

**How Has Booktok Affected the Publishing Industry and Helped Self-Published Writers? A
Study on Parasocial Relationships and Social Media Affordances**

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A Thesis

in

John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Administration (Marketing)
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2023

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
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Relationships and Social Media Affordances.

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Master of Science in Marketing

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect
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ABSTRACT

How Booktok affected the Publishing Industry: The Effects of parasocial relationships and

Tiktok affordances

Sara Shafiei

Along with the many changes the pandemic brought, Tiktok grew in popularity, reaching new levels of users and downloads. As a result of the additional free time individuals had, many decided to pick up old hobbies or get into new ones, such as reading. The creation of Booktok, a subculture within the Tiktok application has brought on multiple changes and new opportunities within the publishing industry. This qualitative study conducted through interviews and netnography helps explore the effects of Booktok on the publishing industry. My findings show that Booktok contains mainly three actors: the supporter, the creator and the writer. Together these actors have created a community which has allowed for entertainment, parasocial relationships and professional relationships. While literature shows that parasocial relationships are evolving and changing from what they used to be, my findings add another perspective by demonstrating how Tiktok has taken these relationships to another level. The features offered on the digital platform allows for back-and-forth conversation between viewers and performers, which enhances the strength of these relationships. Additionally, this study looks at how social media affordances affect parasocial relationships. Writers, supporters and creators can use these new affordances, such as artistic extension, association, reenactment, engagement and support, promotional and educational tactics to promote and engage within the book community.

This allows for additional insight to the literature in terms of the use of social media. For practitioners the study emphasizes the changes within the publishing industry that publishers should be aware of and the new marketing tools that can be used to succeed as a writer.

Keywords: Tiktok, parasocial relationships, social affordances, booktok, publishing industry, self-publishing, booktoker

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To begin, I would like to thank my parents and my friends who remain my number one supporters. Whether it is with school or anything else I wish to accomplish. Coming from another country, my parents sacrificed a lot to allow me to have the opportunities that I have. I would like to thank my mother for giving me the values that I have and making sure I always strived for the best. Also, a shout out to my dad for his unconditional love. Additionally, I am thankful for my friends for benign my support system when things get overwhelming or if I feel the need to vent, as well as always reminding me what I'm capable of.

Furthermore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude towards my supervisor, Dr. Zeynep Arsel. After taking her marketing class in the fall of 2021, I immediately appreciated her way of teaching and her way of providing feedback while helping her students. Her enthusiasm for my project made it easier to focus and stay motivated. Without giving too much away, her guidance and feedback always steered me in the right direction. She trusted me enough to think for myself and make mistakes and learn from them. No matter what, Dr Arsel always had the same level of energy in our meetings which never failed to brighten my mood or make me feel better about where I was at. Even with her hectic schedule, I always knew I could count on her if I needed advice or a quick response. I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to work with her.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Caroline Roux and Sharlene He for being a part of my thesis committee. Their valuable questions and feedback allowed me to further analyze my thesis and allowed me to make improvements.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of years, Tiktok downloads surged in correlation with the pandemic (Koetsier, 2020). In an era of digital evolution, Tiktok, more specifically Booktok, has allowed for a change in the publishing industry by providing opportunities that didn't exist in the past. With additional free time and the larger community of Tiktok users, individuals came together to discuss their new favorite pastime: reading. Creators, supporters and authors have created a community by sharing thoughts and feelings in regard to books. This subculture is known as Booktok.

It is a digital space on Tiktok where supporters, creators and writers have created an open space to discuss their love for books. These influencers, also known as "Booktokers" engage, discuss and share opinions on books they've read while promoting and creating awareness of upcoming or existing books. As a result, book sales have rocketed throughout the past few years since the pandemic, bringing fame to not only unknown and self-published writers, but also traditionally published and well recognized writers.

While extensive literature exists regarding affordances, which can be described as how individuals use the tools available to them in their environment, there seems to be a gap when it comes to the way affordances on Tiktok are being used to help promote the publishing industry. These affordances are important to take into consideration as they have helped revive the industry and have provided opportunities to self-published writers that didn't exist in the past. These tools can also be considered for individuals who are aiming to succeed in other industries and are searching for marketing tools to promote their business.

Little attention has been given to this new phenomenon and how Tiktok features are helping this specific industry and how these affordances may allow other industries to grow as well. Additionally, parasocial relationships have also been often studied amongst past literature. PSR refers to a one-sided relationship between media performers and fans, where these viewers feel a strong emotional attachment towards these figures. Within this past literature, they are also generally explained as one sided relationships where the performer doesn't interact with the viewer (Breves, et al., 2021). However, Tiktok has added a new dimension by allowing and giving the performer the tools to reciprocate communication with their viewers. In turn, this has solidified these parasocial relationships.

Using the context of the pandemic and the rise of Booktok, the study aims to help fill this existing research gap by answering these questions:

1. How do parasocial relationships and Tiktok's affordances allow existing writers and newer writers to grow in popularity?
2. How is this changing the self-publishing industry?

This thesis contributes to the use of affordances and parasocial relationships to create long lasting relationships, allowing writers and creators to succeed on Booktok. The findings show that the use of social media affordances on Tiktok can be separated into three categories: Booktok as a source of entertainment, the evolution of parasocial relationships, and the creation of professional relationships. These categories respectively have supporters, creators and writers as actors that use these affordances while creating parasocial relationships that have affected the publishing industry. Parasocial relationships are also discussed by explaining how they are solidified and how they have helped self-published writers and existing writers to grow within the market.

The study enriches the literature of parasocial relationships created online and determines new types of affordances by studying the tools and features used on Tiktok.

For practitioners, the findings also demonstrate that publishing houses need to take these changes into consideration. Additionally, it gives writers a new marketing perspective. By this, I mean the way that Tiktok individuals have made the most out of the various tools that Tiktok has given users, such as videos, comments, captions, lives, stories, shares, saves. The Booktok community has found ways of creating high engagement, support and interest which have led to numerous positive implications within the publishing industry. Along with the positive impacts, this thesis will also discuss some minor implications that I discovered through my findings.

The next sections of this thesis will discuss the research context regarding the ripple effect of the pandemic, the rise of Booktok and the publishing industry. This will be followed by the literature review of affordances and parasocial relationships, the data collection process as well as the findings and discussion. Finally, it will end with a conclusion and the implications of this study.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The ripple effect of the pandemic

Approximately three years ago, the world came face to face with a worldwide pandemic that flipped our daily lives around. COVID-19 brought on many different challenges that affected individuals in multiple ways.

Firstly, the pandemic played a drastic role in mental health. Examples of mental health issues that individuals suffered from or continue to suffer from are depression, loneliness, boredom, insomnia and anxiety (Mayo Clinic staff, 2021). A study on U.S. adults showed that the anxiety they felt during the pandemic negatively impacted their mental health, going from 32% of individuals in March 2020 to approximately 53% of individuals in July 2020. A considerable increase only within a few months (Brodie et al., 2021). In 2021, 22% of American adults received mental health treatments which was a 3% increase from the percentage in 2019 which is said to be 19% (McPhillips, 2022).

Secondly, during the heat of the pandemic, a majority of individuals found themselves with more free time than they ever had (Fine et al., 2021). The health measures put into place restricted activities that individuals previously committed time to. Additionally, many gained extra time given the fact that they were working or studying from home and cutting down their commute hours (Fine et al., 2021).

In search of ways to deal both with the additional free time and coping mechanisms against previously mentioned mental health issues, individuals aimed to immerse themselves in new activities (Fine et al., 2021). A survey showed that 59% of Americans picked up a hobby during the pandemic (Beck, 2022). The search for new hobbies isn't unique to the pandemic. This trend mirrors that of global crises' in the past, such as the Great Depression when individuals turned largely to playing the game of Bridge (Hamedy, 2021).

A well-recognized clinical psychologist Dr. Jeff Gardere stated: "In this time of uncertainty and instability, and a world and existence we no longer recognize, people need an anchor to familiarity and what once brought them comfort, stability, safety, and happiness (Hamedy, 2021)."

Additionally, according to the Mayo Clinic, hobbies are a part of the list of self-care strategies to cope during the pandemic (Hamedy, 2021). To continue, surveys showed that reading in the United Kingdom doubled during the early stages of the pandemic (Flood, 2020). When the initial health measures were implemented by the prime minister of the UK, 41% of individuals responded that they were reading more than before (Flood, 2020). Their reasoning for reading was separated into three categories: 52% stated that they were reading more because they had spare time. Another 51% claimed to want to stay entertained while 35% claimed to need a form of escapism (Flood, 2020). Additionally, this rise in readers can also be demonstrated through the increase in book sales in bookstores. For example, Indigo Books & Music Inc. credits Booktok for having a 20% surge in sales during their first quarter in 2022 compared to the year before (Bhugra, 2022). Their revenue in the first quarter went from 172.1\$ to 204.6\$ million (Bhugra, 2022).

It has been proven that reading can give individuals a feeling of pleasure and relaxation (McMaster University, 2020). Escapism is another important element to keep in consideration.

Escapism can allow an individual to forget negative emotions that could lead to anxiety, loneliness, despair and in more serious situations self-harm. (Kalia, 2021). According to Carla Marie Manly, a clinical psychologist, escapism is the “desire or behavior to ignore, evade, or avoid reality” (Kalia, 2021). As a result of these changes, reading became a common hobby for many (The Economic Daily, 2022).

Furthermore, a study has shown that consumer spending increased on recreational reading between 2019 and 2021 (The Economic Daily, 2022). In 2020, the amount spent on books increased by 22.9% and by another 1.8% in 2021 (The Economic Daily, 2022). This jump went from 12.2 billion dollars in 2019 to 15.2 billion dollars in 2021 (The Economic Daily, 2022). In fact, according to the New York Times, book sales in 2020 for Barnes & Noble increased by 14% (McMillen, 2023). Rania Hussein, the senior vice-president of Print Indigo stated: "Prior to the pandemic, we started to see some interest in Booktok ... and through the pandemic, we saw an exponential growth (Bhugra, 2022)."

Therefore, it can be said that the pandemic had a serious impact on the book industry and created a domino effect which brought on the rise of Booktok discussed in the next section.

The publishing industry and Booktok

When one thinks of publishing a book, one might typically think of traditional publishing. For the longest time, the typical steps have been to send off your manuscripts to agents and publishing houses in hopes of being represented. While other forms of publishing also existed, such as self-publishing, it was still difficult to gain visibility and was deemed much more of a taboo. self-publishing has also usually been deemed as less lucrative and less prestigious (Steimle, 2021).

However, with the pros of traditional publishing also came cons. On the bright side, a writer's expenses are taken care of and the writer will receive advance pay along with royalties (Hebert, 2022). On the other side, the marketing budget allotted to a writer's book can vary, meaning the author may or may not get proper support (Hebert, 2022). Additionally, traditional publishing offers little creativity, which means that often, writers must make changes they don't entirely agree with (Hebert, 2022). In turn, this can create frustration for the writer.

Wanting to follow the traditional route also means needing to find an agent. Many believed it to be an impossible feat or grew discouraged after multiple rejections (Hebert, 2022). Therefore, the low chances of being published might have stopped some aspiring writers from ever picking up their pen. However, thanks to the efforts of social media and the rise of Booktok, noticeable changes can be discussed in the publishing industry (Coleman, 2022).

Largely due to the pandemic, in the first quarter of 2020, Tiktok had over 315 million downloads worldwide (Head, 2021). As of 2023, Tiktok has over 1.53 billion users with 1 billion of those being active (Ruby, 2023).

As mentioned previously, Booktok is a subculture on Tiktok where book lovers come together to share their reading experiences. Today it has over 138.8 billion hashtags. While there is no official statement, it is said that Booktok originated with one woman, Cait Jacobs, also known as @caitsbooks on Tiktok (Osman, 2022). On her Tiktok bio, it states how she “accidentally founded Booktok”. After her first book related video went viral in 2020, it inspired others to hop on the trend (Loughran, 2022).

FIGURE 1

CAIT'S TIKTOK BIO



Based on this phenomenon, many big publishing houses have started to take Booktok into consideration when planning their marketing. Simon and Schuster began to send boxes filled with books and gifts to influencers as a form of promotion (Coleman, 2022). Moreover, Penguin Random House collaborated with Tiktok by creating a new tagging feature (Castaneda, 2022). This feature allows users to tag a book that is published by Penguin Random House through a link, which allows people to be directed toward a page with details about the book and a collection of other videos that discuss the same title (Castaneda, 2022).

Alyssa Castaneda, the head of social at Penguin Random House U.S. stated that: "#Booktok validates that word of mouth is still the most powerful force for our industry. People want to know how a book will make them feel, and Tiktok values authenticity more than any other platform (Coleman, 2022)."

On a more international scale, Tiktok has always partnered with Harper Collins, retailers WHSmith and Bookshop.org, which are now Tiktok Shop UK merchants, to create a new product category on the UK Tiktok Shop for books (Tiktok 2022). This allows readers to purchase books without ever leaving the application. To help promote this new feature, they partnered with various Booktok influencers, such as @laurens.little.library (Tiktok, 2022).

Patrick Nommensen, the Tiktok shop senior director of eCommerce mentioned: "It has been incredible to witness the Booktok community sharing its passion for reading, and reshaping the publishing world in the process (Tiktok, 2022).

To continue, indie publishing houses can also take advantage of this phenomenon. Tiktok has given a platform and a way for self-published writers to reach a larger audience than in the

past. Furthermore, rather than having writers reach out to agents and publishing firms, the tables have started to turn as well thanks to the ability to go viral on Booktok.

To help explain the extent of influence Booktok can have, I will discuss Alex Aster, a writer that reaped all the benefits. Back in 2020, Alex had been dropped by her agent after the failure of her first book (Flood, 2022). Focusing on writing her new book, *Lightlark*, she was initially rejected by multiple publishers (Flood, 2022).

On March 13, 2021, during the height of Booktok, Alex posted a short video of fourteen seconds asking readers if they would read the book she was writing, by providing a quick and simple summary (Flood, 2022). Within a day, the video received millions of views (Flood, 2022). About a week after posting the video, Alex was offered a six-figure deal with Amulet Books and Universal bought the film rights, hoping to turn it into a movie (Flood, 2022).

Booktok has also influenced indie publishers. They have been signing all major self-published players that seem to be trending on Tiktok. On their website, you can find information on the type of authors they are looking for which says:

Working with Bloom Books enables authors to benefit from all that a top publisher has to offer, including powerful retail relationships and deep distribution channels. This new, unconventional approach allows established authors to take greater control in the creation, development, and marketing of their books.

Moreover, publishing houses aren't the only victims of these changes. Bookstores have also found the need to adapt by using new types of marketing tactics that are in line with the Booktok trends. Bookstore chains, such as Barnes & Noble's websites now include a dedicated page for Booktok where they feature the most popular books that are discussed within the online community (McMillen, 2023) (See Appendix C).

In brief, the growth of the reader community on Tiktok hasn't gone unnoticed amongst writers, bookstores and the publishing industry. This context helps us understand the importance of this study as Booktok has taken over more than just the reading community and expanded into something much bigger, changing and affecting the publishing industry. The following sections will provide an in-depth reasoning regarding Booktok's success and how it is encouraging self-publishing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships theory

Parasocial relationships (PSR) have long been studied and discussed since the 1950s (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). Parasocial relationships were traditionally one-sided and have been explained as a “one-sided intimate connection with a media performer based on repeated encounters” (Breves, et al., 2021).

