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## **Curving Entertainment: The Curvilinear Relationship Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Entertainment Experiences While Watching a Political Talk Show and Its Implications for Information Processing**

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# Curving Entertainment: The Curvilinear Relationship Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Entertainment Experiences While Watching a Political Talk Show and Its Implications for Information Processing

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Two studies were conducted to test the relation between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences as well as their respective influence on information processing while watching a political talk show on TV. Assumptions from entertainment theory and positive psychology served as theoretical basis. A curvilinear relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences was found through an online survey ( $N = 675$ ). The second study ( $N = 132$ ) was an experiment in which hedonic entertainment experiences were manipulated. Again, a curvilinear relationship between both entertainment experiences was detected. Furthermore, entertainment experiences were associated with information processing in a meaningful pattern. These results point to the distinct relationships and effects of different forms of entertainment experiences. Implications for political media and entertainment education are discussed.

## ***Public Policy Relevance Statement***

There sometimes seem to be two conflicting views when it comes to how political media are supposed to look like. Some argue they should be very entertaining, to motivate people with low political interest to get involved and learn something on the side. Others argue they should not be entertaining but rather serious, so that real learning is possible at all. Our data cannot support either notion. From our results we would argue that some fun in political content is not necessarily a bad thing. The “correct” mixture is the relevant point; in our studies we see a threshold, a cutoff point, at which fun is too much of a good thing. However, until that point it should be a goal to provide hedonic entertainment experiences, i.e., fun, joy, wittiness, humor.

**Keywords:** political entertainment, entertainment theory, information processing, survey, experiment

Entertainment research has focused on the commonalities, differences, and specialties of viewer’s experiences while watching comedies,

dramas, and thrillers (see, e.g., the special issue of the *Journal of Communication*, Oliver & Raney, 2014). Slowly but steadily comprehen-

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sive theoretical models have been developed to account for viewers' experiences while watching traditional entertainment formats. However, what at least to some extent has been neglected in the past are the analyses of viewer's psychological experiences while watching political entertainment, for example, political talk shows on TV.

The existing theoretical models can mostly be referred to as two-process models of entertainment but differ to some degree in their specific assumptions (Lewis, Tamborini, & Weber, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011; Tamborini et al., 2010, 2011; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015; Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012). Usually, they include one form of entertainment that consists of positive experiences like feeling fun and joy (often referred to as enjoyment or hedonic entertainment; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). The second form is shaped by mixed emotions, meaning the experience of sadness and anger as well as of thoughtfulness, meaningfulness, and being moved (usually referred to as appreciation or eudaimonic entertainment; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011; Vorderer & Ritterfeld, 2009; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2012; Wirth et al., 2012).

Researchers have only begun to adapt and extend these theoretical frameworks to explain entertainment experiences while watching or reading political (entertaining) content (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp, & Vorderer, 2014). This proceeding occurred because political formats can be catalysts for the experience of both entertainment processes, whereas a "pure" comedy might not be multifaceted enough (Roth, 2016). Furthermore, new questions connecting entertainment theory and information processing were discussed: Because political content is often supposed to inform the public, researchers wondered to what extent the two processes of entertainment can enable a systematic, "deeper" processing style that is associated with learning. So far, it has been demonstrated several times that specific entertainment processes (i.e., eudaimonic ones) can indeed lead to a deeper, more systematic and effortful processing of content (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Roth, 2016). As a secondary effect, research in this area can lead to important insights into how political entertainment has to be designed to be

most beneficial for political education purposes (Roth, 2016; Weinmann, 2015).

However, many questions in both areas (traditional entertainment media and political media) are still unaccounted for. We know little about how the two processes of entertainment are related to each other. Do both processes just correlate? Is one process a precondition for the formation of the other? How does the balance between the processes influence information processing? Only when we gain a deeper understanding of the interrelation of both processes, we can state clearer advice on how to design political formats to make them entertaining in a way that might endorse the kind of deeper information processing that often seems to be the goal of political media. Therefore, this paper will analyze "serious" political talk shows as a prototype of political entertainment and the entertainment experiences they offer to establish first answers to these questions.

### Dual-Process Models of Entertainment

The early beginnings of entertainment research focused mainly on positive outcomes of viewers' exposure to such content (cf., e.g., Bosshart & Macconi, 1998; Zillmann, 1988; Zillmann & Bryant, 1994). Media users were seen as hedonic beings striving for pleasure and avoiding negative feelings like sadness, anger, and frustration. Positive emotions like fun, pleasure, or amusement were subsumed under the term enjoyment (Vorderer et al., 2004).

In addition to this research line, scholarly discussions about the sad film paradox (i.e., the paradox that many viewers enjoy movies that make them feel sad; Oliver, 1993) started, and the questions on how the "enjoyment" of, for example, drama, art, and sad documentaries can be explained became more pressing (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). In addition to enjoyment, a second psychological response (called appreciation or eudaimonic entertainment) was advanced. The theoretical conception for this process differs slightly between two lines of research (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015).

One line of research relies on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to this work, only the striving for higher insights and personal development can create well-being in a person (Aristotle, 1931). Based on this idea, eudaimonic entertainment is conceptualized as an experience of moral-

ity, thoughtfulness, the feeling of being moved, and the gaining of deeper insights about one's own life or human lives in general (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011; Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012; Oliver & Raney, 2011).

The other line of research sees eudaimonic entertainment as an experience that results from the satisfaction of three intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Vorderer & Ritterfeld, 2009). Those three needs and their importance for human well-being were originally postulated by self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT is a motivational theory from positive psychology.

One study by Wirth et al. (2012) can to some extent be seen as bridging both lines of research. To conceptualize eudaimonic entertainment, these authors use a theory that stems from the same tradition like SDT (i.e., positive psychology): the six-factor-model of well-being by Ryff and Singer (2006). With this theory, Wirth and colleagues (2012) incorporate the three original intrinsic needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their theoretical model. Furthermore, they include the constructs "purpose in life" and "activation of central values" as additional dimensions of eudaimonic entertainment. These dimensions comprise experiences, which are rather similar to the concept of appreciation that has been forwarded by Oliver and colleagues (2010, 2011, 2012) as explained above.

