

INDIGENISM IN THE TIMES OF INSTAGRAM

Analysis on mexican
indigenism Insta-culture

Politecnico di Milano
School of Design
Master of Science in Communication Design
Academic year: 2020/2021
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To my parents who always encourage me to follow my dreams.

Abstract



Figure 1, Maty García, Volar

Instagram è una piattaforma social interamente dedicata alla condivisione di video e foto, questa è diventata uno spazio di comunicazione visiva con regole e formati specifici che hanno dato vita a diverse culture visive.

Ho incentrato la mia ricerca in una particolare cultura visiva. Mi sono focalizzata sulla condivisione di contenuti inerenti alla vita di persone all'interno di tribù indigene, dei loro usi e costumi, il loro cibo e la loro condizione socioculturale. Tramite questa ricerca voglio mostrare come Instagram è diventato uno strumento per promuovere queste comunità, preservando la loro identità e tradizioni.

Partendo dalla domanda "Come si è sviluppato l'indigenismo Messicano su Instagram?" ho sviluppato una ricerca finalizzata a scoprire quali tipologie di account promuovono questo indigenismo e in che modo. Quali sono le ragioni per condividere questo tipo di contenuto, in che contesto interagiscono, il loro comportamento; così come l'effetto e l'influenza della diffusione digitale delle comunità tramite la piattaforma.

Per rispondere a questa domanda, dopo un'analisi di contesto preliminare (Visual Culture, Indigenism, e Instagram) ho realizzato tre tipi di ricerca: analisi visiva dei dati, interviste e sondaggi.

La ricerca prevede un'ipotetica situazione di indigenismo Messicano, su Instagram, che consiste in cinque principali tipologie di account, tra i quali ci sono i personali, di brand, promozione di culture indigene, turismo e cultura. Questi condividono principalmente fotografie di indigeni, il loro artigianato e paesaggi messicani. Le Insta-culture pubblicano contenuti in modo da creare un'immagine positiva e ridurre le discriminazioni verso queste minoranze. Gli account in analisi mettono in luce queste comunità pre-ispaniche, che sembra si stiano estinguendo, cercando di promuovere i loro prodotti, incrementando il loro turismo. Inoltre la condivisione di ritratti di persone indigene permette a queste etnie di mantenere la loro immagine come simbolo, poiché dopo l'indipendenza messicana la raffigurazione della persona indigena divenne simbolica a livello nazionale per la loro identità culturale; tutto questo viene tramandato tuttora attraverso Instagram.

Instagram is an entirely visual platform which purpose is to enable users to share videos and photos, and it has become a space for aesthetic visual communication with specific rules and formats that have shaped different visual cultures.

In this research, I am focusing on one particular visual culture. I focused on people posting indigenous tribes, sharing photos and videos of indigenous people, their food, handicrafts, and socio-cultural situations. Through this research, I intend to show how Instagram is becoming a medium for promoting indigenous communities and preserving their identities and traditions.

Starting from the question “How is Mexican Indegenism developed on Instagram?” I developed research aimed to discover which types of accounts are promoting indigenism and how they are doing it, people’s motives for sharing, the context in which they interact, and their behaviors, as well as the effects and influence of the digital diffusion of the communities through the platform.

To answer this question, after a preliminary context analysis (Visual Culture, Indigenism, and Instagram) I realized three types of research: visual data analysis, interviews, and surveys.

The research provides a scenario of Mexican Indigenism on Instagram that consists of 5 main typologies of accounts which are personal accounts, brands, organizations, indigenous promotion, tourism and culture. The accounts mainly share pictures of indigenous people, their handicrafts, and Mexican landscapes. The insta-culture is posting this content in order to promote a positive image of them and reduce discrimination. They are visualizing these pre-hispanic communities that might seem to be lost and are promoting their products and boosting their tourism. They are mainly sharing indigenous people’s portraits because since the Mexican Independence the image of the indigenous became a national symbol of distinction and cultural identity, something that is still being transmitted through Instagram.

Abstract



Figure 2, Maty García, Brenda

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Introduction



Figure 3, Maty García, Huautla de Jiménez

Mexico is one of the countries with the most Instagram users in Latin America, there are 100 million active Mexican users who check it constantly. Instagram is an app that has changed how people in Mexico and other countries interact with each other. Being a visual social media has revolutionized our contemporary society and its visual languages. The app that was born in 2010, has gone through many updates and it has become the most popular visual channel of our times.

Users are producing content from their phones and gadgets, capturing, editing, and publishing photos and videos in creative ways through aesthetic choices that define them in different visual cultures. There is no one interpretation of Instagram but many different perspectives and languages that can be observed in the way that different people use it. Instagram has many different visual groups that are determined by their content and aesthetic choices rather than demographics.

As an active Instagram user, I have noticed a phenomenon on my feed and stories. Mexican people tend to post pictures of Indigenous people. Going into different accounts I noticed that is something common and I asked myself why do they do that? This tendency to post indigenous people gave me a starting point for my thesis. Looking into other accounts I found that there are people that specifically promote Indigenous people and cultures through their pages. Searching for other indigenous related visual art references I got into the works of famous Mexican muralists and painters of the 20th century, and indagating into the story of them I discovered that their works were influenced by “the indigenism movement” which aims to promote a positive image of the indigenous person and which made the image of the indigenous a symbol of Mexican cultural identity.

After doing theoretical research on the indigenism art movement in Mexico I decided to do exploratory research that aimed to discover how this movement influenced

Mexican Instagrammers. To achieve this, my dissertation explores texts referring to themes such as visual cultures, Instagram development, Instagramism, and Indigenism. I also did research using quantitative and qualitative methods, using Instagram as the main tool for visual data analysis.

The main question around which the whole thesis is developed is: How is the Mexican Indigenism movement being approached through Instagram? The following questions also emerged for the research: Who is posting and what are they posting? Which are the reasons why they post this content? How do these users interact with the indigenous person when portrayed? How do they interact with their audience? What do Mexican users think about these posts?

By developing an analysis of the different accounts posting Indigenous-related content and the type of things that they post I was able to understand how Mexican indigenous people and their communities are being visualized. Instagram, in this way, benefits people and communities through promoting a positive image of them that results in artisanal products sales, tourism, and cultural genocide avoidance.

The goal of the paper can be summarized in the understanding of this visual culture which is using Instagram as a platform to visualize remote indigenous communities. This was done by the collection of different information and data, insights, and opinions.

The first chapter provides a review of the themes covered in the thesis, beginning with a study on visual cultures, going into the evolution of Instagram as a visual communication media, and the analysis of Mexican Indigenism and how it's influence on social media. The second chapter moves to the phase of data analysis, summarizing the methods of quantitative and qualitative research carried out, which include visual data analysis, interviews and a survey. Third chapter exposes the results obtained from the three research methods and an analysis of them.



Figure 4, Maty García, La Conquista

1. Panoramic of mexican indigenism insta-culture

This chapter offers an overview of the topics covered in the thesis, starting from an examination of visual cultures, moving into the development of Instagram as a visual communication platform, and the overview and history of Mexican Indigenism.

1.1 Visual cultures

The actual internet model is a world that has exponentially grown the images. Digital social media are spaces that enhance the high mobility of social interactions and processes of symbolic exchange based on information. The overabundance of images, especially photographic ones, is incorporated into our digital lives. The image has stopped being a centripetal figure of the virtual universe, to become the predominant emblem of digital social media.

The majority of the visual materials that are now part of the iconic universe of social media have to do with photography. For this to happen, new technological consumption patterns occurred, in particular the appear-

ance of digital objects like digital cameras, and smartphones. These digital objects also allow producers to manipulate and symbolically alternate original content. As a result, there has been an intense speed of exchanges and at the same time a visual explosion leading to an overpopulation of images: digital visual explosion.

Images are now fundamental tools to understand the mechanisms that articulate and shape contemporary society. Social media represents an opportunity to understand and interpret the emergence of new visual cultures.

1.1.1 Visual cultures history

From the early 1980s, the study of culture has become overwhelmingly significant in social sciences. In an interview with Mitchel, Raymond Williams suggests that culture is the structure of symbols, images, and mediations that make a society possible. The concepts are interdependent, you cannot have a society that doesn't have a culture, and culture is an expression of social relations. However the culture is not the same thing as society: society consists of the relations among people, culture the whole set of mediations that make those relations possible. Visual culture is what makes the possible society of people with eyes. (2019, Howels)

Our culture understands everything better through images, and the world of text is being substituted by the world of image. It is not the first time this happens, let's remember that cathedrals and churches are full of sculptures and frescos that tell the stories of the bible for a public that, at that moment, was an alphabet. Then when the population began to read, the society moved towards literature. Images have always been part of our culture, but since the arrival of mobile technologies and social media, images have become the principal means of communication. The human experience is being visualized, people are investing more and more free time in visual communication media, spending on average 2 hours and 25 minutes daily on social media.¹

The image has become not just a medium of expression and pre inscription of the senses, but a universal language, a natural and spontaneous form of relating with each other by sharing images. This revalorization of the image is also making us reflect on the im-

portance of: the development of our visual culture, how we learn to see, visualize and in-visualize. (2016, Mirzoeff)

As Howels describes in his book, some researchers use the term visual culture to denote new theoretical approaches in art history, some want to expand the professional territory of art studies to include artifacts from all historic periods and cultures, another emphasis the process of seeing across epochs, while still others think of the category of visual as encompassing nontraditional media- the visual Cultures not only of television and digital media but also of science, medicine, and law. (2019, Howels)

Nicholas Mirzoeff insists that visual culture "is something different from art history with a little bit of theory, he calls visual culture: the interface between all the disciplines dealing with the visibility of Contemporary culture." Images allow us to view cultures, they make us spectators of the way they interact, behave and express. Aesthetics provide a manifestation of cultures themselves. "Visual Culture is tactic with which to study the genealogy, definitions and functions" of today's life from the point of view of a culture". (1999, Mirzoeff)

We are immersed in a digital era where the impact of images and the visual inputs are constant. The Contemporary society has developed a visual code where images contain semantic meanings that need to be recognized, as if we were talking of a new language. There is now a need to interpret the post-modern globalization of the visual as part of everyday life. That is, not directing the importance to the medium, but to the relationship of the image with the viewer.

¹ Statista., Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2020, 2020, URL (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>) [20/03/2021]

1.1.2 Visual cultures semiotic approach and context

In our contemporary society, images are part of our daily lives and the visual aspect is giving more sense and shape to our world through iconic immediacy, this is why they should be analyzed from the point of view of semiotics: “the science that studies the role of signs as part of social life” (1974, Saussure, p.16). Semiotics was viewed by Saussure as the key to unlock a variety of cultural phenomena all of which are various sign systems.

The first theories on semiotics are fundamental for understanding the actual visual theories that have evolved from new technological advances. Semiotics is the basis for studying Contemporary visual cultures.

An important interpretation of the image and photography was advanced from the book by Roland Barthes, *The Echo Chamber*. Through this book, Barthes claims the existence of a deep bond between photography and the object represented in the photo. Barthes states that the photograph reports the existence of a specific object. Therefore, the presence of a photograph is a kind of certification of the existence of the object itself, it gives the certainty that a certain event happened, somewhere and in a precise moment. (2003, Barthes, p.130)

The image, according to Barthes, represents the affectivity of an object and prevents us from taking the right distance from it. This is why, almost always, individuals support images with a language explanatory report. From his point of view, semiotics are mainly useful to explore the connotation of the signs visually, in which the images are significant of specific moments.

