

Communication Using Manga Expressions

The ‘Exhibition by Manga’ Pattern and a Case Study

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Abstract

In this paper, we delve into the potential of manga as a novel medium for communication. Among various potential applications, this paper focuses on substituting conventional text-based posters in exhibition booths with manga panels to provide a more engaging and illustrative form of presentation. We outline the framework of this approach, named ‘Exhibition by Manga,’ and illustrate its application with specific instances from our experiences, which introduced concepts of ‘creative society,’ ‘generator,’ and ‘pattern language.’ Ultimately, we introduce the concept of ‘mangacy,’ which denotes the literacy required for effective manga-based communication, a subject we aim to explore in greater depth.

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, humanity has utilized both drawings and words as mediums of communication. Following the advent of writing, texts and images started being jointly recorded on paper, serving both documentation and communication purposes. Within this publishing culture, the art form of manga arose, characterized by sequences of images that depict time progression alongside accompanying texts.

As a vehicle for storytelling expression, *manga* has spawned numerous works and has been cherished for its storytelling prowess. Particularly, Japanese manga, alongside anime, has achieved international acclaim, transcending borders to captivate a worldwide audience, thus affirming its significant influence as a form of entertainment.

However, it’s fascinating to note that the utilization of manga for non-entertainment purposes has been relatively scarce. Considering manga as a communication tool and delving into its potential represents a promising field of exploration.

This paper seeks to embark on such a journey. Our primary focus is the exploration of manga’s feasibility as an exhibition method. Initially, we will introduce a pattern that concisely encapsulates this concept, termed ‘Exhibition by Manga,’ followed by a discussion of our practical implementations of such exhibitions. Readers of this paper will not only have the opportunity to peruse the exhibited manga but also gain insights into the creative process behind these works. Finally, we introduce a novel concept, ‘mangacy,’ which denotes the skill of manga creation.

Now, let us commence by exploring the foundational pattern of this paper.

2. Pattern

Exhibition by Manga

In an exhibition booth targeting general visitors, you aim to convey specific content to visitors.

▼ In this context

Even if the research or content is intriguing, a uniform output method may not effectively convey its allure or interest to visitors. Traditional posters typically center around text with occasional illustrations, making it difficult to capture the attention of general visitors unless they have a specific interest in the field. Moreover, the difficulty in discerning whether the content is of interest may lower the willingness of general visitors to engage, emphasizing the importance of considering the target visitors for the exhibition and aligning the presentation methods accordingly.

▼ Therefore

Express the desired content through manga to create an exhibition that is both engaging and easy to comprehend. Manga is an expressive medium that tells a story through the actions and dialogues of characters, emphasizing visual elements. Integrate this manga style into your display panels by crafting a brief narrative that communicates the intended message effectively through a combination of imagery and text, serving as an engaging introduction that prompts visitors to want a deeper understanding. Collaboratively developing this with your team, through discussion and refinement, can enhance its impact.

▼ Consequently

Utilizing the appeal of manga, visitors are more likely to interact and read with interest. They may understand the message within the context of the story, making the content more tangible and easier to grasp, thus enhancing memorability. Furthermore, in an environment dominated by text-heavy posters, a manga-themed exhibit will stand out, attracting additional attention. Moreover, a space decorated with manga transforms into an exciting and captivating setting.

3. The Uniqueness of Manga Expression

The pattern ‘Exhibition by Manga’ utilizes the distinctive expression of manga. But what unique characteristics does manga possess?

The term ‘manga’ is also referred to as ‘comics,’ but here we define them as synonymous. Manga, fundamentally, consists of the three basic elements: “pictures, words, and panels” (Natsume, 1992; Natsume & Takekuma, 1995). The interplay and relationship among these three elements give rise to the concept of ‘story.’ ‘Pictures’ refer to the depiction of characters, settings, and the use of versatile lines, including the distinctive effect lines in manga. ‘Words’ encompass dialogue, onomatopoeia, and other textual elements. Finally, ‘panels’ serve as the basic units, defined by enclosed spaces outlined by straight lines, ensuring the continuity of time through their sequential arrangement.

When these three elements converge, manga emerges as a unique medium for expression, allowing readers to perceptually receive information and progress through the narrative. The

visual richness of illustrations, coupled with the textual components and the structured flow of time maintained by panels, and by adding the unique expressions of manga, collectively create an immersive and distinctive means of storytelling in the form of manga.

