

Міністерство освіти і науки України
Закарпатський угорський інститут ім. Ференса Ракоці II
Кафедра філології

Реєстраційний № _____

Кваліфікаційна робота
Comics and manga. Their impact on the culture of the 21st century

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Освітня програма: «Середня освіта (Мова і література (англійська))»

Спеціальність: 014 Середня освіта (Мова і література (англійська))

Рівень вищої освіти: бакалавр

Тема затверджена на засіданні
кафедри Протокол № ____ / 202_

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Робота захищена на оцінку _____, «__» 2025 року
Протокол № ____ / 2025

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КОМІКСИ ТА МАНГА. ЇХ ВПЛИВ НА КУЛЬТУРУ ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯ

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Берегове 2025

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Qualifying paper
Comics and manga. Their impact on the culture of the 21st century

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ЗМІСТ

ВСТУП	6
ЧАСТИНА I: ІСТОРИЧНА ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ ТА ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ОСНОВИ КОМІКСІВ І МАНГИ	9
1.1 Історичні передумови та ранні розробки.....	9
1.1.1 Комікси в західній культурі.....	10
1.1.2 Поява манги в Японії.....	17
1.2 Теоретичні підходи до візуальних наративів	18
1.2.1 Семіотика та візуальна мова.....	19
1.2.2 Наративні структури та техніки	20
ЧАСТИНА II: СУЧАСНИЙ КУЛЬТУРНИЙ ВПЛИВ КОМІКСІВ ТА МАНГИ У XXI СТОЛІТТІ.....	23
2.1 Переосмислення оповідання в цифрову епоху.....	23
2.1.1 Цифрова трансформація	23
2.1.2 Технологічна інтеграція в наративних техніках	25
2.1.3. Використання штучного інтелекту у створенні малюнків до коміксів та манги	26
2.2 Репрезентація, ідентичність та соціальні питання	28
2.2.1 Різноманітність та інклюзія у візуальних наративах	29
2.2.2 Політичні та соціальні коментарі	30
2.2.3 Фандом, ідентичність та залучення спільноти.....	33
ЧАСТИНА III: ЕМПІРИЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ	36
3.1 Учасники дослідження	36
3.2 Інструменти дослідження.....	37
3.3 Процедура дослідження	37
3.4 Результати дослідження	38
3.5 Обговорення дослідження.....	49
ВИСНОВКИ.....	50
СПИСОК ЛІТЕРАТУРИ.....	51
РЕЗЮМЕ	55
ДОДАТОК.....	56

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
PART I: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF COMICS AND MANGA.....	9
1.1 Historical Background and Early Developments	9
1.1.1 Comics in Western Culture.....	10
1.1.2 The Rise of Manga in Japan	17
1.2 Theoretical Approaches to Visual Narratives	18
1.2.1 Semiotics and Visual Language.....	19
1.2.2 Narrative Structures and Techniques	20
PART II: CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL IMPACT OF COMICS AND MANGA IN THE XXI CENTURY	23
2.1 Redefining Storytelling in the Digital Age	23
2.1.1 The Digital Transformation	23
2.1.2 Technological Integration in Narrative Techniques.....	25
2.1.3. The usage of AI in creating the drawings to comicses/manga's.....	26
2.2 Representation, Identity, and Social Issues.....	28
2.2.1 Diversity and Inclusion in Visual Narratives.....	29
2.2.2 Political and Social Commentary.....	30
2.2.3 Fandom, Identity, and Community Engagement	33
PART III: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	36
3.1 Participants of the research	36
3.2 Research instruments.....	37
3.3 Procedure of the research.....	37
3.4 Findings of the research.....	38
3.5 Discussion of the research.....	49
CONCLUSIONS	50
REFERENCES	51
REZUME	55
APPENDIX	56

INTRODUCTION

Comics have become a new genre in the world of literature, and its pace of development is phenomenally fast; in just 100 years, comics have evolved from inserts in newspapers and magazines to an entire industry that is studied by scientists.

Comics have become a part of many people's lives. The genre itself went through many stages of development and eventually evolved into what we know today. It's no exaggeration to say that comics have become part of human culture, as well as part of many people's childhoods. With the popularity of comics, another genre was born in Japan, manga, which is similar to comics but still differs from them in many ways. But eventually, manga also captured the hearts of readers around the world, becoming a cultural phenomenon just like the comic book.

The **relevance** of the study lies in the fact that comics and manga are generally a young genre in literature, which has recently experienced an important turning point in its history, namely the creation of generative AI. Also, the relevance lies in the extreme popularity of this genre among young people (teenagers, children). Comics and manga should be considered not only as a kind of caricature for children, but also as a branch of art and literature. Many people do not understand their influence on culture, so in my work I will try to answer this question.

Theoretical background. In our work, **we** used the fundamental work of Scott McCloud 'Understanding Comics: the invisible Art', which helped to explain the main artistic and narrative features of comics. We also used an article from the Kyiv National University of Technology and Design (KNUTD for short) by O.V. Kolisnyk, whose work helped me write the history of comics, and in this work I found several sources that were useful for my work. Various online articles were used in writing.

The **aim** of our bachelor thesis is to study the influence of comics and manga on the culture of the 21st century society, to analyse their special forms of narrative presentation, as well as political and socio-cultural influences, their evolution under the influence of digital technologies, and their role as artistic expressions that convey human experience and emotions in a concise and accessible format.

The **objectives** of my work are as follows:

1. To explore the historical evolution of comics and manga. Their stages of development, and talk about 4 ages in the history of comics.
2. To consider theoretical approaches to visual narratives, including semiotics, narrative structures and visual language.
3. To analyze the contemporary cultural impact of comics and manga in the 21st century, including their role in identity formation, representation, and social commentary.
4. To assess the impact of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on the creation and distribution of comics and manga.
5. To conduct an empirical study to assess current audience perceptions and reader preferences for comics and manga.

The **object** of this paper is the comics and manga as a visual approach to storytelling and a form of visual and literary art in global culture.

The **subject** of this study is the specific cultural, social, technological, and communicative impact of comics and manga on 21st-century society, including their evolution, audience perception, and transformation in the digital age.

The **theoretical contribution** of this research is the overall picture of comics and manga as visual storytelling and cultural representations. By employing semiotic theory, narrative theory, and media studies, the study contributes to scholarly literature in the role it undertakes in examining the role of graphic narratives in forming cultural identity and public consciousness in the 21st century. The study also offers a comparative study of Western comics and Japanese manga, adding depth to cross-cultural influences' theoretical framework in contemporary literature and media.

The practical application of this research is the empirical results from audience surveys, which provide insights into readers' modern tastes, political content preferences, and sentiments regarding artificial intelligence in the creative process. The findings can serve as a reference for artists, publishers, and media practitioners in the comic book and manga industries to gain a better understanding of modern audience demands and expectations. Furthermore, the research identifies trends in digitalisation and reader interaction that can influence the future of visual narrative forms.

Methodology of this research employs a mixed-method approach, combining both theoretical and empirical methods to ensure comprehensive analysis. A theoretical approach is needed to analyse the historical development of comics and manga, as well as their semiotics. It is also needed for a comparative analysis of the narrative and visual structures of Western comics and Japanese manga. Also, an empirical approach to collecting sufficient data on participants' preferences, attitudes towards political topics, and the use of AI in comics and manga

Structurally, the thesis consists of an introduction, 3 chapters, a conclusion and references.

The introduction consists of relevance, theoretical background, purpose, objectives, object, subject, methodology, theoretical and practical values.

Part I provides an overview of the historical development of comics and manga. As well as narrative approaches and semiotics.

Part II analyzes the contemporary cultural impact of comics and manga in the twenty-first century. It examines changes in storytelling forms, the impact of digital technologies, and issues of representation and identity.

Part III presents the results of an empirical study of this thesis. Conclusions summarize the results of the study.

The list of references includes 43 sources.

PART I: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF COMICS AND MANGA

A comic is a form of visual storytelling that is both literature and fine art. Comics originated as small sketches aimed at enticing readers of newspapers and magazines and have grown into a huge business and important part of global culture. What began as simple illustrations have now developed into complete franchises that form the basis of films, television series, as well as other media adaptations. It would not be an overstatement to state that comics now hold a commanding percentage in the literature market of the world. The success of comics has also inspired numerous artists and has assisted in bringing new life to old literary masterpieces in the form of graphic adaptations. Moreover, the success of comics paved the way for a specialized division in Japan—manga. Manga has, over the years, gained immense popularity globally, outselling Western comics. A case in point is Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece*, which has sold over 500 million copies globally, demonstrating the overwhelming power of the medium.

This chapter speaks about the history of comics and manga, their origin, key creators, and issues these media have faced in their evolution as the phenomena they are today. It also examines cross-cultural influence, comics and manga adaptations and their impact, along with the evolution of their visual narrative, structure, and specificity as a storytelling medium.

1.1 Historical Background and Early Developments

As long as human history has existed, drawings have been used to narrate. Prehistoric cave murals and ancient Greek adorned pots are examples of this. In the Middle Ages, pictures served a necessary function to disseminate religious news to the masses of illiterates so that peasants could learn the moral lessons from the Bible through pictures. Erik Kwakkel, who is a medieval book studies specialist at Leiden University (the Netherlands), cites the widespread analogies between medieval and modern technologies. In his book, he encountered one remarkable analogy: a page of a 14th-century manuscript that is structured similarly to modern comic book pages. A miniature dated approximately around 1300 depicts a group of people who is going somewhere in company, with a narrative sequence similar to the visual narratives of our times. The reader can “hear” the words and thoughts of the characters written above their heads, sometimes even in bubbles, which is very similar to today's comics. The researcher also

found medieval manuscripts in which the speaker's direct speech is written in the air without being packed in a bubble. In order to correlate the speaker with his or her statement, the scribe depicted the lines in such a way that they flowed from the speaker's mouth. The result was wavy lines of lines dancing across the page. The scribe also colored the words in different colors to make it clearer to the readers who was speaking (Onkovich, G. V., & Onkovich, A. D.,2016).

The earliest modern comic-like pieces were seen in the 18th century in the form of satirical cartoons that showed political and social life during that period. William Hogarth was among the first to work in this field, whose works consisted of sequential drawings linked by a common theme and narrative. Some of his famous works are *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress*, and *Marriage à la Mode* (KNUTD, 2022).

This form of visual storytelling persisted until the early 19th century when the growing popularity of newspapers and magazines among the masses led publishers to include illustrations as a means of attracting people, primarily immigrants who were illiterate. Rodolphe Töpffer contributed a lot to the development of comic art when he became popular with his book *The Adventures of Mr. Obadiah Oldbuck*, which was published in 1833 and later translated into numerous languages. Töpffer created a form of short stories that were organized in multiple panels, each with text written below the images. His work was driven by a two-way interest in visual arts and literature (KNUTD, 2022).

A key milestone in the evolution of comics as a distinct art form was the creation of speech balloons by American cartoonist Richard F. Outcault in the late 19th century. This made it possible for characters' dialogue and inner thoughts to be explicitly expressed within the image. Therefore, Outcault's *Hogan's Alley*, *The Yellow Kid*, and *Buster Brown* strips are widely regarded as the first classic examples of the traditional comic book format (KNUTD, 2022).

1.1.1 Comics in Western Culture

Comics evolved and began to be printed in various magazines and shops, so the above-mentioned “*Yellow Kid*” (1895) and “*Buster Brown*” (1902) were published, as well as comics such as: “*Little Nemo in Slumberland*” (1905), and “*Krazy Kat*” (1913)

had been published, followed by titles like “Little Orphan Annie” (1924), “Blondie” (1930), and “Prince Valiant” (1937) (YouTube)

Over time, there were comics for every genre. Magazine comics in the interwar era featured a large number of different characters and situations - funny animals, romance, adventure, historical, western, humour and literary adaptations. While the majority of comics were aimed at children, even during this period there were some materials produced for adults - including the infamous so-called ‘Tijuana Bibles’, which usually depicted celebrities or classic comic characters in sexual situations. Many of these comics were created illegally, without permission, from the 1930s to the 1950s. During the Great Depression, many cheap one-off comics were published for free, attached to advertisements to keep expensive printing presses running.

The history of comics is considered to be divided into 4 eras: The Golden Age (1938-1951); The Silver Age (c. 1956-c. 1970); The Bronze Age (c. 1970-c. 1985); and The Iron/Modern Age (c. 1985-present).

