Launching Personalized Recommendations on Goodreads

Bhupesh Kumar Sirso

ABOUT GOODREADS

- Goodreads is an American social cataloguing website owned by Amazon, focused on cataloguing books & creating a platform for users to interact with them.
- Founded in December 2006 by Otis Chandler and Elizabeth Khuri Chandler, it allows users to search a vast database of books, annotations, quotes and reviews.
- Goodreads provides an interactive space where individuals can create personal library catalogs, reading lists and engage in discussions about books.

CORE FEATURES

Book Cataloging and Shelving:
- Users can add books to personal bookshelves, rate them, and write reviews.
- The platform provides default shelves—'Read', 'Currently Reading', and 'To Read'

Book Discovery and Recommendations:
- Goodreads suggests books based on users' past ratings and reviews. The recommendation engine uses algorithms to predict books of interest.

User Reviews and Ratings:
- A system of one to five-star ratings allows users to express their opinions and accompany them with written reviews.

Community and Social Features:
- Users can see what friends and favorite authors are reading.
- The platform supports creating and joining groups for book discussions, surveys, and polls.

Reading Challenges:
- Users can set annual reading goals and track their progress, fostering a motivational aspect to reading

Content Access and Interaction:
- Users can read or listen to previews of books via Kindle Cloud Reader and Audible.
- Goodreads also provides quizzes, book lists, and hosts giveaways.

Author and User Engagement:
- Authors can interact with readers through interviews, discussions, and blogs.
- Users can join discussions or start their own on forums and book pages.
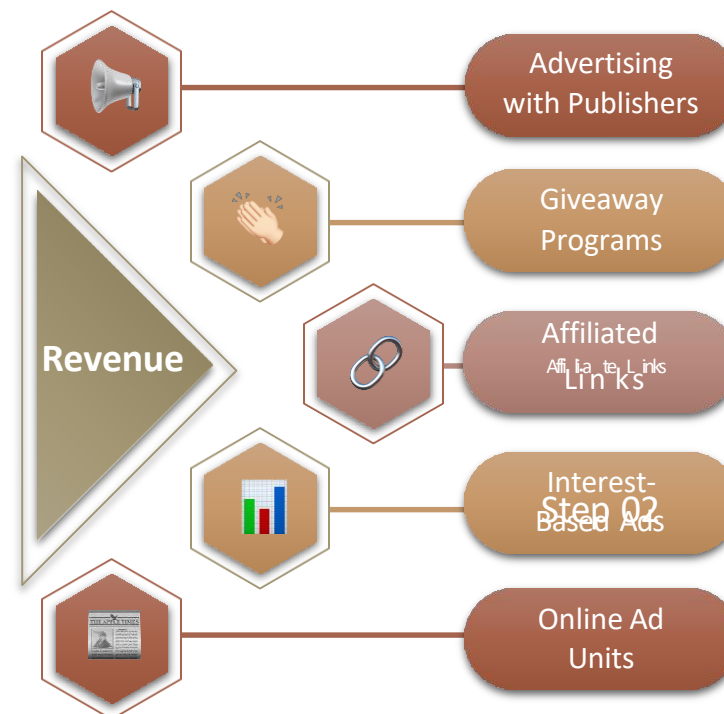
Social Media Integration:
- Goodreads allows linking with Facebook and other social networks for sharing book lists, ratings, and reviews.

Catalog Data and API:
- Book data is periodically updated with information from multiple libraries and databases.
- Goodreads had an API that allowed developers to access its ratings and titles until its deactivation in December 2020.

Offline and Interactive Events:
- The site organizes ofline activities like book swaps and literary events.

Revenue

- Advertising with Publishers
- Giveaway Programs
- Affiliated Links
- Interest-Based Ads
- Online Ad Units

OBJECTIVE

Goal is to reinvigorate the platform by addressing stagnant user growth and poor reviews, especially among users who don't read traditional books or prefer audiobooks and podcasts.

The key objective is **to attract new users** and **retain existing** ones by offering **personalized book recommendations** based on individual habits and interests, encouraging more active reading habits.

