



From Manuscript to Marketplace: The Digital Transformation of Indie Literature

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Abstract. The digital era has ushered in a transformative period for indie literature, significantly simplifying the process of publishing literary works and necessitating a reevaluation of their value. This study asserts that innovation is a cornerstone of this evolution. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the research explores the creative processes, marketing strategies, and the broader impact on indie writers in the digital landscape. Data were gathered through interviews with indie writers and analyzed using descriptive techniques. The results indicate that the production and marketing of indie literature are deeply intertwined with digital technologies, which streamline the efforts of writers, publishers, and marketing teams. Indie writers emphasize that these digital advancements are crucial in facilitating the publication and distribution of their works, marking a significant shift from traditional to digital paradigms.

Keywords: Digital, Indie Literature, Literature, Publishing, Transformation.

1 Introduction

In the MBKM (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka*) program, several campuses provide students with the option to choose one type of scientific work as a final assignment or requirement for undergraduate-level completion. Not only theses, but students can also take the path of creating or producing literary works in various forms such as novels, poetry anthologies, short story anthologies, drama anthologies or scripts, and essays. Having such a choice is one of the conveniences for students who have actively and productively produced literary works.

As a final assignment, students will be asked to create a literary work accompanied by a report. The report contains the creative process of creating the work. Such as sources of inspiration, background of story acquisition, and also the design process. Meanwhile, the literary work that has been compiled can then be published and officially recorded to be shown as the final product.

Although for students of the Indonesian Language and Literature study program, creating literary works is nothing new. As students who study and delve into literary works, creating or producing works is a crucial part of it. However, novice writers who

have never published their books through a publisher usually have a lot of questions. Questions such as: how to publish a book? Does it take a long time? How much does it cost? How to market it?

According to Widuri (2017), there are currently two types of publishers in Indonesia, namely major publishers and indie publishers. The existence of both types of publishers provides writers with the means to publish their work. The emergence of indie literature seeks to break free from the rigid rules and constraints that are inherent in the world of writing and publishing, making indie literature a breath of fresh air and an innovation for novice writers, as well as a distinguishing factor against the consistency of literary works (Yulianeta, 2023). Major publishers have been developing for a long time in Indonesia, but along with its development, there are indie publishers. Indie publishers make it easy for anyone to publish their work, most of whom are writers who have their own ideology or novice writers whose manuscripts have not been accepted by major publishers.

Furthermore, each type of publisher has its own advantages. Major publishers have the advantage that books can be widely circulated in a relatively easy way because major publishers have a wide distribution network, no promotion is needed, no capital is needed, and when they want to publish a work, they must follow the established publishing procedures. Indie publishers have the advantage of self-publishing with unlimited printing time (passive income), cutting publishing bureaucracy which in major publishers has a minimum waiting period of 6 to 12 months, control over their work is entirely in the hands of the author, and the printing system is based on the number of orders.

Alamsyah (2015) explained that there are three parties to indie publishing, namely the author, the printing company, and the indie publisher. There are two types of indie publishers, the first is the self-finance indie label, namely the author pays for printing costs, settings, and so on. Indie publishers only help with printing, binding, and attaching logos. Second, non-self-finance, namely indie publishers who publish and finance all costs from start to finish. According to Hapsari (2015) regarding indie publishers, manuscripts are accepted no matter what, this is because there is no selection unless it has been previously stated that it should not discuss SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group). This type of publisher has layout services, book cover designers, and editors, but they work for a fee. The number of prints also depends on the capital and the ISBN is also charged as a service fee.

In terms of process, it can be explained that publication or publishing management generally consists of a publisher, editor, writer, and printer (Nurkhodijah et al., 2020). Then, there is not only one type of publisher, but three types, namely major publishers, indie publishers, and self-publishing. However, in general, in Indonesia, indie publishers and self-publishing are considered the same. Furthermore, publishers have organization, this is so that the publisher can run as it should. The organization consists of three parts, namely the editorial section, the production section, and the marketing section. However, different publishers allow different names, even though the core of the function is the same. From this process, books that have been printed can be purchased,

either in bookstores, online shops, and so on, depending on the publication being processed by which type of publisher. Major publishers can be found in bookstores, but not other types of publishers.

