

Reading Between the Lines: LGBTQ+ Representation, Identity
Expression, and Community Belonging on BookTok Across English
and Spanish-Speaking Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Ever since books were written, they have been reviewed. However, where and by who these books were reviewed shifted from professional reviewers in newspapers to amateur reviewers on online platforms. Such an online platform is TikTok, where users share short videos or comments about books in the subcommunity BookTok. This serves as a digital book club by and for young readers who influence what kind of stories and voices are heard. These voices typically include members of the LGBTQ+ community. However, limited research has been done on how book reviews with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed across different linguistic and cultural contexts within BookTok. Therefore, this thesis combined research on BookTok, LGBTQ+ communities, and identity to examine how books with LGBTQ+ representation were discussed across different linguistic contexts. It aimed to answer the research question: *How are books with LGBTQ+ representation discussed on BookTok across English and Hispanic-speaking videos?* In answering this question, there was a specific focus on identity and community belonging. To answer this research question, this thesis utilized qualitative thematic analysis. It examined 40 TikTok videos and corresponding 300 comments from English and Spanish contexts to analyze recurring themes or patterns within the data. The main findings from the data included three recurring themes: community belonging, identity and representation, and experiences of repression or support. First, BookTok functions as a community of practice and as an imagined community, where a feeling of belonging is created in both the English and the Spanish-speaking context. Second, users from the English and Spanish context felt safe sharing their personal experiences and sexual orientation on TikTok, which is particularly significant in the current sociopolitical climate marked by uncertainty and polarization. Lastly, the feeling of safety in this turbulent world did differ from where a person is from. Both contexts showed support, but in the Hispanic context, this support is more pronounced compared to the English context, where religious-based repression mirrors the current sociopolitical environment. These findings illustrated how community, representation, identity, and culture are all interconnected on BookTok, resulting in different experiences and types of engagement for LGBTQ+ users. This thesis concluded with a recommendation for future research as this thesis illustrated how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed across different cultural and political climates, giving marginalized groups the chance to share their voices and stories in a safe environment where research contributes to making the world a more inclusive one.

KEYWORDS: *BookTok, LGBTQ+ representation, identity, community belonging, cross-cultural*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Study

“And for many young people reading this book will be the first time they ever truly feel represented in the media, and that is worth its weight in gold”

This quote effectively highlights the importance of trans and queer representation in books, derived from a book review on the social media platform TikTok. Ever since books were written, they have been reviewed. In the 20th century, such reviews were usually published in printed newspapers. Now, however, book reviews have shifted from newspapers to online platforms, altering how books are perceived (Asplund et al., 2024, p.635; Chong, 2020, p.2).

Book reviewers are usually defined as people who connect writers and publishers with readers, and whose opinions influence how books are perceived and valued (Chong, 2020, p.1).

Traditionally, book reviews were published in elite newspapers such as *The New York Times*. These reviews are considered credible, and their opinions usually hold significant influence (Koreman et al., 2023, p.736). However, the influence of such traditional reviews has declined significantly in the last decade, as the influence of online amateur reviews -with the image of fellow consumers - has grown (Chong, 2020, p.2). This shift from published professional reviews to digitalized online amateur reviews occurred alongside the rise of the internet, which provided platforms for readers to share their opinions, connect with others, give and receive recommendations, and discuss books by rating and reviewing them (Murray, 2018, pp.13-14). This resulted in media spaces where every reader can voice their opinions (Chong, 2020, p.120). The primary distinction between traditional reviews and amateur reviews lies in the absence of an editor in online spaces (Chong, 2022, p.122; Koreman et al., 2023, p.745). Particularly, amateur reviewers utilize memes, emojis, and overall, an informal style of reviews, challenging the traditional style of professional reviews (Koreman et al., 2023, p.745). However, whereas professional reviewers in traditional spaces share their critical opinions, amateur reviewers primarily write online reviews to share their passion and connect with other book lovers (Chong, 2020, p.123).

The main platforms on which books are currently reviewed include YouTube (with BookTube), Instagram (with Bookstagram), and TikTok (with BookTok). The latter is the newest platform and is assumed to be a key driver of today's book sales (De Melo, 2024, p.2). Specifically, BookTok is a subcommunity on TikTok where users share short videos about books and share book recommendations (Asplund et al., 2024, p.635; Boffone & Jeresa, 2021, p.11; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). Under the hashtag #BookTok, young adults post or watch videos about

reading and discussing books. Thus, the hashtag BookTok serves as a digital book club created by young readers for young readers (Asplund et al., 2024, p.635; Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10).

The role of BookTok in promoting a more inclusive environment for minoritized groups is paradoxical. On the one hand, BookTok serves as an influential digital book club by and for young readers, they influence what kind of stories and voices are heard (Asplund et al., 2024, p.635; Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10). These voices typically include members of historically marginalized groups, voices that have been neglected in most of the traditional book reviews. On the other hand, BookTok is often seen as a space that lacks diversity and does not promote inclusion (De Melo, 2024, p.10). This thesis examines the marginalized voices of people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+). Existing research has three main shortcomings that this thesis aims to address: the differences among cultural and linguistic contexts as a majority of the existing research focuses on the English context, how identity and belonging are expressed across linguistic contexts, and how inclusion and representation are shown in an excluding environment such as TikTok.

First, a considerable gap in existing research is that most online LGBTQ+ communities and queer ideal studies are focused on English content and viewed through a Western lens. This overlooks cultural differences in understanding queer concepts (Argyriou, 2023, p.162) and is not representative of how LGBTQ+ communities function in other parts of the world. Therefore, it is important to examine a cross-cultural comparison of how LGBTQ+ representation and belonging are discussed across different linguistic contexts. This thesis aimed to address these gaps by studying how LGBTQ+ books were discussed on BookTok across English and Spanish-speaking territories, as these are among the English most spoken languages in the world (Statista, 2025).

Second, research indicates that BookTok creates a safe space for queer youth to express their self-identity and foster a sense of community (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.11). This is essential for the LGBTQ+ community, which often faces limited representation and spaces to express their self-identities. Murray (2018) argues that online platforms, such as BookTok, focus on self-identity by letting users show their book collections and discuss the literature with other interested readers (p.14). In this way, users can develop and express both their cultural and individual identities within a global community of book lovers. Thus, BookTok facilitates community building and identity expression through digital book clubs, in which books are discussed and reviewed. However, what remains unknown is how this sense of belonging is expressed and felt differently among cultural and linguistic contexts.

Lastly, research has been conducted on the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ authors in the English context (De Melo, 2024). Nonetheless, there remains a gap in how representation or lack of diversity is perceived on BookTok and how this could differ across linguistic contexts. The

algorithm of TikTok plays a vital role in this as it has a unique feed of videos called the “For You Page”, which includes an unlimited amount of videos that are highly curated by algorithms based on the interaction and engagement of the user (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye, 2023, p.94). However, this also results in videos where LGBTQ+ representation is shown less on a user’s “For You Page” because the algorithm can favor other groups (Maddox & Gill, 2023, p.4; Reddan et al., 2024, p.28). Therefore, the paradox question remains how does inclusion work in an excluding environment such as TikTok?

1.2. Research Question

This thesis combines research on BookTok, LGBTQ+ communities, and identity to examine how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed across different linguistic contexts. It aims to answer the research question: *How are books with LGBTQ+ representation discussed on BookTok across English and Hispanic-speaking videos?* In answering this question, there is a specific focus on community belonging and identity as this allows for developing a clear understanding of how users connect, express themselves, and engage with queer representation on BookTok within different linguistic contexts.

This thesis employs the qualitative content research method where the TikTok videos and comments from English and Spanish languages are analyzed. Rather than focusing on specific countries, this study examines linguistic territories due to the qualitative content analysis approach and the impossibility of identifying TikTok users’ country of origin, making a linguistic territories analysis more feasible. This ensures that the results are analyzed accurately in regard to broader cultural and linguistic patterns, resulting in an applicable conclusion.

1.3. Relevance of the Study

This thesis makes three academic contributions. First, while extensive research exists on the influence of book reviews in traditional media like newspapers (Chong, 2020), this research addresses the gap in digital media by focusing on the subcommunity BookTok within the app TikTok. It is argued by Martens et al. (2022) that social media platforms such as TikTok transformed the reading climate (p.706). Because TikTok is a relatively new platform, it is important to research the platform’s influence, especially how this influence impacts marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community. While current research examines BookTok’s impact on the publishing industry (De Melo, 2024) and its potential as an education tool for LGBTQ+ literature in English-speaking territories (Boffone and Jeresa, 2021), there remains a gap in understanding how these discussions differ across linguistic territories. To compare TikTok

communities across the English and Spanish-speaking contexts, this thesis will utilize the theories of Communities of Practices and Imagined Communities. These two theories combined provide analytical tools to describe and compare the functioning of these communities across different linguistic contexts.

Secondly, it is important to research how identities, communities, and digital cultures are interconnected. Research conducted by Cover (2022) emphasizes the multiple facets that identities have and how this corresponds to digital communication. Users on TikTok engage with their community by sharing videos with popular audio and following popular trends while keeping their self-identity by adding their own opinions and expressions (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.221). However, there remains a gap in understanding how identity influences communities on new platforms, such as TikTok, and how these affect members of the LGBTQ+ community. This thesis wants to contribute to this existing literature by analyzing identity expression from the LGBTQ+ community on BookTok.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to the research on cross-cultural context and LGBTQ+ rights by analyzing videos and comments about queer book reviews in the English and Spanish language. Research exists on how LGBTQ+ rights evolved in Latin America over the years (Encarnación, 2016), and how many books by authors from the LGBTQ+ community or queer characters prevail on BookTok (De Melo, 2024). It is important to add to this research how books with LGBTQ+ representation could help members of this community and how culture played a role in this, especially considering the current sociopolitical climate with anticipated restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights in the US (Middleton, 2025, para.14).

This study makes three societal contributions. First, reading for pleasure is important as it results in better reading ability and academic success (Brozo, 2019; OECD 2019; Sullivan and Brown, 2015, as cited in Asplund et al., 2024; p.636). While traditional media saw a decline in reading for pleasure among young people, the emergence of BookTok during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in more people beginning or rediscovering reading (Asplund et al., 2024, p.636; Martens et al., 2022, p.707; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). This happened due to the interaction with BookTok for enjoyment with preferred readings instead of educational obligation (Asplund et al., 2024 p.635; Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.14). Therefore, BookTok can be used as a teaching tool to close the gap between the students' habits of in-school and out-of-school readings (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10). As emphasized by Asplund et al. (2024), there is a pressing need for such a tool due to the decline in young people's reading comprehension and habits (p.636). This thesis contributes to the knowledge of the role that BookTok has in the emergence of reading habits among young adults and can be used to further enhance reading activities.

Secondly, according to Reddan et al. (2024), the influence of BookTok extended to more readers among Generation Z, and an increase in book sales (p.27). However, the book recommendations on BookTok feature predominantly straight characters, potentially alienating LGBTQ+ readers (De Melo, 2024, p.3). In addition, social media simultaneously acts as a safe space for queer young adults to express themselves and navigate the feelings of sexuality and gender (Lucero, 2017, p.124) as well as a space where marginalized identities such as people from the LGBTQ+ community can experience exclusion and harassment (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.1). The role of TikTok was researched by Hiebert and Kortes-Miller (2021) who concluded that young adults of marginalized groups often reach out to the queer community 2SLGBTQ+ on TikTok for support (p.808). It is important to research what kind of space BookTok provides and if this is influenced by cultural differences. Currently, the intersection of queer community within books is particularly important as 25% of the books with LGBTQ+ representation in American public-school libraries are banned in the 2023-2024 school year (Baêta, 2023, para. 2).

Lastly, the role of BookTok was specifically researched as a learning tool (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021), as a general community (Martens et al., 2022), and how it contributes to a reader's identity (Asplund et al., 2024). However, there remained a research gap on how this includes books with LGBTQ+ representation and how this influences queer readers from different cultural and linguistic territories. This research contributes to this discourse by looking at the English and Spanish-speaking territories. This is particularly significant as books with LGBTQ+ representation have a positive impact on readers as they feel represented (De Melo 2024, p.3) and since right-wing and conservative parties now hold significant influence in Western countries (Haynes, 2020, p.2). Therefore, tensions about LGBTQ+ rights are rising in the current political climate and this research is now more important than ever.

2. Theoretical Framework

This thesis aims to understand how LGBTQ+ representation in books is discussed and reviewed on BookTok across English and Spanish-speaking contexts, focusing on themes of community belonging and self-identity. To achieve this, the theoretical framework integrates concepts from three main areas: book reviewing, communities and identities, and LGBTQ+ representation.

2.1. Book Reviewing

Book reviewers are positioned between writers, publishers, and readers and actively shape how books are esteemed (Chong, 2020, p.1). Reviews offer different types of objectivity for different types of readers. For example, readers engage with book reviews to get an idea of what books they will enjoy, to select which books to read, or to identify themselves with the cultural conversations around books (Chong, 2020, p.140). Ultimately, book reviewers are reporting on books and constructing personal opinions which influences how books are perceived among readers (Chong, 2020, pp.5-6). Book reviews have thus considerable influence on people, but the extent of this influence might differ among linguistic territories.

