THE "WATTYFEVER": CONSTRUCTS OF WATTPAD READERS ON WATTPAD'S ROLE IN THEIR LIVES

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Abstract

This research study was done to understand how and why people engage themselves in reading on Wattpad. The study also sought to identify the reasons why Wattpad readers tend to be addicted in a story. Moreover, it looked into the factors that triggered the readers to start reading as well as the factors that motivated them to continue reading on the site. Basically, this study was made to know the constructs of Wattpad readers on Wattpad's role in their lives. Based from the findings gathered, a conceptual framework was created which represents the Wattpad engagement process of readers.
The researchers used the qualitative approach in this study. They conducted open-ended, in-depth interviews with their participants to gather data that will suffice their research. The researchers identified themes of experiences that answered the research questions of the study. The researchers first found out the factors that triggered the participants to read on Wattpad. These include "surrounding people", "interest in literature", "social media", "boredom", "free cost" and "convenience". They also found out the motivational factors that made the participants continue reading on Wattpad which include "Learning Satisfaction" and "Emotional Satisfaction". Based on the gathered data, the researchers have come up with a realization that the participants tend to be addicted on Wattpad given the aforementioned factors. The researchers also found out that reading on Wattpad has already become part of the participants' lives. It appears that once they got engaged, losing grip will be hard. To fu¬rther improve the study, the researchers recommend a follow-up qualitative study that will focus on the Wattpad writers since this study focused on the Wattpad readers. It is further suggested that a quantitative study that will test a large number of participants in terms of the effects of Wattpad in their lives be conducted.

***Keywords:** communication, wattpad, wattyfever, constructs, role, readers.*

INTRODUCTION

Biagi (2005) once wrote that in this modern era, where the use of mass communication has become a way of life, "to be connected is to be wireless". New and emerging technologies allow people to use them anywhere even without the presence of wires. Hence, this mass media generation lets people access to anything. Through using portable computers, satellites, and devices one can carry in his/her pockets, he/she can watch movies, listen to radio, and download music, books, and newspapers. In other words, mass media and its users are "totally mobile" (p.5).

Furthermore, Biagi (2005) added that technology greatly influences the field of book publishing. The whole process of printing and circulating books entails an expensive cost compare to embracing technology advancements that only calls for lower production costs, thus, resulting to benefitting the industry. Since book publishers eye on earning from their works, they resort to producing audio books and electronic books (e-book).

According to Rodman (2010), the term e-book refers to "books that exist as digital files". E-book devices called readers which resemble the size and shape of printed books are now being sold. These e-books can be bought and downloaded via the Internet and can be formatted and obtained from different forms of hardware such as mobile devices and any kind of computer (p.67).

On the other hand, the hand-held tangible devices used to read e-books are called e-readers. These are usually in the form of tablets. Popular examples of these are Kindle, Nook, and Sony Reader among others. Mobile devices and other Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) are also considered as e-readers (Rouse, 2011). In addition, there are also websites that contain

different e-books that can be accessed and downloaded for free such as Wattpad (wattpad.com), Fan Fiction (fanfiction.net), Archive of Our Own (archiveofourown.org), Asian Fanfics (asianfanfics.com), DevianArt (devianart.com), FicWad (ficwad.com), and Internet Archive (archive.org) (Kowalczyk, 2014).

In an article entitled "Digital Books Down, But Not Out" by Fanklin Paul, he stated that there is a future that awaits for e-books. Also mentioned in the piece was Richard Doherty, research director at Envisioneering Group, who implied that e-books cater to two main audiences namely the youth and retired readers. The former is not fond of going to libraries while the latter wants reading convenience provided by light and handy devices (as cited in Biagi, 2005).

On a survey about the top ten things students do on their tablets conducted by Pe Benito (2013), it was found out that aside from browsing through Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter, students also use their tablets for the purpose of reading, which landed on the sixth spot of the survey. The results made mention of Kindle and Wattpad, e-book reader and site, where over a million books were published and can be accessed for free.

Hemus (2013) wrote that Wattpad has found its niche in the online reading setting. According to its official website, www.wattpad.com, Wattpad is the "world's largest community for discovering and sharing stories". It is a site where authors and readers can write, read, and interact with one another for free.

Wattpad manages to continuously attract and get readers, having 16.9 million visitors all over the world per month and recording an average of 30 minutes spent in reading per visit. Tagged as the "YouTube for Writers", it

provides a way for authors to share their stories with the world and that particular title really fits the interactive nature of the said online platform (Hemus, 2013).

