

THE VISUALIZATION OF SPIRITS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD AS CREATIVE COMMODITIES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: *This study analyzes the visualization process of spirits in the supernatural world that are seen by humans in the physical world through digital contents as creative commodities. Spirit content is still promising as a creative commodity in Indonesia. This content has a lot of curious fans because it can be facilitated visually. The content, which is believed to have different worlds, is able to unite the physical world and the energy world. The energy world includes the digital world and the supernatural world. Thus, the differences between the worlds are interesting to analyze for creative process development. This study uses the qualitative method, the virtual theory from Rob Shield used to map the position of spirits, humans, and platforms. The communication theory is used to see the visual transfer process to society, and Sasmita explores the signs that appear in the content. The findings indicate that representing intangible entities through locally relevant visual symbols proved beneficial for content creators, enabling the production of innovative content that enhances audience interaction. This was achieved by conveying messages to the audience through the construction of symbols and leveraging visual perception.*

Keywords: *creative commodities; digital world; spirits content; visual process.*

Introduction

The Indonesian society holds a belief in the coexistence of another realm that operates parallel to their daily activities (Sodik, 2020). This belief has become an unwritten consensus that presupposes the existence of spirits or supernatural beings with distinct activities in an alternate world (Smith, 2020). Representations of these spirits are found in various media, from oral traditions to digital platforms. The oral depiction of spirits in traditional stories, such as Pocong, Tuyul, Kuntilanak, and Genderuwo, is a significant aspect of cultural heritage in various regions. These stories are often passed down through generations, preserving the unique be-

liefs and values of different communities (Claus, 1979) (Willerslev, 2004) (Stanyukovich, 2003) (Rosa, 2019). They play a crucial role in character education, particularly in children's development, and are a valuable source of moral, religious, and educational messages (Rosa, 2019).

Pocong is depicted as a figure wrapped in white cloth, Tuyul as a child with a bald head notorious for stealing money, Kuntilanak as a woman with long hair and a white gown, and Genderuwo as a tall, black figure. These characters are believed to inhabit dark, cold, and secluded areas inaccessible to humans, such as large trees, abandoned buildings, or aged structures with a tragic past. These areas

often witness unpleasant events involving the loss of human lives through accidents, murders, or suicides. The visual characteristics of dark, tall, and imposing figures attribute greater power to these entities than ordinary humans, inducing feelings of inferiority and fear when encountering areas believed to be inhabited by these spirits. (Sujatmiko, 2014)

Some individuals, intrigued by these beliefs, venture into these locations, recording their experiences using digital media. These recordings showcase various phenomena, including testimonials of encountering specific entities, depictions on paper or through digital devices, and possession experiences with dialogues between spirits and content creators, creating captivating content for audiences.

Horror content is widely embraced in Indonesia, with various YouTube channels amassing millions of subscribers. Channels like Sara Wijayanto, Malam Jumat, Jurnal Risa, Neror, and Rizky Riplay present diverse approaches in delivering horror content, combining exploration, narration, and animation. The increasing subscribership indicates the growing popularity of virtual horror content, prompting the exploration of the interplay between the realms of humans, spirits, and digital content in both virtual and actual worlds.

In addition, there is also a connection between the audience and the trusted character. This is also due to the emotional attachment that occurs in believing; fans' affection towards the character can rise and fall depending on how well they understand the character's emotions, actions, and relationships between characters. (Putri, 2021) Furthermore, it also strengthens the identity of a fictional character, creating a strong bond between the fictional character and the target (Violeta, 2020).

The process of visualizing spirits in the

virtual world, as proposed by the study, can be understood through a combination of Rob Shield's theory of existence (Shield, 2016), basic communication theories, and Sasmita to map the visual process from the supernatural realm to the digital realm aids in determining visual codes for spirits.

This approach aligns with Sanchez's (2000) proposal to use metaphorisation to embody abstract knowledge in virtual environments, and Heng's (2020) exploration of the role and agency of spirits in deathscapes, suggesting that spirits can communicate and interact with the living through visual proxies. Medeiros (2015) further supports this by discussing the visualization of the invisible through spirit and thought photography, while Bubandt (2019) highlights the use of technology to validate the existence of spirits, which can be applied to the digital realm.

