



Strategies for Promoting Traditional Indonesian Cuisine through *Webtoon* Comics

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Abstract. Indonesian cuisine is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and increasing global awareness of Indonesia's rich culinary traditions. This study explores the effectiveness of utilizing *Webtoon* comics as a medium to introduce and promote traditional dishes to teenagers. Focusing on the *Webtoon* series "Narasa: The Authentic Taste of *Rawon*," the research investigates how visual storytelling and engaging narratives can captivate young audiences and enhance their appreciation for Indonesian cuisine. By blending modern digital platforms with traditional culinary elements, the *Webtoon* format offers an innovative approach to food promotion. The study analyzes audience engagement, content effectiveness, and the potential of *Webtoon* comics in fostering cultural pride and culinary curiosity among teenagers. Through surveys and interviews with readers, the findings highlight the impact of relatable characters and immersive storylines in making traditional dishes appealing and accessible to a younger demographic. The research concludes that *Webtoon* comics represent a promising strategy for promoting traditional Indonesian cuisine, suggesting broader implications for cultural preservation and culinary education.

Keywords: Indonesian cuisine, *Webtoon*, comic, *rawon*.

1 Introduction

Each region in Indonesia is known for its rich and diverse culinary heritage, reflecting the country's cultural and geographical diversity. Each province boasts unique traditional dishes, utilizing local ingredients and traditional spices that embody the historical heritage and daily life of its people. These foods not only offer distinctive flavors but also encompass social values and local wisdom passed down through generations, becoming an integral part of the cultural identity of each region in Indonesia.

One traditional dish with a remarkable taste is *rawon*. According to a poll conducted by TasteAtlas in 2020, *rawon* ranked number 1 among the 12 best soups in Asia, garnering 63,402 votes. *Rawon* also has significant historical value, dating back over 1,000 years. This is evidenced by the discovery of an inscription known as the Taji Inscription, in which *rawon* is referred to as "*rarawwan*." Additionally, research by the Center for Traditional Food Studies at Gadjah Mada University (cited in Haryono, 1997) mentions that in the Kakawin Bhomakaya manuscript (81.37), there is a description of *rawon* as "*rarawwan*" (*rawon* soup), praised as "enak ikan *rarawwan* amarèg-marègi" (delicious and satisfying *rawon*). It is also believed that in ancient times, *rawon* was initially a dish of the common people, which eventually developed into a dish served to the royal family [1], [2].

Although *rawon* is recognized as one of Indonesia's unique culinary delights, its popularity among the younger generation remains low. The increasing availability of foreign food in major cities and their aggressive promotion are among the reasons why international foods are more favored than local cuisine. Traditional foods are becoming less popular among the youth compared to foods from other cultures due to several factors. One significant factor is the trend of globalization and modernization, which introduces foreign cultural influences through social media, films, and music, often featuring international foods such as burgers, pizza, and sushi. Additionally, the convenience and accessibility of widely available foreign fast food are particularly appealing to young people with busy schedules who seek quick and easy options. On the other hand, the lack of promotion and innovation in presenting traditional foods in a way that appeals to the younger generation makes these foods less attractive to them. As a result, traditional foods are increasingly marginalized amidst the dominance of more popular international cuisine [3].

If this issue is left unaddressed, the diversity of Indonesian cuisine may be increasingly eroded over time. It is essential to make efforts to popularize local cuisine among the younger generation as a form of preserving Indonesian culture. This research initiates the design of a comic aimed at introducing *rawon* as one of the archipelago's premier dishes to young people. According to Law No. 40 of 2009 on Youth, the younger generation is defined as individuals aged 16 to 30. This age range represents a productive period that will significantly influence future generations. Therefore, they play a crucial role in preserving Indonesia's cultural heritage in the future.

The choice of comics as a medium to promote *rawon* is based on the consideration that comics are a popular medium among young people, incorporating visual elements and storytelling that can enhance interest in the content presented. The designed comic will be published through the *Webtoon* platform.

