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Purchase Decisions for Bookish Boxes: Influence of Instagram

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Purchase Decisions for Bookish Boxes: Influence of Instagram

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Abstract

There is no question that the internet, and by extension, social media has changed the way people communicate in the world today. Not only has the rapid advancement in technology affected how people communicate with each other, but also with businesses. Businesses have been forced to start marketing their products digitally in order to compete with others in their respective markets. The entire e-commerce industry has formed because of these technological advancements and changes in consumer tastes and preferences. To some small businesses, the emergence of social media has been a great benefit because they now have access to a marketing tool that can reach more people at a lower cost.

One industry that has been taking advantage of social media, and more specifically, Instagram, is the bookish subscription box companies. These companies offer book-loving people boxes full of things ranging from books to book-related merchandise on a subscription basis. This study explores marketing tactics used by these companies by looking at the presence they have on the internet and various social media platforms. A survey was sent to the book community on Instagram, known as the #bookstagram community, to discover the motivation behind the purchases of bookish boxes and the influence social media has on those purchase decisions.

The results reveal the strong influence of social media on consumer purchase decisions when it comes to bookish boxes. Most participants indicated that they look towards Instagram to find out information on these companies. The fear of missing out (FOMO) and the fandoms represented in the products were also highly influential and have grown as a result of social media.

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Introduction

Reading has been something I enjoyed ever since I was a child. However, due to the stress and lack of time from attending college, I stopped reading for pleasure for about three years. Realizing that I missed reading books and being immersed in fictional worlds, I finally decided to push myself to read again in May of 2017. I made up a rule that I had to read at least twenty-five pages per day and it helped me rediscover my love for books, especially in the fantasy genre. Roused from my three-year reading slump, I purchased *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas. This book changed my life because it helped me discover the various online book communities that were out there. None of my friends and family in real life are fans of reading fantasy novels, so I had no one to turn to when I needed to express my feelings about this phenomenal book series. I ended up typing the title into the search bar on YouTube and found a bunch of people who were reviewing the book on their channel. I subscribed to a few of these YouTubers and found myself watching videos about books whenever I could.

One day late last year, I noticed a video with the word “unboxing” in the title. Turns out, there are companies that sell boxes full of book-related merchandise on a subscription basis. I had no idea that book-related merchandise even existed! Intrigued by this new industry that I found from watching book-related YouTube videos, I looked up the company, called FairyLoot, that curated the box from the video. I loved the concept of receiving a box every month with a new Young Adult fantasy book along with a few exclusive goodies. I saw that FairyLoot was selling their “Oh So Regal” themed box in a few days so I set my alarm and hoped for the best. On the day of the sale, their website crashed and I spent forty minutes trying to buy the box, but they were all sold out. I decided to try again the next month for their “Talk Faerie To Me”

themed box, which was supposed to include an item inspired by the *Throne of Glass* series.

FairyLoot's website crashed yet again and the boxes were sold out within minutes. I felt incredibly disappointed because I wanted to own a piece of merchandise inspired by my favorite book series. My two failed attempts at securing myself a box spurred me to research other bookish subscription box companies and subscribe to them. I received my first ever bookish box in February 2018 and have purchased over fifty bookish boxes totaling over \$1,500 since then. It has truly become an addiction for me.

Around the same time I received my first bookish subscription box, I launched an Instagram account dedicated to books, which has gained over 2,100 followers and is steadily growing. My Instagram account consists of book reviews, unboxings, promotional content for bookish companies, and general book photography. I use this platform to share my love for reading and books, which has made my life so much happier, but it has also caused me to spend an absurd amount of money. Since I am such an active member of the book community on Instagram, I spend a lot of time looking at pictures and watching people's stories. Whenever I see someone open a bookish box or post a picture of a piece of merchandise inspired by a book I love, I feel an incredibly strong impulse to make a purchase so that I can own it myself. I cannot stop buying boxes because I fear missing out on items that everyone else will have. My own box addiction has inspired me to research social media's influence on purchase decisions for bookish boxes.

Literature Review

Brief History of Subscription Services

Subscription services have actually been around for hundreds of years. The newspaper industry was one of the first subscription services in existence, offering their customers the option to receive their newspapers by mail or home delivery instead of purchasing them at stands or anywhere else (Lanson, 2013). Believing that selling books via mail order was the future, Harry Scherman founded Book-of-the-Month Club, Inc in 1926 (Book-of-the-Month, n.d.; Brown, 2016). The service grew quickly because of the convenience it provided since not everyone lived near bookstores or libraries (Brown, 2016). Members also seemed to be onboard with the idea of receiving a few books per year through the mail rather than visiting stores physically. The company was so successful because they were one of the first companies to create a service such as this and the needs of the time matched up with what they were offering (Book-of-the-Month, n.d.). The company was then able to offer lower priced books to its customers, which helped them grow even more. They managed to attract customers by using traditional marketing methods such as buying “advertisements in magazines and weekly book review sections of newspapers” (Book-of-the-Month, n.d.) because those were the only advertising platform available to them and they had become big enough that they could afford it.

The Columbia Record Club, under the Columbia House brand, came a few decades later in 1955. The club marketed music directly to consumers by mail on a membership basis (Columbia House Company, n.d.). Without the aid of modern technology, it took the Columbia Record Club over 40 years to substantially grow its customer base (“Inside the Booming,” 2016). However, unlike Netflix, the world’s leading internet video streaming service, which started as a

mail-order DVD rental service (Company Profile, n.d.; Littleton & Roettgers, 2018), Columbia Record Club did not survive the transition into the digital age and filed for bankruptcy in 2015 (Hamilton, 2015).

The slow growth of the Columbia Record Club greatly contrasts Birchbox, the first modern e-commerce subscription service, which “launched in 2010 and grew 179 percent in just 2-1/2 years to 800,000 members” (“Inside the Booming,” 2016). Attracted by the success of the new e-commerce subscription service industry, both new companies and traditional mail-order subscription businesses geared towards certain niches have started entering the online market. The subscription e-commerce industry has grown over 100 percent per year in the past five years (Chen, Fenyo, Yang, & Zhang, 2018; Columbus, 2018). In fact, the newspaper industry, that many believed to be failing, has started to see some growth in sales with the introduction of digital subscriptions (Gilbreath, 2017; Tzuo, 2017).

After decades of struggle due to the emergence of paperback books and bookstore chains like Barnes & Noble that were able to offer consumers lower prices, Book-of-the-Month Club was revived in 2015 by current CEO John Lippman and renamed Book of the Month (Book-of-the-Month, n.d.; Brown, 2016; Feldman, 2017). Even Book of the Month, which had been traditionally mail-order has, under its new CEO John Lippman, repositioned the company online and entered the online market. To this day, the company still offers customers a choice between a few carefully selected books a month at a discounted price of \$14.99 per month for one book, with the option to add additional books for \$9.99 (Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.). However, everything is now available for purchase on their website. With all of these new companies entering the e-commerce and subscription service market at such a rapid rate,

businesses must find ways to differentiate themselves from their competition and find cheaper, reliable ways of marketing their products and services.

Traditional and Current Marketing of Subscription Services

Traditional marketing includes any means, besides digital, companies use to increase visibility and sales of their products. This would include billboards, flyers, paper mail sent directly to consumers, and commercials on television and radio (Bobnak, 2017; Todor, 2016). Early subscription services were traditionally marketed through newspaper and magazine inserts or as bill stuffers, as well as all of the ways mentioned before. Due to this fact, it is likely that subscription services were mostly executed by big companies, such as the Columbia Record Club and Book of the Month Club before the emergence of the internet. Bigger companies such as those were more likely to have the funds to support a marketing budget using traditional marketing methods.

Although new technology has affected how people do business and how they market it, traditional marketing methods are still relevant today. In an interview with Forbes, Book of the Month CEO John Lippman revealed, “We’re running TV ads and subway ads. We are in the New York City subways promoting Book of the Month and the books” (Feldman, 2017). These traditional marketing methods are still effective but can be supplemented by social media marketing, which can very accurately target consumers in a more inexpensive way (Todor, 2016). Small online subscription companies do not have the luxury of spending loads of money advertising through the traditional mediums so they have turned to a much more cost friendly, and potentially more successful alternative. By going directly to their target consumers via various social media platforms, businesses can form stronger relationships through frequent and

more direct connections (Daley, 2010). The emergence of small companies that only sell their products online shows how much the marketing field has expanded from the older, traditional mediums. Social media is now essential to the survival of many businesses (Holmes, 2015).

Without this relatively inexpensive way of raising awareness for their products, some businesses might not even be able to form. By speaking directly to their target consumers, they are saving a lot of time and money.

