

## Reader Consumption Symbols in Social Media Fiction Comment Columns: Semiotics of Digital Culture Studies

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### Abstract

The number of fiction readers continues to increase along with the development of social media fiction platforms that not only show the reader's contribution to the acceptance of a work, but also create a consumption symbol that can influence the production and distribution of social media fiction. Wattpad is one of the fictional social media platforms that offers various genres and easy access for readers. The ease of access and assessment of works in Wattpad gives rise to a symbol of reader consumption that deserves to be studied in the context of digital cultural semiotics. The purpose of this study is to describe readers' activities in interpreting fictional texts and how readers construct the meaning of symbols in the comment column. This study uses a qualitative method by analyzing Wattpad's comment column. The data analyzed are readers' comments and authors' responses in the fiction comment column of the 2022 Wattys winners. The results of the study show that the Wattpad comment column functions as an interaction medium for readers to express their identity, values, and efforts to build a community of fiction readers on social media. In addition, reader comments also influence the process of creating and distributing works that allow the formation of reader fanaticism. The results of this study contribute to the understanding of the symbol of consumption of reading in the context of digital culture and provide recommendations for the author to develop communication patterns with readers so that the process of production, distribution, and consumption of social media fiction develops as needed.

**Keywords:** *Consumption Symbols, Readers, Social Media Fiction, Digital Cultural Semiotics.*

### INTRODUCTION

The consumption of social media fiction is a phenomenon that continues to grow in the digital era. Readers can not only enjoy the work, but can also contribute by commenting on the fictional comments on social media. The reader's comments show the symbol of consumption in the context of digital culture. The symbol of reader consumption is an expression of the reader's identity and value (Fedele, 2014), which can be seen from the way readers choose and judge works and how the interaction between readers and between these authors affects the reader's creative process and the wider distribution of the work. Social media fiction comment columns serve as a public space where readers share opinions, express emotions, and build communities based on shared interests in specific fictional genres (Gearhart et al., 2020). Thus, the comment column not only reflects the reader's reaction, but more than that, namely as a medium of expression of the social symbol of the wider digital society.

Research on fictional social media consumption symbols in the digital era is important because it can provide insight into the process of individual identity development through interaction on social media platforms (Han et al., 2016). Reader comments in the comments column of social media fiction, consumption symbols reflect the reader's preferences, values,

and social norms, including how the reader is perceived by the social media fiction reader community (Pettigrew & Charters, 2010). Understanding the fictional consumption symbols of social media can help understand social dynamics in digital interactions and their influence on the perception and behavior of readers and authors in interacting (Greiwe & Khoshnood, 2022).

Semiotics, as the study of signs and meanings, provides a powerful framework for analyzing how the symbolism of consumption appears in interactions in the comment column (Takahashi et al., 2023). In the context of digital culture, this symbolism is not only limited to the products consumed but also includes the way users communicate and build meaning through their comments (Birdi, 2014). Therefore, this study is important to understand how digital culture shapes the way we interact with fiction and how such symbolism contributes to collective identities within online communities (Wittelman et al., 2016).

Some previous research has shown that comment columns can influence readers' perception of content and form communities around certain fictions (Fong et al., 2013). For example, research by Gearhart et al. shows that user comments can affect perceived credibility and bias towards news, which can also be applied in fictional contexts (Gearhart et al., 2020). In addition, other research shows that interactions in the comments column can create a space for readers to share their interpretations and experiences, which enriches the collective understanding of fiction (Pino & Mazza, 2016).

This research offers a new perspective by combining the analysis of consumption symbolism and semiotics in the context of social media fictional comment columns, which are still rarely discussed in the academic literature (Salahuddin, 2020). With the increasing use of social media as a platform for sharing and discussing fiction, it is important to explore how the symbolism of consumption functions in this context and how it can affect social interactions and user identities (Huang & Fishbach, 2021). This research is expected to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between fictional consumption and social interaction in the digital age.

This study hypothesizes that the consumption symbolism that appears in the fictional comments of social media reflects the values and social identity of users, as well as influences the way they interact with fictional content (Birdi & Ford, 2018). The purpose of this study is to describe the findings of consumption symbols in the comments column of social media fiction from the perspective of the study of digital cultural semiotics, in the hope of providing deeper insights into the social dynamics that occur in digital interactions (Giles et al., 2015). Thus, this research focuses not only on the aspect of fictional consumption but also on how such interactions shape identity and community in the context of digital culture.

