

## The Effect of Thriller Movie Content on Anxiety Levels and Interpersonal Relationship Patterns of Gen Z Students

Widya Sandrila<sup>1</sup>, Pitri Noviyanti<sup>2</sup>, Erlita Zahrah<sup>3</sup>, Kholis Ridho<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Studies, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta.

[pitrinoviyanti26@gmail.com](mailto:pitrinoviyanti26@gmail.com)

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### Article Information

### ABSTRACT

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Effect, thriller movie, anxiety, interpersonal

This study examines the influence of thriller movies on anxiety and interpersonal relationship patterns of Gen Z students in Indonesia. The method used was quantitative with a survey approach, involving 123 respondents. Data was obtained through a questionnaire containing 12 multiple choice questions and 3 essay questions, using a Likert scale to measure respondents' attitudes and opinions. The results showed that most respondents felt anxiety when watching intense scenes in thriller movies and thought of bad scenarios more often. However, the impact on sleep difficulties and unreasonable anxiety was not significant. In addition, thriller movies affected the pattern of interpersonal relationships with respondents becoming more cautious in trusting others and more empathic to other people's emotional situations. Based on the Uses and Gratification theory, thriller movies are chosen to fulfill emotional and entertainment needs. The findings reveal how media, particularly thriller movies, can affect young people's psychological well-being and social relationships.



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### 1. Introduction

Today's mass communication media is growing rapidly thanks to the support of increasingly sophisticated technology, enabling the fulfilment of various human needs. Mass media can be considered an extension of the human senses (Rakhmat, 2013). Mass communication media can present information about objects, people or places that may not be experienced directly by the audience. However, mass media has limitations because the reality presented has gone through a selection process. In other words, media such as newspapers, television, or movies only display reality that is indirect or second hand reality (Banowo & Dema, 2019). Without realizing it, the media serves as a link that conveys the reality that occurs in society through creative elements that are light and educative. This makes the message conveyed easily understood by various groups. One example is movies, which are packaged creatively without overriding the main message to be conveyed to the public (Yustiana & Junaedi, 2019). Film is a medium resulting from the development of technology and informatics. Movies have become an important part of modern human life, especially as a form of entertainment in mass communication.

With the advancement of technology, films can not only be enjoyed in theaters or television, but also through various internet platforms such as Youtube, Netflix, Iflix, and WeTV. These platforms can make it easier to access movies for all people (Fajar & Lestari, 2021). These platforms can make it easier to access movies for all people. As an entertainment medium, movies are expected to present shows that satisfy the audience, one of which is by evoking their emotions. A movie is a text consisting of a series of photographic images that create the illusion of movement and action as in real life (Danesi, 2010). Thus, movies function as a medium designed to impact the audience through messages conveyed in creatively packaged storylines. According to Graeme Turner, a movie is a representation or picture of reality. Movies recreate and reflect reality based on codes, conventions, and ideologies influenced by the culture in which they are made (Sobur, 2006). Over the years, movies have become an integral part of social life and have a significant impact on their audiences. Apart from serving as entertainment, movies can also influence the psychology and social behavior of individuals who watch them.

Just like television broadcasts, the main purpose of watching movies is to seek entertainment. However, movies can also function as informative, educative, and persuasive media (Ardianto et al., 2014). Even so, movies are more often thought of as a means of entertainment than as a tool to influence or persuade its audience. Movies must pay attention to various elements that can evoke emotions from the audience, such as good visual quality, supportive background music, interesting and unique storylines, and other aspects. The emotions that arise also vary depending on the theme or genre of the movie, such as happiness when watching a comedy movie, sadness when watching a drama, or fear and anxiety when watching a horror movie (Masaoy & Ramdhan, 2024). Movies can be considered a reflection of reality because of their influence on the audience. (Natasari, 2023) Quality films generally have a positive impact on the audience, while films that have a negative impact, whether realized or not, will remain recorded in the cultural memory of the community.

In general, movies can be divided into two categories. First, based on the media, namely big screen movies and glass screen movies. Second, based on the type, movies can be divided into non-fiction and fiction. Non-fiction films themselves are divided into three categories, namely films for scientific purposes, documentary films, and documentary films (Kristanto, 2007). Fiction films are divided into two types: experimental films and genre films. The term "genre" itself refers to the grouping or classification of films based on certain characteristics. These characteristics can be seen from various aspects, such as theme, storyline, character, narrative structure, time period, and other elements (Berdian & Deval, 2021). With these characteristics, each genre has a unique identity that distinguishes it from other genres. The thriller genre is one of the most popular genres in cinema. At first glance, this genre seems similar to the horror genre as both create a tense and frightening atmosphere. However, the difference is that the main focus of the thriller genre lies in

creating tension based on logical elements, such as murder cases or events that can be explained rationally (Javandalasta, 2011).

