

Construction of Fear: A Shared Experience of Indonesian Independent Horror Moviemakers

Atalia Praratya¹, Vidi Sukmayadi², Kenmada Widjanto¹

¹Film and TV Production Study Program, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

²Communication Science Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Correspondence: Vidi Sukmayadi, Communication Science Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the creative process of Indonesian independent horror moviemakers, explicitly analyzing how they generate elements of fear in their short movies. Using a phenomenological method, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with five emerging Indonesian independent moviemakers whose short movies had received acclaim for excellence or achieved exceptionally high levels of audience engagement. The data analysis identified nine significant themes related to the moviemakers' motivation and creative process. These themes provide insights into the delicate balance between the aesthetics of *mise-en-scene* (cinematic components) and cultural influences that contribute to the construction of fear in their movies. The findings highlight the significance of understanding the subtleties of the short movie format and the socio-cultural factors involved in horror production. The discovered themes demonstrate a collective experience among the moviemakers, emphasizing typical approaches and difficulties in producing captivating and fear-provoking horror short movies.

Keywords: cinema, films, horror, indonesia, independent moviemakers, phenomenology

1. Introduction

The domain of horror movies is a compelling fabric of emotions, where the interplay of visual aesthetics, narrative structure, and cultural idiosyncrasies come together to evoke fear and excitement in audiences. Despite the ups and downs of the movie industry, even in times of turmoil and change, the horror genre has quietly kept things alive and thriving (Lopresto, 2023). The genre has always had an appealing charm and has created its own specialized market. Studies show that people enjoy horror movies for a variety of reasons. Vittrup (2022) and Clasen (2021) highlight that the genre provides a safe way to experience some fear and danger, which can be thrilling and entertaining. Another study pointed out that the increased enjoyment of horror movies is highly correlated with the sensation and adrenaline-seeking of their audience (Martin, 2019). With the continuous evolution of the global cinematic landscape, regional horror genre contributions have become increasingly prominent, presenting unique cultural flavors and perspectives.

The horror genre is constantly in high demand, particularly in Indonesia. In the country, horror films frequently convey stories that local audiences are familiar with. They build experiences rooted in local mythology and lore that cannot be found elsewhere (Guild, 2023). The strong affinity of Indonesian culture towards mystical elements contributes significantly to the widespread acceptance of horror genre films among the Indonesian audience. Hence, horror films have enjoyed a box office dominance in Indonesia that is significantly superior to other genres, owing to their cultural resonance and psychological sensation (Lestari & Sihombing, 2022).

In other words, horror films are profitable in Indonesia, which is noteworthy considering that an expanding consumer base annually propels a greater proportion of Indonesians to the movies. As a consequence, horror film studies have become an alluring area of study in this country. Despite the growing interest in the genre, there is understudied study attention that explicitly focuses on the creative creation from the perspective of moviemakers inside Indonesian horror movies.

While horror movies have been the subject of scholarly research, past studies have primarily concentrated on Western horror traditions, leaving a considerable gap in the understanding of non-Western horror aesthetics (Fortuna Jr., 2018a;

Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; Loutzenhiser, 2016; Schwarz, 2022; Wang, 2021). Existing research tends to focus on audience reception studies or broad thematic analyses, overlooking the in-depth investigation of the development of suspense or fear moments as a narrative and cinematic device (Adiprasetyo, 2023; Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; K. Pandjaitan &., 2012; Rizky & Stellarosa, 2019). Furthermore, Despite the growing prominence of Indonesian horror cinema on the international stage, more research needs to be conducted on the creative processes and cultural influences shaping these films, especially in the independent short movie sector. This knowledge gap is significant, as short movies often serve as experimental grounds for innovative techniques and narratives that may later influence mainstream cinema (Lang, 2022).

This study bridges those gaps by focusing on the Indonesian horror genre, recognizing its cultural basis and artistic manifestation. This study focuses on the construction of cinematic fear moments in order to acquire a better understanding of the experiences of selected Indonesian independent horror moviemakers. In guiding the study, the authors attempt to address two main research questions: (1) what motivates a moviemaker to create horror-themed short movies? (2) How do they construct a sense of horror in their movies through *mise-en-scène* elements? These questions will be the primary foundation for the authors to explore how the moviemakers in this study consciously construct fear-inducing moments, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of horror cinema as a medium for storytelling.

2. Literature Review

Indonesian horror movies have become indispensable to the country's film industry. They not only occupy the stage of the movie theater but also integrate into the popular culture that fills people's day-to-day lives. In this paper, we look at the cinematic construction of suspense and fear in Indonesian horror movies from the standpoint of independent moviemakers. By focusing on themes such as the domination of horror movies in Indonesia as a social phenomenon, Indonesian independent moviemakers, and phenomenology as the theoretical foundation, the authors expect to better understand the issue as the prior knowledge in conducting this study.

