

**PENANG YOUNG VIEWERS' INTEREST AND
PERCEPTION TOWARD LOCAL
MESOMORPHIC SUPERHERO DESIGN (LMSD)**

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MESOMORPHIC SUPERHERO DESIGN (LMSD)**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Area
DOI	Diffusion of innovation
EC	Equator College
FPI	Four phase interest
H	Hypothesis
HCUC	Han Chiang University College
LMS	Local Mesomorphic Superheroes
LMSD	Local Mesomorphic Superhero Design
LYV	Local Young Viewers
MDEC	Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation
MODAS	Microsoft office data analysis system
MS	Mesomorphic Superheroes
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
S	Section
TDP	Top-down processing
TOA	The One Academy
UOW	University Of Wollongong
USM	University Science Malaysia
WOU	Wawasan Open University

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PERCEPSI DAN MINAT PENONTON MUDA PULAU PINANG TERHADAP REKA BENTUK MESOMORFIK ADIWIRA TEMPATAN (LMSD)

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memahami dan menganalisis bagaimana penonton muda Pulau Pinang melihat dan berminat terhadap reka bentuk adiwira mesomorfik tempatan (LMSD). Disebabkan kekurangan kajian dalam subjek adiwira di Malaysia, tidak diketahui sama ada penonton muda tempatan sanggup menerima figura adiwira buatan tempatan yang berotot seperti adiwira komik barat. Kajian dimulakan dengan melihat asal usul anak muda dan wira-wira tempatan, diikuti beberapa profesional tempatan telah ditemu bual untuk menyokong lagi idea dan kepentingan kajian tersebut. Sampel bagi kajian ini melibatkan 256 responden dalam tinjauan kuantitatif dalam talian, yang dianalisis menggunakan ujian-t dua ekor dengan nilai $p < 0.05$ sebagai nilai standard, dan 24 peminat komik, animasi, dan adiwira, telah ditemu bual melalui tinjauan temu bual kualitatif dalam talian melalui Google Meet. Menurut analisis data dan dapatan respons mereka, majoriti peserta berminat dengan reka bentuk adiwira mesomorfik (MSD) dan lebih suka adiwira tempatan tampil secara rekaan mesomorfik. Di samping itu, tiada perbezaan jantina yang boleh dilihat dalam cara mereka bertindak balas terhadap reka bentuk adiwira yang berotot. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa memasukkan jenis badan mesomorph ke dalam reka bentuk adiwira tempatan mempunyai kesan ke atas cara peserta mentafsir dan melihat sudut pandangan wira-wira tempatan. Data juga mendedahkan bahawa tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam persepsi dan minat terhadap reka bentuk adiwira tempatan (LSD) berotot antara peserta lelaki dan wanita. Berdasarkan ini, adalah dicadangkan sektor produk adiwira tempatan boleh mempertimbangkan untuk

mencipta adiwira tempatan berdasarkan jenis badan mesomorph. Siasatan lanjutan perlu dilakukan untuk mengetahui elemen-elemen lain yang boleh meningkatkan keberkesanan produk adiwira tempatan.

PENANG YOUNG VIEWERS' INTEREST AND PERCEPTION TOWARD LOCAL MESOMORPHIC SUPERHERO DESIGN (LMSD)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyse how Penang's young viewers perceive and interest in local mesomorphic superhero designs (LMSD). Due to a lack of research in the superhero subject in Malaysia, it is unknown whether local young viewers are willing to accept local made superhero figures that are muscularly built like western comic muscular superheroes. The study begins by looking into the origins of local young people and superheroes, followed by several local professionals were interviewed to further support the idea and significance of the study. The sample for this study involved 256 respondents in the online quantitative survey, which was analysed using a two-tail t-test with a p-value of 4.0 as a standard value, and 24 young comics, animation, and superhero fandom, were interviewed through an online qualitative interview survey via Google Meet. According to the data analysis and findings of their responses, the majority of the participants were interested in mesomorphic superhero design (MSD) and preferred the local superheroes to appear mesomorphically designed. In addition, there was no discernible gender difference in how they reacted to the muscular superhero design. The findings show that incorporating mesomorph body-type into local superhero designs has an impact on how the participants interpret and perceive the local superheroes' viewpoint. The data also revealed that there is no significant difference in perception and interest in muscular local superhero design (LSD) between male and female participants. Based on this, it is suggested that the local superhero product sector could consider establishing local superheroes based on mesomorph body type. Other elements that

