

## THE TREND OF WATCHING RELIGIOUSLY-THEMED HORROR FILMS: ANALYZING THE IMPACT ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN SOCIETY

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### Keywords:

Horror films, Social behavior, Society

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**Abstract:** Horror films are a genre that is widely enjoyed by the public. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of watching religious horror films on the social behavior of society. This research used a qualitative approach with a survey method. Data were collected through questionnaires from participants selected using convenience sampling. The results of the study showed that the majority (63.6%) watched horror films for entertainment, while others were attracted by adrenaline (27.3%), moral values (18.2%), and mystical elements (15.2%). Psychological impacts included increased vigilance and courage (24.2%), as well as fear or paranoia (33.3%). The majority (66.7%) felt connected to the moral and spiritual values in the films, while others (30.3%) viewed them solely as entertainment. Strategies to cope with fear varied, ranging from rational thinking (33.3%) to increasing spiritual activities (18.2%). This study concluded that the impact of horror films is highly variable, depending on individuals' backgrounds and experiences. Further research is recommended to expand the scope of participants and use methods beyond just surveys.

## INTRODUCTION

The horror genre has become one of the most popular in the film world and possesses a unique quality that attracts audiences (Fa et al., 2024; Namira & Ap Sinaga, 2024). The trend of watching horror films with religious elements has indirectly triggered controversy among the public, even leading to calls for boycotts (Daffauzan Thaufani, 2024). According to Zikri et al., (2024) despite being adorned with frightening visual effects and complex storylines, horror films have the potential to convey profound moral messages, instilling awareness of life values, ethics, and the consequences of various actions. According to Kurniawan et al., (2022); Ramadhani et al., (2024) films that raise stories with mystical or horror nuances often succeed in attracting millions of viewers, such as *Jelangkung*, *Danur*, *Suzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur*, and *Pengabdi Setan*. Although belonging to the horror mystery genre, many films in this

category convey various moral messages. Currently, a specific sub-genre, namely horror films with religious nuances, such as films like *Hidayah* and *KKN di Desa Penari*, has attracted public attention thanks to horror narratives that are equipped with religious messages (Safitri & Masruroh, 2024; Sari et al., 2024). Fitri (2022) reveals that films have undergone significant development in human life. A film encompasses various elements, such as storyline, characters, language, costumes, music, and settings that are adapted to the genre being carried. Each of these aspects is designed to convey specific moral messages to the audience. According to Anggraini et al., (2024) films like *Ivanna* convey moral messages that can be analyzed through a semiotic approach. Furthermore, Rizal & Aesthetika (2022) research shows that watching horror films can also influence communication patterns in digital communities.

Currently, the religious horror genre has gained significant popularity. According to Karolina et al., (2020) films in Indonesia can be enjoyed through two main media: television and cinemas. Films offer valuable moral and educational lessons that can be applied to daily life. It is inspire and influence both children and adults (Malisi et al., 2023). This genre blends spiritual elements with suspenseful narratives. According to Ihsana & Urfan (2024), demonstrates how traditional Javanese beliefs are depicted in the film *Primbon*, highlighting the close connection between local culture and spiritual themes. Meanwhile, Aryani & Putri (2023), view the film *Pengabdi Setan* as not only promoting religious values but also critiquing social issues like gender discrimination. Nevertheless, the social impact of watching religious horror films has not been extensively studied, especially regarding its influence on people's behavior. This phenomenon becomes increasingly relevant when considering the film *Siksa Neraka*, which presents a story about punishment for human sins through a religious approach. This film, like *Munafik 2*, conveys a moral message emphasizing the importance of introspection and adherence to religious teachings (Rokhman, 2020). Although these elements have been widely discussed in semiotic studies by Amelisa et al., (2024); Athari Basir (2022) research specifically linking religious horror films to their impact on people's social behavior remains relatively scarce.

Most previous research has used a semiotic approach to understand the meaning contained in horror films. Studies by Asri et al., (2020); Rahmadani et al., (2022); Syahdewa et al., (2024) demonstrate how this technique is capable of uncovering hidden symbolic messages. Ibrahim (2023) highlights the role of cinematography in indoctrination through the film *Midsommar*. On the other hand, research by Br Sinulingga & Sitorus (2024) also analyzes public sentiment towards horror films. Although these techniques provide deep insights, there

is a research gap that can be filled with a more practical approach, such as conducting surveys of the public.

