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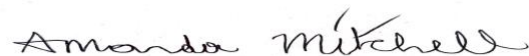
The Impact of BookTube on Book Publishing: A Study of John Green's
Looking for Alaska

by

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An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the University Honors Program

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Reading used to be a mostly solitary activity, but with social media, it has turned into a place of community and frequent discussion. The online community known as the BookTube community on YouTube has changed the way one can read and interact with others while reading. Along with creating a collaborative book community, BookTubers are changing the way book publishers approach marketing, connecting with their audience, and publishing debut authors. In the literary world, BookTube has become an important community that has had a major impact on readers, particularly young readers, as well as the publishing industry.

Young adult author John Green has seen mass success on the BookTube platform, but what many people do not know is that he has also helped lay the foundation for what BookTube is today through his other work on the YouTube platform. Green's work on YouTube helped create a real sense of community between content creators and viewers, which eventually affected most groups on YouTube, including the BookTube community. His literary work has also seen major popularity on the platform through discussions of his novels and their adaptations. His debut novel, *Looking for Alaska*, has seen the most recent resurgence of popularity because of its recent adaptation into a television mini-series. *Looking for Alaska* is Green's most critically acclaimed book and also a fan favorite. Though the novel was released before most BookTube channels were created, it has seen a rise in discussion on the platform since the series adaptation.

I first read the novel when I was in high school, and it was one of my favorites. I read the novel when I was the same age as the characters in it, and the story felt very personal and thought-provoking to me at the time. I reread the book several times when I was in high school, but I had not reread it again since starting college until recently. After spending several years

studying classical and contemporary literature as well as writing, it was interesting to revisit this novel years later as an adult with my new literary knowledge. Before beginning, I was curious if the story would impact me as heavily, or if I would still enjoy the story at all. I was happy to realize that while I did not feel as close to the characters this time around, I still enjoyed the novel and if anything, I felt more emotionally impacted by the ending than I did previously.

Looking for Alaska has held a special place in my heart for years, and it has been comforting to me to know it still feels relevant for me personally and academically as I have studied it and evaluated the text and related discussions as I include it here.

The BookTube community has had significant effects on contemporary readership and the publishing industry, and the community has contributed to the popularization of John Green's novels such as *Looking for Alaska*. Understanding the characteristics and effects of BookTube as well as the community's discussion of novels such as *Looking for Alaska* is essential to understanding current and future readers. "BookTube" is the name for the community of creators and viewers who consume book and literature-related content on the YouTube platform. Though there is no official date as to when the BookTube community was established, it is commonly thought to have formed in the early 2010's and has grown from there. The community began with creators posting book-related videos purely for enjoyment and to connect with other book lovers. As the popularity of YouTube grew, so did the audience of all niche communities on the platform such as BookTube. Creators discuss all genres, but the young adult genre particularly found popularity and success on the platform. After seeing creators' growth and close audience relationship, publishing houses discovered BookTube was the ideal marketing platforms to reach young audiences.

Many BookTubers now receive paid sponsorships from publishers in exchange for a mention of a title in a video or a dedicated video review (Leon 1). Many BookTubers refer to these sponsorships as "collaborations," and these collaborations have made it possible for several creators to go from creating book content as a hobby to making it a financially sustainable full-time career. Along with paid sponsorships, many publishers send BookTubers new releases free of charge either upon release or in the form of an advanced reader copy (Tomasena). Both paid and unpaid methods of collaboration with publishers help fuel the content one can find online today.

What started as a small community has grown significantly through the years. Currently, the most popular BookTubers have between three to four hundred thousand subscribers. Along with the evolution in community size, the community's content has changed over time as well. What started out as general book reviews has grown to a variety of content. Along with regular reviews, popular video categories today include book hauls, reading vlogs, book tags, and monthly wrap-up videos. In a book haul video, the creator shows the viewer a group of books they have recently acquired, whether through their own purchase or through a publisher. A reading vlog is shot in a video blog style and usually captures a BookTuber's experience with a book as they read it. Book tag videos are where a creator is given a list of themed questions or challenges to complete the "tag." Lastly, monthly wrap-up videos focus on a creator giving an overview and opinion of the books and other content they consumed during a month. These video styles are all popular within the community, and many of them encourage communication and collaboration between viewer and creator. One of the most unique attributes of the BookTube community is that the platform is designed to be a collaborative space rather than strictly one speaker addressing an audience.

Along with discussing published books, many creators also make videos discussing their own writing endeavors and processes. This niche within the BookTube community is commonly referred to as AuthorTube, and it has allowed several authors to gain more popularity for their work as well as give BookTubers more resources and popularity to get their own work published. Some notable members of AuthorTube include Christine Riccio, who established herself as one of the biggest and most successful BookTubers with her content and then began chronicling her journey writing, revising, and eventually publishing her first novel with Wednesday Books (Polandbananasbooks, n.p.). Since then, Riccio creates both book and writing content on her channel, and she is just one example of several creators who have established successful authorship careers on YouTube. Overall, the BookTube community has undergone an extreme transformation from the small group of creators that were creating videos as a hobby to the large community it is currently.

