REVIEW ARTICLE   **OPEN ACCESS**

A digital ethnography of #BookTok content on TikTok

Dominic Rascati[1] iD, and Susan Grantham[2]* iD

1 University of North Dakota, United States
2 University of Hartford, School of Communication, United States
* **Correspondence:** 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117 – USA. Tel: 1-860-768-4016, e-mail: grantham@hartford.edu

Abstract

This research employed a mixed-methods digital ethnography to analyze BookTok, the subcommunity about books on TikTok. Grounded in the Theory of Affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973–1974), the study examined the frequencies of varying poster roles, book genres, and content categories in the subcommunity. More specifically, this data was first analyzed with qualitative notes. Following this, quantitative analysis was employed to determine if a connection existed between poster roles, book genres, and post type. This research added to theoretical understandings about social media while expanding TikTok research and knowledge about the wider book industry and marketplace. While making similar types of content overall, the findings demonstrated that the authors' behavior diverged from that of more general users, like readers, as readers are recommending on BookTok more than authors are promoting. This indicates that readers, outside the authors' control, are an important component of book marketing on BookTok. Posters' recommendations included memes, comedic content, accessories, etc.

1. Introduction

TikTok is a social media app that has been popular since 2019, particularly after global Covid-19 lockdowns. Like other social media, the app allows book lovers to form a vibrant community. This community, called BookTok, is ripe for analysis in the same vein as BookTube on YouTube and Bookstagram on Instagram (Martens et al., 2022). The following research presents BookTok as a valuable online community for multiple stakeholders and social media. Similarly, a body of research still in its infancy continues to focus on TikTok in areas such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the political action of young people (Schellewald, 2021). Communication scholars and those from other fields see great potential for studying this platform (Zeng et al., 2021). There is no reason why the various industries and types of people involved with books would not also benefit from scholarly attention to TikTok.

This research uses digital ethnography to examine BookTok content. Such a methodology has been applied to TikTok, whether more generally or suited to a different niche (Schellewald, 2021; Southerton, 2021). Like other social media, TikTok also employs hashtags, which can facilitate research for ethnographic purposes (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). While Martens et al. (2022) have already performed a digital ethnography on #BookTok, they examined different aspects such as a sample of book titles, English versus Danish language use, and certain BookToker profiles they pinpointed in their research. This research, however, is not concerned primarily with certain profiles, titles or language comparisons. Instead, it examines what types of content are made on BookTok, what book genres broadly are present, what roles users fulfill in this online community, and if there are connections between the aforementioned aspects. BookTok will also be a lens through which to scrutinize the broader content categories, or "communicative forms," proposed by Schellewald (2021). How do these forms apply or not to BookTok as a TikTok subcommunity?

In summation, the following research fulfills multiple purposes for both scholarly and industry audiences. On a scholarly level, it adds to a nascent body of research on TikTok. It dives into a specific community on the social media platform that is underutilized in research. Furthermore, it also aligns itself with theories of affordances and uses and gratifications. This focused look at a valuable community advances our understanding of theories surrounding digital media and TikTok in particular. Lastly, it compares the findings of other TikTok research by Schellewald (2021) and provides more material for future TikTok studies.

For industry audiences, there is even more value. By discovering and correlating the prevalence of different book genres, types of content, and roles of various users, anyone with a stake in books and/or publishing can gain a sense of what is prevalent on BookTok, which itself has commercial value as is discussed later. This usefulness may apply to writers, publishing agents, bookstore owners, book influencers, and more. Furthermore, as a snapshot of this community in time, this research preserves a piece of BookTok for anyone interested in book culture and/or social media in the early 2020s. Whether for commercial trends or personal interest analysis, this research also provides useful insight to many outside academic circles.

2. Literature Review

2.1. An Overview of TikTok Scholarship

TikTok is a huge success story in the social media ecosystem. Like other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, its underlying corporate structure contributed to its rise. Spearheaded by the Chinese company ByteDance, TikTok emerged in 2017. By 2018, it had fully merged with Musical.ly, a platform that had garnered many teen users outside of China in the previous four years. This merger handed TikTok a premade base of users, which only exploded when Covid-19 spurred worldwide lockdowns in 2020. The pandemic helped TikTok's user base expand to all age groups as people sought ways to entertain themselves (Zeng et al., 2021). Over 100 million people regularly used TikTok by early 2021 (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022), establishing its value as a platform worthy of study.

Such a large number of users naturally piqued scholarly interest in TikTok in its early years. From 2019 to April 2021, the number of research articles about TikTok jumped from 13 to 122 (Zeng et al., 2021). Many of these articles involve health and Covid-19, as well as politics (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2021). Some studies focus on the creative and content-focused side, including influencers (Zeng et al., 2021) and social media challenges (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022). This research builds on Schellewald (2021), who spent six months analyzing the app and proposed many "communicative forms" (Schellewald, 2021). Interestingly, Schellewald (2021) also notes challenges on TikTok, such as doing popular dances, which fall under interactive content. The other categories include documentary, comedic, explanatory, communal, and meta content (Schellewald, 2021). These categories deserve further scrutiny in online subcultures, such as BookTok.

For the sake of brevity, interactivity typically involves challenges, duets of another's videos, or similarly interactive content. Documentary videos capture the user's mundane life experiences, such as in the workplace or shopping. Comedic content conversely presents a punchline, such as in a meme or a skit. Occasionally, these punchlines repurpose sound bites that are available on TikTok. Explanatory content, or how-to content, displays a process like a dance, baking, or some creative process. Communal content shows off friends and family in nearly any setting. This can also be blended with the aforementioned categories. Lastly, meta content references TikTok itself, such as with skits or other videos that address the algorithm (Schellewald, 2021). The results of this study will be compared to those of this framework for further validity.

TikTok research is limited but has grown rapidly in recent years (Zeng et al., 2021). Scholarly interest in it encompasses healthcare (Peña-Fernández et al., Southerton, 2021; 2022; Zeng et al., 2021), advertising (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022), influencers and online cultures (Zeng et al., 2021), and brand strategies for harnessing the platform's potential (Perreau, 2021). Crucially, Schellewald (2021) examines TikTok broadly and develops a typology of content that inspires this research. In summation, the current state of TikTok research is in its early stage, but certain trends are emerging and warrant deeper exploration.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

The Theory of Affordances underpins the theoretical contributions of this research. Via a literature review, Ronzhyn et al. (2022) developed a working definition of affordances to apply to social media research. Before their synthesis, many researchers defined the same affordances under different terms and did not know how to structure them together. This theory also expanded into social media after it originated to conceptualize natural environments, so Ronzhyn et al. (2022) created their definition with application to social media in mind.

An affordance is some perceived quality of a platform, whether it exists or not (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). They stem from the relationship between the user and the digital environment, meaning that users can use affordances differently and that each social medium, such as TikTok, can provide unique affordances compared to other platforms. For instance, Schellewald (2021) compares Snapchat, which is used more for direct communication, to TikTok's 'For You' page. This technological difference connects users through the algorithm to the overarching TikTok ecosystem, giving the app a unique position to generate new trends. Because of this innate understanding of the differences between social media, users will act differently on each platform.

