

## Audiovisual genres in BookTubers' productions: a quantitative analysis



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## Abstract

Using Bakhtin's concept of genre (1982), this article presents a quantitative analysis of the most popular genres among the productions of Spanish-speaking BookTubers (Book + YouTubers). Its aim is to determine which discourses are the most dominant discursive forms in their production and the repercussions these audiovisual genres have on their audiences through quantitative indicators of popularity (views, likes/dislikes/comments). We quantify the presence of audiovisual genres in a random sample of videos published in 2017 ( $n=368$ ) using digital methods, through the informatic script YouTube Data Tools to obtain information about the videos (Title, Description, Number of Views, Comments, Likes and Dislikes). Evidence shows that BookTubers are able to use a great variety of audiovisual genres that come both from other YouTubers (such as vlogs, challenges, hangouts, hauls or unboxings) and from other media (reviews, rankings, lists, interviews). The most prominent in our corpus are the review, the list and the wrap-up, which fit a traditional recommendation function; however, the most popular among their audiences, in terms of views, comments and likes, are those in which the BookTuber performs a thematic selection of several books, such as lists, rankings or wrap-ups. This reinforces the curatorial value of their work as reading mediators.

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## LOS GÉNEROS AUDIOVISUALES EN LA PRODUCCIÓN DE LOS *BOOKTUBERS*: UN ANÁLISIS CUANTITATIVO

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### Resumen

A partir del concepto de género desarrollado por Mikhail Bakhtin (1982), este trabajo analiza cuantitativamente los géneros audiovisuales de los *booktubers* (*book + youtubers*) en lengua española, con el objetivo de determinar cuáles son las formas discursivas predominantes en su producción y la repercusión que tienen en sus audiencias, a través de indicadores de popularidad (vistas, *likes/dislikes/comentarios*). Para ello hemos realizado una muestra de vídeos publicados en 2017 ( $n = 368$ ) y obtenido diversos indicadores cuantitativos de popularidad (número de vistas, comentarios, *likes* y *dislikes*) por métodos digitales. Los resultados demuestran que, discursivamente, los *booktubers* han sido capaces de adaptar a la temática libresca una variedad enorme de géneros audiovisuales, que provienen tanto de otros *youtubers* (*vlogs, challenges, hangouts, hauls, unboxings*) como de otros medios de comunicación (*reseñas, rankings, listas, entrevistas*). Los más presentes en el corpus de análisis son la reseña, la lista y el *wrap-up*, que cumplen una función de recomendación tradicional; sin embargo, los datos muestran que los vídeos mejor recibidos por las audiencias son aquellos en los que el o la *booktuber* realiza alguna selección temática de varios libros, como las listas, los *rankings* o los *wrap-ups*, lo que refuerza el valor curatorial de este tipo de mediadores de lectura.

### Resum

A partir del concepte de gènere desenvolupat per Mikhail Bakhtín (1982), aquest treball analitza quantitativament els gèneres audiovisuals dels *booktubers* (*book + youtubers*) en llengua espanyola, amb l'objectiu de determinar quines són les formes discursives predominants de la seva producció i la repercussió que tenen entre les seves audiències mitjançant indicadors de popularitat (vistes, *likes/dislikes*/comentaris). Per a això hem fet una mostra de vídeos publicats l'any 2017 ( $n = 368$ ) i hem obtingut diversos indicadors quantitatius de popularitat (nombre de vistes, de comentaris, likes i dislikes) amb mètodes digitals. Els resultats demostren que, discursivament, els *booktubers* han estat capaços d'adaptar a la temàtica llibresca una gran varietat de gèneres audiovisuals que provenen tant d'altres *youtubers* (*vlogs, challenges, hangouts, hauls, unboxings*) com d'altres mitjans de comunicació (ressenyes, rànkings, llistes, entrevistes). Els més presents en el corpus d'anàlisi són la ressenya, la llista i el *wrap-up*, que compleixen una funció de recomanació tradicional; tanmateix, les dades mostren que els vídeos més ben rebuts per les audiències són aquells en els quals el o la *booktuber* fa alguna selecció temàtica de diversos llibres, com ara les llistes, els rànkings o els *wrap-up*, la qual cosa reforça el valor comissarial d'aquest tipus de mediadors de lectura.

