Japanese Webtoon: Marketing Manga Online Using South Korean Platform Designs

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Marketing Manga Online Using South Korean Platform Designs

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Abstract

WebToon is a new digital means of distributing commercial cartoon content to online communities all over the world. Webtoon was first developed and commercialized by South Korean portal service providers, such as Daum and Naver, the two juggernauts that have miraculously expanded their online manga market in South Korea to $900 million by 2018. What’s interesting is that these Korean portal goliaths are penetrating the Japanese manga market. The export of Korean webtoon platforms to Japan, including Line Manga, XOY, Comico, and Piccoma, is a newfangled development in the paper-based Japanese manga market that is gradually preparing to be more transnational than ever due to the smart phone revolution in the 2010s. For example, a Japanese spin off company from Naver, Comico, has demonstrated pivotal success by publishing several Japanese WebToon works that are being exported back to Korea or other countries. Based on the two case studies of ReLife and Lookism, two of the most popular WebToon titles in Japan from Comico and XOY, respectively, we examine the competitive advantage of the WebToon platform in the Japanese manga market, explain a new rise of Comico in the global WebToon market, and evaluate WebToon’s cultural value in the Japanese manga market via intermediality (or media mix). We find that the transnational consumption of Japanese WebToon is increasingly salient all over the world, as Japanese WebToon originals adopt effective storytelling strategies. Simultaneously, the cultural value of the Japanese WebToon has also sharply increased due to intermediality.

Introduction

The rise of the digital comic, especially that of the app platform for WebToons (Web-based Cartoons), has caught the attention of many pundits in the field (see, among others, Seo and Ham 2010; Kim 2013; Lee et al. 2014; Song et al. 2014; Song 2014; Cho 2016). As Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 indicate, both global and Korean manga markets ushered in a new era of the rapidly expanding WebToon genre. The proportion of the WebToon market is now surpassing 20% in both global and Korean cartoon markets (although the Korean data is...
depleted after 2015). Since digital formats are easier to export to the smartphone users in other countries, Korea has encountered an abrupt upsurge in the export of comic content in recent years (Fig. 3).

Figure 1. Global Comic Market Size

![Figure 1. Global Comic Market Size](image)


Figure 2. Korean Comic Market Size

![Figure 2. Korean Comic Market Size](image)


The Japanese digital publication market is also rapidly leaning toward the global trend as $1.3 billion worth of digitalized manga was sold in Japan in 2016 alone (*Shuppankagakuenkyûsho* 2018). This is over 80% of total digital publications in Japan in the same year. However, the extant studies on WebToon fail to answer our current
research questions: (1) why has Korea become the leader in the development of WebToon platforms and/or applications rather than Japan; (2) what is Japan doing now after seeing the success of the Korean WebToon industry in many parts of the world to defend its domestic WebToon market from Korean invasion; and (3) would Japan’s active investment in WebToon content on the smartphones result in a similar success to that of the Korean side in the global WebToon market?

