

## Analysis of Horror Commodification in the Film “KKN Di Desa Penari”

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**ABSTRACT:** The study examines the commodification of horror in the film *KKN di Desa Penari*, an Indonesian movie that gained widespread attention by utilizing elements based on local legends. The purpose of this research is to analyse how horror elements are packaged as commodities that influence viewers perceptions of mystical culture in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores the construction of horror in the film, including the uses of symbols, characters, and narratives blended with commercial values to enhance market appeal. The finding of this study show that the film *KKN di Desa Penari* not only provides entertainment but also reflects the cultural dynamics of society in dealing with traditional beliefs and collective fears. This film also reinforces the appeal of local horror as commodification in Indonesian cinema, as well as its impact o identity and the creative economy

**KEYWORDS:** Commodification, horror film, media political economy, *KKN di Desa Penari*

### INTRODUCTION

Film, as a form of media, plays an important role in shaping public perception and opinion. It serves as a medium of communication to convey messages to a group of people through audio-visual means (Effendy, 2014). In mass communication, films are a highly strategic public commodity for accumulating capital gains under the principles of capitalist ideology (Haryanto and Kartika, 2017). In this context, films are considered assets that can be monetized and used to recoup investments made by filmmakers during the production process. This process of film capitalization involves several stages, from production funding to post-production, distribution, promotion, and marketing.

One of the films that successfully penetrated the market is *KKN di Desa Penari (Community Service Program In The Dancer's Village)*. This film originated from a story posted by a Twitter account named @SimpleM81378523, which shocked the public. The viral nature of the story not only caught the public's attention, but also attracted MD Pictures, a production house, to turn the story into a film, thus creating *KKN di Desa Penari* (Coritama et al., 2022). By early 2023, the film had garnered 10 million viewers. This achievement makes it one of the most significant and fantastic milestones for Indonesian cinema. The 10 million-viewers milestone conform that *KKN di Desa Penari* is categorized as a blockbuster in Indonesia cinema ([www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), July 15, 2023). Here is a list of top-grossing Indonesian films:

I. THE 10-MILLION-VIEWER MILESTONE CONFIRMS THAT *KKN DI DESA PENARI* IS CATEGORIZED AS A BLOCKBUSTER IN INDONESIAN CINEMA.

List of Top-Grossing Films in Indonesia

NO	Film Title	Audience	Production	Year	Director
1	Jumbo	10.201.948	Visinema Pictures	2025	Anggia Kharisma
2	KKN di Desa Penari	10.061.033	MD Pictures	2022	Awi Suryadi
3	<u>Agak Laen</u>	9.125.188	Jagartha	2024	Muhadkly Acho
4	Warkop DKI Reborns: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1	6.858.616	Falcon Pictures	2016	Anggy Umbara
5	Pengabdian Setan 2: Communication	6.391.982	Rapi Films	2022	Joko Anwar
6	Dilan 1990	6.315.664	Max Pictures	2018	Fajar Bustomi Pidi Baiq
7	Miracle in Cell No.7	5.860.917	Falcon Pictures	2022	Hanung Bramantyo
8	<u>Vina: Sebelum 7 Hari</u>	5.815.492	Dee Company	2024	Anggy Umbara

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9	Dilan 1991	5.253.411	Max pictures	2019	Fajar Bustomi Pidi
10	Sewu Dino	4.823.997	MD Pictures	2023	Kimo Stamboel

Source: <https://filmindonesia.or.id/film/penonton>, October 22, 2025

The data above indicates that the film "KKN di Desa Penari" achieved the highest ranking among various box-office films in Indonesia over the past 15 years. This reflects the success of "KKN di Desa Penari" as a commodity that has captivated the attention of local audiences. Some of the popular films listed above include horror genre titles, such as "Pengabdi Setan 2" with 6,391,982 viewers, "Sewu Dino" with 4,823,997 viewers, Vina: Sebelum hari with viewers 5.815.492 . Meanwhile, "KKN di Desa Penari" garnered 10,061,033 viewers. Horror films are particularly appealing in the country, thus possessing commodification aspects within the media's political economy perspective. The popularity of "KKN di Desa Penari" not only attracted public attention but also caught the interest of MD Pictures as a production house to adapt this story into a film.



