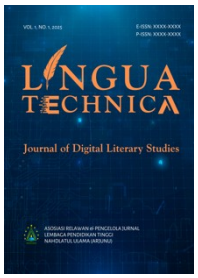
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Reader participation, platform affordances, and interactive meaning-making in online literary environments

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A B S T R A C T

Background: The growth of online literary environments has transformed reading from a private act of textual reception into a participatory, interactive, and platform-mediated cultural practice in which readers comment, evaluate, classify, recommend, and circulate literary works. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how reader participation and interactivity are constructed through the relationship among digital narrative structures, reader responses, and platform affordances in online literary environments. **Method:** Using a qualitative digital textual design, this study analyzes digital literary works, reader comments, votes, kudos, bookmarks, tags, author's notes, content warnings, interface features, and participation metrics from Electronic Literature Collection, Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and ELMCIP Knowledge Base. **Results:** The findings show that interactive narrative structures operate through hyperlink-based navigation, multimodal activation, serial continuation, paratextual framing, and interface-mediated reader movement. **Implication:** Reader responses demonstrate that literary meaning is produced through affective engagement, interpretation, evaluation, communal interaction, curation, and textual circulation. **Novelty:** This study contributes to digital literary studies by integrating digital narratology, reader-response analysis, and platform/interface analysis into a unified framework for understanding online literature as a socio-technical literary ecology.

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INTRODUCTION

The expansion of digital reading cultures has transformed literary experience from a solitary act of textual reception into a networked practice of participation, interaction, and communal meaning-making. This transformation is socially significant because digital platforms now operate not only as channels for distributing literary texts but also as infrastructures through which readers comment, evaluate, classify, recommend, and circulate literary works. DataReportal reported that Indonesia had approximately 230 million internet users in October 2025, with internet penetration reaching 80.5 percent of the population, indicating the large social base for digitally mediated cultural participation. A similar transformation is visible in literary platforms: Archive of Our Own reported 10 million registered users in January 2026 and 17 million fanworks in March 2026, showing that participatory literary culture has become a large-scale digital phenomenon rather than a marginal practice. These developments make the study of reader participation and interactivity urgent because literary authority, textual visibility, and interpretive agency are increasingly reorganized through digital traces such as comments, votes, kudos, tags, bookmarks, and platform metrics.

Previous research has examined electronic literature, fanfiction, digital social reading, and online writing communities from various perspectives (Alan, 2023; Gil & Sylla, 2021; Metawe, 2024). The Electronic Literature Organization has positioned electronic literature as literature produced for the digital medium, while the Electronic Literature Collection provides curated examples of hypertext fiction, interactive poetry, and multimodal literary works (Electronic Literature Organization, n.d.). Studies on Wattpad have demonstrated that reader comments can function as valuable evidence for understanding how fiction circulates through digital social reading practices (Zafar et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Research on fanfiction archives has also shown that tagging, bookmarking, kudos, and fandom-based classification shape how readers encounter and interpret texts (Bell & Ensslin, 2024; Lisenkova, 2021). However, existing studies often examine textual form, reader response, or platform affordance separately, leaving insufficient attention to how these three dimensions operate together in the production of online literary meaning. This gap is important because online literature is not only written and read; it is navigated, classified, discussed, evaluated, archived, and circulated through platform-specific systems of interaction.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how reader participation and interactivity operate in online literary environments. It specifically asks how digital literary texts organize interactive narrative structures, how readers participate in meaning-making through visible response practices, and how platform interfaces shape the possibilities and limits of literary interaction. The study treats digital literary works, reader comments, paratexts, platform features, and participation metrics as interconnected units of analysis rather than separate objects. Methodologically, it combines digital narratology, reader-response analysis, and platform/interface analysis to capture the layered nature of online literary experience. Digital narratology is used to examine hyperlinking, fragmentation, seriality, multimodality, and reader navigation; reader-response analysis is used to interpret affective, evaluative, speculative, and communal responses; and platform/interface analysis is used to examine how tags, comments, kudos, votes, bookmarks, recommendations, and visibility metrics organize participation. Through this design, the study clarifies how digital literature becomes co-produced through text, reader, and platform.