In an article entitled "Story behind Wattpad, Online Story Hub", Wattpad CEO Allen Lau said that the online community has roughly six million visitors from the Philippines monthly (as cited in Yang, 2014). On the other hand, Kristel Tan, Wattpad's country manager for the Philippines, said that of all the countries represented on Wattpad, the Philippines is the second most represented (just behind the US, but ahead of Canada), counting for more than 20 percent of all stories posted, many of them written in Filipino. Moreover, she also gave emphasis on the fandom that Wattpad writers are able to cultivate in the Philippines, stating that it is more developed than in other countries (as cited in De Vera, 2013).

Because of the demand and success of Wattpad, readers, specifically the avid Filipino readers, came up with the term "Wattyfever". Combining the words "Watty", the short term for Wattpad, and "Fever", which means "craze" or "frenzy", they were able to coin a term which simply means the "Wattpad Phenomenon".

On another note, in a research entitled "#BalitangNetizen: Constructs of Citizen Journalists on their Role in the Society", Jasareno et al. (2013) interviewed six citizen journalists in the Internet and sought answers as to why these journalists engaged in the said field; that includes their thoughts, experiences, and their perceived roles in the society.

The researchers tackled the same qualitative study, only having Wattpad as the research topic and Wattpad readers as the main participants. With the growing population of Wattpad readers, the study sought to find out their constructs as content consumers on the medium's role in their lives.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study aimed to determine the contructs of Wattpad readers on Wattpad's role in their lives.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. identify what triggered the participants to engage in reading on Wattpad;

2. determine what motivated the participants to read on Wattpad;

3. describe the indicators of Wattpad addiction among the participants; and,

4. develop a conceptual framework that describes the constructs of the participants on Wattpad's role in their lives.

Formulated Conceptual Framework

Triggering Factors
- Surrounding People (Insistent & Aggressive Classmates, Insistent & Aggressive Friends, Insistent Relatives)
- Interest in Literature (Interest in Reading and Writing)
- Social Media
- Boredom
- Free Cost
- Convenience

Wattpad Addiction

Wattpad Engagement

Wattpad Use

Motivational Factors
- **Emotional Satisfaction**
- Pleasure, Relatability (Empathy and Sense of Belongingness), Relaxation, 'Kilig' Vibes, Hope, Self-esteem Booster, Suspense, Heartache
- **Learning Satisfaction**
- Creativity and Imagination, Knowledge of New Vocabulary Words, Open-mindedness, Preparation for the Future, Problem Solver, Change in Belief, Source of Identity
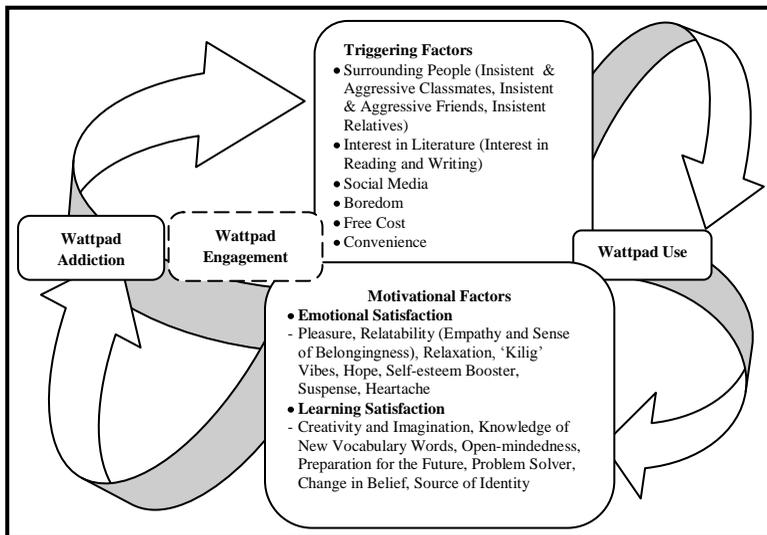
Figure 1. The Wattpad engagement process

The framework of the study shows how and why the participants engage in reading on Wattpad. The figure starts with the triggering factors,

the things that caused the participants to establish a relationship with Wattpad. Some were lured to Wattpad because of the insistent and aggressive people around them, while some read to satisfy their interest in reading and writing. Their exposure to social media, boredom experience, and the free cost and convenience that Wattpad provides also emerged as triggering factors.

The said triggering factors led to the use of the technology – Wattpad. As they read stories from it, the participants found themselves motivated since in the course of their reading, Wattpad has been fulfilling their emotional and learning satisfaction. Because of the participants' constant usage, indicators that they are getting addicted to Wattpad came into view. They choose Wattpad over their duties and responsibilities. They tend to skip their meals, allow themselves to be sleep-deprived, and even forget to accomplish household and school-related chores.