Previous research on affordances also proves the value of this research. Having covered over 200 articles in their literature review, Ronzhyn et al. (2022) do not list TikTok as a platform that has received significant study. Conversely, they identify it as one of the platforms gaining influence but still lacking research. Facebook is the most significant portion of their sample, followed by Twitter (now X). An ending recommendation is to explore those less-researched platforms. There is also speculation that platforms arise in the first place to fill a gap in affordances left empty by larger social media (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). This theory and its guidance for future social media research underpin the importance of analyzing a community like BookTok.

Users' contexts, such as their culture, affect affordances and how they are used. Primarily, these perceived qualities provide the potential of, and also hinder, action on the platform. In other words, what users perceive about a platform will affect how they choose to act or not act. Knowing this, creators will address that fact and then present how they are likely similar to the viewer. This type of content exemplifies visibility as a function of how platforms like TikTok are perceived.

Uses and Gratifications Theory also provides valuable theoretical insight. Developed by Katz et al. (1973–1974), this theory concerns the variety of roles the media fulfill for consumers, both active and passive. They also consider how much, if at all, the media generates consumer needs and how much the media satisfies consumers. People consume media for various reasons, and different people may take different gratifications away from the duplicate content. This theory attempts to balance the views of the media between a drug to pacify the general public into accepting reality as is and a force beholden to the audience to provide nothing more than escape. The media can fulfill many needs, which deserve categorization in various forms that media can take (Katz et al., 1973–1974). As summarized by Katz et al. (1973–1974), some of the original gratification typologies included entertainment, information, and connection to others and oneself. Regardless of differences in wording, these kinds of gratifications repeatedly show up.

Meservy et al. (2019) applied the theory to social media use to differentiate motives behind producing content from those behind consuming content. As Uses and Gratifications Theory explores using specific media over others, Meservy et al. (2019) wondered if people created or consumed content for different reasons. Some of the already established reasons for social media use include sharing opinions, entertaining oneself, educating oneself, and gaining social resources (Meservy et al., 2019).

Their findings provided a valuable understanding of people's behavior on social media. Younger users, for instance, more frequently want to pass time and gain social resources compared to their older counterparts (Meservy et al., 2019). Contrary to the researchers' hypothesis that entertainment, among other uses and gratifications, would align more with consumption behaviors, the entertainment motive did not differ significantly between producing and consuming content. In other words, it was a motivation for both actions (Meservy et al., 2019). Importantly for this research, sharing opinions and information most often served as motivation for producing content. Meservy et al. (2019) emphasize that creating content, unlike passive consumption, often requires users to be noticeable online in some way. A well-known creator will become recognizable in online communities. Therefore, Meservy et al. (2019) conclude that spreading information satisfies users' desires to be both visible and a contributing community member.

The two theories employed in this research complement each other by both describing the usage of media, and they both acknowledge the complexity surrounding the root causes of different uses. For example, Katz et al. (1973–1974) acknowledge that both passive and active viewers exist. They wonder how much viewers are satisfied with the media and how much it generates viewers' needs in the first place. They push back on the assumption that every piece of media can fulfill any need, instead identifying the need to "explore the social and individual conditions under which audiences find need" (Katz et al., 1973–1974, p. 521). Ultimately, they claim viewers challenge the media industry to fulfill their various needs better (Katz et al., 1973–1974). But they never solidify if the actual creation of media needs rests more in the hands of the media or the audience.

Similarly, in explaining the contextuality of affordances, Ronzhyn et al. (2022) acknowledge that the individual user with agency, the time and place they live, and the platforms themselves all contribute to how platforms are used. Sometimes, users and the platform have different visions of the medium, which can cause tension between the two groups. Affordances ultimately limit or encourage specific uses of platforms, whether a perception of them is legitimately real or imagined by users. Ronzhyn et al. (2022) have a much richer media landscape to examine than Katz et al. (1973–1974) did. For instance, TikTok and its users can disagree about the functions and perceptions of the platform in real time while on TikTok itself. Media allows much more two-way communication than in the past. Nevertheless, both theories admit or imply that usage rests on a relationship between the media and the audience. There is no clear answer yet regarding which is more powerful in generating different uses. There may never be a one-size-fits-all answer.

While social media research cannot assume a user's motivation from their content alone, patterns of the different roles of posters can be created just as patterns in the type of content can. Cross-referencing these patterns will determine if a specific type of poster typically creates a specific type of content. What role are they filling, and what content does that lead them to make? In BookTok, roles and content will be filtered through the lens of books. Many people, such as readers, authors, publishers, and more, have a stake in books. Therefore, it is worth analyzing what this community is, who is a part of it, and why they matter.

2.3. What is BookTok?

BookTok is a subcommunity on TikTok of users and influencers who make content about books and reading. The likeliest motivation behind this community is simply a passion for books, as opportunities to make money with TikTok are currently small. TikTok does not share the same economic model as YouTube for example. YouTube shares 45% of ad revenue with creators (Vallese, 2023). As of December 16, 2023, TikTok ended its Creator Fund, instead having paid creators enter the Creativity Fund. The catch is that this fund only monetizes videos over a minute long (Sternlicht, 2023). The prevailing consensus from large creators is apparent in all of these instances. The most significant sources of income are traditional, long YouTube videos and outside monetization, such as brand partnerships. Short online content is better suited to growing one's audience (Vallese, 2023). Therefore, influence and community seem to guide these creators (Martens et al., 2022). It is also noteworthy that the platform's functionality provides a different culture. Videos need not be long form, like some on YouTube, or as aesthetically curated as on Instagram (Martens et al., 2022).

BookTok also relies on the specific functionality of TikTok by including audio clips as meme types, for example. There are audios through which users might introduce themselves, such as an audio about one's unread book pile that is used in over 7,200 TikTok videos (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). Other examples of what BookTok content entails are book reviews, recommendations, and overall trends geared towards bookish users (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). This sense of community and sharing books ultimately helps both writers and readers. Simply discussing books in videos can lead to real consequences and tangible benefits.

2.4. Who is on BookTok?

Users are truly the heart and soul of BookTok, as is the case with many digital subcultures. One prime example of who is active on BookTok is teenagers. Many young people already use TikTok, so BookTok allows popular titles to connect with readers where they are (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; Martens et al., 2022). Interestingly, young readers experience more choices on BookTok than in a traditional English class. It is no wonder that the Young Adult, or YA, category is so popular on the app. In the same vein of young people controlling their reading habits, it also creates opportunities for them to see themselves in books. BookTok can promote titles that feature LGBTQ+ and/or non-white stories and authors. This starkly contrasts some classrooms where certain texts are not allowed or considered academically viable (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). In their thorough analysis of young people on BookTok, Jerasa and Boffone (2021) also conclude by encouraging teachers to embrace BookTok in whatever ways it might enhance the classroom reading experience. Martens et al. (2022) also acknowledge similar educational potential from this community. Laing (2017) provides valuable insight into the social media use of authors, the individuals who create the books. Many authors surveyed utilized Twitter and Facebook daily, listing platforms such as Goodreads and YouTube. Primarily, authors want to sell their books, connect with fans, and share their opinions. They also wish to discuss their writing and engage with fellow authors (Laing, 2017). Crucially, a sense of community among authors unintentionally developed due to efforts to reach readers (Laing, 2017). This research from 2017, however, was conducted before the already established rise of TikTok. Similar behavior from authors may be expected on BookTok.

