



PRODUCTION DESIGN IN THE CREATION OF THE SHORT FILM *BEHIND THE DOOR* (A Qualitative Approach to Cinematography and Visual Storytelling)

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Abstract

This study examines the process of making a short film entitled “Behind the Door”, which has a psychological and mystery theme. Audio-visual works with optimized artistic and technical work are the main objectives of this design. Pre-production, production, and post-production are all part of the design process, which focuses on script creation, storyboarding, location selection, and lighting and sound arrangements to support the mood of the story. To ensure the quality of production in accordance with cinematographic standards, this design uses a qualitative approach by conducting literature research, observation, and interviews with film practitioners. It is hoped that this design will become a model for making short films that can convey story messages and provide a deep experience to the audience.

Keywords: Production Design, Short Film, Behind the Door, Cinematography, Pre-Production

Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mengkaji proses pembuatan film pendek berjudul “Behind the Door” yang mengusung tema psikologis dan misteri. Tujuan utama perancangan ini adalah menghasilkan karya audio-visual dengan kualitas artistik dan teknis yang optimal. Proses perancangan ini mencakup tahap pra-produksi, produksi, dan pasca-produksi, dengan fokus pada penulisan naskah, pembuatan *storyboard*, pemilihan lokasi, serta pengaturan pencahayaan dan tata suara untuk mendukung nuansa cerita. Guna memastikan kualitas produksi yang memenuhi standar sinematografi, perancangan ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka, observasi, dan wawancara dengan praktisi film. Diharapkan perancangan ini dapat menjadi acuan dalam pembuatan film pendek yang mampu menyampaikan pesan cerita sekaligus memberikan pengalaman mendalam bagi penonton.*

Kata kunci: Desain Produksi, Film Pendek, Behind the Door, Sinematografi, Pra-Produksi

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INTRODUCTION

Short films have become an important medium of visual communication and storytelling, enabling filmmakers to deliver meaningful narratives within a limited duration. Unlike feature-length films, short films emphasize concise storytelling while maintaining strong emotional and aesthetic impact. Their relatively flexible production process also provides opportunities for filmmakers to experiment with narrative structures, visual styles, and cinematic techniques. According to David Bordwell **and** Kristin Thompson (2021), film is a system of visual and auditory communication in which narrative, cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, and sound work together to construct meaning and influence audience interpretation. Consequently, the production design of a short film plays a crucial role in shaping the overall viewing experience by integrating artistic and technical elements into a coherent visual narrative.

In addition to functioning as a storytelling medium, films are also designed to evoke emotional and cognitive responses from audiences. Noel Carroll (1990) argues that horror films deliberately create emotional engagement through the construction of fear, suspense, and curiosity, while Murray Smith (1995) explains that audiences become emotionally invested through character engagement, recognition, alignment, and allegiance. These theoretical perspectives demonstrate that effective film production extends beyond technical execution, requiring careful consideration of narrative development, visual symbolism, and audience psychology. Therefore, production design is not merely a supporting aspect of filmmaking but an essential component in communicating meaning and emotional experience.

Among various film genres, horror and thriller continue to attract audiences because of their ability to combine suspense, uncertainty, and emotional intensity. Rather than relying solely on frightening scenes, contemporary horror-thriller films increasingly emphasize psychological tension that gradually develops throughout the narrative. This approach encourages audiences to interpret hidden meanings, anticipate unexpected events, and emotionally connect with the characters' experiences. Plot twists, visual symbolism, lighting, sound design, and mise-en-scène collectively contribute to creating a compelling cinematic atmosphere that keeps viewers engaged from beginning to end (Dadlani, 2024).

Recent developments in horror cinema also indicate a shift from supernatural horror toward psychological horror. Instead of presenting monsters or paranormal entities as the primary source of fear, psychological horror explores internal conflicts, trauma, guilt, memory,

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and the complexity of the human mind. This approach allows filmmakers to create fear through atmosphere, symbolism, and character psychology rather than explicit visual horror. As noted by Rosita (2025), contemporary horror increasingly invites audiences to reflect on emotional and psychological experiences while maintaining suspenseful storytelling.

