From Changing Universe to Evolving Characters: The Interplay of Social Media-Themed Films

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Abstract

This study examines technological horror films focusing mainly on social media-themed films that feed people's anxieties. The study examines social media-themed films' place, importance, and effect on people's lives and explains social media-themed films using the concept of technological determinism. The study considers social media, characters, and the universe, arguing that horror films are moving away from the natural universe and increasingly taking place in a virtual universe. The evolutionary angle of this paper explores how horror cinema has evolved to reflect societal changes, with a particular focus on the influence of social media on the genre. This discussion delves into the ways in which horror films have adapted to the digital age and how they mirror our shifting anxieties and fears. With technological advances, anxiety is experienced in a more abstract universe, lending new shapes to people's fears and adding complexity to the relationship between the horror film and the audience.

Keywords: horror cinema; technological determinism; sub-genre, technological horror films; social media-themed films

INTRODUCTION

Horror, first manifested in art and literature, eventually cinema. American cinema first tackled fantastical and supernatural subjects utilizing classical literature (Fowkes, 2010), adapting the fantastic 19th-century horror literature of Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe to the cinematic screen. The first *Frankenstein* was filmed in 1910 as an Edison production (Vidal, 2016); J. Searle Dawley directed, and Charles Ogle played the monster with long, unkempt hair and a sackcloth suit. Illustrating Mary Shelley's Gothic masterpiece, cinema actively incorporated horror in film (Sanchez, 2018).

The horror film genre is one of the most popular in cinematic history. The potential of horror films to attract an audience at cheap production costs using a universal language has long attracted producers. Horror films have the added appeal of offering opportunities to explore sexuality, class, power, and race. Horror films have a unique place in cinema with their imagery. From the horror films of the silent era to today, now with many sub-genres and influential works from cinemas worldwide, horror films have been highly inventive and diverse, distinct yet somewhat similar. Even though the experience of watching a horror film has evolved throughout the years, the main goal of horror

films is to scare the viewer in various ways (Benshoff, 2017; Gomery, 1996; Gürkan, 2009).

The periodic emergence of horror cinema subgenres (Hutchings, 2004; Kawin, 2012) are linked to such factors as religious beliefs, political events, wars, economic crises, and technologic change. People's fears are formed by the period in which they live. The importance of horror cinema is validated by the opportunity it offers audiences to confront their fears in the movie theater and achieve catharsis. Recent technological developments and the phones and computers that have become essential to our lives are the new forms fear in the contemporary age. People who actively use social media face anxieties such as, "What if I am being watched?" or "What will happen to me if I share this?" Particular concerns may differ from person to person.

The history of horror cinema identifies clear sub-genres for each of its periods. Moreover, what may constitute a sub-genre of the contemporary horror film, in both form and content, can be defined in terms of a historical context. Completely, for example, is the literature on the stalker/slasher subgenre on which many of these films are significantly patterned, especially in their use of the camera -- as a point of view shot shared by the machine, the character, and the viewer. This study bases the recent technological horror sub-genre of horror cinema on technological determinism, which argues that technology determines every moment of life and that technology directly impacts what people will experience. While technological horror films have a broad scope, this study narrows this scope and focuses on social media-themed films. The concept of "social media," which emerged mainly in the first decade of 2000 and gained popularity in the 2010s, is the subject of horror films. The study sample consists of three US-made horror films in the horror genre from the beginning of the 2010s to the present day (2022). When social media became a full-fledged part of human life,

three films directly related to a social media application, chronologically the study sample. These films are *Unfriended* (dir.: Levan Gabriadze, 2014), *Like.Share.Follow* (dir.: Glenn Gers, 2017), *Follow Me* (dir.: Will Wernick, 2020).

HORROR FILMS AS A GENRE

The film industry constantly and rapidly renews itself, affecting every genre of film. As technology advances, new movie genres emerge and the range of genre films expands. Horror is one genre where we see this expansion. As Abisel puts it (1999: 117), "Horror films enrich and refresh themselves with the change of styles that have been eroded by time, the formation of new forms or the addition of modern horrors to the old ones." Although the horror genre is the focus of interdisciplinary interest, the process of examining this genre begins with the idea that the corpus of horror films has collectively created a genre of cinema and that both filmmakers and audiences have embraced this genre and, therefore, the subject under study is, in fact, a genre of cinema.

