



Youth's experiences with books: Orientations towards digital spaces of literary socialisation

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of ten interviews with participants aged 13 to 23 from international contexts on youths' experiences of literary socialisation. Guided by affect theory and cultural geographies, the research examines the affective intensities arising from those experiences that render possible digital participation around books, reading and writing. Consequently, we aim to contribute to understanding youths' literary socialisation dynamics and the role of digital media in young readers' literacies. Through the notion of space as an interrelation of trajectories, we could analyse these participants' experiences around spatial nodes of home, school, circle of friends and community. The findings led us to conceptualise four orientations of youth to digital literary participation: literary kinship, literary intuition, literary intimacy, and literary activism. Finally, we discuss digital algorithmic mechanisms in literary socialisation through the lens of critical literacies.

1. Introduction

Literary socialisation has been studied in the formal context of school (Johansson, 2021; Pieper, 2011; Poveda, 2003), in the informal context of home (Kraaykamp, 2003; Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 1990; Van Peer, 1991) and in libraries, bookshops and parks (Poveda, Morgade & Pulido, 2010), as well as within popular culture (Verboord & Van Rees, 2003). Alluding to Schleiermacher and Habermas' ideas on socialisation, Pieper (2011) stressed that this is a process where the link between identity formation and the shaping of society is constantly in dialogue with the traditions and cultural knowledge in everyday life. Continuing with the sustained interest of this journal in literary socialisation, we join the discussion about readers, books and the affective responses from their encounters (Koopman, 2015; Laffer, 2021; Liebers & Schramm, 2017; Thumala Olave, 2020). We do this by focusing on the everyday practices of literary socialisation of youth online.

With increased digitisation in people's everyday lives, individuals and communities have searched -and found- online a great variety of spaces to develop an affinity (see Gee, 2005), such as the passion for books and reading. Several current studies have investigated online reading practices (Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers, 2013; Nakamura, 2013; Thelwall, 2019; Thomas & Round, 2016; Vlieghe, Muls, & Rutten, 2016). Youths' literary practices have been described by research on social media platforms such as Goodreads (Sánchez-García, Hernández-Ortega & Rovira-Collado, 2021), Instagram (Kovalik & Curwood, 2019), Tiktok (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021), Facebook (Aliagas-Marín, 2015), Snapchat (Wargo, 2015), Wattpad (García-Roca & De-Amo, 2019; Korobkova &

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Collins, 2018; Pianzola, Rebora & Lauer, 2020), BookTube (Ehret, Boegel & Manuel-Nekouei, 2018; Paladines-Paredes & Margallo, 2020; Paladines-Paredes & Aliagas, 2021; Tomasena, 2019; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Contreras-Pulido & Guzmán-Franco, 2019) and blogs (Manresa & Margallo, 2016; Sen, 2021), among others. As previously argued, these practices illustrate forms of cross-generational socialisation through literature in the ecology of the digital platform, characterised by moving in a digital flow, affording fluid identities and roles, and being intrinsically collaborative (Santa María, Aliagas, & Rutten, 2022).

Moreover, it can be argued that youths' online reading practices challenge the existing age norms in literary socialisation theories through the idea of intergenerational solidarity (Deszcz-Tryhubczak & Jaques, 2021) and other post-developmental forms of conceptualising children's and adults' engagements (Burman, 2018; García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2020). Van Lierop-Debrauwer's (2022) retrospective explanation of her research on literary socialisation in the family context offers a ground to build on: "Doing literature" was a social activity, in which it was not determined beforehand who would be learning from whom. Children were as much social agents as the parents, who took their children's way of experiencing the world through both play and literature seriously" (p. 255). Corsaro's (2005) argument of interpretive reproduction in young children's peer cultures, who actively contribute to cultural production and change, helps us to look beyond age when addressing agency in youths' literary socialisation processes. Bond Stockton's (2009) notion of growing sideways is suggestive of thinking queerly about socialisation, which would also involve irregular modes of growth through lingering and delays.

Research studies on adolescents' recreational reading habits give us clues for further investigation. One of Howard's (2008) proposed taxonomy's category of Canadian teen readers is *avid detached communal readers*, "who rely on peers other than their immediate friendship group for reading encouragement and support" (Howard, 2008, p. 108). They see themselves as trendsetters or opinion leaders, and as the researcher suggests, would respond most "positively to online or face-to-face book clubs or library-based networking opportunities that facilitate the sharing of book reviews with peers from outside their friendship circle" (Howard, 2008, p. 117). Merga's (2015) mixed methods research on the correlation between frequent reading and social networking among Australian teenagers found that frequent readers spend less time social networking.. Students who were involved in visiting social network sites around book ratings generally avoided membership, using the sites to read reviews rather than to share information. The study adds that the keenest social networkers around books participated in fiction writing communities, particularly those hosting fanfiction. Merga, McRae and Rutherford (2017) investigated Australian adolescents' attitudes towards talking about books through mixed methods research. With few exceptions, they found that adolescents were generally positively disposed toward discussing books. Parents and friends were the most frequent counterparts in these interactions. Zasacka's (2020) research on Polish adolescents' perspectives on their early literary socialisation experiences highlights the role of play in those encounters around reading with caregivers, especially parents, which fostered their ongoing literary engagement.

These research studies highlight a favourable disposition of avid readers towards social interaction around reading, a reading engagement formed through intergenerational relations and a disconnection between the habit of reading and the frequency of social media networking, except participants writing in fanfiction communities. From this perspective, this article concerns young people's experiences with literary reading and the affects of those experiences that render possible digital participation around books. The study aims to locate digital media in youths' literary socialisation oriented by affect theory and cultural geographies. Understanding the role of the digital in young readers' socialisation processes has relevant implications for the field of literary education to shorten the gap between in and out of school learning practices, discourses and devices. Moreover, we aim to contribute to a pedagogy of critical reading literacy with a new materialist (García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2020) and posthuman approach (Hayles, 2020) to tackle socio-technical relations within literacy (Leander & Burris, 2020).

