

| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Networked Spectrality and the Glocal Mediation of Cultural Anxiety in Digital Horror****Hela Salih Alkhider***Assistant Professor in Contemporary Literature & Literary Theory and Criticism, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia***Corresponding Author:** Hela Salih Alkhider, **E-mail:** h.alkhadar@qu.edu.sa**| ABSTRACT**

Digital horror operates not only as a mode of fear production but as a site for immersive psychological and existential engagement, employing a wide range of narrative strategies and aesthetic forms. A defining feature of many digital horror texts is their reliance on participatory spectatorship, requiring audiences to interpret symbols, navigate fragmented archives, and actively reconstruct meaning. These practices articulate contemporary anxieties surrounding surveillance, dislocation, identity instability, and existential uncertainty. This study examines selected digital horror narratives to analyze their formal and aesthetic configurations in relation to their broader cultural, ethical, and transnational circulation. In doing so, it demonstrates how digital horror reconfigures traditional cultural motifs within globally circulating media frameworks, revealing the mutability of cultural memory and the destabilization of tradition within networked environments.

| KEYWORDS

Digital horror, circulation, cultural anxiety, adaptivity, glocalization

| ARTICLE INFORMATION**ACCEPTED:** 01 January 2026**PUBLISHED:** 18 January 2026**DOI:** [10.32996/ijts.2026.6.1.2](https://doi.org/10.32996/ijts.2026.6.1.2)**Introduction**

Digital stories have significance in this age of technological revolution. Individuals and communities create stories for various purposes on web-based and social media platforms, employing innovative strategies to captivate their audiences and foster productive discourse. New forms and tropes have emerged in digital storytelling, necessitating study and exploration within literary narrative theory and cultural context. This study examines emerging strategies in digital stories, specifically horror-themed ones, and how they differ from traditional narratives in terms of form and function. It explores how digital horror narratives serve as mediums for cultural and literary expression, and how their influence shapes meaning and identity. Digital horror is a new form of folklore created and shared across global platforms, often featuring supernatural themes or viral horror. Unlike traditional horror stories, they are characterized by their international reach and rapid transmission. The global internet not only draws people together but also standardizes and can unify aesthetics, language, and narrative structure, sometimes undermining cultural diversity. Examining the relationship between the global and the local allows us to see how local traditions are maintained and adapted when moved into the digital space. It also uncovers how new myths and rituals develop within digital culture. Understanding this tension allows us to examine how power operates in online storytelling and whose stories and fears are told and centered upon. Local horror stories often embody spiritual beliefs, historical trauma, and cultural taboos. Therefore, studying these stories helps us explore how digital horror can serve as a tool of cultural resistance and a means for marginalized communities to reclaim space, voice, and visibility in global media.

An increasing body of contemporary literary studies is investigating digital horror narratives and their distinction from the traditional Gothic genre. Gothic literature and digital horror both effectively elicit fear and unease in audiences; however, they differ in the specific nature of the fear they evoke and the atmospheric contexts in which this fear is experienced. Gothic stories are a literary genre that focuses on evoking fear and incorporating supernatural elements, often set in dark, isolated

environments such as castles and mansions. These settings foster atmospheres of gloom and mystery, reflecting themes of inherited tragedy and psychological terror. In contrast, digital horror is a sub-genre of horror that leverages software and computer files to convey anxieties specific to the digital era, including phenomena such as media glitches and data corruption. Recent academic debates, therefore, examine the transformation of this genre, driven by technological advancements and globalization, with a focus on cultural voice, local representation, and postcolonial critique. When local horror stories are shared and integrated into global platforms, they become arenas of cultural dialogue and negotiation, or maybe appropriation. Analyzing the interplay and tension between the global and the local enables us to explore the strategies for representing identity and voice, and how these techniques lend power and authority to these narratives, allowing them to challenge dominant narratives. Digital horror stories often employ non-linear structures, unreliable narrators, and multi-platform narration, utilizing fragmentation, metafiction, and genre hybridity. These texts echo and evolve postmodern and poststructuralist literary techniques, providing a foundation for applying literary theory. This study attempts to situate digital horror narratives, particularly Creepypasta and Found Footage horror, within the evolving domain of literary studies, arguing that such texts are contemporary extensions of oral folklore, Gothic fiction, and postcolonial literature. By examining the tension between global digital forms and local cultural content, the study explores questions of narrative structure, genre, and artistic representation. It contributes to the study of how digital local horror operates in a global, networked world, challenging traditional literary boundaries.

