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Research Article

A Genre Analysis of “Gabi Ng Lagim” Episodes in KMJS: Exploring Narrative Devices and Cultural Construction in Philippine Horror Television

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Abstract

The study analyzed the genre conventions present in the “Gabi ng Lagim” episodes of Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho (KMJS) by identifying the dominant narrative devices, horror subgenres, and cultural elements embedded in each episode. This research was grounded in a qualitative design, specifically employing genre analysis and thematic analysis to investigate the construction and reception of horror narratives in Philippine television. Data were collected through genre analysis of selected 2024 Gabi ng Lagim episodes and semi-structured interviews with eleven Gabi ng Lagim viewers. Findings revealed that imagery is the most dominantly used narrative device, followed by suspense, symbolism, dialogue, foreshadowing, and repetition. These devices were intricately aligned with four primary horror subgenres—psychological, supernatural, folklore, and demonic horror—each reflecting specific Filipino cultural beliefs. Furthermore, audience responses indicated that horror elements in Gabi ng Lagim episodes resonate deeply with shared cultural schemas, enhancing fear and emotional engagement. The study concluded that genre conventions in Filipino televised horror are not only tools of storytelling but also powerful vessels for expressing collective memory, identity, and societal values.

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1. Introduction

The horror genre has long been a significant part of global entertainment, captivating audiences through its ability to evoke fear, suspense, and curiosity. Rooted in folklore, mythology, and societal anxieties, horror stories serve as a reflection of cultural beliefs and fears (Carroll, 2003). In the Philippines, horror narratives are deeply embedded in oral traditions and contemporary media, influencing various storytelling formats, including television series, films, and literary works (Corbita & Saministrado, 2019; Rowsell, 2025). One such notable platform for Filipino horror narratives is Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho (KMJS), which features the widely popular "Gabi ng Lagim" episodes. These segments showcase Filipino horror stories, drawing from real-life accounts, urban legends, and supernatural folklore, making them a relevant subject for genre analysis (Clarín & Jocson, 2016; Paman, 2011).

Understanding the stylistic elements and cultural representations in these episodes contributes to a broader appreciation of Filipino horror narratives and their impact on audiences. Despite the rich storytelling tradition in Filipino horror media, there is a growing concern regarding the lack of scholarly attention on how genre-specific elements shape audience engagement and cultural discourse. While international scholarship has examined horror's psychological and sociological dimensions, there remains limited research on how Filipino horror narratives uniquely fuse indigenous belief systems with contemporary media aesthetics, leaving a significant gap in understanding the cultural and discursive dynamics of local televised horror (Gamayo et al., 2024). Given the increasing popularity of horror content in mainstream and digital media, there is a pressing need to analyze how these narratives employ specific narrative devices to create suspense, evoke fear, and sustain audience engagement (Ainslie, 2017). Moreover, the evolution of horror subgenres within local contexts warrants

further examination, particularly in understanding how these elements reflect contemporary Filipino anxieties and cultural values (Reyes & Dela Cruz, 2021).

This study aims to fill these gaps by conducting a genre analysis of the "Gabi ng Lagim" episodes, focusing on the linguistic and narrative devices used to enhance horror narratives. While previous research has analyzed horror films, limited studies have delved into episodic television horror within the Philippine context, especially regarding its implications on cultural identity and audience reception (Shaw, 2023). By examining the stylistic elements, horror subgenres, and cultural representations in KMJS horror episodes, this research provides a more nuanced understanding of Filipino horror narratives. Narrative Theory, primarily advanced by David Herman (2002), examines how narratives function as tools for organizing and making sense of human experience. Audience Reception Theory, notably developed by Sonia Livingstone (2002), explores how audiences actively interpret and engage with media content. Cultural Schema Theory, as proposed by D'Andrade and Strauss (1992), suggests that individuals understand the world through mental structures or "schemas" formed by cultural experiences.

Further, this study is among the first to undertake a combined genre-analytical and reception analysis of contemporary Filipino televised horror, specifically examining how Gabi ng Lagim integrates narrative devices, multimodal features, and cultural belief systems in constructing fear. By merging structural analysis of horror subgenres with audience interpretations and receptions, this research offers a uniquely comprehensive account of how Filipino horror operates as both media genre and cultural discourse, thereby contributing an innovative framework to local and regional horror scholarship.

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Research Questions

1. What narrative devices are dominantly employed in *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes?
2. How does the alignment of narrative devices in the horror subgenres presented in *Gabi ng*

Lagim episodes affect the perception of the audience?