The central argument of this article is that interactivity in online literary environments should not be understood merely as a technical feature or a decorative supplement to literary form. Rather, interactivity functions as a socio-literary mechanism through which readers become navigators, interpreters, evaluators, curators, affective witnesses, informal critics, and agents of textual circulation. Interactive structures invite readers to move through narrative space; response features allow them to articulate interpretation and affect; and platform affordances convert these actions into visible signals of attention, relevance, and communal value. This means that online literary meaning is produced not only within the authored text but also around it, through comment threads, tags, metadata, recommendations, bookmarks, and accumulated traces of participation. The implication is twofold: literary analysis must move beyond close reading of textual content toward an ecology of reading practices, interfaces, and infrastructures, and digital literary studies must account for how platforms redistribute agency among authors, readers, communities, and algorithmic or archival systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital narratology

Digital narratology provides a crucial framework for understanding how narrative operates when literary texts are produced, distributed, and experienced through digital media. Unlike classical narratology, which often assumes a relatively stable text, linear progression, and readerly interpretation after textual production, digital narratology emphasizes procedurality, navigation, multimodality, hyperlinking, and user interaction (Koenitz, 2023; Martínez, 2024). In this perspective, narrative is not only a sequence of events arranged by an author but also a dynamic structure activated through reader movement, interface design, and technological mediation. Scholars of electronic literature and interactive digital narratives argue that digital texts challenge conventional distinctions between text, medium, and reading act (Bell & Ensslin, 2024; Rukmi et al., 2024). Therefore, digital narratology is particularly relevant to online literary environments because it enables the analysis of how narrative meaning emerges from the interaction between textual architecture, platform interface, and reader operation.

The main indicators of digital narratology in online literary environments include non-linearity, narrative branching, seriality, hyperlink structure, multimodal composition, and navigational agency (Meyerhofer-Parra et al., 2024). Non-linearity refers to the reader's ability to encounter narrative units in different sequences, while branching concerns the presence of alternative routes or possible narrative paths. Seriality appears in platform-based fiction that develops through updates, chapters, or installments, making reading temporally extended and socially anticipated. Multimodality includes the combination of words, images, sound, animation, layout, and interface. Navigational agency refers to the extent to which readers shape their reading trajectory through clicking, scrolling, selecting, filtering, commenting, or revisiting textual fragments. These indicators show that digital narrative should be understood not as a closed textual object but as a participatory structure whose coherence is partly produced through reader action.

Reader participation

Reader participation is another central concept in the study of online literary environments because digital reading is increasingly performed as a visible, social, and interactive practice (Trichopoulos et al., 2023). Traditional reader-response theory emphasizes that meaning is not contained entirely within the text but emerges through the reader's interpretive act. In online environments, this interpretive act becomes publicly traceable through comments, ratings, votes, kudos, bookmarks, reviews, annotations, and discussion threads (Rukmi et al., 2024). Participation therefore exceeds interpretation; it includes affective expression, evaluative judgment, communal negotiation, and sometimes direct influence on the continuation of a text (Metawe, 2024; Rodríguez et al., 2021). Digital social reading studies demonstrate that readers do not merely consume literary works but also produce metadata, emotional responses, recommendations, and interpretive communities around them. Thus, reader participation repositions literary reception as a visible and socially organized component of digital literary culture.

The indicators of reader participation may be grouped into cognitive, affective, evaluative, and social dimensions (Gaudenzi, 2022; Gil & Sylla, 2021). Cognitive participation appears when readers interpret narrative events, predict plot development, analyze characters, or compare textual elements. Affective participation emerges through expressions of empathy, excitement, anger, grief, suspense, admiration, or identification with characters and storyworlds. Evaluative participation includes ratings, votes, kudos, reviews, criticism, and judgment of narrative quality. Social participation occurs when readers respond to one another, address the author, form fandom-based communities, or participate in collective interpretation. In platform-based fiction, these dimensions often overlap because a single comment may simultaneously express emotion, evaluate the story, speculate about future events, and strengthen the reader's belonging to a literary community. This overlap makes reader response a key site for analyzing participatory meaning-making in online literature.