Book reviewing has a long history and evolved alongside the media landscape from traditional book reviewing to digital book reviewing. Especially for traditional book reviewing, this change makes the future of those reviews unsure in the broader news media environment (Chong, 2020, p.2). Distinctly, there are professional reviewers who mostly write their reviews in traditional media such as newspapers, and amateur reviewers who mostly voice their reviews on online media platforms. While professional reviewers may publish across offline and online media, they differentiate themselves from amateur reviewers by considering online reviewing as a hobby, whereas professional reviewing – they argue – is built around a career (Chong, 2020, p.105). Yet, Chong (2020) also highlights how digital platforms have democratized book reviewing, shifting from a primary focus on professional reviews to online spaces where diverse readers can share their perspectives (p.141). This online amateur reviewing occurs on social media platforms such as BookTok and BookTube, but also on online platforms such as the app Goodreads or the website Amazon.com. Particularly, book reviews on online platforms such as Goodreads have a higher chance of being a *New York Times* best-seller, whereas book reviews in newspapers have little effect (Chong, 2020, p.3). Therefore, because amateur reviews are so easily accessible there is a potential decrease in the influence of traditional reviewers (Chong, 2020, p.2). This means that, instead of focusing on traditional newspaper book reviewing like Chong (2020) does, it is now crucial to look into digital amateur book reviews on the social media platforms such as TikTok.

Besides the impact, there are profound differences between newspaper professional reviewing and more contemporary forms of online reviewing. Within a newspaper, the choice of which book will be reviewed, and which reader will write the review is carefully considered due to the lack of

space within the media format (Chong, 2020, p.19). On the contrary, amateur book reviews can post as many reviews as they like on online user platforms. This transformed the reading culture by creating virtual spaces where readers can connect, discuss literature, and strengthen their identities as book lovers, resulting in an online community for readers (Chong, 2020, p.144). Typically, amateur reviewers include emotional reactions and personal experiences in their reviews, which is something professional reviewers refrain from (Koreman et al., 2023, pp.743-744). Nevertheless, professional and amateur reviewers also share common components: their self-identity as a reader shapes the way how they review a book (Chong, 2020, p.29; Reddan et al, 2024, p.20) and book reviewing is done because reviewers want to belong to the literature community (Chong, 2020, p.113). Yet, professional reviewers do not feel that they belong to a group or community by participating in book reviewing (Chong, 2020, p.101). Taking into account the shift from traditional book reviewing to online reviewing it is important to research the impact of online platforms, especially to examine if there is a community feeling on BookTok.

2.1.1. BookTok Reviews on TikTok

To investigate the sentiments of the BookTok community on TikTok, it's crucial to first describe TikTok as a platform and then examine how BookTok reviews are presented and shared within it. TikTok is a widely popular social media platform, especially among Generation Z, known for its emotional appeal and content shaped by its algorithm. This algorithm curates and recommends videos based on user engagement, ensuring that users see content that aligns with their interests and interactions. On TikTok, creators can upload videos ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes, incorporating sound bites, music clips, hashtags, and text to enhance their storytelling and connect with their audience (De Melo, 2024, p.1; Martens et al., 2022, p.707). In addition, users can watch these videos and interact with them by liking, commenting, searching, duetting, stitching, and sharing videos (Reddan et al., 2024, p.28).

According to Jeresa and Boffone (2021), TikTok is particularly popular among Generation Z because the platform reflects authenticity and feels genuine due to its messy and chaotic aesthetic (p.220). The rise of BookTok, a niche community on TikTok reflects the shift from traditional to new media. Using the hashtag #booktok, users post reviews, recommendations, and emotional reactions to books (De Melo, 2024, p.1; Reddan et al., 2024, p.29; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). Hashtags are an important tool to make content easy to find and to receive attention on TikTok (Taylor & Abidin, 2024, p.7). Due to the popularity of TikTok among Generation Z, BookTok attracts a lot of young readers and provides a digital space for book lovers, develops self-identity, and builds a community, which can enhance the feeling of a 'generational culture' (Jeresa & Boffone, 2021, p.220).

TikTok is one of the newest social media platforms but is arguably the one that changed the reading climate the most by virtue of the sub-community BookTok (De Melo, 2024, p.2). The content on BookTok includes an emotional response to books that feels chaotic, is high in energy, and includes an experience that is multi-sensory (Martens et al., 2022, p.706; Reddan et al., 2024, p.29; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). Particularly, BookTok videos include content with books that are on their to-be-read (TBR) list, discussions of books, short book reviews, and trends that appeal to emotions (Dezuanni et al., 2022, p.356). For example, famous videos on BookTok include readers showing their emotional reactions when reading (Reddan et al., 2024, p.29). Similarly, Martens et al. (2022) describe that BookTok videos with emotional appeal including #crying are very popular on the app (p.714). A young adult book *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller (2011) contains such emotional topics, including queer identities, love, and drama. Research done by Martens et al. (2022) found several examples of emotional videos related to these titles on BookTok. Such as a book review video about *The Song of Achilles*, where a person is audibly crying, and says (through tears) “no, because what the f_____. Ok goodnight.” The text under the video reads “I have never in my life cried bc of a book i am so unwell” and is accompanied by the hashtag: #thesongofachilles. (Martens et al., 2022, p.714). The emotional responses that BookTok videos evoke are what sets the social media platform apart from traditional reviews, BookTube and Bookstagram. Correspondingly, Wiederhold (2022) points out the following:

In a way, with its widely accessible, authentic, and entertaining content, TikTok in general – and BookTok in particular – brings storytelling full circle, back to its original roots. It is the gathering around the campfire, the town square play, the monthly living room book club reinvented for today’s world (p.157).

BookTok has a great impact on the literary world, which is clearly illustrated in the increase in new books and long-standing book sales (Stewart, 2021, as cited in Reddan et al., 2024, p.27). As a result of BookTok’s emotional appeal to its users, classic books resurfaced again on the best-selling list many years after its release, showing the power of transforming the marketing and publishing industry (Martens et al., 2022, p.707; Reddan et al., 2024, p.29). BookTok gained this impact due to the specific features that TikTok possesses. Specifically, the algorithm of TikTok differs profoundly from the YouTube and Instagram algorithms (De Melo, 2024, p.2).

However, engaging with content from the LGBTQ+ community is nuanced, as visibility can be affected by algorithmic biases, manipulation, and gatekeeping. This can lead to negative experiences on BookTok created by TikTok’s shadow bans, including the suppression of user content by platforms, miscrediting, and censorship (Taylor & Abidin, 2024, p.2). The algorithm of TikTok depicts what users get to see on their “For You Page” based on engagement with videos (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye, 2023, p.95). This is defined by Noble (2018) as

‘algorithmic oppression’, referring to the explanation of how racism and sexism are reinforced in algorithmically driven platforms (p.4). Additionally, manipulation occurs when the algorithm reinforces content that aligns with users’ interests and identity while concealing other perspectives that might exist within the app as well, this is described as manipulation (Maddox & Gill, 2023, p.4). This is further expanded by Jones (2023), who states that TikTok has an algorithmic imaginary, which gives the users the feeling that they voluntarily chose to be part of the community whereas actually, the algorithm curated it (p.1192). Consecutively, this knowledge about the TikTok algorithm is utilized by people from marginalized groups to find ways to make sure their content still gets seen (Duffy and Meisner, 2022, as cited in Taylor & Abidin, 2024, p.6). This is done through utilizing hashtags and popular sounds which is also visible in this study.

Regarding gatekeeping, BookTok interaction and content can differ based on when a person joins TikTok, resulting in a hierarchic division (Maddox and Gill, 2023, pp.8-9). Even though content abundance results in greater availability, it also means that much of the content remains invisible. An example of this is given by De Melo (2024), who states that BookTok creators mention authors from the LGBTQ+ community and women less than their straight male counterparts (p.1). This raises the question: if BookTok is formed through algorithmic patterns rather than conscious collective belonging, can it then be classified as a community? To answer this, information is needed about community-building, which is explored in the following section, where BookTok is scrutinized as a community of practice and an imagined community.

2.2. Community and Identity

To compare BookTok communities across different linguistic contexts, it is essential to first develop a clear understanding of how these communities function. To support this analysis, the thesis draws on two complementary theories of community: Imagined Communities and Communities of Practices.

2.2.1. Theories of Communities

Bacon (2009) describes a community as a group of people who connect with each other in the same environment and through interaction, create a feeling of belonging which leads to community (p.5.). The definition of belonging is a happy or content feeling derived from being accepted and belonging to a specific group (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025, para. 2). Therefore, a sense of belonging is the reason why people remain part of communities, and pursuing this belonging is conceived as the main objective of community building (Bacon, 2009, p.7). Likewise, online communities are defined as a sense of common support and connection among the people in online spaces (Hammond, 2017, as cited in Hiebert and Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.809).

Imagined Communities, originally published in 1983, describes how nations and large groups feel connected even though they never meet in real life (Anderson, 2006, p.6). According to Anderson (2006), media is the widespread distribution of books and newspapers which allows people to develop a shared consciousness despite geographical separation (pp.33-34). The theory focused on printed media as it was established over 40 years ago but since then the media landscape changed significantly. Nowadays, social media functions as an important tool for creating imagined communities between users all over the world (Kavoura, 2014, p.494). Specifically, TikTok can be seen as an imagined media platform, since users are not able to see every single community member, but they do feel part of the community as they read the same books and identify themselves as part of the BookTok community (Maddox & Gill, 2023, p.4).

Language plays a key role in imagined communities because it creates a sense of unity among people who may never meet in person (Anderson, 2006, pp.144-145). However, on BookTok some videos include the English language, some the Spanish language, and many other languages. Therefore, language plays a role in two different ways: on the one hand BookTok is overall a community with certain emojis and symbolic, but on the other hand users from different language territories can engage with BookTok videos that include LGBTQ+ representation differently.

First, while linguistic and cultural differences exist, social media also has its own language that is globally understood. BookTok has particular characteristics that include abbreviations and conversational tone (Toisuta, 2024, p.55 & p.59). Examples of these abbreviations are “DNF” (did not finish) or “LOL” (laughing out loud) which show a user’s experience and feelings when reading (Toisuta, 2024, pp.59-61). Furthermore, the content on BookTok includes more than text. Videos often incorporate tools, movements, songs, voiceovers, and visual photos to tell their messages and convey new meanings (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.223). Social media platforms often use specific symbols with characteristics that resonate with the imagined communities (Kavoura, 2014, p.494). These non-verbal tools show that meanings can be globally understood, such as showing the pride flag in TikToks when referring to LGBTQ+ books. The overall widespread distribution of BookTok videos and books with LGBTQ+ representation results in a shared community despite geographical separation.

Second, possible differences in language territories could be expected. Research done by Toisuta (2024) shows how the BookTok community is built by interaction where abbreviations and conversational tone contribute to a sense of unity among English-speaking users. However, research is missing on how this is seen among Hispanic – or other languages – videos on BookTok. Cultural and political aspects of BookTok videos show the importance of content and the messages that are expressed and shown (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.222). Yet, the meanings in the BookTok videos can differ and be interpreted differently depending on the language. This

thesis is positioned between these two perspectives where BookTok is acknowledged as a global community while aiming to contribute to seeing how interaction may differ across cultural and linguistic contexts.

While imagined communities examine how a sense of belonging and emotional connection is formed, the theory of communities of practices provides a framework for understanding how these communities are sustained through shared practices over time. Social media platforms are often seen as communities of practices, which are groups with a shared passion for a topic and who learn more from this topic due to interaction (Kaye, 2023, p.97). Within BookTok, these interactions occur in two different ways. Firstly, users can send and receive messages from each other through TikTok's message function, wherein members have an active role in finding and building community and contributing to the platform's community building (Kaye, 2023, p.102). Secondly, TikTok is not a community participant through membership but by simply watching the videos. Even without commenting or making content on TikTok, people can still feel a sense of belonging and connection within a community (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803-804).

Users on TikTok utilize hashtags to find similar interest videos to connect with others and see more of those videos (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye, 2023, p.94; Taylor and Abidin, 2024, p.3). Creators use generic hashtags such as #fyp, which stands for 'for you page' and descriptive hashtags to explain the video such as #jazz to enhance visibility and participate in the community (Kaye, 2023, p.102). Users on TikTok add "Tok" at the end of the topic to describe what kind of community it is (Kaye, 2023, p.102). Even though TikTok does not have formal community structures such as forums, the platform can be seen as a community due to interaction with hashtags and chatting with friends and because it is formed around a common passion.

Combining these two theories is important because both offer different lenses to examine BookTok. The imagined community can identify how users experience a feeling of belonging and if this transcends across linguistic borders, whereas the community of practice can explain how the shared passion of reading and engagement is shown and if there is a difference across linguistic territories. Research regarding community has been done on Jazz on TikTok (#JazzTok) by Kaye (2023) and Black girls on TikTok (#BlackGirlTikTok) by Taylor and Abidin (2024). However, existing literature focused on the English language, neglecting how communities may differ across linguistic territories. This thesis looks at the English and Spanish-speaking BookTok videos and comments to examine how communities are expressed online and if this differs across cultural and linguistic contexts.