3. How do the horror subgenres in *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes reflect Filipino cultural beliefs?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design integrating genre analysis and corpus linguistics to explore how *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes reflect Filipino cultural beliefs through horror subgenres and narrative devices. As a corpus-based study, it systematically analyzed transcribed episodes to identify recurring language patterns and culturally embedded narrative features (Baker, 2006). Genre analysis, as explicated by Gantz (2019), was used to identify recurring conventions, rhetorical structures, and linguistic features that indicate horror subgenre alignment, such as supernatural, psychological, or folk horror. Swales (1990) and Corbet (2006) emphasized that genre functions as a social action, shaped by recurring discourse patterns. Similarly, Bawarshi (2021) noted that genre helps define how narratives function within specific cultural contexts. Thematic analysis complemented this by uncovering patterns of meaning across the transcribed data. Braun and Clarke (2021) described thematic analysis as a flexible method for identifying themes within qualitative data, while Kiger and Varpio (2020) emphasized its usefulness in exploring cultural meaning and participant interpretation. Together, these methods enabled a systematic analysis of how *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes reflect Filipino cultural schemas, such as beliefs in spirits, karmic justice, and familial responsibility.

2.2. Data Sources

This study utilized two primary data sources: (1) verbatim transcriptions and multimodal textual analysis of four *Gabi ng Lagim* (2024) episodes, and (2) semi-structured interviews with eleven purposively sampled viewers (inclusion criteria: ≥ 18 years old and regular viewers of *Gabi ng*

Lagim). Each episode was viewed and re-viewed systematically (minimum three viewings), and transcripts were read multiple times to ensure deep familiarization. These sources provided qualitative insights into how horror subgenres in the show evoked suspense, fear, and engagement while also reflecting Filipino cultural beliefs about the supernatural. The episodes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using genre analysis and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to examine their narrative structures, horror subgenres, visual techniques, and cultural themes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Bhatia, 2017). The employment of genre analysis alongside reception analysis was to capture both the structural and experiential dimensions of the *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes. Genre analysis identified recurring narrative patterns and linguistic features, while reception analysis explored the participants' emotional responses to horror. This methodological integration provided a holistic view of televised horror as both a media genre and a cultural discourse shaped by belief, memory, and identity.

2.3. Data Analysis

The analytic procedure proceeded in four steps: (1) data familiarization (viewing and repeated reading), (2) open coding of linguistic and visual markers, (3) thematic clustering and subgenre mapping through genre-analytic categories, and (4) synthesis with reception analysis derived from interviews. Coding was carried out independently by two researchers, with intercoder comparison and negotiated resolution of discrepancies; intercoder consistency was checked and documented. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasize that methodological

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triangulation strengthens qualitative credibility, while Chan-Olmsted and Wolter (2018) highlight its value in capturing multiple perspectives on media engagement.

The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive method, guided by the theoretical frameworks of Narrative Theory (Herman, 2002), Audience Reception Theory (Livingstone, 2002), and Cultural Schema Theory (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992). Narrative Theory helped examine how storytelling

techniques—such as suspense, pacing, and imagery—were used to evoke fear. At the same time, Audience Reception Theory provided insight into how participants engaged with the narratives based on their academic training and personal experiences.

Their responses revealed varied interpretations shaped by individual and collective perspectives. Cultural Schema Theory informed the analysis of recurring themes involving spirits, karma, religious rituals, and ancestral beliefs.

