





Online challenges among children and adolescents: Self-inflicted harm and social media strategies


Desafíos en línea con niñas, niños y adolescentes:
violencia autoinfligida y estrategia mediática


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ABSTRACT Challenges are in line with the risk-taking practices frequent in child and youth culture. However, online challenges take on new meanings when mediated by digital sociability. To analyze this phenomenon, 122 challenge videos in Portuguese that had been made by Brazilian children or adolescents were recovered from the YouTube platform, of which 35 were selected and transcribed. Twelve types of challenges were analyzed; all involved potential self-inflicted injuries to participants, with risks ranging from minor to lethal. The discourse analysis led to an interpretation based on the theory of self-image and ethos. Online challenges appear as a powerful communicative resource to reaffirm belonging, recognition, and audience adherence, and so constitute a media strategy adopted by youth in the construction of an Internet-mediated identity in which risk and violence are decisive devices in building a self-image capable of retaining an audience. The enunciator's body sacrifice assumes a bargaining role in this media adherence.

KEY WORDS Internet; Wounds and Injuries; Self-Injurious Behavior; Communications Media; Adolescent Health; Brazil.

RESUMEN Los desafíos son parte de las prácticas de riesgo frecuentes en la cultura infantil y juvenil. Sin embargo, los desafíos en línea adquieren nuevos significados cuando están mediados por la sociabilidad digital. Para analizar este fenómeno, se recuperaron 122 videos de desafíos de la plataforma YouTube, videos en portugués realizados por niñas, niños y adolescentes brasileños de los cuales se seleccionaron y transcribieron 35 videos. Se analizaron 12 tipos de desafíos que implicaran posibles lesiones autoinfligidas por sus participantes: desde riesgos menores hasta letales. El análisis del discurso llevó a una interpretación basada en la teoría de la imagen de uno mismo y del ethos. Los desafíos en línea se presentan como un poderoso recurso comunicativo para reafirmar la pertenencia, el reconocimiento y la adhesión de las audiencias, y constituyen una estrategia mediática adoptada por los jóvenes en la construcción de una identidad mediada por Internet, en la que el riesgo y la violencia se convierten en dispositivos determinantes en la construcción de una imagen de sí mismos capaz de retener una audiencia. El sacrificio corporal del enunciador asume el papel negociador en esta adhesión mediática.

PALABRAS CLAVES Internet; Heridas y Traumatismos; Conducta Autodestructiva; Medios de Comunicación; Salud del Adolescente; Brasil.

INTRODUCTION

Attraction to risk and the search for emotions that disrupt everyday sensibility are standard practices in youth culture. Le Breton^(1,2) proposes the category of “passion for risk” to define this extensive and diverse set of practices that allow for psychoactive changes, ways of transcending perception, and intense bodily experiences. Among young people, such sensorial-bodily experiences are aligned with the search for identity construction and for self-knowledge regarding their body and emotions.⁽³⁾ Thus, the literature highlights “games” and “challenges” experienced by a number of generations, such as “extreme sports,” competitions – which sometimes involve violence – and other practices that allow adolescents and young people to show courage, irreverence and experience “risky” activities that would be reproached by adults. These practices reveal the impossibility of a society whose risks would be fully controlled by the institutions and agents dealing with adolescents.⁽⁴⁾

With the expansion and consolidation of the Internet, especially starting with Web 2.0, both youth and adult sociability is redefined by online interactions. In technical terms, Internet 2.0 is a time in which anyone without former knowledge of technology use can produce content and disseminate it in a few seconds to thousands of users connected to the network.

In historical terms, Internet 2.0 is a new moment of capitalist globalization and is a space for the production of cognitive commodities, the circulation and provision of economic and symbolic goods, services and capital, as well as the dissemination of ideologies, lifestyles, and, obviously, subjectivities.⁽⁵⁾ Based on the full mobility of access and hyperconnectivity among users, on the Internet people work, consume more than before, invest, teach/learn, build affections with friends and family, and love. New technology-mediated orders of subjectivity are designed, thus building – to use a Foucauldian category – a biopolitics quite different from one anchored in disciplinary introjection, typical of industrial

society. The digital culture and all the underlying market relationships, through their platforms and websites,⁽⁶⁾ support extensive connectivity, spreading creative expression, the sharing of experiences, and the constant public testimony of private life.⁽⁷⁾

We move from the internalized psychosocial construction of the character and the modeling of the “ego” to the phase of complete externalization of the intimate and private spheres. Daily life and the lives of ordinary people reach a status of interest in digital social media platforms, which – depending on the amount of membership and number of shares – can be monetized and, consequently, become a model of success. The exposure of ideas, knowledge, tastes, emotions, and experiences become the most crucial evidence of social existence.^(8,9)

The task to belong to digital culture is the construction of an acceptable “self-image” endowed with symbolic attributes considered positive by the target audience. In this sense, the broad tradition of discourse studies and before them, the rhetorical treaties, help us to understand the construction of *ethos* and its role in the relationship with audiences. Amossy⁽¹⁰⁾ points out that every discursive act involves a self-representation, whether through gestures, repertoire, linguistic uses, or even clothing and appearance. In this sense, the construction of a self-image and the successful demonstration of *ethos* is intended to ensure the success of a discursive enterprise, but it depends on how this discursive relationship with partners is established, in a game of mutual influence.

