Mapping the Evolution of Book Influencers: A Bibliometric Journey

Iuliana Obreja
Adriana Manolică
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi,
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Romania
iulianaobreja18@gmail.com
manolica@uaic.ro

Abstract

As the literary landscape of the 21st century has changed its marketing approach over the years, the bookstagram phenomenon has implemented the most effective means of promotion, namely influencers. Therefore, bookstagrammers are powerful pillars in terms of developing influencer marketing on Instagram. Hence, this paper investigates the nature of book influencers in the literature based on keywords found in the Web of Science online database. Accordingly, a quantitative research encompassing 167 studies viewed through the VOSviewer tool in the form of bibliometric maps is noted. Thus, the study aims to better understand the landscape of book influencers, starting from the analysis of keywords found and, implicitly, the links that are created between them. Moreover, any influencer's digital action affects the consumers and also increases their trust. This paper provides relevant insights on bookstagrammers, as well as laying the groundwork for future research on the evolution and impact in modern readers' lives.

Key words: book influencer, bookstagrammer, bookstagram, social media influencer, influencer marketing
J.E.L. classification: M30, M31, M37, M39

1. Introduction

Every day we are faced with more and more changes in web technologies and, with them, new ways in which the Internet is perceived by consumers. Therefore, to keep up with the speed at which product promotion in the virtual environment is taking shape, both companies and marketers are adhering to up-to-date techniques. In other words, we recall different perspectives on implementing elements of influencing consumer behavior, where we discuss influencer marketing.

Although this strategy adopted by brands is a novelty in the field, more and more individuals are opting to create a safe space for potential and current consumers. More importantly, they are embracing this way of promoting products and services in the digital environment with a desire to rethink and transform old strategies into opportunities for the 21st century market. Hence, forced by the conditions of everyday life, namely the uncontrollable development of the Internet and, with it, of existing social media platforms, companies are turning to influencers.

2. Theoretical background

As social networks evolve and introduce more and more tools to integrate communication between individuals, it can be argued that they can be seen as the most popular way for brands to connect with potential consumers. Thus, digital marketing and, more specifically, influencer marketing is intensifying, becoming an important characteristic that brings out the work of social media campaigns (Nadanyiova, *et al*, 2020, p.109; Jin, *et al*, 2019, p.568, Appel, *et al*, 2019, p.5). In terms of understanding this form of promotion, created and sustained by the constant changes in the demands and needs of virtual customers, we present influencers as individuals who hold a certain

intangible power in terms of influencing users' decision to purchase a certain product or service (Sugiarto, *et al*, 2022, p.685; Leparoux, *et al*, 2019, p.435). As such, they represent individuals perceived by the target audience as being similar to them and are not necessarily considered celebrities in order to be popular, but on the contrary, they are popular because they are part of the audience and stand out through a quantity of additional information (Dimitrieska & Efremova, 2021, p.111).

Essentially, the influencer is a consumer who manages to remove the barrier that has arisen from a lack of trust in the digital activities of brands and lays the foundation for an authentic relationship with their followers, since they are also considered a member of their followers (Dimitrieska & Efremova, 2021, p.110; Grin, 2020, p.5). Moreover, these content creators can take the form of any individual online, regardless of their location, and mark a connection with consumers based on providing information for free and by default, through authentic, experience-based answers to the target audience's questions (Geyser, 2023; Novotná, *et al*, 2021, p.4).

Throughout economic and technological change, the marketing of products and services has undergone various changes to pattern itself to the demands of 21st century consumers. Thus, this study aims to introduce influencers into the marketing strategies of brands in the online environment and, with this, to characterize them in relation to the target domain – books (Sugiarto, *et al*, 2022, p.678).

In a society where digital has taken over the majority of the activities a consumer undertakes, the methods of influencing them are continually evolving and, by extension, transforming according to market demands. Specifically, in order to ensure good communication between individuals and businesses and, moreover, to reach a point where potential customers' decisions depend entirely on digital content, companies are adhering to new means by which to ensure a good approach to the economic process (Leparoux, *et al*, 2019, p.436).

