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# Digital Comics and Webtoons: Format Innovation, Markets, and Reader Communities

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## ABSTRACT

Digital comics and webtoons have transformed the contemporary comics landscape through innovations in format, platform distribution, and audience engagement. This study examines the evolution of digital comics with particular emphasis on webtoons as vertically scrolling, mobile-oriented narratives that redefine comic storytelling and reader interaction. Unlike traditional print comics structured around page-based navigation, webtoons employ continuous vertical scrolling interfaces that enhance pacing, cinematic immersion, and accessibility on smartphones and tablets. The study explores how digital comics integrate multimedia features such as animation, sound effects, music, and interactivity to expand the expressive possibilities of sequential art. The paper further investigates the market dynamics and industrial structures underpinning digital comics and webtoon ecosystems. It analyzes the rise of platform-centered distribution systems, including WEBTOON, Tapas, Lezhin, and KakaoPage, alongside evolving creator economies and intellectual property arrangements that reshape relations between creators, publishers, and audiences. The global expansion of webtoons demonstrates the importance of localization, cross-cultural adaptation, and transnational circulation in digital comics markets. Reader communities constitute another central focus of the study. Digital comics foster participatory cultures through fan labor, collaborative creation, commentary, translations, remixes, and online interactions that blur the distinction between producers and consumers. Community moderation and platform governance also play crucial roles in shaping digital comics ecosystems, influencing accessibility, inclusion, content regulation, and sustainability. Additionally, the paper examines experimental digital comic formats, cross-media adaptations, and transmedia storytelling strategies that connect comics with film, animation, gaming, and other digital entertainment industries. Despite opportunities for creative innovation and global market expansion, challenges remain regarding creator sustainability, platform dependency, censorship, piracy, quality control, and reader retention. The study concludes that digital comics and webtoons represent a major transformation in the comics medium, reshaping storytelling practices, market structures, and cultural participation while simultaneously generating new economic, technological, and regulatory concerns for the future of digital creative industries.

**Keywords:** Digital Comics, Webtoons , Vertical Scrolling , Reader Communities and Platform Ecosystems

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital comics differentiate themselves from print comics through their integration of digital technology and a capacity for multimedia. They can take the form of webcomics (viewable via web browsers) or enhance the reading experience via specific software [1]. Webcomics often exploit the web as a medium for storytelling and art, yet certain series in this category do not operate under the conditions usually associated with comics [2]. Digital comics may use platforms designed specifically for sharing and reading comics, but (as with webcomics) such publications cannot be classified under this format. The definition of e-comics remains fluid and context-dependent [1]. Digital

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comics are often synonymous with webcomics. The rise of smart devices has fostered greater interest in comics that are consumed using vertical scrolling rather than horizontal scanning. To distinguish this emerging tradition of comics, the following term is adopted: “webtoon” [2]. Webtoons refer to comics originally conceived as such and specifically designed for vertical scrolling. They are distinct from comics that have simply been repurposed for that format. The concept of the webtoon embodies a growing interest in rethinking comic-making practices around the use of web/online media and smart devices. The term remains a work-in-progress, an evolving concept rather than a definitive definition [1]. The growing popularity of the webtoon format invites further examination of the factors underpinning its success and the implications for contemporary comic storytelling [2].

### Evolution of Digital Comics Formats

Digital comics encompass a broad spectrum of comics designed for digital distribution, spanning webcomics, e-comics, and mobile comics [2]. This study examines webtoons, defined here as vertical-scrolling comics serialized on platforms that facilitate reader communities, to explore how format innovation, changing market dynamics, and reader engagement shape the digital comics landscape [3]. Three questions guide the investigation: What distinctive formats have emerged for digital comics? What market and industry structures underpin these formats? How do reader communities and cultural practices relate to them? Methodologically, the analysis synthesizes scholarly literature with insights extracted from primary sources, including audiovisual case studies and screenshots. By illuminating an underexplored segment of the comics ecosystem, the project offers insights for comics scholars, industry representatives, and platform operators [4]. Webtoons embody a paradigm shift in comic’s presentation and experience [1]. The dominant page-based format, inherited from print, structures navigation as a confined act: readers move from one complete page to another in a sequential, pre-determined order. In contrast, vertical-scrolling webtoons position the entire narrative sequence along a single, continuous column, inviting an always-on mode of engagement: scrolling toward the bottom of the page reveals the next sequence of events [5]. Horizontal displacement is eliminated; narrational progression follows a predetermined downward trajectory, analogous to the downstream flow of written text. Principles of comics layout still apply, space between two panels indicates a temporal gap, but in the vertical-scrolling format, visual displacement has little impact on the overall experience [1]. Within digital comics, scrollable narratives, akin to hypertext poetry and fiction, progressively expose visuals and text. Frames containing complete information emerge and vanish according to position in the scrolling vector: gradually appearing elements suggest building anticipation, while rapidly disappearing frames link to earlier parts of the narrative [4]. Tile-based panels are static and discrete; continuous panels reshape comics. As each slice crosses the screen, readers develop different processes for textual and visual arrangement, potentially hindering comprehension [5].

