

From Text to Platform: Conceptualizing Literary Value in Algorithmic Culture through Critical Infrastructural Hermeneutics

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Abstract:

Every era entails various sorts of moods, tastes, and judgments which shape the values of its cultural production. This study examines the evolving landscape of literary evaluation in digital contexts, where algorithmic culture, platformization, and computational methods increasingly shape reading and interpretation. It aims to investigate how literary value is currently produced, circulated, and institutionalized. Drawing on research in social reading, platform studies, and computational literary analysis, the study adopts a critical infrastructural hermeneutics framework to link literary interpretation with political economy, data governance, and reception analytics. Findings indicate that literary value no longer emerges solely from traditional sites of judgment—such as reviewers, prize committees, or curricula—but through a relay structure of classification systems, recommendation engines, interface hierarchies, and monetization logics that continuously shape visibility and legitimacy. Participatory digital reading cultures expand expressive publics while intensifying data extraction and opacity, and computational literary methods provide insight at scale but risk reproducing historical exclusions if corpora, metadata, and evaluative frames are unexamined. The study concludes by proposing a practical research agenda emphasizing accountability, multilingual comparatism, and mixed-scale interpretation. Ultimately, the relevance of literary and cultural studies depends on its capacity to interpret both texts and the infrastructures that sort, surface, and monetize them.

Key words: Algorithmic culture; platformization; literary value; social reading; computational literary studies; infrastructural hermeneutics.

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1. Introduction

The evolving nature of the literary field in the digital age has introduced new complexities to the production, circulation, and interpretation of literary works. Texts, authorship, and institutions such as universities, journals, and publishers still play critical roles; however, these traditional structures now operate within platforms that rank relevance, sequence visibility, and shape discoverability through proprietary systems. Literary attention, therefore, often arrives preconfigured by algorithms that prioritize engagement metrics, recommendation engines, and circulation dynamics. This shift marks a significant transformation in how literary value is produced, not merely interpreted but operationalized (Gillespie; Striplhas; Nieborg and Poell).

This transformation compels a reconsideration of two long-held assumptions: first, that literary value is primarily adjudicated by interpretive communities in fields like criticism and pedagogy; and second, that distribution technologies are merely secondary means of transmitting pre-existing value. Both assumptions are increasingly unsustainable in the context of platformed systems, which do more than transmit literary objects—they classify, align, and iteratively recalibrate visibility through user profiles. This reordering is masked under the term “personalization” but reflects a deeper shift, positioning sorting and recommendation as forms of cultural gatekeeping (Bucher; Seaver; Hu et al.). Moreover, political economy analyses demonstrate that these systems are not neutral, but are instead market-driven infrastructures focused on data capture, retention, and monetization (Srnicsek; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal; Zuboff).

In light of these changes, the study argues that contemporary literary and cultural scholarship must shift its focus. Current research cannot continue to treat platform mediation as peripheral. Instead, it must examine how platform infrastructures shape interpretation, reception, and canonization. This article responds to that need by offering a critical review of scholarship in algorithmic studies, platform studies, social reading research, and computational literary studies, and argues that these fields, though often studied in isolation, address the same structural phenomenon: the infrastructural production of cultural value.

The research problem addressed in this article is that literary value in platformed contexts operates in a relay structure, forming through successive transformations rather than being established at a single site. A text is classified, ranked, surfaced, reviewed, monetized, and archived through interconnected mechanisms that redistribute legitimacy at each stage. This framework acknowledges the agency of readers, critics, and educators while situating that agency within infrastructures that are often opaque and unevenly accountable (Kitchin; Dourish; Noble). The article proposes critical infrastructural hermeneutics as a framework to integrate close reading, institutional analysis, and empirical research on platforms.