According to Horton and Wohl, the original creators of this term, it’s television viewers that build an emotional attachment to television personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Within these one-sided relationships, there are two types of actors, often referred to as the viewer and the performer. On one side of the relationship, an individual will provide emotional energy, interest and time. This is known as the viewer (Beto & Burnett, 2000). However, the other individual is generally unaware of these feelings and often unaware of the existence of said person. This individual is the performer (Beto & Burnett, 2000). In the traditional sense, there doesn’t seem to be any two-way interactions between them (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). The performer might even be unaware of the viewer’s existence. In fact, these relationships can be so strong that viewers imagine having conversations or meetings with media figures (Hoffner, 1996). Additionally, previous studies have shown that women tend to have a stronger PSR connection with their favorite television characters than men do (Beto & Burnett, 2000).

Another defining factor for parasocial relationships in the past was their broad reach and restricted access. This means that a performer or media figure might have reached a large population, however this individual within the PSR wouldn’t have had contact with the viewers (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). Generally, the only type of contact viewers could have with the performer is through fan mail and meet and greets (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021).

Likeability, perceived similarity and the desire to be like a character can alter the way an individual will react to these personas and alter the intensity of the parasocial relationship (Beto & Burnett, 2000). Additional studies have also shown that individuals can change their behavior, such as personality characteristics, demeanor or fashion sense to match their favorite characters (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

While parasocial relationships have been studied for decades, the traditional research leaves a gap and fails to consider how parasocial relationships are shifting along with ever-developing technology (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). Nowadays, with the broad reach the internet and social media has, the nature of parasocial relationships has shifted. Parasocial relationships have been studied through the lens of sports, fictional characters, movie characters, newscasters and much more (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). For the sake of this research, I focus on parasocial relationships between social media users and influencers. The next section discusses parasocial relationships and how the birth of influencers has affected and changed it.

Parasocial relationships and social media

The internet has allowed for a variety of possibilities that didn’t exist in the past. We are now able to connect to people we never would have met if it weren’t for social media platforms. Hence, the internet has allowed for several new forms of bonds to exist.

As brands began to promote themselves on multiple platforms, customers slowly began to take on new roles. Going from observers and purchasers to individuals who also play a part in a brand's marketing role (El-Gohary, et al., 2022). These individuals, also known as influencers, provide a high level of influence for not only a large number of followers, but also they take on the role of opinion leaders (Ouvrein et al., 2021). As opinion leaders, they manage to affect the way a consumer can make decisions or evaluate a product. Part of this reasoning is because influencers are seen as being more authentic than traditional celebrities, increasing the trust that their followers have for the products they share (De Backer et al., 2021). Influencers are also considered to be more relatable and attainable (El-Gohary, et al., 2022). They allow companies to achieve the brand perception they desire through the interactions influencers and their followers have (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

These digital celebrities usually grow in popularity through blogs or social networking systems (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). According to studies, digital celebrities are considered to have a social influence based on their number of followers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). A study by Bond and Hoffer states that parasocial relationships can also exist with influencers (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Back in the 2000's parasocial relationships were beginning to be discussed in regard to these "microcelebrities" and social media influencers. According to the term that was coined by Senft, microcelebrity refers to someone who has gathered a large number of followers within a digital platform (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021).

While traditional definitions of parasocial relationships don't speak of reciprocity in communication, nowadays, with online communities, it's important to keep it in mind. Social media allows for influencers to interact and to engage with their followers (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Despite their smaller number of followers compared to mainstream celebrities, studies have suggested that their power of influence is stronger given the fact that they have the possibility of interacting with their viewers (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). A Twitter showed that many individuals trusted an influencer as much as they trusted their friends (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

These interactions between the viewer and performer are what have influenced and changed parasocial relationships. Pamela Rutledge, direct of the Media Psychology Research Center stated that:

The visceral cues provided by the up close and personal nature of the videos help blur the line for viewers, allowing them to feel that there is a genuine bond with the host you start to develop a one-sided relationship with that person where you feel like you really know that person (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021).

One new type of online communication can be done through live streaming, which is a way that influencers can interact with their audience in real time (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021). Audience members can leave comments or questions in the chat which is visible to the influencer. Live streaming plays an important role in creating stronger parasocial relationships (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021).

Communication between each individual within parasocial relationships create a stronger sense of community affiliation. This explains the strong interpersonal relationships that are founded based on shared interests. In turn, this sense of community can help the longevity of a PSR (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). Communication can also create wishful identification, which means that viewers value the streamer's opinions and aim to be like them (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021). There is also greater emotional investment and fandom cultures (Kowert & Daniel, Jr., 2021).

The next section will discuss the ways creators can use digital tools to help create these long lasting parasocial relationships.

Affordances

Affordance theory

The theory of affordance was initially created by Gibson. As defined by J. J. Gibson: “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill (Chong & Proctor, 2019).

According to Gibson, an object can exist without being used, but each one has a special meaning (Leonardi, 2017). In other words, an affordance has existing relationships that don’t necessarily require preexisting knowledge (Chong & Proctor, 2020). Furthermore, based on the theory, objects have materiality that “affords different possibilities for action based on the context in which they are used (Leonardi, 2017).” In other words, our environment presents us with opportunities to interact and the ways it is important to each individual.

Later on, Norman argued that affordances aren’t only explained by their actual properties, but also by their perceived functions (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2021). The affordance itself may not change, but the perception that a person has in regard to the affordance can vary, therefore leading to different actions (Chong & Proctor, 2020).

For the sake of this study, I also take a look at Evans et al (2017) definition. When it comes to identifying an affordance, Evans et al. (2017) developed three minimum criteria to help. To classify as an affordance, the answer to the following two questions requires one no, “is it a feature?” and “is it an outcome?” and yes to the third question, “does it vary?”

Throughout the years, the concept of affordances has changed and been reevaluated. Nowadays, this theory has continued to develop with the creation of social networking systems and technological changes which provide individuals with new objects to evaluate and use. For the sake of this research, we’ll continue to focus on its definition within the social media literature.

Affordance and social media

With the evolution of technology and the creation of social networks, we now have something known as platform affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2017). This kind of research in regard to affordances focuses on the new dynamics and new forms of communication that these digital platforms can afford (Bucher & Helmond, 2017). Existing research states that social network websites are categorized by four high-level affordances: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability (Boyd, 2010). These types of affordances allow for better engagement for social media users (Boyd, 2010). Continuously, there are also low-level affordances that relate to a platform’s technical functions that are controlled by features such as buttons or interfaces (Bucher and Helmond 2017).

Additionally, recent literature categorized four types of social affordances based on platforms, such as Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook and Tiktok (Shamayleh &

Arsel , 2021). These categories are: expressive, connective, commercial, and co-creative affordances (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2021).

Expressive affordances focus on the manner in which people express their identities online with the features that give individuals the capacity to create and share content (Shamayleh & Arsel , 2021). Connective affordances rely on the fact that users have the ability to connect through tools, such as tagging or mentions (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2021). These communicative affordances can be done internally (within the account) or externally (with other content and users) (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2021). Commercial affordance speaks of the brand, the influencer and the consumer. Social media platforms have become another source of marketing for brands, allowing companies to introduce products through sponsored content (Shamayleh & Arsel , 2021). Finally, the co-creative category focuses on the fact that individuals can interact and collaborate on content creation on these platforms (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2021). Despite where the creator lives, these social affordances allow for different levels of collaborations. For example, adding another creator as an admin on a blog (Shamayleh & Arsel , 2021).

However, there continues to exist a gap in literature when it comes to the way creators and writers have been taking advantage of Tiktok affordances and the role it's playing within the publishing industry. The following research aims to contribute to the literature.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to study the phenomenon of Booktok. I incorporated two analysis methods: in-depth interviews and netnography. The data was collected over the span of nine months between September 27 2022 and June 12, 2023. Given the fact that Tiktok is global, the data collected through netnography didn't have any geographical limitations. The interviewees predominantly came from Canada, United States and Europe. This can be due to the fact that my focus was primarily on English speaking writers and the accessibility to publish to America. Additionally, the United States currently has 113.3 million Tiktok users which is more than any other country (Oberlo, 2023). As a Canadian myself, my for you page might also be tailored to my location and interests. Therefore, I was exposed to authors from these countries the most which allowed me to complete my research.

Primary Data

Interviews

I collected data through 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with writers. The interviews gathered insights about new authors that have recently published their first book or new authors that are still in the process of doing so. Additionally, it gathered insights about authors who have been published for some time. To qualify for this research, the writers must have been active on Tiktok. More specifically, on Booktok. This means that writers have accounts where they create content to advertise their own book solely, or they are also Booktokers that share and support work from other existing authors. For the most part, writers that were interviewed started out as self-published writers. Either they remained within self-publishing or they are now signed with an indie publishing house as a result of their success on Tiktok. One writer used hybrid publishing, which means that they pay a company to do the required work. Some writers were also still working towards their goal of publishing.

Interviews were held between September 2022 and June, 2023. Both self-published and traditionally published authors were contacted. The goal was to understand how writers use Tiktok to not only advertise their book, but how it affected or influenced their publishing journey.

The study was approved by the University's Ethics Committee and ethical procedures were taken into consideration while conducting the study. To recruit participants, I searched Tiktok for writers who seemed to match the requirements discussed previously. I reached out to them by either messaging them on Instagram or e-mailing them if their email was available to the public. A similar message was sent to each, explaining who I am and what my research is while explaining why I think they would be a good match. If the author agreed to the interview, a consent form was then sent and signed. The consent form informed participants of the research more in-depth and informed them that they could withdraw their interview from the study within one month of the interview. The participants were given a choice between disclosed and coded identifiers. Depending on the author's choice to remain anonymous or not, they were protected

by pseudonyms. As soon as the consent form was signed and returned, an interview time slot was set. The research did not offer compensation.

To conduct and design these interviews, Arsel's (2017) guidelines were used. The choice of semi-standardized interview questions was made to allow for probing throughout the process and allow for more in-depth questions depending on the participants' responses.

The interview protocols were semi-standardized (Berg & Lune, 2012) so that the researcher could probe and come up with more in-depth questions depending on the responses of the interviewee. Consisting of 14 general questions and 22 follow-up questions, the interview aimed to seek answers for 4 main groups of information:

1. Demographics information (Getting to know the author)
2. Relationships with the publishing industry and their journey
3. Their experience with Tiktok and how it has affected them

Interviews lasted between 40 to 120 minutes. Due to geographical distance and for safety, each interview was conducted online via Zoom video meetings. Before starting the interviews, I reminded each participant of the topic at hand and aimed to make them feel at ease by reminding them that they can stop or take breaks at any moment.

Participants of this research were primarily females aged anywhere in their twenties and thirties. This can be due to the fact that the majority of Tiktok users, about 71.3%, seem to fall between the ages of 18 and 34 (Oberlo, 2023). Most participants were writing within the fantasy, contemporary and romance genres. This might be a result of algorithmic bias on platforms and convenience sampling. Most writers I reached out to were those I knew from personal experience as a Booktok user myself, from reading their books, or from those who appeared on my for you page while researching. Since the Tiktok algorithm is trained to show you what you like, most writers I was exposed to were within the genre I enjoy reading. Furthermore, based on my personal views and observations, I believe this to be a genre that is heavily represented. One study based on Barnes and Noble, Goodreads and Google search interest data, it was shown that the titles growing in popularity are majorly in the romance, fantasy and young adult genres (Zajechowski, 2022). Some of the writers I interviewed have also dabbled in sci-fi and recently one title in horror. However, even these genres were mixed with romance.

More than half of the participants were from the United States while others were from Canada or Europe. While many interviewees joined Tiktok during the pandemic as a result of boredom, a few joined with the sole purpose of promoting their books. Their followers ranged from 300 to 52 000. They varied in their success as authors and where they were in their publishing journey.

Table 1 gives an overview of the participants' profiles. The writers are listed in chronological order of when they were interviewed.

TABLE 1**SUMMARY INFORMATION OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

PARTICIPANT	Publishing Journey	Country	Why they joined Tiktok	Number of books already published	Follower Count on Tiktok	Current Writing Genre
Ella*	Indie publishing	Canada	Pandemic	2	363	Fantasy Romance
Annie*	Indie publishing	USA	Pandemic	1	12.9K	Fantasy Romance
Scarlett St. Clair	Self-published to Indie published	USA	To promote books	11	51.2K	Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, horror
Luna	Self-published	USA	Pandemic	1	3140	Fantasy Romance, sci-fi
Charlotte*	Self-published	Canada	Pandemic	1	4299	Fantasy Romance
Andrea	Self-published	Europe	Pandemic	1	17.6K	Contemporary Romance
Serena*	Self-published	USA	To promote books	27	8189	Fantasy
Kelly*	Traditional route	USA	Pandemic	0	33.9K	Historical Fantasy Romance
Olivia*	Self-published	USA	Pandemic	0	8795	Fantasy Romance
Violet*	Hybrid publishing	USA	To promote book	1	3627	Fantasy Romance

NOTE.—Names that contain asterisks are made up to respect the writer's desire to remain anonymous.

The Spiggle's (1994) coding process was used to allow interpretation of the data. After reading through the transcript, I highlighted words or phrases that were often repeated that related to my research. Highlights were made in various colors to help categorize each response into specific topics or themes, depending on what they revealed. Following this step, I analyzed and used the similarities and differences between these themes to create a theoretical framework (Berg & Lune, 2012). This step was done a few times as new findings were found throughout the process of the research. After coding my interviews, I linked my findings to the theory and created tables to help reflect these effects. To do so, I had to revise multiple times until I found the proper categorization.

Netnography

Another part of my primary data came from netnography, which played a large role in my research. This data was collected by observing creator and consumer behaviors on social media applications with Tiktok as a priority. Observational data collection was done through two methods. Given the fact that I am personally active on Booktok, I would often take notes on what appeared on my For you page. To keep track of videos, I created a category in my Tiktok favorites called "thesis". When I came across a video I found pertinent, I saved it there which allowed me to revisit it at any time. This also applied when I noticed Booktok emerging within other categories, such as the music industry or acting Tiktok.

Additionally, I would purposely use keywords in the search bar to find specific videos I was looking for or information that I believed would be pertinent. This type of data allowed me to gain a better scope of the study and provide me with an insider's outlook. My priority was to remain on Booktok where I could gain a better outlook on the way users, creators and writers interact with one another. I took notes of the type of videos made, the comments and the interaction.

Keywords included: self-published writer, New writer, fantasy writer, Booktok, romance book recommendation, NA fantasy book, ACOTAR memes, pregnancy trope books, dancing Tamlin, ACOTAR art, single mom book trope, would you read, etc.

TABLE 2

Keywords explained

Keywords	Explanation
NA	New adult
ACOTAR	A court of Thorns and Roses
Tamlin	Main love interest in A court of Thorns and Roses
Dancing Tamlin	Keyword associated to a dancing creator who was called Tamlin by Booktok
Trope	Plot device in books

Furthermore, as a writer and Booktok content creator myself, I used my introspective position to help with my research. Having existing experience and knowledge allowed me to facilitate finding specific examples I was looking for.

Moreover, supplementary notes were taken on other platforms, such as Instagram, to allow for comparisons. While I follow Booktok accounts myself, the algorithm on Instagram isn't as personalized as Tiktok. Therefore, most of my data came from personally going out of my way to search. By doing so, it allowed me to understand the different possibilities and ways each app is used for writers and readers. This was also due to the fact that many participants in my interviews claimed using Instagram as well.

Secondary Data

Given the fact that my research topic has only emerged within the last few years, I didn't have access to as many scholarly articles in regard to Booktok and its effects on the publishing industry. My secondary data mainly allowed me to define certain terms and have a better understanding of statistical data in regard to Tiktok users. Therefore, my secondary data primarily focused on helping me build bridges and fill in the existing gaps in regard to this topic. Interviews and netnography is what mainly helped me during my research.

FINDINGS

The findings helped reveal how parasocial relationships are formed between creators, writers and supporters with the use of affordances available on Tiktok. Additionally, it sheds light on the way these relationships and tools are changing the publishing industry by encouraging reading, helping indie writers and indie publishing houses and by making self-publishing much more accessible than in the past. As discussed, these findings came from the multiple interviews held and the netnography conducted.

