A Review of Indonesian Folktale Preservation through Visual Storytelling in the Form of Photography for Young Adult

Angela Oscario[1], Liliek Adelina Suhardjono[2], Laura Christina Luzar[2] and B. Sriherlambang[2]

[1]*Creative Advertising Program, Visual Communication Design Department, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480*
[2]*New Media Program, Visual Communication Design Department, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480*

Keywords: Workshop, Photography

Abstract: Folktale is one of many Indonesian heritages that need to be preserved. Through a workshop held by Binus University, Jakarta – Indonesia and Tomas Bata University – Czech Republic, young adults created visual storytelling of folktales to attract the attention of their own age group and feel the connection with the story, so they are interested to read the folktales. As the case study, we chose a photograph series of *Sitti Nurbaya* by Dwima Hamid, a participant of the workshop. The objective is to understand how Hamid created a relevant visual story telling of a folktale for the young adult. The first step of this qualitative research is using content analysis to find the gap between *Sitti Nurbaya* storyline and the interest of the young adult. The second step is analysing the form of *Sitti Nurbaya* visual storytelling to define its content and context. Using content analysis, we then use the data to identity whether the visual storytelling is relevant for the young adult. The results are the steps on how to create a visual storytelling of folktale that can grab the interest of the young adult in order to preserve it and make it sustainable.

1 INTRODUCTION

In terms of culture, Indonesia is a very rich country. With approximately 1340 ethnic groups, Indonesia possesses massive numbers of folktales that were inherited from generations to generations. Folktales contain local wisdoms that reflect a number of cultural system information such as philosophies, values, and norms (Unsriana, 2013). These folktales reflect how the society views itself, its social value and justice (Shoniwa, 2013). They are used as educational tools to introduce literary, social and cultural heritage of diverse cultures (Bruijn, 2013). They have the power to transfer local wisdom, influence people's perception, behavior and attitude (Songsil, 1999).

Content-wise, folktales are not exclusive for children age group. Some, such as *Roro Mendut, Sangkuriang* and *Sitti Nurbaya,* are more suitable for young adults than children. Until the 90s, folktales were still popular in Indonesian society; however, currently the young generations, especially those who live in big cities, barely know any Indonesian folktales (Purwanto, 2008). There are several factors that made folktales lost its popularity. For example, the rise of digital media that provides more engaging entertainments, which accelerates the behavioral change that make the folktales become no longer relevant. Indonesian writer from North Sumatra, Damiri Mahmud, said that the young adults feel indifference toward folktales because they consider its storytelling and characters as outdated. They are more interested in modern high-tech metropolitan storylines – things that are closely related with their daily life (Riandini, 2016).

Cultural critics, educators, and people in creative industries have put some efforts to preserve folktales. They hold storytelling events, publish children folktale books and/or interactive e-books, and even produce movies. However, the majority of these activities were targeted for children, and left out the young adult segment.

Considering that, Visual Communication Design – Creative Advertising program, Bina Nusantara University (Indonesia), and Tomas Bata University (Czech Republic) tried to take part to preserve folktales for the young adults. Together, they hold a series of workshop to rekindle the folktales from

498

respective countries, in the form of photography as visual story that can help hold the attention of the reader. Visual helps readers to imagine the story, make connections with what they read, so the story feels more tangible. Through visual, readers could gain better understanding of the story (Anon, 2016). The goal of the workshop was exploring relevant visual storytelling that makes the young adult attracted to read the folktales. Mr. Noor Latif, Mr. Tomy Alim, Mr. Jan Jindra and Ms. Eva Plutova coached the first workshop, held in 2015. There were six Indonesian students participated, and their projects were later exhibited at the university's gallery. One project in particular – a series of photographs from the *Sitti Nurbaya* folktale by Dwima Hamid received many attentions during the exhibition. Due to Hamid's success in grabbing people's attention, this research will focus on how he created visual storytelling to attract the young adult to read folktales.

2 METHODS

This research incorporates some qualitative methods, namely literature study, *persona* method, and content analysis method. Firstly, we analyse how the society portraits the *Sitti Nurbaya* folktale through existing literature studies and online data. Along with it, we collect data of the young adult in big cities by observation and literature method.

