



# Social reading

How teenage readers engage with books  
and reading online

# Reading cultures on bookish social media

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The social dimensions of reading have a long history. For example, Jane Austen's novels, especially *Northanger Abbey* (1818), feature readers who use book talk to develop social relationships and engage in debate about taste and morality. This 'bookish self-fashioning' is both a performance of individual identity and an attempt to connect with other book lovers (Birke 2021). Popular modern social reading practices include book clubs (in person and online), events such as book launches, author talks and literary festivals, as well as the proliferation of bookish social media.

But what about contemporary teenage readers? How does their immersion in digital social media platforms affect their reading lives? Our research has been examining the online life of books and booklovers, particularly readers of young adult fiction. In this research digest, we provide a snapshot of the reading cultures on the bookish social media platforms BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok.

## Social media use by Australian teens

First, we need to think about where Australian teens hang out online. YouTube remains the most popular social media platform, with Instagram a close second. However, TikTok—the fastest growing social media platform to date—[is rapidly catching up](#).

There is not much data about the audience for the bookish subset of each platform, so it is difficult to know how many teen readers are on BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok. Our examination of the different cultures of reading on each platform aims to learn more about the types of reading practices popular in online spaces that have a larger user base of teens.

## BookTube

BookTube is the home of long-form conversational videos about books and reading. Videos feature a diary or confessional aesthetic with creators filming in their homes, often their bedroom, in front of their bookshelves. BookTube creators

present themselves as readers rather than critics or professionals, emphasising that their channel reflects their personal opinion and reading tastes. In doing so, they aim to satisfy their audience's expectation that they are relatable and authentic book lovers, in other words, someone they would like to discuss books with (Albrecht, 2017). For example, the most popular videos posted by Little Book Owl, the largest Australian book tube account, are ones that showcase her personal [reading practices](#) and [reading tastes](#).

## Bookstagram

Bookstagram is the place to go if you want to look at beautiful pictures of books and bookish objects. It features a carefully curated aesthetic that emphasises the materiality of books and the sensory experience of reading (Thomas 2021). This content celebrates the book as an aesthetic object and represents reading as an aspirational activity and reflects the iconography of luxury and wealth Alice Marwick identifies as a key feature of Instagram's visual lexicon (Marwick 2015). For example, posts by [@realmyfriendsarefiction](#) feature a rich colour palette and an abundance of books from her extensive fantasy fiction collection. The colour scheme used by [@hayaisreading](#) is more muted, and her beautifully styled interiors frame reading as part of a cosy lifestyle aesthetic.

## Booktok

BookTok is for readers who want to get swept up in the emotion of reading. BookTok videos are short, fast, and loud, often filmed and viewed on a smartphone, with the creator in close up focus. They feature a playful, unrehearsed aesthetic, an example of the 'everydayness' Crystal Abidin identifies as a key characteristic of internet celebrity (Abidin 2018). One of the most unexpected impacts of BookTok has been the generation of demand for 'backlist titles', books no longer being actively promoted by publishers. For example, the ['books that will make you sob'](#) video posted by @moongirlreads in August 2020 cause a spike in sales for titles including the 2011 novel *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller.

# References and further reading

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# Teen Reading in the Digital Era

**Discovering a Good Read:**  
Cultural Pathways to Reading for  
Australian Teens

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ARC Linkage LP 180100258

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