

SENTIMENT IN THE STACKS: ANALYZING GOODREADS REVIEWS OF 'WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR IS IN THE LIBRARY'

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pembaca Indonesia berinteraksi dengan novel "What You Are Looking for Is in the Library" melalui analisis 41 ulasan berbahasa Indonesia di Goodreads. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran (mixed methods) yang menggabungkan analisis sentimen kuantitatif dengan *coding* tematik kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi tren sentimen dan tema utama seperti *Moral*, *Emotion*, *Structure*, *Library*, dan *Purpose*. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas respon pembaca bersifat positif, dengan tema *Moral* menjadi yang paling dominan, diikuti oleh *Purpose* dan *Library*. Pembaca mengaitkan perpustakaan dalam novel dengan penyembuhan emosional, pertumbuhan diri, dan koneksi sosial, mencerminkan perannya yang lebih luas dari sekadar pusat informasi. Meskipun terdapat sejumlah kecil ulasan kritis yang menyentuh aspek struktur naratif atau dampak emosional, sebagian besar pembaca mengakui kemampuan novel ini untuk memicu refleksi diri dan meningkatkan keterlibatan emosional dengan literatur. Hasil penelitian, khususnya sentimen yang sebagian besar positif yang diungkapkan oleh pembaca Indonesia, menunjukkan bahwa narasi fiksi secara signifikan memengaruhi persepsi publik terhadap perpustakaan dan praktik membaca. Hal ini menawarkan wawasan berharga bagi pustakawan yang berupaya mempromosikan literasi dan keterlibatan komunitas melalui inisiatif berbasis literatur yang memanfaatkan resonansi emosional dan moral yang teridentifikasi dalam ulasan-ulasan tersebut

Kata Kunci: analisis tematik, fiksi, persepsi perpustakaan, respons pembaca, ulasan buku

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Indonesian readers perceive the novel "What You Are Looking for Is in the Library" by analyzing 41 Indonesian-language reviews on Goodreads. Employing a mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative sentiment analysis using BoardFlare and qualitative thematic coding to uncover dominant sentiments and key interpretive themes such as Moral, Emotion, Structure, Library, and Purpose. The findings reveal predominantly positive responses, with readers appreciating the novel's moral depth, emotional resonance, and idealized portrayal of libraries as spaces of healing and self-discovery. Many reviewers expressed renewed appreciation for libraries, viewing them not only as information centers but also as sanctuaries for personal growth. Despite a small number of critical reviews focusing on narrative structure or emotional impact, most readers acknowledged the novel's ability to inspire introspection and foster emotional engagement with literature. These findings, particularly the predominantly positive sentiment expressed by Indonesian readers, suggest that fictional narratives significantly influence public perceptions of libraries and reading practices. This offers valuable insights for librarians seeking to promote literacy and community engagement through literature-based initiatives that leverage the emotional and moral resonance identified in such reviews.

Key Words: book reviews, fiction, library perception, reader response, thematic analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, fiction literature has increasingly been recognized not only as a source of entertainment but also as a medium for shaping public perceptions about social institutions, including libraries (Dubourg & Baumard, 2022). “What You Are Looking For is in the Library”, a novel by Michiko Aoyama, explores the transformative power of books and the symbolic role of libraries as spaces for self-discovery, healing, and connection (Aoyama, 2023). While literary analysis of such works often focuses on narrative structure or authorial intent, less attention has been given to how readers interpret and respond to these themes (Afdholi, Manuaba, Hun, Bramantio, & Setijowati, 2024; Rasyid & Nugraha, 2024). This study addresses this gap by analyzing Indonesian-language reviews of the novel on Goodreads, employing a mixed-methods approach to explore both the sentiment and thematic interpretations conveyed by readers. By combining quantitative sentiment analysis using Boardflare with qualitative thematic coding, this research seeks to uncover how readers perceive the relationship between literature, literacy, and library services through their engagement with the novel.

The central issue addressed in this study is the extent to which fictional narratives influence readers’ attitudes toward libraries and reading practices. Despite the growing popularity of online book review platforms like Goodreads, there remains limited scholarly exploration of how such platforms can be leveraged to understand reader responses within the context of library and information science (LIS) (Wang, Liu, & Han, 2019; Zhang, Zang, Bai, & Liu, 2024). The purpose of this research is threefold: first, to identify dominant sentiments expressed in Indonesian-language reviews; second, to extract key thematic patterns related to literacy and library use; and third, to contextualize these findings within LIS theory. By doing so, the study contributes to the understanding of how popular literature can shape public discourse around libraries and inform strategies for promoting reading culture and library engagement.

