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Literary Production in the Quasi-Digital Society

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Abstract

This article investigates the practice of literary production in the digital age, characterized by the spirit of using internet-based technological innovation, mainly social media. In this context, Indonesian literary writers often use social media platforms, especially Wattpad (a story-sharing website), to produce their literary works. Nevertheless, such a condition has not dampened the circulation of literary works in printed (conventional) form. Even though in one side they use Wattpad to publish their works, but in the other side they still follow publication system through conventional publishers. Accordingly, this particular study aims to examine the influence of technological advancement to literary production culture. Therefore, through a sociocultural approach and qualitative methods, this study is designed to observe how far the advancement of social media technology can stimulate specific behavior of literary writers in their creative process and presenting their works to the public. As a result, through exploration and analysis, it is found that social media technology could encourage digital literary production at a certain point. However, this cannot entirely make literary agents turn away from more conventional printing technology. It further reveals the strategy of literary writers with popular genre to deal with the doxa in the of Indonesian literary field. This social condition remarks the quasi-digital society.

***Keywords**: Literary Production Practice; Conventional Publishing; Story-Sharing Website; Wattpad; Doxa; Quasi-Digital Society*

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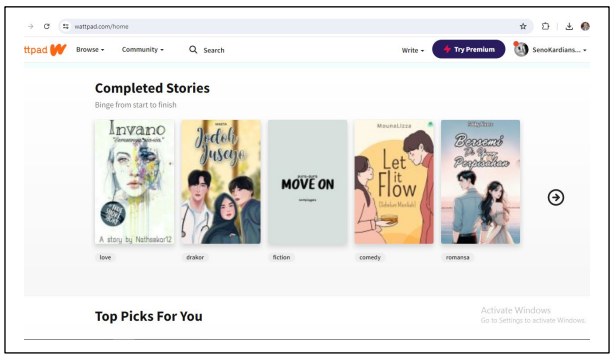
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Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought a socio-cultural implication toward global human life (Potter & McDougall, 2017; Marin-Lacarta, 2019). Digital technology significantly impacts Indonesian social and cultural life, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. According to a social media overview by We Are Social Institute (2024), Indonesia had approximately 139 million active social media users. The data implies that around 49,9% of the 278,7 million Indonesian population now interact on digital social space. This condition shows how influential social media technology is for Indonesian socio-cultural activities. It is no exception for literary production, especially by Indonesian writers.

Far before the utilization of social media, the term cyber literature has been known in Indonesia since the late 1990s. Roekminto (2005) stated that the first Indonesian internet literary site was *cybersastra.net*. This platform was founded by three Indonesian poets (i.e., Nanang Suryadi, Yono Wardito, and Donny Anggoro) in 1999. Since *cybersastra.net,* an uncountable number of literary sites have emerged in cyberspace. At that time, it stimulated many narratives about cyber literature in Indonesia from literary writers, academicians, and the general public. However, he criticizes that there was no tremendous shift between cyber literary work and conventional work. According to him, cyber literature offers no particular literary characteristics besides using the internet as a medium of expression. In short, he strongly argues that the early Indonesian cyber literature only transferred the conventional way of writing onto the internet but gave less significant improvement to the literary works produced.

Along with the development of cyber or digital technology, social media platforms are also developed with various types and functions. Besides the platforms mentioned previously, Wattpad is a popular digital platform that is specifically functional for a story-sharing website (Davies, 2017). After 18 years of operating as a social storytelling platform, Wattpad has reached 90 million readers and writers worldwide. It makes Wattpad the most extensive reading and writing platform in the world. Wattpad offers its readers free access to all available literary works as a social media platform. Wattpad also allows professional and beginner writers to share their novels, short stories, or poetry anthologies with global readers without undergoing the complexity of conventional publishing systems. To complete its characteristic as a social media platform, Wattpad provides a feature enabling asynchronous (non-real time) communication between writers and their readers. This feature results in a typical interaction among users that commonly occurs in general kinds of social media. Consequently, writers tend to maximize the function of Wattpad as a social media technology to produce their literary works and communicate with their prospective readers. Therefore, it is unquestionable that many people are interested in actualizing their literary enthusiasm through this platform.