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## 1 Introduction

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Despite being a minority group in comparison with other type of content creators, such as gamers or fashion vloggers, BookTubers (Books + YouTubers) have gained notoriety as promoters of reading, especially among young audiences (Lluch 2017; Tomasena 2016, 2019). The phenomenon began mainly among young people, but in recent years it has diversified in age and subject matter throughout Latin America. (Tomasena 2021). Although their activity is centred around YouTube, their practices expand transmedially to other social platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads and TikTok. BookTubers have been studied under the lens of the "participatory cultures" (Jenkins 2006; Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd 2015; Jenkins *et al.* 2009; Burgess and Green 2018; Jeffman 2015), as communities of knowledge (Sorensen and Mara 2013) and as reading mediators among young people (Rovira-Collado 2016, 2017; Lluch 2014), with profound interest in their potential to promote reading skills in formal education (Tusa, Fontaines-Ruiz, and Tusa 2017; Torralba Miralles 2018; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Contreras-Pulido, and Guzmán-Franco 2019).

In terms of their audiovisual style, there have been studies into how BookTubers have adapted the dominant conventions of other YouTubers to their thematic niche (books and reading) (Frobenius, 2014; Scolari and Fraticelli 2017). These conventions — looking directly at the camera, addressing their followers using "I" and "you" — are used to enhance the emotive dimension of the discourse and provoke interaction with their audiences; they build horizontal "reading contracts" (Verón, 1985) based on the authority of the "common reader" (Scolari *et al.*, 2021).

The way in which these conventions are structured in audiovisual genres has been described in several academic articles (Lluch, 2017; Ravettino Destefanis, 2015; Rovira-Collado, 2016; Sued, 2017; Tomasena, 2016,2019b; Vizcaíno-Verdú *et al.*, 2019). Their importance lies in the fact that they propose different forms of mediation and interaction between video producers, the literary text and their audiences. However, the genres of BookTubers' have not been systematically classified, so there is no information on how often producers use them or how their audiences respond to these types of videos.

This paper proposes to bridge this gap through a quantitative analysis of the productions of Spanish-language Booktubers. It has two objectives:

- To determine the predominant discourses in their production.
- To establish their impact on their audiences, through popularity indicators (views, likes/dislikes/comments).

These indicators of popularity, expressed through the data systems of the digital platform, constitute what van Dijck has described as "the popularity principle": "the more contacts you have and make, the more valuable you become, because more people think you are popular and hence want to connect with you" (van Dijck, 2013, p.13). In this sense, studying the audience's reaction to the range of genres produced by BookTubers contributes to understanding the processes in which popularity is accumulated, exchanged or sold (Tomasena, 2021b).

The article is structured as follows: the first section classifies the genres of BookTubers through the review of recent academic production, the second details the methodology applied in this analysis, the third presents the results, and the fourth discusses the implications of these results for the study of BookTubers, and in a broader sense, of other forms of platformized audiovisual production.

## 2 The audiovisual genres of BookTubers

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In his study of textual genres, Bakhtin defined discursive genres as "relatively stable types of utterances" and identified three "moments" that are inextricably linked to the text: thematic content, style and composition. These elements are determined "by the specificity of a given sphere of communication". (Bakhtin 1982, 248).

In the case of BookTubers, although each video has individual variations, it can also be said that "each sphere of language use elaborates its own relatively stable types of utterances which we call discursive genres". (Bakhtin 1982, 248). These types afford viewers a horizon of communicative expectations and enable them to situate their own roles in the interpretation process.

In previous works (Tomasena, 2016, 2019), we have described some of the characteristics of the most used BookTube genres, which coincide with other research (Lluch, 2017; Ravettino Destefanis, 2015; Paladines-Paredes and Margallo, 2020) and with some BookTubers' own videos (Milibros 2014). Table 1 summarizes the most important ones.