Influence of Social Media and the Internet on Purchase Decisions

The motivation behind a person's purchase decisions is largely based on the concept of value. Value is categorized into two main dimensions: utilitarian value and hedonic value (Overby & Lee, 2006; Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005). When a customer shops purely to complete a task, their shopping goals are considered utilitarian (Overby & Lee, 2006). Customers who are not purchasing necessities are making decisions based on hedonic value judgments; meaning they are shopping not only for task completion but also for the experience (Overby & Lee, 2006). In the past, consumers would have to seek out intermediaries with expert knowledge when making purchase decisions. However, nowadays, anyone and everyone can post a review of a product online to be discovered by others. With customers shopping based on hedonic value judgments, placing more importance on peer recommendations rather than expert reviews (Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005), subscription services offering products or services that are not necessities may need to pay more attention to reviews online.

With the development and growth of the Internet in the 1990s, and shortly thereafter, the growth of social media (Andrews, 2013; Morrison, 2014), marketing strategies have been completely transformed and businesses have had to adjust to the increasingly highly digitized

world today (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009). Companies have to be mindful of the different people and places customers can find product recommendations depending on what types of products and services they offer. The Internet and, by extension, social media have made communicating with other people that have similar interests considerably easier (Quelch & Klein, 1996).

Influences on consumer purchase decisions have really changed over the years because of the ability to interact with others in online communities. Businesses must keep a close eye on how their products are perceived not only by expert critics but also the general public because research shows “88% of consumers are as likely to trust online reviews as personal recommendations” (Rajapack, 2016). Customer reviews and recommendations may play a significant role in the success of some companies.

The Rise of Online Book Communities

Before the existence of the Internet, book-lovers had to physically meet or mail letters in order to discuss their favorite books or just share their love for literature. Groups of people who share a strong interest in books, simply known as the book community (Bolme, 2018), were mostly restricted to their physical location and could not really discuss topics immediately. Book club meetings had to be planned and letters took a while to be sent and received through the postal system. As technology has advanced, though some do still meet in a physical capacity, many book communities have emerged online (Baxter-Wright, 2018). Instead of physically meeting for local book clubs, people from around the world are able to form communities on social media sites such as Facebook, Goodreads and Instagram. These online communities allow book-lovers to communicate directly and immediately with other people no matter where they live. For example, with a name stemming from the popular hashtag used to share book-related

photos, Bookstagram, the community on Instagram, has become a place where bookworms everywhere are able to share pictures of their books and bookish merchandise (Drews, 2018; Vespa, 2018). Facebook's ability to allow its users to form groups has also given rise to several book communities on Facebook. Some bookish box companies have created Facebook groups of their own; for example, OwlCrate created one called the "The OwlCrate Society" that has over 17,000 members (The OwlCrate Society, n.d.). Everyone is allowed to join this particular group, but there are also groups that are more selective when it comes to their members (BWWPC Book Club, n.d.). Anyone can create a group on Facebook so the possibilities are endless.

Bookish Box Companies

An industry that has sprung up from the creation of these online book communities is bookish box companies, which are subscription companies that offer boxes in all shapes and forms. Some companies offer monthly subscriptions, in which you get a mystery book along with a few bookish items such as character prints or candles themed around a book, while others offer limited edition boxes, where you only get bookish merchandise but no book (Penn, 2017; Thebookishbox, n.d.). Bookish merchandise is essentially just any book-related merchandise (Seales, 2018). Smaller companies are starting to emerge because of the access to social media platforms where they can easily market their items. The main differences between the newly revised Book of the Month and the bookish box companies, that have been born from the e-commerce industry, are the element of surprise and also the additional products offered. Unless they are offering a limited edition box, in which they have announced the book included, bookish box companies offer customers a subscription to a box full of surprises (Gallucci, 2017). They will give hints and perhaps a vague synopsis of the book that they will be including in a certain

month's box, but they do not reveal it. Customers do not get to choose what book they receive in their box, yet they still purchase it. So although both Book of the Month and other book subscription services are sending their consumers a book a month, their products are very different from each other. Book of the Month is selling their customers a book, and perhaps an opportunity to be a part of a book club, but bookish box companies are offering their customers a book and an experience (How It Works, n.d.).

Influential factors of purchase decisions have changed considerably in the past years because of the rise of these new products and services (Su, 2017). New subscription services appear regularly, such as the bookish box industry (Mosendz & Bhasin, 2016). Bookish subscription box companies saw an opportunity to tap into the Bookstagram community as a way to market their products. Not only do these box companies have to offer consumers a great product, but they must also give them an experience to remember in order to keep them coming back. People who buy into subscription services do so because "they want a great end-to-end experience and are willing to subscribe only where automated purchasing gives them tangible benefits, such as lower costs or increased personalization" (Chen, Fenyo, Yang, & Zhang, 2018). Book subscription boxes like FairyLoot and OwlCrate surprise subscribers with not only a book, but also several bookish items that are inspired by different fandoms (Gallucci, 2018). This adds to the appeal of the boxes because it adds to the excitement. People can buy these boxes for themselves or as gifts. Although these boxes are expensive, especially when you add on the shipping fees, the consumers are ultimately getting more for their money. Not only are they getting a box with a retail value worth more than they are paying, but they are also paying for an experience. Taking a quote directly from FairyLoot's website, "we want each and every one of

our boxes to be a special experience and make you feel like you are opening a box of treasure taken straight from a fairy's lair” (Our Story, n.d.). The book community loves a good story, and FairyLoot is trying to appeal to that desire.

Relevant Concepts

There are four main concepts that are relevant to social media's influence on the purchase decisions for bookish boxes: the unboxing phenomenon, fear of missing out, impulse buying, and fandoms. These concepts help to explain why these bookish boxes have become so desirable and hard to resist. All have become increasingly influential due to the growth of social media.

Unboxing phenomenon. The unboxing phenomenon, which is the rising popularity of posts and videos made of people simply unpacking products, is important to explore because it provides some insight on why subscription boxes have become so successful. Many companies are using unboxings as a way to promote their products, and people love watching them (Hof, 2015; Kelly, 2014). These unboxings live on all different platforms and in different formats, from an unboxing video on YouTube to an Instagram post featuring all the contents in a particular box. Cratejoy is an online marketplace that sells a variety of subscription boxes from different genres (About Cratejoy, n.d.). Cratejoy approaches marketing in different ways for different subscription boxes. The site uses Instagram and Youtube influencers to push the different boxes in order to target certain niches. The company explains that it “partners with YouTube influencers to produce and distribute unboxing videos on an ongoing basis. These influencers tend to have audiences within a specific niche (jewelry, books, cooking, etc.) and love to share new and interesting subscription boxes with their fans” (“How We Market,” 2018).

Many YouTubers that are active members of the book community are called BookTubers (De León, 2018).

Many BookTubers such as Emmmabooks, Clockwork Reader, and Tashapolis have partnered with Cratejoy or specific book subscription box companies to do unboxings. The subscription box companies send boxes to these influencers and have them upload a complete unboxing video to their channel (Giordano, 2016). This is an example of how companies are able to raise awareness on their boxes and pull in potential customers without exorbitant spending on traditional marketing methods because “digital marketing has much lower cost and in many cases websites can generate traffic even for free” (Todor, 2016). Since these influencers have already amassed a following within specific niches, companies also know that their products will be reaching their target consumers through unboxing videos. Bookish box companies that are geared towards young adult fans can enlist the help of BookTubers that talk more about YA because their followers are already familiar with that kind of content.

With unboxings, consumers are able to see what they get. Since the books and items in book subscription boxes change every month, these unboxings show people what they are missing out on and can create a sense of need among the audience. Unboxings can be extremely useful to brands because they take advantage of human curiosity and can be a cheap form of advertising (Rajapack, 2016). Beyond unboxings, almost every bookish box company encourages their customers to post on social media (OwlCrate, 2018; FairyLoot, 2018). Some companies have even created photo challenges for people to participate in (Figure 1; Figure 2). Figure 2 is an actual entry for the photo challenge.



Figure 1. The prompts for Shelflove Crate's June "Romance Reboot" box's photo challenge.

Reprinted from shelflovecrate, (2018, July 14).

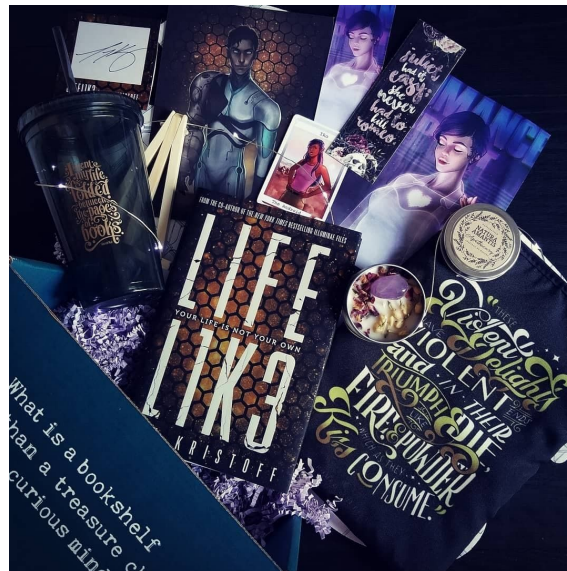


Figure 2. A complete unboxing of the June "Romance Reboot" box by Shelflove Crate.