The short film *Behind the Door* adopts this psychological horror-thriller approach by presenting fear through symbolic visual storytelling rather than supernatural elements. The central symbol of the **door** functions not merely as a physical object but as a metaphor for hidden memories, personal choices, consequences, and self-discovery. Each door encountered by the protagonist represents a psychological barrier that reveals previously concealed truths about the character's life. This symbolic narrative distinguishes the film from conventional horror productions that primarily depend on supernatural threats or graphic visual effects. Instead, suspense is constructed through production design, lighting, cinematography, sound, and mise-en-scène that reinforce the protagonist's emotional journey (Jia, 2025).

The novelty of this production design lies in three main aspects. First, the film employs the symbolic use of doors as a recurring visual metaphor that drives narrative progression and psychological interpretation. Second, the story emphasizes psychological horror rather than supernatural horror, allowing fear to emerge from internal conflict and emotional uncertainty. Third, the production design integrates cinematography, lighting, color composition, set design, and sound design to strengthen the symbolic meaning of the narrative and create an immersive emotional atmosphere. This integrated production design approach demonstrates how artistic and technical elements can function simultaneously as narrative devices rather than merely aesthetic components.

Based on these considerations, the production of the short film *Behind the Door* seeks to develop a production design model that effectively integrates visual symbolism, psychological storytelling, and cinematographic techniques. Through qualitative methods, including literature review, observation, and interviews with film practitioners, this project aims to examine how production design contributes to building suspense, communicating symbolic meaning, and enhancing audience engagement. It is expected that this production will provide both practical and academic contributions by demonstrating an innovative approach to psychological horror filmmaking in the context of contemporary short film production.

METHOD

To achieve optimal results, the research method used in the process of creating the short film "Behind the Door" combines theoretical and practical methods. For each short film production, the theoretical method is applied alongside the practical method during the on-field process, which consists of three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. The practical method focuses on implementing concrete actions during the film production process, while the theoretical method focuses on creating a conceptual framework underlying filmmaking, which includes literature research on cinematography theory, narrative, and character psychology relevant to the film's theme. Pre-production is the first phase. In this stage, the established theories are used to organize shooting schedules and location selection.

A. Pre-Production

Pre-production is the initial stage of the filmmaking process, encompassing all preparatory activities before principal photography begins. This phase includes concept development, scriptwriting, production planning, location scouting, casting, scheduling, budgeting, and storyboard preparation. Effective pre-production is essential because it establishes the creative and technical foundation of the film while minimizing potential challenges during production. According to Kurnia Fernanda and Ria Edlina (2024), careful planning at this stage significantly influences the efficiency, quality, and overall success of film production.

Concept development serves as the starting point of the creative process. According to Deiza Aldarubi (n.d.), this stage begins with brainstorming to generate various story ideas before selecting the most appropriate concept. The chosen story should be original, engaging, and capable of conveying the intended message or theme. Once the central idea has been established, the production team identifies the target audience to ensure that the narrative style, visual approach, and emotional tone correspond with viewers' expectations. At the same time, the development of characters and dramatic conflict is carefully considered because compelling characters and meaningful conflicts are fundamental to creating audience engagement and emotional investment throughout the story.

Scriptwriting transforms the initial concept into a structured narrative that guides every aspect of production. According to Sasongko (2013), a screenplay contains the story structure, character development, dialogue, scene descriptions, and visual directions required for

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filmmaking. The writing process begins with determining the main theme and storyline, followed by preparing a synopsis that summarizes the narrative and introduces the central conflict. The screenplay is then developed into a complete draft, which undergoes multiple revisions to improve narrative coherence, dialogue quality, pacing, and dramatic effectiveness. A well-developed script functions as the primary reference for directors, cinematographers, actors, and the entire production crew throughout the filmmaking process.

Production planning translates creative ideas into practical implementation. According to Suhadi and Dahar (2024), this stage involves organizing the financial, technical, and human resources required for production. Activities include preparing the production budget, developing a detailed shooting schedule, selecting filming locations, recruiting production crews, and casting actors who best represent the intended characters. Thorough planning enables efficient resource management while reducing production risks and ensuring that filming proceeds according to schedule.