Since its rise in popularity, BookTube has proven to be a strategic marketing opportunity for book publishers, particularly for reaching younger audiences. Though people of all ages watch BookTube, most of the audience consists of millennials and members of Generation Z (Leon 1). In an article for *The New York Times*, a marketing director of Bloomsbury Publishing described partnering with BookTubers as "going after them (teens) where they already are" (Leon 1). This quote encapsulates the main advantage of working with BookTubers to reach young adults and teens. The young adult genre is one of the most frequently discussed on the platform, making BookTube the ideal place to market young adult content to their intended audience. Though it is impossible to gauge an exact quantity of influence BookTubers have over the reading community, many publishers believe that they are very influential over their audience. When searching for a strong candidate to partner with, publishers can prioritize

audience engagement and the creator's upload consistency rather than the size of their following and view numbers (Tomasena 1). At first consideration, this may not seem strategic or profitable for the publisher, but upon further reflection, this method has the potential to be more impactful than only partnering with most-followed creators.

To put it into perspective, if a creator had only fifteen thousand subscribers but a very high percentage of viewer engagement and an established trust with their audience, then their viewers are going to be more likely to follow through with a purchase or further discussion of a title, which is the publishers' ultimate goal. On the other hand, if a creator had over one hundred thousand subscribers, but lower viewer engagement overall, this would mean the creator with a smaller following would actually have the bigger impact within their audience. However, this does not indicate that publishers always or usually prefer creators with smaller audiences over large ones; both can be profitable in their own respect depending on the context. Being able to collaborate with creators of varying sizes is a major factor contributing to the flexibility and success of BookTube as a marketing platform for publishers.

Another factor that makes BookTube marketing successful is the way the platform is built for communication amongst the audience and the creator. This communication encourages word of mouth marketing, a form of marketing that relies on people's everyday recommendations to each other to spread the word about a product or service, which is said to be the most effective and trusted form of marketing (Whitler 1). According to an article for *Forbes*, "According to Nielsen, 92% of consumers believe recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising... In a recent study, 64% of marketing executives indicated that they believe word of mouth is the most effective form of marketing" (Whitler 1). The BookTube community revolves around sharing book opinions and recommendations to one another, and this translates to the

audience as well as the creators. Viewers of BookTube are able to collaborate and share with each other via YouTube comments and other social channels, as well as interacting together in real life. Furthermore, audiences who feel emotional attachment or trust with a creator can often come to think of them as a sort of online friend, which adds to the level of trust viewers have in their recommendations.

Though communicating online may not be the traditional form of word-of-mouth marketing, it uses the same principles and achieves an even faster result. Word-of-mouth marketing is also incredibly inexpensive but can achieve strong results. For example, if a publisher sends a BookTuber a free copy of a book, they recommend the book to their audience, and then their audience buys the book and recommends it to people they know, it has the potential to create a large ripple effect in sales and exposure just for the low cost of sending one creator a free copy. Publishers can also utilize the BookTube community as a way to maintain their audience and tap directly into what their preferences and desires are, which is main goal of all social media marketing within the book publishing industry (Nolan and Dane 1). With YouTube and other social platforms, publishers have an endless library of videos and posts to see how their audience is responding to their books, and what they want or do not want in future titles.

Along with helping to increase sales and exposure, BookTube has also brought publishers new opportunities for publishing first-time authors who already have an established following. The most notable example of this occurrence was the book *Zenith*, which was written by Sasha Alsberg and Lindsay Cummings and published by Harlequin Teen. Sasha Alsberg is a notable BookTuber who currently has over three hundred and fifty thousand subscribers on her channel, Abookutopia (Abookutopia n.p.). Cummings had previously released two of her own novels

prior to *Zenith*, but *Zenith* was Alsberg's debut novel (McCarthy 1). Combined, the two authors had close to two million followers on their various social platforms. (1). The novel became a best seller upon release, and while critical perceptions were mixed, Harlequin Teen sold many copies. One can compare publishing BookTuber's books to celebrity books; they already have an established fanbase, which makes them less of a financial risk than most debut authors. Though classifying BookTubers as celebrities is a bit of a stretch, within the reading and BookTube communities, those with large audiences are a kind of niche celebrity. If publishers decide to sign BookTubers stories, they can count on some of their followers to buy the stories upon release, which means an almost guaranteed profit for them. Writers on BookTube have changed what it can mean for publishers to sign a debut author. BookTube has had a major impact on how publishers approach marketing, especially when targeting younger audiences. It has provided publishers with a platform to organically market their books and easily reach their audience. The platform has also given them immediate access to audience feedback and wishes for future content. BookTube has become a crucial tool for many publishers and may become even more so as more generations begin using online platforms in the future.