Figure 3. Export of Korean Cartoon Content in $ million


The three questions outlined above remain significant in the sense that the extant studies of Japanese manga failed to see the rise of Korea in the Japanese manga market as a potential threat. This is largely because manga experts missed the big picture of the 21st century pop culture via digital content on smartphones, including Hallyu (or the Korean Wave), which included WebToon as its new genre. This is related to a deep-rooted tradition within the Japanese manga industry which saw the globalization of Japanese manga as either an open or a closed system of development. For example, scholars argued that the massive popularity of Pokémon in the world was due to cultural hybridity (Iwabuchi 2004; Lu 2008; Bryce et al. 2010; Yui 2010). According to these studies, the creators and distributors of the manga and later anime deliberately wanted to make it look non-Japanese or nationality-less (i.e., mukokuseki). In other words, the success of Japanese manga/anime was not because of its Japaneseness but because of its mukokuseki. However, this explanation fails to explain why Korean pop culture content became as popular as Japanese manga/anime in the 21st century without resorting to the same argument that Korean pop culture content was also mukokuseki. If that is the case, why is similar content from China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesian, Filipino, and others not globally popular despite being mukokuseki?
To avoid this kind of logical snag, others argue that the Japanese manga/anime industry has been closed to outsiders (Kinsella 1998; Azuma 2001; Jenkins 2012; Brenner 2007; Lee 2009; Galbraith & Karlin 2016). It is typically an “otaku” system of production and fandom that restricts outsiders from entering the industry through a strict editorial gatekeeping or a production council system. Typical evidence of the closedness is the infamous Seisakuiinkai [Production Council] system (Kameyama 2013). The purpose of strict gatekeeping is to preserve and develop Japanese creativity in manga and anime production, given that a form of “nemawashi” [group decision-making based on consensus among manga/anime experts] would engender far better outcomes for the industry than any other that is based on purely individual, amateurish, and unprofessional business decisions. While relying on loyal “prosumer” activities, this closed system secures aggravated revenue sources through intermediality or media mix (i.e., converting manga into anime, TV dramas, films, and other genres). Expansion into the global markets was possible not because of mukokuseki but because of the global division of intermediality that involves American and European translators, producers, and distributors, who worked independently of the Japanese Seisakuiinkai in the interest of propagating superior Japanese manga/anime products to the rest of the world (Itô 2005; Cooper-Chen 2011). Furthermore, this is the same reason the Japanese anime industry is now falling behind the global trend of distributing anime films to global streaming service providers including Netflix, which wants to distribute Japanese manga/anime in massive quantities at high prices directly from copyright holders (Shino 2018).

However, the otaku system of production and distribution through intermediality fails to explain why the Japanese creativity that is protected by the strict gatekeeping system nevertheless produces substantially non-Japanese content and characters (i.e., mukokuseki) for the global audience. Furthermore, it fails to explain why copyright holders are now bypassing Seisakuiinkai, when it is now apparent that they can make windfalls by aligning with global streaming service providers. The sudden fall of the regulatory power of Seisakuiinkai has never been clear in their explanation. At the same time, WebToons from Korea are a newly dominant player in the global manga market. The otaku thesis fails to explain why the otaku fans are now following the Korean suit of creating and distributing app-based WebToons for smartphone users bypassing the otaku system that Seisakuiinkai has created. We need to highlight otakus’ original desire to globalize their cultural content instead of emphasizing falsely that they wanted strict domesticity.

The shortcomings of these two competing arguments lead us to our understanding of the matter. Japanese manga/anime has also been a part of the glocal system of creativity intended for global production and consumption through a collaboration among Japanese creators, producers, and global entrepreneurs (Condry 2009; Otmazgin 2014). In the glocal system of the entertainment industry, including manga/anime, content and/or platforms are originally imported from overseas (e.g., the U.S.) and then localized with great domestic
efforts and sophistication (or kaizen). This localization of the original can at times turn out to be far better in quality and price for outside consumers, who will then want to import back to the originating country (Oh 2017). In the case of Japanese manga/anime, the local improvement or kaizen was the very cause of its success in the E.U. and the U.S. markets. Therefore, what counts is not where the content has originated from, but who has made it better than the original. It is a well-known fact that the Germans and the Japanese have excelled in improving the cars that the Americans and the British started to manufacture first. The entire process of invention, improvement, and global distribution of both original and improved products is what we refer to as a global and local (or glocal) system of production and distribution. Anime is no exception.

To corroborate the validity of our perspective and the resulting hypotheses, we employ archival data, CAPA analyses (to be detailed below), and in-depth interviews with Japanese WebToon developers and service providers.

Our Hypotheses

Based on the short literature review, we came up with six hypotheses. These hypotheses are grouped into three dimensions of glocalization, kaizen, and intermediality (media mix). First, glocalization can be defined as a process of localization based on the original content or platform for future export back to the originating market or the entire global market. This concept leads to two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Given that WebToon is a kaizen outcome, Korea has an extremely creative manga industry that is more efficient/effective in kaizen than the competitors for its own global niche market.

Hypothesis 2: Given that manga/anime is a kaizen outcome, the Japanese manga industry is expected to produce better WebToon content and/or platforms than its Korean counterpart for its own global niche market.

Second, creativity through kaizen can be defined as a process of securing a core technology of adapting, changing, and improving original content or media platforms for reverse exports back to the originating market. This concept leads to two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: The Japanese manga/anime industry protects their core technology of kaizen in their home countries, while they outsource inputs and distribution for active globalization.
Hypothesis 4: The core technology of Japanese manga/anime *kaizen* consists of “character,” “setting,” and “storying the world” (or CAPA).