My study showed that as a whole, Booktok has created a large impact on the publishing industry. Exposure, marketing and visibility is more accessible than ever. The large community of readers that has been created allows word of mouth regarding books to travel faster than ever.

My observations also showed how Booktok has created a newfound popularity for self-published writers. By searching through Booktok, I noticed a few cases where new writers gained quick popularity. Besides Alex Aster, which was discussed previously, there are other authors that went viral either by promoting themselves or as a result of readers who shared their work. For example, Chloe Walsh, the writer of the boys of Tommen series, doesn't have a Tiktok account herself. However, if you search hashtags related to her books, you'll notice that they have over millions of views. For example, #boysoftommen has 85.1 million views while #chloewalshbooks has 12.8M views.

As a result of this popularity, Chloe has recently been signed by Bloom Books, an indie publishing house that is continuously poaching self-published writers that seem to be gaining popularity. Another case and point would be Lauren Asher. She is best known for her Dreamland billionaire's series, though she has written other books as well. She is another example of a writer who began by being self-published and now has over 160 thousand followers on Tiktok. Unlike Chloe, she does use Tiktok as a platform to promote her books, though creators also play a large role. She was also signed by Bloom Books due to her growing popularity. The Lauren Asher hashtag has over 259 million views. These observations demonstrate that whether it's by the writer or from creators, self-publishing is becoming less taboo and more accessible, allowing more writers to follow their aspirations. In fact, during my interview with Violet, she discussed how there's a lot about self-publishing that appeals to her now compared to the past. As she stated: "I admit I think I had a negative view of self-publishing, and I now don't".

Next, findings conveyed that these results and changes are largely due to the parasocial relationships that are created between creators, writers and supporters by the use of Tiktok affordances, such as hashtags, videos of different lengths and style, comments, shares, etc.

This following section shows:

1. How Booktok helped the publishing industry blossom and allow for success for writers
2. How Booktok is creating a new-found popularity for self-publishing
3. How the use of affordances by writers and creators have created parasocial relationships which have allowed for these changes

I separated the findings into three tables to help understand the effect Booktok has had on the publishing industry. Three main types of users exist in the world of Booktok. Each table considers the following actors:

1. Supporters: These are Tiktok users that are active on Booktok either by observing, commenting or engaging with creators. While they do not make consistent content themselves, you may find a video or two on their page. Others remain completely

anonymous with a blank profile page. Supporters are considered outsiders and generally the ‘fan’ side in the parasocial relationship.

2. Creators: These individuals can also be referred to as influencers or Booktokers. Specifically, those who have earned a larger and loyal following. They create a variety of content depending on their style, personality or talents. Each creator is unique in its own content. They are the main source of entertainment on Booktok. They are the people that influence readers to read and promote writers, helping them gain a bigger audience. By entertaining and creating interesting content, they give birth to these parasocial relationships.
3. Writers: Writers can be both creators or observers. Many sit back and watch Booktokers do the work for them. Others will take the time to promote their books on their page by creating different kinds of videos. Some writers are also creators. This means that while they are promoting and writing their own stories, they also create content for other books.

Three effects were discovered through my findings.

First of all, I found that Booktok is used as a source of entertainment for users. Findings showed that Tiktok affordances are used by creators and writers to attract viewers by keeping them interested. These affordances reach new or existing readers, welcoming them into the community and allowing them to feel a deeper connection to the books and characters. It attracts a large audience, creating long term readers, helping old readers find their joy of reading and introducing reading to a whole new generation of readers. The way these affordances are used creates entertainment and by doing so, it influences and shapes decisions.

Second of all, parasocial relationships are created through a community of avid readers, creators and fans where interaction between parties solidifies loyalty and emotional attachment. This can be defined as beneficial relationships and friendships where Tiktok affordances allow parasocial relationships to be created. As a reminder, the traditional definition of parasocial relationships are generally one-sided relationships where the viewer creates an attachment to the performer. For this study, the viewer is considered the reader and the performer can be either the creator or writer. In some instances, the creator is also a writer. Given the fact that this research is mainly about Tiktok, I use the more recent definition of parasocial relationships where the performer can also be reciprocal in the communication, in turn, enhancing the PSR.

Third of all, there is the creation of professional relationships. Findings also showed that Booktok has helped create a network of professional relationships through existing affordances. These relationships are created between writers, editors, artists, graphic designers, or even publishing houses and book related, also known as bookish companies. This can also refer to social capital, which is “relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is developed when participants work together to pursue their shared objectives (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007). These shared objectives allow individuals to develop connections based on voluntarism, reciprocity and social trust (Martineau & Arsel, 2017). These are connections that could have been difficult to create without Booktok or impossible in some instances.

To help understand the following tables, these are the definitions of each affordance I will be discussing:

1. Artistic extension: This affordance focuses on the use of art to connect to the Booktok audience. Art can be defined as music, paintings, drawings, graphic design, etc. Artwork is used to perform one of the specific roles.
2. Association: Association happens when one of the Booktok actors links any form of media to a specific book. These associations help create connections in the actor's mind regarding books.
3. Reenactment: This affordance refers to any affordance that has the goal of bringing to life book-related themes. Actors aim to bring characters, scenery, and moments to life. This can be done through different outlets, such as acting, music, cosplay, etc.
4. Engagement and support: This affordance is one of the most important ones and can be found across every effect Booktok has and among all actors. This role is associated with the way the community encourages support and engagement with one another.
5. Promotional: Affordances can be used as a promotional tactic to attract readers and market oneself.
6. Educational: Finally, this affordance is associated with the tools Tiktok offers to help users gain accessibility and knowledge. This affordance helps writers in their self-publishing journey while also allowing other actors to find books they may be looking for.
7. The following section discusses each one of the three categories in depth to help understand the findings of my study.

Entertainment and influence on Booktok

TABLE 3
ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED THROUGH AFFORDANCES

EFFECTS	ACTORS	AFFORDANCES	
		CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Booktok as a source of entertainment and influence	Creators	ARTISTIC EXTENSIONS	Videos used to reveal new book art Videos used to promote book related merchandise Creators sharing book artwork and tagging artists

		ASSOCIATION	Using clips from other shows and movies to relate to book characters Videos of songs and sounds that remind people of books
		REENACTMENT	Using videos to create skits of book characters Creators using videos to show how book characters would dress Using the carousel feature to post pictures of outfits Using videos to show cosplay photoshoots of book characters Cosplayers re-enacting scenes with audio books Cosplay collaborations and dues
	Supporters	ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	Supporters sharing and saving videos Comments are used to discuss and engage Insider Jokes within comments Comments leading to book artwork Comments asking for book artwork

	Writers	PROMOTIONAL	Writers sharing book scenes Writers creating aesthetic videos Cover reveals Title reveals Release date reveals
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This first section focuses on the entertainment side of Booktok. Creators use available affordances in three different ways: artistic extensions, associations, reenactment. Supporters create entertainment through engagement and support while writers use promotional tactics. The next section will help understand each one of these effects, by discussing findings that support the affordances used.

Creators

The artistic extension within the creator's affordance focuses on the use of art as a way to engage readers. For example, during my observations, I noticed that creators may post a video to reveal new book art. This form of art isn't always official artwork that was commissioned by the writer or publishing house. This can be done by any artist at any time as part of their hobbies. Some artists will sell the book art on Esty or Redbubble. In most cases, they will ask permission from the writers and have it officially licensed. This can include characters, book scenes, or even comics or fan-created moments the reader wishes to see. An instance of this would be how readers of Sarah J Maas wish there was a wedding scene between the main couple of the A Court of Thorns and Roses series.

FIGURE 2

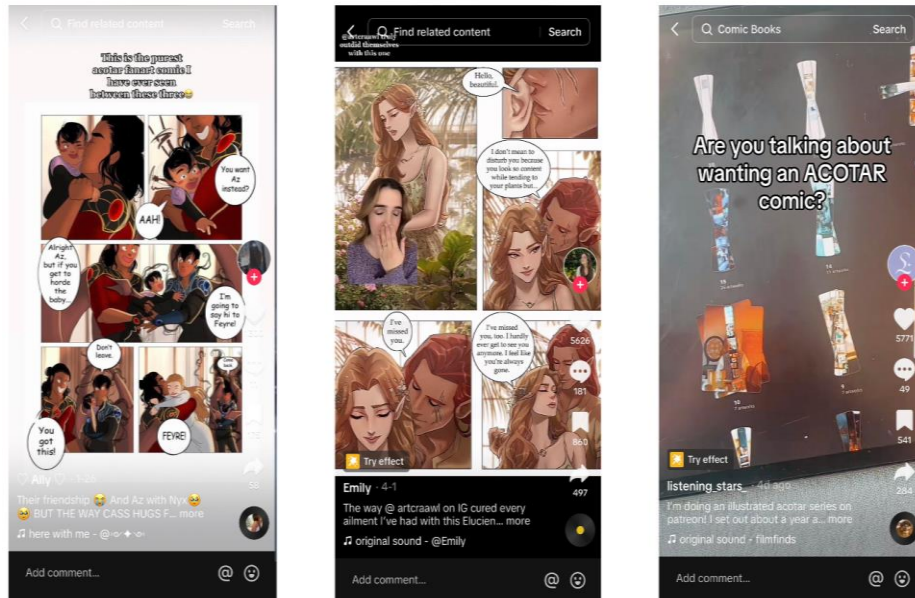
FEYRE AND RHYSDAND WEDDING SCENE ARTWORK



These types of fan art allow readers to continue living within the world of the book even once they are done reading. It provides new material and content that readers can dive into. Many artists have taken it upon themselves to draw out this scene. Other examples of this extension of book scenes can be comics or made-up fanfiction scenes. Some artists will also use popular Tiktok sounds that are conversations between people and create animations, as if the book characters are the ones speaking. In other cases, they will simply create scenes and conversations they would like to see in the books, similar to fanfiction, but in an art format.

FIGURE 3

EXAMPLES OF COMIC ARTWORK OF ACOTAR

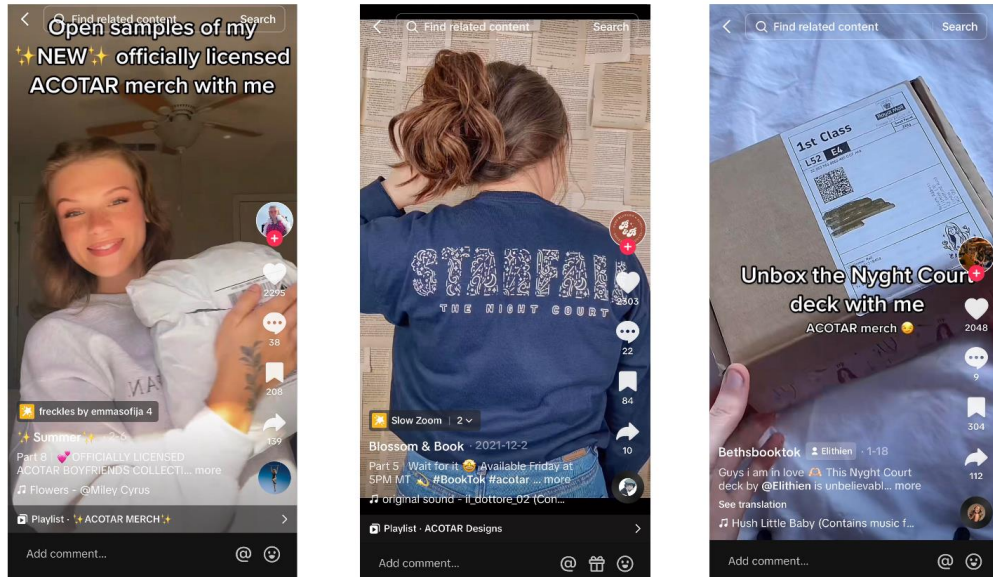


When it comes to posting these artworks, it can be done through different uses of existing affordances on TikTok. The main affordance used are videos through different formats. It can depend on the type of emotions and entertainment the creator is aiming for. For example, some creators will post their drawing process or post sneak peeks without showing the final product. This keeps readers intrigued and attached, making them come back for more. These types of videos not only manage to keep users on Booktok, but findings showed that they can also influence their purchasing decisions. During my interview with Andrea, she spoke about the number of times she has purchased a book only from seeing a piece of art drawn by artists and shared across TikTok.

Other ways that creators use the artistic extension to create entertainment is by posting videos to show their small business and book relevant merchandise that they plan on selling. Book-relevant merchandise can include a variety of objects, such as sweatshirts, phone cases, unofficially dust jackets, tote bags, stickers, printed art, etc.

FIGURE 4

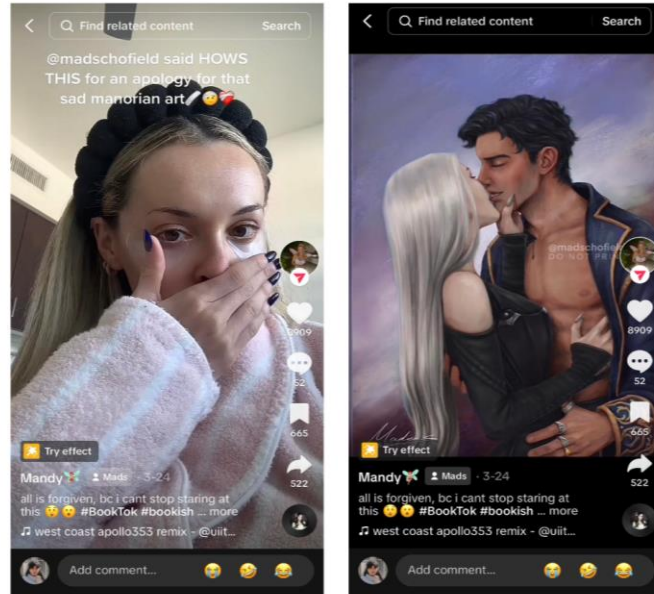
EXAMPLES OF BOOK MERCHANDISE BEING PROMOTED BY CREATORS



In other situations, the creator may not be the artist: Creators can also share artwork that they personally found and enjoyed. This can be done by duetting the artist's video, stitching the artist's video, or pasting the artwork in the video itself. For example, the figure below demonstrates two snippets of the same video from the same creator. In the first short, it's visible that Mandy builds suspense by showing her emotions and writing a caption on the video. In the second image, she shows the artwork itself.

FIGURE 5

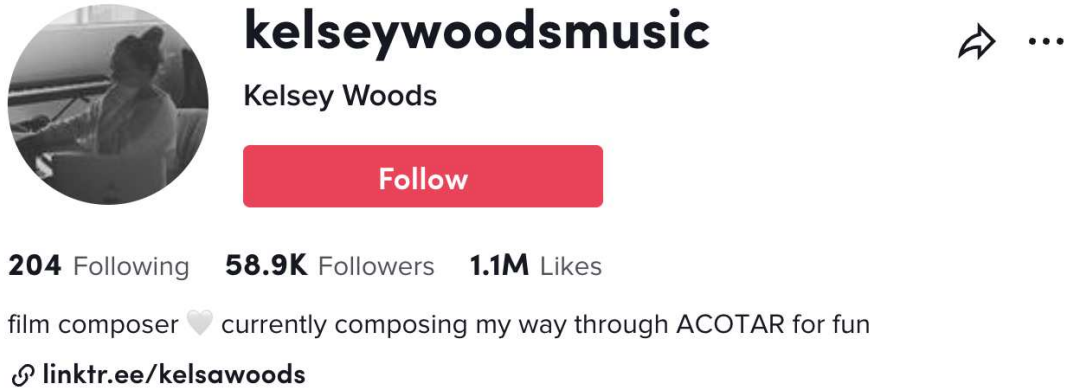
CREATOR, MANDY, SHARING HER LOVE FOR AN ARTWORK



Another kind of art that can be shared is merchandise that creators wish to show off. If a creator is collaborating or simply desiring to show their recent purchase, it can also be done in different ways. Some will simply use a popular sound while showing the purchased items. Others will use transitions and others will incorporate it with the theme of the book. For example, by cosplaying the characters. When creators share merchandise that they either purchased or received as collaborations, they typically tag the artist or small business, creating visibility in that way as well. For example, many small businesses will have influencers they call “reps”. For a few months, these creators will be in charge of sharing book-relevant merchandise they receive for free. Another way artist extension is used is through the creation of music. Some creators will create new music and associate it with books. For example, Kelsey Woods, known as kelseywoodmusic on Tiktok created a melody for a popular scene in the A Court of Thorns and Roses book which went viral, inspiring creators and cosplayers to use it in different ways. She continued to create music for other moments as well. Her bio reads as “currently composing my way through ACOTAR for fun”.

