

## From Ink to Pixels: How Digital Media is Revolutionizing Traditional Manga

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### *Abstract*

*Digital media has changed the way traditional manga is created and shared. It has introduced new tools and methods into the process of manga-making. This paper looks at how these new changes are transforming the manga industry. These include the use of digital software to create manga and the rise of online comics (webtoons). The transition from hand-drawn methods to modern production tools has forever changed the landscape for the manga industry. This paper explores how digital technologies affect the artists who create manga works. This paper also focuses on how these stories are told and how readers interact with manga. This paper shows that while digital media presents some challenges to traditional manga, it also offers exciting new opportunities for creativity and reaching audiences around the world.*

**Keywords:** Manga, Digital Media, Online Comics, Creativity, Reader Interaction.

### **Introduction**

Manga is a word that has garnered worldwide popularity in this decade alone. It has originated from American comic strip-style cartoons with speech bubble format in Japanese in the late 19th century. It is also known as Japanese comics. According to Schodt, “Japanese manga are a visualized narrative with a few words tossed in for effect” (26). But manga is not limited to visual artworks. They portray complex stories that explore profound themes such as identity, trauma, political conflict, existential angst, and many others:

Manga has caused moral panics about its violence and sexual content even though it grapples with deep philosophical questions: to be or not to be (*Confidential Confessions*), the nature of war (*Barefoot Gen*), what is it to be male or female (*Yours and My Secret*), the environment (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), the essence of evil (*Death Note*), and what it means to be human (*Ghost in a Shell*). It is a complex visual art form, an aesthetic with proven worldwide appeal. (Johnson-Woods 12)

In a sense, Manga is a narrative multi-panel cartoon divided into strips that conveys the storyline in a continued fashion over the weeks. One such prominent publication nowadays that

serializes chapters from several manga and articles on Japanese culture, language, and figurines is the magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* by Shueisha. Known for their complex and intriguing storylines consisting of different genres, they have captivated the attention of an audience that spans over generations not only in Japan but worldwide. It was a hand-drawn comic strip for the entertainment of Japanese children. But now, it is being translated into every major language. This transformation was possible due to the advent of the digital world and social media culture, where nothing is limited to a source location anymore. Earlier, manga artists had to sketch and shade their art on paper with utmost care. It was a rigorous and painstaking process. When asked about how long it takes Eiichiro Oda to finish the full draft for a single nineteen-page chapter of manga, the mangaka replied, “Three days, ideally. I would take all the time in the world if I could” (*The Shonen Jump Guide to Making Manga* 82). However, in recent years, the use of digital media and tools has revolutionized the process of manga creation along with its distribution and consumption.

This paper aims to explore how digital media is transforming the old ways and practices of manga creation and hand-drawn techniques to digital production and its distribution. It will also examine the rise of digital platforms that publish the manga and the interactions of the audience with the comics in the modern era. By investigating these elements, this paper aims to understand how the digital age is revolutionizing and is responsible for the evolution of manga. This research also seeks to identify the effects of digital transformation on the creativity and originality of manga as a whole.

### **Evolution of Manga: From Traditional to Digital**

Manga is a collaborative effort of artists and editors discussing the story, characters, actions, and storyboarding the pilot chapters with rough sketches. Mangaka or artists roughly sketch the characters, which are later inked into clear, bold lines. Later, the artists or assistants add shades, textures, and backgrounds using tools like screen tones and adhesive sheets, further detailing the artwork. But even without much of all that, manga writers often narrate a great story. “Comic artists are the same, so with no coloring and with shading at a minimum, the mere curve of a character’s eyebrow takes on added significance” (Schodt and Tezuka 22). This laborious work is rigorous and time-consuming for the entire team involved, with deadlines imposed by the editors and publishers of weekly magazines adding extra pressure to the creative process. This collaborative effort is the hallmark of the manga production, providing high-quality content. The traditional techniques used to create the artwork are tied to the physical medium of paper and ink, the visual artwork, and detailing with expressive character designs and backgrounds. This makes the transition to digital format a significant shift for the industry.

Due to the advent of technology in the 21st century and the introduction of digital tools and software like Adobe Photoshop, Blender, and many more, it marked the ease of manga creation. The influence it had on manga development was massive. These new technologies provided a range of abilities such as correcting mistakes, digital inking tools, brushing, and shading all in an instant with greater precision and flexibility. This also includes experimenting with different styles and artforms using layers and effects to create more complex textures. These new techniques amounted to a reduction of the once time-consuming process to a click.