2.1 The Social Phenomenon of Horror Movie Dominance in Indonesia

Audiences' continuous acceptance of horror movies has contributed to their status as one of the most provocative and controversial film genres (Hutchings, 2008). This genre has evolved from an early perception as a low-culture form to one that frequently reflects the social, political, and cultural unrest surrounding its inception. Notwithstanding its ancillary standing, the horror genre has persisted since the earliest days of cinema. Since the inception of cinema, audiences' perspectives of the horror genre have developed. Horror has become a timeless genre that has grown across generations (Adrian, 2016).

A similar phenomenon occurs in Indonesia. The country has long been regarded as one of Asia's major producers of horror movies (Ferrarese, 2021). This phenomenon not only occurs in the film industry but also reflects the audience's tremendous interest. Data have shown that horror films are frequently the biggest-grossing films in Indonesia, garnering millions of spectators annually (Guild, 2023; Wahid & Agustina, 2021). This fact reflects the great interest of the public in this genre. Despite this, the Indonesian horror film industry has experienced periods of underperformance. Following their peak in the 1970s and 1980s, Indonesian horror films declined but did not perish in the 1990s and 2000s. Horror films were considered B or C-grade at the time, with the majority of their productions relying solely on erotic appeal (Ayun, 2015). After a decade of decline in popularity, Indonesian horror films saw a resurgence in the late 1990s and 2000s, coinciding with the advent of a new generation of horror films in Asia known as New Asian Horror (Adiprasetyo, 2023).

Following the release of the movie "*Jelangkung*" in 2001, Indonesian horror films progressively gained a following despite experiencing intermittent periods of popularity. Each year, a certain number of Indonesian horror films rank among the fifteen most-viewed films in the country, and from 2015 to 2021, the quantity of Indonesian horror films has also increased substantially (Adiprasetyo, 2023; Ferrarese, 2021).

Multiple factors contribute to the prevalence of horror films in Indonesia. In the first place, an extensive mystic tradition and culture have permeated the daily lives of Indonesians. This phenomenon fosters a favorable cultural environment for the creation and viewing of horror films. Then, the horror film industry in Indonesia gave birth to several renowned classics, including "*Satan's Slaves*" or "*Pengabdian Setan*" in 2017 and "*Village of Dancers*" in 2022. These movies have garnered international recognition, bolstered the reputation of the Indonesian film industry, and are a significant indicator of the horror film industry's prosperity in Indonesia (Cinthiana, 2018). Hence, the horror genre's dominance at the Indonesian box office serves as evidence of its appeal to Indonesian audiences, who are captivated by tales infused with native mythology and folklore.

Indonesian horror cinema has experienced a noteworthy resurgence, solidifying its position as an emerging force in Asian filmographies (Ferrarese, 2021). The growing number of streaming platforms is one of the primary factors contributing to this resurgence. The introduction of Indonesian horror films into the broader Asian horror genre has been facilitated by

the unprecedented global reach that these platforms have provided (Ghifari, 2022). Joko Anwar's Netflix series "Nightmares and Daydreams" exemplifies this trend. He has become the most successful Indonesian horror movie exporter by creating films that incorporate local folklore and societal issues, which have garnered international recognition and established Indonesian horror cinema on the global stage (Llewellyn, 2024).

This horror movie trend is not confined to feature-length films but is also significantly reflected in the short movie sector. Cultural affinity is also evident in the short film business, where moviemakers use the horror genre to explore local narratives and connect with audiences on a grassroots level. Short movies have emerged as a platform for moviemakers in Indonesia to experiment with horror elements, frequently resulting in culturally significant pieces that employ innovative narrative techniques (Fauziah, 2021). For example, the Bali International Short Film Festival showcases the economic value and collaborative spirit within the short film community, providing a platform for horror shorts that reflect the nation's unique identity (minikino.org, 2023).

The popularity of horror in Indonesian cinema, whether in feature-length or short movies, is a tribute to the genre's capacity to capture and keep a niche market. The genre provides entertainment, education, and excitement while creating a safe space for audiences to experience fear and danger (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020). As a result, the horror genre continues to grow, fueled by a solid cultural link and an emerging film industry that recognizes the short form as a vehicle of aesthetic expression and creative storytelling.

As a whole, the popularity of horror movies in Indonesia stems not only from high market demand but also from moviemakers' willingness to investigate social and cultural issues via the prism of this genre. Horror films often depict social instability, tensions between modernity and tradition, and issues related to fear and societal beliefs (Vittrup, 2022). Subsequently, several Indonesian directors have recently remade horror movies from the 1970s and 1980s due to the popularity of the embedded culturally correlated themes in those movies. This is an example of an attempt to recall the success of bringing up societal beliefs achieved decades ago and revive the realm of fear that once worked effectively.