could improve the effectiveness of local superhero items need to be investigated further.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Superheroes are usually portrayed as muscular simply because of a comic book and superhero media convention. Superheroes have a significant presence in our society and dominate popular media for boys and men, frequently reflecting unrealistic muscular ideals (Young, A. F., Gabriel, S., & Hollar, J. L. 2013). Muscles are frequently employed to portray strength and power, which is an important component of many superheroes' skills and personalities (Muthalib. H. A., personal communication, December 20, 2023), full interview can be referred to Appendix S. Additionally, it is due to the audience whereby people prefer to see strong and powerful characters, and muscles are a great method to do that (Hussain. H. A., personal communication, December 20, 2023). It is important to note, however, that not all superheroes are portrayed as muscular, and some characters may have various physical traits that nonetheless express strength and power. While muscular superheroes are often shown, it is important to point out that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to superhero design. Superheroes appear in a variety of sizes, forms, and powers. Some superheroes, such as Spider-Man and Ant-Man, are shown as slim or even wiry, despite their great agility and power. Other superheroes, such as the Hulk, have a large, muscular body to portray their great strength. Some superhero characters, such as Batman, are not necessarily represented as possessing superhuman strength, but their muscular body reflects their amazing physical ability and commitment to rigorous training. Furthermore, some superhero heroes, such as Professor X from the X-Men, may not require physical strength and instead combat evil using their cerebral

powers. Apparently, while strong physiques are often used to portray strength and power in superhero design, there are many diverse methods to superhero design, and the most essential component of a superhero is their character and talents. This study is primarily about muscular cinematic superhero design, and it is important to first understand how superheroes were originally developed and created, primarily from comic superheroes and early American superhero comic character design.

Comic book characters are present in a variety of media and items, largely as a result of recent film adaptations of the characters. Since Superman, the original comic book character, first debuted on the cover of Action Comic in 1938, comic book superheroes have had a strong body image. In the American approach, researchers have labelled Superheroes as modern mythology (McCloud, 2001:111). Digital animation often visualizes mythologies, fantasies, lifestyles, and superheroes from books or comics (Lent, 2004; Micheal Q Ceballos, 2012), resulting in successful stories. Hollywood has created a pseudo-religious yet secular ideology. The superhero unites all historical exemplars into a single, cohesive mental anchor. The superhero enjoys the legendary dualism of Greek deities, who had either earthly or earth-compatible biology (Pitafi, N. A., 2023). Character design is crucial in digital media, including animation, cinematography, video games, and television commercials (Syed Idros. S. S., personal communication, January 23, 2024). It resembles a process for creating a character out of thin air because it begins with a sketch and ends with the appearance of the finished article. Character design's main goal is to create a character for a certain medium that is appealing and intriguing to the target audience, engaging enough to pique their interest and make them fall in love with and remember the character at first sight. An effective character design is always one that can pique the interest and attention of the appropriate audience. The superhero genre refers to a

group of characters who have appeared throughout history. Whatever the story, the characters provided the basic defining parameters for the genre, and their conflicts became a means for creators and viewers to see problems in the real world. All genre literature, genre movies, and mass culture can be said to be built on stable forms, repetitive plots, and practised techniques. No exceptions and superhero scenes in which you can identify sustainable forms, the archetypes of heroes, and draw conclusions about modern society's problems, as well as how to solve these problems, which are considered acceptable by modern society, through the analysis of these sustainable forms. Of course, the described characteristics cannot be directly applied to all current heroes. There are currently so many comic book superheroes that they cannot be tallied. Apparently, Character design for these comic superheroes is primarily based on one philosophical theory, the archetype of heroism. The use of archetype theory is combined with the use of phenomenology as the chosen methodological basis for the study of myth in general and social myth in particular (Akim, K., Murza, G. K., Saenko, N., Suharyanto, A., & Kalimullin, D. 2019).

Previous research has suggested that superheroes are modern-day mythology gods based on the Greek gods' outlook and concept, and that the ancient people believed that these mythological beings were their hope and inspiration. The story was written by Siegel and illustrated by Schuster. When it came to Superman, the friends decided to make him a positive hero who saves people and the world rather than a villain (Akim, K., Murza, G. K., Saenko, N., Suharyanto, A., & Kalimullin, D. 2019). Hero is a Greek word that means "warrior." Scholars who study this cultural trope have constantly redefined the term hero, super or otherwise. According to Allison and Goethals (2011), the definition of a hero is in the eye of the beholder. According to

Loeb and Morris (2005), while the concept of a superhero is problematic, they are still heroes who have risked their lives for the sake of others and embody noble qualities.

Comic superheroes are often seen as muscular and strong because it is a norm of comic books and superhero media, superheroes are frequently shown as muscular. Muscles are frequently employed to portray strength and power, which is an important component of many superheroes' skills and personalities. Additionally, it is due to the audience. People prefer to see strong and powerful characters, and muscles are a great method to do that. *“a muscular body always gives a good impression of a strong superhero.”* (Syed Idros. S. S., personal communication, January 23, 2024). It is important to note, however, that not all superheroes are portrayed as muscular, and some characters may have various physical traits that nonetheless express strength and power. While muscles are often used in superhero media to depict strength and power, there are many characters that do not fit the classic muscular superhero archetype. Spider-Man, for example, is frequently shown as slender and agile rather than highly muscled. Similarly, characters such as Batman and Iron Man rely on technology and intelligence rather than brute might. It's also important to point out that the emphasis on muscularity in superhero culture can have a negative impact on body image and self-esteem, especially among young people who may feel pressured to conform to unattainable body standards. As a result, in recent years, there has been a growing push to represent superheroes with a broader range of body types and to encourage body positivity. This trend acknowledges that body diversity is important not only for encouraging healthy body image, but also for creating more realistic and relatable characters. Creators may better reflect the diversity of their audience and help more people see themselves represented in the media by showing superheroes with a greater range of body types and physical abilities. Another significant part of this philosophy

