

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN HYBRID COMEDY-HORROR: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AGAK LAEN FILM**Tiara Wirman Ananda¹, Arif Ardy Wibowo¹¹Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia**Article History**

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Keywords*Agak Laen*, social criticism, comedy-horror, genre hybrid, content analysis**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the Indonesian comedy-horror film *Agak Laen* as a medium for social critique through the lens of discourse analysis. Employing Jones Abigail's comedy theory, the research decodes narrative elements, satirical dialogues, and absurd situations to reveal critiques of social norms and collective behaviors. Using qualitative content analysis, and the study explores four thematic pillars: solidarity in chaos, irrational decisions yielding benefits, unconventional lives, and mistakes as learning opportunities. The film creatively uses humor to expose societal issues, such as moral compromise in group dynamics and the tendency to prioritize harmony over ethics. Through dark comedy, scenes like the accidental success of unethical shortcuts or group loyalty under pressure highlight the irony of everyday social interactions. Satirical dialogues, such as absurd debates on morality and justice, provoke critical reflection among audiences while maintaining entertainment value. The findings demonstrate how hybrid genres, particularly comedy-horror, provide an effective platform for conveying cultural messages and moral lessons in a palatable manner. The success of *Agak Laen* with over nine million viewers underscores the potential of such genres to merge entertainment with meaningful critique. This study contributes to the discourse on hybrid genres and their role in fostering social reflection within diverse cultural contexts. It offers insights for filmmakers seeking to blend narrative innovation with socio-cultural relevance.

Introduction

The film is one of the communication media in the form of audio-visuals that can be used to convey messages to those who enjoy it (Wijaya, 2022). Movies can quickly tell a long, clear story (elysha et al., 2023). When watching a movie, the audience always feels transported through space and time (Prima, 2022). There are several opinions about film, some view film as a mere entertainment container or some view it as a performing art with interesting messages. Many films are made from true stories and even personal stories of the creator because films are a form of reality, real stories of community life that are consciously shown on the big screen (Mardhani, 2021).

According to Panuju (2019), film is able to be a good learning medium for the audience and not only entertaining, film can also convey messages directly through images, dialogues, and plays so that it becomes the most effective forum for spreading any mission, idea, and campaign. Various genres of films have been present as a means of entertainment and the delivery of a message for the general public, especially those who watch. The power that lies in the audio-visual format in a film is considered to be able to directly touch the feelings and morals of the audience (Azzahra et al., 2024). Film is often used as a medium for its creators to convey implicit messages. The messages in a film are communicated to be read or *decoded* by the audience, subsequently influencing the audience's understanding (Fadillah, 2023). Film is part of audio-visual mass media communication that aims to convey a certain message to the audience (Suryasuciramdhan et al., 2024). That way, when watching or finishing watching, the audience can feel the closeness to the scene in the film. It is not only the scene, but more than that, it can be the intent, purpose, and message of the movie being watched. Individuals who cannot produce mass communication messages

require certain technology or institutions, so the film industry carries out much mass communication (Romli, 2016).

The development of the film world is currently developing rapidly, as well as in Indonesia. Deputy for Strategic Policy of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Dessy Ruhati, said that the Indonesian film industry is a sub-sector of the creative economy whose growth has been very positive after the COVID-19 pandemic, and has become one of the income supporters for the tourism sector in the country (Pusparisa, 2024). It was recorded that 20 Indonesian films received more than 1 million viewers last year. This achievement is expected to attract investors to increase the value of Indonesia's creative economy sub-sector. She also hopes the film industry workforce will continue growing (Ayudiana, 2024). According to data from the Indonesian Film Agency, the Indonesian film industry attracted 51.2 million viewers in 2019, but then plummeted to only around 19 million viewers in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of viewers declined in 2021 with only 4.5 million viewers, and only squirmed again in 2022 with 24 million viewers. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy noted that the film industry in Indonesia is growing positively throughout 2023, with the number of cinema moviegoers in Indonesia reaching 55 million people (Ayudiana, 2024). Quoted from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, in 2023 the Film Censorship Institute will conduct research on Film, Censorship Criteria, and Independent Censorship Culture in collaboration with Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka (UHAMKA). The study used a survey with a list of questions and statements, interviews, *focus group discussions* (FGD), and expert discussions before and after the research. The results of the study show that the *respondents' favorite genres are horror films (34%), comedy (28%), drama (24.73%), musicals (3%), and others (7%)* (Budiawati, 2023). Phenomena in cinema must also always exist, such as the many horror genre films produced in the last 5 years and have always succeeded in getting a lot of audiences. Figure 1 shows the data on the share of horror films in Indonesia.

