
YouTube, the Attention Economy and Digital Audience Interest in Sponsored ASMR Videos

YouTube, la economía de la atención y el interés de las audiencias digitales en videos patrocinados de ASMR

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Abstract

Although the Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) phenomenon has grown notably in Mexico in recent years, local YouTube channels lack effective and continued use of digital marketing strategies and tactics as reflected in their sponsored videos, in contrast to the most popular YouTube ASMR channels, which are essentially English-speaking. After completing a detailed review on YouTube, this article compares both groups and argues that, with a few changes, Mexican ASMR creators can benefit from marketing strategies used by the more popular creators from other countries. By doing this, Mexican creators could ride the nascent wave of attention economy that posits that cognition is a commodity that can be monetized. The analysis of both groups of channels found that Mexican ASMR creators display, more often than not, lower production quality, little knowledge of basic marketing concepts, as well as lower posting frequency than English-speaking videos when compared to their more popular international counterparts. These findings are discussed under the marketing concepts of reach, relevance, and resonance as well as the attention economy construct.

Keywords: ASMR, Mexican ASMR, Digital Marketing, Attention Economy.

JEL Classification: M31.

Resumen

Si bien el fenómeno de videos ASMR (siglas del inglés Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) en YouTube ha tenido un aumento notable en México en los últimos años, los principales canales aún carecen de uso efectivo y continuo de estrategias y tácticas de marketing digital como se observa en los videos patrocinados, a diferencia de los canales más populares de otras latitudes, esencialmente angloparlantes. Mediante una revisión detallada en YouTube, este trabajo compara ambos materiales y argumenta que el mercado mexicano puede aprovechar las estrategias de marketing de sus contrapartes, con algunas modificaciones, para montarse a la economía de la atención, aquella en donde la cognición se plantea como un bien que puede ser monetizado. El análisis de ambos grupos de canales halló que, en general, aquellos perfiles administrados por creadores de ASMR mexicanos cuentan con menor calidad de producción, escaso conocimiento de conceptos básicos de marketing y menor frecuencia de publicación de videos en inglés, al contrario de los canales más populares a nivel internacional. En el texto se discuten estos hallazgos a la luz de los conceptos de marketing relativos al alcance, relevancia y resonancia, así como del constructo de la economía de la atención.

Palabras clave: ASMR, ASMR México, marketing digital, economía de la atención.

Clasificación JEL: M31.

1. Introduction

The digital phenomenon known as ASMR or *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* has grown in popularity recently. Broadly speaking, ASMR videos are created with the declared intention to relax the person who observes them while generating pleasurable sensations, and distributed most often on YouTube.

ASMR has become a subject of increasing interest for academic study in recent years. Well-known database Web of Science (2022) catalogs 77 research papers on this topic from 2011 to 2021, 67 of which were published between 2018 and 2021. Meanwhile, Google gives 212 million hits when “ASMR” (2022a) is searched in its video tab using the English language preference. Additionally, according to “ASMR” (2022b), which shows the frequency of searches by word on Google Trends, the subject reached a maximum worldwide popularity of 100 points in February of 2019. That highpoint coincides with a Michelob Ultra advertisement broadcast on February 3, 2019 during Super Bowl LIII. The beer ad made ASMR a popular subject among the public. According to “ASMR” (2022b), China, South Korea, Japan, Canada, and the United States are the countries that search most frequently for ASMR. Mexico is ranked 20 out of 61 countries in that same database.

Fest (2019) noted that before Michelob Ultra, other well-known brands had already dabbled in this digital trend, notably Sony, Pepsi, Ritz, KFC, Coca-Cola, IKEA, Tic Tac, Taco Bell, and Dove Chocolates in markets like the United States, China, and South Korea. In Mexico, bubblegum brand Trident, through their official Instagram account @trident_mex (Trident Mexico, 2019), as well as TV series *La Casa de las Flores* (Netflix Latinoamérica, 2019), have used ASMR in their advertisements.

Having said that, contrary to what is seen in other countries, and barring some notable exceptions, Mexican ASMR video creators have shown little to no strategic marketing integration in their own content when their sponsored content videos are analyzed, even considering that Spanish is the fourth-most spoken language worldwide with 534 million speakers (Ghosh, 2020). Additionally, with its approximately 85 million internet users Mexico is ranked as one of the countries with the greatest number of web users (“Top 20 countries...”, 2021). The lack of a robust local ASMR industry is particularly intriguing, especially since Mexico is one of the most important consumers of video in the world: on average, Mexican internet users watch 18 hours of video each month, the highest number among Latin American countries (*White Paper Video*, 2017).

This paper intends to quantify and summarize digital marketing interest found on popular Mexican ASMR YouTube channels by sponsored video count and sponsored video viewership. As a comparison, other digital marketing interest benchmarks of popular ASMR channels, mainly, but not limited to, English-speaking creators, are quantified. These findings are interpreted as a feasible new marketing tool for Mexican brands, given the large audiences that have access to YouTube. Before doing so, the ASMR phenomenon will be examined from an academic perspective.

