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Comparative literature in the digital era: Improving media literacy through Panji Boma's adaptation of literature learning

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Abstract: *The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally changed the literary landscape, shifting the paradigm from purely printed texts to a multimodal media ecosystem. This qualitative study explores comparative literature in the digital era, focusing on how the adaptation of the classical narrative of Panji Boma, which originated as oral literature/folklore, into interactive and digital multimedia, enhances media literacy in college literature classes. Using a descriptive-qualitative approach within the comparative literature framework proposed by Bassnett and Damono's adaptation theory, this study examines the pedagogical transformation of classical texts into digital novels, digital comics, digital illustrations, and 2D/3D animations. Data were collected through textual analysis, observational studies of classroom instructional design, and semi-structured interviews with literature students and lecturers. Findings indicate that comparative literature across various multimodal adaptations not only deepened students' interpretive appreciation of classical Javanese literary tropes and philosophical values but also significantly enhanced critical media literacy. Students developed critical awareness in decoding transmedia storytelling, evaluating ideological shifts in adaptations, and generating creative digital responses. Ultimately, the integration of Panji Boma's digital adaptation bridges traditional cultural heritage with contemporary communicative competencies, presenting a transformative model for literary pedagogy in the digital age.*

Keywords: *comparative literature, digital era, media literacy, adaptation (transfer of media), Panji Boma*

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the 21st century has massively transformed the cultural landscape, including the way literary works are produced, distributed, and appreciated (Jenkins, 2006; Hayles, 2008; Yuki et al., 2025). Literature, which was initially dominated by print media (print culture), is now closely intertwined with a digital ecosystem that is multimodal, interactive, and convergent (Landow, 2006; Bolter & Grusin, 2000). In the context of literary education, this media shift demands a pedagogical reorientation that focuses not only on conventional text analysis but also equips students with critical media literacy competencies (Buckingham, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007). Media literacy is no longer limited to technical skills in operating devices, but also the ability to access, deconstruct, critically analyze, evaluate ideological messages, and produce discourse in various media formats (Hobbs, 2010; Livingstone, 2004).

Amidst this digital disruption, the discipline of comparative literature has found significant momentum for methodological and epistemological innovation. Traditionally, comparative literature has emphasized the comparison of texts across

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nations, languages, or the relationship between literature and other art forms (Bassnett, 1993; Guillen, 1993; Remak, 1971). However, in the digital era, comparative studies have expanded to encompass comparisons across mediums or between platforms (transmedia and intermediality) (Rajewsky, 2005; Ellestrom, 2010; Hutcheon, 2006). The study of transmedia (ecranization or adaptation) provides a crucial bridge in examining how narrative structures, philosophical values, and aesthetics transform when a canonical text is transferred to digital media such as webcomics (webtoons), animation, film, or video games (Damono, 2018; Stam, 2005).

One of the classical Indonesian literary corpuses that holds a rich narrative, mythological, and philosophical richness is the story of Panji Boma, which is located in the West Java region, especially in the Ciamis Regency. This story describes an epic conflict between the wisdom of a knight and the ambition to fight over a princess from the Galuh Kingdom. Panji Boma is a story rooted in the Mahabharata epic but has undergone deep cultural indigenization in Java and Bali (Vickers, 2005; Poerbatjaraka, 1968) so that it has become an original story of the Javanese natives. However, classical literature is often perceived by the digital generation (digital natives) as archaic texts that are distant, difficult to understand, and anachronistic (Prensky, 2001). The low interest in classical texts has an impact on the threat to the transmission of local wisdom values. Therefore, the presence of the Panji Boma story adaptation into a contemporary digital format opens up promising pedagogical opportunities.

Previous research on media adaptations has generally focused on novel adaptations for the big screen (Eneste, 1991; McFarlane, 1996; Hutcheon, 2006; Mutmainnah & Yuki, 2025), while media literacy studies are often limited to digital news consumption or social media (Hobbs, 2010; Potter, 2013). There remains a research gap that integrates intermedial comparative literary studies based on classical Indonesian literature with the strengthening of critical media literacy in literature learning in higher education. The novelty of this research lies in the use of comparative media adaptations of Panji Boma as a dual pedagogical instrument: revitalizing classical literature while simultaneously training students' critical thinking in uncovering visual rhetoric, transmedia strategies, and cultural commodification in the digital ecosystem. The urgency of this research is based on the need for a literature curriculum that is responsive to the challenges of the 21st century without uprooting the nation's cultural roots.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comparative Literature and the Study of Intermediality in the Digital Age

Comparative literature historically developed from the French school which was oriented towards historical influences (*factual reports*) towards an American school that is more open to cross-disciplinary comparisons, including the relationship between literature and fine arts, music, and audio-visual media (Bassnett, 1993; Wellek & Warren, 1949; Remak, 1971). In the postmodern and digital era, these disciplinary boundaries are increasingly dissolving with the emergence of the concept of intermediality (Rajewsky, 2005; Higgins, 2001). Intermediality views the relationship between texts as not only linguistically intertextual, but also includes media transfer, media combination, and intermedial references (Ellestrom, 2010; Wolf, 2005). In this perspective, digital texts are not merely new containers, but semiotic agents that have

their own materiality, sensory, spatio-temporal, and semiotic modalities that transform the meaning of the source text.

