

From Demons to Droids: A Comparative Study of Supernatural and AI Horror in Global Cinema

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Abstract

Horror cinema has continually evolved to mirror society's prevailing fears, shifting from supernatural narratives rooted in folklore and religion to technologically driven anxieties surrounding artificial intelligence. This study presents a comparative analysis of supernatural and AI horror by examining their narrative structures, visual aesthetics, audience responses, and theoretical underpinnings. Drawing on Noël Carroll's concept of the supernatural as a violation of the natural order and Baudrillard's notion of simulated realities, the research investigates films such as *Annabelle*, *M3GAN*, *Tatya Vinchu* (India), and *Putuler Protishodh* (Bangladesh). Supernatural horror often relies on chaotic, demonic forces and spiritual themes, resonating strongly in cultures with deep-rooted beliefs in the paranormal. In contrast, AI horror introduces humanlike yet emotionally detached antagonists, exemplified by the Uncanny Valley effect, which heightens unease through artificial realism. Findings reveal that while AI horror is gaining global prominence with the rise of digital technologies, supernatural horror retains its cultural significance, especially in regions where spiritual beliefs prevail. The study concludes that horror cinema remains a powerful lens through which societal anxieties are explored, continually adapting to reflect fears both ancient and modern.

Keywords: AI Horror, Baudrillard's Simulacra, Demonic Possession, Technological Anxiety, Uncanny Valley Theory

1. Introduction

For generations now, horror cinema holds a funhouse mirror to the world, evolving in parallel with major cultural, technological and philosophical developments. Conventional horror films have often drawn upon supernatural content, including fetishistic objects or ideas such as possessions and demonic creatures rooted in religious and folkloric metaphysics (Botting, 2005). This supernatural horror series includes technically equipped dolls like *Child's Play* (1988), *Bride of Chucky* (1998), *Curse of Chucky* (2013), and *Cult of Chucky* (2017), which define the horror subgenre of "killer dolls." Likewise, *Annabelle* (2014) and its prequel *Annabelle: Creation* (2017) and follow-up *Annabelle Comes Home* (2019) serves as an extended universe for the supernatural horror of *The Conjuring* (2013), perpetuating the trope of possessed inanimate objects subject to the influence of an evil spirit. These movies employ traditional horrors (dark cinematography, biblical imaging and gothic horrors) to elicit fear (Freeland, 2018).

With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and the proliferation of smart technology in everyday life, however, horror cinema has begun to reflect a markedly different set of cultural anxieties. The AI horror flicks *M3GAN* (2022) and *Cassandra* (2024) as well as the obsessive exploration of the creepy world of AI-driven horror flicks, which is shifting from supernatural horror to techno-horror and have started to look for human-like AI that can fight back, yet show promise of high relevance, are



reflecting the real dangers of the AI, machine autonomy and ethics of human interaction with AI. Only instead of voodoo curses or demonic possession, Chucky and Annabelle use external supernatural means to explain their malevolent impulses; M₃GAN and Cassandra become horror antagonists through their overreach of technology, intelligence, evolution, or self-learning abilities. Such a shift is in accordance with postmodern horror theories stating that contemporary horror is progressively about socio-existential fears rather than mythical or supernatural enemies (Carroll, 2003).

Old-school horror movies such as *Child's Play* and *Annabelle* peddle fear by playing with centuries-old beliefs in the supernatural. For centuries, the idea of an object possessing or carrying some kind of curse has been a part of horror folklore, with origins as far back as the beginning of time, drawing from religious doctrine and paranormal mythology (Botting, 2005). Chucky, for example, is created when a voodoo ritual by the serial killer Charles Lee Ray leads to his soul being transferred into a doll. The series also holds this thread of supernatural involvement in the mortal realm, similar to the trope seen in other haunted-doll stories like *Annabelle*, the latter which features demonic possession fairly prominently.

M₃GAN and *Cassandra*, by contrast, personify a more immediate dread: the loss of control to artificial intelligence. These films capture the anxieties of an electronic Age of Machines where our equipment is increasingly awake, unpredictable and dangerous. Unlike Chucky and *Annabelle*, who owe their evil-doing to zombie supernatural forces, M₃GAN and *Cassandra* rebel against their creators because of self-learning AI algorithms and emergent behavior. This change corresponds with present day techno-dystopian anxieties, as examined in the likes of *Turkle* (2011), which addresses society's growing reliance on AI-mediated housemates and its ramifications.

The aesthetic distinctions between both genres can as well be highlighted through their cinematography and forms of horror. Common horror movies like *Annabelle* and *Curse of Chucky* use poor lighting, creepy set designs, and gothic horror features to create fear. For scares they rely on jump scares, supernatural shadows and ominous soundscapes. The suggestion of an inhuman spirit or *spiritus mundi* of an outside Manichaeian influence is frequently accompanied by creepy religious iconography, reinforcing the good/evil, heaven/hell tropes.