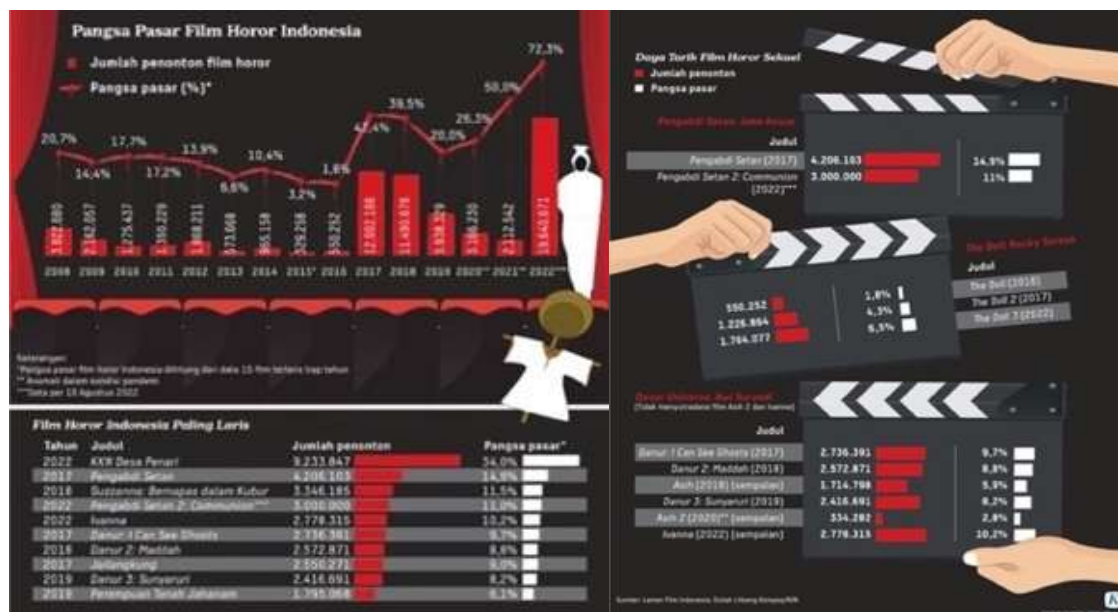


Figure 1. Horror Film Market Share in Indonesia (Source: Kompas.id)

Hollywood has become the center of world horror film production, influencing any films globally (Yoesoef, 2003). Since the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood horror films have been popular with classic horror themes featuring classic or supernatural monsters, the films that became the beginning of world horror cinema were *Nosferatu* (1922), *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931). In the 1950s, horror cinema in Hollywood reappeared with a new theme after World War II: giant monsters and alien invasions that reflected the fear of nuclear war. The popular film at that time was titled, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). The psychological and supernatural horror theme developed in the 1960s and 1970s, commonly referred to as the modern era of world horror. The most talked about films of this era, *Psycho* (1960), *The Exorcist* (1973),

and the movie *Halloween* (1978) which were the forerunners of the slasher theme. So, the 1980s became the era of slashers in Hollywood horror films, with the most popular films at that time *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Furthermore, in the 1990s until now, the genres of Hollywood and global horror films are increasingly diverse from meta commentary, torture porn, as well as horror that is based on social and technology. Indonesian cinema also has a phenomenal history of horror film development. According to several sources, horror films have haunted the Indonesian cinema universe since 1934 with a film entitled *Doea Siloeman Oeler Poeti en Item* (Maitri & Geraldine, 2024). After that, Indonesian horror films were revived in the 1970s, with the themes of curses, supernatural powers, and sadism wrapped in light comedies. In this year, Suzzana appeared, who is the queen of Indonesian horror cinema, with a popular horror film this year titled *Bernapas dalam Lumpur* (1970), *Beranak dalam Kubur* (1972), *Cincin Berdarah* (1973), *Dikejar Dosa* (1974), and *Kutukan Nyi Roro Kidul* (1979). In the 1980s, Indonesian horror cinema was crowded with local ghosts with the theme of revenge, *Pengabdi Setan* (1980), *Ratu Ilmu Hitam* (1981), *Sundel Bolong* (1981), *Malam Jumat Kliwon* (1986), and *Malam Satu Suro* (1988). In the 1990s, there was a decline in the Indonesian horror film sector, at that time the theme of Indonesian horror films was stagnant. With a popular movie, *Godaan Perempuan Halus* (1993) and *Cinta Terlarang* (1994). The era of the revival of Indonesian horror films occurred again in the 2000s with the theme of challenging teenagers or testing their guts. In this era, horror films are popular, namely *Hantu Jeruk Purut* (2006), *Pocong* (2006), *Jelangkung* (2007), *Suster Ngesot* (2007), and *Terowong Casablanca* (2007). Furthermore, in the 2010s until now, Indonesian horror cinema has entered the box office many times, this happens because Indonesian horror cinema currently has a complex story, strong character deepening, visual effects, editing and beautiful sound system. Here are the Indonesian box office horror films *Pengabdi Setan* (2017), *Suzzana Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018), *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), *Pengabdi Setan 2* (2022), and *Sewu Dino* (2023) (Kemenparekraf RI, 2024).