Umberto Eco is another theorist who contributed to the development of semiotics. Photography differs from drawings and paintings because it represents both objects that trace them. The photography lies on the border between semiotic and semi semiotic, and between sign and no-sign. In other words, it means a certain object is achieved by deduction thanks to a set of stimuli. Leaving from the statement that “the semiotics deals with everything that can be considered a sign”, Eco’s theories expand not only towards “signs”, but on anything that can “represent” something else, like photography. (1979, Eco, p.23)

In the digital era, the technological barriers between emisor and receptor have derived in the potentialities of the social networks, so this proliferation of images also corresponds to a redistribution of the traditional forms of spectatorial, where there is no longer a distinction between a space of observation and performative space, but concentrates everything in a single public performer.

At the same time that the content created by users has proliferated in the last decade, photography undergoes substantial changes. In the nineties, Fontcuberta defined photography as “a sign that, indeed, requires a relationship of physical causality with the object to be achieved. The object represents itself by the light it reflects. The image is nothing more than the trace of the impact of that light on the photosensitive surface: a stored trace, a memory trace”. (1997, Fontcuberta) But in 2011, the same author redefined it: “In these photos, the playful and self-exploratory will prevail over memory. Taking photos

and showing them on social networks is part of the seduction games and communication rituals of the new post photographic urban subcultures of which, although led by young people and adolescents, very few are left out. Photos no longer collect memories to keep but messages to send and exchange: they become pure communication gestures...” (2011, Fontbuberta) After the digital and mobile revolution of user networks, photography is no longer memory, it is instant. It no longer stores, but shows: “it’s me”, “I’m / was here”, “I bought this”, “we came here”. Photography shared on social networks is an ephemeral indication of millions of inconsequential moments if considered in isolation, but it can provide new knowledge about spaces, the bodies that occupy them, aesthetics, ways of life and the meaning of photographic practice in a given time and place if studied collectively.

From these quick observations emerges the new cultural dimension of the image as an object constructed in the social, as well as variable in the historical: the discontinuity resides in the fact that today the power of the visual, its capacity for fascination, is diluted in a postmodern liquidity that evens out the high and the low and makes the coexistence between different registers possible, thanks to the omnipotence of social media.

Images are a way of representing cultures and identities. According to the culturalist thought of Hall (2013, Hall), to represent is to give meaning to the experience, giving it value and identity. Meanings organize and regulate social practices, since these include the construction of identities, representa-

tions and forms of human socialization, and are part of culture understood as a semiotic system. (1973, Geertz)

Lev Manovich has explored the way that digital images are representing our society with his book “Instagram and contemporary Image”.² He places Instagram image culture within a rich cultural and historical context, including histories of photography, cinema, graphic design, as well as contemporary social media, design trends, music video, and k-pop. At the same time, it uses Instagram as a window into the identities of a young global generation connected by common social media platforms, cultural sensibilities, and visual aesthetics. With this study, he provides an overview of the subjects and aesthetics of shared images around the world.

² Manovich Lev., *Instagram and contemporary Image*, 2017, <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/instagramand-contemporary-image>, [23/04/2021]

1.2 Instagram

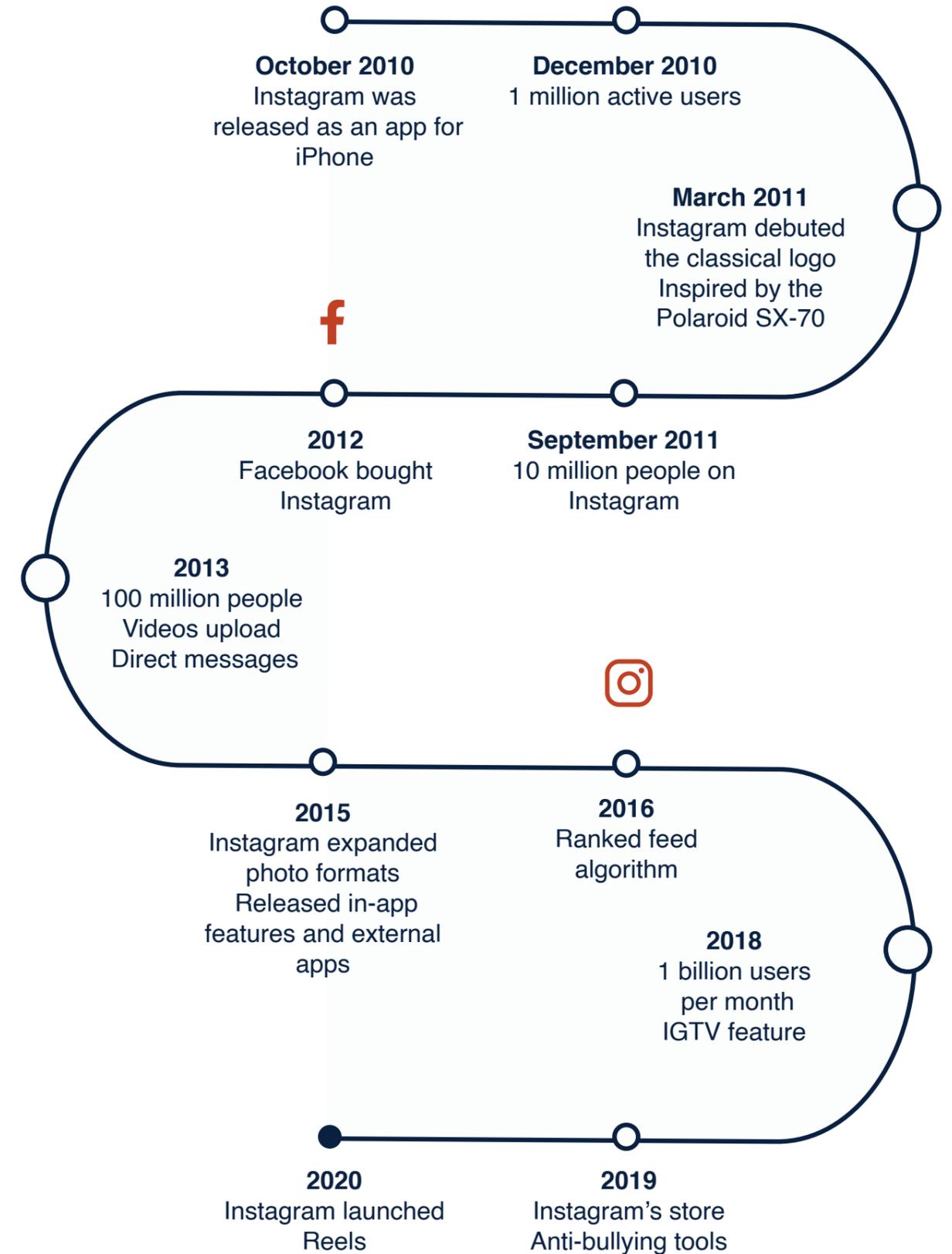
The human is by nature a sociable being, it cannot live alone, it has to satisfy certain basic needs like enabling relationships with other humans. In sociology, the term social media is used to analyze interactions between individuals, groups, organizations, or societies since the end of the 19th century.

The developments in online technology and web 2.0 have enabled user interfaces that are easy, accessible, and interactive. In the digital era, social media are the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities, and mobility. (2018, Tuten and Solomon)

Social networks have shaped the way that our contemporary society interacts and they have become a part of the daily lives of millions of people. Social media is the number one online activity worldwide.

The networks provide users with communities, entertainment, e-commerce and publishing opportunities. They are systems of participation, where users can post, create, share and play. They are platforms for instant communicating and socializing.

The most popular social media are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube, Tik-Tok and Instagram. Instagram is a social network that allows users to upload images, and videos with multiple filters, and effects in order to share them through the platform or in other social media.



Graphic 1, Instagram evolution

1.2.1 Instagramism

The term “Instagramism” is an analogy to modern art movements such as futurism, cubism, surrealism, etc. Instagramism offers its vision of the world and its visual language. But unlike modernist art movements, Instagramism is shaped by millions of authors connected by, and participating in, Instagram and other social networks. (2017, Manovich)

The Image cultures that develop with digital media are shaped not just by technologies and the way in which people use them, but also by cultural “languages”, that Manovich defines to be systems of conventions and techniques that define the subjects, narratives, editing, compositions, lighting, sequencing, and other image characteristics. A “visual language” represents systematic choices made on every visual dimension recognized as relevant for creators and audiences.

With the use of Instagram, cultural trends are emerging and are becoming popular at a quick speed, and people develop small variations rather than making something different and innovative. Contemporary cultural identity is just established by some small differences and variations.

Instagrammer is the name given to someone who regularly shares images, or other things such as video or text, on the social media service Instagram.³

Instagrammers own the means of cultural production, they have gadgets, the skills and the understanding for using the app in a creative way to promote themselves. Instagram is developing an aesthetic society where social media tribes are emerging and sustaining themselves through aesthetic experiences and choices.

1.2.2 Professional, designed and casual photos

Through an analysis of different visual data, Manovich classified images on Instagram according to their visual aesthetic, resulting in 3 categories: casual, professional and designed.

Casual photos

The main purpose of casual images is to document an experience, a situation, or represent a person or a group of people. A person who captures and shares a casual photo does not try to control contrast, colors, and composition. Representative function dominates over aesthetic function. Casual photography on Instagram is dominated by the human world.

Designed

These are photos that have been arranged and edited to have a distinct stylized look. While retaining the basic properties of modern photography, these images also have characteristics of modern graphic design. Designed photos adopt the aesthetics that go back to a different tradition of modernist art, design, and photography of the 1920s. It was further developed in commercial fashion, advertising, and editorial photography. These photos are edited with external apps that help edit, saturation, composition, lights, tones, etc. They follow a particular style that is coherent with the rest of the images in the Instagram grid.

Professional

Professional photos are created by people who are explicitly or implicitly aware of the rules of “professional photography” that also developed during the twentieth century. The authors of these photos try to follow these rules, conventions, and techniques, which they likely learn from either online tutorials, posts, videos or classes. Thus, in my use the term “professional” refers not to people who earn living from their photography but to photographs that follow particular aesthetics. The lists of such photographic rules may differ but what is important is that they were fully established before Instagram and mobile photography stage.

Between this kind of photographs we can find:

- Ideal subjects:
- allegorical composition,
- history composition,
- portrait,
- scene of everyday life
- landscape,
- animal,
- still-life.

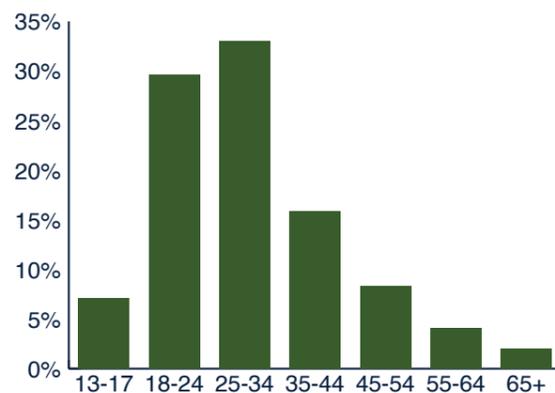
³ Cambridge dictionary., Instagrammer, 2021 URL (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/instagramme>) [1/04/2021]

1.2.3 Instagram functioning

Instagram is one of the most rapidly evolving social media. According to data from Sensor Tower ⁴ Instagram was among the top five most-downloaded apps in both the App Store and via Google Play in 2020.

The platform is largely dominated by Millennials and Gen Z. According to Statista ⁵ the majority of Instagram's users range around 18 to 34 years old.

Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as October 2020



Graphic 2, Distribution of Instagram users

Above appealing to the younger crowd, Instagram is known for its frequency of use. For example, 63% of Americans say they check Instagram daily. ⁶ Also, a research conducted in Australia exposes that the average user spends at least 7 hours per week on Instagram. ⁷

It's already been discussed that Instagram is a visual platform where the most common posts are the image post, but the app allows the users to play with different functionalities and media like videos.

One of the most popular functionalities are the stories, which allow users to post with a higher frequency without over posting in their feed. They are generally more organic images and videos that do respect the "on the go" posting initial purpose of the app.

