

FROM MYTHOLOGY TO MODERNITY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL INDONESIAN SUPERHEROES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The transformation of traditional Indonesian superheroes such as Gundala, Si Buta dari Gua Hantu, Maza, Nusantara and Godam in the digital era, showing how traditional elements can be adapted to modern media. These Indonesian superheroes not only symbolise cultural heritage, but also reflect the aspirations and struggles of Indonesians at various times. In contrast, American superheroes such as Superman, Batman and Spider-Man dominate the global popular culture landscape and represent modern values such as individualism, capitalism and universal heroism. This study also discusses the role of superheroes in expressing the values and identities of their creators, as well as the impact of the dominance of American superhero culture on the global cultural market and its pressure to adapt established visual and narrative standards. It has been found that recent superhero works are more inclusive and reflect the diversity and intimacy of society more broadly. This article highlights the importance of integrating traditional values and cultural heritage with the evolving context of the digital age.

Keywords: Indonesian Superhero, transformation, globalization, local culture

INTRODUCTION

Context and Significance of the Research

Superheroes have become an indispensable part of global popular culture, bridging geographical, social, and cultural boundaries. They are not only a symbol of strength and courage, but also a reflection of the evolving social values and cultural identity of the society that created them.

In Indonesia, the emergence of superhero characters such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, and *Godam* features a unique narrative rooted in local mythology, showing how traditional elements can be adapted into modern media. These figures not only symbolize cultural heritage, but also become a reflection of the aspirations and struggles of Indonesian society in various eras. Bigazzi et al (2023) explores the social repre-

sentations of heroes and their significance in reflecting social values, norms, and morality of the present while creating a bridge to future possibilities. Annisa Wahdiniawati et al (2023) states that traditional values and cultural heritage must not only endure but also thrive through continuous integration into the fabric of the digital age. We need to preserve local wisdom and culture, identifies workable solutions, advocates for cultural education, encourages intercultural collaboration, supports sustainable development, and promotes the wise use of technology in the context of preserving local wisdom and culture. These Indonesian heroes also undergo a transformation. The influence of globalisation is gradually leading to modernisation without losing the existing local characteristics.

However, American superheroes like *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Spider-Man* dominate the popular culture landscape on a global level. Through the support of highly developed entertainment industries such as *Marvel Studios* and *DC Comics*, American superheroes have become global icons representing modern values such as individualism, capitalism, and universal heroism. This dominance not only affects global cultural markets, but also puts pressure on other countries to adapt to established narrative and visualization standards. Levin et al (2019) examines the role of superheroes in expressing values and identities of their creators. The fact that a majority of superhero creators, until recently, were Caucasian and upheld the dominance, virtues, and heroism of the able-bodied, White, Anglo-Saxon, North American male. Based on the facts found in his superhero studies, Levin also learned that in the current era, superhero stories have evolved to become more plural and do not refer to the narrow ideals of the creators.

Superheroes have continued to evol-

ve to reflect the diversity and inclusivity of society more broadly. Carstarphen & Carr (2012) examines the evolving role of superheroes in media and popular culture. They argues that superheroes have evolved from mere sources of entertainment and adolescent power fantasies to complex symbols with deep rhetorical significance that merit critical attention. Carstarphen & Carr concludes that the cultural significance of superheroes in providing people with a nationalism, patriotism, identity, and inspiration to aspire to something greater than themselves. Looking at popular culture, particularly comic books and superhero films, and their impact on consumer behavior and identity formation, the authors suggest that superheroes offer multicultural hybridity that can potentially help build communities around the world.

Globalization creates opportunities as well as challenges for local superheroes like in Indonesia. On the one hand, digital technologies offer a new medium for distributing and modernizing local narratives, enabling traditional characters like *Gundala* to reach a global audience. On the other hand, there is a risk of cultural homogenization, where local values can be eroded by dominant global cultural influences. In this context, it is important to understand how local wisdom can be maintained in the midst of cultural and technological transformation, so that Indonesian superheroes can become symbols of national identity as well as competitive actors on the global cultural stage. Yuyue Zhang in his research explains that the presence of new formats in the media certainly brings many positive impacts, this can occur due to the influence of modernisation. Traditional media has slowly been replaced with much more modern media so that the scope of information dissemination becomes wider. Zhang examines the role of traditional me-

dia, such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio, in providing reliable and credible sources of information. Zhang also explained about the presence of the new media platforms, including social media, websites and streaming services, which have emerged in the context of globalisation and the advent of the internet. These new media have introduced interactive elements and greater accessibility, leading to significant changes in individuals' daily experiences (Zhang, 2024). Nowadays, the existence of Indonesian superheroes is not limited to the comic format; digital media has facilitated the revival of these characters, which were initially confined to comic books and have now expanded to encompass web comics and films.

Considering this relevance, this study focuses on exploring the interaction between locality and globalization in shaping the transformation of Indonesian superheroes. This study aims to highlight the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation, both as a challenge and an opportunity, in an era of increasingly digitally connected popular culture.

