

BookTok: The Savior of Literature, or a Facade

Growing up as a bookworm, it's easy to remember the huge fandoms surrounding various book series, such as *Percy Jackson* (2005-2009), *The Hunger Games* (2008-present), or *Divergent* (2011-2014).

Preteens and young adults banded together in communities to immerse themselves in the world they loved so much. A massive book club where many groups could come together and discuss characters and the stories they loved. A blooming connection between peers found through school due to these notorious fandoms.

Scaling up the book club seems like a great idea, a place to make connections, get ideas, and discover more. TikTok created just the platform for that, a sub-genre titled BookTok, where creators and watchers could join together in support of the latest reviews, favorite novels, and support for the next generation of writers.

This new TikTok community, however, quickly soured as the overconsumption and need for relevancy poisoned the residents, pushing for a literature world that is now unsustainable, low quality, and problematic.

The Virality Of Reading

BookTok, a subsection on the popular app TikTok, has become a large community full of conversations about new authors, popular books, and general literature discourse. Within these influential internet walls sit the saviors of modern-day literature or perhaps the impending downfall. Large creators and the immersive reading community on TikTok have brought new life into the world of books, encouraging reading and discussion as well as helping physical bookstores stay in business. Recently, as Amazon announced a cross-platform book sale, many books were being sold at 80% off; booktokers with large platforms came together to announce the boycott of the event and encouraged the rest of the community to venture offline and into their local bookstores instead.

There's no doubt about the success and deeds TikTok has led to due to the virality of reading, with many debut authors gaining instant success from TikTok marketing; however, the fame of it doesn't come without its cost. As influencers began to grow their platform and sustain a life of reading for profit with the TikTok monetization program, the hauls and wrap-ups became more intensive and vast. With their job as a full-time reader, many of these creators started to read monthly book wrap-ups as large as 40 books—a number larger than the number of days. Creators such as [@Bethanys_books](#), who read 39 books in October last year, or [@Kurryreads](#), who was able to read 38 books last month in July. Although this is great for them, it sets unrealistic standards and diminishes the appreciation of the book itself, as some influencers may start to feel the pressure to rush through their book without thought or deep comprehension.

The standardization of reading an enormous amount has led to a mass production of books. Residents of the BookTok community have begun to buy a large number of books due to the influence and constant new hot topics being discussed across the platform. The virality of the books becomes the most critical part as these book content creators feel the need to keep up with the new topics and continue relevancy, rather than reading for the story itself.

This trend of buying large hauls of the most popular books has created an overproduction of books, with a few popular influencers claiming over six hundred unread books and counting. Many videos with the shared feeling of disappointment have been shared across the platform as people who only read a book a week feel like a failure in comparison. In reality, four books are an accomplishment, but with the new standards and praise to those who hit over ten, it's not seen as one.

How 'Spicy' Is It?

The encouragement of reading and book sales to first-time authors is a tremendous achievement in itself, but with the influencer side of most things, it's been taken too far to the point where consumerism and the profitability of literature are becoming the most critical aspect, more than the words on the page itself.

Smut, a term coined for books that contain a large percentage of sexually explicit scenes, has become one of the most popular and bought subgenres. With cartoonish character covers, hockey subplots, and fantastical worlds taking the spotlight, the question every book faces is the same: 'How spicy is it?'

The higher the 'spice' level, the more likely it is to sell, putting the priority of marketability at the forefront over the writing and, in some cases, the ethics of the story. Many controversies have blown up publicly over some of these questionable choices. Such as Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us* (2016) and the tough conversation around domestic violence, with the addition of spicy scenes. Penelope Douglas's book, *Credence* (2020) became one of the most infamous books across BookTok, starting as a praised, sought-after book, highlighted for its spice level. It became a marketed success, selling enough copies to be considered a best-selling author, with many residents of the BookTok community feeling influenced enough to read it. As the novel began to see more eyes, the absurdity of its content became apparent, with the plot revolving around a graphic sexual relationship of an eighteen-year-old girl and her step-uncle and two cousins. A shocking and disturbing story that still sold even more copies after the content was revealed, since the discourse over the obscenity of the novel kept users entertained.