When users post a story, they disappear within 24 hours. Instagram stories integrate the following settings:

- **Type:** Creates a text post
- **Music:** Pairs a music clip of your choice to an image or video
- **Live:** Captures and publishes live content to your Instagram for your followers to watch
- **Superzoom:** Adds an animated zoom to a video
- **Focus:** Focuses on a subject and blurs the background
- **Hands-Free:** This allows you to capture video without having to hold the record button

According to Instagram ⁸ themselves, 500+ million people use Stories daily and one-third of the most-viewed stories come from brands. These stories aren't restricted by the Instagram algorithm.

Instagram Story Highlights are Instagram Stories that have been preserved past their 24-hour limit and posted to an Instagram profile. They can be found in small circles under an Instagram bio. Story Highlights are the user's accounts. For a story to be in the highlights it needs to be a previously-posted Instagram story.

Instagram has a live video option for sharing content real time. Once a live video is started, any followers currently active in the app receive a notification stating that someone they follow is transmitting live. IGTV is another functionality where users can watch long-form, vertical video from other Instagram creators. The difference between IGTV, and Instagram Live is that IGTV is uploaded footage, which gives users the opportunity to edit and fine-tune their video. Instagram Live is filmed and uploaded live.

Instagram recently incorporated Reels, which is very similar to the Chinese app Tiktok. With Reels, users can record and edit together 15 to 30-second vertical video clips set to music and share them to their Stories, Explore Feed, and the Reels tab on a user's profile. Reels is considered to be a direct response to the growing popularity of Tiktok, which generated "the most downloads for any app ever in a quarter" in Q1 2020, according to Adweek. (2020, Nover)

Reels algorithm looks similar to the Tiktok For You page. It's likely influenced by who the users already follow, what content they interact with, and where they are located.

Hashtags can also be used on Instagram. Hashtags refer to keywords or keyword phrases that are spelled without spaces and prefaced with a pound (#) sign. (2020, Kollowich) They are generally used to reference events, conferences, pop culture, entertainment, or recurring themes and are a great way to make your content more visible. Ori-

ginally popularized by Twitter, hashtags are now on multiple social networks. Instagram feeds are always changing, and with that much content, it can be difficult for a post or account to get noticed. That's where hashtags come in. On Instagram, hashtags aggregate posts from a variety of users into a single feed, although private accounts can't be shown. Instagram makes it simple and easy for users to find tagged content.

Another aspect that has been very popular on social media is influencers. Influencers are Instagram users that possess a great ability to influence other users, well-established credibility, and a large audience with high engagement rates. From a marketing point of view, an influencer is a person that can influence potential clients or buyers. Companies develop commercial relationships with influencers to expand their reach on the platform and sell more. Influencer marketing is popular nowadays because consumers tend to trust them more than the brands.

According to Instagram ⁹ 87% of people say that an influencer has driven them to make a purchase. They also indicate that 70% of "shopping enthusiasts" turn to Instagram for product exploration. Even if people aren't buying from influencers directly, there's no denying their impact on making Instagram an ecommerce platform. For those that do purchase from them, standard image posts (78%) and Stories (73%) are regarded as the most effective types of influencer content according to MediaKix.

⁴ Sensor tower., Store Intelligence Data Digest, 2021, URL (https://www.biblio.polimi.it/fileadmin/user_upload/tutorial/Citare_le_fonti_evitando_il_plagio_02.pdf) [1/04/2021]

⁵ Statista., Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of January 2021, by age and gender, 2021, URL (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/248769/age-distribution-of-worldwide-instagram-users/>) [1/04/2021]

⁶ Pew Research center., 8 facts about Americans and Instagram, 2020, URL (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/21/8-facts-about-americans-and-instagram/>) [1/04/2021]

⁷ Yellow social media., Yellow Social Media Report, 2020, URL (https://2k5zke3drtv7fuwec1mzuxgv-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Yellow_Social_Media_Report_2020_Consumer.pdf) [1/04/2021]

⁸ Instagram., Business, 2021 URL (<https://business.instagram.com/a/stories-ads>) [1/04/2021]

⁹ Instagram., Business, op. cit.

Influencers are divided into three categories: nano, micro, macro and mega influencers. (2017, Tegtmeier)

Nano influencers have a high level of authority but a limited reach, a high level of commitment in their social group and a maximum follower number of 1,000. Any social media user can be assigned to this group. Particular forms in this category are the product fans or brand advocates who stand out as “persuaders” regarding particular opinions on a product in a social group.

Micro influencers are experts in certain topics. They are characterized by credibility, relevance and great social media engagement, interacting with the followers. Parasocial relationships, which are one-sided relationships in which one person expands emotional energy, interest as well as time and the other party, the person, is completely unaware of the existence of the other, is established and familiarity with the influencer is built. (2021, Bennett)

Macro influencers are influencers with followers in the six- and seven-digit range. In this area, the commitment rate drops to only 5 to 25%. A high frequency of postings characterizes this group of influencers, to create an artificial connection about updates. In contrast to the three above mentioned types of influencers, mega influencers are influencers with follower numbers from seven-digit range and a minimal commitment rate of 1 to 5%, including celebrities and stars who have already worked in the classic testimonial business and also manifest their prominence in the social media. (2017, Tegtmeier)

Influencers are to be seen as role models and people with whom the user can identify. With regard to the increasing importance of social media and due to the postponement of information procurement, influencers are becoming increasingly important for companies and the information process. (2021, Tamble)

1.2.4 Instagram visual cultures

Instagram can better be understood as a channel for communication in the extensive scenery of visual social media cultures. It is a social media platform, but the visual focus is extremely important in its success and relevance.

Instagram is a symbol for understanding and mapping social media cultures. Rather than there being a singular understanding and use of Instagram, many different perception approaches and languages are visible in how different groups use the platform. The app

is well known for the abundance of cultures that aren't determined by particular demographic categories.

There are a variety of cultures posting different things. We can recognize people using it to post pictures of their lives, others posting travels photos, feeds full of selfies, memes profiles, brands accounts, fashion influencers, foodies, users who share and consume visual poetry, healthy communities, architecture photographers, digital illustrators, feminist movement groups and movie fan pages just to mention a few.

1.2.5 Instagram use in Mexico

Mexicans are sociable people that go social also online. 100 million people are the number of active social media users in Mexico.¹⁰ Even though other social media channels like Youtube are more popular in the country, Instagram is popular, especially with young generations. It is the second Latin American country after Brazil with the most Instagram users.¹¹ Instagram users in Mexico are really active on the platform and they check it constantly. In a survey made in 2019 by Statista, nearly 24 percent of Instagram users

surveyed in Mexico claimed to spend an average of one hour per day on this social media platform, while approximately 15.5 percent of respondents said they spent less than one hour on it.¹²

The main content shared by them are photos of themselves, but they also post selfies, trips, photos with friends, photos of events they attend, images with cultural content, photos with family, food, videos and photos of their work.¹³

¹⁰ Hootsuite., We are social, 2021 URL (<https://wearesocial.com/digital-2021>) [23/04/2021]

¹¹ Statista., Countries with the most Instagram users in Latin America as of January 2021, 2021 URL (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/950923/countries-with-most-instagram-users-latin-america/>) [23/04/2021]

¹² Statista., Average daily usage time of Instagram users in Mexico as of March 2019, 2020 URL (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1071236/average-daily-usage-time-instagram-users-mexico/>) [23/04/2021]

¹³ Statista., Main content users shared on Instagram in Mexico as of March 2019, 2020 URL (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1071280/mexico-main-content-shared-instagram-networks/>) [23/04/2021]

1.3 Indigenism as a visual culture



Indigenism is a movement that promotes a positive view of indigenous or ethnic societies. It has had a bigger impact in Latin American, where people have been suffering from discrimination since they were conquered by European countries.

When the Mexican independence occurred, the “Indian” became an icon of identity and distinction from Spain. After the revolution in 1920, indigenism became the most important feature of politics and art. Indigenous people became the figures of national identity and their folklore influenced the Mexican aesthetic that famous artists like Frida Kahlo followed. The indigenous art of famous muralists of this time like Diego Rivera focused on the cultural heritage and traditions of pre-hispanic cultures.

This artistic movement didn’t stay in the 20th century but transcended to influence the aesthetics of our contemporary and digital society. Instagram has become a platform where Mexican indigenous traditions and cultures are promoted through photographs and images. Instagrammers are developing a visual culture that incorporates portraits of people and indigenous elements, and they have also approached the social media network to sell typical indigenous products. Indigenism Insta-culture shares photos and videos that illustrate the authentic and unique indigenous communities that founded



Figure 5, Maty García, Ejutla

Figure 6, Maty García, Zoé

1.3.1 Panoramic of Indigenism

Indigenism is a term used to talk about different aspects concerning the status of the indigenous people in society. This movement originates in Latin America, especially in Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia, where it became a characteristic of revolutionary nationalism. It was an important part of the artistic and progressive political movements in the 20th century, making the “Indian” a central element of national identity.

Mid-20th-century scholars of indigenism had described it “as a current of thought favorable to Indians,” (1998, Favre, p. 7) one that promotes “a sympathetic awareness of the Indian.” (1959, Stabb, p. 405) It is a way to protect indigenous people against the discrimination that they have been suffering from since the conquest of Latin American societies. The goal of this movement is to defend human dignity and avoid “cultural genocide”, giving them the freedom to develop culturally distinct forms of education, spirituality, and traditions. It aims to change the negative views that society has developed over native people.

The roots of contemporary indigenism start with Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican priest that in the 16th century, questioned Spanish colonialism and exposed the violence committed against native societies. In his famous work, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, he refuted the legal justifications for the violence of the conquest offered by the Spanish Crown, demonstrating that such violence was illegal because it was a contravention of international law; immoral, amounting to a diabolical perversion of Christian teachings; and materially

damaging to the Crown, because of the vast destruction inflicted on subject peoples by Spaniards themselves. (1992, De las Casas) His work was so powerful that it influenced Spanish-American independence thinkers. Another precursor of modern indigenism in the 19th century is “Indianism”. In the wake of Independence, the “Indian” became a figure of nationalism and identity distinct from the Spanish crown.

The period from 1910 to 1970 marks the bloom of indigenism. During this period indigenism was present in most of Latin America, especially in Mexico where it played a significant role in shaping the country’s modern cultural and political history.

After the revolution, indigenism became the core characteristic of national politics and thoughts. It became the center of the state policy and it was a tool for transforming the Mexican society and establishing a unified national identity. Indigenist anthropology also took a leading role that left a print in the government and the visual arts. Indigenist anthropologists stated Indigenous people to be a source of nationalism and they promoted them as icons of national identity in the Mexican aesthetic, resulting in having an impact on arts. Indigenism also promoted “mestizaje” which is the process of mixing races between native Americans and Europeans. It was an attempt to homogenize Mexico’s diverse cultures. As Claudio Lomnitz succinctly puts it, Mexican anthropology “was charged with the task of forging Mexican citizenship both by ‘indigenizing’ modernity and by modernizing the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community”. (2001, Lomnitz, p. 231)

1.3.2 Indigenism in contemporary mexican art

There are different definitions relating to the word indigenism, but in the context of visual art, it refers to a movement that originated in Latin America during the 1920s which saw artists fighting against the dominance of European art in favor of making art about their own culture which embraced pre-Columbian art. Art associated with indigenism is nearly always figurative, with subjects that focus on the country's cultural heritage and traditions, as well as their spiritual beliefs.

In 1921 when the Mexican revolution ended, everyone began to talk about a "new era". In the field of arts a new renaissance was intended, one that conciliated the notions of continuity and renovation. The Mexican nationalists proclaimed that the authentic classic American tradition was located in the pre-Hispanic past.