2.2.2. BookTok Communities

BookTok – as a specific community on TikTok – can be seen as a digital community where users are connected through a shared passion for books (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye,

2023, p.94) and as a safe space for queer readers (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10; Lucero, 2017, p.125). BookTok is a cultural space, where young people connect through stories that are told in books (Wiederhold, 2022, p.157), and where books, writing, and characters are discussed and reviewed (Guiñez-Cabrera & Mansilla-Obando, 2022, p.114). Therefore, the BookTok community forms friendships among the users (Guiñez-Cabrera & Mansilla-Obando, 2022, p.119) and feel safe to express their experiences on TikTok (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.809).

While the traditional publishing industry and social media platforms are often not inclusive and mostly favor white and straight people (De Melo, 2024, p.2), BookTok is a place where readers who normally do not feel represented can experience inclusion on the platform and discuss their love for books (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10; De Melo, 2024, p.2). Online platforms also resulted in queer members connecting with each other, making community-building a fundamental aspect of reading engagement (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.11). Research shows that online platforms provide safe spaces for minority communities as they connect them with shared experiences and transfer knowledge (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.802). BookTok is such a platform and serves as an affinity space where LGBTQ+ readers and allies can find representation and support (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, pp.13-14).

2.2.3. Identities

Identity is defined as the relationship between sexual orientation, gender, race, and class (Lucero, 2017, p.118). A person's identity is influenced by family, religion, upbringing, media, and communication (Cover, 2022, p.3). Identity is interconnected with activities related to a sense of self-identity and to cultural identity based on shared history (Cover, 2022, p.1 & p.6). Therefore, identities are not individually constructed but rather influenced by offline and online spaces (Lucero, 2017, p.118). Due to the rise of the internet, there can be a distinction made between online and offline identities. A person's online identity can be different from their offline identity because social media makes it possible to create a different construction (Lucero, 2017, p.125).

Social media accounts can create an environment where people can interact with other people while not directly having to face them, even when not all social media offer anonymous accounts this differs from actual face-to-face conversations (Lucero, 2017, p.125). Besides, the social media accounts that do offer anonymity are used by people to share personal parts especially when they are worried about being judged (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.5). Being able to be anonymous or indirect results in a feeling of freer exploration and expression of their sexual identity, which is especially significant for LGBTQ+ youth and the construction of their online identity (Lucero, 2017, p.124-125). Social media has given rise to online dynamic environments where alternative identities are shaped (Lucero, 2017, p.118).

Therefore, social media has a significant impact on how online identity is shown and practiced because social media is widely used (Cover, 2022, p.19). Even though social media and online communities offer spaces to express identity, find support, and feel belonging, it is also a space where marginalized identities - such as people from the LGBTQ+ community - can experience exclusion and harassment (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.1). Therefore, it is important to research if TikTok serves as a safe environment for LGBTQ+ users. Existing research illustrates that social media platforms offer spaces for identity expression and belonging (Cover, 2022; Lucero, 2017). However, their research focuses on user-driven platforms such as Facebook and is limited to the English context. Since TikTok is algorithm-driven it is important to analyze if BookTok functions as a safe space for queer users and if there are differences within linguistic contexts. Despite its individual nature, reading is a social behavior formed by time and place (Reddan et al., 2024, p1.). As a result, book communities can actively shape the identity of readers formed by the offline and online spaces.

2.2.4. BookTok Identities

Book culture and internet culture are interconnected, which results in opportunities for users to engage with other members of the community to formulate their identity (Haglund, 2021, as cited in Asplund et al., 2024, p.636). BookTok users can reform their self-identity and strengthen their reading identity. Identities can be constantly reformed, as they can change and evolve (Cover, 2022, p.2). Reader identity revolves around the characteristics of how people read, when people read, and how the accessibility of books shapes how people see themselves (Dezuanni et al., 2022, p.365). The reader identity of Booktokers is specifically formed around their book consumption (Asplund et al., 2024, p.644; Martens et al., 2022, p.713). According to Asplund et al. (2024) “Identity processes and a sense of belonging are interconnected, and when these young people cross borders of different communities of practice, it creates new possibilities for them to develop reading practices and strengthen reader identities.” (p.647). This indicates that both community and identity are intertwined with each other and that both of these are expressed on BookTok.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ users on TikTok can see a positive representation of queer minorities, which can help improve their self-identity (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.808) BookTok can be seen as a space that is safe from judgment where readers can freely discuss books (Martens et al., 2022, p.715). Users have different involvements in the community, based on differences in interests and abilities where they can learn from other members within the community (Asplund et al. 2024, p.637). This can not only grow a reader’s identity but also helps to grow the queer community through books. Books on BookTok include themes of identity, diversity, emotions, and “found family” where characters bond with characters based on feelings of belonging and mutual understanding which can have personal recognition to the LGBTQ+ community (Vélez, 2020, as cited in Reddan et al., 2024, p.66).

Yet, what current research overlooks is how these feelings of community belonging and self-identity differ across cultural and linguistic territories. The comment sections under BookTok videos provide an interactive space where creators and users can talk, strengthening the sense of community and queer identity (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021 p.13). These comments highlight the transformative power of seeing trans and nonbinary identities reflected in literature, reinforcing the importance of queer representation in books. Nevertheless, the visibility and influence of LGBTQ+ representation differ across linguistic territories.

2.3. LGBTQ+ Representation Across Different Contexts

Besides allowing us to better understand how TikTok communities differ across linguistic contexts, this research also includes English and Hispanic-speaking territories because LGBTQ+ representation varies globally. Judith Butler (1990) describes gender as performative, meaning it is acted out based on societal expectations rather than being innate (p.xxi). Specifically, the idea of performativity is crucial to understanding the connectivity between cultural practices such as online media use and identity (Cover, 2022, p.13). Identity is a normative ideal derived from language and culture instead of an experience and therefore identity is not tangible but an effect of performative practices (Cover, 2022, p.13). According to Cover (2022), “Our identities are performed ‘in accord’ with discursively given norms, categories, stereotypes, labels and expressions. These norms are given to use in culture, and while we vary them substantially we culturally compelled to perform our identities within normative limits” (p.40).

Performativity is a fundamental concept within the broader framework of queer theory. Queer theory is based on the principle that identities are not predetermined, but they are socially constructed and embodied to fulfill specific goals (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p.1). The term “queer” challenges the binary understanding of sexuality, embracing the diversity of identities, such as gender ambiguity, transsexualities, etc. (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p.1). Challenging such binary understanding is especially important on platforms like TikTok. As stated by Jones (2023), when social media creators identify themselves as part of a specific community, such as the LGBTQ+ community, this can help viewers connect with these communities (p.1199). Engagement on social media is an active performance as people create content and leave comments and thus can also be seen as an act of performativity (Cover, 2022, p.14).

Gender is also performed differently in varying countries. Historical research shows that sexuality in the 19th century in Latin America was characterized by complexities, anxieties, and uncertainties (Sibbald & Parriego, 2010, p.3). Throughout the 20th century, demonstrations took place to advocate rights for sexual minorities such as in Spain, but in many Hispanic countries, these movements were only just started around 2010 when Argentina legalized same-sex marriage

as the first Latin-American country (Encarnación, 2016, p.2; Sibbald & Parriego, 2010, p.4). While same-sex marriage is legal in countries like Canada, the UK, Australia, and Spain, it remains outlawed in parts of Latin America, such as Bolivia and Cuba (García-Jiménez et al., 2021, p.144; Masci et al., 2024). Conversely, current political tensions highlight ongoing disparities, such as anticipated restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights in the US (Middleton, 2025, para.14), and the ban on books with LGBTQ+ representation in American public school libraries (Baêta, 2023, para.2).

LGBTQ+ representation in films, television, and academics is generally higher in English-speaking territories compared to Hispanic territories (García-Jiménez et al., 2021, p.146). However, Spain is an exception since the country adopted same-sex marriage and became a global leader in LGBTQ+ rights which is reflected in the country's literature and film representation (Sibbald & Parriego, 2010, p.6). Nevertheless, a majority of these include cisgender, gay, and lesbian representation while overlooking transgender, asexual, and bisexual representation (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.4). Even though there is higher representation in English-speaking territories overall, Reddan et al. (2024) point out the shortage of diversity in the published literature environment of the English language (p.60). However, Jeresa and Boffone (2021) highlight the role of young adult readers in demanding more diversity in literature (p.222). Readers are fighting for better representation of readers from marginalized identity groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, to see a portrayal in books that are not stereotyped or insensitive (Reddan et al., 2024, p.60).

In Hispanic territories (excluding Spain) both representation and the discursive environment are generally less developed. This is due to the case that the Hispanic territories exist in multiple countries that all have their own sociopolitical environment which impacts queer visibility and rights differently (Sibbald & Parriego, 2010, p.1). Latin America is historically one of the most challenging regions in the world for gay rights due to its political and social environment (Encarnación, 2016, p.1). But, over the past years, there has been a gay rights revolution in Latin America's countries following the examples of the Western countries (Encarnación, 2016, p.2). On the other hand, there is still a lot of discrimination and violence among queer citizens of Latin America especially in countries like Argentina and Chile where queer rights are most implemented (Encarnación, 2016, p.3). This highlights that fully implemented legal protection does not automatically lead to social acceptance within Hispanic countries. The reason for this is further explained by Encarnación (2016) "For centuries, the Catholic Church in Latin America has promoted the view of homosexuality as a sin, if not as an outright abomination, a point stressed in family life and echoed by the legal establishment, the education system, and government policies" (p.3). This indicates that even though many countries are adapting laws to increase queer rights this still does not mean that the LGBTQ+ community feels fully accepted in Hispanic countries.

When it comes to LGBTQ+ legislation, the picture becomes more nuanced. The advancement of legislative reforms in Latin American countries is often credited to Spain, which became the first predominantly Catholic nation to legalize same-sex marriage in 2005, serving as a model for other Hispanic countries (Encarnación, 2017, pp.821-822). In contrast, while same-sex marriage is legal across English-speaking countries, legal protections for LGBTQ+ members remain inconsistent, with many states in the United States still allowing legal forms of discrimination (Encarnación, 2017, p.818). Thus, the English context is often viewed as more inclusive and representative, but the current political tension in the US shows that this is subordinated. On the contrary, the Hispanic context is historically underrepresented due to sociopolitical environments and religion but has recently made more inclusive steps towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. This thesis will position itself between these debates to see if there is a difference in how queer representation is discussed on BookTok among these two linguistic territories.

In summary, communities on social media platforms like BookTok are important as they have the potential to represent groups that are often underrepresented and offer spaces where people can connect, express their passion, create feelings of belonging, and reshape their identities. But the possibilities to do this are influenced by the context in which they find themselves, in the case of books this is often the language territory. Therefore, this thesis looks at how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed on BookTok across English and Hispanic-speaking videos, with a specific focus on self-identity and community belonging.

3. Research Design

3.1. Justification of the Method

To answer the research question, this thesis utilized qualitative data analysis. The general feature of qualitative research is to analyze real-world interplays and connections of documents, including TikToks (Flick, 2018, p.5). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was chosen because it enabled the examination and interpretation of languages and visual content to uncover both implicit and explicit dimensions of social meanings (Flick, 2018, p.5). It is based on meaning-making, thus examining how, and why people do what they do which leads to new insights (Flick, 2018, p.5). This research sought to understand how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed on the social media platform TikTok. Therefore, by applying the qualitative research approach, the interaction and communications on TikTok videos and comments were analyzed. Leading to new insights on how these books are talked about on BookTok and what this could mean for the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, implicit and explicit cultural dimensions were uncovered due to the focus on different cultural territories.

To examine these different cultural indicators, an appropriate methodological approach was chosen. Qualitative data looks in depth for more detail and meaning (Babbie, 2016, p.25). Conversely, quantitative methods focus on numerical data, offering a more superficial analysis that emphasizes breadth and generalizability (Babbie, 2016, p.25). Because this thesis aimed to examine how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed on TikTok and how this relates back to feelings of belonging and identity, a qualitative analysis was more suitable. In this way, it can be examined what is being said, why and how, and what it means.

Qualitative research consists of multiple different approaches to analysis, each with its unique aspects (Flink, 2018, p.10). The approach that this thesis selected was the thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be described as a method that identifies, analyses, and presents patterns or themes within a data set (p.79). Therefore, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns and themes within BookTok videos and comments that relate to LGBTQ+ representation, self-identity, and community belonging. Furthermore, the advantages of using thematic analysis included that it was suitable for analyzing data that offers flexibility which can result in rich and in-depth insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.78, 97). Which data was suitable to analyze was based on a specific sampling strategy.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

This thesis employed a content analysis of TikTok videos from the BookTok community. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select BookTok videos and comments that discuss or review books with LGBTQ+ themes. This method was chosen because this ensured that the content can be intentionally selected according to particular criteria that are relevant to the research subject (Babbie, 2016, p.196). These criteria included English or Spanish-speaking videos, books review or discussions with LGBTQ+ themes, comments that demonstrated reader engagement, videos that reflected self-identity and community belonging, and representation of diverse LGBTQ+ perspectives and experiences. The research focused on English and Hispanic territories instead of specific countries because it is difficult to identify the specific country of origin from the creators since this is not information that is usually provided in BookTok videos or in the comments. These linguistic territories were chosen because both are among the most spoken languages worldwide (Statista, 2025) and have a significant presence on TikTok.