The discussion will be narrowed down to Indie publishing. According to KBBI, an indie publisher is a small publisher, such as a scriptwriter who publishes their own work. Indie publishers are also often referred to as minor publishers. In fact, the term indie is not only in publishing but also in music and comics (Oktafian & Utama, 2024). Indie publishers are a popular term for independent publishers, namely publishers on a smaller scale than major publishers, generally in the form of business entities such as limited partnerships (CV) or do not have a business entity at all, and HR management tends to be limited or even personal. In general, indie publishers publish books with small circulation quantities. However, it is possible for indie publishers to have large-scale production activities, especially for indie publishers who have long experience in managing publishing even though they only involve limited personnel (Oktavia & Wati, 2022).

This publishing process needs to be explained in more detail and structure. It is hoped that this paper can be used as a guide for students or non-students who will publish books, especially literary works through indie publishers. Through this article, we can also address the creative writing process that makes it easier for novice writers to be more confident and produce more work until they reach the peak of their career as writers.

Moreover, literature is also a commodity because it has entered the industrial world which is produced and generated on a large scale and is intended for market consumption. Literary works as one form of this commodity can be utilized by writers as a means of livelihood. The more students and people who are productive in writing, the betterment of welfare and preservation of culture through literary works can be formed.

Based on its development, indie literature has become an intriguing phenomenon in the world of contemporary literature. Indie literature is a literature work produced independently by writers who are not members of mainstream publications. In the current digital era, online platforms and social media have also made it easier for indie authors to produce and disseminate their works widely. This has resulted in significant growth in the number and diversity of indie literature works. Indie literature pioneers refer to writers or groups of writers who have played an important role in popularizing and developing the indie literature movement. They have demonstrated courage in exploring controversial themes, publishing their works independently, and utilizing digital platforms to disseminate their works widely. One example of a pioneer of indie literature is Charles Bukowski. He is known as an indie literature writer who depicts everyday life in a controversial and provocative style. Bukowski's works, such as "Post Office" and "Factotum", provide honest and poignant depictions of everyday life, failure, and human despair (Bukowski, 1971; Bukowski, 1975). The pioneering works of indie literature explore controversial themes, create narratives that are not bound by traditional literature conventions, and give voice to minority groups in society (Bennett, 2019; DeKoven, 2016).

The latest developments in indie literature show trends that continue to be diverse and innovative in terms of writing styles, themes, and ways of distributing works. Indie

literature continues to experience rapid growth with more and more authors publishing their works independently via online platforms and social media. Current indie literature writers often deliver themes that are relevant to social issues, politics, identity, and personal experiences (Moody, 2013). They are willing to explore new points of view that are rarely seen in mainstream literature and encourage diverse dialogue. In terms of writing style, recent indie literature also reflects experimentation and diversity. Authors often adopt unique writing styles, such as mixing genres, unconventional use of language, and non-linear narratives. This provides a fresh reading experience and presents a new perspective on literature (Aritenang & Dewi, 2022; Beeves, 2013).

Indie literature cannot be separated from the role of technology and the writer's efforts in making their work a reality; can be read and enjoyed; also presents the values contained therein (Noorda, 2019). So far, from indie literature reviews, it can be concluded that firstly, the issue of indie literature is still a serious debate among critics. Bad assumptions and stigma are strongly attached as if there is little room for indie literature to expand its popularity (Darmanto, 2001). However, the history of indie literature began a long time ago with figures such as Walt Whitman in his work *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and other figures such as Emily Dickinson and Charles Bukowski. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, there are many writers who have contributed to the world of indie literature, including Dewi Lestari, Eka Kurniawan, Faisal Oddang, Dea Anugrah, Raihan Lubis, Prita Prawiroharjo, Fiersa Besari, Raditya Dika, and many more (Firdaus & Wati, 2022; Hasimah et al., 2018).

Indie literature first emerged in the post-reformation era. Although it is not precisely when it all started, the early 2000s were a sign of the development of indie literature, which was marked by the emergence of indie literature movements, as well as indie literature communities (Salam & Anwar, 2015; Elliot, 2016). Apart from that, other phenomena are characterized by the carrying capacity of technology, such as the rise of social media as a way to disseminate, share, and promote work using an easy and cheap system (Pratama & Wati, 2022; Pecoskie & Hill, 2014). Nevertheless, the journey of indie literature is still ripe with challenges and opportunities that need to be explored further. How writers can collaborate with technology and encourage the development of indie literature so that it becomes increasingly known and appreciated (Ismail & Yusoff, 2016; Johnson, 2020; Mawardi, 2018).

