

Mimicry in Actor and Actress Representation: The Adaptation of Korean Drama Standards by the Indonesian Drama Industry

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Abstract

The phenomenon of drakor (Korean drama) has become increasingly popular in Indonesia, influencing many aspects of the entertainment industry, including the representation of actors and actresses in Indonesian dramas. This article aims to examine the process of mimicry, a concept proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, by focusing on how Indonesian actors and actresses mimic visual elements, acting styles, and the star persona typical of drakor, while adjusting to local cultural norms. The research employs a qualitative approach with critical discourse analysis to examine actor representation in Indonesian dramas, compare elements influenced by drakor, and explore audience perceptions of these adaptations within the local cultural context. The findings indicate that although Indonesian actors and actresses mimic the style and appearance associated with drakor stars, they strive to sustain their local cultural identity through changes in acting techniques, visual expression, and character portrayal. This mimicry process creates cultural ambivalence, generating tension between the desire to align with global standards and the effort to uphold local values valued by audiences. The study also highlights that mimicry is not mere copying but a cultural negotiation involving actors and actresses as agents shaping hybrid media identities. This research offers insights into how globalization affects cultural representation in local media and how actors and actresses contribute to preserving Indonesian cultural identity. By balancing these dynamics, the Indonesian entertainment industry illustrates an active negotiation between global influence and local tradition, enriching the evolving forms of cultural representation in Indonesian television.

Keywords: mimicry, Korean drama, actor representation, cultural identity

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Introduction

In the last decade, Korean dramas (drakor) have become a dominant force in Asian popular culture, especially in Indonesia. Accessible via digital platforms such as Netflix, Viu, Disney+ Hotstar, and YouTube, drakor has transcended national borders and reshaped local media consumption (Korea Foundation, 2020). Beyond entertainment, drakor has influenced Indonesian lifestyle, fashion, beauty ideals, and youth communication styles (Heryanto, 2014; Seasia, 2023).

However, only a few researches have explored how drakor influences the representation of Indonesian actors. Increasingly, local productions adopt drakor-inspired aesthetics—from cinematography to acting style and star image. This trend is best understood through Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry, which frames cultural imitation as “almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86), highlighting a space of ambivalence and negotiation rather than exact replication.

Mimicry is not passive imitation, but a strategy of localization and resistance. It enables local cultures to absorb global elements while adapting them to fit local narratives and values (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008). In Indonesia, mimicry becomes clear in how actors embody Korean celebrity traits while grounding performances in national cultural contexts: The rise of OTT services and internet access has heightened audience expectations. Viewers compare Indonesian productions with global content, especially drakor, prompting local industries to improve quality while maintaining cultural authenticity (Jin, 2016; Kim, 2019).

This article argues that adapting drakor standards is a form of cultural negotiation that balances global aesthetics with local identity. Using the lens of mimicry, the study explores how Indonesian actors strategically navigate these expectations, offering insight into how globalization reshapes local entertainment representation. While past studies emphasize fandom or cultural consumption, few examine the role of actors as agents of mimicry and audience interpretation of these changes. This study addresses that gap, positioning mimicry as an active cultural strategy in Indonesian drama.

Methodologically, the study uses critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Van Dijk, 2015) to examine selected dramas, their production contexts, and related sociocultural discourses. The researcher's dual role—as both a drakor fan and media scholar—supports a reflective, nuanced interpretation of mimicry in performance. The analysis focuses on four Indonesian dramas:

- *Kau yang Berasal dari Bintang* (RCTI, 2014), an overt adaptation of *My Love from the Star* (SBS, 2013-2014);
- *Cinta 2 Pilihan* (RCTI, 2022), influenced by *Crash Landing on You* (tvN, 2019-2020) in tone and style;
- *Merindu Cahaya de Amstel* (MD Pictures, 2022), which blends drakor aesthetics with local religious and diaspora themes;
- *Bad Guys: Vengeance* (BASE Entertainment & CJ ENM, 2025), a formal co-production merging Korean technique with Indonesian content.

Primary data came from viewing episodes, reading scripts, and analyzing key scenes via Netflix, RCTI+, and Viu. Secondary sources included news articles, interviews, and social media responses (Basri & Afifulloh, 2025). Triangulation was done through video archiving, online discourse analysis, and academic literature review.

