

LITERALLY: SOCIAL READING AND MEANING-MAKING

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Eleanor Beale

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Abstract

People read less for personal fulfillment than in the past. In fact, reading for pleasure is at a 30 year low (McWilliams, 2018). People wish they read more but are deterred by several different psychological blocks, including lack of time, motivation, and access, as well as digital distraction.

The dominant, modern narrative around reading is one of a sterile knowledge transmission from book to individual. I argue that this understanding of reading as a solitary act is lacking in several ways. My research focusses on meaning-making in book clubs and the advantages afforded by social reading, as an alternative. I want to situate the book club tradition within a digital landscape and showing how virtual clubs and in-person discussion are not mutually exclusive. To fill gaps in the conversation about social reading, modern book clubs, personal interaction, and meaning-making, I am looking at possible digital spaces for reading and thus identity formation.

1 - PROBLEM, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTION

1.1 Problem

Reading is an essential activity for learning and acquiring knowledge. Through reading, we locate ourselves in the world, outside of the limitations of our immediate surroundings and time, and do important meaning-making in order to construct a sense of self, others, and culture. The pleasures of reading have been acknowledged for centuries among the literate population. Not only is reading intellectually enriching, it is also personally fulfilling as a leisure activity. My research focuses on meaning-making in the modern-day book club and the advantages afforded by collaborative, social reading for personal enrichment. I am interested in situating the book club phenomenon, which originated at the height of mass print culture, within a fast-paced digital landscape. To fill gaps in the conversation about social reading and modern technology, I am examining the possibilities of digital reading spaces. Through my research I created a prototype a digital tool called *Literally*, which places users in book clubs based on their reading-related interests.

In 2016, reading rates in the United States were at a thirty year low (Pew, 2017). Specifically, reading for pleasure and self-betterment are in decline as people feel they don't have the time to spend on this type of reading activity. This distinction is important to acknowledge since reading in general has likely not declined as dramatically. Between e-readers, texts, and near-constant access to internet content, the digitally-connected population probably reads more now than ever. The type of reading I am focused on is the type we do to gain something personal from, not the type we have to do. Through my research I uncovered the many benefits of this type of reading (particularly when done socially), as well as some of the contemporary challenges to reading culture, namely digital distraction, which have led to decreased rates of reading for personal enrichment. Book clubs, I learned, represent moments of communal meaning-making but they also produce accountability through social facilitation, which in turn can promote reading (Triplett, 1898). In fact, people in book clubs on average read

10-15 hours a week compared to a non-member that averages approximately 3 hours. This presented a solution: a digital tool which would enable social reading through book clubs.

To supplement my secondary research on book clubs, I crafted a 15-question survey with the aim of gathering more information on my target audience. The goal of the survey was twofold. First, it helped me understand that many people wish they read more. Second, it uncovered what they were doing and/or using to address this problem.

Before development, I also conducted market research to identify major competitors in the space of digital reading. These market insights helped me identify where gaps exist. These gaps may represent unmet market needs and will hopefully help me on my journey to achieving product/market fit. Throughout the development process, I researched the development components of the app so as to understand what would be needed to code a complete product, beta test a functional prototype, and iterate based on user-tests. All of the steps required to make this app idea a reality are situated in the research regarding meaning-making in book clubs and digital reading spaces.

1.2 Objectives

Before embarking on this project, I established some objectives for this project based on preliminary research and what I already knew about reading and book clubs. My objectives are as follows:

- **Objective 1:** Situating book clubs within a digital context and showing how virtual and in-person discussions are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be complementary.
- **Objective 2:** Understanding the role of reading in an era of digital communication and how digital reading spaces operate.
- **Objective 3:** Creating a working prototype for a digital tool to promote reading and social, collaborative learning.

1.3 Research question

My research question and, subsequently, my process to answering it, are based firmly in Lean methodology. The Lean method, pioneered by Japanese car manufacturers and articulated in more detail by Eric Ries in his best-selling book, *The Lean Startup* (2011), is a user-driven method for doing entrepreneurship. In short, the Lean method involves discovering a problem, identifying the audience most impacted by that problem, and then interfacing with them regularly in the develop of a solution (Ries, 2011). The research question is, in fact, 2 interdependent questions:

1. How might I develop a tool to help people read more?
2. What would an effective digital tool for helping people read more look like?

My three hypotheses going into the customer discovery phase were as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: Many people wish they read more (as a means for personal growth)
- Hypothesis 2: The reasons people do not read more have to do with lack of tangible accountability
- Hypothesis 3: Book Clubs improve reading productivity through social relationships accountability

2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature review

Reading is an essential tool for learning and acquiring knowledge and, most importantly, a crucial part of being human. According to a study published in the *Journal of Reading Behavior*, the two main functions of reading are “(a) ...as a stimulus in activating elements of the reader's past experience with both literature and life, and (b) ...as a blueprint, a guide for the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what is being called forth” (Purcell-Gates, 1991, p.248). By reading, we locate ourselves in the world and do important meaning-making in order to construct a sense of self, others, and culture. Interestingly, the dominant, modern narrative around reading is one of a sterile knowledge transmission from book to individual. This understanding of reading is lacking in several key ways and I aim to address several failings in this conceptualization of reading.

My research focuses on meaning-making in the contemporary book club and the advantages afforded by collaborative, group learning. It situates the book club phenomenon within a fast-paced digital landscape to show how virtual and in-person discussion are not mutually exclusive, but, in fact, complementary. Educational and other organizations are increasingly moving towards digital learning environments, but there is still much to learn about how to fully leverage digital tools to enhance social reading for personal fulfillment, outside of a classroom setting. Understanding older, embodied ways of reading and sense-making may offer a key to unlocking a digital space for promoting reading for self-betterment. To fill gaps in the conversation about collaborative learning, modern reading, personal interaction, and meaning-making, I am looking at possible digital spaces for reading and thus identity formation, in organizations and among individuals.

According to Pew Research, people read less now than in 2011, likely due to distraction and information overload in the age of technology (Pew Research, 2016). The same study

shows that the typical American adult now reads only four books a year and 27% didn't read a single book in 2015. In 2016 a report from the National Endowment for the Arts found that reading was at a 3-decade low (McWilliams, 2018). It is important to clarify that these studies focus on the decline of a very specific type reading behaviour. That is, the type of reading that one does for pleasure, personal fulfillment, or self-betterment. In general, reading has likely not declined; considering our access to e-readers, digital technology, and the internet.

Based on these studies, my first hypothesis is that people don't read as much as they'd like to, the primary reason being they can't cultivate the habit of reading regularly on their own. It is self-evident that much of the modern world is glued to their digital devices. They provide instant gratification and information right at our fingertips. As such, the effort required to give all of our attention to a book for self-betterment seems burdensome, even though it's not. Long-form reading becomes increasingly difficult with the attention spans cultivated by digital technology.

Arguably, the current narrative of solitary reading could be the cause of both of these issues. Before discussing solutions, however, it is important to consider the literature on the topic.

The problem I'm addressing has previously been articulated in a number of ways. Currently, a large portion of the academic discourse on reading groups and book clubs focuses on classroom settings. The topic of book clubs is prominent in the literature on reading pedagogy, not surprising given that many researchers are also teachers and thus stakeholders in research about student learning. It is important to acknowledge that, while I am interested in social reading in a broad context, most of the literature on social reading is coming from a pedagogical context. With that being said, social reading has been proven to be beneficial in the classroom, and so would I argue that the benefits are the same, outside of the classroom. Specifically, I want to parlay this social reading research from the classroom into a dialogue about promoting reading for personal fulfillment.

Pedagogical researchers would define the problem as a lack of interest and concentration among students when it comes to reading. An ongoing problem for teachers is that students do not regularly complete their assigned readings, meaning students do not get a deep understanding of the concepts (Macpherson & Cherry, 2011). According to Diane Barone (2011), in her paper on meaning-making in book club structures, teachers must understand the importance of conversations centered on the readings, which help students uncover deeper meanings that might not have been evident in an initial read-through. Her research suggests that reading groups allow students to bring their own experiences and ideas to the table which helps cultivate both individual and group identities (Barone, 2011). The pedagogical book club, “therefore, offers an instructional overarching structure that allows students opportunities to explore the process of meaning-making, a process that is often messy and non-linear” (Barone, 2011, p.7).

She specifically looked at focused reading groups in a university setting and their effect on completion and overall understanding of the readings assigned. The potential downside of Barone’s strategy is that it fails to include a connection to the digital world, which is increasingly important in the classroom. With that being said, often digital tools for engaging learners in reading and other academic areas fall short or are not used in classrooms. This is likely because when it comes to literature or theory, it seems impossible to fully engage with a group of people unless it is face-to-face. Certainly, there is truth to this, but what if there was a better way to leverage these digital tools for learning, specifically in reading?

Other research by DeNel Rehberg Sedo (2003) compares face-to-face (f2f) and virtual book clubs and how the internet is changing the way we engage with literature. She discusses club dynamics, demographics, attitudes, and members’ motivations for being in their respective clubs. In virtual clubs, for example, 23 percent of members said they liked the effortlessness of meeting up online and it was flexible to their schedules and only six percent of f2f members said this was important to them (Sedo, 2003). Furthermore, many f2f members considered the social

relationships the most rewarding part of the of membership whereas this was not a motivation in virtual clubs (Sedo, 2003). On the other hand, an issue with f2f clubs is that this sort of book club is largely formed through friends, meaning there is less diversity within clubs. Virtual book clubs are better for “permeating cultural boundaries that were heretofore inaccessible” and creating a safe space for people, outside of institutions, to explore and expand their understanding of the world (Sedo, 2003, p.74). Much like the Barone’s student reading groups, these clubs become “binding mechanisms” that “inform individual and group identities, and eventually form group solidarity” (Sedo, 2003, p.69). Certainly, this comparative research is interesting, but does not propose a hybrid model for book clubs.

This tradition of book clubs is a long one, dating back more than 500 years (Sedo, 2003). Before books were printed they were handwritten by scribes who spent hours labouring to create beautiful ornate books called manuscripts. Sometimes manuscripts would circulate, other times people would get together and write them in a group. Most importantly, manuscripts were often consumed in groups producing a visceral reading experience. After the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1440, books were increasingly mass produced and reading became accessible to everyone in the general public. No longer was it a privilege afforded only to academic and ecclesiastic elites; now everyone could read. But, as printed books became widespread, there wasn’t a necessity for reading in groups anymore. Suddenly reading became a sterile transmission of knowledge instead of an embodied exchange, and today it is understood as a private act. Book clubs destabilize this because they “transform the intensely private process of reading into an open, public forum” (Sedo, 2003, p.67). This recalls Carey’s (1989, p.18) ritual model of communication where the focus is on “the maintenance of society in time” and the “representation of shared beliefs” in a communal way.

In book clubs, James Carey’s notion of obsessive individualism is rejected in favour of a culture that fosters the creation of new meanings and interpretations (1989). In this sense, reading becomes the transaction “not only between reader and text but also between reader,

text and group” (Sedo, 2003). In other words, printing technology changed the experience of reading from collective one to a solitary one. In her case-study on book clubs and their members, DeNel Sedo describes “book interpretation in collective environments is a result of people [...] wanting to connect with one another in these times of perceived individualism. (Sedo, 2003.

It is easy to lament the loss of communal reading culture but I would rather invoke McLuhan’s medium theory which “is inseparable from the processes of modernity undergone by advanced industrial societies” and helpful in understanding the changing dynamic of readership (Laughey, 2008). The medium used for disseminating information will always be evolving and consequently will “become [an] extension of ourselves; [an] extension of our human senses” (Laughey, 2008). The book club, I am arguing, opens up a subversive, disruptive space outside of “formal institutional systems” of education which can sometimes work to suppress certain ideas and voices (Sedo, 2003, p.74). These spaces also operate to destabilize author/reader and active/passive binaries which are not helpful for understanding authentic cultural production. Book clubs, I argue, represent moments of communal meaning-making and facilitate the negotiation of identities.