Third, intermediality refers to a process of adding value by transmogrifying genres and medias from one to another. For example, a manga book can complete intermediality and add value by being produced into an animation movie. In our case, paper-based manga can be transformed into a WebToon through intermediality. However, what is more important for our purpose in this paper is whether WebToons can be transformed into anime films through media mix or intermediality. This concept leads to two additional hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5: To sustain profitability, successful Japanese WebToons will be intermedialized into manga books, anime, films, or TV dramas in a similar fashion to that of the intermediality of Korean WebToons.

Hypothesis 6: Japanese WebToons can also be exported back to Korea and other countries as WebToons or in different media formats.

Hypothesis 6 indirectly predicts the superiority of Japanese WebToons after *kaizen* over the Korean originals, although it is almost impossible to test such a hypothesis at the current stage. Our hypotheses as a whole are derived from the following conceptual model of the glocalization process of an entertainment genre.

According to the above model of glocalization, the three grey boxes represent the Korean and Japanese system of *kaizen*, where input and distribution are outsourced to foreign contractors. The core technology of *kaizen* is protected in the local area so that they can maintain the competitive advantage of their domestic manga/anime or WebToon industries. To corroborate these concepts and hypotheses, we will analyze two representative works of *Lookism* (Korean original) and *ReLife* (Japanese original), both of which are popular in the Japanese WebToon market. Using the CAPA analysis, we will try to demonstrate that Korean and Japanese WebToons might have different audiences and therefore the latter has a larger chance of appealing to a wide range of WebToon fans not only in Korea and Japan but in other parts of the world as well.

The appearance of fiber optic cables for ethernets and local area networks (LAN) in South Korea has triggered a staggering dissemination and spread of personal computers (PCs) during the 2000s and onward. The LAN speed in the country is now the world’s fastest (see Table 1) at an average speed of 28.6 average Mbps. The rapid speed of LAN in South Korea ushered in a new era of enabling readers to enjoy WebToons by freely scrolling down pages of manga stories without unwarranted interruptions due to slow
LAN speed. Readers can even scroll down a long page very quickly using a high-speed mouse or track pad.

Figure 4. The Model of a Glocalization

The Rise of the Korean and Japanese WebToon Apps and Platforms

This technological breakthrough enabled a new era of WebToons in South Korea with a large readership size in a very short period of time. However, Japan did not necessarily see the necessity of adopting this new WebToon platform in the 2000s, as most young and mature manga readers relied on paper-based manga books and magazines, while only a small number of young people used digitally scanned paper manga for cell phones (before the arrival of the smartphone and app revolution).

The leading South Korean WebToon platform and later content developers were Daum and Naver, both of which owned and operated free of charge portal services. Since their WebToon content and platforms were successful even during the arrival of smartphones and apps, and particularly because it was much easier for readers to scroll down the page using their fingertips rather than their mouse or track pad, the WebToon apps developed by both companies are now being actively exported to the global market as well as to Japan.

As Japanese firms progressed their WebToon development, Daum and Naver found it timely to infiltrate into the Japanese manga market with their apps and content
that were either imported from Korea or produced in Japan with local artists and editors. Piccoma, Comico, Line Manga, and XOY are some of the Korean or originally Korean WebToon apps and platforms that are now very popular in Japan. The strength of the Korean WebToon content in Japan partly derives from the popularity of Hallyu, which induced many young and mature Japanese female fans of Hallyu to use Kakao Talk and Line, both of which deliver a plethora of Hallyu related services to Japanese fans. Kakao Japan provides both Korean and Japanese WebToon to its readers, while Naver provides scanned manga service through Line Manga and a full WebToon service through XOY. It should be noted that Comico, which was originally a Naver subsidiary in Japan, became fully independent from the Korean giant and is now competing full time with both Korean WebToon providers not only in Korea but also in other foreign markets. The rise of Comico as the first genuine WebToon app in Japan signifies a lot in the context of the changing Japanese manga market, and it is Comico that produced the first Japanese WebToon mega hit, ReLife. Based on our interview with Comico editors, we analyze the entire process of the glocalization of Comico.