Part of what makes BookTube a unique community is the relationship between the creators and their audience. BookTubers as a whole pride themselves on their close relationship with their viewers. A BookTuber has yet to surpass four hundred thousand subscribers, which means they have a relatively small audience in the grand scheme of social media. Because of the audience size, it is fairly manageable to interact with many viewers. Direct interactions between creator and viewer varies from creator to creator as well as from video to video, but many BookTubers make it a point to ask for feedback in the comments of the video. For example, if the video was a focused book review, they may ask what their viewers thought of the book.

Sometimes the creator will respond to individual comments, but even when they do not, viewers will often respond to each other and have a short discussion.

BookTubers have also created events or challenges that encourage viewer participation with the creator. A notable example within the community is the Bookspllosion live show created by Christine Riccio, Jessethereader and Katytastic. Each month, the creators pick a book to read that is typically recently released and host a live show with viewers of the community discussing the book at the end of the month. Viewers are free to ask questions and express their opinions to the hosts (Bookspllosion n.p.). Various literature-themed challenges have also occurred in the community for several years. These range from reading, creating, or writing challenges that encourage the BookTuber's audience to do the challenge along with them and document it on social media.

Another example of this collaboration in the community is the "Reading Rush" event, which was formerly called "BookTubeathon." "Reading Rush" is a week-long event that encourages participants to read as many books as possible during the week along with other activities that vary from year to year (Reading Rush n.p.). The event was created by Ariel Bissett in 2013, and she continues to host the event each year with the help of other creators. Reading Rush is described as "the internet's largest readathon," and has had thousands of participants since its establishment (Ariel Bissett n.p.). Along with the regularly scheduled Reading Rush, a Stay-at-Home Reading Rush was also initiated in 2020 to encourage people to stay home during the pandemic (The Reading Rush n.p.). In her announcement video for the Stay-At-Home event, co-founder Ariel Bissett describes why they decided to have the event: "It is an opportunity for us to all come together during these stressful times and just hang out and read. We want to encourage people to stay home, but also we want to just give a fun reading event that can take

our minds off stressful things" (The Reading Rush n.p.). Then, she goes over the reading challenges for the event, and one is to read a book that is set somewhere one wishes they could go. She says, "I think this really celebrates the wonderful escapism we have through books. Yes, we are all stuck at home, but we have books to help us escape" (n.p.). Both forms of the Reading Rush are prime examples of BookTubers using their platforms to create a sense of community among their viewers and encourage them to read and discuss different kinds of books.

Along with promoting literacy and literary discussion on their platforms, many creators foster close relationships with their audience through personal connection. Many do this through sharing personal stories with their audience or even meeting their audience in person. In her video "Favorite BookTube Memories," creator Emmabooks goes into detail about her favorite BookTube experiences. When talking about her experience going to different book conventions over the years, she says, "I think my favorite, favorite thing about BookCon and all different book conventions is the opportunity to meet my followers and subscribers. There's just no experience like it that I've come across so far. I love being able to meet people from all over the world... I love the chance to talk to you and get to know you more, and what you're reading and what you like outside of books" (Emmabooks n.p.). Later in the video, she recounts the times she planned meet ups with subscribers in New York City and London. She also reminisces on the time she spent an entire day with the first subscriber she ever met and states that she is still in contact with him today.

Emmabooks' account of her relationship with her subscribers is just one example of many creators who strive to create meaningful, trusting relationships with their audience. This mutual trust between creator and audience is a major contributing factor to every creator's influence over their followers. If an audience feels a genuine connection with a BookTuber, they are more likely

to be impacted by their opinions and recommendations than if they do not feel a strong connection. While every BookTuber's relationship with their audience is different, the community as a whole aims to create a collaborative, friendly environment between themselves and other readers. They achieve this by valuing and seeking their viewers' opinions, sharing personal stories, and sharing face-to-face experiences when possible. This trusting relationship between audience and creator grows to become the influence that many creators have today.

In addition to being a collaborative platform, BookTube is also an ideal platform for reception theory analysis. Because BookTube is an open platform that promotes discussion of opinions, the entire existence and operation of BookTube can be viewed through the lens of Stuart Hall's reader reception theory. Reception theory focuses on viewing the reactions and experience of the readers or the audience; reception theorists "often derive results from the experience of an audience created by watching a cinema, game or books" ("Reception Theory" n.p.). Additionally, readers can be separated into three categories: dominant, oppositional, or negotiated reader. Dominant readers perceive the work at face value, oppositional readers completely reject the author's work and message, and negotiated readers may acknowledge an author's faults but accept the work overall ("Reception Theory" n.p.). BookTube is a space where creators express positive, negative, and neutral feelings about books, and therefore all three of these types of readers are represented on the platform.

