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Self-expression in contemporary digital culture

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CHAPTER FOUR

Emotional Outcomes of Sharing Emotions Online: Feeling Better or Feeling Worse

The current study pursued the question of whether the expression of emotions, when shared on social media, subsequently intensifies (i.e., intensification effect) or reduces (i.e., fading effect) these emotions. Furthermore, we sought to understand the extent to which the magnitude of these emotion outcomes was related to expressing oneself in a public (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) or a private (WhatsApp) social media setting. Our survey data ($N = 1,201$; $M = 19.2$ years, 51.2% female) showed that positive emotion expressions (i.e., joy and pride) intensified positive emotions. By contrast, negative emotion expressions (i.e., sadness, anger, disappointment and worry) reduced negative emotions when shared on social media. Moreover, the intensification effect for positive emotion expression occurred in both public and private social media settings, while the fading effects for negative emotions were stronger in private than in public social media settings.

Social media platforms provide an important outlet for emotional expressivity in the current digital age. Expressions of emotion include the verbalizing and sharing of one's positive and negative thoughts, feelings and experiences. The literature has consistently asserted that doing so may lead to beneficial 'self-effects'; that is, the effects of crafting and sharing personal messages on the message crafter or sender him or herself (Valkenburg, 2017). The popular belief holds that sharing positive emotional experiences with others maximizes one's positive feelings (i.e., an intensification effect), whilst sharing negative emotional experiences with others may subsequently lessen one's negative feelings leading to a fading effect (e.g., Rimé, 2009; Skowronski, Gibbons, Vogl, & Walker, 2004). However, little research has examined these self-effects of emotion expression within the context of social media. Social media may boost more frequent and more prominent self-effects compared to offline settings due to their social sharing contexts; specifically, social media platforms may spur more frequent self-expressions which are available to a wider and more varied audience (Valkenburg, 2017).

In a social sharing context, socio-affective benefits and cognitive reappraisal are reasoned to evince an intensification effect for positive emotion expression and a fading effect for negative emotion expression (e.g., Nils & Rimé, 2012). The socio-affective benefits (i.e., attention, affection, and support) that one gains in the sharing process may bring further joy when receiving enthusiastic and validating feedback after positive emotion expressions. Likewise, comforting feedback from others can help to reduce distress resulting from negative experiences. The sharing process may also elicit a cognitive reappraisal of the emotional experience, which may subsequently enhance the personal significance of a positive event as well as foster reinterpretation of a negative event (Reis et al., 2010; Rimé, 2009). Social media offer numerous yet novel ways to fulfill these socio-affective and cognitive needs, and may therefore elicit similar intensification and fading effects. However, to fully grasp the consequences of emotion expression on social media, differences between public and private social media settings need to be taken into account. After all, users are able to reach a larger and diverse audience on public social media platforms, while private social media platforms facilitate more intimate and in-depth responses. These public and private social sharing contexts may prompt different self-effects due to differences in the socio-affective and cognitive benefits they offer, and merit further examination.

The current study intends to assess the extent to which the expressions of specific positive (i.e., joy and pride) and negative emotions (i.e., sadness, anger, disappointment, and worry) are associated with either a fading or an intensification of the specific emotion experienced afterwards. The first objective is to establish whether the effects that have been found in offline contexts can be extended to social media. The second objective is to understand whether differences occur when emotions are expressed in public (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) or private (i.e., WhatsApp) social media settings.