2. What is ASMR and how is it linked to marketing?

Klausen (2021) states that ASMR can be understood as a kind of tickling sensation, generally relaxing and pleasurable, produced in response to a specific sensorial or aural stimulus, almost always associated with triggers transmitted through videos on YouTube. Harper (2019) defines ASMR as mediated intimacy with a strong technological component, most notably high-quality and highly priced microphones. Barratt & Davis (2015), meanwhile, cited throughout ASMR literature, describe it as a “combination of positive feelings, relaxation and a distinct, static-like tingling sensation on the skin. This sensation typically originates on the scalp in response to a trigger, travelling down the spine, and can spread to the back, arms, and legs [...]” (Barratt & Davis, 2015, p. 11)

Some marketing studies have integrated ASMR phenomena as a new tool to increase its efficacy. Chae *et al.* (2021) noted ASMR is an effective tool for marketing since the consumer feels less stressed and compensates for a lack self-esteem by watching this type of videos. In addition, after analyzing more than 7000 YouTube comments and various in-depth interviews with young men and women related to Ikea’s 2017 *Oddly* advertising campaign based on ASMR techniques, Lee & Chen (2021) found that, taken altogether, ideas related to the brand were positive, friendly, and the attention towards specific products was correctly focused. Related to this topic, Tran & Choi (2021) found that ASMR product reviewers had a higher communication effectiveness than ASMR creators specializing in how-to videos, squarely placing the former in the influencer category for marketing strategists. Moreover, according to Labrecque (2020), ASMR can be categorized as a type of sensorial marketing. Thanks to its diverse set of tools, the author states, it’s

possible to produce more creative content with a higher possibility of engagement materialized as more convincing auditory and visual experiences.

Supplementary to this, according to Pham & Sun (2020), ASMR can also be useful to engineer a relaxing sensation that improves positive emotions such as consumer pride, consumer excitement, and consumer relaxation, all of which can improve the customer journey. Bogueva & Marinova (2020), meanwhile, observed that ASMR can be a persuasive tool to increase awareness of the impact of climate change, as well as to promote actions to reduce its impact. Additionally, Bode (2019) maintains that ASMR can be used as a marketing tool to promote *slow tourism*—a kind of exploration that emphasizes self-awareness and local traditions—among young travelers, thanks to the inherently relaxed editing of these videos. An additional study by Sin & Yun (2019) showed that while distinct types of viewers react differently to visual and aural ASMR-based advertisements, moderate use of both elements helped viewers concentrate and focus on the information provided. In this same vein, Lee (2019) demonstrated that the technique used by ASMR creators advertising products—that is, talking directly through the camera to create a sensation of intimacy with the audience—enhances brand identity and auditory stimulation and thus the feeling a potential consumer has towards the service or product being offered.

More emphatically, according to Antonova (2019), the essential characteristics of ASMR make it an ideal vehicle for digital marketing since such videos can be watched on repeated occasions for their stimulating and stress-reducing properties. Similarly, Antonova (2019) proposes ASMR can be used for the following digital marketing tactics: 1) As direct cooperation between brands and ASMR artists to manipulate an object in front of the camera, such as beauty or personal care products; 2) As native advertising, that is, by placing and using products in a video without mentioning the brand or name of the product even when their packaging can be seen on-camera; and 3) As direct promotion, wherein the use of a specific product is openly discussed and the creator of the video integrates a link that directs the viewer to a landing page where it can be bought.

Having said that, the ASMR phenomena has also been covered by the general-interest press. Some of the most recent published journalistic pieces include outlets such as *The Guardian* (Dewey, 2021; Wainwright, 2020), *European CEO* (Goldsmith, 2019) and *BBC Worklife* (Fowler, 2018). Spanish-speaking media reports on ASMR include those published in *La Vanguardia* (Fitó, 2021), *El Periódico* (Fortuny, 2021), *Expansión* (“La ciencia del ASMR...”, 2021), *Milenio* (Hernández, 2021), and *Hipertextual* (Redondo, 2020), to name only a few. Specialized business

and marketing magazines texts on ASMR can be seen in *PuroMarketing.com* (“El boom del ASMR...”, 2019) and *YPulse* (“How these 5...”, 2019). These mass media texts reflect a growing interest in the subject.

Besides marketing, ASMR studies have seen a growing interest among other academic fields such as Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Psychology, Neurosciences, and Sonology. Recent work in the Media Studies field includes Maddox (2021a, 2021b), Klausen (2021), Zappavigna (2020, 2021), Holmowaia & Danzis (2020), Starr *et al.* (2020), Łapińska (2020), Waldron (2017) and Gallagher (2016). Examples of Psychology research on the subject can be seen in Swart *et al.* (2021), Morales *et al.* (2021), Roberts *et al.* (2018, 2020, 2021), Janik & Osborne-Ford (2020), Cash *et al.* (2018), as well as Fredborg *et al.* (2017, 2021). On the Neurosciences front, some notable works include Ohta & Inagaki (2021), Gyoung (2021), Maniago *et al.* (2021), Idayati *et al.* (2021), Fredborg *et al.* (2021), Lee *et al.* (2020), Smith *et al.* (2020), Paszkiel *et al.* (2020), Valtakari *et al.* (2019), Poerio *et al.* (2018), Lochte *et al.* (2018), Barratt *et al.* (2017), and Smith *et al.* (2017). The Sonology field has also produced some recent works on ASMR, most notably Uchiyama & Kawamoto (2021), Klefeker *et al.* (2020), Fukushima (2019), Kovacevich & Huron (2018), Janik & Banissy (2018), and Rouw & Erfanian (2018).