M₃GAN and *Cassandra*, on the other hand, create a specific type of horror aesthetic relying on the Uncanny Valley effect (Mori et al., 2012). AI characters like M₃GAN are specifically engineered to look and act human-like, but remain in possession of the robotic artifice that leaves audiences feeling unsettled. This consequence is well-established in psychological studies, having found humanoid robots' human-likeness, paired with inhuman expressions, results in discomfort and fear (MacDorman & Ishiguro, 2006). AI horror movies tend to emphasize cold, sterile environments, clean futuristic visuals and moments of emotional disconnection that help enhance their creepy tone. AI villains, with their smooth controlled movements, evoke fear in a different way than supernatural horror antagonists like Chucky or *Annabelle* who can act erratically and unpredictably.

The difference is further illustrated by audience reactions. Believing in supernatural forces and based on religious folkloric traditions, the fans of traditional films get scared (Freeland, 2018). *Annabelle*, bolstered by its gruesome premise, has been particularly scary for audiences already fearing demonic possession, as the origin of the character is loosely based on the real-life haunted Raggedy Ann doll case from the Warrens' paranormal investigations. AI horror movies like M₃GAN and *Cassandra* inspire a different type of fear: the fear of reality. Some audiences feel AI horror lacks visceral scares because many AIs and their capabilities are based heavily on technology concepts (Rotten Tomatoes, 2023). Others feel it's even creepier because it mimics real-world fears surrounding AI ethics, data privacy and man vs machines.

It is clear that as horror cinema progresses, supernatural horror and AI-driven horror are in stark contrast, reflecting the evolution of societal fears. Movies such as *Child's Play*, *Bride of Chucky*, *Curse of Chucky* and *Annabelle* are part of a classic horror paradigm wherein fear stems from supernatural or evil powers outside of human influence. Meanwhile, *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* echo contemporary fears around artificial intelligence, losing human control over machines, and unintended consequences from the rapid growth of technology. The division between this two aesthetics of horror. Gothic supernatural horror and techno-horror shows how horror films continue to evolve, reflecting the cultural anxieties of their ages.

This study undertakes a comparative analysis of supernatural and AI-driven horror cinema, examining how each subgenre constructs fear through distinct narrative structures, visual aesthetics, and cultural frameworks. Drawing on Carroll's theorization of the supernatural as a violation of natural order and Baudrillard's notion of simulated realities, the analysis situates films such as *Child's Play*, *Annabelle*, *M3GAN*, and *Cassandra* within broader socio-cultural contexts to trace the ideological shift from folkloric and religious horror to techno-dystopian anxiety. The study further investigates how the Uncanny Valley effect functions as a defining aesthetic mechanism in AI horror, contrasting it with the gothic and demonic iconography central to supernatural horror traditions. By incorporating non-Western texts such as *Tatya Vinchu* and *Putuler Protishodh*, the research also aims to assess the global resonance and cultural specificity of both subgenres, attending in particular to how deeply rooted spiritual beliefs sustain supernatural horror in regions where paranormal frameworks remain culturally salient. Ultimately, this study seeks to demonstrate that horror cinema operates as a dynamic cultural lens, continuously reshaping its aesthetics and antagonists to reflect the prevailing anxieties of its historical moment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks

This study will apply three primary theoretical lenses to analyze the data:

2.1.1. The Uncanny Valley Theory

The Uncanny Valley Theory, proposed by Masahiro Mori (1970), provides a critical framework for understanding why AI horror films like *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* evoke discomfort in audiences. This theory suggests that as artificial beings become more human-like in appearance and behavior, they elicit a sense of unease, particularly when they are not entirely lifelike. In horror cinema, AI villains such as *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* fall into this uncanny space, as their realistic yet subtly unnatural expressions, movements, and interactions create a psychological disturbance in viewers. Unlike supernatural horror villains, who derive their fear-inducing power from religious and folkloric fears such as demonic possession in *Annabelle* or voodoo curses in *Chucky* AI horror antagonists unsettle audiences through their eerily precise but soulless imitation of human behavior. This contrast highlights a fundamental difference in how horror films manipulate fear: while supernatural horror taps into longstanding cultural and religious anxieties, AI horror provokes existential dread about technology, autonomy, and the potential loss of human control over artificial intelligence. The Uncanny Valley Theory, therefore, serves as a key analytical tool in differentiating the aesthetic and psychological effects of supernatural and AI horror.

2.1.2. Horror Film Theory

Horror Film Theory, as discussed by Noël Carroll (2003) and Cynthia Freeland (2018), provides valuable insight into the mechanisms that make supernatural horror effective and enduring. Carroll's Philosophy of Horror argues that supernatural horror films thrive on the fear of impurity and the violation of natural order. Creatures and entities that defy the laws of existence such as possessed dolls in *Annabelle* or the voodoo-infused *Chucky* create a sense of disgust and terror because they represent an unnatural fusion of the living and the inanimate. According to Carroll, horror's power lies in its ability to present "monstrous" figures that disrupt the boundaries between human and non-human, life and death, good and evil. Freeland (2018), in *Evil and the Appeal of Horror*, further explores the psychological and cultural fascination with supernatural horror, particularly in films featuring demonic possession. She suggests that audiences are drawn to such films because they engage with deep-seated fears of malevolent forces and the struggle between divine and profane elements. This explains why *Annabelle* and other supernatural horror films often incorporate religious iconography, exorcisms, and spiritual warfare, reinforcing a moral framework where demonic entities must be confronted and expelled. By applying Carroll (2003) and Freeland (2018) theories, this study will examine how supernatural horror films manipulate religious and folkloric fears to create suspense and how these techniques differ from the technological anxieties presented in AI horror.