The 'BookTok' Section

With the newly found hype for reading communities on TikTok, many bookstores, most notably Barnes and Noble, have started their own subsection for BookTok finds. In their browsers can find a plethora of various books from revamped classics, epic fantasy series, dark romances, and new debut authors. Promoting authors and highlighting the hard work that goes into the creation of their novel is aspirational at best. Due to the BookTok community, there has been a spike in interest in older literary fictions that have important messages and moving story lines that otherwise may not have been read by many in the new generation. Jacqueline Harpman's *I Who Have Never Known Men* (1995) was written in 1995, a devastating and impactful read that deserves all the attention TikTok has revamped into it. Many other astounding works have been given a new life in this modern age, with many debut novels being allowed their first life in the new spotlight.

At worst, the platform has allowed problematic voices to influence an unmonitored section. With the popularity and marketing of TikTok influencers, books that contain abusive and toxic mentalities in romantic relationships are being blindly sold to impressionable consumers. Discrete covers and a lack of trigger warnings hide what lies beneath, and the popularity of an entire community's mention of the novel sells it.

Colleen Hoover is the most notable author who was given a large platform and significant success due to BookTok. Many of her books are deemed 'spicy' with problematic situations and her lack of sensitivity for groups of individuals. Her novel, *November 9th* (2015), inappropriately romanticizes being a burn victim and promotes the relationship between the female victim and the man responsible. With that and countless consensually vague sexual scenes in many books, it could be argued that the mob mentality of TikTok, due to the many users attempting to keep trending, has allowed problematic voices to shine.

Fame First

Although Colleen Hoover gained much of her notoriety as a writer through BookTok, she was already an established author separate from the app. It was users on the platform that found her work and marketed it, spreading their love for her writing, causing her sales to skyrocket from the sales of her most endearing fans and her harshest critics—both equally published with their remarks. It's not just well-known novels and authors gaining traction across BookTok, as many debut authors have been given almost instant success with their first release.

Helping debut authors be able to market their book in a condensed area that will help them gain some success in their career is a fantastic accomplishment of the platform. However, there have been some new writers where the marketing and fame have become the most important part, and the quality of their debut novel has suffered. Some authors, unfortunately, were exposed for using AI to write, or other, more genuine young storytellers who publicly missed the mark. Audra Winter, the young author of the upcoming book, *The Age of Scorpius*, is living out the nightmare scenario of any writer.

She gained fame and notoriety through her TikTok videos, in which she showed her process for developing a fantasy series around the zodiac signs. With a massive following and overwhelming support, Winter published her first novel with thousands of preorders. However, the instant rating and overall conclusion were low, with disappointment from those who had been supporting her. With many spelling errors and poor writing choices, it became clear that her focus was on the art style and the future series rather than the details and editing.

A devastating downfall of a new author, but as notoriety through the public forum becomes the primary source of marketing, and with the growing number of book influencers, we may see a trend of fame becoming before the book.

An Unsatisfying End

Literature can be many things to a person: an escape, a message, or an understanding of oneself. It's an experience every reader would wish on someone else, and that's why BookTok became such an expansive part of the app. Many people put themselves out there to give to others what a writer had given them—reading is the gift that keeps on giving. However, as monetization rolls in and the view count becomes a necessity, relevancy becomes the most crucial factor. It's the problematic voices, extreme numbers in wrap-ups and hauls, and the next big event that generates the most revenue.

BookTok Caters to virality, meaning it'll be writers with the most offensive stories and the most unsustainable creators that will be given the biggest platform. With readers being fed to overconsumption numbers and the same problematic novels, the literature world is bound to continue its snowball down in quality and culture.