Notwithstanding their differences, all described eudaimonic entertainment concepts have in common that they relate to some extent to basic ideas of positive psychology. Positive psychology states that well-being cannot, after all, only result from hedonic pleasure but rather needs to be supplemented by eudaimonic experiences in life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Some of the insights and results of positive psychology might be transferable to entertainment research in order to provide an informational basis on how the processes of hedonic pleasure seeking and eudaimonic experiences while using media relate to each other.

### **The Relation Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Entertainment**

In positive psychology, eudaimonia and hedonia are considered as two related but distinct constructs (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 148; see also Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Sirgy, 2012; Water-

man, 1993; Waterman, 2008; Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008). Some researchers went so far to see hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being as hierarchical. Waterman (1993) was one of the first to theorize that hedonia is a precondition for eudaimonia when it comes to overall life satisfaction. In Waterman (2008) and in Waterman et al. (2008), he amended this idea by stating the following:

Thus, there are three conceivable categories of activities, (a) those for which both hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonia are experienced; (b) those for which hedonic enjoyment, but not eudaimonia, is experienced; and (c) those giving rise to neither hedonic enjoyment nor eudaimonia. (Waterman et al., 2008, p. 43)

Both studies could demonstrate the proposed pattern empirically, as have, at least to some extent, also Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne, and Hurling (2009) in their paper on measuring happiness in different cultures. In their experimental studies, King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gasio (2006) found a strong relation between positive mood (as indicator of hedonic happiness) and meaning in life (as indicator for eudaimonic well-being). Overall, the results point to the fact that hedonia can exist without eudaimonia but eudaimonia can only develop in humans when they also experience hedonia. However, the question remains whether these results can also be applied to entertainment research in general and to the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment in specific.

Several, albeit in part contradicting, notes have been made with regard to the question of how enjoyment and appreciation might be associated with each other. Oliver and Bartsch (2011) stress that hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences should not be understood "as opposite ends of a continuum" (p. 30). According to these authors, both processes are distinct forms of experiences, which develop depending on the content of the media. They may appear together as well as independent from each other. Hence, Oliver and Bartsch (2010, 2011) seem to imply that the eudaimonic entertainment experience can exist on its own. This, however, is not in line with the above-mentioned research in positive psychology, which assumes eudaimonia to be dependent on the prior existence of hedonia.

In contrast, entertainment research that refers more closely to SDT is more in line with the original concepts of positive psychology. Vorderer and Ritterfeld (2009) conceptualize enjoyment (hedonic entertainment) as the fulfillment of “lower order needs” (i.e., emotional ones) and appreciation (eudaimonic entertainment) as the fulfillment of “higher order needs” (i.e., rational ones). These labels imply an assumption about a specific sequence of the processes, that is, enjoyment being inferior to appreciation. However, the authors stress that they do not necessarily see an established hierarchy between both. Nonetheless, their conceptualization seems to be rather close to the one proposed by Waterman and colleagues (2008). Another perspective in this context is taken by Tamborini and colleagues (2010, 2011). They differentiate between eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment as two subprocesses of the one overall experience of media enjoyment. This perspective contradicts the ideas of Waterman and colleagues (2008), because it implies no hierarchy at all.

In contrast, Wirth et al. (2012) do not explicitly mention how they see hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences being related

to each other. In their experiment, they manipulate both processes independently, which suggests that they see them as separate. This suggestion is also supported by their specific analysis of the data, as the authors calculate a structural equation model in which hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment represent separate (but related) latent variables.

Overall, entertainment literature in general does not seem to have one coherent message concerning the relationship between eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences. As a consequence, it remains unclear whether they are positively or negatively correlated, independent factors, or maybe even in a curvilinear or cubic relationship (see Figure 1 for graphic displays on how these relationships would look like).

Furthermore, the question remains to what extent the aforementioned research is applicable to political media in general and political talk shows in particular.

### Entertainment Theory and Political Media

Previous entertainment research has mainly used movies as stimuli to investigate psycho-

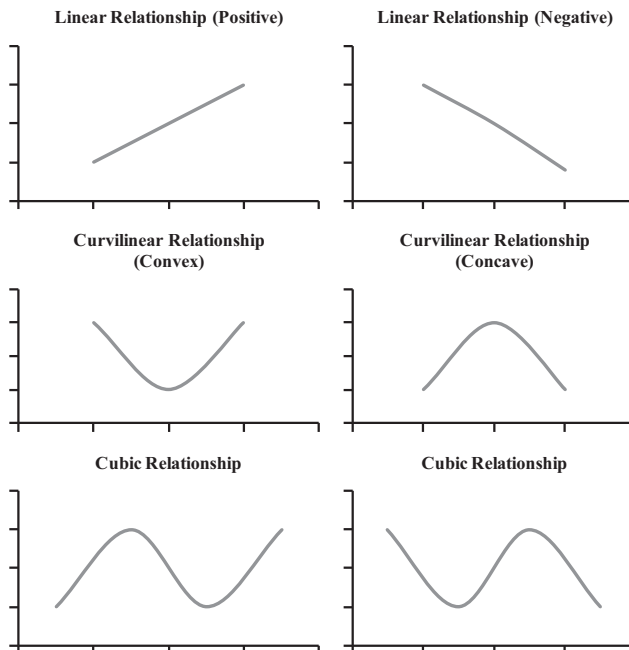


Figure 1. Graphic display of linear, curvilinear, and cubic relationships.

logical responses. However, no two movies are comparable in terms of their storyline, their main characters, or other important features. Therefore, entertainment experiences while watching them differ significantly, whereas political shows often entail rather similar settings from show to show. Hedonic entertainment experiences have mainly been researched with regard to funny movies like comedies, whereas eudaimonic entertainment experiences have most often been studied by using sad, poignant, and tragic content. We believe that looking at both forms of entertainment experiences with one format alone should be the next step in order to understand the relationship between them.