The sequential arrangement of panels gives rise to the flow of time, allowing readers to explore the experiences of characters and the depicted world. Furthermore, through the combination of text and visuals, manga conveys information more densely than mere textual descriptions, enhancing the reader's understanding through visual perception.

Furthermore, manga allows us to depict and visualize worlds that do not exist in reality. By embedding new concepts into fictional contexts and portraying them, we can understand these concepts through stories. Creative imagery in manga has the potential to evoke rich imagination in readers, leading to more creative and expansive forms of communication.

When using manga expression, there's a trade-off between stimulating visual information and imagination while reducing the explanatory information. It's crucial to consider and utilize where to place the emphasis of information transmission depending on the intended visitors.

4. Case

In this section, we aim to showcase the exhibition at our, Iba Lab's, booth during the Open Research Forum (ORF), an event open to public, hosted at the Shonan Fujisawa Campus (SFC) of Keio University, as a case study of 'Exhibition by Manga.' Here, the significance of manga exhibitions targeting general visitors and the collaborative creation process are introduced.

4.1. Iba Lab Exhibition at ORF2023

Open Research Forum (ORF) is a research exhibition aimed at translating research outcomes into societal impact. Each year, numerous labs present their research findings in various ways. While many labs typically use traditional posters for presentations, Iba Lab took a different approach at this year's exhibition. We used for illustrations and stories instead of using text-based displays to convey their ideas, aiming to engage visitors by evoking imagery. This shift allowed a wider range of visitors, from young children unfamiliar with academic content to elderly members of the community, to grasp and appreciate the exhibition's content. Some visitors remarked, "Even if it's complex, I can understand it through manga." This innovative method extended the understanding of their research to those not usually involved in academic realms.

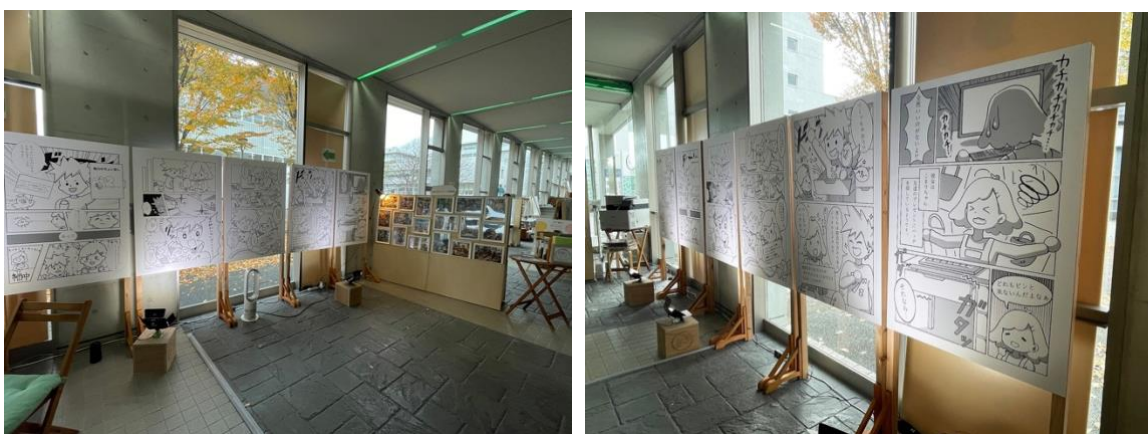


Figure 1: Iba Lab Exhibition Showcasing 'Exhibition by Manga' at ORF 2023.

4.2. Manga Displayed at the Iba Lab Exhibition

Let's proceed to examine the actual manga, represented in Figures 2-4. This manga introduces three concepts: 'creative society' (Iba, 2013, 2016), 'generator' (Iba *et al.*, 2011; Ichikawa and Iba, 2022), and 'pattern language' (Alexander, 1977, 1979; Iba, 2015).

For added clarity, we will include a textual description of the story below. The story begins with a girl named Komari searching for a bag as a birthday present for her friend. Even after looking through online shopping sites, she struggles to find the perfect bag. At that moment, a boy named Gener and a bird named Metar emerge from a drawer, and together, they decide to create a bag.

Komari, initially bewildered, starts making the bag with Gener. Throughout the process, Gener, behaving like a typical 'generator,' involves Komari in a unique world of creativity. A generator is someone with a distinctive worldview who engages others in the creative process. Komari, being drawn into this generator's world, gradually finds joy in the creative endeavor and becomes more proactive.