As of April 2025, there were more than 52 million TikTok videos under the hashtag #BookTok which are available to see at any given time. In order to obtain the most popular ones on the platform, each video that is analyzed needed to be viewed at least by 5000 users to ensure it reached a broad audience. The sample included 20 English language TikTok videos and 20 TikTok Spanish videos with a minimum duration of 1 minute and a maximum duration of 5 minutes. This minimum and maximum duration was to ensure that the book reviews were talked about enough to conduct in-depth research. As mentioned by Taylor and Abidin (2024), observing less than 100 videos in a sample also ensured that it was substantial enough for an in-depth qualitative analysis of posts (p.7). Similarly, the selection process of which video to analyze included that the videos had at least 100 likes because this ensured that there was sufficient interaction with the video. Moreover, 150 English comments were analyzed, and 150 Spanish language comments were analyzed with a minimum of 5 words and a maximum of 8 words. This then was divided into 7 to 8 comments per video. One of the criteria for the comments is that each analyzed video needed to have a minimum of 50 comments to ensure audience engagement. Because this research was focused on LGBTQ+ representation in books a TikTok video was only analyzed when it specifies this characteristic.

Furthermore, book recommendations on TikTok can vary from talking about books to showing books with text and using trendy songs and emotions to show books. Because this is so varied, this thesis utilized a mix of all these videos to cover the different types of BookTok engagement videos. Importantly, only videos in the English or Spanish language were analyzed since this research was focused on these language territories. Appendix 1 shows an engagement table with an overview of the analyzed videos. The engagement metric was followed by similar TikTok research conducted by Taylor and Abidin (2024, p.8). It was adapted to the TikTok videos from this thesis. The engagement metric included the 40 TikTok video clips with information

about the date the video was added to the dataset for this study, the number of views, likes, and comments, how many times the video was shared, and the hashtags that are used in the description of the video.

The videos were collected by using two new TikTok accounts: one for the English-speaking videos and one for the Spanish-speaking videos. This was to ensure that the algorithm could generate neutral and unbiased BookTok videos, as seen in previous TikTok research by De Melo (2024, p.5) and Maddox and Gill (2023, p.4). Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted to gain insight into the most used hashtags among the BookTok videos. The first hashtag that was typed into the search bar was #BookTok. From there it became clear that the most used hashtags on TikTok to find BookTok videos across the English context included #booktok, #bookrecs, #lgbtbooks #queerbook, #lesbianbookrecs, #fyp. Correspondingly, the most used hashtags across the Hispanic context included #booktok, #booktokespañol, #libroslibroslibros, #librosrecommendados, #librosgay, #lgbt, #parati. As these hashtags showed up in the most popular BookTok videos, these were the hashtags specifically selected for picking the sample. Explicitly, since these were the hashtags that were used the most among creators when they talked about books with LGBTQ+ representation. Some of the TikTok videos did not include hashtags, however, these videos were found by typing in the search bar the specific hashtags mentioned above. As specified, under each video there were 7 to 8 comments analyzed as well. Furthermore, the videos were saved by a screen recording video on the iPhone 15, and the comments by a screenshot on the same device. After this, both the screen recordings and screenshots were put on a hard disk to save it.

3.3. Operationalization

Operationalization is an important step in the research process, where abstract concepts are translated into observable and measurable elements that support empirical introduction (Babbie, 2016, p.43). In this thesis, operationalization was essential for examining how review type, communities, identity, personal narratives, gender, and LGBTQ+ representation were reflected in BookTok videos and comments across English and Hispanic-speaking communities. Additionally, terminology that was further used in this thesis is explained as follows: the individual who uploads the TikTok video was referred to as the “creator”, while those who write comments under the TikTok videos were called “commenters”. The term “users” was used to refer to anyone who engages on the platform and is mostly used when referring to both creators as well as users. These terms were used to distinguish the roles within the digital interaction.

Table 1. Operationalization

Concepts	Definition	Sub-concepts	Definition	Examples / Indicators
Review type	Book reviewers are positioned between writers, publishers and readers and actively shape how books are esteemed (Chong, 2020, p.1).	Professional review Amateur review	While professional reviewers may publish across offline and online media, they differentiate themselves from amateur reviewers by considering online reviewing as a hobby, whereas professional reviewing – they argue – is built around a career (Chong, 2020, p.105).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewer background e.g. journalist, influencer, reader Tone and style (objective vs. emotional) Engagement metrics Formal or informal language e.g. 'as a critic' or 'in my opinion'
Communities	Group of people who connect with each other in the same environment (Bacon, 2009, p.5).	Community of practices BookTok community Imagined communities	<p>Communities of practices are groups with a shared passion for a topic and who learn more from this topic due to interaction (Kaye, 2023, p.97).</p> <p>BookTok – as a specific community on TikTok – can be seen as a digital community where users are connected through a shared passion (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye, 2023, p.94) and as a safe space for queer readers (Boffone & Jersa, 2021, p.10; Lucero, 2017, p.125).</p> <p>Imagined Communities explains how nations and large groups feel connected even though they never meet in real life (Anderson, 2006, p.6).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge sharing Expression of passion Proclaims of support BookTok language e.g. "DNF" (did not finish) Pictures of "TBR" (to be read) queer books Addressing audiences with formal or informal language Specific pet names for audiences
Identity	The relationship between sexual orientation, gender, race and class (Lucero, 2017, p.118).	Self-identity Reader-identity Cultural identity Offline identity	Everyone conducts activities that relate to a sense of this self-identity, such as having a driver's license or having a presence on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal expressions Book consumption Sharing books/opinions Hashtags e.g. #Booknerd #Bookworm Gen-Z language

		Online identity	<p>social media (Cover, 2022, p.1).</p> <p>Reader identity revolves around the characteristics of how people read, when people read and how the accessibility of books shape how people see themselves (Dezuanni et al., 2022, p.365).</p> <p>Cultural identity refers to how a person is perceived by themselves and others linked to concepts such as shared history and generation groups (Clover, 2022, p.6).</p> <p>A person's online identity can be different from their offline identity, because social media makes it possible to create a different construction (Lucero, 2017, p.125).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational language • Cultural stories • Cultural references • Freer explanation of a person's identity • References to coming out help • Differences in offline versus online identities mentioned
Personal narratives	Famous videos on BookTok include readers showing their emotional reactions when reading (Reddan et al., 2024, p.29).	Emotional reactions Personal experiences		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #Crying • Sharing personal experiences • Showing emotions
Gender	Male, Female, Non-binary	'Doing gender' Performativity	Gender is performed means that gender is not something someone's born with, but it is performative and thus something we act out on based on society's expectations and rules (Butler, 1990, p.xxi)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queer coded language used • Pride flag • Emojis • Rainbow color scheme • Songs from a queer artist or queer lyrics
LGBTQ+ representation	Hispanic territories exist of multiple countries who all have their own sociopolitical environment that	Nationalities Sociopolitical Cultures		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture mentions • Local sociopolitical mentions • Catholic mentions • Symbols • Pride flag

	<p>impacts queer visibility and rights differently (Sibbald & Parriego, 2010, p.1). English context is representation more inclusive (García-Jiménez et al., 2021, p.146), but the current political tension in the US shows restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights (Middleton, 2025, para.14).</p>	<p>Sexual orientation Visibility in content Types of representation Books & authors</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive, negative, stereotypical representation Tagging authors Mentioning book names, queer characters, authors, themes
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3.4. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, thematic analysis was utilized. This method was selected for the data analysis as thematic analysis is a flexible and practical research approach that can offer a complex and rich data report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a research method that identifies, analyses, and writes down different patterns/themes found in data (p.79). The steps that need to be undertaken when conducting thematic analysis were divided into six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87).

First, data familiarization was necessary when the videos were viewed, and the comments read about the BookTok data. This was done by first viewing a TikTok video and immediately afterward reading the comment in the comment section of the video. This was first done for the 20 videos with the corresponding comment section of the English context followed by the 20 videos and corresponding comment section of the Spanish context. Secondly, the initial codes were generated from the key concepts mentioned in the operationalization and the coding scheme. These initial codes were written down in the ATLAS.ti program. Then step 3 was to further analyze the initial codes uncovered in step 2 to uncover implicit and explicit meanings. This resulted in the creation of themes where the first codes were grouped into potential first themes on ATLAS.ti. Step 4 included reviewing the themes and verifying whether they accurately represented the coded data and that the themes aligned with the theoretical framework. This was done by searching for the ‘red line’ through all the codes to see what was really important in the whole data set and if this could be reflected and explained back to information from the theoretical framework. Step 5 included refining the themes in ATLAS.ti and giving the themes accurate and specific names based on the findings of the previous step. Lastly, the findings were reported in the result chapter and connected the findings to the literature. This study analyzed the cultural

differences and similarities. The final step was to relate the findings back to the research question to answer how LGBTQ+ books are discussed across English and Hispanic-speaking territories. The evidence of the data collection in the ATLAS.ti program can be found in a separate zip file.

According to Flick (2018), the coding process is identifying patterns in the data through a coding frame that consists of a main category and two or more subcategories (p.174). A coding framework was made that consisted of these main and subcategories which helped to organize the data systematically. The coding scheme was developed to identify themes connected to self-identity, community belonging, and cultural influences within both the videos and comments from English and Hispanic contexts. A deductive approach was undertaken in step two of the initial codes, by identifying key concepts and themes from the theoretical framework such as LGBTQ+ representation and community belonging. Moreover, an inductive approach was also taken in step five where the coding frame was reviewed and modified since new codes were generated that brought new themes to the surface. During the course of the analysis, the coding framework was thoroughly revised and improved. This method ensured that the nuances of LGBTQ+ representation and community belonging on BookTok were analyzed with both in-depth and flexibility. This final coding scheme is illustrated in Appendix 2.

Moreover, the use of generative AI tools was used during this thesis to assist with idea generation and to help check for grammar and spelling. The use of AI tools was also utilized to help with synonyms and to explain concepts, academic texts, frameworks, and theories to the researcher. The declaration page for the use of AI tools and the AI prompts is presented in Appendix 3.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were particularly important when acquiring and reporting qualitative data, due to the personal nature of the qualitative method (Flick, 2018, p.33). Therefore, ethics was an important step taken into consideration when collecting and reporting the data of this study. As stated by Taylor and Abidin (2024) conducting research with data from social media involves ethical concerns (p.9). The TikTok data collected included videos and comments from people who were unaware that their data was used in this study. This prompted extra consideration that the rights of these people were respected and handled with care (Flick, 2018, p.33). Especially when taking into consideration that it is uncommon for TikTok users to specify their ages. The way the findings were reported was with consideration for users' privacy, particularly since they could be minors (Taylor & Abidin, 2024, p.9).

Therefore, the dataset of this research was handled with care and applicable steps were undertaken to protect the TikTok creators and commenters. First, it made sure that there was no mention of the names or usernames when reporting the data in the results chapter. Second, when a screenshot was provided in the results chapter, of either the video or the comment section, the usernames, faces, profile pictures, and any other type of personal information that could trace back to the TikTok account of the individual were removed from the data set. In this way, the creators and comments remain anonymous as they can be potential minors and are unaware their data has been used in the research.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the 40 BookTok videos and the 300 corresponding comments from both the English and Hispanic contexts. It explores three main themes: community belonging, identity and representation, and experiences of repression or support.

4.1. Belonging Beyond Borders

Simultaneously, BookTok functioned as a community of practice and as an imagined community, where a feeling of belonging is created in both the English and the Spanish-speaking context. While previous literature stressed the role of following friends (Kaye, 2023, p.102), algorithmic pathways (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, pp.803-804), and utilizing hashtags for community-building (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.803; Kaye, 2023, p.94; Taylor and Abidin, 2024, p.3), this research emphasized the comment sections as an important space where belonging was exhibited and expressed.

Particularly, the engagement within the comment section is of importance as it illustrates how BookTok serves as a community of practice: a group that has a shared passion for a topic and who learns more from this topic due to interaction (Kaye, 2023, p.97). What especially stood out was the amount of support in the comments. These feelings of happiness and gratitude were critical as they were expressed in the comment section. This resulted in a dialogue, where a commenter responded to a video with: “*amo tus recomendaciones* ❤️” and the creator responded with “*Awwww* 😊 ❤️ *me alegro mucho! Amo estos comentarios* 🎉”. This translates to “I love these recommendations” and “Aw, I’m very happy about that! I love these comments”. These reactions and dialogues resulted in a feeling of belonging in both the English and Spanish-speaking contexts. Comments such as “*I’m queer and love your recommendations. Thank you!!!*” and “*Viva nuestra comunidad* 😊 😊 😊” which translates to “Long live our community” highlighted these feelings of belonging on BookTok.

