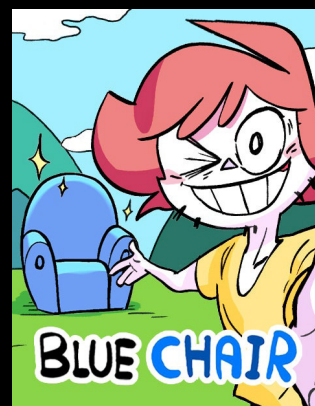
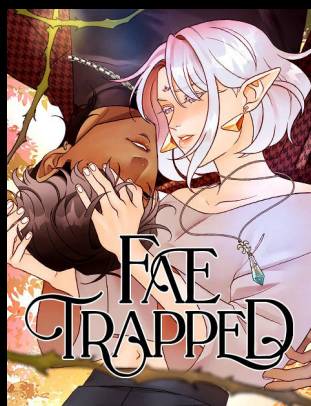
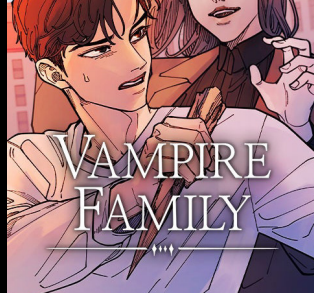




INSIDE WEBCOMIC FANDOM

What fans love, how they engage, and why the format punches above its cultural weight.

Webcomics are at an inflection point.

The story of the modern entertainment landscape is increasingly defined by formats that began on the cultural margins and went on to reshape the mainstream. Genres and mediums that are widely recognized now—such as manga, anime, K-dramas, and K-pop—all began with popularity across Asia. But as they picked up fanbases in the West, it was clear that a bigger pop culture shift was under way.

These formats have proven their staying power by attracting new fans, keeping existing ones engaged, and creating opportunities for merchandise licensing. Now, anime fandoms are central to US comic conventions, K-dramas get prime billing on streamers the moment they premiere, and K-pop bands sell out some of the world's biggest music venues.

Enter webcomics.

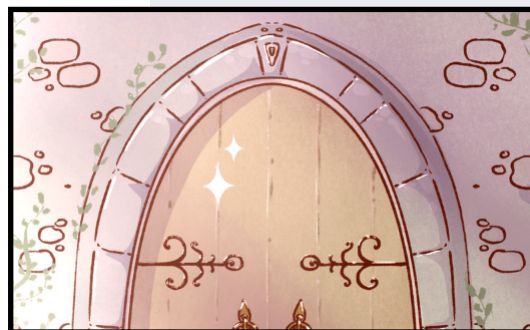
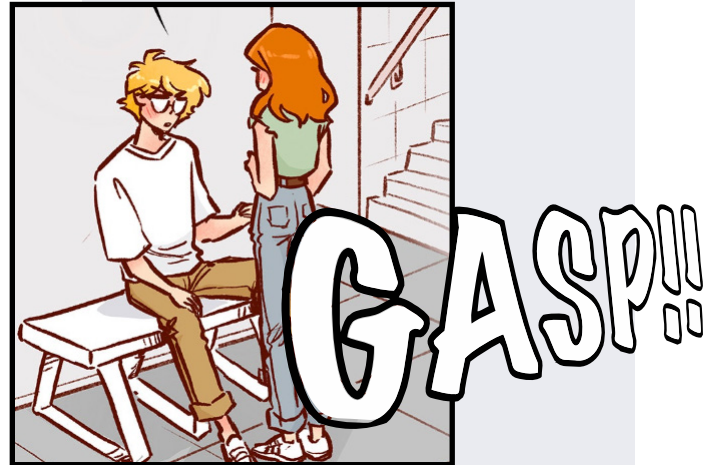
Originating in South Korea and known for their unique vertical scroll format, webcomics are following a similar cultural trajectory.

Webcomics first burst onto the scene just prior to the 2000s, when the Asian financial crisis pushed out-of-work comic creators online and a new generation began publishing for the screen rather than the page.¹ The format found an audience as the South Korean government built out high-speed internet infrastructure in the 1990s.² Eventually, smartphones would make webcomics even more widely accessible.

WEBTOON pioneered the mobile webcomic format and carried it out of Korea to a global readership, launching in 2005 and reaching the US in 2014. What started as a workaround for readers who couldn't afford print is now one of the defining storytelling formats of the mobile era.

¹"[A brief history of webtoons](#)," V&A, April 17th, 2024

²Ananya Bhattacharya, "[The countries with the fastest internet, charted](#)," Quartz, July 21st, 2022



Consider how webcomics have crossed into the mainstream with major titles like *Hellbound*, *All of Us Are Dead*, and *Heartstopper* adapted by Hollywood and other media companies into global streaming hits. Major studios and streamers such as Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+, and Crunchyroll have all invested in webcomic ecosystems and partnerships.

Webcomics boast a deeply passionate fanbase and they appeal to the emerging, powerful Gen Z consumer base.

77%

of Gen Z readers say they love or like webcomics.

155 million

monthly users are active on WEBTOON Entertainment platforms globally.³

27 million

creators are hosted on WEBTOON Entertainment platforms.³

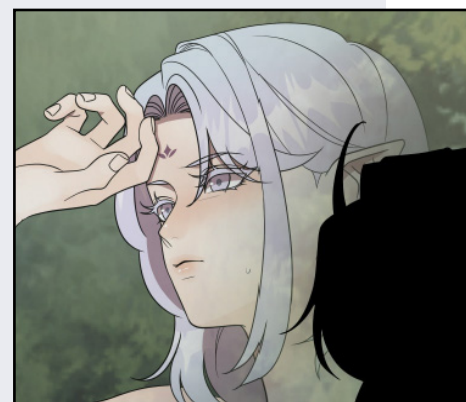
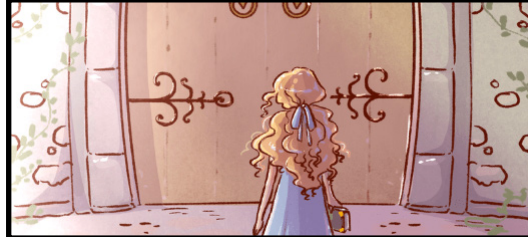
120,000

new episodes are released every *single day*.³

The format's burgeoning popularity reflects an evolution in audience behavior, creator ecosystems, and franchise development. Its accessibility, unique form factor, and breadth of storytelling have offered wide creative latitude for artists, while generating highly engaged fandoms.

While webcomics may still be a nascent category in the US, they are clearly gaining momentum, just as anime did in the 1990s and 2000s, and K-dramas have in the last decade. These other formats and genres provide models for what continued global takeoff could look like for webcomics as they reach more new fans across generations, languages, and countries. The opportunity for webcomics extends well beyond publishing; their digital-native ecosystems present studios and IP developers with plenty of opportunities.

³"[WEBTOON Entertainment \(WBTN\) J.P. Morgan 54th Annual Global Technology, Media, and Communications Conference Summary](#)," Seeking Alpha, September 11th, 2026



What makes webcomics different from other emerging formats?

This report focuses on US teens and adults aged 13 to 49 who read webcomics at least once a month. It explores what they love about the format, what makes it unique, and what keeps them coming back. It also examines where they want the medium to go next, and why media executives should not overlook its potential.

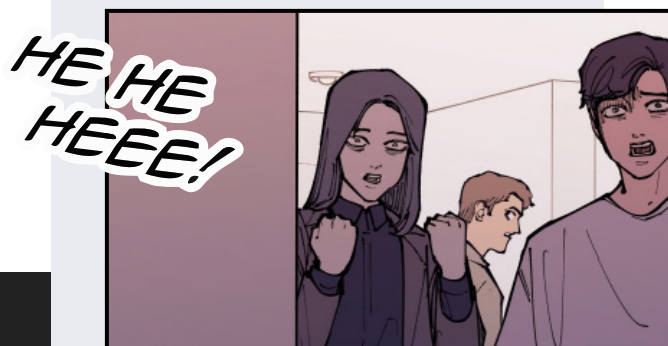


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Driver 2: Community—Episodic storytelling creates community and builds anticipation.

