



# Analysis of infrastructure-superstructure on platform and practices of Line webtoon Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The position of Digital platforms in the economy occupies a comprehensive position because it plays a role in the production, distribution and consumption of a digital commodity. This nature makes a platform an infrastructure in itself through the structuralist concept of infrastructure-superstructure. Furthermore, this concept can reveal how the webtoon platform significantly shapes the webtoon itself as a commodity format as shown by its three main characteristics: color, scrolling, and weekly. These three characteristics make the webtoon platform require a lot of labor to run its production mode smoothly. This not only impacts the welfare of webtoon comic artists who are required to work hard, but also has its own imperialistic side when webtoon platforms actively employ Indonesian comic artists with lower salaries, an inevitable result of the webtoon platform's mode of production itself.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Webtoon as a word in Indonesia can refer to two things: an online comic format and the platform that houses the comic (Muliawati et al., 2020). This dual meaning may seem ambiguous, but the truth is that webtoon can be both at once. In the beginning, webtoon referred to a platform founded by Naver in 2004 under the name Naver Webtoon, where webtoon itself is a combination of the words web and toon (Cho, 2021). While the comic format presented by Naver Webtoon is called webcomic, which is still a common designation in South Korea (Hanum & Kurniawan, 2023). The development of the meaning of webtoon that doubles its format at the same time only occurred after Naver Webtoon expanded its operations to the international level with the help of the government (Ryoo, 2020).

A glimpse of the meaning of an object (in this case a format) as a whole by using one of the brand names (platforms) that present similar products. In Indonesia, this phenomenon occurs for example with toothpaste (Odol), water pump machines (Sanyo), or even motorcycles (Yamaha). Of course, there are variations in each region because the naming will depend on the first brand that presents the product. From this perspective,

webtoon naming follows a similar pattern considering Line Webtoon is the first Korean webcomic provider in Indonesia.

The unique nature lies in the close relationship between webtoon as a format to webtoon as a platform. From the visual aspect, the characteristics of the webtoon format are determined by how Naver Webtoon optimizes it with the smartphone interface: full color, a long aspect ratio according to the screen (9:16), and presented in scrolling without pause (Kim & Yu, 2019). However, Naver Webtoon's platformization process of cultural commodity production (webtoon) where they are simultaneously publisher, distributor, and marketplace has affected the webtoon format more totally through both visible and invisible aspects (Kyung-Pil, 2023).

Indeed, throughout its history, the format of comics has always been influenced by the physical media and technology available. The selection of color palettes in American comics with high saturation and four-color combinations was determined so that the images could still appear striking even when using low-quality paper (Prytz & Palmer, 2020). Similarly, Japanese manga became popular in the Post-War period of 1945-1960 where color presented too high a production cost for a country that was in the process of rebuilding (Shi & Kin, 2020). However, the relationship between comic formats was limited to the medium of choice. Traditional comics are published through (print) publishers, not platforms, so they follow the dynamics and rules of (physical) commodities where products are produced and realize their added value by different parties (Hasian & Mardika, 2017).

The unique dynamics of webtoons caused by platformization have not escaped media studies. Cho (2021) explains how the process of platformization by the platform has created its own almost total media ecology. The focus is on the political-economic aspect as the South Korean government's involvement in the development of the webtoon industry has made it an unavoidable oligopoly. To reject the webtoon format is to not draw comics at all, a situation that Cho's study implicitly describes. However, Cho's comprehensive study seems to be missing something, especially after his study has actually placed strong evidence to draw a firmer line of evidence on how platformization has given platforms the power to sublimate formats and forms at the same time. Using the concept of base-superstructure, it can be said that Cho focuses on the base until the superstructure escapes his eyes.

Currently there is a gap on current literature on study that analyze platformization of webtoon on its political-economic aspect. Through the perspective of base-superstructure, this paper will not only look at platformization, especially of cultural products, in its political-economic aspects but also provide an explanation on the format side as an embodiment of superstructure. Furthermore it should be noted that platformization of webtoon are recent phenomenon which made previous studies on the subject are scarce even on global scale let alone studies that specifically study this phenomenon in Indonesia (Cho, 2021).

