Storytelling in the Age of TikTok
Decoding the success of YA book promotions

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, reading has been the preferred form of entertainment. Today, however, with the introduction of digital objects in our day-to-day lives, less and less people see the necessity to turn to books to get entertained. In the attention economy, books have to compete for consumers' time with other media such as phones, movies, and social media. The proliferation of these social media is worrying the public and academics alike about their impact on readership. Research has therefore been conducted on the impact of social media on the reading habits of individuals (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018; Owusu-Acheaw, 2016; Rafiq et al., 2019). However, little has been done to study the impact social media has on the authors themselves. Therein lies the subject of this thesis. This paper aims at discovering how authors use the TikTok platform to promote their books, taking into account that TikTok is known as a social media where users scroll mindlessly and never remember what they have seen (Hirose, 2022, para. 3). This thesis therefore aims at investigating the following question: "How can romantasy YA authors capture potential readers' attention on TikTok to promote their books ?" Existing literature on the young adult publishing industry (Strickland, 2013), the promotion of books (Martens, 2016) and, most importantly, audience engagement (Hollenbeek et al., 2014) is thoroughly examined to give a solid base for the continuation of the paper.

A qualitative analysis is chosen as being the most appropriate way to approach the research question. Subsequently, a thematic analysis is deemed the most suitable form of analysis for this thesis for its flexibility and its usefulness with a large data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). Through a thematic analysis of 100 TikTok videos by 10 different authors, three main themes are uncovered: "promoting a story", "promoting an object" and "promoting a person". The findings of the analysis reveal that, in order to capture viewers' attention, authors not only talk about their book's story in their videos, but they also promote their book as a pretty item of decoration, an essential feature in an aesthetically-filled social media world. Moreover, in a cancel culture world, authors also promote themselves in a positive light, trying to appear friendly.

KEYWORDS: *Authors, Audience Engagement, TikTok, Promoting, Young Adult*

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And lastly, to all future EUR students stumbling upon this thesis in the repository to anxiously check if what they are doing is correct (just like I did about a million time throughout this year): Hello! Welcome, to my thesis! Please, make yourself at home (but could you first please take off your shoes before you enter). I certainly cannot promise that everything I wrote is worth a 10 and that you should definitely compare your thesis to mine, but hey, we're all in this together, right?

List of abbreviations

YA   Young Adults

NA   New Adults

Gen Z Generation Z

U&G   Users and Gratifications

CBE   Consumer Brand Engagement

1. Introduction

As of January 2024, the "BookTok" hashtag on TikTok has accumulated 217.4 billion views on the app, with the number increasing every day, (*#BookTok*, n.d.), making it the most active community of the platform (Shaffi, 2022, para. 3). BookTok is the reader's community on TikTok, where content creators share videos recommending books, sharing their passion of reading, documenting their journey while reading a particular novel, etc. (Shaffi, 2022, para. 2). Thanks to the BookTokers, the community's content creators, a lot of new books have become popular, such as *Red White and Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston (2019) and other older books have seen their sales increase significantly, such as *It Ends with Us* by Collen Hoover who first came out in 2016 (Shaffi, 2022, para. 2).

Publishing houses, seeing this new appeal in books on the app, have jumped on the wagon and created their own profile pages to showcase the books they publish, introduce new authors, and push their sales, like Penguin Random House, one of the Big Five publishers, who posted their first video in late 2021 (Currenti, 2023, pp. 30-32). On the platform, new Young Adult authors have seen this as an opportunity to get some exposure to promote their own books. Indeed, nowadays, social media are omnipresent in young adults' lives, whether it be Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube or, more recently, TikTok (Auxier et al., 2021, p. 4). Young Adults are increasingly spending time on social media: 92% of American Gen Zs and Millenials check their social media daily (Noorda & Berens, 2024, para. 2).

Promoting a product on social media is now a must for companies: 90% of social media users follow at least one brand on the different platforms (Wong, 2023, para. 21). Companies use influencers – individuals followed by a large number of users and who have an influence on them – to promote their product (Zak & Hasprova, 2020, p. 2). However, in this social media world in which using influencers is becoming the norm to advertise a product, promoting an object without being the former is no easy feat. It becomes even more arduous when promoting on TikTok, a platform on which, if a video does not hook the viewer in the first few seconds, the latter immediately scrolls and forgets about it (Hirose, 2022, para. 3). Authors must therefore learn how to be visible on social media and how to leverage engaging content in order to capture their target audience's attention.

In the past, researchers have attempted to investigate the relationship between social media and readership. A lot of experts have analysed how readers use social media to come together to talk about books (Šesek & Pušnik, 2014), review the books they read (Perkins,

2017) or even choose their next read (Rozaki, 2023). Another aspect of these research was how social media impacted reading habits (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018; Owusu-Acheaw, 2016; Rafiq et al., 2019). However, all of these research have mainly focused on the impact of social media on readers. There indeed seems to be a lack of investigation into the impact these social media have on the authors of books themselves. Little is known about how authors navigate the different social media platforms, if they perceive them as competitors or, on the contrary, as useful tools, or about how authors actively use these platforms. Hence, this thesis aims to shift the focus from the reader's engagement with the TikTok platform to the author's use of it, thereby shedding new light on the subject. Additionally, being a new and quickly evolving social media, research made in recent months on the impact of TikTok on some industries might already be obsolete. A more recent update might thus be necessary.

Therefore, in order to address the academic gap and the social concern, this thesis will attempt to answer the following question: How can romantasy YA authors capture potential readers' attention on TikTok to promote their books ?

This thesis will be divided into four main sections: the Theoretical Framework, the Methodology, the Results, and the Conclusion. The Theoretical Framework will discuss and give an overview of the existing literature in relation to the book industry. It will look at the publishing industry and how it is structured, looking at the very debated notion of the Young Adult book genre and mentioning the uncertain future of the book in a digital world, at the different techniques already employed to promote a book, and at the different notions of the concept of audience engagement. These existing literature will provide a solid basis for the analysis.

The Methodology part of the paper will delve into why a qualitative method with a thematic analysis approach was deemed most appropriate to answer the research question and how it will help in answering it. The detailed steps carried out during the data analysis will be reported. Additionally, this section will examine how the data was collected; in other words, how the authors analysed for the paper were chosen and what was analysed in their TikTok videos. A short biography of each author analysed, accompanied by a short summary of the promoted books analysed will also be present.

Next, the Results section will address the main themes unearthed during the analysis of the aforementioned TikTok videos. These themes will be discussed thoroughly in relation to the research question, giving new insights on the literature discussed in the Theoretical Framework. The first theme will dive into how authors try to capture potential readers'

attention by promoting the book's story. The second theme will look at how authors try to grasp viewers' attention by promoting the book itself as an object. Last but not least, the third theme will discuss how authors, in order to capture potential readers' attention, promote themselves. These three themes uncovered will be the basis for the answer to the research question.

Last but not least, the Conclusion section will give an overview of the different sections of the thesis. It will give an answer to the research question by diving into the key findings uncovered throughout the analysis. Finally, the conclusion chapter will discuss the limitations encountered during the research as well as the further research that could be investigated in the future on the topic of authors using new social media to promote their books.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Publishing Industry

The invention of the printing press in 1440 can be considered as the starting point of the publishing industry as we know it today as it enabled mass-production of books (Tucker et al., 2024, para. 5). However, if the invention of the printing press established mass-production, the Industrial Revolution amplified it: the new technologies of the time allowed for easier and faster printing of books, reducing costs significantly (Tucker et al., 2024, para. 5; M, 2023, para. 23). Simultaneously, the Industrial Revolution brought a rise in public literacy (M, 2023, para. 17). The combination of both the decrease in costs of printing and the increase in literacy rate led to the boom of the publishing industry in all of its forms: books, newspapers, and/or magazines (Tucker et al., 2024, para. 5; M, 2023, para. 23).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the publishing industry consisted mostly of small publishing houses throughout Europe and North America (Tucker et al., 2024, para. 5 and 7). Throughout the century, multiple publishing houses not only started to expand and merge to face growing competition but also started to specialise in distinct sectors, especially the very lucrative educational sector (Tucker et al., 2024, para. 5). Nowadays, the publishing industry is divided into two big sectors: consumer publishers and non-consumer publishers (Clark & Phillips, 2019, p. 4). The latter is the biggest of the two sectors and comprises everything that relates to professional or educational books, such as school textbooks or academic journals. Additionally, the biggest publishers in the publishing industry, regardless of the sector, are all non-consumer publishers: Pearson (English), RELX which is the result of the merger between Reed International (English) and Elsevier (Dutch), Thomson Reuters (Canadian) and Wolters Kluwer (Dutch). The consumer publishers', also known as trade publishers, biggest publishing houses are both European: Penguin Random House (German) and Hachette (French) (Clark & Phillips, 2019, pp. 5-8). According to the European Union, publishing is one of Europe's biggest creative industry, with a €36-38 billion market value (*Books and Publishing*, n.d., para. 1).

2.1.1. *The Young Adult Genre*

The Outsiders (1967) by S.E. Hinton is regarded as being the first YA book with the term "Young Adult" being first used in the 1960s (McKay, 2018, p. 1; Strickland, 2013, para. 6). But it is not until the beginning of the 2000s and the success of the *Harry Potter* series by

J.K. Rowling that publishers and bookstores began to view YA fiction as an important aspect of their catalogue and began to market books directly to Young Adults (Strickland, 2013, para. 10). The frank success of J.K. Rowling's series paved the way for new YA book series such as *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer (2005) or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2015), further anchoring YA fiction to the publishing scene (Strickland, 2013, para. 10). In 2020, the YA book market value was estimated at approximately $16,878 million, a number that is expected to continue growing (*Global Children and Young Adult Books Opportunities And Strategies Market Report*, n.d., para. 3). Moreover, the number of YA book sales keeps on increasing from year to year, showing the success of this book category (Curcic, 2023, para. 10).

However, readers of YA books are not necessarily teenagers. Indeed, 55% of YA book purchasers are over 18 (Curcic, 2023, para. 12). This number can be explained by parents or guardians buying the books for their children, but 78% of over-18 buyers purchased these books for themselves. This shows that the YA book category is not a book segment confined to teenagers, it can be appreciated by other age groups as well (O'Sullivan, 2023, para. 12).

2.1.1.1. *Young Adult Romantasy books*

As previously mentioned, book genres are a very debated subject. No one has the same definition of a certain genre. Young Adult books are widely accepted to be "coming-of-age" books with a teenage protagonist, talking about topics such as identity/coming-of-age, family, mental and physical health, death, substance use, LGBTQ, and relationships (Owen, 2003, p. 11). YA novels are mostly targeted at teenagers from 12 to 18 years old. McIvor (2016, para. 5-17) outlines YA sub-genres as follows: Sci-Fi/Dystopian, Crime/Mystery, Thriller/Horror, Fantasy, Romance, Historical, and Contemporary.

According to Barnes & Nobles (n.d., para. 1), the romantasy subgenre "fuses fantastical elements with romance". They are coming-of-age romances in adventure or action-packed books. Since the success of the Harry Potter franchise, fantasy books have been among the more popular sub-genres of the YA genre, with 8 out of the 10 bestselling YA books of all time being fantasy books (McIvor, 2016, para. 11; Curcic, 2023, para 22). Moreover, recently, fantasy books have become, thanks to TikTok, more often than not, intricately linked with the romance sub-genre (Andrew, 2024, para. 3-4). This combination delights old and new readers alike: in 2023, the hashtag "#romantasy" figured in more than

200,000 videos, propelling it from mere sub-genre to sought-after book category (Andrew, 2024, para. 14).

2.1.2. *The digital publishing and the uncertain future of books*

2.1.2.1. *Reading habits*

Reading habits are defined as the way an individual organises their readings (Davidovitch et al., 2016, p. 130). Marinak and Gambrell (2008, p. 22) state that readers who are personally motivated to read books will be more likely to remain avid readers throughout their lives than readers who are externally motivated. Furthermore, Wigfield et al. (2008, p. 432) claim that the intrinsic motivation of reading is to read for pure enjoyment, nothing else. Therefore, a crucial element in making readers happy to continue reading in spite of the rise of technology and for books not to be completely replaced by the former is to simply read what one likes and not be forced to read (Merga, 2017, p. 19). It is thus of the utmost importance to get a closer look at what people like to read in their leisure time.

