

SEMIOTIC OF SOUND TECHNIQUE IMPACTING THE UNDERSTANDING IN HORROR GENRE SHORT FILM “HAWA” (2016)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the sound technique that is used to analyse the structure of sound in “*Hawa*”, Directed by Tan Ce Ding in 2016, a short horror film about a girl who is being locked inside her room by her parents due to her infection. Using semiotic analysis, this research studied their sound technique that they employ to convey a message in each scene. To comprehend how the techniques of various noises used in motion pictures, as well as the temporal evolution of sound energy, create an emotional experience for the audience. In the context of multimedia content analysis and indexing, qualitative methodologies have already been applied to horror film soundtracks. It was decided to use a qualitative research strategy, and more precisely, a hybrid technique that combines thematic analysis with semiotics content analysis. This method was chosen because it was necessary to find, code, classify, and count both obvious and latent meanings in the written responses of the audiences. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the audience’s understanding in *Hawa* film directed by Tan Ce Ding, that can elicit horror understanding and feeling. Such as the existence of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, contrapuntal sound, parallel sound, and sound bridge can imply to the understanding.

Keywords: Sound design, sound technique, thematic analysis, short horror, semiotic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Sound can play an important role in a film to create the role of the different story or mood in a certain type of movie. Such as in a horror film, the frightening or high scale of sound can create a frightening experience for the viewer (Grøn, 2013). Based on William Whittington, he writes that “in general, horror films use music and sound effects to establish emotive intensity and impact far more aggressively and conceptually than any other genre” (Whittington, 2007). The use of sound design can perceive and interpret the whole image of the scenario for the movie and create the sense of realism and coherence feeling to the viewers and keep the whole scenario of the film balanced with visual and audio.

The study of sign code and norms is called semiotic analysis, it is a method to express what the meaning code listen by the listeners. It is crucially important that no object or word is meaningless. Including the sound design and technique used in *Hawa*. Analysing and

comprehending the signs in the film is not easy to predict, but we can apply a semiotic technique to extract the meaning presented in the sound film. Semiotics, according to Benny Hoed (2011: 3), is the study of signs or the science that analyses the signs in humans.

Semiotics assists the viewer to comprehend the film's context, allowing them to go further into the story and learn more about the characters. The primary function of a theatre is to convey signals to the receiver, which is the audience. This does not imply that the audience will understand exactly what the director's message; the audience will interpret the message differently according to their beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with semiotics.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Talking about film of art, films have their own unique ability to attract their audience into the individual's world itself. The audience can be confronted with a different representation or portrayal of reality when watching a film. Also, because of its power to engage audiences to another era, whether past or future, film might be considered a partly time machine. But talking about film, most of the audience will be crucial talking about how exclusive the visual components were edited in the film, i.e., cinematography. The sound components of film will be unjustly ignored by the audience. Hence, how many of us know who does know the sound design or techniques used in film (Schweitzer, 2004).

OBJECTIVES

This research will study on what are the technique used in the various noises in "*Hawa*". It will study about the sound design used to convey a message in a selected scene. And also describe the attention of sound design in this short film.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher will be using qualitative methods. For a deeper knowledge of the research, it is important to analyse the data to allow for more depth of information. This research is more into depth of desk research, and the data collection technique is divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. The 15 minutes short film "*Hawa*" serves as the study's principal source of information. In addition, secondary data is gathered from libraries, journals, and certain online sources.

