

# Influential children on YouTube and Instagram: content and presence of brands during confinement

## Niños y niñas influyentes en YouTube e Instagram: contenidos y presencia de marcas durante el confinamiento

### *Crianças influentes no YouTube e Instagram: conteúdo e presença da marca durante o confinamento*

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**ABSTRACT** | This research addresses the type of content and the presence of brands in publications made by thirteen Spanish-speaking influential children on YouTube and Instagram. The study period includes the six weeks in which children under 14 years of age were confined to their homes in Spain (between March 14 to April 26, 2020), a moment of important consumption and exposure to screens. Thus, YouTube viewing increased by 55%. We studied 304 posts employing content analysis. Contents linked to the pandemic are frequent, with scripted stories based on routines, recommendations, and healthy habits. Children show they are aware of the need to stay home. This exemplary behavior contrasts with the high presence of brands included in the publications that these influencers make on social networks, on many occasions, without explicitly stating it and linked to confinement in a contextual way. Brands have also been contextually linked to confinement. This shows the need to face a critical attitude towards the content consumed by children, especially in times of increased consumption of devices and social networks, especially by minors, during this exceptional worldwide pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** influencers kids; YouTube; Instagram; brands; advertising; confinement; Covid19.

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**RESUMEN** | Esta investigación analiza el contenido y la presencia de marcas en las publicaciones realizadas por 13 niños y niñas influyentes menores de catorce años de habla hispana en YouTube e Instagram durante el primer periodo de confinamiento en España (14 de marzo al 26 de abril de 2020). Durante este, el visionado de YouTube se incrementó en 55%. Se examinaron un total de 304 publicaciones. Los contenidos vinculados con la pandemia han sido frecuentes, con historias guionizadas basadas en rutinas, recomendaciones y hábitos saludables. Asimismo, los niños influyentes han concienciado de la necesidad de no salir de casa y de respetar las normas higiénicas y de salud impuestas. Este comportamiento contrasta con la alta presencia de marcas en las publicaciones de estos influencers, en un elevado número de ocasiones, sin señalarlas explícitamente y vinculadas con el confinamiento de forma contextual. Se evidencia la necesidad de afrontar una actitud crítica ante los contenidos que consume el público infantil, especialmente en los periodos de mayor consumo de dispositivos y redes sociales como ha sucedido a nivel mundial durante la pandemia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** niños y niñas influyentes; YouTube; Instagram; marcas; publicidad; confinamiento; Covid19.

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**RESUMO** | Esta pesquisa aborda o tipo de conteúdo e a presença de marcas nas publicações feitas por 13 crianças influenciadoras de língua hispânica no YouTube e no Instagram. O período do estudo inclui as seis semanas em que crianças menores de 14 anos foram confinadas em suas casas na Espanha (de 14 de março a 26 de abril de 2020). Assim, a visualização no YouTube aumentou 55%. Através de uma análise de conteúdo, foram examinadas 304 publicações. Verificou-se que os conteúdos relacionados à pandemia têm sido frequentes, com histórias escritas com base em rotinas, recomendações e hábitos saudáveis. Eles também tomaram consciência da necessidade de não sair de casa e respeitar as normas de higiene e saúde impostas. Esse comportamento contrasta com a alta presença de marcas que fazem parte das publicações que esses influenciadores fazem nas redes sociais, em um grande número de vezes, sem sinalizar explicitamente e vinculadas ao confinamento de forma contextual. Portanto, é evidente a necessidade de enfrentar uma atitude crítica em relação ao conteúdo consumido pelo público infantil, principalmente nos períodos de maior consumo de dispositivos e redes sociais, como ocorreu durante a pandemia vivenciada em todo o mundo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** crianças influenciadoras; YouTube; Instagram; marcas; publicidade; confinamento; Covid19.

## **INTRODUCTION: CORONAVIRUS, INFLUENCERS, AND CHILDREN**

There is an important relationship between children's use of screens and social networks and the contact with influencers. The current media ecosystem is characterized by countless devices, screens, social networks, and apps at people's fingertips at an increasingly younger age (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2018). Researches are aimed at understanding online opportunities and risks for this digital generation (Livingstone et al., 2011; Garmendia et al., 2016), as well as phenomena such as youtubers (LópezVillafranca & Olmedo-Salar, 2019; Jorge et al., 2018).

Children can interact with their favorite youtuber: for example, by commenting on videos, buying their products, watching them at events, or following them on other social networks such as Instagram (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). When going out to play or going to school is not an option, the linkage between what they watch through social networks becomes even more relevant ("YouTubers, quiénes son" ..., n.d.). In addition, parents admit to having no rules regarding the use of the Internet, social networks, and mobile devices (Condeza et al., 2019; López-DeAyala et al., 2019).

In the case of youtuber channels, there is also a lack of regulation, with a high presence of advertised products and exposure of the private sphere that creates greater emotional bonding and proximity (López-Villafranca & Olmedo-Salar, 2019). Thus, it is necessary for families to be involved so that children learn to manage their relationships in the virtual world (Romera et al., 2021; Martínez et al., 2020) and transmedia literacy is required (Núñez et al., 2015; Jorge et al., 2018; Rozendaal et al. 2011, 2013; An et al., 2014; Van Wesenbeeck et al., 2017; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2017; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Rozendaal et al., 2011, 2013; Van Wesenbeeck et al., 2017; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2017).