Reprinted from Shen, S. [itsafangirlfantasy], (2018, July 16).

Customers who have purchased a box have the opportunity to post pictures based on a particular prompt, given by the company, for a chance to win a free box. These photo challenges are not limited to just the influencers chosen by these companies; anyone who has purchased a box can join in. These challenges are an excellent way of raising awareness for bookish boxes and generating a sense of FOMO among the people who did not purchase a box.

Fear of missing out (FOMO). The concept of “FOMO” (fear of missing out) is extremely important to understand because it is a type of social anxiety closely tied to the rise of social media that can play a role in consumer purchase decisions. In an article from *Psychology Today*, Nick Hobson argues that “while fear of missing out has always been there, the explosion of social media has launched our young people headfirst into the FOMO experience” (2008). The fear of missing out has always existed, but it has gotten so much worse now that pictures can be shared more easily. With platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, people can instantly share what they are doing or even the products that they are buying. Their friends then have the ability to see their posts right away.

One factor that could increase feelings of FOMO would be the exclusivity associated with some products. Companies can make their customers feel special by offering exclusive products and special deals that are only available to a certain group of consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). That is exactly what some of these bookish box companies are offering. The fear of missing out may increase as the availability of a product decreases because there is a higher chance of missing out. Feelings of FOMO still exist when products are available for purchase, but perhaps a consumer is not in the right financial position to make that purchase. They might have a strong desire for the product, but they know that once they have a little more money, they

can buy it right away. However, FOMO likely gets worse when the person has the means to buy something, but are not able to because they were only available for a limited time or have completely sold out. Not only do people feel like they are missing out on a great experience, but they are also missing out on items that will never again be available for purchase (Fae Crate, 2018). There is often a sense of exclusivity with these boxes because many of the items included are made exclusively for that company or box (Home, n.d.; Gallucci, 2017; Thebookishbox, n.d.). Consumers will not be able to buy them anywhere else and once they are gone, they are gone. OwlCrate uses this strategy in all of their boxes with their exclusive covers. The book that they send their subscribers every month has a cover that is made exclusively for OwlCrate (OwlCrate Shop, n.d.). For example, the books featured in Figure 3 are all the different editions of *The Cruel Prince* by Holly Black. The book on the left is the OwlCrate exclusive edition that was only available for subscribers who purchased their January 2018 Fearsome Fairy Tales box (Past Boxes, n.d.).



Figure 3. A photo of all three editions of *The Cruel Prince* by Holly Black. Yip, E. (2018, February 21). Everything You Need to Know About The Cruel Prince Editions.

Most companies have begun to curate items that are exclusive to their boxes as well, essentially creating collectible items. An entire secondary market, in the form of buy, sell, trade groups on Facebook, has formed as a result of demand for these collectible items from people who did not have the opportunity to buy the box that they came in (OwlCrate Official B/S/T, n.d.; The Official Fairyloot B/T/S, n.d.).

Impulse buying. Impulse buying is a huge problem associated with the emergence of e-commerce because purchasing products has become so much easier (Semuels, 2018). People can now buy things with a click of a button instead of physically going to the store. The success of bookish boxes could be in part due to the fact that these boxes are only sold online. When a consumer feels connected to a certain product their minds start acting as if they already own it and “a social connection with a product is created when we see someone using it and compare ourselves to that person” (Zimmerman, 2012). The social connection with a product that Zimmerman mentions can be easily formed when you see someone’s social media post about it. The connection can be especially strong when you factor in a person’s feelings towards a particular fandom that the specific product derives from. These bookish box companies usually announce their boxes at least a few weeks ahead of time and post constant reminders of when they are going on sale. The fear of missing out on a certain experience, combined with the easily accessible purchase channels, pushes people to buy these boxes impulsively.

Fandoms. In order to understand the emergence of these bookish box companies, the concept and role of fandoms must also be explored. The importance of sports fandoms cannot be overstated, because “fandom is a blessing; it connects you, as nothing else can, to childhood, and to everything and everyone that marked your life between your time as a child and the present”

(Elliot, 2005). This idea helps to explain why these boxes have become so popular. A fan's devotion to their fandom might urge them to try to own every single piece of merchandise available. These bookish box companies usually make sure to include at least a few big fandoms, such as Harry Potter, in their boxes to attract customers that would not usually purchase the box (OwlCrate, 2018). Not owning a particular item related to a fandom that one is part of, might make someone feel excluded from their community.

Research Question and Methodology

How does the use of marketing on Instagram affect purchase decisions of bookish subscription boxes? Since this research question deals with consumer purchase decisions, the best course of action was to go straight to the consumers with the research. This is an analytical study on the purchase motivation for bookish subscription boxes and the influence of Instagram. A survey that asked questions relating to the motivation behind bookish box purchases and the role of social media in purchase decisions was conducted (Appendix A). The survey was sent out to people in the Instagram book community who are most likely aware of the existence of bookish boxes. The #bookishbox hashtag alone has 26.6k posts as of December 2018. By posting a link to the survey on @itsafangirlfantasy's bookstagram account, which had around 1,950 followers during the duration of the survey, participants were limited to those already in the book community on Instagram.

It was extremely important for this paper to be highly ethical so a proposal (Appendix C) for this study was sent to the IRB board for review and it was approved. To minimize risk, necessary steps were taken to make this survey anonymous by not asking participants to provide identifiable personal information. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and people

were free to decline to take part in the project. There were a total of 144 responses. The survey was set up so that participants were able to skip all of the questions except for question one, which asked for their consent (Appendix B). This is why the number of responses for each question varied.

In addition to sending out a survey, an analysis of the websites and social media presence of four bookish box companies – FairyLoot, Fae Crate, Shelflove Crate, and OwlCrate – was performed to learn the different marketing tactics they are enacting. The analysis included studying the photos and captions of several social media posts on Instagram, as well as the content on their websites.

Results

Marketing Strategies

An analysis of the websites and social media presence of FairyLoot, Fae Crate, Shelflove Crate, and OwlCrate, showed that bookish box companies use three main marketing strategies to influence purchase decisions. Through social media posts, companies bring out feelings of FOMO by writing clever captions and revealing certain items and suppliers included in boxes. They also rely on social media influencers (reps) within the Bookstagram community in order to raise awareness for their products and pull in potential customers who see these people as a reliable source.

Fear of missing out. When customers purchase boxes, especially monthly subscriptions, they are usually doing so for the next box and not the one currently being sent out. For instance, FairyLoot announced that their December ‘Dragons’ box was sold out on November 19, 2018 in an Instagram post (FairyLoot, 2018). The December box is not scheduled to be shipped out until

mid-December, which means that people bought this box knowing that it would not arrive for a few weeks (FairyLoot, 2018). This begs the question of why customers are willing to spend money on a product that they will not receive right away. One source of motivation could be their fear of missing out (FOMO). Recently, OwlCrate announced that they were doing a limited edition box for a highly anticipated YA fantasy novel, *The Wicked King* by Holly Black. The official release date for *The Wicked King* is not until January 8, 2019 (Black, n.d.), so customers will have to wait until next year to receive their box. However, Owlcrate put them up for sale over two months in advance on November 2, 2018 (OwlCrate, 2018). In their announcement post on Instagram, Owlcrate says, “We have stocked up three times as many boxes as we did for the past Vengeful box, but we do anticipate these selling out fast” (OwlCrate, 2018). The box did end up selling out within days. As of December 2018, the box is listed as sold out, but people can join a waitlist in case there are any extra boxes once all the pre-orders ship out in January (Limited Edition Wicked, n.d.). Social media posts such as these influence purchase decisions by increasing the urgency. People may not wait too long to make their purchase decision after companies alert customers of their expectation of selling out fast because of their fear of not being able to snag a box before they are all gone.

The company even goes so far as to apologize in advance to anyone who “misses out on the box” (OwlCrate, 2018). This is an incredibly smart marketing strategy because they are essentially instilling the fear of missing out in their customers. They are already predicting how people will feel after learning that they missed out on the box. This could potentially lead to some impulse buys by those who do not want to be left out when everyone else receives their boxes.

Not only do companies attempt to increase a potential customer's fear of missing out, which could lead to impulse buying, but they may also trigger an impulse buy directly. Fae Crate announced an update of their December box sales on an Instagram post on November 3, 2018. They announced that there were less than one hundred boxes left for sale and made a suggestion to customers still waiting to buy. The post says, "If you are hesitating on buying I would make your decision asap as we cannot get any more books once they are sold out" (Fae Crate, 2018). They also go on to reiterate that the books were made exclusively for Fae Crate. In a matter of two sentences, they have reminded customers of the exclusivity of their product, possibly bringing out feelings of FOMO, and urged customers to make an impulse purchase decision.