Furthermore, the entire premise of BookTube is the discussion of readers' reactions and reading experience, which makes it the ideal platform for reception theory analysis. By watching BookTube, one can discover what meaning an audience assigns to different texts and if the author's message is effective with the audience through reception theory. It is interesting to view BookTube through this critical lens because it shows that BookTube is an informative platform

rather than only an entertaining one. Analyzing BookTube reactions through the reception theory can also help authors and publishers learn which aspects of a book's message were effective or ineffective with their audience. For example, author John Green's work has been widely discussed on BookTube and other online book communities. His books, while very popular, have also been met with criticism from many readers and have a variety of commentary and reception. For example, readers' receptions of Green's novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, were mixed overall. In her review, Savannah from Fluffy criticizes Green's execution of the plot and characters. She says, "His writing is solid, but his characters and the plot are boring... The fact of the matter is that they were just boring characters. I felt that most of their personality was built on their terminal illness," (Fluffy n.p.). She also admits that she feels that Green usually executes characterization and character development very well in his other novels, but he had failed with the characters in this work in particular. In this case, Savannah takes the oppositional reader stance with *The Fault in Our Stars* because she is rejecting Green's messaging and execution of the novel. Though some readers agree with Savannah's opinion, there are also many other perspectives present in BookTube discussions of John Green's work. When looking through the reader reception theory lens on BookTube, one can find all three kinds of readers represented and get an overall idea of which aspects of a work resonated with readers the most.

Though John Green's books have been widely discussed in communities such as BookTube, he is also a successful content creator on YouTube. John and his brother Hank Green started their YouTube channel Vlogbrothers in early 2007 (Vlogbrothers n.p.). They currently have over three million subscribers on the Vlogbrothers channel, but they also have nine other YouTube channels. Of their other channels, their most popular one is CrashCourse, which has over eleven million subscribers. The Green brothers have widely diverse content across their

multiple platforms, but most of their videos revolve around educating their audience on some level rather than just to entertain.

On the Vlogbrother channel, both brothers produce a video a week each, and the content of each video varies. They discuss a variety of topics from current events, economics, government, politics, science, literature, history, pop culture, and more. Some videos focus on laying out the facts in more lecture-styled content, but many other videos focus on presenting the audience with background information about a topic, and then one of the brothers offer their own commentary on the topic. Some of their videos are also more personal where they share their own subjective stories or experiences and often relate them to speak on a more serious topic. Most of their videos are under five minutes in length, making their content bite-sized and easy for their audience to consume.

The Green's CrashCourse channel is an educational resource for many viewers; they choose a topic such as U.S. history and create educational videos, and these often line up with various school curriculums. To use U.S. History again as an example, the CrashCourse program was designed to coincide with the Advanced Placement U.S. History curriculum so high school students enrolled in the AP class could use it as a resource (CrashCourse n.p.). Among all of their platforms a common theme is present: approachable education. Based on their content, most of the Green's audience watch in order to learn something, whether they have previous knowledge of the subject matter or not. This is because of their inclusion of background information, and in the case of CrashCourse, the way the content is designed to educate the viewer from the ground up. This theme is also a pillar in the BookTube community as well. Though BookTube is certainly meant to be entertaining, it is also an accessible educational platform for many.

In addition to their own YouTube content, John and Hank Green have made other significant contributions to the online community. They co-founded the popular convention, VidCon in 2010 (Hills 1). VidCon was designed to bring the online community together and give creators and viewers an opportunity to connect in real life. The convention is extremely popular and has expanded internationally to Europe, Asia, Australia, and Central America. In 2019, VidCon was acquired by Viacom Media Group, which assisted in the international expansion (VidCon LLC n.p.). Through the years, thousands of people attended VidCon in the US, including many BookTubers, and the convention is one of several that have given BookTubers and other creators the opportunity to form a closer relationship with their audience.

The Green's also have two major charitable programs: DFTBA and Project for Awesome. DFTBA, which stands for Don't Forget To Be Awesome, is a long-standing slogan of the Green's content. They used this acronym as the name of their online merchandise store that was founded in 2008. Today, it is very common for YouTubers to sell channel-related merchandise, and DFTBA houses merchandise for many creators and donates over ninety percent of their profits to different charities (DFTBA n.p.). Project for Awesome is an annual fundraising event held by the brothers' 501(c)3 organization, Online Creators Decreasing World Suck. This event brings online creators and viewers together to raise money for charities chosen by Hank and John Green as well as charities chosen by community participants. Before the PFA event begins, content creators make videos about a charitable organization that is important to them and submit them to the PFA website. When the two-day event begins, viewers watch the various videos and vote for their favorite organizations, and donate to the fundraiser if they choose to do so. When the event officially begins, the Green brothers along with other guests host a forty-eight-hour livestream. The livestream consists mainly of entertainment to encourage views, which in turn

encourages donations. The Project for Awesome event has raised millions for charities over the years; 1.5 million dollars was raised at the 2018 event alone (Project for Awesome n.p.).

