

# Cybernetic Literary Practice of Indonesian University Students toward Online Stories: An Evident from North Sumatera

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**Abstract.** Online story platforms reinforce cybernetic literary practices and serve as a symbol of the online story community's emergence. Many online platforms encourage readers to form an online community between authors and readers in an inclusive environment; cybernetic literary practices also incorporate a sense of social acquaintance. This study aims to investigate the participation of 46 Indonesian university students from North Sumatera who have become active readers on the online storytelling platform. We distributed the questions to the students to gain insight into their reading preference and cybernetics literacy practice. The study's findings revealed that students' practice centered more on rating the stories than commenting on them. However, once the students decided to engage with the comments, they improved well in their cybernetics literary practice. Online interactions, such as commenting and engaging in the narrative construction process, have the potential to foster robust online communities, thereby instilling students with a sense of autonomy, genuineness, and inclusion.

**Keywords:** Cybernetics literary practice, in-depth interview, North Sumatera university students, online stories, questionnaire.

## 1 Introduction

Web-based online story platforms reached their popularity in Indonesia in 2020. Platforms such as *Wattpad*, *Webtoon*, and *Tiktok* are growing rapidly and presenting web-based online stories. This online platform is preferred by media readers. This happens because web-based online story platforms offer new, interactive ways of reading compared to conventional texts and other types of online texts

As technology advances and software that facilitates learning to read and write becomes more popular, new forms of narrative from online platforms emerge, changing the role of the reader in the world of literature. Readers are no longer passive agents waiting to see how the author will resolve the knot they have created; instead, they are important factors that influence the ending of the story [1]. The reader-writer is intimately involved in both the characters' actions and the turning points of the story. They want to see how their choices affect them. Readers are social writers who influence the course of web-based online fiction stories on various platforms. The fate of their favorite characters, and the unique aspects of this interactive genre are what keep readers interested online in web stories. Interactive narratives according to

Cavazza and Young are not told from beginning to end, but readers may be asked to return to previous points and reread the text because, for example, they gave the wrong answer to a question [2]. As a result, two people reading the same story may come to different conclusions leading to new trends in reading and writing habits.

The behavior of reading various web stories can be seen on online story platforms. College students in Indonesia love web-based stories because they can share their thoughts about the chapters they read, they can question the author about written events, and they can even share their hopes for the story's future development [1]. This study examines the phenomenon of online learners, who are university students in North Sumatera, Indonesia and read English fiction. It endeavors to address the subsequent inquiries:

- a. What are the reading preferences of North Sumatera University student when reading online story?
- b. In what manner do they employ cybernetic literary practices?

## **2 Reading Preference**

Subject matter or a preference for a particular genre of literature are frequently referenced as reading preferences. In a simpler concept, reading preferences is the reading resources that students choose in which they allocate a significant amount of energy and time to studying them. Cavazos-Kottke defines reading preference as a comprehensive concept that includes a person's established reading interests and the types of materials that may inspire their interest and serve as a catalyst for specific interests [3,4].

Reading preference is typically determined by a variety of variables, such as age, family background, and educational attainment. Gender is an additional factor that influences students' reading preferences. In their research, Maro, Gusdian, and Safitri discovered that female students were more inclined to read fantasy, while more male students enjoyed the adventure genre [5]. In addition to gender as one of important elements of reading preference, the reading media preferences of learners are also the subject of research conducted on older/higher education groups. Spencer conducted research on the reading preferences of university students regarding course-related materials that are available online [6]. According to her findings, Numerous students conveyed a preference for the paper version of course materials, and even those who prefer to read from a screen expressed an interest for the option of a hard copy due to its convenience, reliability, annotation, highlighting, and the field of ergonomics as per her findings.

The initial step in determining students' reading preferences is to identify materials that are likely to capture their interest. This is because, irrespective of the complexity or simplicity of a text, students will find it tedious or difficult to read if it is not engaging. Students may hesitate to read unless they encounter materials that spark their interest. In general, young people choose to read books for enjoyment and learning in their leisure time, and they tend to favor light, enjoyable reading [7]. Their enthusiasm and motivation to read will persist if they begin to read independently and with the text they prefer, without any form of pressure.

## 2.1 Online Stories

Indonesia was the fourth-largest subscriber of Wattpad in the world at the beginning of 2020 [8]. Toon Novels, Inovel, and other online story platforms are also experiencing significant growth and have a devoted readership due to their diverse genre offerings, including fan fiction, flash fiction, adventure, horror, fantasy, science fiction, and mystery. Online story platforms have emerged as a favored reading source for the younger generation in Indonesia due to their integration of interactive, creative, and multimodal elements. Therefore, the online reading platform phenomenon is deserving of further investigation due to its accelerated growth.

