

# Teen Audience and Fabrication of Fear in Indonesian Horror Films

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**Abstract.** This study seeks to understand the phenomenon of "fear fabrication" in horror genre Indonesian films from the perspective of young film fans as well as film activists, so that their knowledge and experience can contribute more to the effort to understand this phenomenon more deeply. The phenomenon of "fabrication of fear" is understood as a horror film production that uses repetitive and monotonous methods only to produce an experience of fear that is easily predictable by the audience. The meaning of commodity is still the dominant meaning in this case. However, what also needs to be considered in the development of the horror film genre is the mode of appearance of eroticism and female beauty, which are the objects of gaze as the main commodity of spectacle. The issue of the role of supernatural powers and superstitions in stories with ethnic backgrounds attracts the audience to think that certain ethnic traditions are always associated with occultism in negative perceptions. Increasingly quality storytelling is supported by the use of technology in production until after production has succeeded in luring the audience not to underestimate Indonesian horror films.

**Keywords:** Horror Films, Fabrication of Fear, Commodification of Feelings of Fear

## 1 Introduction

Studying a film is like seeing a mirror of the reality of human life at a certain time. The audience does not only see something that appears on the screen alone, but the audience also intervenes in the meaning that is deliberately penetrated by the film maker through the medium. Realizing this, on the other hand, the audience also enjoys what the filmmakers present on the cinema screen. Movies do provide an aspect of enjoyment of a spectacle that is represented on the screen, in which we recognize film stars, styles and genres. Film is a social practice of the maker and the audience, in narrative and meaning, we can put evidence of how our cultural ways make sense [1].

Films then developed with a variety of genres, which in just one genre can be broken down again with specific distinctions or sub genres. Hutomo [1] mentions several film genres: (1) Action adventure, (2) Gangsters, (3) War/combat, (4) Western, (5) Drama, (6) Action Melo drama, (7) Musical/dance, (8) Romantic comedy, (9) Weepy, (10) Fantasy, (11) Historical, (12) Slapstick comedy, (13) Travel adventure, (14) Pornography, (15) The Holocaust, (16) Documentary, (17) Parody, (18) Science Fiction, (19) Horror.

From the list of recorded film genres, horror films offer one interesting thing that is different from almost all film genres where humans are the main subject of storytelling, but different from horror films, magical, spiritual, absurd things, even ghosts that become the center of the storytelling.

Movies with the horror genre have their own impression on the minds of the audience slightly different from several other genres. The comedy genre can be enjoyed by many people, as well as the drama, action, and animation genres. Watching horror films requires some capital, including; mental courage, an interest in believing in something that is invisible from other people's stories, being able to accept the image of a creature outside of reason to be logical, and also supported by the ability to combine a personal fictional world that is attached to the image of a film maker that runs on the conveyor plot film.

However, horror films are now in the era of computer graphics technology which is increasingly mature in convincing visual images as if reduced to creating new fears that try to satisfy the thirst of the audience's addiction to the experience of fear that seems to demand more and more than ever. The fabrication of fear is increasingly prevalent in horror films today, not only around the world as well as in Indonesia.

Quoted from It is noted that during 2019, several horror films produced in the country successfully won a large number of viewers. Five of the 15 Indonesian films with the most audiences are horror films. Data quoted from [2].

**Table 1.** The number of viewers of Indonesian films horror genre

No	Film	Number of viewers
1	Danur 3: Sunyaruri	2.411.036
2	Perempuan Tanah Jahanam	1.795.068
3	Kuntilanak 2	1.726.570
4	Ghost Writer	1.116.676
5	Ratu Ilmu Hitam	915.227
6	Dread Out	831.100
7	Makmum	813.400
8	Mata Batin 2	569.500
9	Satu Suro	400.300
10	Sunyi	365.800

Source: [filmindonesia.or.id](http://filmindonesia.or.id).

From these data, it can be interpreted that the audience's achievement for Indonesian horror films is one of the audience's favorites, considering that the film's screening date coincides with various films with other genres that also offer interesting themes and not only from Indonesia.

Then why is the fabrication of fear an interesting thing in the horror film genre? One of the things that is feared in the creative world is finding a formula and standard form which then becomes a kind of template that can be borrowed from each other. Of course, it will produce a typical film work. Both in story, visual and sound technical, and jump-scare technique, and so on. If this happens, it is feared that the creative world of horror films will be trapped in a fabrication of fear. A term to represent the restlessness of the creative world of

horror films to become a typical and undeveloped factory for horror film creators because some elements of the film's builders have copied horror films that have managed to reap profits from the high number of viewers. This kind of practice was rampant in the 1980s [3].