Rob Shield (2016) explains two conditions, Actual and Ideal. In the context of energy, Actual refers to the reality that occurs, also known as actuality, while Ideal can refer to the desired, optimal condition, or what is known as aspiration. Both can be connected through the existence of a medium. The actual condition is also called the Physical World, which refers to the reality or the measurable, observable, or directly perceivable reality by human senses. This condition is related to risks, destiny, and possibilities within the constraints of time. Risk refers to the possibility or potential occurrence of loss, danger, or immediate events, while destiny is more related to beliefs or views about events predetermined and unchangeable by human actions. Possibility refers to how likely an event can occur on a larger speculative scale. On the other hand, The Ideal condition is also referred to as the Energy World; this world is virtual or metaphysical to describe a realm beyond the physical dimension. This condition is associated with the existence of symbols,

myths, and abstract concepts within the constraints of time. Symbols exist in the present time; if a symbol is not confirmed, it is referred to as a myth, and when a myth itself is not formed, it is called abstract.

Sasmita, a concept in Javanese literature, is explored in various ways in the literature. Adnyana (2020) discusses the theological and literary implications of the concept, while Ahimsa-Putra (2019) delve into its linguistic and cultural aspects. The environmental and ecological dimensions of Sasmita are also examined by Sukmawan (2016), who emphasizes the importance of harmony with nature in Javanese literature.

This study is influenced by cultural and historical contexts, as seen in the practices of visualizing spirits in early-medieval China (Michael J. Puett, 2010). The role and agency of spirits in deathscapes, including their ability to communicate and interact with the living, is also a key factor (Heng, 2020). The use of visual codes for spirits can be further explored through the lens of supernatural (visual) photography, which has been used to document miraculous phenomena and engage with the otherworldly (Wójcik, 2009).

This studies seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What role does Rob Shield's theory of existence play in shaping the visual representation of spirits in the virtual world?
2. In what ways does Sasmita aid in mapping the visual process of spirits from the supernatural to the digital realm?

These studies provide a rich foundation for understanding the complex process of visualizing spirits in the virtual world.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing Digital Content Analysis, narratives, and testimonials from the YouTube platform as examples. Subsequently, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to establish the theoretical foundation, encompassing Rob Shield's theory, fundamental communication theories, and the concept of Sasmita.

The research instrument involves the implementation of a Digital Content Analysis checklist from YouTube. This checklist facilitates the meticulous recording and analysis of key elements within digital content associated with the visualization of supernatural beings.

Visual analysis is the primary method, aiming to discern patterns and relationships between findings and the theoretical frameworks from Rob Shield's theory and Sasmita's concept.

Sasmita reinforces the second variant of communication, involving symbols that are visible and readable in the physical world, interpreting signs through five interpretable clues, Sipta, representing metaphysical and physical clues, Smita, portraying physical and psychological characteristics, isyarat indicates communicated indicators, Tanda, depicted through signs and Ramalan, is a statement or estimate about a future event or outcome. Sasmita is highlighted as a tool to interpret symbols and signs. (Sedana, 2016)

The research questions center around two key inquiries. The first question delves into the role of Rob Shield's theory of existence in shaping the visual representation of supernatural beings in the virtual world. The second question seeks to comprehend how Sasmita contributes to mapping the visual process of supernatural beings from the supernatural

This study significantly contributes to unraveling the intricate interplay between humans, spirits, and digital content. It sheds light on the visual representation of supernatural beings in the virtual realm through Rob Shield's theory and Sasmita's concept.

The relationship between symbols, the virtual, and the concrete is clarified, providing a framework for defining scattered visual elements into a coherent virtual visualization experienced in the physical world through media.

The diagram illustrates the creative process as a flow between two worlds: the Ideal (Energy World) and the Actual (Physical World). In the Ideal world, the process starts at the SOURCE, moves through a MEDIUM, and ends at the RECEIVER. The MEDIUM is divided into four stages: VIRTUAL, SYMBOL, MYTH, and ABSTRACT. The Actual world shows the progression from CONCRETE to ABSTRACT, with stages including Human, Symbol, Myth, and Abstraction. The process is also linked to the concepts of Risk, Destiny, and Possibility. The diagram is credited to Rob Shink and Gough Sujatniko.

The family, named Widia, shares their strange encounters in the house through a recorded video sent to the Jurnal Risa team, seeking an identification of the presence of spirits in their home. The process from the Widia family sending the video to the Jurnal Risa team's identification, leading to its enjoyment by the audience, is depicted in the analysis.

The analysis begins by noting that the Widia family has experienced interactions with spirits through *sipta*, *smita*, *isarat*, *ramalan*, and *tanda*, yet without clear definition or proof. The family is initially in the realm of myth, making assumptions without sufficient evidence, causing distress.

