

Colleen Hoover, BookTube, and the Emergence of BookTube Critic

Reading quickly is an expensive hobby if you can't acquire your "Must Read" books used or from the library. Without much time or dimes, I turned to BookTube to guide me. With BookTube, an online space created for readers, not only are YouTube videos free, but they can be curated. Through my search, I noticed that a BookTuber with a sizable following usually fell into two camps. One type of BookTuber was the Influencer BookTuber, who focused more on Book Hauls, book organizing, and book tags. The other type was more critical and focused on in depth reviews/critiques of books, trends, and authors. Although these content creators may differ, they can often intercept and both contribute in the creation of new online actors: the BookTube Influencer and the BookTube Critic.

Placing BookTubers into two camps does oversimplify the overall landscape of BookTube and there are creators who can be considered both, but creating two groups creates a simple, general understanding of BookTube. While there is an array of BookTubers, 90% of views are concentrated in the 20% most popular channels and therefore the most successful BookTubers are shaped by similar elements, influenced the community's needs and the algorithm's recommendations¹. This entails a necessary adherence to captivating aesthetics in the thumbnail and video. A key factor that differentiates previous actors from BookTubers is that their livelihood as literary actors directly corresponds to their ability to stand out in an oversaturated online space and retain long term viewership. There are several ways to achieve this: technical quality, following trends, being creative/unique, and adding humor.²

Where the BookTube Critics and Influencers begin to drift comes in the form of entertainment they deliver. Influencers adhere to traditions of BookTube, such as book-tags, book hauls, TBR lists, book reviews, and challenges. These kinds of BookTubers will publish videos with titles such as "We Swapped Our Favorite Books ft:@SaraCarrolli @haleypham"³, "HUGE BOOK HAUL because I need to fill my home library...(100+books)"⁴, "25 books everyone needs to read in 2025"⁵, and "every book i want to read in 2025(and why i stopped posting book reviews)"⁶. A visually appealing thumbnail will feature a large number of books with aesthetic covers for either haul, recommendation, or TBR videos. According to literacy

¹ Tomasena, José M., and Carlos A. Scolari. "Books, Videos and Platforms: Exploring the BookTube Interface." *Information Society* 40, no. 3 (May 2024): 187. doi:10.1080/01972243.2024.2326226.

² Ehret, Christian, Jacy Boegel, and Nekouei, Roya Manuel. "The Role of Affect in Adolescents' Online Literacies: Participatory Pressures in BookTube Culture." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 62, no. 2 (September 2018): 156-158. doi:10.1002/jaal.881.

³ Destiny Sidwell, "We Swapped Our Favorite Books ft:@SaraCarrolli @haleypham," March 10, 2023, entertainment video, 31:51, https://youtu.be/K6_md7fCZfE?si=EO0gOgyj-T8Etwjw.

⁴ Briddy, "HUGE BOOK HAUL because I need to fill my home library...(100+ books)," April 12, 2024, entertainment video, 30:45, <https://youtu.be/nnpdLbTSJSg?si=FDVCBd6GX5k0xI7u>.

⁵ A Clockwork Reader, "25 books everyone needs to read in 2025," February 6, 2025, entertainment video, 30:18, https://youtu.be/dXA1pxWfSqs?si=Gn8PTE0_nv921Ru.

⁶ Jack Edwards, "every book i want to read in 2025," January 10, 2025, entertainment video, 38:45, <https://youtu.be/YxxkSjV-sDI?si=HrGmBiWduNyiQeos>.

researchers, “The participatory pressure to buy and arrange aesthetically pleasing book displays is interrelated with the culturally formed design literacies of BookTubing.”⁷ Therefore, although there is a low barrier of entry for BookTube viewers⁸, there is a cost barrier to becoming a BookTube Influencer. This style of BookTube content aligns heavily with consumerism and aesthetics, encouraging these BookTubers to promote pretty covers, series that fit nicely along the bookshelf, and excess amounts of books, usually seen behind them in the video. While these BookTubers garner the most viewership, they also garner criticism from traditional critics for being “too commercial”⁹ and criticism from the BookTube community for giving insincere book reviews in exchange for views and/or advanced reader’s copies or sponsors¹⁰.

As a literary actor, the importance of influencer-type creators lies in their ability to shape the influence of the purchases of the BookTube community by endorsing books, trends, genres, and authors. Creators can receive direct access to authors and conventions¹¹, advanced reader’s copies, sponsors, and lots of ad money for maximizing the YouTube algorithm. For example, Colleen Hoover is an author who has garnered both love and hate on the BookTube space. Regardless, she has achieved a movie adaptation starring Blake Lively and another movie, “Verity”, is confirmed starring Dakota Johnson and Anne Hathaway¹². She would not be as prolific without many BookTube videos made on her with upwards of hundreds of thousands of views. Such BookTube videos discussing Colleen Hoover are “i read the 5 most popular colleen hoover so you never have to”¹³, which largely ridicules and criticizes Hoover’s writing; “RANKING ALL COLLEEN HOOVER BOOKS*including It Starts With Us* reviews * spoiler free plot summary”¹⁴, which largely praises Hoover’s plots and writing; and “Colleen Hoover reveals whether Verity’s letter was real...”¹⁵, which is an interview with Hoover herself.

