

## Bookstagram Tours: Redefining Social Media Marketing in the Publishing Industry in Romania

Iuliana Obreja<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*Both social media marketing and the digital activity of Instagram influencers have transformed the virtual landscape of book promotion. In other words, the growth of the #bookstagram community has given the entire publishing industry the opportunity to interact with potential readers and, by extension, increase product visibility through the social media platform Instagram. With this in mind, the present study aims to deepen the importance of promotion techniques within bookstagram and, moreover, to portray the modern methods implemented as central pillars in 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing strategies. Therefore, the paper investigates the broad spectrum of online approaches accessible to book influencers in the field of social media marketing through qualitative research, with in-depth interviews as the research method. As promotion can be achieved through a number of valuable techniques, the research focuses on highlighting the bookstagram tour, but also other equally effective strategies in terms of expanding the target audience and maximizing interactions. Moreover, there is the approach of types of posts, the involvement of awards or even touching on divergent topics of the books. Thus, by examining the phenomenon present in social media – influencer marketing and their methods of attracting consumer attention, the paper helps to build on the literature and offers new insights for both publishers and influencers. In particular, the research contributes to the evolving information on influencer marketing and highlights the importance of incorporating social media into marketing strategies to keep the online landscape current and dynamic.*

*Keywords: bookstagram tours, influencer marketing, bookstagrammers, book marketing, bookstagram*

*JEL Classifications: M30, M31, M37, M39*

DOI: 10.24818/REJ/2024/87/03

### **Introduction**

With the advent of social media, the everyday marketing strategies have been shaped by the demands of the modern consumer and, by extension, new web technologies. In other words, the way products are promoted and consumed in the marketplace has been revolutionized, including in the publishing industry. In this manner, social media gives rise to a welcoming and safe community for any book lover. Therefore, bookstagram is considered an online space for enthusiasts where visual appeal is

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: iulianaobreja18@gmail.com

combined with a passion for reading, offering end users unique content based on recommendations and a desire to share opinions with and about books.

Thus, this paper explores this virtual environment from the perspective of implemented marketing strategies and highlights a variety of promotional techniques that aim to create direct links with potential consumers. Moreover, modern methods aimed at increasing reader interaction are emerging within the bookstagram community. For this reason, the "Bookstagram Tour" is one such innovative approach to book marketing in Romania and consists of book influencers working in digital by showcasing and reviewing a specific book over a specific period of time. In particular, the research focuses on the impact of these influencers in the Romanian bookstagram community and the ways in which they manage to attract the attention of their followers. Namely, the study aims to better understand how these digital promotions influence the decisions of Romanian book consumers by analysing the direct perspectives of book influencers. Thus, the visibility and attractiveness of books among potential consumers are key elements considered throughout the in-depth interviews conducted in this paper. More importantly, the qualitative research presented provides a comprehensive perspective on online campaigns that aim to influence Romanian readers' book buying behaviour. As the paper examines the wider effects of these digital promotion techniques, the results analyzed are presented to provide clarity on the extent to which social media influencers are involved in digital promotion in the book industry. The study also adds to the literature in the field of digital marketing and social media influencers, providing qualitative insights into innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century book promotion strategies.

### **1. Review of the scientific literature**

The digital daily we find ourselves in relies heavily on social media engagement in marketing strategies since it takes up the majority of potential consumers' free online time. Also, the digital age that surrounds us marks the failures of traditional media promotion and therefore the need to introduce social media as a major pawn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century product promotion process (Foster, 2023). Moreover, although a presence on social media is becoming a necessity, it is not enough to guarantee the success of literary businesses. Thus, we emphasize that in addition to attracting as many followers, likes or shares as possible, it is essential that what the end user consumes is original, clear and targeted content. Therefore, a well-conceived and sustained online marketing strategy is gradually becoming a minimum foundation of any company that wants to remain active today (Popescu & Tulbure, 2022). Hence, when discussing social media as a tool for marketing products, we also emphasize the communication elements embedded in its daily activity, which helps

to create a form of expression and implicitly, promotion of products (Appel, et. al, 2020; Witari, 2023). Therefore, the more a book is delivered digitally through an effective message, the more consumers' attention will be captured and ultimately used to influence their behaviour (Maguni, et al., 2022).

