

Article

Disguising Commercial Intentions: Sponsorship Disclosure Practices of Mexican Instamoms

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Abstract

Influencers have established themselves as key allies for brands by cultivating a powerful public image to promote them. In the case of Instamoms, these collaborations can offer moms a means of achieving economic stability. In a country like Mexico, where the gender gap in the labor market remains a contentious issue, digital work represents an opportunity for women. The similarity between the organic content and commercial content created by these profiles has strengthened the presence of hybrid advertising. This means of advertising has not spelled the end for the original content, and audiences may struggle to spot ads if sponsorship is not disclosed properly. It is important for consumers to be able to identify ads so their persuasion knowledge can be activated. This article examines the commercial messages and types of disclosure used by Mexican Instamoms to inform their followers of the commercial nature of their collaborations. The types of disclosure are analyzed based on language, location, and type of text. After a content analysis of 10,135 stories and more than 330 posts, 40% and 47% of the sample, respectively, was identified as advertising content. The analysis revealed that less than 5% of the Instamoms sponsored content was tagged as such and that sponsorship disclosure does not form part of the usual protocol for influencer-brand collaborations in a country where no legislation is yet in place and the sector is making little effort to control these practices.

Keywords

advertising; influencer marketing; Instagram; Instamoms; persuasion knowledge; sponsorship disclosure

Issue

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1. Introduction

In 2010, Instagram was launched as a social network to share images globally by means of hashtags. Since then, social networks have changed and taken on an increasingly commercial tone. This has given rise to a new form of advertising known as influencer marketing. In Mexico, 58% of the investment by influencer management is channeled to 100% digital influencers, where 53% of campaigns correspond to Instagram (IAB México, 2020c). Studies now indicate that Instagram is the most engaged social network in terms of users' interaction with posted content, which has made it brands' platform

of choice to carry out their business strategies (Briceño, 2020; Leone, 2018).

The rise of social media has boosted the emergence of new advertising formats characterized by less overt commercial intentions and this has highlighted the importance of being able to detect the persuasive nature of such content. The persuasion knowledge model proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994) contemplates the activation of strategies designed as self-defense mechanisms when individuals are exposed to persuasive messages and suggests that activating such strategies requires the explicit recognition of the persuasion or advertising intent. When faced with atypical advertising

formats, individuals lack the experience and reference points needed to identify them as ads (Evans et al., 2013; Kinard & Hartman, 2013).

The commercial messages on Instagram take different forms: posts by brands on their own channels, brand-sponsored posts that appear on a user's feed alongside other content, and brand-sponsored posts that appear on third-party channels. The first two models replicate advertising formats used in traditional media, so their identification as ads does not pose a challenge for users. The third variant, known as influencer marketing, represents more of a challenge, given that it is displayed in a novel format and is communicated by third parties who are trusted by their followers.

Influencer marketing has been defined as an advertising strategy that uses opinion leaders (i.e., influencers) to influence consumers' buying choices as a way of promoting a brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Scott, 2015). An influencer is essentially a content creator who is an expert in a specific area and has attracted several captive followers (who have marketing value for brands) through the regular creation of valuable content on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 59). Influencers are viewed as celebrities who have developed an online reputation and created a business model based on the creation of social media content, which they share with the community they have built and with whom they have established a relationship of trust. This allows them to become commercial figures validated by an audience and referred to as brand spokespeople (Abidin, 2017; CONAR, 2018).

One of the key characteristics of influencers is that they develop credibility among their followers by building an intimate relationship with them, which enables them to persuade their followers through endorsements, since influencers are seen as personal, credible, and easy-to-relate-to sources (De Veirman et al., 2017). It has been suggested that influencers are more effective than traditional celebrities at selling certain products precisely because of the credibility and admiration they attract (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). While the fame and success of traditional celebrities are based on their achievements or talent, the popularity of online celebrities is underpinned by the intimate and personal moments they share (Abidin, 2018).

Influencer collaborations are usually dynamic and have been referred to by several authors as "covert" or "hybrid" advertising, given that they are embedded in other content, thereby blurring the traditional lines between commercial messages and content with informative or entertainment value (Hoek et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2017; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020).