Genre	Description
Review	It comes from the mass media and consists of summarizing, commenting on and evaluating the virtues and defects of a book in front of the camera.
Lists	A video containing comments on different books grouped around a common theme. For example: "5 vampire books" or "Best romance novels". Unlike rankings, lists don't have a hierarchical order.
Wrap-up	A type of list that reviews books that the Booktuber has read over a period of time.
BookTag	A tag is a video in which the enunciator responds on camera to a set of questions or prompts for which he/she has been nominated by another content creator. The BookTuber also tags others to do the same. BookTags are based on building relationships between books and other topics, such as music, film, or TV series. These games form a meta-conversation across several videos.
Monologue	The BookTuber talks in front of the camera about a topic of his or her choice. This is a space to express an opinion on any topic.
Ranking	Type of video in which BookTubers rank their favourite books according to some thematic or stylistic criteria. "Top 10 books by..."; The best books are usually left for the last part of the video in order to build suspense.
BookHaul	On YouTube, hauls are videos in which a YouTuber shows on camera the products he/she has recently purchased (usually clothes or make-up). In the case of BookTubers, they show books that "have not been read yet ". The conversation with their followers, therefore, is related to the expectations of that future reading.
Vlog	Videos that document daily life routines, in the sense of "audiovisual diaries". Vlogs tell personal life stories under a non-fiction contract with the audience.
Re-telling	Retelling is a genre in which the BookTuber orally retells a story or part of a story contained in a book.
Challenge	Challenges are a type of video in which YouTubers film themselves resolving a challenge formulated by another content creator. In the case of BookTubers, challenges are related to books. Unlike BookTags, Book Challenges have to do with the performance of a physical action that is documented, rather than a verbal response to questions or slogans.

**Table 1.** Description of the most popular audiovisual genres in the sample. Source: own creation based on Lluch, 2017, Ravettino Destefanis, 2015, Tomasena, 2019b

In the interactive context of a platform like YouTube, audiovisual genres function as textual tags in the title, description and thumbnail of the video, announcing to the recipient what they will find in the video and inviting them to click (Figure 1). Therefore, this framing is always geared towards obtaining a response from the audience (in terms of views, likes, comments, and so on).

This tagging has several functions: first, it announces to the recipient what they will find in the video. This formulation can be explicit ("Review: The Art of Asking - Amanda Palmer") or implicit ("Long books worth the effort" or "Let's talk about Desert Cities"). Secondly, it works at the level of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) — such as tags or keywords — to position the video in YouTube's search and related content algorithms. It is therefore key at the datified intersection of what some scholars have characterized as "algorithmic cultures" (Rieder *et al.*, 2018; Bishop, 2020; Carah and Angus, 2018). Finally, genres also serve to delimit social group membership; the end user has to be familiarized with these collective terms in order to understand the codes for each video. In this sense, the appearance of videos that explain to neophytes the meanings of genres used by BookTubers is symptomatic, such as in the video [¿Qué es IMM, wrap up, book haul...?](#) (Milibros 2014).

Ravettino Destefanis (2015) considers that genres transcend the textual category to become "virtual performances" in which reading is "publicly shared". These performances, unlike traditional literary criticism, are not limited to evaluating the content of a book, but to exposing "what, how much and how one reads".

Paladines-Paredes and Margallo (2020) quantified the number of videos from six channels, following a classification of videos based on three functions:

- a)** analysis (reviews, reading guides, studies),
- b)** collection (BookHauls, Bookshelf tours and wrap-ups) and
- c)** selection (BookTags, Challenges, tops).

They found a predominance of videos with an analytical function, but they also found large age differences: while the youngest people favoured lists, older people were more likely to use analytical content, which — in their interpretation — indicates a certain evolution in young people's reading practices. However, the size of their sample (6 channels) does not allow them to draw broader conclusions.