FIGURE 6

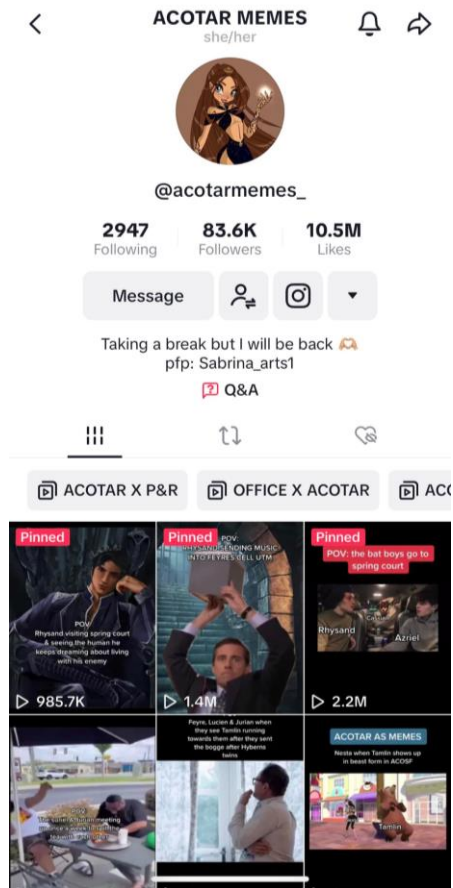
KELSEY'S TIKTOK PROFILE BIO



The next affordance used by creators is association. Here, creators can use clips from other shows or movies in hopes of relating to book characters. Most of these videos are done to evoke different emotions and reactions. In majority, they're meant to be comedic which translates into entertainment, while some may be emotional. Based on personal experience, this help attracts readers and create a new layer to the world of the book. One account known as @ACOTARmemes_, which now has over 80 thousand followers, focuses primarily on creating a compilation of clips they find across different media by relating them to characters.

FIGURE 7

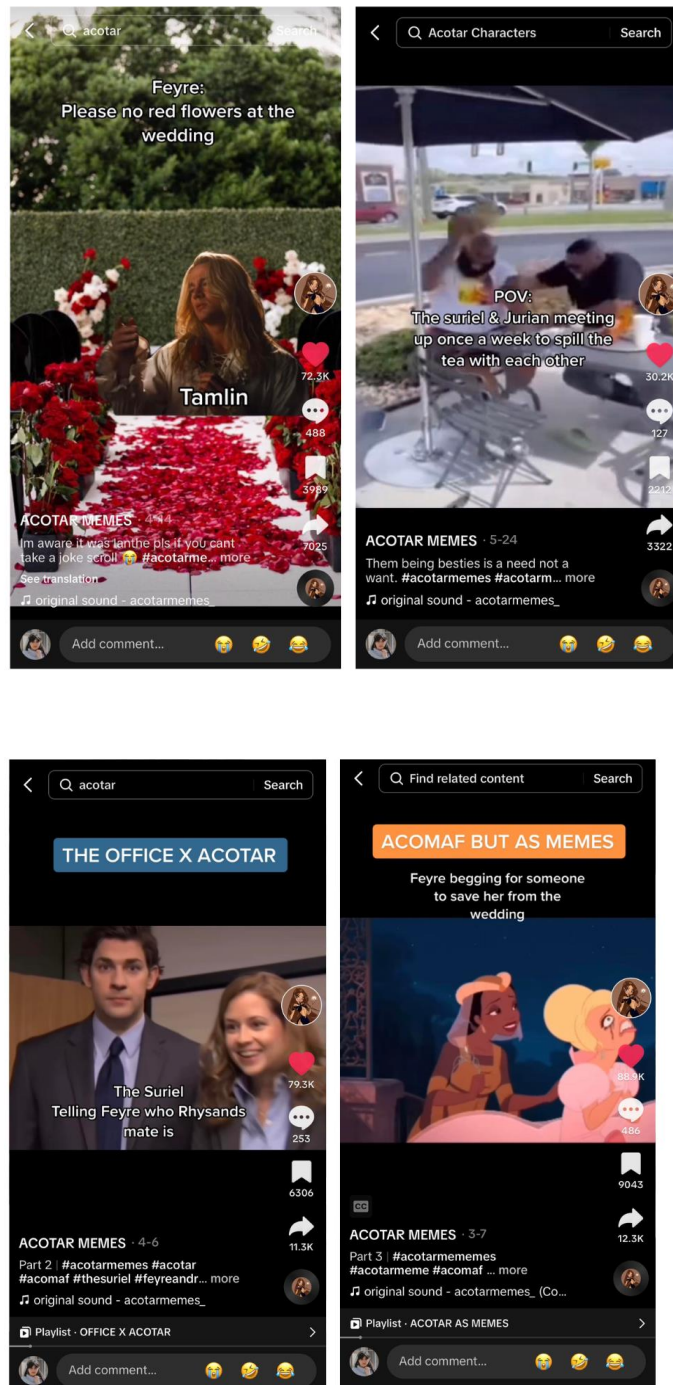
@ACOTARMEMES_ PROFILE PAGE



For example, they can take sounds or clips from tv shows such as New Girl, Friends, Parks and recreation and compile them into one Tiktok. Then, they edit the videos by adding character names, matching them to the TV show character they think fits that specific character.

FIGURE 8

MEME ASSOCIATION AS VIDEOS EXAMPLES



Another form of association can also be through music. For one, creators will point out existing music that makes them think of specific scenes or specific couples, characters or friendships in a book. For instance, an artist that is often used to relate to these scenes is Taylor Swift. Her songs are especially used for Sarah J Maas's books. Based on my observations I noticed that some examples of songs from her discography include: Speak Now, Labyrinth, The Great War, Delicate, Vigilante Shit, The Archer, I knew you were trouble, You're losing me, Anti-hero, Tolerate It, Enchanted, Midnight Rain, Bad Blood, Champagne Problems, Begin Again, etc. Affordances can be used in several ways to make these musical associations. Besides Taylor Swift, there are also undiscovered artists that can gain popularity from these associations.

Some creators will simply post themselves in the frame of the video listening to the song and explaining what they think of it while other creators will take it to the next stage and use cosplay to demonstrate these associations.

FIGURE 9

SARAH J MAAS FANS DISCUSS TAYLOR SWIFT SONG ASSOCIATION TO SARAH

J MAAS

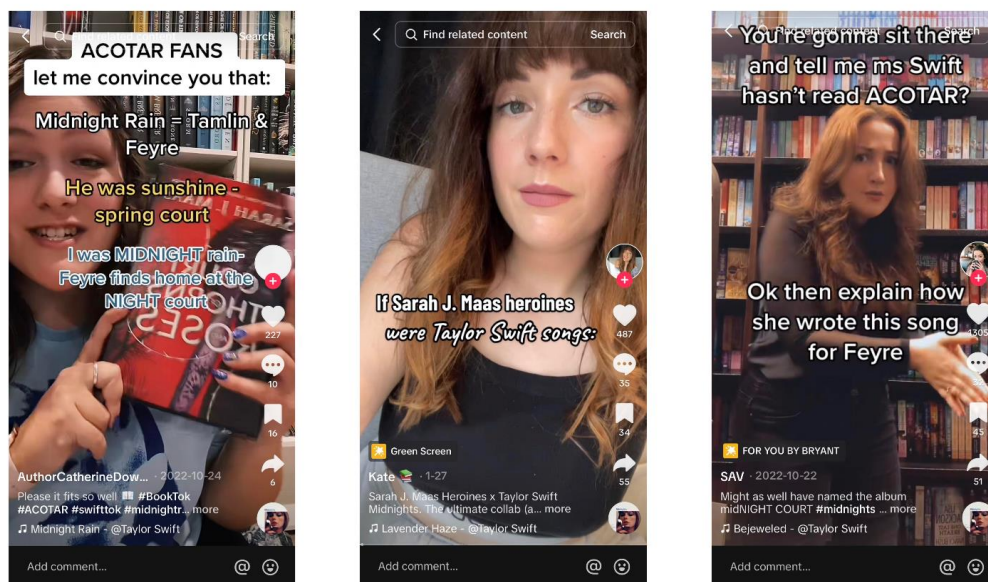
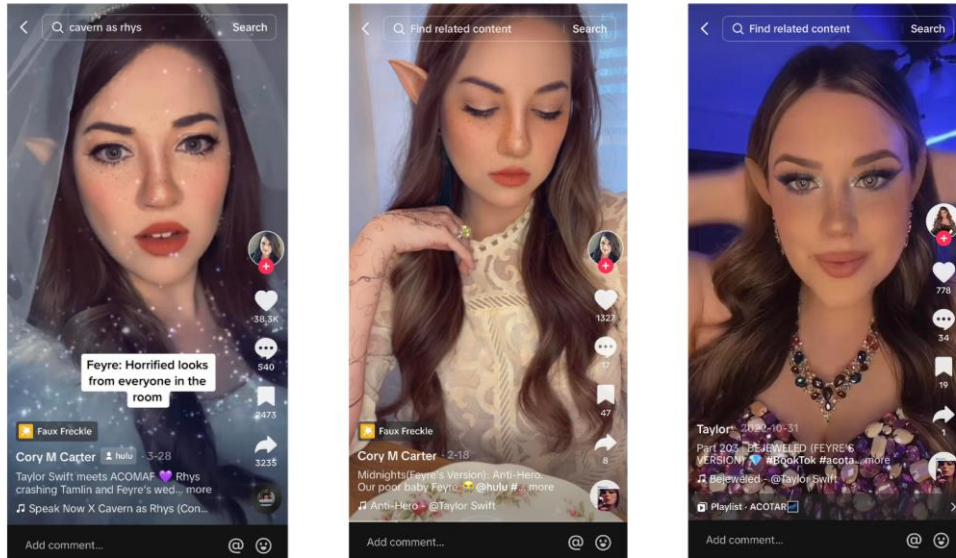


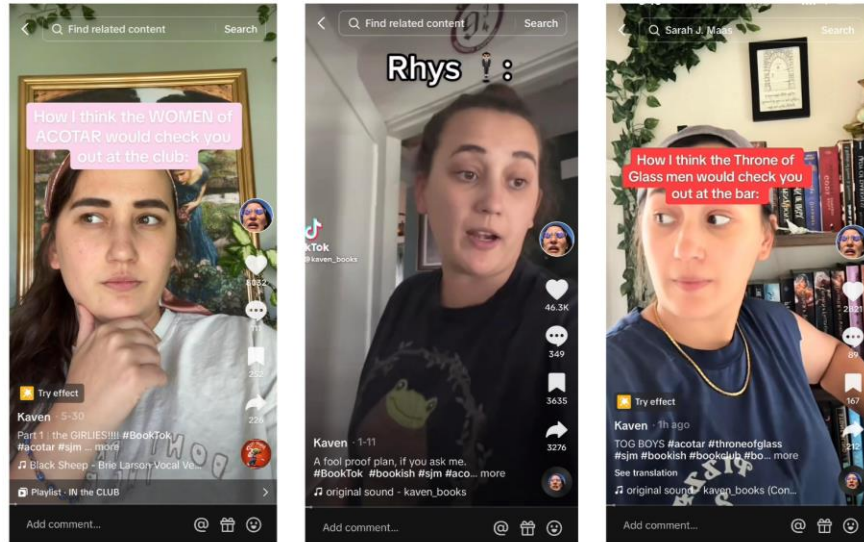
FIGURE 10

SARAH J MAAS FANS USING TAYLOR SWIFT SONG ASSOCIATIONS TO
COSPLAY BOOK CHARACTERS



Reenactment is also used to create entertainment. One common form of reenactment is through skits. Creators use what they know about characters and bring them to life by acting out specific scenes they write themselves and deem would fit the vibes and personality of the character. For example, a creator called Kaven gained her large following by primarily making skits in regard to ACOTAR.

FIGURE 11
KAVEN CREATING BOOK SKITS

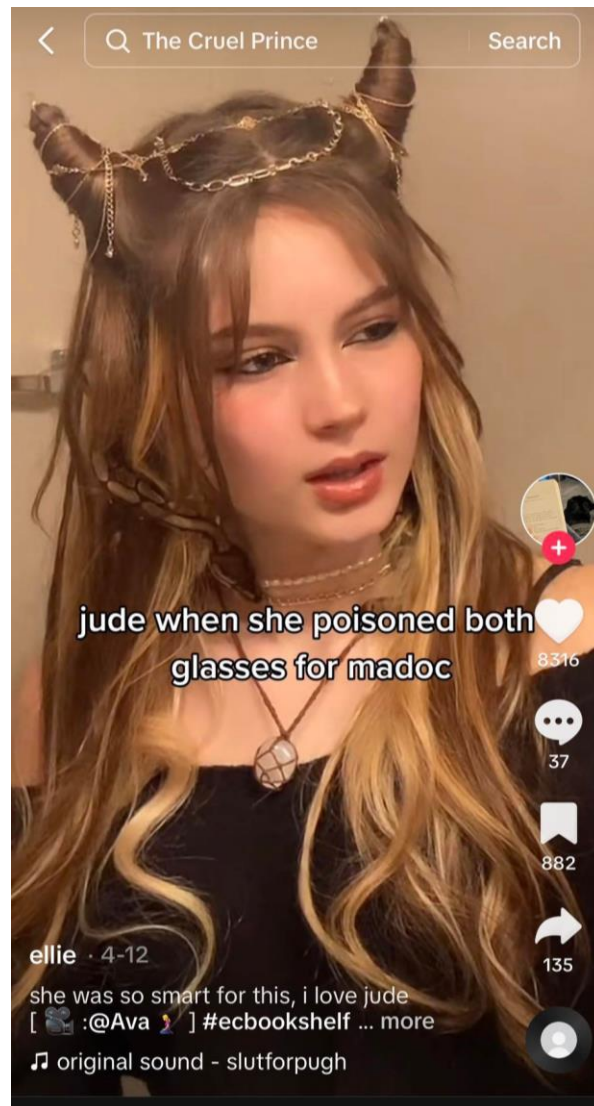


In her comments, you will often find readers saying how they look forward to her skits and how they make them laugh. In turn, these videos serve as entertainment for readers.

Reenactment can also take the form of cosplay, where book characters or book scenes are brought to life. They do this by using a complete cosplay where they showcase their outfits primarily or by using sounds from movies that they think could suit a possible conversation between characters to bring that specific character to life.