Research Question

The development of popular culture in the digital age has brought significant changes to the way superheroes are produced, distributed, and accepted by global audiences. In Indonesia, the transformation of superheroes from characters based on local mythology to modern representations reflects the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation. In this process, fundamental questions arise regarding how traditional characters can remain relevant in the midst of strong globalization currents. For example, how can a superhero like *Gundala*, rooted in a local heroic narrative, evolve into a character that appeals to the digital generation without losing its cultural iden-

tity?

Moreover, the success of American superheroes such as *Superman* and *Spider-Man* in dominating the global market provides an interesting framework for comparison. American superheroes have long been symbols of values such as individualism, technological innovation, and capitalism, which are promoted through global media. This raises a second question: how does the transformation of Indonesian superheroes compare to the evolution of American superhero characters? Is there a unique pattern or is it homogenization under the influence of global popular culture?

Another question relates to the interaction between locality and globalization. On the one hand, Indonesian superheroes face the challenge of preserving their cultural roots; on the other hand, adaptation to global standards is needed in order to compete in the international market. How do these two forces interact in shaping the identity of an Indonesian superhero? Does this transformation reflect a harmonious integration between local traditions and the demands of modernity, or is it simply the adoption of a global element without retaining its unique character?

By asking these questions, this study aims to uncover the processes, challenges, and opportunities that arise in the transformation of Indonesian superheroes. The analysis of this question not only provides insight into the dynamics of local popular culture, but also an important contribution to the understanding of how cultural identities can be sustained amid the increasingly intense influence of globalization.

Research Objectives and Contribution

This study aims to explore the transformation of Indonesian superheroes from mythology-based traditional characters into relevant modern entities in the di-

gital age. In this process, research focuses on how changing narratives, visualizations, and distribution media have changed the position of local superheroes in the midst of global cultural currents. Characters like *Gundala*, originally presented as heroes with deep roots in local culture, are now being transformed to appeal to a wider audience, including the younger generation growing up in the digital ecosystem. This study aims to identify elements of local culture that survive, change, or even disappear in the adaptation process.

In addition, this study also aims to conduct a comparative analysis between Indonesian and American superheroes. By comparing the evolutionary patterns of these two types of superheroes, research is expected to uncover fundamental differences in the narrative approach, visual design, and cultural values they represent. American superheroes, with the support of a highly developed entertainment industry, are often the global standard for defining the superhero genre. Therefore, this comparison will provide a deeper insight into how Indonesian superheroes can learn from the global model without losing their local essence.

The contribution of this research lies not only in the enrichment of popular culture studies, but also in the provision of new perspectives in understanding the interaction between locality and globalization. In the context of cultural globalization, this study provides a more holistic view of how local cultural identities can be maintained amid global cultural dominance. In addition, this research is expected to provide practical recommendations for creators, producers, and stakeholders in the Indonesian creative industry to develop authentic but relevant superhero narratives in the global market. Thus, this study not only serves as an academic contribution, but also as a

strategic guide for the future development of Indonesian popular culture.

Literature Review

Superheroes in Cultural Perspective

Superheroes are popular cultural phenomena that have the capacity to represent the social values, morals, and cultural identities of the people who created them. In various cultural studies, superheroes are often regarded as metaphorical symbols of collective struggle, hope, and human aspirations in the face of life's challenges. The definition of a superhero generally includes characteristics such as extraordinary strength, courage, and commitment to goodness, but its manifestations are strongly influenced by the cultural context in which they were created. The popularity of superheroes, first appearing in comic book form, then in the modern era, as today, expanding into the world of film so that the marketing reach can be wider, and the live-action performance is certainly far more stunning than comics which tend to be static, the success of superhero films has managed to captivate fans around the world and has become modern popular culture (Elhefnawy, 2022). Superheroes not only act as visual narrators of moral conflicts, but also serve as a means for societies to negotiate their cultural identities amid social and political change. Hakiki & Hidayat (2022) reveal that both Indonesian and American superhero films effectively promote patriotism due to the presence of patriotic elements within their narratives. However, differences emerge in the manner in which patriotism is expressed.

The history of the development of superheroes in Indonesia and America reflects different cultural approaches in defining and representing the concept of heroism. In Indonesia, superhero characters like *Gundala* and *Si Buta dari Gua Han-*

tu emerge from narratives rooted in local mythology and traditional wisdom. These stories often bring up themes such as the struggle against injustice, courage in the face of supernatural forces, and respect for traditional elements such as spirituality and nature. In contrast, in the United States, superheroes such as *Superman* and *Captain America* emerged as symbols of modern ideologies such as individualism, capitalism, and patriotism, against a backdrop often associated with contemporary issues such as technology, politics, and globalization. Storytelling in American superhero comics has shifted toward investing more information in the images and increasing complexity and maturity of the visual narrative structures (Cohn et al., 2017).

