses. These themes were then analysed thematically, integrating a conceptual framework (Table II). Thematic analysis is normally applied to qualitative data, in which the researcher arranges the data into categories after reviewing the variables. This analysis allows the researcher to work flexibly yet systematically when identifying emerging patterns from a wide range of information (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In the case of our research, two themes have emerged in our interview sessions: (1) "Happy" Media: Stress and Emotional Management Tool; and (2) Effective Coping Tool.

FINDINGS

"Happy" Media: Stress and Emotional Management Tool

This theme discusses "happy" media in providing resources for women to manage or suppress their stressors for better psychological and emotional well-being.

In general, participants expressed positive views about the potential effects of "happy" media on their stress and emotional management. While some recognised their increased screen time or dependence on media for coping, the consensus was that media consumption greatly

benefits their needs, with most participants referring to the accessible, easy, and personalised gratifications that “happy” media has on their overall coping process. When contextualising “happy” media in participants’ perspectives, many defined it as something entertaining, capable of uplifting their negative moods and emotions, and can distract them from their stressors. It is expected that people would view media through hedonistic perspectives, as the term “happy” is associated with positive emotions. Meanwhile, media is frequently evaluated based on its ability to provide entertainment, which involves emotional gratification factors ranging from fun to thought-provoking experiences (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009; Zillmann, 1988).

However, when we delved deeper into their responses regarding their preferred “happy” media genres, we discovered that participants also consider informative and educational content as “happy” media. They express that such content is helpful for stress and emotional management, including satisfying their informative needs and fostering feelings of calmness, particularly with stressors or environments beyond their control. In relation to “happy” media being consumed for participants’ informative needs, these media content are often short-formatted, instructional, or demonstration videos related to participants’ stressors and emotional well-being. Correlating to this, we observed that participants are most likely to engage in approach, problem-solving coping strategies when intending to have better emotions and stress control in their work environment. Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

“I’d come across contents about social media awareness or tips on how to reduce anxiety. Or people in the comment section sharing their opinions about what food can induce stress, like caffeine. So, maybe at work we can avoid that. I think that helps.” (Participant 1)

“I would find some videos related to my work, mostly from content creators from similar profession as I am. These videos are mostly for solutions handling certain medical problem or just the general patient care and treatments.” (Participant 3)

On the other hand, our unemployed participant would also watch such content to improve her soft skills, such as communication, language, critical thinking, and emotional management. She believed that enhancing these skills would personally benefit her and prepare her for future job opportunities. Apart from this, we found that these contents promote positive coping outcomes, particularly when participants consume it for relaxing activities (e.g., hobbies). Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

“I do find tutorials for my crocheting. There’s lots of patterns and creations out there, and there’s videos that even show you how they do them!” (Participant 2)

“I like watching hair styling or fashion-related videos because I’m into those kinds of things. Watching these videos really helps me with my stress too.” (Participant 6)

From the perspectives of mood and emotional discourse, participants mentioned that they tend to consume “happy” media to evoke positive emotions and reduce negative ones; additionally, they may also turn to “happy” media to mitigate the impacts of their stressors and negative emotions. Interestingly, emotional “happy” content is also consumed as a means to

boost participants' self-esteem while they seek motivation, inspiration, and reassurance through mutual emotional support. Our findings are in line with the studies conducted by Najmul-Islam et al. (2022) and Costescu et al. (2021), which inferred that social media use can act as a mediator between stress and coping thus implying that the media has a positive impact on users' emotional support-seeking responses. These emotional "happy" media contents comprise comedic videos, feel-good or inspirational content, as well as religious content. Comedy is a highly consumed genre of "happy" media amongst our participants, which typically includes funny cat videos, skits or short dramas, and sometimes even dark humour. Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

"When I need distraction from my stress, I'll look at something funny, like funny animal videos. They're the top ones. I also love clips of adult cartoon like South Park, Futurama, the Simpsons, those with dark humours in it. I love those." (Participant 5)

"The ones that cheer me up is usually comedy videos or funny cat videos." (Participant 2)