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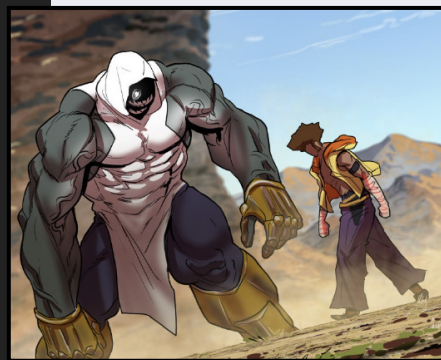
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Conclusion



Terminology

For the purposes of this white paper, “webcomics” are defined as vertical, scrollable digital comics that exist on platforms like WEBTOON and are sometimes referred to as “webtoons” more colloquially.

Methodology

1. Quantitative: Unless otherwise specified, data in this report comes from a study of 505 webcomic readers aged 13–49 from the US, who consume webcomics on at least a monthly basis. Respondents took a 20-minute survey that was conducted online between April and May 2026.

2. Qualitative: NRG conducted nine interviews with webcomic creators across the globe. Interviews lasted 60 minutes and creators were a mix of ethnicities and gender identities, who created webcomics spanning a range of genres (e.g., romance, action, thriller, comedy, drama, and sci-fi).

Section 1

State of the Fandom

Meet the webcomic fanbase: powerful evangelists that participate in trendsetting fandoms.

The fanbase for webcomics is a deeply passionate one; many of these readers are teens and Gen Z, who are among the entertainment industry's most sought-after audiences. These fans recognize that webcomics sit at a unique intersection of creativity, connection, and identity. And at a time when younger audiences yearn for community, webcomic fandom provides a way to participate in culture as a collective.

Readers love webcomics more than they love their favorite celebrities. Four in five webcomic readers say they like or love the format—higher than the share who say the same about Zendaya, Lady Gaga, or Taylor Swift. These readers show more love for webcomics than they do for many other fandoms or for the biggest names in pop culture.

More striking, however, is that the most passionate webcomic enthusiasts are those who love *other* active fandom categories such as fan fiction, online fandom communities, and cosplay.

Webcomic fandom versus celebrity fandom

Share of webcomic readers who love or like the following

80%
Webcomics

72%
Zendaya

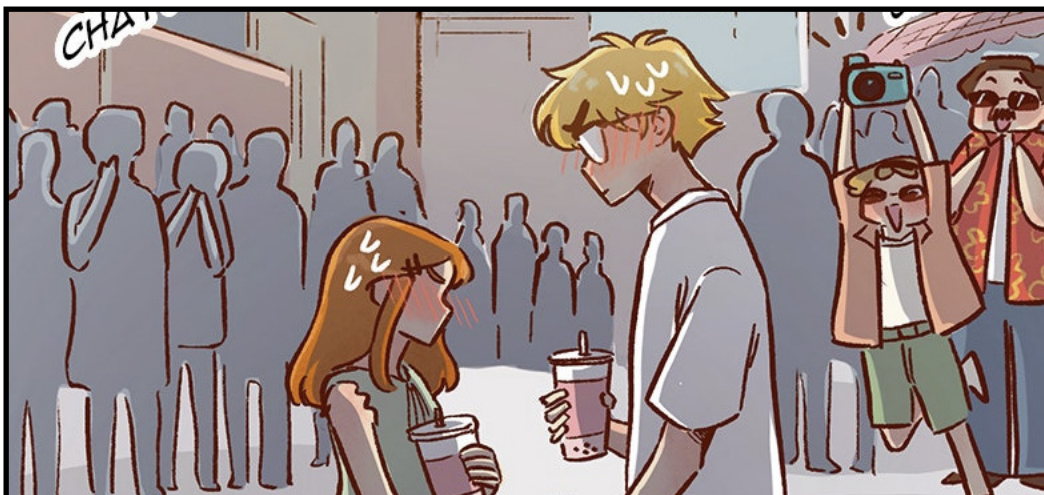
70%
Lady Gaga

66%
Kendrick
Lamar

64%
Billie Eilish

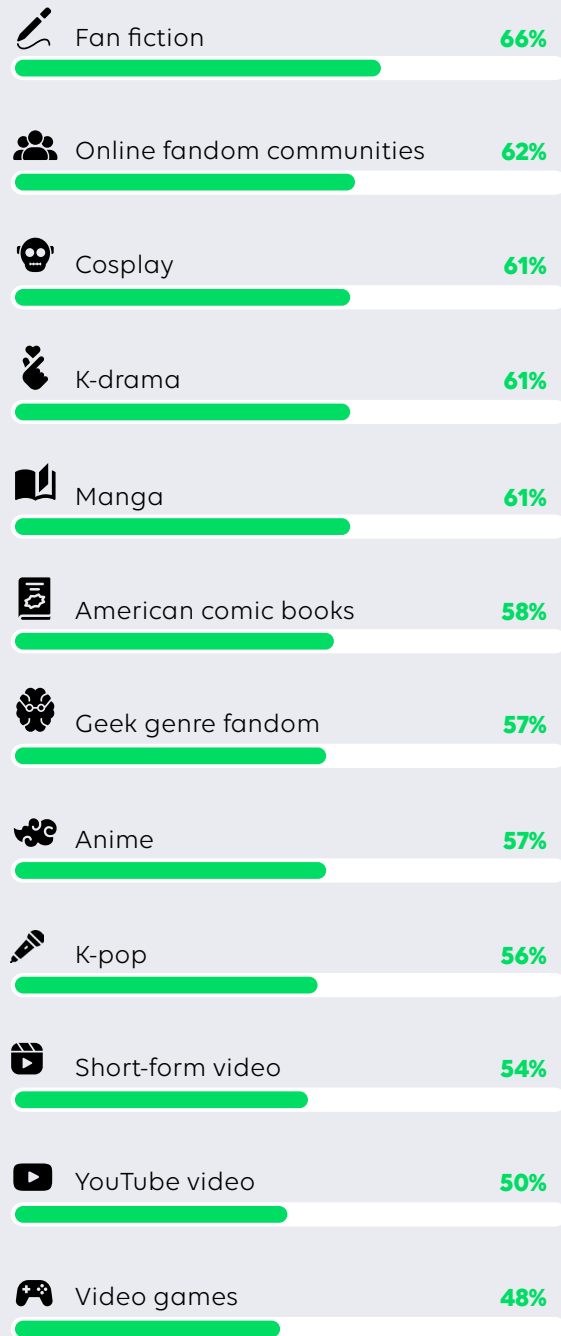
59%
Pedro
Pascal

55%
Taylor Swift



How much other fandoms love or like webcomics

Share of big fans of different content formats that say they love webcomics



The most passionate webcomic fans are pop culture's early adopters—the same audience that propelled anime, fan fiction, and K-dramas into the mainstream.

Respondents 24 and younger are the biggest fans of the format: 84% of teens 13–17 love or like webcomics. Large portions of fans of other formats like fan fiction (66%), online fandom communities (62%), cosplay (61%), K-drama (61%), and manga (61%) are also likely to say they love webcomics. These formats and genres tend to attract audiences that are drawn to discussion and chatter in online forums. If a fan is interested in Asian culture or is heavily invested in world-building and dissecting storytelling, those behaviors carry over regardless of format or channel.

And young fans are not passive consumers: they create content, generate discussion about their fandoms online, share profusely across friend and interest groups, theorize on the latest story twists and turns, and evangelize to those in their circles who have yet to watch or read the content du jour. This is, after all, an audience that has propelled webcomics into a billion-dollar industry in Korea⁴ and the same type of audience that turned anime from a subculture into a multi-billion-dollar global industry.⁵



⁴Yonhap, "[Webtoon industry revenue tops \\$1.397 bil. for 2nd straight year](#)," The Korea Times, December 29th, 2025

⁵Nikita Mishra, "[Why marketers should care about anime](#)," Campaign, February 1st, 2026

Webcomic fandom is rooted in escapist worlds, complex characters, and enduring values.

The themes that drive webcomic fandom are the same ones that made anime a global phenomenon: escapism, moral complexity, loyalty, and justice.