The relationship between mythology, tradition, and modernity plays an important role in shaping a superhero's identity. In Indonesia, local mythology is a major source of inspiration in creating unique superhero narratives, while modernity offers opportunities to revitalize these stories through digital media and visual technology. In America, the superhero narrative tradition has evolved together with social change, from the era of World War to the 21st century, with a focus on relevance to global issues such as sustainability, diversity, and equality. The study shows that superheroes are not just static products of culture, but dynamic entities that are constantly adapting to changing social, technological, and ideological contexts. Saptanto & Dewi (2020) explain that the superhero concept had the same story pattern, such as a person with a superhero alter ego and deep heroic storyline, even though they were presented by different countries. Saptanto & Dewi delves into the concept of superheroism as a form of modern literature and traces the impact of historical background, politics, and intertextuality in

the creation of Indonesian superheroes. The study finds that the universes of Indonesian superheroes differ considerably from those of American superheroes, as Indonesian superheroes heavily emphasize the incorporation of local wisdom while stories by American authors tend to focus on science, sophisticated equipment, and alien existence.

In a matter of cultural perspective, superheroes serve as a bridge between the past, present, and future. They represent how local and global cultures can meet, interact, and influence each other, creating narratives that reflect the complexity of the modern world. Superhero stories are always related to the historical context and trends that develop according to the era, the elements of the story are also adapted to the interests of young generation, so that the continuity of this superhero story is well-maintained (O'Connor, 2019). Therefore, this literature review aims to explore the dynamic relationship between cultural identity, narrative representation, and superhero transformation in Indonesia and America.

Theories and Concepts

In order to analyze the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the influence of globalization, this study utilizes various relevant cross-disciplinary theories and concepts to understand the dynamics of the interaction between locality and globalization. One of the main theories used is the theory of cultural globalization, which focuses on how local and global cultural elements interact, influence each other, and sometimes assimilate. Acosta Bustamante (2023) states that the transformation of the conventional superhero archetype, which has evolved from its historical association with the defeat of malevolent entities threatening human civilization. He posits

that this archetype has now been imbued with a more sinister and imperialistic ambience, aligning it with the individualistic persona of America. This theory provides an analytical framework for understanding how Indonesian superheroes, rooted in local mythology, can evolve into modern entities without losing their cultural identity under the pressure of global homogenization. Cultural globalization also describes the process by which traditional characters face transformation in terms of narrative, visual design, and distribution media to meet global market expectations. According to Gârdan (2020), the deconstruction or changes that occur in superhero characters that undergo the process of adaptation into new media formats are largely due to changes in views produced by the presence of globalization.

The concept of cultural representation and identity in the media is also an important foundation in this study. Superheroes, both in Indonesia and America, are not only entertainment, but also a tool of cultural identity representation. Gonzalez (2016) states that an understanding of historical context is crucial for interpreting the portrayal of the relationship between the American government and its foreign policy practices as depicted in fictional works such as comics and animated series. The portrayal of superheroes such as *Captain America*, *Superman*, and *Wonder Woman* exemplifies the ideals and patriotism associated with the American identity. Conversely, these characters also serve as emblems of American militaristic violence, thereby elucidating problematic aspects of American foreign policy, such as violence and corruption. Through representational analysis, this study explores how superhero narratives reflect the social, political, and cultural values of the communities in which they are created. This concept helps

identify fundamental differences in the way Indonesian and American superheroes display their identity, especially in relation to themes such as tradition, modernity, and diversity.

Another theory used is the theory of narrative transformation, which focuses on the evolution of stories over time and how narratives can adapt to changing cultural and technological contexts. This theory is particularly relevant for understanding how Indonesian superhero stories, like *Gundala's*, change from traditional narratives rooted in local mythology to modern narratives featuring global issues, such as sustainability, technology, and social justice. The theory also allows an analysis of how American superheroes, who have undergone various stages of narrative evolution since the 20th century, became models or reference points for superhero transformation in other countries.

By integrating the theory of cultural globalization, the concept of identity representation, and the theory of narrative transformation, this study provides a holistic approach to analyzing changes in the representation of Indonesian superheroes. This approach not only helps to understand the interaction between tradition and modernity, but also provides insight into how locality can be sustained in the face of the pressures of global cultural homogenization.

Research Gap

Although the study of superheroes as a popular cultural phenomenon has developed significantly, there are limitations in research that specifically discusses the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the context of the digital age. Most of the existing studies focus on global superheroes, especially from the United States, which dominates the world's comic and

movie industries through *Marvel Comics* and *DC Comics*. Mahmutovic (2021) illustrates how superhero comics activate the concept of “world” through the global dissemination of the Marvel Universe, which is characterized by its infinite extensibility. His argument is that by operating in terms of a universe with malleable diegetic rules, *Marvel Comics* and *Marvel Cinematic Universe* popular culture not only reflects the current state of the world, but also influences its evolution and spread. The universality of the modern worldview is no longer a concern for realist thinking, but rather an enhancement of its overall inclusiveness and infinite diegetic capabilities. These previous researches often highlight themes such as capitalism, individualism, and globalization, but rarely touches on how similar phenomena occur in countries with rich cultural traditions, such as Indonesia. Thus, studies centered on local superheroes facing global cultural pressures are still a minimal area of exploration.