The comment section of the Fae Crate post is also jammed packed with other customers expressing their excitement for the box and letting people know that they have already made their purchase (Fae Crate, 2018). This is the reason why social media is such a powerful marketing tool for all business, but especially small businesses such as these. Instead of having to open another tab or pull up another website, customers can find reviews right in the same post. Additionally, since purchase decisions for items bought for pleasure, such as these, are based on hedonic value judgments, the expertise of reviews matter less (Overby & Lee, 2006). Potential customers will, most likely, make their purchase decision based on recommendations and reviews from family members, friends, and other members of the book community. Of course, the flip side of this would be if customers start to criticize the company and post negative reviews. Companies must be careful and monitor their accounts on the various social media platforms that they operate to make sure that their customers are satisfied. This is a great place

for them to see what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong because they are hearing feedback directly from the consumers.

Item and supplier reveals. Another way Instagram clearly influences purchase decisions is through “reveals”. In addition to posting constant reminders of when boxes go on sale, many bookish box companies also announce certain items and suppliers included in boxes. Most boxes have a set theme, so consumers know what to expect in that sense, but they are often kept in the dark about which specific items they will be receiving (Our Story, n.d.). The companies often post these reveals on their Instagram pages keep customers engaged and ensure that anticipation does not die down. This makes the experience that much better. Reveals usually consist of a post on their Instagram account about an item or supplier that is expected for a particular box. These posts almost always include an eye-catching graphic (Figure 4; Figure 5) that says whether it is an item or supplier reveal and which box it is for.



Figure 4. FairyLoot reveals that their October ‘Beautiful Deceptions’ box will include a beanie hat. Reprinted from FairyLoot. [fairyloot]. (2018, September 16).



Figure 5. FairyLoot reveals that their October ‘Beautiful Deceptions’ box will feature artwork done by Emily Haynes Art. FairyLoot. Reprinted from FairyLoot. [fairyloot]. (2018, October 2).

These reveals serve a variety of purpose; the obvious one being to notify existing customers of what they will be getting in their box. Another purpose is to draw in additional, new customers by influencing their purchase decisions. When companies post a supplier reveal, customers who are loyal to that supplier may decide to purchase the box because they want to show their support or they just really like items made by that specific supplier. The same could be said about the item reveals. People may decide to purchase a box because of a specific item that they know will be included. For example, Figure 4 shows an item reveal that FairyLoot posted for their October ‘Beautiful Deceptions’ box. Many followers expressed their excitement in the comment section because FairyLoot had included a beanie hat in one of their previous boxes and it was one of their “most popular items ever!” (FairyLoot, 2018).

These reveals are posted at any time. Companies post them before sales open to get customers interested, during sales to convince those who are still waiting to make their purchases, and even after sales close. Posting item and supplier reveals after sales close can

benefit companies in two ways. These constant reminders can increase the hype and anticipation surrounding a box. The built-up excitement creates a more positive experience for the consumer when they finally receive their box and open it. The subscription service industry is all about the experience (Kestenbaum, 2017). Having a good product is simply not enough to keep customers coming back, especially with the increased saturation in the market. A great unboxing experience could mean a new loyal customer or ensure a future purchase from an existing one.

The other way these companies stand to benefit from posting reveals after sales close is by showing potential future customers the quality of their products, and what they are missing out on. These feelings of FOMO are present on all of the social media pages for bookish boxes that were explored. Potential customers who are not sure about whether to buy from a certain company can get a feel for their products from these posts. People are constantly discovering new products and companies every day so it is smart to post things like this often. This way, new customers do not have to spend a lot of time researching on their own.

Rep searches. Bookish box companies have created their own way of using social media influencers. Most commonly, bookish box companies have been seeking people to act as representatives and they do this through what they call rep searches. These searches help them find the best influencers to help promote their products. Companies will often post a rep search, in the form of an eye-catching graphic (Figure 6), on Instagram in hopes of finding a set amount of bookstagrammers.



Figure 6. Fae Crate’s rep search announcement. Reprinted from Fae Crate. [faecrate]. (2018, December 3).

In exchange for a free box, bookstagrammers are expected to do things such as sharing a discount code with their followers, often referred to as a “rep code,” and posting a certain amount of pictures per month for the company (Fae Crate, 2018; OwlCrate, 2018; shelflovecrate, 2018). Rules vary with each company, but they are all relatively straightforward. These rep searches themselves are also a great marketing tool because it helps raise awareness. In order to enter a rep search, people are frequently expected to create a collage of their pictures, along with a graphic provided by the company (Figure 7).

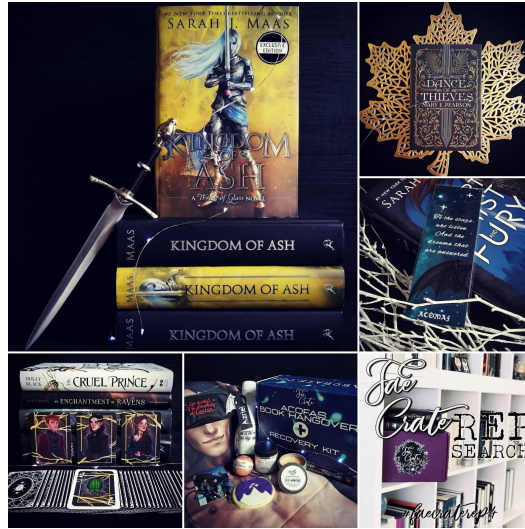


Figure 7. A rep search entry for Fae Crate posted by @itsafangirlfantasy. Reprinted from Shen, S. [itsafangirlfantasy]. (2018, December 3).

This creates a buzz even before the company has selected its official reps. When people post their rep search entry, all of their followers would be able to see it and maybe it would inspire a few of them to apply themselves. Not only can these rep search entries raise awareness for active rep searches, but they can also help people discover different bookish box companies and influence their purchase habits.

The bookish box companies also have quite a large social media presence themselves. Bookish box companies often share pictures posted by other people in the bookstagram community and interact directly with customers on the various social media platforms where they have a presence. For instance, FairyLoot often reposts pictures on their account that were originally posted by their followers, and they credit the accounts in the captions (FairyLoot, 2018). This makes their customers feel more connected with the brand and more willing to purchase. Brands that have a history of great products and customer service will always attract more customers, whether they are return customers or new ones because people trust them

(Shaw, 2018). Communication through social media has a big impact on purchase intentions (Shaw, 2018). By urging customers to post on social media using certain hashtags, these bookish box companies are creating a community for their customers (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). This helps inspire brand loyalty because people feel closer to smaller companies rather than the bigger ones which pass up opportunities to connect with their audience on a more personal level.

Survey Results

The survey was split into nine different sections for better organization (Figure 8).

Sections	Survey Questions
Consent	Question 1
Demographics	Questions 2-5
Social Media	Question 6-9
Bookish Boxes	Questions 10-12
Monthly Bookish Subscription Services	Questions 13-19
Purchase Decisions	Questions 20-25
Bookish Boxes and Social Media	Questions 26-27
Unboxings	Questions 28-29
Social Media's Influence	Questions 30-32

Figure 8. Sections of survey results and corresponding questions.

There were a total of 143 people who gave their consent and took the survey, but the response rate for each question might differ because they were allowed to skip questions they were not comfortable answering.

Demographics. Since this study deals with purchase decisions, it was important to ask for general demographic information in order to get a sense of the consumers. Participants

supplied their age, gender, country of residence, and employment status. It was not surprising to see that all but one of the participants were female, since the bookstagram community is mainly comprised of women. Within this female saturated community, 44.4% were ages 18-24, 45.1% were ages 25-34, and the rest were over the age of 34. The ages of the respondents explain the results for employment statuses because 42.7% were employed for wages and 32.9% were students. An interesting thing was 63.6% of participants reside in the U.S., while the rest are from all corners of the globe, including Canada, Australia, the U.K., Malaysia, Israel, and Estonia, just to name a few. This just goes to show how far the reaches of the bookstagram community are.

Social media. Out of all the participants, 81.8% said that Instagram was the platform they use most often and 92.3% said that Instagram was also the platform they turn to the most for book-related activities. However, it is important to acknowledge that the survey was sent out via Instagram, which likely skewed the results to favor Instagram more highly. Nevertheless, because of the quantity of bookish box companies active, Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms used to promote and spread the word about products. Even though the participants were sourced from Instagram, almost all of them have accounts on other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Tumblr. In addition, at least 70% of them use platforms other than Instagram for book-related activities. Since a majority of them are active on other platforms, yet still use Instagram the most for book-related activities, it would make sense that bookish box companies would want to take advantage of that.

