

#Bookstagram: A dual perspective study on the trend's evolution

Iuliana OBREJA^{*}, Adriana MANOLICĂ^{**}, Alexandra Raluca JELEA^{***}

Abstract

The way firms and marketers promote their products is being shaped by consumer needs and trends alongside the evolution of the marketplace. As web technologies and consumers' online behavior improve, influencers are becoming increasingly significant in social media marketing strategies. This research intends to investigate a particular digital phenomenon observed in the field of books, namely, marketing books on Instagram. Therefore, the study aims to highlight the key aspects of book influencers' Instagram activity, namely by examining the literature, but also the evolution of the bookstagram phenomenon in a dual perspective in both Romania and the United States. Furthermore, the purpose of this research is to draw attention to the similarities and differences among the existing communities in the two countries pointed out by a quantitative research. On that account, the data analyzed was collected in two different ways, first we retrieved information from Statista online database about the phenomenon in the United States of America and then, we conducted a questionnaire to bookstagram community members in Romania. Accordingly, the paper will contribute to the expansion of the literature on #bookstagram communities in various cultures around the world by providing useful information and a more diverse view of this market.

Keywords: digital influencer, bookstagram, book influencers, book consumption, book trends

Introduction

In today's contemporary era of digital influence, the marketing landscape is continually evolving and also, the promotion of products and services is undergoing a substantial transformation. This is particularly evident in the realm of social media, where influencers have become pivotal in shaping marketing strategies because of the consumers' constantly changing needs and preferences as stated in the present trends. Therefore, these micro celebrities have become increasingly important as web technologies have developed, and consumer behavior has matured in the digital environment.

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Hence, the way products are advertised and used has reshaped according to the digital use of the online platforms.

This research is dedicated to a specific digital phenomenon: the marketing of books on Instagram. Known as #bookstagram, this trend represents a modern and quite beautiful intersection of social media marketing, more specifically influencer marketing and reading culture. In this manner, it offers a significant opportunity to better understand the book consumption regarding the digital promotion of books and, simultaneously, to examine the evolution of the relationship between the micro celebrity and the consumer. The study begins by acknowledging the broader context of the bookstagram phenomenon, recognizing the importance of social media as an essential medium for influencer marketing, where new marketing and promotion strategies are introduced.

Since the global book consumption has been greatly impacted by the bookstagram movement, it is essential to comprehend how this cultural phenomenon manifests in diverse cultural contexts and having that in mind, this study investigates this trend both from the Romanian and the American perspective. Therefore, the relevance of the study lies in its exploration within these diverse environments, where the main purpose is to uncover reading choices and habits. This study is particularly relevant in an increasingly globalized world where understanding the nuances of cultural influence on media consumption is crucial. The insights gained will not only contribute to academic literature reviews in social media studies but also provide valuable information for marketers and stakeholders in the publishing industries, helping them to better understand and engage with divergent reader communities.

For a better understanding of the #bookstagram phenomenon, we conducted an extensive review of the literature, where we focused on academic articles, books and reputable online sources related to the evolution of this trend both in Romania and the United States of America. In this way, the information accumulated was extracted from several academic databases, where we mention Google Scholar and Research Gate. This review provided a theoretical framework and contextual background for the study.

The journals and publications consulted were chosen according to representative keywords, namely, social media influencers, Instagram, social media, bookstagram, influencer and influencer marketing. Moreover, all these main ideas found in the literature are also translated in the present paper, thus providing relevant information for the research. Another important criterion we used in the analysis of the articles was the publication period, primarily based in the period 2019–2022, when the bookstagram phenomenon had the most significant growth online. The limited available articles on the bookstagram phenomenon highlight the importance of understanding this phenomenon.

1. Literature review

The ways in which consumers are influenced in the daily life of the economic market are continually changing, shaping themselves according to its demands in relation to the evolution of society and embedded digital technologies. As a consequence, the online environment supports the majority of the activities of participants in the buying and selling process and thus businesses are forced to adapt their marketing strategies. In this manner, new digital means are being implemented that aim to ensure effective communication and, moreover, respond to the needs of consumers with the intent that potential customers' decisions depend entirely on digital content (Leparoux, *et al.*, 2019).

To that end, influencers are introduced as modern methods of promotion, where their main objective is to improve the process of convincing users about the benefits of the promoted product, which ultimately ensures its sale. However, the new approach, which is by definition direct and organic in terms of establishing real connections with potential consumers, relies primarily on how the relationship is formed with them.

Consequently, the choice of people must be made accordingly, since they – the future influencers who will share information about the brand, represent the target market. Therefore, the company's messages must be perceived from an honest perspective so as to facilitate the buying process and ultimately strengthen the relationship between the company and its customers. Moreover, the micro-celebrities introduced in the marketing strategy should be people who have a large number of followers in social media, as this aspect influences the purpose of promotional techniques. Therefore, information should reach as many users as possible in order to be much more effective (Martinez-Lopez, *et al.*, 2020). In this way, the influencers become trustworthy people because they provide customers accurate data and authentic review and recommendations from their own experiences.

To highlight the importance of such an approach in the 21st century, we point out that 44% of potential customers rely on the recommendations of online micro-celebrities to buy products and also associate all their activity with the brand they represent. Hence, as the digital activity of influencers develops, they gradually become the actual image of the promoted product, which users take for granted (Pradhan, *et al.*, 2022). In addition, there have been so many changes in marketing strategies that this modern approach has become one of the most effective promotion techniques, since it keeps discussions going in real time. Respectively, it provides the opportunity for messaging with a direct representative of the company who is also perceived as a member of the target market due to the content created detailing their experience with the product (Acikgoz and Burnaz, 2021). Moreover, it

creates a sense of trust and belonging, ultimately attracting customers through the digital version of word of mouth, posts and personalized images.

In terms of the field we want to study in this research, namely books, we can point out that companies are adhering to the changes in the market and choosing to integrate into the current bookstagram trend. As well, we define the current social media platform, Instagram, which focuses mainly on visual content and often posts high quality images. In addition, this online medium was primarily designed to provide users with the opportunity to connect with each other and therefore to break down the barriers that prevent the formation of quality relationships between Generation Z, millennials and companies (Salomon, 2013).