Data analysis followed three stages: identifying visual mimicry elements such as lighting, camera framing, and wardrobe; interpreting how these elements were localized within the cultural context of the production; and analyzing their impact on identity construction and audience perception. The study *Framing Perception* by Maradia et al. (2025) supports this approach, demonstrating that camera framing and lighting techniques in cinema significantly influence how viewers derive meaning, particularly in relation to objectification and visual mimicry. To enhance analytical precision, NVivo 14 was used to systematically organize thematic codes and strengthen the overall argumentative structure.

This study bridges theory and practice, contributing to mimicry literature in Southeast Asia while offering practical insight for the Indonesian drama industry to compete globally without losing cultural distinctiveness. The adaptation of drakor aesthetics by Indonesian dramas is a layered cultural process. Bhabha (1994) mimicry theory explains this as strategic appropriation: adopting global forms while adapting them locally. Thus, media globalization enables hybrid identities rather than creating one-way cultural domination. Most research on the Korean Wave in Indonesia has focused on fans or fashion, not on how drakor aesthetics reshape local performance norms. The shifts in actor portrayal, delivery, and identity negotiation remain underexplored.

This study highlights mimicry as a transformative cultural practice. Applying Bhabha's theory, it shows how actors adopt drakor conventions while maintaining local identity. It pursues three main goals:

1. Analyze visual and narrative elements adopted from drakor;
2. Explore how actors adapt these stylistic demands;
3. Assess audience perceptions of these mimicry practices.

Theoretically, the study expands Bhabha's mimicry concept to Southeast Asian popular media. Practically, it informs content creators and producers about balancing global influence with cultural authenticity. It also enhances media literacy, encouraging critical audience engagement. Mimicry should be seen not as loss of authenticity but as creative cultural negotiation. Indonesian actors are not passive imitators but active agents of hybrid identity. Ultimately, this study examines how drakor influences actor representation and identity in Indonesian drama. Imitation contains creativity and resistance—mimicry as a contextual strategy that helps Indonesian entertainment stay globally relevant while culturally rooted.

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has shaped global media consumption, including in Indonesia. Drakor, widely available via Netflix and YouTube, is now a cultural force creatively adapted by local producers (Jin, 2016; Lee, 2020). Indonesian content increasingly mirrors Korean visual styles and storytelling, appealing to audiences familiar with East Asian aesthetics (Iwabuchi, 2022). Bhabha (1994) concept of mimicry explains this trend as mentioned before, where global norms meet local resistance. Kraidy's (2022) idea of cultural hybridity complements this, framing mimicry as a creative negotiation between global and local values.

Kau yang Berasal dari Bintang mimics *My Love From the Star*, while *Cinta 2 Pilihan* mirrors the pastel tones and pacing of *Crash Landing on You* (Nugroho, 2023). *Bad Guys: Vengeance*, co-produced with CJ ENM, exemplifies institutional mimicry (Basri & Afifulloh, 2025). Indonesian actors adopt the “clean look” and subtle expressions of K-stars, raising concerns about cultural erasure. Drawing on Maradia et al. (2025), who show how visual framing shapes audience perception and objectification, this study argues that mimicry is not merely aesthetic but performative—negotiated through producers, actors, and audiences.

Audience behavior, such as emulating *drakor* styles, reflects mimicry's reach into everyday life. Actor representation thus embodies hybrid identities—visually Korean, yet locally grounded.

Results & Discussion

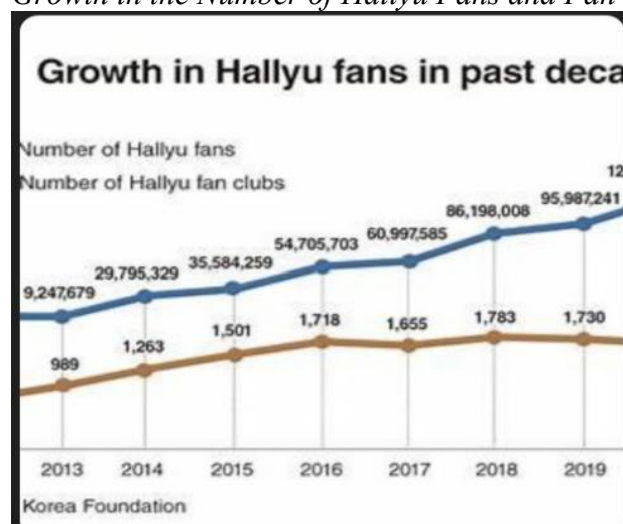
Hallyu Trends and the Growth of Drakor Popularity in Indonesia