Such adverts, which are camouflaged by general content due to their design and format, are also referred to as integrated advertising, embedded marketing, covert marketing, branded content, or native advertising (Evans et al., 2017). Consumers object to having their browsing experience interrupted, which helps explain why they accept ads disguised as organic content; however,

these can, in turn, give rise to negative reactions when consumers realize that an endorsement is not genuine (Lee et al., 2016). Hybrid advertising is a phenomenon that combines entertainment and advertising and can help reduce the skepticism that prevents persuasion knowledge from being activated in certain individuals (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Given hybrid advertising's similarity to organic content, detecting, and processing it involves a higher degree of complexity (Rozendaal et al., 2016).

1.1. Regulation and Influencer Marketing Industry

As the phenomenon has grown in popularity, critical voices have started raising concerns over the lack of control of these messages and the excessive influence that content creators can exert on vulnerable audiences (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019; Feijoo & González, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). This new context requires responsible consumers who can develop a critical mindset based on knowledge and interpretation of the terminology used at all stages of the consumption chain (Area-Moreira & Pessoa, 2012; Berríos-Valenzuela & Buxarrais Estrada, 2015). Based on the principle that explicit recognition of advertising is key to activating knowledge of a persuasion attempt (Friestad & Wright, 1994), academics and public and private institutions have proposed that explicit disclosure be used in native advertising formats on social media to inform audiences of commercial collaborations.

There are growing calls for measures to balance the potential effects of these practices on consumers' online experiences, given the Western context, the regulations that have served as a guide for codes of conduct in Latin America have been spearheaded by international and North American organizations. The overarching argument of the OECD document is the need for transparency and the audience's right to know that they are being exposed to paid content. The document highlights four areas of online advertising: (a) misleading marketing practices, (b) ad identification, (c) endorsements, and (d) protection of children or vulnerable consumers. It also calls on the industry to design disclosures that are understandable and easily identifiable by users (OECD, 2019). The US Federal Trade Commission (2019) issued a document with indications for disclosing sponsorships on social media to inform followers of the commercial nature of collaborations.

There is also a need for ethical codes or regulation of these practices in the Ibero-American sphere; a recent study shows that only one in 10 Spanish fashion influencers has disclosed the commercial nature of their collaborations with brands (Sixto-García & Álvarez-Vázquez, 2020). In this context, Autocontrol (2020), the Spanish independent advertising self-regulatory organization, developed a code of ethics in 2020 that invited influencers to adequately disclose the commercial intent of their content.

Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia are the only countries in Latin America that have launched public or private initiatives to ensure good practice in commercial messages on social media. As shown in Table 1, the initiatives in Chile and Argentina have been promoted by the advertising sector itself or by civil associations, while government institutions in Peru and Colombia

have drafted good practice guides to protect consumers' online experience.

All the documents analyzed concurred that content should be properly identified when it relates to a paid collaboration. The different organizations specify that advertising must reflect the content creator's actual experience and must avoid exaggeration. With respect to

Table 1. Ethical codes for influencers in Latin America.

Restriction code	Organization	Indications
Chilean Code of Advertising Ethics (Chile) published in 2018	Council of Self-Regulation and Advertising Ethics (CONAR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posts must be clearly and visibly tagged as advertising content. • Any financial payment or payment in kind for said posts must be disclosed. • Influencers' experience as consumers of the products or services used must be truthfully and openly communicated. • Children and adolescents must not be encouraged by influencers to participate in online commercial activities without their guardians' supervision.
Advertising Guide for Influencers (Peru) published in 2019	National Institute for the Defense of Free Competition and the Protection of Intellectual Property (INDECOPI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial posts must be marked as sponsored adverts. • Content about experiences that are not authentic or recent must not be posted. • The legal system must be respected. • Restrictions and prohibitions on commercial practices on grounds of consumer health and safety must be respected. • Format: disclosures must be identifiable and appear in Spanish in a visible location. • Labels must not appear at the end of posts. • Abbreviations and ambiguous references must be avoided. • Disclosures must not appear at the end of videos. • The advertiser's name must not be combined with the disclosure or label. • The first hashtag should indicate the commercial nature of the post.
Guide to Good Practice in Influencer Advertising (Colombia) published in 2020	Superintendence of Industry and Commerce (SIC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial relationships with advertisers must be identified. • Advertisers or agencies that hire influencers to provide their services should be asked to indicate their guidelines for fully identifying messages as adverts. • An advert must not be posted if a brand suggests concealing the nature of the collaboration. • Experiences or reactions relating to the product must not be faked.
Influencers: Guide to Commercial Communication (Argentina) published in 2020	Advertising Self-Regulation Council (CONARP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posts corresponding to commercial collaborations must be clearly identified whenever a monetary benefit, exchange, discount, etc. has been agreed. • Disclosure should be clearly provided under the name of the influencer or at the beginning of the post. • The use of "Content in collaboration with... (brand)" or "#SponsoredContent" is suggested. • All commercial posts must comply with the principles of legality, honesty, and social sensitivity. • Exaggeration and exploiting users' lack of experience should be avoided, and professional endorsements and recommendations that have not been obtained through the corresponding authorization must not be falsified. • Posts depicting demonstrations, promotions and comparative advertising are not recommended.