Not all books are the same and have the same popularity. Depending on the genre, individuals will be more or less inclined to read them. Indeed, books can be categorised into two big groups: fiction and non-fiction. In-between these categories, there is already a big difference in readership. Indeed, around six people out of ten prefer reading fiction books rather than non-fiction books (Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999, p. 205; Rea, 2020, para. 46). This big difference could be explained by the fact that one of the main reasons readers read books is to escape from their lives (Wilkinson et al., 2020, pp. 160-161), something that reading non-fiction books can hardly provide.

Moreover, the two big groups of books (fiction and non-fiction) can be divided into different genres. However, the classification of book genres is a very subjective matter. One person might think that one book belongs in a certain genre, whereas another might disagree. The lines between genre classifications are more often than not blurry and overlapping (Thelwall, 2017, p. 405). Let us therefore take Sabri et al.'s (2020, p. 86) genre classification with "Memoir", "Biography", "History", "Science", and "Self-Help" as non-fiction book genres and "Young Adult", "Fantasy", "Science Fiction", "Classics", "Historical Fictions", "Contemporary", and "Romance" as the biggest fiction book genres. Depending on the age of the reader, genre preferences will vary greatly. Indeed, among the youngest generation (Generation Z, from 16 to 22 years old), "Fantasy", "Young Adult" and "Romance" were among the most popular ones (Rea, 2020, para. 48). Whereas the oldest generation (the Silent

Generation, from 74 to 91) prefers reading "Historical Fictions" (Rea, 2020, para. 51). As stated previously, a book's popularity will greatly depend on its genre. In a world in which the population constantly experience stress and pressure from every aspect of their lives, non-fiction books seem indeed on the decline.

Moreover, it is important to take into consideration that not everyone has the same levels of reading habits depending on their geographical location. Indeed, readers in less developed countries do not have the same resources as readers in more developed countries (Nag et al., 2014, pp. 1-5). This leads to young people not having the same reading level depending on their socio-economic background: on average, children in the top quarter of the International Socio-Economic Index had higher literacy rates than those in the bottom quarter of the ISEI (Mostert & Wikan, 2008, pp. 95-96; Shiel & Eivers, 2009, p. 353). Moreover, Jhang (2014, p. 400) found that in countries with a shortage of qualified teachers (mostly countries in the third world), young people will have a more negative attitude towards reading. Reading habits are therefore not equal everywhere.

2.1.2.2. *New technologies*

In a world filled with technologies, different levels of reading habits are not the only thing threatening books from becoming obsolete (Greco et al., 2013, p. 1). For a long time, individuals have been anxious that new generations will discard the medium in favour of television or social media; it is the myth of the "new media replacing the old media" (Ballatore & Natale, 2016, p. 2380). Integrating new technologies into reading behaviours is therefore a necessity for books to keep thriving. The publishing industry has thus embraced these technologies, seeing them not as the enemy but as a very useful tool to continue thriving (Carreiro, 2010, pp. 222-223). E-books and audiobooks are some of the technologies that the publishing industry has welcomed. Carreiro (2010, pp. 220) discusses in depth how e-books are not a way to replace books, but rather, among other things, a way to raise book accessibility. Concerning audiobooks, Spjeldnæs & Karlsen (2022, pp. 7-8) explain how an audiobook enables readers to read even more than they normally would, thanks to being able to multitask.

2.2. Promoting books

Promoting books is an essential part of publishing as it enables the book to find its

target audience, without which it becomes fruitless. Throughout the years, there have been a lot of controversies regarding the Young Adult Literature: from a lack of diversity, to inappropriate books categorised as "YA", without forgetting YA books being seen as simply "bad" (Crowe, 2001, p. 146). Recently, however, a new problem that authors are facing has arisen in the industry: the saturation of the market (Flood, 2019, para. 4). In the article by Flood (2019), Sally Nicholls, a YA author, states that the "market is too overcrowded" and that some writers even decide to leave the world of YA in the hopes of making it into another book genre. The question of being able to, as a YA author, differentiate oneself from another one therefore becomes primordial.

As previously stated, new technologies are everywhere today, and it would therefore be foolish to discard them and not use them to one's advantage. The publishing industry uses them as another way of consuming books, but they also use these platforms as a way to promote the latter. The Internet is, after all, an efficient, effective, and cheap medium of communication (Pi, 2006, p. 26). The digital revolution has ushered book marketing strategies into a new era. In the past, book promotions relied exclusively on offline strategies such as book-signing and school visits (Martens, 2016, p. 50). Now, authors have taken matters into their own hands, leveraging social media platforms to reach their audience.

2.2.1. *Offline marketing strategies: a publisher-led approach*

As previously mentioned, the term "Young Adult" was first coined in the 1960s. Ever since, publishers, in order to sell their YA books, have put in place different marketing strategies to reach their audiences. Before the advent of social media, publishers were faced with "gatekeepers". These were institutions or people, such as parents, librarians, teachers, or figures of authority, that acted as a barrier between a YA book and its intended target (Martens, 2016, p. 50; Rutherford, 2009, p. 2). If a librarian deemed a book not correct enough for Young Adults, they would not put it on their shelves, and YAs would not know of its existence. Publishing houses therefore had to accommodate their strategies to either bypass gatekeepers or find a way to get through to them. Examples of strategies that publishers could use to bypass gatekeepers could be putting advertisements for books in teen magazines or sending authors' biographical sheets in response to fan letters (Martens, 2016, p. 50). However, these techniques proved to be both ineffective and very expensive. Indeed, marketing budgets for children's or YA books were very low compared to adult books (Martens, 2016, p. 50). Contrastingly, publishers mostly tried to sell their books by fostering

positive relationships with gatekeepers: publishers would send their authors to do school visits, they would create book review events in libraries, and they would send sales representatives in different institutions, etc (Martens, 2016, p. 50). These marketing techniques proved to be more successful and efficient.

2.2.2. *Online marketing strategies: an author-led approach*

Nowadays, however, since, most YA spend their time online, when one markets a YA book on social media, they bypass all these gatekeepers and immediately reach their targets, making social media an essential tool in marketing YA books (Martens, 2016, p. 60). YA publishers try to appropriate this tool in order to differentiate themselves from the ever-growing competition in the market. One of the most commonly used techniques to reach the target audience is the creation of websites and social media to create a relationship with their readership (Martens, 2016, p. 60). In these websites, young adults could discuss with fellow readers, take part in contests, or sign up to become book reviewers to receive free books to review on their blogs or channels.

Additionally, the advent of social media allowed authors to become more present and more in control of their book promotions. Indeed, before the digital age, authors were being told what to do by the publishing houses, now they could take the reins of their book promotions. Authors create their own social media accounts where they can directly talk with their readers without having to go through their publishers. It allows authors to become more "approachable" to their audience, who then feel more at ease asking questions, getting to know the writers and learning more about the books (Martens, 2016, p. 61). Moreover, authors use social media to do cross-media book promotions (Martens, 2016, p. 61-62): in addition to their main social media account, authors can create other types of content, such as novellas on Wattpad in between books being published, YouTube scripted videos related to the book, or Facebook pages that go hand in hand with the plot of the novel. All these techniques are attempts to attract more audiences and to continuously cultivate a relationship with the readers, even when no book is to be promoted at the moment.

2.2.3. *Social Media*

In order to be able to promote their books effectively, it is crucial for authors to get familiar with the different types of media they have at their disposal, as it will help them engage more easily and naturally with their readership (Martens, 2016, p. 60-61). An example

of an author who effectively uses social media to connect with his audience is John Green, the YA author of *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) (Martens, 2016, p. 61). John Green has created on the YouTube platform several channels with his brother, making him appear more approachable and likeable to the fans (Martens, 2016, p. 61). Each social media platform is different and has its own approach and specificities when it comes to promoting (Alalwan et al., 2017, p. 1181). It is therefore essential for authors to get better acquainted with these particular practices.

2.2.3.1. *TikTok*

TikTok is a social media app that was first launched in late 2016 and consists exclusively of videos (*ByteDance - Inspire Creativity, Enrich Life*, n.d., para. 1). These short videos allow users to express themselves creatively, show their talents to the world, share their everyday lives, and so on. The possibilities are infinite. It is therefore no wonder that, as it has been done with other social media like Instagram and Facebook, individuals and companies are starting to use the platform as a way to sell their products (Guarda et al., 2021, p. 36). Publishing houses have quickly realised that they could promote their books through TikTok, especially thanks to the "BookTok" community (Currenti, 2023, p. 32). Moreover, in 2022, in the US, 67% of users on TikTok were between the ages of 18 and 19 (Ceci, 2023, figure 1) which shows that this is a young social media platform YA authors should use if they want to make sure they will target the right audience.

2.2.3.2. *YouTube*

YouTube was created in 2005 and is a platform where individuals can post a video online that others can watch, like, and/or comment on. YouTube is the second most visited website in the world, with 34.6 billion of visits per month (Neufeld, 2021, figure 1). Among the videos on the platform, a book community has emerged: BookTube, in which content creators make videos to discuss, reviews and show the latest YA books they have read (Perkins, 2017, pp. 352-353). These videos can take many forms, such as filming oneself while reading a book, or showing the books one has just purchased. Booktubers are seen as endorsers of books, and their reviews of books are extremely important to publishers as they will determine the purchase decisions of viewers (Tomasena, 2019, p. 1). Therefore, publishing companies often collaborate with Booktubers in order to put forward their books, in an attempt to market their books. Booktubers will then be invited to book conferences,

authors' meet-ups, will receive Advanced Readers Copy books (books that have not officially been published yet), etc. (Tomasena, 2019, pp. 6-7). YouTube is therefore a great platform for publishers to use in order to promote their upcoming releases.

2.2.3.3. *Instagram*

Instagram is a social media platform that was developed in 2010 and allows users to share photos and videos with people who follow them (Blystone, 2024, para. 2). Similarly to BookTube and BookTok, a book community emerged on Instragram dubbed Bookstagram (Thomas, 2021, p. 3). In this community, users would post the books they are currently reading or create an aesthetic post matching the book's content. The aesthetic aspect of a post is a fundamental part of the Bookstagram community, as it is a visual way to entice Instagram users to read books, the more aesthetically pleasing a post about a book is, the more it will give viewers a wish to read it (Thomas, 2021, p. 3) . Comparably to BookTube, publishers have realised the potential of collaborating with Bookstagram's content creators in order to put forth their books and to use it as a marketing strategy (Pretel-Jiménez et al., 2024, p. 306).

2.3. Audience Engagement

Recent research has shown that social media, especially TikTok, have an important effect on memory loss and information retention (Srivastava, 2023, p. 4-5). This makes it even harder for companies trying to market a product on these social media: they need to not only focus on outsmarting their competitors, but they also need to capture the attention span of their potential customers (Kumar & Gupta, 2016, p. 306). Indeed, as TikTok users mainly use the app in a passive way and to "mindlessly scroll" (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1), it becomes primordial for companies and, in the case of this paper, YA authors, to be able to capture and retain the attention of the users in order to be remembered.

2.3.1. *Uses and Gratifications theory*

In order for YA authors to be able to effectively promote their books on TikTok, they must first understand the needs and motivations of their potential readers (Duggal, 2018, para. 1). They must understand why someone would go and buy a romantasy book.

Chandler & Munday (2011, para. 1) describe the uses and gratifications theory (U&G theory) as a way of understanding the motivations and needs of users of media. This theory, since it was first introduced in the 1940s, has been reviewed and revised by a great number of

experts, who each gave their own take on the different aspects of it. For the clarity of this research, the four dimensions suggested by McQuail in 1983 are looked at: (a) the diversion dimension, which aims to describe the media as a way to escape the routine of individuals or to provide emotions for the spectators, (b) the personal relationships dimension, which aims to explain how media compensate for the absence of relations or how it facilitates social interactions, (c) the personal identity dimension, which aims to explain how media can help individuals in deciding how to behave in real life, and how media can reinforce an individual's value. Lastly, (d) the surveillance dimension, which aims to explain how media can provide individuals with means of information (McQuail, 1983, p. 353).

The dimensions of the uses and gratifications theory can help authors understand why someone would want to buy a romantasy book. When it comes to reading fantasy books, Allen et al. (2006, p. 58) discussed that the main motivation was to escape reality, to live an adventure, which correlates with the entertainment dimension of the U&G theory. Moreover, another motivation to read fantasy books is that they allow the readers to "expand on their techniques for solving personal problems" (Allen et al., 2006, p. 58). In other words, fantasy books can help the reader face real-life problems by incorporating what they might read – a characterization of the personal identity dimension. Additionally, when it comes to reading romance books, Burnett & Beto (2000) argue that the main reason the people they interviewed read romance books was because they were feeling lonely and wanted to feel like they had a relationship (p. 33), which corresponds to the personal relationships dimension of the U&G theory. Last but not least, Burnett & Beto also recount that the people interviewed liked reading romance books because the latter could give them advice on how to deal with their real-life relationship (p. 35), linking it to the surveillance dimension of the uses and gratifications theory.