Source: suara.com

There are several reasons why horror films have a strong appeal for audiences. First, horror films evoke sensations and tension. These films are designed to create intense thrills and suspense, captivating viewers and challenging them to immerse themselves in a chilling atmosphere through exhilarating experiences. This sensation emotionally engages viewers and boosts their adrenaline.

Second, horror films can explore the imagination and inner fears. They often tackle frightening themes such as death, fear, loneliness, loss of control, and guilt. Third, these films frequently include elements of sensuality and sexuality aimed at attracting a wide audience. Viewers enjoy such scenes and find entertainment in them; on the other hand, these elements are also used to explore deeper themes related to love, self-discovery, desire, and infidelity to convey communication messages to the broader society. Therefore, with these various factors, supported by viewer data and the prevalence of many films dominating cinema screens or television, it indicates that the film industry in the country receives fantastic responses from the public, leading to its success. The film "KKN di Desa Penari" represents the enthusiasm of cinema audiences for the horror genre based on true stories (Salsabila and Fatawi, 2023). From the perspective of the political economy of media, this film becomes a narrative that can be commodified, resulting in remarkable financial accumulation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In political economy, there are key concepts for understanding phenomena, namely commodification, spatialization, and structuration (Mosco, 2009). Commodification focuses on a process that transforms use value into exchange value, characterized by monopoly, oligopoly, and conglomeration through the formation of structures among social agents or vice versa (Pramudita Okky, 2022).

### Commodification

Commodification refers to the utilization of goods and services based on their utility, which is then transformed into commodities that possess commercial value. In a broader sense, political economy also encompasses the social products of communication, including the audience and labor. Furthermore, Vincent Mosco identifies three forms of commodification:

1. **Commodification of Content.** The commodification of content is the process of transforming messages and sets of data into a system of meanings that can be commercialized by the media. The process of commodification in communication involves the transformation of messages, starting from the construction of messages (data bits) that form a meaningful system of thought, to becoming marketable products. Many events occur in society, but few can be said to have commercial value.

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Therefore, skills in writing, storytelling, and dramatizing narratives are needed so that certain events become interesting and marketable. This is important because mass media essentially generates capital or surplus value when a large audience accesses it (Nugraha, 2020). The commodification of content can drive the creation of exchange value for mass media products. Mass media products are produced through preliminary research to understand the tastes and desires of the mass media audience. Thus, mass media products are closely aligned with audience market interests because by following market desires and preferences, these products will naturally sell easily (Haryanto, 2020).

- 2. Commodification of the Audience.** The commodification of the audience is defined as the process by which mass media produces an audience and delivers it to advertisers. Media programs are used to attract an audience. Advertisers pay media companies to access the audience; thus, it can be said that the audience is "delivered" to the advertising companies (Baret, Olyver, and Newbold, 1995). In this regard, ratings serve as a reference for whether a commodity is marketable or not, leading media companies to closely monitor the stability or increase in ratings, which translates to higher advertising revenue, rather than focusing on the quality of media products. Therefore, what is exchanged is not the message or the audience, but rather the ratings.
- 3. Commodification of Labor/Workers.** Essentially, the commodification of workers is a form of transforming the work process in capitalism, where the skills or expertise and working hours of workers are turned into commodities that are exchanged and valued with money/wages. The agreement on the exchange of these commodities is then manifested in a work contract voluntarily agreed upon between the workers and the capitalists. Through this agreement, workers typically feel they have the opportunity to enhance their capacity in pursuit of their personal interests. In the commodification of labor, there are two processes to consider. The first point is that the commodification of labor is carried out by using communication systems and technology to enhance control over labor and ultimately modify the entire labor utilization process, including within the communication industry. The second point is that political economy describes a dual process where, while workers are engaged in modification activities, they are simultaneously being commodified.