is the idea that superheroes can be powerful and capable regardless of their physical appearance. While muscular bodies are generally linked with physical strength, there are numerous other ways to portray power, including intelligence, creativity, leadership, and tenacity. Creators may help break down preconceptions and promote a more inclusive and tolerant understanding of what it means to be a superhero by exhibiting these attributes in a variety of body shapes. It's important to note that the effort for body positivity and diversity in comic book superheroes is part of a greater cultural change towards more inclusive and accepting media. As more individuals become aware of the negative impacts of excessive body expectations and the necessity of representation, there is a growing need for media that reflects a broader range of experiences and opinions.

To that end, the creative team should study and investigate the character design by knowing the target audience's wants and preferences in order to produce a product that meets the audience's taste, which is always the primary concept of any creative team. However, character design research in Malaysia is still in its infancy, and little work has been done in this area. Just as Hassan Muthalib (2023) said, “American animation or American films, they already have a long start more than a hundred years. Our side, I think in the live action, only in the millennium we get to see it happening, and even for animation, it was only from 1998 when I made the first animation film.” This is the purpose of this study, to cover the knowledge gap in character design in order to contribute to the study's future development in the local character design sector. This study aims to study the Penang young viewers' interest and perception of local mesomorphic superhero design (LMSD). This study was conducted in Penang, Malaysia, because Penang is a well-known state in Malaysia. One of the reasons why the researcher chose to conduct this study in Penang is that it is one of Malaysia's

developing states, with many cultural events taking place there over the years, as well as many activities and events such as cosplay, Japanese food fairs, comic and toy conventions.

1.2 Background study

This study involved several Universities and colleges' young adults in Penang. First of all, the study was held in Penang because Penang has been a place for many industries and is a developing state in Malaysia. Penang is regarded as one of Malaysia's most industrialised states, with a thriving manufacturing industry that contributes significantly to the country's economy. Many high-tech sectors, including as electronics, engineering, and medical equipment, are located in the state. Apart from being an industrial state, Penang has a variety of events and activities throughout the year. Penang has already held various Japanese-themed events, particularly those linked to Japanese culture and food. Event such as Bon Odori, The Bon Odori Festival is a Japanese cultural celebration held in Penang each year. The celebration, which includes traditional Japanese dances, food, and music, attracts both locals and foreigners. Then we have The Japanese Film Festival, The Japanese Film Festival is held in Penang every year and showcases a variety of modern Japanese films. The festival allows film aficionados to experience Japanese films and learn more about Japanese culture. Penang also holds the Japanese Food Festival, Penang has also hosted various Japanese food festivals, which highlight a range of Japanese cuisine, such as sushi, ramen, and tempura. The festivals allow both locals and visitors to enjoy Japanese cuisine and learn more about Japanese culinary traditions. And of course, Penang also holds the Japanese Anime and Manga Events yearly. The Anime and Manga event is one of the most important events that this study is all about and has a significant connection with. Apparently, Penang has hosted a number of anime and

manga events that promote Japanese animation and comic books. Cosplay competitions, merchandise sales, and screenings of major anime shows are all part of these events. With all these events being held in Penang, we can see that Penang has hosted a number of events promoting Japanese culture and lifestyle, reflecting the state's colourful and diversified cultural landscape as shown in Table 1.1. These events enable locals and visitors to learn more about Japanese culture and recognize the contributions of Penang's Japanese population. Photos regarding the activities and events are listed in the Appendix T.

	Event	Year	Venue	Participants	Source
1	ACGC Penang 2008	27th-29th-6-2008	Gurney Plaza, Penang	500+ responded	ACGC 08 Gurney Plaza - Penang (lowyat.net)
2	AKI Matsuri Japan	8th-10th-11-2019 18th,19th-11-2023	The TOP, Penang	almost 200 performers, 50% Local, 50% Japanese	https://penangfoodie.com/aki-matsuri-autumn-festival-penang/ https://cj.my/137307/penang-aki-matsuri-festival-2023-bridging-cultures/
3	Amigo Cos Market	10th,11th-6-2023	Straits Quay, Penang	584 responded	https://www.facebook.com/events/620946253243679?active_tab=about https://allevents.in/george%20town/amigo-cos-market/200024662205822
4	Amigo Grand Time	10th,11th-9-2022 16th, 17th-9-2023	Straits Quay, Penang Vervea Trade & Exhibition Center (VTEC)	20++ cosplayers appearances, locally 8 famous cosplayers Guest Matsumoto Rica (Pokemon Satoshi Voice)	https://www.ticket2u.com.my/event/28065/amigo-grand-time-2022 (details) https://www.ticket2u.com.my/event/31831/amigo-grand-time-2023 (details)