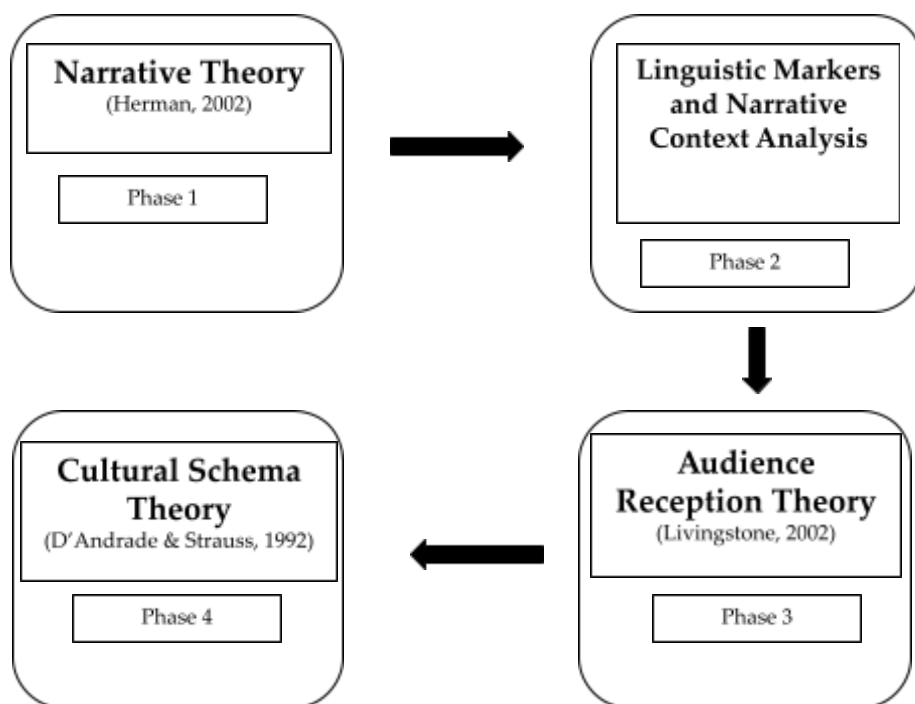


Figure 1. Integration of Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

Corpus checks were used to validate the preliminary findings. Through Colaizzi's thematic-inductive approach, the researchers analyzed Gabi ng Lagim episodes by examining

2.4. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was enhanced through methodological triangulation, an audit trail of analytic decisions, peer debriefing, and member-checking of key thematic summaries

narrative language, visual elements, and emotional impact—revealing deeper cultural meanings within the supernatural narratives.

with selected participants. Further, the study adhered to the framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which focuses on credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

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3. Results

This section outlines the most frequently occurring narrative devices across the four *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes analyzed. These elements not only serve to evoke emotional responses but also reflect cultural fears and beliefs embedded

within the narratives. Their consistent use across episodes suggests a deliberate effort to align with genre conventions while resonating with Filipino audiences.

3.1. Dominant Narrative Devices Employed in *Gabi ng Lagim* Episodes

Table 1 presents the dominant narrative devices across the four *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes, showing that imagery (32%) and suspense (20.8%) are the most prevalent, followed by symbolism (17.6%), dialogue (15.2%), foreshadowing (9.6%), and repetition (8%).

Table 1. Dominant Narrative Devices Employed in *Gabi ng Lagim* Episodes

Narrative Devices	Haunted House for Sale	<i>Ang Misteryo sa Impounding Area</i>	Antique Store	<i>Pamilya na Demonyo?</i>	Total Frequency	Percentage
Imagery	12	10	11	7	40	32%
Suspense	6	9	6	5	26	20.8%
Symbolism	5	6	6	5	22	17.6%
Dialogue	3	8	4	4	19	15.2%
Foreshadowing	2	4	3	3	12	9.6%
Repetition	1	3	3	3	10	8%

3.2. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Haunted House for Sale*

Table 2 shows that in *Haunted House for Sale*, imagery (45.28%) and suspense (20.75%) are the most dominant devices, supported by symbolism (15.9%), foreshadowing (9.43%), dialogue (5.66%), and repetition (3.7%).

Table 2. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Haunted House for Sale*

Linguistic Markers	Narrative Devices	Percentage
"I got goose bumps even before entering the gate." "There was a human-shaped shadow, completely black." "It felt like something heavy was walking." "The attic door suddenly opened. Even though there was no wind, it seemed like a shadow passed across the mirror." "When I entered, I felt a sad, creepy feeling "The house's original color felt off, so I changed it." "I felt her hair brushing against my back." "In the house, a woman makes her presence felt every night." "They hear something running on the stairs, going up and down." "My hair stood on end when I entered the house." "In the hallway, I saw her shadow, completely black "I felt like I was with someone not ordinary. "I felt heavy, like someone was watching."	Imagery	45.28%

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"Secret attic door open by itself." "Can we turn it off? I do not want to continue." "Door opens again, caught on CCTV." "It is like someone is groaning." -With the light getting dim." "Dragging sensation like a cable."	Suspense	20.75%
"Souls that keep coming back here cannot cross over... they seem to be trapped in the house." "Haunted House for Sale -Waiting for resolution "	Symbolism	15.9%
"I saw a shadow in the shape of a person in that hallway -Ricardo Singapan "Amyris does not want to continue." Staff: "What are they saying?" Ed Caluag: "There is that choking again. Fr. Ramos: "This prayer invites the Lord." Justine: "I heard something upstairs. "Pilar: "I could not sleep there." "Mang Lito: "Something touched me." Gloria: "I heard whispering".	Dialogue	5.66%
We were struggling. Our life felt heavy. "There was a feeling of presence after leaving. "Darkness in the attic is worse than the rest. It is heavy; the wind cannot open that unless you really move it to open. -Mang Lito	Foreshadowing	9.43%
It is heavy. The wind cannot open. Unless you really move it." "Door kept slamming... door kept slamming." "I cannot sleep... I cannot sleep..."	Repetition	3.7%