MARKET OVERVIEW
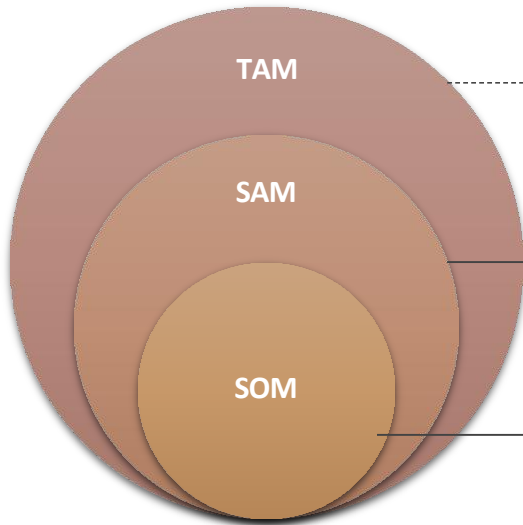
Global Book Market: The global book market is valued at approximately **$143 billion** in 2024, growing steadily with the increasing popularity of digital formats

Goodreads User Base: Goodreads has over **120 million** registered users globally.

Online Reading Community: Including competitive platforms like Audible, Scribd, and BookBub, there are about **500 million** active readers worldwide who could potentially engage with personalized recommendation tools.

Active Goodreads Users: Of the 120 million users, about **40 million** are actively engaging with reviews, book recommendations, and reading lists. These are prime users for a personalized recommendation feature.

Subscription-Based Readers: Approximately **50 million** readers subscribe to similar services such as Scribd, Kindle Unlimited, and Audible, who could be interested in a more tailored book discovery experience

Initial Target: Based on engagement rates, Goodreads could target around **20-30%** of its active user base (8-12 million users) for personalized recommendations in the first phase.

Expansion: If the feature proves successful, it could attract users from competitor platforms looking for more personalized book discovery experiences, expanding to 15-20 million users over time.

Competitors Analysis

Players	TheStoryGraph	LibraryThing	Bookly	Bookbrowse	Fable
Strengths	Detailed mood-based and personalized recommendations; rich data insights on reading habits.	Advanced book cataloging and metadata-driven discovery; community tagging.	Focus on tracking reading habits, goals, and gamification.	Curated book recommendations, editorial content, book club resources.	Focuses on social reading and book clubs with a collaborative reading experience.
Weakness	Smaller community, limited social networking.	Limited focus on recommendations and an outdated interface.	No social features or advanced recommendation system.	Subscription model limits user access; smaller community.	Less personalized recommendations compared to TheStoryGraph.

USER PERSONA

John, Inconsistent Reader & Casual Book Enthusiast

- **Age**: 34
- **Occupation**: Marketing Manager
- **Location**: Delhi
- **Tech Savviness**: Uses basic apps, prefers mobile experiences but doesn't engage deeply with platforms.
- **Reading Habits**: Struggles to complete books, reads occasionally, non-fiction and audiobooks when commuting.

Goals:

- **Develop a Regular Reading Habit**: Wants to read more consistently but struggles with finding the right motivation and time.
- **Get Quick Recommendations**: Desires book suggestions that fit into his busy schedule and limited attention span.
- **Find Books He'll Actually Finish**: Needs book suggestions that match his time constraints and keep him engaged till the end.

Pain Points:

- **Difficulty Staying Engaged**: Often starts books but doesn't finish them, as the recommendations don't match his time availability or interest.
- **No Real-Time Adaptation**: His recommendations don't change based on his completion rates or preferences for short reads or audiobooks.
- **Time Constraints**: He has limited time to read, so longer or slower-paced books are unappealing, yet they often appear in his recommendations.

Sarah, Avid Reader & Aspiring Book Blogger

- **Age**: 27
- **Occupation**: Content writer & aspiring book blogger
- **Location**: Bangalore
- **Tech Savviness**: Comfortable with technology, regularly uses Goodreads, Kindle, and social media platforms for book-related activities
- **Reading Habits**: Reads 2-3 books a month, primarily fiction, seeking strong characters and emotional depth

Goals:

- **Discover Tailored Books**: Find highly relevant and emotionally engaging books without sifting through irrelevant suggestions.
- **Maintain a Reading Log**: Track her progress, review books thoroughly, and organize her thoughts.
- **Get Personalized Recommendations**: Receive book suggestions that match her evolving preferences, moods, and reading habits.

Pain Points:

- **Generic Recommendations**: Finds Goodreads' recommendations too broad and not specific enough for her evolving taste.
- **Overwhelming Discovery Process**: Spends too much time filtering out irrelevant books that don't match her style.
- **Static Experience**: Goodreads doesn't adapt dynamically to her reading patterns or behaviours (speed, completion, moods).