Regarding feel-good or inspirational media content, participants shared that their social media algorithm would recommend this genre of content whenever they felt stressed or emotional and would usually watch it when it appeared on their feed. We identified that this content typically includes positive or inspiring messages, relaxing videos (e.g., decorating or organising videos), and religious content. Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

"I like to see something peaceful, and what I usually like to see are videos like organizing things or restocking the pantry. Or farming videos where we see them harvesting the fruits and vegetables that they've planted." (Participant 1)

"When I'm feeling emotional or stressful, I'll watch videos that has motivational quotes or Bible verses. Watching them just helps me reduce my stress." (Participant 4)

Participants also revealed that they tend consume "happy" media to disengage mentally and emotionally from their stressors; interestingly, product reviews are the most-consumed genre when this occurs. With that said, participants expressed that watching such content helps them forget their stressors and regulate their negative emotions, nevertheless, this also cause participants to passively scroll or act impulsively, such as using their social media platforms for online shopping. Below is an excerpt of their experiences:

"When I'm stressed, I will open TikTok and browse through. I'll add to cart, add to cart, add to cart, but- I don't checkout! Adding items into the car is just for self-fulfilment. Once the streak is over, I'll go back and delete them." (Participant 6)

Effective Coping Tool

Aside from shifting the balance between resources and stressors to mitigate positive outcomes, “happy” media can also be consumed for coping after stress has been evoked. This theme discusses the impact of consuming “happy” media on women’s coping tendencies. Here, we identified and analysed the effectiveness of “happy” media based on how these contents aligned with participants’ stressful experiences and coping tendencies (approach coping, avoidance coping, problem-solving coping, emotion-focused coping).

Throughout our research, we discovered that women tend to react emotionally to their stressors, and thus, there is often an emotional aspect within their coping tendencies. We observed that women consumed “happy” media to manage their negative emotions and stressful situations; frequently these coping tendencies are also intended to evoke positive emotions and coping outcomes.

Several studies have demonstrated that happiness is attainable through media use, suggesting that media consumption can predict happiness (Brooks, 2015), evoke positive emotions and relationships (Rae & Lonborg, 2015), and satisfy users’ life satisfaction (Valenzuela et al., 2009). Since media effects are one of our inquiries, participants were asked how they felt when consuming “happy” media for stress-coping. All participants expressed satisfaction with social media’s ability to facilitate their distinct coping tendencies and considered media content helpful to their overall coping processes. Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

“When we’re stressed and we tell others about it, no one would really understand your situation. So, only through this [media consumption] am I able to calm my stress and tension down.” (Participant 4)

“In my opinion, it’s better this way [media consumption] so you don’t become mental. I’ve read that stress can cause lots of mental issues, so it’s better for me to handle it like this.” (Participant 5)

Participants also considered “happy” media an effective learning tool and a great alternative to other search engine websites like Google or Yahoo. When we asked participants why they prefer consuming informative content on social media, they explained that it offers shorter, easily digestible, and entertaining information; moreover, social media does not require users to scroll through or close multiple tabs of advertisements to find the information they need. Most significantly, participants expressed that these contents provided them with a better understanding of the nature of their stressors and helped validate their conflicting emotions during stressful situations. Below is an excerpt of their experiences:

“It [media content] helps me understand myself emotionally and it’s good because I’m not keeping my negative emotions in.” (Participant 2)

These contents also aided participants with their coping processes by enabling them to apply appropriate coping strategies, which would even help them overcome or avoid similar stressors in the future. When “happy” media is able to give significance to participants’ lives or contribute to their personal growth, they perceive it as effective in their coping process.

These findings aligned with Ryff's (1989) inference that media content influences the affective, cognitive, and behavioural patterns in personal growth. Hence, it explains why we sometimes change our normative ways of thinking in favour of coping tendencies focused on meaningfulness and desired coping outcomes.