2.5. The Commercial Value of BookTok

One of the greatest implications of this research is to demonstrate, examine, and better understand this medium to harness the commercial value of BookTok. BookTok and TikTok generally hold great commercial opportunities for the book industry, given this community's already established variety of people and content. The most pressing examples of this value come from the popular press. The *New York Times*, in an article by Harris (2022), includes Madeline Miller, author of *The Song of Achilles*, as a BookTok success story. Initially published in 2012, it sold 20,000 copies (Harris, 2022). A decade later, thanks to BookTok's marketing power, her novel reached two million sales. This extreme rise in popularity allows Miller to remain an author into the future (Harris, 2022).

Also mentioned is a deeply symbiotic relationship between BookTok and Barnes & Noble. The book retailer often showcases tables of books dedicated to popular BookTok titles. Via links and codes, BookTok also links to Barnes & Noble and vice versa (Harris, 2022). The Barnes & Noble website even has a BookTok page with titles grouped by genre and specific authors (Barnes & Noble, n.d.). Zarroli (2021) also reports for *NPR* on additional BookTok superstars. One example is Colleen Hoover, whose book, *It Ends With Us*, became a *New York Times* bestseller four years after publication (Zarroli, 2021). This was due to sudden, rapid virality on BookTok. Author Chloe Gong also debuted her bestseller, *These Violent Delights*. Despite her large audience on TikTok, however, Gong attributes success more to reader word of mouth than anything she posts (Zarroli, 2021). Needless to say, all of these occurrences in the popular press and industry chatter show anecdotal evidence of BookTok's power. It can make an author practically an overnight star regardless of how long a book's been out. Publishers currently have an early understanding of BookTok, particularly with how it can revitalize older titles.

2.6. Power of BookTok

Other scholarly evidence, such as the work of Lo (2020), also proves similar findings on the importance of platforms. This applies to multiple social media and multiple stages of publishing. For example, the Twitter hashtags #ownvoices and #DVpit make it easier for authors to showcase their diverse and/or marginalized identities, which lend real authenticity to their diverse stories. These hashtags help in the pitching process when authors want to find an agent for their books, as well as post-publication when a book deal is actually announced. The same article concedes the influence of BookTube and Bookstagram (Lo, 2020). It stands to reason that BookTok would be no different as a way for books to attain visibility in the social media landscape.

There are already tips for how brands can best engage with TikTok. These include maintaining an authentic brand presence and being adaptable when creating content. TikTok content is as much trial and error as it is deliberate. One must experiment with content while also being aware of what types of content are currently fashionable. TikTok allows brands to be flexible because it places the 'For You' page as more important than an account's followers. Brands can reach followers and unknown users. This is a key factor making TikTok unique (Perreau, 2021). Perreau (2021) lists paddlers as one type of user. Paddlers are new TikTok users of all

generations who prefer to scroll endlessly and not go any deeper into the app beyond what their algorithm feeds them. These users should not be discounted because they provide such great algorithm honing for the app, doubling their time on TikTok compared to other social media and acting as a broad cohort for brands to assess the success of their content.

In terms of all social media, Nguyen et al. (2019) recommend strategies such as ensuring there are genuine reviews and content from actual users. People trust content from real readers when they buy. A social media presence should include events, promotions, and contests (Nguyen et al., 2019). These may include book signings or giveaways if you like a post and follow the author. All of this can be realistically worked into TikTok content. It has been shown, after all, that traditional and digital marketing methods work best when working with each other. This is true regardless of the size of the publisher (Beditz, 2018).

And of course, new stories should receive promotion (Nguyen et al., 2019). As BookTok has made clear it can promote older stories, that does not mean new stories should be avoided. This should be good news to authors and scholars. In this environment, research into BookTok proves valuable for authors old and new, as well as readers who will use BookTok to find information on the books and authors they like.

In summary, TikTok and the subcommunity of BookTok still have value to add to the existing literature. TikTok research has accelerated in recent years (Zeng et al., 2021), and it has more room to run. The content typology devised by Schellewald (2021) is a particular inspiration to this research. Furthermore, the Theory of Affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973–1974) provide ample theoretical foundations and work well in tandem to better understand how people use social media like TikTok. BookTok in particular is a fruitful environment for authors to succeed and readers to share their passions.

3. Method

3.1. Digital Ethnography

This study utilized a mixed methodology. Using a digital ethnography method, data was collected and content analyzed. Digital ethnography is the process of applying ethnographic principles to an interconnected, computerized environment (Grandinetti & Bruinsma, 2022). To do so is not new to TikTok, or even to algorithms in general, and builds on a scholarly tradition that has evolved over more than 20 years. This methodology requires authentic immersion, which oscillates between hard data such as hashtags and more subjective data such as how one's experience changes algorithmically over time (Grandinetti & Bruinsma, 2022).

Ethically, there has been debate over how private the information or content one posts online is, and different fields have different views (see Murthy, 2008). This research takes the position that social media content freely posted and freely available is fair game for researchers to analyze. Additionally, participants may be willing to share more or less depending on the media researchers use to communicate with them (Murthy, 2008). This is valuable for those who want to reach out digitally to human subjects, but this research is not concerned with that. Instead, the content made is what is most important, in addition to what that content communicates.

The method of data collection will be further explained later, but the basic approach mitigates ethical concerns. By accessing the top videos under #BookTok while not logged into TikTok, the researcher does not impose themselves onto any one creator. Rather, TikTok as a website is displaying the same BookTok for everyone to see, at least as far as the hashtag is concerned. The general public, including those with no TikTok account, could theoretically see the same pool of content. Furthermore, while digital ethnography stems from the qualitative approach (Murthy, 2008), presenting the data quantitatively and in aggregate further minimizes ethical concerns that any one creator or other individual may have. If they do not want their content to be public, the user has the freedom to alter the settings on and/or delete their content at any time, regardless of the researcher's actions.

Digital ethnography is an offshoot of ethnography, which Seaver (2017) explains in the application of ethnography to the study of algorithms. At its heart, ethnography analyzes different cultures. In a perfect world, ethnography entails immersive fieldwork that examines the norms and day-to-day operations of a particular culture (Seaver, 2017). In other worlds, one must immerse themselves in the culture in question and observe it. Seaver (2017) recommends a handful of tactics for the particular study of algorithms, but they appear to be useful tools for the overall field. Broadly speaking, they include scavenging or collecting data from a variety of types of sources, understanding what the researcher and even cultural insiders can or cannot access in the culture, and interviewing people to gain deeper insight. As Grandinetti and Bruinsma (2022) put it, ethnography requires immersion, and that may not always lend itself so easily to just objective or just subjective data.

Schellewald also recommends acknowledging the "complex and dynamic nature" of TikTok and other platforms (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1441). To avoid the personalized bias of one's algorithmic experience, focusing more on specific hashtags and less on automated content exposure, such as TikTok's 'For You' page is sometimes worthwhile. This is especially useful for exploring subcultures on an app like TikTok (Schellewald, 2021). Martens et al. (2022) began their BookTok research via #booktok, but then transitioned to specific popular users and titles, focusing on the English versus Danish languages.

This does not mean that digital research must be subjective. While Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) used hashtags and likes to collect a sample of TikTok content on immigration, they also used Python to perform a digital version of the snowball method. This automation gathered data, including related hashtags, audio, and more, from their predetermined sample of videos (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). In this instance, subjective data and automated quantitative data combined to enrich the sample.