After establishing genre theory in cinema, a fundamental problem has become theorists' focus. This problem arises from the questions of what a genre is, how to draw its boundaries, and how to distinguish it from other genres. This problem becomes more critical in the case of genres such as horror, which share commonalities with different genres or intertwine with them to create hybrid genres. Andrew Tudor argues that genre theorists are caught in a vicious circle. First, they enter into a genre. Accordingly, to determine what a genre is, a theorist analyzes several genre films, identifies what they have in common, and makes a distinction based on this. However, to select a specific type of film to define a genre, they must start from a pre-given definition. In other words, to define what a western is, it is necessary to look at films with specific characteristics but determining which films to look at without knowing what a western

is creates a dilemma (Tudor, 2012). Similarly, genre theorists who addressed the same problem have proposed solutions to overcome this problem. Tzvetan Todorov proposes the scientific method to solve this dilemma. According to Todorov, a general hypothesis will be established by examining a small number of situations before starting a film study. Then this hypothesis will be verified or falsified by applying it to other conditions (Abisel, 1990). Another theorist, Edward Buscombe's solution to the same question, is based on common sense. Buscombe suggests making a list of the elements in the analyzed films and evaluating the films with the features in this list in the same category (Tudor, 2012). Tudor states that there are two solutions to this issue. The first solution is to choose a criterion from an a priori idea depending on the critical purpose and make the distinction accordingly. The second is to rely on a generally accepted cultural consensus about what constructs the film in the genre under scrutiny and to analyze the genre on this basis. Tudor relies more on the second solution, stating that genre is 'what is believed to be genre.' This is because, for Tudor, genre consists of a series of cultural conventions (Abisel, 1999). In a genre such as horror, which is considered a product of popular culture and the ultimate criterion of its success is the audience's appreciation, it is appropriate that the distinction of the genre is determined not by theorists but by the audience criteria within the framework of the 'what is culturally believed to be a genre' approach. This approach, which also considers culture, contributes to the study's validity when dealing with today's horror cinema.

There are also different views on the qualities of genre films. Barry Grant considers genre films as commercial films and defines them as films that tell similar stories through repetition and variation with characters in similar situations. Thomas Sobchack, on the other hand, draws attention to the fact that genre definitions are limited by the conventions agreed upon between filmmakers and audiences. According to

Sobschack, genre films are films with a fixed plot, clearly defined characters, and satisfactorily predictable outcomes (Abisel, 1999). Tudor offers a different definition, arguing that genre is "what we collectively believe to be genre" (Abisel, 1999). This approach emphasizes genre films as belonging to popular culture. Finally, Harry Geduld and Ronald Gottesman provide a more concise definition, defining genre as "a category, style or form of film that is distinguished by its subject matter, theme or technique" (Sobchack, 2012). This study adopts Geduld and Gottesman's more inclusive and flexible definition. Starting from the assertion that the films selected for this article are horror films, it aims to examine more broadly the boundaries of a horror film. The aim is to emphasize the diversity of horror film subgenres and the emergence of new subgenres with technology. As Cheery (2014: 41) points out, different forms, periods, and sub-genres constitute updates of the basic pattern. For example, Westerns and musicals declined. This has led to a break from slasher films and the rise of technological horror films influenced by the rapid development of technology.

In addition to the multiplicity of its sub-genres, horror cinema poses a problem in classification, as it includes hybrid films that overlap with science fiction (Abisel, 1999; Cherry, 2009; Sobchack, 1997). The diversity of horror films leads to various classifications and sub-genres. Dubois (2000: 298–299) divides horror films into subgenres and four main categories. **Classic horror films** like *King Kong* (1933) feature an intense intimacy between the heroine and the monster; this intimacy continues until the monster is killed (destroyed, eliminated) and a human man rescues the woman. **Psychological horror films** like *The Seventh Veil* (1945) often include a doctor gets to know his patients, revealing one who feels torn between herself and the man she loves. **Serial killer horror films** like *Psycho* (1960) manipulate gender differences and roles. Yacowar (1986: 217–223) states sub-genres of horror centered

on biological attacks, giant prehistoric creatures, predatory animals, pets, storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes have emerged over time. Derry (1978) categorizes horror films according to the horror of the personality, the horror of the life and death struggle, and the horror of the demonic. Kawin (2012), meanwhile, categorizes horror films as pertaining to monster stories, psychosis or psychopath stories, and supernatural stories. Kawin states that while there can be transitivity between these story types, not all horror films necessarily involve a ghost or supernatural force or conform to a psychological environment.