During the first two weeks of the national lockdown decreed by the government of Spain following the WHO declaration categorizing COVID-19 as a pandemic (March 15-29, 2020), YouTube consumption increased by 55% ("El consumo de vídeo en YouTube"..., 2020). This produced a change in consumers' habits (Orduña-Malea et al., 2020).

Influencers have been involved in this pandemic from three angles. It affects the content of their social media channels or profiles (especially if it is fashion, travel, or tourism) and leads to loss of advertising revenue (Yaroshchuk, 2020). They have also given advice without having a medical authority (Rodríguez, 2020). Finally, the Ministry of Health itself resorted to influencers such as Dulceida -with great influence on young audiences- to ensure that no one left the house (Marcos, 2020).

Confinement is also a challenge for children's youtubers. The closure of businesses and recommendations to avoid making orders that were not essential limited the contents that are most repeated in their channels. Formats such as unboxing –opening a box of a promotional item while commenting on the product– or outdoor activities (Aznar-Díaz et al., 2019) were conditioned by the new health situation. This may also affect the way to achieve engagement, as beyond calls to followers to subscribe to the channel or share content, they also use contests and the lure of prizes and gifts (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018).

Influencers can change attitudes, with a socio-educational implication based on the direct influence on children's thinking and way of acting (Aznar-Díaz et al., 2019), as well as the ability to train or support the school in its training in a more informal and attractive environment (Tur-Viñes et al., 2019). Therefore, we seek to verify what type of content about COVID-19 these Spanish-speaking *kidinfluencers*, followed in different countries, created, what type of messages they communicated about the situation experienced, whether they chose to stay away from this topic or if they published fictional and timeless content.

We also analyzed their role as promoters of brands and products at this juncture, to observe what commercial techniques they used and what type of products were exhibited at a time of high audiovisual consumption.

The classic literature on advertising and children states that by the age of eight they are aware of the persuasive intent of advertising (Chu et al., 2014) and have already acquired the skills and performance of an adult consumer (McNeal, 1992). Although many may be aware of the persuasive intent (Ali & Blades, 2014), this does not guarantee that they have a particularly deep insight into the intentions of advertisers, being quite trusting in the nature of advertising, especially in the face of new digital formats that intermingle persuasion and entertainment (Feijoo et al., 2021), as is the case of influencer marketing.

## **THE GENERATION OF KID INFLUENCERS**

Influencers are those people with the potential to create engagement, generate a high number of followers, drive conversation, and influence a target audience's decision to purchase products or services. The two most relevant types of influencers are on YouTube and Instagram (IAB Spain, 2019). Children born from 2010 onwards are characterized as prosumers, as they are active consumers and content producers. YouTubers are considered prosumers, as they produce and generate new content (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020).

What most persuades this generation are their friends and what they consume. In second place, advertising and, in third place, influencers and vloggers (Bermúdez, 2020). We must consider the child not only as a consumer, but also as an emitter (audiovisual creator and advertising prescriber). In Spain, 12.2% of them are influenced by online influencers (“Entendiendo a la generación...”, n.d.).

In this context, the youtuber figure acquires special importance. In fact, the most popular YouTube channels do not belong to brands, but to influencers (Jorge et al., 2018). Based on creativity and innovation, the influencer can expand his/her personal sphere to a whole universe of followers who comment, value, share, and are the real fans of his/her work (Hidalgo Marí & Segarra-Saavedra, 2017). Likewise, watching videos is one of the main activities performed by children (Aznar-Díaz et al., 2019).

Although in Spain one must be 14 years old to have a profile on YouTube, children are on this network from the age of 13.49% between 12- and 14-years old use Instagram (“Cómo regular el uso...”, 2019). Being a youtuber is one of the preferred professions for Spanish children, which they can exercise thanks to the active role assumed by their parents (Tur-Viñes et al., 2019), and an increase of child influencers is expected in the coming years (Bermúdez, 2020). In countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom, children between 9 and 12 years old are one of the fastest growing audiences on YouTube, although research is still incipient (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). The studies seek to understand the strategies of influencers to produce engagement in the audience, the mediation of parents in their children’s content, the videos’ characteristics, the personality of these prescribers, or the behavior in the use of devices. The analysis of brands and their suitability for children’s target audience is one of the least addressed phenomena (Tur-Viñes et al., 2019).

Influencer marketing in the child audience acquires relevance and brands aspire to communicate in an empathetic way through the community of followers of youtubers (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018). Social networks allow previously unknown people to generate such a large community that brands seek to collaborate with them through new ways of advertising (Elorriga & Monge, 2018).

Mothers often consider themselves prescribers on Instagram, employing in their actions and campaigns the image of their children (Cervilla-Fernández & Marfil-Carmona, 2019). Some 22% of parents have joined Instagram to see what their children are doing (“Entendiendo a la generación...”, n.d.) and their role is to “supervise and participate in the videos’ production and editing, in the management of sponsors or supporting brands, and in the administration of earnings” (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020, p. 8).

Youtubers' frame of action is amplified through their profiles on other social networks, such as Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram ("Youtubers, quiénes son...", n.d.). Tolbert and Drogos (2019) highlight the influencers' multiplatform use. Children follow their favorite youtubers first on Instagram, which is followed by Snapchat and TikTok. While the literature has focused particularly on YouTube (Jorge et al., 2018; Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020), TikTok has become a global phenomenon, with 500 million users by 2020 (Gil, 2020).