3.3. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Ang Misteryo sa Impounding Area*

Table 3 indicates that in *Ang Misteryo sa Impounding Area*, imagery (25.5%) and suspense (23.5%) dominate the narrative, followed by dialogue (19.6%), symbolism (13.7%), foreshadowing (9.8%), and repetition (7.8%).

Table 3. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Ang Misteryo sa Impounding Area*

Linguistic Markers	Narrative Devices	Percentage
"The car looks like a crushed can and is not being piled upon by damaged trikes." "Footsteps heard in empty cars..." "Hair brushing on my back." "People breaking windows to escape the fire." "Lights turning on in vehicles." "Dark, burned interior of the van." "Sound of weeping in the backseat." "Footsteps heard in empty cars..."	Imagery	25.5%
"The towing truck assistant, at night, suddenly came running, panting..." – Marlon "I felt banging inside the bus." "Come running, panting: 'Sir, I saw something.'" "Ghost: 'We will all burn in hell together.'" "Body chills and swelling ears." "Crying echoes from inside." "Movement from van window." "Voices calling for help." "Repeated knocks without people." "Whispers around 2 AM."	Suspense	23.5%

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<i>"The bus that burned... was brought to the impounding area, and since then, there have been constant haunting."</i> <i>"Burned bus represents jealousy and love gone wrong."</i> <i>"Crushed van haunted by victim."</i> <i>"Vehicle carries spirit's memory."</i> <i>"Dead still attached to their vehicle."</i> <i>"Spiritual unrest from unresolved death."</i> <i>"Spirits ride the van endlessly."</i> <i>"Presence follows the wreck."</i>	Symbolism	13.7%
	Dialogue	19.6%
<i>Ghost: "Help us, please. I want to live."</i> <i>Ghost: "Why did you burn me?"</i> <i>Ryan: "It is always cold near the backyard."</i> <i>Marlon: "Someone ran away from there."</i> <i>"Security: "Let us check the back."</i> <i>Mary: "There is something strange here."</i> <i>Psychic: "They are still here."</i> <i>"My daughter does not talk about it anymore."</i> <i>Driver: "Even the camera fails when we pass it."</i> <i>Guard: "Something whispered in my ear."</i>		
<i>"At night I can see a figure in white... something passes by, in the mirror." – Manuelito.</i> <i>"You feel something bad near the van."</i> <i>"Voices come around midnight."</i> <i>"Accidents happen only with the Blackman."</i> <i>"Presence gets stronger near the impounding area."</i> <i>"He never speaks again after hearing the cry."</i> <i>"CCTV always turns off when it is near."</i>	Foreshadowing	9.8%
<i>Ghost: "Help us, please. I want to live."</i> <i>"Help us, take us to the hospital."</i> <i>"Take us to the hospital, take us to the hospital." – Spirit Voice</i> <i>Take us to the hospital, take us to the hospital."</i> <i>"Why did you burn me? Why did you burn me?"</i> <i>"We will burn... we will burn..."</i> <i>"Please... please... please..."</i>	Repetition	7.8%

3.4 Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in Antique Store

Table 4 highlights that in Antique Store, imagery (38.28%) is the most frequently used device, followed by suspense (18.75%), symbolism (18.75%), foreshadowing (12.5%), and dialogue (12.5%).

Table 4. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in in Antique Store

Linguistic Markers	Narrative Devices	Percentage
<i>"The doll stared at me... "</i> <i>"Cabinet slammed shut..."</i> <i>"Antiques linked to spirits..."</i> <i>"She said the doll moved again..."</i> <i>That woman with bulging eyes."</i> <i>"She vomited blood."</i> <i>"She had no head."</i> <i>"Crying, screaming, moaning."</i> <i>"Shadowy figure caught on CCTV."</i> <i>"Coldness wrapping around me."</i> <i>"Eyes glowing in the hallway."</i>	Imagery	38.28%