Platform affordance

Platform affordance is equally important because online literary interaction is never produced by readers and texts alone; it is shaped by the technical and social architecture of the platform. Affordance refers

to the possibilities for action that a technological environment enables, encourages, restricts, or makes visible (Basaraba et al., 2021). In literary platforms such as Wattpad, AO3, Goodreads, and electronic literature archives, affordances include commenting systems, tagging structures, search tools, recommendation mechanisms, bookmarking, rating systems, author notes, subscription features, and visibility metrics (Koenitz et al., 2023; Palioura & Dimoulas, 2022). Different platforms conceptualize literary participation differently. Wattpad encourages social storytelling and serialized interaction, AO3 prioritizes archival organization and tagging, while electronic literature collections emphasize curated access to experimental digital works (Chang & Chu, 2022). Accordingly, platform affordance mediates how literature becomes readable, searchable, discussable, valuable, and socially circulated within digital environments.

The major indicators of platform affordance in online literary environments include visibility, accessibility, interactivity, discoverability, relationality, and algorithmic or archival organization (Nik et al., 2024; Rahiem, 2021). Visibility concerns how platforms display texts, comments, popularity signals, and reader engagement. Accessibility refers to how users enter, navigate, and retrieve literary works. Interactivity includes the technical features that allow readers to comment, vote, tag, bookmark, share, or respond. Discoverability concerns search systems, tags, metadata, rankings, recommendations, and categorization. Relationality refers to the way platforms connect authors, readers, texts, fandoms, and interpretive communities. Algorithmic or archival organization determines whether literary circulation is shaped by recommendation systems, user curation, tags, database logic, or editorial selection. These indicators confirm that online literary meaning is produced within an ecology of text, reader practice, platform design, and infrastructural visibility.

METHOD

This study takes online literary environments as its material object, with the unit of analysis consisting of digital literary texts, reader responses, platform features, paratextual elements, and participation metrics. To strengthen the empirical boundaries of the study, the corpus was organized into four platform-based clusters: curated electronic literature, serialized social fiction, fanfiction archives, and scholarly metadata repositories. The selected data include electronic literary works, online fiction chapters, reader comments, votes, kudos, bookmarks, tags, summaries, author's notes, warnings, hyperlinks, interface tools, and visible engagement indicators. Each corpus item was treated not as an isolated textual object but as part of a broader interactional ecology involving narrative form, reader activity, and platform design. The corpus is summarized as Table 1.

This study employed a qualitative digital textual design with a multi-layered analytical orientation. Rather than treating online literary works as isolated texts, the study approached them as socio-technical literary events produced through the interaction of narrative form, reader response, and platform affordance. The design was selected because the research problem requires an interpretive approach capable of examining textual structures, visible reader practices, and interface-mediated participation within the same analytical frame. It was also comparative because the corpus included different types of online literary spaces, such as curated electronic literature, social storytelling platforms, fanfiction archives, and metadata-based repositories. This comparative design enabled the study to identify both shared patterns of digital literary interaction and platform-specific differences in how participation is organized.

The sources of information consisted of primary and secondary digital materials. Primary sources included selected digital literary works, reader comments, engagement indicators, platform features, tags, author's notes, content warnings, and interface documentation obtained from Electronic Literature Collection, Wattpad, AO3, and ELMCIP. These sources were chosen because they provide direct evidence of how online literary texts are structured, accessed, interpreted, evaluated, classified, and circulated. Secondary sources included scholarly articles, theoretical works on digital narratology, reader-response theory, electronic literature, fanfiction studies, digital social reading, and platform studies. The secondary sources were used not as substitutes for corpus data but as conceptual support for interpreting the relationship between narrative form, reader participation, and platform affordance.