What is the reality of this phenomenon in teen-horror-flick adolescents, who have also attended film schools and are active in making films? This is interesting to explore because of course their understanding and experiences are more complex.

## 2 Methodology

This research uses a qualitative type with a phenomenological method in an interpretive paradigm [4]. The steps that were taken after data collection were; develop textural and structural descriptions of informants, then combine textural and structural descriptions, and finally synthesize textural and structural meanings to obtain the essence of experience. Taking informants from young film activists and horror film fans with the aim of being able to dig deeper into the phenomenon of "fabrication of fear" from the perspective of those who have experienced production and are also observers of the horror genre in Indonesian cinema. Besides that, the experience of being trapped in the production of this genre of film in the vortex of the film industry is also interesting to explore. Creative negotiation efforts with the industrial world that are solely oriented towards money are a valuable contribution to obtain more comprehensive data. The informants in this study were 6 people from 3 cities that have cinemas and film schools, namely Semarang, Surakarta and Jogjakarta.

Horror films are interesting to study in more depth, especially regarding their interactions with an intense audience. Imagine, if people watch romance/drama, comedy, or action films generally aiming to get pleasure. Because love stories offer sadness, happiness, romantic emotions, or cuteness, all of which bring joy. However, horror films and the like rely on dark nuances, mystery, fear / feelings of fear, or the terrifying experience of interacting with a non-human being or an unreasonable condition due to the influence/control beyond reason that in everyday life is often avoided or unwanted, and hard to enjoy.

This research scope seeks to explore the meaning of their experiences who are close to the appreciation activities and horror film production but also as horror film enthusiasts. Of course the intensity of the experience is becoming more complex and important to reflect on the development of Indonesian horror films itself.

The term fabricated fear is not a standard term in the world of film studies. However, referring to several terms in film criticism that emphasize the essence of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences rather than standardization of terms, a term that is equivalent and has been written for the phrase fabricated fear, namely the hair industry. This term is used by Darmawan [3] in his series of writings entitled: Why Horror Films.

An article on [filmsite.org](http://filmsite.org) defines horror films, which are understood to be horror films that are disturbing films designed to create fear and panic, instigate horror and alertness, and elicit hidden fears. Often this reflection goes through a story line that is both terrifying and shocking, but nevertheless, it also inserts entertaining things through cathartic experiences.

Discussing the issue of appreciation and observation of film audiences certainly cannot be separated from how the audience understands the art of watching itself. Boogs 1978 in Hutomo [1] mentions seven things about the art of watching films:

1. Theme and purpose
2. Standard and dramatic elements of the film
3. Visual Elements

4. Dialogue and sound effects
5. Music
6. Acting
7. Directing

These seven things are mainly highlighted by the audience when watching the film. The film that is focused on here is a horror film which usually tells the story of human experiences interacting with supernatural beings, creatures that are beyond reason, and so on, or conditions beyond human control. Meanwhile, genre is understood as patterns, forms (styles), or a variety of basic story themes that can be seen and felt in a film. Therefore, even without saying it, people will know which genre the film falls into [5]. To determine the genre, it can be seen from the repertoire of elements or genre elements consisting of characters, settings or backgrounds, iconography, narrative, and text form. The accuracy in determining the genre of a film, especially in the context of research, is important because it becomes a guide and a belief that the researcher really understands the categorization of the genre so that it is precisely the criteria in calling the object of the study.

### **3 Results and Discussion**

After going through several stages of research, the following is the essence of experience from the synthesis of textural and structural meanings. Regarding the meaning of horror genre films, it is recognized that horror films cannot be separated from film products that present mysterious, scary stories, often associated with supernatural beings and forces beyond reason. Likewise, Anne Radcliffe gave a limit to horror in *The New Monthly* magazine as quoted by Darmawan [3] that horror is a gripping thing that freezes, even almost destroys the soul. Everything that threatens is manifested outwardly and we face it directly.

The quality of Indonesian horror films is considered to be getting better, marked by the release of Joko Anwar's film *Pengabdi Setan*. This film really focuses on the main elements of the presentation of horror. There is no need to polish with the appearance of a sexy woman as a trigger for attention, but arrange a series of stories carefully so that the strength of the story idea appears to be not merely a side effect. The image of Indonesian horror films only sells eroticism in the late 1980-1990 decade has now changed. However, the stigma that Indonesian horror films have typical storylines and recognized stereotypical characterizations still exists. It all means that horror films are also profit oriented.