### **ADVERTISING CONTENT IN SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Branded content that appears prescribed by kid influencers on their channels, without stating its advertising, is one of the most disturbing aspects regarding YouTube (Tur-Viñes et al., 2019; Feijoo & Pavez, 2019). It is necessary to promote effective regulation to differentiate commercial content from the rest (IAB Spain, 2019).

Brands seek to insert advertising directly and indirectly on toys or other types of content, present in different places of the videos' props and shots, to influence the child to purchase them (Elorriaga & Monge, 2018). Information is given about their usefulness, demonstrations are made about their use, and they appear associated with positive emotions, turned into objects of desire (TurViñes et al., 2018).

New generations tend to consider digital advertising as annoying, unless it generates real interest based on rewards or the inclusion of immersive elements (Kantar Millward Brown, 2017). They demand formats of a ludic nature, which blurs the lines between entertainment and advertising in content aimed at children and adolescents (Feijoo et al., 2020). One of the main characteristics that stands out of this embedded digital advertising is its lack of transparency (van Reijmersdal & Rozendaal, 2020). The ability of minors to interpret advertising messages is diminished when the influencer indicates that in his/her sponsored vlogs there is no commercial interference from the brand (De Jans & Hudders, 2020). Moreover, adolescents accept the presence of brands and sponsorships in the videos disclosed by their influencers as long as the balance between entertainment and commercial content is not disturbed (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019).

The risks derive from the difficulty of younger people to identify the advertising intention, the inexistence of warnings due to imprecise regulation, and the perception of credibility given to the youtuber's commercials (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018; Feijoo & Pavez, 2019).

## METHODOLOGY

This research analyzed the type of content published, the presence of brands and advertising techniques used in the videos, and their possible association with the confinement or COVID-19 theme, of thirteen Spanish-speaking children influencers under 14 years of age on their YouTube and Instagram channels during the first period of confinement in Spain (March 14 to April 26, 2020).

We selected the influential children's channels with the largest number of follows on YouTube in Spain and the rest of the world (Social Blade, 2020; Alonso, 2020; "Entendiendo a la generación...", n.d.): (1) Las Ratitas; (2) MikelTube; (3) La Diversión de Martina; (4) The Crazy Haacks; (5) Alexity; (6) Los Juguetes de Arantxa; (7) Karina&Marina; (8) Juega con Adri; (9) TeamNico; (10) Jugando con Aby; (11) Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan; (12) Pino and (13) Neno&Family. We obtained 116 YouTube videos and 188 Instagram posts. We conducted a content analysis with a greater interpretative than quantitative predominance (Andreu, 2002). The analysis variables are shown in table 1.

Commercial content was considered any brand identified in the content whether or not cataloged as advertising (Feijoo & Pavez, 2019; Feijoo & García, 2020), regardless of the prior contractual relationship between the youtuber and said brand.

RQ 1	Channel or profile information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Channel/Profile</li> <li>• Subscribers/Followers</li> <li>• Number of publications (March 14-April 26, 2020)</li> </ul>
RQ 2	Description of the content of each video/publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content format:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video (origin: Instagram, IGTV, TikTok)</li> <li>• Picture (Instagram)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Temporality               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current</li> <li>• From archive</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Video environment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interior (home is seen)</li> <li>• Interior (decor)</li> <li>• Exterior (inside the home)</li> <li>• Exterior</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Parents' presence</li> <li>• Content type               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game</li> <li>• Challenge</li> <li>• Tutorial</li> <li>• Vlog (routine)</li> <li>• Scripted story</li> <li>• Comment/Reflection/Testimony</li> <li>• Others (staged, dances)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Confinement-related content               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of publications</li> <li>• Themes: hygiene, health, education, exercise/sports, family relationships, leisure/entertainment, future plans, what's happening in the world, optimistic messages, others</li> <li>• No. of publications that refer to COVID-19 (either literally or symbolically)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

RQ 3	Brand presence in each video/publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of identifiable brands (interval of the number of brands among the selected sample of videos)</li> <li>• Brand categorization             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Audiovisual</li> <li>• Cosmetics/beauty</li> <li>• Toys</li> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• School supplies</li> <li>• Products linked to their channel</li> <li>• Clothes/fashion</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Videogames</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advertising technique             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-promotion</li> <li>• Promotion</li> <li>• Active or passive placement</li> <li>• Unboxing</li> <li>• Contest</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advertising warning             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes, but not very visible or ambiguous (practices that detract from visibility and understanding, such as only placing the hashtag at the end, mixing it with others, use of ambiguous references or abbreviations such as “Ambassador”, “Partner”, “Company X”, “#Adv.” or “#Ad”).</li> <li>• Yes, visible, understandable, and in Spanish.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• % of publications in which the influencer provides information about a brand</li> <li>• % of publications in which the influencer is emotionally linked to a brand</li> <li>• % of publications in which a brand is related to confinement and/or COVID-19</li> </ul>
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**Table 1. Analysis sheet used**

*Source: Own elaboration based on Smith et al., 2012, Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz, 2016, TurViñes et al., 2018, Tur-Viñes et al., 2019; Feijoo & Pavez, 2019.*

**RESULTS**

**Activity during confinement**

The 13 profiles of influencers – boys and girls– posted on both social networks, except for Jugando con Aby (who updated her YouTube account) and Juega con Adri (active only on Instagram).