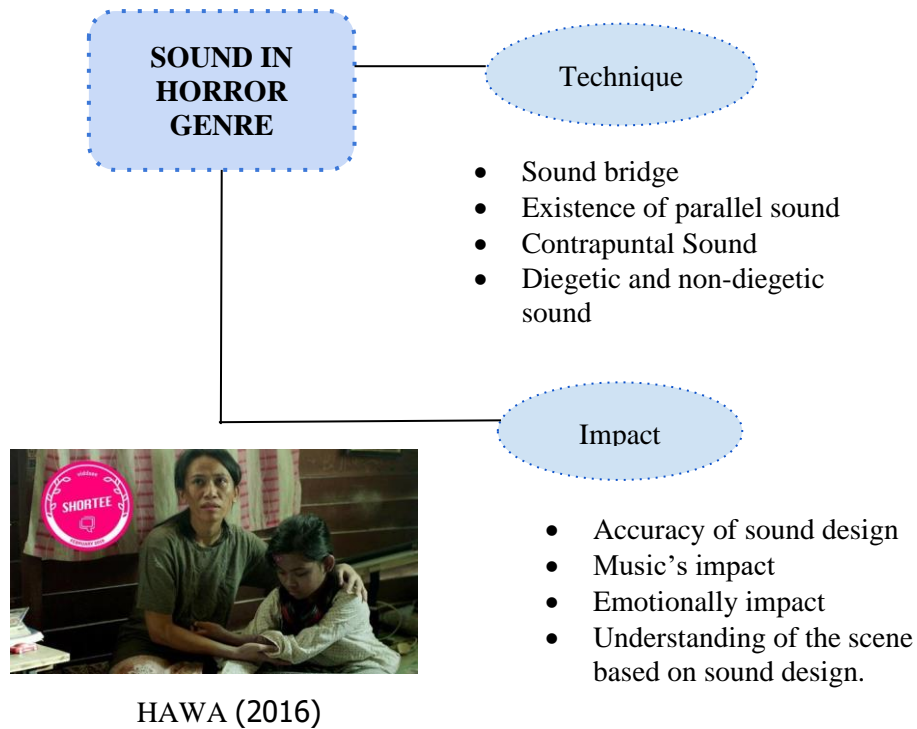
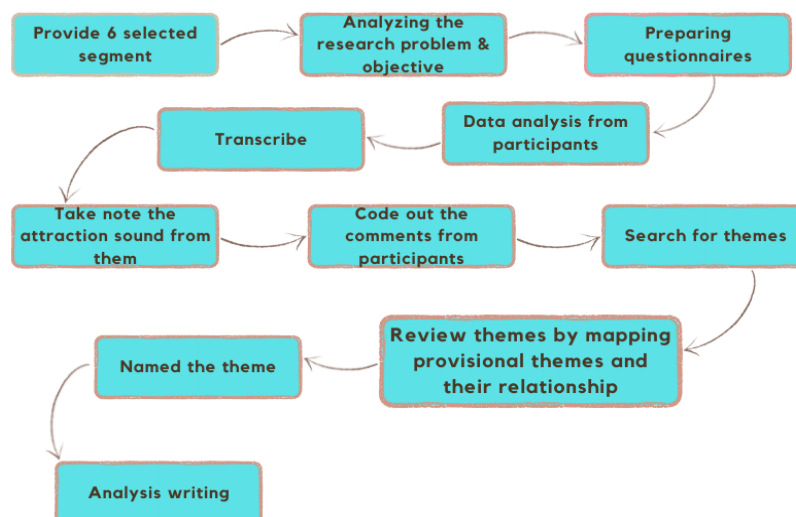


Figure 1. Writer's conceptual framework

The collected data in this short film “*Hawa*” will be analysed using the thematic implication, which will be focusing on the way the film portrays or conveys their messages to the audience using the various techniques in sound designs. The techniques in this film were evaluated using a descriptive qualitative technique and a semiotics analysis method, examining the meanings and how those sound designs portray the message and represent the movie's theme based on the researcher's understanding.



Source: Doing a Thematic Analysis: A practical step-by-step for learning and teaching scholars by Moira Maguire & Brid Delahunt (2017).

Figure 2 Process of thematic analysis in the research

Provided 6 selected segment- Instead of selecting the whole segment of the entire film. Author had chosen 6 segments from this film to extract as for the research study. **Analysing the research problem and objective-** To extract the 6 selected segments, researcher needs to do in-depth review on this film and keep watch this film for several time, that can be identify which segment to select for research. **Preparing questionnaires-** This part will be very broad, easy research topic for the sake of this exercise: What are viewer impressions of feedback? This is an extract from a genuine focus group (group interview) with visual art students and film industrial expert as part of a research that investigated sound design and technique used in “Hawa” that elicit understanding feedback. **Data analysis from participants-** Braun and Clarke (2006) present a six-phase guidance that is a highly effective foundation for undertaking this type of study (see Table 1).