The top three themes that resonate for monthly webcomic readers are about escaping into another world, friendship and loyalty, and morally complex heroes and villains. Across age groups, there are slight differences, including a preference for revenge and justice among those 24 and younger, and one for surviving in a harsh world for those 25 and older.



Favorite story themes

Among monthly webcomic readers

	All monthly webcomic readers	24 and below	25 and above	Webcomic "Big Fan"
1	Escape into another world	Escape into another world	Friendship and loyalty	Escape into another world
2	Friendship and loyalty	Morally complex heroes and villains	Escape into another world	Revenge and justice
3	Morally complex heroes and villains	Revenge and justice	Surviving in a harsh world	Friendship and loyalty

These mirror the narrative DNA that undergirds major anime hits such as *Demon Slayer*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, and the breakout anime that preceded them.⁶ For those 24 and younger, moral complexity edges out loyalty as a top three theme, suggesting that the youngest generation is more interested in seeking narrative and character nuance.

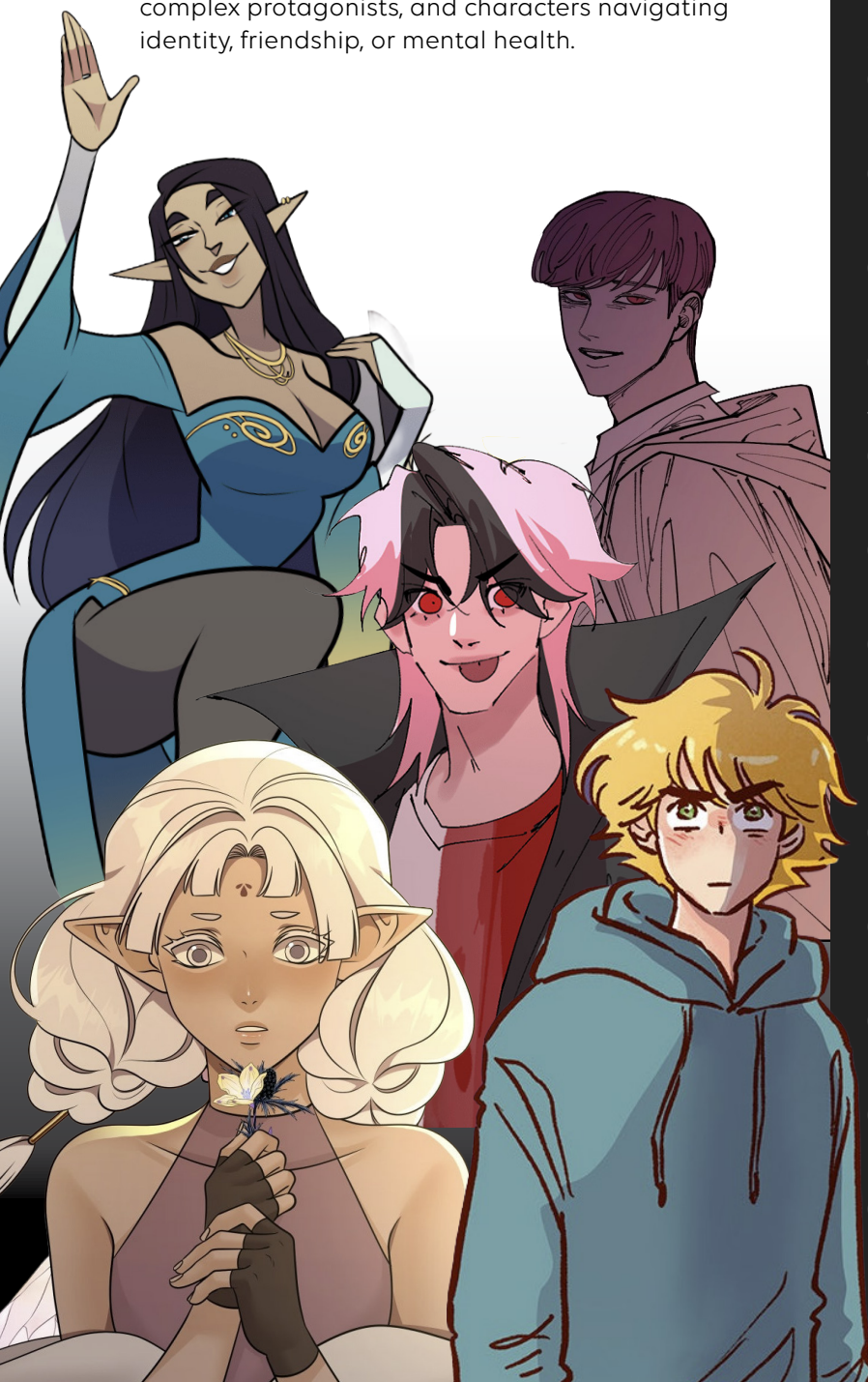
When it comes to genre, fantasy has broad cross-generational appeal, much like isekai has of late become a go-to genre for many anime fans. Beyond that, younger readers gravitate to romance and drama, while older readers lean more toward sci-fi content.

⁶"[Anime, Ascendant Report](#)," National Research Group, September 6th, 2024



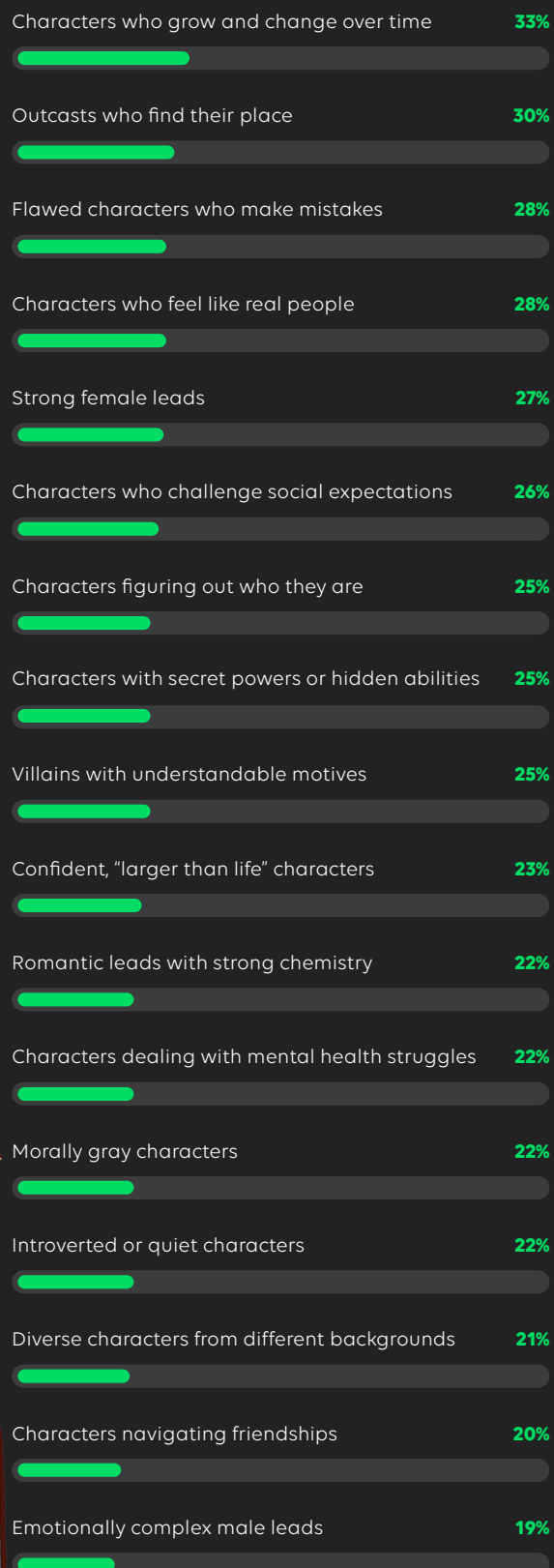
For readers 25 and older, nostalgia remains a powerful hook, with 81% liking or loving the idea of webcomics being adapted from classic franchises. Platforms like WEBTOON host a variety of reformatted classic comics and new stories, fostering both old and new fandoms. Plus, franchise adaptations can provide those unfamiliar with the webcomic format an easier entry point into the category through universes they already know and love.

