

The Influence of the Advancement of Social Media in The Visual Language of Indonesian Comics Strips

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Abstract. Through the years, Indonesian comics have been developing well, not only from the technical aspects but also on how they are published. Today, comics can be read in both printed and online versions. The advancement of comic publishing over time also influences the way comic artists work with their tools. In addition to using traditional drawing tools, the artists' visual styles have been affected by the use of digital tools such as drawing tablet and graphic software. Turns out that such phenomenon merely influences the common visual style many Indonesian comic artists have in common, which is the use of Japanese *manga* and *manhwa* styles. This include the form of the figures, strokes of the lines, to color palettes, especially in the age of social media where many comics are drawn digitally. This also influences the visual style of comics in conveying their information, not only in the form of a longer storytelling, but also a shorter comic strip version, and is found in the rapid phenomenon of social media in Indonesia. This research analyses how the transformations of media trend in Indonesia affects Indonesian comic artists' visual styles. Using qualitative method with literacy and visual content studies, this research shows the advancement of technology influences the transformations of style of the comic artists, especially in comic strip forms over time as their visual identities.

Keywords: Comic Strips, Visual Language, Manga style, Manhwa style, Digitalized Comics, Social Media Comic, Platform

1 Introduction

Indonesian visual language has been built since the time of the ancient kingdoms in the archipelago. For example, the history left its traces in the reliefs found in temples throughout Indonesia. The visual language forms the ways of artists to form their way of expressing ideas by juxtaposing sequences panels of images, which is called a comic.

As for the comic itself, the history of Indonesian comics is believed to have begun in the 1930s. The presence of comic in Indonesia in the 1930s through short comic strips format in newspaper and later in magazines. Then, after 1940's the medium of Indonesian comics grew in comic books format. Afterwards, the political turmoil and patriotic spirits through the 1950s and 1960s made comic a nationalist propaganda tools.

In the late 1960-1970s, after the fall of Soekarno's regime, the Indonesian comics were heavily influenced by both Western and Asian martial arts movies. Home video technology was later introduced into households and brought influence in the form of classic Japanese anime, giving a new reference of visual style. The Japanese influence also emerged in the 1990s -2000s, when Elex Media Komputindo, one of mainstream publishers in Indonesia, brought translated Japanese comics (*manga*) to comic readers in Indonesia. The influence went on to raise numbers of Indonesian comic artists with *shoujo* manga artwork style, and such style continues to be in high demand. Although many drawing styles continue to emerge as new references, the comic strip format always lasts from year to year.

Today, in the decades of technology revolution, Indonesian comics have their own time to shine. With the ease of internet access and the widespread social media users, Indonesian local comics have finally found their progress through digital publication. The online revolution have led publishers to find new ways to publish their comics, and also the artist to find new ways to make their comics in digital formats, tools, and styles.

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With that in mind, this research aims to reveal the processes, which are (i) how the advancing social technology affect common media such as comics and comic strips, which also influencing the Indonesian comic artists' visual style in terms of techniques and character developments, and (ii) how the artists' visual style had been affected by the influence of technological development, so that they not only create with traditional drawing tools, but also make use of digital tools such as drawing tablet and graphics software. The final chapter of the research later reveals that this phenomenon merely influences the artists' visual style and behavior. Many Indonesian comic artists have common style, particularly the use of Japanese *manga* and *manhwa* styles. The style includes the form of the figures, line art strokes, and the color palettes, which came through a mix of influences and can commercially competes and form larger circle of readers, so that Indonesian comics get to reach its popularity through the revolution in publication.

To this end, this paper uses two methodologies: (i) Observation in published Indonesian comics strips in common media through years including the social media platform and (ii) visual content analysis using visual comparison between comic strips and social media comics in Indonesia

2 Theoretical Background

Scott McCloud states the comics and its revolution within the storytelling, styles, and character development influenced by technology have been put together in comic artists' works over time [1]. As digital technology develops, few people have used computers to cultivate different manual media approach in comic-making. In 1980, at the time of the computer's first appearance, very few people took up the computer-made image aspect in the process of showing something completely new. So, initially the computer was only used in the final completion of comic book images before getting them published, or as a means to more efficiently solve tasks that were usually done in manual techniques, such as colors separation or bit of finishing on color-shading.