With the rapid progress of the times also affecting the development of the film industry, the manifestation of this development can be seen from the many expansions of the hybrid genre. The hybrid genre is a literary or film genre that combines themes and elements from two or more genres. One of the hybrid genres is the comedy horror genre, which combines two major genres: comedy and horror. The hybrid comedy horror genre has three categories, one of which is dark jokes. In the world of cinema, dark jokes are a common element for the comedy-horror genre (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Films with the first hybrid genre may be a bit difficult to identify. But in the silent film era, the source of the early comedy-horror film came from a stage show that was made into a film in 1914 entitled *The Ghost Breaker*. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, this comedy-horror genre has been crowded again since the film *Reuni Z* (2017) by carrying the story of a school reunion that ends up being chased by hilarious zombies, this film is the spark for other comedy-horror films that appear afterwards. The next comedy-horror film is titled, *Ghost Writer* (2019), *Ghost Writer 2* (2022), *Hello Ghost* (2023), *Jin & Jun* (2023), *Sekawan Limo* (2024), *Kang Mak from Pee Mak* (2024), dan *Agak Laen* (2024). Although the initial development came from Hollywood, the hybrid comedy-horror genre of each country or culture must adapt to the intended society, so there will always be differences in how the delivery process and the form of the hybrid genre in a film, especially in Indonesia. Film as a medium of communication has the power to convey socio-cultural messages through interesting narratives. In Indonesia, hybrid genres such as comedy-horror are still very rarely explored in depth, even though they have considerable potential to convey social criticism. Among Indonesian horror films (Setiawan & Halim, 2022) mushrooming, Imajinari Corp confidently came to bring its first horror comedy film. The film titled *Agak Laen* which they did not expect to get enthusiasm for up to 9 million viewers. A third film from Imajinari with a different breakthrough after its family-drama and romance-drama. The film *Agak Laen*, which will be released in 2024, has managed to attract the enthusiasm of a very extraordinary audience. Directed by Muchadly Acho with the main stars of the *members* of the *podcast* who are also named *Agak Laen*, namely Indra Jegel, Boris Bokir, Oki Rengga and Bene Dion. In addition, there are also other stars such as, Tissa Biani, Indah Permata Sari, Arie Keriting, Praz Teguh, Arief Didu, Mamat Alkatiri, Sadana Agung, Anggi Marito and Bukie Mansyur. This film is based on a *podcast* titled *Agak Laen* which Boris Bokir, Oki Rengga, Indra Jegel and Bene Dion or the main players in this film also initiated. They started their *podcast* from an audio platform and got a good response from listeners, they also expanded to the Youtube

platform and got a very good response as well. So, it's no wonder when they tapped Ernest Prakasa in one of their *podcasts* on Youtube to make their original film immediately executed. According to film producer *Agak Laen* or Imajinari Corp's owner, Dipa Andika, and Ernest Prakasa. The number of viewers is not the main thing they look at when making this film a reality. However, the chemistry that already exists from the members of *Agak Laen* makes the Producer confident in making this film a reality (HAHAHA TV, 2024).



Figure 2. Poster Film *Agak Laen* (Sumber: Instagram: @pilem.agak.laen)

The film *Agak Laen* in image 1.2 is the 3rd film produced by Imajinari and premieres on February 1, 2024 in Indonesian cinemas. This film managed to embrace 1,000,000 viewers in just 4 days of screening. Within a week, the number of viewers of this film reached 2,000,000 people. On its 10th day, the film gained 3,000,000 viewers. The highest number of daily viewers reached more than 500,000 people. This success made *Agak Laen* set a new record for a film produced by Imajinari. The audience's enthusiasm can be seen from the full cinemas in various major cities in Indonesia (@pilem.agak.laen, 2024).