The Golden Age of comics began when Superman in “Action Comics #1” debuted in 1938, published by Detective Comics (the predecessor of DC Comics). Superman's popularity helped comics become a major branch of publishing, leading to other companies creating their own superheroes.

Between 1939 and 1941, Detective Comics and its affiliate, All-American Publications, launched a number of iconic superheroes, including Batman and Robin, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Green Lantern, Doctor Fate, the Atom, Hawkman, Green Arrow, and Aquaman. During the same period, Timely Comics—later known as Marvel Comics—found commercial success with best-selling titles such as The Human Torch, The Sub-Mariner, and Captain America. Despite the enduring legacy of DC and Timely characters, contemporary circulation data indicates that the most commercially successful superhero comic of the era was Captain Marvel Adventures by Fawcett Comics, which sold approximately 1.4 million copies per issue.

In 1953, the comic book industry hit a setback when the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency was created in order to investigate the problem of juvenile delinquency. This event marked the end of the Golden Age and the beginning of the Silver Age

Silver Age (1956 - 1970). Because of the Comics Code Authority genres like horror, crime, romance, talking animal humor have been declined. In the wake of these changes, publishers began introducing superhero stories again, a change that began with the introduction of a new version of DC Comics' The Flash in Showcase #4 (October 1956). With the success of Showcase #4 several other 1940s superheroes were reworked, including Green Lantern, Aquaman, the Atom, and Hawkman, and the Justice Society of America was remake as the Justice League of America. Only the characters' name was remained the same; their costumes, locales, and identities were altered, and imaginative scientific explanations for their superpowers generally took the place of magic as a *modus operandi* in their stories (Pethokoukis, J., 2004). Due to those changes in the mid-1960, DC established the concept of "Earth-One" and "Earth-two". In which characters in "Earth-Two" were from Silver Age and "Earth-One" had characters from the Golden Age.

In response to strong demand, DC began publishing more superhero titles including Justice League of America, which prompted Marvel Comics to follow suit beginning with "The Fantastic Four #1." The age was featured by the development of the character makeup of superheroes. Young children and girls were targeted during the Silver Age by certain publishers; in particular, Harvey Comics attracted this group with titles such as Little Dot.

Under Stan Lee's leadership, and with artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, Marvel redefined superheroes by introducing flawed, relatable characters. "Fantastic Four #1" marked the beginning of this shift, featuring heroes who argued, struggled with everyday problems, and felt real. This fresh, more human approach stood in contrast to the perfect superheroes of the time and quickly resonated with young readers, especially college students during the counterculture of the 1960s. Characters like Spider-Man, the X-Men, and the Hulk became symbols of a new kind of hero—imperfect, emotional, and deeply human.

There are debates between critics and historians that one characteristic of the Silver Age was that science fiction and aliens replaced magic and gods. Other argue that magic was an important element both in Golden and Silver Ages.

The Silver Age is known for the rise of pop art, an artistic movement that used popular cultural artifacts, such as advertising and packaging, as source material for fine,

or gallery-exhibited, art. One of the best-known pop artist is Roy Lichtenstein, he is known for individual panels from comic books and repainting the images, modifying them to some extent in the process but including in the painting word and thought balloons and captions as well as enlarged-to-scale color dots imitating the coloring process then used in newsprint comic books (Couperie, P., Horn, M., et al., 1968).

The Silver Age of comic books was followed by the Bronze age. Historian Will Jacobs suggest the Silver Age ended in April 1970 when the man who had started it, Julius Schwartz, handed over Green Lantern—starring one of the first revived heroes of the era—to the new-guard team of Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams in response to reduced sales. However, comics scholar Arnold T. Blumberd placed the end of the Silver Age in June 1973, when "The Night Gwen Stacy Died" got published. In this story Gwen Stace, girlfriend of the Spider-Man, was killed in front of Spider-Man's eyes, saying that the era of "innocence" was ended.

The Bronze Age (1970 – 1985). The Bronze Age continued many of the traditions established during the Silver Age, with classic superhero stories still dominating the comic industry. However, the darker plot elements and storylines more related to relevant social issues had a return during this period, prefiguring the later Modern Age of Comic Books.

The beginning of the Bronze Age started with the end of the careers of many veteran writers and artists of the time, or their promotion to management positions and retirement from regular writing or drawing, and their replacement with a younger generation of editors and creators, many of whom knew each other from their experiences in comic book fan conventions and publications.

This era also saw significant changes in the distribution of and audience for comic books. As time progressed, there was a transition in the medium from inexpensive, mass-market products that were available for purchase at newsstands to a more costly product that was sold at specialty comic book shops and targeted a more limited, dedicated audience of enthusiasts. The shift in distribution patterns enabled numerous small-print publishers to enter the market, thereby transforming the medium from one dominated by a select few large publishers to a more diverse and eclectic range of books.

In 1970, Robert E. Howard's pulp character Conan the Barbarian was published by Marvel. Conan's success resulted in in adaptations of other Howard characters: King

Kull, Red Sonja and Solomon Kane. DC decided not to be left behind by Marvel and released the comics featuring Warlord and Beowulf.

The murder of Spider-Man's longtime girlfriend, Gwen Stacy, at the hands of the Green Goblin in 1973's "Amazing Spider-Man #121–122" is considered by comics scholar Arnold T. Blumberg to be the definitive Bronze Age event, as it exemplifies the period's trend towards darker territory and willingness to subvert conventions such as the assumed survival of long-established, "untouchable" characters.

In 1971, Stan Lee, on request of United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, wrote a Spider-Man story "Green Goblin Reborn!" in which he portrayed drug use as dangerous and unglamorous. At that time due to Comics Code Authority (CCA) any portrayal of drug abuse was banned, regardless of the context. The CCA refused to approve the story, but Lee published it. The positive reception of the story led to CCA to revise the Comics Code later that year to allow the portrayal of drug addiction, but in one condition – it should be portrayed in a negative light. This revision to the Comics Code has relaxed rules for ghouls, vampires and various impurities in comic books, allowing the growth of a number of supernatural- and horror-oriented titles, such as Swamp Thing, Ghost Rider and The Tomb of Dracula, among numerous others.

The revision also gave a beginning in reinterpretations of the theme of the social relevance. After the Spider-Man's story about drug addiction positive feedback DC comics had published their own drug abuse storyline in "Green Lantern/Green Arrow #85–86". Written by Denny O'Neil with art by Neal Adams. That series dealt not only with drugs, but with other topics like racism and environmental degradation. The "X-Men" titles, which were partly based on the premise that mutants were a metaphor for real-world minorities, became wildly popular.

Bronze Age is also known for its most significant developments – rise in the number of black and other non-white minority superheroes. Started in the early 1970s with the introduction of characters such as Marvel's "Luke Cage" (who was the first black superhero featured in his own comic book in 1972) of the "Defenders", Storm of the "X-Men", Blade, Monica Rambeau of the "Avengers", Misty Knight, Shang-Chi, and DC's Green Lantern John Stewart, "Bronze Tiger", "Black Lightning", Vixen and Cyborg of "Teen Titans", many of whom were black (with the exception of Shang-Chi himself).

Additionally, Jewish superheroes became more visible with the appearances of Marvel's Kitty Pryde of the "X-Men" and "Moon Knight", respectively.

With the beginning of the Bronze Age the popularity of the superhero genre shifted away towards titles where superheroes were absent altogether. This non-superhero genres were inspired by genres like Western or fantasy & pulp fiction. As previously noted, 1971's revised Comics Code left the horror genre ripe for development and several supernaturally-themed series resulted, such as the popular *The Tomb of Dracula*, *Ghost Rider* and *Swamp Thing*. Post-apocalyptic survival stories were an early trend, in the science fiction genre: French "Metal Hurlant" and its American counterpart "Heavy Metal". Official comic book adaptations for various projects were published by Western Publishing/Gold Key, Marvel and DC. There were adaptations for films ("Planet of the Apes", "Godzilla", "Logan's Run", "Indiana Jones", "Jaws 2", "2001: A Space Odyssey", "Star Wars"), TV shows ("The Six Million Dollar Man", "Lost in Space", "The Man from Atlantis", "Battlestar Galactica", "Star Trek", "The A-Team", "Welcome Back Kotter"), toys ("G.I. Joe", "Micronauts", "Transformers", "Rom", "Atari Force", "Thundercats"), and even public figures (Kiss, Pope John Paul II).

It is generally accepted that the end of the Bronze Age is in 1985 when DC published their "Crisis on Infinite Earths" marking the end of an old era and rebooting the universe to become a serious contender against Marvel. During the same time Marvel had ended their own line of comic books "Secret Wars" and with publishing of "X-Factor" which is an extension of the X-Men franchise

Iron/Modern Age (c. 1985-present).

The Modern Age of comics dates from the mid-1980s to the present. This era's main characteristic is an evolution in visual style, thematic complexity and industry structure. The Modern Age is known for its shift toward darker, more mature, complex nuanced storytelling unlike The Bronze era which retained many traditional superhero tropes.

One of the main features of The Modern Age is the emergence of gritty realism and deconstruction in superhero narratives. Significant works such as "Watchmen" (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, and *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) by Frank Miller, challenged conventional notions of heroism, presenting protagonists in ethically

complex environments, and triggered a broader trend in the industry toward exploring themes such as trauma, identity, political corruption, and existential uncertainty [6][7].

Another characteristic of this era is the rise of the independent publishers such as Image Comics (founded in 1992), which is recognized for producing “Invincible” (2003) by Robert Kirkman, Cory Walker, and Ryan Ottley. With this rise gave creators more control over their intellectual property. This development extended the diversity of content in the market, allowing other genres to thrive - including horror, crime, slice-of-life, and autobiographical works (Sabin, R.,1993). The creative freedom offered by independents contributed to a wider spectrum of artistic and narrative experimentation

The Modern Age also witnessed the rise of the digital technologies with transformed the comic book industry. Access to comics became more expanded particularly through its growing dominance of the internet, webcomics, and digital distribution platforms, altering how readers consume content and how creators reach audiences. At the same time, the globalization of manga, notably its dominance in youth markets outside Japan, presented a major cultural and commercial shift. Manga titles began outselling traditional Western comics, influencing both stylistic choices and storytelling techniques across the industry (Schodt, F. L., 1996).

In 1996 Marvel faced financial crisis and near-bankruptcy which was triggered by the speculative bubble of the early 1990s – when collectors purchased comics in droves in the expectation that they would become more valuable. – Marvel and other publishers, like DC, overproduced titles and variants, saturating the market (Onkovich, G. V., & Onkovich, A. D., 2016). When the bubble burst, sales decreased drastically, leading to massive layoffs, store closures, and restructuring. Marvel filed for bankruptcy protection but later returned to the market when they changed their focus to producing multimedia content like films and animation (Marvel Entertainment, Inc.,1996).

One of the main definitions of The Modern Age is the rise of the comics book adaptations in cinema and television. With the launch of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in 2008, superhero stories became an important part of pop culture.

1.1.2 The Rise of Manga in Japan

Manga is a form of Japanese-style comics, typically drawn in black and white and is published in a multi-volume edition.

The origin of manga as a dominant form of visual literature in Japan reflects a deep historical evolution from traditional art forms and modern cultural shifts. The term 'manga' first appeared in the 18th century, originally it was used by artist Katsushika Hokusai to describe his sketchbooks, however, after World War II it got its modern form.

The early forms laid the aesthetic and conceptual groundwork for the manga medium where picture scrolls (emakimono) woodblock prints (ukiyo-e), established the country's deep connection with sequential visual narratives. During the early 20th century political cartoons and illustrated satirical magazines further developed manga's visual language (Michelle, G., Bailey, J., Cariani, K., Owens, T., & Altman, M., 2017)

The major turning point occurred in the post-war period, when Osamu Tezuka, often referred to as the "god of manga," influenced by American comic books and animation, revolutionized the format by integrating cinematic techniques and complex characters. His work, such as "Astro Boy" (Tetsuwan Atom), introduced a new visual grammar characterized by dynamic panel layouts, expressive facial features, and a strong emotional tone (Schodt, F. L., 1983).