The platform focuses on attracting users with eye-catching elements, vibrant colors and memorable posts designed to impress and satisfy the user. To that end, the virtual community succeeds in increasing the popularity of the social network (Tselenti, 2020). Since its launch in October 2010, when 25.000 users registered on the first day, by the first quarter of 2023, there are approximately 2 billion users on Instagram¹ (Zhan, Tu and Yu, 2018). With this data in mind, we can conclude that one of the main characteristics of the online environment created is its ability to attract the attention of a large number of individuals from different fields, covering a large part of the general digital population (Budge, 2020).

In other words, social media is beginning to consolidate a considerable database of potential customers for certain products and is becoming a habit and an essential element of the present society. As a result, the behaviour of a 21st century shopper is largely influenced by new technologies and opportunities in the virtual environment. This allows us to highlight the foundation of innovative marketing strategies with regard to Instagram, characteristics that can be transferred to the subculture called bookstagram (Acikgoz and Burnaz, 2021; Bowles, 2016). In this way, it consists of people sharing images, opinions and recommendations related to books. Therefore, we define the trend as an opportunity to connect people with similar passions from anywhere in the world so that they can actively participate in the online community that has been created.

What started as a simple hashtag to organize book-related posts – bookstagram, has grown to encompass around 99.7 million posts that are part of a community-built and maintained ecosystem for book lovers.² #Bookstagram continues to play an important role in promoting books online as the relevance of the trend has grown over time and continues to influence an increasing number of active users (Tselenti, 2020). Consequently, companies can benefit from the images and associated text

¹ Statistical data retrieved from: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-stats/>, accessed on 3 December 2023;

² Number of posts retrieved from the Instagram platform on 23 January 2024.

because it builds a connection with those interacting with the post, i.e. Instagram users. In other words, writers, booksellers or marketing people who want to sell books actively contribute to the growth of the community, attracting customers by being active with the trend. In addition, some of them become important members of the community by participating in the visual development of the platform: either by posting frequently and recommending different books, or by reaching out to bookstagrammers, specialized influencers (Thomas, 2021).

The impact these individuals have on book consumers is therefore valued. Book influencers can shape the opinions of their target audience and thus their decision-making process. In particular, #bookstagram creates a safe environment in which bookstagrammers introduce readers to new books, types of literature they may not have tried before, lesser-known authors, and advantageous methods of buying books. In this way, these influencers offer marketers a modern way to connect organically and over a longer period of time with users, showing that promoting books is a fun and natural activity for Instagram users. More importantly, this modern technique of marketing by leveraging bookstagram helps to increase the number of visitors to profiles promoted through integrated techniques such as hashtags used, locations offered, and individual influencer mentions. In other words, bookstagrammers attract target audiences, regardless of age, using a variety of techniques and continuing to promote the sense of belonging that community reinforces through free expression and welcoming behaviour (Alfonzo, 2019; Novotná, *et al.*, 2021).

As this trend created from the joining of two words – "book" representing both the product to be sold and the domain being cornered and "Instagram", is based on the social media platform mentioned above, we point out that the emergence of the trend is relatively recent, being closely linked to the rise of social media and its desire to take over the daily activities of consumers. Additionally, it was created to make it easier to describe content – books – in cases where images were not compelling enough, therefore communicating in a visually appealing way (Abbott, *et al.*, 2013).

It is important to note that it is becoming popular due to the significant increase in users' use of the virtual environment, but also due to their desire to share images of and about books, as well as the need to exchange opinions, recommendations and information about specific areas of reading (Darma, *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the bookstagram phenomenon was born in early 2010 with the development of the social media platform, laying the foundation for a new way of communication and continues to make books more compelling through pictures rather than words ever since (Tselenti, 2020).

Consumers introduced the hashtag "*bookstagram*" in 2011 and it quickly became popular after its first appearance since it has been used regularly on social media platforms. In this case, the trend plays a key role in expanding the target audience of the person distributing the post, thus reaching an audience larger than the number of followers (Zappavigna, 2015). Book lovers registered on

Instagram regularly use this method of sharing content related to books and, by the large number of posts that are visible, increase the value of a community.

Table 1. The evolution of number of posts that exists in the #bookstagram hashtag on Instagram (August 2022 – October 2023)

Date of search	The hashtag searched globally	Number of posts
15 th August 2022	#bookstagram	79.870.608 posts
8 th November 2022	#bookstagram	82.566.659 posts
30 th December 2022	#bookstagram	84.392.106 posts
17 th January 2023	#bookstagram	85.238.736 posts
20 th March 2023	#bookstagram	87.925.185 posts
5 th April 2023	#bookstagram	88.517.453 posts
8 th May 2023	#bookstagram	89.828.937 posts
30 th May 2023	#bookstagram	90.678.891 posts
22 nd June 2023	#bookstagram	91.579.796 posts
1 st August 2023	#bookstagram	93.157.381 posts
27 th September 2023	#bookstagram	95.363.637 posts
21 st October 2023	#bookstagram	96.381.775 posts

Source: Own processing based on the online activity registered on hashtags on Instagram

Also, the trend of the phenomenon is to add new material and content gradually and consistently, as can be seen in Table 1, a particular case where the hashtag "*bookstagram*" is analyzed globally. According to this data, this phenomenon underlines the importance and continued growth of bookstagram communities among book lovers on Instagram.

So, between August 2022 to October 2023, the #bookstagram community reaches a new stage of online appreciation. As a result, the number of digital interactions posted on Instagram increases by more than 17 million new Instagram posts, reflecting a 20.67% content addition. This activity growth allows users to better interact, setting the stage for a conducive environment for friendships and collaborations (Thomas, 2021). It also highlights the success that the ways of connecting implemented in this community are having among consumers of digital content. So the trend we can examine from this data is that the phenomenon continues to grow in terms of the actual amount of digital interactions, content shared between users, but also the virtual visibility offered to brands in this environment (Wiederhold, 2022).