The engagement within the comment section was reflected in multiple ways. Firstly, a supportive community was depicted in the way users help each other with book recommendations and show mutual engagement, which is illustrated in Image 1. This not only highlighted the shared passion linked to the community of practice but also reflected upon the definition of online communities – as online spaces where people experience a sense of common support and connection (Hammond, 2017, as cited in Hiebert and Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.809). Secondly, it functions as a community of practice as the interaction in the comment sections was based on knowledge exchange and passion for books and the queer community. The exchange of knowledge was shown in comments with “*porque nadie habla que estas series tienen representación queer???* OMGAAH.” Which translates to how she did not know that the book

series (which is talked about in the TikTok video) has queer representation. This highlights how BookTok users find new books with queer representation through the knowledge of another commenter or creator. Shared passion was also clearly visible on the platform among the users, through supportive interactions of their reading practices and through their expression of emotions. One comment stated for example: “*This sounds traumatic but did I just buy it? Yes I did* 

I would love recommendations around bisexuality ! :)

2024-6-3 Antwoorden 6

Try: Old Enough, Patricia Wants to Cuddle, Chain-Gang All-Stars, and Conversations with Friends 

Image 1: Engagement through book recommendations

Not only did this illustrate that BookTok functioned as a community of practice, but it also highlighted that it could be described as an imagined community. Benedict Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined communities explains how nations and large groups feel connected even though they never meet in real life (p.6). This theory was reinforced in the data, where this imagined community was shown. Particularly, this feeling of connection was highlighted in the comment section of book recommendations. For example, one commenter wrote “*I just finished this, I'm not okay* 

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context, there were a lot of exclamations of love between the users, where a commentator added: “     *Amo tu perfil* ” in which the creator responds with “*YO TE AMO* ”. This translates to “I love your profile” and “I love you”, underscoring how even though they met on the social media platform TikTok and probably never met in real life, there were feelings of connection, love, and support.

Furthermore, BookTok could also be linked to the concept of imagined communities as it included a common language that was understood across all linguistic contexts which could foster a connection across people virtually. Language plays a key role in imagined communities because it creates a sense of unity among people who may never meet in person (Anderson, 2006, pp.144-145). As Anderson (2006) explained, newspapers and print capitalism resulted in people imagining themselves as part of a collective, by reading the same language and stories as others even though they would never meet (p.44). BookTok videos can be spoken in the English language, the Spanish language, and other languages. Therefore, users in both English-speaking and Hispanic-speaking territories could engage with the BookTok videos that include LGBTQ+ representation differently. Notably, what was common across all contexts was the ‘book language’, which then resulted in the common engagement of creating a sense of unity and belonging that went beyond physical borders. This ‘book language’ included abbreviations such as “DNF”, which stands for “did not finish” a book, and “LOL”, which stands for “laughing out loud” which highlights a more conversational tone and experiences of reading (Toisuta, 2024, pp.55-61).

These abbreviations were seen on both BookTok videos and comments in the English context: “*Adding so many of these to my TBR!*” and Hispanic contexts: “*Una de mis sagas favoritas*  *la mayoría de mis comfort characters pertenecen a esos libros* 

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Moreover, language did not only play a role in the comments but also in the BookTok videos itself. While BookTok is known for the book language and non-verbal communication, such as symbols and emojis, the emotional tone and connotation of the BookTok videos contributed to unity among users. The main strength of BookTok videos was that they include emotional responses to books that feel chaotic, are high in energy, and include a multi-sensory experience (Martens et al., 2022, p.706; Reddan et al., 2024, p.29; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). These emotional reactions are unique characteristics for amateur reviewers, as these typically include emotional reactions and personal experiences in their reviews (Koreman et al., 2023, pp.743-744). Unlike research done by Chong (2020) who examined the role of professional reviewers, this study illustrates the contribution of amateur reviewers who highlighted reviews that depict unity and belonging instead of professionalism. Amateur reviews do not try to give a professional review but to give a review with a language that their community could understand with emotional connotations. Therefore, for these amateur reviewers on TikTok, community is more important than professionalism. This emotional language used to describe books is done in both contexts and is typical for a universal feeling on BookTok. An example of this is shown in Image 2 where an amateur book reviewer started her BookTok recommendation video with "*If you look closely you might see my heart splattered against the * walls*". Not only did this indicate an emotional reaction but it was also vocalized in a theoretical way which highlighted the chaotic and high-energy characteristics. The reading practices of users on BookTok are linked to social, physical, and emotional dimensions which are shared on the platform within the community (Asplund et al., 2024, p.648). Supporting the notion that in addition to language, symbolic and emotional expression also contributed to a sense of community.



Image 2: Emotional book language

To conclude, BookTok served as a community of practice and as an imagined community. Both the English and the Hispanic contexts prevailed feelings of belonging, virtual connections, and engagement through a shared ‘book language’. However, this study highlights that the Spanish-speaking context utilized more symbols and emojis in the videos and comments than the English-speaking context. The community was built on common book tastes, the feeling of belonging, and support on the TikTok platform. This was in line with the research of Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando (2022) who stated that feelings of bonding, stimulate participation and acceptance within the BookTok community (p.119). People within the BookTok community could feel belonging which exceeds borders as they may never meet in real life but did connect universally based on the internet and book language. This resulted in a shared identity across borders through commenting and utilizing emojis. The comment section under BookTok videos provided an interactive space where creators and commentators could talk, strengthening the sense of community and queer identity (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021 p.13). Users felt safe sharing their experiences on TikTok, which had a direct effect on the community and their inclusion of belonging (Hiebert and Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.809).

4.2. Finding a Safe Space in a Turbulent World

The fact that users on TikTok felt safe sharing their personal experiences was particularly significant in the current sociopolitical climate, which is marked by uncertainty and polarization. In this climate, finding a safe space and community was important for marginalized groups, such as queer people as they more often encounter digital challenges (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.11). Safe spaces and communities decrease mental illness symptoms (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.801) and are a place where they can gain knowledge about LGBTQ+ identities (McInroy & Craig, 2016, p.33). Nowadays, freely expressing one’s identity and sexuality is uncommon, especially since tensions regarding gay rights are rising.

Against this backdrop, existing research indicated that BookTok was a safe space for readers (Martens et al., 2022, p.715). In this safe space of BookTok, identity expression was important as this is the relationship between sexual orientation, gender, race, and class influenced by offline and online spaces (Lucero, 2017, p.118). The data of this study corroborated these findings and showed that users talked and commented often and openly about their sexual orientation and therefore found BookTok safe enough for identity expression. This was the case in both the English-speaking context and the Spanish-speaking context. This was not surprising, since existing research indicated that LGBTQ+ youth prefer online communication through social media, feeling more comfortable online expressing their sexual identity than in the real world (Lucero, 2017, p.124). Many of the recommended books on BookTok videos included a specific and explicitly stated representation of LGBTQ+ characters and/or authors. But, unlike existing

studies, this thesis showed that not only the characters and authors of the books are important for representation, but the creators and fellow community members served as important role models as well.

Frequently, the creator of the video shared their specific sexual orientation openly, serving as a real-life LGBTQ+ representation. The comments sometimes also included a form of open self-expression about their sexual orientation. For example, in a Spanish TikTok, a creator talked about a book she recommended that includes lesbian representation: “*Tiene representación de mi sexualidad también, creo que soy de mi sexualidad*”, which translates to “it has a representation of my sexuality too, or I think my sexuality”. This demonstrated that she not only disclosed her sexuality openly but also framed it as an evolving and potentially fluid aspect of her identity. This suggests that identities can be constantly reformed, as they can change and evolve (Cover, 2022, p.2). This also extended to queer theory as it challenged the idea of fixed binary identities (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p.1). Moreover, the comment section included responses that highlighted people’s openness about their sexual identity, cultural identity, and the importance of queer representation in books which is shown in Image 3. These comments not only showed how happy commenters were with positive representation but also how they felt safe enough to share their sexual orientation on the platform and their reasons for why they would be reading the book mentioned in the TikTok video.



Image 3: Evidence of sexual identity, cultural identity and importance of queer representation

In addition to feeling safe enough to disclose their sexual orientation, users also vocalized their personal queer and book experiences. Including multiple videos in which creators explained which books helped them realize they were gay or helped them with their feelings related to their sexuality. Again, this was both discussed in the BookTok videos and comments in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking contexts. Image 4 shows the TikTok video of a well-known Hispanic BookToker who talked about which books helped him process his feelings about his sexuality and helped him discover his homosexual orientation. It is very important there are positive representations of the queer community as this leads to improving one's self-image (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.802). These representations ranged from queer book characters to queer authors and Booktokers. The comment section of the videos where Booktokers discuss books that helped them with their feelings about sexual orientation included many similar experiences and support. For example, one user wrote: *"As a librarian and a gay man, thank you for these recommendations. I wish I'd had the freedom when I was young like you to talk freely and be myself."* This is reflected back to the research from Boffone and Jeresa (2021) as they affirmed that BookTok is an affinity space for LGBTQ+ readers to find representation and support (pp.13-14). Therefore, this thesis argued that this representation is not only found in the books with LGBTQ+ characters but also with the famous Booktokers who gave these recommendations and openly shared their experiences and support.



Image 4: Books that helped him confirm his homosexuality

As stated in the theoretical framework, there was a difference between an online identity and an offline identity. A person's online identity could be different from their offline identity because

social media made it possible to create a different construction (Lucero, 2017, p.125). Online is a feeling of freer exploration which is especially of significance for LGBTQ+ youth and the construction of their online identity (Lucero, 2017, p.125). This also might explain why the community BookTok was seen as a safe space and as a reason for feeling free to express and state their sexuality online, especially since the offline world is not that inclusive. This was expressed in the comment section where many respondents vocalized their feelings of how they were afraid to come out to their friends and family. Contributing, to asking for help online about how to come out of the closet or with specific queer book recommendations with subtle covers so they could hide their sexual orientation from their family. The videos in which they discussed books with subtle covers were found in the English and Spanish contexts. For example, one of the Spanish videos seen in Image 5, explained the words “*te recuerdo que aquí siempre tienes un espacio para contarme lo que necesitas y en una comunidad que te acepte bastante*” which translates to “I want to remind you that here you always have a space to tell me what you need and in a community that accepts you”. She said this while showing some extra words of affirmation with text in the video clip that translated to “this account is a space for you to be yourself  My messages are always there ”. This in turn underscored the supportive and belonging nature of the specifically mentioned community as they helped each other with either coming out by giving tips or supporting each other for users who were not ready to reveal their sexual orientation in real life but did feel safe to express it on BookTok.

Evidently, these findings related to the concepts of community practices and imagined communities. As mentioned, Kaye (2023) described a community of practice as groups that have a shared passion for a topic and who learn more from this topic due to interaction (p.97). In this case, BookTok functions as a community of practice as queer literature was the shared passion and exchanging queer book recommendations and coming-out experiences, and overall, a listening ear provided support within the community. At the same time, this also illustrated the characteristics of an imagined community, as the users connect with each other sustained on the platform and not in real life (Anderson, 2006, p.6). This showed how BookTok served as a safe space for identity expression, showed representation, and supported users, which all underlined the common thread of community of practices and imagined communities.



Image 5: Words of affirmation

Furthermore, social media also plays a role in how identity is performed online. There was a difference between a person's "real life" versus "virtual self", where online identity is voluntarily performed with purpose and control (Cover, 2022, p.39). This interpretation was reinforced by the performativity concept of Judith Butler (1990) who stated that gender is not something someone's born with but is performative and thus something we act out on based on society's expectations and rules (p.xxi). A person's offline identity could therefore be different from their online identity, especially for people who feel like they cannot express their sexual orientation in the real world due to cultural norms and expectations. Additionally, this also extended to reading as an activity, since this can be seen as uncool, and BookTok, therefore, provides a space that is safe from judgment (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.221; Martens et al., 2022, p.715). As it is framed by Butler, a person could act a certain way that they think is how gender should behave based on cultural norms and their society's expectations. Modern culture forces us to make identity look stable and consistent, meaning that we are urged to act out certain norms of identity to fulfill the cultural demand and be able to participate in society (Butler, 1993, pp.225-226, as cited in Cover, 2022, p.36). However, the BookTok online space challenged this notion of converting identities to cultural demands. Therefore, BookTok is a space where queer users could shape and change their own identity based on their terms and express this safely without constraints from the real world and cultural or familial pressures. This extended to queer theory as it challenged the idea of fixed binary identities and argued that they are socially constructed and embodied to fulfill specific goals (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p.1). Users could challenge the idea of fixed binary identities by exploring their identity and sexual orientation online which differs from their offline lives.

Concluding that identities are not fixed but are re-constructed through interaction among BookTok with people who share the same passions for books and experiences which makes community and identity connected.

A person's online identity could be different from their offline identity because social media makes it possible to create a different construction (Lucero, 2017, p.125). Users felt safe on BookTok to change and express their sexual identity because it gave them the freedom of not being identified in the digital environment. Even though not all social media accounts are anonymous, they offer a different environment than face-to-face conversations. This resulted in a safer environment where people feel free to interact with people they do not directly face (Lucero, 2017, p.125). Furthermore, TikTok does offer the option to be anonymous by adding a username that is a pseudonym and a picture that does not show a person's face. This could lead to people sharing personal stories quickly as they feel less worried about being judged (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.5). Many of the users who commented on the videos by explaining their sexual orientation or their anxiety about coming out of the closet included a graphic picture instead of a personal photo and a pseudonym as username such as 'J reads '. This indicated their reader identity with the book symbol and their sexual orientation as queer.