3. Theoretical Framework

The text “ASMR media and the attention economy’s crisis of care” by Rachel Fest (2019), a researcher at State University of New York College at Oneonta, was used as the conceptual and theoretical basis for this paper. Fest states that, due to the advances of digitalization in practically every aspect of life, we have entered an attention-based economy where human cognition has become society’s most precious commodity. Attention, this reasoning follows, becomes harder to achieve due to the proliferation of electronic devices, gadgets, and screens concurrently vying to capture a person’s consciousness and senses during their waking hours. In this line of argument, ASMR videos, thanks to the innate characteristics of the genre, hold the viewer’s attention, provide a temporary sense of companionship, and mediate care through the technology consumed. The two latter properties of human relationships have become scarce in large cities of highly industrialized countries, where loneliness is common.

It must be noted that the concept of “attention economy” touched on by Fest (2019) was originally coined by American writer Michael Goldhaber (1997), who published

the essay “The Attention Economy and the Net” during the first months of 1997 based on the following premise: if the internet is to be understood as a space where more and more activities of human life are executed, then the economic laws must be inherent to that new space. Thus, attention becomes the most sought-after interchangeable merchandise in this new digital era, a concept that’s naturally antagonistic to the industrial-era paradigm of monetary exchange for goods.

Fest (2019) disputes the use the attention economy concept has been given today yet acknowledges the model has been extremely successful from a commercial and marketing point of view, particularly when ASMR videos are analyzed. The author asserts, in fact, that the sudden increase of these videos between 2011 and 2012 can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, video consumption grew because of the 2007-2008 international financial crisis, which left many workers unemployed and exacerbated economic and social inequality on a global scale. Secondly, the ascent of ASMR coincides with the explosion of mobile devices connected to the internet that forces the user to focus attention on a small screen to consume information. “These (and other) contemporary realities have established precarity and anxiety as the new millennium’s dominant structures of feeling [...]” (Fest, 2019, para. 3)

Extending feminist critic Nancy Fraser’s “crisis of care” idea, Fest argues ASMR is an “emergent attempt to ameliorate this crisis of care, and the attendant anxieties present economic, political, and social conditions produce, from inside the attention economy” (Fest, 2019, para. 4). This video genre, warns the author, preserves the traditional role of “affective labor” assigned socio-historically to women and entrenches it as a universal construct, even though ASMR as a mass-media phenomenon appeared in 2011 and is highly dependent on the platforms, structures, and styles of current digital capitalism.

Fest (2019) carefully analyzes the commercial possibilities of ASMR videos specialized in triggers that manipulate on-screen a wide variety of artefacts with the intent to create “relaxing” and “pleasurable” sounds, a kind of ASMR sub-genre that can be easily taken advantage of by marketing experts. However, even if the declared intent of ASMR artists is often openly unrelated to commercial ends, ASMR media is influenced by market interests since these videos necessitate large networks and corporate sponsorships to generate capital. As a genre, the author advances, ASMR videos rely on well-known marketing conventions and revitalize consumer capitalism (Fest, 2019, para. 14).

Fest also calls attention to the pleasure of consumption, another kind of sensation linked to ASMR, but rarely declared in ASMR videos. For this reason, “trigger”

videos “reproduce many of the techniques marketers have developed to encourage consumption” (Fest, 2019, para. 17). Consequently, it should be of little surprise that many “unboxing” and “haul” videos exist, both of which are frequently sponsored. In this way, ASMR influencers allow for “vicarious consumption” which can be pleasurable for many YouTube users thus “monetizing anew items that have technically been ‘consumed’ already” (Fest, 2019, para. 18). That is to say, the creation of capital extends beyond its original point of acquisition since products can be opened and caressed, making “trigger” videos content that “render[s] consumerism itself consumable, multiplying revenue, not only for designers, manufacturers, and suppliers, but also for the attention economy’s new digital and cultural stakeholders” (Fest, 2019, para. 18).

4. Method

A quantitative approach was used for data collection and analysis, bolstered by direct research on YouTube to categorize a selection of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Mexican ASMR channels.

Ten of the largest English-speaking ASMR channels by subscriber count on YouTube were systematically analyzed to find high view-count videos openly declared as sponsored. Since nine out of ten ASMR videos are consumed on YouTube (Bode, 2019), the list conforms to what the average ASMR viewer expects when watching this type of content. These well-known channels were taken from Bode’s (2019) work where the author listed the 20 largest ASMR channels on YouTube based on total number of subscribers. While it’s true that the ASMR scene involves a rapidly changing field of new participants and changing subscriber counts, Bode’s list remains relevant to this day. Furthermore, it should be stressed that the list is not exhaustive but rather *representative* of the overall ASMR phenomenon on YouTube. Having said that, other non-documented channels may have garnered a larger follower base since the publication of Bode’s work, a fact that does not alter the value of the author’s original list. The most popular sponsored video of each channel was considered for this analysis, a total of seven unique productions, since three of the most popular channels listed by Bode (2019) do not feature openly sponsored content.