2.2 Ideation

Rather than condemning all digital technology for its negative effects on reading, I wanted to leverage it to promote reading and community building. So, after analyzing all the research on collaborative learning in the classroom and the benefits of social reading, I was able to reach ideation process for a digital tool to promote reading for self-betterment.

As a solution, I propose an ancient tradition with a new twist: a book club match-making application for finding your community within the literary world. Both a connection to other like-minded people looking for lively discourse about great books, and a means to expand your repertoire and build enviable reading habits, this is the all-in-one book club app. Armed with Triplett’s theory of social facilitation - the idea that we are more likely to do something if we feel

we are being observed by our peers (so long as the task is a simple one, like reading) - the app is designed to help people achieve the reading goals they haven't been able to meet on their own (Triplett, 1898). The conundrum of wanting to read more but being unable to cultivate the habit is reconciled by social facilitation—read in a group to create a sense of accountability. The app would facilitate the free-flow of Ideas and dialogue between engaged individuals and help users stay accountable to their goals.

Minimal data exists about book clubs in Canada. The most recent study showed 40,750 book clubs reported in Canada with club membership averaging between six and 12 members. (Sedo, 2002. Book club members read on average 15 to 10 hours a week, whereas non-club members read less than three hours a week (Sedo 2002. “The majority of book club readers of my online survey report spending more than \$500 per year on books (27%), and do so at chain booksellers (38%)” (Sedo 2002 According to quantitative research done in focus groups, being in a book club fulfills members’ “desires to read more, to read differently, to discuss what they’re reading, and to interpret books through the people they trust and respect” (Sedo 2002. An important finding showed that the social bonds forged in these clubs tend to be an “unexpected benefit”, according to focus group participants (Sedo 2002.

I used James Carey’s (1989) ritual model of communication as a lens for the design of my solution because it speaks to our profound need for human connection and desire to create an “ordered, meaningful cultural world” (p.19). When it came to other digital solutions to the problem of decreased leisurely reading, namely *GoodReads* and other virtual book clubs, the experience was largely individualistic. Luckily for me, learning about thematic gaps and blind spots in current research has helped to situate my solution in a dialogue about social reading and accountability.

3 - READING SURVEY: DESIGN, ADMINISTRATION, & ANALYSIS

3.1 Customer discovery phase

Before entering the development phase of my project, I had to answer my main research question and test the corresponding hypotheses. These were developed as a result of my own personal struggles to read more, and through research which pointed to a similar sentiment among the general public. Research has determined that reading is

- a) declining among younger generations (over the past 30 years)
- b) conducive to social benefits such as identity formation, and
- c) often influenced by accountability and social facilitation.

As a response of these research findings, I came up with a general concept for a digital reading tool: a book club app. The next step was to validate this assumption and prove product/market fit. This is why I decided to opt for a survey. I wanted to gauge interest, desire, and commonly held beliefs of actual book lovers, and I wanted to reach a large number of them.

3.2 Participants

One mistake I wanted to avoid was going to the wrong audience to try and find a product/market fit. The key question that participants needed to answer “yes” to was: “Do you wish you read more?” I used that question as a litmus test for interest in my product. At the same time, I also wanted to know the how many people in the general, non-book-loving public would answer yes to that same question. This is why this question is my first hypothesis. Research suggested that I find my target audience in online forums, namely, Facebook groups and subreddits on Reddit (Hootsuite, 2017). According to Hootsuite (2017), Reddit has over “50,000 niche communities and 250 million unique monthly visitors” who are often talking about brands and products”. After some searching around, I landed on a handful of these forums which I believed would help me engage the right people. These included:

Books and reading-specific forums:

- Reading subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/reading/>
- Books subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/books/>
- Book Club subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/bookclub/>
- Betterment Book Club subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/BettermentBookClub/>

- Book Club:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/187547284642012/?ref=group_browse_new
- Facebook Book Club:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/whatshouldiread/?ref=group_browse_new
- The Secret Book Club:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheSecretBC/?ref=group_browse_new
- Book Club Novel Readers Amazon Kindle:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BookClubNovelReadersAmazonKindle/>

General forums:

- Entrepreneur subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/Entrepreneur/>
- Apps subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/apps/>
- Favors subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/Favors/>
- Sample Size subreddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/SampleSize/>
- Survey Tandem: <http://www.surveytandem.com/#/share-survey>
- Survey Swap: <https://surveyswap.io/take-a-survey>

3.3 Design

I elected to go with an online survey in order to reach a niche audience of book lovers, but also have a reasonable sample size to work with. Studies in Lean Methodology show that reaching as many potential customers as possible, early in the develop process, is a crucial for understanding the needs and desires of your target market (Ries, 2011). In order to get to a nuanced answer to my equally nuanced research question, I had to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions were split evenly between multiple choice questions, Likert scales, short and long answer questions. This, I hoped, would give me a more holistic picture of who the participants were. To create the best tool and find product/market fit, I needed to understand not just behaviors, but attitudes and beliefs around reading. I wanted to understand the desires of these participants, especially when those desires were left unmet. The questions were designed to let participants share these sorts of answers honestly, without being led. After completing the secondary research, I had already developed assumptions about the type of digital reading tool I could develop, but it was important that it not be mentioned in the survey so as not to skew results.

The following is a comprehensive look at my consent form and survey questions which I used to gather data from potential customers:

How important is reading to you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely important

Do you wish you read more?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What keeps you from reading more? (ex. work, family commitments, etc.)

Long answer text

Figure 3.1 TITLE? I.e. Survey question 4

The first two questions (Figure 3.1) aim to test the first hypothesis: “people wish they read more”. If the majority of participants answer these first two questions with a rating below 3 (out of 5) and “No”, then it will be clear: there is no unmet need for a digital reading tool.

What keeps you from reading more? (ex. work, family commitments, etc.)

Long answer text

...

What would help you to read more?

Long answer text

Figure 3.2 TITLE

The questions in Figure 3.2 are meant to probe the participant to understand what obstacles prevent them from reading more. Regardless of their answers in the first two questions, these open-ended questions are crucial for understanding the barriers people face when trying to read (whatever their reading goals may be). I also want to know the extent to

which people are self-aware about their reading habits/obstacles, and whether they have ideas about how to improve them.

Are you currently in a book club?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you previously been in a book club?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you've been in a book club, how would you rate your experience?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Terrible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fantastic

Figure 3.3

The questions in Figure 3.3 deal with participants' experiences with book clubs. With these questions, I am trying to probe the participants to gauge their familiarity, level of experience, and quality of experience. This question is trying to discover if people who wish they read more have been in and are enjoying (or have enjoyed) being in a book club. Assuming participants have had experience, I want to know if this experience was positive or not.

Have you ever used an app or an online tool related to reading? If so, what was it called?

Short answer text

If you've used an online tool related to reading, how would you rate your experience?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Awful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fantastic

If you answered the previous question, please elaborate on your answer. (ex. what made it a good experience? Was it easy to use? Expensive?)

Long answer text

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.4 shows a section of questions on digital reading tools. These questions, similarly to those in Figure 3.3, aim to gauge reading interest and experience- but this time with apps or online tools related to reading. This was the simplest way to pinpoint competitors in the market, both direct and indirect. It is important to have low competition, not no competition when starting a business or launching a product. If there is competition, it is likely because there is no audience that is asking for a solution. Fortunately, there *are* a couple book club apps with similar concepts on the market, and I wanted to see if any of my participants were using them. If they weren't using a book club app, I wanted to know which product they were using. The goal is to understand exactly how participants are going about solving the problem: "I wish I read more".

If you answered the previous question, please elaborate on your answer. (ex. what made it a good experience? Was it easy to use? Expensive?)

Long answer text

How often do you discuss what you read?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

Do you enjoy discussing what you read?

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I keep it to myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Yes, I love to share

Figure 3.5 TITLE?

Figure 3.5 shows two questions aimed at discovering discrepancies between the frequency with which participants discuss what they read and the motivation to discuss what they read. The purpose of these questions, beyond exposing the gaps between doing and wanting, is to see if discussing books is actually something participants want to do. If so, do they also act on this desire? The bigger the gap between the two questions, the bigger the opportunity for product/market fit.

In general, do you struggle to meet your goals?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

⋮

What genres do you like reading?

Long answer text

Rate your feelings of social fulfillment

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unfulfilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very fulfilled

Figure 3.6 TITLE?

Figure 3.6 shows the final three questions. The question, “In general, do you struggle to meet your goals?” is aimed at discovering whether participants have a hard time being self-motivated. The results of this question would help be discover whether accountability would be a viable solution to a lack of self-motivation. According to Gretchen Rubin’s theory of the four tendencies, people can be divided into four personality categories based on internal and external expectations (2017). The most common of the four types is the “Upholder,” who is very motivated by external expectations, like those of family, friends, bosses, and partners. The downfall of the Upholder is that they have a harder time being motivated by internal expectations, in other words, being self-motivated (Rubin, 2017). Since the Upholder is the most common of the four, I expected the responses would tend towards the higher end of my Likert scale. If this turned out to be true, and many people did struggle to meet their goals, it would make a case for an accountability-based solution.

The second question in Figure 3.6 was an attempt to learn more about my audience and their interest in reading. I wanted to understand if there was a great deal of overlap in favourite genres among participants so that I could determine if a genre-based algorithm for creating book clubs would make sense.

The final question in Figure 3.6 asks participants about their feelings of social fulfillment. Though it seems out of place in a survey on digital reading tools, I am trying to figure out whether people feel disconnected from each other. If that turns out to be the case, there will be an even stronger precedent for a tool which connects people through reading.

3.4 Administration

I posted the survey in the forums I had identified (above) and waited for the responses to come in. Once the survey had collected just over 200 responses, I used many of the visualization features available through Google Forms to present the data in the following chapter, but I also exported it all into a spreadsheet so I could analyze the data more effectively.

The last question in the survey asked participants to include their email for a chance to win a draw for a \$50 Chapters gift card. When I closed the survey, I had collected 75 emails from consenting participants. I reached out to all participants via email to let them know the winner, and asked if they might give me feedback on the idea I had developed with the help of the responses. Unfortunately, I received no responses. I am hopeful that, in the future, I still might have the chance to engage with some of these participants. Their feedback would have been helpful throughout the development and testing phases.

3.5 Analysis

The expectation of the results from the survey is that they would:

- a. Validate the unmet market need or problem that I assume exists and;
- b. Point to a possible solution in the form of a digital tool.

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I had already developed a concept for a digital tool based on secondary research and anecdotal evidence. This concept took the form of a book club app. Of course, it would be unwise to start development without gauging customer interest and product/market fit. The most challenging part of crafting the survey and analyzing the results was being able to determine product/market fit when the product itself was never mentioned.

Throughout the following breakdown of the survey results, it will become clear that there is a case for a product similar to the concept I had developed based on secondary research. It is difficult to say if that product/market fit is perfect until users start to actually test a minimum viable product, but based on quantitative and qualitative data collected, it would seem that there is a general interest in a new reading tool that isn't on the market yet.