The indigenist impact on the arts during the Revolutionary and immediate post-Revolutionary period can be seen in the promotion of vernacular arts such as handicrafts, dance, and music that contributed to a "new aesthetic vocabulary of Mexicanidad" that prized its indigenous components. (2010, López, p. 69)

These arts consciously intended to include iconographic and formal elements that are recognizably "Indigenous," to elevate native culture through complex and positive portraits, and to create a resemblance of "Mexicanness" thoroughly infused with "Indigeneity".

The great promoter of this movement was the minister of the time, José Vasconcelos, who carried out a program that aimed to socialize art to make it closer to the people.

He filled the country with murals with works by artists who worked on these issues in a large format. The Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo embraced indigenism: they were committed to promoting Mexican culture and their murals depicted their country's history and its people. In their works, indigenous were portrayed with their lives, traditions, beliefs, and mythologies. Mexican muralism was an artistic movement where the figure of the indigenous became the representative image of Mexican nationalism and a symbol of the Latin American image and identity. This monumental art was anti-aristocratic and anti-elitist, and was a collective space of public domain that has been called "The Renaissance of indigenous culture".

As for indigenous iconography, some of the first works that came to light were those of the muralists Jean Charlot and Fermín Revueltas. Charlot represented The Massacre of Tenochtitlán. Likewise, Revueltas stood out when painting the Allegory of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the indigenous virgin of Latin America.

The murals from Siqueiros were influenced by Aztec art, and he incorporated Olmec elements in the physiognomy of the characters represented, large forehead, pronounced cheekbones, oblique eyes, prominent nose, and lips. An example of this is the mural "Mother proletariat".

Diego Rivera explored and studied the sources of pre-Hispanic art, such as codices and pre-Hispanic art pieces. By doing what the Renaissance painters did, who studied Greek myths and biblical stories in detail to

build classical art, Rivera became the inventor of the indigenous classical.

Orozco rejects the idealized and mythologizing compositions of the indigenous past since he understands that the pre-Hispanic and the Hispanic are intertwined in a conflictive process marked by the struggle between progress and reactionary sectors. In this way, Orozco was the first to allude to Spanish colonialism, as evidenced by the fresco Cortés y la Malinche, from 1926, in which the consequences of Hispanic domination and indigenous subjugation are evidenced.

Drawing on the cultural background of the indigenous cultures of the southwest of the country, Rufino Tamayo reinterpreted the modern methods of filling and color theory based on the customs of ancient people. The artist sought to bring the problems and worldview of these cultures closer to contemporary times, so its themes revolve around the human being who experiences his relationship with nature, always with a relationship close to the use of pre-Hispanic iconography.

Indigenism also influenced other artists like the famous Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who incorporated to her paintings indigenous elements such as multiple bright colors, animals, temples, and skulls, always portraying herself wearing indigenous dresses and embroidery. The artist was fascinated by the pre-Columbian world and Aztec mythology. Her art pieces respond to the historical context where she lived, a moment in which art was considered as a tool to establish a national identity. As a result, Kahlo promoted the representation of the indigenous world from an idealizing perspective.

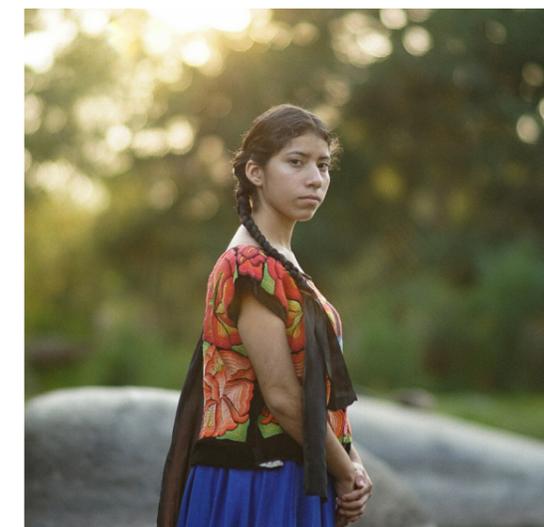


Figure 7, Maty García, Jhannia

Figure 8, Maty García, Pelusa

1.3.3 Indigenism Insta-culture

I already mentioned before in this analysis that many different visual cultures have evolved in social media, and in this thesis, rather than analyzing each of them, I am emphasizing one in particular that I call: Indigenism insta-culture. Just as the contemporary Mexican artists of the XX century did, there is an online community of Instagrammers that through photographs provide positive imagery of native community members and different ethnic groups around the world. Users following this visual culture share positive and stylized photos of indigenous people, cultures, and communities. They are portraying authentic people from different countries, sharing their lifestyle and different types of art crafts, and dishes. Through this culture, Instagram is a media that is providing the world with indigenous visibility. One person that is currently living in Canada can get to know an ethnic group in Africa or South America without even having to travel.

These accounts are showcasing cultures in different ways by sharing portraits of people, promoting indigenous languages, selling art crafts or typical products, just to mention some. There are some users showing different indigenous cultures around the world, others promoting one tribe in particular, and others that focus on the tribes on a specific territory, country, or region. Alessia Ramponi is a Mexican influencer with approximately 20 million followers on Instagram. She travels around the world visiting ethnic communities in different countries like Pakistan, Kenya, Thailand, India, and more. She posts photos of her travels, mainly portraits of people wearing typical customs, working, and participating in the typical rituals or traditions. Ramponi also shares stories that showcase

through videos the traditions and the history of the cultures, allowing her followers to ask questions or doubts that she replies to educate her online community and promote the lifestyle of these particular ethnic groups.

There are also some Native Indian influencers who use Instagram to share their thoughts and to promote their culture and generations-old traditions while educating their fanbase in appreciating native people. Kahara Hodges is a Los Angeles-based Afro-Indigenous model, style influencer, and advocate. She's a proud member of the Ta'neezahni Nahasdzáán (Navajo Tangle Clan), and actively educates her followers on Navajo-related current issues and history. Hodges was one of many Indigenous women featured in Nike's N7 campaign, designed by Diné artist Tracie Jackson, "which highlights the importance of self-representation for Indigenous people. It's really beautifully to exist and have a presence in spaces that my ancestors have been excluded from," Kahara captioned a shot from the campaign.¹⁴

Some governments have also promoted sharing Indigenous communities through Instagram as a way to promote and conserve their cultural heritage. An example of this is The Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples Secretariat, which joined Instagram in 2016 and held a photo contest to highlight Indigenous communities and life in the Arctic. The contest hashtag was #MyIndigenousArctic and its purpose was to see glimpses of everyday life in the North. The contest received over 100 entries of pictures showing handicrafts, documenting traditions, and portraying landscapes and locals.¹⁵

1.3.4 Mexican indigenism insta-culture

Many different accounts portraying indigenous around the world exist, but for the purpose of this study, I am focusing on the accounts promoting indigenous cultures in the Mexican territory. Mexico is a multicultural country founded in its indigenous communities. According to Inegi, in the country exist almost 12 million indigenous, that are considered the ones that speak an indigenous dialect.⁴² There are around 65 indigenous communities that speak around 73 different languages.

The indigenous population is distributed around all the territory but is concentrated specifically in Sierra Madre del Sur, Yucatán, and Sierra Madre Oriental and Occidental. The indigenous population in Mexico isn't so large due to mestizaje (mixing of indigenous and European), but the presence of native Mexicans inside the national identity is very strong. Part of the mestiza population in Mexico is influenced and identified by indigenism.

In the north, center and east of Mexico populate groups like the Huicholes, Mazahuas, Taramaras, Otomíes, Mexicas, Purépechas, Nahuas and Yaquis. And in the south and southwest Mixes, Mixtecos, Tlapanecos, Triquis, Mayas and Zapotecos. The states with the biggest indigenous population are Oaxaca and Yucatán. Some ethnic groups like Zapotecos, Mayas, Nahuas, Purépechas, Mixtecos, Yaquis, Kikapúes, and Otomíes have improved their living conditions and have adapted easily to commerce and globalization.

Since the Mexican revolution, the image of the "Indian" became a symbol of Mexico, and this icon transcended to digital platfor-

ms as a figure that represents the Mexican people and the country's folklore. As the muralist of the XX century did, Instagrammers are incorporating into their visual language the vibrant colors, the different embroidery and typical costumes, elements of prehispanic mythology, photos of food and ceremonies or traditions. Instagram indigenism, as well as the contemporary art that emerged after the Mexican revolution, focuses on promoting a positive image and identity of the Mexican people, but unlike it, also exploits one of the platform's opportunities: commerce and digital marketing. Many of these accounts promote and sell authentic products made by artisans, from food to handicrafts and art pieces. Thanks to the great reach of the platform, Mexicans who sell this type of merchandise benefit from sales inside and outside the country.

Indigenous insta-culture is one of the many visual cultures that have developed in our modern society and the support of images has helped to promote the identity and traditions of different local communities that might seem to be getting lost in our world.



Figure 9, Maty García, Amuzgueña

¹⁴ Harvey Oliviva., 13 indigenous influencers you should follow on Instagram right now, 2020 URL (<https://hellogiggles.com/lifestyle/indigenous-instagram-accounts-to-follow/>) [10/05/2021]

¹⁵ Arctic council., Instagram Contest, 2021 URL (<https://www.arcticpeoples.com/our-work-2#ipswork>) [10/05/2021]

⁴² Inegi., Censo 2020, 2020 URL (https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/ccpv/2020/doc/Censo2020_Principales_resultados_EUM.pdf) [10/05/2021]



Figure 10, Maty García , Mariana

Figure 11, Maty García, Niña

Context to research



In conclusion, the chapter addressed shows how the arrival of digital has strongly influenced the way we communicate and interact with each other. The question from which the speech started was “Why are Mexicans posting pictures of indigenous people on Instagram and why do they do it?”.

From here emerged a picture that started from the contemporary visual culture where images are incorporated into our daily digital lives as the most important feature of the virtual world, and then moved to Instagram, a social media where communication is extremely visual and where different visual cultures have developed.

Instagram is a creative tool that has changed the way in which people communicate and commercialize products. It is a space in the cyber world where different cultures emerge, creating their own visual language and aesthetic rules.

Instagram has helped to promote different things and one of them is a positive view of indigenous people where they become national identity icons rather than subjects of discrimination.

This Indigenism insta-culture is influenced by the artistic movements that appeared in the XX century in Mexico, where indigenous cultures became the representative image of Mexican nationalism and a symbol of the Latin American image and identity.

The research carried out supports that visual communication through Instagram can help to avoid the cultural genocide of millennial cultures and help to promote products that are authentic from a specific region. Instagram is an important social connector capable of preserving national identity inside and outside a country. The platform or means of production can change due to new technologies, but when something becomes a strong symbol it can transcend time even if the visual narration evolves.



Figure 12,
Maty García, Alesha

2. Approaches and matters of analysis

Once concluded the theoretical framework used for defining the behaviors in the use of Instagram and for delimiting the theme of Indigenism, we move to the phase of data analysis. The starting question for developing

the research is: How is Mexican indigenism being approached through Instagram? The chapter summarizes the methods of quantitative and qualitative research carried out to answer this question.

2.1 Introduction to the methods of analysis



+



+



The changes implemented by the new technologies are already being mentioned, leading to new ways of communicating. We have also talked about how indigenism was a visual movement that inspired the visual arts in Mexico and that made the indigenous an icon of cultural identity.

While scrolling into my Instagram feed I came to ask myself “Why do people I follow share pictures of Indigenous people on Instagram”?

The Mexican artists of the XX century were painting indigenous people and elements that portrayed the Pre Columbian essence of the country, now our generation is bringing the same concept into the digital world, using digital artifacts like smartphones, digital cameras, and editing software and apps.

The new media and digital tools are offering new opportunities for promoting Mexican identity. The indigenous are the subject of attention and the icons of the country. Different accounts share indigenous posts and incorporate them into their digital and communication strategies, helping to promote the valorization of ancestral traditions and the appreciation of indigenous cultures.

