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## THE PARADIGM SHIFT OF COMIC AS STORYTELLING MEDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Comics are media stories that are not specific to a particular group of readers. But in reality, comics are often regarded as mere children's reading. This raises a negative paradigm for comics, and comics are considered as reading that degrades children's morale. This article will describe the history, definition, and function of comics as storytelling media, and how the negative paradigm affects the comic industry in Indonesia. As a medium, the comic is a means to convey messages similar to television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. And similar to other media, comics can be used to convey various kinds of information, not merely intended for entertainment only. Various kinds of messages, ranging from advertorials, political propaganda, public services, even education, can all be conveyed using comic media.

However, most people still believe the false paradigm that that comic is only for children. This is a misunderstanding and is not true. Since the beginning, the Indonesian comic industry has always tried to grow and counter the negative paradigm. In order to revitalize comics as one Indonesian creative industry subsector, a paradigm shift on how the society values and appreciates comics not just as child reading material needs to happen.

**Keyword:** comic, media, story, paradigm shift, creative industry.

### INTRODUCTION

Comics are entertainment media that have become part of popular culture and are familiar with modern society. Comics have long been used as a media for storytelling. In Japan, for example, printed comics or *akahon* appeared for the

first time in the 18th century. At that time, Japanese comics containing folklore and local legends were represented to people with low levels of education who were unable to read Kanji.

As a country that has a long tradition of illustration, Japan is a great market for comics. Comics in Japan are better known as manga. A typical Japanese manga with large eye features was introduced after World War II by Osamu Tezuka. In this era, the number of manga pages was also increased from tens of pages per book to hundreds, in addition to the style of manga illustration at that time was heavily influenced by Disney animation.

Japan expands its manga reach to cover many genres, from teen fantasy to romance and adult. Japanese manga is usually published in large anthologies, containing several hundred pages. Manga stories are later used as material for adaptations to animated film formats. In Japan, those films are referred to as anime, and many creators work in both formats simultaneously, which leads to an intrinsic connection between those two formats.

This regard became one of the impulses of the paradigm shift that occurred in the early 1900s where comics evolved from story media to popular culture products. A similar shift occurred in America in 1938, marked by the publication of the Superman comic created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. At this time the comic industry in the United States turned into a large industry as well as an indicator of the beginning of the golden age of comics.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method used in this research is analytical descriptive by collecting references from various literature and popular articles regarding comics in general and comic industry both in Indonesia and international. The data is then analyzed using the theory paradigm shift as a framework.

## **DISCUSSION**

The development of comics as popular culture continues until the modern era today. In the entertainment industry in Indonesia, comics have become one of the media enjoyed by the public the younger generation. Unfortunately, the

popularity of this comic is followed by antipathy behavior and even a negative paradigm by some people towards comics.

According to Thomas Kuhn, the paradigm is the whole faith and values that are believed and performed equally in a community. In other words, there is a belief in some communities of educators and parents, that reading comic is a useless activity, and comics are junk reading that only has a negative impact on children.

Since the beginning, the Indonesian comic industry that always tried to grow and counter the negative paradigm. This regard certainly had an unfavorable impact on the growth of the industry itself, and the number of local comics and comic artists has begun to decrease. From the observations in bookstores, currently, the printed comic market in Indonesia is still dominated by Japanese comics. Moreover, the results of the 2018 comic sales records published by Elex Media Komputindo, it was recorded that the titles with the best-selling results were Japanese comics, and there were only one or two local titles.

This regard is not overly surprising, considering that since the early 1990s the Indonesian comic market has been dominated by Japanese comics. Alongside the popularity of Japanese comics in this era, the negative paradigm that is bound to comics also experienced its peak. According to Hikmat Darmawan, a cultural expert in the seminar of *"Komik dan Kartun di Media Massa"* in Jakarta, the negative paradigm towards comics appeared to be institutionalized in schools through comic raids that were often carried out by teachers in that era. This action showed that the school considered comics as useless reading material and harmful to children. This view was then adopted by parents, so comics were considered as a reading material that was prohibited both at school and home. So reading comics was an activity that should be avoided by children.