1.1. Theoretical framing of the research

This research finds ground in the line of inquiry of affective literacy studies (Boldt, 2021; Ehret & Rowsell, 2021; Leander & Ehret, 2019; Cole, 2009). They call to pay less attention to language and instead give space to more uncontrollable modes of expression and materials that mark the specificity of everyday practices. In the field of reading, García-González (2022) proposes an affective childist literary criticism, which uses affect theory and new materialist epistemologies to describe encounters with books by following the book's agency. The "affective turn" in humanities and social sciences "expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory" (Clough, 2007, p. 2), which together with new materialist approaches also challenges modern discursive dichotomies such as body/mind and nature/culture. Taking distance from an anthropocentric worldview, these perspectives focus on lives affected by matter whose agency allows recognising relationalities as plural, complex, and contingent (García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2020).

Our conceptualisation of the digital is bound to the interdisciplinary field of cultural geographies, and specifically to geographies of youth, which emphasises the particular and everyday meanings and practices of young people and the spaces they inhabit. At the crossroads, Kraftl (2020) explains that non-representational work in children's (and youths') geographies have focused on affect (shared emotions and atmospheres, and embodiment) and "on querying the apparently linear, teleological logics of "growing up" in favour of messier, non-linear notions of "going on" (Kraftl, 2020, p. 23). These perspectives in cultural theory reinforce our study of literary socialisation in the digital environment. Firstly, it argues that age is neither linear nor static as a category. Secondly, it will give attention to non-representational aspects that may illuminate how youth, books, and digital space affect each other to co-produce learning. Together with this, we grapple with Hayles (2020), when she explains that the difference is not between the materiality of print and the immateriality of digital forms but rather between different kinds of material instantiations and diverse kinds of textual bodies. Moreover, digital forms are instantiated in specific platforms, operating systems, coding protocols, and display mechanisms (p. 3).

When recalling their past and present experiences of literary socialisation, participants in this study described four nodes: home, school, friends, and community. To develop our argument, we consider nodes as spaces. Massey (1999) defines space as:

The sphere of the meeting up, or not, of those trajectories - where they coexist, affect each other, and fight. Space, then, is the product of the intricacies and complexities, the intertwinings and the non-interlockings, of relations, from the unimaginably cosmic to the intimately tiny. Space, to repeat yet again, is the product of interrelations (p. 8).

Building on Massey (1999), we will characterise the participants' nodes of literary socialisation as spaces of interrelations of trajectories, which, as she further argues, are always unfinished, constantly being made. Moreover, its loose ends invite us to think of space as an open system where new relations, new trajectories, identities and differences can be formed. Based on Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional theory of reading, we define readers' trajectories as a combination of past life and literary histories, a repertoire of internalised codes, and a very active present with its preoccupations, anxieties, questions and aspirations.

By coupling this notion of space with that of affective intensities, we want to understand the existing or potential formations of trajectories of literary interrelations between the participants and the digital. In a study on affective formations in networked media, Paasonen (2020a) explains that "affect, as qualities of connection and sensation, comes into being in encounters between bodies -be these those of people or those of other animals, inanimate objects, values, ideas- and its intensity feeds on circulation, interaction, and connectivity between these bodies" (p. 22). Massumi's (2021) theory helps us further by explaining that affective intensity marks the tendency of a body to have futurity or continuous bodying. The intensity of affect is a potentiality that makes way to participation, which is to be open to other bodies to affect and be affected. Moreover, he adds, "with intensified affect comes a sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life" (Massumi, 2021, p. 40). In their ethnographic research on literacy, Barton and Hamilton (2012) defined "ruling passions" as those conversational events in which participants talk about literacy by telling about other strong feelings from their lived experiences. Similarly, we want to explore the affects that increase -or decrease- youths' capacities to interact and set digital socialisation about books and reading into motion. Alternatively, in Massumi's words, we are exploring what makes young readers and writers feel embedded in the larger field of life that the digital world offers through enhanced interactions, audience reach, and content flow, among other affordances.

Through a phenomenological lens and resonating with cultural geographies, Ahmed (2006) suggests that spaces are not exterior to bodies; "instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body" (p. 9). Ahmed (2006) defines orientation within these entangled layers as being directed toward an object or body. It is how we inhabit a space. This definition is central to our study: bodies may become oriented towards digital participation in response to their lived experiences with literature and other bodies, given their capacity to affect and be affected. However, Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology offers a "different slant" to the concept of orientation, which would pay equal attention to the phenomenon of disorientation that occurs when the work of inhabiting a space fails. Hence, our study does not conceive the digital as a desirable destination; instead, it is a "collective direction" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 15) that has already been socially organised and pulls bodies into its networks. Returning to Massey (1999), what is left to discuss is to what extent the digital space can create new interrelations of literary trajectories that can intensify youths' connection with the literacies of literary reading and writing.

2. Research design

2.1. Guiding question

This study explores the affective intensities that allow avid adolescent readers' digital participation in books. We analyse these affects through in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten frequent young readers aged 13 to 23 on their past and present literary socialisation experiences. Guided by Merga's (2015) findings that avid readers use digital technologies in different ways and levels of immersion, we inquire about their lived experiences with literary socialisation in general without unilaterally directing our interactions towards a preconceived proclivity to online participation. Hence, our research question is: How do the affective intensities that emerge from young, frequent readers' literary socialisation experiences orient them towards digital literary participation?

