

THE ROLE OF POPULAR HORROR NARRATIVES IN SHAPING ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

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Opinion and Ideas



The advancement of information technology and the internet has massively transformed the way humans communicate, and social media has become one of the most popular mediums today known as “new media”.

The advantage of new media specifically social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly known as Twitter), and others, is the ability to obtain information through fast services and access it at any time. Consequently, it is clear that the emergence of innovations like technology and the internet will have an impact, both on daily life and on



teaching and learning activities, such as instructional methods (Mondry, 2008). Social media facilitates the rapid spread of information, including stories that are currently going viral.



The horror genre has become one of the most sought-after forms of entertainment in Indonesia, manifesting in various formats such as films, stories, myths, and other forms circulating within society. The development of horror fiction in Indonesia has grown rapidly alongside widespread digitalization. Social media platforms like Twitter (now known as X) play a crucial role in boosting the popularity of horror fiction, as well as distributing creators' work and attracting readers' attention (Yudono and Adi, 2022). Furthermore, mystical stories are no longer considered unusual for the majority of Indonesian society. Ghosts, spirits, kuntilanak, pocong, and other entities are widely recognized, serving as entertainment and even being passed down from one generation to the next.

There are many reasons why horror and the mystical are highly popular in Indonesia due to cultural context, such as where the Indonesian nation reflects beliefs, traditions, and other aspects related to folklore or natural phenomena. Another factor is traditional narratives that have become deeply rooted, such as the figures of the 'pocong' or 'kuntilanak.' Lastly, ghost stories generally serve a moral purpose, acting as warnings against certain behaviors or to foster social values. For example, children are taught to go inside the house immediately before Maghrib at 6 PM, because otherwise, they will be kidnapped by spirits. This is a form of reminder so that children learn the discipline of stopping their playtime, infused with a touch of mystical lore.

Furthermore, based on data from numerous streaming services and movie theaters, the films most favored by Indonesian society belong to the horror genre, such as "Pengabdian Setan" (Satan's Slaves), "KKN di Desa Penari" (Curse and the Dance), "Danur," "Suzanna," and others.

This indicates just how high the standing of the horror genre is in Indonesia. Consequently, this can be leveraged as a rather unique medium for character education among students. In Indonesia itself, the horror genre can be divided into several subgenres, including: the local ghost subgenre that explores traditional spirits like the Kuntilanak or Pocong; supernatural horror, which is usually associated with santet (black magic); psychological horror, which depicts the emotional disturbances of its characters; and religious horror, which portrays themes of faith and fear. Other sub-genres include comedy horror, which blends humor with horror, and the quite provocative exploitation horror, which depicts themes that challenge social norms and cultural perspectives. Cinematic excellence, along with emotional dynamics and easily understood storyline, are the reasons why horror stories and films have become immensely popular and highly favored in Indonesia.

Social media, as one of the vehicles for spreading these horror stories, is a sign that technology not only transforms how we communicate and learn, but also influences how we understand and apply moral and ethical values across various contexts. Character education becomes essential, especially as a foundation for providing academic knowledge while shaping a morally strong personality base as they grow up alongside technology.

There are several benefits associated with horror and mystery stories. Among them, these stories expose readers to a wide range of emotions. Experiencing these various intense emotions through horror and mystery stories will help build self-confidence and foster a better understanding of how to handle threatening or unsafe situations. To quote Neil Gaiman, a legendary author of science fiction and horror, who stated, 'For stories to work, for children and for adults, they should be frightened. And we should win. There's no point in winning over evil if evil isn't scary' (Smith, 2017).

The following are several steps that can be implemented for character education using horror stories: First, select horror stories that are appropriate for the age and conditions of the class. Second, collectively analyze the aspects and elements of the horror story in class to gain beneficial knowledge. Third, after developing the ability to analyze, the next activity can proceed with students writing their own horror stories as a form of literacy training. And the last step, after reading and analyzing the aspects and elements of the horror story, and discussing the characters within it as a form of character education, it is also expected to boost students' motivation to increase their respective reading interests.

In conclusion, horror and mystery stories offer a safe way for students to learn how to assess risk and manage their fears. Thus, it is expected that character education utilizing horror and mystery stories will help students become more resilient, with the caveat that the chosen horror and mystery tales must be carefully tailored to the age and specific conditions of each student. So, what's your favorite scary movie?.

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