Nowadays, nearly three decades have passed since the 1990s, the negative paradigm towards comics still occurs. This paradigm can also be seen from the lack of scientific studies on comics. It shows that academics still give a negative stigma to comics. This is in accordance with what Seno Gumira Ajidarma said in his dissertation summary (AJI DARMA, 2011). As long as this negative paradigm is still followed by the majority of the community, it will be difficult for creative industry players to develop comics in Indonesia. Indonesian comics will have

difficulty becoming a large and advanced industry as in Japan and America, where comics are seen as equal to other popular cultures such as literature and films.

Considering this condition, it is not surprising that the Indonesian comic market is still dominated by Japanese comics. This regard is certainly very unfortunate, considering that in the 1960-1970s the Indonesian comic industry had experienced a golden era of Indonesian comics. Various comic titles born in this era include: *Si Buta Dari Gua Hantu* (Ganes TH), *Mahabharata* (R.A. Kosasih), and *Gundala Putra Petir* (Hasmi).

R.A. Kosasih, one of Indonesian comic artists at that time, had published 40 editions of the *Mahabharata*, each of which had more than 42 pages. He was the first person who brought the *Mahabharata* into the world of visual storytelling such as comics, researched legends, wrote texts and made drawings, and colored his own works. At the peak of his success, the *Mahabharata* comic was printed for 30,000 copies per edition, with the distribution reaching from Medan in North Sumatra to the eastern scope of eastern Indonesia.

The works of R.A. Kosasih's crosses genre boundaries, including *wayang*, romance, adventure, superheroes, and martial arts. The popularity of the books produced contain long stories and gave a solid contribution to the growth of Indonesian comic industry from the 1950s to the 1980s. *Wayang* comics were certainly a unique genre for Indonesia. Basically, this comic displays stories adapted from hybrid mythology originating from Hindu traditions in India and classic Javanese legends. Kosasih chose a syncretic approach, which introduced Islamic values into this hybrid mythology. (Bonneff et al., 2008)

When observed from the comics of R.A. Kosasih and various Indonesian comic titles that were popular in that era were comics whose stories were aimed at adults. Therefore, it can be concluded that during the golden era of comics, industry performers realized the role and function of comics as a storytelling media which was equivalent to film and literacy that could reach various age groups, and did not limit comics as merely children's reading.

During this golden era, the comic industry in Indonesia has become a large part of the whole publishing sector in Indonesia. However, unfortunately in the 1980s, the number of graphic novels published declined, and the 1990s

marked the beginning of the golden era of manga translation comics of shoujo (for teenage girls) and shonen (for teenage boys) that dominate the Indonesian comic market until today. Starting in the early 2000s, the local comic industry began to slowly rise with a variety of local comics of the Japanese teenage girl genre or Shoujo Manga.

### **Comics as Storytelling Media**

Based on the comic definition that has been formulated by experts, Will Eisner in the *Graphic Storytelling* book (Affeldt et al., 2018) states that a comic is a set of pictures and word balloons that is in sequence in a book.

Whereas, Scot McCloud in *Understanding Comics* (McCloud, 2001) defines comics as images and other symbols that are adjacent, juxtaposed in a certain order to convey information and/or achieve an aesthetic response from the reader. Hafiz Ahmad et al, (AHMAD Hafiz, 2006) argue that the comic is a communication media that is closely related to film, television, and books.

From the aforementioned definitions, it can be concluded that comic is an art media that utilizes still images and is arranged in such a way to form a storyline, similar to films and literacy.

Moreover, if observed, no definition classifies comics as children's literature. Therefore, there is a negative paradigm in society that comics are reading materials that are not suitable for children. These regards arise since people do not understand that comics, similar to other storytelling media, are not necessarily written for children. There are comics that have heavy and mature themes and are intended for adult readers.

Most people still believe the false paradigm that that comic is only for children. This is a misunderstanding and is not true. Although comics and movies adapted from comics are mostly for family or teen entertainment, there are some comics that are intended for adults and adapted in the form of PG-rated or PG-13 movies. For example, the character and movie *Deadpool*, a superhero film produced by Marvel Comics that is rated R.

