From Sacred to Commodified:
The Semantic Transformation of Arabic Language in Indonesian Horror Film Titles

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Abstract

This study examines the use and semantic transformation of Islamic religious language in Indonesian horror films. Findings reveal that desacralizationge with horror themes to attract the predominantly Muslim audience, media commodification has transformed sacred expressions into commercial tools, leading to the distortion of religious literacy and public resistance. The research aims to identify forms of semantic transformation, investigate its causes, and analyze its impact on public discourse and understanding of religious language. Using both primary and secondary data, the study focused on Indonesian horror films released on YouTube between 2019 and 2023. Data were classified based on theories of desacralization and connotative meaning, with analysis encompassing linguistic patterns and audience comments. Findings reveal that semantic transformation arises mainly from the commodification of religion through syncretic storytelling that blends Islamic elements with horror, creating confusion and misinterpretations of Islamic teachings among the public.

Keywords: *semantic transformation, Arabic language, media commodification, semantic transformation*

Introduction

The use of Arabic vocabulary in Indonesia is in correlation with the entry of Islam into the archipelago in the seventh century AD (Suroiyah & Zakiyah, 2021). Arabic vocabulary serves as both a scientific and religious language within Islamic teachings (Apriani et al., 2021; Mahfud et al., 2021). As a religious language, it holds special significance in conveying beliefs and practices related to Islamic preaching. Religious language is no longer used solely for preaching but has also become a common feature in the titles of religious-themed horror films with the rise of the popular horror genre in the Indonesia film industry (Maram et al., 2024). This language has been commodified in horror films to attract Indonesian audiences who are predominantly Muslim. The commodification process begins with the transformation of sacred elements in religious language to create a scary atmosphere, incorporating mystical or

supernatural elements into film narratives. Consequently, the commodification of horror films has led to the desacralization of religious language.

Previous studies on desacralization can be categorized into four categories, namely: (1) religious, (2) cultural, (3) political, and (4) economic. First, desacralization in a religious context is often associated with increasing secularization and changes in social values (Baker, 2019). Secular principles such as individualism and materialism are increasingly replacing traditional religious values (Boguszewski & Bożewicz., 2020; Sadari, 2020). For instance, in Balinese Hindu society, the Catuspatha symbol has been desacralized due to socio-political factors, leading to a decline in public trust (Wastawa & Sudarsana, 2019). Second, in a cultural context, desacralization can be observed in modern East Slavic food where sacred meanings have been lost due to globalization, new food technologies, and cultural expansion, leading to the erosion of national traditions and the resacralization of traditional foods (Kobzar, 2021). Third, desacralization in a political context can refer to the process by which political figures or state symbols previously considered sacred or untouchable are questioned, criticized, or less respected (Balestrieri, 2022).

Denotation referred to the literal meaning of language or a sign (Qalyubi & Misrita, 2023), and often considered the first level in a semiotic system. Roland Barthes was known for semiotic approach, particularly the concepts of denotation and connotation (Putri et al., 2023). In films, denotation implied visual and audio text aimed at communicating messages through signs that could be understood literally (Nisa & Deni, 2023). Furthermore, connotation in films functioned as a visual and narrative medium full of symbolic meaning (Nisa & Deni, 2023). Symbolic elements such as color, lighting, and dialogue were often manipulated to evoke certain emotions or associations (Hannes & Siegesmund, 2022). In the context of horror films that used religious language, connotation was used to connect religious elements with mystical or scary themes (Aburqayeq, 2021).

In horror films, religious language was often used denotatively to create direct associations with Islam (Haider & Shuhaiber, 2024). Symbols such as the Qur'an, Arabic calligraphy, or the sound of the *adzan* served as denotative signs that led the audience to specific religious interpretations. Additionally, connotations in horror films shaped myths that constructed new narratives. For example, the word "*qarîn*" in Islam referred to a human companion but was often reinterpreted in horror films as a terrifying (Abduljabbar, 2024). Several factors contributed to the deviation of connotative and denotative meanings into myths including cultural commodification (Bapir, 2022), adaptation of the horror genre (Graja et al., 2021), recontextualization in Popular Media (Maier & Engberg, 2023), and the reduction of meaning by the audience (Sahari, 2021).