3. Research methodology

Alongside this, the present paper will approach a quantitative method that will call for identifying and exploring aspects of book influences present in modern virtual spaces. Namely, the aim is to measure the presence of the aforementioned phenomenon in the literature and, implicitly, the in-depth understanding of its concepts through a bibliometric analysis. In addition, the research succeeds in incorporating new perspectives of the growing trend, marking future trends in the book influencers academic literature.

As bookstagrammers rely on highlighting visuals as a pillar in their success, the tool chosen for the research – VOSviewer 1.6.20, manages to use visual maps for the purpose of analysis. Therefore, the bibliographic data entered will be examined through interactive maps, graphs and clusters accessible in the online program. On account of that, from the software tool's wide range of functions, we focused on keyword co-occurrence analysis, where the clusters analyzed in terms of existing themes and the most cited academic works are created (van Eck & Waltman, 2017). To that end, we visualized the bibliographic data so that we could extract prominent topics as well as future research directions of the field.

In order for this analysis to take place, we created the database for the keyword "book influencer" with the help of the Web of Science database. So, the data used in the present paper was retrieved on 5th of March 2024, including a total of 167 academic papers filtered by relevance, as it is shown in the Web of Science online platform. Further on, the format used for downloading the database was .RIS, a configuration accepted by the VOSviewer program.

4. Findings

With the advent of social media and, by extension, the embrace of digital shaping of the everyday, as well as the publishing industry, fundamental changes in the way readers interact with books are evident. Therefore, we recall the introduction of new platforms for discussion, recommendations and, implicitly, product promotions, at a time when book influencers are considered increasingly important in influencing literary trends.

In other words, the figure no. 1 illustrates, by different years, the number of publications published with the aim of discussing and researching these book-loving micro-celebrities. Thus, although the first article on our topic appears in 1992, there is no notable activity until 2011-2014, a significant period also for the emergence of bookstagram communities in the digital environment (Piazza, 2017). Thus, we highlight a relatively gradual increase in the involvement of researchers in the relationship created between an influencer and the literary field until 2021, where the number of publications explodes and reaches a peak so far of 21 such studies.

Figure no. 1 Publications for the articles with the keyword "book influencer" shown by year
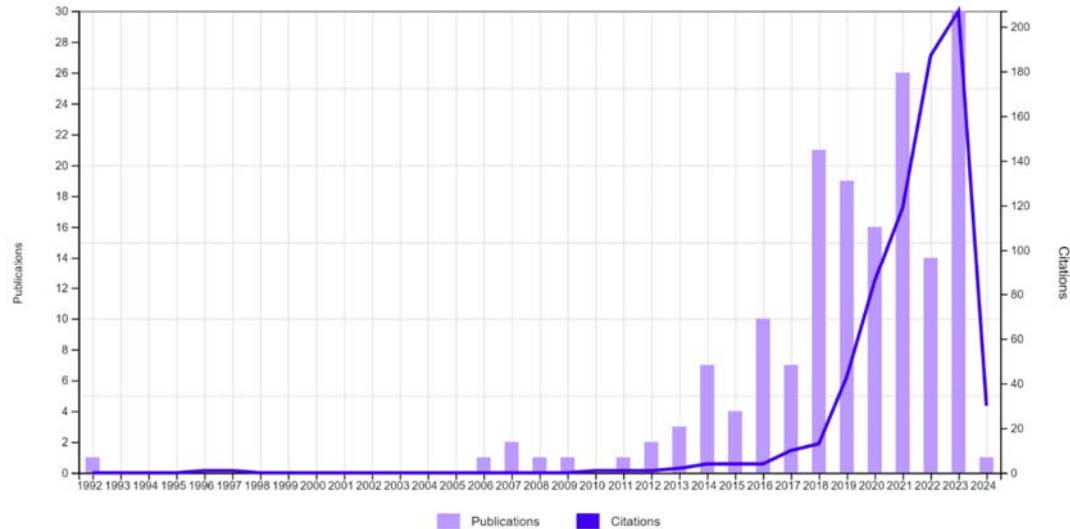
Source: Web of Science online platform

At the same time, the trend towards digitization and adherence to increasingly online activities remain in the coming years, with 32 academic papers in 2023. Without doubt, this represents the most prosperous year in terms of studies found in the academic literature and also marks a bridge for future research. As of the date that this research is being conducted, 5th March 2024, there are 4 publications in the field in 2024.

