

Is It All Jumpscares?

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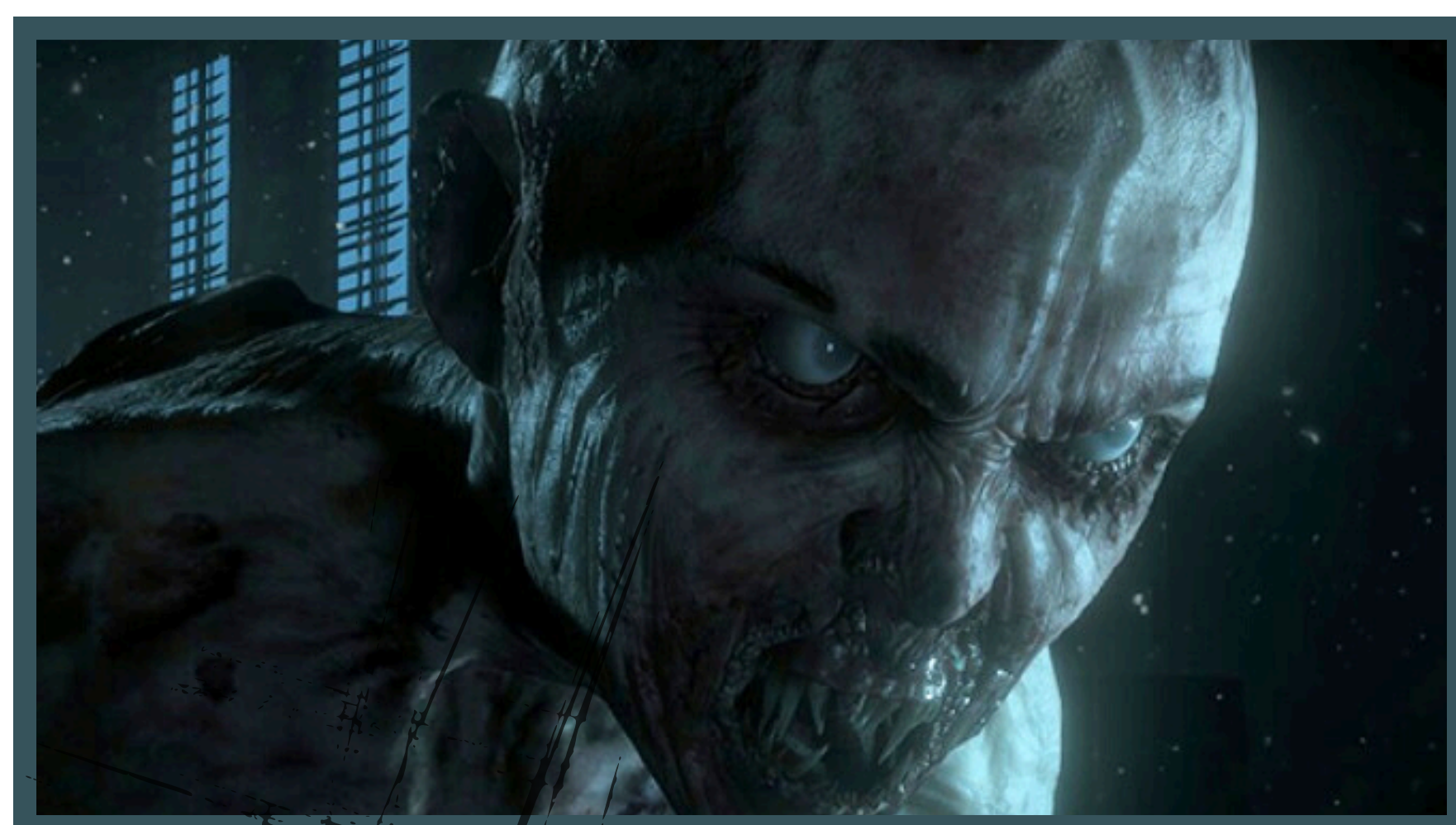
Until Dawn

Until Dawn is an interactive horror video game released in 2015 by *Supermassive Games*. Players control eight young adults whose lives are endangered on a remote mountain. Choices made have a direct impact on life and death, utilizing and demonstrating the "Butterfly Effect."



The psychology of horror and fear has been studied numerous times, but the study of horror from a communication perspective is underdeveloped – especially in light of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), a prevalent persuasion theory of actions and responses.

- The gameplay is a mix of cutscenes and third-person player exploration
- Players directly control characters in linear environments.
- The study aims to show how horror video games are prominent within the decision-making process and induce fear beyond jump scares.



1. Introduction

Video games are a prominent form of entertainment media, potentially holding a powerful influence on communication. Existing research has examined comedic and violent video games, but has undermined the value of horror video games.

As a result, horror video games have been underexplored. This study addresses that gap by investigating how elements of horror games – such as lore, decision making, atmospheric horror, and jumpscares may affect player decision making.

2. Methodology

The Elaboration Likelihood Model proposes that processes of change are involved when a person elaborates and when they encounter forms of communication, which are processed through varying levels of thought. ELM is a dual-process theory that explains how thoughts can emerge in two ways:

- **Low elaboration:** involves minimal thought, picturing nonverbal cues or inherent ideologies.
- **High elaboration:** elicits cognitive processing, requiring more complex thought and time

This project used:

- Content analysis - a method for identifying patterns within media
- Categorical Coding – identifying atmospheric horror, lore, decision making, and jumpscares.