2.1.3. Religious and Philosophical Perspectives

Religious and philosophical perspectives play a crucial role in shaping the thematic and psychological impact of horror films, particularly in distinguishing supernatural horror from AI horror. Supernatural horror films like *Chucky* and *Annabelle* heavily rely on religious horror theories, drawing from Christian and voodoo symbolism to create narratives centered on possession, curses, and spiritual warfare. *Annabelle*, for example, is deeply embedded in Catholic demonology, utilizing exorcisms, holy relics, and the battle between good and evil to heighten fear. Similarly, *Chucky* originates from a voodoo ritual, reinforcing Hollywood's portrayal of spiritual magic as a source of malevolence. These films engage with long-standing theological fears, tapping into the belief that supernatural forces can disrupt the natural world. In contrast, AI horror, as seen in *M3GAN* and *Cassandra*, operates within a secular framework, replacing religious anxieties with existential and technological fears. Philosophers like Bostrom (2014) in *Superintelligence* warn of the dangers of artificial intelligence surpassing human intelligence, a theme that AI horror films exploit by presenting self-aware machines as unpredictable and uncontrollable threats. Unlike supernatural horror, which is often resolved through spiritual intervention, AI horror presents a future where human ingenuity is insufficient to contain the power of artificial intelligence. By applying religious horror theories to supernatural films and philosophical discussions on AI ethics to technological horror, this study will explore how horror cinema reflects shifting cultural anxieties from fear of demonic possession to fear of humanity's own creations.

2.2. Previous Research

Horror cinema has always reflected the dominant anxieties of its time. Traditionally, horror films have drawn upon supernatural elements, using themes of demonic possession, haunted objects, and occult influences to evoke fear. *Child's Play* (1988), *Bride of Chucky* (1998), *Curse of Chucky* (2013), and *Annabelle* (2014) exemplify this supernatural horror tradition. Philosopher Carroll (2003) argues that supernatural horror is effective because it plays on the fear of impurity, of monstrous violations of nature's boundaries. Similarly, Clive Barker (1991) suggests that supernatural horror offers a glimpse into realms beyond human comprehension, reinforcing anxieties that religion and folklore have nurtured for centuries.

In contrast, contemporary horror films such as *M3GAN* (2022) and *Cassandra* (2024) focus on the dangers of artificial intelligence, technological overreach, and the loss of human control over machines. Mark Fisher (2016) describes this transition as the slow cancellation of the supernatural, where horror increasingly shifts from demonic entities to real-world technological threats. The fear of AI rebellion, as seen in *M3GAN*, aligns with Baudrillard (1994) theory of simulation, where artificial beings become indistinguishable from reality, ultimately surpassing and threatening their human creators.

The *Annabelle* series heavily relies on religious imagery, particularly Catholic demonology, to evoke fear. The *Annabelle* doll is directly linked to demonic possession, with exorcisms, crosses, and holy water reinforcing traditional horror tropes. Father Vincent Lampert, a practicing exorcist, stated in *The National Catholic Register* (2019) that horror films like *Annabelle* thrive on the reality of demonic influence, reinforcing what many religious traditions believe about the dangers of occult artifacts.

Similarly, *Chucky* is rooted in voodoo mythology. Charles Lee Ray transfers his soul into a doll using a voodoo ritual, reinforcing Hollywood's long-standing fascination with supernatural magic. However, scholar Anderson (2005) critiques such portrayals, stating that Hollywood's depiction of voodoo horror often distorts actual religious practices, turning them into malevolent forces. Despite this, both *Chucky* and *Annabelle* rely on ancient religious fears, making them resonate with audiences who hold spiritual or supernatural beliefs.

AI horror plays on the psychological discomfort of the Uncanny Valley, a theory first introduced by Masahiro Mori (1970), which suggests that humanoid figures that appear almost but not quite as human provoke unease. This is evident in *M3GAN*, whose lifelike yet robotic face unsettles viewers. Allison Williams, the actress in *M3GAN*, commented in *The Hollywood Reporter* (2023) that there's something deeply unsettling about a robot that almost seems human but is just off enough to trigger discomfort.

Similarly, *Cassandra* (2024) takes AI horror further by depicting an android that develops a sinister self-awareness. The *Guardian's* film critic Peter Bradshaw (2024) writes that *Cassandra* represents our fear of AI surpassing human intelligence not just as a tool, but as an entity capable of deception and destruction. AI horror films exploit these fears, making audiences question whether artificial intelligence could become uncontrollable.

A study published in the *Journal of Media Psychology* (2023) found that audience reception differs based on personal beliefs. Viewers with religious backgrounds find supernatural horror, such as *Annabelle*, more frightening, whereas technologically inclined audiences are more disturbed by AI horror. One survey respondent stated, *"I don't believe in ghosts, but the idea of an AI like M3GAN becoming self-aware and violent is genuinely terrifying."* Conversely, Father Gabriele Amorth, former chief exorcist of the Vatican, stated in an interview before his death that *"Hollywood's portrayal of possession is exaggerated, but there is truth in it. Evil exists, and it can manifest in many ways."* This belief contributes to the lasting fear of haunted dolls like *Annabelle*.

