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Reading from Digital to Analogue. The Influence of Social Media

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Abstract: *In contemporary society, individuals are continually exposed to enticing offers and discounts across various platforms, making it challenging to avoid the pervasive presence of consumer goods and services. The societal emphasis has largely shifted towards a culture centred around consumption, where purchasing is often perceived as a pathway to happiness. Research indicates that shopping activities can trigger an increase in dopamine levels within the brain, momentarily enhancing mood and satisfaction. However, this dopamine surge is typically short-lived, subsiding once the desired item is acquired. Consequently, individuals may experience a recurrent urge to engage in further consumption as a means of replicating this dopamine-driven sense of gratification.*

Keywords: *buying books, Social Media, promotion, online promotion, influencers*

1. Introduction

Is it possible to influence individuals to purchase books, even if they do not consider themselves readers? In Romania, we are witnessing a decline in reading habits. According to a Eurostat study, 35% of Romanians have never read a book in their lifetime. While these figures are concerning, it is worth noting that 16% of Romanians read at least one book per month. Although this comparison highlights a troubling trend, it is encouraging to recognise that a segment of the population remains engaged with reading.

With the advent of the internet, it is clear that books have lost some of their former appeal. Nevertheless, they continue to be promoted online, albeit in reduced numbers. The rise of social media has further diminished the popularity of books, particularly among younger audiences who now seek entertainment through digital platforms. Even in the pursuit of information, books are frequently overlooked in favour of quick online searches. As economist Tyler Cowen remarked, "when access to information is easy, we tend to prefer the short, sweet and fragmented" (Cowen, 2011). It prompts one to wonder how many people choose a quick Google search over a thorough exploration of books when seeking information.

Social media serves as a venue for individuals to share their interests and hobbies. From makeup to sports, a plethora of posts can be found online. These posts help form communities that can wield significant influence. Additionally, when popular figures endorse specific products, their followers often express interest, leading many to make purchases based on these recommendations. This is the definition of an influencer. Influencers, according to Brittany Hennessy, should be divided into two categories: content creators and lifecasters.

Content creators encompass individuals who produce blogs, vlogs, and Instagram photos, showcasing their creativity. Lifecasters, on the other hand, present curated glimpses of their seemingly perfect lives on social media, often attracting followers due to the positivity reflected in

their feeds (Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social Media).

Among the numerous topics shared online, posts about books emerge from those who enjoy reading. Furthermore, many influencers receive books from publishers, actively promoting reading in their content. A brief search reveals that the hashtag "books" has garnered 34,000 results on Instagram, 25,000 on Facebook, and 10,000 on TikTok, indicating a substantial presence; book influencers play a significant role in advocating for literature.

Just as certain individuals can persuade their followers to purchase particular products, this influence extends to novels as well. Although the primary audience for these promotions consists of readers, popular posts in this realm often resonate with non-readers as well. The TikTok algorithm frequently introduces users to videos they may not have actively sought out. Additionally, collaborations with various publishers involve compensating influential figures to discuss the books they submit for review.

Humans are inherently susceptible to influence. Therefore, if a product or idea is presented frequently or mentioned repeatedly, there is a reasonable likelihood that it will attract at least one buyer. Within the publishing and bookstore sectors, such advertising is often executed subtly, whether through strategic placement of a book at the centre of a display or its prominent listing on a bookstore's website.

Publishers also explore alternative avenues for promotion by collaborating with individuals who maintain book-related accounts. On platforms like Instagram, the process is straightforward: active accounts with a substantial following (typically a minimum of 2,000) may receive complimentary books from certain publishers in exchange for promotion. The terms of collaboration vary among publishers; for instance, some arrangements have no deadlines, allowing the influencer to read and review books at their convenience alongside representative photography.

Many individuals within this community engage in such collaborations, and it is encouraging to witness publishers sending books to genuinely passionate readers. However, there are instances where publishers distribute free books to those who do not necessarily have a strong interest in reading.

In 2023, an unnamed publisher found itself embroiled in controversy with the reading community on Instagram due to its demands on collaborators without providing compensation. The publisher requested numerous tasks from collaborators, effectively expecting them to fulfil the role of social media specialists without payment. While Bookstagram collaborators may not receive financial compensation for promoting literature, some publishers imposed requirements resembling those of social media internships.

This particular publisher pressured collaborators to create content for their Instagram and TikTok accounts without offering any remuneration. Promoting a book is one matter; however, creating posts specifically for the publisher should be the responsibility of someone who is compensated for that role.

One individual abandoned her video editing project that involved a script provided by the publisher due to the severe negative feedback she received, which took a toll on her mental health. It raises the question: is anyone compensated for such efforts? Disturbingly, I later observed public figures who had collaborated with this publisher creating videos for their platforms, undoubtedly receiving payment for each of those videos.

It is disheartening that celebrities are financially rewarded for their promotional content, while those who genuinely enjoy reading and wish to contribute meaningful content do not receive the same consideration. It appears that some publishers prioritise selling as many books as possible, opting to collaborate with celebrities who may not have a genuine interest in reading, thereby compromising their credibility.

