

Inspiration Contagion Effects:

Elevated Thoughts and Transcendent Emotions

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Motivation

Why study “inspiration contagion” online?

In motivational communities, posts don’t just inform—**they can spread inspiration** through replies.

- Prior work on **emotion contagion** often focuses on:
 - broad *valence/arousal*, or
 - basic emotions (e.g., happiness vs. sadness)
- But inspiration is not only “positive affect”:
 - **thoughts/ideas**: e.g., evoked by scripts, lessons, narratives
 - **self-transcendent experience**: feel hopeful and acquire a sense of self-expansion (Chang, 2023; Thrash, 2007)

Our contribution

- We disentangle two pathways:
 - **Thought contagion**: transfer of *thematic ideas* (topics) from posts → comments
 - **Emotion contagion**: transfer of *specific feelings* from posts → comments
- And focus on two kinds of emotions:
 - **Self-transcendent**: admiration, gratitude, optimism (Narayan and Seng, 2018)
 - **Motivation-related**: curiosity, desire, realization

Research Questions

RQs

- **RQ1:** What topics are more likely to trigger: (a) thought contagion and (b) emotion contagion?
- **RQ2:** Do inspiring posts generate more inspiring *thoughts* in comments?
- **RQ3:** Which self-transcendent emotion triggers the strongest emotion transfer?
- **RQ4:** Which motivation-related emotion triggers the strongest emotion transfer?