*Deadpool* is a superhero character, unlike the usual superhero stereotype. If other superheroes like Superman and Spiderman are portrayed as honest, polite, and always defend the truth. *Deadpool* is their opposite or in the world of literacy known as an antihero. But actually, *Deadpool* is not the only comic

character that is not intended for children and teenagers, many other comic characters are specifically intended for adults.

This regard indicates that comics are a suitable medium for storytelling for adults. However, the way it's delivered is different from comics for kids and teenagers. Unfortunately, these different forms of characters and stories are less acceptable because of the false paradigm that comics are reading for children.

Whereas as a medium, the comic is a means to convey messages similar to television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. And similar to other media, comics can be used to convey various kinds of information, not merely intended for entertainment only. Various kinds of messages, ranging from advertorials, political propaganda, public services, even education, can all be conveyed using comic media.

For instance, referring to the early development of comics, comics can also be used as a medium for advertising. The first superhero comics had almost no advertisements at all. However, this regard began to shift during the 30s to the 40s, when comics began to gain international success, it started to be seen, the utilization of comic page space for advertising.



Figure 1. Example of a Kool-aid advertisement in a comic form  
Source: syfy.com

These advertisements appeared in bright colors and were part of a comic that was famous at that time. These advertisements that appeared sporadically throughout the '40s sometimes also included discount coupons to get items offered at a discount. These advertisements would later become the nuisance of

comic collectors, with many problems that still present in a period of time which was ruined by the scissors held by people who at the time wanted to buy things they could only get from comics. At that time, in a world without television, advertisements for toys were found almost exclusively through magazines, newspapers, and radio programs. For some time, comics were one of the best places for sellers to market their products.

Comics are also constantly adapting to the conditions and the world developments they represent. For instance, in the 90s and 2000s America tried to combat drugs among young people, therefore, in this era, it can be found the rise of anti-drug advertisements in most mainstream comics. Marvel went a step further by including an anti-drug petition in the Spider-Man comic book story. This story was a special assignment to Marvel given by the White House Office of Drug Control Policy.

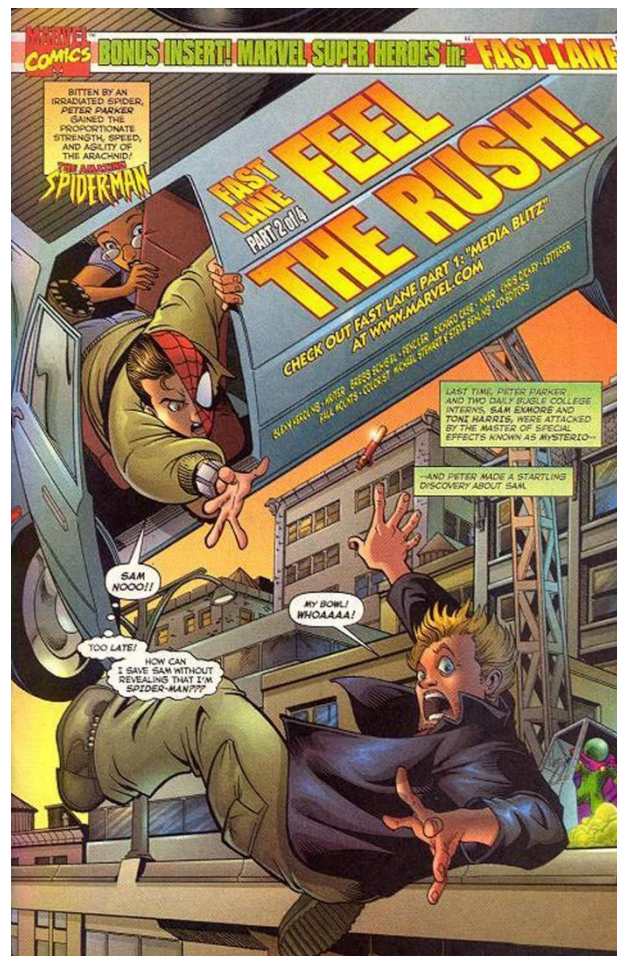


Figure 2. Anti-drug public service advertisement in the form of comics  
Source: [comicvine.gamespot.com](http://comicvine.gamespot.com)

One of the scenes shows a young man who wore flannel at one point dropping his marijuana pipe and then he actually jumping out of a helicopter to try and catch it. It is described to show how bad the marijuana effect is for a person.