2.3.2. *Consumer Brand Engagement*

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) refers to the brand-consumer relationship the company creates in order to gain awareness, retain loyalty, and create brand trust with the consumer (Hollebeek et al., 2014, pp. 149-165). In other words, CBE refers to how, in the case of this paper, YA authors can create a relationship with potential readers on TikTok in order to capture their attention and, ultimately, turn them into loyal readers.

Hollebeek et al. (2014, pp. 149-165) characterised CBE as a three-dimensional concept: the cognitive, the behavioral and the emotional aspect. The cognitive aspect refers to

how much effort and consideration the consumer puts into thinking about a brand during an interaction with said brand (p. 154). The emotional aspect refers to the degree to which the consumer has a positive attitude towards the brand during an interaction with said brand (p. 154). And lastly, the behavioural aspect refers to the "level of energy, effort, and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Additionally, Samarah et al. (2021) argued that "customers are more willing to engage with a brand on social media when they perceived it to be highly interactive" (p. 658). Moreover, brand trust was also found to increase CBE on social media (Samarah et al. 2021, p. 659). Therefore, higher brand interactivity and brand trust lead to higher CBE, which, in turn, leads to higher brand loyalty and brand retention (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Samarah et al., 2021).

Considering all of this, romantasy authors on TikTok must be able to actively interact with users on TikTok and actively create brand trust if they wish to effectively capture and retain the attention of potential readers on the app. In the case of this paper, brand interactivity can be characterised by both the author's interactivity with potential readers in the comments section and by the author encouraging shares, likes, or comments on the video. Brand trust can be characterised by thesymmetry and authenticity of the information provided by the author in their videos.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methods

In 1995, Stake distinguished quantitative and qualitative research as having different purposes. One of them is the following: *"The distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose of a inquiry"* (p. 37). Moreover, Flick (2018) describes doing qualitative research as a way of understanding, describing, and explaining societal phenomena, as opposed to quantitative research, which simply describes and interprets (p. 5). There is a meaning-making aspect to qualitative analysis that quantitative analysis lacks. Flick further discusses how qualitative research *"seek to understand how people construct the world around them, what they are doing, how they are doing it or what is happening to them"* (p. 5). This paper is focused on trying to understand the different ways Young Adult authors promote or market their books on social media in order to touch a generation that does not read anymore, not just list them. Therefore, using a qualitative method for this research is the most appropriate approach.

3.2. Data Analysis Method

As stated by Braun and Clark (2006), a thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse, as well as report patterns from the data collected (p. 79). As this research aims to understand how authors promote their books on TikTok, a thematic analysis has therefore been deemed the most appropriate data analysis method. Indeed, analysing the content of authors' videos to promote the books and their ramifications (comments, likes) will allow the discovery of explicit or implicit patterns, to help explore how authors use this particular social media to help them market their books.

As with any form of analysis, thematic analysis has its advantages and its disadvantages (Guest et al., 2012, p. 17-18). The main advantage of a thematic analysis is the flexibility it provides the researchers when it comes to the analytical tools used during the analysis process. Moreover, a thematic analysis is suitable for large sets of data and allows for an interpretation that goes beyond individual experiences. However, reliability is the main concern in using this type of analysis, as there will inevitably be an interpretation bias in the generation of the codes (Guest et al., 2012, p. 17-18). Transparency throughout the analytical process is therefore paramount in ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.

Braun and Clark (2006, p. 16-24) identify six different steps to be taken during a thematic analysis that this paper has followed. The first step is data familiarization. In other words, after collecting the video data from TikTok, an immersion in the data has been carried out, and a thorough review and analysis of the videos has been performed. The second step, according to Braun and Clark, is the generation of initial codes, which kicked out the coding process of the thematic analysis. During the generation of initial codes, patterns have been found among the data, which have afterwards been divided and categorised into codes. During the third step, relationships between the codes were drawn, connections were made. The subsequent codes have then been regrouped into different, larger categories that have become the main themes discovered. The fourth step is the review of the themes. During this phase, the data were reviewed once again, this time applying them to the themes to see if nothing went amiss and if the themes fit with the data collected. Iterations of this step were necessary in order to avoid unreliable and inaccurate themes. Relabelling, regrouping codes, or revised themes are some examples of steps that were used to ensure accurate themes. The penultimate step is the definition of themes. At this stage of the analysis, it was important to see if the themes were not too complex or too diverse. After making sure of this, definitions and explanations of what the themes consist of have been made. Lastly, the sixth step of the thematic analysis was the write-up of the discovered themes.

A thematic analysis can be inductive or deductive, meaning that, codes and themes can be developed, respectively, through the analysis of both the data collected and the literature analysed prior to the data collection (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019, para. 4). For this paper, a mix of inductive and deductive codes has been created, with an emphasis on inductive coding. This decision allowed a preliminary bias-free data analysis in the pursuit of a reliable and valid analysis. This open-coding process was performed in the hopes of uncovering, in the first round of the analysis, new codes and patterns dissociated from the already existing theories. In the later stage of the coding process, some deductive codes have been introduced in order to subsequently connect theories to the data collected.

The use of Atlas.ti, a coding software, was most useful during the entire process of the analysis. It allowed a clear documentation of all codes produced during the analyses as well as a suitable tool to draw connections between the latter in order to uncover the main themes. As previously mentioned, interpretation bias in the generation of codes is the main concern in doing thematic analysis. Therefore, by allowing the recording of the different steps

undertaken during the analysis, Atlas.ti is an excellent way for researchers to be as transparent as possible in this process to ensure the reliability of the analysis.

3.3. Credibility and ethics

As Silverman (2011, p. 360) discusses, research credibility relies on both the reliability and validity of the data. Throughout this research, reliability is achieved by a rigorous and constant pursuit of transparency throughout the entirety of the research, notably by making the data gathering and analysis processes clear. The validity of the data, as Babbie (2016, p. 152) discusses, can be divided into four aspects: the face validity, the criterion-related validity, the construct validity, and the content validity. The construct validity, which refers to the extent to which a concept measures what it is intended to measure, was ensured by using theories previously developed by experts in the field.

3.4. Data collection and sampling

To gather the data necessary for the research, purposive sampling was adopted. This type of sampling allows the researcher to choose certain units of analysis based on specific traits useful for the research (Babbie, 2016, pp. 152-153). In the case of this research, it has been decided that around 10 authors of Young Adult romantasy books will be investigated on TikTok. Around ten of their videos promoting their books were collected and analysed, to have a comprehensive view of the different ways authors promote their books.

As previously mentioned, purposive sampling allows the researcher to single out data based on certain criteria useful for the research. Hence, criteria were decided to choose the authors and books that were going to be analysed. To choose the authors to be analysed, the first criterion was that they had to have a TikTok account. Then, a thorough investigation of BookTok was made. The main aim was to include both well-known and lesser-known TikTok authors to provide a comprehensive overview of the different promotional strategies, regardless of the author's popularity. Therefore, the authors chosen for the analysis have a follower count ranging between approximately 7k and 500k. Another criterion was that the authors' book needed to have a certain level of popularity on TikTok. Indeed, if a book was popular, it indicated that the authors' promotional strategies must have been a success, therefore making this paper's analysis more interesting in investigating them. Therefore, the choice of authors analysed was based on their readership and on their book's popularity.

Then, to choose which types of books were going to be analysed, the main criteria were that the book imperatively had to be a YA book and that Romantasy had to be the main genre present in the story. Indeed, as McIvor (2016, para. 11 and 13) points out, YA Fantasy books and YA Romance books are the most popular genres in the Young Adult category. He also discusses how these two genres overlap and are sometimes complicated to dissociate, becoming books dubbed "romantasy" by readers. Next, the book for which the TikTok videos were made had to be recent enough to have been originally promoted by the author on TikTok. Therefore, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (Maas, 2015), as popular as it is on TikTok, could not be analysed for this research as it was first released in 2015, when the platform did not yet exist. Additionally, if the authors had an ongoing book series, only videos promoting the first book of the series would be chosen to be analysed. If a TikTok video did not meet all these criteria, it was not considered for the interview.

After deciding on the authors and books to be analysed thanks to purposive sampling, the first step in collecting the data was to retrieve the videos from the author's TikTok account. Every video promoting the book in question was downloaded to single out all data meeting the criteria previously specified. Then, a second selection of data was made. As more or less ten videos per author were needed, a random selection of the data previously selected was carried out in an attempt to recreate the "FYP" (For You Page) effect a TikTok viewer might experience. In the TikTok app, the "FYP" is the home screen where the user can discover diverse videos suggested by the app tailored to them thanks to the algorithm. However, a content creator never knows how or which video will pop-up on a user's FYP. That is why randomly selecting the pre-collected data was decided to be the best course of action. All the videos chosen ranged from 6 seconds to more than 1 minute and 50 seconds.

Before diving into the presentation of the different authors chosen for the analysis, it is essential to discuss the terms of authors and content creators on social media. Throughout the analysis, the term "authors" will refer to Merriam-Webster's dictionary definition: "the writer of a literary work" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Social media content creators, however, is a fairly new term. It refers to individuals, on social media, who create any type of content. Anyone owning a social media account and posting pictures or videos of themselves or of their holidays, is therefore automatically a content creator. However, some individuals, whether they be influencers, Youtubers, gamers, or vloggers, use content creating as a source of income, as a profession (Craig, 2019, p. 363). The type of social media content creators produce will depend on their specificities; some will do live videos of themselves gaming

while others will simply post photos or videos of themselves (Craig, 2019, p. 363). As Later Social Media Glossary discusses, "the role of content creators on social media is to entertain, inform, and educate their audience with the content they create and share" (Later Social Management, n.d., para. 3). Therefore, in the case of this paper, authors are not only individuals who write books but are also social media content creators, as they create videos to inform and promote their work.

3.5. Authors and books chosen for analysis

3.5.1. *Hafsah Faizal – A Tempest of Tea*

Hafsah Faizal, known as @hafsah_faizal on TikTok, is an American #1 *New York Times* bestseller author who made her big debut with *We Hunt The Flame* (2019) and its sequel, *We Free The Stars* (2021) and is a Forbes 30 under 30 honoree ('About • Hafsah Faizal', n.d.). *A Tempest of Tea* (2024) is her latest book. As of April 2024, on TikTok, she has gathered 109.2k followers as well as a total of over 2.2 million likes (Faizal, n.d.).

Filled with suspense, twists, vampires, and romance, *A Tempest of Tea* follows the adventure of Arthie who owns a tearoom that, at night, becomes a bloodhouse for vampires. However, when her tearoom gets threatened, she must ask for the help of an unlikely foe to help her save it (*A Tempest of Tea (Blood and Tea, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.2. *Chloe Gong – Foul Lady Fortune*

Chloe Gong, known as @thechloegong on TikTok, was born in Shanghai, grew up in New Zealand, and now lives in New York. She is a New York Times bestselling author of *These Violent Delights* (2020) for which she was nominated in the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction (2020)' category of the Goodreads Choice Awards (*Chloe Gong*, n.d.; Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-a). She was also named Forbes 30 Under 30 2024 (*Chloe Gong*, n.d.). *Foul Lady Fortune* was published in 2022 and was nominated for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction (2022)' category of the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-c). As of April 2024, Gong has 210.3k followers on TikTok and has garnered a total of 12.1 million likes (Gong, n.d.).

Foul Lady Fortune narrates the tale of Rosalind Lang in Shanghai in the 1930s, who, after being brought back from the dead, has stopped ageing, does not have to sleep anymore, and can heal any of her wounds. With Orion Hong, a spy, they must poise as a couple to

uncover the criminal behind a series of murders (*Foul Lady Fortune (Foul Lady Fortune, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.3. *Adalyn Grace – Belladonna*

Adalyn Grace, known as @authoradalyngrace on TikTok, is a young American New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today bestselling author for *Belladonna*, published in August 2022 (*Home -,* 2024). Thanks to her debut novel *All the Stars and Teeth* (2020) and thanks to *Belladonna* (2022), Grace was nominated twice for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction' category for the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-a; Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-c). Grace, as of April 2024, has 22.5k followers on her TikTok profile, and has accumulated a total of 707.5k likes (Grace, n.d.).