Figure 5. Korean WebToon Apps and their Globalization
The Glocalization at Comico

This section is predominately based on our interviews with Comico editors that took place during March in 2018 in addition to our archival research. The glocalization of Comico has started due to the breakup of the NHN Japan, a Naver subsidiary that intended to introduce the Korean style free portal service to Japan, which was dominated by Yahoo! Japan at that time. However, most Japanese internet users did not prefer PCs over cell phones, as the LAN speed was not fast enough for internet portal browsing. Users had to pay higher premiums for the fast speeds, making it unrealistic for Naver to provide web services with free content using the portal platform that could be profited only through corporate sponsorship. Furthermore, overly confident of their success in South Korea, Naver did not nurture local networks for acquiring local knowledge of Japan. The ironic facet of Comico is that most former Naver employees, including the current Comico CEO, remained in the new WebToon company.

Table 1. Comico Corporate Fact Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPANY NAME</td>
<td>NHN Comico Corp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHED</td>
<td>June 1, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Hyun-Soo Jang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANDS</td>
<td>Comico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATIONS</td>
<td>NHN Japan, NHN Play Art, NHN HanGame, NHN Techorus, NHN Savaway, NHN Capital, NHN Entertainment, NHN Service Technology, NHN Taiwan, NHN Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>#1 app in the manga genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popular mostly among women in their 10s &amp; 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEGA HIT TITLES</td>
<td>ReLife: 1.5 million manga books sold, English version started, published in Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Poland, developed into TV anime, developed into a film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Momokuri &amp; 7 other titles: Developed into TV anime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Koekoi &amp; 6 other titles: Developed into stage dramas, TV dramas, or movies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NHN Comico Corp. 2018.
Comico’s priority was to take advantage of local knowledge and to open up WebToon services for the Japanese readers as soon as smartphones become widely available. This was because NHN Japan grossly neglected the importance of cell phones and their mobile content by imprudently concentrating resources on PC portal content. As Table 2 indicates, Comico became Japan’s leading manga app platform in less than a year, producing several signature titles that are now globally exported back to Korea and other countries. This is a result of a timely entrance in the Japanese market during the peak of the smartphone revolution and Hallyu popularity among Japanese young women, both of which were absent when Naver and Daum entered the market. Furthermore, Comico’s local knowledge enabled the firm to plan, search, edit, and publish original Japanese content for WebToon platforms beyond the level of simply importing content from South Korea. In other words, Comico has the editorial efficacy that they learned from their experiences in the Japanese manga market, an important addition to the business by contributing their knowhow in finding and selecting potentially big stories with Japanese style manga drawing techniques. An interviewee with Mr. Ôtô Mitsuhiko, a Comico producer, put it this way:

Comico’s goal is to develop original Japanese WebToons that are significantly different from Korean storytelling or traditional paper-based manga in Japan. With new Japanese WebToons, Comico wants to globalize the content for worldwide readers. To do this we need to find, educate, and develop new artists. Readers will also gradually, if not overnight, love our WebToon content.

The core technology of Comico is its local knowledge of developing original Japanese WebToon content that is saliently different from those from Korea or traditional Japanese manga. In addition, the editorial staff also have knowledge of training young artists to acquire the mastery of the trade skills in developing stories, drawing up illustrations, and editing them together as a marketable product. Mr. Ôtô again put it this way:

When we started out there was no artist who would readily contribute new works of art to our platform. We searched the internet, contacted all our friends, were introduced to strangers, and finally found a handful of good fellows. We showed them Korean WebToons asking if they can produce similar or better work. Established manga artists of course showed no interest in the beginning. We thus had to focus on up and coming young artists who showed some interest in this new Korean content. We also started an audition program called “The Challenge,” where unknown artists can send in their amateur work. Things are now getting better fast.
Given that most Comico fans are females in their teens and twenties, we repeatedly assume them to be Hallyu fans as well, who might have already been exposed to Naver and Daum WebToons, including those famous ones as Misaeng, which was adapted into a TV drama and aired on Fuji TV in 2016. The reason ReLife was first Comico work that gained mega popularity among these female fans might be that it carried a common Hallyu drama theme in a Japanese setting – the heroine’s tragic life that is to be redeemed and transcended through an encounter with a perfect male lover. We therefore analyze ReLife using a CAPA analysis in order to distinguish it from a Korean WebToon, Lookism, which is the best seller content from XOY. Our hypothesis is that the Korean content cannot capture the mind of these young Japanese female fans due to different narrative structures.