The widespread emergence of digital horror, particularly in forms such as Creepypasta (shared web-based horror narratives and folklore), Urban Legend (widely circulated contemporary myth), and Found Footage (narrative through found recordings), denotes a significant shift in the methods used to produce and share these narratives. These techniques used in digital horror draw on traditional storytelling methods but are broadened and transformed by the enabling power of technology, such as multimedia, interactivity, ontological ambiguity, non-linearity, fragmentation, and focalization (Lambert, 2013). Ontological ambiguity, a fundamental narrative technique in Creepypasta, infuses narratives with a disturbing realism that captivates the audience and blurs the boundary between reality and fiction, generating a sense of unreliability or delusion in the narrator and leaving the truth unclear, thereby disrupting the reader's perception of reality (Ryan, 2001). Due to the blurring between fact and fiction and the use of unreliable narrators, Creepypasta and digital horror stories exist in a hybrid space between local cultural storytelling traditions and internet-driven global culture. These stories, which are disseminated globally through online networks, emerge from deep local cultural traditions, including folklore, religious beliefs, and historical trauma. Namely, digital horror stories highlight deep-seated cultural anxieties, mixing with global narratives echoing fears of cultural erasure, surveillance, and algorithmic control, geopolitical control, and information overload. The tension between the global and the local in digital horror stories produces and culminates in deeper cultural patterns in the internet age, where stories spread globally yet remain deeply rooted in local identities and anxieties. These two forces often blend but clash, creating tensions in how stories are told, received, and interpreted. This study examines four selected horror digital stories to explore the tension between the global and the local in digital horror, particularly in genres such as Creepypasta, which reflect broader cultural, political, and technological dynamics in the digital age. Analyzing this tension enables a deeper understanding of how digital stories develop and evolve, what power structures they reflect, and who controls cultural meaning in the digital age. This study aims to address the following questions: Can digital horror serve as a form of cultural resistance or preservation amid global digital homogeneity? Do local communities, particularly indigenous and marginalized ones, have the right to protect and interpret their own narratives? When global internet users consume or remix local horror stories, does this raise ethical and ownership questions? How are local stories filtered through global norms? Recognizing this tension within digital horror or understanding the function of these stories as legitimate literary texts that challenge existing notions of authorship and narrative form has not yet been thoroughly examined within the scope of literary critical studies. Therefore, it is increasingly necessary to analyze not only their aesthetic and narrative structures but also the cultural dynamics and moral implications of their adaptation and international circulation.

Literature Review

Researchers exploring digital horror have found that the emergence of digital media—such as social networks, surveillance systems, and interactive platforms—has fundamentally transformed the ways horror is crafted, experienced, and circulated. Digital horror incorporates several recurring themes across its various formats, including Found Footage films, Creepypasta, livestreams, and other horror games. Digital horror reshapes classic fears—such as death, loss, and the unknown—by examining them through technology and networked culture. These stories, whether about haunted devices, fractured identities, or the collapse of digital systems, reflect the anxieties of a time when reality feels increasingly mediated and unstable. As scholars continue to explore this developing genre, digital horror serves as both a mirror and a critique of our increasingly haunted relationship with technology, exposing the anxieties that come with living in a world where the lines between the global and local, the human and the machine, are continually blurred. Scholars studying digital horror mainly focus on how technology and media heighten the fear. A noteworthy example of this form of investigation can be found in Sayad's study (2021), "Beyond film: The reality of participation in experiential cinema and games," in *The Ghost in the Image: Technology and Reality in the Horror Genre*. This chapter offers a rich lens for viewing how horror media evolve with technology and how participation challenges long-standing boundaries between the spectator, spectacle, and reality. It emphasizes that, in horror, the ghost is not only within

the image but also in the surrounding space, affecting your agency and presence. Sayad successfully extends traditional film analysis to encompass immersive cinema, Virtual Reality, and games, thereby bridging film studies, media studies, and game theory. Sayad's use of 'reality' as a recurring concept ties together horror's mediation of the supernatural and the viewer's sense of the real, showing how participation blurs the line between fiction and reality. She addresses the idea of participation but offers limited insight into how real audiences engage with these immersive events or games. The discussion in this study remains mostly theoretical, lacking ethnographic or empirical support. Sayad's study, although not heavily focused on empirical cases, distinguishes itself by covering a wide range of examples from both cinema and games. This sets it apart from most research in this genre, which usually concentrates only on film and cinema. Sarkar's (2023) article, "Modern Anxieties and Traditional Influence in Horror Anime", for example, explores how Japanese horror anime draws on traditional folklore, art styles, and supernatural beliefs, weaving them into narratives that address modern sociocultural anxieties. He argues that these anime narratives utilize traditional forms to articulate modern anxieties, including mass hysteria, ambivalence toward outsiders, and the pressure of globalization. By selecting three unique horror stories from anime series, this article establishes a clear textual and material foundation rather than relying solely on abstract theory. It skillfully connects traditional folklore with contemporary perspectives; however, its focus remains limited to Japanese culture and only three anime series, excluding consideration of other forms of digital horror. Another scholarly work that explores a specific aspect of anxiety within digital horror—primarily focusing on film and cinematic media—is "Digital Dread: Horror Narratives and Surveillance Anxiety in TikTok's Attention Economy" by Balcioglu and Altindag (2025). The article examines how the short-form video platform TikTok functions as a site of surveillance anxiety and horror narrative, by placing users within an economy of attention where they are both observers and observed. It connects and bridges media studies, horror theory, and digital culture coherently, arguing that users experience a kind of "digital dread" when their identity, image, performance, and visibility are subject to algorithmic evaluation and commodification. This article uniquely shifts horror studies into the platform era, moving beyond film or cinema to redefine horror through social media, algorithmic visibility, and attention capture. However, this piece may have limited empirical data and more theoretical speculation.

