Discussion on Using Mockumentary Staging Techniques in the Creation of Frightening Imagery

Koshi, Hoshino.
Kyushu-sangyo University
hoshino@ip.kyusan-u.ac.jp

Daewoong, Kim.
Kyushu University
dwkim@design.kyushu-u.ac.jp

Yoshito, Kawasoe.
Kyushu-sangyo University

Abstract

Recently in the horror genre of films, mockumentary staging techniques have often been utilized. A mockumentary is a staging technique by which the audience is led to believe that a created work of fiction is actually a documentary. In this paper, taking societal backgrounds into account, we used subjective evaluation experiments to determine why mockumentary staging techniques are so frequently utilized in today's film industry, particularly in the horror genre. Furthermore, in our subjective evaluation experiments, we clarified the significance of the POV (Point-of-View) aspect - a frequently used staging technique when presenting imagery in the mockumentary genre (hereafter mockumentary) - and also the significance of inserting the film's premise at the storyline's beginning. From this, we discussed a depiction of frightening imagery through mockumentary staging techniques.

Keywords: film , documentary , staging techniques

1. Introduction

In recent years, utilizing staging techniques to create a mockumentary, a pseudo-documentary, has been popular in the horror film genre. Mockumentary is a term coined from "mock" and "documentary" and holds the meaning of something which mimics or imitates (or, in some cases, parodies). Mockumentary staging techniques present a fictional work as a non-fictional documentary. One factor that led today's film industry to favor the mockumentary style is that filming itself has become readily accessible to ordinary people. Since Sony first introduced its Handycam in 1985, commercial camcorders have rapidly spread and have been constantly improved. Today's camcorders have evolved into high-quality units capturing high-definition imagery. As camcorders became smaller and gained more functionality, it became possible for anyone, at any time, to film/record high-quality images of any subject. Furthermore, because cell-phones and digital cameras are now capable of image recording, filming has grown to be part of everyday life for many people. Meanwhile, on the Internet, video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Nicovideo came to be widely used and made filming an essential part of people's lives. Because of the above-mentioned environmental factors enveloping the general public, it can be said that easy access to filming is one of the contributing factors that make today's mockumentary films successful. Based on these points, through our subjective evaluation experiments using original short films, we will review and discuss the conditions by which mockumentary staging techniques become effective for the films in which they are used.

2. Background and Research Goal

Using the Internet is now an indispensable part of daily life and acquiring cinematic information is no exception; many people utilize internet services to obtain information about soon-to-be-released movies. In mockumentary films, the depth to which the audience believes what they are viewing is non-fiction is determined by the effectiveness of the staging techniques presented to them. In *The Blair Witch Project* (USA, 1999), a mockumentary film released in 1999, a mix of media tie-ins, including the use of the Internet as an advertising tool, produced successful results. Prior to its release, the filmmaker launched a website (http://www.blairwitch.com/) (Figure 1) that provided information about the movie and introduced the Blair Witch Legend, a folklore created to serve as the film's premise, to the website's visitors. *The Blair Witch Project* had a production budget of only $30,000 but because the information on the website evolved organically as people's curiosity grew, the movie became a blockbuster hit with the box office revenue of $200 million. Motivated by the success of this movie, mockumentary staging techniques came to be widely used in the 2000's horror movies. Elements common amongst these movies include the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a subjective point-of-view (hereafter POV shot). In this paper, the insertion of the film's premise is defined as being the presentation of story background and settings at the beginning of the movie; the POV shot is defined as unfolding the scene through a character's point-of-view, which leads the audience to feel that they too are participating in the scene as it is presented. Because the POV shot is presented with shaky or out-of-focus camera shots, which is very similar to the type

Figure 1 The Blair Witch Project Official Movie Site (A Timeline in the History of the Blair Witch)

of recordings people would make when they use their own portable devices (e.g. cameras), the POV technique increases the realism for the viewer. In this paper, by identifying the effect of mockumentary films based on the above mentioned aspects, we think it is possible to define what makes for a frightening depiction of events specific to mockumentary staging techniques. To achieve this, we conducted subjective evaluation experiments to determine how the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot contribute to the staging of a mockumentary film.