While Hoover gained much praise in circa. 2016 BookTube, some questioned whether the messaging in Hoover’s books were appropriate for the young viewership on BookTube. This created the basis for an emerging actor on BookTube: the BookTube Critic. They deviate from influencers by more strictly gatekeeping the community from certain kinds of books, trends, and authors. For years, “rant review” videos were made about one or several of Hoover’s books. Some even garnered over a million views, such as “I read Colleen Hoover’s LOWEST RATED

⁷ Ehret, “Participatory Pressures in BookTube Culture.” 156.

⁸ Ehret, “Participatory Pressures in BookTube Culture.” 151.

⁹ Tomasena, “Books, Videos and Platforms.” 195.

¹⁰ Ehret, “Participatory Pressures in BookTube Culture.” 160.

¹¹ Tomasena, “Books, Videos and Platforms.” 197.

¹² Katcy Stephen, “Colleen Hoover’s ‘Verity’ From Director Michael Showalter Sets May 2026 Theatrical Release,” *Variety*, last modified March 24, 2025, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://variety.com/2025/film/news/verity-colleen-hoover-release-date-anne-hathaway-1236346957/>.

¹³ A Clockwork Reader, “i read the 5 most popular colleen hoover books so you don’t have to,” December 21, 2023, entertainment video, 1:41:02, <https://youtu.be/73N0hAmO4Ik?si=RSsNDafaNF622dfu>.

¹⁴ Zoe Maya, “RANKING ALL COLLEEN HOOVER BOOKS*including It Starts With Us* reviews * spoiler free plot summary,” October 30, 2022, entertainment video, 23:53, https://youtu.be/dxx2BQRhXUk?si=4UwcjdpVDD_DFVc

¹⁵ Bettysbooklist, “Colleen Hoover reveals whether Verity’s letter was real,” January 18, 2022, entertainment video, 09:54, <https://youtu.be/FF96O6qQNNE?si=A1rdtiZkbeoS4iq6>

books”.¹⁶ Unlike influencer BookTubers, critic BookTubers are not sponsored as often as influencer BookTubers and therefore may not have as heavy material interest to maintain good relationships with authors and their teams. However, they do still receive advanced reader’s copies because their criticism can be very helpful in avoiding authors from becoming the next “rant review”. Another difference is that they are not required to buy books for the video as the focus is on dissecting the book or author. This focus can include background information, analysis, criticism, and oftentimes, humor. Entertainment is still a primary concern, so creative titles and thumbnails are often necessary. Such titles can be “Reading ‘The Worst Book of All Time’”¹⁷, “LANI SAREM’S BESTSELLER SCAM|AUTHORS BEHAVING BADLY”¹⁸, “Booktube destroyed my reading and how I’m going to fix it”¹⁹, “bookish trends we should leave in 2024”²⁰, and “why is romantasy like this?(a writer’s perspective)”²¹. These videos aim to infuse entertainment in the form of discussion or humor with a critical lens. Common values are author integrity, talent, well-crafted plot and prose, opposing trends, and critical reading.

These values were held against Colleen Hoover by many BookTube critics. One early, arguably the first, BookTuber to speak against Hoover’s books was Caleb Joseph. Joseph integrated criticism into lengthy read along “rant review” videos that showed his reactions to Hoover’s books as he read. In addition, he didn’t buy Hoover’s books directly but checked them out from the library. In one video, he criticizes “Ugly Love” for misogyny, an abusive love interest, bad dialogue, and ‘zero plot’²². After reading November 9 and Ugly Love, Joseph was proudly on the Hoover hate train.

He wasn’t the only one either: Due to online reader concern and backlash, an explicit and disturbing SA scene from her novel “November 9” was removed²³. This was largely boosted by BookTube criticism that Joseph helped pioneer. A comment on a different Caleb Joseph video²⁴ with 46,000 likes stated, “okay but the fact that caleb was just a young boy and had more awareness than all the adults in the book community bullying him for disliking colleen

¹⁶ Nikki Carreon, “I read Colleen Hoover’s LOWEST RATED books,” September 21, 2023, entertainment video, 01:55:08, <https://youtu.be/9WZuGfYYdRg?si=gFqTy0wpesWq-Wv2>.