Technological horror films mark the emergence of a new horror subgenre in today's film industry. Phones, tablets, and computers, now fixtures in our lives, have started to shape the situations we enjoy in life and also our fears. Technology has affected cinema by creating a new sub-genre for horror cinema, the technological horror film. It is possible to differentiate technological horror films, separating those that explore the dangers of social media. People have become addicted to social media in the last decade (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Monacis et al., 2017). Meanwhile, social media has introduced a realm where people feel free, uninhibited by the constraints of acceptable behavior in the real world (Abril et al., 2012; Kang et al, 2013; Kugelman, 2012; Salam, 2022). This has introduced an opportunity for producers, presenting new commercial possibilities. Horror films have started to attract more attention from young people and allow people to entertain their fears.

The anxieties caused by the development of technology are evident in Asian horror cinema. The cult film *Ringu* (1998) demonstrates the Far East's fear of technology, no matter how good its relationship with it. In featuring an evil spirit that comes out of the television, this film shows humans viewing developing technology as an enemy. According to Gürkan (2012: 19), "The film…refers to today's information society and…makes us think about the question 'Does man dominate technology or technology

dominate a man?…[and] shows the fears of the Japanese society…literally a giant of technology in the global world…"

We can declare that with technological development horror cinema has experienced the emergence of a new sub-genre. The unforeseen ramifications and consequences of technological advancements create anxieties that have taken on a structure that feeds horror films. In this sense, technology feeds human fears and hides what is feared behind its screens. When we look at the history and subgenres of horror films, we see that everything that is feared is somehow related to the material world: *The Phantom of the Opera* (1989) takes place at the opera, *Haunted House* (2013, 2014) takes place in a house, natural disasters occur in real-world environments. Yet in the context of technological horror films, social media-themed films unfold in a different universe. Supernatural creatures that appear in selfies, ghosts that appear after haunted videos are watched and downloaded apps that reveal the day you will die are evidence that the universe of fear has changed. Films classified as technological horror films in general and "social media-themed films" in particular are the most significant proof of this.

TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

In the 1950s and 60s Marshall McLuhan advanced the idea of putting technology at the center of life and linking all else to it. McLuhan's thesis on technological determinism analyzes society, change and history based on technology. Significantly, McLuhan did not emphasize the message; he was not interested in the content. Essential for him was the medium itself and its becoming part of the human body. Technological determinism refers to this.

According to Innis (1999; 2007), a philosopher working on technology, social change is related to technology. Innis maintains that technology is a continuation of human physical movements while communication technologies are a continuation of consciousness. Innis divides

technology into two, such as times and space based. In terms of technology, he discusses electronic tools are both time and space biased. Innis' view of technology is pessimistic. He argues that advances in mass communication technology have decreased people's efforts to understand each other and have created some adverse effects. For example, the telegraph caused people to speak less, narrowing the language, while newspapers and magazines led to less communication. Meanwhile, Ivins (1969) emphasizes the dimension of communication technologies related to economic developments. According to him, social change and transformation occur due to technology; for example, the printing press resulted in books, easily accessible and portable in form, so that information was no longer individualized but multifaceted. According to McLuhan, as communication technologies have developed, all societies and cultures in the world have become closer and more uniform. The main protagonists in this regard are telegraph and radio.

Maintaining that media such as the Internet, telephone and television permit communication between people on different continents, McLuhan (1994) maintains that the world has become smaller and distances shorter. Society, he says, offers us unfamiliar or inconvenient possibilities with the widespread use of mass media. We now control all kinds of interests, such as food, clothes, etc., of people living in other countries at the computer. Access to social media allows rapid spread of fashion trends from one part of the world to another. As a result, the world has become a global village where everyone shares commonalities and understands each other, even without speaking the same language. According to McLuhan, the vital point is the form of technology, that is, the technology itself: "The medium is the message." According to McLuhan, the influence of the medium is powerful and intense, affecting people uncontrollably and unconsciously. McLuhan emphasizes that he is not saying the message has no importance but is emphasizing the medium's

meaning in making sense of technology's effects on human beings.

The medium's message can be described as follows; what is essential is not what is watched on television but the television itself because television can sometimes be used for good and sometimes for a foul. Therefore, the importance of the technological device, the medium, should be considered independently of what it reflects.