### Webtoons and Vertical Scrolling Interfaces

Webtoons, the dominant form of digital comics across East Asia, exploit a unique vertical scrolling interface to provide a fundamentally distinct reading experience [1]. Vertical scrolling pages accommodate the large screen sizes of smartphones and tablets while ensuring a smooth workflow with little interruption. This seamless reading flow has further emphasized the temporal nature of comics and augmented their cinematic quality 2. The need to manage reader attention arises during the creation of webtoons [2]. Only one frame is visible on the screen at a time, making it impossible to exhibit multiple images or panels simultaneously. For this reason, instead of inserting blank spaces between panels, webtoon cavities predominately consist of gutters that turn images into separate frames [3]. The integration of multimedia elements is another characteristic of webtoons. Many of these comics include animated GIFs, music, sound effects, or voiceovers. Furthermore, births of scrollable narratives and arrangements of frames form an important part of vertical scrolling comics creation in which various channels are organised in such a way that segments are readable even when a certain channel is still being animated [4].

### Scrollable Narratives and Frame Management

Webtoons distinctively employ vertical-scrolling Web interfaces that afford additional narrative capabilities compared to conventional comic formats [1]. Consequently, comics and graphic novels presented through this medium need to consider the reading flow within its scrolling chapters and the spacing allocated between frames in a manner specific to this distribution system [2]. Digital comics and Webtoons can be read with the flat, tile-based frame structure used in Continuity Without Frames, though many tend to adopt a continuous approach 3. In this case, a gradual movement of images through the continuous area allows readers to glance around the flow without fixation on a specific frame. For Noncommercial Patterns of Participation, continuous narratives can be investigated in either diagrammatical or scroll-based Web delivery [3]. The scroll structure of Webtoons enables readers to adjust the flow and pacing to match different narrational speeds. Titles such as this expand the concept of ‘pan-and-scan’ into a collaborative joint focusing mechanism, enabling clear representations of interrelated duality to emerge from raw temporal crossing [4].

### **Multimedia Integration and Interactivity**

Digital comics and webtoons are characterized by their rich multimedia integration and interactivity, which are often absent or less prominent in the more traditional formats of printed or digital comics [1]. The integration of audio, animations, and additional visual effects impacts the storytelling potential and the audience engagement generated by the storyboards [2]. With the designated focus only to the storytelling elements, digital comics and webtoons can innovate and experiment further without losing the essence of the platform. The interactivity of storytelling involves reader participation on multiple levels, including selection of character roles, navigation sequences, and structural elements [2]. When the reader has a choice to select between multiple route on the storyline, it allows them to have their own interpretation and feeling towards the comic at each time of reading it. Therefore, comics are no longer a medium merely produced by the creator, but a medium that involves the audience interpretation on creating meaning in their respective level [3]. Multiple techniques are adopted for audio integration. Sound effect is often glued with visual action, enhancement of atmosphere without disturbing other contents. Besides, ambient music composing with the artistic style strengthens the emotional context of the comics. Comparably to illustrated novels or storyboards, digital comics tilt towards focus on visual description and graphic narration from the reading flow, while on webtoons emphasis given is on motion graphic and animation. Different contextual media accompanied webtoons to create a sensation of film watching experience [4]. Panel layout in comic are circular, rectangle and irregularly shaped, yet still retaining systematic as they cannot exceed the containment of unmentioned page layout. Continuity outside the dimension of the page is eliminates when the digital platform is possessed with virtual infinite space. Henceforth a second pattern framework is invented with without breaking time and space but at the same time multiple chapter and question can still approach toward the reader together to stimulate interests in further reading [5].