This research aims to explore the impact of watching religious horror films on people's social behavior. This focus is relevant because, research Bernadette et al., (2024) shows that watching horror films can unintentionally create pollution in the mind. In this study, a survey approach is used to directly explore viewers' experiences and perceptions, without involving complex semiotic analysis. With this approach, the research is expected to make a significant contribution to both academics and film industry practitioners.

The research gap that aim to fill is the use of survey techniques to understand the social impact of religious horror films, unlike most previous research that has relied heavily on semiotic approaches. This approach is expected to provide a direct picture of the viewer's experience, as also recommended by Masaoy & Ramdhan (2024) in their research on the behavior of children who enjoy watching horror films. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the relationship between the experience of watching religious horror films and its impact on people's social behavior, especially in social contexts as explored by previous researchers such as Batrisyia et al., (2024); Munirul Hakim, (2023); Putri et al., (2021); Tantri et al. (2024).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a survey method to examine the impact of watching religious horror films on people's social behavior. The primary instrument used in data collection was the distribution of questionnaires. The use of questionnaires in this research allowed for efficient data collection from a large number of respondents in a short period. Questionnaires also enabled the standardization of questions and facilitated easier data analysis. The participants in this study were individuals who enjoyed watching horror films, selected through convenience sampling, as done by (Hujairi et al., 2021). This technique was chosen as it allowed researchers to reach easily accessible participants who were willing to participate, as needed by the research. The data collection process involved distributing questionnaires to participants who voluntarily agreed to be the author's participants. This technique provided flexibility in understanding the unique experiences of each participant while also identifying the reasons for liking horror films. Through this survey method, the research was expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the experience of watching religious horror films and its impact on people's social behavior.

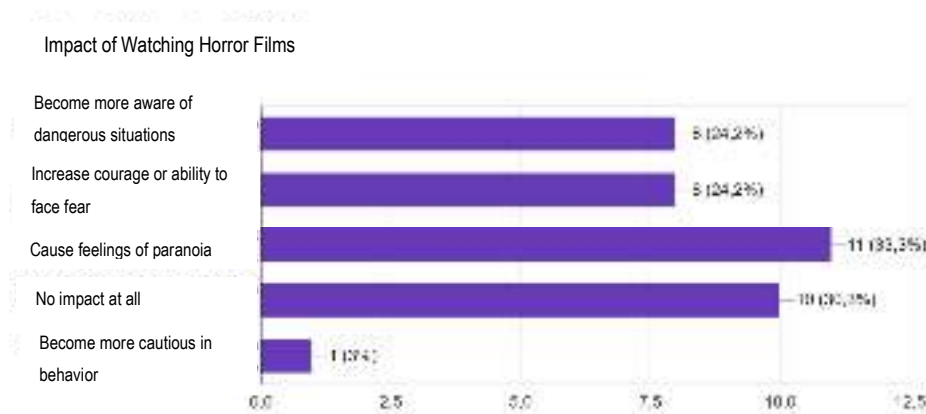
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Main Reasons for Watching Horror Films



The survey results regarding the primary reasons for watching horror films revealed that a significant majority (63.6%) of the 33 respondents watched horror films purely for entertainment. This indicates that, for many people, watching horror films is an effective way to relax, escape from their daily routine, and experience something different. This aligns with Ariani et al., (2021) research, which suggests that watching films is often solely for entertainment. The second most significant reason was to test one's courage or experience adrenaline (27.3%). This is consistent with Fa et al., (2024) findings that horror films not only provide entertainment but also influence viewers psychologically through adrenaline rushes, fear, and intense emotional experiences. According to Surawan & Mazrur (2020), psychology is one of the branches of science that study of psychological symptoms, or real behavior. This suggests that there is a group of viewers who seek the sensations and thrills offered by horror films. They are drawn to the emotional challenges presented by this genre. Other reasons that emerged, although with smaller percentages, include interest in the story and moral values (18.2%) and liking mystical themes (15.2%). Furthermore, some respondents were attracted to the storyline or things related to the mystical, which is in line with the research of (Salsabila et al., 2023). This indicates that there is also a group of viewers who are more interested in the psychological and philosophical aspects of horror films. They may be interested in exploring human fears, morality, or the unexplained. Lastly, only a small percentage of respondents (3%) watched horror films because they were invited by their partners. This suggests that while social influence can be a factor, the decision to watch horror films is generally driven by personal choice.