Data

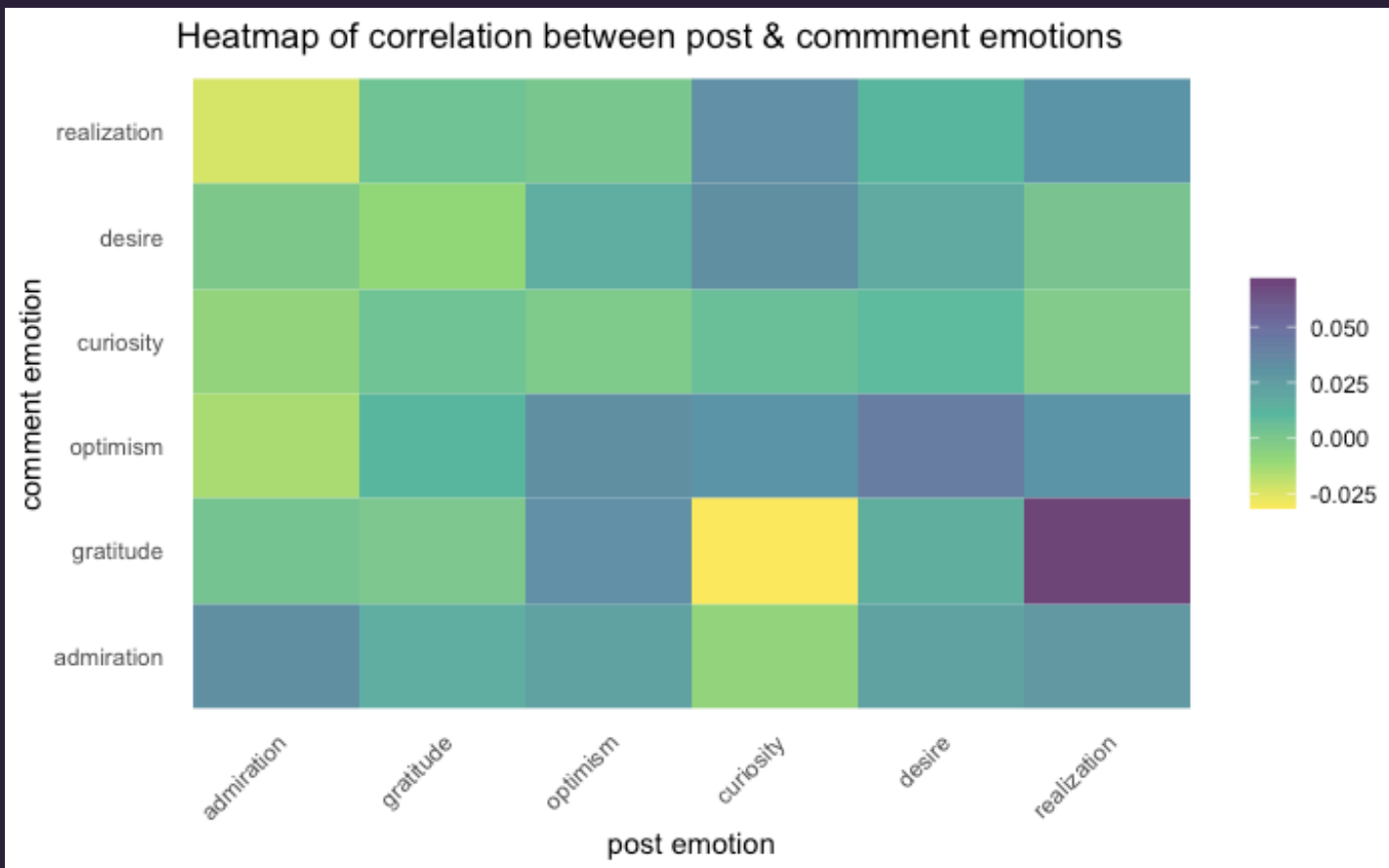
r/GetMotivated at scale

- Community scale: **24M+ followers**, **23rd** largest subreddit
- Collected: **all posts + comments** from subreddit creation **March 2010 → Dec 2022**
- Final dataset:
 - **15,793 posts**
 - **230,418 comments** (linked to posts)
 - Source URL archives from *The-Eye.eu*

Measures

Emotions from text (classifier)

- BERT-based model aligned with **GoEmotions** (28 emotions), output on [0,1]



Topics as “inspiring thoughts”

Topic modeling (**BerTopic**-style):

Nine topics identified:

1. Embed: **SBERT all-miniLM-L6-v2**
2. Reduce: **UMAP** (tuned #components)
3. Cluster: **K-Means** (chosen for interpretability)
4. Tokenize + weighting: count vectorizer + c-TF-IDF
5. Represent: keywords + docs + **GPT-4-mini** + human review

1. Media, Inspiration, and Personal Stories
2. Relationships and Personal Growth
3. Motivational Insights...
4. Overcoming Struggles...
5. Weight loss and healthy lifestyle...
6. ...

Analytic Strategy

Two contagion tests

Thought contagion

- **Chi-square**: post-topic \times comment-topic
- **Cramer's V**: effect size
- **Mixed-effects multinomial logistic model (MEMLM)**
 - Predict *comment topic* from *post topic*

