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GLOBAL PLATFORMS, LOCAL MARKETS: THE PLATFORMIZATION OF MEDIA AND PUBLISHING IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The cultural industries have transformed due to processes of platformization (Poell et al., 2021). This paper examines the platformization of media and publishing in the Philippines, using Wattpad as a case study. Wattpad, a global creative writing and reading social media platform, has altered the way intellectual property and creative content is sourced and produced in the Philippines. Once self-described as the YouTube for books, Wattpad now promotes itself as a multi-platform entertainment company and implements a pan-entertainment business model. The pan-entertainment business model has been matured by China's BAT (Baidu, Ali Baba and Tencent) platforms, and describes the production and professionalization of intellectual property across multiple media formats. The logics of adaptation that underpin Wattpad's pan-entertainment strategy adapt traditional markers of success, such as awards and sales (Ellis, 1982; Murray, 2012), with digital metrics (van Dijck & Poell, 2013) and combine this with logics of platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017).

Wattpad has embedded itself in the Filipino media and publishing industries by developing partnerships with book publishers and television studios. While such partnerships exist globally, Wattpad's impact on Philippine media culture is particularly acute. Wattpad's position in the Philippines illustrates the way Wattpad, a globalized platform that is extremely popular amongst Filipino users, is entering and adapting local cultural industries. What opportunities exist for decolonization of media content in the platformization of the cultural industries in the Philippines? What are the conditions of the Filipino media landscape that contribute to the success of Wattpad's pan-entertainment strategy in this territory?

This interdisciplinary research brings together publishing studies, platform studies and media ecology. To do so, I draw on and adapt José van Dijck's (2013) connective media ecology model, which examines the socioeconomic and techno-cultural aspects of platform microsystems and their position in the connective social media ecosystem. In this paper, I explicitly extend the ecosystem frame to include traditional cultural industries to account for the growing interconnectedness between platformed and

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traditional spaces of media production. Focusing on the platformization of cultural production in the Philippines, a media landscape marked by postcolonialism, state-run media and concentrated private ownership (Estella & Löffelholz, 2019; Pertierra, 2021), this research adds to scholarship that works to de-Westernize and re-regionalize platform studies (Jin, 2013; Steinberg & Li, 2017; Davis & Xiao, 2021) as well as publishing and media studies (Amin et al., 2000; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Parnell et al., 2021).

The impact of Wattpad in the Philippines

This paper draws on interviews with seven Wattpad authors conducted over Zoom in late 2020 and early 2021, focusing on their experiences working on the platform and within Wattpad's pan-entertainment system. These authors write across genres, but primarily work within romance and young adult fiction. Three main themes were identified from the data.

First, post-colonial tensions play out in the dominant languages of traditional and platformed cultural production. While the Philippines has over 120 local languages, traditional media have historically been dominated by Filipino/Tagalog and media republished or adapted from Wattpad are often written in Taglish, a code-mixing dialect of Tagalog and English. In both systems of production, the commercial opportunities for media by creators working in regional Philippine languages is extremely limited. One participant, who is from Iloilo City where the local language is Hiligaynon/Ilonggo, attributed her decision to publish on Wattpad to her ability to write in English and find an audience. English is the dominant language on Wattpad (Ramdarshan Bold, 2016), the second national language of the Philippines, and this author's second language so, as she stated, "Aside from English, I really have no other choice." Western platforms like Wattpad provide new avenues for creators from regional provinces who work in languages not privileged by traditional Filipino institutions, but they do not dismantle colonial structures that privilege creators working in dominant national languages and discourage the use of local languages.

Second, Wattpad is creating opportunities for greater diversity and inclusion in Filipino book and media culture. In 2021, Bliss Books, Wattpad's imprint with Anvil Publishing published *Wake Up, Dreamers!* by Demi Ailon, which features LGBTQIA+ characters. Literature and media featuring LGBTQIA+ themes and characters have historically been excluded in Filipino media. Through popularity metrics such as awards and the number of reads (*Wake Up, Dreamers!* had more than 1.4 million reads by the time of publication), Wattpad can demonstrate the tried-and-trusted success of inclusive stories in the Philippines.

Third, media products developed from Wattpad benefit from distinctly Filipino modes of reception. Kilig, a Filipino term that refers to an affective feeling of romantic excitement, inflects the relationship between Wattpad authors, readers, actors, and story characters. This high level of fan engagement contributes to the successful adaptation of Wattpad media in the Philippines. Love teams, pairs of celebrities launched by mainstream Filipino studios to appear in a succession of films, TV series, advertisements, and other

media together (Bolisay, 2015), have also become a key feature of the romance stories Wattpad has adapted and republished in the Philippines.

Conclusion

Wattpad operates collaboratively and competitively with Filipino publishers and producers through its pan-entertainment strategy and has a significant degree of power in shaping popular culture in the Philippines. Wattpad's pan-entertainment strategy in the Philippines demonstrates how multi-platform companies are leveraging the interconnectedness of media industries in an increasingly convergent and globalized media landscape and provides insight into the impact that Wattpad and other platforms like it may have on the creative industries more globally.

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