## 2. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

If we follow McLuhan's paradigm "the medium is the message" (1964) then in the case of webtoon the meaning process is not just a mere name embedding. (Naver) Webtoon is not just a platform that presents webcomics but also refers to an art form formed through a set of standards and formats set by it. (Cho, 2021). Especially considering that webcomics themselves in South Korea did not have a standardized format and came in various forms before being codified by the rise in popularity of Naver Webtoon itself in the decade of 2010 (Kim & Yu, 2019). Even in Indonesia, similar dynamics apply due to the existence of online comics without a standardized format that are unfortunate to cross the cyberspace (Ramadhan, 2020). Thus, the dual meaning of webtoon as a format and

platform at the same time is not just a mere naming but a reflection of the unique nature of webtoon itself as a medium, especially in terms of the comics industry.

The concept of base-superstructure is commonly used as a Marxian political-economic structuralist analysis. However, the development of Marxist theory in general on the cultural wing, as done by Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams, has allowed base-superstructure to become a suitable analytical tool to examine the unique nature of the dual meaning of webtoons as formats and platforms. One of the basic concepts in Marxism that has been inherited by many of its intellectual heirs is the conception of base and superstructure. The two concepts are a unity that forms one of the bases of thought and the lens of analyzing the political economy structure of Marxist ideology, especially in relation to conflict or struggle between classes. The definition of base based on orthodox Marxism is "real human existence based on real relationships between productive forces", and superstructure means "reflection, imitation, or reproduction of reality on the base directly or indirectly". (Williams, 2006).

The concepts of infrastructure and superstructure were originally intended to explain the political-economic aspects of class society. Moreover, the primacy of infrastructure over superstructure prompted some neo-Marxist scholars to abandon structuralism and establish the post-structuralist school. However, there are some western Marxist scholars who try to retain structuralism and adapt it to go beyond economic materialism and put culture at the center. One of them is Raymond Williams who tries to place base and superstructure into the study of culture. First, it is necessary to understand how Marx placed cultural (products) based on his labor theory of value using piano production as an example. The piano maker is clearly the base, with the piano distributor also included because it has realized surplus value despite not actively participating in its production. Meanwhile, the pianist, who is the last to utilize his commodity to play music, is the superstructure. Williams here objects because this position makes the pianist and even other cultural activities a dead end. Therefore, in analyzing culture through the lens of base and superstructure, he takes a different position: base is not just productive labor but productive forces, which more or less means that (creative) humans themselves are the base. (Williams, 2006).

Considering that the focus of attention of this study is webtoons which are (and produce) cultural products, Williams' definitions of infrastructure and superstructure can be used. However, Williams shifts infrastructure from productive labor to productive forces. This shift is useful if the analysis is carried out at the level of individual actors, seeing how webtoonists through their practices produce their work. However, the focus of this study is webtoon as a platform that through the process of platformization has become its own mode of production. In other words, webtoon as a platform is an infrastructure that produces webtoon as a format (rather than just a cultural product) which in turn is a superstructure. This makes the concept of infrastructure and superstructure based on orthodox Marxist definitions can be used as an analytical lens directly.

This application is possible as a result of the unique duality of the platform through the process of cultural platformization. It is a mode of production that produces its own superstructure to sustain the media ecology it creates. As Cho argues that "Webtoon platforms do not neutrally publish and deliver digital comics to readers, rather they (webtoon platforms) construct and drive the ways in which webtoons are produced, circulated, and consumed." (2021). Cho argument in this case raise further question on what is the role of political-economic aspect of that influence development of the webtoon industry specifically on shaping webtoon platform infrastructure and superstructure. The findings of this analysis thus will contribute to the scholarly understanding of the evolving relationship between infrastructure and superstructure in digital content platforms. The paper concludes by discussing potential implications for the future development of webtoon platforms and suggesting avenues for further research.