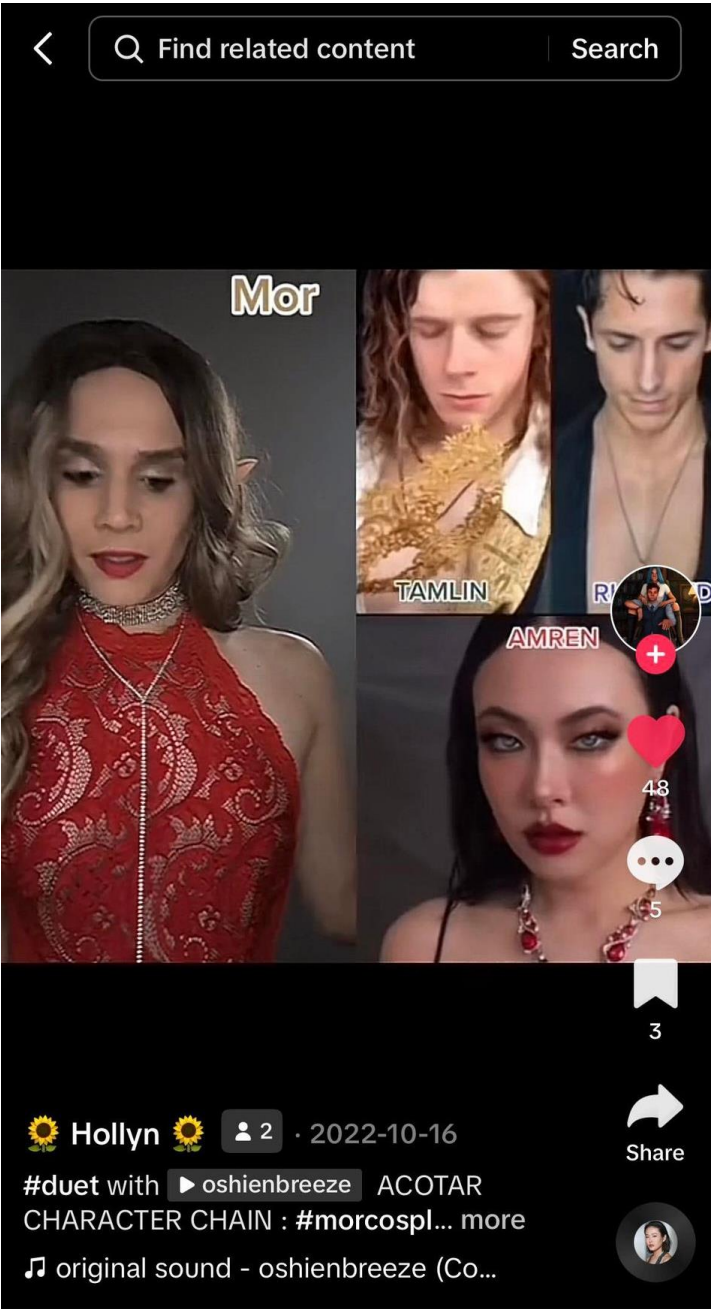
FIGURE 12

COSPLAYER BRINGING JUDE FROM THE CRUEL PRINCE TO LIFE



In many instances, these cosplays will also be duetted. Two or more cosplayers may come together by creating a chain, giving readers the full picture.

FIGURE 13
CHAIN OF ACOTAR COSPLAYERS



Furthermore, many readers also comment on videos stating that they would only accept a movie adaptation of a book if a specific cosplayer were casted. Other examples include videos where creators showcase how they think a character would dress or how a character would act on Instagram. This affordance gives a second life to books.

FIGURE 14
ACOTAR CHARACTER IF THEY HAD INSTAGRAM AESTHETIC



These forms of entertainment can therefore translate into possible book sales. Findings showed that while in the past most readers skimmed the bookstore to find their next read, nowadays, readers turn to Booktok recommendations.

For instance, Olivia claimed in an interview:

Before, it was just like browsing in bookstores. I love just going in bookstores and just taking my time and reading all the back. [...] with Tiktok, I got on the platform maybe two years ago, like, pandemic, like a lot of people. And then I got into the books on Booktok, and then that's how I find them now.

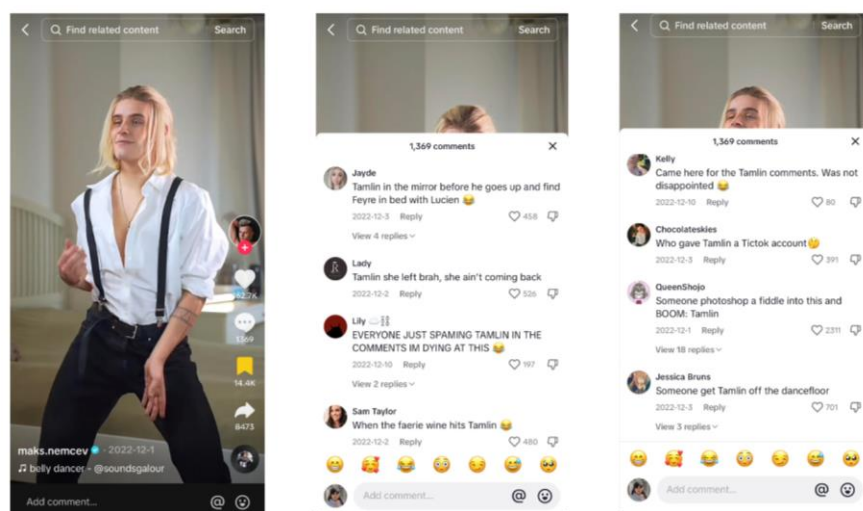
Supporters

Furthermore, supporters also add to this effect of entertainment by engaging and supporting. To do so, they share and save videos. Shares and saves can be determined by looking on the right bottom corner of a video (See Appendix D). Tiktok allows users to create categories within favorites. Therefore, when you visit your profile, there is a private section where videos that a user saved in their favorites will be shown. If the user has created categories, it will allow them to easily find the videos they want. For example, they can create a “to read” category where they save book recommendations. This way, it can be easy to go back to video and find the books they wanted to read. Observations on Tiktok also showed that some comments can even say things such as: saving this for later, saving so I don’t forget, saving to read later, etc. Shares can translate to supporters thinking their friends might enjoy such a video or book.

Comments are also used to discuss and engage, often creating inside jokes within a community. For example, the Sarah J Maas community is a great example once again. There are many inside jokes in regard to her series, such as *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and *Throne of Glass*. Back in December 2022, a large creator, @maks.nemcev posted a dance video which went viral and reached the Booktok community. Maks has over 6 million followers and his page consists of dancing videos, either alone or with his group, none of these videos have ever been purposely related to books. However, given the way the creator’s hair looked within the video, many people in the comments were comparing him to Tamlin, a character from the ACOTAR series.

FIGURE 15

BOOKTOK INVADES MAK’S COMMENT SECTION

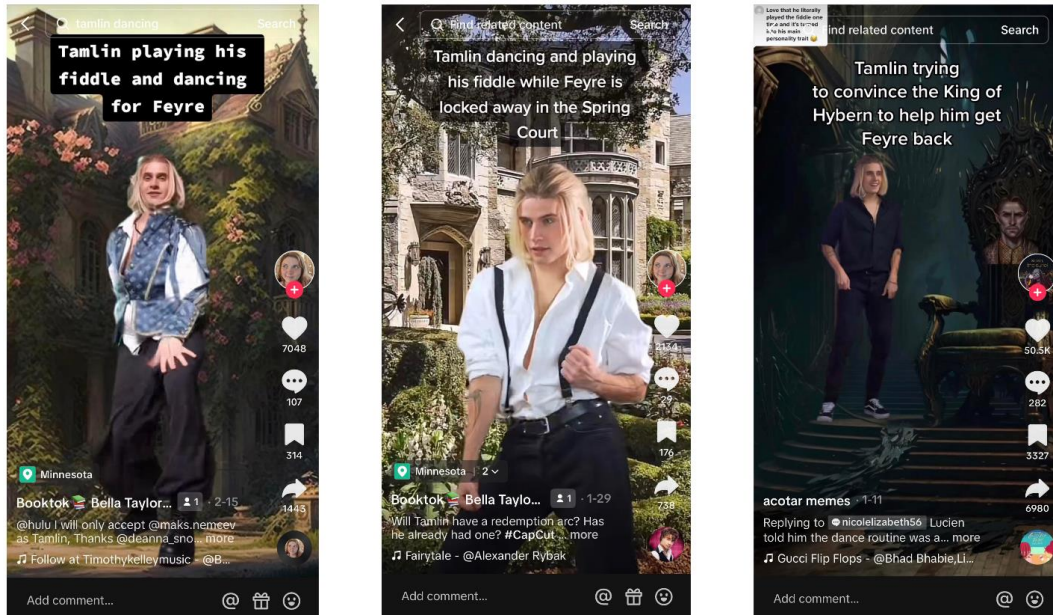


Given the fact that the creator hadn't meant the video to be one relating to Booktok, the comments became an inside joke and a source of entertainment for readers.

In fact, if you type the keywords "dancing Tamlin", Tiktok will direct you to the many uses of this creator's video. The hashtag itself now has 2.6 million views. Following this, many Booktok accounts began to use him as a meme.

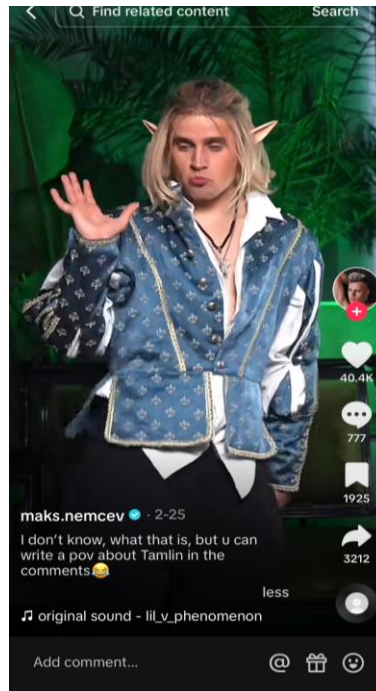
FIGURE 16

USE OF MAK'S VIDEO AS ACOTAR MEME EXAMPLES ON BOOKTOK



Eventually, the creator himself decided to jump on board and cosplayed as Tamlin for Booktok which was greatly appreciated by the community.

FIGURE 17
MAKS CREATING A TAMLIN VIDEO



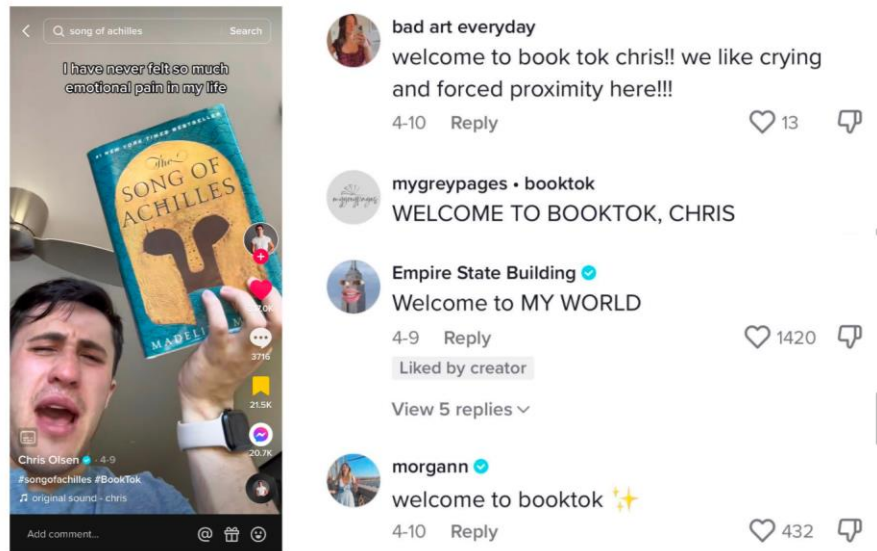
Comments read as: “The fact that he accepted his fate as Tamlin is AMAZING.” Other comments read as: “So glad he embraced the inevitable.” It’s safe to assume that he might have gained more followers through this tactic.

Not only do these videos help keep existing readers engaged, but it also attracts new readers. For example, one comment read: “I really have to read this book so I can understand what the hell is happening in this video.” These comments can also be a way to find artwork or music, as readers may tag or ask about it.

Furthermore, Booktok has created such an impact that even celebrities and celebrity creators have embarked on the hashtag. Chris Olsen, who has over 10 million followers, recently posted a video crying over *The Song of Achilles* and added Booktok as a hashtag in the video. In the comments of the video, you can find many welcoming him to Booktok.

FIGURE 18

INFLUENCER CELEBRITY WELCOMED INTO BOOKTOK



Another great example of this phenomenon and how Booktok is reaching a much wider audience than simply readers, is the Seattle kraken NHL hockey team. This is derived from something I like to call the “Elle Kennedy effect”. Elle Kennedy was a self-published writer with a collection of published books. It was her series called Off Campus that gained traction on Tiktok, making her viral and eventually signed by the indie publishing house, Bloom Books. The Off Campus series is a new adult romance that follows a group of college male hockey players and the female main characters.

As a result of this growing popularity, many readers started to grow an interest in hockey, posting videos about going to hockey games to find their very own Garrett Graham, who is the most popular “book boyfriend” of the four-book series. Eventually, readers began to target hockey player creators, finding one who specifically reminded them of Garrett. This is similar to what happened to Maks and the Tamlin jokes. Garrison Dunn (@gsondunn) was bombarded with booktok comments. Readers were calling him Garrett Graham. Eventually he gave in and read the book, letting his followers know his thoughts and joined a podcast to discuss it.

This effect soon reached more and more hockey players. College teams began to take part until it reached the professional league of NHL. The Seattle kraken team has taken advantage of this hype and posted videos to attract readers.

Booktok entertainment has served as an excellent tool for self-published writers, making publishing more accessible and possible for those who don’t have the ways of following the traditional route. This subculture on Tiktok allows readers to not only discuss books, some videos earning up to millions of views, but it allows writers to promote themselves with that same magnitude.

Writers

The third actor, the writer, also creates entertainment, mainly by using affordances as a form of promotion. They create videos where they share book scenes. During my interview with Annie, when asked for examples of how she uses Tiktok for content, she claimed: “I like to find audios that would, like, fit the aesthetic of book one or book two and then kind of make videos or skits from that. A lot of it is still, like, aesthetic videos, which is just trying to give a teaser.” She followed this by saying how her goal is to reach a larger audience and share these videos to readers who care and want to see similar things. When interviewing Charlotte, she also claimed to have shifted her focus towards more promotional material: “I kind of decided to go a little bit more not professional [...] in the sense of promoting my book more than anything. My number one tool for marketing my book really is booktok.” Going back to my interview with Andrea, she mentioned how she posted videos leaning up to her cover and title reveal. This generated buzz amongst readers and her followers. It brought readers back to her page when it was time for the reveal.

They can also create video montages of several pictures they find represent the aesthetic of their book. By aesthetic, I mean pictures of videos that help the reader understand what they would be getting themselves into. It also creates a visual for the world of the book by helping readers visualize elements, such as locations or characters. Similar to movie trailers, it creates a desire to know more and an excitement to be a part of that world. This is relevant, because one again, it generates attention, excitement and attachment. Moreover, writers post videos in regard to cover reveals, title reveals and release reveals. In some instances, they will tease and hint to create excitement.

TABLE 4

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS CREATED THROUGH AFFORDANCES

EFFECTS	ACTORS	AFFORDANCES	
Parasocial relationships	Creators	CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
		ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	Videos that discuss books they have read and why to read it Positively speaking of books in stories or videos Commenting on author videos to express their love Duetting author videos to show excitement Going live to discuss books and author, GRWM lives, lives as a form of connection to fans
		REENACTMENT	Videos that are relatable between readers or writers
	Supporters	ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	Comments expressing excitement for books and support to new writers Shares and saves allowing readers to come back to a post about new books Commenting to boost and support Comments that encourage creators by mentioning what they love

			about their videos or them “fangirl/boy” comments
	Writers	PROMOTIONAL	PR box giveaways Book giveaways Videos introducing collaborations

		ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT	Live Q&A sessions Videos Supporting fellow writers Videos asking if readers would read their book and opinions Duetting videos Posting about their life as an author Writers sharing their knowledge with other authors through videos
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This section focuses on the beneficial relationships and friendships created with the use of affordances. These relationships are also known as parasocial relationships. As discussed earlier, parasocial relationships are one sided relationships where one side has a high opinion and a lot of love for the other side. This can often allow for an engaged and loyal audience. These findings further look into the way social media has amplified the engagement of parasocial relationships thanks to the possibilities of interaction between both parties.

