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Producing Cultural Capital on Social Book Platform Goodreads:
The Performativity of Reading Books through Achievement and Taste

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social book site Goodreads, an Amazon acquisition since 2013. It is a platform where users can track their reading practices, leave book ratings and reviews, organise books on virtual shelves, stay up-to-date with friends' reading activities, and get recommendations. Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital, composed of three forms: material, embodied and institutionalised cultural capital, is the main theoretical concept upon which this study is based, to explain how the types of cultural capital can be produced and displayed, and how the reader's identity can hereby be performed. Other concepts, Lupton's self-tracking and Foucault's Governmentality are used to conceptualise Goodreads as a disciplinary technology. Instead of using self-tracking in the context of productive practices to govern and improve one's health and body as aligned with institutional interests, the study bridges users' agency in feature appropriation and the disciplinary self-tracking regimes that limit and restrain user freedom, and hereby, discusses ramifications. This study conducted a walkthrough analysis and its findings show that users can produce and display measurable and identity marking evidence of their book reading as material and embodied capital on their profile and Update Feed and gain social praise from it. Moreover, the study finds that Goodreads functions as an institution granting recognition to users through mediated signals like special titles and leaderboards. Goodreads is a data source for Amazon that uses user-generated content, in particular star ratings and reviews, for economic and strategic gain. This research project contributes to the general field of new media studies and adds to a more nuanced perspective of the term 'governmentality' in relation to behavioural agency, through the term of 'cultural capital'.

Table of Contents

1. Introducing the study	4
2. Conceptual Framework	7
2.1 Goodreads’s design elements and the material form of cultural capital.....	7
2.2. Embodied cultural capital: governmentality and performance.....	8
2.3 Goodreads as a new institution for social and symbolic recognition	11
3. The Walkthrough and data collection proceedings	12
3.1. Justification of method and starting point	12
3.2. The tailored steps of the walkthrough analysis	12
3.3 Data collection choices and considerations	13
4. The results of doing the Walkthrough	15
4.1. Book tracking features as tools to accumulate material cultural capital.....	15
4.2. The accumulation and display of embodied cultural capital	19
4.2.1. How Amazon benefits from users’ accumulated material and embodied cultural capital ..	24
4.3. Users’ accumulation and display of institutionalised cultural capital	28
5. Conclusions and further discussion	33
6. Bibliography	36
7. Appendix	39
A. Screenshot from the 2021 Reading Challenge where confetti is splashed across the screen. ..	39
B. Screenshot of my Update Feed. Example of a crowded timeline.	40
C: Print screen of book page on desktop where users can go to book sellers’ webshops.	41

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1. READING CHALLENGE WELCOME SCREEN	15
FIGURE 2. THE LAST WELCOME SCREEN EXPLAINING READING SHELVES.....	16
FIGURE 3. NAVIGATION MENU OF THE APP.....	16
FIGURE 4. THE 'MY BOOKS' USER INTERFACE AND THE READING CHALLENGE	17
FIGURE 5. THE RECAP OF THE USER'S 'YEAR IN BOOKS'	18
FIGURE 6. THE USER PROFILE LAYOUT	19
FIGURE 7. THE STEPS OF HOW TO REPORT ONE'S 'READING PROGRESS'	21
FIGURE 8. A BOOK PAGE SHOWING RATING STATISTICS AND FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY REVIEWS	22
FIGURE 9. AN EXAMPLE OF NOTIFICATIONS FOR RECEIVING A LIKE ON A REVIEW	23
FIGURE 10. MESSAGE FROM OTIS CHANDLER ON THE 'ABOUT GOODREADS' PAGE.....	24
FIGURE 11. ONE OF GOODREADS'S KEY VALUES	25
FIGURE 12. DEFAULT PRIVACY SETTINGS	26
FIGURE 13. THE DISCOVER PAGE OF THE GOODREADS APP	27
FIGURE 14. A WELCOME SCREEN, INVITING NEW MEMBERS TO FOLLOW WELL-KNOWN ‘READERS’	28
FIGURE 15. AUTHOR PAGE MADE ‘OFFICIAL’ WITH A VERIFIED BADGE	29
FIGURE 16. A REDDIT POST OF A MEMBER ASKING FOR HELP ON HOW TO BECOME A LIBRARIAN	30
FIGURE 17. LISTS OF TOP MEMBERS UNDER DESKTOP’S SUBMENU ‘PEOPLE’	30
FIGURE 18. LEADERBOARD SHOWING THE TOP 5 HELPERS.....	31

1. Introducing the study

Since I started using the social book platform Goodreads in 2021, right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, I noticed that I became a more motivated and passionate reader, to the point that I had to buy a new bookcase to hold all my books. I started to share my book opinions and reviews with friends, and it became enjoyable to follow on Goodreads what they were reading and thinking about the books. After a while, however, I began to notice a change in my habits and attitude towards reading books. I increasingly let other people's reportages of their reading activities, whether a recommendation or a negative review, guide and shape my choices and opinions. Furthermore, whenever I was stuck in a book and saw other people's impressive updates, such as their book choices or reviews on my timeline, sometimes I could feel a sense of competition or inadequacy. Goodreads has made reading books more social, but the activity can, as a result, become loaded with expectations and comparing oneself to others. Other people's reading progress, elaborate display of 'shelved' and finished books and expressive reviews become reader identity markers that you want to live up to or excel. This pressure can make you adapt your book choices to be perceived as a better or more noteworthy reader.

Goodreads was bought by Amazon in 2013 but founded in 2007 by Otis and Elisabeth Chandler. It has not undergone large updates on its design and features in recent years and its recommendation algorithm is still primitive. Many now use it purely to track their reading, rather than get recommendations or build a community (Manavis, 2020). Nevertheless, Goodreads counts more than 125 million members worldwide and has an enormous database of books that users can put in their digital library (Michelle, 2022). In 2023, almost eight million people participated in Goodreads's Annual Reading Challenge, where users read an average of forty-three books (Goodreads, 2024). Participating means setting a reading goal and reporting what you read throughout the year and the app shows your proximity to success. While book clubs only gather weekly or monthly and diary-writing is an individual activity around the self, Goodreads affords constant self-monitoring, selective self-expression and praise on one's displayed updates that constitute the representation of the user's identity.

Goodreads's design and its embedded features and affordances play into and shape users' drive to monitor and improve their book reading activities. These efforts require discipline and are rewarded by the quantified display of achievements and taste, social praise and recognition by the platform, which Pierre Bourdieu (1986) describes as 'cultural capital'. Therefore, the phenomenon I will focus on is how user activities can produce cultural capital and once accumulated, it allows the user to perform a certain reader identity. I hereby aim to increase my understanding of how interaction between the app's features and the Goodreads member enables these performances.

Goodreads has received some academic attention in the past. Media professor Lisa Nakamura's essay touches mainly upon the performative aspect where Goodreads is used as a tool that relies on users' 'play labour' to perform one's identities as readers in a public and networked forum (Nakamura, 2013). Albrechtslund's walkthrough analysis on Kindle touches upon Goodreads as a self-tracking tool and personal archive with the purpose of memorising and communication. The creation of lists of cultural resources in the form of virtual bookshelves is part of the practice of self-expression on social media (Albrechtslund, 2019, 559-562).

The two works place Goodreads in relation to social media and discuss the site's multiple purposes and uses, but without paying attention to any embedded disciplinary forces in the site's design shaping behaviour, let alone through the conceptual lens of cultural capital. This study moves away from the dominant use of self-tracking and the Quantified Self-movement in the context of Foucault's Governmentality, where self-tracking technologies are health-improving tools to measure, discipline, control and regulate the bodies of productive citizens (Foucault, 1988, 2008; Lupton, 2020). Instead, I argue that self-tracking can be used in a more nuanced understanding, namely as a user practice to obtain a form of cultural capital. My research bridges the divide between the user's agency in appropriation of the site's features to book tracking and reader sociality and the disciplinary self-tracking regimes as forces that limit and restrain user freedom. Goodreads as a platform shapes its users and partly dictates their goals and, in turn, their behaviour shapes the platform.

By analysing the affordances and functionality of Goodreads, its material aspects, I can shed light on the immaterial: self-tracking in relation to cultural capital and social media performance. Pierre Bourdieu's three forms of cultural capital: Material, embodied and institutionalised cultural capital will form the structure of the next chapter: the conceptual framework. The material form sees books as cultural goods and possessions. Embodied cultural capital involves a form of self-improvement and is most prominent in users' self-representation to express how reading books cultivates their mind. The last form of cultural capital, the institutionalised form discusses symbolic capital through social recognition enabled by Goodreads (Bourdieu, 1986).

Other concepts help operationalise the three cultural capital forms for analysing Goodreads and explain the forceful regimes shaping user behaviour. The first form will be discussed through some gamification and affordance theory as it requires an understanding of the app's design mechanisms. The embodied form and the self-tracking regimes that shape user behaviour will be explained through Michel Foucault's notion of Governmentality, operationalised with performance theory. Foucault (1988) argues that when someone disciplines oneself in interaction with a technology of the self, they become the product of governmentality. Goodreads is a disciplinary power that shapes users' ability to perform their reading self and display cultural capital, but also how to measure oneself in quantified terms. The idea of self-tracking discussed by Deborah Lupton (2020) will be discussed to

explain this desire to monitor and improve one's book reading practices and obtain more embodied cultural capital. The third form will be theorised through Bourdieu and Lamont and Lareau (1988). Ultimately, the analysis will provide valuable insights into the platform's power to grant cultural capital to its users and shape users' book reading and tracking activities. It will contribute to the broad media field and more closely the social media field and qualitative app studies. Moreover, it may lead to a more nuanced perspective of 'governmentality' in relation to behavioural agency, through the term of 'cultural capital'.