2.2 Indonesian Independent Horror Moviemakers

Cinematic construction in horror films is critical in generating a frightening atmosphere and an immersive experience for the viewers. Directors play an essential role in this process because they are responsible for the film's artistic and narrative vision (John et al., 2017).

The transition of the horror genre from its fringe to the mainstream established it arguably as the most enduring genre in cinematic history. To maintain its mainstream status, the genre has gradually reformed, evolved, transformed, and hybridized into a diverse array of subgenres and novel forms to provide its audience with various thematic experiences (Adiprasetyo, 2023). This development has become a crucial factor for moviemakers in the horror genre as they keep evolving and altering their creative work to produce scary elements while considering the audience's fear dynamics.

A handful of Indonesian directors have taken novel ways to create horror films. Joko Anwar, for example, is well-known for his ability to merge traditional Indonesian cultural components with contemporary aesthetics. In films like "*Pengabdian Setan*" in 2017, Anwar tells a story full of mystical undertones and horror while also incorporating modern cinematography and directing techniques. As a result, the movie became a hit and set a new standard for future moviemakers in designing the aesthetics of horror movies (Wahid & Agustina, 2021). Another trend in Indonesia is that some moviemakers like Timo Tjahjanto and Kimo Stamboel favor brutal sequences and intense visual aesthetics in their respective films "*Macabre*" in 2009 and "*The Night Comes for Us*" in 2018. They demonstrate that aesthetic construction in horror films can be strengthened through powerful images and sound in addition to complex narratives (Utami, 2019).

In this study, the authors will place greater emphasis on the creative process that independent moviemakers employ. Independent moviemakers are vital to the film industry because they bring fresh perspectives and innovative storytelling that might not be possible within the constraints of large production houses (Barry, 2018). As further highlighted by Hadžiahmetović (2022), independent films can be a stepping stone for emerging moviemakers to distinguish themselves and demonstrate their creativities that engaging and successful films can be created outside of the major label movie studios. As a result, it is intriguing to learn how independent directors illustrate how successful films, particularly horror films, can be made outside the main studio structure, which can be encouraging and monetarily viable for new moviemakers. In other words, the significance of studying horror movies produced by independent moviemakers stems from their capacity to make the best of their cinematic talents despite all limits, enabling its evolution through creative diversity and financial affordability.

Given the growing popularity of horror movies as a social phenomenon in Indonesia, the aesthetic construction of the director is a significant factor in the formation of these films. A director directs actors and production crew and builds a visual and narrative atmosphere that conveys their grasp of the embedded ideals (Tarvainen et al., 2015).

In relation to the study, the authors also searched independent horror moviemakers in Indonesia who have achieved

respectable credentials. These credentials were evaluated based on the audience engagement they achieved on their online platforms and the accolades they received. Hence, the authors connected with five relevant Indonesian independent horror moviemakers for this study.

2.3 Phenomenology and How It Fits the Study

Indonesian horror moviemakers employ particular narrative and visual techniques to evoke a profound emotional response from the audience. In relation to phenomenology, this approach is crucial to comprehending the life experiences of moviemakers in crafting their work. As defined by Husserl (2012), Phenomenology is a philosophical method that focuses on firsthand observation and the personal experience of individuals regarding a phenomenon. In the context of filmmaking, phenomenology allows us to understand how moviemakers convey experiences and emotions through their work (Yacavone, 2016).

By conducting a phenomenological study of these independent horror movie makers, a researcher can reveal how they negotiate between traditional horror clichés and creative strategies to generate anxiety in their audience. This approach supports Naficy's (2001) idea of "accented cinema," which he explores in his book on how moviemakers from outside mainstream industries infuse their works with particular cultural and personal experiences.

The emphasis of phenomenology on embodied experience is especially relevant in horror movies, as the audience's perception of fear depends much on physical reactions and sensations constructed by their directors. Studies have shown that movies affect audiences on a visceral and pre-cognitive level (Anisti, 2017; Sari, 2021), an idea that resonates strongly with phenomenological core values. Human experiences are influenced by their relationships with others and the social environment in which they live (Husserl, 2012). This concept is particularly relevant when examining how independent horror filmmakers in Indonesia draw upon shared cultural memories, myths, and social issues to construct fear in their works.

Additionally, Chen's study (2016) pointed out that an artist's cultural perception, intentions, and embodiment have a significant role in visual art creation. Subsequently, phenomenology in the study of Indonesian independent horror cinema allows a deeper look at the filmmakers' creative processes to acquire a deeper understanding of the intentionality and lived experiences that underlie the moviemakers' choices in constructing fear.

Thus, by utilizing the method, this study explores how the selected independent horror moviemakers construct the fear elements in their short movie formats based on the complex interplay between cultural context, personal experience, and cinematic techniques. A study of their creative process and moviemaking experience is expected to foster a more profound appreciation for the cinematic appeal of Indonesian horror short films.