As authors like Schellewald (2021), Southerton (2021), and Grandinetti and Bruinsma (2022) showcase, exploring digital spaces is an experience that is never quite the same twice. The approaches to this methodology both share and differ on many aspects. BookTok as a community on TikTok is no less challenging to encompass, but such an endeavor is also incredibly worthwhile. Based on the design of previous studies examining TikTok in general, the following research questions guided the exploration of the BookTok community with the forethought that potential poster roles, book genres, and content categories would be evident in the data. The content categories were then analyzed to determine which roles, genres and types of content existed and whether there was a relationship between these variables. Pertinent research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What poster roles are most prevalent in BookTok content?

RQ2: Which genres of books are most prevalent in BookTok content?

RQ3: What overarching content categories arise from BookTok content?

RQ4: Which of the prevalent genres correspond to which of the poster roles in BookTok content?

RQ5: Which content categories correspond to which of the prevalent poster roles in BookTok content?

RQ6: Which content categories correspond to which of the prevalent genres in BookTok content?

Answers to these research questions will serve various purposes. The fundamental concerns are who posts, what kind of content they post, what kind of books they include in their content, and how these subcommunity aspects correlate.

Theoretically, BookTok is an example of consumers shaping the book industry with their content, similar to the assumption in Uses and Gratifications Theory that consumers push the media to address their needs better (Katz et al., 1973–1974). Furthermore, the Theory of Affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) posits that the platform is a fundamental factor in the end product of what content is created. While this research does not compare BookTok to other online subcommunities about books (Lo, 2020), it provides a baseline of what BookTok is for future research to continue exploring it in the broader digital environment.

This research has also established BookTok's potential for impacting the book industry. By learning more about the people of this subcommunity, the genres towards which they gravitate, and the kinds of content they produce, various stakeholders in the book industry will have more information to guide business decisions and satisfy their customers.

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection and analysis was as follows. Two hundred videos were analyzed under the hashtag #BookTok. This was the same sample size as the TikTok study performed by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022), emulating their intentional sample of specific hashtags. Southerton (2021) used certain hashtags pertaining to her topic as well.

Kaye et al. (2021) focused on the hashtag #fyp, corresponding to the platform's 'For You' page. They additionally accessed TikTok from an internet browser rather than through the app. This does not require a login and reduces algorithm interference (Kaye et al., 2021). Schellewald (2021) also agrees that circumventing algorithms, such as researching via hashtags, is beneficial and even guides research themes. With these methods established, an analysis of the first 200 videos under #BookTok, which were not logged into TikTok, presented the best data sample for these research questions. This analysis concerned who makes the content, what type of content is made, and how it relates to book genres. When analyzing the first 200 videos under #BookTok, a spreadsheet was used to document relevant information about each video. Each video entry omitted the user's username; instead, the entries numbered 1–200. For each one, the role(s) of the user and genre(s) present were documented by the researcher. The date of posting for all videos was marked as well. Each video

also had a section on the spreadsheet for research notes. Schellewald (2021) emphasized the importance of a spreadsheet and notes for each piece of content examined.

The first step was to content analyze the notes to identify repeating themes for category creation. This method reflects Schellewald's (2021) recommendation for determining whether there is enough information to create categories. In continuing this line of research, #BookTok illuminated new categories of content unique to that subculture. Categories developed from this sample were also compared and contrasted with the communicative forms created by Schellewald (2021).

The first video under # BookTok was always the starting point for every data collection session. Every video was reviewed, skipping those that had already been collected, until 200 videos were analyzed. Videos not in English were skipped and omitted from the sample, except for certain videos where the language did not impede the meaning of the content.

Data were collected over several weeks in May 2023, which was advantageous as it aligned with summer reading. Summer reading is a critical phenomenon for the industry, likely due to the excess free time many people enjoy (DeMarco, 2022). The book industry has capitalized on summer consumption since the 19th century. This trend persisted even through World War I, followed by an explosion of paperbacks in the 1930s and the introduction of the Kindle in the late 2000s. In 2020, the hit of the summer by Emily Henry was titled *Beach Read* (DeMarco, 2022). Both distant and recent historical trends indicate that summer reading is here to stay. Thus, May was an ideal month to examine this online book community on TikTok. Over several weeks, data were collected explicitly during sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays at 10:00 AM. This timing corresponded with some of the best posting times on TikTok, especially on Fridays, to capitalize on potential engagement changes (P.T., 2023). Each session included 25 posts to create a manageable workload and to analyze all 200 posts from May.

4. Results

The first element of the findings concerns the frequency of the different variables. These include the year the content was posted, the poster's role, the prominent book genre identified, and the content category. By measuring the frequency of these items, it becomes apparent what is most common in BookTok content. Calculating frequencies also allows for the crosstabulation of different variables, which can illustrate other important insights. To ensure the data's recency, the year of the posting was logged. Of the 200 videos in the sample, 47 (23.4%) were posted in 2023, 84 (41.8%) were posted in 2022, 65 (32.3%) were posted in 2021, and 4 (2.0%) were posted in 2020. Based on this, the bulk of the sample came from 2021 through May 2023, with most videos being from 2022. This information is important as it documents current practices.

RQ1 evaluated the occurrence and prevalence of poster roles. Poster roles concern the role, or the primary identifying purpose, of the user who posts the content. In other words, the role of a poster is what the user portrays themselves as. These may include authors, readers, libraries, and more in the world of books. In analyzing the 200 videos, five poster roles were established. Of these, 83 (41.3%) of the posters were creators. This poster role is a generic catch-all for someone who does not present themselves in a certain capacity, profession, skill, or persona. Another 71 (35.3%) of poster roles were readers, 21 (10.4%) were authors, and 17 (8.5%) were crafters or artists. This is every type of poster role with more than 10 occurrences. The other poster roles include bookstores, libraries, and other book platforms, one for teachers, and one for videos in which multiple people and/or roles were present. These roles encompassed 5 (2.5%), 1 (0.5%), and 2 (1.0%) videos, respectively. These results represent a broad representation of roles.

RQ 2 evaluated which genre of books was posted. The categories encompass recognizable genres such as romance, fantasy, and poetry, while also including less intuitive ones. One is a category for books in general, which does not deal with specific genres of books, but rather videos concerning books as a more abstract concept. There are also videos containing books with multiple genres and content, where one cannot correctly tell the genre from the video. This constitutes another category of genre. Lastly, there is a category for N/A, which is not applicable. Videos marked as this do not relate to books in any way. One example is a video in which a violinist takes a pop song and reimagines it to fit in a movie soundtrack. Of the 200 videos, 42 (20.9%) were about books in general, 39 (19.4%) were N/A, 36 (17.9%) were romance, and 24 (11.9%) were fantasy. These are the genres that comprised more than 10% of the sample.

The rest of the genres have 10 videos or less in the sample. Erotica/smut and videos with multiple and/or indistinguishable genres have 10 occurrences at 5.0%. Poetry has 7 (3.5%), and picture books and autobiography/memoir have 6 (3.0%). Self-help books comprise 4 videos (2.0%) and historical objects. Historical objects are books which, regardless of subject matter, are treated as artifacts or rare pieces from history. Science

fiction appears 2 times (1.0%). Manga, thrillers, environmental fiction, non-fiction, and horror all have just 1 video each (0.5%). Environmental fiction is one case in which the most fitting genre was pulled from the Wikipedia page of the book itself ("The Overstory," 2023). Another case used the Amazon page of a book better to determine its genre (Amazon, 2022). Again, the results indicate a wide representation of interests by individuals posting in BookTok.

