

Loving 'it' - Explaining the Motivation for Horror Movie Consumption

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Abstract:

Horror movies are enjoying a great popularity although they belong to a film genre which triggers fear and terror at its recipients. Accordingly, the question arises which motives and characteristics justify the devotion to this film genre. In this regard, no previous research considered the basic psychological needs of self-determination theory. Therefore, we take a closer look at these needs regarding different types of motivation and their influence on the frequency of horror movie consumption. We conducted an online questionnaire study, in which personality traits and characteristics from 289 horror movie consumers were collected. Our results show that intrinsically motivated consumers are characterized by a low need for relatedness, while extrinsically motivated ones are characterized by a strong need for relatedness and a low need for autonomy. Furthermore, intrinsically motivated recipients consume horror movies more often than extrinsically motivated ones.

Keywords: Horror movie consumption; Self-Determination Theory; Types of Motivation

Track: Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction

Horror movies depict terrible and violent content, trigger fear and terror at its recipients, and generate disgusting emotions through striking and shocking elements. Individuals pursue the consumption of such movies out of the intention to experience a certain state of mind, which is associated with a feeling of fear. However, feeling afraid is generally not positive. It is paradox that medial contents are sought which trigger negative emotions (Bantinaki, 2012). Therefore, the question arises why so many recipients voluntarily and deliberately expose themselves to film-induced fear. Looking at the content of such movies, it is easier to explain why some people don't like this film genre. Nevertheless, it causes different reactions among its recipients. While some people like the feeling of being afraid and perceive this feeling as pleasant and entertaining, others find it repugnant (Oliver & Sanders, 2004). The high number of successful horror movies of the last decades shows that the consumption of this film genre enjoys great popularity and is not limited to a small consumer group. Particularly noteworthy is the success of the movie *Paranormal Activity*. Its production cost was less than \$ 15,000. More than \$ 193 million could be recorded in profit, and already on its launch weekend the movie grossed \$ 19.6 million (Box Office Mojo, 2018a). The movie *Halloween*, the eleventh part of the successful horror series, grossed on its launch weekend \$ 76.2 million (Box Office Mojo, 2018b). These numbers illustrate that the production of a horror movie seems to be worthwhile for economic interests.

Previous research already delivered numerous findings which try to explain the success of this film genre. Mostly, demographic characteristics and personality traits were considered. Particular the characteristics sensation seeking and empathy were in focus of several researchers (for an overview see Oliver & Sanders, 2004). A high level of sensation seeking and a low level of empathy lead to a more frequent consumption of horror movies and a greater sense of pleasure (e.g. Tamborini & Stiff, 1987; Tamborini, 1991). Furthermore, males report greater enjoyment and lower levels of fear than females (Oliver, 1994). Besides, horror movies are watched preferably with friends or on a romantic date, meanwhile the man expresses mastery and the woman expresses fear (Zillmann et al., 1986). Based on previous research, the stereotypical horror movie recipient is male, not very empathic, enjoys the thrill and the adrenaline rush, and is somewhat rebellious and aggressive (Oliver & Sanders, 2004). While these findings are very pertinent, Robinson, Callahan, and Evans (2014) discovered a recipient group which contradicts this stereotypical horror movie consumer. They describe some recipients with a lower level of sensation seeking and a strong feeling of fear during

watching a horror movie and in the aftermath. There seem to be different motives for consuming horror movies and so far, some aspects have been completely disregarded. No previous research considered the influence of the basic psychological needs of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1993) and the type of internal and external motivation affecting the consumption of horror movies. However, it is important for researchers and practitioners to understand human motivations for consuming horror movies.

Therefore, to tackle this research gap, we use a self-determination theory approach to explore the devotion to horror movies. We examine the three basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy corresponding to different types of motivation and their influence on the frequency of horror movie consumption.

2. Theoretical Background

To answer the question why so many people expose themselves voluntarily to film-induced fear, the complex nature of human motivation should be considered. In this context, the self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1993) is an interesting approach. It is a theory of human motivation, which is based on the concept of intentionality. Individuals are motivated to perform an activity when they want to pursue a specific purpose. This theory postulates three basic human psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The need for competence refers to an individual's feeling to be effective and competent in his social environment and to have the opportunity to demonstrate his skills. Relatedness is the need to feel connected with other persons. Individuals want to be part of a community and be accepted by others. The need for autonomy affects the person's need to behave based on his volition and choice (Deci & Ryan, 2002). It is assumed that human behavior is controlled by the aim to satisfy these psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 1993). Therefore, we consider them as motivational factors for the consumption of horror movies.

