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Producership, Characterization, and Gender Representation in the Luna Maya Suzzanna Horror Franchise, Indonesia 1981–2023

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian horror cinema has moved over the past decade from single-film production towards franchise production, yet scholarship on this shift has continued to treat textual analysis and industrial analysis as separate undertakings. This article examines how producership, directorial characterization, and gender representation together sustain the Luna Maya Suzzanna franchise, produced by Soraya Intercine Films since 2018. Three films are compared: *Sundelbolong* (1981, Sisworo Gautama Putra), which serves as the baseline for the original icon, and the two franchise titles led by Luna Maya, *Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018, Rocky Soraya and Anggy Umbara) and *Malam Jumat Kliwon* (2023, Guntur Soeharjanto). The study combines close textual analysis of the three films with a corpus of some thirty-five publicly circulated paratexts published between 2018 and 2024, including producer and director interviews, press-conference reports, trailers, and reviews. Material was coded in two passes against the physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions of characterization and triangulated across independent sources. The character retains a stable basic structure across all three films, that of a wronged woman who returns as a vengeful supernatural force, while variation concentrates in the sociological dimension, moving from domestic betrayal in the first franchise film to family economic pressure in the second. The producer sustains iconic identity through consistent casting, visual and narrative reference to the original Suzzanna titles, and the recurring presence of veteran supporting performers, while promotion frames every release as the return of the horror queen. Character thus operates simultaneously as a narrative unit and as an industrial asset managed across changes of director.

KEYWORDS

characterization
film franchise
gender representation
producership
promotional strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade the Indonesian horror film industry has shifted perceptibly from single-film production towards a sustainable franchise model. The pattern is visible in the success of Joko Anwar's *Pengabdi Setan* and in *KKN di Desa Penari*, which generated the prequel *Badarawuhi di Desa Penari*; both occupy places among the highest-grossing Indonesian films of all time. Within this trend Soraya Intercine Films pursued a different route. Rather than inventing a new horror character, the production house chose to revitalise a legendary Indonesian horror icon, Suzzanna Martha Frederika van Osch, through a new lead performer, Luna Maya, beginning with *Suzzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur* in 2018.

Revitalising an icon poses creative and industrial problems that inventing a character does not. A new character carries no audience expectation; Suzzanna carries a great deal. The original image has been embedded in Indonesian audiences' memory since the 1980s through titles such as *Sundelbolong*, *Beranak dalam Kubur*, and *Malam Satu Suro*, so each new film must hold fidelity to that image and artistic renewal in the same frame. The tension is sharpened by the franchise's production configuration: each film has been helmed by a different director — Rocky Soraya with Anggy Umbara for the first, Guntur Soeharjanto for the second — while the producer and the production house, Sunil Soraya and Soraya Intercine Films, have remained constant.

That configuration places the producer in a strategic position as the guardian of character-identity continuity across changes of director, a role that Vogel (2020) and Wasko (2003) describe as central to producership in the modern entertainment industry: balancing the director's creative freedom against the need to preserve an intellectual property's brand equity across its production cycle. Dyer (1998) accounts for the adjacent mechanism in the domain of stardom, defining star image as the collective construction of a performer's public persona out of films, promotional material, and media coverage, which then becomes an asset the producer manages across projects; Turner (2004) extends the argument by treating celebrity itself as an industrially produced commodity whose market value depends on managed continuity across roles. The combination of an iconic character and a star performer makes this franchise a productive object for work that bridges narrative and industry.

Research on Indonesian film promotion has developed quickly. Setiadarma (2024) examined integrated marketing communications in the promotion of *13 Bom di Jakarta*, finding that a combination of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations builds emotional ties with the target market. Mutiara et al. (2023) traced integrated marketing communication for *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* and stressed message consistency across promotional channels. Iskandar (2024) showed that user-generated content and audience review significantly extend a film's promotional cycle on social media. Rezki (2022) confirmed, through the marketing communication plan for *Cinta Sama dengan Cindolo Na Tape*, the value of target-market research from pre-production onwards, and Permana et al. (2018) demonstrated with *Haji Asrama* that effective promotion begins well before post-production ends. This line of work establishes how Indonesian films are sold, but it stops at the threshold of the text: none of these studies asks what the promoted object is as a narrative construction.