Storyboard preparation concludes the pre-production process by visually translating the screenplay into sequential images that illustrate each planned scene. According to Darmoyo (2020), a storyboard serves as a communication tool that enables the production team to visualize camera composition, shot size, camera movement, scene transitions, and actor positioning before filming begins. By providing visual guidance for every scene, storyboards facilitate coordination among directors, cinematographers, art directors, and other crew members, ensuring consistency between the creative vision and its execution during production.

B. Production

Production is the stage during which all creative plans developed in pre-production are implemented through principal photography. At this phase, the screenplay, storyboard, and production schedule are translated into audiovisual content by coordinating the work of directors, actors, cinematographers, production designers, sound recordists, and other crew members. Because numerous technical and artistic elements must operate simultaneously, production represents the most demanding phase of filmmaking.

The core activity of production is shooting, during which every scene is recorded according to the screenplay and storyboard. According to Lu (2024), filming integrates performance, cinematography, lighting, sound recording, camera movement, and production

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design into a unified visual narrative. Throughout this process, the director supervises actors' performances while ensuring that each shot effectively communicates the intended emotions and narrative objectives. Collaboration among all production departments is essential to maintain visual continuity, technical quality, and storytelling consistency.

In addition to original footage, filmmakers may incorporate stock footage to strengthen visual storytelling. Rahmayanti et al. (2021) explain that stock footage consists of previously recorded video materials that can be integrated into film projects to improve production efficiency. Such footage may include landscape imagery, urban environments, daily activities, or special events that would otherwise require additional time, budget, or logistical preparation to capture. The use of stock footage allows filmmakers to expand the visual scope of their productions while optimizing production costs. Nevertheless, all stock materials must be used in accordance with copyright regulations and licensing agreements to ensure legal compliance and ethical production practices.

C. Post-Production

Post-production is the final stage of filmmaking, during which all recorded materials are processed into a complete audiovisual work that is ready for distribution. This phase integrates technical refinement with artistic enhancement through editing, sound design, color grading, visual effects, rendering, and publication. The objective of post-production is not only to improve technical quality but also to strengthen narrative clarity, emotional impact, and overall audience engagement.

Editing represents the primary activity in post-production. After filming is completed, editors organize and assemble all recorded footage into a coherent narrative structure. The editing process generally consists of offline editing, which focuses on selecting and arranging the best shots, followed by online editing, where high-resolution materials are refined through color correction, visual effects, sound synchronization, and final adjustments. According to Sasongko (2013), effective editing determines the rhythm, pacing, continuity, and dramatic intensity of the film, making it one of the most influential stages in cinematic storytelling.

Following editing, the production proceeds to rendering, which converts all digital production elements into the final visual output. According to Nurul Shadrina et al. (2023), rendering integrates various production components—including camera settings, lighting,

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textures, geometry, animation, and visual effects—into high-quality audiovisual files suitable for exhibition across multiple media platforms. This process ensures that the final film achieves the desired visual quality and technical standards.

The final activity in post-production is publication, through which the completed film is introduced to its intended audience. According to Wijaya and Riau (2022), film publication involves distribution and promotional strategies designed to maximize audience reach and engagement. These strategies may include screenings at film festivals, cinema exhibitions, digital streaming platforms, social media campaigns, and online promotional activities. Effective publication enables a film to reach its target audience, increase public awareness, and maximize its cultural and communicative impact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the application of the research method used in producing the short film *Di Balik Pintu*, starting from pre-production, production, and post-production.

A. Pre Production

There are many plans being considered for making the film "Behind the Door", from selecting the target audience to developing the characters. To produce a work that is not only engaging but also meaningful, every step is carried out through strong collaboration.

1. Concept Development

Identify the concepts and visual concepts to be created and designed comprehensively. Start by determining the message to be conveyed, choosing the characters, identifying the target audience, and creating a brief summary. The production team for this film consists of :Muhammad Rahessa Adli Nurochim, Nobel Perdhana, Indra Jati Kusuma, Muhamad Khairul Isnanto, Andin Destiana. Class of 44.4C.12, Communication major, University of Bina Sarana Informatika.