QR Code leads to complete codebook used in study

3. Results

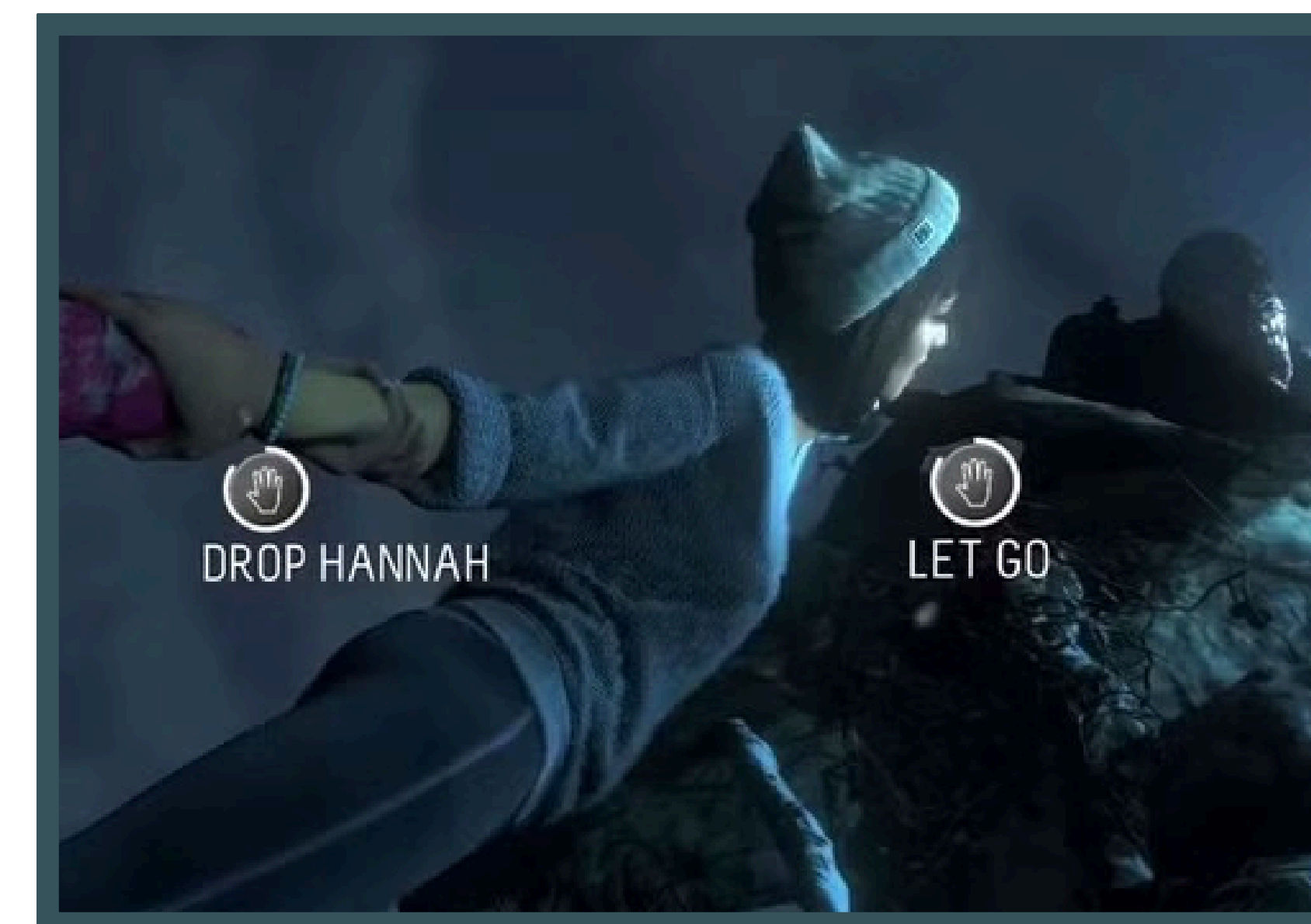


Figure 1: An example of decision-making within the game.

Results are pending as research and coding are still underway. The results are expected to showcase a wide variety of horror interactions through character choices, environmental elements, and storytelling.

- It is expected that the game will demonstrate a reliance on environmental fear, rather than jump scares, to enhance the fear-based encounters.
- These findings will help clarify how different horror design elements contribute to a player's overall experience.
- UROP research assistants are continuing to code selected gameplay videos; additional content analysis is in progress.

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4. Discussion

This project highlights how interactive decision-making, along with other key horror media elements, can contribute to fear responses. Future findings aim to broaden understanding of the inner workings of horror media, specifically focusing on persuasive and cognitive processes.

- Future analyses will aid in identifying the relationship between gameplay characteristics and fear induction.

5. Next Steps

The outcome of this project has the ability to impact the horror game genre and the fear that the players experience.

- This project will continue to work on and code different video games, such as *Soma* and *Resident Evil 7*.
- Future work may incorporate player response and anticipatory fear data to further sustain claims.



References



QR Code leads to list of references used in study