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THE BOOKTOK EFFECT

Exploring the intersection of social media and contemporary reading culture

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores BookTok, a book-focused community within TikTok, and its influence on how books are discovered, discussed, and selected. Using a quantitative survey of TikTok users with an interest in reading, the study examines patterns of exposure, purchasing behaviour, and social participation.

According to the results BookTok strength is helping TikTok users find new books. This seems to be thanks to TikTok's algorithm, which often throws unexpected titles onto users' feeds without them even looking for them. Some of the replies reported that they buy books due to the recommendations, while others find the videos entertaining to watch. However, this study shows that sharing book suggestions with friends was common, though feeling of connection to the BookTok community was mixed. Overall, BookTok plays a significant role in shaping reading trends and fuelling online conversations, even if its influence on purchasing decisions and community ties is less consistent.

Keywords BookTok, TikTok, Social media and reading, Digital reading culture

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1 INTRODUCTION

As a daily reader and avid social media user, it has become apparent that book related content known as BookTok in TikTok has been more common and gaining popularity among readers and content creators. BookTok is basically a corner of TikTok where readers swap thoughts, reviews, and recommendations, a kind of online hangout for book lovers. This TikTok trend has been increasing awareness and discovery among book fans and enthusiasts alike. The main thing that makes BookTok unique is it creates a platform for a community of book lovers online.

This trend has influenced the reading culture and its habits but also the ways in which literature is marketed, consumed, and discussed on social media. Different from regular book clubs, BookTok thrives on viral trends, engagement, and a tailored algorithm, all accessible through your phone.

One short video can spark a trend, and when a book goes viral, it often drives a surge in sales and even prompts reprints. What began as a passing online fad has grown into a major influence on the publishing industry. Book publishers and authors are adapting their marketing strategies to follow the platform's format, prioritizing engaging cover designs, emotionally resonant narratives, and collaborations with influencers who can connect and engage diverse audiences.

1.1 Research Question

- Does BookTok shape the way people find and buy books today?

This question matters because BookTok has grown into a big platform for readers who talk about books online. BookTok has changed how TikTok users discover new titles, how opinions are shared and how books become a bestseller.

Answering this question will also clarify how reading habits have changed. Are TikTok users buying books because of BookTok or is just for watching the videos for entertainment.

1.2 Main Objective

This thesis main objective is to explore how BookTok influences the way TikTok users discover, engage, and choose to read books. With aiming to examine the impact of BookTok on reading habits, book purchasing decisions, and sense of community in TikTok. Additionally, this research also explores on how TikTok's algorithm supports how a book title gets exposed to a TikTok user.

The thesis also looks into whether a user feels a sense of belonging to a community or has a more individual experience. It explores how users interact with BookTok, watching videos to recommend books to friends and family. Therefore, BookTok is shaping both personal reading choices and social interactions around books.

2 THEORETICAL STUDY

2.1 TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform that specializes in short-form content, videos ranging from a few seconds to 10 minutes long. Launched in 2016 by a Chinese based company called Bytedance. Consumers can create, watch and share videos which are amplified with music, filters, effects and sounds that are provided by TikTok. One of the big things that makes TikTok stand out is its recommendation system the famous 'For You Page.' It pulls together a feed for each person based on what they watch, like, and interact with. This leads to a highly personalized content, which improves user engagement and contributes to the platform's addictive appeal. (D'souza, 2025)

2.2 BookTok

BookTok is a subcommunity within TikTok, where readers create content centred around books. These videos typically feature book reviews, recommendations, book hauls or previews of unreleased or released books. The trend started gaining momentum in 2020, since then these videos have collectively amassed millions of views. (TikTok, 2025)

2.3 Social Customer Journey

According to the social customer journey, consumer decision-making is not an entirely individual process. Instead, it occurs and is shaped through interactions within social relationships and broader societal norms. This theoretical perspective highlights the influence of what is referred to as the "distal social other" larger social groups or communities that exert an indirect yet significant impact on consumer behaviour. Additionally, these groups are unknown and have a weak tie to the consumer. In the modern digital age, it has become increasingly for potential consumers to rely on user-generated reviews and feedback from

others who have previously experienced a product or service. The social customer journey theory outlines six distinct stages that consumers typically navigate throughout their decision-making process. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