Much research has been conducted on online story platforms in the last three years. One of them is about the appearance of online social authors who underline a trend of the emergence of micro celebrities; the communication of new writers with followers as an online fan community [8]. This research demonstrates that micro celebrities serve as influencers in addition to authors. A prominent study that investigated the emergence of online-based social authors focused on the increasing trend of micro-celebrities, which is the interaction of new authors with readers as an online fan community [9]. This investigation demonstrated that microcelebrities serve as both authors and influencers.

One of popular online stories platform is Wattpad. It has been a platform for sharing short stories in which amateur readers can provides feedback to writers after reading a story. The existence of Wattpad for almost a decade marks a significant shift of mode of reading for younger readers. Another research conducted by Bal described the experience of reading and writing Wattpad in school learning systems and outside of school is the subject of additional research [1]. This study employed a survey to illustrate that reading stories online on Wattpad outside of an educational environment is a more pleasurable experience than reading for formal educational purposes. Readers who are not in a school environment exhibit more positive responses and motivation in their reading experiences. The research emphasized the interplay between the online communities and their respective positions in the digital era and the role of technology in the learning of writing and reading.

Wattpad and Webtoon are examples of online story platforms that serve as sources for cybernetic literature research, with an emphasis on the interactions between authors and readers. The notion of cybernetic literature implies public contributions, specifically the reader as a medium for "recreating" and "reimagining" events and plots in an existing narrative [10,11] . The trend of the reproduction and dissemination of cybernetic literary works is shared by the author and the reader [12,13].

In terms of teaching literature, previously the method used was the "traditional" method which made students read only using printed books and in limited quantities and in limited places, for example only in the library. With the development of story applications, it provides space not only reader but also for novice writers to get a special space to show their abilities. They can also show their existence amidst a borderless global communication network that can minimize the barriers between novice and senior writers. Therefore, researchers aim to investigate how EFL students respond to short stories available online on Wattpad, as well as their preferences and experiences when reading them online. Additionally, this study aims to delve into the cybernetic literary practices of student-readers as they engage with online stories. We aim to investigate how these student-readers, based on their preferences and behavioral patterns, perceive their role as social readers of cyber literature during off-campus reading activities.

### 3 Methodology

The design of a survey with open-ended inquiries was the primary focus of this study, which employed qualitative research. The data was composed of the responses obtained from the questionnaire. The responses of students to questionnaires were categorized into three groups: demographic information, their reading preferences and their cybernetics practices. In order to ascertain these three aspects, we evaluated the responses to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was created using Google Form Survey, and the URL was disseminated through WhatsApp, an instant messaging platform, to expand the sample. The questionnaire was to be completed by the students within two weeks. The survey aimed to collect information regarding their reading habits and cybernetics engagement when they accessed English fiction online. The survey was completed by all 60 students, and 46 responses were used for the purpose of inquiry to provide supplementary insights. 38 females and 8 males submitted responses. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first section contained questions that were intended to obtain demographic information from the respondents, while the second section was intended to explore their reading preferences and motivation. The qualitative survey was completed by respondents, and their responses were incorporated into the data analysis. Their responses were consistent, indicating their motivations for reading online stories and their engagement as foreign language adolescent readers. The qualitative questions allowed the researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the specific factors that influenced the reading motivation and preferences of these students. These factors included the reasons for selecting English fiction, the genre preferences of the stories, the devices they used to read online, the length of their reading sessions, their attention to literary elements such as characters, plot, and setting, and their use of cybernetic literary aspects to interact with the author and other readers and comment on online stories through the use of technology.

Two groups were used to recruit 40 survey participants in their second academic year. A large number of the participants were acquiring English as their second language. At the English language and literature Department, the participants are formally acquiring English language and literary criticism skills. The initial section of the questionnaire delineated the characteristics of these student-readers, including their gender, academic year, and study program. The items encompassed inquiries regarding the language test that students take during their first academic year and their exposure to English. This investigation employed qualitative research that focused on the writing of a survey that employed open-ended questions. There were more than twenty questions prepared for gaining more insight into participants' reading preference and cybernetics practice.