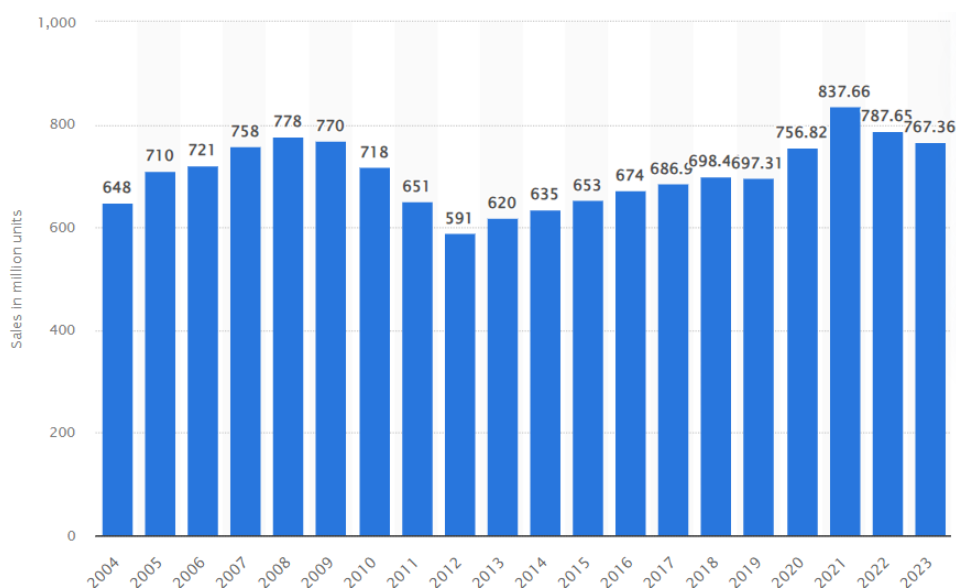
1.1. The American approach to Bookstagramming

The "bookstagram" phenomenon arose from the desire of users on Instagram to interact with book lovers in a different way than simple message exchanges. In other words, a community that has formed around it includes both readers who look forward to sharing their opinions and reviews, and enthusiasts who read often but want to stay up to date with the latest releases. Hence, bookstagram stands out for its diversity, giving any consumer the chance to participate in the evolution of digital book marketing actively or inactively.

This trend continues to have a significant impact in the United States, where it has gradually become more of a necessity than simply a way for people to interact with each other, since is educating the 21st century public about the importance of books. In particular, we can say that the bookstagram phenomenon has evolved from a simple hashtag that is used to properly manage book-related posts into an extended digital culture. In terms of the book product, the environment created around the above-mentioned initiative has become an important basis for educating the 21st century audience. Therefore, bookstagram is having an impact on reader habits, literary genres and the publishing industry.

To that end, Figure 1 describes how the book industry has evolved throughout the years, highlighting the fact that even if the year 2023 has recorded a smaller amount of units of books sold, the number is higher than the year prior to 2021. Therefore, this industry is still rising, continuing to create great products for consumers.

Figure 1. Unit sales of printed books in the United States from 2004 to 2023



Source: Statista, 2023

With this in mind, the main advantage of the preceding trend is its ability to create a buzz around digitally published content. In other words, the way #bookstagram has grown over time has been driven by the posts created and Instagram's tendency to convey information through images. Therefore, bookstagram provides users with a visual experience that connects them directly to a book they might read to stay up to date with community news (Li and Xie, 2019).

In addition, the phenomenon of book consumers and content in the United States started with the launch of the platform and adapted to the market requirements significantly affected by technological advancement. Thus, we recall the first steps of bookstagram, which were between 2010 and 2014. The year 2010 is the year in which the hashtag was created more out of interest, as it was also the year in which Instagram became accessible to the general public (Tselenti, 2020). Although it was more of a curiosity at first, 2014 was the year when the phenomenon took shape and quickly adapted to new trends and user desires to post and discuss, and how quickly other users wanted to join the trend. Also, from the figure above we can observe that starting with 2014, the quantity of books sold slowly escalated because the product started to become more popular in the eyes of the potential consumers.

Next, the period of growth in popularity of #bookstagram occurred between 2014 and 2018, when it saw a large number of posts and appearances online. The content focuses on books and how they can become increasingly important to users' daily lives, reaching around 12 thousand posts in 2016. In addition, the phenomenon managed to double its activity two years later. This was disclosed by the 24 thousand posts it posted on Instagram in 2018 and highlighted how people are sharing their passion for reading and the desire to keep the culture alive.³ This phase of the #bookstagram trend also shows the emergence of book bloggers and people who want to share this passion from a subjective perspective.

Due to efforts to change the way most businesses communicate with their customers; the phenomenon is slowly taking over marketing strategies and becoming the core component used in social media promotion. In other words, influencer marketing is considered more of a necessity than a surprise in the 21st century and the fact that creating the closest and strongest relationships with potential customers is becoming a necessity (Acikgoz and Burnaz, 2021). Companies are looking at the potential of the bookstagram community in terms of book promotion methods, and the emergence of bookstagrammers has also introduced the idea of collaboration by providing just released copies of books in exchange for posts on book influencers' personal profiles. In particular, this method

³ Maria Bellotto, November 4, 2018, article accessed from: <https://losbuffo.com/2018/11/04/leggere-ai-tempi-di-instagram-il-fenomeno-bookstagram/> on November 10, 2023.

increased the number of people participating in the trend, and while the passion for reading continued to increase the number of interactions, #bookstagram underwent changes in terms of built-in commerciality.

Between 2018 and 2021, the years of growth and diversity are characterized by continued community development in terms of the number of posts, members and digital activities. However, the community continues to grow and become increasingly diverse and also, the book industry has experienced growth as brands have recognized the potential of collaborations with book influencers and marks the time when influencers become a 21st century necessity. As a result, the "voices" that gather around the hashtag become micro-celebrities for a portion of the platform's users, transforming from mere influencers into individuals with similar experiences followed by a growing number of readers. But as the trend becomes more popular and has more followers, its variety expands, and new categories of virtual content emerge.