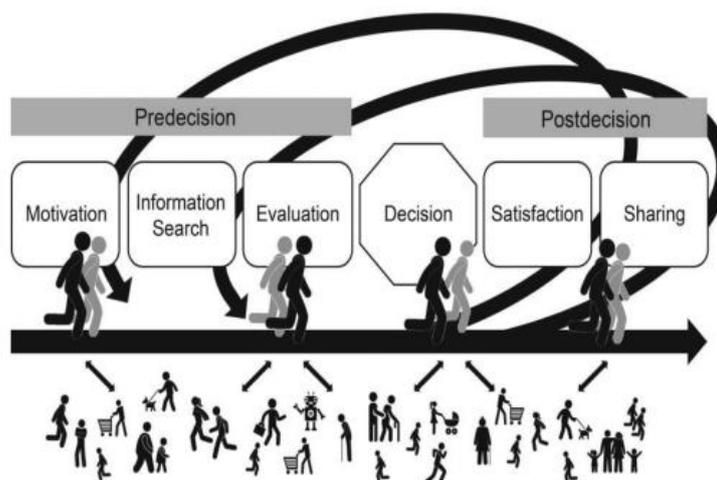


Figure 1 Social Customer Journey

Motivation is the first step, which focuses on the discovery of a product or service. This stage focuses on the initial discovery of a product or service. Companions usually tend to trigger recognition, which gives the initial motivation to investigate further. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

The second stage is **information search**, which relies on the consumer having the ability to access the relevant information about the product or service. For instance, the information shared by others may include product or service reviews, suggested alternatives, or personal insights based on their own experiences. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

The third stage **evaluation**, the consumer evaluates the available options related to the product or service they intend to purchase. Companions assist in comparing these options by contributing shared preferences or engaging in negotiation. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

The next stage "**decision**" centres on the consumer's decision-making process following the evaluation of available options. Social influences may arise from the actual presence of others during the decision, or from the perceived presence of others within the setting. Through group dynamics which can either sway or reinforce the final purchase decision. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

This fifth stage is **satisfaction**, which occurs after the consumer has used the purchased product or service. The social context in a product or service is used can significantly shape or alter the consumer's experience, thereby influencing their overall satisfaction and perception of value. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

The final stage "**sharing**" centres on the consumer's personal evaluation of the product or service, often leading to the sharing of post-purchase opinions. The motivation for sharing these evaluations may stem from social factors such as identity signalling and the desire to foster social closeness or from self-oriented drivers, including self-expression and symbolic self-completion. (Hamilton et al., 2021)

2.4 Consumer engagement in online brand communities

This article emphasizes how consumers do not just engage with the brand itself. However, they engage with other like-minded individuals within the community. Previous research has focused solely on engagement with a single factor such as the brand, the community, or organizational activities. This study argues that engagement is complex and multifaceted, involving interactions with multiple entities such as the brand, other community members, and the platform itself working all together. (Dessart et al., 2015)

Given that BookTok heavily relies on interactions among community members, this form of participation aligns with what is identified in the literature as behavioural engagement. This is understood as the learn-

ing, sharing and endorsing behaviours, in which members actively exchange information, support the brand, and contribute to the community's activities. Breaking down the behaviours involved in this method of engagement, we start with sharing which involves actively exchanging content, experiences or opinions with other community members. Learning which is seeking information or resources from the brand or other community members. Lastly, endorsing involves publicly supporting or recommending the brand and its offerings in the context of this study, specifically books. (Dessart et al., 2015)

There are two antecedents of engagement that members of the BookTok community would relate to. Firstly, social factors, play a significant role, as engagement with an online brand community often fosters a sense of identification and belonging, allowing individuals to feel part of a larger collective. Secondly, functional factors would be the value obtained from participation such as information, entertainment, networking, and benefits. (Dessart et al., 2015)

