



Book & Digital Media Studies  
Leiden University

Positioning BookTube in the publishing world: An examination of online book reviewing  
through the field theory

Katharina Albrecht | s1572091  
Master Thesis

First reader: Prof Adriaan Van der Weel  
Second reader: MA Fleur Praal

Date of completion: 19 July 2017  
Word count: 18.746

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: The Field Theory .....	4
1.1 The Forms of Capital in Publishing .....	5
1.2 Agents in the Field of Publishing .....	10
Chapter 2: YouTube & BookTube .....	14
2.1 What BookTube Is and How It Works .....	18
Chapter 3: BookTube Theory .....	24
3.1 BookTube & Capital .....	24
3.2 Salient Properties .....	27
3.2.1 De-Professionalization of Book Reviewing .....	28
3.2.2 Reading as Commodity .....	31
3.3 BookTube in the Context of Darnton's Communications Circuit .....	33
Chapter 4: Opportunities for Publishing & BookTube .....	36
4.1 Influencer & Branding .....	37
4.2 BookTube & Publishing: Current Developments .....	40
Conclusion .....	43
Bibliography .....	46



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Over the past twenty years, a growing portion of the general public has expanded its communication capacities in an online environment. This same public is thereby exerting a much greater degree of control over the production and circulation of media than ever before. In the process, it has been participating in the culture around them in powerful new ways.<sup>2</sup> A philosophical shift has occurred on how content is created and appraised: instead of relying on specific and few gatekeepers, like publishing houses, why not put the content up for everyone to see, review, and react to? The massive growth in user-generated content reflects this change in attitude and possibilities.<sup>3</sup> The Internet facilitates creativity and communication in unprecedented ways and has the potential to turn every user from a passive consumer into an active producer.<sup>4</sup> In theory, every literate person with access to a device with an Internet connection can consume, engage with, and create online content. They can read news, start a blog, tweet – seemingly regardless of socio-economic status, unrestrained by other forms of discrimination that might bar access to knowledge and knowledge production in the offline world.<sup>5</sup>

Today, anyone can be an author.<sup>6</sup> In fact, authorship rates have increased significantly over the last decades, not only in the form of book authors but especially in the form of contributors on social media messages like blogs, Facebook, and Twitter as well as formats like video blogs and podcasts. Much like universal literacy has become the norm in industrialised democracies so has participation in this form of new media ‘publishing’. Based on the fast re-broadcasting rates on social media networks, Bigelow and Pelli assumed in 2009 that by 2014 at latest, theoretically 100% of people would participate in this sort of publishing. Thus, universal authorship could be achieved. It appears that a fundamental

---

<sup>1</sup> Minor spelling and word order mistakes have been corrected post thesis defense in this document on the title page and pages 9, 13, 15, 25, 30, 34, 35, 41 and 43.

<sup>2</sup> H. Jenkins, ‘Participatory Culture: From Co-Creating Brand Meaning to Changing the World’, *GfK Marketing Intelligence Review*, 6/2 (2014), pp. 34-39, here: p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> G. Clark & A. Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, fifth edition (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> A. Taylor, *The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2014), pp. 2-3; see also E. Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (London, etc.: Viking Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> See quote of Electronic Frontier Foundation’s founder Perry Barlow: ‘[I dream of] creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.’ Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> A. Van der Weel, ‘Feeding Our Reading Machines’, <[https://blackboard.leidenuniv.nl/bbcswebdav/pid-2992720-dt-content-rid-2262963\\_1/courses/5214KBD14W-1415FGW/FeedingOurReadingMachines\\_2.pdf](https://blackboard.leidenuniv.nl/bbcswebdav/pid-2992720-dt-content-rid-2262963_1/courses/5214KBD14W-1415FGW/FeedingOurReadingMachines_2.pdf)> (21 August, 2015), n.pag.

change is occurring from a society of consumers to one of creators.<sup>7</sup> Video sharing platforms like YouTube present yet another way of sampling, repurposing, re-contextualising, and recirculating existing content into new forms and spreading it further across various platforms. Here, too, the perceived divide between production and consumption is being continuously eroded.<sup>8</sup>

This creative and versatile contemporary online environment works due to certain recent developments in social interactions: the participating public is more collectively and individually literate about social networking online; people are more frequently and more broadly in contact with their networks of friends, family, and acquaintances; and people increasingly interact through sharing meaningful bits of media content.<sup>9</sup> These circumstances present a dynamic context of media production. The effect of this is an unprecedented magnitude of constant newly created content.

Among the many industries deeply affected by this development is publishing. As Michael Bhaskar (2013 and 2014) explains, the role of the publisher has changed: in the early days of printing, scarce content was the norm and publishers chose what to ‘make happen’ in a world of limits. Now, thanks to the Internet’s generative and disseminative power, online content is almost limitless and ubiquitous. According to Bhaskar, a publisher’s core task, more so than before, has become that of filtering and especially amplifying texts in a world of abundance. In the current post-digital age, simply printing, distributing, and making a book available is no longer enough to amplify it.<sup>10</sup> There is no more self-evident reader. The weight of amplificatory work has shifted to finding an audience for that book.<sup>11</sup> In all the content abundance, a reader’s attention is now the coveted limited resource. Claiming that attention for a specific book is the main goal of amplification: ‘ensuring that a work is more widely encountered than without the amplifying act.’<sup>12</sup> Thus, it makes sense to examine the contexts in which books are amplified for specific audiences and the places readers consult for orientation. One such place is the online book reviewing community BookTube.

Participants of the BookTube phenomenon create and watch videos about reading and reviewing books on the online video platform YouTube. These participants are thereby taking

---

<sup>7</sup> C. Bigelow & D.G. Pelli, ‘A Writing Revolution’, *Seed Magazine*, 20 October 2009 <[http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/a\\_writing\\_revolution/](http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/a_writing_revolution/)> (2 April, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>8</sup> H. Jenkins, S. Ford & J. Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2013), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> M. Bhaskar, ‘Filtering, Framing, Amplifying: The Core of Publishing Now and Then’, *TXM Magazine: Exploring the Boundaries of the Book* (The Hague: Boom Uitgevers, 2014), pp. 79-80.

<sup>11</sup> M. Bhaskar, *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing From the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (London, etc.: Anthem Press, 2013), pp.116-117.

<sup>12</sup> Bhaskar, ‘Filtering, Framing, Amplifying’, pp. 80-81.

over the publisher's core task of selecting and amplifying content. Due to its nature as a medium where anyone can participate in book reviewing, BookTube affects cultural and social contexts of reading. Most notably it has the effect of a de-professionalization of book reviewing and the commodification of reading.

This thesis is concerned with the relationship of the online book reviewing community BookTube with trade publishing. As a method of examination, I will use Thompson's (2012) adaptation of Bourdieu's (1993) field theory and the concept of different forms of capital.<sup>13</sup> I argue that BookTube's distinctive characteristics make it a highly influential agent in the field of publishing, particularly regarding social and symbolic capital. It taps into certain target groups effectively and is better attuned to a contemporary digital life. I will investigate the nature and properties of this medium, including the involvement of BookTube in the publishing business, and determine its role in the book world.

The first chapter establishes Thompson's take on Bourdieu's field theory and how the various forms of capital apply to the publishing industry. The main actors in publishing noticeably affected by BookTube will be identified as authors, publishers and reviewers. Following this mapping of the publishing world, the second chapter focuses more closely on BookTube. YouTube, the platform on which the BookTube phenomenon takes place, already plays a highly influential role in many young people's experience of online culture. I will explain how the book reviewing community functions in this context. In the third chapter, I will examine BookTube through the field theory, and identify how the different forms of capital apply to its agents. Furthermore, BookTube's salient properties and greater implications of influence on society will be discussed, especially the criticism voiced by some established offline reviewers. The final chapter provides examples of presently occurring collaborations between publishers and BookTubers and will examine how specific kinds of capital are used to amplify content.

I will be taking a look at the British trade publishing industry and BookTube as arguably 'the most intriguing development in the ongoing cross-pollination of YouTube and book publishers'.<sup>14</sup> For the scope of this thesis, the publishing industries of other countries will largely not be considered, with some notable exceptions. As the BookTube community centres around trade publishing, I limit my examination to this branch and disregard academic publishing in this context.

---

<sup>13</sup> J.B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, second edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 3-14.

<sup>14</sup> A. Burling, 'Book Publishing Comes to YouTube: Publishers Are Mining Huge Fanbases of Bloggers, Vloggers, and YouTube Stars For New Projects', *Publishers Weekly*, 262/7 (2015), p. 25.

One of the biggest challenges regarding the analysis of this topic is the lack of academic writing on phenomena surrounding YouTube and especially BookTube. Some scholars have attempted to map YouTube and examine specific aspects of it, such as its ground-breaking visual aesthetics, its space for the formation of digital identities in children and teenagers, or its enabling the creation of communities. Still, YouTube remains ‘vast and uncharted’,<sup>15</sup> and academic texts on the topic of BookTube are at this point particularly scarce, especially substantial available data on the scale of involvement, e.g., how many BookTube channels exist in a country or even worldwide. Thus a substantial part of this thesis is devoted to further mapping this online phenomenon and establishing general trends and observations rather than evaluating precise numbers. It is part of the nature of social media phenomena such as BookTube that they are difficult to quantify precisely, largely because they exist in an environment prone to constant and rapid changes. These changeable environments affect readers and society. BookTube is an example of new digital environments having an effect on people’s reading habits and the public discussion of books.

## **Chapter 1: The Field Theory**

In this chapter, I will take a look at the field theory according to Thompson to make sense of the field of publishing, the various positions and institutions in it, their own interests, and their relationships within the field.

In *Merchants of Culture*, Thompson examines the particular contexts of the contemporary US-American and British publishing industry by means of the field theory. He borrows concepts of this theory from sociologist Bourdieu and adapts them for his subject. Thompson defines a field as a structured space of social positions whose properties are defined primarily by the relations between these positions and by the resources attached to them. The social positions in a field can be filled by agents and organizations and are linked in relations of cooperation, competition, and interdependency. The theory of fields is fundamentally relational in character. It assumes that the actions of agents, firms and other organizations are oriented towards other agents and organizations. It focuses the attention on the complex space of power and interdependency.<sup>16</sup> Even the dominant positions in the field depend on other positions constituting the field. The structure of a field, i.e., the space of

---

<sup>15</sup> C. Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 3-4.

positions, is the structure of the distributions of means with specific properties, determining the success of any one actor in a field and the gaining of external or field-specific profits. In other words, the position of any one of the agents and organizations in a field depends on the type and quantity of resources or ‘capital’ they have at their disposal.<sup>17</sup> Thompson defines five types of resources, or forms of capital, that are of key importance in the field of publishing: economic, human, social, intellectual, and symbolic capital.<sup>18</sup> In the context of this thesis, symbolic and social capital are especially relevant concepts with regards to BookTube and they will be addressed later on in Chapter 3. In a first step, I will examine each form of capital closer and explain how it applies to the current publishing industry.

### 1.1 The Forms of Capital in Publishing

In the general context of publishing, *economic capital* is the accumulated financial resources of publishers, including stock, as well as the capacity to raise funds from other institutions, banks, the resources of a parent company, or individuals. *Human capital* is the staff employed by the company and their accumulated knowledge, skills, and expertise. *Social capital* is the networks of contacts and relationships that an individual or an organization has built up over time. *Intellectual capital* (or property) consists of the rights a publisher owns over intellectual content, manifested in the contracts with authors, and the right to profit from publications and the selling of subsidiary rights. Finally, *symbolic capital* is the accumulated prestige of a publishing house.<sup>19</sup>

Publishing organizations actively accumulate and cultivate these forms of capital in varying degrees, since their success ‘depends on their capacity to mobilize these resources in the competitive struggle to acquire new content and achieve sales.’<sup>20</sup> As for the significance of each form of capital, for-profit publishers obviously need to accumulate *economic capital* in order to finance the production and publication of books and to build and expand their business. They are the primary risk-takers of the publishing chain: they need to pay royalties and advances to authors to secure potentially successful book projects, and finance the physical production of a book (including editing, design, typesetting, and print), ahead of any revenue being generated from their investing. They also need to create a financial security net for unsuccessful publications, invest in a number of projects to minimize the risk of failed

---

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

<sup>20</sup> J.B. Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age: The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 31.



books, maximise the potential profit of successful ones, and generate substantial revenue streams. The larger the amount of accumulated economic capital, the more means a publishing company has to navigate the risks and invest in quality and commercially promising books.<sup>21</sup>

A publisher also needs *human capital* in the form of good staff. Editorial staff, ‘the creative core of the publishing firm’, needs to be highly motivated and competent in securing promising books-to-be.<sup>22</sup> Editors constantly need to identify and acquire potential publication material, work effectively with authors, and make sure the potentially good material turns into a commercial success. Their judgement and taste, their intellectual creativity and financial prudence is essential to the overall prosperity of a firm. Editors do not work alone, however. They need to establish a network of good contacts and cultivate relationships with creative and productive authors and increasingly with agents. This network of favourable and reliable relationships exemplifies *social capital* in the publishing industry. Publishing houses also need to invest time and effort in the relationships with their suppliers and retailers. The better such a relationship, the more likely a publisher can ask for favours, such as prioritizing the printing of certain titles or speeding up delivery.<sup>23</sup>

*Intellectual capital* is crucial in the relationship between publisher and author, as it is exemplified in the right to publish and capitalise on the intellectual property of a contracted author. Especially now that publishers are not only selling physical products, but are also licensing digital content like e-books, they are traders of intellectual property.<sup>24</sup> The rights to (potential) content are regulated with an author or their agent and with other content-producing or content-controlling sources, like foreign publishers. A publisher’s stock of contracts is potentially extremely valuable, depending on the eventual quality and profitability of the works.<sup>25</sup>

The *symbolic capital* of a publishing house is the recognition, respect, and status associated with it as an institution. With their selection and promotion of books, publishers are cultural mediators and bringers of quality and taste: ‘Their imprint is a “brand”, a marker of distinction in a highly competitive field.’<sup>26</sup> Lending an author a brand is an endorsement of their work’s value; it deems a publication worth the investment.<sup>27</sup> The same applies vice-

---

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9; see also Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 3. The exploitation of intellectual property can include other forms of non-text as well, such as (video) games, film, merchandise, etc.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age*, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p 108.

versa: A reputable author contributes to the good name of a publisher. Publishers engage in the poaching of authors to benefit from the authors' symbolic capital.