Emotion Expression and the Potential Benefits of Sharing

It has been readily established that emotion-eliciting experiences trigger people to express and share their emotions with others (Rimé, 2009). As evident from social support literature, individuals typically seek support from others when distressing events occur in order to cope and reduce that distress (e.g., Stroebe, Stroebe, Abakoumkin, & Schut, 1996). By contrast, the sharing of good news or positive experiences is likely motivated by maintaining the pleasant feelings of the experience and by gaining positive validation from others (e.g., Reis et al., 2010). The internet is replete with expressions of emotions, often verbalized in a more explicit manner than face-to-face-settings allow for (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008). As argued by Derks et al. (2008), online settings evoke a sense of 'safety' in expressing emotions due to the lack of non-verbal information and higher levels of control over what one shares, when, and to whom. Due to their social and conversational structures, social media additionally allow for support and affirmation from others through commenting and validation features (e.g., like-buttons) whilst being able to reach a large and varied number of people (Trepte, Dienlin, & Reinecke, 2015). The immediacy with which one can post and share messages with others further adds to the instantaneous manner with which one can obtain such social feedback on social media (e.g., Cui, 2016; Trepte et al., 2015). Social media overall encourage emotion expressions by providing such opportunities for fulfilling the social needs that arise when emotions are shared with others.

A considerable body of research has addressed the question of whether it is beneficial to the self to share positive or negative emotions with others in face-to-face settings (e.g., Rimé, 2009). Much of this research was inspired by the expressive writing paradigm, which focused on the consequences of writing

down one's thoughts and feelings about distressing or traumatic emotional events (e.g., Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). This writing task essentially reactivates the emotional experience, after which participants are encouraged to actively reflect on this experience. Doing so helps individuals to first acknowledge the emotional experiences and subsequently better comprehend and reduce its impact on the self through cognitive reappraisal, the so-called 'venting hypothesis' (e.g., Nils & Rimé, 2012; Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). Expressive writing research has since evolved to include the process of socially sharing one's emotional experiences and the potential consequences this may have (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001). The social sharing of emotion framework posits that individuals have an inherent tendency to share their emotional experiences with others to deal with the outcomes of these emotions. This social sharing, in turn, can have beneficial self-effects as well as stimulate social bonding (Rimé, 2009).

In terms of beneficial self-effect of socially sharing one's emotions, Nils and Rimé (2012) have suggested that either socio-affective or cognitive benefits need to be obtained. As mentioned above, the main reason for people to seek contact with others to talk about emotions is to obtain certain responses. Socio-affective responses may serve to help another through attentive listening and verbalizing support or comfort. Receiving such responses, in turn, provides the attention, affection, or support that one needs to savor the experience or facilitate relief (Nils & Rimé, 2012). Another type of response that one may obtain is cognitive. Listeners may offer advice or a different perspective on the experience that triggered the emotion, which may elicit reflection and cognitive reappraisal (Nils & Rimé, 2012). This cognitive benefit corresponds to the 'cognitive effort' that, within the expressive writing paradigm, participants are encouraged to invest in order to minimize the experienced emotional intensity of an event.

In light of these benefits, the sharing of negative emotions is commonly believed to bring relief and consequently dampen the negative affect one experiences. Specifically, talking about a negative emotional experience may at first reactivate the negative affect, but the socio-affective benefits from being listened to may help reduce the distressing feeling (e.g., Afifi, Shahnazi, Coveleski, Davis, & Merrill, 2017; Albrecht, Burlison, Brant, & Goldsmith, 1994) and foster temporary relief (Nils & Rimé, 2012). However, to further accelerate and dissolve the negative emotions associated with the event, cognitive reappraisal is necessary, as Nils and

Rimé (2012) have pointed out. Hence, when listeners lend the support that elicits reflection and reframing of the negative experience, the benefits are argued to shift from temporary relief to complete recovery. Other research has highlighted that unpleasant feelings associated with a negative emotional experience faded more strongly as a result of frequent disclosure in group settings (Skowronski et al., 2004). Given that social media generally allow for (concurrent) support from multiple people, it therefore seems reasonable to expect a fading effect to occur when negative emotions are expressed.