Sources: Compiled by the authors based on data from Consejo de Autorregulación y Ética Publicitaria (CONAR, 2018), Consejo de Autorregulación Publicitaria (CONARP, 2020), Instituto Nacional de Defensa de la Competencia (INDECOPI, 2019), and Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio (SIC, 2020).

disclosures, the organizations agree that followers must be informed of influencer-brand collaborations and that this should appear in Spanish and in a visible location under the name of the influencer or at the beginning of the post to avoid ambiguous references. There is clearly some consensus that sponsorship disclosure enables followers to recognize advertising messages by triggering their persuasion knowledge, thus allowing potential consumers to identify the advertiser's origin, target audience and persuasion intent (Boerman et al., 2012). In native advertising, the disclosure of collaborations is key to giving potential consumers the tools they need to protect themselves from persuasion attempts (Kim & Kim, 2020).

Legislation has yet to be developed in Mexico to regulate social media advertising and research could help to raise awareness of the phenomenon. The Federal Consumer Protection Law in Mexico, which was published in 1992, requires, in its most recent reform in the Official Journal of the Federation in 2014, that radio and television stations distinguish between commercial content and content for the purposes of entertainment, but its scope is limited to traditional media. Although some articles have been published in newspapers about these shady practices of influencers ("Abre Fisel investigación," 2021), there is a lack of proper studies or statistics on sponsorship disclosure in the Mexican influencer marketing industry.

1.2. *Instagram and Instamoms in Mexico*

Mexico has the most Instagram users of any Spanish-speaking Latin American country; there were 35,320,000 Instagram users in Mexico in May 2021, which accounted for 26% of its entire population (Napoleon Cat, 2021). A total of 93% of internet users in Mexico connect via a smartphone, and the most used applications are social networks, which are used by 90% of users; this has given rise to significant changes that have aligned Mexico with other countries in terms of advertising spending in digital media: in Spain, this spending represents 35% of the total; in Mexico, the figure stands at 43%; and in the United States, it stands at 55%. It is also the Latin American country with the highest number of mega-influencers and, in turn, the Latin American leader in terms of digital media investment, with 25% of the total according to Influencity (2020), a private company that provides updated market information about Latin American digital reality. In one year, investment in native advertising formats grew by 61% and Instagram was the main social network for campaigns with influencers (IAB México, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

Among many other subjects, sharing maternity or paternity related content online has been seen as a natural practice by many of the users on social networks and, in the case of influencers this type of content has been widely accepted by followers. This practice has become known as sharenting and some concerns and

critical voices have been raised about the need to protect the digital memory of minors (Garmendia et al., 2021). In Mexico, the content created by mom influencers, or Instamoms, is particularly significant, since mothers represent one of the segments with the greatest impact on consumption in the country (Treviño, 2017) and are increasingly shifting toward online platforms. In addition, Mexican women are more likely than men to use cell phones (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2020). These two variables have fed into this concept of the digital mom as someone who is adopting technology faster than any other consumers (Treviño, 2019). The traits that characterize Instamoms make them hugely valuable influencers for the country's brands.