Maingueneau^(11,12) mentions that *ethos* involves a presentation of the character (a bundle of psychological traits) and a “corporeality,” a set of gestures, body and voice modeling, but also an attitude that builds on a set of stereotypes, that is, of well- or ill-regarded representations. The enunciator designs an *ethos* based on a scene of enunciation, adopting a “tone” that is the mixture of a demonstrated character and corporeality. Thus, as suggested by Maingueneau,^(11,12) if each type of discourse has a pre-established distribution of roles, the enunciator can choose more or

less freely a “scenography,” that is, a performance that is professorial, prophetic, “cool,” among others, defining the necessary tools for successful communication.

In this context, online challenges are a revealing facet of the appropriation of this discursive management by adolescents in their digital interactions. The “challenge” modality incorporates several non-exclusive possibilities – play, competition, opportunity to show skills – and can represent a type of activity to be carried out in a mediatic roadmap, pre-defined based on the trends of actions that can arouse the interest of netizens and allow the construction of a favorable self-image.⁽¹³⁾

Indeed, some challenges bring messages of “overcoming,” related to skills or adherence to specific causes. However, those that have become more popular include risks with great potential to harm their practitioners’ health and physical integrity. The Blue Whale⁽¹⁴⁾ and Momo incite challenges involving self-harm and suicidal practices and were disseminated worldwide. The challenges related to self-suffocation are reported in several languages (“jogos de desmaio”, “jeux d’étranglement”, “choking game”, among many other designations), and are addressed as a health problem by some countries⁽¹⁵⁾ due to their lethal and harmful potential. However, dozens of other challenges with immense self-injurious potential for health are out there, and they are renewed almost weekly, generating thousands of views and followers.

In this sense, we were interested in analyzing the role of self-injurious challenges in the digital sociability of children and adolescents. Our analysis was guided by several research questions: How is the self-image produced in challenge practices? How is the relationship with the audience established? What particularities do digital environments bring to this self-construction?

METHODS

We started the exploratory phase by searching on Google, a search environment with

the most significant scope on the Internet. Through the Portuguese keywords of “desafios” (challenges), “desafios adolescentes” (adolescent challenges), “desafios autoleivos” (self-injurious challenges) and “desafios mais perigosos” (most dangerous challenges), taken from our thematic categories, we made a preliminary map the first week of January 2019 that indicated the primary digital environments in which this type of practice is disseminated. Most of the challenges were hosted on YouTube, the largest video sharing platform.

As the initial search yielded more than 10,000 videos, we defined more precise inclusion criteria to reduce the collection. The first criteria were the year in which the video was published (a period of five years was used, from 2014 to 2019), the number of views (more than 100), and that the video be performed in Portuguese, implemented by children or adolescents, and involve a potential health risk. The impossibility of precisely defining the age of the participants was a drawback in this selection.

Even after applying these criteria, the YouTube search engine yielded a large number of videos (more than 1,000). Thus, a new foray was made into the collection. After the research team’s screening, we managed to group the videos around twelve challenges that met the listed criteria, especially those with the highest potential harm to the health of children and adolescents, as follows: alcoholic drinks, mouth (lip challenge), cinnamon, charcoal, fainting, deodorant, Coca-Cola® and Mentos®, fire, anthill, ice and salt, condom, and Super Glue. In terms of potential harm, we highlight primarily consequences to physical health (burns, asphyxiation, poisoning, lacerations, contact allergies, and death).

Based on this classification, a collection was created with 122 videos whose links were listed in an Excel file and classified by type of challenge. Bearing in mind that this is a sizeable audiovisual collection for an in-depth analysis, a second screening was carried out based on the previous analysis of this set of videos. Each researcher independently

analyzed a subset of videos to identify the main saturation elements of this informative material. Saturation is a conceptual tool frequently used in the reports of qualitative investigations in different areas in the field of health. Fontanella et al.⁽¹⁶⁾ define sampling closure by theoretical saturation as the suspension of new participants when the researcher believes that the obtained data show a certain redundancy or repetition, no longer contributing significantly to the improvement of the theoretical reflection based on the data being collected. Thus, we excluded the videos that repeated the argument structure, choosing the most representative of the arguments and behaviors related to each type of challenge. We concluded this selection phase with 35 videos.

The 35 selected videos were downloaded from YouTube using the Tube Catcher tool and saved to Google Drive. In the digital space of this storage platform, the videos were separated into folders named after each challenge. The possibility of copying the video to an offline file was essential in order to keep a copy of those videos that might be lost if removed by YouTube for violating safety standards (a common feature of this material).

