



RESEARCH PAPER

Horror Sells as Commodity: Examining Socio-psychological Effects of Horror Film among Adults during Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to uncover the causes that affect young people's choice to watch horror films. Demographics i.e. gender, setting, and psychological factors i.e. past beliefs about the entities shown in horror films; audiences are exposed to specific results that differ in severity and nature-based on their gender category, setting, and past beliefs about the objects seen in horror films. This study's fundamental structure is to find the psychological issues among adults while focusing on social cognitive theory. It can be explained what makes some people enjoy horror films and why some people avoid them, argues that audiences are proactive and their location, self-effectiveness, and self-reflexiveness play a significant role in their learning process. The survey research is employed for this study and data collected from 560 male and female of two cities of Punjab, Pakistan (Sargodha and Lahore) with age 20 to 35 years during the Covid-19 lockdown. The findings of the study reveal that there are two critical reasons for youth to watching horror films, amusement and interest. Young people who believe in these characters from film or other supernatural entities are more scared than those who do not believe in their existence. It is infer that horror is commodity that sells fear in horror films among adults. However, Socio-psychological effects of horror films cannot be ignored.

Introduction

Dropout is In the Covid-19 era, the global pandemic enforced all the states, provinces and counties to enforced lock down and restrict human movement and

interaction because of possible fear of infection. The watching of movies was the potential source of consumption of time among youth during Covid-19. The horror films are the second significant genre in the movies industry that draws together audiences from all around the globe and in every social and income groups. However, individuals are varying significantly in their love for horror films. Consequently, reviewers, audiences, and film authors' efforts, the definition of "genre" in cinema was established within the film culture industry and currently retains its base. However, there is no firm agreement about precisely how these genres are described or how they have been created. Even though violent and fright depictions could evoke adverse effects, audiences continue to consume horror media material for entertainment (Martin, 2019). Horror books, tales, animations, and plays are characterized by monsters' appearances that caused to create first impression of horror imaginary in the minds (Carroll, 2018). Horror in film genres are making substantial use of unusual physics or implausible and ghostly scenes and calls their core theme queasiness induced by death and deterioration and the fear of being haunted by strong and sometimes very biting weird agencies (Leeder, 2018; p.60). They have managed to retain the title of "most-watched" across film history; while horror films have become the longest existing film genre, they have also managed to maintain the title of "significantly watched." Despite losing prominence from time to time, horror films appear to be unaffected by sectional financial crises; with low budgets, horror films can be made. Besides, since they are one of the most favored film genres worldwide, another explanation why horror films are still standing (Abisel, 1999). It is noted that the movie viewer played the role of trigger for this transition in the business. The competition also intensifies as this industry expanded. Producers have come to draw the viewer with diverse and exciting subjects and tales. The type of horror often drew fans because it had imagination, excitement, action, and suspense. The trend of progression in the tradition of horror films has continued over time, and the amount of terror represented by the film is primarily attributed to the available special effects that influence emotionally or psychologically. Researchers have also commenced experiments to verify the impact of films on viewers and have obtained substantial success in this field's growth. The topic of whether or not horror movies have a definite detrimental impact on the human mind and mental wellbeing remains an age-old argument. Many researchers often believe that each generation is more desensitized to upsetting photos of some sort by the years' passage. This study aims to consider the social impact of a horror film on young people. There will be short-term impacts on consumers as well as long-term results. An individual who has seen a frightening film lately will not sleep for a night and then forget about it or stay in this condition for weeks and months, and the person begins to use the night bulb. Youngsters are drawn to mystery and thrill films. Some may not like horror movies, but some appreciate them. Our fascination with frightening fantasies is not merely focused on trying to understand the unseen. This study is intended to discover why youngsters want to see horror movies. We also have a natural fear of ghosts and nightmares.