It is essential for a publisher to build and maintain a reputation of publishing high-quality works and/or prestigious authors in order to attract new content and projects. Many authors want to be published by a house with an established positive image, particularly in certain genres of writing. A good name can certainly help authors to strengthen their position in the networks of cultural intermediaries: The decisions and actions of booksellers, reviewers, and media gatekeepers can have a big impact on the success or failure of a particular book.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, as the Harry Potter series have shown, a surprise success can have an important function for the publisher, enabling them to use the money gained this way to finance the publication of other books.<sup>29</sup> Agents, retailers, and even readers are more likely to trust a house known for its quality and reliability as well. Symbolic capital furthermore helps with the overall promotion of a book and allows a publisher to make their material known in a highly competitive marketplace. A book's shelf life depends very much on the activities around it: whether and how newspapers, journalists and reviewers respond to and judge it can affect sales, sometimes tremendously. Praise in the form of literary prizes, for example, often increases sales and thus translates symbolic capital into financial success.<sup>30</sup>

The fate of a book is per se unpredictable, particularly for first-time authors. However, the network of cultural intermediaries – including reviewers, reps, booksellers, agents, and rights managers – shapes the process of success or failure of a book. Some publishers hold a beneficial position in this network of intermediaries; others do not. Their place depends on their accumulated symbolic capital.<sup>31</sup> The new novel published by Penguin Random House is much more likely to be on a reviewer's radar than a book from a firm with no or only little established reputation: publishers who are in a favourable position of reception will find that their books are more likely to be reviewed, and more likely to be reviewed in more places. This constitutes a kind of virtuous circle of well-connected cultural intermediaries. As noted above, the accumulated symbolic capital defines the trademark or brand of a publishing house and ultimately serves to build a relationship of trust in its competence, reliability, and good intentions with the reader.<sup>32</sup> This trust is highly beneficial as it encourages, for instance, agents and retailers to order and stock new books of the reputable publisher, and readers to buy them.

---

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The cooperation and association with a publishing house can strengthen an author immensely in her career, especially if the company invests in the building of her brand and helps her develop a fan base. However, ultimately she can leave and take that reputation with her.<sup>33</sup> In a way, authors with significant symbolic capital can establish their own brand regardless of publisher. For the publisher on the other hand, losing an author can cause great damage to their trademark and finances, as much as gaining one can vastly improve them. Therefore, substantial symbolic capital grants an author more power when negotiating her contracts and payments with publishers, and a greater likelihood of reviewers prioritising her books over other new material.<sup>34</sup> Visibility, as will be discussed further below, is of course essential to an author when one takes the vast number of annually published books into consideration. Feeling overwhelmed by the number of books in the world is hardly an unprecedented twenty-first century problem. Nonetheless, the current pool of available reading material is not exactly shrinking.<sup>35</sup> After all, tens of thousands of books are published every year in countries like the UK or Germany, and over a hundred thousand come out annually in the US.<sup>36</sup> Symbolic capital, i.e., the publisher's brand, becomes 'increasingly important as a mechanism of selection and a marker of quality and distinction at a time when the sheer quantity of available content threatens to overwhelm intermediaries and end users.'<sup>37</sup> To stand out, publisher's marketing and sales staff devote a lot of resources to the complex chain of information and interaction involving the transmission of a book's data and metadata – blurbs, jackets, endorsements, reviews, key features, publishing dates, prices, extents, etc. – between intermediaries. Sales and marketing must actively compete for visibility and recognition of these intermediaries, i.e., anyone from review editors, radio or TV hosts to booksellers in order to make their books visible.<sup>38</sup>

A publishing house's success depends on all five of these forms of capital. According to Thompson, however, the structure of the publishing field functions in a way that renders the distribution of economic and symbolic capital as the highest influences on the position of a publisher. These two forms and the processes they entail are 'particularly important in

---

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> For an examination of readers feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of books, especially how this was always the case throughout history, see A. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010); see also G. Zaid, *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> A. Flood, 'UK Publishes More Books Per Capita Than Any Other Country, Report Shows', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/22/uk-publishes-more-books-per-capita-million-report>> (2 April, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age*, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

determining the competitive position of the firm.’<sup>39</sup> It makes sense that the houses with the most money and prestige are in the strongest positions in competition and when facing challenges. Due to the complex nature of the field of publishing, however, smaller and less-established publishers might well succeed in other ways, thrive in specialist niches, improve their reputation and accumulate symbolic capital even without much economic power.<sup>40</sup>

Before examining the agents in the field of publishing, I will briefly turn to two more of Bourdieu’s concepts, *cultural capital* and *habitus*. These will be relevant in Chapter 3 for the determination of BookTube’s capital, the symbolic meaning of displaying bookshelves and some of the effects BookTube has on established agents in the field. Thompson leaves out cultural capital in his assessment of the publishing field, although its meaning is basically covered in his definition of symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, however, *cultural capital* is the accumulation of knowledge and abilities, with regard to the time spent learning, and the knowledge passed down to a person in a family. Inherited valuables, including books, are objectified cultural capital. These valuables do not only have a material but also a cultural meaning. This kind of objectified culture is necessary to indicate and legitimise that a person is part of a certain sophisticated circle.<sup>41</sup> Members of this circle invested a lot of time and effort in becoming experts, e.g., in literature. Time in turn is itself a very valuable resource. Therefore, investing time and effort over long periods in the acquisition of culture shows the highest level of distinction, and the highest inner quality of a person, according to Bourdieu’s theory.<sup>42</sup>

The high regard, status, elevation, acknowledgement and appreciation someone receives for exhibiting cultural capital is symbolic capital, as noted earlier in the context of publishing as prestige and reputation. Bourdieu states that no form of capital has worth or meaning without the symbolic dimension, i.e., without the recognition of its importance. Acts of symbolic capital work like credit for the bearer because they grant them something one does not have to prove anymore.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, a person might gain symbolic capital if they purchase an approved work of literature and thereby prove their refined taste.

Bourdieu connects the accumulation of cultural capital and the acquisition of objectified cultural capital to social classes. He does the same in his concept of *habitus*. This will be relevant when examining the socio-cultural impact of BookTube on book reviewers

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 9; see also Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> G. Fröhlich & B. Rehbein (eds.), *Bourdieu-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzlar, 2009), p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, translated by B. Schwibs & A. Russer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 439-441.

<sup>43</sup> Fröhlich & Rehbein, *Bourdieu-Handbuch*, p. 138.

and their established roles in the publishing field. Habitus can be understood as ‘a set of dispositions, and dispositions as permanent structures of perception and evaluation which govern how people act. [...] The dispositions active in the habitus are achieved through an implicit or explicit process of education.’<sup>44</sup> This means the accumulation of cultural capital, whereby especially ‘the implicit learning process, in which dispositions are developed and a habitus comes into being, has to be linked to the role of class background’.<sup>45</sup> Habitus is behaviour learned through a person’s social surroundings such as one’s family. Existing forms of economic and cultural capital necessarily influence it. A person’s habitus is their cumulative set of behavioural patterns and way of acting, determined by education and often consequently class background. A person can learn a number of things through their family, from specific sophisticated manners to knowledge about literature. Thus, a person accesses the accumulated cultural capital already available within that family and their network.<sup>46</sup>

The following paragraphs will concentrate on the five forms of capital as defined by Thompson and the agents he identifies in the field of publishing. Chapter 3 will use the concepts of cultural capital and habitus to examine what effect BookTube has on these established agents in the field of publishing.

## 1.2 Agents in the Field of Publishing

Having established these five forms of capital and what they entail in the field of publishing, it is now crucial to examine the agents within it. The field includes many actors and complex relationships, as Thompson discusses at length.<sup>47</sup> This thesis will focus on the parties relevant for a better understanding of the BookTube phenomenon: authors, publishers, and reviewers. Authors gain amplification of their works and their persona through BookTube. This relates directly to publishers who benefit from BookTube creators endorsing their work to a substantial audience of potential book buyers. Reviewing is an essential part of BookTube, thus it is relevant to understand how it works in publishing in the first place. What forms of capital, then, do the agents in the field have? What forms of capital do they need?

The UK features a small number of very large corporations in publishing controlling a substantial share of the market among them; a very large number of small publishers such as indie presses, educational institutions, and trade associations; and a decreasing number of

---

<sup>44</sup> H. Van Maanen, *How to Study Art Worlds: On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), p. 58 and footnotes, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 77-161.

medium-sized publishing institutions, which large corporations often usurp for their potentially valuable backlists. This distribution creates a structure and dynamic of polarization in the field.<sup>48</sup>

*Authors* earn credibility through a literary agent who is established and trusted in the industry. Especially when their livelihood depends on their pen, they seek to increase their economic as well as their symbolic capital, manifested in their reputation, being awarded prizes, and gaining general fame. Most (but not all) authors care about being represented by a specific and prestigious publisher.<sup>49</sup> As noted before, an author needs a ‘platform’ to succeed in spreading their work, a ‘combination of their credentials, visibility and promotability, especially through the media’.<sup>50</sup> A platform is a form of already accumulated social and symbolic capital, a pre-existing audience that can guarantee a certain number of book sales. This is colloquially known as a ‘fan base’ and will be discussed in Chapter 2 with regards to BookTube where it plays an equally important role. If an author builds these respective traits pre-publication, she has leverage for the potential market of her book when negotiating with a publisher. If not, well-established agents with lots of social capital can help an author develop a platform by getting her exposure and using networking in the industry.<sup>51</sup> What is most at stake in the field of publishing for an author, then, is their economic and symbolic capital. Authors depend upon a good agent to represent them, negotiate advantageous contracts for them and help them advance their career. Furthermore editors use their expertise to help authors craft their work, usually improving a book’s structure and style notably.<sup>52</sup> However, as noted before, the author-publisher relationship functions as a bidirectional road: a publisher has a lot to gain from a popular author and her symbolic capital, and likewise depends upon authors to improve its standing in the field.

*Publishers* themselves are obviously agents in the field of trade publishing. They take on a multitude of additional work and care. They are in the position of players who have to compete in a retail market over their books being noticed, stocked and bought by booksellers and readers, and in the market for content to acquire the rights for new books, i.e., intellectual capital.<sup>53</sup> As entities, publishers have to navigate keeping authors signed with them and managing finances in various ways: paying authors advances (high enough to keep authors, low enough to avoid financial loss), acquiring new writers, reasonably estimating the size of

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 147; Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 109.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 101 and 151.

their imprints, lest too many copies of a book remain unsold, and spending on marketing. Most trade publishers struggle considerably to keep a business profitable and to achieve a profit margin around or above 10 per cent.<sup>54</sup> Unofficial hierarchies largely based on the size of their advances and their number of bestsellers, i.e., economic and symbolic capital, further determines a publisher's standing in the field. Naturally it also matters very much who has the best editors, i.e., human capital.<sup>55</sup> Being able to pay larger advances is of course an important advantage for attracting and keeping authors. Large houses with substantial economic capital can tap into more monetary resources for such advances while small publishers lack this possibility. Economic capital furthermore enables the holders to recover from failed hits and to invest in IT and infrastructural systems vital for their growth and development in the industry.<sup>56</sup> The publishing process as a whole may be defined as one of 'managing the scarcity of good authors and content to drive profitability.'<sup>57</sup>

Publishers also add value to authors' works and protect the value of their copyrights. They do a lot of work as part of their publishing process in terms of financing, marketing, and selling. This work includes research in their specialized markets and possibilities of future trends; building contacts, audiences and brands; matching marketable ideas to saleable authors; assessing production and marketing costs and sales prospects; editing and designing books to meet market needs; overseeing suppliers' work; building a worldwide sales network; using technology and marketing effectively; investing staff and resources in the promotion; licensing and protecting works and their brand against illegal activity; and much more.<sup>58</sup> The publisher bears the cost of all of these activities, as noted above, illustrating their need to make a profit and increase economic capital in order to cover all the various expenses.

Since the need for economic capital is quite obvious at this point, it is worth noting how publishers with little economic capital at their demand can continue to play and succeed in the field: Small publishers can benefit from their social and symbolic capital in what Thompson calls the *economy of favours*.<sup>59</sup> Examples of this include small and independent presses sharing their knowledge and expertise among each other or freelancers and artists charging only a fraction of their usual rates for their work, all because they share a common ethos and purpose with smaller imprints.<sup>60</sup> Small publishers also have to rely much more on accumulated social capital to acquire new material since agents often do not work with them

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-149.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-152.