All videos were transcribed, including the description of the scenarios, overlapping statements, gestures, jokes, or any type of body language, as well as the use of visual and sound effects (music or noises). The title of each video was kept as is (many have already been removed from the platform for violating its security rules), but the name of the channel was omitted to preserve the child or adolescent's identity.

The collection was subjected to a floating reading, and a synthesis of the saturations observed was elaborated based on a preliminary analysis guide (self-image construction; relationship with the audience; meanings assigned with the challenges accomplished). The discourse analysis led to interpretation based on the theoretical categories of self-image,⁽¹⁰⁾ *ethos*, and incorporation.⁽¹²⁾

The research study was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the

Fernandes Figueira Institute of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collection

The collection included 12 challenges with different self-injurious potential to practitioners, ranging from the minor risks like bruising to the extreme risk of death (Table 1).

The titles invoke different meanings, from a tutorial, to a sensationalist announcement of harmful consequences, to the description of the type of challenge carried out, followed by # (hashtag), the symbol used to organize content and facilitate the search for users. The most popular video reached 100,523 views and was posted in 2015.

YouTube as an enunciative context

The YouTube video sharing platform defines the enunciative context of the challenges. This space has a set of communication rules that are broadcast and inculcated informally or through a profusion of videos that teach how to become a YouTuber, guiding newbies on how to create content, what to post, how to speak, how to plan the channel, how to define a visual identity, among others. Different authors indicate that YouTube's success and monopoly when it comes to online video sharing is due to four technological features that increase interactivity between users: video recommendations through the "Related Videos" list, an email link that allows the sharing of videos, comments (and other features inherent to social networks), and a video player that can be incorporated into other websites.⁽¹⁷⁾ In this way, the dissemination of materials and the consequent monetization (the company's main objective) are based on the logic of interactivity and sharing, and, in the same way, those who want to be successful and recognized in this interactional space must know how to handle such devices. In other words, online platforms are

Table 1. Characterization of challenges, video titles, number of views and posting date. YouTube platform, 2018.

Type of challenge	Video title	Number of video views	Posting date
1. <i>Fainting</i> : Accelerated breathing for several minutes, holding one's breath and pressing on the chest until passing out..	<i>Como desmaiar em 5 segundos!</i> [How to faint in 5 seconds!]	27,749	January 16, 2016
	<i>Como se auto desmaiar dois retardados kkk (Como "se desmaiar" passo a passo muita zoeraa)</i> [How to make yourself faint two retards lol (How "to make yourself faint" step by step a lot of fun)]	6,668	April 13, 2016
	<i>Brincadeira do desmaio não temem isso em casa!!!</i> [Fainting game don't try this at home!!!]	45,116	September 24, 2017
2. <i>Anthill</i> : Placing feet or hands in an anthill for a specific time, until the insects bite the skin.	<i>Irmãos fuinha desafios #4 (Pé no formigueiro, gelo na cueca, bike sem freio)*</i> [Fuinha Brothers challenges #4 (Foot in anthill, ice in underwear, bike without breaks)*]	100,523	November 24, 2015
	<i>Colocando a mão no formigueiro!! Desafios #3</i> [Putting my hand in an anthill!! Challenges #3]	9,258	March 1, 2016
	<i>Coloquei a mão no formigueiro deu BO</i> [I put my hand in an anthill and ended up with a police report]	6,364	May 1, 2016
	<i>Desafio: Formigueiro - Com formigas vermelhas!</i> [Challenge: Anthill with red ants!]	852	November 12, 2016
3. <i>Charcoal</i> : Placing one's head inside a bag full of charcoal and tying it until suffocating.	<i>Fiz desafio do carvão com meu pai</i> [I did the charcoal challenge with my dad]	3,022	January 23, 2019
4. <i>Lip challenge</i> : Sucking on a glass or small container with one's lips until they are totally swollen.	<i>Desafio da boca grande</i> [Big mouth challenge]	25,202	June 25, 2015
	<i>Fui fazer o desafio de Kylie Jenner e deu merda</i> [I did the Kylie Jenner challenge and everything went wrong]	12,167	September 24, 2016
	<i>Desafio kylie jenner challenge Parte 1</i> [Kylie Jenner challenge Part 1]	3,682	September 30, 2017
	<i>Desafio copo na boca kk deu merda</i> [Glass in the mouth challenge lol everything went wrong]	11,894	July 12, 2017
5. <i>Deodorant</i> ¹ : Spraying aerosol deodorant directly on the skin of the thigh for as long as one can stand. Spraying aerosol deodorant on one's leg and lighting a lighter or match over one's leg's hair.	<i>100 Sentido Desafios #1 - Desafio Depilando a Perna com Desodorante e Fogo</i> [Meaningless Challenges #1 – Shaving legs with deodorant and fire]	785	August 21, 2015
	<i>Brincadeira do desodorante com fogo</i> [Playing with deodorant and fire]	667	July 21, 2016
	<i>Desafio #13 - Desodorante por 30 segundos na Perna</i> [Challenge #13 – Deodorant for 30 seconds on the leg]	2,928	June 6, 2015
6. <i>Fire</i> ¹ : Spreading alcohol on one's armpits and lighting a match in the hair or burning it directly. Setting fire to the hair on one's head and then putting it out with a cloth.	<i>Botando fogo no cabelo, tomando suco de cebola e muito mais!*</i> [Setting hair on fire, drinking onion juice, and much more!*	1,477	May 26, 2015
	<i>Desafio fogo no suvaco</i> [Setting armpits on fire challenge]	5,125	July 12, 2016
	<i>Desafio - fogo nas axilas #04</i> [Challenge - Setting armpits on fire #04]	3,374	October 29, 2015
7. <i>Super Glue</i> : Gluing one's lips with high impact glue (individually or in pairs). Gluing one's hands on the faces of other participants, forming a circle, where everyone is glued together.	<i>#1 Desafio super bonder</i> [#1 Super glue challenge]	251	August 14, 2018
	<i>Desafio do super bonder #01</i> [Super glue challenge #01]	226	March 7, 2016
	<i>4º Desafio "Super Bonder no Rosto"</i> [4th Challenge "Super glue on face"]	176	November 19, 2016
8. <i>Condom</i> : Inhaling a male condom and removing it through the mouth or the other nostril. Filling the condom with water and throwing it over the head of a second participant so that when it falls, it covers, without bursting, the person's whole face and head.	<i>Camisinha no nariz - Desafio #1</i> [Condom in the nose – Challenge #1]	1,701	March 15, 2016
	<i>Desafio camisinha</i> [Condom challenge]	3,621	December 19, 2015
	<i>Desafio da camisinha!</i> [Condom challenge!]	2,542	January 13, 2016
9. <i>Ice and salt</i> : Holding a piece of ice over a quantity of salt in one's closed palm for as long as possible until the palms burn.	<i>#Desafio Gelo e Sal no Parque!!</i> [#Ice and salt challenge in the park!!]	81,860	July 12, 2015
	<i>Fazendo: Desafios da canela e Desafio gelo e sal</i> [Doing: Cinnamon challenges and ice and salt challenge]	6,066	February 20, 2014
	<i>Fui fazer o desafio do gelo com sal e olha o que aconteceu com a minha mão #desafios3</i> [I did the ice and salt challenge and look what happened to my hand #challenges3]	2,090	July 12, 2016

