

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the current digital era, the use of the internet in Indonesia continues to increase. By 2025, the number of internet users will reach 229.43 million people or around 80% of Indonesia's total population (Cloudcomputing.id, 2025; Gizmology, 2025). This increase has also encouraged the advancement of science and technology (Rahmatunnisa et al., 2023), but on the other hand, it also poses challenges in the form of increasing the spread of hoaxes on digital media and social media (Effendi, 2023). Hoaxes can be interpreted as information or facts that are false (Ulfa Batoebara & Hasugian, 2023) and have the potential to lead public opinion if the truth is not verified first (Dwi Nurhaliza, 2024). The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology recorded 1,615 hoax issues handled throughout 2023, with a cumulative number of 12,547 hoax content from August 2018 to the end of 2023 (InfoPublik.id, 2024). The large amount of hoax information circulating makes it difficult for people to distinguish between true and false information (Nizaa et al., 2023).

Based on the 2022 Kominfo and Katadata surveys, Indonesia's digital literacy index is at 3.54 on a scale of 1–5, which shows that people's digital literacy and critical thinking skills still need more attention (Infopublik.id, 2023). This condition contributes to the rampant spread of hoaxes, even though digital literacy has a strategic role in equipping people to be able to interact wisely in the digital space (Nurjuman et al., 2025).

This problem is very vulnerable to be experienced by teenagers because they are an internet generation that tends to be active users, making them very vulnerable to becoming perpetrators of spreading hoax news on the internet. For today's teenagers, various information can spread quickly both from the surrounding environment and digital media without adequate filtering. Teenagers as active users of internet media, skills in filtering information are still lacking so they are still vulnerable to exposure to false information. This condition is the main reason why adolescents aged 18–25 years are set as the target segment in design. This age group is in the phase of identity development and has a high interest in interactive digital media. The rise of the hoax phenomenon due to low digital literacy and critical thinking skills shows that there is a need for alternative media that is able to convey education in an interesting way. (Rico Oktavian and al., 2024) (Preliminary) and al., 2024)

Basically, local Indonesian culture is able and effective as an alternative medium to teach anti-hoax education to teenagers but is still rarely used, one of which is the story of the Ramayana. The story of the Ramayana itself tells a classic story about the love story between Rama, Sinta, and Rahwana (Puspitasari et al., 2024). The story has been retold in various languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tibetan, Tamil, Old Javanese, Japanese, Telugu, Assam, Malayalam, Bengali, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Odia, and Kashmiri, presenting a variety of points of view. One of the most famous characters in this story is Rahwana, a king from Alengka. (Sinha & Ali, 2024)

In general, Rahwana is often understood as a complex antagonist in the story of Ramayana (suaramerdeka.com, 2024). One of the most iconic events involving Rahwana was the kidnapping of Dewi Sinta which triggered a major conflict with Rama. However, a number of versions and reinterpretations, including the novel by Anand Neelakantan, present an alternative point of view that suggests that the event is not always interpreted singularly (Wardani & Triyono, 2024). This difference in interpretation suggests that one event can be conveyed in a different narrative, depending on the point of view of the narrator. This is also reflected in the story of Sinta Obong (agnipariksha), when there are allegations that Sinta has been defiled during her captivity by Rahwana. The accusation has not been proven definitively, but it has an impact on the staking of Sinta's moral integrity in front of the public (Sinha & Ali, 2024). This story shows how prejudice and unverified information can shape collective opinion and harm certain parties. In this context, the figure of Rahwana can be understood as a reinterpretation of a character who is often portrayed unilaterally as a pure antagonist, even though she has character complexity that is rarely critically reviewed. This phenomenon is relevant to the current condition of society, where information in digital media is often received instantly without an adequate verification process. Therefore, the story of Ramayana, especially through the character of Rahwana and the Sinta Obong incident, can be interpreted as a reflection on the importance of being critical in responding to information to avoid the spread of hoaxes. Internet media itself is one of the main factors in the rampant spread of hoaxes (Susanto et al., 2022).

Adolescents, especially 18–25 years old, are included in *the emerging adulthood* phase, which is the transition period from adolescence to adulthood. They are the group that most often interacts with the internet and actively access various content, both entertainment and internet education. From the results of the questionnaire to 133 respondents. It found that as many as

89.5% of teenagers between the ages of 18-25 said they liked to read comics, and 79.7% of them thought that they read digital comics more often than they read print comics. Their proximity to digital media makes online-based platforms an effective medium to reach this target audience. Based on these considerations, digital comics were chosen as a relevant medium (Santrock , 2010) (Rico Oktavian and al. , 2024) because they are able to combine visual and narrative aspects that are in accordance with the characteristics of adolescent content consumption. Digital comics are visuals that can be accessed with digital and electronic media that are arranged side by side in a certain reading order to convey information from readers (Payanti, 2022). In addition, digital comics can reach a wider audience because digital comics can be accessed anywhere and anytime and are available on various devices such as *smartphones*, tablets, laptops, and computers. This shows that digital comics are very suitable for media to distribute education, entertainment, or disseminate information and culture because their delivery is also more interesting and easily accepted in today's era. There are various platforms that can be used to read digital comics including *Line* Webtoon, MangaEvo, Webcomics, Manga UP, Mangatoon, Kakao Webtoon, KaryaKarsa, Bilibilicomics, *Tapas*, and the like.