The thriller genre emphasizes the presentation of a complex and mysterious story, which triggers the audience to think and follow the plot (Qomariah et al., 2022). The main goal of a thriller movie is to create a sense of intense tension and fear in the audience. The storyline in a thriller genre movie is usually designed with non-stop action, crime, and a strong mystery (Nor & Rahman, 2019). These elements maintain the intensity of tension throughout the movie until it reaches its climactic peak. Since movies can affect the thoughts, personality and emotions of the audience, the thriller genre has the potential to trigger disturbances in these aspects. This is due to the thriller genre's main focus on suspense and thrill as the main elements in the storyline (K. Pandjaitan & ., 2012).

Anxiety is an important aspect in understanding the impact of thriller movies on Gen Z students. In general, anxiety arises when a person faces a situation or event that makes him feel uncomfortable. This condition can trigger excessive emotional reactions that are difficult to control, causing negative changes in a person, both physically and socially (Deliyani, 2019). According to Solehati and Kosasih, anxiety is an emotional response that arises when a person feels afraid of a threat that is not clear or cannot be identified (Aji et al., 2019). In this case, thriller movies often use elements of suspense, mystery, and uncertainty that can elicit emotional responses such as fear, tension, or anxiety. According to Fausiah, mild anxiety is still considered normal and can even improve one's performance. However, if the anxiety level is too high, it can actually have a bad impact and interfere with activities (Sekarwuni, 2018). This is in line with how thriller films are able to spur adrenaline and provide interesting emotional stimulation, thus becoming a favorite form of entertainment for Gen Z. However, if the elements of thrillers are enjoyed excessively or too often, this can trigger excessive anxiety that has the potential to disrupt emotional balance.

Interpersonal communication patterns also play an important role in understanding the impact of thriller-induced anxiety on one's emotional balance. According to Muhammad, interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging information between a person and at least one other person, or usually between two people where the response back can be immediately seen and felt (Kaharfin & Mariana, 2023). According to Josep A. Devito, interpersonal communication is an interaction between two people that aims to get to know each other, establish relationships, exert influence, socialize, and help each other (Devito A, 1997). This is relevant in the context of anxiety triggered by thriller movies, where interpersonal communication can be a way to manage emotions and build social support. Interpersonal communication begins with an understanding of oneself. All forms of perception and understanding in communication start from the way a person views and understands himself, which is influenced by his experience and identity. This communication process is one of the main factors in building and strengthening relationships with others (Situmorang, 2016). This communication focuses on fulfilling various

basic human needs as social beings, such as the need to establish interpersonal relationships and emotional bonds, the need to gain recognition for the existence of one's abilities, the need for support and approval of one's behavior and life, and the need to cooperate and help each other between individuals (Clief Maitimu et al., 2024).

In comparison, this study differs from previous studies that generally only examined the emotional impact of thrillers broadly, such as the influence of the tension or fear felt by the audience. Many previous studies have focused on how thrillers trigger emotional reactions without delving further into the relationship between the anxiety generated and the audience's interpersonal communication patterns. This research, on the other hand, tries to link the anxiety that arises after watching a thriller movie with how it affects interpersonal communication, especially in Gen Z students, who have different ways of interacting and responding to emotions. With this approach, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how thrillers not only affect the audience's emotions, but can also affect the way they communicate and relate to others.

## **2. Methodology**

The quantitative method is a scientific method that meets empirical, objective, measurable, rational and systematic scientific principles. The qualitative method is called the artistic method because the research process interprets the data found in the field, and is a literature study as the object studied (Wijaya, 2019). The approach that will be used in this research is an approach that uses analysis or conclusions by combining and collecting data obtained from the research results. This approach is used because researchers focus on respondents to find out the results created from watching thriller movies on anxiety levels and interpersonal relationship patterns of gen z students from various universities. The method in this study uses survey research, to be more specific. If we intend to conduct a research activity by collecting relatively limited data from a relatively large number of cases, then the research method that can be used is the survey method.