Continued on next page.

¹Although both challenges involve the possibilities of burns and the use of fire, the challenges have different intentions. The purpose of the "Deodorant" challenge is to spray this everyday substance onto the skin for an extended period of time in order to generate a chemical burn or irritation. The use of fire has to do with burning the leg hair in order to "shave" one's legs. In the "Fire" challenge, the intention is to withstand the burn or simply observe the pyrotechnics of the body in flames. In these videos, deodorant was occasionally used as a flammable material, but alcohol was the most commonly used substance.

Table 1. Continuation.

Type of challenge	Video title	Number of video views	Posting date
10. <i>Alcoholic drinks</i> : Drinking several drinks in the shortest possible time.	<i>Desafio das bebidas alcoólicas</i> [Alcoholic beverages challenge]	31,097	January 21, 2017
	<i>Desafio da cerveja *o*</i> [Beer challenge *o*]	1,960	February 27, 2014
	<i>[Desafio] 500ml de cerveja boa? Por que não 700ml de uma cerveja ruim?</i> [Challenge: 500ml of good beer? Why not 700ml of bad beer?]	6,351	February 15, 2014
	<i>Experimentando bebidas alcoólicas Parte 1</i> [Trying out alcoholic drinks Part 1]	2,127	November 5, 2017
11. <i>Cinnamon</i> : Ingesting or inhaling large amounts of cinnamon and holding one's breath.	<i>Desafio da garrafa 2 comi canela</i> [Bottle challenge 2 ate cinnamon]	1,990	September 12, 2017
12. <i>Mentos and Coca Cola</i> : Mixing Coca Cola and Mentos candies in a container, sealing it and shaking until it explodes, or ingesting the mixture.	<i>#3º Desafio, Bebendo Coca Cola Com Mentos y Tomando Ovo Cru!!! (*) *</i> [3rd Challenge, Drinking Coke with Mentos and Drinking Raw Egg!!! (*)*]	1,598	May 6, 2016
	<i>Bebendo Coca com Mentos #Desafio 1 (*)</i> [Drinking coke with Mentos #Challenge 1(*)]	13,383	December 28, 2015
	<i>#4 Desafio Coca com Mentos + Gelo na cueca (*)</i> [#4 Coke with Mentos challenge + Ice in underwear (*)]	1,123	March 5, 2016