Table 1. Research corpus

No	Corpus Category	Data Type	Unit of Analysis	Example of Data	Source
1	Electronic literature	Digital literary works	Hyperlinks, narrative paths, multimodal elements	Hypertext fiction, interactive poem, digital fiction	Electronic Literature Collection
2	Online fiction	Serialized literary texts	Chapters, plot updates, narrative structure	Popular or sample stories	Wattpad
3	Fanfiction archive	Transformative digital texts	Tags, kudos, bookmarks, comments	Fanfiction works and reader traces	Archive of Our Own/AO3
4	Reader comments	Reader-generated responses	Interpretation, emotion, evaluation	Comment threads, replies, feedback	Wattpad/ AO3
5	Participation metrics	Quantitative engagement traces	Votes, kudos, reads, bookmarks	Number of reads, votes, kudos	Platform metadata
6	Digital paratexts	Supporting textual elements	Tags, synopses, author's notes	Summary, warnings, update notes	Wattpad/ AO3/ELO
7	Interface features	Platform interaction tools	Comment box, vote button, tagging system	Reader-response interface	Platform observation
8	Archival metadata	Descriptive information	Author, genre, date, form, medium	Work profile and classification	ELMCIP Knowledge Base

Data collection was conducted through purposive digital observation and corpus documentation. First, relevant works were selected based on the presence of interactive, participatory, or platform-mediated features. The selection prioritized corpus items that displayed clear evidence of reader navigation, visible response practices, paratextual framing, or interface-based interaction. Second, textual and paratextual elements were documented, including titles, synopses, tags, chapter structures, author's notes, hyperlinks, warnings, and multimodal features. Third, reader-response data were collected by recording selected comments, reviews, votes, kudos, bookmarks, and visible engagement indicators. Fourth, interface features were documented through field notes and screenshots, especially features that enable commenting, tagging, rating, navigation, recommendation, bookmarking, and author-reader interaction. All data were then organized into a corpus matrix to classify each item according to source, text type, interaction feature, reader response, platform affordance, and analytical relevance.

Data analysis was conducted in five stages. The first stage involved corpus mapping to classify all data into textual, paratextual, participatory, and interface categories. The second stage applied digital narratology to examine narrative structure, hyperlinking, seriality, multimodality, fragmentation, and reader navigation. The third stage used reader-response analysis to identify patterns of interpretation, affective engagement, evaluation, speculation, criticism, and communal meaning-making in reader comments and participation traces. The fourth stage applied platform/interface analysis to examine how affordances such as tags, comments, kudos, votes, bookmarks, recommendations, warnings, filters, and visibility metrics shape literary interaction. The final stage synthesized the findings across the three analytical tools to explain how online literary environments transform readers from passive recipients into active participants in the production, circulation, and negotiation of digital literary meaning.

RESULTS

Interactive narrative structures in digital literary texts

The first layer of analysis examines how online literary environments reorganize narrative structure through interactive textual design, reader navigation, and platform-based participation. As shown in Figure 1,

the corpus does not present digital narrative as a single formal category, but as a continuum ranging from structurally interactive electronic literature to socially interactive platform fiction. Hypertext fiction, interactive poetry, multimodal digital stories, serialized Wattpad narratives, and AO3 fanfiction each demonstrate different degrees of reader involvement. Some texts require readers to activate meaning through links, fragments, sound, image, motion, or branching routes, while others generate interactivity through comments, tags, updates, votes, kudos, bookmarks, and author-reader exchanges. This section therefore focuses on how narrative becomes interactive both inside the literary text and around its platform-mediated circulation.



Figure 1. Corpus-based flow of interactive narrative structures, reader operations, and narrative consequences in online literary environment.
(Source: corpus-based synthesis by the researcher, 2025)

Figure 1 shows four dominant patterns of interactive narrative structure across the corpus. First, electronic literature embeds interactivity within the work itself through hyperlinking, fragmented layouts, multimodal composition, and reader-directed navigation. Second, Wattpad fiction often maintains relatively linear storytelling but becomes interactive through chapter comments, votes, rankings, update rhythms, and author's notes. Third, AO3 fanfiction relies strongly on tags, warnings, kudos, bookmarks, comments, series links, and metadata to guide reader selection and interpretation. Fourth, ELMCIP and cross-platform paratexts show that digital literature is also accessed through archival classification, summaries, tags, author notes, and interface-based thresholds. Across the corpus, interactivity appears not only as narrative branching but also as navigation, anticipation, classification, feedback, visibility, and circulation.

