



THE ROLE OF HABIT AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION ON ENTERTAINMENT VIDEO

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ABSTRACT

Communication research has largely sought to explore how users come to consume media. This study examines audience selection of entertainment media, in particular television program genres streamed in the online environment. By drawing from social cognitive theory, it is the aim of this study to investigate whether acts of emotional self-regulation can provide an explanation for selective exposure to media entertainment. In an experimental setting, mood management theory and social cognitive theory are pitted against each other in determining content preference under the influence of sad moods. Putting all subjects in a sad mood, and manipulating habit strengths for comedic and dramatic content, it is predicted that subjects whose emotional self-regulation is depleted will select more habitual entertainment video options than non-depleted subjects.

Keywords: Entertainment media consumption, Audience behavior, Habitual media use, Mood management, Emotional self-regulation, Online entertainment selection.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study extends prior research by examining media selection behavior in online environment. The findings of this paper indicate that habits drive selective exposure when individuals are in depleted-resource states regardless of their mood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Assessing media exposure and exploring its determinants has been at the heart of much communication research. For example, how do people make a decision of watching a comedy show rather than watching a courtroom drama? Early theories of mass media regarded media behaviors as consequences of a conscious decision-making processes or rational choice. However, contrary to premises of such deterministic approaches as Uses and Gratification theory (UG) (Palmgreen *et al.*, 1985) or Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) later empirical findings (Wood *et al.*, 2002) suggest that a considerable portion of media exposure happens as a result of automatic and uncontrolled processes, and those processes can be unique predictors of what media content people consume (Verplanken and Orbell, 2003).

Despite its expanding acceptance among media scholars, the role of media habits in determining television genre preferences has not been established experimentally. By introducing the concepts of self-regulation and habits as separate predictors on media behavior, the current study aims to clarify the distinctive roles of each on determining genre preferences for TV viewership. Getting more sense of media habits can enlighten dynamics of habits that go out of control, as in cases of excessive media use referred to as media “addictions” in the literature. By offering a Social Cognitive approach to entertainment research, this study also brings clarification to the paradoxical findings associated with mood management uses of media.

1.1. The Concept of Mood in Media Research

Examining emotional experiences in relation to media, entertainment, Zillmann and Bryant (1985) and Zillmann (1988b) proposed and tested a model of media selection governed by affective states. The assumption of this line of research is that individuals select entertainment media content to enhance or prolong positive moods and avoid negative moods (Bryant and Zillmann, 1984; Christ and Medoff, 1984; Meadowcroft and Zillmann, 1987). The term *mood* is often used ambiguously and interchangeably in the literature with other terms such as affect, emotion, emotional state, and feeling. Generally, mood is defined as a type of affect, less intense than emotions in the subjective experience, but relatively more enduring (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999) not directed at specific targets (Pieters and Van Raaij, 1988) that has direction and intensity. The assumptions of these studies were initially referred to as affect-dependent stimulus arrangement, but subsequently gained more prominence under the label of mood management theory (MMT) (Knobloch, 2006).

MMT research is typically conducted in experimental settings where opposing mood states are induced to the subjects and their preference for media are observed subsequently. It is expected that media consumers tend to make media choices based on the perceived hedonic valence of the entertainment content. In particular, MMT posits that genre choice is often comedy. According to Zillmann (2000) comedy is "a winning formula for media entertainment. More often than not, people do look for merriment by picking comedy with all its foolishness over serious, problem-laden program alternatives".

In the MMT literature, empirical examinations have not yielded convincing results in support of this assumption. The weak findings pose the most important challenge to this theory: the question of why one would ever turn to saddening or dramatic entertainment content or to media offerings that intensify a dysphoric state (Mills, 1993; Oliver, 1993; Knobloch, 2003). For example, Erber *et al.* (1996) found sad participants preferred negative media fare without trying to repair their mood using positive media stimuli. Various examples of puzzling forms of media consumption have been examined, such as media that elicit sorrow or pain, as in the example of crime dramas (Wakshlag *et al.*, 1983) fear and anxiety as in horror (Fischhoff *et al.*, 2005) or sadness as in tearjerkers or tragedy (Oliver, 1993). Strizhakova and Krmar (2007) reported nervous subjects choosing horror films and sad subjects choosing dramas, choices that would seem to enhance, rather than repair, negative moods. Others, however, found anxious individuals choosing calming entertainment content and sad individuals choosing empowering or rewarding entertainment content (Raghunathan and Corfman, 2004) which aligns more with the conventional mood management hypothesis.

To explain the paradoxical results, some researchers defended the implicit pleasing components of those genres, such as supportive family bonds, shared love, or ultimate happily-ending in tearjerkers (Oliver, 1993; Ahn, 2009) or interpreted consumption of these genres as a form of sensation-seeking (Bartsch *et al.*, 2010). From a methodical perspective, Knobloch-Westerwick (2007) argued that gender differences were the main reason for opposing mood management strategies, resulting in insignificant findings when tested uniformly. One common element of these studies were examining and evaluating post-viewing responses such as enjoyment (Tamborini *et al.*, 2010) or emphatic distress (De Wied *et al.*, 1995) leading to a need for further exploration for conditions that set up the selection behavior.

