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# Paths to Transformation Across Contemporary Reading Practices: The Role of Motivations and Genre Preferences

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Transformative effects of reading, in terms of shifts in self-understanding and enhanced social cognition, have been the topic of a variety of theoretical and empirical studies recently (cf. Fialho, 2019; Kuiken & Sopčák, 2021). However, most studies on this topic focus on print (and literary) fiction, thus ignoring the multifaceted, transmedial reading practices of the digital era. The present study tackles this gap in research with a systematic comparison between readers of books (in print and e-books) and two digital-born reading practices: digital fiction (e.g., interactive fiction, hypertext) and Wattpad (the most popular digital storytelling platform), in which we tried to answer the question whether why we read and what we read leads to perceived transformative effects. An online survey measured participant's ( $N = 814$ ) eudaimonic and hedonic motivations for reading (Oliver & Raney, 2011), their genre preferences (M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2020) and whether a reader felt that they read a text, in the last 2 years, that left a lasting impact on them. Our study shows that eudaimonic motivations lead to perceived transformation for the book condition, and to a lesser extent for the digital fiction condition, but not for the Wattpad condition. Furthermore, engaging frequently with drama, further described to our participants as referring to texts with a focus "on character's inner lives and psychological insight," seems to be the main predictor of perceived transformation across groups. Overall, the present study gave us a more nuanced picture of what leads to transformative reading experiences in the digital era.

*Keywords:* perceived transformative effects, genre preferences, eudaimonic and hedonic motivations, digital fiction, Wattpad

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The core assumption of this study is that why we read and what we read are related to how reading affects our lives. A growing body of research focuses on the transformative effects of reading fiction (Fialho, 2019; Tangerås, 2020), often articulating these effects in terms of self-modifying feelings or self-altering experiences (Kuiken & Sopčák, 2021). Several findings indicate that reading fiction can lead to shifts in self-understanding (Djickic & Oatley, 2014; Sikora et al., 2011; Tangerås, 2020) and enhanced social cognition (Eekhof et al., 2022; Kidd & Castano, 2013), i.e., it deepens the perception of both self and others. However, if one considers the media ecology of current reading practices, empirical research on transformative effects of reading and the conditions under which it occurs has so far only focused on a limited section of the reading phenomenon. We read in a digital era, but transformative effects are almost

exclusively investigated within print fiction, and more specifically within literary print fiction. This approach is partly due to a shared view on the key role of literariness in this field: literary texts are assumed to be effective because of their striking stylistic features that deviate from ordinary language (Kuiken et al., 2004). These features seem to allow readers to deepen the modification of their sense of self (Van Peer et al., 2021). Indeed, genre fiction, such as sci-fi, fantasy, and romance, is rarely studied along with literary fiction, and it tends to be discarded as an ineffective counterpart "intended to entertain their mostly passive readers" as it "portray[s] the world and characters as internally consistent and predictable" (Kidd & Castano, 2013, pp. 377–378). Thus, one might argue that current research on the effects of reading is still somewhat bound to the highbrow/lowbrow distinction that has been repeatedly problematized as outdated (Alexander, 2020; Bolin, 2016). Indeed, the line that supposedly separates "serious works of art" that are only fully intelligible to academics, from the "discount culture" of the masses, is a purely sociocultural construction (Swirski & Vanhanen, 2017). This is particularly detrimental, as disregarding genre fiction and digital reading practices when investigating the current cultural panorama can only result in an incomplete picture that tends to marginalize all forms of reading that don't fall under the "literary reading" label (Floegel et al., 2020). The present study tackles this gap in research with a systematic comparison between readers of books (in print and e-books) and two digital-born reading practices: digital fiction (e.g., hypertext,

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interactive fiction, and visual novels), and Wattpad (the most popular digital storytelling platform), in which we tried to answer the question whether why we read (in terms of motivations for reading) and what we read (in terms of different reading practices and genre preferences) relate to how reading affects our lives.

The relationship between why we read and how reading affects our lives is often addressed by focusing on associations between motivations for reading and transformative effects. Oliver and Raney (2011) refer to two different types of motivations, namely hedonism, the dimension of pleasure and positive affect, and eudaimonia, the dimension of search-for-meaning and insight. Recent studies showed a connection between eudaimonia and a wide range of transformative effects of reading (De Mulder et al., 2022; Koopman, 2015; Schrijvers et al., 2019), expecting hedonism to be ineffective in this respect, but reporting mixed findings when it was measured. Indeed, in Schrijvers et al. (2019) hedonism was unrelated with indicators of fiction-elicited transformation (e.g., autonomy, relatedness, empathy), while De Mulder et al. (2022) found positive effects of both eudaimonic and hedonic books on mentalizing ability. Plausibly, the role of eudaimonia and hedonism might oscillate depending on which subsets of transformative effects are considered by researchers. In this study, we investigate the effects of both eudaimonic and hedonic motivations on the occurrence of a specific type of transformation that prioritizes the reader's experience over the researcher's parameters, that is, perceived transformation, for which we will provide a detailed definition in a dedicated subsection of the theoretical framework.

Oliver and Raney's research, which was conducted within film studies (2011), also showed a reciprocal relationship between motivations for entertainment consumption and genre preferences. Therefore, their study provided grounds to hypothesize that motivations and genre preferences could have a reciprocal relationship when we read as well. The first aim of the present article is to investigate how the three reading practices under investigation compare in terms of motivations for reading and genre preferences. The results that might emerge from this first step of the research will be used to guide our interpretation of the results from the second step of the research, which focuses on the effects of the interplay of motivations for reading and genre preferences on perceived transformation across the three reading practices.

### Three Contemporary Reading Practices

The prevailing focus on (literary) print fiction in the study of transformative effects of reading inadvertently neglects other contemporary reading practices that are grounded in the digital sphere. Adjacent areas in reading studies do address the comparison between reading in print and on digital devices, such as tablets or e-readers (Mangen et al., 2019; Singer & Alexander, 2017), which assumes a rather artificial dichotomy between print and digital (Ensslin, 2021), in that the only difference between the two forms of reading is that the same text could be read either on the page or from a screen. This ignores a large part of what is considered digital reading, namely reading practices that are digital-born (Ensslin, 2014), meaning text-based fictional narratives that specifically originated on (and for) the digital medium, instead of being purely read in digital form (as in the case of e-books). Thus, for a comprehensive outlook on how readers currently engage with (and are affected by) different text-based fictional narratives, what we still lack is a comparison between fiction

books (both in print and e-books) and other reading practices that are structurally and aesthetically different because they are specifically digital-born. In this article, we chose to compare books, digital fiction (e.g., combinatory, hypertext, interactive fiction), and digital storytelling platforms (e.g., Wattpad and ArchiveOfOurOwn). In what follows, we provide concise definitions of these three reading practices.

We will refer to the first reading practice, and the first condition in our study, as "fiction books" (or simply "books" for the sake of abbreviation). This category overlaps the most with what empirical studies on "literary reading" focus on, but we decided to (a) adopt the value-free definition of "fiction" by considering a wide variety of genres and (b) to position print books and e-books on the same level, since it has been found that, when it comes to reading fiction (as opposed to non-fiction), reading in-print or in a digital format does not lead to any differences in terms of narrative engagement (Mangen & Kuiken, 2014).

Digital fiction, our second condition, has been defined as "fiction written for and read on a computer screen that pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and would lose something of its aesthetic and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium" (Bell et al., 2010, n.p.). If early examples of digital fiction were mainly hypertexts and interactive fiction, contemporary works provide a more diverse panorama (e.g., network writing, visual novels, combinatory poetry, narrative and poetic games), often including audio-visual components. The defining trait of digital fiction, and its most evident difference from digital storytelling platforms, is that "each reading [...] is different, either because the reader takes a different pathway through the text or because the text offers a different version of itself" (Bell et al., 2014, p. 5). This dynamic component is often prompted by interactive elements, which facilitate a deictic shift into the story world (Bell et al., 2018).

For what concerns the third reading practice and the third condition in our study, namely digital storytelling platforms, we will focus on Wattpad, the most popular among these platforms (with 90 million monthly active users, Wattpad, 2022). Many Wattpad users are not only readers but also writers on the platform. Wattpad stories are digital-born (although one could easily print them as if they were books without altering the story, which is not possible for works of digital fiction); they are typically read on computers or mobile devices; they can include multimedia content (e.g., pictures of story characters, songs to listen to while reading); and they display features that we can label as "interactive" (e.g., readers can comment on story chapters and single lines, thus shaping author's creative processes and the emergent narrative). These second-order, socially interactive features (Klaiber, 2014) show that the social community around reading (and writing) is a salient trait of Wattpad (Kraxenberger & Lauer, 2022). Even though other digital storytelling platforms also display similar socially interactive features, they arguably do so to a lesser degree, as readers' comments are limited to the end of chapters, not within the margins of any line in the story (e.g., ArchiveOfOurOwn) and this commenting activity is generally less intense. Moreover, many are predominantly focused on fandom stories (e.g., fanfiction.net), while Wattpad hosts a great variety of original stories.