In summary, users in both the English and Spanish contexts felt safe sharing their personal experiences on BookTok. Because book characters, authors, and creators provided role models, users expressed their identity which revealed a distinction between a person's offline and online identity. This resulted in a community where belonging and identity are formed through queer literature and engagement. Queer youth must have the ability to explore their own identity online as they feel more comfortable online to express their sexual orientation (Lucero, 2017, p.124). However, the internet is not always known as a safe space especially not for minorities. This is also reflected in the LGBTQ+ community which can experience exclusion and harassment on social media and in online communities (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.1).

4.3. Repression in English Territories, Support in Hispanic Ones

In this turbulent world, the feeling of safety differs greatly depending on which country a person lives in. The LGBTQ+ community continued to face repression worldwide, though the intensity and nature of this repression varies significantly by region, often shaped by factors such as religious beliefs and cultural norms. These regional differences were also reflected in the BookTok analysis. Notably, English-speaking BookTok creators frequently reported experiencing religious-based repression, while such accounts were virtually absent among Spanish-speaking creators. This pattern was especially evident when books with LGBTQ+ representation were

recommended in English-language videos. In many instances, users responded with comments about religion and insisted that the reviewers should read the Bible instead. An example of this can be found in a TikTok video where the creator recommended four queer books, explained their topic books, and argued why people should read them. This particular video received several comments in which the commenters asked God for the reader's forgiveness, explaining how Christ died for our sins and overall how they should "walk to God". One commentator, for example, wrote, "*Bro find god you weird mf no religion will accept your this world is nothing heaven is the goal*". Aside from this example, many other English-language videos also faced comments regarding religious oppression. Image 6 shows a series of comments under an English queer book's recommendation video.



Image 6: Comments under TikTok video

Not only did the English TikTok videos face repression in terms of religion, but also in terms of tolerance toward the LGBTQ+ community more generally. One queer book recommendation video was even made in response to a negative comment stating that "*lgbt ruined books*" as seen in Image 7. The video and corresponding comment opened up a debate in the comment section, where some users agreed with the statement by stating "*lgbtq ruined our childhood, ruined stores, ruined this generation*" whereas other people praised the recommendations of queer books such as "*Bury those shitty comments in more queer recs ❤️🌈*" and "*how can someone claim that LGBT+ 'ruin books' when they go above and beyond to yank queer books off of libraries and schools? Thanks for recommending*". These comments highlighted the tensions between the current state of the, especially the US, political climate and the queer community.

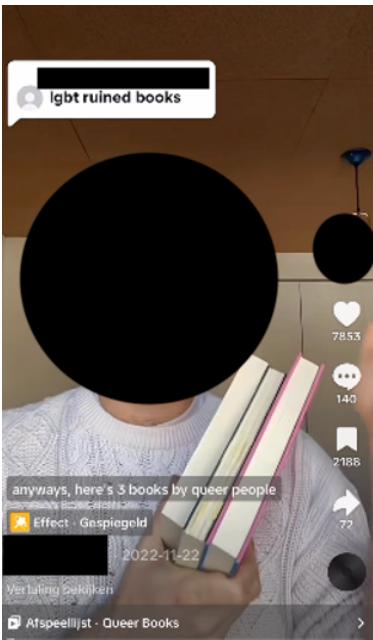


Image 7: TikTok video in reply to a negative comment

What was particularly striking was that the analyzed Spanish language BookTok videos did not receive a single comment regarding religion or expressive negative sentiments towards LGBTQ+ content. Because previous literature focused on English-speaking content and neglected a cross-cultural comparison, this difference between the two linguistic contexts was unexpected. Especially, because one might think that the Hispanic territories should have more negative and religious comments due to the overwhelmingly Catholic populations in most Spanish-speaking countries. However, as the data of this study showed and the general LGBTQ+ movement analysis of Encarnación (2016), explained this assumption is wrong. Previously, countries in Latin America had an unfavorable sociopolitical climate for gay rights as the population of Latin America is predominantly Catholic, and the culture is framed around machismo (Encarnación, 2016, p.1 - p.3). Therefore, people think to have an understanding that the population of Latin America is against homosexuality, as historically the Catholic church described homosexuality as a sin and even as a crime (Encarnación, 2016, p.3). However, as of 2008, all the countries of Latin America have a restriction on discriminating a person based on their sexual orientation, which makes the linguistic territory highly progressive regarding the right of queer people (Encarnación, 2016, p.2). These laws make Latin America comparable to the advanced queer rights of the West (Encarnación, 2016, p.2). Thus, given the machismo and Catholic identity of the Hispanic territory, people might expect this population to be less tolerant on social media platforms regarding gay rights and queer representations. But as the data showed, the only negative comments regarding queer representation connected to religion were on the English language videos and not on the Hispanic videos. An example of this in the Spanish context was when a creator reviewed a romance book that included the interplay between the Mormon religion and

gayness. As seen in Image 8 the users have a conversation surrounding personal experiences and the book's impact revealed a respectful engagement style.



Image 8: Conversation surrounding religion, sexual orientation and stories

The reason why there were religious and negative repression comments under the English videos might be related to the current political climate and tensions in most Western countries, where right-winged and conservative parties now hold significant influence (Haynes, 2020, p.2). In these contexts, religious rhetoric - particularly that rooted in Christianity - is often intertwined with conservative, right-wing political ideologies. In this sense, the presence of religiously framed comments in English-language BookTok videos is less surprising, given the ideological overlap between Christian beliefs and contemporary right-wing politics in these regions (Haynes, 2020, p. 3).

Furthermore, the earlier themes acknowledged that BookTok served as a community through belonging and common practices and as a safe space for identity expression. Within this, the comment sections under BookTok videos provide an interactive space where creators and users can talk and strengthen the sense of community and queer identity (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021 p.13). But when comparing the comment sections of the English-language videos with Spanish-language videos, a notable pattern was seen where the former tended to feature more active discussions, whereas the latter videos primarily received supportive comments. This does not mean that the English-language videos did not receive any type of support. However, their comment section generally had a more assertive discussion tone and engagement style. Image 9 illustrated this, showing a conversation under a video called: "*five queer books that changed my life*", in which a male creator recommends five titles. This video sparked considerable commotion in the comment section, as he labeled his recommendations queer books, yet he only included gay books (i.e., featuring male protagonists). While both terms are used as a self-identity, the term "gay" is mostly

used as an attraction from men to men, whereas the term “queer” is used primarily for a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual or tied to a specific gender identity (Dictionary, 2023, para. 5-7). This is important to highlight as creators who review books have considerable influence on people. This is in line with Chong’s (2020) argument that book reviewers’ opinions influence how books are perceived by readers and shape cultural conversations (pp.5-6). This resulted in a more direct engagement style from the English context.



Image 9: discussion comments

This engagement style was vastly different from the Hispanic linguistic videos which were more enthusiastic and supportive but did not contain a direct engagement style. Instead, their comments mostly consisted of emojis and supportive declarations. Additionally, both linguistic contexts could be critical of book recommendation videos especially when questioning queer-related aspects such as representation. The main difference between both linguistic contexts was how this criticism was conveyed. The English-language videos and comments contained content expressed in a direct way and straight to the point. An example of this was the comment “*It's about time we have more... heteronormative queer relationships-? What*”. Whereas the Hispanic comments were more indirect and expressed respectfully. For example, “*perdón por mi ignorancia pero que significa Safico?*” which translates to ‘sorry for my ignorance, but what does sapphic mean?’.

The concept of imagined communities could be used to demonstrate the differences in communication and engagement styles between the linguistic contexts, where nations and large groups feel connected through shared media, even though they never meet in real life (Anderson, 2006, p.6). This was particularly relevant for BookTok, where messages can create new cultural meanings through the means of engagement (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.222). The reason why these interpretations of communication styles were in line with this theory is because a shared identity within the imagined communities was constructed through media and language. Language plays a key role in imagined communities because it creates a sense of unity among people who may never meet in person (Anderson, 2006, pp.144-145). However, on BookTok there are various languages spoken. Therefore, users in both English-speaking and Hispanic-speaking territories could engage with the BookTok videos that include LGBTQ+ representation differently. This has shown in the data that there indeed is a difference between the two linguistic contexts, where English-speaking users often engaged through a discussion or conversations, while Hispanic-speaking users relied more on emotional exclamations and symbolic emojis. Therefore, repression illustrated the religious tension and discussion style in the English-speaking contexts, whereas the Catholic Hispanic contexts showed more support. This could explain the reason why there were more comments on the BookTok videos from the English context and why there were none found in the Hispanic context. To conclude, these findings illustrated how community, representation, identity, and culture are all interconnected on BookTok, resulting in different experiences and types of engagement for LGBTQ+ users.

5. Conclusion

The rise of the internet has shifted book reviewing from the domain of professional critics to that of amateur reviewers (Chong, 2020, p.2). These amateur reviews are posted on social media accounts, including the relatively new platform TikTok. This social media platform has an extensive influence on the publishing world serving as a key driver for the increase in book sales (De Melo, 2024, p.2). Under the #BookTok users post reviews, recommendations, and emotional reactions to books on the platform TikTok. (De Melo, 2024, p.1; Reddan et al., 2024, p.29; Wiederhold, 2022, p.157). The hashtag Booktok now includes more than 52 million TikTok videos.

This thesis focused on these Booktok videos and explored how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed across different linguistic contexts within these videos. This is done with a specific focus on community belonging and identity as this allows for a clear understanding of how users connect, express themselves, and engage with queer representation on BookTok. This thesis focused on two major languages worldwide and on TikTok: English and Spanish (Statista, 2025). The following research question was proposed in the introduction chapter: *How are books with LGBTQ+ representation discussed on BookTok across English and Hispanic-speaking videos?* The answer to this question is as follows: books with LGBTQ+ representation are abundantly discussed on BookTok where, in both contexts, there is a feeling of belonging, support, exchange of knowledge, passion, and connection between users on the TikTok platform, resulting in a community and a safe space for the expression of sexual orientation and where queer representation is abundant. In the Hispanic context, this support is more pronounced compared to the English context, where religious-based repression mirrors the current sociopolitical environment.

More specifically, the analysis shows that BookTok functions simultaneously as a community of practice and as an imagined community. This thesis illustrates that books with LGBTQ+ representation are abundantly discussed on BookTok which results in a feeling of belonging among English and Hispanic contexts. As opposed to research on professional reviewers (Chong, 2020), this thesis highlights that BookTok amateur reviewers use a language with emotional connotations that their community can understand, favoring community above professionalism. Unlike previous literature, this thesis includes the comment section as a crucial space where belonging is expressed. Accordingly, BookTok serves as an imagined community which became apparent in the user's expression of support in the comment section, the exchange of knowledge and passion, the vocalizing of feelings of connection, and the usage of a common book language understood across all borders. This study discovers differences among various (linguistic) communities. For instance, in the Hispanic context, there is a noticeable difference in the use of non-verbal tools, with more symbols and emojis being employed in their videos and comments.

Moreover, BookTok creates a safe space for identity and sexual orientation expression, particularly among often marginalized LGBTQ+ members from both English and Hispanic contexts. Existing literature highlighted that there is a difference between an online identity and an offline identity, as social media makes it possible to create a different construction (Lucero, 2017, p.125). The data of this study reinforced these findings and showed that users in both linguistic contexts felt safe to construct and express their online identity in these communities, as demonstrated by asking for help with their sexual orientation, reading books that include a specific LGBTQ+ representation, and supporting each other. This thesis illustrates that representation is not only found in the books with LGBTQ+ characters but also with the famous Booktokers who gave these recommendations and openly shared their experiences and support. This connects directly to Butler's (1990) concept of performativity, which extends to queer theory as it challenges the idea of fixed binary identities (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p.1). Therefore, BookTok is an online space where queer users can shape and change their own identity, based on their terms and express this safely without constraints from the 'real world' and cultural or familial pressures. By doing so, they are able to construct their own norms and narratives and normalize experiences that may be perceived as 'deviant' in the offline world.

However, the perception and expression of safety within these communities vary significantly. Contrary to previous literature, this thesis focussed on a cross-cultural comparison. Previous studies researched the English TikTok and BookTok content, which is not representative of other parts of the world. In fact, when this thesis looked at other linguistic contexts it illustrates developments that were not previously expected based on Western perspectives or prejudices. These developments include that the English comment sections exhibit more religious-based repression and negative comments regarding the LGBTQ+ community, while such comments are virtually absent among Spanish-speaking creators. This trend reflects the current uncertain sociopolitical climate of the West, where Christian beliefs and contemporary right-wing politics are dominant (Haynes, 2020, p. 3). Conversely, even though the Hispanic territories are often characterized by Catholic and traditional masculine cultural influences, such negative comments are absent from this study's data. While one might expect less tolerance on social media platforms regarding gay rights and queer representations in these areas, the data reveals that negative comments regarding queer representation are found only in English language videos, not in Hispanic ones.

