



## **The Use of Graphic Medicine (Comics) by Taulebih as A Tool to Promote Health Literacy About Reproductive Health**

Talitha Ulfa Raissa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master of Communication Science, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia Email: talithaulfa12@gmail.com

### **Abstrak**

Studi ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan graphic medicine, khususnya komik, untuk meningkatkan literasi kesehatan remaja terkait kesehatan reproduksi di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana komik, dengan kombinasi elemen visual dan narasi, secara efektif mengomunikasikan topik kesehatan yang kompleks dengan cara yang sensitif terhadap budaya dan menarik. Menggunakan metode analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini mengkaji konten Instagram dari Taulebih, sebuah organisasi nirlaba yang berfokus pada edukasi kesehatan seksual dan reproduksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui tangkapan layar komik dan dilengkapi dengan literatur yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan efektivitas komik dalam menyederhanakan informasi medis yang kompleks, membangun koneksi emosional melalui karakter yang relatable, serta menggunakan bahasa dan visual yang sesuai dengan budaya. Elemen-elemen ini secara efektif mengangkat topik kesehatan yang sensitif, seperti endometriosis dan HIV/AIDS, dengan menantang kesalahpahaman serta mendorong edukasi kesehatan sejak dini. Komik tidak hanya meningkatkan pemahaman pesan, tetapi juga mendorong perilaku kesehatan yang proaktif, termasuk berkonsultasi dengan tenaga medis dan menormalkan diskusi tentang kesehatan reproduksi. Studi ini menekankan potensi graphic medicine dalam merevolusi pendidikan kesehatan, terutama bagi audiens muda dan individu dengan literasi kesehatan yang rendah, dengan menggabungkan aksesibilitas, keterkaitan, dan relevansi budaya.

**Kata kunci:** komunikasi kesehatan; graphic medicine; literasi kesehatan; promosi kesehatan; kesehatan reproduksi

### **Abstract**

*This study explores the use of graphic medicine, specifically comics, to enhance adolescents' health literacy regarding reproductive health in Indonesia. The research aims to analyze how comics, with their combination of visual elements and narrative, effectively communicate complex health topics in a culturally sensitive and engaging manner. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examined Instagram content from Taulebih, a non-profit organization focused on sexual and reproductive health education. Data were collected through screenshots of comics and supplemented with relevant literature. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of comics in simplifying complex medical information, fostering emotional connections through relatable characters, and using culturally appropriate language and visuals. These elements effectively address sensitive health topics, such as endometriosis and HIV/AIDS, by challenging misconceptions and promoting early health education. Comics not only improve message comprehension but also encourage proactive health behaviors, including consulting medical professionals and normalizing discussions on reproductive health. This study underscores the potential of graphic medicine to revolutionize health education, particularly among young audiences and those with lower health literacy, by combining accessibility, relatability, and cultural relevance.*

**Keywords:** *Health Communication; graphic medicine, health literacy, health promotion; reproductive health.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, adolescents face significant barriers in accessing and understanding reproductive health information, perpetuating myths and delaying preventive care. A study by Kurniawati et al. (2023) found that 49.7% of early adolescents (ages 13–15) in urban Indonesia lacked basic knowledge of contraception, with girls exhibiting lower awareness than boys. This gap in health literacy is further exacerbated by cultural taboos surrounding sexuality, which restrict open discussions within families and schools, as well as the complexity of medical jargon, which makes traditional health materials difficult to understand. These challenges highlight the urgent need for innovative strategies that simplify information and encourage proactive health behaviors among young people.

One promising approach to overcoming these barriers is the use of comics as a health communication tool. Comics offer an engaging and accessible format for conveying health information to the public. Widyaningrum et al. (2023) explained that the purpose of health communication is to effectively convey health information to influence people's decision-making regarding better health management. This aligns with Sonke et al. (2021), who stated that health communication aims to disseminate information, shape people's attitudes and behaviors, and increase awareness and understanding of health issues. Effective health communication strategies must transcend literacy and cultural barriers, ensuring messages are accessible to all, regardless of background (Salim et al., 2022). Integrating accurate health information with engaging visuals such as through comics can help make complex topics easier to understand while appealing to a broader audience (Kearns & Kearns, 2020).

