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# Effectiveness of Online Altruistic Viral Videos on Altruistic Attitudes and Behaviors



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## Purpose of Study

This study seeks to provide evidence that exposure to viral altruistic videos disseminated online positively influence altruistic attitudes and subsequent behavior.

## Literature

With the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, people are exposed to a wide range of media and messages that can impact people in a variety of ways. For example, in June of 2014, Facebook revealed manipulating users' news feeds with either negatively or positively valenced messages, thus impacting the valence of subsequent posts of the users. Users mirrored the emotional valence of their newsfeeds with their own posts (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). With this evidence of emotional contagion occurring online coupled with evidence that people are more likely to perform acts of altruism when in a happy mood (Baek & Reid, 2013), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) combined with cultivation theory (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009), would predict that those exposed to online videos of altruistic acts are more likely to perform such acts than those not exposed to such media. As recent as early fall 2014, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge went viral via social media, and raised millions of dollars for ALS funding. Will people be moved enough to such altruistic acts without a personal "challenge" from a friend? Will just observing those kinds of acts online be enough to impact attitudes and behaviors?

## Hypotheses

- H1: Altruistic attitudes will differ between control and treatment conditions immediately after exposure as well as 1-2 weeks later.
- H2: Likelihood to behave altruistically will differ between control and treatment conditions immediately after exposure as well as 1-2 weeks later.
- H3: When presented with opportunities after exposure, altruistic behaviors will be greater for treatment condition than control condition.
- RQ: Will attitudes and behaviors change over time after exposure?

## Method

Participants were selected from a random sample of Hope College alumni and parents of current students. After informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to two different groups: a treatment and control group. The treatment group was exposed to the treatment video (Life Vest Inside - Kindness Boomerang "One Day"), while the control group was exposed to the control video (Butterball Downstairs). Both groups were post-tested on altruistic attitudes and likelihood of future altruistic behavior. Within two weeks of original exposure, a second round of online data collection assessed altruistic attitudes, likelihood of future altruistic behavior, and altruistic behaviors performed when presented with opportunities. Upon completion, participants were debriefed.

### Measurements

**Altruistic Behaviors:** The Self-Report Altruism Scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ; Rushton, 1981) asked people their level of agreement with altruistic beliefs, e.g., It feels wonderful to assist others in need (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, and Strongly Agree).

