

# How Data Can Help Your Story Get Discovered

By Corley Frierson

In 2013 Anna Todd, a mom working part time at Ulta (an American chain beauty store), uploaded some chapters for a story to an internet community of readers and writers called Wattpad. One year later, she had completed an entire series of books on the app. She'd also signed a six figure deal selling the series. The deal, orchestrated by Wattpad, auctioned her work between five publishing houses before Simon & Schuster secured her stories. Over the course of 12 months, Todd had blossomed into a successful new author, and Wattpad, a literary agent?

In the years since, Wattpad has become a force in commercial media. What began as a self-publishing app in 2006 has now transformed into a “global multi-platform entertainment company for original stories” which introduced a new branch called Wattpad Publishing in 2019. Stories posted here

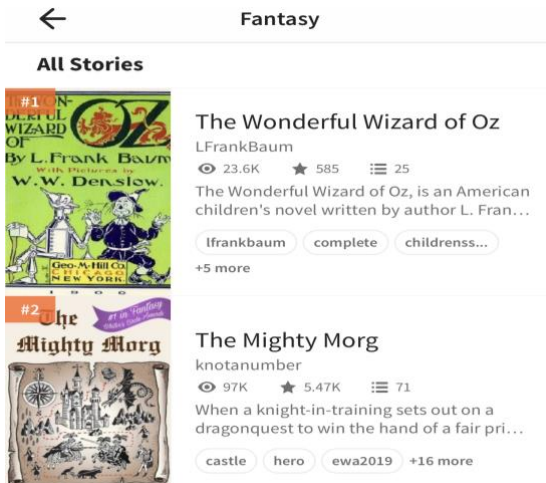
have led to the bestselling novel *After*, and popular Netflix movie *The Kissing Booth*, marking Wattpad as an up and coming entertainment studio to watch.

Wattpad's success as a company is one thing, but their new approach to publishing is also making waves. Taking advantage of its 80 million user community, Wattpad is collecting data from its users, alongside their original content, in order to create an easy-to-use interface experience, as well as more developed, data based, trend insights reports.

On just the surface level of the app, anyone (publishers included) can log onto Wattpad and see a list of top-ranking stories in variety of genres. Wattpad has borrowed much from other social media platforms, so alongside each title and book cover, Wattpad displays the views and likes for each book.

The app is able to curate a selection of stories, based off of this collected information. This data also helps the user sort through their book options faster. If a publisher was looking for something specific, the

app's keyword search system would streamline the acquisitions process.



The screenshot shows the 'Fantasy' category on Wattpad. At the top, there is a back arrow and the word 'Fantasy'. Below that is a section titled 'All Stories'. The first story is '#1 The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' by L. Frank Baum, with 23.6K views, 585 stars, and 25 chapters. The second story is '#2 The Mighty Morg' by knotanumber, with 97K views, 5.47K stars, and 71 chapters. Each story entry includes a book cover, the title, author, statistics, a brief description, and tags.

← Fantasy

**All Stories**

#1 **The Wonderful Wizard of Oz**  
By L. Frank Baum  
With Pictures by W. W. Denslow.  
Geo. M. Hill Co. NEW YORK

**The Wonderful Wizard of Oz**  
LFrankBaum  
👁 23.6K ★ 585 📖 25  
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, is an American children's novel written by author L. Fran...  
lfrankbaum complete childre...  
+5 more

#2 **The Mighty Morg**  
knotanumber  
👁 97K ★ 5.47K 📖 71  
When a knight-in-training sets out on a dragonquest to win the hand of a fair pri...  
castle hero ewa2019 +16 more

Above are the top-ranking stories on Wattpad in the fantasy genre, along with each story's details.

Behind the scenes, Wattpad is doing even more. CEO Allen Lau explains that Wattpad uses *machine learning* (the use of AI to recognize and infer patterns) in order to “collect over 1 billion data events based on what the...global community is searching for, reading, and engaging with.” This allows the app to identify which type of content is trending, and what part of a story receives the most attention from viewers.

We “collect over 1 billion data events based on what the...global community is searching for, reading, and engaging with.” - Allen Lau, Wattpad CEO

This data also looks more specifically at each story that is posted, gathering information on the time viewers spend reading all the way to counting specific words in your writing. All of this data can be accessed through their paid service of story insights reports. These reports rank writers' strengths and weaknesses of their writing based upon the collected data.

Wattpad is spearheading a movement of data-backed publishing with this new branch, and the insights that their shared data provide. But how does this method compare to the traditional publishing model? A model that has typically only been filled with people, while this is rooted in computers and algorithms.

Take Penguin Random House, one of the “Big Five” book publishers in the US. In a series of interviews on their YouTube page, staff members describe the publishing process. Their stories are selected through a few different routes. Sometimes it’s a literary agent sending along a manuscript, other times it’s an editor bringing an idea to writers who are either new or known to the company.

The story is then taken to an acquisitions meeting, where they “discuss it with the other teams that we work with (sales, marketing, international rights) and we ultimately make a decision.” This process means that established staffers are selecting stories, based on their own personal tastes, and that the stories must make it through this long journey to become officially selected for publishing.

Comparatively, Wattpad use of data changes how stories reach publishers. Instead of waiting for stories to be delivered by a literary agent, publishers can use Wattpad to hunt for a story that matches what they are looking for, simplifying the selection process. It also shortens the pathway for a writer to reach a publisher, (if publishers are looking on

Wattpad) potentially making it easier for writers to get discovered.

Wattpad can even benefit self-publishing authors. If a writer pays to receive a story insights report on their writing, they are better equipped to make edits to their story (without requiring another person or company). This could make their journey from unpublished manuscripts to finished stories easier.

Wattpad's ranking and voting systems also provide another way to value a story instead of simply one person's taste or preferences. An editor can see that even if the story isn't something that responds to their personal taste...over a thousand other people have voted to show support, so maybe it's worth publishing after all. In this way, data backed publishing could allow for more diverse stories to become published.