3. Method

This paper is based on a qualitative approach that explores the shared experience of Indonesian horror short movie directors when they construct aesthetic elements in creating "fear" and suspenseful moments in their movies. The authors utilized phenomenology as the research method. It is a qualitative approach that prioritizes the study of individuals' lived experiences toward a phenomenon to enable researchers to gain insights from the experiences of others (Husserl, 2012). The authors chose the method since Phenomenology is considered adequate for exploring how individuals experience a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

A phenomenological study emphasizes comprehending the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings that a particular group of individuals associate with a specific phenomenon. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on generalizability, phenomenology seeks depth and complexity by studying unique elements of a phenomenon. Phenomenological findings have limited generalizability due to their context-specific character, small sample size, assumption bracketing, emphasis on subjective meaning, extensive descriptions, and transferability (Englander & Morley, 2023). Although the method is not generalizable and focuses solely on the study participants' experiences, the significance of phenomenology stems from its potential to provide profound insights and comprehension that may be applied to other similar occurrences.

The authors acknowledge these limitations while emphasizing the profound insights and understanding gained through this qualitative approach. Hence, by employing phenomenology, the authors have the opportunity to gain insight into the moviemakers' conscious experience, thereby enhancing our comprehension of their creative process and the formation of special moments within their movies.

3.1 Study Site and Participants

The study was undertaken in Indonesia to explore the conscious creative experience of Indonesian moviemakers. The study informants were recruited via homogeneous sampling. This sampling is a purposive sampling technique that seeks to obtain a group of participants with identical (or very similar) characteristics or traits (Creswell, 2013). As further

pinpointed by Omona (2013), a homogeneous sample is typically selected when the research question being addressed is specific to the characteristics of the particular group of interest, which is then investigated in depth. Purposive homogeneous sampling is appropriate for this study. This is due to the fact that investigating the creative process of moviemakers aligns with the fundamental objective of Phenomenology, which is to fully understand and elucidate a specific group in profound detail, as opposed to relying on generalizations and quantity (Alase, 2017; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Subsequently, the authors selected relevant individuals who share similar traits and expertise in moviemaking. The authors then recruited five informants whose films had received acclaim for excellence or achieved exceptionally high levels of audience engagement. The recruitment process began with a secondary data search of online papers and video-sharing platforms. Once the potential candidates were identified, the co-authors of this paper contacted them via their public social media accounts to request their consent and availability.

We recruited five moviemakers who fulfilled the criteria, were available, and were willing to participate. Three of them achieved national recognition due to the positive reception their short films received from audiences on YouTube, with over one million views. The remaining two moviemakers had won awards in international short movie competitions.

3.2 Data Collection

In collecting the data, the authors conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with the moviemakers. The authors employed semi-structured interviews because the open-ended nature of this type of data collection not only defines the topic under investigation but also permits the researcher and informants to discuss the study topic in greater depth using their own words (Creswell, 2013). Since the informants are experts in moviemaking, this type of data collection can enhance the quality of a phenomenological study by allowing for fluid and detailed discussions with the study informants.

After obtaining verbal agreement from the study informants, formal letters were sent to them to attend the interview sessions. After the initial email, follow-up emails and text messages were used to confirm and schedule the interview. This type of data collection is suitable for gathering perspectives from people with similar expertise to discuss a specific issue and elaborate on the meaning that lies from their perspectives (Mishra, 2016).

The authors focused the interview discussions on the following aspects: (1) identifying the motivation and creative vision in crafting a horror genre short movie, and (2) the experience in creating the aesthetics of fear moments through the elements of a movie (*misè-en-scene*). These discussion points were inspired by the aspects of *misè-en-scene* introduced by Gibbs (2007). The authors then continued to gather all the data and elaborated them to the point of saturation.

This study completed the whole interview process in approximately three months. In implementing the interview, the questions were not limited solely to the leading 20 designed questions. Additional items were asked following the informants' responses. If there was missing information or specific difficulties in the questions sparked by the interviewer, reconfirmation was used to confirm its meaning. The interview sessions used the Indonesian language to create a more friendly and natural atmosphere. Furthermore, the sessions were audio recorded, and verbatim transcription was used. However, for non-recorded talks, the interviewer jotted the critical points from the interviews and noted them in the research field memos after the discussion.

3.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the authors employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) adapted from Moustakas' IPA steps (Moustakas, 1994). Firstly, the authors engaged in the bracketing phase, where we set aside our preconceptions related to moviemaking to immerse ourselves fully in the participant's world. Secondly, the authors proceeded to the following level, which involved identifying units of meaning. In this phase, we reviewed the transcribed discussions and identified statements related to the issue being explored.