While several studies have explored reader responses to literature using online review platforms, most existing research focuses on English-language texts or employs purely quantitative sentiment analysis without delving into the thematic and contextual dimensions of reader interpretations (Harlina, Ramadina, & Hartati, 2024; Bilianos & Mikros, 2022). For instance, prior investigations into Goodreads reviews have primarily concentrated on bestsellers in Western contexts, often overlooking non-English narratives and their cultural receptions (Hajibayova, 2019). Furthermore, despite growing scholarly interest in the intersection between fiction and library perceptions, few studies have explicitly connected literary themes to concepts within Library and Information Science (LIS), such as information literacy, emotional engagement with texts, or the symbolic function of libraries as social spaces (Given, Case, & Willson, 2023; Adams, 2025; Alemdar & Anılan, 2020).

This research is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of information worlds (Given, Case, & Willson, 2023) and emotional literacy (Steiner, 2001; Alemdar & Anılan, 2020), both of which provide insights into how individuals construct meaning from textual experiences within specific socio-cultural contexts. It also draws upon the concept of “the library as place” (Chartier, 1993; Garnar & Tonyan, 2021; Adams, 2025), which emphasizes the symbolic and functional roles of libraries beyond mere information access. Based on preliminary observations, it is hypothesized that positive sentiment will dominate the reviews, particularly among readers who identify with the novel’s portrayal of libraries as sanctuaries for personal growth. Furthermore, thematic analysis is expected to reveal recurring motifs related to escapism, self-reflection, and the restorative function of reading.

Ultimately, this study aims to demonstrate how user-generated content on digital platforms can serve as a valuable resource for LIS researchers and practitioners interested in understanding public perceptions of libraries. The findings also offer practical insights for librarians seeking to engage younger audiences through literature-based programs and community storytelling initiatives.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative sentiment analysis and qualitative thematic coding to investigate Indonesian-language reviews of “What You Are Looking For is in the Library” on Goodreads. The research is positioned within the framework of descriptive-interpretive inquiry, aiming to both quantify dominant sentiments and interpret underlying themes related to literacy, emotional engagement, and perceptions of libraries. These themes align with established concepts in Library and Information Science (LIS) research, particularly concerning the symbolic and functional roles of libraries (Given, Case, & Willson, 2023; Adams, 2025; Alemdar & Anılan, 2020) and the emotional connection readers form with texts (Steiner, 2001; Alemdar & Anılan, 2020). Building upon these frameworks, our thematic analysis focuses on recurring patterns observed in reader responses, categorized as ‘Moral’, ‘Emotion’, ‘Structure’, ‘Library’, and ‘Purpose’, reflecting the multifaceted impact of the novel on readers' perceptions and personal growth. The subjects of this study are Indonesian readers who have posted reviews of the novel in the Indonesian language on Goodreads, while the object is the textual content of those reviews. The research was conducted between January and April 2025, with all data collected from the Goodreads website as a digital platform for reader-generated content.

A total of 41 Indonesian-language reviews were identified through a structured search on Goodreads using relevant keywords and filters. Given the specific nature of the novel and the Indonesian-language context, preliminary observations revealed a limited number of available reviews. Consequently, these reviews were selected based on the total sampling method also known as a census or exhaustive sampling (Eichhorn, 2022), which involves examining every single case or item that meets the inclusion criteria within the defined population. This method was deemed appropriate and necessary as the entire population of Indonesian-language reviews for “What You Are Looking for Is in the Library” on Goodreads during the data collection period (As of 24 May 2025) comprised exactly 41 reviews. Therefore, a complete enumeration was conducted and eliminating the need for a sampling formula as all available data points were included in the analysis.

To ensure accuracy in sentiment classification, each review was first translated into English by the researcher using a combination of DeepL Translate and manual refinement to preserve contextual meaning. This step was necessary because BoardFlare Sentiment Analysis Tool, used in the quantitative phase, demonstrates higher reliability and precision when analyzing texts in English.

For the quantitative component, translated reviews were imported into Excel and analyzed using BoardFlare, an online sentiment analysis tool that categorizes text into positive and negative sentiment classes. BoardFlare was chosen for its user-friendly interface and compatibility with spreadsheet-based workflows, making it suitable for small-scale academic research.

To enhance the robustness and validity of the qualitative thematic coding, a subset of 10 reviews (approximately 24% of the total dataset) was independently coded by a second researcher.