Picture 1: *Wattpad Home Page (https://www.wattpad.com/home)*

Based on that explanation, it can be seen that Wattpad has become a digital social space where writers can produce any literary work and share it without necessarily undergoing the conventional publishing system. In this kind of space, they can even gain popularity due to the wide range of prospective readers they can encounter on the platform. On this point, the innovation of social media utilization seems disruptive for conventional publishing systems. However, the fact that many Indonesian writers still publish their works in printed form raises two fundamental socio-cultural questions regarding the existence of digital literary platforms in Indonesia: 1. "*Does it disrupt conventional literary production?"* And 2. "*How significant has it changed literary production practice?"*. In this case, a deeper investigation is needed to investigate the role of social media platforms, such as Wattpad, in

Indonesian literary production. This sort of study aims to reveal how far technological innovation can influence the dynamics of the literary industry in Indonesia.

Within academic investigation, digital literature has emerged as a topic of discussion among Indonesian scholars. Roekminto (2005) studied polemics and literary innovation caused by the early emergence of cyber literature (literary sites) in Indonesia. Related to that study, Hidayat (2008) observed cyber media's positive and negative impact on Indonesian literature. Another discussion also covered trends, patterns, and approaches by scholars in Indonesia to conducting digital literary studies (Rokib, 2019). Meanwhile, Nugraha and Suyitno (2020) assessed the narrative of cyber literature in Indonesia, which misses its attention in electronic literature. Recently, other scholars have developed studies that focus on social media utilizations in literary production, such as the commodification of Wattpad literary work on independent publishers (Mawardi, 2018), the role of Wattpad as an online self-publishing application for information distribution (Lifiani & Krismayani, 2020), and the character of Wattpad as a field of literary production (Kardiansyah, 2019).

However, a study that investigates the impact of digital literary production on conventional publishing systems is rather tricky to find, especially regarding the behavior of both writers and readers in responding to the current digital era. The existing studies show how limited the attention of previous researchers to the dynamics of literary production practice amid the intersection between conventionality and digital-based innovation. Therefore, this current study can potentially fill the gap left by the previous researchers. By investigating the role of social media technology in shaping society's socio-cultural behavior in producing literary work, this study can reveal the mode of literary production in the current situation.

This study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's genetic structuralism theory as the main framework of thought. With concepts like 'field', 'habitus', and 'capital', the Bourdieusian sociological paradigm is essential to answer various issues of literary production. It addresses topics including how literary production practices affect social change and whether social variables affect the creation of literary works. In light of this, this study aims to learn more about the literary mode of production in Indonesian literature. Therefore, current common sense in the literary field potentially dominating literary production must be analyzed comprehensively.

Pierre Bourdieu is a specialist in the sociology of cultural production, endeavoring to formulate two approaches to epistemology: objectivism and subjectivism. He then advances the field of genetic structuralism theory or genetic sociology by putting forth a theoretical framework known as "the objectivity of the subjective" (Bourdieu, 1993). Specifically, Bourdieu (1993) explicitly explains that "the genetic structuralism I propose is designed to understand both the genesis of social structures—the literary field—and the genesis of dispositions of the habitus of the agents involved in these structures". As a result, it is clear that his conceptual framework combines an investigation of the objective social structure with examining the origins of the socially constructed mental structure, internalized into particular individuals, which triggers practice. The following part explains some conceptual frameworks that will be used to engage with research questions formulated previously: field, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa*.

According to Bourdieu (1993), The literary field's science is a form of site analysis that establishes each position using a system of distinguishing characteristics that demonstrates how one position can be placed among others. Furthermore, Bourdieu sees the literary field as a 'field of force', along with a 'field of struggle' that tends to transform or conserve this field of force. This field is constructed by the objective relation based on the agents' varying positions during the struggle to maintain or strengthen their position. Ultimately, the force and position of agents in the power relations determine the strategy employed.

The term "field's structure" refers to a space of positions, which is the capital distribution structure of particular attributes that facilitates the agents' success in the field and generates either specific profit (prestige) or external profit (financial). In that sense, the agents' positions inside a field define its structure, and changes in their positions will likewise alter the field's structural order. Thus, agents struggle to control authority, resulting in legitimacy, consecration, and prestige in all fields.

Related to the concept of field, capital and habitus are also crucial concepts to explain social factors that influence the production of literary work. Capital can be understood as a set of accumulative power sources that literary translation agents can use. In detail, Bourdieu (Jenkins, 2013; Bourdieu, 1990; Karnanta, 2013) classify capital into four categories: 1. Economy capital that covers production devices, properties, and money; 2. Cultural capital is accumulative intellectual qualification achieved through formal education, custom, and tradition; 3. Social capital is a social network that agents have in their social relations with other parties in a social space, and 4. Symbolic capital can be prestige, status, authority, and legitimacy accumulated by agents in a social space. In this context, agents who enter the space of literary translation practice must have an orientation to gain more capital to strengthen their position in the field.