As can be seen in table 2, during the six weeks of mandatory confinement for children up to 14 years of age, influencers published at least one video per week on YouTube. The channels with the highest production were Pino (17 videos), Karina y Marina (14), The Crazy Haacks (13), Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan (13) or Alexity (12). The youtubers with the most millions of followers –Las Ratitas and MikelTube– generated the least amount of content, with six and seven videos, respectively. This could indicate that the child influencers with fewer views took advantage of the confinement to increase their number of subscribers.



In the case of Instagram (table 3), a social network with more instantaneous publication, there was a greater intensity of publications. Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan (41), Los Juguetes de Arantxa (31), La Diversión de Martina (24) and MikelTube (20) stand out with the highest number of posts. Although photos were the most recurrent content on this social network, La Diversión de Martina opted to a greater extent for the short video format (16 versus eight images), as did MikelTube, which during this period posted more videos than photos (14 videos, six images). On Instagram, influencers with fewer followers such as Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan were the most active, posting twice as many posts as profiles with more subscribers (La Diversión de Martina).

Channel	Suscribers.	No videos (N=116)	Advertising content type posted	Confinement-related content		
				Channel's % videos	Theme?	% videos in reference to Covid19
Las Ratitas	19.6M	6	Stories scripted stories, game, challenges	17%	Health	17%
MikelTube	5.94M	7	Vlogs, tutorials, game, scripted stories	14%	Leisure and entertainment	29%
La diversión de Martina	3.99M	6	Vlogs, scripted stories, challenges, commentary/ reflection	83%	Leisure and entertainment and hygiene	0
The Crazy Haacks	3.65M	13	Vlogs, challenges, games, scripted stories	69%	Leisure and entertainment	0
Alexity	3.49M	12	Vlogs, tutorials, scripted stories, game, unboxing, other (dance, song)	50%	Leisure and entertainment, exercise and sport	17%
Los Juguetes de Arantxa	3.45M	8	Vlogs, scripted stories, game, unboxing	25%	Leisure and entertainment, health	12%
Karina & Marina	3.1M	14	Scripted stories, vlogs, challenges, other (room tours)	50%	Leisure and entertainment	0
Juega con Adri	2.87M	0				
TeamNico	2.71M	7	Challenges, scripted stories, game	43%	Optimistic messages, health, leisure and entertainment	29%

Continues →

Jugando con Aby	2.69M	6	Challenges, scripted stories, game, unboxing	0	-	0
Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan	2.12M	13	Games, challenges, scripted stories	15%	Leisure and entertainment	0
PINO	1.75M	17	Games, challenges, other (jokes)	12%	Educational	0
Neno&Family	221.000	7	Vlogs, challenges, tutorials, other (jokes)	23%	Hygiene, leisure and entertainment, family relations	14%

**Table 2. Activity and content posted on YouTube during confinement**

Source: Own elaboration.

Channel	Subscribers.	No videos (N=188)	Type of content posted	Confinement-related content		
				% public. Channel	Theme?	Confinement-related content
la_diversion_de_martina (La diversión de Martina)	978K	24	8 📹 16 📺 <i>Lipdubs and dances (TikTok), scripted stories, tutorials, challenge, staged portraits, tutorials</i>	54%	Leisure and entertainment, family relationships, future plans, health	0
mamaalexia_pg_oficial (Alexity)	742K	13	10 📹 3 📺 Routines, games, comment/reflection, scripted story, poses	31%	Leisure and entertainment, exercise and sports, family relations	0
hoynohaycole (The Crazy Haacks)	466K	17	15 📹 2 📺 Routines, challenges, comments/reflections	88%	Leisure and entertainment, family relations, educational	0
karina_dancer (Karina & Marina)	343K	19	15 📹 4 📺 Poses, promotion of her 3rd book and other influencers' books, dances, contests, scripted stories	47%	Leisure and entertainment, education, exercise and sports, optimistic messages, future plans	0
las_ratitas_pandilleras (Las Ratitas)	274K	6	5 📹 1 📺 Portraits, youtubers ranking, own book	50%	Leisure and entertainment, future plans	0

Continues →

losjuguetesdearantxa (Los Juguetes de Arantxa)	226K	31	31 📷	Portraits of routines, contests, games, own book	93%	Leisure and entertainment, educational, future plans, family relationships, health, exercise and sports, optimistic messages	13%
pino_link (PINO)	143K	3	3 📷	Poses with clothes by SikSilk	0	-	0
Jugando con aby (Jugando con Aby)	110K	0					
teamnico7 (TeamNico)	85,7K	4	3 📷 1 📺	Challenges, routine, comment/ reflection	75%	Exercise and sport, leisure and entertainment	0
mikeltube (MikelTube)	75,1K	20	6 📷 14 📺	Self-promotion, challenges, commentaries/ reflections, tutorials, scripted stories	50%	Leisure and entertainment, exercise and sport, hygiene, educational	0
nenofamily (Neno&Family)	37,1K	5	5 📷	Routines, family portraits	80%	Leisure and entertainment, family relations	0
las_aventuras_de_dani_y_evan (Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan)	23,1K	42	32 📷 10 📺	Routines, games, challenges, commentaries/ reflections, scripted stories	67%	Leisure and entertainment, educational, exercise and sports, optimistic messages, relationships family relationships, future plans	7%
juega con adri (Juega con Adri)	>1K	4	4 📷	Selfies and poses	75%	Optimistic messages	0