In Indonesia, one form of using comics as a medium of communication for adults can be seen in the example of using comics as a medium for the 2014 presidential campaign. The 2014 Indonesian Presidential Election attracted great attention from Indonesian people all around the world, which more than ever, became very active in the campaigns for two candidates: Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo (commonly called Jokowi). One of the strategies used by supporters was the use of creative arts. One of the creative art forms used by Jokowi's volunteer supporters includes Tintin-style posters (from Hergé comics) and other printed materials that describe Jokowi. These comics have spread through social media. This collection of posters was later officially published as a book entitled "Kisah Jokowi Blusukan" (*blusukan* can be approximately translated to sudden visits to meet people). Through the art of storytelling, Jokowi was successfully portrayed as a leader of the people, humble and modest, representing the proletariat. After being elected as president, this storytelling strategy continued when the comics were still being produced, but nowadays, depicts Jokowi and Vice President Jusuf Kalla.





Figure 3. Comic of " Kisah Jokowi Blusukan"  
source: bukukita.com

Storytelling has long been recognized as a powerful political medium to motivate people to take action. The basic idea is that stories can influence the voter's decision-making process by generating emotions, for instance, hope, fear, or kindness. Storytelling in election campaigns usually comes in the form of television advertisements, which the candidates manage to trigger certain emotions and convince voters concerning the candidates' strengths.

This is in accordance with the statement of Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comic* (McCloud, 2001), he states that the comic is a medium that can attract the audience's attention of all ages, this is caused by comics having the advantage namely a simple format, added by words in daily language.

Therefore, the negative paradigm towards comics is actually a mistake that arises caused by public misunderstanding. Comics are only identified as

children's reading, therefore, when there are comics found which are targeted for adult readers as well as with mature materials, comics are directly accused of being harmful reading that is not suitable for children. Whereas comics have advantages that are not owned by other media, even comics can be used as a learning media.

### **Paradigm Shift**

Comics as a learning media are common in foreign countries. For instance, in countries with a central comic industry such as Japan and America. In both countries, comics have been used as teaching materials for various disciplines and subjects, for instance, reading, social studies, activities, and class discussions. (Hutchinson, 1949)

Many students who are currently attending school (also known as Generation 'Y' i.e., children born between 1982 and 2003) grew up in an environment filled with interactive visual media. From smartphones, tablets, and laptops, everything is very interesting in terms of visuals. Due to the popularity of visual media, students are less interested in the long, text-only textbook. Most of them find it easier to learn through interactive visual formats that are similar to their educational materials. The strength of comic books is the visual representation of the narrative. Assessing this physical form of comic books, which is mostly illustrated with limited text, can create harmony between the sustainable student's life activities and their learning experiences at school, motivating students to learn more about the information presented. (Muzumdar, 2016)

According to the National Education Association (NEA) the definition of learning media is communication media that can either be in the printed or digital form and other equipment that can be engineered, read, seen, and heard. Learning media that is designed and used properly can improve students' ability to pay attention and understand teaching materials. (Azhar Arsyad, 2009).

Textbooks in various levels of education and study subjects such as history, biology, and physics can be made in comic format. In addition, what can be presented in a comic format is not limited to elementary school subjects. The more difficult materials such as philosophy, information technology concepts,

and programming have also been made in comic format. Moreover, many courses are taught assisted by textbooks in the comic format.

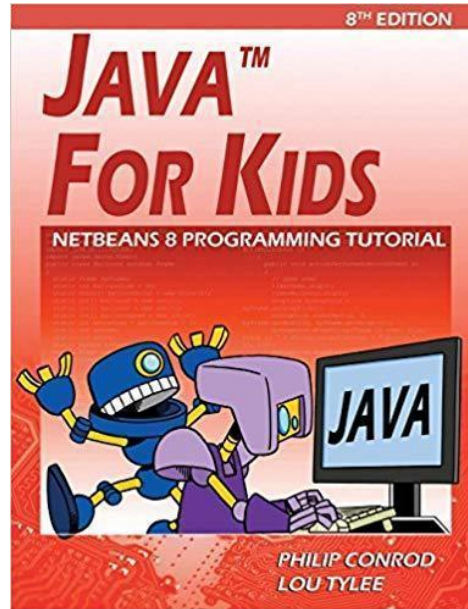


Figure 4. Comic of Programming tutorial "JAVA FOR KIDS"