Figure 1. Intercooder Reliability Data for Thematic Analysis

		Coder 1's Theme					
		Moral	Emotion	Structure	Library	Purpose	Total
Coder 2's Theme	Moral	2	0	0	0	0	2
	Emotion	1	1	0	0	0	2
	Structure	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Library	0	0	0	2	1	3
	Purpose	0	1	0	0	1	2
	Total	3	2	1	2	2	10
Cohen's Kappa formula:							
p0	0.7						
pe	0.21						
k	0.620253						

The intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient in Microsoft Excel, yielding a value of approximately 0.62. This value indicates substantial agreement between the two coders. Initial discrepancies in interpretation were identified in 3 instances, primarily related to distinguishing between certain nuanced themes, such as in one instance where Coder 1 assigned 'Moral' and Coder 2 assigned 'Emotion', or another where 'Purpose' was assigned by Coder 1 and 'Library' by Coder 2. These differences were thoroughly discussed and resolved through a consensus-building process, leading to a refined understanding of the coding scheme and ensuring consistent interpretation across the entire dataset.

In the qualitative component, thematic analysis was conducted manually following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The original Indonesian texts were used for this stage to retain cultural and linguistic nuances. Based on initial reading and open coding, five main thematic categories were developed:

Table 1. Five Main Thematic Categories

No.	Theme	Description
1	Moral	reflections on ethical lessons or values conveyed in the novel
2	Emotion	expressions of personal feelings or emotional responses
3	Structure	comments on narrative style, pacing, and storytelling techniques
4	Library	perspectives on the role and symbolism of libraries
5	Purpose	interpretations of the novel's overarching message or intent

The selection of these themes was guided by their recurring prominence in the reader reviews and their relevance to the novel's core narrative and its connection to Library and Information Science (LIS) concepts. For instance, 'Moral' and 'Purpose' themes emerged frequently as readers reflected on the ethical lessons and overarching messages conveyed by the novel, aligning with existing research on fiction's role in shaping personal values and self-discovery (Afdholi, Manuaba, Hun, Bramantio, & Setijowati, 2024; Dubourg & Baumard, 2022). The 'Emotion' theme was crucial given the novel's perceived bibliotherapeutic effect and its emphasis on emotional healing, a concept explored in previous studies on emotional literacy and reader response

(Alemdar & Anılan, 2020; Steiner, 2001). 'Structure' captured reader comments on narrative techniques, which is a common analytical dimension in literary studies and book reviews (Rasyid & Nugraha, 2024; Wang, Liu, & Han, 2019). Finally, the 'Library' theme was central to the research objective, directly reflecting readers' perceptions and renewed appreciation for library spaces, echoing LIS literature on "the library as place" and its evolving symbolic roles (Adams, 2025; Garnar & Tonyan, 2021).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a convergent parallel design, enabling cross-validation of sentiment trends with thematic interpretations. Ethical considerations included anonymizing reviewer identities and citing only general patterns rather than individual opinions. By combining sentiment and thematic analyses, this methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of how readers perceive literature's capacity to shape attitudes toward reading, self-reflection, and the social function of libraries.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS ANALYSIS

The analysis of 41 Indonesian-language reviews of "What You Are Looking for Is in the Library" on Goodreads reveals a predominantly positive reception, with 35 reviews classified as positive (85.4%), and only 6 identified as negative (14.6%). This distribution underscores the novel's appeal to readers seeking emotionally resonant and reflective narratives that emphasize moral clarity and introspective journeys. More than just a story about books, the novel portrays the library not merely as a repository of information but as a symbolic and safe space. A place where emotional and spiritual solutions are offered to visitors navigating life's uncertainties. In an increasingly digital and individualistic society, this narrative reaffirms the traditional yet evolving role of libraries as centers of community, knowledge, and personal transformation. Through the character of Sayuri Komachi, the empathetic and wise librarian, the novel positions the library as a site of acceptance, listening, and personalized guidance through curated book recommendations. This depiction reflects a broader shift in how libraries are perceived not only as institutions of information, but also as spaces for social interaction and psychological healing.

Qualitative thematic coding further enriches these findings by identifying five key categories: Moral, Emotion, Structure, Library, and Purpose. Among the positive reviews, Moral emerged as the most frequently referenced theme, appearing in 19 out of 35 reviews, followed closely by Purpose (14) and Library (13). Readers consistently praised the novel's ethical undertones and its ability to convey life lessons through simple yet profound storytelling. Many highlighted how the book encouraged self-reflection and offered guidance during personal struggles, reinforcing the idea that literature can serve as a source of moral and philosophical insight. The Library theme, in particular, was interpreted not only as a physical setting but also as a metaphor for inner exploration and sanctuary. Several reviewers expressed a newfound or renewed appreciation for libraries, both symbolically and practically, with comments such as *"I've never wanted a library near my house this badly before"* and *"I wish there were more libraries where people feel at home..."* indicating that the novel successfully evokes nostalgia, longing, and the desire for deeper engagement with library spaces. Although some critical voices suggested that the portrayal of the library was overly idealized, most readers recognized its symbolic power in fostering personal growth and emotional well-being.