People have likely been sharing ghost tales around a campfire for thousands of years. That could be why horror movies and television shows unfold with a scene of someone sharing a story at night. The crowd will know they are going to be shown something frightening. This strategy can be used in *The Fog*, directed in 1979 by John Carpenter (Giannetti & Leach, 1999). Desensitization theory claims that individuals are desensitized from prolonged exposure to something. They are not sensitive to it now. It advocates that viewers who see these films daily are less scared of the sense of horror movies than someone who seldom subject themselves to these films.

Fear and Horror Films

The horror genre is popular worldwide and among all social classes, with a wide range of people enjoying the entertainment provided by these films. Palmer (1989) was quoted by Leathers and Eaves (2015) to find the distinct variations in horror film viewing behavior between people and recognize definite human features that predict physiological reactions to horror film viewing. The thesis is subject to two criteria. The first condition, the questionnaire-only, includes only an opinion survey intended for those that displayed a disdain for horror films, whereas the second condition, the questionnaire-psychology, contains those who expressed a love for horror films. These individuals were shown a video that contained horror clips and clinical factors such as heart rate and blood pressure. In the group study, there was no discernible pattern for more extraordinary fearlessness in the questionnaire-psychology condition than the questionnaire-only condition. The systolic blood pressure was the only physiological measure that substantially improved from baseline to video.

Furthermore, a rise in systolic blood pressure has a detrimental association with fearlessness and a good relationship with cold-heartedness. The studies show a personality difference between those who enjoy horror films and those who do not. Furthermore, it illustrated physiological differences among horror movie audiences.

Johnston describes motivations for watching horror films (1990). These are suspense, (ii) bloodshed, (iii) liberty, and (iv) problem-solving. These motives reflect what we see on the screen and are related to our intellectual reactions to the film. Walton (1989) states, "We consciously realize that we are safe because the movie itself shows that to us." He argues that fear is a conviction that an individual is not healthy. Walton discussed the make-believe principle. However, Morreall (1993) believes that fear will take on different insentient forms. Fear of tornadoes should not involve an actual encounter. Fear can be a significant cause for the person who watches movies. People do not fear death because they have experienced an event, but they are terrified of the movie character.

For persons at high risk, low fear is predicted by someone else. Sparks & Sparks (2000) claim the excitement and interest as a source of the horror movie watching. Heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration increase during sexual arousal. When the film is finished, neural excitation continues. However, other people only love high degrees of physical excitement. It is the same for horror movies; specific viewers watch them

because they are unfamiliar with them. Most people want to know about unusual happenings. The sudden transition has interrupted our routine. Visual effects in cinema are a cause for audiences to be attracted to film. Since observing *Jaws*, few people sound weird about swimming in oceans and lakes.

Others can avoid films which are too near to their home. However, why should we watch horror movies? The researcher noticed that adrenaline soared with the roller coaster experience, but the elevated heart rate did not significantly affect the body. People will even like to experience both destructive and optimistic emotions together. Any individual may be able to be sad. It is nice that someone has been through a social disengagement to come out of the other hand. More signs have been proposed by collecting investigations undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s, the heyday of horror films. It looked at the variations in people viewing horror movies. Many do not like terror, but many like watching it. Who are the citizens who capture fear? Hoffner and Levine (2005) published a meta-analysis of 35 functional studies, and the findings indicate the general trends of attachment types which include vulnerable, ambivalent, avoidant, preoccupied, and resistant. When the kid grows older, it becomes more fun. "Teenage" begins with teenagers and eventually declines with age.

Effects of Horror Movies

Mass media impact study began with findings of shifts in the mind and actions of individuals. Mass media impact in children's past studies is penny-funded surveys that documented severe effects on the children. The business develops and advances over time and technology. Visual and sound effects in movies render movies more believable and successful. A report on the influence of film indicated that the movies' concepts influence people subjected to movies. The various types of movies have different impacts on the actions and perceptions of people.