Under these circumstances, subgroups of people in the same industry of bookstagrammer are forming, growing in popularity through different approaches, such as "*black bookstagram*", "*Latinx bookstagram*" or "*LGBTQ+ bookstagram*". These are all focused on a specific demographic that identifies with a set of values or people who directly support them. It is also believed that these types of environments created through social media are becoming significantly accessible to people using the internet. These virtual spaces create a comfortable, authentic and friendly environment for consumers, where they can connect with other book lovers much more easily and effectively (Wiederhold, 2022).

Despite the fact that the pandemic period coincides with the aforementioned period, these two periods are interlinked, as between 2020–2021 there was a massive increase in digital users, which led to an excessive practice of the bookstagram community. In other words, the time spent increasingly at home, with laptop in hand and without the opportunity to normally go outdoors, has directly led to an increase in online interactions. As a result, reading, in combination with bookstagram activities, has become an ideal way for people to spend their time, as you can see in the figure number 1, where between 2019 and 2021, the number of books sold increased fundamentally. Similarly, the year 2021 became the period of time for selling and promoting this product. Furthermore, the target population has become even more interested in this trend. Hence, the size of the audience significantly determines the relevance of the community to the marketing industry. For this reason, the community has shaped itself into a major player in the book market, incorporating social and political themes, as community personalities use their "voice" to promote and encourage change for the better (Balaban, *et al.*, 2020).

Despite the changes that have occurred since the phenomenon's inception to present time, the community around the hashtag #bookstagram continues to focus on the passion for reading, providing users with resources and content to educate and encourage them to read as a means of personal development. Thus, digital activity focuses on recommending specific books, reviews and photos, as well as participating in various discussions, contests or special experiences with other active community members.

As for the exact number of community members relying on #bookstagram, this is not formally identified or analyzed as the community continues to grow and there is no concrete evidence to support the membership record. In other words, we can only recall the significant amount of posts that have been published, estimated to be over 96 million in October 2023. Respectively, for each content created there are hundreds of thousands of users and therefore many more lovers following this hashtag related to books.

1.2. The Romanian approach to Bookstagramming

Since the bookstagram phenomenon has become a popular way to connect book lovers across Europe, the desire to share the same principles of literary culture has also materialized in our region. As for the exact moment when the #bookstagram hashtag appeared in Romania, we don't have exact data, as it had a slow start and absorbed elements of the global bookstagram community gradually. However, at present, we can say that #bookstagram is almost a decade old, having been most exploited in the most recent period of the present.

So, the trend emerged later in Europe, around 2012–2013, partly influenced by content creators in the United States. In addition, more developed countries such as the UK, Germany and France managed to keep up with the aforementioned official launch of #bookstagram and had people focusing their attention from the beginning on spreading and appreciating book-related posts. In other countries, such as Romania, it has been harder to keep up with the progress of digital activity. This is because the country has a smaller population and therefore a smaller number of potential users and a less up-to-date social media culture.

In other words, the Romanian community based on the #bookstagram hashtag has been growing in recent years, posting pictures, reviews or even favorite books from different types of literature, as well as supporting contests or book clubs in comments and private messages on Instagram. Regarding the history of this phenomenon in Romania, we can remember that it started with a small number of

readers who discovered Instagram as a new way to share positive thoughts and experiences about books during 2015–2016, about 8 or 9 years ago.

In addition, Romanian bookstagrammers claim that in the beginning they didn't know what it meant to be a "book influencer" and that their activity was just a desire to post images illustrating what they were reading. Oana Turcea claims, in an interview for Ziarul de Iași, that "I had started in 2015 to post pictures of books on my personal account, and then I discovered other pages from abroad", supporting the idea that the concept of bookstagram did not yet exist in Romania at that time.⁴ Moreover, the aforementioned bookstagrammer says that she was among the first to adopt the hashtag #bookstagram in early 2016.⁵ For a while, the hashtags for posts dedicated to books in the country were #bookstagramro and #citind. Then the community focused on #bookstagram, like most Instagram activity at the moment, amplifying the hashtag's popularity and connecting digital content globally with all the sub-communities in the rest of the digitized world.

From 2016 to 2019, there have been years of growth where the popularity of the trend has progressively increased, but not to the same alarming level as in the United States. However, a growing number of book bloggers and influencers started posting on Instagram, gaining likes and followers, which laid the foundation for the future Romanian #bookstagram community. Gradually, these individuals became strong voices, eager to build a safe and open place for all readers in the country, being considered by the public advocates for reading. As the rapid evolution of social media forces most entities to change the way they interact and maintain a certain connection between business and consumers, both Romanian publishers and authors tend to use bookstagrammers to promote their products to their target audience.

Consequently, Instagram has become an ideal medium for promotion, as it is among the most popular social media platforms where merchandise can be "humanized" by its influencers (An and Haryanto, 2021). And, as Statista Research Department states, the book industry in Romania is booming, with a considerable leap in 2018, when the Romanian bookstagram community is coming together and literally bringing the trend into the "spotlight" of the digital social media platform.⁶

The impact of the #bookstagram community in the United States on its users cannot be compared to the one in Romania in 2019–2020. However, more and more Romanians are joining the

⁴ Oana Turcea – @oanareads24 is known as a bookstagram with over 14,000 followers on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/oanareads24/>).

⁵ Andreea Popa, 14 August 2022, article accessed from: <https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/foto-povestea-celor-patru-fete-frumoase-din-iasi-care-au-lansat-a-bookstagrama-o-inedita-iniiativa-online-ce-incurajeaza-lectura-utilizand-retelele-sociale--330853.html?fbclid=IwAR3RTsj3F0qfSWUsW-jOD5VFTIXLUI5tEVe1Hh61a8mhA-eD-PhwNBH6w3A> on 10 November 2023.

⁶ Statista Research Department, 21 December 2023. Industry revenue of "book publishing" in Romania from 2012 to 2025, data retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/395793/book-publishing-revenue-in-romania> on 25 January 2024.

trend and sharing the opinions of the reading community in the country. In other words, regional barriers are being broken down, and the passion for books is making the space that has been created open and able to accept an increasingly wide range of opinions, literary genres and methods of discussing books. Moreover, the Romanian community reaches a peak in terms of the amount of information provided and end-user responses in the period 2020–2021, especially during the pandemic, when #bookstagram played a role in promoting books and increasing online sales.