Selecting the right media for health communication is essential for ensuring message clarity and impact. Notoatmodjo (2014) emphasizes that the right media can make health messages more comprehensible and accessible. Comics, as a widely used form of health communication, cater to diverse audiences, including adolescents and adults. Their combination of humor, relatable characters, and engaging storytelling enhances both entertainment and education (Sabri et al., 2024; Celentano et al., 2021; Kilanowski, 2020).

In healthcare, the concept of graphic medicine was introduced by researchers, doctors, and artists to describe the use of comics in medical education and health communication (King, 2016). Thus, in healthcare, comics are often referred to as graphic medicine. Graphic medicine uses visual storytelling in the form of comic art to share health-related information and experiences in a more understandable and attention-grabbing way. This method has been widely used to educate the public on various health issues, including skin cancer, HIV/AIDS, and the HPV vaccine (Duong et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2022; Councilor & Fink, 2024).

Comics are particularly effective in addressing sensitive health topics, as they use dialogue and repetition to reinforce key messages while making information enjoyable and accessible (Lukitowati et al., 2023). In Indonesia,

reproductive health remains a sensitive subject, often considered taboo in public discussions. Considering this, Taulebih, a non-profit organization in Indonesia focused on sexuality and reproductive health education, utilizes graphic medicine in conveying health information. Comics are not merely used to convey information but also have various functions, namely as entertainment and educational tools. This aligns with the opinion of a leading figure in the field of comics, Will Eisner, who explained that the function of comics is not only as a form of entertainment but also considered as a useful teaching medium (educational tool) and other purposes (Sabri et al., 2024; Hoffman, 2023).

The effectiveness of comics in health communication lies in their ability to combine visual storytelling with clear narratives. Visual storytelling integrates images, animations, and compositions to communicate messages effectively (Cahyadi et al., 2023). In comics, this approach is applied through illustrations and panel arrangements that convey emotions and build narratives. By reducing reliance on lengthy textual explanations, comics make health information more engaging and accessible, especially for audiences with low health literacy.

Public health professionals have been using graphic medicine to reach young audiences and individuals with low literacy levels (Duong et al., 2024). Research shows that readers prefer comics over traditional educational materials because they enhance comprehension while making learning more enjoyable (Kearns et al., 2022). Comics convey health messages using visual imagery, narrative, and emotional content, making health messages accessible, relatable, and culturally relevant. The success of comics in health communication is attributed to their key elements, including visualization, narration and dialogue, emotional engagement, and repetition (Sabri et al., 2024). Visual elements attract attention and reinforce messages, while narratives and dialogues help develop stories and convey moral lessons. Emotional engagement, achieved through relatable characters, allows readers to connect with the content on a deeper level. Repetition further reinforces key messages, ensuring that health information is retained.

Despite evidence of graphic medicine's efficacy in other contexts, few studies focus on its application to reproductive health in Indonesia. This gap is significant, as cultural taboos and low health literacy rates make traditional health communication methods ineffective. However, studies specifically examining how graphic medicine particularly comics can enhance reproductive health literacy among Indonesian adolescents remain limited. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the use of graphic medicine, specifically comics, as a health communication medium to enhance adolescents' reproductive health literacy in Indonesia.

## II. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach and is presented descriptively. The method used is qualitative content analysis, which aims to comprehensively interpret the content under study with a focal point on key or significant meanings that align with the research questions, objectives, and conceptual framework

(Monggilo, 2020). Utilizing qualitative content analysis, this study interprets how Taulebih's Instagram comics communicate health messages. The primary data source was obtained from Taulebih's Instagram page for the comics. The selection of comics was conducted using a purposive sampling method, with comics chosen based on their relevance to the research objective, which is reproductive health. Relevant literature was also used as a supplement to provide deeper and more comprehensive insights into the use of comics as a medium for communicating health messages by Taulebih. The unit of analysis in the study is comics, which are further divided into two sub-units, namely text (speech balloons) and non-text (digital images) of each comic panel. Where comics, as a unit of analysis, are collected using screenshots, a method commonly utilized to present or share information (Juniartha et al., 2021). This study has limitations, as it focuses only on the visual and textual elements of Instagram comics, excluding audience engagement. As qualitative content analysis is interpretative, findings may be subject to researcher bias, though analytical rigor was maintained. Ethical considerations were addressed by analyzing only publicly available content, attributing Taulebih as the content creator, and excluding personal data or user interactions.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