Digital-born reading practices are a potentially fruitful venue for studying transformative effects of reading because they are becoming more and more popular, especially among young adults (Pianzola et al., 2020; Reborá et al., 2021), which is in sharp contrast with the commonly reported alarming claims on the decline of reading for pleasure in adolescents (Schleicher, 2019). While there is no similar body of research on the topic of transformative effects in

digital-born reading practices as there is for book reading, there are elements to these practices that suggest they are just as likely to affect readers' lives. Within digital fiction, the active role of the reader in shaping the story, can deepen the experience of effectively "trying on" other identities through fictional characters, which has already been theorized as a key function of reading fiction books on a more conceptual level (Slater et al., 2014). Furthermore, recent projects employ works of digital fiction to prompt climate change awareness (Rudd et al., 2020) and body image positivity (Wilks et al., 2022). Regarding Wattpad, we need to consider that its content is user-generated and therefore it effectively matches the interests of its plethora of readers (mostly young adult and female). A study by Bal (2018) observed that it can be perceived as a popular alternative to in-school reading, which is often regarded as a boring obligation. In contrast, Wattpad was found to evoke "positive experiences characterized by willingness, diversity, meaningfulness, and entertainment" (Bal, 2018, p. 89). The present study tests empirically whether digital-born reading practices can lead to the occurrence of perceived transformative effects, assuming that such effects are not an exclusive prerogative of book reading.

### Toward Perceived Transformation: A Theoretical Model

The transformative effects of reading have been investigated in many ways, which can be grouped into two broad categories. The first category pertains to effects on the self, such as modification of personal meanings (Fialho, 2012; Sikora et al., 2011; Tangerås, 2020) and changes in the self-concept (Sestir & Green, 2010). The second category concerns effects toward others, such as socio-cognitive abilities (Eekhof et al., 2022) and empathy (Koopman, 2018). In this study, we focus on the first macrocategory. Previous studies in this line of research (see review in Kuiken & Sopčák, 2021) mainly focused on capturing these effects "in real time," as they occurred, by using numerically aided phenomenology (Fialho, 2012; Sikora et al., 2011), pre and posttest personality measurements (Sestir & Green, 2010), or mixed methods assessments of intervention programs implemented in high-school settings (Schrijvers et al., 2019). However, since transformation "seems to happen naturally and unexpectedly" (Fialho, 2019, p. 8) and is thus favored by a match between text and reader, using experimenter-selected texts can become problematic. Testing specific populations (university and high school students) also does not facilitate a generalization of these effects to the wider population of actual readers. Lastly, this approach conveys a top-down view: researchers set the parameters of what can be considered transformative.

Tangerås (2020), on the other hand, turned to actual readers, carrying out an extensive qualitative analysis on retrospective accounts of life-changing reading experiences and noting that transformation is particularly likely to occur during life crises. However, such an in-depth analysis necessarily involves a low number of participants. In the present study, we similarly adopted a retrospective perspective and a bottom-up approach, considering as transformative what actual readers perceive as such. We chose the term perceived transformation to identify the type of transformative effects under investigation in our study, defined as the conscious realization through which readers feel that a specific text had a considerable impact on them. In other words, if a reader feels that a text left a lasting impact on them (e.g., it made them realize something about themselves or others, it inspired them to do something, or it somehow changed their

plans), in our conceptualization this reading experience qualifies as "transformative." We will use the terms "perceived transformation" and "transformative reading experience" interchangeably in this article, to situate our study in the broader panorama of research on transformative effects of reading.

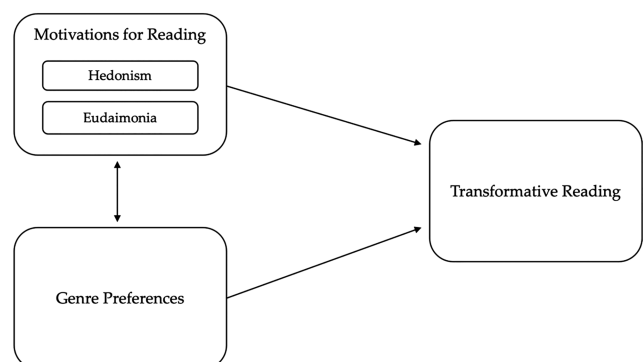
To prioritize ecological validity, we decided to ask a wide range of readers whether they had a transformative reading experience and collected the responses of those who did in the form of open answers. While we conducted a mixed methods content analysis to compare in-depth what is perceived as transformative across different reading practices, these results are not the focus of this article (see Loi et al., 2023a, for those results). For now, we aim to address a preliminary step, namely what combinations of reading motivations and genre preferences lead to the occurrence of transformative reading experiences across these three reading practices.

The model that we present in Figure 1 highlights that we expect that motivations for reading and genre preferences have a bidirectional relationship, and that considering their relationship might better explain why particular combinations of these reading habits lead to a higher chance of experiencing perceived transformation. Since we hypothesize that the three different reading practices might differ in terms of motivations for reading, and especially in terms of genre preferences, we also expect that they might likewise show different paths toward perceived transformation. Thus, we will first draw a comparison between the three groups of readers regarding reading motivations and genre preferences per se, before we apply these results to the interpretation of the different paths to transformative reading experiences across the three reading practices.

### Motivations for Reading

Why do we read? Or, more precisely, what are the underlying needs that we seek to fulfill when reading a story? To answer this question, Oliver and Raney have theorized and measured most entertainment consumption as driven by both pleasure-seeking (hedonism) and meaning-seeking (eudaimonia) motivations, thus challenging a long-lasting conceptualization that viewed entertainment as a means of experiencing enjoyment and considered the appreciation of "sad" stories as somewhat paradoxical (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Oliver and Raney's perspective is now widely adopted within media psychology

**Figure 1**  
*Theoretical Model Indicating the Expected Relationships Between Motivations for Reading, Genre Preferences, and Transformative Reading*



(Eden, 2020). The eudaimonic dimension associated with meaningfulness and insight is recognized alongside the hedonic dimension associated in turn with pleasure and positive valence. Although Oliver and Raney's framework was developed within film studies, it can easily be employed across different media, which is why we chose to work with their measure in the context of the present study. Our first research question reads:

*Research Question 1 (RQ1):* Do readers of books, readers of digital fiction and readers of Wattpad stories score differently on motivations for reading?

Previous studies on reading books often focused in depth on either eudaimonia or on hedonism. Koopman's (2015) study, which was centered on engagement with sad books, investigated eudaimonic motivations on the grounds that eudaimonia facilitates personal growth and insight into human nature (Koopman, 2015); while other studies focused on hedonic components such as experiencing pleasure in reading (Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004). However, Schrijvers et al. (2019) and De Mulder et al.'s (2022) studies could be considered exceptions in this respect, as they measured both eudaimonic and hedonic motivations. The first included both dimensions in the context of a reading intervention in the high school classroom, the second investigated exposure to both eudaimonic and hedonic books, TV series, and films among children and adolescents (from 6 to 16 years old). Just as in Oliver and Raney's (2011) study on films, in both studies, participants reported higher scores on hedonism than on eudaimonia. However, these findings might be due to the specific age range of participants (high schoolers in the first case, children and adolescents in the second case). The role of eudaimonia might be more prominent in a broader age range, especially when reading motivations are conceptualized in trait-like terms as in Oliver and Raney's (2011) study, which showed that eudaimonic motivations tend to increase with age.

Motivations for reading have never been empirically investigated for either digital fiction or Wattpad. For digital fiction, previous research outputs that come closest are studies that investigate motivations for engaging with video games. The rationale for this comparison lies in an overlap between digital fiction and some types of video games, with narrative games being a subcategory of digital fiction and vice versa. Indeed, Ensslin (2014) proposed literary gaming as a term that "allows for the integration of a wide range of hybrid phenomena that are experienced as a mixture of, or indeed clash between, reading and gameplay" (Ensslin, 2014, p. 6). For decades video games have been considered a purely hedonic entertainment driven by challenge and ludic enjoyment. However, a growing body of research is focusing on eudaimonic aspects of video games (Consalvo et al., 2019; Holl et al., 2020), highlighting that many players report mixed-affect emotional experiences, to the point that meaningful play is no longer a niche experience (Oliver et al., 2015). Elson et al. (2014) also noted that the satisfaction of relatedness and insight largely depended on the story within the game. This observation should be even more valid for digital fiction: without employing "motivations for reading" as a theoretical framework, previous research has established that the presence of meaningful narrative elements is quite prominent within works of digital fiction (Bell et al., 2014). Notwithstanding, the presence of ludic and goal-driven components in digital fiction could signal that hedonism on its own might be experienced more frequently

among readers of digital fiction than readers of books. The same tendency might be observed among Wattpad readers, albeit for a different reason. Wattpad readers are mostly teenagers and young adults (Tirocchi, 2018), and previous studies identified story-driven reading (reading for plot rather than insight) as particularly common in adolescents (Miall & Kuiken, 1995; Van Schooten, 2005).

However, we do not have grounds for either of the digital-born reading practices to hypothesize that reading for hedonism is more common than reading for eudaimonic motivations. On the contrary, many elements suggest that eudaimonia might play a key role; the peculiar age range of Wattpad readers, for example, might actually justify the prevalence of search for meaning and insight. On Wattpad, people read, write, and comment on stories that primarily revolve around love, family issues, search for identity, all areas of life that are extremely important in the life stage of adolescents (Caskey & Anfar, 2014; Kloep, 1999).

The relationship between the dimensions of hedonism and eudaimonia could also yield interesting results when compared across groups. Oliver and Raney (2011) observed a modest negative correlation between these scales, suggesting that hedonism and eudaimonia do not represent bipolar motivations and can likely coexist. Sometimes one might be more in the mood for fun and positive stories, and at other times more for challenging reads that focus on human conditions. Thus, our second research question is:

*Research Question 2 (RQ2):* How do eudaimonia and hedonism relate to each other across groups?