Belladonna retraces the steps of Signa, a 19-year-old orphaned girl who cannot die: whenever she tries to, she has an encounter with Death himself. Together, they will try to solve the murder of her aunt (*Belladonna (Belladonna, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.4. *Elizabeth Lim – Six Crimson Crane*

Elizabeth Lim, known as @elizabethlimwriter on TikTok, is an American Japanese New York Times, Sunday, and USA Today best-selling author. She began writing stories while completing her studies at Harvard and Julliard (*ELIZABETH LIM | ABOUT*, n.d.). Her first book was published in 2018 and, in 2021, she published *Six Crimson Cranes* for which she was nominated for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction (2021)' category for the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-b). As of April 2024, Lim had gathered on TikTok 41.6k followers and collected a total of 1.1 million likes (Lim, n.d.).

Six Crimson Crane, set in an East Asian-inspired fantasy world, tells the story of Shiori'anma, a princess, cursed with forbidden magic by her stepmother. As a result of the curse, her six brothers are turned into cranes, and she loses her voice. To break the curse and save her family, Shiori must go on a dangerous journey filled with adventure, magic, and romance (*Six Crimson Cranes (Six Crimson Cranes, #1)*, n.d.)

3.5.5. *Tricia Levenseller – The Shadows Between Us*

Tricia Levenseller, known as @tricialevenseller on TikTok, is a Utah-based New York Times and USA Today best-selling author (About - Tricia Levenseller, 2024). She has written seven books so far and is known primarily for the *Daughter of the Pirate King* duology. *The*

Shadows Between Us (2020), the first book in her latest series, was nominated for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction (2020)' category for the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-a). On TikTok, as of April 2024, Levenseller has garnered 6749 followers and amassed a total of 89.7k likes on her profile (Levenseller, n.d.).

The Shadows Between Us recounts the life of Alessandra, a villain, who, in order to gain power, plans to seduce, marry, and, eventually, kill Kallias, the Shadow King. But throughout the book, she finds herself protecting him more than scheming to kill him (*The Shadows Between Us (The Shadows Between Us, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.6. *Sunya Mara – The Darkening*

Sunya Mara, known as @sunyamara on TikTok, is an American author who resides in Los Angeles. Before becoming a writer, she wrote and illustrated for Kobe Bryant's company, Granity Studios (*About — Sunya Mara*, n.d.). Her debut novel, *The Darkening*, was published in 2022. As of April 2024, she has garnered 99.1k followers, as well as 3.9 million likes overall on TikTok (Mara, n.d.).

The Darkening (Mara, 2022) is an action-packed book set in a world with a dangerous storm that curses everyone who touches it. There are two main characters: Vesper, the daughter of failed revolutionaries who is on the run, and Prince Dalca, born to protect his home from the storm. The book is filled with political intrigues, magic, and romance (*The Darkening (The Darkening, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.7. *Chloe C Peñaranda – An Heir Comes to Rise*

Chloe C Peñaranda, known as @chloecpenaranda on TikTok, is a well-established Scottish author. *The Nytefall* series allowed her to become a USA Today best-selling author (*BIO + EVENTS*, n.d.). As of April 2024, she is followed on TikTok by 74.9k users and has collected a total of 2.5 million likes (Peñaranda, n.d.).

An Heir Comes to Rise (Peñaranda, 2021) is the first installment in a seven-book series and follows the story of Faythe, an orphan human who lives in a kingdom where fae rule and where being human is dangerous. She meets Nik, a fae assassin, who awakens unknown fae abilities in her that could get her killed if discovered (*An Heir Comes to Rise (An Heir Comes to Rise, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.8. *Lauren Roberts – Powerless*

Lauren Roberts, known as @laurentrobertslibrary on TikTok, is a young, first-time author born and raised in Michigan (*Lauren's Library*, n.d.). Her debut novel, *Powerless*, published in January 2023, was nominated for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science-Fiction (2023)' category for the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-d). On TikTok, as of April 2024, she has gathered 486.8k followers and has accumulated over 21 million likes on her profile (Roberts, n.d.).

Powerless (Roberts, 2023), the first installment in the Powerless Trilogy, is set in a world that suffered a plague where the survivors either have powers, the Elites, or not, the Ordinaries. The main character, Paedyn, is an Ordinary who ends up in a deadly competition meant to showcase Elites' powers after she saves the kingdom's prince, Kai (*Powerless (The Powerless Trilogy, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.9. *Liselle Sambury – Blood Like Magic*

Liselle Sambury, known as @lisellesambury on TikTok, is a Trinidian-Canadian author who writes books focused on the faithful representation of black people (*Liselle Sambury - Author*, 2024.). Her debut novel, *Blood Like Magic* (2021) was a Governor General's Literary Award finalist. Sambury, on TikTok, as of April 2024, is followed by 11.6k users and has accumulated a total of 85.6k likes (Sambury, n.d.).

In *Blood Like Magic*, the main character, Voya, must perform a task given by her ancestors in order to access her magic and gain her powers. If she fails to perform it, her entire family loses their magic. The only problem is, she is tasked with killing her first love (*Blood Like Magic (Blood Like Magic, #1)*, n.d.).

3.5.10. *Amélie Wen Zhao – Song of Silver, Flame Like Night*

Amélie Wen Zhao, known as @ameliewenzhao on TikTok, was born in Paris, grew up in Beijing, and now lives in New York, where, in addition to being an author, she works in finance (*Amélie Wen Zhao – New York Times Bestselling Author*, n.d.). She is a New York Times and Sunday Times bestseller of the trilogy *Blood Heir* (2019). Her latest book, *Song of Silver, Flame Like Night* (2023) was nominated for the 'Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science Fiction (2023)' category of the Goodreads Choice Award (Goodreads Choice Awards, n.d.-d). On TikTok, as of April 2024, Zhao is followed by 103.9k people and has accumulated a total of 4 million likes on her profile (Zhao, n.d.).

Song of Silver, Flame Like Night, inspired by ancient China's mythology and folklore, retraces the steps of Lan, an orphan who works as a sexworker and who tries to find information about her mother, brutally murdered, and about the strange mark on her arm that appeared during the night of the murder. Only she can see the mark until the day she encounters a boy, Zen, who can see it as well (*Song of Silver, Flame Like Night (Song of the Last King…*, n.d.).

4. Results

4.1. Promoting a story

This first theme dives into how authors try to capture potential readers' attention to promote their books by talking about the story of the novel, teasing the plot of the book to the viewer, creating a desire in the audience so they will want to buy the book. It has been discovered to be the most popular type of content in the data.

4.1.1. *Visuals used in the videos*

When it comes to shooting a video, the visuals will obviously be the key aspects of it, in order to appeal to the audience. Visuals are a primordial element in promoting a story on a video-sharing platform. Indeed, a book's story is not visual, it is written on a piece of paper. Therefore, in order to promote it, authors need to use art, pictures, and videos to attract people to their story. They need to show the audience that their book is worth reading. These "visual aids" are used in different ways, but mainly to show the viewer the book's aesthetic, to do book trailers, and to introduce the main characters of a story.

4.1.1.1. *World visualisations*

The use of artworks, photos, or videos to promote a book is really helpful for both the potential and the confirmed reader, as they help them visualise places in the book or some book scenes. Since romantasy books are set in a different world than ours, it can be a complicated feat for the reader to constantly have to imagine and visualise a whole new world. Authors thus use visual representations to help their audience achieve this. For instance, @chloecpenaranda, in one of her videos, incorporated pictures of a village and of a forest as a way to help her readers visualise her world (2021). These visual representations allow the author to showcase to the reader how they envisioned the world in their minds. Although one might argue that a good author should be able to transcribe their visions without having to rely on visual aids. Yet, Speed et al. (2024, p. 12) discuss how having visual aids could help readers with difficulties such as aphantasia (people who cannot create mental imagery).

Visual aids such as pictures or artworks are also a great way for the author to introduce the characters of the story. An important aspect of a good book is having good characters (Schier, 2015, para. 13). They are the backbone of the story, especially the main

characters, and the reader will follow their steps throughout their adventures. For approximately 300 pages, the reader will be stuck with them. It is therefore a necessity for authors to write interesting and appealing characters that readers will want to get to know. However, it is a complicated feat to tease out a character and their personality enough that it will appeal to the audience, but not so much as to spoil the story and its intricacies. The authors of the dataset analysed have, however found a way to introduce their characters to the audience without spoiling the story too much: by showing the audience what they look like. In some videos, the audience is simply presented with a string of artworks representing the characters, with music fitting the feel of the book in the background. In other videos, however, authors, like Elizabeth Lim in Figure 1 (2021), stand in front of the camera and display some artwork depicting the characters, as well as say one or two sentences to tell the audience about who the characters are, what their personalities are and their roles in the story. In this video, Lim also gives a "pronunciation guide" to the reader while showing the

Figure 1

Pronunciation guide

Note: Link to the TikTok video

characters in question. As her story is set in a Chinese fantasy world, some names can indeed be complicated to pronounce for a western audience. It can be quite complicated for a reader to read just a few sentences in a book meant to describe a character and come up with an idea of exactly what they look like. Therefore, thanks to the artwork or pictures shown by the authors on the videos, readers will be able to have a visual representation of certain characters, making their reading experience easier.

4.1.1.2. *Book Aesthetic*

A book aesthetic is defined as a "compilation of images, music, quotes, and even video that help tease out the artistic feel of a story" (Hbreneau, 2021, para. 5). Book aesthetics are an important part of promoting a story, as they allow the viewer, as already touched upon previously, to imagine for themselves what the book will be about. Some book aesthetics are commonly organised into different categories, such as dark academia, glamour, cottagecore, royalcore, adventurecore etc (Aesthetics Wiki, n.d.). Each of these aesthetic sets the tone for the book; if a book is categorised as royalcore, the audience knows that it will be heavily focused on royalty. Likewise, if a book is categorised as adventurecore, the audience knows that the book will have an emphasis on adventure. "The Lord of the Rings" is a great example of an adventurecore book. In one of the videos of the dataset analysed, an author categorises her own book as being Wuxia, and the visuals in the duration of the video back this up: we can see videos of people in a Chinese-set world, practicing martial art (Zhao, 2022).

In the dataset, most of the authors made videos to share the aesthetic of the book with their audiences. Most of the time, these videos were, as the definition states, a compilation of photos, videos, or artwork meant to inform the audience about what they are getting themselves into when reading the book. Peñaranda, the author whose video is depicted in Figure 2 (Peñaranda, 2021), has mastered the art of book aesthetics. In her video, she first shows the book, telling the viewer that the reader does not only see pages but sees a whole new world. Then, she proceeds to show the audience a compilation of pictures and videos, so the readers can discover the book's world: it is set in a mediaeval time in which there is royalty, sword fights, combats, and a romance between two characters. The epic sound used also informs the viewer that the book will be fast-paced and thrilling. Book aesthetics videos

Figure 2

What people think we see vs What we really see
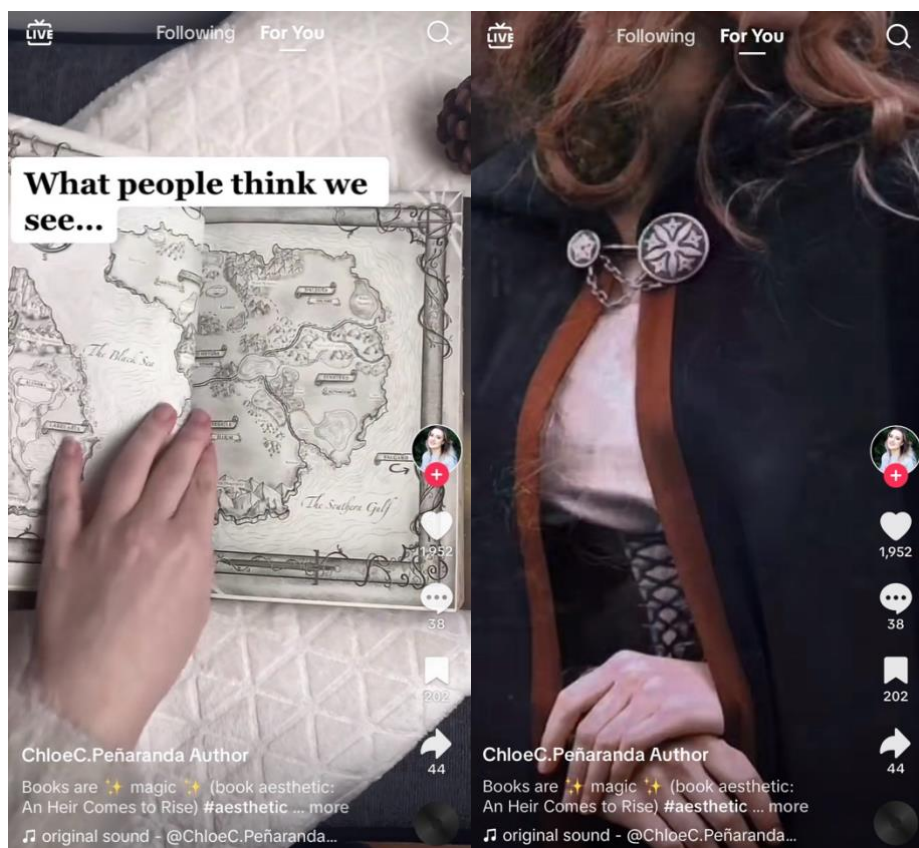
Note: <u>Link to the TikTok video</u>

are very efficient, as, thanks to them, without even having read the blurb of the book, the audience is given a lot of information and can already form their opinions on whether or not they would like to read it.

