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Lessons Learned from Bookstagrammers for Library Promotion and Promotion of Readership: Qualitative Study

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Abstract: The prevalent problem with which libraries deal with today is decrease of patrons in younger generation. There is a lot of academic and research attention dedicated to studies of their behavior and trends connected to increase in time spent online and on social media. There are also concerns about attention spans of younger children and their reading habits. Many libraries tried to pull younger generation toward book reading and libraries in general by starting Instagram accounts but not many know how to run it to address the desired group of users.

We have conducted interviews with three out of eight most popular Influencers in Czech Republic specializing in book promotion. We processed results with grounded theory and derived recommendations for library marketing specialists out of key findings.

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1. Introduction

With every study published on topic of book reading in younger generations [1], with every research survey about internet dislocating traditional media [2] the librarians grow more anxious. Internet is everywhere and with wide adoption of new technologies by the young generation [3], technologies are the first thing they turn to when in information need.

It is also true that adoption of social media as an information source is a cross generational phenomenon. [4] But all the generations use it in a different way. The younger generation [5] use it to watch youtubers and influencers who steer and nurture their interests. Even in book world it is working so well that number of the publishing companies found a way to cooperate with influencers on Instagram to help them promote their goods. These bookstagrammers are a new asset in promotion repertoire which help publisher spread a good word about a book, target a certain audience, prepare the audience for a product, or get feedback on how the wording or shape of campaign should go. [6]

The question is, where in this are or could be the libraries. A library certainly does not have a product that would need a massive campaign on digital media. Still, we must not forget that what is behind Instagram is entertainment. Libraries often present themselves as institutions of education, but reading is not only about education it is also about fun. And that is what readers are looking for on bookstagrammers accounts.

On Instagram very young audience like to present themselves as readers for example as fans of Lisa Jane Smith or Susanne Colins. They already like to read and would promote reading to their friends and followers. The relationship of an influencer with his/hers audience is represented by feeling alike, reading alike, sharing an opinion. And that is something what library could do if there would be enough understanding how it works. [7]

Instagram has a very good reach among young generation who is familiar with digital environment [8] but does not have to be familiar with the library. Therefore, we wanted to

investigate the bookstagramming activity more and asked the Czech most famous influencers to help us.

2. Methodology

In this research we tried to accomplish two main goals. First, inspect the unique environment around book recommending influencers on Instagram, so called bookstagrammers. Second, find out traits of successful bookstagrammer and characteristics of relationship with their audience so we could derive from them useful recommendations for library marketing specialists.

We expressed our goals in our two research questions:

- 1) What draws bookstagrammer to his/hers audience?
With this research question we tried to reveal the relationship of bookstagrammer with his/hers topic as well as interest in the audience, in quality of content and plans for the profile as a whole.
- 2) How does being the bookstagrammer work?
With this research question we tried to cover reasons for cooperation with publishing houses and other subjects. Relation of this profession to personal life of bookstagrammer, plans for life and other social media.

As a method of data gathering was chosen semi-structured interview because it allows researcher to cover selected topics but also allows him/her to go deeper on the matter if an interesting topic appears. Based on research questions was assembled an interview scenario which was then followed.

We have contacted eight most successful bookstagrammers in Czech Republic with a request for a research interview. Their success was measured in number of followers. Three of them agreed to let us conduct the research. Two of them were women, one of them was a man. All the respondents signed Consent with recording and data processing.

2.1. Data gathering

The interviews were conducted online using video calls of Google Meet and Skype. All of them were recorded and afterwards transcripts were made. All the data were anonymized before analysis began.

2.2. Data analysis

Analysis of our data was performed using grounded theory according to Corbin and Strauss. [9] In the transcript we have been searching for concepts, used open coding, and then decided on main categories and subcategories using axial and selective analysis. [10] We have repeated the process constructing note base which helped our research to get saturated. Table 1 shows an example of axial coding. The results are summarized in the next section.

3. Results

As we noted we carried out three semi-structured interviews with famous bookstagrammers from the Czech Republic. Each of the interviews provided slightly different point of view on the topic and the best practices of three people with different backgrounds and occupations, but similar goals as book influencers. We grouped their notes and ideas into the following categories, which helped us answer research questions above:

- Characteristics of a bookstagrammer
- Characteristics of audience
- Characteristics of content
- Bookstagrammers environment
- Choosing social media platform

Table 1: Example of axial coding for category Choice of social media platform.