Instagram is a platform that allows exploring different visual data. It is the media to be analyzed and contains all the content and posts regarding the visual culture to study. The research is composed of 3 different research methods.

The first and main method is Visual Data Analysis. Starting from the question: How is Mexican Indigenism approached through Instagram? This method was applied to gain knowledge about the different types of accounts posting, the things they post, how they use the platform, and the main hashtags used. The analysis was done by collecting a random sample of 200 posts that were categorized by typology, subjects portrayed and Instagram functionalities being used. Hashtags used in the posts were also collected. To gain more qualitative insight into this vi-

sual culture, I interviewed 7 account owners. The interviews were methods to gain knowledge about the reasons they post indigenous content, the message they are willing to transmit through the images, and how they interact with their audience and with the people and communities being portrayed.

To find out what the rest of the Mexican users think about these types of posts a survey was created. The survey was a tool for roughly describing the thoughts about indigenism images and obtaining information about whether or not Mexican Instagram users tend to portray indigenous people, buy their products on the platform or follow accounts posting Indigenous-related content.

2.1.1 Insta-culture visual data analysis

The main method used for the thesis research was visual data analysis, which was aimed to answer the following questions:

- Who is posting Mexican indigenous content on Instagram?
- Which are the different typologies of accounts posting?
- What type of content are they posting?
- What are the subjects of the posts shared on Instagram?
- Which are the Instagram features used by these accounts?
- Which are the main hashtags used in these posts?

The visual data analysis consisted of a collection of a random selection of accounts that promote Mexican Indigenous people, their communities, and products.

The selection included accounts with more than 30 followers, that followed more than 30 accounts and at least 60 posts, resulting in a sample of 200 accounts. Verified accounts were not included in this selection.

From the 200 different accounts, a random selection of 50 users was done, proceeding by downloading their profiles and their 20 recent photos. This dataset allowed for making predictions with a 95% confidence level and a 13% confidence interval for users, accurate enough for the analysis in this thesis. A sample of 200 photos from 1,000 photos obtained (50 users by 20 photos per user) was used.

I categorized the typologies of posts (single photos or videos, carousels, reels, or IGTV) and the subjects portrayed in them. I also examined the hashtags used in the posts. Another aspect analyzed was the category of the accounts that were posted, the Instagram functionalities they use (reels, highlights, IGTV), and their average followers, followed, and posts.



Sample collection:
May 13th, 2021.



Sample size:
200 posts

First I performed a general analysis with all the samples collected and observed that there existed five different typologies of accounts posting content regarding indigenous people.

I analyzed the 200 posts sample in general, including all types of accounts, and then moved to a detailed analysis for each account type. The overall analysis included the types of account distributions, the number of followers, followed, and posts per account type, the Instagram functionalities used, and the type of posts and subjects of the posts. I got the five most used hashtags of all posts and then the top five hashtags for each subject portrayed category. I observed the post types, the subjects portrayed, and the Instagram features used by each account typed. The results obtained from this analysis, which will be seen in more detail in the next chapter, show that the majority of the posts from the sample were indigenous people's portraits and that the users mainly post single photos and use Instagram highlights more than the other app functionalities.

2.1.2 Interviews to indigenous content creators



11th to 22nd of
June 2021



7 intervieweed
persons



Videocall modality



8 questions

The data analysis and the interviews gave me a great panorama of the accounts posting indigenous content but I also noticed people portraying indigenous people even though they just do it occasionally when the purpose of their accounts isn't to share indigenous people.

I created a survey to know if Mexican Instagram users whose aim isn't to promote indigenous cultures also tend to portray indigenous people and the reasons why they do it.

I also used the survey to know:

- whether people like this kind of post,
- with what do they relate the images of indigenous people,
- if they follow accounts that promote indigenous cultures and which types of accounts

The survey consisted of 15 questions with 2 open questions and 13 multiple choices. It was a google form that I spread with Mexican Instagram users getting a sample of 205.

The outcomes complemented the previous analysis. They reassured some points like the fact that there are some users that occasionally and sporadically posts photos of indigenous people or that the indigenous image is considered to be an icon of cultural identity.

2.1.3 Mexican users surveys



11th to 22nd of
June 2021



205 answers



Spreaded on
social media



15 questions
Google form

Even though the data analysis provided a great understanding of who is posting and what they are sharing, I still wanted to inquire more into the accounts.

The things that I wanted to know and that I couldn't get from the data analysis were:

- The reasons why the account owners share indigenous images
- The message aimed to be transmitted
- How they interact with the indigenous people when portraying them
- The benefits that Indigenous people and communities get from their diffusion on Instagram
- The things that their audiences like

For the interviews, I found seven different account categories, and I interviewed the people behind them. Talking to them gave me a better conception of the purpose of this visual culture, the images that visualize ethnic communities and their people in different aspects.

The interviews were held via video call in a conversational modality where I asked them nine pre-established questions. To receive more insights I let the interviewees share their thoughts and express freely about the topics addressed.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. And they were held on different days from 11th to 22nd of June 2021. They were all recorded with the previous permission of the interviewees.

After interviewing the users I went over the things said in the interviews and looked up similar opinions among them as well as different insights that enriched the research.



Figure 13, Maty García,
Tierra de Nahuales

3. Research findings and outcomes

This chapter exposes the results obtained from the three research methods. Once concluded the period of data collection for each of the research methods, I started analyzing all different information, data, and insights. Each dataset was analyzed individually, first categorizing the data analysis and com-

plementing it with the insights discovered through the interviews. The outcomes that emerged from the first two research methods helped to understand and get a picture of the accounts and the users posting indigenous-related content.

3.1 Outcomes from visual data analysis

Visual Data analysis was the main method used for my research. After randomly collecting 200 posts on May 13th, 2021, I categorized the types of posts and the subjects portrayed in the posts. I also examined the hashtags used in the posts. Another aspect examined was the typology of the accounts, the Instagram functionalities they use, and their average followers, followed, and posts.

After studying the accounts collected, I observed that existed 5 different taxonomies of accounts posting content regarding indigenous people:

- Personal accounts:

Owned by a person, their username or bio includes their name. The bio usually contains a personal short description. The profile picture is usually a personal photo or a photo taken by them.

- Organizations accounts:

ONGS, alliances, community organizations, governmental institutions. Their username or bio contains the name of the organization and a short description of it. Their profile picture is usually the logo of the organization. They are organizations dedicated to helping indigenous people.

- Tourism and cultural promotion accounts:

Touristic and cultural organizations that promote indigenous and non-indigenous places and destinations. Their username is usually related to the name of a region. Their bio description says that it is an account dedicated to the promotion of tourism and culture of a region. Their profile picture is a logo of a tourist institution or a photo of a tourist place. Their main goal isn't to promote indigenous traditions or people, it is just a part of a whole communication.

- Brands accounts:

Brands or stores that sell artisanal products made by indigenous people. Their username is the name of the brand. Their profile picture is the logo of the brand. In their bio, they describe the products they sell and they post photos of the products.

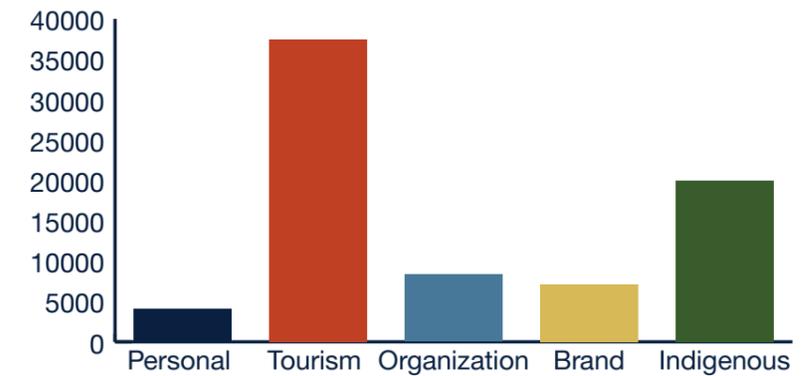
- Indigenous promotion accounts:

Accounts dedicated to promoting indigenous languages, traditions, art, communities, and gastronomy. Their bio usually describes that they are accounts that promote and preserve indigenous cultures.

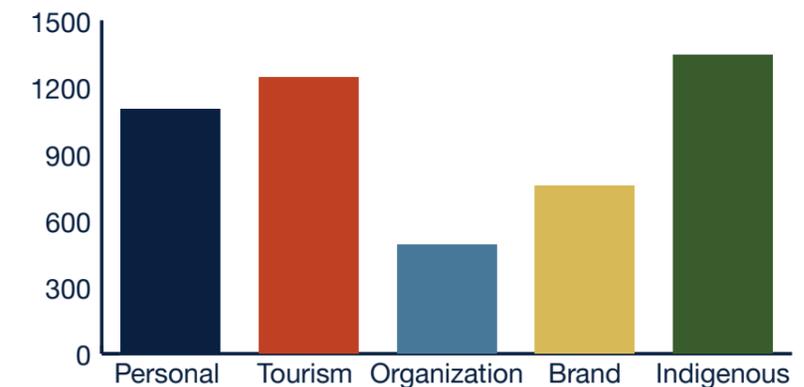
Account typology distribution from the 200 posts sample



Average followers per account type



Average posts per account



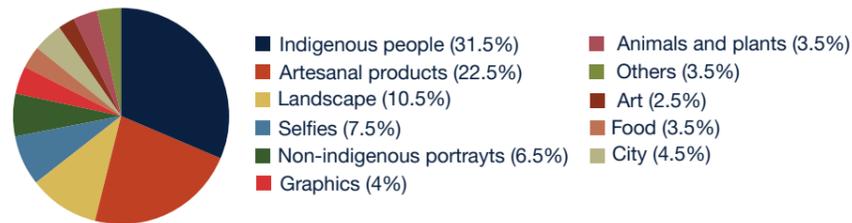
Graphic 3, Account typology distribution

Graphic 4, Average followers

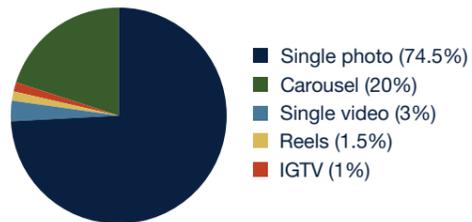
Graphic 5, Average posts per account

General results overview

Posts subjects

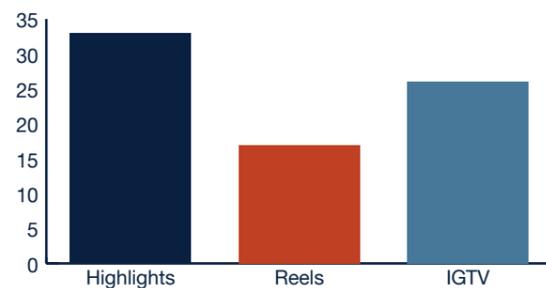


Types of posts



The major part of the posts were indigenous people’s portraits, followed by Indigenous artisanal products photos and landscape photos. There were other posts like selfies, photos of nonindigenous people, graphics, food, artisanal processes, architecture, art, and others. Most of the posts of indigenous people are portraits of single persons but there is also a representative amount of portraits of more than one person.

Functionalities use



When posting in the feed Instagram allows you to do it in different formats like carousels, IGTV, reels, videos, and photos. From the 200 post samples, the majority were single photos followed by carousels.

From the Instagram functionalities besides feed posts, I wanted to see which are the ones most used by these accounts and they happened to be stories highlights.