4.1.1.3.   *Book trailers*

"Book trailers" is a term used to describe a type of video that has more or less the same elements as well as the same purpose as a movie trailer: music that fits the ambience of the book, visuals that depict the characters, the book world, or some scenes, quotes from the book, and information about the release of the book (FriesenPress, 2023, para. 4, 5, 6, 8). Just like a movie trailer, the book trailer aims to attract the audience to the book. They are a very efficient way to promote a book, as, in a very short timeframe, they are able to convey a lot of information. The book trailer videos of the dataset analysed can be divided into two categories. Some book trailers focus on promoting the book in itself, while others, more

commonly, promote the book with the help of its story. The latter videos usually go as follows: a quote or a quick summary of the book is seen on the screen in addition to visuals, which, much like book aesthetics, give a feel of the book or depict the world. At the end of the video, the book is shown with more practical information, such as the release date or the name of the author. The whole thing is accompanied by music meant to relay the emotions the reader will feel when reading the book. @authoradalyngrace's video (2022) is a perfect example of a book trailer as described. After seeing these videos, the audience knows what the book is about, when they can read it and, thanks to the visuals, if they would like to read it.

4.1.2. *Creating a desire*

The second sub-theme examines how authors promote their book story, by creating a desire in the viewer. Indeed, the main aim of marketing is to create a desire for a product so that consumers will want to buy it. With this in mind, authors, in their videos, will try to catch the viewer's attention using book tropes, sneak peaks of the story or by comparing the story, to other types of media.

4.1.2.1. *Book tropes*

Book tropes are very popular on TikTok; they are recurring patterns or themes found across books that move the plot forward. They can take many shapes, such as a character archetype (the "morally grey character" trope), a plot structure (the "Chosen One" trope), or a plot device (the "one-bed" trope) (Chesson, 2024, para. 6). As it was discovered throughout the analysis, using book tropes as an incentive to read the book is not only common but necessary. Authors use these book tropes to appeal to the most people by making them want to read the book, solely based on tropes. Every author analysed had, at least, one video in which they either talked about the tropes present in the books or simply listed them. Sometimes it was done in the video itself while other times the tropes were listed in the description of the video. Tropes are well-known and useful as they are recognisable by readers. It allows them to anticipate some plot developments in the story, making them eager to read the book or to move forward with the story. Authors therefore really capitalise on them to sell their books to the unsuspecting TikTok audience. One author, @laurenrobertslibrary (2023), talks about how she wanted to read a book with all her favourite tropes in it, so she decided to write it. In the video, she then proceeds to list the

tropes present in her novel. In a video by another author, @hafsah_faizal uses a popular comedic TikTok sound while the viewer can read on the screen the different tropes found in her book (2023). The tone of the video, accentuated by the use of the comedic TikTok sound, reflects a sense of self-awareness from the author and a shared understanding within the BookTok community. It highlights the widespread affection for book tropes, almost to the point of obsession, which has evolved into becoming one of the pivotal elements, alongside the blurb, that readers want to know before diving into a new story.

Additionally, the most liked video of the entire dataset, with over 1.3 million likes at the time of writing (Figure 3), is a video of an author, @sunymara, listing the different book tropes the reader will find in her book (2023). In the video, Mara is cutting into a cake that looks exactly like her book. While she is cutting several slices of her book-cake, the screen reads, "if you want a book… with a villain prince…with stolen magic…a girl in disguise to steal it back …then this is for you" at each new slice. At the end of the video, the author

Figure 3

If you want a book with…
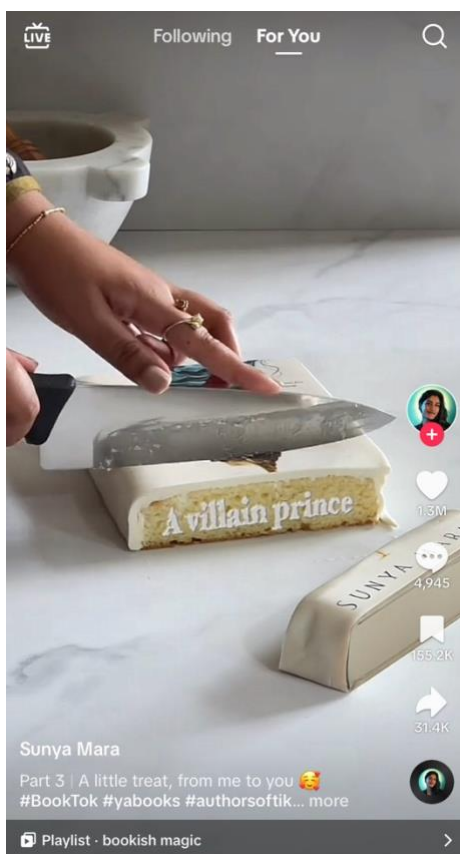
Note: Link to the TikTok video

mashes all the slices together, creating the starting dough for the cake that transforms back into the actual book. The combination of impressive visual effects, great transitions, and 'inventory' of the book tropes found in the author's work, accounts for the success of the video.

By using book tropes to advertise their books, authors attest to the audience what they will be faced with during their reading experience. Whether it is an adventure, relating to the diversion dimension of the U&G theory, or whether it is falling in love, relating to the personal relationships dimension of the U&G theory. For instance, the "misfits on a mission" trope in @sunyamara's book aligns with the diversion dimension in which readers seek escapism and adventure when reading fantasy, as explained by Allen et al. (2006, p. 58). Similarly, a reader might pick up a book labelled with the "enemies-to-lovers" and the "found-family" tropes, because they feel lonely and want to feel like they have a relationship, as explained by Burnett & Beto (2000, p. 33) when illustrating why people read romance.

Some book tropes are more popular than others. The "enemies-to-lovers" trope, in which the main characters start off as enemies and end up as lovers, was the most mentioned and advertised book trope throughout the dataset. Indeed, the most recurring trope mentioned as a hashtag in the video description was "#enemiestolovers". Other book tropes specific to both fantasy and romance books were also greatly promoted, such as the "rich vs. poor" trope usually found in romance books, in which one of the main characters, usually the female main character, is poor, and the other main character is rich. Another common trope was the "magic" trope, promising the reader some fantastical elements. "Fake-dating", a popular romance novel trope in which the two main characters are forced to pretend to be involved romantically, was also very popular. Finally, "morally grey male character" was also quite common.

4.1.2.2. *Sneak-peaks*

Sneak peaks are similar to teasers for movies. Their sole purpose is to pique the audience's curiosity. By disclosing a small part of the book, usually a quote, authors hope to intrigue the TikTok viewer enough that they will want to read the book. The authors analysed all use more or less the same strategy to do sneak peaks and to entice the audience. The most common approach was to put a quote from a book in the video while the author was present but silent. A music fitting the quote can be heard in the background, while the authors usually look directly at the camera with a knowing and conspiratorial look or by acting as though

they were reading said quote for the first time and mimicking their reaction to it. Quotes are commonly never more than two or three sentences. They are usually romantically focused, either by being a tension-filled excerpt of a dialogue between the romantic interests or by being a sentence said by the male romantic interest. The whole purpose of these quotes is to bring the audience to a point where they want to know what happens before or after them to have the full context of the dialogue. Indeed, in the comment section below videos teasing quotes, it was not uncommon to find viewers commenting that they could not wait to have the book in their hands to know what happens after these excerpts.

Quotes are not the only way to tease a book. Talking about specific scenes without revealing too much about the intrigue was also a strategy used by authors. In one or two sentences, the author would describe a specific scene aimed at enticing the reader. In one video, @laurentrobertslibrary (2023) even goes as far as reading a passage of her book out loud while a friend of hers tries to act out the scene in the background. In this particular scene, the "knife to the throat" trope in a fight scene is mentioned, allowing the author to not only entice the viewer to go read the book by teasing a scene, but also by teasing a beloved book trope.

Other times, authors will do a video where they simply show an entire page of their book. In these instances, at times, sentences on the page are highlighted to stress the importance of some elements of the story to the reader. This page reveal sneak peak not only aims at, once again, piquing the reader's curiosity but is also a way for the audience to see if they like the author's writing style, a crucial feature in choosing a book to read.

4.1.2.3. *Comparison to other media*

Authors often use other types of media to promote their novels. They are used as a reference point for the book's story; authors will use them to inform the viewer that their books have the same feeling, the same themes, and the same tropes as these media. There is a lot of uncertainty for readers in the process of choosing a book: will it be a good book, will the story be interesting, and so on. Reading a book is also a commitment, as it is time-consuming. Therefore, authors have understood that, for readers, any elements that may help minimise these risks are important. In order to do so, authors have found that comparing their works to other popular media not only intrigues the viewer but also helps them decide if they would like the book, if they would be interested in reading it: whether it be a movie or TV show with a similar storyline or feel, another book with similar book tropes and aesthetics, a

song that perfectly describes the romantic relationship between the love interests, a video game that has a similar world building to the author's book, a meme to comically refer to a particular book scene, or even childhood cartoons that will nostalgically appeal to the audience. Any type of beloved media is adopted to make the still-unknown book more relatable for the viewer.

In these videos, authors address the viewers directly, by using catchphrases such as "If you like this show, you will like my book", "Perfect for fans of…" or "If you are looking for a book similar to…". By doing so, the author not only grabs the attention of the viewers by addressing them directly, but by talking about something the viewer knows and can relate to, they have better chances of keeping their attention.

For example, @suryamara, has mostly based her entire marketing strategy on comparing her book with other forms of media. In one video, viewers can see her incorporating various media and pop culture references by placing them in a mixer, blending them together, and presenting her book as the result of this blending process (Mara, 2023). Throughout the video, captions directed to the viewer accompany each media or pop culture reference. For instance, as the *Hunger Games* book is placed in the mixer, the caption reads, "if you like speaking truth to power…", while *The Cruel Prince* book prompts the caption "…and enemies who become lovers". As the *Shadow and Bone* book enters the mixer, the caption reads "girls with godlike powers", while for *Metamorphoses*, the caption reads "curses that show who you truly are". The *Mulan* VHS tape being added to the mixer is accompanied by the caption "a girl in disguise as a soldier", with a tiny chilli representing "a little spice" being added to the mix. Finally, at the end of the video, the caption that accompanies the author's book reads, "If you like all of that. This is for you."

4.2. Promoting an object

This second theme dives into how authors capture potential readers' attention to promote their books by advertising them as objects. Indeed, the physical book has been found to be a sales argument, with authors promoting new editions of books, special editions, hardcover books, etc. More often than not, the videos analysed were found to stage the physical book in an "aesthetically" pleasing manner to attract the viewer and show that the book is not only a story but can also be a decoration on a bookshelf.

4.2.1. *The physical book*

4.2.1.1. *Special editions*

Books usually come in two forms. There is either a paperback edition or a hardcover edition. The paperback editions tend to be smaller and more easily transportable than the hardcover ones. However, recently, "special editions" of books have become more and more popular. During the analysis, it was discovered that special editions of books were a formidable sales argument. Indeed, books can be considered an element of decoration and a prized possession, regardless of the book's story. More and more, avid readers are seeking hardcover books, specifically special editions of their favourite books, to adorn their bookshelves and make the latter "aesthetically" pleasing. Promoting a limited or special edition of a book can, therefore, be an efficient way to advertise it. To do so, some authors analysed filmed entire videos only dedicated to showing off special editions. These videos are focused on showing the viewer all the cool and beautiful specificities of the book that other normal editions do not have, such as sprayed edges, dust jackets, or new cover artwork. @lisellesambury even dedicated an entire video to the remaking of her copy of her book as a DIY project (2022). The goal was to get a new book cover as well as sprayed edges to make the book more "pretty" and "aesthetic".