3.5.1 Customer Discovery Results

How important is reading to you?	Do you wish you read more?	What keeps you from reading more? (ex. work, family commitments, etc.)	What would help you to read more?	Are you currently in a book club?	Have you previously been in a book club?	If you've been in a book club, how would you rate your experience?	Have you ever used an app or an online tool related to reading? If so, what was it called?	If you've used an online tool related to reading, how would you rate your experience?	If you answered the previous question, please elaborate on your answer. (ex. what made it a good experience? Was it easy to use? Expensive?)	How often do you discuss what you read?	Do you enjoy discussing what you read?	In general, do you struggle to meet your goals?	What genres do you like reading?	Rate your feelings of social fulfillment
5	Yes	Fatigue after work	More time?	No	No				It is as useful as long as you are reading. It doesn't really help bookish your mind on reading.	3	5	4	Sci-Fi, Post Sci, Philosophy, 5. Fantasy, Business	3
5	Yes	All of the above	Friends and family who read too	Yes	No	4	Goodreads	3	Free and could track what I'd read. Goodreads has let me to some unbelievable books that I would have never heard of otherwise. It is very easy to use, and it gives me a sense of accomplishment every time I rate a new book and add it to my count.	2	4	4	Fiction, fantasy most things 4 bar romance	2
5	Yes	Work, procrastination	I don't really think I can read more. Maybe having a less demanding job.	No	No		Goodreads	4	like to track what I've read, be able to see how much I've done this year			5	Fantasy, Science fiction, Fiction, biographies. In that order.	2
4	Yes	Other people in the house already have the TV on	Probably something boneheadedly obvious as keeping a book in the TV room	No	No		goodreads.com	4	the interface is clunky but I'd be able to follow others who have similar taste in books as me.			4	I find I need to alternate non-fiction & fiction or I get too entertained or too bored	4
3	Yes	Lack of discipline	A routine	No	No			5	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	3		3	Non-fiction	2
4	Yes	work	More free time and energy left at the end of the day	No	No		I use Google Play Books to read and Goodreads to keep track.	3	It's a recommendation engine and it's fine, but I rarely need to go looking for recommendations. My reading list seems infinitely long as it is.	5		5	2 non-fiction, sci-fi, humor	
5	Yes	work, school, social life	If I had more free time, or if it was easier for me to find new books that I enjoy.	No	No		goodreads.	3	It was easy to use, but ultimately paper feels better in my hands.	4	5	5	horror, fantasy, science fiction.	3
5	No	Children, mostly, but I read a lot regardless.	Babysitters	Yes	Yes	4	readgeek	3	Free library apps Zinio (magazines) and OverDrive (ebooks). Free Kindle app on Fire (lots of free classics etc.). Audible (audiobooks through Amazon. Costs 14.99 per mo. Too expensive. I think and the bookmarks don't work). The others I've mentioned I rarely use. These are the top four that I use.	2	5	2	All of them	3
4	Yes	When I would read, I go for easy entertainment of technology. It can also be hard to choose a book	Help choosing a book, and avoiding easy entertainment	No	No		Goodreads	4	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	2	4	4	Fantastic, fiction, humor, whatever 'nonregal' courts	4
4	Yes	Laziness (Being less lazy, having nothing else to do	No	No		Kindle	3	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	2	4	4	4 Fantasy, novels	4
4	Yes	Digital distractions	More discipline wrt to digital distractions. Maybe a reading buddy.	Yes	No	2	Goodreads	3	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	3	4	4	Modern and new fiction, 3 only the good stuff	5
4	Yes	School mostly	More free time and me choosing easier to read books	No	No		Ereader prestige	5	The book club I am part of is completely online and we utilize Discord with multiple text and voice chat channels in order to discuss books that we are reading individually, serve wider read-a-long books, and suggesting books to those looking for a new book to read. I also use the Goodreads website in order to catalog books I have read, am reading, and want to read. In addition, I utilize Goodreads to update my reading progress for the books I am currently reading and following what my friends and fellow book club members are reading.	2	5	3	Memor prose	3
5	Yes	Working full-time, family, and other social responsibilities.	Dedicating more time toward reading vs other activities.	Yes	No	3	Discord, Goodreads	5	Free library apps Zinio (magazines) and OverDrive (ebooks). Free Kindle app on Fire (lots of free classics etc.). Audible (audiobooks through Amazon. Costs 14.99 per mo. Too expensive. I think and the bookmarks don't work). The others I've mentioned I rarely use. These are the top four that I use.	3	5	5	fantasy, magical realism, historical fiction, LGBTQ+, sci-fi, young adult, 2 suspense/thriller, romance	3
5	Yes	Internet browsing	A time cap on my internet use	No	Yes	1	Kindle, Audible, Libby, OverDrive Library website, Zinio, Book Bazaar Reader.	4	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	4	2	2	Non-fiction, Self-help, 4. Nutrition, Psychology	4
5	Yes	End up using the time to watch to play on my phone, etc	Unsure. But I'd pay for it	No	No		Only the Kindle app	4	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	4	4	4	Fantasy, history, psychology, business, 3 assorted nonfiction	4
5	Yes	Unwired	More time/ discipline	No	No		Kindle	5	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	3	5	5	4 Fantasy, sci fi, history	4
5	Yes	Lack of time	make more money	No	No		Kindle	5	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	3	5	5	3 nonfiction	5
4	Yes	Lazy	Peer pressure	No	No		Good reads	4	Easy to use, free, compatible with multiple word formats	3	3	3	Nonfiction, noir, urban fantasy, Sci-Fi, British classics, between the wars, 5 fiction	2
5	Yes	School	More time	No	No		Goodreads	4	Easy to use and free. I enjoy the "reading challenge" as it motivates me to read more	4	5	5	2 Thrillers, classics, can't fit mystery, fantasy, sci fi, 4 historical fiction, self-help	3
5	Yes	too busy with PhD program to do as much recreational reading as I would like	prioritizing if setting aside time each day/week	No	Yes	5	n/a			4	5	5		2

Figure 3.7

Figure 3.7 is a screenshot of the results from the survey in a Google spreadsheet. I exported the data in this way because I wanted to see the answers to each question laid out clearly so that they were easy to go through. I also wanted to see how individual participants answered each question and to understand how those answers tied together. In Google Forms, the answers are laid out by question or by participant, but not both at the same time. Google Sheets allowed me to get a more holistic picture of who my participants were and what they struggled with. The colour-coding shows commonality between answers. After scanning through the answers, I did a lexical analysis so determine common themes across participants in the text-based questions. Based on my findings in that analysis, I put together some pie charts to illustrate those themes clearly. Certain words like “time” and “work” came up often in question like, “what keeps you from reading more?” and “what would help you to read more?”. I was able to track the number of times those (and other words), were listed using filtering tools offered by Google Sheets. When answers used alternative wording, and were unable to be picked up using filtering tools, I

colour-coded them manually. I also used colour-coding to indicate positive and negative tones and words in specific answers and the intensity of those emotions. This helped me identify the struggles participants were dealing with.

How important is reading to you?

209 responses

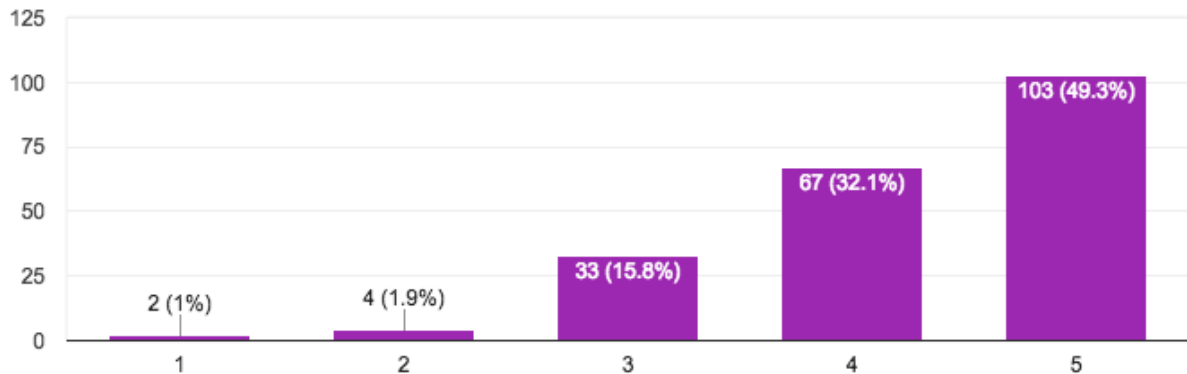


Figure 3.8

Results shown in Figure 3.8 show that reading is, in fact, very important to participants. This was not a surprise since I targeted book lovers and club members for the survey. The results, showing that 81.4% of participants thought reading was “important” or “very important” to them, just validated what I had assumed about these participants. These results suggest that there is a significant group of people who would be motivated to read more. The results to the following question, however, show a discrepancy which would suggest that, just because something is important to us, doesn’t mean we will be motivated to do it.

Do you wish you read more?

209 responses

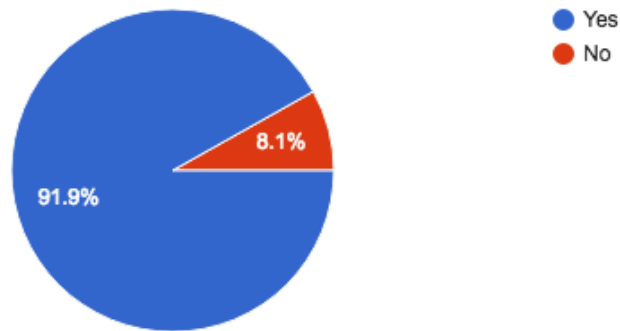


Figure 3.9 Title?

As mentioned above, the results of this question show that, even though reading was important to more than 80% of participants, it doesn't mean they will necessarily be motivated to follow through on it. 91.9% of participants said they wished they read more, despite most of them claiming reading is important to them. The cognitive dissonance, I argue, leads to negative emotions such as guilt which can in turn deter reading even more. The gap between the first and second questions showed me that a nuanced approach to solving this issue will be important.

What keeps you from reading more?

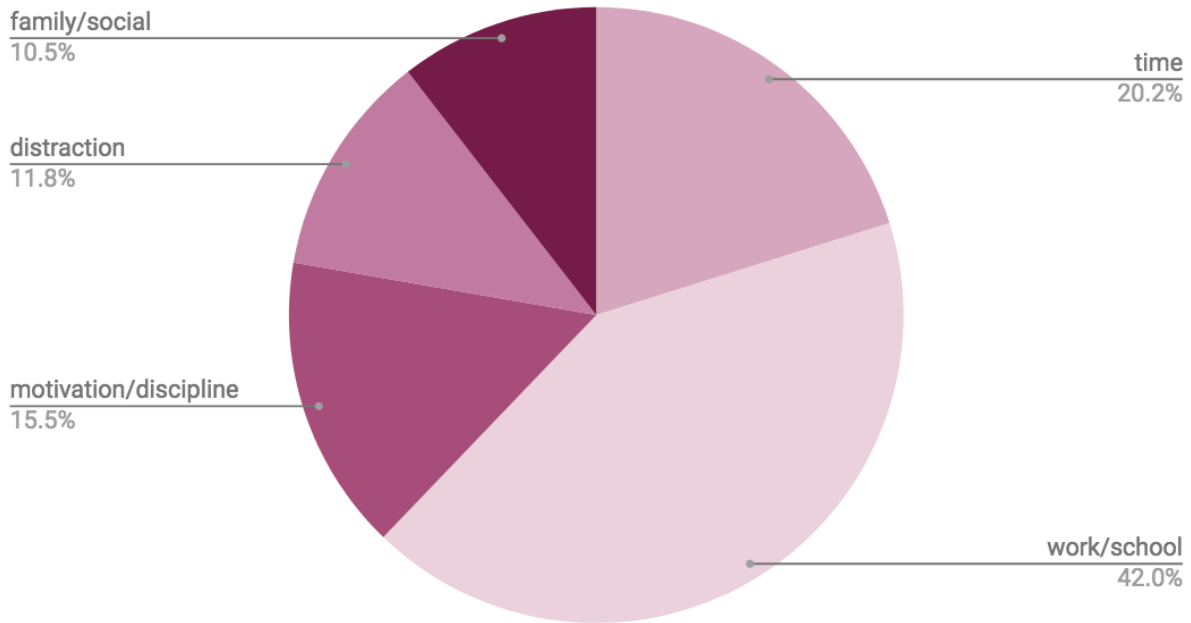


Figure 3.10

Figure 3.10 shows the results for question 3 in the survey. 62.2% of participants claimed that lack of time or work/school stopped them from reading more. I lump these two types of answers together because they are describing the same problem—some more specifically than others. Other reasons for not reading more included, lack of motivation/discipline, family/social commitments, and distractions (usually digital). This question and the following allowed me to understand the psychological blocks that people face when trying to build better reading habits.