### 3 Methodology

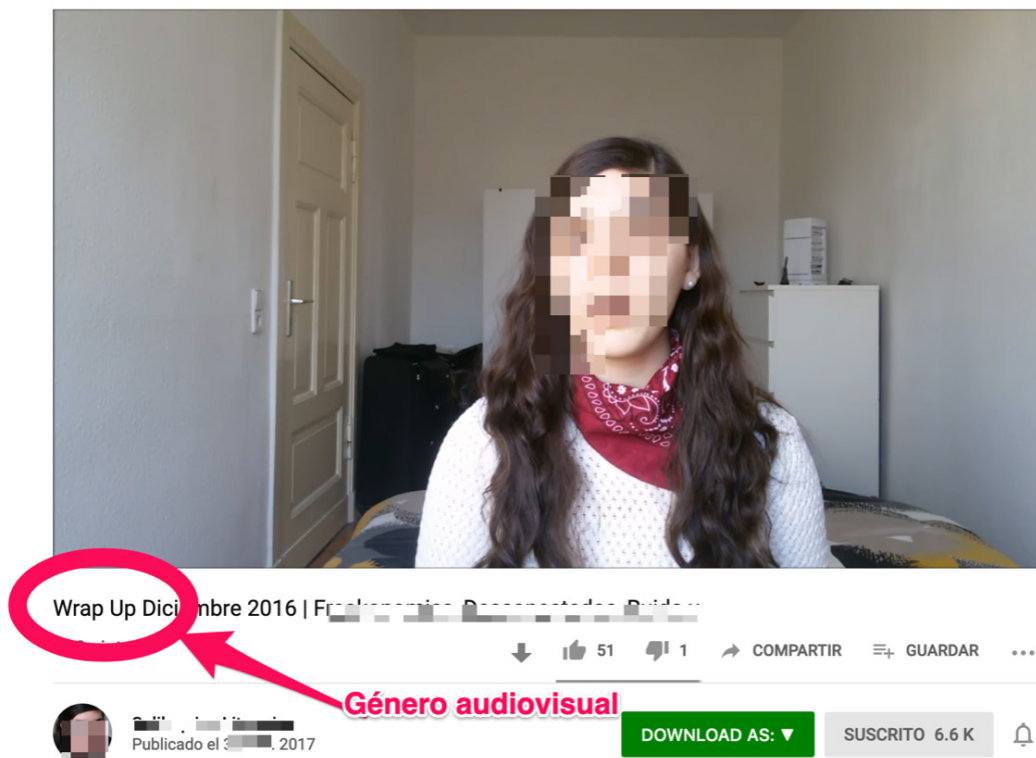
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In order to carry out the quantitative analysis presented in this paper, the following procedure was followed: first, the "Channel network" and "Video List" modules of the YouTube Data Tools (Rieder 2015) were used to obtain a database of 51,322 videos from 464 Spanish-language BookTubers. For each of these videos, the following variables were obtained: video URL, channel ID, title, description, publication date, duration, number of views, number of likes, number of dislikes and number of comments.

Secondly, a sample was established to perform the analysis. The corpus was constructed following two delimitation criteria: firstly, we only considered videos posted in 2017, the year in which the author carried out the ethnographic work that has been published in other works (Tomasena, 2019); this reduced the database to 7,581 videos; secondly, these videos were narrowed down at random to 368 videos.

Once the corpus was established, the audiovisual genre of each video was determined through two alternative methods: textual analysis of the titles and descriptions to identify the keywords used to tag their videos (Figure 1) or direct viewing of each video.

We proceeded inductively, starting from the genre's categories as previously identified in the scientific literature to classify all the videos in the sample. These data was then crossed with the quantitative indicators of popularity described in Table 2 (number of views, number of comments, number of likes and number of dislikes).



**Figure 1.** Audiovisual genre labels in the titles of the videos. Source: own creation

Unit of analysis	Corpus of analysis (n)	Variables	Data gathering methods
Video	368	Audiovisual genre	— Textual analysis — Visioning
		Number of views	Digital methods: YouTube API v.3
		Number of comments	
		Number of likes	
		Number of dislikes	

**Table 2.** Units, variables of analysis and data gathering methods. Source: own creation

Due to space limitations, this paper does not address the qualitative dimension of audiovisual genres. However, this can be consulted in other works (Scolari, Fraticelli, Tomasena, 2021; Tomasena, 2019b, 2021).