Particularly entertaining political formats offer such a diversity of experiences: They deal with serious or sad topics but sometimes still in a funny or thrilling way (Mattheiß et al., 2013). Political talk shows as a round table discussion on TV are an especially good example of such a format. In these shows, politicians, celebrities, and also “ordinary” people discuss political topics under the lead of a host (Schultz, 2006). This type of show is broadcasted around the globe (e.g., in South Africa, Finland, Pakistan, Germany, Austria, see Roth et al., 2014, p. 381 in Footnote 1 for an overview).

Due to the debate nature of the shows, the invited guests try to offer their arguments in a rhetorically entertaining fashion, often by fighting for the sympathies of the audience (Schultz, 2006). They argue, add jokes, and try to make their point by being smart and funny. At the same time, the topics are usually rather sincere and often the focus of public opinion building at that moment (Wessler & Schultz, 2007), such as war, financial crises, or political scandals. It has been argued that this mixture of serious and even tragic topics on one hand and of the rhetorical style of the participants on the other leads to a simultaneous emergence of eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences among viewers (Roth, 2016).

Some studies have already offered insights on how entertainment experiences may look like with regard to this format. Mattheiß et al. (2013) were able to demonstrate that viewers experience hedonic entertainment while watching these shows. Roth et al. (2014) supplemented this result by showing that hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences are an

important part of the viewing experience of the audience with regard to political talk shows. In their study, both entertainment processes were strongly associated. Another study by Schneider, Bartsch, and Gleich (2015) demonstrated that a positive judgment of the watched show was mainly influenced by a hedonic entertainment experience; the eudaimonic experience played a less important role. Finally, Roth (2016) found a strong correlation between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences in both experimental studies. It seems possible that hedonic entertainment experiences are a prerequisite or a baseline for eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching a talk show.

Hence, based on the overall theoretical assumptions concerning the two-process models of entertainment and the (few) results concerning political talk shows, we see clear indications for a close association and high correlation between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences. However, we wondered which shape the association between them might attain. As a first possibility, it could be a simple positive one, implying that more experienced hedonic entertainment also leads to more experienced eudaimonic entertainment. This would mean that the funnier, more joyful and enjoyable a political talk show is (which would lead to a higher hedonic entertainment experience), the more it would also be appreciated (more eudaimonic entertainment experiences). This, however, seems unlikely, as “too much fun” could serve as a strong distraction (Forgas, 2013) and would make it impossible for viewers to have a poignant, thoughtful experience while watching.

Second, the relationship might start as a positive one (i.e., there needs to be some hedonic entertainment) but at a specific point during exposure fun could be “too much of a good thing” and, as a consequence, the eudaimonic entertainment experience would drop. Applied to a political talk show on TV, this may mean that guests who offer some funny comments or argue in an amusing manner enable the viewers to experience hedonic as well as eudaimonic entertainment experiences. If, however, they start to ridicule the topic or other guests by not taking them seriously anymore and instead joke or laugh the entire time, this may be too much and make the eudaimonic entertainment expe-

rience drop. Such a cutoff point and the resulting curvilinear, concave relationship (see Figure 1) has not been established in any study so far.

Another possibility would be that we are dealing with an even more complicated model, for example, one where the relationship shifts from positive to negative to positive to negative at several points, leading to a cubic trend (see Figure 1). This is a possible scenario if the talk show is very lively and in some scenes very funny and joyful, in some scenes ridiculous and “over the top,” and in the next moment probably even boring or dull.

Furthermore, based on Waterman’s (1993) assumption of hedonia being a precondition of eudaimonia and following Roth’s (2016) suggestion, we wonder whether a hedonic entertainment experience might be a precondition for the involvement of a eudaimonic entertainment experience while viewing political talk shows. This could be supported by Mattheiß et al. (2013) and Schneider et al. (2015) who have demonstrated that fun (i.e., hedonic entertainment) seems to be one of the driving factors of talk show use overall. Following this, hedonic entertainment might be the baseline experience: Only when people enjoy watching the show they are able to “open up,” get deeper into the content and, thus, experience eudaimonic entertainment. If they are bored, however, eudaimonic entertainment experiences cannot emerge.

Considering the minimal information available, we pose two research questions concerning the shape of association between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences as well as their hierarchy while watching political talk shows:

RQ1: How does the relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching a political talk show look like?

RQ2: Is a hedonic entertainment experience a precondition for the formation of eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching a political talk show?

### Entertainment Theory and Information Processing

With regard to information processing, we will analyze one aspect, which has been researched in connection to entertainment experi-

ences. We assess processing strategies in a two-path framework as brought forward by numerous researchers (for an overview see Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2008).

The question of entertainment influences on information processing is highly relevant regarding the societal impact of political media fare (and entertainment experiences). Educating the electorate, helping with its attitude formation, and triggering its political involvement are some of the main goals of political media. Processing styles (and especially systematic processing) are closely tied to learning effects and attitude formation (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). Therefore, investigating their psychological effects also helps to answer questions that are at the core of the social relevance of political media. This has also been acknowledged by different scholars who investigated citizens’ information processing during exposure to various political entertainment media formats on TV, especially political satire programs like *The Daily Show*. Basing their assumptions on processes described through the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and message discounting, some studies investigated how political humor, which is of course one of the key elements of such programs, affects the processing of the shows’ messages (LaMarre & Walther, 2013; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007; Young, 2008). Although they revealed that humorous messages, compared with nonhumorous ones (e.g., news programs), lead to less argument scrutiny, the findings also suggest that political humor might in fact encourage deeper information processing in viewers.