What would help you to read more?

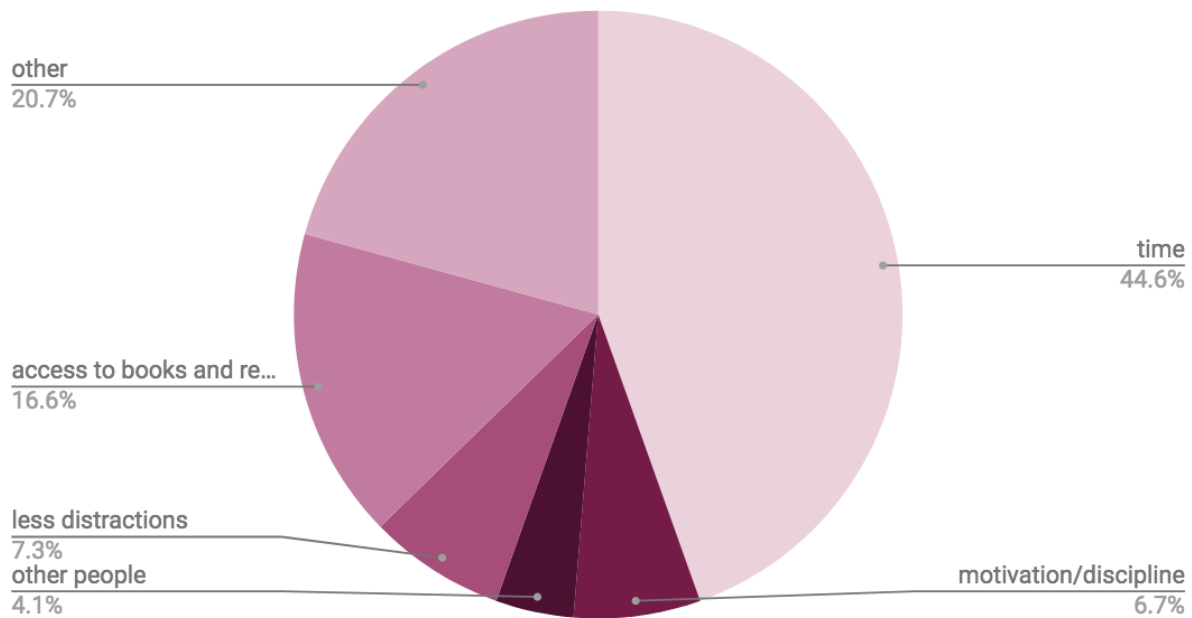


Figure 3.11

The results in *figure 3.11* match up fairly well with the result from *figure 3.10*. This is because they are basically the same question but asked in a more positive way. I wanted to make sure that the themes that came up in the first question were consistent so I could properly identify the psychological blocks and how to solve them. The results show that more time, more motivation and discipline, and less distraction would help people read more.

Are you currently in a book club?

208 responses

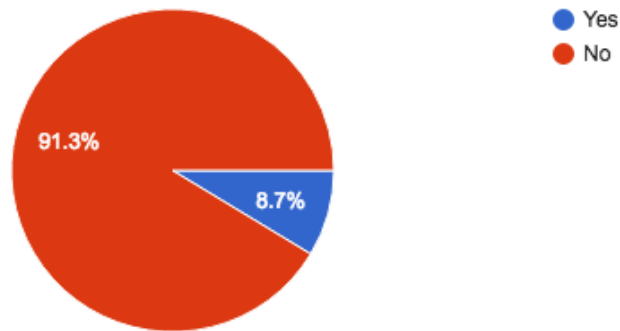


Figure 3.12

Figure 3.12 shows that 91% of people are not currently in a book club. I can only assume this is because there is a relatively high barrier to entry for being in a book club. People have to find and be invited to a book club, or they have to start and then find people to be in their book club. In both instances, time and effort is required and neither is something people want to spend.

Have you previously been in a book club?

209 responses

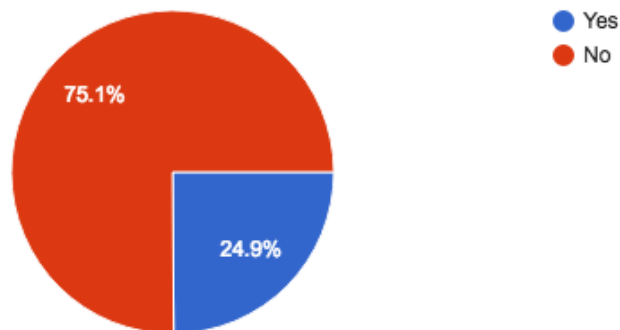


Figure 3.13

Results from figure 3.13 show that only 25% of participants had previously been in a book club. Again, this low number can probably be explained by a high barrier to entry for being in a book club. It's worth noting, however, that 25% is higher than the 9% of participants currently in a book club. This could be because the 25% who has previously been in a book club had a bad experience. More on this is figure 3.14.

If you've been in a book club, how would you rate your experience?

83 responses

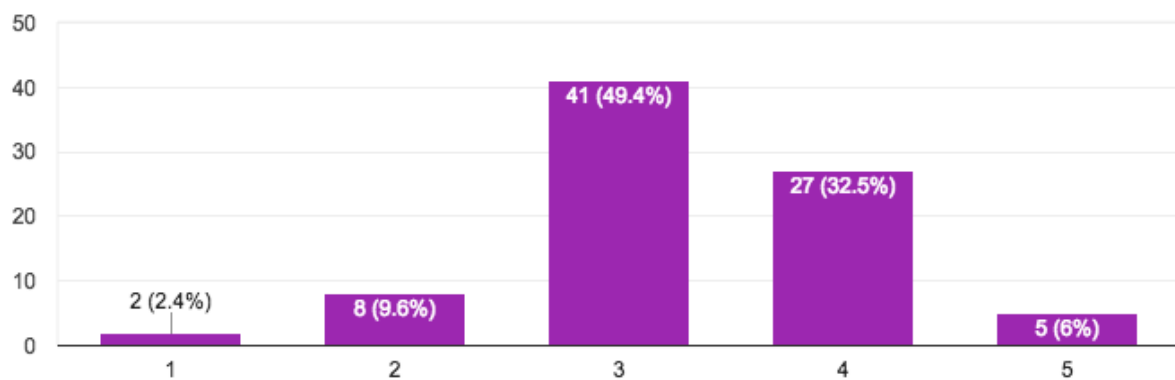


Figure 3.14

In Figure 3.14, we can see that the majority (49%) of people who had previously been in a book club rated their experience a 3 out of 5, with 5 being 'Fantastic' and 1 being 'Terrible'. This might explain why fewer people are currently in a book than people who were previously in a book club. There is still a lot to learn about why people leave book clubs and what makes them stay.

Have you ever used an app or an online tool related to reading?

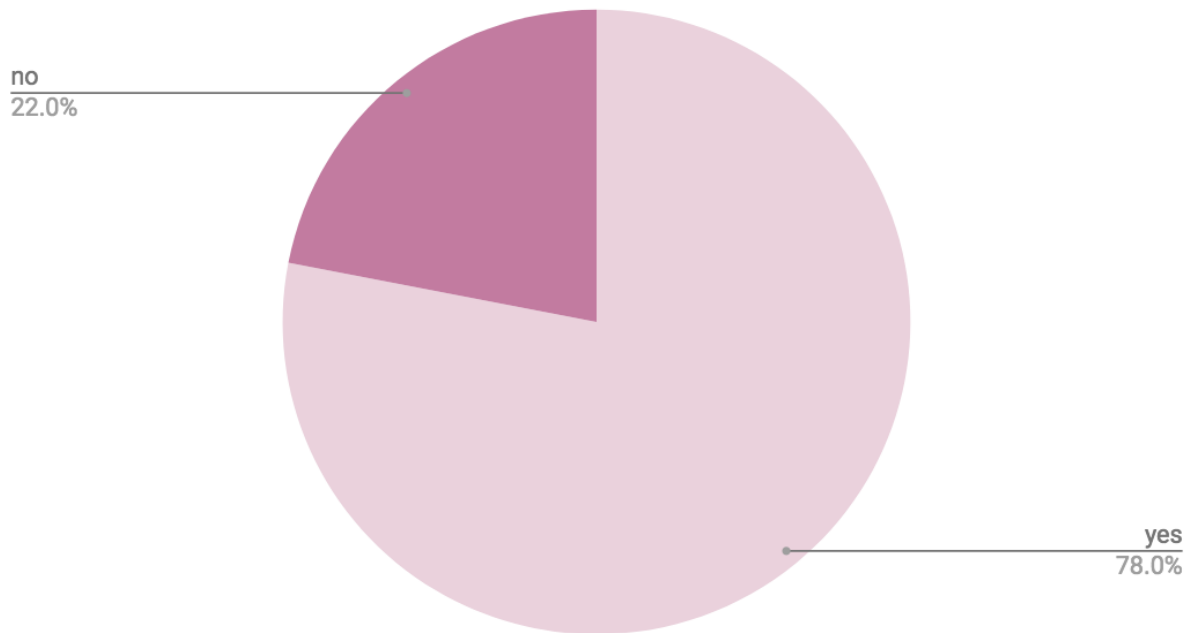


Figure 3.15

Moving on to figure 3.15, we can see that 78% of participants had used a digital tool to help them read more. I used the wording “digital tool” because I wanted to understand all the different types of technology people were using, not just apps.

If so, what was it called?

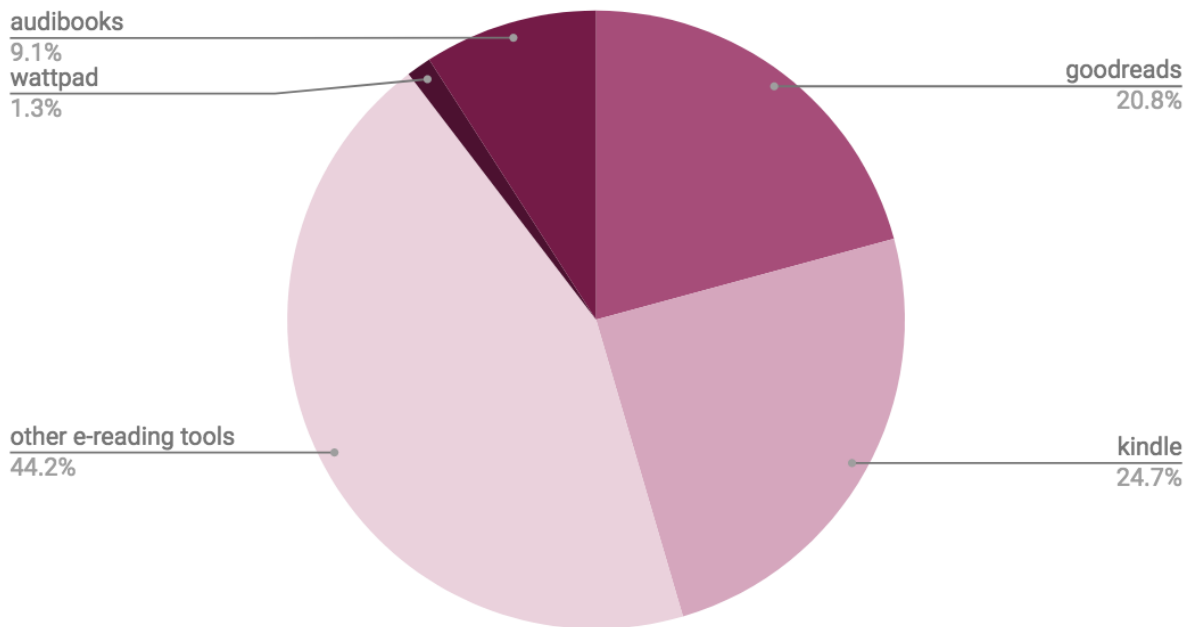


Figure 3.15

When asked to identify which digital tools they were using, participants mentioned e-readers, like Kindle, audiobook players, like Audible, and the reading app called Goodreads. I was surprised to see how many responses had to do with the reading medium—audiobooks and e-reading—rather than apps to help motivate people to read more. When people thought of “tool”, they thought about the way in which they read, and not something to support reading. To me, this shows that people are trying to leverage technology to create better reading habits, but not in the ways I thought. Only the 1% of participants who used Wattpad (a user-generated storytelling platform) were using a tool that promoted social reading.

