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To Link this Article: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i6/7337

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i6/7337

Received: 02 April 2020, Revised: 27 May 2020, Accepted: 16 June 2020

Published Online: 29 June 2020

In-Text Citation: (Bakar et al., 2020)


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Exploring the Roles of Wattpad in Creative Writing Process

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Abstract
In this new era, writing is no longer limited to traditional writing methods such as simply writing on books and papers and blogs and so on. Writing can now be easily accessed and free worldwide. This paper has discovered an application that complies with user-friendly writing features, which is Wattpad. It is a tool to record writing talents and facilitating publishers in finding writing talents. This paper has explored the role of Wattpad, especially in the creative writing process. This was attainable with the help of a publisher from Lejen Press Sdn Bhd (Muhammad Aisamuddin bin Md Asri) and Muhammad Fatrim, an independent creative writer. Both were interviewed and data where transcribed to understand the role of Wattpad in the creative writing process from both a publisher and an author point of view. It was found that for a publisher, Wattpad contributes in finding talent, promotion and creating fan-base. For a writer, Wattpad introduces themselves to the writing community, allows dissemination of ideas, allows learning, practices and experiments with creating writing. Such findings affirms the active and positive roles of Wattpad as discussed in the literatures.

Keywords: Wattpad, Writing Community, Roles, Creative Writing, Writing Process
Introduction
Wattpad is known as a platform that acts as a writing community that connects writers and readers around the world (Rochester, 2012). There are many different genres to be read in this app. In this app, freelance writers can explore various genre that suits their writing style. Wattpad can also be utilized as a learning platform that helps new writers discover their talents and sharpen their writing skills (Nel, 2016; Birch, 2016). According to Kardiansyah (2019), Wattpad is a platform that does not follow traditional publishing methods, in which authors can arrange their publications by searching for suitable publishers to publish their works and so on. Following that statement, this study aims to explore:

- What Wattpad roles in creative writing process from the perspective of publishers?
- What Wattpad roles in creative writing process from the perspective of writers?

Literature Review
Rokha (2019), explains how Wattpad can help authors in their writing especially for those writing in English. Rokha introduced three cycles concerning Wattpad, in which the first cycle includes people who do not use the Wattpad, the second cycle deals with introduction to the Wattpad, while the third cycle examines people after they had been using the Wattpad for a length of time. It shows that student frequent engagement with Wattpad gives good improvement, as they were more motivated to write and there was a noticeable rise in numbers in Rokha's study.

In another paper written by Rahman, Sarudin, Shamsudin and Yunus (2018), they have been studying the Wattpad application and observed whether it affects students’ writing skills in the ELS classroom. They put their focus on writing in English, where the ELS students who are the subject of this study have been instructed to write in the Wattpad application.

This study found that there was a grammatical error in most of the subjects' works but also found that the students helped to give advice and correct each other's errors. Also, their research had been conducted in two ways, namely quantitative and qualitative methods. There are also surveys and interviews carried out.

Based on the interview data, there is a similarity to what their predicted that their students find that using Wattpad to be fun and user-friendly for them. Some of the students started to develop an interest in writing after using the application.

Therefore, their study found that the Wattpad application certainly had a role or impact on students in terms of improving their writing skills and in helping them to feel more confident in writing in English. From studies conducted by Rahman et al (2018), it can be proven from the research findings that creative writing and a relaxed environment can help the writing process to start and encourage writing progress.

Collins (2014) had written an article on students’ involvement in creative writing on Wattpad. According to Collins, Wattpad not only provides students with the opportunity to write with but also provide opportunities for students to engage with the writing industry globally.

Collins also instructed his students to send him a poem each on Wattpad. Within two weeks Collins had seen the number of views, comments, and votes of popularity from each of his students' work. Some of his students continue to use Wattpad to write and gather followers after they had completed the task given. Collins later confirms the fact that the Wattpad application can be used globally without a doubt.
Allen Lau has received a letter from Africa thanking him for creating the application because, in the place where the mailer lives, they cannot use any other gadget besides cell phones. This application allows both reading and writing to take place without any boundaries. Tai (2016) has written an article in The Star about Wattpad being a platform where both writers and readers correspond. Ummi Syalshabella, a Wattpad authors who had been interviewed encourage new writers to continue writing and do not despair if the number of views for their works is not large, as it is a process of initiating these new writers into the world of writing. She also urges them to upload their work into the portal frequently so that they can build their fan base. She also said the Wattpad platform is a great place to practice writing. Authors can improve their writing style by interacting with and observing other well-written works. Her readers are also one of the reasons that motivating Ummi to keep writing. There are even Malaysian publications that had been steadily utilizing Wattpad like FIXI Books. Amir Muhammad has begun putting the works of several official FIXI Books on Wattpad. The author will get their payments which are calculated based on the readers’ view of their work. From this article, Wattpad plays an important role, especially for new writers. New writers use this application to venture into the field of writing, practice writing and refine their writing and gather fans for their writing.

