

NARRATING LOCAL WISDOM AND ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH DIGITAL FOLKLORE IN *TIMUN MAS AND THE LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD*

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Abstract

Digital storytelling continues to shape how cultures are preserved and shared, making examining folklore in both its traditional and digital forms essential to sustain ethnic identity, local wisdom, and cultural literacy. This study explores how local wisdom and ethnic identity are narrated through digital folklore in the Indonesian story of *Timun Mas* and the Western tale of *The Little Red Riding Hood*. Utilizing Jan Harold Brunvand's folklore theory and ethnic literature as theoretical frameworks, the research employs a descriptive qualitative method with an American Studies approach. The primary data consists of words, phrases, and sentences from these two folkloric children's stories. The analysis reveals that *Timun Mas* embodies spiritual resilience, ancestral wisdom, and a harmonious relationship with nature, highlighting key aspects of Indonesian local wisdom. Meanwhile, *The Little Red Riding Hood* emphasizes awareness, self-restraint, and personal responsibility in confronting danger, reflecting values prominent in Western cultural contexts. These findings confirm that both stories serve as cultural tools to convey and reinforce ethnic identity through their narratives, characters, and cultural symbols. Digital transformation makes cultural values more accessible and relevant to today's generation. The interaction between tradition and digitalization plays a key role in preserving cultural heritage in the modern era. The findings suggest that digital folklore can strengthen cultural literacy and ethnic identity. Future research is encouraged to explore transmediality and comparative literature to better understand how local and global values are negotiated through evolving narrative forms.

Keywords: Digital folklore, ethnic literature, local wisdom, cultural identity, storytelling

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed how societies preserve and disseminate their cultures through digital storytelling. This phenomenon represents a significant social fact demonstrating the transformation of media's influence on preserving ethnic identity and local wisdom. Digital storytelling provides broader and more interactive access to folklore, making it an effective medium to uphold cultural values inherited through generations, while adapting to contemporary

communication needs (Lundby, 2018a; Robin, 2016). Thus, digital narratives not only strengthen ethnic community bonds but also enhance cultural literacy among younger generations who are more familiar with digital technology as a tool for learning and cultural exchange (Couldry, 2012; H. Hasan, 2021).

The transformation of folklore narrative from traditional to digital forms creates a new space for a more dynamic and inclusive cultural revitalization. Socio-cultural studies reveal that folklore digitalization is not merely static preservation but a process connecting local contexts with globalization through cultural adaptation (Blank, 2015; Iwabuchi, 2013). Digital storytelling offers opportunities for local cultures to remain vibrant within increasingly digitally connected societies by reinforcing cultural literacy and ethnic awareness in ways that are relevant and accessible. Therefore, studying folklore in various formats is essential to secure the continuity of ethnic identity, local wisdom, and cultural literacy in an ever-changing digital era (H. Hasan, 2021; Lundby, 2018a).

Research on cultural preservation via digital storytelling indicates that digitalization facilitates broader cultural heritage preservation but also presents challenges in maintaining authenticity and cultural context (Bendix, 2016). Hillis (2017c) emphasizes how digital folklore is a crucial medium merging tradition and technology, enabling folk stories to live on and adapt in the digital age. Similarly, Noyes (2018a) discusses the role of narrative in shaping ethnic and cultural identity through digital media, illustrating how digital storytelling can serve as a powerful tool for conserving and expressing cultural identity. Kearney (2020a) also highlights the role of digital media in providing easier and broader access to folk tales, which is essential for global cultural preservation and dissemination.

The close relationship between ethnic identity and digital storytelling is further reinforced by Baker's (2021) study, which demonstrates that digital storytelling serves as a medium to express and strengthen ethnic values as a form of cultural preservation. Smith (2022) adds that digital folklore prevents cultural extinction and enhances cultural literacy, especially among younger generations who are more accustomed to digital

technology as a medium for learning and cultural exchange. Collectively, these studies affirm that digital storytelling represents a highly potential and essential arena for nurturing and revitalizing folklore in the modern context, safeguarding the continuity of ethnic identity and local wisdom in increasingly digitally connected societies (Baker, 2021; Bendix, 2016; Hillis, 2017c; Kearney, 2020a; Noyes, 2018a; Smith, 2022).