Next, an extensive manual search of the ten largest Mexican ASMR channels by subscriber count was performed on YouTube with the intent of finding branded content, promotional material in the description box of the video, and content with the keywords “sponsored” as well as the Spanish words “patrocinado,” “código,”

“oferta,” “compra,” which respectively translate as sponsored, code, sale, buy. The most popular sponsored video of each channel was considered for this analysis, a total of six unique productions, since four of the most popular Mexican ASMR channels manually obtained for this analysis do not feature openly sponsored content. It should be stressed that the Mexican cases analyzed were chosen by reviewing their location in the “About” tab on YouTube. The decision was taken to eliminate ASMR channels from other Spanish-speaking countries, as well as channels run by Mexicans in the USA, since each ASMR creator integrates cultural and linguistic elements into the videos that make them authentically culturally native and, as such, hard to replicate if the person does not reside in the geographical location.

The following variables were used to analyze and compare both groups of selected ASMR channels: a) Channel name, b) Subscriber count, c) Total number of videos, d) Total number of views, e) Sponsored content, f) Most viewed sponsored video + sponsor, g) Total number of views of most viewed sponsored video + interactions, h) Notable channel sponsors. These variables denote the overall activity of the channel as well as the capacity to monetize the ASMR creator’s work via open sponsorships and make the selected channels’ characteristics quantifiable. They also reflect the interest brands have in ASMR in general, and the creator in particular, since the large subscriber count of the top channels can be identified as paid digital influencer marketing. An influencer is an individual who has impact over a specific target audience or medium whose value to marketers can be measured by reach, relevance, and resonance, according to Sudha & Sheena (2017, p. 16). These authors define reach as the size of the audience; relevance as the degree of content usefulness to the target audience; and resonance as the “activity an influencer generates by publishing content” (Sudha & Sheena, 2017, p. 16).

The quantifiable variables selected for this research fit within the influencer marketing parameters defined by Sudha & Sheena (2017). Variables “b” through “d” demonstrate the channel’s reach. Variable “f” displays the pertinence the most popular branded video has for the channel’s audience and the brand that sponsored such content. Resonance, although more difficult to measure since the channel’s internal metrics are not available to outside viewers, can be expressed in variable “g” through the number of views, likes, and comments the most popular sponsored video accumulates, which in the top ASMR channels can reach the thousands, while smaller ASMR creators can amass hundreds. Having said that, resonance can also be measured in the number of notable channel sponsors for any given channel (variable “h”) since it is safe to assume brands would not sponsor videos if they

were not effective in their marketing strategy, whatever the target goal chosen (awareness, brand identity, lead generation, just to name a few).

In synthesis, this form of data collecting allows a clear comparison between two or more YouTube channels and, insofar as previous academic ASMR marketing literature is concerned, had not been published before. After the information of both groups was collected and categorized, the data were summarized in two different tables and ranked by each channel's total subscriber count so as to compare the two cohorts. Data were obtained directly from YouTube on April 6, 2022.

5. Results

Table 1 shows relevant metrics and sponsored video data of some of the most popular ASMR on YouTube channels based on Bode's (2019) selection (see Table 1). Most of these channels include English-speaking videos, upload material several times a week, and maintain a high degree of participation in their comments section. It must be noted that even though some of the international ASMR creators don't have English as their native tongue they upload a vast majority of their videos in this language. The same can be said of the textual elements displayed in their YouTube channel and accompanying videos such as titles, descriptions, acknowledgments, contact information, and self-promotional material or advertised brands, whether official or not. This is the case for bilingual or trilingual creators ASMR PPOMO (English, Japanese, Korean), Sweet Carol (English, Portuguese), Gentle Whispering ASMR (English, Russian), and ASMR Suna (Korean).

As shown in Table 1, all channels surpass 1 million subscribers and have published at least 200 videos (see Table 1). All channels link to diverse social media accounts on a variety of services including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Tingles, and Twitch. It's also common for their YouTube profiles to include physical mail addresses, emails, links to digital payments services like PayPal, Patreon, YouTube Perks, as well as Amazon links for those that are part of the Amazon Partner Network, where each product advertised includes a special link in the YouTube video description that directs a small percentage of the final sale to the ASMR creator if the buyer uses it to make the purchase. Of special importance is the considerable number of interactions the most popular sponsored videos gather, displayed as likes and comments on this content. These numbers frequently surpass likes and comments of other non-sponsored videos from the same channel.

Table 1. Popular ASMR channels with official or unofficial sponsored content

#	Channel name	Subscriber count	Total number of videos	Total number of views	Sponsored content	Most viewed sponsored video + Sponsor	Total number of views of most viewed sponsored video + interactions	Notable sponsors
1	Gibi ASMR	4.13 million	896	1.5 billion	Yes	[ASMR] Intense Ear Attention & Mouth Sounds (Ttktk, Clicking, Shoooooop) Sponsored by Honey	18.7 million 178 000 likes 17 100 comments	AudiblePlus, Casetify, Dollar Shave Club, GFuel, Hades, Helix, Honey, Omaze, Reese Canada, Runescape, Raycon
2	ASMR PPOMO	2.57 million	423	692 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include clearly identifiable brands			
3	ASMR Darling	2.54 million	260	603 million	Yes	ASMR Dreamy Scalp Massage Sponsored by Best Fiends	4.1 million 52 000 likes 6300 comments	Best Fiends, Dollar Shave Club, Helix, Shein
4	asmr zeitgeist	2.36 million	201	484 million	Yes	ASMR - Slimy, Sticky, Satisfying! Extremely Tingly Slime Triggers (3+ Hours) Sponsored by Raid	2.2 million 52 000 likes 2400 comments	Raid, Renault Zoe
5	Sweet Carol	2.31 million	1749	547 million	Yes	ASMR: Tasting Popeyes menu - super crispy Sponsored by Popeyes	292 000 18 000 likes 1400 comments	Adidas, Botavo Nuv, Popeyes, Netflix, Nively, Nissin
6	Gentle Whispering ASMR	2.16 million	577	964 million	Yes	-- Relaxing Towel Folding Tutorial -- ASMR • Soft Spoken Sponsored by method	3 million 37 000 likes 2900 comments	Best Fiends, Blue Apron, EyeBuyDirect, Function of Beauty, method, Reese Canada