The responsibilities undertaken by Mexican women are not dissimilar to traditional gender roles; they are family caregivers in a wide range of areas, including cooking, health, and provisions related to motherhood and femininity (Morton et al., 2020). Digital mothers in Mexico have been strengthening their ties with brands for more than a decade, through online purchases, visits to websites, ads and coupons received and shared by email and in online chats, and social media interactions (Treviño, 2019).

Instamoms can be defined as women with talent and an entrepreneurial spirit who create content on social networks with general or partial reference to their children, who can collaborate with brands to promote products (O'Neill, 2019) and who advertise by sharing their experiences as mothers as a way of earning income (Parsa & Akmeşe, 2019). The content they create varies; it usually starts in early pregnancy and covers shopping before and after the birth, and how to care for, feed, and meet the basic needs of the child. The work of Instamoms can be understood as a subtle balance between financial gains and the desire to create a community by sharing meaningful, supportive content (Archer, 2019; Holiday et al., 2020). For this article's purposes, Instamoms are mothers who share content related to motherhood, child-rearing and child development, and the impact of motherhood on their lives. Likewise, they share content relating to their interests, tastes, and other duties, which underpin their collaborations with brands and their interactions with their followers.

The originality of the study lies in its analysis of a field that has only recently started attracting the interest of academics in Mexico. Treviño (2019) and Treviño and Garelli (2019), after analyzing the motivations behind Mexican mothers' interactions with brands in the digital environment, have concluded that the main motivation of Mexican women content creators is to validate that the brands they use/wear are part of their lifestyle, and they share content using/wearing them in order to make them part of their self-image. Still here is currently no academic literature specifically on Instamoms in Mexico.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Objectives and Questions

The aim of this research was to record the commercial stories and posts shared by Mexican Instamoms to identify the percentage that were accompanied by disclosures. To achieve this, we categorized each commercial message as having (a) explicit, (b) subtle/ambiguous, or (c) zero disclosure. The purpose of the analysis was to offer in-depth knowledge of the sponsorship disclosure practices among Mexican Instamoms with a view to creating a precedent in a country where regulation is currently lacking, despite the huge impact of influencer marketing.

A group of academics and experts from Mexico and Spain was asked to validate and improve the study design, including the data collection tool, the time frame of the study, sample size, and research questions. The time frame selected (November 15, 2020–December 20, 2020) covers a season of international and national e-commerce events in Mexico: “El Buen Fin” (“The good weekend,” November 15–22), an annual commercial event that takes place one week before Black Friday to promote national trade over US trade; Black Friday (November 23–28); Cyber Monday (November 29); and the start of the Christmas season (November 30–December 20). After validation, a pilot test was carried out on the tool to verify its effectiveness. A specific schedule was established for monitoring the profiles daily to ensure that no content was missed.

To meet the proposed objective, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What percentage does the commercial content shared by Instamoms in stories and posts account for?

RQ2: What percentage of sponsored content is disclosed by Mexican Instamoms?

RQ3: When sponsorship is disclosed, is disclosure explicit or subtle/ambiguous?

RQ4: What are the common characteristics of the disclosed sponsored content with respect to language, visibility, and type of text?

2.2. Measurements

The research method chosen to achieve the objective and address the research questions was analysis of the compiled content. A data collection tool was developed, based on the literature review and the specifications recommended by existing documents in countries that require content creators to disclose (see Table 1). Content analysis was carried out manually every day at the same time in order to collect the content for the

entire day. A single encoder performed the whole process based on knowledge of the cultural reality under study. The content of each publication was encoded by date, total brands mentioned, origin of brands, and the disclosure characteristics. In the case of stories, the date, total stories per day, total stories with daily advertising, and total brands mentioned per day were encoded, as well the origin of brands, and the disclosure characteristics. The links of the posts were stored, and in the case of stories, there was a daily double check of each encoding.