A study from Kardiansyah (2019), has studied the Wattpad as to whether it is a literature-producing platform or not. According to Kardiansyah, Wattpad allows both professional and amateur writers to write for free. Although Wattpad is not a publishing app, authors can use this platform to practice writing and generate new ideas. Kardiansyah (2019) also claims that Wattpad is a social space where writers can experiment on all existing genres in this world. The uniqueness of this application is due to a new form of writing as opposed to the traditional way of writing where the writers will need to adhere to certain steps to get published. But on Wattpad writers are free to write from their perspective without having to think of whether the press will agree with them or not. Most good works will be approached by publishing companies who feel that the writers' writing matches what their company is looking for. Wattpad is also a platform for garnering a fan-base for writers. Today's publishing houses prefer authors who already have their fan base as they can help sell the authors' published works. In countries like Indonesia famous writers of this application still have to sell their work themselves to any local publications. But this application is great for writers to train themselves to write better. From Kardiansyah (2019) study, researchers can see that there are several roles Wattpad plays in the creative writing process including that it enables both professional and amateur writers to communicate with each other and their readers and also to write, find ideas, practice writing, garnering fans in the hope it can make it easier for them to select a publishing house of their interest to publish their works, as well as enabling them to experiment with writing in different genres.

Bal (2018) has conducted a study on writing among low-income students in Turkey. These students have been assigned to write on Wattpad and at school. From Bal's (2018) study it was found that students did not write as well in school compared to when they are writing on Wattpad. One of the reasons they give for this poor comparison is that writing at school is too restrictive than on Wattpad. On Wattpad, they are free to work according to their taste. Trying to write their own creative stories without the watching eyes of their school teachers has given them more confidence and encouraged them to write more. They also claim that they are not able to write as fast at school compared to
when they are writing on Wattpad, which has opened opportunities for students to engage in creative writing in this app. From all the previous literature mentioned in this research paper, the researchers found that Wattpad played an important role in the writing process. It provides the opportunity for an aspiring writer to try their hands in writing, to engage with readers, allows them to try and experiment with different genres and different types of writing within Wattpad, to garner fans to facilitate writing and producing published works in real life and finally to find publications that fit the author’s work.

Method
This study has adopted a qualitative research design. According to Crossman (2020), this method is the best method for collecting non-numerical data and it helps if the researcher wants more detailed data that can be parsed. This study has conducted face-to-face interviews with 2 informants, namely the CEO of Lejen Press Sdn Bhd, Muhammad Aisamuddin bin Md Asri; and Muhammad Fatrim, an independent creative writer. Interviews are better than questionnaires because it shows that the researchers are prepared and they meticulous and therefore can get more answers to the research questions (Green, 2017). Data were then transcribed verbatim and findings were transformed into a conceptual framework.

Result
Interviews from Muhammad Aisamuddin bin Md Asri or better known as Aisa, revealed that the publishing house had two of their authors using Wattpad, namely Maria Isabella and Jeffrey Zain. The company started in 2011 and is still in operation today.
Aisa acknowledges that this Wattpad writing platform has helped to publish publications from the standpoint of promotion and finding potential works that can be brought under publication. But with the current deteriorating economy, the decline of books sales has been worrying. Also, the use of e-books is still not as popular as it has been overseas. Thus, Lejen Press has turned to write articles online. But the selling books is still being done and occasional works are being published, simply the number of printed works is not what it used to be; at one time it used to be 5000 books printed at a time, now it’s only 1500 or less. Due to this, the publication house had taken the initiative to try to save the creative writing industry by paying its writers in another way.
As mentioned in Tai (2016) article, Amir Muhammad, the owner of Buku FIXI has used the Wattpad application to promote their novels and authors are paid based on their works viewing numbers on that app. Aisa also used the same system but he incorporates this method on the official Lejen Press portal. This is another alternative that helps the writer to continue working even without the publication of a physical novel.
Aisa also said that having a large fan-base is a bonus. Writers with a fan base will be able to sell their work. If a writer has a large fan-base, the volume of a novel production would not be restricted. Like the famous author Siti Rosmizah, who has a huge fan-base and her novels always being pre-ordered in advance, in which it can reach up to thousands of orders.

Although times have changed, and our current economy is affected, but authors must continue to write for the future of book publishing to recover. This study found that platforms such as Wattpad
are very useful for the writers to write continuously even without getting profit. This platform can create opportunities and a writer's work can be published if the writer has a great fan-base and possess good written work.

The second informant is Muhammad Fatrim Syah or more known from his penname Fatrim Syah or Muhammad Fatrim, who is an author. He is commonly known as an author under the FIXI Book publication. Fatrim admits that he frequently uses Wattpad for writing. The platform is said to give him a sense of the reality of the writing world as readers can comment on the author's work, by giving their opinions and suggestions on how a story can be improved.