In the next phase, these units of meaning are then clustered to form themes that represent the core concepts of the informants' shared experience related to the construction of fear in a horror movie. Finally, the authors construct a comprehensive summary by identifying recurrent and unique themes from the discussion. This summary captures the essence of the informants' shared and unique experiences in crafting the aesthetic behind their horror movies. The summaries were then elaborated to generate composite descriptions of the study's key findings. To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the study findings were triangulated. The authors began by cross-referencing the interview excerpts with their featured short movies to determine the link between the moviemakers' aesthetic construction and its implementation.

The triangulation of data from the interviews, jottings, and memos, as well as the horizontalization of data between participants, further increased the trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2013). The codes from the second and subsequent rounds were paired, and connections were made to the literature as they emerged from the data. Additionally, the authors implemented member checking by providing the participants with all transcriptions, analyzed data, and the article draft to ensure accuracy. We also consulted our data analysis and findings with a relevant peer auditor for the study

triangulation.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The authors adhered to the ethical research criteria outlined in the Indonesian Researchers' Association's code of ethics (Researchers' Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2021). The interviews were undertaken with the required permissions. The discussion participants were informed of their rights and the voluntary nature of their cooperation throughout the interview session. Although their anonymity was assured, individuals consented to have their work included in this paper for research purposes. In addition, each informant had the chance to sign an informed consent form to ensure the confidentiality of their personal information.

4. Results

For this study, the authors determined the invariant constituents, extracted codes and significant statements from the interview transcriptions, and reduced and eliminated those that did not fit the criteria (Moustakas, 1994). We then clustered invariant constituents to generate nine critical themes as the study findings. The overall findings of this study are illustrated in the following figure:

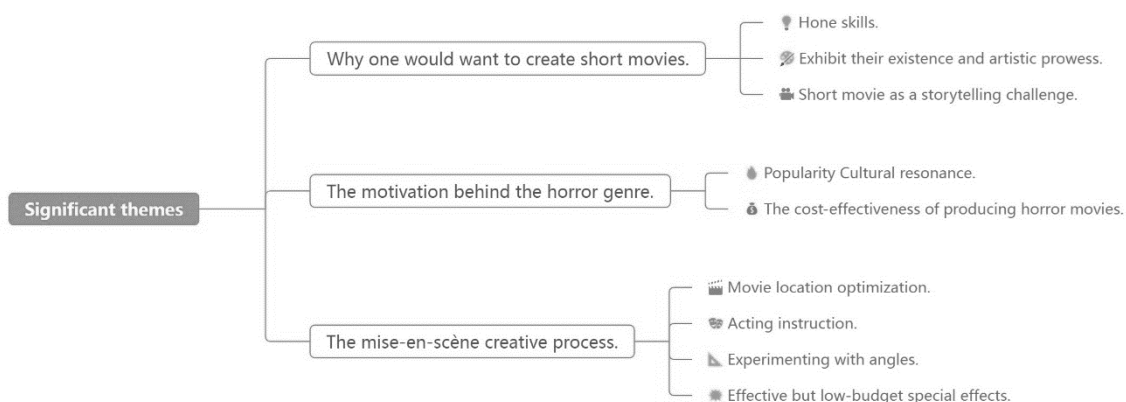


Figure 1. Significant Themes Derived from the Study

(Source: Authors’ Research Data, 2024)

Below, we provide further details of the key themes identified in the study. Additionally, this section exclusively contains the most notable interview excerpts regarding the description of the subjects.

4.1 The Intent of Creating Horror-themed Short Movies

Firstly, we will analyze our primary inquiry: "What does it mean to make a short film?" Based on the comprehensive interviews, three key themes were identified: Skill enhancement, proving existence, creative abilities, and storytelling challenges. The study data shows that the informants see short filmmaking as a means to hone their skills. They argue that this process allows them to learn and grow as a movie maker, refine their techniques, and understand more about the art of visual storytelling. An example of this is reflected in one of the informants' comments:

"For me, short filmmaking is a creative laboratory. It is a spot where I can experiment with different cinematic techniques and storytelling styles without the burden of a major production company film. It is all about putting the test to your skills rather than making profits" (I2, 2024).

The informant’s comment above shows how making a short film can be a friendly and less pressured platform to improve a moviemaker's cinematic art and visual narrative skills. The second central theme connected with the above remark was the moviemakers' motivation to exhibit their existence and artistic prowess. They perceive short films as a medium through which they can manifest their abilities and thoughts to the world. All the informants were motivated that their works are more on establishing their names in the art of short movies and showcasing their artistic skills through their movie portfolios. As stated by the second informant, "Aside from the short duration, there were no ideas boundaries in short movies, this is the time for me to prove a point, construct my identity and send my message through my works" (I2, 2024). Similarly, another informant, who appears to be a film studies and production student, noted that short films combine academic endeavors and personal interests that can help him determine his future professional route in the film industry (I3, 2024).