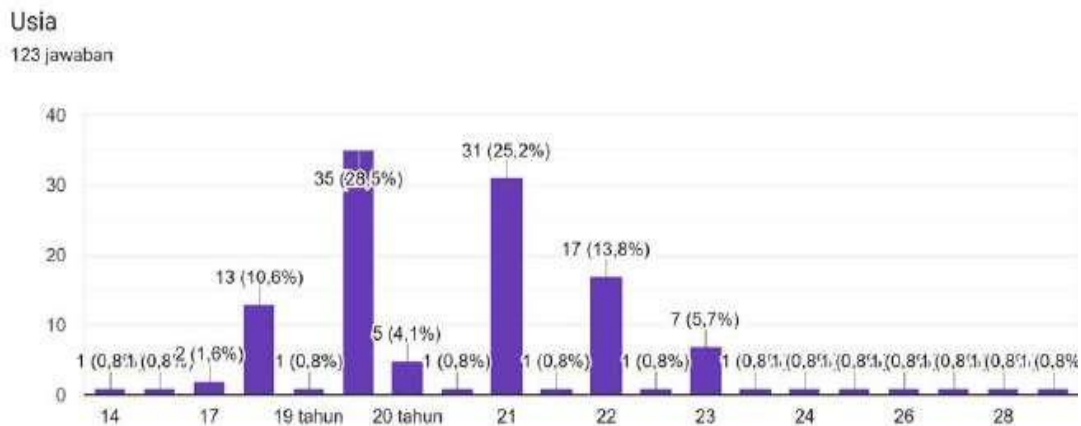
This research will also use a research scale in the form of a Likert scale. This Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes and opinions of the respondents. In our research questionnaire, there are 5 options, namely Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree which will be answered by respondents. After that, we will analyze the results of the respondents' answers and average the results of the analysis. The analysis process that we do carefully and precisely so that no errors occur in it, starting from the highest to the lowest respondent's answer.

We use questionnaires to generate data that is filled in directly by respondents. We will distribute this questionnaire to gen z students from various universities in Indonesia, where they are both respondents and objects of our research. We will distribute 12 multiple choice questions and 3 essay questions, and we are targeting 123 respondents. The questions used are adapted from previous research questions. The process of finding reference

literature to write this article is by searching for official articles or journals from Google or journal sites that also discuss this topic.

### 3. Result and Discussion

**Figure 1**  
**age distribution of the research respondents**



Based on the data displayed, the age distribution of the research respondents showed that the majority came from the age group of 19 years (29.3% or 36 people) and 21 years (26% or 32 people), making this age range the dominant group. Most respondents are in the late adolescence to early adulthood phase, which is a group that tends to be active in consuming media such as thriller movies. Other significant age groups are 22 years old (13.8% or 11 people) and 17 years old (12.2% or 14 people). Meanwhile, respondents aged 14 years, 24 years, and 26 years were represented by only 1.6% (2 people) each, indicating minimal contribution from these age groups. The age range of respondents ranged from 14 to 26 years old, which is relevant to this study as this generation as part of Gen Z tends to have high media consumption patterns and dynamic interpersonal engagement. This reflects that the dominant group in this study are individuals who are in a significant phase of emotional and social development, making it relevant in examining the influence of thriller movies on their anxiety levels and interpersonal relationship patterns.

**Table 1**  
**Cognitive Emotional Theory (The Effect of Thriller Movies on Anxiety)**

No	Question	STS	TS	N	S	SS
1.	I feel tense when I watch intense scenes in thriller movies.	0	4	8	58	53
2.	Thriller movies make me think of bad scenarios in real life more often.	8	32	11	49	23
3.	I had trouble sleeping after watching a thriller movie.	30	37	16	25	15
4.	After watching a thriller movie, I felt anxious for no apparent reason.	27	37	17	31	10

According to Piaget, cognitive development is a genetic process, meaning that the process is based on the biological mechanism of the development of the nervous system. The older a person gets, the more complex the arrangement of nerve cells and the more it increases (Nurhadi, 2020). Cognitive is related to the ability to develop rational aspects or reason. Cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of processes and efforts in optimizing a person's rational thinking ability. This theory also highlights that each part of a situation is interconnected with the overall context of the situation.

The questionnaire results show that most respondents feel tense when watching intense scenes in thriller movies (111 out of 123 people agreed or strongly agreed). A total of 72 respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that watching thriller movies made them think of bad scenarios in real life more often. However, the effect on difficulty sleeping and feeling anxious for no apparent reason tended to be lower, with the majority of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with both statements (67 and 64 people respectively).