Current study aims to examine an alternative explanation, which integrates socio-cognitive processes involved in predicting media behaviors (LaRose, 2010). It is possible that expressions of enjoyment could represent *post hoc* rationalizations for media selection behavior that in fact is not the product of conscious mood management but rather non-conscious selection processes. For example, a person with a strong habit of watching crime dramas or horror movies may well be selecting products of these genres by force of habit. In other words, when one's judgments become automatic, as in the case of habits, people may react on the basis of their past behavior. Since an act that reached at a level of automaticity demands very little cognitively, it causes much less stress when compared to making thoughtful selections as in the case of active mood management. Habit performance seems to have an

insulating quality that reduces the immediacy of emotional experience (Wood *et al.*, 2002). Accordingly, when in negative mood states an individual may find relief in exerting habitual acts even though his behavior is seemingly not the most effective response to bring positive emotions. This proposition also explains some paradoxical findings in the MMT literature.

1.2. Habits and Their Role in Media Use Behavior

In social psychology, habits are defined as "learned sequences of acts that have become automatic responses to specific cues, and are functional in obtaining certain goals or end-states" (Verplanken and Aarts, 1999). Contemporary theoretical explications regard habits as cognitive knowledge structures, or so to say, "scripts" (Abelson, 1981) that exist independently from past behavior (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000; Armitage, 2007) and a self-directed process that, once started, runs by itself (Graybiel, 2008). It is this nature of habits that helps economizing on the cognitive effort and making them maintained, especially due to the comfort and ease they provide.

Media habits, defined as a form of automaticity in media consumption that develops as people repeat media behavior in stable circumstances (LaRose, 2010) have recently received interest in communication studies. For example, studies focusing on television usage (Koch, 2010 as cited in (Ouellette and Wood, 1998; Hartmann *et al.*, 2012)) found that both habits and intentions jointly predicted future behavior. In stable contexts, such as watching television, habits emerged as better predictor of future behavior than intentions. Also new evidence suggests that several media behaviors have a habitual component including but not limited to WWW usage (Limayem *et al.*, 2007) video game playing (Hartmann *et al.*, 2012; Wohn, 2012) social networking (LaRose *et al.*, 2010) and participating in an online production community (Wohn *et al.*, 2012). Despite the fact that much correlational evidence was found that can be used to support habitual media use (LaRose *et al.*, 2003; Limayem *et al.*, 2007; Hartmann *et al.*, 2012; Wohn, 2012; Wohn *et al.*, 2012) there is dearth of experimental data.

1.3. Self-Regulation, Emotional Regulation, and Ego-Depletion

The habits are likely to be triggered when self-regulation is depleted. MMT proposes that media consumption decisions are a function of emotional self-regulation. In addition to sensing their emotions, people often make judgments about their emotions, evaluate them against inner standards and in some cases engage in acts to change them, which altogether is referred to as emotional regulation. Self-regulation can be regarded as an evolutionary skill that liberates one from becoming slave of impulses and enhances living harmoniously with others in a social life. Emotional regulation is conceptualized as a heterogeneous set of cognitive processes by which emotions are self-regulated, that is to say, the way in which individuals influence how they experience and express emotions (Gross, 1998). Emotional regulation has received increased interest in mass media research over the past twenty years.

On determining behavior, the concept of self-regulation acts as the mediator of the progress from people's current state to their desired end state (Baumeister and Heatherton, 1996). Numerous studies has supported the assumption that self-regulation is a limited resource by showing that prior engagement with activities that require effortful self-regulation leads to impaired subsequent self-regulation performance (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998) a state known as *ego-depletion*. According to the limited capacity perspective of self-regulation, capacity to regulate the self and overcoming the impulses and drives draws on a common inner resource. This reservoir of regulatory resources however, is finite and prone to temporary fatigue from situational self-control demands. This phenomenon has been empirically explored typically in two steps: First, people have been asked to work on a self-regulation task, such as controlling impulses, actively focusing attention, or resisting temptations. In the second step, same subjects were measured by their performances on another task demanding self-regulation (task persistence, controlling temptations, intellectual performance). Consistent findings of studies that employed the dual task paradigm showed

that the performance of the second self-regulation task was reduced because of prior self-regulation (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998; Muraven *et al.*, 1998; Vohs and Heatherton, 2000).

1.4. The Present Study

In ego-depleted states, people tend to exert less control than they might prefer, hence, economizing on cognitive processes and acting on habitual, automatic behaviors. If one were in the habit of watching dramatic, sorrowful movies, then when ego-depleted, turning to habitual behavior would avoid further exhaustion of this limited resource. A seemingly self-defeating behavior of watching tearjerker movies when feeling sad therefore can be explained simply in terms of emotional self-regulation failures. By adapting this perspective, current study aims to test the intertwined relationships among habit, emotional self-regulation and moods on entertainment media behavior.