- a. Brainstorming — the entire creative team, including the scriptwriter, director, and producer, took part in a brainstorming session. This process began with intensive discussions to discover story elements that could capture the audience's attention. To connect the various ideas that emerged during brainstorming, we wrote them directly in Microsoft Word as raw material for the script to be developed later.

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Additionally, the brainstorming process drew inspiration from famous films such as “Pengabdian Setan” (Satan’s Slaves).

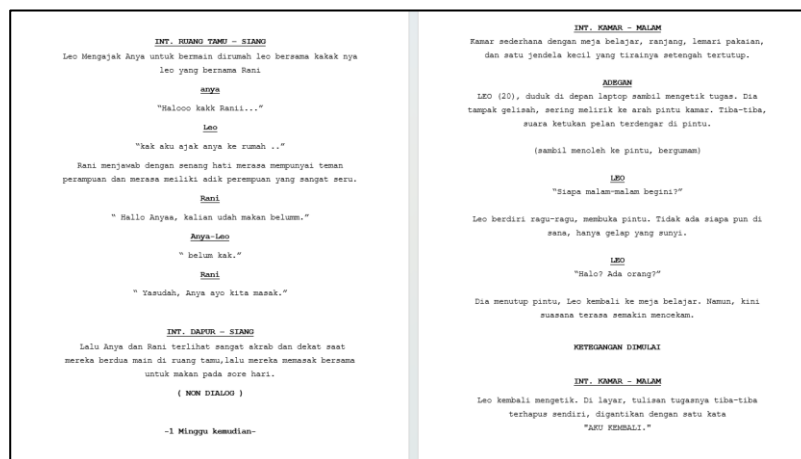
- b. Determining the Story Idea — the story concept focuses on a main character who becomes trapped in a tense situation at night in their bedroom, disturbed by the presence of a mysterious woman. To deepen the story, horror elements are combined with a psychological twist. The conflict between curiosity and the fatal consequences of the main character’s actions drives the plot’s development. We ensure that the story is structured in three strong phases: introduction, conflict, and a gripping resolution.
- c. Target Audience — one of the crucial early steps in developing the concept for the film “Di Balik Pintu” (“Behind the Door”) is defining the target audience. This film is intended for viewers aged 18–35 who enjoy the horror and thriller genres with adrenaline-pumping stories. Millennials and Gen Z, who are particularly drawn to psychological themes and mysterious elements, form the foundation of this target audience selection. This is due to the high level of interest from viewers within this age group.
- d. Character Development — to ensure that each character has a strong background, the character development process is carried out meticulously. We also created supporting characters who play a significant role in building the mystery. Emphasis is placed on how each character behaves in realistic horror situations. Their dialogue and actions are tailored to their individual psychology, enhancing the emotional connection with the audience.

2 Script Writing

The entire process of developing the concept for the film *‘‘Behind the Door’’* focused on scriptwriting. This process began with thorough research to ensure the story contained elements appropriate for the horror and thriller genres. The story structure was built in three acts. It began with the introduction of the characters and a frightening setting, followed by the main conflict centered on the protagonist, and concluded with a shocking resolution.

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Picture 1. Short Film Script Behind the Door

The writer strives to deliver a visual and emotional horror experience, making the audience feel engaged with the characters' experiences. Each scene is intended to drive the story toward a thrilling climax. The revision process is an essential part of scriptwriting. It is carried out thoroughly for every scene to ensure there are no plot holes or elements of the story that feel inconsistent.

3. Production Planning

To ensure that all production elements align with the film's vision and objectives, the production planning of "behind the door" involves meticulous budget calculations, a strict production schedule, and highly selective casting choices.