The article examines factors such as the size of the online brand community and its influence on user participation and engagement levels. It argues that that as the size of an online brand community increases, consumers may experience a diminished sense of uniqueness, which can subsequently lead to a decline in their participation and engagement. This gives an indication that changes in community scales affect consumer willingness to participate in the future. (Dessart et al., 2015)

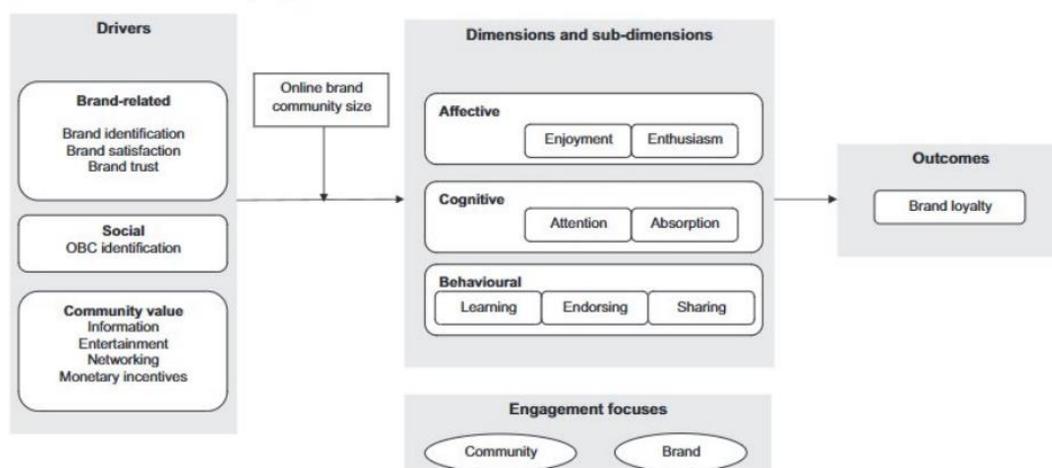


Figure 2 Consumer engagement in online brand communities

2.5 Echo Chamber

An echo Chamber is a communicative and informational environment; individuals are exposed to opinions and beliefs that line up with their own perspective. Therefore, also limiting and rejecting opposite views. This effect occurs when a group of like-minded individuals start reinforcing each other's opinions. This can cause the person to tunnel vision as they only see and hear the same opinion as their own. (GCFGlobal, n.d.)

In BookTok the echo chamber can be seen with TikTok's algorithm. When a user engages with a certain topic or gender, the app continues to recommend similar content. Therefore, the users "For you Page" may not have a wide range of content.

2.6 How TikTok Disrupts Publishing and Fuels Literature

In TikTok, particularly in the BookTok subculture, is reshaping the publishing industry by creating a movement by social media users, who are demanding for romance-fantasy also known as romantasy novels. These days publishers nor marketers decide what books become popular, but rather readers who make and post content for others to connect with.

This has led to the rapid rise of romantasy, with titles like Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and Rebecca Yarros's *Fourth Wing*, achieving viral status and significant sales. Publishers are adapting to this phenomenon by remodelling marketing strategies, adapting content strategies in response to trends emerging from BookTok. It highlights how the romantasy boom has changed not only economic models in publishing but also cultural consumption, with fan-driven events, cosplay, and immersive engagement becoming central to reader identity. (Balling & Martens, 2024)

2.7 The Algorithmized Self and Self-Making on TikTok

Ever since TikTok became a leading social media platform, TikTok users have used the app to express themselves, however this has differed from other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. TikTok's recommendation system also known as "For You", is where the app shows users content it thinks they will prefer. Unlike the other social media platforms which feed is made of following friends, TikTok makes the page specifically for the user account, based on the interactions, likes and watches.