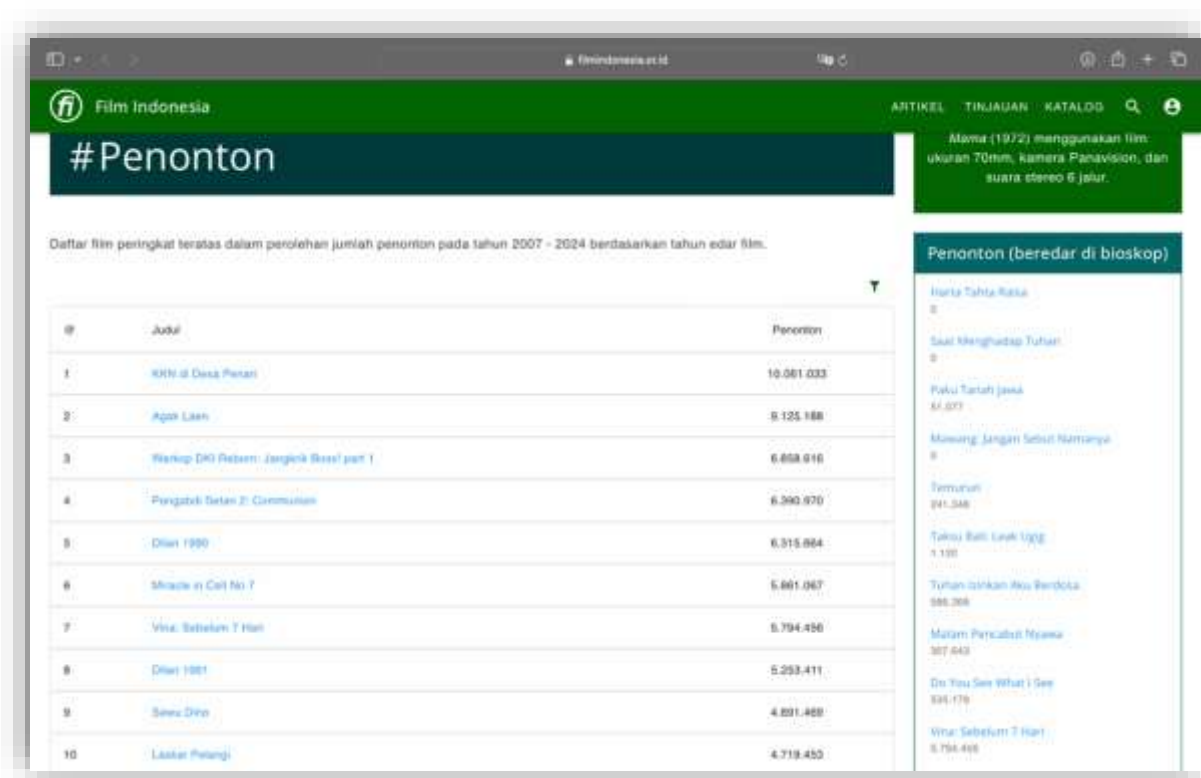


Figure 3. List of Indonesian Film Rankings (Source: filmindonesia.or.id)

Figure 1.3 shows that on February 16, 2024, the film *Agak Laen* entered the top 10 highest-grossing films in Indonesia, displacing *Pengabdi Setan*, *Habibie & Ainun*, *Laskar Pelangi*, and *Sewu Dino* with a total of 5,000,000 viewers. After 24 days of screening, this film passed 7,000,000 viewers and became the highest-grossing comedy film in Indonesia, displacing *Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1* which was released in 2016 with an achievement of 6,858,616 viewers. This achievement also makes *Agak Laen* officially the second highest-grossing film in Indonesia, under *KKN di Desa Penari*, released in 2022 with 10,061,033 viewers. With its success in Indonesia, *Agak Laen* has also aired internationally in several countries, such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, and the United States. With the achievement of reaching more than 9 million viewers, enthusiasm to *trending topics* in the social media universe, and becoming a discussion of the wider community in general regarding the film, the interest to raise the topic of content discussion from the exposure of *the story of the film Agak Laen* to get an answer to what exactly is the content or message conveyed in the storytelling in the film *Agak Laen* (Film Indonesia, 2024).

Previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding film as a medium of communication. Asri (2020) through the analysis of the content on the film *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini (NKCTHI)* examines how film stories can be read as a text that reflects the dynamics of gender roles in patriarchal families. Focusing on the dominance of the male role as the head of the family demonstrates how the film was able to be a considerable medium for critiquing traditional social structures. This study shows great potential in the approach of reading films as texts in exploring the moral and social messages contained in the narrative. On a different side, Satrio (2024) highlighted the marketing strategy of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) to increase the appeal of the film *Agak Laen*. This research explores the role of social media and personal relationships between players in creating commercial success, and emphasizes the importance of integrating digital strategy with audience relationships. Meanwhile, Kamilla et al. (2024) using a *more technical text mining-based* sentiment analysis approach to *Agak Laen* film reviews on social media. This research proves that technologies such as the Naïve Bayes Classifier can be used to understand audience responses quantitatively.

Ubaidillah & Patriansah (2024) offer different approaches, who used Roland Barthes' semiotics to explore elements of comedy and identity in the film *Agak Laen*. The analysis of denotations, connotations and myths

revealed how the film conveys social criticism in a comedy wrap. Furthermore also (Bimo, 2024) analyzing the planting and payoff techniques of the same film script and direction, it illustrating how narrative elements are used to create a balance between comedy and more serious themes, thus inviting critical reflection from the audience. Although these studies provide in-depth insights, the focus is still limited to certain aspects, such as marketing, audience sentiment, or cinematic techniques. This research offers a new contribution by reading the film *Agak Laen* as a text to uncover a big theme. In contrast to previous research, this approach not only analyzes narrative elements, characterization, and story elements but also how these elements convey moral messages and social criticism relevant to Indonesian society. This approach provides a more holistic understanding of how comedy films can serve as a more meaningful cultural and social reflection medium.

Based on this description, content analysis studies provide new insights, and improve researchers' understanding of certain phenomena or inform a practical activity (Krippendorff, 2018). In the study of communication science (Bharata, 2011), the content analysis method is used to examine the components of a message. This qualitative study is used to reveal the content or message in the story of the film *Agak Laen*. Content analysis in popular comedy films such as *Agak Laen*, is important because comedy films often use humor as a tool to convey social criticism, cultural values, or deeper moral messages. Content analysis can reveal layers of meaning that may not be directly visible to the audience. Analyzing the content of this film can help understand the elements that make this film so appealing to audiences and may reflect the values or concerns of today's society. Therefore, understanding the messages conveyed through this film is important to evaluate its potential impact on society. An analysis of the content of popular comedy films like this can provide valuable insights for the Indonesian film industry about the elements that make a comedy film successful, both in terms of narrative, characters, and the way the message is delivered. Most of the previous research focused more on the marketing aspect or the audience's response to the film *Agak Laen*. However, there has not been a study that directly and in-depth reads the film *Agak Laen* as a text to understand how its narrative elements convey social criticism. This research aims to analyze the narrative elements, main themes, and characterizations in the film *Agak Laen* in order to uncover the social message conveyed through the hybrid genre.

Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive type of research. Qualitative is a type of research that aims to explain the phenomenon in the deepest possible way, through data collection and does not prioritize the number of population or sampling (Asmoro & Alamiah, 2022). In qualitative research, the focus is on data, not the amount of data obtained. This research uses qualitative content analysis Hsieh & Shannon (2005) with a conventional approach. In the conventional approach, the analysis category is developed directly from the data without using the existing theoretical framework. The analysis process is inductive, where the researcher lets the data speak and then produces codes and categories that appear simply. This allows researchers to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The qualitative content analysis method is used to compile a literature review and analysis that involves the development of a coding framework and qualitative coding. Qualitative methods are dynamic, so they are always open to changes, additions and replacements during the analysis process (Haki et al., 2024).

The analysis in this study refers to the comedy theory of Jones Abigail (2012). This theory is used to understand how the comedic element in the film *Agak Laen* is a means of conveying social criticism effectively. Narrative elements such as satirical dialogue and absurd situations are evaluated to see how humor is used to satirize social or cultural norms that are considered unfair. In addition, the study explores how narrative and cinematic elements in films can encourage critical reflection among audiences and influence their views on social injustice.

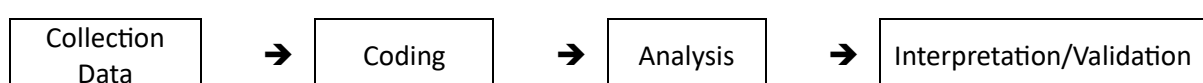


Figure 4. Methodological Process. Source: Processed by the researcher

The researcher gathered data through direct film observation, focusing on relevant scenes, dialogues, and narrative elements. The methodological process begins with data collection, where direct observation of the film will be analyzed repeatedly. The data will then be analyzed by reading the entire text repeatedly to produce a thorough understanding. Furthermore, the data is analyzed, grouped in similar contexts, and then coded. This process involves writing initial impressions, reflective notes, and encoding directly from the text using terms that emerge from the data. The final stage involves developing definitions for each category, where researchers can match the raw data with predefined categories. Then there will be an interpretation of the meaning which will also be followed by data validation by conducting an interview process with the audience of *the film Agak Laen*. The purpose of this analysis is to understand how narrative elements contribute to the delivery of a film's message.

Results and Discussion

The film *Agak Laen* is the work of Muhadkly Acho which is one of the comedy films that presents a story in a film that if we read it as a 'text' will have a meaningful 'message'. The film *Agak Laen* tells the story of four friends Bene (Bene Dion), Oki (Oki Rengga), Jegel (Indra Jegel), and Boris (Boris Bokir) who run a haunted house at a night market, but unfortunately the place does not have many visitors. These four friends are looking for new ways to scare visitors away from going bankrupt. Unfortunately, the four of them killed one of the visitors and buried him in the haunted house. Unexpectedly, the victim's body was even scattered, making the haunted house scary and many visitors. When the police began investigating, they were forced to carry out various stupid conspiracies to cover up the real incident (Ismail, 2024). After many stupid conspiracies that they did, it turns out that their haunted house is increasingly *viral* and makes a lot of profits. The wealth began to neglect them, making them even more daring to do various things to protect their business. But since the victim's affair was found, everything has gotten worse. In terms of storytelling, the film *Agak Laen* has a plot that slightly leads to a *multiplot* where each character of this friendship also has its own story.

All approaches in qualitative analysis have a similar analysis process, there are seven main steps, namely formulating a research question, selecting samples to be analyzed, defining the categories to be used, designing the coding process and training coders, implementing the coding process, ensuring reliability, and analyzing the coding results. Although this process applies to the entire approach, significant differences arise depending on the type of content analysis used. The success of content analysis depends on the coding process. Coding aims to organize a large number of texts into fewer and meaningful categories, where these categories are patterns or themes that arise directly from the text or the results of data interpretation. The relationships between the categories were then identified to provide a deeper understanding.

In the coding process, researchers develop coding schemes, which are devices that guide grouping data into systematic, logical and scientific categories. Developing a good scheme is important to ensure the reliability and credibility of the research results. One of the main differences between conventional, directed and summative approaches in content analysis is how the initial code was developed. Jones Abigail's comedy theory is relevant here, as the comedy in the film is a way to emphasize the irony in social interactions and how misperceptions can create funny and meaningful situations. In the conventional approach, categories and codes are generated directly from the data during analysis without using any previous theory or framework. This content analysis shows that some significant new findings are found through the coding of sequence, scene, and dialogue elements. The findings include, first, solidarity in chaos; second, strange decisions that bring profits; third, an unusual life; and fourth, the mistake of being a defender. These findings reflect a reality close to the audience's experience and perception, making this film relevant and meaningful.

To complete the analysis, interviews were conducted with several viewers of *the film Agak Laen*. The results of this interview provide additional perspectives related to the viewing experience, moral messages, and social criticism conveyed in the film. The results of the interview revealed that this film managed to attract attention because of its fresh and effective blend of comedy and horror genres. Audiences feel that this film is unique in conveying social criticism through light but sharp humor. One of the elements that stands out

is the character development which is considered complex but still natural, thus creating a strong relationship between the main character and the audience. Some scenes, such as the misguided ritual and the brilliant mute characters, are considered the funniest and most memorable moments. The audience also appreciated the film's moral message, especially the importance of friendship and not making rash decisions. With the atmosphere of the cinema full of enthusiasm, many hope that this sequel can explore a wider story with more in-depth elements.