				Actor), Thames Malerose (Thailand Famous Cosplayer)	
5	ARCON 2016 a.k.a MOEPA	28-5- 2016	Penang Times Square	1.6K people interested and 717 people going	https://www.facebook.com/events/578097355700640/?active_tab=discussion https://pgevents.my/arcon-2016-aka-moepa
6	Bon Odori	launched in 1977 15-7- 2017 21- 7-2018 30-7- 2022	Queensb ay Mall & Outdoor Carpark Esplanad e (Padang Kota Lama) Esplanad e (Padang Kota Lama)	1.8k responded over 20,000 visitors	https://thesmartlocal.my/bon-odori-festival-2023/ https://penangfoodie.com/bon-odori-festival-penang-2017-queensbay-mall/ https://penangfreesheet.my/penang-bon-odori-festival-july-21st-2018/ https://www.buletinmutiara.com/thousands-celebrate-the-return-of-bon-odori-festival-in-penang
7	George Town Toys & Comic Con 2017	18th- 20th-8- 2017	1st Avenue Penang	1.6k responded	https://www.ticket2u.com.my/event/9702/george-town-toys-comic-con-2017 (details)
8	Comic Fiesta mini Penang	15th, 16th-9- 2018 14th, 15th-9- 2019	Straits Quay, Penang 1st Avenue Penang	401 responded 1k responded	https://www.facebook.com/events/1839418046358259/1839418049691592/?active_tab=about https://www.facebook.com/events/324062551635732/324062554969065/
9	Coscon Penang	inaugurat ed in 2015 7th-11th- 7-2022 11th,12th -3-2023	Prangin Mall, Penang Komplek s Bukit Jambul, Penang	30,000 visitors over 311	Cosplay convention to take place at Prangin Mall Buletin Mutiara https://www.facebook.com/events/567586358652228/ https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=589676913201726&set=a.494867772682641

10	Coswalk Convention SAIKO 2018	17th, 18th-3-2018	Straits Quay, Penang	3 organizations, 50+ staff	COSWALK CONVENTION SAIKO (C2S) – Anime Support Krew https://animesupportkrew.com/2018/04/18/coswalk-convention-saiko-c2s/
11	Cosworld Penang	22-7-2022	1st Avenue Mall, Penang	35,000 visitors	Cosworld Festival returns to 1st Avenue Mall after three years Buletin Mutiara https://www.buletinmutiara.com/cosworld-festival-returns-to-1st-avenue-mall-after-three-years/
12	Gourment Food Fair	7th, 8th-10-2023	DEWAN NG YAM HUAT HALL, Bukit Mertajam	No specific record	https://www.facebook.com/events/688918633259768/
13	Mobile Friend League Tournament 2022	19th,20th-3-2022	1st Avenue Penang	192 participants	https://howei.com/event_details/mobilefriendleague/mobilelegendsbangbang
14	Parent Child Interactive Anime Cosplay	7th, 8th-10-2023	DEWAN NG YAM HUAT HALL, Bukit Mertajam	308 people responded	https://www.facebook.com/events/688918633259768/
15	Penang Anime Matsuri	23rd,24th-5-2015 1st, 2nd-7-2017	Indoor exhibition at Dewan Sri Pinang Outdoor activities at Esplanade Setia SPICE Arena	DJ Kazu, kradness, k z (livetune), May'n, nano, Angie, Baozi & Hana, Shine, YingTze, Yuichi Ito, FeiGiap	https://www.wljack.com/2015/05/anime-related-event-event-penang-anime.html https://sozo.sg/home/penang-anime-matsuri-2017-1-2-july/

16	Penang Esport Festival	7th, 8th-9-2019	Setia SPICE Arena, Penang	professional players from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan	https://penangfoodie.com/penang-esports-festival/
17	Spring Cosplay Festival	11th, 12th-3-2016 18th, 19th-3-2017	Penang Times Square Han Chiang University College (韓江學院)	3.3k people responded 3.2k people responded	https://www.facebook.com/events/penang-times-square/spring-cosplay-festival-aka-cosplay-invasion-2016/1561501284140894/ https://pgevents.my/spring-cosplay-festival-cosplay-invasion-2017 https://www.facebook.com/events/1728125737447552/
18	Yosakoi	17-9-2022 16-9-2023	Karpal Singh Drive, Penang	17+ teams of Yasakoi dancers, total number of 600 dancers all over Malaysia & overseas Thousands of people	https://cm.penang.gov.my/index.php/en/all-stories/362310-the-yosakoi-penang-malaysia-day-international-parade-2022 https://www.penang360.my/events/penang-yosakoi-parade-2023 https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2023/09/23/street-festival-with-japanese-flair