So, my research aims to understand how social book site Goodreads integrates the material and immaterial in its design and allows users to perform their book reading self and accumulate the three forms of cultural capital. This study is guided by the following research question:

How do the features and affordances of the social book app Goodreads enable users to produce cultural capital and, hereby, perform one's reader identity?

The main question shall be answered by formulating answers to the following two subquestions:

1. How can users accumulate cultural capital through the app's book tracking features and affordances?
2. How can users display their cultural capital through the app and receive social and symbolic recognition?

I will conduct a so-called 'walkthrough' on the app, guided by steps outlined by Light et al. (2018), consisting of a technical walkthrough and an analysis of the environment of expected use. I will navigate Goodreads's interface, including the information on a user profile and experiment with features like the Reading Challenge. Ultimately, the analysis will increase the understanding of users' cultural values of performing their reading identity, and how that is embedded in the app. In the Methodology chapter, I will further explain my choice of method and what the proceedings of the data collection and analysis will be.

2. Conceptual Framework

This chapter is structured along the three forms of cultural capital. Each section discusses a type in connection to other concepts to explain how users engaging in features and affordances can accumulate the cultural capital and put its evidence on display. Moreover, the sections discuss how producing each type is rewarded by the platform, other user, or both. The first section connects material cultural capital with gamification theory, and explains the design mechanisms that encourage users to produce it. The second section builds on the first to explain embodied cultural capital, and how the two types can be displayed and manipulated, through performance theory. The section hereby outlines the tension between user agency and top-down disciplinary regimes restraining users' behavioural freedom and does so through the notions of Governmentality and self-tracking. The last section discusses institutionalised cultural capital that explains the platform's power to reward the discipline of active users.

2.1 Goodreads's design elements and the material form of cultural capital

According to Carriere et al. (2012), books as material artefacts and social actors create a sense of cultural identity and belonging as they are part of a circulation of symbolic representations. To understand how this works, we need to look at the three forms of cultural capital: the objectified, embodied and institutionalised state, and explain and operationalise them for the analysis. Bourdieu's theorisation will enable me during the walkthrough to identify the forms of cultural capital embedded in the Goodreads design and features that can be displayed so that it gains a symbolic function.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital can come in an objectified or material state where books are objects and cultural goods that are transmittable. Reading many books suggests access to resources and being literate, which already connects to the embodied form of cultural capital. Putting many books on one's shelf, in a physical or virtual sense, becomes symbolic capital, where it disguises any labour of reading or acquiring it (Bourdieu, 1986). Nakamura (2013) argues that Goodreads shelves remediate earlier reading cultures where books were displayed in the home as signs of taste and status.

Producing and displaying the objectified state of cultural capital on the app means users must interact with the user interface. McGushin (2014, p. 132) argues that in life, one's options are laid out and one is encouraged and instructed, gently nudged, or firmly pushed in the proper direction, but a similar thing can be argued about Goodreads's features. Technologies reflect certain beliefs, and its software features are purposefully designed for users to use long-term which suggests it is a disciplining technology that invites us to record the books the user is reading (Curinga, 2014). The app contains tools that shape us (Curinga, 2014). A quality of a software features is, according to Hutchby (2001), that the user actions they afford can change across different contexts, and that some elements

constrain the possible range of interpretive moves of the user to lead them to certain actions. The relationship between the technology and the user is bound by ordinary practices interfaced with affordances and constraints (Hutchby, 2001, p. 453). Moreover, while affordances can be learned and developed over time, they are the most powerful when the learned meaning is deeply embedded in the social practices of the user (Curinga, 2014). This affordance theory forms a useful background during the technical walkthrough for analysing the learned meanings and possible constraints in the everyday use of the app.

Even though users use Goodreads voluntarily, Goodreads encourages and steers users in their behaviour through its design options. On Goodreads, tracking book reading habits and progress is gamified. For example, the Reading Challenge incorporates playful elements and positive feedback mechanisms to make the non-gaming feature and required self-monitoring practices more enjoyable. It uses gamification techniques like a bar levelling up or a rewarding animation to bring the user into this relation with the machine, and persuading them to stay (Whitson, 2013, p. 170-171). Whitson (2013) argues, use users' aspirations and capacities aimed at self-development. Goodreads hosts a community of book readers where users engage in governing their reading practices by 'playing' with design features, motivated by their reading goal. Paulo Ruffino's article describes that typical of gamification examples is the quantification of 'life' itself, playing into the need to count, number, evaluate, and compare results (Ruffino, 2014, p.48). Schrape (2014, p. 43) further argues that gamification makes it possible to effectively motivate intended behaviour in a pleasant way, without the need to appeal to the mind or reason. It aims at the regulation of behaviour while circumventing attitudes. Analysing the platform's gamified design elements and affordances will shed light on how users can display material cultural capital and how the site plays into the need to count, evaluate and compare book reading practices.

2.2. Embodied cultural capital: governmentality and performance

One requires embodied cultural capital to appropriate material cultural capital and give meaning to it. Bourdieu (1986, p. 443) argues that the embodied form manifests in some form of self-improvement or work on the self to transform one's attitudes, preferences, and behaviour. For book readers, it manifests in book tastes, character traits or mental dispositions when reading certain books (Bourdieu 1986). Making efforts to become a 'better' reader and active member requires reading frequently and cultivating one's book taste to produce embodied cultural capital. This can, in turn, be displayed on Goodreads in book reviews or one's bookshelves, for instance.

Genres and books historically signified a certain class or level of education, but now more symbolic attributes like smartness, and specific social orders, such as feminine or softness (Atkinson, 2016, p. 263). Reading a book with a low ability to cultivate the reader is poor in cultural capital and

can suggest time wasted (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). However, reading books can always have a positive value for users, for its entertainment or shocking value. Books and genres have subjective symbolic values and the activity of writing reviews allows users to express how the book transformed them somehow. The review contains evidence of the obtained embodied cultural capital.

The user practice of documenting reading habits and opinions and hereby acquiring and displaying embodied cultural capital is a type of self-monitoring and makes it, according to Humphreys (2018, p. 38) and Lupton (2016), fundamentally a self-tracking process. Lupton (2016) argues that self-tracking is a practice of selfhood with affective dimensions that conforms to cultural expectations concerning self-awareness, reflection and taking responsibility for managing, governing oneself and improving one's life. On Goodreads, social media functions are merged with user-initiated book-tracking features. Goodreads users engage in 'private self-tracking', which is undertaken for such personal and self-initiated reasons. The tracking is also partly communal, where the app relies on people sharing their reading progress with others, underlying a drive towards 'sharing your numbers' (Lupton, 2016, p. 103). Self-tracking features provide the quantification of users' attributes (Lupton, 2016), but Goodreads adds a layer of interpersonal and subjective depth to the objective numbers (Kersten-van Dijk & IJsselsteijn, 2016, p. 130). Goodreads is also a site of network capital, making social support and building mutual ties between book readers accessible (Rettie, 2008, p. 292). This, in addition to motivational purposes, can enhance the user's chance to receive social praise on the objective results, which can generate more cultural capital.

Humphreys (2018) argues that social media updates are individual and relational identity performances (p. 82; p. 135). Albrechtslund (2019, p. 559) argues that reading functions as a catalyst for social meaning and identity performance. Likewise, Nakamura (2013) points out that Goodreads emphasises the joy in a public reading performance and other pleasures of readerly sociality. However, user updates also generate (virtual) 'profits': status and social value (likes and followers), depending on competition between other possessors of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). Members with a larger following receive a good amount of likes on their reviews, which results in even more visibility and following. Competing for status and social praise through cultural capital can generate, has implications on the users' 'free' actions on the site.

According to Goffman (1959), social interaction is akin to performing on stage and functions as a form of performativity, the performance depending on the performer's role and the audience one is addressing. Goodreads and its social spaces serve as an intermediary to facilitate social interaction where users express themselves and, in turn, give off an impression to others, or rather, creating an intended effect to be seen as a reader with cultural capital. If the user writes reviews or leaves updates, it will be in their interest to control others' responsive treatment of them because it ensures a specific projection of an image (Goffman, 1959). This corresponds with what Jill Walker Rettberg (2017)

argues about social media self-representations. She says that visual self-representations like photos or status updates are about “constructing a truth or many truths about who we are and could be” (p. 23). Moreover, they are often personal, social and made for the moment and show only a certain aspect of ourselves. Social sites have, therefore, changed our idea of how to narrate the story of ourselves (Rettberg, 2017, 26-27). During the walkthrough, I analyse how users can be selective of what they share or exaggerate it, as to control the projection of their image as effectively projected (Goffman, 1959), or in other words, their displayed cultural capital related to what and how much one reads.

The ‘free’ performances of book lovers’ identities are rather unfree. User agency is limited because of the technology’s disciplinary power to regulate user behaviour. Schrape (2014) argues that the constant monitoring of every individual’s behaviour and its regulation through designed options and feedback mechanisms from the platform and other users could entail a new mode of governmentality (p. 43). Governmentality is a frequently employed Foucauldian notion that refers to a disciplinary technology that stands in relation to another term of his: ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Such a technology permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). He argues that technologies constitute themselves through obedience and a certain sacrifice of free will (Foucault, 1988, p. 18-19).