Based on Academic Search Premier & SocIndex, the term "young adult" is used for people in 18-25 age groups (Anon). Hamid is allegedly a member of this age group. We then process these data using *persona* – a method that was created by Alex Cooper in 1998. Persona is a synthesized character to represent a group of people who share common goals, attitudes and behaviors (Curedale, 2013). Subsequently, using content analysis we compared the common perception of *Sitti Nurbaya* and the young adult persona to understand the gap that makes story of the folktale irrelevant to young adults. Content analysis is a method to make inference that can be replicated and valid data with the regard to its context (Bungin, 2007).

For the second part of the research, we visually read *Sitti Nurbaya* in the form of photograph series and analyse it using Robert Bersson's 'form, content and context' theory. Content is the meaning that consists of denotative or connotative meaning, while context is the situation when the artwork was created or interpreted (Bersson, 2004). Using content analysis, we compared the content and context of

Sitti Nurbaya photograph series and the young adult persona. The next step, using screenplay theory from Syd Field (Field, 2005), we analyse Hamid's perspective as his foundation to create a visual storytelling. Finally, we conclude with the steps on how Hamid created a relevant visual story telling of folktale for young adult.

2.1 Waste Management Literacy

Generally, literacy defines as the capacity of human beings to apply their knowledge and skills on specific issues and conduct analysis, and communicate effectively the views, solutions proposed and interpretations of problems in various situations. Since the term of literacy relates to the context, such as financial literacy for a financial issue or environmental literacy for learning process in raising knowledge of the environment. Solid waste is one of the most complex environmental problems as it produces by individuals, but the final process of the materials becomes the responsibility of the government. However, community participation has an important role in accomplishing integrated waste management. In order to raise awareness and community participation, waste management literacy is needed, so it encourages a person to have knowledge and skills in managing waste.

Therefore, the activities of literacy, communication, and interpretation of the environment are interrelated activities. Heat (Bungin, 2007) mentions that literary events generally occur in the classroom, but the practice is reflected in activities within the home or in the public sphere or in the community. Along with the development of information technology, where the internet becomes a space that allows distance education, then there also environmental/ecological literacy activities can take place. This concept is in line with what Mocker and Spear have proposed: self-directed learning or self-learning where self, in view of refers to autonomous behavior for both individuals and groups who agree to study together.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Portrait of Siti Nurbaya Folktales in Indonesian Society

Sitti Nurbaya is Indonesian romance novel written in Malay language by Marah Rusli in 1922. Not many people have read the original novel, but because the

story was considered phenomenal at that time, it was orally passed down from generation to generation.

The premise of the story is the fate of a girl, Sitti Nurbaya, who sacrificed herself to marry a rich man named Datuk Meringgih, to pay her father's debt. During their marriage, Sitti became a victim of domestic violence. Because of that, after her father's death, Sitti struggled to get back to her true love, Samsubahri, but Datuk Meringgih would do anything to hold her off. Despite the actual premise, *Sitti* Nurbaya is known as a story that depicts the negative effects of a forced marriage. The setting took place on the early 20th century in Padang where the Dutch colonized Nusantara. At that time, the society was ruled by the common law, and what Sitti did (trying to get out from her violence marriage and get back to her lover) was considered as a law violation.

3.2 Persona of Indonesian Young Adults That Live in Big Cities

18-25 years olds are split into two generations dubbed as 'the millennials' (gen Y), born between 1981-1996; and 'post millennials' (gen Z), born after 1996. Since the main target for romance novel is woman, accordingly this research focuses on female young adult in big cities.

Based on Bryan Melmed's research that was presented at Advertising Week in New York, the millenials are the most diverse and heterogeneous generation. He divided millennials into twelve groups (Griner, 2014). Among these twelve groups, the most potential target for *Sitti Nurbaya* is 'Boss Babes' who are considered as a feminist. Based on the literature research and observation on user model, we then made their persona. Meanwhile, for the post millennials, because the oldest has only reached 21 years old, the research about them is not as much as millennials. Based on their general characteristics and observation on user model, we also made another persona.