3. Commonality in Mockumentary Horror Movies

Based on the assumption that today's horror movies often make use of mockumentary techniques, i.e. documentary-like imagery, rather than following conventional, storyline-based filming techniques, this paper will discuss commonalities found in mockumentary horror movies before discussing the effectiveness of mockumentary techniques.

3.1. Insertion of the Film's Premise

One of the common elements found in a number of mockumentary films is that the insertion of the film's storyline premise at the film's beginning is presented as if it is part of a documentary. The meaning of "insertion of the film's premise" is that at the beginning of the film there are scenes (refer to Figure 2) which present the story background and settings. This technique was observed in numerous mockumentary horror movies recently released. In mockumentaries, this insertion of the film's premise not only serves to explain the situation under which the film's sequences were recorded/saved but also sets up the precondition under which the viewer will watch the story that has been composed of those sequences. By presenting the film's premise, the setting in which the filming was done becomes clear and the POV technique used to film the story is now understandable. One example from recent movies is a panic movie titled *Cloverfield* (Figure 2). This movie starts with a scene which reads "Multiple sightings of case designate 'Cloverfield.' Camera retrieved at incident site U.S. 447 area formerly

known as 'central park.'" This movie is presented under the premise that it is recorded footage of an incident, implying that the sequences of the storyline were recorded through POV shots. Also, in the movie titled *The Fourth Kind* (Figure 3), an actress appears at the story's opening saying "I am actress Milla Jovovich and I will be portraying Dr. Abigail Tyler. This film is a dramatization of events that occurred October 2000 in Alaska. To better explain the events of this story, the actual archived footage was included. This footage was acquired from psychologist Dr. Abigail Tyler, who has personally documented over 65 hours of video and audio materials." This presents the film's premise that the composition of this film is a mix of dramatization and archived footage of a psychologist.

Figure 2 Opening of Cloverfield
Cloverfield. Dir.Matt Reeves. Perf. Michael Stahl-David. Paramount Pictures,2008.

Figure 3 Opening of The Fourth Kind
The Fourth Kind. Dir. Olatunde Osunsanmi. Perf. Milla Jovovich. Universal Pictures.2009.

3.2. POV Shots

Another common element in addition to the insertion of the film's premise is the use of a POV shot. Although the movies *[REC]* and *The Blair Witch Project* are often referred to as representative works of the POV technique, this type of shot is often utilized in action and suspense scenes. This allows the camera's angle to match with a character's point-of-view, leading the viewer to feel that they are part of the story. Most movies using the specialized filming technique of a subjective shot often require the insertion of an explanatory scene at the beginning or end of the movie to make the story natural. However, thanks to the insertion of the film's premise in those movies, their POV shots do not require this explanation.

Normally, filming is done with much consideration given to

technical aspects such as mounting the camera on a tripod for stabilized image quality or shooting in a studio with lights to minimize interference from weather and natural light conditions. However, films shot under those conditions often include artificial aspects and, based on director's intention, the imagery captured within the viewfinder is generally narrowed down to contain a minimal amount of information. On the other hand, these aspects of POV films - unstable image quality, shaky shots or the sound of the cameraperson breathing - often become advantages that are important in making the movie highly realistic to the viewer.

3.3. Discussion of the Insertion of Film's Premise and POV Shots

We have shown that a number of films use the techniques discussed in the previous section. Based on this finding, it can be said that these techniques are essential elements in determining what makes a frightening depiction within the mockumentary genre. In this paper, by identifying the characteristics and effects of the insertion of the film's premise, and the use of POV shots, on mockumentary films, we believe it is possible to analyze frightening descriptions specifically created through mockumentary staging techniques. To achieve this, we produced multiple sets of sequences that followed a specific pattern and conducted subjective evaluation experiments using that imagery to see how the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot contribute to the film's effect.

