

Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—January 10, 2023

37 Participating on Zoom

How to use TikTok to Sell Books



Shelby Leigh, a mental health writer, poet, and book marketer shares how we can utilize TikTok to sell books and grow our readership. Shelby has sold over 50K books without using ads and grown her audience to over 500,000 using TikTok. She has helped over 600 authors get started on TikTok and tonight dives into her best tips for using the platform.

Why TikTok?

- Over 1 billion monthly active users.
- Short-form vertical video format isn't going away.
- It is easy to use, and you can repurpose content across other platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, etc.
- TikTok users are twice as likely to recommend a product or service they found on TikTok.
- The organic growth is still fantastic.
- New people see your posts every time. Shelby had over 10,000 followers in her first week. Many people who are not following you will still discover your posts.
- #BookTok has over 100 billion views. People love talking about books. #BookTok is mostly reader-driven but authors and small presses can use it to make a big impact.

How to use TikTok:

- Setting up your profile is easy. Download the app & create an account. There are copyright-free sounds you can use. Choose a fitting username, key works, books, author, etc. Upload a profile picture.
- Your TikTok bio. Make this reader-focused, not you-focused. What do your books DO for the reader? Use emotions, feelings, lessons, etc.
- Example, Shelby's bio. "Helping others feel less alone through my books. Publishing stories that will keep you awake at night. Writing books to make you believe in love again."
- Final piece—a call to action. For example, "Check out our books here." "Buy our books here." "Read more here." You need 1,000 follower to have a sales link in your bio. Until then, you can connect to an Instagram account.

TikTok fundamentals: the hook

- You need to capture attention in the first second
- Text hook, most important
- Music hook
- Voiceover hook
- Combination of all

TikTok fundamentals: the video

- Vertical video filmed on your phone (16:9)
- Back camera better quality than selfie
- Natural lighting



TikTok fundamentals: the editing

- You can do most editing in the TikTok app
- Cut out *anything* that isn't needed
- Add text and music in TikTok. Their music is royalty free.
- Clip multiple videos/pictures together

Analytics: watch time

- There are many analytics: views, likes, comments, forwards, and awesomes.
- But the most important is *average watch time* for a particular video. If you get longer watch times, TikTok will recommend to more people. Also see what percentage of people watch the whole video. 30 percent is very good.
- Here is one of Shelby's results:



- This Shelby video was only 15 seconds long. She recommends keeping them short, especially if you are a beginner.

Once you find what works, do it again and again!

- You will have new viewers each time
- Only one person among hundreds of thousands has ever seen Shelby’s video more than once

Popular Booktok video styles:

- Page flips/spine flips
- Aesthetic videos with stock imagery (use royalty free, e.g., TeXual or [Pixabay](#))
- Author telling a story/educating audience (great for nonfiction!)
- Laying a block of text over still video—sometimes people will come back multiple times to finish reading all the text. Maybe some text from the book.