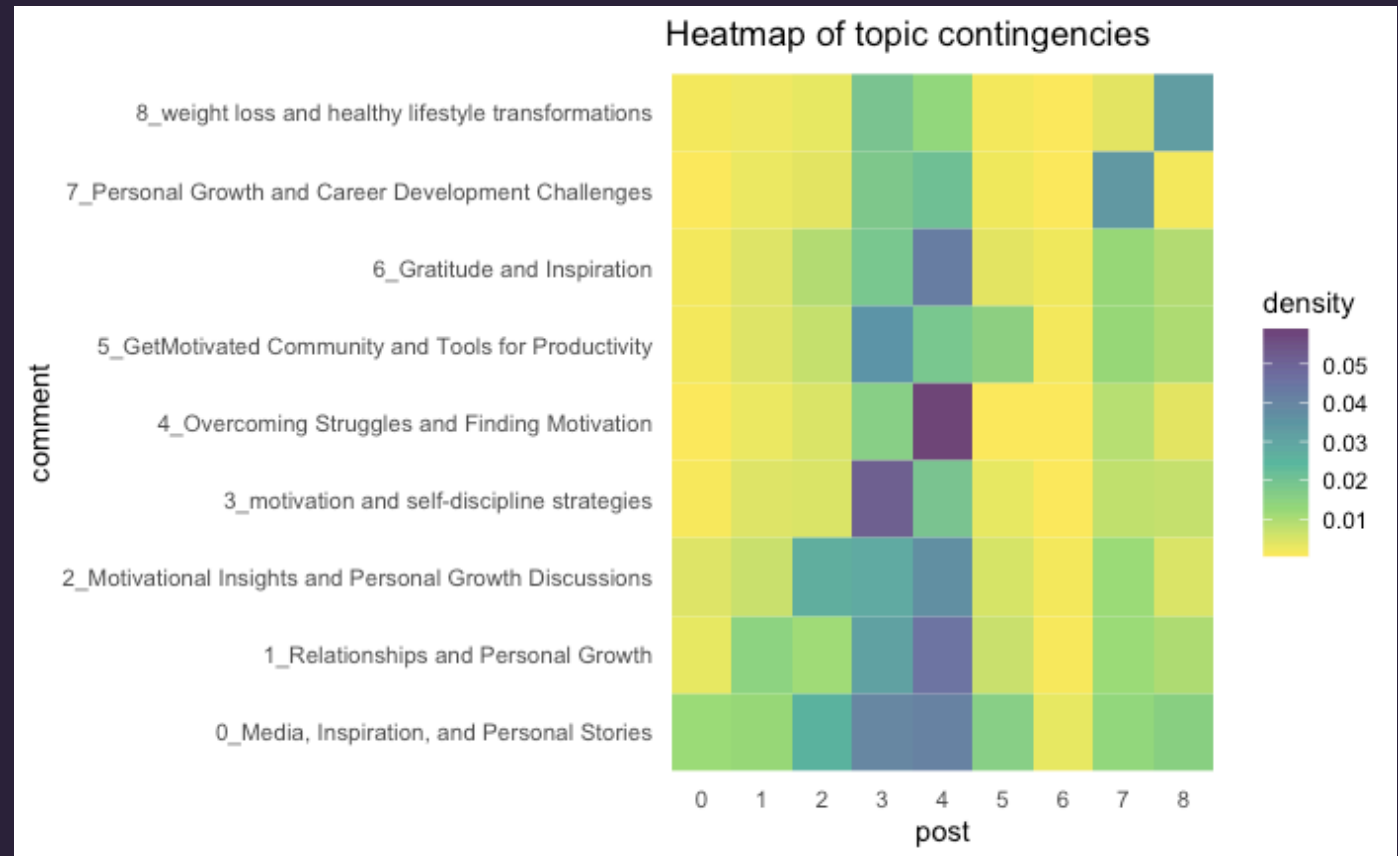
Emotion contagion

- **6 mixed-effects logistic models** (one per comment emotion)
- Predict *comment emotion* from:
 - **same post emotion**
 - **other post emotions** (cross-emotion)
 - **topic + emotion \times topic** interactions

Results

Thought contagion: strong topic alignment

- Post-topic and comment-topic are **not independent**, $\chi^2 = 75,648$, $p \leq .001$
- **Cramer's V = 0.21** (moderate association; clear diagonal structure)
- MEMLM: strong **positive** log-odds for “matching topics”



Heatmap of topic contingencies

Emotion contagion: selective (same-emotion + cross-emotion)

- **Same-emotion transfer**

- Gratitude → gratitude in comments: $\beta = 0.15$, $p \leq .01$
- Admiration → admiration in comments: $\beta = 0.07$, $p \leq .01$
- Optimism / curiosity / desire / realization: **ns** (no direct transfer)

- **Cross-emotion**

- Post curiosity → more comment admiration: $\beta = 0.06$, $p \leq .05$

Topic context: boosts baseline emotion AND moderates transfer

Two roles of topic context:

Discussion

What we learn about “inspiration contagion”

- Inspiration spreads through **two channels**:
 - **Ideas**: topics strongly mirror between posts and comments
 - **Emotions**: transfer is selective (strongest for **gratitude**)
- **Implication**: designing motivational communities may require supporting both:
 1. transferable narrative “scripts” (e.g., overcoming adversity), and
 2. gratitude-rich affective framing.

Wrap-up

Limitations + next steps

Limitations:

- Text classifier measures **expressed** emotion (not felt emotion)
- Observational design: contagion \neq causation
- Topic labels + classifier outputs introduce measurement error

Limitations + next steps

Next steps (planned): Experimental priming test

- Add a **Prolific + Qualtrics + jsPsych** lexical-decision task after each post
- Two blocks per post:
 - **Emotion accessibility** (emotion targets)
 - **Topic accessibility** (topic-keyword targets)
- Stimuli: targets from cluster keywords (**KeyBERT** + `GPT-5.1`); fillers + non-words **length-matched**
- Outcomes: **RT + accuracy**
- Hypothesis: faster RT for targets \Rightarrow increased **accessibility/priming**, offering causal evidence for mechanisms behind observed contagion

Q&A

Thank you!