ReLife vs. Lookism via CAPA Analysis

According to Herman (2013), CAPA analysis refers to two parts of “worlding the story” (or giving corpus to characters) and “storying the world” (or giving logos to characters’ corpus). These two parts have the following CAPA structures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worlding the Story</th>
<th>Storying the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contexts (C) for interpretation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ascriptions (A) to performers of narrative acts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediality into WebToons motivates readers to go back to the original contexts (archetypes)</td>
<td>Persons with their world of intersubjectivity with other persons finally gain “logos” vis-à-vis their “corpus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling Actions (A) that secure cooperative actions from readers</td>
<td>Persons are the characters who perform acts of telling as well as acts of interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediality into WebToons enables readers to enjoy reality-filled actions</td>
<td>Persons (P) are base units of intersubjectivity that provides flesh to the bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons (P)</strong> are base units of intersubjectivity that provides flesh to the bone</td>
<td>Defeasible Ascriptions (A) to performers of narrative acts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is ascertained by the above dichotomy of the corpus vs. the logos that “persons” would gain full animated human status through intermediality from paper-based storytelling (e.g., light novels, novels, manga, etc.) to WebToons, it is also noticeable that the logos would play a more important role than the corpus in WebToons.

What makes an intermediality project from text-based stories to WebToons successful is the skillful management of applying these strategies of the “storying the world” to the entire process of “storying the world” (i.e., providing the logos to the
It is therefore our hypothesis that Japanese originals would fare better than their Korean counterparts in the process of the storying the world. Having this in mind, we will carry out a CAPA analysis for ReLife and Lookism as follows.

Table 2. Strategies of Storying the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chunking/Framing Experience</td>
<td>Stories as source of structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving meanings to the behavior with or without focalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imputing Causal Relations</td>
<td>Beyond the heuristics of revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving meanings to the behavior with causal and chronological wholes or causal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Raising and Solving</td>
<td>Typification and the limits of tribal justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stories fill the gap (problem solving) when typification (chunking) fails (problem raising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing Actions</td>
<td>Communicative and Representational Protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textual or visual protocols that govern the order of activities in storying the world in order to put into effect the navigational strategies of storying the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributing Intelligence</td>
<td>Storying the world across time and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making the story’s moral lessons and knowledge universal and long lasting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


ReLife

Yayoi Sô is an alias for the female author who wrote ReLife. Preferring one’s alias over revealing his/her real identity is also a well-known Korean practice among WebToon artists. In the WebToon world authors’ anonymity gives a surreptitious touch to the readers who would naturally interact with an unknown author on the platform throughout the series. Also, anonymity gives an enigma to the author herself who is not at all established or famous in the manga market, not to mention the WebToon world. However, the author remits a strong feminine sensation to the readers who themselves are mostly women. This is again a basic premise between Hallyu artists and fans, both of whom promote female universalism that intends to transcend gendered melancholia (see inter
By hook or crook, her virgin serial ensnared a mayhem in the Japanese WebToon business by concocting a miraculous success overnight. As Fig. 6 shows, her serial has now a dedicated app from Comico, a corporate decision that is rare for WebToon works even in South Korea.

Figure 3. ReLife Platforms

Figure 4. Storying the World for ReLife

The ReLife story world depicts two conflictual spaces of the real adult world and the idealized high school world, to the latter of which the hero sneaks in as disguised high school students to fix his adult life as a final chance of redemption. With numerous flashbacks, the narrator convinces the hero that his current adult life problems in face
derive from his time in high school. It is during this space switch (back and forth between adult and high school spaces) where he also meets his ideal lover. They immediately develop mutual affinity, although he knows that they must forget and forsake each other after the mission is completed by returning to his real adult world as a new and successful person. These two conflictual reference worlds are later expected to be resolved into a story world after the climax with a new lesson learned about their life in general (see Fig. 7). In Fig. 7 it should be noted that the anonymous narrator can use both text-based and graphic-based semiotic channels for her strategy of storying the world (i.e., giving the logos to the corpus).