These dimensions could be more intertwined for readers of digital-born reading practices, since they present elements that could serve both hedonic and eudaimonic purposes, such as the implications of the typical age range of Wattpad readers discussed above. In the case of digital fiction, one of its key characteristics—interactivity—has a double function: although it is commonly considered as the main marker of hedonic gratifications, it can easily fulfill eudaimonic concerns because the active role that it grants to readers (who can "walk in the character's shoes" and whose choices determine the story outcome) facilitates identification (Hefner et al., 2007) and moral reflection (Holl et al., 2020). It might also be that hedonic and eudaimonic motivations can co-occur even in the same reading experience, rather than on separate occasions. These observations suggest that we may find an even weaker negative correlation between hedonism and eudaimonia in these groups as compared to the results found in Oliver and Raney's (2011) study. After comparing motivations for reading per se, we will investigate their role in predicting the occurrence of perceived transformation and thus our third research question reads:

*Research Question 3 (RQ3):* Which motivations for reading predict the occurrence of perceived transformation across groups?

Previous research recognizes a key role for eudaimonia in eliciting transformative effects, both in books (Schrijvers et al., 2019) and other media contexts (Oliver et al., 2021). After all, eudaimonia involves searching for meaning, and transformation is "where modifications of personal meanings are observed" (Fialho, 2019, p. 8). However, as we have stated that previous studies on hedonism reported mixed findings in this respect, we do not exclude the possibility that it might also have a role in the occurrence of perceived transformation. Overall, testing the relationship between motivations

for reading and transformative effects might yield some preliminary interesting results in and of themselves. However, we believe that adding genre preferences to this equation will result in a more well-rounded understanding of which reading habits facilitate the occurrence of transformative reading experiences.

## Genre Preferences

Investigating what kind of stories we read, and extending this question to a variety of reading practices, inevitably entails assessing one of the most controversial notions in literary theory and cross-media narratology, namely genre. Recognizing that the very concept of genre lacks stability to the point that it has been regarded as “resistant to theory” (Cohen, 1986), modern theoretical perspectives argue that this is precisely why the study of genre is important (Prince, 2021; Todorov, 1990). White (2003) conceptualized genre as an “essentially contestable subject” that should not be seen as a classificatory tool, but rather as an instrument of meaning. Metamorphosis, fluidity, and hybridity are now the main key words in the study of genre, after it has been “redefined and democratized” (Duff, 2014, p. 35) as “something like a state of permanent revolution” (p. 48), meaning that the same text can contain and reelaborate leitmotifs of multiple genres, and in turn this process gradually leads to the rise of new genres. Additionally, genre distinctions nowadays are not just a topic of discussion between literary theorists, but rather are used within the branding strategies of the publishing industry and online reading communities that offer genres as a flexible tool for users to categorize their favorite reads or find recommendations (e.g., Goodreads and Wattpad). In this article, we take a perspective that traditional literary theory does not typically consider, namely how actual readers use the notion of genre.

If genre is already a fluid concept within books, with new genres constantly emerging and merging, this tendency is even more evident in digital-born reading practices. The case of digital fiction is emblematic. Its interactive and multiplatform nature adds to this complexity and fluidity by necessarily involving genre conceptualizations of digital fiction’s close relative, i.e., video games (Clarke et al., 2017). While this debate is far too articulated to be treated in the present article, it is important to stress that the different forms of digital fiction (e.g., hypertext fiction, interactive fiction, and combinatory poetry) are usually considered as genres, albeit with fluid boundaries (Rettberg, 2018). Moreover, “structural” genres, distinguished on by technical aspects such as the type of software or programming language that is used, are crucial within digital fiction. The editors of the Electronic Literature Collection recognized the increasing obsolescence of using generic criteria from print tradition and, from the second volume onwards, introduced “a more flexible, less hierarchical system of tagging” (Rettberg, 2010, p. 88). Besides traditional descriptions like poetry or fiction, each work of digital fiction can be assigned other keywords describing technical types (e.g., bot and hypertext) and software platforms, and some further “evolving critical vocabulary” (e.g., “activist” fiction, defined as politically or socially motivated) (Electronic Literature Collection Volume 3, 2016). Online platforms such as repositories and forums (e.g., ifwiki.org, IFDB, itch.io, and Steam) also use similar tags to categorize works of digital fiction from different angles (using both structural and thematic genres, with varying degrees of specification).

The use of keywords/tags to define genres is also common on digital storytelling platforms, although refunctionalized to match the peculiarities of the type of stories that populate them. Wattpad, for instance,

categorizes stories according to the “traditional” thematic genres (e.g., romance, mystery, and poetry), with the addition of some particularly popular subgenres like “Werewolf” and “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer,” in a context-dependent example of the “canonization of the junior branch” (Duff, 2014, p. 47), which occurs when a genre that was previously minor or marginal acquires a new position of dominance. These main genres, however, are complemented in each story by further tags specifying several other subgenres or single plot elements (e.g., “highschool,” “badboy,” or “diversity”), which allow readers to select stories that match their preferences. If digital fiction differs from traditional genre distinctions of books for its technological and structural subtypes, Wattpad is characterized by a higher degree of specification of thematic genres and key plot elements (although mostly still revolving around macro-genres such as romance and fan fiction).

For comparing genre preferences in such varied reading practices, we developed a transmedia-conscious approach to thematic genres, using an adapted version of the Reading Habits Questionnaire (RHQ; M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2020). Although inevitably losing some nuance, this approach allows for a systematic comparison that would not be possible when considering all the specific subgenres of each reading practice. Instead, this way we will be able to answer our fourth research question:

*Research Question 4 (RQ4):* Do readers of books, digital fiction, and Wattpad have different genre preferences?

More specifically, our study will investigate what the most and least popular genres across reading practices are and how these genres relate to one another. This comparative angle allows us to observe which genres are grouped together for each reading practice, reflecting readers’ conceptualizations of genre distinctions (or lack thereof).

The rationale behind the inclusion of genre preferences in our model stems from previous research suggesting an existing relationship between genre preferences and eudaimonic and hedonic motivations. Oliver and Raney (2011) found that eudaimonia was associated with greater preference for nonfiction, dramas, and science fiction films, whereas hedonism was likewise related to comedies and action adventures films. We want to replicate (and expand on) this analysis for each of the three different reading practices, as this approach will allow us to answer our fifth research question:

*Research Question 5 (RQ5):* How do genre preferences relate to motivations for reading across different reading practices?

Testing this relationship should clarify whether, in the context of text-based narratives, there are such things as “eudaimonic genres” contrasted to “hedonic genres,” and if they remain stable or differ across the three groups. We previously hypothesized that readers of digital-born reading practices may be motivated to read texts for eudaimonic and hedonic reasons simultaneously. If we find out that this is the case in our samples, we may expect some groups of genres to relate to both hedonism and eudaimonia, rather than to one or the other exclusively.

Lastly, after analyzing what genre preferences and their relationship with motivations for reading can tell us about the peculiarities of each reading practice, we will turn to our sixth and final research question:

*Research Question 6 (RQ6):* How do genre preferences predict perceived transformation across different reading practices?

The phrasing of our question signals that we expect that reading certain groups of genres frequently will lead to a higher chance of reporting a transformative reading experience. What interests us particularly is which groups of genres have this effect across the three readerships. The components introduced so far, especially the relationship between genre preferences and motivations for reading, will be crucial for interpreting the findings that will result from this last step of our theoretical model. Lastly, we acknowledge that it might also be the case that experiencing transformative effects has an impact on reading motivations and genre preferences. However, investigating this potential reciprocal relationship between our variables is not the focus of our study, which is aimed at identifying predictors of perceived transformation.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were recruited for three online surveys on Qualtrics via a link distributed on social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), forums, and other online communities (i.e., Reddit, Wattpad, Goodreads, and Discord). As we were targeting three specific populations (i.e., three distinct groups of readers), the choice of the channels for distribution was directed by this purpose, and we addressed specifically communities that revolved around the three reading practices of interest. The recruitment messages are made available on an OSF project page (Loi et al., 2023b) under this link: <https://osf.io/zs8dm/>. As an incentive for taking part in the study, participants were given the possibility to enter a prize draw for a total of 30 gift cards worth 25€ each (i.e., gift cards for Netflix, Steam, Amazon, and Apple Store or Google Play).

Nine hundred and twenty-nine people participated in the study, of which 115 were excluded due to unserious participation, by following the guidelines for automated and manual detection of survey bots (Xu et al., 2022). The final merged sample consists of 814 participants from three conditions: books ( $n = 317$ ), digital fiction ( $n = 261$ ), and Wattpad ( $n = 236$ ). In terms of gender distributions, 484 participants were female, 254 male, 35 preferred to self-describe as nonbinary, and 41 preferred not to specify their gender. Most participants ( $n = 521$ , 64% of the total sample) were English native speakers. The average age differed among groups: book readers ( $M = 31.26$ ,  $SD = 10.39$ ), digital fiction readers ( $M = 26.17$ ,  $SD = 8.57$ ), and Wattpad readers ( $M = 22.91$ ,  $SD = 7.73$ ). Even though the overall sample consisted of 814 participants, during data cleaning we identified some cases in which the reported transformative reading experience did not qualify for data analysis because they reported reading a work of nonfiction. Thus, in the sections of results that involve the perceived transformation variable, these participants were excluded as ineligible (reduced sample size: 777, of which books = 198; digital fiction = 243; Wattpad = 236). More detailed demographics for both the final sample and the reduced sample, including gender distributions per group, are reported in supplementary materials.

### Procedure

The survey was developed in three versions: for readers of fiction books (i.e., in print and e-books), digital fiction (i.e., hypertext, interactive fiction, combinatory poetry, etc.), and Wattpad (i.e., the most popular digital storytelling platform). The versions were analogous

in content but custom targeted to the three conditions, with the necessary slight phrasing adjustments.

The survey started with a general briefing that explained what participation in the study would entail, an estimation of the time it would take them, and it informed them that they could participate in a prize draw if they so wished. They were then asked to give their consent for us to use their data and to confirm that they were older than 16.

