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How Social Media Connects the Reading Community

When I was younger, my dad used to bring me to our local public library. In my young eyes, the library was heaven on Earth. I used to have a field day, piling books into my arms that I wanted my dad to read to me, and as I grew older, I wanted to read myself. Unfortunately, as I grew older, our trips to the library became less and less frequent, but my love for reading still stuck. I especially found myself growing more connected to the reading community during the Covid-19 pandemic, since quarantining gave me much more free time to read the books I had been wanting to. Most readers, myself included, tend to stick to a similar genre and author preferences, but with social media platforms continuing to gain more and more popularity, the reading community is able to spread recommendations and reviews around to each other easily, expanding readers' preferences. Readers use prose literacy on social media platforms such as TikTok and Goodreads because they allow users to connect with each other based on similar interests, lead to the promotions of different books, and in the explanations of typical preference trends.

Social media platforms have been created to connect communities closer together, and the reading community is not one that has been skipped over. One of the biggest book-sharing social media platforms that readers use is Goodreads (Naik and Trott 320). “*Goodreads* is by far the most popular social media site devoted to books, with 65 million users and counting” (Bourrier and Thelwall 5). Goodreads is an online platform where users are able to rate books,

write reviews, start discussions, and recommend other books to other users (Naik, Trott 320). Users are also able to add friends on the app, create a “To Be Read” (TBR) list, join or start book clubs, and track the books they are reading. I don’t remember how I learned about the Goodreads app, but when I first downloaded it, I was only intending on using it to track my reading and set myself a “reading challenge” goal for the year. The more I used it, however, the more features I found useful. On Goodreads, it was so easy to find a book that I wanted to add to my TBR, making which books I wanted to read easily accessible. Goodreads made finding new book recommendations easy as well. On the website, there is a “Browse” section, where users are able to find book recs based on genres. Under the browse section, Goodreads also provides recommendations based on books you have already read and the ratings you provided for them. On top of the general recommendations, the community aspect of Goodreads is another feature of the site that draws readers in. Goodreads allows users to friend each other, create book clubs, post reviews, and message other users. As readers look for new books, online sites like Goodreads are often a good place for them to start, with many people looking for the input of other members of the community (Naik and Trott 319-320). The reviews portion of Goodreads is one of the biggest ways users are able to get book recommendations. After finishing a book, a reader will often write a review, which then often prompts a discussion where participants can discuss whether the book is worth reading or not (Naik and Trott 320). Reviewers are able to include a variety of “appeal terms” or “repel terms” when discussing books, which in turn helps readers decide whether they want to read the book or not (Naik and Trott 320-321).

Another way the reading community connects is through TikTok. On TikTok, users get videos on their “For You Page” based on their interests, which the app is able to pick up on based on the videos the user interacts with. TikTok is typically broken down into different categories

based on what the videos are, and there is a large section of the app dedicated to reading, which has been ultimately named “BookTok”. Although social media being used to promote reading may come as a surprise to many, TikTok seems to be a prominent promoter of reading for teens. “While this absorbing screen-based new social media might be seen as a natural enemy of book reading, youth-produced content on social networks such as TikTok can influence reader choice” (Merga 1). Similar to the reviews aspect of Goodreads, content creators on Booktok are able to make short video reviews of books they have recently read, in turn influencing whether or not readers choose to pick up that book or not. Creators on BookTok will also make videos providing recommendations of “lesser” known books based on if readers enjoyed more popular books. Since the rise of TikTok, books have gained new interest and are climbing up the bestseller list, where they seem to stay put for months (Jensen 28). “Books that gain traction on #Booktok tend to trend for a long time, allowing a broad swath of readers to discover these books” (Jensen 29). TikTok is definitely a platform more popular with teenagers, and librarians across the country have found that teens have been getting more into reading since the rise of BookTok (Jensen 29-30). Creators on TikTok gain followings by creating videos that other people enjoy, and there are many “Booktokers” who have gained large platforms and in turn, have large influences on the books people are reading.