Here, creators use engagement and support as well as reenactment to build these relationships. Readers continue to use the engagement and support affordance. Findings showed that writers use engagement and support affordances along with the promotional affordances.

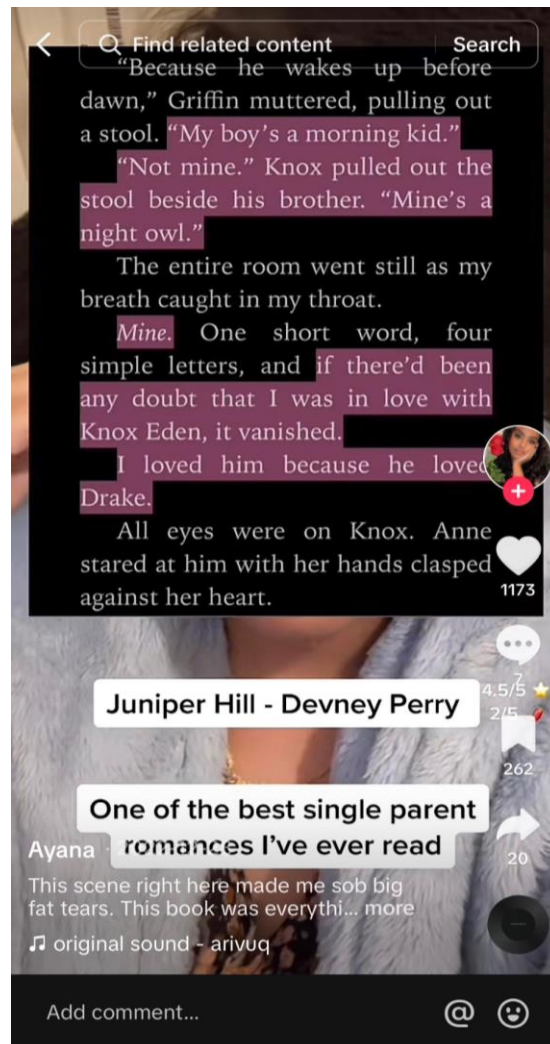
Creators

My observations and interviews helped show that the use of affordances within engagement and support for creators is one of the most important tools in creating long lasting parasocial relationships and loyalty, creating value for an influencer's opinions. Engagement and support are used to create these parasocial relationships.

To begin, creators will post videos where they discuss books they have read and why they recommend it. There are multiple formats these videos can have, such as: in depth reviews that can take more than the 60 second video format, quick reviews under 60 seconds, multiple book rankings within one video or videos showing quotes that the creator loves and quotes they believe readers will be attracted to. These types of videos usually showcase romantic or spicy quotes.

FIGURE 19

CREATOR SHARING ROMANCE QUOTE TO GAIN READER'S ATTENTION



Creators can also speak of books positively in the new story feature on Tiktok. Communication on the creators' part can come in the form of comments, likes or video responses. For example, a creator may post a video about a book they enjoyed with a specific theme, also known as tropes on Booktok. Readers may comment to ask the creator if they know any other books with a similar trope if they have already read that book. They might also ask for recommendations in regard to other themes. As a result, either the creator can simply leave a comment to answer or they can create a video that will be attached to the comment. The reader will be notified about the video and it gives a way for the creator to go more in-depth by utilizing the different lengths of videos on Tiktok.

The following figure shows a creator replying to a comment asking for recommendations based on the single mom trope. If you click on the comment, Tiktok takes you to the video where

it originated. In this case, the creator had posted recommendations on books with the single dad trope.

FIGURE 20

EXAMPLE OF CREATOR REPLYING TO COMMENTS THROUGH A VIDEO



As the theory previously discussed, this can amplify emotional investment, community affiliation and wishful identification. During my interview with Luna, she mentioned how she takes time out of her day to make sure she has responded to all her comments:

Something that I really strived to do whenever I created this account is that I was responding to every single comment on my video, because I want all my followers to feel seen. [...], I'm probably going to sit down for a few hours on my Tktok and just go through every single one of my videos and just scroll through and find all the comments that I've somehow missed and just responded. [...] I want them to see and I want them to feel interacted."

To continue, creators will often comment on an author's video. They can duet or stitch these videos to express their excitement. Naturally, readers will be exposed to these videos. These videos serve as a form of promotion for writers thanks to existing parasocial relationships between readers and creators. If a reader sees a creator they love stitching a writer's video, they may trust their judgment and look for further information regarding that writer. In other instances, the reader might share the creator's excitement and feel like their emotional connection to that writer might be validated. This refers back to community affiliation and wishful identification.

Additionally, seeing a booktoker they love post their positive feelings towards a book can entice a reader to buy or share the book with others within their community. Netnography showed that readers would automatically purchase or add a book to their *to-be-read* (tbr) pile based on who was sharing said book. This was found through various comments when searching through Booktok videos.

FIGURE 21

EXAMPLE OF CREATOR REPLYING TO COMMENTS



Finally, going live on Tiktok is a great tool for creators. It allows booktokers to engage with their audience in real-time. Tiktok also shares lives on users's For You page if it seems to be doing well, which means creators can continue to reach an audience that's larger than simply their following.

As mentioned earlier, live streaming is a positive way to increase parasocial relationships. Luna also spoke of how she would go live on Tiktok to do writing sprints. This means she would let her viewers watch her write. As discussed previously, live streaming can promote parasocial relationships as it gives the viewer a stronger feeling of connection towards the performer. In our interview, she said: "It's really cool and not only does it get people excited, but you also get to meet new people, you get to know them, you build a better connection with your readers." Other forms of lives can include get-ready-with-me lives, book discussion lives, and group lives between different creators or between creators and writers.

My findings also showed that the creation of these parasocial relationships has also played a large role for aspiring indie writers.

As mentioned previously, Kaven Hirning started as a creator, creating comedy skits as characters from A Court of Thorns and Roses. Her videos soon gained a lot of traction. Today, she has over 174 000 followers. Kaven first created her community by providing content and going live before she announced she was writing a book. By that point, she had already created a large pool of parasocial relationships and adoring fans who were willing and excited to buy her book. Kaven also uses her platform to support other indie writers. She will sometimes post videos about a new book she read, highly recommending it. In the past, she also had Tiktok lives where she would bring on aspiring writers and talk about their books. Given the fact that she had a large audience joining her lives, not only did the writer gain attraction, but since her followers trust her word, they wanted to support the author by association.

Another example would be Hannah Nichole Mae. Beginning as a content creator, Hannah soon started posting snippets and promotional content concerning her book. With over 200 thousand followers today, her book has already gained a lot of traction despite not being published yet. On January 25, 2023, she posted a video on Tiktok announcing that she was going to be published by Red Tower and Entangled Publishing, a large player within the industry. In the comments, you can see that she is thanking her audience for helping her achieve this goal.

FIGURE 22

HANNAH NICOLE SHOWING APPRECIATION FOR HER SUPPORTERS WHEN
ANNOUNCING HER BOOK DEAL



Hannah Nicole Maehrer · Creator

This would not be happening without all of you 💖 I am forever grateful for each and every one of you 💖 I love you

1-25 Reply



View 1 reply ✓

Despite the fact that she will be considered a new writer, the relationships she created with her followers will play a role in her sales.

Furthermore, to refer back to creators who post art, artists can also take suggestions, drawing something that their followers asked for. To do so, the creator will reply to the comment by making a video of the suggested art. Readers might feel appreciation and feel more dedicated toward that creator since they are responding to their requests.

This phenomenon also applies to writers that had been published prior to the creation and popularity of Booktok. One prime example is the fantasy trilogy written by Kerri Maniscalco. Kerri's first book was published in October 2020, just a few months before the pandemic.

In the acknowledgments of the third and final installment of her trilogy, Kerri mentions Booktok and thanks two big creators for their early support of the books: "Booktok - I adore you! Special shoutout to Ayman Chaudhary (@aymansbooks) and Pauline (@thebooksiveloved) for their amazing videos and early support of this series."

These two Booktokers known as Ayman (@aymansbooks) and Pauline (@thebooksiveloved) were one of the first to discuss this book and gave early support. Ayman and Pauline are the top two most popular Booktok accounts. The first has over 943K followers while the second has over 553K followers. There have been other authors since who have also thanked Booktok for their success. For example, Morgan Elizabeth, another self-published writer, has a dedication to booktok within her novel called *The Playlist*. The quote in the acknowledgment section reads: "Thank you to Booktok - yes, the whole damn thing - because without you this would all be a pipe dream. It's easy to see the shitty parts of the platform but when you push that aside, there's a glorious, supportive, beautiful mix of people who are so kind and amazing. I'm honored to be a part of it."

Another affordance used by creators to build parasocial relationships is through reenactments. Creators can create videos in regard to different themes. For example, they can be relatable to the reader by posting videos of what readers do while reading or posting how they're on a book-buying ban, but they end up at the bookstore anyway. This type of relatability allows for genuine bonds to be formed.

FIGURE 23

CREATOR BEING RELATABLE BY POSTING WHAT READERS DO



Additionally, my interview with Scarlett St Clair showed that she hadn't been on Tiktok herself when her books went viral. Scarlett's Hades and Persephone retelling is what boosted her popularity. During her interview, she stated: "Readers are at the end of the day, no matter what I do, the readers carry my books almost." Later in the interview, she also said:

To think that the only reason I am here is because a lot of people like my books and they were willing to talk about them and that is a big deal.[...]I have a lot of them to thank for everything that they've done to carry my books. Because people read what their friends are reading, period.

As a result of her popularity on the application, her current agent encouraged her to create an account.

In short, fans create parasocial relationships with creators by coming across them on their for you page on multiple occasions. Loyalty and trust are built and, in turn, readers reciprocate by promoting authors.

Supporters

Supporters also use engagement and support for this section. Traditionally speaking, in this case, the supporter would be considered the viewer in the parasocial relationship. They are the one looking up at the creators and providing their support and loyalty to both booktokers and writers. This can be done by expressing excitement for upcoming books and support to new writers. For example, we can look back to Kaven Herning who received plenty of support as a self-published writer even before her book was out. Another form of engagement and support is the action of saving and sharing once more.

Here, it's done not with the purpose of sharing entertainment, but with the desire to support the creator a PSR has been formed with. Sometimes supporters will simply comment for the sake of "boosting" a video. The more comments, shares or saves a video has, the more likely the Tiktok algorithm is to push the video to more viewers. Comments can also include words of encouragement to the creator or writer.

Writers

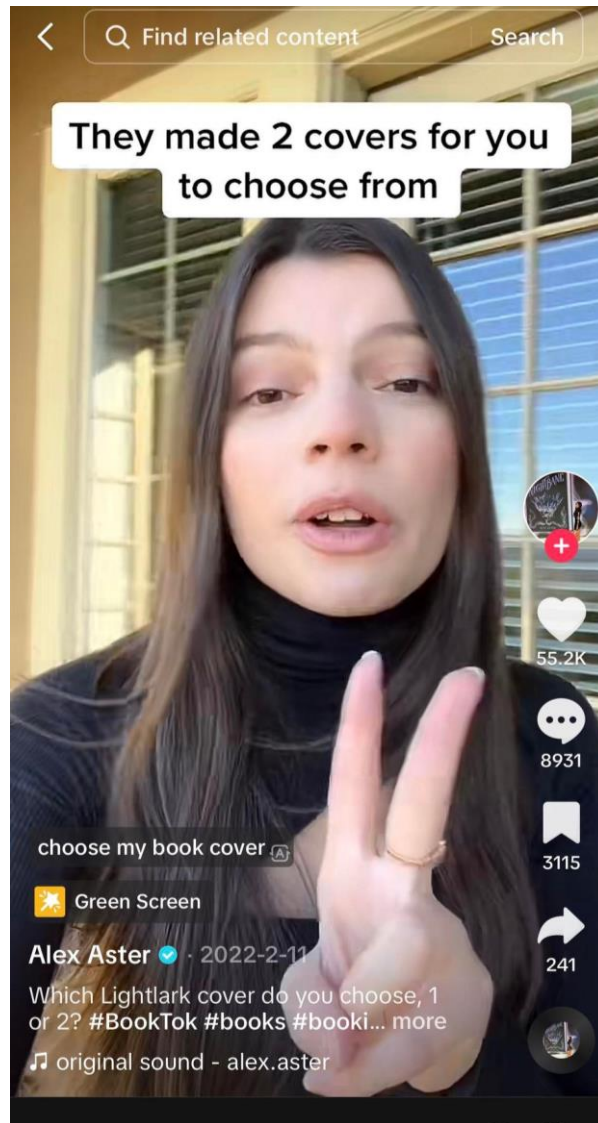
When it comes to creating parasocial relationships for writers, they use engagement and support promotional tactics.

Engagement and support consist of many different uses of Tiktok tools. For example, writers, similar to creators, can also go live to discuss their books and answer questions. In many situations, writers will be invited into the lives of a big creator to help share information about their book.

Another example can be the way writers encourage their followers to be a part of the conversation. For example, Alex Aster let her fans decide what her cover page would look like after showing a few options on Tiktok.

FIGURE 24

CREATOR BEING RELATABLE BY POSTING WHAT READERS DO

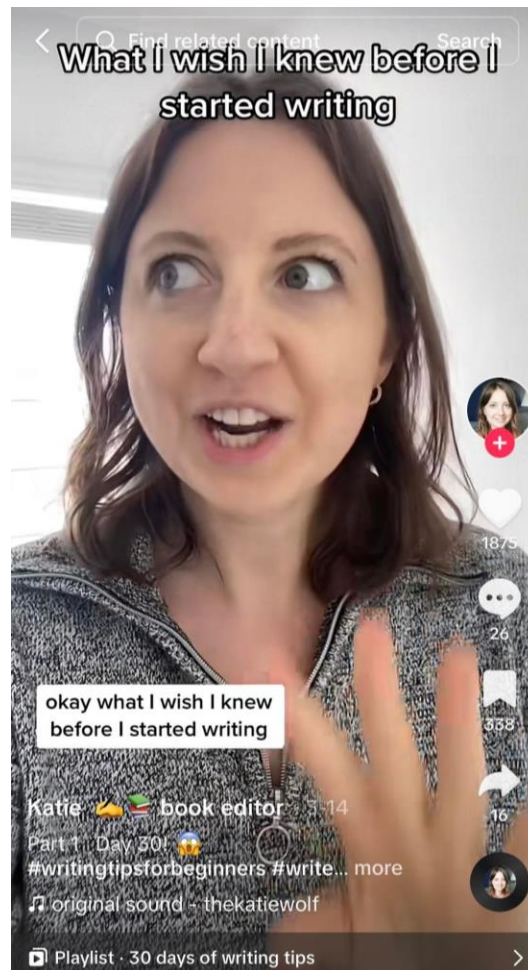


In some instances, writers will create videos where they ask readers if they would read their book. This trend originated from Alex Aster herself after her video went viral. Many authors have taken on the same formula by providing a short summary of their book to see if it gains attraction and engagement.

Sometimes writers will duet videos of creators who are raving about their book to show appreciation and show that they value the generous feedback. This kind of action strengthens these parasocial relationships.

Furthermore, some writers will take the time to offer tips and tricks to support new authors who don't have much experience. This way, writers are also building a relationship with other writers, which in turn will want to support them.

FIGURE 25
WRITER SHARING TIPS



To continue, promotional affordances can include giveaways. Giveaways are a great way to celebrate your followers and show appreciation for their support. These giveaways can be in different forms all related to the writer's book. The writer can give away a PR box which is a box full of goodies and the book itself. The giveaway can also simply be for the book or a special signed edition. For example, when Alex Aster was close to publishing her book, she announced on her Tiktok page that if readers pre-order her book, they will receive limited artwork with the book.