#	Channel name	Subscriber count	Total number of videos	Total number of views	Sponsored content	Most viewed sponsored video + Sponsor	Total number of views of most viewed sponsored video + interactions	Notable sponsors
7	Chynaunique ASMR	2.06 million	322	356 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include clearly identifiable brands			
8	ASMR Suna	1.81 million	329	445 million	Yes	VLOG ASMR Spending a day to prepare for the week [ENG SUB] Suna's fourth VLOG Sponsored by KitKat	1.4 million 36 000 likes 2100 likes	Downy, KitKat, Lego Korea, Zippo
9	Frivolous-Fox ASMR	1.81 million	828	694 million	Yes	ASMR Ear Eating, Licking & Fluttering ❤️ (New Mic Test) Sponsored by Dollar Shave Club	3 million 46 000 likes 4800 comments	Dollar Shave Club, Green Chef, GFuel, Helix, MunchPak, Raid, Raycon, Surfshark VPN
10	ASMRMagic	1.44 million	231	469 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include clearly identifiable brands			

Source: Compiled by the author.

* Denotes male ASMR artist

Table 2, meanwhile, shows the ten largest Mexican ASMR channels ranked by subscriber count (see Table 2). Each case was manually obtained via YouTube. Sponsored content was found on five of these channels. Like the previous group of mainly English-speaking ASMR creators, most of the Mexican creators are young women who upload content several times a week and maintain a high degree of activity in their comments section. It must be highlighted that three of these channels (Murmullo Latino, Vivi Alto, CocoWhispers) publish videos in English and include textual elements in their videos' descriptions and titles in that language. None of the Mexican ASMR creators considered reach a million subscribers, but just like their predominantly English-speaking counterparts, the Mexican cases analyzed place links to their social media and digital payments services in their video and channel information. Of special note is the much lower number of likes and comments displayed in the most popular sponsored videos of these Mexican creators. All in all, their total number of interactions are much lower than their international counterparts. Furthermore, the number of likes and comments generally remains below or the same as other non-sponsored videos on their YouTube channels.

6. Discussion

The selected variables show a clear and quantifiable interest in ASMR videos that feature sponsored content when the ASMR channel reaches a high number of subscribers, placing it inside the influencer marketing category as defined by Sudha & Sheena (2017).

Additionally, when done correctly, ASMR sponsored content has the capacity to fulfill the requisite conditions of digital marketing linked to an influencer that not only promotes but finds a niche for a particular product or service to be marketed, as demonstrated in Table 1 where some of the most important ASMR channels on YouTube display considerable reach, as well as relevance and resonance for their target audience (see Table 1). Resonance, as defined by Sudha & Sheena (2017), is perhaps the most important concept in digital marketing since it allows the brand and marketer to quantify an interaction, indicated in Tables 1 and 2 as the total number of likes and comments on the most popular sponsored videos from the various ASMR channels analyzed. These interactions transform the passive viewer to an active entity, a prime example that consciousness is being used to reveal

Table 2. Popular Mexican ASMR channels with official or unofficial sponsored content

#	Channel name	Subscriber count	Total number of videos	Total number of views	Sponsored content	Most viewed sponsored video + Sponsor	Total number of views of most viewed sponsored video	Notable sponsors
1	Murmullo Latino ASMR	321 000	572	71 million	Yes	ASMR in Spanish What's in My Phone + Amino APP Sponsored by Amino	128 000 1900 likes 220 comments	Amino
2	Vivi Alto	242 000	322	41 million	Yes	ASMR 🇲🇽 BIKINI SHOWROOM FT. CUPSHE Sponsored by Cupshe	856 000 21 000 likes 1700 comments	Cupshe, PPZ, Rappi, Shein
3	Andrea ASMR	158 000	366	23 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include object manipulation with clearly identifiable brands			
4	Irland ASMR	68 000	48	2.3 million	Yes	ASMR Soft spoken "Haul Stationerypal" (español) 🇲🇽 SORTEO CERRADO Sponsored by Stationery Pal	31 000 No likes 355 comments	Stationery Pal
5	Gongu ASMR *	63 500	442	10 million	Yes	LOS MEJORES AUDIFONOS para ESCUCHAR ASMR - DOR-MIRAS EN MINUTOS Sponsored by BlitzWolf	24 000 1000 likes 138 comments	Banggood, BlitzWolf, ClipClaps, Plan-tas vs Zombies Heroes