Desacralization was the process of removing or reducing the sacred nature of something previously considered holy and spiritually significant. This concept was widely applied in religious, cultural, and political contexts. In a religious context, desacralization referred to changes in public perceptions of places of worship, rituals, or religious figures. For instance, a place of worship once considered sacred could lose its status due to demographic changes or a decline in religious belief in the area (Molteni

& Biolcati, 2023). The impact of desacralization in a religious context often led to secularization or a decline in religious authority.

Film was an art form and communication medium that used moving images to tell a story, depict an event, or express ideas and emotions (Abu-Obeid & Abuhassan, 2024; Rees, 2019). Based on the story themes, films were categorized into various genres such as drama, comedy, horror, science fiction, documentary, and animation (Grant, 2023). Horror films were a genre designed to create a sense of fear, suspense, and dread in audiences (Seyler, 2019). This genre often used supernatural, psychological, or violent elements to create a frightening atmosphere, stimulating both adrenaline (Shaw, 2019) and anxiety among the audiences (Kovács, 2022). Common themes in horror films included death, supernatural beings such as ghosts, demons, and vampires, psychopaths, curses, as well as other dark or mysterious elements (Weismann, 2021). Horror films often explored the darker aspects of human existence, both psychologically and physically (Aistrope & Fishel, 2020).

In horror films, jump scares were a frequently used technique. Jump scares were designed to startle the audience with sudden and intense visual or auditory shocks. This technique relied on elements of surprise to generate immediate reactions of fear. Jump scares were typically executed through a sequence of buildup, distraction, and sudden impact.

This study aims to address gaps in previous literature that have largely overlooked the semantic dimension of religious language in the context of film media. Specifically, the analysis outlines how the semantic transformation of religious language reflects media commodification and religious influences shaped by communities still influenced by animism and dynamism. Consequently, three questions are answered such as: (a) what are the forms of semantic transformation of religious language in Indonesian horror films? (b) what factors underlie the semantic transformation of religious language in horror films? and (c) how does the semantic transformation of religious language in horror films contribute to deviations in public knowledge and literacy? The answers to these questions provide insights into the foundational ideas behind policies regarding the censorship of religious horror films.

Furthermore, this study argues that the semantic transformation of religious language in Indonesian horror film titles primarily originates from media commodification, blending syncretic elements with the horror genre. The phenomenon contributes to public confusion in understanding religious teachings, leading to interpretations that deviate from Islamic law.

Method

The semantic transformation of religious language in horror films was chosen as the subject of this study for three main reasons. First, the topic had received little attention in the academic literature on language, religion, and media. Previous studies have primarily examined desacralization in cultural, political, and economic contexts. Second, the semantic transformation of religious language in horror films explained the causal relationship between public understanding of religious language and the subsequent public rejection of horror films such as *Kiblat* (*qibla*) in Indonesia. These

consequences required mapping to formulate appropriate responses. Third, studying the semantic transformation of religious language in horror films was expected to provide a deeper understanding and insight into the widespread use of religious language in Indonesian horror films.

Religious horror films were selected in Indonesia because the genre was widely popular among Indonesian audiences. This was a subgenre that incorporated Islamic religious values into horror narratives. The genre gained popularity in 2019, beginning with the release of *Hidâyah*. A qualitative approach was used to allow for a detailed examination of the semantic transformation of religious language in horror film media. This study relied on both primary and secondary data where primary source was obtained from an analysis of horror-religious films that used religious language in the titles. The collected data consisted of the forms, factors, and implications of the semantic transformation of religious language in horror films. The forms of semantic transformation were examined through patterns in the use of Islamic language and terms. The factors contributing to semantic transformation were mapped based on commodification through the horror genre, community beliefs includin animism and dynamism, as well as the influence of media globalization.