Another gap lies in the lack of comparative research comparing the transformation process of Indonesian superheroes to American superheroes. In fact, this comparative analysis can provide deeper insight into the dynamics of the interaction between locality and globalization. For example, how Indonesian superheroes adopt global elements without losing their local cultural identity, or the extent to which American superheroes influence the design, narrative, and representation of superhero characters in Indonesia. This study not only contributes to a broader understanding of popular culture, but also enriches discourse on cultural resistance and adaptation in an era of globalization.

Furthermore, the interaction between local traditions and global culture in shaping the identity of Indonesian superheroes has not been systematically studied.

Many Indonesian superheroes are rooted in mythology and folklore, but they must adapt to the expectations of modern audiences influenced by global standards. This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing how traditional elements are integrated into modern narratives without losing local authenticity.

Overall, this research gap shows the urgent need for a more comprehensive and contextual study on the transformation of Indonesian superheroes. This study will not only expand the literature on global popular culture, but also make important contributions to the understanding of how non-Western countries, such as Indonesia, face challenges and opportunities in maintaining their cultural identity amid globalization.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the context of global popular culture. This approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of the narrative, visualization, and cultural representation in a medium that is the main medium for superhero characters. Qualitative methods are suitable for understanding complex cultural phenomena, such as the interaction between locality and globalization, through interpretive analysis of textual and visual data.

Textual and visual analysis were used in this study as the main methods to identify changes in the narrative and design of superhero characters. This approach involves an in-depth reading of Indonesian superhero comics and films and comparing them to similar products from the United States. Using textual analysis, this study highlights key themes, narrative motifs, and cultural values embodied in superhero sto-

ries, while visual analysis focuses on design elements such as costume, color, and symbolism. These two methods complement each other in providing a holistic understanding of superhero transformation.

The study also adopts the sociological perspectives of literature and cultural studies to understand how superhero narratives reflect the social, political, and cultural dynamics of society. The sociological perspective of literature helps analyze the relationship between superhero texts and their social contexts, such as how *Gundala*'s story reflects the struggle against social injustice in Indonesia. Meanwhile, cultural studies allow a broader analysis of the interaction between local and global cultures in shaping superhero identities. This approach also helps explore how superheroes serve as a means of communicating cultural values to audiences, both locally and globally.

Through a combination of qualitative approaches, textual and visual analysis, and interdisciplinary perspectives, this study provides a strong framework for exploring the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the digital age. This approach is not only relevant for identifying patterns of change, but also for understanding broader implications for local cultural identities in the context of globalization.

Data Sources

This research uses a variety of data sources that include comics and films to explore the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the context of global popular culture. Comics as a complex subject involving interactions between diverse cultural dimensions, including ethnicity, gender, and history. This complexity is evident in the existence of various types of comics originating from different countries and cultures, such as *manga*, animated strips,

and superhero comics. These comics can be examined from multiple perspectives, including historical, psychological, educational, and even economic and business aspects related to the comic industry (Berninger et al., 2010). Indonesian superhero comics and films, such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, and *Godam*, are the main data in analyzing the narrative, visualization, and cultural values represented. These works were chosen because they reflect the evolutionary journey of Indonesian superhero characters from traditional roots to relevant modern adaptations in the digital age. These comics and films also provide materials to explore how local mythological elements are used as the foundation of narratives and how they transform over time.

The study also used American superhero comics and movies, such as works from *Marvel Comics* and *DC Comics*, as comparative data to understand differences and similarities in the evolution of superhero characters. Characters like *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Iron Man* represent global standards in superhero representation, with narratives and visual designs often adapting to global issues, such as technology, diversity, and sustainability. These data help identify common and unique patterns in the evolution of superheroes in Indonesia and America, as well as the influence of globalization on local character designs and narratives.

By combining data sources from comics and films, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the transformation of Indonesian superheroes in the digital age. This combination of different types of data allows a deep exploration of the relationship between local and global cultures in shaping superhero identity, while identifying its implications for the future of Indonesian popular culture.

Data Analysis Technique

To answer research questions and achieve the objectives that have been set, this study uses comparative analysis techniques as the main method. This technique allows the identification of differences and similarities between Indonesian superheroes and American superheroes in various aspects, such as narrative, visual design, and cultural values represented. Comparative analysis also provides a systematic framework for exploring the influence of globalization on superhero character transformations, as well as how local elements are maintained in global cultural pressures.

Along with comparative analysis, this study utilizes narrative review to examine the evolution of Indonesian superhero stories. The technique focuses on narrative structures, themes, and motifs in comics and films, reflecting social and cultural dynamics. For example, a review of *Gundala*'s story could reveal how the themes of social justice and the fight against injustice fit into a more global modern context. Narrative review also helps identify how local mythologies are adapted or altered to meet the expectations of digital-age audiences without removing the traditional values on which they are based.

On the visual aspect, this study uses visual analysis to explore changes in superhero character design. This technique includes the analysis of elements such as costumes, colors, symbols, and other visual expressions that reflect local cultural identities as well as global influences. For example, how the costume design of *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu* was adapted to accentuate modernity without losing the traditional feel that characterizes it. This visual analysis is important for understanding how aesthetic elements are used as an effective cultural communication tool in local and global contexts.