Thriller movies, with their intense and suspenseful plot, stimulate threat-oriented thought processes or bad scenarios. However, emotional responses such as difficulty sleeping and anxiety for no apparent reason seem to be more influenced by individuals' mindsets and their ability to regulate emotions after watching the movie. This suggests an important role for cognition in interpreting and managing media-induced emotional experiences.

**Table 2**  
**Symbolic Interactionism (The Effect of Thriller Movies on Interpersonal Relationship)**

No	Question	STS	TS	N	S	SS
1.	Thriller movies make me more cautious in trusting others.	1	20	26	53	23
2.	I feel that my relationship with friends or family changes after watching a thriller movie.	53	47	12	7	4
3.	Thriller movies make it easier for me to understand other people's emotional situations.	6	25	20	62	10
4.	After watching thriller movie I find it more difficult to communicate with others.	45	52	15	4	7

Symbolic Interactionism theory, which developed after Max Weber's action theory, emphasizes the natural relationship between individuals in society and the interaction between society and individuals. According to Arisandi, this theory has basic characteristics that show that interactions between people develop through the symbols they create. These symbols include various forms of communication, such as voice or vocals, body movements, physical expressions, and body language, which are done consciously (Arisandi, 2015).

In accordance with Symbolic Interactionism theory, the questionnaire results above show that thriller movies influence interpersonal relationship patterns in diverse ways. A total of 76 respondents chose to agree and strongly agree where they felt more cautious in trusting others after watching thriller movies. However, the majority of respondents (100 respondents strongly disagree and disagree) stated that thriller movies did not cause significant changes in their relationships with friends or family. On the other hand, 72 respondents felt that thrillers helped them better understand other people's emotional situations, which shows a positive impact in terms of empathy. Even so, most respondents (97 strongly disagree and disagree) did not feel that thrillers made it harder for them to communicate with others.

Based on Symbolic Interactionism Theory, this finding can be explained because of how individuals interpret the experience of watching thriller movies and relate it to their social interactions. Thriller movies, with their emotionally charged scenes and interpersonal conflicts, seem to influence how individuals perceive others (more cautious or more empathetic). However, this viewing experience did not necessarily translate into tangible changes in their relationships, as individuals' interpretations of movies are subjective and contextual. Overall, the influence of thriller films on interpersonal relationship patterns was seen more in the cognitive aspects (perceptions of trust and empathy) than the direct behavioural aspects (changes in communication or relationships).

**Table 3**  
**Uses and Gratification Theory**

No	Question	STS	TS	N	S	SS
1.	I watch thriller movies in search of a relationship.	41	56	13	9	4
2.	Watching thriller movies helps me escape from my daily routine.	18	37	17	37	14
3.	I feel satisfied after finishing watching a thriller movie.	8	17	21	51	26
4.	Thriller movies provide an emotional challenge that I enjoy.	11	10	15	53	34

Uses and Gratification theory was first introduced by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. This theory focuses more on individual actions towards the media, not on what the media does to individuals (Jalaluddin, 1984). According to Blumer and Katz, uses and gratifications theory assumes that users have alternative choices to meet their needs (Nurudin, 2017: 192). This theory emphasizes the use of media to achieve the fulfillment of individual needs. Thus, most audience behavior can be explained through their various needs and interests. Uses and gratifications suggests that the main focus is not on how the media influences audience attitudes and behaviors, but rather how the media meets their personal and social needs (Indriyani, 2020).

According to Dainton, Marianne (2018), in the Journal of Technology and Business Information, audiences do not only consider the medium used to

convey messages, but Uses and Gratification Theory focuses more on the reasons behind the choice of medium by the audience. This is due to the large number of medium options available, which leads to preferences based on the needs of each individual. Therefore, the approach in this theory emphasizes more on the reasons why audiences choose a particular medium as well as when the medium is chosen and used. For example, someone may prefer social media to interact with their friends, or choose movie streaming for entertainment, depending on the emotional or social needs they want to fulfil (Damanik & Tambotuh, 2022). This is reflected in the results of a questionnaire conducted on Gen Z students about the influence of thriller movie content on their anxiety levels and interpersonal relationship patterns. The survey results show that many respondents watch thriller movies for various reasons. For example, on the question "Watching thrillers helps me escape from my daily routine," 37 people agreed and 14 people strongly agreed, indicating that they use thrillers as a way to cope with boredom or stress. This shows that they seek entertainment or emotional escape from everyday life, which is in line with the need for entertainment being one of the main categories in the Uses and Gratification theory.