As much as these channels of communication between individuals have been able to leverage the power of bookstores in the book market, allowing authors to promote their books themselves, #bookstagram has benefited from the flow of activity created. Firstly, the hashtag-based Romanian community has significantly increased interest in reading. Also, the trend has significantly contributed to the increase in book sales through the simultaneous recommendation of literary novelties, as according to Statista Research Department, we can understand that the year 2021 for the book industry is the most fruitful year from 2012–2025.

Given these stages that the #bookstagram phenomenon has gone through both in the United States and in Romania, the trend is an influential force in the digital promotion of reading, books and the publishers or authors. Consequently, living in an era primarily influenced by the Internet, the communities created around this hashtag directly involve users in the whole process of promoting the final products and thus help create connections and increase interest in books (Lo, 2020).

2. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to thoroughly clarify the book consumption phenomenon from a dual perspective, focusing on both Romania and the United States. In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding, we collected both primary and secondary data, using two distinct research approaches.

For this research, we can outline four objectives that aim to help improve the understanding of the book digital environment. Hence, we have the following:

- O1. To examine the book consumption in Romania
- O2. To examine the book consumption in the United States of America
- O3. To investigate the book format preferred by Romanian readers
- O4. To investigate the book format preferred by American readers

In order to examine the impact that the hashtag has on the digital consumers and also, the book consumption and the forecast of books in the 21st century, we extracted both primary and secondary

data. Objectives O1 and O3 were followed by an online survey and objectives O2 and O4 were reached by a secondary data approach, using information available on Statista database. Due to the limitation of online access to an up-to-date database for the case of Romania, we conducted a structured questionnaire, developed specifically for this country. In that case, we wanted to better understand the book consumption that is already analyzed worldwide, having the American trend as the main example and then, to gather contemporary data from the Romanian bookstagram community.

Therefore, the sample for the survey was consisted of Romanian respondents, both female and men, with ages between 18 and 57 years old. The questionnaire focused on #bookstagram usage, reading habits, and the number of books read. On account of that, we focused on how many books do they read and also, in which format do they prefer to enjoy the lecture. Regarding the questionnaire sampling, in order to gather significant data for our research, we utilized a sampling technique in which only Instagram users, namely people from the bookstagram community in Romania, were asked to answer the questions. Thus, 91 respondents participated in our research, with the majority of the answers being from the female perspective (80 women and 11 men).

The questionnaire was distributed among Facebook groups dedicated to the book community, Instagram stories, both from the personal bookstagram account and from two other bookstagrammers accounts and also, was handed out to family, friends and colleagues that satisfy the reading requirement. The survey was open for about two weeks, date of start: 1 November 2023 and its availability of the link ended on 14 November 2023.

As such, we wanted to ensure representation of the actual and real perspectives on #bookstagram phenomenon. When it comes to the secondary data used in this study, we extracted relevant information from Statista database in order to broaden trends in book consumption and reading habits from the United States of America, information that already exists in the domain. For the data analysis, we mention the statistical analysis tools that we applied, including descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, to interpret the quantitative data gathered from the Romanian questionnaire.

3. Results

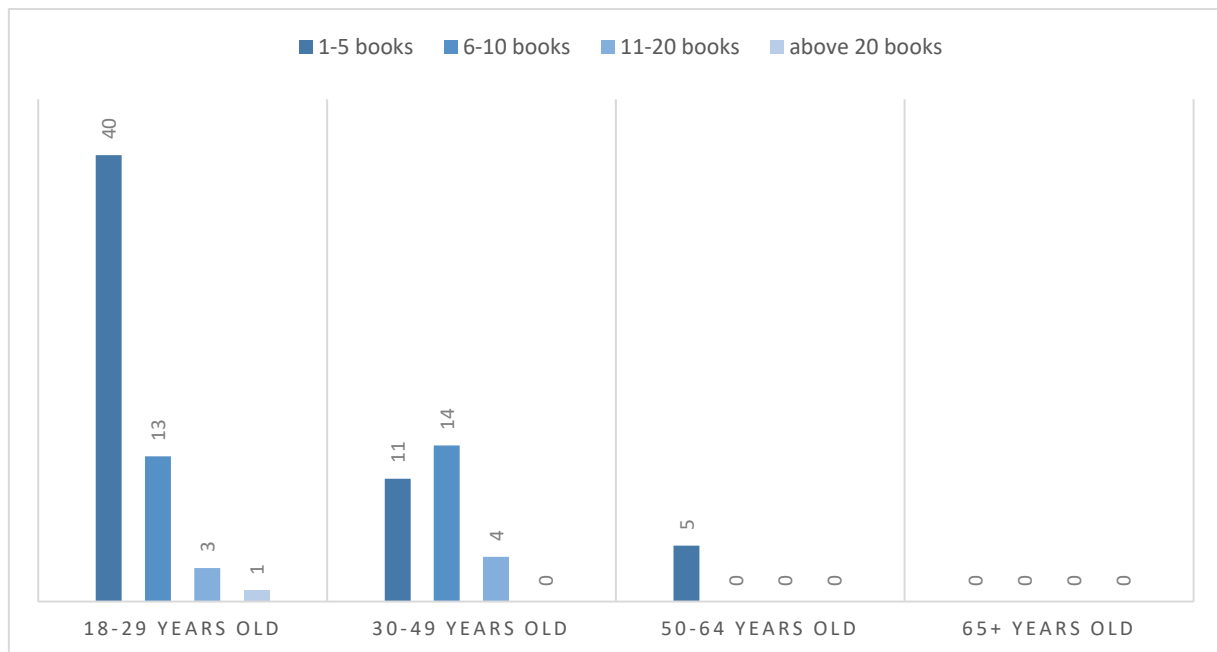
3.1. Book consumption in Romania

The future of #bookstagram in Romania remains uncertain, but its steady growth indicates a significant impact on the Romanian publishing industry, as there is a tendency to bring local authors and publications to the forefront. Also, it marked the process of independent book authors digitally

promoting their products at the same level as publishers. All this together, it reinforces the fact that, alongside the #bookstagram phenomenon, the book consumption arises. Therefore, the digital environment in which book influencers are creating unique and visual appealing content can help the book industry to gather more units sold than previous years.