3.2.1 Summary of a Persona for 22-25 Years Old Group

Liberty is 25 years old woman living in Jakarta. She works as a marketing communication officer but she dreams to start her own coffee shop that empowering local coffee farmers. For her, success means helping others to succeed. If anybody says her dream is impossible, she will feel challenged and try to prove that they were wrong. She was raised to believe that she is special and can achieve whatever she put her determination into. In her social media, she follows women influencers that are independent and confidence. Inspired by them, she does not hesitate to express her voice in any social issues. She spends her relax time drinking coffee with friends, browsing image and video, reading articles that she finds related to her life in the internet.

3.2.2 Summary of a Persona for 18-21 Years Old Group

Malinda is 18 years old communication student in a private university in Jakarta. She knows that the world is in chaos, so deep inside she worries about her future. She realizes that she was not born special, and so she must compete with her peers. This competitive tendency makes her prefer to do things alone rather than in group. She believes in freedom – for her, freedom means having her own private territory. She carefully curates her social media content and does not rant her feelings on it. To catch her attention, one must personalize their posts to suit her interest. She concerns about social issues, but gender discrimination is not one of them because she believes that women and men have already possessed equal rights.

3.3 Content Analysis of the Gap Between Sitti Nurbaya Folktale and the Young Adults

The story of forced marriage and domestic violence is not relevant for the female young adult in big cities. For the 18-21 years olds, they do not believe that this still happened, because to their knowledge women have already had the same right as men. For the 22-25 years olds who prefer to read something that are related and/or inspiring to them, a woman that was obedient enough to have a forced marriage was not their preferred source of inspiration. Sitti Nurbaya's earlier periodical setting also convinces them that those social issues are out dated, not something they should have taken care of.

3.4 Visual Story Telling of Sitti Nurbaya Folktale by Dwima Hamid

Hamid made five photo series to represent the Sitti Nurbaya folktales. He chose photography as his visual approach because he wanted his artworks to look as real as possible. As Roland Barthes said the photographic image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect analogon (Barthes, 2003).

Photo (a) depicts a woman inside a birdcage with a sincere expression. We do not see any third party that force her to go inside, so it implies that it is her own decision to go inside the cage. Photo (b) depicts a woman that is trapped into submission. Her hands are tied, implied that her power to make her own decision had been robbed. Despite her condition, she still displays resilient expression. Photo depicts a woman inside a birdcage, screamed her lungs out. She cannot keep her silence anymore. There're butterflies outside the cage. Butterfly is a symbol of transformation or metamorphosis in life (Harris). It implied that she is about to start to transform her life, fight for her freedom. Photo (d) depicts a smiling woman with swollen eyes and wound mark on her neck. Even though she's hurt, she's no longer inside a cage or being tied. She has her freedom. Even though she is defeated, she felt like a winner. Photo (e) depicts a relax woman with closed eyes. Butterflies around her head implied that even though she died, she found her peace because she has fought for her belief.

All of the photographs shot in white plain background, so we cannot associate it with a certain year. The model wears modern clothing and applies thin makeup with simple and natural hairstyle. Her complete styling implies that her story happens in present-day.

His photograph series used figurative language with some subliminal messages. The objects on the photo symbolically stand for something else. Figuratively, the photograph tells us a story about a modern woman who struggles to fight for her belief. It does not say anything specific about a forced marriage or domestic violence but covers general issues related to freedom.

To attract the attention of the young adult, the visual story telling is not only need to be relevant, but also possess a stopping power. The first photo is the most crucial because it determines whether the audience will continue to observe the artwork or not. If we look at photo (a), Hamid tried to make a stopping power using irony figurative language. The common perception is woman that is caged would looks stressed but in photo (a) the woman expression looks calm. Again in photo (d), the woman is wounded but smiling. Those anomalies make the audience curious to decipher things that more than meet the eye.

Figure 1. *Sitti Nurbaya* Visual Storytelling by Dwima Hamid

3.5 Visual Story Telling of Sitti Nurbaya Folktale by Dwima Hamid and Young Adult Analysis

On his photograph series, Hamid focused only on Sitti Nurbaya and eliminated other characters. He portrayed Sitti as an independent woman who makes her own decision (including the decision to be restrained). He broadened the topic from a forced domestic violence into the struggle to stand for one's belief. However, he still followed the original plot: a woman who sacrifices her freedom, but finally fought to get it back. The photographs also retain the original moral value; a strong woman who would not stay silent or wait to be rescued, but struggled to reach her own happiness. Hamid did not change the story but find a relevant perspective to cater the story for the young adults.