2.2. Participants

In 2020, we conducted an exploratory online survey¹ to gather information about the online social practices of adolescents aged 12 to 22 around books, reading, and writing. Public libraries, reading promotion organisations, and individuals in Belgium, The Netherlands, Australia, Mexico, and Chile disseminated the survey. The participants were young, frequent readers or frequent library users. Respondents could voluntarily register their email addresses to further collaborate with the research project. Later, between June and October 2021, we conducted ten online in-depth semi-structured interviews with Belgian, Chilean, and Spanish participants. We contacted four participants through the registered email addresses in our previous survey and the other six through snowball sampling.

We sent an information letter via email to all participants and explained further the aim of the research via video call. Participants over 18 years old and caregivers of minors signed the informed consent before conducting the interviews.² The first author of this article conducted all interviews in Spanish or English, participants' first and second languages, and they took place via Zoom due to the international reach of the study and the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Furthermore, research has evidenced that Zoom is a highly suitable platform for collecting qualitative interview data (Archibald et al., 2019).

Table 1 characterises the participants. All of them are frequent readers in their spare time. That characteristic is what brings them to participate in this study. However, it is a heterogeneous sample regarding cultural background, age, and gender. The cultural heterogeneity can be justified in two ways. First, the international scope of the exploratory survey that preceded this study gave us access to young readers in different contexts, which made it practical to pursue a global sampling for this study. Second, the idiographic nature of IPA – methodology will be explained in the methods section later- appeared as an opportunity to provide a rich, transparent, and contextualised analysis of the participants' accounts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 45), which could allow transferability of young people's experiences in different cultural backgrounds regarding an orientation towards digital participation.

Five participants aged 13 to 17 were secondary school students at the time of the interviews, while the other five aged 21 and 23 were university students in humanities and social sciences. The age disparity of participants was sought to evidence differences in their experiences and affective intensities towards digital participation. As Korobkova and Collins (2018) point out, younger and older adolescents might use literacy for different purposes and in service of other tasks; hence, understanding differences among subgroups and individuals can assist researchers in giving shape to how adolescents learn, what they do, and the learning spaces that they inhabit (p. 389). Although the study does not aim to establish these differences, exploring the contrasting reading experiences of youth along their different life stages gives us insights into literary socialisation as an event and a process.

Nine interview participants identified as female, and one identified as male. The gender disparity is correlated with participation in our previous exploratory international survey, where 10% of respondents were male. It also echoes research that has found a gap in engagement intensity in reading behaviour between students identifying with female and male genders (Rutherford, Merga & Singleton, 2018). Nevertheless, our inability to find more avid male readers could be related to the snowball technique, since this kind of recruitment might be shaped by first participants' social network. The discussion section will elaborate on the limitations of this sample's heterogeneous features for an IPA study.

2.3. Methods of data gathering and analysis

As this research delves into youths' lived experiences with literature and digital media, we ground the study methodologically within the interpretive phenomenological analysis. IPA views human beings as sense-making creatures; therefore, "the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 3). This interpretive endeavour of experience entails a double hermeneutic in which the researcher tries to make sense of what each participant tells us about their experience. In IPA research, experience "invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meanings which are unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship to the world" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 17).

In-depth semi-structured interviews allowed us to facilitate an interaction with participants in which they could "tell their own stories, in their own words, in-depth and in detail" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 54). Moreover, conceived as a dialogic space, the researcher and participant are active protagonists of the communication. Dialogism affords the interview a narrative expansion where the participant builds a place for reflection, self-affirmation, and materialisation of their experience (Arfuch, 1995). The interviews

¹ The survey was produced through the LimeSurvey server and was made available for a month in May 2020. Because we wanted to reach out to frequent readers, we contacted youth libraries, organisations for reading promotion and individuals who promote reading among young people, who generously helped us disseminate the survey through their social media accounts. As a result, we collected 102 complete responses -from 207 incomplete responses- from youths residing in Australia, England, Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina and Chile. Regarding gender, 88 respondents identified themselves as female (86,2%), 13 as male (12,7%) and one as non-binary (0,9%). To illustrate the participants' age, we borrowed Korobkova & Collins' (2018) categories of younger adolescents (11–15-year-old) and older adolescents (15–25-year-old): 50% of the survey's respondents were in the younger group, and 50% in the older adolescents group. The questions focused on the frequency with which respondents engaged in online activities, such as reading or listening to others' comments on literary texts, commenting on literary texts, writing literary texts, and playing games based on literary texts. Besides frequency, the survey also included open questions about the digital platforms where they performed these activities, which allowed us to consider it a qualitative research tool. Most importantly, the survey functioned as a participant recruitment tool for the second research stage, consisting of semi-structured interviews.

² This research project was approved by the Autonomous University of Barcelona's Ethics Commission on 21 February 2022, with reference number CEEAH CA32.

Table 1
Characterisation of participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Student	Gender	Country	Interview language
Sara	13	Secondary school	female	Chile	Spanish
Elisa	14	Secondary school	female	Chile	Spanish
Heidi	16	Secondary school	female	Belgium	English
Jaime	16	Secondary school	male	Chile	Spanish
Alicia	17	Secondary school	female	Chile	Spanish
Anna	21	University	female	Belgium	English
Dalia	21	University	female	Chile	Spanish
Marta	21	University	female	Spain	Spanish
Matilde	21	University	female	Chile	Spanish
Gloria	23	University	female	Chile	Spanish

concerned frequent adolescent readers' lived experiences of literary reading and writing, focusing on social interaction. The interview prompts were directed to understand readers' trajectories, identities, repertoires, practices and attachments. We also posed questions on digital media.