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts	Examples
Choice of social media platform	Instagram	Best platform, photos, videos, Reels, short videos, stories, broad audience, easiest community reach, best content manag. tools.	"I primarily use Instagram." "Now I focus mostly on creating podcasts on Instagram."
		YouTube	"I've also used YouTube but I can't keep up recording with the videos due to time constraints." "Thanks to YouTube I grew more, I gained followers but because of time constraints I had to leave it." "I used Facebook, but I have to admit that I no longer use it. Our generation does not use it much." "I put the same on FB as I do on Instagram besides competition posts which I prefer to be only On Instagram."
	Facebook	Universal platform, personal profiles, resharing, photos, videos, statuses, supplement.	"YouTube videos are also on the decline, because not so many people watch the video they rather listen to the podcast." "There were few podcasts at the time and none related to literature or culture."
	Podcast	Spotify, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, voice, trend, self-development, supplement	"I think it is only new type of promotion and show off, it is targeted more on the youngest which probably need it because it is funny, partially interactive and attention is easily obtainable."
	TikTok	Short videos, very young audience, trend, not favorite.	

3.1. Characteristics of a bookstagrammer

The bookstagrammers see themselves as a part of book community on the Internet. They take inspiration from other bookstagrammers but also from influencers who focus on different topics than books. They often seek advanced techniques and trends in creating eye-catching content more than book titles. They also get ideas from their friends, colleagues, and followers on Instagram. For them, looking for trends and following other influencers is fun, but also time-consuming part of their "job".

"I often follow foreign influencers, I seek what kind of formats they use, on which topics they focus and how do they communicate with their followers."

"I always read comments from my followers. So, I can see what they like and what content they need."

"Book community on the social media is very friendly and respectful. I meet my Instagram colleagues and friends at book events, and we often share experience."

We ought to say that even though our respondents are famous and popular bookstagrammers in the Czech Republic, being a bookstagrammer is not their full-time job and source of income. Two of them work as content creators and marketers in different area than book market. They use their book-related profiles as a sandbox to try and learn new things. This helps them in their occupation and self-development. They are aware of their influence on younger audience, so they try to use it to get young people to read.

"I live out of content managing on social media so some things I try on my account rather than on an account of my client."

"This represents a job and a hobby to me; it brings me a lot of opportunities. I can share my opinion about books with other people who give me feedback, so I know if they like it. I am often invited to book events. Also, my own short story will be published because of that. It is all possible thanks to my Instagram profile and activities."

Instagram is an attractive platform for audience in age 34 and younger. All our respondents stated that their content is primary targeted on an audience between 16 and 20 years old, but the biggest impact of their profile is on age group approximately 24 years old. The bookstagrammers create content for their age group, they understand language and culture of their peers. They all like using and learning social media, they are creative and try to be original and entertaining. Their followers identify with them, but they have high expectations too. The pillars of bookstagrammers' community are constructive critic and feedback. From their favorite influencer followers anticipate authenticity, originality, and consistency in content. Followers have chosen several influencers and they do not want to receive the same content from them, so authenticity and originality are very important factors of successful bookstagrammer.

"I strive for originality but sometimes I slip to photos of books in a Caffee ... but when many profiles do the same, I know it from the declining number of followers."

The "job" of a bookstagrammer may seem easy but it isn't. It demands time and space, especially when content creator strive for interesting, original, and enjoyable posts. They also manage their publishing strategy for the best reach. They also need to communicate with their followers, so they often stand against unpleasant hates, which sometimes lead to flame wars between members of their community. They must throw a good example and show as leaders.

All participants agree, that being a bookstagrammer helps them grow. They all learn skills and get experience needed not only for their Instagram profiles, but also for their occupations. They need to react and adapt to new features, technologies, and tools, which are developed by owners of social media platforms.

"Some of the posts are done very easily but some take hours of thinking, preparing and processing."

"For creation of cool and inspiring posts it is important to have certain technical skills, for example Photoshop and video editing skills."

