

Anna McLeish (PhD) Faculty of Culture & Society

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have fostered rapidly growing book-focused communities, commonly referred to as 'bookish social media'. These online communities play a pivotal role in influencing readers, shaping literary discourse, and propelling authors to sudden prominence. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this is a relatively new area of interest, and with the exception of a quantitative study conducted by Tandem Collective and Coalition for Books (2024), in-depth qualitative research has yet to be carried out on bookish social media in the New Zealand context. This presentation reports on initial findings from a current doctoral study that addresses this gap by examining celebratory and critical practices in New Zealand's bookish social media community. Its aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the impact and influence of bookish social media on New Zealand users, readers, authors, and publishers. To achieve this, the study triangulates a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of interviews with twenty bookish content creators, early career authors, established authors, publishing house representatives, and independent bookstore owners about their experiences of bookish social media, with an analysis of bookish social media content collected from five other bookish content creators informed by Kozinets's (2020) netnographic approach. Initial findings show participants' desire for greater diversity, authenticity, and more reviews from readers on these platforms. They also highlight the pressures of being a full-time content creator alongside already demanding roles within New Zealand's literary ecosystem, and the competitive nature of bookish social media, where the pursuit of virality and engaging content often supersedes genuine personal reflection and literary discussion.

Keywords

bookish social media, online book communities, New Zealand literature, bookstagram, booktok, booktube, netnography, reflexive thematic analysis

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications. DOI: 10.1037/13620-004
- Coalition for Books. (2024, March 28). *Tandem Collective's take on working with BookTok and Bookstagram creators*. <https://coalitionforbooks.nz/all-news-newsletters/tandem-collectives-take-on-working-with-booktok-and-bookstagram-creators>
- Kozinets, R.V. (2020). *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*. (3rd Ed.) SAGE Publications.