McLuhan (1962) states that the medium is an extension of human consciousness. This includes the spoken and written word, clothing, money, timepieces, the press, houses, roads, wheels, cars and other vehicles, photographs, the telegraph, the typewriter, the telephone, radio, television, the cinema and guns Clothes are an extension of our skin. The house is a shelter, a temperature control mechanism for the body. Cities are further extensions of this, providing for the needs of large groups of bodies. McLuhan's statement that vehicles are people's extensions is directly proportional to the meaning he attributes to them. Everything that enters our lives becomes a part of us. With technology development, we become integrated with our tools. According to technological determinism, all we do is directly related to technology. For example, the car we drive is an extension of us, and if all conditions are met - driving license, financial, etc. - it has become a critical need for people to buy a car. Technology makes it almost compulsory to buy a car.

McLuhan deals with many aspects of technology, parsing how it affects and changes people's lives and what people encounter due to these changes. Seeing technology as a living organism has enabled him to analyze it and communicate his conclusions.

THE CHANGING UNIVERSE OF HORROR CINEMA IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

With the development of technology, tools have become an extension of human beings, and some fears have emerged, particularly with respect to

social media. A new sub-genre of horror has resulted from these anxieties in combination with the commercial anxiety of filmmakers.

The sub-genre of technology-based horror films basically deal with frightening aspects of the development of technology. Especially in Asian cinema, technology has become the main subject of horror films. This study, however, departs from these general technological fears and examines technological horror films in the context of "social media-themed films". This should not be confused with science fiction.

The fear that gives rise to this new sub-genre exists not only in one country but in all countries that have been introduced to social media, almost the entire world. In a world that has become a "*global village*," fear is common to everyone. The language of these movies is exact and understandable for everyone who uses a phone, has an account on social media and /or uses a computer.

Technological determinism argues that technology exerts external pressure on people and society, dictating how people should live. Technology does this most easily in cinema. *"In the case of cinema, mediation is activated every time the film is watched, and this situation has the opportunity to continue indefinitely. The "medium" itself, which acts as a "tool," cannot be left out of the media process because this situation inevitably occurs. While watching a film, the camera and all the technological elements belonging to the field of cinema can never be left out because these elements constitute the essence of the filmic process, and the camera is no exception."* (Al, 2017: 51). Cinema, a tool, encompasses the other devices it contains. When watching a film, the main issue is its genre and the camera that shoots it. While technology has a comprehensive definition that can be examined comprehensively, customizing it makes it easier to read using technological determinism.

According to McLuhan and Powers (1989), technology forces one of the human senses to the fore, while the others are either weakened or temporarily eliminated; realizes the human tendency to worship its appendages. Taken far enough, man thus becomes 'a creature of his machine,' and falling under the influence of one's creation is one of the things that people fear most. This article explores this fear through in horror cinema and technological developments.

While technology directly affects the economy, politics, and daily life, cinema is also affected by it. Social media-themed films have been shaped by technological determinism and technological determinism is decisive in their narratives.

Film narratives are analyzed through McLuhan's arguments. First, the medium is the message: social media is the medium, the one that delivers the message directly. No matter the application of social media used or what is shared on social media, the issue is social media. Social media directly affects our lives and shapes people. Social media-themed films are more concerned with social media itself than its message. They are about the use of social media and human relationships. Sometimes this is presented in a positive light, and sometimes in a negative light. Therefore, emphasizing the message will mistakenly lead to ignoring the point that the medium is the message.

Films often depict social media as being used with bad intentions. Even used with good intentions, we have seen social media surrounded with bad choices, showing that we should focus on the tool, not the purpose. In other words, this tool is somehow directly involved in human life. The "global village" concept explains that technology will uniformize people, and the world will become a global village. With these words, McLuhan foresees the situation provided by today's social media. People are so unified that their collective actions are not considered strange but normal. Thanks to social media, the global village has expanded. People can roam freely throughout this village, though separated in time and space, with the help of a screen. An American group can travel to Russia - we are talking about two ends of the earth here - to

produce content for a live broadcast. In these social media-themed films and technology-based horror films, the characters' style and the content they create are features that can be easily understood and encountered in every country in the world.

THE EVOLUTIONARY ANGLE OF HORROR CINEMA

Horror cinema has always been a reflection of the collective fears and concerns of its audience. In the past, classic horror films often revolved around supernatural elements, monsters, or external threats. However, with the rise of social media and the digital revolution, our fears have shifted to more intangible and personal terrains.

