

IS IT ALL JUST JUMPSCARES?

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Abstract

- Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a staple of communication theory, its specific application to the interactive decision-making processes within the horror video game genre is still under explored.
- This research investigates how environmental themes and game mechanics influence player processing via the central route of cognitive elaboration versus the peripheral route of affective, or emotional, response.
- For this study, everyone in our research team created a detailed content analysis of gameplay walkthroughs in popular horror games, such as my assigned video game, Resident Evil 7.
- A structured codebook was used to categorize specific triggers and player responses.
- Given that the study is currently ongoing, the researchers anticipate that these findings will demonstrate how the horror genre strategically utilizes communication theories to influence player behavior and cognitive processing.
- This study can be used as a gateway to future studies surrounding horror video games and communication theories.

Preliminary Results

The results show that there will be a wide variety of stimuli in Resident Evil 7, where decisions are aligned with the central route and jumpscare resonate with the peripheral route. Resident Evil 7 maintains player engagement by constantly switching players' cognitive elaboration and emotional processing. While these results are derived from pre-recorded videos from content creators, there is a connection between communication theories and video horror games because of how modern games integrate these theories into gameplay to influence player behavior. These results are preliminary, but inter-coder reliability tests suggests the same pattern. Inter-coder reliability tests are reliable due to krippendorff's score of 80%.

Game	Timestamp	Is Lore Present?	Lore Type:	Lore Description
SOMA	6:46-6:52	0	90	90
SOMA	6:53-7:27	1	1	90
SOMA	7:38-7:40	0	90	90

Is Decision Making Present?	Type:	Decision Context
0	90	90
0	90	90
0	90	90

Is Existential Horror Present?	Thematic Description	Is Atmospheric horror Present?	Atmospheric Type:
0		90	1 3
1	Simon's vision glitches		1 2
0		90	1 4

Are Jumpscare Present?	Score	Type:	Questions/Comments
0	90		Sudden music change
0	90		Music is scary while ingame recording plays, and you hear a voice
1	3		Dark hallway shows a monster you are supposed to hide from



Conclusion

This research is not simply a video analysis of Resident Evil 7, but also a gateway to further research with communication theories and video horror games. Our research started with testing coder reliability to code Resident Evil 7 using an Excel Sheet, ending with an 80% reliability score. ELM is used to observe a connection between the central and peripheral paths and Resident Evil 7. A video analysis was conducted, and results were recorded on an Excel sheet, with a codebook to rely on. Resident Evil 7 uses constant shifts between central and peripheral cues to maintain engagement. These results are derived from pre-recorded videos and not live subjects, but there is a link between communication theories and horror games. This study suggests expanding research into other games and using biometric tools to measure real-time responses of players.

Methods

This study measures specific moments through a video analysis of a Resident Evil 7 playthrough when any type of lore, jump scares, decision making, and atmospheric horror are present. This is done through using a premade codebook and an excel sheet to input data. This video analysis includes a procedure of following a codebook that includes specific rules for certain moments. The codebook asks a series of questions about whether the variable is present and what type.

- 1 Is Lore Present? → 0 = No, 1 = Yes → If yes, 1 = Audio Recording, 2 = Notes, 3 = Digital/Data, 4 = Dialogue, 5 = Case Files, 6 = Survey, 7 = Other, 8 = Multiple
- 2 Is Decision Making Present? → 0 = No, 1 = Yes → If yes, explain in decision context section
- 3 Is Existential Horror Present? → 0 = No, 1 = Yes → If yes, describe the existential horror in the thematic description box
- 4 Is Atmospheric Horror Present? → 0 = No, 1 = Yes → If yes, 2 = Sound, 3 = Lack of Sound, 4 = Visual
- 5 Is Jumpscare Present? → 0 = No, 1 = Yes → If yes, 1 = Noise, 2 = Hidden Attack, 3 = Hide and Seek, 4 = The Chase, 5 = Surreal Scare

Discussion

- These preliminary results suggests a variety of conclusions that will be strengthened once this research has officially concluded with all data coded.
- The results shows a constant shift in peripheral and central cues that will effect how the player makes decisions during gameplay.
- Intercoder reliability test established high level of objectivity through 80% Krippendorff threshold of data categorization.
- There is a limitation on results due to data derived from pre-recorded source instead of live subjects.
- This can serve as a framework for future studies with communication theories and video horror games or other sub-genres.

References



Codebook Reference