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<i>"She said the doll moved again... With terrifying lights." "That woman with bulging eyes... she vomited blood." – Maris When I turn off the lights, I can immediately feel a presence." "It felt like something was pulling me—like I was being played with." "Someone is waiting for me right by the stairs." "Something that grabbed my leg was firm!" "Multiple voices shouting in my ears—it is so painful!"</i>	Suspense	18.75%
<i>"The wardrobe served as a portal..." – Ed Caluag "The doll with the child's spirit watches over the shop." "Spirits attached to old belongings." "She did not want the item to be sold." "Old items carry energy and memory." "Prayer is needed to release the soul from the object."</i>	Symbolism	18.75%
<i>"Something grabbed my leg was firm, like firm, like this!" – Ed Caluag "When I look inside, there she is—that woman with bulging eyes." "Maybe it got upset." "Only saw a woman—she did not have a head."</i>	Foreshadowing	12.5%
<i>"Maris? Maris, is that you? Miss, what are you doing here?" – JB Marites: "I feel cold, as if it is wrapping its arm around me." JB: "What is that sound from the hallway?" JB: "I was just about to turn off the lights."</i>	Dialogue	12.5%

3.5. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Pamilya Na Demonyo?*

Table 5 reveals that in *Pamilya na Demonyo?*, imagery (25.9%) ranks highest, followed by suspense (18.5%), symbolism (18.5%), dialogue (14.8%), and both foreshadowing (11.11%) and repetition (11.11%).

Table 5. Linguistic Markers and Narrative Devices in *Pamilya Na Demonyo?*

Linguistic Markers	Narrative Devices	Percentage
<i>"His eyes were glowing with rage." "Figure peeking through the window." "I feel weak, my hands are shaking." "She was vomiting blood." "A large figure with glowing eyes... standing on the stairs." "Face looked like a beast—dark and hollow." Marjorie suddenly froze. "Wait a moment..." "I do not want to." "Who are you talking to?!" "Marjorie suddenly froze during the interview." "It is wondering if it should hurt me." "She is afraid the dark shadow will get angry."</i>	Imagery	25.9%
<i>"The dark shadow wants her to stay in the house." "We are being tormented by demons." "The demon was controlling their emotions."</i>	Suspense	18.5%
	Symbolism	18.5%

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<i>"Michelle's good fortune came from a black child spirit."</i> <i>"The dark shadow wants her to stay in the house."</i> <i>"We are being tormented by demons."</i> <i>"The demon was controlling their emotions."</i> <i>"Michelle's good fortune came from a black child spirit."</i> <i>"Prayer and unity are the only way to drive it out."</i>				
<i>Marjorie: "I do not want to. Wait... it feels so heavy."</i> <i>Anna: "You are feisty, but you need to control it."</i> <i>Michelle: "I was the one who sacrificed and went abroad."</i> <i>Psychic: "She is not alone—there is a child spirit here."</i>			Dialogue	14.8%
<i>Conflicts between family members escalated."</i> <i>"A dark figure appeared, and their behavior changed."</i> <i>"Photo showed something peeking through the window."</i>			Foreshadowing	11.11%
<i>Ever since that dark figure appeared..."</i> <i>"We were fighting... we were fighting..."</i> <i>Let go of me! Let go!"</i>			Repetition	11.11%

3.6. Subgenre, Narrative Devices, Audience Perceptions, and Cultural and Thematic Episodes

Table 6 integrates the findings across episodes, showing that each subgenre—psychological, supernatural, folklore, and demonic horror—uses similar narrative devices to evoke culturally rooted fear.

Table 6. Subgenre, Narrative Devices, Audience Perceptions, and Cultural and Thematic Episodes

Episode	Subgenre	Narrative Devices	Audience Perception	Cultural and Thematic Episodes
Haunted House for Sale	Psychological Horror	Imagery Suspense Symbolism Dialogue Foreshadowing Repetition	<i>"I cannot control my emotions..."</i> <i>(Player 380)</i> <i>When I see big trees, I picture that something might be living there."</i> <i>(Player 222)</i> <i>"They feature unresolved issues from the past; I get intrigued to know what I cannot control in my emotions..."</i> <i>(Player 380)</i> <i>"When I see big trees, I picture that something might be living there."</i> <i>(Player 049)</i> <i>"They feature unresolved issues from the past; "I get intrigued to know what really happened."(Player 001)</i>	The fear of inherited trauma and spiritual unrest tied to family lineage and ancestral home.