Hamid's artwork easily reached the female young adult's attention because it portrays Sitti Nurbaya as a present day's strong independent woman. In the photographs, Sitti is the kind of woman they would follow on social media. She matches the profile of source of inspirations: a woman who bravely follows her dreams and struggle for her belief no matter what. Gender issue may not attract the 18-21 years olds group, but they do care about the freedom issue. They, who want to have their own private area, think that freedom is everyone's right. The modern portrayal of the photograph also makes the issue feels more real and relevant to them. Hamid dressed up the model with the style of model in a fashion editorial in young

adult media. Most female young adult groups look at that kind of model as one of their style aspirations.

4 CONCLUSION

Folktale is one of Indonesian heritages that must be preserved. Preservation can be done through various ways. Dwima Hamid tried to preserve folktale by creating a relevant visual story telling of a folktale for young adult in big cities in Indonesia. The relevant visual story telling is used to attract the young adult's attention, help them to relate with the story and furthermore interested to read the folktales.

Based on the review of *Sitti Nurbaya* preservation action by Hamid, here are the steps to create a relevant visual story telling of folktale for the young adult:

❖ Research on young adult personality. Find their interests.
Connect the content of the story with the interests of the young adult. It is not mandatory to modify the content of the story but it is necessity to find a relevant point of view to frame the story.
Change the context of the story to make it closer with the daily life of the young adult. Alter the old setting into a modern setting to match their environment.
Visualize the content and context into a form that is relevant to young adult's interest. Photography is not a must, but it makes a visual storytelling looks more real.
Craft the appearance of the model so that it resembles young adults' everyday attires. Both of literal and figurative language can be used, however, figurative language has broader interpretations, so the young adults can connect with the visual in accordance to their own experience.
Create an anomaly in the visuals so it can grab the attention of the young adults. There are many ways to create a visual anomaly, but one of them is using figurative language.

Hopefully, Hamid's way of creating heritage preservation solution can be duplicated to visualize other folktales. By understanding how a member of the young adults preserve the heritage for themselves, people in creative industries, educators and cultural critics can develop more ways to preserve the nation's heritage.

REFERENCES

Unsriana, L., 2013 *Nilai Kearifan Lokal dalam Cerita Rakyat Jepang (Minwa) Humaniora* **4** 310

Shoniwa, K., 2013 *Why folktales are important Online* https://www.herald.co.zw/why-folk-tales-are-important/

Bruijn, A., D., 2017 *From Representation to Participation: Rethinking the Intercultural Educational Approach to Folktales Childrens Literature in Education pp 1–18*

Songsil, P., 1999 *Study and Analysis of Khmer Legends and Folk Tales Regions 1-9* (Bangkok: Thai language Field of Study, Faculty of Human Social Science)

Purwanto, H., 2008 *Generasi Muda Sekarang Kurang Minati Cerita Rakyat* Online https://www.antaranews.com/berita/90863/generasi-muda-sekarang-kurang-minati-cerita-rakyat

Riandini, M., 2016 Cerita Rakyat, Tak Hanya Sebatas Ingatan *Pontianak Post*

Anon, 2016 *Drawing on Success: The Importance of Illustrations* (Dorrance Publishing)

Anon, *"Development through Life"* by Newman & Newman www.widener.edu

Curedale, R., 2013 *50 selected design methods: to transform your design* (Topanga, CA: Design Community College Inc.)

Bungin, B., 2007 *Penelitian kualitatif: komunikasi, ekonomi, kebijakan publik, dan ilmu sosial lainnya* (Jakarta: Kencana)

Bersson, R., 2004 *Responding to art: form, content, & context* (New York: McGraw-Hill)

Field, S., 2005 *Screenplay the foundations of screenwriting* (New York, NY: Delta Trade Paperbacks)

Griner, D., 2014 *Are These the 12 Types of Millennials? – Adweek* www.adweek.com

Barthes, R., 2003 *The responsibility of forms: critical essays on music, art, and representation* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press)

Harris, E., *Butterfly Spirit Animal & Totem* www.spiritanimal.info