The indie literature category is included in alternative publishers that emphasize publication and self-publishing. This is different from major publishers which have standards and rules for selecting manuscripts. This means that not everything can be published if the process is deemed complicated and survival (Puja, 2021; Rachmawati, 2019). One such writer from Indonesia who has created indie literature is Dewi Lestari with her extraordinary novels, the *Supernova* series.

Meanwhile, in terms of disseminating work, social media and online platforms play a very important role. Indie literature authors use personal blogs, websites, social media, and indie publishing platforms to expand their reach and communicate directly with their readers (Hviid et al., 2017; Stephen, 2000). This provides an opportunity to build a loyal community of readers and get real-time feedback (Sanders, 2017; Wang, 2020).

2 Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative research model to obtain data on the printing process of indie literary books in the digital era. The data was obtained through an open questionnaire technique. This questionnaire was filled out by novice writers/students (Respondent 1) who published a collection of short stories as a final assignment. The data that had been obtained was then described by triangulation through secondary sources. The secondary sources of this study were offline and online information related to indie publishers, especially Ellunar publisher, which is where the respondent (1) published their literary works.

Additionally, the participant serving as the primary source in this study was an individual writer, a university student who successfully published a literary work through an indie publisher. The open-ended questionnaires were distributed manually and handed directly to the participants. The respondents then filled out the questionnaire according to the instructions provided on the questionnaire sheet. The data gathered was subsequently analyzed using a qualitative approach, cross-referencing it with other sources available online, such as online discussion forums, books, and journal articles.

The qualitative research process includes Creswell (2008) who has presented special stages of qualitative research, including (1) Problem identification; researchers must start with the target of the research, namely the process of publishing, distributing, marketing, and the impact on indie literary writers in the digital era. (2) Literature review; in this section, researchers must look for reading materials or sources related to the phenomenon to be studied, so that researchers are able to find novelty or advantages of their research compared to previous research. (3) Determining research objectives; the main purpose/objective of the research is to describe the process of publishing, distributing, marketing, and the impact on indie literary writers in the digital era. (4) Data collection; through an open questionnaire filled out by indie literary writers. (5) Data analysis and interpretation; the data obtained by the researcher is then analyzed or interpreted to produce ideas or theories. (6) Reporting; researchers make reports on the results of their research in a descriptive manner.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Indie Literature Book Production Process

The stages of the production process in publishing have a general scheme that can be understood by many people. Based on the results of the questionnaire mentioned by respondent (1), the following is the production scheme of a book published through an indie publisher.

In general, the steps are (1) the author sends a draft of the manuscript and payment, (2) the author sends the manuscript authenticity letter to the publisher (3) the manuscript is processed by the editorial team including editing, layout, cover, ISBN, etc., (3) the manuscript is checked, revision

notes are given, until approved by the author, (4) the book is produced, (5) the book is received by the author via expedition delivery.

The process of each publisher may differ from the one depicted here (Ellunar Publisher). Based on the results of the questionnaire, it was found that the time needed during the publishing process was approximately two months. This process can be said to be shorter when compared to the publishing process carried out by major publishers. It takes months from the time the manuscript is sent until the book can be published because the production process is longer. Among them is the manuscript selection process, which is quite strict and requires a longer time because the number of queues entering major publishers tends to be greater.

The entire process has a template that must be aligned. For example, at the stage of sending a manuscript, the publisher will mention several signs as shown in Fig. 1.

Cara Kirim Naskah ke Ellunar

- Isi formulir berikut ini (klik **di sini** untuk mengunduh formulir).
- Kirim formulir yang sudah diisi + draf naskahmu ke surel kami ellunar.publisher@gmail.com.
- Subjek e-mail: JENIS PAKET_JUDUL BUKU_NAMA PENULIS (Contoh: REKOMENDASI_ANTARA LANGIT DAN BUMI_ANNABELA).
- Tunggu respons surel dari redaksi Ellunar maksimal 3 hari kerja.