Theory of Media Transfer and Cross-Media Storytelling

Transfer of media is defined by Damono (2018) as the process of transferring an artwork from one type of art to another, such as printed literature into film, dance, painting, or vice versa. Linda Hutcheon (2006) in *A Theory of Adaptation* emphasizes that adaptation is not a passive imitation or degradation of the original work, but rather a process of repetition without variation, an act of interpretation and re-creation that dialogues with the horizons of contemporary reader expectations. Digital adaptations often transform into cross-media storytelling (transmedia storytelling), where narrative fragments are systematically spread across various media platforms to create a deeper aesthetic experience and understanding of the story universe (Jenkins, 2006; Ryan, 2004). Robert Stam (2005) adds that contemporary adaptation theory must break away from the moralistic myth of fidelity to the original text (fidelity) and move on to dissecting intertextual dialogism, ideological resistance, and media transformation.

Panji Boma: From Classic Manuscripts to Digital Landscapes

The story of Panji Boma holds a monumental place in the treasury of Old Javanese literature. This text combines themes of heroism, romance, chivalric ethics, and cosmological philosophy, reflecting the conflict between dharma and adharma (Zoetmulder, 1974; Creese, 2004). The character of Panji Boma is depicted as a valiant and handsome knight who possesses the power of both earth and heaven. When this narrative is adapted into contemporary media such as digital comics/webtoons, digital novels, and animation, there is a recontextualization of character visualization, plot dynamics, and narrative simplification to meet the tastes of digital audiences (Barker, 2000; McCloud, 1993).

Critical Media Literacy Framework in Literature Learning

Literary learning in the era of media convergence cannot be separated from critical media literacy (critical media literacy). Kellner and Share (2007) formulated that critical media literacy expands the concept of conventional literacy by teaching students to analyze power relations, ideological representation, political economic commodification, and cultural hegemony hidden behind visual and digital media texts. Buckingham (2007) identified four main pillars of media literacy: production, media language, representation, and audience. Integrating intermedial comparative literature with media literacy trains students to become not only passive consumers of digital products, but also sensitive visual semiotic analysts and critical cultural producers rooted in tradition (Hobbs, 2010; Alvermann, 2002).

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an intermedial comparative literature framework (Bassnett, 1993; Rajewsky, 2005; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen to examine the comparative relationship between the source classical literary text and its digitally adapted artifact, as well as to analyze its pedagogical implications for strengthening student media literacy. The data

sources in this study consist of two categories: textual-intermedial data and pedagogical field data.

Textual data comes from folklore/oral literature texts that have been translated into the form of texts of stories about the origins of Buniseuri, Dayeuhluhur, and Pasir Boma and Panji Boma's translated works in the form of digital novels and digital character illustrations on the YouTube platform. Meanwhile, pedagogical data comes from learning interactions in the Comparative Literature/Fictional Prose Studies course in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education study program at one of the LPTKs at Galuh University for one academic semester. Research participants involved 20 students and 2 lecturers teaching literature courses. The data are in the form of translated folklore about the origins of Buniseuri, Dayeuhluhur, and the origins of Pasir Boma, as well as transcripts of in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants. Data collection was conducted through document study techniques (intertextual analysis and multimodal visual semiotics), participant observation during the lecture process, and in-depth interviews to explore students' critical reflections on the comparative reading process and media reception (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The application of an intermedial comparative literature approach through the transfer of Panji Boma's medium in literature learning shows two fundamental achievements: the structural-aesthetic transformation of classical texts in the form of folk tales to digital media, and an increase in the dimensions of students' media literacy. The findings of text transformation and media literacy competencies are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Transformation Matrix of Panji Boma Media Transfer and Dimensions of Student Media Literacy

Analysis Category	2D Comic/Animation (Digital) Adaptation	Media Literacy Achievements
Media Modality & Language	Multimodal text; graphic visuals, speech balloons, infinite scroll vertical panel layout, graphic sound effects.	Able to deconstruct the visual grammar of digital media and recognize multimodal rhetoric.
Plot Structure & Tempo	Accelerated plot in medias res; dramatization of battle conflict; cutting of side subplots.	Understand digital media pacing techniques, platform format conventions, and audience engagement strategies.
Characterization	Humanization of Panji Boma as a superhero figure, handsome with his strength and bravery.	Evaluating the shifting ideological perspectives and commodification of pop aesthetics.
Thematic Resonance	Issues of identity search, social marginalization, and criticism of the hegemony of authoritarian power.	Reflecting classical values contextually in modern problems.