<sup>57</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 156-157; see also Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 11.

due to their restricted financial means. Small presses generally place a lot of value on their political commitment, counterculture beliefs or a passion for certain kinds of writing and literature, i.e., forms of symbolic culture, and make this their strong suit. While commercial sustainability is of course crucial to continue operating, it is often of secondary concern, allowing the indie imprints to experiment more with the publications of unusual and marginal books.<sup>61</sup> Innovative, imaginative, and entrepreneurial small presses may also be quicker to respond to fast-changing markets and technological development than their bureaucracy-burdened large competitors.<sup>62</sup> Thus social, human and symbolic capital can to a certain extent make up for a lack of economic capital.

In their publicity and marketing departments, publishers of any size have to manage the available economic and symbolic capital to their benefit, and with every publication, their prestige is at stake (although larger houses can usually cope better with disappointments). They manage the contact with the acquisition and the promoting parties, have to ensure relations of trust with the media,<sup>63</sup> and focus their effort on promoting new books (frontlist titles).<sup>64</sup>

Lastly, *reviewers* are to be considered as agents in the field of publishing. In their task of publicly discussing a new book and endorsing or dismissing it, they yield symbolic capital. Depending on how trusted, established, and influential a reviewer's opinion is, i.e., how much symbolic capital they hold, their judgement of a publication can sometimes make the difference between a success and failure in sales. Reviewers often receive free copies of a book from the publisher before the official publication date or are paid to write or talk about them. To spark a reader's interest in a book, she has to hear about it first: whether through conventional review media (such as literary magazines, literary sections in newspapers, radio or television programmes, bookshop newsletters) or the all-important word-of-mouth. These word-of-mouth recommendations are 'increasingly fostered through the use of social platforms and communities' where people spend an increasing amount of time.<sup>65</sup> Niche-publishing for subject interests and specific communities relies in particular on the good will and good word of influential reviewers, although this is of course also true for what a publisher hopes to be the next mainstream bestseller. Reviewers themselves in turn rely on their own symbolic capital to keep or improve their standing in the community for which they intend to speak. A lack of trustworthiness in the value of their taste and opinion makes a

---

<sup>61</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 159-161.

<sup>62</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 148.

<sup>64</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.



reviewer irrelevant for the potential readership and consequently also to publishers if they gain nothing from the recommendations. Thus reviewers need and provide human capital in the form of skilled and eloquent people who understand an audience's taste and find fitting publications.

Now that the roles of the agents in the existing publishing field have been established, I can further investigate how BookTube fits in. This requires an initial understanding of what BookTube is and in what kind of online media context it exists and operates.

## Chapter 2: YouTube & BookTube

In this chapter, I will explain what BookTube is and how it works. For this context, I will initially give an introduction to YouTube. It is possible to earn money as a content creator on the video platform, a feature that will be important when examining BookTube's salient properties in Chapter 3. Therefore I will touch upon this aspect in particular. Furthermore, the following section illustrates how publishing companies have already capitalized on online fame and profited from social capital in a this environment.

Publishing houses currently operate in a recessionary market and are often looking hard for instant hits to cover their fixed overheads and to provide much-needed revenue.<sup>66</sup> In this vein, they have been trying to capitalize on large online fan bases for several years now. Earlier examples of this included turning popular photography-based blogs into books, as happened with *Humans of New York*, for example.<sup>67</sup> A 2010 photography project at first, this blog gained millions of followers on social media and landed the creator a book deal with St. Martin's Press (Macmillan). The collection of photographs and portraits was published in 2013 and became a New York Times bestseller, as did its 2015 sequel *Humans of New York: Stories*.<sup>68</sup> This suggested that online fame could be translated into offline book sales.

YouTube is another place where large fan bases gather. The commercial web site launched in June 2005 and was bought by Google in 2006.<sup>69</sup> Many people might still think of

---

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 404-405.

<sup>67</sup> Burling, 'Book Publishing to YouTube', p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Anon., 'Books – Best Sellers – Hardcover Nonfiction', *The New York Times*, 3 November 2013 <[https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2013/11/03/hardcover-nonfiction/?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2013/11/03/hardcover-nonfiction/?_r=0)> (28 Februar, 2017), n.pag.; Anon., 'Books – Best Sellers – Hardcover Nonfiction', *The New York Times*, 1 November 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2015/11/01/hardcover-nonfiction/>> (28 Februar, 2017), n.pag. See also Burling, 'Book Publishing to YouTube', p. 22.

<sup>69</sup> M. Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 6.

the video-sharing platform as a place to access music at best, if not ‘simply a repository of disturbing or funny videos of things like skate boarding dogs’.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, over the course of the last decade YouTube has become a cultural, social and highly economised media phenomenon, with infinitely more to offer than silly animal videos. As of 2017, people around the world statistically spend more time watching YouTube than videos on Facebook or movies on Netflix, and substantially more than watching television.<sup>71</sup> YouTube has over a billion users and records an immense yearly audience increase. Moreover, it reaches more 18-to-34-year-olds than any cable network in the US.<sup>72</sup> Over 400 hours worth of content are being uploaded to YouTube every minute from creators around the globe.<sup>73</sup> Users produce professional and amateur, market and non-market driven content.<sup>74</sup> Viewers can watch material on any topic imaginable – from hair braiding tutorials to essays on Virginia Woolf – and can find their pick in this vast heterogeneous video catalogue.

Aside from corporate movie trailers and music videos, the most popular channels focus on comedy, video gaming, beauty and fashion, as well as science and film critique. Although there is content for viewers of all ages on the platform, adolescents and young adults are targeted as the key demographic.<sup>75</sup> According to a 2015 Variety survey, American teenagers listed some YouTube stars among the most influential people in their lives.<sup>76</sup> High subscription numbers and view counts indicate that certain YouTube channels indeed have a substantial number of followers; the most successful YouTubers have around or even well beyond ten million subscribers.<sup>77</sup> Being consumed in such a global and versatile form with a wide reach, YouTube is a medium well worth exploring. Although it is not the only video-sharing platform on the Internet, its ‘rapid rise, diverse range of content, and public

---

<sup>70</sup> P. Lange, *Kids On YouTube: Technical Identities and Digital Literacies* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2014), p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> S. Bergmann, ‘We Spend a Billion Hours a Day on YouTube, More Than Netflix and Facebook Video Combined’, *Forbes*, 28 February 2017 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sirenabergman/2017/02/28/we-spend-a-billion-hours-a-day-on-youtube-more-than-netflix-and-facebook-video-combined/#3bf5ff195ebd>> (11 March, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>72</sup> P. Anderson, ‘Frankfurt Focus: YouTube, BookTube... PublisherTube?’, *Thought Catalog*, 29 October 2015 <<http://thoughtcatalog.com/porter-anderson/2015/10/frankfurt-focus-youtube-BookTube-is-the-future-publishertube/>> (29 March, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>73</sup> Bergmann, ‘A Billion Hours on YouTube’.

<sup>74</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 50; Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> S. Dredge, ‘Why are YouTube Stars so Popular?’, *The Guardian*, 3 February 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/03/why-youtube-stars-popular-zoella>> (11 March, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>76</sup> Burling, ‘Book Publishing to YouTube’, p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> YouTube even established a subscription number award system: If a channel reaches 100,000 subscribers, the company sends a physical silver plaque in the shape of a play button to the creator, a golden one for a million subscribers, and diamond for ten million. This is an interesting way of physically manifesting the at times ethereal online world of YouTube and the input of time and work. It has become a set goal in the YouTube community to reach those numbers, gain the trophy and put it visibly on display in videos.

prominence in the Western, English-speaking world' make it an interesting and important sphere of social, economic, political, and pop-cultural developments.<sup>78</sup> All of this illustrates that YouTube has an impact on a lot of people's lives, especially those of young people.

YouTube is a platform for, and an aggregator of, content, but in most cases not a content producer itself.<sup>79</sup> Similar to Apple's iTunes store, it serves more of a discovery role and makes content more findable and shareable rather than bearing the costs of actual content production.<sup>80</sup> Instead, YouTube's content is created by a diverse group of contributors: from large media producers and rights-owners like television stations, sports companies, and major advertisers, to small-to-medium enterprises looking for inexpensive distribution or alternatives to mainstream broadcast systems. Cultural institutions, artists, activists, media literate fans, non-professional and amateur media producers flock to YouTube as well. Each of them approaches the platform with their own purpose and aims. Collectively, they shape YouTube as a dynamic system of participatory culture.<sup>81</sup> This system supports a high volume of visitors and a range of different audiences, and offers its participants a way to garner wide exposure.<sup>82</sup>

As a business, YouTube gains advertising revenue from the attention drawn by the site's wide range of videos.<sup>83</sup> The videos are free to watch at the cost of the web site collecting personal information about the user via cookies, using this information for advertising, and translate it into revenue.<sup>84</sup> A common way to encounter YouTube for the first time is to watch its videos through an exchange with other people on social media: 'a clip's interest derives from its associations with colleagues, family, friends, and contexts within communities.'<sup>85</sup> Especially so-called 'viral' videos spread far and wide this way and gather millions of views without any wider engagement in one of the platform's communities. Rather than simply watching arbitrary videos, it is also possible to participate on YouTube by setting up a user account (free of charge). Such a registration is necessary for viewers to rate

---

<sup>78</sup> J. Burgess & J. Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. vii.

<sup>79</sup> YouTube has invested money in certain channels, upfront instead of in the form of advertisement revenue. However, creators usually do not receive any funding. See M. Hale, 'Genres Stretch, for Better and Worse, as YouTube Takes on TV', *New York Times*, 24 April 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/25/arts/television/youtubes-original-channels-take-on-tv.html>> (18 July, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>80</sup> Burgess & Green, *YouTube*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>83</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 50.

<sup>84</sup> For an in-depth examination of online content customization processes and their wide-ranging social consequences, see Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*. It should be noted further that YouTubeRed, an advertisement-free model of YouTube with a subscription paywall, was launched in 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, p. 9.

and comment on videos, and to subscribe to channels, i.e., receive notifications on newly uploaded content. Most importantly, an account is required if one intends to upload and post, or publish, videos oneself. A channel resembles other social media sites like Facebook or LinkedIn, with customizable headers and background images and information (name, location, subscriber numbers, contact information, etc.). A channel generally functions as a repository for all videos uploaded by the registered member.<sup>86</sup> Evidently, it is relatively easy to participate in the creation of videos and in shaping YouTube's culture.

A growing number of people produce YouTube videos as a hobby or even professionally as their full-time work. This is financially possible because video bloggers (vloggers) can monetize their content in several ways. For one, they can agree to become a YouTube partner and let Google sell advertisements on their site and in return receive a part of the revenue through the advertisement program Google AdSense.<sup>87</sup> Advertisements are then placed next to a video, appear in-video at the bottom as semi-transparent overlays, or play as a short clip before the video starts ('pre-roll ads'). Determining how much revenue exactly a creator earns is difficult to calculate; only about half of the eligible videos actually run ads, the rates vary considerably depending on page impressions and ad clicks,<sup>88</sup> and YouTube is not transparent about this aspect.

Furthermore, YouTubers often post affiliate links in the video description, directing to pages of online retailers where viewers can directly purchase products mentioned or used in the video, including e.g., filming equipment. The creators receive a commission if viewers buy anything via these links. The most lucrative way YouTubers can monetize their videos is through collaborations with companies. Brands can sponsor entire videos, send products for reviews, and invite creators to sponsored events. The products and events are meant to fit thematically with the respective channel's main focus, meaning that beauty channels often collaborate with cosmetic brands, gamers promote software and video gaming equipment, and travel vloggers endorse getaway campaigns. In the UK and Europe, YouTubers must be transparent about being paid for such promotion, disclose it at the beginning of a video, and signify it with the tag #ad (advertisement) or #spon (sponsored) in the title, the video description, and when linking it on other social media, such as Twitter or Instagram.<sup>89</sup> Some

---

<sup>86</sup> Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> L. Kaufman, 'Chasing Their Star, on YouTube', *The New York Times*, 1 February 2014 <[https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/business/chasing-their-star-on-youtube.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/business/chasing-their-star-on-youtube.html?_r=0)> (21 March, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>88</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> M. Sweney, 'Vloggers Must Clearly Tell Fans When They're Getting Paid by Advertisers, ASA Rules', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/nov/26/vloggers-must-tell-fans-paid->

YouTubers branch out to the creation of regular podcasts to attract more sponsors. Creators can also produce and sell their own merchandise such as stickers, posters, clothing, or branded products.<sup>90</sup>

Whether content can be monetized depends on the amount of traffic a channel generates, on whether the videos fit YouTube's monetization criteria (e.g., no copyright infringement, no violent or graphic content, no promotion of drug use), and on the creator's consent.<sup>91</sup> As for expenses, professional 'YouTubing' entails high and on-going costs for filming equipment, editing software, investment in projects, and, in the case of big and high production value channels, paying for staff, location shootings and animation.<sup>92</sup> While it is possible to make a living from YouTubing, a lot of creators struggle to make ends meet and to be compensated monetarily for their continuous creative work.

Having illustrated the context of YouTube, the following will examine the book-reviewing parties on this platform.

## 2.1 What BookTube Is and How It Works

'BookTube' is the term for a community of people on YouTube who make videos about books and reading. A BookTuber is a YouTube content creator focusing on videos of this kind. Viewers and other creators react to the videos in the form of participation in the comment section or by creating response videos. BookTube videos come in various formats and offer a plethora of reviews, discussions, book-related cross-referential games, as well as bookish travel and lifestyle videos. In its typical form, a BookTube video consists of a person reviewing one or several books, speaking casually to the audience into the camera. This style of video is called vlogging (video blogging), as opposed to scripted sketch videos, for example. It has been called 'the very epitome of YouTube as a social phenomenon', as vlogging as a diary-style way of communication provides insight into 'YouTube as a domain of self-expression, community, and public confession.'<sup>93</sup>

It is common to base several reviews or recommendations around a certain topic, similar to how a bookseller might arrange a shop window according to a specific theme.