The study included collecting data from YouTube and TikTok. The use of religious language in the titles of horror films on these platforms served as the primary data source, as the materials were the main digital platforms where the semantic transformation of religious language was disseminated. The collected data was categorized into five forms namely: (1) worship tools, (2) worship times, (3) directions during worship, (4) people in the congregation during worship, and (5) words of guidance from Allah.

Content analysis was conducted to identify and classify various forms of semantic transformation of religious language meaning. Visual and narrative text data from the comment sections of YouTube and TikTok were collected and analyzed to identify recurring patterns. Horror film footage was also accessed and classified according to the five forms of semantic transformation. The study process followed a structured method beginning with data collection, followed by classification and analysis, ensuring a systematic analysis of the semantic transformation of religious language in Indonesian horror films.

The interpretation method for visual horror film data and narrative text in the comments sections of social media particularly YouTube followed three main stages namely data restatement, description, and interpretation. The data restatement stage included reconstructing data related to the use of religious language in horror film narratives to understand its contextual meaning. The description stage focused on identifying patterns and themes within horror film storylines. Finally, the interpretation stage provided an analysis of the ideological influences behind the desacralization of religious symbols in horror films. This method facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

This study concentrated on thesemantic transformation of religious language meaning in Indonesian religious horror films. YouTube as a visual media platform had become a major vehicle for the rapid and unrestricted dissemination of desacralized

religious language (Castells, 2009). The semantic transformation of religious language as particularly relevant in Indonesia considering its position as a leading digital nation and its status as the country with the fifth-largest Muslim population in the world. This study examined the forms, causes, and impacts of desacralization by tracing the underlying ideological influences.

Result and Discussion

The forms of desacralization of religious language in the titles of horror films were as follows.

Semantic transformation of the word "tasbîh" as a medium for dzikr (remembering Allah) into an empty "tasbîh" as a "medium for pesugihan (an occult wealth-seeking ritual)"

The word tasbih in Indonesian implied reciting praises to Allah by saying subhanallah "Glory to Allah". This term originated from Arabic, a noun-verb from the word *sabbaha* (سَبَّحَ), which implied "to praise, glorify, extol, laud, and eulogize". It was frequently used idiomatically with the word *jalâlah* (Allah) as in *sabbaha lillâhi* and subhanallah. In the context of Muslim society, the word tasbih denoted a tool for *dzikr* (remembering Allah), consisting of a series of wooden or stone beads tied together with a thread. The number of beads in a *tasbîh* corresponded with the Prophet's *sunnah* (tradition) to recite it 33 or 100 times.

In the commodification of film media, tasbih was depicted as a medium for *pesugihan* by Pattiro Kanja in the Sulawesi region. *Pesugihan* referred to an alliance with the devil or Satan to gain wealth. This film narrated the story of two employees of the statistics office, the characters Asti and Umar who were assigned to update data in a remote village in an Indonesian regency. Most villagers were bound by a promise to the devil for pesugihan and performed human sacrifices to carry out the ritual. The film *Tasbih Kosong* (Empty *Tasbîh*) depicted the figure of a shaman wearing a religious robe who appeared pious, virtuous, and prayerful but who was a cruel figure opposing sharia and allying with *jinns* through the practice of pesugihan. The meaning of the word *tasbîh* in the film was depicted in the following character dialogue.

Village head: "All of this is good. It comes from Allah the Almighty Creator. However, most people misuse this knowledge. And they want that knowledge to remain through *tasbîh*." The semantic transformation of the word *tasbîh* in the title of the horror film. The netizen comments column in Table 1 showed the deviation of public literacy regarding the religious symbol of *tasbîh*, as the word began to be associated with mystery.