McGushin (2014)’s interpretation of Foucault’s notion of Governmentality can best explain how Goodreads, Amazon’s company, gives shape to the behaviour of its users. Goodreads can be seen as another powerful way it allows people to give form to their lives through focusing the attention on the individual user with productive potential to read more or care more about books. Its power lies in the app’s ability to regulate behaviour and learn how to measure oneself in quantitative terms, because then it can be improved. The app is organised so that users can compare oneself to one other and get an idea of what kind of development in book taste and reading itself is normal. Rather than repressing the user, discipline nudges the Goodreads user to be more productive, and makes it difficult to resist, since the technology appears to be on their side (McGushin, 2014, p. 132-133). Phrased differently, governmentality is the ‘ready-made’ pattern of life (p. 132) where it has been ‘normalised’ to produce a self that lives a certain way and sees itself and the world in terms of normalisation, self-interpretation and self-expression (McGushin, 2014, p. 141). Goodreads enables its users to express their book reading identity, by reporting how productive one has been and how their taste might develop. Goodreads’s design as a disciplinary power plays a role in maintaining and reinforcing this desire to use the app and construct their reading identity through displaying one’s accumulated embodied cultural capital. McGushin’s and Foucault’s conceptualisation of the notion will guide the walkthrough to find evidence of Goodreads acting as a disciplinary power in the app design and how it

'teaches' the user how to express their reader identity in their display of material and embodied cultural capital.

2.3 Goodreads as a new institution for social and symbolic recognition

Institutionalised cultural capital is the third form that Bourdieu describes, which underlies the power to objectify and certify the first two forms of cultural capital. It involves the ability to show forth and be believed, and to impose recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 20). Lamont and Lareau (1988) offer a more individual approach to status than Bourdieu offered. They define institutionalised cultural capital as widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion. For any of these signals to be considered a form of cultural capital, it needs to be defined as such by a relatively large group of people, so that their quality makes them salient as status markers. The 'repertoire' of these signals, which on Goodreads take on a remediated form of special titles and leaderboards, has a performative nature. Goodreads' symbolic symbols certify the value of users' accumulated cultural capital (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 156). The site's software keeps track of users' reading and other efforts like getting followers and reviewing into quantifiable and comparable amounts, which enables the platform to decide who gets recognition. As a result, someone with institutionalised cultural capital may be granted platform privileges. Thelwall and Kousha's (2017) identified one privilege that active users can earn; as Librarians, users gain editing powers to improve the site's functionality (p. 975). During the analysis, using Lamont and Lareau (1988), I explore the repertoire of institutionalised cultural signals Goodreads users can obtain and how Amazon, can be considered as a new type of institution of cultural capital that benefits from users' engagement with the app's features. After all, as Bourdieu (1986, p. 242) argues, in the right conditions, cultural capital can be converted into economic capital.

Altogether, the discussion of concepts and theories linked to a form of cultural capital form a lens, through which I look through during the walkthrough analysis on Goodreads. The analysis explored different ways the user can produce and then display their cultural capital like on their user profile or through the Update Feeds of their network. The readings habits tracking features and affordances, like the Reading Challenge and star rating and reviews to reflect, provide different options to generate evidence of the user's book taste and reading accomplishments. Moreover, additional material, within and outside Goodreads, demonstrate the cultural signals given out by the platform to grant users recognition and sheds light on Goodreads soft power as an Amazon company.

3. The Walkthrough and data collection proceedings

3.1. Justification of method and starting point

My chosen method is a tailored version of a Walkthrough, in which I followed the steps as outlined by Light et al. (2018). The systematic method is designed specifically for apps and enabled me to analyse Goodreads's technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and might shape them (p. 882). The basis of the method consists of mapping Goodreads's environment of expected use, and walking through the app's interface, called a technical walkthrough. Following all the steps in detail, as outlined by the article was not feasible, but the method is flexible. So, I selected and operationalised relevant steps from the article that matched my research aim and question and decided on an appropriate order, which depends on the type of app. The walkthrough enabled me to assess how the Goodreads app frames users' self-expressions in its interface and features that enables them to perform a particular identity around reading books and how these displays of cultural capital involve interaction with other users (p. 897). The analysis was done with the understanding that Goodreads as a technology is "designed, experienced and further developed within a culture that shapes and is influenced by them" (Light et al., 2018, p. 887).

I used my prior knowledge during the technical walkthrough for observation, note-taking and taking screenshots of the interface and features of the environment that I am already familiar with (Light et al., 2018, p. 887). It bears some similarity with an autoethnography in the proceedings as I take notes of things that stand out, like any opportunities and restrictions that emerge (Hine, 2015, p. 83). Another account was created for this stage to collect data on the welcome screens. The rest of the analysis was conducted on my account and my devices. I already had a network of friends and an active timeline of updates on my homepage and a large digital library.

3.2. The tailored steps of the walkthrough analysis

The first part of the analysis entailed constituting Goodreads's 'environment of expected use' by uncovering Goodreads's vision, operational model and (in)formal governance. Since Amazon bought the platform, it had wanted users to receive and integrate the socioeconomic and cultural context into their technology usage practices. Goodreads's original and Amazon's vision, so its purpose, target user base and scenarios of use, were uncovered through analysing the Goodreads 'About Us' and 'Careers' page, and some welcome screens during registration and entry. Since Goodreads does not rely on in-app purchasing, I looked at some Goodreads's guidelines and any embedded links to Amazon that shed light on the operating model. Moreover, by manually searching, I looked at some relevant Goodreads Help pages, accessed through desktop to analyse explanations and disclaimers that form Amazon's discursive representation of the app. The privacy policy and settings on the desktop version

offered insight into the site's (in)formal governance and what agency the user has in making their account and activities private (Light et al., 2018, p. 889-891).

At the start of the technical walkthrough, I analysed the welcome screens and how I can set up my account as part of the registration and entry stage. Then, came the everyday use stage of the technical walkthrough, as explained by Light et al. (2018), which turned out to be the most important. While maintaining a critical and analytical eye, I stepped through the app and conducted the analysis and obtained insights into how the ways users can obtain the three forms of cultural capital enabled by the app's features and affordances like virtual book shelving, reviewing, and the reading challenge and its recap, and how the user profile layout enables users to display their accumulated cultural capital. I stepped through the interface using the navigating menu, exploring how the user is enabled to self-monitor and showcase their reading habits and progress and how Goodreads culturally frames and grants symbolic recognition of accomplishments and involvement. This also required looking beyond the app interface at the desktop version where Goodreads Help pages and the submenu 'people' shed light on mediated ways Goodreads grants symbolic recognition to users, like top rankings, leaderboards and titles. I also analysed an additional source, namely Reddit post that provided me more information on how becoming a Librarian works.

Navigating through the app requires positioning oneself as a user and paying close attention to the range of affordances and how the user would perceive them. I engaged with the app interface, working through screens, tapping buttons and exploring key features like the Annual Reading Challenge, shelving books, and updating reading progress. Walking through the app's basic functionality provides a sense of what activities it enables, limits and guides users towards. Like an affordance analysis, I paid close attention to Goodreads's design elements and how it guides users to conduct. Imagining how users would perceive these as affordances or constraints are central. However, I also paid close attention to the flow of activity, which you would not do with a normal affordance analysis (Light et al., 2018, p. 891-893). I took note of the look and feel of the app and its likely cultural associations with respect to the imagined user and ideal scenarios of use (symbolic representation). I looked at any top-down traces, like affiliate links to booksellers' websites and blogs on the discover page, and explored how Amazon uses Goodreads to convert the by-users-produced cultural capital into economic capital.

3.3 Data collection choices and considerations

I started collecting data at the end of 2023 when I received a recap of that year's Reading Challenge. At the beginning of 2024, I set up a new goal to partake in the 2024 challenge. I manually searched for public profiles of people with a large following but did not directly take screenshots of ordinary users' activities or sensitive information. If users' data were visible in screenshots, they were anonymised

and will be stored on my password-protected device for no more than six months (Light et al., 2018, p. 896). A risk of using my personal account was that my chosen settings and interface would filter out important points of observation prior to walking through the entire app and some Goodreads help pages. Nevertheless, my curiosity and responsibility as a researcher, my prior knowledge and interest as a user made for a good combination during the user-led walkthrough.

4. The results of doing the Walkthrough

The structure of this chapter follows the three types of cultural capital: material, embodied, and institutionalised, as in Chapter 2. The first subquestion is gradually answered over the three sections. The second subquestion is mainly answered in the second and third section, where users' effect-driven behaviour goes hand in hand with social praise and symbolic recognition granted when displaying the embodied and institutionalised form of cultural capital. The results of analysing the environment of expected use form a subsection, part of the embodied cultural capital section, and was relevant to include because users' accumulated embodied cultural capital forms the most valuable aspect of Amazon's business model and current vision. The last section on institutionalised cultural capital builds on the already established soft power of Goodreads and shows how Goodreads can be considered an institution for granting users symbolic recognition through the platform's repertoire of cultural signs. Throughout the sections, the analysis of the app showed that the three types overlap and that 'capital' is an ambiguous notion.

4.1. Book tracking features as tools to accumulate material cultural capital

The social book-tracking app provides the same level of access to users. However, the quality of the app experience depends on how active the user tracks their reading and interests.

The following two welcome screens the user gets after registering informs users on the book tracking features that are available and what their desired use is.

