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# Interactive Media for Cultural Continuity: Reimagining Panji Culture Through Branching Narrative Video Game

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## ABSTRACT

*Panji Culture* is a collection of various literatures, poems, folksongs, performance arts, and folktales that depicts a group of various classical Javanese stories about *Panji Tales*. These stories are popular and widespread across Indonesia as well as Southeast Asia. Despite the rich cultural heritage and historical significance, there are noticeable decline in awareness and engagement with these narratives among younger generations. Using video game as digital media and modern entertainment and *Panji Tales* as the content, it is possible to leverage to revitalize interest in *Panji* Culture. As branching narrative may increase the replayability value of a game, the main goal of this research is creating branching narrative structure from multiple stories of *Panji Tales* to be adapted to fit the interactive nature of video games. The method of this research is conducted with literature study with comparative approach. First phase is breaking down stories into plot points. Second phase is finding possible nodes for divergence and convergence points for branching narrative. Third phase is assembling those points into a branching narrative and implementing it into digital narratives of video game. The main result of this research is a branching story that are combined from several Panji Tales stories that can be integrated into role-playing game concept. The branching story aims to engage multiple Panji Tales stories to modern audiences with a single video game title. In the face of the rise of digital media, traditional narratives of the Panji Tales are witnessing a significant decline in awareness and engagement. This research addresses this issue by leveraging digital gaming as a modern tool to revitalize and preserve these cultural stories.

**Keywords:** *Video Games; Panji Culture; Branching Narrative; Storytelling*

## INTRODUCTION

*Panji Tales* is a group of various classical Javanese stories which their main characters are *Prince Panji* as main male character, *Princess Candrakirana* as main female character, accompanied by their servants with story set around kingdom of *Kediri* and kingdom of *Kahuripan* during 12$^{th}$ century (Kieven, 2013; Saputra, 2014). Based of those similarities, Robson (1971) also considered that *Panji Tales* is a genre. The earliest stories of *Panji Tales* were written in 14$^{th}$ century in Java and became popular and widespread across Indonesian Archipelago as well as Southeast Asia in 17-18$^{th}$ century in form of literatures, poems, folksongs, performance arts, and folktales.

There are some opinions that notice the decline in awareness and engagement of Indonesian folktales and classical literatures (Fatanti et al., 2019; Rambu et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2022). This trend can be attributed to the increasing influence of digital media and modern entertainment that usually deliver contemporary content over cultural heritages. Despite the rich cultural heritage of *Panji Tales* in Southeast Asian literature especially in Indonesia, *Panji Tales* also fell into this kind of decline among younger generations. Although usually deliver contemporary content, digital media and modern entertainment can be used to deliver cultural heritage to younger audiences. There are some attempts to adapt *Panji Tales* into various modern media e.g. picture cards, illustrated storybooks, animations, school drama, and regional pop songs but very rarely in video games.

Game and interactive media can provide experiential learning opportunities, making complex subjects more accessible and memorable (Champion, 2023). Digital platforms can combine text, images, sound, and video to create a rich, multi-sensory experience that traditional storytelling cannot match (Miller, 2019). Immersive experiences that resonate with contemporary audiences can be created by integrating *Panji Tales* stories and visual arts with elements of digital games.

There are several researches that prove the usefulness of narrative to motivate people to increase their performance in playing video games (Farič et al., 2021; Hwang & Lu, 2018; Lu et al., 2023). Moreover, branching storyline may increase the replayability value as there would be many more possible unique ways to experience the story (He, 2024).

As mentioned before, *Panji Tales* is a collection of various stories that share same main characters and realms, and some stories are variants of one another. There are possibilities that some stories have similar or same plot points. It is expected these plot points can be employed as convergence and divergence points to integrate several stories into a branching narrative structure. This branching narrative can be integrated with interactive elements of a digital game with branching storylines so the players can experience different stories of *Panji Tales* depending on player's choices. This research sought to create a branching narrative structure from multiple stories of *Panji Tales* to be integrated into interactive nature of video games.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research uses a literature study method with a comparative approach. The chosen stories are broken down into several plot points. The plot points from each story then are compared to identify same or similar plot points and core differences. These identified points and core differences are analysed to find possible divergence and convergence points for branching narrative. After that, these plots are assembled into one branching narrative that is presented in nodes and paths where players can experience each different story by choosing different combination of paths.

The data used in this research are the following stories: *Panji Kuda Semirang, Timun Mas, Kethek Ogleng, Keong Mas, Enthit, Panji Walang Sumirang,* and *Ande Ande Lumut* (Nurcahyo, 2022). The game concept itself is a role-playing game where players will experience different characters point of view according game progression and player's path choice.

