

Visual Asset Characters Design for Webcomic “If I were you, Mom!”

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for high-frequency webcomic production presents a challenge in maintaining visual consistency while ensuring production efficiency, particularly in four-panel (4-koma) formats that require clarity and repetition. In this context, character design plays a crucial role in conveying personality, emotion, and narrative function effectively within limited visual space. This study explores the design of the main characters in the webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* which portrays everyday family life intertwined with conflicts arising from a body-swapping incident between a grocery store owner and her middle school daughter. This study aims to develop and implement a structured minimalist character design process that supports production efficiency while maintaining strong visual identity, as well as to validate its effectiveness through audience perception. This study is using a descriptive qualitative method, using visual reference analysis, sketch exploration, character sheet development, and audience-based visual validation through questionnaires. The evaluation's result was an overall mean score of 4.09 (good category), indicating that the character designs convey effectively identity, role suitability, and emotional expression, therefore showing the viability of a minimalist visual strategy for serialized webcomic production.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the advancement of digital technology has transformed visual content consumption patterns and shifted conventional comics into digitally distributed webcomics (Sanders, 2024). This transformation has led to a more fast-paced and competitive production environment, where webcomic creators are required to deliver content in high-frequency installments while maintaining visual quality and narrative clarity. In this context, character design becomes a crucial element, as it functions as the primary medium for conveying narration, emotion, and conflict (Aditia & Aditia, 2024; Angkawijaya et al., 2025).

As a visual narrative medium, comics integrate images and text to communicate emotions and interactions effectively (Angkawijaya et al., 2025). Emotional engagement in webcomics is not solely constructed through dialogue but also through visual elements such as gestures, expressions, and composition (Haendiges, 2024). Therefore, character design plays a significant role in expressing personality, social relationships, and narrative perspectives, while also influencing readers' engagement and interpretation of the story (Haendiges, 2024; Sabri et al., 2024).

However, in practice, many webcomic creators face challenges in balancing production efficiency with the need to establish strong and distinguishable visual identities. This issue becomes more critical in high-frequency serialized formats, particularly in four-panel (4-koma) comics, which follow the kishōtenketsu narrative structure consisting of Ki (introduction), Shō (development), Ten (twist), and Ketsu (conclusion) (Arnavas & Bellini, 2024). The limitation of four panels requires visual clarity and simplification so that the narrative message can be delivered effectively within a constrained space (Berube et al., 2024). Failure to achieve clear silhouette differentiation, proportions, gestures, and expressions may reduce narrative readability and weaken emotional engagement.

In addition, the demand for continuous production in serialized webcomics increases the importance of sustainability in the design process. Complex character fatigue and excessive details may slow down production,

increase creator fatigue, and affect the consistency and quality of the output. Therefore, an efficient and sustainable visual strategy is required to support long-term production without compromising communication effectiveness.

A minimalist design approach is considered a potential solution to address these challenges. By simplifying forms, proportions, and visual elements, minimalist character design enables faster reproduction while maintaining clarity and recognizability. Clear silhouettes and controlled proportions are essential in communicating character roles, age, and personality effectively (Flora & Susanto, 2025). Moreover, visual simplicity helps direct audience attention to key narrative elements and enhances emotional readability (Gumber, 2023; Usman, 2025)

Webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* adopts a slice-of-life family theme that explores intergenerational dynamics through a body-swapping premise between a mother, who owns a grocery store, and her middle school daughter. Family-based narratives are known to carry strong social and psychological dimensions, making them effective in portraying emotional conflicts and relatable daily experiences (Adornetti et al., 2022; Sorohiti & Kirsan, 2023). With a four-panel format and a high-frequency publication schedule of three episodes per week, this webcomic requires a strategic balance between visual efficiency and strong character identity.

