

# AMERICAN MARKETER

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LETTERS

## Calling out media double standard on promoted hashtags

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*Lord & Taylor promoted hashtag on Instagram*

By A READER

Everyone is up in arms about the Lord & Taylor 50-instagrammers moment. If you are not familiar, the retailer commissioned 50 fashion girls who have a strong reach on Instagram and blogs for the most part to share an outfit post with a paisley pastel summer dress that flows just so.

While **the campaign was successful for the retailer** the dress sold out there was backlash. Let us not get into the fact that this program is not novel brands have been doing it since the beginnings of the social media movement and we can think of a dozen that date back more than six or seven years.

Back to the backlash.

Not fare?

**Adweek published a piece last week**, calling out the fact that there was little clarity on the fact that this influencer collaboration was #sponsored.

The Federal Trade Commission is definitely eagle-eye watching what is happening in this space and calling for transparency in this department.

We, as a whole, agree with the need for candor, whether it is with #sp, #ad or something that has a more eloquent sound to it like #partnership or #formalcollaboration.

The fact is, in the world of style bloggers, it is known that the best ones do not do things just for compensation. They often pass if they do not like the brand, product, message or campaign. And their audience will trust them, even with the obvious "I was paid for this" hashtags because the content they create, especially when paid for, will always feel organic to the publisher's sensibility and style.

Where we see the problem in all of this is that there is a clear double standard between digital and traditional media.

No one says a word to the powers that be at Conde Nast, Hearst, Time Inc., or the large Web sites when they post things on Instagram as part of the added value component of a media buy.

These days, it almost seems like a media buy, be it print or online, does not exist without a social media component and given that so many dollars are moving from print to digital, the print side that was once church and state between editorial and advertising is a bit blurrier.

Have you ever noticed that, while pouring through a fashion magazine, you see an ad for a commercial shoe brand and then pages later, in the fashion well, you spot a gorgeous and super-high-fashion shoot where that commercial

brand happens to be paired with designers it would normally not have been mixed with by the stylist?

This does not mean high and low do not gel they do. But there are times, more often than not, where it is clear to the naked eye that the placement in an editorial spread is the result of the dollars spent on print.

No one from the FTC calls out traditional editors or stylists who are wearing tens of thousands of dollars of clothing, all given to them as part of the relationship building yes, sometimes loaned, but often, gifted.

Gram cracker

The mixing of media and content is not new and making it seem so, focusing solely on digital, does not feel like the game is equally weighted.

Both sides should carry the transparency that consumers want to see and understand. Just like a fashion blogger we hope would not promote something she did not believe in, a magazine would not Instagram or style an accessory that was not on-brand as a whole.

But why is it just one side that is being singled out?

What about the celebrities who have spokesperson contract deals that now include Instagram, Twitter or any other social media platform? There is hardly a required hashtag to note that it was paid.

Consumer packaged goods marketers such as Procter & Gamble Co. incredibly corporate rule players are insistent that any talent they partner with disclose #sp or #ad and the fact that we see these collaborations over and over again, from mom bloggers to television personalities, is proof that it will not necessarily turn off an audience, generally speaking. Of course, some people will be turned off.

How can it be regulated across the board? What systems are in place?

WE DO NOT think there are any answers this second, but these are the questions we should all be asking ourselves.

And when it comes to what the disclosure hashtag is, does it make sense to use one that is just a little more editorial feeling in nature but still clear that its nature is that of a business deal where money is exchanged?

We are legitimately putting this out there as a talking point to discuss and we would love to hear your thoughts, especially from you, the FTC.

*Name withheld by request*

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