While the expression of negative emotions can minimize negative emotions when socially shared, the sharing of positive emotions with others is generally reasoned to intensify one's positive feelings. The socio-affective benefits gained through social sharing offer a stronger impact in preserving and boosting one's positive affect (Reis et al., 2010). Verbalizing one's positive emotional experiences reactivates the positive feelings about a given event, which may be subsequently reinforced by obtaining positive feedback. Specifically, socio-affective responses may validate the positive experience and legitimize the experienced positive affect (Rimé, 2009). Research on capitalization supports this benefit of telling others about one's positive emotional experiences, emphasizing that savoring a positive experience and receiving validation are important motivators for why people are driven to express and share positive emotions (Langston, 1994). This beneficial intensification effect of sharing, rather than merely verbalizing, one's positive emotions is further supported by Skowronski et al. (2004), who concluded that pleasant feelings are more likely to be enhanced after disclosing positive emotions to an audience. Hence, expressing positive emotions on social media likely elicits an intensification effect as one is able to reach multiple others.

Socio-affective and cognitive reappraising responses are thus important for beneficial self-effects, both for positive and negative emotion expressions. In case these benefits are not obtained, negative emotions may resurface and intensify while positive emotions may fade (e.g., Rimé, 2009). Nevertheless, the intensification effect for positive emotion expression and the fading effect for negative emotion may likely extend to social media. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of these self-effects, we focus on specific emotion expressions that are common across social media platforms (i.e., joy, pride, sadness, anger, disappointment, and worry). Taken together, we expected the following:

H1: Positive emotion expressions (i.e., joy and pride) on social media will lead to higher ratings of positive emotion experienced afterwards (i.e., intensification)

H2: Negative emotion expressions (i.e., sadness, anger, disappointment and worry) on social media will lead to lower ratings of negative emotion experienced afterwards (i.e., fading)

Public versus Private Expressions of Emotions

An important distinction that characterizes different social media platforms is that of public versus private settings. Here, public can be described as the potential to reach a larger scale of people, enabling broader distribution and greater visibility of one's message as facilitated by the platform (boyd, 2011). Platforms characterized by networked technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, generally offer this type of publicness. Compared to offline conceptualizations of 'publicness', social media add more layers to public expressions by bringing together multiple and diverse audiences into one setting (Baym & boyd, 2012). Platforms and features focused on instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, represent a more private social media setting. In this sense, private refers to restricted visibility, as platforms such as WhatsApp facilitate interactions with a single or few individuals without the possibility for others to view its contents (Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016).

Research has shown that individuals adjust their behavior and expressions based on differences between private and public social media (e.g., Bazarova, Choi, Sosik, Cosley, & Whitlock, 2015; Choi & Toma, 2014; Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Lin, Tov, & Qiu, 2014). For instance, in private Facebook messages people tend to share more intense as well as less positive emotions compared to Facebook's public features (Bazarova et al., 2015). These differences between private and public settings are often linked to self-expression motives, such as information sharing or relational development (e.g., Bazarova & Choi, 2014). Research has shown that private platforms are more likely used to interact with close ties, and in turn foster more intimate interactions and greater perceived intimacy (e.g., Hu, Wood, Smith, & Westbrook, 2004). Normative perceptions have also been found to vary across public and private platforms, in that negative emotion expressions are generally

considered less appropriate on public social media platforms compared to private social media platforms (e.g., Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2017). Overall, people seem to take to different social media for certain expressions or interactions, based on the public or private social sharing context that platforms offer. However, comparative research between public and private social media platforms is still limited.

One claim that has been put forward is that public social media settings may strengthen self-effects in online settings (e.g., Valkenburg, 2017). While both public and private settings allow for socio-affective and cognitive benefits in the process of composing and sharing self-expressions, public settings may offer more socio-affective benefits due to the greater number of people one is able to reach. Related research on selective self-presentation found individuals to achieve a self-concept change in a public online setting while a private mediated setting did not evoke such self-effect (e.g., Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). This effect was reasoned to result from an activation of self-concept because public settings evoke a feeling of accountability for one's expressions, termed 'public commitment' (Tice, 1992). For the expression of emotions, however, beneficial self-effects may be better explained by receiving social feedback than by public commitment. A study on emotion expression has found individuals to report, overall, to experience satisfaction when sharing positive emotional experiences in both public and private Facebook channels (Bazarova et al., 2015). Sharing personally relevant emotions were found to lead to greater reported satisfaction in a public setting compared to a private setting. To explain this, the authors suggest that the number of received comments appeared to play an important role in subsequent satisfaction. Theoretically, the intensification effect for sharing positive emotions mainly depends on socio-affective benefits (Reis et al., 2010), which public social media platforms offer more of in the form of comments and likes. Consequently, public social media settings may more likely strengthen the intensification of positive emotion compared to private social media settings.

