

DIGITAL COMICS BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM: AN IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW MEDIA LITERACY AS A CAPITAL FOR LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE ENTREPRENEURS AMONG GENERATION Z

Rafiqah Yusna Siregar^{1*}, Hendra Kurnia Pulungan²

^{1,2}Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan

^{1*}email: rafiqahyusnasiregar@gmail.com

²email: hendrakurnia@unimed.com

ABSTRACT

Generation Z students are highly active as consumers of digital media, yet their capacity to convert digital and cultural resources into productive entrepreneurial value remains underexplored. Prior studies tend to frame new media literacy as a protective-critical competency and to treat local-wisdom-based digital comics primarily as instructional media, leaving the intersection of new media literacy, cultural entrepreneurship, and the creative economy largely unexamined. This study addresses that gap by analysing how local-wisdom-based digital comics function simultaneously as a form of new media literacy and as entrepreneurial capital among Generation Z students in the Indonesian Literature Study Program at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED). The study employs a qualitative approach grounded in Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology. Data were collected from seven purposively selected students representing fourteen study groups in the Language and Literature Entrepreneurship course through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and were analysed using the Miles and Huberman model (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification), with credibility pursued through triangulation of the three data sources. The findings show that students transformed from passive digital consumers into active creative producers who mobilize digital media for communication, cultural representation, and entrepreneurship, and that digital comics operate as interactive communication media integrating local wisdom, digital creativity, and economic value at once. Theoretically, the study contributes an integrative model that links new media literacy, cultural entrepreneurship, and the creative economy, repositioning media literacy from a protective competency into productive capital. Practically, it offers higher-education institutions a project-based, culturally grounded model for entrepreneurship learning that strengthens students' cultural identity while enhancing the originality and competitiveness of their creative content.

Keywords: New Media Literacy, Digital Comics, Local Wisdom, Entrepreneurship, Generation Z.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the ways information is produced, distributed, and consumed. Generation Z, born and raised in a digital environment, is commonly described as a cohort of “digital natives” that is highly adaptive to technology, visually oriented, and inclined to consume multimedia content (Siregar et al., 2025). This condition places new demands on higher education, particularly on Indonesian Literature study programs at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), to integrate digital literacy, creativity, and entrepreneurial skills within a single learning process.

One course directly relevant to these demands is Language and Literature Entrepreneurship, which emphasizes not only theoretical understanding but also students' ability to create language- and literature-based creative products with economic value. In practice, however, learning still tends to be conventional and weakly contextualized, and it does not fully exploit the digital potential that is so closely tied to the everyday lives of Generation Z students. As a result, students frequently remain positioned as consumers of digital content rather than as producers of creative and economically valuable work.

At the same time, globalization and the dominance of global popular culture have marginalized local wisdom, including folklore, which is experiencing a decline of interest among younger audiences.

Folklore, which should constitute an essential part of cultural identity, is increasingly displaced by global popular content. This reveals a gap between the cultural potential of local wisdom and the media through which it is conveyed, which are frequently misaligned with the preferences of today's generation.

Within this context, developing local-wisdom-based digital comics represents a strategic alternative. Digital comics are visually appealing, easily accessible, and consistent with the media-consumption characteristics of Generation Z. As a visual-narrative medium that combines text and images, they can effectively convey cultural values and local wisdom while simultaneously functioning as creative products with economic potential in the creative-economy era (Ernawati, 2020).

Despite this potential, existing scholarship has approached the relevant phenomena in a fragmented manner. **First**, studies on media literacy have predominantly framed it as a protective and cognitive competency intended to shield audiences from the negative effects of mass media (Siregar, 2023). **Second**, research on local-wisdom-based digital comics has largely positioned them as instructional media, for example in elementary science and mathematics learning (Ni Made Santi Ayuni et al., 2023; Ni Made Sunaryan Niriavidya & Werang, 2023). **Third**, digital-literacy studies of Generation Z tend to document technical skills in operating social media without examining how those skills are converted into entrepreneurial value (Taslimahudin & Susanty, 2026). Consequently, the point at which new media literacy, cultural entrepreneurship, and the creative economy intersect — that is, where media literacy operates as *productive entrepreneurial capital* rooted in local culture — remains largely unexamined. This is the research gap addressed by the present study.

To address this gap, the study is guided by the following research questions: **(1)** How do Generation Z students in the Indonesian Literature Study Program at UNIMED experience and reinterpret new media literacy through the creation of local-wisdom-based digital comics? **(2)** How do local-wisdom-based digital comics function as entrepreneurial capital within the creative economy? and **(3)** How does the integration of local culture shape students' cultural identity and the competitiveness of their creative content?

Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the function of new media literacy as a form of capital in cultivating language and literature entrepreneurs through local-wisdom-based digital comics among Generation Z students. **Theoretically**, it contributes an integrative conceptual model connecting new media literacy, digital content creation, entrepreneurial competency, the creative economy, and cultural entrepreneurship, thereby enriching communication and new-media studies. **Practically**, it offers higher-education institutions a project-based, culturally grounded model for entrepreneurship learning that can encourage Generation Z to become more productive, creative, and competitive digital creators while preserving local cultural identity.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is used to explore and understand individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to events — that is, how people consciously perceive, interpret, and give meaning to the reality around them. Specifically, the study draws on Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, which analyses social action through a person's subjective motives, distinguishing the “because-motive” (rooted in past experience) from the “in-order-to motive” (oriented toward future goals). This lens is used to examine three interrelated dimensions enacted by students during the Language and Literature Entrepreneurship course: media literacy, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation.

Participants and setting. The research subjects were students of the Indonesian Literature Study Program (class of 2025) enrolled in the Language and Literature Entrepreneurship course at UNIMED. Seven students were selected purposively as primary informants because they represented the fourteen study groups in the course; each group was given the same assignment — to create a local-wisdom-based digital comic — with varying storylines and production processes. To preserve confidentiality, informants are referred to as I1 through I7.

Data collection. Data were collected through three techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The interview guide covered four domains: (a) understanding of new media literacy; (b) experience in creating digital comics; (c) local wisdom and cultural preservation; and (d) language and literature entrepreneurship. The guide was designed to elicit

informants' subjective experiences while strengthening the study's theoretical and empirical contributions.

Data analysis and trustworthiness. Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To enhance credibility, the study applied source and technique triangulation across the three data-collection methods, so that observational, interview, and documentary evidence were cross-checked before conclusions were drawn.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings organized around the four interview domains. Interpretation and theoretical dialogue are reserved for the Discussion. Table 2 summarizes the data reduction, and representative verbatim excerpts follow each theme.

Table 1. Data Reduction

No	Theme	Condensed Finding	Illustrative Behavior
1	New media literacy	Students shifted from consuming digital content to producing it, reinterpreting literacy as a productive, income-generating skill.	Active use of TikTok, Instagram, Canva, Webtoon, CapCut, and AI tools; self-directed learning of visual design and communication strategy.
2	Digital comic creation	Creation began with selecting a folktale, reworking it for contemporary audiences while retaining its core, then designing it across applications.	Adapting folklore into modern visual narratives; using AI tools for illustration and storyboarding.
3	Local wisdom & cultural preservation	Local wisdom was integrated as a source of uniqueness and identity, modernized without erasing authentic values.	Folklore, traditional dress, cuisine, regional languages, myths, and North Sumatran (Batak) narratives adapted for younger audiences.
4	Language & literature entrepreneurship	Students moved from equating entrepreneurship with conventional trading to recognizing digital content as a monetizable product.	Interest in monetization via social media, freelance illustration, content partnerships, and creative branding.

Source: Researchers, 2026

A. New Media Literacy: From Consumption to Production

Most informants demonstrated a relatively high level of adaptation to digital media, actively using platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Canva, Webtoon, CapCut, and various AI-based applications. Prior to the course, however, they positioned themselves primarily as consumers of digital content rather than producers. Through digital comic production, they began to reinterpret media literacy as a productive skill capable of generating economic opportunities, and reported learning — largely on their own — about visual design, storytelling, audience engagement, and digital communication strategy.

Informant I: "At first, I thought social media was just for entertainment, but after making a digital comic I realized this work could actually earn money."

B. Experience in Creating Digital Comics

Digital comics emerged as one of the most preferred creative media because they combine visual communication, narrative storytelling, and digital technology in an attractive, easily distributed

format aligned with Generation Z communication patterns. Informants explained that comics allowed them to express ideas more freely than conventional academic assignments, transforming folklore, local stories, and cultural symbols into contemporary visual narratives. Several integrated artificial-intelligence tools to support illustration and storyboard development. Students also reported attending to audience response — comments, shares, likes, and engagement metrics — as indicators of communicative effectiveness.

Informant II and III: “With comics, we could tell our folktale in our own visual way, and kept checking which panels people responded to.”

C. Local Wisdom and Cultural Preservation

A major finding was students' heightened awareness of preserving local wisdom through digital media. They recognized that local culture carries distinctive values that differentiate their content from dominant global popular culture. Forms of local wisdom integrated into the comics included folklore, traditional clothing, local culinary traditions, regional languages, myths, traditional values, and social norms originating from North Sumatran culture, with several students adapting Batak folklore into modern visual narratives. The findings indicate that students modernized cultural narratives without eliminating their authentic values, reporting that the use of local wisdom increased the originality of their content. Some students, however, encountered difficulties translating traditional values into modern visual formats and faced limitations in cultural references and visual-design skills.

Informant IV and V: “I wanted the Batak story to feel modern, but I was careful not to lose its real meaning – that made our comic feel more original”

D. Language and Literature Entrepreneurship

Prior to the course, most students associated entrepreneurship only with conventional activities such as trading or selling products directly. After producing digital comics, they began to understand that digital content can itself function as an entrepreneurial product with economic value, recognizing monetization opportunities through social-media platforms, digital advertising, freelance illustration services, content partnerships, and creative branding. Several informants expressed intentions to continue producing comics independently and to commercialize their works. Students also reported developing communication and marketing strategies — visual branding, engaging captions, strategic hashtag use, and audience-interaction optimization — reflecting the emergence of entrepreneurial communication competencies.