According to Bourdieu, habitus is typically defined as an internalized, subjective system, such as the scheme of perception, conception, and behavior adopted by individuals in a given social group, and it is the prerequisite for all objectification and apperception (Bourdieu, 1995). Furthermore, he explains that "scheme", an ordered objective system created by history, impacts habitus as a concept that generates practices. This circumstance demonstrates how habitus structures and is structured at the objective level.

Here, habitus is defined as an agent's "feel for the game" or "practical sense" that leads them to act and respond in a specific way. This concept refers to a set of dispositions that creates practice and perception with some characteristics: durable, transposable, structured structure, and structuring structure. The first characteristic demonstrates that habitus can endure throughout an agent's life. Simultaneously, the second characteristic emphasizes that this concept can work to develop practices in other fields of activity. The third characteristic demonstrates how objective conditions with a generative scheme impact habitus and shape it socially. Meanwhile, the last characteristic refers to habitus' capacity to produce behaviors under particular circumstances.

Furthermore, habitus is tightly related to the concept of strategy. One of the significant ideas in Bourdieu's (1993) theory of cultural production is that strategy is a specific orientation of practice. This concept is not based on conscious calculation but on unconscious dispositions toward practice (unconsciousness). Accordingly, the agents' actions follow the game flow (feel for the game), which their mindset has already internalized. This concept is also directly related to the practice of an agent in a social space or particular field based on their capital. The agent's practice will theoretically lead to the legitimacy contestation in literature.

To understand how the production of literary work is related to the contestation of literary agents to gain legitimacy, another important concept must be understood from Bourdieu's paradigm. That concept is what he calls doxa. In this context, doxa can be explained as a scheme of thinking and perception that gives rise to objectivity and can only be created by exploiting cognitive limitations of understanding (misrecognition). These limitations then create obedience or belief in the traditions of the social world as something natural and acceptable (taken for granted).

However, by the time doxa is realized by the agent, it has entered the discourse and is the subject of two competing narratives: orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In this case, Orthodoxy is a discourse raised by agents who occupy a dominant position in a field by implementing conservative strategies to maintain the status quo and, at the same time, their dominant position there. On the other

hand, heterodoxy is typically borne by recent entrants or pre-existing dominated agents. These newcomers generally practice by implementing subversive strategies to challenge the existing doxa and its dominant nature in the field. Ultimately, the internal conflict between doxa and opinion (discourse) domains determines a field's dynamics and function.

In the context of this current study, it can be assumed that the literary field has doxa that can be tried to be defended or even opposed through the production of digital literature. It implies that all the practices carried out by digital literary agents hypothetically have implications for the dynamics of training in Indonesian literature. The repercussions may be related to the agents' structural position, habitus, and capital and are inseparable from the struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy concepts in the field. Therefore, this kind of issue deserves to be studied more deeply through this study.

Methodology

This study approaches the object through a socio-cultural lens by onthologically seeing literary production practice as a form of the agent's social behavior to possess capital and legitimacy in the literary field. Therefore, the data to be collected and analyzed must be relevant to the problem and approach taken. Before data collection and analysis, a study must decide the material and formal objects to be investigated (Faruk, 2012). The material object is the object being studied, while the formal object is the point of view taken in analyzing the material object. In the context of this study, the material object is the production of literary works by Indonesian writers concerning the trend of story-sharing website platform utilization, especially Wattpad. Among many writers, this study purposively observes—the observation was conducted on June 2024—the practice committed by two writers (i.e., Erisca Febriani and Mia Chuz), due to their popularity both inside and outside of Wattpad and literary strategy to promote their digital and conventional works through Wattpad.

In accordance, the formal objects of this study are the literary agent's practices (related to their habitus and capital) and the doxa amid the influence of digital technology in Indonesian literature. Thus, the primary data for this study are the digital footprints of the chosen writers' practice taken from Wattpad pages and posts by directly observing the agents' practice, screen capturing, and taking notes to every relevant data found from the platform (primary data source). Besides, this study also needs secondary data sources in which they are taken from results of previous studies, articles, and testimonies about Wattpad literary works found on the internet. These data will be selected and classified inductively based on the research needs to answer the questions formulated before. Since this is not a content analysis, the data will not focus on the intrinsic elements of the chosen writers' works, but rather only focus on writers' habitus, capital, and doxa of Indonesian literary field (external factors).