## 4 Results

In our analysed corpus, we found 34 different audiovisual genres (Table 3), with a very uneven distribution (Figure 2). The analysis shows that just under half of the videos (46.5%) in the sample can be classified into the three most popular genres: the review (90), the list (41) and the wrap-up (36). These discursive forms were not invented by BookTubers, but were inherited from mass media, such as the press and television. All three cases constitute genres in which the BookTuber recommends one or more books that he/she has already read, with the aim of convincing their followers to read them too. In terms of representativeness in the sample, four genres follow: the BookTag (22), the monologue (21), the ranking (20) and the BookHaul (19).

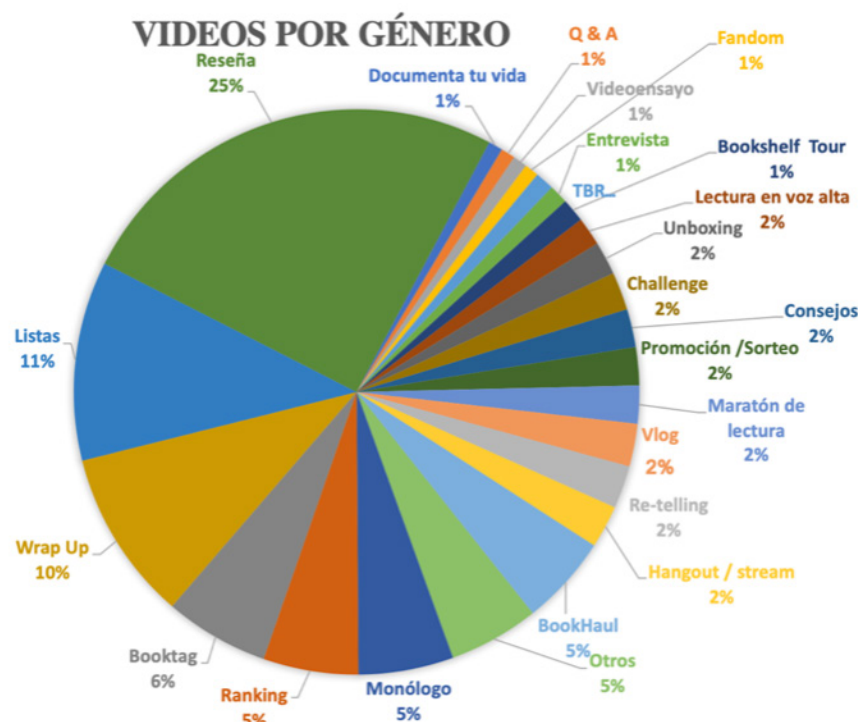


Figure 2. Distribution of videos according to their audio-visual genre ( $n = 368$ ).

Source: own creation

It is noticeable how, in addition to the recommendation function produced by the rankings, the other three genres have other types of communicative functions: in the case of the BookTag, it is a playful relationship based on association games between books and another theme — a television series, a film, a musical group — that enables a subsequent comparative game between channels to see how other Booktubers have responded to different questions. In the case of the BookHaul, it is even more striking, since this is a genre in which the BookTuber talks about books he/she **has not read yet**; in this sense, the dialogue established with his/her followers in the comments section often turns into a more horizontal conversation in which the roles of recommenders are reversed: end users usually recommend to the BookTuber titles that they should read first.

The dispersion of the other genres in the sample also shows how BookTubers use a wide range of audio-visual genres adopted or copied from other YouTubers, such as the vlog (9), re-telling (9), challenge (8), livestream/Hangout session (8), tips (8), promotion or giveaway (8), readathon (8) and unboxing (7). Each of these genres represents around 2% of the total. In this sense, we could say that BookTubers take the predominant genres on YouTube and adapt them to the subject of their interest: books.

These results offer much more nuance to the quantification efforts of Paladines-Paredes and Margallo (2020): although the review is the most present genre (25%) — which emphasizes the analytical function of videos — genres involving some kind of selection or curation (lists, wrap-ups, BookTags, BookHauls or rankings) represent 37.8% of the sample.

When including in the analysis the variables that indicate the response of the audiences of their channels, in terms of views, comments, likes and dislikes (Table 3), what stands out is how the most popular audiovisual genre is the List. Despite representing less than half of the reviews analysed, this genre achieves 2.5



times more views, slightly more comments and three times more likes and dislikes. The same could be said of other genres that imply a curatorial function, such as wrap-ups or rankings.