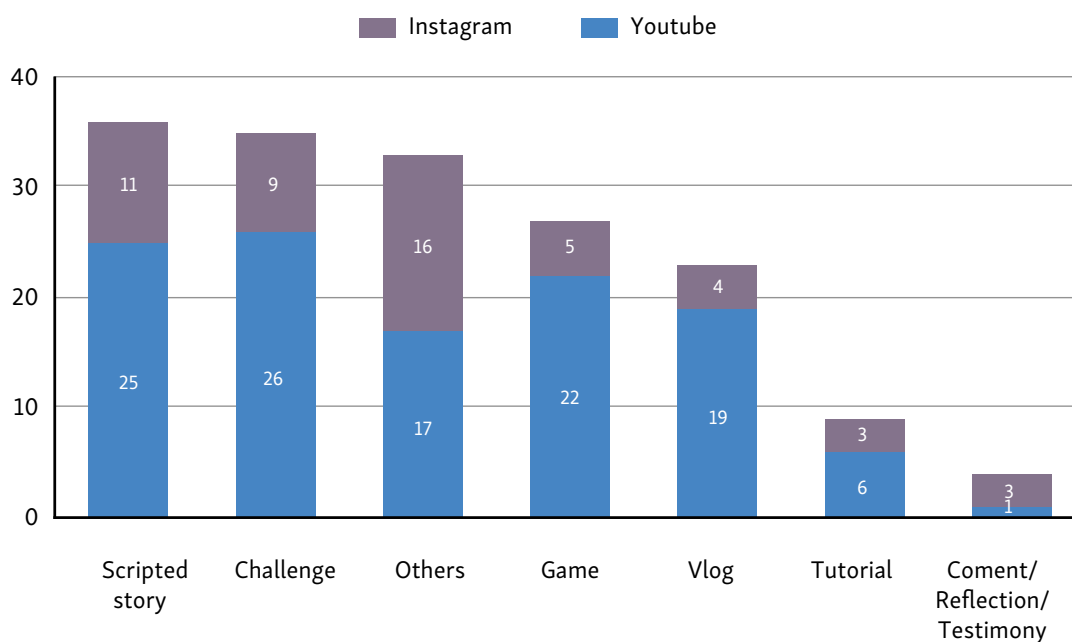
**Table 3. Activity and content posted on Instagram during confinement**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

### Type of content published

The videos published on YouTube and Instagram were mainly based on scripted stories, challenges, and games (figure 1). In this entertainment function, influencers play a role, especially on YouTube, through a scripted story, for self-promotion in the profiles with the most followers on both networks. For example, Las Ratitas shows the sisters needing Dad's help to open a tube of Lacasitos<sup>1</sup> or a bag of chips, and pestering him while he reads the Las Ratitas book.

1. Candies similar to M&Ms (translator's note).



**Figure 1. Types of video content on YouTube and Instagram**

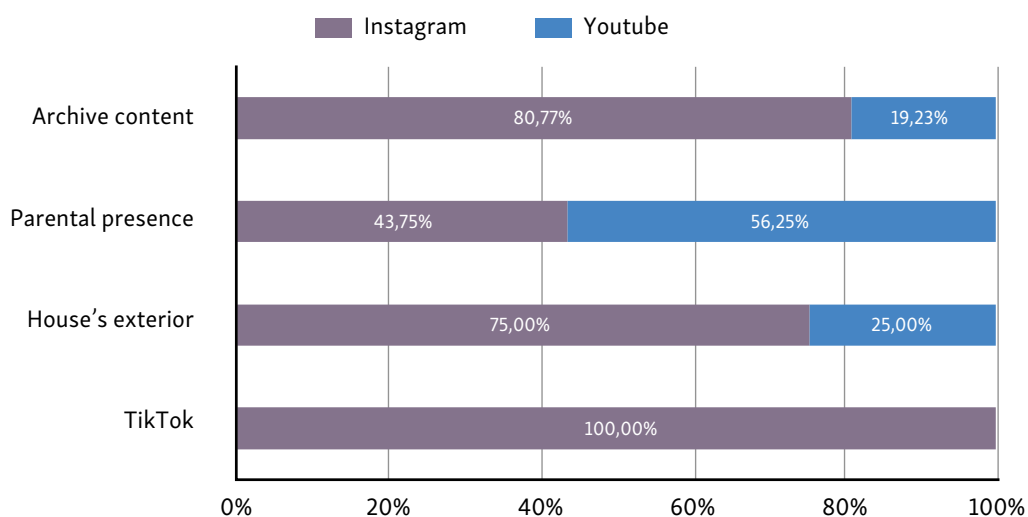
*Source: Own elaboration.*

In *La Diversión de Martina*, she plays the role of her own series, which she shares with other youtubers such as *Los Juguetes de Arantxa* or *Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan*, who have their own series.

Challenges represent the second type of content, especially on YouTube. There are challenges that show a superficial treatment of money, as an input that can be obtained without too much effort. This seems to be generalized in the profiles more linked to gamers, as is the case of Pino (2020) or TeamNico (2020). Many of the games are related to confinement, developing creativity about what can be done at home. In the other category we found mainly self-promotion videos.

Content created for YouTube tends to make less use of archive material (figure 2). The youtubers recorded for this platform more in their homes (indoors and outdoors) and TikTok is not present. The active presence of parents in stories broadcast on YouTube from home stands out.

On Instagram (figure 2) there is a greater number of archive publications and a lower presence of parents. This social network is conducive to posting photos taken beforehand. For example, on Father's Day or Easter, celebrated at home. As on YouTube, the outdoor locations are archive images or videos. There are also posts from TikTok. *La Diversión de Martina* stands out: she even asked her followers which network they preferred (Instagram or TikTok).