- TikTok users are aware of the algorithm. Many try to train their algorithms to show more of what they prefer. Additionally, users often mention how the app knows and understands them.
- The content matters more than the creator. Contrasting the other platforms where users follow creators and friends, TikTok users prefer what content the algorithm shows, who is creating the content is irrelevant.

TikTok creates a new way of thinking about ourselves online, not by talking to other people, but by reacting to what the algorithm shows us. The authors call this the "algorithmized self", a version of ourselves

shaped by how the app sees us, rather than how we want to be seen by others. (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022)

2.8 Reading Identity in Online Communities

Social media users have always expressed and shaped themselves in online. In this case how focusing how readers would use books, pictures and captions to present themselves online. The book subgenre on social media apps is not just about books themselves, but also visually, the books aesthetic and style. Users would post content specifically around their personal taste to curate their aesthetic to be seen as a specific type of reader. This identity building includes what genre books they show, colour palettes and their photo layouts. Additionally, this will build the community's expectations and feedback on the admins curated aesthetic, reinforcing post more content.

Additionally, the article also shows that these social media accounts reading habits are highly personal. Often showing how each has connected to books in moments of their lives, with books acting as companions and symbols. This age of digital online culture and the online reading community are not only to recommend and review books, but also how one would display their identity and how they are perceived by others. (Boér-Endacott, 2025)

3 METHOD

3.1 Choice of method

The methodological approach adopted in this study focuses on quantitative research. The nature of the research questions which seek to measure and analyse patterns, trends, and relationships between BookTok and consumers. This necessitates a methodological approach that allows for statistical analysis and generalization. Accordingly, this study employs quantitative research, a structured survey as the primary instrument for data collection. (Ghanad, 2023)

3.2 Respondents

The respondents for this study were selected through purposive sampling. A non-probability sampling technique wherein participants are deliberately chosen based on predefined criteria relevant to the objectives of the research. This approach ensures that the selected individuals possess the specific characteristics necessary for addressing the research questions. The criteria in which the respondents were selected is based on two points. First that they use TikTok. Secondly, having some form of interest in reading novels. The respondents may have a short or long history of interest in the hobby. The number of respondents would range from anywhere between 50 to 60 respondents to attain as many perspectives related to the study. Approaching random sampling in this study would jeopardize the accuracy and reliability of the data retrieved as the study is directed towards a specific community. (Campbell et al., 2020)

3.3 Data Collection Method

The data was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed

through social media platforms over a period of two weeks. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymous.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, including:

- Demographics (age, gender).
- TikTok usage habits.
- Exposure to and interaction with BookTok.
- Behavioural influence.
- Perceptions of authenticity and community.

3.4 Instrument design and validation

The questionnaire was developed based on prior studies on social media influence and consumer behaviour. It was pilot tested with a small group of 5 respondents to ensure clarity, coherence, and relevance. Minor adjustments were made based on feedback to enhance validity and reliability.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any point. No personal identifiers were collected, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Consent was obtained electronically through the first page of the questionnaire. (ry & ry, 2018)

3.6 Limitations of the method

While the chosen method is effective for gathering broad insights, it has several limitations.

- Self-report bias, as participants may misreport behaviour or attitudes.

- Sampling bias, with non-probability sampling reduces generalizability.
- Platform dependency, since the results reflect primarily TikTok users and may not extend to the readers on other platforms.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Results From Questionnaire

Demographics

The majority of the respondents are within the 25-34 age group with 73,2% of the participants. Followed by the 18-24 group with 19,6%. Smaller numbers of participants are 35-44 with 3,6% of the respondents. However, 45-54 or the under 18 had 1,8% each.