For (O1) we highlight Figure 2, where we gathered Romanian respondents' answers regarding how many books do they read in a month. With this research, we wanted to examine the book consumption in Romania, by age group and also to forecast the consumption of this product with real time evolving digital technologies taken into consideration.

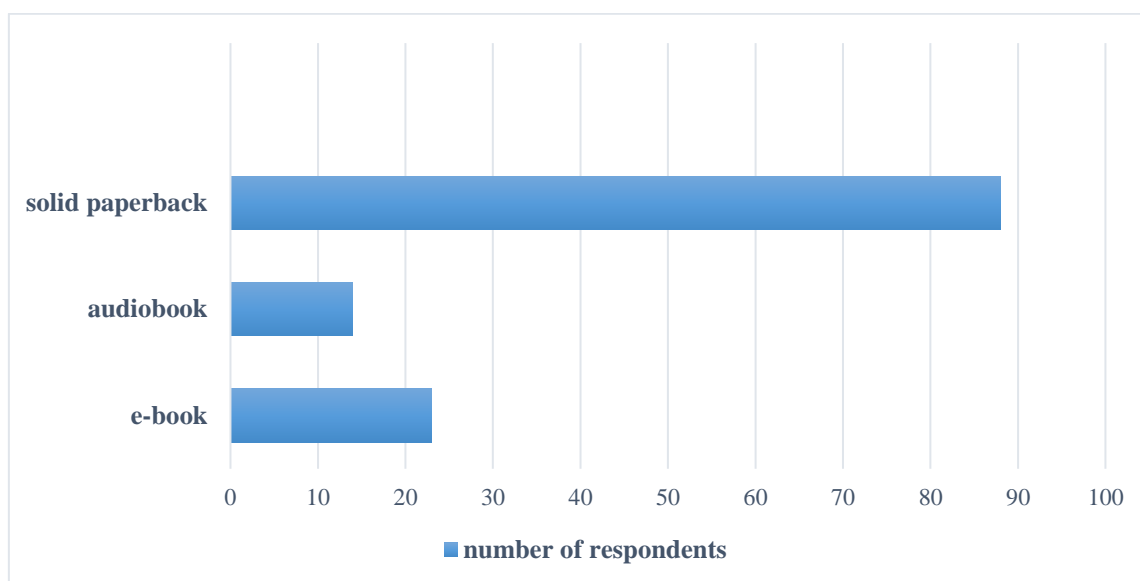
Figure 2. Number of books in any format read by the Romanian readers in 2023, by age group



Source: own processing based on the conducted questionnaire

The majority of the respondents were people from the #bookstagram community who were familiar with the Instagram phenomenon that promotes books, reading habits and literary culture. So, all 91 participants of the questionnaire are active readers and, therefore, they are inclined to read between 1 or more than 20 books per month, just as the figure illustrates. To that end, the book consumption trend by age is that individuals between 18 and 29 years old allocate the most time for reading at least one book per month. Actually, the majority of consumers that are attracted to online visual content is stated that belongs to Generation Z, namely people with ages between 12 and 28 (An and Haryanto, 2021). Hence, our results confirm the fact that this age range is more predestinated to consume books in the digital era, where a lot of recommendation and discussions are held in an online environment, because it's easier for them to access this information.

Figure 3. Book format preferred by Romanian readers in 2023



Source: own processing based on the conducted questionnaire

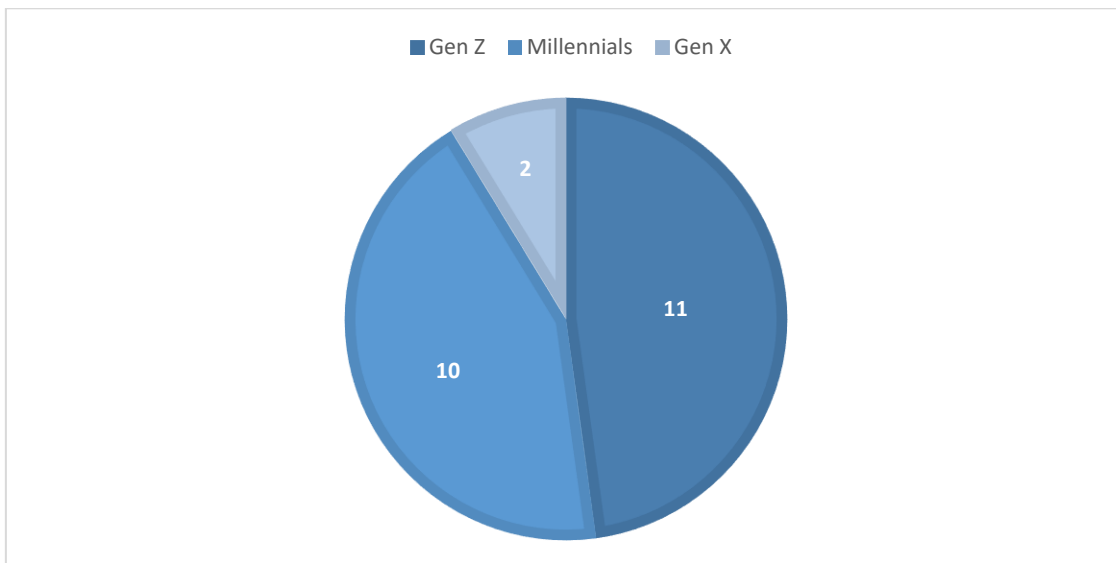
While trying to investigate the book format preferred by these Romanian readers, we concluded in creating Figure 3 for (O3), where the majority of the respondents continues to choose the paperback version of a book at the expense of e-book or audiobook versions. Hence, the number of books sold in Romania for the near future should increase. As the Statista Research Department (2023) mentioned it is expected that book industry will maintain its course, which is steadily rising.