In the following decades, manga was divided into multiple genres. In the 1960s and 70s manga had genres like shonen (boys' comics), shojo (girls' comics), seinen (comics for young men), and josei (comics for adult women). This diversity of genres allowed manga to reach a broader demographic than Western comics, which were often limited to superhero narratives (YouTube. (n.d.)), (Schodt, F. L., 1983).

In Japan, manga is respected as much as serious literature, which has led to the teaching of manga as a separate subject in universities. An example of this is Seika University in Kyoto, which was the first university to start teaching manga in 1973, and in 2006 opened a faculty dedicated to these graphic works.

Manga in the 1980s and 90s became a foundation of Japanese popular culture. The rise of manga publishers, such as Weekly Shonen Jump, and expansion of the manga cafés and conventions had a major cultural impact on culture and became a part of daily life. During this time, manga also began to reach international markets, laying the foundation for the global popularity it enjoys today (YouTube. (n.d.)).

Manga is also tied with the anime industry, with manga titles being adapted into anime series and films. This synergy has helped manga become a major economic force in Japan and abroad, for example the anime adaptation of “Jujutsu Kaisen” by Gege Akutami, tripled sales, making the manga one of the best-selling titles of the year. The highest number of copies sold was 5 million in 2019.

1.2 Theoretical Approaches to Visual Narratives

The analysis of visual narratives, including comics and manga, demands an interdisciplinary methodology that brings together semiotics, narratology, and media theory. These media are not merely a mix of text and image, but operate as intricate systems of meaning-making in which the visual and verbal engage in a structured and culturally specific manner.

In comparison to traditional prose, visual narratives communicate meaning in terms of spatial and temporal relationships between elements, requiring specific kinds of visual literacy from the reader. To that end, researchers such as Scott McCloud and Will Eisner emphasize the necessity of understanding the internal workings of comics, including visual symbols, narrative conventions, and the role of the reader in creating meaning.

This section discusses two main methods of analysing visual narratives. The first (1.2.1) is concerned with semiotics and visual language, exploring how icons, symbols and abstractions operate as instruments of communication. The second (1.2.2) explores narrative systems and devices like panel composition, spatial reasoning and transitions, and the way that Western comics and Japanese manga use many forms of stylistic convention to depict time, emotion and narrative continuity.

Comics as a visual medium are a complex semiotic system involving image, text, and symbol. As per the definition provided by the methodology presented by Scott McCloud in his influential book "Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art", comics can be approached as a unique language where the privileged unit of narrative is an icon – symbolic image used to represent an individual, place, action, object or idea (McCloud, S., 1993, pp. 26-28).

1.2.1 Semiotics and Visual Language

Comic books, as a form of visual art, constitute a complex semiotic system that integrates imagery, text, and symbolism. According to the approach proposed by Scott McCloud in his fundamental work “Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art”, where comics can be considered as a unique language in which the main unit of narrative is an **icon** – symbolic image used to represent a person, place, action, thing or idea (McCloud, S., 1993, pp. 26-28).

Icons, symbols and abstraction

McCloud in his work is stating that symbols and icons are from one category, except they have different meaning. By the author’s definition, symbols – images used to represent concept, ideas and philosophies, for example the symbol of Ying-yang, Peace and flags.

The author divides icons into different types, such as:

Practical icons – the icons of language, science and communication (letters, numbers, hieroglyphs, etc.)

Pictures – Images designed to actually resemble their subjects. Although the author notes that as resemblance varies, so does the level of iconic content which mean that their meaning is fluid and variable.

Non-pictorial icons – their meaning is fixed and absolute, they represent invisible ideas (letters, numbers, signs)

Pictorial, or Abstract icons – icons that resemble their real-life counterpart. Faces, for example, can be represented as photographs or simplified drawings—both are considered icons, though simplified drawings contain less detail, are flatter, and more abstract.

McCloud states, that more simplified the image, the higher its ability to be identified by the reader, by stripping down an image to its essential “meaning”. The author calls this phenomenon “amplification through simplification”, believing that

minimalist forms can even enhance the content and emotional perception of an image. (McCloud, S., 1993, pp. 30-33).

Visual language of the comics

Comics are using their own visual language system, in which forms of lines, design of frames, text bubbles and other visual elements serves as semiotic function. For example, types of fonts, or size of letters can indicate the tone, volume, or emotional state of a character. McCloud described comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence".

By McCloud there are several core components:

Icons – symbolic image used to represent a person, place, action, thing or idea. They were described earlier

Closure – phenomenon when reader mentally fills in gaps between panels to create a coherent narrative

Panel composition – it is how the panels are spaced apart. For example, Alan Moore's "Watchmen" in this comic book the panels have symmetrical layouts and recurring visual motifs to build thematic resonance and narrative rhythm. Meanwhile, manga often uses unconventional panel shapes and flow to manipulate time and emotion. In "Death Note" by Tsugumi Ohba and illustrated by Takeshi Obata, panels have dramatical angles and extreme close-ups intensify psychological tension during confrontations.

Onomatopoeia – word representations of sounds. Words like "BAM!", "ZAP!", "WHOOSH" plays an essential part in visual storytelling.

1.2.2 Narrative Structures and Techniques

Comics as a form of art have a unique narrative structure, which combines visual and verbal elements, allowing the creation of complex stories. Scott McCloud emphasizes

that comics are not just a mixture of words and pictures, but a special form of communication based on the sequence of images in time.

Panel composition and spatial thinking

As discussed above panel composition is an essential part of the visual language and narrative tool. It is the sequence of images that creates narrative dynamics. The page composition, size and shape of the panels determine the rhythm and flow of time.

Gutter

One of the central concepts of McCloud is the term “gutter” – a space between panels. This is where the “closure” – a phenomenon as previously discussed in the section on closure, happens. By fracturing both time and space, gutter offer a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments (McCloud, S., 1993, pp. 63-67). However, closure allows to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous unified reality.

Panel transitions

There are 6 classified panel transitions, which have an impact on the style of story

Moment-to-moment – minimal chronological movement, it require minimum closure

Action-to-action – when the subject acts step by step

Subject-to-subject - transition between subjects in one scene.

Scene-to-scene – change of time or space.

Aspect-to-aspect - creating a mood, not a plot.

Non-sequitur - the deliberate absence of a logical connection.

The use of these techniques in different proportions is the basis of a special narrative style. For example, American comics uses 65% of “action-to-action”, 20-45% “subject-to-subject”, and 5-15% of “scene-to-scene” techniques. However, in manga the “aspect-to-aspect” technique is dominant, it became an integral part of Japanese mainstream comics almost from the beginning (McCloud, S., 1993, pp. 70-81). This

diversity can be explained by the fact that manga is published in an anthology format, i.e., in volumes.

PART II: CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL IMPACT OF COMICS AND MANGA IN THE XXI CENTURY

2.1 Redefining Storytelling in the Digital Age

The 21st century has witnessed a profound transformation in the ways stories are created, distributed, and experienced. The rapid development of digital technologies has allowed comics and manga to evolve beyond the limits of traditional print media. This chapter examines how the emergence of web-based platforms, mobile applications, and interactive tools has redefined the narrative structure and reader engagement of graphic storytelling. Special attention is given to the rise of digital-native formats, such as Webtoons, as well as the integration of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) into the creative process.

2.1.1 The Digital Transformation

In the earlier segment it was mentioned, that the Modern Age of the comics history also witnessed the rise of the digital technologies which transformed the comic book industry. Access to comics became more widespread particularly through its growing dominance of the internet, webcomics, and digital distribution platforms, altering how readers consume content and how creators reach audiences.

Digitalization has become a turning point for the entire industry. With the emergence of platforms like Webtoon, MangaPlus+, Marvel Unlimited and etc., accessibility to comics and manga has become more democratic. Unfortunately, this has greatly affected the sales of paper editions, especially in America, largely due to the common question among readers: why invest in physical editions when digital access is free and immediate? Although it should be noted that digitalization has not had a major impact on the manga industry in Japan, but this topic will be discussed in the following topics.

With the advent of digital software and technology, such as special tablets for artists, which allowed artists to draw and edit their comics and manga digitally. An

example of this is Kentaro Miura's *Berserker*, where the author redrew more than 20 pages a day so that his manga could be scanned and released on online platforms.

With the changes in the industry, comics appeared, but only in digital format. Some of these comics make explicit use of digital technology through hyperlinks, animation, or sound, while others strongly resemble print comics but have been published on digital platforms. (Tandfonline, 2018). Due to the delicate nature of digital files (Michelle et al. Citation2017), it is easier to both collect and preserve print versions of comics, and holding duplicates of works in both print and digital formats utilises additional amounts of finite resources. Jen Aggleton in her work analysed what digital comics are, according to her, digital comics are comics that are published solely in a digital format. That printed comics that are also published in digital format are not digital comics, but electronic representations. The author takes Garrish's idea of 'expression' and argues that "a print-born comic that has been adapted into digital format can be considered a digital comic if it is a "new expression" of the original work, rather than the "same expression" in a new manifestation (or format)" (Garrish, 2011).

The emergence of platforms such as Webtoon, Manga Plus, and Marvel Unlimited, has made access much easier. These platforms can be divided into three categories:

Library platforms are platforms where various manga and comics are stored. They allow you to buy new chapters and re-read old ones. Some platforms, such as MangaPlus+, may also provide free, 'trial' access to new manga chapters, but you can read them only once, after which you will have to pay per chapter

Publishing platforms are platforms that enable various authors to release their work to the public. On such platforms, authors can draw their work and release it, and readers can evaluate the work by writing reviews to the author, and such sites also provide funding opportunities for authors of successful works. Such sites also have a technology for purchasing new chapters, similar to the library platforms. An example of such sites is Webtoon, which is one of the most famous in the world. Webtoon not only a name of the platform, but also a type of episodic digital comics that originated in South Korea usually meant to be read on smartphones, it is known for its innovative narrative structure, vertical scroll.

Pirate platforms are platforms that provide access to all comics and manga chapters for free. The definition of piracy is the unauthorized duplication of copyrighted content that is then sold at significantly lower prices in the “grey” market. Piracy has become a big problem for the industry, and various publishers are putting all their efforts into fighting this phenomenon. However, such sites distribute comics and manga all over the world and give readers the opportunity to read their favorite works for free. Such platforms can also provide translation services, allowing you to read various works in languages where there is no official translation. Therefore, although pirate platforms are illegal, they distribute comics around the world, giving a large number of readers access much more efficiently than official platforms.

2.1.2 Technological Integration in Narrative Techniques

In the Digital Age, new technologies significantly transformed not only the method of consumption of the comic books, but also the narrative structure. Technological integration to digital comics has led to creation of new format of storytelling, which significantly expand the boundaries of traditional panel thinking.

Webtoon-specific storytelling: vertical scroll and infinite canvas.

The Webtoon format uses vertical scrolling, adapted to reading on smartphones, which eliminates the need for page turning. Instead of traditional page layout, Webtoon function as “infinite canvas”, in which authors can play with rhythm, space and unforeseen visual effects. The advantage of this format is ability of managing emotional tension by the pace of scrolling – for example, usage empty space or individual ‘pause frames’ that enhance the drama (Gravett, 2004).

AR/VR, animated panels and motion comics.

Because of the rise of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) comics have gained the ability to transfer to three-dimensional space. With the help of AR, readers have the ability to “bring to life” characters by pointing smartphones at a page or screen. In VR environments, readers can find themselves inside the world of a comic book, interacting with the environment and characters, which turns reading into a real experience (Tandfonline, 2018).

Animated panels and motions comics also became an important technology, it is a hybrid between comics and cartoon in which static picture are accompanied by movement, sound and voice acting. It creates the effect of “living comics”, enhancing emotional perception without complete loss of the characteristic visual structure (KNUTD, 2022).

Interactivity and serialisation through social media

Another important component of the modern storytelling is interactivity. Certain digital comics give access to the readers to affect the plot through the choice of options (as in visual novels), or comment directly in the context of the page. It creates a mutual connection between author and reader, which is very important to publishing platforms like Webtoon and Tapas, in where feedback is crucial for the popularity and monetisation of a work (Tandfonline, 2018).

Besides, social media became another serialisation platform. Many authors are publishing their stories in the format of Instagram-reels, Tiktok videos or Twitter comics, adapting content to suit the platform's format. Such distribution allows creators to quickly engage the audience, increase the author's visibility, and even test ideas before launching a full-fledged series.