The informants' third motivation theme was a short movie as a storytelling challenge. According to the interview results, while it was difficult to create a significant impact in a short-duration movie, it was also the aspect that they most

appreciated. Three out of five informants perceived the duration limit as a motivating factor to enhance their storytelling prowess and selectively incorporate crucial elements into their films. Furthermore, the first and fifth informants mentioned that there is a certain satisfaction if we can get our cinematic works to inspire others because many direct messages from their young audience asked them about the creative process behind the movies and how their cinematic technique inspires them. Overall, the three themes mentioned above were the moviemakers' primary motivation for experiencing the short filmmaking process. They also emphasized the value of short films as a tool for professional and personal development and the challenges and enjoyment involved in the process.

Subsequently, when asked about their rationale for selecting the horror genre, the interviews unveiled two primary themes: cultural resonance and cost-effectiveness. The moviemakers in this study agreed that the horror genre is popular and has considerable cultural resonance. They believe that horror films in Indonesia have great appeal and can tap into people's deep cultural fears and beliefs. In the words of the second informant: "I chose horror because this genre in Indonesia has a strong cultural connection and always appeals to the audience. "I myself made this short film based on my own mystical experience, and I believe Indonesian audiences often experience this kind of thing." (I2, 2024). Additionally, the first informant pinpointed the following opinion:

"The genre always has a large market; while short films do not provide significant financial rewards on free video sites such as YouTube, people are practically guaranteed to view them. For me, this is my goal: to gain audience appreciation by having them watch it and comment about it, which will inspire me to create more and better" (I1, 2024).

Aside from the fact that horror has always been popular among Indonesian moviegoers, the second topic that emerged was the cost-effectiveness of producing horror films. The directors noticed that making a horror film is typically less expensive than other genres, such as drama. This makes it a viable option for moviemakers, particularly those working on a tight budget. This is mirrored in the third informant's statement: "With a limited budget, I believe that making a horror film is the most efficient option." By focusing on setting, camera angle, and sound, we can create something terrifying and suspenseful on a low budget." According to the interviews, each informant confirmed they only used the highest budget of 100 million rupiah (equivalent to US\$ 6000) and the lowest budget of zero rupiah (equivalent to US\$ 0). For instance, the first and fifth informants consistently employ a budget ranging from zero to five million rupiah (US\$ 300) when producing films, as they both originate from identical independent production houses (DDG Production).

In summary, the moviemakers in this study chose the horror genre for their movies due to its cultural resonance and cost-effectiveness. They believe that horror films, which tap into deep cultural fears and beliefs, have a strong appeal in Indonesia and are less expensive to produce than other genres, making them a viable option for moviemakers working on a tight budget.

4.2 The *Mise-en-scène* Creative Process

The interviews in this study resulted in a typology of the informants' approaches in constructing fear moments in their short movies. Based on their experiences, the *mise-en-scène* strategies are divided into four major themes: (a) movie location optimization through cultural influences, (b) acting instruction, (c) experimenting with angles, and (d) effective but low-budget special effects. These themes will be further described below.

4.2.1 Coalescence of Movie Location Optimization and Cultural Influence

The first theme that emerges from the moviemakers' minds is how they optimize the setting as the key to constructing suspense moments. They realized that with a limited budget and time, the informants focused on a small setting but felt it had a cultural resonance with the audience. In detail, the fourth informant described his experience:

"At the time, I was in Bogor, and I carefully looked for a village with characters similar to my scenario; ultimately, I found a village called 'Cibanteng' with the name 'bulls,' which fits perfectly with my novel about a horned monster. When I observed and spoke with the local population, I discovered they frequently had mystical experiences in one of the village's locations. That is why if people in that area have experienced mystical phenomena, this might also appeal to Indonesian audiences who are already familiar with the typical Indonesian village setting, along with the absence of light, which is perfect for jump-scares and suspense sensations. This method is truly cost-effective because the setting and vibes happen naturally" (I4, 2024).

The first informant also noted that, as an Indonesian developing horror short movie, he needs to feel what the audience will feel about a location or setting, which will ignite imagination (I1, 2024). This particular focus setting choice is highly advantageous for informants limited by budget, as it enables them to optimize natural settings based on cultural beliefs to create a foundation for potential horror scene moments.

4.2.2 Acting Instruction by Recalling Personal Experience

Horror acting goes beyond simply “being scared.” As with any dramatic performance, character portrayal must be genuine, immediate, and accurate. That is why it is important to see how the informants, as directors, direct their movie talents to maintain audience engagement and deliver a thrilling performance.