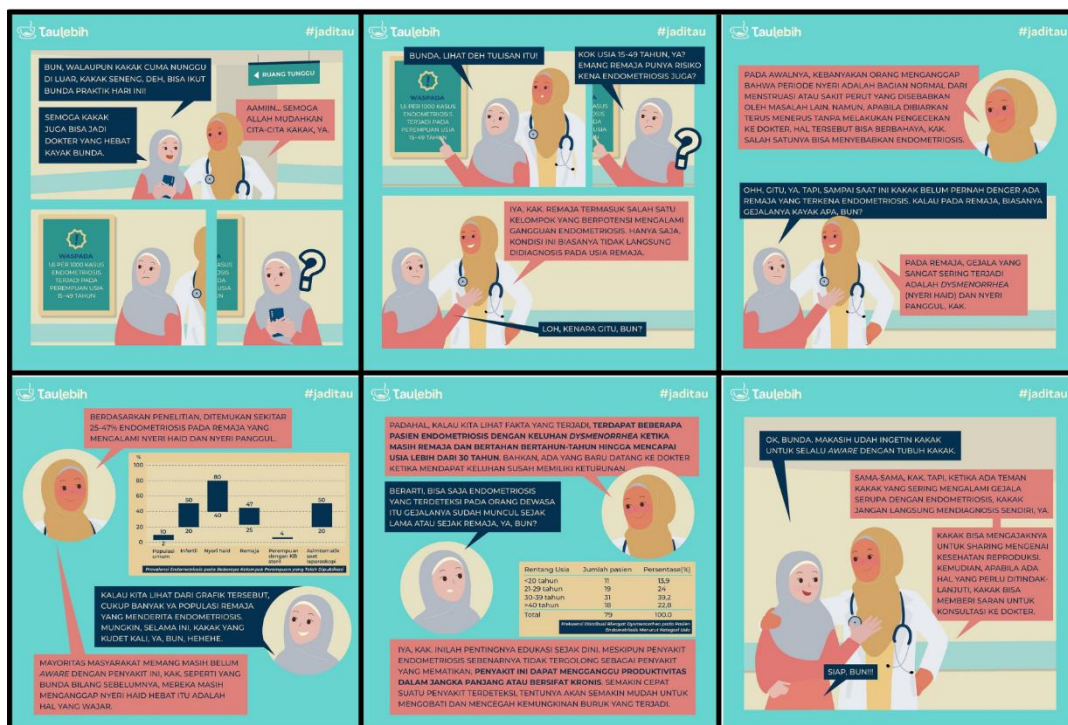
Taulebih is a non-profit organization focused on education related to sexuality and reproductive health from an Islamic perspective. The topics addressed by Taulebih vary from menstruation and puberty to other aspects of reproductive health. One of the media Taulebih uses to disseminate health information is comics, which serve as an engaging tool to communicate complex health messages effectively. Below is a review of the theme from Taulebih's comics as shared on their Instagram account, @taulebih.id:

**Table 1.** Themes of Taulebih Comics

| Comic Title   | Link                      |
|---|---------------------------|
| Hah, Perempuan Bisa Mimpi Basah?                              | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Kenapa "Kids Zaman Now" Lebih Cepat Menarche?                 | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Poligami dan Pernikahan Dini Bukan Solusi Penyebaran HIV/AIDS | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Membersihkan Vulva dengan Sabun. Emang Boleh?                 | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Endometriosis Terjadi Pada Remaja. Emang Bisa?                | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Cegah Endometriosis, Kok Dengan Jaga Kesehatan Usus?          | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Endometriosis 101. Raising Awareness of Endometriosis         | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Keputihan = Kanker Serviks?                                   | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Vulvodinia. Bahaya Nyeri Di Area Vulva                        | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |

| Comic Title  | Link                      |
|--|---------------------------|
| Masih Ada Flek. Ini Haidnya Udah Selesai Belum Ya?       | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |
| Baru Nikah 6 Minggu, Udah Hamil 8 Minggu. Hamil Duluan?! | <a href="#">Instagram</a> |

The themes explored in these comics align with the research objective of improving adolescents' reproductive health awareness. By debunking myths, normalizing discussions, and promoting preventive health behaviors, these comics serve as a culturally sensitive approach to health communication. In particular, comics discussing endometriosis help raise awareness of a condition that is often misunderstood or overlooked. As a medium that combines text with visual elements, comics can be utilized as a communication strategy in promoting health. Their engaging nature fosters enthusiasm and encourages audience participation. Health knowledge is a critical asset, particularly for adolescents, as it equips them to make informed decisions about their well-being. Yoon et al. (2021) emphasized that such knowledge forms the foundation of an adolescent's behavior, whereas a lack of knowledge can lead to various health problems.