Based on the reasoning that private settings allow for more intimate and in-depth conversation, beneficial emotional outcomes for negative emotion expression are more likely to be obtained in private social media settings. As Nils and Rimé (2012) argue, for negative affect to effectively be reduced in a social sharing context, the cognitive benefits one can obtain likely outweigh the benefits one can obtain from

merely fulfilling socio-affective needs. Instant messaging platforms have been argued to allow for a connected presence with close others in a more synchronous manner, and therefore present an outlet for seeking and providing timely support and advice in times of difficulty (Cui, 2016). Research has, furthermore, indicated that these private types of interactions offer more emotional engagement, as they are often used for the sharing of emotional and intimate content (e.g., Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). From that perspective, in private social media settings individuals are more likely to receive specific advice and support for reflective thought from specific friends, which may elicit cognitive reappraisal of the negative emotional event. Compared to public social media settings, the fading effect for negative emotion expression is likely amplified in a private social media setting. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H3: The expected intensification effect for positive emotion expression will be stronger in public social media settings compared to a private setting

H4: The expected fading effect for negative emotion expression will be stronger in a private setting compared to public social media settings

Method

Sample and Procedure

As part of a larger research project, a professional research company collected survey data among 1,201 young individuals in March 2016 in line with institutional ethical procedures. The sample consisted of 591 late adolescents (15-18 years) and 610 emerging adults (19-25 years). In terms of gender, 48.8% of the full sample was male, and 51.2% was female. After individual as well as parental consent for those under the age of 18 years was obtained, participants completed the survey for which they received monetary compensation in keeping with the research company's guidelines.

Participants were first asked to indicate which social media platforms they had used at least once in the month prior to the survey, to allow for subsequent filtering of questions related to each of the four platforms of interest (Facebook, $n = 1060$;

Twitter, $n = 416$; Instagram, $n = 655$; and WhatsApp, $n = 1083$). Order-effects were accounted for by randomizing the order in which platform-specific questions were presented.

Measures

Emotion self-effect

To assess self-reported intensification or fading of emotions after posting a specific emotion expression, participants were first asked to indicate the frequency with which they shared each emotion expression for every platform in use. The specific emotion expressions included sadness, anger, disappointment, worry, joy, and pride. Participants who indicated to never post a specific emotion expression were not presented with this measure for that particular emotion expression (attrition rate ranged from 41% to 2%, which equals 432 and 18 participants respectively). For those who indicated to have posted specific emotion expressions, two items were presented to measure self-reported intensification or fading of emotion for each of the emotion expressions of interest. That is, participants were asked to report how often they felt less (item 1) or more (item 2) of the emotion after having posted the emotion expression on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). As an example, the measures for sadness were presented as follows: "After you've posted/sent something that made you sad on [platform], how often do you feel less and/or more sad after having done so?", with subsequent items "I've felt less sad" and "I've felt more sad".

Public versus private

The measures for emotion self-effects were used for each of the four platforms, which totaled to 12 items per platform and 48 items for four platforms. Given that the responses per platform provided within-subjects data, the dataset was restructured to a long format to allow for differentiation of responses between public and private expressions of emotion. Hence, a variable was created to represent public (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) versus private (i.e., WhatsApp) emotion expression, for which responses on the items for 'more' and 'less' felt emotions after expression were maintained. Doing so allowed for repeated measures analyses in the linear mixed modeling function using SPSS.

Age and gender

Participants were asked to indicate their age through an open-ended response format. This continuous variable was subsequently transformed into a dummy variable, reflecting the age category corresponding to the age ranges of late adolescents (15 to 18 years; coded as 0) and emerging adults (19 to 25 years; coded as 1). In addition, participants were asked whether they are male or female. Both age and gender were considered as control variables in the tested models.