The survey consisted of several sections presented in the following order: (a) a section on general reading habits, asking them about reading frequency with all three reading practices, and whether or not they engage in creative writing; (b) a section on genre preferences, in which we presented them with the adapted RHQ (M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2020) asking them to fill it in twice, once for their engagement with their condition's specific medium in mind (books, digital fiction, or Wattpad) and once across media (including films, games, TV, theater, visual arts); (c) a section on motivations for reading where we presented the participants with an adapted version of Oliver and Raney's Motivations for Entertainment Consumption scale (2011); (d) a section on perceived transformation, in which we first asked the participants whether they had a reading experience (with either a book, a piece of digital fiction or a Wattpad story) in the last couple of years that had a significant impact on them and if yes, whether they could elaborate on that experience. For the analyses in the present article we only used their response to the yes or no question (the qualitative data is analyzed in a different article (Loi et al., 2023a)); (e) in case participants responded yes to the previous question, they were asked to fill in the Story World Absorption Scale (M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2014) and four questions on Storyworld Possible Selves (Hakemulder, 2015, adapted for the purposes of this study with reference to Martínez, 2014) with their chosen text in mind; (f) a quasi-experimental section in which participants were asked to read two short extracts from a novel by Milan Kundera, presented in randomized order, and were asked to rate their appreciation of the excerpts and write down their immediate responses to the excerpts; and (g) a section on demographics, where we asked about their age, gender, whether or not they were native English speakers, and in which language they read the text they referred to in the survey. Section (f) was not considered in the analyses for this article, but is discussed elsewhere (Loi, under review). Completing the entire survey took participants on average 38 min in the book condition, 49 min in the digital fiction condition, and 44 min in the Wattpad condition. The survey protocol was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Basel. Data were collected from May to September of 2021.

## Measures

### General Reading Habits

To assess general reading habits, we asked participants how often they engage with each reading practice: the one for which they participated in the survey, and the other two on a scale from 0 (*never during the past year*) to 6 (*almost every day during the past year*). We also asked in which language (or multiple languages) participants usually did their reading activities, and whether they also engaged in creative writing themselves within the reading practice

for which they participated (e.g., whether a Wattpad reader also writes Wattpad stories).

### **Motivations for Reading**

Motivations for reading were assessed using an adapted version of a 12-item scale developed within the field of media psychology to measure hedonic (six items) and eudaimonic (six items) motivations for entertainment consumption (Oliver & Raney, 2011), in which we substituted the term “movie” with “story,” making it suitable for use in all three conditions in our study. While hedonic motivations are characterized by pleasure-seeking and positive valence (“My favorite kinds of stories are happy and positive”), eudaimonic motivations represent search-for-meaning and insight (“I like stories that challenge my way of seeing the world.”). The items were rated on a 6-point bipolar scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was carefully explained to participants that we were interested in their preferences specifically within the domain of the reading practice for which they participated in the study (e.g., participants in the digital fiction condition were kindly asked “to complete this section without taking into consideration other forms of fiction such as books or movies”). Both eudaimonia and hedonism dimensions showed good reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$  and  $.81$ , respectively).

### **Genre Preferences**

To measure genre preferences, we used an adapted version of the RHQ (M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2020). The original RHQ questionnaire includes 21 items (13 for fiction and eight for nonfiction); the version used for this study includes 18 items: 17 for fiction and one for (cultural) nonfiction. The choice of including a higher number of fiction genres allows us to observe in more detail potential similarities and differences across groups, which might otherwise remain under the surface. The original section nonfiction of the RHQ was considerably reduced to only one item, (cultural) nonfiction, as exposure to nonfictional essays, biographies, and self-help books might also play a role in the likelihood of experiencing transformative effects with fiction, and of fulfilling certain motivations for reading, particularly the search for insight into the human condition typical of eudaimonia. In this respect, magazines, newspapers, and social media are less relevant forms of nonfiction and were thus excluded in our adapted version.

The changes we made respond to two main principles: (a) genres should be phrased in a way that is clearly recognizable for all three reading practices in our sample; (b) associations of the term “literary” to certain genres should be avoided as the highbrow/lowbrow distinction, apart from being outdated per se, does not suit current reading practices like Digital Fiction and digital storytelling platforms, where readers consider what they are reading to be beyond canonical print literature (Ensslin, 2007). The “classics” genre is an exception in this respect: not only might excluding this item result in confusion for participants in the books condition, but classics also have their own category on Wattpad.

The items were phrased analogously in the three versions of the survey, with descriptions in brackets when further explanations were necessary for a specific condition (as shown in Table 1): for example, the “comics” genre referred to graphic novels and comic strips for the books condition, whereas within digital fiction they

corresponded to visual novels and webcomics. Participants were asked to rate how often they read each of 18 text genres on a scale from 0 (*never during the past year*) to 6 (*almost every day during the past year*). We acknowledge that it might be quite difficult for participants to isolate their genre preferences within only one reading practice, while not considering their genre preferences with other media (e.g., films and other reading practices). Therefore, each of the 18 genre items was presented twice, once for their condition’s specific medium (books, digital fiction, or Wattpad) and once for other types of media entertainment (e.g., the other two reading practices, films, games, TV, and theater). Examples of how this distinction was presented to participants are reported in supplementary materials, together with descriptive statistics on the “genre preferences with other media” variable, which was not included in the analysis plan of this article, as it functioned only as a facilitator to improve control over our measurement.

### **Perceived Transformation**

We measured whether participants reported the occurrence of a transformative reading experience during the past couple of years with a categorical binary variable (a simple yes/no). Restraining the time to approximately the past 2 years was motivated by memory concerns of recalling reading experiences. The question was presented to the three conditions as follows: “In the past couple of years, have you read a book/Wattpad story/work of digital fiction that had a significant impact on you? For example, it made you realize something about yourself or others, it inspired you to do something, or it somehow changed your plans. This is not a complete list: you can interpret impact in any way you wish.” To identify perceived transformation, we chose the expression “significant impact.” The underlined terms function as word-clues that facilitate associations with possible markers of transformation (e.g., abstract and concrete realizations, recognizable changes). Finally, by ending on an open note that allows participants to interpret impact in any way they feel appropriate, we signal our adoption of a bottom-up approach: perceived transformation is grounded in (and determined by) the reader’s own experience. Aside from being reminded that we are interested in reading experiences that occurred exclusively with works of fiction, participants were kindly asked to select “yes” only if they had a specific text in mind, thus excluding general feelings of a cumulative effect due to long-term exposure to fiction.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis reflects the logical order of our theoretical model as outlined in Theoretical Framework section. After some preliminary observations about demographics and reading frequency, we investigated the main components of our model, first separately and then in their relationships. All analyses were carried out from a comparative angle to observe potential similarities and differences between our three conditions. The very structure of this analysis plan reflects the intertwined two main aims of this study: to describe motivations for reading and genre preferences per se across the three conditions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4), and to test how their interrelatedness can predict the occurrence of transformative reading experiences (RQ3, RQ5, and RQ6).

To answer the main research questions we posed in this article, we first inspected the mean scores on motivations for reading in order to



**Table 1***Genres Included in the Adapted Version of the RHQ Used in This Study, in Comparison With the Original RHQ*

Adapted RHQ	Original RHQ (fiction)
Poetry *DG: e-poetry	Literature (poetry)
Classics (canonical works of art) *W: (canonical works of art, e.g., the former “classics” category)	Literature (novels)
Drama (focus on characters’ inner lives, emphasis on psychological insight)	
Short fiction (short stories, flash fiction) *W: (e.g., one shots, “short story” category)	Literature (short stories)
Historical fiction	Historical fiction (involving actual figures and events)
Romance	Romance (involving love and interpersonal relationships)
Horror and psychological thriller	Thriller (involving madness, horror, and disaster)
Crime and mystery	Thriller (involving criminal activities and detective work)
Adventure (emphasis on exploration, action-driven plot)	
Science fiction	Fantasy (science fiction)
Fantasy (involving imaginary realms and magical events, including myths and legends)	Fantasy (involving ghosts, monsters, and magical events)
Paranormal fantasy (involving supernatural characters and/or supernatural events set in the real world) *W: (involving supernatural characters and/or supernatural events set in the real world; “werewolf” and “vampire” categories are included)	Fantasy (e.g., myths, fables, and legends)
Young adult (including teen fiction, new adult, and chick lit)	
Comics (graphic novels and comic strips) *DG: (visual novels and webcomics)	Fantasy (e.g., children’s literature and fairy tales)
Comedy (humor and satire)	Comics (e.g., comic strips and graphic novels)
Coming of age (or <i>Bildungsroman</i> , emphasis on character development from childhood to adulthood)	Comedy (e.g., humor and satire)
Fan fiction *DG: (in the form of digital fiction)	
Nonfiction (biographies, essays on science, politics, philosophy, and self-help books) *DG: (digital nonfiction: e.g., works that are primarily informative, socio-political, etc.) *W: (nonfiction category)	Science essays, articles, or books (nonfiction) History essays, articles, or books (nonfiction) Political essays, articles, or books (nonfiction)

*Note.* Asterisks, followed by DG or W, signal the phrasing adjustments made to better suit other reading practices when needed. Items of the original RHQ are reported in their entirety only for the fiction dimension, for the nonfiction items that do not fall under (cultural) nonfiction, see Kuijpers et al. (2020). DG = digital fiction; W = Wattpad; RHQ = Reading Habits Questionnaire.

compare them with the results of previous studies on other media and to observe differences between conditions. We also inspected how eudaimonia and hedonism relate to each other, since the strength and direction of their correlation can be interpreted as an indicator of a tendency of specific groups of readers to conceive of motivations for reading as rather unrelated or more intertwined. Then, we tested the role of motivations for reading in predicting the occurrence of transformative reading experiences across groups by running a logistic regression analysis.