**Fig 1. Comic "Endometriosis Terjadi Pada Remaja, Emang Bisa?"**  
 Source: Compiled by researcher from Taulebih's Instagram Page (2024)

The comic above is one of the comics published by Taulebih on their Instagram titled "Endometriosis Terjadi Pada Remaja, Emang Bisa?". This comic consists of several panels containing a combination of text (dialog or narration) and visual elements (images). The format is adapted to the platform used for

Instagram's carousel (slide) format. The use of strong narratives and familiar or easily identifiable characters creates a sense of emotional closeness, making the messages in health promotions resonate more deeply. Sabri et al. (2024) stress the importance of tailoring health communications to the target audiences, considering factors such as age, cultural preferences, and language.

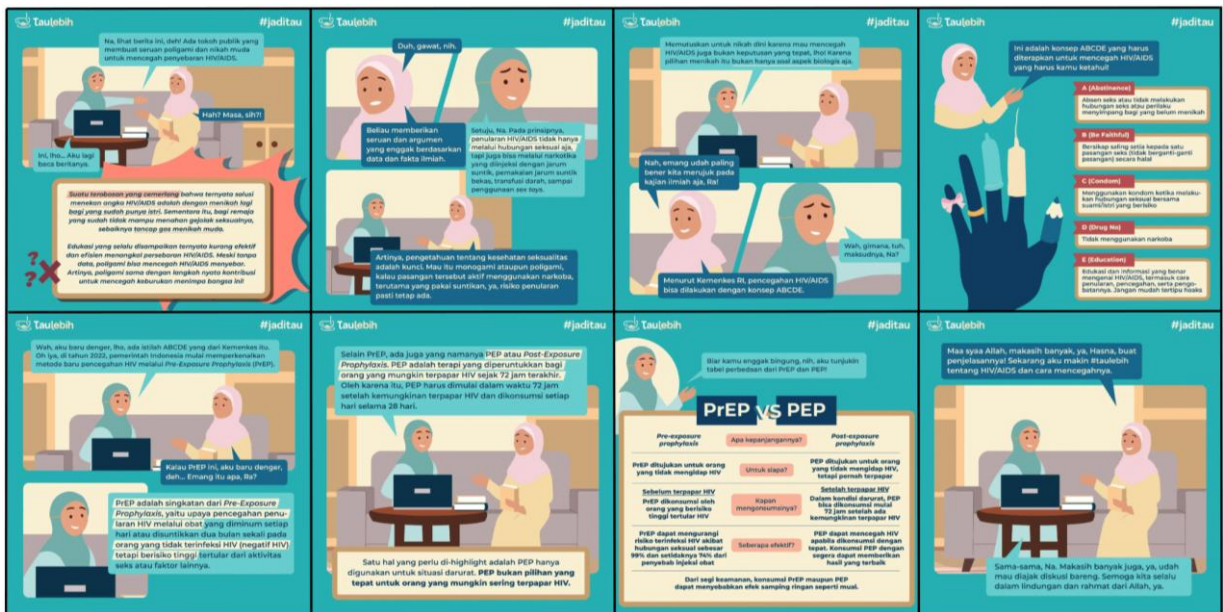
This comic illustrates a dialogue between two female characters wearing hijab. The first character is a mother who works as a doctor, and the second character is her daughter. The first panel focuses on introducing context, and then the story unfolds as the daughter expresses her pride and happiness toward her mother, fostering an emotional connection. Subsequent panels depict the daughter's confusion about a poster on endometriosis, which stated 1.6 per 1000 cases of endometriosis occur in women aged 15-49 years. This serves as an introduction to discussing reproductive health issues, specifically endometriosis.

The combination of narratives that use everyday language and visual elements of relatable characters creates familiarity in interaction, making the health messages easier to understand. Septialti et al. (2022) affirm that comics are easier for readers to understand and digest because they use conversational language. This is evident in Panel 3, where one character states, *"Pada awalnya, kebanyakan orang menganggap bahwa periode nyeri adalah bagian normal dari menstruasi atau sakit perut yang disebabkan oleh masalah lain, namun, apabila dibiarkan terus menerus tanpa melakukan pengecekan ke dokter, hal tersebut bisa berbahaya, kak. Salah satunya bisa menyebabkan endometriosis."* This dialogue challenges the misconception that menstrual pain is always normal and emphasizes the importance of seeking medical consultation to prevent potential health risks, such as endometriosis.