Another interesting aspect related to human motivation is the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from Deci and Ryan (1985). Both types of motivation are self-determined. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are associated with the needs for competence and autonomy (Deci, 1975), while extrinsic motivation is associated with all three needs (Deci & Ryan, 1991). However, there is not only one type of extrinsic motivation. To differentiate these types, Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced a subtheory within self-determination theory, called organismic integration theory (OIT). It contains six different

motivational types with different degrees to which motivations emanate from the self, which can be represented on a continuum (Figure 1).

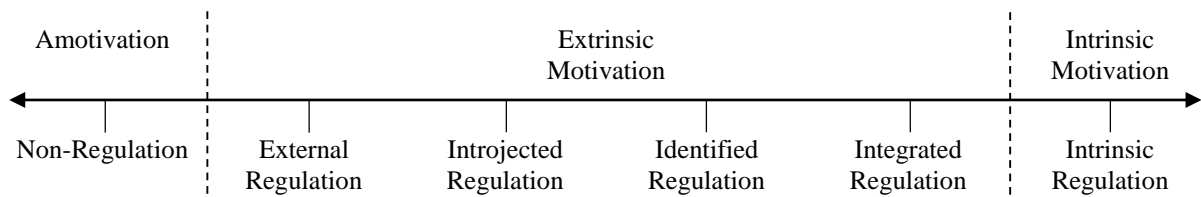


Figure 1. Different types of motivation (following Deci & Ryan, 1985)

The first one is ‘amotivation’, the state of lacking the intention to act. The five other types are classifications of motivated behavior. Four of them are extrinsically motivated. ‘External regulation’ refers to a motivation, where the behavior is dependent on external coercions like rewards and punishments. ‘Introjected regulation’ is a relatively controlled form of regulation in which behavior is performed to attain ego enhancements and to avoid guilt and shame. ‘Identified regulation’ emerges when people identify with the value of an activity and when it is accepted as personally important. ‘Integrated regulation’ occurs when identified regulation is assimilated to the self. The last one is ‘intrinsic regulation’, which describes performing an activity for its inherent satisfaction. It represents the prototypic instance of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Previous research demonstrated that there are different aspects which influence the consumption of horror movies. Robinson et al. (2014) defined a group of consumers with characteristics of people who don’t like this film genre and it is interesting to examine how these consumers are motivated. It can be assumed that people who don’t like this film genre are not intrinsically motivated to watch it, because this type of motivation only occurs when individuals enjoy the activity. Based on Deci and Ryan’s (1985) different types of motivation, it is assumed that the consumption of horror movies can be intrinsically as well as extrinsically motivated.

As previously described, extrinsically motivated behavior is dependent on external influences and the individual wants to get attention from his social environment. The need for relatedness refers to the person’s need for belongingness and connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Based on literature, the first hypothesis arises:

H1: Extrinsic motivation is characterized by a strong need for relatedness.

Furthermore, extrinsically motivated behavior is less autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, we assume:

H2: Extrinsic motivation is characterized by a low need for autonomy.

Intrinsically motivated behaviors are associated with the needs for competence and autonomy (Deci, 1975). Based on this knowledge, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Intrinsic motivation is characterized by a low need for relatedness.

Simultaneously, intrinsic reasons for action represent a high degree of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, we assume:

H4: Intrinsic motivation is characterized by a strong need for autonomy.

Moreover, we examined the intensity of the basic psychological needs in the different types of motivation, advanced by OIT.

In addition, we want to identify if a correlation between the type of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation and the frequency of horror movie consumption exists. Intrinsic motivation refers to an activity which is inherently interesting or enjoyable. Individuals who act intrinsically motivated are more satisfied with their activities than extrinsically motivated ones (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Sheldon et al., 2004). Therefore, we assume that intrinsically motivated behaviors are more often exercised and propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Intrinsic motivation has a positive influence on the frequency of the horror movie consumption.

3. Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we administered an online questionnaire study. The survey started on February 28, 2015 and was completed on April 30, 2015. We captured personality traits and characteristics from 289 horror movie consumers, as well as information about the reasons for and the frequency of their horror movie consumption. 165 of them were female (57.1%). Ages ranged from 18 to 62 years, with an average age of $M = 30.44$ ($SD = 7.96$).

To measure the strength of the three basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, we used the Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale (BNSG-S) developed by Ryan and Deci (n.d.). It contains 21 items measured on a seven-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). Seven of them describe feelings of autonomy ($\alpha = .697$), eight items evaluate the need for relatedness ($\alpha = .766$), and six items the need for competence ($\alpha = .733$).

To assess the motivation for horror movie consumption, we used a list of 43 items ($\alpha = .817$), developed by Robinson et al. (2014). The items include statements of horror movie fans, explaining why they like that film genre. The participants were asked to assess the

reasons why they consume horror movies. Response options for the items ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

4. Results

Our participants reported an average of $M = 39.76$ horror movies within the last year ($SD = 61.09$). This statement ranged from 0 – 400 movies.

To identify the five different types of motivation, we conducted a cluster analysis with the items from Robinson et al. (2014). It revealed a homogeneous solution. The elbow method yielded five clusters which can be assigned to the different motivational types from OIT. Type 1 is characterized by items, which describe ‘external motivation’. The external motivation for the consumption of horror movies is dependent on external coercions like rewards and punishments. Type 2 is assigned to ‘introjected motivation’. Items with high values belonging to this type state that the consumption of horror movies is performed to attain ego enhancements and to avoid guilt and shame. Type 3 contains items, which assign to ‘identified motivation’. Consumers, who are identified motivated, consider the consumption of horror movies as personally important. It is important for them to feel competent and they therefore try to cope with their own fears. We describe type 4 as ‘integrated motivation’. These consumers watch horror movies because they relate the content to their own lives. The feeling of fear does not come to the fore. Type 5 is characterized by items, which describe ‘intrinsic motivation’. Intrinsically motivated horror movie consumers watch this film genre for their inherent satisfaction. They like the feeling of fear and terror and the adrenaline rush they get.

To investigate the intensity of the three basic psychological needs in the different types of motivation, we used a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation with the items of the Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale. The number of factors was fixed to three because of the three basic needs that are measured by the scale. After excluding items with loadings lower 0.4, the three-factor solution explained 39.08% of the total variance. The first factor, containing five items, which explain 26.96% of the total variance ($\alpha = .659$), describes the need for relatedness. The second factor, which refers to the need for competence, includes three items, explaining additional 7.08% of the total variance ($\alpha = .669$). Factor three describes the need for autonomy and also contains three items, which explain further 5.04% of the total variance ($\alpha = .642$). The mean factor scores for each of the five motivational types are shown in table 1.

Factors	<u>Type 1</u>	<u>Type 2</u>	<u>Type 3</u>	<u>Type 4</u>	<u>Type 5</u>
	External motivation	Introjected motivation	Identified motivation	Integrated motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Need for relatedness	.1605	.1293	.0778	-.0421	-.1040
Need for competence	-.0281	.0151	.1153	.0427	-.0482
Need for autonomy	-.1514	.0304	.0423	.0213	.0120

Table 1. Intensity of the three basic psychological needs in the different types of motivation

‘External motivation’ is characterized by the highest mean value for ‘need for relatedness’, which shows that the external motivated consumer wants to be socially involved. Hence, H1 is supported. Furthermore, type 1 has the lowest mean value for ‘need for autonomy’. This type of motivated behavior is less autonomous. H2 is also supported. ‘Introjected motivation’ has also a high factor score for ‘need for relatedness’. However, the mean values for ‘need for competence’ and ‘need for autonomy’ are only slightly positive. ‘Identified motivation’ is characterized by a strong ‘need for competence’, while the factor scores for the other both needs are close to zero. Consumers, who are identified motivated, want to feel competent and try to cope with their own fears. The mean values of the three basic needs for ‘Integrated motivation’ are all close to zero, where ‘need for relatedness’ even has a negative score. ‘Need for relatedness’ has also the lowest mean value for ‘intrinsic motivation’. An intrinsically motivated action is not associated with the need for relatedness (Deci, 1975). Hence, H3 is supported. Intrinsically motivated horror movie consumers watch this film genre for their inherent satisfaction and not for being socially involved. Simultaneously, the factor score for ‘need for autonomy’ is the highest one of the three basic needs. Even it is a value close to zero, it is still higher than those for ‘need for relatedness’ and ‘need for competence’. Thus, H4 is partially confirmed.