Table 1.1 – Activities and events in Penang

This study was conducted in Penang is not mainly because of the events and activities, but also it is a state of education and academy. In terms of education and academics, Penang is considered as one of Malaysia's leading states. The education system in the state is well-developed, with a variety of institutions offering basic, intermediate, and higher education. One of the reasons why the researcher chose these institutions for the current study is by referring to the references of previous research from Khalis, F. M., and Mustaffa, N. (2017), he suggested that students would inherit the animation industry. They are still in school, have little experience, and simply know the fundamentals of design. As a result, students will develop their skills

and determine which influence or reference best suits their abilities. Thus, undergraduates are the ideal sample. Having said that, Penang has various universities and several education colleges, such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Wawasan Open University (WOU), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Penang Branch, Han Chiang University College of Communication, University of Wollongong (UOW), Sentral College Penang, SEGi College Penang, Malaysian Institute of Art (MIA) and Equator College etc. Based on the researcher's job experience as an educator in the education industry, he noticed that Penang, with those universities and colleges, has become an ideal place for young people from all over Malaysia to live and study. Penang is a place where many young people live and build up, therefore it has become a place for young people's lifestyle and way of living. So says Mr Azmi (2023) who is an established comic artist based in Penang, he noticed that Penang is filled with events and activities specifically from Japanese culture and some from western such as cosplay, animation, film festa, comic events and etc. With that, the researcher believes that this is an appropriate spot to begin this case study. Therefore, the reason for selecting these institutes was based on recommendations from lecturers and professionals at these institutions, as well as knowledge and feedback from lecturers at these institutions about their students who studied there.

The current study's sample size for this study was 256 students for the QUAN phase and 24 students for the QUAL phase. Both sampling was chosen using a random sampling method and purposive sampling method from universities and colleges in Penang, Malaysia. As for the 256 students involved in the QUAN phase of participants, they are active students who have been living in Penang Island for several years and have been following the life style and way of life in Penang, which is a state full of entertainment and various art and cultural events that have been held for many years.

As a result, this sampling is a good fit for the current study because the students at the chosen university are generally between the ages of 18 and 23, and they study art, mass communications, computer science, and 3D animation. It appears that they are students or young people who are active in contemporary day entertainment, such as cinema, video games, arcade, comic, cosplay, 3D gaming, 3D animation, animation, and social medias, among other things. As a result, regardless of whether they were chosen at random from one institute to the next, they are all young individuals, which is the current study's domain sampling in Penang. As for the QUAL phase, it involved 24 students aged 18 to 23 who were chosen by the researcher from several institutes. These institutes provided art and design students as well as 3D animation students, who were interested in this form of superheroes and fictional characters entertainment and activity. That is, they are someone who has knowledge in superheroes genre, whether through comic books, movies, or video games. They, too, had lived in Penang for several years and had spent their life style in Penang for several years, understanding the way of life in Penang and having participated in events hosted in Penang such as cosplay, Japanese events, movies, toy events, cultural events, and so on. The researcher selected the students again with the recommendations of the lecturers and professionals who worked in the selected institutes in Penang to look for volunteers to participate in this online interview for this study. The interviews were conducted via Google Meet video chat, and the researcher interviewed the students in the same manner as an online class meeting.

This study will look into how local young viewers perceive muscular (also known to be mesomorphic in this study) superhero figures, regardless of whether they are comic superheroes or real-life superheroes, but this study is primarily focused on real life superheroes known as cinematic superheroes, and the subject of focus figure

will only be the cinematic superheroes as a main study focus throughout the process of this study. As therefore, it is important that we start looking at all of the expectations of superheroes, particularly comic superheroes, because comic superheroes are the primary reason why superheroes were created right from the start, so it is critical that this study focuses on the backgrounds and history of how superheroes came from and began in human history.

The superhero subgenre of American comic books is one of the most well-liked ones. The 1930s saw a rise in the popularity of the genre, which peaked in the 1940s and has since remained the standard comic book format in North America. Superhero comic books have already been published for the last 80 years, and fans and collectors characterise them into four eras: Golden (1938–1950), Silver (1956–1970), Bronze (1970–1985), and Modern (1985–the present). The Golden Age of Marvel Comics, which ran from 1939 to 1956, the Silver Age, which ran from 1956 to 1971, the Bronze Age, which ran from 1971 to 1980, the Iron Age, which ran from 1980 to 1987, and the Modern Age are all referred to by fans as "periods" of Marvel Comics, just like in the field of literature (Reidelbach, M. 1991). Prior to the emergence of superhero comics, action heroes like The Shadow could be found in "pulp," or pulp fiction novels, which have been sold on newsstands for 10 cents. The debut of Superman in DC Comics' Action Comics #1 in 1938 marked the start of the Golden Age of comic books (Figure 1.1). Any analysis of Superman and Batman's effects and enduring influence must take into account the historical setting in which they first appeared. Both 1930s creations, both their origins and later myths owe a great deal to the post-Great Depression American cultural scene (Goulart, 2001).