As social media is perceived as a way for individuals to connect and collaborate digitally, we highlight the ability of this virtual medium to create communities of like-minded members (Witari, 2023; Foster, 2023). As such, the characteristic of social media platforms to lay the foundation for communication-based relationships is an important element in increasing the interactions businesses have with potential consumers (Popescu & Tulbure, 2022; Foster, 2023). Moreover, companies are adhering to new approaches to fit in with modern user demands and thus incorporating influencer marketing as a way to create and maintain direct relationships with their customers (Appel, et al., 2022; Leung, et al., 2022). In addition, social media influencers, besides being an innovative and effective way to promote products in digital, also highlight a process through which digital interaction increases. (Driel & Dumitrica, 2021; Leung, et al., 2022). In particular, the community that is created in Instagram – bookstagram, represents a virtual space that influences users' reading habits and at the same time the culture of books from review-based content (Martens, et al., 2022; Singh & George, 2023). Likewise, book influencers play an important role in the book industry since they can connect with potential consumers through content created online (Singh & George, 2023).

## 2. Research methodology

The methodological section of this research outlines the systematic approach followed to better understand the complex dynamics of the “Bookstagram Tour” phenomenon. Thus, the study assesses digital activity within the bookstagram community from October 10 – 23, 2023, the timeframe in which Epica Publishing House is sponsoring the virtual event of Colleen Hoover's "Too Late" book tour. The study therefore aims to better understand the actual promotion of a book through book influencers on Instagram. The concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century promotion method is that participating bookstagrammers publish a post about the book being promoted on the day individually allocated to them. In other words, the visibility of the product increases day by day with each new target audience reached by the digital content created.

This research aims to examine the promotional techniques used by influencers in the Romanian bookstagram community and to better understand the advantages they have in relation to interaction with potential consumers. So, in order to improve our understanding of bookstagrammers' experience of creating and sustaining online book recognition, we set a number of specific objectives, such as:

- O1. Observe whether at least one user interacts privately with the tracked influencer following the content in the "Bookstagram Tour" (i.e., private message);
- O2. To examine the benefits of the "Bookstagram Tour" promotion method;
- O3. To understand which approach technique is considered more beneficial from an Instagram book influencer's perspective for increasing book visibility.

Above all, the data collection is due to the research method - the in-depth interview and implicitly, the instrument used, namely the question guide designed to understand the perspective of the bookstagrammer. It contains 5 open questions addressed to the influencers through which we want to obtain the most relevant information for the present study. Regarding the way in which the participants were chosen, we mention Figure 1, which shows 14 bookstagrammers who participated in the virtual event "Bookstagram Tour", but only 5 of them, i.e. 30.77% of the identified sample, provided answers for our study. This choice was conditional on the willingness of the influencers to accept the invitation to the in-depth interview. These individuals represent important figures of the Romanian book influencer profile.

Figure 1. The Announcement of the Bookstagram Tour (i.e. the participation list)



Source: original post from Instagram, @epicapublishinghouse account

The study was conducted online, with the social media platform Instagram being the medium in which the research data was collected. As a result, on October 9, the date the "Bookstagram Tour" officially begins in the bookstagram community, book

influencers are contacted about the upcoming research and request consent for the interview. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted from October 13 to November 30, 2023, during which time Bookstagrammers were available to respond to the interview guide. The actual data analysis continued from November to December 2023.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Book influencer's online private interaction with user

Regarding the private interaction of bookstagrammers with their followers we will present O1 and, according to the recorded responses of the 5 interviewed influencers, identify the exact number of private messages. In this way, we mention the bookstagrammers whose responses fluctuate between 4 and 10 recorded messages respectively through the option of sending a private message on the Instagram platform. Most of them report receiving between 8 and 10 messages, i.e. 60% of participants (i.e. 3 bookstagrammers), while the rest report 4 or 5 private messages. Thus, in Table 1 there is this highlighted section that reinforces the claim that at least one user interacts privately, i.e. through a private message, with the book influencer on the Bookstagram Tour.