If you've used an online tool related to reading, how would you rate your experience?

144 responses

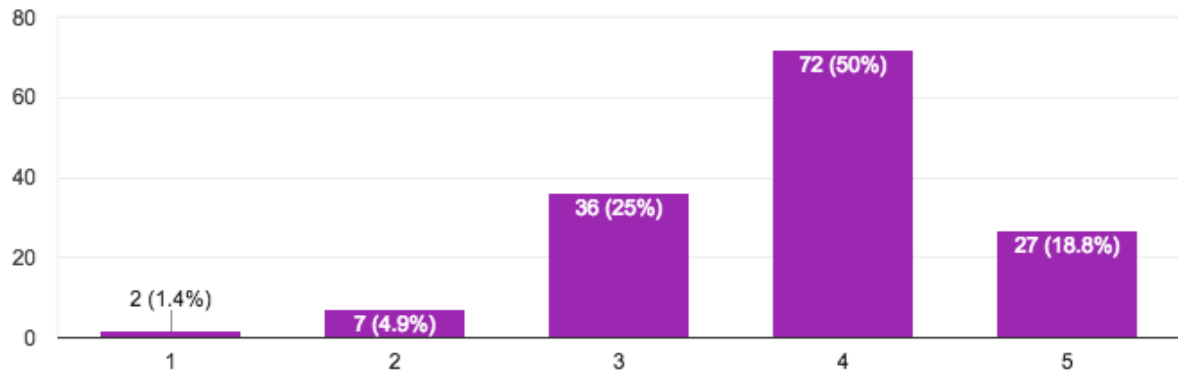


Figure 3.16

Figure 3.16 shows that the majority (50%) of participants rated their experience with digital tool a 4 out of 5, with 5 being 'Fantastic' and 1 being 'Awful'. While 4 is not bad in this case, it still isn't a perfect rating, and the next largest group (25%) of participants rated their experience as neutral. It is clear that participants are trying to use digital tools, but are not altogether satisfied with their outcomes.

Please elaborate on your answer

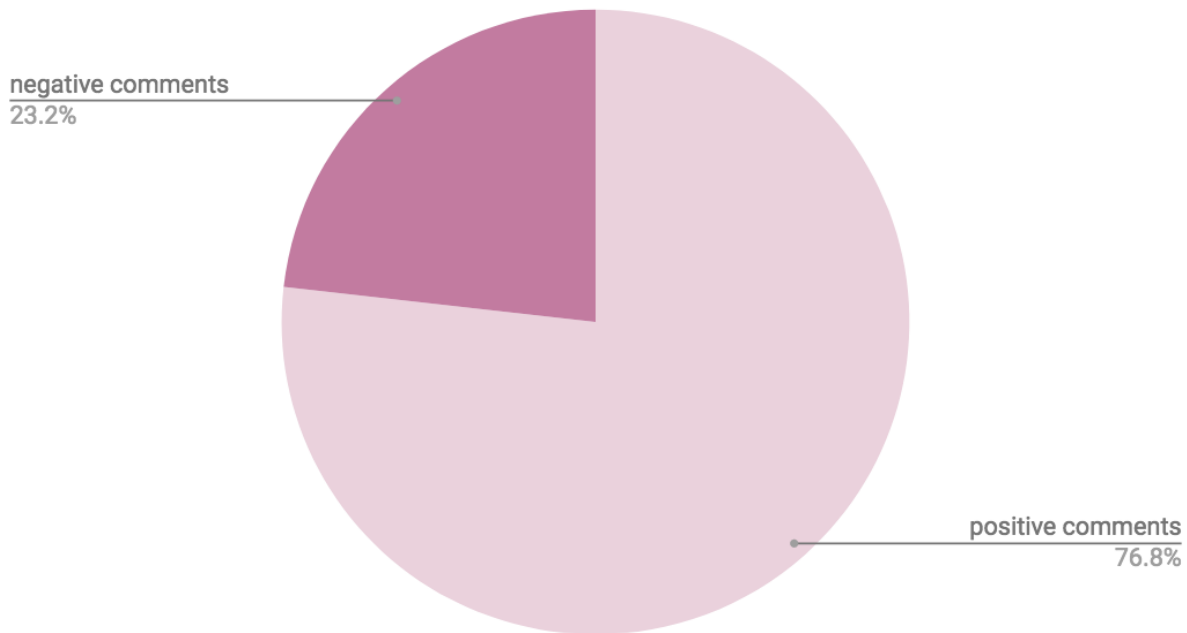


Figure 3.17

Figure 3.17 shows the percentage of participants who said negative and positive comments about the digital tools they have used. 23% of participants had negative to share about the digital tools they had used. Even though most comments were positive, the negative comments were helpful to me in figuring out what is currently not working for customers. For example, Participant 2 “[Goodreads] is useful as long as you are reading. It doesn't really help boosting your morale on reading”. This response is an interesting comment which related to accountability and how it is hard to cultivate on most reading apps. A more positive participant 17 said: “The book club I am part of is completely online and we utilize Discord with multiple text and voice chat channels in order to discuss books that we are reading. [...] In addition, I utilize Goodreads to update my reading progress for the books I am currently reading and following what my friends and fellow book club members are reading”. This participant was using two separate tools to achieve the same outcome as a book club app which would allow for discussions as well as sharing of book reviews and recommendations. Participant 105 said of

Goodreads: “I enjoyed being able to see recommended books and see what friends are reading and see their reviews, sort of like a book club I guess, less personal though, which I guess is a negative”. This comment speaks directly to a lack of social reading on mainstream reading apps—a lack which could be filled by my digital tool.

Desire to discuss vs actually discussing what you read

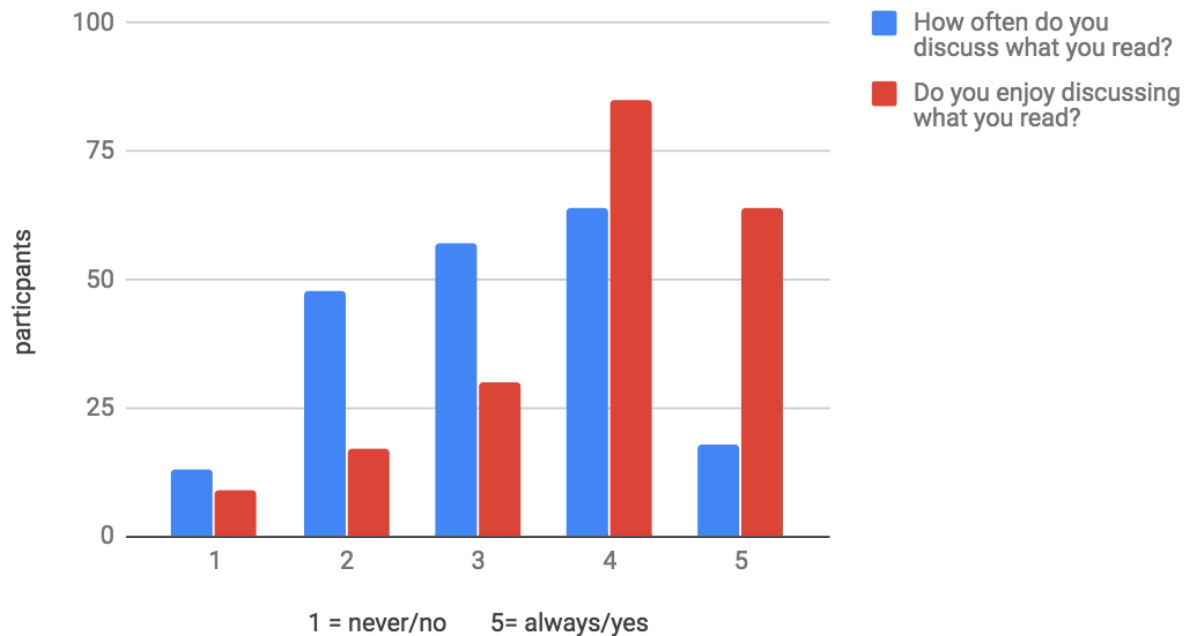


Figure 3.18

Figure 3.18 shows the discrepancy between the extent to which participants enjoy discussing what they read and the frequency with which they actually do it. This was an important finding to illustrate that people have a desire for social reading and a lack of opportunity to partake in it. In other words, this discrepancy underscored a problem that could be solved by my digital tool

Rate your feelings of social fulfillment

204 responses

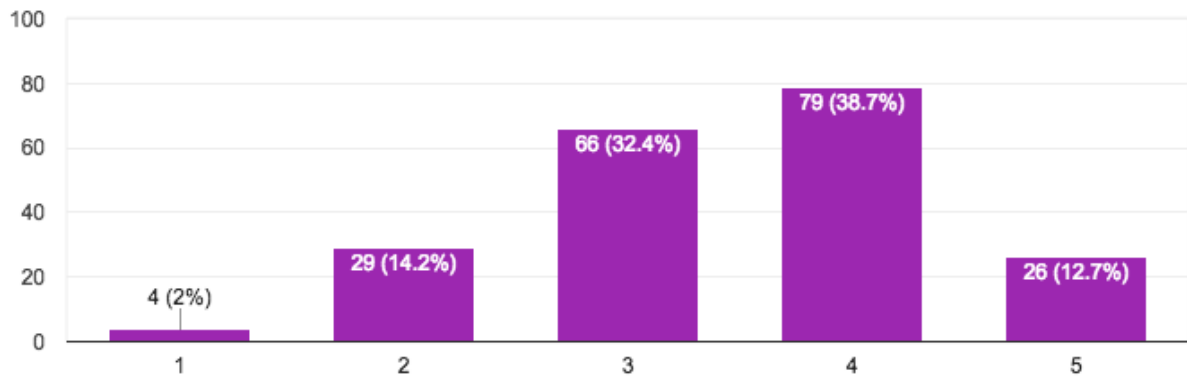


Figure 3.19

The results in figure 3.19 show that the majority (38%) of participants rated their feelings of social fulfillment a 4 out of 5, with 5 being 'Very fulfilled' and 1 being 'Unfulfilled'. This was another way to gauge the problem of people not participating on social reading activities. According to these results, participants are fairly fulfilled in the social lives. This, however, doesn't speak to their social fulfillment in their reading lives.

In general, do you struggle to meet your goals?