The frequency of different content categories was measured to answer RQ3. These include some categories that align well with those proposed by Schellewald (2021) and new categories that emerged seemingly uniquely on BookTok. Of the 200 videos in the sample, 39 (19.4%) were comedic, 38 (18.9%) were under recommendation, 32 (15.9%) were for promotion, and 31 (15.4%) comprised accessories, such as bookmarks, bookshelves, and other physical items meant to enhance one's experience with books. Another 21 videos (10.4%) were documentary, 13 (6.5%) were edits/aesthetics, and 10 (5.0%) were communal. The rest of the content categories had fewer than 10 occurrences each. These were educational with 8 (4.0%), challenge videos with 5 (2.5%), and meta videos with 3 (1.5%). As was demonstrated with poster roles and book genres, within the content roles, or types of content posted, there was not one overwhelming type of content. While many of the categories in Schellewald's (2021) typology appeared, this examination identified additional categories that may be specific to BookTok and include accessories and educational content. While educational may be related to explanatory, they are not how-to explanations. The role of the accessories category presents the ability of the poster to present the artistry and interpretation of the subject matter.

Based on the three categories posited in the research questions, crosstabulations were run to examine if potentially insightful relationships existed between variables. Three crosstabulations were performed. These are poster role and genre, poster role and content category, and genre and content category.

The crosstabulation of poster role and genre examines how many users of each type posted about various genres (see Table 1). This addresses RQ4. When a specific type of user frequently posts about a particular genre, an association emerges between these two variables. For example, readers as a group often post about romance and books in general, with 20 instances each. Creators, categorized as a general catch-all poster role, exhibited the highest crosstabulation with N/A at 38 instances in the sample. In other words, these are posters with no defined role who post videos on BookTok unrelated to books. Readers also contributed 9 posts in fantasy and 7 posts in erotica/smut. Creators had 7 posts in romance and 8 in fantasy, as well as 5 posts for picture books. In addition, the role of crafter/artist accounted for 7 posts, while creators had 12 related to books in general. The results of this crosstabulation were significant, x^2 (96, N = 195) = 212, p = .001.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages for book genres present for each poster role on BookTok

Genre	Poster Role n (%)					
	Reader	Author	Crafter/ Artist	Creator	Others *	Total
Romance	20 (55)	5 (14)	4 (11)	7 (19)	0	36
Fantasy	9 (37)	1	4 (16)	8 (32)	2	24
Multiple/unable to tell	6 (60)	1(10)	0	0	3 (30)	10
Nothing to do with books	0	0	1 (3)	38 (97)	0	39
Erotica/smut	7 (70)	2 (20)	0	1 (10)	0	10
Books in general	20 (48)	2	7 (16)	12 (29)	1	42
All others **	6 (18)	10 (29)	1	15 (44)	2	34
Total	68	21	17	81	8	195

* Poster role others: bookstore/library/platform, multiple people/roles, teacher

** Genre all others: Manga, thriller, historical object, not related to books, environmental fiction, picture book, nonfiction, autobiography/memoir, self-help science fiction

Table 2 presents the results for RQ5 about the relationship between poster roles and content categories. This refers to the types of content posted by each type of user. Readers, for instance, largely made posts that were recommendations (30 posts), comedic (19 posts), and in the accessories category (10 posts). Authors' posts were mainly promotional, comprising 17 of the 21 total posts attributed to them. As the name implies, the role of crafter/artist correlated strongly with the accessories category, which comprised 16 of the 17 posts under that poster role. Creators as a poster role had one of the larger spreads of content categories. For example, the poster role of creators had 18 comedic posts, 12 documentary posts, 11 posts under edits/aesthetics, and 10 promotional posts. The full results for the crosstabulation of poster role and content

category are presented in Table 2. The results of this crosstabulation were significant, x^2 (54, $N = 200$) = 253, p = .001.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages for content categories present for each poster role on BookTok

Content Category	Poster Role n (%)					
	Reader	Author	Crafter/Artist	Creator	Others*	Total
Recommendation	30 (79)	0	0	7 (18)	1	38
Comedic	19 (48)	2	0	18 (46)	0	39
Promotion	1	17 (53)	1	10 (31)	3 (9)	32
Accessories	10 (32)	0	16 (52)	5 (16)	0	31
Documentary	7 (33)	1	0	12 (57)	1	21
Communal	1 (10)	1 (10)	0	8 (80)	0	10
Edits/aesthetics	2 (15)	0	0	11 (85)	0	13
Others**	1	0	0	12 (75)	3 (19)	16
Total	71	21	17	83	8	200

* Poster role others: bookstore/library/platform, multiple people/roles, teacher ** Content category others: challenge, educational

The final crosstabulation is for genre correlated to content category. In other words, what kinds of content on TikTok does each book genre inhabit? These results in full in Table 3, which answers RQ6 about the relationship between book genres and content categories. The largest book genre present was books in general, with 42 posts. Of these, the major content categories present included 14 posts for accessories, 12 comedic posts, and 10 documentary posts. The category of N/A had 39 total posts. That genre, or lack thereof, was mainly filled with comedic content (10 posts), communal content (7 posts), and edits/aesthetics (6 posts). The romance genre follows with 36 total posts, which are largely recommendations (13 posts), promotion (7 posts), and accessories (6 posts). The major content categories surrounding fantasy are accessories, with eight posts and four posts each that are recommendations and comedic. Five of the category's 10 posts were recommendations for posts with multiple genres or unidentifiable books. This was the same for erotica/smut with five being recommendations, three being comedic, and two being promotional. The results of this crosstabulation were significant, x^2 (144, $N = 195$) = 283, p = .001.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages for content categories present for each book genre on BookTok

Genre	Rec	Com	Promo	Acces	Doc	CML	EA	Oth*	Total
Romance	13 (36)	5 (14)	7 (19)	6 (16)	3 (8)	0	2	0	36
Fantasy	4 (16)	4 (16)	2 (8)	8 (32)	2 (8)	1	3 (6)	0	24
Multiple/un-able to tell	5 (50)	1 (10)	2 (20)	0	1 (10)	0	0	1 (10)	10
Nothing to do with books	0	10 (26)	4 (19)	1	5 (20)	7 (18)	6 (15)	6 (15)	39
Erotica/smut	5 (50)	3 (30)	2 (20)	0	0	0	0	0	10
Books in general	0	12 (29)	1	14 (33)	10 (24)	1	1	3 (7)	42
Others**	11 (32)	2 (5)	12 (35)	1	0	1	1	6 (1)	34
Total	38	37	30	30	21	10	13	16	195

* Content Categories: Rec – Recommendation; Com - Comedic; Promo - Promotion; Acces - Accessories; Doc - Documentary; CML - Communal; EA = Edits/Aesthetics; Oth = Others that includes challenge or educational.

**Genre others - Manga; thriller, historical object, not applicable/not book related, environmental fiction, picture book, nonfiction, autobiography/memoir, self-help, science fiction, and horror.

