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An Exploratory Study on Genre Labeling of Online Comic Reading Platforms in Taiwan

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Abstract

As online comic reading continues to grow in Taiwan, online platforms have become important sites for both comic consumption and discovery. This exploratory study examines genre-labeling practices on three major online comic platforms in Taiwan. We collected genre terms from the platforms' Traditional Chinese and English interfaces and generated a list of 35 unique English genre terms. These terms were then mapped onto a facet framework drawn from previous literature. Our preliminary findings show that platform genre labels function as multidimensional access points rather than simple genre categories, representing aspects such as setting, mood, plot or narrative, and production context. Cross-platform differences in labeling granularity and cross-language differences in semantic scope were also observed. The findings may inform the development of more consistent and user-friendly genre labels for digital comic environments.

1. Research background

Comic books have become a popular form of pleasure reading. According to a market analysis published in 2023, the global comic book market is estimated to grow from USD 19.05 billion in 2025 to USD 37.15 billion in 2033 [1]. Particularly, Asia Pacific is identified as the largest regional market. In Taiwan, comics are highly visible among young readers. A 2021 survey reported that around 70% of Taiwan's Generation Z is accustomed to reading comic books [2]. These reports show that comics are no longer a niche habit, but an increasingly important part of contemporary reading culture and media consumption. Traditionally, comics were serialized in magazines and later compiled into bound volumes. In recent decades, the reading environment has expanded access beyond print and made online reading platforms an important site for readers' discovery and consumption [3]. Online comic reading platforms do not simply distribute works; they also organize works through metadata, categories, and browsing structures that shape how readers encounter and interpret content [4], [5].

Existing research on comic description has focused primarily on metadata integration and cross-linking between established records and external resources. For example, Kiryakos and Sugimoto [6] proposed a linked data aggregation model for Japanese manga that incorporates bibliographic data from multiple provider types, including libraries, organizational databases, and fan web resources. These sources differ in authority, granularity, and descriptive emphasis. Generally speaking, metadata contributed by institutions usually include more authoritative records, whereas data from fan communities and organizational databases offer richer content-level details, such as plot summaries, character information, and volume-specific data. More recent studies have extended this line of inquiry by examining the use of online community data for

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metadata analytics [7] and the application of Linked Open Data (LOD) models to enrich the semantic representation of comic narrative structures [8].

Other studies have also explored integrated bibliographic models and descriptive frameworks. Oishi et al. [9] used linked open data to develop a dataset of comic books, anime, and video games. Nomura et al. [10] integrated the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), Wikipedia, and film/television content standards. They then created an interpretive data model that presents bibliographic information and the internal content of comic books. Similarly, Kodaira et al. [11] analyzed 3,421 subcategories under "Category: Comics" in Japanese DBpedia and summarized these subcategories using the FRBR model, finding that "Characters" accounted for the highest proportion, followed by "Series" and "Music." Since DBpedia's category structure directly incorporates information from the original Wikipedia data, these categories may reflect users' real information needs.

Beyond basic descriptive information, readers also rely on subject categorization, such as genre, when searching for pleasure reading materials in online platforms. Lin [12] found that existing appeal factor frameworks often fail to differentiate adequately between genres. Moreover, readers of different genres may have different expectations of a work. This issue has also been noted in studies on the segmentation of comic book readers. To provide a more comprehensive representation of comic book content, Akiyama and Yamanishi [13] combined topic models and large language models to generate attribute descriptions at a detailed level between genre labels and work summaries. Still, the issue of whether single genre labels are insufficient to represent the multidimensional nature of comics and related media remains unresolved. Addressing this limitation, Cho et al. [14] collected 1,597 terms from 36 online English-language animation databases and websites and then applied inductive and card-sorting methods to analyze and organize them. Their analysis revealed that anime genre terms encompass a wide range of informational features and extend far beyond simple single-label categories. Finally, Cho et al. identified 153 foci (e.g., thriller, drama) and further categorized them into nine major genre facets: audience, setting, mood, character, plot/narrative, subjects, association with other works, feature, and production.

Despite these developments, comics remain relatively underexamined within knowledge organization research, especially in terms of how online comic platforms operationalize genre categories for user access. This gap is particularly notable in Taiwan, where online comic reading is widespread. Accordingly, this exploratory study aims to compare genre-labeling approaches across the most popular online comic platforms in Taiwan. Specifically, we focused on the categorization practices in the user-facing navigation bars and investigated the genre labeling issues from the perspective of information architecture.