Source : <https://codewizardshq.com>

Levie and Lentz (Megawati, 2010) said that, the four uses of the visual media development in learning media, namely:

- a) The function of attention in visual media is to attract students' interest and attention in learning, moreover, it can help students concentrate on the content of the lesson. And finally will enable students to remember the content of the lesson delivered.
- b) The affective function of the image or visual media is how students can feel and enjoy the learning process or when studying illustrated material.
- c) Cognitive function, according to the findings of cognitive correlation research on image media, reveals that with images or visual symbols people will tend to more easily remember and understand the information conveyed, therefore the objectives of learning will be achieved.
- d) The delivery function of the image media for teaching according to the research results found that the image media has a concept to understand the text and help students who have the tendency of slow reading and connecting information in the text.

Therefore, it can be concluded that using visual media or images in learning media facilitates students to understand the content of the material, thus, they are more interested and have the motivation to learn and understand the content of lessons.

Consequently, in reading or learning, it is necessary to be given pictures or assisted by visual media to attract interest in reading or increase the passion for learning, therefore their academic competence can be improved.

Currently in Indonesia, using comics as the learning media has been introduced by major publishers. One of the examples is the comic series “Why?” originating from Korea and has been translated into Indonesian by Elex Media Komputindo. This comic series promotes various sciences, ranging from Natural Sciences to Social Sciences which are presented in comic format. The series includes International Organizations, Chemistry, Physics, Philosophy, Numbers and Mathematics, Money and Economics, and many other titles.

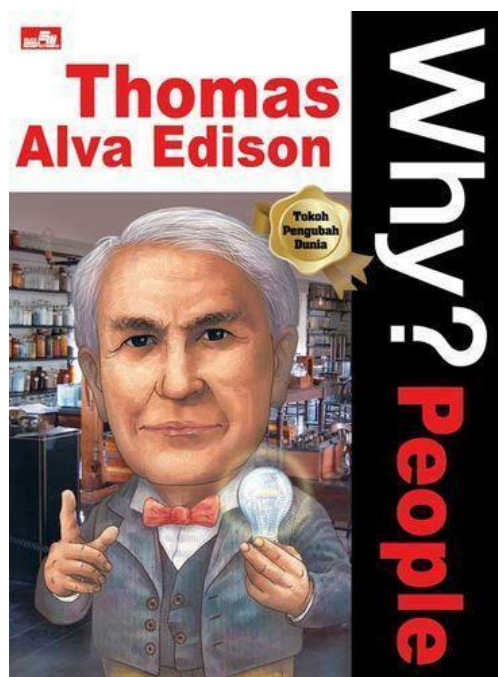


Figure 5. Comic Series “Why? People” Thomas Alva Edison  
Source : [ebooks.gramedia.com](http://ebooks.gramedia.com)

Based on observations in bookstores and data on sales results by publishers, educational comics such as "Why?" series achieved high sales. This

result shows that although still in the process, there have been Paradigm Shifts in the parent community. Since the decision-maker to buy comics is in the parents' hands, therefore, it shows that parents are willing to buy comics for their children as long as the content is educational.

The appearance of educational comics affects their mindset, therefore, the old assumption that considers comics as destructive reading materials and then creates a new paradigm that comics with good content can be utilized as useful educational media for children.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned data explanation, it can be concluded that there has been a paradigm inaccuracy in viewing comics as children's reading. Therefore, comics for adult readers with content that is not appropriate for children are unacceptable to society and seen as reading that damages the child's morale. As a result, all comics got negative stigma as unqualified useless readings, therefore the comic industry also dying.

However, with many appearances of imported educational comic series, there has been a paradigm change among parents and educators. Comics are not only considered as bad reading but can also be used as a learning media for children.

Although considered as positive, this paradigm shift should be addressed carefully by the comic industry owner, since parents still consider comics for just merely children's reading, however, they realize that there are comics with positive content that are suitable for children.

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