By using simple and relatable language, the comic helps bridge the gap between medical knowledge and public understanding. Moreover, this comic includes data presented through tables and graphs, strengthening the credibility of evidence-based messages. The use of visual elements improves audience retention of information compared to text-only messages (Suryadi & Jupriadi, 2023). In addition, the reflective dialogue in the story encourages readers to recognize the importance of early detection and the abnormality of severe menstrual pain. Delays in diagnosis are often caused by low levels of awareness and understanding of this condition, the stigma surrounding discussions about gynecological symptoms (the health of the female reproductive system), and societal views that tend to normalize the pain women experience (Allaire et al., 2023). In the last panel, it emphasizes the importance of community engagement and proactive health measures, encouraging readers to normalize open discussions on reproductive health and to seek medical advice from health professionals.

Using comics in the health sector is not a new strategy. The combination of text and image (visual) elements simplifies complex information, making it easier to understand (Muzumdar, 2017). This edition illustrates gaps in community health literacy, particularly among adolescents, about reproductive health, such as endometriosis. The portrayal of a mother who works as a doctor and her daughter also implies that health literacy gaps can occur among young people,

even among those who have families with medical or health-related backgrounds. The main messages emphasized in this comic include the importance of early education on reproductive health, recognizing signs of endometriosis conditions, the urgency of regular health checks, and the potential impact of undetected endometriosis. In other words, this comic not only aims to improve health literacy, particularly about endometriosis. This comic also encourages a change in attitude toward the importance of medical consultation, especially for those experiencing severe (abnormal) menstrual pain.



**Fig 2. Comic "Poligami dan Pernikahan Dini ukan Solusi Penyebaran HIV/AIDS"**  
 Source: Compiled by researcher from Taulebih's Instagram Page (2024)

The next comic uploaded by Taulebih on their Instagram page is titled "Poligami dan Pernikahan Dini Bukan Solusi Penyebaran HIV/AIDS". This comic consists of several slides, each of which contains one or more panels. This health promotion using comics is carried out to increase public awareness and knowledge, thereby enhancing better health literacy. Low health literacy will have an impact on adolescents' difficulty finding, selecting, and understanding quality information (Brooks et al., 2020). Moreover, the easy accessibility of information on the internet raises significant concerns about the validity of the information adolescents encounter (Ditiharman, 2022). In this edition, Taulebih emphasizes narrative storytelling and visual elements to dismantle misconceptions about HIV/AIDS prevention that are prevalent in Indonesian society. The comic directly challenges unsubstantiated claims about polygamy and early marriage as solutions to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The story unfolds through a dialog between two female characters wearing the hijab who are peers. In the first slide, the initial panel sets the context for the reproductive health issues being discussed. It begins with a dialog between the two characters discussing recent news in which a public figure made a call for

polygamy and easy marriage as a solution to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This news is depicted in the comic with a red "crossed" icon, emphasizing that the information is incorrect or misleading. The use of red symbolizes the danger of baseless news (false information), aligning with Sari's (2010) explanation that the red evokes psychological responses such as power, energy, love, aggression, and danger (Farida et al., 2020). This psychological association explains its frequent use in warning signs and emergency notifications, where it triggers a sense of alertness in viewers. By incorporating red into the icon that marks the misinformation in the comic, the visual design not only invalidates the false claim but also reinforces the importance of critically evaluating such messages.

Furthermore, colors play a crucial role in shaping emotions and setting the tone of a visual message (Suryadi & Jupriani, 2023). They influence how audiences interpret information and can have a significant psychological impact (Farida et al., 2020). In this context, the use of red strengthens the comic's function as a tool for health communication, ensuring that the audience perceives the false claim as alarming and requiring scrutiny. This strategic use of color enhances the effectiveness of the comic in debunking myths related to reproductive health.

As the dialogue progresses in the following panels, the discussion between the two characters developed into a scientific discussion regarding the causes and prevention of HIV/AIDS, based on evidence. The comic clarifies that HIV/AIDS is transmitted not only through sexual intercourse but also through used syringes, blood transfusions, and the use of unsterilized sex toys. It introduces the ABCDE concept promoted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenkes RI) as a concrete prevention strategy: Abstinence, Be Faithful, Condom, Drug No, and Education. To strengthen the health message, symbols and visual elements are incorporated into this comic. Visualization of hands with accessories representing each aspect of the ABCDE concept improves the message's clarity and engagement. This combination of visual illustrations and concise, impactful text helps facilitate understanding of certain topics, improve memory retention, and enable readers to visualize and internalize the message (Kraenzle, 2020). This comic medium is considered an effective strategy for reaching diverse audiences, including children and adolescents, who may be less interested in conventional educational materials (Hidayat et al., 2023; Rosidah et al., 2022).