This involves two processes. The first process is the use of communication systems and technology to expand the commodification of labor processes, including in the communication industry, by increasing flexibility and control for employers or owners. The second process, political economy is depicted as a dual process in which labor is commodified in the process of producing commodity goods and services (Haryanto, 2020).

### III. METHOD

The method in this research employs a qualitative approach using literature study. The qualitative approach is positioned to examine natural objects by the researcher with the aim of obtaining significant insights (Sugiyono, 2005). This study explains how the horror genre in the film *KKN di Desa Penari* is commodified to gain financial profit. The literature study used in this research involves data collection, with the research relying on secondary data obtained from interviews published in high-credibility media relevant to the topic of the film *KKN di Desa Penari*. The selected media include national outlets (Tribunnews and Liputan6)) that are verified. Subsequently, the data obtained is analyzed in conjunction with findings from other relevant research sources, thus elucidating the aspects of commodification in the film *KKN di Desa Penari*.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The film "KKN di Desa Penari" has successfully become a phenomenon in the Indonesian film industry, achieving remarkable commercial success. This success can be understood from the perspective of media political economy, where the process of commodification plays a key role in capturing the audience's attention and achieving fantastic viewer numbers. The commodification process in this film is evident in how cultural values within the horror narrative are transformed into attractive and marketable audiovisual products. By leveraging the frightening horror genre with supernatural elements, the film has successfully drawn the attention of a diverse audience. Additionally, clever marketing strategies, including the use of social media to expand audience reach, have also played a significant role in the film's success. In terms of media political economy, the commercial success of "KKN di Desa Penari" is reflected in its high ratings and large viewer numbers, making it appealing to advertisers. Thus, the film serves as concrete evidence of how the commodification process in horror can be a key factor in achieving success in the Indonesian film industry.

Commodification refers to the process of transforming cultural values into tradable commodities in the market. In the context of film, commodification refers to the process of turning films into commercial products that attract audience attention and achieve financial success (Mosco, 2009). The process of commodifying the film can be seen in how "KKN di Desa Penari" was produced and marketed. The filmmakers and producers explored horror themes within local legends to attract viewer interest

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and create market value for the film. They utilized technology and social media to extend audience reach and build enthusiasm around the film (Nugraha, 2020).

According to Awi Suryadi in an interview with *Tribunnews*, The success of *KKN di Desa Penari* was influenced by the viral popularity of its original twitter story, the perfect post pandemic release timing, and audience enthusiasm. He noted that this momentum heightened public curiosity. The film was also designed to deliver a powerful cinematic experience in theatres.

In this process, the cultural values embedded in the film's story and narrative are transformed into engaging audiovisual products that captivate audiences. Horror films often incorporate storylines involving death, the supernatural, power dynamics, and evil characters that evoke fear in viewers (Fitri, 2022). The commodification in "*KKN di Desa Penari*" can be observed in how symbols and characters from the original story, rooted in the real experiences of rural communities and traditional beliefs, are utilized as commercial material. The film is rich in local cultural symbols, particularly those related to beliefs in the mystical realm, spirits, and customary rules. Symbols such as the mysterious dancer, the giant snake, and the forbidden forest setting carry significant cultural value. In the context of commodification, these symbols not only serve as profound story elements but are also used to attract audiences interested in horror with a local touch. These symbols are exaggerated in the commodification process to create a more dramatic sense of fear, making them more digestible for modern audiences who may be less familiar with the original stories.