Despite the growing number of studies on character design and digital comics, there is still limited research that specifically integrates minimalist character design strategies with the demands of sustainable serialized 4-koma production, supported by audience-based evaluation. Therefore, this study aims to design, develop, and validate the visual assets of the main characters in the webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* through a structured minimalist approach that integrates iterative visual exploration and audience-based evaluation. In doing so, the study emphasizes iterative design practice as a form of knowledge production within visual communication design. Furthermore, this research seeks to examine how such a structured minimalist character design process can support production efficiency and narrative clarity, as well as how audience perception can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the resulting designs. The novelty of this study lies in the

integration of production-oriented design strategy with audience perception as a validation framework within the context of visual communication design.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This research is using Practice-Based Research (PBR) method with qualitative descriptive and quantitative descriptive mixture. PBR is selected because this research focuses on designing characters as a form of creative practice that also improves on academic knowledge. In the context of visual communication design, PBR makes it possible to accomplish systematic and well-documented production process, reflection and evaluation. Qualitative approach is applied in the concept exploration phase, visual analysis, and character design development, while quantitative descriptive method is for the validation phase using Likert scale questionnaire to gauge audience perception about design effectiveness.

Research Subject / Case Study

The subject of this research is the process of designing characters in the webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* with the focus on minimalist visual style to support periodical *4-koma* format production efficiency. Validation is gathered from respondents which comprised of 32,5% males and 67,5% females, and the education levels are junior high school (7,5%), senior high school (35%), and university (57,5%).

Research Data Collection Instruments

The instruments used in this research are as listed below:

1. Literature Study and Visual Observation

Character design theory analysis, visual storytelling, minimalist style and *4-koma* comics structure, also observation of family themed and/or minimalist styled webcomics, such as: Like Mother Like Daughter, Mom, I'm Sorry, My Giant Nerd Boyfriend, Sarah's Scribbles.



Figure 1. Webtoon literature review.
Source: Google

2. Visual Design Process Documentation

Shapes exploration sketches, silhouettes, body proportion, facial expressions, gestures, and also character sheet as main visual data.

3. Likert Scale Questionnaire (1–5)

Used to gauge audience perception about five indicators: visual clarity, consistency, emotional readability, production efficiency and aesthetic appeal.

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis is accomplished by two stages:

a. Internal Evaluation (Visual Heuristic Evaluation)

Internal evaluation is conducted by using heuristic approach based on visual communication design principle. This approach is selected in order to measure design effectiveness in conveying narrative function and character identity. According to Lezcano Airaldi, et al, narrative visual evaluation using heuristic principles can communicate stories effectively, especially on media that combine visual elements and narratives (Lezcano Airaldi et al., 2025). Evaluation is performed on five main aspects:

1. Clarity (Silhouette Clarity and Expression)
2. Consistency (Style Consistency and Proportion)
3. Emotional Readability

4. Simplicity & Production Efficiency
5. Visual Appeal

Heuristic evaluation approach is relevant in analysing visual narratives because it is able to measure how far visual elements can communicate the story effectively.

External Validation (Audience Validation)

Questionnaire data is analysed descriptively by calculating the average and percentages to understand the success rate of the design in representing narrative function and visual identity.

Method Selection Justification

This method was chosen because the goal of this research was not to test statistical hypothesis but to develop, evaluate and validate character design in the context of serialized webtoon production.

Practice-Based Research makes it possible for a design process to function as a research methodology where knowledge is generated from visual explorations, iterations and critical reflections. This approach is suitable for visual communication design which places artifacts as objects and also research result.

Qualitative Analysis supports visual element interpretation, such as body proportion, silhouettes, and style consistency. Determining body proportion and character types is important because those elements represent ages, roles, behaviours, and characters ability while also maintaining silhouette readability (Flora & Susanto, 2025). Therefore, visual analysis becomes crucial in measuring character representation effectiveness. On the other hand, quantitative validation through audience perception strengthens design result reliability. User-based evaluation helps to ensure that visual solution produced not only conceptually strong, but also communicatively effective.

Accordingly, the combination of PBR, qualitative analysis, and quantitative validation is methodologically in line with research aim, which is to construct a

communicative, efficient and sustainable character design in the context of serialized *4-koma* format webtoon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Design Procedure

Design process is conducted gradually and iteratively:

1. Story concept design and main conflict.
2. Character visual mapping based on narrative function and personality.
3. Visual exploration (forms, proportions, expressions, gestures and rastering).
4. Design evaluation and refining before final implementation.
5. Character visual validation by potential target audience.