Figure 1.1 - Action Comics - Superman, 1938.

Before the publishing of this issue, comic books often included a range of characters and storylines in a single volume. Even if this practice persisted, it started to become commonplace to publish issues with only one superhero's story. Under the name Timely Comics, the comic book studio that would later become Marvel Comics published Marvel Comics No. 1 in 1939, which featured the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner. Other well-known American comic superheroes, such as Captain America, who is not the subject of this study, were also depicted as muscular in superhero comics back in the day. In December 1940, Captain America (Figure 1.2) made his debut, fighting the Nazis and repeatedly hitting Adolf Hitler. These publications sold incredibly well. During World War II, comic books were indeed a pervasive and affordable form of amusement.



Figure 1.2 - Captain America

DC launched super teams in 1940 in an effort to make some lesser-known superheroes more well-known. The Justice Society of America was formed from them. The Flash, Green Lantern, Hour-Man, and Johnny Thunder were among them. The All-Winners Squad, a superhero team from Timely Comics, later known as Atlas Comics, included Captain America, Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch. For The Avengers to debut 23 years later, this squad would set the benchmark in the Marvel superhero universe. After the war, readers' interest in superheroes began to decline, and comic book publishers started to concentrate on other genres, such as detective fiction, westerns, horror, and crime. The new preferred pastime was watching television. Publishers temporarily shelved a lot of superheroes. Batman and Superman were two of the superhero comics that were still being published.

After a five-year decline in comic book readers, DC editor Julius Schwartz tasked Robert Kanigher and Carmine Infantino with modernising the Flash, a Golden Age hit. The redesigned Flash, who made his debut in 1940 as the Scarlet Speedster, helped to rekindle readers' enthusiasm for comic books. The Justice League of

America from DC likewise made its debut in 1961, expanding on the concept of the super squad. Marvel Comics had replaced Atlas Comics. Marvel's publisher Martin Goodman asked writer and editor Stan Lee to come up with a new super team in reaction to DC's success with the Flash. In 1961, Lee and illustrator Jack Kirby came up with the superhuman group known as the Fantastic Four. Since the group was so well-liked, Lee and Kirby set to work developing more new characters, like the Hulk, Thor, Iron-Man, X-Men, Daredevil, Dr Strange, and the immensely popular Spider-Man. Captain America, who the team found frozen in a block of ice in the North Atlantic, was a member of the Avengers super-team when it was first formed in 1963. The Captain, who had been believed to be dead since 1945, was revived and put back into service. The Bronze Age of comic comics started in 1970. Darker subjects, especially those involving horror and the supernatural, were being covered. Women and African Americans started to appear more frequently. Beginning with the licenced superhero product boom, Hollywood started looking to comic books for ideas for upcoming blockbuster films. In 1978, Superman, casted by Christopher Reeve in the film series (Figure 1.3) can be seen on TV screen globally.



Figure 1.3 – Superman 1978 film series character

Apparently, comic books are starting to be recognised as serious art. Instead of earlier themes like patriotism and morality, comic comics from the modern era are

heavily influenced by realism. As many publishers left the comic book industry, several new ones emerged. DC and Marvel witnessed a steady fall in sales throughout the latter 1990s and early 2000s following a few prosperous years of revenue in the early 1990s. Marvel was acquired by Disney in 2009, and DC Comics by Warner Bros. When DC redesigned and relaunched their entire line with the release of 52 new comic series, all of which debuted at #1, they did so in 2011 in an effort to draw in a new generation of readers. The popularity of superhero tales is evident from the longevity of both comic books and movie adaptations. Since 1977, a superhero movie has been released almost every year, and more are already planned for the upcoming years. Perhaps the next comic book era has already begun, and future generations will refer to it as the Blockbuster Movie Age. There are enough superhero-related stories to interest almost everyone, even if arcs are reset to draw in new readers. This may not appeal to somebody who enjoys older comic book series. The superhero genre is undoubtedly here to stay. Comic book superheroes are now frequently seen on social media and in the news, particularly in movies that first appeared in theatres. These superheroes are considered to be a part of contemporary pop culture's cinematic era. For this study, it is important to understand the history of these comic book superheroes because it lays the groundwork for understanding where the concept of superheroes originated, how they have influenced human history, and how they have persisted to the present day.

According to the above study, superheroes have been developed from time to time since the beginning, and numerous fictitious characters have been created with various unique outfits and designs. One cannot deny that the majority of the figures developed are showing strong and muscular people, especially male superheroes. Because it is a norm of comic books and superhero media, superheroes often appear

as muscular. Muscles are often used to portray strength and power, which is an important component of many superheroes' skills and personalities. Additionally, it is due to the audience. People prefer to see strong and powerful characters, and muscles are a great method to do that. Because some professionals in the local industry have also stated that. Hassan Muthalib (2023) said, *“everybody wants to be muscular when you see the bodybuilding contest, we also want to be like that person and so on, but of course it takes a lot of work so is only in their imagination.”* Fakeez (2024) also said that *“There is no denying that having a powerful body makes the superhero character itself look more attractive, and can attract the reader's interest with a more attractive body”* (Adnan. F. K., personal communication, January 23, 2024). However, we may see that not all superheroes are portrayed as muscular, some characters may have various physical traits that nonetheless express strength and power.