Finally, this review is necessary due to ongoing debates that oscillate between two reductive perspectives: one that views algorithmic systems as having displaced interpretation entirely, rendering literary criticism obsolete, and another that insists interpretation remains untouched by platform conditions, making infrastructural analysis unnecessary. Neither position aligns with the evidence. Research on social reading underscores the importance of robust reader participation and interpretive creativity (Thelwall and Kousha; Walsh et al.), while studies on recommender governance highlight persistent opacity and concentrated control over visibility (Gillespie; Bucher; Ziewitz). The intersection of participation and governance, therefore, calls for a new theoretical approach.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews key scholarship across algorithmic culture, platform political economy, social reading, and computational literary studies, all of which address how cultural value is produced and mediated in digital environments. While these studies share overlapping concerns with visibility, infrastructure, and evaluation, they often approach these issues from parallel rather than integrated perspectives. As such, the existing scholarship implicitly points to, but does not fully address, the problem of how literary value is infrastructurally produced across these domains.

2.1 Reviews Related to Theoretical Approaches

Gillespie, in *The Relevance of Algorithms*, examines how algorithmic systems transform normative judgments into technical procedures, arguing that platforms function as institutionalized relevance machines that shape visibility while maintaining an appearance of objectivity. His objective is to expose the political dimensions of algorithmic sorting, and he adopts a critical media studies approach to analyze platform governance. The findings demonstrate that algorithmic curation embeds cultural values into technical systems, thereby structuring public discourse. This insight is significant for the present study because it establishes visibility as a constructed and governed condition rather than a neutral outcome. Similarly, Bucher, in *Want to Be on the Top?*, investigates Facebook's visibility politics, focusing on how users experience and adapt to algorithmic ranking. Through qualitative and interpretive analysis, she shows that users internalize platform logics, forming what she later terms the "algorithmic imaginary." These findings highlight the cultural consequences of algorithmic systems, reinforcing the relevance of user perception and behavior in shaping literary circulation.

Kitchin, in *Thinking Critically About and Researching Algorithms*, addresses the need to analyze algorithms as sociotechnical assemblages, emphasizing code, data, institutions, and practices. His approach challenges reductive views of algorithms as isolated entities. Dourish, in his work on sociotechnical systems, similarly critiques abstract notions of "the algorithm,"

advocating for context-sensitive analysis. Seaver, through ethnographic studies, further develops this perspective by demonstrating that algorithms are culturally constructed through organizational practices and iterative design. Ziewitz adds that governance narratives often exaggerate algorithmic coherence, obscuring infrastructural complexity and accountability gaps. Collectively, these studies reveal that algorithmic systems are embedded within broader institutional and cultural processes, a perspective that is essential for understanding literary visibility as infrastructurally mediated.

Srniciek's *Platform Capitalism* investigates the economic foundations of platform infrastructures, identifying data extraction and network effects as central to contemporary capitalism. His objective is to theorize platforms as dominant economic forms, and he employs political economy analysis to demonstrate how value is generated through data accumulation. Similarly, van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, in *The Platform Society*, examine how platforms reshape public values and institutional arrangements, emphasizing their governance role beyond technical systems. Nieborg and Poell introduce the concept of platformization of cultural production, showing how cultural goods become dependent on platform infrastructures and metricized distribution. Their findings are extended by Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy, who analyze creative industries and demonstrate how labor, production, and promotion are reorganized under platform conditions. These studies collectively underscore that cultural value is inseparable from infrastructural and economic systems, directly informing the present study's focus on literary value formation.

Synthesis of Theoretical Approaches: Taken together, these studies converge on the insight that visibility, value, and cultural circulation are structurally mediated by algorithmic and platform infrastructures. However, they tend to treat literary interpretation and textual analysis as secondary concerns, leaving unresolved how these infrastructural dynamics intersect with literary value formation specifically.

2.2 Reviews Related to Literary and Cultural Practices

Murray, in *The Digital Literary Sphere*, explores how digital environments reshape publishing, reading, and literary reputation. Her objective is to map transformations in literary culture under digital conditions, and she employs a mixed-methods approach combining platform analysis and cultural critique. Her findings show that platforms such as Goodreads centralize evaluative authority while maintaining an appearance of participatory culture. Spjeldnæs extends this analysis by examining publishing strategies, demonstrating how publishers adapt to platform-driven discoverability and demand signals. Tattersall Wallin investigates audiobook platforms, showing that subscription models reshape reading temporalities and user engagement. These studies are significant because they provide concrete evidence of how platform infrastructures reorganize literary production and reception practices.

