

**ADAPTATION ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN VIDEO GAMES *MORTAL KOMBAT* INTO FILM *MORTAL KOMBAT REBOOT 2021*****Arya Saputra, Salman Alfarisi, Rista Nur Kholifah**

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, many games are transformed into adaptation works. One of them is *Mortal Kombat Game*, adapted into Film *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*. Using these objects, the *Mortal Kombat Game* and its film adaptations *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*, this research analyzes the movie adaptation process since it contains some changes and omissions. The changes are inevitable because the media is transformed, which was originally in the form of game and adapted into a version with a shorter duration, a movie. This is in accordance with Hutcheon's adaptation theory in the Interacting to Showing section, which is also used as the main theory to analyze the object of this research. There are also differences in terms of audiovisual and interaction with the audience. There are two problem formulations to be discussed in this research. First, what changes are made in the movie adaptation, and second, the consequences of differences in media of the stories in the games and films. To conduct this research, we use the descriptive comparative method to explain the differences. This method supports written information and pictures, which is important to study this article. The results of the research reveal that there are two changes that occur in this film adaptation. First, there are five different character visualizations and one additional character, and second, four plot changes. The researchers conclude that the adaptation made by the film production team is not much different from the appearance of the characters and the plot of the original game. Thus, the adapter does not completely change it from the original game but only expands it as a new story made for the film, but keeps the game as the main reference.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Game, Film, Changes, Mortal Kombat, Media Studies**INTRODUCTION**

In the past, the most popular adaptations ranged mainly from literary texts to movies and only then to video games. Recently, this pattern has begun to change as we see more and more video games being adapted into movies, "one of the most immersive forms of adaptation" (MacArthur et al., 2009). This development is not surprising considering the growing profits of the games industry that often compete with or, in some cases, eclipse the earnings of the film industry. Furthermore, as Brown and Krzywinska (2009, p.86) have pointed out, "The growing number of movies and related games is because they have shared many similarities since then." Like movie, digital games are screen-based and therefore use many features and cinematic power. Thus, it provides one of the most fundamental and formal reasons for the growing number of links to video games while simultaneously emphasizing a central difference, compatibility. The

game's interactivity, however, is what defines games in general, distinguishing them from other mediums. The game must be played.

With these differences in mind, this article examines the adaptation of the action-adventure fighting video game genre into films. Although Flanagan (2017) mentioned that video games are usually taking their reference from other textual media like novels, comics, or films, it is not rare that this type of entertainment is the source of reference, just like the object of this research. The game becoming the object of this research is *Mortal Kombat 1992-2019* which was adapted into a film that can be considered, at least commercially, very successful: *the Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* series. The series itself has grossed \$83 million worldwide, with a budget of \$55 million, and this is HBO Max's most successful film release to date (Herman, 2022).

*Mortal Kombat* is an American media franchise centered around a series of video games developed by Midway Games in 1992 (Hayse, p.419). The original *Mortal Kombat* was the first fighting game to introduce a secret fighter, which was achieved if the player met certain requirements. The original game spawned multiple sequels with several action-adventure games; the game also featured a comic series and a card game (Budziszewski, 2012, p.420).

*Mortal Kombat* has been adapted into two major films, *Mortal Kombat* (1995) and *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* (1997), and both were distributed by New Line Cinema. The first movie was released on August 18, 1995, and the second was on November 27, 1997. After the two previous films were released, the third *Mortal Kombat Reboot* movie adaptation of this game was released on April 14, 2021, produced by James Wan, directed by Simon McQuoid, and written by Greg Russo and David Callahan (IMDb, 2021). According to Chachowski (2021), "The entire plot of *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* seems to dedicate itself more to setting up a bigger conflict and storyline in the future rather than focusing on developing an actual movie here. Throughout its runtime of just under two hours, the movie sets up the major conflict, the titular *Mortal Kombat* tournament between Outworld and Earthrealm and its respective fighters, without ever actually showing the tournament, leaving it open for a sequel." Therefore, this film caused a lot of curiosity among *Mortal Kombat* fans and thus was chosen as the object of this research.

