"Tá, tá movimentando": The Publishing Industry and TikTok in Brazil

"Tá, tá movimentando": a indústria editorial e o TikTok no Brasil

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Resumo: *A partir da comunidade literária booktok, esta pesquisa busca compreender como a apropriação da plataforma TikTok impacta a indústria editorial no Brasil. O objetivo é atentar como booktokers atualizam o conceito de leitura compartilhada na era digital repercutindo no consumo literário e em novas práticas de popularização da leitura. Metodologicamente, o estudo é exploratório de viés qualitativo, com inspiração na netnografia. Foram monitoradas as hashtags #fofocaliterária e #booktokbr, no período de dezembro de 2021 a julho de 2022, com a coleta de vídeos classificados pela plataforma como de maior relevância. Os resultados apontam para a diversidade de conteúdos e o papel de influência dos booktokers como agentes importantes para o mercado editorial.*

Palavras-chave: *Booktoker; booktok; Tiktok; Leitura Compartilhada; mercado editorial.*

Abstract: *This research intent to unterstand how booktok community, through the TikTok plataform apropriations made by the users, impacts Brazil's publishing industry. Our purpose is to attempt at how the booktoker readers update the concept of shared reading in the digital age, the impacting on literary consumption and on new practices of popularization of reading. Methodologically, was made an exploratory study with a qualitative bias, inspired by netnography. The*

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A R T I G O

hashtags #fofocaliterária and #booktokbr were monitored from December 2021 to July 2022, with the collection of videos classified by the platform as most relevant. The results point to the diversity of contents and the influential role of booktokers as important agents for the publishing market.

Keywords: *Desinformation; Booktoker, booktok; TikTok; shared reading; publishing industry.*

"Tá, tá movimentando" (meaning something like "Yeah, it's shaking") is part of a chorus that went viral on TikTok, accompanied by a choreography. However, in this text, we will not delve into music and dance but how TikTok is shaking the publishing industry in Brazil, ranging from commercial publishers to independent publications. We see TikTok as a platform currently playing a significant role in promoting titles and authors through content created by so-called *booktokers*.

The platform of short and viral videos (ABIDIN, 2021) is fostering the publishing market by building a community of recommendations and discussions about books called *booktok* (MERGA, 2021; GUIÑEZ-CABRERA; MANSILLA-OBANDO, 2022) like what happens on YouTube with the *booktube* (JEFFMAN, 2015) and on Instagram with the *bookstagram* or bookgram (VIEIRA; CIRINO, 2021). The dynamism of TikTok lies in the circulation of creative trends and the use of hashtags connecting videos from different producers on the same topic. In the case of literary content, the relationship is positive for Brazilian publishers, given the sales increase for books with lots of views on the platform. Some bookshops even have created spaces to display books trending on *booktok*.

Algorithmic logic that seeks to keep users increasingly connected and engaged governs the circulation of content on TikTok (SMITH, 2021). Unlike the usability of platforms like Instagram and Facebook, TikTok has a high delivery rate, a dynamic highlighted by Abidin (2021) when investigating the navigation processes that favor the reach and can, therefore, make the content go viral. Given this, we ask: How did TikTok become a space that encourages reader interaction and, consequently, the promotion of books?

People's interaction with digital media creates links and new niches for producing social and cultural meaning (WINOCUR, 2009) and provides readers with a collective and deterritorialized act (CANCLINI, 2015), updating the dynamics of socialization of reading (CHARTIER, 1998). Thus, this work aims to explore how Brazilian *booktokers* update

the concept of shared reading in the digital age, reflecting on literary consumption and new practices for popularizing reading.

Methodologically, the study is exploratory with a qualitative bias inspired by netnography (KOZINETS, 2014). We monitored the popular *booktok* hashtags *#fofocaliterária* (*#literarygossip* in English) and *#booktokbr* from December 2021 to July 2022, collecting videos classified by the platform as most relevant. Furthermore, we recorded our observations about the workings of TikTok in a field journal.