This research explores how local wisdom and ethnic identity are narrated through digital folklore in the Indonesian story *Timun Mas* and the Western tale *The Little Red Riding Hood*. Digitalizing cultural heritage presents a significant opportunity for preserving and disseminating local cultural values (Bendix, 2016), while digital folklore bridges tradition and technology in reinforcing cultural identity (Hillis, 2017c). Digital narratives play a crucial role in shaping cultural awareness and collective identity through storytelling that involves cultural symbols and values (Harris, 2019; Noyes, 2018a). Digital media, as a preservation medium for folk tales, makes local wisdom more accessible and relevant to today's younger generation (Kearney, 2020a) and expands the reach of ethnic stories, further strengthening ethnic identity (Baker, 2021). Therefore, this study views digital folklore as a strategic tool for maintaining and transmitting cultural values and ethnic identity through narratives packaged on digital platforms.

This research starts from the hypothesis that the digitalization of folklore stories functions not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a strategic medium to strengthen local wisdom and ethnic identity through digital narratives. Bendix (2016) emphasizes that digitalization offers excellent opportunities to disseminate and maintain local cultural values that are vulnerable to being lost in the modern era. Hillis (2017c) adds that digital folklore combines tradition and technology to reinforce cultural identity in a more dynamic way that is easily accessible to younger generations. Furthermore, Noyes (2018a) and Harris (2019) highlight the importance of narrative for shaping cultural awareness and collective identity, especially in the digital context, which enables a broad and interactive dissemination reach. Kearney (2020a) affirms that digital media enhances the accessibility of folk tales, making local wisdom relevant and sustainable amid changing times. Correspondingly, Baker (2021) argues that digital platforms enable global dissemination of ethnic stories, which impacts the strengthening of ethnic identity

on a broader and more sustainable scale. Therefore, the initial hypothesis of this study is that digital folklore plays a significant role in transmitting cultural values and reinforcing ethnic identity through digital media that harmonizes traditional and modern aspects.

Underlying Theory

1. Folklore Theory, Cultural Literacy, and Ethnic Identity

This study is grounded in the understanding that folklore is a crucial medium in preserving culture and ethnic identity. Jan Harold Brunvand's theory asserts that folk tales are social tools for transmitting local values and wisdom across generations (Brunvand, 2001). Meanwhile, ethnic literary theory highlights how ethnic identity and cultural experiences are manifested within literary narratives as forms of cultural representation (Gates, 1988). In the context of cultural and digital literacy, the theory of cultural literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) emphasizes the importance of cultural interaction as a form of social capital increasingly developed through digital media, opening new opportunities for preserving cultural values.

These theories play a vital role in this research by providing a comprehensive framework to understand the function of folk tales as a medium for preserving and transmitting local wisdom and ethnic identity across generations. Referring to Brunvand's theory, this research underscores that folklore narratives function as entertainment and as vehicles to instill cultural values, social norms, and distinctive symbols of ethnic identity. Furthermore, ethnic literary theory enriches the analysis by affirming that stories like *Timun Mas* and *The Little Red Riding Hood* reflect cultural experiences and the construction of group identity through narratives embraced by their communities. The cultural literacy approach adds an essential dimension by highlighting how audience interaction in digital media, particularly among technology-savvy younger generations, can strengthen cultural appreciation and broaden access to and relevance of these values in the modern world. Thus, these three theories collectively form a solid foundation for understanding the dynamic preservation of culture that is contextual, interactive, and adaptive to the development of digital technology.

2. Theory of Cultural Digitalization and Digital Folklore

This section examines the transformation of media and digital technology in the continuity and evolution of folklore. The American Studies approach provides an interdisciplinary framework to understand the adaptation of traditional narratives in digital and new media (Rosenberg, 2011). Digital folklore theory explains how folk tales evolve in the digital realm and how digital technology serves as a new space for strengthening and preserving cultural identity through digital folklore (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017b). This theory is particularly relevant to examining how the stories of *Timun Mas* and *The Little Red Riding Hood* are presented and maintained in participatory and contextual digital forms.