2 Methods

This research focuses on two main objectives: 1) designing a comic to be published on the *Webtoon* platform, and 2) testing the medium to obtain and understand reader responses to the developed comic. The *Webtoon*-based comic design employs the ADDIE method. This method is chosen because it provides a systematic and structured framework for developing visual communication products, such as comics. ADDIE, which stands for Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation, allows designers to carefully navigate each stage and ensure that every aspect of the design process is thoroughly considered [4], [5], [6].

In the Analysis stage, the needs and objectives of the comic are identified, including the target audience and relevant content. The Design stage involves detailed planning of the storyline, characters, and visuals to be used. This helps establish a strong foundation before moving on to the next stage. The Development stage in the ADDIE method is when the comic starts to be created based on the previously designed plan. Following this, the Implementation stage ensures that the comic is tested and introduced to a small audience to gather initial feedback. The Evaluation stage, which is ongoing throughout the process, allows designers to measure the effectiveness and appeal of the comic and make necessary adjustments. By using the ADDIE method, the comic design process becomes more organized and focused, ensuring that the final product is not only visually appealing but also effective in achieving the set goals.

During the implementation phase of this research, a group of *Webtoon* readers aged 14-17 is involved to provide constructive feedback. This age group is chosen because they represent one of the largest segments of *Webtoon* consumers, making their input invaluable for creating content that suits their tastes and needs. This process includes discussion sessions, surveys, and prototype testing, where these teenagers can directly share their opinions on the plot, characters, art style, and other elements of the comic. By listening to the views and suggestions of teenage readers, comic designers can identify which aspects are engaging and which need improvement. The feedback obtained from this group allows designers to make necessary changes and develop a more appealing and relevant comic for their audience. The active participation of teenagers in the design process also provides deeper insights into current trends and preferences among young readers, ultimately helping to create a more competitive and successful product in the *Webtoon* market.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 *Webtoon* as a Popular Comic Platform in Indonesia

Webtoon refers to webcomics that can be read digitally. According to Wang, *Webtoons* are a type of digital comic that can encompass a wide range of genres, including comedy, drama, thriller, romance, and fantasy, and can be enjoyed online on mobile devices anytime and anywhere. The term "*Webtoon*" is a combination of 'web' and 'cartoon,' meaning cartoons or comics that can be enjoyed online in the form of websites. The *Webtoon* phenomenon originated in South Korea. Considering the distinctive art style, *Webtoon* comics are often considered a part of manhwa, which is the term for South Korean comics, similar to how manga refers to Japanese comics [7], [8].

The *Webtoon* platform was first launched in South Korea as "Daum *Webtoon*" by the web portal Daum in 2003, followed by Naver's release of "Naver *Webtoon*" in 2004. Eventually, both platforms became globally known as "Kakao *Webtoon*" and "LINE *Webtoon*." During those years, the comic industry in South Korea experienced a decline due to many publishers going bankrupt as a result of the economic crisis that had previously hit the country. This situation was exacerbated by the increasing prevalence of illegal digital publications, which led to a decline in sales of printed books. Shim et al. argue that illegal piracy and the economic crisis were the primary causes of the weakening of the print comic industry in South Korea [9]. The popularity of *Webtoon* comics is notably more prominent compared to other comic platforms due to its distinctive features and format. *Webtoons* are designed to be read vertically, which facilitates ease of reading on both mobile devices and websites. This format optimizes the reading experience by allowing readers to scroll smoothly through panels, eliminating the need for zooming in and out typically required by traditional horizontal formats. This user-friendly approach caters directly to modern digital consumption habits, where accessibility and convenience are paramount. As a result, *Webtoons* have gained widespread popularity for their innovative presentation style, making them highly appealing to a diverse audience across various demographics [10].