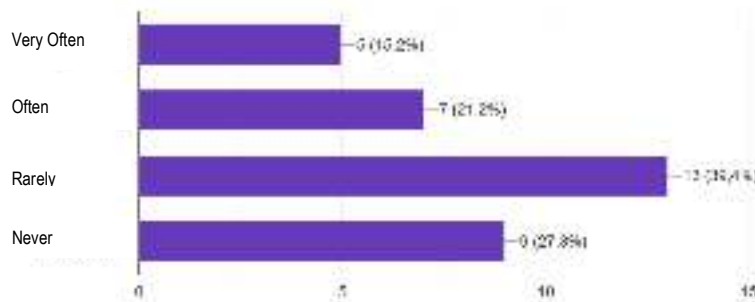
## The Impact of Watching Horror Films on Social Behavior



The Survey results regarding the impact of watching horror films on behavior revealed a significant degree of variation. A majority of respondents (33.3%) reported increased feelings of fear or paranoia after watching horror films, indicating that this genre can induce anxiety. This is in line with Ratna Rezkhy Dwiastry (2022) research, which highlights factors such as an individual's anxiety level, personal experiences, and the type of film watched as influencing the extent to which horror films impact individuals. Everyone has experienced the negative aspects of life at some point according to (Hamdanah et al., 2023). However, not everyone experienced negative effects. A significant proportion (24.2%) of respondents felt more alert to their surroundings, suggesting a positive aspect of horror films in enhancing vigilance. Jha et al., (2023) findings provide strong support for this research, demonstrating how horror films can influence the mental health, social behavior, and emotional development of adolescents. Furthermore, (24.2%) of respondents even felt braver after watching horror films, indicating that horror films can serve as a kind of challenge that can overcome fears. Meanwhile, (30.3%) of respondents stated that they experienced no changes in behavior at all, suggesting that individual responses to horror films are highly varied and influenced by various factors such as personality, type of film, and frequency of viewing. This finding is supported by Miller et al., (2024) discovery that not all adolescents are affected equally, but those who frequently watch horror films are more likely to exhibit impacts such as nightmares or sleep disturbances.

## Frequency of Changes in Thought Patterns or Behavior Due to Horror Films

Frequency of Changes in Thinking or Behavior Due to Horror Films

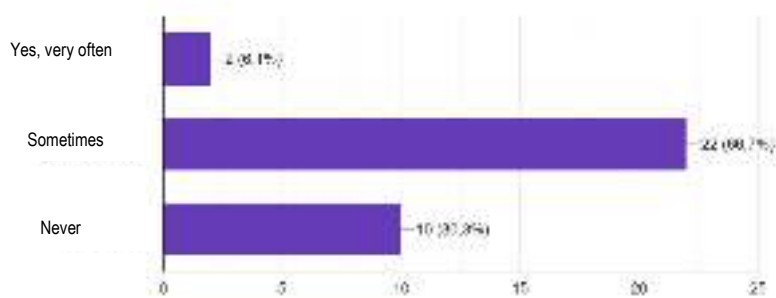


The survey indicated that a majority of respondents (39.4%) reported rarely experiencing changes in thought patterns or behavior after watching horror films. This suggests that many people can enjoy horror films without experiencing significant disturbances in their daily lives. However, approximately a quarter of respondents (21.2%) admitted to frequently experiencing changes after watching horror films. This could mean they became more vigilant, fearful, or had difficulty sleeping after watching horror-genre films. These findings are supported Jha et al., (2023) who found that exposure to horror content can affect sleep patterns, increase fear, and even trigger aggressive behavior in adolescents, who are one of the dominant viewer groups in this genre. A smaller percentage, namely (15.2%), stated that they very often experienced changes after watching horror films. This indicates that horror films have a significant impact on a small proportion of people. Finally, around (27.3%) of respondents stated that they never experienced any changes after watching horror films. This suggests that there is a group of people who are completely unaffected by horror films, even after watching them repeatedly. The survey results indicated that the impact of horror films on individuals' thoughts and behavior varied significantly. Most people did not experience significant changes, but there were also some who were quite influenced. According to Rega Rohadi & Ulfatun Najicha (2023), the effects of media on behavior depend heavily on the viewer's emotional involvement. Viewers who are more emotionally involved, especially in high-intensity horror genres, are more susceptible to changes in thought patterns and behavior. This is supported by Wayan et al., (2024) who stated that the visual and auditory intensity in horror films often creates a lasting emotional experience, which can trigger psychological responses such as fear, vigilance, or nightmares. These findings are relevant to the percentage of respondents who frequently or very frequently experienced changes after watching horror films, where emotional elements were a primary factor.