Thelwall and Kousha, in their study of Goodreads, analyze reader-generated data to demonstrate how large-scale evaluative practices emerge in social reading environments. Their objective is to establish social reading platforms as valuable sources for reception studies, using quantitative and computational methods. Walsh et al. examine how categories such as “classics” are constructed through interactions among users, platforms, and markets, highlighting the dynamic nature of literary categorization. Hu et al. further show that recommendation systems increasingly mediate gatekeeping processes within these platforms. English and Porter complicate these findings by identifying cross-genre reading patterns that resist simple categorization. These studies collectively demonstrate that reader participation remains central to literary culture, but is increasingly structured by platform mechanisms.

Moretti’s *Distant Reading* introduces a methodological shift toward large-scale literary analysis, proposing that literary history can be understood through patterns rather than individual texts. Jockers expands this approach through macroanalysis, applying computational methods to genre and stylistic change. Algee-Hewitt and McGurl, as well as Algee-Hewitt et al., develop field-level analyses of canon formation and archive dynamics. Long and So integrate machine learning with interpretive frameworks, while Underwood, Bamman, and Lee, and Evans and Wilkens demonstrate how computational methods generate new historical insights. At the same time, Da critiques methodological overreach in computational studies, while So, Long, and Zhu, and So and Roland emphasize the importance of historical and racial context in data-driven analysis. Underwood calls for integrating computational evidence with humanistic interpretation, and Klein and Lee and Beckelhimer highlight issues of scale, labor, and imperial history. These contributions are significant because they reveal both the potential and limitations of computational methods in literary studies.

Synthesis of Literary and Cultural Practices: Across these studies, a shared insight emerges that literary production, reception, and analysis are increasingly mediated by data, platforms, and computational methods. However, the relationship between these practices and the infrastructural production of literary value remains insufficiently theorized, particularly in terms of how visibility, interpretation, and evaluation interact across systems.

To conclude, the reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that algorithmic systems, platform infrastructures, and computational methods have transformed the conditions under which literary value is produced, circulated, and interpreted. While each body of scholarship provides critical insights into specific dimensions of this transformation, they remain fragmented and rarely integrated into a unified framework. This fragmentation indicates an existing gap in the field, namely the lack of a comprehensive approach that connects infrastructural dynamics with literary interpretation and value formation. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing contemporary literary and cultural studies.

Table 1.

Conceptual Traditions and Their Relevance to Platformed Literary Value

Tradition	Foundational Question	Key Sources	Core Insight	Main Blind Spot
Critical Algorithm Studies	How is relevance technically produced and socially governed?	Gillespie 2014; Bucher 2012; Kitchin 2017; Seaver 2017; Ziewitz 2016	Visibility is politically formatted through ranking and recommendation	Literary institutions are sometimes treated as secondary
Platform Political Economy	How do platforms reorganize cultural production and capture value?	Srnicek 2017; van Dijck et al. 2018; Nieborg and Poell 2018; Poell et al. 2021	Cultural circulation is infrastructural and market-embedded	Textual form and interpretive nuance can be underdeveloped
Social Reading and Reception Analytics	How do readers evaluate and circulate books at scale?	Thelwall and Kousha 2017; Walsh et al. 2021; Hu et al. 2025; Holur et al. 2021	Reception becomes empirically tractable through user-generated data	Platform metrics can be mistaken for cultural consensus
Computational Literary Studies and Critique	What does scale reveal or distort in literary history?	Moretti 2013; Jockers 2013; Da 2019; Underwood 2020; So and Roland 2020	Pattern detection expands historical inference	Corpus bias and inferential inflation remain persistent risks

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Background

The concept of critical infrastructural hermeneutics is grounded in the historical and intellectual development of both literary criticism and media studies, particularly in the context of digital platforms. Traditional literary theory has long emphasized the importance of

close reading and the intrinsic value of texts, a view that was primarily concerned with textual analysis and the interpretation of meaning within a fixed historical and cultural context. However, as digital platforms have become central to the circulation and interpretation of literary works, this traditional framework has become insufficient. The rise of platforms such as social media, online publishing, and digital archives has created a new environment where the mediation of texts through algorithmic sorting, classification, and ranking systems significantly influences their visibility, reception, and legitimacy. Scholars like Gillespie, Bucher, and Seaver have highlighted how algorithms shape the visibility and cultural value of texts in ways that were previously understood as purely subjective or critical judgments.