#	Channel name	Subscriber count	Total number of videos	Total number of views	Sponsored content	Most viewed sponsored video + Sponsor	Total number of views of most viewed sponsored video	Notable sponsors
6	CocoWhispers	55 900	258	10 million	Yes	ASMR Médico Español: Roleplay Doctora te da una clase sobre El Sueño Sponsored by SubZ	96 000 2400 likes 334 comments	SubZ
7	Gaby Asmr	50 800	171	6 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include object manipulation with clearly identifiable brands			
8	David ASMR *	23 000	222	1.6 million	Yes	ASMR en Español - Surros para Dormir Y Relajarse David ASMR Sponsored by Mu6 Lifelike2 Recording Headset	4800 614 likes 83 comments	Mu6 Lifelike2 Recording Headset
9	Tengo ASMR	22 200	597	4.1 million	No sponsored content detected, but the creator incentivizes donations through digital payment systems to which a special personalized video for the donator is produced			
10	Perlucina smr	15 500	184	2.1 million	No sponsored content detected, but some videos include object manipulation with clearly identifiable brands			

Source: Compiled by the author.

* Denotes male ASMR artist

a reaction with the content displayed on-screen. These quantifiable indicators of interest can be understood as markers under the attention economy principle since attention and consciousness are connected. These findings strongly suggest that the creator behind the ASMR channel, and not the product or service being promoted, is the driving force eliciting viewership action, a hallmark of influencer-based marketing and the attention economy paradigm linked to the commercial purposes of ASMR mentioned by Fest (2019).

It should also be stressed that ASMR channels offer brands a different marketing perspective from other YouTube outlets. Whereas standard YouTube channels follow trends that emphasize shorter videos with fast-paced editing, loud sounds, changing music backgrounds and saturated colors, successful ASMR channels opt for little or no editing cuts, subdued sounds, preferably no background music and a low-key color palette.

As demonstrated in Table 1 (see Table 1), the most viewed sponsored videos can promote a product or a service with equal efficiency, but the innate qualities of the ASMR creator, production frequency and values seem to determine the overall success of the channel as served by the YouTube algorithm, a key difference with regards to the Mexican ASMR creators in Table 2 (see Table 2). Both cohorts, it must be said, manipulate the promoted objects on-screen for long periods of time or play with them in different ways such as taping, squishing, or caressing it in front of camera for it to be clearly identifiable. Such is the case of Gentle Whispering ASMR's 36-minute-long towel-folding video, where the creator promotes extensively the sponsored detergent and bathroom products by actively moving and touching them inside the frame. Other times, as with Mexican ASMR creator CocoWhispers, the promoted brand is linked to a role-play video. In this case, the content is sponsored by a sleep-aiding drug and the role-play puts the viewer inside a 40-minute-long class presentation on the benefits of good quality sleep. A different kind of successful ASMR, in the same vein as the *slow tourism* proposed by Bode (2019), can be seen in Korean creator ASMR Suna, where her most popular sponsored content video gives the viewer an opportunity to observe her routines inside her home in a non-working day.

Also of importance is the fact that some channels prefer service-based advertising over product specific videos, as is the case with Gibi ASMR and ASMR Darling. The most relevant case here is asmr zeitgeist's 180-minute-long video where the creator manipulates different colored slimes that produce low-volume squishy sounds when placed near his highly sensitive microphones. The sponsor of the video, however, is

a fantasy videogame. This goes against Sudha & Sheena's (2017) resonance principle because the product being displayed in front of the viewers and the sponsorship of the video are completely dissimilar in nature. It could be speculated, however, that viewers of asmr zeitgeist's channel are also frequent videogame players, or at least an overlapping portion of his 2.36 million followers.

What is more, Tables 1 and 2 seem to indicate viewers of ASMR content are disposed to consume branded content when the sponsorship integrates correctly with their habitual ASMR videos, considering the number of likes and comments generally does not deviate from non-sponsored content (see Tables 1 and 2). This is especially relevant for brands seeking long-form advertising opportunities based on digital influencer marketing. Unlike at least 65% of viewers who try to skip YouTube ads ("Skipping around the world...", 2017), ASMR consumers *anticipate* a video of long duration to meet their expectations and, as demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2, sponsored content does not seem to be objectionable to them (see Tables 1 and 2). More to the point, according to a survey of 1000 regular ASMR consumers developed by Bode (2019), the community around this digital genre considers the ideal ASMR video should last between 20 and 30 minutes and has an overall positive perception of marketing in ASMR videos. Nine out of ten responded that they have watched sponsored content, that they have no problem with ASMR creators doing sponsored videos and that their favorite type of ASMR marketing involves ASMR videos with sponsorships and short ASMR pre-roll ads. Additionally, Bode's (2019) survey found that correctly indicating the sponsorship is important for the ASMR community, that sponsored videos are a good thing since their favorite ASMR creators need them to make a living, and that they are happy with more traditional media advertisements using ASMR techniques since that reflects a growing recognition around this phenomenon.