As discussed in other categories, Tiktok has a feature that allows you to reply to comments with videos. Writers sometimes use this as a way to strengthen parasocial relationships. Scarlett St Clair said that she sometimes uses her platform on Tiktok as a way to answer questions.

Additionally, videos can also be made to introduce collaborations. These collaborations can be with other writers, influencers, artists, or brands that create monthly book-related boxes.

TABLE 5

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS CREATED THROUGH AFFORDANCES

EFFECTS	ACTORS	AFFORDANCES	
		CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Professional relationships	Creators	PROMOTIONAL	Artists posting about their work in search of commissions Editors posting about their work in search of work Videos of creators that are nudging, trying to turn their hobbies into professions
	Supporters	ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	Supporters help writers by commenting and tagging to direct to the information writers are seeking Tagging writers in videos they think might be helpful Messaging writers to give them information either through Tiktok or finding their Instagram handle through their bio

	Writers	EDUCATIONAL	Using hashtag and SEO to find things they're looking for that would help with self-publishing. Editors, cover designers, etc
		ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	Writers reaching out to other writers through comments or messages for collaborations

Findings also showed that Booktok has led to professional relationships that would have been difficult to create in the past or impossible. When speaking to self-published writers during my interview, they mentioned how the connections they created via the social media application allowed them to gain more confidence in their writing journey. In fact, Luna said:

I honestly think that if it wasn't for book talk and Tiktok in general, that I would not be here today publishing those books. I would not have written book two. [...] I would say, without a shadow of doubt, book talk had a huge influence on my author journey.

These new-found relationships motivated them to finish and publish their books. For this section, creators use promotional tactics, supporters use engagement and support while writers focus on educational tactics as well as engagement and support.

Creators

By using promotional tactics, creators are promoting their work. By doing so, they aren't only securing possible clients, but they are building long-term relationships. Even if a viewer may not need their type of work, they might refer their page to someone who does. For example, this can apply to artists who post about their work and promote the fact that they take commissions. This can be for regular art, book covers or book maps, which are the maps you find at the beginning of fantasy novels to help readers picture where they are within the world. If you look at the hashtag "bookcoverdesigner", there seems to be over 7 million views. self-publishing writers, or possibly indie publishing houses, can therefore easily search for designers.

FIGURE 26

BOOK COVER ARTIST PRESENTING HER WORK



The same can apply to editors who often post videos and create an audience by giving tips and sharing their experiences. This helps prove their professionalism and gives accessibility for writers to find them through the Tiktok algorithm. As a result, booktok is allowing creators to turn some of their hobbies or aspirations into professions, by creating these professional relationships.

Going back to my interview with Luna, I asked her to explain in what way she feels that Tiktok encouraged her self-publishing journey and what type of contacts she created. Luna explained how she was given tickets to Apollycon, a convention for writers, through a friend she made on Tiktok. When attending the event, she was introduced to the curator of the book-related box. This company is a large bookish merchandise company with over 223K followers on Instagram. Readers can subscribe to their monthly boxes that come with goodies and special editions of books. They also provide merchandise that can be bought separately and often sell specific themed boxes that can be purchased without the subscription as well. Figure 20 shows an ad on Instagram for the monthly subscription, while Figure 21 shows an ad on Instagram for a limited-edition box set that can be purchased by anyone.

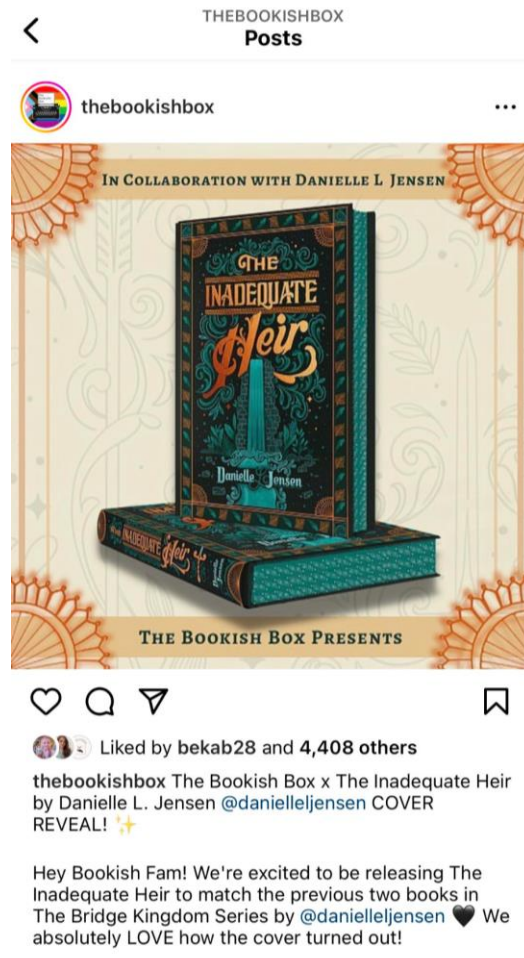
FIGURE 27

JUNE 2023 SUBSCRIPTION BOX BY BOOKISH BOX



FIGURE 28

LIMITED EDITION BOX OPEN TO ALL BY BOOKISH BOX



To continue, as a result of this interaction at Apollycon, Luna's book was chosen to be in January's bookish box.

Speaking to her friend later, Luna said: "[...] this would not have happened if you had not brought me here."

In short, these opportunities may not have existed if it weren't for the accessibility in communication that Booktok has provided self-published writers.

Supporters

For this third effect, supporters use engagement and support once again. They help writers by commenting and tagging to direct to the information writers are seeking. Another way

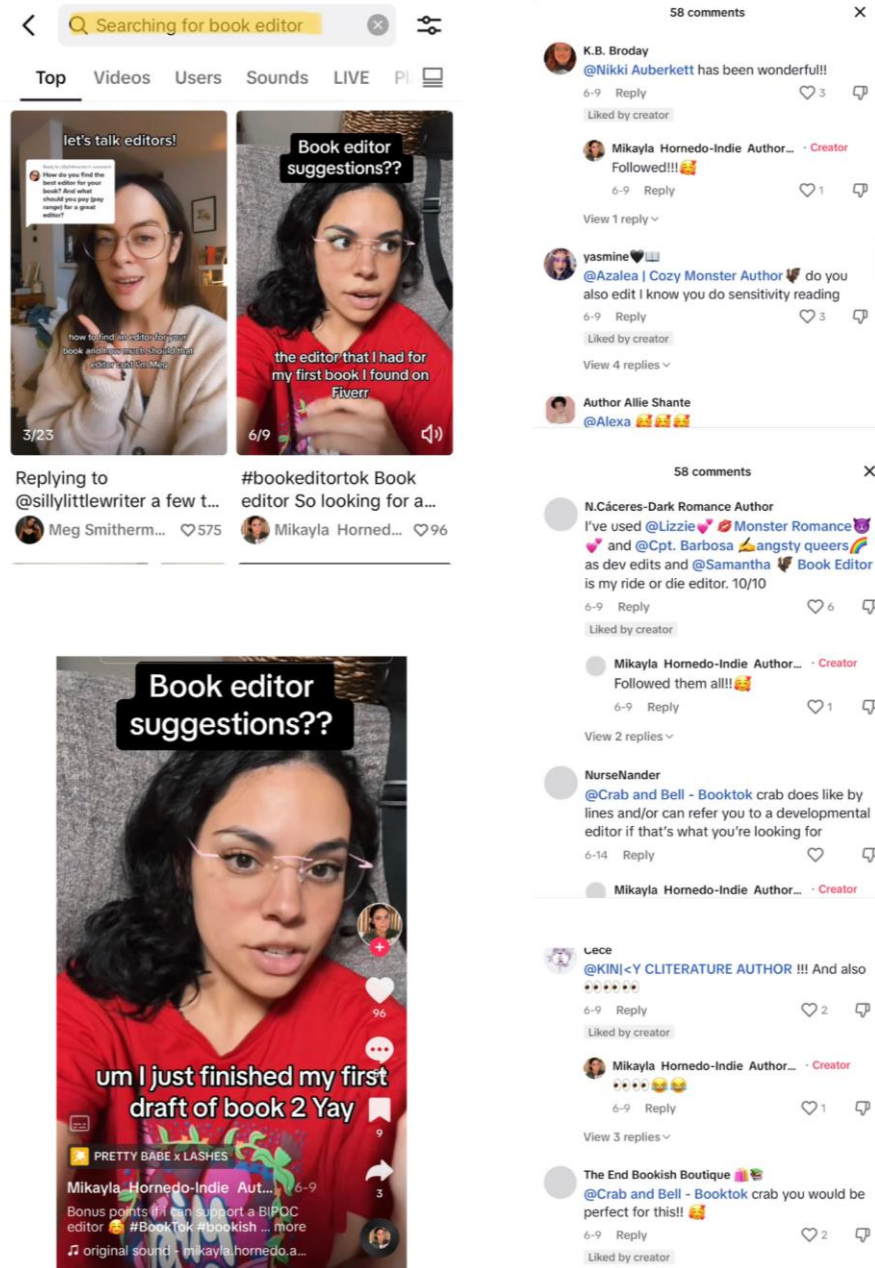
supporters can be supportive is by tagging writers in videos they think might be helpful. For example, an author might post about how they're on the hunt for an editor and as a result, supporters will come to the rescue. This can also be done through messages and personal messages on Tiktok or Instagram.

During my interview with Olivia, I asked her about the process she used to find her editor. She explained how one of her followers commented that her mom was an editor: Her daughter commented on one of my TikToks and I had been looking for a bunch of people. I had a bunch of profiles, and she commented, like, hey, my mom's awesome. And I'm like, Why not? And so I'm like, hey, did you have your mom's website or something? [...] I'm like, okay, let me look it up. And the website was super convincing, and so I was like, okay, let me get in touch. And that was it.

Given the fact that she was in the process of finalizing her book and searching for an editor as a self-published writer with not much experience, this support was helpful.

FIGURE 29

EXAMPLE OF WRITERS SEARCHING FOR EDITORS AND SUPPORT FROM READERS



Furthermore, Olivia also mentioned finding her book cover artist on Tiktok by searching as well. Initially, she tried to find a designer on freelance websites, such as Fiver, however, she claimed that it can be difficult to trust people you don't know. Eventually, one of her friends mentioned how Tiktok has a great search engine. When discussing how she discovered her cover artist, Olivia said: "I saw one of my cover artists' videos. It's kind of like her process. It looked so nice. I was like, okay, convinced, done, sold."

Writers

Finally, writers take advantage of educational affordances and engagement and support. To begin, educational affordance refers to the use of hashtags or SEO to find specific videos or information they are looking for. One advantage that Tiktok has over other social media platforms is the power of its search engine. Users can type in any word and be directed to exactly what they want. As mentioned in the previous examples, if a writer is searching for editors or agents, or tips in regard to writing, they can type what they want and Tiktok will lead them to the appropriate videos or pages. Based on my observations, I noticed that this feature is weaker on Instagram and Youtube. For example, on Tiktok, simply by writing the first part of someone's username, Tiktok instantly knew who I was looking for. However, on Instagram, I struggled to find the account I wanted. The same applied to keywords or hashtags. Most book hashtags hardly exist on Instagram.

Olivia also stated that she has noticed a difference between the search engines on Tiktok and other platforms. For example, she claimed: "Instagram search is so shit. It's useless unless you actually know the fucking handle."

Writers can also use engagement and support to help them create professional relationships. By commenting on other writers' profiles or commenting responses to creators who support them, they can expand their relationships. One example is the way that authors will partner with other authors or artists to hold giveaways.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

This research provides contributions to the literature on affordances and parasocial relationships. As my findings showed, there are three main new forms of effects that were categorized in terms of affordances. These new affordances have translated into book sales and the growth of the publishing industry.

First, my research helped identify affordances that create a source of entertainment on Booktok. With the use of artistic extension, associations, reenactments, engagement and support and promotional tactics, Booktok users have found ways of establishing a large reading community. Thanks to this affordance, readers have grown exponentially, making Booktok a place where most individuals will find their next read.

Second, I show that through reenactment, promotional tactics and engagement and support, Tiktok users can develop deeper parasocial relationships which in turn result in higher loyalty and support for writers. This effect plays a big role in the success of self-published writers and the sudden push towards indie publishing. These parasocial relationships that are created through the connections made via Tiktok have allowed writers to gain better visibility, to gain reader's interest and to create the urge to be supported.

Third, the final effect of Booktok that my findings demonstrated is the use professional relationships, similar to social capital, which can also be developed through Tiktok features. This allows writers to gain connections that better their chances of becoming successful.

Recognizing these affordances is important because writers and publishers can learn from them in hopes of successfully publishing books. Up and coming writers can use these affordances which seem to be a formula for success and imitate the pattern to help their own sales. The publishing industry as well as other actors that can benefit from the rise of Booktok can also take these into consideration when creating their marketing strategy.

Additionally, this study provided a deeper contribution to the technological sides of parasocial relationships that have experienced changes with the creation of social media and the new tools it provides both viewers and performers. As shown in my findings, Tiktok allows creators to interact with their audience through comments, video replies, live streaming, and so on. This takes the traditional definition of parasocial relationships, which explained that performers often had no contact with their fans, to new heights. With social media, there is a new layer at play amongst these relationships, allowing the creator to interact with their supporters.

These findings are not only limited to the publishing industry, but these affordances can be used to help other industries. The use of PSR and entertainment can appeal to the music industry, fashion industry, travel industry, small businesses, or freelance workers.

In brief, this thesis has provided a new scope for social media affordances and a better understanding of parasocial relationships built on social networks which allow for reciprocity.

These improved and developed relationships add a new layer of loyalty that might have been difficult to create in the past. With the help of social media, public figures can make their fans feel appreciated and provide a stronger feeling of connection. By creating stronger ties, viewers will be more likely to base decisions on the performer's recommendations and have a stronger inclination to support writers in this instance.

Practical Implications

Implications from this study can also be applied to publishers. Now, more than ever, it's easier for publishers to find their next big thing. With the help of social media and more specifically Booktok, they don't need to take a risk on unknown writers, but aim to poach writers that seem to be building these parasocial relationships and whose book is growing more popular within the community. As a result, the role of an agent as an intermediary may slowly become obsolete since publishers can directly search for themselves.

Authors now have a cheap and relatively easy marketing tool that didn't exist in the past, providing them with many opportunities that make their dreams of being a writer far more accessible.

Based on my findings, if an individual's goal is to grow as an influencer and continue to create content for the Booktok community they should find ways to use artistic extension, associations, and enactment as an affordance to entertain their followers. To add, the best way for creators to grow is by solidifying parasocial relationships. Based on my findings, creators would be advised to use engagement and support as well as reenactment affordances. By doing so, they are communicating with their followers, showing that they care, but they are also gaining a reader's interest with content that can be relatable. Creators that are searching to turn their hobbies into monetization should focus on promotional affordances, which will allow them to create professional relationships.

Moreover, it's important to note that even creators who are outside of the Booktok circle can take advantage of these affordances to grow their page by appealing to the book community. As shown in the findings, many influencers who exist outside the subculture of Booktok have gained popularity thanks to videos that were brought to readers' attention.

Following this, even supporters who simply play the role of viewers or commenters on Tiktok should take this research into consideration. These findings also imply that supporters who engage and support only via comments should continue to do so. Their support plays a huge role in encouraging self-published writers to take the leap and it is their support that continues to make the market grow.