Moreover, we can also observe a correlation between the activity recorded over the above-mentioned period and the years with a significant digital load. In other words, publications on book influencers started to appear shortly after the launch of the social media platform Facebook, namely 2004, and are also an important building block in the construction of this field (Hall, 2024). Also, the frequency of scholarly papers restarted in 2010, a decisive moment in the launch of the social media platform Instagram and continues to grow to this day (Eldridge, 2024).

In terms of the number of citations, the activity starts slowly in the period 2010-2012, but remains steady in terms of growth, with more and more citations being added to the literature each year. In particular, the attention towards book influencers is increasing since more and more researchers are interested and eager to keep the information as up-to-date as possible. In 2023, the current benchmark, there are 212 citations.

In order to understand to a greater extent the current research around book influencers, we will visually explore through VOSviewer the keyword networks formed in this subdomain by mapping the main themes. In particular, this approach succeeds in highlighting both the academic importance of the analyzed keyword and explaining the role it plays in today's literary ecosystem.

It should be noted that there were keywords incorporated in the database that do not meet the necessary conditions for analysis, among which we mention the membership of the clusters created, but also the relevance to the topic we want to explore. Thus, we excluded occurrences such as "cardiovascular-disease", "justice", "united-states", and "activist dubbing" in order to subtract from the existing clusters the themes relevant to the bookstagram phenomenon and book influencers.

On account of that, the figure no. 2 reflects the bibliometric map of the 167 scholarly papers found in the book influencer literature, highlighting the most mentioned keywords, strong links and relevant clusters of the analysis.

Figure no. 2 Keywords network for the "book influencer"
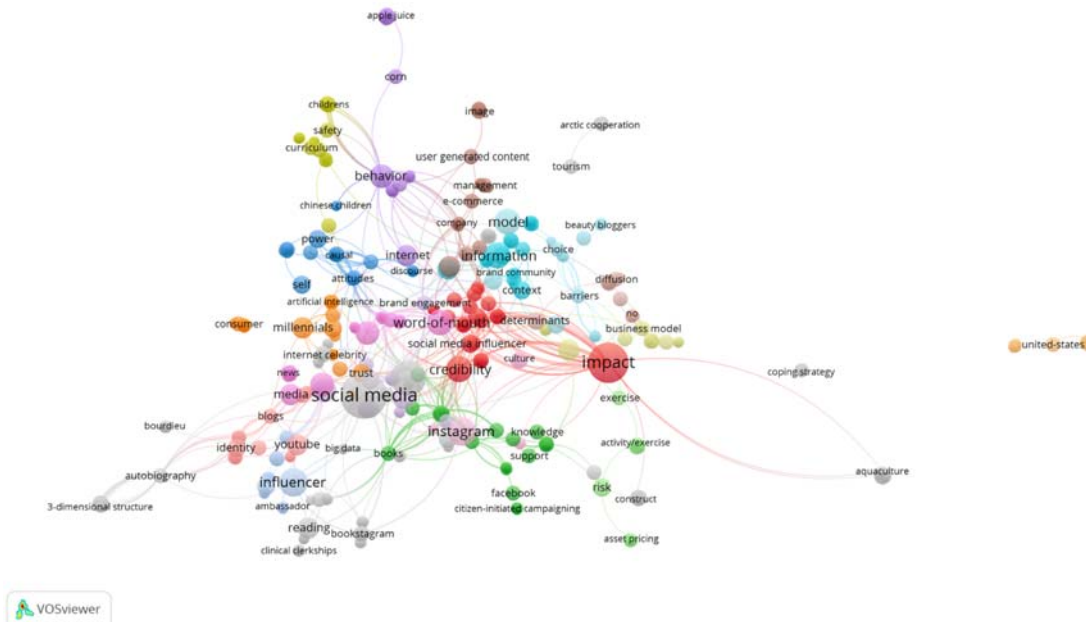
Source: own processing using VOSviewer program

Similarly, the first Cluster – the Cluster 1, observable in the color red, suggests the main characteristic of an influencer in relation to potential consumers of its content, namely that it affects them directly. Thus, "impact", "credibility" and "reviews", in addition to "social media influencer" reinforce the theme identified above in figure no. 3, where we can point out the importance of each keyword by the dimension of the ball itself, the most prominent ones are the most cited keyword in the academic literature.

