

# The Flow of Books in the Era of Social Media: A case study of a reading group

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**ABSTRACT:** Although many researchers have investigated individual factors (e.g. motivation, price of book, etc.) impacting on readers' book choice, few research has been done to investigate the social factors impacting on people's book choice in the era of social media, in which more and more interact with each other. The purpose of the study was to explore learners' book choice from the perspective of social network, and provide results for those who are interested in the flow of books under social media spaces. A relatively closed reading group, including 42 readers, was selected to be surveyed and interviewed. Characters of this reading group, readers' roles, and factors influencing book choice were analyzed and represented. Issues and recommendations about the flow of books were discussed.

**Keywords:** social reading, book choice, social network

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Group reading, or social reading, means the process in which a group of readers share reading feelings and receive feedback (Dean, 2016; Vlieghe, Vandermeersche, & Soetaert, 2016). With the emergence of social media devices (e.g. Facebook, twitter), a great number of readers are influenced by other readers through social media when selecting a book. However, few studies explored readers' book choice from the perspective of social network. Although there were some research investigating factors that influenced readers' book selection (Bang-Jensen, 2010), there existed some limitations. One limitation is the lack of investigation of social factors influencing readers' book choice. Although those studies mentioned the phenomenon that readers' book selection can be influenced by social interactions with others, deep inspection for the reasons was not conducted. The purpose of this article is to investigate social features of a reading group, investigate social factors influencing readers' book choice from the perspective of social network, and propose suggestion for people who are interested in the flow of books in the era of social media.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

A total of 42 first-undergraduate students (13 males, 29 females) in Educational Technology Department in a university located at east of China were selected for analysis. Those students were in the same department, so they read may read similar books, especially professional books. In addition, they interact frequently with each other as they attended classes together. We

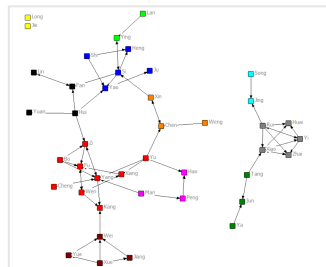
intentionally chose all the first-year graduate students as participants as they formed a relatively close group. Then we analyzed the characters of this reading group to investigate social factors which may influence these students' reading.

The survey was sent out to all the first-year graduate students in Educational Department in a university in China. All students (42 students, 13 males and 29 females) responded and completed this survey. The data collected from the survey were analyzed using social network analysis. In this paper, we changed all participants' name with pseudonyms. In addition, six students were interviewed to for much more detailed information.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Major roles in the reading group

Figure 1 presents the book influence network (whom influence you in book selection) in this reading group. Based on our analysis, there were three different roles in group reading: outsiders, key leaders, and brokers. Long and Jie were outsiders in the reading group as they did not influence others' book choice. Apart from them, students, such as Yang, serverd as a leader in a reading group. In addition, there were also borkers in this reading group. In our analysis, there were multiple sub-groups. As shown in Figure 2, different groups are presented with different colors. To connect these sub-groups, brokers served as a bridge between those subgroups. For intance, without Yu, the red group cannot connect with the organe group as well as pink group. So, brokers play an important role in the information flow among different groups. Table 1 presents five types of brokers. All brokers played a role in connecting two or more groups.



**Figure 1: book influence network    Figure 2: sub-groups in this class**

**Table 1: Five kinds of brokers**

Types of brokers	Students
Coordinator	Yao, Chen, Peng, Yang, Wen, Xiang, Fu, Zi, Fan
Consultant	--
Gate keeper	Si, Yao, Chen, Yang, Zi, Fan, Xiao
Representative	Ying, Xin, Wei, Rui
Liaison	Ying, Si, Yao, Chen, Xin, Peng, Yang, Wen, Xiang, Fu, Zi, Fan, Wei, Yi, Rui, Xiao

### 3.2 Impact of reading behaviors

Correlation analysis was conducted to investigate how reading interactions (book borrowing, book attention, book sharing) influence group members' book choice. Table 2 provides the correlation results. The book borrowing behavior was the most influential factor, revealing that the flow of books impacts on book selection most in a reading group.

**Table 2: Correlation analysis between influential relation and reading relations**

	Book borrowing network	Book attention network	Book sharing network
Influential network	0.420***	0.386***	0.331***

\*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

### 3.3 Impact of social behaviors

Table 3 shows the correlation analysis between book influence network and social relation network (emotion, informal communication, formal communication, advice, knowledge trust). Emotion network had the highest relation with book choice influential network. This revealed that readers tended to be influenced by people who they shared feelings with.

**Table 3: Correlation analysis between influential relation and social relations**

	Emotion network	Informal communication network	Formal communication network	Advice network	Knowledge trust network
Influential network	0.494***	0.475***	0.374***	0.408***	0.331***

\*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study is to explore social features of a reading group and investigate social factors influencing people's book choice. In this paper, the author analyzed: 1) major roles in a reading group, 2) social factors (reading relations and social relations) impacting on group reading. The findings help to add valuable discussion to book choice in the era of social media. The significance of the study is to propose a new way to investigate social factors impacting people's book choice and provide insight for future research on book recommendation under social media environment.

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