### 3. METHODS

This study conducted through integrative literature review methodology (ILR). ILR involves integrative and comprehensive approach to assess, critique and synthesize existing literature on a chosen topic that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge (Cronin & George, 2023). This approach is chosen for its ability to synthesize a broad range of scholarly works, theories, and empirical studies, providing a holistic understanding of the interplay between technological infrastructure, cultural superstructure, and user practices (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The first phase involves an extensive search across academic databases, digital libraries, and relevant online platforms using keywords such as "Line Webtoon," "webcomics," and "digital platforms," with a focus on publications addressing the Indonesian context. The inclusion and exclusion criteria will be defined to select literature based on its relevance to the research objectives, publication date, and academic rigor.

Data extraction will involve systematically retrieving key findings and methodologies from selected sources, with a subsequent thematic analysis to categorize literature into overarching themes related to infrastructure, superstructure, and user practices (Cronin & George, 2023). This process will culminate in the development of a theoretical framework that integrates insights from the literature review, guiding the subsequent analysis of Line Webtoon's technological foundations, cultural influences, and user behaviors.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Webtoon Platform as Production Mode Infrastructure

First, it is necessary to define what is meant by platform. Trettien (2023) in defining platforms uses a layered meaning for platforms that consists of four semantic meanings: 'computational', 'architectural', 'figurative', and 'political'. Meanwhile, Van Dijck (2013) sees platforms as mediators that "*shape the performance of social action rather than merely facilitating it*" (Cabalquinto & Wood-Bradley, 2020). Van Dijck further gives a technical definition of platforms as "providers of software, (sometimes) hardware, and services that encode social activities into computational architectures; they process (meta)data through algorithms and format protocols before presenting their logical interpretations in the form of user-friendly interfaces with basic settings that reflect the strategic choices of the platform owners." (Van Dijck, 2013). Their definitions show the different emphases of platforms: Van Dijck focuses on the constitutive role, while Gillespie emphasizes the metaporic misrepresentation of the platform (Cho, 2021). These two different emphases will help to understand the role and nature of *webtoons* as platforms, especially Van Dijck's definition that shows the powerful role of platforms on culture and society at large (Cho, 2021).

Broadly speaking, *webtoon* platforms fulfill Van Dijck's definition both as a mediator and its technical definition. The existing series of *webtoon* platforms facilitate or mediate *webtoon* comic artists to deliver their work to readers (Shim et al., 2020). All works available on the platform are also packaged and recommended to users through its own algorithm in order to provide the best recommendations and according to the individual tastes of the readers (Alt, 2022). But *webtoon* platforms are not just mediators or facilitators. They also act as publishers who pay comic artists to compose *webtoons* that will later become the main commodity that will be used to sell to readers (whose activity in turn will be sold to advertisers as harvested data) (Lamerichs, 2020). In addition to the wage that the platform pays to the comic artist, a cut will also be given through the sales of each individual *webtoon* episode based on the business model used, providing more incentive for comic artists to submit their work to *webtoon*

platforms (Dal Yong, 2019).

At first glance, *webtoons* look like a *marketplace* rather than a mode of production in its own right. After all, it's common for *marketplace* platforms like Amazon to have *inhouse brands* sold on its platform. But *webtoon* platforms don't just hire comic artists and act as publishers. It forms its own *content creator* ecosystem where there is a flow of talent and new content through a *user generated content* (UGC) system where amateur comic artists upload their work for free to the platform. Each individual platform may have different procedures, but in general, amateur comic artists who upload their work are incentivized through the opportunity to be appointed as *content officials who are* paid by the platform. The ecosystem of this process, as argued by Cho (2021), is that the system of Korean *webtoons* is not just a content provider and distributor.

This end-to-end control makes the *webtoon* platform a holistic mode of production. It is simultaneously a producer, a delivery service or distributor, a *database*, and a facilitator. Thus, the *webtoon* platform becomes an irreplaceable infrastructure that shapes and manages the overall production, distribution, and consumption of a *webtoon* commodity (culture). (Cho, 2021). Indeed, technically, comic artists can have their own production tools such as tablets and digital drawing pens as well as the drawing *software* used. There is also nothing preventing them from uploading digital comics outside the *webtoon* platform and regardless of the demands of the predetermined format. It's just that *webtoon* platforms control so much of the *surplus value* process that the decision *not to* publish online comics on these platforms has great economic repercussions. To use an analogy, a tailor can own his own sewing equipment and this means that he technically controls the mode of production. However, this puts him in a more vulnerable position as his production will depend on individual orders. Meanwhile, a tailor in a factory, even though he does not own his mode of production, his position is more secure through the wages paid by the factory owner as long as he is still employed every month.