Source: Own elaboration.

technical-cultural artifacts that shape the sociality of their users, their ways of acting and communicating.⁽⁶⁾

Most of the analyzed videos are part of a collection within the channel of the adolescent or child. In each channel, the videos address several themes and are grouped into collections called “programs.” The YouTube platform, whose motto is “broadcast yourself,” spreads the dream of everyone having their “own program” and perhaps becoming a celebrity. If having a television program was once impossible for most people, in our collection it was not uncommon to see that each member of the same family had their “own channel.” With cross references, teenagers also promote the channel of their sisters, cousins, mothers, among others. Thus, in a logic governed by the gift of disclosure and visibility, they also seek to secure an audience and its loyalty for the other channels of their family or network of friends, who are also candidates for the position of “digital celebrity.” They expect their peers to do the same, creating a feedback loop of channel references. They mainly aim to capture more subscribers to the channel, given that the YouTube platform sets goals regarding the number of subscribers needed to continue circulating the material in its algorithmic

logic. It is only with a certain number of subscribers and number and length of views that these videos will appear in the list of “related videos” as the first suggestions for netizens to view in their search.

So guys, subscribe to the channel (brings arm forward) because that was today's video, ok? You subscribe to the channel, give us that “like,” activate the notification bell, and that's it. Ah, and one more thing guys (raises the index finger to screen), don't forget the goal of the channel, which is before December... 250 subscribers. (Alcoholic drink challenge, adolescent)

Van Dijck⁽⁶⁾ states that the “like” button reveals instant and emotional reactions, but represents much more than the “good feeling of approval.” “Likes” are also commercial clickbait, that is, they can automatically generate the popularity of a product or person. The “like” button is not as spontaneous as users think, and is at the core of a commoditized system. According to the number of “likes,” the number of views and number of followers the channel owner has, posts are monetized and the channel owner receives benefits to improve the platform experience

(new technological resources), in addition to financial benefits.

Building the self-image

The central idea of most of the posts analyzed is that of self-exposure, building an image geared to public acceptance. Even children are already aware of the commercial logic imposed by the platform and, consequently, are very concerned with “likes,” with the viewing time of each video, and, above all, with gaining more subscribers to their channel.

I'm going to ask you to do something I've never asked you to do before, ever! NEVER! Which is this: the "like" goal, right people. (...) I already have enough videos on the channel, and I never asked you for a "like" goal. If you like this challenge and want to leave more challenges to achieve the "like" goal. The "like" goal, people! For the love of God! It'll be twelve likes. (Kylie Jenner challenge, girl)

With a script rehearsed in a “cool” tone, children and adolescents greet the audience using many slang terms. The greeting “what’s up, people?” can be addressed to mini-audiences, schoolmates or relatives, macro-audiences, and potential audiences in general. Despite the differences and regional accents found in the collection, the repertoire of slang and expressions is repeated.

“Hey, people of our channel! How’s it going?” (Video: #1 Desafio do Superbonder [1 Super glue challenge], adolescent)

“Hi people, what’s up?” (Video: Fiz o desafio do carvão com o meu pai. [I did the charcoal challenge with my dad], girl)

“What’s up? How’s it going?” (Video: 500ml de cerveja boa? Por que não 700ml de uma cerveja ruim? [500ml of good beer? Why not 700ml of bad beer?], adolescent)

“What’s up, people of YouTube? How’s it going?” (Video: #4 Desafio Coca com mentos + gelo na cueca () [#4 Coke with Mentos challenge + Ice in underwear (*)], adolescent)*

The composition of the statements has the same basic structure: the boy/girl introduces himself/herself, asks for subscription to their channel, describes the challenge that they are going to perform, performs the challenge, evaluates their own performance, and ends by asking people to subscribe once again. There is, therefore, a clear demarcation of what Bakhtin defines as a narrative genre: the presence of certain stylistic, thematic, and relatively stable composition statements.⁽¹⁸⁾

Teens can show a great deal of amateurism or reveal the air of more experienced communicators. Anything goes, from dancing, using a lot of slang and swearing, and adding sound or visual effects that interact with the theme and text. Phonetic effects and writing with grammatical errors predominate in this style.

In this discursive perspective, there is also an appeal to the “characterization of the enunciator’s body” in every text.⁽¹¹⁾ The *ethos* not only refers only to the verbal dimension, but also includes all the bodily attitudes that will be invoked in the construction of this image: girls pout their lips and fix their hair; boys and girls make gestures with their hands and arms (gestures like “thumbs up,” “hang loose,” imitations of rappers’ gestures, among others), roll their eyes when they want to show irony, and speak in high-pitched voices to mock possible received criticisms. The songs (in general, Rio-style funks, electronic music, US pop hits) help build the ambiance and are used in many of the videos, giving greater intensity to the interpreted actions and the presenter’s persona. Like in any self-image construction, boys and girls will use various elements (verbal and non-verbal, ethical, and aesthetic). The incorporation will depend on the interlocutor’s apprehension of a set of social and cultural representations that they share as members of the same generation marked by digital sociability.