Besides, one consistent finding is that viewers’ motivations, expectations, and perceptions with regard to such programs seem to play a key role in how they process the specific content and what they learn from it (Feldman, 2013; Kim & Vishak, 2008; LaMarre, Landreville, Young, & Gilkerson, 2014; Nabi et al., 2007; Young, 2013). For example, it has been found that viewers tend to provide more cognitive resources on processing if they regard political entertainment programs to be some kind of news or “serious” information, whereas they allocate less resources if the programs are classified as mere entertainment (Feldman, 2013). All of these findings underline the importance

of further investigating information processing strategies in the context of political entertainment. However, the majority of the mentioned studies did not differentiate between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment (motivations or experiences) as focused on in this article.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the two forms of entertainment experiences and processing styles has been discussed by several authors more recently. From a theoretical viewpoint, Schneider, Weinmann, Roth, Knop, and Vorderer (2016) have argued that the processes which constitute hedonic entertainment experiences may be rather similar to a more simple (i.e., heuristic) form of information processing: While consuming specific media content, users lay back, relax, and have fun, thus enjoy what they are exposed to. If users experience such forms of positive affect, they are rather unmotivated to process information in detail (Forgas, 1995; Lang & Yegiyan, 2008; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). In contrast, experiences of negative affect signal important changes in the environment and motivate the users to process this information more carefully (Forgas, 1995; Lang & Yegiyan, 2008; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Such a deeper reflection, however, has been described to be one of the core processes underlying eudaimonic entertainment experiences. Consequently, some authors suggested this form of entertainment to be associated with a more elaborate (i.e., systematic) form of processing. In their article, Bartsch and Schneider (2014) have similarly connected the two forms of entertainment experiences with dual-process models of information processing. They even went one step further, proclaiming that entertainment experiences might trigger one or the other processing style in media users. And indeed, using two different stimuli covering political issues (i.e., fictional films and soft news), the authors found viewers' emotional involvement in a eudaimonic sense to stimulate reflective thinking (i.e., systematic processing).

With regard to entertainment and political media in specific, there are more studies that demonstrated effects of eudaimonic entertainment experiences on deeper information processing (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Lewis et al., 2014; Roth, 2016). However, there are slightly conflicting results. For example, Roth (2016) demonstrated that eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching political talk shows lead to a more pro-

nounced systematic processing and resulting attitude formation compared with hedonic entertainment experiences. Furthermore, the more pronounced systematic processing was associated with higher objective learning of facts from the show. Contrary to that, Schneider and colleagues (2016) were unable to find effects of eudaimonic entertainment experiences on objective knowledge (as outcome of more systematic or deeper processing) for viewers who watched (nonpolitical) online video clips. Due to these conflicting results, there might also be curvilinear processes: Maybe, a very pronounced eudaimonic experience with the associated feelings of sadness and thoughtfulness will captivate too many cognitive resources to deem systematic processing possible (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). A less pronounced eudaimonic experience could, however, enhance the attention for the program due to the associated mixed emotions and even enable a systematic processing style (Forgas, 1995). Again, one would deal with a cutoff point of a curve, where too much of one experience might hinder the other one. To investigate this effect, we will take a closer look at the relationship between entertainment experiences and heuristic or systematic information processing.

Based on the existing, conflicting results concerning information processing styles while using political media, we pose the following research question:

RQ3: To what extent is the information processing while watching political talk shows influenced by entertainment experiences?

## Study 1: Exploratory Online Survey

### Method

**Procedure.** In order to answer RQ1, an exploratory online survey was conducted between May 13th and June 5th, 2015, via *EFS Survey*. The study consisted of two waves, with only the first wave being used for this paper. Participants were recruited by the noncommercial online access pool *SoSci Panel* ([www.soscipanel.de](http://www.soscipanel.de); Leiner, 2012). *SoSci Panel* provides access to a pool of German panelists for scholars conducting noncommercial research. The panelists enlist themselves, main recruitment channel is the associated *SoSci Survey* (<https://www.soscisurvey.de>), a freeware to program surveys. *SoSci Survey* studies always incorporate a link to *SoSci Panel* at the



end with which participants of the studies can register as panelists. Panelists of the *SoSci Panel* are aged from under 19 to 69 and older; however, most of them are between 20 and 34 years old. They have different educational degrees, but the majority holds at least a high school degree (see <https://www.soscisurvey.de/panel/researchers.php>).

It is necessary to undergo a peer review process in order to use the panel. After acceptance of the study, the link to the questionnaire and an invitation to the study is sent out via mail to a specific number of panelists. The number of contacted panelists depends on the target size of the sample for a study as well as the average response rates of the panel, and the current number of studies conducted via the panel (i.e., how many studies have recently been accepted).

Therefore, after undergoing the review process with *SoSci Panel*, the questionnaire was sent to their registered panelists. As an incentive, participants had the chance to win a gift coupon for Buecher.de (a German website that sells books). The raffle included two coupons with the value of 25 Euro and five coupons with the value of 10 Euro. After finishing the study, participants had the chance to sign up for information on the results. A summary of the results was also sent to *SoSci Panel*.

**Sample.** The questionnaire was completely filled in by 683 persons. Of those, eight participants were deleted due to their extremely high or low editing time for the questionnaire, so the final nonstudent sample ( $N = 675$ ) consisted of 403 females (59.7%) and 272 males (40.3%), aged 15 to 80 ( $M = 37.13$ ,  $SD = 14.66$ ). The majority of the participants had a university (50.2%), a high school (24.1%), or a doctoral degree (5.6%).

**Measures.** After a few measures that are not analyzed in the present paper (e.g., concerning their overall media use and life satisfaction), participants were instructed to remember the last political talk show they had seen on TV. To enhance memory performance, participants had to state the title, the topic, and a short description of the talk show. The answers to these open-ended questions were screened before the data analysis to ensure that all participants were thinking about the same format when answering the questions. The statements of the participants were rather uniform; the five most important shows on German TV were named by the majority, ensuring a homogeneous starting point

for answering the entertainment questions. Subsequently, we measured participants' entertainment experiences by using six items of Oliver and Bartsch's (2010) audience response scale (e.g., hedonic: "I really enjoyed watching the political talk show"; eudaimonic: "The political talk show was thought-provoking"). We decided to only incorporate the measure by Oliver and Bartsch (2010), because research has demonstrated that it is so far the most appropriate entertainment scale to be applied to political talk shows (Weinmann, Schneider, Roth, Bindl, & Vorderer, 2016).