Second, we explored how the three reading practices differ from each other in terms of genre preferences, which is why we inspected the reading frequencies for all 18 genres across conditions and then we ran separate principal component analyses (PCA) of genres per condition, to see how the genres cluster together differently. Third,

we used the genre factors that emerged from the PCA as predictors of both motivations for reading (multiple regressions) and transformative reading (logistic regression).

## Results

### Preliminary Observations and General Reading Habits

It is important to note that, even though it was expected—and it signals intrinsic differences between the three reading practices—the conditions were not homogenous in terms of age: A Kruskal–Wallis test showed that the books condition ( $M = 31.26$ ,  $SD = 10.39$ ), the digital fiction condition ( $M = 26.17$ ,  $SD = 8.57$ ) and the Wattpad condition ( $M = 22.91$ ,  $SD = 7.73$ ) differ significantly

between each other,  $H(2) = 149.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants in all three conditions read mostly in English (books = 87%; digital fiction = 93%; Wattpad = 90%); more detailed trends in reading languages per condition are reported in the online supplementary materials. Generally, participants who not only read, but also write works of fiction are less represented (books = 191 vs. 126; digital fiction = 146 vs. 115), but the Wattpad condition reverses this trend substantially: the vast majority also writes Wattpad stories (52 vs. 184). Overall, the percentage of participants who reported a transformative reading experience is considerable across all groups (books = 77.6%; digital fiction = 64%; Wattpad = 70%).

Before testing our main hypotheses, we looked at reading frequency, both media-specific and across media. Within their own reading practice, participants in all conditions are quite avid readers: books ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ), digital fiction ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ), and Wattpad ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). However, when looking at mean engagement with the other reading practices, the books condition scores on the low end of the scale, while the other two conditions appear to be much more versatile in this respect (Figure 2).

### Motivations for Reading

In our overall sample, participants report higher scores on eudaimonic ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) than hedonic motivations ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ). More importantly, we checked whether the three conditions score differently on motivations for reading (RQ1). All conditions scored similarly on eudaimonia, with no significant difference across groups,  $H(2) = 0.63$ ,  $p > .1$ : books ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), digital fiction ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), and Wattpad ( $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). For hedonic motivations, a Kruskal–Wallis test showed that there was a significant difference between conditions,  $H(2) = 55.992$ ,  $p < .001$ . To see which conditions differed from each other, we ran pairwise comparisons using a Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction. Both digital fiction ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) and Wattpad ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) conditions score significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) on hedonism compared to the books condition ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). Results are visualized in Figure 3.

To answer RQ2, we investigated the relationship between hedonism and eudaimonia: scores on these scales were significantly negatively correlated only for the books condition ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the digital fiction condition was not significant in this respect ( $r = -.08$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and the Wattpad condition (although not significantly) even reversed the direction of the correlation ( $r = .18$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

### Motivations for Reading and Perceived Transformation

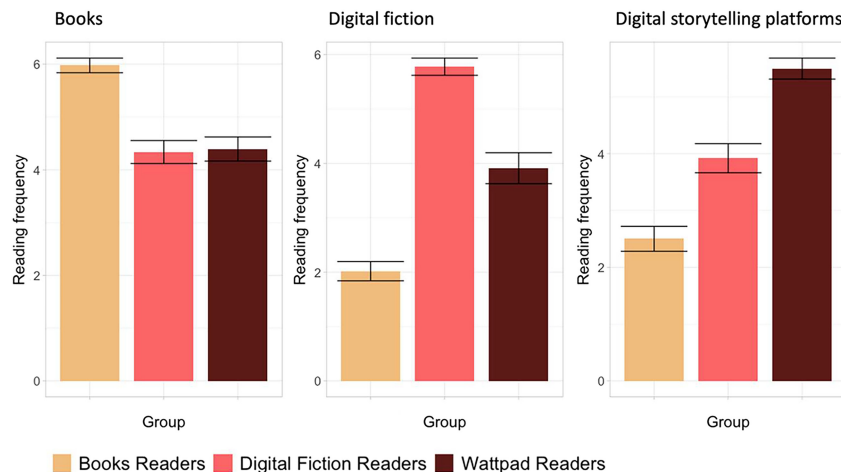
To answer RQ3, we ran three logistic regression analyses with eudaimonic and hedonic motivations as predicting variables and whether a participant reported a transformative reading experience as outcome variable, controlling for age, gender, and whether a participant engages also in creative writing. The choice to control for these variables stems from the need to account for demographic variables that are confounded with the different groups, and, as shown in the “general reading habits” section above, the groups are not homogenous in age, in gender (the sample is predominantly female), and in their tendency to also engage in creative writing. Results, reported in Table 2, show that scoring higher on eudaimonic motivations predicts a higher chance of reporting a transformative reading experience for the books condition and for the digital fiction condition, but not for Wattpad readers. The only positive predictor for the Wattpad condition is being younger in age, an effect observed for the books condition as well.

### Genre Preferences

To compare genre preferences across conditions (RQ4), we first looked at reading frequencies for each of the genres on the adapted version of the RHQ. The descriptive statistics per genre for all conditions can be found in Table 3.

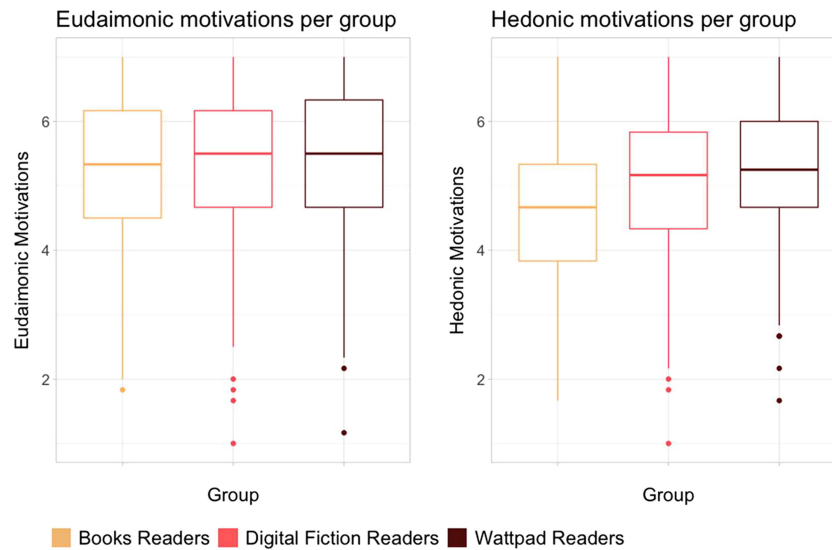
To identify genre factors and compare the resulting components across reading practices, three separate PCA were conducted on the 18 items, with oblique rotation (Oblimin). For the books condition, one item was excluded from this analysis: fan fiction, as it is not

**Figure 2**  
*Mean Engagement With Each Reading Practice Per Group*



*Note.* Minimum and maximum scores reading frequency: 1–7. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Figure 3**  
*Mean Scores on Motivations for Reading by Group*



*Note.* Minimum and maximum scores on motivations for reading: 1–7. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

read in a book format, but rather on online reading platforms. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis KMO (books) = 0.80, KMO (digital fiction) = 0.66, and KMO (Wattpad) = 0.91. Five components had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of one for both books and digital fiction conditions, and three for the Wattpad group. However, all three scree plots were slightly ambiguous and showed inflections that would justify retaining six components. Thus, given the benefits of comparing conditions across the same number of components, and that retaining more components is likely to add nuance to the overview on genres, six components were retained in the three final analyses. Table 4 shows the factors retained for each condition with factor loadings for each of the 18 genres after rotation. The structure of the table reflects an attempt to highlight correspondences between the different factors across the three reading practices. We named the factors attempting to highlight similarities while doing justice to peculiarities of different groups.

### Genre Preferences and Motivations for Reading

Three multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to evaluate the prediction of eudaimonic motivations for reading from the six components resulting from the PCA outputs, controlling for age and gender, the results of which are reported in Table 5 (RQ5). For the books condition, results show that “literary fiction” and “serious fiction” factors are significant positive predictors of eudaimonia, and “thriller fiction” is a negative predictor. For the digital fiction condition, positive predictors considerably trending toward significance are “dramatic fiction” and “literary fiction,” while “fan fiction and young adult” is a significant negative predictor. For the Wattpad condition, the strongest predictor of eudaimonic motivations is “romantic fiction”; other significant positive predictors are “literary fiction” and the “comics and non-fiction” factor.

Identical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted with hedonic motivations for reading, the results of which can be found in Table 6. In the books condition, “fantasy fiction” and “romantic fiction” are significant positive predictors of hedonism, while “literary fiction” is a significant negative predictor. In the digital fiction condition, hedonic motivations are significantly predicted by “fan fiction and young adult,” “visual novels/webcomics,” and “dramatic fiction”; “literary fiction” is a negative predictor. In the Wattpad condition, we found that—as with eudaimonic motivations—the strongest predictor of hedonism is “romantic fiction,” followed by “comics and nonfiction” and “fan fiction,” with “literary fiction” approaching statistical significance as a negative predictor.