This was an early inclination to interpret new media through old media filters. For example, written language is a relic of the tradition of speech, radio which came from the print media, to the television, which is a combination of the concept of radio and cinema, from which we can enjoy entertainment in audio and visual. According to McCloud, it is not surprising that the sensibilities which derived from the manual line art and mechanical reproduction would dominate the early days of computer-made comics.

Thus, the sensibility of ink drawings would always be relevant in works reproduced with ink. Modern comic artists have even benefited from the study of the drawing sciences which have existed long ago, but choosing a computer as a primary drawing tool is equivalent to choosing some almost invincible palettes. The revolution in technology, and the references that also happened in the comic artists' surrounding environment, such as popular medias and cultural contexts, will manifest in the comic artist' artworks, including in the format of the comic strips.

The impact of internet technology to comic's industry was also predicted in McCloud's second book, *Reinventing Comics*. McCloud explained that the internet technology would change comics industry in many ways, especially in production's process to the way to publish. At the same time, McCloud also explained about the reader behavior which would change the way to read comics because the media is changing [2].

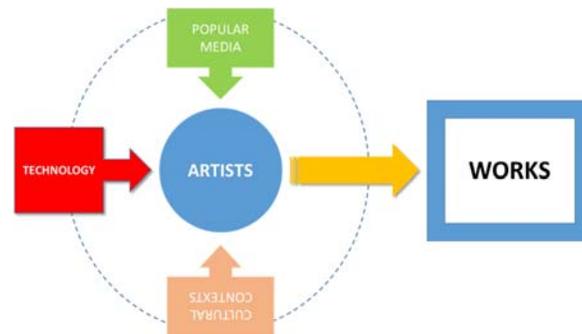


Fig. 1. The Comic Artist' Work Influences

Figure 1 shows that the advancements of technology, popular media, and cultural contexts influence the comic artists' works. Using visual language, comic artists communicate their ideas through the

limitless opportunities in comics. The ideas developed with the revolution of technology and the cultural influences through history have also been captured in the comic artists' works. The cultural context here refers to the audience's cultural influence within their social life, such as the behavioral change because of the advanced technology which affected to social activities.

3 History of Indonesian Comic Strips through Its Media

The development of comics in Indonesia is formed by a long history. The modern Indonesian comics were initially published in comic strips format in a newspapers' serial. The first one was titled *Put On*, published in *Sin Po* newspaper. The comic which told about daily life of *Put On*, a Chinese descent characters with his humorous trait was illustrated by Kho Wan Gie in the 1930s. Then, in 1950s, *Star Weekly* magazine introduced *Sie Djin Koei*, the first martial arts hero in the history of Indonesian comics. At the beginning, the Indonesian comics in very first appearance used Malay-Chinese language, because the publishing and printing industries were owned by the Chinese descents in Indonesia in the 1930s to 1950s (Shown in Figure 2).



Fig. 2. The Early 1930's and 1950's Comic Strips in Newspapers and Magazine

Meanwhile, the patriotic spirit have inspired other works. In the early 1950s, one of the comic pioneers named Abdulsalam published his heroic strip comics in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* daily from Yogyakarta. One of them, *The Story of Occupation of Jogja*, tells of Dutch military aggression in Yogyakarta. This comic was then reproduced by Bandung-based daily *Pikiran Rakyat*.

After 1965 until today comic strips could find in every printed mass media. The major genres that usually found in comic strips are comedy. One of the famous comic strips in Indonesia was *Lembargar*, which published in Pos Kota newspaper. The *Lembargar* was printed in 2 spread pages and filled with many comic strips titles. The most well-known titles were *Doyok*, and *Ali Oncom*. Meanwhile in high end newspaper like Kompas, we could read *Panji Koming* and also the famous *Benny Mice* (later re-titled as *Mice Cartoon*), which still bring a satire comedy genre. At the other side, martial art series and super heroes' series also found in some newspaper and magazines.