The Green's work has promoted the feeling of community on the YouTube platform through their encouragement of interaction and collaboration amongst creators and viewers. Their efforts have trickled down into many niche communities on YouTube, including BookTube. For example, many BookTubers are viewers and fans of the Green's content, and because the Green's started making YouTube videos early on in 2007, many creators viewed their content before starting their own channels. Their start and growth on the YouTube platform were an early inspiration for many content creators, including BookTubers. Along with their content, the creation of VidCon was a huge success for the platform and has influenced how digital generations think of YouTube and creators today.

Although John Green spends much of his time creating YouTube content, he is also known as a celebrated young adult author. His debut novel, *Looking for Alaska* was published in 2005 and was highly acclaimed within its first few years of publication. The novel won the Michael L. Printz Award in 2006 along with several other awards and recognitions (JohnGreenBooks n.p.) *Looking for Alaska* is a coming-of-age novel that follows a boy Miles as he seeks adventure at a boarding school in Alabama. While there, he becomes infatuated with his new friend, Alaska Young, and the story follows how Miles navigates his new school and friend group. Then, when Alaska dies suddenly, Miles and his friends are left to piece together what happened and learn how to cope with their grief after her death. *Alaska* was released before most BookTubers had their platforms; however, it has recently seen a resurgence in discussion because of the novel being adapted into a mini-series.

Though highly acclaimed both commercially and critically, *Looking for Alaska* was not met without opposition. Since its publication, the novel has been banned or challenged in schools in several states (Marshall Libraries n.p.). In Tennessee alone, the book was challenged and banned from being taught in 2012 and 2013 in Knox County and Sumner County schools because of "inappropriate language" and complaints from students' parents. The reasons given for the bans across the country have been the novel's explicit language, inclusion of smoking, and sexual content (n.p.). In Knox County specifically, the novel was "challenged as required reading for Knox County (TN) High Schools' Honors and as Advanced Placement outside readings for English II because of "inappropriate language" (N.p.). In 2016, Green himself made a video addressing the challenging of his book after the novel was listed as the most challenged book in the country in 2015 by the American Library Association and the Office of Intellectual Freedom (Vlogbrothers n.p.).

In the video he states that he does not believe that he should be the one to say whether *Looking for Alaska* should be taught in schools or not and then continues to say,

"Teenagers are critically engaged and thoughtful readers... they... don't read *The Outsiders* and think 'I should join a gang,' or read *Divergent* and think 'I should jump onto moving trains.' So far as I can tell, that kind of narrow prescriptive reading only takes place inside the offices of school superintendents... I think teachers and librarians know more about teaching and librarianship than I do, and I believe that they must be allowed to do their jobs serving the whole public. But even beyond that, I don't believe that books, even bad books, corrupt us. Instead, I believe books challenge and interrogate, they give us windows into lives of others and give us mirrors so we can better see ourselves. And ultimately, if you have a

worldview that can be undone by a novel, let me submit that the problem is not with the novel" (Vlogbrothers 2016)

Even with attempted censorship in schools, John Green still managed to create a major fanbase consisting of readers of many ages, including fans and mass discussion on BookTube. Along with *Alaska*, his other novels such as *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns* were bestsellers and both adapted into movies. *The Fault in Our Stars* is probably his most beloved and popular book aside from *Looking for Alaska*, and it was published in 2012 and adapted into a movie in 2014. His novel *Paper Towns* was published in 2008 and adapted into a film in 2015. Green's most recent novel, *Turtles All the Way Down*, was published in 2017 and follows the story of a teenage girl who has severe OCD (Green n.p.).

Green addresses several different themes in his works, but one that has reoccurred across several of his novels is the idea of his protagonists idolizing another character and then realizing they are just regular people. This is present in *Looking for Alaska*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and *Paper Towns*. In *Alaska*, Miles romanticizes Alaska so much that he cannot see her for who she truly is until after her death, and even then, he struggles to see her as an equal human and not as a flawless entity. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the protagonist Hazel has an obsession with one particular book and idolizes the author. When she has the opportunity to travel to Amsterdam to meet him, she is completely disappointed when she sees his rude and erratic demeanor. In *Paper Towns*, the main character Quentin idolizes his childhood friend Margot, and he searches for her when she goes missing and seemingly leaves clues on a scavenger hunt leading to her location. When he eventually finds her, Margot tells Quentin she left clues for her own entertainment; she never did it with the intention or desire for anyone to find her. Quentin is then embarrassed that

he idealized Margot so much. Teenagers and young adults often overly romanticize people, particularly love interests and artists, and Green includes this into his characters' hardships.