## **THEORETICAL STUDIES**

Fictional consumption symbolism refers to how individuals use fiction as a means to express their identity and values. In this context, fiction is seen not only as entertainment, but also as a medium that allows readers to interact with symbols that reflect their aspirations, desires, and worldview (Diamonds & Hasan, 2023). Through fictional consumption, individuals can construct personal narratives related to their social and cultural experiences, thereby creating a deeper meaning than just reading (Wibowo, 2020). Therefore, the symbolism of fictional consumption is important to understand in the context of social interaction and identity in the digital age. The symbolism of fictional consumption can be categorized into several manifestations, including the choice of genres, characters, and themes chosen by the reader

(Manurung et al., 2019). For example, readers who choose fantasy fiction may seek an escape from reality, while readers who choose realistic fiction may be more interested in reflections on everyday life (Muly, 2023). In addition, the way readers interact with fiction through the comment column on social media also creates a new symbolism, where their reactions and interpretations of fiction can reflect their values and identities (Gandakusumah & Marta, 2021). Thus, the symbolism of fictional consumption is not only limited to text but also extends to social interactions on digital platforms.

The social media fiction comment column is a space where readers can provide feedback, criticism, or appreciation for the fictional work they are reading (Nugroho & Waryanto, 2022). In this context, the comment column serves as an interactive platform that allows readers to share their views and experiences, as well as build a community around a specific work of fiction (Sianipar & Poerbowati, 2024). In addition, the comment column can also be a place for deeper discussions about themes and characters in fiction, thus enriching the reading experience (Naibaho, 2023). Therefore, the comment column serves not only as a space for expression but also as a medium to build collective meaning among readers.

Comment columns can be categorized into several types, such as positive, negative, and analytical comments (Setiawan, 2023). Positive comments usually reflect appreciation for the work of fiction, while negative comments can indicate dissatisfaction or criticism of certain elements in the story (Ahmad, 2023). Additionally, analytical commentary often contains in-depth discussions of themes, characters, and symbolism in fiction, which can enrich other readers' understanding (Sheba et al., 2018). Thus, the comment column serves as a dynamic space where different perspectives can interact with each other and form new meanings.

Digital cultural semiotics is the study of signs and meanings in the cultural context shaped by digital technology (Lidinillah et al., 2023). In this context, semiotics includes not only text analysis but also social interactions that occur on digital platforms, including social media (Wiraseptya et al., 2023). The semiotics of digital culture allow us to understand how signs and symbols function in shaping the identity and experience of users in the digital world (Darusman et al., 2021). Therefore, this study is important to understand the social dynamics that occur in digital interaction and how they affect the way we communicate and interact with fiction.

The semiotic manifestations of digital culture can be categorized into several elements, including visual symbols, text, and user interaction (Misnawati, 2019). Visual symbols, such as emojis and images, are often used to express emotions and reactions in digital interactions, while text serves as a medium to convey information and meaning (Sibarani & Ekomadyo, 2021). Additionally, user interactions, such as comments and content sharing, create space for readers to collaborate in building collective meaning and identity (Nugraha et al., 2023). Thus, the semiotics of digital culture provides a powerful framework for analyzing how symbolism functions in the context of social interaction in the digital age.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach because it aims to understand complex social phenomena, especially the symbolism of consumption in the fictional comment column of social media. The descriptive method was chosen to describe in detail how the symbolism arises and functions in the context of digital interaction. The theory used in this study is the semiotic theory of digital culture, which allows researchers to analyze the signs and meanings contained in readers' comments as well as interactions that occur on social media platforms.

With this approach, the research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the social dynamics formed in the fiction comment column.

The main data source in this study is the comment column found on the Wattpad platform, which is one of the popular social media platforms for sharing fictional works. The data collected includes readers' comments on fictional works, as well as authors' responses to those comments, either in the form of sentences or emoticons, or emojis. The use of data from this comment column is important because it can provide a clear picture of how readers interact and express the symbolism of their consumption in the context of the fiction being read.

The instrument used in this study is content analysis, which allows researchers to identify themes, patterns, and symbols that appear in reader comments. In addition, the researcher also uses field records to record observations and reflections during the data collection process, so that they can enrich the analysis carried out. Using this instrument, researchers were able to collect relevant and in-depth data on the symbolism of consumption in fictional comment columns.