Other studies shift the focus away from film, video, or cinema, exploring narratives in digital horror instead and analyzing their form, techniques, and innovative elements such as interactivity. A prominent example is Joe Ondrak's study (2018), which illustrates how Creepypasta stories serve as digital fiction that express the anxieties, nostalgia, and uncertainties inherent in modern connected culture, drawing on Mark Fisher's concept of hauntology. In this article, Ondrak argues that "Creepypasta" narratives (internet-based horror stories that circulate via forums, social media, etc.) should be treated as a distinct form of digital fiction, rather than simply as remediations of folktales or urban legends. He presents a new way of understanding Creepypasta, not just as folklore or urban legend, but as a distinct genre of digital fiction that encourages discussions beyond traditional frameworks. In this article, the author connects theoretical issues (hauntology, post-postmodernism) with media forms (digital platforms, social media, remix culture) and the horror genre. While the article provides examples, it is not a comprehensive empirical study of numerous Creepypasta instances across cultures, focusing primarily on Anglophone examples and Western media culture. Another study in the same vein of digital horror is Natalie Underberg-Goode's work (2025), "Introduction to Creepypasta, Digital Horror, and Legend Formation Across Interactive Media," which examines how digital storytelling has changed the way horror and folklore are created, shared, and experienced online. It examines Creepypasta as a modern form of folklore that blends traditional legend motifs with participatory digital culture. This study illustrates how interactive media, such as forums, platforms, and gaming spaces, serve as sites where legends are created, developed, and spread. While the article discusses the current phenomenon of digital horror and interactive media, connecting traditions of legend and folklore with digital horror and network storytelling, it does not offer specific empirical examples of how digital horror and Creepypasta function across different platforms. Additionally, it lacks an analysis of how Creepypasta or digital horror legends form in non-Anglophone and non-Western contexts. "Decomposing the Fundamentals of Creepy Stories" by Sakshi Goel et al. (2022) is another valuable and timely contribution because it shifts the study of "creepy stories" into a large-scale, data-driven approach, which is relatively uncommon in horror/story studies. The empirical finding about fear spikes is especially insightful because it highlights a structural feature that matches decades of intuition about scary stories. It also uses an interdisciplinary approach that connects the humanities and computer science, a rare approach in horror research. The study uses a massive dataset of Reddit horror stories, offering an unusually quantitative view of narrative fear. Given that this study primarily utilizes social media platforms such as Reddit, its cultural and demographic scope is limited. As a result, the findings may not apply to global horror traditions or contexts outside of digital environments. It also focuses on the Natural Language Processing (NLP) model, which primarily identifies explicit "fear words" in its analysis of the reasons for fear in creepy stories. Another vital contribution to the study of cultural anxiety in digital horror is offered by Moreno-Almeida (2024) in "*Memes, monsters, and the digital grotesque*", who examines how memes operate as digital monsters, embodying collective fears and anxieties circulating within online communities. Her work highlights how digital folklore and participatory media practices transform traditional notions of horror into networked, memetic forms. In this book, the idea of treating memes as monsters and digital grotesque is both fresh and provocative; it opens up digital culture in a new aesthetic/political register. This work draws on media studies, cultural studies, monster theory, and digital aesthetics, addressing non-Anglophone contexts, Arabic cultural

production, and the “Arab Winter” period, and offers a broader geographical/cultural perspective. Some themes may be treated more conceptually than with deeply grounded case studies, and may be limited to Moroccan culture.

These studies collectively examine the evolution of horror across various digital formats and cultural contexts. Several studies focus on analyzing forms such as film, cinema, VR, images or videos, social media, and games rather than short narratives or folklore and legends. It is also apparent that most of these studies primarily theorize and conceptualize the digital horror genre rather than conduct detailed empirical research, prompting the question of whether digital horror exists at the intersection of theory and practice. Furthermore, the majority of these studies focus on Anglophone or Western contexts rather than broader global perspectives. The present study aims to analyze how short stories or urban legends shared and circulate across various platforms employ techniques such as ontological ambiguity, multimedia integration, and interactive storytelling to generate tension between the local and the global. Cultural and ideological dimensions should be examined to understand how narratives in digital spaces are used as vehicles of ideology and power, and how they reflect or challenge sociocultural traditions and norms. This study mainly links digital horror, glocalization, and postcolonial studies, emphasizing core ideas of cultural anxiety, narration, and interaction. Moreover, little attention has been given to short narratives, folklore, and urban legends in digital horror, despite their role in shaping cultural anxieties and values across various regions and societies.