The combination of comparative, narrative, and visual analysis techniques provides a holistic approach to understanding the transformation of Indonesian superheroes. This approach is not only relevant for uncovering the internal dynamics in Indonesian popular culture, but also for understanding the complex interaction between locality and globalization in shaping cultural identity. Thus, this research offers an important contribution to the study of local perspective-oriented global popular culture.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Indonesian Superheroes

The process of transforming Indonesian superheroes can be seen as a journey that brings together local mythologies with the need to adapt to technological developments and global issues. Since its appearance, Indonesian superheroes such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, and *Godam* have gone through a series of evolutions in both narrative and visual design. At first, these characters were heavily influenced by Indonesian mythology and folklore, which became a strong foundation for their cultural identity. For example, *Gundala*, inspired by folklore about heroes with the power of lightning, initially had a simpler design and a narrative that focused on local and traditional elements.

However, in recent decades, these characters have undergone significant changes, both in terms of design and theme of the story. One of the most obvious changes is the evolution of Indonesian superhero visual design, which is now more modern and adopts elements from technology and global visual culture. This change reflects the need to reach a wider audience, especially young people who are more connected to the digital world. For example,

le, The outfits of today's superheroes are presented as more modern and follow the trends that are popular in today's culture, inspired by global trends in international superhero films and comics.

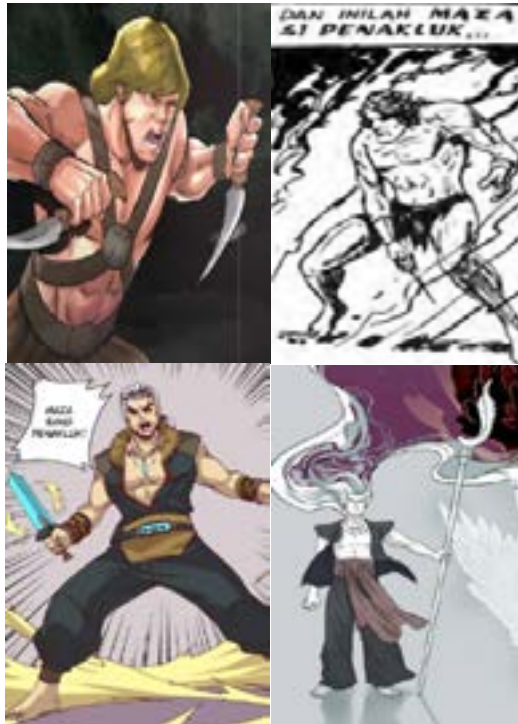


Figure 1: Maza's appearance over time, starting from left to right. The first image is the original Maza character design by Hasmi, the second image is Maza's form in the Bumilangit Pusaka era version, the third image is Maza in the Bumilangit (R)evolution era version in the "Prince of Dream" series and the fourth image is the final form of Maza 'Sang Penakluk' in the Bumilangit (R)evolution era version.

Referring to the pictures above that represent changes in the visual concept of Maza, this has shown the modernization of Maza's character creation in order to keep up with the modern global market. This change in visual concept is also motivated by the power of foreign cultures which are the fundamental basis for the creation of Indonesian superheroes.

We can see from the initial concept

of Maza in the 1960s created by Hasmi. Maza's initial concept visually resembled Edgar Rice Burroughs' iconic character Tarzan. The second transformation occurred in the Bumilangit Pusaka version. This second version of Maza emphasizes his warrior aura with some additional attributes. This version of Maza has similarities with the fictional character John Carter who was also created by Edgar Rice Burroughs and also an amalgamation with a fictional character named *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* which was a popular animated series in the 1980s. Next is the visual appearance of Maza in the 'Prince of Dream' series which was made more modern by Bumilangit in the (R)evolution era. If previously Maza was influenced by Western culture (superhero from American comic book), second transformation of Maza's shows a very strong Japanese cultural influence. This can be shown by Maza's visual design which is very similar to the visual design of Manga characters from Japan. What further emphasizes the impression of Japanese cultural influence is Maza's costume, which is similar to a formal *kimono* outfit called *Montsuki*, which is worn as a traditional samurai dress in Japan. The last manifestation of visual change is shown by the process of physical change of Maza's character who is again influenced by American culture through the process of creating Maza the Conqueror whose design is similar to a character named Kraven 'The Hunter' from Marvel comics by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko who first appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man #15* comic in 1964.

The theme of Indonesian superhero stories has also undergone a shift, from more local and mythology-based narratives to broader social and global issues. The symbolic meaning of Indonesian superhero storytelling is undoubtedly a reflection of noble or spiritual values. The concept

of Indonesian superhero stories frequently features encounters with spiritual entities or supernatural beings from other dimensions, which are imbued with profound spiritual nuances. This concept describes or refers to concepts, experiences, or practices related to religious or metaphysical beliefs, values, or activities (as believed by the majority of Indonesians who adhere to the customs of their ancestors). The backgrounds and origins of Indonesian superheroes frequently exhibit strong connections to local culture, myths, or spiritual beliefs.