This theory is crucial in this research because it offers a conceptual framework to understand how traditional narratives such as *Timun Mas* and *The Little Red Riding Hood* transform the digital domain. Using the American Studies approach, this research explores how digital media changes how stories are disseminated and influences how audiences interact with and internalize the cultural values embedded within them. (Rosenberg, 2011). Digital folklore theory broadens this perspective by highlighting the evolution of folklore within digital technology contexts, where folk tales are preserved and presented in more flexible, participatory, and contextual formats, thus sustainably reinforcing cultural and ethnic identity. (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017b). This approach is relevant for analyzing how digital platforms become new spaces that enable cultural encounters and dialogues and support the preservation of dynamic cultural heritage in the modern era.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on an interdisciplinary American Studies framework to examine digital folklore narratives in the story of *Timun Mas*, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023 (Y. Khairani, 2023), and *The Little Red Riding Hood*, published by Twinkl in 2018 (Twinkl Ltd., 2018). This approach is chosen as it allows the researcher to describe and understand the socio-cultural context and values deeply embedded in

folklore and context. (Nasution, 2014). Qualitative descriptive research prioritizes data collection in words, phrases, and sentences from narrative stories to explore how local wisdom and ethnic identity are represented through digital media. (Moleong, 2017).

Primary data were collected through textual documentation of the traditional stories and their digital versions, then analyzed using narrative and thematic techniques to uncover cultural values such as spiritual resilience, ancestral wisdom, and connection to nature in *Timun Mas*, as well as awareness and responsibility in The Little Red Riding Hood (Creswell, 2014; Endraswara, 2013). This study also highlights the role of digital media as an effective means of preserving folklore (Prensky, 2011), as well as the interaction between tradition and digital transformation in sustainably strengthening cultural and ethnic identities through digital folklore (Hillis, 2017c), in line with folklore research principles emphasizing understanding cultural meaning in evolving stories (Dorson, 1972).

Narrating Local Wisdom and Ethnic Identity

The research reveals narrative elements from the stories of *Timun Mas* and The Little Red Riding Hood, uncovering symbolism and cultural values contained within them, such as spiritual resilience, ancestral wisdom, and harmonious relationship with nature in *Timun Mas*, as well as awareness, self-control, and personal responsibility in The Little Red Riding Hood. Here, we explain how these various narrative elements form the framework of cultural values that become the foundation of ethnic identity and how these narratives serve as effective cultural educational media.

1. Narrative Elements of *Timun Mas* and The Little Red Riding Hood

The story of *Timun Mas* contains various narrative elements and symbols rich in cultural meaning, as reflected through the different symbols and values embedded in the narrative. The mother's instruction to *Timun Mas* to throw the contents of the package when danger arises represents ancestral wisdom and teaches obedience to important advice. (A. Khairani, 2023). The act of throwing the needle that turns into a bamboo grove not only functions as magical protection but also reflects a harmonious relationship with nature, which is the core of local wisdom.

The conflict with Buta Ijo symbolizes resilience and courage in facing life's challenges, a significant value taught through this folk narrative. The symbol of the bamboo grove emphasizes nature's role as both protector and source of life, conveying messages of harmony and balance within local culture. Timun Mas's steadfastness in facing threats affirms the values of spiritual resilience and bravery that underpin the protagonist's character in the story (A. Khairani, 2023). An explanatory table will follow to provide a clearer illustration of the narrative elements or symbols.

Table 1. Narrative Elements of Timun Mas (Y.Khairani, 2023)

Narrative Element / Symbol	Explanation	Text Quote	Cultural Value
Mother's message to Timun Mas	The message about throwing the contents of the package in times of danger serves as an essential instruction in the story. This message reflects the wisdom of previous generations as practical knowledge passed down orally.	"Throw the contents of the package when there is danger!" p.9	Ancestral wisdom, obedience to parents
Needle throw turning into a bamboo grove.	The thrown needle transforms into a bamboo grove, symbolizing magical protection. In local culture, bamboo often symbolizes resilience and flexibility.	"Timun Mas took the needle, then threw it. Immediately, the needle turned into a vast bamboo grove." p.10	Protection from danger, magical power, and nature symbol
Conflict with Buta Ijo	The fight between Timun Mas and Buta Ijo represents life's challenges. It shows the struggle between good (Timun Mas) and evil (Buta Ijo).	"Buta Ijo chased Timun Mas again. Timun Mas ran wildly." p.15	Resilience, courage, and struggle in life
Cucumber field	A natural symbol that appears due to the power of narrative and symbols. The cucumber field appears from seeds thrown by Timun Mas as a symbol of nature's strength, assisting her.	"Timun Mas then threw cucumber seeds. Immediately, the seeds turned into a cucumber field." p.13	Harmony with nature, local wisdom, power in simplicity
Timun Mas's steadfastness	Timun Mas shows steadfastness and cleverness when facing threats by using salt.	"Buta Ijo chased Timun Mas again. Timun Mas quickly threw salt. Immediately, the salt turned into a sea." p.12	Spiritual resilience, courage, steadfastness, and intelligence in facing threats