- The production budget is crucial to the success of a project. In this case, the budget for "behind the door" was carefully prepared because the horror and thriller genres require special features such as sound effects, dramatic lighting, and costumes to enhance the eerie atmosphere.
- The Production Schedule is the next essential component of this plan. With a limited timeframe, the production team of "behind the door" must work very efficiently. Pre-production, filming, and post-production must all be carried out according to schedule. A unique challenge lies in selecting the right filming location with a horror ambiance. The chosen location must not only fit the budget and logistics but also create a tense and unsettling impression. For night shoots, good coordination is necessary to ensure smooth progress without technical obstacles.

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- c. Casting: The actors chosen for the lead roles in “behind the door” were selected based on their ability to create an emotional atmosphere. The male lead, who plays the protagonist trapped in a terrifying situation, was chosen for his acting ability to convey mental resilience when facing strange and frightening events. For the female lead, portraying a character who is both strong and vulnerable—a key to building a tension-filled storyline—an actress capable of expressing deep emotions was required.

In addition, at this stage, the selection of software and hardware to be used was also carried out, as explained in the following table.

Software	Utility
Windows 11 Home	The operating system used to run editing programs such as Adobe Premiere Pro 2023.
Adobe Premiere Pro 2023	Cutting and combining a set of images to fit the story. Adding video effects to specific images.
Microsoft Word	Save the results of the team discussion in a document with the .docx extension.
Microsoft Excel	Create a director’s treatment and save it in a document with the .xlsx extension
Capcut	Creating footage for the credit title and also bloopers
Canva	Creating typography for a movie title.

Table 2. Software Specifications Used

Hardware	Utility
Laptop MSI KATANA	Running all the software used for short film editing
Camera Cannon 800 d	Capturing footages during the shooting process
Canon Lens Fix EF 50mm f/1.2L USM	Produces sharp image quality in any situation
Wireless Clip On (Saramonic Blink 500 B2)	Produce good audio
LED Viltrox D85T 15 Inch Bi-Color V-Mount Battery	Used for lighting
Canon Lens Fix EF 35mm f/1.4L USM	Used to produce sharp image quality in any situation

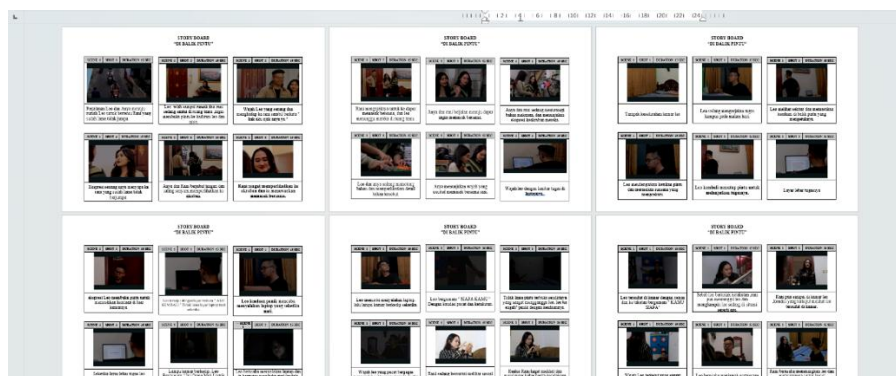
Table 3. Specifications of Hardware Used

4. Storyboard Development

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The framing and composition of each scene are carefully considered components of the storyboard. Each shot is designed to create incredible tension and surprise. In horror films, frightening events often appear suddenly. The choice of camera angle is very important. For example, you can use a low camera angle to show that a character feels threatened or place the camera in a spot that is invisible to the character, so that the audience feels the tension before the character realises it.