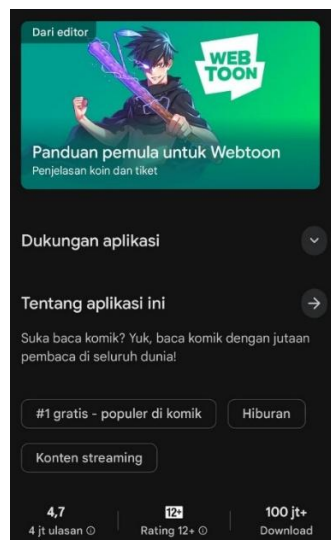


Figure 1. 1 Review Rating and Total Downloads, 2025
(Source: LINE Webtoon App on Playstore)

From the results of the questionnaire to 133 respondents, it was found that as many as 79.7% of adolescents aged 18-25 years chose to use Line Webtoon as a digital comic media used to read comics. The Line Webtoon platform is one of the *most popular digital comic platforms today, in addition to providing* an easy-to-access, free, interactive format, and presenting narrative visuals that suit the tastes of today's teenagers. Of the various digital comics

in Indonesia, Line Webtoon occupies the first position in the most popular comic nominations on the playstore in 2025 with a total of more than 100 million downloads, 4 million reviews, and a rating of 4.7. In addition, in celebration of its 13th anniversary, they announced a significant achievement in September 2023, which managed to record 196 million monthly active users globally. The four largest markets that contributed to this achievement were Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, and Indonesia (*Line Webtoon Official*, 2024). Of course, this popularity cannot be separated from the format presented by Line Webtoon, because comics are in general. This popularity cannot be separated from the unique format presented, namely by developing the concept of *infinite canvas*, or it can be called the use of electronic media screens so that it causes vertical, interactive and almost infinite canvas formats. The correlation between the appointment of Rahwana and webtoon media in this study is in an effort to build critical awareness, especially for adolescents aged 18-25 years who are prone to being consumed by hoax news. (Syafiq, 2024)

Thus, this research is expected to present new media that is suitable and liked by young people, so that it can be a means of education about the phenomenon of hoaxes. In addition, it is also expected to be able to instill an understanding that information or stories in real life sometimes have more than 1 version of the truth so that they, especially teenagers, can be wiser and not just swallow information without reviewing and comparing from other perspectives first before making a conclusion.

1.2 Problem Identification

1. Today's teenagers show a tendency to not know local cultures such as puppetry which actually contains educational values in instilling a critical attitude towards false information or hoaxes. In fact, the Minister of Communication and Information stated that culture is one of the important elements that can be used as an effective means to ward off the spread of hoaxes through instilling the value of truth and local wisdom. (Jogja.antaranews.com, 2025)
2. Teenagers are a group that is vulnerable to being targeted and perpetrators of spreading hoaxes, because they are active users of digital media and social media. (Rico Oktavian and al. , 2024)
3. Based on the Kominfo survey (2023), the digital literacy index in Indonesia is still not good, so the ability to think critically and be aware of digital information is still low. This

condition further strengthens the need for media that can help increase digital literacy among teenagers.

4. There are not many educational media based on local culture, especially digital comics or webtoons with a puppet theme, which have been developed specifically to instill moral values while increasing anti-hoax awareness among the younger generation (LPM Mayantara, 2025).

1.3 Problem Formulation

From the explanation that has been made from the background of the problem to the problem identification stage, the problem formulation of this design is found, namely:

How to design a *webtoon* comic about the story of Rahwana in the Ramayana story as an educational medium for anti-hoax and local cultural preservation for teenagers aged 18–25 years?

1.4 Problem Limitations

The limitations of the problems created in the design of this final project are as follows:

1. The design of this Webtoon only focuses on comics for teenagers aged 18-25 years
2. The design of this webtoon only focuses on the story of Ramayana, especially discussing alternative representations of the character of Rahwana
3. The design of this Webtoon focuses on the value of education
4. The design of this digital comic will be published on the *Webtoon Canvas platform*

1.5 Purpose of Planning

The purpose of designing digital comics as an alternative representation of the character of Rahwana for teenagers 18-25 years old is as follows:

1. Representing the character of Rahwana in the story of Ramayana so that it is not only seen as an antagonist, but also as a character with more complex characters from various perspectives.
2. Designing digital comics *with* a Webtoon platform to preserve local culture by presenting interesting ramayana stories to teenagers aged 18-25 years.
3. Make digital comics a means of critical literacy education to adolescents aged 18-25 years by showing that an event can have a variety of stories and truths from various perspectives.