### 4 Results and Discussion

Table 1. Demographic Data of Survey Participants

Measure and Items	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	8	17.4%
Female	38	82.6%
<b>Participant exposure to English</b>		
Less than 5 years	2	4.3%

5-7 years	12	26.1%
8-12 years	9	19.6%
More than 12 years	23	50%

Table 1 provides comprehensive details, categorized by the total number of participants from North Sumatera. Out of all the replies submitted, 48 were determined to be valid since they answered all the questions completely. Table 1 presents a summary of the students' survey results. Among the 48 participants, 38 (82.6%) were women, and 8 (17.4%) were males. The fact that majority of students from English language and literature department are women suggest the validity of the demographic statistics. The poll indicated that 50% of the respondents have been studying English for more than 12 years. Most of them learned English from primary level to undergraduate level and being an English literature student, they are exposed to fiction such as short story and novel.

**Table 2.** Participants' Reading Preference

Measure and Items	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Reading frequency</b>		
Everyday	16	34.8%
During weekends	20	43.5%
Once in a month	10	21.7%
Others	3	6.5%
<b>Reading platform</b>		
Wattpad	26	56.5%
Noveltoon	4	8.7%
Facebook online stories	8	17.4%
Webtoon	22	47.8%
Others	7	15.2%
<b>Preferred genre</b>		
Romance	30	65.2%
Fan fiction	10	21.7%
Fantasy	19	41.3%
Thriller	14	30.4%
Romantic-comedy	16	34.8%
Others	6	13%
<b>Preferred Story's element</b>		
Character	23	50%
Plot (storyline)	37	80.4%
Setting	6	13%
Theme	15	32.6%
All of it	1	2.2%

The question of survey allowed the researchers to discover individuals' reading preferences. The responses of the survey participants were alike, demonstrating their preference for reading stories on the internet and their engagement as student-readers of a foreign language respectively.

When inquired about the frequency of reading online fiction, over half of the respondents (43.5%) reported engaging in this activity on weekends (refer to table 2). Furthermore, it is observed that the percentage of student readers who read online articles 'every day' was lower than those who read the online story on weekends. Thus the table describe reading preference

of university students to read online stories on the weekend (43.5 %). The number also described the pattern of reading habit as a leisure time for North Sumatera university students. The findings highlighted that reading online stories constitutes an off-campus activity. A considerable proportion of student-readers who engage in online reading once in a month have reinforced the trend of online stories in North Sumatra; they do not participate in online narratives as frequently as they do in other activities such as watching YouTube, TikTok and posting on their Instagram account. The findings also underlined the engagement of adolescent reading activity.

Table 2 illustrates that participants for this research favored utilizing online platforms such as *Wattpad* and *Webtoon* for reading fiction in English. Wattpad is a popular online platform that connects readers and aspiring writers, allowing them to publish and access stories through its website or mobile app. The platform features a wide variety of genres and writing styles, but literary scholars are especially intrigued by one key aspect: most of the stories are born-digital, meaning they are originally published on Wattpad and are often written directly on mobile devices. Finding described that fifty-six percent of participants indicated that they utilized *Wattpad* as their online reading platform. The survey indicates this as a high number of users. This study supports prior studies indicating that *Wattpad* is the primary digital social network for substantial worldwide reading activity [14]. Also, the questionnaire indicates that students favor *Webtoon* as their second most favored platform. The majority of stories that are published on Wattpad are works of fiction that establish unique story worlds. Wattpad has become the most widespread application for EFL university learners to read novels. Wattpad is considered a popular and effective application for reading stories, and it offers numerous benefits in terms of reader response practices. Thus, it became strong reason for reader to visit Wattpad more often than another platform.

In the meantime, 65.2% of participants selected romance as their preferred genre, followed by fantasy at 41%. The type of romance predominantly seen in young adult literature is relevant and authentic since most participants found the romance relatable to their life; the story plot and characters are familiar and lively to the students-readers. The survey findings indicated distinct preferences: participants found romance the most appropriate genre for online stories. Romance is a traditional form of fiction that is popular. The primary function of wish-fulfillment is the defining characteristic of narratives that transport the reader to a fantasy realm where a whole and authentic personality can be envisioned [15]. Romance is actually emerged as a popular genre right in the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Next, fantasy was chosen by other readers as an escape from reality. Fantasy is a multimedia genre that spans novels, films, paintings, and role-playing games [16]. Despite this diversity, narratives remain fundamental to the genre. Visual works, such as paintings and drawings, often require a narrative context to explain fantastical elements like dragons, trolls, and wizards. Without such context, these works might not be recognized as fantasy. While some fantasy works are non-narrative in form, compelling stories are essential to defining the genre. This underscores the decision to prioritize narratives over other media like games and paintings. In relation to this point, student-readers visited the platform and selected fantasy as an escapism, immersing themselves in the fantasy of becoming friends with the wizard and dragon.

