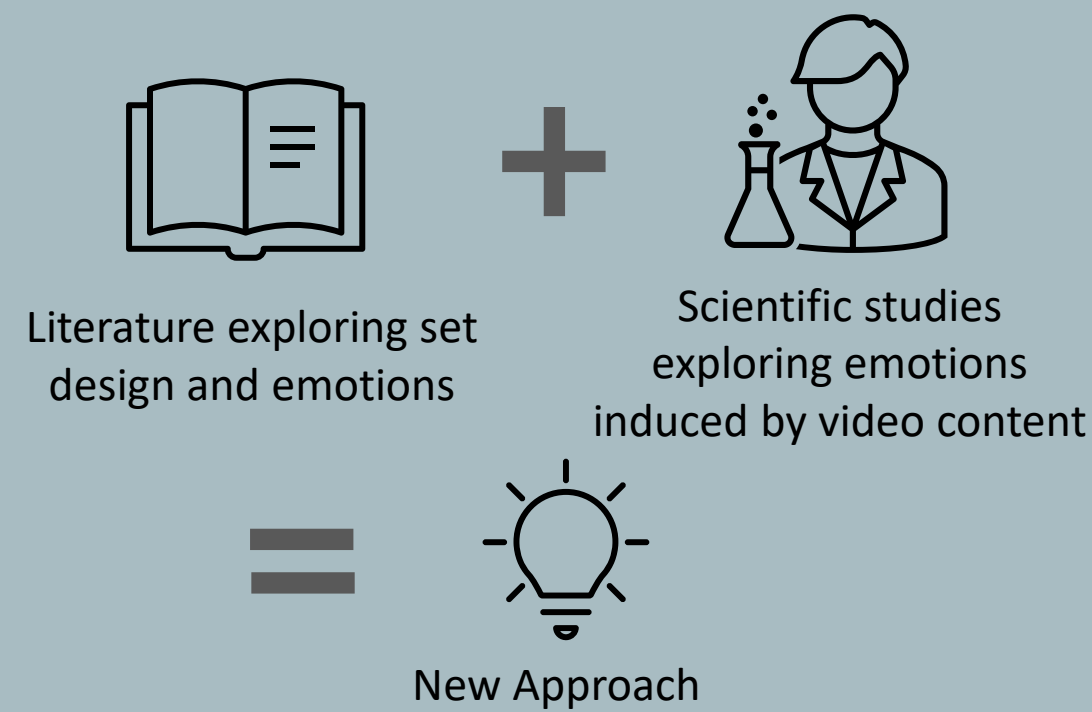


Hijacking the movie *Inception* (2010)

How does set design affect the emotions of the audience?

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Context and aim



There has been literature exploring the relationship between set design and emotion, and there has been scientific research in the emotions induced by affective movie content, however, without a specific focus on set design. No source has mixed the two. During my dissertation I fused the two approaches creating a new method to analyse the relationship between set design and induced emotions. This allowed me to analyse how set design can be specifically altered to induce specific emotions in the audience.

Method

I chose 4 students studying sciences such as physics and chemistry and 4 studying architecture as to create a statistically valid sample for 'university students aged 20 or 21 in the UK' and observe if there were any differences within the groups.

After watching the movie, the participants took a self-administered questionnaire which highlighted which scene out of the whole movie had the strongest emotional impact and why.

I then edited this scene into three distinct versions. (These cannot be added here due to copyright issues)

Afterwards, I organised another viewing with the altered scenes. I created a second questionnaire to collect qualitative data, aiming to find out if their emotions have changed compared to the original scene and in what way.

I finally analysed and discussed the findings in the context of existing literature.

Results and importance

During this research I showed that through edits made to the set, it is possible to manipulate feelings of happiness, change the understanding of the narrative and induce new emotions.

- In the first edit I swapped the view out the windows to one previously used in the film that was associated with the dream world. Participants reported their understanding of the narrative changed and feelings such as happiness or hope were replaced by sadness or uneasiness
- In the second edit I replaced the comfortable interior of characters' home with a modern living room from Villa am See. The results were consistent among all the participants and indicated a drop in positive feelings
- In the last edit I let the action take place on a black background. I wanted to observe if the emotions would prevail the same in the absence of a set. Feeling of confusion appeared consistently across the sample and unexpectedly, people assigned meaning to the place thinking the main character was now in a deeper dream level.

Another interesting insight was that when watching the full movie, two architecture students were the only ones to point out the artistic side of the visuals and the craft behind creating them to increase feelings of awe

The findings further highlight the power set design can have on its viewers. My small study opened the avenue for more scientific research to be carried out on a larger scale, focusing on inducing specific emotions through the set design of movies, as well as research into how the background of a viewer can affect their emotions.

Acknowledgments and key sources

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