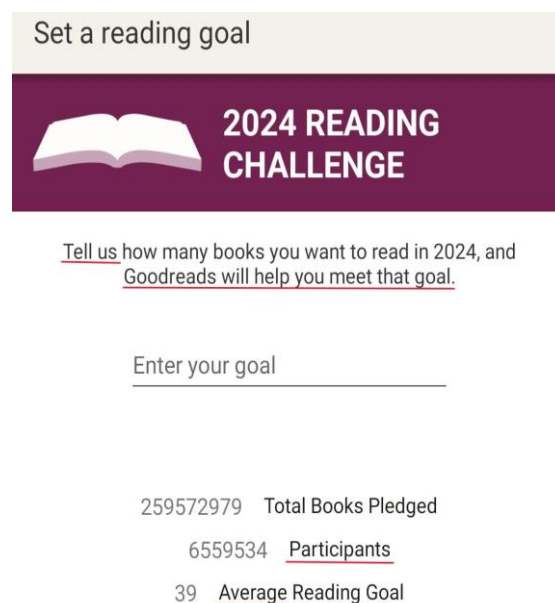


Figure 1. Reading Challenge welcome screen

The first screen asks the reader to set a reading goal (Figure 1). The app 'asks' the new member to tell the app the amount, and in return, it promises to help the user get there, establishing itself as a book-tracking tool. It shows some statistics of how many members are already participating

in the challenge, which is more than 6,5 million members as of March 14th, 2024. The numbers fluctuate depending on the people that collectively partake in ‘sharing your numbers’ (Lupton, 2016). The user learns that by using one’s existing reading capacities and aspirations, they can ‘meet that goal’ and do some self-improvement (Whitson, 2013). The average goal already sets a standard of how many books the average member aims to read during the year. The user is allowed to postpone the step before continuing to the next screen, which is to pick one’s favourite book genres so that the site can give the member book recommendations.



Figure 2. The last welcome screen explaining reading shelves

Figure 2 shows the last welcome screen before you are free to explore the app. It gives the new user a disclaimer that shelves are public information and provides an instruction on how to shelf books. By default, the user’s bookshelves form a public display of material cultural capital. It tells the user that it can be a helpful feature for the reader to remember which books he has already finished and which ones are yet-to-be-read. Moreover, it helps readers to find new potential reads and thus opportunities to appropriate the material cultural capital into the embodied state.

The app’s features can be explored through the menu navigation system at the bottom of the screen, as shown in Figure 3.

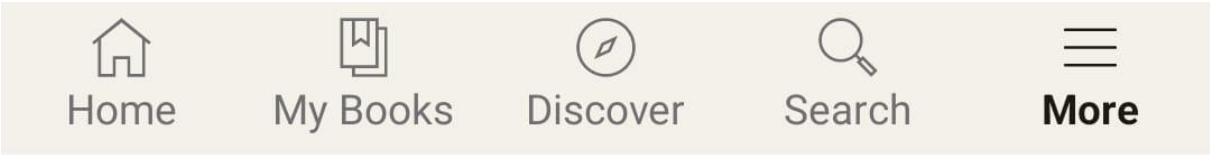


Figure 3. Navigation menu of the app

Under ‘more’ is a larger menu with the options to among other things: access one’s profile, find friends, find account and profile settings, access the reading challenge and see what books the Goodreads algorithm recommends in ‘top picks’, which is based on the user’s specified favourite

genres. The second page next to 'home' is the page 'my books' (Figure 4), which shows an overview of the reading challenge and the three default shelves: read, currently-reading and 'want to read'.

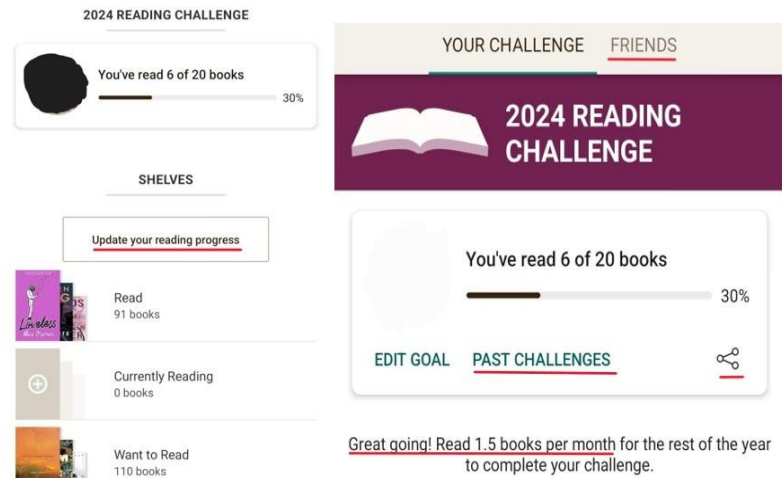


Figure 4. The 'my books' user interface and the reading challenge

The shelves accumulate to a digital library where the amount is always displayed. Users can create more personalised shelves and tags. Saving books and categorising them according to a theme on a shelf is a type of collecting material cultural capital. An empty and inactive looking 'currently reading' shelf can motivate to pick up a book again. The Reading Challenge is always prominently at the top, and the multiple gamified elements make participating appealing. The progress bar indicates how many books the user still needs to read to achieve the goal. Clicking it gives access to an overview of your friends' challenges, and your friends can see your progress. The bars are not ranked but can be interpreted as an interim score, primarily if the reader aims to read more than other people or their past self. A challenge can be both inspiring and stress-inducing as it involves creating the expectation to read a certain amount. Without self-discipline, the reader will not reach their goal, unless they cheat or lower it. The motivational message (Figure 4) and the other positive feedback techniques below the widget show the technology is on the reader's side to help them reach their goal (McGushin, 2014, p. 132-133), aiming to circumvent any unproductive user attitudes (Schrape, 2014, p. 43).

The set goal is ascriptive until it is achieved, which Goodreads rewards. At the end of each year, everyone gets a recap of what they have read, whether readers achieved their goal or not (figure 5).



Figure 5. The recap of the user's 'year in books'

If the goal is achieved, the reader is congratulated with the splash of a small animation of confetti across the user screen (see an example in Appendix A). The reader's efforts are celebrated with this ceremonial award and thus certified by the platform, which counts as institutionalised cultural capital. The recap of 'your year in books', besides reading count, mostly revolves around quantifiable information: page numbers, book length, average rating, most and least shelved, and the first and last review you wrote that year. The recap does not give insight in deeper book reading behaviour patterns, like which genres were dominant; it leaves it up to the reader and their audience to do that. The reading challenge and recap learns users to measure oneself in quantified terms.

If a reader participates every year, they can track how their taste in literature and reading count has improved or not. So, the book tracking feature provides a quantification of readers' attributes (Lupton, 2016) and the recap allows users to add a subjective depth to these objective numbers (Kersten-van Dijk & IJsselsteijn, 2016, p. 130). The recap is a memory refreshment for the reader of their book choices, but also is evidence of accomplishment to be shared on other social media sites. Goodreads plays into the reader's need to reflect on 'their year' and to compare their results with others, their past selves (Ruffino, 2014, p.48). It could even activate users to participate next year so that they can compare that years' results with the next. The accomplishment of achieving one's reading goal, mediated by the platform as a year recap, is tangible proof of success and discipline that the user can be put on display as material cultural capital.

4.2. The accumulation and display of embodied cultural capital

The user profile (see Figure 6) permanently displays previous year's reading challenge, the number of books read, the number of books in one's library and the number of friends.

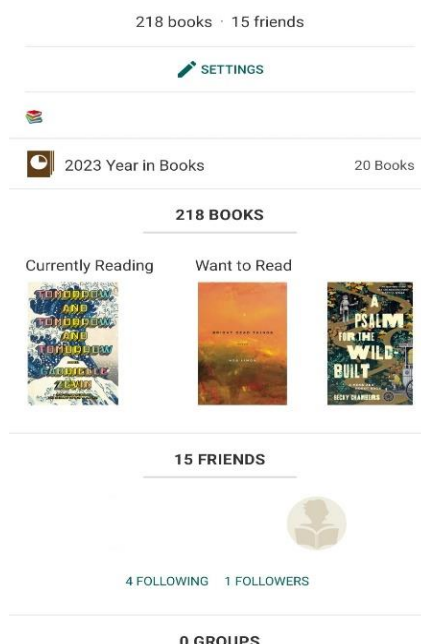


Figure 6. The user profile layout

The profile displays chunks of information that accumulate to the reader's 'story'. So, Goodreads and the app interface enables users to narrate the story of their reading self and how they can display their cultural capital (Rettberg, 2017, p. 26-27). The display of the recap, '2023 Year in Books', on the profile is a mediated type of institutionalised cultural capital, a certificate of participation in the challenge. The platform recognises the user as a reader for participating in their annual Challenge and thus certifies the material cultural capital. Simultaneously, it is a demonstration of embodied cultural capital. Insight into a reader's year reveals something about their taste, preferences and how they have transformed themselves that year in terms of books. The average rating indicates how critical or experimental the reader has been with their book choices. 'Most shelved' could symbolise popularity or liking the classics, whereas least shelved could indicate a niche book taste. Reading short books might signify laziness or reading a lot of poetry, whereas reading books over 500 pages is impressive and suggests the reader has discipline. A book choice reported to the platform is effect-driven; it aims not only to transform the self somehow but also to create an effect on one's audience so that one is seen as someone with embodied cultural capital.

Additionally, books on the shelves and the number of books read are someone's repertoire and become the display of their material and embodied cultural capital. The app mediates how someone's physical bookshelves in the home would signify taste and status (Nakamura, 2013). The 'read' pile also showcases the user's productivity. The profile always displays a couple of shelved books; the book cover picture depicting what the reader is currently reading is placed first, followed by some

recent books recently added to the 'want-to-read' shelf. The display of covers is a type of self-presentation and expression of oneself as a reader. To its audience, other users, the covers can signify something about the reader's current reading practices, but also of their identity: intellect, interest in social issues, or a broad or specific book taste. A majority of romance book covers on one's shelf can signify to others symbolic attributes and traits that are guided by social orders, like femininity or 'the romantic type' (Atkinson, 2016).