Bookish boxes. The results from the survey highlight the importance of social media for these bookish box companies. When asked where they first heard of bookish boxes, 133 out of

143 (93%) people said that they discovered them through a social media platform. Out of these 133 people, 63.2% said that they found out through Instagram, 20.3% through Youtube, 13.5% through Facebook, and the rest responded with other platforms or could not remember. If a vast majority of their current and potential customers are finding out about bookish products from social media platforms, it shows the industry's reliance on social media for their purchase decisions. Most people discovered bookish boxes on Instagram, which is not surprising because there is a bigger presence of bookish box companies on Instagram than on any other social media platforms as the study has discovered. Instagram and Youtube are places where users can post visuals, whether it be a picture or a video. All of the major bookish box companies have active Instagram accounts. It is so much easier to show customers what they can get rather than tell them. Even though only 83.9% of participants indicated that they have either purchased or received a bookish before, all the responses in the later sections will still be relevant because it reveals the motivations behind making or not making a purchase.

Monthly bookish subscription services. In order to get a sense of the monthly bookish subscription services that are in the market, participants were asked to supply the names of the companies they have subscribed to before. They were given a list of seven companies that have at least 10,000 followers on Instagram: OwlCrate, Fairyloot, Shelflove Crate, Fae Crate, LitJoy Crate, Book of the Month, and Uppercase Box. They also had the option of listing other companies that were not already listed on the survey. The results show that there are a staggering amount of bookish box companies out there, showing the saturation of the market. Fifty-one companies, including the ones listed, were mentioned in the survey results. People mentioned purchasing boxes from companies such as Illumicrate, Enchanted Fandom, Whimsify, Beacon

Book Box, and Enchanted Book Box. Someone even mentioned a company based in India called Books 'n Beyond. These were only for monthly subscription boxes, but surely there would be many more companies mentioned if limited edition boxes were also included in the mix. There are so many different companies, yet they are still able to operate because people still subscribe to them, as show in the research. Participants were asked to select all the different types of subscriptions they have ever purchased. The monthly and one-time subscriptions seem to be most popular among the participants, as 44.7% indicated that they have purchased a one-time box before and 40.4% have had a monthly subscription. Although not as popular as a one-time subscription purchase, 30.5% of the participants indicated that they have previously purchased a multiple month subscription.

Motivation behind subscribing. Participants were asked to respond to a short answer question asking them to explain the reason why they subscribe to monthly book subscription boxes. There were three main points that were a common theme among the answers: affordability, fun and surprise, and the sense of community.

Affordability. The affordability of these book subscription boxes seem to be a huge motivation behind purchasing these boxes. The price of buying a box is always cheaper than buying all of the items individually. The average price people seem to pay per box, according to the responses for Question 14 (Appendix A), is \$30-\$39.99 (40.4%), \$40-\$49.99 (16.2%), \$20-\$29.99 (14.7%). At the end of the day, the customers are getting their money's worth because not only are they getting a book that usually comes with a signed bookplate or is signed itself, but they are also getting several other items related to the theme of the box and an experience. Since most of these books are either signed or come with a signed bookplate, it is

also a much more affordable way to get a signed book. Signed books at most bookstores are usually sold at list price, which is about half the price of what most people pay for an entire bookish box.

Bookish boxes offer customers a great deal. Shelflove Crate recently sent out their first special edition box, themed around the *Throne of Glass* series by Sarah J. Maas. Customers had the option to purchase the Standard Kingdom of Ash Special Edition Box, with twelve items for \$68 (excluding shipping), or the Deluxe Kingdom of Ash Special Edition Box, with fifteen items for \$115 (excluding shipping) (Standard Kingdom of, n.d.”). These boxes did not include the book, and instead had various Throne of Glass-related items made exclusively for Shelflove Crate. This might seem like a steep price to pay for a box, but the retail value of a Standard box totals over \$140, and over \$250 for a Deluxe box. One item in particular that was included in both boxes was a large blanket designed by Ink & Wonder. Extra stock of the blanket was made available on the Shelflove Crate shop for a list price of \$80 (Erilea Blanket, n.d.). The blanket was only one of the twelve items included in the Standard edition, yet it was worth more than the entire box.

Fun and surprise. Many people also mention the word “fun” and “surprise” in their response, adding to the whole idea of how bookish box companies are selling an experience, as well as a product. Some people get these boxes as a way of treating themselves. One participant even said, “I like getting a box of unknown stuff because it makes me feel like it's Christmas.” This also relates to the love of getting and discovering new books that some people mentioned in their responses. The books included in monthly subscriptions are mostly the first book in a series or a standalone unless it is a special box because they have to appeal to a broad audience. A lot

of the time companies end up choosing debut authors, which subscribers might not have otherwise discovered on their own.

Sense of community. One of the participants explained that she is a junior high English teacher who uses these boxes to help keep her up to date on what is popular in the YA community. She enjoys posting unboxings on her classroom Instagram account and her “students clamor over who gets to read the books first and it really builds community and interest in a culture of literacy.” These books and boxes give the community a lot to talk about. People can bond over their love of books and bookish merchandise. Getting these boxes are a great way for people to get more involved in the book community.

Use of books and merchandise included in boxes. When asked how often they read the books from bookish boxes, the responses were pretty evenly split between Sometimes, Always, Often. Out of 133 responses, 28.6% were for often, 27.1% for always, 19.5% for sometimes, 6% for never, 4.5% for rarely, and 14.3% did not receive a book in their box. These companies are obviously choosing the right books to include in their boxes if customers are reading them. The choice of book is extremely important because, unless it is a limited edition box, customers do not get to choose what book they receive. Companies will often give a vague summary of the synopsis, but do not explicitly state the name of the book to keep the element of surprise for their customers.

In terms of the book-related merchandise included in bookish boxes, out of the 132 responses, 47% said that used the merchandise often, 27.3% said sometimes, 14.4% said always, 6.1% said rarely, 3.8% said never, and 1.5% did not receive merchandise in their box. The fact

that a majority of people actually use the merchandise included in their boxes is a good sign because it shows that these bookish boxes are in tune with the needs of their customers.

Limited edition boxes. Regarding how often people buy limited edition boxes, out of 133 participants, 28.6% said never, 24.8% sometimes, 21.8% rarely, 17.3% often, 3.8% always, 2.4% expressed their desire to purchase them in the future, and 1.6% said that they wanted to buy one, but the box was out of their price range. They were then asked why they purchased the box and given the option to write as much or as little as they wanted in response to the question. There were a total of 87 responses, but 7 of them were from people who have not purchased a box before and just wrote that the question was not applicable, so those answers are excluded from the results. Out of the 80 other responses, 71 mentioned fandoms, themes, and their love of a particular author, book, or series. That seems to be the main appeal of special limited edition boxes, which may explain why companies always stock such a limited quantity. These special boxes are almost completely reliant on the popularity of a particular author, book, theme, and/or series, so they must be selective. Five people also mentioned the exclusive items included in the boxes. One participant said, “I bought it because it was for a series that I love, and I figured the items would not be released again.” This response perfectly sums up the role fandoms and exclusive items play in the purchase decisions of these boxes.

Merchandise only boxes. Out of 136 people, 57.4% indicated that they have purchased merchandise only boxes before. The motivation for buying merchandise only boxes was very similar to the ones submitted for limited edition boxes. Their answer to this question was allowed to be in short answer format. There were 81 responses, four of which stated that the question was not applicable to them while the rest provided an explanation for their purchase. Seventeen

people used the word “fandom” in their response showing that fandoms play a big role in the purchase decision for merchandise only boxes. Sixteen people, who did not already include the word “fandom” in their reason, said that their enjoyment of the particular book or series prompted them to make a purchase, which also makes their decision influenced by fandoms. Another popular response from fifteen people was the fact that the people had already purchased the book represented in the merchandise and did not want duplicate copies.

Purchase decisions. When looking at purchase decisions for bookish boxes, the motivation and decisional factors were examined. Rep code usage was also explored for the level of level of influence these reps have.

Rep codes. Since bookish box companies are so reliant on word of mouth and social media to raise awareness for their products, it was important to ask the book community whether they actually use the rep codes provided by the influencers chosen by these companies. The majority of respondents indicated that they have used at least one rep code before. 27.2% often, 26.5% always, 17.6% sometimes, 17.6% never, 8.1% rarely, and the other 3% expressed their desire to use rep codes whenever they are allowed. Some companies limit the products that rep codes work on. For example, on Fae Crate’s listing for their Queen of Air & Darkness Hangover Recovery Kit, which is a limited edition box, they explicitly state, “Rep Coupons do not work for Special Edition crates due to the quantity and quality of products included” (Queen of Air, n.d.). The fact that almost three-quarters of the participants have either used a rep code before or wish to use rep codes for their orders shows the success of the rep searches. In one of the responses for the motivation behind subscribing to monthly book subscription boxes, one participant said, “I find one with a theme, items, or fandoms I like. I get all that info through Insta, the posts I see

from reps and the boxes themselves. Rep codes always make me more likely to purchase a box, even if they're one for 5%...it just makes me feel better!" There is a chance that a lot of these people, like this participant, had already planned on purchasing a box before and they went searching for a rep code to use as a discount, but at the end of the day, the companies are still gaining customers through their reps. Reps are also a valuable source of information for potential customers.