A second line of scholarship approaches the same cinema through genre convention and textual form. Pratista (2017) supplies a widely used account of Indonesian film grammar across genre, narrative, and style, while Bordwell and Thompson (2008) provide the formal vocabulary — mise-en-scène, narrative structure, cinematographic technique — through which textual analysis is ordinarily conducted. Within horror specifically, Sukatno and Bazaleel (2014) found that conventions such as the vengeful female ghost recur across Indonesian productions as a marketable narrative template rather than as isolated authorial choices. This work establishes the text but brackets the industry that commissions it.

Studies of the Luna Maya Suzzanna films themselves have begun to appear, with a different focus from the present one. An undergraduate thesis at Universitas Jember (2021) compares three-dimensional characterization between the 1981 original and the first franchise film, but is confined to two objects and does not reach production or promotion. The study of the pious-wife image in *Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2022) analyses Islamic representation through a Peircean semiotics of the kind described by Sobur (2004), addressing the religious dimension rather than cross-film comparison. Debby et al. (2020) examined the desacralisation of Indonesian horror through reception analysis, showing how contemporary audiences re-signify mystical elements, and so supply audience context without a production account.

Taken together, these three bodies of work leave a specific deficiency rather than a mere absence of publications. Promotion research explains industrial communication without the text; textual and semiotic research explains the character without the industry; reception research explains the audience without either. No study examines, within a single Indonesian horror franchise, how characterization under different directors, the producer's management of the character, and the promotional framing of each release operate as one process; and none asks how the character's gendered arc, from domestic compliance to supernatural retribution, interacts with that process. This article is the first to trace a single Indonesian horror icon across a 1981 baseline and two franchise installments while integrating characterization, producership, promotion, and gender representation in one analytical frame. As Clover (1992) demonstrated in her study of gender in modern horror, the figure of a wronged woman who returns with destructive power is not incidental to the genre but constitutive of it, which makes the Suzzanna franchise an apt case for connecting textual, industrial, and gender-representational analysis.

The study is delimited to the three films named in the Method section. Other original Suzzanna titles of the 1980s — *Beranak dalam Kubur*, *Telaga Angker*, *Malam Satu Suro* — are excluded even though they served as narrative references for the first franchise film. That title was released close to, and partly after, the end of the data-collection window and has not yet generated an independent secondary-source trail sufficient for the triangulated analysis applied to the earlier films; early coverage also suggests that it departs from the *sundel bolong* transformation convention by keeping Suzzanna human throughout, a departure flagged here as a priority for follow-up research. The delimitation keeps the analysis focused on one baseline and two development points for which reception and post-release data are mature.

The article accordingly pursues four aims: to compare the three-dimensional characterization of Suzzanna in *Sundelbolong* (1981) with that of the two Luna Maya films, each made under a different director; to analyse the producer's role in maintaining iconic identity across those directorial interpretations; to examine the promotional strategy accompanying each release as a means of managing the character as an industrial asset; and to situate the recurring victim-to-avenger transformation within the study of gender representation in Indonesian horror.

METHOD

The study is a qualitative comparative textual analysis of three films, supported by documentary analysis of publicly circulated industry paratexts (Sugiyono, 2019). Because the design sets one baseline text against two later installments of the same franchise, it follows Endraswara's (2014) requirement for comparative research that a valid cross-text comparison rest on an explicit, shared set of comparison points applied consistently to every object. That requirement is operationalised here through Harymawan's (1988) three dimensions of characterization and through the eight comparison aspects set out in Table 3. Validity procedures follow Moleong's (2017) account of *keabsahan data* (data trustworthiness) in the Indonesian qualitative tradition.

Theoretical Framework

Four frameworks are used, each brought to bear at a stated point in the analysis rather than named and abandoned.

Characterization and character arc

Harymawan's (1988) division of characterization into physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions provides the coding frame applied to all three films and governs the comparison reported in Tables 2 and 3. Egri's (1960) account of character change and McKee's (1997) treatment of the arc as the outward sign of an internal transformation forced by conflict supply the vocabulary for describing the movement from victimhood to vengeance, and Lutters' (2004) classification of role types is used to place Suzzanna as protagonist, antagonist, or ambivalent figure in each title.