As digital tools became popular, more accessible, and affordable, mangakas and artists began to incorporate them more frequently. Consequently, a combination of current and old tools and styles

was used to create a hybrid approach. It was done to produce high-quality aesthetic contents. It also led to the development of new storytelling formats. One example of this would be Webtoons. They were first designed for smart devices that allowed vertical scrolling. This provided a sense of progression as the reader scrolls through the story in a continuous fashion. The colour prints that were limited earlier due to printing costs are more prevalent now, increasing the richness of the viewing experience. This also meant more engagement from the readers. The distribution part was also smooth, as it reached a global audience online almost instantly. This shift in digital media provided new opportunities to small publishers and houses. Earlier, they had little or no access to traditional print distribution channels that were available to large publishing houses and companies. Digital platforms like Viz Media, Shonen Jump, Manga Plus, Crunchyroll, Manga Rock, and many others have democratized the manga industry. It allowed the creators and publishers to directly present their content to the readers and audience without any hassle. Even today, some mangakas use the traditional method of hand-drawn art on paper, and then they scan them digitally. They use this digital image for inking, shading, and coloring. This is done in order to retain the quality of the hand-drawn techniques while also taking advantage of the digital tools. But most artists have fully embraced the modern approach of digitally creating their art from start to finish using styluses and pen tablets. This gives them the ability to draw on a digital canvas, bypassing the need for any paper medium, thus, saving their time and effort. “Manga creators often latch on to a particular method of drawing and stick with it throughout their career. Sometimes that means drawing on paper and scanning; some pick up a mouse and never put it down; others purchase their first graphics tablet and fall in love” (Horton and Yang 3). These digital tools increase the process of manga formation significantly. It allows the artists to complete a single chapter or volume rather quickly. Thus, meeting the deadlines and demands of editors and publishers. It also allows the mangakas to meet the needs of readers who await a whole week in anticipation for the next turn of events in their favorite manga series. But there are critics who prefer the traditional hand-drawn art over modern polished and uniform art design. According to them, the natural imperfections in hand-drawn art imbibe the originality and authenticity of an artform with more subtlety.

### **Rise of Online Manga**

The emergence of manga online has significantly changed the evolution and popularisation of the industry, mostly due to the growth of digital channels. “In recent years about 63000 new book titles have been published annually, with around 1.5 billion copies printed, and an estimated 3000 periodical titles have been coming out, with some 5.1 billion copies printed” (Kiyota 43). Webtoons, or online manga, are a form of comic specifically designed to be viewed on smart devices; unlike the usual paper publications, they are optimized for reading on electronic devices on the go, like smartphones and tablets. These are published in full color, widespread, and read vertically by scrolling down the screen. The key lies in their accessibility. Webtoon platforms like Crunchyroll and Viz Media offer a variety of genres in content, with new chapters arriving weekly, which has garnered immense audiences down the years, particularly young readers accustomed to consumption of media on their smart devices, where they are awaiting new releases and looking forward to the next week keenly with anticipation. There is also an interactive community aspect of such platforms where like-minded individuals share their thoughts and comment about their favorite series and whatnot. They can even support the creators directly

through payment gateways provided along with subscription services. The level of engagement helps build a social circle and a loyal fan base, providing valuable feedback that influences the trajectory of the stories. The manga is further adapted into TV shows called Anime, films, and even live adaptations, expanding their reach.

For example, the manga *One Piece* by Eiichiro Oda, running over two decades and still ongoing, has garnered worldwide recognition and popularity, staying at number one in ranking among other manga on all online platforms, with a dedicated fanbase creating theory channels online on platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Discord, and many other such social media platforms, discussing the happenings of the story and future plots. The anime adaptation for *One Piece* is running simultaneously with the manga, with several films being released internationally on large screens. The series also managed a live adaptation by Netflix, gaining further popularity globally. Similarly, the manga *Kimetsu No Yaiba* by Koyoharu Gotouge has been the talk of the town recently when it was adapted into an anime TV series with a compelling storyline, breathtaking visuals, and realistic animations, gaining popularity internationally. The popularity of the show allowed it to get dubbed in several languages so that people all over the world can enjoy the show at their own comfort. The film adaptations of this series are eagerly awaited by fans worldwide, breaking the box-office records.

Many Japanese manga publishers have begun to experiment with digital platform formats after such profound impact it left in the industry. One such notable example is of Shueisha, publisher of Shonen Jump magazine and LINE webtoon, where Shueisha began releasing digital versions of its popular manga series, making them available to readers all around the world, embracing the digital future of manga and allowing its popularity over other publishers to reach a global audience. Some examples of the popular manga are *Dr. Stone*, *Boku No Hero Academia*, *One Piece*, *Shingeki No Kyojin*, *Kimetsu No Yaiba*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, *One Punch Man*, *Boruto*, etc.