The protocol to determine the percentage of advertising compared to organic content consisted of recording each time a brand was mentioned by an influencer via a “mention” sticker or each time the product was shown or verbalized. From the record of each collaboration, we identified whether or not it was accompanied by a disclosure before noting whether this disclosure was explicit or ambiguous based on three conditions: (a) language used for the disclosure, (b) visibility (visible size and location), and (c) type of text (hashtag, phrase, abbreviations). When the disclosure met all three conditions (e.g., “Paid partnership with” or “#Advertising”), it was scored as explicit, and when it was written in English or abbreviated, contained euphemisms, and/or was not visible at first glance (e.g., “#Ad,” “#Thanks,” “Gifted,” “#Sponsored,” or “Sp”; Han et al., 2020), it was scored as subtle/ambiguous. When no disclosure was detected, it was scored as zero. Disclosures were measured by narrative unit. In the case of posts, disclosures were recorded by brand. For stories, given their ephemeral and flexible nature, the appearance of the brand counted as one narrative unit; therefore, the presence of the brand and the disclosure were scored as one if they formed part of the same narrative.

Types of actions used to promote products and services were categorized. To measure the type of interaction between the influencer and the promoted product, 19 possible advertising actions were analyzed (see Table 2).

2.3. Sample Description

Seventeen Instamoms were selected for the sample with the help of the HypeAuditor portal (www.hypeauditor.com); the classification of influencers is based on Mediakix (2021) and depends on the number of followers, and the name of each category that corresponds to it (nano: 1,000–10,000 followers; micro: 10,000–50,000 followers; mid-tier: 50,000–500,000 followers; macro: 500,000–1,000,000; mega influencer: 1,000,000+; see Table 3). The profiles chosen were Instamom accounts that appeared in the top 100 influencers by number of engaged followers in the categories “kids and toys” and “family.” Since there is no official registry of influencers, it is not feasible to determine the exact number of Instagram users whose main economic activity involves creating content. Therefore, the selection of the sample was based on: (a) theme: Mexican

Table 2. Advertising actions by Instamoms.

	Advertising actions
1	Discount code
2	Giveaways
3	“How to” photo or video
4	Blogtrip
5	Event and/or visits to events, locations, etc.
6	Interview the brand or vice versa
7	Tags
8	Inform: in addition to tagging the brand, Instamom talks about the brand
9	Unboxing
10	Challenges
11	Swipe up
12	Link in bio
13	Redirect to the brand’s page
14	Haul
15	Question sticker
16	Shares posts/stories by the brand in stories
17	Shares the telephone number for the brand
18	Location sticker
19	“Support local businesses” sticker

moms that share maternity content as part of their daily life; (b) geography: Instamoms living in Mexico; and (c) followers: at least five from each category (micro, mid-tier, and mega influencers). Selection was based on similar criteria used by Sixto-García and Álvarez-Vázquez (2020). This portal has a tried-and-tested algorithm for segmenting and evaluating accounts and their audiences. Some of the Instamoms occasionally collaborate on television and radio programs, and their mentions of television and radio stations were counted as commercial content. Mentions of family and friends were not counted.

3. Results

3.1. Commercial Content in Instamom Stories and Posts

Of a total 10,135 stories, 4,047 stories with commercial content were identified: 40% of the stories shared by the Instamoms had a brand presence. The study also documented 330 posts, 154 (47%) of which contained advertising messages (Figure 1). There is not a significant difference in the presence of commercial content between stories and posts ($\chi^2(1, N = 10,465) = 0.507, p = 0.476$). The Instamoms mentioned a total of 1,062 brands on the days monitoring was carried out.

Table 3. Instamom categories.

@Instamom	Followers	Category
tambiensoymamamx	15.3 K	Micro-influencer
lamadelospollitos	16.6 K	Micro-influencer
mamushkamx	20.7 K	Micro-influencer
loreniamm	27.7 K	Micro-influencer
mamaentenismx	42.3 K	Micro-influencer
michelleronay	63.9 K	Mid-tier influencer
nataliruzg	67.6 K	Mid-tier influencer
bettinaguisa	97.2 K	Mid-tier influencer
danigalvanz	109 K	Mid-tier influencer
trianalion	644 K	Macro-influencer
jazminconj	803 K	Macro-influencer
andibenavidesm	1 M	Mega-influencer
alerivera_comediante	1.3 M	Mega-influencer
musamistral	1.5 M	Mega-influencer
marianaecheve	2.2 M	Mega-influencer
inesgomezmont	2.3 M	Mega-influencer
claudiaalvarezo	2.6 M	Mega-influencer