Adaptation and franchise repetition

Hutcheon (2006) treats every repetition of a story or character in a new medium or installment as an adaptive process that involves variation rather than identical replication, and argues that audiences experience adapted works through a palimpsestuous memory of prior versions, so that each new film in a franchise is read in dialogue with its predecessors. Damono's (2014) concept of *alih wahana* (transposition across media) emphasises the freedom and the responsibility involved in moving a character between media or interpreters, a concept continuous with Eneste's (1991) earlier account of the transformations that occur between novel and film. Jenkins (2006) situates both within convergence culture, in which a character is built to persist across installments, platforms, and audience communities rather than to be contained in a single self-sufficient text. Read together, these sources predict variation at each installment and set the analytical task: to identify which variations are permitted without breaking recognition.

Producership and the character as industrial asset

Vogel's (2020) entertainment industry economics and Caldwell's (2008) production culture treat the producer as the central actor in managing intellectual property as a long-term asset, including through the management of star image (Dyer, 1998; Turner, 2004). Because production culture as Caldwell formulated it rests on industry ethnography and insider fieldwork that this study's public-source approach cannot replicate, the framework is applied here in an adapted form, following Gray's (2010) argument that promotional and paratextual materials are themselves sites of industrial meaning-making rather than peripheral to a real text, and Havens and Lotz's (2016) position that media industry analysis routinely and legitimately builds industrial understanding from public-facing evidence where organisational access is unavailable. Promotional analysis draws on Morissan (2010) and Kotler and Keller (2016) on integrated marketing communications.

Gender representation in horror

Clover (1992) argues that horror repeatedly stages a woman's movement from victimisation to violent, often monstrous, empowerment, and that this movement organises how audiences are positioned to fear and finally to side with the transformed woman. Van Heeren (2012) and Heryanto (2015) describe the Indonesian specificity of that pattern after 1998, in which the position of women is renegotiated between sexualised object and suffering subject who ultimately gains power, often in tension with increasingly prominent Islamic norms in public discourse. This framework is applied at the final stage of the analysis, to the pattern established by the preceding three.

Corpus, Period, and Selection

The corpus comprises three films: *Sundelbolong* (1981, Sisworo Gautama Putra), the baseline in which the character is played by Suzzanna Martha Frederika van Osch herself; *Suzzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018, Rocky Soraya and Anggy Umbara); and *Suzzanna: Malam Jumat Kliwon* (2023, Guntur Soeharjanto), the latter two starring Luna Maya and produced by Soraya Intercine Films. The three were selected purposively as a baseline and two subsequent points in the franchise's development under different directors, each with mature reception and secondary data, which permits longitudinal tracing of variation. Films were viewed in full from commercially released recordings; the 2024 installment is excluded for the reasons given in the Introduction. The secondary corpus consists of approximately thirty-five items published between 2018 and 2024, spanning the release window of each film and the period of writing.

Data Collection

Collection combined documentation and observation (Arikunto, 2010). Primary data consist of complete viewings of the three films, observed with the formal vocabulary described by Bordwell and Thompson (2008) and attending to mise-en-scène, framing, and narrative structure, in order to identify the characterization elements present in each title. Secondary data comprise media articles, producer and director interviews, critics' reviews, and prior academic studies, drawn from Indonesian entertainment news outlets, the production house's official promotional channels, and film-criticism platforms. Items were included where they directly quoted the producer, a director, or the lead performer on characterization, casting, or promotional strategy, or where they documented a promotional event such as a press conference or trailer launch; items that merely recirculated such material without attribution were excluded. This corpus was used to reconstruct production context and the promotional strategy accompanying each release.

Data Validation and Analysis

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, each film was coded in two passes following the procedure described by Miles et al. (2014): an open-coding pass recording any textually salient characterization detail, followed by a pattern-coding pass that sorted the open codes into the physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions for each film. Second, the coded results were compared across films to separate elements consistently preserved from elements varying by director, which yielded Tables 2 and 3. Third, the producer's role in maintaining that consistency was analysed against the secondary corpus, with particular attention to statements attributable to the producer. Fourth, each film's promotional strategy was analysed from publicly circulated promotional material and launch coverage, treating those paratexts, after Gray (2010), as primary evidence of industrial meaning-making in their own right.

Credibility was established through source triangulation (Moleong, 2017), in which direct observation of the films was compared with secondary data from independent outlets so that no interpretation of producership or promotion rested on a single, potentially interested source. Where accounts diverged, the interpretation reported here retains only what two or more independent sources support. Triangulation of this kind strengthens but does not substitute for access to internal production records, a constraint returned to in the methodological reflection below.

