Digital Wonders: Examining Awe in Information Seeking

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ABSTRACT

Awe is a sense of enormity that alludes comprehension. Because of awe's properties as a knowledge emotion, awe elicitors can increase awareness of knowledge gaps, boost scientific interest, and promote inquiry. However, the relationship between awe and exploratory behavior, such as information seeking, remains unclear. Using a mixed-methods approach, this dissertation asks how, if at all, awe fosters information seeking. This question was examined through a two-pronged approach. First, in a laboratory setting, participants (n = 34) were exposed to a variety of awe elicitors through a virtual reality (VR) head-mounted display. Participants' quantitative and qualitative responses were gathered immediately after exposure in the laboratory as well as 24 hours later through questionnaires. Second, a stratified sample of participants who voluntarily conducted information seeking (n = 8) completed phenomenologically informed interviews. Findings indicate that although awe is primarily experiential, information seeking may arise from surprising learners with unknown and unexplained phenomena. Additionally, feelings of perceptual envelopment and accessing the inaccessible characterized participants' VR-based awe experiences. From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that simulating moments of discovery during travel may increase learners' intrinsic motivations for formal and informal research. Emergent findings also reveal that creating awe-inspiring VR content may require reduced didactic information to generate feelings of presence. From a theoretical perspective, this study pushes empirical awe literature beyond the confines of laboratory settings, illustrates how understudied awe elicitors pique curiosity, and provides a nuanced, qualitative report on the phenomenon of virtually induced awe.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information seeking; Information needs; Education.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Awe; Curiosity; Information experiences; Presence; Virtual reality.