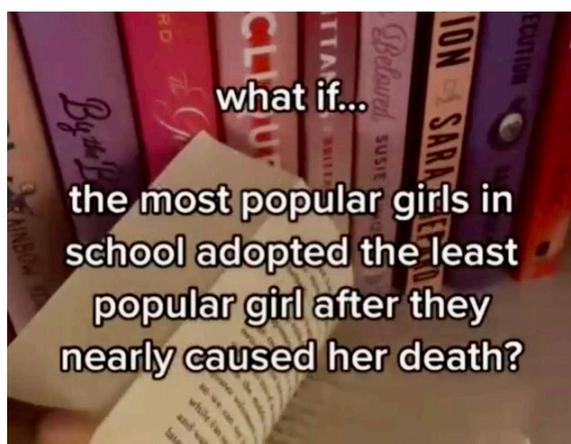
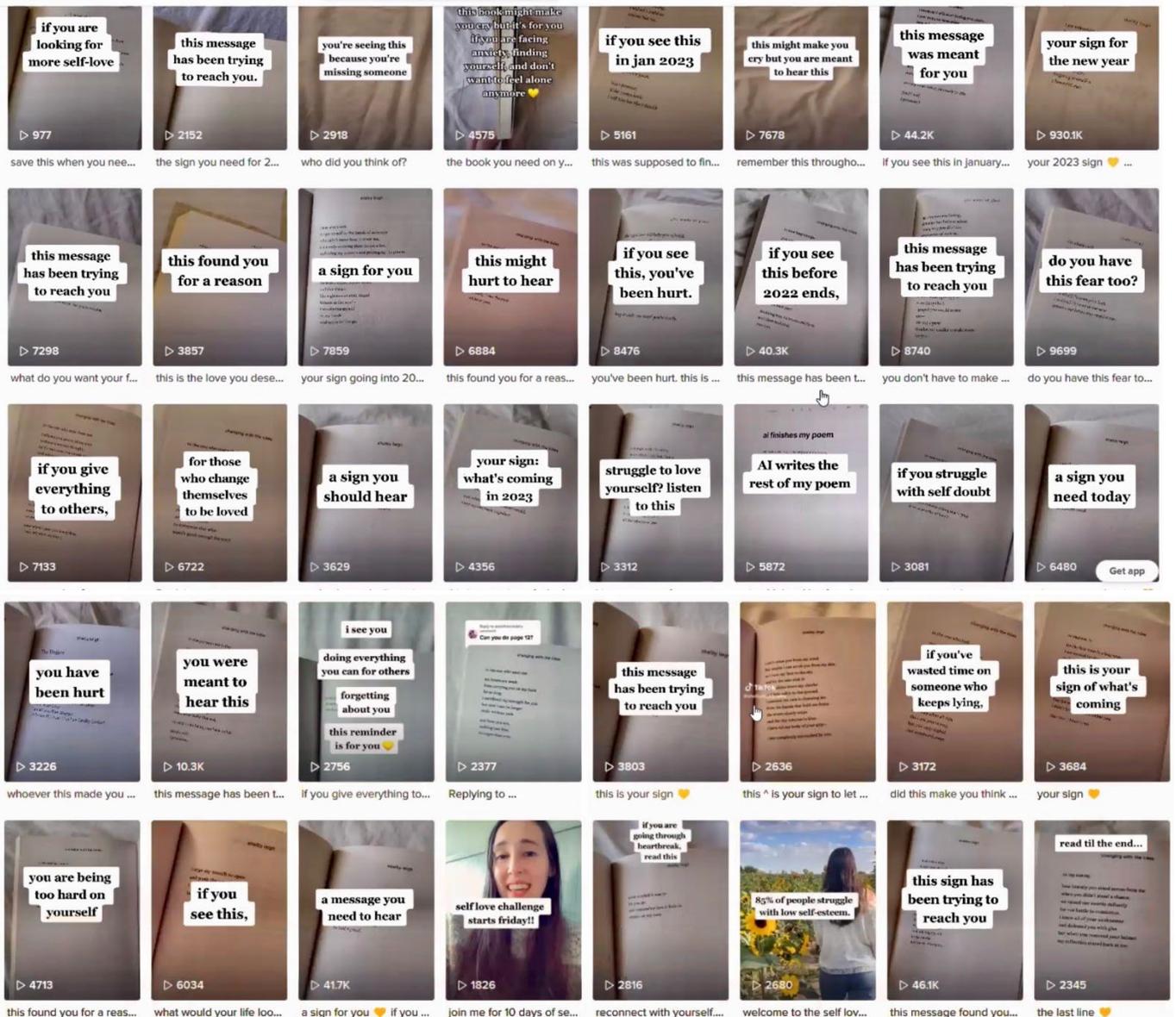
Working with booktokers:

- Search for your genre on TikTok and look at popular videos
- If an account is dedicated to books, and they enjoy your genre, they might be a good fit
- Follow & engage before asking if they want your book for them to recommend. They may have details to do so on their website!