More than that, if in 2020 a majority of Romanian respondents have never heard of an e-book, but alone use it, we can highlight the fact that in 2023 a quarter of the respondents are regularly using an e-book.⁷ Hence, 23 individuals from 91 respondents (i.e. 25%) are thinking about an electronic version of reading a book.

In the same manner, Figure 4 explores the range of ages that the e-book readers have. As follows, the majority of individuals are from the younger generation, namely Gen Z, data similar to the Statista research (2023), where in 2020, the highest consumption was allocated to teens (ages between 14 and 17 years old). Therefore, in the future we can assume that the trend in which people more familiarized with digital content and easy access to Internet chose to read from an audiobook or an e-book will continue to evolve.

⁷ Statista Research Department, 12 June 2023. Reading e-books frequency in Romania in 2020, data retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1264505/romania-reading-e-books-frequency/> on 25 January 2024.

Figure 4. E-book consumption for Romanian reader in 2023



Source: own processing based on the conducted questionnaire

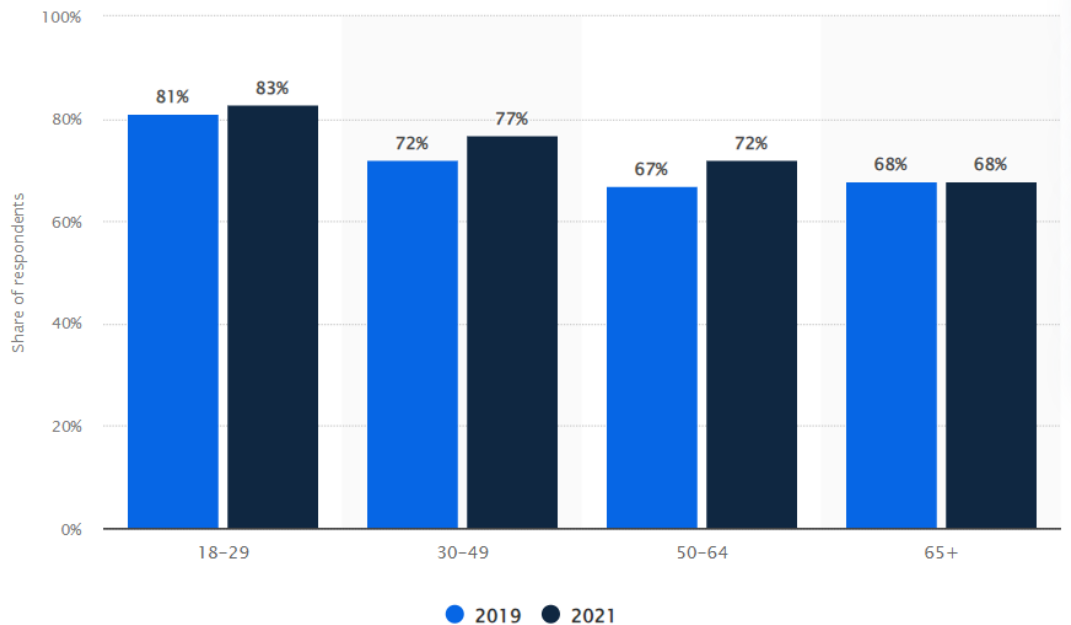
Thus, the more accustomed to the digital, the more chances to use it. In addition, the substantial difference between book formats from the Romanian readers may change in the future since the tendency starts to add value to the digital versions of the products and, on account of that, book enthusiast will start to use all kind of formats according to their current need and comfort.

3.2. Book consumption in The United States of America

The future of bookstagram in the United States is expected to grow, adapting to new technologies and trends. Collaboration between brands and bookstagrammers will become more common, helping independent authors to promote their works authentically. Also, the impact of #bookstagram will become even stronger when it comes to accessibility of reading all together.

For (O2), we can observe in Figure 5 the book consumption habit of American readers both from 2019 and 2021, pre and pandemic years. Hence, the major difference between these periods of time is the fact that individuals, regarding the age group, are still interested in reading books. Actually, the number of American readers is growing from one year to another, data that illustrates the fact that the book industry is also growing. Even if the research presented is about respondents who read at least one book in a year, different from our research conducted in Romania, the desire of choosing to participate in the reading culture is prominent.

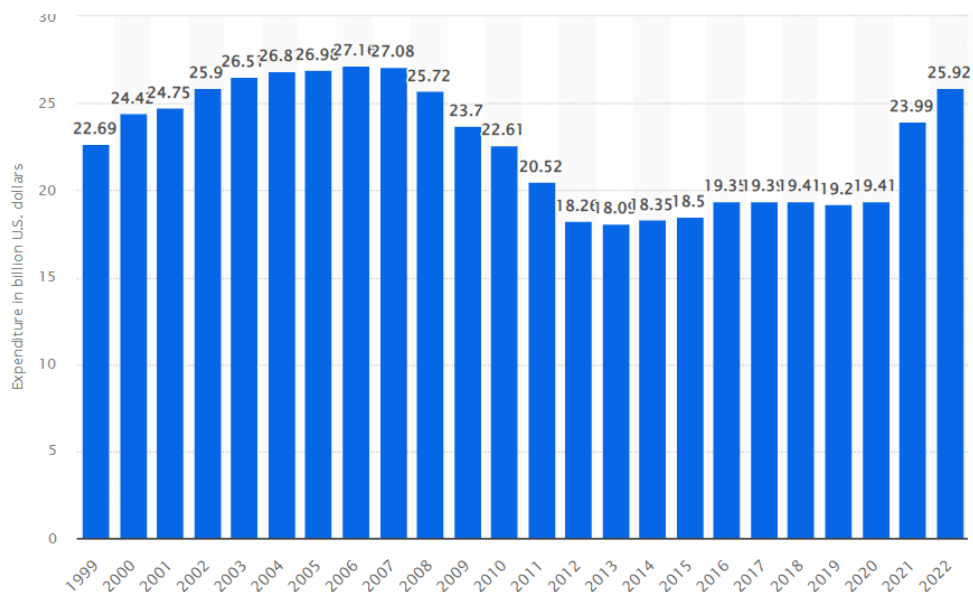
Figure 5. American readers who read at least one book in any format in 2019 and in 2021, by age group



Source: Statista, 2023

Under these circumstances, the survey results show that the younger generations are more likely to read one book in a period of time of twelve months than the individuals wild older age range. This being said, the energy and vitality that the American readers from 18–29 and also from 30–49 have is the key element that supports the book consumption regularly. More than that, according to figure number 6, we can observe that with each year, people are even more eager to spend money on books.