2. Method

We identified three of the most popular platforms in Taiwan based on website traffic rankings in 2025 [15]: LINE Webtoon (Webtoon, https://www.webtoons.com), MOJOIN (https://mojoin.com/comics), and CCC Webcomics (CCC, https://www.creative-comic.tw). Webtoon and MOJOIN are commercial platforms. By contrast, CCC has a distinct institutional background. Originally launched as the Creative Comic Collection, CCC began as a print comic publishing project funded by the National Science Council Digital Archives Program of Academia Sinica in Taiwan. The project aimed to support local comic creators and promote authentic Taiwanese story topics through the print comic format. In 2020, it transitioned to an online platform format and was later renamed CCC Webcomics. It is now operated by the quasi-governmental Taiwan Creative Content Agency. Accordingly, the genre labels presented on these three platforms reflect not only the interests of readers and content creators but also the representation of topics considered culturally and socially distinctive to Taiwan.

We applied a card-sorting technique to compare genre labels across platforms. This technique enables researchers to examine different data structures, assess whether equivalent meanings are represented consistently across platforms, and evaluate the effectiveness of the underlying information architecture [16]. Our analysis focused on platform-level rather than work-level genre labels. Accordingly, we manually extracted genre terms from navigation bars of the three platforms, and individual tags assigned to specific comic works were excluded from the scope of this study. Additionally, the three platforms differ in their available language versions (i.e., Webtoon offers seven language versions, including Traditional Chinese, Korean, and English; MOJOIN is available only in Traditional Chinese; and CCC provides both Traditional Chinese and English versions). For this reason, genre terms collected for this study were primarily in Traditional Chinese and English. During February and March 2026, we collected 22, 18, and 12 Traditional Chinese terms from Webtoon, MOJOIN, and CCC, respectively, as well as 22 and 12 English terms from Webtoon and CCC. All collected terms were entered into a shared Google Sheet for collaborative sorting and review by the research team.

We then grouped identical terms, synonyms, and near-synonyms into the same row in both languages, consulting the online Cambridge Dictionary when clarification was needed. For combined terms (e.g., Horror/Thriller), we created separate rows and placed them near the corresponding single-genre terms (e.g., Horror). Because Webtoon's Traditional Chinese and English interfaces did not always align, we used URL path names to determine English equivalents for Chinese-only labels. After sorting and translation, we collected 35 unique genre terms across the three platforms. Given that comic-specific databases usually integrate richer metadata schemes [6], we adopted Cho et al.'s [14] Anime Genre Facets Framework, which was developed using genre terms extracted from anime databases and websites, for our analysis. Since this framework was originally developed for anime, we modified the operational definitions of two facets (i.e., Association with Other Works; and Production) to better align with

comics. We also consulted Cho et al.'s list of 153 foci and followed their original facet assignments whenever a term in our dataset appeared in that list.

3. Result

As of March 2026, Webtoon's Traditional Chinese version (Webtoon_C) includes the largest number of genre labels (n = 22), followed by MOJOIN (n = 18), Webtoon's English version (Webtoon_E) (n = 17), and CCC (n = 11). In terms of the unique genres in the nine facets, Plot/Narrative exhibits the greatest diversity with 9 unique genres, followed by Setting (n=7), Subject (n=6), Production (n=5), Mood (n=4) and Audience (n=2). The rest of the facets (i.e., Character, Association with Other Works, and Feature) include only one genre. A detailed breakdown of these genres across the platforms is presented in Table 1.

3.1. Audience, Mood, Character

Regarding genre usage across the platforms, the Audience and Character facets reveal differences while the Mood facet shows similarities. Within the Audience facet, genres are defined by the target demographic of the work. In this category, Webtoon_C distinguishes between two demographic groups: "adults" and "shōnen (boys)," whereas MOJOIN exclusively features the "adult" group. For the Character facet which addresses figure-related concepts in anime, "superhero" appears exclusively in Webtoon_E, while other platforms recorded no terms under this category.

On the other hand, the Mood facet categorizes genres by the emotional responses that works elicit. Webtoon_C and Webtoon_E exhibit the highest diversity with four genres each: "comedy," "heartwarming," "horror," and "thriller." By contrast, CCC and MOJOIN both feature three genres, though their classifications differ: CCC consolidates "horror" and "thriller" into a single category, whereas MOJOIN maintains "horror" as a single genre. Notably, both Webtoon interfaces differentiate between "horror" and "thriller," a distinction not shared by CCC and MOJOIN. As of March 10, 2026, our analysis revealed a significant discrepancy in work counts: in Webtoon_C, thriller titles (n=152) nearly tripled horror titles (n=59). A similar trend was observed in Webtoon_E (189 thrillers vs. 72 horror works). Despite the lack of explicit definitions, a thematic divergence was observed that "thrillers" predominantly feature relatable urban legends and stalking crimes, while "horror" is used for gore and violence.