4. Subjective Evaluation Experiments
4.1. Experiment Description

In this study, we conducted subjective evaluation experiments with specific regard to the techniques of inserting the film's premise and the use of a POV shot, both of which are common in mockumentary horror movies. Then, we will use the result in an attempt to define which elements of a frightening depiction are specific to mockumentaries. For films to be used in the subjective evaluation experiments, we produced three kinds of shots with varying staging techniques. Conducting a comparative analysis on data acquired through the subjective evaluation experiments according to the three different shot patterns, we then investigated the effect and characteristics of each staging technique for those shots. Figure 4 shows a conceptual diagram of the comparative analysis.

1) Subjects

Experiment participants: Japanese Males (41) and Japanese females (19) between the age of 18 and 25

∗ Shot A: 20 individuals, Shot B: 20 individuals, Shot C: 20 individuals

2) Procedure

The experiments were conducted on one side of a studio located at Kyushu Sangyo University. In the experiment room, lights were off and the computer workstation used to view the video was partitioned (Figure 5) so that several subjects could view shots at the same time. The subjects viewed the sequences on a 20-inch computer monitor with headphones. Additionally, the subjects were divided into assigned groups by type of shot - A, B or C - and viewed only one type of shot. Prior to the experiments, the subjects were informed that the experiments were about frightening imagery. After the experiments, the subjects were to fill in questionnaires on a scale of one to five.

Figure 5 Experiment Device

3) Shots of Experiment

To assess subjective evaluations with specific regard to the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot through cross comparisons, we produced different shot patterns in accordance with the experiment's purpose. Since this is a comparative experiment on the effects of the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot, we created Shots of Experiment using a consistent storyline to clarify the individual characteristics of those components. The content of the experiment shots is as follows.

Shot pattern used in the experiments
・ Shot A: Raw footage captured by handheld camera(1min)
・Shot B: Composed of staged shots with background music(2min and 4sec)
・ Shot C: Shot A imagery with the film's premise inserted(2min and 5sec)

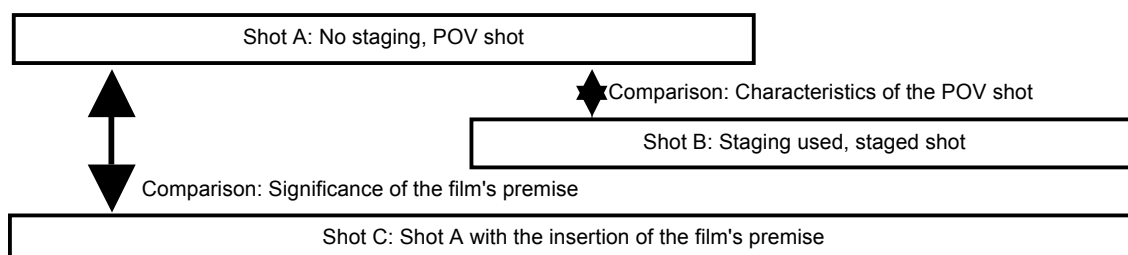A composition of shot patterns is shown in Figure 6.