Picture 2. Storyboard

B. Production

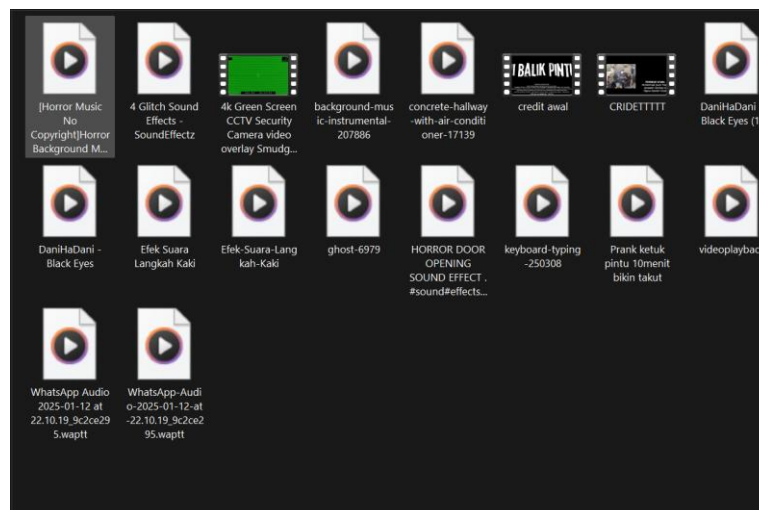
At this stage, the entire production team works together to ensure that every scene is done correctly. It begins with filming at locations that have been carefully selected to create an immersive and suspenseful atmosphere that supports the storyline.

1. Shooting, The process of capturing images also involves taking many shots, which often requires repetition to achieve the desired results. Every detail, including camera position, lighting, and actor movement, must be in accordance with the initial plan. It is not uncommon for certain scenes to require more intense shots or additional effects to highlight horror elements, such as eerie sounds or visual effects that show the strangeness experienced by the characters. The equipment used included a Canon 800D camera, 35 mm and 50 mm fixed lenses, Viltrox D85T 15 Inch Bi-Color V-Mount Battery LED lighting, and Wireless Clip On audio (Saramonic Blink 500 B2). Before starting filming, several retakes were done to ensure that the images captured were perfect. On the first day of shooting, several shots were taken from the existing scenes.



Picture 3. Results from a day of filming *Behind the Door*

2. Stock footage has been successfully used to create a tense and profound horror atmosphere through careful planning, selection, and integration. All of this was done without compromising the overall quality of the production. Stock footage, which is the work of others, includes video and audio that we used in *Behind the Door*.



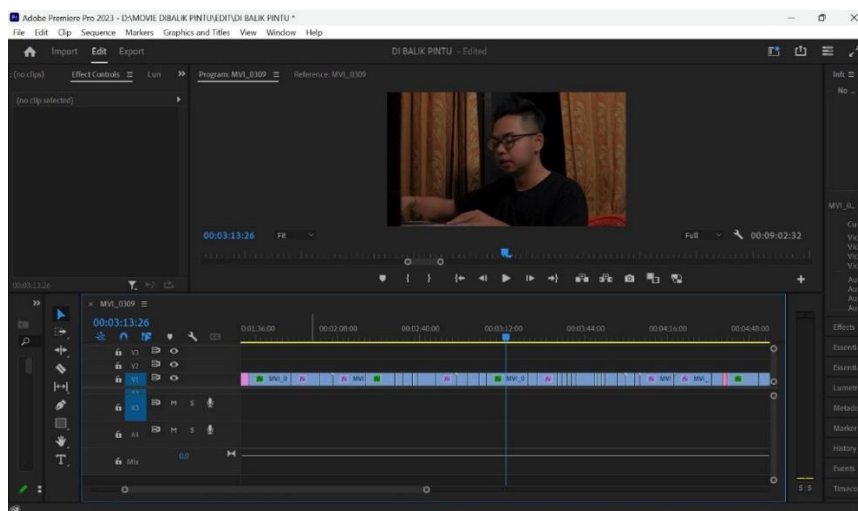
Picture 3. Stock Footages by google

C. Post Production

The concept behind the door as a captivating thriller and horror film was largely shaped by the rendering process, online and offline editing, and publication. To provide an unforgettable viewing experience, from stunning visuals to haunting sounds, every step was taken with great care. The film is not only visually appealing but also successfully