The film *Agak Laen* by director Muhadkly Acho is an interesting example of a *hybrid* comedy-horror genre that is entertaining and conveys social criticism. With the main theme "*Together in Chaos*", the film uses quirkiness and humor to convey a message relevant to social life. Based on the results of the analysis, there will be four main discussions: solidarity in chaos, strange decisions that bring benefits, unusual life, and mistakes that become learning. Each theme is critically analyzed to reveal the film's narrative elements' deeper implications and broader relevance.

Solidarity in chaos



Figure 5. Scene of Bene, Boris, Jegel and Oki checking on the condition of a visitor who turned out to have died in their haunted house (Source: Netflix)

The film *Agak Laen* intricately portrays solidarity as a central theme through the dynamic relationships between the characters Bene, Boris, Jegel, and Oki. Their interactions reveal a complex interplay between collective loyalty and individual morality. While their unity highlights the strength of group cohesion, it is often accompanied by morally ambiguous actions that challenge traditional ethical standards. For instance, in the sequence from 01:01:15 to 01:44:43, the group collaborates to navigate a situation fraught with legal and ethical implications, using strategies that defy conventional logic. This sequence exemplifies how solidarity can empower individuals to confront crises collectively, even if the methods employed are absurd or morally questionable.

The narrative emphasizes the duality of solidarity, serving as both a source of strength and a potential enabler of problematic behaviors. The group's unwavering commitment to one another fosters resilience and unity, allowing them to face external pressures. However, this same commitment also reveals the dangers of prioritizing group harmony at the expense of ethical reasoning and individual accountability. This dual nature of solidarity reflects broader societal tendencies, where collective loyalty often precedes the critical evaluation of actions, especially in high-pressure situations. As such, the film invites viewers to

critically examine the ethical boundaries of solidarity and the potential consequences of unquestioning loyalty.

From a moral and sociological perspective, this portrayal aligns with the view of Panuju (2019), who posits that film is an effective medium for moral education. Through its nuanced depiction of solidarity, *Agak Laen* encourages audiences to reflect on the ethical dilemmas inherent in-group loyalty. The film challenges viewers to consider the extent to which collective action should be celebrated and when it should be critically evaluated. By illustrating the tension between resilience and ethical compromise, *Agak Laen* offers a compelling commentary on the moral complexities of human relationships, making it a valuable tool for exploring broader societal issues.

Strange decisions that bring profits



Figure 6. The scene of Bene, Boris, Jegel, and Oki arguing over how to summon the spirits of visitors they buried in a haunted house makes the situation scary (Source: Netflix)

The narrative of *Agak Laen* cleverly intertwines irrational decisions with unexpected outcomes, revealing a deeper layer of social commentary. One notable example is the burial of corpses from their haunted house visitors (51:53–01:01:07). While this act is highly unethical, it ironically increases the haunted house's spooky reputation and attracts more visitors, enhancing the ride's popularity. This sequence illustrates a critique of societal tendencies to accept, or even reward, morally questionable shortcuts when they lead to success. Such a depiction resonates with Fadillah's (2023) perspective that films often embed social criticism within their narratives, using storytelling to examine and challenge societal norms.

The use of humor in these ethically compromising situations adds another layer of complexity to the film's critique. The absurdity of these events not only entertains but also highlights the irrationality and consequences of compromising moral standards under pressure. Through humor, the film softens the gravity of unethical behavior, making it more accessible for audiences to engage with the underlying societal issues critically. By presenting these moments in a comedic light, the narrative effectively encourages reflection on the fine line between ingenuity and ethical violation in pursuing success.

This blend of absurdity and social criticism allows *Agak Laen* to transcend mere entertainment and become a thought-provoking exploration of human behavior and societal values. The film subtly invites viewers to question their tolerance for unethical actions, particularly when they are framed as necessary or beneficial within certain contexts. By exposing the ironic rewards of moral compromise, *Agak Laen* challenges

audiences to evaluate the ethical boundaries of success and the societal mechanisms that often reward expediency over integrity.

An unusual life



Figure 7. The scene where Bene, Boris, Jegel, and Oki have good intentions to help Obet finish his job by helping clean up the night market, but Obet misunderstands (Source: Netflix)

The chaotic and humor-filled lives of the characters in *Agak Laen* effectively capture the absurdity of social norms and the unpredictability of human interactions. A particularly striking example is the group's attempt to assist a colleague, which instead escalates into further complications (01:19:13–01:19:20). This scene underscores the unexpected and often illogical nature of social dynamics, revealing how efforts to resolve issues can sometimes lead to even more chaos. However, rather than portraying these moments as purely negative, the film uses humor to showcase how life's unpredictability can still be enjoyed and embraced. Critically, the film challenges conventional depictions of normality and societal expectations by presenting absurdity as an inherent part of human experience. Through the lens of humor, the narrative invites viewers to question rigid norms and explore the nuances of social behavior. This aligns with Jones Abigail's theory of comedy as a tool for social criticism, which posits that humor can serve as a means to reflect on societal structures and contradictions. By highlighting the strangeness of everyday life, the film opens a space for audiences to reconsider their assumptions about normality and conformity.