Through surveys conducted in Indonesia, it has been found that *Webtoon* comic readership is predominantly female compared to male, with percentages of 46.30% for female readers and 30.92% for male readers. This demographic trend explains why some of the most popular *Webtoons* are dominated by romance genres, which are favored more by female readers. However, this does not mean that other genres are less popular. For instance, "*Jajanan Squad*" is a *Webtoon* created by Dito Satrio with a slice-of-life genre that focuses on Indonesian culinary themes. The *Webtoon* showcases a wide variety of Indonesian cuisines, from Padang satay, *pallubasa*, *nasi kebuli*, to *rawon*, which is briefly discussed though not specifically. Since its release in 2017 until 2020, "*Jajanan Squad*" has been viewed over 95 million times and has garnered 845 thousand favorite readers. It serves as a successful example of a *Webtoon* that effectively combines culinary themes with engaging storytelling, providing readers not only with education about various Indonesian cuisines but also sparking their curiosity to try these dishes themselves.

Teenage readers on LINE *Webtoon* predominantly favor light-hearted genres such as romance, comedy, and slice of life. This preference is due to these genres being more relatable to the everyday lives of teenagers. Research by Sofuroh (2018) explains that the primary reason users of LINE *Webtoon*, dominated by teenagers, engage with the platform is to fill their leisure time. This underscores why light and entertaining content is highly sought-after on the LINE *Webtoon* platform [11]. Furthermore, research by Maya (2020) among LINE *Webtoon* users demonstrates that reading *Webtoons* provides insights and moral values that entertain young generations. It can be concluded that teenagers choose to read *Webtoons* because their themes closely reflect everyday life, offering both insights into various aspects of life and valuable lessons during their youth [12].

3.2 *Rawon* as an Archipelago Culinary Delight

Rawon is a traditional dish from East Java, Indonesia, consisting of a rich, dark-colored beef soup typically served with white rice. It is enjoyed throughout the day without specific time restrictions, appealing to a wide range of consumers including children, youth, and adults. Like many other Indonesian dishes, *rawon* is prepared with a variety of spices such as candlenut, turmeric, shallots, garlic, coriander, chili, and most notably, *keluak*, a key spice that gives it its distinctive dark color. These spices are ground into a paste, sautéed until fragrant, and then added to the beef broth along with small pieces of beef that have been simmered until tender [13].

Rawon is one of the oldest culinary traditions in Indonesia, believed to have originated over 1,000 years ago. Specifically, in the year 901 AD, evidence of its existence is found in the Taji Inscription, authored by Rakryan i Watu Tihang pu Sanggramadurandara. In this inscription, *rawon* is documented under the name "*rarawwan*" or *rawon* soup. This dish was considered a favorite among royalty, as noted in the inscription, where *rawon* was a customary dish served during grand events and celebrations [1], [14].

The unique characteristics and rich flavor of *rawon* have made it a beloved dish not only in East Java but throughout Indonesia. This popularity has made *rawon* a sought-after culinary experience for tourists visiting cities like Surabaya and Malang in East Java. Its deliciousness is not only nationally recognized but also internationally, where it is referred to as "black soup," reflecting its distinct dark broth. As a significant part of Indonesian culture, culinary heritage plays a crucial role due to the country's diverse regional cuisines. This diversity is something to be cherished and preserved, as emphasized by Marwati in Setiabudi (2016), who argues that culinary traditions are cultural assets handed down by ancestors that must be safeguarded for future generations [15].

3.3 Development of the Comic "*Narasa: The Authentic Taste of Rawon*"

Setting objectives is the initial process to establish the desired outcomes for creating a work. The objective of creating this *Webtoon* comic is to highlight the appeal of *rawon* as a prominent culinary dish among young adults. Therefore, in its production process, considerations are given to visual aspects and storytelling to effectively

showcase *rawon* as an enticing and appetizing cuisine. Additionally, the language used in the comic will be informal to create a relaxed reading experience, making it more digestible for the target audience.