Format baku Ellunar:

- Ukuran kertas: A4
- Font: Times New Roman 12
- Line spacing: 1.5 (spacing before/after 0)
- Align text: Justify (rata kanan-kiri)
- Margin: default/normal/2,54 cm untuk kanan, kiri, atas, bawah
- Tebal: maksimal 100 halaman*
- Jumlah kata: maksimal 23.000 kata*

Source: (<https://www.ellunar.my.id/>)

Fig. 1. How to send a manuscript to Ellunar Publisher.

According to respondent (1), at the same time as sending the manuscript, the author also has the right to choose the publishing package (see Fig. 2). This publishing package has been mentioned by the publisher on their website so that the author can access the information online. This information can also be consulted with the publisher to get the best offer and price, according to the author's financial condition at that time.

The entire series of indie publishing is currently done online, utilizing various digital technologies, such as websites, emails, and WhatsApp applications. This allows novice writers throughout Indonesia to publish their works, whether in the form of novels, short story collections, poetry collections, or drama scripts. Even without a very strict selection process, the process of publishing indie works still goes through a screening process carried out by the publisher. The publisher still has the right to read and determine whether a work is worthy of being published or not. In fact, throughout the pub-

lishing process, the publisher will continue to edit the manuscript, while still being accompanied by the author so that the editing process of a book will still be done by the author, like general publications. The editing process is carried out until the publisher and author feel that the manuscript is ready and worthy of being widely distributed.

Fasilitas	Jenis Paket Penerbitan		
	Standar Rp500.000	Rekomendasi Rp875.000	Prioritas Rp1.375.000
REDAKSI			
Disunting Editor	✓	✓	✓
Ditata-letak Layouter	✓	✓	✓
Dibuatkan Sampul	✓	✓	✓
Revisi	1X	2X	2X
ISBN	✓	✓	✓
Laporan Penjualan Jika Ada Pembelian	✓	✓	✓
Royalti Setiap Bulan	✓	✓	✓
Grup WA dengan Tim Redaksi	✗	✓	✓
PROMOSI			
Mockup/Poster Buku	1	2	2
Tayang di Media Sosial Ellunar	✓	✓	✓
Cetak Buku Tanpa Minimal Pemesanan	✓	✓	✓
Layanan Pemesanan via WA dan Line	✓	✓	✓
Layanan Pengemasan dan Pengiriman Buku	✓	✓	✓
Dijual di Webstore, Tokopedia, Shopee	✗	✓	✓
Buku Ada Stok Siap Kirim	✗	✓	✓
ADMINISTRASI			
Kustomisasi Spesifikasi Buku	✓	✓	✓
Buku untuk Perpusnas dan Perpustakaan	✓	✓	✓
Buku untuk Penulis	2 buku	5 buku	10 buku
Gratis Ongkir Buku Bukit Terbit	Maks. Rp20K	Tidak Dibatasi (Seluruh Indonesia)	Tidak Dibatasi (Seluruh Indonesia)
Lama Pengiriman	Sesuai Antrean	Sesuai Antrean	Tanpa Antrean (Terbit 20 Hari Kerja)

Source: (<https://www.ellunar.my.id/>)

Fig. 2. Publishing types of packages at Ellunar Publisher.

This fact refers to the form of digital transformation. Digital transformation can be defined as the process of leveraging existing digital technologies, such as virtualization, mobile computing, cloud computing, and the integration of all systems within an organization, among others (Loonam et al., 2018). It can also be interpreted as the impact resulting from the use of a combination of digital innovations, leading to changes in the structure, value, processes, positions, or ecosystems within the organization and its external environment (Hinings et al., 2018). A literature review conducted by Morakanyane, Grace, and O'Reilly concluded with insights into the question of what digital transformation is (Morakanyane et al., 2017). They stated that digital transformation is an evolutionary process based on existing capabilities and digital technologies to create or alter business processes, operational processes, and customer experiences, resulting in new value.