Readers also connect with an unusually broad mix of characters—from outcasts and morally gray heroes to strong female leads, emotionally complex protagonists, and characters navigating identity, friendship, or mental health.



Types of characters readers connect with in webcomics

Among monthly webcomic readers



Three-quarters of readers call webcomics “underrated,” and fans see the format as “ahead of the mainstream.”

Webcomic enthusiasts feel that the format is at the forefront of the next wave of pop culture: a vast majority (76%) say webcomics are “underrated” and a similar share (74%) say it’s “ahead of the mainstream.”

This audience is poised to evangelize for the format, with 79% saying that they like to discuss webcomics with others. Word of mouth is particularly important, given the human element is likely to inspire higher levels of trust. Moreover, audiences—particularly younger ones—are navigating a growing mix of recommendations from brands, influencers, and fellow fans, placing greater emphasis on trusted voices within their communities.

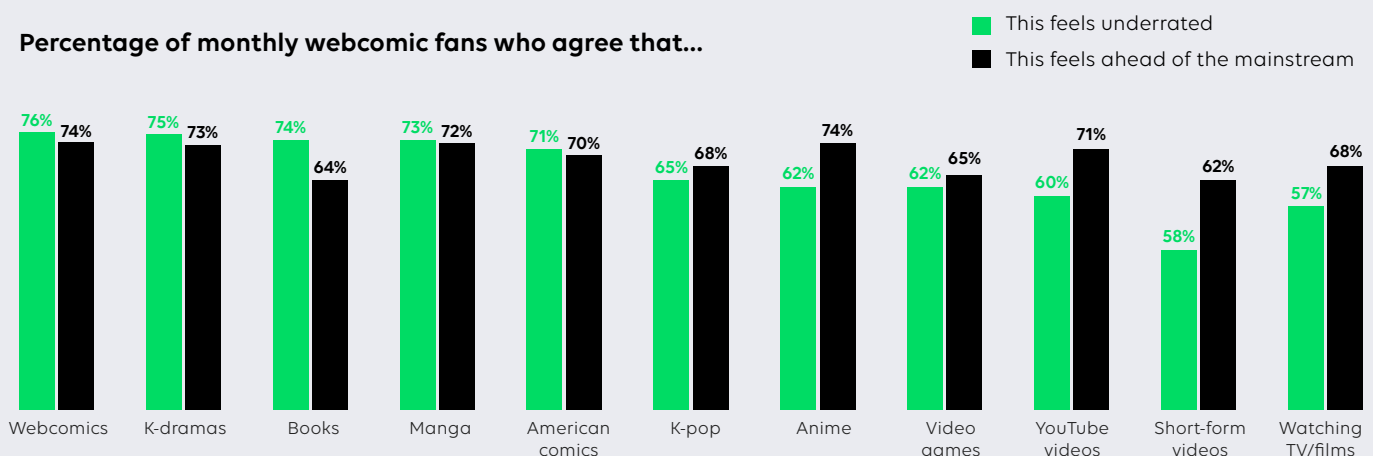
By acting as a cultural vanguard, webcomic fans can introduce the format to brand new readers, who will eventually themselves become the evangelists that propel the format into the mainstream. When manga, anime, and K-dramas were emerging, they were seen as niche by media and key opinion leaders. But it was their fanbases who kept spreading the gospel—going to events, buying merchandise, talking about them online—before they eventually got the attention of the broader public.



“WEBTOON is getting a lot more reach over the last few years... They’re getting collaborations with bigger companies. They celebrated ringing the bell at NASDAQ... People are going to hear about WEBTOON a lot more.”

Brent Bristol,
creator of **Ordeal**

Percentage of monthly webcomic fans who agree that...



Section 2

The Five Drivers of Fandom

But what are the unique structural properties of webcomics that fuel the intensity of the format's fandom? WEBTOON partnered with NRG to identify five key drivers of this unique fandom. Collectively, these drivers help to explain why the format is distinct, and what keeps passionate fans coming back for more.

Webcomics have five key advantages that make them unusually good at generating an invested and intense fandom.

1

IDENTITY

The range of comics and creators means fans can show off their identity and find their tribe.

2

COMMUNITY

Episodic storytelling creates anticipation, while feedback and discussion among readers build community.

3

FORMAT

Webcomics' unique format blends the vertical scroll of the mobile-native era with elements of traditional print comics, allowing for immersive storytelling.

5

ACCESSIBILITY

Low barrier to entry means it's easy for fans and creators to jump in. For readers particularly, episode-by-episode storytelling is an easy way to try out many stories.

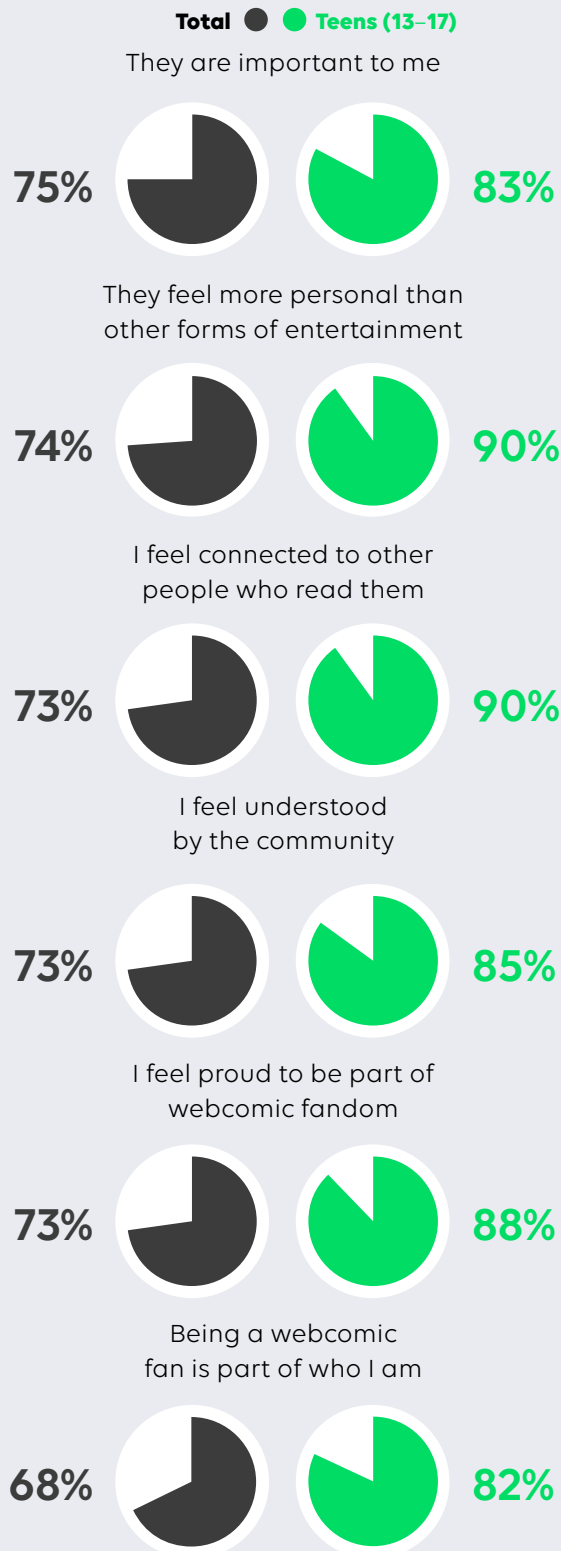
4

ATTENTION

The vertical scroll that defines the format is uniquely well-positioned to attract reader focus and attention.

Webcomic fans who agree the format has personal significance to them

Share of monthly webcomic readers who strongly or somewhat agree



DRIVER 1

Identity

For Gen Z readers especially, webcomics can be a core pillar of their identity.

Thanks to the breadth of creators, genres, and represented experiences, readers will be able to find stories that mirror their own lives—including groups that are underrepresented in other forms of media—or give them glimpses of lives they'd like to lead, or at the very least, escape into.