3.2. Setting, Plot/Narrative, Subjects, Feature

As for the Setting, Plot/Narrative, Subjects, and Feature facets, the platforms exhibit varying levels of genre diversity, reflecting different assumptions about user preferences and content categorization. The Setting facet encompasses the environment in which a narrative is situated. It is further categorized into setting-time, setting-place, and setting-situational dimensions; variation in genre complexity is observed across platforms. Webtoon_C exhibits the highest diversity with five genres, including "European court," "ancient court," "fantasy adventure," "school life," and "reincarnation." MOJOIN includes four genres: "historical," "fantasy/alternate universe," "sci-fi," and "school life."

Webtoon_E presents three genres: "historical," "fantasy," and "sci-fi," while CCC contains the fewest, with two genres: "historical" and "fantasy/alternate universe."

With respect to the Plot/Narrative facet, genres generally capture how narratives are structured and developed. MOJOIN and Webtoon_C exhibit the highest diversity with six genres each. MOJOIN identifies "drama," "adventure/action (adventure portion)," "mystery," "romance," "BL (Boys' Love)," and GL (Girls' Love)," while Webtoon_C includes "drama," "fantasy adventure (adventure portion)," "mystery," "romance," "LGBTQ+," and "slice of life." Following these, CCC lists five genres: "drama," "coming-of-age," "adventure/action (adventure portion)," "romance," and "mystery/suspense." Webtoon_E features the most streamlined selection with four genres: "drama," "mystery," "romance," and "slice of life." While MOJOIN maintains "BL" and "GL" as independent categories, CCC integrates these as searchable tags on work webpages rather than fixed genres. Webtoon_C labels the "LGBTQ+" genre as a collective category for these works. However, this designation is missing in Webtoon_E, where BL and GL works are integrated directly into the "romance" category. These different labeling approaches reflect distinct strategies for organizing diverse types of plot content.

The Subject facet comprises genres that represent the primary themes or topics of a comic. In this facet, Webtoon_E exhibits the highest diversity with three genres: "informative," "sports," and "supernatural." Meanwhile, MOJOIN and Webtoon_C each feature two genres; MOJOIN focuses on "martial arts (wuxia)" and "military," whereas Webtoon_C lists "martial arts" and "modern/work life." As noted previously, since wuxia (武俠) on Webtoon_C was not paired with an equivalent English term in Webtoon_E, the URL path names were used to determine its translation as "martial arts." However, the term "martial arts" still lacks the cultural nuances and thematic complexity inherent in "wuxia" works.

Finally, as a facet that captures highly specific yet pervasive characteristics in comics, the Feature facet shows a consistent distribution across the studied platforms. Each platform identifies exactly one category within this facet: Webtoon_C and Webtoon_E utilize the "action" genre, whereas CCC and MOJOIN employ the label "adventure/action."

3.3. Association with other works, Production

The Association with Other Works and Production facets reflect how platforms leverage external media connections and distinctive branding strategies. The former facet identifies genres that are referential in nature, defining connections to external media. Webtoon_C is the sole platform to include one genre, "adaptation (film/television)" in this facet. Previous literature indicates that Korean webcomics usually leverage their existing readership for film and television adaptations, and these adaptations can also attract viewers back to the original comics [17]. Therefore, from a commercial marketing perspective, creating a separate genre for film and television adaptations provides clearer browsing guidance for viewers searching for the original comics on Webtoon.