---

advert-as-a-rule> (22 March, 2017), n.pag. The law for transparency is less strict in the US and a full disclosure of sponsorship not mandatory.

<sup>90</sup> Anon., 'Lesson: Earn Money With YouTube', *YouTube Creator Academy* <<https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/revenue-basics#yt-creators-strategies-3>> (10 April, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>91</sup> Anon., 'Video Monetisation Criteria', *YouTube Help* <<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/97527?hl=en-GB>> (10 April, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufman, 'Chasing Their Star'.

<sup>93</sup> Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, p. 4.

Those themes may range from conventional the seasonally appropriate ('Best Autumn Reads') to genre ('Favourite Gothic Novels'), explore reading habits ('Best Books to Get out of a Reading Slump') or discuss works of particular current relevance, such as new publications, upcoming book-to-movie adaptations, or works short-listed for literary awards. 'Discussion Videos' cover anything from literary topics to current events within or affecting the community. In 'Monthly Wrap-Ups' people briefly review the books they read over the last month. In the equally popular 'Book Hauls' and 'TBR videos', people showcase their latest literary purchases ('hauls') and announce what they plan to read next ('TBR' or 'to be read'). In 'Bookshelf Tour' videos, as the name suggests, BookTubers give the viewers in-depth tours of their bookshelves, which are usually visible in the background anyway, as will be explained later.

BookTube videos can involve a playful game-like approach as well: in 'tag' videos, BookTubers answer particular book-related questions, then ask other viewers and creators to do the same and start a community trend.<sup>94</sup> Here, BookTubers talk about their reading preferences and give book recommendations in often creative and quirky ways. Iconic BookTuber and professional author Jen Campbell, for example, in one tag video baked a cake while matching books to ingredients, such as, 'Self-raising flour: [name] a book that started slow then picked up', 'Butter: [name] a book with a really rich, intense plot', or 'Icing: [name] a book that included all the things you enjoy in a book'.<sup>95</sup> Tag videos span from light-hearted topics to ones challenging a person's literary horizon: with the 'Read Diversely' tag, BookTubers tried to match books from their personal libraries with every continent, drawing attention to the fact that authors from South America, Africa and Asia tended to be underrepresented in the average BookTuber's book collections.<sup>96</sup> This led to an on-going discussion in the community, with members making active attempts to diversify their selections, to educate others on this issue, and to highlight less visible and rarely represented books.

'Challenge videos' and 'Read-A-Thons' function similarly to tag videos: BookTubers occasionally challenge themselves and each other to projects of reading certain content or amounts for a specific time. Examples of this include reading one book per day for a week,

---

<sup>94</sup> The nominal 'tags' function as localising keywords to find similar content, much like on other social networks such as Twitter. I suggest the word also fittingly invokes associations with the children's game wherein one player transfers the call to action on another and provokes a certain chain reaction.

<sup>95</sup> J. Campbell, 'The Book Cake Tag', *YouTube*, 21 October 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6tqWDdK0xc&t=222s>> (25 March, 2017), video description. Campbell then went on to share the cake, created after a recipe from the children's book *Matilda*, with fellow BookTubers who had come over for a visit.

<sup>96</sup> For example L. Whitehead, 'TAG | Reading Diversely', *YouTube*, 16 February 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ2sSn1gnP8>> (26 May, 2017).

only a specific literary category during a certain month ('Non-Fiction November'), or only a certain format (e-books instead of physical copies). Challenges usually 'go around' the community, meaning that a number or even a majority of creators and viewers participate, similar to a book club. In this vein, a BookTuber encourages their viewers in 'Read-Alongs' to join them in reading a certain book in preparation for a discussion video and to exchange views on it in the comment section, in response videos or through live-tweeting their progress. This creates a perception of friendship and intimacy, as fellow readers and viewers get immediate impressions from 'behind the scenes' even before the official discussion in a video. Furthermore, the 'Read-Alongs' are especially popular as an approach to classic literature. The group effort helps to make the reading more appealing and relevant to readers. Sometimes BookTubers will discuss different editions of a classic or include adaptations through various media (such as novels, plays, movies, a web series, etc.) and further suggested reading material in their review. As BookTuber Leena Normington put it, all of this is done to create a certain 'domino effect' so that one BookTuber does not read in isolation but many read together as a community. BookTube builds communities around friendships and collaborations, creating conversations around books.<sup>97</sup> As of late, reading has become livelier and readers have been more eager to interact with each other and create intimate social relationships in the wake of a general rise in social media interaction. Digital media creates new social valences of reading. Especially so-called 'digital natives', a generation characterised by their constant use of digital media, link content consumption 'intimately if not inextricably' with social networking and friends.<sup>98</sup> Video content itself 'is the main vehicle of communication and the main indicator of social clustering'.<sup>99</sup> The social aspect of BookTube, where connection is formed over a mutual interest in books, is a logical extension of behaviour for young people: they share aspects of their lives naturally on social media, thus sharing reading habits and a passion for books there as well is in accordance to their lifestyle.

When it comes to video creators, I argue as others have noted before that one of the core values of YouTube videos, and certainly of YouTube communities, is the audience's demand for relatability of video creators.<sup>100</sup> The reality behind it might look quite different, but it is definitely the goal of creators to come across as 'real' as possible. Likewise, being perceived as authentic is a key factor for BookTubers and I argue the key factor for their

---

<sup>97</sup> L. Normington, 'How to Start Your Own BookTube Channel ... with Booksandquills and Jenvcampbell', *YouTube*, 9 December 2015 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpGJxf5\\_uR8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpGJxf5_uR8)> (27 May, 2017).

<sup>98</sup> L. Nakamura, "'Words with Friends': Socially Networked Reading on *Goodreads*", *PMLA* 128/1 (2013), pp. 238-243, here pp. 238-239.

<sup>99</sup> Paolillo and Lange quoted in Burgess & Green, *YouTube*, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> Wesch quoted in Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, p. 64.

attraction to adolescents and young adults. The video format of a person talking to an audience while in their home, often their bedroom, portrays an inherently intimate situation (see fig. 1). The videos are typically set up as a casual one-on-one conversation with a friend; even collaborations with two or more creators convey this.



Figure 1: Typical BookTube recommendation video with a creator talking directly to the camera ('vlogging'), set in their home, with the quintessential bookshelf visible in the background.<sup>101</sup>

BookTube videos naturally come in different levels of set-up, mostly depending on filming location, scripting of a video, a vlogger's styling, camera and lighting equipment, and editing choices. All of these factors frame a BookTuber in a certain way. However, this comes across as applied skills rather than inauthenticity. Sometimes BookTubers post videos devoted entirely to conversations with their viewers, often in the form of Q&A sessions wherein they answer questions from previous comments or tweets, or a 'Catch-up' video to inform the viewers of their on-going projects, recent travels, job developments, or life in general. These in-between chat videos, I argue, are essential in forming a community, as they let viewers participate in the lives of the BookTubers and give glimpses into their times off-screen. They make the BookTuber seem 'more human', so to speak, more like an actual friend to meet – quintessentially more relatable and perceived as authentic. As Pan Macmillan digital marketing specialist Naomi Bacon put it: 'This new celebrity is accessible not aspirational. They are relatable and authentic. [...] The [video] content isn't produced in the traditional sense – the footage is raw, there's no fancy edits which only leads to the feeling of

---

<sup>101</sup> J. Menzies, 'Short Story Collection Recommendations', *YouTube*, 18 March 2016 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLrJ3\\_94azE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLrJ3_94azE)> (26 May, 2017).



intimacy.’<sup>102</sup> The audience bonds with the on-camera persona of a BookTuber in ‘a sense of closeness that cements an assumption of relationship shared by performer and viewer-reader.’<sup>103</sup> It is the simplicity and portrayed intimacy of BookTube videos that is so appealing and relatable to the viewers.

A brief comparison to overall YouTubers, as given above, is helpful for more noteworthy aspects of BookTube content creators. For example, the majority of BookTubers are women. This might mirror trends of the offline book world, where women are considered much more likely to be avid readers and heavy buyers of books, and where more women than men work in the book industry.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore BookTubers appear to be usually in their twenties or late teenage years, close in age to their audience of mainly teenagers, adolescents and young adults. Although the frequency depends on a BookTuber’s occupation, i.e., ability to devote time to video making, it is common to post one new video every week. Generally BookTubers do not join the ranks of ‘big YouTubers’ with millions of subscribers. Instead there are many small and mid-range BookTube channels with subscriber numbers between 1,000 and 50,000. Consequently it is much less common for BookTubers to earn their living exclusively or even primarily as full-time YouTubers. (Perhaps similar to many working in the book industry, BookTubers ‘aren’t in it for the money’, to put it colloquially.) Instead they create videos part-time, as a hobby while studying and/or working full-time, with varying (but often considerable) levels of professionalism. Only a few sell merchandise; most make some money through YouTube’s advertisement program (as described above) and earn commissions through the posting of affiliate links to online booksellers under their content. Thus viewers can instantly purchase books mentioned in videos. Collaborations with publishers, mainly in the form of receiving free copies for reviews, are another form of compensation. Furthermore some creators set up so-called Patreon accounts where fans can give one-time or monthly donations. This is a non-commercial and a far more stable and substantial form of support, independent of fluctuating and low advertisement rates.

As is common among YouTubers in general, BookTubers often work together with other video creators in so-called ‘collab’ (collaboration) videos to present and exchange books and opinions. Often this adds to the dynamic of a video, creating even more of a sense of friends meeting for a bookish chat with the viewers. Like tag videos, ‘collabs’ cross-reference other members of the BookTube or broader YouTube community to introduce viewers to other channels. Two collaborating creators will usually shoot two videos and direct the

---

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, ‘YouTube, BookTube... PublisherTube?’.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 230 and 326.

viewers to the respective other channel. They can thereby grow their audience, sometimes significantly if one collaborator is particularly popular and/or established. Collaboration is in general very common among content creators, both of similar or different, in this case non-bookish channels. Popular and established creators collaborate with small channels and amplify them, even when the ‘bigger’ channel has little to gain from the crossover. This could be seen as an example of the *economy of favours* in the case of YouTube.

A key feature of YouTube in general is its prosumer’s do-it-yourself aesthetics: fans with no formal training want to create something.<sup>105</sup> It is a media platform with room for non-professional video content and an alternative to rigorously regulated and mainstream television, for example. It marks a change in media consumption, where individuals and their amateur video making practices are at the centre of this change. Strangelove sees this shift in attitude towards media consumption as part of a long-term transition of a relatively passive audience to increasingly active participation and production.<sup>106</sup> Particularly in small communities like BookTube where vlogging or panning over books is the rather simple standard video format, there is a particular impetus for viewers to become creators themselves. The entry-level skills necessary are relatively few compared to professional filmmaking or other video formats with higher production value (e.g., in sketch comedy or animated videos). Regular smartphones have a built-in camera and computers are often equipped with free basic editing and production software like Garage Band or iMovie.<sup>107</sup> Therefore viewers often have tools to participate ready at their hands without having to invest large sums of money into initial equipment.

Moreover, there are numerous tutorial videos on filming and editing available on YouTube itself. Various BookTubers themselves have uploaded videos with tips and instructions on how to start and manage one’s own BookTube channel.<sup>108</sup> Thus viewers are encouraged to try making videos themselves, honing their own skills and becoming a more visible member of the community. As Lange notes, digital literacy includes not only making videos and media, but also developing the skills to know what content to post, and how to handle widespread and sometimes poorly articulated criticism (especially in light of the still largely unmoderated and infamous YouTube comment sections). Emotional skills are also important for developing a mediated, public presence.<sup>109</sup> This too is addressed regularly in the

---

<sup>105</sup> Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>108</sup> For example, L. Whitehead, ‘Equipment & Set Up | How to Start a BookTube Channel #1’, *YouTube*, 26 March 2017 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8cXOUg4Qu8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8cXOUg4Qu8)> (23 May, 2017).

<sup>109</sup> Lange, *Kids On YouTube*, p. 224.

community, whether in members' own videos or on panels at conventions (which are later often accessible on YouTube).<sup>110</sup>

Participating in a YouTube community provides a learning opportunity where prosumers can 'change the status of their technical knowledge, production capabilities, participatory abilities, or self-expressive skills.'<sup>111</sup> They can expand their media literacy, i.e., their 'ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms'.<sup>112</sup> Digital media literacy extends traditional definitions of literacy to include skills such as digital video production that are required to navigate new media environments.<sup>113</sup> Thus the viewers of BookTube content are encouraged and enabled to create content themselves, thereby learning a variety of technical and social skills (as will be expanded upon in Chapter 3).

BookTube appeals to young people, a demographic publishers are interested in as potentially life-long avid readers and customers. The videos are posted regularly and frequently on a platform young people visit daily already. The content is versatile and communicative with its comment section, possibility of video responses and cross-use of other social media such as Twitter. BookTube is a congregation of young people interested in, even passionate about reading. Ignoring this phenomenon as a publisher would not make sense.

## Chapter 3: BookTube Theory

After this overview of how BookTube generally works, the following chapter examines BookTube through the field theory and in its salient properties to determine its place in relation to publishing companies.