In addition, the survey results also showed that 53 people agreed and 34 people strongly agreed with the statement "Thriller movies provide an emotional challenge that I enjoy." This indicates that thrillers provide an emotional challenge that I enjoy. This indicates that thrillers provide emotional experiences that audiences enjoy, fulfilling their need for emotional experiences that trigger suspense, anxiety, or curiosity-something that can add excitement to their lives.

The questionnaire data also noted that some respondents felt satisfied after watching the thriller (51 people agreed, 26 strongly agreed). This perceived satisfaction indicates that the media-in this case a thriller-provides gratification or fulfillment to certain needs of the audience, such as the need to feel entertained, get a deep emotional experience, or simply avoid boredom.

Thus, the results of this questionnaire illustrate how the Uses and Gratification theory works in practice. Audiences choose the media they consume based on their personal needs - be it for emotional escape, entertainment, or even to fulfill curiosity. The theory emphasizes that the media does not only function as a messenger, but also as a tool that audiences use to fulfill their different types of needs and desires, which ultimately affects how they interact with the media.

The implications that can be drawn are very relevant to the theories used to analyze the influence of thriller films on anxiety and interpersonal relationship patterns in respondents, especially generation Z. Based on Piaget's cognitive emotional theory, the survey results show that most respondents feel tense when watching intense scenes in thriller movies, which reflects the cognitive process of interpreting threat or tension. This indicates that younger generations, who are in a dynamic stage of cognitive development, have different abilities in managing their emotional responses after watching a thriller movie.



In addition, the survey results also show that thrillers can affect patterns of interpersonal relationships, such as increasing vigilance in trusting others and increasing empathy for others' feelings. However, significant changes in relationships with friends or family did not occur, which is in line with symbolic interaction theory which states that individuals shape their social perceptions based on the symbols they create in interaction. In this case, thrillers may strengthen alertness or empathy, but not change social relationships directly.

Finally, the uses and gratifications theory explains that individuals choose media based on their personal needs, and the survey results show that many respondents watch thrillers to avoid boredom or seek emotional challenges. This suggests that thrillers fulfill individuals' emotional and social needs, such as entertainment or emotional escape. Overall, these findings provide important insights into how generation Z responds to and manages the emotional experiences generated by media, as well as how they choose media that suits their personal needs.

In this study, generation z is the main object of researchers because gen z is a generation that is often exposed to digital technology and also media consumption such as watching movies, one of which is a thriller film. In the vulnerable age of gen z, namely from 1997-2012 where they are experiencing an important phase in the formation of their social and emotional identity, which can be influenced by the use of media they consume. Thriller films themselves are often known as films with genres that show tension, emotional, and even cause fear in the audience. With these effects, thriller movies have the potential to have an impact on psychological conditions such as anxiety and can even affect the interpersonal relationship patterns of the audience.

This research is important because it can provide new knowledge about how exposure to thriller movies can affect the level of anxiety and interpersonal relationship patterns of gen z. The results of this study can contribute to the development of psychological conditions such as anxiety. The results of this study can contribute to the academic literature in the field of media psychology and interpersonal communication, and at the same time can be a reference for media literacy education. In addition, the results of this study can also help improve media literacy, so that readers can recognize the impact of media, especially thriller movies, so that individuals can manage these influences on individual emotional well-being and social relationships.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that the influence of thriller films on anxiety levels and interpersonal relationship patterns of Gen Z students can be explained through various psychological and communication theories, including Cognitive theory, Symbolic Interactionism, and Uses and Gratification. Piaget explained that cognitive development is closely related to a person's ability to process information and regulate emotions. The survey results show that while thrillers may trigger temporary feelings of anxiety or tension, long-term effects such as sleep difficulties or

vague anxiety seem to be more influenced by individuals' ability to manage their emotional responses to media.

In the context of Symbolic Interactionism, these findings suggest that the experience of watching thrillers may affect how individuals value their social relationships, with increased vigilance towards trust or increased empathy. However, direct changes in interpersonal relationships are not as significant, as individuals' interpretations of thrillers are more subjective and contextual.

Uses and Gratification theory explains that audiences choose media based on their personal needs. The survey shows that Gen Z students use thrillers as a form of emotional escape from daily routines and to seek out fun emotional challenges. This suggests that media, such as thrillers, fulfill various individual needs, such as entertainment and the search for emotional experiences that trigger curiosity or anxiety. Overall, the results of this study illustrate how media can fulfill audiences' personal and social needs and how it affects their cognitive understanding and social interactions.

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