Johnston (1995) discovered that certain people are terrified of horror videos. Viewers like faces of horror films that are seen in the most grotesque films. Movie viewers like to watch disfigured pictures and frightening expressions, and blood flowing down. It is okay to watch these scary movies if you do not share the video's scenarios. Although once you start having anxiety, then it may be a symptom of paranoia. Several cases have proven violent sequences in the film impact the physical and psychological wellbeing of audiences. It induces terror, anxiety, sleep disturbances, phobia, and emotional distress. Repeated viewing makes audiences desensitized. Johnston finds that violent coverage makes violence more possible, and offensive reactions follow. Studies have noticed horror movies such as anxiety, fatigue, terror, phobia, anxiety, nightmares, frightening images, blood/injury or injection, situation, smells, sensory stimulation, noisy noises, sensations of panic, and horror. If people watch horror movies, they appear to establish odd patterns of behavior.

Consequently, the results suggest that people who view horror movies have a slower reaction to cognition. There are noticeable impacts of horror films on teenagers

and adults. Heart rate, blood pressure, and adrenaline levels can increase watching scary movies. They get excited after finishing the stress.

Any fans cannot sleep after watching terrifying movies. Watching a horror movie can trigger insomnia for several days, even months. The victim might start using a nightlight to sleep. He may be distracted by the frightening protagonists in the horror movie. This may trigger sleep issues.

The horror genre also uses terror as a predictor. Viewers can become frightened, sob, yell, tremble, shudder or even nauseate if the horror film scares them. Anhedonia is often encountered.

Seeing the movies can trigger a phobia for mammals, insects, reptiles, flames, flood, water, blood, injections, accident or height, and confined spaces.

Quite distressing looks and noisy sounds will annoy audiences. Terror and other environmental threats also impact the audience of a horror film. Bladed arms, blood, damage, suffering, cuts, needles, and other physical hazards are frightening. It is critical to horror movies. They find it terrifying in confined rooms, like elevators, and noisy places like doctors' offices. i.e., frightening, distorted noises. Loud sounds, blurred faces trigger traumatic symptoms.

Mental Trauma

Disturbing and horrifying pictures may trigger emotional distress. PTSD is very popular among people, and PTSD can lead a person to have trouble discriminating between fact and fiction. Clements and Sinclair argue that people who watch horror movies should be emotionally healthy. Otherwise, it can trigger depression. D'Souza (2016) finds that while certain people may not know why they get nervous or scared after seeing horror videos, we may tell that children and teenagers might be at greater risk than adults. Parents should recognize their children's growth as they determine what type of programming to make them enjoy. Those kids with a low capacity to differentiate reality from fiction can avoid horror films for more years. Many people feel hallucinations during sleep, such as sounds, darkness, or troubling visions. There will be certain instances where the sleeping condition may take months, years, or even decades. Carl Jung clarified in *Psychological Forms* that negative and socially inappropriate traits are fundamental to human existence. He believed the shadow is a crucial part of being human, and an individual needs to deal with it to grow and evolve constantly. Horror movies serve as a fun diversion to the modern world where children can test their darkest desires, urges, and fears. Piaget indicates that schemas shape cognitive development that is how we perceive the environment. Development in conceptual schemas needs developing and learning. Most of the infant and adolescent demographic places the e-cigarettes at risk for experiencing paranoia or phobias that are also not well known. Kruise and Kalmus (2016) disagree about the behavioral shifts induced by seeing frightening scenarios in movies and find that such audiences become surprised as they encounter such circumstances.

Desensitization Effect of Watching Horror Movies

Seeing horror movies may even be fun. If you see these movies so frequently, you might become desensitized to crime. They could become less susceptible to difficult circumstances in actual life and believe they are accustomed to those challenging situations. Horror films can aid with the management of fears and phobias. Rydell (2016) explores the theories linked to aggressive media consumption and found little help. Cantor (2002) surveyed 530 horror screenings and questioned how they feel the night after seeing the various horror movies and received several answers. When questioned whether horror movies had a substantial impact on the conduct, 1/3 of the respondents said they do not. The findings support the theory that movies may generate apprehension of an entity and even desensitize emotion. Cantor(2000) performed an interview with 90 students (kindergarten to second graders) and 129 students (third to sixth graders) and posed the question: Do exposure to horror movies leave them desensitized? The respondents say that they do not have bad feelings towards aggression or scary images. There is a mass media phenomenon called desensitization that decreases emotional arousal and creates antisocial behavior. People that participate in desensitization minimize interference in wars and are least compassionate to victims of abuse. Cantor (2002) showed that there is a strong connection between scary movies and antisocial behavior. He concludes that movies should be classified and mainstream media should be informed to reduce movies and mass media.