**Lookism**

The South Korean WebToon, *Lookism*, however, reveals author’s real name and face right out to show off his physical and facial sleekness (See Fig. 8). Regardless of the initial controversy of the narcissistic practice in WebToon creation, the serial has enjoyed sustained popularity among fans in Korea, Japan, and countries. Therefore, it is easily imaginable that the fans of this WebToon are young females who like to see and read what this handsome man acts and utters in each episode. However, as most readers would have assumed it, the entire story world is expected to end with a climax of reprimanding and resolving “lookism” itself in favor of a more egalitarian society that does not discriminate against people based on their outward appearance. In this sense, the ascription of “look first” mentality to the main character is contradictory to author’s own narcissism even before the narration has started. This internal contradiction of the WebToon has angered quite a number of male readers who felt uneasy about author’s own face appearing on the WebToon as an overlap and chunking strategy (Namuwiki 2018).

The story world of *Lookism* features a narrator that is actively involved in the process of worlding the story through recreating his own body/face in the form of a hero, while presenting two conflictual reference worlds of “handsome” and “ugly” worlds. The hero of the WebToon was born ugly and obese, an easy victim of school bullies. However, one day he discovers a perfectly shaped handsome body that he can use as a second self while his real body is asleep. Given that the main character understands how it feels like to be an ugly student in his high school, the handsome body carries out violent actions against the school gangs in defense of ugly looking students, simultaneously hoarding a number of female followers. The hero’s shuttling trips between the ugly and handsome worlds, however, fails to provide him with the logos that can recover his true identity that transcends his ugliness and obesity in a positive way at the end of the story world. At the end of the day, readers are left with myriad physical representations of handsomeness and ugliness without any moral conclusion about how these people should live together harmoniously and peacefully.
Findings

The result of the CAPA analysis we have carried out so far is summarized in Table 4. The biggest difference in the story world of both WebToons can be found in Actions, Persons, and Ascriptions. *ReLife* awards no discrimination against people based on their superficial appearance. The corpus of *ReLife* is equally functional and beautiful among characters, whereas the logos given to persons in the WebToon suffers from various mental distresses that need to be healed by taking a spatial travel back to their high school life. On the contrary, *Lookism* awards the biggest importance to the corpus of persons in the WebToon, inciting them to discriminate against each other based on how others look physically. In this sense, individuals in the WebToon suffer from both physical and mental distresses that cannot be healed even as the hero switches his bodies between the ugly and handsome shapes. While the hero and the heroine of *ReLife* are filled with love and charm during their high school time as disguised students, the hero of *Lookism* cannot control his feast...
that throws blows against his enemies who provoke violence and domination over the weak people on a routine basis.

Table 3. CAPA Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ReLife</th>
<th>Lookism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contexts</strong></td>
<td>Space switching between high school and adult life space (e.g., Hiding Out)</td>
<td>Body switching between handsome and ugly boys (e.g., Switch! 18 Again!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actions</strong></td>
<td>Corrective actions; learning; recovery of pure love</td>
<td>Violent actions; domination; defiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons</strong></td>
<td>Charming; mature; learning</td>
<td>Dichotomous characters; violence; defiance; impure love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ascriptions</strong></td>
<td>Commitment to success via learning to help change one’s own life</td>
<td>Commitment to physical beauty and power via violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the different CAPA results, each WebToon presents contrasting strategies of storying the world (see Table 5). This is again partly because their story worlds are substantially different from each other with the different readers held in mind by respective authors. The Japanese female WebToon artist targeted female fans using female universalism, whereas the Korean male artist wanted to please male fans using male universalism. Each story, however, has genuinely local elements. For example, going back to high school as an ideal life re-charging place is very Japanese, whereas taking male sleekness seriously is a cultural feature frequently found amongst those from South Korea.