While the participants in the study admitted that they are addicted to Wattpad, the researchers still assume that there are still others who engage themselves in reading on Wattpad but did not reach the level of hype – hence, the Wattpad non-addicts enclosed in a box with broken lines. The readers' engagement or addiction, for that matter, continues as these certain factors trigger and motivate them to use Wattpad.

METHOD

The researchers used the qualitative research design to determine the constructs of Wattpad readers on Wattpad's role in their lives. Cresswell (2008) defined qualitative research as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis

inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

Specifically, the grounded theory approach was applied. This qualitative research strategy involves data collection and analysis as well as formation and development of theory. Cresswell (2008) added that the two primary characteristics of this design are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences of information.

The participants of the study were 14 Wattpad readers who are residing within the city of Calamba, Laguna and municipalities of Sto. Tomas and Tanauan, Batangas, and who have been reading Wattpad stories for at least two years.

The researchers used purposive sampling. According to Oliver (2006), purposive sampling is a non-probability type of sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researchers. It is based upon a variety of criteria that may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, and the capacity and willingness of the participants to participate in the research.

Also, the researchers used the snowball technique in this study. In this sampling, the researchers collect data on the few members of the target population they can locate, and then ask those individuals to provide information needed to locate other members of that population whom they know (Crossman, 2014).

In order to obtain the needed data and information for the study, the researchers made use of in-depth interviews as the data gathering instrument. They used the unstructured type of interview to provide open-

ended questions that allow both the researchers and participants to ask and answer further, and discuss topics in a more detailed manner.

Voice recorders were also used to tape the conversations. These will serve as sources too for the transcription and coding procedures.

Using purposive sampling, the researchers selected Wattpad readers residing within Calamba City in Laguna, Santo Tomas and Tanauan City in Batangas. The participants have been reading in Wattpad for at least two years. They were chosen by the researchers using a network of Wattpad readers in Facebook as well as through referrals. After the selection, they provided request messages to ask if the chosen readers can become participants of the study. As confirmations were received, the researchers formulated and conducted personal unstructured in-depth interviews with them. As data saturation occurred, the researchers did the transcription and coding of a total of 14 interviews. According to Siegle (2002), data saturation happens when the researchers no longer acquire different information or answers from the participants.

The coding processes involved listing down *in vivo codes*, key terms that emerged from the interviews. These words and phrases were given meanings through assigning them *constructed codes*. From there, the researchers sorted them in terms of their similarities, differences, thought, and meanings. After the classification of codes, the researchers then came up with themes of experiences, subthemes, and categories that were later on used to form the conceptual framework.

The researchers used the data driven coding approach for analysis. Kawulich (2004) stated that this approach involves inductive code development based on the data collected in the study. Three levels of analyses – open coding, axial coding, and selective coding – will be applied

to gather a complete picture of the information obtained during the data collection process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008 as cited in Kolb, 2012). Coding involves the constant comparison method in which data are constantly compared to data that have already been gathered. Pertinent concepts are identified and assigned codes. These codes are constantly reviewed as new interpretations are made out of the data (Prentice Hall Health).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the study, the researchers find out that most of the readers on Wattpad are female whose ages fall between pre-teenage and early 20's. Since Wattpad is a form of technology and most of its stories are written by the youth, its audience would also be consisting of young readers who can easily relate with the content.

Three major themes of experiences emerged in the study. The first one that came out was the factors that triggered the participants to read on Wattpad. These served as their sources of knowledge that established their connection with Wattpad. It was found out that the people, whom the participants often encounter, were the ones who persuaded and recommended them to try reading on Wattpad. Moreover, the participants' personal interest in reading and writing also triggered them to read. Wattpad has a wide array of stories, so it can be compared to a library where bookworms would definitely love to stay. Participants, who aspire to become writers, engaged on Wattpad as well to have an idea on how to write stories. *Social media, boredom, free cost, and convenience* surfaced as triggering factors, too. Wattpad is an online reading platform that is why it can be seen on the Internet and social media. The boredom the participants feel whenever they got nothing to do results to reading on Wattpad instead. Since

stories from Wattpad can be accessed without spending a cent and can be read on tablets and mobile phones, the participants did not hesitate to engage into it because of the reading convenience they experience.

Given that most of the participants are still students, they gave out common answers that revealed that their classmates were the main reason why they tried reading on Wattpad.