Material and Methods

In this research, the quantitative research-based online survey approach is used, and data is obtained from the moviegoers between the age 20 and 35 years during first phase of Covid-19 from male and female. Quantitative research helps researchers assess and calculate the item, analyze the collected data, perform statistical analyses, and classify and make predictions correctly (Gurcum&Arslan, 2017).A sampling of 560 moviegoers responded using the online questionnaire. A well-structured questionnaire intended to collect the respondents' perceptions about films. The reliability of the instrument is alpha 0.87.

Results and Discussion

Most respondents (35.3% female and 34.1% male)said their preferred genre is a romantic film. The horror film is viewed as a second by the audience (26.5% female) and (27.3% male).Satire and action contents are viewed at third and fourth respectively among the audience. The finding indicates that the overall horror genre is second most liked by both male and female respondents.

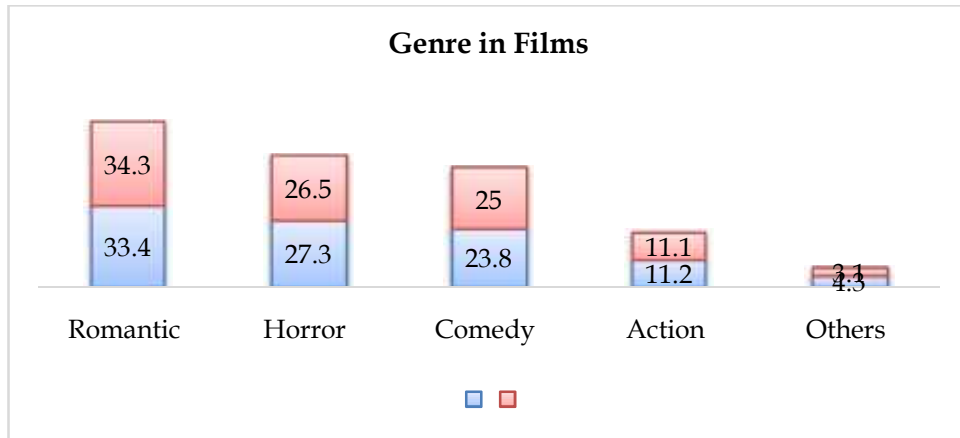


Figure 1: Favorite genre in films

Respondents are questioned what the motives they are exposed to the horror film, and they reply that leisure is the first significant elucidation (50.8%), and at the second level, the respondents often exposed to horror movies for inquisitiveness (47.8%). More than half (55.5%) replied that they were not addicted to seeing horror films(See figure 2). These observations are in line with Sparks and Sparks (2000), where he agrees that horror movies are perceived as a product of dissemination and conditioning of suspense. Costanzo (2014) argues that film genres are varying in global film industry. The rising awareness and globalization brought cross cultural aspects in films. Film genres are revolving around the cultural heroism and demonism i.e. *Kung Fu Panda* is Chinese cultural character whereas *Samurai* is Japanese character and in Indian culture wedding and family festivity is significant so it reflects in their movies. Film genres in another segment of horror movies also depicting the cultural horrific characters. In some cultures ghost like characters celebrated heroes while in some they are demon.