### **Impacts on Authenticity**

In traditional manga, the mangaka, the Japanese word for a comic artist or lead artist, is often regarded as the sole author of the story and the mastermind behind the scenes. But traditional notions of this singularity as one identifiable creator of a story are challenged by the collaborative efforts of the entire production team of assistants and editors that play significant roles in the proper flow of the manga chapters weekly and their eventual completion. The boundaries of authorship are flexible as different individuals take on a specific task such as sketching, inking, coloring, editing, etc., providing a team effort that remains hidden behind the surface of the glory and popularity of a manga. The question arises then: who could be considered the author of a particular manga—the one who conceptualizes the story, the lead artist who brings forth the art, or the entire team that put together a compiled result as a chapter being released weekly for fans to read? Moreover, the digital advancements of manga have led fans to direct the shaping of narrative, as the interactive nature of it allows the readers to play a significant role in influencing the direction of the story, which makes it hard to say where the actual ownership lies in all this commotion. For example, some online platforms allow polls, comments, and ratings as reader feedback to take suggestions from, further blurring the lines between consumer and creator, making it participatory as the creators incorporate fan suggestions into their work, complicating it further. It has been termed ‘fanservice’ as of its popularity in this digital culture.

“Payment for pages shot up, but most artists had to knock them out in quantity to a strict weekly

deadline and were subject to editorial intervention” (Gravett 41). Artificial intelligence is taking over the digital front as it can generate artwork that is often indistinguishable from that created by a human; it can create characters and replicate styles and effects with ease on a set of programmed inputs which raises the question of ethicality in the role of artists and their creativity. So, if the majority of work has now been automated, doesn't it undermine the value and originality of art? Therefore, the future of the manga industry will depend on how it navigates the challenges posed by digitization concerning authorship, authenticity, and originality of artwork in a way to support the creators who are committed to their craft and focus on quality over quantity. As digitization shapes a coordination between culture and technology, enabling creators to produce their work effortlessly with a global reach; it allows artists to experiment with their artforms and styles, promoting innovation and creativity; the issue of ethicality also poses obstacles and raises concerns about copyrights; it remains to be seen how the industry continues to thrive and evolve amidst all this.

### **Globalization of Manga**

Manga was primarily produced for a Japanese audience locally with stories and folklore of Japanese society and culture. Prior to the emergence of digital media, manga frequently focused on highly localised and cultural subjects, such as Japanese history, mythology, spirituality, family relationships, social conventions, and daily hardships. The ideals of optimism, tenacity, and social peace that were ingrained in the post-war Japanese environment were mirrored in series like as *Doraemon*, *Astro Boy*, and *Slam Dunk*. These topics spoke to the actual realities of the Japanese readership and struck a chord with them.

However, Manga gained popularity internationally as there was an increase in the accessibility of Japanese pop culture growing worldwide and publishers began to notice the potential of a global market. This shift in the global fan community led to the localization and translation of popular manga series for international audiences to access and enjoy which also helped influence distinct themes, styles, and content for manga consisting of foreign culture, history, and mythology and broadened the scope of readers into a variety of genres. “Manga is also a highly popular medium with a distinct grammar and inner logic made of pictograms, written text, and visual frames, which has a strong potential to influence mass opinion” (Otmazgin and Suter 4). Some typical comics stories include complex multiverses, open and interwoven narratives, often in the context of serial publications. Publishing a story or story arc can take years, if not decades, involving a main title and others. Contemporary manga increasingly explores globally resonant topics such as environmental collapse, identity crises, digital dystopia, and racial injustice. This change is reflected in manga series such as *Attack on Titan*, *Tokyo Ghoul*, and *One Piece*, which include international issues into their stories.

For example, in *One Piece*, one can observe themes from Greek mythology, Indian mythology, ancient Asian cultures, war histories, folklore, American slavery and racism, and many other themes prevalent in the real world in both distant past and current times. Another example is of *Shingeki No Kyojin*, where the entire plot is roughly based on the theme of the world war and the origin of mankind, signifying biblical origin. All this helped garner the popularity of manga worldwide, appealing to a larger audience internationally. The advent of digital platforms played their significant roles in reaching and providing easy access to readers all over the world and boosted the globalization of manga. These platforms release chapters weekly and simultaneously

with their original Japanese translations without any lag, making it more accessible to global fans. According to Tremblay, “The continued existence of fan translation groups is considered indicative of consumers attempting to fill a gap in service not satisfied by licensed industry players – and fan translation itself as a practice born of consumer desire and perceived necessity, rather than creative or transformative expression” (Tremblay 319).