Additionally, some Indonesian superheroes possess abilities or superpowers derived from Indonesian mythology or folklore, which is closely related to the rich spiritual dimension of the Indonesian's local wisdom narrative. In other findings, some Indonesian superheroes are tasked with combating crime, and their actions are informed by spiritual concepts that serve as a reference point or moral and ethical basis for their conduct. In this regard, Indonesian superheroes demonstrate a commitment to and reverence for the traditional values of the nation, which serve as a cultural heritage and inform their actions.

The Indonesian Multiverse concept is linked to mythology and local values. If the multiverse encompasses various cultural contexts, then the existence of Indonesian superhero storytelling can facilitate the linkage of the noble values and spirituality in Indonesian superhero stories to the mythology or local values of the archipelago, which are then assimilated into the concept of a vast universe (multiverse). For example, some Indonesian superheroes have un-

dergone mystical journeys or adventures with spiritual beings from other dimensions or realms.



Figure 2: Some scenes from Wid N.S's Godam comic with the series "Mencari Jejak Mayat" show the existence of spirits (jinn) that overshadow other dimensions.

Indonesian superheroes not only fight against mythological or supernatural forces, but also involve the fight against social injustice, and global threats such as terrorism and criminal groups. This transformation shows how Indonesian superheroes strive to remain relevant amidst the current globalization without losing their cultural roots. Overall, Indonesia's superhero transformation reflects a complex adaptation process in which local identities are maintained, yet open to global influences and demands. In this context, the development of Indonesian superhero characters illustrates the shift from traditional representations to increasingly dynamic modern narratives, reflecting the challenges and opportunities that arise in this digital age.



Figure 3: Some scenes from Frank Miller's *Batman* comic in the "The Dark Knight Returns: Tenth Anniversary Edition" series that shows *Batman* takes out the bad guys with heroic action .

Gundala Putera Petir comic, in the series "Dokumen Candi Hantu", the character of *Gundala* is depicted as a superhero engaged in the fight against crime. His actions are driven by his quest to locate Ghazul, who has stolen secret documents pertaining to the existence of the Candi Hantu (Ghost Temple), a site shrouded in mystery and said to contain valuable treasures. *Gundala* represents an Indonesian superhero who is able to compete with the concept of American superhero storytelling. For example, the superhero's fight scenes with criminals are similar to the concepts of the American superhero Batman in his action

to eliminate his enemies. The fight scenes are depicted in a darker and more intense.



Figure 4: Some scenes from Hasmi's *Gundala Putra Petir* comic in the "Dokumen Candi Hantu" series that shows *Gundala* swiftly eliminating Ghazul's men.

Comparison with American Superheroes

American superheroes, who have dominated the global stage through *Marvel* and *DC Comics*, have different characteristics compared to Indonesian superheroes. Characters like *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, and *Batman*, for example, often portray the values of individualism, personal struggle, and the desire to save the world with personal power. American superheroes are usually connected to the ideology of capitalism, individual freedom, and modern values that reflect Western society. In this context, the American superhero becomes not only a symbol of physical strength, but also a representation of the underlying social and political system—from resisting tyranny to maintaining existing social structures.

Indonesian superheroes, despite progressing towards more modern concepts, have deeper roots in local mythology

gy and culture. Characters such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, or *Godam* initially focused more on local stories that raised the values of virtue, justice, and community struggle in the face of social injustice. These characters often struggle in contexts closer to everyday life, with backgrounds deeply rooted in Indonesian history and mythology. Nonetheless, the influence of American superheroes in design and narrative is unavoidable, especially in an era of globalization and digitalization that enables broader global media distribution.

The comparison between Indonesian and American superheroes reflects fundamental differences in the representation of social and cultural values to be conveyed by each. American superheroes tend to carry global themes, such as identity seeking and individual struggles against more abstract crimes, while Indonesian superheroes remain tied to local contexts that highlight more concrete and community-based themes. However, along with the increasing influence of digital media and global distribution, there is a tendency for Indonesian superheroes to adopt elements from American superheroes, both in terms of visual design, story themes, and narrative style. This shows a two-way influence, where Indonesian superhero characters try to strike a balance between local authenticity and the demands of the wider global market.



Figure 5: The cover page of *Marvel Comics* from the United States in the “*Civil War*” series which was then ‘borrowed’ by Indonesian comics in the title “*Prahara: Bentrok para Adisatria*”. Both have similar storytelling concepts, that the story is told of a dispute between two groups of heroes that occurs due to ideological differences.

Overall, although there are many differences in cultural contexts and values, there are also similarities between Indonesian and American superheroes, especially in terms of adaptation to changing times and the demands of global audiences. These comparisons provide deeper insight into how superheroes from both cultures seek to adapt to global developments, while retaining the unique characteristics they carry.

