

BookRapport

A Relationship Building App for Book Clubs and Bookstores

Research Document

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Research Statement

The purpose of this research was to explore the interest of book clubs and bookstores to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. I collected feedback on how book clubs run their meetings and obtain books, as well as asking bookstores about their experience hosting book clubs and what perks they offer to them. The goal of the app is to create a more enjoyable book club experience and increase sales and awareness for bookstores.

Online Survey Results for Book Club Members

Using Google Forms, an online survey tool, I contacted fourteen book club members or individuals interested in creating and/or joining a book club. I also gathered a sampling of different income levels, ages, types of communities in which they lived, educational levels, marital status, and whether they have children living at home. Results indicate a potential to create an app that will promote books, offer discounted titles at local bookstores, and connecting authors with book clubs for discussions.

Over 85% of participants are already members of a book club and over 78% meet monthly.

Over 65% of participants would like assistance with selecting reading selections.

Over 65% of participants would like a local source for book club selections at a discounted price.

Over 65% of participants would like to connect with authors to join book club discussions.

Gender: Female: 79% | Male: 21%

Age: 18-24: 7% | 25-34: 21% | 35-44: 43% | 45-54: 0% | 55-64: 14% | 65+: 7%

Marital status: Unmarried: 36% | Married: 50% | Divorced: 14%

Gross household annual income:

< \$20,000: 7%

\$20,000-\$34,999: 7%

\$35,000-\$49,999: 7%

\$50,000-\$74,999: 43%
\$75,000-\$99,999: 7%
\$100,000-\$149,999: 0%
\$150,000-\$199,999: 14%
\$200,000+: 14%

Highest education level:
Some college but no degree: 14%
Bachelor degree: 50%
Graduate degree: 36%

Have children < 18 living at home: Yes: 29% | No: 71%

Communities in which they live: City: 79% | Suburb: 21%

Face-to-Face Interview Results for Book Club Members

Interviewing three members of various demographics about their book club experiences revealed what they liked the most and least with their groups.

Assumed pain points were thought to be finding a central location to meet at a bookstore and assistance facilitating book club meetings. Although the respondents were open to the idea of meeting at a bookstore, meeting at members' homes worked fine for them. Moreover, they reported their book clubs moderated their discussions well without any assistance.

Those interviewed reported food and beverages are often served at meetings. Although snacks and drinks did not always relate to the reading selection, book club members said when they did, it made the meeting more personal and fun.

Book club members expressed interest in receiving book club recommendations from bookstores, publishers, authors, and even other book clubs. They shared little enthusiasm for interacting with publisher reps or other book clubs.

Two of the book club members were intrigued with connecting with authors to join their book club discussions, yet one member said when his book club did this in the past, it made members uncomfortable, as they didn't feel they could honestly share their opinions about the author's book.

All respondents expressed an interest in supporting local bookstores if reading selections were offered at a discount. Currently, book club members borrow books from the library, purchase online, or download to their e-reader or tablet. Two respondents stated they tended to borrow or download books to prevent collecting more clutter.

The three book club members liked the idea of an app that would allow them to check the date, time, and location of the next meeting; allow book club members to recommend and vote on reading selections; see upcoming reading selections; rate reading selections via an average of member votes; show a history of the titles the book club has read; send out notifications to all members or change in meeting details; and verifying if a reading selection is in stock at a local bookstore.

All respondents agreed if an app were available, they would find it helpful. Although two of those interviewed stated they would prefer using a website viewed on a desktop or laptop computer, they thought most book club members would prefer a mobile app used on a tablet or smartphone.

Online Survey Results for Bookstore Owners

Using Google Forms, an online survey tool, I contacted seven bookstore owners and received three completed surveys. I also gathered a sampling of bookstores with variations in physical size, gross sales, types of communities, and types of books offered. Results indicate a potential to create an app that will connect bookstores with book clubs, assist book clubs with making reading selections, increase sales, and connecting book clubs with authors.

100% of participants are interested in connecting with book clubs.

100% of participants are interested in assisting book clubs select reading selections.

Over 67% of participants have a meeting space in their bookstore for community groups to use.

Over 67% of participants have dedicated employees to coordinate with book clubs.

Over 67% of participants see a value in promoting book clubs in their bookstore.

Type of Bookstore: New Books Only: 33% | New & Used Books: 67%

Length of time in business: 4-5 years: 33% | 6-10 years: 33% | 16-20 years: 33%

Estimated size of bookstore:

790 square feet: 33%

2,000-2,999 square feet: 33%

6,000 square feet: 33%

Estimated gross annual sales:

\$250,000-\$499,999: 33%

\$540,000: 33%

\$1,000,000: 33%

Communities in which they live: City: 67% | Suburb: 33%

Face-to-Face Interview Results for Bookstore Owners

Interviewing two owners of various demographics about their bookstores revealed what potential benefits and obstacles they forecast in interacting with book clubs.

The initial assumption that bookstores would be eager to host book clubs in-store proved to be split. One bookstore owner liked having book clubs meet in his store, even though it did not impact sales in a large way, because it positioned his store as a community resource and a place to share thoughts, ideas, and a love of reading. The other bookstore owner only hosted two book clubs in her store--one meeting bi-monthly and the other monthly. More focused on book clubs generating sales, she indicated only a third of book club members purchased from her store in exchange for using her space for free.