Research Ethics and Positionality

The study involved no human participants, no fieldwork in a community setting, and no restricted or sacred material, so no institutional ethical approval was required. All films analysed are commercially released works, and all industry material cited is publicly circulated; film titles, performers, and production personnel are named as published. Verbal

and visual material from the films is used within the limits of fair dealing for criticism and review, and is attributed to creator, title, and year. The author has no professional, financial, or personal relationship with Soraya Intercine Films or with any of the performers and directors discussed, and writes as a film scholar rather than as a participant in the production culture analysed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Corpus at a Glance

Table 1 sets out the three films, their directors, and their position in the franchise chronology.

Table 1. Profile of the research objects

Film	Year	Director	Position in the franchise
Sundelbolong	1981	Sisworo Gautama Putra	Baseline; original character played by Suzzanna Martha F. van Osch
Suzzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur	2018	Rocky Soraya and Anggy Umbara	First film of the revitalisation franchise (Luna Maya)
Suzzanna: Malam Jumat Kliwon	2023	Guntur Soeharjanto	Second franchise film

Source: compiled by the author.

The Baseline: Suzzanna in *Sundelbolong* (1981)

In the baseline film Suzzanna is physiologically an adult woman who acquires a transformed mystical body, the *sundel bolong* (a hollow-backed female revenant of Javanese folklore), which becomes the most durable visual marker of the character across her entire legacy. Psychologically she is constructed as a victim of violence who becomes a vengeful supernatural force, with the emphasis falling on explicit horror and mystical visual effect in the manner characteristic of 1980s Indonesian horror. Sociologically, she is placed outside ordinary social structure after her death and transformation, operating within a relatively autonomous supernatural logic detached from conventional norms. The character in 1981, in other words, is defined less by her social situation before death than by the horror mechanics that follow it — a distribution of emphasis that the franchise films will reverse.

Elaboration in *Suzzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018)

In the first franchise film the characterization is elaborated in the psychological and sociological dimensions while the physiological marker is held constant. Luna Maya performs with prosthetic make-up designed to resemble the original Suzzanna's face, and the *sundel bolong* form is retained as the transformation marker. Psychologically the character is given a fuller emotional history: she is a contented wife and expectant mother before she suffers betrayal and violence, which renders the revenge motive more personal and more humane than in the baseline. Sociologically she is embedded in a legible family and factory-community structure before her transformation, which gives her fall a social setting the 1981 film did not supply. The elaboration, in the terms of the framework, is an addition of motive and milieu around an unchanged structural core.

Displacement in *Suzzanna: Malam Jumat Kliwon* (2023)

Under a different director the second franchise film preserves the victim-who-avenges pattern but relocates its social cause. The character is entangled in family debt and is used, in effect, as collateral, a more specifically socioeconomic predicament than the domestic betrayal of the first film. The psychological nuance shifts accordingly, from romantic betrayal towards

economic exploitation, while the basic structure of transformation from victim to avenging force is retained without modification. Physiologically the film again uses prosthetic make-up and the *sundel bolong* form, consistent with the visual approach of its predecessor. What changes between the two franchise films is therefore the account of why this woman is wronged, not the fact that she is wronged, nor what she becomes as a result.

What Is Preserved and What Varies Across Directors

Table 2 summarises the comparison across the three dimensions, separating elements preserved across films from elements left to directorial interpretation.

Table 2. Consistent and varying characterization elements across the three films

Dimension	Consistent elements (preserved)	Varying elements (directorial interpretation)
Physiological	Suzzanna's face as visual reference; *sundel bolong* form as transformation marker	Technical detail of prosthetic make-up and styling
Psychological	Transformation from victim to avenging force	Source of motivation: personal betrayal (2018) against family economic pressure (2023)
Sociological	Membership of society before the central conflict; severance from society after transformation	Specific social context: factory community (2018) against entanglement in family debt (2023)

Source: author's analysis of the three films.

The pattern in Table 2 indicates that although the two Luna Maya films were made by different directors, the basic structure of the character is stable in all three dimensions, and that variation occurs at the level of specific narrative context rather than at the level of structure. This is consistent with Hutcheon's (2006) contention that adaptation and repetition always involve variation, and it specifies where the variation is placed: at the surface of the story, where it refreshes the film, rather than at the structural core, where it would break recognition of the property. It also qualifies Sukatno and Bazaleel's (2014) finding that the vengeful female ghost circulates as a marketable template across unrelated productions; within a single franchise the template is not merely reused but actively policed, with a specific boundary between the revisable and the fixed. Because the pattern rests on only two franchise films it should be read as an indicative trend rather than a settled conclusion.