These promoted special editions of books also contain additional aspects related to the novel's story. These promotional contents can take the form of an elaborate map of the fantasy world, of some artwork found inside the book, or even of bonus chapters that other editions of the book lack. In one video, author @hafsah_faizal (Figure 4) simply filmed herself sitting in her car, talking about the bonus content she developed with her team and and sketches of the heist the characters of the books are trying to pull off (Faizal, 2023). The latter is a good way for the author to make the story feel more real, to make the reader more involved and immersed in the story. Moreover, in the comments, the viewers positively loved the idea of bonus contents coming with this edition, with one commentor even writing, "*We love maps, we love heists and most importantly we love your books. Especially if they are your drawings*!!". Bonus content in special editions of books is therefore a great feature that appeal to the audience. Between buying a normal edition and a special one featuring bonus content, readers will be, based on the comments under the videos promoting special editions, more tempted by the latter. It is crucial to note that these special editions of books are always more expansive than the regular paperback editions, making them even more commercially beneficial for the authors to promote.

Figure 4

Bonus content reveal
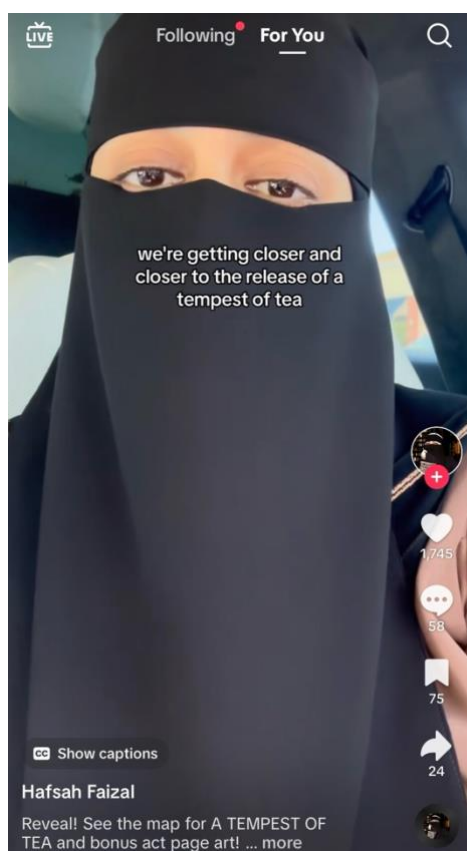
Note: <u>Link to the TikTok video</u>

4.2.1.2. *International audience*

The authors analysed in the dataset are all exclusively anglophones. Most are Americans, while others are Canadian or even Scottish. Therefore, they all write their books in English. However, not every person who stumbles upon their videos is able to read the book in its original language. So, while they might appreciate their videos and like the book's story, the authors might not be able to turn this potential customer into a recurring one as they would not purchase the book or go the extra mile to see if the book has been translated into their language. In one of her videos, @tricialevenseller shows the audience all the international editions of her book in nine different languages (2023). Linking it back to the behavioural aspect of the Consumer Brand Engagement defined by Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 154) as being the "level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction", authors, by promoting the international editions, positively impact the former. Indeed, by being informed by the author of a book edition available in

their language, it streamlines the process for the reader. They no longer need to expend energy wondering when or if they can access the book, nor do they have to leave the app to search for it online. The information is already there.

In correlation to the different special editions there are of books, authors take the opportunity of killing two birds with one stone: they advertise the special editions of books in different countries while informing the audience that their books exist in different languages. Indeed, the same book can have different covers and different artworks depending on the country and the local publishing house. It is therefore not uncommon for authors such as Gong (2022) to reveal the US and UK book editions in the early stages of publishing the latter and talk about their differences. Moreover, in comments under videos such as these, users discuss the different international editions: some are disappointed at not being able to get the visually appealing edition in a foreign language, while others mention buying all the international editions to collect all the special editions there are. Not only does this help enhance referencing, as more comments lead to increased visibility and greater chances for the authors to attract more viewers to the video (Cha, 2022, para. 5), but it also demonstrates users' willingness to purchase the books multiple times.

4.2.1.3. *Aesthetics*

As previously discussed in the theoretical framework, each social media has its own book community and its own way to promote books: on YouTube there are Booktubers who review books, and on Instagram, there are users who are part of the Bookstagram community. The latter, as previously mentioned, post aesthetically pleasing photos of the books they are eading. These aesthetic posts entice Instagram users to read the books portrayed (Thomas, 2021, p. 3). Realising the success of these books, authors decided to transfer this success to TikTok, this time being the ones to stage their books, and not Bookstagramers. Indeed, it was not uncommon to find, while analysing the dataset, that authors would post videos in which they staged their books aesthetically. In other words, their books were surrounded by flowers, objects, or decorative elements that matched the aesthetic of the book. For instance, in one of her videos, @chloecpenaranda staged her book, whose story is set in a mediaeval world and focuses on royalty and fights, with a crown and a dagger, adorned with some flowers all around to make it "pretty" (Figure 5).

However, as, unlike Instagram, TikTok is a video-sharing platform, the authors, to

Figure 5

Book's aesthetic
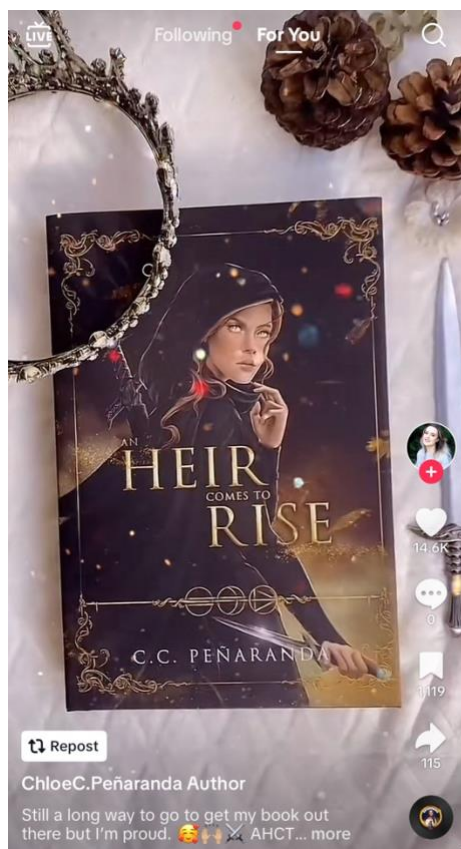
Note: <u>Link to the TikTok video</u>

grasp the attention of the users, could not only settle for simply showing the book in an aesthetically pleasing way. They had to add elements to these posts to make them more interactive. Some would promote the book in this way while also promoting the story. Indeed, more often than not, one video would combine both promotional aspects of the book's story and promotions of the object in itself. Some authors would show the aesthetically pleasing staged book while sharing quotes from the book, while others would show both the aesthetic of the object and the aesthetic of the story. For the latter, there seems to have been an unspoken consensus among the authors about how to combine both: first, the viewer sees the book aesthetically adorned with decorative elements, then the author opens the book, and the viewer then dives into the pages and is immersed in the story's aesthetic, as described in the previous theme.

4.2.2. *Promotional aspects*

The second sub-theme encompasses everything that is directly linked to purely promoting the book. In other words, this sub-theme will discuss how authors inform their readers about the release of the books: where, when, and how they can find them. It will also look at how authors announce the possibility of winning giveaways or goodies while buying the book, in order to tempt viewers.

4.2.2.1. *Information about the books*

Every author is different. They all have their "specialities" and things that set them apart from the rest when promoting their book. Therefore, when it comes to the purely promotional aspects of releasing a book, authors will not all do it in the same way. It was discovered, throughout the analysis, that there were three main types of videos to inform the viewer of the releases of the book: the "blended" version, the "informative" version, and the "in-description" version. The information about the book's release, throughout the videos were always the same: they referred to when the book will be released, if it is not yet the case, where the viewers will be able to find it, and how they can get it.

The "blended" version refers to how the book's release information is blended with other types of content, usually with the promotion of the story, so as not to be a purely informational video. Book trailers, for example, have, at the end, information about the book's release. In some videos, the book's release information will be shared right before or after the author summarises the book's story, or while the author presents to the audience a special edition of the book. In other videos, the viewers can read this information on the screen as it is being mentioned simultaneously with other types of information, such as book tropes (Roberts, 2023, Figure 6).

The "informative" version refers to how the author creates a video purely for the sole purpose of talking about the book's release information. Two types of "informative" videos were seen during the analysis. In the first type, authors talk directly to the camera to the viewers to tell them all the information there is to know. Sometimes they discuss a potential pre-order date if the book is not yet released, other times they list bookshops and websites where the readers will be able to purchase the book and some even hint at a potential second book in the series. The second type of video could be described as "commercial" videos. Indeed, they are professional videos in which the book is showcased in a neutral background

Figure 6

Blended version
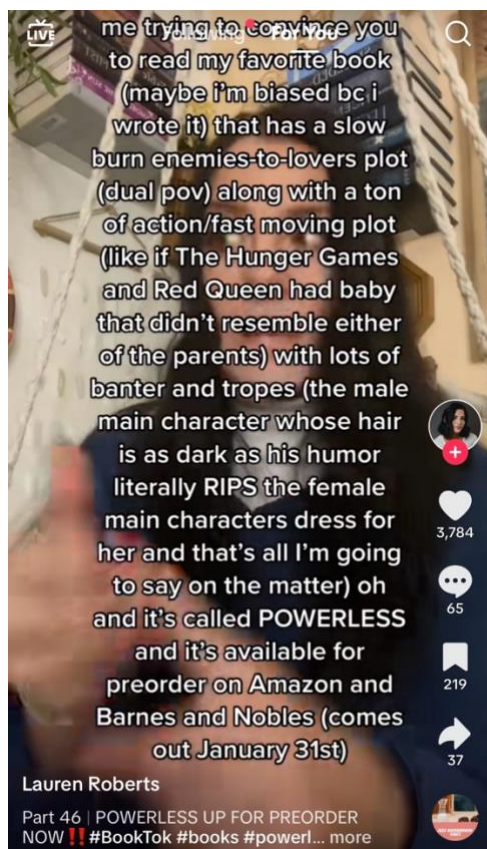
Note:

with the release information (most usually only the release date), and with a popular music in the background to catch the attention of the viewer (Levenseller, 2024).

The "in-description" version refers to videos in which the release information of the book is not mentioned at all throughout the video but is mentioned in its description. For each video, the description is there for the content creator to bring up information that was not acknowledged in the video. Some authors will therefore mention the book's release date or other useful information related to the book's release not in the video per se but in the description. It is often the case when the video is focused on promoting the story rather than on promoting the book itself, so as not to disturb the viewer's immersion in the book's story. Additionally, more often than not, the description of the video is also the space in which the authors will be able to use different types of hashtags, as it tremendously helps with the referencing of the video.

4.2.2.2. *Goodies and giveaways*

Goodies are another term for promotional gifts or promotional merchandise. A brand usually gives the latter for free to a consumer after the purchase of a product as a thank you for buying something from them (Corporate gifts, 2020, para. 1). Recently, goodies or merch have taken over the book industry, as illustrated in Diamond's article (2024, para. 17). When publishers want to promote their authors' books, they send them to a "BookToker", a content-creator who reviews, recommends, and discusses books on TikTok. Not only does it create a desire in readers to get little gifts related to the book they want to read or are reading, but it is also amazing marketing publicity for the publishers as it increases the book's visibility by turning readers into walking advertisements (Diamond, 2024, para. 3). For instance, if a reader gets a tote bag as a goodie and uses it daily, people around them might ask where they got it from or what the design represents, sparking a conversation around the book being promoted through the merch. These goodies can take different forms, such as tote bags, as previously mentioned, bookmarks, character arts, playing cards, scented candles, or even food (Diamond, 2024, para. 1).

