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DIGITAL COMMUNITIES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSUMER CULTURE: THE BOOKTOK PHENOMENON

This paper examines the role of digital communities in the transformation of consumer culture using BookTok as a case study. It focuses on user-generated content, emotional reactions, social proof, recommendation systems, and their influence on consumer behavior and marketing communication.

Keywords: digital communities, consumer culture, BookTok, social media, consumer behavior, user-generated content, social proof, digital marketing

Social media have significantly changed the way people communicate and interact online. They have also contributed to the development of numerous communities built around shared interests. One of the most well-known examples is BookTok, a digital community focused on books, reading, and reader experiences [1].

Such communities influence how users interact with content, perceive information, and make decisions, which makes them increasingly relevant for marketers. On platforms such as TikTok, they can grow into large digital networks supported not only by direct interaction but also by recommendation systems. These systems influence which content becomes visible and how quickly particular trends spread [1, 2].

BookTok demonstrates this process in practice. Its content includes recommendations, reviews, emotional reactions, reading challenges, and aesthetic videos. Much of it is created by readers rather than publishers or brands, making users active participants in the creation and distribution of information [1].

One reason why such content can be influential is its personal and authentic character. BookTok users often focus less on describing a book and more on sharing their own reactions to it. This may encourage others to seek the same emotional experience [1]. A good example is Hanya Yanagihara's A Little Life. On TikTok, videos of readers crying, sharing their feelings, and describing the novel's emotional impact became part of its online image, turning personal reactions into a form of promotion.

When similar reactions are repeated across many posts, social proof becomes another important factor. Seeing the same title in videos, comments, and recommendations creates a sense of popularity and can increase consumer interest and influence purchase decisions [3].

Social media have also changed the consumer journey. Previously, readers often discovered books through bookstores, professional reviews, traditional media, or personal recommendations. Today, discovery and evaluation can take place within the same platform: a user may first see a book in a short video, later encounter it through other creators, read comments, and then decide whether to purchase it [4, 5]. Social media therefore become not only promotional channels but also spaces where consumer decisions are formed.

These changes also affect marketing communication. Traditional advertising is no longer the only source shaping consumer choices. Reviews, comments, recommendations, and trends created by users become part of a product's public image, giving online communities a greater role in how products are perceived [1, 2, 5].

For publishers, this creates new opportunities. Online popularity can renew interest in older books and extend their commercial life. Publishers can respond through creator collaborations, renewed promotion, special editions, or stronger visual presentation. In this way, digital trends can influence both marketing strategies and product positioning.

However, these processes may also have negative effects. Recommendation systems can repeatedly promote the same books, genres, and trends, increasing the visibility of already popular products and reducing variety [5]. Aesthetic content and

special editions may also encourage overconsumption by making books attractive because of visual appeal, online popularity, or participation in a trend.

Although BookTok focuses on books, similar patterns can be observed in digital communities related to fashion, beauty, gaming, music, and other interests. Therefore, their influence on consumer behavior can be considered part of a broader development in digital marketing.

In conclusion, BookTok illustrates how digital communities can affect the way consumers discover, evaluate, and engage with products. As the digital environment continues to evolve, understanding user-generated content, community interaction, and changing consumer behavior becomes increasingly important for marketers adapting their communication strategies.

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