So, the profile constitutes the user's virtual image, to which other users can project their idea of that person's identity on. Like all social media sites, there is no way to check its authenticity or who watches someone's profile. Nevertheless, the user with a public profile is aware of the possibility to be watched and could therefore, manipulate the displayable embodied cultural capital to perform a certain reader identity. Anticipating an audience thus invites effect-driven behaviour. If a user would like to be perceived as a cultured reader that reads classics, it will be selective of what books to openly shelf, read and review to control their image (Goffman, 1959).

The user profile also displays which groups one belongs to and the user's friend list, indicating their network capital (Rettie, 2008, p. 292). At the bottom, it shows an overview of the user's recent updates. The user profile layout makes the reader's current book taste and sociality prominent. The book covers and titles form the reader's 'expressive' book taste and make the user profile appealing to look at, although it requires manual labour and reader productivity to customise and give colour to it.

In one of the welcome screens, it assumes the new member has already read books before joining and gives them a taste of the process of tracking progress. It asks it to rate books he has already finished or to add an unread book to one's 'to-read' list. Goodreads therefore assumes new users bring with them some existing embodied cultural capital and that they have potential to develop their taste and reading discipline. Tracking one's reading habits on Goodreads requires some small actions of labour as illustrated in Figure 7.

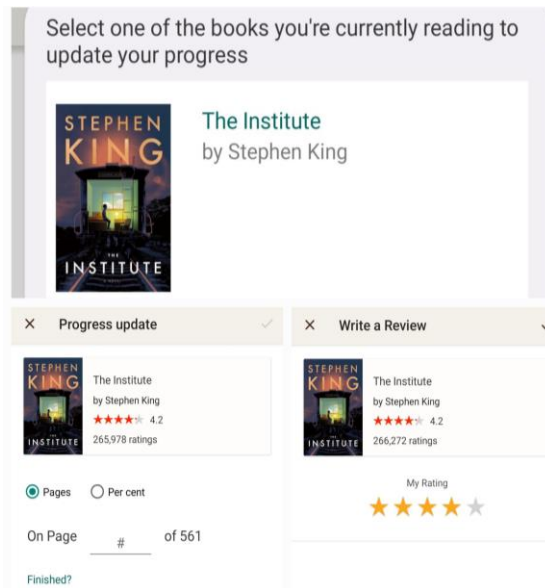


Figure 7. The steps of how to report one's 'reading progress'

One can report one's reading progress until they have finished the book and are ready to rate it in stars. One can specify whether the reader is on a certain page or at a certain percentage, which is more common when the reader uses a Kindle or another type of e-reader. Specifying which page you are on can be considered social bookmarking, as you declare to friends your current reading state.

As progress reporting resembles bookmarking, clicking the 'finished?' button is like closing the book and start reflecting, which users are invited to do by rating the book from 1 to 5 stars. After some time of using the app, it becomes an automatic action and gives the reader a feeling of accomplishment. Reflection on the reading experience is outsourced from the mind to the app, so using a disciplinary power for self-expression and interpretation has been normalised (McGushin, 2014, p. 141). Moreover, a long-term use of the book feature is most powerful when the learned purpose, measuring one's reading in quantified terms, is deeply embedded in the social practices of the user (Curinga, 2014), so when app use becomes part of the reader's reading and reflecting practices.

The user is not obligated rate it in stars and is invited to explain their thoughts below in a review, which can be as long as they like. As illustrated in Figure 8, a specific book's page shows the book's rating statistics, along with star ratings and reviews from friends and community members. The site does not allow rating the book in half stars, but the average rating is rounded up to one decimal.

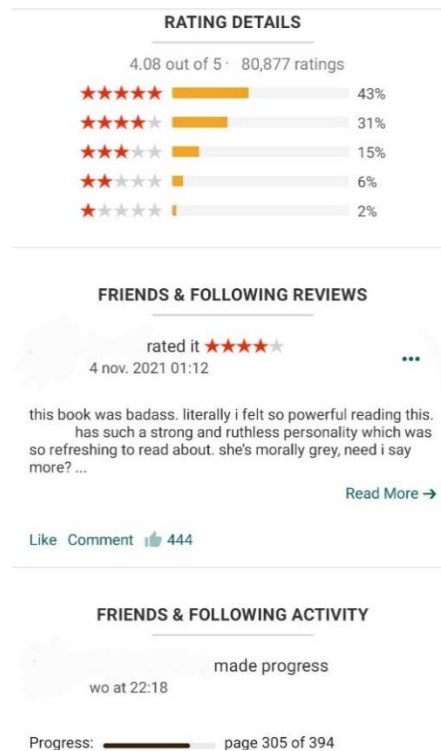


Figure 8. A book page showing rating statistics and friends and community reviews

The user can choose to leave a review at any time after logging the book as read and can also edit the specific dates. Once the book is reported as finished, the book counts for the reader's reading goal. The app makes star rating appealing and allows the user to express approval or disapproval of a book. The average rating and percentages of users that voted for each score are displayed prominently on the book's page, so, consequently, one can be easily influenced and adapt their critical take to the opinion of others. Since the app can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection, the reader can look up the consensus on a book and popular community reviews in a library or bookstore. Influenced by other people's displays of expertise and experience, thus embodied cultural capital, it could confirm or reaffirm whether a book is worth picking up.

The community, through its contributions in rating and reviewing books can raise and lower the perceived worth of a book and shape individual members' book choices. Furthermore, the user does not have to show proof that they have read the book to rate or review, compromising their integrity and trustworthiness. An unintentional user practice is that fans or haters leave overly positive or negative ratings and reviews on new books to either show their loyalty as a reader or their dissatisfaction with a particular author or the book's theme. It is called review bombing (Oyler, 2024), and the app's software enables it by preventing moderation and allowing reviews on unreleased books that are added to the database early on. The platform gives the community a level of power to make or break a book's early success. So, reviews as representations of opinions and positions are constructions of truth(s) (Rettberg, 2017, p. 23).

A book review includes statements about its value, like the review in figure 8. It is a way for the reader to perform one's experience ('this book was badass'), literary expertise ('morally grey') and taste to sound knowledgeable and cultured. Thus, it displays reviewers' embodied cultural capital. Book reviews, as public self-expressions and displays of embodied cultural capital, can receive social praise, in review comments or likes. A review is likely to receive many likes if readers find it enjoyable or insightful to read, but it mainly depends on the user's network of friends, friends-of-friends and followers who can see your review and privacy settings. Reviews and friends-to-friends recommendations for books are kept up with on the Update Feed (home page). The timeline preferences can be altered on desktop, but by default, it shows the updates friends engage with, so also featuring what friends-of-friends have been reading, thinking of a book, liking and rating. The more friends and people one follows, the busier the timeline gets. The user theoretically will get unlimited book recommendations, ratings, and reviews from people whose opinions they trust. Nevertheless, it can become a clustered and laborious task to keep up-to-date with everyone's recommendations and opinions, especially on the app as only three updates fit the screen at a time (see Appendix B for an example).

The reviews with most likes and comments are at the top on book pages. So, the user interface arrangement of book pages shapes the visibility of user reviews.

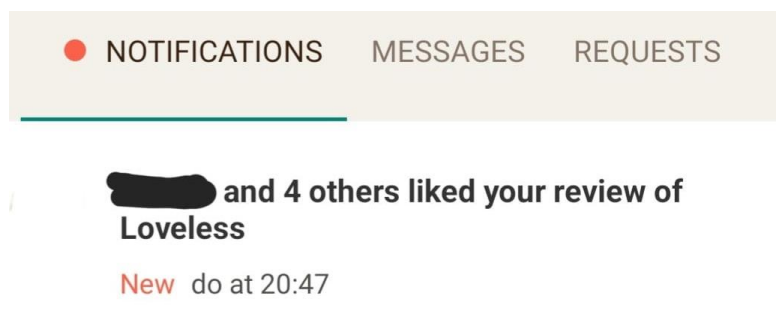


Figure 9. An example of notifications for receiving a like on a review

Figure 9 shows an in-app notification of people liking my written review when it appeared on their timeline as an update. Next to the notification column, you can see whether you have a friend request. Only on the desktop/website, users can search for friends by name or email, otherwise an invite can be directly send to people with a link, usually real-life friends. Adding friends is not only to receive book recommendations from them, but also to be a witness to your updates and progress.

Despite always being public, the content of one's review tends to depend on one's audience because the purpose of writing it is for someone to read it. It can be for oneself to keep track or remember your opinion later. Members can make themselves almost impossible to find if they are solely members to get recommendations and track their reading progress. If the review is intended for only friends, it tends to be more personal, and its tone is more informal. If members intend to write a review for the community and like to receive social praise for their observations, the review will likely

be lengthier in English and its tone more assertive. Reviews aimed at the community often contain nuanced opinions and observations guided by their literary expertise and taste. Their expressed dislike or admiration for a book is emblematic of their reader identity. Therefore, updates like reviews can be regarded as individual and relational, functioning as ways friends and followers consider and understand the reviewer (Humphreys, 2018, p. 82; p. 135). An elaborate review can not only be considered someone's experience of a book, but it also projects a particular image of the reader, depending on the review's likeliness to be liked, the tone (serious vs. funny) and level of nuance (Goffman, 1959). So, reviews are tailored to the reviewer's imagined audience, and the expressed opinions display the reviewer's embodied cultural capital. Social praise can be earned, but depends on one's network capital with active followers.

