



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Why do you keep buying books you don't read?

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While running through my monthly room cleanout programme, I discovered a pile of books abandoned at the back of my shelf. Unsurprisingly, many of them were yet to be read. As I began to leaf through the pages and getting lost in the aroma of freshly bound timber, the ringing sound of a notification broke the spell and marked the end of what could have been a reunion with long-forgotten books.

Despite another usual failed attempt of trying to choose reading over scrolling, an interesting question came up. To observe the continuous acquisition of books that occupy space without fulfilling their intended purpose is undeniably perplexing. However, what drives an individual to purchase a book without much dedication to the reading process itself?

There is a Japanese term, "Tsumodoku", that refers to the practice of buying books but keeping them piled up in a place instead of reading them. Often, the mere idea of a shelf filled with books brings pleasure. It is essential to understand that buying a book means not only owning a piece of content, but also the hardcover illustrations, the aesthetic and the blissful feeling that tags along with it. Therefore, what may seem unrelated to the reading experience can influence in driving a book's sales.

To better address the question, figuring out where young readers look for book recommendations in the 21st century can be helpful. Social media is an obvious answer. A recent global survey conducted by the Publishers Association suggests that digital platforms are influencing Generation Z kids to grab a book. But let's be honest, book reviews have always existed online. So, what leads youngsters to find interest in an idea previously dubbed as "old-fashioned" by many? BookTok might know to answer.

In 2022, a phenomenon on TikTok featuring short videos, where influencers turn the pages to a pile of hardcover books with an aesthetic backdrop, gained popularity under the name "BookTok." What sets BookTok apart from traditional book reviews is its ability to make reading feel trendy and exciting. The platform has a unique way of turning books into must-have items, driven by the enthusiastic endorsements of passionate readers. Popular titles

often go viral, leading to skyrocketing sales and renewed interest in literature among young people. However, there is a problem.

BookTok recommendations are comically vague and inclusive to only a few popular genres of reading such as young adult fiction, rom-com, and fantasy. Due to a lack of details, it becomes difficult to identify whether or not a book can actually offer a story that caters to the reader's preference. BookTok reels are about a few seconds long and rely on viral audio to keep the audience engaged. As for visuals, the focus is generally on creating a pleasing atmosphere. Clearly, the goal is to focus on how a book

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makes you feel instead of the content inside.

The platform, while vibrant and influential, can sometimes feel like an overwhelming cacophony of trends and hype. While the benefits of reading remain settled, the issue with buying books just to inhabit shelf space promotes consumerism because they do not serve their intended purpose. Although it may be arguable whether reading and buying books are separate pleasures, the true value of a book lies within the story it uncovers. Perhaps, amid digital trends and social media influences, taking a step back and rediscovering the joy of reading for reading's sake could lead to a more fulfilling relationship with our collections.

Reference The Guardian (August 6, 2023). 'I can't stress how much BookTok sells': teen literary influencers swaying publishers

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How to build a reading habit

Set a reading goal

Define a specific target, such as reading a certain number of pages or books per month, to give yourself a clear objective and track your progress.

Create a reading schedule

Allocate a specific time each day for reading, whether it's in the morning, during lunch, or before bed, to make it a consistent part of your routine.

Mix up genres

Explore different genres and authors to keep your reading experience fresh and exciting, preventing boredom.

Track your progress

Use a journal or an app to log the books you've read and your thoughts on them, helping you stay committed and see your achievements.

Always carry a book

If possible, keep a book with you at all times, whether in physical form or on a digital device, so you can read whenever you have a few spare minutes.