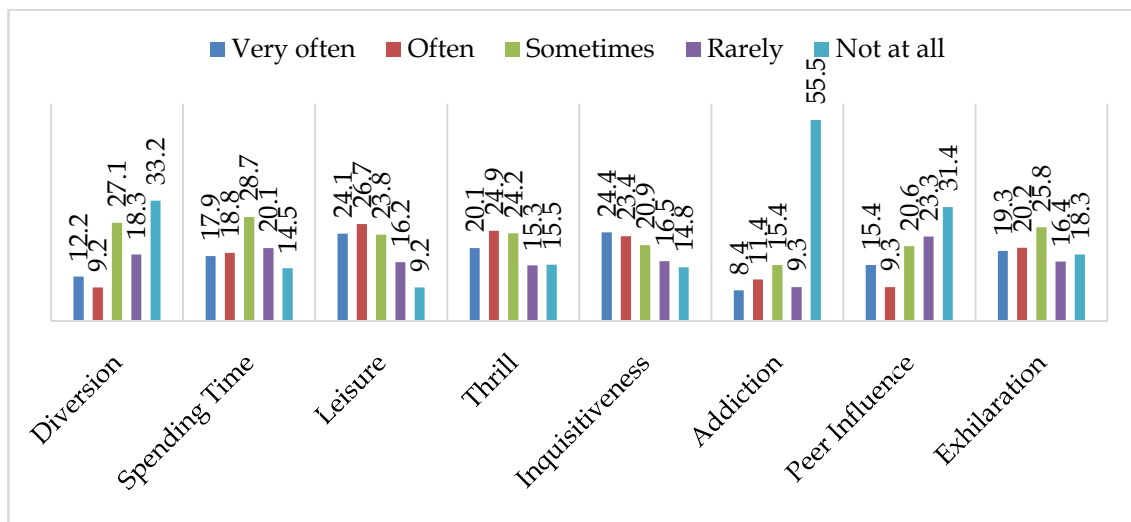


Figure 2: Aim of the viewing horror films

In response to the question to the respondents that whether they found some difference in their sleeping behavior after seeing a horror film; respondents(39.9%) respond that they often experience disturbance in sleeping after seeing a horror movie, while (45.2%) of the respondents respond that they do not feel any disturbance in sleeping. Bad dreams and wild imagination troubled frequently (27.1 percent) and (28.4 percent) respondents respectively, although more than (respectively 57.25 and 52.5 percent) responded they do not have any bad dream or wild imaginations after seeing a horror movie (see Figure3). The results are in the line of Andrade and Cohen (2007). They notice that horror movies are perceived both for negative and positive reasons. The consequences may be gauged based upon the circumstance, and the spectator is engaged.

Fukumoto and Tsukino (2015) observed the relationship of horror movie character and physiological effects through experimental study on 10 male Individuals and find that horror movies give excitement and brought changes in short term physiology that give pleasure to some and change in temporal cardio rhythm. However, results are varying on Individual to Individual.