What is your age?
56 vastausta

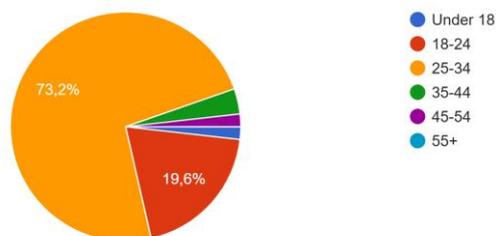


Figure 3 Age distribution of respondents

In terms of gender, most participants identified as female with 83.9%. Male respondents represented 8.9% and 7.1% identified as non-binary

What is your gender?
56 vastausta

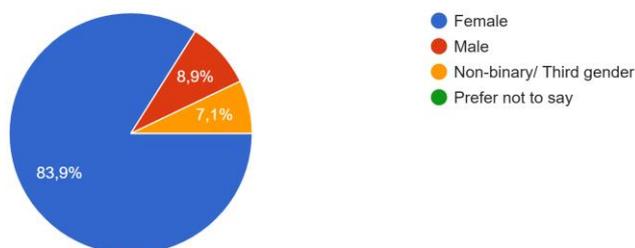


Figure 4 Gender distribution of respondents

TikTok Usage Patterns

Almost all participants, 92.9%, reported using TikTok, while 7.1% did not. Of those who used TikTok, 53.6% accessed the platform multiple times per day, highlighting its role as a routine habit.

Do you use TikTok?
56 vastausta

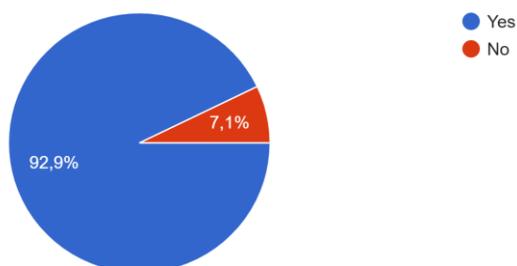


Figure 5 TikTok usage among respondents

How often do you use TikTok?
56 vastausta

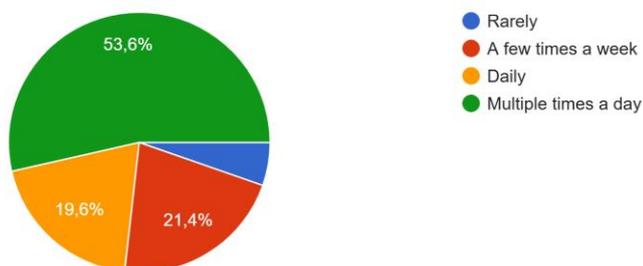


Figure 6 Frequency of TikTok use

Reading habits

While many participants enjoy reading books with 71.4%, only a portion answered doing it frequently 31.1%, most replied with occasionally or sometimes.

Do you enjoy reading books?

56 vastausta

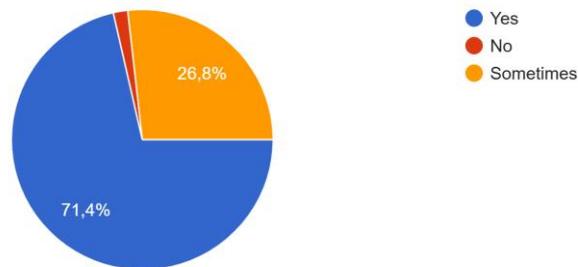


Figure 7 Enjoyment of reading

How often do you read books?

56 vastausta

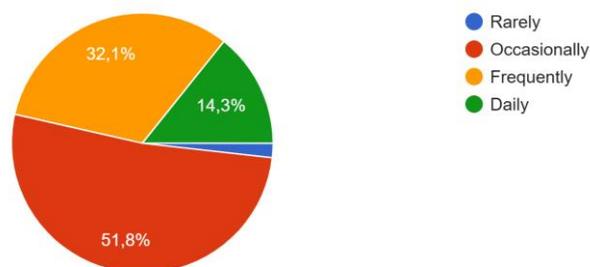


Figure 8 Reading frequency among respondents

Exposure to BookTok

A high number of respondents have book related content appear on their For You page. Which confirms BookTok is algorithmically eminent. However fewer respondents follow BookTok creators, implying that the algorithm exposure is not intentional by not seeking out the content themselves.