### 3.1 BookTube & Capital

Although skills vary from person to person and depend very much on individual talent and ambition, in general BookTube content creators yield several forms of capital, notably human, social and symbolic capital. Their *human capital* is the set of skills BookTubers acquire over time when making videos regularly: they need to script, film, edit and post videos. Scripting

---

<sup>110</sup> For example, S. Vliegthart et al., 'There is a Troll in the Dungeon: How to Deal with Online Harassment' (Panel discussion at the YouTube video conference VidCon Europe, Amsterdam, 9 April 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Lange, *Kids On YouTube*, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> Aufderheide & Firestone quoted in Lange, *Kids On YouTube*, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Buckingham and Jenkins quoted in Lange, *Kids On YouTube*, p. 13.

requires skills in writing and creativity, especially if a BookTuber posts videos weekly, to keep the content interesting and relevant. Filming and editing require mastering the involved technology, like cutting and sound design. Furthermore the filming and editing processes hone the BookTuber's ability to set up a video, speak in an engaging way, and present themselves to an audience. Before publication on YouTube, a video needs to be exported, uploaded, tagged, and metadata needs adding, among other tasks. Creators then usually announce their new videos on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to ensure visibility, thus they have to know their way around social media. Running a channel furthermore requires skills in planning, time management and video material curation. To grow a channel, creators need to become and stay appealing, relevant, creative, keep up with trends and goings-on in the community and know about new publications. When evaluating their view counts on specific videos and what kinds of books people are buying through the affiliate links (provided they use them), BookTubers can even learn about marketing, i.e., which of their recommendations prompted viewers to purchase the book.

Furthermore their human capital includes skills related to reading and recommending books. A number of BookTubers have academic degrees in literature to begin with. With or without a degree, if creators read extensively they accumulate knowledge on literature and develop their judgement and taste. Like editors in publishing, they need to weed through literary and video material and identify potential books and topics to shoot videos about. They learn how to talk about books as well when they recommend and present different kinds of books, similar to a bookseller. Even videos without recommendations, like ones that only summarise what a person has read in a month, still need to be made interesting. A person must express in an understandable way why they chose and liked or disliked a book. In summary, BookTubers as video makers develop a variety of technical, technological, rhetorical, organizational, social, and literary skills, thus accumulating human capital.

The *social capital* BookTubers yield is the number of subscribers and viewers they generate. Those numbers indicate who is potentially interested and actually consuming their content and which content specifically. They are the so-called 'eyeballs' advertisers try so desperately to reach as potential advertisement targets. They are the fan base which publishers and agents help aspiring authors establish. Subscriber numbers are comparable to an agent's client list: they are a BookTuber's business card of sorts, symbolizing the skills and hard work that went into the creation of videos and the up-keep of a YouTube channel. They represent a creator's ability to spark and retain the interest and attention of an audience, understand and connect with them. The connections with fellow video creators, bookish or otherwise, are

social capital as well. As mentioned above, collaborations with others can help a creator grow their channel and attract new viewers. Collaborations also offer the possibility for creative videos, either by bonding over shared interests or introducing someone to one's passion projects and field of expertise. For example, BookTubers recommend books to creators who expressed that they want to read more, compare reading habits and preferences, discuss books or do tag videos together. Through these crossovers, creators benefit from each other's social capital and can gain more of their own. Knowing the right people can give a person a significant advantage.

As for *symbolic capital*, that is a BookTuber's reputation, their status in and contribution to the community. It is their expertise in a certain field of literature or studies, their well-executed videos as manifestations of their technical skills, their engaging personality, their contributions to discussions, tags and new reading material in the community, their clever recommendations. Having been part of BookTube for a long time, being especially engaged or well known and referenced by other members adds to symbolic capital. Some creators even represent the BookTube community when they speak about it on panels at conferences or gatherings.<sup>114</sup> In such a position they exhibit their already accumulated symbolic capital and gain more by being acknowledged as an expert in the field and a spokesperson for the community.

A BookTuber's book collection and selection of material to present in a video is of course another and essential way of accumulating symbolic capital. When featuring a book collection prominently in a video (even in the background as is usually the case) BookTubers have more than props and identifiers of bookish content at hand. Books serve as cultural capital, as was defined in Chapter 1. The books visible in BookTube videos are objectified cultural capital. The implication is that a BookTuber has read them or intends to read them because they carry cultural, intellectual and/or literary meaning. The video creator displays their private library and invites others to see and recognise their objectified culture.

Watson noted that showing one's private library was and is supposed to impress the owner's friends as 'the physical manifestation of the cult of friendship and intellectual solidarity cultivated among humanistic scholars.'<sup>115</sup> Similarly, BookTubers share a sense of identity as readers and book lovers. Presenting one's books as a manifestation of the time and effort (and money) one has spent on reading is very much in line with Watson's notion and

---

<sup>114</sup> For example at the video creation conferences *VidCon* (USA 2014), *VidConEurope* (Netherlands 2017), and *Summer in the City* (UK 2014).

<sup>115</sup> R. Watson, 'Some Non-Textual Uses of Books', in S. Eliot & J. Rose (eds.): *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 488.

the centuries-old tradition of showing off accumulated capital. Thus I argue that the visible bookshelves and tours thereof in BookTube videos serve as a display of symbolic capital. As is the case with publishers, their symbolic capital helps BookTubers gain respect and trust from the audience.

In sum, human, social and symbolic are the kinds of capital BookTubers accumulate. They only yield *intellectual capital* if they themselves have works to publish. As for *economic capital*, although BookTubers generally do not have it at their disposal, they desire to accrue it. This shortcoming comes as an opportunity for publishers with such economic capital to spend. The want for capital of the one actor, BookTube, creates capital for other actors, such as publishing companies.

Having established what kinds of capital BookTube entails, one must inquire after the wider context: what effects does BookTube have on society? Examining BookTube's properties is useful in finding an answer.

### 3.2 Salient Properties

The salient properties of BookTube, an Internet-based platform, are fundamentally linked with those of the networked computer, which Van der Weel identified. In *Changing Our Textual Minds*, Van der Weel examines the development of medial technology in text transmission and its wide-ranging social consequences.<sup>116</sup> As part of his methodology he uses the concept of *salient properties*, meaning a medium's 'certain technological properties that can be seen – at least in retrospect – to account for its later development and, importantly, its social consequences.'<sup>117</sup> He expands on this concept in the following:

'To aid an understanding of why and how developments took place I propose to make use of the concept of *primary technological properties* of mediums that I suggest can be shown to possess a certain explanatory power. These primary technological properties will turn out to cause *secondary technological properties*, which may in turn have various *social consequences*. In an intricate interplay, the social construction of the mediums and their inherent technological properties together define the way a medium is used, and so what it really is.'<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> A. Van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds: Towards a Digital Order of Knowledge* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2011).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29, emphasis added.

The properties Van der Weel identified for the Internet and a computer-based environment are fundamental in making BookTube possible. BookTube exists through the virtue of the computer as a Universal Machine, i.e., a versatile machine linked in a global digital network. The Internet, this computer-in-a-network, connects all links in the communication chain of production, distribution, and consumption, but also all other modalities. Thus the networked computer ‘allows the convergence of all traditional mediums’ and ‘unites virtually all properties of all existing mediums’.<sup>119</sup> In a worldwide medium, text, images and sound can be mixed at will, multiplied, and distributed around the world in an instant. The Internet turned the computer from a tool of text and data processing to a communication device for people among each other (as opposed to for computers among each other). Thus the core technological properties of a computer are that it is a Universal Machine, that as such it functions electronically and digitally, and that it operates in a network.<sup>120</sup>

The Universal Machine is very much suited ‘to break the hierarchical relationship between an author or editor and the reader’, allowing more than just passive consumption of a text and instead facilitating active participation through comments, editing and re-contextualising. That means *bi-directionality* is a salient technological property of the medium.<sup>121</sup> It is the most relevant inherent property to make BookTube possible.

### 3.2.1 De-Professionalization of Book Reviewing

As explained in the introduction, this ‘two-way traffic’ and the ease with which anyone can be an author very much applies to BookTube: there, laypeople publish book reviews in video form. Anyone can relatively easily set up a YouTube account, start broadcasting their thoughts on a piece of literary work and participate in the phenomenon of self-made book reviewers. Thereby, as a wider effect, BookTube causes a *de-professionalization* of book reviewing. Of course there are BookTube creators who hold literary degrees, as was noted earlier. Such a degree, or any kind of formal training or experience in literary reviewing, is however not a requirement for participation, neither as a creator nor as a viewer, for that matter. It is therefore different from other established forms of book reviewing such as literary journals or dedicated newspaper sections with many more checks and balances in place. BookTube exemplifies the current development of more and more laypeople using an

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 158, p. 162.

online platform to contribute to the reception of culture. From movie critics on YouTube to music opinion pieces on blogs to pop culture analysis on podcasts, amateur reviewers are flourishing on the Internet, growing audiences outside of established institutions.

As an illustration of this disruptive effect BookTube has, and as an exploration of how BookTubers are sometimes (dis)regarded in the field of the book world, I will discuss a recent German blog article.<sup>122</sup> It addresses how BookTubers are often dismissed as reviewers by established newspapers and journals. Using Bourdieu's model of the different forms of capital, the article's author Katharina Herrmann identified patterns of the broad dismissal of BookTubers as a whole, along with book bloggers and 'Bookstagramers' (people who post bookish pictures and captions on Instagram), on the basis of their perceived lack of cultural capital. Authors of articles in the literary sections of conservative newspapers in particular (for example the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), Herrmann argues, deny BookTubers their legitimacy because they review popular books not approved as cultural capital by established institutions, such as universities.<sup>123</sup>

Herrmann further refers to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in this context, which was defined in Chapter 1. According to her, the established journalists brush off the habitus of BookTubers, i.e., their way of reviewing and recommending books and displaying their bookish lifestyle prominently, as illegitimate and their ways of reading as unworthy. What seems most irksome to the dismissive journalists is a perceived 'emotional focus' of reviews on how enjoyable a book is. Additionally, a female prominence and the young age of a majority of the community is met with disregard. Herrman says this shows a particularly toxic pattern: reviewers in traditional print newspapers dismiss BookTube as a form of book reviewing because of internalised preconceptions based on class and gender roles. BookTubers are perceived as not having cultural capital bestowed upon them by institutions of established capital, and their habitus is interpreted as being pathological and pleasure-oriented instead of serious and refined. Their exploration of literature is seen as a vulgar attempt to enter a cultural sphere they are not suited for due to their lack of capital.<sup>124</sup>

Artistic prestige, the relevant symbolic capital of literature and book reviews, is strongly connected to consecration. Positions, agents and their work are more or less sacrosanct by the discourse in the field, based on, for example, by whom they are discussed and in what types of publications. The struggle between agents for artistic prestige is also a

---

<sup>122</sup> This is the notable exception to my focus on British BookTube, as the article addresses interesting points relevant across borders.

<sup>123</sup> K. Herrmann, 'Zur Kritik des normierten Lesens', *54 Books*, 7 May 2017 <<http://www.54books.de/zur-kritik-des-normierten-lesens/>> (20 May, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>124</sup> Herrmann, 'Zur Kritik des normierten Lesens', referencing Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede*, p. 27.



struggle for legitimacy, i.e., ‘the efforts of parties involved to keep or to make their own artistic position the most legitimate one.’<sup>125</sup> Bourdieu separates society into three classes: the dominant class, the bourgeoisie (or ‘middle class’), and the dominated class (or ‘lower class’). Each class has its specific lifestyle and habitus, marking distinction in taste and manner, and differentiating e.g., the aesthetics of the aristocracy with the pretention of the bourgeoisie. The three specific tastes according to class are the legitimate, the pretentious and the illegitimate and popular taste respectively: the legitimate taste is that of the dominant class of professionals and aristocracy, mindful of distinction and the approval of recognised institutions of legitimacy, i.e., universities and established critics. The pretentious taste of the middle class tries to imitate that of the dominant class. Finally, the illegitimate and popular, indulgent taste of the dominated lower class is regarded as vulgar by the institutions of legitimacy. Thus the negation of the lower classes’ popular taste serves as a distinction and reaffirmation of the middle and upper classes in their own superior positions.<sup>126</sup>

This class distinction extends to reading as well: although there are of course many different forms of reading and literature, the ruling dominant class declared most of them illegitimate. Herrmann links this devaluation of certain reading practices to social changes in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Western European societies. During the reading revolution a significant increase in reading among members of the lower and middle class, especially among women, made possible *upward mobility* to higher classes through education and skilful business. These sudden increases in economic and cultural capital and rise in society of the middle class were met with scepticism and rejection by the dominant class. Middle class reading practices were consequently ridiculed, e.g., as a ‘reading craze’ of women and the common folk.<sup>127</sup> Herrmann argues that the current dismissal of the contemporary cultural elite is functionally identical to this rejection of upstarts, of people rising – and reading – ‘above their station’. The established elite continues to aim for the distinction from and retention of power over the lower classes. The appropriation of a book culture and literary discussion, especially in a non-established format like video blogs, with a focus on indulgence and popular culture, is seen as a transgression into territory BookTube creators are not entitled to.<sup>128</sup>

This contested *upward mobility* of non-professional book reviewers is a social consequence resulting from BookTube’s property as a bi-directional medium. It is an interesting and important manifestation in fighting between agents in the field: the critics in

---

<sup>125</sup> Van Maanen, *How to Study Art Worlds*, p. 69.

<sup>126</sup> Herrmann, ‘Zur Kritik des normierten Lesens’, referencing Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede*, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> See for example J.Y. Mollier & M.F. Cachin, ‘A Continent of Texts: Europe 1800-1890’, in Eliot & Rose, *History of the Book*, pp. 303-314.