### **Market Dynamics and Industry Structure**

Digital comics and webtoons offer different distribution and business models and markets; hence, countries exhibit different growth rates and needs for localization. Global penetration is lower for digital comics, limiting the independence and creator-centric power asymmetries of digital comics [2]. Platform differences between webtoons and digital comics partly determine thematic and stylistic preferences. The comic book industry originated in the United States; manga emerged in Japan; digital comics evolved into webtoons in South Korea; and light novels, youth literature, and graphic novels became alternative trends in other countries. Linguistic proximity and cultural familiarity facilitate access to South Korean contents [3]. Readers cannot consume originals in various territories, lighting the need for commercial versions. Mermaid, Bastard, and The Breaker have been introduced in multiple languages yet have been easily surpassed by competitors. Cultural filtering determines the extent of adaptations [5]. Coexisting entrepreneurship models and creator economies mutually shift contents circulation. Mosaic, VIZ, and Comikey entered the market with traditional manga-oriented access platforms and creator-centric arrangements that differ from conventional European comic and cartoon practices [5]. Portrait webtoons became prevalent through Kakaopage and on-profit commercial distribution and manga-style condensation. On-page transition interfaces persist alongside scrollable narratives [2]. Webtoons take up the large share of manga-friendly investment. Advancing revenue flows on simultaneous digital-physical expansion through large-plateau guidance led to cautious business setups [3]. Bound by revenue-share consideration or entry cost, independent webtoons settled on paged pattern yet have produced K-drama-oriented adaptations going viral through non-Korean platforms. Pageless serialized webtoons preclude differential premium subscription in South Korea yet remain international option or formation. Webcomics, contests, or illustration facilitate migration to webtoons. Copyright acquirement and platform-selection difficulty provoke scattered success narratives [2].

### **Platform Ecosystems and Revenue Models**

In the digital age, comics have transformed from the printed page to the digital screen, and comics made for and distributed through the Internet have progressed from niche, alternative formats to established, widely available and commercially viable art forms [1]. Such developments have spurred a flourishing of innovations and the creation of new, distinct “comics” that, while still reliant on the fundamental elements of comics, may have little in common with their print-based forebears [2]. As the adoption of personal computers and the Internet spread in the 1990s, the first wave of online comics embraced and adapted components of pre-existing techniques developed for print comics for digital viewing. Subsequently, new tools, platforms and social dynamics emerged that allowed for further experimentation and led, by the late 2010s, to the second wave of digital comics expanding globally [3]. The rapid rise and ongoing success of webcomics in North America is accompanied by a parallel transformation in the global comic industry. The growing popularity of comic reading on mobile devices coincides with surging global interest in webcomics and webtoon-style comics [4]. Beyond North America, an ongoing and robust transformation of the medium has occurred, with digital comics created primarily for the Internet exponentially growing in popularity and commercial viability. Even digital comics produced specifically for Internet distribution have witnessed rapid

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proliferation and development [4]. Before the mid-2010s, the predominant format of comics for standard personal computers and laptops was two-page (or single-page, in rare cases) scrolling frames displayed in a left-to-right horizontal arrangement, a direct adaptation of print comics [4]. By the mid-2010s, vertical scrolling comic formats began appearing and proliferating on mobile devices. By the late 2010s, such formats shifted from a second-line option to the dominant distribution and reading method, with webcomic readers increasingly prioritizing vertical-scrolling webtoons and originally composed works designed specifically for mobile readership [4]. Such approaches shifted readership attention to visual flow and pacing not present in horizontal or tile-based comics. There remain substantial variations in frame management, with a significant body of tile-based webtoons operating still within a predominantly non-continuous, non-linear framework restricted to side-scrolling transitions [4].