The strategy of chunking (i.e., visual framing that make readers memorize the WebToon easily) is more effective in Lookism than ReLife, as the former interchangeably shows handsome and ugly people in massive numbers and high frequencies. However, the strategy of causality (i.e., the convincing plot based on reasonable causal consequences) is more effectively utilized in ReLife than the other with a reasonable explanation of the process and sequence of going back to the high school world by the two adults. In a similar vein the strategy of problem raising and solving is more effective in ReLife than the other, as the adult problem of not being able to adjust to the harsh economic life in a big city is more generalizable than the problem of having an unattractive face/body. However, both WebToons used a similar strategy of sequencing that involves switching bodies or switching places interchangeably. The biggest difference between the two WebToons is the strategy of intelligence, which is also a factor that would distinguish ReLife from Lookism as a more influential and therefore appealing story to many readers in the world. Whereas Lookism has no potentially outstanding moral
lessons to be learned by the characters and readers, *ReLife* casts a potential solution to many young adults in the world: the problem you’re facing must be resolved by you through active networking with other human beings based on genuine sincerity and love.

Table 4. Strategies of Storying the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ReLife</th>
<th>Lookism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chunking</strong></td>
<td>Focalization to highlight the learning and changing processes</td>
<td>Highlighting conventionally attractive vs. ugly faces/bodies with or without focalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure of nude postures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causality</strong></td>
<td>Rescue by super natural forces on the condition of passing the test</td>
<td>Rescue by body switches with no clear condition or causality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose between your life and lover (Can’t get both!)</td>
<td>You cannot choose one body (Can’t get the one you like permanently!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving</strong></td>
<td>Recovery of human relationships through pure love</td>
<td>Narcissism perpetuated through violent vengeance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success depends on human relationships (Overcome Otaku-ism!)</td>
<td>Expected to gain new intelligence about body/face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequencing</strong></td>
<td>Interval sequencing between the high school world and the adult world</td>
<td>Interval sequencing between body switches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intelligence</strong></td>
<td>Success depends on human relationships (Overcome Otaku-ism!)</td>
<td>No moral lessons learned about the looks-first world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, a comparison of these two case studies reveals that all of our six hypotheses are harnessed by partial, if not full, support. Both Korea and Japan maintain *kaizen* capabilities that can lead to improved local products for exports back to product origins (H1, H2). The Japanese manga/anime industry protects its core technology of *kaizen*, while it is open to Korean and other imports and while it also relies on global distributors who are not necessarily Japanese (H3). The case studies also supported H4 by showing how the strategy of story the world robustly enables the sustainability of Japanese WebToons business. The basis of business profitability of the new Japanese WebToon industry derives from intermediality and exports back to Korea (i.e., WebToon origin) and other markets (H5, H6).
Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated the recent transnational development of the WebToon industry in South Korea and Japan focusing on two cases of Lookism and ReLife. The process of the transnational collaboration between South Korea and Japan toward the establishment of a new WebToon industry in Japan demonstrated the importance of the global division of labor that necessitates an increased effort to be played by local and global entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the CAPA analysis demonstrated the fact that intermediality or media-mix plays a pivotal role in harnessing WebToon’s commercial and artistic values in the market and among the readers.

What is strikingly implicative about the future of the Japanese WebToon industry is the increasingly transnational nature of business that involves quickly improving devices (e.g., smartphones and apps), content, and multilingual services. Korean-Japanese collaboration in the new industry is also very illuminative of the nature of the WebToon or any similar genre. The intermediality of WebToon works into anime, dramas, and films also involve multinational participants, making the entire industry globalized. However, it is also noted in this study that kaizen still continues to be an important process in the Korean and Japanese pop culture industries, including the WebToon industry. Korean artists tend to emphasize the importance of worlding the story (i.e., giving the corpus to the story), whereas their Japanese counterparts stress the importance of storying the world (i.e., giving the logos to the story). Further studies can be designed to analyze more WebToon work in both countries to further confirm the hypotheses put forth in this study.

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Notes

1. Female universalism is an opposite concept to male universalism which promotes modern Western values of science, logical thinking, rationality, and Western high culture. On the contrary, female universalism refers to the gendered melancholia, a common pain all women in the world share, including the very fact that they were born women and therefore have to suppress their sadness of existing this world as the second sex. Simultaneously, this entails the inability to renounce their feminine mandate to accept men as their sexual and marriage partners (see Butler 2011; Oh 2017).

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