Here are the opening scenes from some of Shelby’s videos:

- Notice the focus on the reader
- She sticks with the same style
- A face shot is sometimes used

- If it starts with a book shot, then the rest of the video can turn to the spine, cover, or special page, perhaps reading a page



Example of a good hook:

In a spine-flip example: the page edges are shown (with some intriguing text), but at the end (7 seconds) the book is turned so the cover can be seen

Shelby also showed a video from A P Beswick to promote his books.

Q&A:

Q1: How often do you suggest posting?

A1: At first, once per day. Don't leave for a week. Also spend time researching.

Q2: How much time do you spend on the app?

A2: Probably 15 minutes per day.

Q3: Can we edit from a computer?

A3: I think you have to post from the app.

(Later someone found that his computer has such a link.)

Q4: Are there still worries about China tapping into TikTok information?

A4: I think it is a personal decision. I like it.

Q5: Tell us about the use of hashtags.

A5: I don't use much. But others spend hours adding hashtags. Typically the range is 3 to 7 per video.

Q6: Are there older users?

A6: Authors of all ages have used it successfully.

Q7: How much time do you spend engaging with your audience? Some seem to have thousands of comments.

A7: Not too long, 30 minutes. Of course when there are many comments you can't get back to most.

Q8: You don't seem to be including purchase links.

A8: Right, I get plenty of traffic. I don't recommend paying for that option.

Q9: Is it important to reply to each comment?

A9: Early on you should respond to as many as you can to show that you are engaged.

Q10: Can you schedule a post ahead of time?

A10: There are some schedulers who will do this, and it may be coming to TikTok.

Q11: Can you join to observe and not post?

A11: Yes, you should research for a couple of weeks, but don't leave it empty for months.

Q12: Does the business level app cost money?

A12: No, it also is free.

Q13: It seems that TikTok has some very popular genres. How should you post if you are not in those genres?

A13: There are thousands who will see it anyway. Use hashtags to better define and get to your market.

Q14: How do you get to your audience if you don't use hashtags?

A14: Even your titles and text in the video are searchable. So use attractive words. Keywords are also important.

Q15: For fiction, how do you find the right readers?

A15: Think about what the one first sentence of your video should be to hook those readers. See what others are saying about your book. Experiment.

Q16: Do you use TikTok to find new ideas? Do you find yourself getting sucked into the app?

A16: At first I did. Now I plan to only do research only on important subjects.

Q17: Is there a benefit in building the audience before the book comes out?

A17: Yes, it might be a little slow, but when the book comes out it will be faster. Pose a lot of questions leading up to the launch.

Q18: Have you put reviews or testimonials on your posts?

A18: Yes, and then I comment on them.

Q19: Seems like the text doesn't need to be as polished as we usually try.

A19: Yeah, the audience does skew younger, and you should focus on how it will feel to the reader. It's really informal.

Q20: Do you sometimes get negative comments and how do you deal with them?

A20: I mostly respond to those making positive comments.

Q21: So, we could join at an individual level to just observe and don't need a professional level?

A21: Yes, you can switch back and forth.

Closing discussion:

If you search for Shelby's name you will see which got the most views. Check those out.

Starting out, one MiPA person got fewer views, around 40. Keep at it and it will increase.

On TikTok only a small percentage are selling things. Most are just posting about themselves or their lives.

Do you think there will still be a big audience for readers in the future? Shelby thinks video and social media are actually increasing book sales.

A little TikTok logo appears on each post. It can be removed by third party agents before sending to Instagram. Instagram doesn't like it.

You can "duet" a video with another person's videos. Ask for permission.

If you have a long poem, just read part of it.

Character inner thoughts can sometime be revealed better in text. But videos are valuable too.

Are people following people or genres? Both. You should be sure your posts are not too divergent from the genre you are in. Just explain, or use two separate accounts to avoid confusion.

Do you have thoughts on AI? Some people repost things from Shelby often. AI may start stealing from everywhere soon. Some of the AI programs/apps are more ethical than others. A long discussion about the future of AI and its success followed, with no conclusions. This is why MiPA will be having a general meeting session on the subject later this spring—probably with an expert panel.