USER JOURNEY

❗ Indicates the path can be more personalized

❗ Social Media Link: User can link social media accounts
Interest Selection: Users select favourite genres to help personalise recommendations and browsing

❗ Dashboard: The home feed shows updates from friends, general recommendations and reading challenge progress. Recommendations are mostly based on popular books, not personalized ones.

❗ Explore: To browse through trending books, genre pages or popular lists for broader discovery

❗ Search Bar: Users can again search for books, authors or genres

❗ Landing on Book Page: User arrives on the book's detail page. This includes -book summary, Community ratings and reviews, Author profiles and additional book series, Information on formats (ebook, audiobook, etc) and finally add to Shelf

Finding New Books: Recommendation appear through "Readers Also Enjoyed" and genre-based lists. These suggestions lead users back to the **dashboard** for more general recommendations or to **search & explore** for broader discovery.

S T A R T

Sign-Up Process
Users download the Goodreads app or visit the website and sign up using an email, Google, or Facebook account.

❗ Search & Explore
Users can search for books or explore general genre pages, trending books, and lists. Filters for deeper customization are limited

Recommendations and add to shelfs
Users add books to default shelves—"Want to Read," "Currently Reading," and "Read." Suggested books are broad, based on chosen genres.

Marking a Book as "Read" Rating and Reviewing: After marking the book as read, users are prompted to give the book a star rating (out of 5) and write a review

FEATURE #1 - Detailed Preference Survey During Onboarding

Increase the number of genres allowing it to be more customizable

As soon as the user is on board, he gets recommendations based on his preferences

Screen 1 — Reading Preferences

13:57

Reading Preferences

*Required

What are your favourites genres?
You can select upto 5

Adventure
Biography
Business
Children
Classics
Comics

Which of the characteristic do you appreciate the most in a book right now?
You can select upto 3

☐ Realistic/Real-world settings/storielines
☐ Plot Twists
☐ Character driven
☐ Plot-heavy
☐ Loveable characters

Which of these, if any, turn you off in a book?
You can select upto 3

☐ Predictable plot
☐ Gory horror/violence

Screen 2 — Reading Preferences

13:57

Reading Preferences

Complete this sentence: I am never/ rarely in the mood for books that are....
You can select as many as you like

☐ adventure   ☐ reflective
☐ challenging   ☐ hopeful
☐ dark   ☐ informative
☐ emotional   ☐ sad
☐ funny   ☐ tense

What is you preferred pace of the book?
You can select as many as you like

☐ Fast
☐ Medium
☐ Slow

Do you listen to audiobooks?

| Yes | No |

You can update your answer later in preference section

Save Answers

Considering both likes and dislikes to refine the books recommended better

Inquire about audiobooks: 🤑 Potential partnering with audiobook players to advertise as per user preference

Screen 3 — Home

13:57

🔍 Title, author or ISBN 📷 🔔

Want to Ride Pile

You don't have anything on your want to read pile

Recommendations   [Filter]

Based on Survey   [Browse]

BLACK CAIRN POINT · THIS CAN NEVER NOT BE REAL · THE TWIN · TH WI WO EN

Based on Read Books   [Browse]

FAMOUS LAST WORDS · THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS · THEY'RE WATCHING YOU · THE GAME

Popular this week   [Browse]

The Midnight Library
Matt Haig

A Study in Drowning
Ava Ried

🏠 Home   📖 My Books   🧭 Discover   🔍 Search   ☰ More

Feature Insights:
- Collects user likes and dislikes (genres, themes)
- Filters out unwanted content from the start

Key Features:
- Likes/Dislikes: Customizes based on what users like and want to avoid.
- Dynamic Update: preferences filled in the start can be updated later
- Refined Algorithms: Fine-tune recommendations on the home page to get started

Impact:
- Improved personalisation from onboarding
- More relevant home feed
- Higher engagement and retention

Success Metrics:
- Engagement rates post-onboarding
- Time spent on the platform
- Reduced bounce rates

USP:
Filters both likes and dislikes for more accurate recommendations from the start

FEATURE #2 - Mood Recommendations with Post-Read Feedback

Feature Insights:
This feature personalizes book recommendations based on users' moods and genres, collecting feedback after reading to improve future suggestions.

Key Features:
- *Recommendations*: Users select moods (e.g., uplifting) and genres, updating suggestions dynamically.
- *Post-Read Feedback*: Users rate mood, pacing, and themes after reading, enhancing future recommendations.
- *Personalized Engine*: Learns from user input to deliver increasingly accurate suggestions.