We aligned the steps in the analysis to the IPA principles defined by [Smith, Flowers and Larkin \(2022\)](#). After conducting the interviews, the article's first author transcribed the video files into Word through NVivo. She read and listened simultaneously to each interview to actively engage with the data and correct software transcription mistakes. She continued by thoroughly re-reading each Word file and making exploratory notes unrestrictedly to become familiar with each case. These paper notes included questions, concepts, and relations with other excerpts, among other non-systematic comments. The third step consisted of constructing experiential statements that could cluster our exploratory notes, making sense of them simultaneously. Immediately after, the first author wrote an interview report for each participant that could shape an initial profile based on the experiential statements. Infused by our research question, each account followed the same structure, e.g., the participant's experiences in the context of the family, school, and friends and a description of their reading engagement. By doing this, we risked establishing connections within cases prematurely. Nevertheless, it offered a means to share and discuss the analysis process with the team members.

Through triangulation we could develop new relationships across experiential statements. The following coding was performed using NVivo software. We created ten cases and reviewed the interviews again, coding the experiential statements to cluster them in personal experiential themes (PETs). Once we had coded each interview, it seemed easier to go back to Excel files, where we could annotate the resulting PETs, which were four to six for each case. Finally, we created the group experiential themes (GETs) across cases in the spreadsheet, such as readers' self-image, the nature of their reading attachment, and belonging to a community of readers. However, at this stage, we wanted to highlight the unique features of the participants' orientations toward the digital in the form of affective intensities. Hence, we developed GETs that expressed shared affective intensities toward digital participation. To report the findings, we have translated Spanish-speaking participants' quotations into English.

3. Findings

As participants recall the lived experiences in which their reading trajectories have interrelated with others the most, they describe spatial nodes that we have clustered into four categories: home, school, circle of friends and community. Some participants have strong connections in only one of these spatial nodes, others in two or more. As a reminder, our research question is: *How do the affective intensities that emerge from young frequent readers' literary socialisation experiences orient them towards digital literary participation?* To respond we will describe participants' spatial nodes for literary socialisation as we have learnt from their experiences. This description will permit situating participants' affective intensities that mark an orientation towards digital participation in books, reading and writing. For advancing theory, we have named the participants' affective intensities loneliness, curiosity, togetherness and discomfort. While risking settling participants' affects in emotional categories (Ehret & Leander, 2019), we consider these feelings as "becomings", as presently in motion in these young people's lives. As qualities of excess, affect resides in the ins and outs of emotivity (Seigworth, in [Dernikos et al., 2020](#)). These feelings are revealed to us through the bodies' emergent capacities to move and be moved in social life, where affect is the force that compels movement ([Gregg & Seigworth, 2010](#)).

3.1. Home is where reading trajectories begin

Eight out of the ten study participants described having experienced literary socialisation at home in the past or present. Parents are the main actors in these experiences, with a prevalence of mothers, and the activities that are performed range from reading together to offering and recommending books, giving books as presents, visiting the public library together, and discussing books. Participants reflect in hindsight that having parents who were avid readers -and with this, they suggest frequency and enjoyment- influenced their reading habits and passion for books. For most of them, home was where they had, and some still have more extensive access to books of their choice.

However, some cases broke that tendency. Anna and Gloria described that a family member did not accompany their entrance to literary reading but media exposure. Anna explained to the interviewer that she was only interested in reading comics as a child and loved watching films. After the third *Twilight* film adaptation, she was so hooked that she could not wait for the fourth one to be

launched and grabbed the book (*Breaking Down*, Meyer, 2008) to finish the storyline. This event was her opening moment to a reading trajectory with young adult books.

Similarly, Gloria's opening moment to reading began with watching and drawing anime as an adolescent. When she discovered that the anime she watched on television was based on published manga books, such as *InuYasha* (Takahashi, 1996), she started reading them online. With that also began a passion for collecting manga, her favourite genre.

3.1.1. *Loneliness: reaching out to find readers with similar tastes and cultural views online*

This affective intensity towards the digital originates in the home space and is experienced by Alicia. Alicia has had such successful literary socialisation at home that she struggles to find other spaces to establish significant relations around literature. She described how her parents never obliged her to read, but seeing them read books frequently interested her. Alicia enjoys talking with her mom about the books recommended by her. She admires her mom's knowledge and wit. Thanks to her mom, Alicia has read many women authors and learnt that feminism is an undefinable mode of living. Alicia's friends do not read, and she said, "Besides my mom, I don't have anyone to talk to about books" (Alicia, 17). She recently joined a series of online lectures on culture offered by a youth feminist collective, hoping to discuss books and films with them. She described these series as an enriching experience. However, she was confronted by the gap between her reading taste and the other members:

They liked *Shadow Hunters*, *The Hunger Games*, and things like that, and I was thinking, 'No, why?' [...] I am very prejudiced because I have never read a book like that [...] These books are all so literal, melodramatic, vampire-siblings and all that [...] They are probably entertaining, but no (Alicia, 17).

She also follows a couple of "intellectual influencers" on Instagram, as she calls them, but she randomly uses this app and does not comment on their posts regularly. On the other hand, the school has offered some space for engaged discussion about literary readings yet framed by the curriculum.

Alicia's search for deep interactions around literature drew her to online participation -at a time when social interaction was only possible digitally- without offering what she wanted and needed. Her affective intensity of loneliness, which has been longitudinally constructed throughout Alicia's life, is moving her towards searching for digital spaces of peer socialisation. Not finding what she is looking for intensifies the feeling of loneliness due to the lack of cultural and literary connection with her peers. This unresolved and growing affect has opened possibilities of new interactions online without closing others. Alicia is presently wandering; hence, she will continue searching for connections with other reading trajectories in and out of the digital world to form new spaces of literary socialisation, guided by her unsettled, questioning, and challenging reader identity. Thinking along with Ahmed's concept of disorientation, how is Alicia's search opening up a range of routes to socially engage with and around books?