It is also aim of this study to address some of the methodical issues that were addressed in the previous sections. For example, to avoid the possibility that a reactive treatment might have been responsible for some MMT results, the mood induction procedure employed in this study does not include showing emotion-evoking video clips or stressful puzzle/question solving procedures. The extreme forms of affect-provoking manipulations used in some previous studies (Bryant and Zillmann, 1984; De Wied *et al.*, 1995; Knobloch-Westerwick and Alter, 2006) could intensify ego depletion by forcing individuals to struggle with their own emotions. For example, in one of the most cited experimental studies of MMT, Zillmann and Bryant (1994) put subjects into negative mood by using GRE questions, a method commonly used in experimental psychology for manipulating ego-depletion (Gailliot *et al.*, 2007; Fennis *et al.*, 2009). Such tests are regarded very complex and demanding on the executive functioning, requiring multiple cognitive processes such as encoding, memory maintenance and updating as well as multiple arithmetic operations. Going through such tests exhausts self-regulatory resources. Thus, ego depletion emerges as a potential determinant for the results of mood management research. Rather than selecting content to regulate their mood, individuals could instead be attempting to revive themselves from states of ego depletion.

The first hypothesis of this study predicts that in order to repair depleted self-regulation people will prefer comedic content regardless of their habitual strength or emotional self-regulation state. The mood-management account does not highlight the role of ego-depletion as a critical variable in affect regulation and has consequently not provided predictions comparing the impact of depleted or non-depleted states, as compared to positive or negative moods, on affect regulation. If MMT expectations are right, there should be no difference whatsoever between those who are ego-depleted and those who are not, and all subjects should prefer comedy over drama uniformly due to the hedonic valence of comedy (Zillmann, 2000). Comedies are used in the previous

H₁ Ego-depleted subjects will prefer more drama than comedy regardless of their habitual state.

Secondly, this study aims to examine the role of habits in entertainment video selection. Habits have been observed to determine wide range of media including but not limited to specific types of Internet use (Wohn *et al.*, 2012) and video game play (Hartmann *et al.*, 2012). The repetitive nature of most entertainment media exposure (e.g., television) makes habitual use an important research subject. Also, in accordance with the strength model of ego-depletion, making habitual choices is not only a result of depleted self-control but also a strategy to conserve scarce reserves or even to restore them (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000; Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). It has been previously shown that depletion of self-control resources impairs the inhibition of habits, and conversely, the inhibition of habits depletes self-regulation (Vohs *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly it is expected that regardless of the nature of the content, hedonic or a non-hedonic, as long as the media alternative is habitual and people are ego-depleted, people with strong habits are more likely to give in to the force of their habits when compared to those with weak habits. Therefore,

H₂ Ego-depleted subjects are expected to prefer habitual content to non-habitual content.

It can be expected that when emotional self-regulation is depleted, habitual content will be people's first choice, to either restore or else avoid further diminishing of self-regulatory powers. Pre-existing habits might explain why respondents often fail to select the "right" choice that would logically regulate their moods. The paradox of watching dysphoric content then may be expected to happen as a failure of emotional regulation in low habit conditions. The third hypothesis predicts an interaction effect between habit strength and emotional self-regulation; *H₃ Choices that are consistent with habits will be more frequent when emotional depletion is present than when it is absent following the induction of a sad mood.*

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from a large Western university in the United States in return for a partial course credit. A total of $N=144$ undergraduates participated in the 2(emotional regulation state: depleted vs. non-depleted) X 2(habit state: high comedic habit strength vs. high dramatic habit strength) between subjects design experiment for extra course credit. The state of emotional self-regulation and habitual preference states were independent variables and number of comedic selections out of 10 choices was the dependent variable. Of these participants, 61 (42.36%) were men and 83 (57.63%) were women. The mean age was 23.42 ($SD=5.69$) and the median was 22, ranging from 18 to 52. Mood management (Knobloch-Westerwick and Alter, 2006) and media enjoyment researchers (Sparks et al., 2005) report moderate effect sizes of .23. Cell size in a 2x2 factorial design with an estimated power of .80 and an alpha level of .05 is 38 (Cohen, 1977).

2.2. Procedure

Figure 1 presents the procedure sequence in detail. Procedures applied in this study were designed according to APA ethical standards and were IRB approved. Data was collected over a 1-month period beginning at November 2012. Subjects were randomly assigned to the conditions upon arrival at the lab, by use of Latin squares rotation of seating. Participants were unable to see each other's monitors during the sessions.

