

Sponsored Research – Webtoon Category

Supported by Webtoon

Webtoon is a digitally native, vertical scroll storytelling format that has rapidly developed into a global content ecosystem for comics and web novels. It engages approximately 160 million monthly active users across more than 150 countries. Average daily user time reaches 26 minutes on Webtoon Korea, 38 minutes on LINE Manga in Japan, and 27 minutes on Webtoon North America. In the North American market specifically, more than 20 million monthly active users access the platform, with approximately 75 percent belonging to Gen Z.

The platform combines serialized narrative delivery, mobile-first consumption, and AI-based content recommendations. It also incorporates monetization models such as Fast Pass and Daily Pass, and successful intellectual properties frequently extend into secondary channels such as television, film, and branded collaborations.

As part of this sponsored collaboration between the Division and Webtoon, we invite research exploring Webtoon as a growing medium for persuasive communication and audience engagement. While the platform already demonstrates strong fandom and sustained usage, there is significant academic and strategic interest in understanding **how its storytelling format and community dynamics operate within the North American market**. This category aims to establish foundational insights that advance scholarly thinking and may inform future platform strategies.

Researchers do not need access to internal Webtoon data. Studies may use simulated Webtoon-style stimuli, content analysis of publicly available episodes, surveys, experiments, interviews, focus groups, secondary data, or conceptual and critical approaches.

This Webtoon-sponsored category is newly introduced this year and is designed to support innovative projects that are already underway but not yet fully completed. Due to timing considerations, *papers do not need to be in final form at the time of submission*; however, they must demonstrate **substantial progress and clear research direction**.

Submissions must meet the following criteria:

- The **first author must be a faculty member** (full-time or adjunct). Student-led projects are welcome if a faculty member serves as first author
- Projects must be actively in progress (e.g., data collection, analysis, and/or manuscript development is underway).
- Studies involving human participants must have **IRB approval filed**, and data collection should be initiated or scheduled at the time of submission.
- Manuscripts should contain sufficient detail to allow reviewers to assess scholarly rigor, contribution potential, and methodological soundness.
- Fully completed papers *currently under review elsewhere* are **not eligible** for this category.
- Submissions must be anonymized for blind review; any identifying information will result in automatic disqualification.

Possible research topics include, but are not limited to:

- **New user acquisition and platform positioning**

Investigation of the underlying drivers and inhibitors of Webtoon adoption among non-users and light users, considering current market awareness, North American media consumption patterns, and comparative positioning versus competing digital platforms (e.g., short-form video or streaming services).

- **Narrative structure and persuasive effects**

How Webtoon's vertical scrolling and serialized storytelling format influence attention, emotional engagement, narrative transportation, and intention to begin platform use?

- **Fandom dynamics and community influence**

The role of parasocial relationships, creator–fan interaction, and community participation in sustaining engagement and facilitating new-user conversion.

- **Cross-cultural resonance and content adaptation**

How storytelling formats, character archetypes, and emotional tone originating in Webtoon resonate with or require adaptation for North American audiences.

Awards (sponsored by Webtoon)

1st place: \$300

2nd place: \$200

Eligibility and Recognition

To be eligible for the sponsored awards, at least one author must be a current member of the AEJMC Advertising Division at the time of award notification. Authors who are not members at the time of submission may join the Division if their paper is selected for recognition.

Award recipients are encouraged to acknowledge Webtoon's sponsorship in their professional communications (e.g., LinkedIn updates, university newsletters, or personal websites) to help promote academic–industry collaboration. With author approval, Webtoon may also feature winning projects through its communication channels.

We look forward to submissions that help broaden scholarly and professional understanding of Webtoon as a narrative-driven, high-engagement platform with growing potential for audience expansion and persuasive communication.

For inquiries, please contact Anna Kim, Head of Advertising Division, AEJMC at eunjink@usc.edu.