3.2. *Bittersweet reading experiences at school*

For some participants, the school played either an irrelevant role in their reading trajectory or a negative role altogether because the types of books they were offered were not their choice. Dalia and Marta told us that school readings limited their interests throughout primary and secondary. Alicia was critical of reading and children's books during primary school: "Books for children that can read on their own, especially for around 8+ years old, they try to teach a lesson at the end, and I don't like that [...] I also don't like that books must be oriented for children or youth" (Alicia, 17).

For others, however, the school space has allowed them to grow as readers, expand their knowledge and socialise around literature. Overall, they value school reading plans that include students' choices and being able to choose between two or three books. Matilde and Sara highlight their teachers' role in their reading identity. Matilde is grateful that her teachers recognised her early development of reading trajectory and skills, allowing her to read more complex books than her peers, such as Enid Blyton's series. In secondary school, she experienced the same recognition through teachers' recommending practice: "My Spanish language teacher, from year 9 to year 12, would teach us literature and recommend us interesting books not included in the reading plan. She and another Literature teacher used to talk about their favourite Latin American female authors" (Matilde, 21). Sara's experience with teachers recommending books is like Matilde's:

My Spanish Language teacher in year four used to recommend books [...] She recommended *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2006), which I loved. My English Language teacher also recommended books to me; he knew what I liked to read, so whenever there was extra time in class, he would bring me a new book to read (Sara, 13).

Sara was saddened because her current teachers do not recommend her books as they used to do before; however, she found the support and friendliness she needed in the school librarians.

Heidi finds her current Language Arts classes very satisfying because they focus mainly on Dutch literature. Participating in the Flemish Children's Book Jury -*De Leesjury* is a Flemish initiative for all school-aged children- offered interesting literary discussions with schoolmates, which made the effort worthwhile:

It was in school. It's the day's pause, and I could eat and participate in the debate. It was a small group because it was for the last four years of high school, and a friend and I were the only ones who could read all the books because, in high school, we had much work, and then it was hard (Heidi, 16).

3.2.1. Curiosity: the internet as a space to deepen learning about books

We portray curiosity as a second affective intensity derived from school spatiality. Sara, Jaime, Elisa and Heidi are secondary school students who all see school as a positive space for their literary learning. When describing their digital participation around their reading affinity, the four teenagers focus on prevalent internet use towards enhancing literary knowledge, either book- or genre-specific, or expanding knowledge on a topic they have read. For these four adolescents, curiosity takes different shapes, which affects their orientation towards digital participation.

Sara (13) is passionate about fantasy and dystopic novels. She finds videos on YouTube that help her better understand a character or setting in *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997), *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954) or *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) story worlds, among others. As she does not have an account, she only watches the videos and shares them with friends but does not give likes or comment on them. She knows the internet's algorithm recommends her content based on her searches and the links she clicks. When the interviewer asked her what her thoughts on this feature were, she expressed excitement due to being offered a large amount of specific content on her favourite books, together with stress produced by hyperlinks that took her to never-ending portals of knowledge:

My teacher sent us five links to recommended books. I wrote down the books I wanted to take from the library, but because you have clicked on them, on the sidebar, you see the links to other hundred books that people who read that book also liked, and I click on them and continue finding more and more books. And then it becomes... you never finish. Or you only finish when they call you for dinner (Sara, 13).

Elisa's (14) digital participation is less intensive than Sara's. Most of her time online is for school since the COVID-19 pandemic started, and she considers that social media is for social life, not for her reading affinity. Nevertheless, she expressed doing Google searches of books like the ones she has enjoyed, especially looking for reviews to orientate herself before downloading a book on her Kindle: "If I stumble upon a book I might want to read, I investigate it in Google, I read reviews or critical pieces of people who have read it, and I see what it is about before reading it" (Elisa, 14). This way, Elisa showcases valuing other readers' opinions before engaging with a book.

Jaime (16) and Heidi (16) have a similar orientation towards digital participation in the school context. Both define themselves as curious people who like reading to expand their knowledge and challenge their worldviews. They both follow cultural websites and receive their newsletters. Jaime and Heidi also look for written or video reviews before reading a book. Heidi only spends a little time online, mainly searching for information for school or reading-related topics, not interacting with other readers. She is passionate about mythology; thus, her readings often lead her to navigate sources on history and philosophy, such as *Mythos: The Greek Myths Reimagined* (Fry, 2017). For example, when the interviewer asked her if the two fairy tales she discussed were connected, she answered: "This is something I'm very curious about. I haven't had the time yet to search about these two stories, but I have the idea of searching on the internet, you know, which one is actually first and which story influenced the other" (Heidi, 16). Like Heidi, Jaime only spends a small amount of time online after school hours. However, he likes to watch videos on Youtube about interesting topics or ideas he reads in philosophical texts, such as Harari's books *Homo Deus* (Harari, 2017) and *Sapiens* (Harari, 2014). "Reading those books amuses me because the ideas they propose make me question things I had not thought of before, and I realise situations and ideas I didn't know. And I like getting to know things, educate myself" (Jaime, 16). He seldom used Goodreads to look for reviews but never wrote anything.

Moreover, he expressed carefulness in taking those reviews too seriously. Wattpad made a poor impression on him: "I entered once, had a look and left. I never read anything from it. The thing is, nothing of what I saw convinced me" (Jaime, 16).