Given the range of themes and topics, readers find webcomics to be a deeply personal medium: 75% agree that webcomics are important to them, 74% say they feel more personal than other entertainment formats, and over seven in ten say they are proud to be webcomic fans. Teens (aged 13–17) are even more likely to agree with all those statements, showing that webcomics inspire feelings of belonging among this younger audience.

This sense of understanding and connection is the key to growing the global fandom for webcomics: 73% of monthly webcomic readers say they feel connected to and understood by others who read webcomics, and 77% say webcomics give them something to bond over. Webcomic fans are a highly engaged and passionate audience, similar to that of more established mediums like anime, but are distinguished by their unique relationship with storytelling and belief that great stories can help people better understand themselves.

DRIVER 2

Community

Webcomics have resurrected appointment viewing for Gen Z.

Because of the way webcomic creators tend to release new work—many on a weekly basis—the format has become appointment viewing for younger audiences. Among teen readers (13–17), 37% say they proactively check to see if new episodes have been released, and 36% say drops of new episodes feel like events when they happen.

The behaviors point to unusually strong retention. Webcomics become part of readers' weekly routines, with fans actively making time to return each week.

Top 5 reactions to weekly releases from teens

Rank among teen readers 13–17

1

I check the app to see if a new episode has been released

2

It feels like more of an event when a new episode drops

3

The wait between episodes builds suspense

4

I feel more excited to read because I had to wait for the next episode

5

I look forward to new episodes being released each week

The nature of these scheduled releases means that webcomics act as a community-generating engine. They create shared anticipation and provide a synchronized, communal experience. This aspect of the format is particularly important for young people, who are eager for connection and activities they can bond with friends and peers over. Habitual engagement like this is something that many platforms spend millions on to try and manufacture—sometimes for very little return—but is built into the very nature of how webcomics function.

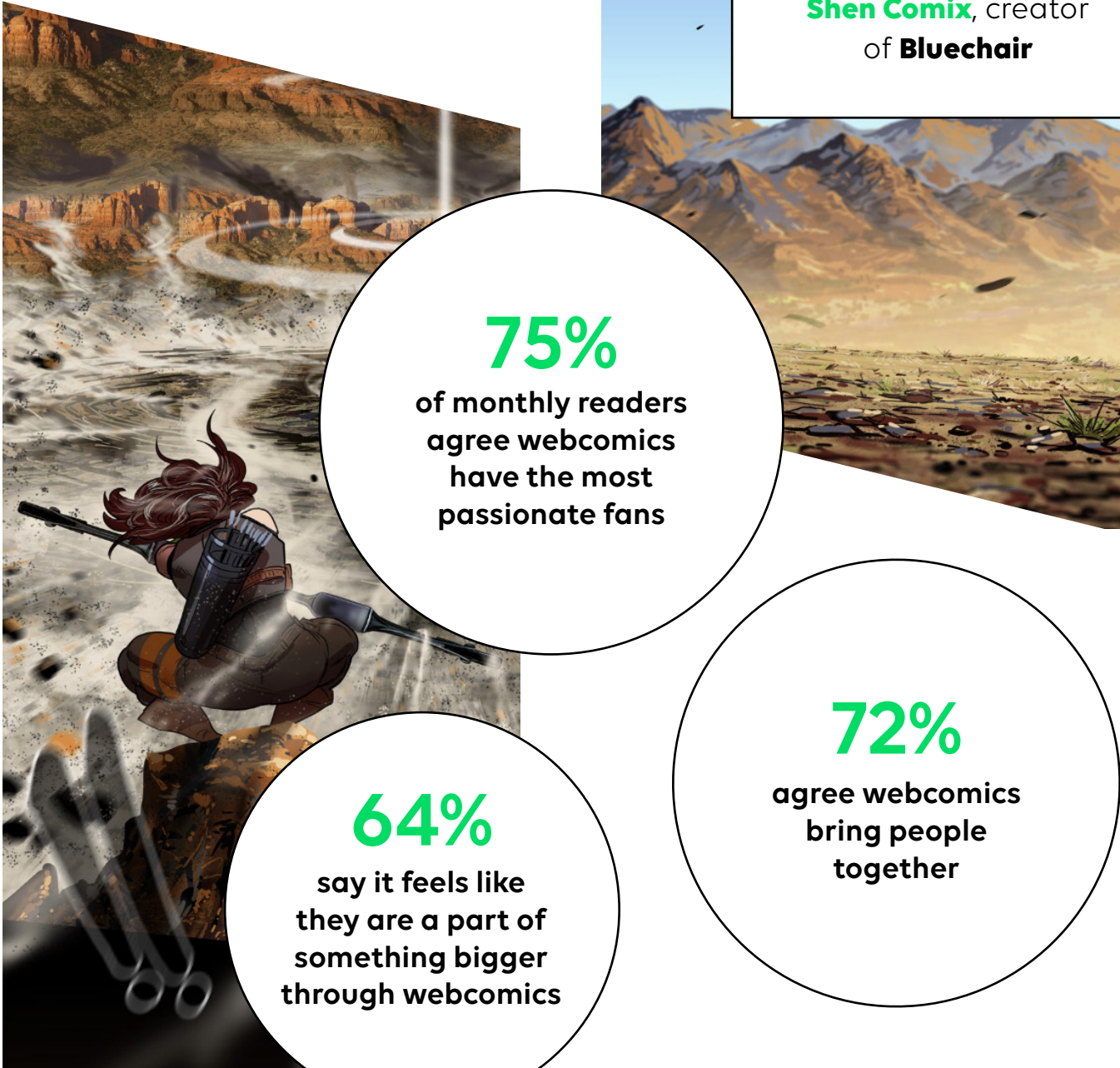


Furthermore, webcomic readers feel excited about being part of an in-group with other fans: three-quarters of monthly readers feel that webcomics have the most passionate fans, and 72% say the format brings people together. And more than half of teens say they read webcomics at a friend's house, reinforcing the point that webcomics can be crucial to the way young people develop their own communities for the first time, or the way they enter new ones within their peer groups.



"It's like being in a big book club. And every week you read a chapter and then you meet for a big discussion. And that discussion is the comment section, right?"

Shen Comix, creator
of **Bluechair**



75%

of monthly readers
agree webcomics
have the most
passionate fans

64%

say it feels like
they are a part of
something bigger
through webcomics

72%

agree webcomics
bring people
together

DRIVER 3

Format

The vertical scroll gives this format a storytelling grammar that no other medium can replicate.



"You can choose how long a reader can stay on a moment in the series and what they should focus on, what they should feel when they focus on that."

Jjolee, creator of **Cuffing Cupid**



"It's almost like a bridge between watching a show and reading a comic book."

Feathermage, creator of **Mage and Mimic**



"WEBTOON is more like a movie. It's a lot more like one image at a time... you control the flow."

Unfins, creator of **Vampire Family**

Creators describe webcomics as a hybrid between a book, film, and graphic novel—with pacing, tension, and emotional control that the page-turn format cannot achieve. For one, traditional comics and graphic novels are better rendered in a physical print format; webcomics instead are optimized for reading via mobile, with an endless vertical scroll, and immersive images that wouldn't fit on traditional comic book pages. This has been a crucial way for younger fans to get familiar with the format—78% of readers aged 13–17 say they read webcomics on a smartphone, for example.

Aside from portability, the scroll is a storytelling tool that creators use to their advantage. It better controls what readers feel and when, giving creators the ability to manufacture tension. And it helps set the stage for impactful reveals—especially in the negative space between panels known as the "gutter"—since a panel-by-panel trickle builds suspense. Compare that with traditional formats, where a bigger aperture on the page means it's easier to come across a reveal before a reader is ready.

WEBTOON also gives webcomic creators specific features like music layers (background music overlaid on a specific webcomic) and Video Episodes. These Video Episodes push the format beyond comics and into a more cinematic realm by bringing webcomics to life through added motion, voice acting, and sound effects. This makes comics on WEBTOON feel more like a mixed media product, opening up new creative opportunities for artists.