Impact:
- Personalized reading aligned with mood & genre.
- Increased engagement through detailed feedback.
- Better discovery of relevant books.

Success Metrics:
- Mood filter usage.
- Feedback completion rates.
- Accuracy of future recommendations.

USP:
Offers mood-driven, personalized book recommendations, refining future suggestions based on user feedback for a highly tailored experience.
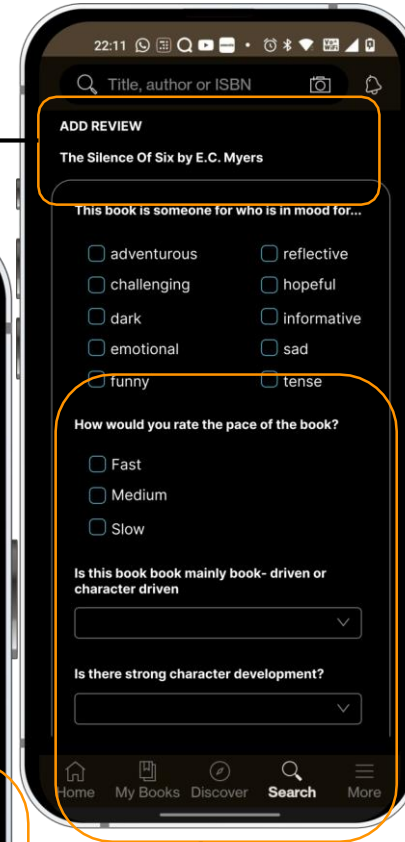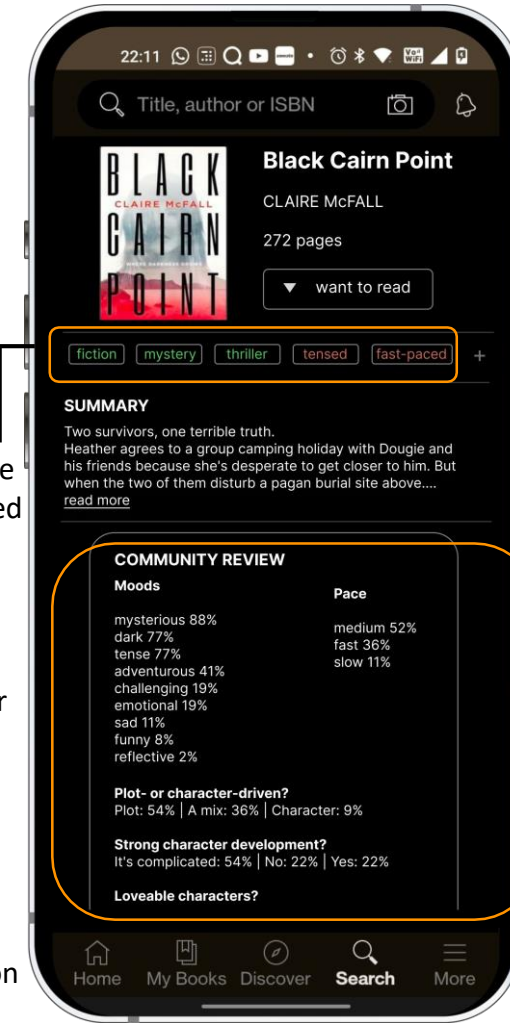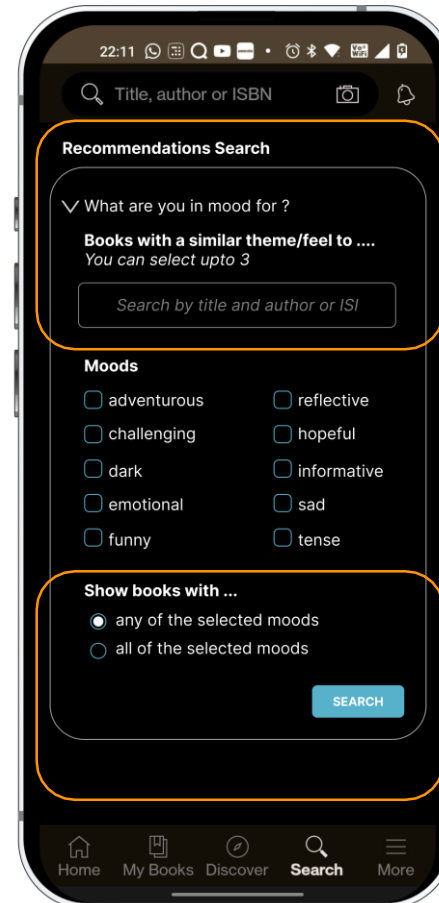
Mood-based filter recommendations which are more personalized than genres filtering