As a film adaptation, there seem to be many differences between the game and the movie itself. Hutcheon says all adapters connect stories in different ways. They use

the same instrument that storytellers always use, but the story that concerns them is taken from elsewhere, nothing new (2006, p.3). This means that the adapters get their material from other adapted works. They use stories from novels, comic books, plays, poetry, or video games. The current discussion about adaptation analysis is not just about fidelity. Mary Donaldson-Evan (2009, p.24) said their interest in these film adaptations centered on a particular way of filmmaking in which the film adaptations “recreate” a particular novel and the films are judged based on whether they are “faithful” to the fictional story that sets them up inspirational.

There have been many articles discussing adaptation, especially literary adaptation. However, only some articles and essays study the adaptation from games to other media or the other way around. The article by Mark Rowell Wallin sees how a novel by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, was adapted into different kinds of games. Another discussion about game was written by Agung Prasetyo Wibowo (2021), which focused on the translation and adaptation of the language in the game. Meanwhile, articles about *Mortal Combat* are mostly written in the field of psychology. One published in Elsevier in 2002 by Bartholow & Anderson, focuses on how violent video games, including mortal combat, influence aggressive behavior of different sex. The other one is entitled *Seeing the World Through Mortal Kombat-colored Glasses: Violent Video Games and the Development of a Short-term Hostile Attribution Bias* (Kirsh, 2016). This article discusses the effect of violent and non-violent video games on children's responses to provocative stories.

To conduct this research, we compared the game and its movie adaptation, which has never been done before. After comparing the two, we highlight two things: What changes did the film’s production team make during the transformation process, and how different media affected the story of the game and the movie. Regarding the problem to be discussed, this study has two objectives. They are to find out the changes made by the film’s production team and find out the effects of those changes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Adaptation Theory**

The relationship between literature, fine arts, games, and electronic media, for example, has received increasing interest from critics and theorists in the field. This is also catalyzed by the development of technology, which makes the availability of the media increase (Paula, Burn, Noss, & Valente, 2018, pp.39-46). This relationship allows

literature to become one of the primary sources of inspiration for the production of movies and video games. Through adaptation, certain stories are recreated and presented to the public in new forms due to the many technological instruments that support this recreation.

James Naremore (2000, p.44) states that “adaptation is part of a general theory of repetition since narratives are indeed repeated in different ways and in distinct cultural or artistic means.” In other words, a story can be remade or rewritten in different media. The main idea of the story is the same, yet when the technology used to present it or the writer, either script writer for film, translator for the translated version of the story, or even a game developer, is different, the narration is presented somehow differently.

In her book entitled *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon introduced adaptation as not just a formal entity but also the process entailed in the adaptation. Hutcheon in Yushar (2018, pp.9-10) divided adaptation into two senses; the first is the object as a product, which extensively means not only the novel as the object of adaptation but also other literary works, such as poetry, short stories and play, or even certain transcoding. Words, for example, for the code of a novel, can be transcoded into movie, and the code turns into pictures. The second is as a process of reinterpretation, including paraphrasing and translating new adapters, then erasing something from the original source or adding new aspects in the adapted version.

The process above raises two types of questions, who and why. Who are the adapters is an easy question for narrative media with only one author. Hutcheon in Yushar (2018, p.10) says that in performance media, the process of interpretation and creation is collaborative. Since all subsequent work on the adaptation is based on the screenplay, it seems logical to consider the screenwriters as the adapters. However, there are also pitfalls, one of which is the task's potential complexity that determines the script's author. In some cases, another screenwriter may have revised the original script, and the editor may have made changes. A "music director/composer" who creates sounds and music to amplify emotions or evoke reactions in an audience could be another possibility. Nevertheless, their role in the coordination of achieving the adaptation process is essential. “Composers usually work from the script, not from the adapted game, because they have to write music specifically to fit the production action, timing, and budget” (Hutcheon, p. 81).

Hutcheon also mentioned that actors sometimes draw inspiration from acting adaptations, especially in the case of playing famous literary characters. Each actor

certainly brings something special to the adaptation, but rather they also adapt the script that they always have to adhere to. Therefore, the actors also had a role in the adaptation process. "The editor sees and creates the whole in a way no one else does. However, none of these artists, screenwriters, composers, designers, cinematographers, actors, editors, and the list could go on—is usually considered the primary adapter of a film or television production." (Hutcheon, p.82).