When they think the bag is finished, Gener exclaims, "It's not over yet!!!" and presents a pattern called 'CHERRY ON TOP' (Iba *et al.*, 2012; Iba and Iba Lab, 2014). Here, 'pattern language' articulates good rules of thumbs to support people's lives. 'CHERRY ON TOP' is a tip to adding extra effort to make something even better. In the end, Komari decides to include her friend's favorite keychain in the bag. While creating a gift for her friend with Gener, Komari learns about what is 'creative society.'

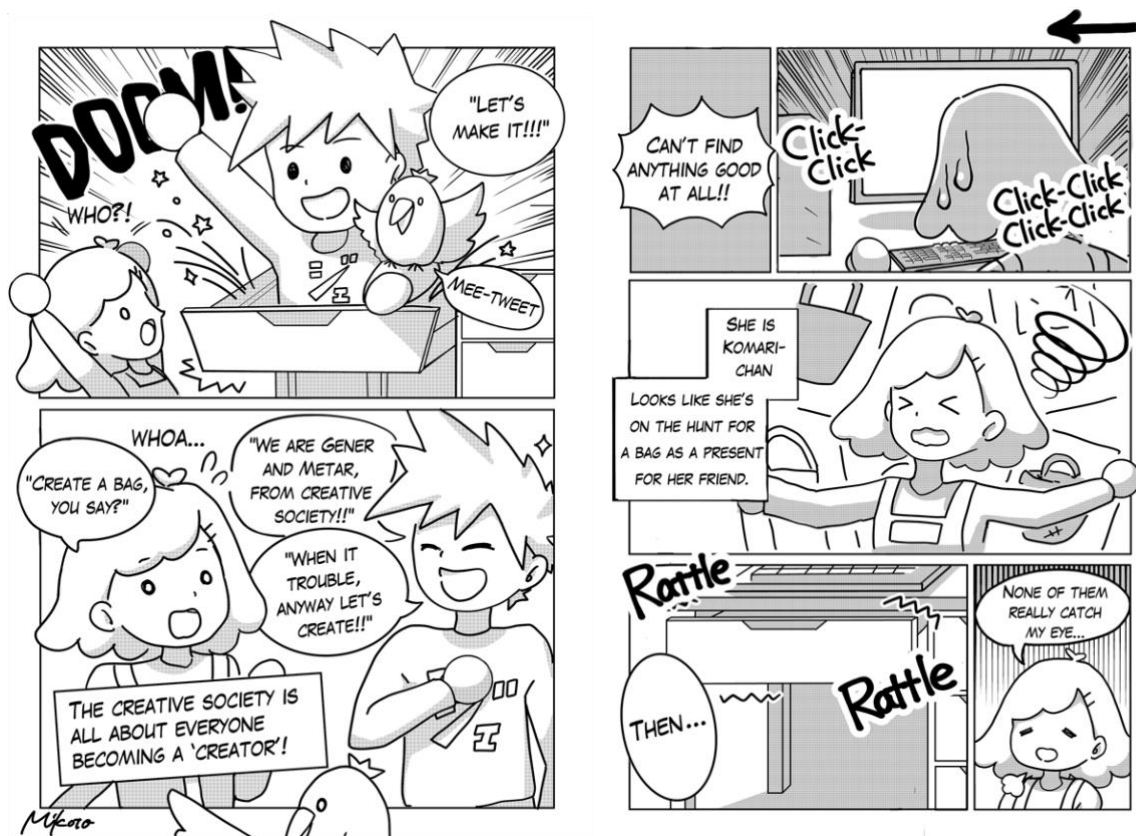


Figure 2: Iba Lab Exhibition Manga at ORF2023, page 1-2.



Figure 3: Iba Lab Exhibition Manga at ORF2023, page 3-4.