Shot A: No staging, POV shot

Comparison: Characteristics of the POV shot

Shot B: Staging used, staged shot

Comparison: Significance of the film's premise

Shot C: Shot A with the insertion of the film's premise

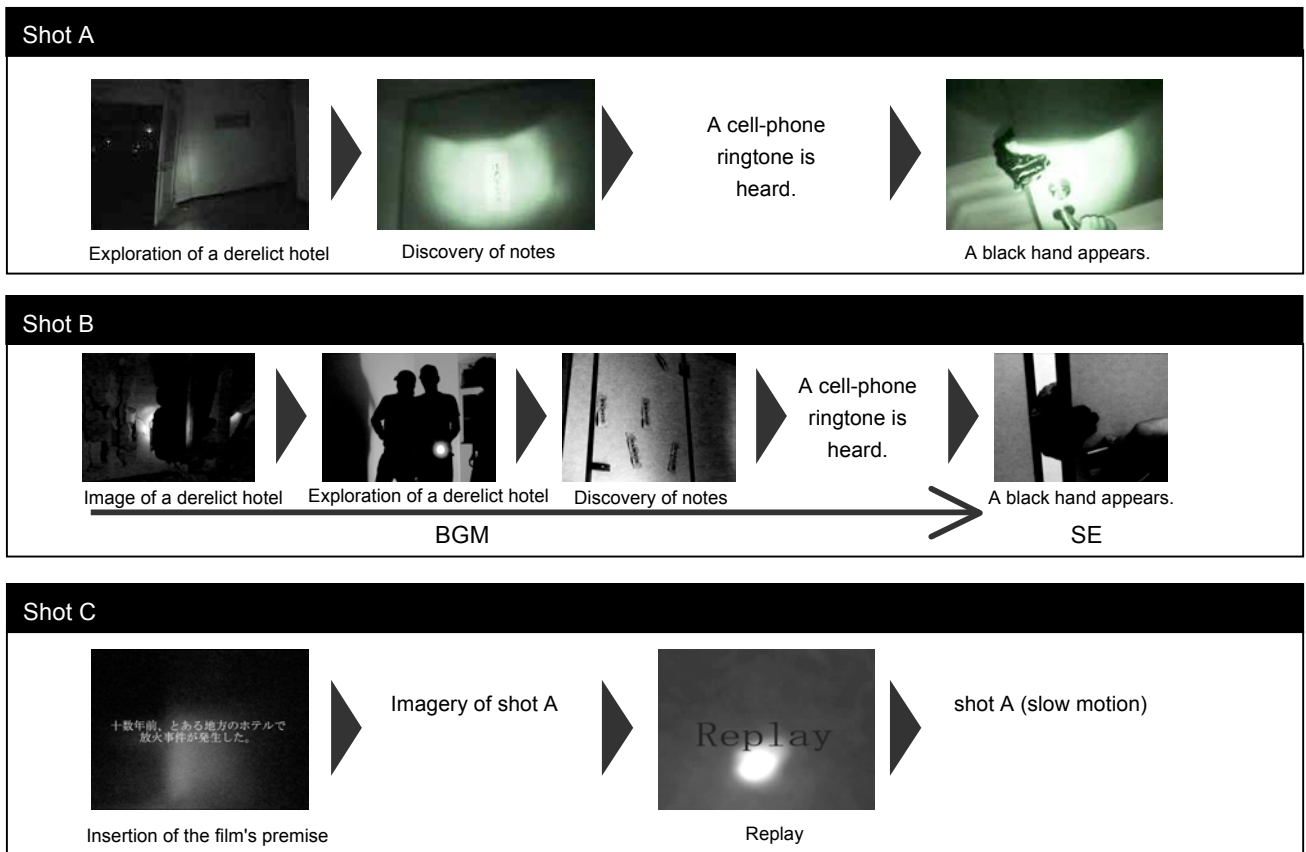**Figure 4** Conceptual Diagram of the Comparative Analysis

Figure 6 Composition of Shots of Experiment

4) Story

Shot A, B and C were produced using a consistent storyline. The storyline: Three male university students enter a derelict hotel on a dare. Inside, they find a door that has some notes affixed to it and, at that location, have a frightening experience.

5) Selection of Evaluation Terms

For evaluative terms, 29 students chose 118 adjectives that are considered as being associated with the depiction of horror movie scenes and then narrowed it down to 25 suitable evaluative terms. Evaluation terms used in the questionnaire are as follows:

暗い（Gloomy），驚きを感じる（Surprising），気持ち悪い（Gross），ぞっとする（Creepy），不気味である（Spooky），奇怪である（Bizarre），醜い（Ugly），不快である（Uncomfortable），臨場感（Dramatic），ありえるような（Plausible），写実的である（Realistic），すぐ近くの（Within striking distance），自然な（Natural），引き込まれる（Engaging），謎である（Mysterious），緊張感が高まる（Growing tension），未知的な（Unknown），ストーリー性のある（Story-telling），難解である（Difficult），単純な（Simple），不思議な（Enigmatic），シュールである（Surreal），ザラザラした（Coarse），荒い（Harsh），見やすい（Conspicuous）．

5. Results and Discussion
5.1. Analysis 1 (Shots A and B - Principal Component Analysis)

To determine characteristic features of Shot A and B, we conducted a principal component analysis.