Have book-related videos ever appeared on your TikTok feed (BookTok)?
55 vastausta

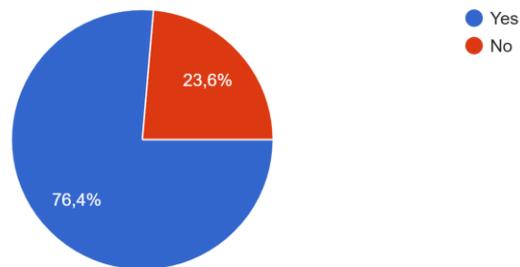


Figure 9 Exposure to book-related content on TikTok

Do you follow any BookTok creators?
55 vastausta

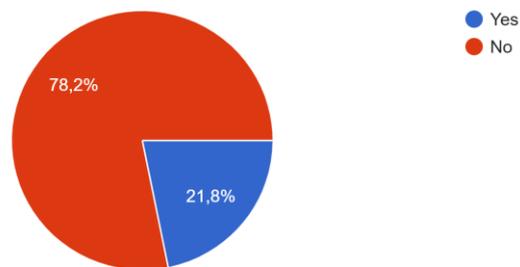


Figure 10 Following BookTok creators

BookTok influence

The impact of BookTok consumer behavior is mixed,

- Several respondents replied that they have been influenced by TikTok trends including BookTok
- Some reports say that they have purchased books because of BookTok, while others have not due to BookTok content.
- Most participants imply that BookTok have not changed their opinion of a book after reading it

Has TikTok ever influenced your decision to purchase a book?
56 vastausta

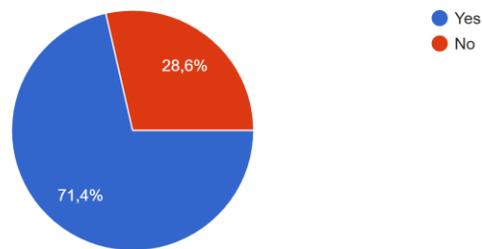


Figure 11 Influence of BookTok on purchasing books

Has TikTok ever influenced your decision not to purchase a book?
56 vastausta

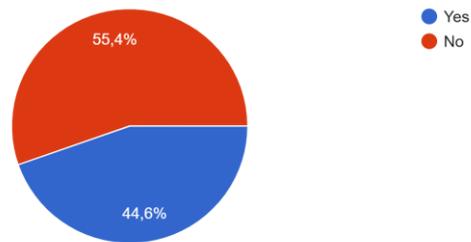


Figure 12 Respondents reported behavior influenced by BookTok

Has TikTok changed your opinion of a book after reading it?
56 vastausta

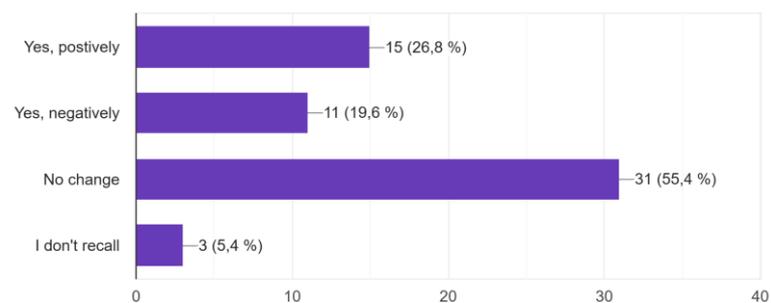


Figure 13 Impact of BookTok on reading opinions

Community and Interaction

The responses about the feeling of community is mixed. While 29,1% people answered they were part of a community, the largest group of 45,5% replies with "sometimes" and 25.5% replied with "no". Despite this the social interaction around BookTok is strong with 72,2% respondents said they discuss BookTok with friends. Additionally, 65,5% people replied that they have recommended a book that they saw on BookTok.