¹⁷ Caleb Joseph, “Reading ‘The Worst Book of All Time,’” September 4, 2018, entertainment video, 46:22, <https://youtu.be/cmWSqd12O9c?si=olipzAYQ6F6UdHws>.

¹⁸ Reads with Rachel, “LANI SAREM’S BESTSELLER SCAM|AUTHORS BEHAVING BADLY,” October 4, 2022, entertainment video, 21:22, <https://youtu.be/XmcBpWAuObc?si=UnhWTRAJcjPcbUsW>.

¹⁹ Tori Talks, “Booktube destroyed my reading and how I’m going to fix it,” December 5, 2024, entertainment video, 19:06, <https://youtu.be/ke1BK4n4QPog?si=c7eMHo9pfdXQ3Sh2>.

²⁰ The Book Leo, “bookish trends we should leave in 2024,” December 22, 2024, entertainment video, 28:03, https://youtu.be/7yQIFAftqo0?si=jPI_aD7EiuUAxESM.

²¹ The Cozy Creative, “why is romantasy like this?(a writer’s perspective),” February 9, 2025, entertainment video, 32:12, https://youtu.be/BpeWHKx_ftA?si=aN2kZFXmnSKQzMZy.

²² Caleb Joseph, “GIVING MY LEAST FAVORITE AUTHOR A SECOND CHANCE,” January 16, 2018, entertainment video,

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²⁴ Caleb Joseph, “A complete history on my feud with Colleen Hoover,” August 18, 2022, entertainment video, 41:35, https://youtu.be/U8zP5R3kh3o?si=YopJPSIIHb_Ykzdb.

hoover....” which shows the evolution of BookTube attitude towards Colleen Hoover and BookTube criticism as a whole. BookTube began to turn on Colleen Hoover, cementing a divide in the community: the influencers versus the critics.

Hoover’s interactions with the community didn’t stop there. Hoover took to posting online about the online criticism²⁵ and acknowledging the presence of BookTube critics²⁶. However, down the line, BookTok revived Hoover’s works amongst readers that were not familiar with her, leading to the recent movie adaptations. This then fed the current BookTube critics and created a new wave of Hoover hate videos circa 2022-23, like “Exploring the Insane World of Colleen Hoover(Part 1)”²⁷ with over a million views and “November 9 by Colleen Hoover has the WORST love interest I’ve ever read(and I have the receipts)”²⁸ with over a half a million views.

In general, BookTube has facilitated interaction between readers and authors through publicity. This includes positive interviews and reviews, but also negative press. This includes rant reviews on not just books, but against negatively perceived behavior as well. Debut author Cait Corrain got exposed for review bombing other authors and losing a significant book deal.²⁹ She used a fake GoodReads account to give one star reviews to fellow debut authors who hadn’t even published the book yet in some cases. A controversial author or book acts as source material to create an entertaining and/or critical analysis, regardless of the author’s pre-existing fame. Unlike traditional book critics, who rely mainly on their credentials, BookTube critics operate on a socially bestowed merit that encompasses their ability to both criticize, inform, and entertain the viewer to varying degrees. In many cases, the aim can be equally to criticize authors, books, trends but with a lens of ‘drama’ that adds entertainment value. The most successful BookTube critics don’t pull their punches and can also act as journalists, investigating the drama and providing evidence, also known as ‘receipts’ online. They also provide the longest and in depth, line by line, rant reviews.

BookTube continues to evolve, especially with the rising prominence of a competing platform BookTok. However, one thing remains constant: BookTubers are ‘sellers’ in a secondary media marketplace tagging along the primary literary marketplace of books. Readers pay the price in their time and attention, which in a sense competes with authors who want readers to spend money and time/attention. Overall, BookTubers, authors, and publishers have a monetary and mostly symbiotic relationship that can quickly become antagonistic if BookTubers decide to criticize a book/author.

²⁵ Joseph, “A complete history,” 20:31.

²⁶ Joseph, “A complete history,” 21:01.

²⁷ Casey Aonso, “Exploring the Insane World of Colleen Hoover(Part 1),” September 10, 2023, entertainment video, 30:01, <https://youtu.be/IatKojHB5KE?si=QAFo3YN-3y6owS5u>.

²⁸ withcindy, “November 9 by Colleen Hoover has the WORST love interest I’ve ever read(and I have the receipts),” October 10, 2023, entertainment video, 59:19, <https://youtu.be/6SbiwsBg85s?si=cf-jscZjfe4HG3A>.

²⁹ withcindy, “How an author’s pettiness destroyed her career: review bombing, Reylos, and 30+ pages of receipts,” December 14, 2023, entertainment video, 52:31, <https://youtu.be/FY4vgK9B8sk?si=AlgnyzLrEPuc6mzJ>.