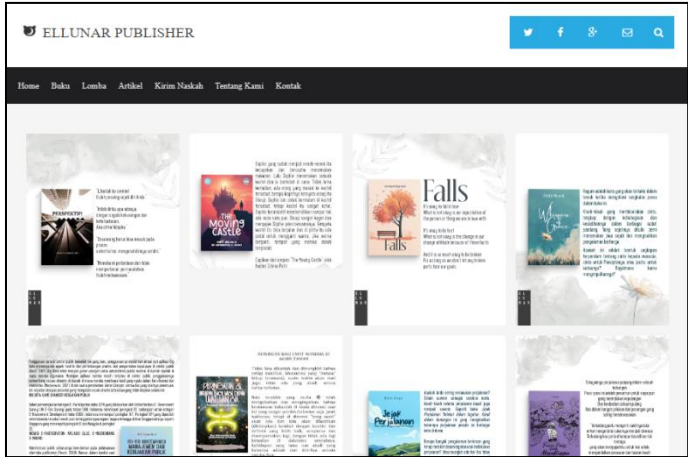
3.2 Distribution and Marketing Process of Indie Literature Books

In the digital era, the book distribution process is done online and offline. 1) Online, books will be offered through several systems. First, the pre-order system through the author. Through this system, the author can determine the number of books to be printed

which is adjusted to the number of orders. This pre-order system can minimize the number of unsold books. This system can be done by novice authors, as one way to ‘test the waters’ before actually producing books in large quantities.

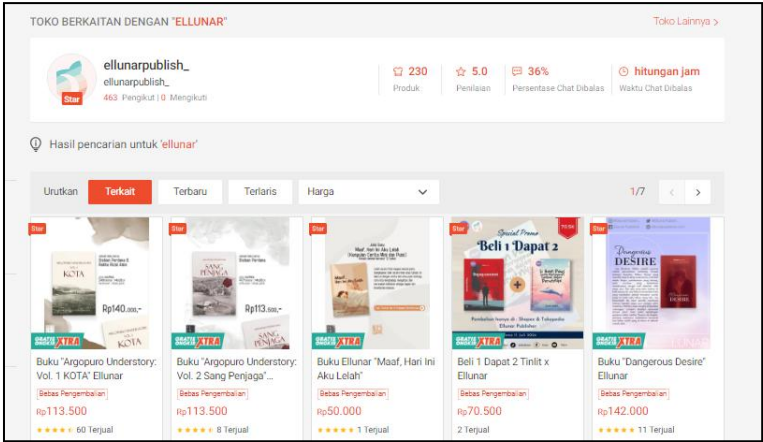
Second, the online sales system is through the publisher’s website (see Fig. 3). This sales system has also been commonly implemented. The publisher will place advertisements on a number of social media, and buyers or potential readers can make purchases through the website.

Third, the online sales system through marketplaces such as Shopee (see Fig. 4), Tokopedia, Bukalapak, and so on, as well as through social media such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and so on. The sales system through marketplaces and social media is currently being intensively carried out by many authors and publishers, because this sales system can reach national and global markets, and allows buyers to interact directly with publishers or authors directly.



(<https://www.ellunar.my.id/>)

Fig. 3. Ellunar Publishing’s online catalogue.



(<https://shopee.co.id/search?keyword=ellunar>)

Fig. 4. Marketplace Shopee @ellunarpublish_.

The next distribution process is 2) offline. The published books will be sold in physical form through bookstores, such as Gramedia, Palasari, and other bookstores. This physical sale will usually be done by authors who have started to have a 'big name' so that they are widely known by the public. The production of their books is also in large quantities, so they have a large opportunity to be purchased by prospective readers.

Program development and activity monitoring are also important. Various efforts are always made by the marketing or sales side. They take steps to at least maintain the number of purchases in marketing indie publisher books. Not only fixed through one method but also appreciating every idea that arises and is possible to be realized. Book merchandise such as bookmarks, posters, and t-shirts accompanies several published books. Book packages are even beautifully packaged using bamboo baskets. These methods are called promotions.

3.3 The Influence of Indie Literary Publishing on Writers

According to respondent (1), the entire publishing process is done through the approval and knowledge of the author, and so are the funding and distribution of royalties for the work. This discussion will be stored and used as a basis for publishing in subsequent processes. According to respondent (1), income or royalties obtained through indie publishing can increase student income, although not significantly in terms of quantity, because the number of books published is also not many, namely hundreds, not thousands.

The influence of this publication is certainly not only in terms of income but also in terms of the popularity of the author. There are many additional activities that can be done by the author to increase the number of book distributions, both through book launching activities, offline promises, and online promotions by utilizing social media. Through social media, various social interaction activities can be carried out. For example, social media uses web-based technology that changes communication into interactive dialogue. With its function of supporting social interaction, social media can be a communication bridge between publishers and the public, or authors and readers. Several digital platforms facilitate direct interaction between readers and authors through comments, reviews, and discussion forums. This forum is a real form of appreciation and literary criticism of readers toward authors. The sustainability of this forum can be an attraction as well as a warm promotional medium in this digital era.