**Table 1. List of participants' answers to the interview questions**

Nr. Crt.	Date of "birth"	Nr. private messages	Did the impact of posts from "Bookstagram Tour" faded away after?
1	August 2020	10	"Compared to other accounts, my following has grown quite quickly in a relatively short time" yes
2	July 2020	8	"I have never analyzed this phenomenon. I don't realize" N/A
3	2017	5	"It usually decreases, but some people always stay" yes
4	2016	8	"When posting, the most activity is in the first 24 hours, after that it is discovered by people going directly to the profile of interest" yes
5	August 2020	4	"If I'm referring to the Too late post, I noticed a decrease in activity on the second post about this book" no

*Source:* Own processing based on the participants' answers to the interview

The new strategic marketing approach also succeeds to some extent in delivering a powerful but short-lived impact. This is mentioned by 3/5 book influencers, who state that the number of followers has increased quickly and in a short time. Furthermore, although the interaction does not persist during the time when the marketing strategy tool is in full swing, there are still users who continue to follow the bookstagrammer's digital content after the promotion has ended (i.e. 2/5 influencers). The response of one book influencer was inconclusive.

### 3.2 Bookstagram Tour's extracted advantages

In other words, participants affirm the effectiveness of the "Bookstagram Tour" and illustrate this approach as an essential way to generate interest in particular books being promoted. Thus said, according to the answers collected during the interview and presented in Table 2, we can outline a number of advantages of the aforementioned technique, mapping O2.

**Table 2. Participants' answers to the interview questions and extracted advantages**

Nr. Crt.	Is "Bookstagram Tour" method useful?	Extracted "Bookstagram Tour" advantages
1	"When such a bookstagram tour is organized, it will automatically spam the book. With multiple accounts posting both story and feed information/reviews to a book, users tend to be curious about that book appearing so often, even if there is a Bookstagram tour behind it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– wide online coverage of book content</li> <li>– sense of curiosity created by viewing content about the book</li> </ul>
2	"The interested consumer stumbles upon it and it's likely to pique their interest, if only out of curiosity."	– interest generated from repetitive display and discussion of the book
3	"Posting on multiple consecutive days, covering a larger demographic (since each creator has a different follower base), and having a prize always leads to increased awareness."	– a wide range of followers can see the digital content
4	"I believe that by promoting a book on more than one account, there is an opportunity to reach as many different people in the readership as possible"	– reach of diverse followers since every bookstagrammer has distinct followers
5	"This method gives bookstagrammers freedom of expression and creativity, so I find it very beneficial."	– the chance of book influencer to create their own content and also participate in a collective phenomenon

*Source:* Own processing based on the participants' answers to the interview

In this case, book influencers consider it most important (with 50% of mentions) that there is interest in the promoted book since it appears repeatedly on Instagram, and there is a wide reach of potential consumers. We can also see in Table 3 the other advantages identified, such as the interest in the challenged book based mainly on curiosity – with two mentions, but also the original content that participating in a "Bookstagram Tour" can offer to a book influencer on Instagram, with only one mention from participating influencers.



**Table 3. Table of frequency for the extracted advantages**

Nr. Crt.	Extracted advantages	Frequency per appearance	% frequency
1	wide online coverage	3	50%
2	sense of curiosity	2	33,33%
3	original content	1	16,66%
TOTAL		6	100%

*Source:* Own processing based on the participants' answers to the interview

Therefore, one of the most advantageous methods for increasing the visibility of a digital content, as stated by the bookstagrammers participating in the in-depth interview, is the "Bookstagram Tour" promotion technique itself, as it simultaneously fulfils a number of essential characteristics for maintaining appeal among book lovers.

### 3.3 Book influencer's preference for online marketing strategies

At the same time, Table 4 shows the concrete responses of book influencers on the methods of promoting books in the digital environment.

**Table 4. Participants' answers to the interview questions and extracted marketing strategies techniques**

Nr. Crt.	Which method do you find the most advantageous?	Extracted marketing strategies techniques
1	"These days no one feels like reading a long, thick review with a billion quotes and a summary at the end (as it used to be on blogs) (...). In my opinion, short reviews, reading marathons have the best impact."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short text in a post</li> <li>- posting reviews</li> <li>- reading marathons</li> </ul>
2	"I would say it depends on the season. Usually when people are away more, holidays, travel, content is consumed light, short and to the point. In the cold season we are already talking about other types of books, harder, more impactful, so I have noticed that people respond positively to reviews"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short text in a post</li> <li>- light content for spring/summer</li> <li>- meaningful content for cold season</li> <li>- posting reviews</li> </ul>
3	"100% always contests attract the most people"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- giveaways</li> </ul>
4	"I've also noticed that short video promotion also has a pretty big impact."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reels (short videos)</li> </ul>
5	"I've noticed that posts without a lot of description and simple pictures work really well"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short text in a post</li> </ul>

*Source:* Own processing based on the participants' answers to the interview

According to the answers, an approach worth exploiting in the digital environment is to create content that is as succinct as possible, easy for users to understand and at the same time engaging in terms of the information presented. In addition, the majority of influencers find this technique beneficial for their digital activity, as shown in Table 5, with 40% of all mentions. Shorter, review-type posts also appear among bookstagrammers' responses.