Sheresh, one of the particpants, for that matter, first knew Wattpad through this one classmate of hers: *"Inintroduce niya [classmate] sa'kin.'Di ko talaga 'yun alam tapos.. 'yun, sabi niya, buksan mo 'tong website na 'to.. ta's naano na din ako. (My classmate introduced Wattpad to me. At first, I really didn't know it. Then she encouraged me to open Wattpad's website. That's how it all started.)"*

Particpants were also as to what makes them continue reading on Wattpad. It was found out that they remain as readers because of the *emotional satisfaction and learning satisfaction* they get. They simply see Wattpad as a form of pleasure and relaxation. They find a connection whenever they read because they can relate to the stories. Furthermore, the stories help them emotionally by boosting their self-esteem, giving them hope and anticipation, and releasing their sadness and heartaches.

For some participants, Wattpad has become an instrument that lightens up their mood. Stanton (2009) cited that one of the reasons why people read is to be pleased. He stated that stories and sound of words people are gaining from reading tend to satisfy their pleasure needs. Moreover, Mary Ann Naples, publisher at Rodale Books, noted that a book is an excellent path to happiness (as cited in Westbrook, 2014).

One of the particpants cited: *"Masaya, tapos kapag nung unang basa ko kasi, parang wala, naboboring ako. Ta's nung parang nag-ano na*

siya, 'yung parang nagtagal na, na parang nakakakilig na, nakakatuwa, parang na-a-add mo na sa everyday life mo. (It [Wattpad] makes me happy. Initially, I was bored but as time passed by, when the stories already make me blush and happy, little did I know that Wattpad has already been becoming a part of my life.)"

Aside from the emotional fulfillment, it was also discovered that Wattpad is a source of learning. The participants revealed that they learn many things from Wattpad that they apply in their own lives. For instance, Wattpad enhances their creativity, imagination, and vocabulary knowledge. It also teaches them to become open-minded and gives them ideas as preparation for their future. In a way, Wattpad provides solutions to their problems and influences them to change their beliefs. It also serves as a way towards knowing their identities as persons.

Stansberry (2009) noted that reading increases and improves one's vocabulary and spelling. Reading forces readers to look at words that they might not have seen or heard recently.

In this study, Wattpad has introduced unfamiliar words that were later on added to the vocabulary knowledge of the participants.

One participant stated: *"Dahil sa Wattpad, may natututunan din akong mga bagong salita. May mga English words na hindi ko naman talaga alam, na di-ni-dictionary ko. Ngayon ko nga lang nalaman. Diyan ko nga lang din nalaman 'yung 'stroll', 'yung mga, 'drools', 'yung 'grin', 'yung mga laging ginagamit ng author. (Because of Wattpad, I've got to learn new words. Whenever I encounter unfamiliar English words, I search them in the dictionary. Actually, it's on Wattpad that I've got to know the meaning of some words such as 'stroll', 'drools', and 'grin'. These are the words that are often used by Wattpad authors.)"*

The continuous engagement of the participants on Wattpad leads them to become addicted to it. They revealed that they devote most of their time reading on Wattpad, to the point that they skip meals, forget to take a bath, disobey their parents, and do not bother reviewing for their exams and finishing household chores.

In conclusion, the researchers can say that Wattpad has become part of the participant-readers' lives. Wattpad appears to be playing a big role not just as a medium for reading but also as a medium that gratifies the participants' emotional and cognitive needs and wants. Despite Wattpad being an online library of millions of fiction stories, the things that it imparts on the readers prove to be significant and can be applied in reality.

Researchers from the Brigham Young University reported that reading aggression in literature can influence subsequent aggressive behavior, which tends to be specific to the type of aggression containted in the story. The study does not show that reading a fictional account of an aggressive action increases belligerent behavior, but it suggests exposure to such literature has a psychological impact on readers, affecting the way they respond to provocations (as cited in Jacobs, 2011).

Some participants encountered such kind of experience: *"Minsan, naiiyamot ka. 'Pag nabasa mo 'yung kwento ta's minsan sa mga kaklase ko naibubunton 'yung galit ko. (Sometimes, when I got annoyed by a Wattpad story, I tend to release my emotions, the anger I'm feeling to my classmates.)"*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

In conclusion, the researchers found out that Wattpad has become part of the participant-readers' lives. Wattpad appears to be playing a big role not just as a medium for reading but also as a medium that gratifies the participants' emotional and cognitive needs and wants. Despite Wattpad being an online library of millions of fiction stories, the things that it imparts on the readers prove to be significant and can be applied in reality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for the improvement of this study:

1. To conduct a follow up study using a quantitative approach that will survey Wattpad readers on the effects of Wattpad in their lives.

2. To make a qualitative approach that will focus on Wattpad writers since this study focuses on Wattpad readers.

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