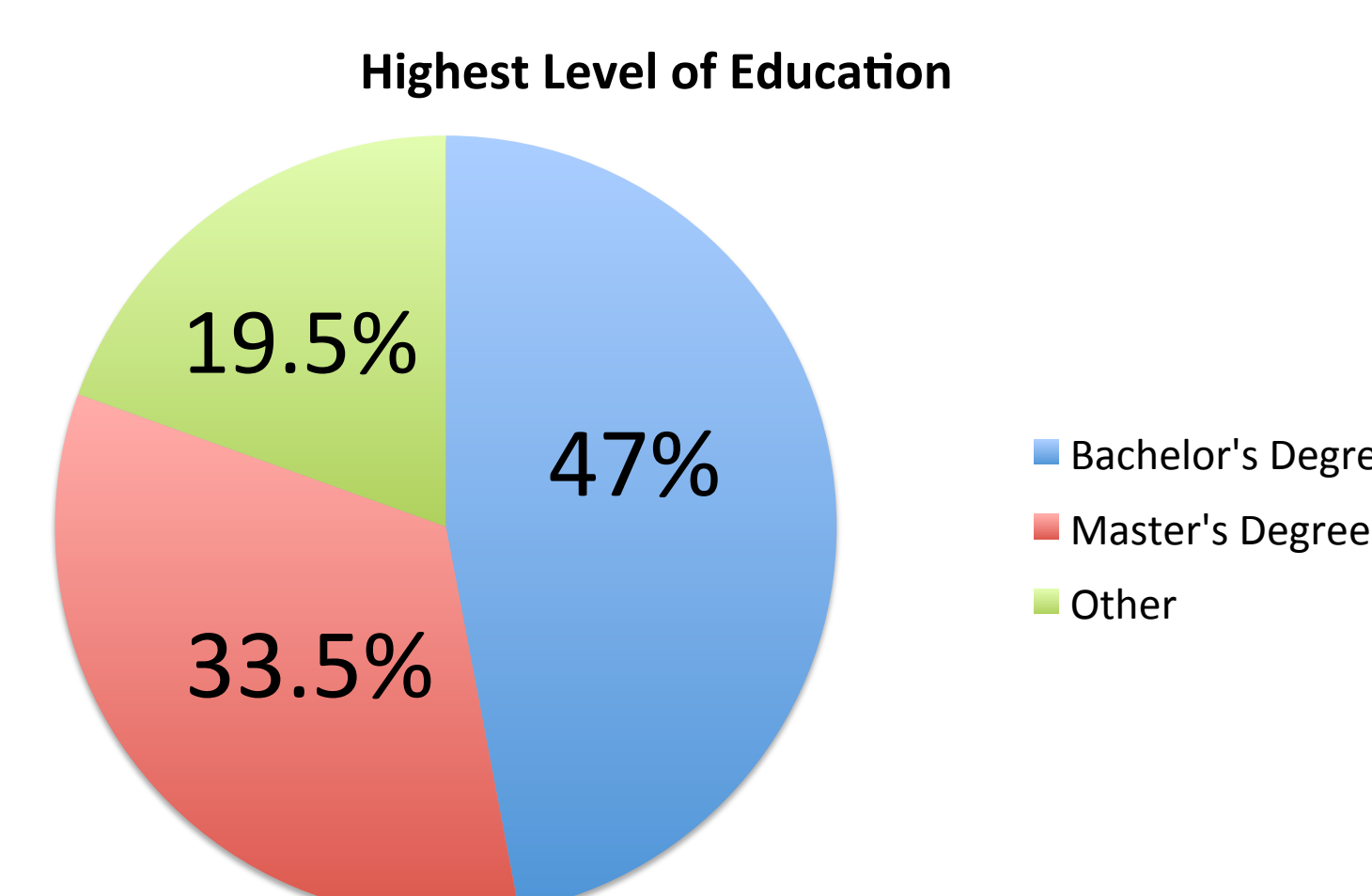
**Likelihood of Behaviors:** A modified Helping Attitudes Scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ; Nickell, 1998) asked people how often they exhibit altruistic behaviors within the next week on a Likert-type frequency scale, e.g., I would give directions to someone I did not know (Never, Once, More than Once, Often, and Very Often).

### Manipulation



## Demographics

N = 115  
 Mean age: 44 years old  
 Sex: 66.7% women  
 Ethnicity: 94% Caucasian/white; remainder African American, Hispanic/Latino, or prefer not to answer.



## Results

	Round 1		Round 2	
	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment
Altruistic Attitudes	M = 43.71	M = 43.90 $p = .420$	M = 44.16	M = 45.05 $p = .109$
Likelihood of Behaviors	M = 42.50	M = 47.10 $p = .02$	M = 45.06	M = 48.63 $p = .065$
Behavior/ Opportunity			89%	92% $p = .102$

Results indicate partial support for hypotheses. Round one results suggest that altruistic viral videos create an immediate increase in likelihood of future altruistic behaviors. Round two results indicate altruistic viral videos have a longitudinal effect on likelihood to behave altruistically as well as behaving slightly more altruistically when given the opportunity.

### Limitations

Mean average of altruistic attitudes for control and treatment condition similarity could be due to both videos inducing positive emotions. The sample limits generalizability.

### Implications/Future Research

Findings imply that nonprofit organizations could utilize viral videos without a personal challenge from a friend as effective and affordable means to promote their missions and goals. Future research could use a more neutral control video and involve more diverse population demographics.

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