Each step of design procedure is a basis of the next design improvement until optimal result reached.

Character Design

There are some prior researches that discussed about character design and visual narration in digital comics. Sapmayada underlined the importance of visual elements such as silhouettes and shapes in constructing character differentiation, while Aditia and Aditia highlighted the role of visual communication through the exploration of forms, colours and expressions in order to establish character identity (Aditia & Aditia, 2024; Sapmayada, 2024). Angkawijaya et al. also indicated that a strong visual design could improve readers' emotional engagement (Angkawijaya et al., 2025).

Character design in a webcomic is a key element for building communication and narration. Characters function not only as a story's figures but also as a visual tool that conveys information regarding to personalities, emotions and roles through silhouettes, shapes, colours and expressions. Sapmayada establishes that visual elements such as silhouettes and shapes are able to build a strong pointer to support a storyline (Sapmayada, 2024). In the

context of digital media, character design effectiveness is not only measured from the aesthetics perspective but also from its function, which is to relay the meaning visually. Expressions, gestures, and body forms contribute to building a communicative visual narrative so that readers can understand the characters' personalities and emotional dynamics even before the first dialog starts (Aditia & Aditia, 2024). Moreover, visual communication principle plays a role in building engagements between the characters and the readers. Visually unique characters are easier to recognize and be remembered, and also help the readers to interpret the storyline effectively (Alim et al., 2024).

The character design process started with the sketch exploration phase by using traditional media such as pencil, eraser, brush pen and paper. In this phase, form exploration was conducted by drawing silhouettes, body proportion and facial expression variations to find the most visually representative characteristics to the personalities and narrative functions of each character. Sketching with a pencil offered flexibilities in corrections and refining shapes gradually, while eraser was used to clean the construction line and strengthen main contour. Settling on a body proportion and character type is essential, because these aspects convey the character's age, role, behaviour and abilities while preserving a clear silhouette through recognizable anatomical features (Flora & Susanto, 2025). Anwar et al. said that character design must start from a clear behavioural concept, not from visual aesthetics only. In their research, "Active and Independent Behaviour" concept became the main foundation before entering the visualization phase (Anwar et al., 2025).

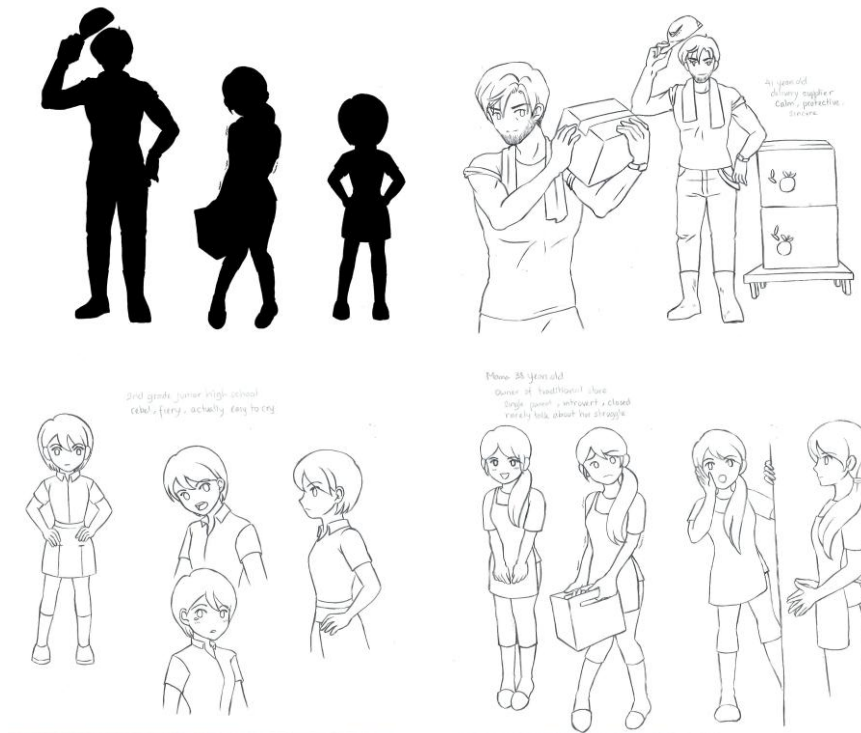


Figure 2. Sketch exploration phase
Source: author's documentation

After the sketching phase has fulfilled the aspect of visual clarity and character differentiation, the next phase, inking, commences in order to create and refine bold outlines. This step is intended to preserve manual lines characteristics which gives homey, traditional atmosphere and strengthens every day's life back story that relates to readers' personal experience.