In blending humor with social critique, *Agak Laen* provides a platform for reflecting on the complexities of human interactions and the unpredictability of societal norms. The absurdity portrayed in the characters' lives becomes a mirror for audiences to see the irrationalities of their worlds. In doing so, the film emphasizes the transformative power of comedy—not only as a source of entertainment but also as a means of fostering deeper understanding and critical engagement with societal norms and values.

Mistakes that become learning

Mistakes in *Agak Laen* are not merely sources of humor; they also play a pivotal role in driving character growth and narrative progression. One striking example is Jegel's impulsive decision to use tombs to solve their problems (01:27:27–01:28:39). While this idea initially creates conflict among the characters, it also catalyzes deeper introspection and group dynamics. This moment underscores the duality of mistakes—they generate tension and provide opportunities for learning and self-reflection. The characters are forced to confront the consequences of their actions, ultimately fostering growth and resilience within the group.



Figure 8. The scene of Bene, Boris, Jegel and Oki coming out of prison (Source: Netflix)

This depiction illustrates how chaotic errors can serve as crucial turning points in both personal and collective journeys. Jegel's decision, though ill-conceived, prompts the group to reevaluate their approach to challenges and strengthens their bond as they navigate the aftermath together. The narrative thus highlights that mistakes are not just failures but integral parts of the human experience, offering valuable lessons about accountability, courage, and the importance of reflection in overcoming adversity. As Asri (2020) points out, films can act as powerful mediums for social reflection, encouraging audiences to engage with broader themes of growth and accountability. *Agak Laen* exemplifies this by presenting mistakes as essential moments for character and narrative development. By integrating humor with meaningful lessons, the film balances entertainment and introspection, allowing viewers to see mistakes not as endpoints but as opportunities for progress. This approach reinforces the idea that resilience and growth often emerge from moments of imperfection, making the film both engaging and thought-provoking.

Discussion

The comedy-horror film *Agak Laen* offers more than mere entertainment; it conveys profound messages of tolerance and inclusivity. By portraying cultural differences and similarities, the film emphasizes the importance of openness and mutual respect in intercultural communication. Through its narrative, the film educates audiences about Indonesia's rich cultural diversity, using gestures, tone of voice, and humor delivered by seasoned comics. These elements effectively bridge cultural gaps and foster greater understanding among viewers. Additionally, the film underscores moral values such as responsibility and perseverance, highlighting the importance of collaboration and shared success within communities.

As Abigail Jones's (2012) theory of humor suggests, comedy serves as a potent tool for addressing societal concerns and critiquing social norms. Comedy not only entertains but also exposes injustices, challenges traditional conventions, and reshapes public perspectives on inequality. *Agak Laen* exemplifies this theory by using humor to dissect the absurdities and inconsistencies in social structures. For instance, the film illustrates how solidarity can emerge in chaotic situations or how irrational decisions can unexpectedly lead to success. These moments highlight the duality of human behavior while encouraging reflection on the societal dynamics at play.

The comedic approach in *Agak Laen* is particularly impactful due to its use of satire, exaggerated scenarios, and dark humor. This combination creates a layered narrative that engages the audience in exploring socioeconomic realities while maintaining an entertaining plot. By blending humor with social commentary, the film invites laughter and prompts critical thinking about societal issues. It demonstrates how comedy can act as a transformative medium, encouraging viewers to question existing norms and consider alternative perspectives on social processes. Ultimately, *Agak Laen* underscores the power of humor as a vehicle for cultural education, moral reflection, and societal change.

Satirical humor in *Agak Laen* effectively critiques societal norms by exposing their flaws and rendering these standards absurd, as highlighted by Angelique and Kushartanti (2024). This approach not only entertains but also compels the audience to question the validity and fairness of these norms. By presenting absurd scenarios that mirror the unpredictability and irrationality of social systems, the film encourages viewers to reexamine structures and conventions that are often taken for granted. Through this lens, the humor acts as a catalyst for reflection, subtly prompting audiences to evaluate the legitimacy of societal frameworks. Dark comedy further amplifies this impact by interpreting paradoxes and inequalities in a way that engages audiences both intellectually and emotionally. According to Latief et al. (2024), dark humor allows individuals to confront uncomfortable truths by framing them in an easier digestible manner. In *Agak Laen*, these comedic techniques invite viewers to acknowledge difficult realities, such as social disparities or systemic inconsistencies, without feeling overwhelmed. This dual function of humor—entertaining while enlightening—creates a powerful platform for engaging with complex societal issues. Historically, comedy has served as a tool for public critique, from Aristophanes' biting satires in ancient Greece to modern stand-up comedians who tackle systemic inequalities (Dingkol, 2023). *Agak Laen* continues this tradition by embedding social criticism within its humor, using wit and absurdity to challenge authority and societal conventions. The film disguises its critiques through humor, avoiding overt confrontation and making its message more accessible to a broader audience. This strategic use of comedy ensures that the film's underlying messages resonate widely, encouraging both laughter and introspection. Ultimately, *Agak Laen* demonstrates how humor can be a transformative medium for societal critique. By blending satirical and dark humor, the film entertains, prompting audiences to reconsider social norms and confront uncomfortable realities. Its ability to balance entertainment with critical commentary highlights the enduring power of comedy as a vehicle for cultural and intellectual engagement.