Table 1. Poster and semantic transformation of the word tasbih meaning in the film
Tasbih Kosong

Film Title, Poster, and Link	Number of viewers	Netizen comments	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning and myths in the horror film
Film title: *Tasbih Kosong* (Empty *Tasbîh*) Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6k5ndu-Qac&t=17s	636	"O Allah, why is *Tasbîh* empty, unable to be used to remember You, O Allah? Is there a mystery behind this empty *Tasbîh*?" @IwanSantosaIwan pijet-g5d	*Tasbîh* is a medium for dhikr/getting closer to Allah	*Tasbîh* is a medium for *pesugihan*/misguidance

Semantic transformation of Maghrib time meaning into 'haunted time'

The word *Maghrib* (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016) in Indonesian denoted west, the direction of the sunset. It also implied the time of sunset, which was the obligatory prayer time that began before sunset until the red light disappeared on the western horizon. This word was a noun indicating a place or time, derived from Arabic whose root word (غرب) implied "to set, go down, and sink" (i.e., "sunset time")(Baalbaki, 1995). In the context of Muslim society, *Maghrib* time was identical to the ritual of *Maghrib* prayer which was performed when the sunset. *Maghrib* time was connected to the sun's movement, and therefore it was considered an efficacious time for prayer. This correlated with the hadits from Abu Hurairah r.a. that the Prophet Muhammad SAW said: "Indeed, prayer will not be rejected between the *adzan* and the *iqãmah*" (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadits No. 521; Sunan Al-Tirmidzi, Hadits No. 3491). This hadits suggested that the time between the adzan including *Maghrib* time, when the *adzan* is was carried out at *Maghrib* was efficacious for prayer (Sahih Muslim, Hadits No. 831).

In the commodification of the *Waktu Maghrib* (*Maghrib* Time) film media, the word Maghrib was reinterpreted as a sacred time for swearing regarded as a time for the arrival of evil spirits or ghosts to the point of causing possession. The film narrated the story of the characters Adi and Saman who were frequently punished by Mrs. Woro who was a disciplined and fierce teacher. One day, Adi and Saman's annoyance toward Mrs. Woro peaked, and cursed her hoping that the teacher would die. This oath was uttered at the same time as the *Maghrib adzan* sounded. The meaning of *Maghrib* time in the film was shown in the conversation of the characters (https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSYjfRFFk/) as follows.

Ustadz: "The Prophet's *sunnah* recommended not to go out early at night, do you know what that implied?

Child 1: "*Maghrib* time, sir!"

Ustadz: "Smart! Because at *Maghrib* time, many demons roam around, thereby I remind you once again!".

The semantic transformation of the word *Maghrib* meaning in the title of a horror film. The netizen comment column in Table 2 showed the deviation of public literacy regarding *Maghrib* time and assumed that numerous ghosts roamed around.

Table 2. Poster and semantic transformation of the word *maghrib* meaning in the film *Waktu Maghrib*

Film Title, Poster, and Link	Number of viewers	Netizen comments	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning and myths in the horror film
Film title: *Waktu Maghrib* (*Maghrib* Time) Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFGE0hMw2OQ	24 thousand	"If it is like that, for example, at *Maghrib*, you have to go home quickly because many ghosts like to roam around at *Maghrib* time. If we are at home, we should close the door and the window tightly at *Maghrib* time. If everything is performed, quickly read the prayer in the house and pray at the mosque…..". @dayyinahadara8080	*Maghrib* is the time for obligatory prayers	*Maghrib* is a haunted time

Semantic transformation of the Word Makmûm (A Person Led in Prayer) into a Makmum Ghost

In Indonesian, the word *makmûm* referred to a person who was led in congregational prayer by an *imâm*. It denoted a follower in prayer who stood behind the *imâm* and followed the lead (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). This word originated from the Arabic word أَمَّ meaning "to lead". In its noun form (مأموم), it translated to "the one who was led in congregational prayer". In Muslim society, *makmum* described a group of worshippers performing prayer collectively, beginning with *takbîr* and ending with *salâm,* while following the *imâm*.