After breaking down the stories into several plot points and comparing each story's plot points, it was identified that 10 plot points are shared across two or more stories as seen in ***Table 1***.

**Table 1. Shared plot points**

| No. | Plot points | Stories | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | Galuh Ajeng jealousy | V | V | | | | | |
| 2 | Candra Kirana banished | V | V | | | | | |
| 3 | Candra Kirana is looking for Inu | V | V | V | | | | |
| 4 | Inu is looking for Candra Kirana | V | | V | | V | V | |
| 5 | Candra Kirana already outside | | | | V | V | V | |
| 6 | Inu leaves for adventure | | | | V | | | V |
| 7 | Gunungsari is looking for Candra Kirana and Inu | | V | | V | V | V | |
| 8 | Candra Kirana disguised herself | V | V | V | | V | | |
| 9 | Candra Kirana lost in jungle | | V | | | V | V | |
| 10 | Inu will be coronated as king | | | V | | | | V |
| Stories: | 1. Panji Kuda Semirang, 2. Keong Mas, 3. Ande Ande Lumut, 4. Enthit, 5. Timun Mas, 6. Kethek Ogleng, 7. Walang Sumirang | | | | | | | |

The identified plot points are then assembled into branching narratives as seen in ***Figure 1***.

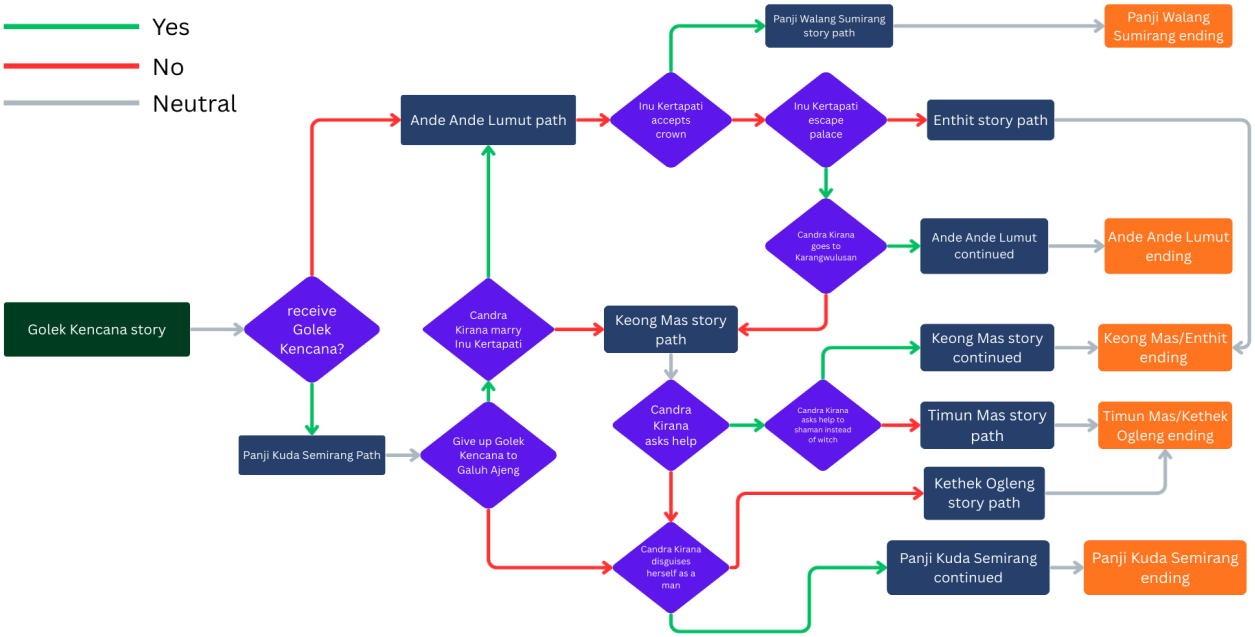



**Figure 1. Branching narrative of Panji Stories**

All shared plot points are started by different causes and ended by different results depending on stories. Because of this, these plot points can be used as nodes for branching narratives. On the other hand, these differences can be used to map the paths of the narratives. From this identification, the story's branching structure is determined. In this case, a tree structure model narrative is used. There are 9 nodes where players can choose their path. The branching narrative results with 5 endings where two of them are shared between two different stories.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that similarities in plots across several stories of *Panji Tales* can be assembled into a branching narrative. This finding also demonstrates that *Panji Tales* stories can be

adapted into a role-playing game concept, which allows players to explore various story paths based on their choices.

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