Locality and Globalization Interactions

In the formula of transformation in Indonesian superheroes, the interaction between locality and globalization plays a very important role in shaping the identity and relevance of these characters in the digital age. As global media influence increases, Indonesian superhero characters are faced with the challenge of maintaining their traditional elements and local culture, while also trying to adapt to evolving global trends and norms. The strong influence of globalization, especially through international media such as American films and comics, brings a more universal narrative and visual style, often focusing on global themes such as social justice, technology, and individualism. This can be seen in the way Indonesian superheroes adapt costume design, the use of technology, as well as in the shift of more global themes that reflect international issues such as climate change, terrorism, and social inequality.

However, despite the many elements adopted from the world of global superheroes, efforts to maintain local identity remain visible in this process of transformation. Indonesian superheroes continue to strive to integrate strong local cultural values and symbols, such as the use of traditional mythology and local hero stories, in their narratives. For example, even though character designs have become more modern, many Indonesian superheroes still carry stories about the struggle of the people or against injustices that are very relevant to the social context in Indonesia. These characters still maintain a close relationship with Indonesian culture and history, which is evident in the portrayal of characters, story settings, and conflicts presented.



Figure 6: An illustration from the scene where *Tsazabo* trying hard to save *Nusantara*, which was badly injured by *Vorkill*'s attack. This scene provides an illustrative example of the conceptual similarities that serve as the foundation for the creation of a superhero.

The genesis of superhero characters is frequently rooted in scientific research, particularly in the context of classified experiments conducted within sophisticated laboratory settings. Such extreme experiments result in the creation of a superhuman or superhero with abilities that exceed the capabilities of the average human. This is demonstrated by the incubator tube or special capsule utilized to generate a new superhero. The description of *Tsazabo*'s scientific experiments on *Nusantara* above serves as an illustration of the adaptation of the formula for creating superheroes through extreme experiments. Examples of this can be seen in the cases of *Logan*, who became a killing machine named *Wolverine* in the '*Weapon X*' series, *Steve Rogers*, who was injected with the Super Soldier serum and armed with a vibranium shield in the *Captain America* series, and also *Wade Wilson*, who was turned into a deadly killing machine in a secret project.

The adoption of global elements by Indonesian superheroes not only involves visual or narrative changes, but also creates space for new possibilities in building more inclusive and modern national cultural symbols. This transformation can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between two different worlds 'local and global' with the aim not only to meet the needs of the domestic market but also to introduce Indonesian cultural values to an international audience. Thus, although globalization has a significant impact on Indonesian popular culture, this interaction also opens up new opportunities for Indonesian superheroes to emerge as symbols of cultural pride that can compete on the global stage.

Finally, the interaction between locality and globalization in the transformation of Indonesian superheroes shows that these two forces are not always contradic-

tory, but complementary. In this process, Indonesia's local identity is maintained and at the same time updated to create characters that are not only relevant to the domestic audience, but also acceptable on a global scale. This process reflects the highly complex dynamics in an ever-evolving global popular culture, and provides insight into how local cultures can survive and thrive in an increasingly digitally connected world.

DISCUSSION

Indonesian Superhero Transformation Analysis

The transformation of Indonesian superheroes from traditional characters based on local mythology to modern heroes with the influence of technology and global issues reflects the social, cultural, and political dynamics of Indonesian society in the contemporary era. As a product of popular culture, Indonesian superheroes have undergone an adaptation process to adapt to the times, including the inclusion of digital media as the main platform of distribution and consumption. This transformation is not only seen in narrative aspects, such as the exploration of global themes that include environmental sustainability or social justice, but also in character visualizations that are now more inclusive of international design influences. This phenomenon shows that Indonesian superheroes are in the process of negotiating between the preservation of local cultural identities and the adoption of global elements.

The pivotal key factors driving this transformation is technological advancement, including the production of films with advanced visual effects and the digitization of comics, which enables more relevant storytelling for younger generations. Social media also plays a role in expanding the reach and influence of Indonesian su-

perheroes, allowing them to compete with the dominance of global superhero characters. Nevertheless, local mythology remains an important foundation in maintaining the uniqueness and identity of Indonesian superheroes, as seen in the character of *Gundala*, which combines elements of traditional heroes with modern powers.

Taking into account the challenges of global cultural homogenization, the transformation of Indonesian superheroes is also a form of resistance to the influence of Western popular culture. This process creates space for a more diverse narrative, enabling a more authentic representation of Indonesian society. This study aims to uncover how these factors interact in shaping the transformation of Indonesian superheroes and what the implications are for the understanding of popular culture in the era of globalization.

Differences and Similarities with American Superheroes

American superheroes have become a global standard in popular culture, offering narratives heavily influenced by the values of individualism, capitalism, and globalization. Characters such as *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, and *Iron Man* are often represented as individuals who face internal and external conflicts by prioritizing individual freedom and technological innovation. In contrast, Indonesian superheroes such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, and *Godam* emphasize the values of collectivism, partisanship to the people, and interrelation with local traditions, reflecting the social and cultural context that is typical of Indonesia. Nevertheless, the interaction of globalization has created a common ground in design and narrative elements, where some Indonesian superheroes have begun to adopt visual styles, technologies, and themes relevant to a global audience.