Table 3 illustrates the procedure at a finer grain, comparing eight aspects across the three films. Two rows are left empty for the 1981 baseline, because preserved iconic elements and the role of veteran supporting cast are by definition retrospective markers: they describe what a later film chooses to carry over from the original, and have no value for the film that is being referred to.

Table 3. Comparison of eight characterization aspects across the three films

Aspect	*Sundelbolong* (1981)	*Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018)	*Malam Jumat Kliwon* (2023)
Primary physical form	*Sundel bolong*	*Sundel bolong*	*Sundel bolong*
Initial social status	Village woman	Wife of a factory owner	Young woman of an indebted family

Aspect	*Sundelbolong* (1981)	*Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018)	*Malam Jumat Kliwon* (2023)
Conflict trigger	Sexual violence and murder	Robbery and murder	Debt collateral
Principal motive	Supernatural revenge	Personal revenge	Revenge for exploitation
Social relations after the conflict	Severed from society	Severed from society	Severed from society
Preserved iconic elements	—	Face, speech style	Face, speech style
Veteran supporting cast	—	Clift Sangra	Clift Sangra
Dominant generic mode	Supernatural horror	Horror family drama	Horror social drama

Source: author's analysis of the three films.

Read against Table 2, the finer comparison confirms that the most consistently preserved elements across the two franchise films are the veteran supporting performer Clift Sangra together with facial reference and speech style, while the socioeconomic context of the conflict trigger is the widest field of cross-directorial variation, without alteration of the primary physical form or of the character's post-transformation social position.

The Producer as Guardian of Iconic Identity

Behind the change of directors, Soraya Intercine Films, with Sunil Soraya present as producer across both franchise films, functions as the guardian of narrative and visual continuity. Media interviews indicate that Rocky Soraya acted as producer and as reshoot director on the first film, which is direct evidence of an active producership intervening in creative outcomes to hold the franchise to a standard, rather than an administrative financing function. This supports Vogel's (2020) and Wasko's (2003) account of producership as the management of brand equity, and specifies the mechanism in a national industry that their largely Anglophone examples do not cover.

The continuity the producer maintains is visible in three practices. The first is consistent casting: Luna Maya plays Suzzanna in both films, which makes her star image in Dyer's (1998) sense, and in Turner's (2004) sense of celebrity as an industrially managed commodity, the stable identity anchor of the franchise across directorial change. The second is deliberate visual and narrative reference to the classic titles, with *Bernafas dalam Lumpur*, *Beranak dalam Kubur*, *Sundelbolong*, *Telaga Angker*, and *Malam Satu Suro* all serving as story references for the first franchise film. The third is the casting of supporting performers from the classic Suzzanna era, above all Clift Sangra, the late Suzzanna's husband, who appears in both franchise titles and functions as a symbolic link between the original legacy and the new interpretation. Continuity, on this evidence, is not a by-product of the text but a set of production decisions taken at the level where directors do not vary.

Promotion as the Industrial Communication of Continuity

The promotional strategy of both franchise films follows the integrated marketing communication principles described by Morissan (2010) and Kotler and Keller (2016): press conferences, official trailer launches, media interviews with the lead performer, and the use of seasonal release windows to maximise attendance, a launch pattern shared with other

Indonesian horror franchises such as *Pengabdi Setan* and *KKN di Desa Penari*. What distinguishes this franchise is the content of the message rather than the channels: promotion consistently foregrounds the return of the horror queen as a nostalgic draw for audiences who remember the original Suzzanna, while simultaneously introducing the new interpretation to younger viewers unfamiliar with the 1980s films.

This is best read as an observable instance of the palimpsestuous memory that Hutcheon (2006) describes in the abstract. The framing works precisely because it asks audiences to read the new film against their memory of the old ones rather than as a self-contained text; in Jenkins' (2006) terms, it is convergence-era franchise-building in practice, in which the character's continuity is not entrusted to the film text alone but constructed through paratextual discourse circulating before, during, and after release. Adaptation theory and promotional analysis are therefore not two parallel explanations of this franchise but two views of one mechanism: repetition-with-variation in the text, and its industrial communication to audiences.