When asked, the informants said they generally directed the acting talents according to the scenario and the director's vision, but they also gave a chance for their talents to improvise. Four of the six participants in this study directed the specifics of their reactions to the scene while remaining receptive to their input. According to the first informant, “I consider my actors and actresses to be my family, my little brothers and sisters. I brief them and show them references from other movies, but I am still listening to their input on approaching the scenes” (I01,2024). Interestingly, a particular informant tends to grant greater autonomy to their abilities. According to the fourth informant, he allows his talents to interpret the script freely. He added, “I had faith in my actors’ abilities to pull this off—all I had to do was prompt them to consider their own mystical experiences and imaginations when faced with a terrifying situation, even if it was not explicitly stated in the script” (I04,2024).

The above interview extracts show that the study informants usually provide performers instruction based on the script regarding directing acting abilities. They also recognize the need for improvisation based on their experience in facing mystical phenomena, allowing the artists to provide their own perspectives to enhance the performance.

4.2.3 Experimenting with the Camera Angles

The interviews demonstrate that the study informants adopt several creative strategies to cope with the tight budget and make the most of what they have. One of the most significant strategies is experimenting with camera angles. Camera angles are important because they can affect the atmosphere and tension you want to create in your movie. According to the first informant:

Camera angles do not require a big budget; they rely on creativity. For example, using low, oblique camera angles can create a sense of uneasiness and tension while also providing our audience with a more intimate and up-close view of the characters. Meanwhile, Using POV (point of view) from the main character's perspective helps boost audience immersion by bringing them along on the character's experience (I1, 2024).

Another informant supported those classic techniques, such as experimenting with camera angles on windows, mirrors, and shadowy alleyways, often do the trick (I3, 2024). On top of that, the second informant also pinpointed that consistent discussions with the director of photography (DoP) will greatly assist in determining the most visually enticing camera angle (I2, 2024). The interviews ultimately lead to an understanding that innovative use of camera angles is essential for establishing a captivating and immersive visual encounter for the audience while bolstering the intended narrative and thematic elements of fear in horror movies.

4.2.4 Effective but Low-Budget Special Effects

There is a common misconception that horror films require expensive special effects. The interview results demonstrate the exact opposite phenomenon. In producing a short horror film, maximizing facial make-up and simple prosthetic effects are effective ways to give the characters a terrifying appearance without expending a great deal of time or resources. An informant highlighted that “as moviemakers, we do not always have access to an abundance of resources, which means we must be able to make the most of what we have.” (I1, 2024)

As another example, the fourth informant shared his experience:

“With a limited budget, we can use simple make-up and effects and let them be enhanced with video editing during post-production editing. For example, we can replace prosthetics with simple materials like hot glue, cornstarch, and face paint to generate realistic-looking wound effects. Just try sticking pieces of wet paper that have been colored red on the skin with a hot glue gun, then adding a little shading effect with face paint, and we can create a pretty scary wound look. During the final editing, play up the brightness of the colors and light and combine it with sound effects, and then the wound effect will look even better” (I4, 2024).

Furthermore, as stated by additional sources of information, uncomplicated cosmetics, including pallid facial make-up and blood effects created from corn syrup, condensed milk, poster paint, or a combination of other household substances, can help heighten the visual sense of horror.

Overall, the excerpts imply that a moviemaker can create a scary and gripping look on a limited budget by using simple but creative make-up and special effects tricks. The informants underscored the significance of remembering that meticulousness and ingenuity in applying make-up can significantly contribute to producing a compelling horror effect.

Thus, based on the four themes above, when creating a horror movie, particularly in a short film format, it is essential to

optimize the movie setting, provide acting guidance, explore different camera angles, and use effective yet low-cost special effects. By creatively incorporating these four components, moviemakers may create captivating horror stories that have a lasting impact, even under constraints imposed by short film duration formats and limited budgets.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the shared experience of moviemakers related to their motivation to work on short movies and how they construct horror elements in their works. For the first study questions, the concept of short filmmaking as a skill enhancement medium and "creative laboratory" resonates with existing studies. Moviemakers frequently utilize short movies as a means to explore innovative techniques, refine their skills, and challenge creative limits (Laskari, 2022). As further described by Kolker (2012), These tightly packed narratives enable moviemakers to experiment with unconventional storytelling techniques, explore visual aesthetics, and develop their directorial abilities.

In other words, by working within the constraints of limited duration, they learn to convey impactful messages concisely. This aligns with studies emphasizing the value of experimentation and risk-taking in creative processes. The study informants, who were emerging movie makers, also perceived short films as a powerful medium to establish their foothold in the industry. By creating compelling narratives within tight timeframes, moviemakers demonstrate their artistic prowess and unique voice (Fortuna Jr., 2018). These short works may function as calling cards, demonstrating their skills to potential collaborators, producers, and film festival organizers. The progression of acclaimed directors such as Damien Chazelle and Taika Waititi from short to feature-length films exemplifies how the success of short films frequently opens doors to feature-length projects (Lang, 2022). It demonstrates that the ability to captivate people in a limited format indicates a moviemaker's versatility and storytelling skills, making short films an important stepping stone in their careers.