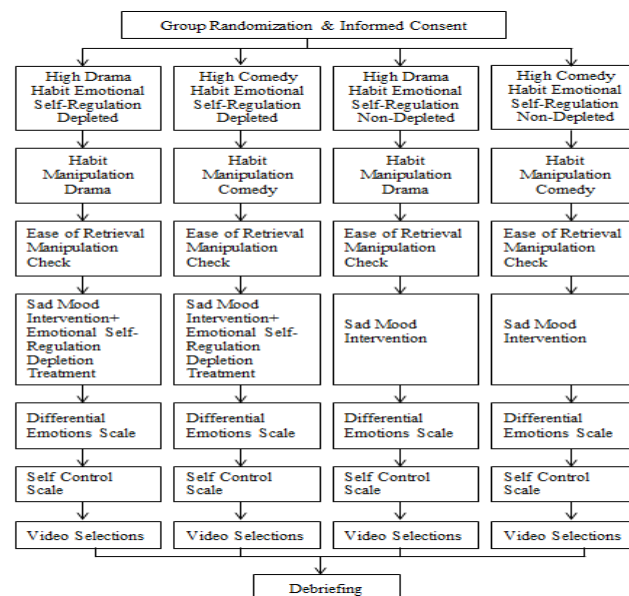


Figure-1. Graphical representation of experimental procedure

To eliminate subjective bias on the part of experimental subjects, hence to assure internal validity, subjects were told that the study was about testing an online entertainment video website. All subjects were debriefed after the completion of the experiment via e-mail.

2.3. Habit manipulation

Measuring habits by methods other than self-report questionnaires is essential since habits act on a semi-conscious level and would provide a more accurate picture. Changing past behavior is literally not possible; accordingly, manipulating one's habitual behavior in an experimental setting may seem unachievable. However, it has been argued and illustrated that in order to change *perceptions* of past behavior it is not necessary to actually change the real life experiences, simply reconstruction of one's memory is adequate (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000; Armitage, 2007). The manipulation relies on the memory phenomenon known as the "ease of retrieval" effect. When people judge their own memory, they are more likely to rely on their experienced ease of retrieval, rather than the amount of information they retrieve (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). To illustrate this, Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2000) asked participants to generate three (easy retrieval task) or eight (difficult retrieval task) instances of past bicycle use. Participants reported higher frequency of their own behavior after they had generated three examples, rather than eight examples. Eight instances of behaviors are difficult to retrieve and, consequently, individuals assume they seldom do that behavior. As a step in methodological improvement in media use literature and in the light of the evidence presented above, this study will adapt ease of retrieval as a measure for habit strength.

In this study, strength of habitual media content preference was manipulated by inducing ease of retrieval (Armitage, 2007) on comedic and dramatic genres. In the high comedy habit condition, subjects were asked to generate and type in three examples of comedic videos and then eight examples of dramatic videos they had watched recently. In the high drama habit condition, they were asked to generate three examples of dramatic videos and then eight examples of comedy.

2.4. Mood Manipulation

To ensure the MMT effects, all subjects were put in a sad mood at the beginning of the study. Several studies have shown autobiographical recollection procedure to be effective in changing mood states of individuals (Mosak and Dreikurs, 1973; Baker and Gutfreund, 1993). This manipulation included asking all participants to think about the two saddest events in their lives and take written notes. Subjects were told to expect questions regarding these events ("Approximately how old were you at the time of the first/second event?" "In what city did this happen?") upon completion of ten minutes. This was followed by an assessment of participants' perceived difficulty of concentrating on their pasts. The responses ranged from very *easy* (1) to very *difficult* (7).

2.5. Emotional Self-Regulation Manipulation

Prior research showed that suppressing emotions decreased regulation of performance over subsequent behaviors demanding regulation (Muraven *et al.*, 1998; Schmeichel, 2007). Therefore, manipulation for emotional self-regulation included instructions to hold facial expressions while concentrating on the pasts. Participants in this condition were let to believe that their facial expressions were being videotaped but actually, no video recording was made. In the emotional regulation non-depletion condition, participants were not required to repress their emotions.

2.6. Measures

Ease of retrieval was measured with the item: "How difficult did you find it to generate eight examples of you watching (comedic or dramatic, depending on the condition) media programs?" Participants responded on a 7-point scale ranging from *easy* (1) to *difficult* (7). The purpose of using ease of retrieval, as a measure for habit strength is that individuals make judgments of the likelihood of their own behaviors from the ease with which they can retrieve relevant information from their memory. Using such meta-memory beliefs as a manipulation for self-related judgments has previously been validated in the literature as a measure of habit strength (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000). The manipulation check for emotional self-regulation depletion was the Self-control Scale by Ciarrocco,

Twenge, Muraven and Tice (unpublished manuscript). The scale had six items and responses ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7), higher scores indicating less emotional self-regulation. Items included “I feel drained,” “I can feel like my willpower is gone,” “I would want to quit any difficult task I was given,” and a reverse item “I feel calm and rational”.

To measure the effectiveness of mood induction procedure, happiness and sadness sub-scales of the Differential Emotional Scale (Izard, 1977; Boyle, 1984) was used. Negative mood was measured with an additive index of items listing “sad,” “downhearted,” and “discouraged” while positive mood was measured with the summary scores on the items “happy,” “joyful,” and “delighted.” Respondents rated their feelings on a 7-point scale ranging from *not true at all* (1) to *very true* (7), in this case as of the time of the experiment.