5. Discussion

This research employed a mixed-methods digital ethnography to analyze BookTok, the subcommunity about books on TikTok. Grounded in the Theory of Affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973–1974), the study examined the frequencies of varying poster roles, book genres, and content categories in the subcommunity, as well as associations between all of those variables. In doing so, this research added to theoretical understandings about social media while also expanding TikTok research and knowledge about the wider book industry and marketplace. Methodologically, this research

developed categories to describe BookTok content based on qualitative notes taken during data collection and quantified those categories in order to generate useful insights about the subcommunity.

Findings from this exploratory evaluation of BookTok content proved very interesting. While making similar types of content overall, authors' behavior diverged from that of more general users like readers. For example, there is a difference between content that recommends a book and content made by an author that promotes their book. Both of these exist, and both put certain books in a good light, albeit under different motives. Recommendations and promotional content were judged as separate categories for this reason.

The poster role and content category crosstabulation digs deeper into this. For instance, readers made recommendation content in 30 instances whereas promotional content made by authors only occurred 17 times in the sample. This means that readers are recommending on BookTok more than authors are promoting. How these findings should be interpreted depends on someone's BookTok goals, which ties into both theoretical approaches applied to this study. Recommendations by readers, making up 30 videos out of 200, comprise 15% of the sample alone. This speaks to the power of readers' digital word of mouth. Authors, on the other hand, may find this discovery disheartening. While authors' promotional content is prevalent, readers' recommendations are nearly double. This insinuates that much of the heavy lifting of book marketing on BookTok is done by readers who exist outside of the authors' control. However, this is likely a benefit to book consumers who can learn about potential reads directly from other readers. In other words, readers enjoy digital word of mouth amongst each other on this platform. Nevertheless, an author who wants to make an account to promote their books will find the impact of their content to be less fruitful than readers' organic opinions, which they cannot control.

Memes and comedic content provide an interesting counterexample. Both authors and readers make comedic content, commiserating and poking fun at different parts of the two lifestyles. For example, there is one video in which a reader uses an audio clip as a kind of meme punchline, lip syncing to it to make a joke about being unable to decide what to read. There is another video in which the user is driving a car and, via text on screen, implies that they cannot think of a good character name. This identifies them as likely a writer. The punchline of the joke is when the user is revealed to be driving through a cemetery. Both of these examples are comedic content, made by people with different roles in the BookTok community. However, whereas recommendations and promotional content should be separated categories because of different end goals, both memes by writers and readers can remain under the comedic category together. They both serve the same purpose. This finding aligns well with the comedic communicative form proposed by Schellewald (2021). Just as comedy is popular on TikTok in general (Schellewald, 2021), BookTok adopts this broad category for its own purposes and the interests of the subcommunity's members. That interest is, of course, books. There is also comedic content where the role of the user is just as a creator, not necessarily a reader or an author. One comedic video showed the user acting as different characters from *Twilight*. This could appeal to people whether they were familiar with the books, movies, or both. Regardless, all of these videos exist to be comedic. It should be noted, however, that readers and creators in general create the most comedic content with 19 and 18 posts, respectively.

Another prominent content category is accessories. These are videos not related to specific books or genres, but they showcase objects that all readers could use. Examples include special bookshelves, a thumb saver to help readers better hold pages, and one user making bookmarks. These are useful items that enhance the reading experience, whether they are bought or handmade. Accessories is a category also related to art, not entirely for the sake of usefulness. These videos had users assigned roles like artist or crafter. A prominent example of this is called a book nook. Book nooks are little dioramas about the size of a book. They can be made out of containers opened on one side and filled with painted and glued household objects, as well as small store bought objects. They create homemade scenes to fit in with books on a person's bookshelf, and can be made for the user themselves or as a gift for someone else. Accessories as a category can encompass both useful objects and arts and crafts. Not only does this category fill a unique niche in the subculture of BookTok, but it can also tie into the communal communicative form from Schellewald (2021). This applies when objects are given to or made for a loved one, as some in the sample are. In this case, it is both an offshoot of broader content on TikTok and a unique form of expression for BookTok. In this content category, most of the instances came from crafters/artists (16 posts) and readers (10 posts). Crafters and artists may show accessories they create whereas readers may show accessories they use.

Another new type of content is aesthetics. Aesthetics may be code for the general feel or tone of something. This correlates heavily to how genres are conceptualized. There are certain images and colors that come to mind with gothic horror as opposed to Victorian romance or science fiction, for example. These aesthetic

videos invite the user in, much like the challenges category from Schellewald (2021) as a kind of game amongst the community. They often involve different images and color palettes in quick succession. Examples include which feminine archetype the viewer would be, which tragic plot each zodiac sign would have, or even other general aesthetic type settings attributed to certain zodiac signs. Another example that blends with art is a user who did elaborate makeup and cosplay to show which zodiac signs would be which districts from *The Hunger Games*. It is clear that zodiac signs are often connected to this based on the sample. Most edits/aesthetics were made by creators, and they most often appeared in the N/A genre. In other words, most of these kinds of posts did not correlate to any specific genre of books or even books in general.

There were also findings that defied expectations and even planned methods of data collection. Under #BookTok, many videos were about books, reading, or writing, but did not relate concretely to any single book or genre. Nevertheless, other videos in the sample were unrelated to books in any way, even tangentially. Many videos also challenged the presumed clear distinction between videos in English versus videos in other languages. In other words, it was assumed by the researcher that the language of a post always impeded the ability of an English speaker to understand it, but this was not the case. Language was not a barrier to understanding, especially for posts classified as N/A. These videos are not about books at all and may form an invasive category, and many of them blur the lines of language. For example, there were multiple videos in which a group of young men would go down a water ride, playing a song not in English and enjoying a summery, party atmosphere. In these videos, they were only lip-syncing, at most, to a song that was not in English. They were not saying anything. They remained in the sample because the overall essence of their video was not tied to knowledge of a different language.

Nevertheless, these videos had nothing to do with books at all. There were similar videos following the mishaps of an amusement park mascot, dressed as a giant frog, with a children's song in another language over the video. Again, language proved irrelevant to understanding the comedic scenarios of the video, but it still had nothing to do with books. Videos such as these are intriguing in the sample because there are enough to warrant their inclusion, but nothing about them relates to books. It could be speculated that the users posting them might use the BookTok hashtag simply to gain more views. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these videos, their presence in BookTok should alert users and researchers. These videos use hashtags that do not logically connect to them. After books in general, with 42 posts, N/A was the second largest genre in the sample with 39 posts. If nearly 20% of posts in the sample have no association with books at all, what does this say about BookTok, and why do people feel the need to attach unrelated content to BookTok? These are valid questions under this popular hashtag and potentially others. Nevertheless, there was plenty of relevant content as well. Romance and fantasy were prevalent book genres in the community, comprising 36 and 24 posts, respectively. Readers led the charge in both of these book genres. Creators also had many posts relating to them, while crafters/artists made an even number of posts for each. Most posts about romance books were recommendations, while most about fantasy were for accessories.