Figure no. 3 Keywords network for the Cluster 1
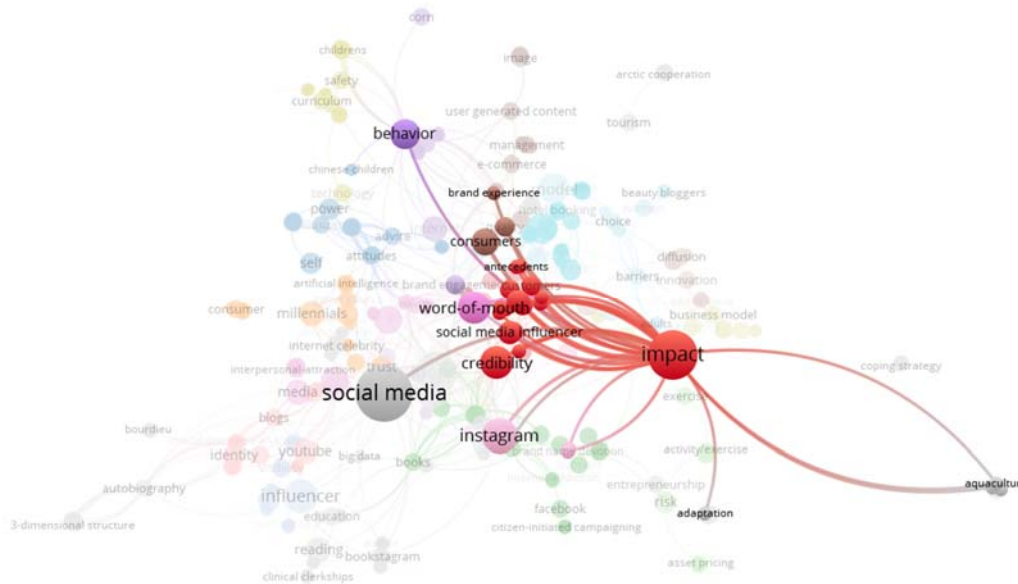
Source: own processing using VOSviewer program

Another notable Cluster, Cluster 2 – the grey one, is shaped by keywords such as "social media", "influencers", "bookstagram", but also "(internet) celebrity" and "education". More importantly, it presents the digital environment as a pawn in terms of receiving relevant information for user development, as you can observe in figure no. 4, where the connections created between the keywords lead us to better understand the book influencers' ecosystem.

Figure no. 4 Keywords network for the Cluster 2
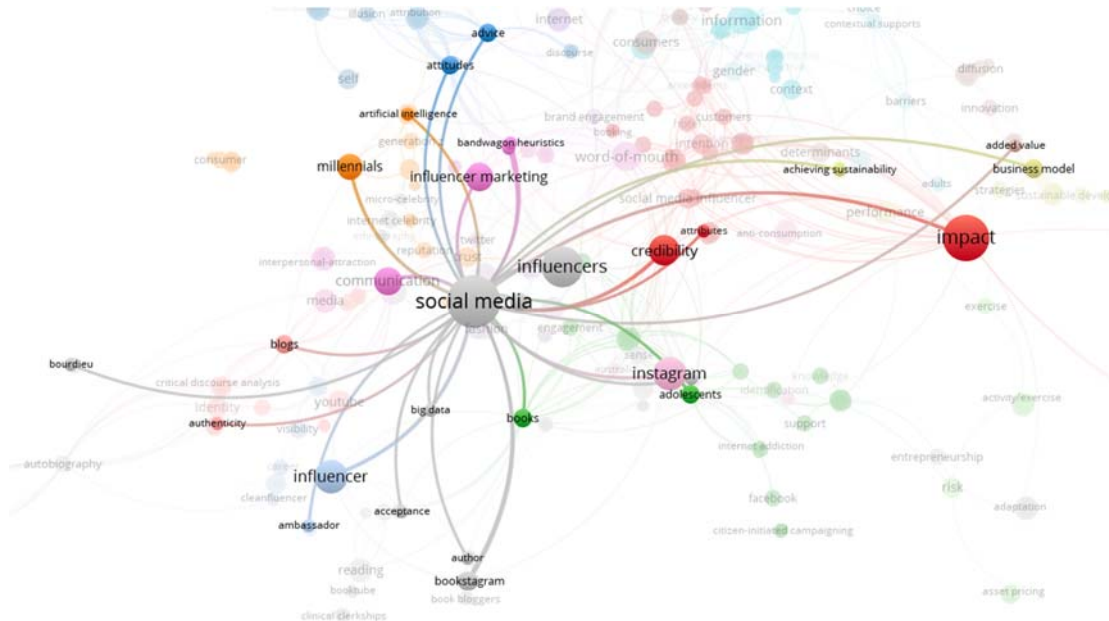
Source: own processing using VOSviewer program