The data collection technique was carried out through direct observation of the comment column on Wattpad, where the researcher identified and recorded comments relevant to the research theme. The data was then grouped based on consumption symbolism categories, such as positive, negative, and analytical comments. This process of grouping is important to facilitate further analysis and to ensure that the data collected can provide comprehensive information regarding reader interactions.

The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis, which allows researchers to identify and analyze the main themes that emerge from the data collected. The analysis process begins with reading and understanding the comments that have been collected, followed by coding the data to identify relevant themes and patterns. After that, the researcher compiled the results of the analysis in the form of a descriptive narrative that described the symbolism of consumption in the fictional comment column of social media. Thus, this analysis technique is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social interaction that occurs on digital platforms.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In this study, data collected from the comment column on Wattpad showed that readers not only consume fiction passively but also actively interact with the text through comments. This phenomenon includes the use of certain symbols, such as emoticons and verbal expressions, that reflect the emotional reaction and interpretation of the reader to the story being read. This symbolism becomes important because it can show how the reader constructs their meaning and identity through interaction with the fiction of Gökerik (2024). Additionally, comments provided by readers often reflect broader social and cultural values, thus creating a space for readers to share experiences and build a community around fictional works.

The data shows that the symbols that appear in the comment column include various forms of expression, from praise to criticism. For example, many readers use emoticons to express their feelings towards a character or storyline, which indicates high emotional engagement (Udoudom et al., 2024). In addition, comments of an analytical nature also appear, in which the reader provides an in-depth view of the themes and characters in the fiction. This shows that readers are not only emotionally involved but also intellectually involved in the

process of fictional consumption, which enriches their reading experience (Liu & Mattila, 2016).

This relationship shows that reader interaction in the comment column serves not only as a response to text but also as a medium to build social identity and community in the digital age. Readers use symbols in their comments to express themselves and interact with other readers, creating an interconnected social network (Myint et al., 2018). Thus, this phenomenon reflects how fictional consumption on social media can serve as a tool to build meaning and identity in the context of digital culture.

Analysis shows that the symbols used in comments, such as certain emoticons and phrases, have deeper meanings. For example, the use of a smile emoticon can indicate satisfaction or happiness towards a story, while an angry emoticon can reflect dissatisfaction or criticism of a character (Sharda & Bhat, 2019). In addition, commentaries that contain an in-depth analysis of the theme and character also show that the reader seeks to understand and interpret the deeper meaning of the text they are reading. This shows that fictional consumption on social media is not only entertainment, but also a process of learning and reflection.

The data shows that the meaning behind these consumption symbols reflects the social values and norms embraced by the reader. For example, readers who provide positive comments on strong, independent characters may reflect the values of feminism or empowerment (Hoz et al., 2023). On the other hand, negative comments on characters who are considered weak or stereotypical can indicate a rejection of existing social norms. Thus, the consumption symbols in the comment column not only reflect individual reactions but can also serve as indicators of broader social and cultural change.

This relationship suggests that the symbolism of consumption in the comment column can provide insight into how readers construct their meaning and identity in a broader social context. Readers' interactions in the comments section create a space for them to share their views and experiences, which in turn can influence the way they understand and interpret fiction (Deng, 2023). Thus, this phenomenon reflects the social dynamics that occur in fictional consumption in the digital age.

The data shows that the consumption symbols in the comment column include various elements, such as language, emoticons, and social interactions that occur on digital platforms. These symbols serve as signs that reflect the identity and values of the reader, as well as how they interact with the text (Mahardika et al., 2018). In addition, the use of distinctive language in the commentary also creates a community among readers, where they share each other's experiences and views on the fiction being read.

The explanation shows that the consumption symbols in the comment column not only reflect the reaction to the text but also serve as a medium to build meaning and identity in the context of digital culture. For example, the use of emoticons and slang in comments can create a sense of closeness and connectedness among readers, which strengthens the community around the work of fiction (Jumah & Nthiga, 2022). Thus, the symbolism of consumption in the comment column creates a space for readers to express themselves and interact with others in a broader context.

This relationship suggests that the symbols of consumption in the comment column can provide deeper insight into how readers construct identity and meaning in a broader social context. Interactions in the comment column create a space for readers to share their views and experiences, which can influence the way they understand and interpret fiction (Dong, 2024).



Thus, this phenomenon reflects the social dynamics that occur in the consumption of fiction on social media and how it contributes to the formation of collective identities in the digital age.