Finally, writers are one of the main actors that should take the implications of this study to heart. These new affordances that Tiktok has brought to life with the Booktok community will allow writers to strive in their careers if they take the required steps. Based on these findings, writers should create a form of entertainment by using promotional affordances. This will help keep readers interested and willing to follow their journey as a writer. Enhancing parasocial relationships is also an important step. By using promotional tactics and engagement and

support, writers can create attachments to their persona and make readers willing to support them no matter the situation. To end, the creation of professional relationships will allow them to gain possibilities that might have been impossible for self-published writers. The use of educational affordances, such as the Tiktok search engine, can provide writers with information that allows them to move forward with their self-publishing journey. The networking system at their disposal can be a matter of failing a book launch or succeeding. By supporting other writers and using the engagement and support affordance, they can also create a support system and gain attraction through other writers' popularity.

Additional findings: negative implications

While findings showed that Booktok has mainly played a positive effect on writers and the reading community, it doesn't go without its own personal downsides. One of these is the existence of toxic fandoms. There can be a lack of respect within these fandoms, often leading to bullying or harassment (Moore, 2023) If opinions aren't shared, it can create tension, hostile and aggressive behavior as well as cyberbullying. This mainly arises between readers and some creators who share intense and passionate opinions on certain books or book characters. Findings exhibited that some readers may take a step back from Booktok or even avoid engaging within the community for fear of being cyberattacked.

Another negative side to Booktok is the cancel culture. In recent years, social media has played a large role in cancel culture, which is known as "the phenomenon of promoting the "canceling" of people, brands and even shows and movies due to what some consider to be offensive or problematic remarks or ideologies " (Kato, 2021). Some readers and creators might be out for blood when it comes to certain authors. They aim to point out the problematic sides, setting off a chain of haters. This can also apply to canceling a creator for supporting problematic writers or other problematic creators. While creators and writers may rejoice in the viral views they get on Tiktok, in some cases, they also have to deal with the haters. One single video has the power to destroy a writer's image. For example, when Alex Aster's book was released to advanced readers, there was an influx of hate towards her anticipated book, Lightlark.

Additionally, authors have claimed a new celebrity status through the power of Booktok. This comes with its own set of responsibilities. Especially within a generation that appreciates diversity and is supportive of various causes. Authors must take feedback into consideration and be careful to not be harmful to minorities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

The first limitation of my research is in regard to my sampling size and the representativeness of writers. As mentioned in the methods section, I did adhere to convenience sampling. While there are multiple writers from any genre, race, and gender, my sampling was primarily determined based on my personal knowledge of Booktok and its writers. Additionally, it depended heavily on the accounts that my personalized for you page showed me. Despite not wanting to limit my research to “smaller” writers, such as those who are still growing and beginning their journey, many bigger writers either didn’t respond to my requests or claimed to be under tight deadlines. Furthermore, it was difficult to contact bigger traditionally published writers that also experienced a surge in sales as they don’t provide public contact information and, in most cases, their agents and publicists don’t reply. Given the minimal timeframe I had to conduct my research, I didn’t always have the possibility to wait for said writers. Moreover, with additional time, I could have interviewed a larger pool of writers. By increasing the sample size and representation, I could have more valuable insights on the effects Booktok has had on writers.

All my interviews were based on romance and fantasy writers. Given the fact that my observations also focused on videos related to the genre and niche, it’s difficult to say if this success also applies to other genres and if Booktok can be a means to success for other writers as well. It is also possible that readers within this genre are more engaged to post online

Furthermore, the geographical scope of the study can also be considered a limitation. Because observations were done on a social media platform, it wasn’t always obvious where the user’s location was originally from. As a result, it is difficult to say if Booktok is more successful in one country versus another.

Finally, while the fact that I had a considerable set of knowledge in regard to Booktok before the start of my research aided me greatly, it is possible that my personal experiences on Tiktok and my position as a creator, as a viewer, and even as a writer could have led to some disadvantages. For example, my positionality might have affected the way I went about finding information. My closeness to the situation might have shifted my focus on data that confirmed my own experiences.

Future Research

Given the broadness that is the topic of Booktok and its newness, there is a lot of room for further research. One of the points discussed in this paper was the creation of new jobs. During the interviews, many participants raised a point that Booktok is allowing for the possibility of new jobs. Many individuals are able to turn their hobbies and passions into part-time jobs and in some lucky cases, full-time jobs. This can be in regard to artists who start their own merchandise business, editors, videographers, voice actors, etc.

Moreover, given the fact that my study was primarily focused on Tiktok, future research can look into studying whether or not the found affordances can be applied to other social media platforms and if the success of Booktok can be streamlined.

Another topic that was commonly discussed during my interviews is the way writers are shifting towards self-publishing. Therefore, future research can dive into the ways that traditional publishing is reacting to these changes. For example, some industry standards seem to be changing too, such as cover designs (Chrysostomou, 2022).

Furthermore, future research can elaborate on the different types of parasocial relationships. In this study, I only discussed PSR between the viewer and the performer. However, there can be different extensions, such as PSR between book characters that are cosplayed or brought to life through videos and the viewers.

The rise of book sales has also led to a new era of book to movie adaptations. As mentioned in my findings, many music lovers create original sounds or songs for certain books. Future research can view the effects of book popularity on the movie and music industry.

In short, this study paves the way for many possibilities of future research.

CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the effects of Booktok on the publishing industry. It investigated how parasocial relationships and new social media affordances on Tiktok are allowing writers to gain a bigger audience and how it's promoting the appeal towards self-publishing. To help this study two theories were discussed: parasocial relationships on social media and affordances. My findings showed that Booktok has allowed for three types of effects with the use of new affordances: entertainment, parasocial relationships, and professional relationships. In particular, I found that videos on Booktok have spread to different communities, claiming and turning many individuals into readers and convincing readers to pick up certain books based on these promotional and entertaining videos. Furthermore, the study showed that writers feel more inclined to self-publish than in the past. Findings confirmed that Tiktok has provided them not only with more confidence and support, but it has also provided them with tools that wouldn't have been as accessible in the past.

The research provides several important contributions on the literature of social media affordances and parasocial relationships. Moreover, it also offers implications for practitioners. This research can give a better insight to traditional publishing houses to help improve their methods. It can also help self-published writers in their quest for writing. Finally, it also provides an insight into the negative sides of the community.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Dear (author name),

My name is Sara Shafiei and I am a student at John Molson School of business. As part of my thesis for the Msc Marketing program, I am conducting research on the effects of Booktok on the publishing industry. To help, I am looking to interview (writers/employees in the publishing industry/content creators) who use Tiktok and are familiar with Booktok. After looking at your profile, I believe you would be a great fit and I would love to have the chance to schedule an interview. If this interests you, please let me know and I can provide you with further information.

Thank you!

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself.
 - a. Name, age, relationship status, occupation
2. What are some books you read recently that you enjoyed?
 - a. How did you find out about them?
3. What made you decide to become a writer?
4. What genre do you prefer writing in?
 - a. Do you plan on expanding in different genres or sticking to one?
5. *These questions will depend on whether or not they have published:*
What stage are you in your writing process? Have you published any books? Are you currently in the process of publishing a book? Have you published already and are working on publishing more?
 - a. Which books have you published?
 - b. Are there any that you wrote and never published? Why?
 - c. What made you decide to self-publish VS working with a publishing house?
6. What is your relationship like with the publishing industry?
 - i. Who are your contacts and friends?
 - ii. Who do you work with?
7. Tell me about your writing journey.
 - a. How did it begin?
 - b. What steps did you take?
 - c. Did you have a process?
 - d. What decisions did you have to make?
8. What pushed you to download Tiktok?
 - a. How do you use it?
 - i. Do you create content? If so, what type of content? What inspires you when making content?
 - b. What do you use it for? What is your goal on Tiktok?
 - c. What sort of content do you interact with and appear on your fyp?
9. In what way, do you believe Tiktok has inspired or helped you in your writing journey?
 - a. Are there any negative ways it could have affected you?
10. What audience are you trying to reach with your book and/or content?
 - a. Who is your current audience?
 - b. How do you interact with your readers/followers/audience?
 - c. Do they provide you with feedback or important input? Do you take it into consideration? Do you feel it has altered the way you write?

11. What are your creative goals on/with Tiktok?
- Where do you want to be in five years? This can relate to content or your writing journey.
12. *This question will depend on when they started to write/publish.*
- If you published books before the rise of Booktok: How has Tiktok changed the way you market yourself and your books? Do you find it easier or more challenging?
- If Tiktok had existed before, would you have made the same decisions as you did? What would you do differently at the start of your career?
- If they published/started writing after Tiktok:
- Has Tiktok changed your way of thinking or decisions when it comes to publishing? If so, what changes?
13. How do you feel creators help you in your writing process as well as publishing process?
14. How do you think Tiktok has affected your journey? Why?

APPENDIX C

BARNES & NOBLE WEBSITE LEADING TO BOOKTOK SECTION

The screenshot shows the Barnes & Noble website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Barnes & Noble logo, a search bar, and a shopping cart icon. Below the navigation bar, there's a horizontal menu with categories: Books, Fiction, Nonfiction, eBooks, Audiobooks, Teens & YA, Kids, Toys & Games, Stationery & Gifts, and Music & Movies. The main content area is divided into several sections: Books >, BESTSELLERS (B&N Top 100, NY Times Bestsellers, 30% Off Bestsellers, All Bestsellers), CUSTOMER FAVORITES (New Releases, Coming Soon, Signed Books), WE RECOMMEND (B&N Monthly Picks, B&N Book Club, B&N Bookseller Picks, B&N Discover Picks, B&N Book of the Year, B&N Discover Prize), TOP SUBJECTS (Bibles & Christian Living, Biography, Cookbooks, Food & Wine, General Fiction, Historical Fiction, History, Horror, Manga, Mystery & Crime, Religion, Romance, Sci-Fi & Fantasy, Self-Help & Relationships, See All Subjects >), BROWSE (Father's Day Gifts, Gifts for Grads, Summer Reading for All Ages, B&N Exclusives, Best Books of the Year, Black Voices, Buy 1, Get 1 50% Off, Book Awards, Book Club Picks, BookTok, Boxed Sets, Banned Books, Books in Foreign Languages, Large Print Books, Mental Health Awareness, Things to Do at Home, Up to 30% Off Pre-Orders), DEPARTMENTS (Audiobooks Store, Audiobooks Subscriptions, Paperback Store, Libros en español, Book Annex, eBooks & NOOK, Indie Books, Books on CD, Newsstand, Textbooks, Gift Cards, Reading Accessories, B&N Apps, B&N Press Blog, B&N Reads - Our Books Blog, Poured Over - Our Podcast), and a Premium Members section on the right offering 10% off and rewards. At the bottom, there's a BookTok section with the text 'Discover the most popular TikTok books' and a carousel of book covers.

BARNES & NOBLE All Search by Title, Author, Keyword or ISBN

Books | Fiction | Nonfiction | eBooks | Audiobooks | Teens & YA | Kids | Toys & Games | Stationery & Gifts | Music & Movies

Books >

BESTSELLERS

- B&N Top 100
- NY Times Bestsellers
- 30% Off Bestsellers
- All Bestsellers

CUSTOMER FAVORITES

- New Releases
- Coming Soon
- Signed Books

WE RECOMMEND

- [B&N Monthly Picks](#)
- B&N Book Club
- B&N Bookseller Picks
- B&N Discover Picks
- B&N Book of the Year
- B&N Discover Prize

TOP SUBJECTS

- Bibles & Christian Living
- Biography
- Cookbooks, Food & Wine
- General Fiction
- Historical Fiction
- History
- Horror
- Manga
- Mystery & Crime
- Religion
- Romance
- Sci-Fi & Fantasy
- Self-Help & Relationships
- [See All Subjects >](#)

BROWSE

- Father's Day Gifts
- Gifts for Grads
- Summer Reading for All Ages
- B&N Exclusives
- Best Books of the Year
- Black Voices
- Buy 1, Get 1 50% Off
- Book Awards
- Book Club Picks
- BookTok
- Boxed Sets
- Banned Books
- Books in Foreign Languages
- Large Print Books
- Mental Health Awareness
- Things to Do at Home
- Up to 30% Off Pre-Orders

DEPARTMENTS

- Audiobooks Store
- Audiobooks Subscriptions
- Paperback Store
- Libros en español
- Book Annex
- eBooks & NOOK
- Indie Books
- Books on CD
- Newsstand
- Textbooks
- Gift Cards
- Reading Accessories
- B&N Apps
- B&N Press Blog
- B&N Reads - Our Books Blog
- Poured Over - Our Podcast

Premium Members
Get 10% Off and Earn Rewards
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Literature
Mystery & Crime
Paranormal & Fantasy

BookTok
Discover the most popular TikTok books

BookTok

Discover the most popular TikTok books

Teens & YA

[See All](#)

The screenshot shows a carousel of book covers from the BookTok section. The books are: 'If He Had Been with Me' by Laura Nowlin (5 stars), 'The Way I Used to Be' by Amber Smith (5 stars), 'Better Than the Movies' by Lynn Painter (5 stars), 'The Inheritance Games' by Jennifer Lynn Barnes (5 stars), and 'Caraval' by Stephanie Garber (5 stars). Each book cover is displayed with its title, author, and a star rating. Navigation arrows are visible on the left and right sides of the carousel.

If He Had Been with Me
by Laura Nowlin
★★★★★

The Way I Used to Be
by Amber Smith
★★★★★

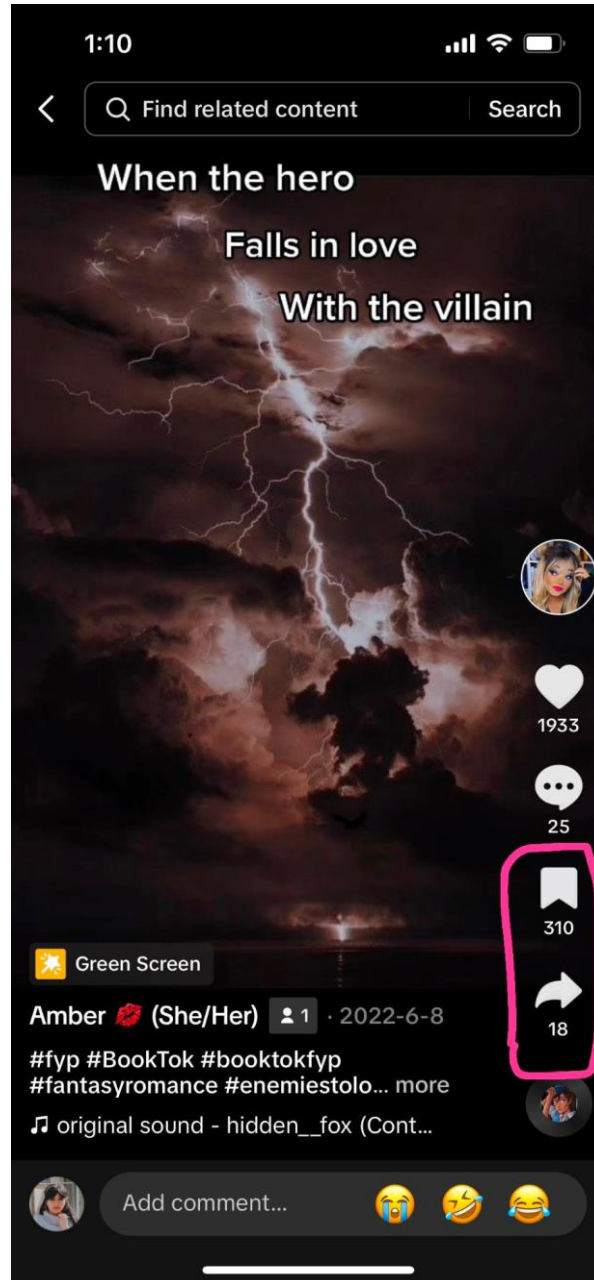
Better Than the Movies
by Lynn Painter
★★★★★

The Inheritance Games
(Inheritance Games Series #1)
by Jennifer Lynn Barnes
★★★★★

Caraval (Caraval Series #1)
by Stephanie Garber
★★★★★

APPENDIX D

SAVES AND SHARES SHOWN ON TIKTOK VIDEO



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