This study primarily explores cultural anxiety in digital horror and the influence of glocalization on digital stories, focusing on key concepts of narration and interaction. There has been limited attention to how the local-global relationship shapes cultural anxieties and values in non-Western regions and countries. The role of digital horror in highlighting cultural specificities and engaging international audiences with folklore and indigenous myths is significant in this study. The study selects several digital stories from various platforms, “Djinn” on Royal Road, “Kumiho” on Wattpad, “The James Currie Film” on Creepypasta, and “The legend of Hombarume” on Wattpad, to analyze their elements and techniques for creating new and fear-inducing images of their cultures that reflect cultural anxiety and globalization’s influence while remaining connected to traditional views. This approach places the study within three intersecting perspectives: digital horror, globalization, and postcolonial studies. Research on digital horror examines how this genre uses online media to share and circulate narratives and experiences, generating feelings of dread and anxiety, and transforming familiar traditions into strange experiences.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative and interpretive framework, focusing on thorough textual analysis to explore the strategies employed in digital stories, which play a vital role in creating the interplay and intention between the local and the global. It is based on the following interconnected frameworks: digital horror, literary criticism, and theories of globalization and postcolonial studies. These approaches are combined to gain a deeper understanding and facilitate an in-depth analysis of how the tension between the global and the local is represented in digital stories, thereby creating fear and dread. The primary method of inquiry is close reading, examining narrative structure, form, tone, and imagery. The analysis is rooted in the work of digital storytelling theorists such as Joe Lambert, Bernard Robin, and Jean Piaget, who analyze digital storytelling and study its elements and framework. Lambert is one of the leading figures in establishing the seven primary elements of digital stories, emphasizing that all of the emotional content, point of view, a dramatic question, the gift of your voice, the power of soundtrack, pacing, and economy are central elements that offer a qualified framework to understand and create digital stories. Robin follows in his predecessor’s footsteps, building on Lambert’s theory by expanding it and introducing additional elements (an educational perspective, an emphasis on multimedia skills, and assessment criteria), increasing the total from seven to ten. Their frameworks are crucial for this study, enhancing the analysis of the chosen stories.

This study draws primarily on theories of digital horror to examine the strategies employed in digital stories that escalate and intensify horror and dread. Scholars such as Marie-Laura Ryan, Xavier Aldana Reyes, Mark Fisher, Wendy Chun, Eugene Thacker, and Brian Massumi examine how contemporary technologies generate forms of fear and effect. Marie-Laura Ryan analyzes the form of digital stories in general and, in particular, unreliable narration, emphasizing the role of digital platforms and multimodal storytelling in shaping horror. Ryan introduces a framework that enhances our understanding of the transmission of narratives across various platforms, focusing on the analysis of the form and its role in creating dread, suspense, and disorientation. Her framework also considers narrative immersion, interactivity, and the influence of digital form on narrative engagement. Her theory of unreliable narration emphasizes the role of the unreliable narrator and the rhetorical manipulation of the reader to build an untrustworthy relationship and create psychological tension, fear, and ambiguity. Ryan explores narrative structure and the immersive creative process, focusing on trust and voice in horror literature. Reyes investigates how digital and postcinematic aesthetics transform horror’s sensory and bodily effects, highlighting immersion, embodiment, and the merging of fiction and reality. Fisher’s concept of the “weird and the eerie” and his analysis of capitalist realism reveal how late-capitalist media environments generate ambient anxieties, hauntological sensations, and a feeling of inescapability. Chun focuses on how digital systems establish lasting vulnerabilities, arguing that habitual interaction with software, networks, and surveillance normalizes fear through repetition and opacity. Thacker’s philosophy of horror—especially the “world without us”—investigates how networked, biological, and ecological disasters expose the limits of human understanding, framing technology as a source of existential dread. Through affect theory, Massumi demonstrates how contemporary media and security measures influence

preconscious intensities, making fear a constantly circulating force that shapes perception and political life. Collectively, these thinkers reveal how modern technologies produce new atmospheres of anxiety, uncertainty, embodiment, and affective experience control.