Analyses

Mixed modeling was opted for as it effectively handles missing data, since subjects with missing data points are not removed from the analyses (e.g., Bageella et al., 2000). In addition, the mixed models approach allows for fitting specific covariance structures to the data. For the purpose of this study compound symmetry was selected, which treats all variances as approximately equal and all covariances as approximately equal (Bageella et al., 2000). This structure is commonly used if there is no logical ordering to the observations, which applies to the current data. Models were tested under Maximum Likelihood estimation. The Bonferroni adjustment was applied to all models to account for multiple testing (Westfall, Johnson, & Utts, 1997).

The variable representing emotion self-effect, as in more and less emotion felt after emotion expression, was included as a repeated factor (two levels), as was the public and private emotion expression variable (two levels). In doing so, we were able to assess whether more and less felt emotion that participants reported on significantly differed from each other for each emotion expressed. In addition, it allowed for modeling these differences between responses for public and private platforms. These mixed models were run for each of the six emotion expressions separately.

Results

Intensification or Fading of Emotion Expressed

To test Hypothesis 1, which stated that the expression of positive emotion would lead to higher positive emotion experienced afterwards (i.e., intensification) than

lower experienced positive emotion, mixed models were run for the emotions of joy and pride. For joy, the results indicated that participants reported to significantly feel more joy ($M = 3.18$, $SE = .02$) than less joy ($M = 2.13$, $SE = .02$) after expressing joy on social media in general, $t(3090) = -41.03$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants reported to significantly feel more pride ($M = 3.12$, $SE = .02$) than less pride ($M = 2.12$, $SE = .02$) after sharing something they felt proud of, $t(3032) = -39.24$, $p < .001$. These results agree with the general expectation of intensification of positive emotions, and are thus in support of Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 focused on negative emotion expression, with the expectation that it would lead to lower negative emotion experienced afterwards (i.e., fading) than higher experienced negative emotion. The results for sadness revealed that participants reported to significantly feel less sad ($M = 2.77$, $SE = .02$) than more sad ($M = 2.35$, $SE = .02$) after expressing something that made them sad on social media in general, $t(2281) = 16.47$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants reported to significantly feel less anger ($M = 2.73$, $SE = .02$) than more anger ($M = 2.40$, $SE = .02$) after sharing something they felt angry about, $t(2357) = 13.26$, $p < .001$. For disappointment, results showed again that participants felt significantly less disappointed ($M = 2.64$, $SE = .02$) than more disappointed ($M = 2.35$, $SE = .02$), $t(2345) = 12.49$, $p < .001$. Finally, participants reported to feel significantly less worried ($M = 2.71$, $SE = .02$) than more worried ($M = 2.39$, $SE = .02$) after expressing something on social media that made them worry, $t(2370) = 13.00$, $p < .001$. Overall, these findings evidence a fading of negative emotions felt after expressing negative emotional experiences on social media, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Public versus Private Expressions of Emotions

To further understand the extent to which intensification or fading effects occur after the expression of emotion on social media, differences between public and private social media platforms were examined by looking at the interaction of both repeated factors (emotion self-effect; public vs. private). Given the pattern that resulted from the specific emotions self-effects as reported above, two variables were created to represent the mean of negative emotions all together as well as for both positive emotions in order to test the third and fourth hypotheses. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the expected intensification for positive emotion expression would be stronger in public social media settings compared to a private setting.

In contrast, Hypothesis 4 posited that the expected fading for negative emotion expression would be stronger in a private setting compared to public social media settings.