In response to these shifts, critical infrastructural hermeneutics draws on insights from critical algorithm studies, platform studies, and cultural theory to propose a framework that integrates the analysis of texts with an understanding of the infrastructures that mediate them. This framework is informed by historical materialist approaches that emphasize the relational and historical production of cultural value, alongside theories of mediation that account for the complex systems that govern contemporary media environments.

3.2 Critical Infrastructural Hermeneutics

At the core of this article is the development of critical infrastructural hermeneutics, a framework designed to analyze how literary value is mediated through technological and institutional infrastructures. This framework rests on three central propositions: (1) literary value is relational and historical, not intrinsic; (2) platforms function as interpretive infrastructures because they classify, sort, and prioritize texts using operational criteria that carry normative effects; and (3) literary criticism must expand beyond textual analysis to include infrastructural mediation in order to offer a comprehensive explanation of literary value in the digital age.

The concept of relay value formation plays a crucial role in this framework. Relay value formation suggests that value is produced through a series of linked relays, each translating cultural meaning into different technical and institutional currencies. These relays include:

- **Classification Relay:** In this relay, texts are categorized through metadata schemas, genre taxonomies, and user-generated labels that define their cultural context.
- **Curation Relay:** Recommendation systems convert user interaction data and item similarity into ranked outputs, shaping which texts are seen and by whom.
- **Visibility Relay:** Interfaces and platforms allocate attention through strategic placement, badges, and list architecture, determining which works rise to prominence.
- **Monetization Relay:** Engagement metrics are linked to retention, conversion, and subscription economies, transforming cultural value into economic value.

- Canonization Relay: Institutional mechanisms such as syllabi, prizes, reviewing cultures, and archives stabilize certain works as legitimate and worthy of sustained attention.

3.3 The Implications of Relay Value Formation

This model helps explain the volatility and contradictions in contemporary literary hierarchies. For example, a work may perform well in terms of platform circulation but remain marginalized in traditional institutions, while another might be institutionally prominent yet suffer from low visibility in algorithmic systems. Relay analysis also challenges the traditional debate of “quality versus popularity,” showing that popularity under platform conditions is not merely a reflection of aggregate reader preference. Instead, it is shaped recursively by prior ranking and exposure (Hallinan and Striphas; Rader and Gray). Likewise, the concept of quality is no longer limited to isolated critical judgment; it is increasingly influenced by platform discoverability and metadata legibility (Murray; Walsh et al.).

3.4 The Role of Close Reading in Infrastructural Analysis

Despite the focus on infrastructures, critical infrastructural hermeneutics does not dismiss the importance of close reading. Rather, it repositions close reading within a broader framework that accounts for the ways in which platforms mediate literary production, circulation, and interpretation. Close reading remains essential, but it must be integrated with infrastructural analysis and methodological reflexivity. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of how meaning is constructed, not just through textual interpretation, but through the complex interplay of technological systems and institutional processes. Theoretical concepts are thus brought into practice without sacrificing the critical depth that close reading offers.

Table 2.