The video sent by the Widia family aims to bridge the gap in defining the evolving myth, constructing visible symbols in the home for the Jurnal Risa team to interpret. The team watches and identifies the video, working to explain the occurrences in the house, thereby defining *sipta*, *smita*, *isyarat*, *ramalan*, and *tanda* clearly and constructing symbols that depict virtual forms.



Sipta is a metaphysical and physical indication experienced by Widia's husband seen in figure 2. In the video, Sipta is evident during the scene where the husband carries the baby, and the narration in the video states, "... there's a drop of water, don't know from where, and it's just one drop." Widia's husband explains

the situation of feeling a water drop-let while sitting in the living room of his house. However, the room does not have any access points that would allow water to enter. Water serves as a metaphysical indication in this context, as it becomes a means of spiritual communication to humans, demonstrating the presence of the spirit. The spirit aims to convey its actual and existing nature, but due to differences in space and time, there is a desire for something realistic.



Figure 3. Isyarat, Indicating a signal, a visual movement on the bed.
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpB-kL_-bTo)

Isyarat are indicators communicated. In this case, the indicators refer to phenomena that occur in Widia's home but lack a clear definition, requiring validation to confirm these symptoms. Figure 3 on the right side, there is a narration: "Our child often looks towards the top of the curtains and is invited to play several times. We also woke up several times because our bed seemed to vibrate." The phrases "looking towards the top of the curtains" and "...our bed seemed to vibrate" are signals experienced by Widia's family. Spirits in the energy world attempt to indicate their presence through sounds and movements to divert attention. However, the difference in worlds places Widia's family in a position where they do not fully understand what is happening; they can only make assumptions.



Figure 4. Isyarat, Indicating a signal, a visual movement on the bed.
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpB-kL_-bTo)

Sasmita also indicates the presence of signs playing in its definition. This section reveals symptoms of the emergence of signs that can further strengthen the existence of spirits. Borrowing a bit from Peirce's semiotics on Index, Icon, and Symbol to delve deeper into this section. Figure 4 shows the narration: "I took this video after both of us returned from the Laundry place in the Basement, when Amelia was alone in her bed." Widia explains that Amelia, Widia's child, seems to be interacting with someone, laughing as if having a conversation with someone, but there is no one in the room. Amelia, laughing alone and known by Widia, indicates an index - laughter is a sign that occurs after stimuli from her communication partner. Known by Widia indicates a slower time position than the stimuli that occurred, so it can be called an index in Peirce's theory. Harbeck (2011) explains that an index signifies something beyond its own existence. This representation can manifest in diverse forms, including words, images, or gestures, and the association between the sign and its meaning is grounded in a cause-and-effect or contiguity principle.



Figure 5. Tanda, Indicating a shape in green.
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpB-kL_-bTo)

Figure 5 depicts a shape in green, as indicated by the arrow. There is a narration: “In some of my photos, there was ‘something’ in green. I’m still positive (perhaps due to poor lighting).” The word “something” in the sentence above refers to a form. In this case, Widia cannot define what the shape represents. Therefore, she states that she thinks positively, possibly because of poor lighting, resulting in the appearance of that form. The term “shape” is still general and does not refer to anything specific. Visually, it can be seen that the top part looks round, resembling a head with shoulders on the bottom right and left. The shape illustrates a human silhouette in green. In Peirce’s theory, something that resembles something else is called an icon.

Widia begins to all the phenomena in her home. Water droplets, her child talking to herself, human silhouette lead to a the presence of spirits. Widia’s family attempts to interpret this spirit presence by sending videos to Risa’s team. This signifies that Widia’s family already perceives these occurrences as symbols, indicative of the presence of astral beings. Symbols that live through societal agreement that emerges (Harbeck, 2011).

Discussion

From Sasmita we will know the sign

of Sipta is exemplified by the husband experiencing water droplets inexplicably. Smita involves facial appearances, and isyarat indicates communicated indicators. Tanda strengthens the presence of spirits, as seen in visual representations of green forms and Amelia’s interactions. Sasmita is highlighted as a tool to interpret symbols and signs.

Human beings exist in the current position, denotative, real, and tangible, while spirits are represented in a virtual, connotative, illusory, and intangible position. Media serves as the primary connection between the energy world and the physical world. Humans can perceive representations of spirits according to what their designers create. Visible visuals are capable of depicting the forms of spirits in a very precise and clear manner.

In the energy world or the actual ideal world, there are “spirits” that live. These “spirits” are believed by humans in the actual world. When undefined, these spirits exist in an abstract area because their forms have not been seen. In the mythical realm, these spirits begin to take shape and are only believed by a few people. These forms are validated by specific individuals and transmitted using oral language, eventually becoming myths. This is because the definition of a myth itself is something that cannot be proven true or false.