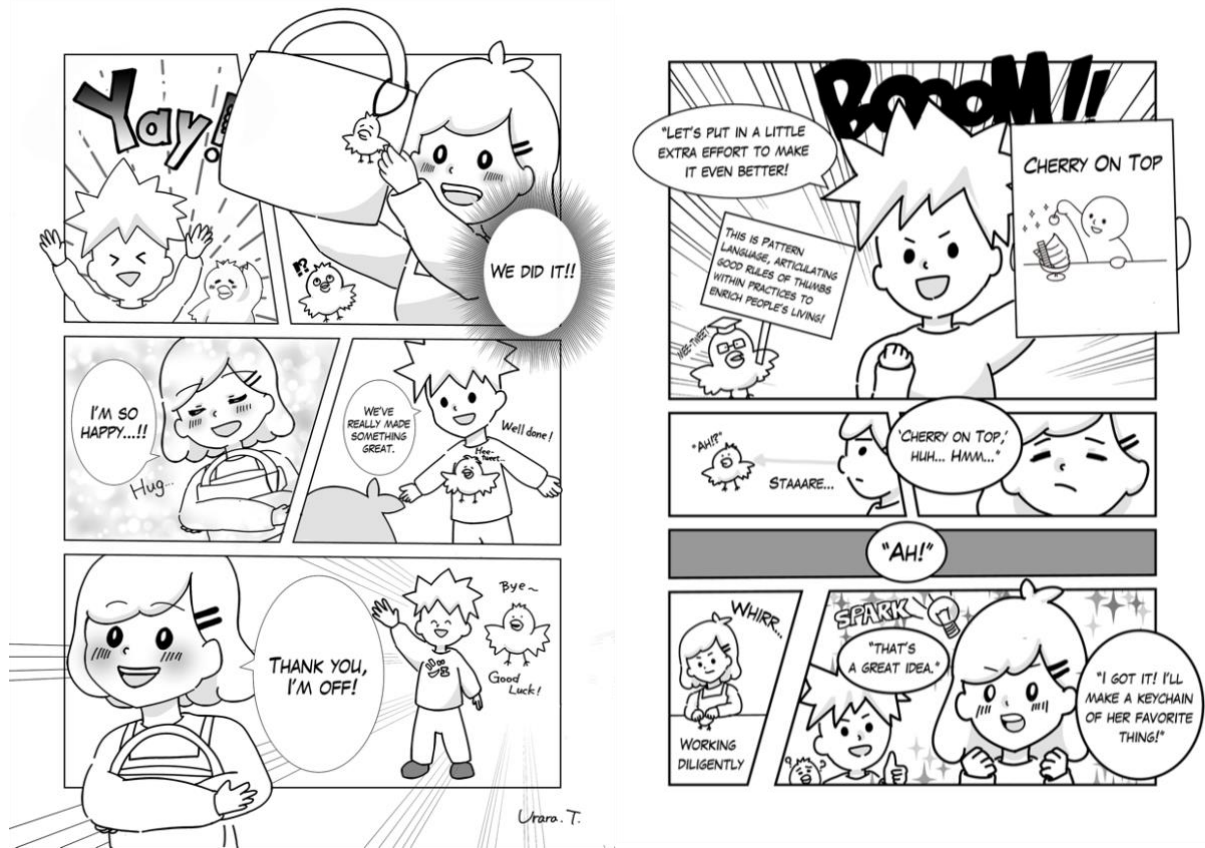


Figure 4: Iba Lab Exhibition Manga at ORF2023, page 5-6.

4.3. Crafting Process of the Manga

This manga is the result of a collaborative effort rather than the work of a single author. Initially, some members drafted character prototypes (Figure 5), refined them through discussion (Figure 6), and crafted the story (Figure 7). Subsequently, the group collectively deliberated on the manga's expression (Figure 8). In this way, the manga was created through collaborative teamwork (Figure 9).

After producing the first draft, we printed the manga in a large format, allowing fellow lab members to review it from a reader's perspective. We discussed modifications needed to enhance clarity and appeal (Figure 10). This iterative process of refinement was repeated multiple times to strengthen the story and expressions. Ultimately, three members each contributed the final touches to two pages, culminating in the final piece.

When it comes to creating manga, some people may feel discouraged because they believe they're not good at drawing. However, in this context, the quality of the artwork, whether good or bad, is not the issue. What matters most is the act of expression itself, even if it's with simple drawings.



Figure 5: Visual Brainstorming on Characters.

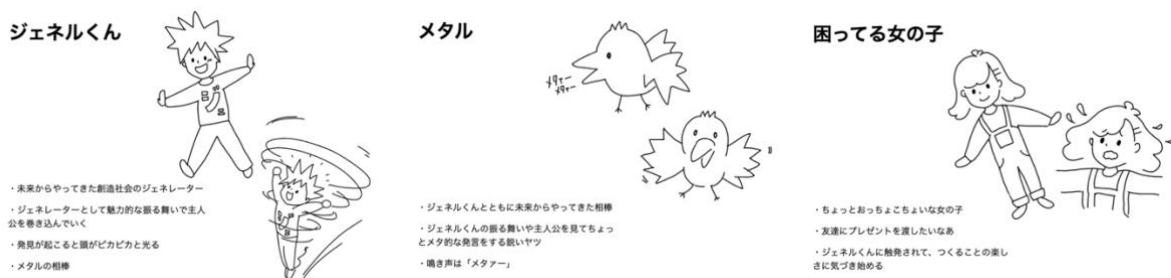


Figure 6: Character Specifications.