Thus, technological integration in narrative techniques not only changes the way comics are created and consumed, but opens new horizons of storytelling in which the line between reader and author is disappearing.

2.1.3. The usage of AI in creating the drawings to comicses/manga's

Technology has greatly influenced the comics and manga industry. In the last 5 years, the development of AI (artificial intelligence) has significantly transformed global creative industries. AI has been used for every aspect of human life, from advice on what to cook to help with writing scientific works. A fundamental change in generative AI was the creation of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) in 2014 by American computer scientist Ian Goodfellow. This is an unsupervised machine learning algorithm that involves two competing neural networks. One network is a generative model that

generates content, and the other is a discriminative network that tries to find out whether it is an authentic sample or not (Toloka, 2023).

A major breakthrough in generative AI occurred in 2018, when the first version of GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) by OpenAI was released. Then in 2021, the same developers released DALL-E which is a machine learning model that generates photorealistic images from textual descriptions.

The creation of these AIs has divided the entire comics and manga industry into a before and after. Drawing comics and manga has been simplified thanks to AI. This is especially useful for mangaka who draw their works for publication every week. AI allows creators to significantly reduce the time spent on illustration tasks.. Generative AI helps especially if an artist is unable to draw in the moment due to health reasons. An example of a work drawn with the help of AI is “Quantum Entanglement” by Arts Angel, which was drawn with the help of AI (Webtoon, (n.d.).

There are many advantages to using AI, one of which, as mentioned earlier, is speed. AI algorithm are capable of generating multiple images within seconds. Another advantage is accessibility: anyone with no artistic background can ask AI to draw anything.

The use of AI in the creation of comics and manga has sparked a lot of debate about authorship and originality. McCloud's theories applied to the current debate about AI, in his work he stated that ‘The surface is what first draws the eye, but the true depth of a comic lies in its idea and structure’ (McCloud,1993, pp. 162-184), which is often not the case with AI-generated comics, as they tend to remain at the “surface” level of artistry. Artists have expressed their concerns about a phenomenon called “creative impotence”.

Moreover, AI models are trained on huge datasets of existing images, most of which are other people's images that have not been authorised by the authors. This has raised ethical and legal issues around copyright and intellectual property infringement (Wired, 2023). Industry experts warn that without clear rules, AI could undermine the creative industry by replacing the work of professional illustrators (The Verge, 2022).

Reactions in the comics and manga industries were divided. In the manga industry, most publishers have unofficially asked their artists not to use AI, while

publishers have not given any official comments. Morita Takashi, the author of “Kaitō Rupan den abanchurie” (“A Story of Arsene Lupin, Aventurier”), stated that AI art is high quality art that allows for an amateur artist to perform like a professional. He suggests that whenever a work is created by AI or by hand, that is only the method, while the important thing is the purpose. (Nippon, 2023)

In contrast to the manga industry, the comic book industry has expressed its concerns about AI, emphasising that AI should complement, not replace, human creativity, meaning that it should be a tool (Forbes, 2023). For example, Marvel has created its experimental “Marvel: Raster Manga Vectorisation project” where AI is used to improve the clarity of lines and automate repetitive tasks, allowing artists to focus on storytelling and composition (arXiv, 2021).

Looking ahead, the use of AI to create artistic projects will continue to evolve until human artists collaborate with AI algorithms for greater efficiency and image quality. As AI technology continues to evolve, the industry is likely to see a combination of traditional craftsmanship and algorithmic innovation, opening up new frontiers in storytelling while maintaining artistic integrity.

2.2 Representation, Identity, and Social Issues

In the previous sections, it was mentioned that the first comics were political in nature, due to the then war in Europe in the twentieth century, they showed the military as heroes who defeat the enemy (the Nazis) and save the innocent. It is also worth mentioning the transition between the Silver and Bronze Ages, where social issues were raised in comics, which gave rise to a new vector in the comics narrative. One of the main developments of the Bronze Age was the rise of black and other minority superheroes. Representation of minorities, identity and race is now a hot topic. Writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have played a crucial role in advancing this movement. In her novel *Americanah*, Adichie addresses the intricate issues of race, migration, and identity. During her widely recognized TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” she asserts that while narratives have historically been used to marginalize and misrepresent, they also possess the potential to empower individuals and affirm shared humanity

(Adichie, 2009). Both her work and that of other contemporary authors highlight the critical role of diverse storytelling in questioning and reshaping prevailing cultural norms.

2.2.1 Diversity and Inclusion in Visual Narratives

In modern visual narratives, such as west comic and Japanese manga, issues of gender, race and representation of LGBTQ+ communities are becoming increasingly relevant. According to Khan (2018), comic books are becoming an important platform for representation of minority groups, because their visual nature allows them to clearly convey social and cultural challenges (Khan, 2018).

Gender, race and LGBTQ+ representation in west comics and Japanese manga.

It is observed that in the west comics an active rise of minority representation is happening. For example, Marvel's "Ms. Marvel" series, where Kamala Khan, a pakistani-american Muslim woman is being portrait as a main character (Wired, 2015), (KQED, 2022). This event became a significant step in overcoming stereotypes and expanding the cultural field of superhero stories. Researchers Hughes-Hassell & Rawson (2018) also notes, that inclusion like this have a positive outcome and impact on young readers, helping them identify themselves with characters (Hughes-Hassell & Rawson, 2018). Also, as mentioned in the previous part, the "X-Men series" is an allegory for racial, ethnic and sexual differences. They are portrayed as positive characters who help people in need, even though they are despised by society. Such stories show how to treat those who are different from them and develop tolerance in young readers

The problem of racial representation is an acute issue in Western comics. Smith (2021) in his analysis indicates on evolution of portrayal of black characters in comics, which has gone from stereotypical images to full-fledged heroes, such as Black Panther, Luke Cage and Storm (Smith, 2021). Wired also emphasised the importance of increasing racial diversity in articles in 2003 and 2015 (Wired, 2015).

However, in Japanese manga the topic of LGBT+ is represented less actively, but as an example, the manga 'Our Dreams at Dusk' by Yuuki Kamatani is a good example of this topic. Author, who is nonbinary, created a realistic and sensual narrative about accepting of self-identity in Japanese society. (Wired, 2003), (Trans Express, 2019).

Nevertheless, given all the advantages of representation in comics, most readers are not interested in them. Over the past 10 years, the topic of representation has been used in comics much more frequently, which has led to the fact that Western comics are bought much less often, and with the growing popularity of manga, where these topics are rarely shown, sales and interest in comics have been falling over the years. When interviewing people, as well as users of the Reddit platform, readers prefer manga to comics due to several factors, one of which is the oversaturation of the topic of representation, which leads to the conclusion that people are tired of it and this can lead to the opposite effect, people will begin to despise and dislike minorities more, because according to readers, they have ruined comics.

2.2.2 Political and Social Commentary

Comic books as a tool of political protest and criticism

One of the most famous examples of political commentary in comics is “Maus” by Art Spiegelman. This Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel narrate about the history of survival of authors parents in time of Holocaust, portraying Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, Americans as dogs and Poles as pigs. Spiegelman uses the metaphor of animals to emphasize dehumanization of victims and absurdity racial classifications. This work has become an important contribution to the literature on the Holocaust and an example of how comics can convey complex historical themes (Moore, 1986-1987). Another example of political commentary is “Watchmen” by Alan Moore. In the review Jeroen Admiraal stated: “The story works as a window into the psychological occupations of postwar United States. Dr. Manhattan clearly represents the atomic bomb, and what the creation and the use of the atomic bomb did to the American psyche. The entire comic is preoccupied with it and its impressive how Moore ramps up the feeling of dread for a looming 3rd World War. Atomic bombs in general feature heavily in American comics because it is a thing to have confused feelings about and something that has to be explored and digested from various angles” (Moore, 1986-1987). Another example of this author's work is V for Vendetta, which explores the themes of totalitarianism and personal freedom. The story is set in a futuristic Britain, where war has led to the breakdown of society and a fascist government has taken power, using fear to rule

through surveillance programmes and detention camps for the undesirables. The protagonist of this story, V, is a terrorist with a penchant for bombs and knives who dedicates his life to overthrowing the government and restoring freedom to the people through anarchy. The work is considered one of the best graphic novels in Alan Moore's career.

It was mentioned in the previous part, that in 1971 Stan Lee, then editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, published a story in "The Amazing Spider-Man", where Peter Parker is faced with the problem of drug abuse by young. This story was published without permission of the Comics Code. Lee's decision to violate the rules was a turning point for the whole comics industry, it led to the change of Comics Code, this led to a new narrative branch, namely a turn to social topics (racism, ecology, the Vietnam War).

Manga approaches to nationalism, war and ecological issues.

Japanese manga also actively explores political and social issues. For example, manga "Akira" by Katsuhiro Otomo describes a postapocalyptic Tokyo, in which government corruption and military experiments lead to disaster. The topic of social problems in Japan is very acute: the cruel work culture, hard and competitive education, and the demographic crisis all have a strong impact on the psychological state of people. These topics are also depicted in manga, such as the manga "Oyasumi Punpun" by Inio Asano, this coming-of-age story portrays the protagonist's life and his mental struggles against the backdrop of modern Japanese society.

After WWII, Japan became a pacifist country, where the topic of war and war crimes is taboo. However, works were written that showed the horrors and consequences of wars, such as "Barefoot Gen" by Keiji Nakazawa, a manga that tells the story of a boy named Gen and his family before and after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. The story is full of autobiographical parallels with Nakazawa's own life, having witnessed the bombing in Hiroshima. This manga shows the consequences of the war in a very brutal way, it is not for the faint of heart, but it shows the realities of people's lives after the war and their attempts to survive.

Another example of the theme of war is the world-famous manga "Naruto" by Masashi Kishimoto, about a boy who dreams of achieving universal recognition and becoming the Hokage - the head of his village and the strongest ninja, despite the fact that he has been cursed since childhood, which is why everyone hates him. Towards the end

of the story, the 4th Ninja World War begins and we are told about the past of many characters who fought in previous wars and how those wars destroyed them. This story describes the difficulties of survival for children who lost their homes because of the war. The psychological traumas such as survivor's guilt, PTSD, manic persecution and dehumanisation are beautifully portrayed.

Environmental themes are also present in Japanese manga. Hayao Miyazaki's works, such as *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Winds*, raise the issue of environmental disaster and human responsibility for the environment (The Guardian, 2008). In his works, Miyazaki despises the themes of nationalism, or shows them in negative terms. In one interview, he said: "We need to liberate our children from nationalism. The nationalistic view suggests the problems in the world come from its multi-ethnicity. [It] creates a possibility for the country we love to turn into something negative for the world as a whole. This is a lesson we learned from the past war and which we cannot forget." (The Guardian, 2008)

Dystopia and Cyberpunk.

Cyberpunk, as defined by Sterling, Rucker, and Shiner, is contemporary science fiction that shows the impact of future technologies on society and/or humans (Sterling, Rucker, and Shiner, 1988). In the works of this genre, the world is depicted as a gloomy place where huge corporations rule everything. Also, all spheres of human life are closely connected with computer technology. In such works, people are not purely biological organisms - they are fully or partially composed of cybernetic implants. This genre originated in 1983, created by the writer Bruce Bethke in his short story "Cyberpunk", where he first used the term, after which it began to be used as a term for genres of a similar nature. It is interesting to note that the most prominent representative of this genre in cyberpunk cinema was Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep", which was released in 1982, a year before Bruce Bethke's story. (termin.in.ua. (n.d.)).

Dystopia is a genre that describes a state or world order in which, despite the initial desire for an ideal existence for all inhabitants, negative development trends emerge (Eksmo. (n.d.)). This genre is the opposite of the utopia genre; in the world of this genre, the image of an ideal world is only a beautiful cover under which the world of totalitarianism and dictatorship is hidden; in this world, the protagonist stands up to the

regime of power. Famous representatives of this genre in literature include Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" and George Orwell's "1984".

Following the researchers, there is a debate about the difference between Cyberpunk and Dystopia, because they are both about the same thing. Opinions differ between the fact that 'cyberpunk' was just a movement among writers in the 70s and 80s, and some think that the genre itself is a mistake and that there is no such genre. (StopGame. (n.d.)). In my opinion, the Cyberpunk genre is about technology and how it affects life, and Dystopia is about people (their souls, emotions and thoughts). The main question of cyberpunk is: "What makes a human a human?", "Where does a human end and a robot begin?". And the main question of dystopia: "What is freedom?", "Is what the government does right?".