Under Component 1 (Table 1) of Shot A, loadings were higher for the following adjectives:

暗い(gloomy)，驚きを感じる(surprising)，気持ち悪い(gross)，ぞっとする(creepy)，不気味である(spooky)，奇怪である (bizarre)，醜い (ugly)，不快である (uncomfortable)，写実的である(realistic)，すぐ近くの (within striking distance)，引き込まれる(engaging)，緊張感が高まる(growing tension)，未知的な（予見できない）(unknown (unpredictable))，ザラザラした (Coarse)，荒い(Harsh).

This component was designated as the "**horror component**."

Under Component 2, higher loadings were seen for the following adjectives:

謎である(Mysterious)，不思議な(Enigmatic)，シュールである(Surreal).

This component was designated as the "**mystical component**."

Next, with Shot B, the adjectives that showed higher loadings for Component 1 (Table 2) are as follows:

臨場感(Dramatic)，引き込まれる(Engaging)，謎である(Mysterious)，未知的な（予見できない）(unknown (unpredictable))，ストーリー性のある(Story-telling).

114

Table 1 Component List of Shot A

	Component	
	1	2
Gloomy	**.663**	.074
Surprising	**.880**	-.205
Gross	**.887**	.220
Creepy	**.864**	.159
Spooky	**.891**	-.097
Bizarre	**.746**	.262
Ugly	**.549**	.514
Uncomfortable	**.532**	.414
Dramatic	.132	-.302
Plausible	.086	-.727
Realistic	**.448**	-.039
Within striking distance	**.492**	-.223
Natural	.133	-.260
Engaging	**.751**	-.112
Mysterious	.272	**.556**
Growing tension	**.637**	.128
Unknown (unpredictable)	**.629**	.064
Story-telling	.410	-.444
Difficult	-.153	.472
Simple	-.279	-.587
Enigmatic	.006	**.751**
Surreal	-.493	**.584**
Coarse	**.581**	-.288
Harsh	**.509**	-.250
Conspicuous	.499	-.189

Table 2 Component List of Shot B

	Component	
	1	2
Gloomy	-.464	.779
Surprising	.375	.157
Gross	-.461	**.544**
Creepy	.181	.451
Spooky	.249	.434
Bizarre	.125	**.570**
Ugly	-.677	.430
Uncomfortable	-.582	.317
Dramatic	**.500**	.051
Plausible	.338	-.064
Realistic	.240	.245
Within striking distance	.490	.432
Natural	.245	-.040
Engaging	**.537**	.006
Mysterious	**.500**	.485
Growing tension	.374	.222
Unknown (unpredictable)	**.632**	.483
Story-telling	**.683**	-.150
Difficult	-.507	.258
Simple	.483	-.346
Enigmatic	.054	**.816**
Surreal	**.523**	**.525**
Coarse	.331	.174
Harsh	.103	.486
Conspicuous	.449	-.253

This component was designated as the "**entertainment component**."

Under Component 2, loadings were higher for the following adjectives:
暗い（Gloomy），気持ち悪い（Gross），奇怪である（Bizarre），不思議な（Enigmatic），シュールである（Surreal）.
This component was designated as the "**eerie component**."

1) Discussion of Shot A and B
Based on the subjects' impressions, we found the following components in each of experiment shots.
- Shot A
  Horror component, mystical component
- Shot B
  Entertainment component, eerie component

Although the Shot A mockumentary was only a short sequence, it still delivered horror elements as well as some mystical aspects. On the other hand, Shot B held entertainment aspects but, as a horror film, did not have as many horror elements as Shot A; instead, it only contained an eerie component.