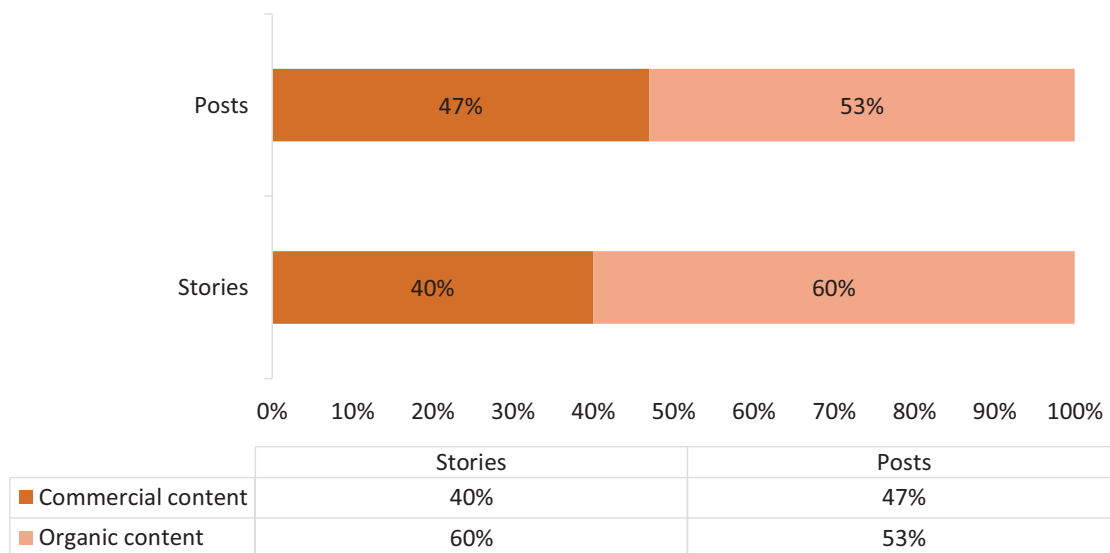


Figure 1. Commercial and organic content.

3.2. Sponsorship Disclosure

Of the 154 posts that mentioned a brand, only five (3.2%) disclosed the sponsorship collaboration. The percentage was even lower in the case of stories, in which the Instamoms disclosed the commercial nature of the collaboration just 0.4% of the time. This difference is statistically significant as can be seen in the chi-square value in Table 4.

The study identified seven Instamoms who, on at least one occasion, disclosed a brand collaboration in their stories. Of these seven, one stood out for doing so twice, while the others did so for one specific collaboration (see Table 5). Four of the Instamoms who disclosed advertising content were micro-influencers, one was a macro-influencer, one a mid-tier influencer, and one a mega-influencer.

However, our analysis of disclosed collaborations revealed a tendency to use subtle or ambiguous means of advertising in that only 8% of the stories explicitly disclosed sponsorship, and all were from the same influencer. In all other cases, the disclosure took the form of “#Ad,” though it did appear in a visible location and size. This ambiguous disclosure was used 92% of the time when Instamoms communicated the commercial nature of the story (Table 5).

With respect to the actions used when sponsorships were disclosed, the study revealed the use of “swipe up”

as the most common, followed by “how to” content, the second most common action (see Table 5).

In the case of posts, the analysis revealed that 3.2% of posts that mentioned a brand contained a disclosure. Five posts with labels that suggested a brand-influencer collaboration were detected. Two of these posts met the criteria for explicit communication by using the disclosure provided by Instagram, i.e., “paid partnership with...” The others used “#Ad,” which appeared at the end of the text, a practice that requires users to click on “see more” to read it. In posts, 100% of Instamoms who disclosed sponsorships did so on just one occasion. As Table 5 shows, the number of brand sponsorships disclosed does not represent a significant proportion of the total number of collaborations. As with stories, three of the Instamoms who disclosed sponsorships were micro-influencers, one was a mega-influencer, and one was a macro-influencer (see Table 6).