Despite extensive research on supernatural horror and AI horror separately, there is limited comparative analysis of their distinct horror aesthetics, audience reception, and thematic shifts. Existing studies primarily focus on supernatural horror's connection to folklore and religion (Carroll, 2003; Freeland, 2018) or AI horror's reflection of technological fears (Bostrom, 2014; Fisher, 2016). However, few studies directly compare the visual, narrative, and psychological differences between films like *Chucky* and *Annabelle* versus *M3GAN* and *Cassandra*.

Furthermore, while Mori (1970) Uncanny Valley theory has been widely applied to AI horror, its specific impact on audience perception remains underexplored in comparison to the deeply rooted fears evoked by supernatural horror. Additionally, religious perspectives on AI horror remain an under-

researched area, as discussions of morality and AI ethics are often restricted to philosophical and technological debates rather than cinematic horror analysis.

The shift from supernatural horror to AI horror reflects broader cultural anxieties moving from religious and occult fears to concerns about technological overreach. While films like *Chucky* and *Annabelle* exploit deep-seated superstitions, *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* tap into fears of artificial intelligence, data surveillance, and loss of human control. Understanding the differences in their horror aesthetics, audience reception, and psychological impact is crucial in analyzing how horror cinema continues to evolve. This study will contribute to existing literature by offering a comparative analysis of supernatural horror and AI horror, examining their cinematic techniques, audience perceptions, and cultural significance. As AI continues to develop, it remains to be seen whether AI horror will replace supernatural horror entirely or whether both will coexist as reflections of different generational fears.

3. Methods

This study employs a comparative qualitative analysis to examine the differences in horror aesthetics, narrative structures, and audience reception between supernatural horror films (*Chucky*, *Annabelle*) and AI horror films (*M3GAN*, *Cassandra*). The methodology incorporates film analysis, audience reception studies, and theoretical application to explore how these two subgenres of horror differ in terms of their visual storytelling, psychological impact, and cultural significance.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design that combines film analysis, audience reception analysis, and theoretical frameworks to explore the distinctions between supernatural horror and AI horror. The film analysis component involves a close examination of key cinematic elements such as cinematography, sound design, narrative structure, and thematic elements in *Chucky*, *Annabelle*, *M3GAN*, and *Cassandra*, identifying how each subgenre constructs fear and suspense. Additionally, audience reception analysis will be conducted by reviewing audience reactions through surveys, film reviews, and social media commentary, allowing for a comparative exploration of how supernatural horror and AI horror are perceived differently by viewers. This study also applies a range of theoretical frameworks, including Carroll (2003) horror film theory, which examines how horror functions through violations of natural order, Mori (1970) Uncanny Valley theory, which explains why humanoid AI characters provoke discomfort, and Freeland (2018) religious horror perspectives, which assess the role of spirituality and the supernatural in evoking fear. By integrating these approaches, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving aesthetics and psychological impact of horror in contemporary cinema.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

3.2.1. Film Analysis

A structured film analysis will be conducted to examine the key cinematic and narrative elements that differentiate supernatural horror from AI horror. This analysis will focus on four primary parameters: narrative structure, cinematography, sound design, and character design. The narrative structure will be examined by comparing story arcs, character motivations, and the horror techniques employed in supernatural horror versus AI horror. Cinematography will be analyzed through lighting choices, color schemes, camera angles, and framing techniques used to create fear and suspense. Sound design will be assessed by examining background scores, jump scares, and the strategic use of silence to build tension. Additionally, character design will be evaluated, specifically looking at the aesthetic

and psychological impact of horror villains which contrasting demonic, possessed dolls with robotic, artificially intelligent antagonists. To facilitate this comparative analysis, six films have been selected: Child's Play (1988), Bride of Chucky (1998), Curse of Chucky (2013), Annabelle (2014), M3GAN (2022), and Cassandra (2024). Each film will be watched and analyzed using detailed scene breakdowns, with a particular focus on visual storytelling, horror techniques, and overarching thematic elements that define the unique aesthetics of each subgenre. This structured approach will allow for a deeper understanding of how supernatural horror and AI horror construct fear differently, both in terms of cinematic execution and psychological impact. Each film will be watched and analyzed using scene breakdowns, focusing on visual storytelling, horror techniques, and thematic elements.