#### **Global Market Penetration and Localization**

The global comics market has expanded significantly in recent decades, driven by renewed interest in print comics, particularly from Hollywood adaptations; but especially to the growing market for digital comics, spearheaded by South Korea's webtoons [1]. At the same time, significant barriers to market entry remain, and localization is essential for the success of any overseas attempt. Case studies of the major platforms reveal commonalities and differences in accessibility, audience research, governance, and community support, highlighting the interplay between global system and regional specifics [2]. Naver Webtoon and Daum Webtoon command around 90% of the South Korean webtoon market; registered users comprise 46% of South Korea's population; and total annual visits exceed 14 billion. Even with 40% of its content in Japanese, Line Manga earns 80% of its revenue from the Nakama app, which has few free offerings and serves just 2 million users. LINE's next-largest market is Taiwan, where revenues originate from advertising and sponsorship rather than payments [3]. The Chinese market hosts Tencent Animation, the dominant manga portal, and popular apps from Bilibili and 51comic. The United States market centers on WEBTOON, operated by Naver, and Tapas, supported by Kakao, which targets niche audiences with Korean-style manhwa and English originals [4]. The webtoon-style format offers great accessibility to creators and consumers. On platforms like WEBTOON, authors are almost entirely free to create what they want. Most works release episodes for free and rely on ad revenue or readers' contributions for income [5]. Unofficial translations and adaptations flourish, expanding the audience for webtoons and reciprocally feeding other media; popular series frequently receive translations and spin-offs in several languages within months of the original release. At the same time, a large pool of creators produces work for hire often manhwa-style and proprietary properties remain, especially on platforms outside South Korea [5].

#### **Creator Economies and Intellectual Property**

The rapid global spread of digital comics and webtoons not only enables new narrative strategies and artistic styles but also alters the economic structures that underpin their production and distribution [1]. In particular, the rise of platforms like LINE Webtoon and Tapas fosters the emergence of so-called creator economies, where individual artists seek to monetize their work in ways that diverge substantively from established publishing models [2]. When they engage with these platforms, creators retain rights to their intellectual property, a crucial issue for many artists in a creative landscape still dominated by a legacy of uneven contractual agreements [4]. Yet they must also navigate an ecosystem in which both royalties and terms of service vary considerably; the stakes are significant, since the wrong choice could not only threaten their ability to earn revenues but also, potentially, jeopardize their ownership of their creations [4]. Creator initiatives ultimately take shape within a rapidly evolving, highly competitive, and notoriously fragmented landscape [5]. Digital comics and webtoons occupy a peripheral niche within the broader comics' ecosystem in the global north. Much of the historical investment devoted to preserving audience formats, modes, and cultural attributes remains in place, further complicating efforts to define alternative channels honed to suit the needs of, and rapidly grow the audience for, webcomics [2].

#### **Reader Communities and Cultural Practices**

Digital comics and webtoons foster diverse, dynamic reader communities that intersect with creative participation and cultural practices. Fandom activities range from reactive appreciation to collaborative co-creation, facilitated by many-to-many platforms that bridge production and reception [2]. User-generated content includes fanworks (e.g., remixes, parodies, and edits) and commentary (e.g., annotations, reviews, and translations), while opportunities for fan labor extend from assistance and promotion to full-scale adaptation [1]. Accessibility, social inclusion, and audience research represent ongoing challenges shared with other media. Creator surveys contribute to global mapping of fan reception and cultural appropriation through informal metrics such as follower counts, readership statistics, and crowdsourced translations. Platforms increasingly report activity and access data through dashboards and public service announcements [3]. Community moderation and platform governance shape the sustainability of creative ecosystems. Enforcement policies often cover sensitive topics such as sex, race, gender, and politics, yet approaches and priorities differ by region. Transparency varies widely: instant removals sometimes occur without stated motives, while remedial procedures offer different tiers of feedback [4].

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### **Fandom, Participation, and Collaborative Creation**

Digital comics and webtoons cultivate fandoms and encourage participatory practices, blurring the boundaries between readers and producers. User-generated content, transformations of original works, and collaborative projects become avenues for fan labor and ongoing creative engagement [2]. Platforms such as Tapas, Webtoon, and Lezhin offer community tools that nurture these practices, which in turn amplify visibility, enhance discoverability, and bolster creator-audience connections [2]. Evidence points to a vibrant, multilingual ecosystem of remixes circulating on YouTube, Instagram, Jajajak and 9gag, while the rapid emergence of dedicated platforms, such as MuMu and Fileshare, further reflects the strong appetite for interactively repackaged content [1]. Analysis of user-derived material across diverse social media and webcomic venues illuminates reader engagement and community activity during the transnational diffusion of user-generated webcomics, underscoring how fan labor stimulates ongoing participation and interaction with creators' works. Online comics serve as a bridge that connects a diverse array of formal and informal cultural practices, facilitating the extension and adaptation of stories, images, and genres. Such activities demonstrate the enduring impact of comics-based reading in magazine formats, where mingling, mixing, and juxtaposing different materials, techniques, and pictorial bodies constituted an ineluctable engagement [2].