Along with these digital horror theories, the theory of globalization is also rooted in this study. Roland Robertson and Arjun Appadurai are key theorists of globalization, examining the interplay between global cultural forms and local cultural content, offering a strong framework for understanding how horror narratives adapt in digital spaces. Digital platforms such as Creepypasta, Reddit, Wattpad, and AO3—online spaces for the creation and sharing of multimodal narratives—have significantly contributed to the global dissemination of locally rooted horror stories. Robertson's concept of 'glocalization' elucidates how writers deliberately blend universal elements of horror with culturally specific themes, fears, folklore, or settings. This hybridity points to underlying anxieties about cultural authenticity, loss, and shifting frameworks to align with global communal goals. Robertson's insights deepen understanding of digital horror stories as a site of cultural preservation and transformation. This emphasis on hybrid forms of digital stories and their impact in creating cultural anxieties is also supported by Appadurai and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, whose theories complement Robertson's concept of glocalization and the analysis of digital stories and cultural hybridity. Appadurai provides a deeper insight into how global cultural flows influence imagination, identity, and storytelling. Meanwhile, Pieterse characterizes globalization as involving homogenization, polarization, and hybridization, demonstrating that hybridity questions strict ideas of ethnicity, race, and nationality. While Robertson emphasizes the blending of global and local influences, which are crucial for understanding how digital horror survives and adapts universal tropes to specific cultural contexts, Appadurai introduces the notion of overlapping "scapes," such as ethnoscapes and mediascapes, that explain how stories emerge from disjunctions in global flows. In short, both theories help analyze how digital horror reflects both the hybridity of cultures, as noted by Robertson, and the fragmented, often unsettled experiences of globalization, as referred to by Appadurai and Pieterse, particularly through narratives that merge traditional fears with global technologies and platforms. Postcolonial theorists, such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Achille Mbembe, also deepen our understanding of the anxieties arising from conflicts between modernity and tradition by examining this concept. However, each approaches the phenomenon uniquely. Fanon shows how colonial modernity disrupts indigenous social worlds, leading to deep psychological struggles as people are compelled to navigate Western norms imposed on them and their suppressed cultural traditions. In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that neither inherited tradition nor colonial modernity can define a culture, which is created anew through the collective revolutionary action of the colonized. Bhabha is also another influential theorist in this regard, as he explores this cultural clash through his concepts of hybridity and ambivalence, arguing that the encounter between modern colonial power and local traditions creates tense "in-between" identities that question ideas of authenticity. Hall considers modernity as a force that diminishes traditional identities. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," he argues that globalization and migration create cultural anxiety as communities struggle to reconcile their inherited pasts with the ongoing changes unfolding. Mbembe contributes to this discourse and illustrates how postcolonial societies experience uncertainty as older social structures clash with the disruptive forces of global modernity. Together, their work shows how the tension between modernity and tradition fuels cultural anxiety in both colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Analysis

This study selects four mythical horror stories from various online platforms, namely, Creepypasta, Royal Road, and Wattpad, to examine how they evolve and reflect cultural anxiety and hybridity, blending local and global elements. The focus will be on the following digital horror stories: "Djinn" on Royal Road, "Kumiho" on Wattpad, "The legend of Hombarume" on Wattpad, and "The James Currie Film" on Creepypasta. Authors on platforms such as Creepypasta and Wattpad frequently reinterpret classical horror figures. These writers situate the characters within relevant cultural frameworks or incorporate elements of regional folklore and customs. Such participatory engagement facilitates the exploration of contemporary cultural anxieties outside conventional social media channels. The authors from diverse cultures blend global horror tropes, such as vampires and haunted houses, with local myths, community legends, and regional folklore, adapting them into contemporary universal settings and a digital storytelling framework. Global digital formats are employed, while embedding cultural specificity in themes such as ancestral guides, mystic traditions, and local legends, thereby making culturally specific horror more approachable and appealing internationally. This study analyzes narrativity, metafiction, and perspective to understand how digital horror stories are structured and how narrative techniques express cultural themes and make them accessible globally. These narratives draw upon several methods, such as fragmented structure, unreliable narration, self-reflexivity, and embedded formats, to reveal the anxiety or friction between local identity and global impact. Fragmented storytelling conveys the inconsistent preservation of cultural identity. At the same time, the use of an unreliable narrator reveals the instability of cultural memory and perspective, reflecting the characters' conflict between traditional local beliefs and global realities. Metafictional forms also enhance immersion and the infusion of the local and the global by critiquing the transformation or loss of local cultural narratives. By employing these techniques, digital horror becomes more than a domain of dread; it is also a space where cultural hybridity, global visibility, and the fear of loss and erasure collide. These strategies draw attention to the story's crafted structure, highlighting how narratives, and consequently cultural identities, are shaped, manipulated, or commodified. Within the framework of glocalization, metafiction can demonstrate how local myths or traditions are reinterpreted or potentially misrepresented through globalized

formats, resulting in a dynamic between authenticity and adaptation. Such horror narratives frequently engage readers or viewers in active participation and commentary on local cultural themes during narrative construction, thereby highlighting prevalent concerns about the distortion or appropriation of cultural heritage in the digital era. Although these techniques allow horror writers to reveal the complexity of living amid cultural hybridity and negotiating global influence, they also balance local specificity with global accessibility, allowing broad audiences to experience unique cultural horrors.