5.2. Analysis 2 (Shot A and C - Factor Analysis) (Table 3)

Table 3 Loadings of Each Factor

	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Horror level	Roughness level	Entertainment level	Realism level	Clarity level
Gross	**.963**	.131	−.226	.021	−.013
Creepy	**.961**	−.244	−.041	.165	.214
Ugly	**.856**	−.163	−.059	−.128	−.039
Bizarre	**.760**	−.001	.037	−.165	.063
Spooky	**.591**	.262	.112	.129	.013
Surprising	**.411**	.334	.312	−.014	.058
Harsh	−.121	**.920**	.122	−.116	−.074
Coarse	−.040	**.815**	.044	−.042	.049
Gloomy	.272	**.560**	−.188	−.051	−.340
Within striking distance	−.139	**.418**	−.056	.241	−.071
Enigmatic	−.092	−.016	**.781**	−.333	−.140
Natural	−.299	.023	**.699**	.226	.064
Unknown (unpredictable)	.112	.080	**.605**	−.065	.128
Growing tension	.043	.226	**.523**	.008	.121
Engaging	.171	.093	**.401**	.312	.292
Plausible	−.131	−.062	−.127	**.903**	−.094
Realistic	.180	.022	.075	**.646**	−.419
Conspicuous	.141	−.006	−.133	−.241	**.754**
Dramatic	.013	−.165	.166	−.091	**.514**
Simple	−.324	.305	−.596	.092	**.353**

Correlation among Factors

| I	II	III	IV	V
1.000	.445	.568	.196	.084
	1.000	.430	.275	.204
		1.000	.211	.267
			1.000	.410
				1.000

Software: SPSS

Rotation: Promax rotation

Extraction method: Principal factor analysis

The aim of this analysis is to determine whether the viewer's impression can be altered through the insertion of the mockumentary film's premise. Because Shot A and C are both mockumentaries, it was thought that an analysis at deeper psychological levels than the previous analysis was necessary for this comparison. To do this, a factor analysis was first conducted on data from Shot A and C; mockumentary film factors were extracted; and then the score for each factor, calculated by simple addition, was used to compare data between Shot A and C.

1) Factor Analysis Results (Table 4)

Using scree plots, the number of factors was determined to be five. Then, a principal factor analysis was used to extract the factors, upon which a promax rotation was applied. For Factor 1, the adjectives gross, creepy, ugly, bizarre, spooky and surprising received higher factor loadings, so this was designated as the "horror level" factor. For Factor 2, the adjectives harsh, gloomy and coarse received higher factor loadings and, as a result, was designated as the "roughness level" factor. For Factor 3, the adjectives enigmatic, natural, unknown (unpredictable), growing tension and engaging received higher factor loadings, so this was named the "entertainment level" factor. With higher factor loadings in the adjectives plausible and realistic, Factor 4 was designated as the "realism level" factor. Lastly, Factor 5 was designated as the "clarity level" factor for its higher loadings in the adjectives conspicuous, dramatic and simple. Now, after calculating the score (-2 to +2) for each factor through simple addition and then averaging it, the results were compared.
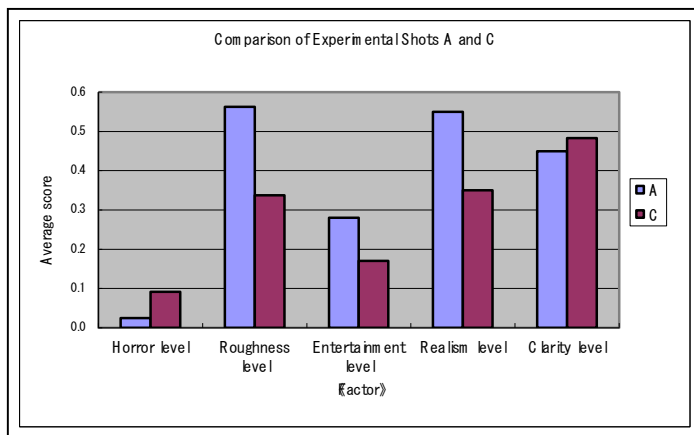
Table 4 Graph Illustrating Comparison for Each Factor