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Ang Misteryo sa Impound ing Area	Supernatural Horror	Imagery Suspense Symbolism Dialogue Foreshadowing Repetition	"That is where the child died... so eerie." "My family believes in supernatural events." "Yes, it adds suspense, because I can incorporate those beliefs into it." (Player 044) "It is scary because it involved an accident. They showed how damaged the vehicles were. You can see a toy from the cars. That is where the child died... so eerie." (Player 049) "My family believes in supernatural events. Yes, it adds suspense, because I can incorporate those beliefs into it." (Player 044) "It is scary because it involved an accident; they showed how damaged the vehicles were. You can see a toy from the cars" (Player 380)	Urban legend shaped by collective memory of tragic accidents and the belief in restless spirits.
Antique Store	Folklore Horror	Imagery Suspense Symbolism Dialogue Foreshadowing Repetition	"Antiques are sacred... they should not be sold." (Player 044) "The attachment the ancestors of the antiques remain, that is why it is continuously disturbing the people who sold them." (Player 248) "They do not want the Antique to be sold by their family members, because maybe that is what makes them feel connected to their home and to their loved ones" (Player 120) "A woman appears in the Antique. She is crying. It feels real. It really feels real." (Player 444)	Respect for ancestral objects and the animist spirits.
Pamilya na Demonyo?	Demonic Horror	Imagery Suspense Symbolism Dialogue Foreshadowing Repetition	"He was possessed... not himself." "Their minds were controlled by evil entities; the demon was very scary. It made it seem real. (Player 044) "At first their family was okay, right? And then the demon started affecting them. A husband and wife keep fighting already." (Player 149) "It was not the demon that created chaos in their family, but the demon that really comes from them." (Player 087) "I believe that there is really a demon in their house that is what their house is not happy; it feels like there is blocking a good relationship a family wants to build." (Player 222) "Yes, demons really exist." (Player 125) "I think they are easily getting posed because they do not go to church." (Player 125)	Catholic demonology, fear of evil taking control.

Overall, the data demonstrate that Gabi ng Lagim constructs horror through a synergistic interplay of visual, linguistic, and auditory devices, creating a layered narrative experience. Imagery and suspense dominate because they

most effectively bridge sensory realism and cultural belief, while symbolism and dialogue ground the horror in moral and social context. These findings affirm that the program's narrative success lies not merely in fear

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production but in cultural resonance—its ability to weave local spirituality, folklore, and morality into the universal language of horror. In essence, *Gabi ng Lagim* exemplifies a distinctly

Filipino form of televised horror, where narrative devices operate as both artistic and cultural mechanisms of meaning-making

4. Discussion

The integration of Herman's Narrative Theory, Livingstone's Audience Reception Theory, and D'Andrade and Stauss' Cultural Schema Theory enabled a multidimensional interpretation of the findings. Narrative Theory explained how textual structures and linguistic features construct meaning within each episode; Audience Reception Theory accounted for interpretive variability among viewers and how their personal and cultural backgrounds shaped understanding; and Cultural Schema Theory clarified how shared Filipino beliefs and traditions informed these interpretations. Together, these frameworks provided a coherent lens that bridged textual analysis, audience engagement, and cultural context, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of horror as both discourse and cultural expression.

4.1. Narrative Devices in *Gabi ng Lagim* Episodes

The first major finding revealed that imagery is the most dominantly employed narrative device across all four *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes, followed by suspense, symbolism, dialogue, foreshadowing, and repetition. This was derived through systematic content analysis of transcripts and narrative elements. This finding is best explained through David Herman's (2002) theory of narrative construction, which posits that narratives organize experience into meaningful structures by invoking world-making processes. Through devices like vivid imagery and foreshadowing, the episodes simulate experiential worlds that immerse the audience in the horror. For instance, phrases like

“dark shadow in staircase” or “I felt a sense of sadness and chills” cue narrative scripts that prompt viewers to construct fear-inducing story worlds. The dominance of imagery and suspense indicates the program's emphasis on visual and psychological engagement to evoke fear and emotional tension. Symbolism and dialogue enhance depth by expressing moral and spiritual undertones; while foreshadowing and repetition establish continuity and rhythm. Altogether, these patterns reveal that *Gabi ng Lagim* constructs horror through sensory realism and emotional pacing, blending supernatural elements with culturally grounded narratives of belief and fear.