The attractiveness of the director as the main hand of film creators is still the main reason for watching horror films, after that other elements in the film, one of which is the trailer and visual effects, and who the actors are behind it. The interest in watching horror films is generally based on the quality expectations of the director. However, in some horror films this expectation does not materialize mainly because the story scenario cannot be trusted. Favorite horror films are those that don't just rely on jump-scare as a shortcut to foster feelings of fear and shock the audience through adjusting the volume. Regarding this, Darmawan [3] also has a similar assessment that the exploitation of these technical elements often seems typical. Apart from the problem of technical elements like that, the preferred horror films are those that have strong ideas, the elements of the story are intact and consistent with the world built and based on regional culture.

Horror films that set stories of ancient traditions/occult/mystery things are very popular. Apart from the fact that the mystery setting originating from the traditions of a region in Indonesia can strengthen the main idea of the film, these stories have also developed in the

tradition of speech from generation to generation and have become partial collective memories but are so alive and real in the minds of the people. For this reason, horror films set in the mystery of past traditions are here to bind collective memories as well as complement one another. This becomes interesting because the audience is drawn to appear as if they have to complete the partial information they have and at the same time want to see the visual realization of mysteries, unreasonable beings, as well as supernatural powers that were originally only in the form of imagination in their minds. That is what happened. Each period has its own horror style [3].

The sensation of waiting for the momentum of the emergence of another scary or mysterious figure in a horror film becomes its own seduction. These sensations can also appear in fear that is built slowly, quietly, alone, and relates to the fear that often appears in real life. It's not just a fake and forced fear, with a jump-scare formula and another editing technician simply glued from one horror film to another.

The purpose of watching horror films is to get the sensation of an experience that is recognized but without risk. Besides that, he was also curious about the story building and the strong ideas of the film. So far, in general, the technique in Indonesian horror films to create feelings of fear in the minds of the audience is considered successful.

Regarding the issue that horror films simply sell visual and sound technical aspects, the various interpretations of the experience conveyed feel that this is just a shortcut to create mere sensory shocks. However, it is far more important that the film maker should put more emphasis on building a story that is relevant to the audience and logical with strong ideas. On the other hand, there are also those who do not make this an important issue because maybe that is the goal of the film creators to maximize the achievement of technical aspects and that is their characteristic.

The issue of the emergence of a ghost or creature beyond human reasoning in Indonesian horror films which is said to be "making it up" is not a problem, it is often what has been eagerly awaited and what is more important is that the ghost must be related to the story. Today's Indonesian horror films are far from the spice of eroticism as in the late 1980-1990 years before the "suspended animation" era of Indonesian cinema because such gimmicks are no longer in demand for film fans today.

Regarding several Indonesian horror films that use elements of traditional occultism as a commodity, it is actually appreciated as one added value and its own uniqueness that cannot be found in horror films outside Indonesia. This is considered not to be a bad thing as long as it is used to promote a certain mystical belief in an area which has traditionally been very strong in the storytelling of the community and is unique in itself. Do not just bring up the mystical/mystery or traditional occult stories of certain ethnic communities to be placed as antagonists in stories that actually demean or insult the culture. It is considered legitimate if it is used as a spectacle commodity as long as it is related to the story and it is indeed close to the people and other people who are curious about the mysterious/mystical stories of other peoples' cultures.

The issue of horror films simply selling the sensation of fear is undeniably the main goal of horror films to provide curiosity and experience fear. But besides that, the important emphasis in this case is not to stop at this goal, providing a strong story as a basis for the emergence of fear is also important to strive for.

The discourse of commodification is still the main discourse. However, it also needs to be noted in the development of horror film genre, namely the mode of appearance of eroticism and women's beauty as objects of gaze as the main commodities of spectacle. Seduction to present frightening figures apart from the popular ghosts also surfaced. The problem of

magical and superstitious constructions in stories with ethnic backgrounds also often leads the audience to think that certain ethnic traditions are always associated with mysticism. Another thing that also impressed the audience was the increasingly quality storytelling which was also supported by the use of technology in production to post-production which was stunning and succeeded in luring the audience to no longer underestimate Indonesian horror films.

## References

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