Since the early 2010s, Korean dramas (*drakor*) have made a significant impact on Indonesia's entertainment landscape. According to data from the Korea Foundation, the global number of Hallyu fans—which includes *drakor* enthusiasts—increased sharply from 9.2 million in 2013 to more than 95 million by 2019 (Korea Foundation, 2020). This growth was accelerated by the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Viu, and Disney+ Hotstar, which have made Korean content more accessible than ever to Indonesian audiences (Chung, 2024).

The mimicry phenomenon observed in Indonesia's local drama industry does not occur in isolation. Rather, it emerges as a response to the ever-intensifying flow of global cultural influence, particularly from East Asia. To explore how this mimicry manifests and adapts in the Indonesian context, four key visual references are presented below. These visual materials not only support the study's main argument but also serve as indicators of cultural transformation influenced by transnational media flows.

Figure 1

Growth in the Number of Hallyu Fans and Fan Clubs From 2012 to 2019



Source. Korea Foundation (2020)

The above figure illustrates the dramatic rise in the number of global Hallyu fans over the last decade. In 2012, the figure stood at approximately 9 million. By 2019, it had surged to nearly 96 million. This nearly tenfold increase confirms that the Korean Wave is far more than a fleeting pop culture trend—it represents a robust and sustained global community bound together by shared interests in Korean dramas, music, and fashion (Korea Foundation, 2020).

The graph that follows visualizes this exponential growth in popularity, reinforcing the argument that Hallyu has become a dominant cultural force with tangible effects on local media industries, including in Indonesia. This data serves as a foundational context for understanding the immense cultural power of Korean dramas in shaping new standards of

taste across the globe, including in Indonesia. As the global fan base expands, so does the expectation for domestic media industries to meet the aesthetic and narrative benchmarks popularized by *drakor*. In this environment, the mechanism of mimicry begins to take shape—local drama industries are pressured to adapt in order to remain culturally relevant to audiences who have grown familiar with the polished and emotionally resonant style of Korean entertainment.

Figure 2

Netflix Original Productions Shared by Country of Origin, 2017–2019



Source. Ampere Analysis (2020)

Adapted from the Ampere Analysis (2020) report via Statista, this figure illustrates the country-by-country distribution of Netflix Originals production between 2017 and 2019. South Korea emerges as a dominant force in the Asian content market, showing a consistent upward trend and gradually approaching the production levels of traditional Western content producers within Netflix’s portfolio. This growing share signals Korea’s rising status not only as a content creator, but also as a trendsetter in digital media aesthetics.

In this context, Netflix operates not merely as a content distributor, but as a powerful tastemaker. Through the global circulation of Korean dramas, the platform indirectly establishes the template for what a “quality” drama should look like. Indonesian drama producers, whether consciously or not, begin to emulate this template—adjusting episode durations, cinematography styles, narrative pacing, and character development to match the “Netflix-meets-East-Asia” flavor that has now become a dominant mode of storytelling.

The deepening cultural connection between Indonesian audiences and *drakor* is further underscored in Figure 3, which maps the 15 countries with the highest number of K-Drama viewers worldwide—excluding South Korea itself. According to data published by Seasia.co (2023), Indonesia ranks fourth, following only the Philippines, Egypt, and Malaysia. This ranking not only confirms the country’s centrality within the global Hallyu network but also reinforces the extent to which *drakor* consumption has become embedded in everyday media behavior in Indonesia.