5.1. Discussion

This research makes three contributions to the academic understanding of communities, safe spaces, and book reviewing. First, it shows that BookTok clearly functions as a community of practices (Kaye, 2023) and as an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) across the English and Spanish linguistic contexts. Even though there is a shared passion for books with LGBTQ+

representation, knowledge is exchanged about these books, and a shared digital book language is used among both contexts, it might not automatically mean that it also functions as a community. One of the most important aspects of a community is the feeling of belonging which stimulates both participation and acceptance within the BookTok community (Guíñez-Cabrera & Mansilla-Obando, 2022, p.119).

However, this thesis reveals that in the English-speaking contexts, there is a more adverse engagement style and oppression in the comment section based on religion which could negatively influence the feeling of belonging. These examples of oppression comments found in the English context undermine the statement that the BookTok community is a safe space for everyone. If the feeling of belonging was absent could this then also undermine the claim that BookTok serves as a community? Not all comments were positive and even included religious oppression and negative comments, nonetheless, this only strengthened the connection between the LGBTQ+ group on BookTok with videos made in response to such comments as highlighted in Image 7 of the result part and the accompanying comment to this with “*Bury those shitty comments in more queer recs* ❤️🌈”. This in turn highlights that BookTok does function as a community.

Unlike existing literature, this thesis highlights how community theories could be used as new tools to understand how digital communities are different from traditional book-reading communities. Contrary to traditional book reviews and other social media platforms, BookTok is driven by algorithm, engagement, and emotional expression. The analysis of this thesis illustrates that engagement differs across linguistic territories where the Hispanic context engages with more symbols and emojis and wherein the English context interacts with more discussion and religious comments.

Not only does this thesis highlight the contributions of these theories, but also the limitation of applying the 50-year-old theory of imagined community to contemporary emerging phenomena of TikTok. If English has become such a world language, can it still be an imagined community, when that language is no longer rooted in a specific country or cultural context? The BookTok and queer communities could be seen as an imagined community, but in a nuanced way. Speaking in a language that is understood by many people that transfers cultural borders, gives people a chance to openly participate in the community, support each other, and talk about their sexual orientation and personal experiences. This created the feeling of connection based on similar tastes in books and/or sexual orientation regardless of a person’s residence. Especially on the platform TikTok, this results in an imagined community, because if one person is from Poland and another one from England the chances are high, that they might never meet in person but do connect through the same spoken language and taste in books. This interpretation aligns more with contemporary applications of imagined communities from Kavoura (2014) who specified how imagined

communities are created by social media users all over the world (p.494). Similarly, Maddox and Gill (2023) argue that TikTok is an imagined media platform since users are not able to see every single community member, but they do feel part of the community as they read the same books and identify themselves as part of the BookTok community (p.4).

Additionally, because algorithm-driven platforms are relevantly new, the community of practices theory can offer new and unique insights into how communities manifest on the platforms. This thesis built on imagined theory and communities of practice by illustrating that TikTok served as an imagined community as argued by Kavoura (2014) and Maddox and Gill (2023). Therefore, these two theories were conducted in the analysis as they offer complementary insights. While imagined communities examined how a sense of belonging and emotional connection was formed, the theory of communities of practices provided a framework for understanding how these communities were sustained through shared practices over time.

Secondly, this thesis showcased that even though social media is not always an inclusive environment for marginalized groups, BookTok is a safe space on the internet for the LGBTQ+ community. The analysis of this study shows that users talk and comment often and openly about their sexual orientation, vocalize their personal experiences, and serve as a community in the English and Spanish-speaking contexts. Especially in the current socio-political climate is this openness and support within the community of importance as tensions regarding LGBTQ+ rights are rising. This study contributes to the academic research that safe spaces are crucial for LGBTQ+ persons, as they encounter digital challenges that straight people do not (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.11). According to McInroy and Craig (2016), the media is one of the first places where people, including people from the LGBTQ+ community, gain knowledge and encounter LGBTQ+ identities (p.33). Traditional media often stereotypes LGBTQ+ people as peripheral, whereas new media provides safe spaces for discussion and creativity (McInroy and Craig, 2016, p.44). Representations of LGBTQ+ persons in the media are not meant to be for the mainstream audiences, but rather for specific queer children to help them realize that queer existence is real (Muñoz, 1999, as cited in Jones, 2023, p.1199).

Lastly, this thesis highlights the shift from professional reviews to amateur reviews. It adds to the research that this makes the future of professional book reviewing uncertain (Chong, 2020). Therefore, the emerging phenomena of BookTok were researched. The findings highlight the large number of amateur book reviews on TikTok. Considering all the other social media apps (such as YouTube with 'BookTube'), blogs, and book websites (such as Goodreads and Amazon.com) there is no denying that there is a huge shift from professional reviews to amateur reviews. This makes the future of professional book reviewing uncertain (Chong, 2020, p.2). Amateur reviews include emotional reactions and personal experiences (Koreman et al. 2023, pp.743-744). This

thesis highlights the emotional reactions and personal experiences that are used by amateur reviews on BookTok, finding unity and belonging more important than professionalism as opposed to professional reviewers which was researched by Chong (2020). It is important to research the emerging phenomena of BookTok, to decrease the chances of having these types of uncertainty for amateur reviews. Particularly, for the marginalized group of the LGBTQ+ community, because BookTok serves as a safe space to get knowledge about which books with queer representation are good, support for coming out and they build a community. Therefore, amateur reviews contributed to that their voices and stories are being heard which is important that this does not diminish in the same way it did for professional reviews.

Furthermore, not only do these findings contain academic contributions but they also include social implications. In the introduction it was emphasized how BookTok can function as a teaching tool (Asplund et al., 2024 p.636; Boffone & Jerasa, 2021, p.10), it provides a safe space (Lucero, 2017, p.124) as well as an exclusion space (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.1) and how books with LGBTQ+ representation have a positive impact on readers as they feel represented (De Melo 2024, p.3). These social contributions alongside the analyzed results gave opportunities that could be made for social media and the literary world. Firstly, the results highlight how social media functioned as a safe place for the LGBTQ+ community in both contexts as well as a place of repression in the English context. Because social media is one of the first places where people, including people from the LGBTQ+ community, gain knowledge and encounter LGBTQ+ identities (McInroy & Craig, 2016, p.33), there is an opportunity for social media platforms to foster an inclusive environment. This includes striving for a safe space for marginalized groups, depicting representation that is not stereotypical, and providing help for those who need it. Secondly, the literary world needs to adjust accordingly to the continuing growth of amateur reviews on social media platforms like TikTok. Especially when TikTok is the app that changed the reading climate the most due to the popularity of BookTok (De Melo, 2024, p.2), publishers and authors may consider adapting to these digital dynamics to sustain interest in books, particularly those with LGBTQ+ representation.

5.2. Future Research

In order to keep reading popular and to provide safe places where marginalized voices can be heard, and stories can be told it is important that more research is conducted. This thesis looks at how books with LGBTQ+ representation are being discussed on BookTok across English and Hispanic-speaking videos with a focus on community belonging, identity, and LGBTQ+ representation. This was done by applying the theories of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006), the community of practice (Kaye, 2023), performativity (Butler, 1990), and queer theory

(Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). Even though these studies provided a great framework for understanding and answering the research question, more information and research are necessary to gain further insight.

One of the key concepts of this thesis is the concept of identity. Identity is a substantial concept, and this thesis touched upon multiple sub-concepts within identities such as self-identity, reader identity, online identity and offline identity. Particularly, this thesis linked the aspects of identity back to queer theory and performativity. Therefore, it focused on how identity is performed in the English and Hispanic contexts of BookTok and how BookTok serves as a safe space for online identity expression as opposed to the offline world. However, a limitation of this thesis is that it did not look at broader cultural structures, such as politics, economics, class, etc. As Lucero (2017) argues, identity is also framed around the relationship between sexual orientation, gender, race, and class (p.118). Therefore, it could be interesting for further research to utilize specific theories tied to identity to see how much users are aware of the identity they perform on social media platforms and how much is enforced of this by culture. This would explain a different side of identity theory by analyzing how identity is not only performed but how influenced it is by class, politics, and economics and not by consciousness recognition (Cover, 2022, pp. 8-9).

In the theoretical framework and the result chapters it is illustrated that BookTok is seen as a safe place and talked fondly about in regard to communities. However, as briefly touched upon in the theoretical framework, social media also creates spaces where marginalized identities such as people from the LGBTQ+ community can experience exclusion and harassment (Simpson & Semaan, 2021, p.1). This is a limitation as this study for the most part highlights the positive aspects of social media, whereas there is various research explaining the negative aspects. Therefore, this thesis shows a one-sided view of communities and BookTok and overlooks potential exclusion and discrimination to LGBTQ+ communities. More research could be enhanced with this, especially considering that TikTok has a unique algorithm that can reinforce racism and sexism. Research on this is done by Noble (2018) who defined this as ‘algorithmic oppression’ (p.4). Deeper research can be conducted to fully understand how this algorithm and gatekeeping works on TikTok, what the impact of this is on BookTok, and how this influences the LGBTQ+ community.

Lastly, this thesis only focused on two linguistic territories. There are currently more studies done on subcommunities within TikTok such as #JazzTok by Kaye (2023) and #BlackGirlTikTok by Taylor and Abidin (2024). However, these studies solely focused on the English language, neglecting how communities may differ across linguistic territories. This thesis looks at the English and Spanish-speaking BookTok videos and comments, but this neglects other linguistic territories such as France or other specific countries. This is a limitation to fully conclude to see how BookTok impacts the queer community. In the introduction of this thesis, it was noted that,

instead of focusing on specific countries, this study examined linguistic territories. This decision was driven by the qualitative content analysis approach and the difficulty of identifying TikTok users' country of origin, making an analysis based on linguistic territories more feasible. Nevertheless, the country of origin was sometimes noticeable in the data as illustrated in Image 6, where there is a Polish flag displayed next to the username. People from all over the world are on TikTok, and a majority of people speak the English language, even if it is not their native language (Statista, 2025). Consequently, people who write English comments may come from countries where English is not the native language, including the example of Poland. Future research could be done to draw a more accurate argument on how engagement on BookTok is shaped depending on a specific country's culture and political environment.

This can be done by opting for a different research method. Even though the qualitative content method was useful to draw a conclusion based on thematic evidence, it can be useful to conduct the research with a mixed method or qualitative interview method. By utilizing a qualitative interview method, for example, there can be a clear statement of which country a person is from. In this way, it is more accommodating to draw deeper cultural insights from this. Additionally, quantitative analysis can be useful to research multiple linguistic contexts with a cross-linguistic analysis. With multiple linguistic contexts included, there can be a more concrete correlation drawn from current political climates and the impact on community and queer representation on BookTok. Ultimately, this can illustrate how books with LGBTQ+ representation are discussed across different cultural and political climates, giving marginalized groups the chance to share their voices and stories in a safe environment where research contributes to making the world a more inclusive one.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1

Engagement metrics of the 40 TikTok videos.

English-speaking videos							
TikTok clip	Date added	Views	Likes	Comments	Saved	Shared	Hashtags
1	22/04/2025	369,7K	62,4K	848	28,1K	1841	#booktok #fyp #foryou #book #books #bookrecommendations #bookrecs #booktoker #queer #queerbook #lgbt #lgbtq #allthatsleftintheworld #foryoupage
2	22/04/2025	364,5K	36,5K	432	23,9K	2106	#book #booktok #booktoker #reading #bookrec #bookrecommendations #literary #litfic #literaryfiction #books #writer #lgbt #queerbook #lgbtbooks
3	22/04/2025	89,4K	9223	137	4921	642	#bookbinc #booktok #bookrecommendations #queerreadingrecs #pridebooks
4	22/04/2025	8606	1077	50	100	8	#songofachilles #madelinemiller
5	22/04/2025	183,2K	28,3K	333	7702	220	None
6	22/04/2025	600,6K	38,3K	387	20,1K	940	#lesbianbookrecs #sapphicreads
7	22/04/2025	217,5K	7919	156	3927	94	#booktok #literatyficton #queerbook #queerbookrec
8	22/04/2025	48,8K	3315	163	1529	101	#bookrecommendation #queerbook #lgbtqbooks #literaryfiction #bookrecs #creatorssearchinsights
9	22/04/2025	32,2K	3273	68	1567	116	#stich #bookrecommendations #booktok #bookrecs #fantasybooktok #queerbook #sapphicbooks
10	22/04/2025	103,8K	8724	115	6009	597	#booktok #lesbianbooks #lgbtqbooks #lesbian #queer #reading #cozy #lgbtq #fyp #amsterdam #viral #wlw #lesbiansoftiktok