**Table 5. Table of frequency for the extracted marketing strategies techniques**

Nr. Crt.	Extracted marketing strategies techniques	Frequency per appearance	% frequency
1	short text	4	40%
2	reviews	2	20%
3	reading marathons	1	10%
4	reels	1	10%
5	giveaways	1	10%
6	meaningful content	1	10%
TOTAL		10	100%

*Source:* Own processing based on the participants' answers to the interview

Moreover, book influencers on Instagram also present contests – which attract users with the promise of a prize at the end of the mentioned period – as promotion techniques, as well as short videos that depict the book in a special and, by default, quick way as time period. Reading marathon is a technique highlighted by a mention, as well as the particular content, different from the simple presentation of books. Outlining O3, they want to create the closest connection with the digital follower and implicitly increase the trust that consumers have in book influencers.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the comprehensive research of book influencers and the promotion strategies they are implementing on bookstagram has provided valuable insights into digital promotion. Since 21<sup>st</sup> century book consumers are constantly on the move and want to consume as much as they can in as little time as possible, we can highlight that concise posts and reviews stand out as outstanding tools to influence their behavior. Moreover, we also point out that the innovative "Bookstagram Tour" promotion method has a number of significant advantages, including the widest possible coverage of online users and the generation of a sense of curiosity among potential consumers. In other words, the approach techniques considered most advantageous for the book influencers of the daily present in which we find ourselves are represented by a dynamic, concise process that is consumed in accordance with the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century consumers.



## References

- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., Stephen, A., T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Vol. 48, pp. 79-95. DOI: 10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1.
- Driel, L., Dumitrica, D. (2021). Selling brands while staying “Authentic”: The professionalization of Instagram influencers, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 27(1), pp. 66-84. DOI: 10.1177/1354856520902136.
- Foster, C. (2023), "The Impact of Social Media on the Publishing Industry: A Case Study of Author Colleen Hoover", Undergraduate Honors Theses, Paper 771, retrieved from [<https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/771>].
- Leung, F., F., Gu, F., F., Li, Y., Zhang, J., Z., Palmatier, R., W. (2022). Influencer Marketing Effectiveness, *American Marketing Association, Journal of Marketing* 0(0), Vol. 86(6), pp. 1-23. DOI: 10.1177/00222429221102889.
- Maguni, W., Mongkito, A. W., Sumiyadi, S., Hadisi, L., & Akhiria, D. R. (2022). Marketing strategy through Instagram social media: (Study at Nazwa Hijab Kendari Clothing Store). *UJoST- Universal Journal of Science and Technology*, 2(1), 308-322. <https://doi.org/10.11111/ujost.v2i1.110>.
- Martens, M., Ballig, G., Higgason, K., A. (2022). #BookTokMadeMeReadIt: young adult reading communities across an international, sociotechnical landscape, *Information and Learning Sciences*, Vol. 123(1). DOI: 10.1108/ILS-07-2022-0086.
- Popescu, A. & Tulbure (Handaric) A. (2022). The importance of social media marketing strategies for small business, *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, Series V: Economic Sciences*, Vol. 15(64), No. 2, pp. 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.es.2022.15.64.2.4>.
- Singh, H., George, G. (2023). The Youth’s Way of Personal Branding as Bookstagrammers. In A. Munna, M. Shaikh, & B. Kazi (Eds.), *Contemporary Approaches of Digital Marketing and the Role of Machine Intelligence* (pp. 145-172). IGI Global. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7735-9.ch007.
- Witari, P., S. (2023). Identity construction based on a communal layer of CTI: A case on bookstagram, *Journal of English Language and Culture*, Vol. 14(1), 56-71. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30813/jelc.v14i1.4808>.