Genre	Number of videos	Percentage	Total views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes
Review	90	25.3%	163,675	3,401	12,976	262
List	41	11.4%	410,603	3,871	37,873	637
Wrap-up	36	9.8%	194,148	2,350	19,561	177
BookTag	22	6.0%	97,460	945	10,105	100
Monologue	21	5.4%	58,726	980	6,197	200
Ranking	20	5.4%	121,522	1,241	10,421	138
BookHaul	19	5.2%	179,006	1,948	17,813	268
Vlog	9	2.4%	4,807	128	426	17
Re-telling	9	2.4%	154,549	1,450	18,490	86
Challenge	8	2.4%	112,183	422	5,682	64
Hangout/livestream	8	2.2%	10,192	96	668	26
Advice	8	2.2%	61,614	342	4,487	55
Promotion/gi- veaway	8	2.2%	4,408	312	263	3
Readathon	8	2.2%	2,831	130	305	12
Unboxing	7	1.9%	20,393	210	2,111	24
Reading aloud	6	1.6%	637	16	55	4
To Be Read (TBR)	4	1.1%	1,507	46	178	2
Bookshelf tour	4	1.1%	37,212	249	2,375	31
Interview	4	0.8%	3,968	61	325	2
Document your life	3	0.8%	56,721	293	6,549	23
Q & A	3	0.8%	11,004	86	957	14
Video essay	3	0.8%	6,150	232	652	19
Fandom	3	0.8%	98,965	1,016	7,344	369
<b>Other</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5.2%</b>				
Cover	3	0.5%	1,239	58	142	4
Reaction	2	0.5%	1,244	10	51	13
Book-film comparison	2	0.5%	40,345	288	3,898	19
Covers	2	0.3%	4,801	65	435	18
Parody	1	0.3%	311	11	35	1
Storytime	1	0.3%	47	4	4	-
If you liked...	1	0.3%	162	31	25	1
Tag	1	0.3%	1,964	27	207	6
Song	1	0.3%	638	21	104	1
Things about me	1	0.3%	12,393	84	1,052	12
Vlog	1	0.3%	627	7	31	1
DIY Tutorial	1	0.3%	95	2	10	-

**Table 3.** Audiovisual genres among the BookTubers analysed, according to total views, comments, likes and dislikes. Source: own creation

In short: those videos that involve some kind of selection or curation by BookTubers tend to be much more successful than reviews of individual titles. This highlights the role of BookTubers as curators of content, rather than as literary analysts, like traditional literary critics.

## 5 Conclusions

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The results of this work show that BookTubers use a wide variety of audiovisual genres adapted to the theme of books. Quantitative analysis of our sample allowed us to register 34 different types of videos, understood as "relatively stable types of utterances" (Bakhtin 1982, 248). Audiovisual genres, in the context of YouTube, transcend the mere textual register to become virtual performances on the one hand, and elements of interactivity between content creators and platform users on the other.

In this sense, they are part of "algorithmic cultures" (Rieder *et al.*, 2018; Bishop, 2020; Carah and Angus, 2018) at the intersection of creative content creation, algorithms and search engines that condition the visibility and reaction of users through datified systems.

The most common audiovisual genres are reviews, lists and wrap-ups, BookTags, monologues, rankings and BookHauls, which have more than 5 per cent presence in the sample. Although the review accounts for a quarter of the videos, genres involving some kind of selection account for 37.8 percent of the sample and obtain four times as many views. These results offer much more nuance to the quantification efforts previously made by Paladines-Paredes and Margallo (2020).

User reactions to such videos, in which the BookTuber produces a thematic creation (lists, rankings, wrap-ups, BookHauls), reinforces their value as "curators" rather than as original producers or critics. This resonates with Michael Bhaskar's thesis on the value of curation — understood as the value created from selection — in a media ecosystem characterized by super-abundance (Bhaskar, 2017).

If these genres transcend mere textual grammar to become "performances" (Ravettino Destefanis, 2015), future research should explore the implications of this "curatorial" dimension of BookTubers, in comparison with other forms of reading mediation, such as literary critique, school, bookshops, or the family.

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