This approach is further exemplified in the next panel, which presents a simple table comparing HIV prevention methods in Indonesia, specifically Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). The table, accompanied by a brief explanation, simplifies the information, making it easier for readers to understand the differences between these methods. The inclusion of two teenage characters in this comic also holds significant implications. These characters show that topics of sexuality and reproductive health, which are often still considered taboo and sensitive topics in society, can be discussed more openly, without any discomfort. This helps to encourage peer-to-peer discussions.

Additionally, the comic highlights that even sensitive topics, such as HIV/AIDS, can be addressed in a thoughtful and respectful manner. As McNicol

(2014) explains, comics can serve as an effective medium for discussing sensitive topics in a relaxed and light-hearted approach, as opposed to traditional printed materials. By depicting fictional characters in realistic settings such as family or school, comics can navigate difficult discussions with humor, empathy, and other positive emotions to attract readers' attention (Celentano et al., 2021).

The main messages highlighted in this comic include the importance of debunking myths and misconceptions that pose risks to public health, the necessity of relying on evidence-based and scientifically supported information, and the encouragement for audiences to critically evaluate health information by verifying the credibility of their sources. Through a compelling blend of storytelling, visuals, and scientific accuracy, Taulebih effectively delivers its message, making complex health topics more engaging and accessible to the public, empowering its audience with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions.

Both comics effectively raise awareness about endometriosis and HIV/AIDS, but their impact goes beyond simply delivering information. They highlight the importance of technology-driven and culturally sensitive health communication strategies. By leveraging visual storytelling on digital platforms, these comics present crucial health information in a way that resonates with young audiences. This aligns with the graphic medicine approach, which simplifies complex medical topics through comics. Given that adolescents are highly active on social media, using platforms like Instagram enhances reach and engagement more effectively than traditional educational materials.

Additionally, the cultural and religious context plays a key role in message acceptance. The mother-daughter dynamic in the endometriosis comic reflects familial values in Indonesia, where discussions about reproductive health are often mediated by trusted figures such as parents, professionals, or religious leaders. Likewise, the HIV/AIDS comic incorporates hijab-wearing characters and references Islamic values, ensuring the message resonates with Indonesia's predominantly Muslim audience. According to the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE), Culturally relevant and context-appropriate education improves message acceptance and effectiveness (UNESCO, 2018). By integrating health messages within an Islamic framework, such as using religiously acceptable language or referencing Islamic perspectives on health, these comics enhance audience receptivity and encourage more open discussions on reproductive health.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This study emphasizes the potential of comics as an effective medium for health communication, particularly in addressing complex and sensitive topics like reproductive health. By integrating narrative and visual elements, comics simplify medical information, such as endometriosis and HIV/AIDS, making it accessible and engaging for diverse audiences. They also foster emotional connections through relatable characters and culturally appropriate language and visuals. Taulebih's approach, which includes familiar characters, conversational language, and evidence-based data enhances the accessibility, emotional connection, and credibility of its messages. These strategies

promote health literacy and challenge societal misconceptions, as seen in Taulebih's efforts to normalize open discussions around reproductive health. The practical implications of these findings suggest that public health organizations, educators, and policymakers can leverage comics as a strategic tool to improve health literacy and encourage informed decision-making. Graphic medicine, which combines education with entertainment, has proven to be a communication medium for health promotion, especially in reaching adolescent audiences with low health literacy. Beyond disseminating information, it also plays a role in shaping health behaviors by encouraging proactive actions such as seeking medical advice and critically assessing health information. Additionally, its use in digital platforms, such as social media platforms where young people are highly active, enhances message reach and engagement compared to traditional educational materials. Given these advantages, public health practitioners should consider incorporating graphic medicine into their communication strategies to enhance engagement and message retention, particularly in digital spaces where younger audiences are highly active. However, this study did not examine changes in health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors before and after exposure to health comics. Future research should explore the long-term impact of comics on health behaviors and evaluate their effectiveness across different age groups and cultural contexts to further validate their role in public health communication.

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