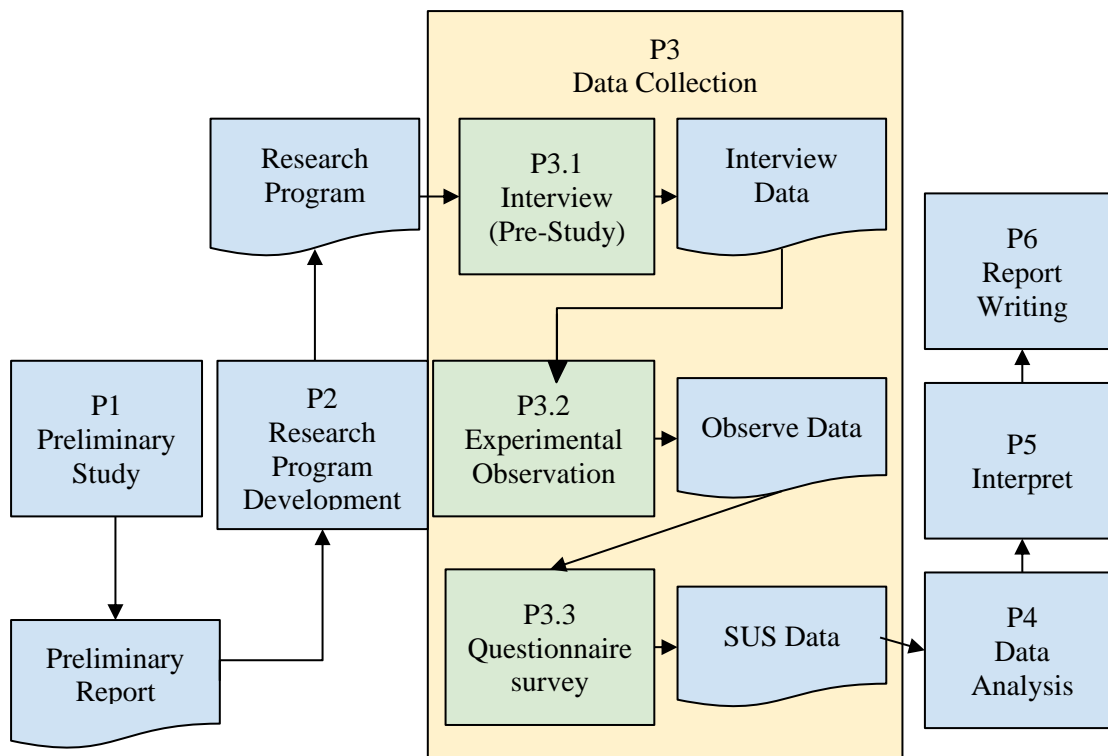
Table 1 Braun & Clarke's six phase framework for thematic analysis process

Step 1: Get familiar with the data.	Step 4: Review themes
Step 2: Generate initial codes.	Step 5: Define themes.
Step 3: Search for themes	Step 6: Write-up

Source: Maguire & Delahunt (2017)

Transcribe- The first stage in any qualitative study is to read and re-read the transcripts. Before proceeding, you should be highly comfortable with your complete body of data or data corpus (i.e., all the interviews and any other data you may be utilizing). Making notes and jotting down early impressions is helpful at this point. **Code out the comments from participant-** In this step, we begin to organize our data in a meaningful and methodical manner. Coding breaks down large amounts of data into little morsels of meaning. We need to answering research questions and analyse the data accordingly; therefore this was a theoretical theme analysis rather than an inductive one. As a result, coded every segment of data that was related to or captured anything noteworthy about our study issue. Researcher did not code every line of text. If conducting a more inductive analysis, it may have utilized line-by-line coding to code every single line. Researcher employed open coding, which means did not use pre-set codes and instead developed and adjusted them as went through the coding process (Victoria Clarke & Virginia Braun, 2013).

Search for themes- In this case, we evaluated the codes and saw that some of them obviously matched together to form a theme. For instance, we had various codes relating to opinions on film understanding from feedback. We compiled these into an initial theme called The Purpose of Feedback. **Review themes-** Researcher examine, adjust, and refine the preliminary topics throughout this phase. Researcher read the data connected with each theme and determined if the data actually supported it. The next step is to consider if the themes make sense in the context of the complete data set. **Name the theme-** This is the ultimate refining of the themes, with the goal of identifying the "essence" of what each topic is about (Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2006). What does the theme mean? If subthemes exist, how do they interact with and connect to the primary theme? How are the topics related to one another? **Analysing writing-** The ultimate result of research is usually some form of report, such as a journal article or dissertation (Moira Maguire & Brid Delahunt, 2017) .