Figure 3
15 Countries With the Highest K-Drama Viewers



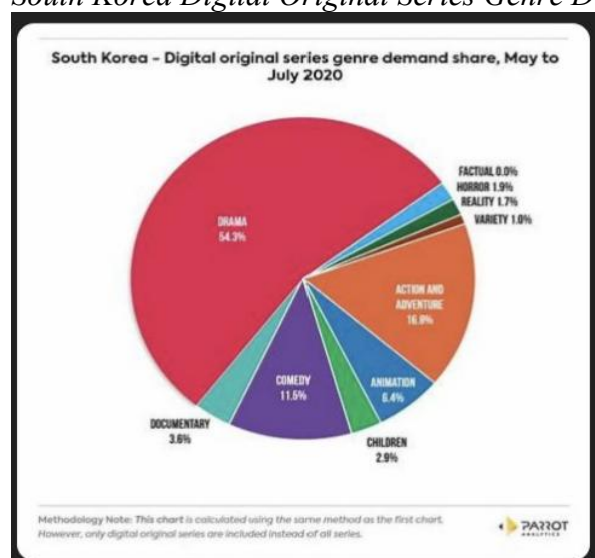
Source. Seasia (2023)

For Indonesia's local drama industry, the data presented above are far more than just entertainment statistics—they function as powerful market signals. As one of the most loyal and active K-drama consumer bases globally, Indonesian audiences have cultivated strong cross-platform fandoms and play an important role in shaping digital media trends. In this context, the effort to incorporate drakor-style aesthetics into local soap operas and films is not simply a matter of artistic preference, but a calculated business strategy. These adaptations help domestic productions remain competitive in a market increasingly saturated with high-quality imported content. In such cases, mimicry operates as a pragmatic bridge between audience expectations—heavily influenced by Korean media—and the production realities of a local industry often constrained by budgetary and infrastructural limitations.

This interplay becomes even clearer in Figure 4, which illustrates the genre demand distribution for digital original series in South Korea between May and July 2020. The data reveals that drama overwhelmingly dominates content preferences with a 54.3% share, followed by action, animation, comedy, and other genres in smaller proportions. These findings highlight that the drama genre is not only culturally significant within South Korea but also serves as a powerful export commodity shaping global content tastes.

Figure 4

South Korea Digital Original Series Genre Demand Share, May to July 2020



Source. Parrot Analytics (2020)

When this data is read in relation to Southeast Asia—particularly Indonesia—it reinforces the notion that this region is a key market for Korean drama consumption, consistently ranking among the top global audiences. This further validates the rationale behind the mimicry observed in local productions. If Korean dramas captivate audiences through emotionally charged narratives, subtle visual storytelling, and romantic plotlines framed in a “clean look” aesthetic, it is no surprise that Indonesian producers emulate not only the visual language but also the structural rhythms of storytelling found in *drakor*.

More than mere duplication, this genre adaptation reflects a deliberate creative strategy—one that seeks to package familiarity in a form that resonates locally. The four figures presented across this section, when interpreted alongside supporting narratives, form a cohesive visual argument: mimicry in the Indonesian drama industry is embedded in the broader logics of market demands, audience preferences, and digital media flows.

Through the lens of Bhabha (1994) theory, mimicry emerges as a dynamic space of negotiation. Imitation arises from the need for appropriation and cultural survival, yet in the very act of mimicking, producers, actors, and audiences co-create a space where “the Korean” is absorbed, recontextualized, and interwoven with what remains “Indonesian.” These visual data points are thus not ornamental—they are living proof of how popular culture operates as a fluid, bidirectional force. What is borrowed is reshaped; what is emulated is localized.

At this crossroads of global and local aesthetics, Indonesian drama finds its unique momentum. It is here that actors and actresses take on dual roles—as sophisticated imitators and as guardians of national cultural identity. They do not merely perform; they negotiate. And in that negotiation lies the creative heartbeat of contemporary Indonesian screen culture.

The practice of mimicry at the heart of this research is most clearly observed in the ways Indonesian dramas borrow, assemble, and reconfigure various elements from Korean drama productions—yet without completely erasing their distinct sense of “Indonesianness.” Close examination of four selected titles—*Kau yang Berasal dari Bintang*, *Cinta 2 Pilihan*, *Merindu Cahaya de Amstel*, and *Bad Guys: Vengeance*—reveals that adjustments in visual

aesthetics serve as the dominant gateway for aligning local dramas with audience expectations shaped by drakor standards.

For instance, *Kau yang Berasal dari Bintang* replicates the cinematic framing and soft, wash-out lighting of *My Love from the Star*, complete with slow-motion close-ups during emotionally heightened moments. This adaptation goes beyond camera techniques; it also shapes the narrative rhythm, prolonging emotional tension in a manner consistent with the storytelling formula of modern Korean dramas (Kim, 2019). Similarly, *Cinta 2 Pilihan* employs minimalist indoor sets and pastel-toned lighting to recreate the visual atmosphere of *Crash Landing on You*. Despite this visual mimicry, the director deliberately retains domestic elements—such as typical urban Indonesian homes and colloquial dialogue—as anchors of local authenticity (Lee, 2020).