However, even if publishers are an important aspect of marketing a book, promoting a book online is more of an author-led approach than a publisher-led approach, as previously discussed. Therefore, when promoting their books on their own social media channels, particularly their own TikTok profiles, authors are occasionally seen promoting the possibility of winning goodies or merch. However, not every author is able to do give-aways, as self-published authors, such as @chloecpeneranda or @laurenrobertslibrary for instance, might not have sufficient funds to develop and create goodies to give away. Nevertheless, it was discovered throughout the analysis that authors promote the possibility of winning book-related goodies in different ways, even though there was an unspoken consensus to offer these goodies as pre-order prizes. These prizes, which are small collections of items, are given to readers as a thank you for pre-ordering the book before its release. For instance, author @hafsahfaizal (2024) involves her audience and readership in choosing and voting for their favourite character art. The winner of this vote would then be featured in the pre-order prize for the book. @elizabethlimwriter (2021) also promotes her book by teasing what the pre-order prize consists of. To do so, during her "pronunciation guide" video, for each character's name's pronunciation, she displayed the corresponding character art that was part of the pre-order prize. These pre-order prizes are a win-win for the author and the audience: it first creates a sense of urgency, for these character arts are only available to the audience

purchasing the book in advance, but it also enhances reader engagement as it makes for a more immersive and enjoyable read. Both of these arguments make the audience more eager to buy the book.

4.3. Promoting a person

This third and last theme examines how authors promote themselves in order to capture potential readers' attention when advertising their books. It was discovered that they would post videos in which they were found to interact with the audience or in which they were found to be relatable, in order to appeal to the audience. Indeed, viewers might be more inclined to read a book from an author who appears friendly and approachable than from an author who does not. This theme will also be divided into two different sub-themes: proximity and interactivity. Both of these sub-themes are closely linked to the Consumer-Brand Engagement. "Proximity" is linked with the emotional aspect of the CBE while "interactivity" is linked with brand interactivity. "Interactivity" will also be linked with the personal relationships dimension of the U&G theory.

4.3.1. *Proximity*

The first sub-theme dives into how authors portray themselves in their videos. Indeed, after the Colleen Hoover controversy, authors must be very careful of what they say and do. Colleen Hoover is a popular American author who is very criticised for normalising abuse in her books and for allegedly assaulting a minor (Willingham, 2023, para. 8). Today, she garners a lot of criticism, and faces cancel culture. Authors have thus realised that when promoting their books, they not only have to advertise their story but also themselves: viewers will not want to read books if the author is seen as either problematic or outright unsympathetic.

The emotional aspect of the Consumer Brand Engagement, as developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 154), refers to the degree to which the consumer has a positive attitude towards the brand during an interaction with said brand. In other words, if the audience's experience with the brand is a negative one, they will not likely go back to it in the future. On the contrary, if a consumer is pleased with their experience with the brand, they will be more inclined to go back to it time and again. In the case of this paper, the authors analysed thus had to ensure that the audience had a good experience watching their content and their

promotions by appearing approachable and amusing so that the latter are more inclined to buy their books.

4.3.1.1. *Behind the scenes*

One way to appear approachable is to let the viewers know a bit more about themselves, to make them realise that authors are people just like them. To do so, authors often share the "behind the scenes" of their daily lives as writers. As Bergh (2023, para. 2) mentions, creating behind-the-scenes videos helps humanise a product. With these videos, the book goes from being an inanimate object, a story, to being the fruit of hard labour, to being the result of months of work, sacrifice, or doubts. Readers will perhaps feel more sympathetic and be more lenient with the quality of the book, knowing the struggles that the author faced to

Figure 7

Room tour

Note: Link to the TikTok video

publish it. For instance, @laurenrobertslibrary has documented her entire writing journey on her TikTok profile. And, in the comments section on several of her videos, viewers sometimes encourage her, telling her that they have followed her since the beginning and will buy the book the moment it gets released. By sharing her daily life as a writer, Roberts has made herself out to be a genuine person, happy to share her story with the world.

Other authors, just like Roberts, also share some snippets of their lives, in order to promote their books in a less impersonal way than pure advertisements. Some will make "book tour" videos in which they do a mini-vlog of the events related to the release of a book: meeting with fans, talking at conferences, signing of books, and so on. Some might do a "room tour" video, in which they present to the audience their office, where they have spent countless hours writing the book, as seen in Figure 7 (Sambury, 2021). Other behind-the-scenes videos also simply present "a day in the life of a writer", in which the author takes the audience through a typical day of writing and/or editing their book, meeting with their publisher, facing the struggles of writer's block, and so on.

4.3.1.2.   *Relatability*

Another technique authors use in their videos to appear more approachable and closer to their audience is to portray themselves as relatable, to show the viewer that they are humans just like them. To do so, there were several types of video content uncovered during the analysis made to appear more relatable to the audience.

The first one was to identify oneself as a reader. Indeed, even though authors create the stories readers will immerse themselves in, it is easy to forget that, they too, are avid readers in the first place. Before becoming writers they too spent much of their time reading books, obsessing over a book world, over fictional characters, and so on. By reminding their audience of this, the authors analysed create a bond with their viewers, as if to say, "we are alike you and I". To do so, authors often use, throughout these videos, the pronoun "we" to designate the authors themselves and their audience. By using "we", authors put themselves at the same level as their audience. This assures the readers that in this para-social relationship, defined by Dibble et al. (2016) as "socio-emotional bonds that users develop with media performers," (p.24), no one is superior to anyone. It emphasises that there are no unequal power dynamics. By doing so, authors ensure that the audience has a favourable experience with them, leading to a high degree of CBE emotional aspect. Moreover, in one of her videos, @sunyamara (2023) is seen doing a TikTok trend popular amongst readers: "Why

use a bookmark when you have…". This trend comically refers to the fact that avid readers rarely use actual bookmarks but rather whatever they can find close-by. With this trend, @sunyamara shows the audience that she too is an avid reader and faces the same comical conundrum of finding an appropriate bookmark.

Another type of video content made to appear relatable to the audience was to inform them of the same cultural references they share. Indeed, as previously mentioned, it is not because authors write books that they are completely different from their audience. They too use TikTok on a regular basis and therefore have the same TikTok references. They too watched the same movies or TV shows growing up as their viewers. They, too, read a lot of books and therefore have the same author references or the same bookish references that only a reader can understand. As previously seen, 55% of YA book readers are older than 18 (Curcic, 2023, para. 12), making them sometimes the same age as the authors themselves,

Figure 8

Lip-sync
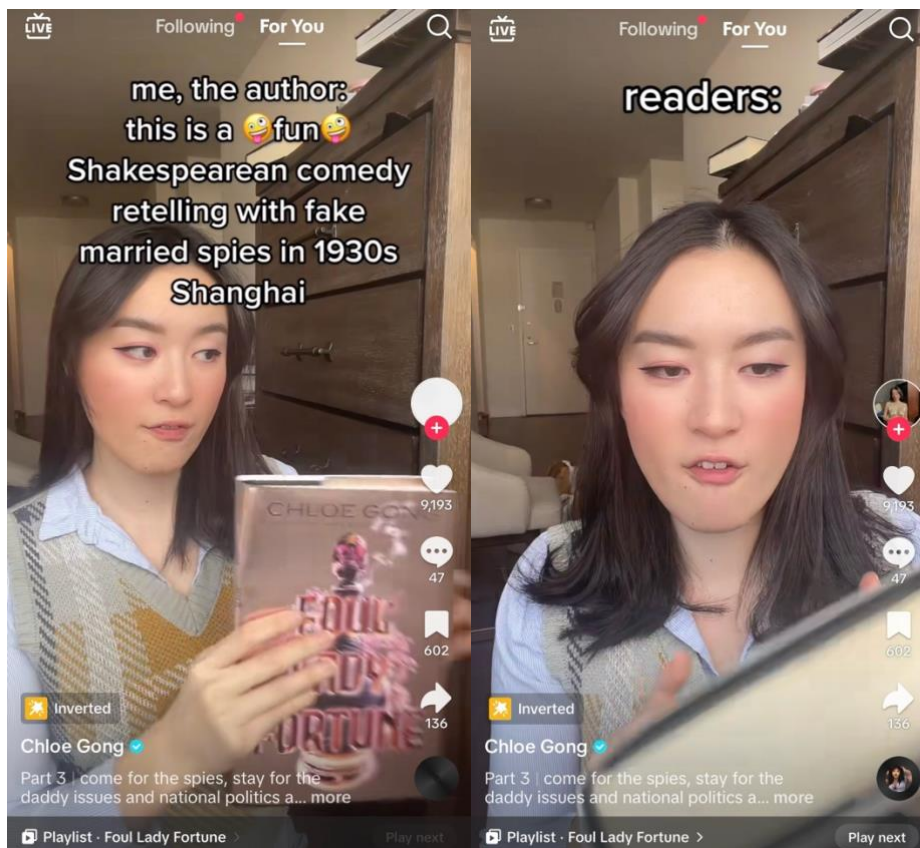
Note: Link to the TikTok video

facilitating the relatability between both the readers and the writers. It is therefore not unusual to see an author share a video of them lip-syncing to a popular TikTok sound to promote their books. Doing a TikTok trend video not only has the ability to using the same trend. This makes it possible for the authors to be seen by more people and to expand their audience. @thechloegong used two different types of TikTok trends to promote her book. In one video (Figure 8), we can see her lip-syncing to a popular sound, comically having a conversation between the author and the reader in which she plays both roles (Gong, 2023). In a second video, she uses a Taylor Swift song to promote her story (Gong, 2022). This video not only helps the audience understand the story by comparing it to another form of media, as discussed in the first theme, but it also shows that the author, like many others right now, is a fan of Taylor Swift and wants to express her appreciation for her music, once again illustrating that the author has the same cultural references as the audience.

Finally, authors try to appear relatable in their videos by using a comical. More often than not, in these comically toned videos, authors use self-deprecation and comic skits to talk about either something funny that happened to them or to talk about their book with sarcasm and self-reflexivity. These videos allow the audience to see that the authors do not always take themselves too seriously and are aware of their shortcomings as human beings, a valued trait that makes them even more relatable. For instance, in one video, @hafsah_faizal (2024) admits to misspelling a name while book-signing, shares how she sent her husband to buy another copy of the book and how now she is the "proud owner of a copy made out to Megg with TWO G'S BECAUSE I PANICKED AND MADE IT WORSE". This situation is highly relatable, as everyone has already misspelt someone's name in a stressful situation. Another author, @lisellesambury makes a skit to share a funny anecdote that happened to her with Goodreads, an app to look for books and track your reading (2021). This video is also highly relatable, as a majority of readers use this app, and any reader using it has or will face one day or another some problems with it (*Goodreads: A Platform for Readers and Authors - Digital Innovation and Transformation*, 2022). By using a comical tone, authors ensure that the viewers have a positive experience when watching their videos, ensuring a high degree of the CBE's emotional aspect.

4.3.2. *Interactivity*

The second sub-theme will be dedicated to discovering how authors interact with their fans, whether it be online or in the real world. In line with wanting to appear approachable

and friendly, authors often interact with their audience. To that end, the comment section below a video is a great place for authors to connect with their audience. Another way for writers to get closer to their audience is by using TikTok functionalities such as stitching a video or video-replying to a particular comment. Additionally, despite authors promoting on a social media platform, there is also a big element of community, whether online or offline, being mentioned and nurtured throughout the videos.

4.3.2.1. *Comments*

On a TikTok video, the comment section is the place for viewers to react to the video, interact with each other, and ask questions to the content creator, among other things. It is the only space dedicated to the viewers where they can express themselves and share their opinions. In the comment sections, viewers and original content creators alike can directly answer to each other, for everyone to see. It is therefore a great feature for authors to communicate with their audience and their readership. Some writers take up on the opportunity to converse with the viewers, while others not so much. It was discovered, however, that the authors who do take advantage of these comment sections used them in a similar fashion. Indeed, most of the questions the authors answered were from excited viewers, either enquiring about the release of the book or to inform the author that they loved their book. The authors responded usually with a matching excitement, thanking the viewers who took the time to read it and giving the information about the book release back to the viewers who inquired about it.

Additionally, some authors, such as @hafsah_faizal, used the comment sections to continue being relatable. Indeed, by means of sarcasm, of writing in capital letters to show the author's excitement, of taking the time to answer a considerable number of comments, of being funny, and of talking to the viewer as if they were a friend, some authors excelled at creating a bond with their audience throughout the screen. These methods strengthened the para-social bond between the authors and their readers, ensuring that the audience has a positive experience during interactions. This positive experience enhances the emotional dimension of customer brand engagement. Moreover, as discussed previously, Samarah et al. (2021) argue that "customers are more willing to engage with a brand on social media when they perceive it to be highly interactive" (p. 658). A high level of brand interactivity leads to a high CBE, which, in turns, leads to high brand loyalty (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Samarah et al., 2021). Therefore, by answering viewers' questions in the comments, authors ensure high

brand interactivity and a strong emotional dimension of the CBE, ultimately gaining brand loyalty.