This finding aligns with David Herman's (2002) theory of narrative construction, which posits that narratives organize experience by invoking world-making processes through language. Imagery and foreshadowing, in particular, enable the simulation of fear-inducing “story worlds” that engage audience perception. For example, phrases like “dark shadow in the staircase” or “I felt a sense of sadness and chills” prompt internal visualization and emotional response, allowing audiences to co-construct the narrative. Herman's assertion that meaning arises not only from narrative content but from the structural arrangement of events is evident in how these episodes layer mood, setting, and perception to sustain horror. Recent research also confirms this; according to Brümmer (2015), immersive horror narratives depend heavily on sensory language and atmosphere to evoke psychological realism and empathy in viewers. The

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effectiveness of these narrative strategies is also supported by emerging genre scholarship. Contemporary horror storytelling, particularly in Asian media, relies on layering emotional cues and cultural symbols to heighten suspense (Choi & Wada-Marciano, 2009; Jin, 2023). This supports the finding that *Gabi ng Lagim* employs not just direct horror imagery but also symbolic repetition and emotionally charged dialogue to sustain tension. Moreover, thematic cohesion across episodes is achieved through the careful recurrence of motifs—such as ancestral spirits, isolated locations, and supernatural guilt—which aligns with what Reyes (2016) describe as “emotional echoing,” a technique that deepens affective response in serialized horror content. The structural use of language, such as “I felt sadness and chills,” exemplifies the integration of sensory experience and narrative coherence, leading to heightened audience immersion. Thus, *Gabi ng Lagim*'s use of narrative devices not only reflects Herman's theory but demonstrates how horror operates through both textual design and affective impact.

4.2. Sub-genre Classification and Genre Hybridity

The second key finding revealed that each *Gabi ng Lagim* episode corresponds to a distinct horror subgenre—psychological, supernatural, folkloric, or demonic—yet exhibits overlaps that illustrate genre hybridity. This hybridization became evident through recurring combinations of narrative devices, character tropes, and thematic elements across episodes. For instance, while one episode may center on supernatural possession, it also contains psychological horror elements rooted in trauma or unresolved guilt, reinforcing the layered complexity of horror in Philippine storytelling.

This hybridity supports postmodern genre theory, particularly Herman's (2002) concept of narrative multiplicity, which suggests that narratives can operate within multiple genre logics simultaneously. In the episode *Antique Store*, for example, folkloric horror (linked to animism and ancestral spirits) is blended with psychological horror (fear of cursed objects and isolation). Similarly, demonic themes in *Pamilya na Demonyo* overlap with religious horror and moral anxiety, reflecting a convergence of local spirituality and moral fear. Hanich (2011) and Menninghaus et al. (2017) argue that contemporary horror texts often disrupt rigid genre boundaries, favoring hybrid forms that better reflect modern cultural tensions and fears. This fluidity also aligns with Sonia Livingstone's (2002) emphasis on the audience's active role in meaning-making. Participants did not simply label the episodes by genre; instead, they described layered interpretations influenced by personal, spiritual, and cultural frameworks. Comments such as “It feels real” or “You will wonder if they truly exist or not” demonstrate how viewers actively negotiate genre categories through their own schemas and emotional histories. This affirms what Gupta and Nair (2025) describe as “viewer hybridity,” where audiences blend their belief systems with genre cues to co-construct meaning. Furthermore, Velasco and De Chavez (2023) observes that horror in the Philippine context often blends Catholic imagery, animistic traditions, and folk myth, resulting in stories that feel psychologically and spiritually authentic to Filipino viewers. Thus, genre hybridity in *Gabi ng Lagim* not only reflects narrative experimentation but mirrors the cultural and religious intersections shaping Filipino identity and fear.

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This shows how horror is a cultural practice where creators and audiences actively co-create meaning through shared lived experiences, shaping the narrative's significance, its cultural resonance, and its role in expressing collective fears and values. It highlights the dynamic exchange between media and society, where storytelling becomes a vessel for cultural memory and identity. In this way, horror becomes both reflection and response.

4.3. Audience Perception and Cultural Beliefs

Findings from the third research question revealed that audience interpretations are deeply influenced by Filipino cultural schemas, including Catholicism, animism, and folk spirituality. Participant responses revealed themes of spiritual realism, demonology, and ancestral presence. This connects with D'Andrade and Strauss' (1992) Cultural Schema Theory, which explains that individuals rely on culturally shared cognitive structures to interpret experiences. When participants said, "they are easily possessed because they do not go to church" or "antiques are sacred", they were drawing from embedded cultural schemas—religious morality, soul continuity,

and spiritual cause-and-effect. D'Andrade and Strauss' theory aligns with these findings by demonstrating how viewers apply familiar cultural maps to comprehend the supernatural. Horror becomes effective not just because it is scary, but because it resonates with pre-existing belief systems.