The dystopian and cyberpunk genres in comics are often used to criticise social structures and technological progress. The comic book "Robocop" by Marvel Comics tells the story of a policeman Alex Murphy, who was brutally murdered by a gang of criminals, but was resurrected as Robocop, a cybernetic policeman who is now programmed to destroy Detroit. In this comic, the script is very emotional and intense, with all the characters, including the protagonist, having their own strengths and weaknesses. This comic touches upon the issue of police brutality, which has been and still is a major concern for ordinary US citizens. (Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology, 1988)

An example of a manga is "Ghost in the Shell" by Masamune Shiro, which explores the issues of artificial intelligence, cybernetic implants, and identity in a technologically advanced society. This work raises philosophical questions about consciousness and humanity in a world where the boundaries between man and machine are blurred (Shirow, 1989).

2.2.3 Fandom, Identity, and Community Engagement

The rise of online fandoms has fundamentally transformed the way readers and interact, contributing to the formation of a fandoms centered around comics and manga. By the dictionary fandom is a state of being a fan, or group of fans someone or something, especially very enthusiastic ones. It's important to note that in Japan, fans are

called otaku, however there is a slang term which calls fans of Japan culture and, specially, manga and anime as weeb, it's a crude term and have a negative connotation. Platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, and Pixiv provide spaces where fans can discuss plot development, celebrate their favorite characters, share theories, and show off their fan art (Jenkins, 2006). These fandoms also influence content creation, fan feedback can lead to creator adjusting storylines or introducing original characters. Such creativity can led to the creation of a new character in the original work, for example, in the manga “My Hero Academia” by Kōhei Horikoshi there was a contest in which fans could create their own original character and if they would win the contest their character would be added to the original manga, so the characters Bubble Girl and Centipede-man were created (Reditt,2019).

A Japanese online community, called Pixiv, has become especially prominent in the manga and anime world, where artists share fan art, doujinshi (self-published works), and collaborate with fellow enthusiasts. This participatory culture enhances a sense of ownership and engagement among fans. These creative works allow fans to address gaps in the story, explore alternative relationships, or comment on social and political issues (Jenkins, 2006).

The phenomenon of cosplay was also influenced by comics and manga. Cosplay is a type of performance that consists in reflecting certain well-known characters or ideas in real time with the help of a costume and characteristic accessories. The phenomenon originated in America from fans of anime, manga, comics, and computer games, so most cosplayers dress up only in them. Cosplayers gather at conventions where they present their outfits to each other and meet other fellow cosplayers. According to several studies (Napier 2007; The Manila Times 2008), it is assumed that cosplay provide performers with an escape from the problems and monotony of the real life (Rahman, Wing-sun and Cheung, 2012).

Conventions such as Comic-Con International, Anime Expo, and Japan Expo serve as a physical space where fans can express their creativity and immerse themselves in shared interests (Gravett, 2004). The first comic book convention took place in New York City in 1964. San Diego Comic-Con International, which is considered in the industry to be the flagship event, got its start in 1970 (Universal of central Florida, (n.d.)). Nowadays, conventions are a huge festival where people from all over the world meet

and have fun; representatives of the manga and comics industry are now present at such conventions, sharing news with fans every year, or answering questions from fans about the canon in the story or the characteristics of the characters. Conventions have become a huge cultural phenomenon that allows people to share the culture of different countries with each other.

PART III: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Comics have become an integral part of the culture of 21st century society, where everyone knows what comics are or knows characters from these works. The comic book was followed by a new genre of Japanese literature called manga. Manga and comics share many similarities, but differ in details, but they differ in details, such as manga is black and white, unlike comics. The characters of these graphic stories have become a cultural value, a symbol, for many people around the world. The variety of plots, characters and ideas in these graphic works keep the reader interested in these genres, and they reveal social and political topics of concern to society. With the evolution of technology and the emergence of AI, the process of creating stories has become much easier, leading to the emergence of numerous works by authors without professional artistic skills

Despite the numerous theoretical studies on the value of comics and manga, we also need to know how people feel about manga and comics. Which do they prefer more, manga or comics? How do they feel about political topics? What topics would they like to see more often? How do they feel about the use of AI in comics? In the survey, I also asked the participants to write their favourite works, if they had any.

In order to address these questions, an anonymous survey was conducted among a diverse group of respondents. I wanted to find out their attitudes towards this cultural phenomenon and its impact on the 21st century. In these questions, I focused on the participants' attitudes towards the use of AI as well as political topics.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the results of this study. Through the data collected, I want to provide a reader's perspective on comics and manga and their cultural impact.

3.1 Participants of the research

In total, 24 people took part in my research, of whom 60% were students, 30% had completed higher education and 10% had secondary education. Also, the majority of participants, namely 90%, were between 18 and 24 years old, 9% were between 25 and 34 years old and 1% were 45+ years old. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of respondents were women - 65%, men - 25%, and 10% of participants were non-binary.

This diversity of participants allowed us to obtain a wider range of opinions on the topic under study. The survey was conducted online and was anonymous. This was done to ensure more objective survey results.

It is interesting to note that I asked the participants to write their favourite works, if any, to analyse specific works and topics that are of most interest to readers.

3.2 Research instruments

For my research, I used the Google Forms application, where a survey was created. The survey consists of 18 questions. The survey was conducted exclusively in an online format, which allowed for more accurate answers and made it easier to count participants and answers. The survey itself was in Hungarian and Ukrainian, which was necessary to ensure that the majority of participants who did not know English could take part in the survey, and an English version of the same survey was created and used among students of the English Language and Literature course.

There were 2 questions in the survey where participants could provide their own answers. These were the questions: ‘At what age did you first get acquainted with comics or manga?’ and “Your favourite comics/manga”.

The estimated time to complete the survey was 5 to 10 minutes.

3.3 Procedure of the research

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2025. The link to the survey was uploaded on various platforms, and more specifically in groups on Messenger and Telegram. Personal links were also sent to students via e-mail, and with the help of students and friends, links were sent to other people. As the topic of comics and manga is very well known, it was not difficult for the participants to answer the questions.

3.4 Findings of the research

The first two questions have already been described in the previous segments, namely the age, gender and level of education of the participants. So, to avoid tautology and repetition, I will start with the results of question 4.

Question 4 was: ‘What do you prefer to read?’. According to the results of this question, 55% of the 24 participants answered that they read comics and manga, while 30% of the participants answered that they do not read any of these. Also, 10% of the participants chose to read manga, and only 5% of the participants read only comics

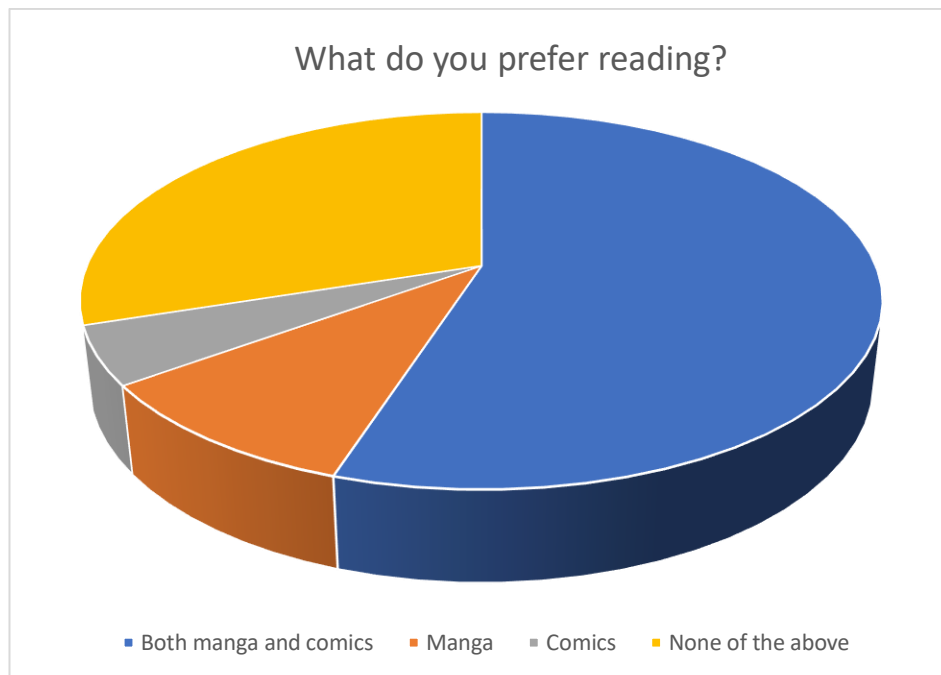


Figure 1.

Question 5 focused on identifying what participants read in what format. This question was asked to determine whether the development of technology and social media has affected the format of reading. According to the results, almost half, namely 45% of the participants read graphic stories through digital applications (PDF, online platforms), emphasising that the vast majority of readers have switched to digital analogues of reading. Social media was the second most popular medium with 30%, which means that these participants prefer to read comics through networks such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. It should be noted that pirated scans of comics and manga are posted on social media, and I think it is inappropriate to condemn readers. Also, 15% of readers said that they read in all formats, i.e. both digital and paper formats.

10% read in paper editions, which indicates a gradual transition of the industry to digital formats and a tendency to reduce the popularity of printed publications.

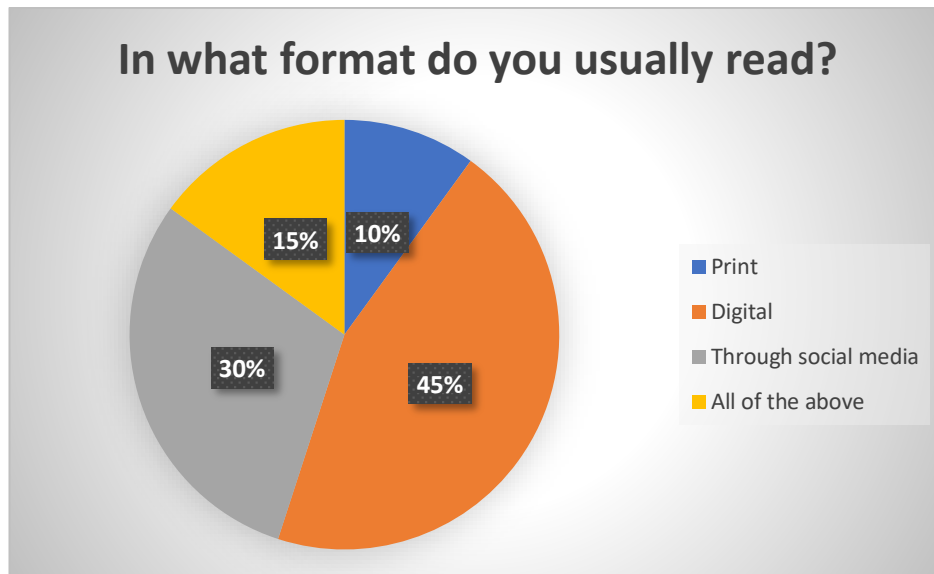


Figure 2.

Question 6 was designed to find out how often readers read comics and manga. Thanks to this question, we can determine the frequency of reading graphic works among the participants. The result was unexpected for me, the answers to this question had an almost perfect balance. According to the results, the first places were shared by the answers 'Several times a week' and 'Rarely' - they both had 25%. In second place were the answers 'Once a month' and 'Never' with a score of 20%. And in last place, which was a big surprise, was the question with 10% of the votes - 'Every day'. These results mean that it is almost impossible to clearly define the frequency of reading among the participants, i.e. each reader has his or her own reading pace.