### **Accessibility, Inclusion, and Audience Research**

Digital comics and webtoons enforce distinct theoretical, practical, and social expectations on creators and participants. Webcomics, as emphasized by early entrants, feature a level of experimentation in narrative and production practices unattainable in print [1]. Participation, formulation, and aesthetic contribute equally to contemporary comic interaction. Readers increasingly view reading and participation as equivalent; the latter profoundly influences the former. Static-reader, motion-reader, and sound-reader distinctions enable closer examinations of aesthetic modalities [2]. All participants aim for resonance through dialogue, fan-commentary comics, and, most importantly, for temporal-lingual harmony. Webcomics offer narrative, formal, and production models aligning more closely with creator-identified practices [3]. The digital-comics conception rests on the reader experience shaped by interface, flowing direction, and content transformations, encompassing webtoons, videos, motion comics, and more. Despite their visibility, distribution remains marginal. Dynamic reader engagement notwithstanding, digital formalism pervades traditional genres: tracking-scroll linear-comic animations survive, fanvid-derived panel-less motions persist, and sonic-visual comics continue to exploit base features [4]. Proprietary PDF readers expand accessibility but restrict participant access. Collaboration within and beyond comic-making spheres seeks modes expressing fresh concerns through broader inquiries that digital technologies raise [1].

### **Community Moderation and Platform Governance**

Platform governance encompasses overarching rules, policies, and enforcement mechanisms that influence community moderation strategies [1]. Platforms employ terms of service (TOS) or community guidelines (CG) that outline rules for content generation, dissemination, and interaction. Users may agree to wayward, broad, or contested rules and tackle unintended consequences [2]. Content moderation, while subject to TOS or CG, fosters additional rules or beliefs beyond formal policies. To encourage discourse, platforms might permit hate speech, trolling, and pornography. Decisions on what to regulate, how to regulate, and whose voices shape regulations impact anime, manga, and DC comics [3].

### **Case Studies in Format Innovation**

Global success of webtoons and contributions to the digital comics industry arise from innovative formats and creative experimentation [1]. Numerous webtoon-style titles demonstrate global appeal on platforms like Tapas, Webtoon, Lezhin, and the mobile applications of Pocket Comics, Manta, and Manta's sister service Canva. Series like Let's Play amass tens of millions of views and Webtoon Originals like Lore Olympus, True Beauty, and I Love Yoo consistently top readership charts; all share a similar vertical scrolling format. Recognition extends beyond platforms: Siranow's Enzo commenced on Tapas, Emmalia's T pill on Webtoon, and Frz3i's Sports Girls on Manta; Café Mancér and Outroversé Books adapt webtoons into novels; and Let me hear your voice, a popular title, sparked a remake in China [2]. Experimental formats also characterize pioneering creators. The success of traditional comics on platforms led some authors to replicate established comic formats instead of exploring digital story possibilities. Despite the increased availability of original works on various platforms, comic book and webtoon competition remains intense, guiding creators' decisions based on familiar models [3]. Digital comics continue to integrate video games and film, establishing dedicated platforms, yet many storytelling strategies remain steadfast in origin, unfiltered by the adaption to engage wider audiences [4]. The arrival of artificial intelligence (AI) tools propelled innovation, enabling creators to propose combination ideas with illustrations and execute simplified drafts to finalize pages. These enhancements allow for more elaborate exploration of storytelling and case development, defraying initial page formatting concerns while also triggering additional content generation and refinement. Thus, both venues embody diverse narrative possibilities extending beyond traditional boundaries [5].

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### Successful Webtoon-Style Series and Global Reception

Digital comics and webtoons offer an objective, evidence-based examination of format innovation, markets, and reader communities. Successful webtoon-style titles notably *Fist of the North Star: 55th Anniversary Edition*, *Tower of God*, and *Lore Olympus* reinforce distinctive aesthetic and structural dimensions while gaining traction in markets beyond South Korea [4]. These series share specific traits vertical scrolling, continuous paneling, and single-frame progression that strengthen format-specific characteristics and maximize systematic advantages [5]. Their global reception highlights how the format influences comic perception, supporting claims that digital comics actively shape consumer understanding, taste, and exposure [2].