2.7. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study was media selection behaviors and measured by the number of comedic or dramatic shows ranging from 0 to 10. A similar measure of entertainment media selection behavior was used in most MMT studies (Bryant and Zillmann, 1984). A special media interface was created for the experiment to simulate media choices made in services such as Hulu and Netflix. The interface presented 30 thumbnails and hyperlinks to three-minute clips of popular shows categorized under comedy and drama genres. Participants were asked to choose ten shows they would like to watch at that moment. The comedic options in the list were coded with 1 and dramatic options were coded as 0.

A diary study by Hill *et al.* (2010) revealed a list of shows that were rated as pleasant and happy, or unpleasant and sad. This list was incorporated with the Nielsen’s top rated 25 TV shows for populations aged 18 to 34 during March 2011 (Gorman, 2011) reported monthly at the TV by the Numbers Website (tvbythenumbers.com). Comedic content consisted of 15 feel-good or humorous TV programs such as “*Two and a Half Men*,” “*The Office*,” “*Family Guy*,” etc. Dramatic content included programs such as “*Law and Order*,” “*Criminal Minds*” “*Fringe*”, etc. To avoid ceiling effects due to presentation of the videos, the order of the dramatic and comedic shows were shifted at every fourth subject.

3. RESULTS

The final sample that underwent statistical analysis comprised of 144 undergraduate students. Data analyses were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 19.

3.1. Manipulation Checks and Randomization

The potential confounding effects of the order with which the video options were presented was tested with an independent samples t-test. Results showed that the order of the presentation of video clips; comedy options first ($M=6.06$, $SD=.96$, $N=74$) or drama options first ($M=5.61$, $SD=1.62$, $N=70$), did not produce a statistically significant effect on the number of video selections, $t(142)=-1.50$, $p>.05$ (two-tailed).

Armitage (2007) used ease of retrieval as a measure for the manipulation of judgments regarding past behaviors. This phenomenon regards self-judgments, including those related to habits, being subject to the ease with which relevant information is accessed from memory, such that people believe that they are more likely to have done certain behaviors more frequently if they remember them easily. In line with this argument, ease of retrieval task was used to manipulate habit strength. As expected, subjects in the high comedy habit condition reported greater ease ($M=3.04$, $SD=1.94$, $N=72$), with listing three instances of past comedic content watching than those were in the high drama habit condition ($M=3.76$, $SD=2.04$, $N=72$), $t(142)=2.15$, $p<.05$ (one-tailed) in which they were asked to list eight instances. Similarly, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the responses to the difficulty with listing eight comedic content examples. Results showed that participants who were asked to create eight instances of past behavior of watching comedic content (those in the high drama habit condition) found the

task significantly more difficult ($M=4.94$, $SD=1.60$) than participants who were asked to create three instances of watching comedic content (those in the high comedy habit condition) ($M=4.42$, $SD=1.86$), $t(143)=-1.80$, $p<.05$ (one-tailed).

Emotional self-regulation was manipulated in a negative manner in depleted group as intended. The Self Control Scale which had five items showed an acceptable reliability score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $M=15.78$, $SD=6.30$, $N=144$). Higher scores on the scale meant more emotional self-regulation depletion. The independent samples t-test showed that participants in the emotional self-regulation depleted condition scored higher on the emotional self-regulation scale ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.25$, $N=72$) than participants in the non-depleted condition ($M=2.98$, $SD=1.25$, $N=72$), $t(142)=1.63$, $p<.05$ (one-tailed), indicating that the manipulation for self-regulation depletion was effective. The manipulation check for emotional self-regulation also included the question "how difficult did you find it to concentrate on your past?" The scale had seven responses ranging from very easy to very difficult, and had a median score of 3.00. As expected subjects in the emotional self-regulation depletion group reported significantly higher difficulty in concentrating on their past ($M=3.65$, $SD=1.54$, $N=72$) than those who were in the non-depleted group ($M=3.07$, $SD=1.69$, $N=72$), $t(142)=2.16$, $p<0.05$ (one-tailed), $\eta^2=.03$.

To measure the effectiveness of the mood induction procedure, happiness and sadness sub-scales of the Differential Emotional Scale (DES)-IV were used (Izard, 1977; Boyle, 1984). Boyle (1984) and Akande (2002) have provided evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the DES. Reliability score of the scale was $\alpha = .80$ ($M=4.20$, $N=144$, 6 items). An additive index of the items "sad," "downhearted," "discouraged," had a mean score of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 1.00. An additive index of the happiness subscale consisted of the items "happy," "joyful," and "delighted" had a mean of 3.68 ($SD=1.74$). The responses on the negative mood measurement items and positive mood measurement items were negatively correlated ($r = -.51$, $p=.01$). This result is consistent with earlier studies that used DES as a manipulation check for mood treatment (Salovey and Birnbaum, 1989; Gross and Levenson, 1995). A one sample t-test was conducted on the negative and positive mood scores to evaluate whether their mean was significantly different from 4, the midpoint of the scale. As the mean score for negative mood was lower than the midpoint significantly $t(143) = -7.07$ $p<.05$ (one-tailed), manipulation check showed that the mood manipulation did not put all subjects in a negative mood.