1.2.1 Local character design in local animation product

This study can have a cross-study on character design in Malaysia by searching the backgrounds of where the local characters were mainly coming from and being designed for the local audience due to the lack of research on comic or cinematic superhero in Malaysia. As therefore, looking at the animation background of Malaysia's animation industry is relatively important because Malaysia does not yet have a specific study about local animation or film character design, so the only way that this study can relate its study about local character design is through the character design of the existing local animation production. Based on the researcher's interview with Hassan Muthalib (2023), he says that *“Because there aren't enough content, not enough superheroes from our side, whereas anime and western superheroes have a global market, our market is confined to Malaysia, which is why we don't have as*

many.” So, the following background study is important as it should begin with the background understanding of local animation products so that the flow of the study can gradually relate to the local character design. Sharifah Sarah (2024) also said that, *“I believe the industries from Japan and America have established long enough. Disney itself is almost 100 years in the industry and thus people are most familiar with them, be it from normalization in TV programmes and merchandise. Same goes to Japanese anime and the manga industry. This is what the local characters/superheroes are struggling with.”* While it is true that many Malaysian animation character designs are aimed at children, this is not the exclusive demographic. Malaysian animation studios create a diverse range of content for a wide range of age groups and audiences. Malaysia has a thriving animation industry that produces animated programmes, films, and shorts of all genres and themes. While some of these works are aimed primarily towards children, such as educational shows or cartoons with basic narration and bright visuals, there are also animations aimed at adults. In recent years, there has been an increasing attempt to broaden Malaysia's animation landscape and generate work that appeals to a wider range of age groups. This comprises animated shows and films with more complicated storytelling, advanced animation methods, and topics that appeal to adult audiences. The animated film "Upin & Ipin: The Lone Gibbon Kris" drew notice both locally and globally, and its storytelling and cultural features appealed to viewers of all ages. Furthermore, animated programmes such as "Ejen Ali" and "BoBoiBoy" have become popular among both youngsters and teenagers.

Malaysia began its first animation in the late 1970s and is continuously evolving and working toward the aim of producing excellent animated films. In 1995, the first Malaysian animated television programme aired. Despite the fact that Malaysia did not have a well-established animation studio at the time as other Asian

nations did, the animation film industry was able to create its first-ever animated TV series in 1995, which was broadcast. The long-form animation market in Malaysia "appears to be on the cusp of greater things to come" (Muthalib, H. A. 2007). Despite all of the local animation industry's successes and achievements, Malaysian animation is still not at a level of production that will allow it to be globally competitive. Malayan Film Unit (MFU) was established in the middle of the 1940s to create some straightforward animation for commercial usage as well as some documentaries. As a result, the local animation film industry also developed the characters that were created for these animation productions at the same time as the local animated films and other items. Through regulations and incentives, the Malaysian government has actively supported the animation industry. Funding, training programmes, and infrastructural assistance are provided by organisations such as the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) to foster local animation talent and accelerate the industry's growth. Malaysian animation studios frequently work with international partners, such as well-known animation studios and broadcasters. These collaborations contribute to the global reach of Malaysian animated content while also providing chances for knowledge exchange and talent development. Malaysian animation often integrates Malaysian culture, folklore, and traditions. This enables for the preservation and promotion of local heritage, as well as the introduction of local heritage to international audiences. Such cultural depiction in animation can be informative and can assist Malaysians develop a sense of pride and identity. Malaysian animation producers have embraced technology advances in animation production, such as computer-generated imagery (CGI) and digital animation techniques. As a result, visually attractive and technically amazing animated content has been created.

In order to encourage the local industry to become one of the world's leading centres for animation, the Malaysian government is now offering the sector a lot of incentives and support. (Rosnan and Aziz. 2012). However, the price would be very costly because a budget and adequate government assistance are absolutely needed to develop a 3D animated film or movie. Looking back, Malaysia created its very own short animated film that was entirely original and aired it on TV in 1978. The short-animated video was highly distinctive and it showed the content of the location by using one of the well-known creatures in Malaysian history called Hikayat Sang Kancil. Despite being a 2D animated movie, it was quite innovative and energising during the time it was shown on the TV, mostly on RTM1 and RTM2. Well, this prompted the production of five additional animated shorts in the 1980s. (Wahab et al., 2012). Kids who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s would certainly note that local animation flashed on the TV screen occasionally because the majority of animation at that time was primarily targeted towards TV series advertisements. However, some were created to enhance local films and advertisements. (Omar and Ishak, 2011). Usop Sontorian, a very original cartoon produced by Kharisma Pictures, a local animation studio, aired on RTM1 from 1996 to 1998. As the first locally created digital animation, Rozila (1996) describes this animation film as a strong beginning for Malaysian animation. Following this, the local animation industry began to generate an increasing amount of local animation, including Yokies, Keluang Man, and Anak-anak Sidek. Despite being in the midst of an economic crisis, Malaysia managed to release its first feature-length animated film, *Silat Lagenda*, in 1998, which is recognised as the second crisis gap for Malaysian animation production. (Omar and Ishak, 2011), *Puteh*, produced by Eurofine, followed in 2001. Sadly, it was known that *Silat Lagenda* was a failure. This is when the local animation business began to