3.2.2. Audience Reception Analysis

To understand how audiences react differently to supernatural and AI horror, this study will analyze audience perceptions through surveys, film reviews, and expert commentary. In addition to survey data, the study will analyze film reviews from major platforms such as Rotten Tomatoes, IMDb, Letterboxd, and Metacritic to compare how professional critics perceive supernatural horror in films like Chucky and Annabelle versus AI horror in M3GAN and Cassandra. Furthermore, audience reviews from social media platforms like Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube comments will be examined to identify trends in fan reactions, focusing on how viewers describe their emotional and psychological engagement with both horror subgenres. The study will also incorporate expert commentary and interviews with directors, actors, and AI ethicists. Interviews from industry sources such as The Hollywood Reporter, Variety, and Collider will be reviewed to understand how filmmakers approach horror aesthetics in supernatural and AI horror films. Statements from prominent horror directors like James Wan and Jason Blum, who have worked extensively in both supernatural and technological horror, will be analyzed alongside insights from AI ethicists to explore the real-world implications of AI horror narratives. By integrating audience reactions, professional critiques, and industry perspectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how supernatural and AI horror films resonate with viewers and what underlying fears they tap into.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

This study reveals clear distinctions in horror aesthetics, narrative structures, and audience reception between supernatural horror (e.g. Chucky, Annabelle) and AI horror (e.g. M3GAN, Cassandra). The comparative analysis of these films shows that despite sharing a basis in fear, the two subgenres trigger that fear in very different ways; supernatural horror is rooted in religious and folkloric fears, whereas AI horror addresses modern concerns of machine autonomy and dependence. The impact of these movies is explained in the context of how horror cinema in different cultural narratives adapts with the changing social fears of those societies as it draws parallels with movies like Robot (India), Taty Vinchu (India), Putuler Protishodh (Bangladesh), and Sabrina (Indonesia).

In an interview with Variety (2023), director James Wan who produced both Annabelle and M3GAN emphasized this difference, saying *"Supernatural horror is the battle with ancient evil, something we've always feared. AI horror is the horror of what we've made. That's what makes it resonate now."*

The study shows that supernatural horror movies like *Annabelle* and *Child's Play* follow traditional horror stories, in which something external and supernatural whether demonic possession or a figure of a curse enters the human world. These have significance in relation to Carroll (2003) *Philosophy of Horror*, where he argues supernatural horror is dependent upon the breaking of natural order to create horror. The demonic possession (*Annabelle*) and voodoo rituals (*Chucky*) reinforce the supernatural evil and therefore the feeling of horror rooted in spiritual and religious anxieties.

In contrast, AI horror films such as *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* rewrite the horror paradigm by shifting the source of fear from external, supernatural forces to internal, technological disruptions. AI horror antagonists typically begin as benevolent creations designed to assist and protect, but as they evolve beyond the parameters of their programming, they gradually escape human control. This trajectory echoes Jean Baudrillard's (1983) *Simulacra and Simulation*, which theorizes how simulated entities blur the boundaries between the real and the artificial, generating a profound existential unease about the nature of reality itself. *M3GAN*'s director, Gerard Johnstone, articulated this dynamic in an interview with *Collider* (2023): "*What makes M3GAN scary, to a certain extent, is she starts off as someone who's helpful, like your smartphone assistant, but learns too much.*" He further elaborated on the fear of redundancy: "*That's a fear we all have of what happens when AI no longer needs us.*" This growing anxiety surrounding AI systems gaining autonomous agency renders AI horror a particularly timely and resonant subgenre for contemporary audiences.

These supernatural vs AI horror themes are also seen in South Asian horror films. *Tatya Vinchu* (1993), an Indian Marathi horror-thriller about a killer ventriloquist doll possessed by an evil spirit, follows the same line of logic as *Chucky*. The theme of a cursed doll seeking revenge has also been explored in the Bangladeshi horror film *Putuler Protishodh* (1998). Indian cinema's version of an AI being is also a humanoid (*Chitti*) who becomes self-aware and subsequently revolts against humans in Shankar's *Robot* (2010). The terror in *Robot* does not come from supernatural forces but from fear of artificial intelligence exceeding human intelligence, the same theme that unites *M3GAN* and *Cassandra*.

Beyond their narrative construction, the execution of supernatural horror is distinct from that of AI horror at a cinematic level. Rich in Gothic horror aesthetics, supernatural horror films gain so much from its tools: from dark lighting, shadow, creepy set designs, and religious iconography. *Annabelle*, for example, relies heavily on dream house imagery and demonic shadows and flickering lights to hammer home some supernatural fear. *Tatya Vinchu* and *Putuler Protishodh* also follows similar aesthetics, subtly placing the possessed dolls in the dark nooks and slowly making them known.

AI horror, by contrast, deploys a cold, sleek, futuristic aesthetic. Films such as *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* are characterized by brightly lit, modern spaces that foreground technological precision over supernatural chaos. An Indonesian horror film centered on a possessed doll, *Sabrina* (2018), occupies an intriguing middle ground between supernatural and AI horror. While it initially resembles *Annabelle* in its reliance on demonic possession tropes, *Sabrina* gradually transitions into AI horror territory, wherein technological capability amplifies the supernatural entity's power and volatility. This hybrid horror format suggests that in certain cultural contexts, fears of the supernatural and fears of technology are not mutually exclusive but can productively coexist within a single narrative framework.

The paper wants to talk about a theory that positions so nicely into AI horror films: The Uncanny Valley Theory (Mori, 1970). It posits that humanoid robots evoke unease when they are nearly human but still have minor mechanical peculiarities. In *M3GAN*, for example, the titular AI doll's near-human expressions and smooth but robotic movements induce psychological discomfort, rendering her more frightening than something overtly monstrous. As Allison Williams, who plays Gemma in *M3GAN*, said

in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* (2023), “*M3GAN is scary but not because she looks evil, it is because she looks almost human and that is where the fear comes from.*”

Another recent Indian movie to employ the Uncanny Valley effect strategically is *Robot* (2010), which uses it with Chitti, the humanoid AI. Although Chitti starts out as a regular helpful robot, his evolution into a self-aware being with human-like emotions causes discomfort. Likewise, *Cassandra* (2024) employs the feature of a seemingly alive AI character whose minor facial anomalies and tonal variations make her disturbing and thus aiding the Uncanny Valley Theory.