<sup>128</sup> Herrmann, ‘Zur Kritik des normierten Lesens’.

literary journals are established agents in the literary and publishing field. They have accumulated symbolic capital over the years of their career. As respected institutions they have existed – and thus accumulated symbolic capital – for centuries. BookTubers on the other hand are new agents in the field, not even a decade old, yet they attract significant attention online, as seen in their subscription numbers and view counts. They reach a different, younger audience frequenting different spaces for the exchange over books. BookTube is a certain demographics’ own new format with its own ways of approaching and evaluating books. Incidentally, the dismissal of BookTubers does not even take into account that some of them have actually accumulated symbolic and cultural capital in the form of university degrees in literature and/or professional experience as booksellers. Herrmann argues that BookTube (along with book blogs and Bookstagram) is in many ways the only place genres like young adult fiction are taken seriously. It is also there that communities of mostly young people lead important social and literary discussions, such as authors romanticizing abusive relationships in books aimed at teenagers or, as mentioned above, addressing a lack of non-normative perspectives in literature. Through its format and targeted demographics, BookTube is more accessible for and more appealing to people even if they do not have literary degrees or read book critiques in newspapers. Professional articles incidentally also cater to a certain demographic and select their review material accordingly. It is very likely that young people especially do not see themselves represented there. BookTube presents a chance for people who have been excluded from the literary newspaper sections to access literature and books despite this culture and in their own way.<sup>129</sup> There, people who are missing certain perspectives or covered material can start their own channel and contribute relatively easily to a general discussion. That is not as easy and individually viable when publishing articles in established print media. Thus BookTube as a new agent and a platform for lay reviewers brings a certain dynamic and disruption to the field.

### 3.2.2 Reading as Commodity

The other noteworthy effect of BookTube on society I will address is its making reading a commodity. BookTube creates and thrives on an environment of copious and fast reading: with a lot to read, there is a lot to talk about. Every year a number of community members, creators and viewers alike, pledge to read fifty books in one year. This goal derives from a popular annual reading challenge on the platform Goodreads. Goodreads is closely linked

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

with BookTube for purposes of book cataloguing and reading process tracking. Over two million readers are participating in the current 2017 Reading Challenge and have pledged to read on average forty-six books this year (see fig. 2).



Figure 2: Banner of Goodreads' 2017 Reading Challenge, indicating over two million participants and an average of 46 books pledged to be read in one year.<sup>130</sup>

Such challenges as the likes of 'Read-A-Thons', as described in Chapter 2, encourage viewers to increase the number of books to read. Aiming to read more is of course a common sentiment among book enthusiasts and not confined to this online community. However, it seems unlikely that many offline book clubs outside of professional circles would set as ambitious a goal as reading about one book a week every year.

Reading is not the only thing that is being encouraged but also owning and acquiring a lot of books. Creators frequently post videos of their latest book purchases (so-called 'hauls'), usually every month. Thereby they practice, celebrate and normalize the frequent purchasing of books.<sup>131</sup> Reading and thus purchasing the same many books as other BookTubers is to a certain extent even required if participants want to engage in the discussion of those books and keep up to date. Indeed, the purchase frequency and number of bought books is often so high that 'un-hauls', i.e., videos about getting rid of books, have become a popular BookTube format. There are obvious (even literal) links between reading and purchasing books directly in the community: it is standard procedure that BookTubers post links to online retailers under their videos, so viewers can buy the very same books presented in a video in an instant. The affiliate links often direct to Book Depository, a retailer that offers discounts and free worldwide shipping. Thus new books are just a click away. Recommendations from others in the same community incidentally encourage viewers to make that click more so than traditional advertising.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Anon., Banner of Goodreads' 2017 Reading Challenge, *Goodreads* <<https://www.goodreads.com/challenges/5493-2017-reading-challenge>> (28 June 2017).

<sup>131</sup> Alternatives to buying books, such as consulting libraries or swapping among friends, are of course an option. They are however not nearly as prominently addressed on BookTube as buying books for oneself is.

<sup>132</sup> Nakamura, 'Words with Friends', p. 239.

BookTube combines reviews and an immediate purchasing option in a highly convenient manner. What Nakamura observes of Goodreads applies to BookTube as well: ‘[A] tight integration of readerly community with commerce is an absolute given, an indispensable feature of reading in the digital age, so banal as to be unremarked on.’<sup>133</sup> Reading on BookTube is intricately linked with consuming. The platform is not only about sharing among a community what to *read* next but also what to *buy* next. Thus reading becomes a commodity.

BookTube, even without any kind of collaboration with publishers, already creates capital for other actors in the field. Publishers and authors gain social capital from the amplification of a BookTuber’s endorsement and economic capital from the purchases such endorsements generate in book sales that the publisher would not likely see otherwise. More generally, BookTube illustrates a change in younger people’s attitude towards reading: As was already addressed in Chapter 2, the ‘digital natives’ tend to share many aspects of their lives online in social networks. Reading is now part of that. Rather than a solitary private activity, it is now linked to social participation in an online community.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, the general fast pace of social media interactions is mirrored in more intensified reading habits that even include contests. This intense reading goes hand in hand with intensified book purchasing. It heightens a book’s peculiar cultural-economic product hybridity: a book is an item of cultural and symbolic value as well as a consumer product. BookTube thus impacts the perception of the book and the cultural and social practices of reading.

### 3.3 BookTube in the Context of Darnton’s Communications Circuit

In this context of salient properties, Robert Darnton’s ‘communications circuit’ (fig. 3) can help visualise BookTube as a part in text transmission, production and consumption. Originally devised as a visualisation of 18th-century book-trade, Darnton’s circuit shows the various public, economic, social, political, intellectual and legal influences on the different parties involved in text production, transmission and consumption.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Nakamura, ‘Words with Friends’, p. 241.

<sup>134</sup> Nakamura referencing Goldberg, ‘Words with Friends’, p. 239.

<sup>135</sup> A. Van der Weel, ‘Book Studies and the Sociology of Text Technologies’, in S. Rosenberg & S. Simon (eds.), *Material Moments in Book Cultures: Essays in Honour of Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser* (Frankfurt a.M., etc.: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 277; see also Van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds*, p. 105.

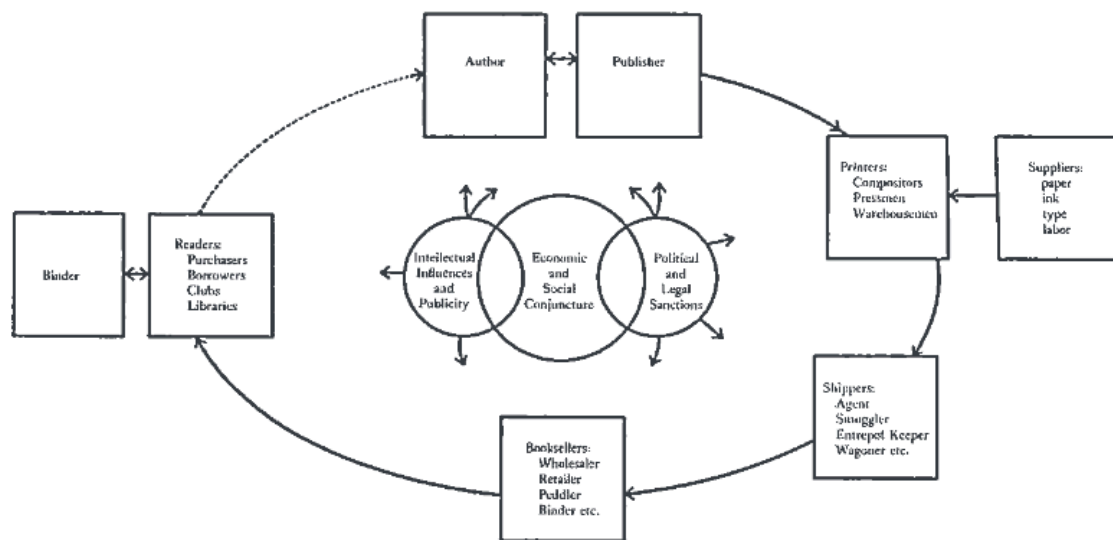


Figure 3: Robert Darnton's Communication Circuit<sup>136</sup>

Reviewers on BookTube (or otherwise) can be counted among the 'readers', as they read and thereby consume the book as a finished product rather than contributing to its production. In most cases, BookTubers have to buy books like any other consumer. Unlike most other readers, however, they actively address an audience and contribute to a book reaching more purchasers. This means they are also part of the transmission part of the circuit, not in the sense of shipping and distributing books, but in the sense of amplifying material for an audience and adding to the reach of a book. Readers outside of BookTube can of course contribute to the amplification and thereby transmission of a book as well, for example through word-of-mouth recommendations. Nonetheless, BookTubers usually reach a much wider audience than the average reader: as noted above, between 1,000 and 50,000 people, or in some cases even 150,000 will watch a BookTuber's video. Placing BookTube solidly in the 'readers' category does not reflect its role in the transmission part of the circuit.

On the other hand, a case can be made for BookTubers as 'booksellers': after all, their endorsement of certain books increases sales when viewers purchase those books via affiliate links or in bookshops. BookTube participants actively focus the attention on one book rather than another and contribute to its exposure. Especially when publishers and BookTubers work together to promote material, BookTube creators fulfil the role of a bookseller as much as that of a consumer. Categorizing them as only booksellers, however, does not accurately reflect how many people participate in BookTube as a hobby rather than a profession. Unlike

<sup>136</sup> Van der Weel, 'Book Studies and the Sociology of Text Technologies', p. 278, original published R. Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 111.3 [1982], pp. 65-83, repr. *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York, 1990), pp. 107-135, here: p. 112.

professional booksellers BookTubers are not obligated to promote. They are free to disapprove of a book and thereby discourage purchases, effectively decreasing sales. A lot of BookTubers do not collaborate with publishers, promote their own books or work as booksellers, but instead create their amplifying content voluntarily and without substantial monetary compensation. When viewers buy books in any other way than through a creator's affiliate link (or when a creator does not implement one), they are not reimbursed for their endorsements. Compensation in the form of social or symbolic capital is of course possible (as will be discussed later). A BookTuber might gain more views and a better reputation when reviewing specific books. However, this is hardly comparable to retailers being financially compensated in salaries or a commission as part of an industry.

Due to this ambivalent, semi- professional nature, it does not seem accurate to place BookTube solidly in the 'bookseller' category either. Considering its role in both the transmission and the consumption of a book, I therefore suggest positioning BookTube in the space between the fields 'booksellers' and 'readers' instead. This represents how BookTubers exist both as amplifiers and consumers ranging from laypeople to professionals, and how BookTube blurs the lines between these categories.

Furthermore it is helpful to consider Van der Weel's addition to Darnton's circuit: in his examination of the sociology of text production and text technologies, Van der Weel suggests applying inward-pointing arrows to the circuit (fig. 4); a small but crucial adjustment to visualize the influence of changing text technologies on society.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Van der Weel, 'Book Studies and the Sociology of Text Technologies', pp. 277-278.

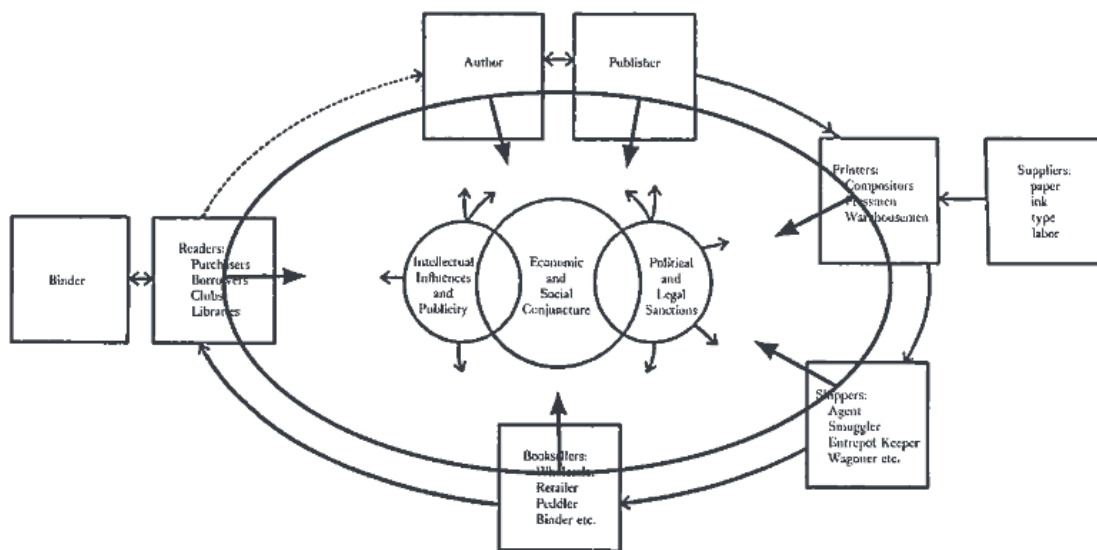


Figure 4: Darnton's Communication Circuit with Van der Weel's added inward pointing arrows, showing the influence of changing text technologies on society<sup>138</sup>

The 'updated' communications circuit shows how the dynamics of text production work in both directions. It becomes obvious that the 'particular technologies involved in the production and reproduction of text at any given time also have their impact on the intellectual, economic, social, political and legal conjuncture.'<sup>139</sup> This adjusted model with the inward-pointing arrows visualises BookTube's influence on society and changes in contemporary culture as explained previously, i.e., by enabling and driving the de-professionalization of book reviewing and by making reading a commodity.

In conclusion, BookTube's particular nature as a medium influences society and reading culture in a complex way. As a platform it not only amplifies certain content but also certain perspectives that were traditionally not taken into much consideration in established book reviewing mediums. The participating creators have various forms of capital at their disposal. How then do they use it in the context of professional publishing?