Source: Investigating quality of institutional repository website design using usability testing framework, 2021 (<https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0041677>)

Figure 3. Thematic Analysis Process using QDA Miner Lite

To study and observe the impact of sound technique in horror in audience's feeling, preliminary research (P1) was conducted by reviewing relevant literature and then continuously watching/listening on the "Hawa". The researchers then devised research programs in the form of research proposals for the purpose of proposing research implementation (P2). The researchers then chose the framework for usability testing.

The two qualitative data collecting processes were then implemented in this study, following the research framework (P3). The participants were prompted to answer a structured interview regarding their data and general knowledge of the sound design that can affect the audience's expectation or understanding in selected scenes through the film (interview data), steps (P3.1). It was to collect demographic information about the participants, such as personal information, understanding information, and general knowledge of what makes them interested when watching or listening to horror films the most. The participants were directed to complete four segments of tasks in the experience observation step (P3.2), and their activities were observed to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the sound technique used in that film, as well as their response during the task completion. The questionnaires of the participants were prepared using Google Form. The System Usability Scale (SUS) Questionnaires (Table 2) were presented to the participants in the last data collecting stage (P3.3) to measure the semiotic value of the film.

The thematic analysis was used to evaluate the understanding of the sound technique in *Hawa* can bring understanding and satisfaction replies using the QDA Miner Lite program. The thematic questions will be prepared by the researcher based on the suitability of the research question (Table 3). The researcher will categorize the theme into feeling, expectation, understanding and attraction to the sound. To calculate the SUS score, sum the contribution

scores of each item first. The score contribution for odd items is the scale position minus 1. The contribution for even items is 5 minus the scale position. To calculate the overall SUS score, multiply the total score by 2.5 (Aang Subiyakto, Yuliza Rahmi, Nia Kumaladewi, M. Qomarul Huda, Nidaul Hasanati & Tri Haryanto, 2021).

In the interpretation step, the researcher then interprets the results based on the threshold values and writes out the collected data based on the researcher's understanding (Aang Subiyakto, Yuliza Rahmi, Nia Kumaladewi, M. Qomarul Huda, Nidaul Hasanati & Tri Haryanto, 2021).

Table 2. SUS Questionnaires

Segment	Questions
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I found the sound in the film is clear and easy to understand. 2. I was able to follow the storyline of the film without difficulty. 3. The sound effects in the film enhanced my understanding of what was happening on screen. 4. The overall sound quality of this scene was satisfactory. 5. The sound in the film helped me to feel more engaged with this scene. 6. I felt that the sound in this scene added to my overall empathy for the viewing experience. 7. The sound in the film helped me to better understand the situation. 8. The sound in the film helped me to better understand the characters' emotions and motivations. 9. The sound in the film was well-balanced and not distracting. 10. The sound in the film added value to my overall understanding and appreciation of this scene.
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sound design in this film helped me to understand the story better. 2. The use of music in this film added to the emotional impact of the story. 3. The sound in this film was mixed in a way that enhanced my emotional engagement with the story. 4. The sound in this film was appropriate for the tone and style of the story. 5. The sound in this film was consistently well-designed and intentional. 6. The sound in this film made me feel more connected to the characters and their experiences. 7. The sound effects in this film were effective at creating a sense of realism. 8. The sound in this film was balanced and didn't overpower the dialogue. 9. The use of silence or quiet moments in the sound design added to the overall impact of the story. 10. Overall, the sound design in this film was effective at conveying the intended emotional impact and enhancing my overall experience.