Relay Value Formation: Mechanisms, Effects, and Critique

Relay	Mechanisms	Value Translation	Typical Asymmetry	Research Priority
Classification	Metadata standards, tags, genre labels, NLP categories	Textual heterogeneity becomes machine-readable comparability	Taxonomic reduction, anglophone category dominance	Comparative taxonomy studies across languages and markets
Curation	Collaborative filtering, popularity	Reader activity becomes ranked recommendation	Feedback loops favor already visible works	Exposure audits by language, press size, and

	weighting, personalization models			author demographics
Visibility	Interface hierarchy, search defaults, featured lists, notification design	Ranking becomes attention and interaction	Opaque discoverability, design-driven inequality	Interface ethnography and controlled user-account testing
Monetization	Subscription metrics, conversion funnels, engagement optimization	Attention becomes revenue and retention	Commercial incentives shape cultural prominence	Divergence analysis between critical reception and engagement metrics
Canonization	Syllabi, reviewing institutions, prizes, archives, citation networks	Circulation becomes cultural legitimacy	Institutional adoption mirrors platform bias	Counter-canon projects with transparent selection protocols

4. Methods and/or Techniques

The study employs a critical integrative review design appropriate for interdisciplinary fields characterized by heterogeneous forms of evidence. The corpus comprises fifty-six sources published between 2011 and 2025, including books, journal articles, chapters in edited volumes, conference papers, and research pamphlets. Sources were selected based on thematic relevance to algorithmic mediation, platformization, social reading, and computational literary studies, as well as their demonstrable influence on conceptual or methodological debates within these areas. The review proceeded through two linked coding stages. The first stage applied descriptive coding to record publication type, methodological orientation, scale of analysis, and value register, distinguishing among aesthetic, social, economic, and infrastructural framings of value. The second stage employed axial coding to identify recurring problem formations, including visibility governance, participation and extraction, scale and context, race and archive, and methodological accountability.

Interpretation followed a reflexive protocol that treats methods as historically situated rather than neutral instruments. Rather than extracting consensus, the review seeks conceptual synthesis under conditions of disciplinary disagreement, foregrounding tensions instead of smoothing contradictions. Disagreement is treated as productive evidence, particularly where computational and critical traditions diverge in their inferential standards or normative assumptions (Da; Underwood; So and Roland). This design supports the article's aim of developing a theoretically rigorous and practically usable account of how literary value is formed within platformed cultural environments.

5. Material Studied

The corpus spans four interrelated thematic domains: algorithm governance and visibility politics; platform political economy and cultural production; social reading and reception analytics; and computational literary studies, including its internal methodological critiques. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on platforms operating in North American and European contexts, with particular attention to Goodreads and major social media infrastructures, which function as key sites for studying algorithmic mediation and reader interaction. Although comparative research across regions and platforms is gradually expanding, it remains relatively limited. The linguistic distribution of the literature is likewise strongly anglophone, a pattern that should be understood not merely as a consequence of sampling but as a structural feature of the field itself, reflecting broader inequalities in academic publishing, data accessibility, and platform research infrastructures. The corpus also encompasses a range of publication types in order to capture both the conceptual foundations and empirical developments of the field. Monographs typically advance system-level theoretical arguments about platforms, algorithms, and cultural value, while journal articles provide more targeted empirical analyses and methodological innovations. Conference papers and research pamphlets are included where they have exerted demonstrable influence on scholarly debates, particularly in shaping the early methodological trajectories and critical discussions within computational literary studies.

Table 3.

Corpus Architecture and Analytical Distribution

Dimension	Category	Count	Proportion	Analytical Function
Thematic Domain	Algorithm governance and visibility	16	28.6%	Explains relevance production, opacity, and user-facing effects
	Platform political economy and publishing	14	25.0%	Explains infrastructure ownership, value capture,

				and industry transformation
	Social reading and reception analytics	10	17.9%	Explains reader participation, evaluative discourse, and recommendation dynamics
	Computational literary studies and critique	16	28.6%	Explains scale effects, method innovation, and inferential constraints
Document Type	Journal article	36	64.3%	Core empirical and conceptual evidence
	Book/monograph	12	21.4%	System-level theorization
	Chapter/pamphlet/conference	8	14.3%	Method formation and high-impact conceptual framing
Temporal Range	2011–2014	8	14.3%	Early articulation of algorithmic and platform issues
	2015–2018	20	35.7%	Rapid conceptual consolidation across fields
	2019–2022	17	30.4%	Expansion into publishing and reception infrastructures
	2023–2025	11	19.6%	Intensified focus on gatekeeping and methodological reflexivity