Social media-themed horror films explore the darker aspects of our interconnected world. They delve into the consequences of sharing too much personal information online, the dangers of online anonymity, and the potential for our deepest secrets and vulnerabilities to be exposed to a vast audience. These films tap into our unease about the loss of privacy in an era of constant connectivity.

Moreover, social media-themed horror films often explore themes of cyberbullying, online harassment, and the spread of misinformation. They showcase the devastating effects of viral content and how it can manipulate public perception or lead to real-world harm. This evolution in horror cinema highlights the impact of technology on our mental well-being and social dynamics, portraying the digital realm as a breeding ground for terror.

The transformation of horror cinema also reflects the way we consume media. Social media has revolutionized the way we interact with horror content, allowing for viral marketing campaigns, fan theories, and instant feedback loops (Grodal, 2009). Films like *Unfriended*, *Like. Share. Follow, and Follow Me* take advantage of this trend by presenting their narratives entirely through the perspective of digital screens and online communication. This immersive approach brings the horror closer to home, making it more relatable and unsettling for modern audiences.

Additionally, the changing character of horror cinema in social media-themed films showcases the blurring lines between reality and fiction. With the rise of user-generated content and online hoaxes, the notion of what is real and what is fabricated becomes increasingly ambiguous (Keen, 2008). This ambiguity fuels the horror in films like *Unfriended*, *Like.Share. Follow, and Follow Me* where protagonists must confront their own online personas and grapple with the uncertainty of who they can trust.

The evolutionary angle of horror cinema refers to the idea that horror cinema, as a genre, has evolved and changed over time. Instead of merely being about traditional monsters or supernatural elements, it has adapted to reflect contemporary societal fears and advancements in technology.

The evolutionary angle of horror cinema demonstrates how horror cinema has adapted to reflect our evolving societal fears and technological advancements (Duchaney, 2015). By centering narratives on the perils of social media and the digital age, these films resonate deeply with contemporary audiences, tapping into their anxieties about privacy, online behavior, and the fine line between reality and fiction. As technology continues to shape our lives, it is likely that horror cinema will continue to evolve, offering new and chilling insights into the ever-changing landscape of our interconnected world.

THE SAMPLING OF THE STUDY AND METHOD

The research uses film genre analysis, a qualitative research method. The study examines the horror film genre through the film genre analysis and analyzes technological horror films in the context of social media-themed films. In conducting the film genre analysis, the study aims to present the new sub-genre in detail using critical approaches that expand the ways of evaluating films and reveal cinema's artistic potential.

This perspective provides a discourse that can guide films to come and expand the creative contributions of directors (Özden, 2004: 12).

Different periods have seen new sub-genres of horror cinema emerge; yet as Abisel puts it,

"It is difficult to make a precise definition and a consistent subclassification since a very complex heritage of different cultures, forms and developments has played a role in the formation of the horror genre. Moreover, words such as suspense, horror, brutality, and disaster are interchangeable flexibly." (Abisel, 1999: 119)

This study illuminates the in-depth analysis of social media-themed narratives, which can be defined as a (new) subgenre of the horror genre, by creating analysis kits according to narrative, character, *mise-en-scene*, and other cinematic elements. However, we are given a description of how this contemporary technology is used in relationship to established horror genre film conventions and film form. What transformations have taken place? Who functions as the "monster" in these films, for example, and how is cinematic space and time used? Moreover, how do these films compare to the established stalker/slasher subgenre that has dominated the past 50 years of the horror film? These are questions to ask when claiming a new subgenre. We inquire, in this sense, what is the plot structure of the films, and what are the character types that generate these actions? What is the setting, and what is use of the camera, of the point of view shot, and the spaces created? (Carroll, 1990; Clover, 1992).

Film genre analysis (criticism) analyzes film as text, studying various genres (horror, comedy, action, science fiction, etc.) and identifying the characteristic elements that define them. This analysis reveals which elements in a film are identified for discussion and how they are discussed. Through film genre analysis, films can be compared as texts and their similarities and differences can be seen in the context of the genre structure. Through film genre analysis, the textual conventions of specific genres facilitating the construction of meaning (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990; Upton & Cohen, 2009) can be understood (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2009; Swales, 1990).