The platform can also give an author the idea or inspiration to write and create new ideas. With a wide range of works from around the world, the platform allows authors to discover and enjoy valuable works from other countries.

“Most publisher nowadays has got their own official Wattpad account. FIXI and Karyaseni already have their own Wattpad accounts.” (Fatrim, personal communication, 2020). From Fatrim’s statement, other publications have started using these applications for promotional purposes, finding new talent and so on. Some companies hold a writing competition and will end up publishing only one work, but once the competition ends the publisher could be discovering that there is more than one potential writer in the market to sell, so they choose more than one winner.

Most publishers are looking for writers from Wattpad because writers on Wattpad already have their fans. According to Fatrim even though there are publishing companies offering contracts to these writers, do not be so quick to sign with them. Because most writers are unaware of the real economic situation in the writing industry, so to be safe, authors prefer publications with established names like Karyaseni, Fajar Pakeer, and FIXI.

But some writers are afraid to publish their work in the mainstream market, preferring indie, self-published small publishing instead.

As a self-published author, though yet not that active in publishing his work, Fatrim feels Wattpad is a great platform to promote his work, attract fans and finding talents that fit with his image.

He confirms that this application is the best platform for a writer to be practicing his or her writing. Fatrim has used this platform frequently for spontaneous writing purposes. Every day he uploads his written work, until the end of the story. Shortly thereafter a publication requested his work, hence making a novel titled Revenge a published work now.

When it comes to putting an author work on social media there will always be questions about plagiarism. "Because I put in 10 chapters, so I have no problem." (Muhammad Fatrim, personal communication, 2020). According to Fatrim, writers need to be as smart as possible and use the Wattpad application as much as possible. Like laying down a chapter and once it reaches its target numbers of the reader, the author promptly retracts the chapter on the online platform.

His experience in using Wattpad also teaches Fatrim the importance of using formal languages. Although English has a variety of slang and dialects, this does not mean that the public, in general, will be able to understand these dialects and slangs. Thus, Fatrim always tries to write in Formal English.

Given the opportunity for readers who are willing to translate his work into other languages, Fatrim accepts it with open arms. For Fatrim such openings will open up more opportunities for his work to be marketed globally.

“Wattpad can contribute to the writing industry, especially in terms of promotion and marketing. If an author wants to promote his work to international readers, Wattpad is a shortcut. They don't
have to go through the various steps involved in getting an agent to sell their book to a foreign publication."
(Fatrim, personal communication 2020)
Wattpad also has competition sections like the Watty Awards and so on. Fatrim encourages new writers or those who want to firmly establish themselves to take part in this kind of competition. Competitions like these are an opportunity to get to know and gather fans of their work.
As a result of the interviews conducted, the researchers found that Wattpad had a role in the writing process other than those mentioned in Aisa's interview, which included writing exercises, finding ideas and inspiration, participating in global writing competitions, and providing real feedback, and helping authors understand the standard or marketable writing.
It can be concluded from the two interviews conducted that there are some real roles in the creative writing process. The role can be seen in Figure 1 below.

![Figure 1: Wattpad Role Chart for Publishers and Readers.](image)

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Wattpad plays a significant role in the creative writing process. Starting from the launch of Wattpad to the world, it has opened the path of writing for writers so that they can experiment, inspire each other, practice writing diligently and eventually venture into the world of writing.
Wattpad publications proved to be very useful in finding talent, promoting an author’s work and introducing various publishing brands and attracting fans. Each of these aspects can contribute towards the creation of a published work.
With the changes in time and rapidly advanced technology, writers should take this opportunity to continue to develop their talents and introduce themselves as writers. The same goes for publishing houses.
In conclusion, Wattpad has a similar role to that of other countries. Its main role is to allow free writing and reading activities to take place and to connect these two groups as a writing community.
The Wattpad is an easy-to-use platform that gives an author a clear view of how one can make a writing work and then develop one’s creative writing process. Although the economy of the writing industry is not as stable as it used to be, one must continue to write so that his or her talent is not wasted in this modern world. It is hoped that this research paper will be able to assist new writers and the writing industry as well as open the way for future studies. In conclusion, finding from this study has proven that Wattpad offers its users a community but also a marketplace, and as such articulates with the transformations in traditional publishing, as well as with the wider field of platform-enabled commerce. This study is suggesting for all inspiring writers to serialise their stories, uploading one or two chapters at a time and inviting comment and discussion on each chapter. Thus, as a platform, Wattpad’s aim, similar to that of Facebook, YouTube and others, is to facilitate the creation of content in order for that content to generate interactions between users and so build a community (Davies, 2017).

Acknowledgements
This paper is supported by the Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation and Geran GIP (600-IRMI 5/3/GIP (011/2019)) granted by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia.

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