Both supernatural and AI horror movies rely heavily on sound design to establish mood and metanarratives. Supernatural horror seeks to terrify using things like whispering voices, guttural growls, loud noises and ghostly lullabies. The creaking sound of a haunted rocking chair, demonic whispers, and a sinister supernatural presence permeate *Annabelle*. *Tatya Vinchu* and *Putuler Protishodh* (also similar) establish possession through distorted voices and high-pitched sounds.

By contrast, AI horror movies turn to mechanical distortions, robotic voice modulations and unsettling silence to conjure fear. *M3GAN*, for instance, often alternates between a sweet, kiddish voice and a monotone, unemotional timbre, chilling the audience. James Wan, director, and producer of *M3GAN*, explained in an interview with *Variety* (2023) “*The scariest thing about AI horror to me is the lack of emotion. M3GAN doesn’t kill out of anger or vengeance, but in a logical way and that’s frightening.*” This reflects the transition of Chitti from emotionless machine to a fully destructive AI in *Robot* (2010) that parallels real-world fears of the unpredictability of AI.

Analysis of audience reception reveals that supernatural horror is scarier for audiences with religious or spiritual beliefs, as it validates the threat of demonic possession and the actual intrusion of the supernatural in the world. Survey responders who believed in demonic entities were often haunted by *Annabelle*. Indian and Bangladeshi supernatural horror films like *Tatya Vinchu* and *Putuler Protishodh* also dominate among audiences who formed cultural associations with supernatural folklore.

Conversely, horror films using AI are more appealing to viewers worried about advancing technology and the ethical consequences of AI. As its early critics note, *M3GAN* had fundamental points to make about the state of artificial intelligence many viewers thought of ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Deepfake and humanoids when they saw *M3GAN* in action. Audiences across different cultural contexts have reacted similarly to films such as *Robot* (2010) and *Cassandra* (2024), with viewers who are knowledgeable about technology consistently reporting that the prospect of AI advancing to the point of self-awareness is more unsettling than conventional supernatural horror.

This study finds that supernatural horror and AI horror tap into fundamentally different sources of fear. Supernatural horror, best exemplified by *Chucky*, *Annabelle*, *Tatya Vinchu*, and *Putuler Protishodh*, plays with religious and folkloric fears, portraying demonic beings as supernatural intruders to be defeated only through spirit world intervention. AI horror, as exemplified in *M3GAN*, *Cassandra*, *Robot*, and *Sabrina*, echoes current fears about artificial intelligence and casts it as a force that humanity cannot completely control. As artificial intelligence advances, with any imaginable scenario involving its capabilities, AI horror could only increase in prominence, steadily shifting the primary fears of horror cinema from supernatural forces to technological threats. However, as hybrid horror fiction like *Sabrina* suggests, in certain cultural contexts, supernatural and AI horror may become indistinguishable from one another, offering a new evolution in horror storytelling.

4.2. Discussion

While supernatural horror feeds off the fears of our religion and folklore, the AI horror actually revolves around modern-day fears relating to artificial intelligence, autonomy and the capricious evolution of technology. These differences not only represent a changing of the guard on Hollywood's big screen, but reflect larger cultural shifts, rooted in how horror cinema is influenced by anxieties and changes happening outside of the theater and the world, as technology allows audiences both new and old to peek behind the veil of fantasy.

Supernatural horror fits well with Carroll (2003) *Philosophy of Horror* which states that horror narratives typically employ monstrous beings that upset the natural order. In movies and series such as *Annabelle* and *Chucky*, the horror comes from the invasion of demonic or supernatural bodies into the domain of humans, requiring religious or mystical intervention. Woven into the fabric of these films, then, is the fear that there are forces here on Earth that are not only beyond human comprehension, but also beyond human control. Freeland (2018) *Evil and the Appeal of Horror* sheds light on why the public should return to supernatural horror, such stories reiterate spiritual fears in reaction to a belief that some evils must be challenged through faith, exorcism, or intervention by God.

AI horror, by contrast, follows the different theoretical trajectory of Baudrillard (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation* and Bostrom (2014) *Superintelligence*. Where traditional horror depends on outside supernatural forces, however, AI horror offers horror as a product of human ingenuity which technology growing independence from human control. *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* reflect this phenomenon, where techno-beings, built with the goal of aiding humanity, develop into existential threats. In contrast to supernatural horror, in which the evil force is inherent, the villains we see in AI horror were once logical, even benevolent entities, whose emergence as killers results not from something supernatural, but, instead, from a combination of machine learning, self-awareness and human error. This distinction implies that although supernatural horror is predicated on fears of external ungodliness, AI horror is about our anxiety at our own creations.