The tension between local and global elements in digital stories is demonstrated throughout the non-linear narrative, the found-footage format, and the self-reflexivity. "Djinn" by Barakat is a fantasy short story set in Arabian culture and mythos, with the lens focused on the hardships one must endure when seeking salvation and redemption. The author writes his story into four chapters: "The Valley", "The Way of the Musafirin", "A Good Night's Sleep", and "When Darkness Falls". All these chapters revolve around a fantasy in which the main character, Anur, takes a long, arduous journey through the desert to achieve his undisclosed goals. According to the narrative, this setting is depicted as rough, parched, and unrelenting: "Alard is a Pangea marked by the scorching sands of endless desert and the beauty and respite of countless oases. Nevertheless, stay wary, because when darkness falls in the kingdom of parched lands, demons and spirits of the sand emerge to quench their insatiable thirst". During his journey, Anur encounters different challenges and obstacles starting with the desert and its scorching sun, endless sea of sand, wild creatures, the skull, the old acacia tree, the valley, the supply shortage in the market, the eatery, the men discussing the shadow in the north, the Innkeeper and his associate, the visions of fire in his dreams, and ending with the otherworldly experience in the Fari where the scene of Djinn unfolds and delivers a shock. The ending of this story seems horrific and unbelievable, as the author blurs the line between fantasy and reality, blending local and global elements throughout Anur's encounter with a snake that emerges from his blue emerald ring, reminding him of what he had been through and what was yet to come. The author's blending of global horror elements with culturally specific themes and settings emphasizes Robertson's concept of 'glocalization,' which suggests an underlying anxiety about authenticity and loss. The snake's speech aligns with Djinn's conversation with Al-Mosafir Anur, uncovering the true nature of the jinn and their evolution from a sinister union of light and darkness. The narrator's perspective on jinn is unclear or contradictory, mirroring anxiety about belonging, memory, and cultural authenticity. Furthermore, Anur's investigation into the origin of shadow and his exploration of phenomena of darkness and light highlight the tension between preserving cultural stories and adapting them for a new global audience. This reflects Bhabha's concept of tense "in-between" identities that challenge traditional ideas of authenticity. The narrator presents two disturbing images: one of darkness in a scorched desert, representing the appearance of the creatures called jinn, and another of a snake emerging from his blue, emerald ring, symbolizing profound inner change or a new life phase, which ultimately leads to Anur's death, "Afá [snake], displeased by the sound, sprang at his neck, sinking their fangs into it" ("When Darkness Falls"). The snake seems to be fighting Anur for his thoughts about the origin of jinn, as stated in the story, realizing the fact, "Djinn are creatures born from shadow, an unholy matrimony of Light and darkness. When they consume something's light, they extract that thing from reality; it no longer belongs in Light's design". The image of Djinn is rooted in Arabic folklore and Islamic tradition as they are supernatural, invisible creatures that live in remote places like deserts and are created from smokeless fire, according to the Quran. However, this image appears to have been altered to suit a global audience, often depicting its origin as a blend of light and darkness and incorporating elements of evil to reflect a Western or Christian perspective on Djinn. This struggle between the image of the jinn and the snake reveals the tension between cultural specificity, even preservation, and global compatibility. The narrative articulates cultural concerns by highlighting the tension surrounding issues of belonging and cultural authenticity.

Some digital horror stories may shift across time and different perspectives, reflecting the disjointed nature of cultural memory and ongoing tensions between global and local influences. "The legend of Kumiho" by Seunghb is a fragmented, non-linear narrative that represents disrupted histories and hybrid cultural identities inherent to glocalized settings. It is a Korean fantasy based on the folktales of East Asia and the legends of Korea. This legend tells the story of Kumiho, a superhero creature that can freely transform into a beautiful woman (or man) and often sets out to seduce unsuspecting victims to eat their liver or heart. In this story, Minho was one of these creatures who frequently roamed the night in search of food. He often took his humanoid form, which was not complete, yet his ears and nine tails were visible. One night, Minho is discovered wounded in the forest by a human boy named Jisung. Although Minho seems to be a man-eating fox spirit, Jisung determines to offer his support. The malevolent Minho and a kind-hearted Jisung, fall in love with one another. This story centers on the evolving relationship between the two protagonists, as the narrator examines the tension between the culturally specific Kumiho—a traditionally female seductress—and the more universal figure of Minho, who is attractive to males. This dynamic delves into themes of homosexuality and reflects broader global sociocultural trends. The refusal of Jisung's parents and his close friends to accept this developing relationship represents cultural anxiety and a clash between global and local identities. Despite the differing perspectives of the parents who discovered their son's relationship with that creature and of friends who witnessed their bodies stuck in the river and insist on knowing more about it, these conflicting voices between parents and the new generation regarding Jisung's relationship with Minho embody cultural anxiety between tradition and modernity. This moment in the story reveals the strange within the familiar, or the 'uncanny' as explained by Thacker and Scone, creating unease by blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination, human and non-human, life and artificiality. These multiple perspectives, or

polyphonies, reflect the mixing of local and global elements, echoing Hall's idea that modernity acts as a force that diminishes traditional identities.