The *webtoon* platform system in reproducing new talents through UGC uploads also marks a shift in the mode of comic production, at least in South Korea. In Kim & Yu (2019) study, the *webtoon* system is said to be open and has minimal barriers when compared to the pre-existing and more established *manhwa system*. In the *manhwa* system, there are obstacles in the form of social capital because a comic artist must first become an assistant to a more senior comic artist. While in the *webtoon* system this barrier does not exist because practically everyone can upload works directly to the platform. The loss of these social capital prerequisites triggered the phenomenon of "mass amateurization" (Kim & Yu, 2019). However, there is one notable difference between the two systems: in the *manhwa* assisting program, an apprentice comic artist is paid in the process of learning and accumulating knowledge, while an amateur comic artist on a *webtoon* platform does everything for free (Dal Yong, 2019). So from this shift in production mode, mass amateurization is paid with a more intense form of exploitation of young comic artists who want to start their careers because from the previously paid learning process, they have to do everything themselves. This form of mode of production also turns comic production from a group effort into an individually driven project (Kim & Yu, 2019).

There are not many options for South Korean comic artists here. Of all the print comic magazines, only one remains and *webtoons* have a *readership of 73.6%* of all comics both online and in print (Dal Yong, 2019). This virtual oligopoly in both format and platform makes *webtoons* the most *feasible* option for young comic artists. That means they have to go through the process of composing work and accumulating knowledge without being paid and most importantly, following the established comic format. Because of this, the *webtoon* platform fundamentally influences the way *webtoons* are produced, circulated, and consumed through means such as the

freemium business model, various modes of profit-making, standardization of serial publication, regulation of user comments and recommendation systems, *webtoon* reader apps, and amateur comic book league systems (Cho, 2021).

So a *webtoon* comic artist must follow a format that has been standardized through three distinctive features: color, *scrolling*, and published weekly. This standard was originally set by Naver Webtoon which was later adopted by its competitors such as Daum, Kakao, and Lezhin Comic so that the format applies across all available *webtoon* platforms. As for the profit-making scheme, the dominant model is *freemium* where most of the content is presented for free with paid content in the form of new episodes that can only be unlocked through paid coins (Pratiwi et al., 2022). Only Lezhin here is an *outlier* with a premium profit-making scheme, but that doesn't mean much. With more *webtoon* platforms using the *freemium* system, it means that the money-making scheme is the infrastructure of the production mode for *webtoon* platforms in general.

#### 4.2 Superstructure Sculpting the Format of Cultural Products

Through the concept of infrastructure and superstructure, the entire *webtoon* industry is part of the superstructure even though it has become part of *Hallyu* with an industry size of up to 368 million USD and the potential to grow to 894 million USD by the end of 2020 (Choi & Yoon, 2018; Kim & Yu, 2019). This is demonstrated through the dependence of the *webtoon* industry (and other cultural industry sectors) on the economic policies of the ruling government. In the 1980s, which is referred to as the pre-Hallyu era the development of the cultural industry was led directly by the government, which still adopted a developmentalist economy (Ryoo, 2020). In this era, the cultural industry policy focused on cultural identity so that the aspects of culture promoted were national music, painting, and calligraphy with further emphasis given to the simultaneous conservation and vitalization of the arts (Chung, 2019).

When the 1997 monetary economic crisis occurred that forced the South Korean government to take IMF loans and adopt neoliberal reforms, the cultural industry policy under the two administrations of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-hyun. The change was characterized by a retreat from the direct role of the government and a shift to indirect policies as practiced by the Kim administration. Following the demands of neoliberal economic reforms set by the IMF Kim also marked his economic policy with the breakup of large and dominant publicly and privately owned enterprises. As a result, the basis of South Korea's ultra-competitive cultural industry was formed during this period.