Horror is a film genre that adheres to specific recognizable patterns. This study focuses on the technology-based horror films that have emerged with recent advancements in digital media and the internet, categorizing these films as separate and distinct from social media-themed films and examining them through the lens of technological determinism. In general, these films appeal to young audiences. The main features of these films include themes of intimidation, social media connection, and developing technology and its uses.

Considering all these situations, the films are selected in accordance with the criteria as follows:

- From the early 2010s to the present day (2022), when social media became a full-fledged part of human life,
- It belongs to the horror genre,
- Made in Hollywood,
- They are directly related to a social media application in terms of its subject matter.
- Chronologically, the first, the last, and one other film in the middle of these two films were selected.

The films under examination are *Unfriended* (Levan Gabriadze, 2014), *Like.Share.Follow.* (Glenn Gers, 2017), and *Follow Me* (Will Wernick, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

These films are analyzed to

(i) identify and understand the characteristics of social media-themed films;
(ii) comprehend the reasons for their emergence and the purpose they serve;

(iii) predict the role these films will play in society and culture in the future;

(iv) demonstrate the evolution of social media-themed films.

This study explores the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of this new subgenre of horror cinema?
- What has changed as social media-themed films have changed?

Given these questions, the films are analyzed by the social media they concern, the characters they feature, and the universe(s) they inhabit. Plot summaries provide readers with context for the social media they cover.

UNFRIENDED (2014): SYNOPSIS

Six friends talking on Skype realize that someone uninvited has entered the conversation. They try to exclude the intruder from the conversation without success. As the conversation continues they receive messages from a close friend who committed suicide exactly one year previously; the uninvited participant in the discussion is the spirit of their friend, who killed himself because of an embarrassing video they uploaded to the internet, come to take revenge. Though disbelieving at first, they are eventually convinced by mysterious events that ensue. Revealing the darkest secrets of each, the spirit kills them one by one when they leave or try to leave the conversation. His girlfriend is the last one left. Her best friend uploaded the video that caused the boy to commit suicide. There is no escape: the spirit is relentless in taking its revenge.

LIKE.SHARE.FOLLOW. (2017): SYNOPSIS

Garrett, a YouTube phenomenon with 2 million followers, gets involved with an obsessed fan. When Garrett becomes suspicious of her intentions and ends his relationship with her, the fan kills a girl Garrett was with. Garrett flees and hides with a friend in a mountain house waiting for the fan to be apprehended but the fan finds the home through the internet and comes to where Garrett and his friend are hiding as they play a game on live TV. Garrett asks for help on live TV, giving their location address, but his followers think it's just a ploy to get more viewers. Garrett comes face to face with the obsessed fan and kills her. A follower he asked for help on live TV comes to his rescue but doesn't take him to the hospital. The nightmare continues for Garrett.

FOLLOW ME (2020): SYNOPSIS

Cole goes to Moscow with his close friends to shoot an escape room-themed video. A friend in Russia makes all the preparations for the escape room. When they enter the escape room, everything that initially was fun becomes a nightmare. Cole barely saves his girlfriend from drowning and then his friends are murdered one by one. Witnessing his friends dying, Cole struggles to protect his girlfriend, the last remaining. Following the light from the ventilation in the escape room, Cole escapes from the room and sees his Russian friend, who brought them to the escape room. Thinking that his Russian friend planned all this, Cole kills him with an empty gun. When the lights turn on, Cole finds himself in a vast crowd, and everything he experiences is a game.

This study interprets the codes of this new sub-genre of horror film through social media, character and universe.

(i) Social Media

The film *Unfriended* opens with the main character watching a video on YouTube, which is the audience's entry point to the virtual world. A Skype call continues throughout the film. Gmail and Facebook are actively used in the cutscenes. All these elements show that the film is social media-based.

Today, the place of social media is undeniable. Social media has become a part of daily

life, and technological devices have become the center of life, directly affecting people's lives and selves. In *Unfriended*, people encourage friends to kill themselves through posts from fake accounts, then post messages of grief for the deceased. Social media hides reality. It presents observers with a deceptive image of truth.

