Survey says young Japanese less interested in manga than older generations

Thursday 5 June, 2025

It sounds like a case for Detective Conan: A recently conducted survey revealed that young Japanese are not as interested in manga—the iconic comic book medium—compared to older generations.

Published on Japanese site PR Times in March, the results indicate that about 70% of those in their 40s read manga. However, the figure drops to 40% for those in their the 20s. The group in their 30s, raised on the internet, is split down the middle at 50%, making it a point of inflection.

Since the end of World War II, manga has been a popular form of entertainment. However, interest is now waning.

“Manga’s enduring appeal in Japan is at a crossroads,” said Marta Synelnyk, Content Writer at file-editing platform PDF Guru, which commissioned the survey. “While those in their 40s and 50s uphold its legacy, younger generations are drifting, captivated by digital alternatives.”

The aim of the survey was to get a better understanding of the publishing industry in Japan. It targeted a total of 2,000 persons (901 men and 1,099 women).

For decades, young people would follow the adventures of robotic cat “Doraemon.” Into adulthood, their interests may transition into more mature fare, perhaps the dark fantasy world of "Attack on Titan" or the latest investigations of the aforementioned kid sleuth Conan in “Case Closed.”

The popularity of manga has also spread internationally, notably in 2002 with the launch of an English version of magazine Shonen Jump, which featured translations from popular titles like “One Piece” and “Yu-Gi-Oh!” Interest in the U.S. is particularly high. The search frequency on Google for the English term “manga” in the U.S. averages around 290,000 per month, the most of any country.

In Japan, however, there appears to be a shift in priorities taking place. Synelnyk said, “Early exposure is pivotal—57% of readers started in elementary school, cementing lifelong habits. Although more than 60% of respondents reported reading manga, only around 23% of respondents read manga regularly, a startling drop from its perceived ubiquity.”

For those who still enjoy manga, their interests are quite diverse. About 56% of respondents favor action-adventure themes, while roughly 42% find favor with more mature, psychological or thriller content. Other genres, such as romance, everyday life, fantasy, comedy, horror and sports, also register notable interest, ranging from roughly 17% to 32%.

Gender tends to shape preferences. Men prefer action-heavy themes (65%) and printed magazines (48%). Meanwhile, women choose romance-focused titles (47%) and digital reading (40%).

Obtaining manga is typically done through physical bookstores (41%) and free manga apps or websites (40%). Lesser-used sources include manga rental shops (7%) and libraries (5%).

Respondents primarily keep up with manga industry trends through digital channels, with about 40% using social media and 38% relying on industry websites and blogs.

The latter platforms also appear to be the path to survival for the medium itself. Synelnyk concluded, "To thrive, manga must embrace digital formats and target elementary-aged readers, ensuring its cultural grip endures. Manga’s next chapter depends on recapturing Japan’s youth.”

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