6. Results

6.1 Value Formation Is Distributed Across Infrastructural Relays

Across the reviewed corpus, a clear convergence emerges around the idea that literary value is not produced through discrete acts of judgment by critics, institutions, or markets alone, but through distributed mediation across multiple infrastructural layers. Research in algorithm studies demonstrates how notions of relevance and importance are technically encoded into ranking systems and subsequently normalized through everyday use (Gillespie; Bucher). Work in platform political economy situates these mechanisms within broader structures of ownership concentration, data capture, and platform governance, showing how the infrastructures that sort and surface texts are embedded within profit-oriented data ecosystems (Srnicsek; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal). Studies of social reading platforms further

reveal that reader interaction—through reviews, ratings, tags, and discussion threads—does not remain at the level of discourse but becomes machine-legible input that feeds recommendation systems and algorithmic curation (Thelwall and Kousha; Hu et al.). In parallel, computational literary studies provides the analytical tools needed to detect the large-scale outcomes of these dynamics across corpora, while internal critiques of these methods highlight the epistemological limits and interpretive risks involved in such analyses (Underwood; Da).

Taken together, these strands of research support the relay model of value formation advanced in the theoretical framework. Rather than locating literary value within singular evaluative authorities—such as professional critics or market demand—the literature demonstrates that value emerges through a sequence of infrastructural relays that translate cultural interpretation into classification, ranking, visibility, and ultimately legitimacy. Each relay introduces its own criteria and constraints, meaning that literary value is continually reshaped as it moves between interpretive communities, platform systems, and institutional recognition. This distributed perspective challenges explanations that privilege either aesthetic judgment or market popularity in isolation, instead emphasizing the infrastructural processes that mediate between them.

6.2 Participation and Extraction Are Structurally Coupled

A second consistent finding across the corpus is that reader participation and platform-based extraction operate as structurally intertwined processes rather than opposing forces. Research on social reading environments shows that user-generated practices—such as reviewing, shelving, annotating, and rating—create vibrant interpretive communities that enable readers to share meaning, debate evaluation, and construct collective reading cultures outside traditional critical institutions (Walsh et al.; Holur et al.). These participatory spaces often function as alternative arenas of literary discourse where readers negotiate genre conventions, author reputations, and interpretive norms in ways that expand the scope of reception beyond professional criticism.

At the same time, the same participatory practices that sustain these communities also serve as a primary source of data for platform infrastructures. Reviews, interaction histories, and engagement signals are captured as proprietary assets that feed recommendation algorithms, ranking mechanisms, and monetization strategies (Murray; Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy). Participation therefore generates both cultural expression and economic value, producing a double movement in which interpretive abundance coincides with intensified forms of data capture and commodification. This coupling complicates both celebratory narratives that frame participatory culture as purely emancipatory and deterministic accounts that depict platforms as systems of total control. Instead, the literature suggests that participation and extraction must be analyzed together as mutually constitutive dynamics

within platformed cultural production. Critical research, therefore, needs to attend simultaneously to meaning-making practices and to the political-economic infrastructures that translate those practices into platform value.

6.3 Opacity Reconfigures Agency Without Eliminating It

User-centered studies of algorithmic platforms suggest that readers operating within these environments are neither fully informed actors nor passive recipients of automated curation. Instead, users frequently develop practical, experience-based theories about how recommendation systems function and attempt to adapt their behavior accordingly (Rader and Gray; Eslami et al.). Readers may experiment with rating patterns, tagging practices, or browsing strategies in order to influence recommendations or increase the visibility of certain works. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate that users actively negotiate platform environments and seek to understand the rules that structure their experience.