Heidi likes writing and has won prizes for her stories in and out of the school context, giving her the confidence to pursue writing a novel. Regarding publishing, she considers the internet an unsafe space to publish her work: "I'm not really comfortable about putting things on the internet because when it's there just stays there, everybody can get on there [...], And maybe one day someone else will use it for their own publication" (Heidi, 16).

We can infer that Jaime and Heidi are distant on digital participation. They take advantage of the information available online. However, they want to leave as little a digital footprint as possible to keep their reading preferences private and to protect their creations. These four experiences, affectively filled with curiosity, illustrate an understanding of the digital space as a container of information, a holder of knowledge. Either reading ignites a search for new knowledge on the internet, or reading tackles a search for new reading recommendations. What is at stake is learning and the preservation of a reading habit. Nevertheless, the participants' online experiences, framed and motivated by curiosity, show varied levels of affective intensity towards the digital: Sara's is strong, resulting in an enthusiastic orientation, while Elisa, Jaime and Heidi's are looser, which makes their orientations somewhat resistant and disorienting.

3.3. There is no better chat about books than with friends

Friends open a space for new interrelations of reading trajectories. Sometimes, friendship pre-exists the reading affinity, and sometimes, the affinity produces an intimate relationship of friendship between two people. The latter is Heidi's and Marta's case. The circle of friends is a space crossed by contexts of schooling, neighbourhood, hobbies or family, and among readers, friends exert significant influence (Howard, 2008; Merga, 2014). We will describe this space as the participants affectively experience it.

3.3.1. Togetherness: sharing with friends the affects moved by a book

Marta, Elisa and Sara each have a group of friends for whom reading is a shared passion. They recommend books to one another,

and they usually all read the same book simultaneously to be able to comment throughout the reading process. They described talking about books as a fun activity. “With my friends, for example, we discuss, I mean, we like discussing books very much, I prefer this character over this other, because of this or that. And we all see something different” (Sara, 13). Sara added that their passion for *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) made her friends create a Whatsapp group only to discuss the saga, of which they have very varied and heated opinions. They send each other memes and YouTube videos related to *THG*. Similarly, Elisa implied that book talks allow making sense of the affects moved by a story world synchronically.

We were reading a book simultaneously with a friend and commenting on where we were in the story. My friend reads a lot faster, so she told me, “You are not going to believe what happens next”. So, I read it quickly and finished it. It was 11 pm, and the book was awfully sad, so I cried. I texted my friend and had a long conversation about the story. We needed to understand how the story could end so badly (Elisa, 14).

Marta’s friends are on Goodreads and use the platform to share their readings and recommendations periodically. She likes to maintain her Goodreads circle small and intimate. Her passion for books has been a way to find new friends. “I met one of my best friends through Wattpad’s comments four years ago [...] after we left 50 comments on a fic’s chapter, we began private messaging on Wattpad, then on Whatsapp and after that, we met in real life” (Marta, 21). Marta’s frequent reviews on Goodreads seek to share her reading experience with the community and her friends, from whom she expects feedback. For example, after reading *Red, White & Royal Blue* (McQuiston, 2019), she said about her review: “It has a hook, but there is something about how it is written that I don’t like. I told my friend I liked the book a lot, but the way it’s written, I don’t know, maybe the phrases are too short, too simple, or else. We’ll see what her opinion is” (Marta, 21).

Private or public, for these young women, the digital offers a communication channel with friends and a source of paratexts that enhance their feelings and opinions about books, such as memes, icons, videos and reviews. The encounter with a book and the story it tells affects these participants. It moves them to feel and think together synchronically, actively and subjectively. Youths’ book talks with friends illustrate germinal reading affects, “a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange” (Williams, 1977/2009, p. 131). In these affective interactions, there is an intense digital materiality that overlaps with that of the book and the exchange itself, populated by paratexts, emojis or instant messages, all of which help organise a social structure around reading.

3.4. Engaging with the community makes you grow as a reader

Literary socialisation also takes place in the broader community. Book clubs, public libraries, and the publishing industry are spaces where different reading trajectories interact. The older participants in this research described experiences of literary socialisation within the community, online and onsite. Anna is an exemplary case because she began writing a blog about young adult literature when she was fourteen, and a year later, she created a YA book club in her favourite hometown bookshop. These interactions have made her grow as a critical reader and showed her different facets of the publishing industry, where she has collaborated as a book reviewer and ambassador. For Alicia, Matilde and Dalia, who volunteer in feminist collectives, literary socialisation has acquired a feminist shape that aligns with their identities and beliefs. Since her early adolescence, Marta’s reading habits have been boosted by social reading apps, first using Wattpad with her friends for reading, then migrating mainly to Goodreads. This app offers Marta an organised digital shelf of books to read and to be read, a platform for reading a wide variety of reviews and sharing hers in return, and to comment on books she is reading with friends. Tiktok, on the other hand, is an ideal environment for live reading, as Dalia experienced.

3.4.1. Discomfort: activists in a global audience

For Anna, Matilde and Dalia, inhabiting the digital space allowed them to reach a broad audience and develop activists’ profiles for feminism, in Matilde and Dalia’s case, and for diversity, in Anna’s case. Anna’s (21) blogging activity was a credential to start collaborating with the Dutch language publishing industry. Publishers would give her young adult books in exchange for reviews on her blog. However, as she grew as a reader, she experienced a gradual detachment from the industry and felt more oriented towards reading critically and tackling diversity issues. This move was not painless because the feeling of belonging to a community was very satisfying: “There’s a whole community of young adult, well, lovers. I think that influenced me a lot personally. The feeling of belonging somewhere. So that is what kept me going” (Anna, 21). However, when recalling her reviewing experience in hindsight, Anna realised that as she gained more confidence in the community and became more educated, she lost the fear of speaking out her opinion despite being a target of criticism, for change is chief: “If you keep tolerating those racist, sexist, homophobic ideas in young adult books, then nothing is going to change” (Anna, 21).