## The Relationship Between Moral or Spiritual Values and Religiously-Themed Horror Films

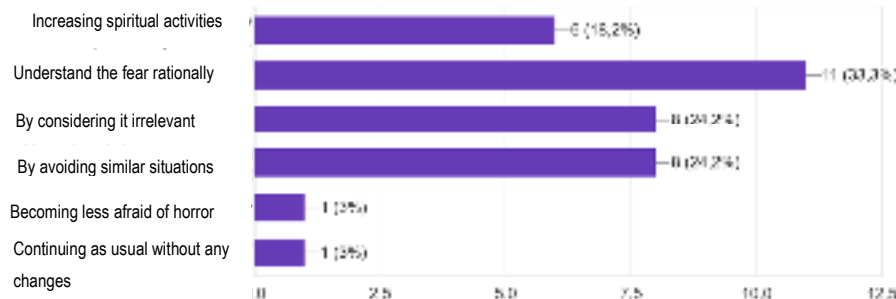
Connection to Moral or Spiritual Values in Religious Horror Films



The survey results showed that of the 33 respondents, (66.7%) stated that they sometimes felt connected to those values. This means that many people who watched religiously-themed horror films felt they received certain moral or spiritual messages from the films they watched, although this did not always happen with every film they saw. On the other hand, around (30.3%) of respondents stated that they never felt connected to moral or spiritual values in religiously-themed horror films. This is in line with Wayan et al., (2024) research, which stated that visual and audio elements in films contribute to the reinforcement of moral messages, but their effectiveness varies depending on the individual's emotional involvement. In other words, for some people, horror films even religiously-themed ones, are seen more as entertainment and do not provide in-depth messages about life values. This data supported by research Iskandar Zulkarnain et al., (2022) films, a sequence of moving images, serve as a medium for education, entertainment, and information. As such, they can have both positive and negative effects on viewers. This survey indicates that audience perceptions of moral or spiritual values in religiously-themed horror films were quite diverse. This is supported by the findings Winarjo (2022) who explained that religious narratives in popular media, including horror films, are often designed to provoke introspection and increase awareness of moral consequences. Praratya et al., (2024) shows that Indonesia utilizes local cultural and belief elements to create fear. This aligns with your finding that religiously-themed horror films often involve mystical or supernatural elements relevant to Indonesian society. Although most respondents felt there were moral or spiritual messages, not everyone felt the same. This indicates that the interpretation of messages conveyed in a film is highly subjective and influenced by various factors, such as each individual's religious background, culture, and personal experiences.

## Strategies for Managing Emotions and Fear After Watching Horror Films

Strategies for Managing Emotions and Fear After Watching Horror Films



The survey results showed that the most common strategy used was trying to understand their fears rationally. Around (33.3%) of respondents chose this method to cope with fear after watching horror films. This indicates that many people tried not to get carried away by the fear they felt and tried to find logical explanations for what they watched. This is in line with research by Rega Rohadi & Ulfatun Najicha (2023) revealed that individuals with strong cultural and spiritual backgrounds tend to have more effective strategies for managing fears arising from horror media. The second most popular strategy was to increase spiritual activities such as prayer. Around (18.2%) of respondents chose this method. This indicates that for some people, praying or engaging in other spiritual activities can help them feel calmer and more comfortable after being exposed to frightening content. This is in line with the study by Gokmen & Sami (2024) found that spirituality proved to be an important factor in coping with trauma or fear. Meanwhile, around (24.2%) of respondents chose to avoid situations similar to what they watched in horror films. This could mean they avoided watching horror films for a while or avoided places or situations that reminded them of the scary scenes in the film. Only a small number of respondents, around (3%), stated that they ignored their fear or continued life as usual without any changes. This indicates that a small proportion of people were not too affected by horror films and could easily forget the feelings of fear they experienced.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This research found that watching religiously-themed horror films had a diverse impact on individuals, in terms of reasons for watching, emotional responses, and resulting thought patterns. Most respondents watched horror films for entertainment purposes only, while others were interested in the adrenaline rush, moral values, or mystical elements. The psychological



impacts experienced included increased vigilance, courage, and feelings of fear or paranoia. Respondents also demonstrated a variety of strategies for coping with fear, such as rational thinking, prayer, avoiding fear triggers, or ignoring it. These findings indicate that the impact of horror films is subjective, depending on the personality, experiences, and beliefs of each individual. Future research is expected to expand the scope of participants and explore elements in horror films that have the potential to have positive and negative impacts on society. Suggestions for future researchers include expanding the number of participants and using data collection techniques other than surveys.

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