Another interesting point from the findings is that the moviemakers in this study selected the horror genre for their movies because of its cultural significance and financial efficiency. In contrast to Hollywood, the horror genre's enduring popularity in Indonesia can be attributed to the fact that it typically retells tales that are already familiar to local audiences. Indonesians have a strong predilection for the supernatural and the unseen, and these horror films offer audiences encounters with regional mythology and legend that are difficult to encounter beyond the country's borders (Guild, 2023).

Indonesian movie enthusiasts have most likely accepted these films due to their adaptation to local preferences and narratives that resonate with the people's cultural heritage (Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas, 2020). While audiences have well-received domestic horror, it has been challenging to adapt other genres for the Indonesian market (Wahid & Agustina, 2021). This fact means that for the foreseeable future, Indonesian moviemakers and producers will continue to feature horror in their feature-length and short films, for better or worse.

To answer the second research question, the findings from this study aligned horizontally between informants of this study and previous studies. The study's findings on the *mise-en-scène* creative process illuminated the creative approaches used by the informants to work with limited resources and produce immersive and frightening experiences for audiences. The focus on making the most of filming locations, providing acting advice, experimenting with camera angles, and using inexpensive special effects draws attention to the creativity and resourcefulness of the study informants.

Prior studies further support the significance of these findings. For example, Alves's (2020) and Park's (2018) study underscore the significance of movie settings in horror films, positing that the location can function as a character in its own right, affecting the narrative's mood and tension. This is consistent with the informants' emphasis on using natural settings and cultural resonance to amplify the horror elements in their movies. As for independent or short-movie formats, moviemakers may lack the financial resources or influence necessary to secure access to numerous locations where they aspire to locate their films. Consequently, the director's decision-making process is characterized by the tendency to select the most readily available option, regardless of whether it would be more beneficial to the narrative, as long as it can serve as an extension of the film's characters and convey the emotional themes (Renee, 2015).

Then, Falconer's (2023) study emphasizes the need for genuine and prompt acting in horror films to effectively captivate the audience. The informants' technique of coaching actors based on the scenario while allowing for a larger chance of improvisation based on their cultural or mystical experience is consistent with the goal of producing authentic depictions that stimulate fear and suspense.

At this point, it is also worth noting that the use of innovative camera angles and low-budget special effects in horror filmmaking, Gibbs (2007) emphasizes the use of creative cinematography and tangible effects to augment the visual intensity of scenes. During a triangulation interview with the study's peer auditor, it was mentioned that film transitions also serve as a crucial component of visual storytelling. They skillfully guide the audience's focus from one scene to another, ensuring a smooth narrative progression without confusion while gently shaping viewers' perceptions and emotional responses to the story. In other words, it is not about the tools, but it is all about the person behind the tools. This notion is reflected in the informants' strategies for experimenting with angles, transition techniques, and employing

simple make-up and budget-friendly prosthetics, demonstrating how taking creative risks can result in compelling and scary visual storytelling.

Building on the practical findings from this study, we recommend various directions for future research and investigation. Firstly, further studies can examine how diverse cultural origins influence the development of fear moments in short films. Scholars may compare and contrast the methods employed by moviemakers from various regions to better understand the impact of cultural differences on audience perceptions of horror. Then, the use of new technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to enhance the *mise-en-scène* aspects of horror short films can be looked into. Explore how these technologies can be utilized to create horror experiences that are more engaging and immersive for audiences. By investigating these areas for further studies, scholars or even moviemakers can further enhance their comprehension of the art and practice of *mise-en-scène* in creating innovative methods and alternative ways for crafting captivating cinematic narratives.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the shared creative experiences of Indonesian movie makers in the context of horror movie making. The compact nature of short films necessitates concise storytelling, innovative use of settings, and genuine, prompt acting to effectively captivate the audience. The general findings of the informants' experience emphasize the significance of ingenuity, collaboration, and cultural creativity in the production of memorable and captivating cinematic experiences within the horror genre.

The findings presented in this paper have significant implications for both established and emerging moviemakers. Gaining a deep understanding of the nuances of the short film format and its socio-cultural aspects can allow moviemakers to utilize its advantages optimally, especially in the horror genre. Cultural resonance, atmosphere, suspense, and character reactions are pivotal in this genre. Finally, a short horror movie can leave an enduring impression when executed well, demonstrating that its impact is not restricted by its duration or limited resources.

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Authors contributions

The first and third author was responsible for study design and data collecting. The second author analyzed the data, drafted the manuscript, and revised it. The final manuscript was reviewed and approved by all authors.

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