In the commodification of film media, *Makmûm* (Congregation) reinterpreted the word as "a spirit or ghost that followed prayer." The film *Makmûm* 1 told the story of Nurul, Nisa, and Putri, three students living in a girls' dormitory. One night, as they prepared to perform the tahajud prayer, Nurul sensed an eerie presence behind her. She felt as though someone was following her in prayer as a *makmûm*. Suddenly, an unsettling voice began mimicking their recitation of Quranic verses. Despite their growing fear—marked by shivers and goosebumps—the characters continued their prayer until the

end. The meaning of makmum in the film was depicted in the following dialogue (https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSYjyqFJT/).

Nurul: "Allahu Akbar (praying)

Makmum Ghost: "*Allahu Akbar* (following Nurul's words)

Nurul: "*sami'allahu liman hamidah* (while shaking with fear because she heard other people's voices)

Makmum Ghost: *sami'allahu liman hamidah* (continue to follow Nurul's words)

Nurul: (continuing prayer until greeting in a state of fear)

Makmum Ghost: (follows all Nurul's movements and words, until the greeting then *Makmum* Ghost appears in front of Nurul). The semantic transformation of the word makmum meaning in the title of a horror film. The netizen comments column in Table 3 showed public concerns about horror films instilling fear and discouraging people from performing voluntary (*sunnah*) prayers such as tahajud.

Table 3. Poster and Semantic Transformation of the Word *Makmûm* in the Film

Film Title, Poster, and Link	Number of viewers	Netizen comments	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning and myths in the horror film
Film title: *Makmum* (Congregation) Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks0rYwutbXQ	28 thousand	The negative impact of this film: people become afraid to perform *sunnah* prayers such as *tahajjud* at home alone @muhammadalifuady2031	*Makmûm* is a person who follows the imam in congregational prayer	*Makmûm* is a ghost who follows prayers

Semantic Transformation of the Word Qibla ('Direction of Prayer') into 'Turning toward Error'

In Indonesian, *qibla* referred to the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, which Muslims faced during prayer as well as the denoted general directions and cardinal points (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). The term originated from the Arabic word *qibla* (القبلة), derived from the root pattern (فِعْلَة), meaning "the direction to Muslims" (Baalbaki, 1995). In Islamic teachings, qibla held spiritual significance guiding worshippers toward the Kaaba as the focal point of prayer.

In the horror film *Kiblat* (*Qibla*), the term was redefined with a supernatural twist. The film followed the character Ainin, who experienced extreme pain as her body was unnaturally twisted during *rukû'* (the bowing position in prayer). Her head, instead of facing downward, was eerily forced upward. The terrifying scene intensified with agonizing screams, reinforcing a nightmarish distortion of the sacred act of prayer. A

glimpse of this scene could be viewed in the YouTube clip (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/_R8zM2LhI1I). The desacralization of the word *qibla* in the horror film. The comments in Table 4 showed public discontent, as many viewers perceived *Kiblat* as blasphemous and an attempt to instill fear around worship.

Table 4. Poster and Semantic Transformation of the Word *Qibla* in the Horror Film

Film Title, Poster, and Link	Number of viewers	Netizen comments	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning and myths in the horror film
Film title: *Kiblat* (*Qibla*) Link: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/_R8zM2LhI1I	694	The movie is titled *Kiblat* (*Qibla*), but it features ghosts scaring people who pray at night. Couldn't they select a different title? It is insulting @ASTI379688 -Why do horror movies nowadays keep incorporating Islam? It is not funny and scary. There are scenes of people being scared while praying *tahajjud* and now even the qibla is being used @pussyyyyyy	*Qibla* is the direction of prayer facing the Kaaba, the direction, the place to face in prayer	The *Qibla* can reverse direction if people are in error

Semantic Transformation of the Word Hidâyah

The word hidayah in Indonesian denoted instruction or guidance from God (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). It originated from the Arabic root هدى which implied "to guide, direct, lead, show the way, conduct, pilot, and usher" (Baalbaki, 1995). In an Islamic context, *hidâyah* was interpreted as self-awareness by receiving guidance from Allah about beliefs or what was right, related to worldly and afterlife affairs. Someone receiving hidayah could be interpreted in two methods namely (1) someone who received guidance to embrace Islam, and (2) a Muslim who leaves all forms of sin then changes to be better because of guidance from Allah SWT.