Popular hashtags

The 5 most used hashtags of all posts:

- #textiles
- #oaxaca
- #Oaxaca
- #tradicion
- #pueblosoriginarios

Indigenous people :

- #tradicion
- #textiles
- #Oaxaca
- #triquis
- #raices

Indigenous artisanal products:

- #oaxaca
- #textiles
- #hechoamano
- #handwoven
- #handmade

Landscapes:

- #visitmexico
- #vive_oaxaca
- #NuncaOlvidesTusRaíces
- #mexicomagico
- #mexico

Self-portraits

- #viernestradicional
- #modalenta
- #bordadoamano
- #modelomexicana
- #prefierovestirmx

Non-indigenous people portraits

- #mexicomagico
- #vive_oaxaca
- #viveoaxaca
- #vivemexico
- #streetphotography

Graphic posts

- #cultura
- #social
- #pueblosoriginarios
- #patrimoniocultural
- #Mexico

Food posts

- #consumelocal
- #tradición
- #gastronomía
- #viajaseguro
- #maíz

Animals and plants

- #viveoaxaca
- #vivemexico
- #vive_oaxaca
- #pasionxoaxaca
- #pasionxmexico

Cities

- #streetphotography
- #streetactivity
- #oaxacaparatodos
- #mexicomagico
- #mexicoconosido

*For art pieces and other posts, there were not popular hashtags because there were no repeating.

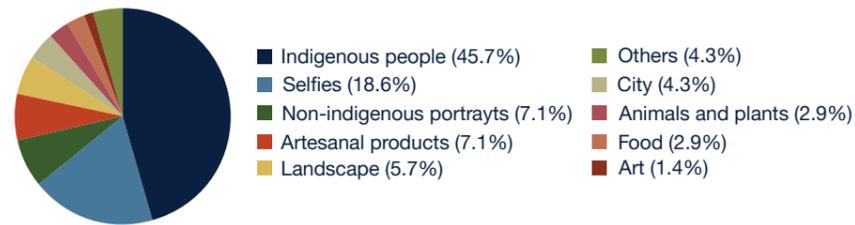
Graphic 6, General posts subjects

Graphic 7, General types of posts

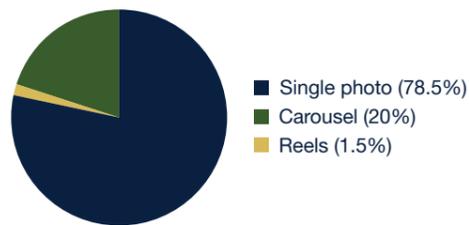
Graphic 8, General functionalities use

Personal accounts

Posts subjects



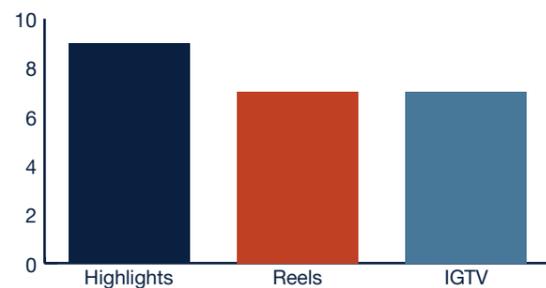
Types of posts



Personal accounts' posts are mainly indigenous people's portraits which are divided by 56.3% of single-person portraits, and 43.8% of group photos.

Self-portraits are also popular in this kind of account. Other things posted are photos of non-indigenous people, indigenous artisanal products, landscapes, and others.

Functionalities use



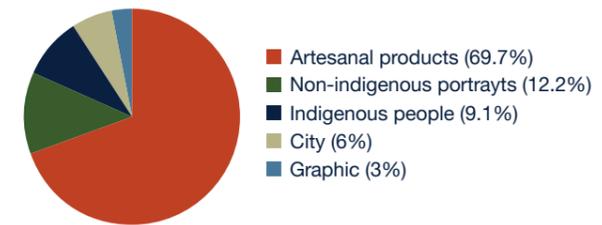
Personal accounts posts tended to be single photos, whenever not several photos are posted together by using carousels.

Half of the personal accounts use Instagram highlights, and around 42% are using reels and IGTV.

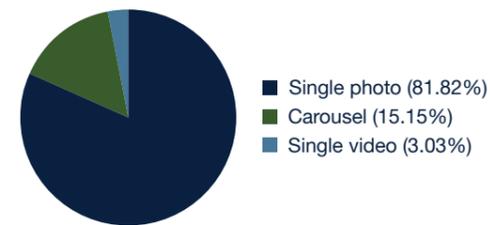
Graphic 9, Personal posts subjects
 Graphic 10, Personal types of posts
 Graphic 11, Personal functionalities use

Brands accounts

Posts subjects



Types of posts

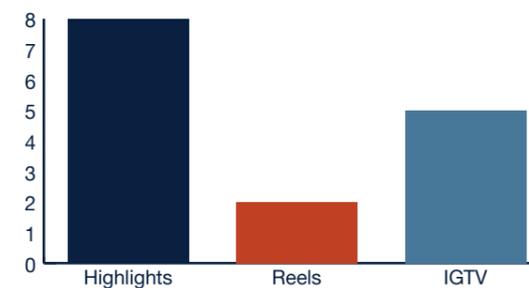


The majority of the posts of brand accounts are indigenous artisanal products photo posts. They also post non-indigenous people portraits, photos of artisanal processes, indigenous people portraits, architecture photos, and some graphics.

The majority of the posts are single photos, they also post some carousel photos and a minority of single videos.

89% of the brand accounts use Instagram highlights, 22% use reels, and 56% use IGTV.

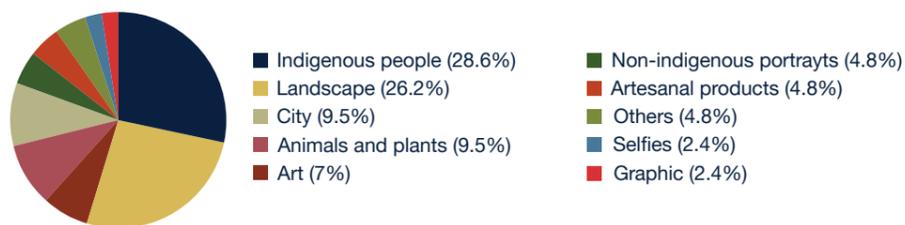
Functionalities use



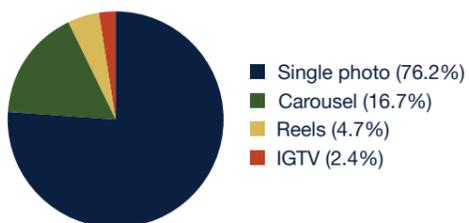
Graphic 12, Brands posts subjects
 Graphic 13, Brands types of posts
 Graphic 14, Brands functionalities use

Tourism and cultural promotion accounts

Posts subjects



Types of posts

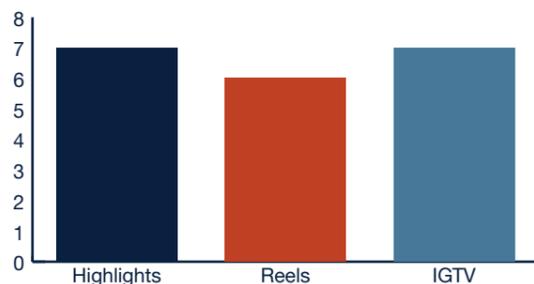


From the posts of tourism and cultural promotion accounts, the majority are posts of Indigenous people and landscapes. Other subjects like art pieces, architectural things, animal artisans, non-indigenous people, and graphics are also shared by these types of accounts.

Most of the posts from tourism and cultural promotion accounts are single photos and carousel photos.

64% of the tourism and cultural promotion accounts use highlights, 55% use reels, and 64% use IGTV.

Functionalities use



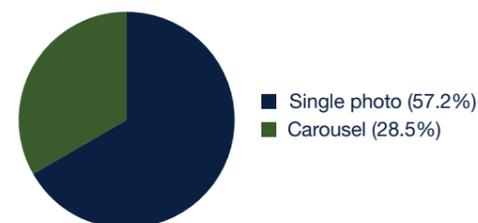
Graphic 15, Tourism posts subjects
 Graphic 16, Tourism types of posts
 Graphic 17, Tourism functionalities use

Organizations accounts

Posts subjects



Types of posts

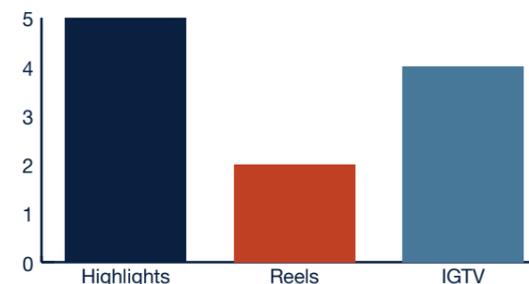


The majority of the posts are indigenous artisanal products photo posts. They also post indigenous people portraits and graphics, followed by food, lanscapes, non-indigenous people portrayts and art pieces.

72% of the accounts use Instagram highlights, 29% use reels, and 57% use IGTV.

Organizations mainly use single posts, and occasionally carousels and single videos. The carousels are used to post just photos in general and sometimes for videos.

Functionalities use



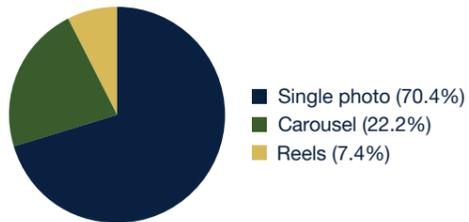
Graphic 18, Organizations posts subjects
 Graphic 19, Organizations types of posts
 Graphic 20, Organizations functionalities use

Indigenous promotion accounts

Posts subjects



Types of posts

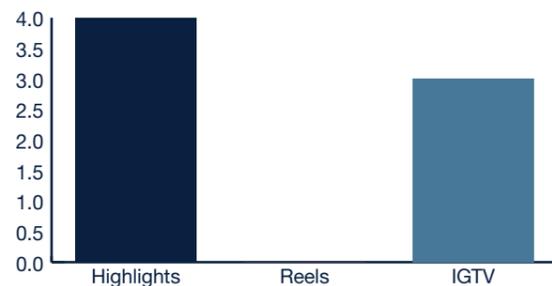


The posts that Indigenous promotion accounts tend to post more are indigenous people’s portraits, mainly with photos of single persons and sometimes groups. They also post landscapes, food, artisanal processes, and other things.

They are more likely to post single photos, followed by carousel.

The Indigenous promotion accounts don’t use reels, 67% of them use Instagram highlights.

Functionalities use



Graphic 21, Indigenous posts subjects

Graphic 22, Indigenous promotion types of posts

Graphic 23, Indigenous promotion types of posts

3.2 Insights from interviews

The data analysis which was the principal research method helped know the different categories of accounts posting indigenous-related content on Instagram. It also gave me an idea of the type of content shared, the subjects that are usually portrayed by these accounts types, and the Instagram features used. It was beneficial for having a panoramic view of how Indigenism is portrayed on Instagram but I wanted to gain more knowledge regarding how these accounts impact indigenous communities in Mexico and how the photographers and the account owners interact with the indigenous people portrayed and their Instagram audience. Another important aspect that I wanted to know was the intentions behind these pages, what they are willing to transmit, and the message behind their images.

The interviews were mainly composed of 9 questions and lasted around 45 minutes per person. I interviewed 7 people with different types of accounts that matched the typologies found in the data analysis. When going over the different interviews I looked up the similar and different insights and opinions of the interviewees.

I talked with 3 users from personal accounts from which 2 also contribute to tourism accounts, one from a brand account, one from an indigenous promotion account, one from an organization account, and another one from a tourism account.

Personal:

Maty @hombredecafe
 Vivi @channaphotography
 Andrés @corazon_zapoteco_

Brand:

Adriana @quetzaltmx

Indigenous promotion:

Concepción @mundotriqui

Organization:

Fernando @colectivoyuugel

Tourism and cultural promotion:

Mario @mibelloaxaca

Similar insights found in the interviews

Regarding the findings that matched common opinions between the different users, I found that they all use the same features, they all have the aim to visualize and help indigenous communities through their accounts, and before taking pictures and sharing them they all talk with people and ask for their permission.