Motivation behind buying bookish boxes. Survey takers were given a few options when asked why they buy bookish boxes in general, including, a) To feel a sense of belonging in the book community, b) I want the exclusive items included in the boxes, and c) I like the element of surprise. They were allowed to select more than one option. 86.4% said that they buy bookish boxes because they wanted the exclusive items included. 72.7% said that they liked the element of surprise. 48.5% said that they bought it to feel a sense of belonging in the book community. These responses align with the ones from Question 15 (Appendix A), which asked a similar question.

Decisional factors. An important question that needed to be asked was what factors into people's decision whether or not to buy a certain box (Appendix A). People were given eight different predetermined answers, including a) Price, b) Number of items included, c) Fandoms represented, d) Brand recognition, e) Recommendation from others, f) Mystery appeal, g) Sense of belonging, and h) I have a bookish box addiction. They were asked to select all that applied and were also given the option to type their own response. Out of 137 responses, the most popular answers among all of the participants were price (93.4%) and fandoms represented (90.5%). Price is obviously something that factors into the decision no matter what product a

person is buying. Eighty survey takers rated it as the most important decisional factor. However, the fact that so many people decide whether or not to buy a box based on the fandoms represented further shows the importance of fandoms. 43.1% of people also selected recommendations from others. Recommendations could come from anywhere, and since most people are finding information about these boxes through social media platforms, the recommendations from other people in the online book communities are probably very important. This shows the influence social media if almost half of these participants rely on the recommendations from others to make their decision.

Bookish boxes and social media. When asked which social media platforms they used to find information on bookish boxes, participants were allowed to select more than one option from the list of social media platforms and could also type in their own responses. Instagram was the most popular response, with 99.3% of the participants selecting that option. 30.3% selected Facebook, 16.2% selected Twitter, and 23.9% selected Youtube. Only one person out of 142 said that they got their information from emails. Instagram is probably the most popular social media platform that bookish box companies use to promote and spread the word about their products. 97.2% of participants also indicated that they follow bookish box companies on Instagram.

Unboxings. Since unboxings are such a popular way for bookish box companies to promote their items and raise awareness for their products, it was only fitting to ask the book community if they actually looked at unboxings online. Out of 141 responses, 93.6% said that they do look at unboxing pics or watch unboxing videos. The following question asked them why they look at pictures or watch videos of bookish unboxings. The participants were asked to type out their response. Among all the responses, most of them mentioned the entertainment

aspect of unboxings and how they want to see what is inside the box and the quality of the items included. One participant said, “It is fun for me to watch other people get excited about a box they receive. Additionally, it helps me to know what boxes are out there and quality in boxes so when I'm financially able I can subscribe to a company's box myself.” There were also a substantial amount of people who said that they watched unboxings to help them determine whether to purchase from a company. Out of 132 responses, over thirty people mentioned how these unboxing help them determine a future purchase. This shows how important unboxings are to the bookish community. One respondent said, “Everyone shows them whether I want to see them or not. They're very difficult to avoid most of the time.” Unboxings are truly a phenomenon that companies are taking full advantage of. Anyone in the community can share their unboxing. It is not just limited to the influencers chosen to represent a particular company's products. People do it because it is fun and it creates a sense of community among readers. The whole thing is very interactive. Those who cannot afford bookish boxes can watch unboxings to “live vicariously through the unboxers,” as one participant said, and when they have enough money to purchase a box for themselves, they are already aware of all of the potential companies to choose from and the quality of their products.

Social media's influence. When asked to rate how much social media posts influence their decision to buy a certain box on a scale of one to ten, over 68% of the participants rated it an eight or higher. The entire graph (Figure 9) was skewed to the right, meaning that most people find social media posts to be highly influential when it comes to their purchase decisions. This is not surprising because many of these people rely on social media for information on these boxes.

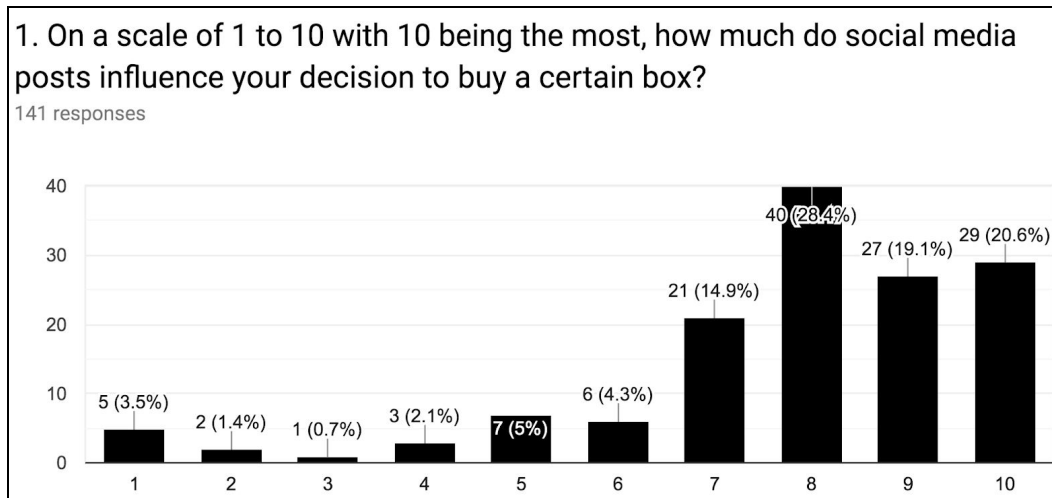


Figure 9. Graphic representation of question responses.

The graphs (Figure 10; Figure 11) resulting from the responses regarding the impulse buying and FOMO questions in this section look similar to the one discussed above. The overall impulse to buy bookish boxes is particularly strong among the people in this community with 63.1% of participants rating it an eight or higher. It is not surprising to see similar results for each of these questions because they are all related to social media's influence. Impulse buying and the fear of missing out have all gotten worse due to the rising popularity of social media. The graph for FOMO's influence on purchase decisions is interesting because it is not as skewed as the others. This shows that social media's overall influence is strong, but perhaps the individual factors that stem from it have differing levels of influence.

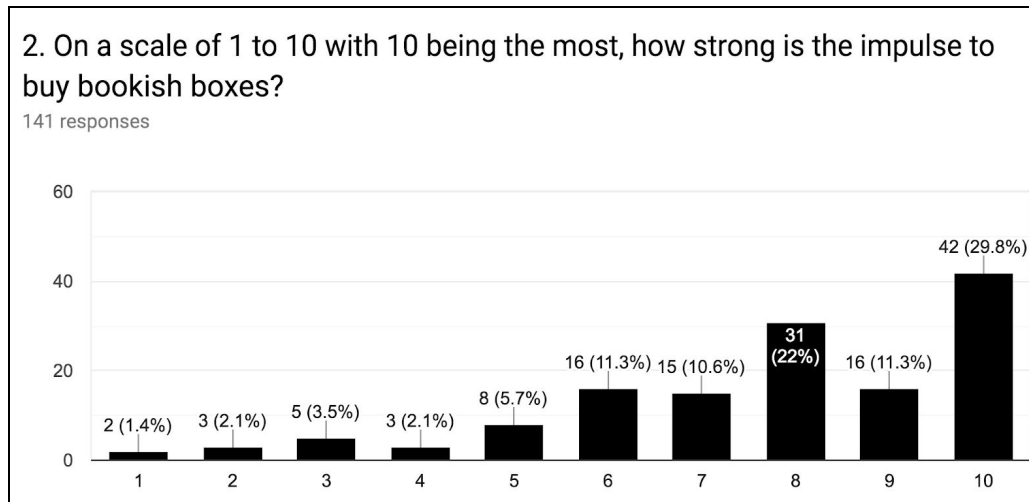


Figure 10. Graphic representation of question responses.