Especially the ‘need for relatedness’ shows a clear pattern within the types of motivation. While ‘external motivation’ is characterized by a strong ‘need for relatedness’, this need has the lowest factor score for ‘intrinsic motivation’. The intensity of this need is decreasing from type to type. The ‘need for competence’ shows also a pattern. While ‘external motivation’ and ‘intrinsic motivation’ are characterized by negative mean values for this need, and the values for ‘introjected motivation’ and ‘integrated motivation’ are close to zero, ‘identified motivation’ is characterized as the only one by a high positive value.

The frequency of the horror movie consumption shows also a pattern within the clusters, which is shown in table 2. The cluster ‘intrinsic motivation’ displays the highest mean value of the consumption frequency, while the cluster ‘introjected motivation’ has the lowest value, followed by ‘external motivation’. The consumption frequency increases from

type to type. This results confirm H5, which implies that intrinsic motivation has a positive influence on the frequency of horror movie consumption. Based on these findings, we conduct that intrinsically motivated recipients consume horror movies more often than extrinsically motivated ones.

	<u>Type 1</u>	<u>Type 2</u>	<u>Type 3</u>	<u>Type 4</u>	<u>Type 5</u>
	External motivation	Introjected motivation	Identified motivation	Integrated motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Consumption Frequency	24.53	20.91	37.08	44.80	50.33

Table 2. Average consumption frequency for different motivational types

5. Conclusion and Implications

With the present study, we wanted to examine the motivation for the consumption of horror movies. We considered a differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and if the psychological needs of self-determination theory influence the devotion to this film genre. Using a cluster analysis, we could capture five different types of motivation, which could be assigned to five types of motivation of the OIT of Deci and Ryan (1985). The consumer can either be extrinsically or intrinsically motivated, where the extrinsic motivation is further differentiated into ‘external motivation’, ‘introjected motivation’, ‘identified motivation’, and ‘integrated motivation’. To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first study that investigated the intensity of the basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy in the different types of motivation advanced by OIT. The basic psychological needs have different intensities within the different types of motivation. Especially the ‘need for relatedness’ shows a clear pattern, because its intensity decreases from type to type. While ‘external motivation’ is characterized by a strong ‘need for relatedness’, this basic need has an opposite effect on ‘intrinsic motivation’, which shows the lowest mean value. However, ‘external motivation’ has a low ‘need for autonomy’, while ‘intrinsic motivation’ shows the highest mean value for this need. The type of motivation also affects the frequency of horror movie consumption. Intrinsically motivated recipients consume this film genre more often than extrinsically motivated ones.

Nevertheless, this study shows that some individuals consume horror movies without being intrinsically motivated. Rather, there are extrinsic motivators which influence the consumption of this special film genre, for example social aspects. It seems that extrinsically motivated consumers watch horror movies to satisfy their need for relatedness and to attain ego enhancements. Therefore, a successful marketing campaign for this film genre should be

geared to intrinsically motivated consumers, who watch scary movies for their inherent satisfaction, as well as for extrinsically motivated consumers. For the former, the communication policy should address the need for autonomy of the consumers and highlight the feeling of enjoyment while watching such movies. However, marketing campaigns for extrinsically motivated consumers should be different and address their need for relatedness and allude to a social context while watching horror movies. Special attention has to be given to this group in order to reach even more recipients.

One limitation of the present study is the used Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale for measuring the strength of the three basic psychological needs. The factor analysis, which we used for investigating the intensity of the needs in the different types of motivation, shows that some items did not seem to be suitable for the measurement of the respective needs. Therefore, future research should consider to use other scales to measure these needs. Further, this is the first study that used a self-determination theory framework to examine the motivation for the consumption of horror movies and that considered different types of motivation. However, we focused only on these characteristics. It would also be interesting to consider other personality traits like sensation seeking and empathy regarding different types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, we concentrated only on the horror genre. Future research could examine characteristics and personality traits of recipients of other film genres and if there is a significant difference. Further research should take a closer look at possible differences between different horror subgenres. A generalization to other industries would also be useful.

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