**Figure 2. Archive posts, parental presence, exterior location or TikTok use in content generated on YouTube and Instagram**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

### Content on confinement

All YouTube influencers allude to the phenomenon in at least one video, except for Jugando con Aby, which maintains content about gaming and unboxing toys.

Confinement was addressed in 36% (N=42) of the total number of YouTube videos (N=116). In channels that also reach a teenage audience –such as La Diversión de Martina, The Crazy Haacks or Karina y Marina– the number of posts about confinement was higher. La Diversión de Martina especially stands out, with five out of six videos.

Regarding Instagram, the allusion to confinement is more important, also because the number of publications was higher (N=188). 64% included it, which shows how child influencers joined the conversation about this exceptional situation.

In YouTube videos there are mainly leisure and entertainment messages: proposals to occupy the days at home, recipes, games inside the home or in the garden, a list of movies or books, furniture assembly, homemade haircuts, as well as a special insistence on consuming their contents in social networks and their related products (books, videogames, etc.).

As for entertainment, nine of the 13 youtubers proposed a routine for these atypical days, showing their day at home and always encouraging healthy practices and habits, such as exercise to stay active, homework, reading and controlled screen time. Messages related to health were also detected (tips to avoid contagion, such as not touching the elevator, or the use of gloves and masks), with allusions to hygiene (hand cleaning), education (homework, reading, handing in grades), and coexistence.



**Image 1. Example of an optimistic message on Instagram**

Source: @las\_aventuras\_de\_dani\_y\_evan (2020)

Sport at home is linked to entertainment and routines, but there is also advice, as in Alexity's channel, on how to exercise with material available at home. In the case of Instagram, the YouTube trend is maintained. The dissemination of optimistic messages was also frequent, supporting and encouraging confinement with the hashtag #yomequedoencasa (I stay home) (image 1), reflections on future plans, family coexistence or video screens.

Finally, there is a coordinated strategy among the accounts of these influencers. Many of the photos and videos on Instagram are intended to redirect users to YouTube. For example, if we want to know how The Crazy Haacks' haircut turned out, we have to see it on YouTube.

### Coronavirus content

Explicit allusion to the virus is rare: only 8% of YouTube videos and 4% of Instagram posts (tables 2 and 3). When child influencers allude to the coronavirus on YouTube, they do so symbolically and indirectly (five videos), for example, through characters representing the pandemic. On Instagram, some (six of seven posts) did it literally.

We can highlight three interesting examples. In two of them, the virus is alluded to symbolically and in the last one, literally. In addition, they maintain the essence of each channel: challenges (TemaNico), toys (Los juguetes de Arantxa) (image 2) and music and dance (Alexity).



**Image 2. Buying with gloves and mask**

*Source: Parreño (2020).*

### Brand presence

The presence of brands inserted in the content published by youtubers is frequent on YouTube and Instagram. Videos were found in which there were up to 12 different brands (Jugando con Aby, Pino, or La Diversión de Martina), with the exception of Las Ratitas, with no ads. In Instagram, due to its publication format, the number of brands per post is lower, although there was one case with seven brands in the same post (Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan). The strategy in Instagram is to rely on the use of hashtags to reinforce the presence of a brand that appears in the shared image.

The brands' category in the channels analyzed depends on the profile of each youtuber (see tables 5 and 6: toys and fashion, among others). In terms of gender stereotypes, there is a difference between traditional products for girls and boys. Doll brands are inserted in girls' channels such as Arantxa. Car or dinosaur products are featured in boys' channels (Dani y Evan). Videogames and accessories (helmets, gaming chairs, etc.) are linked to the profiles of male youtubers (TeamNico).

The differentiation of technology brands (mobile phones, tablets, computers), as well as audiovisual content distributors (Netflix, Amazon, HBO), is transversal to many of the profiles studied, although it predominates in those in which parents actively participate in the channels (TeamNico or The Crazy Haacks), often as a passive location, as part of the homes' equipment, but also actively, when they recommend buying the youtubers' books on Amazon.

Channel	No. Brands in each video (Mín-Máx)	Categories	Techniques	Señalización	% of videos with brands related to confinement / COVID-19
Las Ratitas	0-3	Products linked to the channel, audiovisual, toys, food	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement	NO	0
Mikel Tube	2-9	Products linked to the channel, videogames, technology, apparel/fashion	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	14%
La diversión de Martina	1-12	Products linked to the channel, technology, apparel/fashion, audiovisual, food	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	67%
The Crazy Haacks	3-10	Products linked to the channel, technology, apparel/fashion, audiovisual, food, other (IKEA)	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES	54%
Alexity	1-9	Products linked to the channel, toys, apparel/fashion, technology, audiovisual, others (baby strollers)	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement Unboxing	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	42%
Los Juguetes de Arantxa	1-5	Products linked to the channel, toys, audiovisual, technology, food, places	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement Unboxing	YES, but little visible or ambiguous (YES in two cases)	12%
Karina & Marina	2-10	Products linked to the channel, toys, technology, apparel/fashion, cosmetics/beauty, food, others (mattress)	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement Unboxing		29%
Juega con Adri					
TeamNico	3-8	Productos asociados con su canal, tecnología, videojuegos, ropa/moda, audiovisual, alimentación	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	NO	57%

Continues →



Jugando con Aby	3-12	Productos asociados con su canal, videojuegos, juguetes, audiovisual	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement Unboxing	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	0
Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan	1-5	Productos asociados con su canal, juguetes, tecnología, audiovisual	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous (YES in two cases)	15%
PINO	4-12	Productos asociados con su canal, videojuegos, ropa/moda, tecnología	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement Unboxing	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	0
Neno&Family	3-7	Productos asociados con su canal, juguetes, videojuegos, ropa/moda, tecnología	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous (YES in one case)	43%

**Table 4. Brand presence on YouTube**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The placement of food brands is more common on YouTube channels than on Instagram profiles, especially in videos about routines: breakfasts, lunches, snacks, dinners.