The mother's message to Timun Mas, which contains the instruction to throw the contents of the package when in danger, represents a practice of cultural literacy where

social values and norms are conveyed contextually within cultural interactions (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This message functions not merely as a narrative instruction but as a reflection of ancestral wisdom and obedience that strengthens the reproduction of traditional values through symbolic communication, sustaining the continuity of ethnic identity.

The thrown needle, transforming into a bamboo grove, symbolizes the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, embodying local wisdom embedded within folklore. Digital folklore facilitates preserving and transforming cultural symbols into a broad and adaptive digital medium. (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017c). Through digitalization, these symbols become tools for education and cultural identity reinforcement in a digital society.

The conflict between Timun Mas and Buta Ijo reflects life's challenges, requiring fortitude and bravery while enforcing social and ethnic identity through narrative cultural practices. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This narrative serves as a medium for teaching courage and steadfastness, which can be developed and preserved through digital media as an ethical inspiration for current generations. (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017c).

Meanwhile, in the story of The Little Red Riding Hood, the message emphasizes vigilance and responsibility in facing danger, a practice of cultural literacy in which social norms and moral values are conveyed contextually through narrative. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This message teaches caution toward threats and strengthens self-awareness and social control values, which are crucial for shaping individual and collective identity in Western culture.

The symbols in the story, such as the red cloak and the figure of the Wolf, possess strong meanings in shaping cultural identity and moral teaching. The red cloak symbolizes bravery and vulnerability, while the Wolf represents danger and deceit that must be guarded against. Within digital folklore, these symbols undergo transformation that enables the preservation, dissemination, and adaptation of cultural values into digital

media relevant to modern generations. (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017c). Below is a detailed table of the narrative elements or symbols.

Table 2. Narrative Elements of The Little Red Riding Hood (Twinkl Ltd., 2018)

Narrative Element / Symbol	Explanation	Text Quote	Cultural Value
Mother's Warning to Little Red	The mother's message is to stay on the right path, not to linger, to keep to the path, and never to talk to strangers.	"Now, you're to take the cupcakes straight to Granny's. No dilly-dallying, keep to the path, and never talk to strangers. Do you hear me?"	Obedience, vigilance against danger
Red Cloak (Red Riding Hood)	Symbol of uniqueness and purity of character, as well as a visible social identity	"Her bright red cape swung just above her ankles."	Identity, solid visual symbol
Encounter with the Wolf	An interaction depicting temptation and danger from an external, potentially malevolent party	"Hello, little girl," said a silky voice. "I'm Mr Wolf."	Vigilance, intrigue, conflict
Forest	A setting representing a world full of risks and uncertainties	"As she skipped merrily through the sun-dappled forest..."	The natural world, as well as hidden dangers
Cake Basket	Symbol of the child's love and responsibility toward family	"piling them into a wicker basket..."	Affection, familial responsibility

The conflict in the narrative between The Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf is a metaphor for life struggles and social ethical learning. Through this story, the values of awareness, self-control, and social responsibility are learned and maintained through narrative cultural practices, as outlined in the theory of cultural literacy. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In the digital realm, this tale provides space for education and inspiration of contextual ethical values that can be developed by changing times (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Hillis, 2017c).

2. Digital Folklore as a Medium for Cultural Transmission and Revitalization

Digital folklore is essential in preserving and adapting culture through digital media, replacing traditional oral and print methods with more interactive and disseminative platforms. Digitization enables folklore to be stored as digital archives and updated to align with modern socio-cultural contexts, especially for younger, active digital media users (Bendix, 2016; Blank, 2015; Rosenberg, 2011). Thus, folklore becomes a dynamic living medium that continually evolves.