Optional feature once the book is marked read

Mood Tags
Green tags indicated the mood aligned with user search
Red tags indicate not searched for moods

Allowing more flexibility in the recommendation

Leveraging Community review to refine the algorithm and give more streamlined and exhaustive suggestion at the same time

App screen 1 — Recommendations Search

Recommendations Search

⌄ What are you in mood for ?
Books with a similar theme/feel to ....
You can select upto 3

Search by title and author or ISI

Moods
- ☐ adventurous   ☐ reflective
- ☐ challenging   ☐ hopeful
- ☐ dark   ☐ informative
- ☐ emotional   ☐ sad
- ☐ funny   ☐ tense

Show books with ...
- ◉ any of the selected moods
- ○ all of the selected moods

SEARCH

Home My Books Discover Search More

App screen 2 — Black Cairn Point

Black Cairn Point
CLAIRE McFALL
272 pages

▼ want to read

fiction mystery thriller tensed fast-paced +

SUMMARY
Two survivors, one terrible truth.
Heather agrees to a group camping holiday with Dougie and his friends because she's desperate to get closer to him. But when the two of them disturb a pagan burial site above....
read more

COMMUNITY REVIEW

Moods   **Pace**
mysterious 88%   medium 52%
dark 77%   fast 36%
tense 77%   slow 11%
adventurous 41%
challenging 19%
emotional 19%
sad 11%
funny 8%
reflective 2%

Plot- or character-driven?
Plot: 54% | A mix: 36% | Character: 9%

Strong character development?
It's complicated: 54% | No: 22% | Yes: 22%

Loveable characters?

Home My Books Discover Search More

App screen 3 — Add Review

ADD REVIEW
The Silence Of Six by E.C. Myers

This book is someone for who is in mood for...
- ☐ adventurous   ☐ reflective
- ☐ challenging   ☐ hopeful
- ☐ dark   ☐ informative
- ☐ emotional   ☐ sad
- ☐ funny   ☐ tense

How would you rate the pace of the book?
- ☐ Fast
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ Slow

Is this book book mainly book- driven or character driven?

Is there strong character development?