Publishers are looking forward to individual creators as new talents as their success on digital platforms has begun to influence the traditional manga industry for their works have been adapted into print or other media like TV shows and LIVE adaptations. This democratization emphasizes the expanding boundaries of what manga can be. While it raises some issues over cultural misrepresentation, as manga becomes global, it is bound to get certain elements manipulated or misconstrued by creators who are not that familiar with the nuances of Japanese culture, deeming it inauthentic and misleading to the audiences. Also, the sheer number of creators that are producing content makes it hard for anyone to stand out for readers to discover new and exciting series, creating a competitive environment where only the most popular or one with high status gets promoted and glorified while the rest are dealing with stifling potential.

### **Challenges and Future Directions**

There is a pressure to continually produce quality content and unique stories with innovative narrative ideas where readers’ expectations are frequent and demanding that inevitably creates unnecessary burnout amongst creators. The transition from traditional to modern methods, aided by digital advancements, has opened up new possibilities as well as some constraints for the individuals working in the manga industry. Frequent updates regarding the concerned series have become a staple to keep the audiences engaged as readers await the next installment of the storyline on a weekly or monthly basis, which further overwhelms the creators with health issues. One such example is when the creator of *One Piece* Eiichiro Oda, when asked in an interview about his sleep cycle, says he barely sleeps for three hours from 2:00 AM till 5:00 AM in the morning, and he has been doing that for almost 15 years now, affecting his health severely. Oda says he needs to meet the deadlines consistently as he is just as busy now as when he was in his younger days, and that he takes a full day of sleep the next day after turning in the manuscript. He has been seen working on *One Piece* bedridden in the hospital, which paints his workaholic nature vividly. Oda has been taking frequent breaks lately, releasing one manga chapter in a month, contrary to four, giving him time to rest and recover from his busy schedule, as such a schedule will obviously lead to deteriorating health, which hints that his breaks are rather a preventive measure than a cure.

Now, publishers must also adapt to this change of offering services by traditional methods and help creators with marketing and monetizing support through various channels and facilitating international translations of the work by leveraging augmented reality and other new technologies. According to Dahlan, “There will be artists that do not share the perspective to conform to the various publishing standards employed by the manga industry. With this, these manga creators might pursue another path, which is by producing doujinshi” (Dahlan 658). Here, doujinshi is a Japanese term for self-published works. According to Ichikohji and Katsumata, “Manga creators creating shonen-ai works often came from doujinshi, such as Shungiku Nakamura, who drew *Junjo Romantica*. Many doujinshi were made depicting shonen-ai among characters from commercial manga and anime, and writers of shonen-ai works who got their start commercially also

continued creating doujinshi” (Ichikohji and Katsumata 93). Publishers could also identify new talents through mentorship programs issued on online platforms, nurture them, and further aid the growth of the manga industry in this rapid pace of the digital era. According to Murakami and Bryce, “Manga are entertaining and yet simultaneously educational, as they distribute accurate information on focused, specific fields, acting like manuals, thereby playing a significant role as popular resources for lifelong education” (Murakami and Bryce 54). Hence the future seems bright for the manga industry, with endless possibilities for creative expression on a global scale.

### Conclusion

Manga has become a global cultural phenomenon. It started from its humble origins as a Japanese art form and comic book strips for the entertainment of kids. It connected readers from around the world. It has undergone a profound transformation with the advent of digital media. This paper has examined the possibilities of digitization and how it shaped the production and processes of manga creation. This paper also discusses the authenticity and originality of the content and the very creative nature of the mangaka.

The transition from hand-drawn methods to modern production tools has forever changed the landscape for the manga industry. This transition has simplified everything down the line and made manga creation more accessible to artists worldwide. The contribution of creators and fans alike has led to the democratization and global appeal of manga. The rise of online platforms and innovative hardware has led to a transcending experience in manga viewing, attracting the young generation of tech-savvy audiences.

The flexibility of these digital platforms allowed the rise of communities and fanbases to grow along with the artists and creators who get supported directly for their creative works, making it an interactive experience for everyone. Although it brought up few concerns regarding the originality and authenticity of the content, it also gave up-and-coming talent equal chances to succeed in the manga industry’s rapidly evolving and cut throat environment. The continued rise of individual creators influencing the fan communities ensures the long-term viability of manga as a literary medium, providing immersive and interactive storylines that appeal to the taste of new generation of readers. The journey of manga from its traditional roots to digitization is a testament to its adaptability and evolution as a medium and as a powerful tool for cultural expression and storytelling, bringing people together through this universal language of art.

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