All in all, the different data points mentioned in this discussion propound the idea that ASMR marketing, particularly in sponsored videos watched on YouTube, allows brands to reach a considerable number of viewers in a way not available before ASMR became popular. For the marketing to work, the videos must, preferably, understand the intrinsic rules of ASMR on a creative level by acknowledging the fact that the ASMR creator, when successful, is an influencer capable of moving large amounts of attention towards the product or service being advertised. Not only that, sometimes the focus is placed upon a *particular characteristic* of the product showcased in the ASMR video, such as the texture of a chocolate bar that produces certain sounds when cut with a knife (see Korean creator ASMR Suna's video), or the pattern of a swimsuit made of certain fabrics (as Mexican

creator Vivi Alto's 21-minute-long video shows), or even the "crunchiness" of a brand of deep-fried chicken (observe Brazilian creator Sweet Carol's video slowly tasting different fast food dishes). These are only a handful of examples where the content produced by ASMR creators adds value to their digital communities, otherwise the considerable number of likes and comments displayed in Tables 1 and 2 would be hard to achieve. At the very least, these identifiable metrics show the viewership is curious about the products being marketed.

Since outside examination does not allow for a more detailed internal metrics analysis of the selected ASMR channels, the quantifiable variables used in this research suggest, minimally, that many ASMR YouTube viewers are consuming sponsored content in a novel fashion by giving their attention to branded content that fits within their scope of interest. This could be a boon for marketing specialists that wish to increase brand awareness given the video length preferred by most ASMR fans. Digital interaction is high when the service or product is well-integrated into the video, or presents an interesting narrative to the viewer, such as ASMR Darling's 31-minute-long digital scalp massage where she shows different cosmetic products to perform her role-play besides the official sponsorship of the video. In this case her audience rewarded her with 4.1 million views on that video only, 52 000 likes and 6300 mostly positive comments. The data collected for this analysis indicates that tingly and relaxing *sponsored content* is still considered *good content* by the ASMR community.

In summary, descriptive Tables 1 and 2, while only showing quantitative external metrics available freely on YouTube, reveal that regular ASMR viewers are not opposed to consuming sponsored videos when they consider the content being watched offers them value, as demonstrated by the high view count and large number of interactions documented in this analysis (see Tables 1 and 2). Such data, insofar as previous ASMR marketing literature is concerned, had not been registered and compared for academic purposes. While Labrecque (2020) and Antonova (2019) focused on the theoretical implications of ASMR marketing, and Chae *et al.* (2021), Lee & Chen (2021), Pham & Sun (2020), Sin & Yun (2019) and Lee (2019) concentrated on the most effective techniques to manufacture ASMR with marketing purposes, the data shared in this analysis sheds light on the interconnection between different brands and ASMR influencers as well as the expected results when sponsoring one of their videos by quantifiable data such as view count, likes, and comments.

The combination of YouTube reach, relevance, and resonance, as defined by Sudha & Sheena (2017), place ASMR creators in the digital influencer category,

more so when an activity requires a high degree of attention from the viewer, as Tran & Choi (2021) noted. This is especially relevant for companies, independently of the marketing objective selected for a given product or campaign (awareness, creation of brand identity, brand image, brand culture, lead generation, etc.). In other words, top ASMR channels have gained the necessary number of “eyeballs” to be included in the influencer marketing grouping by virtue of the audience interest reflected in their considerable number of subscribers, video views, posting regularity, as well as previous paid sponsorships.

The same cannot be said about most Mexican ASMR channels analyzed. After both groups of ASMR creators were compared, it's clear that the largest Mexican ASMR channels lag well behind in their reach and merchandising capacity versus their international counterparts. Five of the Mexican channels include openly branded content or advertisements in contrast to seven of the mainly English-speaking group. Digital metrics differences are more pronounced: while in the Mexican group creator Murmullo Latino ASMR has the most subscribers at 320 000, in the international set, Gibi ASMR has over 4 million. Of note is the fact that the Mexican channels include at least one link to their social media profiles, as well as digital payments services, which could mean that the creator receives some sort of monetary compensation that goes beyond the openly advertised products seen in some of their videos and monetization options enabled by YouTube. While it is clear regular ASMR consumers reward sponsored content when the video creator shows it values the ASMR community, as documented in Table 1 (see Table 1), Mexican ASMR artists interest in sponsored content is harder to gauge, as observed in Table 2 (see Table 2). This poses a challenge to brands interested in advertising themselves with Mexican ASMR viewers, since there are scarce few benchmarks in this group, unlike those shown in Table 1, where products and services are more likely to find at least one previous ASMR marketing effort in their industry (food, cosmetics, videogames, subscription service, clothing, etc.).

As of this date, besides the distinction of the Mexican accent and well-known cultural traditions and features of the country like certain food dishes, sweets, linguistic expressions, media references, and slice-of-life comedic situations, it's difficult to find any clear marketing trend in the largest Mexican ASMR channels. This remains paradoxical since the larger international ASMR channels hold a strong influence over Mexican ASMR channels. It's not uncommon for local creators to copy the most important trends, viral challenges, or role-plays from their international counterparts. Adding to this, Mexican ASMR videos, taken altogether, do utilize

the three ASMR marketing tactics described above by Antonova (2019), but not every channel seems to comprehend the reach, relevance, and resonance triad as defined by Sudha & Sheena (2017) to achieve more ambitious marketing goals. Even so, in sharp contrast to the mostly English-speaking ASMR group, no Mexican ASMR channel produces branded content with the same regularity as their peers. This could be due to the lower audiovisual production values of the analyzed Mexican sample and the lack of sponsorships by Mexican brands, a significant contrast when compared to popular English-speaking ASMR creators. In the latter, high-profile international sponsorships abound, as well as local products and services. The latter group, in addition, presents a large variety of sponsors from different sectors, while the Mexican group is limited to clothing, digital games and services, and some electronic gadgets.