Likewise, "happy" media are also consumed for mundane activities like domestic chores. It was apparent that when participants successfully recreated recipes or achieved outcomes demonstrated in these contents, they exhibited positive coping outcomes through improved emotions. Participants also exhibited increased self-satisfaction when they successfully recreated recipes or achieved outcomes demonstrated in these contents. Below are some excerpts of their experiences:

"Previously, I'm not very knowledgeable on Western dishes as these are not what I'd usually have back in my hometown. Watching these cooking videos online helps me with this and now I know how to cook dishes like Lemon Chicken. I feel happy when I'm able to cook and have others try them out." (Participant 4)

"I love watching cooking videos and following their recipes afterwards. Since I'm always cooking at home, I'll get bored of cooking the same thing so I'll find different recipes or dishes with the same ingredients that I already have. It makes me happy when the dishes come out great and my family enjoys eating them." (Participant 6)

Besides, we discovered that some participants consumed media content passively. Surprisingly, this did not negatively affect them; instead, it generated a sense of satisfaction. But this could be attributed to their preference for consuming "happy" media without engaging with other online users through commenting or other interactive means. In addition, we found that "happy" media can be a source of comparison whereby participants reinterpreted the content positively or meaningfully. For example, one participant shared her enjoyment of watching farming videos, which she perceived as happy and relaxing content. Although she was not inspired to do gardening, the videos made her happy, especially when they showed the harvested crops. This finding is supported by the works of Courbet et al. (2023), who found that comparison in positive media content can improve social acceptance whilst cultivating positive emotions and interpretations.

Contrarily, our findings suggest that creating or sharing happy, positive content online can result in positive emotional contagion, consistent with the study of Kramer et al. (2014). In interviews, participants reported that sharing jokes, funny videos, and memorable moments of their lives online elicited positive emotions and interactions. However, they also mentioned that sharing online is not for social validation, but rather as a means of seeking self-reassurance or "small pleasures" (Courbet et al., 2023). Another notable mention is the participant's use of social media platforms as online albums to store memorable pictures and videos in case of limited phone storage or other complications. Viewing these pictures helps them calm their emotions and reminisce happy memories. Below is an excerpt of their experiences:

"I feel so relax when I look at those pictures. When I look back, I can recall all the fun, happy moments that I've forgotten. The feeling is like 'wow'." (Participant 5)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Regulating our stress and emotions is a natural and healthy part of our everyday lives (Selye, 1982); the same can be said when we are finding happiness for hedonistic and eudaimonic fulfilments. When looking into what women considered as “happy” media during stress-coping, they identified them as contents that could elicit feelings of happiness, amusement, calmness, motivation, and relatability. Specifically, women associated “happy” media with contents featuring funny cats, short skits or comedy, visually pleasing content that aligns with their personal aesthetic preferences, information and solutions, including contents that related to their hobbies or interests and those that carries messages that may be significant to their emotional and psychological needs. Our findings align with the works of other researchers who also found that positive media consumption leads to positive emotions, including users being able to have better management of their emotional state and express functional emotions (Costescu et al., 2021; Eden et al., 2020; Revathy et al., 2018)

Media consumption for emotion and stress management has become increasingly appealing among women due to its ubiquitous presence in their everyday lives. Our research has found that exposure to “happy” media positively affects women’s emotion and stress management, whereby women can better understand the nature of their stressors and apply appropriate coping practices beneficial to their emotional and coping needs. Moreover, the variety of “happy” media allows women to cope through entertainment, suppression, and informative means to avoid or overcome their stressors (Najmul-Islam et al., 2022; Eden et al., 2020).

Prior, we have established that women are more vulnerable to stress because they tend to perceive stress emotionally, which leads to their coping tendencies being more focused on emotional well-being. With this in mind, our findings, including the works of other researchers, have inferred that exposure to “emotional-happy” media helps women to process and cope with their emotions, thus lessening the impact of negative emotions through interpreted meaningfulness from media messages (Revathy et al., 2018; Reinecke & Eden, 2016). Further, there were also instances in our research demonstrating women utilizing “happy” media to manage or overcome their stressors in uncontrollable environments and seek information on how to avoid similar stressors in future encounters. This consumption pattern comes as no surprise: since the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has begun shifting into an informational and educational platform, and these contents are very easily accessible with a simple hashtag or search result (Garcia et al., 2022; Newman, 2022). Hence, our research also infers that short-formatted videos with straightforward information and a touch of humour create effective engagement and encourage learning experiences among women. This is also evident in their reliance on humour for stress-coping.