3.4 Discussion

Based on the findings on the production, distribution, and marketing processes, indie publishers are currently in demand by the public because of some of their conveniences. Indie literature in the digital era offers many advantages, but there are also some disadvantages that need to be considered. Some of the advantages of producing literary works through indie publishers include the following.

First, ease of accessibility and distribution. This accessibility has even been easy since the production process uses various digital media. In addition, independent literary works can be easily accessed and distributed through digital platforms such as blogs, personal websites, self-publishing platforms, or social media. This allows authors to reach a wider audience without having to go through traditional publishing channels (Waluyo, 2020).

Second, writers' freedom of expression is nigh unlimited. Writers can explore more experimental ideas and are not tied to dominant market trends or needs. They can write more freely without the pressure to follow existing literary norms. This happens because indie publishers do not specifically determine basic themes or certain themes that can hinder the creativity of writers in expressing their ideas (Sari & Wati, 2023).

Third, there is the ease of interacting with readers. Through many types of digital platforms, writers can interact directly with readers through comments, feedback, and discussions on social media or forums. This can enrich the writing experience by getting direct responses from the audience. This is a real form of literary appreciation activities, and also sometimes literary criticism given by readers to writers. Writers can provide responses according to the writer's capacity, as well as a form of 'branding' that the writer wants to achieve.

Finally, there is a relatively low cost. Publishing and distributing works independently and digitally often have a lower cost compared to conventional publishing. This allows authors to maintain full control over their work without relying on third parties. Authors can also choose a publishing package from the first time they submit a manuscript. Authors also have the right to determine how many books will be printed. Thus, authors have the ease of determining the cost in accordance with their financial condition.

Apart from the advantages mentioned above, there are several disadvantages to indie publishing. These disadvantages can be a consideration for novice writers when publishing their work on an indie basis.

- 1) Limited recognition and prestige among the public. Indie literature may be less widely recognized than works traditionally published by major publishers. This can affect the author's image and reputation in the mainstream literary industry or in academic contexts.
- 2) There may be difficulties in the marketing process. Without strong marketing and distribution support from a major publisher, indie literary authors may have difficulty reaching a wider audience or attracting the attention of the media and literary critics.
- 3) The varying quality of indie publishers' production. While digital technology has made self-publishing easier, not all works published independently through digital platforms maintain high standards of quality. This can lead to fluctuations in the quality and professionalism of the work available in the market.
- 4) Competitive market. Due to easy access and distribution, competition in the digital indie literature market can be very tight. Attracting a relevant audience and building a loyal reader base can be a challenge.

Overall, indie literature in the digital age offers a lot of potential to expand creative expression and reach a global audience. However, authors must consider both advantages and disadvantages to make informed decisions about the publication path and exposure of their work.

This study serves as a reinforcement of previous research, such as the study by Dewi (2022), which discusses one of the indie publishing processes at a publisher in Semarang. This research further emphasizes that there are many innovations and breakthroughs in indie literary publishing in the digital era, encompassing the production, distribution, and consumption patterns. Throughout this process, many have utilized the power of digital tools and information systems as communication media, enabling novice writers to engage in the field. The various conveniences offered in indie literary publishing during the digital era will also impact the development of themes and forms of literary works both now and in the future. Therefore, further research is still needed on the development of Indonesian indie literature, particularly from the perspectives of authors, literary themes, and other viewpoints.

4 Conclusion

Indie literature in the digital era presents a revolution in the way literary works are produced, accessed, and enjoyed by readers. Some conclusions that can be drawn from the development of indie literature are: 1) Digital technology allows anyone to create and publish their work independently, without depending on major publishers. 2) The internet allows writers from all over the world to connect, collaborate, and build literary communities globally. This enriches the perspectives and variations in indie literature. 3) Indie literature writers tend to be freer to experiment, allowing for innovation and diversity in literary works. 4) Digital platforms such as social media allow writers to interact directly with their readers. 5) Creative marketing strategies and collaboration between writers are the keys to success in this regard. Thus, indie literature in the digital era not only changes the way literary works are produced and consumed but also has a significant impact on enriching and expanding the global literary landscape as a whole.

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