Similarity 1:

Instagram stories are the main used features

Supporting the data analysis where I found out that the main Instagram features used by the accounts are highlights, the interviews also revealed that the tools that are mainly used are stories and feed posts.

An interesting point that was mentioned in 2 interviews is that for the users living in indigenous communities it is hard to use features that demand a higher internet range like IGTV since some communities are isolated and the internet isn't good.

"I just do portraits and stories".

- Maty

"We just use posts and stories. Our internet isn't good, so that limits us and we cant do lives".

- Concepción

Similarity 2:

Indigenous communities visualization is the main goal

Another common point between the 7 people interviewed is that they all mentioned that their purpose is to envision ethnic and rural communities. They said that they use Instagram as a tool for sharing indigenous cultures and educating people about them.

"Our idea is to transmit through the account with images, everything that we have in our village".

- Fernando

"We are an ethnic business, and we try to visualize the people behind the embroideries. We also want to visualize the indigenous community".

- Adriana

"My account originates to promote the culture of Oaxaca, which is a zone with multiple indigenous regions. We want other people to know our culture through photography, in particular the most isolated zones which are indigenous".

- Mario

Similarity 3:

They all aim to help indigenous communities

During the interviews, they all argued that their accounts are helping promote the communities benefiting them with tourism, economical incomes, and cultural appreciation and recognition.

"One of the principal income sources of Oaxaca is tourism, so our page helps the communities by bringing people to them, they visit the archeological zones and consume their products. We promote places that aren't known and we support their economy".

- Mario

"When people from outside of the community see the pictures they like them and want to visit, they ask about how they can travel".

- Vivi

"We saw the opportunity to share with people that don't know our culture. Sharing it and posting photos of our artisans gave our clients more confidence to buy our textile. We have obtained a lot of clients from Instagram".

- Concepción

Similarity 4:

They ask for permission to take the photos and share them

I wanted to learn how the interaction with the indigenous people is while portraying them. When I asked if they requested permission to take the photos and share them they all said that they always talk to them before shooting and that the pictures are authorized. I also

"We always ask for permission to take pictures. Some people get offended because they feel like symbols of compassion and they don't want to transmit that. We try to capture their daily life and festivities, we want to show the other side of the indigenous communities that the world likes to show and that the majority of tourists don't observe".

- Mario

"We talk with the artisans to take the photos, at the beginning they are shy but when they realize they are being recognized they become empowered".

- Adriana

Different insights found in the interviews

Difference 1:

Indigenous people as icons of Mexican identity

While doing the theoretical research I found some authors that said that the image of the indigenous people became an icon of Mexican identity, so I wanted to know if people sharing these images also consider them to be. With the interviews, I discovered that the image of the indigenous person is considered by most of the interviewees as an icon of Mexican national identity. Concepción from the account @mundotriqui who happens to be an Indigenous person is the only one that mentioned that she doesn't consider indigenous people as an icon of Mexican identity because indigenous people still suffer from a lot of discrimination making them feel as they don't belong to the Mexican republic.

"The image of the indigenous person is an icon in all Latin America, but people relate it more with Mexico".

- Maty

"The people in my community don't feel like a part of the Mexican republic, we suffer from a lot of discrimination, so I would not say we represent what Mexico is."

- Concepción

Difference 3:

Intentions benefiting the indigenous people

Most of the interviewees said that one of these types of posts' intentions is to make Indigenous people proud of what they are, to empower and encourage them. Viviana mentioned that another intention she has is to reduce the discrimination towards indigenous people and promote a culture of respect towards them. Mario said that he wants to transmit a positive image of the indigenous community where people are happy with their traditions and culture, rather than the common image of indigenous people being sad and marginalized.

"With these pictures, I always try to inspire kids and new generations to feel proud of the place they come from and what they are, also to use their huipiles. The message that I want to transmit is that people don't discriminate, that they respect the ethnic groups that represent our culture and history. To reflect and to be empathetic towards the people from these communities".

- Vivi

"They are people that show us a different reality, we are used to seeing pictures of models and influencers. Some people share pictures of indigenous people but showing them with a sad characteristic aiming for compassion, marginally. Our mission is to change this, is to show the face of a happy indigenous person that lives happily in his community and that can transmit joy".

- Mario

Difference 2:

What the audience likes

When interrogated about what their audience likes the most, Maty and Concepción mentioned that their audience likes posts that give context about the photography, a description, or a story in the caption of the post that they can read to know more about the community.

Mario and Vivi said that their audience likes portraits of kids and elder people in particular. Also, 2 interviewees said that people like to see the typical clothes of indigenous cultures. It was also mentioned by one of them that foreigners also appreciate indigenous people's portraits and they are usually the ones interacting the most with them. For brands, these types of posts work because clients visualize the artisans behind the work and realize the hard work behind the products and that if they buy they are helping people in indigenous communities.

"What people like is a good portrait, with good illumination, a typical costume, and a good story. The fact that people read a story in the caption gives more meaning to the photograph. That's when people interact more with my posts".

- Maty

"What captures people's attention is to read or see something about our culture".

- Concepción

"I started with the idea of taking photographs of my people, kids and elders. I think that the pictures of my region received a lot of interaction because people outside this region and the country felt identified".

- Vivi

"The content that people like the most are indigenous people's portraits, especially pictures of kids and elders that are wearing their typical clothing".

- Mario

"My audience likes to see ecotourism places or spots that keep something mystical. They also like to see the typical clothes that indigenous people use".

-Andres

"People from other parts of the country and foreigners are the ones that value and interact more with the posts where we portray people".

-Fernando

"People like these kinds of posts because they realize that we aren't taking advantage of the artisans and we are contributing to their economy".

- Adriana

3.3 Survey results

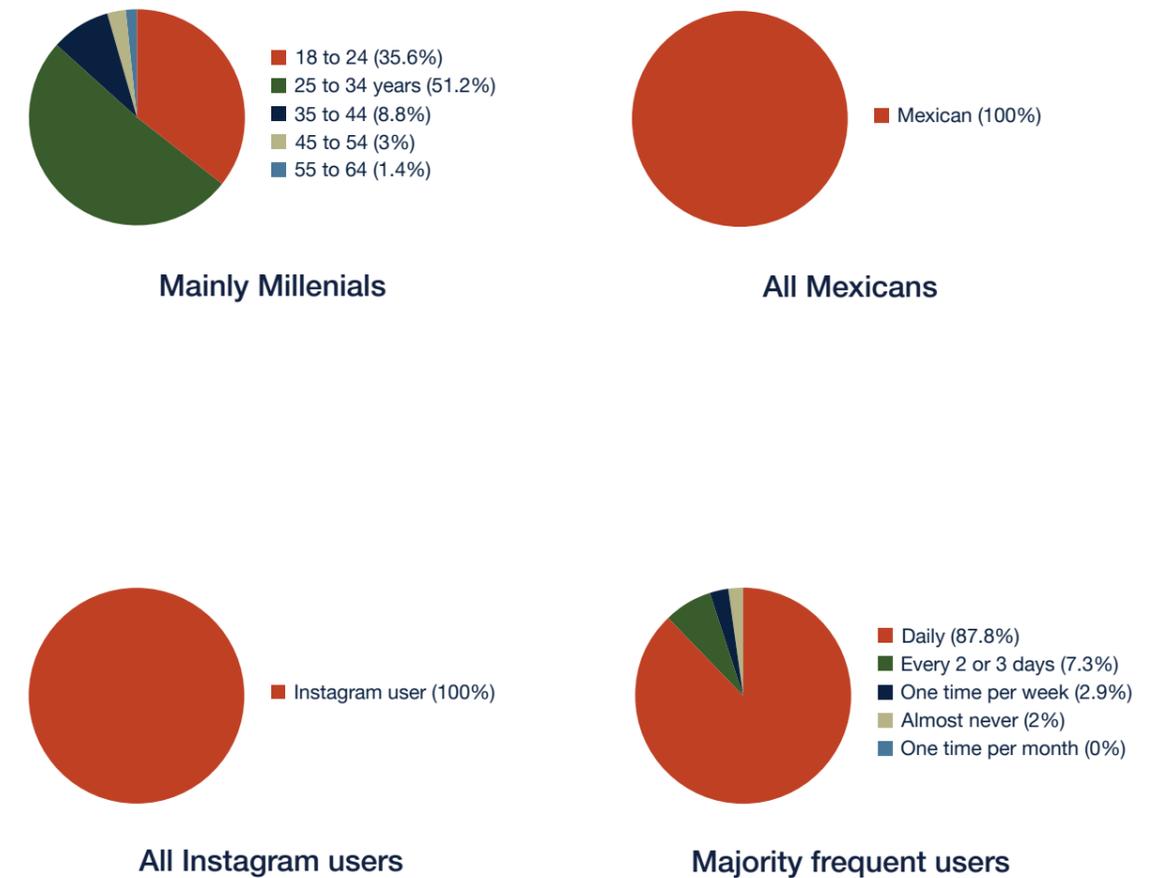
With the data analysis and the interviews, I got an integrated view of accounts that promote indigenism on Instagram. The survey was the last study method applied, it was a complementary tool to know more about this topic from the point of view of Mexican people that aren't necessarily aiming to promote indigenous communities. The survey was composed of a total of 15 questions, 2 open ones and 13 with multiple options, from which the majority was allowed just one answer.

The results are reported in the same order in which the questions were formulated in the questionnaire. In the first part are described some questions regarding nationality, age-range and Instagram use. The second part questions describe whether they have posted images of indigenous people. Successively moving into the next part concerning their thoughts about indigenous posts and accounts they might follow.

Demographics and Instagram use

The survey which was distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook groups received 205 answers. It has to be mentioned that all of the respondents are Mexican since they are the target for this research and the survey was shared in groups of Mexican people. We can observe that the majority of the users (51.2%) range in the age of 25 to 34 followed by (35.6%) 18 to 24 years, these two groups include the main users of Instagram.

All of the respondents are Instagram users since it was mentioned before that only Instagram users should participate. It is also immediately recognizable that most of them (87.8%) use Instagram daily.



Graphic 24, Survey age

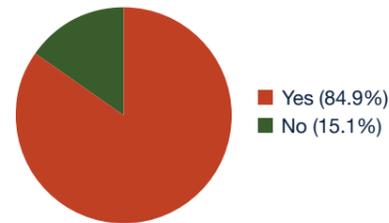
Graphic 25, Survey nationality

Graphic 26, Survey Instagram users

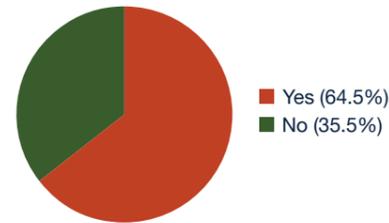
Graphic 27, Survey frequency of use

Indigenous people posts on Instagram

Have you ever posted a picture of an Indigenous person on Instagram?



Did you ask the person for permission to photograph him and share the picture?



Why did you took and shared the picture?

- “To promote the artisanal products they do”.
- “I am passionate about their cultures”.
- “To show my culture and that I am proud of being Mexican”.
- “I did social service for 3 months in an Indigenous community, I wanted to share what I was living”.
- “She is my grandmother and I like to show our culture”.
- “I went to the community and I wanted to show their lifestyle”.

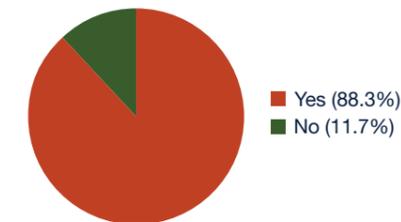
In the second part of the survey, it emerges that just a small part (15.1%) have taken pictures of indigenous people, and from them, more than half (64.5%) asked the people for permission before taking the picture. We are talking about Instagram users that have posted pictures of indigenous people because they wanted to share their culture, picture someone that is part of their family, or share an experience where they were working or doing social service at an indigenous community. They are occasionally sharing these pictures and it isn't the main aim of their accounts.

