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Exploring ‘Creative Limitations’ and their Effects on the Malaysian Comic Industry: Socioeconomic and Structural Constraints

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Malaysian comics have demonstrated a significant cultural and economic value to the country such as being an entertainment medium for the people and playing a role of political tool. However, as comics gained popularity over the years, turning it into a mainstream media, creative limitations; which in the context of creative industries can be defined as challenges that may arise from any form of restrictions and industry policies which commonly affect creative autonomy and creative process, began to emerge, shaped by commercial, structural, and institutional pressures. Additionally, despite comics being an important cultural tool, institutional and scholarly attention regarding the medium remains scarce, which dismisses the structural constraints comic creators may face in their practise of making comics. Thus, this paper aims to address this gap by exploring how creative limitations, through socioeconomic and structural lens, impacts the Malaysian comic industry and how local comic creators operate within these constraints. This research will employ a qualitative approach through data collection from past studies to illuminate existing problems and discover gaps, and through in-depth interviews of comic creators such as artists, writers, editors, and producers to gather direct information via lived experiences. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production as the base framework, this study will analyze the interactions between commercialization of comics and comic creators' autonomy, shedding light on how these creators negotiate systemic constraints. This study is expected to offer deeper insights into the current status of the comic industry, especially the working realities of local comic creators. Moreover, it is anticipated that the findings will help contribute to the efforts of making the comic industry to be sustainable for the future of Malaysia's cultural and creative industries.

Keywords: *comic; creative limitation; creative industries; cultural production; comic creators*

INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence as an editorial political cartoon in the early 19th century (Muhamad Azhar Abdullah, 2012), Malaysian comics have shown significant cultural and economic values, climbing its way into being one of Malaysian popular culture. Comics' mark in the creative field is notably evident in its role as an instrument to “reflect the values, beliefs, and attitudes of society” (Kapasi, 2023). However, the development of comics into a commercialized and mainstream medium has caused it to face commercial, structural, and institutional constraints such as in regards to creative autonomy, digital shifts, and undervaluation of comics that affect comic creators. And yet, these issues continue

to be overlooked as past studies on comics mainly focus on its visuals and contents—leaving problems regarding its production process to remain hidden.

Hence, this study will address this gap by exploring these systemic creative limitations and how they affect comic creators in their process of bringing comics to life. In this research, ‘Creative Limitations’ refers to the constraints or restrictions that commonly affect a creative process. In the context of creative industries, creative limitations can be defined as the challenges that may arise from any form of restrictions and industry policies, such as censorship, funding constraints, market fragmentation, and more (Rahida Aini Mohd Ismail & Teoh, 2024). This research however will specifically focus on the effects of creative limitations on the Malaysian comic industry rather than the broader creative sector to highlight the particular challenges faced by comic creators—including artists, writers, editors, and producers—in bringing a comic to life.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, this research will examine how comic creators navigate through creative limitations formed by socioeconomic and structural constraints. This framework offers a comprehensive look into the production side of the comic industry wherein factors such as power dynamic and policies play a role in shaping how industry players operate within the sector. Previously, Beaty (2012) also had applied the same theory in studying the marginalization of comics caused by commercialization, showing the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theory to be applied in investigating the constraints in creative industries. The aim of this study will be answered using the method of qualitative research which will be through a series of interviews with Malaysian comic creators along with data collection from previous related studies. Through data collection, this research will address the gap in past studies, while thorough interviews with comic creators will reveal their lived experiences in the practice of making comics.

This study will be highlighting three research objectives: to investigate how creative limitations affect local comic creators, to explore the initiatives adopted by comic creators to navigate around creative limitations in their practice, and to analyze the creative limitations in Malaysian creative industries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are expected to offer new perspectives on how socioeconomic and structural constraints influence the working condition of a comic artist. It is anticipated that the findings will help in illuminating the creative limitations in creative industries shaped by structural, institutional, and commercial restrictions and their effects on the comic industry. Additionally, it will also contribute in suggesting the way comic creators operate in spite of the challenges. Through discussions of comic creators’ experiences within the walls of creative industries, this research seeks to not only explore the creative limitations affecting the local comic industry but also to investigate the gap in educational opportunities, platform system, and policy.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this proposal presents an exploration into the effects of creative limitations on comic creators and how they overcome and adapt to it during their creative process. Current studies show that there are significant gaps in understanding the struggles of comic creators in producing works that adhere to the rapid development of the comic industry particularly concerning their creative autonomy,

digital shifts of the industry, and constant dismissal of comics in formal space. Through qualitative methods including data collections of past studies and extensive interviews with comic creators such as artists, writers, editors, and producers, this research seeks to address these gaps. With Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production as the base framework, this paper will dive deeper into the relationship between the heightened commercialization of comics, creative limitations, and comic creators' autonomy. While the research is still yet to collect any findings, it is anticipated that the results would bring a beneficial insight—for not only readers but also policy makers and scholars, into the production process of comics and offer a new look into comics as more than just a nostalgic cultural medium but instead as a creative labor. Ultimately, this research aims to help in supporting the comic industry into a more sustainable sector that can contribute more to the creative economy of Malaysia.

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