From a storytelling perspective, cliffhangers are also particularly important to webcomics, given the nature of weekly release cadences, and are a surefire way to keep readers hooked and coming back for more.

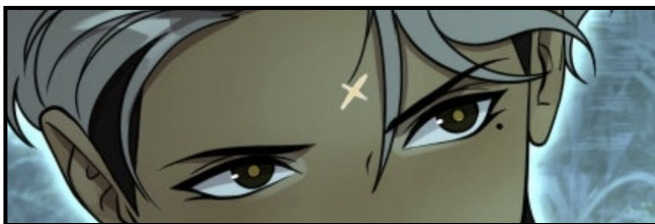
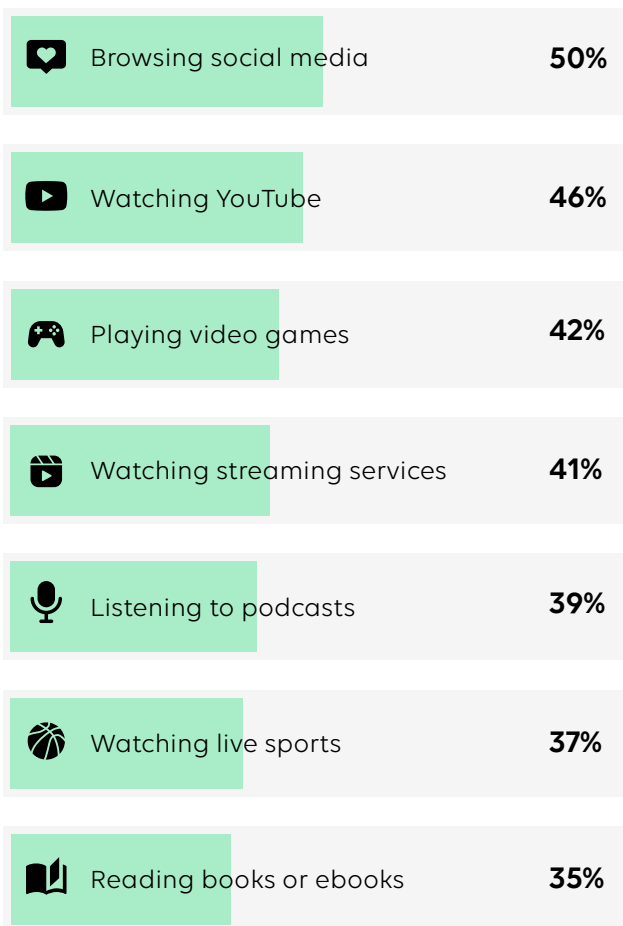
DRIVER 4

Attention

Webcomics have beaten social media at its own game: using the scroll to generate focus over fragmentation.

Webcomic readers who say they spend less time on each activity when reading more webcomics

Among monthly webcomic readers



In 2026, sustained attention is a scarce resource. Attention spans now average around 47 seconds, down from 75 seconds a decade ago.⁷ Second screening—the use of a secondary electronic device while a primary device is already in use—is already rampant. And webcomics are an antidote to that, particularly for young readers.

Webcomics use the same scroll gestures as Instagram or TikTok. Not only is there no need for fans to adopt new behaviors, the gesture also locks a reader into a single story and keeps them there. The result is sustained, focused engagement.

Among monthly webcomic readers, half say they browse social media less when reading more webcomics (the highest ranked activity), and a similar share (46%) say they spend less time on YouTube. This all points to how webcomics are pulling attention away from other formats that advertisers are most often competing over. And more importantly, 90% of readers say they often choose to read webcomics over other entertainment activities in their free time—favoring webcomics over major entertainment categories, from browsing social media to playing video games and watching video streaming services.



Social video has become increasingly screen-agnostic, with audiences now consuming content seamlessly across smartphones, computers, and TVs as social video expands into the living room.⁸ But webcomics arrest attention: from episode to episode, readers need to absorb storytelling, digest visuals, *and* internalize written information. From comic to comic, they remain emotionally invested *across* episodes.

Webcomics may just serve as the ultimate doomscrolling antidote.

⁷"[Why our attention spans are shrinking, with Gloria Mark, PhD](#)," American Psychological Association, February, 2023

⁸"[Empowering consumers through the short-form video revolution](#)," National Research Group, January 2nd, 2024

DRIVER 5

Accessibility

Webcomics have one of the lowest barriers to entry in storytelling; fans can easily become creators, fueling an entire fandom journey.

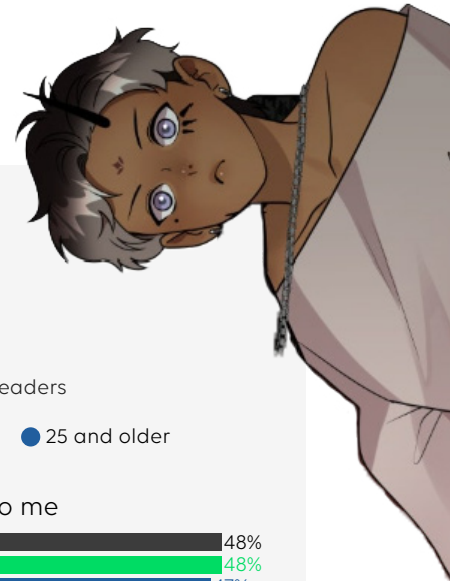
One of webcomics' unique traits is that anyone can access the platform and start reading or creating content. Similar to the fan fiction fandom, the creative ecosystem within the world of webcomics is "self-generating," where readers can become fans, fans can become creators, creators generate more content, and that content then generates even more readers—and so on.

NRG's research shows that two in five readers say that webcomics are easy to read on their phones. That's a good indicator of what the rest of the fandom journey may look like: readers get hooked by the accessibility of webcomics, and from there, stay within the ecosystem to both read and create, thus propelling the journey to deeper fandom. Across blogs, social media, and forums, webcomic artists share anecdotes about how their journeys started when they were readers, before they took the next step and began creating their own stories.

“

"I've always been a hobbyist in making comics ever since I was 4 years old. It wasn't until 2015 that I heard about WEBTOON having a contest... So I submitted my own entry... it wasn't too long after that, WEBTOON reached out to me to be one of [their] original creators."

Instantmiso, creator of
Siren's Lament



Key reasons for reading webcomics

Among monthly webcomic readers

● Total ● 24 and below ● 25 and older

The art style appeals to me



Easy to read on my phone



Breadth of genres available



Helps me relax



The stories feel emotional and intense



Excited waiting for new episodes



I like that episodes are short



More fun than books or other comics



Stories/characters I don't see elsewhere



For readers, anyone with a smartphone can access a global library of creators, genres, and fan communities at no cost, since there are no subscription fees required. Given that webcomics have been around for decades, the sheer volume of content available for free is unparalleled.

For creators, self-publishing platforms like WEBTOON's CANVAS allow them to publish, build an audience, and receive real-time feedback from readers. Not only is there no upfront capital required, but being part of these ecosystems has also led to broader discovery beyond webcomic borders. For example, a growing number of webcomics published on WEBTOON have been adapted for the screen, and Netflix has been heavily investing in adapting popular webcomics.⁹



“

“I think what makes WEBTOON great is the ease of access, both as a reader and as a creator. As a creator, you get to start on CANVAS, which is a great way to self-publish and get instant feedback.”

Unfins, creator of **Vampire Family**



Because the cost of entry is very low and the tools provided for storytelling are so diverse, creators' imaginations are not constrained by format. They have the freedom to explore any and all types of stories, and the ability to experiment with how they tell those stories as they grow as creators.



⁹["Adapted for the Screen,"](#) WEBTOON

Section 3

The Future of the Fandom

Webcomics are where anime was five years ago.

Over the past decade, the formula for formats crossing over from niche into mainstream has been consistent. They started with deeply engaged core audiences—often passionate, participatory, and excited to shout about the medium whenever possible—who consume and advocate for the format before it reaches the wider popular culture.

When looking at who consumes webcomics, how webcomics develop fandom participation, and how they continue to attract and engage those communities, all signs indicate that the format is at a crucial pivot point. The core fandom is forming rapidly, creators are becoming influencers and celebrities, institutional investment is taking shape, and general public awareness is starting to grow.