For positive emotion expressions, the omnibus test of fixed effects revealed a non-significant interaction of the repeated factors ($F(1, 3118) = 1.68, p = .194$), indicating that the intensification for positive emotion expression was similar across public and private social media settings. Pairwise comparisons, however, revealed significant differences. These comparisons showed that participants reported to feel more positive emotions after sharing positive emotions in a private social media setting ($M = 3.27, SE = .03$) compared to public social media settings ($M = 3.02, SE = .03$), $F(1, 3273) = 54.89, p < .001$. However, self-reports revealed the same difference for less positive emotions experienced, in that participants reported to also feel less positive emotions after sharing positive emotions in a private social media setting ($M = 2.21, SE = .03$) compared to a public setting ($M = 2.02, SE = .03$), $F(1, 3273) = 31.31, p < .001$. While self-reports were thus higher in the private social media setting, the difference between reports on more and less positive emotions experienced remained similar in the public social media settings. This pattern contradicted our expectation, and as such Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

The omnibus test of fixed effects did reveal a significant interaction of the repeated factor for negative emotion expressions ($F(1, 2562) = 26.32, p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants reported to have felt more negative emotions after expressing negative emotions in a private social media setting ($M = 2.46, SE = .03$) than they did in public social media settings ($M = 2.24, SE = .03$), $F(1, 2806) = 54.17, p < .001$. However, self-reports for experiencing less negative emotions were much higher in a private social media setting ($M = 2.88, SE = .03$) compared to public social media settings ($M = 2.46, SE = .03$), $F(1, 2806) = 205.23, p < .001$. Hence, while a fading effect emerged in both public and private social media settings, the self-reported fading appeared greater in a private setting. Hypothesis 4 was therefore supported. To control for potential individual variations, we additionally tested for the influence of age and gender. No main effects were found for these variables when included in the models as covariates. As such, the above reported findings seem independent of age and gender.

Discussion

Previous works on expressive writing (Pennebaker, 1997) and the social sharing of emotion (Rimé, 2009) have brought attention to the potential benefits of expressing and sharing one's emotional experiences. Across online settings, manifestations of emotion expressions have been well-documented (Bazarova et al., 2015; Derks et al., 2008) yet the consequences for senders are relatively understudied. To that end, the current study addressed the extent to which intensification and fading of positive and negative emotions were experienced after emotion expressions on social media. A second goal was to establish whether there would be different outcomes between public and private social media platform. This allowed for a better understanding of emotion self-effects within the different social contexts that social media generate.

The data generally indicated that, for the expression of negative emotions, participants felt less negative emotions afterwards. Conversely, participants felt more positive after expressing positive emotions. Based on this, it seems that an intensification effect persists for expressing positive emotions and a fading effect occurs for expressing negative emotions on social media. The intensification of positive emotions is consistent with expectations, further supporting the idea of capitalization that has previously been put forward in research on emotion expressions (Reis et al., 2010). Likewise, the finding for negative emotion expression supports the notion that sharing negative emotions with others on social media may reduce the negative affect resulting from the experiences that elicited them (Nils & Rimé, 2012; Skowronski et al., 2004). Accordingly, the beneficial self-effects of emotion expression that have been found in face-to-face settings can also be obtained through social media.

The results furthermore confirmed a stronger fading effect for negative emotions in private compared to public settings. Self-effects have previously been argued to become stronger in public settings (Valkenburg, 2017). For stronger fading effects to occur after negative emotion expressions, however, it seems that private settings facilitate the needed socio-affective and cognitive benefits more effectively. That is, private platforms generally allow for more intimate and in-depth support (Cui, 2016), which may help to reflect on the negative emotional experience and as such facilitate cognitive reappraisal.

The findings for positive emotion expression indicate that an intensification effect occurs approximately equally in both public and private settings. Public settings were expected to cultivate a stronger intensification of positive emotions, due to the greater amount of feedback one could obtain. However, the current finding seems in line with the study by Bazarova et al. (2015) who found greater satisfaction after sharing positive emotional experiences regardless of being expressed in public or private Facebook contexts. The socio-affective benefits that are important to evoke intensification effects thus seem to be achieved in both public and private social media settings. Overall, these findings indicate that the extent to which beneficial outcomes may be obtained depend on the social media platform one chooses for expressions of emotion, especially negative emotions.