In *Merindu Cahaya de Amstel*, the influence of the drakor aesthetic is expressed through a gentle musical score, contemplative close-ups, and minimalist piano instrumentals. However, these elements are interwoven with culturally specific visual markers such as Indonesian hijab fashion and the setting of Amsterdam’s canals—blending “global borrowing” with “local ornamentation” (Heryanto, 2014). Most notably, *Bad Guys: Vengeance*, a co-production with Korea’s CJ ENM, showcases a more advanced form of mimicry: its sharp cinematography, brisk editing style, and crime-thriller genre are directly influenced by Korean production standards. Yet, the characters speak in distinctly Indonesian tones and linguistic nuances, signaling a conscious localization within a transnational framework (Basri & Afifulloh, 2025).

To synthesize these observations, the following table presents a comparative summary of hybridized production elements found across the four analyzed dramas, illustrating how mimicry operates as a blend of imitation, adaptation, and cultural negotiation.

Table 1
Mimicry and Localization in Four Indonesian Dramas (Author’s Compilation)

Series	Adaptation Element	Local Aesthetics
<i>You Who Came from the Stars</i>	Cinematic framing, soft lighting, Korean-style wardrobe	Local humor in dialogue, working-class characters
<i>Love 2 Choices</i>	Pastel glow, slow transitions, minimalist set	Urban Indonesian home settings, casual language
<i>Missing the Light de Amstel</i>	Melodious scoring, expressive close-ups	Local fashion, Indonesian diaspora context
<i>Bad Guys: Vengeance</i>	Fast-paced editing, K-thriller musical scoring	Bahasa Indonesia, local actors

Emerging patterns of mimicry in Indonesian television drama are increasingly evident in the evolving performance styles of actors, which reflect the restrained aesthetic typical of Korean drama. Nugroho (2023) identifies a growing tendency among Indonesian actors to adopt subtle gestures, emotional minimalism, and deliberate pacing—marking a significant departure from the traditionally expressive modes associated with local soap operas. This stylistic shift suggests an internalized adaptation to audience preferences shaped by sustained exposure to K-drama conventions. As Maradia et al. (2025) demonstrate, visual techniques such as framing and performative restraint play a critical role in constructing viewer perception and signaling cultural sophistication. Within this framework, mimicry is not

merely cosmetic but functions as a performative negotiation—one that allows local productions to align with transnational aesthetic standards while simultaneously engaging with domestic cultural expectations. Rather than eroding authenticity, such practices reflect a dynamic process of hybridization that redefines local identity within a global media ecology.

From the audience's perspective, reception is complex and layered. A panel survey conducted by Jakpat (2025) revealed that 82% of viewers appreciated improvements in cinematography and narrative nuance. However, 40% expressed concerns that Indonesian dramas were becoming too similar to *drakor*, losing their distinctive cultural "voice." Furthermore, 15% of respondents believed such adaptations risk diluting traditional aesthetics altogether. These reactions mirror concerns raised in other Southeast Asian contexts, including Malaysia and the Philippines, where hybrid content is increasingly scrutinized for its cultural authenticity (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Kim, 2019). Clearly, Indonesian audiences are not passive recipients—they act as cultural gatekeepers, selectively accepting or rejecting global elements based on relevance and resonance.

This selective reception aligns with Bhabha (1994) concept of mimicry as "almost the same, but not quite"—a form of imitation intentionally marked by difference to create room for negotiation. Indonesian dramas embody this tension: while adopting Korean-style framing, lighting, and soundtracks, they retain distinctive markers such as local dialects, familial themes rooted in village life, and recognizable domestic settings. What emerges is not blind replication, but a culturally negotiated strategy (Kraidy, 2022) that balances global appeal with local identity.