However, such negotiation occurs under conditions of persistent opacity. The criteria governing ranking, recommendation weighting, and exposure allocation remain largely inaccessible to ordinary users, and the operational logic of these systems is rarely transparent. As a result, user strategies operate within partially imagined models of algorithmic behavior rather than fully verifiable knowledge. Agency therefore persists, but in a modified form: it becomes situated, adaptive, and constrained by infrastructural asymmetries. For literary reception theory, this finding implies that reader agency should no longer be conceptualized as an autonomous interpretive authority detached from mediating systems. Instead, agency must be understood as relational and infrastructurally conditioned. Readers remain active participants in meaning-making processes, yet their interpretive and discovery practices are scaffolded—and sometimes redirected—by systems whose internal operations they cannot fully inspect.

6.4 Computational Scale Produces Insight and Distortion

Large-scale methods generate important insight into literary history and discourse. Studies on gender, geography, and field dynamics demonstrate the explanatory power of corpus-scale inference (Underwood, Bamman, and Lee; Evans and Wilkens; Algee-Hewitt and McGurl). Yet critiques reveal persistent problems, including representational gaps, unstable proxies, and rhetorical inflation of findings (Da; So, Long, and Zhu). Race-centered critiques further show that methodological abstraction can reproduce archival exclusions if corpus construction is not historically and politically interrogated (So and Roland; Klein). The result is not methodological failure but methodological responsibility. Scale must be triangulated with contextual and interpretive evidence.

6.5 Platformization Is Reshaping Publishing Temporalities and Formats

Research on contemporary publishing practices indicates that the platformization of cultural distribution is reshaping not only how literature circulates but also how it is produced and managed. Studies of digital publishing infrastructures and audiobook markets show that platform metrics increasingly influence decisions about commissioning, release schedules, promotional strategies, and catalog maintenance (Spjeldnæs; Tattersall Wallin). Publishers monitor engagement indicators, recommendation performance, and audience retention data to inform editorial planning and marketing priorities. As a result, the temporal rhythms of literary production—such as release pacing, series development, and promotional cycles—are increasingly synchronized with the feedback mechanisms of platform analytics.

This shift does not eliminate traditional forms of editorial judgment or literary evaluation, but it alters the conditions under which such judgment is exercised. Decisions that once relied primarily on professional expertise and cultural forecasting are now frequently informed by measurable engagement signals and platform-derived visibility metrics. The literary marketplace thus becomes partially integrated into infrastructural feedback loops that continuously register and redistribute reader attention. This transformation has significant implications for literary criticism and pedagogy. Because platform-based discoverability increasingly shapes which works circulate widely and gain sustained attention, curricular selections and canonical recognition may be influenced by infrastructures that have already prefiltered the field of visibility. Understanding these dynamics therefore becomes essential for evaluating how literary value is formed and stabilized in contemporary cultural systems.

Table 4.

Synthesis of Findings and Their Theory-to-Practice Implications

Empirical Finding	Theoretical Consequence	Methodological Consequence	Institutional Consequence
Value is relay-based, not site-based	Literary value must be theorized as processual and infrastructural	Studies should map transitions from classification to canonization	Journals should require mediation mapping in platform-relevant submissions
Participation and extraction co-occur	Reader labor is both interpretive and economic	Reception studies should combine discourse analysis with data governance analysis	Editorial policy should request data provenance and ownership disclosure

Agency is negotiated under opacity	Agency models must integrate constraint and adaptation	Mixed methods are needed to connect user narratives and exposure outcomes	Pedagogy should include platform literacy and recommendation critique
Scale reveals patterns but amplifies bias	Method claims need explicit epistemic limits	Corpus construction and missingness reporting become mandatory	Institutions should support multilingual and minority-serving corpus development
Platformization reshapes publishing rhythms	Literary institutions and infrastructures are co-constitutive	Publishing studies should measure discoverability regimes	Canon formation research should test exposure inequality and institutional lag

7. Discussion and Findings

The synthesis suggests that literary and cultural studies is at a methodological threshold. The field has already produced sophisticated critique of algorithmic systems and strong innovation in computational method, yet integration remains incomplete. Studies often remain siloed: platform research can be institutionally rich but textually thin, while literary analysis can remain textually rich but infrastructurally underdescribed. Critical infrastructural hermeneutics addresses this divide by treating mediation as constitutive rather than contextual.