These findings extend digital narratology by showing that interactivity cannot be reduced to choice-based structure or non-linear form. In online literary environments, narrative interaction operates through a wider ecology of textual architecture, reader practice, platform affordance, and digital paratext. The reader becomes not merely an interpreter but also a navigator, organizer, commentator, evaluator, and participant in textual circulation. The narrative object is therefore no longer confined to the authored text alone, because it also emerges through links, fragments, interfaces, tags, metadata, comments, and visible engagement traces. This suggests that digital narrative should be understood as procedural and relational: it is activated through the interaction between story design, readerly action, and the technological conditions that make participation visible, repeatable, and socially meaningful.

Reader responses and participatory meaning-making

The second layer of analysis focuses on reader responses as evidence of participatory meaning-making in online literary environments. As shown in Figure 2, reader participation appears in various forms, ranging from short affective reactions to extended interpretive comments, votes, kudos, bookmarks, recommendations, reviews, and replies among readers. These responses indicate that online reading is not limited to private interpretation but becomes a visible and socially shared activity. Readers respond not only to plot development and character conflict, but also to author's notes, tags, warnings, platform metrics, and other readers' comments. Their responses do not merely follow the text; they surround, extend, evaluate, classify, and circulate it. This section therefore examines how reader-generated traces become part of the meaning-making process in digital literary culture.

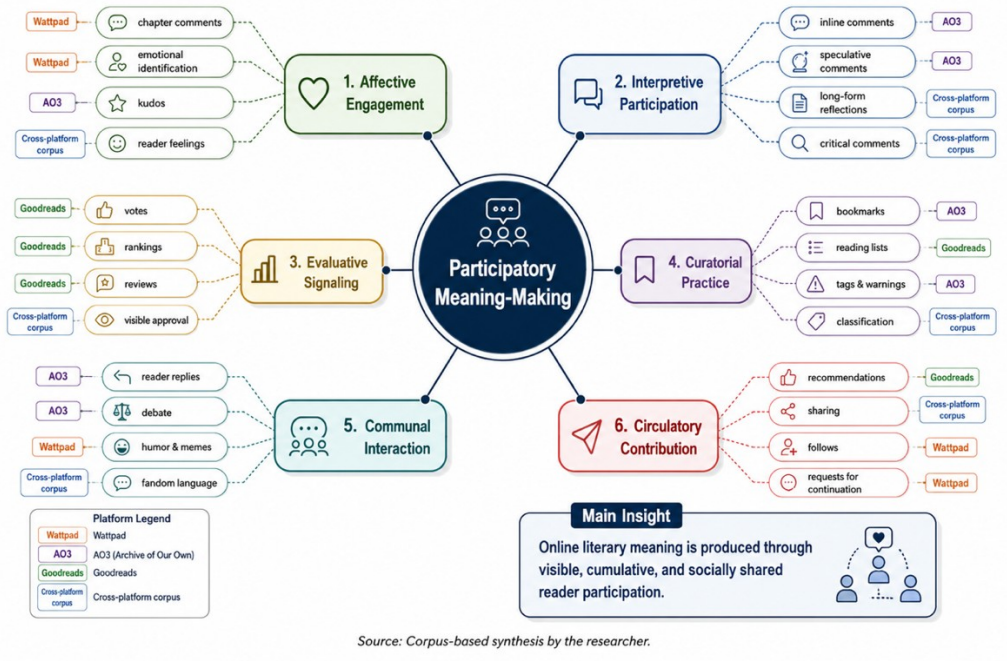


Figure 2. Reader-responses and participatory meaning-making in online literary environments. (Source: Corpus-based synthesis by the researcher, 2025)

Figure 2 identifies six major patterns of reader response across the corpus. First, affective responses are visible in expressions of excitement, empathy, anger, sadness, suspense, admiration, and identification with characters. Second, interpretive responses appear through character analysis, scene-based commentary, plot prediction, thematic reflection, and long-form analysis. Third, evaluative responses are found in votes, kudos, reviews, criticism, rankings, and corrective comments on narrative quality. Fourth, communal responses emerge through replies, jokes, fandom language, debate, and shared interpretation among readers. Fifth, curatorial responses appear through bookmarks, lists, recommendations, tags, and classificatory practices. Sixth, circulatory responses appear through sharing, following, accumulated engagement, and visibility metrics. Wattpad foregrounds immediate and serialized participation, while AO3 foregrounds tagging, kudos, bookmarking, warnings, and fandom-based interpretation.