These and all following items except for the sociodemographics were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*do fully agree*). Both subscales for eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences displayed a high internal consistency (hedonic: Cronbach's alpha = .87; eudaimonic: Cronbach's alpha = .81). The values were evenly distributed (see Figures A1 and A2).

## Results

The first study mainly served the purpose to address RQ1. To analyze the association between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, we calculated one hierarchical regression with forced entry for each measure, following the procedure as described by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). In these regressions, we first incorporated a linear, then a curvilinear, and lastly a cubic term for the hedonic entertainment experience (as proposed independent variable), always keeping the lower order terms in the regression. The curvilinear term was calculated by multiplying the index for the hedonic entertainment experience with itself ( $\chi^2$ ). For the cubic term, it was multiplied with itself twice ( $\chi^3$ ). All terms were mean centered before entering them (it is, however, not necessary to center the dependent variable; Cohen et al., 2003, p. 201).

There was a significant linear ( $R^2 = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as curvilinear relationship ( $\Delta R^2 = .013$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between hedonic ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) and eudaimonic entertainment experiences ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). The coefficient for the curvilinear term was negative, meaning that we are dealing with a concave shape of the curve ( $B = -.065$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Note that the coefficients of polynomial terms cannot

be interpreted with regard to size of the effect. They, however, indicate the shape of the curve (Cohen et al., 2003). The cubic term did not have a significant impact ( $\Delta R^2 = .002, p = .15$ ).

## Discussion

The exploratory survey study was conducted to investigate RQ1: How does the relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching a political talk show look like? Trend analyses for a linear, a cubic, as well as a curvilinear relationship showed that there seems to be a curvilinear relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences. Moreover, based on the interpretation of the concave shape of the curve, there seems to be a point at which too much of a hedonic entertainment experience inhibits a eudaimonic entertainment experience, leading to the drop of the curve, instead of a constant ongoing rise of both. This is a new finding because most literature so far only reported positive linear correlations (Roth et al., 2014).

The most important limitation of the survey study is the lack of available causal inferences, due to the study's design as well as to the fact that respondents were asked to remember their last viewing of a talk show. This inhibits the robustness of the findings. In order to account for these problems and further investigate and corroborate our findings, Study 2 was an experiment in which the hedonic entertainment experience was manipulated.

### Study 2: Experiment on the Connection Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Entertainment Processes

#### Method

**Procedure.** The experiment was conducted from August 6th to August 11th 2015 in a lecture hall of a mid-sized university in Germany. The participants in the nonstudent sample were invited to take part in the study via distributed flyers. Furthermore, they were directly addressed around the nearby central train station by student assistants who conducted the recruitment for the study. The participants were told that the study deals with their viewing experience while watching a political talk show.

A cover story was not deemed necessary. As an incentive, participation was rewarded with 10 Euros. Upon arrival, each person was welcomed and randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions. At the beginning, the participants were shown a clip from a German TV political talk show on a laptop computer with headphones. After watching the clip, participants filled in the questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire they were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed. It took participants about 15–20 min to take part in the study.

**Design and stimulus material.** Based on the results of Study 1, a  $3 \times 1$  between-subjects design was applied. The goal was to manipulate the hedonic entertainment experience of the participants to (a) explore whether and how this changes their eudaimonic experience (RQ1 & RQ2) and (b) investigate to what extent the differing entertainment experiences are related to the information processing style of the participants (RQ3). Three clips from the German political talk show *hart aber fair* (English: tough but fair, aired on November 14th, 2014) were used as stimuli. Each clip was approximately four minutes long. The complete talk show focused on matters of politically correct food and discussed, for example, whether consumers should choose regional over imported food.

**Experimental manipulation.** In order to influence the participants' hedonic entertainment experiences, the three clips differed in their hedonic value (i.e., how funny and joyful they were) and focused either on the dark sides of factory farming (3:43 min, low hedonic entertainment), controversial labels for regional food (3:58 min, medium hedonic entertainment), or the global production processes of a ham that is labeled to be situated in the German Black Forest (4:32 min, high hedonic entertainment). Before the actual experiment, we checked the manipulation in a pretest with 45 participants ( $n_{\text{low}} = 14$ ), ( $n_{\text{medium}} = 13$ ), ( $n_{\text{high}} = 18$ ). Each participant was randomly shown one of the three clips and subsequently asked whether she or he thought the clip was entertaining, by answering the three enjoyment items of Oliver and Bartsch's (2010) audience response scale. The results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the participants' enjoyment was highest among

those participants who saw the high hedonic entertainment clip ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ), but that the low ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ) and medium ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) conditions were inverted in their level of experienced hedonic entertainment. Notwithstanding the small sample size, which reduces the robustness of this finding, the analysis still indicated significant differences between the three groups, Welch's  $F(2, 27.29) = 4.45$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .172$ . Although the three clips elicited different levels of hedonic entertainment experiences, which indicate a successful manipulation, participants experienced the medium hedonic entertainment clip (food labeling) less funny than the low hedonic entertainment clip (factory farming). As a result, we switched the clips for these two conditions in the main study. This meant that in the main study the former medium hedonic entertainment clip was treated as low hedonic entertainment clip and the former low hedonic entertainment clip was treated as medium hedonic entertainment clip.

**Measures.** All participants' answers (except sociodemographics and political orientation) were assessed on 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 5 (*does totally apply*). Like in Study 1, three hedonic and three eudaimonic items of Oliver and Bartsch's (2010) audience response items were used in order to measure participants' hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences (hedonic: Cronbach's alpha = .87; eudaimonic: Cronbach's alpha = .84).

Participants' systematic versus heuristic processing of the clip were assessed with six systematic and six heuristic items of Schemer et al.'s (2008) scale. The items were slightly adapted to account for the specific context of political talk show use. In the original scale, all items are relating to a specific, overall topic. This was changed so that the items related to the specific topic of the talk show, for example, "While watching the political talk show, it was important for me to know all arguments concerning the topic in detail" (systematic; Cronbach's alpha = .86) and "While watching the political talk show, I followed the offered information only partially." (heuristic; Cronbach's alpha = .69).