This does not mean that Mexican ASMR artists are excluded from participating in the attention economy described by Fest (2019), but competing head-to-head in this new marketing arena with international ASMR creators with the intention of gaining a larger audience would most likely require an increase in their production values regarding sound, subject framing, and lighting in most videos to increase audience interest and interaction. If attention is the most sought-after good in today's digital environment, Mexican creators find themselves in an attractive place to fuse the particularities of their local culture with international trends and production styles to procure the sensation of care and companionship that a large group of ASMR viewers seek when consuming this type of content on YouTube, as noted by Fest (2019). Moreover, this "mediated care" and "affective labor" is not limited to young Mexican female ASMR creators, according to the results obtained in this analysis, since two of the most popular local creators are male, a finding that diverts from Fest's (2019) theory on the intrinsic qualities of success of ASMR as a digital phenomenon.

It should also be underscored that Mexico has been one of the most severely battered countries during the SARS-CoV-2 COVID-19 pandemic, possibly increasing the overall sense of precarity and anxiety as a dominant social structure, creating a strong incentive for Mexican artists to produce more videos with a higher frequency rate. Equally as important is the fact that, on average, about 85 million Mexican internet users connect daily to the internet for 8 hours and 20 minutes, and roughly half of that time is spent on social media ("*16º Estudio sobre los Hábitos...*", 2021). A combination of attention and interaction from viewers, as demonstrated in Table 1 when analyzing some of the most important

and successful international ASMR channels, indicates regular ASMR audiences are interested and curious in sponsored content when it meets the community's expectations, something Mexican ASMR creators have not yet achieved with the same frequency and determination as their more marketing savvy international counterparts (see Table 1).

7. Closing Remarks

This study sought to further the academic implications of ASMR research, a nascent field in the media and business landscapes. The findings extend the notion that ASMR has become a helpful tool for marketers reaching a large audience accustomed to the overall production of English-speaking creators that, thanks to the regularity of their video publication and the close-knit communities they have cultivated, have cultivated a sponsorship-friendly space with their audiences. These findings coincide with previous research on ASMR and marketing by Chae *et al.* (2021), Lee & Chen (2021), Pham & Sun (2020), Antonova (2019), and Bode (2019) in the sense that, when used effectively, ASMR is a powerful vehicle for digital marketers. The data collected for this paper demonstrate that, when done correctly, sponsored ASMR videos can extend the reach, relevance, and resonance of products and services and produce quantifiable interactions for marketing specialists and brand decision-makers. Since this data had not been collected previously in academic circles, it marks a small but relevant waypoint in emergent digital marketing techniques.

Yet, while English-speaking ASMR channels have proven attractive to different brands, as shown in Table 1 of this study, the same cannot be said of Mexican ASMR channels, where only a few of them have received sponsored content with regularity, as opposed to their English-speaking counterparts (see Table 1). As noted above, local ASMR channels lack the production quality and marketing savvy of the English-speaking group. These findings are relevant so marketers can avoid the unsuccessful paths taken up to this point by the majority of Mexican ASMR creators consolidated in Table 2 (see Table 2).

Having said that, it seems that Mexican ASMR viewers are equally or more interested in the pleasure of consumption delineated previously by Fest (2019). This poses a huge opportunity for local ASMR creators even if purchasing power per capita in countries like Mexico is below that of highly industrialized economies.

“Haul” and “unboxing” videos are far less common within the sample of Mexican ASMR channels selected for this analysis, when compared to the larger, mainly English-speaking channels, but they are not totally absent either. Local channels could take advantage of the “vicarious consumption” noted by Fest (2019) to create new advertising opportunities through aural and visual triggers that go beyond the original purchase of a product.

Additionally, given Mexican social mores that put a high value on care and attentiveness towards others, as well the rapid pace of urbanization in most of the country, which in turn can produce elevated feelings of loneliness and isolation, local ASMR creators could play an important role in the attention economy. If taken seriously, this could translate into relevant practical implications for ASMR creators and marketing professionals who wish to capitalize on this genre of videos, since the interest in consuming such content is clear, as shown by the large number of interactions quantified in the more successful ASMR channels and videos noted in this analysis. Marketing professionals could teach Mexican ASMR creators the correct way to properly market their channel with the intent to formalize a business model that benefits both parties via sponsorships, for example.

It must be underscored, however, that the overall local success of this new marketing strategy hinges on higher local production standards, adjustments to flourishing trends previously tested in larger and more successful ASMR channels, and a precision use of social media channels to increase their reach beyond YouTube’s algorithm. Having said that, Mexican marketing experts should view ASMR as an additional tool to advertise their products and services, since, as demonstrated by much larger mainly English-speaking ASMR channels, human cognition can be monetized through access to video platforms such as YouTube if the correct strategies and tactics are implemented in this blossoming field.

Lastly, since this is the first time the Mexican ASMR scene is documented in the academic sphere, new studies must be conducted to further the findings of this work, in particular for those who view ASMR as a viable marketing tool in emerging economies, not to mention the social and technological aspects of this digital phenomenon. For starters, no academic research has been carried out with the local creators themselves, where new and rich insights could be obtained with qualitative methods.



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