As mentioned above, narrative media is collaborative. Even many artists are involved in the complex filmmaking process. Identifying the adapter is not an easy task, but it is obvious. Hutcheon in Yushar (2018, p.11) mentioned that from the studio's press release and critical response, the director is ultimately responsible for the overall vision and, therefore, the adaptation as an object. However, screenwriters often begin the process by writing a script in addition to interpreting the game adapted for a new medium. Therefore, the main duties and main responsibilities for the film adaptation are shared by the screenwriter and the director. Besides that, the other artists involved may draw inspiration from the game being adapted, but their responsibility lies more with the script and the editor's interpretations, therefore, with the film as a standalone work of art.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this research, the researchers use descriptive comparative method. This comparative method is suitable to use in this research because comparative research analyzes and compares two or more objects or ideas. Comparative studies are studies that demonstrate the ability to test, compare, and contrast topics or ideas. Comparative research shows how similar two subjects are or shows and how different the two are" (Bukhari, 2011). This comparative method is used to identify and measure the relationship between two or more variables by observing different groups by choice or given different treatments. This means that this method is intended to gather information and provide a detailed explanation of the process of adaptation from games to film.

In this research, we compare the narrative elements and visual elements of the two objects since both provide visuals to the players (for a game) and the audience (for a film). In addition, comparative method allows us to focus on our main research and argument. Thus, the researchers are able to decide whether the game and the movie being compared are more similar or more different. The researchers will analyze them and highlight the significant differences with different points of view in order to draw conclusions based on the research.

The data sources in this research are *Mortal Kombat Game* and *Mortal Kombat Reboot Film 2021*. After collecting data, we conduct data analysis through the following steps: first, the researchers display and categorize all of the data found in the games and film adaptations. Second, the researchers analyzed and explained the data found using the adaptation theory by Linda Hutcheon. Then the last, the researchers draw a conclusion about the adaptations of the games into the films.


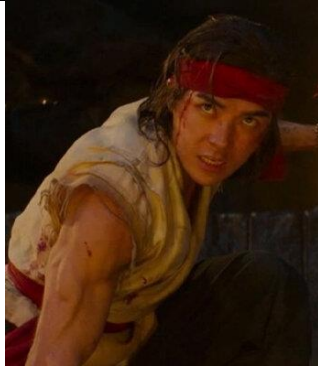






## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In the research findings, the researchers display some of the data found and explain the changes that the film's production team made during the process of transformation, including Character Differences and Plot Change, and consequences of the different media on the story of games and films, using the adaptation theory by Linda Hutcheon.

### **Character Differences**

After collecting and analyzing the data, our next step is to elaborate on all the findings that have been found during research about the differences in the visual depiction of characters in the game *Mortal Kombat* and its film adaptation version of *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*. There are some differences in the character, which are presented as follow:

NO	CHARACTERS NAME	APPEARANCE ON THE GAME	APPEARANCE ON THE FILM
1.	Sub-Zero		

2.	Liu Kang		
3.	Mileena		
4.	Kano		
5.	Jax		

Sub-Zero is a warrior from the fictional clan Lin Kuei (Chinese; pinyin: Lín Kúì), a character defined primarily by his ability to control ice in various forms. He is the only fighter to appear in each of the main installments of the series, along with being featured as the protagonist of the action-adventure spin-off *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*.

The visual depiction of the character Sub-zero has several differences. Sub-zero character in the game does not show his face and looks like a monster with a full-face mask and shining eyes. His head is covered by a kind of hood that hangs over his shoulders. While for the character design in the film is mostly adapted from the Noob Saibot character, who is also another **Mortal Kombat** games character. The character in the film is seen wearing a mask that covers half of the face and a headgear without covering the eyes and without a head covering those hanging over the shoulders.

Liu Kang is a fictional character in the **Mortal Kombat** fighting game series. He is described as a warrior and champion from the Earthrealm. Liu Kang is one of the protagonists in **Mortal Kombat** and can be considered the main hero in the series.