Beyond mere preservation, digital folklore provides space for revitalization and re-contextualization of stories and cultural symbols through multimedia and interactivity. This approach allows old folklore to be reinterpreted with new meanings without losing its essential core, making it relevant in modern cultural practices and social guidance (Blank & Shaw, 2015; Couldry, 2012; Hillis, 2017a; Lundby, 2018b). Digital folklore as a bridge connecting tradition and technology.

Digitization also broadens cultural access for the younger generation, presenting local cultural stories attractively and contextually to enhance appreciation and understanding of ethnic identity through active cultural literacy practices. (Baker, 2021; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; R. Hasan, 2021). Therefore, digital folklore not only maintains the continuity of ethnic identity and cultural values but also reinforces a sense of community and cultural sustainability in an ever-changing society. (Brunvand, 2001; Kearney, 2020b; Noyes, 2018b).

3. Comparative Cultural Values and Implications for Cultural Literacy

The story of *Timun Mas* from Indonesia and The Little Red Riding Hood from Western tradition contains cultural values that reflect their respective societies' social and moral frameworks. *Timun Mas* highlights values of family, courage, and harmony with nature, reflecting local wisdom and the spirituality of Indonesian culture. (Brunvand, 2001; Noyes, 2018a). In contrast, The Little Red Riding Hood emphasizes vigilance, obedience to social norms, and individual responsibility in facing danger, reflecting Western cultural values related to discipline and personal morality. (Couldry, 2012; Lundby, 2018a). Both stories demonstrate how local cultural contexts shape the meaning and function of folklore as media for moral education and social identity.

Cultural symbols found in *Timun Mas*, such as Buta Ijo, and in The Little Red

Riding Hood, such as the Wolf, play roles in strengthening the ethnic identity and culture of their respective communities. These symbols are story elements and representations of cultural and historical values that actively reinforce a sense of togetherness and group identity (Blank, 2015; Hillis, 2017c). The differences in these symbols reflect variations in how societies respond to threats and safety, serving as instruments for cultural preservation and teaching fundamental social values. In the digital context, these symbols remain adapted for contemporary relevance without losing their essential meanings (Couldry, 2012; Lundby, 2018a).

Cultural exchange through folklore opens spaces for cross-cultural dialogue and broader global understanding, especially with digitization support, accelerating the dissemination of stories and new meanings. Although there is a risk of misinterpretation or changes in meaning when folklore moves across cultural contexts, digitization allows for contextualized adaptation and enrichment of values for global audiences, making folklore a bridge connecting cultures (H. Hasan, 2021; Rosenberg, 2011). This change illustrates that digital folklore is not only a tool for conservation but also a vital medium for intercultural dialogue across generations and ethnicities.

The implications of this research for cultural literacy and education are significant. The comparison of values and symbols in local and Western folklore can enrich curricula based on digital folk stories, enhance cultural sensitivity, and foster appreciation for diversity. Digital materials integrating local and global cultural values can strengthen the formation of inclusive and adaptive identities in younger generations. (Bendix, 2016; Kearney, 2020a). Future recommendations include developing interactive and reflective digital learning platforms so that folklore can continue to be a living part of society in modern and global contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that digital folklore plays a crucial role in preserving local wisdom and ethnic identity through narratives presented in digital form in the stories of *Timun Mas* from Indonesia and Little Red Riding Hood from America. Both stories contain essential cultural values representing their respective societies' social and

cultural contexts, where *Timun Mas* emphasizes spirituality, resilience, and harmonious relationships with nature. At the same time, *Little Red Riding Hood* highlights awareness, self-control, and personal responsibility in facing danger, reflecting prominent values in the Western cultural context. Digital adaptation allows these values to be maintained and disseminated more broadly and relevantly to younger generations, making digital storytelling an effective medium for strengthening cultural literacy and ethnic identity (Lundby, 2018a).

This study is limited to analyzing two folktales using a descriptive qualitative approach and specific theoretical frameworks, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, it does not explore the aspects of transmediality and audience interaction across various digital platforms, which are essential to the current development of folklore. Future research should broaden the scope by including folktales from diverse cultures, employing more varied comparative methods, and examining the influence of audience interaction and the negotiation of local and global values in digital narratives. Such studies are crucial for formulating effective strategies in developing digital materials for cultural education and preserving ethnic identity more inclusively and adaptively.

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