President Roh Moo-hyun's next term promised that he too would pursue a similar focus on cultural industry development. However, his administration was marked by a shift in economic policy focused on a free trade pact with the United States in which South Korea's film industry was most affected. As a precondition for pressing ahead with the free trade pact, the United States required the Roh government to abolish the protectionist film quota policy that had been responsible for the South Korean film industry thriving and surviving under the wave of globalization. The Roh government also clamped down on allowing full foreign ownership of the broadcasting sector. Lastly, Roh cut funding for the promotion of the cultural industry that had been in place since 1999 in 2007. Although the Ministry of Tourism and Culture argued that the policies taken by President Roh were strategic measures to navigate the economic climate at the time, the impact on the cultural industry was great. It can thus be seen how the superstructure, i.e. the cultural industry here, (and *webtoons* included) will depend heavily on the development of and can even be shaped directly by policies aimed at the value-added economic sector (infrastructure).

Of course, similar dynamics can be found when the concepts of infrastructure and superstructure are applied to *webtoons*. The *webtoon* platform as infrastructure

produces cultural commodities in the form of *webtoons* which are superstructures for profit. The scheme of profit-seeking or disposal is a form of production mode of the *webtoon* platform as infrastructure. Any changes that occur in the infrastructure, the superstructure - namely the *webtoon* format - will also be directly affected. As Cho, (2021) writes, "*webtoon platforms do not act as neutral publishers to readers, but rather they construct and drive the ways in which webtoons are produced, circulated, and consumed*".

As a cultural product, the status or position of *webtoons* as part of the superstructure is not in doubt. However, in the context of *webtoon* as a platform, it is no longer just a superstructure but an infrastructure that plays a role in the process of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural commodities (Duffy et al., 2019). The three main characteristics of *webtoon*, namely color, *scrolling*, and serialization in weekly time, are the result of the optimization of the format to be produced, distributed, and consumed as a smartphone application (Lamerichs, 2020). This format optimization was carried out by Naver Webtoon in an effort to capture a new market of smartphone users who need light entertainment, as well as economic stabilization that moved from free to a premium service (Cho, 2021). With these three characteristics literally forming the *webtoon format* itself, it can be said that the process of *webtoon* production becoming a commodity is part of its superstructure.

The color format of *webtoons* has considerable implications for the production process. The development of digital *imaging* technology has indeed simplified the coloring process in general while drastically reducing the price when compared to traditional coloring. However, the workload involved in the coloring process itself remains exponential, especially in comics production (and illustration in general) because the coloring process remains a deliberative creative endeavor. With a weekly serialization schedule, the workload involved requires a *webtoon* comic artist to hire a coloring assistant even though a new artist's wage is generally only enough to support himself or herself (Kim & Yu, 2019). With the large workload demands faced, it is not surprising that many *webtoon comic artists* have decided to set up studios and socialize the production process of their published works as a whole in pursuit of efficiency. Not all studios are established by established comic artists, so studios that are more vulnerable in position are forced to take on more titles to just cover operational costs. With many titles to pursue each week, there is also a process of efficiency that resembles a factory *assembly line* where each worker is given their own specialization.

The serialization of publishing on a weekly basis also influences how *webtoons* are shaped as a cultural product format and commodity. Freemium business models generally require either a large amount of content, coming out regularly in a relatively short period of time, or both, in order to grow and maintain an audience at an acceptable level (Carroni & Paolini, 2020). *Webtoon* platforms are no exception, where each *webtoon* title is generally assigned a day of the week and named after the day, such as *webtoon Saturday*, *webtoon Sunday* and so on. (Cho, 2021). The placement of time clusters on this weekly infrastructure not only ensures a consistent flow of content but also on the reader's side will form new habits that can be predicted by the platform owner. Such habit engineering falls into one of the modes of production of *webtoon* platforms that commonly sell reader data to advertisers or to display relevant advertisements (Cho, 2021). This aspect drives *webtoon* stories so that each episode ends with a *hook* or *cliffhanger* with the aim of keeping readers coming back the following week and the impact on the creative process of *webtoon* production cannot be said to be minimal.

