Chapter 2
Personality Traits and Fans' Motives for Attention to Fictional Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Fans of fictional narratives are highly involved with and attentive to media texts. The present study investigated personality traits likely to influence the motivations that drive fans of fictional narratives to attend to their preferred texts and engage with other fans, drawing on Oliver and Raney's two-factor model of media enjoyment. In a survey of self-identified fans of fictional narratives or series (n = 401), respondents completed measures of the Big-5 personality traits, fan community involvement, cognitive flexibility, and hedonic and eudaimonic motives for viewing fan media content. Eudaimonic motives were associated with trait openness and cognitive flexibility. Hedonic motives were associated with conscientiousness and cognitive flexibility, but negatively associated with emotional stability.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, researchers have begun to apply empirical research tools to investigate what it means to be a fan of fictional narratives or texts. Fans of fictional narratives are those audience members whose sense of self, to at least some degree, is organized around a relationship with a text or series (Taylor, 2015, 2019); they think of themselves, or identify, as fans. This research has included investigations of the way fans engage their preferred texts, including modes of engagement centered on the text and on broader fan communities (Taylor, 2015), as well as the motives underlying those modes of engagement (Delmar, Sánchez-Martín, & Velázquez, 2018; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Fans of fictional narratives

are more likely to approach fictional narratives seeking meaningful or profound, or eudaimonic, experiences (Delmar et al., 2018), and among fans, those with stronger eudaimonic motives are more likely to participate in fan communities (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Enjoyment of the text itself, however, remains a vitally important factor driving attention to fan texts (Lee & Taylor, 2014).

Fans' tendency to (and interest in) intensely engage with texts in seeking both meaningful or profound experiences and pleasurable enjoyable experiences calls for an understanding, not merely description, of these motives. Understanding the source of these motivations becomes the next logical step. In the present chapter, we examine personality traits as predictors of eudaimonic and hedonic motives for fans' attention to fictional narratives.

Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives

Recent scholarship on entertainment motives and experiences emphasize two types of experience--hedonic and eudaimonic. Those whose entertainment media use is motivated by hedonic considerations seek (and anticipate) a positive affective response to the entertainment, often characterized as fun, enjoyment, or amusement (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Eudaimonic motives emphasize seeking meaningful experiences with or through media use; such experiences are often characterized as appreciation (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Hedonic experiences involve feeling good during media consumption, and eudaimonic experiences involve gaining insight into important questions of what it means to be human (Oliver & Raney, 2011).

Most research on eudaimonia and hedonia as motives for entertainment media use has focused on the relationship between these motives and the selection of and attention and response to the texts. For example, researchers have documented effects of motivations on film genre preferences; eudaimonic motives tend to be associated with a preference for dramatic, political, or historical films, whereas hedonic motives are more closely associated with a preference for action, comedy, or adventure films (Igartua & Barrios, 20213; Oliver & Raney, 2008); whereas someone might choose to watch the latest superhero movie from the Marvel Cinematic Universe to satisfy a hedonic motive, the same individual may gravitate toward episodes of historical social-justice series *Call the Midwife* to satisfy a eudaimonic motive. Motives affect the nature of attention to or involvement with entertainment media; hedonic motives have been shown to increase moral disengagement when viewing programs with a morally ambiguous protagonist, whereas eudaimonic motives reduce such disengagement (Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2016). Researchers have also demonstrated that eudaimonic and hedonic experiences during media use elicit different consequences after viewing. For example, eudaimonic experiences while viewing political talk shows has been shown to be associated with a sense of being informed by those shows, whereas hedonic experiences have not (Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp, & Vorderer, 2014).

Multiple studies have documented a significant relationship between eudaimonic motives and participation in fan communities (Delmar et al., 2018; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) explained the relationship they observed between eudaimonic motives for engagement with fictional narratives and participation in fan communities by speculating that they shared the same underlying drive or motive. The nature of that shared drive was unidentified. A reasonable first step in understanding this relationship may lie in identifying a factor or set of factors that underlie or predict eudaimonic and hedonic motives among fans. Personality offers a likely possibility.

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