206 responses

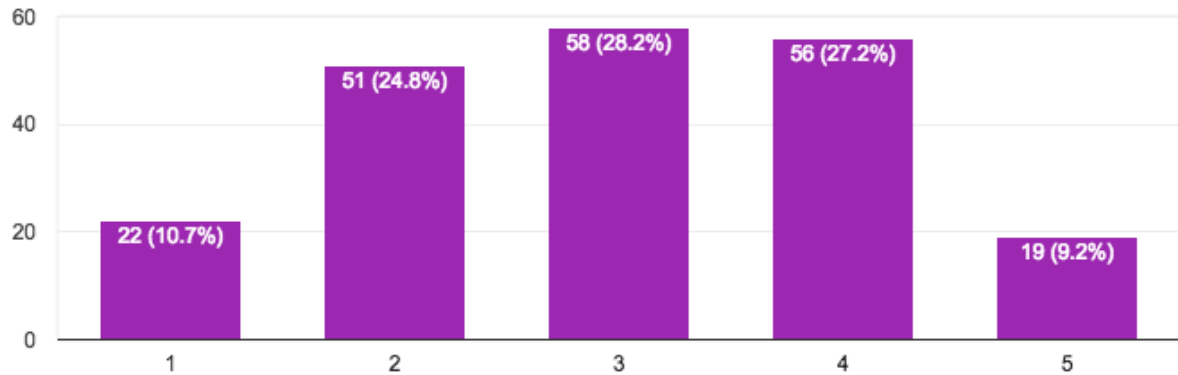


Figure 3.10

In figure 3.20, results show that people are evenly separated in how good they are at meeting their own goals. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being 'Always' and 1 being 'Never'. The majority (28%) of participants were neutral on whether they struggled to meet their goals. I was surprised by the answers to this question, considering 91% of participants said they wished they read more, meaning they have not met their reading goals.

3.5.2 Results Discussion

The majority of participants attributed not reading more to lack of time, lack of discipline/motivation, and too many distractions. When it came to what participants thought would help them read more, the majority said, "more time", "more motivation", "less distraction" I am arguing that social reading provides a) the ongoing occasion, b) the motivation, and c) the focus participants are lacking.

Reading, like anything else, is a habit. In order for a habit to form, it needs to be incorporated into a routine which can take time. This explains why most participants said they lacked time to read regularly. Social reading can provide the structure/routine, through regularly

scheduled and ongoing meetings, for participants to develop a reading habit. Once a routine is formed, participants can organize their time accordingly to cultivate the habitual reading behaviour.

A smaller, but still significant portion of participants viewed a lack of motivation and discipline as the core reason for why they didn't read more. Though they might have the time and ability, these participants struggled to motivate themselves to read for self-betterment. Luckily, social reading, through accountability to other people, can motivate participants to read more. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of social facilitation, whereby people are more likely to do something if they are in the presence of others. These participants would fall into Gretchen Rubin's "Upholder" tendency, meaning they need external expectations—in this case, the expectations of their club's members—to motivate them (Rubin, 2017).

Another group of participants were wary of the distractions in their lives, specifically technology and social media, as the main reason for not reading more. They acknowledged their lack of self-control around the internet and social media was the main reason for why they don't read more for personal fulfillment. Now, given that I want to develop a digital solution, there is a risk that it would be considered to be another type of digital distraction which would, in turn, keep people from forming positive reading habits. I believe that, rather than contributing to more distraction, this digital tool can curb other forms of digital distraction which are not as enriching or socially fulfilling.

There was a small group (about 4.1%) who brought up the need for relationships or other people to help them read more. This group was of particular interest as they articulated the problem in a way that speaks directly to social reading, and the lack thereof. These participants, few as there were, were aware of the lack of social reading in their lives. They identified as a possible solution for bad reading habits but still haven't made any changes in their own lives to create more social reading.

A final, noteworthy group cited lack of access to books as a deterrent for reading more for self-betterment. Whether it was a lack of access to actual books or just not knowing what to read, social reading can be a solution. A tool that promotes social reading inevitably promotes relationships and these relationships can create access to books through recommendations and book lending. This is just another example of how social reading can make a difference in people's reading lives, regardless of what barriers stand in the way.

Throughout the results analysis, I was able to identify an unmet market need for a reading tool which promotes social reading and, consequently, positive reading habits through accountability. In order for a tool like this to be adopted easily, it will need to be in digital form. Results show that most existing book clubs have a high barrier to entry, which prevents people from joining them. A digital tool which places people in book clubs would reduce the friction involved in being in a book club, and connect users based on common interests, not just location.

4. LITERALLY

My research, through the literature review and the customer survey, helped shape a concept for an app which would place people in book clubs based on their reading-related interests. Much like a dating app, it would collect data on its users when they sign up, including their favourite books, genres they like, their age, availability, and ideal size of book club. The tool, using algorithms, would then place each user in a book club based on their demands; it will even choose a convenient location to meet. The goal of the app is to promote reading for self-betterment through habit forming. The premise is simple: being accountable to a group helps people cultivate a routine of repeated behaviour. In this case, the behaviour is reading for pleasure and self-betterment.

4.1 Competitive analysis

Following the breakdown of results, I did a preliminary competitive analysis based on data collected about what digital reading tools participants were using. I also did research and found other book club apps, namely, Book Movement, Bookship, and Novellic. Interestingly, these apps did not appear to be at all popular among survey participants. Virtually none of the 200+ participant used any of the apps I had identified as direct competitors. Instead, they used what I identified as indirect competitors; those who solve the same problem, “I wish I read more,” but in a different way.

Direct competitors: solving same problem same way

1. Book Club by BookMovement
2. Novellic - Builds Book Club Communities On- And Offline with Meetup-Like App

Indirect competitors: solving same problem different way

1. GoodReads
2. Audible: audiobooks
3. E-readers: Kindle, Kobo

Book Club by Bookmovement

BookMovement started as a website for book clubs to register and keep track of their books and meetings. Eventually, they developed an app to allow their users to navigate their services more efficiently. These services include: scheduling for meetings, meeting reminders, tracking books the club has read, tracks reviews of books, allows members to vote on which book they want to read next, shows top books being read by other clubs as well as book sales. It is safe to say that BookMovement has captured a huge market of book lovers who are already part of book clubs. This service helps them keep their book clubs organized and this is a great tool for existing book clubs. In fact, interviews with book club members have shown that a tool for helping organize their clubs would improve their experience significantly. When it comes to the non-club member audience, I think my product is uniquely positioned to meet their specific needs. So far, there is no existing product which places people in book clubs, who aren't already in book clubs (the non-members).

Considering they have approximately 43,000 clubs, each with 10 members, BookMovement has a significant user base to which they can advertise. BookMovement also boasts a user-base that reads much more than the average American; 36 books/year compared to 5 books/year, that are likely to buy the books they read (60%), and that are 98% likely to recommend a book they've read and enjoyed to a friend. By tapping into an audience that reads more than the average person, BookMovement has been able to capture the attention of major publishers who want to sell to that same target audience. This has led to some important partnerships for BookMovement. They have dominated the current book club member audience. This means that they are the primary tool being used by existing book clubs which makes it harder to convince people to use a new digital tool. They were the first book club app so they have credibility, novelty, experience, and popularity as competitive advantages

This app is only available on iOS devices. If I were to offer a product that was cross-compatible with Android and other, non-Apple-based phones, it would be in a better position to

reach a larger audience. Not only that, but the app doesn't offer a solution for people who aren't already in a book club. My product would help people get started by placing them in a book club based on common interests.

Novellic

The Novellic app acts as a database for organizing book clubs online, and in person. It gives the opportunity to create, find, and manage book clubs. The app also offers a means to buying books whether online or physical copies, with one component of being an online bookstore with links to iBooks, and Amazon. The app offers book clubs to users, but does not facilitate in the joining of the book club, nor does it link users with people of similar interests—it is more work for the customer. Novellic is catered specifically to people who are seeking to become members of book clubs, and as an end goal, the target market of people looking for book clubs is the same, however, I think my product is uniquely positioned to meet specific needs. So far, there is no existing product which places people in book clubs. The target market is more generalized for this product, although similar. Not to mention, this app is only available on iOS devices. If I were to offer a product that was compatible with android and other, non-apple phone, I would be in a better position to reach a larger audience.

4.1.3 Indirect competitors and Identifying gaps in the market

Throughout my competitive analysis, I learned that direct competitors were reaching only a small audience and that none of my participants used any similar products to Literally. In order to better position my product, I needed to understand why these apps were not being adopted.

After learning more about these direct competitors, it became clear that they were mostly focused on specific segments, specifically, current book club members. This finding clarified why my participants, who for the most part was not in book clubs, did not use any of the book club apps on the market.

With that being said, the customer discover survey still showed that 78% of participants used a digital tool related to reading. These represented my indirect competitors- or, those who

are solving the same problem, but in a different way. The competitive analysis revealed that these alternative solutions, like Goodreads, Audible, and e-readers, are based on the premise that reading is a solitary act. These reading tools do not allow for relationships to be formed and therefore miss out on the motivational power of accountability through social reading. In fact, GoodReads has been condemned numerous times by users for imposing restrictive guidelines on what users can talk about in forums (Miller, 2013). This shows that existing solutions maybe be deficient in areas related to user experience as they can be institutional and threaten freedom of expression.

Participants from the customer discovery survey also shared some thoughts on these products. Participant 2 said: “[Goodreads] is useful as long as you are reading. It doesn't really help boosting your morale on reading.” and participant 11: “it’s nice to be able to follow others [on Goodreads] who have similar taste in books as me.” The latter comment may seem positive, but it underscores the one-sidedness of Goodreads, where users can follow but not really interact with one another. Participant 105 articulates this problem clearly: “I enjoyed being able to see recommended books and see what friends are reading and see their reviews, sort of like a book club I guess, less personal though, which I guess is a negative.”

4.2 Product development and Coding

4.2.1 Product Development

With new data to support my concept of a book club app, I got started on the product design. First, I created some wireframes on paper to jot down some initial ideas. Next, I translated those hand-drawn wireframes to digital format using a free online platform called wireframe.cc. Once those wireframes were set up and looked good, I started recreating my ideas using an online software called Proto.io. Proto.io allowed me to import photos, logos, and designs while also creating most of the UI myself in the software. Most importantly though, it allowed me to create multiple screens that interact with each other. From there, I continued

building out more screens with different types of interactions which I believed would be most used.

Wireframes

Throughout the wireframing process, I was inspired by the design of the major social media apps as well as some lesser known apps. I wanted to make use of industry “best practices, and standardized codes” instead of trying to “reinvent the wheel” (Toth, 2017). It was important to me that the app be intuitive to a user and so I borrowed UI conventions popularized and well-tested by Facebook and Instagram. Specifically, I went for an icon-based bottom navigation bar with well-known icons like Instagram has, a profile with a sliding bar to show both profile information and personal feed like Facebook has, and a sleek, minimal sign-up/sign-in screen which is common across many apps.

The goal of the start-up screens was to create a seamless experience with as little friction as possible. This is important for the first screen sign it sets the precedent for the rest of the user experience in the app. In addition to a straightforward UI, the first screen also showcases your brand and grab users’ attention. Nora Toth of *UX Studio* describes this balance as adding “some playfulness and emotionally appealing quality to our design without risking usability and bullet-proof design guidelines” (UX Studio, 2017). Easier said than done, I realized. Despite their apparent simplicity, the first screens were actually some of the trickiest to design. I tried to include lots of white space and a gradient background to draw the eye to the focal point of the screen, the sign-up fields. Soft shapes also appear on these screens because they are easier on the eye and come across as sleeker than hard edges. These soft edges are carried over into some aspects of the apps main UI, but I also transition to hard edges to give the app a more formal appearance. Until I can do AB testing on the shapes, I am happy with how they look.