A major implication concerns the status of criticism itself. If visibility is increasingly allocated through recommendation infrastructures, then criticism is no longer simply an after-the-fact commentary on already stabilized texts. It becomes one relay among others, participating in circulation ecologies where indexing, shareability, and platform affordances condition reach. This does not diminish criticism's value; it redefines its object and responsibility. Criticism must now interpret both literary form and infrastructural form.

The field's longstanding tension between close and distant reading can also be reframed. Rather than a binary opposition, the evidence supports a mixed-scale architecture. Close reading is indispensable for semantic nuance, rhetorical complexity, and formal specificity. Distant and computational methods are indispensable for historical breadth and structural patterning. Infrastructural analysis is indispensable for understanding the conditions under which texts are surfaced and evaluated. The strongest scholarship will likely braid these scales in explicit relation, with each scale constraining the claims of the others (Moretti; Underwood; Klein).

Another key discussion point concerns justice. The review shows that questions of race, language, region, and archive are not supplementary ethics topics added after analysis; they are methodological conditions of valid inference. If corpora are linguistically narrow, if metadata standards erase local categories, or if recommendation systems privilege already dominant markets, then conclusions about literary culture risk becoming artifacts of infrastructural inequality (Noble; So and Roland). Accountability therefore requires explicit reporting of exclusion, missingness, and representational limits.

For editorial practice, especially in journals committed to theory-to-practice translation, this review suggests concrete shifts in evaluative criteria. Manuscripts that draw on platform-derived data should disclose extraction conditions, platform constraints, and ownership context. Studies making broad cultural claims should include methodological reflexivity about what remains unobserved. Comparative submissions should be encouraged to move beyond anglophone platforms and include multilingual evidence. None of these shifts dilute literary inquiry; they strengthen its rigor.

The discussion also highlights an institutional paradox. Universities and journals increasingly demand innovation in digital method, yet infrastructures for transparent and equitable digital scholarship remain uneven. Proprietary dependence persists, especially where platform APIs are closed, unstable, or selective. A critical response requires investment in open tools, reproducible workflows, and collaborative corpus-building practices that reduce vulnerability to proprietary opacity (Pasquale; Zuboff).

Finally, the review clarifies why this research agenda is urgently necessary. Platform infrastructures now influence which books are encountered, how they are interpreted in public discourse, and whether they enter long-term institutional memory. The question for literary studies is no longer whether infrastructure matters; it is whether the field can develop robust critical methods to analyze infrastructural mediation without abandoning interpretive depth.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how literary value is formed within contemporary platformed culture by proposing the framework of critical infrastructural hermeneutics and applying it through a critical integrative review of scholarship across algorithm studies, platform political economy, social reading research, and computational literary studies. Rather than focusing solely on textual interpretation, the article investigated how digital infrastructures mediate the circulation, visibility, and reception of literary works. By synthesizing insights from these interdisciplinary fields, the study aimed to develop a framework capable of explaining how technological systems, reader participation, and institutional practices interact in the contemporary formation of literary value.

The analysis shows that literary value emerges through a series of infrastructural relays linking classification, recommendation, visibility, monetization, and canonization. Across the reviewed literature, value formation appears as a distributed process rather than a discrete act of evaluation by critics or markets alone. Reader participation generates interpretive discourse that simultaneously feeds platform data systems, algorithmic opacity reshapes but does not eliminate user agency, and computational literary methods reveal large-scale patterns while also introducing methodological risks. Together, these findings demonstrate that literary circulation, attention, and legitimacy are increasingly shaped by platform infrastructures that organize cultural visibility and interaction.

The significance of these findings is that literary criticism must expand its analytical scope beyond the text to include the infrastructures that condition discovery, circulation, and reception. Criticism remains indispensable, but its object of analysis must be recalibrated to account for the systems that sort, rank, and amplify literary works. Recognizing literary value as relational, processual, and infrastructurally mediated has implications for both research and institutional practice, suggesting the need for mixed-scale interpretive methods and greater methodological accountability when studying literature in digitally mediated environments.

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