3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sound design in this film helped me to understand the characters' emotions and motivations. 2. The use of sound effects in this film created a sense of tension or suspense that added to the overall impact of the story. 3. The sound design in this film helped to create a sense of atmosphere and setting. 4. The use of silence or quiet moments in the sound design added to the overall tension and impact of the story. 5. The sound design in this film was consistent and cohesive, helping to create a unified and immersive experience. 6. The sound effects in this film were realistic and effective at creating a sense of danger or threat. 7. The sound in this film was varied and interesting, adding to the overall richness of the experience. 8. The use of silence or quiet moments in the sound design added to the overall impact of the story. 9. The sound in this film helped to create a sense of pacing and rhythm. 10. Overall, the sound design in this film was effective at conveying both understanding and emotional impact, while also creating a sense of tension and suspense.
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sound design in this film helped me to understand the character's feelings and motivations. 2. The use of sound effects in this film created a sense of danger or threat that added to the overall impact of the story. 3. The sound design in this film helped to create a sense of space and setting. 4. The sound in this film was mixed in a way that helped to draw me into the story and kept me engaged. 5. The use of music in this film effectively conveyed the mood and emotional tone of the story. 6. The sound design in this film was consistent and cohesive, helping to create a unified and immersive experience. 7. The sound design in this film was innovative and original, contributing to the overall impact of the story. 8. The sound design in this film helped to create a sense of time and place, contributing to the overall atmosphere of the story. 9. The sound effects in this film were creative and effective at conveying the intended sense of danger or threat.
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The use of silence or quiet moments in the sound design added to the overall tension and impact of the story. 2. The sound design in this film was consistent and cohesive, helping to create a unified and immersive experience. 3. The sound effects in this film were realistic and effective at creating a sense of threat or danger. 4. The sound design in this film helped me to understand the character's feelings and motivations. 5. The use of sound effects in this film created a sense of danger or threat that added to the suspense of the story. 6. The sound design in this film helped to create a sense of time and place, contributing to the overall atmosphere of the story. 7. The use of sound design in this film helped to build and release tension throughout the story. 8. The sound in this film was mixed in a way that helped to draw me into the story and kept me engaged. 9. The sound in this film was appropriate for the genre and style of the story. 10. Overall, the sound design in this film was effective at conveying both understanding and emotional impact, while also creating a sense of threat and tension.

6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sound design in this film helped me to understand the character's feelings and motivations. 2. The sound in this film was balanced and didn't overpower the dialogue. 3. The use of silence or quiet moments in the sound design added to the overall impact of the story. 4. The sound design in this film was memorable and helped to create a lasting impression. 5. The use of music in this film added to the emotional impact of the story. 6. The sound design in this film was distracting or took away from the emotional impact of the story. 7. The sound in this film made me feel more connected to the characters and their experiences. 8. The sound in this film was consistently well-designed and intentional. 9. The sound effects in this film were realistic and convincing. 10. Overall, the sound design in this film added to my enjoyment and emotional engagement with the story.
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Source: Writer's constructed questions

Table 3 Thematic Questions

Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are your overall impressions of the sound in the film? How would you describe the use of sound in this film? 2. How did the sound impact your emotional response to the film? Did it help create a particular mood or atmosphere? 3. What specific sounds stood out to you in the film? Why did they catch your attention? 4. Were there any moments in the film where the sound felt particularly effective or ineffective? Can you describe these moments in detail? 5. How did the volume and balance of the sound elements in the film impact your viewing experience?

Source: Writer's constructed questions

RESULT AND FINDINGS

A. Semiotic Sound Technique Impact the Horror Understanding

Generally, horror films work to make the audience feel scared and uncomfortable (Khan, 2020). In the realm of horror films, the importance of sound in creating an immersive and terrifying atmosphere cannot be overstated. While visuals play a crucial role in conveying the message of the story, it is the sound design that truly heightens the audience's emotional and physiological responses, plunging them into a state of fear and anxiety (Malone, 2023). By utilizing a range of sound techniques such as sound bridge, parallel sound, contrapuntal sound, diegetic and non-diegetic sound techniques, filmmakers can manipulate the audience's perception of reality and elicit a visceral response to horror (Sound Techniques In Film, n.d.).

In the short horror film "*Hawa*," directed by Tan Ce Ding, the filmmakers utilized various sound design techniques to create a truly terrifying experience for the audience. The

visuals of the film set the stage for the horror story, but it is through the sound that the audience truly becomes engaged and involved in the story.