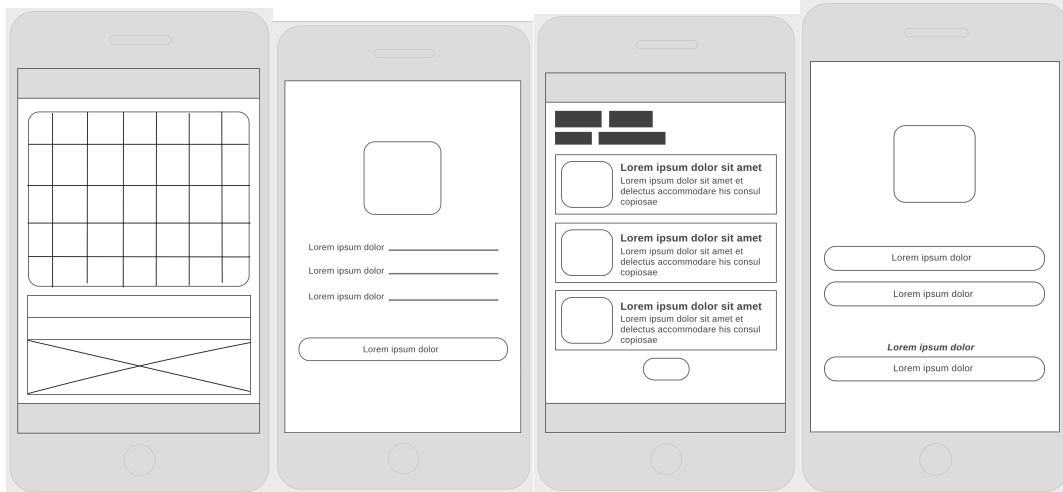


Figure 4. 1 - Wireframes of Literally made in wireframe.cc

Prototype

After the wireframing, I started converting my ideas into a working prototype via Proto.io. This software allowed me to bring my designs to life, literally, through interaction. During this step, I played with colour images to really make the UI compelling for users. While creating interactions between my screens, I was able to learn where certain icons should go and how to organize a page using colour and text. An eye-tracking study of 232 users done by the Nielsen Norman Group shows that people's eyes tend to scan a page in an 'F' shape (Nielsen, 2006). I kept this eye-tracking pattern in mind in my placement of white space, images, and icons. In a later, longitudinal study, results showed other eye-tracking patterns were emerging as users became more comfortable with digital technology. These included the cake pattern, the spotted pattern, and the marking pattern which is especially common among mobile users. In this pattern, users' "eyes focused in one place as the mouse scrolls or finger swipes the page" similar to a dancer who is spotting during a spin (Pernice, 2017). Ultimately, the best design prevents patterned scanning, but until I can do more testing to figure out the best design, wanted to include common patterns to capture the attention of as many users as possible.

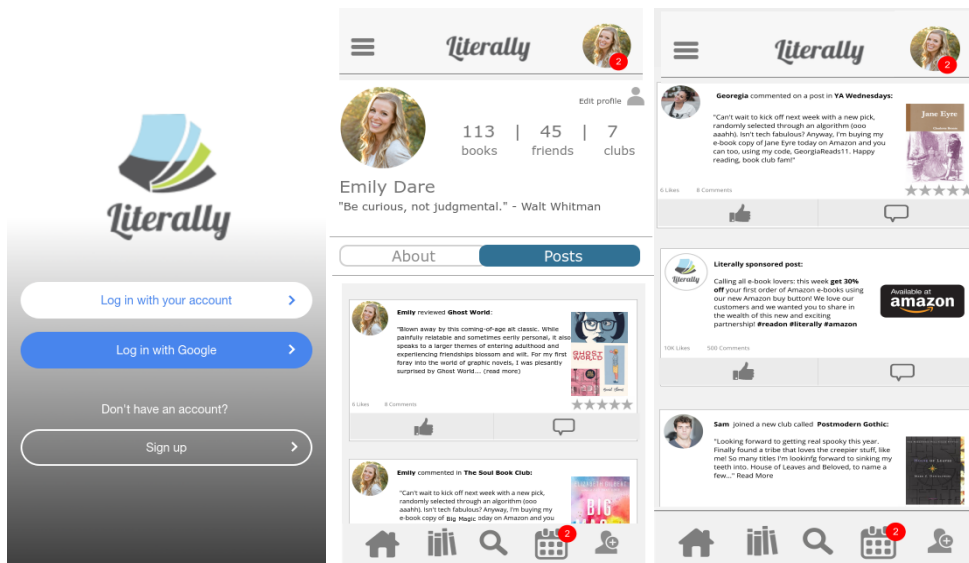


Figure 4.2 - Stills of Literally prototype on Proto.io

4.2.3 Coding Document (Beale, 2017)

In order to be able to use push notifications when the user gets a message or has a meeting reminder, *Literally* will have to be developed as a native app. Why push notifications? “Only mobile apps give you the opportunity to send well timed push notifications to re-engage users”, that’s why (Saccomani, *Mobiloud*). Another reason is because it’s more difficult to block ads on mobile compared to a web browser where many people have ad blockers (Saccomani, *Mobiloud*). Finally, since this is an app that we predict people will use frequently, it makes sense to have it easily accessible via portable mobile device.

While it’s costlier to build a native app, *Literally* needs to have access to phone sensors (specifically camera and location services) and in order to have unrestricted access to those sensors, the app needs to be native. Another reason for choosing native *Literally* needs to have a consistent user interface across the app. A consistent UI will contribute to better user experience because it gives the app a more legitimate feel. Not only are they fast and easily accessible, native apps are also easy to monetize. We rely on an in-app payment system for membership upgrades and this is easier to accomplish via native app. The in-app chat feature is also a main reason for choosing native since that feature isn’t easily developed in a hybrid app.

In 2017, “99.6% of all smartphones run on either iOS or Android.” (Klubnikin, 2017).

Xamarin is one of the best ways to develop an app for both Android and iOS according to Klubnikin (2017), since it “allows developers to reuse code and simplifies the process of creating dynamic layouts in iOS.” (Klubnikin, 2017) Since Xamarin is a cross-platform system, it saves time and money during the development period. Instead of coding the app for each operating system, Xamarin lets developers code both at once.

To be on the same level as major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, *Literally* will need to have an asynchronous protocol. This means that users will see an auto-updated timeline every time they open the app or hit the home button. The asynchronous protocol is also absolutely necessary for an in-app chat feature, which I’d like to include. Without it, users would have to pull to refresh or hit a button to access incoming messages in their chat. When it comes to coding languages, MEAN rather than LAMP stack development would be a better choice when building *Literally*. With MEAN stack, JavaScript is used for both front and back end. This makes programming easier and more streamlined for a development team.

Context Diagram

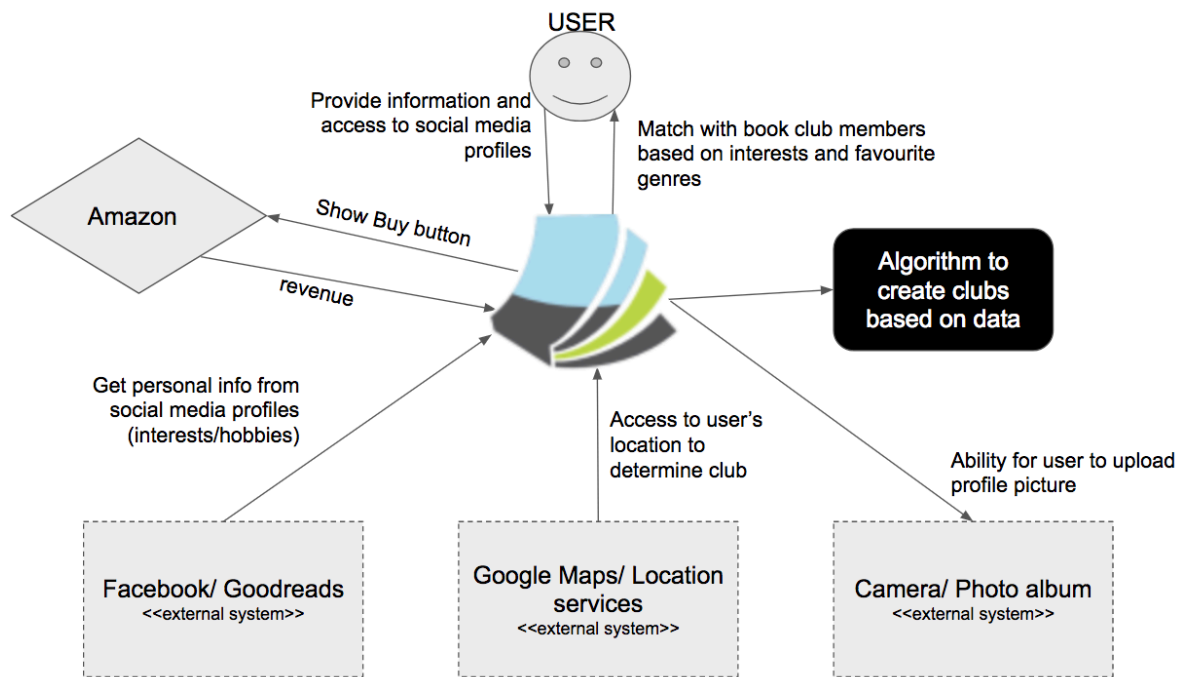


Figure 4.3 - Context Diagram for Literally app

4.3 Marketing & Defining the customers

4.3.1 Defining the Brand Persona

Vision statement

Since its inception in 2016, Literally has always been about helping people and communities thrive using one secret weapon: reading.

Unique value proposition

Literally is the only book club app that uses algorithms to match users based on common interest and schedules. It is the easiest way to manage the internal structure and day-to-day administration of your book club.

Positioning statement

For the person who wants to improve their reading habits, Literally is a convenient way to find accountability through a book club. But unlike other book clubs, Literally matches you with club

members using algorithms which track your interests, schedule, and location for the best results.

Elevator Pitch

People don't read as much as they used to. In fact, in 2016, reading rates were at a 3-decade low. The good news? Surveys have found that 91% of people wish they read more but 62% felt like they were too busy to do so. In short, there's a hunger for a product that will build healthy reading habits and save people time. Armed with the theory of social facilitation—the idea that you're more likely to do something in the presence of others—Literally is tackling the issue of bad reading habits with an age-old solution, updated with a 2018 look: the book club. In the next 12 months, our team is going to be launching an app which puts users in book clubs based on their common interests, schedules, and locations.

4.3.2 Marketing Strategy

Distribution of the service

This book club-making service is being distributed through a free app, available in the Apple App Store. Downloading the app and providing your personal information like name, age, location, interests, favourite book genres, schedule, etc., is the only way to actually gain access to the service.

Social media strategy

the strategy for social media to share user experiences as much as possible while creating brand love and awareness across all the primary platforms. We want our socials to reflect our brand personality but not be too navel gazing when it comes to content and narrative. In our social media story, our customers are the heroes, not us.

Beauty-based platforms like Instagram are great for sharing compelling images and beautiful graphics. They're not so good at selling services, like book club apps. Instagram will house the content related to our user's stories. We want to share the success they've had in

finding a book club and building better reading habits. We want this page to be about our users, not about us.

In a group-centric platform like Facebook, it makes more sense to talk about some of the apps best group-management features. Keeping in mind all the trigger-happy fingers that scroll through timelines at light-speed, we want to make sure we're posting compelling organic content for our followers. We understand that there is a rich and vibrant community of readers online already so we're willing to post content from these third-party sites if it'll keep our followers engaged. This also shows that we as a brand have a perspective that reaches beyond ourselves. It says that we're relevant and have our finger on the pulse.

Twitter is where we can take more risks and let our personality shine through. This might be the place to test out different voices and take risks with our tone and style. Twitter is also a great platform for reaching new and existing users as well as prospects who are curious about who we are. We can learn a lot from what people tweet at us and we intent to that this feedback very seriously.

Advertising strategy

Advertising should be minimal with targeted ads reaching prospects no more than twice a week on social media. This means banner and sidebar ads on Facebook and timeline ads on Instagram. The target market for these ads is people in urban areas of Canada and the United States between the ages of 18 and 45, in English only, to start.