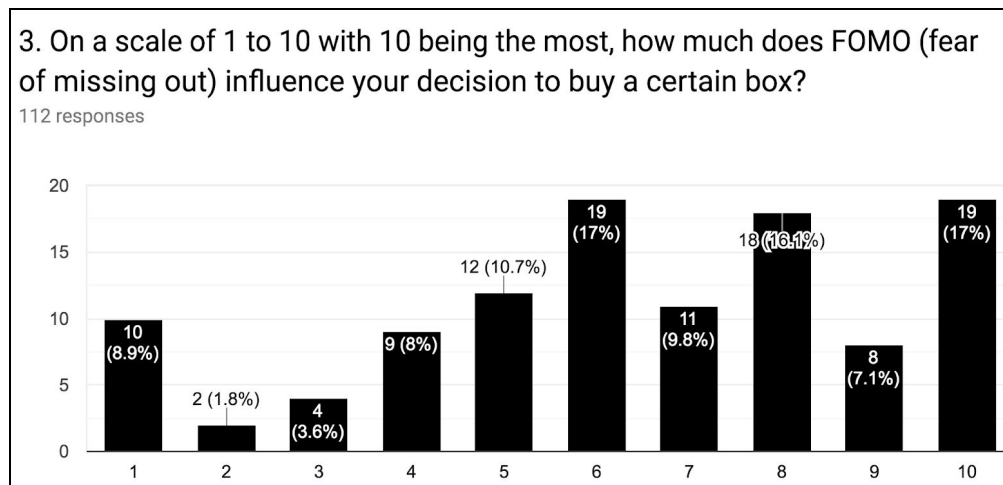


Figure 11. Graphic representation of question responses.

Conclusions and Possible Future Research

Based on my website analysis and the responses from my survey, the results show that there are four key influencers on Instagram of purchase decisions for bookish boxes: fear of missing out (FOMO), impulse buying, fandoms, and the sense of community these boxes provide. All of these key influencers have been made possible, or at least increasingly possible, by social media. The ease of sharing has given rise to the unboxing phenomenon, which is

extremely beneficial to this industry. Unboxings serve to increase feelings of FOMO and encourage impulse buys. Social media's ability to connect people from all over the world allows people to form communities online. These communities bond over their shared passions, which could be books or specific fandoms stemming from books. Customers can share their experience opening bookish boxes by sharing their unboxings on social media, which opens up discussion and gives people a sense of community.

Since researching this topic, the bookish subscription box industry has changed again. More box companies have emerged, some have closed down, and controversies surrounding rep searches have occurred. Bookstagram is such a tight-knit community that controversy and drama can influence the bookish subscription box industry because it is so reliant on social media. There are many other ways social media's influence could be explored in regards to the book community and the businesses associated. Social media platforms beyond Instagram could be examined to measure their influence. In addition to bookish subscription box companies, other book-related merchandise selling companies could also be explored. It is evident that social media has the ability to play a significant role in influencing a consumer's purchase decision, but every company and industry is different. What works for one business may not work for other businesses. It would be interesting to see how, for example, a company selling bookish candles markets their products on social media compared to one selling book-related t-shirts. Additionally, Since these bookish box companies are relatively small and private, their financials are not so readily available for the public. With so many of these companies selling out their stock so quickly, it would be interesting to see the profitability of these boxes. There is so much room for this research to be expanded since the bookish box industry is still relatively new.

When I started doing research into this community that I am deeply involved in, I did not expect to learn as much as I did. The survey results allowed me to look at this industry through the eyes of so many different people in the community. Before the results came in, I only thought of the impacts unboxings had on people on an emotional level. However, through reading the participants' responses, I learned that people not only see unboxings as a form of entertainment, but also as a way to gather information on the quality and types of items companies provide. The sheer amount of companies out there was also shocking because I did not realize that this niche market was so saturated.

It was interesting to see the number of people who had the same types of opinions as I have regarding the influence social media has on our purchase decisions. I started this journey because I wanted to find the source of my bookish box addiction and I think I have found just that. Being a part of the Bookstagram community has been such an amazing experience for me this past year and I am so incredibly grateful to have found a place where I can share my passions. However, as beneficial bookstagram has been for my life, I also recognize the harmful effects of it, another possible topic for further research.. There were so many times when I was faced with a decision of whether or not to purchase a certain box and I ended up making an impulse purchase due to my fear of missing out. This study has made me more aware of the factors that influence my purchases so, hopefully, I can finally start finding a balance in my purchases.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Consent:

1. ELECTRONIC CONSENT (Appendix B)

Demographics:

2. What is your age? (18 – 24, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54, 55 – 64, 65+, Prefer not to answer)

3. What country do you reside?

4. What is your gender? (Female/Male/Prefer not to answer)

5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status? (Employed for wages, Self-employed, Out of work and looking for work, Out of work but not currently looking for work, A homemaker, A student, Military, Retired, Unable to work, Prefer not to answer)

Social Media:

6. Which social media platform(s) do you have accounts for? (select all that apply)

(Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

7. Which social media platform do you use most often? (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

8. Which online book communities are you a part of? (select all that apply) (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

9. Which social media platform do you use the most for book-related activities? (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

Bookish Boxes:

10. Where did you first hear about bookish boxes? (From a friend/family member, On a social

media platform, Website for a bookish box company, What are bookish boxes?)

11. Which social media platform did you first hear about bookish boxes? (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

12. Have you ever purchased or received a bookish box? (I have purchased a bookish box before, I have received a bookish box before, but did not purchase it, I have never purchased or received a bookish box before)

Monthly Bookish Subscription Services:

13. Have you ever subscribed to any of the monthly bookish subscription services? If so, which ones? (select all that apply) (OwlCrate, Fairyloot, Shelflove Crate, Fae Crate, LitJoy Crate, Book of the Month, Uppercase Box, I have never subscribed to any monthly book subscription services)

a. Was your subscription – one-time, monthly, multiple months? (select all that apply)

14. Do you currently have a subscription to any of the monthly bookish subscription services? If so, which ones? (select all that apply) (OwlCrate, Fairyloot, Shelflove Crate, Fae Crate, LitJoy Crate, Book of the Month, Uppercase Box, I have never subscribed to any monthly book subscription services)

a. Is your current subscription – one-time, monthly, multiple months? (select all that apply)

15. Why do you subscribe to monthly book subscription boxes? (Open ended response)

16. How often do you read the books included in the boxes?

(Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never/My bookish box did not come with a book)

17. How often do you use merchandise included in the boxes?

(Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never/My bookish box did not come with merchandise)

18. How often do you purchased limited edition bookish boxes?

(Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never)

a. Why did you buy it? (Open ended response)

19. Have you ever purchased a merch only box? (Yes/No)

a. Why did you buy it? (Open ended response)

Purchase Decisions:**20. How often do you use rep codes when purchasing boxes?**

(Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never)

21. Why do you buy bookish boxes? (select all that apply) (To feel a sense of belonging in the book community, I want the exclusive items included in the boxes, I like the element of surprise, other)

22. What factors into your decision whether or not to buy a certain box? (select all that apply) (Price, Number of items included, Fandoms represented, Brand recognition, Recommendation from others, Mystery appeal, Sense of belonging, I have a bookish box addiction, other)

23. Rate the following decisional factors in order of importance. (1 being the least important to 9 being the most important) (Factors listed: Price, Number of items included, Fandoms represented, Brand recognition, Recommendation from others, Mystery appeal, Sense of belonging, I have a bookish box addiction, other)

24. What is the average amount you spend per box? (\$0 - \$9.99, \$10 - \$19.99, \$20 - \$29.99,

\$30 - \$39.99, \$40 - \$49.99, \$50 - \$59.99, \$60 - \$69.99, \$70 - \$79.99, \$80 - \$89.99, \$90 - \$99.99, other)

25. What is the average amount you spend per month on bookish boxes? (\$0 - \$49.99, \$50 - \$99.99, \$100 - \$149.99, \$150 - \$199.99, \$200 - \$249.99, \$300 or more)

Bookish Boxes and Social Media:

26. Do you follow any bookish box companies on Instagram? (Yes/No)

27. Which social media platform(s) do you use to find information on bookish boxes?

(Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr)

Unboxings:

28. Do you look at pictures or watch videos of bookish unboxings? (Yes/No)

29. Why do you look at pictures or watch videos of bookish unboxings? (Open ended response)

Social Media's Influence:

30. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most, how much do social media posts influence your decision to buy a certain box?

31. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most, how strong is the impulse to buy bookish boxes?

32. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most, how much does FOMO (fear of missing out) influence your decision to buy a certain box?

Appendix B

Survey Consent Form

Pace University IRB Consent Form Template – May 2017

**Pace University, New York
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT**

How Social Media Affects Purchase Decisions for Bookish Boxes

RESEARCH TEAM
Lead Researcher
Susan Bishop
Lubin School of Business
212-618-6586 sbishop@pace.edu

Other Researchers: Sabrina Shen

You are invited to participate in a research study on Google forms. Participation is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Sabrina Shen. I am an undergraduate student at Pace University, working with my faculty advisor, Professor Bishop in the Lubin School of Business. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns the influence of social media on the purchase decisions for bookish boxes.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will ask you to complete the online survey/ questionnaire. The survey will involve questions about the social media platforms you use, your awareness and opinion of different bookish boxes them, and should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will provide insight on whether or not social media has helped to raise awareness for bookish box companies and develop the drive behind these purchase decisions.