Among the negative reviews, none directly criticized the novel's Moral message, but instead focused on subjective experiences such as emotional resonance (1 review), narrative structure (2 reviews), portrayal of the library (2 reviews), and overall purpose (2 reviews). These critiques often reflected unmet expectations rather than fundamental flaws in the novel's content. Some readers found the emotional impact lacking or felt that the plot failed to fully develop its characters. Yet even among these dissenting views, there remained a level of respect for the novel's intent and sincerity. This suggests that while the novel may not resonate equally with all readers, its core themes retain relevance and meaning across diverse reader perspectives.

One of the most compelling insights from the analysis is the bibliotherapeutic effect reported by many readers. Numerous reviews described the novel as emotionally soothing, mentally supportive, and motivating. Phrases like *"When I'm stressed, I run to reading books. I feel seen,"* *"This book held me tightly and warmly,"* and *"Books have the power to change human thought patterns and behavior for the better!"* reflect how readers experienced the novel not just as entertainment, but as a form of emotional catharsis and mental respite. The librarian's role in recommending specific books that align with each visitor's personal dilemma reinforces the idea that literature can be a guiding force in navigating life's complexities. Despite being a work of fiction, the novel's messages are often treated by readers as sources of practical wisdom, demonstrating how fictional narratives can function as tools for self-improvement and emotional resilience.

Moreover, the novel engages readers in a process of critical information literacy, where they actively select, interpret, and apply insights from fiction to their own lives. Reviews such as *"The quotes are ones commonly found in self-improvement or motivational books,"* *"You can decide things, but there's no guarantee everything will go as planned,"* and *"Sometimes we find ourselves stuck in an endless merry-go-round..."* illustrate how readers draw upon the text to seek answers, strategies, or new perspectives on life challenges. This indicates that fiction, when crafted with depth and intentionality, can transcend its genre boundaries and become a valuable medium for personal development and decision-making.

Importantly, many readers encountered the novel during pivotal moments in their lives, when facing career confusion, identity crises, or existential uncertainty. Comments like *"This book fits perfectly with the phase I'm going through now..."*, *"Things don't just happen to you. It happens because you did something,"* and *"You can decide things, but there's no guarantee everything will go as planned"* suggest that the novel functions not only as a literary experience but also as a companion for introspection and personal meaning-making. While a few negative reviews expressed difficulty in articulating the novel's central message, the majority embraced it as a tool for reflection and affirmation of life's dynamic journey.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how fictional narratives can shape perceptions of libraries, reading, and personal growth. The novel's portrayal of the library as a nurturing and transformative space resonates deeply with many readers, prompting them to re-evaluate their relationship with real-world libraries and the role of books in their emotional and intellectual lives. At the same time, the presence of critical responses highlights the importance of reader context, expectation, and interpretive diversity in shaping literary reception.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how Indonesian readers engage with the novel by examining their Goodreads reviews. Specifically, the research pursued three main objectives: first, to identify the dominant sentiments expressed in Indonesian-language reviews; second, to extract key thematic patterns related to literacy and library use; and third, to contextualize these findings within Library and Information Science (LIS) theory.

Regarding the first objective, the quantitative sentiment analysis revealed a predominantly positive reception for the novel among Indonesian readers. This widespread positive sentiment underscores the novel's resonance with its audience.

Fulfilling the second objective, the qualitative thematic coding identified five key interpretive themes: 'Moral,' 'Emotion,' 'Structure,' 'Library,' and 'Purpose.' The findings show that readers connect deeply with the novel's portrayal of the library not merely as a space for books, but as a sanctuary for personal growth, healing, and meaningful human connection. The theme of 'Moral' was particularly dominant, followed by 'Purpose' and 'Library,' indicating readers' appreciation for the novel's ethical depth and its ability to inspire introspection. Many reviewers expressed a sense of longing for real-world libraries that mirror the empathetic and transformative

environment depicted in the story. Furthermore, the reported bibliotherapeutic effect highlights how readers experienced the novel as a source of emotional comfort and mental respite.

For the third objective, these findings are contextualized within LIS theory, reinforcing the idea that fictional narratives can significantly influence public perceptions of libraries and reading practices. The novel's powerful depiction of the library as a nurturing space aligns with LIS literature on "the library as place" and its evolving symbolic roles beyond mere information centers, fostering self-discovery, healing, and social connections. The observed emotional engagement and bibliotherapeutic effects align with broader LIS discussions about the affective and existential dimensions of reading and information literacy, where readers actively apply insights from fiction to their lives.

Looking ahead, future research could expand this inquiry by exploring reader responses across different cultural contexts or investigating how such narratives might be integrated into library programs aimed at promoting mental well-being, community engagement, and lifelong reading habits. The insights from this study offer valuable guidance for librarians seeking to enhance community engagement through literature-based initiatives

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