Table 4 Segregated 6 segments with selected scene

(a)  1:01-1:14	(b)  1:51-2:00	(c)  2:15-2:44
(d)  6:57-7:49	(e)  2:02-2:13	(f)  12:24-12:36
(g)  0:00-0:15	(h)  13:34-13:48	(i)  12:24-12:36
(j)  9:35-10:08		

Source: Horror Short Film “*Hawa*” | ALTER (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRVcMyQ-UY>)

Table 5 Semiotic Analysis on sound technique in “*Hawa*”

Figure	Signifier	Signified	Connotation	Technique
(a)	Parent’s conversation	Distance to sound source	The explanation to another next scene	Sound Bridge Technique
(b)	High pitch of sound effect	Push the plot forward	Tension, fear, and suspense from being careful	
(c)	Boy playing at the outside	Outside source of sound	The explanation to another next scene will be at outside	
(d)	Zombie attacking sound	Threatening sound	Fear, tension, and suspense from zombie attack	

(e)	Nature ambience sound	Create an illusion of calm surrounding	The loneliness and sorrow facing by “ <i>Hawa</i> ”	Parallel Sound
(f)	Low growling sound	Reveal current condition from the actor	Infection starts to strike from her	
(g)	Screeching sound	Facing uneasy problem	“ <i>Hawa</i> ” is having a delusional about her past	Contrapuntal Sound
(h)	Melancholy music	To create a sad ending that did not match the visual on purpose	Sad with helpless ending	
(i)	Heavy gasping sound	Threatening	Increase the intensity of her infection	Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Sound
(j)	Zombie eating flesh	The monster is dangerous	The zombie is eating flesh that not far from “ <i>Hawa</i> ’s” current location	

Source: Semiotic analysed by writer

In the case of “*Hawa*,” we can listen sound design team employs these techniques to evoke a sense of horror, emotion and heartbroken towards the end in the audience, drawing them into the story and leaving a lasting impact. Through the semiotic implication of sound technique, “*Hawa*” presents a multi-layered and deeply unsettling exploration of the human psyche, revealing the power of sound in shaping our emotional responses and perceptions of the world around us (Ding, 2023).

B. Thematic Implication Results

Table 4 presents the profiles of 80 test subjects (21 men 59 women). The age ranges of the participants were from 20 to 26 years old. 3 reported that they find it hard to understand the film sound, and the rest said they did understand. The test on participants was explained and verbal consent was given to them. They were informed they will watch a 15-minute short film, then write down their feedback about the selected 6 segmented on the printed questionnaire.

Table 6. Participant general background

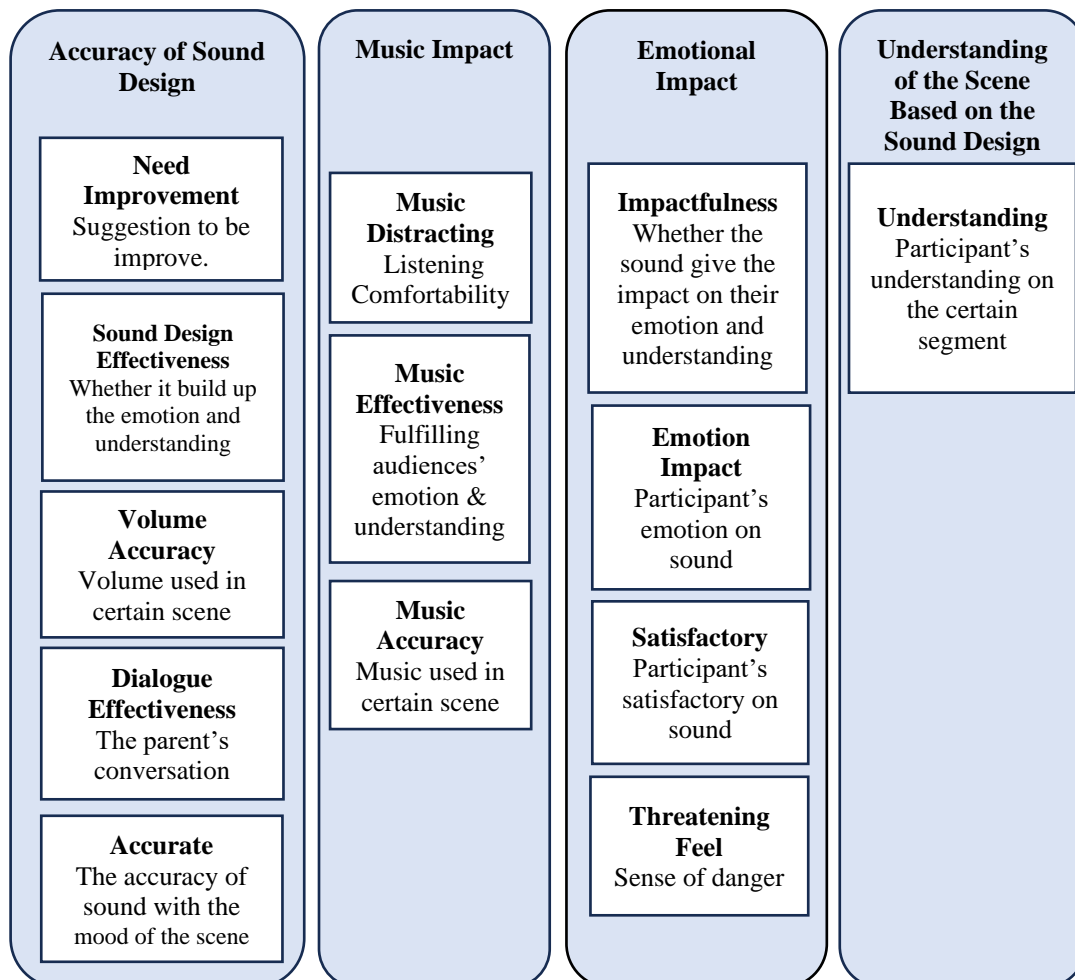
Profiles	Characteristics	Numbers	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	26.2
	Female	59	73.8
Age	20 years old	5	6.3
	21 years old	57	71.3
	22 years old	13	16.3
	23 years old	4	5
	26 years old	1	1.3
Status in Bachelor	Year 1	80	100
Watch Movies	Daily	5	6.3
	2-3 times per week	25	31.3
	Once per week	14	17.5
	1-2 times per month	22	27.5
	Less than a month	14	17.5