Table 1. *Result of genre categorization*

Facet/Platform	CCC	n	MOJOIN	n	Webtoon_C	n	Webtoon_E	n	Total number of gernes
Audience		0	Adult (成人向)	1	• Adult • Shōnen (Boys)	2		0	2
Setting	• Historical (歷史古裝) • Fantasy/Alternate universe (奇幻架空)	2	• Historical (歷史古裝) • Fantasy/Alternate universe (奇幻架空) • SCI-FI (科幻) • School (校園)	4	• European court (歐式宮廷) • Ancient court (古代宮廷) • *Fantasy*/Adventure (奇幻冒險) • School (校園) • Reincarnation (穿越/轉生)	5	• Historical • Fantasy • SCI-FI	3	7
Mood	• Comedy (幽默搞笑) • Heartwarming (溫馨療癒) • Horror/Thriller (恐怖驚悚)	3	• Comedy (幽默搞笑) • Heartwarming (溫馨療癒) • Horror (恐怖)	3	• Comedy (搞笑) • Heartwarming (療癒/萌系) • Horror (恐怖) • Thriller (驚悚)	4	• Comedy • Heartwarming • Horror • Thriller	4	4
Character		0		0		0	Superhero	1	1
Plot/Narrative	• Drama (劇情) • Coming-of-age (青春成長) • *Adventure*/Action (冒險動作) • Romance (愛情) • Mystery/Suspense (推理懸疑)	5	• Drama (劇情) • *Adventure*/Action (冒險動作) • Mystery/Suspense (推理懸疑) • BL (*BL* 耽美) • GL (*GL* 百合) • Romance (愛情)	6	• Drama (劇情) • Fantasy/*Adventure* (奇幻冒險) • Mystery/Suspense (懸疑推理) • LGBTQ+ • Slice of life (生活/日常) • Romance (愛情)	5	• Drama • Mystery • Slice of life • Romance	4	9
Subjects		0	• Wuxia (武俠) • Military (軍事)	2	• Wuxia (武俠) • Modern/Work life (現代/職場)	2	• Informative • Sports • Supernatural	3	6
Association with Other Works		0		0	Adaptation (film/television) (影視化)	1		0	1
Feature	Adventure/*Action* (冒險動作)	1	Adventure/*Action* (冒險動作)	1	Action (動作)	1	Action	1	1
Production	Fresh recommendations (新感覺推薦)	1	• Global • Illustrated notes (圖文記事)	2	• Graphic novel (小說) • Original Taiwanese works (台灣原創作品)	2	Graphic novel	1	5

The Production facet categorizes genres based on presentation styles or the identities of the creators. Within this facet, MOJOIN and Webtoon_C lead with two genres each: MOJOIN features "global" and "illustrated notes," while Webtoon_C includes "novels" and "original Taiwanese works." In contrast, CCC and Webtoon_E offer a more singular classification, listing "fresh recommendations" and "graphic novel," respectively. Given that CCC's "fresh recommendations" genre is not semantically intuitive, we conducted further exploration. According to the platform's official documentation [18], this genre was established to introduce experimental serialization themes that diverge from mainstream formats through trial issues. The platform characterizes such works as having "distinctive art styles or unique themes." Given its focus on visual presentation and thematic selection, we assigned this genre to the Production facet.

Webtoon_C = The Traditional Chinese version of Webtoon; Webtoon_E = The English version of Webtoon. The genres presented in *Italian* refer to categories with combined terms, assigned based on the specific facet they emphasize within this study.

4. Discussion

4.1. The granularity of genre labeling

While the categorization of genres into nine facets underscores the multidimensional nature of comics, existing genre labels often provide only a flattened, unidimensional view of a work's characteristics. To bridge the gap between simplified labeling and narrative complexity, platforms adopt various strategic interventions. These include dual or multiple labeling systems and the synthesis of separate concepts into combined terms. Such strategies reflect an attempt to balance taxonomic precision with user accessibility, allowing platforms to cover broader conceptual ground within a streamlined interface.

The terminological variations across platforms illustrate how multidimensional concepts are either integrated or separated within specific labeling frameworks. For

instance, CCC and MOJOIN both use the labels "fantasy/alternate universe" and "adventure/action", while Webtoon uses "fantasy/adventure" and "action." In fact, fantasy, alternate universe, adventure, and action are distinct genres. As noted by Cho et al. [14], these terms represent different facets: fantasy pertains to "setting," adventure to "plot/narrative," and action to "feature." The reduction of Webtoon_C's "fantasy/adventure" to simply "Fantasy" in Webtoon_E further exemplifies the loss of narrative nuance in favor of broader setting-based labels, echoing Unser-Schutz's [19] observations on the fluid boundaries of comic demographics.

This logic of labeling granularity extends to the distinction between "horror" and "thriller" on the Webtoon platforms. However, the usability of this granularity is debatable. Without explicit platform definitions, users might not intuitively grasp the nuanced differences between these labels. Therefore, future research must address the potential cognitive gap between platform-defined labels and the actual mental models held by comic readers.