Another common phenomenon is self-promoting the content of their own products. For example, The Crazy Haacks recreates in a video the types of passengers on a cruise ship, through a scripted story, to promote the content of Mateo Haack's book, available on Amazon and on the website of his agency, La Rezeta. On YouTube, users are encouraged to subscribe to the channel, like or follow them on their social networks. Their Instagram profiles are often used to reinforce their image as public figures. They feed them with photos and videos created specifically for YouTube and invite people to watch new content on their channel.

We analyzed whether the brands acquired some prominence in the content disclosed explicitly (by the youtuber himself/herself) and implicitly (through audiovisual resources). When the channels updated content, we detected some publications with a brand occupying a central place. Techniques such as unboxing, product promotion, self-promotion of their social networks or products linked to their channel imply that the centrality of brands is a frequent dynamic, with the characteristic reinforcement of hashtags and purchase links in the publication's description. They mainly promote their books, one of the usual business diversification products of these influencers.

It is also common to provide information on related products. When brands do not have a special prominence, they are usually described in publications to inform. Sometimes, they not only offer objective data, but also emotional and subjective messages (“I love the Philadelphia” (Karina & Marina, 2020) and “the mattress is the best because I sleep like a queen [...] and in my house all the mattresses are from *Lo Monaco*” (Karina & Marina, 2020), on Karina and Marina’s channel; “how cool, I’m super excited to open them” or “wow, I love the Barbie Colour Reveal” and “what did you think, I loved it”, by Arantxa (Parreño, 2020) while doing the Barbie unboxing. “I love it, it’s pink and with turquoise highlights”, “I think this one is super cute”, “these are Mattel Barbies, and they are all beautiful”, Alexity also alluding to Barbie Colour Reveal (Alexity, 2020).

Brands are integrated into the content mainly through their explicit promotion by the youtubers in their videos or publications, sometimes creating a scripted story with product centrality, such as the example of Karina y Marina (2020) for Mattel’s *Enchantimals* dolls. Another way is the active placement (presence and differentiation in the shot and interaction of the youtuber with the brand), without forgetting to mention the self-promotion of their social networks and related products in most of their publications. Although unboxing is usually a common phenomenon, it has a secondary role, especially present in channels with a leading promotion of toys (Jugando con Aby or Los Juguetes de Arantxa). Despite the confinement, influencers continue to receive material from brands to promote their products. This is the case of Arantxa sharing games with her cousin and a friend, also for Mattel’s *Enchantimals* (Parreño, 2020).

Explicit signaling of products or services’ promotion is still very sporadic. Except on rare occasions, the warning of the brands’ presence is not clear (image 3). What is usual is the insertion of hashtags and links to the websites of the promoted products in the content description. For example, the YouTube channel The Crazy Haacks, which has existed for five years, explicitly indicates the promotions. It is important to emphasize that brand signaling with a persuasive purpose is even less frequent on Instagram (image 4), where it is reduced to the use of hashtags and on many occasions serves as a reinforcement of the brand promotion already carried out on YouTube. The fact that this signaling is done differently for the same brand shows how the responsibility falls mainly on influencers.

Channel	No. of brands in each post (Min-Máx)	Categories	Techniques	Signaling	% of videos with brands related to confinement / COVID-19
la_diversion_de_martina (La diversión de Martina)	0-2	Products linked to the channel, apparel/fashion, technology, audiovisual	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	17%
mamaalexia_pg_oficial (Alexity)	1-5	Products linked to the channel, apparel/fashion, toys	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	15%
hoynohaycole (The Crazy Haacks)	0-4	Products linked to the channel, audiovisual, apparel/fashion, toys	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	35%
karina_dancer (Karina & Marina)	0-3	Products linked to the channel, reading, apparel/fashion, other (mattress)	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement Contest	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	26%
las_ratitas_pandilleras (Las Ratitas)	1-3	Products linked to the channel, audiovisual	Self-promotion Promotion	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	0
losjuguetesdearantxa (Los Juguetes de Arantxa)	1-3	Products linked to the channel, toys, audiovisual, reading, technology	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement Contests	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	35%
pino_link (PINO)	1	Apparel/Fashion	Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	0
Jugandoconaby (Jugando con Aby)					
teamnico7 (TeamNico)	1-2	Its social networks, apparel/fashion, technology, videogames	Self-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	25%
mikeltube (MikelTube)	0-3	Products linked to the channel, apparel/fashion, reading	Self-promotion Promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	30%
nenofamily (Neno&Family)	1-3	Products linked to the channel, technology, apparel/fashion	Self-promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	80%
las_aventuras_de_dani_y_evan (Las Aventuras de Dani y Evan)	0-7	Products linked to the channel, toys, apparel/fashion, technology, videogames, audiovisual, other (IKEA)	Sel-promotion Promotion Active/passive placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	29%
juegaconadri (Juega con Adri)	0-2	Its own social networks, apparel/fashion	Self-promotion Active placement	YES, but little visible or ambiguous	25%

**Tabla 5. Presencia de marcas en Instagram**

Fuente: Elaboración propia.



