

Contemporary Reading Cultures
Call for Papers
29 – 30 January 2026
Technische Universität Dortmund

I'm letting the wheel of shame dictate which of the 237 unread physical books on my tbr that I read. This is the last book that she ended up giving me and you know what, in the moment I gave it four stars, might have been a bit generous, but hey ho. And we're gonna give her another quick spin today. We've had a lot of thriller and horror, so maybe a bit of a genre change up would be very much appreciated. (@bibliophel)

Reading is cool. Influencers and readers alike are sharing recommendations, opinions, and general thoughts over all different forms of social media, with the “BookTok” community on TikTok being one of the most well-known communities at the moment. Even outside of the digital space, many bookstores now prominently feature books that are popular online, some even going as far as putting “Popular on TikTok” signs on book tables or “As seen on BookTok” stickers on books. Simultaneously, online communities also appear to have significant impact on the publishing industry. Not only has the number of book sales increased with the rise of especially BookTok (Thomas), but there is also a notable influence on the way books are marketed and the kinds of books that get traditionally published, as “publishers use these social media reading cultures as predictive tools [to] harness already existing audience interest” (Maddox and Gill 2).

Contemporary reading communities appear to resemble what Henry Jenkins coined as “media fandom” in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992). He describes the members of “media fandom” as “largely female, largely white, largely middle class, though it welcomes into its ranks many who would not fit this description. This subculture cuts across traditional geographic and generational boundaries and is defined through its particular styles of consumption and forms of cultural preference” (1). While the media that are being used by fans to participate in fandom have changed drastically since the early 1990s, many of the descriptors offered by Jenkins still ring true in connection to contemporary book fandoms.

Using current developments in reading and book fandom as a starting point, the aim of this conference is to investigate reading cultures, fandom, and media practices at a time when social media is becoming more and more impactful. We are interested in the intersection of reading practices and reading discourses in the 21st century and their implications for future developments in reading.

We welcome papers from scholars at all different levels on and beyond the following topics:

- The role of online communities like BookTok, BookTube, and Bookstagram in shaping reading and publishing cultures in the 21st century
- The rising popularity of (dark) romance and romantasy and the discourses surrounding these (sub-)genres
- The mainstreaming of fan fiction and its impact on contemporary reading communities
- Publishing between established conventions and self-publishing
- Affect and literature and its performance on social media
- Marginalized perspectives in contemporary reading cultures
- The construction of “the reader” and the ethics and aesthetics of reading
- The differences between physical books, digital books and audiobooks in reception as well as the surrounding discourse and the construction of “literature” as a category
- The evolution of online book content from blogging to short-form visual content
- Paratext and its relationship to the (over) consumption of books

Submission Guidelines and Details:

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words and short biographies of no more than 100 words to Nicole Mellin (nicole.mellin@tu-dortmund.de) and Katharina Röder (katharina.roeder@tu-dortmund.de) by 10 October 2025.

The conference will take place at TU Dortmund from 29-30 January 2026; further details will be announced on the conference’s website: www.islk.kuwi.tu-dortmund.de/crc.

Works Cited:

Blaise, Eloise [@bibliophel]. “Dare I say a contender for one of my favourite reads of the year? [side-eye emoji] #tbrchallenge #physicaltbr #tbr #whattoreadnext #contemporaryromance #lgtbqia #translated #bookwormstruggles #readerproblems.” *TikTok*, 25 May 2025, <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNdB3wM56/>.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers. Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge, 2012.

Maddox, Jessica and Fiona Gill. “Assembling ‘Sides’ of TikTok: Examining Community, Culture, and Interface Through a BookTok Case Study.” *Social Media + Society*, 2023, pp. 1-12.

Thomas, Nathalie. “BookTok’s influence on publishing is set to last.” *Financial Times*, 2024. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/5cfd524b-5b1f-4af0-8f9c-ce6778d0d6a9>.