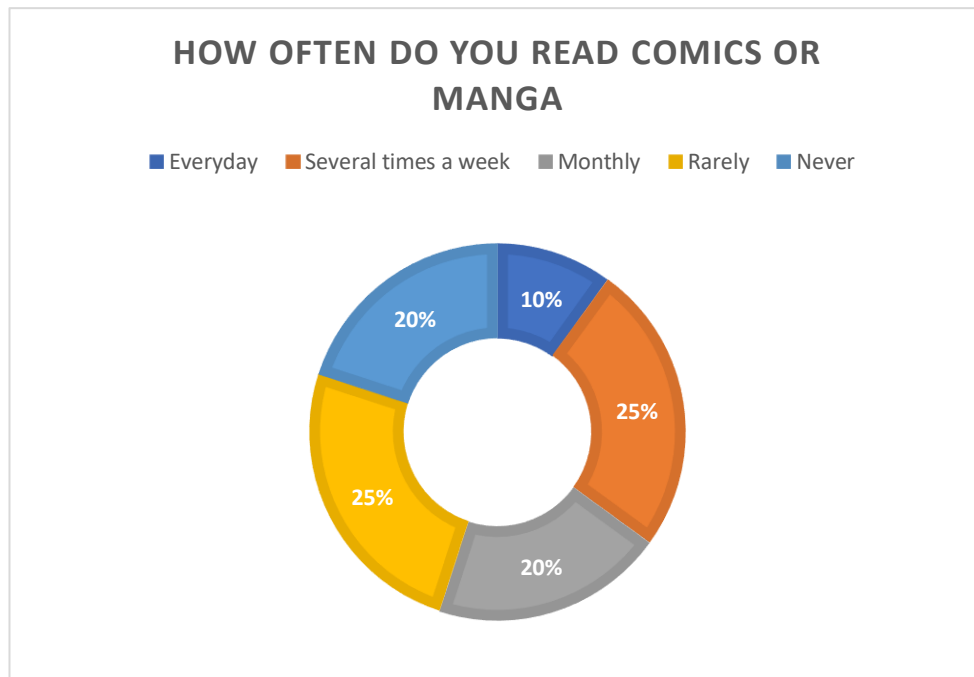


Figure 3.

Question 7 was an open-ended question. This question was designed to determine in what year the participants learned about comics and manga. Most of the participants wrote only their age, and some wrote about how they learned about this genre, which was the next question. Therefore, it was decided to combine questions 7 and 8 into one. According to the results, out of 24 participants, 9 discovered graphic stories in their teens, 13 learnt about them as children, and 2 participants said that they knew about comics since childhood and learned about manga in their teens. An interesting discovery was the answers to question 8, where 50% of participants discovered these genres through cartoons and anime, 25% through friends, 15% through film adaptations, and 10% through social media. These results suggest that the development of cartoon and anime story adaptations works well as advertising, and is most effective in promoting the comic book and manga industries.

It is interesting to note that the purpose of the open-ended survey was to find out at what age the participants learned about comics and manga. Unfortunately, only two participants gave a complete answer.

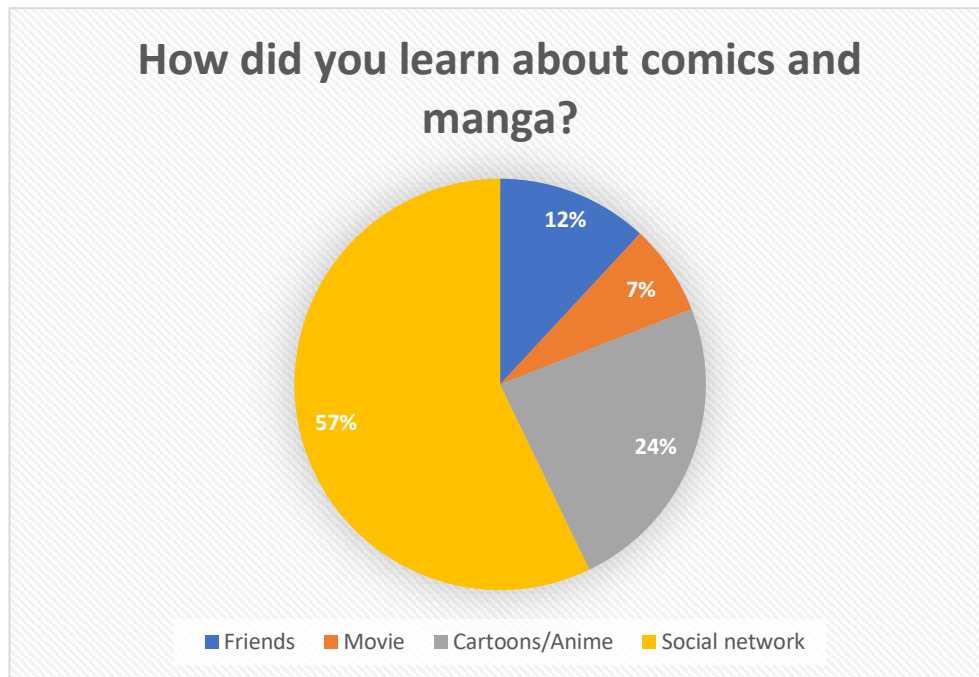


Figure 4.

Question 9 is about style. In this question I want to know what style readers prefer. Thus, the participants chose Japanese manga by a huge margin - 65%, while 21.5% chose comics and only 10.5% chose other styles (Webtoons). Based on these results, we can conclude that readers like the drawing and narrative style of manga more than the comic book style. This underlines the growing interest and preferences of readers in manga.

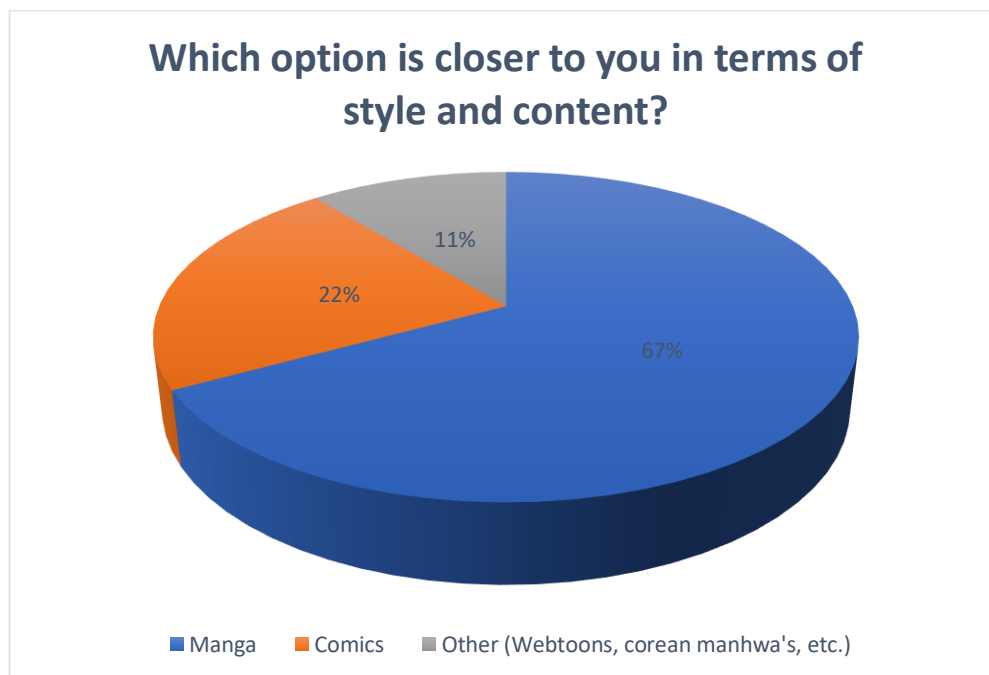


Figure 5.

Question 10 is designed to find out what genre the participants prefer. This is one of my favourite questions. This question was created to determine which genre, due to the huge number of different types, is more in demand and attracts the majority of readers. According to the results of this survey, Action/Adventure and Romance/Drama are tied for first place with 35% of the votes. Fantasy/Science Fiction is in second place with 15% of the vote, followed by Comedy/Satire with 10% of the vote and Horror/Mystery with 5% of the vote. Judging by these answers, readers prefer sentimental works along with adventures, and there is also a strong interest in the fantasy and science fiction genres.

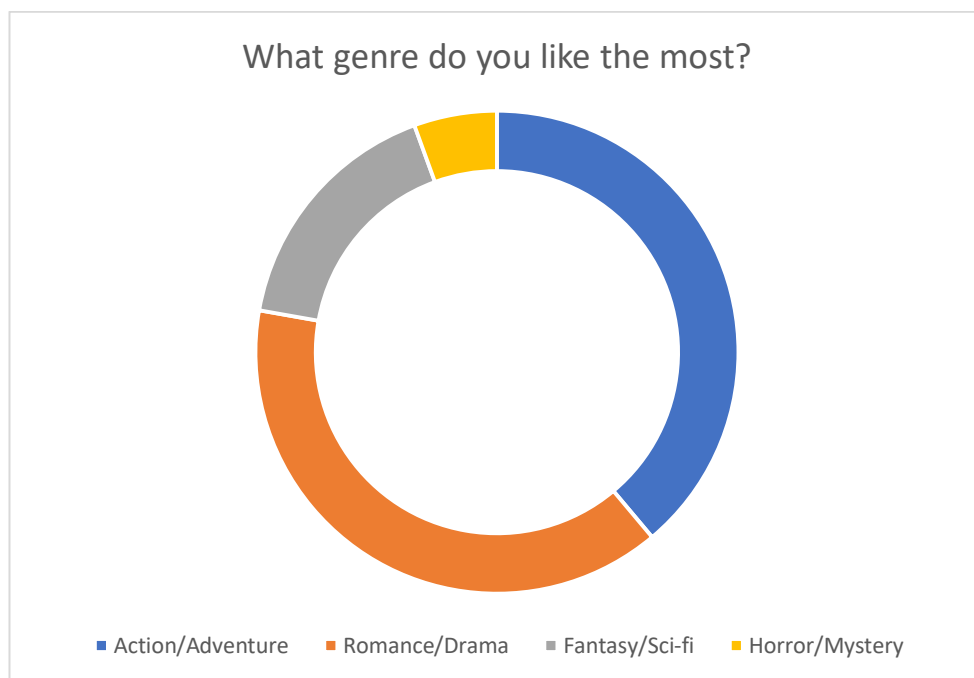


Figure 6.

One of the most interesting questions, question 11 is designed to find out what is most important in comics and manga. This question is designed to identify the most important components that readers think are needed in graphic works. And with a score of 55%, readers chose plot depth, marking that plot is the most important component in comics. Interesting characters were chosen by 25%. 10% chose high-quality images and romantic lines, and 5% chose dynamic storytelling.

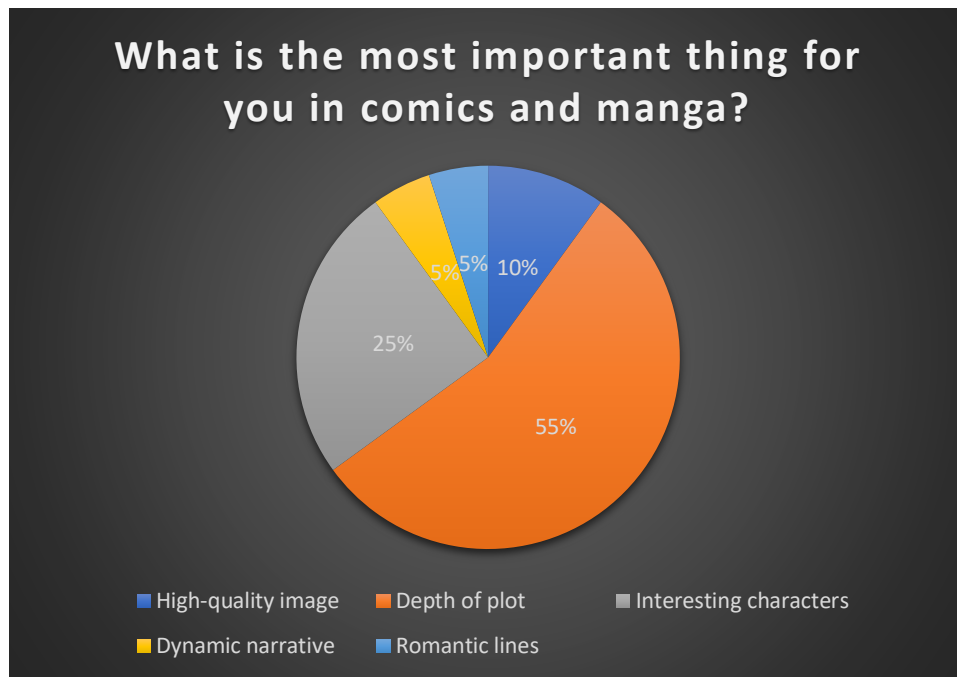


Figure 7.