Notably, this negotiation occurs not only on screen but also behind the scenes. The production of *Bad Guys: Vengeance*, a collaboration with CJ ENM, reflects a shift from unlicensed imitation to officially sanctioned hybridization. In the broader landscape of global cultural economics, this signals a maturing industry where intellectual property rights and cross-border ethics are increasingly institutionalized—fostering synergy between Indonesian content creators and Korean media conglomerates (Iwabuchi, 2022).

From an academic standpoint, this research contributes to expanding Bhabha's theory of mimicry into the realm of Southeast Asian entertainment. Originally conceptualized to interpret colonial power dynamics, mimicry now serves to decode how global pop culture is reconfigured within the narrative factories of the digital age. This study's focus on actors as agents of hybridity enforcement and audiences as curators of cultural authenticity enriches the cultural studies discourse (Hall, 1997; Kraidy, 2022).

In practical terms, the findings serve as a cautionary guide for content producers. It is essential to avoid the extremes of either total replication or outright rejection of global aesthetics. The viable solution lies in technical refinement inspired by Korean standards, while preserving narrative frameworks rooted in Indonesian values. Integrating domestic symbols, local cultural references, and vernacular dialogue ensures that mimicry does not collapse into a crisis of identity (Heryanto, 2014).

For policymakers and regulators, this study underscores the need to establish ethical guidelines for cultural adaptation. Standardizing cross-border production partnerships, ensuring fair royalties, and supporting legally recognized hybrid projects can position Indonesia as a competitive content hub—global in flavor, yet local in soul.

In conclusion, Indonesian drama is at a critical juncture. On one side, there is the pressure to meet global standards shaped by the Hallyu wave; on the other, a responsibility to preserve and amplify the nation's cultural voice. Within Bhabha's theoretical framework, it is precisely this in-between space that transforms mimicry from mere replication into a rich site of identity articulation.

Conclusion

This study affirms that Indonesian dramas are currently situated at a cultural crossroads: striving to meet global aesthetic standards driven by the Hallyu wave, while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of local identity. Within this in-between space, the practice of mimicry emerges not as passive imitation, but as a dynamic cultural negotiation—a site where global and local impulses intersect, clash, and merge.

By applying Homi Bhabha (1994) theory of mimicry, this research demonstrates that the incorporation of drakor elements—such as soft lighting, pastel tones, and understated emotional performance—into Indonesian productions goes beyond replication. Instead, these aesthetic choices become tools of articulation, producing works that are simultaneously *foreign* in form yet *familiar* in spirit. The analysis of four dramas—*Kau yang Berasal dari Bintang*, *Cinta 2 Pilihan*, *Merindu Cahaya de Amstel*, and *Bad Guys: Vengeance*—supports this assertion by showing how these stylistic adaptations create hybrid texts marked by cultural duality.

On the level of performance, the shift toward subtlety and visual clarity reflects not only an aesthetic upgrade but also a transformation in how actors position themselves as mediators of global taste and national character. Meanwhile, audience responses captured from social media reflect ambivalence: appreciation for enhanced production values, yet concern for the erosion of cultural uniqueness. This tension is indicative of mimicry's core nature—it invites both admiration and critique, both acceptance and resistance.

Theoretically, this research extends the reach of Bhabha's mimicry beyond literature and colonial discourse, applying it to the field of Southeast Asian popular media. It also supports Kraidy (2022) assertion that cultural hybridity is the defining logic of the globalized entertainment industry. Practically, these findings offer valuable insights for Indonesian producers, writers, and policymakers, suggesting that global competitiveness does not require the abandonment of local roots—rather, success lies in striking a creative balance between adaptation and authenticity.

That said, the study has its limitations. Its focus on mainstream dramas excludes web-based series and independent productions, which may reveal different modes of mimicry or even more experimental forms of cultural negotiation. In addition, its reliance on textual and online observation would benefit from deeper interviews with actors, directors, and producers to validate interpretive claims.

Future research should explore mimicry practices in other formats—reality shows, musical dramas, or OTT-exclusive content. Digital ethnographic methods may also enrich our understanding of how local audiences interpret, challenge, or redefine hybrid content in their everyday cultural consumption.

Ultimately, this study encourages a reframing of mimicry not as a threat to originality, but as a strategy of survival and reinvention in an increasingly borderless media landscape. With critical awareness and thoughtful production ethics, the Indonesian drama industry can position itself not as a derivative of global trends, but as a distinctive voice in the global narrative—almost the same, but unmistakably ours.

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