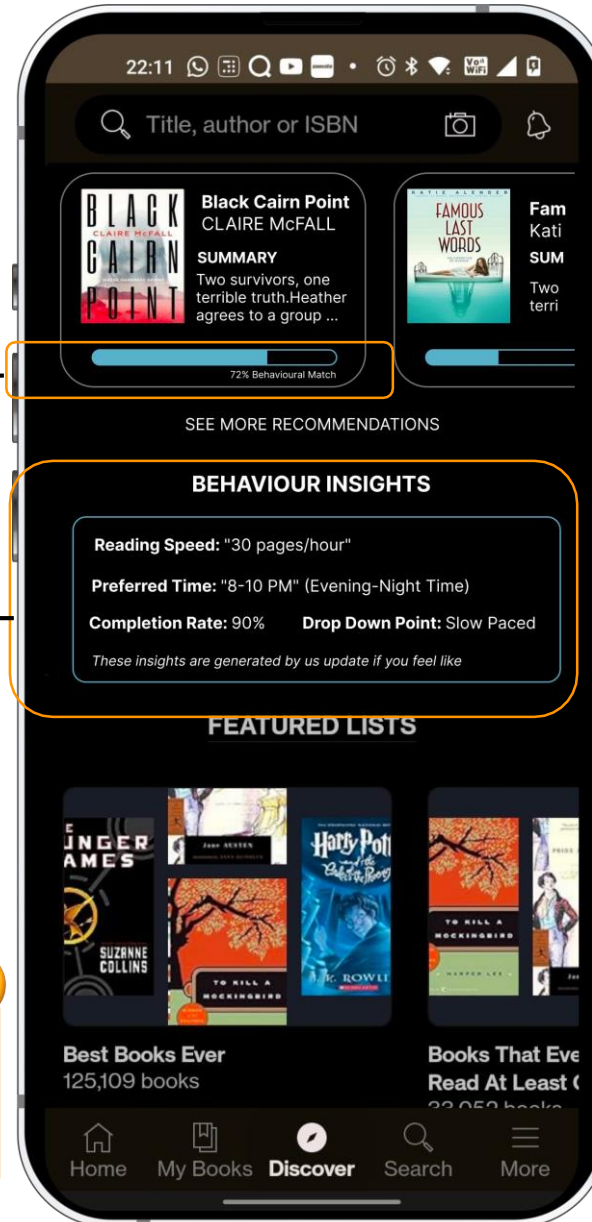Home My Books Discover Search More

FEATURE #3 - Adaptive Recommendation System Based on Reading Behaviour

Encouraged to switch to a book more suited to user behaviour and reading speed, preventing user from feeling frustrated with slow progress

A dynamic progress bar below the book description shows how closely the book matches the user's reading habits, based on factors like reading speed, timing, and completion rates.

Behaviour Insights Panel: Shows user speed, preferred time etc and at the same time allows the user to edit to make the insights better aligned refining the data further

User Behavior Data could also help the sales and promotion to the correct audience thus increasing sales

Phone 1 (Currently Reading screen)

18:35

Currently Reading

Sorted by Date updated

STUCK ON WAR AND PEACE? TRY SOMETHING FASTER-PACED!

SUGGESTIONS ▶
EXPLORE BOOKS

Black Cairn Point
CLAIRE McFALL

SUMMARY
Two survivors, one terrible truth. Heather agrees to a group ...

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
by J.K. Rowling, Mary GrandPré
★★★★ 4.5
3,481,515 ratings
First published August 31, 2004
912 pages
Last updated September 15, 2024

Phone 2 (Discover screen)

22:11

Title, author or ISBN

Black Cairn Point
CLAIRE McFALL
SUMMARY
Two survivors, one terrible truth. Heather agrees to a group ...

Famous Last Words
Kati
SUM
Two terri

72% Behavioural Match

SEE MORE RECOMMENDATIONS

BEHAVIOUR INSIGHTS

Reading Speed: "30 pages/hour"

Preferred Time: "8-10 PM" (Evening-Night Time)

Completion Rate: 90%   Drop Down Point: Slow Paced

These insights are generated by us update if you feel like

FEATURED LISTS

Best Books Ever
125,109 books

Books That Eve Read At Least (
33,052 books

Home   My Books   Discover   Search   More

Right panel

Feature Insights:
The system adapts to real-time reading behaviour to dynamically update recommendations

Key Features:
•Behaviour Tracking: Monitors reading habits (time, speed, completion rate)
•Smart Suggestions: Adjusts recommendations based on real-time patterns
•Engagement Alerts: Sends notifications for stalled progress, offering alternatives

Impact:
•Tailors recommendations to evolving user preferences.
•Increases engagement and book completion rates.
•Reduces book abandonment

Success Metrics:
•Recommendation Accuracy
•Engagement Rates
•Completion Rates

USP:
This feature dynamically evolves recommendations based on real-time user behaviour.

PRIORITIZATION

	REACH	IMPACT	CONFIDENCE	EFFORT	RICE SCORE
Detailed Preference Survey During Onboarding	8 — High – Every new user goes through onboarding and existing users can be encouraged to fill out or update their preferences	6 — Medium- Improve user satisfaction early on, increasing platform engagement and retention	9 — High -Onboarding is a common and reliable touchpoint where users will likely provide their preferences.	4 — Medium – Requires designing a new onboarding flow and refining the recommendation algorithm based on input	10.5 🥇
Mood Recommendations with Post-Read Feedback	6 — Medium – Affects users who engage frequently, providing ongoing value based on their behavior.	8 — High – Real-time adjustments can keep users more engaged and reduce abandonment of books or the platform.	7 — Medium-High – Behavioral data provides strong personalization, though some users may prefer not to be tracked so precisely.	6 — High – Requires significant backend work for behavior tracking and real-time recommendation algorithms	7.0 🥉
Adaptive Recommendation System Based on Reading Behaviour	7 — Medium-High – Attracts users who finish books and engage with the feedback loop and recommendation system.	8 — High – Provides highly relevant recommendations based on both mood and genre, enhancing both user satisfaction and discovery.	6 — Medium – Dependent on how engaged users are with providing feedback and utilizing mood-based filters for discovery.	5 — Medium-High -Requires integrating mood-based tagging and post-read surveys, as well as refining the recommendation engine.	7.7 🥈

SUCCESS METRICS

Detailed Preference Survey During Onboarding

- **Completion Rate**:

$$\frac{\text{Users who complete survey}}{\text{Total users who start survey}} \times 100$$

- **Home Feed Engagement**: Track user interactions with their personalized home feed, including clicks on recommended books.

$$\frac{\text{Interactions with recommendations}}{\text{Total recommendations shown}} \times 100$$

- **Reading Session Frequency**: Monitor the increase in daily or weekly reading sessions among users who complete the onboarding

- **Long-Term Retention**: Assess how well this feature improves long-term user retention and encourages consistent reading habits.