In the case of posts disclosed as paid collaborations, “how to” content stood out: Three of the five posts shared by the Instamoms used this advertising format, while the other two featured photographs of the brand’s products and mentioned the brand. Another feature shared by the posts with a sponsorship disclosure is that they all referred to brands of international origin, although international brands represented only 10% of the total brands mentioned by Instamoms (see Table 6).

Table 4. Disclosure in publications.

Brands mentioned	Stories		Posts		
	Sponsorship disclosed	% disclosure	Brand collaboration posts	Posts with disclosure	% disclosure
1,062	5	0.4%	154	5	3.2%

Note: Chi-square test ($\alpha = 0.05$) with Yates’ continuity correction for disclosure in Stories and Posts ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,216) = 9.165, p = 0.002$).

Table 5. Sponsorship disclosure by Instamoms in stories.

Category	Instamom	Total brands	Disclosed brand	Actions	Language	Text	Visibility
Mega-influencer	Andybenavides	217	Gucci	Event/visit and swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
			Vickmexico	Swipe up	Spanish	#Publicidad	Yes
Mid-tier influencer	Nataliruizg	85		How to	English	#Ad	Yes
Micro-influencer	Mamaentenismx	85	ZiplocMexico	Swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
				Swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
Macro-influencer	Trianalion	15	DisneyPlus	Swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
Micro-influencer	Mamushkamx	77		How to	English	#Ad	Yes
Micro-influencer	Lamamadelospollitos	73	Similac	Discount code and swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
				Swipe up	English	#Ad	Yes
				How to	English	#Ad	Yes
Micro-influencer	Tambiensoymama	53		Mention	English	#Ad	Yes
				Informs	English	#Ad	Yes
				Question sticker	English	#Ad	Yes

The insufficient number of posts and stories that disclosed advertising in the collected sample did not provide sufficient data to understand if there were similarities in terms of language, text, or visibility in these disclosure practices. The only common feature of all the disclosed posts and stories, both explicit and ambiguous, is that the promoted products have an international origin.

4. Discussion

Five out of every 10 posts by the Instamoms contained sponsored content. The ads shared by Instamoms highlight the importance of collaborations for influencers, regardless of their category and number of followers. This balance between organic and commercial content

Table 6. Sponsorship disclosure by Instamoms in posts.

Category	Instamom	Total brands	Disclosed brand	Actions	Language	Text	Visibility
Mega-influencer	Andybenavides	111	Gucci	Mention	Spanish	"Paid partnership with" and "#Ad"	Yes
Micro-influencer	Mamaentenismx	15	ZiplocMexico	How to	English	#Ad	No
Macro-influencer	Trianalion	6	DisneyPlusla	Mention	Spanish	"Paid partnership with" and "#Ad"	Yes
Micro-influencer	Mamushkamx	17	Similac	How to	English	#Ad	No
Micro-influencer	Lamamadelospollitos	8	Similac	How to	English	#Ad	No

shared by Instamoms makes it clear that companies consistently embrace the potential of influencer marketing to promote their brands (Hoek et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2017; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020). It is also consistent with the conclusions of Treviño and Garelli (2019) on how Mexican women creators share the brands they use/wear as a way to show off their self-image: In the case of Mexican Instamoms, they try to differentiate themselves from the average mother by posting about brands in half of their content.

Although the sample reveals five examples of brands that complied with sponsorship disclosure, this is not a significant number and does not indicate a tendency among profiles to disclose the commercial nature of content to their followers. Even though seven of the 17 profiles studied disclosed commercial content, they did so on just one occasion. As previous research has shown, the lack of clarity behind these practices should be addressed (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019; Feijoo & González, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018), since the country still lacks sufficient media awareness of this novel advertising format. Although the online behavior of Instamoms shows a close relationship with brands, and their promoting actions are in line with the global definition of an influencer, when it comes to following the international recommendations for advertising disclosure, Instamoms choose not to imitate these transparency practices with their audience.

Although the percentage of disclosure in stories and posts was very low, posts were more likely to carry a disclosure than stories; similarly, sponsorship was more likely to be explicitly disclosed in posts than in stories. Still there is not a significant difference between the amount of commercial content in stories and posts. The study categorized the instances of sponsorship disclosure by Instamoms as isolated cases since they did not form part of recurring behavior during the analysis. Research shows that, in the analyzed sample, publications with disguised advertising are the norm, whereas those that adhere to international criteria for sharing advertising are the exception.