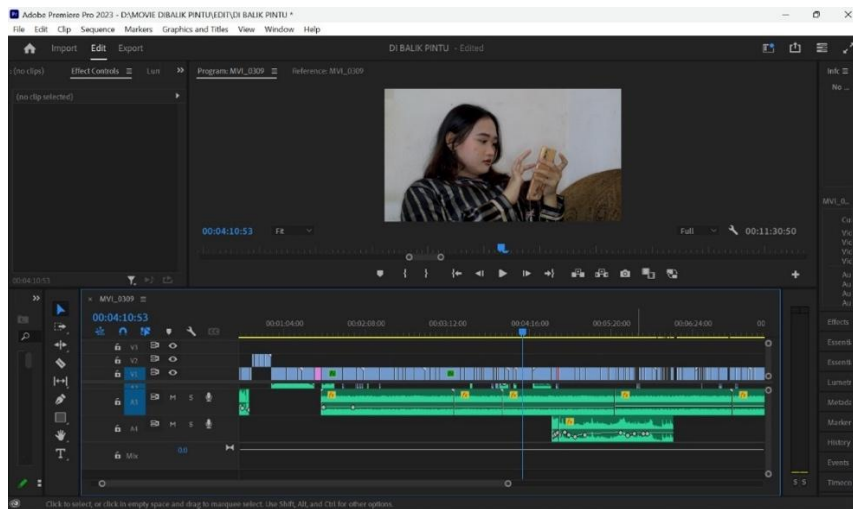
reaches a wide audience by combining modern production techniques with effective promotional strategies.

1. Editing (Offline and online), The offline editing process at behind the door is crucial in determining the rhythm of the story, selecting the most relevant scenes, and arranging the footage so that the flow matches the script. The horror and thriller genres require precise coordination, as editors must be able to create a blend of gradually increasing tension and unexpected surprises. At this stage, crucial scenes such as dialogue, character expressions, and transitions between scenes are meticulously designed to maintain the audience's attention.



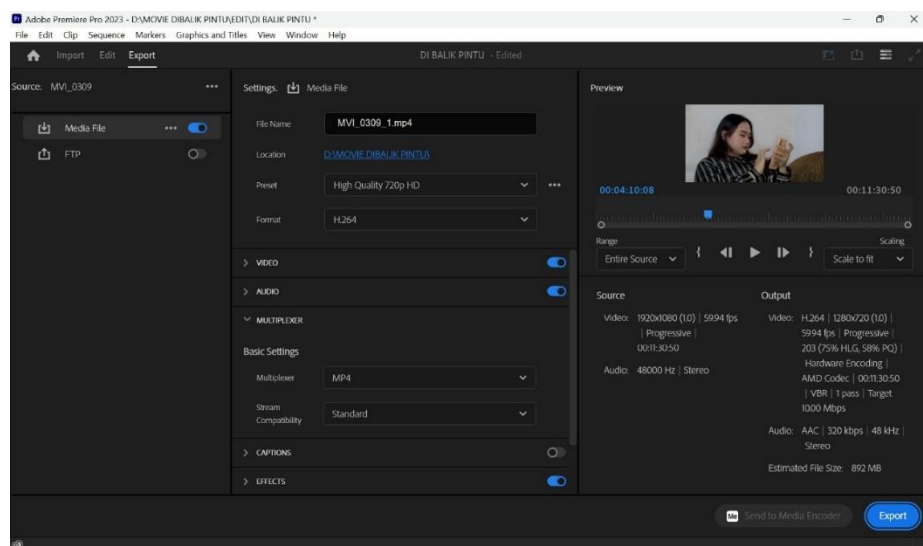
Picture 4. Editing Offline process

In the Online Editing section, voice-overs, background music, and visual effects are added. Voice-overs and background music are used from stock audio recordings that are imported and stored in the audio folder.



Picture 5. Editing Online process

2. Rendering, this process is used in Behind the Door to convert the initial data from the camera and editing equipment into a format that is ready to be displayed in a perfect visual form. Rendering not only combines visual elements such as video, effects, and graphics, but also ensures that the image quality meets the desired standards for horror and thriller films. Compressing the video project into H.264 format with High Quality 720p HD resolution is how the short film behind the door is rendered..