Anna also told the interviewer that the Dutch young adult book community has shifted to Instagram. Despite many blogs still being popular, she thinks Instagram has more traffic and is accessible to a broader audience. Matilde (21) uses her Instagram account to disseminate her readings on feminism, for which she prepares a post with a review. With nearly 3000 followers by the time of our interview, Matilde felt great satisfaction for combining her love of reading with feminism and culture into a practice that could impact girls and young women. “My Instagram account is a blog, not a bookstagram. Although they share some features, my account has a more activist side because I also publish activities related to the feminist collective where I work, not only about books” (Matilde, 21). Although she posts frequently, she felt frustrated about not knowing how Instagram’s algorithm works, resulting in a limited reach. Because of this, she noticed that some posts have a lot more likes and comments than others, and not having a complete understanding of her audience poses a problem. Interactions occur mainly via private messaging, which she likes, but she would like interactions to be

more frequent: “I want to produce more dialogue around books. Maybe my followers don’t know the books on my posts, haven’t read them, or are afraid of sharing their opinions. But I want the conversation to become richer” (Matilde, 21).

Dalia (21) considers that talking about books shows an integral part of herself that she does not want to hide. Being a reader and writer is part of her identity. As a reader of mostly female authors, she regrets losing her time reading classics in the past, which, in her opinion, stigmatised women. Now, she has devoted herself to fighting for women’s rights through volunteering in a feminist collective for girls and young women, workshops on women’s sexual rights for girls, and, most of all, writing her first feminist book. Initially self-published on Amazon, her book narrates eight stories of gender repression based on women’s experiences. For Dalia, the internet and social media are a space to encounter other women fighting for their rights in a world structured by men. She learned the women’s testimonies that inspired her first book through her Instagram account. Goodreads and The StoryGraph allow her to share her readings and interact with other readers and their points of view about books. Although she does not read on Wattpad, she published her book’s first chapter on the platform to reach a more extensive adolescent audience. TikTok’s spreadable content and live features are attractive to her. It helped her to disseminate her book across Latin-American borders because it has “such a good algorithm that a post easily becomes viral” (Dalia, 21). She added, “Booktok is so addictive [...] for recommendations or live reading sessions, where girls open a marathon and keep their phones recording for a week or so, then every half an hour they ask, ‘how many pages did you read? What are you reading?’ That’s the content I consume the most nowadays” (Dalia, 21).

These three activist readers approach the digital space as a commons where public debate occurs. Nevertheless, they know digital content circulation has rules that escape their control. That is why they are learning that to maintain the public discussion, they must adapt to the network’s flows. As Paasonen poses in an interview with [Boler and Davis \(2020\)](#), the commercial meshwork commons parameters are never for the individual or collective users to control or decide, but there are varying degrees and ways to navigate and manoeuvring systems in place. For these three participants, the belief in women’s and other displaced groups’ rights intensifies the affects that orient them to the digital space, affording them a social organisation that, although triggered and infused by books, is taking them beyond literary borders towards a political arena.

4. Discussion

Participants conceive the internet as a space to enhance their knowledge of books and genres, find reading recommendations, interact with other readers about books they love, and simultaneously reach out to the community as activists on feminism and diversity. Based on the findings, we propose four types of orientation towards digital participation (see [Table 2](#)), propelled by the different affects experienced by the participants within literary socialisation spaces. Furthermore, we elaborate on [Ahmed’s \(2006\)](#) concept of disorientation regarding algorithmic digital logic. By encouraging digital and literary intuition, we expect our research to supplement the pedagogical conversation in literary literacies and education.

As indicated in [Table 2](#), we suggest that participants’ subjective experiences of literary socialisation in four different spaces where the interrelation of reading trajectories occur (home, school, circle of friends and community), outline access routes to digital literary participation. These routes are formed by participants’ affective intensities that give way to online activity around books, reading and writing such as loneliness, curiosity, togetherness and discomfort. The result is an orientation showcasing digital functionality or participants’ online frame of attention. Understanding these routes as contingent, not determined or static, is essential. Instead, they represent an itinerary that, in our perspectives, guided these ten young people to participate online in literature and reading in disparate ways. Hence, these routes are subjective and participant-related, and we attempt to define them as follows.

Route 1: From home to the readers’ online literary kinship

We conceive this orientation towards digital participation as guided by social interactions, materials, discourses, and practices aligned with adolescent readers’ passion for books. In the study, this orientation originated from Alicia’s affective intensity of literary loneliness in the home space, where despite the strong presence of her parents, she lacked peer relationships around reading. As Alicia, young readers and writers are drawn to the digital to weave a literary space of affinity and connection. However, taking distance from [Gee’s \(2005\)](#) conceptualisation of affinity space, we conceive literary kinship less as getting together to share reading as an activity but much more as feeling close or similar to other people or communities due to the shared affects arising from reading experiences.

Route 2: From school to the readers’ online literary intuition

This orientation towards digital participation was found in the participants’ accounts of their literary socialisation experiences at school. It is fuelled by the search for general book information, book reviews, book recommendations, literary criticism, authors’ biographical notes, and fanfiction, among other materials. The search for knowledge is fuelled by intuition, which anticipates knowledge and is active and unsettled. A reader’s ability to select and discard online information based on biases, hunches, and

Table 2

Affective routes towards digital literary participation.