As initial results, we highlight the participation and creation of literary trends, production of reviews, recommendations of LGBTQI+ books, and high circulation of books with erotic (hot) themes, especially those published by Kindle Unlimited platforms and by independent authors. These indicators help us reflect on the relationships that readers are building as a way of experiencing, promoting, and consuming literature.

Reading market

The publishing industry encompasses a constellation of actors. Following Bourdieu's (2008) distinctions within the field of production of cultural goods, these actors are not only companies that publish and sell books but also authors, writers, translators, proofreaders, and illustrators, among other professionals, who work closer either to the commercial side or the cultural side. In publishing practices, distinctions within the field correspond to the conception of different business models, the first being that of traditional publishers, generally medium or large, and the second being that of small publishers and independent publishers. Thompson (2013) and Lalli and Schöndube (2012) indicate that the denial of profit due to the cultural and creative quality of works is a fundamental point of differentiation reinforced by small publishers. However, the apparent opposition between commerce and culture is present in the editorial product, as "the book, an object of two faces (economic and symbolic), is both merchandise and meaning." (BOURDIEU, 2018, p. 222).

When we understand that books are objects of consumption and, thus, cultural goods, we place the publishing field as part of the creative

economy, in which symbolic value is essential to generating economic value (FIGUEIREDO, 2014). We agree with Canclini (2012) on the need to observe the links between the economy, social development, and cultural innovations, given the conditions of production, circulation, and access offered by recent technologies. From this perspective, we will seek to articulate how reading and, by extension, book sales have been encouraged on the TikTok platform despite the crisis scenario that has plagued the publishing field in Brazil for years.

The fifth edition of the *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* survey, released by Instituto Pró-Livro, revealed the loss of more than 4.6 million readers in the Brazilian market, dropping from 56% to 52% from 2015 to 2019. The survey focuses on readers who have read an entire book or parts in the last three months. Considering works read voluntarily by interviewees, the average number of books read is 1.61 and drops to 0.81 if counting only works of literature. The general reading rate, including didactic works, is 2.60 books read. Children and adolescents are among the biggest consumers of literature in Brazil. However, this number decreases as children get older and relative to the literary works recommended by the school (INSTITUTO PRÓ-LIVRO, 2020).

The data indicate that "mandatory" reading in the school environment appears to be an obstacle to maintaining the habit of reading. Silva and Sanfelici (2015) report that some young people use spaces outside of school to read that are in line with their literary tastes. "Apparently, and quite simply, we can say that this occurs given the mismatch between the interests of the school and those of adolescents" (SILVA; SANFELICI, 2015, p. 193). Correa (2010) reinforces that reading "for pleasure" needs to be encouraged in the school environment and that there is an important role of the school in training new readers, as "reading does not yet have a secure place in this society" (CORREA, 2010, p. 284).

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Brazilian publishing market shows the complexity of analyzing reading in the country. The *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil*, released monthly by the Brazilian National Union of Book Editors (SNEL), showed the book sector increased in the first months of the pandemic, remaining active in 2021 and slowing down in 2022. Although the beginning of the period of social isolation hurt physical bookstores, e-commerce, digital bookstores, and stores that started selling online helped increase sales during the pandemic (CRUZ, 2020).

Besides commerce, the relevance of the internet lies in bringing book consumers together with an emphasis on the relationship between readers and content producers. In 2019, 3% of respondents in the *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* survey chose a book to read based on recommendations from *booktubers*, *bookgramers*, and *booktokers*. This index rises to 28% in 2022 in the version of the survey carried out during the 26th São Paulo International Book Biennial. Although the scope of the two surveys is relatively different, it is notable that 52% of respondents point to digital influencers as motivators for interest in books. Therefore, considering the niche of readers in an event that promotes reading, the role of the internet is undeniable. Although the scope of the two surveys is relatively different, it is notable that 52% of respondents point to digital influencers as motivators for interest in books. Therefore, considering the niche of readers in an event that promotes reading, the role of the internet is undeniable (INSTITUTO PRÓ-LIVRO, 2020, 2022).