These findings show that online literary meaning is produced through the accumulation of readerly actions around the text. A comment may express emotion, offer interpretation, evaluate narrative quality, and invite further discussion at the same time. A vote or kudos may seem minimal, yet it contributes to visibility, popularity, and perceived value. A bookmark does not simply save a work; it classifies, remembers, recommends, and sometimes redistributes it. In this sense, readers act as interpreters, evaluators, curators, affective witnesses, informal critics, and agents of circulation. The literary text remains important, but its online significance is shaped by the visible traces of participation that gather around it. Meaning therefore emerges through a network of text, reader response, communal exchange, paratextual classification, and platform-based visibility.

Platform affordances and the design of literary interaction

The third layer of analysis examines how platform affordances shape the design of literary interaction in online environments. As shown in Figure 3, the relationship between reader and text is not produced by narrative content alone, but also by the interface through which the text is accessed, displayed, discussed, classified, evaluated, and circulated. Each platform offers a different structure of interaction: Electronic Literature Collection foregrounds navigation, multimodality, and curatorial framing; Wattpad emphasizes serial reading, comments, votes, rankings, notifications, and mobile accessibility; while AO3 highlights tags, filters, kudos, bookmarks, warnings, and fandom-based classification. These features show that digital platforms do not simply host literary works. They actively organize the conditions under which reading becomes interactive, social, visible, and repeatable.

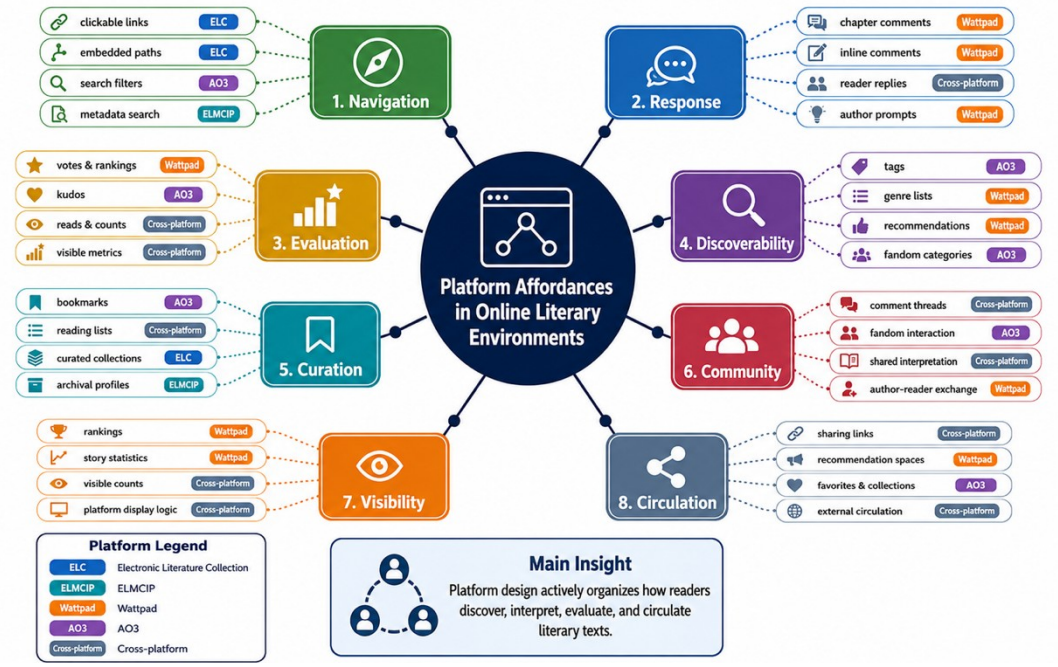


Figure 3. Platform affordances in literary interaction across digital literary platforms.
(Source: Corpus-based synthesis by the researcher, 2025)