Figure 6 shows, symbols that are already believed to be true or visually defined are reconstructed into a unified definition, known as the main communication material. This material is then conveyed by the representation creator or designer through a medium and is received by the actual world’s inhabitants.

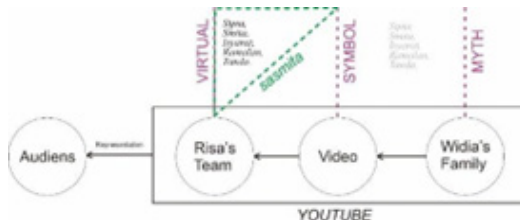


Figure 6. Audience Reception of Messages through Myth, Symbols, and Virtual Visualization (Source: personal research construction)



Figure 7. Characterization of spirits as visual symbols. (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpB-kL_-bTo)

In the subsequent phase, the transition into the virtual realm involves the characterization of spirits as visual symbols, as depicted in Figure 7. This entails specifying visual attributes like their physical appearance, hair, costume, face, place and pose, rendering these symbols visually conceivable and representable. The intention is to create a detailed and coherent visual representation of these spirits in the virtual space. By defining these symbols with precision, the subsequent step in-

volves their virtual portrayal through the media. This process facilitates the translation of conceptualized characteristics into tangible virtual visual elements, allowing for the effective depiction of these spirits in the virtual through communication media.

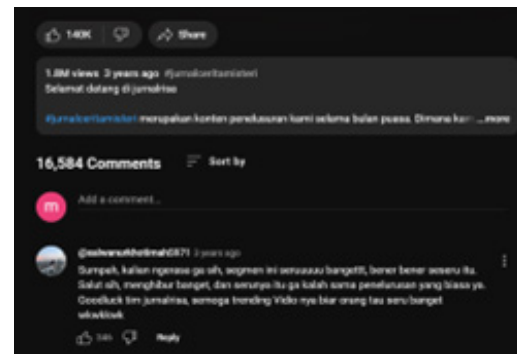


Figure 8. Views and comments in content. (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpB-kL_-bTo)

People in the actual world, as audiences, perceive these symbols as entertainment in their respective media. Figure 8 show of 1.8 million views indicates that a substantial audience has accessed and consumed the content, suggesting a widespread appeal or interest. This is not only indicative of the content's reach but also implies a significant impact within its target audience. The high number of views underscores the content's ability to attract attention and suggests that it has successfully captured the interest of a broad viewer base, making it a notable and widely-consumed piece of media.

The fact that this content has generated 16,585 comments from viewers highlights a substantial level of engagement and interaction. The comments indicates that the audience not only consumed the material but actively participated in a dialogue surrounding it. The sheer volume of comments suggests a diverse range of opinions, discussions, and feedback, reflecting a vibrant and involved view-

ership. Additionally, the mention of one of the comments being among the most popular, as conveyed by @salwanurkhotimah5971. “Sumpah, kalian ngerasa ga sih, segmen ini seruuuuu bangettt, bener bener seseru itu. Salut sih, menghibur banget, dan serunya itu ga kalah sama penelurusan yang biasa ya. Goodluck tim jurnalrisa, semoga trending Vidio nya biar orang tau seru banget wkwkkwk”, expressing positive appreciation for the content, further underscores the favorable reception of the material. This individual comment serves as a representative example of the positive sentiments expressed by viewers, suggesting that the content has successfully resonated with its audience, eliciting a favorable and participatory response.

Conclusion

The study explores the journey from the energy world (ideal) to the physical world (actual) through myths and virtual definitions, emphasizing the role of media as a connector. Symbols, once defined and believed, are reconstructed into communication materials and transmitted through media, reaching the audience in the physical world for entertainment.

Rob Shield’s theory and Sasmita, connected between symbol construction, the virtual world, and humans in the physical world. The Sasmita concept underscores the relationship between the ideal and physical worlds, facilitating understanding and enjoyment of ideal-world phenomena in the actual world. The connection is further emphasized through signs and sensory experiences that bridge the energy and physical worlds, reinforcing human belief in the signs originating from the energy world.

The analysis concludes by presenting an example from a popular Indonesian YouTuber, Jurnal Risa, where symbols representing spirits are presented using

media. Media visually process and represent symbols observed through extrasensory perception. The audience, as receivers of the message, attempts to understand and provide feedback, indicating a merging of the ideal and actual worlds through the medium of the iPad.

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