3.2. Descriptive Data

Participants in this study made an average of 5.84 ($SD=0.15$) comedic choices out of 10 selections. All the participants made exactly 10 selections, no missing data was reported on the dependent variable.

3.3. Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis predicted that subjects whose emotional self-regulation had been depleted would choose comedy over drama more often than non-depleted subjects would, following the induction of a sad mood. The number of comedic preferences observed was analyzed as a function of emotional self-regulation state (depleted vs. non-depleted) in a one way between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). Opposing with H1 predictions, results of this test indicated marginally significant preference for comedic entertainment videos among those whose emotional self-regulation was not depleted, compared to the emotional self-regulation depleted group. The emotional self-regulation depleted group had an average selection of 5.63 comedy videos ($SD=1.75$, $N=72$) whereas the non-depleted group had an average of 6.05 ($SD=1.86$, $N=72$) $F(1,143)=1.93$, $p=.08$, $\eta^2=.01$.

The second hypothesis concerned with the effect of ease of retrieval and predicted that subjects with manipulated habit strength for comedic content will choose content consistent with their experimentally induced genre habits (i.e., comedy over drama) more often than those with drama habits, while those with drama habits will choose content consistent with theirs (i.e., drama over comedy). The data were consistent with this hypothesis.

Subjects in the drama habit strength group preferred significantly fewer comedic videos ($M=5.55$, $SD=1.86$) than subjects in the comedy habit strength group ($M=6.13$, $SD=1.73$), $F(1, 142)=3.79$ $p < .05$, $\eta^2=.02$

The third hypothesis of this thesis predicted the interaction effects between habit strength and emotional self-regulation state. To test this hypothesis, data were analyzed with a two-factor between subjects ANOVA. Contrary to H3 predictions however, interactions effects did not approach statistical significance $F(1, 143)=.08$ $p>.05$.

Table-1. Significances for the main and interaction effects for number of comedic choices out of ten selections $N=144$.

	M (SD)	F	Sig of F (two-tailed)
Emotional self-regulation state (depleted vs. non-depleted)	5.63 (1.75) 6.05 (1.86)	1.93	0.16
Habit strength (comedy vs. drama)	5.55 (1.86) 6.13 (1.73)	3.8	0.05*
Interaction of emotional self-regulation state by habit strength		0.08	0.78
* $p<.05$			

To ensure that those who did not get into the sad mood after the treatment did not bias the results, an additional analysis was performed on the number of comedic selections (out of 10). Specifically, those who were not in negative mood were excluded from the analysis. To determine that, an additive index of negative mood items and reversely coded positive mood items was created. Subjects who scored lower than or equal to four on that index were excluded from the analysis. The results of the two-factor between subjects ANOVA test revealed significant findings only for the habit effects when number of selections were out of 10. Subjects in the drama habit strength group preferred significantly fewer comedic videos ($M=5.38$, $SD=1.94$) than subjects in the comedy habit strength group ($M=6.15$, $SD=1.73$), $F(1, 82)=3.22$ $p < .05$ (one-tailed), $\eta^2=.03$.

Table-2. Means, standard deviations and significances for the main and interaction effects for number of comedic choices out of ten selections $N=83$.

	M(SD)	F	Sig of F (two-tailed)
Emotional self-regulation state (depleted vs. non-depleted)	5.45 (1.62) 6.00 (1.98)	1.39	0.24
Habit strength (drama vs. comedy)	5.38 (1.94) 6.15 (1.73)	3.22	0.05*
Interaction of emotional self-regulation state by habit strength		0.15	0.90
* $p<.05$			

However, two hypotheses of the study tended to receive support when the dependent variable was limited to the first three selections of the participants. MMT studies that used entertainment selection behavior as their dependent variables limited the number of selections to a few choices such as one choice (Strizhakova and Krmar, 2007) six choices (Bryant and Zillmann, 1984; Meadowcroft and Zillmann, 1987) or eight choices at most (Helregel and Weaver, 1989). An ordinal logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict number of comedic selections out of first three choices using emotional self-regulation state and habit strength state as predictors. The statistical significance of individual regression coefficients was tested using the Wald Chi-square statistic by the SPSS (Version 20) Ordinal Logistic Regression procedure. The first hypothesis predicted more comedic choices among subjects whose emotional self-regulation had been depleted following the induction of a sad mood, however, Wald's chi-square statistics did not reveal significant results supporting this hypothesis ($p>.05$). Second, it was predicted that the subjects with high comedic habit strength would make more comedic choices ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.20$, $N=33$) than those with high dramatic habit strength ($M=2.57$ $SD=1.54$, $N=28$). This hypothesis was supported, Wald's χ^2

=3.80, $p < .05$. Finally, the interaction hypothesis approached significance, such that ordinal logistic regression test revealed that choices that were consistent with habits were more frequent when emotional depletion was present than when it was absent following the induction of a sad mood Wald's $\chi^2 = 2.87$, $p = .09$. Further analysis was conducted to test the role of enjoyment in the model. A test of the full model against a constant only model was not statistically significant, (Wald's $\chi^2 = 4.13$, $p > .05$ with $df = 3$). Also, *post hoc* analyses among the subjects who reported higher scores on the negative mood scale than the midpoint (i.e., who reported being sad) revealed no significant relationships between number of comedic selections out of 10 choices, being in a sad mood ($r(81) = .06$, $p > .05$ two-tailed), or being in a happy mood ($r(81) = .02$, $p > .05$ two-tailed).