12 creation question to gather participants' opinions on political topics in comics. This question is relevant nowadays, especially when many political agendas appear in the media. 40% said they were neutral, 35% said they were positive if it was appropriate and meaningful, and only 25% said they had a negative attitude towards political topics. Analysing the results, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents do not have categorical prejudices against political content in comics, while a significant part of the audience prefers the contextual relevance of such topics. This indicates the need for authors to find a balance between artistic narrative and the inclusion of socio-political messages to avoid excessive politicisation of works and maintain a wide readership.

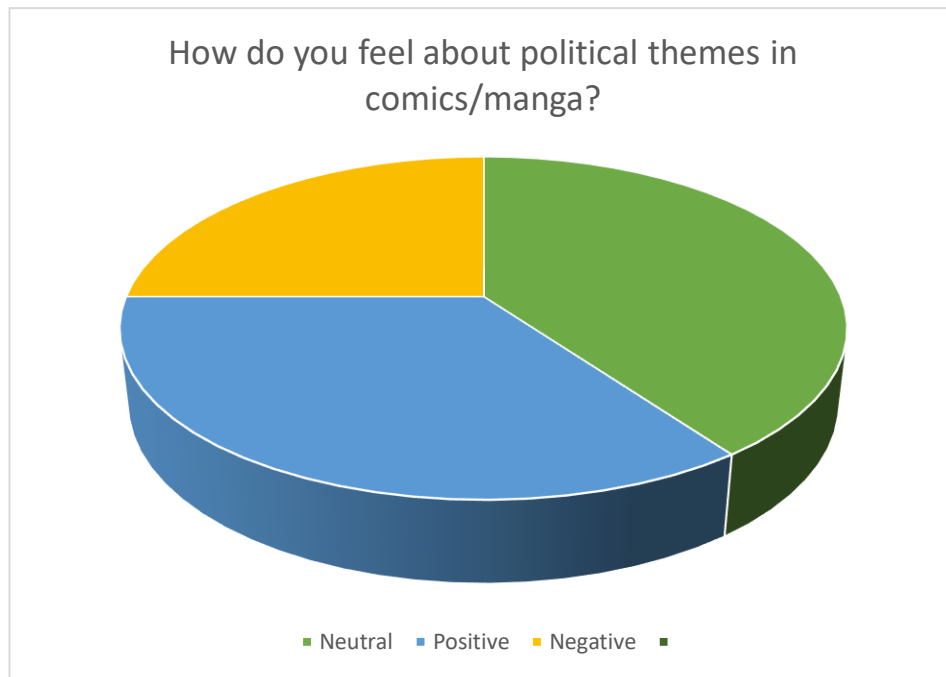


Figure 8.

Question 13: Do you agree or disagree with the statement: ‘There is too much political content in contemporary comics and manga’? This question was designed to find out how readers feel about the amount of political content. As we learned from the previous question, readers are neutral about political themes in graphic novels. But the question is how they feel about the number of these themes. According to the results, 45% of the participants chose the answer “no”, which means that they do not think that there are many political subtexts in manga and comics. Also, the results of 25% were divided between two options, namely: “hard to say” and “partially”. But only 5% chose “yes”.

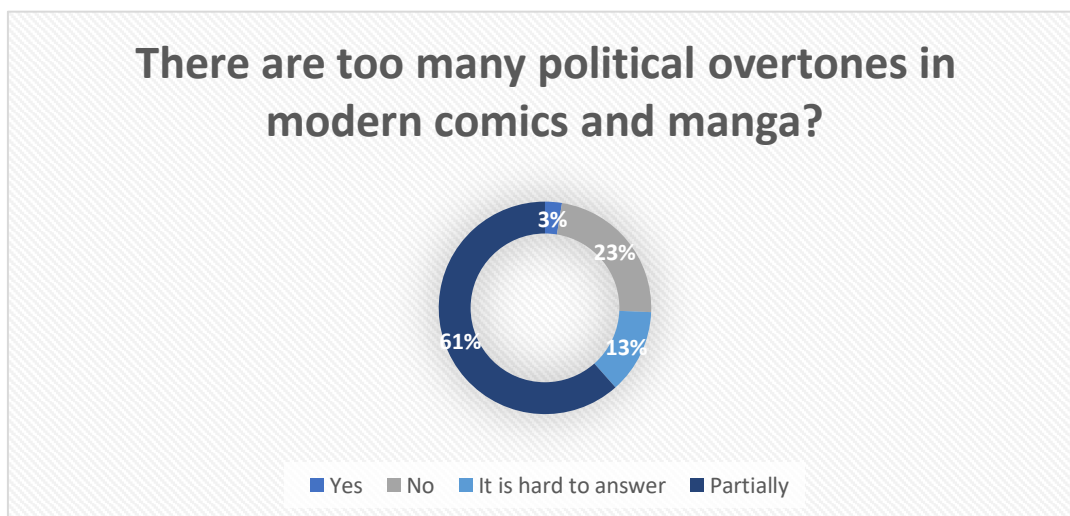


Figure 9.

Question 14 was formulated to better understand whether social issues such as representation, equality, and feminism influence the content of comics and manga. It was aimed at finding out how important it is for readers to include such topics in graphic works.

According to the survey, 35% of participants said that social issues do make comics more meaningful. Another 40% chose the ‘partially’ option, meaning that they recognise some value of such topics, but do not consider them to be key. 15% of respondents believe that social issues do not add content, and 10% said that it all depends on how it is implemented.

Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents - 75% - consider social context to be an important component of comics to some extent. This indicates a general trend towards a deeper, more meaningful approach in graphic art.

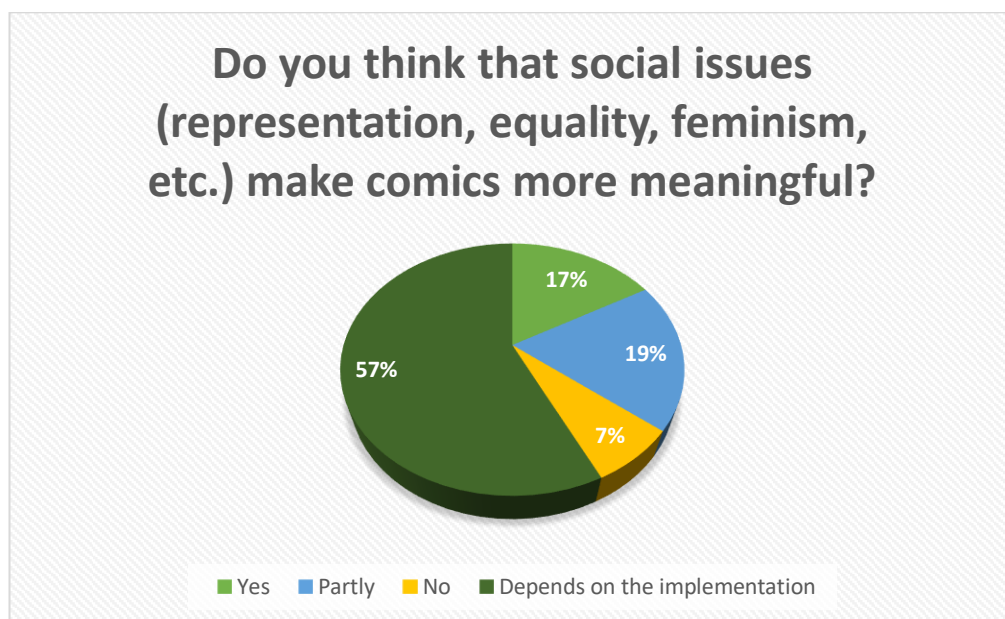


Figure 10.

Question 15: “How do you feel about the representation of ethnic, gender and other minorities in comics/manga?”. This question was asked to find out how readers feel about the representation of ethnic, gender and other minorities in comics and manga. It helps to better understand how important the topic of social inclusiveness in graphic works is to the audience.

According to the answers, only 20% of respondents consider such representation to be really important. The option that it looks like something forced received the most votes - 40% - indicating a critical or even wary attitude towards this issue. Another 25% remained neutral, and 15% had no clear opinion at all.

Thus, we can say that the attitude towards the representation of minorities in comics is rather ambiguous: some readers support it, but a significant number of them are cautious or sceptical.

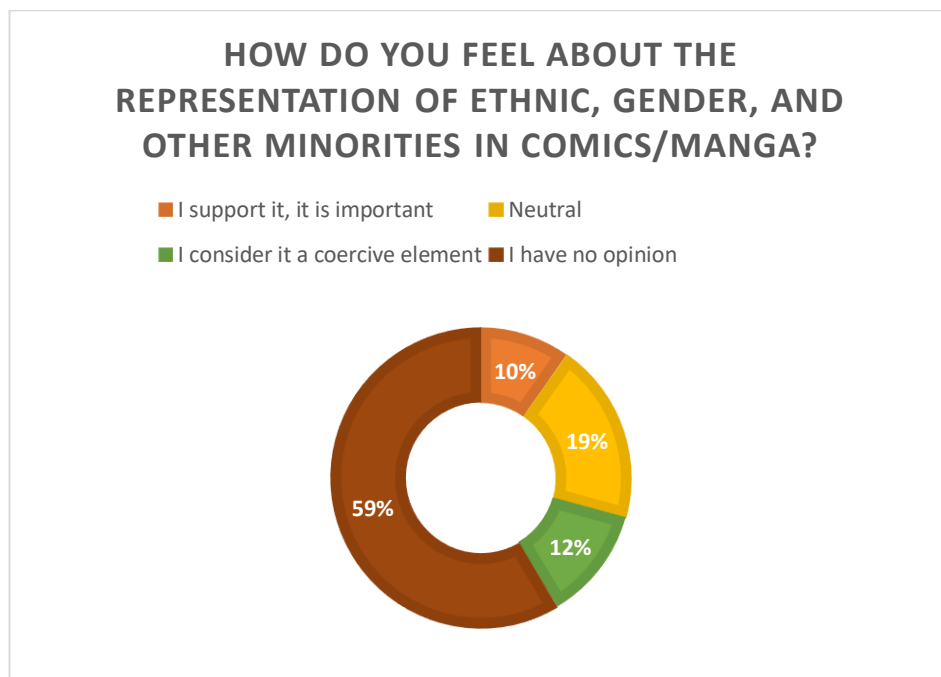


Figure 11.

16 The question is particularly relevant in the digital age. The question refers to the use of AI in comic book creation, and specifically the attitudes of the participants to this practice. The issue of AI has become a very sensitive one, and as already mentioned, most artists have a negative attitude towards AI, but does this apply to readers? 60% of the participants decided that only partial use is acceptable, i.e. the use of AI as a tool. 20% of the participants have a negative attitude towards AI. 15% chose the option 'it is a modern tool that can be useful', which means the full use of AI. And only 5% decided to remain silent.

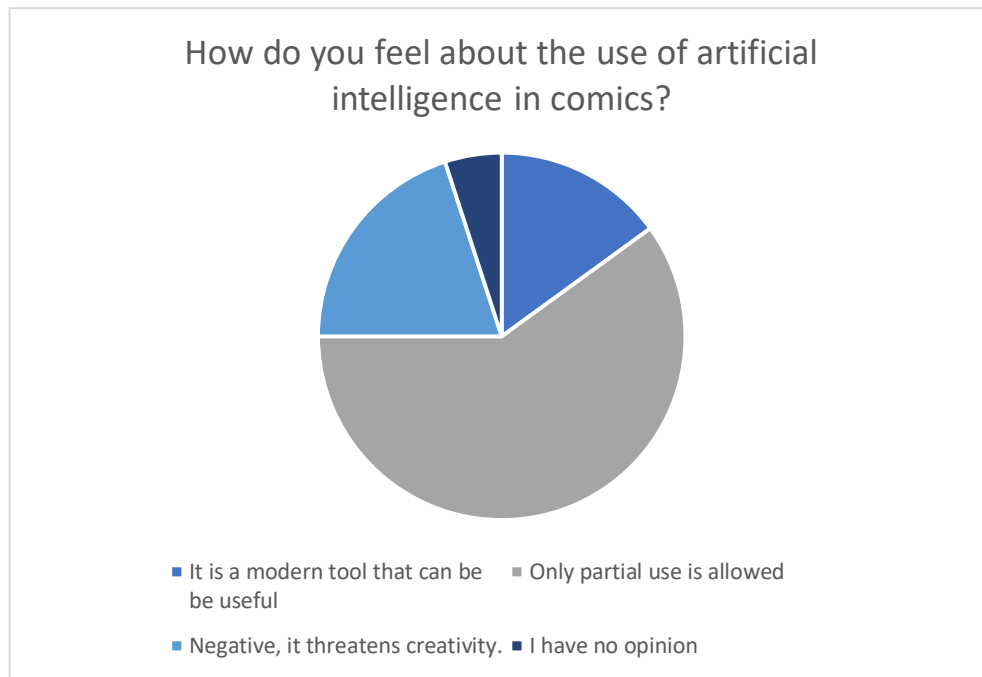


Figure 12.