Like many writers, Green draws from personal experience in his works. When he was younger, he attended a boarding school in Alabama, was a class prankster, and experienced the death of a fellow classmate just like Miles in *Looking for Alaska*. Green also copes with OCD and anxiety, which is where he drew inspiration for *Turtles All the Way Down* (Alter n.p.). *The Fault in Our Stars* was inspired by his time working in a children's hospital, and it is dedicated to Green's friend Esther Earl who died of thyroid cancer at age sixteen (Griffiths n.p.). These personal touches are part of what makes Green's stories unique.

Green's debut novel *Looking for Alaska* is arguably the one with the most lasting cultural effect because of its inclusion in school curriculums today. It is an old favorite of many readers, and its educational merit has been recognized by its inclusion in public school curriculums. After several failed attempts to make *Looking for Alaska* into a film adaptation, it was adapted into a television mini-series by Hulu in 2019. Over ten years since its release, *Looking for Alaska* is still making a splash in popular culture and is being taught in schools today. *Alaska* was released several years before most BookTubers began their channels, but with the new series adaptation, the novel has seen a resurgence of discussion on BookTube as well.

Because BookTube is an ideal platform for analyzing readers' receptions of texts, one can also use the platform to analyze readers' receptions of *Looking for Alaska*. The novel is divided into two parts, "Before" and "After." The "Before" focuses on the protagonist, Miles', transition into life at his new school Culver Creek. Miles has always had an average life, and he applies to Culver Creek to seek adventure. While there, he meets his best friends: the Colonel, Alaska Young, and Takumi, and Miles is soon nicknamed Pudge by the group.

One of the most popular topics in online discussions of this novel is Green's characterization of Alaska. During my own experience rereading, I perceived Alaska's characterization very differently than I did when I was a younger reader. I found it more important to highlight and separate Alaska's characterization outside of Pudge's bias. It is very easy for a reader to gloss over Alaska's more positive attributes or to only see her through Pudge's perspective. However, with a closer reading, one can see that Green actually portrays her as a strong young woman outside of Pudge's view. Though she is impulsive and often breaks the rules, Alaska is incredibly intelligent. She attends Culver Creek completely on scholarship, and she is very well-read for her age. She continually analyzes the philosophical meaning of the texts she reads and applies it to life. She is also a self-proclaimed and educated feminist. Unlike Pudge, she is very socially aware, she sees that Pudge has feelings for her from the beginning even though she is already in a relationship. She is also a natural leader; her friends follow what she wants with little question. It is clear for any reader that Alaska is strong-willed, but one has to go deeper to actually see how intellectually and socially clever she is.

Though I personally liked her characterization, some readers find her very frustrating as a character because of her bluntness and impulsivity. In her discussion video on the novel, BookTuber Tiffany White says, "I know the novel is called *Looking for Alaska*, but I actually don't really know how I feel about Alaska because she is just this frustrating person... I just went in and out of liking her, and I just didn't know how to feel about her throughout the entire book pretty much. And you kind of see in the 'After' part... the Colonel and Miles feeling the same way, too, they just don't really know how they feel about her" (Tiffany White n.p.).

The way mental health, particularly Alaska's mental health is portrayed in the novel has been debated amongst readers. Some find it to be a relatively realistic representation of mental

health issues in teenagers, while others claim Green romanticizes depression and depressive symptoms. In an online review of the novel, Kelsey Marie says, "This book perfectly paints what depression is like... This book beautifully illustrates what unexpected death feels like" (Good Reads n.p.). On the other end of the spectrum, Nicole Aboodi discusses the difference between Alaska's characterization in the novel versus the series adaptation. She states, "Book-Alaska was the perfect embodiment of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl. The reader was never privy to anything going on inside her head. She would have random outbursts and show depressive tendencies that were portrayed as interesting tics or a secretive nature. By only existing in Miles's gaze, Alaska never had any agency. She was created solely for Miles's pleasure" (Aboodi 1). These two quotes show two completely different receptions of Green's work. In my own reading experience, I can find truth in both sides of the argument, but I believe that Green's portrayal is relatively realistic in spite of some flaws.

Readers of the novel have also discussed how Alaska's death is jarring for both the reader and the characters, but how it's ultimately the most pivotal point of the novel. In her review of the novel, BookTuber Emily Cait praises Green's execution of Alaska's death. She says, "It felt true to her character that she died, like how she smoked cigarettes, she smoked cigarettes to die faster, so it makes sense that she would die young," (Emily Cait n.p.). She notes that Alaska's death and how it fits with her characterization was important to her because she felt that the characterization of female characters in Green's other novels was lacking.