The similarities between Indonesian and American superheroes can be found in their focus on universal issues such as justice, courage, and sacrifice. However, approaches to these issues differ significantly. American superheroes tend to personify individual struggles against large institutions, while Indonesian superheroes are often portrayed as figures close to local communities, fighting against structural oppression and foreign forces that threaten cultural identity. This representation not only reflects the social context of each country but also shows local adaptation patterns to global narratives.

The influence of American popular culture on the design and narrative of Indonesian superheroes cannot be ignored. The adjustment of global elements in Indonesian superheroes shows an effort to remain relevant in the international market while maintaining local uniqueness. However, resistance to cultural homogenization also arises through the reinforcement of traditional elements rooted in local mythology and history. Thus, these differences and similarities not only highlight the dynamics of locality and globalization, but also reveal how popular culture can become a contentious field of identity and representation in the modern era.

Implications of Globalization on Local Popular Culture

Globalization has had a significant impact on popular culture, including in the production and consumption of superheroes. On the one hand, globalization opens up huge opportunities for local popular culture to reach a global audience through digital distribution, cross-cultural collaboration, and social media influence. However, on the other hand, the cultural homogenization brought about by the dominance of global narratives, especially

from the Western culture, poses challenges for the preservation of local cultural identities. In the Indonesian context, superheroes like *Gundala* and *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu* reflect efforts to maintain local wisdom while remaining relevant in a global market dominated by superhero characters from *Marvel* and *DC Comics*.



Figure 7: A phenomenal scene from Barda Mandrawata in the comic “*Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*” that shows him struggling to save himself from the attack of a giant python that is a supernatural creature that lives in the cave.

The scene of Barda fighting a giant snake in a cave is a representation of the tradition of local beliefs in Indonesia, which often have myths about spirits or genies living in caves, large trees, and empty houses. The existence of belief in this myth has become a hereditary belief, passed down from generation to generation, so that it becomes a belief in things that smell mystical, constructed and agreed

upon by the community.

The positive impact of globalization on local popular culture is seen in the way Indonesian superheroes are beginning to be recognized abroad. Improved production quality, as seen in the film adaptation of *Gundala* (2019), shows the local ability to compete on the international scene. Globalization also encourages local creators to adopt modern narrative and visual techniques, allowing them to reach a wider audience without losing the local essence. However, challenges remain, especially in maintaining a balance between the preservation of traditional cultural values and the need to meet the tastes of an increasingly heterogeneous global market.



Figure 8: A contemporary form of globalisation and modernisation in the visual creation of Indonesian superheroes.

In addition, globalization also provides space for cultural dialogue that can enrich local superhero narratives. Through the process of adaptation and transformation, Indonesian superheroes can integrate global elements such as technology and environmental issues without sacrificing their cultural identity. However, resistance to cultural homogenization must also be

emphasized to prevent loss of local uniqueness. Thus, the implications of globalization on local popular culture, particularly Indonesian superheroes, serve not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to create a dynamic identity in the global cultural landscape.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian superheroes are a reflection of cultural complexity at the intersection of local traditions and global influences. The findings of this study highlight that the transformation of Indonesian superheroes, such as *Gundala*, *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, and *Godam*, is a dynamic evolutionary process. The transformation includes changes in the aspects of narrative, visual design, and thematic relevance that reflect the challenges and opportunities in the digital age. Their narratives rooted in traditional mythology and values are now adapting to contemporary issues, such as environmental sustainability, technology, and social justice, showing that Indonesian superheroes remain relevant in the global cultural dynamics.

This study also found that the interaction between locality and globalization creates a complex space of cultural identity negotiation. On the one hand, Indonesian superheroes adopt global elements to meet the expectations of modern audiences and compete with the dominance of Western popular culture. On the other hand, local cultural roots are maintained as an effort to resist global cultural homogenization. This makes Indonesian superheroes a flexible symbol of cultural adaptation while maintaining the essence of national identity.

By integrating narrative and visual analysis through the perspective of literary sociology, this study provides new insights into how popular culture can become a

strategic arena in building and representing national identity. In addition, the results of this study indicate the importance of local popular culture studies in filling academic gaps related to the interaction between tradition and modernity in the era of globalization. This conclusion reinforces the role of popular culture as an important medium in identity discourse at the local and global levels.

As a form of popular culture, Indonesian superheroes have great potential to become a representation of local cultural identity that is able to compete on a global level. To achieve this goal, a more focused development is needed on character design and narrative that prioritizes elements of locality. Creators need to delve deeper into unique traditions, mythologies, and local values to reinforce cultural appeal while creating characters that are relevant to modern audiences. Thus, Indonesian superheroes are not only national symbols but also agents of cultural diplomacy that introduce Indonesian cultural wealth to the world.

Collaboration between local and global creators is also a strategic step to expand the reach and influence of Indonesian popular culture. By leveraging global platforms such as movies, digital comics, and social media, Indonesian superheroes can reach a wider audience without losing their identity. On the other hand, this collaboration can also be a means to improve production quality through the transfer of technology and creative knowledge. This effort will open new opportunities for Indonesian superheroes to transform into an important part of global popular culture while strengthening national identity in the era of globalization.

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