17 Question: ‘Have you ever been inspired by comics or manga in your own work?’ This question is important for this study. In the previous sections, it was said that comics and manga inspire people to create their own stories, both within the same fandom (creating fan sequels to favourite stories) and to publish something new. The purpose of this question was to get relevant answers. 35% voted that these works inspire participants and they create their own stories. The same percentage of participants, 35%, said that they were not inspired to create something new. And 30% said that graphic stories inspired them, but for various reasons they do not do it. As you can see, the results show that comics do inspire people to create their own stories, but although not everyone wants to do it, it still shows that comics are a cultural phenomenon that inspires many people to create their own work.

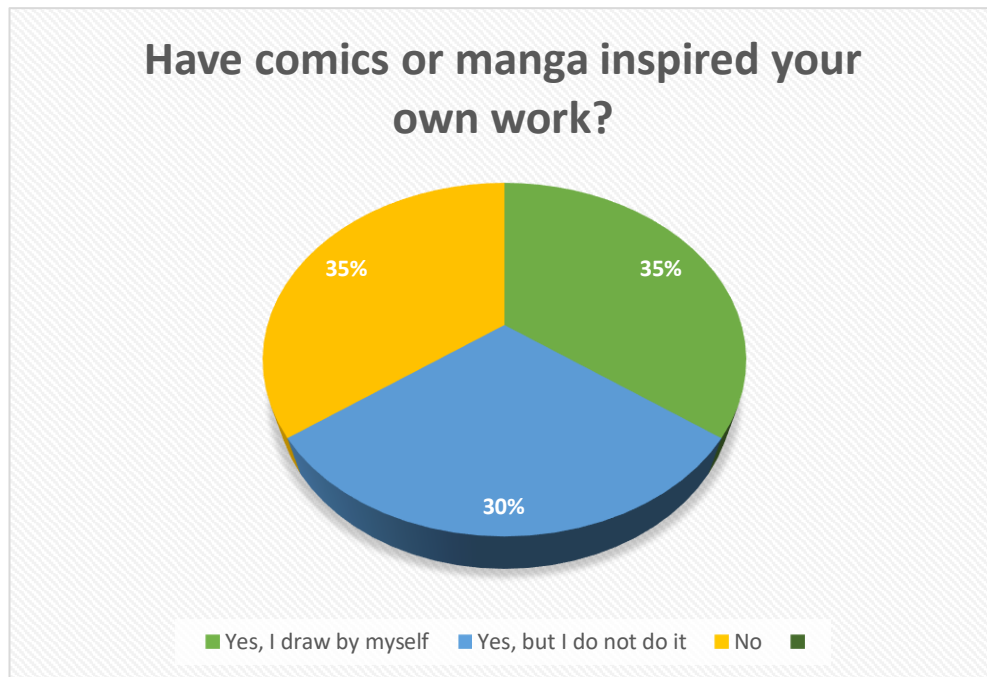


Figure 13.

Last, question 18. This is an open-ended question where participants were asked to write their favourite works. And the answers were very different. Two participants wrote that they loved Spider-Man stories, and one participant wrote that he loved Garfield comics as a child. One participant wrote that he loved Art Spiegelman's "Maus". When analysing the answers, an interesting observation was made: there were more manga than comics among the answers. Among the participants, 3 wrote that they adore Hirohiko Araki's "Jojo's bizarre adventure", and "Tokyo Ghoul" by Shui Isida and "One Piece" by Eichiro Oda were mentioned 2 times. The appearance of "Oyasumi Punpun" by Inio Asano was particularly noteworthy. Other works listed were "Berserk" by Kentaro Miura and 'Baki the grappler' by Keisuke Itagaki.

If you analyse these works, they are excellent evidence for question 10. For example, the works: "Tokyo Ghoul", "Oyasumi Punpun", "Berserk" and "Maus" are works with a deep plot and well-developed characters. These works perfectly reveal the nature of the human soul in different circumstances. In turn, the works "One Piece", "Jojo's bizarre adventure", "Baki the grappler", and the mentioned "Berserk" are a great example of an adventure story and action. These works illustrate the journeys of the characters, their goals and the challenges they face on their way.

3.5 Discussion of the research

The demographic structure of the respondents indicated a diverse yet predominantly young and female audience: 90% of participants were between 18 and 24 years of age, and 65% identified as female. This means that young readers are predominantly female.

In terms of content preference, the survey revealed a strong dominance of Japanese manga over Western comics. More than half of the participants preferred manga, when less than a quarter favored traditional comics. This can mean that popularity of manga is surpassing comics books, which changes the global vector of the sales. It was indicated by participants, that they prefer manga's visual style, narrative depth, and emotional engagement

An important aspect of the study was understanding reader habits in the digital age. Almost half of the participants stated that they consume graphic stories via digital platforms, while 30% preferred social media. This confirms the trend of declining the print media over online platforms.

As previously mentioned, comics and manga had an influence on inspiration of creation of their own stories. This supports the opinion that comics serves as a catalyst for creativity.

The survey explored attitudes towards political content in graphic works. Because of the results, we can conclude that readers support political content when it is relevant. This means that people are tolerant of such topics, as long as they are used as a context for something or are not used for "brazen" propaganda of political ideas

Last of all, the study touched on the topic of AI. The results indicate a gradual acceptance of this technology and that it is becoming a great tool for creating their own unique works. It can be seen an increase in readers' trust in AI, which indicates a bright future for this technology.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that comics and manga remain powerful cultural phenomena. The data reveals a generational shift toward manga and digital consumption, a balanced approach to political content, and nuanced attitudes towards AI integration. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how graphic narratives continue to evolve and influence global culture.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to research the 21st-century aspects, cultural impact, and new trends in comics and manga using theoretical frameworks and empirical analysis. Through the integration of literary theory, media studies, and research from a large reader questionnaire, this study has provided a critical analysis of how graphic narratives are impacting and transforming contemporary culture.

Theoretically, the thesis contrasted the evolution of comics and manga as distinct but increasingly interconnected media of visual storytelling. Based on semiotic theory and narrative studies, the research explained how these media mix images and text to create complex, multi-layered narratives. Particular emphasis was placed on the distinctive visual language of manga and Japanese storytelling's global reach, along with the historical evolution of Western comics and their development through digital media.

The empirical section of the research provided valuable insight into the taste and habits of readers today. According to the results, manga outranked Western comics in popularity among young readers, primarily due to its aesthetic, complexity, and emotional qualities. The study also revealed the shift towards reading graphic narratives in digital form, where platforms and social media became crucial in engaging readers. Respondents expressed intermediate acceptance of AI-generated artwork as an assistive creative tool but not a replacement for human creativity.

Finally, the study underscored the growing importance of manga and comics as pedagogical tools and agents of new creative expression. As readers embrace diversity and accessibility in contemporary graphic works, commercialization and overemphasis on politics were noted concerns. The research contributes to a better understanding of how comics and manga not only captivate us, but also inspire individual creativity and cross-cultural conversation in an increasingly globalized world.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Метою цієї бакалаврської роботи було дослідити особливості XXI століття, культурний вплив та новітні тенденції у сфері коміксів і манги на основі теоретичних підходів і емпіричного аналізу. Завдяки поєднанню літературознавчих теорій, медіадосліджень та результатів анкетування широкої читацької аудиторії, було здійснено ґрунтовний аналіз того, як графічні наративи впливають на сучасну культуру та трансформують її.

У теоретичній частині роботи я порівняв еволюцію коміксів і манги як окремих, але все тісніше взаємопов'язаних медіа візуального оповідання. Спираючись на семіотичну теорію та дослідження наративу, у роботі пояснено, яким чином ці форми поєднують зображення і текст для створення складних, багаторівневих історій. Особливу увагу було приділено візуальній мові манги та глобальному впливу японського стилю розповіді, а також історичному розвитку західних коміксів і їх трансформації в цифрову епоху.

Емпірична частина дослідження надала цінну інформацію про смаки та звички сучасних читачів. Згідно з отриманими результатами, манга перевершує західні комікси за популярністю серед молодшої аудиторії — переважно завдяки своїй естетиці, емоційності та складності. Також було виявлено помітний перехід до цифрового формату читання графічних творів — платформи та соціальні мережі відіграють ключову роль у взаємодії з читачем. Респонденти висловили помірковану підтримку використання штучного інтелекту як допоміжного інструменту в творчості, однак не як заміну людській уяві.

Насамкінець, у дослідженні підкреслено зростаючу роль коміксів і манги як педагогічного інструменту та засобу нової творчої виразності. Хоча сучасні читачі підтримують різноманіття та доступність графічних творів, занадто сильна комерціалізація і надмірна політизація викликають занепокоєння. Це дослідження сприяє глибшому розумінню того, як комікси та манга не лише захоплюють читача, а й надихають на індивідуальну творчість і міжкультурний діалог у глобалізованому світі.

APPENDIX

Greetings!

My name is Meisarosh Denis, I am a 4th year student of English Language and Literature at the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute.

This survey is a part of my research for my diploma thesis, which is dedicated to the influence of comics and manga on the culture of the 21st century.

The aims of the research are to find out how the characters and plots of comics and manga influence readers; to investigate the level of popularity and perception of these media in different age and socio-cultural groups; to identify factors that influence readers' choices (genre, style, cultural context); to assess the role of digital technologies in the consumption and creation of comics and manga; and to study attitudes towards political and social topics in these visual arts.

This questionnaire will take only a few minutes to complete, and your answers will be an important part of my research.

Thank you very much for your participation!

1. How old are you?

- ☐ 12–17
- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45+

2. Your gender?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Other: _____

3. Your level of education

- Secondary
- Incomplete higher (student)
- Higher

4. What do you prefer to read?

- Comics
- Manga
- Both of them
- Nothing from above

5. In what format do you usually read?

- Printed publications
- Digital (PDF, online, apps)
- Social media
- All of the above

6. How often do you read comics and manga?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

7. At what age were you first introduced to comics or manga?

Answer:

8. How did you learn about comics and manga?

- Through friends
- Movies/Serials
- Cartoons/Anime
- Games
- Other: _____

9. Which option is closer to you in terms of style and content?

- Western comics (Marvel, DC, etc.)
- Japanese manga
- Other (Korean manhwa, webtoon, European comics, etc.)

10. What genre do you like the most?

- Action / Adventure
- Fantasy / Science Fiction
- Romance / Drama
- Comedy / Satire
- Horror / Mystery

11. What is the most important thing for you in a comic book or manga?

- High-quality image
- Depth of plot
- Interesting characters
- Romantic lines
- Dynamic narrative

12. How do you feel about political themes in comics/manga?

- Positive, if it is appropriate and meaningful
- Neutral
- Negative, politics spoils the impression
- Depends on the context

13. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “There are too many political overtones in modern comics and manga”?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- It is hard to answer

14. Do you think that social issues (representation, equality, feminism, etc.) make comics more meaningful?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- Depends on the implementation

15. How do you feel about the representation of ethnic, gender, and other minorities in comics/manga?

- I support it, it is important
- Neutral
- I consider it as a coercive element
- I have no opinion

16. How do you feel about the use of artificial intelligence in comics?

- It is a modern tool that can be useful
- Only partial use is allowed
- Negative, it threatens creativity
- I have no opinion

17. Have comics or manga inspired your own work?

- Yes, I draw by myself
- Yes, but I do not do it
- No

18. Your favourite comics/manga (open question)

Answer:_____

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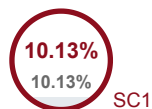
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