Due to the fact that participants were recruited off the street, it was decided to incorporate several control variables to make sure that the groups did not differ too much on other than

the intended variables. First, we measured participants' entertainment preferences by employing the eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment motivations by Oliver and Raney (2011). Six eudaimonic and six hedonic items were used (eudaimonic; Cronbach's alpha = .71; hedonic; Cronbach's alpha = .71). Furthermore, we measured the mood of the participants by applying Bradley and Lang's (1994) Self-Assessment Manikins for the emotional state of pleasure.

We also considered political control variables; first of all, the political orientation of the participants. They were asked for which of the seven most popular political parties they would vote if the parliamentary elections for the German Bundestag were taking place on the following Sunday. Furthermore, the respondents' internal and external political efficacy was assessed through the Political Efficacy Short Scale, designed by Beierlein, Kemper, Kovalova, and Rammstedt (2012; internal efficacy, two items;  $r = .649$ ,  $p < .01$ ; external efficacy, two items;  $r = .561$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Participants' political interest was measured through the five items of Otto and Bacherle's (2011) Short Scale Political Interest (Cronbach's alpha = .93). Finally, the need for cognition of the participants was measured by applying four items from Beißert, Köhler, Rempel, and Beierlein (2014). The internal consistency of the scale was low (Cronbach's alpha = .35).

In order to control for attitudes and experiences with the talk show topic, the participants' personal relevance of the issue was assessed using one item suggested by Rössler (1997): "How important do you consider the topic of politically correct food?". To measure their attitude toward the issue, participants were asked to agree with three statements like: "My attitude towards politically correct food is positive/negative" (Roth, 2016; Cronbach's alpha = .70). Lastly, we asked them whether they had seen the clip before participating in the study. Sociodemographics (age, sex, education) completed the questionnaire.

**Participants.** One hundred and fifty participants were recruited. Three participants had to be excluded from data analyses due to problems with the procedure (e.g., one questionnaire was filled out together with another person). Fifteen participants were removed from the dataset because they had seen the political talk show before participating in the study, which could

have changed their entertainment experience. This left us with 132 participants in our final sample. It consisted of 80 females (60.6%) and 52 males (39.4%), aged 14 to 64 ( $M = 23.45$ ,  $SD = 9.72$ ). The level of education was broad, with 21.2% holding a high school degree, 15.9% a professional, and 15.9% a university degree. Due to the exclusion of cases, our groups differed slightly in size:  $n_{\text{low}} = 46$ ,  $n_{\text{medium}} = 44$ ,  $n_{\text{high}} = 42$ .

## Results

A manipulation check was conducted to analyze whether the three videos led to different hedonic entertainment experiences. We conducted two ANOVAs with polynomial trend analyses to check for differences between the groups. The results for hedonic entertainment indicated that there was only a significant linear effect in the expected direction,  $F(1, 131) = 25.570$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .165$ . The group with the least hedonically entertaining clip had the lowest hedonic entertainment experience ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), followed by the medium ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ), and the high group ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). However, Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed that only the groups with low and high hedonic entertainment video differed significantly ( $p < .05$ ) regarding their entertainment experience. This was not the case for the low and medium as well as medium and high group. Even though the results did not show a perfect manipulation (i.e., the group differences were not all significant), the overall trends in the results pointed in the right direction to continue with the analyses.

ANOVAs were conducted to check for differences between the groups regarding the assessed control variables. There were no significant results regarding mood, age, need for cognition, political interest, external political efficacy, internal political efficacy, attitudes toward the topic of the talk show, hedonic, and eudaimonic entertainment motivations (all  $F < 3.064$ ). For gender and political orientation,  $\chi^2$ -tests were conducted and did not reach significance (all  $p > .2$ ). Hence, the randomization had been successful. Also, the clips did not influence any of the control variables, pointing toward an adequate amount of similarity of their influence to establish internal validity of the manipulation.

In order to analyze the association between eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences for RQ1 and RQ2, we conducted an ANOVA with our three experimental groups and calculated polynomial trends. The eudaimonic entertainment experience was the dependent variable. The ANOVA indicated a significant linear,  $F(1, 131) = 12.656$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .089$ , and curvilinear,  $F(1, 131) = 6.137$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .045$ , effect of hedonic entertainment experience on the eudaimonic entertainment experience. As in Study 1, the curve was found to have a concave shape (see Figure 2 for a graphic display): The eudaimonic entertainment experience was highest in the medium hedonic entertainment group ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and lower in the low ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and high group ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ). However, Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that not all groups differed significantly ( $p < .05$ ) from each other. Specifically, it was not the case between the medium and high hedonic entertainment group.

These results point toward the same outcome as found in Study 1: Hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences do not seem to rise together in a linear fashion but rather in a concave-shaped curve (see Figure 2 for a graphic display).

RQ3 deals with the influence of the entertainment experiences on the information processing of the content. To check for this, we conducted an ANOVA with polynomial contrasts. The experimental groups were used as independent variable. As dependent variable, we used the indices for systematic and heuristic processing (Schemer et al., 2008). The results support the notion that processing styles are closely associated with entertainment experiences. For heuristic processing, there was only a significant curvilinear trend,  $F(1, 131) = 4.462$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .033$ . However, the curve is not shaped concave but convex (see Figure 3 for a graphic display), meaning that heuristic processing was lowest ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) in the group with the medium hedonic entertainment experience (and highest eudaimonic experiences). It was higher in the group with low hedonic entertainment experience ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) and the group with the high hedonic entertainment experience ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). However, the three groups did not differ significantly from each other in Bonferroni post