produce and use local characters in production, with the characters in the animation expressing the local identity and design. In 2007, with the support of several agencies, Malaysia managed to broadcast a fully 3D animated series on the TV screen called Upin & Ipin, followed by the BoBoiBoy animation series. The Malaysian government has built new studios and agencies that are associated to creative material in the animation business as a result of the popularity of the Upin & Ipin television series. (Omar and Ishak, 2011). Both these organisations served as the key pillar in both the degeneration and continued development of Malaysian animation.

The Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems, provided by the new sub-agency, has functioned as a support provider to the new animation project, which is overseen by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation. As a result, the Malaysian Development Corporation provided all incentives and infrastructure for Malaysia's animation industries (MDEC) (Rosnah and Aziz, 2012). As Malaysia Animation Content Centre has provided enough technology and resources related to the creative multimedia industry, Multimedia Super Corridor Malaysia has given support to MAC3 in order to further improve and transform Malaysia into a provider of creative digital content. In addition, MAC3 also offers funding opportunities and talent development. A national identity that embodies the art, culture and traditions of Malaysians must be created in order to expand the Malaysian animation product beyond all the plans and development platforms already established and offered. But as Malaysia is well renowned for having many different races living there, it is difficult to assess the country's achievements, despite what the Malaysian government claims. Children and teenagers in Malaysia are undoubtedly greatly influenced by foreign animation movies, television shows, books, magazines, toys, and other products that have heavily flooded the local market and industry. Their perception and interest in

comic characters or superhero designs were genuinely changed as a result of this, as were their ways of thinking and living, as well as the cultural influences on their lives. Apparently, during the cosplay event related to comic or movie character design, it is one of the worries to know how much the local young viewers had been inspired by the western and Japanese superheroes, and we can easily tell that the local cosplayers tend to focus primarily on cosplaying Japanese characters. As such, it is undeniable that Japanese culture, including anime, manga, and video games, have an extensive following among young people globally, as well as the Malaysia fandom. Characters in these mediums often wear elaborate costumes, which may inspire young people to try cosplaying themselves. Furthermore, Japanese media such as Japanese anime, manga, and video games have a significant following among Malaysian adolescents. These media often feature characters dressed in distinct and recognizable outfits, which may inspire Malaysian cosplayers to mimic them in their own cosplay.

This study is understanding and analysing how local young viewers perceive local character design, so it is important to look at the very early appearance of the Malaysian superhero character known as "The Keluang Man" which appeared in the TV series in 2D animation platform. The Keluang Man (1997) (Figure 1.4), a TV series 2D animation broadcasting a Malaysian costumed superhero wearing a costume that looked like the American Superhero Batman (Figure 1.5), is another outstanding example of how local animated TV series superhero design resembled one of the western comic superhero designs (1939).



Figure 1.4 Keluang-Man – 2D animation character design

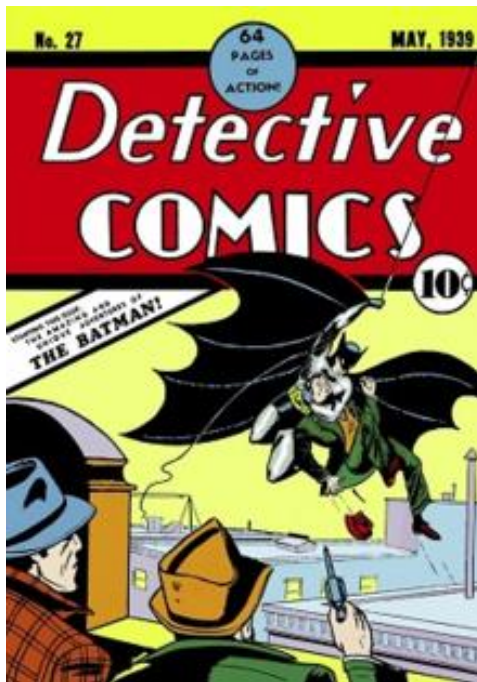


Figure 1.5 Detective Comics - Comic - Batman

Its primary inspiration was Batman from the Detective Comic Book in 1939 (Figure 1.4), and it has nothing to do with Malaysia's identity or locality (Muthalib. H. A., personal communication, December 20, 2023); rather, the dialogue, which provided a feeling of place, was the only thing that seemed Malaysian. The local animation industry then debuted a more regionally themed animation series on TV shows, with