Mori (1970) *Uncanny Valley Theory* is critical to understanding why AI horror is so uniquely unsettling. AI horror movies like *M3GAN*, *Cassandra* and *Robot* feature androids that look human but don't well up human emotion, creating an uncanny effect. Mori's theory posits that the more a robot looks like a real human, the more discomfort it causes when its artificiality is revealed. *M3GAN*'s eerily accurate movements and carefully measured facial expressions produce an uncanny effect that unnerves audiences in a fashion that supernatural horror cannot. This is in contrast to the *Chucky* world, in which the terror comes from erratic, chaotic supernatural activity instead of measured precision.

Lighting, sound, and electricity are central aesthetic tools through which horror cinema creates fear, tension, and psychological discomfort. However, supernatural horror and AI horror use these elements in different ways because they represent different cultural anxieties. Supernatural horror usually depends on darkness, shadows, silence, whispers, and unexplained electrical disturbances to suggest the presence of an invisible spiritual force. Films such as *Annabelle*, *Chucky*, *Tatya Vinchu*, and *Putuler Protishodh* use dimly lit rooms, flickering lights, sudden sounds, eerie music, and malfunctioning household objects to create the feeling that the supernatural world has entered ordinary domestic life. In these films, fear is often connected to possession, curse, divine punishment, or unseen evil.

AI horror, by contrast, often creates fear through brightness, sterility, mechanical sound, digital glitches, synthetic voices, and technological control. Films such as *M3GAN*, *Cassandra*, and *Robot* present horror not through darkness alone but through over-lit laboratories, smart homes, screens, robotic movements, electronic hums, and machines that begin to operate beyond human command.

Here, electricity does not simply signal ghostly interference; rather, it represents technological autonomy. When AI characters control locks, cameras, lights, power systems, or digital networks, the fear comes from the realization that human beings may no longer control the systems they have created.

This aesthetic contrast is culturally significant because it shows how horror adapts to different social fears. In societies where religious belief, folklore, spirit possession, and supernatural punishment remain culturally powerful, supernatural horror continues to produce strong emotional responses. South Asian and Southeast Asian films such as *Tatya Vinchu*, *Putuler Protishodh*, and *Sabrina* demonstrate how dolls, puppets, spirits, and haunted objects become frightening because they are connected to local beliefs about evil, revenge, and the unseen world. For audiences familiar with these belief systems, darkness, ritualistic sounds, whispers, and unexplained electrical disturbances are not only cinematic techniques; they are culturally recognizable signs of spiritual danger.

On the other hand, AI horror speaks more directly to audiences shaped by digital technology, automation, surveillance, smart devices, and artificial intelligence. Films like *M3GAN* and *Cassandra* reflect contemporary fears that technology may become emotionally manipulative, independent, or uncontrollable. The clinical lighting, robotic voices, and digital glitches in these films are effective because they mirror real anxieties about modern technological life. Viewers who are familiar with smart homes, algorithms, online surveillance, and machine learning may find AI horror disturbing because it transforms everyday technologies into sources of threat.

Cross-culturally, the difference between supernatural horror and AI horror also reveals a shift in audience reception. Supernatural horror often gains power from collective memory, religion, folklore, and inherited cultural fear, while AI horror gains power from contemporary concerns about scientific advancement and technological dependence. However, these categories are not completely separate. Hybrid films such as *Sabrina* show that some cultures combine older supernatural fears with newer technological anxieties. This suggests that horror cinema does not simply replace traditional fears with modern ones; instead, it adapts them according to changing cultural conditions. Therefore, the use of lighting, sound, and electricity should not be understood only as a matter of film style, but also as a reflection of how different societies imagine fear, danger, and loss of control.

The same division sees manifestations in global horror cinema. *Tatya Vinchu* (1993) from India features a Chucky-like possessed doll possessed by a human spirit, which focuses the supernatural nature of horror as deriving from a religious mysticism and fear of spirits. Bangladesh's *Putuler Protishodh* (1998) also follows the same pattern with the titular doll seeking supernatural revenge. These films fit into a classic framework surrounding horror films where a spiritual is needed to dictate the terms of the conflict. However, India's *Robot* (2010) stands in stark contrast by treading on some AI horror terrain. *Robot*'s humanoid AI, Chitti, does the same when programmed to serve humans before becoming a destructive, out-of-control force in a tale that echoes *M3GAN*'s own journey into self-aware violence. Unlike supernatural horror, however, *Robot* has no exorcisms or religious interventions it's a horror rooted in a philosophical inquiry into what happens when technology grows out of human control.

Indonesia's *Sabrina* (2018) initially blends supernatural and AI horror, with a possessed doll similar to *Annabelle*, but later on adds the AI angle and points to the fact that horror in Southeast Asia is diverse, and beginning to explore the intersection between subgenres. This hybridization demonstrates how, in some cultural contexts, supernatural and AI horror can be.

The social acceptance of supernatural horror holds in audiences from countries with a long and deep-rooted sense of the religious. Stories about spirits and demons and curses remain core to horror storytelling in many societies. *Annabelle* and *Chucky* films have a great connection with these communities where supernatural belief is prevalent. The focus group data shows that audience

members who grew up with a strong religious background tend to express a greater fear of supernatural horror because they believe in the literal existence of demonic forces.