The above description only explains the *free* part of the *freemium* model. In the *premium* aspect, *webtoon* platforms generally offer a number of *webtoon* episodes locked behind a *paywall* where a reader can unlock them by paying a certain amount

of coins that can be obtained through real money purchases. In South Korea, the 'pre-view' system is referred to as *miribogi*. Although locked episodes will eventually be accessible for free, the *miribogi* system has proven to be a success as it has transformed a *webtoon* platform that was once vulnerable in terms of income due to its reliance on advertising into an industry with a valuation of hundreds of millions of USD. However, maintaining the monetization mode means that a *webtoon* title will be extended or stretched out as much as possible, especially if the title reaches the level of success as old episodes will literally not generate any income when they are made free. Here the mode of production of the *webtoon* platform again affects *webtoons* as a format and a cultural product commodity simultaneously.

The *freemium* model of the above *webtoon* platforms, in other words, will continue to require new titles to be able to sell new episodes through the *miribogi* system. Platform owners will be incentivized to publish *webtoons* in quantity rather than quality. It is not surprising that *webtoon* platforms generally go through a period of time where a genre or type of story will dominate the platform especially after a story of the same genre has previously achieved success. For comparison, in 2017 alone Naver Webtoon granted official serialization status to a total of 137 titles. While Weekly Shounen Jump, a weekly serialized *manga* magazine, published a total of 59 titles from the time period of 2015 to 2019 of which only 4 are still serialized as of this writing. The large amount of content demanded by *webtoon* platforms' pouring model eventually led to homogenization and shaped the perception of *webtoon* as an entertainment that is like a snack culture (Yecies et al., 2020).

Changing one of these characteristics can be made possible through different modes of production. Lezhin, one of South Korea's mid-sized *webtoon* platforms has a premium business mode intact. This shift eventually allowed Lezhin to give its comics the opportunity to publish their work on a 10-day serialization. But Lezhin is just one player in the oligopoly of the *webtoon* industry. With most other platforms using the *miribogi* mode of production, *webtoons* will have a superstructure where *webtoons* as cultural product commodities have a temporary value, prioritizing the present, even though the workers behind their production have to bear a very heavy workload.

#### 4.2 Platform Infrastructure and Superstructure Dynamics in Indonesia

This study mainly discusses *webtoon* platforms through the concept of infrastructure and superstructure originating from South Korea. The author feels the need to place the results of the above analysis in the Indonesian context, especially considering the fact that Naver Webtoon, a *webtoon* platform that holds a *market share* in South Korea of 75%, opened an official branch in Indonesia under the name Line Webtoon Indonesia. Moreover, the Line Webtoon Indonesia platform has a significant impact on the development of the comics industry in Indonesia.

Transferring the results of the above analysis to the Indonesian context is not difficult because the characteristics of the mode of production used by Line Webtoon Indonesia are almost similar to Naver Webtoon in South Korea. One significant difference is how Line Webtoon Indonesia presents translated *webtoon* titles derived directly from Naver Webtoon among the original titles composed by Indonesian comic artists. The presence of translated titles (or Indonesian titles from an alternative perspective) alleviates the burden of the *miribogi* mode of production which demands a significant quantity of titles in order for profits to be made. However, there is no significant change in the superstructure of the *webtoon* production process as a commodity cultural product other than the use of Indonesian workers as hired labor.

However, beyond the infrastructure and superstructure, the existence of Line Webtoon Indonesia, especially with its status as a virtual monopoly on the *webtoon* platform, presents its own polemics. As stated earlier, Line Webtoon Indonesia has translated titles as *leverage* to reduce the burden of quantity demands from *its miribogi*

mode of production. While digital *platforms* do not technically have a limit on the content that can be hosted, *platforms* generally have an equilibrium between quantity and *discoverability* so there is a 'cap' on the content that can be published. This means that the presence of translated titles effectively reduces the number of Indonesian titles that can be present on the Line Webtoon Indonesia platform at any given time.

Such conditions will cause an overflow of workers that cannot be accommodated by Line Webtoon Indonesia as a single platform. *Webtoon* comic artists who have generally socialized the *webtoon* production process will need several titles at once to obtain sufficient operational costs for their assistants or studios. The existence of a group of workers or studios whose position is vulnerable presents a workforce or *labor* that can be paid cheaply by international *webtoon* platforms. As such, the overflow of workers who cannot be accommodated domestically and must seek wages from outside platforms has become what is called a literal (*international*) *reserve army of labor*.