The film *Like.Share.Follow.* surrounds the social networking site. In the film, we also see the use of gaming applications in live broadcasts. When his father asks Garrett how he knows that his fan is his bookstore, Garrett replies, "They know everything about me! Brave new world, Dad." With these words Garrett opens his life and himself on YouTube, the biggest marketplace of our time, to those who follow him. In another scene, he verbalizes the inconvenience of this: "Can you live without the internet? Yes, of course, you can. It's not bad. I won't live without the internet. I think technology brings everyone closer together, and yes, this is dangerous. I know it's risky to open up and trust." With these words, Garrett recalls McLuhan's global village metaphor. The language used on YouTube appears almost universal. Garrett's dyed blonde hair represents a style frequently used among YouTubers in all countries. The film shows us a full of people who all look alike and speak the same language. Garrett refuses to live without the internet and starts streaming again, even though his life is in danger. The film *Like.Share. Follow.* shows us that people have become a part of technology and that they cannot remove it from their lives despite its accompanying threats and negativity.

Garrett doesn't even remember the content of his videos because they are part of his daily conversations and he lives his life in front of the camera. But he has internalized his life so much that he doesn't even realize where and what he is talking about, let alone what he needs to avoid. His YouTube channel, which he opened just for fun, causes Garrett to pay a considerable price. Today's influencers, who live their private lives naked in front of everyone, are open to danger.

The film *Follow Me* is based on the concept of the Phenom. A young man who becomes a social media Phenom, together with his Phenom friends, starts live broadcasts. There they share their every waking moment, aiming to produce content. This film's most important feature is the blurring of the distinction between reality and the virtual world. Cole is so immersed in what he is experiencing that he doesn't even allow himself to listen to the truth when it is told. This also shows that a well-constructed game can be dangerous. This fictionalized game being watched robs Cole of his perception of reality. Cole believes in the game so much that, fearing for his life, he ends up killing someone.

At this point, the film criticizes social media itself. It points out that as technology advances, content production pushes boundaries, realizing more and more extremes to retain and attract new audiences.

(ii) Character

Social media is actively used, especially by young people. It cannot be expected that a film about social media would not include young people and that young people would not constitute the audience. The characters of *Unfriended* are young high school students and *Unfriended* provides the following statement to young audiences: "Every video you watch on the computer, every click you perform, is somehow being watched. The screen records your every moment. You are not safe from surveillance and detection."

The group of friends in *Unfriended* thought it would be fun to upload the video that led to their friend's death. The negative power of social media, and the attendant vitriolic criticism, has the potency to drive a young girl to suicide. An example of how significant this impact can be: people living in small neighborhoods follow unwritten social conventions so that their communities do not marginalize them. If they do not conform, they are criticized and expelled. Even in small communities, the pressure one

experiences can be heavy and this is exponentially increased on social media. Any content a young person creates for fun or to express their momentary thoughts and opinions can provoke attack. An uploaded video or a shared post may be criticized by so many that the content originator may be forced to the point of suicidal thought and even action. The film addresses exactly this.

The starting point of *Like.Share.Follow* is YouTube. Generally, it is young people who produce content for YouTube, so the audience and characters of the film are also young; people in their late teens and early twenties are more active on YouTube than those in their late teens and early twenties. As a result, the YouTube audience also falls within this range, though different age groups are included in YouTube audiences. Young people use social media most actively and one of the essential features of social media-themed films is to appeal to this age group.

The film *Follow Me* concerns young people. Its characters comprise a group traveling from America to Russia and the people waiting for them there.

(iii) Universe

The universe of *Unfriended* reverses the conventional universe, exemplifying "the changing universe of horror films" that this thesis concerns. The entire film takes place on a computer screen and the film is visualized through a screen within a screen. The conversations and calls made by the six friends in the film are seen on the computer screen, and the film ultimately places us in that virtual universe, creating the perception that everything that happens there in the film is happening to us.

Unfriended moves fear to a virtual dimension, placing it behind the computer camera. Every projected emotion is realized in both the virtual dimension and the real world. The movie takes place in a virtual universe that is often intertwined with the real world, so that anyone

watching the film is familiar with the language of the movie, understanding that something terrible is about to happen when the screen freezes or the sound cuts out. We understand emotions in the film through the actors' voices, the occasional frozen images, and the applications the characters use. The virtual sex between the two young lovers transports a physical act done face-to-face and side-by-side in the real world to a different dimension. Even the film poster reflects the virtual world. We can say that this film is a pioneer that creates the universe inhabited by social media-themed films.