As smaller clusters are necessary in the evolution of a field, we mention the pink cluster, focused on "influencer marketing", "communication", "word-of-mouth" and "media". This gives rise to the theme of marketing based on the involvement of individuals in conveying information to the target audience, and also the association of this approach to promoting products with the traits of the person considered an influencer in the digital environment in which they create content. Also, you can see in the bibliometric map for the book influencer keyword, this cluster is closely connected to the most cited keywords in the field, marking its emerging evolution.

Since the frequency of occurrence of these keywords in the papers analyzed from the Web of Science database is important for understanding the direction in which future studies will take with respect to book influencer, we highlight the clusters with the strongest linkages created. Furthermore, the dimension created in VOSviewer using the selected articles highlights the most common keywords, these being "social media" (19 mentions), "impact" (14 mentions), and "influencer" (11 mentions). On account of that, we can point out that "social media" and "influencer" are connected at a deeper level than the rest of the keywords, as can be seen from the color similarity in the mapped map, but also from the close proximity shown in the presented bibliometric visualization.

Essentially, those keywords lay the groundwork for the definition of a book influencer, namely, an influencer whose digital activity measures its importance by user trust.

5. Conclusions

The keyword "book influencer" marks the power an individual can have over a follower. Thus, this analyses looks at digital in terms of its accessibility to provide content that increases the impact on the literary culture of 21st century consumers. Also, the literary landscape, as seen in the literature, is being shaped by these book influencers regarding the way in which books are being promoted and therefore, the way in which a reader follows his reading habits.

In terms of the results gathered throughout the research, they highlight the effect that the digital activity of book influencers has on online consumers. In particular, there is a strong link between the actions taken and the level of trust bookstagrammer followers have in the recommendations of the influencer. Thus, the reading habits of contemporary readers are shaped in tandem with the trends present in social media and, moreover, can change depending on what the book influencer suggests.

As the literature presents the ability of influencers to influence potential consumers, we mark the ideas created through the cluster analysis present in the research, namely, the ability to change behaviors and also, the availability of the digital. In other words, readers may adopt new perceptions or change their literary choices based on the recommendations and opinions that book influencers distribute online. Hence, the higher the degree of trust in the communities in which that information is promoted, the more a consumer will choose content that is more authentic and that he or she considers in relation to his or her values.

Also, the actual environment in which this information exchange takes place, i.e. the virtual ecosystem designed by social media, is a crucial point in a book influencer's approach. In this manner, both the tools used and the characteristics of digital create a space for discovering books and learning new things about literature. Accordingly, it also highlights the potential of book marketing through the primary use of these book influencers. As such, they have the resources to create closer connections with potential buyers on a whole new level than traditional marketing. Above all, direct and honest interaction underlines the successes that book influencers gain from promoting books on social media platforms.

Given the data collected and the themes identified, we can also point out that the prominence of keywords situates the main components of a book influencer as closely related to each other, starting from the social media impact the influencer masters. More importantly, the present research highlights future research perspectives on the ecosystem created around a modern book influencer and also proposes possible studies on the actual strategies implemented in order to shape long-term reading habits.

A limitation that weighs most heavily in this paper is the total number of articles integrated into the analysis. Thus, it has been diminished due to the incompatibility of scanning and understanding non-English scientific papers. In this sense, although a number of relevant insights have been identified, it is possible that valuable insights extracted from non-English sources are lost. Also, in addition to the language barrier present, articles not accessible online were excluded from the database.

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