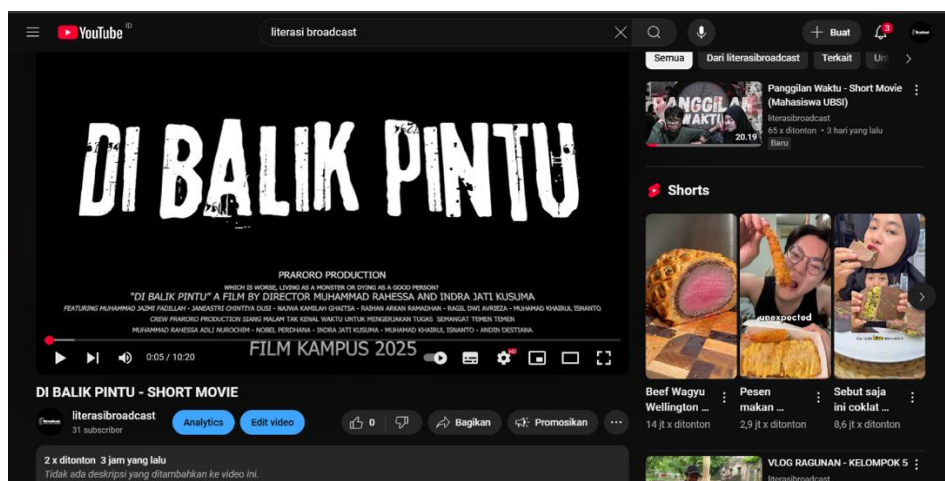
Picture 6. Rendering Process

3. Publication: Once the short film is complete, the next step is publication. The publication is posted on the class's YouTube social media account for public viewing.

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Picture 7. Publication via YouTube Literasi Broadcast

Overall, the analysis of the production process demonstrates that the integration of pre-production, production, and post-production activities successfully translated the initial concept of *Behind the Door* into a coherent psychological horror short film. The findings indicate that comprehensive concept development, detailed scriptwriting, careful production planning, and storyboard preparation provided a strong foundation for the filming process. During production, the effective use of cinematography, lighting, camera composition, and actor performance enhanced the psychological tension without relying heavily on supernatural visual effects. Furthermore, post-production activities, including editing, sound design, rendering, and digital publication, strengthened the narrative flow and emotional atmosphere, resulting in a visually consistent and engaging film. These findings reaffirm that production design is not merely a technical preparation stage but a comprehensive creative process that integrates narrative, visual, and audio elements to communicate symbolic meaning effectively. Consequently, *Behind the Door* demonstrates that a production design approach emphasizing psychological storytelling and the symbolic use of doors can provide an alternative model for contemporary short film production, particularly within the psychological horror genre.

CONCLUSION

The production of the short film *Behind the Door* demonstrates that a well-planned filmmaking process consisting of pre-production, production, and post-production is essential for creating a coherent and engaging audiovisual work. During the pre-production stage, activities such as concept development, scriptwriting, budgeting, production scheduling, and storyboard preparation established a strong foundation for the entire project. The development

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of compelling characters and the identification of the target audience further contributed to a clear narrative direction. In the production stage, the effective application of cinematography, lighting, framing, sound recording, and actor performance successfully created the psychological tension required for the horror-thriller genre. Finally, post-production activities, including offline and online editing, rendering, and digital publication, refined the narrative structure, enhanced the visual and audio quality, and enabled the film to reach a wider audience through online platforms.

The findings indicate that production design is not merely a technical stage of filmmaking but an integrated creative process that combines narrative development, visual symbolism, cinematography, sound, and mise-en-scène to strengthen audience engagement. The symbolic use of doors as a representation of hidden memories, personal choices, and psychological conflict distinguishes *Behind the Door* from conventional horror films that primarily rely on supernatural elements. This study therefore contributes to the field of film production and visual communication by demonstrating how production design can function as an effective storytelling approach for developing psychological horror narratives in contemporary short films.

Future research is recommended to further investigate audience reception of psychological horror films through qualitative or mixed-method approaches and to evaluate how symbolic visual elements influence viewers' emotional responses and narrative interpretation. In addition, future film productions may expand this production design approach by integrating emerging digital technologies, such as virtual production, advanced visual effects, and immersive audio systems, to enhance storytelling quality and audience experience.

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