### Genre Preferences and Perceived Transformation

To answer RQ6, we ran three logistic regression analyses with the factor scores resulting from the PCA outputs as predicting variables on the likelihood of whether a participant reported a transformative reading experience as outcome variable, controlling for age, gender, and whether a participant engages also in creative writing. The logistic regression model for the books condition was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(11) = 38.6, p < .001$ , with an effect size of .18 (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>). Results show that the likelihood of reporting a transformative reading experience increased significantly when participants scored higher on the “literary fiction” ( $OR = 1.71, 95\% CI [1.2, 2.5]$ ) and “serious fiction” ( $OR = 1.36, 95\% CI [1, 1.87]$ ) factors, and when they were younger in age ( $OR = 0.96, 95\% CI [0.93, 0.98]$ ). For digital fiction, the logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(11) = 36.46, p \leq .001$ , with an effect size of .18 (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>). The likelihood of reporting a transformative reading experience increased significantly when participants scored higher on the “dramatic fiction” ( $OR = 1.78, 95\% CI [1.2, 2.4]$ ) and “activist fiction” ( $OR = 1.5,$

**Table 2**  
*Logistic Regressions of Motivations for Reading on Transformative Reading Experiences per Group, Controlling for Age, Gender, and Whether a Participant Engages in Creative Writing*

Predictors	B (SE)	95% CI for OR		
		LL	OR	UL
<b>Books</b>				
Included				
Constant	-1.02 (1.57)			
Eudaimonic motivations	0.68*** (0.14)	1.51	1.98	2.64
Hedonic motivations	-0.12 (0.15)	0.66	0.89	1.18
Age	-0.04** (0.01)	0.94	0.96	0.99
G: male	0.29 (1.08)	0.13	1.35	10.37
G: female	0.46 (1.07)	0.16	1.58	18.78
G: prefer to self-describe	0.40 (1.54)	0.08	1.50	11.82
Writer	0.45 (0.32)	0.85	1.57	2.96
$R^2 = .13$ (Hosmer–Lemeshow), $.14$ (Cox–Snell), $.22$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(7) = 46.19, p < .001$ .				
<b>Digital fiction</b>				
Constant	-3.02 (1.24)			
Eudaimonic motivations	0.40** (0.12)	1.17	1.49	1.91
Hedonic motivations	0.11 (0.14)	0.85	1.12	1.47
Age	-0.004 (0.02)	0.97	0.99	1.03
G: male	1.02 (0.59)	0.86	2.77	9.15
G: female	0.47 (0.57)	0.51	1.60	5.13
G: prefer to self-describe	0.37 (0.79)	0.31	1.45	7.23
Writer	0.70* (0.30)	1.14	2.02	3.65
$R^2 = .06$ (Hosmer–Lemeshow), $.08$ (Cox–Snell), $.11$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(7) = 20.63, p = .004$ .				
<b>Wattpad</b>				
Constant	-0.61 (1.26)			
Eudaimonic motivations	0.13 (0.13)	0.90	1.15	1.47
Hedonic motivations	0.15 (0.14)	0.88	1.52	1.53
Age	-0.04* (0.02)	0.93	0.96	0.99
G: male	-0.54	0.14	0.58	1.93
G: female	-0.15	0.23	0.85	2.61
G: prefer to self-describe	1.19	0.40	3.28	69.85
Writer	-0.13	0.41	0.88	1.76
$R^2 = .05$ (Hosmer–Lemeshow), $.05$ (Cox–Snell), $.08$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(7) = 13.77, p = .05$				

*Note.* Below each model, we reported values for  $R^2$  (according to three different effect size measures defined in brackets), the model chi-square and its significance. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; OR = odds ratio; G = gender. In controlling for gender, we included as covariates three of the four categories used in our study: male, female, and prefer to self-describe. We did not include the fourth option provided to participants (“prefer not to say”), as we considered this category as a missing answer.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

95% CI [1.1, 2.1]) factors, and when participants were also writers of digital fiction themselves ( $OR = 2.33, 95\% CI [1.3, 4.4]$ ). For the Wattpad condition, the logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(11) = 28.26, p = .001$ , with an effect size of  $.16$  (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ). For this group, the likelihood of reporting a transformative reading experience increased significantly only when participants scored higher on the “romantic fiction” ( $OR = 1.68, 95\% CI [1.2, 2.4]$ ) factor.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Comparing Reading Practices

The strongest similarity between all three reading practices considered in this study is quite telling: eudaimonic motivations for reading are more prominent than hedonic motivations. This holds for readers

of books, digital fiction, and Wattpad, and is in contrast with results of previous studies on other (audio–visual) media such as movies or video games (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2015), which found that hedonism was more strongly represented than eudaimonia. Thus, our results indicate that, compared to other entertainment users, readers turn to text-based fictional narratives to fulfill a need for insight (the eudaimonic meaning-seeking) more than they do so to “just” have fun (the hedonic pleasure-seeking).

This observation by no means disregards or underestimates the role of hedonic motivations in engaging with text-based fictional narratives: on the contrary, mean scores on hedonism were quite high in our overall sample. Looking specifically at hedonism also discloses the first difference between conditions: digital-born reading practices (digital fiction and Wattpad) score significantly higher on hedonic motivations for reading, when compared to readers of books. As hypothesized in the theoretical framework, we expected

**Table 3***Means and Standard Deviations Per Genre for Each of the Three Groups of Readers*

Books			Digital fiction			Wattpad		
Genre	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Genre	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Genre	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fantasy	3.73	1.83	Drama	4.74	1.78	Romance	4.46	2.13
Drama	3.72	1.72	Romance	4.46	2.01	Fantasy	4.38	2.09
Science fiction	3.39	1.69	Fantasy	4.32	1.96	Young adult	4.04	2.02
Classics	3.37	1.63	Comics	4.11	2.08	Drama	3.88	1.94
Nonfiction	3.27	1.57	Short fiction	3.69	1.82	Paranormal fantasy	3.77	2.14
Short fiction	3.09	1.54	Paranormal fantasy	3.45	1.95	Short fiction	3.61	2.02
Crime and mystery	2.78	1.61	Adventure	3.43	1.87	Fan fiction	3.41	2.37
Historical fiction	2.75	1.48	Comedy and satire	3.30	1.88	Adventure	3.25	2.02
Horror and thriller	2.75	1.65	Crime and mystery	3.19	1.72	Comedy and satire	3.00	1.97
Adventure	2.62	1.46	Horror and thriller	3.11	1.82	Crime and mystery	2.88	1.87
Paranormal fantasy	2.59	1.69	Science fiction	3.10	1.73	Science fiction	2.87	1.91
Romance	2.38	1.63	Fan fiction	3.04	2.24	Coming of age	2.70	1.94
Comedy and satire	2.39	1.40	Nonfiction	2.95	2.02	Historical fiction	2.65	1.92
Young adult	2.34	1.52	Young adult	2.76	1.95	Horror and thriller	2.64	1.85
Comics	2.30	1.59	Historical fiction	2.67	1.79	Poetry	2.28	1.69
Coming of age	2.23	1.33	Coming of age	2.45	1.66	Classics	2.22	1.66
Poetry	2.22	1.37	Classics	2.26	1.57	Nonfiction	2.01	1.73
Fan fiction	1.39	1.16	Poetry	2.06	1.55	Comics	1.85	1.61

*Note.* Genres are reported in descending order, from the most popular to the least popular for each group. For succinctness and better visualization, some genres are abbreviated. The accurate formulation of each item (with differences across groups) can be found in Table 1. Minimum and maximum scores on all genre items: 1–7.

to observe this difference, which could be due to the presence of ludic components (especially in digital fiction) and, in the case of Wattpad, to the significantly younger age range of its readers (Miall & Kuiken, 1995; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Van Schooten, 2005). On a more speculative note, readers of books might have responded according to ingrained ideas about what should be the purpose of reading. Centuries of distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow literature certainly left a mark in the collective imagery, thus it seems likely that some readers might slightly resist the hedonic components of pleasure and positive valence. For example, it is not hard to imagine a literature student (or a member of a Goodreads group dedicated to classics) frowning at some items on the hedonism scale, such as “I prefer stories that are happy and positive.” On the other hand, digital-born readers might be less inclined to follow certain ingrained traditions, as digital-born fictions originated in recent times (1980s for digital fiction and early 2000s for digital storytelling platforms) and are flourishing within “democratic” online communities.<sup>1</sup>

This possible explanation is reinforced by one of the main findings of this study, namely that for readers of books scores on eudaimonia and hedonism showed the same relationship found in Oliver and Raney’s study (2011)—a modest (but significant) negative correlation—but for both digital-born reading practices this relationship was nonexistent. Wattpad readers even reversed its direction, trending toward a positive correlation. Therefore, even though eudaimonia and hedonism are not bipolar motivations, we can conclude that probably readers of books tend to distinguish more between “meaningful reads” and “fun reads,” selecting texts according to what they are in the mood for, while within digital-born reading practices it is more likely that the needs for insight and pleasure can often co-occur (Koster, 2013), being fulfilled by the same reading experience. Notably, it is only for these groups of readers that some genre factors (such as “dramatic fiction” for digital fiction, or “romantic fiction” for Wattpad) are related to both eudaimonia and hedonism. For

book readers, in turn, we observed more differentiation, with genre factors being connected to either eudaimonia (“literary fiction” and “serious fiction”) or hedonism (“fantasy fiction” and “romantic fiction”).

However, we identified an interesting exception to this trend in “literary fiction,” the most stable genre factor across groups (presenting only minor oscillations in its components across the three reading practices). At this stage of the analysis, we decided to use the term “literary,” because this genre factor captures what emerged inductively from the data, namely that literary genres (primarily classics and poetry) retain a strong connection to each other. Most importantly, this genre factor is a positive predictor of eudaimonia and a negative predictor of hedonism, and these relationships are significant (or considerably trending toward significance) across the three groups. Thus, readers—may they be readers of books, digital fiction, or Wattpad—that engage frequently with literary genres tend to prefer stories that can satisfy a search for insight rather than function as a pleasurable getaway.

