Meaning making through meaningful entertainment? An intensive longitudinal study

on the prospective effects of entertainment use on meaning-coping

When facing adverse situations, people apply different coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Research shows that people regularly turn to *media entertainment* for coping with stressful life events (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). We address the longitudinal relationships of entertainment use and *meaning-focused coping*, a deliberate meaning making process, in which the *situational meaning* of a stressor, is (positively) reappraised (Park, 2010). When triggered by an event, meaning-focused coping occurs, e.g., by realigning priorities or finding benefits such as growing from it as a person (Park & Folkman, 1997). Meaning making is crucial for adaptive mental health outcomes and a key resilience factor (Park, 2017). Media entertainment is an important source of meaningful experiences (Oliver & Raney, 2011), yet little is known about the longitudinal relationship between entertainment use and meaning-focused coping.

Building on two-factor models of media entertainment (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015), we propose that entertaining media can prospectively strengthen individual's meaning making capabilities: Entertainment often features narratives surrounding adversity and overcoming hardships (de Graaf & Das, 2022). This may provide media users with vicarious experiences of adversity and role models for adaptive coping(Slater et al., 2016). Entertainment also frequently elicits positive affect (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015), which is vital in building personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001). We therefore argue that both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment are positively related to meaning making. Escapist media use, however, may hamper meaning making by distracting from mentally engaging with adversity.

To test our assumptions, we conducted a weekly and daily diary survey over one winter term among $N = 609$ university students. The design and sampling plan was

preregistered prior to data collection, is available on the OSF and features detailed

information on our measures.

Several multilevel regressions revealed positive within- and between person

relationships between eudaimonic as well as hedonic entertainment exposure and meaning

making, and negative relationships between escapism and meaning making. Table 1 shows

the results of our multilevel models.

Our findings indicate that media entertainment provides valuable resources that can

strengthen meaning-coping tendencies in everyday life. Notably, this applies to hedonic and

eudaimonic entertainment alike. Though our study is limited by its homogenous student

sample and self-reported entertainment exposure, which is likely biased, we contribute by

providing one of the first studies assessing prospective longitudinal effects of entertainment

use on meaning making.

References

de Graaf, A., & Das, E. (2022). Portrayals of threatened needs and human virtue: A review of

the content of eudaimonic entertainment. *Annals of the International Communication

Association*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2022.2130811

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The

broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, *56*(3), 218–

226. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer.

Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful:

Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption.

Journal of Communication, *61*(5), 984–1004. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-

2466.2011.01585.x

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin*, *136*(2), 257–301. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018301

Park, C. L. (2017). Meaning making and resilience. *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience*, 162–172.

Park, C. L., & Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of General Psychology*, *1*(2), 115–144. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.2.115

Slater, M. D., Oliver, M. B., & Appel, M. (2016). Poignancy and mediated wisdom of experience: Narrative impacts on willingness to accept delayed rewards. *Communication Research*, *46*(3), 333–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215623838

Vorderer, P., & Reinecke, L. (2015). From mood to meaning: The changing model of the user in entertainment research. *Communication Theory*, *25*(4), 447–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12082

Wolfers, L. N., & Schneider, F. M. (2021). Using media for coping: A scoping review. *Communication Research*, *48*(8), 1210–1234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220939778

Table 1

Results of multilevel regressions.

| | Meaning Making | | | | | |
| | Daily | | | Weekly | | |
	b (SE)	p	95% CI	b (SE)	p	95% CI
Fixed Effects						
Intercept	3.15 (.08)	< .001	[2.99, 3.32]	3.58 (.08)	< .001	[3.43, 3.74]
Eudaimonic Entertainment						
Within	.13 (.02)	< .001	[.10, .16]	.10 (.02)	< .001	[.07, .13]
Between	.55 (.05)	< .001	[.47, .64]	.42 (.04)	< .001	[.34, .50]
Hedonic Entertainment						
Within	.08 (.02)	< .001	[.04, .12]	.08 (.02)	< .001	[.04, .12]
Between	.00 (.05)	.94	[-.09, .10]	.05 (.05)	.37	[-.05, .15]
Escapism						
Within	-.04 (.02)	.007	[-.07, -.01]	-.10 (.02)	< .001	[-.13, -.07]
Between	-.02 (.04)	.56	[-.09, .05]	-.12 (.03)	< .001	[-.18, -.05]
Age	-.02 (.02)	.19	[-.05, .01]	-.03 (.02)	.04	[-.06, -.002]
Sex	.13 (.10)	.23	[-.06, .33]	.15 (.10)	.12	[-.04, .34]
Random Effects						
Var: Intercept	1.12			1.05		
Var: Eudaimonic within	.03			.03		
Var: Hedonic within	.05			.04		
Var: Escapism within	.03			.03		
Residual	1.14			.74		
Goodness-of-fit						
AIC	19734			14836		
ICC	.52			.60		
Marginal R^2	.13			.12		
Conditional R^2	.58			.65		

Note: Based on $n_d = 594$ with 6030 observations; $n_w = 607$ with 5077 observations. IVs were centered around their person-mean (within) and grand mean centered person-means (between). Models include varying intercepts, fixed within- and between-person effects and varying within-person effects (slopes).