Additionally, influencers can lose credibility when they endorse nearly any product without conducting adequate research. A notable

instance in Romania is the "King's Cheese" incident, where a Romanian vlogger set out to test whether influencers would promote an unfamiliar product simply for the sake of receiving something for free. The vlogger purchased a plain cheese, customised it, and sent it to several influencers, including Oana Roman and Ana Morodan.

These influencers promoted the counterfeit product to their followers, only to later discover that they had been duped. Upon realising the deception, they threatened legal action against the vlogger. This episode, which can be viewed on YouTube at [this link](#), resulted in a significant loss of credibility for the influencers involved, and rightfully so.

This situation prompts reflection on whether we allow ourselves to be swayed into purchasing specific books. Insights gained from my research method shed light on this issue.

2. Research methods

The initial objective of this research was to assess the respondents' familiarity with the term "influencer" indirectly, followed by identifying a specific number of individuals who have been influenced to purchase books. Additionally, the aim was to ascertain the percentage of individuals influenced by platforms such as Instagram and TikTok concerning book purchases.

The intention is to explore not only whether readers are swayed by social media but also to determine if there is potential for non-readers to be influenced to some extent. Two questionnaires were selected as the primary research methods to capture insights from both demographics.

Furthermore, an analysis of an advertising campaign was conducted to evaluate the success of book marketing efforts. This research seeks to uncover whether readers can be persuaded to buy specific books and to investigate the influence exerted on non-readers.

The hypothesis posits that over 80% of readers have been influenced to purchase particular titles. The questionnaire method is

expected to provide valuable insights into the extent to which readers are swayed to enhance their libraries through books promoted by publishers via online platforms, paid advertisements, and contributors who receive books at no cost.

Moreover, the questionnaire aims to examine how readily readers are influenced regarding library enrichment. To better understand the potential impact of book covers, images of book titles will be included, as non-readers often select books based on their titles and covers. While readers may also use these criteria, it is anticipated that non-readers are more inclined to do so.

3. Results

The first questionnaire targeted Romanian readers, aiming to assess how easily they are influenced to purchase new books promoted by publishers, paid advertisements, or Bookstagram contributors. This survey was conducted anonymously among the Romanian population, featuring both closed and open-ended questions.

Three main objectives were established: to indirectly gauge respondents' familiarity with the term "influencer"; to determine the number of respondents influenced to buy books; and to identify the percentage of individuals influenced by Instagram and TikTok regarding book purchases. The questionnaire received 43 responses, with 60.5% of respondents aged between 18 and 25 years.

In contrast, the second questionnaire contained fewer questions and garnered a total of 28 responses. This survey comprised 14 questions tailored for readers, while a different approach was adopted for non-readers, based on the hypothesis that they might be more inclined to choose books based on their covers and titles. The factual questions mirrored those of the first questionnaire, ensuring anonymity and comprising both closed and open-ended formats to encourage respondents to express their thoughts freely.

The research objectives included assessing the extent to which respondents were indirectly influenced by TikTok. This highlighted the

algorithm's ability to present videos that might not typically align with users' interests. Another objective was to determine the number of respondents who had been influenced to buy books. Although not all respondents ultimately purchased the books, 44% reported feeling curious about a title after seeing it promoted by an influencer. As anticipated, a segment of respondents, 20%, indicated a lack of interest in purchasing the book.

The final objective focused on identifying a significant percentage of individuals who select books based on their covers. Many respondents confirmed that they chose books presented in images based on both cover design and title. This finding aligns with the understanding that readers, as well as non-readers, often select books by visual appeal rather than relying on reviews or recommendations, suggesting that there remains potential for young people to be influenced to buy and read novels.

The initial survey revealed that readers actively influence one another, as 97.7% reported following book-related accounts. Furthermore, 90.7% stated that they had purchased a book after encountering it on such accounts. This indicates that accounts dedicated to book promotion inspire more trust compared to influencers who receive free books in exchange for promotional content.

Regarding non-readers, it is suggested that they may also be indirectly influenced by TikTok, with the algorithm sometimes reaching individuals who do not read regularly. This research confirmed the initial hypothesis that consumers are indeed influenced to purchase books, while also yielding unexpected findings. Notably, 55.6% of respondents expressed trust in influencers who do not typically promote books, even if those influencers received the books as part of a publishing collaboration.

4. Conclusions

Books remain an inexhaustible source of knowledge. Whether individuals identify as readers or not, the value of novels is universally

acknowledged, and every book has the potential to find its audience. Influence from public figures or engaging book accounts may inspire this connection to reading.

The primary objective of this research was to establish that influencers and social media wield a more significant impact on book purchasing decisions than previously assumed. It is essential to approach purchases cautiously, as paid advertisements featuring influencers may not always offer reliable recommendations. Prioritising insights from dedicated readers over endorsements from popular figures is advisable.

To mitigate the risk of disappointment from impulsive book purchases, seeking diverse reviews and opinions from regular readers, rather than relying on influencers who may not have engaged deeply with the texts they promote, is recommended.

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