During his grief, Pudge continues to romanticize Alaska and their relationship after her death. Pudge does not want to believe that Alaska committed suicide because that reality would shatter his idealized view of their relationship because in Pudge's mind, them being together was supposed to be the solution to most of her problems. They are never able to determine whether

Alaska's death was an accident or a suicide, but through the process of searching and grieving, Pudge eventually reaches a point where he is able to accept the situation and remember Alaska in a more realistic light. He describes the conclusion he has come to regarding her death: "I would never know her well enough to know her thoughts in those last minutes, would never know if she left us on purpose. But the not-knowing would not keep me from caring, and I would always love Alaska Young, my crooked neighbor, with all my crooked heart," (Green 218). Pudge finally accepts that he did not know Alaska fully because he did not know or understand all she was going through, and he was not there at the time of her death. He comes to realize that even if she did decide to end her own life, or if her feelings for him were not as deep as his were for her, he would not use that as an excuse to be angry with her or stop caring about her. This is an important revelation because this is his end of his romanticization of Alaska, and the point he begins to truly heal from his grief.

John Green's *Looking for Alaska* is a story that includes many important issues such as death, suicide, depression, substance abuse, friendship, and romance, all while remaining approachable to teenagers and young adults. All of the characters are flawed; they often times react irrationally or take things personally, just as young people do. The novel maintains a comedic, relatable tone for young readers while also discussing important issues. Its ability to both captivate and emotionally impact young readers are the reasons why *Looking for Alaska* is still highly-acclaimed and taught in schools over ten years after its publication.

The highly awaited TV mini-series adaptation was released on Hulu in 2019. The series brought new life and popularity to Green's story in both popular culture and BookTube. Once again, one can use the reception theory to analyze readers' reactions in the BookTube community. Generally speaking, the show expands on the novel's foundation and includes many

scenes that were not in the book. However, as a whole, the adaptation maintains the spirit of the novel even if it diverges from specific events at times.

In addition to the characterization and plot, the structural and technical elements of the series have been praised by readers for contributing to the accuracy of the adaptation. In her review of the adaptation, BookTuber LovelyLikeLaura describes the effectiveness of making the novel into a mini-series as opposed to a film adaptation, which is what several producers attempted and failed to do to the novel in the past. She praises the pacing of the adaptation and how it would not have been allowed to progress or be as detailed if it had been a film adaptation. She says, "The show gave it the correct amount of time to progress... I can't imagine it being in any other form," (LovelyLikeLaura n.p.). She also praises various sets and visual details in the show, and says it felt very familiar to her and straight out of her imagination when she read the novel. Laura later describes her gratitude for the adaptation and says, "If more people are going to watch it, then my favorite story ever gets to be told to more people than who have read the book, then I'm really appreciative of that," (LovelyLikeLaura n.p.). Laura's review is a prime example of an enthusiastic readers' perception of the similarities between the adaptation and the novel.

Though the adaptation is faithful overall, there are also several differences between the two forms. One of the main differences between the novel and the series is that the novel is solely from Pudge's point of view, but the series offers a much more omniscient view into the characters' lives. Though it does focus on Pudge, the other characters get plenty of their own screen time separate from him, particularly Alaska and the Colonel. For example, Alaska's screen time makes her struggles with mental illness seem much clearer than in the novel. Viewers also noted that the omniscient writing of the adaptation strengthened the characterization of several

characters, particularly Alaska. When comparing the two versions of Alaska, Nicole Aboodi explains why she prefers the series version of her character in her review. She states that she felt Green romanticized both Alaska and her mental illness in the novel but says this is less so the case with the adaptation. She says,

"Rather than only showing Miles's perspective, the show expands its scope to include the best friends, the dream girl and the compassionate educators. By broadening the scope, the show eliminates the single-mindedness and the problematic male gaze that the book had. Alaska's actions no longer hold no meaning. Miles's fascination with Alaska is no longer a clear romanticization of mental illness. Instead, we see her world through her eyes. Her random breakdowns and inexplicable actions actually have explanations; we can understand her more now. We see that her interactions with Miles aren't her entire personality, but rather such a small facet of who she is" (Aboodi 1.)

There are several scenes where one can see Aboodi's point come into play. In an added scene that was not in the novel, Alaska joins her boyfriend at a local college party where she ends up binge drinking and getting sick after getting upset. She promptly breaks up with him after having feelings of not being good for him, and then leaves. This scene gives the audience more of an insight into her patterns of self-destructive and self-loathing behaviors that one did not get to see as deeply in the novel, and since Pudge is not in the scene at all, it adds to Aboodi's point of the omniscient writing helping to develop Alaska's identity separately from Pudge compared to the novel.

