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Reading Walls: Digital Social Readers

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ABSTRACT

Reading and writing have now become more democratic. Reading has taken to a new level since the internet has become the main source of reading. Reading is seen as no longer a one-way communication, instead, it has become interactive. Readers easily can contact the writer or co-write or become authors themselves and self-publish their work online. Social media participation in digital social reading has allowed this phenomenon to take place. One of these social reading platforms is Wattpad. Wattpad is a recent example of how a new generation of influential and innovative writers and readers collaborate in this social media publication. Wattpad stories are known to be 'alive and breathing' as writers and readers can participate in the inline comments, thus creating an online social reading platform. The inline comments from readers and authors were investigated in this research. A qualitative method of textual and content analysis was done to assess the inline comments of a fanfiction story over a social online reading platform which is the Wattpad. It is hoped this study will help to give an insight into digital social readers among Malaysian undergraduates,

Keywords: *inline comments, digital social readers, reading motivation, reading engagement*

1. INTRODUCTION

The reading culture of the youngest generation in the 21st Century has dramatically changed. Reading is no longer on paper or hard copy books, instead, it is on online platforms. Reading is done mostly through technology. Research done by [1]revealed that the trend of reading among undergraduates in a Malaysian university is that they prefer to read from all read electronic sources such as e-books, blogs, and web articles on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms.

According to [2] to understand this reading culture, a need to understand the mind of the reader is important. Furthermore, in their research, they elaborated by stating that this need is important mainly because, firstly, a large amount of reading happening on digital social platforms and the users' comments are important to investigate the readers' responses. This is due to the reason that reading on digital social media platforms allows readers' comments in real-time, unlike the normal traditional reading.

2. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, Wattpad is one of the biggest digital social reading platforms with several 80 million monthly readers and writers globally (Wattpad.com, 2019). Wattpad started in 2006 in Toronto, Canada. It was founded by Allen Lau and Ivan Yeun. It took Allen Lau ten years to build a network where reading can be done on mobile, social networking, online collaborations, online communities, and user-generated content [3].

Wattpad offers genres such as mystery, romance, sci-fi, poetry, and fan fiction. To date, Wattpad works on a transmedia platform. Stories were written and get to be published on online platforms; hence being produced in movies, comics, and merchandise. For example, stories from Wattpad are being produced for Netflix series or movies. Recently, a digital entertainment company in Asia, Mediacorp Singapore collaborated with Wattpad to produce stories from Singaporean writers in Wattpad. Meanwhile, other producers from different countries are also collaborating with Wattpad. Leading entertainment and media partners are working together with Wattpad storytellers. Iffix for Indonesia announces their partnership with Wattpad to produce 26 films, whereas the Philippines's TV5 co-produces the hit stories in Wattpad [4].

As such, Wattpad is seen as one of the favorite platforms for storytellers to write their stories. As the numbers of storytellers grow, Wattpad has become one of the main choices in writing and reading stories. Up til now, 80 million readers and writers use Wattpad on daily basis [5].

Due to the popularity, there are a few features in Wattpad that make it appealing to 21st-century readers and writers. The available features of Wattpad are seen as one of the biggest factors that attract young readers to read and young authors to write. Below are some of the features in Wattpad that make it one of the popular digital social reading and writing.

Table 1. Wattpan Features

	Features in Wattpad	
1.	Inline Commenting	Inline comments allow readers to publish their thoughts in the stories. Readers may give comments at the end, middle, or beginning of the stories. Thoughts of the stories are shared in this feature.
2.	Multimedia	Wattpad allows their storytellers to insert animated GIFs, images, Vimeo, and YouTube videos to add visual elements to their stories. The goal of this project is to make Wattpad a home for new forms of storytelling. With the multimedia feature, the storytellers can create and share comics, cookbooks, travel diaries, fashion blogs, and more.
3.	Broadcasting Messages	Wattpad allows the writers to broadcast their latest writing and when this is done, the audience will be engaged to read their work. The broadcast features updates, content, and connects the story with fans via an online platform.
4.	Quote Art	The quote art is one of the favorite tools in Wattpad. Snippets of story passages on image platforms like Instagram and Pinterest and other social networks can be posted via Quote Art. Hence, this helps stories to go viral and assist writers and readers to promote and connect stories online.
5.	Voting	One of the features of Wattpad is voting. Voting helps readers to rate the stories in Wattpad. The more votes a writer gets, the more interesting the story is. Voting allows ranking of the stories in Wattpad.
6.	Curated Recommendations	Wattpad uses the Elasticsearch algorithm to recommend the stories for readers that allows self-ranking for the stories written. Elastic search is a system where the techniques to power the search by re-ranked the stories.
7.	Offline reading	Wattpad future allows writers to earn money when they publish their stories. Successful storytellers will be contacted by the Wattpad team. Wattpad offers coaching under programs like Wattpad Studios, Wattpad Books, Wattpad Paid Stories, and
		opportunities with Wattpad Brand Partnerships for storytellers.
8.	Mobile Writing	In digital social reading, these features play an important role in developing the stories. As such, this research focuses on the inline comments in Wattpad features. Online Participation is important when it comes to writing and reading on transmedia platforms. This online participation comes in the form of inline comments in Wattpad. Inline comments provide an insight of the reader and the writer. This can be seen in the fan communities that were sharing stories and user-generated stories.
9.	Wattpad Future	Wattpad future allows writers to earn money when they publish their stories. Successful storytellers will be contacted by the Wattpad team. Wattpad offers coaching under programs like Wattpad Studios, Wattpad Books, Wattpad Paid Stories, and opportunities with Wattpad Brand Partnerships for the storyteller.

This paper contributes to the debate of hand Transmedia Narrative by exploring how and why Malaysian Undergraduates participate in Wattpad in one of the feature which is the in-line comments.