Holistically, the groups of content identified by Schellewald (2021) were documentary, comedic, explanatory, communal, meta, and interactive. Documentary and comedic content was prevalent on BookTok and aligned with those findings. Communal and educational content were also reasonably common and could be easily translated into explanatory content. Meta content was very uncommon. As for interactive content, there were not many challenges. However, edits/aesthetics emerged as a new phenomenon that did involve elements of interactivity. Recommendations, promotions, and accessories all appeared as new, prominent categories seemingly unique to BookTok. As a whole, the findings of Schellewald (2021) were supported only in part and expanded. What this means pragmatically for BookTok is that it is both a byproduct of TikTok more broadly and a unique subcommunity with its content styles. This supports the theoretical concept of affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) because BookTok is using what is available on TikTok as a whole and repurposing how they communicate (see Schellewald, 2021) to help their own subcommunity flourish and develop a unique identity. In essence, BookTok is not simply a carbon copy of TikTok in general but rather an expansion upon it.

In addition to expanding on similar research, this study added theoretical insight with regards to affordances and Uses and Gratifications Theory. As aforementioned, affordances are the believed attributes of social media platforms, whether real or not, that encourage and restrict certain user behaviors (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). One conclusive affordance identified by Ronzhyn et al. (2022) is visibility. Research on BookTok supported the existence and use of this affordance. For example, almost 20% of the sample fell under the N/A genre, meaning that such content was not related to books at all. One example included videos of young men surfing a water ride and lip-syncing to music. Another example was funny content about a pair of amusement park frog mascots. These videos had nothing to do with books, but were present under the #BookTok hashtag. This seems

to be a tool to achieve visibility. By using and essentially hijacking the popular hashtag, unrelated videos have a greater chance of gaining more views and engagement. The fact that they appeared in this sample speaks to the approach's success. Therefore, the visibility affordance could achieve disingenuous ends when users hijack popular hashtags with unrelated content. This is this study's most important addition to affordances research due to the high frequency of content deemed not applicable to the hashtag.

Content that strongly applies to BookTok fits the visibility and persistence affordances. Visibility, as mentioned before, means that someone will see the content, and persistence means that content can be saved and accessed again over time (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). BookTok content, as well as all TikTok content, applies to these affordances. Unless the user deletes content or specifies certain privacy settings, individual posts can be seen and found again. Many different posters would want to utilize these affordances. Readers post a lot of book recommendations (30 posts), authors post many promotions (17 posts), and crafters and artists create many posts under accessories (16 posts). These are all instances in which someone is showing off their work or expressing some kind of opinion. Whether having just read a book, written a book, or created something, posters will want users to interact with this content even after the hour or day it was posted. Certain content, especially if the poster is trying to push some product or opinion, is evergreen. Even when users make comedic content like memes, such as readers and creators often did in the sample, these jokes will not typically cease being funny the next day. Users will want other users to see their content and find it again if they so wish because the online community increasingly thrives with more engagement.

BookTok research also provided valuable insight for Uses and Gratifications Theory. Many of the different content categories fulfill uses and gratifications laid out by Meservy et al. (2019). Comedic content such as memes provides entertainment and relaxation. Most of the comedic content came from readers (19 posts) and creators (18 posts). Book recommendations lead to social interaction, sharing and seeking information, opinion expression, and overall utility of the platform. This was a huge portion of the sample of 200 posts because 30 posts were book recommendations by readers. Putting this into the broader findings, of the 71 readers in the sample, 49 of them either posted comedic content or book recommendations. Therefore, the uses and gratifications that can be associated with these two content categories are especially prominent.

Another example is authors who made up 10.4% of posters. Authors promoting their work fulfills the gratification of social capital, and there were 17 such posts in the sample. There are many other examples such as people who make art and crafts like book nooks. Of the 17 crafters/artists, 16 of their posts fell under accessories, which encompasses such art. Someone who wants to make their own would find a video about one useful. The creator making one for someone special also leads to social interaction. If someone makes an aesthetic video such as different aesthetics for different zodiac signs, that is entertainment as well as the creator expressing themselves. Most of these posts (11 out of the total 13) were made by creators, the most common poster role in the sample. In summation, many different types of content on BookTok meet all of these uses and gratifications as listed by Meservy et al. (2019). Due to the high frequency of certain poster roles and the clear relationship of certain roles with certain content categories, many uses and gratifications of certain kinds of content can be inferred with strong support.

Even failed hypotheses are supported by BookTok. Meservy et al. (2019) hypothesized that entertainment would be a gratification of consumption, but found that it did not differ from gratifications of producing content. The crafter role and accessories content category, which help answer RQ1 and RQ3 respectively, support this. While the exact motivations cannot be gleaned without surveying users and creators, basic assumptions can be made from the content itself. If a creator makes a piece of art, a book nook, or something like a custom bookmark, it is likely just as entertaining for the person to regularly make these crafts and share them online as it is for the person who watches their artistic content. This would be even more likely if a craft appeared in the content sample more than once as was the case with book nooks. In other words, observing BookTok supported not just established theoretical concepts, but also aligned with the finding of Meservy et al. (2019) that entertainment does not differ whether one is consuming or producing content. BookTok provides further support that the original hypothesis by Meservy et al. (2019) was incorrect.

This examination of BookTok also adds to the possibility of combining the Theory of Affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2022) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973–1974). It is worth restating that the two perspectives agree in two major ways. People use media in a variety of ways, and that usage rests on a relationship between the user and the medium. BookTok clearly encompasses a wide variety of uses. This research identified seven poster roles and ten content categories, and the relationship between them was significant according to the Chi Square results. The intersection of the two theories is clearest in the most prominent content categories for the reader, author, and crafter/artist poster roles. Readers make primarily

recommendation content, authors make primarily promotional content, and crafters/artists make primarily accessories content. These are direct examples of different poster roles fulfilling uses that clearly fit their roles' functions. Readers should want to share their opinions on what they read, authors should want to promote their work, and crafters/artists should want to make things. The fact that none of these results are surprising proves that people are using BookTok to fulfill expected uses and gratifications.

This also ties into affordances, primarily the visibility affordance (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). As aforementioned in this study, readers, authors, and crafters/artists will want users to interact with their book recommendations, written work, or arts and crafts, respectively. These three poster roles in particular post on BookTok knowing that they will be visible. This also ties into the previously mentioned persistence affordance because posts will be able to be saved and seen multiple times (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). This is what a user such as an author would ideally want because someone can engage with their book even if they posted about it days or weeks ago. But crucially, they rely on users and the medium working interconnectedly.

Users could come across posts in a variety of ways, such as searching TikTok manually or surrendering to the algorithmic 'For You' page. These methods of discovery could work in tandem. For example, readers and authors posted 19 and two comedic posts, respectively. Perhaps a user comes across a meme by one of these creators and decides to visit their profile to watch more of their content. Maybe they like a number of posts, leading to greater visibility for a reader's book recommendation or an author's promotional content. As both theoretical perspectives indicate, success relies on the varying gratifications of the user and the relationship between the user and the medium. If both of these align, a user will find and interact with content they enjoy, creating a positive experience for both the person who watched the content and the poster of the content who received engagement. In this way, the two perspectives can work together not just in theory, but in concrete positive social media engagement. BookTok content supporting this with concrete, significant results is good for both social media theorists and users.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the usefulness of this research, there are still limitations to take into account. Even though the sample covers multiple years, all of the data collection was done in May. The sample also only includes the first posts under the BookTok hashtag. This means only a snapshot of the BookTok community was utilized. To combat this limitation, future research should employ a longitudinal study of the community's content. Other research may also opt for a larger sample size of posts.