Graphic 28, Survey indigenous posts
Graphic 29, Survey permission to post

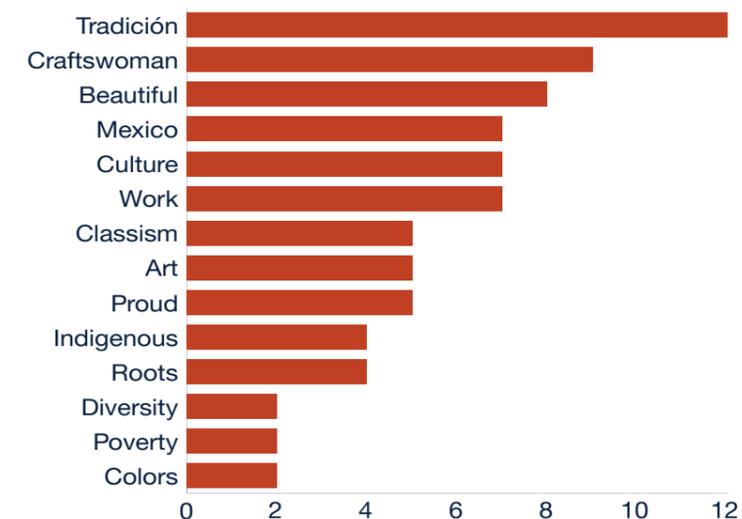
Accounts sharing indigenous content

In this part of the survey, the following image appeared and I realized that the majority of people (88.3%) like this kind of Instagram post. The answers from question 9 show that people mainly relate these posts with tradition, artisans, culture, and Mexico. Most of the words written are positive or neutral words but there are some that come with a negative denotation like classism or discrimination.

Do you like this kind of post?



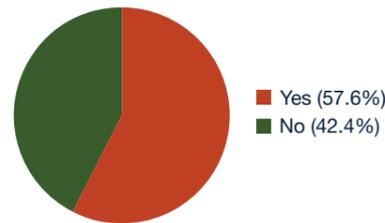
What is the first word that comes to your mind when looking at the picture?



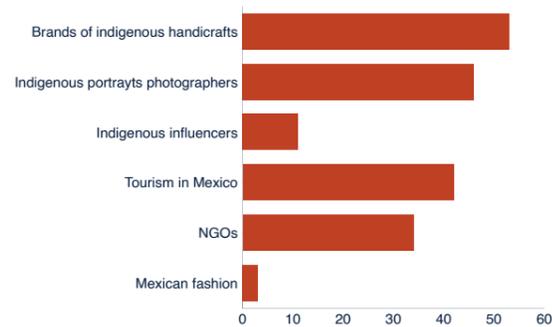
Graphic 30, Survey likelihood
Graphic 31, Survey first words
Figure 14, Maty García, Libertad

3.4 General findings from research

Do you follow accounts that post indigenous-related content?

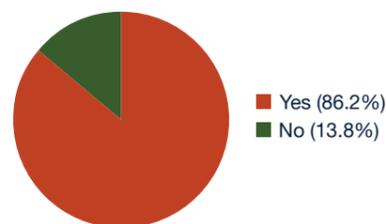


Which types of accounts do you follow?

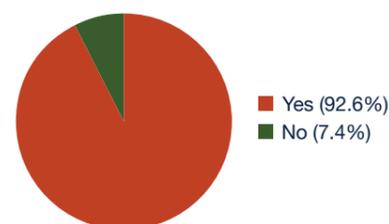


Is observable in the first chart that less than half of the interviewees (42.4%) follow accounts that share posts with some indigenous content. The more popular accounts followed by them are the ones that promote artisanal products, indigenous people portraits, tourism, and indigenous cultures. Just a small percentage (13.8%) of the people have bought artisanal products on Instagram. It is also clear in the chart that the majority (92.6%) of them consider indigenous people to be a symbol of Mexican identity.

Have you bought indigenous artisanal products on Instagram?



Do you consider the image of the indigenous person to be an icon of Mexican identity?



The data analysis was convenient to understand the variety of accounts that are posting indigenous content. It helped to know that the most popular accounts are the ones of tourism and cultural promotion which are also the ones posting the most with personal accounts and indigenous promotion. The study reveals that all accounts used stories highlight the most among all the functionalities that Instagram provides. They are all mainly posting single feed posts where the main subjects are Indigenous people portraits, artisans, and landscapes.

In general, the majority of the posts collected were indigenous people’s portraits. The detailed exploration of each type of account showed that personal accounts and indigenous promotion accounts are mainly posting indigenous people’s portraits while brands and organizations mainly share artisans. Tourism and cultural promotion account’s main posts are equally distributed between landscapes and indigenous people’s portraits. The main hashtags used reveal that the main themes of the photos are about Oaxaca, a region with many different indigenous communities. Another theme is textiles which are the main indigenous products diffused in the platform.

The interviews gave me more perceptions of this visual culture’s intentions that aim to promote ethnic Mexican communities. Finding similarities between them helped me realize that these accounts are visualizing indigenous communities and cooperating with them by bringing people and promoting their products. It also gave me an idea of the pre-publishing step where they interact with the people making the photos consented by them. They also

made it clear that most of them think of the indigenous person as an icon that represents Mexico and that is why they are portraying them. The different points gave me a broader scenario with different ideas of what people like the most from these accounts and made me confirm my theory that the images are benefiting indigenous people by making them feel proud of their roots and promoting a culture where they are seen in a positive and less marginal and racist way.

The outcomes of the surveys have generated complementary information for the previous analysis. The survey was important for this investigation because I found out that a small portion of other Mexican Instagram users share pictures of Indigenous people and they do it because they feel proud of their roots and want to share a part of the Mexican culture through them. On the contrary to the people posting this kind of image more frequently, these users do it sometimes without asking for permission to take the picture and share it. Even though the majority of the people don’t post indigenous content they do like these types of posts and around half of them follow accounts that share them.

Contrary to what I believed, just a few portions have used the platform to buy indigenous people’s artisanal products. In the theoretical research, I found that the image of the indigenous person is considered an icon of Mexican identity, and in the interviews, most of them told me they also considered it to be. The last part of the survey included a question to know the opinion of Mexican users regarding them being a symbol of “Mexicanness” and the results confirmed that is seen by most of the Mexicans like it.

Graphic 32, Survey accounts followed

Graphic 33, Survey types of accounts

Graphic 34, Survey artisanal products

Graphic 35, Survey icon of identity

Conclusions



Figure 15, Maty García, Ofrenda

In conclusion, this thesis emerges from the idea that social media like Instagram have transformed how we communicate and have become instruments for socializing, commercializing, and sharing ideas. In particular, Instagram is a medium with a visual focus where people are constantly sharing images and where a diversity of visual cultures and movements emerge. Instagram is an important tool for understanding contemporary cultures as there are millions of people using it worldwide.

When reading about Instagram I came across that different visual movement that has emerged from it have been compared by authors like Manovich to other art movements like surrealism and cubism. After this research, I also got to compare it with Indigenism, which is a movement that has influenced a particular group of Instagram users.

When asking myself: Why do Mexican people post Indigenous images? I couldn't find an explanation but after investigating I discovered that the image of the indigenous person is an icon of identity, something that Mexicans want to share in their feeds because it represents their culture, traditions, and roots.

The research of the first chapter demonstrates that the representation of the indigenous as a symbol is not something new and it has transcended over time since the Mexican independence occurred and it became an icon for distinction from Spain. Nowadays it is being similarly used through Instagram as it was used by famous Mexican painters and muralists of the 20th century. Instagrammers are incorporating into their visual language the vibrant colors, the different embroidery and typical costumes, photos of food, and ceremonies or traditions.

Indigenism is a movement that fosters a positive image towards the Indians and when doing the interviews I found out that the

users posting pictures of indigenous people have the objective of developing a sympathetic awareness towards them and sharing that they are happy people with great traditions. Rather than representing them sadly and marginally, they capture their lifestyle with authentic portraits. These Instagram users are contributing to the aim of the movement which is to protect them from the discrimination they have been suffering from since the Spanish conquest.

In the scenario of Mexican Indigenism on Instagram exist 5 main typologies of accounts, some used for personal matters, others owned by brands, organizations, and others to boost culture and tourism in the country as well as indigenous traditions or communities. Besides them, some Mexican Instagram users also photograph Indigenous people on random occasions that can include traveling or doing social service in their community.

With the data analysis, I understood that how Indigenism is being portrayed through Instagram images is mainly through sharing portraits of Indigenous people where the majority are of individual persons. Then there is also a representative amount of posts of artisanal products and Mexican and rural landscapes. Other things like selfies, food, or animals are being shared even if they aren't the most-posted. This culture tends to post more single-feed photos and among all the other Instagram features the one they use the most is Stories.

When interviewing people about the reason why they mainly use Stories I discovered that as most of the communities are retired or isolated the internet range isn't enough for doing lives or IGTV.

The detailed analysis for each typology provided me with an understanding of each of them and helped me to figure that while personal accounts and indigenous promotion accounts are mainly posting indigenous people's portraits, brands and orga-

nizations mainly share artisanal products. Tourism and cultural promotion accounts mainly share landscapes and indigenous people's portraits.

Besides just encouraging a positive image towards indigenous people it has benefited them and their communities in many different ways. The interviews showed that the objective of the accounts is to visualize indigenous communities. Instagram provides the opportunity of knowing places and people without having to travel. Visual communication through it is helping to avoid cultural genocide of pre-hispanic cultures and helping people living in indigenous communities which are retired from metropolitan areas by promoting their products and providing virtual space for commercializing them. The images shared by the accounts analyzed have also piqued the interest of other users to visit the communities.

The accounts defunding indigenous communities also want to educate people about them and an interesting thing is that their audiences like it when the posts explain what has been portrayed. They also like to see portraits where indigenous people are wearing their typical clothes, in particular, if they are kids or elders, they tend to like that more.

Indagating into the interaction of the photographers with the portrayed people, the qualitative analysis made me understand many factors beyond the obvious. I discovered that some of them want to empower indigenous people through these photographs by making them feel proud and free to develop their cultural forms. When photographing them they encourage them to continue practicing their traditions, especially with young generations.

The fact that they always ask for permission when photographing and sharing means that the indigenous people portrayed are comfortable and happy with the images of

these accounts. A different fact I found in the surveys was that not all Mexican users that photograph indigenous people occasionally ask for their consent, something that can make the indigenous uncomfortable especially if the purpose of the is not explained.

Even though Instagram Indigenism is just developed by some accounts and is just one of the many different visual cultures existing in the platform, the surveys confirmed that many Mexican users don't post these types of content but like it and follow accounts similar to the ones analyzed in this thesis. Among the most followed accounts are brands, photographers of indigenous people portraits, tourism accounts, and organizations that promote indigenous cultures. The results of the survey show that even though they follow brand accounts, only a small part of Mexican users buy handicrafts through Instagram, a fact that should not be underestimated since it is still an extra income for the artisan that, without the social network, he/she would not get.

Indigenism insta-culture is being developed by sharing positive and stylized photos of indigenous people and cultures. In Mexico, there are around 65 indigenous communities and Instagram is providing the world with Mexican indigenous visibility. The accounts are portraying authentic people, sharing their lifestyles, traditions, and crafts. People from inside or outside the country are getting to know these etching groups by the images, videos, and explanations shared by the different accounts. Instagram is a visual platform which with the support of images has helped to promote the identity and traditions of different Mexican communities that might seem to be getting lost. Instagram indigenism, aims for a positive image of native Mexican people but also serves as a marketing tool that results in products sales and tourism.



Figure 16,
Maty García, Instantes

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INDIGENISM IN THE TIMES OF INSTAGRAM

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