According to a report published by the newspaper O Globo, the 26th São Paulo International Book Biennial revealed the impact of TikTok among readers with sectors dedicated to books that were successful on the platform (GABRIEL, 2022). Publish News, a portal dedicated to the publishing market, presses such as Seguinte, an imprint of Companhia das Letras, declared that the best-selling books at the event resulted from TikTok recommendations (FACCHINI, 2022). It is clear, therefore, that platforms are significant for encouraging reading as a potential space to promote debates and provide exchanges not found in school environments, as discussed by Sanfelici and Silva (2015, p. 194):

> In other words, if several friends read the same work out of free interest, they can create the opportunity, in their space outside of school, to discuss their identification with the character or plot, their feelings about reading and the issues addressed, and other subjects habitually silenced in the classroom.

As Canclini points out in an interview, "There is always society in reading. That is much more evident when we see that there are social situations, such as the book fair, in which we gather around reading, reading groups, YouTubers, book critics, the multiple media and intermediations that exist between texts and readers" (MAZER, 2017, p. 7). From the data presented so far, it is possible to perceive the complexity of processes and contexts that constitute the publishing industry in Brazil, which the sociability surrounding the act of reading permeates.

Michele Petit (2009) elucidates the importance of reading and sharing to produce a sense of belonging for the reader. This exchange is a way of connecting with others because "Reading does not isolate oneself from the world. Reading introduces a world differently" (PETIT, 2009, p. 45). Reading makes it possible to open up to others, not only through the forms of sociability and conversations that take place around books, because, according to Chartier (2011, p. 20), "each reader, based on their references, individual or social, historical or existential, gives

a more or less singular, more or less shared meaning to the texts it appropriates."

In this way, the reading experience is not limited to just an individual and silent relationship (CHARTIER, 1998). Just as acts of consumption reveal sociocultural processes (CANCLINI, 2008), it is possible to think of shared reading as a fundamental part of the relationship dynamics between the reader and the reading experience. Therefore, we should "not just ask readers what they read and how much time but observe their exchanges" (CANCLINI, 2015, p. 12).

According to Canclini (2014), readers comment and interact through blog posts or social media. These actions give clues not only on how to publish but also on how to display and choose titles, demonstrating readers do not read alone but as part of reading communities. The act of sharing, a characteristic of platforms, makes the reader also share what they read. When interviewing Latin American *booktokers*, Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando (2022) highlight that the motivations for producing literary content connect to the passion for books, the possibility of sharing the same tastes, and creating bonds. Therefore, platforms become a place for meetings, dissemination, interaction, and identification among readers, who find collective ways to approach and popularize reading on TikTok.

By appropriating digital spaces to talk about books, readers act as mediators, creating engaged communities that interact, replicate, and remix circulating content through hashtags, audio recordings, and collaborations. More than making readers part of the digital environment, the sociability found on platforms like TikTok turns them into people who act critically in promoting reading through videos, reviews, and trends.

Methodological indications

The popularization of TikTok began with videos of users dubbing songs and audio, becoming a sensation in the music industry with viral dance posts. However, the variety of content on the platform is

increasing constantly, building large and different niches, ranging from mysticism and Tarot readings to a variety of ASMRs[3] and videos of home organization and cleaning.

According to Smith (2021) and Abidin (2021), TikTok presents a random set of videos without a specific order in the first access and then "learns" what the user likes, making the content more personalized over time. According to Walker (2022), this algorithmic operation is known as a "content graph," meaning it is structured based on what the user watches and not on the popularity of accounts or number of followers, making it possible for any video to reach a considerable range.

The application's main navigation method is a tag system that compiles the content, making it findable through the search tool. For this reason, most videos published on the platform use tagging, subtitles, and trending features to accumulate engagement and appear on For You, TikTok's home screen, where users have contact with the content most relevant to them in that social media. This section is not the same for all users: "Although different people may find some of the same featured videos, each person's feed is unique and tailored to that specific user" (WALKER, 2022, p. 92).