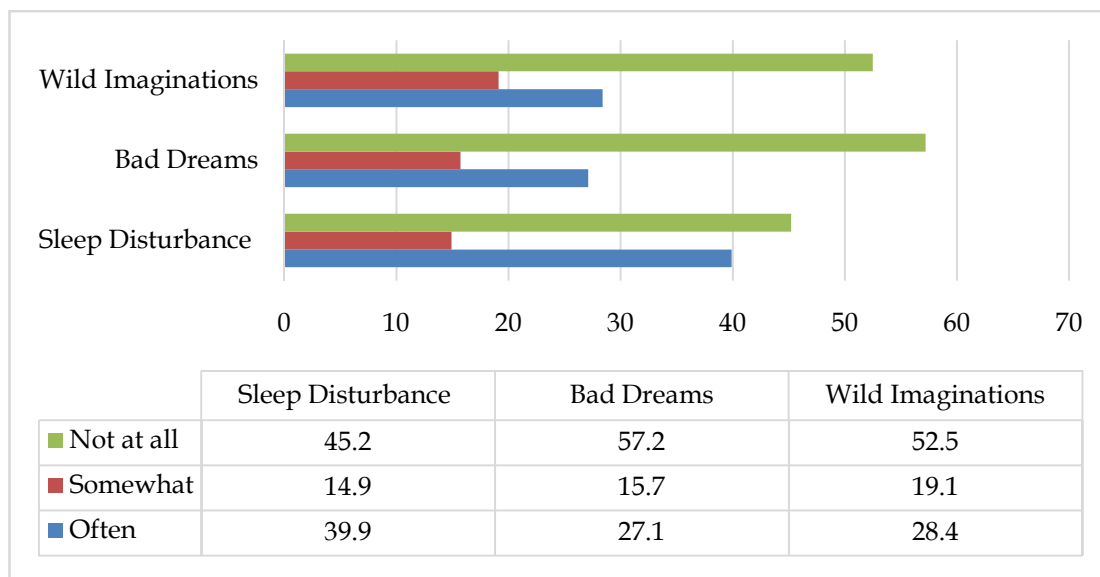


Figure 3: Sleep Patterns after viewing the movie

The respondents were asked if they consider in the dismaying characters' reality (supernatural objects). The data (see figure 4) shows that significant respondents believed that Dracula and Zombies are existed and they are the only film characters, while other believed (39.4%) that Dracula and other supernatural forces are existed in real life. Nummenmaa (2021) noted in the neurology and psychology of horror movies that horror movies are designed in a way that effect our neuromotor and simulate fear. Although, horror movies extensively appealing and bring excitement however it is more popular among male than females. Nummenmaa argue that it attracts to those

individuals who are more prone to aggression and sensation. It is further argued that the older people are less likely to scare as compare to the youth.