Source: 80 participant’s questionnaire result

Table 7. Review Theme

Accuracy of Sound Design	Music Impact	Emotional Impact to Audience	Understanding of the Scene Based on the Sound Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accurate ○ Need Improvement ○ Volume Accurate ○ Volume Not Accurate ○ Sound Design Effective ○ Sound Design Ineffective ○ Zombie Sound Effective ○ Shooting Sound Ineffective ○ Shooting Sound Effective ○ Zombie Sound Ineffective ○ Dialogue Ineffective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Music Distracting ○ Music Effective ○ Music Ineffective ○ Music Not Accurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More Impact ○ Not Much Impact ○ Engaging ○ Emotion Impact ○ Not Satisfactory ○ Average ○ Threatening Feel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Easy Understand

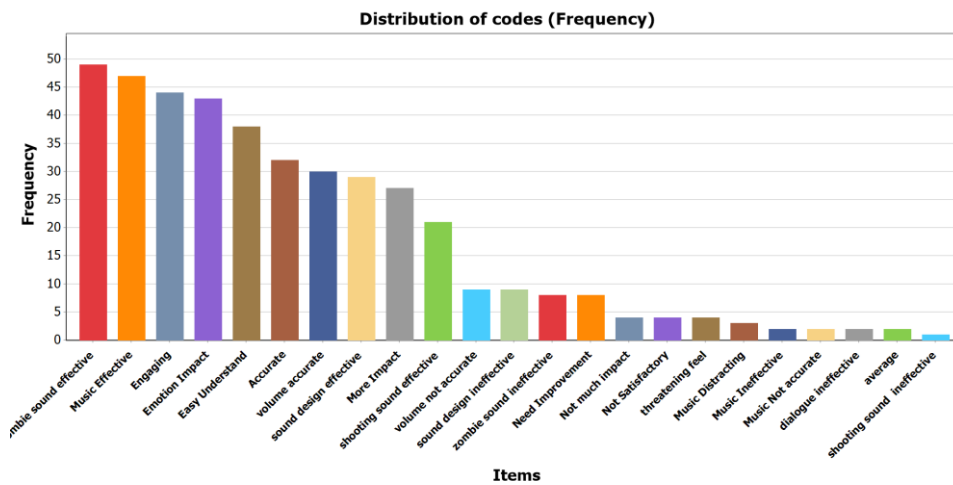
Source: Reviewed themes by writer



Source: Defined theme by writer

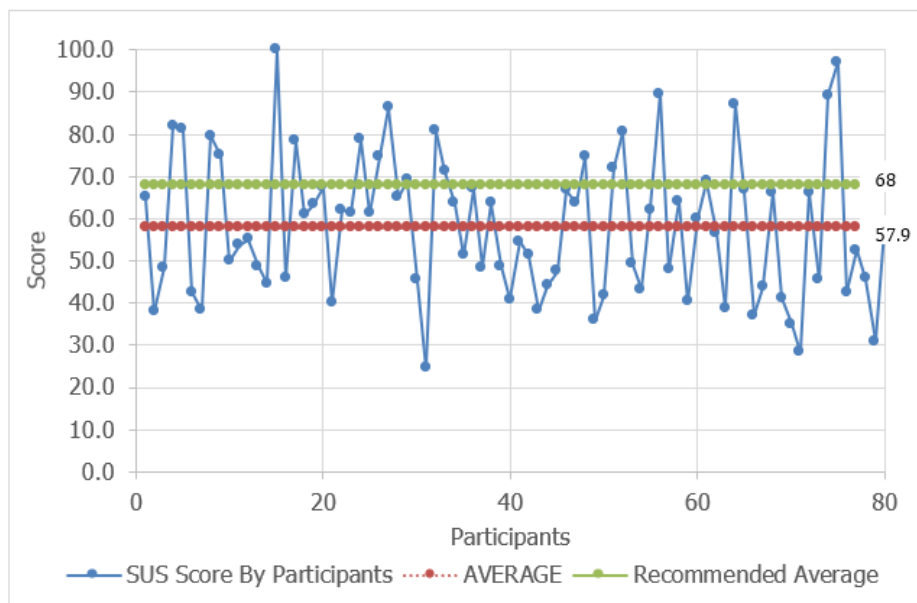
Figure 4 Defined Theme with explanation

Based on Table 7, the study found that while the sound design in the film was effective in some aspects, there were areas that needed improvement. In Figure 4, Participants suggested adjusting the sound levels of dialogue (diegetic sound technique) and background sound (non-diegetic sound technique) to enhance clarity and reduce distractions. Some zombie sounds were criticized for being unrealistic, while the loud shooting sound (non-diegetic sound technique) was praised for being effective in creating tension. In terms of music impact, viewers appreciated the role of music in enhancing emotional impact but noted that it could also be distracting if not used effectively. The emotionally impactful sound design was found to effectively contribute to the overall experience, but some participants felt that there were glitches and cracking sounds that detracted from their experience. Lastly, the sound design and music were found to be crucial in conveying information to viewers and helping them to understand the characters and the story (Armendariz, Cynthia Núñez, 2017).