### Experimental Formats in Digital Comics

Many digital comics exhibit webtoonesque elements that have catalyzed a fruitful period of format innovation. European, North American, and Japanese creators have explored long scrolling narratives, animated GIFs, interactive hyperlinks, and other modalities not possible in print comics [6]. These experiments draw upon similar technical possibilities and still facilitate the traditional comic-reading process. In contrast, platforms, companies, and creators devoted to webtoons and their surrounding cultures seem less inclined to experimental formats. As such, webtoons have developed and stabilized a distinct ecosystem for distribution, monetization, and readership, and their development trajectory may carry additional risks of stagnation [7]. Notable exceptions exist within the world of digital comics. *Sfarog* (“Moa”), a French project from 2020, adapts 3D videogame-like exploration in the comic medium, allowing readers to negotiate the environment from both first and third-person perspectives. Each setting supports non-linear multiple-choice dialogue with the potential for extended “subplots [3].” The content recalls the roots of RPG-style comic books associated with *Dungeons & Dragons* and other game systems. Created with Toon Boom rather than conventional comic-dedicated software, *Moa* achieves this cinematic approach by managing graduated colour fills and transitions customized to character movements within the graphic style. Such comics seek to evolve sequential art traditions rather than merely replicate earlier, analogous forms [1].

### Cross-Media Adaptations and Transmedia Growth

Increasingly, digital comics, whether webcomics, digital comics, or otherwise appeal to the market as they migrate toward adaptations on animation, live action, music videos, and games 5 and generate transmedia franchises that realize digital comics, novels, films, and games, one after another [8]. Transformation is taking advantage of the popularity of already-published earlier versions, relied on as solid bases of cultural-propagation, in rapid tales supplemented with interactive devices and adapted into mobile applications with a number of additional features. The evolution focuses on how materials move ahead from the page, so that after an original, if available, reading experience and set of aesthetics are not damaged [2].

### Challenges and Opportunities

The long-standing challenge of sustaining income over the creator’s lifecycle varies by countries’ social and economic conditions. Despite promising initial revenues, most artists and platforms ultimately experience a rapid decline (churn) of readers and earnings [2]. Churn rates stand at 50% for webtoons in Indonesia and as high as 70% in the USA, where advertising revenue suffers alongside the influx of piracy [9]. Although censorship arises in every medium, comics have drawn heightened scrutiny due to perceived influence over behavior and thought [2]. Platforms are pressured to moderate political, sexual, and religious content according to regional regulations, resulting in differing standards. Those encountering strict enforcement resort to self-censorship or transitioning to text-based blogs [2].

### Sustainability for Creators and Platforms

Concerns over creator sustainability emerged from survey responses and community monitoring. Platforms have explored alternative revenue-sharing models, and some creators express interest in diversifying channels and resources to mitigate churn risks [2]. Income dynamics for webtoon creators exhibit an 80%–90% churn rate within the first year. The challenge weighs heavily on beginner artists lacking brand recognition. Platforms have implemented creator support programs and continue to investigate ways to augment creator ecosystems sustainably [4].

### Quality Control, Censorship, and Moderation

The quality of digital comics is in a perpetual state of flux. Individual creators often work in isolation. Publishing platforms typically impose only minimal quality standards [4]. As a result, completed comics range in quality from the utterly sublime to the unbearably abysmal, and everything in between. Audiences respond to digital comics in different ways. Some viewers relish the creative energy, excitement, and naïve charm of the horrible and sometimes hilariously funny jokes [3]. Others try to find enjoyable stories in the latest fully rendered fantasy epic at sub-graphic novel rates and may tire of these long before the creators finish. Platforms have become attuned to these differences and are experimenting with ways to maintain quality, or at least signal to readers variations in quality. These efforts face the inevitable challenge of bias in the governing personnel and audience demographics. Yet

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platforms can introduce schemes to maintain quality and sensitivity to the readership with varying degrees of innovation risk [4]. Siren is an ad-supported, free-to-read digital comics platform hosting thousands of works in many genres. Because the comics are free to read, quality varies dramatically; some creators are talented, others not so much, and some are just having fun, whether with artistic skills or writing. The range is entertainingly broad in much the same way public-access television can sometimes be enjoyable [10]. Recently, the editorial teams at Siren have begun introducing collections of comics that share a theme, such as Surrealism or Horror. These collections are curated on the Siren home page and labelled as an “Advent Calendar,” and are typically available for limited periods. While such thematic collections require little moderation effort, curating a collection that showcases the platform’s creative talent is a far more challenging undertaking. It also carries the highest risk, as a poorly curated collection can alienate viewers, and by extension, advertisers [4].

