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From the horse's mouth

BookTok as a collection development strategy in academic libraries

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) advancements have reimagined library book acquisitions, where platforms such as social media can be incorporated and embraced by libraries expanding their collections to meet the changing needs of their users. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine using a platform such as TikTok for both personal and professional purposes, especially for collection development. Despite this, the platform for short videos has been increasingly popular in various contexts. Several academic libraries have implemented this platform to improve their visibility and increase user interaction. I have witnessed innovative challenges librarians embarked on to reach larger audiences, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown period, which increased use and popularity of TikTok for leisure purposes and advocacy of virtual library services and resources and reading to keep users engaged.

Even though there is still reluctance from some university libraries, primarily owing to concerns about users' privacy, the benefits that may be gained from using this platform should not be overlooked. My motivation for using this to identify possible titles to add to my library collection comes from TikTok users who have since transitioned into content creators who share reviews and make reading fashionable. As a librarian serving a community consisting of many Generation Z users, it is imperative to embed myself on platforms they are most active in to be on par and stay abreast of new trends.

BookTok sub-community

BookTok is a TikTok sub-community for readers and book lovers. With BookTok, users may share their favorite books, recommend titles, authors, and genres, and make literary inside jokes. Various TikTok users have taken advantage of this platform to share their love for reading and share their recommendations. The #BookTok has taken reading to another level, as individuals from all walks of life gather and share their book reviews. The pandemic has revitalized consumer ebook sales. However, as the BookTok sub-community has grown in popularity, print book sales have increased, particularly for fiction titles.

It has been an awakening for publishers: a sector that relies on people getting lost in the printed word is now reaping the benefits of a digital app designed for short attention spans. Since then, publishers have begun approaching individuals with large followings and offering free books or payment in exchange for publicity of their books.

I came across a display by one of the popular booksellers in South Africa (Exclusive Books),

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which has taken advantage of this platform to enhance their book sales with the hashtag “#BookTok Made Me Read It” trend of displaying popular BookTok titles in their stores and website. In the same way publishers are utilizing BookTok, libraries should be innovative leaders in collection development and management. As I browse through BookTok challenges, popular titles seem to be trending that have motivated TikTokers to get their own copies. Some of the titles include the following:

The Spanish Love Deception by Elena Armas

It Ends with Us by Colleen Hoover

One of Us Is Lying by Karen M. McManus

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid

As I’m also responsible for collection development, I have taken advantage of this platform to build a collection appealing to the TikTok generation of library users to entice and nurture their leisure reading behaviors.

I believe that this sub-community can be regarded as a benchmarking tool for libraries to enhance their collection development strategies. In addition to getting book recommendations for collection development purposes, libraries can also market their collection on the platform with the assistance of their BookTok-active users.

Patron Driven Acquisition

For over a decade, librarians have relied on patron- or demand-driven acquisition (PDA or DDA). Instead of relying on librarians to make book selections, the library turns to its users for advice on what materials should be purchased.

Libraries are now being engaged by users who need trending books recommended on BookTok. The platform enhances circulation in libraries as students seek out hot titles, and as a book club coordinator at my library, I’ve had my fair share of requests from students asking for titles shared and reviewed on BookTok. The excitement students get as soon as they realize that their popular BookTok titles are available in the library makes me realize how important our role is as librarians in embedding ourselves and meeting the changing needs of our users. Students are eager to approach our library staff to recommend titles identified on BookTok, which raises their confidence in engaging with their librarians in providing resources relevant to their needs. In addition, we also get an opportunity to reach our service standards in alignment with the institutional collection development policy and total quality management endeavors.

There is no doubt that this platform is changing the narrative and repurposing the use of social media platforms for enhanced library collection development.

Reading advisory programs and book clubs are also positively impacted as members demand that libraries purchase trending titles to add to the collection.

Conclusion

TikTok seems to be a changemaker in libraries, reinventing and repurposing traditional processes and procedures. It has also changed people's perceptions of these institutions. Librarians must understand industry trends and adapt to entice their users through various technological means.

Academic libraries can cultivate and nurture reading behaviors by acquiring needed materials because the new generation of library users is active on TikTok and engaging in various aspects, including reading activities. BookTok not only benefits libraries in terms of book acquisitions but also in terms of marketing and visibility of their holdings. ♪