Figure 3 identifies eight major affordance patterns across the corpus. Navigational affordances appear in hyperlinks, embedded paths, screen-based movement, search systems, and filters. Multimodal affordances appear through image, sound, animation, kinetic typography, and interface movement. Response affordances appear in comments, replies, author's notes, and discussion threads. Evaluative affordances are visible through votes, kudos, rankings, reads, and engagement metrics. Discoverability affordances include tags, recommendations, genre lists, keywords, archive categories, and search filters. Curatorial affordances emerge through bookmarks, reading lists, collections, work descriptions, and metadata. Ethical-affective affordances appear through warnings, rating labels, content notes, and platform rules. Circulatory affordances appear through sharing features, recommendations, notifications, rankings, and platform visibility systems.

These findings indicate that online literary interaction is designed through the material arrangement of platform features. A reader's decision to click, comment, vote, leave kudos, use a tag, bookmark a work, follow an author, subscribe to updates, or share a story is made possible by the interface. The platform therefore shapes not only access to literature but also the forms of participation available to readers. In this setting, literary experience becomes distributed across text, interface, metadata, metrics, community practice, and platform regulation. The meaning of a work is influenced by how it is found, framed, ranked, discussed, saved, recommended, and remembered within the platform. Reader participation is therefore not a spontaneous activity alone; it is structured by affordances that make certain interactions easy, visible, repeatable, measurable, and socially meaningful.

DISCUSSION

The findings on interactive narrative structures show that online literary environments expand the function of narrative from a fixed textual sequence into an activated field of reader movement. This matters because digital literature does not only ask readers to interpret meaning after reading, but also requires them to participate in organizing narrative order, rhythm, access, and coherence. Hyperlinks, fragmented screens, multimodal elements, serial updates, tags, and author's notes reposition the reader as a navigator of textual possibility. The productive function of such interactivity lies in its ability to increase reader agency, invite exploratory reading, and make narrative experience more personal, procedural, and participatory (Bell & Ensslin, 2024; Rukmi et al., 2024). At the same time, this form of interactivity may also create discontinuity, interpretive instability, and uneven access for readers who are less familiar with digital reading conventions. Thus, interactive narrative strengthens literary experience while also demanding new forms of digital literacy, especially the ability to move across links, modes, platforms, and paratextual signals.

This transformation occurs because digital narrative is structured by a different relationship between text, medium, and reader action. In print-based narrative, sequence is generally stabilized by page order and authorial arrangement, even when the story itself is experimental. In digital environments, however, sequence is distributed across hyperlinks, screens, interfaces, metadata, update systems, comment spaces, and platform-specific routes. The underlying structure is therefore not simply textual but procedural: readers encounter the work through clicking, scrolling, selecting, filtering, commenting, waiting for updates, or returning through notifications. This explains why digital literature often appears less as a completed object than as an event that unfolds through operations performed by readers within a designed interface (Alan, 2023; Metawe, 2024). Narrative meaning is produced through a chain of actions in which textual architecture and reader choice continually shape one another. Consequently, digital narratology must attend not only to plot, voice, and temporality, but also to navigation, interface, seriality, and readerly operation.

The findings on reader responses demonstrate that online literary meaning is increasingly produced through visible, cumulative, and socially shared acts of reception. Comments, votes, kudos, bookmarks, reviews, recommendations, replies, and long-form reflections transform reading into a public record of emotion, evaluation, interpretation, and circulation. This has an important implication for literary studies: reception can no longer be treated only as an abstract theoretical category or as something reconstructed after reading, because online platforms preserve reception as textual, numerical, and interactional data. The productive function of reader participation lies in its ability to build interpretive communities, extend the storyworld, and make readerly affect visible (Trichopoulos et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). However, its possible dysfunction appears when popularity metrics, immediate affective reactions, or community expectations begin to dominate slower, more critical, or less visible forms of literary appreciation. Online reader participation therefore enriches literary meaning, but it also introduces new hierarchies of attention and value.