3. METHODOLOGY

A content analysis was done to investigate the understanding of Malaysian undergraduates' participation in Wattpad. An interview was conducted among 18 Malaysians undergraduates who are actively involved in Wattpad with a record of at least a minimum of 10 stories being published in Wattpad. During the interviews, themes were identified to have a better understanding of the research.

This study adopts [6]framework on coding and selecting the themes for the content analysis .In Taddeo's analysis the samples who were authors and readers were classified according to the classfication of [7]. Similarly, this research adopts this classification when analysing the readers.

The themes and coding were done as described in the picture below. Content analysis was done on an open-source qualitative data analysis software called Targuette. Targuette is being used as it is a free research tool software that allows analysis and gains insights into data before interpretation. The coding was done in Targuette to achieve the codes and iterative analysis was compared to achieve the themes. The themes were analyzed in three stages as such.
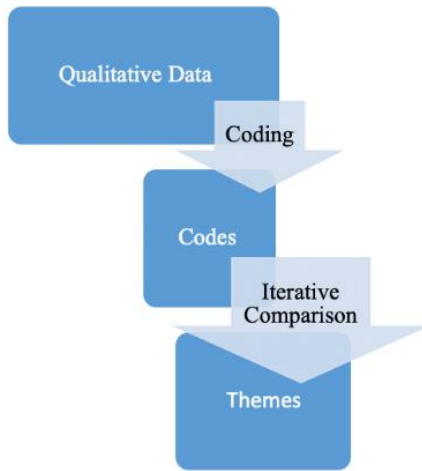
Figure 1. The methodology used in this research.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The content analysis revealed six themes that emerges from Wattpad storytellers of the Malaysian undergraduates. However, only one theme will be discussed in this finding which is about inline comments. Figure 2 depicts the results from coding

Figure 2: Coding analysis in Targuette.

These inline comments were coded into four categories as such;

1. Storyline development
2. Interest in fandom
3. Communicate with special interest in-line commenters
4. Improve their language learning

All 18 interviewees express the importance of being recognized in transmedia platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and other social media pages that associate them with their fan fiction characters. The storytellers take into account of what their fan communities' opinions in the inline comments to proceed with their writing.

The first theme, which is storyline development. Storytellers were inspired by their fans in their writing. Some stories were built on the comments of their fans.

Table 2. Theme 1

Theme 1	
Storyline Development	One interviewee, by the name of Zara (pseudonym), explained how important the opinion of her readers was when she curated her stories to the next chapter when she was writing on teen's diary. Her story was published with a rating of 32.7 likes and read by 672 readers. Her ideas were developed from the comments of the teenagers' friends.

Similar to [6], this theme motivates the storyteller to write more and readers to be a fan community of the storyteller. Two phases were discovered during this process where the storyteller interacts with her community or readers. The first phase allows the readers to feel as if they know the storyteller as an ordinary person, just like them. In the second phase, the storyteller interacts with her community.

The second theme was the interest in fandom. Wattpad allows undergraduates to post on social media pages and this has become a motivating factor to the undergraduates. The storytellers were motivated to communicate with their fans or readers, transforming from behind the scene of writing stories to a fandom, where a community of readers or writers with the same interest. Most interviewees expressed their overwhelming experiences on social media pages when their fans are now their followers.

Table 3. Theme 2

Theme 2	Interview Excerpt
Interest in fandom	An interviewee, Daniel (pseudonym) uses his fanfiction name as "Gabriel Cowie" with a steady number of 200 followers, whereas on his social page he has only 64 followers. Daniel mixes his everyday life journeys with his fanfiction character as if giving life to "Gabriel Cowie". His Wattpad personality grows in Daniel's social media pages. Daniel now communicates with his fans as his fanfiction character.

The third theme emerged as communicate with others in-line comments. Some of the interviewees expressed their shared experiences with their fans as part of their healing process.

Table 4. Theme 3

Theme 3	Interview Excerpt
Communicate with special interest in-line comments	Lily (pseudonym) explained how she communicates with her fans because she has issues coping with her depression. She shares her depression episodes with her fan communities. The aim of this case, is to communicate with her fans with similar experiences. Lily expressed her feelings in Wattpad to help others with this disorder.

Another theme that emerged in this research is a language learning through in-line comments.

Table 5. Theme 4

Theme 4	Interview Excerpt
Language Learning	Huda (pseudonym) elaborated how she learned new words from her readers and writers. When she communicates with them, the reader uses words that she is not familiar with, and she will look up for the word in the dictionary. The fact that she doesn't see her fans, makes her learning language easier.

The results of the interview are congruent to the study done by [6] on Italian teenagers' usage of Wattpad. Three themes about in-line comments depicted similar results which are storyline development, Interest in fandom, and communication with special interest in-line commenters in [6] study. However, one theme that emerged from this study is language learning in the in-line comment, which is theme four. Interviewees shared that they learn new words or vocabulary from the inline comments in Wattpad.

As the in-line comments in Wattpad work similarly to social networking services, it was found out that this feature allows Malaysian undergraduates to use in learning the English Language. Thus, a similar study done on Malaysian university students revealed that students reported making use of social networking services to improve their English [8]. Learning English can take place by socializing in Wattpad since it provides a safe and conducive environment for them to use the language.

5. CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that Wattpad is a form of the new trend of reading among digital social readers. Digital social readers read and communicate with their authors on the site through inline comments. This feature is important as writers use Wattpad to enhance their skills as writers, as social media influencers and a platform to heal. A striking finding revealed that Malaysian undergraduates also learn English through the inline comments. Wattpad is seen as a tool to help undergraduates to learn the English language in a digital society. However, further research is needed to look into learning the English Language through Wattpad to provide a better understanding of 21st-century digital social readers.

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