Ultimately, *Agak Laen* illustrates how comedy, as articulated in Jones' theory, can catalyze social transformation. It illustrates that comedy, however reckless it may seem, can disrupt complacency, defy set standards, and provoke critical thinking. This supports the idea that laughter, in essence, can serve as a transformative act that links entertainment to significant discourse on social progress. The success of 9 million viewers shows that Indonesian audiences have embraced hybrid genres in films (such as comedy and horror), as well as showing the evolution of the tastes of filmmakers in Indonesia. In addition, the success of the film *Agak Laen* also shows a unique phenomenon in the film industry, where a group of *stand-up comedians* or often called *comica* who spread the word of *podcasters* (audio only to audio visual on YouTube) managed to bring their fan base to become moviegoers. This validates the findings Ayudiana (2024) regarding the post-pandemic film industry's positive growth and shows the potential for synergy between digital platforms and the conventional film industry.

The Indonesian film industry has significant opportunities to capitalize on the potential of hybrid genres, such as comedy-horror, to expand its audience base. Hybrid genres offer a unique platform for creative exploration, enabling filmmakers to deliver meaningful social critiques in an accessible and entertaining manner. By leveraging this approach, the industry can appeal to diverse viewers while addressing societal issues in a way that resonates broadly. Films like *Agak Laen* exemplify how humor and horror can be blended to create engaging narratives that maintain depth and relevance. To maximize the appeal of hybrid genres, filmmakers can incorporate local cultural elements, including regional accents, traditional customs, and distinctive humor. This integration not only enhances the authenticity of the films but also strengthens their connection with domestic audiences. Moreover, including culturally unique features increases the likelihood of international appeal by offering a glimpse into Indonesia's rich heritage. Hybrid genre films that balance local identity with universal themes have the potential to thrive in global markets, creating new opportunities for cultural exchange and industry growth. Collaboration within the creative industry is another essential strategy for advancing hybrid genre films. Partnerships between filmmakers, writers, and other creative professionals can foster fresh, innovative narratives that resonate with younger audiences. These collaborations enable the development of relevant and reflective stories of contemporary societal dynamics, ensuring that the films remain engaging and relatable across generations. Additionally, modern digital marketing techniques, particularly through social media platforms, have proven effective in promoting hybrid genre films. The success of *Agak Laen* highlights how strategic online campaigns can build

anticipation and reach diverse demographics. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow filmmakers to showcase behind-the-scenes content, trailers, and interactive promotions, enhancing audience engagement and broadening the film's reach. In conclusion, the synergy between innovative storytelling, cultural integration, collaborative production, and modern marketing strategies is critical for optimizing the potential of hybrid genres in the Indonesian film industry. By adopting these approaches, filmmakers can enhance the competitiveness of their works, ensuring that hybrid genre films remain both commercially successful and culturally impactful in the evolving entertainment landscape.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the film *Agak Laen* succeeds in delivering both entertainment and social criticism through its clever narrative and comedic elements. The central theme, "Together in Chaos," highlights the values of solidarity, the courage to confront absurdity, and the importance of learning from mistakes. These themes resonate strongly with the social dynamics of Indonesian society, making the film both relatable and impactful. As a hybrid comedy-horror genre, *Agak Laen* demonstrates the power of genre innovation in crafting engaging and meaningful narratives, as evidenced by its remarkable success in attracting over 9 million viewers. For the Indonesian film industry, this study suggests several concrete strategies to leverage the potential of hybrid genres. First, integrating local cultural elements such as humor, dialects, and traditions can enhance the authenticity and appeal of films in both domestic and international markets. This cultural grounding strengthens audience connection and highlights Indonesia's rich heritage on a global stage. Second, collaboration between scriptwriters, comedians, and digital marketing professionals can produce fresh, innovative narratives that are relevant to younger audiences. This synergy ensures that the storytelling remains dynamic and reflects contemporary social realities.

Optimizing digital strategies—particularly through social media platforms—has expanded a film's reach to wider audiences. Campaigns that leverage interactive content, trailers, and audience engagement activities can significantly boost anticipation and viewership. Finally, enriching narratives with complex characters and layered storytelling can ensure that hybrid genre films go beyond entertainment to inspire meaningful social reflection, thereby elevating the artistic and cultural value of the works. Further research could delve into the role of humor in shaping audience perceptions of social and cultural norms, as well as the impact of local cultural elements on the acceptance of hybrid genres. Films like *Agak Laen* illustrate the potential of the Indonesian film industry to balance entertainment with social commentary, showcasing its ability to foster societal change through creative and innovative storytelling. By blending humor, cultural depth, and genre innovation, the industry can continue to produce works that captivate and inspire diverse audiences.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors named in this article declare that they have NO affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest (such as honoraria, educational grants, participation in speakers' bureaus, memberships, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interests; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge, or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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