Table-3. Logistic Regression Analysis of Number of Comedic Choices out of first three selections by Emotional self-regulation state and habit strength state. $N=61$.

Predictor	β	$SE \beta$	Wald's χ^2	df	p
Emotional self-regulation state (depleted vs. non-depleted)	-0.45	0.70	0.78	1	0.38
Habit strength (drama vs. comedy)	-1.74	0.89	3.80	1	0.05*
Interaction of emotional self-regulation state by habit strength	1.83	-0.28	2.87	1	0.09
• $p < .05$					

Also an ANOVA test with emotional self-regulation state and habit strength state as two fixed factors and enjoyment as a covariate was conducted. However, enjoyment did not produce significant effect, $F(1,74) = 0.42$, $p > .05$.

Further analysis also showed that there were gender effects on the entertainment video selections. An independent samples t test results revealed that female subjects reported higher scores on the DES sadness subscale ($M=3.2$, $SD=1.61$) than male subjects ($M=2.69$, $SD=1.61$) did, $t(142) = -2.15$, $p < .05$ (one-tailed). Following the induction of a sad mood, female subjects selected ($M=6.14$, $SD=1.87$), on average, 0.52 fewer comedy videos than male subjects ($M=5.62$, $SD=1.74$), $F(1,143) = 2.94$, $p < .04$ (one-tailed), $\eta^2 = .02$.

4. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to identify relationship between habit strength and emotional self-regulation on selective entertainment video behavior as an alternative to the conventional mood management hypothesis. Habit strength for entertainment video genre and self-regulation states were manipulated under sad mood conditions.

Findings of this study suggest that habit strength has an effect on the entertainment video selection mechanism. Also, the selection behavior predicted by MMT model did not hold when habit strength is controlled. Unlike conventional MMT predictions (Zillmann and Bryant, 1994) the induction of a sad mood, however weak, did not produce a preference for comedic content ($r(142) = -.03$, $p > .05$ two-tailed). Since habit strength had a significant effect on the video selections, this may further support the conclusion that habit strength may be an alternative explanation for inconsistent and insignificant findings of the MMT. Specifically, the findings regarding preference for non-hedonic content such as tragedies or dramas might be explained by habits.

Drawing from the limited resource model of self-regulation, this study predicted that in order to restore depleted sources of emotional self-regulation subjects would prefer more comedic alternatives instead of dramatic options. However, subjects whose emotional self-regulation was depleted tended to make comedic selections less often than their non-depleted counterparts did. Therefore, instead of reviving from the depleted state, the choices they made acted in a way that supposedly prolongs those states. Variation in preference for dysphoric content can be explained by emotional self-regulation state. So regardless of the sad mood manipulation, subjects preferred negative content if they were in the ego-depleted group, but preferred comedies or positively-valenced content if they were in the non-depleted group. Another explanation can be moderating effects of self-efficacy. Studies applying moderated mediation analysis to predict self-regulation of demanding tasks indicated that self-efficacy is

among the key determinants of the interplay between cognitions and subsequent behaviors (Wiedemann *et al.*, 2009). If positive emotions lead to decreased preference for dramatic content, such effects may be observed among those who have positive perceptions regarding their self-regulation repair strategies.

Further analysis showed that there tended to be a significant negative relationship between number of comedic choices and SCS scores among those who were in negative mood states, indicating that as the resources for emotional self-regulation diminished, the preference for comedic selections increased regardless of treatment condition. This was consistent with initial predictions and suggests that the effect of depleted emotional self-regulation may be limited to those who are in a sad mood. Emotional regulation and habit strength has never been controlled in MMT studies. However, results of this study favor a habit-congruence hypothesis. Therefore, it is possible that individuals were acting on pre-existing habits than moods in previous research. This alternative explanation might be especially useful in understanding gender related behavioral differences regarding entertainment preferences. Females showed higher likelihood of getting into negative moods and an increased preference for dramas in a sad mood compared to men. Pre-existing habits in female gender for dramatic content might be stronger and hence, in sad mood may manifest themselves as preference for habit-congruent media.