Image 3. Screenshots showing the brands' different presence on YouTube

Source: Karina & Marina (2020).



Image 4. Examples of brand presence on Instagram

Source: @karina\_dancer (2020); @pino\_link (2020)

### Presence brands related to confinement or coronavirus

As for detecting whether the influencers targeting a child audience used contextual advertising on confinement, this strategy was observed transversally (image 5), except in two channels. Kid influencers took advantage of the instance to promote the purchase of their own products (books, T-shirts, videogames) through online stores.



**Image 5. Self-promotion and brand presence on Instagram related to confinement**

Source: @karina\_dancer (2020); @mikeltube (2020)

Some brands also used these younger influencers to develop contextual advertising. This is the case of Nike, to promote sports at home (image 5).

The intentional presence of audiovisual content platforms, such as Netflix, is less clear. In many cases, it is a resource used by influencers to propose how to entertain themselves (D'Antiochia, 2020). Toy brands such as *Bandai* and *GoojitZu* dolls (Neno Family, 2020) or *Hot Wheels* (Dani & Evan, 2020) also use contextual advertising, offering their product as an alternative to boredom at home.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing 304 messages shared by 13 influential children on social networks at the beginning of the pandemic, we observed that they maintained their activity during the confinement. The increase of content in those accounts with fewer followers stands out, which could be understood as an opportunity to obtain greater visibility. Likewise, the content generated on Instagram has been

greater than on YouTube, being used as a network from which to obtain notoriety and redirect the user to the audiovisual content of this video platform.

Publications linked to the pandemic have been recurrent. They shared content, sometimes scripted, showing their quarantine routines loaded with recommendations and healthy habits: attention to homework, time for exercise, for reading, for cooking, for family leisure, or for the use of technology. The presence of parents is considerable, demonstrating their conformity and support to this role of content creators and disseminators, as well as promoters of brands and products.

The influencers reflected the situation experienced but avoided alluding to the coronavirus. The commitment to raise awareness among their followers about the need to stay at home for the good of all stands out. It can be affirmed that they responsibly exercised their power of influence over the children's audience by transmitting enriching contextual content.

Finally, the presence of brands is the most remarkable aspect of this research and the least friendly. As Tur-Viñes and colleagues (2019) point out, there is no content differentiation of the brands that appear or are prescribed by minors, without stating that it is advertising. Thus, many of their creations revolved around home confinement and integrated commercial mentions of a contextual nature. Although traditionally specific resources were associated to communicate with the child audience, such as the creation of fantasy worlds, repetition, or jingles (McNeal, 1992), influencers use techniques aimed at exploiting the advantages offered by the digital environment such as proximity, personalization, or immediacy, utilizing persuasive resources.

Advertisers such as Nike, LoMonaco, Bandai or Mattel, among others, have linked their products to the confinement experienced by children. They have used the engagement generated by these influencers to reach a child audience in an exceptional situation. To do so, they have resorted to innovative advertising formats and techniques that are perfectly integrated with the editorial line of the youtubers, such as challenges or room tours. It is also surprising that brands whose main target audience is not children are trying to address this segment. This confirms the validity of the triple role of children as consumers (primary, future, and influential) (McNeal, 1992). Technology and videogames are also on the scene and promoted in these spaces, in addition to the evident efforts of all influencers to promote products linked to their personal brand image: books, T-shirts, websites, and even their own videogames. Most of the channels analyzed place the social network profiles of family members, more recently created, especially parents or siblings. This strategy evidences the business structure built behind these channels

that have a homemade, familiar, spontaneous appearance (even with spelling mistakes), but managed by specialized marketing agencies (Aznar-Díaz et al., 2019).

This advertising pressure to which children are exposed is produced under a minimal signaling of sponsored content, especially on Instagram. Social networks tend to a hybridization of content, by opting for formats and techniques that make it increasingly difficult to distinguish what is advertising from entertainment.

Young audiences adopt a much more demanding stance towards digital advertising formats than other generations: they want videos, musical narratives, synthesized and immersive messages that provide a valuable experience. This presents a great dilemma, because it is the audience itself that demands formats that present blurred boundaries between advertising, entertainment, and information. Faced with this type of inputs, recurrent in influencer marketing, the recognition of the persuasive phenomenon (An et al., 2014) may not be enough, since minors seem to devote fewer cognitive resources to identify these more subtle persuasive messages (unboxing, recommendations from youtubers and Instagramers), and do not consider it as such (Feijoo et al., 2021). Therefore, a correct advertising literacy requires working on a more interpretative and questioning level (Rozendaal et al., 2013).

This study is limited to six weeks. Although it provides insight into the type of content and advertising pressure to which children have been subjected, it is recommended to expand its findings. Likewise, it is unknown whether there is a commercial relationship between advertisers and influencers behind the brand presences analyzed, which may be another limitation.

The trend towards increased use of screens, as well as the time we spend at home in the face of health crises such as that of COVID-19, make it necessary to maintain a critical and vigilant attitude. As previous research has shown, it is necessary for brands, as well as influencers, to take responsibility for their sponsorships and collaborations to avoid covert advertising and encourage good content creation practices.

Future research on content viewed by children on social networks should consider analyzing the engagement generated by the publications of influential children, which was not considered in this research.

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