While an aesthetics of the “rough,” improvised and rudimentary is welcome, many videos have great production and editing, revealing a vast inequality of investment and technical mastery in productions. The aspiring YouTubers belong to all social classes, and their productions reveal anything from impoverished environments to houses in upper-middle-class condominiums and are made with anything from just the cell phone as a tool to studio equipment. The different accents reveal that the practice of the challenges covers boys and girls nationwide, and the locations show urban or rural contexts.

The presentation of self-image involves a concern for demonstrating skills that the enunciator believes are required for the approval of their audience.⁽¹⁰⁾ Showing oneself as communicative, friendly, charismatic, funny are essential requirements, in addition to those that can generate more adherence from a teen audience, such as being sexy (for girls) or daring (“very crazy”), that is, capable of taking the most varied risks. As Maingueneau⁽¹²⁾ reveals, the most competent in the construction of this *ethos* will be those showing themselves to be “naturally” funny, daring, and “cool,” and not those who claim to have these attributes.

As pointed out by Maingueneau,^(11,12,19) this image is built on multiple relationships with the other (subjects and discourses), and its main interlocutors are the imagined or already existing audiences in digital interactions.

Co-guarantors of self-image: parents and peers as partners or assistants in meeting the challenges

We identified in some pieces of the analyzed collection the presence of parents who assist in the carrying out of the challenge or the filming, make comments, and act as assistants in the construction of the child or adolescent’s image. They act as co-guarantors of the action, inlaying it with parental consent and support. In some cases, they behave as if they were a participant of the same generation, dancing, speaking slang, with costumes

and youthful gestures. Whatever their role (assistant or partner), all were concerned with the public’s adherence to their child’s channel, reinforcing requests for subscription to the channel and “likes.”

Charcoal challenge - Description of the filming environment: Room of a middle-class apartment. Background music and strobe lights.

Girl 1, about 8 years old: *“Hello my loves, how are you? Everything is great with us!”* (she fixes her hair, chews gum). *“People, today I’m here to make a super, hyper, mega-cool video! And if you want to watch, click on our channel logo!”* (She puts her hand on the camera lens. The channel logo appears with a soundtrack, editing, animation, music by Soso Vlogs. She comes back into focus, uncovering the lens and stepping back). *“I’m back!”* (She gestures with arms and little jumps, there is a soundtrack and light in the background). *“And I have two very special guests!”* (She bows in front of the camera) *“My cousin!”* (Girl 2 with an apparent age of 7 jumps off the floor in front of the camera) *“Awesome!”* (Girl 1 gestures with arms) *“and my dad!”* (claps hands).

Man 1, looking 35-40 years old: *“Yuhuuuu!”* (Makes thumbs up sign with hands. He’s wearing shorts with a large skull print and a Mickey T-shirt. Girls 1 and 2 and Man 1 dance). *“Here we are!!”* (Girl 1 claps a hand and bends in front of the camera. Girl 2 in the background smiles and points to the camera. Man 1 dances). *“And we’re here to do the charcoal challenge”* (Girl 2 claps hands and dances).

Girl 1: *“Oh* (straightens her hair), *first of all, don’t do this at home”* (She approaches the camera, Girl 2 and Man 1 make a “no” sign with their hands). *“Only with daddy’s permission”* (She gestures with her hands. Girl 2 points to Man 1. Man 1 makes a thumbs up sign with his hands) *“and mommy’s permission, and*

with an adult watching over okay?" (Girl 2 points in the opposite direction. Man 1 thumbs up with his hands and smiles at the camera)

Parent participation gives a connotation of protection and parental supervision, and that of peers gives the challenge added value, as something "interesting" and fun.

The participation of two or more boys/girls was verified in several videos, such as alcohol, deodorant, fire, condoms, and choking challenges (Table 1). Here the performance could take on the characteristic of a "game/competition," where each participant was required to perform the task until the end, or of "stage assistants" to the main character (channel owner). In the first case, the participants could not give up even amid pain or discomfort. When they showed weakness, fear, or tiredness, they were induced by peers through shouting, threats, and teasing. The challenge was carried out entirely for the camera, showing the constant concern with media recording. In the second case, the peer worked as an assistant, positioning the camera, acting as an immediate audience member through laughter, comments, and shouting, or acting as a stage manager.

The role of challenges in building self-image and bargaining with the audience

Judging by the significant presence of challenges in the channels of children and adolescents, and the existence of entire programs aiming to hold marathons of different challenges, we can infer that this modality plays a vital role in connecting with the audience. The same challenge can generate so much viewership that it is redone in several programs, for example, Challenge #1, #2, #3, etc.