In addition to using the traditional format of tagging using the hash or tic-tac-toe symbol (#) together with a keyword, as was popularized by Twitter and Instagram in their navigation systems, TikTok also uses resources such as audio and a stitch tool as navigation tags to organize content with similar themes. According to Abidin (2020), audio clips would fall into a category called templatability, a resource to engage in the popularization and virality of memes. Users can find these audio clips in the platform's original library or add, edit, and mix them. Abidin considers audio clips one of the app's most innovative features. Audio clips are also essential tools for the narrative construction of a video or for consolidating a viral trend and can come with "transitions," which are video editing effects. Another factor that sets TikTok apart from other

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3   Autonomous sensory meridian response refers to sounds that provoke a feeling of relaxation.

apps and audiovisual social media is the practicality with which users can create and edit content.

To develop this exploratory work, we used netnography, following the precepts of Kozinets (2014). The choice of netnography proved to be efficient as a methodology for exploring and analyzing the functioning of TikTok from the user's navigation perspective, as it allowed us to understand the dynamics of discovery, circulation, and virality (ABIDIN, 2021) of literary content in an algorithm that seeks to maintain the user increasingly connected and engaged (SMITH, 2021).

We organized the investigation in three main phases: 1) observing content circulating on TikTok on literature topics and understanding how the platform works, 2) data collection, and 3) interpretation based on ethnographic inspirations. We recorded our observations of the platform in a field journal. According to Martino (2018), a field journal serves as a document that, when consulted, allows you to find information that can be enriching for the development of the research.

From December 2021 to July 2022, we established observation periods and collection criteria. Subsequently, we organized the data for content analysis. We systematized the process as follows: 1) Creating profiles; 2) Beginning observations; 3) Collecting the first ten videos classified as "Most Relevant" and "Most Liked" on TikTok, manually using the platform's download feature on the last Friday of each month; 4) Break period; and 5) Return for observation and coding.

Developing the methodology for mapping TikTok, Merga (2021) used a profile created solely for observations so the preferences of an existing personal account would not influence data collection. We applied the same choice in this research. However, for comparative purposes, we decided to use a personal account, which had been active for longer, too. The monitoring of these two profiles did not start simultaneously. As one of the profiles was a new user account with automatic settings provided by the application, we monitored it slightly longer to observe the algorithm learning process. A short period of inactivity was enough for the platform to "unlearn" the user's preferences, returning to random

mode again, a fact also reported by Abidin (2021). It was, therefore, necessary to access the platform more frequently for the algorithm to record browsing preferences. That no longer occurred when we personalized the account with a username, photo, and name; that is, a similar configuration to the personal profile also used in the research.

We used TikTok's literature niche as a research focus to understand how the resources and navigability of the platform contribute to popularizing and strengthening sociability in literary communities. We, therefore, begin entering the field by searching for the keyword "book" in the app search bar. At first, there is no need to push the search button for suggestions to appear, as TikTok immediately recommends some tags in a suggestions tab. However, when pressing search, we are directed to a page compiling videos on the literary universe and suggesting profiles with the exact keyword or a variation in their usernames, bios, audio clips, etc. Besides this content, there is the presence of more popular hashtags. Due to the amount of content found and the extensive period stipulated for the observation and collection phase, we decided to use the most relevant and viewed section as a filter and limited ourselves to collecting the first ten videos in that category. From the perspective of a qualitative exploratory study, we outline below evidence and reflections on the ways of appropriating TikTok and, in particular, the *booktok* literary community.

Exploring booktok

As discussed previously, the notion of shared reading refers to conversations about books, the interaction among readers, and, consequently, the promotion of works with a positive impact on the publishing industry. We identified, a priori, the tag *#booktok* or the Brazilian versions *#booktokbr* or *#booktokbrasil* as the principal hashtags that signal literary content on TikTok. Soon after, the hashtags *#bookstan* and *#fofocaliterária* emerged with the highest number of views.

We note the growth in views of videos containing the *#booktok* tag from the beginning of the research until now. According to data

presented and captured on the platform in December 2021, the hashtag accumulated 30.8 billion views and reached 63.3 billion in July 2022. In December 2022, we recorded a volume of 96.1 billion views. These indices corroborate the relevance that TikTok has acquired in promoting works and encouraging reading, as we have already explained with data on the Brazilian market.