Participants’ experiences	Spatial nodes of literary socialisation	Participants’ affective literary intensities	Orientations to digital literary participation
Alicia, Anna, Gloria	Home	Loneliness	Literary kinship
Sara, Elisa, Heidi, Jaime, Matilde	School	Curiosity	Literary intuition
Sara, Elisa, Marta	Circle of friends	Togetherness	Literary intimacy
Anna, Dalia, Matilde, Marta	Community	Discomfort	Literary activism

unconscious movements guides them towards their expected findings while allowing them to negotiate with the algorithmic systems in place and exercise agency in the navigation process. Jaime and Heidi's digital literary intuition made them more cautious to select and consume digital content, while Sara's intuition makes her much more open to fully experience literature online.

Route 3: From the circle of friends to the readers' online literary intimacy

In our findings, we recognised a need for young women readers to share their readings and responses to books among friends, physically and digitally. Friending and following are digital affordances that allow intimate relations through, for example, access to posts and private and public messages, hence shortening public networks' distances. Within literary affinity networks, intimacy allows readers to share synchronically the affects moved by books.

Sara, Elisa, and Marta's relations to books were entangled to friendship. If literary kinship orients readers towards online participation based on similar views, perspectives, tastes, and value of the reading experience, with literary intimacy, what matters more is the possibility of being together with other readers, sharing the reading and chatting in the same space and time.

Route 4: From the community to the readers' literary resistance to digital activism

Our fourth orientation to digital participation is infused by demands for change and social justice, tackling inequalities around gender, race, class, religion or climate change, and it originates from the public community space. Dalia, Matilde, Anna and Marta are resistant to normativity and power relations. For these readers literary activism rests on the belief that books can help shape the type of societies we wish for. Therefore, readers pose a literary demand for ethical books, which digital circulation affordances help disseminate to a global audience.

These four routes do not respond to developmental stages, nor is there a progressive evolution from one to the other. They are contingent on the participants' experiences. For these frequent and avid readers, literary socialisation experiences at different points in life and in different spatial contexts entailed not just immersive reading but an array of affects that have moved and formed their reading trajectories. At the same time, by participating in literary interactions online and onsite, they move and affect readers, digital systems, books, publishing, and writers, among others.

We have broadly described the readers' agential roles within online literary socialisation to respond to our research question. However, agencies are inevitably distributed in any process. That is why we would like to discuss online algorithms through the theoretical lenses of this research, tackling a critical perspective on literary socialisation practices. Participants know that the internet's algorithms track their digital activity, such as book searches and likes, and recommend related content to them. Some participants are wary about this and try keeping consumption activities rather than production. Others find the algorithms' mechanisms handy to satisfy and enhance their interests. To more experienced users, the digital algorithms help in reaching broader audiences. Because the more they know about an algorithm's work, the more control they have in their digital impact.

These contested perspectives invite us to examine the issue more closely. [Paasonen \(2020b\)](#) suggests that the digital attention economy feeds on circulation and spreadability: we grab content and make it our own, and digital media captures our movements and transforms them into data. This process of datafication is orchestrated by algorithmic systems. Hence, online literary socialisation is also subject to the logic of attentional economy that [Paasonen \(2020b\)](#) describes as resonant frequencies or sympathetic vibrations, which result in sticky content circulation. For instance, popular platforms such as Goodreads have replaced traditional socialisation agents in recommending books. That recommendation practice results from filtering what sticks the most online: the more a book is read and reviewed, the more it gets recommended. We share with [Savolainen and Ruckenstein \(2022\)](#) the concern that youths' autonomy is at stake in these human-algorithmic relations.

According to [Ahmed's \(2006\)](#) theorisation, our orientation towards digital participation may lead us to the social norm by following the collective direction. In contrast, disorientation may instruct us to other spaces and make room for new forms of relating to other readers, systems, discourses, or books. Disorientation, in our view, is not about choosing to be offline or reading unpopular books. It is more about being in-between, unsettled, and critical. Less complaisant with algorithmic systems. Alicia, Heidi and Jaime's interview accounts were filled by this affect of discomfort, or at least scepticism, in relation to the digital space. In our view, the study of online socialisation invites critical pedagogy to identify interfaces, which is how the digital presents itself, and prioritise an education in digital intuition.

The digital's attentional economy and algorithmic logic have established new power relations that affect how young people learn, socialise and display their literary affinity. As suggested by [Leander and Burris \(2020\)](#), "Today's readers and composers must be able to identify and interrogate networks of computational and human agents that permeate literacy practices" (p. 2). Through posing questions that bring to the surface positions of human and non-human power and where a critical consciousness on how humans and computational agents transform each other mutually prevails, pedagogy will continue to favour a much-needed socio-technical justice. Hence, an education on digital intuition would work very much as literary intuition: curiosity not just for books, stories, language and characters, but also -and even more- for digital structures and functions.

Furthermore, as [De Ridder, Rutten and Van Bauwel \(2021\)](#) have proposed, to operate within digital media spaces ethically researchers need to be aware of the complexity of the digital affordances in young people's everyday lives and their digital attachments. Such is a limitation of this IPA study. Focusing on a more homogeneous group of young people, specifically regarding cultural backgrounds and age, could have developed more detailed descriptions of their experiences in a specific context. On the other hand, the pandemic situation had negative and positive effects. Social distancing did not allow face-to-face interviews, where it is easier to monitor how the interviewee feels and take appropriate steps if there are indications of distress ([Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022](#)). Also, online interviewing often causes connectivity interruptions that threaten the conversation flow. However, digital contact opened the possibility of reaching out to young avid readers in broad geographic areas and understanding a vast array of experiences of literary socialisation.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Luz Santa María: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Kris Rutten:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Data curation. **Cristina Aliagas-Marín:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

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