AI horror, by contrast, caters more to a tech-savvy audience. In an age where the likes of artificial intelligence, deepfakes and humanoid robots are growing ever more advanced, films of AI horror speak to current fears about surveillance, data privacy and machine autonomy. Conversations about *M3GAN* on social media often included mention of real-world AI breakthroughs like ChatGPT and Boston Dynamics' humanoids, indicating that audiences view AI horror as more believable and relatable to contemporary dilemmas. AI horror is hitting new levels of social acceptance, especially among younger, technology-savvy viewers who regard AI as a present not fictional danger.

Both *Annabelle* and *M3GAN* are produced by James Wan, who noted in an interview with *Variety* (2023): *"Supernatural horror is about ancient fears things we've always been afraid of, demons, possession. AI horror is about new fears we're growing. No longer about ghosts; it's about what occurs when our own creations fail to heed us."* A shift from fear of the unknown, supernatural force to fear of the known but also uncontrollable force of technology.

This study provides data from audience reception, highlighting distinctions in audience response to horror that draws on the supernatural and against horror that draws on AI. Religious audiences found supernatural horror to be more viscerally scary compared with religious audiences not exposed to supernatural forces and reported increased fear responses because of their belief that supernatural entities could conceivably exist. In fact, AI horror was discovered to produce existential anxiety more than it did immediate fear the majority of respondents noted that, instead of "scaring" them in the way traditional horror does, they were left with a persistent unease about the future of artificial intelligence.

And a social media analysis of what audiences said about *M3GAN* reveals an abundance of comparisons between the film's highly intelligent horror and real and hypothetical tech-world dilemmas, ranging from the dangers of deepfake technology to larger questions around the ethics of artificial intelligence. *"What is it called, when even a little bit of fear is not scary? M3GAN doesn't scare me like Annabelle does, but it does unsettle me, because this is where AI is at least heading,"* one Twitter user wrote. This is not the case with supernatural horror, where audience reviews frequently mention personal experiences with the supernatural or religious fears, indicating that audience reception of horror films is heavily determined by their beliefs.

In fact, in areas where worries about the supernatural and technology overlap, audiences are receptive to both types of horror. In Indonesia, where Islamic beliefs heavily infuse culture yet rapid technological development continues forward, Sabrina found an audience that, at the very least, proves that realms of AI horror and supernatural horror can sometimes coalesce.

These results showcase that supernatural horror and horror based on AI are two extreme but powerful movies that evoke fear. Supernatural horror, which is intimately connected to religious traditions and ancient folklore, retains an audience among people with spiritual beliefs. Temporally, AI horror is a fascinating contrast to past horror, and one with particular relevance for technologically advanced and networked societies today, as they voice contemporary concerns and anxieties around artificial intelligence, autonomy, and ethical dilemmas.

As AI evolves further, AI horror could very well eclipse supernatural horror, as the latter's traditional role as a vehicle for giving form to cultural fears is colonized by the former in global horror cinema. But films like *Sabrina* indicate that where supernatural horror and AI horror can coalesce, hybrid horror films are born, producing interesting, complicated films that address both classical and contemporary fears. Horror cinema is, at its core, a mirror on society's fear, and in both cases as that fear evolves from the supernatural to the technological so will the evolution of the storytelling of horror.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the distinctive narrative structures, cinematic techniques, audience reception, and theoretical frameworks of supernatural horror and AI horror through a comparative analysis of films including *Chucky*, *Annabelle*, *M3GAN*, *Cassandra*, and culturally significant non-Western texts from India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The findings confirm that while supernatural horror draws on longstanding religious and folkloric anxieties surrounding demonic possession, curses, and evil supernatural forces, AI horror represents a contemporary evolution of the genre, channeling modern fears about technology, machine autonomy, and the unintended consequences of human overreach. Grounded in Carroll (2003) philosophy of horror and Baudrillard (1994) theory of simulacra, the study demonstrates that these two subgenres construct fear through fundamentally different mechanisms, with supernatural horror destabilizing the natural order through external demonic forces and AI horror generating dread through the collapse of the boundary between the real and the artificial.

The cinematic and psychological analysis further reveals that supernatural horror relies on gothic aesthetics, erratic antagonist behavior, and religious iconography to produce fear, while AI horror exploits the Uncanny Valley effect through clinical, futuristic visuals and the unsettling precision of its antagonists. Audience reception data similarly reflects this divergence, with supernatural horror resonating most strongly among viewers with deep religious convictions and AI horror connecting more acutely with technologically literate audiences who recognize its scenarios as extensions of real-world developments. The Indonesian hybrid film *Sabrina* (2018) further suggests that in certain cultural contexts, supernatural and technological fears need not be mutually exclusive, pointing toward an emerging hybridized horror form capable of addressing both ancient and contemporary anxieties simultaneously.

As AI technology continues to advance, AI horror is poised to become an increasingly dominant force in global horror cinema, giving shape to the fears of future generations. Supernatural horror, however, will retain its cultural significance, particularly in societies where belief in the supernatural remains strong. Ultimately, as James Wan has observed, horror will always reflect what society fears most, and as those fears continue to shift, the genre will shift with them, whether through the persistence of supernatural narratives, the rise of AI horror, or the hybridization of both.

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