

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

In recent years, the tourism industry has undergone a significant transformation. Tourism is no longer viewed merely as an activity for leisure or recreation; instead, it increasingly emphasizes authentic cultural experiences and sustainable development. Travelers today are more interested in destinations that reflect local traditions, values, and identities, which pushes tourism stakeholders to think beyond conventional promotional tools. This shift requires creative strategies that do not only “sell” the place but also communicate the stories, heritage, and uniqueness embedded in it. Storytelling, especially narrative-based promotion, has been recognized as one of the most effective approaches in this regard because it allows destinations to connect emotionally with potential visitors (Richards, 2020)

Alongside this trend, digital transformation has created new opportunities for visual storytelling. Digital platforms now dominate the way tourists seek and consume information about destinations. Research has shown that digital storytelling (DST) can reduce uncertainty among consumers and increase their likelihood of making travel-related decisions (Kaur et al., 2024). Visual narratives such as comics, animations, and short videos are increasingly integrated into marketing strategies, as they can simplify complex messages and make them more appealing to wider audiences. Moreover, the rise of popular culture tourism has highlighted how creative media including animation, cartoons, and films are capable of generating enjoyment and emotional involvement, strengthening people’s curiosity and desire to visit certain destinations (Lundberg et al., 2024).

The global pandemic of COVID-19 accelerated this development even further. With travel restrictions and mobility limitations, tourism actors were forced to rely on digital platforms to maintain visibility.

Virtual tourism, online campaigns, and social media promotions became essential tools to keep destinations alive in the public imagination. This situation demonstrated the need for promotional media that are accessible, engaging, and capable of crossing geographical boundaries. Comics, in this sense, provide a unique advantage: they are easily distributed online, they merge educational content with entertainment, and they can communicate messages across cultures through the universal language of visuals (Pachucki et al,2022).

One case that demonstrates strong potential for applying such an approach is Wonolopo Tourism Village, located in the Mijen Subdistrict of Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The village is historically rooted in traditional Javanese agricultural practices, and despite the pressures of modernization, it has managed to preserve its cultural authenticity. At the same time, Wonolopo has gradually adapted to the growing demands of community-based tourism (Visitjawatengah, 2024). Today, the village offers cultural, educational, and recreational attractions. Its distinctive identity as a herbal medicine or jamu center further adds to its uniqueness, offering a narrative theme that can be promoted to both domestic and international audiences. Situated close to Semarang's urban area, Wonolopo is easily accessible for visitors, yet it retains its rural character and atmosphere. This combination of authenticity and accessibility makes it a promising subject for innovative promotional projects.

The use of comics as a promotional medium is supported by various scholarly perspectives. McCloud (2018) describes comics as “sequential art,” emphasizing their ability to communicate ideas and emotions through carefully arranged images and text. Eisner (2020) refers to them as “pictorial stories” that can overcome language barriers and reach diverse audiences. Harvey (2022) highlights their capacity to simplify complex information into digestible narratives, while Johnson and

Martinez (2023) point out their effectiveness in digital applications and cross-cultural communication. Beyond theory, Hurlock (1991) stresses the suitability of visual media for younger audiences, as they can make learning both enjoyable and memorable. Together, these perspectives underline the relevance of comics in both educational and promotional contexts.

At the same time, comics are not only valuable as marketing tools but also as instruments for cultural preservation. Local history plays an important role in shaping identity and strengthening community pride. As Suyanto (2018) explains, knowledge of local history fosters a sense of belonging and nationalism. However, interest in local history often remains low, especially among younger generations, due to the traditional and sometimes monotonous ways it is delivered. In the case of Wonolopo, the village holds a rich cultural heritage and historical narratives, but much of this potential has not been widely publicized in formats that attract or engage broader audiences (Hasan, 2020).

Against this backdrop, comics provide an innovative solution. Through sequential storytelling and visual appeal, historical facts can be transformed into compelling narratives that are both entertaining and informative. This allows readers not only to understand the cultural identity of Wonolopo but also to develop an emotional connection with it. Furthermore, the accessible nature of comics whether printed or digital makes them suitable for reaching a wide spectrum of audiences, from local schoolchildren to international tourists.

In short, the integration of comics into tourism promotion strategies offers a dual benefit: it strengthens cultural preservation efforts while simultaneously increasing the attractiveness of Wonolopo as a tourism destination. By embedding cultural values into engaging visual narratives, Wonolopo can position itself as more than just a rural destination it becomes a living cultural classroom, a space where

tradition and creativity meet. This approach is not only relevant for the village itself but also reflects a broader trend in tourism marketing that prioritizes authenticity, creativity, and community participation.

Comics are chosen as the medium to promote Wonolopo Tourism Village for several reasons. Comics represent a narrative form of visual art that effectively conveys stories in an engaging, simple, and universally understandable way. This is crucial in introducing Wonolopo's rich traditions, history, and cultural identity to both local and international audiences. Comics serve a dual function: not only as a promotional tool but also as an instrument of cultural preservation. Through sequential visual storytelling, local values can be presented in an educational yet entertaining format, which helps increase the younger generation's interest in cultural heritage. Third, in today's digital era, comics are highly adaptable to various online platforms, making them cost-effective, accessible, and far-reaching. Therefore, the use of comics aligns with current tourism trends that emphasize authenticity, creativity, and community participation.

1.2 Statement of The Study

Based on the limitations of the problem, the problems of this study are:

1. How is the process of developing a bilingual comic for Wonolopo Village in Mijen?
2. How is the stakeholders' feedback regarding the bilingual comic of Wonolopo Village Mijen?

1.3 Objective of The Study

Considering the statement of the study above, the expected
The objective of this study can be formulated as follows:

1. To develop a bilingual comic as a promotional medium for Wonolopo Tourism Village in Mijen, covering the stages of

conceptualization, narrative development, visual design, and production.

2. To evaluate and analyse stakeholders and audiences feedback on the bilingual comic based promotional material, focusing on engagement, cultural understanding, interest in the destination, and perceptions of authenticity.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically, as described below:

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This study may serve as a foundational reference for the creation of English language strip stories. It emphasizes the use of accessible language suitable for readers with limited English proficiency. Moreover, it is anticipated to guide the design of educational visual storytelling media.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

This research is expected to generate real-world benefits for tourists, local residents, and the broader Semarang community. The development of a comic as a promotional medium for Wonolopo Tourism Village aims to enhance the village's visibility and attractiveness as a cultural tourism destination. Moreover, the resulting comic is intended to serve as a sustainable and practical tool that can be continuously utilized and adapted by village stakeholders to support tourism development, community empowerment, and cultural preservation in Wonolopo Tourism Village.

1.5 Output of The Study

The output of this study is a bilingual comic (Indonesian–English) entitled *Beyond Treeveil: The Wonolopo Village*. The comic belongs to the fantasy-adventure genre and consists of 45 pages. It

serves as a storytelling medium to visualize and communicate the historical and cultural identity of Wonolopo Tourism Village. The comic illustrates essential aspects such as the origin of the village, traditional beliefs, local wisdom, and the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

MSMEs refer to community-based business activities managed by local residents on a small to medium scale, which play a significant role in strengthening the local economy, creating employment opportunities, and promoting creative products unique to Wonolopo Village.

This bilingual comic is designed to be both informative and engaging, targeting local residents, visitors, and potential tourists. It aims to promote Wonolopo Tourism Village as a sustainable tourism destination through accessible visual storytelling that highlights its cultural heritage, community life, and economic empowerment through MSME development.