Liu Kang's visualization in the game is different from his visual appearance in the film, although the difference is not that significant. Liu Kang's visualization in the game looks shirtless, has long hair, uses a red headband, and wears Shaolin shoes. Meanwhile, Liu Kang's visualization in the film is depicted wearing a white, sleeveless shirt and a red cloth belt. The film maintains the use of a red headband. This character does not seem to have much difference in visual appearance compared to the other characters in the film.

Mileena is one of the **Mortal Kombat** characters who is a clone of the Edenian princess Kitana, created with the blood of the fictional Tarkatan species. However, it is not fully successful cloning. Rather, she develops deformed facial features of the Tarkatan, and that is the reason she is wearing a veil, to cover the defect. A power-hungry, unstable villain throughout most of the series, Mileena uses a pair of sai (the traditional Okinawan stabbing weapon used for stabbing and striking) as her primary weapon. The fact about her and Tarkatan is probably the reason why a Tarkatan warrior, Baraka, appealed to her.

Mileena's visual appearance looks different in the game and film versions. In the game, Mileena is wearing a sexy purple ninja costume, wearing a mouth covering that is also full purple, with short, flowy hair. Meanwhile, Mileena's visual appearance in the film is described as wearing a full black ninja costume, not wearing a mouth covering and showing her terrible mouth. In the film and the game, this character still uses the same primary weapon, but Mileena's hair in the film is long and tied up. Even though they have different visual representations, they both are presented as terrible characters, one of Shang Tsung's sadistic troops.



The next character is Kano, the leader of the Black Dragon, a fictional criminal organization in *Mortal Kombat*. Kano is distinguished by his cybernetic eye, which he has used as a laser in later installments. As one of the series' recurring villains, he often aligns himself with the forces threatening Earthrealm. He is also the archenemy of Special Forces officer Sonya Blade, who seeks to bring him to justice.

The difference between the depiction of Kano's character in the game and the film lies in his main weapon, which is his cybernetic eyes. In the game, Kano's cybernetic eyes are covered by his character's signature iron mask. Whereas in the film, Kano's cybernetic eyes are not covered with an iron eye mask and there is a scar around his right eye. Kano's visual appearance in the game looks like he is not wearing a shirt, but in the movie, Kano is seen wearing a dark green jeans vest and wearing a black inner shirt. Despite the differences between the film and the game, Kano is still the most annoying villain in the game.

Jax is a mainstay of the *Mortal Kombat* series, including being the protagonist of the action-adventure spin-off *Mortal Kombat* (Ankshear & Knobel, 2002). This character is distinguished by his metal bionic arms and abilities based on his upper body strength. In the game, Jax is first depicted as Special Forces operations commander Sonya Blade and later becomes one of the fighters defending Earthrealm from various threats.

Jax's character in games and movies is characterized by his trademark, robotic arm. Jax's visual appearance in the film seems to take the design from the early game, not wearing a t-shirt and jacket like in the new game. In the game, Jax is depicted wearing a black shirt and brown jacket, has hair, and a beard. Whereas in the film, Jax is depicted not wearing any clothes at all, looking bald, and not having a beard like in the game. Thus, Jax's visual appearance in movies and games is both marked by his robotic arm, but he is bald in the movie.

In addition to the visual differences found in some *Mortal Kombat* characters, additional characters also occur in the film *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*. The new character introduced in this film is named Cole Young. Cole Young is an original character created especially for this film, whose goal is to protect the earth. Cole Young plays the main character, a Mixed Martial Art (MMA) fighter with the *Mortal Kombat* logo on his chest. Cole Young has an arcana (strength) as a suit of armor that absorbs his enemy's attacks, so he can return the attack many times over through his fists. Not only that, Cole can make a weapon like a tonfa from his armor.

### **Plot Change**

In addition to the characters' appearance and an additional character, there are also changes in the plot. The difference between the film and game versions that the production team did is to make the *Mortal Kombat* movie look better. This means that here there will be a “new” story made for the film, but still using the game as the main reference. Some of the differences in the stories found in this game and film include Arcana being a source of strength, Competition between Scorpion and Sub-Zero, Sub-Zero tearing Jax's arm, and Kano's changing nature.