4.2.1. How Amazon benefits from users' accumulated material and embodied cultural capital

User-generated book ratings, reviews and the exchange of recommendations are influential in transmitting taste and cultural capital, and for Amazon and book authors, such word-of-mouth is valuable. Revenue generation for Goodreads does not involve monetary exchange, besides some advertising revenue. Goodreads's About Us page shows the original purpose imagined by the Chandlers, which is still partly applicable to the way Goodreads operates now as an acquisition of Amazon (Figure 10).

A Message From Our Co-Founder

When I was in second grade, I discovered the Hardy Boys series. Ever since, I've loved to read – both for fun and to improve my mind. And I'm always looking for the next great book.

One afternoon while I was scanning a friend's bookshelf for ideas, it struck me: when I want to know what books to read, I'd rather turn to a friend than any random person or bestseller list.

So I decided to build a website – a place where I could see my friends' bookshelves and learn about what they thought of all their books. Elizabeth, my co-founder (and now my wife) wrote the site copy and I wrote the code. We started in my living room, motivated by the belief that there was a better way to discover and discuss good books, and that we could build it.

Goodreads is that site. It is a place where you can see what your friends are reading and vice versa. You can create "bookshelves" to organize what you've read (or want to read). You can comment on each other's reviews. You can find your next favorite book. And on this journey with your friends you can explore new territory, gather information, and expand your mind.

Knowledge is power, and power is best shared among readers.



Otis Chandler
Co-Founder

Figure 10. Message from Otis Chandler on the 'about Goodreads' page

The Chandlers created a platform that Otis, as a book lover himself, would use too to find his 'next favourite book'. The features of adding friends, creating bookshelves and writing reviews were created to go on a journey with fellow book lovers to learn ('explore and 'expand'). This sentiment and goal also embedded in the Goodreads design and features. The title quote of the About Us page matches it as well: "The right book in the right hands at the right time can change the world", which is an altered quote from author John Green. The sentence stands for the power of recommendation and

gaining knowledge about the world through stories. The original purpose, therefore, centred around giving readers the tools to heighten their embodied state of cultural capital, without profiting off users' app use, at least to a less extent. The statement: "I would rather turn to a friend than a random person or a bestseller list", is interesting as it highlights a change in vision since Amazon acquired Goodreads. Goodreads still relies on friends-to-friends book recommendations which is far-reaching as word-of-mouth is an effective marketing strategy.

On the desktop page 'Careers', Amazon advertises its mission and key values so as to appeal to such potential job candidates, saying they are a "mission-driven company" and "only at the start of helping readers find books they love, read more and share ideas". Amazon thus strives for improvement of their services, but also believes in individual self-improvement for users and employees.

ALWAYS BE LEARNING, ALWAYS BE TEACHING

Readers inherently love to learn. We thrive on continuous improvement, as individuals and as an organization. We experiment and take risks, learning from both successes and failures. We openly share what we learn and look for opportunities to learn from others.

Figure 11. One of Goodreads's key values

One of their key values puts importance on self-improvement and adopt Goodreads members' value as Amazon's value. They discursively construct themselves as readers who 'love to learn' and 'openly share' what they learn, as individual employees and as company as a whole (Figure 1). The original Goodreads was already a successful platform that Amazon could learn from and experiment on to develop it to elevate its value.

Amazon's vision also became evident in the default privacy settings (Figure 12). Users have some agency in controlling their privacy, but can only be specified by logging in on the website. Moreover, by creating an account, the user automatically accepts the terms of service and privacy policy. When just having installed the app, the user receives a popup to allow app notifications. Figure 12 shows one category of setting options.

Who Can View My Profile:

anyone (including search engines) (?)

Goodreads members

just my friends

Allow non-friends to follow my reviews

Allow non-friends to comment on my reviews or notes and highlights

Your reviews will always be public, but you can block users outside your friends list from following (subscribing to) and commenting on them. This setting also applies to any notes and highlights made visible from Kindle.

Allow partners of Goodreads to display my reviews

Goodreads allows some partner sites access to book reviews via an API. This access is granted in the spirit of openness with the goal of spreading the love of reading. Current partners include Google Books, WorldCat, and more. Uncheck this box if you don't want the text of your reviews to appear on these sites.

Who Can Send Me Private Messages:

anyone

just my friends and groups I belong to

Make my email address visible to:

Friends & friend requests

No one

Allow Goodreads members to search for me by email

Figure 12. Default privacy settings

By default, the user's account and some information they disclose using the features is public. Users are given the agency to 'hide' their account from strangers and can refuse Amazon's partners to directly benefit (display on their site). Still, reviews are always public, because they are valuable to Amazon and its partners, companies, and authors. Reviews are for users mobilisers of embodied cultural capital, but for these parties, the community's expressed preferences, opinions and book choices are valuable data for their business strategies to convert that data into economic capital. So, two types of capital can be accumulated through reviews, which highlights the ambiguous dimension in the notion of 'capital'.

Goodreads's 'privacy policy' (2023) corroborates that Amazon uses Goodreads members' data. When users link their Amazon account to Goodreads, they can collect information that "may be correlated with any personal information that Amazon.com has and used by Goodreads and Amazon to improve the services we offer". Therefore, Goodreads's data is Amazon's data, so Amazon's revenue likely comes from the data that Goodreads users generate and the affiliate links that connect the platform with their webshop. All user-generated data is valuable for keeping track of any new trends and successes of newly released books. The Guardian writes something similar: "A book's performance on Amazon is the single most important factor in whether it will sell", and that the Goodreads community and its voluntary book tracking efforts function as a facade for Amazon to sell books. Goodreads is a soft power that has become even more powerful in Amazon's possession (Oyler, 2024). User-generated book reviews and ratings are quantitative metrics and indicators of book quality, which is helpful information for potential buyers who visit Goodreads' book pages of popular English books. They often appear as top results on search engines like Google.

So, the large community of book lovers automatically become potential customers and data sources. Amazon's ultimate goal is to convert users' cultural capital into economic capital. The app's discovery page also shows Amazon's soft power, but by purposefully nudging users towards future book purchases. The 'discover' page consists of blog posts, and curated lists by Amazon employees

discursively categorised as 'news' to give its members book specific recommendations based on theme, actuality and popularity, like 'Women's History Month' or 'The Biggest Books From Today's Most Popular Authors' (Figure 13). These lists are based on current book trends on other social media, like BookTok, with overlapping book communities. Users can click to the specific book and author pages and on the desktop version, every book page contains an affiliate link to go to the Amazon webshop and other American book sellers (see example in Appendix C). Goodreads receives a small commission from the bookseller when users buy the book using the link (Michelle, 2022)



Figure 13. The discover page of the Goodreads app

Bringing readers' attention to trending books and new 'hot' releases is part of Amazon's business plan, not of the Chandlers. Calling this submenu the 'discover page' gives the user the impression that they can find recommendations and add them to the 'to-read' shelf rather than the company and bookseller steering the consumer to their products. By bringing users' attention to certain books without making them too obvious, it plays a role in shaping the literary taste of Goodreads members. Readers are encouraged to choose books that, to Goodreads, are marketable as 'widely popular' or categorisable as 'about women's history', which means having cultivational value. Popularity in books symbolises quality and the author's competence. Curated lists powered by a digital bookseller like Amazon institutionalise this further. Amazon uses readers' rich embodied cultural capital, so their knowledge and literature experiences, as expressed in reviews, and users' possible interest to produce more appropriate economic cultural capital.

So, members' book choices are not only influenced by user-to-user recommendations and the book's symbolic value but also by the top-down embedded in-app features. This also became evident in the 'Annual Goodreads Choice Awards', a democratic voting competition where each genre is a

category and each winning book is featured in 'Best Books of The Year'. Most of the winners are popular English books from trending authors, and the award helps promote the book further. It is in Amazon's interest that users save more and more books to their to-read shelves, so a feature that relies on users' taste to further popularise books makes it appear trustworthy.

It can be concluded that Amazon bought Goodreads well aware of the existing in-app economy that functions among users through sharing one's development in literary taste and book reading and enabling users to obtain forms of recognition that generate cultural capital (Light et al., 2018, p. 890) and that they use it to improve and inform their business strategy.

4.3. Users' accumulation and display of institutionalised cultural capital

Goodreads's power to assign and reinforce accounts a certain status becomes already evident in one of the welcome screens, as illustrated in figure 14.

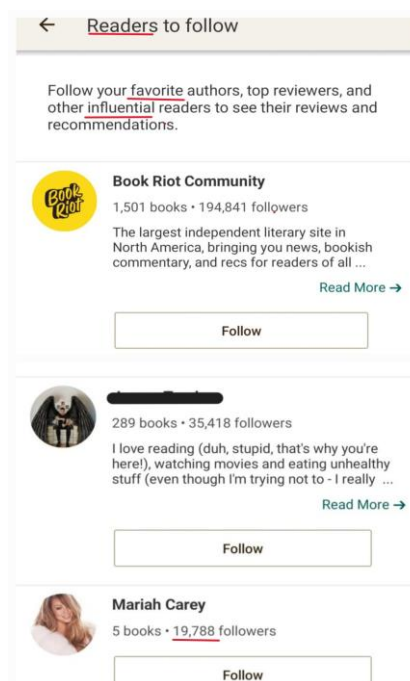


Figure 14. a welcome screen, inviting new members to follow well-known 'readers'

Before the user gets the chance to add friends, the app gives the user a list of well-known authors, readers and organisations active on Goodreads, inviting the new user to follow them. Their profiles on the list display the amount of books in their digital library, the amount of followers and their profile bio if they wrote one. It stood out in the list that the vast majority of these so-called 'influential readers' suggested were American organisations, celebrities, authors and book influencers. These profiles are purposefully shown to be recognised and followed by new members, as a way to activate their account and start with a lively update feed on the home page. If the user decides to follow none, the home page is empty. Goodreads invites the user with a link to go back to the list of 'notable readers', or to invite friends. If the user decides to follow a few, their 'influential readers' reviews and

recommendations show up on the user's Update Feed. These accounts are institutionalised by the platform, given recognition by labelling them as notable readers. Their institutionalised cultural capital, the prominent listing on the welcome screen sets them apart from regular users.