Figure 6. Consumer expenditure on books in the United States from 1999 to 2022

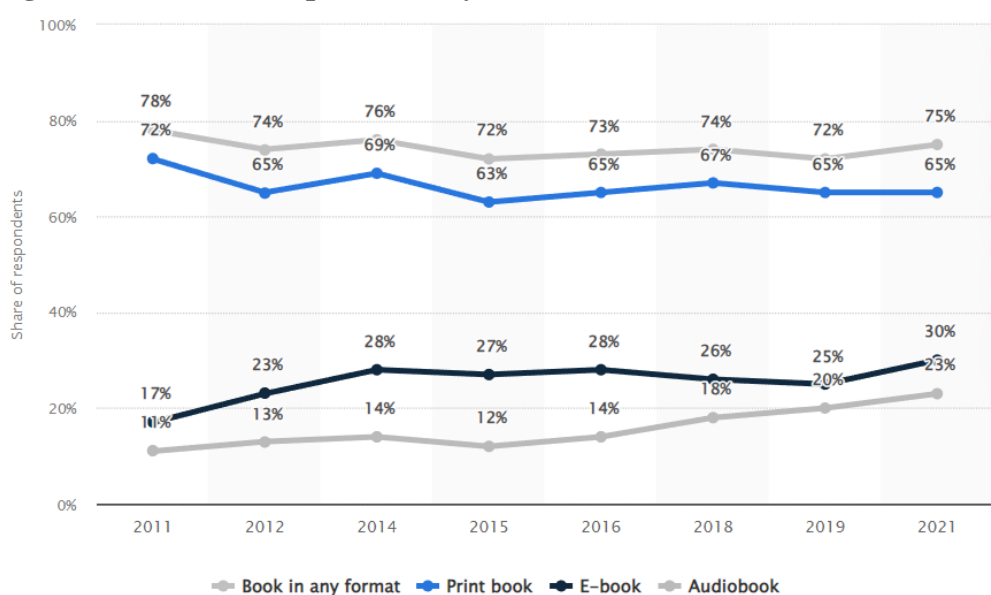


Source: Statista, 2023

Thus, the book culture and therefore, the book consumption in the United States forecast a continuous growth within book enthusiasts that are more familiar with the Internet, namely Gen Z or Millennials. Since they navigate on digital platforms and are dependent on the online facilities and its dynamism, they are expected to rapidly understand the changes in the book industry and consequently, to adapt to its transformations in order to satisfy their reading needs.

As we investigated in the United States (O4), the preferred format for the American readers is also the printed version, maintaining a constant option.

Figure 7. Book format preferred by American readers between 2011–2021



Source: Statista, 2023

This being said, we can affirm that having a physical contact with the product remains a must-do in the reading process from both perspectives. Hence, in figure number 7, we can point out that, even if the digital platforms are evolving and offer more possibilities to reach out to a book content, the printed books continue to be the most demanded choice for the American readers. As well as in Romania, e-reading, even if it includes diverse devices such as Kindle or not, is fighting for the readers’ attention. In the presented data we can see that the year 2021 represents a leap point for its growing popularity, thus the future beholds a great opportunity for increasing use.

Conclusions

Concluding this research about #bookstagram phenomenon and its link to the book industry’s growth both in Romania and the United States reveals a noteworthy development in the mentioned

sector and also, in the reading habits of the Romanian, respectively, American readers. Here, we highlight the evolution driven significantly by the younger generation's digital content consumption, where we mention bookstagram communities and their promotion tactics. For the both countries, despite the digital age's influence, printed books continue to be the favored format among all age ranges that participated in the study. This preference, however, does not overshadow the gradual development of the alternative forms existing. Hence, readers are starting to accept various formats of book content, such as e-books and audiobooks.

In this changing context, bookstagram, a welcoming digital ecosystem where readers share and discover book-related content, has become a catalyst in this on-going changing market landscape. Therefore, it helps close the gap between traditional and digital media, changing alongside the way in which book consumption is being made. As follows, both in Romania and the United States, this modern phenomenon has the ability to influence reading culture, especially among the youth. Growing in popularity, this phenomenon continues to shape the way books are consumed, debated and finally, marketed while also sustaining an interactive place for book enthusiasts to gather and create connections. The study's findings suggest that in order to effectively engage with diverse reading communities, the publishing industry, writers and marketers must adjust to these digital changes, namely, to focus on taking advantage of the digital platforms and bookstagram to reach as many potential customers as possible.

Under these circumstances, publishers and writers should take advantage of this growing trend among the modern readers and embrace different collaborations with influencers in the community in order to create visually appealing promotions and interactive content. Also, the characteristics of social media, namely the Instagram platform, can provide the necessary tools to maintain loyal consumers and identify preferences according to their demographics. Therefore, not only for the marketers, but also everyone who wants to advertise books and book behaviors, the bookstagram trend is crucial for enhancing the overall customer online experience and a more dynamic and interconnected 21st century book market.

The research has certain limitations that we acknowledge regarding the data collection, where we include the sample size constraints for the presented study. Therefore, there was a limited availability of the statistical information about Romania readers and for this reason the questionnaire focused only on the European geographical participants. Due to this discrepancy, namely the absence of data from the same period of time, we had to estimate the results in our dual perspective study, meaning that the responses recorded from Romania are more up-to-date than the American data extracted. Also, in order to gather more accurate results and to be able to create an analysis for the similarities and differences, we recommend future researchers to include a quantitative analysis

conducted for the same period of time and with the same components (i.e. equal number of individuals) for both countries participating in the study. In that way, the collected data will be exact and will become a turning point in deepening the specific preferences and insights about each community created around the hashtag bookstagram.

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