As more and more research is done on reading preferences between men and women, the more we are able to understand what guides the preferences of different readers. On Booktok, most of the users who engage with and create bookish related content are women, the age ranging from as young as 14 all the way to mid-30s (Jensen 29). Even though there has been a noted decline in the number of people who read for fun with the rise of new technology there is still a large group of people who are regular book readers (Thelwall 404). Young girls are using

their platforms to promote some of their favorite genres and books, which then reaches the audiences of other young women with similar interests, leading to the newfound popularity of books that may not have received it before (Jensen 29-30). TikTok isn't the only social media platform that sees a majority of female users: "76% of *Goodreads* users are women, and that the books that they are likely to have read are in the majority by women authors, from Jane Austen to J. K. Rowling, many of whom are writing in the young adult genre" (Bourrier and Thelwall 2). Reading trends have shown that the books typically popular with women have strong female characters (Bourrier and Thelwall 2).

Research into the demographic trends of Goodreads has shown that women, who are more prominent users on the app, read nearly double the amount that male users do, but men are more likely to read authors of either gender (Bourrier and Thelwall 6). Trends between genre preferences between men and women have also been found, which may be linked to differences in book reviewing (Thelwall 403). Throughout history, gender bias has been very prominent in different fields, including literacy, with trends showing works by male authors are more likely to be selected for review than those of their female counterparts (Thelwall 403). Different genres have different purposes, and there are notable trends when it comes to male and female authors in different genres. Studies show that young-adult, romance, and children books written by women made the UK bestsellers list, while books that made the bestsellers list with male authors tended to be thrillers, adventure, and crime books (Thelwall 405). The genre that has the clearest gender bias is romance, with romance novels overwhelmingly being written and consumed by women (Thelwall 405). Gender bias comes into play once more with romance novels, with genres with women as the intended audience being seen as "worse" quality when it comes to literary standards compared to genres that are more male-dominated (Thelwall 405). There are

certain stigmas when it comes to different genres. For example, as romance is typically seen as a more “feminine” and female-centered genre, many also tend to connect science fiction to men (Thelwall 405).

Prose literacy is important when it comes to connecting the reading community. Readers use prose literacy on a multitude of social media platforms, whether it be from writing reviews on GoodReads to commenting on their favorite BookTokers video. One of the reasons Goodreads is so largely used by the reading community is due to the ability for anyone with an account to leave a public review, seemingly without restriction (Thelwall 408). For books listed on Goodreads, if the work has more than 30 reviews, only the top 30 are shown, and research shows that the Goodreads algorithm lists the reviews based on which ones are most likely to interest readers (Thelwall 408). Users on the Goodreads app write reviews and ratings underneath books they have recently finished reading, and in-turn these reviews tend to spark further discussions about the book, whether it be about the review itself, other reader’s opinions on the book, or recommendations similar to the reviewed book (Naik 321). TikTok users also use their platforms to review books, and although they may not necessarily be written responses, their videos also hold influence over other members of the community (Merga 1-2). One of the largest ways videos are able to spread across the BookTok community is through hashtags that are used to tag book-related content. Hashtags used on bookish content tended to contain either the word “Booktok”, “Ya books”, “bookish”, or the names of popular authors and series, such as *The Cruel Prince* series by Holly Black and book series by the YA author Sarah J. Maas (Merga 4). The use of hashtags on TikTok helps content creators to further promote their videos to other users who the algorithm believes will find interest in the content, further allowing TikTok to be a valuable resource when it comes to connecting the reading community (Merga 4).

Literacy is essential to the reading community, not just for the books that are being read, but because of the way users are able to write reviews and voice their thoughts. Finding new books to read is a large part of the reading community, and users being able to use a simple website to connect with other readers who have similar book tastes in them is extremely important to keep them connected with each other. Overall, users on both TikTok and Goodreads being able to voice their opinions in a way that may help them to connect and befriend other readers is one of the reasons these platforms have such an appeal to people.

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