3.2. Characteristics of audience

Audience is a key factor for successful Instagram profile. All activities of all influencers and bookstagrammers lead to acquiring more followers, creating active community and gain better reach for their posts. The audience is most tracked indicator by companies and institutions, that offer cooperation or work positions to influencers. As we mentioned above, bookstagrammers' audience is based on age structure of users on Instagram. For bookstagrammers it is also important to look for genres followers like and seek. They are often interested in different genres of Fiction, Young Adult literature, unknown titles, information about best sellers and entertainment. Audience on Instagram uses all features to express their ideas and feelings about content via comments and communication with influencers.

"I want to publish content for people around 15 or 17 who read Young Adult literature but when I look at Instagram statistics, the group who is following me the most is 18 to 24 years old."

"My target audience is not defined only by age but also by genre I write about, which is mostly Young Adult literature."

"Instagram is quick, easy and it enables communication with people. When someone sends me an interesting message or a comment ... I can build up knowledge about my community."

3.3. Characteristics of content

Instagram offers many features which help to distribute content. Among very popular are Stories, that last for 24 hours, and Photo posts, as well as Reels or IG TV for short videos. The content may become even more dynamic using advanced and third-party tools e.g., Boomerang, Frames and more.

The visual perception and first look are always important as well as text of the post, which carries the main idea and message.

Some bookstagrammers are specialized in photos of books in different arrangements and art designs. The most successful posts contain influencers themselves; their face showing or being arranged in a creative position with a book. Consistency is important, but many similar photos on a profile dashboard may appeal boring. The bookstagrammer must be creative and always find interesting ways how to promote books. Some of them try different styles of photo shooting and editing, use other features (Reels, IG TV) or platforms (podcasts, profiles on other social media platforms).

"I partially use Reels, those are short videos on Instagram, they help to better reach."

"I usually try to change angles and types of photo shooting, to this precedes a reflection about design which I have not used in a while."

"I understand that first look and visual is very important, so I focus on photo editing ... The copywriting of post is also very important because it is the main part which can help my followers to decide what to read."

3.4. Bookstagrammers' environment

Our respondents consider being a bookstagrammer a hobby not a paid job. But thanks to their success being a bookstagrammer they are very often asked for cooperation by publishing houses and book sellers. The cooperation can have different forms and respondents are usually very selective. They are looking for a type of cooperation in which they have a free hand in what they write about a book. They usually decline paid cooperation because that would mean that only positive book review would be in order. Recently a lot of publishing houses and bookstores got interested in social media, they have their own pages, but they also often ask the bookstagrammers for cooperation they choose them according to numbers of their followers. Most frequent reason for rejection of cooperation is time restriction.

"Publishing houses use social networks a lot even though before some time everyone laughed at bookstagrammers. Now they are in high demand."

"I usually do not like doing book reviews when publishing houses demand a positive review. Therefore, I take only collaborations where I have a free hand."

Influencers often participate on book promoting venues as well as organize them. They also nurture friendships among people in this business. These contacts helped to all the respondents in their job career.

"I am often invited on book fairs where I am supposed to promote a book or speak about my profile."

3.5. Choosing social media platform

Bookstagrammers perceive Instagram as the most important platform for book promotion. Reasons for that are the same with every one of them. Firstly, because it is targeting on the right audience, secondly for easy manipulation with posts and content management tools, it also offers nice features (Stories etc.) and it enables combine visual and textual information. It does not mean they do not use other platforms as well, but they use them more as a supplement to their Instagram profile. On Facebook they usually just share content from their Instagram profile. They use Facebook for their personal profiles where they do not promote books. Facebook is perceived as a place for promotion of big companies and publishing houses.

Podcasts are considered very trendy. During production they can invite writers, talk about background of a story or personal life of the writer. They also use YouTube for video publishing but that is very time consuming, and they need a lot of video editing skills. All of them agree that TikTok could be very interesting for book promotion specially for content for younger generation, but they personally hold on to their community on Instagram.

"Now I focus mostly on creating podcasts on Instagram."

"I put the same on Facebook as I do on Instagram besides competition posts which I prefer to be only on Instagram."

"I think TikTok is only new type of promotion and show off, it is targeted more on the youngest which probably need it because it is funny, partially interactive and attention is easily obtainable."

4. Discussion

Before we try to name all the good examples and challenges of being a bookstagrammer, we must state that these lessons learned are dedicated either to content managers of a library or to library management, who would like to decide on cooperation with a bookstagrammer.