#### The Future of Digital Comics Formats

The advent of smartphones, tablets, and laptops has transformed comics publishing, enabling a shift from print to digital formats [4]. Yet many publishers, creators, and readers retain an attachment to printed comics and the traditional page format, suggesting that digital comics occupy a distinct zone between print and born-digital media [3]. Such comics offer an ecological alternative to the multimedia and interactive projects associated with born-digital comics, mapping various kinds of page comics onto eligible digital viewing surfaces; they often remain available in parallel print or PDF editions [4]. Nonetheless, the rise of webtoons and vertical scrolling narratives, scrollable layouts and frame management solutions, multimedia and interactivity options, and other innovations has had profound implications for the comics sector [3]. By making conscious choices about the adaptation of page comics to digital formats and specifically about the creation of new forms that leave traditional page formats behind, publishers and creators fulfil various functions. They satisfy a wide range of cultural needs and economic requirements, and they facilitate increased participation by opening up new kinds of storytelling and enabling alternative models of production [4]. These developments signal a possible transformation of the comics cultural ecosystem. The prominent role of online platforms is reshaping the development and dissemination of comics content. User-generated and collaborative commercial practices further broaden access to creation and publication, echoing developments in video, music, and fan fiction. And ongoing debates over intellectual property highlight the complex interplay between individual creativity and collective improvement and adaptation [10].

#### CONCLUSION

Digital comics and webtoons have fundamentally redefined the production, distribution, and consumption of comics in the digital era. Through the adoption of vertical scrolling interfaces, multimedia integration, and interactive storytelling techniques, webtoons have introduced innovative narrative structures that depart significantly from the traditional page-based logic of print comics. These developments demonstrate how digital technologies reshape not only the visual presentation of comics but also the temporal pacing, reader immersion, and experiential dimensions of storytelling. The emergence of webtoon platforms has also transformed the industrial organization of the comics sector. Platform ecosystems such as WEBTOON, Tapas, Lezhin, and KakaoPage have facilitated the globalization of digital comics by enabling transnational distribution, localization, and cross-cultural circulation. These platforms support creator economies in which artists can monetize their works directly while retaining greater control over intellectual property compared to conventional publishing models. However, platform dependency also creates new challenges concerning revenue instability, algorithmic visibility, unequal bargaining power, and creator sustainability. High creator churn rates and difficulties in maintaining long-term audience engagement reveal the precarious conditions underlying many digital comics ecosystems. Reader communities constitute a defining characteristic of digital comics culture. Participatory practices such as fan translations, remixes, reviews, annotations, and collaborative adaptations blur the traditional boundaries between creators and audiences. These interactive communities strengthen audience engagement and contribute to the transnational spread of webtoon culture. At the same time, platform governance and moderation practices significantly shape the inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability of these communities. Variations in censorship policies, content regulation, and transparency across regions demonstrate the growing influence of digital platforms in determining the boundaries of creative expression and community participation. Experimental digital comics formats and transmedia adaptations further illustrate the dynamic potential of the medium. Innovations involving animation, sound integration, gaming mechanics, and nonlinear storytelling continue to expand the possibilities of sequential art. Simultaneously, successful adaptations of webtoons into films, television series, games, and novels reveal the increasing economic and cultural significance of digital comics within broader entertainment industries. These developments reinforce the role of webtoons as both independent artistic forms and foundational components of transmedia franchises. Despite these opportunities, digital comics and webtoons face persistent challenges related to piracy, market saturation, quality control, censorship, and economic sustainability. The rapid expansion of the industry necessitates ongoing efforts to balance innovation with fair compensation, creative freedom with platform

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governance, and accessibility with sustainable monetization models. Future growth in the digital comics sector will likely depend on the continued evolution of platform infrastructures, creator support systems, technological experimentation, and international collaboration. Ultimately, digital comics and webtoons represent a transformative stage in the history of comics, one that reflects broader shifts in digital culture, media consumption, and participatory creativity in the twenty-first century.

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