Reader response becomes central in online literary environments because platforms convert reception into interactional traces. A reader's emotion becomes a comment; appreciation becomes a vote or kudos; long-term attachment becomes a bookmark; interpretation becomes a thread; and recommendation becomes a mechanism of circulation. This conversion creates a correlation between reader activity and textual visibility. Wattpad foregrounds immediate and serialized participation through chapter comments, votes, update requests, and author-reader exchanges, while AO3 foregrounds archival and fandom-based participation through tags, kudos, bookmarks, warnings, and interpretive comments (Lisenkova, 2021; Zafar et al., 2024). These differences show that participation is not determined by reader motivation alone, but also by the available forms through which platforms allow readers to act. The deeper structure is therefore socio-technical: reader agency is expressed through platform-designed possibilities that make certain responses easy, repeatable, countable, and visible. In this sense, reader participation is both an interpretive practice and an infrastructural effect.

The findings on platform affordances indicate that literary interaction is not simply a spontaneous relationship between readers and texts; it is designed, organized, and governed by interface structures. Search filters, tags, rankings, kudos, votes, comments, notifications, content warnings, recommendations, reading lists, and moderation tools do not merely support literary activity; they shape the form that literary activity takes. The platform functions as a literary infrastructure because it determines how readers discover works,

how they evaluate them, how they respond to them, and how they circulate them (Bell & Ensslin, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Its productive function is to facilitate access, discoverability, interaction, community formation, and textual preservation. Yet its dysfunction appears when visibility is unevenly distributed, when metrics dominate value perception, when algorithmic or archival logics privilege certain texts, or when platform rules limit particular forms of expression. Thus, online literary interaction is always mediated by the technical and cultural design of the platform.

This pattern emerges because online literary platforms are built on different infrastructural and institutional logics. Wattpad is oriented toward social storytelling, mobile reading, serial engagement, rankings, and reader feedback; AO3 is oriented toward archival organization, community tagging, filtering, warnings, kudos, and non-commercial fan preservation; while Electronic Literature Collection is oriented toward curation, experimentation, and the recognition of electronic literature as an artistic field (Nik et al., 2024; Rahiem, 2021). These differences produce different kinds of reader interaction and different forms of literary value. A work on Wattpad may become visible through votes, reads, updates, and rankings, while a work on AO3 may become accessible through tags, fandom categories, bookmarks, and filters. The underlying structure is therefore institutional as much as technical: platform affordances reflect values, governance models, cultural assumptions, and design priorities about what literature, readership, and community should become in digital environments. Reader participation is consequently shaped by the platform's architecture of access, visibility, and interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that reader participation and interactivity in online literary environments are not peripheral features of digital literature but constitutive elements of its textual, social, and platform-based existence. The most important finding is that online literary meaning emerges through the interaction among narrative structure, reader response, and platform affordance. Hyperlinks, multimodal forms, serial updates, comments, kudos, votes, tags, bookmarks, warnings, recommendations, and engagement metrics collectively reshape the reader's position from passive recipient to navigator, interpreter, evaluator, curator, affective witness, informal critic, and agent of literary circulation. The main scholarly contribution of this study lies in its integrated analytical framework, which combines digital narratology, reader-response analysis, and platform/interface analysis to examine online literature as a socio-technical literary ecology. This framework renews the perspective of digital literary studies by treating texts, readers, and platforms as mutually constitutive rather than analytically separate domains.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on selected online literary environments and visible forms of reader participation. It does not fully capture private reading experiences, demographic differences among readers, deleted comments, hidden algorithmic processes, or longitudinal changes in platform design and community practice. Future research should therefore expand the corpus across different linguistic, cultural, regional, and platform contexts, including non-Western, multilingual, and locally specific digital literary communities. Further studies may also combine qualitative interpretation with computational methods such as sentiment analysis, network analysis, metadata mapping, corpus linguistics, or digital ethnography to examine larger-scale patterns of participation and interaction. Comparative research between commercial platforms, nonprofit archives, and curated electronic literature collections would help explain how different infrastructures produce different forms of literary agency, textual visibility, reader participation, and cultural value.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Suaidi: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing; data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The authors used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible documents, platform policies, and governance materials.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly available documentary records concerning machine co-authorship, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the authors affirm that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus/data analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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