Gathering data and references is crucial to establish a foundation for creative work. The data and references collected will be applied to the storytelling aspects and visual style as the basis for creating this comic. In terms of visuals, data is drawn from popular Webtoon titles with substantial readership numbers. This is aimed at understanding the visual preferences favored by a significant portion of Webtoon readers. Based on the findings, a majority of comics with readership exceeding 1 million tend to adopt styles reminiscent of Japanese manga and Korean manhwa. Additionally, the colors commonly used are pastel tones with bright hues.

The creation of the title for this work is based on three aspects: being captivating, easy to remember, and capable of depicting the comic's content. Considering these aspects, "Narasa: The Authentic Taste of Rawon" has been selected as the title for the Webtoon comic project in this study. "Narasa" is derived from the combination of the words "narrative" and "rasa" (taste), making it easier to remember due to its similarity to familiar everyday words. "Narasa" also symbolizes the essence of the comic, aiming to narrate the delicious taste of *rawon* dish.

Narasa: The Authentic Taste of *Rawon* is set in Surabaya, a city known for its culinary delights and where *rawon* is a prominent dish. The plot revolves around two characters, Dito and Rachel, who are on vacation in Surabaya. During their visit, they take the opportunity to taste authentic *rawon*. However, their enjoyment is disrupted when they discover that the *rawon* stall they visit is highly suspicious. Once the plot is established, the story is mapped into several parts. The aim is to measure the standardization within the principles of storytelling.

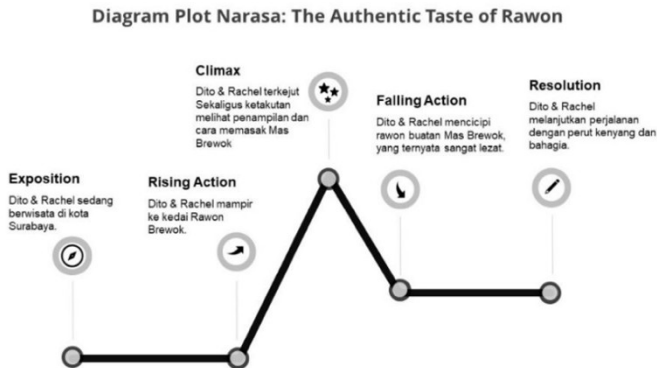


Fig 1. Plot Diagram of *Narasa: The Authentic Taste of Rawon*

3.4 Character Design for the Comic

In this comic, there are 3 characters depicted: Rachel, Dito, and Mas Brewok. Character development is guided by considerations of the target audience, which is teenagers. Therefore, the points of view of Dito and Rachel are used to establish closeness with the readers. Character visualization goes through several processes including sketching, line art, basic coloring, and the addition of shading and highlights.

Here is the character design table for the three main characters in this comic:

Table 1. Character Visualization in the *Narasa* Comic

Character	Character's Visualization	Character Description
Rachel		Rachel is a portrayal of a young individual accustomed to urban life. She exhibits traits of being pampered, talkative, and fearful, preferring everything to be instant and easy. Rachel's style follows current fashion trends, including her hair bleached in pink..

Dito		Dito comes from Jakarta, representing their background as city kids. Dito has a mature and optimistic personality. He often clashes with Rachel due to their contrasting natures. Dito's character visualization is tailored to his personality and background. Like Rachel, Dito prefers simple and trendy fashion. This signifies that Dito has a relaxed demeanor.
Mas Brewok		Mas Brewok is a character who emits a mysterious and intimidating aura. However, he has a gentle side and greatly values food. Mas Brewok is very rigid in his interactions with others. In terms of attire, Mas Brewok always wears formal shirts, indicating that he is a neat person who values integrity.

The comic creation process is carried out using the Clip Studio Paint application. This process encompasses the entire visual creation of the comic, from storyboard, line art, and coloring, to adding dialogue balloons. The canvas in creating this *Webtoon* comic is elongated vertically with a width of 1000 pixels and variable length. Each canvas will contain comic panels arranged from top to bottom. During production, the canvas is divided into several parts, which will later be combined into one to follow the *Webtoon* comic reading format.