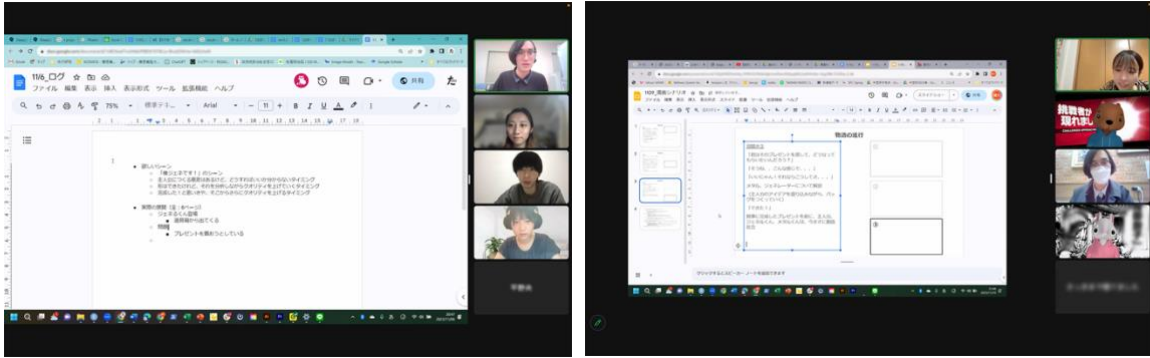


Figure 7: Collaboration for Story Making.

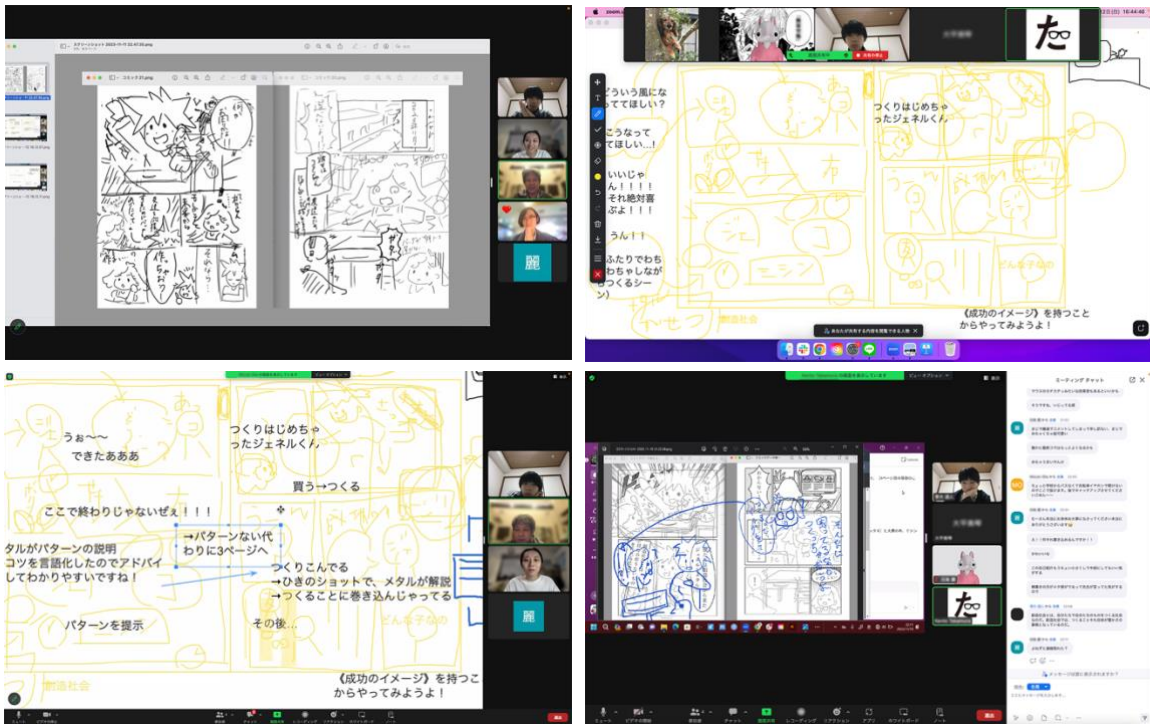


Figure 8: Discussion on the Composition of Manga Panels and Story Development.