The technique of analysis that will be carried out in this study adapts the steps of Bourdieu's method (1993), which seeks to integrate the relational level of social reality by providing adjustments to the research object encountered as follows:

1. Answering the first question by analyzing the practice (e.g., strategy of writing and promoting works) committed by the chosen literary agents inside and outside of Wattpad based on the relevant data selected from Wattpad platform, and then relating them to the information from various references (e.g., internet articles) to the origins of the agent's habitus, namely the structured and structuring character, which gives rise to agent practices both digitally and conventionally; and
2. Develop it to answer the following question by analyzing various information from various references regarding the agent's practice and literary legitimacy contestation in Indonesian literature. It aims to offer a more comprehensive view of the agent's practice's socio-cultural influence on the dynamics of literary production within the Indonesian literary field.

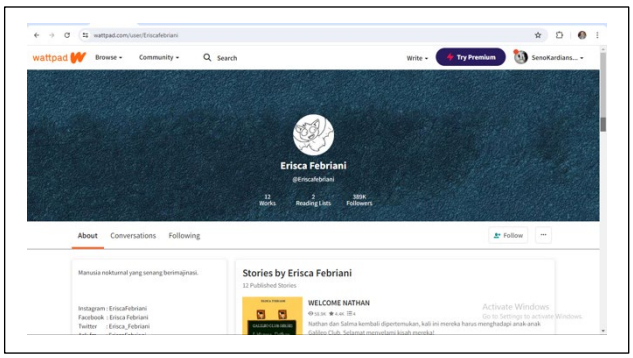
Results and Discussion

According to the research questions formulated previously, this part is subdivided into two main discussions. *Firstly,* this paper will discuss the existence of Wattpad as a digital literary platform and its relation to conventional literary production. The discussion in this part describes how Wattpad influences the mode of literary production in more conventional way. *Secondly,* the literary praxis of Wattpad writers and its influence on the field of Indonesian literature. Here, the discussion highlights how those writers' praxis influences the dynamics in the field of Indonesian literature. Eventually, the discussion will delineate how digital technology plays a role in literary production in today's context.

1. From Wattpad to Conventional Publisher

Since its emergence 18 years ago, Wattpad has become one of the most influential platforms for literary writing. In the context of Indonesian literary writers, many famous writers in the conventional publishing industry started their writing practice from Wattpad. In 2022 (Kasih & Destryani, 2022), Gramedia listed successful writers who started their career from Wattpad as follows: Mia Chuz (*Wedding Agreement*), Cecillia Wang (*Inevitably in Love*), Wulanfadi (*A*), Rintik Sedu (*Geez & Ann*), Erisca Febriani (*Dear Nathan*), Michelle J (*The Nerd Can Fight*), Arum Ekowati (*Merindu Cahaya de Amstel*), Valerie Patkar (*Claires*), and Almira Bastari (*Melbourne Wedding Marathon*). Moreover, from those names, Gramedia (Destryani, 2022) also listed Valerie Patkar and Almira Bastari as bestsellers and famous non-Wattpad writers such as Leila S. Chudori and Tere Liye in the conventional publishing field. This situation describes how story-sharing websites like Wattpad can be a prospective digital platform for beginner to start their writing career.

The popularity of those writers is reasonable since they accumulated social capital while writing on Wattpad. Kardiansyah (2019) justifies this view by seeing Wattpad as a readers-oriented platform, in which the more the writers can fulfil the readers' demand, the higher the possibility for them to be recognized and get more followers, even fans. Eventually, that essential nature can form the habitus of Wattpad's writers to be readers-oriented writers (popular/mass literary agents) to be popular. In this context, Bold (Bold, 2016) terms such a writer as 'micro-celebrity', the emerging writers who gain popularity due to certain trends in a specific time and space. In accordance, the popularity of a Wattpad writer can be seen through the following picture:

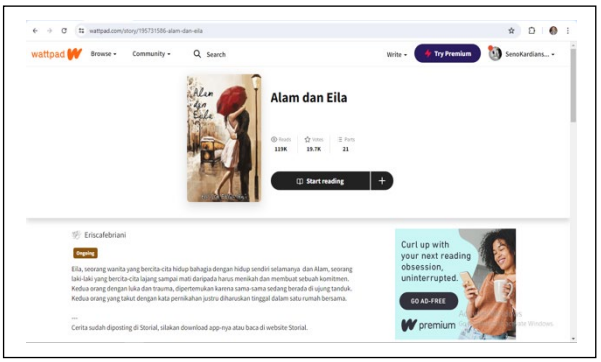


Picture 2: *Erisca Febriani's Wattpad Profile (https://www.wattpad.com/user/Eriscafebriani)*