Mood-Based Recommendations with Post-Read Feedback

- **Mood Filter Usage**: Track how often users engage with the mood-based filters while discovering books

$$\frac{\text{Books discovered using mood filter}}{\text{Total Books Discovered}} \times 100$$

- **Post-Read Feedback Completion**: Measure how many users leave detailed reviews with mood, pacing, and theme categorizations

- **Recommendation Relevance**: Assess whether future recommendations, informed by mood feedback, align with user satisfaction
Relevance Score=

$$\frac{\text{Sum of user ratings on recommended books}}{\text{Total number of recommended books rated}}$$

- **Increased Book Discovery**: Monitor how many users explore new genres or themes due to mood-based suggestions.

Adaptive Recommendation System

- **Book Completion Rates**: Measure how often users finish books recommended by the adaptive system.

$$\frac{\text{Books finished}}{\text{Books Recommended}} \times 100$$

- **Session Duration**: Track how long users spend reading during each session after receiving adaptive recommendations.

$$\frac{\text{Total Reading Time}}{\text{Number of Sessions}}$$

- **User Satisfaction Scores**: Collect user feedback on the relevance and satisfaction with dynamically recommended books

- **Churn Reduction**: Analyze whether users with adaptive recommendations are less likely to abandon books or leave the platform

$$\frac{\text{Users who leave}}{\text{Total Users}} \times 100$$

Churn Reduction=Previous −Current churn rate

PITFALL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PITFALL

RECOMMENDATIONS

PITFALL	RECOMMENDATIONS
Overwhelm: Too many questions during onboarding can cause drop-offs.	**Simplify Setup**: Limit initial questions; gather more data gradually.
Static Preferences: Initial preferences may not reflect evolving interests.	**Dynamic Updates**: Periodically prompt users to refresh preferences.
Algorithm Bias: Recommendations may become too narrow.	**Diversity Boost**: Include "wild card" or trending book suggestions.
Lack of Variety: Users may miss out on diverse books.	**Feedback Loops**: Let users refine recommendations with "Not Interested" or "More Like This" options..
Inaccurate Recommendations: Initial mood-based suggestions might not always align with users' expectations.	**Refine Suggestions**: Use machine learning to improve mood-based recommendations based on user interactions and feedback..
Low Feedback Rates: Users may not consistently provide post-read feedback, reducing recommendation accuracy.	**Simplify Feedback**: Make post-read feedback quick and easy, with options like thumbs up/down or brief ratings to encourage higher participation.

GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGY

PRE LAUNCH

Beta Testing: Roll out to a small, high-engagement group to collect feedback and refine features.

⬇

Marketing Teasers: Build excitement through social media and sneak peeks highlighting how the new features will improve users' experience

⬇

Influencer Partnerships: Collaborate with book influencers to create buzz and drive awareness.

⬇

Internal Training: Ensure the support team is prepared to handle inquiries about the new features.

DURING LAUNCH

Feature Spotlight: Promote key features like Mood-Driven and Adaptive Recommendations with in-app banners.

⬇

Social Media Campaign: Run ads showing how real-time user behaviour influences personalized recommendations.

⬇

Referral Program: Encourage users to share and invite friends by offering rewards.

⬇

In-App Engagement: Prompt users to complete onboarding surveys and engage with the new features..

POST LAUNCH

Monitor Feedback: Track metrics like engagement, book completion, and recommendation accuracy to refine features.

⬇

Email Drip Campaigns: Target users who haven't tried the new features with personalized emails.

⬇

Community Challenges: Create reading challenges based on user preferences to drive engagement.

⬇

Iterate & Scale: Use success metrics to improve the features and scale them for broader adoption.

THANK YOU

Bhupesh Kumar Sirso
bhupeshks21@iitk.ac.in
+91 9165609865