Netizens who watch the videos play an active role in elaborating roadmaps by sending countless suggestions for new challenges. On the other hand, they ask that their names be mentioned in the videos, once again reinforcing the idea of hypervisibility where everyone wants to be exposed and known.⁽²⁰⁾

The higher the risks at stake in the challenge, especially those that may cause harm to health or damage the social image (these have not been explored here), the more favorable they will be seen to an increased audience. Drinking alcoholic beverages in large quantities, placing one's hand or foot in an anthill, gluing body parts with industrial glue, burning the body, choking until passing out, inhaling charcoal, swallowing large doses of cinnamon, causing edema on the lips in order to resemble a famous actress, among others, are the "price to pay" in the harsh search for an audience.

Challenge fire to underarm hair #04 –

The filming was all done in a bathroom. After staging a marathon of several challenges, including using a bottle of alcohol to burn his underarm hair, the 15-year-old says:

Adolescent: *"Hey guys, I hope you enjoyed the video... give it a thumbs up ... subscribe to the channel ... send a challenge..."* (he raises his arms). *"The channel isn't just about challenges. Some people think it's just about challenges"* (he moves his arm) *"and they 'unsubscribe' from the channel"* (he puts two hands up). *"They keep saying 'you have to stop this...'"* (he wiggles with debauchery) *"Damn ... 'you have to stop it, you can get hurt,' and so forth..."* (he rolls his eyes, wiggles with debauchery) *"and if you clamp yourself here ..."* (he points to his arm) *"shit, dude.... shit, dude... I even pricked myself with a..."* (pause) *"a fucking..."* (pause, he shakes his body forward) *"toothpick here on the finger, dude. Subscribe to the channel and give a thumbs up, all right?"* (thumbs up sign with hands). *"Right on, dude!"* (he throws his arms up and down. Cut. Image with the channel name and the words "Your retarded channel !!" appears. Video icon with image announcing the next challenge appears: "Clamping your arm?" Electronic music. End of the video).

The injuries suffered, the pain felt, can be real or staged. What matters is that they be credible and convincing. In many video titles, the gimmicks will be the unforeseen consequences and the harm suffered, as in *"Quem bebe mais pinga. Deu merda!"* [Who drinks more pinga (cachaza). Everything went wrong!], *"Desafio da K.J a boca ficou preta"* [K] challenge my mouth turned black], *"Coloquei a mão no formigueiro deu B.O"* [I put my hand in an anthill and ended up with a police report], *"Brincadeira de desmaiar: nossa quase morri 1"* [The fainting game: my God, I nearly died 1]. This "sacrifice" will be directly or indirectly emphasized with the audience, with the moral consideration that they subscribe to the channel. They make it clear that there is a kind of bargain between the corporal sacrifice of YouTube in exchange for the positive evaluation of netizens.

Ice and salt challenge – A mother with an 8-year-old girl in a park. They carry out the challenge together. The mother says she is afraid and that she knows that the challenge is excruciating. After performing the tasks of distributing the salt and the ice cubes, she interacts with the girl during the implementation and encourages her. Both show the injuries caused and externalize the pain of the burns:

Woman: *"my hand is still hurting..."* (girl points to injured hand) *"here..."* (cut).

Woman looking at her hand: *"I even thought my hand had been burned ..."* (She looks at the camera, an emoji with eyes on fire appears, she rubs the unharmed hand over the injured hand, there is the sound of fire crackling, cut). *"Well, guys, I think that was it"* (sound of fire crackling ends, emoji disappears). *"This was the ice challenge"* (girl looks at camera) *"recorded for you, right?"* (She messes with her hair, the girl shows reddish palm to camera, the woman looks at girl).

The woman continues: *"J. beat the challenge, right, J.? How did you do it?"* (She laughs, the girl makes a peace and love sign with both hands, the woman pushes

the girl's shoulder and falls on it. There is the sound of a cash register and clinking coins).

Woman, now upright: *"J. did it, yeah!..."* (girl rubs both hands). *"So that's it"* (video cut effect).

Girl: *"I hope you liked it..."* (cut).

Woman: *"If you liked it, if you want more challenges, ask us in the comments, and we'll try to make them for you..."* (cut).

Girl: *"Don't forget to 'like' us, because my hand is dying..."* (cracking sound, girl raises injured hand, makes a sad face, woman laughs).

The girl continues: *"Share with your friends."*

Woman: *"It's super important for the growth of our channel..."*

Girl: *"Subscribe to the channel..."* (woman nods).

At the end of one video, a girl who caused herself to faint several times by choking herself lists all possible cardiac and neurological harms she could suffer, and then proceeds to "demand" consideration of this by subscribing to her channel. In another video, with a great deal of editing effects and technical investment, a teenager performs the challenge of introducing her hand into an anthill (*"Coloquei a mão no formigueiro deu B.O"* [I put my hand in an anthill and ended up with a police report]), then posts photos of her hospitalization due to the anaphylactic shock she suffered. Even in the hospital photos, the teenager is concerned with her look, posing sensually with makeup. At the end of the video, she also establishes the same base of negotiation: bodily sacrifice/self-inflicted injury in exchange for an audience and approval by netizens.