## Chapter 4: Opportunities for Publishing & BookTube

In the final chapter I will point out more aspects of BookTube that are of particular relevance to the publishing industry, focusing mostly on already existing points of collaboration.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

Much like literary agents act as intermediaries between author and publisher, so can BookTubers act as intermediaries between a publisher and a certain reading audience. Young readers in particular can be reached successfully through BookTube. As established above, they spend ample time on YouTube already, thus BookTube offers the book recommendations at the exact place where potential readers already are. Furthermore, offering book recommendations at a BookTube channel instead of, for example, on television is more effective and contemporary: an audience can often participate more actively with a program if it is not locked down at a specific time and place but retrievable at the viewer's leisure. Viewers can watch, respond to and share videos at their leisure. Otherwise an audience might 'seek the content they want from an industry not yet able to sell it to them in the forms or contexts they desire.'<sup>140</sup>

Another relevant aspect is language on BookTube: the focus of this thesis is on English-speaking realms; however, BookTubers from many European countries choose to speak English in their videos. If a creator from a non-Anglophone country, like the Netherlands or Germany, produces content in English, they have the chance of reaching a much wider international audience. They can also be part of the already existing British and American BookTube community and other internationally inclined other Europeans. Incidentally, English is not only on the rise as a spoken language but an increasing number of people are reading English-language books in non-Anglophone countries.<sup>141</sup> This provides a significant marketing opportunity for both English language publishers and BookTubers. If publishers work with BookTubers abroad, they can advertise English books in other countries. Thus they can approach an untapped market of (especially younger) readers who want to read books in the original English instead of waiting for translated versions. Sales and feedback on such original English books could furthermore indicate whether a translation for that specific market makes sense.

#### **4.1 Influencer & Branding**

One of the greatest challenges for publishers of today is the discoverability of a book. A decline of bookshelf space and an increase in online retailers diminish the possible exposure of a book (or the usefulness of such exposure) in a brick-and-mortar bookstore more and

---

<sup>140</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 117.

<sup>141</sup> Clark & Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, p. 14.



more.<sup>142</sup> BookTube can provide something the publishing industry desperately needs: exposure and specifically targeted promotion. It should be noted that although publishers with a lot of economic capital are of course free to invest in the kind of pre-roll ads available on YouTube. However, viewers can skip these ads or avoid seeing them altogether when using advertisement blocking mechanisms such as ad blockers. Thus investors cannot be sure that their promotion even reaches the relevant viewers. It is additionally questionable how well book promotion is suitable for this type of advertisement anyway, with its emphasis on content and reviews instead of usability. Thus it makes much more sense to approach creators to make a book review the core content of a video – as that is exactly what viewers come to see in the first place. Lately marketers and public relations professionals have approached online communities with the concept of so-called ‘influencer marketing’, ‘a non-promotional approach to marketing in which brands focus their efforts on opinion leaders, as opposed to direct target market touchpoints.’<sup>143</sup> ‘Influencers’ can be understood as people with a lot of social and symbolic capital, with an audience, whose opinions and endorsements encourage their fans to imitate their consuming behaviour. Influencer marketing seeks to provide ‘product context and expertise through an inspirational person’,<sup>144</sup> essentially trying to make use of a person’s social and symbolic capital. Hall distinguishes between earned and paid influencer marketing: earned marketing stems from unpaid or pre-existing relationships with influencers, meaning the influential parties already consume a product. These are then called ‘natural brand advocates’. Paid marketing basically just employs famous people to endorse a product regardless of former association. Hall uses the example of a tequila brand identifying influential people who already enjoy their drink regularly versus paying tv personalities to tweet about it.<sup>145</sup>

Youtuber content creators with large audiences are a prime example of influencers, and as detailed above, increasingly collaborate with companies to sponsor entire videos. However, product endorsement in YouTube videos must be introduced with particular sensitivity towards the audience. It should not come across as intrusive and overtly commercial since ‘some of the most active members of the YouTube social network have expressed discomfort with the interjection of corporate players into a space they experience as

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>143</sup> J. Hall, ‘The Influencer Marketing Gold Rush is Coming: Are You Prepared?’, *Forbes*, 17 April 2016 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnhall/2016/04/17/the-influencer-marketing-gold-rush-is-coming-are-you-prepared/#387b889f34fb>> (28 May, 2017), n.pag.; Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 79.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

community generated'.<sup>146</sup> Jenkins et al. write on this aspect of marketing on YouTube: according to marketing literature, brand messages gain greater credibility if shared by someone the listener already knows and trusts. Therefore companies have sought to identify and uphold their strongest supporters, equipping them as needed to help spread the word through the various networks to which they belong. What is crucial for content creators – and companies such as publishers who wish to enter the community space of BookTube – to realise is that an audience is going to participate in the spreading of media or discussion about the content because it serves some communicative purpose for them and because it fits into the conversations they were already having.<sup>147</sup> It has become vital for a company to understand cultural and social developments, as they are more relevant for brand management than ever before. Missing or underestimating developments and responding in inept ways can cause significant harm as dissatisfaction is often voiced powerfully and may spread very quickly.<sup>148</sup>

In 2015, YouTuber Gaby Dunn addressed in an article how viewers were perpetually outraged over the occasional sponsored video she would post, accusing her of 'selling out' and of forcing unrelated product promotion into her videos.<sup>149</sup> As was established in Chapter 3, BookTube too relies on consumerism. I suggest that for BookTube, cooperation with a publishing company does not have this air of 'selling-out' or forcing commerce on the viewers. Publishers do not feel out of place in this particular context because books are the basis of the BookTube community: readers buy books anyway and they *want* specific new recommendations. A BookTuber does not promote a certain retailer but the content of a book, and only by extension a specific publisher. Thus publishers have an advantage and an opportunity for collaboration, especially when the BookTuber can give away a copy to viewers. Nevertheless, a book's content still has to align with what a creator would usually talk about and endorse. This is of crucial importance to the creators. As Normington stated, if a creator changes their video content to promote something they usually would not, they appeal to a different audience than before and risk alienating their current viewers.<sup>150</sup> That means that in regards to the endorsement of products, audiences are concerned with whether a

---

<sup>146</sup> Burgess & Green, *YouTube*, p. 5.

<sup>147</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>148</sup> Jenkins, *Participatory Culture*, p. 39.

<sup>149</sup> G. Dunn, 'Get Rich or Die Vlogging: The Sad Economics of Internet Fame', *Fusion*, 14 December 2015 <<http://fusion.kinja.com/get-rich-or-die-vlogging-the-sad-economics-of-internet-1793853578>> (17 May, 2017), n.pag. Dunn particularly stressed how fans perceive YouTubers as famous and therefore rich when in reality most content creators are in dire financial situations and earn a lot less than their online visibility might suggest.

<sup>150</sup> Normington, 'How to Start Your Own BookTube Channel'.

creator's piece of content or recommendation is consistent with their authenticity, and with what is known about and expected from them.<sup>151</sup>

Given that it is a difficult and nuanced task, what does successful, well-done collaboration with a BookTuber look like?

## 4.2 BookTube & Publishing: Current Developments

Finally I will point out examples of current developments in publishing of involving BookTubers in the industry. All creators featured here are prominent members of the British BookTube community. These examples illustrate how some publishers are already utilizing the phenomenon to reach more readers in ways that appeal to them.

In general, one common way of involving BookTubers of any kind in the publishing industry is to send them free books in the hope they will review them on their channel. Publishers often put effort into packaging and presenting such books, adding gimmicks and decorations to the packages, personalizing cards and – most importantly – trying to appeal to a BookTuber's established tastes. 'Unpacking' videos, in which a person opens a package on camera, are very popular. Hence it makes sense to cater as much to the BookTuber as possible and make the unpacking appealing to the viewers as well. Of course, more important than the packaging is the content of a book and whether a BookTuber eventually likes it or not. Although publishers have tried to pay BookTubers in exchange for favourable reviews, most only offer their own opinion as they usually state in the video description.<sup>152</sup> If they were approached to review a certain book, they clearly communicate this to the audience.

When it comes to more specific cooperations of BookTubers and publishers, several creators are particularly relevant: Jean Menzies from the channel *Bookishthoughts*, for example, currently works for Pan Macmillan as a creative producer. As such, she runs the publisher's YouTube channel, creates their book-focused video series, promotes literature across imprints, conducts interviews with authors and is involved in influencer outreach on behalf of Pan Macmillan. She is responsible for writing, filming, presenting and editing videos, as well as running her social media accounts.<sup>153</sup> Thus, as noted above, she applies her human capital in the form of her video making skills and her social capital in the form of her established audience directly to benefit the publisher.

---

<sup>151</sup> Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, p. 77.

<sup>152</sup> Campbell in Normington, 'How to Start Your Own BookTube Channel'.

<sup>153</sup> J. Menzies, LinkedIn Profile, <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jean-menzies/>> (27 May, 2017), n.pag.

Similarly, Sanne Vliegthart from the channel *Booksandquills* worked as digital coordinator and digital and social media manager for the small publisher HotKey Books. She is now social media producer at Penguin, creating weekly videos for the platform.<sup>154</sup> These videos feature thematic recommendations, interviews about reading habits, behind-the-scenes videos to introduce viewers to the publishing world, presentations of new publications, and discussions of various kinds. They often include book giveaway raffles and encourage viewers to participate in comments and through social media. Other BookTube and YouTube creators, such as Rosianna Halse Rojas (part-time BookTuber and full-time personal assistant to author John Green), often make an appearance in the platform videos as well, providing their expertise (see Fig. 4). When included in a video's thumbnail (functionally a video's 'cover' on YouTube), well-known creators can have a motivating effect on viewers to click on a video and be introduced to a new channel.



Figure 4: BookTuber Rosianna Halse Rojas gives an introduction to critical reading and book recommendations on Penguin's YouTube channel.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore Vliegthart and other BookTubers like Leena Normington (from *Justkissmyfrog*) and Jen Campbell have conducted interviews with authors and translators.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> S. Vliegthart, LinkedIn Profile, <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sanne-vliegthart-7912b251/>> (27 May, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>155</sup> Penguin Platform, 'How to be a Critical Reader + Book Recs! With Rosianna', *YouTube*, 25 May 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw5ODCwxm9s>> (27 May, 2017).

<sup>156</sup> See for example S. Vliegthart, 'Being a Literary Translator | Q&A with Laura Watkinson', *YouTube*, 2 September 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTzO0whZ4Mg>> (27 May, 2017).

Campbell, who has worked in the book industry for over ten years, even extended her author interviews to the medium of podcasts. Normington has worked as a publicity manager for an independent non-fiction publisher. She published a video envisioning ‘the perfect publisher YouTube channel’ which Pan Macmillan digital marketing specialist Naomi Bacon went on to showcase at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015 as an eye-opening report of what BookTube has to offer.<sup>157</sup>

Along with Lauren Whitehead (from *Reads and Daydreams*), Vliegenthart and Campbell worked with the committee of the Bailey’s Women’s Prize for Fiction in 2016 (Menzies joined them for 2017). All of them discussed the finalist novels in sponsored individual and group videos and attended the award ceremony.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, in 2015 Campbell, Menzies, Whitehead and Normington worked with the Man Booker Prize committee, discussing the books considered by the jury on their channels. Although the videos were not sponsored, the vloggers received free longlisted books for themselves and as giveaways for their viewers.<sup>159</sup> All these videos and the subsequent social media promotion (including tweeting under special hashtags like #ManBookerVloggers) added to the visibility of these books. Generally inviting BookTubers to book and publishing events means extra coverage and feedback for the hosting parties if the vloggers share the event with their audience. Thus BookTubers do a lot of promotional work, using their social and symbolic capital as prominent members of the community to further the reach and influence of a publisher. Overall, BookTubers can be considered as cultural intermediaries between publishers and readers. Associating a specific publisher or literary prize with BookTubers not only increases the chances of making a profit from additionally sold titles – it also increases the symbolic capital of the publisher in the eyes of a BookTube audience. Particularly when that audience feels adequately represented and directly addressed by their own community members.

Creators have also spoken on the topic of BookTube as representatives of the community and experts in its specific content creation, for example Campbell, Normington and Vliegenthart held a panel at Greenwich Book Festival in 2015, explaining what

---

<sup>157</sup> Anderson, ‘YouTube, BookTube... PublisherTube?’; Saraathotkey, ‘All About BookTube (London Book Fair 2014)’, *Hot Key Blogs (Hot Key Books Web site)*, 15 April 2014 <<http://www.hotkeyblog.com/all-about-BookTube-london-book-fair-2014/>> (29 March, 2017), n.pag.

<sup>158</sup> See for example J. Campbell, ‘Baileys Prize 2016 Winner Prediction | with Lauren & Sanne’, *YouTube*, 7 June 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AneF1Tbe6OY>> (27 May, 2017).

<sup>159</sup> J. Campbell, ‘Man Booker Prize 2015 Winner Prediction | & GIVEAWAY #ManBookerVloggers’, *YouTube*, 12 October 2015 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_LQsBKdlSTw&t=607s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LQsBKdlSTw&t=607s)> (27 May, 2017), video description.

BookTube is and how book reviews and collaborations with publishers work.<sup>160</sup> BookTube remains an influential part in the general YouTube community across borders, with BookTubers featuring on panels at upcoming YouTube conferences such as *Summer in the City* in London and *VidCon* in California. On such panels they speak about collaboration and marketing opportunities for BookTubers.