The above picture shows a writer's Wattpad profile, Erisca Febriani, with around 389.000 followers. This writer emerged in 2015 with a story (which eventually became a novel) entitled "*Dear Nathan*". Until now, the book has been read 33.8 million times on Wattpad, published in printed form, and adapted to the silver screen. So far, Erisca

Febriani has been writing 12 stories through Wattpad. Her popularity is not only visible from her complete or published stories but also from her ongoing stories. That can be proven by one of her ongoing works, "*Alam dan Eila*", that currently has been read 119.000 times.

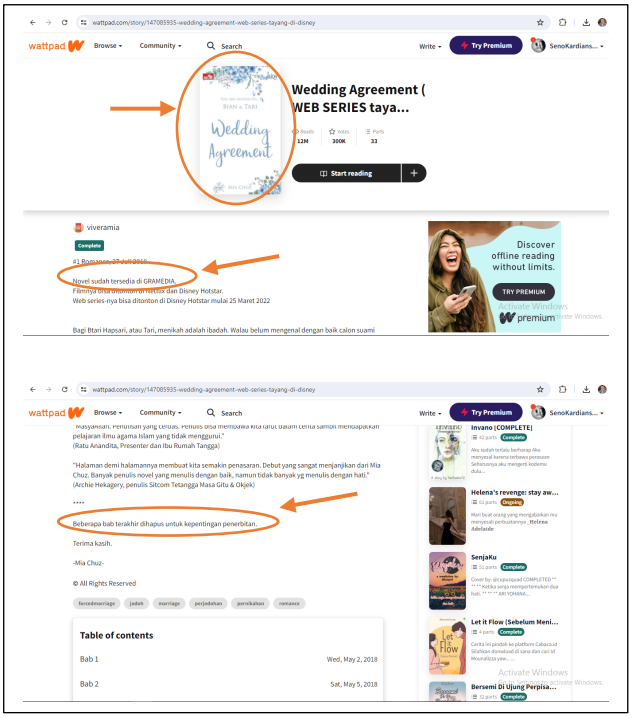
Based on that data, it can be seen that her social capital is undeniably huge as a young writer. As a platform that facilitates the production of popular culture, Wattpad has a reader-oriented nature that nurtures the writers to fulfill the demand of the readers. Therefore, a writer's fame will be determined by their ability to cope with that specific matter. An ability that Erisca Febriani—based on her status in the platform—has eventually overcame.



Picture 3: *Erisca Febriani's Alam dan Eila* (*https://www.wattpad.com/story/195731586-alam-dan-eila*)

However, there is a tendency for Wattpad writers like Erisca Febriani not to be satisfied with their popularity at Wattpad, thus expanding their reader reach through the conventional publishing system. It happens to many writers, including those mentioned previously by Gramedia. They even utilize Wattpad as promotional media for their printed version by explicitly stating that their works have been published and are available in the bookstore.

An example can be seen in Mia Chuz's novel "*Wedding Agreement*". This story was completed in 2018. After its completion, this story was conventionally published by publisher Elex Media Komputindo. The publication is marked by the use of its printed cover version – with the publisher logo – as the cover on the Wattpad page. Besides, the writer also informs in the description that "*Novel sudah tersedia di Gramedia [The novel version is already available at Gramedia]*". Moreover, to stimulate the readers to purchase the printed product and for conventional publication, the writer also removed several final chapters from the Wattpad page by writing "*Beberapa bab terakhir dihapus untuk kepentingan penerbitan [The last view chapters were removed for publishing purposes]*". It can be viewed from the following pictures:



Picture 4: *Wedding Agreement's Wattpad Page*
(https://www.wattpad.com/story/147085935-wedding-agreement-web-series-tayang-di-disney)

This trend shows that Wattpad's famous writers—as individuals who live in the digital era—cannot leave the traditional book publishing industry. In this case, there must be a certain charm (capital) those writers cannot resist in such a mode of publishing. Something that a digital platform like Wattpad cannot provide for those famous writers. In this stage, this study indicates that a digital platform—due to technological advancement—cannot push writers to migrate from a conventional system to a digital one. In the lens of the Bourdieusian sociological framework, this must be motivated by the writers (as literary agents) struggling to accumulate more capital in the field of the Indonesian literary industry.