4. Increase public awareness, especially adolescents aged 18-25 years by instilling an understanding of the importance of processing information before concluding a phenomenon so that hoaxes do not occur.

1.6 Benefits of Planning

With the design of this Webtoon-based digital comic, it is hoped that it can be an interesting educational medium for teenagers aged 18-25 years to improve their critical thinking literacy so that it can reduce the spread of hoaxes by understanding the values in various viewpoints of the Ramayana story, as well as preserving the Ramayana story through an alternative depiction of the character of Rahwana.

1.7 Planning Framework

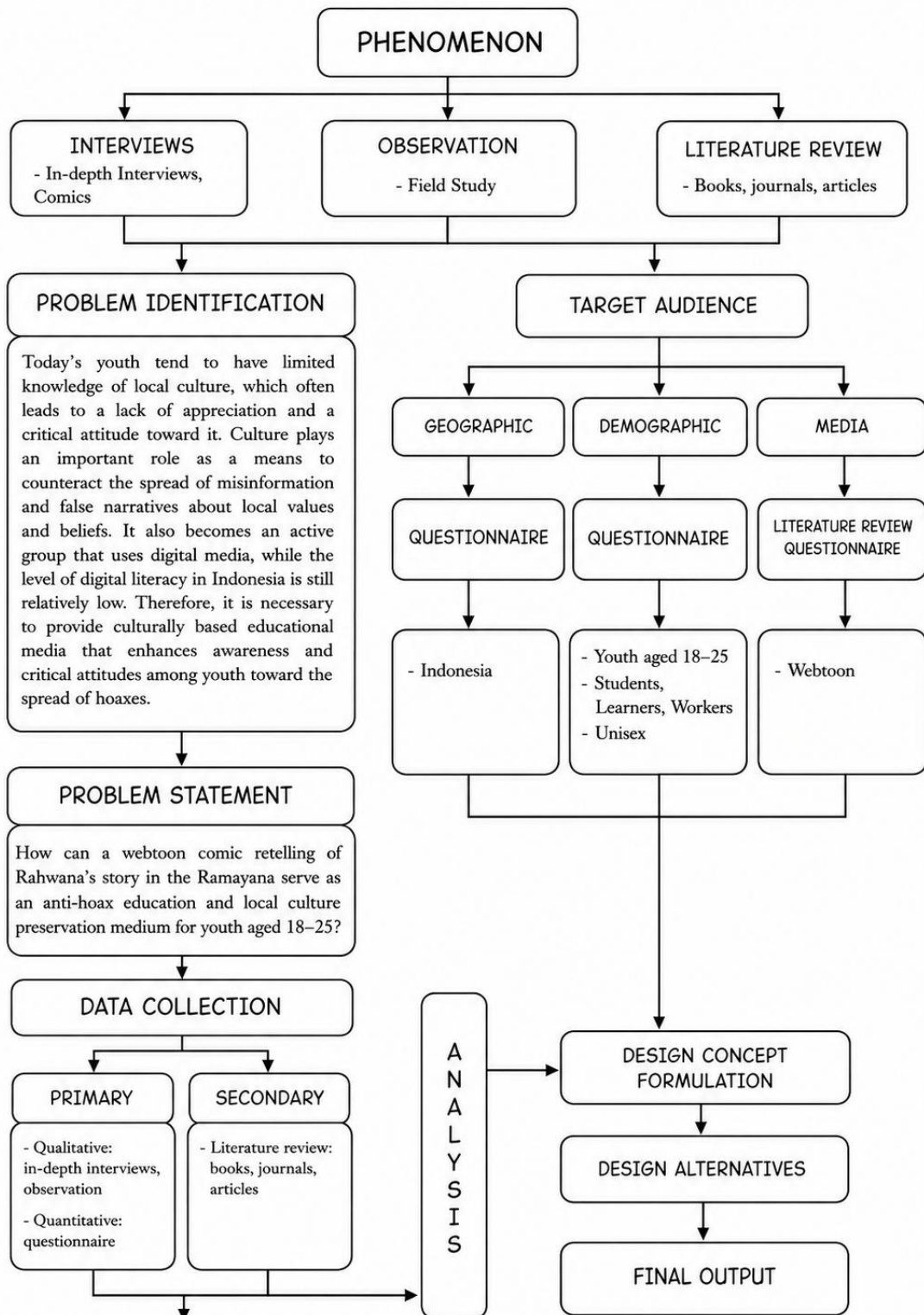


Figure 1.1 Planning Framework, 2025

(Source: Personal Documents)