In floating reading, the circulation of content in the *booktok* community includes various videos and themes, which may or may not represent viral trends, humor, memes, remixing, and interaction strategies, such as requests to follow the profile, comment, or like the video. Recommendations for works, in general, can be seen in review format or specific trends such as *"five books that made me cry," "books you must read," "books to read in 24 hours,"* etc. We also find reading vlogs, Literary Marathon challenges, and tips on how preserving and handling books. The POVs[4] of characters and scenes from books often signal *booktokers'* dedication to producing scripts and improvising characterization with clothes and wigs without losing the homemade tone. There is also room to approach literary diversity with LGBTQIA+ books and works with Black representation among authors and protagonists of narratives.

The content focused on teaching digital reading tools, such as the Kindle, reinforces the expansion of the notion of books beyond the materiality of paper and serves as advertising for the Amazon e-reader. Likewise, promoting independent works on the Kindle Unlimited platform alludes to internal disputes in the publishing field. On the one hand, that demonstrates the strength of the Amazon conglomerate, which enables publishing without the need for a press, escaping the commercial side of the editorial logic (BOURDIEU, 2008, 2018). On the other hand, it serves as an incentive for self-publishing, asserting independent ideals: *booktokers* believe in the symbolic value of what they produce, contributing to greater literary plurality (LALLI;

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4   On TikTok, the acronym POV indicates actions or speeches that happen from the point of view of characters or readers, whether real or the result of the creativity of TikTokers inspired by the plots of narratives they read or their experiences as readers.

SCHÖNDUBE, 2012). Independent authors, in turn, see in TikTok and in linking to hashtags the possibility of advertising their work, becoming known, and participating in the publishing market. It is worth mentioning that most of the independent recommendations on *booktok* refer to erotic novels, the so-called "hot" books.

Merga (2021) describes the importance of understanding hashtags, especially given how the booktok community uses them. Despite much research into the social and political contexts involving hashtags, the terminologies TikTok's literary community uses in hashtags and its value relationships in building the community have been little explored. From this perspective, besides the notes made in general about *#booktok*, we focused on evaluating what circulates with the tag *#fofocaliterária*.

In December 2022, *#fofocaliterária* had around 214 million views and became a viral trend on TikTok between 2020 and 2021. The videos published with the hashtag have as their main structure presenting book plots as if they were gossip told to friends. The trend boosted the dissemination of literary titles, from new releases to books published some time ago and classics. Among the titles highlighted in gossip on the platform are young adult literature such as *Liars* (2014)[5] and *Blood Red, White and Blue* (2019), the recovery of classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *The Outsider* (1942). The video published by a literary profile presenting the work of Albert Camus has accumulated more than 800 thousand views, causing an increase in demand for the book, according to the National Union of Book Editors (SNEL).

Like the publications they comment on *booktok*, content producers also gain prominence with the hashtag. A literary profile with the most viewed videos in the category presents books like *Later* by Stephen King (2021) and *It Ends with Us* (2016) by Colleen Hoover, one of the most cited authors among *booktok* participants. The videos have an easy and relaxed language, arousing TikTok users' interest in reading. This dynamic is a significant part of the reader identification process,

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5   We are referencing the original publication date of these books to show the temporal variety of titles circulating on TikTok.

as it recognizes in the producer someone who shares the same universe of interest. After all, the *booktoker* is a reader. According to Merga (2021), hashtags are responsible for building and establishing a positive relationship with reader identity and helping more people with a common interest recognize themselves as part of this community.

Among the most recurrent readings and authors in *#fofocaliterária*, we note foreign titles that already have some popularity. Among the most viewed videos are *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (2020) by V. E. Schwab, The *Unhoneymooners* (2019) by Christina Lauren, and books by author Colleen Hoover, as previously mentioned. However, in the Brazilian literary world, TikTok brings recommendations such as *Dom Casmurro* (1899) by Machado de Assis and more contemporary titles, such as books by Raphael Montes. Among his most popular are *Jantar Secreto* (2016) and *Uma Mulher no Escuro* (2019), which received the Jabuti Award for Best Entertainment Novel in 2020.