Do you feel part of a community when engaging with BookTok content?
55 vastausta

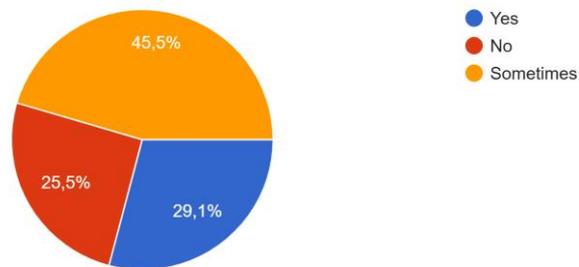


Figure 14 Sense of belonging to the BookTok community

Do you ever discuss BookTok videos or recommendations with your friends or social circles?
54 vastausta

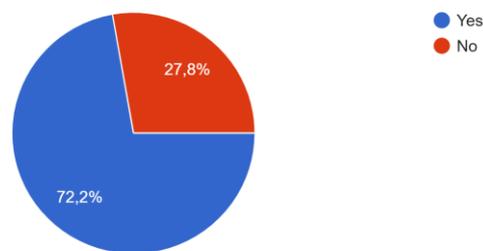


Figure 15 Frequency of discussing BookTok with friends

Have you recommended a book to someone because you saw it on BookTok?
55 vastausta

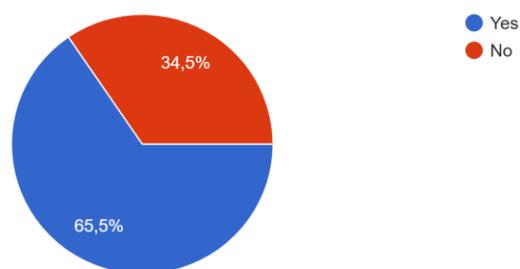


Figure 16 Recommending books seen on BookTok

Trust and perception of BookTok Creators

When asked if the participants agree with the reviews of BookTok creators in a scale of 1-5. 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The most common answer is 3 the middle of the scale with 50,9% of the respondents. While the question of if the BookTok creators are genuine with their recommendations, was a mixed respond. 45,5% replied yes, although 32,7% replied unsure and the rest replied with no.

Do you agree with most reviews or options shared by BookTok creators?

55 vastausta

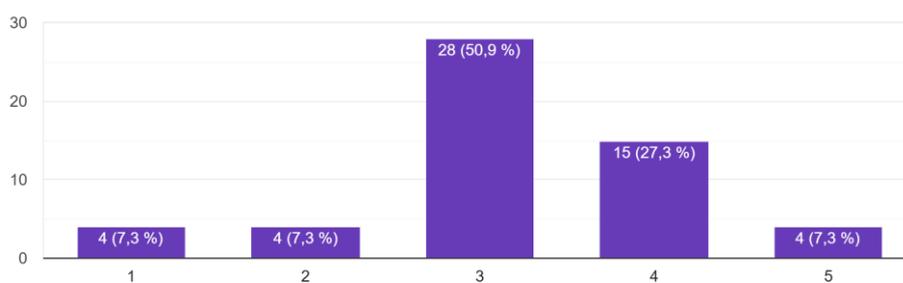


Figure 17 Agreement with BookTok creators' reviews

Do you believe Booktok creators are genuine in their book recommendations?

55 vastausta

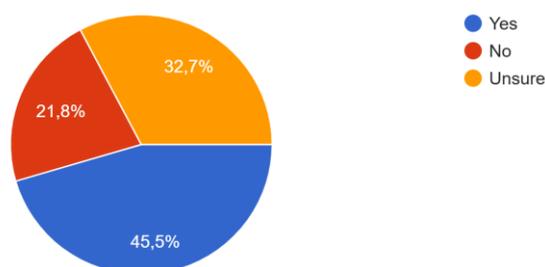


Figure 18 Perceptions of BookTok creators authenticity

Discovering Books though BookTok

When asked if BookTok has been useful to discover books, there was a mainly replies that yes it has been useful. With 58,9% respondents with somewhat useful and 30,4% replied with very useful. While the rest don't find it useful or don't use it for book recommendations.