11	22/04/2025	668,9K	61,7K	555	37,1K	1851	#booktok #literatytok #literaryfiction #gaybookreviews #queerbook #queerbookrecommendations #queerbookrec #reading #queerbooktoker #booktokrecommendations
12	07/05/2025	559,2K	48,7K	6901	5304	850	#booktok #transbooks
13	07/05/2025	77,3K	20,8K	178	3275	864	#booktok #bookreviews #lgbtq #trans #latinx #cemeteryboys #bookrecomendations
14	07/05/2025	30,2K	2013	65	715	71	None
15	07/05/2025	37,7K	4742	130	957	153	#wlwbooks #saphhicbooks #lgbtbooks #kindagayash
16	07/05/2025	33,8K	4804	93	1850	184	#transbooks
17	07/05/2025	233K	30,9K	244	9451	394	None
18	07/05/2025	360,2K	27,5K	688	11,6K	549	#booktok #fyp #bookrecommendations #gaytiktok #lgbtqbooks #relatable #5star #mustread #bookish #lgbtq #booksideoftiktok #reading #bookworm
19	07/05/2025	81,3K	10,8K	229	6585	1147	#lgbtbooks #johneereads #reader #bookstan #fantasybooks #fantasybook #fantasybooktok
20	07/05/2025	87,6K	7854	140	2188	72	None

Spanish-speaking videos

1	22/04/2025	107,4K	17,6K	197	7530	488	#booktokespañol #booktok #libros #bookrecs #recomendacionesdelibros #iriayselene #andrealongarela #teesperoenelfindelmundo #cazadoresesombras #  #boylove #libroslgbt #librosdefantasia #librosdemisterio #librosderomance
2	22/04/2025	414,9K	72,8K	396	26,1K	2748	#libroslibroslibros #librosgay #libroslgbt #librosenespañol #booktokespañol
3	22/04/2025	283,5K	35,4K	127	13,9K	483	#libroslgbt #librosrecomendados #librosenespañol

							#libroslibroslibros #booktok #leer #wlw
4	22/04/2025	475,9K	81,2K	585	22K	2298	#libroslgbt #librosenespañol #libroslibroslibros #booktok #bookclub #bl #booktokespañol #lectores #longervideos
5	22/04/2025	74,9K	15K	112	4322	763	#booktok #libros #booktokespañol #librosrecommended #libroslgbt #boyslove #girslove #bl #gl
6	22/04/2025	21,8K	2823	54	312	26	#libros # booktok #lgbt #librosgay #booktokespañol
7	22/04/2025	65,8K	4599	70	1390	139	#booktok #libros #gay #lgbt #librosquedesleer
8	22/04/2025	60K	12,6K	74	3657	394	#libroslibroslibros #libroslgbtq #librosqueer
9	22/04/2025	27K	3610	65	1582	120	#booktok
10	07/05/2025	37,8K	5212	222	2961	326	#booktokespanol #booktokespana #personajeslgbt
11	07/05/2025	152,7K	12,4K	64	4215	624	#booktok #wlw #lesbianoftiktok #bollodrama #wlwtiktok #lesbiansoftiktok #thesevenhusbandsfevelynhugo #evenlynhugo #stonebutchblues #lesliefeinberg
12	07/05/2025	236K	43,7K	300	11,3K	1113	#librostrans #libroslgbt #librosqueer #libroslibroslibros
13	07/05/2025	51,7K	11,1K	99	2363	105	#libroslgbt #librosenespañol #booktok #greenscreen
14	07/05/2025	74,5K	9384	102	759	12	#librosrecommended #librosenespañol #lgbtbooks #lectores #leer #bookclub #booktok #booktokespañol #longervideos
15	07/05/2025	177,6K	31,7K	238	9830	533	#libroslesbianos #libroslgbt #booktok #publicidad

16	07/05/2025	217,5K	38,8K	271	14,2K	1809	#libroslgbt #booktok #libroslibroslibros
17	07/05/2025	330,3K	35,7K	104	9969	328	#booktok #tiktoklibros #librotok #libroslibroslibros #fyp #parati #biblioteca #lectores #lectura #leer #foryou #bookarg #pt #booktokenespañol #booktokargentina #fy
18	07/05/2025	36,5K	3976	71	1864	260	#wlwtiktok #booktok
19	07/05/2025	60,9K	4182	65	407	76	#lacanciondeaquiles #booktok #reseñasdelibros #booktokespañol #libroslibroslibros #lecturasrecomendadas #librosoftiktok
20	07/05/2025	7201	506	56	115	20	#aquiles #bl #lacanciondeaquiles #booktokespaña #booktokespañol #reseñasdelibros #recomendacioneslibros

7.2. Appendix 2

Coding scheme used when analysing the data

Code name	Definition	Indicators/Example
Professional review	Person who reviews books as a job, mostly for a company or newspaper	Mentions of being a journalist or professional Formal tone: e.g. "as a critic"
Amateur review	Person who reviews books as a passion, mostly independent and online	Mentions of BookTok reader Informal tone: e.g. "in my opinion"
Community of practices	Groups with a shared passion for a topic and who learn more from this topic due to interaction	Recommendations Supportive expressions Knowledge exchange
BookTok community	Digital community where users are connected through a shared passion and a safe space for queer readers	Expressions of connections Referring to BookTok
Imagined communities	Explains how nations and large groups feel connected even though they never meet in real life	Feelings of belonging Symbols Internet language: TBR, DNF, LOL, etc
Self-identity	Everyone conducts activities that relate to a sense of this self-identity, such as having a driver's license or having a presence on social media	Mentions of self-identity
Reader-identity	Characteristics of how people read, when people read and how the accessibility of books shape how people see themselves	Mentions of reading activities #booknerd
Cultural identity	How a person is perceived by themselves and others linked to concepts such as shared history and generation groups	Mentions of cultural traditions/ obstacles
Offline identity	Behavior in the real world	Mentions of real life, e.g. school, work, family
Online identity	Behavior on social media and the digital environment	Performance of self in videos Mentions of behavior change online
Emotional reactions	Expressions of emotions	Crying, screaming, laughing, etc Emotions mentioned and written
Personal experiences	Personal stories/ narratives	Mentions to personal narratives
Gender performativity	Gender is not something someone's born with, but it is performative and thus something we act out on based on society's expectations and rules	Pride flag, performtive actions, clothing, emojis
Nationalities	Where a person is from	Mentions of nationalities
Sociopolitical context	local or naitonal politics, laws, religious views	References to religion, laws, rights issues
Cultural references	Mention of specific cultures	Mentions of culture, country specifics
Sexual orientation	A person's emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to others	Mentions of sexual orientation
Visibility in content	Presence or absence of LGBTQ+ themes in books, videos and comments	Mentions of queer characters, plotlines
Types of representation	How LGBTQ+ is presented in books, videos and comments	Stereotipical, positive mentions, etc
Books/authors mentions	References to specific authors, characters, books, stories	Tagging authors, book titles, book covers

7.3. Appendix 3

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Nina Bakker

Student ID: 703921

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Yosha Wijngaarden

Date: 25/06/2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically Grammarly, ChatGPT and Claude in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Extent of AI Usage

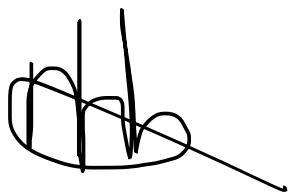
I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Doe".

Date of Signature: 25/06/2025

AI prompts

- Grammarly was used for basic grammar and spelling check
- Claude was used for some idea generation for my thesis in the initial brainstorming phase (image 1)
- Both Claude and ChatGPT were used to help with idea generation (image 2), to help with synonyms (image 3), to explain concepts and academic texts (image 4) and frameworks and theories (image 5).

Image 1

N Hi Claude,
So im working on my master thesis right now. is this a good topic for content analysis?:
1. BookTok and Impact on self-identity
Research question:
How do LGBTQ+ communities on BookTok influence the self-identity among LGBTQ+ Gen-Z users in the Netherlands, the USA, and Spain?

Sub question 1:
How does BookTok foster a sense of community among its LGBTQ+ Gen-Z users?

Sub question 2:
How does participation in LGBTQ+ BookTok communities influence self-identity formation among Gen-Z users?

Sub question 3:
How do the influences of LGBTQ+ communities on BookTok differ between the Netherlands, the USA, and Spain?

Topic of the research project and the context or rationale for this study;
- Look at how BookTok shapes communities among LGBTQ+ users
- In Spain they talk like this and this about books with LGBTQ+ representation, in USA like this, etc
- How do these communities influence the users' self-identity?
- The similarities and differences are therefore this and this

Theoretical framework:
Communities
Self-identity
Cultural

Method:
Content description of operationalization of the concepts from the theoretical framework; communities, self-identity and cultural.
From these concepts I will search for comments and video content of that mentioned

This is an interesting and timely research topic that examines the intersection of social media, literature, identity formation, and cross-cultural differences. Let me provide a detailed analysis:

Strengths of your research design:

1. The topic is highly relevant, combining contemporary social media phenomena (BookTok) with important social issues (LGBTQ+ representation and identity)
2. The comparative aspect between three countries adds valuable depth and cultural context
3. The focus on Gen-Z is particularly relevant given their high engagement with TikTok
4. The connection between online communities and identity formation is well-established in academic literature

Areas that might need refinement:

Research Questions:

- Your main research question is clear, but quite broad. Consider specifying what aspects of "self-identity" you'll focus on
- Sub-question 3 might need more specific parameters about what "influences" you're comparing

Methodological Considerations:

1. Content Analysis Specifics:
 - How will you select your sample? (Random sampling, purposive sampling?)
 - What time period will you analyze?
 - How will you handle language differences in content analysis?
 - Will you analyze both video content and comments, or focus on one?
2. Theoretical Framework:
 - Your theoretical framework needs more specific theories. Consider including:
 - Social Identity Theory
 - Online Community Formation Theory
 - Cultural Identity Theory
 - Digital Media and Youth Culture theories
3. Cultural Context:
 - How will you account for different levels of LGBTQ+ acceptance in these countries?
 - How will you handle different social media usage patterns across cultures?

Image 2

one theme is that the English speaking videos have a lot of videos made in response to hate comments and a lot of comments under queer book videos about god and the Bible. This was surprising to me since the hispanic territories in my mind are more inclined to these comments due to its Catholicism religion. However, the hispanic videos have none of such hate or religion based comments. This also resonates with a source that I found that Hispanic countries have this image of a macho society but in reality they are front runners on gay rights whereas the US is only decreasing these rights. How can I name this theme?

🔗 ↗

That's a fascinating and powerful finding — and it touches on several layers: **surprise, religious discourse, cultural assumptions, and shifting realities about LGBTQ+ acceptance**.

Here are a few **theme name options** depending on the tone and angle you want to emphasize:

💡 **If you want to highlight the contradiction/surprise:**

- "Unexpected Safe Spaces"
- "Challenging Assumptions, Reversing Realities"
- "The Silent Acceptance: When Visibility Doesn't Mean Hostility"
- "More Tolerance Where You Least Expect It"

🌐 **If you want to emphasize religion and conflict:**

- "Religious Resistance and Queer Visibility"
- "God, Gays, and Comment Sections"
- "Sacred Texts, Secular Clashes"

🌐 **If you want to take a cross-cultural/political framing:**

- "Progressive Peripheries, Conservative Centers"
- "Catholic Contexts and Queer Acceptance"

Stel een vraag

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↗ Tools

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Help

Image 3

do you have academic synonyms for "can be seen as"

Yes! Here are several **academic synonyms** or alternatives for "can be seen as" that you can use to **vary your phrasing** while keeping the tone formal and analytical:

 **General Synonyms:**

- can be understood as
- can be interpreted as
- may be viewed as
- can be considered
- might be regarded as
- may be conceptualized as
- can be framed as
- can be perceived as
- may be described as
- functions as

 **Theory-Linked or Analytical:**

- operates as
- serves as
- acts as
- manifests as
- constitutes
- exemplifies
- represents
- reflects
- embodies



Image 4

can you explain this in simpler terms?: However, some scholarship has focused on how individuals use anonymity or indirectness to disclose potentially stigmatized information around identity and experience of self

Sure! Here's a simpler version of that sentence:

Some researchers have looked at how people share personal or sensitive parts of who they are by staying anonymous or by being vague, especially when they're worried about being judged.

This means people might not share everything directly—especially things like their identity—if they think others might react negatively. Instead, they use indirect ways or keep their identity hidden.

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Image 5

what is the difference between queer theory and performative theory?

Great question! **Queer theory** and **performative theory** are closely related, but they focus on different aspects of identity and expression. Here's how they differ and overlap:

Queer Theory

- **What it is:** A theoretical framework that challenges normative ideas of gender and sexuality.
- **Focus:** Queer theory critiques the binaries of gender (male/female) and sexuality (heterosexual/homosexual), arguing that identities are fluid, socially constructed, and culturally specific.
- **Key figures:** Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler (also overlaps with performativity).
- **Key ideas:**
 - Identities are **not fixed**.
 - Labels like "gay" or "straight" are **culturally produced** and **limiting**.
 - Heteronormativity is **socially enforced** through media, institutions, and discourse.
 - Queerness can be a **political stance** against rigid identity categories.

Performativity Theory (Gender Performativity)

- **What it is:** A concept developed by Judith Butler, within the broader framework of queer theory, but with its own specific theoretical application.
- **Focus:** How gender is **performed** through repeated acts, behaviors, language, and social norms.
- **Key argument:** Gender is **not something one is, but something one does** – a series of repeated performances that create the illusion of a stable gender identity.
- **Key ideas:**
 - There's **no essential "gender core"**.
 - Social expectations **shape** how we "do" gender.

Stel een vraag