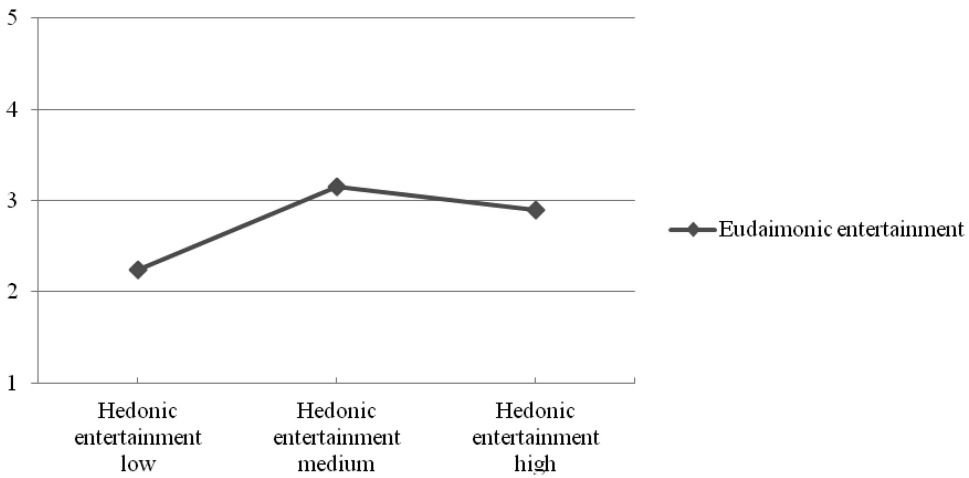


Figure 2. Graphic display of the curvilinear relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences.

hoc comparisons. Systematic processing was highest in the medium hedonic entertainment group ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) and lower in the low ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) and high hedonic entertainment experience groups ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ). Only the low hedonic entertainment group differed significantly from the others with  $p < .05$  in Bonferroni post hoc tests. The curvilinear trend, though, was nonsignificant,  $F(1, 131) = 3.203$ ,  $p = .07$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .024$  (see Figure 3 for a graphic display).

## Discussion

Study 2 further corroborated the findings of Study 1 regarding RQ1. Like in Study 1, we found a curvilinear effect: Even though the hedonic entertainment experience rose linear through all three groups, the eudaimonic entertainment experience was shaped in a concave curve. We can therefore conclude that there is not a simple linear relationship between both forms of entertainment. Moreover, they are

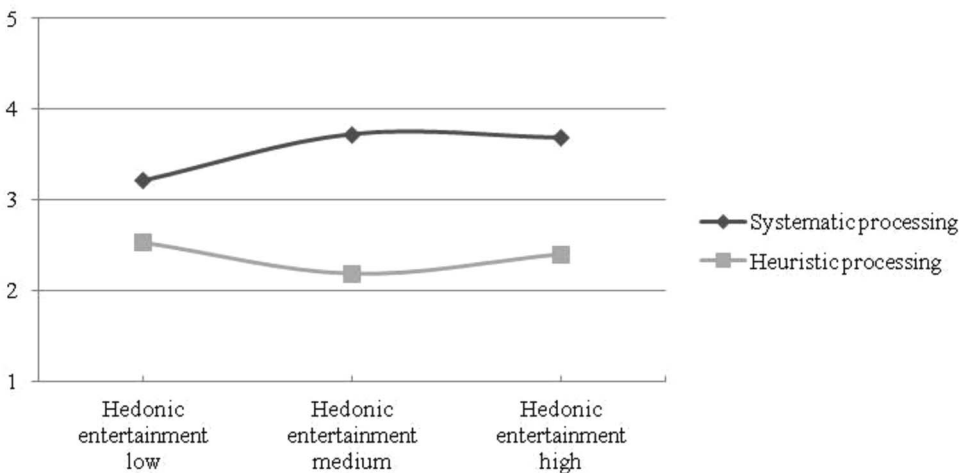


Figure 3. Graphic display of the curvilinear relationship between hedonic entertainment experience and information processing styles.

clearly not independent from each other but closely associated, at least when it comes to watching a political show on TV. This is in line with previous research on political talk shows (Roth, 2016; Roth et al., 2014).

Furthermore, due to its experimental design, Study 2 could offer some insights for RQ2: Is a hedonic entertainment experience a precondition for the formation of eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching a political talk show? Because we manipulated the hedonic entertainment experience through the jocularity and wittiness of the used clips, we can argue for a causal relationship, in which the hedonic entertainment experience presents the baseline for other entertainment forms, ergo eudaimonic entertainment experiences. This is in line with results by Waterman (1993, 2008); Waterman et al. (2008) as well as Vorderer and Ritterfeld (2009) and Roth (2016) who proposed to some extent a hierarchical entertainment model.

RQ3 was investigated to come to a clearer understanding of how the association between hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences influences information processing. The results show that processing styles overall follow a specific pattern. When the eudaimonic entertainment experience is highest the heuristic processing is lowest, whereas the systematic processing is highest. This supports previous studies that demonstrated the positive influence of eudaimonic entertainment experiences on the processing of information (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Lewis et al., 2014; Roth, 2016; Roth et al., 2014).

The most important limitations of Study 2 were threefold. For once, we had to rely on distinct clips, which were supposed to differ mainly regarding their jocularity and wittiness. We can consequently not fully disregard the possibility that we, by accident, also manipulated other factors that were confounded with the videos (e.g., argument quality that might have influenced the processing style) or did not account for factors that may also play an important role in the hedonic entertainment experience (e.g., suspense, Oliver & Bartsch, 2011). However, the clips were from a show that includes identical guests and topic. Furthermore, we discovered no significant differences between our groups for any of our control variables, hopefully accounting for the first half of this problem (confounded factors). As for the second part (missing influences on the hedonic

experience), we can only state this as one of the remaining open questions of our study.

Our second main limitation is closely tied to the first one: Our manipulation check did not illustrate perfectly similar differences between the groups on all levels. Though, the results of the manipulation checks pointed in the right direction overall. Therefore, we argue that this problem is not too central and should be dealt with in further replications of this study.