Moreover, authors are also set apart as they can sign up for a different type of account to be given recognition with Goodreads's verified badge (Figure 15).

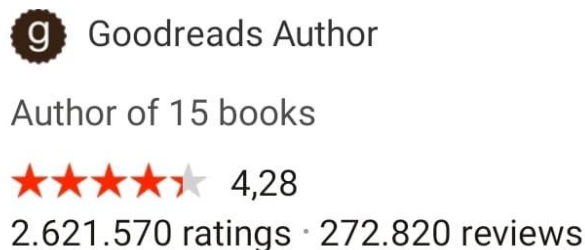


Figure 15. Author page made 'official' with a verified badge

When searching for a book, the user can click to the author's page for an overview of their average rating, its total ratings, per written book and the amount of reviews they have received. It stood out from the analysis that authors rate their own book, as a way to make their following aware of its release through the Update Feed, so that users can add it to their 'to-read' shelf.

Goodreads grants the reader and active user recognition as well for their activities on the platform by granting them a form of institutionalised cultural capital. Active readers that have been members for at least three months and who have shelved more than fifty books qualify to become Librarians or even Superlibrarians. They then become "volunteers who help ensure the accuracy of information in Goodreads' catalogue". Goodreads states that members must be "dedicated to improving Goodreads' data", thus wanting to make Goodreads a better functioning platform (Goodreads help, 2023). With the voluntary role of a Librarian, Goodreads reassigns some control of the app experience to its user on purpose. Members must take and pass a quiz and join the official group to request changes and should act in line with the Librarian Manual, the extensive guide provided by the platform. The Superlibrarian position means an extra privilege: the member can make "added changes, such as removing and editing specific quotes and book details". For Amazon, it is useful to have extra pairs of hands, especially multilingual readers. Thanks to volunteers, more and more non-English books or translations in foreign languages are added to the database. Thus, Goodreads tries to appeal to all readers, regardless of geographical background.

The official group counts more than 200.000 members, but you can join the group without officially been given the title of Librarian (yet). Only when your application has been approved, which can take time, you qualify as Librarian. There are aspiring users that do not get assigned the status of Librarian, even after passing the quiz.

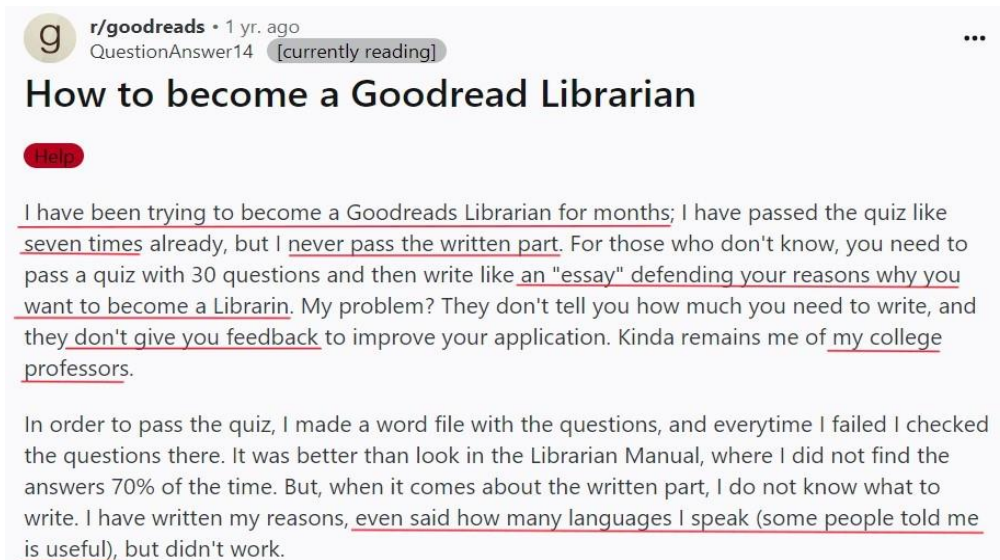


Figure 16. A Reddit post of a member asking for help on how to become a Librarian

In Figure 16, a Goodreads member asks on the Reddit platform for advice on why they have not been accepted and mentions the demands made by the platform to become a Librarian, like writing a motivation essay. The remark that possessing multiple languages would help to get accepted suggests Goodreads is not transparent regarding its decision to accept or deny new Librarian applicants. Here, the power imbalance between the ordinary user and Goodreads as a company becomes evident. It also shows how Goodreads's success relies on its members' labour and unwavering passion for books. The fact that users aspire to obtain this title illustrates that Librarian is a salient status marker where Goodreads' provided application process and formal knowledge given (the manual) is recognised by a large group of people (Lamont and Lareau, 1988).

Only on Goodreads's desktop version, people can follow the editorial work of Librarians (see Figure 17) and 'meet people' according to their active Goodreads membership.



Figure 17. Lists of top members under desktop's submenu 'people'

Under the submenu 'people', users can search by top readers, reviewers, popular reviewers, most followed and top librarians, and filter the ranking by time frame or location. Members are thus ranked according to how many books they read within a week/year, how often they write reviews and how popular they are. Obtaining one of these titles certifies the member's embodied cultural capital and, elevates it to institutionalised cultural capital.

These lists are accessible by all registered members and the top ranking titles are visible on public profiles. Goodreads thus grants the active member with public accounts symbolic recognition and potential new followers and other social praise. However, this ranking feature and its distinct categories raise questions of authenticity, the importance Goodreads places on popularity, and the use of users' free labour to the platform in reviews or Librarian edits. Among aspirational top members, it can invite effect-driven behaviour or even calculated acts to reach a top spot, like exaggerating the amount of books one reads and reviewing more books than one has read, because it means being granted institutionalised cultural capital.

Additionally, there are users, also Librarians or Superlibrarians with an extra granted privilege, sometimes actual employees, that help other users by answering their questions or solving functionality issues on Goodreads Help. The top five helping users appear on the community leader board, showing their profile with the amount of points and the title Goodreads gave them for their services (Figure 18).

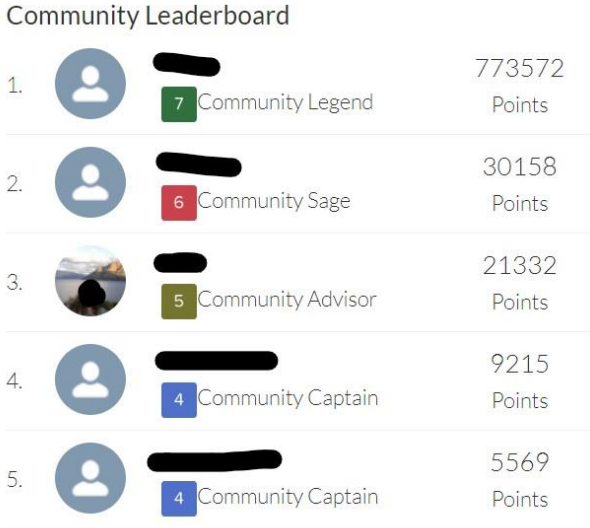


Figure 18. Leaderboard showing the top 5 Helpers

Goodreads has transformed volunteering for the app's functionality into a gamified opportunity to motivate users to strive for institutionalised cultural capital. The leaderboard and points are publicly visible on the Goodreads Help page. Points go up when they cause 'influence', by interacting and replying to users' questions or when they (co)write or edit Help articles, which is a way to reward these volunteers to continue helping the Goodreads community. These top five volunteers get assigned certain titles revolving the Community: Legend, Sage, Advisor and Captain, which all symbolise leadership or worthy roles that form a team. They are put on a pedestal and receive institutionalised cultural capital in return for their voluntary labour. Becoming a top community helper in addition to an editorial Librarian is thus a way to gain extra symbolic recognition. However, long-term Librarians have an advantage over beginners. The top member has

been a member for ten years and could have accumulated enough points to be on the leaderboard or ranked lists without being kicked of their 'throne'. So, such individuals have used Goodreads to effect by their own means and with the help of others to become top Librarians. They have transformed themselves in order to attain a certain state of immortality (Foucault, 1988, p. 18), having accumulated the most institutionalised cultural capital of all.

To conclude, Goodreads is a platform that affords multiple practices for users to produce cultural capital that is embedded in book-tracking features, user efforts and discipline incentivised by gamification techniques. Material cultural capital can be displayed as measurable evidence of accomplishment through users' virtual library and shelves, a completed reading challenge and the platform-generated end-of-year recap. The recap also demonstrates the user's embodied cultural capital and contains markers of book taste and level of expertise. User reviews also demonstrate someone's embodied cultural capital and are written with an intended effect, like receiving social praise in likes, comments or followers. The user profile facilitates the display of all three types of cultural capital. Types of institutionalised cultural capital like unique titles, public rankings, leaderboards and certificates are ways the platform symbolically recognises the efforts of active users. The platform can be considered an institution for granting the most dedicated Goodreads users and volunteers (Librarians) status in return for their efforts of reviewing and reading a lot and, in the case of Librarians, helping the community and the book catalogue. Amazon benefits from any publicly displayed cultural capital, particularly ratings and reviews, as it is valuable data for Amazon to base and redirect their business strategy both within and outside the platform to convert users' cultural capital into economic capital.