With the ease of internet access and the widespread of social media users nowadays, Indonesian comic strips found their progress through digital publication. Some titles, like *Grey dan Jingga* by comic artist Sweta Kartika, and *Si Juki* by Faza Meonk, are some examples of comics which have been published on social media such as Facebook or Instagram. Published regularly as comic strips, these formats gain popularity through Likes and Share buttons.

From the year 2010 until today in 2018, with the growing use of smartphones, tablets, and desktop screen reading, publishers has been releasing comics, graphic novels, and *manga* in digital formats. Especially in Asia, digital comics have become popular to most readers, who read their comics on their smartphones. The online revolution have led publishers to find new ways to publish their comics, while others simply adapt to the digital age while still having great success with the printed comic format. Ngomik.com, Ciayo, Re:on and LINE Webtoon¹ are some of the pioneers of local comic online platforms that open virtually infinite opportunities for new local comic artists. In addition, there is also the rise of aspiring comic artists through local comic events such as Pasar Komik Bandung (Pakoban) and Popcon Asia.

¹ LINE Webtoon, a webtoon portal launched by Naver Corp. South Korea, also influenced the revolution in Indonesian comic format, moreover Indonesia have become the bigger market for LINE Web Toon in South East Asia, alongside other country like Thailand. This platform suggested different format of comic layout which integrated into smartphone and other digital screen way of reading. The layout is no more strictly formed in printed page, but came up in more flexible and responsive layouts embraced the fluidity of digital screens. Certainly, the publishing technologies especially in the era of social media, came in all shapes and forms, and comics embraced all the possibilities.

4 The Research Methods

The content analysis is used to find the pattern of meanings as they appear across mediated messages. The content analysis use to examine and to compare the growth of the comic strips in mass media and social media comics and its contents, especially the visual content, that the research concern about how the tools, precisely the computerized tools affected to the artists' visual style.

5 Result and Discussion

5.1 Social Media Comics in Indonesia

The social media-based comics are the next transformation of digital comics, which use and adapt the social media technology. The platform becomes an alternative for aspiring comic artist to publish their works and gain their audience directly, without having to go through conventional publishing media and printing process.

From the 1990s to 2010s, a comic artist must either pass editorial process or self-publish. Today, in the age of the social media, the said comic artist only need to upload their comics to their social media platforms, which are accessible with minimum fund. At present, aspiring comic artists have a number of options to publish their works, such as 1) uploading their comics to their own social media pages; and 2) submitting to digital/ web comics service providers like LINE Webtoon.

There are extra benefits for aspiring comic artists with the rise of social media in order to publishing their comics in this way. First, the global number of internet users is 3,8 billion, while 2,9 billion people are social media users (see: <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>).

Meanwhile, there are 132 million internet users in Indonesia, and the 40% of this numbers are social media users. Moreover, 39% people of this numbers are actively access social media using their smartphones. The social media users are mostly generation z, who believe that that gadgetry is an important part of their daily lives. This situation creates potential market for those who wish to publish their works on social media [3].

Second, by using social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr, comic artists need not to worry about the publishing and editorial process, even when they self-publish. With easy one-click, the comic artists will be able to connect to their audience directly through their network. This process saves their money and space. If their comic gets viral, there are chances for vendors or sponsors to support it by advertising their products in the page.

Third, the artists could have their own copyrights. The low resolutions for internet sharing will minimize the chances of the comic to be pirated. The fans or followers of the comics will also notice when the comic is being used and shared in inappropriate manners.

Fourth, due to the self-published nature from social media based comics, the artist could express themselves freely without any editing process, except if they published their works with web comics publishers like LINE Webtoon.

5.2 Comparison between Visual Language of Former Comic Strips, Comic Books and Social Media Comics

5.2.1 The Framing and Paneling

The social media based comics are dominated by short stories that consist only a few panels (four panels are common). The story line is made light, entertaining, and tells about comic relief in daily activities or provides criticism on a certain issue, which is currently viral in public. This characterization remind us of the comic strip. There are two common models of social media comics, as seen below:

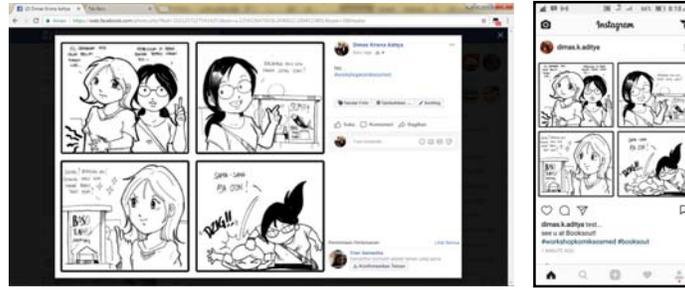


Fig. 3. The example format of social media comics

These kind of models could be referred to as a new form of comic strips. They often share similarities with traditional comic strips published in newspapers, such as few panels, simple composition, and rigid layout. In the perspective of art form, the research has found the different visual language between comic strips, comic books, and the social media comics.

Table. 1. Comparison between former comic strip format and social media comics

	Comic Strip	Comic Book	Social Media Comic
Panels	Few panels	Many panels	Few panels
Encapsulations	The panel is the only unit of encapsulation	Units of encapsulation include the panel, page, spread panel, and insert panels	The panel is the only unit of encapsulation
Layout	Layout is normally rigid	Layout could be creative	Layout is usually rigid but could be designed creatively
Compositions	Composition is usually simple	Composition could be complex	Composition is usually simple
Resolutions	For printing process, the digital format or file must be in high resolution	For printing process, the digital format or file must be in high resolution	Lowest resolutions for uploading to internet

The other popular format that is common to use by aspiring comic artist is webtoon platform. The webtoon format is more like a comic book, but its panels are simpler, like social media comics panels. It is to be read by scrolling from the top of the screen, all the way to the end.

5.2.2 The Visual Traits

To make it easier for comic artists to produce their works, some free software and applications are available for download, offering solutions to aspiring artists for making comics with social media format. However, the side effect of using certain drawing applications and software is the similarity of visual style, due to the similar kinds of brush types, effects, and color palettes. We can find such similar style happening today due to the industry's demand for web comics.



Fig. 4. The example of style similarity between two published Line webtoon comics (Source: LINE Webtoon)

The coloring and visual style between these examples shown in Figures 4, show us that they have almost similarities in the soft color schemes and line art style, that also similar with the Korean *manhwa*². The styles of modeling on the application or the exploration on the technique itself can be further refined according to the comic artists' creativity.

On the other hand, if we look back to previous hand drawing techniques that has been applied in Indonesian comics or manga, the character of line drawing was more distinctive than the line drawing that has been produced by digital techniques. The characteristics still being distinctive even the artwork quality had decreased in digital transfer process by scanning. By the manual techniques, we could recognize the artists' characteristics by their works and also the tools that have been used. In Figure 5 below, we could differentiate which comics were made in 1970's and 2000's from the line, color and techniques by the visual style that appeared, because of the brush strokes and line art qualities, even though both of these comics used similar manga style. The other materials like screen tones was used in 2000's in order to attained the manga's effect quality for prints, but later replaced by screen tones effect in some software like Manga Studio.



Fig. 5. The Indonesian Comics which used manga style and traditional techniques. 1970's Angelina & Impian Ajaib © J. Rio Purbaya (Ria) and 2000's Le Ciel © Shienny Megawati

6 Conclusion

The comic artists through visual language communicate their ideas through the limitless opportunity of comic. Although many drawing styles continue to emerge as new references, the comic strip format always lasts through every evolution in Indonesian comic formats. Comic strip being the format that practically effective in communicating the ideas in the simplest form. This kind of format develops in social media as the next digital comics platform, which use and adapted the former simple layout and content of more conventional comic strips, combined the advantage of social media technology became the alternative for young comic artist to publish their works and gain their audience directly without passing through the conventional publishing media and printing process, caused the faster and more effective generation of artists to work, which raised the similarities between published comics in this current time. This proven the social media based comics phenomena's merely influenced the visual style, that almost Indonesian comic artist has common style, particularly the using of manga and manhwa styles from the form of the figures, line art strokes and even the color pallets that came through mixtures of influences. Nevertheless, the comics produced from the influences of technological advance and social media engagements are successful in forming much larger circle of readers than previous era and can commercially competes with each other resulted in Indonesian comics reached its popularity through the revolution in publication in the era of social media.

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² *Manhwa*: Korean term of comic