Anthill challenge – Opening with musical effect and photos of the owner of the channel.

Teenage girl in the kitchen of her house, gestures and greets the audience: *"Hey girls!"* (unintelligible sentence) ... *"How's it going?"* [...] *"So everyone, the*

first challenge is... to put your hand in an anthill and leave it there for 30 seconds. Except that now it's hard to find an anthill, I went to the neighbor's house and I couldn't find one... So I'll keep looking and see if I can find one (scene cut again, with girl in a vacant lot, crouched on the floor). "I don't know if you can see this very well, but I'll put my hand in here, I'll start the stopwatch now" (girl shows stopwatch on the cell phone screen). "Here we go!" (Scene cut showing girl's hand in the anthill. Girl releases stream of swear words and hits her hand on the floor). "Oh my God, it hurts like hell! Oh my God, 29, 29, 30! (Cut scene). "Man ... my ... my hand is hurting a lot!" (Girl looks at and waves her hand. Video cuts to images. Image 1 has the words "Obs: I ended up with a police report, I didn't feel good and went to the hospital, so I didn't record the other challenges..." Image 2 has the words "Some photos of what happened..." Image 3 is of the back of her hand stung by the ants. Image 4 is of the girl posing in a hospital chair receiving intravenous medicine. Image 5 is of the back of the girl's hand stung by the ants on top of a cell phone on her leg. Image 6 is of the girl in hospital chair receiving intravenous medication. Image 7 has the words "See you in the next video ...; *; * Follow my social networks below." End of the video).

When evident, the consequences or harm to health will be used as capital, as a reinforcement of the image that one wants to build in a "heroic" project of self-determination, despite any risk. The "enunciating body" appears here, as Maingueneau⁽¹²⁾ offers us, in clear enunciative reflexivity in the relationship established between body and discourse. The body validates the *ethos* that one wants to build, as the record that is "shown" is more important and effective than what is "said." The scenography of the discursive context of the online challenges is revealed through different languages, styles, and performances such as the interaction algorithm developed

by the YouTube platform (comments, likes, sharing, video promotion strategies, privacy policies); the spoken language with a great deal of slang and swear words; and the filming technique observed in the camera angle, sound and visual effects and soundtracks. These languages are apprehended and expressed through the body; that is, they are incorporated (embodied) by the enunciators when communicating with their audience.

The challenge, as a strategy to retain the audience's loyalty to the channel, proves to be a success when the other netizens send comments, suggest new challenges to be carried out in front of the camera, or claim that watching the challenge led them to subscribe to the channel. Some of the videos stated that there was a goal for the number of likes, generating the promise that once achieved, new, bolder challenges or supposedly more interesting videos would be posted.

It is interesting to note that even in those challenges with a small number of views, the communication logic of YouTubers is still present. Looking at the camera as if speaking directly to the audience, the verbal language of the latest slang and swear words, and all the body language taken from those who have been successful on the platform are artifices present in the challenges, independently of their reach and number of views.

Although the "choking games" have reached a large number of young people since 2000, especially in the USA and France, and the resulting deaths were widely disseminated in print and TV media sources, in Brazil the phenomenon of online challenges has received little attention by researchers. According to Guilheri *et al.*,⁽¹⁵⁾ no scientific studies in Portuguese on these types of behaviors could be found before 2016. In this sense, other authors highlight the need for carrying out new studies on these types of dangerous behaviors especially in Brazil and Latin America.

After 2016, only three articles were found on the topic in Brazil.^(13,14,15) The works published highlight that the challenges are increasingly popular among young people, who are attracted to the logic of exposure proposed by

social media. The authors agree that both understanding and taking action regarding this complex phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary effort especially involving the areas of knowledge related to health, education and communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Challenges are practices that span generations and expose some of the representations and meanings of the condition of youth in the path of culturally-modeled identity production. The particularity is that, in the context of the digital sociability of children and youth, these phenomena take the place of a powerful communicative resource to reaffirm belonging, recognition, and audience

adherence. They also serve as a discursive opportunity for the presentation of an *ethos*, a self-image modeled in a hyperexposure-oriented scenography.

In an environment where a large amount of information circulates, all the contents produced, especially those referring to the construction of self-image, must be all the more “spectacular” to capture the attention of a receiver flooded by information produced daily in large volume. Thus, online challenges are presented as a media strategy that is incorporated by young people and adolescents in the construction of an Internet-mediated identity in which risk and violence become decisive devices in the construction of a self-image capable of retaining an audience. The challenges reveal that the enunciator’s body is where all these languages are synthesized and this digital sociability is modeled.

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