The granularity of historically related genres also reflects a nuanced adaptation to the audience's cultural proximity. While Webtoon_E maintains a singular "historical" category, Webtoon_C subdivides this into "European court" and "ancient court." Semantically, "ancient court" is less precise than its European counterpart, as it denotes temporal and spatial dimensions without explicitly defining a geographical region. Within an East Asian context in Taiwan, it can be anticipated that this ambiguity might be mitigated by readers' cultural schemas. Thus, "ancient court" may often be naturally associated with East Asian dynastic histories (such as Chinese, Japanese, or Korean) without requiring explicit regional identifiers.

Furthermore, the divergence between CCC and MOJOIN in genre labeling underscores how a platform's institutional history shapes its current categorization logic. While both platforms share similar terminology, MOJOIN exhibits greater granularity by isolating specific features such as "military" and "modern/work life." In contrast, CCC tends to subsume these themes under broader categories, such as "historical." This distinction likely stems from CCC's origin as the "CCC Creative Collection," where the editorial mandate prioritized comics with local Taiwanese themes. Despite the expansion of CCC's work types over time, our analysis reveals that the foundational focus on local narratives has created a form of systemic inertia. CCC's category structure still reflects its original serialization policy, prioritizing cultural or historical resonance over the more segmented, feature-based categories used by commercially oriented platforms such as MOJOIN.

4.2. The variation of the Production facet across platforms

The Production facet demonstrates that genre labeling in online comic platforms has expanded beyond thematic content to encompass diverse forms of metadata, including artistic format and creator identity. Our analysis shows that platforms like MOJOIN and Webtoon utilize this facet to establish distinct brand identities through geographic and formal categorization. For instance, MOJOIN's "global" section functions as a collection

for international contributions, while Webtoon utilizes labels such as "graphic novels" and "original Taiwanese works" to differentiate content based on physical medium and creators identity. These categories suggest that the Production facet serves as a vital bridge between the work's internal narrative and its external industry context, allowing platforms to signal their market positioning and support for specific creative ecosystems.

It is worth noting that CCC's "fresh recommendations" genre illustrates a shift from objective metadata to subjective editorial curation. Based on our observation, this category serves as a vessel for non-conventional content that diverges from standard long-term commercial serialization models. However, the term "fresh" relies heavily on the subjective judgment of platform administrators rather than standardized genre definitions. This reliance on subjective descriptors creates a potential semantic gap. Without direct engagement with the content, users may find it difficult to discern the actual nature of the works from the label alone. Consequently, while such labels allow for editorial flexibility, they might also increase the cognitive burden on readers during the discovery process.

4.3. Cross-language semantic gaps

In terms of cross-language comparison, CCC shows that the terms in the Chinese and English interfaces are not always semantically equivalent. For example, the Chinese term "奇幻架空[1]" (fantasy and alternate world) is mapped simply to "fantasy", and "歷史古裝[2]" (historical and ancient costume) is mapped to "historical". In both cases, part of the original meaning is lost across the two language versions, as the concepts of "alternate world" (架空) and "ancient costume" (古裝) are not preserved in the English interface.

A similar situation also occurs on Webtoon, where 11 genre labels in Webtoon_C cannot be mapped to Webtoon_E. The most notable example is the Subject facet in which "wuxia" (武俠[3]) and "modern/Work life" (現代/職場) appear only in the Chinese version, while "informative", "sports", and "supernatural" appear only in the English version. In other words, the two language versions of Webtoon include substantially different subject genres. This pattern may reflect differences in subject preferences among readers of different languages. However, the gap may cause confusion for multilingual readers who search for comics using both language interfaces.

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study investigates genre labels on three major online comic platforms in Taiwan. Our analysis reveals variations across platforms and language versions in semantic scope, specificity, and naming practices. Some platforms distinguish concepts that others merge, while some labels are thematically clear and others remain vague.

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This finding highlights the complexity of labeling comics in digital environments, where genre labels must support both subject representation and users' access points. Moreover, genre labeling is shaped by both content characteristics and platform-specific assumptions, localization practices, and institutional contexts.

By applying a previously established Anime Genre Facets Framework, our preliminary findings confirm that genre labels represent multiple facets of comics. However, we also acknowledge that a framework developed for anime may not be fully applicable to comic genres, because their physical mediums are slightly different in nature. Thus, our next step is to conduct a user study to examine how readers actually use these labels when discovering comics online. We expect that future findings will extend the facet framework theoretically and inform the development of more consistent and user-friendly genre labels for online comic platforms.

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