All respondents indicated their book clubs discussed the book club selections. Both owners had one book club moderated by a bookstore employee. One owner also scheduled book club recommendation presentations to book clubs who met outside her store.

The bookstore owners shared most of their book clubs met monthly, although they did have a few who met bi-monthly or quarterly. One owner mentioned a few of her book clubs took summers off. The demographics for the book clubs in a suburban community tended to be older, 50 and over, whereas the book clubs in the city skewed more broadly in the late 20s to mid 50s range.

Both owners reported their book clubs did serve food and beverages, although they didn't relate to the book most of the time. However, the cookbook book club prepared recipes from the book club selection and shared the dishes at their meeting.

Owners interviewed said there had not been a need in the past to contact book clubs about a cancellation or change of a meeting and/or time. They mentioned they had phone numbers and email addresses for book club leaders in case they did, although one owner stated book club leaders and their contact information changed without her knowledge, frequently.

Those interviewed didn't imagine their book clubs would be interested in interacting with other book clubs, although one owner stated two local book clubs had jointly hosted an author even to great success.

The respondents were eager to get to know their book club members' taste and make recommendations for reading selections.

One bookstore owner found his book club members enjoyed meeting authors and hearing about their creative process, however, they didn't feel comfortable honestly sharing their thoughts about the book. The other bookstore owner's book club didn't seem as intimidated, perhaps because they average thirty members, and she sold almost all of the author's other books.

All respondents indicated book clubs no longer bought as many book club selections as they did in the past, therefore, discounts had to be discontinued, the percentage lowered, or only offered if books were purchased in quantities of ten or more, as the cost incurred shipping and returning books to distributor were more than the profit on the books sold. Both bookstore owners offered frequent buyer programs where book club members could earn a ten dollar coupon for every one hundred dollars spent. One bookstore owner also shared advanced reading copies from publishers with is book club, who enjoyed reading books before they were actually published. The other bookstore owner hosts a book club party once per year with wine and cheese and invites a publisher rep to attend and showcase upcoming releases. A gift bag with advanced reading copies and other promotional items is given to each attendee.

The two bookstore owners felt an app should send reminders of book club meetings, link to online sales so book club members could purchase the book, provide social sharing features to indicate if the book club member had started the book, where she was in the book, if she finished the book, and what she thought of the book. One owner emphasized the app would have to make some money to justify giving some of her time to use it, such as schedule for her to make an in-person presentation, provide recommendations, possibly subscribe for a small fee and receive presentations and her book picks.

All respondents agreed if an app were available, they prefer a desktop website, although they felt book club members would prefer a mobile app.

Heuristic Competitive Analysis

Book Browse

Links to various areas of site are within a slide show window, which is awkward and nonintuitive to use. Users are able to search by title, author, and ISBN; however, since users may only remember part of the title, a key word search would be helpful. Book Club Interviews links to one featured and one past interview. The questions and answers are very conversational and fluffy--not much meat to them. Interviews could be more focused and ask book clubs to answer the same questions about creating and maintaining book clubs. Website is laid out in a two column grid, yet seems visually cluttered with links duplicated in various places.

Book List Reader

The Booklist Reader uses a WordPress theme by Solostream. Although no bread crumb trail is provided that shows user's path when the user clicks on a post to go deeper into the site, the WordPress format seems more intuitive, perhaps because it's become more ubiquitous and

familiar. The Booklist Reader seemed remarkably easy to scan with the user's eye to find what information she needs. More negative space helps to give a feel of flow and room for the eye to breathe. The Booklist Reader seemed intuitive to navigate. I was able to find the information I was looking for in one or two clicks. The columns on the far left and right could be a solid color or texture to give the eyes some rest, however, I understand their desire to use that space for advertising to maximize revenue. On the second column from the left are a lot of links to other features and functions, the tags being somewhat distracting due to the variety in font sizes, however, the spacing diminishes the distraction. I liked having access to the information if I needed it, yet it was to the right instead of the left, and seemed less distracting. My cursor did hover over the Follow Us on Twitter section and I thought I was continuing to scroll down the page, when, in fact, I was scrolling through the Twitter feed within the site.

Lit Lovers

Lit Lovers seems designed well for what users need. The Home, About, and Contact links are in the upper right corner and can be accessed from any page. The helpful links on the left side follow a logical, natural progression. Links are available to follow Lit Lovers on social media. Under We're all on the same page, we see changing images of people of color and a male reader. It's nice to see some diversity besides a group of white women laughing and drinking wine—and probably not discussing the book. Search, advertising, and a like button for Facebook are all on right side. Most Popular Book Club Books, Newest Books, Reviews Section, Most Visited on LitLovers, Book Club Resources, and Stay Connected are below the fold on the left side and seem to flow naturally from one topic to the other. Links to specific subcategories are listed in each section. The placement and size of Movies Meet Book Club logo by the Lit Lovers logo is too similar. It almost looks like an extension of the Lit Lovers logo and competes for attention.