## DISCUSSION

The study found that the symbolism of consumption in the fictional comments of social media, particularly on Wattpad, reflected the reader's active interaction with the text. Readers not only provide emotional reactions through emoticons and comments, but also engage in an in-depth analysis of themes and characters in fiction.

This shows that fictional consumption on social media not only serves as entertainment but also as a learning process and social reflection that enriches the reading experience (Muflih et al., 2023). The symbols used in the commentary create a space for readers to express their identities and values, as well as build a community around the work of fiction.

This research is in line with previous findings that suggest that interactions on social media can influence the way individuals construct their meaning and identity (Nugraha et al., 2019). For example, research by Nugraha et al. shows that communication on digital platforms allows individuals to share views and experiences, which creates a community around a specific topic.

However, this research adds a new dimension by focusing on the symbolism of consumption in fictional contexts, which shows that readers are not only emotionally but also intellectually involved in the process of fictional consumption.

The results of this study show that the comment column on social media serves as a space to share experiences and views, which can enrich readers' understanding of fiction. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to our understanding of how fictional consumption can serve as a tool for building social identity and community in the digital age (Khotimah et al., 2021). In addition, this study also shows that the symbolism of consumption can reflect broader social and cultural changes, which becomes relevant in the context of the study of digital cultural semiotics.

The implications of this study suggest that understanding the symbolism of consumption in the comment column can help fiction writers and publishers to better understand their audiences. By understanding how readers interact with the text, writers can create works that resonate more with the reader's experiences and values (Ali et al., 2019). In addition, this research can also provide insights for social media platform developers on how to create a more inclusive and interactive space for readers to share their views and experiences.

The results of this study can be explained through the semiotic theory of digital culture, which shows that the symbols used in the comment column reflect the identity and social values of readers (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

In addition, the interaction in the comment column creates a space for readers to collaborate in building collective meaning and identity, which shows that fictional consumption on social media is not only individual but also social. Thus, the results of this study reflect the complex dynamics between individuals and communities in the context of fictional consumption in the digital age.

Based on the results of this study, fiction writers and publishers need to pay attention to readers' interaction in the comment column and use that feedback to improve the quality of their work.

In addition, social media platform developers also need to create features that allow readers to more easily interact and share their views, thus creating a more inclusive and interactive space (Winarti, 2022). Thus, this study not only provides insight into the symbolism of consumption but also offers practical recommendations for improving the reading experience on social media.

## CONCLUSION

The comment column on social media fiction not only serves as a space for expression but also as an arena in which readers actively build their social identity and community. The symbolism of consumption that emerges in the commentary, both through emoticons and in-depth analysis, suggests that the reader is engaged in a complex cognitive process, in which they not only consume the text, but also create new meanings related to their experiences and values Chien et al. (2013). This challenges the traditional view of fictional consumption that is often thought of as a passive activity.

This research makes a significant contribution to the study of digital cultural semiotics by highlighting how the symbolism of consumption in the comment column can reflect broader social dynamics (Qoriah & Husna, 2020).

Practically, the results of this research can be used by fiction writers and publishers to better understand their audiences, as well as create works that resonate more with the reader's experience. In addition, the study also provides insights for social media platform developers to create features that support better interaction between readers and text.

The limitation of this study lies in the focus that only the comment column on one platform, namely Wattpad, may not fully represent the phenomenon of consumption symbolism on other social media (Crawford et al., 2010).

Therefore, further research can expand its scope by analyzing comment columns on different social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how consumption symbolism functions in different contexts. Further research may also explore the impact of these interactions on reader and author behavior in the long term.

**Table 1: Research Findings**

Aspects	Consumption Symbol Findings
Emotional Interaction	Readers use emoticons and verbal expressions to express emotional reactions to characters and storylines.
In-Depth Analysis	Many of the comments are analytical, where the reader provides an in-depth view of the themes and characters in the fiction.
Identity and Values	The symbolism of consumption reflects the identity and social values of the reader, indicating their involvement in the cognitive process.
Reader Community	The comment column serves as an interactive space that builds community around the work of fiction, reinforcing a sense of connectedness.
Learning Process	Fictional consumption on social media is not only entertainment, but also a process of learning and social reflection.
Social Dynamics	The symbolism of consumption in the comment column reflects broader social dynamics, serving as an indicator of social change.

These findings suggest that the comment column in social media fiction serves not only as a space for expression but also as an arena in which readers construct their meaning and identity in the context of digital culture.

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