In our final inquiry into the effects of “happy” media on women's coping tendencies, we found that media consumption positively affects women. Women’s motivations to seek coping tendencies are influenced by several factors, like inadequate emotional support, interpersonal conflicts worsened by role and ambient strains, or the incompatibilities of their environments (e.g., work and home). Because coping is an instinctive response, “happy” media in this inquiry helps women instantaneously seek healthy, effective coping practices when their environment variations cannot fulfil their emotional, mental and coping needs (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Additionally, “happy” media can help women achieve cognitive, emotional, and desired coping outcomes through its vast selection of hedonistic and eudaimonic content.

This research's findings are consistent with past studies that have alluded that emotional support, information-sharing, and positive reassurance through media consumption can play a vital role in women's coping processes (Revathy et al., 2018; Matud, 2004). Likewise, our research also inferred that "happy" media host eudaimonic fulfilments, evidently in women's need to seek interpersonal outcomes like happiness, meaningfulness, and self-acceptance. Social media provides a space where people can share their personal experiences and opinions, as well as connect with others of similar backgrounds, desires, and experiences, therefore allowing for mutual emotional support, motivation and a sense of reassurance among users (Klug et al., 2023). Nabi et al. (2017) also considered media consumption an effective coping tool for women because it enables them to receive mutual emotional support and calming behaviours.

Classically interpreted, MMT proposed that we consume entertainment content to stimulate positive emotions from negative emotions (Zillmann, 1988). While this theory implies that our desires are often hedonistic, our research presented otherwise. We found that women's motivations for seeking mood improvements can also be eudaimonic, whereby they would seek contents that provides meaningfulness to their affective state. Notably, we found that women's eudaimonic-coping tendencies are more likely to experience positive emotions such as appreciation, self-acceptance, and inspiration; they also allow women to cope with stress according to their cognitive and affective abilities. These findings are consistent with the works of Park and Folkman (1997) and Ryff (1989).

Conversely, women who consume media for eudaimonic purposes are not necessarily drawn to positive media messages for emotion and stress management. Their media selection seemed to reflect their current mood, particularly for those experiencing lower affectivity, such as having the inability or lack of motivation to regulate their emotions or manage their stressors. Stevens and Dillman-Carpentier (2015) suggested this may be due to some individuals' need to manage their emotions and stress through self-reflection, rather than taking active coping (e.g., seeking solutions).

Still, MMT provides an excellent explanation of media consumption for coping, evidently through the mood and emotion improvements of conscious and unconscious media selection. Besides the positive emotional and coping outcomes of "happy" media, passive engagement elicited a sense of calmness and collectedness while reducing the impact of negative emotions among women. Most importantly, MMT emphasises the presence of hedonistic and even eudaimonic approaches in media consumption for affective, behavioural, and cognitive growth.

As humans, we all have the innate desire for happiness and pleasure in life, free from constant stress and negativity. This research has shed light on the theoretical perspectives of MMT in understanding women's needs to consume "happy" media for mood and emotional regulation, including their motivations for selecting specific genres of "happy" media when in need of evoking certain moods or emotions. Apart from that, this research has highlighted how "happy" media enables women to develop effective coping tendencies in accordance with their emotional and coping needs.

Future research may explore the implications of sex differences in media consumption, particularly on how men and women differ in consuming "happy" media for stress-coping. It is possible that men and women may have varying perspectives on what they perceive as "happy" media and how it contributes to their coping tendencies. For instance, women may

find makeup videos relaxing, while men may find them boring; hence, women would attribute such videos significant to their coping process. Through this exploration, future research may better understand the influences of media consumption on men's and women's coping tendencies.

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