As explained above, in this research, minimalist visual style design approach is chosen to prioritize visual elements simplicity in order to achieve better communication and effectiveness. Minimalism is not only oriented on aesthetics but also serves as a strategy to reduce inessential detail clutters so that audience attention is directed to the main message (Usman, 2025). This principle is expressed in the use of simple forms, white spaces and controlled visual contrast. In the context of digital comic production, minimalist style application enables the increase of time efficiency and practicality (Gumber, 2023). High frequency serialized webcomic production demands strict time efficiency and visual consistency. Form and detail simplification facilitate

faster production process without sacrificing emotional readability, story flow and character expression. Moreover, minimalist approach helps readers focusing on story conflicts dynamics and characters' emotional expressions, so that visual communication is still effective even though visual elements have been simplified.

The resulting drawings are then scanned into high-resolution digital format. The next step is to start the digitalization process using an editing software, which consists of applying black and white or grayscale shading rendering in order to emphasize volume, contrast and expression readability. This process is a combination of the organic touch of traditional media and the efficiency of digital processing to produce a character design that is consistent, communicative, and ready to be applied to *4-koma* webcomic format.

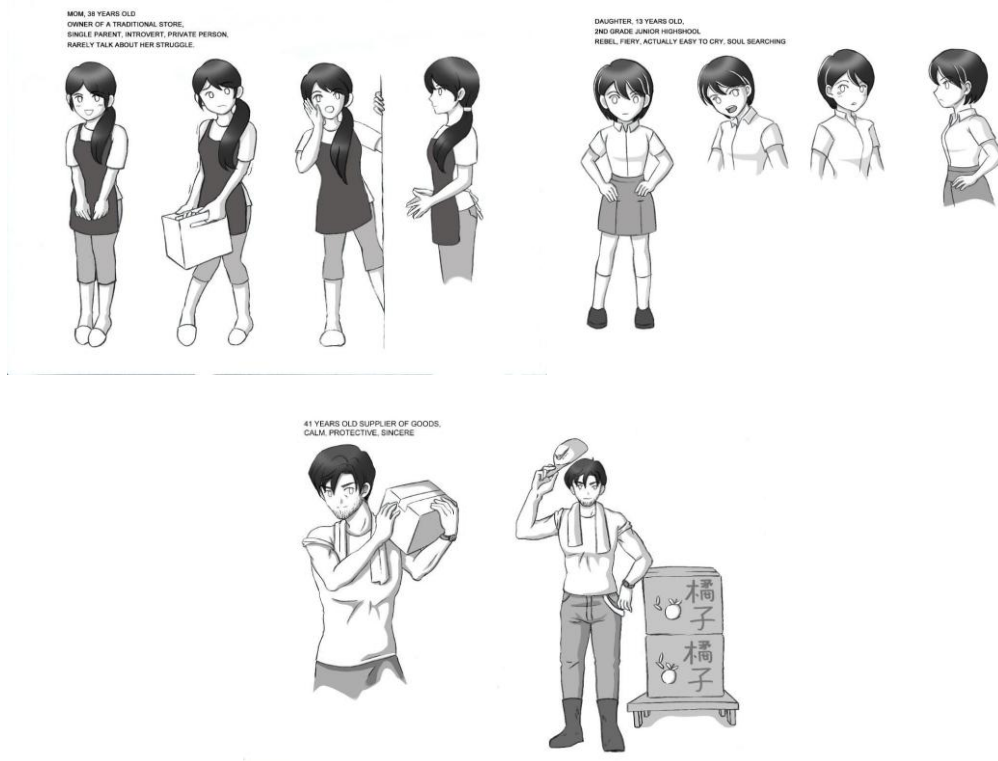


Figure 3. Rastering and shading phase in digital
Source: author's documentation

Visual Validation

Based on the questionnaire result on identity and visual uniqueness aspect, the majority of respondents gave a high score (4 out of 5) on facial expression readability and character silhouette uniqueness. Silhouette/body form achieved the highest score, indicating that visual differentiation between characters were deemed as highly clear. Overall, character design was considered to be accomplished in building strong visual identity and recognizability by audiences.