2. Entering the Field of the Indonesian Literary Industry

As literary agents who start their praxis on a digital platform, Wattpad writers possess two capitals when entering the Indonesian literature field. Kardiansyah (2019) explains that they at least accumulated cultural and social capital while writing on Wattpad. Cultural capital is accumulated when they learn how to develop their creative process by understanding the readers' demands. Meanwhile, social capital is gained when the company attracts readers and maintains its followers or fans. These two capitals are essential because Bourdieu believes they can be converted into another form of capital in certain conditions.

In this context, economic capital is relevant for further discussion. Economic capital, in the Bourdieusian lens, refers to financial or material (e.g., money) resources possessed by an individual or group of agents. Furthermore, Bourdieu believes that in order to gain more economic capital, the agent can convert their cultural and social capital into any financial or material resources. The conversion emphasized in this circumstance refers to the agents' practice of using their technical skills or knowledge, along with their social networking, to gain more financial income. Here, its relevance with Wattpad's writers is tightly related to the behavior of its fanatic readers.

Mawardi (2018) sees a peculiar behavior from Wattpad writers' fans through his study. He notices they tend to be fanatic followers of those famous Wattpad writers. This circumstance leads to a fetishism trend, in

which the need to read literary works is no longer relevant to understanding the reason for their consumerism behavior. Mawardi believes that it is more a lifestyle instead of the need for reading material. Logically, if the need to read drives such a behavior, those fans can freely get it from Wattpad instead of purchasing the book. The fact that they are willing to pay for something available for free justifies Mawardi's claim on their fetishism. Therefore, it can be understood that the readers in this digital era—at least in Indonesia—have not moved to the digital reading culture due to their consumerism behavior. Here, this study notices that the Wattpad writers use such a characteristic of Indonesian readers to accumulate economic capital. They use this situation as an opportunity to convert their social capital into economic profit through a conventional publishing system. Something that they cannot possess if they only rely on Wattpad platform.

Furthermore, this study also finds that Wattpad is utilized by its writers to enter the field of the Indonesian literary industry. Before digital platforms like Wattpad emerged, a writer had to rely only on a conventional publisher—an authoritative agent that holds the *doxa*—to produce a literary work. Even though there is an alternative, such as the self-publishing mode, economic capital is needed initially to invest in the production, which can be challenging for certain beginner writers to afford. Here, it can be seen that Wattpad utilization has become an alternative approach to enter the field of Indonesian literature.

Eventually, Wattpad utilization can be seen as a form of heterodoxy to challenge the authority of conventional publishers by beginner writers to enter the Indonesian literary industry. It shows how significant digital platforms like Wattpad have changed the practice of literary production in Indonesia. In the past, writers were commonly dependent on the publisher's authority, but the situation is different nowadays. Currently, they can start their career by learning how to fit their creativity with the reader's taste and slowly accumulate their social capital in the digital platform before entering the industry.

In this level, it seems that the practical sense in the field of Indonesian literature has been twisted due to the utilization of digital technology. However, the way those Wattpad's famous writers reproducing their works in more conventional manner eventually reconserves the old *doxa* of the Indonesian literary field. It particularly shows that behind all the potential of heterodoxy committed by those Wattpad's writers, there is still room of debate that it is rather an orthodoxy.

Conclusion

Finally, it is clear from the study's results and discussion that there are connections between real social and digital literary spaces. The social practice committed by writers in the digital space like Wattpad and its implication to the traditional literary industry explains how the practical sense between both spaces can influence each other. The *doxa* in the conventional literary industry triggered the writers to practice in the digital space, and the result of practice in the digital literary space has become the new resource of the conventional mode of literary production due to the consumerism behavior of Indonesian readers. On one side, many Wattpad writers and readers show digital technology's significance to Indonesia's literary culture. However, the idea of printing their literary works remains on the other side.

This circumstance illustrates that our literary culture is living in a quasi-digital society. A society that, to some extent, glorifies the digital mode of production while embracing the romanticism of the traditional mode of production. Based on this study, it can be described that quasi-digital society uses online platform, such as Wattpad, to communicate their creative works, but in the other side they still rely on conventional system to deal with more significant matter like economic capital. Furthermore, it can be concluded that literary production practice in quasi-digital society delineates an intertwined between digital and non-digital practices. Therefore, the advancement of digital technology does not disrupt conventional literary production. It is undeniably influential, but unable to replace the preexisting system.

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