And it is worth trusting these readers—after all, many of them are the same engaged audiences that identified manga, anime, K-pop, and K-dramas as significant cultural forces before mainstream media did. Naysayers were quick to dismiss the categories' relevance before begrudgingly acknowledging their cultural importance—and then proceeding to cover the phenomenon breathlessly. This is a cycle that we've seen repeat itself over and over again.

Institutional signals are already rampant. WEBTOON Productions is partnered with top creator-driven production outfits like Margot Robbie's LuckyChap as well as Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's Imagine Entertainment.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Netflix, Amazon, Warner Bros., Disney, Crunchyroll, and HYBE have all made significant investments into webcomics: Netflix announced a slate of webcomic adaptations that will appear on the service throughout 2026;¹¹ Prime Video, the Jim Henson Company, and WEBTOON Productions are developing a series based on *Lore Olympus*;¹² Warner Bros. Animation, in partnership with WEBTOON, announced several animated titles in development based on fan favorite WEBTOON comics;¹³ and Disney+ has several webcomic adaptations on the docket for the second half of 2026.¹⁴

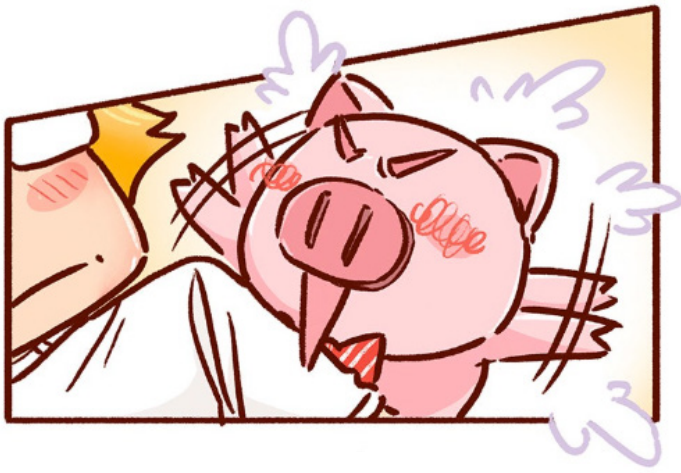
¹⁰["LuckyChap and Wattpad WEBTOON Studios Announce Film Adaptation of WEBTOON Horror Hit 'Stagtown,'" WEBTOON, January 21st, 2025](#)

¹¹Wonhee Cho, ["Netflix Korea Unveils New Snippets From Web Novel, Webtoon Adaptations,"](#) Anime News Network, January 26th, 2026

¹²Rick Porter, ["'Lore Olympus' Animated Series Based on Web Comic a Go at Prime Video,"](#) The Hollywood Reporter, January 20th, 2026

¹³["WEBTOON Entertainment and Warner Bros. Animation Announce New Titles Joining Development Slate,"](#) WEBTOON Entertainment, Warner Bros. Animation, May 13th, 2026

¹⁴Maggie Adan, ["The 12 most anticipated web novel and webtoon K-drama adaptations coming soon,"](#) Tatler Asia, May 20th, 2026



And the fandom is clear about what it wants: more franchise building through webcomics.

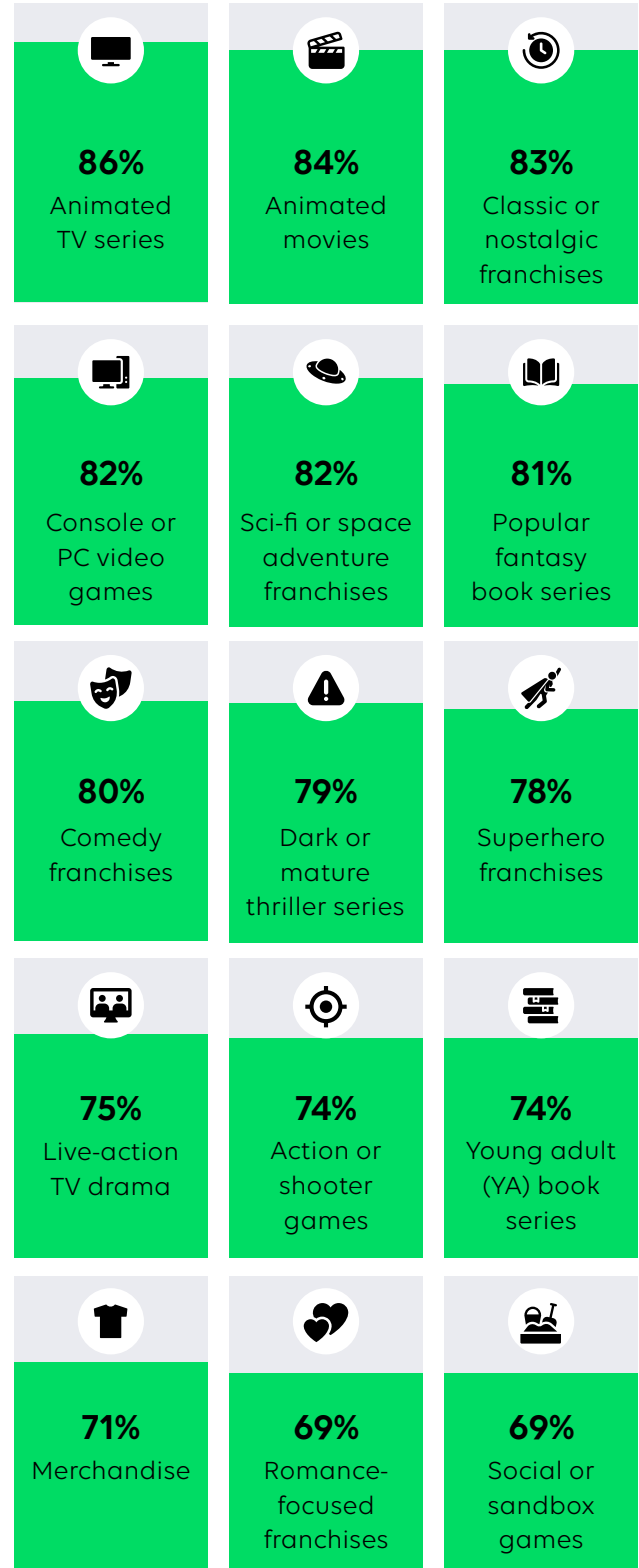
Among webcomic readers, more than four in five want stories based on other mediums, like animated TV shows (86%), animated films (84%), and video games (82%). What's key is that readers gravitate toward source material built around rich worlds, deep lore, and established character ecosystems. The same structural DNA that drives franchise longevity in gaming and film—world-building that outlasts any single story, like the development of character relationships that reward extended reader investment—is precisely what the most successful webcomic series have done.

NRG's research finds that 83% of readers would like to see webcomics adapted from classic or nostalgic franchises. This provides fertile ground for IP holders with legacy properties that are underutilized and could be introduced to younger audiences for the first time if turned into webcomics. Here too, genre preferences can be instructive: fantasy dominates across all age groups, so this genre is a safe bet for IP holders looking to test webcomic waters.

Many of the genres tested scored highly with webcomic readers, meaning there are numerous entry points for studios and IP holders to expand their content ecosystems. By bringing existing stories into these new formats, they can both create novel experiences for diehard fans and court a new generation.

Readers' preferred source material for webcomics

% who would like or love to see webcomic adaptations based on each source material type, among monthly webcomic readers



Entertainment companies should be looking to webcomics to find the next generation of beloved stories and enduring franchises.

In an industry where a failed pilot episode costs millions, and a canceled series can set a franchise back significantly, webcomics offer a new proving ground. With WEBTOON, ideas can find audiences before expanding into new entertainment formats.

The traditional entertainment and studio pipeline runs in one direction and at an enormous cost. Ideas move from the writers' room to development to production, and are then distributed before viewers can weigh in. By the time an audience encounters this new story, there's already a capital investment, but if it doesn't resonate or perform, then the studio takes a massive hit, and the loss is substantial across the board.