Another limitation of this study is the use of the BookTok hashtag itself. While the hashtag provides a great filter for a massive amount of content on TikTok, as well as limiting algorithmic bias in data collection, this tactic also excludes any posts about books on TikTok that do not use the BookTok hashtag. The hashtag also included a substantial number of posts unrelated to books or reading. Future research may use different methods to gather book content outside of certain hashtags, such as the incorporation of certain users by Martens et al. (2022).

Furthermore, these data were collected from the United States, and the bulk of the sample is in English, albeit with a few more ambiguous exceptions. Future research on BookTok should occur outside of the United States and be completed in other languages. Not only would this provide a greater understanding of the global use of BookTok, but it would also add insight into the global book community as a whole. For example, certain parts of the world may value or prioritize certain kinds of content or certain book genres more than others. A more global body of research can determine the extent of hegemony in digital book spaces.

In terms of overall value, this research has shed a light on an important community on TikTok, in addition to online book spaces. Further research should be done to better understand BookTok in other ways. One possibility is to examine BookTok through interviews with many users as Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando (2022) did. This could be expanded to other languages and regions of the world. Researchers may also analyze the subcommunity's prevalence of different races, genders, or economic classes. One could even analyze the average age and popularity of certain prominent books. Do older or newer books have an advantage or disadvantage towards gaining popularity? These are just some ways future research can add to the collective understanding of BookTok.

Other TikTok communities in different niches will also benefit from research directed at them. For example, do music creators on TikTok promote or recommend songs like BookTok does with books? The same question could be posed for television and film creators or other arts. There is virtually no limit to the amount of subcommunities and interests that can populate this social medium. A broader understanding of TikTok must be specified to the platform's varying niches.

This can be accomplished through digital ethnography or other research methods such as interviews. In some ways, are the arts presented differently on TikTok than posts about science, education, or other fields and industries? Do certain fields share content categories with some subcommunities, but not others? With enough research on TikTok subcommunities, could a family tree of content be generated, tying different niche content closely or distantly to each other? Specified analyses of certain profiles are a great way to examine this. BookTok creators, for example, may post content frequently about other art forms. Research must see in which communities' individuals post by examining single accounts holistically.

6. References

Amazon. (2022, February 28). Product details for A Million Kisses in Your Lifetime (Lancaster Prep) by Monica Murphy. https://www.amazon.com/Million-Kisses-Your-Lifetime/dp/B09TMT5W26

Barnes & Noble. (n.d.). BookTok. Barnes & Noble. https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/booktok/_/N-2vdn

Beditz, M. (2018). The dynamic landscape of marketing children's books: Publishers find consistent success through a combination of online and traditional marketing to adults and children. Publishing Research Quarterly, 34(2), 157–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-018-9584-1

DeMarco, N. (2022, August 30). The state of the beach read. Book Riot. https://bookriot.com/history-of-the-beach-read/#:~:text=About%20half%20of%20us%20read,time%20and%20brain%20space%20available.

Grandinetti, J., & Bruinsma, J. (2022). The affective algorithms of conspiracy TikTok. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, pp. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2022.2140806

Harris, E.A. (2022, July 6). How TikTok became a best-seller machine. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/01/books/tiktok-books-booktok.html

Jaramillo-Dent, D., Alencar, A., & Asadchy, Y. (2022). #Migrantes on TikTok: Exploring platformed belongings. International Journal of Communication, 16, 5578–5602. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17435

Jerasa, S., & Boffone, T. (2021). BookTok 101: TikTok, digital literacies, and out-of-school reading practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 65*(3), 219–226. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1199

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973–1974). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509–523. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

Kaye, D. B. V., Rodriguez, A., Langton, K., & Wikström, P. (2021). You made this? I made this: Practices of authorship and (mis)attribution on TikTok. International Journal of Communication, 15, 3195–3215. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/14544

Laing, A. (2017). Authors using social media: Layers of identity and the online author community. *Publishing Research Quarterly, 33*(3), 254–267. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-017-9524-5

Lo, E. Y. (2020). How social media, movies, and TV shows interacts with young adult literature from 2015 to 2019. *Publishing Research Quarterly, 36*(4), 611–618. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-020-09756-8

Martens, M., Balling, G., & Higgason, K.A. (2022). #BookTokMadeMeReadIt: Young adult reading communities across an international, sociotechnical landscape. *Information and Learning Sciences, 123*(11–12), 705–722. https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-07-2022-0086

Meservy, T.O., Fadel, K. J., Nelson, B., & Matthews, M. (2019). Production vs. consumption on social media: A Uses and Gratifications perspective [Conference paper]. Twenty-fifth Americas Conference on Information Systems, Cancun.

Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociology, 42*(5), 837–855. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508094565

Nguyen, H.V., Huy, L.V., Nguyen, T.N., Dinh, V.S., & Tran, V.T. (2019). The role of social media in the purchase of books: Empirical evidence from Vietnam's publishing industry. *Publishing Research Quarterly, 35*(4), 704–709. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-019-09682-4

Peña-Fernández, S., Larrondo-Ureta, A., & Morales-i-Gras, J. (2022). Current affairs on TikTok. Virality and entertainment for digital natives. *El Profesional de La Información, 31*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.ene.06

Perreau, A. (2021). Brands on TikTok: Strategic first steps and successful execution. *Journal of Brand Strategy, 10*(3), 221–233. https://www.henrystewartpublications.com/sites/default/files/JBS10.3BrandsonTikTokStrategicfirststepsandsuccessfulexecution.pdf

P.T, A. (2023, October 5). What is the best time to post on TikTok in 2023? SocialPilot. https://www.socialpilot.co/blog/best-time-to-post-on-tiktok

Ronzhyn, A., Cardenal, A.S., & Batlle Rubio, A. (2022). Defining affordances in social media research: A literature review. *Social Media + Society, 25*(11), 3165–3188. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221135187

Schellewald, A. (2021). Communicative forms on TikTok: Perspectives From digital ethnography. International Journal of Communication, 15, 1437–1457. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/16414

Seaver, N. (2017). Algorithms as culture: Some tactics for the ethnography of algorithmic systems. *Big Data & Society, 4*(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717738104

Southerton, C. (2021). Lip-syncing and saving lives: Healthcare workers on TikTok. International Journal of Communication, 15, 3248–3268. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/16900/3498

Sternlicht, A. (2023, November 29). The death of TikTok's $2 billion Creator Fund is stoking fears among influencers about the value of short-form videos on the platform. Fortune. https://fortune.com/2023/11/29/tiktok-killed-creator-fund-influencers-worry-short-form-video/

The Overstory. (2023, July 25). In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Overstory

Vallese, Z. (2023, February 27). In the three-way battle between YouTube, Reels and TikTok, creators aren't counting on a big payday. CNBC https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/27/in-youtube-tiktok-reels-battle-creators-dont-expect-a-big-payday.html

Weinberg, D.B., & Kapelner, A. (2022). Do book consumers discriminate against Black, female, or young authors? PLoS ONE, 17(6). e0267537. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267537

Zarroli, J. (2021, December 31). TikTok is driving book sales. Here are some titles #BookTok recommends [Radio broadcast transcript]. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2021/12/26/1068063564/booktok-is-a-new-force-driving-book-sales-and-publishing-deals

Zeng, J., Abidin, C., & Schäfer, M.S. (2021). Research perspectives on TikTok and its legacy apps: Introduction. International Journal of Communication, 15, 3161–3172. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/14539