4.3.2.2.   *Interactive content*

In order to create a bond between themselves and their viewers, authors sometimes take advantage of some TikTok features that allow them to have less impersonal and more conversation-like content. One of these features is the ability to directly reply to a specific comment with a video. This allows the creator to provide a more detailed and comprehensive response than would be possible with a brief text reply in the comment section. Authors analysed also use this feature to ensure their response is more visible, as individual comments can easily get lost among many others. For instance, in one of her videos, @chloecpenaranda (2021) replied to one comment to first thank the viewer for ordering her book, then to thank everyone following her and to then give more information regarding a second book and her writing journey. By doing this type of video, Peñaranda takes up the opportunity to promote her work by directly talking to her community, her audience, and not making it look like a plain marketing video.

The second feature some authors use is the "stitch" functionality. This feature allows the author to take a clip from a user's video and incorporate it into their own content. Just like video-replying to a certain comment, "stitching" is a way to respond to, comment on, or expand upon the original content, creating a more interactive and collaborative form of engagement. Indeed, @laurenrobertslibrary stitched herself reacting to a reader's fanart video, as seen in Figure 9 (Roberts, 2023). In this video, a reader's book's fanart is playing while the viewer can discover Robert's reaction to it. Such content can be special for viewers, as it shows that the authors they follow are engaging with and appreciating the content their fans create. With both video-replying and stitching, viewers can feel as if the authors are close to their community. Their viewers might therefore be more likely to generate more comments and more videos about the author's books in the hope of one day being featured on the author's profile, leading to more organic marketing, a type of promotion that occurs when consumers share or create content about a product.

4.3.2.3.   *Community*

Despite authors promoting on a social media platform, there is a big element of

Figure 9

Stitched video
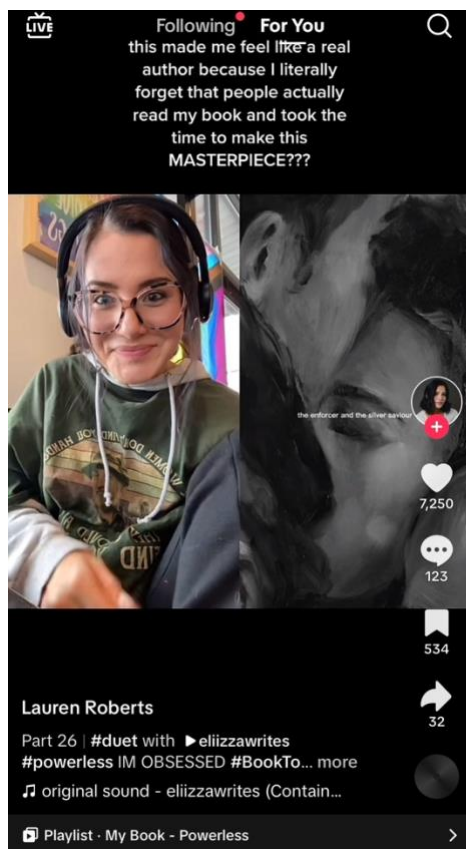
Note: [Link to the TikTok video](#)

community, whether online or offline, being mentioned and nurtured throughout the videos. The online community alludes to the Booktok community. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the BookTok community is the most active on the platform, boasting over 200 billion views under the hashtag #booktok. This hashtag was indeed the most frequently used by the authors analysed, appearing in 81 videos out of the 100 analysed. The authors nurture and develop their online community, in order to retain their viewers and create a relationship between them. To do so, some authors will promote events on their social media channels, such as a book club live on TikTok to talk about their books, others will announce online contests viewers can participate in; while some authors simply decide to use pronouns such as "you" or "we" when talking to the camera. This last element of online community, as previously mentioned, makes the viewer feel as if they are having a one-on-one conversation with the author, creating a privileged relationship with the writer, akin to a parasocial relationship.

Contrastingly, the authors analysed also aim to nurture their community outside of social media, in the real world. To do so, they inform their online community of offline events happening related to the book they are promoting. These events can be meet-ups with the author, book-signing events in bookshops, or conferences held by authors. Similarly, one video of @thechloegong is an edit of clips filmed during her offline book events, with a caption that reads, "it has been such a wonderful time" (2022). This video was meant to thank all the people who came to see her during these events, but it also showed the author's online community the advantages and joys of being part of the offline community. These types of offline events illustrate that, despite the rise of social media, offline marketing strategies as seen in the past, like book tours (Martens, p. 50) have not disappeared. One does not exclude the other; they can be complementary. Online marketing strategies can boost offline marketing strategies and vice versa, creating a powerful and effective synergy.

McQuail (1983, p. 353) discussed how the personal relationships dimension of the Users and Gratifications theory referred to how the uses of media compensate for the absence of relations or how it facilitates social interactions. The BookTok community and the author's own community therefore illustrate how, by reading a book, one can become part of a community, which can, in the long run, facilitate social interactions, whether they be online or offline.

4.4. Conclusion of the analysis

Thanks to the analysis of the videos, it has been demonstrated that authors, in order to promote their books, will not only promote their story but will also promote the book in itself as a piece of decoration and, most importantly, they will promote themselves. It is, however, paramount to keep in mind the socio-demographic implications of this analysis. Indeed, all of the authors analysed were women, relatively young, and from Western countries. The result of the analysis is therefore heavily biassed by these aspects, and one should keep this in mind when critically reading it.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key Findings

The aim of this research paper was to investigate "How can romantasy YA authors capture potential readers' attention on TikTok to promote their books". In order to answer this research question, 100 TikTok videos from 10 YA romantasy authors promoting their books were analysed, by means of a thematical analysis. As a result of this analysis, 489 subcodes were uncovered that were then put into subsequent codes and categories. These 489 subcodes formed the inductive codes, while deductive codes were also introduced. The latter stemmed from both the Users and Gratifications Theory (McQuail, 1983; Chandler & Munday, 2011) and the Consumer Brand Engagement Theory (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Samarah et al., 2021). Resulting from the categories created from the codes, three big themes emerged that have guided the discussion of the analysis: "Promoting a story", "Promoting an object" and "Promoting a person". It was indeed discovered, throughout the analysis of the videos, that when authors promote their books on TikTok, they do not simply promote their books; they also have to promote two other important elements beyond the story: the book in itself, as in the object, and themselves.

These themes proved to be very relevant in answering the initial research question. Indeed, this research concludes that YA authors capture potential readers' attention on TikTok to promote their book thanks to the combination of promoting the story, promoting the book itself, and promoting themselves.

Unlike other social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok videos must be short. There is no time to talk about the product one is selling at length. Indeed, as mentioned earlier in this paper, BookTubers, book content creators on YouTube, make videos to discuss, review, and show the latest YA books they have read. On TikTok, content creators, or, in the case of this thesis, authors, do not have the time to lengthily summarise their books and give all the reasons why the viewers should read them. They need to do this in the span of a few seconds in order to grab the viewer's attention so as not to let them scroll and forget about the book immediately (Hirose, 2022, para. 3). To that end, visuals have been found to be crucial to transpose a story from words in a book to a mini-movie, to hook the viewers on a social media platform that is exclusively about visuals, pictures, and fast-paced videos.

Additionally, it was found that promoting the book in itself was a successful way to capture the potential reader's attention. In a world of social media and appearances, aesthetics

of objects have become paramount. Individuals like to show off their possessions and themselves. Having an aesthetically pleasing book shown in a video therefore helps in capturing individuals' attention whenever the latter are mindlessly scrolling on TikTok (elyseeseste.com, 2023, para. 4).

Lastly, these past few years have been rhythmed by #metoo and by cancel culture. Nowadays, it has therefore become necessary for individuals promoting their work to show the audience who they are, to create a relationship with them, and to assure them that they are not problematic people. Indeed, the case of Colleen Hoover and her "problematic" behaviours show that if authors wish to capture the attention of potential readers', they must portray themselves as being approachable and friendly, lest viewers scroll past their videos.

To conclude, it is essential to note, moreover, that all these three themes work not only individually but also as a tandem. Indeed, authors can use these techniques to capture potential readers' attention together, not only separately. One video can therefore be focused on promoting the story and on promoting the object at the same time.

5.2. Academic and Social Relevance

The premise of this thesis was to research the relationship between authors and TikTok. Plenty of research focused on readers had already been conducted: on the relationship between readers and social media (Perkins, 2017; Rozaki, 2023; Šesek & Pušnik, 2014) or on how social media influenced reading behaviours (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018; Owusu-Acheaw, 2016; Rafiq et al., 2019). However, a noticeable gap was found in how social media affected the authors. This research was therefore aimed at shifting the focus to the writers and how they use the TikTok platform to their advantage. The findings of this research shed a new light on the subject in the academic world. It allowed the discovery of the different ways authors appropriated themselves the TikTok platform to get more visibility and to attract potential readers. It has highlighted the importance of visuals, of creating a desire, of promoting the book in itself, and, last but definitely not least, the importance of promoting the author when capturing the viewers' attention to promote romantasy books on the platform.

Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that social media is rapidly involving. It is now an undeniable part of today's society, and it cannot be ignored. Social media are present in every aspect of today's society, and the publishing sector is not the exception. As it has been illustrated throughout this paper, the arrival of social media has disrupted the

publishing sector, shifting it from a completely offline industry to an almost entirely online one. The publishing industry is changing, evolving simultaneously with new technologies, whether it be with audiobooks or ebooks or with social media being at the centre of marketing strategies. For the future of the publishing sector, it is therefore of the utmost importance for professionals to recognise this change as well as to understand its advantages and intricacies. This thesis hopes to be a starting point for this understanding.

The social relevance of this thesis stems from the fact that the findings also helped uncover how authors appropriate themselves the TikTok platform. The results of the analysis illustrate how authors use the platform to their advantage rather than seeing it as a competitor in the media landscape's competition for the consumer's attention. Especially for romantasy self-published authors, such as @laurenrobertslibrary or @chloecpenaranda, this paper showed that it was not necessary to have an army of publishers helping promote their books. With only a camera, a book to promote, and some creativity, it is possible to reach a wide range of audiences, as illustrated by @sunyamara's successful videos.

5.3. Limitations and Further Research

As in all research, this thesis has been faced with some limitations. The first limitation, which has already been touched upon in this paper, stems from the authors themselves. Indeed, as previously discussed, the authors are all women from Western countries whose books are about a heterosexual couple in a fantasy world. Therefore, unwillingly, the authors will have biases when promoting their books: they will promote their books with a feminine lens, for a certain audience in search of a heterosexual romance in a fantasy world. It would therefore be interesting, in the future, to research and analyse more diverse YA romantasy authors to compare the differences in promoting their books. Indeed, an African or Asian male author promoting a LGBTQ+ romantasy book might not use, in their videos, the same technique uncovered throughout this paper to capture potential readers' attention.

The second limitation derives from the genre of books analysed. Romantasy books, albeit in vogue in YA and NA books, are still a new and niche genre. It might therefore be academically and socially useful to apply the findings of this thesis to other book genres to find out if they are generalizable or if they only apply to romantasy books.

Further research might also want to focus on the correlation between the different techniques used by the authors analysed in this paper and the success of their TikTok videos. This would allow a better understanding of how authors, in the future, can more efficiently

capture potential readers' attention when promoting their books. Similarly, a study focusing on the correlation between the success of TikTok videos and book sales could be very valuable for writers deciding to promote their books on TikTok.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Coding book

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Promoting a story	Visuals used in videos	Depicting characters
		Art
		Depicting places
		Depicting world
		Pictures
		Book aesthetic
		Music used in video
		Book trailers
	Creating a want	Referencing
		Use of book tropes
		Connection to other type of media
		Book scenes
		Creativity of video
		Visual effect
		Book quotes
Promoting an object	The physical book	Book shown in video
		Book staged
		Aesthetic of book itself
		Promoting book as a decor piece
		Different editions
		New editions
	Promotional aspects	Only promotion of book
		Promise of goodies/merch
		Bonus content
		Commercial video
		Information in description
		Information about the book's release
Promoting a person	Proximity	Identifying as a reader
		Author being relatable
		Same references
		Comical aspects
		Behind the scenes
		Skits
		TikTok trends
		CBE: emotional aspect
	Interactivity	Comments on video
		BookTok community
		Q&A
		Stitch
		Directly addressing the viewer
		Online vs Offline
		U&G theory: personal relationships
		Brand interactivity