But with the innate accessibility of webcomics, the format allows ideas to prove themselves organically over time. On a platform like WEBTOON, a creator can publish, build an audience, and receive real-time feedback (within hours of going live) with relatively low barriers to entry. That means that experimentation and bold creative swings are encouraged and can be immensely instructive. A webcomic that does not find an audience immediately could still find legs over time. This is due to the category's growing fandom that's likely to become even more diverse through continued franchise-building efforts.¹⁵

A growing fandom and a creator base incentivized to create compelling stories—WEBTOON paid roughly \$2.8 billion to creators between 2021 and 2025¹⁶—make webcomics a natural proving ground for IP.



“It’s a way to do it because you are able to present your whole story at your own pace and you don’t have to be fighting through publishers to get your stuff out there. I think it’s a smart way to do it.”

Ingrid Ochoa, creator of **The Kiss Bet**

“They definitely give you a good thing on your resume in a way, where you can see that you were a successful, contracted artist and being able to build an audience and showing publishers if you’re trying to get an agent with a print deal.”

Ro-taniah, creator of **Star Catcher**

“It’s much, much easier to just test your idea and make a bunch of stories. Then you realize, oh, maybe my idea wasn’t great, but now I have an even greater idea.”

Unfins, creator of **Vampire Family**

¹⁵“WEBTOON Expands Global IP Business with Strategic Investment in RI Games Holdings Inc.,” WEBTOON, August 8th, 2026

¹⁶Moon Ki-hoon, “Webtoon has paid its creators \$2.8 billion. It wants to pay them more,” The Korea Herald, March 17th, 2026

Webcomics offer a built-in community infrastructure and a feedback loop that operates at a speed no writers' room could ever replicate.

Many creators refer to webcomics as a launching pad: they're able to test their narrative ideas, adapt a story arc or characters based on reader feedback, and demonstrate platform traction with a real-time audience.

And that audience is excited about what's to come. More than four in five are excited to watch animated adaptations of webcomics, 78% want to play video games based on them, and 75% plan on buying merchandise from the IP they love.

The formats readers want to see their favorite webcomics adapted to

Among monthly webcomic readers

87%

Animated films

85%

Animated TV series

82%

Live-action TV series

81%

Printed graphic novels or book collections

80%

Live-action films

78%

Video games

75%

Merchandise

71%

Audiobook or narrative podcasts



Separately, they intend to continue evangelizing about the medium, with the vast majority saying they plan to follow webcomic creators on social media (78%), attend related events or conventions (72%), and create fan art or fan fiction about webcomics (70%). The last example of engagement underscores that the natural path to deeper fandom is already built into the webcomic model.

An evangelizing audience that's primed to want more at a scale that does not yet exist presents massive opportunities for studios and other institutions—and they should act fast. The cost of entry—whether through adaptation, partnership, or platform investment—is low, but the window in which webcomics are still “underrated” is finite.

The marketers and executives that moved early on anime and K-drama captured outsized returns with early positioning; think Netflix in 2019 when it streamed one of its Korean original productions, *Kingdom*, for the first time ever. It was the earliest mainstream streaming service in the West to launch an original that won an Emmy and now has become the go-to streamer for K-dramas.¹⁷ The same opportunity is available here, for studios, platforms, and IP holders willing to act before others and take advantage of this participatory audience and engaging medium.

¹⁷Janko Roettgers, “[How Netflix made us fall in love with K-dramas](#),” The Verge, April 16th, 2026

4

Predictions of what's to come for webcomics

1

IP pipeline

The medium's low barrier to entry makes it an ideal proving ground for new ideas. Creators can test concepts, build audiences, and refine stories before they ever reach publishers, studios, or streaming platforms. As demand for original IP continues to grow, webcomics are well positioned to function as a low-risk incubator for the next generation of franchises.

2

Screen adaptations

Off the back of this greenlighting pipeline, more than four in five readers say they would be interested in seeing webcomics adapted from existing animated series and vice versa. Fans are excited for webcomic adaptations, whether they're animated or live-action films or series, books, or graphic novels.

3

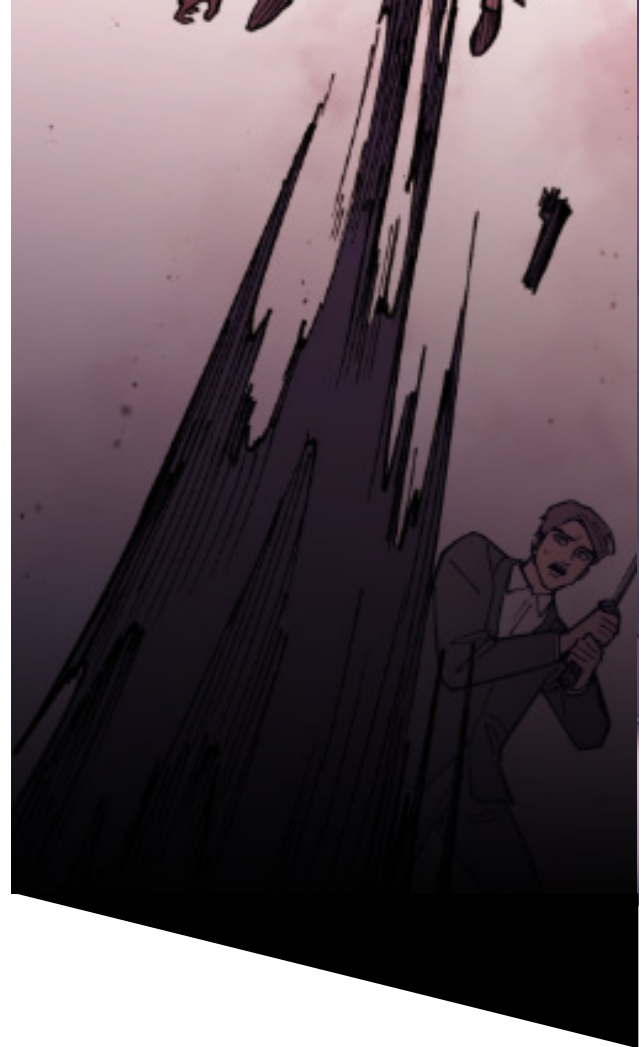
Readers become creators

One of webcomics' unique traits is the fandom journey created by readers turning into creators. As more readers discover webcomics, evangelizing fans will try creating their own stories, fueling a self-sustaining fandom.

4

Mainstream breakout

Readers already see themselves as ahead of the curve, with 76% describing webcomics as "underrated" and 74% agreeing the format is "ahead of the mainstream." As more people discover webcomics through social media, streaming adaptations, and broader cultural exposure, the category is primed for growth. Like anime and K-dramas before them, webcomics are at an inflection point.



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Interested in learning more about webcomics' growing fandom and influence across pop culture?

[Click here](#) to view WEBTOON and NRG's interactive report exploring the webcomic category.



About NRG

National Research Group is a leading global insights and strategy firm at the intersection of content, culture, and technology.

The world's most innovative brands turn to us for insights into growth and strategy for any content, anywhere, on any device. For more on trends shaping the entertainment sector, explore our previous reports, or reach out to us directly at inquiry@nrgmr.com.



About WEBTOON

WEBTOON Entertainment is a leading global entertainment company and home to some of the world's largest storytelling platforms. As the global leader and pioneer of the mobile webcomic format, WEBTOON Entertainment has transformed comics and visual storytelling for fans and creators.

With its CANVAS UGC platform empowering anyone to become a creator, and a growing roster of superstar WEBTOON Originals creators and series, WEBTOON Entertainment's passionate fandoms are the new face of pop culture. WEBTOON Entertainment adaptations are available on Netflix, Prime Video, Crunchyroll, and other screens around the world, and the company's content partners have included Warner Bros. Animation, Discord, HYBE, and Duolingo, among many others.

With approximately 155 million monthly active users, WEBTOON Entertainment's IP & Creator Ecosystem of aligned brands and platforms includes WEBTOON, Wattpad—the world's leading webnovel platform—WEBTOON Productions, Studio N, Studio LICO, WEBTOON Unscrolled, LINE MANGA, and eBookJapan, among others.