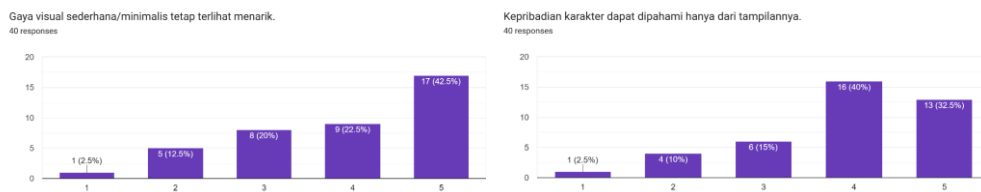


Figure 4 Questionnaire Result on Visual Validation
Source: author's documentation

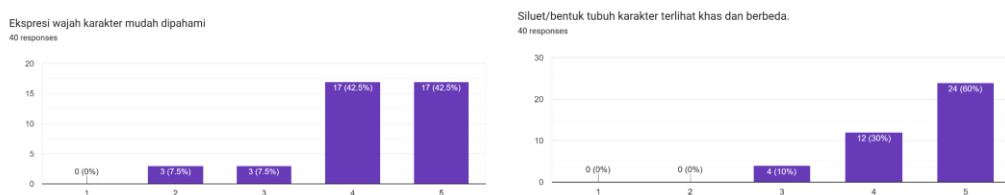


Figure 5 Questionnaire result on identity and visual uniqueness
Source: author's documentation

Based on the questionnaire result, the majority of respondents gave a high score (4 out of 5) on the synergy between character design and individual roles in the story. This positive score shows that character visuals are deemed to be able to represent a clear and relevant narrative function. Overall, the character designs are regarded as consistent and appropriate with the story concept of the webcomic.

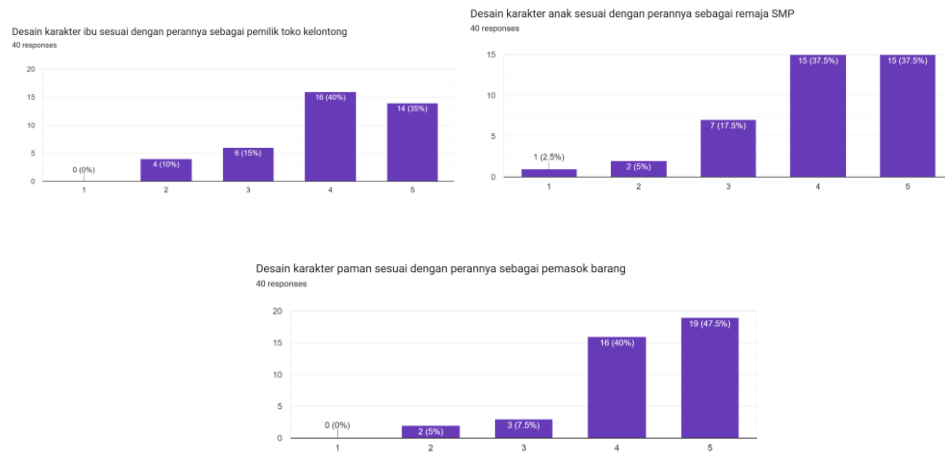


Figure 6. Visual appropriateness with story concept
Source: author's documentation

Comprehensive Analysis

Based on the questionnaire data processing result of 40 respondents, the overall mean achieved is 4.09 on Likert scale of 1-5, which puts it on the “Good” category. This finding shows that the character designs for the webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* have generally met the requirements on the visual readability aspect, role clarity and character communication effectiveness.