Like.Share.Follow is set in the real world but also exposes the viewer to the screen. While it reflects daily life in the real world in one way, it reveals another reality onscreen. In this sense, the film keeps the audience in a relationship with the virtual universe. Garrett's obsessed fan reaches him through social media. He makes videos for her, the language he knows best, and uploads them to YouTube. *Like.Share.Follow* also traps the viewer inside the phone by superimposing calls and texts on the movie scene. It does not allow the viewer to leave virtual reality. When Garrett wants to call someone on the phone, the call screen is given as a film scene, allowing the audience to identify with the movie through the vehicle of the call screen that people frequently use in daily life. Finally, some scenes create the feeling of watching a video on YouTube. This is the most significant proof that the projected universe, the universe of horror films, has changed.

The film *Follow Me* starts in the real world and invites viewers into the virtual world: as the actors broadcast live, the experience of watching them from behind a phone pushes the audience into the virtual world. In this film, there is an ebb and flow between the natural world and the virtual universe, exposing the audience again to familiar live broadcast scenes, particularly scenes of violence (torture and death). This situation places the victim, who used to be only behind the television or movie screen, at a distance from the audience and at some remove. The viewer

sees violence and anger as ordinary and usual, perceiving an ordinary video from daily life watched on the phone.

CONCLUSION

The presence of social media in the films cited addresses the intersection of the cinematic elements and the horror film conventions. While Marshall McLuhan's 1960s theory of "technological determinism" is mentioned, the application of this theory to a discussion of contemporary film is explained. The universe reflected in the film *Unfriended* is virtual. However, the universe of the other two films *(Like.Share.Follow* and *Follow Me)* intertwines the virtual and real worlds. People frequently transition between the real and virtual universe in their daily lives, but audiences will identify with these films and accept this virtual universe more. This universe is not alien; the technological devices we use frequently in daily life are part of this universe. Films serve this universe.

Social media-themed films are designed to appeal to young audiences. To make the characters in these films relatable to the viewing audience, the characters are young people. The conversation between the main character, a YouTube phenomenon, and his father illuminates this in *Like.Share.Follow*.

With the development of technology, people use digital apps and devices daily, effortlessly entering and navigating the virtual universe. In the analyzed films, the screens shown are not foreign. The change of the universe with social media-themed horror films: It created a more layered relationship between the viewer and the victim. Violence has become more regular, people's experiences more ordinary, and terrible things more commonplace. While the changing universe is a necessary consequence of technology, the message given has become related to the technology itself: "the medium is the message."

This subgenre does not have a deep history, but its characteristics can be summarized. In these films we encounter a screen, sometimes belonging to a computer, sometimes to a cell phone. A social media application is directly or indirectly referenced. Usually the plot revolves around young people or popular phenomena. Fame and recognition are common themes of these movies.

In addition, the newness of the genre does not allow its cultural codes to be read quickly. The genre draws the audience in by all means.

The general characteristics of social media-themed horror films follow:

- *Target audience*: Young people. Young characters are usually used in these films to ensure a high level of identification with young audiences, to whom social media generally appeals.
- *Universe*: these movies usually introduce another screen between the camera and the audience. Watching the movie on a computer screen or "live" broadcast are common devices.
- *Application*: these movies often surround the use of popular social media applications. In some movies, the application is named directly. In others, the application remains unnamed but the audience readily identifies it.
- *Objective*: scaring the audience is the primary purpose of horror films and those centered around social media are no exception. The primary source of anxiety in these films varies with the content and storyline. Maybe it's the ghost of a dead girl or an crazed, obsessed social media follower. The source of fear is variable, but this does not differentiate social media-themed horror films.
- *Intention*: social media-themed films do not universally condemn or support social media. In using social media as a topic, some social media-themed films aim to provide social commentary by criticizing social media while others aim only to achieve commercial success.

Ultimately, the ongoing evolution of social media-themed horror films serves as a powerful reflection of our collective concerns and a cautionary reminder of the potential pitfalls within our modern technological landscape. By engaging with these narratives, viewers are compelled to consider the impact of technology on their lives, encouraging a deeper examination of the delicate balance between the benefits and dangers of our digital age. As long as society grapples with its technological advancements' implications, horror cinema remains a pertinent and captivating medium for exploring these complex and haunting themes.

In conclusion, the evolutionary angle of social media-themed horror films showcases the genre's remarkable ability to adapt and resonate with contemporary audiences. As horror cinema reflects our evolving societal fears and technological advancements, it has shifted its focus to center narratives on the perils of social media and the digital age. These films strike a chord with modern viewers by tapping into audiences' anxieties about privacy, online behavior, and the blurred boundaries between reality and fiction.

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