Before focusing on what predicts perceived transformation according to this study, we will highlight some results on the relatively underresearched concept of genre preferences, as they proved

<sup>1</sup> While crowdfunding and the presence of multiple communities dedicated to digital fiction still retain a strong democratic valence, with its popularity heavily relying on the dedications of its users and writers, the case of Wattpad has become more problematic in this respect. A recent study by Parnell (2021) showed that heterogeneity and egalitarianism (proudly stated in Wattpad’s Code of Conduct), are not guaranteed by the platform’s relatively open system of publishing. Partnerships with external (Hulu and Netflix) and platform-specific forms of capital (Wattpad Premium and Wattpad Stars) significantly changed the platform since its launch. Many participants in our study used a comment box to express their disappointment for Wattpad’s recent decision to delete the user-moderated forums on the platform, lamenting that they had to “migrate” to other subsidiary means of online aggregation (Reddit and Discord) to preserve their social communities.

**Table 4**  
*Factors With Factor Loadings per Group*

Books	Digital fiction	Wattpad
Literary fiction Poetry (0.80), short fiction (0.74), <i>classics</i> (0.44)	Literary Fiction Poetry (0.85), classics (0.83), short fiction (0.45), <b>historical fiction (0.36)</b>	Literary fiction Poetry (0.72), historical fiction (0.63), classics (0.51)
Fantasy fiction Science fiction (0.84), fantasy (0.77), paranormal fantasy (0.46)	Adventurous fiction Adventure (0.86), paranormal fantasy (0.70), fantasy (0.70), science fiction (0.62), crime and mystery (0.47), coming of age (0.44)	Fantasy fiction Fantasy (0.88), paranormal fantasy (0.76), adventure (0.58)
Thriller fiction Horror and psychological thriller (0.87), crime and mystery (0.84)	Dramatic fiction Romance (0.86), drama (0.70), horror and psychological thriller (0.41)	Thriller fiction Horror and psychological thriller (0.87), crime and mystery (0.84), science fiction (0.52)
Romantic fiction Romance (0.79), young adult/teen fiction/chick lit (0.76)	Activist fiction Nonfiction (0.81), comedy/satire (0.43)	Romantic fiction Romance (0.83), young adult/teen fiction/ chick lit (0.78), drama (0.67)
Serious fiction Historical fiction (0.84), drama (0.59), nonfiction (0.50), <i>classics</i> (0.43)	Visual novels/comics Webcomics/VN (0.75)	Comics and nonfiction (niche genres) Comics (0.78), nonfiction (0.74), coming of age (0.58), <b>comedy/satire (0.36)</b>
Comic fiction Comedy/satire (0.78), coming of age (0.65), comics (0.55), adventure (0.43)	Fan fiction and young adult Fan fiction (0.80), young adult/teen fiction/chick lit (0.59)	Fan fiction Fan fiction (0.79), short fiction (0.66)
% of variance = 67	% of variance = 68	% of variance = 72

*Note.* Items that do not reach the 0.40 threshold are in bold; double loadings are underlined. This visualization of the factors emerged from three PCA is functional to show the overlap and differences between the three reading practices. The complete results of the three separate PCA analyses (oblique oblimin rotation) can be found in supplementary materials. PCA = Principal Component Analyses; VN = visual novels.

to be effective in identifying some peculiarities of the different reading practices. If we consider the genre factors in Table 4, we can easily notice how within the books group, genres are grouped in a straightforward way—showing a strong overlap with the results from the original RHQ version (M. M. Kuijpers et al., 2020)—, with the factor names closely resembling the traditional genre distinctions (i.e., literature, fantasy, thriller, and romance) that are typically found in bookstores and libraries. The same genres are perceived differently by readers of digital fiction: the genre factor “adventurous fiction,” for example, most likely represents the plot-driven subset of digital fiction works that are denser in goal-attaining tasks and puzzles, often set in distant mysterious realms (e.g., fantasy, science fiction, and crime/mystery) and highly based on the ludic component of mastering tasks and advancing in the narrative, which might be signaled here by the “coming of age” genre. Interestingly, this factor was not significantly connected with either hedonism or eudaimonia, suggesting that it might be worth considering other domains as motivations for engaging with digital-born fiction, which in this case could be closer to game play’s properties such as need for challenge and mastery (Koster, 2013).

Furthermore, we can observe how the more traditional genre groupings of fiction books are sometimes fluidly rearranged to match different uses and functions within digital-born reading practices. One example is the digital fiction factor “dramatic fiction,” which merges what in the other two reading practices are two separate factors (“romantic fiction” and “thriller fiction”).

Lastly, if we consider just the four most popular genres per group (Table 3), we can make two observations: (a) there are two genres that maintain their prominence for all reading practices, namely drama and fantasy, suggesting that character-oriented stories (which are often realistic, closer to the actual world of readers) and

plot-oriented ontologically distant realms conflate into two key genres within text-based fictional narratives; (b) the other two most popular genres are more media-specific: classics and science fiction for readers of books, romance and visual novels for digital fiction, romance and young adult for Wattpad readers. Expectedly, readers of books are the ones engaging more frequently with classics. On the same note, we may notice that the most popular types of “genre fiction” within this group are also comparably more canonized than others that are more prominent within digital-born reading practices. Many works of fantasy and science fiction, indeed, have by now received considerable critical recognition by literary theorists (Roberts, 2016). Comparably, romance, which occupies a dominant position in both Wattpad and digital fiction, has not received the same attention (Kraxenberger et al., 2021). Despite the fact that long-term exposure to romance was found to be the strongest predictor for interpersonal sensitivity in a study that considered a broad range of genres (Fong et al., 2013), literary theorists tend to keep a certain distance from this genre. On the other hand, we believe that studying (reader response to) romance should grant particularly interesting results if applied to the context of digital-born reading practices. Romance fiction has already been identified as a fruitful venue for investigating the emerging of particularly strong parasocial relationships with fictional characters (Burnett & Beto, 2000; Tukachinsky, 2011) that can turn into schemas filled with expectations for readers’ own romantic relationships, sometimes with negative implications such as romanticizing unsafe sex behavior (Diekman et al., 2000). Future research addressing this concept might also want to consider that digital-born reading practices display a higher density of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer stories in comparison with traditional books, and thus might function as a safe venue and supporting environment for readers that struggle with gender identity-related

**Table 5**  
*Multiple Linear Regression Models With Genre Factors as Predictors and Eudaimonic Motivations for Reading as Outcome for Each of the Three Groups of Readers*

Predictors	<i>B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>		<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
		LL	UL				
<b>Books</b>							
Intercept	5.42	5.29	6.11	0.45		.21	<.001
Literary fiction	0.26	0.13	0.39	0.07	.23		<.001
Fantasy fiction	-0.10	-0.22	0.02	0.06	-.09		.12
Thriller fiction	-0.15	-0.28	-0.02	0.06	-.13		<b>.01</b>
Romantic fiction	-0.13	-0.27	0	0.07	-.12		.05
Serious fiction	0.28	0.16	0.41	0.06	.25		<.001
Comic fiction	0.05	-0.08	0.18	0.07	.04		.45
Age	-0.01	-0.03	-.002	0.01	-.13		<b>.01</b>
G: male	0.41	-0.45	1.27	0.44	.17		.34
G: female	0.27	-0.57	1.12	0.43	.12		.52
G: prefer to self-describe	0.17	-1.02	1.37	0.60	.02		.77
<b>Digital fiction</b>							
Intercept	5.14	4.43	5.86	0.36		.11	<.001
Literary fiction	0.15	-0.02	0.30	0.08	.13		.05
Adventure fiction	0.08	-0.08	0.25	0.09	.07		.32
Dramatic fiction	0.16	-0.01	0.33	0.09	.14		.06
Activist fiction	0.13	-0.01	0.28	0.07	.11		.07
Visual novels and webcomics	-0.07	-0.22	0.07	0.07	-.06		.32
Fan fiction and YA	-0.23	-0.39	-0.07	0.08	-.20		<b>.003</b>
Age	-0.01	-0.02	0.004	0.01	-.09		.14
G: male	0.43	-0.40	0.29	0.32	.18		.18
G: female	0.48	-0.20	1.06	0.32	.21		.13
G: prefer to self-describe	0.70	-0.11	1.53	0.42	.14		.09
<b>Wattpad</b>							
Intercept	5.57	4.90	6.23	0.33		.18	<.001
Literary fiction	0.18	0.03	0.34	0.08	.16		<b>.01</b>
Fantasy fiction	-0.03	-0.19	0.12	0.08	-.03		.65
Thriller fiction	0.12	-0.05	0.28	0.08	.10		.16
Romantic fiction	0.24	0.09	0.40	0.08	.21		<b>.002</b>
Comics and nonfiction	0.21	0.04	0.38	0.09	.18		<b>.01</b>
Fan fiction	-0.08	-0.23	0.07	0.08	-.07		.29
Age	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.01	.09		.18
G: male	0.27	-0.32	0.88	0.30	.10		.36
G: female	0.01	-0.53	0.56	0.28	-.01		.95
G: prefer to self-describe	-0.08	-0.91	0.73	0.01	-.02		.18

*Note.* Significant *p* values are reported in bold; results approaching statistical significance are reported in italics. In controlling for gender, we included as co-variables three of the four categories used in our study: male, female and prefer to self-describe. We did not include the fourth option provided to participants (“prefer not to say”), as we considered this category as a missing answer. LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; YA = young adult; G = gender. Significance level =  $p \leq .05$ .

discrimination. The younger age range of Wattpad readers, however, can easily be influenced by the other side of the coin (Benzaquen-Gautier, 2018), namely the perpetuation of problematic portrayals of toxic relationships and abuse that, despite the platform’s condemning policy, permeate a consistent share of the romance stories on Wattpad.