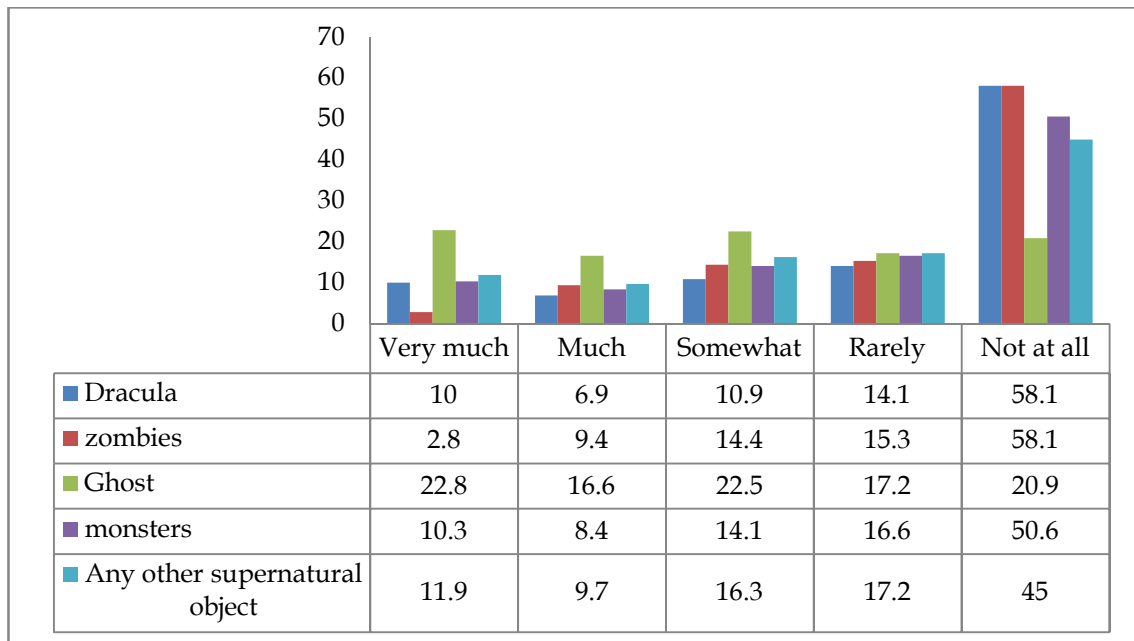


Figure 4: Belief in the Existence of Horrifying Characters

The respondents viewed type of horror movies are startle and scary, they viewed that the real life stories and are reflect preoccupied beliefs (61.5%).The terrifyingobjects, characters are beyond perception are less likely scary (23.1%).Supernatural creatures, characters *Dracula* and *Zombies* and *dead Characters* are scary (17.8%).However, (57.2%)less likely frightening effect on them. However, (29.2%)respondents are observed that visual effects are creating terrifying effect in movies whereas (51.4%)are not terrifying at all (See figure 5). The terror and fear are interlinked and Pakistan went through a terrifying political situation where people of Pakistan went through inoculation effect of terror and fear. However, Nummenmaa (2021) argued that three factors melancholic subjects, a mix of emotional and fear response and dangerous situation and capability of safely handling in context of movies are significant contributing factors in horror movies. The *Dracula*, *Zombies*, ghost, monsters and other supernatural object much culturally rooted.Mitchell (2020) argues that the frightening characters in movies is relating with human imagination rather explicitly. Story telling is part of this human imagination and one of the ancient art. The phenomenal growth in the modern form of communication i.e. movies and different genres are extracted from it.

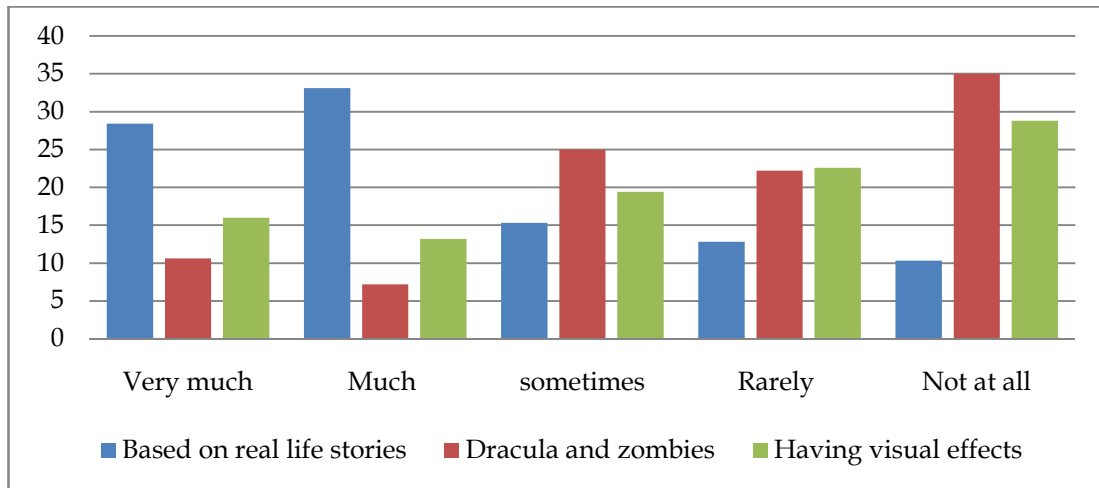


Figure 5: Most Scary Type of Horror Movies

Conclusion

The horror movies is emerging genre in Pakistan. The horror and related variables are always studied from the psychological and cognitive aspects. When it has a relationship with specific variables and environmental consequences, horror movies' results become more apparent. Unfortunately, the Pakistani nation is experienced a war against terrorism, and the environmental aspect that can potentially impact horror movie audiences is significant. Traces of multiple psychological effects are found on audiences of horror movies who find that horror movies can cause these psychological effects, i.e., anxiety, sleeping disorders, terror, phobia, animals, setting, accident or injection, circumstance, sound, and frightening artifacts. These impacts on female audiences are significant relative to male viewers. However, repeated viewing has culminated in a desensitization impact that is vulnerable to developing antisocial behavior among young people. However, trusting in the reality of horror protagonists is a sharing of the viewer's pre-existing values. Compared to those who do not have such confidence, people who already accept such characters are more scared—the consequences of this research area at the policy stage. The government can ensure control of all movies and implement a ranking form so that all complaints will ensure the degree of violence in the movies.

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