Despite being anecdotal, another finding of the research was the Instamoms' preference for ambiguous sponsorship disclosure. Although Instagram offers the option of including "Paid partnership with..." below the name of the user in posts and stories, only 40% of the posts with disclosure and 8% of stories with disclosure made use of it. According to Kim and Kim (2020), disclosing the commercial intention of the content is key to help the consumer to properly understand it. Also, international indications specify that the advertising disclosure must be placed below the influencer's name, or at the beginning of the text, since fast and easy identification of collaboration is the first requirement for the audience to immediately recognize the commercial nature of the post (CONARP, 2020).

The study also detected two features that seemed to recur whenever a collaboration was disclosed: 100%

of the brand sponsorships disclosed in posts and stories were international in origin and micro-influencers were more likely to disclose the commercial nature of both stories and posts. This result coincides with a previous study that highlights international pressure in collaborations to disclose advertising on social media (Sixto-García & Álvarez-Vázquez, 2020), and, as in the Mexican case, it can be seen how the lack of a regulation by the local government that invites brands and influencers to share the commercial nature of the collaborations does not favor the transparency suggested for the protection of audiences and consumers.

5. Conclusions

Hybrid advertising refers to formats and channels that make it difficult for audiences to spot commercial content. This has led European and Latin American countries to recognize that the lack of proper sponsorship disclosure in influencer marketing can have an impact on users. The study reveals that disclosures are rare, even though advertising plays a key role in the profiles of Instamoms. When sponsorship disclosures are made, little importance is given to their location, language, or text format. The brand-promotion practices of Mexican Instamoms emphasize the notion of advertising on Instagram as a form of hybrid marketing, given that Instamoms share commercial content under the guise of entertainment and do not disclose the commercial nature of their collaborations.

The study did not detect the existence of brand-Instamoms collaboration protocols for sponsorship disclosure. The lack of public and industry guidelines means that the decision on disclosing the commercial nature of posts is left in the hands of brands and/or influencers; this urges local governments to create a legal framework that commits all parties (brands, government, agencies, and influencers) to explicitly share the commercial purpose with their followers. The legal framework to protect online audiences must adhere to the needs of Mexican consumers and must therefore include the requirement that the advertising disclosure should preferably be in Spanish, the official language of the country, and should be placed under the name of the influencer, and at the beginning of the text, or in photographs or videos. It should also appear in a visible size, color, and font in order to be easily identified, and also to acknowledge that economic and material exchanges have a commercial intent. Finally, sponsorship disclosure could strengthen the influencer marketing industry by establishing practices to benefit and legitimize the use of this strategy based on the need to protect the audience. Legislative authorities in Mexico must take an active role in protecting online audiences and consumers from persuasive and embedded advertising and political communications by addressing the tax responsibilities of influencers and content creators, as well as the ethical responsibilities of their communications. Considering

the potential relationship between research and emerging interest in good practice, this study is designed to serve as a wake-up call on this subject in Mexico.

5.1. Future Research and Study Limitations

The study's limitations mainly involve the data collection and processing methods. Moreover, although the analysis period was chosen based on representative moments, a longer period might be necessary to identify a decisive trend in Instagram practices. The same can be said of the number of profiles studied. Another limitation of this study is that it analyzed identification alone, which is only one part of the persuasion model; studies that evaluate other aspects would provide more comprehensive analysis. Posts and stories were categorized as "zero" when, despite mentioning a commercial brand, no disclosure element was detected: It is true that this could also mean that the publication was not working in collaboration with a brand, but there is no way of knowing for sure since there is no regulation. Due to the cultural knowledge required to do suitable analysis, encoding was performed by a single researcher. In order to increase the reliability of data collection and interpretation, it would be highly recommendable to include at least two encoders in future research. It could also be of interest to explore other categories besides Instagrams for comparison purposes. Furthermore, to strengthen and improve the experience of minors, there is a pressing need to analyze the influencers who target them. The study of other advertising formats (reels, IGTV) and advertising on other social networks is recommended. A comparative study between countries where some measures have been taken to tackle this issue could also be relevant.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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