### Paths to Perceived Transformation

Our study confirms that eudaimonic motivations do lead to transformation (De Mulder et al., 2022; Koopman, 2015; Schrijvers et al., 2019). However, the relevance of eudaimonic motivations for perceived transformation varies between reading practices, and considering hedonic motivations and genre preferences leads to a more

ambivalent, but more inclusive picture of what facilitates transformative reading experiences.

The first step of our model revealed that the higher book readers scored on eudaimonic motivations, the higher the chances were that they had a transformative reading experience. We found a similar result for readers of digital fiction, but less prominently. The second step of our model revealed that the genre factors that predict perceived transformation for the group of book readers (“literary fiction” and “serious fiction”) are positively related to eudaimonia and negatively related to hedonism, whereas the strongest predictor of perceived transformation for digital fiction readers is engaging with “dramatic fiction,” a genre factor positively related with both eudaimonia and hedonism. The other genre factor that predicts perceived transformation for this group is “activist fiction,” for which

**Table 6**  
*Multiple Linear Regression Models With Genre Factors as Predictors and Hedonic Motivations for Reading as Outcome for Each of the Three Groups of Readers*

Predictors	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R <sup>2</sup>	p
		LL	UL				
<b>Books</b>							
Constant	5.13	4.29	5.97	0.42		.18	<.001
Literary fiction	-0.23	-0.35	-0.10	0.07	-.21		<.001
Fantasy fiction	0.18	0.06	0.30	0.06	.17		<b>.002</b>
Thriller fiction	0.10	-0.02	0.22	0.06	.09		.12
Romantic fiction	0.23	0.10	0.36	0.07	.21		<.001
Serious fiction	-0.05	-0.17	0.07	0.06	-.05		.41
Comic fiction	0.05	-0.08	0.18	0.06	.05		.44
Age	-0.002	-0.01	0.01	0.006	-.02		.74
G: male	-0.55	-1.37	0.27	0.42	-.24		.19
G: female	-0.48	-1.29	0.32	0.41	-.22		.23
G: prefer to self-describe	-0.15	-1.30	1.00	0.58	-.02		.80
<b>Digital fiction</b>							
Constant	5.02	5.01	5.87	0.31		.24	<.001
Literary fiction	-0.27	-0.40	-0.14	0.07	-.25		<.001
Adventure fiction	0.06	-0.08	0.21	0.07	.06		.39
Dramatic fiction	0.16	0.01	0.31	0.07	.15		<b>.03</b>
Activist fiction	0.11	-0.01	0.23	0.06	.10		0.8
Visual novels and webcomics	0.20	0.08	0.33	0.06	.19		<b>.001</b>
Fan fiction and YA	0.22	0.06	0.34	0.07	.19		<b>.003</b>
Age	-0.01	-0.03	.003	0.01	-.09		.14
G: male	0.25	-0.29	0.80	0.27	.11		.36
G: female	0.42	-0.12	0.96	0.28	.19		.13
G: prefer to self-describe	0.46	-0.24	1.17	0.36	.10		.20
<b>Wattpad</b>							
Constant	5.10	4.49	5.69	0.30		.17	<.001
Literary Fiction	-0.13	-0.27	0.004	0.07	-.13		.06
Fantasy Fiction	-0.03	-0.16	0.11	0.07	-.02		.76
Thriller Fiction	-0.07	-0.21	0.07	0.07	-.06		.35
Romantic Fiction	0.31	0.17	0.46	0.07	-.29		<.001
Comics and non fiction	0.23	0.08	0.39	0.08	.22		<b>.002</b>
Fan fiction	0.14	0.003	0.28	0.07	.13		<b>.04</b>
Age	0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.01	.07		.30
G: male	-0.11	-0.66	0.43	0.28	-.04		.68
G: female	-0.06	-0.55	0.43	0.25	-.03		.80
G: prefer to self-describe	-0.03	-0.78	0.70	0.37	-.01		.92

*Note.* Significant *p* values are reported in bold; results approaching statistical significance are reported in italics. In controlling for gender, we included as covariates three of the four categories used in our study: male, female and prefer to self-describe. We did not include the fourth option provided to participants (“prefer not to say”), as we considered this category as a missing answer. LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; YA = young adult; G = gender. Significance level: *p* ≤ .05.

we did not observe significant relationships with motivations for reading, probably because this factor consists of two genres that are read less frequently in our sample (nonfiction and comedy/satire). For Wattpad readers, we found no direct relationships between motivations for reading and perceived transformation. This signals that other media-specific motivations driving reading activity on Wattpad might be more effective in predicting the occurrence of transformative experiences. Future research will benefit from investigating the role of two among the strongest motivators identified by Kraxenberger and Lauer (2022): social contact through digital reading (via intense commenting activities and access to shared fan cultures) and a lively supply and demand panorama that allows users to find “the right story” by using highly specialized combinations of tags and search functions.

From our results, the only identifiable path toward perceived transformation for Wattpad readers is engaging frequently with “romantic fiction,” a genre factor related with both eudaimonia and hedonism and composed of the most popular and representative genres on the platform (i.e., romance, young adult, and drama). The younger age range of this group of readers most likely indicates that they might experience high levels of personal recognition through the main topics that are typically addressed in these genres, such as love, search for identity, family issues, and interpersonal relationships in general—in fact, these components are not only of universal relevance, but particularly timely for adolescents and young adult’s developmental life stages (Caskey & Anpara, 2014; Kloep, 1999).

Overall, our study shows that the combinations of reading habits that predict perceived transformation differ across different reading

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practices. However, zooming in on one particular genre yields an interesting finding that is of general relevance in our sample. Engaging frequently with drama, further described to our participants as referring to texts with a focus “on characters’ inner lives and psychological insight,” seems to be the main predictor of perceived transformation across groups. In fact, although the drama genre appears in different genre factors across groups (“serious fiction” for book readers, “dramatic fiction” for digital fiction readers and “romantic fiction” for Wattpad readers), all of these factors are positive predictors of perceived transformation. We believe that drama is crucial in determining the transformative potential of a group of genres. A possible reason for why engaging with drama leads to a higher chance of experiencing perceived transformation is that “stories that fall under the drama category tend to portray the human experience in a way that permits slower, more deliberative psychological processes” (Khoo, 2021, p. 368). Indeed, we believe that what Khoo’s study showed with films might also hold for text-based fictional narratives, i.e., that dramas “can lead the viewer to think about their personal life experiences in a psychologically beneficial way” (Khoo, 2021, p. 382), due to the fact that these stories prompt complex emotional responses, evoking simultaneously elements of positive and negative affect (Cupchik, 1995), which in turn stimulate reflective thoughts (Bartsch et al., 2014).

This finding also provides support to an underlying shared assumption that we observed in the empirical study of transformative effects of reading, as character-oriented stories (as opposed to action-oriented stories) are often used as stimulus material when measuring the occurrence of a wide range of transformative effects (Djikic & Oatley, 2014; Fialho, 2012; Sikora et al., 2011), as they are expected to be more effective in this respect. Although less prominently than drama, there is another candidate for the status of “key genre,” namely (cultural) nonfiction, present in both “serious fiction” for book readers and “activist fiction” for digital fiction readers. This case is particularly interesting because it seems that exposure to nonfiction is associated with a higher chance of experiencing perceived transformation with fiction, thus suggesting that further research is needed to investigate how reading either nonfiction or fiction compare in terms of their potential to elicit transformative effects—which leads us to the limitations of this study.

### Limitations

In a study that aims at providing an extensive outlook on contemporary reading practices, the most evident limitation is that we did not consider nonfiction, while having no grounds to assume that perceived transformation occurs only with fictional narratives. On the contrary, although we specified that we were not interested in transformative reading experiences with nonfiction, some participants nonetheless reported them (thus being excluded from data analysis). As these spontaneous mentions of nonfiction in studies devoted to fiction already have at least one precedent (M. Kuijpers et al., 2019), we strongly encourage future research endeavors to consider transformative reading experiences with nonfiction, particularly by running a direct comparison with fictional texts, as it might shed light on the role of fictionality in the transformative effects of reading.

Another limitation of this study is that we measured the occurrence of perceived transformation with a simple binary variable, without assigning any sort of “weight” to the transformative effects reported by participants. In general, transformative effects of reading are a

broad phenomenon, manifesting in different ways and degrees—there is no consensus on how to measure its different facets yet, and researchers employ a wide array of methods that depend on whether transformation is measured in real time (Djikic & Oatley, 2014; Sikora et al., 2011) or retrospectively (Ross, 1999; Tanagerås, 2020). For the purposes of our study, a simple yes or no was a necessary first step, as we considered perceived transformation, that is, the conscious realization through which readers feel changed by a specific text-based fictional narrative. In an upcoming study (Loi et al., 2023a), we dive deeper into the open responses provided by participants, tackling the question of what readers perceive as transformative and how it may have different manifestations across reading practices.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study successfully demonstrated that there are many benefits in stretching the boundaries of research on the transformative effects of reading beyond literary print fiction. Our comparative approach succeeded in highlighting fine-grained differences between contemporary reading practices, while simultaneously identifying common patterns in what leads to perceived transformation across those reading practices. Therefore, we strongly encourage further research in the field of empirical literary studies that takes into account the wide variety of contemporary reading practices. After all, being changed by a Dostoevsky novel, experimenting with personal identity through playable fictional characters and learning how to cope with bullies through a Wattpad story are all transformative in different ways and contexts—but, undoubtedly, they are all worthy of our attention when talking about the effects of reading fiction.

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