The series also adds depth to several characters that played a much smaller role in the novel, which many viewers preferred. Of the character changes, the most notable is the students'

world religions teacher, Dr. Hyde. In the novel, he is just an admired professor who instills thought-provoking questions into the students, but in the series, he becomes a confidant and a mentor for several of the students. When Alaska's friends shut her out, he is the one she turns to for advice and company, and after her death, Dr. Hyde becomes a source of comfort for Pudge and the Colonel. He is also developed and given an in-depth backstory that was never mentioned in the novel. In her discussion of the series, co-creator of the channel Getbookish, Les describes how much she loves the addition to Dr. Hyde's character even if it strays from the novel. She says, "I loved learning more about his past... and how he came to believe what he believes" (Gebookish n.p.). Her only critique of his character was the inconsistency of how his health is portrayed. It is emphasized in both forms of the text that Dr. Hyde is sick and only has one lung, but Les felt that they emphasized this in the first few episodes, but then it seemed to be mostly forgotten that he was sick later on (Getbookish n.p.) Les also discusses the bigger role the Colonel's mother Dolores plays in the adaptation. She describes her as "the best of everyone" in the adaptation and discusses how some of her decisions drive the plot further in ways that differ from the novel.

Though there are some differences, the series adaptation is overall very similar to the original novel. Any changes in plot or characterization seem to be for the sake of improving storytelling and entertainment for the TV platform. Every character, even those with more minor roles, feels necessary and important to the working of the story. The adaptation maintains the same spirit and themes that are present in the novel. Though the novel was released before YouTube was popularized, the release of the adaptation gave a new wave of interest to the story on BookTube.

The release of the adaptation caused several BookTubers to reread *Looking for Alaska* after reading it years prior, and it interested new readers who had never read it before. Many of those who had read the book previously have praised the show as both a strong mini-series and adaptation. In Getbookish's discussion, Les particularly praises the portrayal of the Colonel in the series and says the actor's performance "carries the whole show." She praises his emotionality and range in different scenes to portray the Colonel's angry yet kind nature. Upon analyzing Alaska's portrayal, she makes the point on how fans of the novel often have polarizing viewpoints on how her character should be, and audiences have tendencies to romanticize their own version of characters, which, ironically, is a theme John Green discusses heavily in the book. She says,

"This book is so beloved by so many people and there are a lot of extremely strong opinions on what Alaska is based on the text and who Alaska is based on the text, and a lot of people, as we all do, dream up in our heads what we want her to be, what we think that she is, and there will never be an adaptation of anything that is going to meet everyone's expectations... It's never going to be what you want; it's never going to be your version, but I think what we do get to see is that she is yes, she's pretty and she can be sweet, but she can also switch moods absolutely in the same moment and be angry and mad... We really do see her as a full character who wants to keep the sadness of herself away from others."

(getbookish n.p.)

After warning against people's subjectification of certain characters, Les also defends and explains a common critique of the adaptation and of John Green's work in general. Green's critics often complain that the characters in all of his books, who are mostly teenagers, use unrealistic

language or dialect for their age. Many use this as a reason to discredit the value of his work altogether. She alludes to what critics say,

"Teens don't talk like that, kids...' just because *you* didn't or don't know teenagers who do, doesn't mean they don't... If we look at Alaska's interests, she's reading all these books by guys who have that same understanding of the world, so of course she talks the way she interprets the things she takes in... It's very faithful to the source material, and if you didn't like the source material, why are you watching the adaptation?" (Getbookish n.p.)

This discussion of the *Looking for Alaska* adaptation is a prime example of the kind of thought-provoking discussions many BookTubers facilitate on their platforms. Furthermore, examining Les's discussion through the lens of reception theory, it appears that her perception of the series coincides well with her perception of the novel. Her discussion conveys that the two forms of the text complement each other rather than differ from each other. Though *Looking for Alaska* is not Green's most heavily discussed book on YouTube, it is still a noteworthy novel for many in the community. Many read the novel prior to starting their channels, and with this recent adaptation, the appreciation for Green's first novel has been reignited for many, both new and returning readers and viewers.

The BookTube community has grown and changed significantly since its' establishment; it has changed readership, how one communicates with other readers, and how publisher's target and interact with their audience. Today, some of the most popular BookTubers have turned their channels into successful full-time careers, but YouTube and how we think of "YouTubers" today would not be the same without the work of John and Hank Green. Because of the Green's work and appreciation for the online community, they were able to help change the public's perception

of online personalities from merely an entertainer to a legitimate creator. Creators used to be seen as just entertainers, many did not understand or give them credit for the thought, work, and skill that is actually needed to create most kinds of content. They achieved this by uniting online creators with their fans at VidCon, which turned into an international sensation, and in turn helped popularize the YouTube platform even more.

Along with his successful online career, John Green's writing career has also been critically and commercially successful. From several film adaptations to winning the Printz Award, Green has proved his talent for young adult writing. His works have also been taught in public school curriculums throughout the country. John Green has contributed to the BookTube community through his own works and through his work to promote YouTube as a whole. As the new generations grow up with more technology, BookTube and online communities similar to it will inevitably become more normalized, and it is partially due to the Green's contributions that creation on YouTube is now more respected and understood than it was before. Because of Green and BookTube creators, future readers who grow up as digital natives will be able to find an accessible community that encourages them to read on a platform that is familiar to them.

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