Contributions and Implications

Our findings point toward beneficial outcomes of expressing emotions within social media settings, and thereby limn a positive perspective on sharing personal self-related information online. The benefits of expressing emotions online seemingly outweigh the potential costs, which, though tentatively, may explain why people are drawn to sharing their emotions in a variety of social media settings. Social media have been marked to reflect a positivity bias, in that individuals tend to express themselves more positively than negatively (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). While in part due to the positivity norms that have been found to reign on social media platforms (Waterloo et al., 2017), the maximization of positive affect may additionally explain the tendency to engage in such selective self-presentation on public social media platforms. The current findings offer new insights into the possible consequences of such selective self-expressions online. The challenge for future research is to further disentangle the mechanisms that lead up to the beneficial outcomes as a result of these expressions.

As stressed by Valkenburg (2017), self-effects do not occur in isolation within social media settings. Individuals are both senders and receivers of messages in a dynamic and simultaneous manner. Theoretically, responses that facilitate socio-affective and cognitive benefits play a decisive role in how senders feel after expressing themselves via social media. Receiving comments and feedback on one's emotion expression appears to facilitate intensification or fading effects, albeit that such effects may strongly depend on the nature of responses and from

whom these responses are obtained (e.g., Greitemeyer, Mügge, & Bollermann, 2014; Rains & Brunner, 2015). To that end, research would gain from more insights into the impact of socio-affective, cognitive reappraising, or even dismissive feedback on emotional self-effects across different social media platforms. Likewise, the emotional experiences one expresses online may conceivably transfer to offline conversations (e.g., Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013), potentially fostering more long-term effects on well-being. To gain a full perspective on the underlying mechanisms of intensification and fading effects, both the online and offline sharing of emotions need to be carefully and conjointly considered.

The findings on public versus private social media settings further inform us on how different social sharing contexts online may affect the potential outcomes of emotion expression. Previous research on cognitive self-effects (*viz.*, self-concept change) found public settings to result in stronger self-effects based on the logic of public commitment (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). The current study found private settings to enhance the self-effect of negative emotion expression, while the magnitude of the intensification effect for positive emotion expression did not differ between public and private social media settings. These findings tentatively question the explanation for self-effects online to be generally rooted in the idea of public commitment, at least for the expression of emotions. Accordingly, the explanation of self-effects and their strength seemingly depend on the specific type of self-expression involved. To gain a more nuanced perspective on the intricate workings of self-effects, it is of interest to further examine the personal consequences of different types of self-expressions across different social media settings, and further assess other explanations that underlie these (e.g., perceived opportunity for emotion-regulation, see Cheung, Gardner, & Anderson, 2015).

In addition, socially mediated publicness is not a simple dichotomous distinction between public and private, but rather a degree of publicness complicated by differences in audience size and composition (Baym & boyd, 2012). Further understanding the influence of public online settings on interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences requires consideration of these audience differences. Notably, current social media platforms allow their users to actively adjust the privacy settings of their messages, which could further influence the perception of the 'imagined audience' and subsequent self-effects. Further research may aim to explore how self-effects on cognition, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors manifest

themselves online, taking these complexities of audiences, and hence message visibility, into account.

In the current study, we relied on retrospective self-reports to gain an initial sense of whether the beneficial self-effects of offline self-expressions may extend to social media. Although experimental designs may have a higher internal validity than our survey results, experimental designs on emotional self-expressions have also been criticized. Pennebaker and Chung (2011) for example note that “forcing individuals to write about a particular topic or in a particular way may cause them to focus on the writing itself rather than the topic and the role of their emotions in the overall story” (p.423), which could lead to unreliable and invalid results. As such, relying on retrospective self-reports may provide insights into what users themselves perceive to happen after different emotion expressions, which in the end may have uncovered more authentic responses. Future research could strive to triangulate the results from experimental designs with self-reports and action log data to better discern the intrapersonal mechanisms that are at play during and after the sharing of emotions on social media. Given the ubiquity of emotional expressivity online, further understanding when and how self-effects of emotion expression occur in online environments is imperative for researchers who are interested in the dynamics of current interpersonal and mass communication processes.

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