Finally, the student-readers clearly prioritized the plot or storyline over other elements of story such as character or setting. The questions in the survey aimed to identify the most favored feature of a story. The results show that nearly 84 % of participant preferred the narrative because of the interesting plot. Plot Twist and a sudden turning point to the character are the most intriguing aspect of element in the narrative favoured by the student-readers. It is crucial to note that a significant amount of fiction is read for the sake of enjoyment. Stockwell

investigates the aspect of reading in relation to literary texts by analyzing stories that are not included in the literary canon but are read for everyday entertainment [17]. He argued that plot intricacies, such as "twists in the tale" and other such reversals, were crucial in attracting readers to the platform, as plot plays a key role in many popular genres. Plot is pivotal since it determines whether the student-readers decided to continue reading on the platform. As Sutton argues that one type of plot is concerned with action, events, and inciting incidents, while the other is more organic and necessary, focusing on character motivation and conflict. Two categories of plot emerge [18]. Character-driven storylines are prioritized over puzzle plots. The authors articulate the readers' engagement and delight of the characters prior to the complicated storylines.

**Table 3.** Participants' Cybernetic Literary Practice

Measure and Items	Frequency	Percentage
<b>The frequency of Giving Comments in the Story</b>		
Always	3	6.7%
Often	3	6.5%
Sometimes	22	47.8%
Rarely	14	30.4%
Never	4	8.7%
<b>The Frequency of Giving the Story a Rate</b>		
Always	11	23.9%
Often	10	21.7%
Sometimes	19	41.3%
Rarely	4	8.7%
Never	2	4.3%
<b>The frequency of Giving Emoticon</b>		
Always	3	6.5%
Often	5	10.9%
Sometimes	20	43.5%
Rarely	12	26.1%
Never	6	13%
<b>The Frequency of Socializing with other readers</b>		
Always	2	4.3%
Often	5	10.9%
Sometimes	17	37%
Rarely	14	30.4%
Never	8	17.4%

Reader engagement as a cybernetics practice was assessed by the quantity of written comments, reader participation when rating the story, and the relationship between the content and the reader's response like giving emoticon. Nevertheless, when we prompted our participants to discuss their roles as social readers on Wattpad or Webtoon, the majority admitted to being passive readers. The questionnaire includes four questions designed to investigate the cybernetic practices of student-readers:

- a. How frequently do you provide your feedback on the stories?

- b. How frequently do you utilize emoticons in response to intriguing characters, plotlines, or unexpected developments in the narrative?
- c. How frequently do you rate the story upon completion of your reading?
- d. How frequently do you engage with other readers on the platform?

Nearly half of participants answered 'sometimes' for all questions. The necessities to be an active social reader were not important for these student-readers. Although some participants like reading the comments, they lack the motivation to post their own. Occasionally their understanding of the narrative depends on other readers' opinions and the discussions amongst readers. The questionnaires examine also the motivations behind the student readers' engagement in live commenting on the online story platform. Findings revealed that participation was not a primary motivator for most readers. Moreover, additional results regarding their cybernetics practice were similarly discouraging, with the majority of respondents expressing little personal interest in actively engaging in as a social reader.

## 5 Conclusion

Reading literary works as a second language speaker entails not only a critical process of meaning extraction and content evaluation but also an exploration of creative understanding, which encompasses the capacity to articulate aesthetic and emotional responses to texts [19]. Our investigation on North Sumatera student-readers starts due to the scarcity of research about the experiences of second language readers in the online platform. The survey results indicate the reading preferences and cybernetic literary practices of readers. The survey illustrates the frequency of reading: readers allocate their weekends to reading online English narratives, as opposed to dedicating 1-2 hours each day.

This preference suggests that online reading is a leisure activity rather than an academic one. Additionally, the survey suggests that readers prefer to visit *Wattpad* as an online platform, select fantasy and romance as their most favorite genres, and concentrate on the storyline or narrative rather than the character. It is intriguing that the results also indicate that the student-readers show minimal interest in participating in social activities. Readers, as they do not leave comments in the interaction section between the author and the readers, yet leave a trace for giving the story a rate. In the interaction column between the author and the readers or between readers and readers', student-readers in North Sumatera rarely provided feedback. The survey points at the silent interaction of readers as a social author on the platform. This finding has significant implications for digital and cybernetic literature, as it challenges the assumption that the potential for participation on online platforms directly translates into a willingness or desire to participate.

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