Risks/Discomforts

You are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to, or to stop participating at any time. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, no one except the researchers listed will have access to the data. The survey is completely anonymous. Please do not provide any identifiable personal information such as your name, phone number, email or address.

Pace University IRB Consent Form Template – May 2017

When the research is completed, I may save the data for use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for up to 1 year after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

When the research is completed, I may save the tapes and notes for use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for up to 1 year after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate, to answer any particular question, or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at or ss25152n@pace.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, Please contact Office of Sponsored Research by phone, (212) 346-1153, by e-mail at paceirb@pace.edu.

You should not sign this consent form until all of your questions about this study have been answered by a member of the research team listed at the top of this form. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

Your signature below indicates you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about this study.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

If you agree to take part in the research, please print a copy of this page to keep for future reference, then click on the "Accept" button below. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You are over 18 years of age.
- You voluntarily agree to participate

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

Appendix C

Pace University Institutional Review Board Proposal Form

**PACE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
PROPOSAL FORM****PACE IRB Code #****TITLE OF PROPOSAL:** How Social Media Affects Purchase Decisions for Bookish Boxes**TYPE OF PROPOSAL:**☒ New proposal, not previously reviewed by Pace University IRB☐ Continuation of previously approval proposal☐ Modification of previously submitted proposal to Pace University IRBHas this proposal been or to be submitted to another Institutional Review Board? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, give the name of the Institutional Review Board and attach letter requesting approval and/or approval letter.

PROJECTED STARTING DATE: *October 15, 2018***PROJECTED COMPLETION DATE:** *December 31, 2018***SPONSOR/FUNDING SOURCE (If any):** *N/A***FUNDING APPLICATION DEADLINE DATE (if applicable):** *N/A*

Note: Faculty, administrators and staff can serve as Principal Investigators. Undergraduate students cannot serve as a PI; the faculty advisor needs to serve in this capacity, but undergraduates can serve as co-investigators. Graduate students may serve as PI, but must have a faculty advisor.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**Name:** *Susan Bishop***Title:** *Faculty Advisor***Address:** *One Pace Plaza, Room W-408 New York, NY 10038***Telephone Number:** *917-224-6865***E-mail Address:** *sbishop@pace.edu*

ADDITIONAL CO-INVESTIGATOR(S) (if applicable)Name(s) and Title(s) *Sabrina Shen, Student***FACULTY ADVISOR(S) (if applicable) *required for undergraduate and graduate applications**Name(s) and Title(s) *N/A*DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL: *Lubin School of Business / Pace University*

Does the proposal involve human subjects who are:

- ☐ minors (under age 18);
- ☐ over 70;
- ☐ prisoners or others involuntarily institutionalized;
- ☐ developmentally disabled;
- ☐ physically ill;
- ☐ adults lacking decisional impairment during the research;
- ☐ pregnant women;
- ☐ fetuses;
- ☐ nursing women.

Does the proposal involve exposure to radioactive material? ☐ Yes ☒ NoDoes the proposal involve use of recombinant genetic material? ☐ Yes ☒ NoHas the proposal has been submitted for funding? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, submitted for:

- ☐ External funding
- ☐ Internal (Pace University) funding.

Will the proposal be submitted for funding? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, submitted for:

- ☐ External funding
- ☐ Internal (Pace University) funding.

Are you conducting this work as part of an outside/independent consulting arrangement? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, please contact the Associate Provost for Sponsored Research before preparing and submitting this application.

The Study is submitted for the following review:

☒ Yes ☐ No Exempt review – Participants are subjected to minimal risk and the research fits one of the 6 federally designated exempt review categories, e.g., research involving normal educational settings & practices, observation of public behavior, analysis of publically available data sets; see [46.101\(b\)](#) 1-6 for a full description.

☐ Yes ☒ No Expedited review – Participants are subjected to minimal risk and the study only involves procedures in one or more of the [9 federally designated expedited review categories](#). Expedited studies can involve collection of biological specimens or voice, video, digital or image recordings, utilize noninvasive procedures, and research on individual or group characteristics or behavior.

☐ Yes ☒ No Full board review – Full board review is required for research that is greater than

minimal risk and/or does not qualified by exempt or expedited review (for example, identification of the subjects and/or their responses could reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects in some way).

Please see the [IRB section](#) on the Office of Sponsored Research website for a description of these categories.

The investigator should provide thorough summary statements addressing the following points of information. Incomplete information may result in delay of the review and approval process.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: Briefly describe the purpose of the research study.

The purpose of the study is to find out how social media influences purchase decisions for bookish boxes. It also takes a look into the motivations behind the decision to buy certain bookish boxes.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (SUBJECTS): Describe the characteristics of the participants, such as number, age range, sex, ethnic background, and health status. Justify the inclusion or exclusion of any special classes of research participants such as reproductively active men or women, nursing women, fetuses, children, physically or mentally disabled individuals, those with certain health conditions, and adults lacking decisional capacity.

Participants for the survey will be anyone in the book community that is over 18.

If applicable, describe how the proposal complies with the NIH Guidelines on the inclusion of women and minorities as subjects in clinical research (i.e., provide for appropriate recruitment and retention of subjects of both genders and diverse racial and ethnic groups). (Refer to https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/women_min/women_min.htm for further information.)

N/A

If applicable, does the design of your study comply with FDA Guidelines for the Study and Evaluation of Gender Differences in the Clinical Evaluation of Drugs (i.e., will produce data on any gender differences in the pharmacokinetics and/or pharmacodynamics of the drug studied, and ensures adequate numbers of subjects of both genders to allow for detection of clinically significant gender-related differences in drug response)? (Refer to <http://www.fda.gov/RegulatoryInformation/Guidances/ucm126552.htm> for further information.)

N/A

3. METHOD OF PARTICIPANT (SUBJECT) SELECTION: Describe the method to be used to identify, recruit, and randomize (if appropriate) participants. Please upload copies of printed recruitment material and/or transcript of oral request for participation.

I will be putting a link to the survey on my Instagram bio and asking people to participate by clicking into it. I will also be notifying people of the survey's existence on my Instagram posts and stories.

4. METHODS AND PROCEDURES APPLIED TO HUMAN SUBJECTS: Describe the study design and procedures related to participants. Include the duration of each participant's participation. Describe sequentially and exactly what will happen to each participants including questionnaires to be administered, interview questions to be asked, etc.

A link to the anonymous survey will be announced and made available on my social media account (<https://www.instagram.com/itsafangirlfantasy/>). People will be asked to participate in the 10 minute survey, but have the option to decline. They will fill out a Google forms survey online, where they will be

allowed to skip questions and can exit out at any time. See survey questionnaire attachment.

5. RISK TO THE SUBJECT: Describe all potential risks to subjects including physical, psychological, social, legal, or other. Assess the probability, severity, potential duration, and reversibility of each risk. Describe the procedures utilized to prevent and/or minimize any actual and/or potential risk.

No risk

6. BENEFITS: Describe any potential benefits to the subject as well as benefits that may accrue to society in general as a result of the study.

No Benefits

7. RISK-BENEFIT ANALYSIS: Explain why the risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits to either the subject or society.

There are no risks or benefits

8. INFORMATION INTENTIONALLY WITHHELD (DECEPTION): ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, describe any information intentionally withheld from subjects and justify this non-disclosure. Explain circumstances and personnel proposed for post-participation debriefing of and disclosure to subjects, if appropriate.

9. INFORMED CONSENT: Describe how informed consent will be sought, the approach of individuals seeking consent, the method of documenting consent, and the members of the study team who will be obtaining informed consent. Consent form(s) must be uploaded with the proposal. If consent is implicit, describe the manner in which consent is obtained.

Consent is implicit if people decide to take the survey.

10. CONFIDENTIALITY: Describe how confidentiality of data and privacy of subjects will be protected and maintained. Will it be possible to associate specific information in records with specific participants on the basis of name, position, or other identifying information? Include procedure for coding, storage, access to data, and destruction of data at the end of the study.

I will not collect names, email addresses, IP addresses, or anything that might be used to identify the subjects for the survey.

11. ANALYSIS OF DATA: Describe the analysis of data, including statistical procedures, if appropriate.

I will analyse the data using appropriate and statistical methods.

12. DRUGS USED IN STUDY: For each drug, describe the method and route of administration prescription or dosage, and potential adverse effects, including risks of interaction with other over-the-counter medications.

N/A

13. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF INVESTIGATORS AND ANY PERSONNEL WHO WILL INTERACT WITH SUBJECTS: Include information regarding the preparation of personnel to conduct the research, e.g., training, course-work, tutorials, prior research, Human Subject Training, etc.

No one will interact with subject directly for the survey.

14. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS/SPONSORS: List all institutions collaborating in the study. Describe the terms of such collaboration, if applicable. Attach approval letters

on institutional letterhead from appropriate authorized officials indicating support of the collaboration.

N/A