In the commodification of the *Hidâyah* (Guidance) film media, hidayah was interpreted as when the character received guidance/instruction after seeing Ratna's spirit. *Hidâyah* did not have to come by reading religious texts. It could be obtained by paying attention to social phenomena that occurred. The *hidâyah* received by the character Stefani in this film was from the story of the character Ratna mixed with seeing the appearance of Ratna's spirit. The semantic transformation of the word *hidâyah* in the horror film. The netizen comments in Table 5 reflected public disapproval of horror films intertwining religious themes with supernatural horror. Many argued that religious

figures should have focused on spreading Islamic teachings rather than being portrayed as exorcists battling spirits.

Table 5. Poster and Semantic Transformation of the Word Hidayah in the Horror Film

Film Title, Poster, and Link	Number of viewers	Netizen comments	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning and myths in the horror film
Film title: *Hidâyah* (Guidance) Link:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a401F5-0vZY	12 thousand	YouTube comment: "Horror films should not involve any religion, use the *kyai* or *ustadz*, pastor. *Kyai* is a religious scholar. The religious scholar's job is to preach and convey knowledge to the people, not to exorcise demons." @auliarahman6936	*Hidâyah* is guidance to the truth from Allah	*Hidâyah* is guidance to the truth after meeting a ghost

After presenting the results, this study identifies three distinct patterns of desacralization in the meaning of religious language which evolve as part of the commodification of horror film media in Indonesia. First, desacralization occurs through the connotative meaning influenced by Islamic syncretism, blending Islamic teachings with ancient belief traditions, particularly those centered on spirits. Second, it takes place through the use of connotative meanings associated with societal myths and cultural beliefs. Third, it manifests through the horror genre's stylistic elements, which emphasize fear and suspense.

Semantic transformation through Islamic syncretism stems from the enduring influence of animism, dynamism, and various pre-Islamic belief systems. Animism is the belief that all objects, living beings, and natural phenomena possess spirits or souls (Nasir et al., 2019) while dynamism refers to the notion that spiritual energy exists throughout the universe and has the power to influence human life (Lovelace, 2020). The deep-rooted influence of these elements in Indonesian culture has sustained practices such as black magic, shamanism, pesugihan (rituals for instant wealth), and ancestral worship (Piatti-Farnell & Nairn, 2023). This syncretism within Islamic teachings has contributed to the emergence of Kejawen Islam, a localized form of Islam that incorporates animist, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions. Desacralization through the connotative meaning of myths in society can be categorized into three forms. The first involves myths centered on supernatural beings and extraordinary occurrences within magical or mystical settings (Handoko & Green, 2020). The second includes myths embedded in social practices and rituals, which feature sacred elements (Ichsan & Hanafiah., 2020), representations of power, and natural mysteries that demand reverence (Nurhadi et al., 2021). For instance, in Javanese mythology, the keris (traditional dagger) is not merely a weapon but also a symbol of spiritual and political authority (Geertz, 2019). The third form of desacralization occurs through the

connotative meaning associated with the horror genre. Horror films are designed to evoke fear, tension, and anxiety in their audience (Kovács, 2022). In this genre, themes of death, supernatural entities such as ghosts and demons, dark settings, and eerie soundscapes are crucial to the storytelling process.