The pattern also extends Iskandar's (2024) finding on user-generated content, though with a qualification. Iskandar reports that audience review and online discussion lengthen a film's promotional cycle; here the discussion that circulates is specifically argument about the new interpretation's fidelity to the original legacy, so the property's history supplies the controversy that extends the exposure. Fidelity debate, from the producer's standpoint, is not a risk to be managed but a promotional resource that a newly invented character could not generate. The constancy of the framing across both releases shows that promotion, like characterization, is managed as part of a sustained franchise identity rather than redesigned at each launch.

The Gendered Structure of the Victim-to-Avenger Arc

The fourth aim concerns gender. Clover's (1992) argument that horror's recurring movement of a wronged woman from victimisation to violent, monstrous empowerment is constitutive of how the genre organises identification and fear applies closely to Suzzanna's basic structure, which is preserved in all three films analysed here. Van Heeren (2012) and Heryanto (2015) add the Indonesian specificity: post-reform horror renegotiates the position of female characters between sexualised object and suffering subject who finally gains power, often in tension with increasingly prominent Islamic norms in public discourse. Both franchise films display this pattern. Suzzanna is introduced as a woman compliant with her domestic role — a loyal wife in 2018, a family member sacrificing herself to settle a debt in 2023 — before suffering triggers the transformation.

Set beside the producership and promotion findings, the gendered arc appears to be more than a textual regularity. The element the producer most consistently protects across directorial change is precisely the element Clover identifies as the source of the genre's narrative satisfaction. This suggests, tentatively, that gendered narrative satisfaction and industrial brand management are mutually reinforcing rather than independent explanations of the franchise's durability: the structure is protected because it works, and it works, in part, because of how it positions its audience in relation to a woman's suffering and retribution. The present data can identify this convergence but cannot test it, which is why the reception research proposed in the conclusion matters for the argument rather than merely completing it.

Character as a Franchise Asset

Across the four axes the same finding recurs: in Indonesian horror franchise production the Suzzanna character functions doubly, as a narrative unit open to interpretation by successive directors and as an industrial asset managed by the producer across projects. Managing that asset means holding a deliberate balance between continuity — through star image, visual

reference to the original legacy, and cross-generational casting — and variation, through each director's freedom over the narrative context that frames an unchanged core. Decisions that appear purely creative, such as the choice of a specific social predicament for each film, are in practice also decisions about which contemporary social concerns will resonate with audiences at the moment of release.

Table 4 places the study against prior research on the Suzzanna films and on Indonesian film promotion and industry.

Table 4. Objects, analytical focus, and principal findings of prior research and of the present study

Study	Object and focus	Principal finding
Universitas Jember thesis (2021)	*Sundelbolong* and *Bernapas dalam Kubur*; three-dimensional characterization	Marked difference in the psychological dimension between the two films
Pious-wife image study (2022)	*Bernapas dalam Kubur*; Islamic representation	Suzzanna represented as a pious wife through visual symbolism
Debby et al. (2020)	Indonesian horror film; reception analysis	Contemporary audiences re-signify sacred elements through desacralisation
Setiadarma (2024)	*13 Bom di Jakarta*; integrated promotion	Integrated marketing communication builds emotional ties with the target market
Iskandar (2024)	Indonesian film promotion on social media	User-generated content extends the promotional cycle in digital space
Present study (2025)	Three Suzzanna films; characterization, producership, promotion, gender	The producer preserves the basic character structure amid directorial variation, in alignment with a gendered victim-to-avenger arc

Source: compiled by the author.

The comparison clarifies the contribution. Where earlier studies of these films analyse one title, or two, along a single axis, the present study extends the longitudinal scope to three points in the character's history and integrates axes that have been handled separately. The integration is not additive but explanatory: the producership finding accounts for the stability that the characterization analysis observes, the promotion finding accounts for how that stability is made legible to audiences, and the gender finding accounts for why this particular stable structure is worth protecting.

Implications for Icon-Based Franchise Management

Three practical implications follow for production houses developing franchises around iconic characters, particularly in genres that draw on popular cultural heritage. First, consistency of lead casting proves a more stable identity anchor than consistency of director, which suggests that long-term investment in a single performer's star image may be more efficient than retaining the same creative team for every title. Second, the basic structure of the character, the transformation from victim to avenging force, is the element that must be strictly preserved, while the narrative context that frames it can be revised freely without cost to recognition. Third, casting supporting performers from the original character's era, as with Clift Sangra across both films, is an inexpensive and effective mechanism of symbolic bridging between an old legacy and a new interpretation, and is replicable in other Indonesian franchises built on popular-culture icons.