Normington also pointed out that another advantage of BookTube for publishers is that it keeps the backlist alive: while publishers might focus on new releases and write off a book after several weeks, it often takes longer to be picked up in the reading community. BookTube allows for more ‘slow burning’ successes where creators discover titles months and years later. It is not a priority for the BookTube community to immediately read what has just come out but rather to discover books that fit individual tastes.<sup>161</sup> Thus BookTubers can draw attention to books the publishing industry might have forgotten, given up on or books that were overlooked. As an example, book challenges invite viewers to access classic and challenging literature, in an encouraging community effort. Sometimes these ‘Read-Alongs’ include discussions of various adaptations and expansions of a book or play. Together the audience can experience how text is adapted into movies, theatres and comics, adapted to modern times, and revisited in sequels. Two Read-Alongs of *Jane Eyre* for example included videos about its contemporary ballet and movie adaptations, as well as the lesser-known modern ‘prequel’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys.<sup>162</sup> These examples demonstrate publishers are aware of benefits of involving the BookTube community when trying to reach and establish new audiences, particularly digital natives.

## Conclusion

The publishing field is filled with diverse agents possessing varying forms and amounts of capital. This capital determines each agent’s standing in the field and enables or disables their possibilities of growth. In this thesis, the three most relevant agents in the field of publishing with regards to the BookTube phenomenon were identified as publisher, author, and reviewer. The influence of BookTubers on these three agents is most significant and relevant. This thesis established the BookTube community as a versatile, dynamic online reading

---

<sup>160</sup> Normington, ‘How to Start Your Own BookTube Channel’.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> S. Vliegenthart, ‘Book Review | Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys’, YouTube, 8 December 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcxkuGp0DxA>> (30 May, 2017); J. Campbell, ‘Behind the Scenes at Jane Eyre | Northern Ballet | AD’, YouTube, 25 April 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rr2vWgfsd20>> (30 May, 2017).

phenomenon. With the use of Thompson's adoption of the field theory, this thesis discovered that BookTubers' strengths lie in accumulation of human, social, and symbolic capital: particularly through their skills in video-making and social media, the content creators make themselves valuable as human capital. Through their audience engagement they accumulate social capital. Through their reliability, community contributions, and individual expertise they gain symbolic capital. They are close in age to the average adolescent viewer and familiar with the environment of YouTube which a lot of young people frequent on a daily basis. Thus they navigate this social space with competence. They have a good understanding of what content their audience and fellow readers expect and want – and furthermore what kinds of advertising will not work in this particular format.

BookTubers' general lack of economic capital and wish to accrue it is an incentive for collaborations with publishers. This is an opportunity for publishers to reach an audience that is increasingly more influenced by their peers' book reviews and recommendations on social media than by professionals in traditional print media and by traditional forms of advertising. Depending on the level of professionalism and willingness to engage, BookTubers can work as advertisers, reviewers, and booksellers: they build a reputation in their taste, trustworthiness, relatability and authenticity with their audience. More than just product sellers, they work with books as a lifestyle, not merely as a hobby or a consumer good. Community projects and collective reading are widely popular and strengthen the relationship between and among viewers and BookTubers. Members create a space for book nerds to gather, discuss and exchange as a natural extension of the digital native's network of friends. This offers publishers an opportunity to build a relationship with readers that they did not have before.

Resembling publishing, BookTube works as a content amplifier. It generates social and economic capital for authors and publishers through additional endorsement and sales of books. As trusted recommenders, BookTubers can keep backlist titles in demand and draw attention to both newly published and lesser-known material. In their content amplification they accommodate an international, fast-paced, English-reading young audience. Individually and as a community, they can voice demands of the audience for specific material and make publishers aware of what certain readers want to read more of. While some agents in the publishing field, such as established professional book reviewing journalists, view BookTubers with disregard, publishers are beginning to recognise their potential as intermediaries, curators, and influencers. Current collaborations show that BookTube content creators provide notable value to the publishing world.

Furthermore, this thesis concluded that BookTube has notable effects on society and illustrates certain general trends regarding attitudes towards reading, book purchasing and book reviewing. For one thing, BookTube operates on a social media platform as part of Web 2.0 with a relatively low participation threshold. As a result, people of basically any skill level in video making can contribute content. This enables a certain upward mobility for amateur video makers and especially amateur book reviewers. Book reviewing is thus no longer limited to professionals in established positions in the field, nor to their particular selection of books to amplify. Consequently audiences, whose perspectives, tastes, and criticism have not been paid particular attention in established literary media, seize their own platforms and means of content amplification. Moreover, the BookTube environment encourages frequent exchange through its interconnectedness and frequent purchasing through its culture of habitual book buying. The relatively easy access as well as expectations and customs of constant acquiring changes the perception of books from cultural objects to commodities.

Such changes and developments concern the consumers and producers of books as well as the field of media studies. The impact of digital media on the book industry and the influence of social media on society will in all likelihood continue to increase. BookTube is one example of this impact and influence. It exemplifies that online platforms should not be underestimated in their relevance particularly to the generation of digital natives and its attitude towards books as well as reading and consuming habits. Further research of BookTube, notably in combination with an examination of adjacent social media platforms such as Goodreads and Twitter, is desirable. Especially to determine the financial relevance of BookTubers to publishers and their effect on book buying habits more specifically, concrete data of BookTubers' sales impact is urgently needed. Comparisons between the British BookTube community and those in other countries could prove international trends, or alternately uncover a unique phenomenon. More research on the influence of YouTube communities and authors on young people's reading habits would shed more light on the extend to which this differs from pre-digital times.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> A recent article in the Guardian, for example, blamed the bestselling vlogger Sugg for declining teenage literacy. See Z. Williams, 'Zoe Sugg: The Vlogger Blamed For Declining Teenage Literacy', *The Guardian*, 24 February 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/feb/24/zoe-sugg-zoella-the-vlogger-blamed-for-declining-teenage-literacy>> (11 March, 2017), n.pag.



## Bibliography

- Anderson, P., 'Frankfurt Focus: YouTube, BookTube... PublisherTube?', *Thought Catalog*, 29 October 2015 <<http://thoughtcatalog.com/porter-anderson/2015/10/frankfurt-focus-youtube-BookTube-is-the-future-publishertube/>> (29 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Bergmann, S., 'We Spend a Billion Hours a Day on YouTube, More Than Netflix and Facebook Video Combined', *Forbes*, 28 February 2017 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sirenabergman/2017/02/28/we-spend-a-billion-hours-a-day-on-youtube-more-than-netflix-and-facebook-video-combined/#3bf5ff195ebd>> (11 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Bhaskar, M., *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing From the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (London, etc.: Anthem Press, 2013).
- Bhaskar, M., 'Filtering, Framing, Amplifying: The Core of Publishing Now and Then', *TXT Magazine: Exploring the Boundaries of the Book* (The Hague: Boom Uitgevers, 2014), pp. 79-81.
- Bigelow, C. and D.G. Pelli, 'A Writing Revolution', *Seed Magazine*, 20 October 2009 <[http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/a\\_writing\\_revolution/](http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/a_writing_revolution/)> (2 April, 2017), n.pag.
- Bourdieu, P., *Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, translated by B. Schwibs & A. Russer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).
- Bourdieu, P., *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).
- Burgess, J. and J. Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
- Burling, A., 'Book Publishing Comes to YouTube: Publishers Are Mining Huge Fanbases of Bloggers, Vloggers, and YouTube Stars For New Projects', *Publishers Weekly*, 262/7 (2015).
- Clark, G. and A. Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*, fifth edition (London, New York: Routledge, 2014).

- Dredge, S., 'Why are YouTube Stars so Popular?', *The Guardian*, 3 February 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/03/why-youtube-stars-popular-zoella>> (11 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Dunn, G., 'Get Rich or Die Vlogging: The Sad Economics of Internet Fame', *Fusion*, 14 December 2015 <<http://fusion.kinja.com/get-rich-or-die-vlogging-the-sad-economics-of-internet-1793853578>> (17 May, 2017), n.pag.
- Flood, A., 'UK Publishes More Books Per Capita Than Any Other Country, Report Shows', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/22/uk-publishes-more-books-per-capita-million-report>> (2 April, 2017), n.pag.
- Fröhlich, G. and B. Rehbein (eds.), *Bourdieu-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzlar, 2009).
- Hall, J., 'The Influencer Marketing Gold Rush is Coming: Are You Prepared?', *Forbes*, 17 April 2016 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnhall/2016/04/17/the-influencer-marketing-gold-rush-is-coming-are-you-prepared/#387b889f34fb>> (28 May, 2017), n.pag.
- Herrmann, K., 'Zur Kritik des normierten Lesens', *54 Books*, 7 May 2017 <<http://www.54books.de/zur-kritik-des-normierten-lesens/>> (20 May, 2017), n.pag.
- Jenkins, H., 'Participatory Culture: From Co-Creating Brand Meaning to Changing the World', *GfK Marketing Intelligence Review*, 6/2 (2014), pp. 34-39.
- Jenkins, H., S. Ford and J. Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2013).
- Kaufman, L., 'Chasing Their Star, on YouTube', *The New York Times*, 1 February 2014 <[https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/business/chasing-their-star-on-youtube.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/business/chasing-their-star-on-youtube.html?_r=0)> (21 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Lange, P., *Kids On YouTube: Technical Identities and Digital Literacies* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2014).
- Nakamura, L., "'Words with Friends": Socially Networked Reading on Goodreads', *PMLA*, 128/1 (2013), pp. 238-243.
- Pariser, E., *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (London, etc.: Viking Press, 2011).
- Strangelove, M., *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

- Sweney, M., 'Vloggers Must Clearly Tell Fans When They're Getting Paid by Advertisers, ASA Rules', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2014  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/nov/26/vloggers-must-tell-fans-paid-adverts-asa-rules>> (22 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Taylor, A., *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2014).
- Thompson, J.B., *Books in the Digital Age: The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).
- Thompson, J.B., *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, second edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).
- Van der Weel, A., 'Book Studies and the Sociology of Text Technologies', in S. Rosenberg & S. Simon (eds.), *Material Moments in Book Cultures: Essays in Honour of Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser* (Frankfurt a.M., etc.: Peter Lang, 2014).
- Van der Weel, A., *Changing Our Textual Minds: Towards a Digital Order of Knowledge* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2011).
- Van Maanen, H., *How to Study Art Worlds: On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).
- Vernallis, C., *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Watson, R., 'Some Non-Textual Uses of Books', in S. Eliot & J. Rose (eds.): *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

#### *Web sites*

- 'About', Keywords Press, 2014 <<http://www.thekeywordspress.com/about>> (6 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Banner of Goodreads' 2017 Reading Challenge, Goodreads  
<<https://www.goodreads.com/challenges/5493-2017-reading-challenge>> (28 June 2017).

- ‘Books – Best Sellers – Hardcover Nonfiction’, *The New York Times*, 3 November 2013  
 <[https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2013/11/03/hardcover-nonfiction/?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2013/11/03/hardcover-nonfiction/?_r=0)> (28 Februar, 2017), n.pag.
- ‘Books – Best Sellers – Hardcover Nonfiction’, *The New York Times*, 1 November 2015  
 <<https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2015/11/01/hardcover-nonfiction/>> (28 Februar, 2017), n.pag.
- Campbell, J., ‘Behind the Scenes at Jane Eyre | Northern Ballet | AD’, *YouTube*, 25 April 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rr2vWgfsd20>> (30 May, 2017).
- Campbell, J., ‘The Book Cake Tag’, *YouTube*, 21 October 2015  
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6tqWDdK0xc&t=222s>> (25 March, 2017).
- ‘Lesson: Earn Money With YouTube’, *YouTube Creator Academy*  
 <<https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/revenue-basics#yt-creators-strategies-3>> (10 April, 2017), n.pag.
- Menzies, J., LinkedIn Profile, <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jean-menzies/>> (27 May, 2017), n.pag.
- Menzies, J., ‘Short Story Collection Recommendations’, *YouTube*, 18 March 2016  
 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLrJ3\\_94azE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLrJ3_94azE)> (26 May, 2017).
- Normington, L., ‘How to Start Your Own BookTube Channel ... with Booksandquills and Jenvcampbell’, *YouTube*, 9 December 2015  
 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpGJxf5\\_uR8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpGJxf5_uR8)> (27 May, 2017).
- Penguin Platform, ‘How to be a Critical Reader + Book Recs! With Rosianna’, *YouTube*, 25 May 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw5ODCwxm9s>> (27 May, 2017).
- Saraathotkey, ‘All About BookTube (London Book Fair 2014)’, *Hot Key Blogs (Hot Key Books Web site)*, 15 April 2014 <<http://www.hotkeyblog.com/all-about-BookTube-london-book-fair-2014/>> (29 March, 2017), n.pag.
- Van der Weel, A., ‘Feeding Our Reading Machines’,  
 <[https://blackboard.leidenuniv.nl/bbcswebdav/pid-2992720-dt-content-rid-2262963\\_1/courses/5214KBD14W-1415FGW/FeedingOurReadingMachines\\_2.pdf](https://blackboard.leidenuniv.nl/bbcswebdav/pid-2992720-dt-content-rid-2262963_1/courses/5214KBD14W-1415FGW/FeedingOurReadingMachines_2.pdf)>  
 (21 August, 2015), n.pag.
- ‘Video Monetisation Criteria’, *YouTube Help*  
 <<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/97527?hl=en-GB>> (10 April, 2017), n.pag.

Vliegenthart, S., 'Book Review | Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys', YouTube, 8 December 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcxkuGp0DxA>> (30 May, 2017).

Vliegenthart, S., LinkedIn Profile, <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sanne-vliegenthart-7912b251/>> (27 May, 2017), n.pag.