

Title

Temple Run: A Coping Mechanism

Summary

In this episode of *The Longest Rainy Sunday*, we tackle a game that took the world by storm in 2011: “Temple Run”. We analyze why and how this game benefits players in the current context of COVID-19 and relieves anxiety, effectively serving as a coping mechanism. From the mechanics to the story line, we explore it all. We urge you to sit back and come listen to our critical take on the game—welcome to the “Temple Run” episode.

Cover Picture

Script

Anusha: Hi everyone and welcome to this episode: *Temple Run—a coping mechanism*.

Bob: Today, we're going to be talking about *Temple Run*.

Hayden: and you might be thinking: "Wow, I haven't heard that game in a while!"

Anusha: If you had remembered the era in which *Temple Run* took the world by the storm, then you'll probably also remember how this game gradually became a "time passer." You know—that game you play when you're waiting in line or waiting for someone to meet you. Well let me tell you, *Temple Run* is so much more than that.

Bob: Even amidst this pandemic, it managed to be #5 on the action games chart in the Apple Store.

Hayden: So why did people turn to *Temple Run* during quarantine?

Anusha: Well, in this episode, we'll prove to you that **temple run doesn't help you escape from the pandemic, but it helps you cope with the anxiety of this difficult period.**

Bob: Let's start with the mechanism. To play: you swipe up, down, right, and left. That's it, this game is simple. You might say, but where are those elements of *probing* and *telescoping* that Steven Johnson says are critical to games and that in previous episodes, we have established are necessary.

Hayden: Well, we're talking about a new genre of games that has surfaced in the past decade and a half, in a world in which everyone has some sort of hand-held device like a phone or a tablet.

Anusha: Casual games such as these are framed in such a way that they're not necessarily the most appealing but the sheer difficulty drives us to keep playing. Ian Bogost, in an article in the *Atlantic*, talks about Tetris in this way: "even when a game does not literally exploit its players' leisure for its creator's gain, it orients the player toward formal, often numerical goals that structure progress and, by extension, define enjoyment," he says.

Hayden: In *Temple Run*, there is no goal. You just have to keep going forward, but that simple measure of turning forward, supplies pleasure.

Bob: You can look at this in a multitude of ways.

Hayden: In one perspective, we see that this game is a reminder of the pandemic that we are in: a never-ending path in which we have to keep moving forward. We don't know when or how we will get to a point when this pandemic is over.

Anusha: This can be reassuring: many times during these past few months, I really just wanted to curl up in a ball and ignore everything that was going on in this world. Because as we know, 2020 wasn't *just a pandemic*: the worsening economy, the civil unrest, the growing partisanship. It's really easy to simply lose faith in what is happening in this world.

Hayden: Temple Run, though, serves as a simple reminder to persevere. Just keep running forward, especially because as the game continues on, it gets harder and harder & faster. While you might have more chances to stumble in the beginning, as the game progresses, you die as soon as you mess up.

Bob: Moreover, you really have to be aware of the visual cues (like a branch or dead end) or you will not make it—you have to be aware about the injustices occurring around you, you have to be aware of how your body feels both physically and mentally, you have to be aware of what is misinformation.

Hayden: And this really goes back to Jane McGonagal's discussion on how games can help you rewire your brain. You see, self-efficacy, she explains is the state of mind in which you believe that you can effect positive change in your life, and as she puts it "successfully converting motivation into consistent and effective action." Games are excellent tools to increase competence, power, and ability.

Bob: The game is simply realistic to how this pandemic has played out (pun intended): it doesn't become easier to play, but with tenacity, you will get through this.

Anusha: You can look at this style of running forward in another perspective, as a method to help cope with anxiety. According to an article published by Harvard Health: anxiety really evolved from a survival mechanism used in the caveman days. It was meant for mammals to react quickly to life-threatening situations like being chased by a woolly mammoth. We don't have these types of situations now but the body produces this same *flight or fight* mechanism when we face stressors like work pressure or family difficulties. You know the feeling: butterfly in the stomach, sweating. But It has been shown that something as simple as running

significantly alleviates this sense of anxiety because that method of moving and acting on that *flight or fight* response can really alleviate the stress.

Bob: During this year, there has been intense anxiety built up because of the uncertainty going on in the world. But something such as running away may no longer be a possibility for you. Every state and country is in a different phase of the pandemic, but at least once, you must've felt scared to go outside, worried that you could catch the virus and transmit to your dear loved ones. But then so, how do we release those energies and desires? The simple act of seeing your character run may be a stress-reliever.

Anusha: So now you know why the game is such an effective tool to play during this pandemic, but why did people turn to this game unknowingly?

Hayden: Temple Run mirrors covid & life. During the pandemic, there was a lot of information throwing at us. You know, presidential debates, elections, BLM, police brutality.

Anusha: In that regard, those that play temple run can rely on the game. It might not be the most engaging or fun game, but at least it is not mentality taxing.

Hayden: But if you look at it in another way, everything just kind of hit a pause. No sporting events, concerts weren't there, and we were just staying at home 24/7 for months doing nothing really. Temple run is the same way. You keep running and running and get chased (after) with nowhere to go. It's not a game about escape. There were challenges along the way. There were branches, there were dead-ends, there were monsters, and you have to keep track of your environment at all times.

Anusha: Definitely. And playing a game like Temple Run with the continuous momentum can be a breath of fresh air in the monotony that is felt during some points of this pandemic. If we think about Ian Bogost's reference to microecology, it's also important to note, that unlike a 2D platform game, you cannot go back, you have one direction forward.

This game is distinct from something like *Subway Surfers* which although is still popular has differences in both the storyline and setting. In Temple Run, you're quite literally running for your life in what while may technically be the site of ancient ruins, feels like a post-apocalyptic world. Your character is all alone and things that shouldn't be happening (like strange large beasts chasing you) or a virus taking over the world are happening. In Subway Surfers, you're more so doing something stupid and hopping across different tracks. Temple Run is also set up in such a way that you can't shift into different lanes, you have very few choices in the game one of them being to turn left or

right, but even ducking in a place where you're supposed to jump can make you stumble and set you back closer towards the monsters. In Subway Surfers, on the other hand, you always had a choice: left, middle, right lanes? Or maybe you wanna duck—that's an option too!

In this game, and in this pandemic, we don't have many choices. In fact, we have very few choices. To simply stay home and "keep going." But we hope that we have shown you how it can be a helpful coping mechanism, how it can help you persevere and also deal with the anxiety that may have arisen during this pandemic.

Hayden: We hope that you enjoy knowing more about Temple Run and maybe during one of your Longest Rainy Sundays, you will pick up your phone and start running away...

Anusha: Hi, I'm Anusha, I'm the producer for this episode.

Hayden: Hi I'm Hayden, I'm the assistant producer for this episode.

Bob: I'm Bob, the line producer.

Sources

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