Source: Frequency of coded theme questionnaire answered by 80 participants using QDA Miner Lite

Figure 5(a) Frequency of the coded theme using QDA Miner Lite



Source: SUS Score result based on table 2 questionnaire

Figure 5 (b) SUS Score By 80 Participants

The qualitative data analysis from the participants, using the QDA Miner lite tool, showed that zombie sound and music's effectiveness has become the most topic being mentioned by the participants. Followed by these both sounds had made them become more engaging and have emotional impact on them. Moreover, it also makes them more understand about the story flow for every segment (Figure 5 (a)). The satisfaction value (Figure 5 (b)) of the SUS score was 57.9 points, which is lower than the recommended score by Brooke, 68 points.

CONCLUSION

This research question for this dissertation is to extent the sound design to influence the understanding of the audio-visual for this horror short story. To address the research question, this study is about the correlation between the sound design that create the code of the connotation. In conclusion, this feedback study on the sound design and music of a film has highlighted the importance of accurate sound design, effective music usage, emotional impact, and the role of sound in understanding scenes in film. While there were some criticisms and suggestions for improvement, overall, the study showed that the sound design and music effectively conveyed information to the viewers and helped them to better understand the characters and story. The study also revealed that the effectiveness of sound and music in film is subjective and varies from person to person. The findings of this study can be used to inform future filmmakers and sound designers on the importance of paying attention to the accuracy of sound, the use of music to enhance the emotional impact of a scene, and the role of sound in helping viewers understand the story and characters.

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INFORMANT

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