Informant VI and VII: “Once we saw people asking to commission a comic, we understood this could be a real business, not just an assignment.”

From consumption to production: media literacy as productive capital. The transformation reported in Theme A confirms the productive turn in new media literacy theory (Lin et al., 2013): students enacted literacy through making rather than only through interpreting. Read through Schutz's social phenomenology, this shift is legible as a movement between two motive structures. The students' intensive interaction with social media since adolescence constitutes a “because-motive” that shaped their platform fluency, whereas their deliberate use of digital media to build portfolios, increase visibility, and create future economic opportunities constitutes an “in-order-to motive.” Media literacy thus operates as social and cultural capital that can be converted into entrepreneurial action — precisely the link the framework predicts between literacy and competency.

Digital comics as cultural representation. Themes B and C show digital comics functioning as sites of symbolic representation, echoing, who argues that digital comics can adapt folktales and cultural values into formats attractive to younger audiences (Dewi, 2024). The present study extends this: students were not merely reproducing culture but reconstructing it, acting as active communicators who negotiated between authenticity and contemporary appeal. This is the mechanism of cultural entrepreneurship in the framework — local wisdom is mobilized simultaneously as symbolic identity and as a source of originality that differentiates content in a saturated market.

Entrepreneurial competency in the creative economy. Theme D resonates with (Taslimahudin & Susanty, 2026) who document Generation Z's technical fluency, but it advances the argument by showing how that fluency is converted into value — the step their study leaves open. It also refines (Andini & Susanti, 2025), who find innovation to be the most influential driver of

Generation Z's entrepreneurial interest: here, innovation is enacted specifically through the culturally grounded reinvention of folklore, suggesting that in a creative economy, cultural distinctiveness is itself an innovation strategy. Entrepreneurial competency, in other words, emerged not in spite of cultural content but through it.

Systematic positioning of the novelty. To move the study's contribution beyond assertion, Table 3 compares each claimed novelty directly with the focus of prior research, specifying what earlier work established and what this study adds.

Table 2. Systematic Comparison of Novelty with Prior Research

Aspect	Focus of prior research	Contribution of this study
Positioning of media literacy	Protective/critical, cognitive competency to shield audiences from media effects (Siregar, 2023; Potter, 2019).	Reframes media literacy as productive entrepreneurial capital that generates creative-economic value.
Role of local-wisdom digital comics	Instructional media for school subjects (Ni Made Sunaryan Niriavidya & Werang, 2023; Ni Made Santi Ayuni et al., 2023).	Positions them as both object and medium of cultural entrepreneurship with commercial potential.
View of Generation Z	Skilled but described mainly as users/consumers of social media (Taslimahudin & Susanty, 2026).	Positions Generation Z as active producers who monetize content and build personal branding.
Analytical integration	Media literacy, culture, and entrepreneurship examined separately.	Integrates the five constructs into one framework linking literacy, creation, competency, creative economy, and cultural entrepreneurship.
Theoretical lens	Entrepreneurial interest analyzed largely through variable-based models (Andini & Susanti, 2025).	Uses Schutz's because-/in-order-to motives to explain the subjective process of the entrepreneurial turn.

Source: Authors, 2026

Implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to phenomenological communication research by showing how students subjectively interpret digital creativity, local identity, and entrepreneurial aspiration within new-media environments, and it offers an integrative model in which media literacy, cultural preservation, and entrepreneurship are mutually constitutive rather than separate. Practically, it suggests that entrepreneurship education in higher education should integrate digital creativity, communication skills, and cultural innovation simultaneously; the project-based digital-comic model is one concrete, transferable design for doing so.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that local-wisdom-based digital comics function not only as creative digital media but also as productive capital for strengthening new media literacy and entrepreneurial awareness among Generation Z students in the Indonesian Literature Study Program at UNIMED. Through the process of creating digital comics, students moved from positioning themselves as consumers of digital content to becoming active producers who use digital media creatively, critically, and economically, developing competencies in visual communication, storytelling, digital branding, audience engagement, and entrepreneurial communication.

Interpreted through Schutz's social phenomenology, this transformation reflects the interplay of "because-motives" (familiarity with digital technology since adolescence) and "in-order-to motives" (future-oriented aspirations toward self-expression, portfolio building, and economic opportunity). The integration of folklore, regional languages, traditional values, and North Sumatran cultural symbols strengthened students' cultural identity while increasing the originality and competitiveness of their content, so that digital comics served simultaneously as a communication medium and a cultural-preservation strategy — the closing of the loop that defines cultural entrepreneurship.

Limitations and future research. As a phenomenological study of seven informants in a single course at one university, the findings are transferable rather than statistically generalizable. Future research could extend the integrative model across institutions and disciplines, incorporate longitudinal designs to trace whether students' entrepreneurial intentions translate into sustained practice, and employ mixed methods to test the proposed links among the five constructs on a larger scale.

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