The third hypothesis of this study was that there would be interaction effects between ego state and habit state so that people would select negative content when they were in an ego-depleted state and their perceived habitual genre strength was manipulated for drama. Analysis of the data did not bring support for this hypothesis for 10 video selections. However, when the subjects who remained in a positive mood despite the sad mood induction were excluded from the analysis, the hypotheses tended to be confirmed for the first three selections. The rationale for the first three selections being influenced by emotional self-regulation state, habit strength state and the interaction of both could be due the falling back to habitual selections more in emotional regulation depleted states, instead of making hedonistic selections. For example, even though comedic alternatives have a stronger likelihood to cheer up, and lighten the sad mood effects, if one is in the habit of watching dramatic entertainment, in other words if it is accessed in one's memory more easily than any other alternatives, then it is less demanding on the self-regulation. Therefore, an automatic strategy activates itself when triggered by entering the sad mood and or passing the conservation threshold for self-regulatory resources. This process might account for the so-called paradox of sad films.

One explanation for both preferences for negative content when in a state of depleted emotional self-regulation, as well as the null interaction with habit strength, might be mood intensity. The strength with which mood is felt has been shown to have a non-linear relationship with media use such that if the mood is intense enough, it can block media use completely. And if it is low it may be ignored. The literature suggests that gender differences are unlikely to occur in response to negative stimuli that are at high levels or low levels of arousal. Post hoc analysis results were in support of this view. An independent samples t test with among the subjects who scored higher than the midpoint on the arousal and sadness subscales of DES simultaneously did not reveal significant gender differences on number of comedic entertainment choices, $t(30)=1.16, p>.05$ (two-tailed). It is possible that observed results could be linked to differing levels of sad mood intensity among the subjects.

Another explanation could be previous success with mood management strategy in the past that formed media habits. This mechanism can be moderated by the past successes of such strategies that leave "traces" in the subconscious mechanisms responsible for habit formation (Zillmann, 1988a). For example, if drama helped to restore depleted states better than comedies in the past, individuals may find it more appealing as a strategy to repair diminished self-regulatory resources with tuning into that genre instead of comedies. Also, some dramas may possess restorative properties, such as the excitement of the chase in certain police dramas (e.g., *Hawaii Five-Oh*) or the sexual excitement of another type of chase in romantic drama (e.g., *Gossip Girl*). Others (e.g., *Bones*, *House*) have comedic moments of their own. The calming effects of more sedate dramatic fare might also restore self-regulatory resources.

The correlational analyses revealed that there is a substantial relationship between self-control and mood states. Self-control deficiency was negatively correlated with positive states ($r(142) = -.32$) and positively correlated with positive mood states ($r(142) = .44$). Thus, negative mood states diminish emotional self-regulation. Analyses of this study showed that there tended to be a significant negative relationship between number of comedic choices and SCS scores among those who were in negative mood states, indicating that as the resources for emotional self-regulation diminished, the preference for comedic selections increased regardless of treatment condition. This poses a rival explanation to MMT findings such that not mood, but state of self-control, explains entertainment video preferences. In emotional self-control depleted states individuals are likely to fail to perform mood-congruent behavior. They are likely to make habit-congruent selections.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

Although this study offers a model of program choice that integrates a great deal of theory and existing research, it is limited to two genres of entertainment videos. It is clear that available entertainment alternatives are far more diverse. For example, action-oriented dramas may restore depletion through exciting aspects such as car chases. Another important methodological limitation of this study was the strength of the mood and emotional self-regulation manipulations. Despite the fact that earlier studies reported success with Autobiographical Recollections Induction technique, with the participant population of this study, the impact of the treatment was not as strong as it was intended. This might have had a negative impact on the findings. In fact, when further analysis was conducted with the subjects who reported being in negative mood states after the mood induction, the findings were in line with the hypotheses of this study. So replication of the study with stronger mood induction procedures is needed.

Age appears as an important factor in determining mood specific entertainment behavior (Mares and Cantor, 1992) however the variation in age in this sample did not allow for meaningful age comparisons. Analysis of different age groups, therefore, may provide more in depth explanation. Also, following most MMT research this study recruited participants from among college students and it should be noted that college students might differ in their media diet and mood regulating strategies from non-college populations.

It can also be argued that the ease of retrieval method may not be a valid manipulation of habit. It has been discussed that it manipulates perceived frequency of past behavior, which is highly correlated to, but not the same as habit strength, a controversial topic in habit research (Ajzen, 2002). Frequency of past behavior is part of the habit concept but it does not capture the mental construct of habit, especially the automaticity dimension (Verplanken, 2006) or efficiency. However, retrospective inquiries regarding frequency of our own actions are valuable sources of information when guidance for future behavior is needed (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000). Self-related judgments, such as which program types we like and dislike, rely on such meta-cognitions. Moreover, habit is a psychological construct that guides future behavior using such self-judgments as its basis (Verplanken and Orbell, 2003). Nonetheless, it is necessary to further explicate the alternative ways of measuring and manipulating habit strength.

Despite the limitations, this study presented findings that call into question basic assumptions and previous findings in the mood management literature. In the present study, negative moods did not result in hedonistic (or comedic) choices. By integrating self-regulation and habit, this study addressed the conflicting findings in preferences for sad media content. It proposes a nuanced model of mood-activated media choice that deserves further examination.

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