4.3.3 Defining the Customers

1. No time, too busy

The "I don't have time" user is typically the biggest of the customer segments. While this range is large in this category is large (some have work and family commitments while others have school and social commitments), the commonality that unites this type of customer is that they want to read more for personal development, but lack the time. The "I don't have time" user is an on-the-go person who might over-commit themselves and often struggles to manage their

hectic schedule. This group might be tech savvy on account of their hunger for efficiency. They are the type of consumer that wants to remove the friction from all their transactions.

The psychological block for this segment is clearly illustrated in survey participants' responses. Participant 40 says: "I'm a student - not enough time to read outside of classes" while Participant 89 laments: "by the time I get home, I do all the other things I need to do and rarely have time to read". Participant 109 describes their academic commitments: "work, PhD studies, too tired out from everything and can't keep my eyes open to finish a chapter" So how would Literally solve their unique problem? By placing in book clubs, participants are forced to carve out time in their busy schedules for reading. Since they are made to feel accountable to the other club members, they are more likely to reorganize their time in order to reach their reading goals. Over time, this meeting commitment will lead to the formation of a reading routine that fits into any lifestyle, regardless of time constraints.

2. Unmotivated and undisciplined

The second identified segment understands that better motivation and discipline will help them to read more. The missing psychological block for them is finding a way to cultivate motivation and discipline. Participant 206 cited: "Procrastination, Lack of Discipline, Draining of Interest" while participant 214 wished they had more: "Commitment to read". Participant 26 wished they could: "prioritizing it [and set it] aside time each day/week" and participant 46 shared in this feeling citing: "Poor planning" as the reason for not reading more.

Similar to the "lack of time" segment, the "lack of motivation" issue can be remedied through the cultivation and maintenance of a reading habit. True, habits take motivation and discipline to form, but that is where social reading can help. Members of this segment will be able to benefit from the accountability they will feel to the club and this will drive their motivation to read.

3. Distracted by social media and technology

The third customer segment includes all the people who feel like distraction is the biggest deterrent to reading more. Whether it is social media, the internet, video games, or other distractions, this group feels like they cannot focus on reading for self-betterment so long as they have distractions in their life. This is their unique psychological block. Some participants expressed this frustration with Participant 15 saying they wished they had “more discipline [with regard] to digital distractions”. Participant 18 and 38 cited: “Internet browsing” and “Phone addiction” as the main deterrents for reading for personal fulfillment. Similarly, participant 19 claimed that whenever they try to read, they “end up using the time to watch tv, play on my phone, etc.” These were just some of the comments discussing digital distraction in the survey.

As mentioned in the results analysis, there is a danger that another digital solution would contribute further to the digital distraction already plaguing this segment. I would argue that Literally would be able to shift the narrative around digital distractions. If users are able to leverage digital technology to form positive reading habits, this would help them better prioritize their free time and therefore spend less time on social media/the internet. Additionally, the distraction that occurs would hopefully be curbed by a sense of accountability users would have to their club to finish the assigned reading.

4. Needs external motivation

Another, smaller segment that emerged through customer discovery is the segment who craves external motivation in order to read more for personal fulfillment. This segment is self-aware enough to understand that accountability would help them read more, where other segments haven't realized this. This group has looked beyond the problem of wishing they read more, to a solution- other people helping to motivate them. For them, the psychological block is not having access to a “reading buddy” (Participant 15) or “reading partner” (Participant 125). Participant 24 put it more bluntly, saying that only “peer pressure” would help them to read more and participant 209 wished for “others around [them] who also read more”.

Like the other segments, the solution to this segment's psychological block is giving them what they want: external motivation. This external motivation would come directly from other club members' expectations and the accountability produced through social reading.

Additional Segments

Niche markets

As far as customer segments go, the niche user is probably the most nebulous. This is an eclectic type of person who is misunderstood and deeply passionate about very niche topics. As such, the niche user can sometimes feel disconnected from those around him who do not share his or her interests. For them, finding a community of people who he can relate to is the biggest motivation for downloading the app. If the niche user thinks they can find their tribe of yarn-bombers, postmodern gothics, or rare birders on *Literally*, they are sold. The trouble with this segment is that it's hard to nail down the demographics, like age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. Often, these types of passionate people keep their passions and quirks to themselves which only serves to isolate them more. If I can communicate to this group that *Literally* can help them find niche communities through reading, we've got them on the hook. This instinct to include the niche user in the customer segments comes from survey results about social fulfillment and desire to share when reading.

Book club members

This segment represents the potential customers who are currently already in book clubs. This is not the primary market I'll be marketing to, but it is definitely a secondary target market to keep in mind. In order for *Literally* to capture this audience, it is important to showcase a feature set which makes book club administration and management more efficient. The current club member's primary reason for using the app is to remove the cumbersome housekeeping from their book club and get back to what book clubs are all about: reading. This segment is probably in their early 30s to upwards of 60, and probably a female. For this

audience, the efficiency *Literally* offers is both the most important selling point and the hardest sell. Since she's a bit older, it will be trickier to convince her of the value the app can provide in terms of simplifying the book club process.

Amazon

True, this customer segment is almost comically specific, Amazon represents a larger target market for *Literally*: the partnership market. As a pseudo-social platform, *Literally* will have ample opportunity for advertising in the app. Additionally, being in the book market without actually selling any product means that there are lots of potential partnerships with book-sellers on the horizon. Amazon represents these book-sellers. If *Literally* can partner with a giant like Amazon, it's a win-win for both companies. Users like the convenience of buying on Amazon without leaving the app, and Amazon likes all the conversions made possible by our app.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Answering the research question

Following the survey results analysis and development of the prototype, it was time to revisit the research question: How might I develop a tool to help people read more? And what would an effective digital tool for promoting reading look like?

The answer, as it stands, is still evolving and will continue to evolve through continued consultation with potential users and customers. Understanding the unique needs and nuanced issues of the customer is key to creating a tool to promote better reading habits. I think understanding the interrelatedness between collaborative learning, social facilitation, internal and external motivation was important to first understanding and then trying to solve the issue. While lots of digital reading tools exist, none seem to have solved the issue that many users articulated- that they wished they read more. Certainly, these tools have worked well for users, but they all exist in the framework of solitary reading, instead of broadening the understanding of how reading could occur.

Once I unpacked the history of solitary reading, I was able to see how collaborative reading practices could be the key to helping people read more. The missing piece, it seemed, was accountability. It was found that book club members read significantly more than non-book club members and this can be attributed to the accountability derived from social reading. In order to form a habit, one has to be motivated to repeat a behaviour and this is not always easy to do. Feeling accountable to a group, in this case a book club, can help form a reading habit for members.

Through research, it became clear that most people do not belong to book clubs, likely because the barrier to entry is too high. People don't have time to find or form a book on their own. This is how the idea for *Literally* came to be. The digital tool to help people read more would help people find and join book clubs, based on favourite genres, so they didn't have to.

Hypothesis 1: Most people wish they read more

Answer: Yes, 91% of 200+ survey respondents said they wished they read more. This validated what I had assumed based on my own problem with developing a good reading habit.

Hypothesis 2: The reasons people do not read more have to do with accountability

Answer: Most survey respondents would attribute not reading more to lack of time or being too busy at work/school, lack of motivation, and too much distraction- not lack of accountability. With that being said, the *solution* to the identified problems, arguably, is accountability. Through research, I was able to understand accountability in terms of a solution, rather than as the issue. This reframing helped me see how accountability through social reading can solve all the deterrents to reading identified in the survey.

Hypothesis 3: Clubs improve productivity as well as social relationships

Answer: according to Triplett's theory of social facilitation, yes. Many participants cited lack of motivation or discipline as reason for not reading more. Being in a group setting can improve productivity and performance, so long as the task is simple. I also learned that people

in book clubs read more than people not in book clubs. This can be explained by the accountability produced by social reading activities that go on in a club.

4.4.2 Next Steps

The next steps will involve moving forward with a new prototype after significant user testing. Right now, the prototype shows only the user interface that users would see after joining the app and being matched to a book club. Going forward, I will develop the actual sign-up interface and create a portal for gathering users' information. Next, an algorithm for matching users based on the information they provide in the sign-up form will have to be integrated. Throughout these next steps, I intend to user test frequently to ensure each feature, button placement, and icon is working for users. Following user testing, the app will eventually be hard coded and moved out of the prototype phase. Gathering data through the sign-up page will be particularly important at this stage in order to build the user base needed to create clubs.

The more users who join the app and submit their information, the better the app can work to match users to the appropriate book clubs. Much like Tinder or other dating apps, Literally will be able to better match people if there is a large dataset of users to choose from. Slowly, as more users sign-up, clubs can begin to be more specific and niche. The key will be to find early adopters and get them to sign up and tell their friends. To reach these early adopters, I will return to the online literary communities I leveraged for the customer discovery survey and send them to a landing page where they can sign-up. After I have a sufficient number of applicants, I will then be able to match them based on their interests and favourite genres.

Another part of testing will be AB testing the logo, name, and branding. I have received positive feedback so far on the name but I intend to test this thoroughly.

4.4.3 Conclusion

As we continue to navigate this rapidly changing digital world, it is safe to say that our relationships to reading should be changed and shaped by our entrenchment in this technological landscape. Through a deeper understanding of book club culture, we can regain a

part of reading that was once lost and bring it into the present day using digital media. Creating a digital space where communities can form and talk about literature has the potential to be a catalyst for social change and literary movement that has been waiting to launch

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Appendix A: Consent Form

RYERSON UNIVERSITY Consent to Participate in Research

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

My name is Eleanor Beale. I am a graduate student at Ryerson University working with my faculty supervisor, Professor Jason Boyd, in the Masters of Digital Media Program. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns the use of digital tools for supporting reading.

WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO

You are being asked to voluntarily complete this online survey. It involves questions about your reading habits and experience using digital reading tools. It should take about 5-10 minutes to complete. In order for all of your answers to be collected you must go to the end of the survey and click 'submit survey'. This will demonstrate your full consent to participation.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study but you will have the choice to be entered in a draw to win an \$50 Chapters gift card. It is hoped that the research will help to uncover the ways digital tools can be helpful (or unhelpful) for encouraging positive reading habits

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU

Some of the survey questions may make you uncomfortable or upset or you may simply wish not to answer some questions. You are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or stop participating at any time by closing your browser. If you close your browser before getting to the end of the survey and do not confirm your consent to participate at the end of the survey by clicking the 'submit' button your information collected up to that point will not be used.

YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE ANONYMOUS

The survey is anonymous and as such will not be collecting information that will easily identify you, like your name or other unique identifiers. Although your Internet Protocol (IP) address can be tracked through the survey platform, the researcher/s will not be collecting this information. Your IP address may be observed only to ensure that one individual is not completing the survey multiple times.

HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE PROTECTED AND STORED

This survey uses Google Forms and under Google's privacy policy, it states that they may access survey responses if they so choose. If you would rather participate with an email or paper-based survey please contact the researchers.

To further protect your information, data stored by the researcher will be password protected and/or encrypted. Only the researcher/s named in this study will have access to the data as collected. Any future publications will include collective information (i.e., aggregate data). Your individual responses (i.e. raw data) will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

When the research is completed, the researcher will keep the data for up to 3 months after the study is over.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Participation in research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any point up to clicking the submit button at the end of the survey. However, because the survey is anonymous, once you click the submit button at the end of the survey the researchers will not be able to determine which survey answers belong to you so your information cannot be withdrawn after that point.

Please note, that by clicking submit at the end of the study you are providing your consent for participation. By consenting to participate you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at ebeale@ryerson.ca.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board at rebchair@ryerson.ca (416) 979-5042.

3.3.2 Survey Questions

https://docs.google.com/forms/u/1/d/1XOFTN4yThDRWpcy0ED-7yuXp6FFyncAkNIEs0HvSOwU/edit?usp=drive_web