Furthermore, Sonia Livingstone's audience reception theory complements this interpretation by showing how media is filtered through identity, values, and life-worlds. Viewers' statements like "the demon that really comes from them" suggest a deeper negotiation between what is shown and what is believed. A major contribution of the study lies in how it maps audience perception to cultural schema. Participants interpreted events through deeply rooted Filipino frameworks—Catholic morality, animistic reverence, and spiritual causality. This shows how viewers actively construct meaning, using horror to negotiate identity, faith, and social values within Filipino cultural frameworks. Their responses reflect not just fear, but also insight, resistance, and cultural affirmation.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how *Gabi ng Lagim* employs narrative devices and subgeneric features to construct televised Filipino horror while reflecting culturally embedded beliefs about the supernatural. The findings show that the dominant narrative devices—imagery (32%), suspense (20.8%), symbolism (17.6%), dialogue (15.2%), foreshadowing (9.6%), and repetition (8%)—collectively shape how fear, tension, and cultural meaning are conveyed across the episodes. Each of the four episodes represented a distinct horror subgenre, demonstrating how Filipino horror draws on varied narrative traditions to express themes rooted in spiritual experience, communal memory, and cultural

identity. Audience perceptions further revealed how viewers interpret horror through personal emotions, cultural upbringing, and belief systems, highlighting the integral role of reception in meaning-making. Overall, the study affirms that *Gabi ng Lagim* operates not only as a televised horror program but also as a cultural text that mirrors Filipino anxieties, values, and interpretations of the unseen. The research process also emphasized the richness of qualitative discourse analysis in capturing both textual patterns and audience meaning, reinforcing the value of media narratives as sources of cultural insight.

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6. Recommendations

Educators may integrate locally produced horror narratives such as *Gabi ng Lagim* into language, literature, and media classes to enhance students' cultural literacy and analytical skills. The narrative devices and subgenre structures identified in this study can serve as effective tools for teaching stylistics, discourse analysis, and cultural interpretation. Media practitioners may also draw on the findings to create more culturally grounded horror content that resonates with Filipino viewers' beliefs and experiences. Furthermore, curriculum designers may consider using media-based materials to bridge classroom learning with students' lived cultural narratives.

Future studies may expand the dataset to include *Gabi ng Lagim* episodes from earlier or recent years, other televised horror programs, or

user-generated digital horror narratives to capture broader patterns in Filipino horror discourse. Comparative analyses across Southeast Asian horror media may also reveal shared cultural motifs and regional belief systems. Methodological expansions—such as mixed-method approaches combining discourse analysis with focus groups, surveys, or reception-based quantitative measures—may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how horror narratives function both textually and socially. Longitudinal research may likewise explore how students' interpretive and storytelling abilities develop over time when exposed to genre-based media materials. Such directions will enrich the growing body of research on Filipino horror and its cultural significance.

7. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the narrative strategies, genre construction, and cultural dimensions of *Gabi ng Lagim*, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis focused on only four 2024 episodes, which limits the scope and representativeness of the findings. Horror as a television genre is dynamic, and episodes from earlier or later years may reveal additional patterns or thematic evolutions not captured in this corpus. Second, the study relied on a small group of purposively selected participants whose interpretations, though rich and meaningful, may not encompass the full range of audience perspectives across different age groups, regions, or cultural backgrounds. Third, as a qualitative genre analysis employing discourse-based interpretation, the findings are inherently interpretive and may be influenced by researcher

subjectivity despite efforts to maintain analytical rigor and methodological transparency. Fourth, the study's reliance on textual and viewer-response data limits its generalizability to broader media contexts. Finally, as the researchers are cultural insiders and viewers familiar with Filipino horror conventions, their positionality may have influenced interpretive decisions, potentially shaping how certain cultural cues or narrative elements were emphasized. These constraints, however, do not undermine the study's contributions; rather, they emphasize the contextual and exploratory nature of the research. Future studies may address these limitations by expanding the corpus, including diverse audience demographics, and integrating mixed-methods approaches to enhance the validity and generalizability of findings.

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Supplementary Details

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This paper was collaboratively authored by two researchers, each contributing according to their expertise: Ms. Patlunag led the development of the introduction, interpretation of results, and discussion of findings; Prof. Caloc was responsible for the comprehensive review, ensured the rigor of the study through validation of the methodology and results critical refinement of the manuscript.

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