Highest score indicator is achieved on silhouette and character’s body form (mean = 4.35), which indicates visual differentiation between characters is regarded as very clear and easily recognizable. This supports the character design principle that a strong silhouette may build a consistent visual identity and is easily recognized by audiences. Facial expression aspect also achieved a high score (mean = 4.20), which shows that the characters are able to convey emotions effectively even when the minimalist visual approach and grayscale are utilized. This finding shows that expression readability is not purely depended on colours but on form clarity and visual structure. On the personality clarity aspect through visual display (mean = 3.95), the result shows a good category, which means overall respondents are able to understand the characters by only using their respective visual representations. This signifies a success in translating narrative concepts to

communicative visual forms. Concurrently, minimalist visual style indicator (mean = 3.88) and black and white visual contrast (mean = 3.90) are also in the good category, while not ones of the highest scores, still indicate that simplified visual approach is positively acceptable to audiences and are effective in character differentiating. Design appropriateness in narrative roles also shows a consistent result (mean 4.05–4.28), which means character visuals are recognized as representative in functions and background stories of each character.

Overall, the analysis result of the questionnaire confirms that design strategy based on form simplicity, visual contrast and silhouette differentiation has been proven to succeed in creating consistent and communicative characters that are easily understood by audience.

Table 1. Evaluation Result of Audience Perception of The Character Design of the Webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!*

No	Assessment Indicators	Score 4 (%)	Score 5 (%)	Total Positive (4–5)	Mean	Interpretation
1	Personality can be inferred from the visual design	40	32,5	72,5	3,95	Good
2	Visual contrast helps with character differentiation	32,5	35	67,5	3,90	Good
3	Minimalist style visual is still engaging	22,5	42,5	65	3,88	Good
4	Facial expressions	42,5	42,5	85	4,20	Really Good

	are easily readable					
5	Silhouettes / body forms are unique and distinct	30	60	90	4,35	Really Good
6	The mother design is suitable for the shop owner's role	40	35	75	4,08	Good
7	The daughter design is suitable for the junior high student's role	37,5	37,5	75	4,05	Good
8	The uncle design is suitable for the supplier's role	40	47,5	87,5	4,28	Really Good
	Overall Average				4,09	Good

Source: author's documentation

CONCLUSION

This research creates a character design for webcomic *If I Were You, Mom!* that stresses a combination of visual efficiency and narrative strength in minimalist styled *4-koma* format, by using the Practice Based Research method, a reflective and iterative design process that merges character design theory, visual

storytelling and also social observation about every day’s life relation of a mother and a daughter.

Design result shows that character design plays a vital role in building empathy and reader identification, especially on family emotional conflict that is presented in a light-hearted and reflective manner. Quantitative validation shows that facial expression and character silhouette receive the highest score, which indicates that this research has accomplished in building a clear visual identity that is easily discerned. Minimalist style has also been proven to have been able to support production efficiency without hindering visual communication strength, therefore making a consistent continuity of the serialization possible.

Despite of that, qualitative evaluation indicates the need of further development on anatomy proportion, age differentiation, specific visual characteristics reinforcement and also a more expressive gestures exploration. Attires attributes conformation to the local cultural context and revision possibilities on details and colours are also suggested to increase the webcomic’s appeal by building a more in-depth atmosphere. Overall, minimalist approach and *4-koma* structure have been proven effective in presenting emotional narration that is engaging to the readers while also preserving webcomic production efficiency.

Suggestion

According to the research result and respondent’s evaluation, there are some suggestions have been offered, such as:

Characterization and Visual Development: A refinement is needed in anatomy proportion, age differentiation, unique characterization visual through silhouettes, accessories, gestures and more contextual attires. Enrichment of details like those can improve character depth without giving up on minimalist principle that has been applied.

Colour Exploration and Publication Format: further research can evaluate a coloured or semi grayscale version to observe the effects on appeal and reader’s emotional responses. Public testing through platforms such as LINE Webtoon or

Tapas is also suggested in order to reach a broader scale of quantitative data on audience acceptance.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration: Research development can be accomplished by holding a collaboration between Visual Communication Design, Psychology and Digital Media to explore the relationship between visual storytelling, social empathy and local culture representation in digital comic media.

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