5. Conclusions and further discussion

This research project on the social book site Goodreads aimed to identify how Goodreads's features and affordances and its embedded and taught cultural values, can shape the user and how users can accumulate and publicly display the three types of cultural capital. By employing a walkthrough analysis, I could navigate the app through my own set-up accounts and explore both Goodreads's desired use, as evident in Goodreads pages, and the site's potential use, as became evident while doing the technical walkthrough. The additional material, like desktop Help pages and a Reddit post, enriched my insights into the types of institutionalised cultural capital Goodreads it grants its users. The results in the previous chapter have formulated answers to the two subquestions and forms the basis of an answer of the main research question, which was as follows:

How do the features and affordances of the social book app Goodreads enable users to produce cultural capital and, hereby, perform one's reader identity?

Based on the technical walkthrough, it can be concluded that Goodreads can be a valuable tool for book enthusiasts, offering an Update Feed for friend-to-friend book recommendations and book tracking features to manage one's progress and goal. Positive feedback mechanisms, such as messages under the reading challenge progress bar, incentivise users to read more and reflect on their reading habits and evolving tastes. The platform enabled members to engage with books by shelving, categorising, rating, and reviewing them, thereby appropriating material and embodied cultural capital, which can be publicly displayed if allowed in settings. Material cultural capital is measurable evidence of reading amounts. Embodied cultural capital is appropriated material cultural capital and evidence of being a cultivated and frequent reader, involving self-improvement in literary taste, knowledge and experiences. Books of different genres on one's shelf and leaving nuanced reviews display readers' embodied cultural capital. Goodreads reviews, whether just for friends or directed to the community, contain signs of the reader's identity. It depends on the user's social network if a review receives many likes. On book pages, reviews by one's network are shown first, followed by the ones most interacted with. This type of social praise from friends and followers can encourage them to read or review more books. However, the site's social facet and the probability of a watching audience when reviews and bookshelves are publicly displayed as one's embodied cultural capital can drive users to manipulate its display and exaggerate the cultural capital they have produced as readers to gain followers or to climb up in the rankings. As a result, there is a make-believe aspect in constructing one's identity on the social platform, becoming a performed online identity.

The user profile captures and summarises the user's reader identity, displaying users' accumulated cultural capital in quantitative information like friend count and total books in the virtual library, including some recently shelved books. Likewise, it displays the recap Goodreads calculates and presents its members after participating in the Reading Challenge combines all three types of

cultural capital. Firstly, the gamified feature provides tangible proof of success and discipline that the user can display as material cultural capital. Secondly, insight into a reader's year reveals something about their taste, preferences, and how they have transformed themselves through the books they read, thus, their embodied capital. Lastly, the recap of 'year in books' is a Goodreads-mediated form of institutionalised cultural capital, a certificate of participation and achievement that is displayed on the user profile.

Goodreads functions as an institution that grants symbolic recognition to different kinds of users and certifies the value of users' accumulated cultural capital. Authors get verified badges and other 'notable readers' are listed on users' welcome screens, recognising them as worthy of following. The most active and dedicated Librarians, book readers, and reviewers are rewarded for their efforts with titles, rankings and leaderboards. Goodreads grants users institutionalised cultural capital through these gamification tactics and outsources improvement to the platform to them.

Goodreads is mainly oriented to a Western English-speaking audience, but more foreign books are added to the database and its information is corrected by Librarians. English user-generated reviews and star ratings are the most valuable assets to Amazon, the parent company of Goodreads. Word-of-mouth promotes the books to potential buyers and makes book pages informative and opinion-forming. A book's general consensus and popularity could inform what books to list more prominently on their webshop and the app's discovery page. While Goodreads is free of charge with little to no advertising, members pay with their data. Thus, Amazon profits from users' rich cultural capital resulting from their love for reading, including knowledge and reading experiences, to generate economic capital.

Furthermore, my research shows that the full Goodreads experience requires both the app and desktop version. On the one hand, the desktop version is appealing because of its helpful dashboard, which gives more settings options and social features like group joining. On the other hand, the Smartphone app is convenient when you are in public looking for books and want to search for plot information, reviews, and ratings to grasp the book's quality and if it matches one's taste. The app is also useful for quickly bookmarking a book, consulting one's progress in the reading challenge and staying up-to-date on friends' reading through the update feed. Overall, Goodreads is designed to be used long-term as it nudges the user to be productive, at least on the site. An account is easy to set up but requires creativity and reader productivity to personalise one's profile. Once the user has invited some friends and tracks their book reading, thinking in stars to decide a book's value and scanning others' opinions becomes part of the reading and book-picking routine. Goodreads and their gamified features have become an unquestioned aspect of the leisure practice of reading, making users return to track and showcase their productivity. Hence, Goodreads is a disciplinary power and a new type of governmentality that stimulates the normalisation of disciplining and producing the self.

The walkthrough method and the steps of the proceedings gave me insights into answering the research question. However, since I could only do it from my perspective and accounts, the scope limited my observations and findings to a certain extent. The welcome screens during registration and entry are for everyone the same, but navigating the app on my account meant a personalised Update Feed. So, the observations and data collection was limited to my device. Additionally, I could not analyse the platform pre-Amazon, which would have allowed for a good comparison and a more critical account of the original vision, features and affordances. My analysis findings could not look beyond what the platform allowed me to see, so Amazon's double motivates with features and granting user privileges could only partly be discovered. Nevertheless, I could combine an affordance analysis with additional material to broaden my insights beyond the platform.

Further research on similar social tracking apps would benefit the social media field, and the tensions between free decision-making and underlying disciplinary regimes regarding tracking the self could be explored further. Moreover, to foster our understanding of the site's institutionalising power that platforms like Goodreads have, conducting a social study on the most active users' inner motivations and experiences regarding gaining symbolic and social recognition is relevant.

After over a decade, the Goodreads book community has largely stayed on the platform despite the emergence of other book apps. The loyal members maintain the site's market position and functionality. Reading books has been a popular leisure activity with a social dimension for centuries. Whether reading is a way to cultivate the mind, improve or broaden one's literary taste, or simply for entertainment purposes, Goodreads is a handy tool to discover what books are out there, to stay connected to other readers and, ultimately, stay motivated to keep reading, however ambitious the goal. Nevertheless, there is no harm in reading for fun without being in a rush to read a certain amount or genre. Having had 'only' five fantastic reading experiences of romance or detective novels is just as valid.

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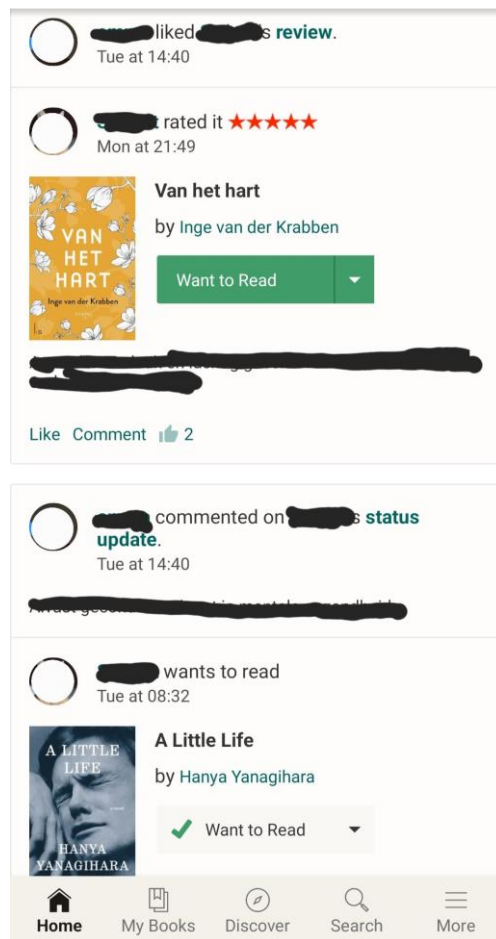
7. Appendix

Extra figures

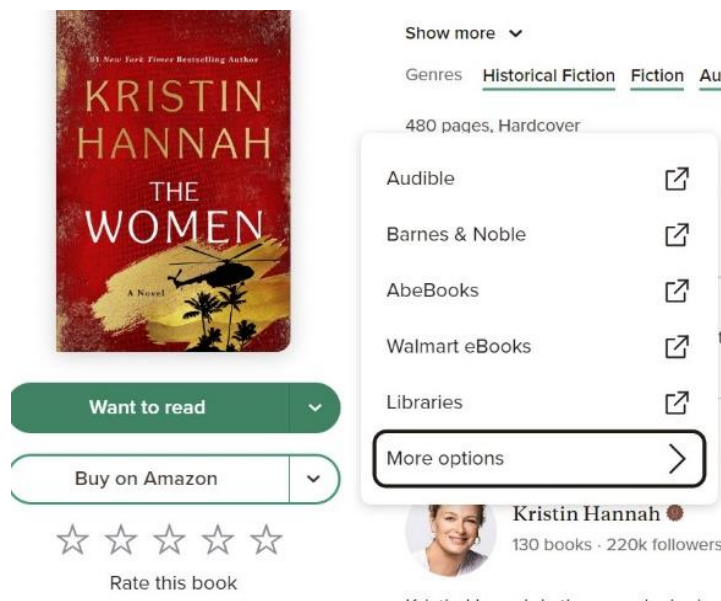
A. Screenshot from the 2021 Reading Challenge where confetti is splashed across the screen.



B. Screenshot of my Update Feed. Example of a crowded timeline.



C: Print screen of book page on desktop where users can go to book sellers' webshops.



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



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