2) Comparison of Shot A and C

Although significant difference was not seen among any of the factors, Shot A showed slightly higher significance in the roughness, entertainment and realism level factors. However, no statistical significance in the horror level - the most important factor in horror films - was observed between these two Shots of Experiment.

6. Subjective Evaluation Experiment

Conclusion

In Analysis 1, after performing a principal component analysis for both shots, it was found that the characteristic features of Shot A, which used POV shots, were different from those of Shot B, which did not use POV shots, even when both shots used the same storyline in its short sequence. Of horror movie characteristics, Experiment Shot A contained various elements as a horror film whereas only the eerie component was noticed in Shot B. Based on these findings, it was determined that while a POV shot in a mockumentary provides little, easy-to-see information, it is more effective when it comes to depicting frightening imagery.

For Analysis 2, mockumentary film factors were determined and two Shots of Experiment were used to compare each of these factors. As a result, the following factors were extracted: horror level, roughness level, entertainment level, realism level and clarity level. In Shot A, in which the film's premise was not inserted, significance was observed for the roughness and realism level factors. However, between the two Shots of Experiment, there was no significant difference in the clarity level or in the horror level, the factor most important in a horror movie. One explanation for this result is that inserting the premise in a reality-based POV shot may give the viewer an impression of artificiality. However, the reality is that most of today's mockumentary films include the insertion of the film's premise. With regard to this point, it can be said that for mockumentaries with longer running times, unlike our short sequence Shots of Experiment, it remains essential that the audience understands the story setting even if doing so decreases the film's realism.

7. Discussion

In this study, we identified the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot as characteristics of mockumentary staging techniques that create a frightening depiction. In subjective evaluation experiments, different shot patterns and five-point scale questionnaires regarding those shots were used to analyze the characteristics and effects of these techniques on imagery. An analysis of the results found that Shots of Experiment using mockumentary staging techniques contained various elements of horror movies and were therefore effective in depicting horror imagery to the viewer. At the same time, however, a problem point identified was that inserting the film's premise could lead to a deterioration of realism and that it could have an adverse effect if it was not presented with caution.

It can be noted that there has been a recent trend to using mockumentary staging techniques in amateur movies. Originally, mockumentary was a filming style that was frequently seen in independent films. Because it does not require a large production budget nor specialized equipment, it is considered as an easy-to-use technique for amateur filmmakers. However, because the POV shot technique provides a minimal amount of information through its imagery, we believe a carefully crafted approach to story plotting and settings is important in making high-quality POV shots.

References

Morita, T., *Film Techniques When Using Home Video Cameras*, Bulletin of Ohkagakuen University Faculty of Humanities 5, pp.123-135, 2003.

Kato, D. et al., *Analysis of the Camera Work and the Subjective Evaluation Experiments*, The Journal of the Institute of Image Information and Television Engineers 53(9), 1315-1324, 1999.

Rotha, P. et al. Taka Atsugi, *Documentary Film*, trans, Mirai-sha Publishers, 1995.

Welles, O. and P. Bogdanovich. trans. Yasushi Kawarabata, *This Is Orson Welles*, Kinema-Junpo, 1995.

Arijon, D. trans. Kenji Iwamoto and Takehito Deguchi, *Grammar of the Film Language*, Kinokuniya Shoten, 1980.

<Website References>
The Blair Witch Project Official Movie Site, http://www.blairwitch.com/.

Dark Tales of Japan: Special Edition, Tokyo Broadcasting System Television, http://www.tbs.co.jp/program/kowaiyoru_20050824.html.