Not only symbols, but characters are also commodified in "*KKN di Desa Penari*." Main characters such as Nur, Widya, and Bima are not just portrayed as protagonists interacting with the mystical world but also as representations of the demographic group targeted by the film industry. They represent urban youth who arrive in the village with little knowledge of local customs and beliefs. These characters are deliberately crafted to be relatable to young audiences, thereby fostering an emotional connection between the viewers and the narrative. Additionally, supernatural characters like Badarawuhi, who serves as the antagonist, are also commodified. Badarawuhi is depicted with visually striking yet frightening characteristics, representing not only a spirit entity but also becoming an icon in the film. The character of Badarawuhi is made more fantastical to maximize visual appeal for promotional materials, trailers, and merchandise.

Moreover, the commodification of the audience plays a crucial role in the success of "*KKN di Desa Penari*." Producers and advertisers leverage the film's ratings and audience numbers to attract companies looking to advertise. Consequently, the audience is considered a commodity delivered to advertisers (Baret, Olyver, & Newbold, 1995). High ratings and large viewership numbers become enticing for advertisers, making this film more attractive from a media political economy perspective. Furthermore, horror films like "*KKN di Desa Penari*" possess strong allure for viewers due to their elements of fear, sensation, and intense emotions. Audiences are drawn to experience the thrilling sensations and tension that this horror film presents (Haryanto, 2020).

In the context of Indonesian society, which still believes in supernatural elements, horror films are often considered appealing as they present frightening and supernatural themes. Additionally, horror films frequently incorporate sensual elements to attract audience attention. This can be seen in how "*KKN di Desa Penari*" combines horror elements with sensual aspects to create tension and enhance appeal for its viewers. The fusion of these elements represents a successful commodification strategy in achieving commercial success for this film (Haryanto, 2020).

The film "*KKN di Desa Penari*" has achieved significant commercial success, which can be analyzed from the perspective of media political economy using the concept of commodification. The commodification process is evident in how cultural values are transformed into attractive commercial products that capture audience interest. The horror genre of this film also serves as a draw for viewers due to its elements of fear, sensation, and sensuality that successfully capture audience attention. Within the context of media political economy, the success of this film can also be observed in its high ratings and viewer numbers, attracting the attention of advertising companies.

Economic, political, and mass media factors can influence the commodification of "*KKN di Desa Penari*." These factors interact and impact the production, marketing, and public perception of the film. The film's appeal has a significant influence on its success. Meeting audience tastes, timely release, the influence of social media, and good creativity and cinematography are factors contributing to the film's success. "*KKN di Desa Penari*" is marketed through various media platforms, including cinemas, television, and streaming services. This indicates that the film has become a commercial product sold to consumers. Mass media plays an important role in the commodification of "*KKN di Desa Penari*." Reviews, coverage, promotions, and advertisements in mass media can influence public perception of the film, as well as its popularity and box office performance.

Meanwhile, the substantive factors of this film are often downplayed because they are seen as lacking commercial value. The *KKN* film, from the public perspective, would often focus on the work programs of students in *KKN* locations, involvement in social activities, community service, and various training programs for the village community, such as digital

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literacy, which are rarely highlighted because they are deemed uncommercializable. Consequently, aspects that cannot be commodified are minimized, while those that can be dramatized and commodified receive significant emphasis. Therefore, through this content commodification, films can become a highly profitable business, although on one hand, it can also spark various ethical and artistic debates regarding films, leading to a focus on profitability or commercialization at the expense of originality in the film's substance. In a society like Indonesia, where belief in supernatural elements persists, this film has found the right place and moment to attract as many viewers as possible, making the commodification process even easier to achieve

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the film "KKN di Desa Penari," through the process of horror commodification, has significantly attracted audience interest, achieving over 10 million viewers. The commodification process in the context of this film involves horror elements presented commercially through engaging narratives and visuals, making it a tradable product. From the perspective of media political economy, this film demonstrates how cinematic works function not only as media of expression but also as commodities designed to accumulate capital gains. "KKN di Desa Penari" serves as a concrete example of how local horror cinema can be adapted into a commercially successful commodity.

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