In addition, it is questionable whether Line Webtoon Indonesia's virtual monopoly position has made it practice what Jin (2017) calls platform imperialism. Considering that Line Webtoon Indonesia is a branch of Naver Webtoon from South Korea, the aspect of unequal relations between the two countries further strengthens the suspicion of platform imperialism. Moreover, in the process of production mode, there is also an imbalance where Indonesian titles in Line Webtoon Indonesia must compete with fellow Indonesian titles and translated titles of Naver Webtoon at the same time while the opposite does not apply. But despite all these conditions, what Naver Webtoon does (through Line Webtoon Indonesia) cannot be called platform imperialism because its virtual monopoly status is not obtained through coercion over domestic competitors in Indonesia as is the case in the practice of platform imperialism manifested by platforms from the United States( Jin, 2017). The virtual monopoly status is achieved solely due to the absence of other actors ready to compete with Line Webtoon Indonesia as an alternative *webtoon* platform.

The latter analysis is not directly related to the analysis of infrastructure and superstructure. However, the author still feels compelled to include it to briefly show the potential space that cultural studies with Marxist theories have for media and popular culture, especially in the field of comics. The comics industry, despite its multi-million dollar industry valuation, has attracted little interest in scientific studies. Cho (2021) also wrote "*there has been little research to date on the production of graphic novels, web novels, illustrations, and other types of art that rely heavily on platforms in the twenty-first century*". Even to quote Seno Gumira Ajidarma, an Indonesian cultural scholar who discussed comics for his dissertation, "There are *not many scholarly studies that discuss comics*" (Gumira, 2011).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The platformization of culture has changed how cultural products are produced, distributed, and consumed with *webtoon* platforms being a prime example. (Cho, 2021). Using the concepts of infrastructure and superstructure in their orthodox definitions, an analysis of *webtoon platforms* reveals their unique nature as media. The *webtoon* platform, which controls the mode of production from upstream to downstream where the process of production, distribution, and even consumption can be controlled by the platform, has become the infrastructure of a mode of production in itself. The totality of the *webtoon* platform over its production makes the cultural product commodity produced not the only superstructure. The *webtoon* format is characterized by three main things, namely color, *scrolling*, and (published) weekly, which are part of the superstructure of the *webtoon* production mode. The color aspect coupled with the weekly serialization schedule has provided an exponential workload for *webtoon* comic artists, encouraging the socialization of the *webtoon* production process as a cultural

product. The production mode of *webtoon* platforms based on the *miribogi* system has influenced especially successful *webtoons* to extend their serialization as long as possible in order to maintain profits. Not only that, the *miribogi* system demands a large quantity of *webtoon* titles so *webtoon* platforms tend to publish new titles based on quantity which often results in the saturation of certain popular genres. In the end, *webtoon* platforms shape the perception of the cultural commodities they produce as light consumption even though the workers behind the production process are burdened by heavy workloads as a result of the mode of production they demand.

This analysis shows how the concepts of infrastructure and superstructure, even without using Raymond Williams' redefinition, can be used for cultural studies. Although infrastructure and superstructure according to orthodox Marxism place culture in a secondary position to infrastructure or the productive forces, this position does not make culture completely under the influence of infrastructure.

It has to be admitted that the primary challenge posed towards this research is the academic sources that focused on this issue are still scarce as it is a recent phenomenon. Furthermore, available sources often solely analyze the cultural aspects and values of comics and rarely they investigate into its industrial practice. A lot of concepts and analysis above has also been the result of off-the-record information from industry insiders that should have been formalised through the process of interview. This deficiency then creates a number of hindrances and steps that this research had to go through in order to reach the level of analysis required for this conceptual paper.

So from the problems outlined above, the primary suggestion will be to vouch for more academic studies of comics. The comics industry in its essence is an inseparable part of the cultural industry, to understated influence on modern life, proved by how Japan spread its soft power through manga, and how South Korea backs the *webtoon* industry to join its cultural industrial engine, giving extra power to boost the unending Korean wave.

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