The balance between preserving cultural narratives and adapting them to globalized digital spaces poses a challenge that stirs cultural unease and anxiety. "The legend of Hombarume" by Theafricanwordsmith is another horror story on Wattpad that combines historical myth and African cultural folklore, aiming to appeal to a global audience. The story revolves around a figure named Hombarume, renowned for his hunting skills in the African jungle. As the hunting trip takes an unexpected turn, Hombarume fatally shoots the prince, who turns into an unknown creature. Hombarume killed the beast not only out of dread at its power to transform the prince, but also to protect himself from its potential danger and to prevent it from harming others in the community. Due to the mysterious disappearance of a villager in Rujeko, the whole village is plagued by strange deaths and events that seem to be synonymous with one man. The story's implication lies in Hombarume's observation of Prince Pomerai, the Chief's son, who transforms into a hyena-like creature during his hunting trip. However, his initial observation marks the beginning of his decline. Following the Prince's disappearance, he is interrogated by the Chief's guards and assistants, subsequently imprisoned, and ultimately loses the confidence of both his girlfriend and the community. The mysterious disappearances of villagers, the deaths of lovers and sons, and the sightings of strange creatures reflected in the river by girls or women who fall in love with strong men or princes in the village highlight the story's primary focus, shedding light on the legend and the mythical African elements. African culture is rich with myths involving flies, strange creatures, spiders, and the Zulu. However, in this story, the author aims to align with global perspectives and readership by transforming some humans into wild, strange creatures, similar to those in Eastern culture. These two conflicting images evoke dread and fear through the uncanny, a disturbing feeling of both the familiar and the eerie, or the known and the unknown, manipulating the reader's mind and the medium. This story illustrates Mbembe's concept of how postcolonial societies confront uncertainty and instability as traditional social structures conflict with the disruptive forces of global modernity.

Some digital horror stories are written in the format of multimodal epistolary or found-footage, embedding supernatural horror within familiar, culturally resonant artifacts to heighten realism and immediacy. This type of narrative blends traditional storytelling with non-textual documents, such as video transcripts, voice memos, and audio logs, to dig into real evidence. In these stories, the author employs films, recordings, or multimedia to explore mystery through a thread, tell a breakup story through unsent emails, or create a horror story from a series of deleted texts and corrupted audio transcripts. These stories sometimes incorporate specific media to root horror in familiar local settings while conveying it through formats that are accessible to a global audience. "The James Currie Film" is a notable example of a movie that employs found-footage techniques. It is a Scottish myth dating back thousands of years, captivating many generations as they seek answers to its mysteries. The story revolves around a female scholar's attempts to understand the reasons behind the disappearances on the Scottish shore near the old homestead called "Losh Ness," and around a massive creature that emerges as the main danger, rising from the sea and swallowing people. Miss Evie Grant, the main character, seeks to meet an old man, Doctor Alistair McKendriak, who is in his seventies, at this homestead/mansion on the shore that has a sign on its door: "The Ordained Society of Loch Ness Monster Hunters," to discuss the findings of her research. During her meeting with the Doctor at his residence, Evie was informed of the original narrative concerning the monster in the lake. However, subsequent accounts of this story, along with the paintings displayed on the walls of the room where their discussion took place, present conflicting versions of the events. Although the Doctor is the leader of this society and insists that irrefutable evidence is necessary, Evie presents him with another piece of proof—a videotape titled "The James Currie film." This footage reveals unexpected facts and further confirms the Doctor's involvement in the crime of murder. Evie requests that the Doctor disclose the facts regarding the footage created by James Currie in the 1930s, which subsequently went missing from the vault bank in London. The Doctor, however, avoids addressing the truth and instead focuses on the loss of the film. When evidence is presented revealing that James Currie's real identity is John Douglas—Evie's grandfather—the Doctor is taken aback and experiences considerable frustration. The story breaks traditional narrative conventions by using unreliable narrators who are either misleading or playful. All elements are incorporated within an epistolary format to craft a horror tale from deleted texts or corrupted sources, building tension as secrets unfold. Evie, a scholar from London, visits the Scottish Highlands for research and meets a Scottish professor to present evidence against this traditional Scottish heritage. This encounter between the elderly and the younger generation reflects a clash between the local and global. In this story, these clashing voices and conflicting perspectives reflect a cultural tension in which its characters challenge the balance between preserving cultural roots and local traditions and adapting to a globalized world. This encounter functions as an active, reciprocal process where global forces are localized, and regional cultures, in turn, reshape the global landscape. It echoes Appadurai's concept of global 'flows' and how these flows—such as 'ethnoscapes' or 'mediascapes'—generate new anxieties and tensions in cultural imagination.