Methodological Reflection

Combining textual analysis with industry paratexts bridges narrative and production context, which are rarely handled within one framework. This should not be read only as a compromise forced by limited access: as Gray (2010) and Havens and Lotz (2016) argue, public-facing industrial material is a legitimate and increasingly standard evidentiary basis for media industry research. At the same time, the absence of internal production records such as creative meeting minutes or early script drafts means that the account of the producer's strategic reasoning remains a reconstruction from public sources rather than documentation of the decisions themselves. The adapted use of Caldwell's (2008) framework described in the Method section is designed to acknowledge that constraint rather than obscure it. Relatedly, all interpretations reported here are qualitative: the classification of elements as consistent or varying in Tables 2 and 3 results from the two-pass coding procedure applied to the author's reading of the films, not from standardised measurement against quantitative thresholds, and no box-office data or inferential testing is involved.

CONCLUSION

Suzzanna's characterization holds a stable basic structure across the three films examined: a wronged woman who returns as a vengeful supernatural force, from the 1981 baseline through both Luna Maya films. Variation across films is concentrated in the sociological dimension, moving from a motif of personal domestic betrayal in *Bernapas dalam Kubur* to one of family economic pressure in *Malam Jumat Kliwon*, while the physiological and psychological dimensions remain largely constant. Behind that contextual variation, the producer actively maintains iconic identity through three mechanisms: consistency of casting, deliberate visual and narrative reference to the original Suzzanna titles, and the recurring presence of performers from the classic era. Promotion is designed in alignment with the same identity, using the return of the horror queen as a nostalgic frame that reaches two generations of audience at once. The recurring victim-to-avenger arc, finally, places the franchise within a gendered pattern that is constitutive of modern horror and specific, in its negotiation of compliance and power, to post-reform Indonesian cinema.

The study's contribution is to show that these are not four findings but one. Character in this franchise operates simultaneously as a narrative unit and as an industrial asset, and the boundary between what may be varied and what must be preserved is drawn by the producer rather than by any individual director. For the study of local culture the implication is methodological as much as substantive: the analysis of a popular-cultural icon requires the textual and the industrial to be read together, since the reasons a character changes lie partly outside the film in which the change appears. For practitioners the implication is that an icon-based franchise is sustained by casting and structural discipline rather than by creative continuity in the director's chair.

Four limitations qualify these conclusions. The account of producership and promotion rests on public secondary material rather than on interviews with the producer, so the reasoning behind production decisions remains inferential. The study incorporates neither box-office data nor audience reception testing, so the effectiveness of the promotional strategies analysed here, and the gendered reading of the arc, remain textual inferences rather than demonstrated audience effects. Only two franchise films are examined, so the pattern of character management identified here is an indicative trend rather than a settled regularity. And the study addresses a single Indonesian horror franchise, which sets a limit on how far the pattern can be generalised.

Each limitation indicates the research that should follow. Interviews with producers, directors, and the marketing team would test the reconstruction offered here against first-hand industry accounts. Audience surveys or sentiment analysis would establish whether viewers actually

perceive the continuity and variation identified textually, and how they respond to the victim-to-avenger arc. The third Suzzanna installment, *Suzzanna: Santet, Dosa di Atas Dosa*, is the most immediate opportunity of all: because early coverage suggests it presents Suzzanna as fully human rather than through the *sundel bolong* transformation preserved in the first two franchise films, a study of that title is well placed to test whether the physiological consistency identified here as a stable marker can itself be varied without damage to the franchise's identity, or whether it is a harder constraint than the sociological variation observed so far. Comparative work on other Indonesian franchises, and on international horror franchises that revitalise older icons, would establish how far the pattern is specific to the Indonesian industry. A further line, untouched here, concerns financing arrangements and contract negotiation among producer, directors, and lead performer, which may offer additional explanation for the creative dynamics traced in this article through text and paratext alone.

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Data availability. The complete characterization worksheets for the three films, the two-pass coding record described in the Method section, and the compilation of secondary sources on production and promotion are held by the author and are available on reasonable request. The summaries presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 represent the principal patterns identified in the full analysis.

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