In the film *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*, every character participating in the tournament must have the *Mortal Kombat* logo on his body. The logo can be owned if he is appointed by Lord Raiden (Tadanobu Asano) or kills the person who has it. While in the game, each character can have superpowers or arcana as long as he has the *Mortal Kombat* logo by awakening his soul through various exercises or stressful events.

The rivalry between Scorpion and Sub-Zero is a central part of the *Mortal Kombat* myth, and it also plays a key role in the reboot. However, a number of details surrounding the rivalry have been removed from the game. Their feud begins in feudal Japan, not in a more modern place as found in the game. At the beginning of the film *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021*, Sub-Zero is depicted hunting down a Scorpion and killing him, while in the game, the killings are carried out in battle. Sub-Zero also killed the Scorpion family. In the game, the murder of the family is carried out by Quan Chi, though Scorpion believes that it was on Sub-Zero's orders. Although there are differences between the film and the game, the story in the game can help give an idea of the feud between Sub-Zero and Scorpion.

As one of the new main villains in the film, Sub-Zero has become the forerunner of Jax character. In the game, Jax loses his arm when Ermac uses telekinesis to tear it from his body. While the story in the film, Jax's arm is torn by Sub-Zero through a fight. The way Jax lost his hand was different from the game. In the film, Jax investigates a frozen wasteland only to be captured by Sub-Zero, who quickly disposes it by freezing and destroying Jax's arm, something that builds more on in the film itself as the character gains his all-powerful new bionic arm. While in the game, Jax and Sonya run into Sub-Zero, then the group starts talking. They're interrupted by Ermac, who Jax then attacks. Unfortunately for Jax, Ermac has psychic powers. Ermac then freezes Jax and proceeds to blow his arms off.

There is also a change in Kano's character in the film. Previously, Kano was the main villain in the *Mortal Kombat* game. He is the most annoying villain and antagonist

in the game. With the characteristics of having cybernetic eyes and having no pity, Kano is one of Shang Tsung's mainstays. However, in the movie, Kano teams up with Sonya, Jax, and Cole to defend Earthrealm, while in the game, Kano is one of Sonya Blade and Jax's mortal enemies. That lessens the number of villains in the movie since Kano teams up with the defender of Earthrealm.

Besides that, these changes in appearance and plot can at least make up for the deficiencies that arise due to the weak acting performance of the main character and those due to the shallowness of the story and the direction given by the adaptor. *Mortal Kombat* is indeed designed to be a presentation that excels in its action scenes, and the adapter was able to provide it. The moments of action, which often come with an impression of brutal violence, as video games always bring, are polished and satisfying. However, when these moments are lost, *Mortal Kombat* often feels that it has lost its storytelling life. Not a really bad presentation, but overall, *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* film provides refreshing impacts of various changes from previous adaptations.

The researchers conclude that the adaptation that occurs in *the Mortal Kombat* game and Film *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* includes character differences and plot changes. There are five different visualizations of characters in the film that are adapted from the game. Then here, there are also plot differences or plot changes in the film and game versions, which is to make the story more refreshing.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the adaptation of *Mortal Kombat* game to *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* film, the researchers found several differences, including visual character differences and plot differences between the game and the film. In terms of character differences, there are five characters that can be said to have different visualizations from the original version of the game. These characters are Sub-Zero, Liu Kang, Mileena, Jax, and Kano, and there are additional characters in the film adaptation, namely Cole Young, which does not exist in the original game. The differences occur only in the visual appearance of the character but do not change the essence of the original character's abilities in the game. In terms of plot changes, there are four pieces of data found which indicate that there is a change in the plot between the original game and the film adaptation. Among them are, Arcana being a source of strength, Competition between Scorpion and Sub-Zero, Sub-Zero tearing Jax's arm, and Kano's changing nature.

Then based on the data collected and analyzed, the researcher concludes that the adaptation of *Mortal Kombat* game to *Mortal Kombat Reboot 2021* film is faithful. The changes made by the adaptor do not change the main theme of the game as the adapted work, so it does not affect or contribute to significant consequences for the new version. This film is a faithful adaptation of a game to the degree that it tells the same representation that the game does. This is in accordance with Hutcheon's adaptation theory in the Interacting to Showing section. This means that there is a "new" story made for the film but still uses the game as the main reference.

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