First lesson we have learned that it seems for an Instagram account to get a lot of attention it is very important to start early in a trend and offer something new. The same can be seen at other social networks. So, to be successful in social media marketing on Instagram you need to really understand what you can offer to the audience. That can be learned only from the interaction with the audience itself. [11]

The content of an Instagram account does not have to be only comprised of nice photos it has to be a well-balanced content of something entertaining and something informative.

Another lesson to mention on which young Instagram audience puts a lot of weight is authenticity. Every influencer is perceived in eyes of their followers as someone admirable and true. If an influencer diverse from his/her image, it results in losses in number of followers and thus loss of popularity.¹

The same applies to nature of content, it must be original and authentic (although the photos are orchestrated). [12] All of the interviewees admitted that they follow competitor's profiles, and they take inspiration from them, only as much so thought so they do not merely "repeat" the content. They also use the competitor's profiles as a measure of content saturation.

¹It is truth though that influencer can rebrand and reach even bigger audience. But it is always very risky move.

Important lesson to be learned is that from some point content management practice must turn professional as all the interviewees did in time. In the Czech environment the position of bookstagrammer is not rewarded with salary. Our bookstagrammers decided to put their experience in practice and have been hired as content managers by bookstores or publishing houses or else. [13] This enabled them to continue to invest huge amounts of time into browsing competitor's profiles, companies' profiles, and social media space in general. It is important to say that none of them studied marketing, but they all have been self-taught. [14]

Today it is common that bookstagrammers are gathered around marketing agencies which offer their services in with link to a specific audience. [15]

From this lesson we can derive that all the libraries must think about readership and library promotion as a job on itself. You cannot stack other jobs on a content manager because if you do, it is going to show. Working as a content manager (reconnaissance, preparation and posting of content) takes a lot of time and it strives on one's creativity. If you overload a person with another tasks, either he/she must invest personal free time, or it will negatively affect his/her performance at the job.

What we have learned so far is that to show personality is very important for bookstagrammer. The successful profile cannot be connected to a faceless person. The instagrammer must have an appearance on the profile and be able to exhibit. It does not matter if the influencer is projecting himself/herself into a rock fan, model, bookworm or else as long as it is authentic and consistent with the profile.

On this note all the influencers take the job as "a personal journey". And they take their followers on the journey with them. That means the content manager must be given a lot of space. Not only for experimenting but also in a means that you must let the person to tell their own story.

All the interviewees have told us that they see Instagram as the best channel for book promotion. Some of them tried podcasts and videos but they are all inclined to use Instagram rather than any other platform. Instagram right now has the best capacity to address generations Y and Z, which means users from 8 to 39 years old. [16,5]

Another lesson learned from our interviewees was unspoken but perceived. Even though there are studies which prove that older generations can use the new media [17] and even though all our research participants stated that their content is primarily targeted on the Young Adult audience, the biggest impact of their profile was in their age group (approx. 24 years old). We can argue about the reason (language used, thought process too distinct from younger generation, or else). Nevertheless, either someone from young generation must speak to the audience (some volunteer, hired bookstagrammer, or part time worker) or you should find someone from your own.

Last thing we would derive as an advice is listen to your community. Audience on Instagram is very connected to the people they follow. If an influencer does not react to their needs or if he/she acts too distant the profile is going to lose followers.

5. Conclusion

To interact on Instagram is today one of the ways how to reach young audience even for libraries. It is needed to hold onto certain rules though in order to be successful. Our research implies that young person with connection to the book community on the Instagram should take care of the profile. The content should be informative but most of all entertaining. It is a good idea to get inspired on other profiles, but own creativity and originality is needed. The profile should have a visible personality in the background with which the followers can identify with.

There is a number of good bookstagrammers who could be hired or asked for cooperation. Even library could become a part of book community ecosystem on social media. They could not only promote themselves their venues and services but also lead young generation to reading and exploration in variety of literature genres.

We understand our research is not all covering and has its limitations. We interviewed only 3 bookstagrammers and we did not contact their audience at all. Also, the experience shared with us

stems from practice in Czech Republic. Therefore, the results cannot be taken rigidly and cannot be taken out of their context.

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