Learning data demonstrates that the comparative media transformation successfully transformed students' perceptions of classical texts from boring and archaic to dynamic and relevant. Furthermore, there was a significant improvement in students' ability to evaluate media messages, moving from passive reception to critical-deconstructive learning.

Discussion

Reconceptualizing Comparative Literature: From Print Textuality to Intermedial Ecology

The research findings confirm that comparative literary studies in the digital era have undergone profound ontological and methodological expansion (Bassnett, 1993; Rajewsky, 2005). Comparing the folktales of the origins of Bunisueri and Pasir Boma with their digital 2D animated versions is not merely a matter of assessing plot compatibility, but rather of examining the ontological shift from a written verbal text medium to a visual-spatial sign system (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Students are confronted with the reality that each medium has its own material limitations (Ellestrom, 2010). In the original texts of the folktales of the origins of Bunisueri, Dayeuhluhur, and Pasir Boma, the majesty of the battlefield and the palace is constructed through poetic metaphors rich in Sanskrit vocabulary (Teeuw & Robson, 2005). Conversely, in digital comics, this majesty is transferred to contrasting color compositions, dramatic camera angles, and inter-panel transitions that utilize vertical scrolling mechanisms (McCloud, 1993). In line with the theses of Hutcheon (2006) and Damono (2018), adaptation is not a rigid replication, but rather an active act of reception by the creator that facilitates an intercultural dialogue between the Old Javanese heritage and contemporary global visual culture (Saito, 2021).

Antagonistic Humanization and Narrative Deconstruction: Meeting Points of Representational Literacy

One of the most striking findings in the comparative process is the shift in the characterization of Panji Boma. In the folktale, the origin of Buniseuri, the origin of Dayeuhluhur, and Pasir Boma. However, in modern digital media adaptations, creators inject a sympathetic perspective of the antagonist or anti-hero (Stam, 2005; Barker, 2000). The visualization of Boma's face is designed to be attractive, and the narrative focuses on the psychological motive of ambition as someone who loves a princess from a Galuh kingdom. This change in representation becomes a critical laboratory for students in honing their media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007; Buckingham, 2007). Students are able to identify the economic motives of the creative industry and the cultural motives of the younger generation who are critical of the binary narrative of absolute black-white opposition. This reflects the theory of critical media literacy that media texts always carry ideological content (Hobbs, 2010; Potter, 2013).

Strengthening Critical Media Literacy Through Transformative Literary Pedagogy

The comparative media transfer activity continued with the students' creative responses. In this learning phase, students were tasked with designing an adaptation storyboard based on excerpts from the Panji Boma fragment, taking into account the digital generation audience. This design process fostered the four pillars of media

literacy according to Buckingham (2007): (1) Understanding Media Language: Students learn to align concise verbal texts with visual semiotic signs of color, typography, and spatial composition. (2) Representational Awareness: Students consider how to represent local moral values of virtue and courage so as not to fall into clichés. (3) Production Understanding: Students recognize digital platform distribution algorithms, copyright adaptation, and audience participation dynamics (Jenkins, 2006). (4) Audience Analysis: Students formulate narrative strategies that can arouse empathy and critical awareness in the younger generation.

The application of this pedagogy transforms the literature classroom into an emancipatory space (Freire, 1970; Kellner & Share, 2007; Yuki et al., 2025). Literature is no longer taught as a frozen pile of past memories, but rather as a living cultural practice.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that comparative literature in the digital era has transformed into an intermedial discipline that is highly relevant to responding to the challenges of modern education. A comparative study of the transfer of the classic Panji Boma story from the folklore text of the origins of Buniseuri, Dayeuhluhur, and Pasir Boma to multimodal digital media proves that adaptation functions as an adaptive and dynamic medium for cultural transmission. This process of transferring the medium does not degrade the philosophical dignity of the classical text, but rather revitalizes local wisdom through a new visual and narrative dialectic familiar to the digital generation. The pedagogical implications of this research offer a transformative literary learning model that simultaneously builds an appreciation of classical literature and enhances students' critical media literacy. Through intermedial deconstruction, students become not merely passive media consumers, but critical analysts capable of reading visual codes, uncovering biases in ideological representation, and producing meaningful transmedia creative works. Therefore, the language and literature education curriculum needs to expand space for intermedial comparative literature studies as a strategic pedagogical strategy to produce a generation that is media literate, critical-thinking, and firmly grounded in the nation's cultural heritage.

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