Figure 9: The Manga Crafting Team.



Figure 10: Discussion with the Fellow Lab Members.

4.4. Scenes of the Exhibition

Over the course of the two-day event, our booth featuring the ‘Exhibition by Manga’ attracted a significant number of visitors (Figure 11). In front of the exhibits, several staff members from the lab were on standby. After visitors viewed the exhibits, they provided additional explanations about the concepts introduced in the manga, the relationship with the research, and supplementary information about the exhibits.

Many stopped to read with keen interest, while others engaged in discussions or posed questions inspired by the content. The exhibition’s clarity and appeal garnered positive feedback, particularly from children and teenagers. A high school student remarked, “Since it’s written in manga, it’s easier to read than plain text.” Although we initially feared that adults might not find it appealing, such concerns were ultimately unnecessary. The exhibition’s novelty also prompted discussions about the methods of display. Overall, this exhibition enabled us to genuinely feel the substantial impact of manga as a medium for communication.

5. Consideration

Here, we will explore the uniqueness of the manga as a form of expression and delve into the reasons why it serves as an effective medium for communication.

5.1. Future of Communication Using Manga Expression and ‘Mangacy’

In this paper, we introduced ‘Exhibition by Manga’ as a new approach to communication through manga expression, showcasing its pattern and example. Although this paper emphasizes the exhibition aspect of manga, there are extensive communication opportunities through narrative development in both pictorial and textual manga. As an exploration of this, we endeavored to articulate pattern language patterns through manga (Iba *et al.*, 2023).



Figure 11: Visitors Enjoying the Booth Featuring the ‘Exhibition by Manga.’

Additionally, the potential extends to other areas, such as transforming written letters into manga expressions, illustrating recipes and operational instructions, and even representing academic papers in manga form. Beyond facilitating communication with others, individuals can also create personal diaries in manga style (indeed, a graduate student in our lab has begun documenting their parenting journey in manga).

This observation leads us to recognize that many may feel they lack the skills to create manga compared to traditional writing. For most, manga is primarily a medium to be consumed (read) rather than produced personally. Consequently, it’s likely that many are unsure how to manifest their thoughts in manga form. Creating manga involves integrating sensibility and logic to produce output, making it a unique form of expression that attempts to communicate with others.

In light of this, enhancing the ability to draw manga, or ‘mangacy,’ seems imperative. While ‘literacy’ typically refers to text, suggesting a semantic incongruity with ‘manga drawing literacy,’ we propose the term ‘mangacy.’ This suffix ‘cy’ indicates a state or capability, implying that just as literacy is the power of letters, ‘mangacy’ is the power of manga, encompassing both reading and drawing manga expressions.

As we continue to practice and refine communication through manga expression, we aim to further investigate and develop the concept of ‘mangacy.’ If you’re intrigued by this innovative and slightly fantastical vision for the future, we welcome collaboration.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we introduced a pattern and example showcasing the potential of utilizing manga expression in exhibitions as a means to make concepts both engaging and easily understandable. By employing the emotionally and logically approachable medium of manga, we also discussed the possibility of fostering ‘mangacy,’ a literacy where more individuals engage in reading and creating manga beyond mere entertainment. While we presented a case study of an exhibition, future endeavors are expected to explore manga’s usage in other settings and formats (such as 4-panel manga), as well as to describe additional patterns for creating more content-rich and intriguing manga.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our profound appreciation to our team members Mikoto Odaira, Ema Okubo, Haruto Aoki, Kento Takamura, and O Hirano for their collaboration in bringing the manga concept to life for the ORF 2023 Iba Lab Exhibition. We extend special thanks to Hiroaki Tanaka for his insightful and practical advice. Our sincere gratitude also goes to all the Iba Lab members who participated in thoughtful discussions and offered invaluable feedback. Everyone’s collective contributions were pivotal to the success of this endeavor. We would also like to express our gratitude to Acci Baba for serving as a shepherd and providing insightful feedback, and to Naoko Osada for contributing comments to the paper. Lastly, we would like to thank Charles Danoff, Valentino Vranić, Aleksandra Vranić, Mitsuhiro Yamazaki, Takao Tomono, Rio Nitta, Sawami Shibata, Kaito Shiota, and Mimi Kuwataka for having a lot of discussions and receiving valuable comments in the Writers’ Workshop.

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