Merga (2021), in a survey carried out with non-Brazilian participants in the Booktok community, found that 40.5% of the most recurring themes in videos are recommendations, 24.1% are related to experiences shared by readers, and 14.6% deal with the emotional response to reading. We found a similar dynamic in this research when observing the hashtags *#fofocaliterária* and *#booktobr*. Most of the analyzed videos have literary recommendations as their primary intention, and for this, they use narrative resources such as storytelling and the perspective of establishing a form of reader-to-reader conversation. According to Merga (2021, p. 5), "one of the documented attractions of TikTok is its capacity to facilitate knowledge sharing."

The sharing dynamic activates a diversity of resources. The platform's native audio clips, keywords, and editing strategies help capture the reader's attention. Another relevant aspect: the videos that stand out seem looser and less scripted, prioritizing extroversion and generating the feeling that there is a direct exchange between the producer and the user at whom the video aims. This more stripped-down aesthetic follows what was said by How (2022): ninety percent of the content

that goes viral is authentic and natural (in WALKER, 2022, p. 90). According to Merga (2021), social media plays a fundamental role in the socialization of participants. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the language norms among *booktokers* to interpret the cultural aspects of the online community.

Merga (2021) states that linguistic norms generated in TikTok communities translate to offline communities. This literary niche has its expressions to refer to books and other elements of readers' everyday lives. Some of these expressions have been popular since the first literature communities formed on the internet, while others have had their meanings adapted to the language of TikTok. Therefore, some clues allow us to observe an initial path to understand how reader communities operate and organize themselves on *booktok* based on monitoring the platform uses. Furthermore, in an overview of the Brazilian literary community, it is possible to understand its specificities, the influences inherited from the dynamics of foreign readers, and which interaction characteristics are part of the *booktok* as a whole.

Final remarks

In response to the initial problem, we adopt an exploratory perspective on how Brazilian *booktokers* appropriate the TikTok platform and highlight the particularities that technologies bring to the processes of reading and literary dissemination. We agree with Canclini (2012) that economic and cultural development are not separate from the technological apparatus. And we see in the *booktok* community another broad and deterritorialized space to talk about books, just like *booktube* and *bookgram*. To a certain extent, these spaces update the primordial forms of socialization of reading, which recall reading aloud in groups, as Chartier (1998, 2011) illustrates. Furthermore, if traditional means of training readers, such as schools and libraries, face difficulties of various kinds, knowledge shared on the internet shows other ways of encouraging reading in the current century, whether by influencing the discovery of a diversity of authors and themes, by indicating support for digital reading,

or by revamping literary controversies, such as questioning if Capitu betrayed Bentinho or not to promote *Dom Casmurro*.

The readings shared on TikTok constitute both conversational dynamics and social exchanges, as proposed by Canclini (2014, 2015). Videos share impressions about classic and contemporary works, national and foreign, in the format of reviews or recommendations. The trends observed and, in particular, the narratives involved in *#fofocaliterária* incite readers' curiosity and encourage the habit of reading, feeding *booktok* itself. After all, the content producer is also a reader. Furthermore, videos impact the search and purchase of titles and authors, as we can attest through data from the publishing market.

We consider the role played by *booktokers* is worth reflecting on. These "reader-producers" do not cease to occupy the reader's place from which they speak, paving the way for identification with other readers. When exerting influence, they become, as Bourdieu (2018) says, a kind of tastemaker, like an influential critic or a personality with power in the publishing world and, therefore, agents who do not have official status but intervene in the functioning of the field. Thus, the logic of promotion and circulation of platforms also drives the publishing industry.

Finally, the netnographic experience enriched the research, as it elucidated connections inside and outside the internet. The presence of readers on social media not only expands the debate about literature but also reflects on the attendance of readers in physical spaces, such as the Biennial. Besides observing the hashtag *#bienal* on *booktok*, the record attendance at the 2022 event, social media personalities as attractions, and TikTok book recommendations among the best sellers corroborate the impact of the platform in the publishing market. We observed that sharing purchases and promotions with the hashtags *#bookfriday* and *#primeday* fosters consumer relationships and that independent authors can promote their works and reach new readers. The broader ongoing research intends to delve deeper into these aspects in tension with the symbolic relationships of interactions encouraged by the *booktok* literary community in Brazil.

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