The third limitation is tied to our way of measuring entertainment and information processing. Both measures were post hoc and self-reports. Consequently, there is a possibility that our manipulation influenced the information processing first and the entertainment experiences were then affected by the different information processing styles. Our causal argument in this case mainly relies on theoretical assumptions and should, therefore, be tested empirically in the future. Another problem regarding measurement is the fact that we did not control for arousal between the groups. Studies have shown (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014) that arousal is a central influence in entertainment experiences as well as information processing; actually, it is one of the connecting elements. Not measuring arousal leaves us with one less possible explanation for our effects and should be accounted for in future studies.

## General Discussion

### Summary of the Studies' Findings

This paper tries to gain insight into how hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment processes relate to each other and how they influence information processing. Knowledge about this can—in the long run—help to understand how to design and create (politically) entertaining and similarly educating media formats and shows. The results of our two studies, a survey and an experiment, both with nonstudent samples, are at large uniform regarding their message: A low hedonic entertainment experience leads to low eudaimonic entertainment experiences, high heuristic processing, and low systematic processing. A high hedonic entertainment experience mainly leads to similar results (however, not as distinctive). A medium hedonic entertainment experience yields the highest results when it comes to eudaimonic entertain-

ment experiences as well as systematic processing. Heuristic processing is lowest in this case.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

The main strengths of our studies lie in the fact that we could replicate our results in two different studies with different methods and nonstudent samples. This enhances the robustness of our findings. However, there are several open questions based on the shortcomings of our studies. We only used one very specific format (political talk shows on TV) with one topic (regional food) to look into entertainment processes. It would be worthwhile to include other political formats and different topics in researching psychological processes behind entertainment experiences and the influence of them on information processing. This could also enhance the possible manipulation strategies for hedonic entertainment experiences. We mainly concentrated on differences in the wittiness of the content. However, other differences might be equally important (e.g., civility of the discussion, Weinmann & Vorderer, 2015, or suspense, Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011). Last, we see the necessity for future studies to incorporate measures for the outcomes of processing styles, for example, memory or attitude change, in order to improve research in the field regarding the impact of entertainment processes on political education outcomes.

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our results extend previous studies in entertainment research by proposing a curvilinear relationship between eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences as well as information processing. Furthermore, we discovered first evidence for hedonic entertainment experience as baseline and precondition for the experience of eudaimonic entertainment. Theoretically, this calls for additions to existing theories: Only by analyzing the relation and interaction between the two processes of entertainment more specifically, we can specify how they need to be defined, where they overlap, where they differ, and how they, together or individually, shape the overall entertainment experience. Positive psychology can be a worthwhile inspiration for such additions. Empirically, our results call for the implementation of more complex analytical models to be able to

detect curvilinear or cubic trends. Entertainment research (as well as most research in communication studies) uses linear models for data analyses. Maybe it is time to enhance and broaden our scope, for past, present and future data sets.

From a practical point of view, we can add insights to an ongoing debate in society as well as political communication research through our results. Overall, there sometimes seem to be two conflicting views when it comes to how political media are supposed to look like (see, Altheide, 2004; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Van Zoonen, 2005). Some argue they should be very entertaining, to motivate people with low political interest to get involved and learn something on the side. Others argue they should not be entertaining but rather serious, so that real learning is possible at all. Our data cannot support either notion. From our results we would argue (like others before us; e.g., Baum, 2005; Holbert, 2014; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Prior, 2003; Young, 2008; for an overview see Landreville & LaMarre, 2011) that some fun in political content is not necessarily a bad thing, the mixture between fun and seriousness is the important factor. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which has been argued to contain as much political humor as serious journalism (Baym, 2005; Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007), might be a prototype for such a combination. Too much fun will not lead to stronger eudaimonic entertainment experiences and more learning. Little fun, however, will not do it either. The “correct” mixture is decisive; in our studies, we see a threshold, a cutoff point, at which fun is too much of a good thing. However, until that point is reached, it should be a goal to provide hedonic entertainment experiences, that is, fun, joy, wittiness, humor. This is the main take home message regarding the creation of successful political media content: It needs to be hedonically entertaining to some point to offer other (wished for) outcomes as well.

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## Appendix

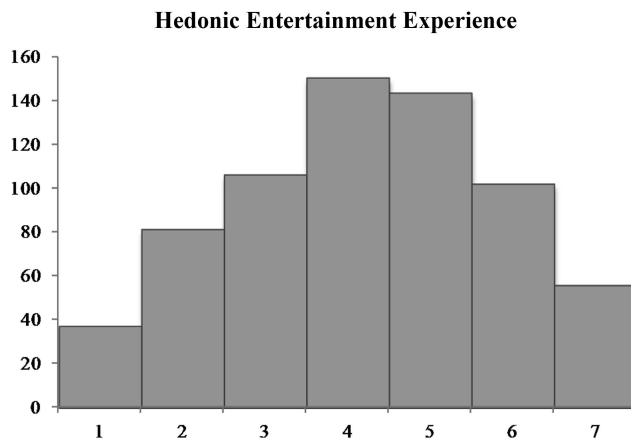
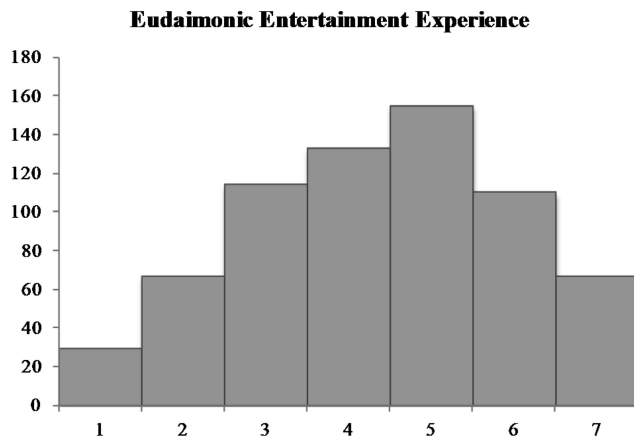


Figure A1. Histogram with distribution of the hedonic entertainment scale values across the sample.

(Appendix continues)



*Figure A2.* Histogram with distribution of the eudaimonic entertainment scale values across the sample.

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