This study outlines that the semantic transformation of religious language originates from these three layers of connotative meaning, contrasting sharply with the inherent sacredness of religious language. Although religious language is expected to evoke a sense of peace and spiritual reflection, horror films transform it into eerie and unsettling. The infusion of fear and suspense into religious terminology strips it of its sacred significance, reducing the theme to a tool for dramatic storytelling. The semantic transformation process begins when religious language is incorporated into horror films alongside visual and auditory elements designed to induce fear. These elements include frightening creatures, dark color schemes, and unsettling sound effects. The influence of syncretic beliefs and societal myths further reinforces the transformation of religious symbols into horror motifs (Mazeree et al., 2023). The connotative reinterpretation of these religious terms is then dramatized and commodified by the horror film industry to capture the attention of Indonesian audiences, the majority of whom are Muslim.

The participation of users in providing comments is then responded to by other users, arousing and accumulating a sense of horror (Astari et al., 2023) in the meaning of religious language in horror films. Barthes further explained that in the communication process, signs not only carry literal meaning but also held deeper meaning influenced by social and cultural contexts (Siregar, 2022) as well as used to strengthen certain ideologies (Nyanoti, 2022). The widespread presence of Islamic syncretism in Indonesian society is reflected in horror films which then become a medium for commodifying religious elements, further blurring the line between faith and superstition.

This study offers a new perspective compared to previous study, which often associates semantic transformation with secularization (Baker, 2019), shifts in societal values, declining trust in religious symbols (Wastawa & Sudarsana, 2019), and the erosion of sacred meanings due to globalization (Kobzar, 2021). The results show that the semantic transformation of religious language in public discourse has contributed to misinformation, rejection of religious horror films, and broader skepticism toward film producers and government censorship agencies.

In response to the increasing use of religious language as a tool for audience engagement in horror films, this study presents several recommendations to mitigate its potential negative impact. First, there is a need for public education on the meaning of religious language, particularly as it relates to Islamic teachings and religious symbolism. Second, greater oversight of horror films, particularly those with religious themes is necessary to prevent misunderstandings that could lead to misinterpretations of religious teachings and inappropriate behaviors. Third, censorship boards and key community figures including religious scholars (dai), mass organizations, and cultural leaders should be actively engaged in shaping the narratives of religious-themed films. These films should be contextualized within the social realities of Indonesian society and presented with an accurate understanding of religious principles. By implementing

these three recommendations, horror films can shift from being sources of religious misinterpretation to platforms that promote a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. Rather than distorting sacred concepts, religious-themed horror films can serve as educational tools, fostering awareness and respect for religious language and its intended meanings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the semantic transformation of religious language in Indonesian horror films primarily originated from the commodification of media, where elements of syncretism were blended with horror narratives. These themes circulated freely on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, where public discussions further reinforced the meanings in comment sections. The unrestricted commodification of horror films was driven by weak regulatory enforcement, as institutions failed to impose strict censorship on horror content accessible to the public. Additionally, the horror films produced and approved by censorship boards were neither verified nor validated by religious institutions, scholars, or community leaders. These films were disseminated on social media, leading to widespread misunderstandings of religious language. The desacralization of religious terminology in Indonesian horror films originated from the unregulated commercialization of horror media within society.

The analysis semantic transformation of religious language in Indonesian horror films led to two significant findings. First, the semantic transformation of religious terminology in these films was not only influenced by syncretism—where Islamic teachings were intertwined with ancient belief systems—but also by the unregulated commodification of horror media on social media. This process contributed to the distortion of religious meanings. Second, this study provided a new perspective on the interpretation of religious language in media. Previously, religious language had been examined solely from a theological standpoint or as a symbol of Islamic preaching, but the analysis outlined the transformation through media commodification.

This study was limited to analyzing the semantic transformation of religious language in the titles of Indonesian horror films. Consequently, the results could not be generalized to explain the broader desacralization of religious language in society or media on a larger scale. Due to these limitations, further publication was necessary to incorporate comparative studies with more diverse data sources. A more comprehensive approach would allow for the development of policies aimed at addressing the distortion of Islamic religious language and preventing misinterpretations of religious concepts in public discourse.

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