Fig 2. Cover Comic Narasa: The Authentic Taste of *Rawon*

The comic consisting of 14 parts was published on the *Webtoon* platform on June 23, 2023, and can be accessed by readers through the following link: <https://www.Webtoons.com/id/canvas/narasa-the-authentic-taste-of-rawon/>.

To date, *Narasa: The Authentic Taste of Rawon* has been read by 1,279 readers and has received very positive responses conveyed through the comment section. In a test involving 30 readers aged 14-19 years, the comic effectively captured the attention of young audiences. Readers were asked to provide their opinions on visualization, storyline, and information about *rawon* presented in the comic.

Aesthetically, the presentation in the comic "Narasa" can be analyzed based on comic elements including panels, gutters, text balloons, perspectives, illustrations, and storyline. Most panels in this comic use open panels without borders on the sides and top, thus freeing up space on the canvas. The gutter, or space between panels on the page, is sufficiently wide to provide spacing between images to prevent overcrowding. Text balloons used include basic bubbles for normal dialogue and cloud bubbles for louder dialogue in specific panels. The common perspective used on the comic page is eye-level perspective (normal angle) with a medium shot in the first and fourth panels, a wide shot in the third panel, a close-up in the second panel, and a medium close-up in the fifth panel.



Fig 3. Several panel excerpts from the comic "Narasa"

The trial results indicate that the comic visualization "Narasa" was highly appreciated by the respondents. They mentioned that the artistic style used was captivating and effectively depicted the details of *rawon*, ranging from the color of the broth to the composition of the ingredients. This rich and engaging visual depiction not only kept readers interested in continuing to read but also enhanced their interest in *rawon* as a traditional cuisine. Furthermore, the lively and expressive character illustrations added to the appeal of this comic, making the story feel more realistic and enjoyable.

In terms of storyline, respondents also provided positive feedback. They evaluated that the story presented was not only entertaining but also informative. The comic successfully conveyed the history and the process of making *rawon* in an easily understandable and enjoyable manner. Information about *rawon*, such as its typical ingredients and cooking techniques, was naturally integrated into the storyline, avoiding a rigid informational text feel for readers. Overall responses indicate that "Narasa: The Authentic Taste of *Rawon*" successfully introduces *rawon* to a young audience and enhances their interest in traditional Indonesian cuisine.

4 Conclusion

The strategy of promoting Indonesian cuisine through the *Webtoon* comic titled "Narasa" has proven successful in attracting the interest of the younger generation to delve deeper into the culinary richness of the archipelago. By leveraging the popular *Webtoon* format among teenagers, "Narasa" effectively delivers information and compelling stories about various traditional Indonesian foods. Engaging visuals and an exciting storyline entertain readers while also piquing their interest in trying the showcased dishes, thereby bridging traditional culture with modern technology.

The success of "Narasa" is evident from the increased number of followers on the *Webtoon* platform and positive reader interactions appreciating the introduction to local cuisines. Readers not only enjoy the stories but also feel motivated to learn more about the featured foods. This demonstrates that the combination of visual art, strong narrative, and cultural knowledge can serve as an effective tool in culinary promotion. "Narasa" proves that digital media such as *Webtoons* can innovate in promoting Indonesia's culinary heritage to a broader and younger audience.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impacts of culinary promotion through *Webtoons* on the growth of culinary tourism in Indonesia. Research could include deeper analyses of changes in consumption behaviors and the interest of the younger generation in traditional cuisines after exposure to *Webtoon* comics like "Narasa". Additionally, studies could assess the effectiveness of collaborations with digital influencers and other social media platforms to expand promotional reach. Thus, research findings could provide more comprehensive insights into cultural promotion strategies through digital media and their impacts on the tourism and local economy sectors.

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