Conclusion

Digital horror encompasses more than merely eliciting fear; it constructs immersive psychological and existential experiences through a range of narrative and aesthetic methods. Numerous digital horror narratives foster tension and audience

engagement through mechanisms such as symbol interpretation, puzzle-solving, and navigating fragmented archives. In doing so, they address contemporary issues, including identity instability, surveillance, social isolation, and existential uncertainty. The use of unreliable narration, metafictional techniques, and non-linear or fragmented structures enables these narratives to articulate the dynamic interplay between local cultural identities and broader global influences.

The case studies presented exemplify this dynamic. In 'Djinn', the protagonist navigates the cultural and philosophical foundations of the jinn, juxtaposing Arabic and Islamic interpretations with Western philosophical perspectives through a non-linear, self-reflexive narrative approach. 'The Legend of Kumiko' addresses intergenerational conflict and expresses cultural unease via Jisung's interactions with the mythical creature, underscoring tensions between tradition and modernity. 'The Legend of Hombarume' illustrates the complexities of maintaining local tradition authenticity while engaging global audiences, depicting a prince's metamorphosis into a mysterious entity—an image not historically found in African folklore. Furthermore, 'The James Curri Film' integrates conventional storytelling with non-textual components, such as video transcripts and corrupted digital artifacts, highlighting generational cultural discord. Collectively, these examples demonstrate how digital horror foregrounds the instability of cultural memory and challenges traditional forms within networked environments. The fusion of native narratives with global storytelling techniques positions digital horror as an effective medium for examining cultural anxiety and the negotiation of identity on both local and global scales.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1]. Aldana Reyes, X. (2014). *Body gothic: Corporeal transgression in contemporary literature and horror film*. University of Wales Press.
- [2]. Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- [3]. Balcioğlu, Y. S., & Altındağ, E. (2025). Digital dread: Horror narratives and surveillance anxiety in TikTok's attention economy. *The Communication Review*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2025.2578118>
- [4]. Barakat. (2023). *Djinn*. Royal Road. <https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/74899/djinn>
- [5]. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- [6]. Blake, L., & Aldana Reyes, X. (Eds.). (2015). *Digital horror: Haunted technologies, network panic, and the found-footage phenomenon*. I.B. Tauris.
- [7]. Booth, W. C. (1983). *The rhetoric of fiction* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- [8]. Chun, W. H. K. (2016). *Updating to remain the same: Habitual new media*. MIT Press.
- [9]. Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)
- [10]. Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* Zero Books.
- [11]. Goel, S., Dharmala, H., Zhang, Y., & Burghardt, K. (2022). Decomposing the fundamentals of creepy stories. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2211.05369>
- [12]. Hall, S. (1996). Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Mongia (Ed.), *Contemporary postcolonial theory: A reader* (pp. 110–121). Arnold.
- [13]. Lacefield, K. (Ed.). (2016). *The scary screen: Media anxiety in The Ring*. University Press of Kentucky.
- [14]. Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- [15]. Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Duke University Press.
- [16]. Mbembe, A. (2003). Necro-politics (L. Meintjes, Trans.). *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>
- [17]. McIntosh, A. (2024). *The James Currie Film*. Creepypasta. <https://www.creepypasta.com/the-james-currie-film/>
- [18]. Moreno Almeida, C. (2024). *Memes, monsters, and the digital grotesque*. Oxford University Press.
- [19]. Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2015). *Globalization and culture: Global mélange* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- [20]. Ondrak, J. (2018). Spectres des monstres: Post-postmodernisms, hauntology and creepypasta narratives as digital fiction. *Horror Studies*, 9(2), 161–178. <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/23603/1/Horror-Studies%209.2%20open%20access.pdf>
- [21]. Robin, B. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital Education Review*, 30, 17–29.
- [22]. Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social theory and global culture*. Sage.
- [23]. Ryan, M.L. (2001). *Narrative as virtual reality: Immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [24]. Sarkar, A. (2023). Modern anxieties and traditional influence in horror anime. *Humanities*, 12(5), 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12050118>

[25]. Sayad, C. (2021). Beyond film: The reality of participation in experiential cinema and games. In *The ghost in the image: Technology and reality in the horror genre* (pp. 87–112). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190065768.003.0005>

[26]. Seungh00. (2024–2025). *The legend of the Kumiho (Minsung)*. Wattpad. <https://www.wattpad.com/story/365883606-The-Legend-of-the-kumiho-minsung>

[27]. Thacker, E. (2011). *In the dust of this planet: Horror of philosophy*, Vol. 1. Zero Books.

[28]. Theafricanwordsmith. (2020–2022). *The legend of Hombarume (Legends Series 1)*. Wattpad.
<https://www.wattpad.com/story/233896092-the-legend-of-hombarume-legends-series-1>

[29]. Underberg-Goode, N. (2025). Introduction to creepypasta, digital horror, and legend formation across interactive media. *Contemporary Legend*, 3, 1–15. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/cl/article/view/41594>