Has BookTok been useful for discovering new books?
55 vastausta

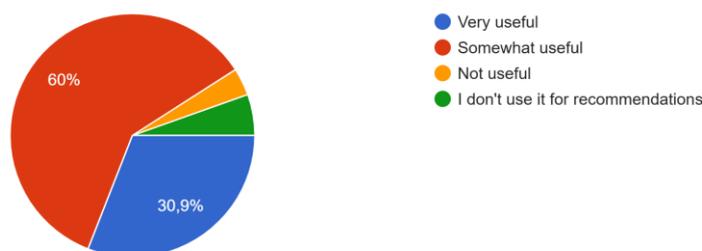


Figure 19 Usefulness of BookTok for discovering books

4.2 Discussion

BookTok and the social customer journey

When looking at the results through the social customer journey model, BookTok does play a significant role in creating interest and helping social media users to find books. Many respondents said they see BookTok content in their "For You" page even when they do not follow BookTok creators. Which means that the TikTok algorithm is introducing them, a major part of the motivation and information stages.

The next stage is when deciding to buy a book, the results are mixed. Some people did purchase a book because of BookTok, while the others were not influenced. While the results were mixed, it is expected that the evaluation and decision stage will depend on whether the source is trusted.

Sharing books is quite common with the respondents. Many replied that they recommend and discuss books with peers, even if they don't feel part of the BookTok community. Which suggests that sharing happens in smaller personal circles rather than big online groups.

Consumer engagement in online brand communities

In this theory there are three key behaviors: sharing, learning and endorsing. Which all three shows up on the results. Participants had shared recommendations and used BookTok to learn about new books.

People seem to be drawn to BookTok mainly for entertainment and book recommendations, instead of feeling like they belong to a community. Which may explain why many interact with BookTok content often, even if they do identity of being part of a community.

Echo Chambers and algorithm influence

The echo effect is seen on BookTok, especially with the romantasy genre trend which keeps showing up, once the content has been interacted with TikTok algorithm will recommend more of the same type of content.

The algorithm theory explains this further, TikTok's algorithm reflects on the choices of the content watcher. Additionally, it decides what will show up next on the feed, which influences reading habits and the way the user sees themselves as a reader. Many respondents came across BookTok content without following BookTok creators, which shows how the algorithm guides on what one will discover.

Conclusion

This study sets out to explore whether BookTok changes the way people discover and choose books. The finding suggests that it does, but how it was expected. BookTok biggest strength is sparking curiosity, with TikTok's algorithm, many discover new titles without looking for them.

For some, BookTok content leads to purchasing a book while others it is entertainment or inspiration. However, books become a talking point, with sharing and recommending books with friends. While not everyone feels a part of a community, many still engage with the content.

In the end BookTok is more than a social media trend, it has become a influence on modern day reading habits. Books are now a popular online conversation, where a single video can make a unknown title into the next best seller.

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APPENDICES

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/ Third gender
- Prefer not to say
- Muu: _____

What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

Do you use TikTok?

- Yes
- No

How often do you use TikTok?

- Rarely
- A few times a week
- Daily
- Multiple times a day

Do you enjoy reading books?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

How often do you read books?

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Daily

Have book-related videos ever appeared on your TikTok feed (BookTok)?

- Yes
- No

Do you follow any BookTok creators?

- Yes
- No

How often do you see book recommendations on TikTok?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always

Have you ever been influenced by a TikTok trends (including BookTok)?

Yes

No

Has TikTok ever influenced your decision to purchase a book?

Yes

No

Has TikTok ever influenced your decision not to purchase a book?

Yes

No

Has TikTok changed your opinion of a book after reading it?

- Yes, positively
- Yes, negatively
- No change
- I don't recall

Do you agree with most reviews or opinions shared by BookTok creators?

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Strongly disagree Strongly agree

Do you believe Booktok creators are genuine in their book recommendations?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Do you ever discuss BookTok videos or recommendations with your friends or social circles?

- Yes
- No

Have you recommended a book to someone because you saw it on BookTok?

- Yes
- No

Has BookTok been useful for discovering new books?

- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful
- I don't use it for recommendations

Do you feel part of a community when engaging with BookTok content?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes