

## **“I’M SORRY YOU DON’T FLAG IT WHEN YOU ADVERTISE”: AUDIENCE AND COMMERCIAL CONTENT ON THE *SOFIA BARBOSA* YOUTUBE CHANNEL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main theme of the article is the context of digital microcelebrity experienced by children and adolescents, particularly on social networking sites such as YouTube. The purpose of the study is to understand how young audiences of the popular Portuguese channel *Sofia Barbosa* on YouTube construct meaning about the commercial content and authenticity that the youtuber presents. The methodology used is qualitative bias and netnography is employed in analysing 1.961 comments made by subscribers on 10 videos posted between January and October 2018. As a means of better understanding the context of the comments we also analysed the visual, verbal and commercial aspects of the videos. The comments demonstrate a perception on the part of followers of closeness and intimacy in relation to Sofia and a strong acceptance of the commercial content promoted by the young woman. However, critical reflections about the marketing practices of the youtuber can at various times be perceived, namely on the lack of transparency in commercial relations; this presents itself as an opportunity to balance a romanticised view that many subscribers have of microcelebrities with a more rational understanding of the industry that sustains them.

### **KEYWORDS**

young people; microcelebrity, authenticity; commercialism; YouTube

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## **“TENHO PENA QUE NÃO SINALIZES QUANDO FAZES PUBLICIDADE”: AUDIÊNCIA E CONTEÚDO COMERCIAL NO CANAL *SOFIA BARBOSA* NO YOUTUBE**

### **RESUMO**

Este artigo trata do contexto da microcelebrização digital vivenciado por crianças e adolescentes, nomeadamente, em sites de redes sociais como o YouTube. O objetivo do trabalho está em perceber como as jovens audiências do popular canal português *Sofia Barbosa*, no YouTube, constroem sentidos sobre os conteúdos comerciais e a autenticidade que a *youtuber* apresenta. A metodologia utilizada tem cariz qualitativo e contou com a netnografia para a análise de 1.961 comentários feitos pelos subscritores em 10 vídeos publicados entre janeiro e outubro de 2018. Como forma de melhor compreender o contexto em que estavam inseridos os comentários, analisamos também os aspetos visuais, verbais e comerciais dos vídeos. Os comentários

demonstram uma percepção de proximidade e intimidade por parte dos seguidores em relação à Sofia e uma forte aceitação do conteúdo comercial promovido pela jovem. No entanto, percebe-se em vários momentos uma reflexividade crítica em relação às práticas mercadológicas da *youtuber*, nomeadamente no que diz respeito à falta de transparência nas relações comerciais, o que se apresenta como uma oportunidade para equilibrar uma visão romantizada que muitos subscritores têm das microcelebridades com uma compreensão mais racional sobre a indústria que os sustenta.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

jovens; microcelebridade; autenticidade; comercialismo; YouTube

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary infantile and juvenile cultures, the relations of children and adolescents with social networks have attracted the attention of the industry, the media, and academia. There are many positive aspects to this presence online of the younger generation, whether as audience or content producers: possibilities of education in interpreting media messages, of interaction and learning new skills, of self-expression and as a manifestation of the values and visibility of their own cultures (Jorge, Marôpo & Nunes, 2018).

However, the potential to create and amplify voices that initially characterised the internet gave way to a new business model on the part of major digital platforms that pairs digital influence with the management of metadata (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016; van Dijck, 2017). This datafication is characterised by the collection, storage and monitoring of data on human socialising and behaviours that is exploited by companies, digital platforms and governmental agencies. These data were long viewed as subproducts of the new technologies, with friendships, personal interests, conversations, expression of tastes and feelings becoming a valuable currency of exchange for the prediction of behaviour, the development of new products and the planning of marketing campaigns (van Dijck, 2017).

With this in mind, platforms such as YouTube and Instagram came to invest massively in the professionalisation and commercialisation of the content produced by users, contributing to the popularity of the so-called digital influencers and the promotion of commercialism among its audiences, which have to a large extent been made up of children and adolescents (Jorge, Marôpo & Nunes, 2018; Khamis et al., 2016). It is in this context that microcelebrities emerge – ordinary people who win fame by sharing elements of their daily life online, at the same time using strategies of authenticity and self-branding to attract the attention of the public and the advertising industry (Banet-Weiser, 2011; Marwick, 2010).

By sharing routines, tastes and interests that are similar to those of their peers, child and adolescent microcelebrities more easily promote feelings of identification in their followers (Tomaz, 2017). Fans of traditional stars may harbour doubts about whether

they really are as they present themselves, while the audiences of microcelebrities feel that they truly know them and that they are familiar with details that only people close to them know. In this way, these “small” digital influencers may have more loyal audiences, where recommendations might be more efficient” (Jorge, Marôpo & Nunes, 2018, p. 81).

Around 70% of adolescent spectators on YouTube say they relate more to digital influencers than to traditional celebrities, and four in every 10 young people who view videos on the platform state that YouTube stars understand them better than their own friends (O’Neil-Hart & Blumenstein, 2016).

Given these findings, one can see the importance of studies that seek clues to the ramifications that this celebrity culture on YouTube has for the formation of the subjectivities of children and adolescents and for their behaviours as social agents and consumers in the context of the attention economy (Crawford, 2015).

In Portugal, the culture of microcelebrity has made significant inroads into young audiences. In the fashion and beauty segment, Sofia Barbosa (aged 20 as of 2020) is a youtuber and Instagrammer widely recognised for her fame. Her eponymous channel was selected as the empirical object of this work due to its popularity in this niche on YouTube in the country (Chaves, 2017), especially among children and adolescents. The channel has around 270,000 subscribers, 558 videos and almost 39 million views (as of October 2019). Sofia Barbosa also has profiles on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter – all with hundreds of thousands of followers – and in September 2019 she premiered her own podcast, *Não sejas pussy* (Don’t be a pussy). She has won the *Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Award prize* for “Favourite portuguese youtuber” (in 2017) and starred in national advertising campaigns, and regularly forms partnerships with leading international brands.

The aim of this article is to show how the audiences of the *Sofia Barbosa* channel construct meaning relating to commercial content and authenticity presented by the youtuber. The methodology used is of a qualitative nature and employs netnography (Fragoso, Recuero & Amaral, 2011) to analyse the comments of subscribers and the content shared by Sofia in 10 videos posted on the channel between January and October 2018. To define the corpus of the empirical research, the content of 50 videos on the channel was analysed (Igartua & Humanes, 2004), as well as the development of rankings of the most popular videos and those that prompted most interaction, according to metrics such as views, likes, dislikes and comments.

## **MICROCELEBRITIES AND THEIR YOUNG AUDIENCES: NETWORKED EXPERIENCES**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought a complete reinvention of consumer culture and the way of relating and being in the world. The process of globalisation has connected people, while new creative and technological devices have altered the linearity of communication, given a voice to subjects, blurred the boundaries between content producer and consumer, transformed the business-client relationship and obliged the market to adapt rapidly (Castells, 2007; Lipovetsky & Seroy, 2010).

While acknowledging the multiple social and cultural divisions in westernised societies, it is clear that in general young people today are present online, interact on social networks and attract the attention of the industry, which keeps an ever closer eye on what is being produced and consumed in the online environment. The studies below, carried out in different contexts and countries, corroborate this statement.

The study *Uniquely gen Z* (NRF & IBM, 2017), involving 15.000 young people aged between 13 and 21, from 16 countries, found that 74% of participants said that they spend their free time on the internet. The study highlighted the consumption potential of this age group, worth \$44 billion per year, and also presented characteristics of its members' consumption behaviour and the level of their interaction with companies in the online environment: 36% said that they had created digital content for a brand, 42% had taken part in online activities for a marketing campaign, 66% expressed a concern for the quality of what they buy and 45% expressed interest in eco-friendly and socially responsible brands.

The study *Teens, social media & technology 2018* (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), involving 743 adolescents aged between 13 and 17 in the United States, found that 45% of the participants said they were "almost always" online and 44% that they went online "several times a day". In relation to social networks, YouTube was the favourite of adolescents (85%), followed by Instagram (72%) and Snapchat (69%).

In the European field, a study carried out with 281 adolescents aged between 12 and 19 in Portugal, Italy and Spain (Pereira, Moura & Fillol, 2018) concluded that the Portuguese participants were those that most used social networks (4.78), followed by the Spanish (4.7) and Italians (4.45). In all three countries YouTube led the field, with 97% of participants saying that they had an account on the platform. WhatsApp was second, at 88%, followed by Instagram, with 73%.

In analysing all these data, the role of social networks in the experiences of children and adolescents online is evident. This prompts the reflection that, if they are indeed occupying these digital spaces, the industry is sure to find ways of also making its presence felt, with the most varied market strategies.

One strategy that has had one of the greatest impacts on children and young people is brand partnerships with digital microcelebrities, that is, those apparently ordinary but successful content producers who understand the importance of self-promotion, build an "online persona" and market it as if it were a brand (Senft, 2008). Microcelebrities talk of their social networks as specific audience niches and tend to do without corporate entertainment "intermediaries" such as the traditional agents of major celebrities (Marwick, 2010). Amid this apparently intimate discourse, which is presented as spontaneous, the microcelebrity displays products, blurring the lines between advertising discourse and authorial narrative. In this way they represent a positive solution to consumers blocking out traditional efforts at persuasion (Williamson, 2016).

This self-promotion by means of strategies similar to those used by brands, sparking feelings of intimacy and affection in the audience, is called self-branding (Khamis et al., 2016; Marwick, 2010; Raun, 2018) and is intimately related to the logic of the

"attention economy" (Crawford, 2015). The driving force of this logic are metrics such as likes, comments and shares, which may indicate microcelebrities' high profile and capacity to influence. These influencers therefore know that, in order to attract the attention of the industry, they must keep their audiences loyal to work in their favour (Tomaz, 2017).

YouTube is the quintessential microcelebrities' social network, not least because it has dedicated significant resources to ensure that amateur videos and their producers give way to every more professional content that is susceptible to being co-opted. The platform was founded in 2005 with the objective of facilitating the sharing of videos based on user-generated content, without the need for great technical knowledge (Jorge, Amaral & Mathieu, 2018). In 2006 Google bought YouTube and the platform rapidly climbed to the top of the ranking of the world's most visited sites (Burgess & Green, 2009). Since then the platform has turned its efforts to the professionalisation of content creators. The strategies used to achieve these objectives are numerous: 1) the complex system of algorithms that co-opt the data of users to be marketed to advertisers and to classify them according to their choices and tastes; 2) social functions, such as comments and likes, 3) the automatic listing of recommended videos; 4) the YouTube Partners Program (YPP); and 5) the logistical support given to content creators, with workshops, events and recording studios dotted all around the world and equipped for youtubers' audiovisual productions (Burgess & Green, 2009; Jorge, Amaral & Mathieu, 2018). These strategies of co-opting user-generated content have brought in \$1 billion a year in revenue to the platform (Jorge, Marôpo & Nunes, 2018).

It is in this context that youtubers have become a bridge between brands and their audiences. In associating themselves with a microcelebrity who presents themselves in an apparently intimate and authentic way to their audience, the brand gains credibility and takes advantage of the influencer's reputation, built on the basis of self-branding. At the same time, the creation by the influencers of a hybrid atmosphere, in mixing personal narrative with commercial content, may be effective in ensuring that the audience does not understand whether what is being shared is a spontaneous recommendation or sponsored content. Where children and adolescents are involved, this type of strategy may go all the more unnoticed. Sampaio & Cavalcante (2016) comment that this audience identifies more easily with advertising appearing on broadcast media than on online media, precisely because online content and advertising are very often not clearly demarcated. In addition, peer culture exercises a strong influence on the formation of subjectivities in youngsters. Successful youtubers seem always to be chatting, talk about routine subjects in their domestic setting, express themselves in an affectionate or comical manner, reinforce the self esteem of their followers, and use standardised jargon and an informal narrative form (Marôpo, Sampaio & Pereira, 2018). They also talk about matters relating to popular culture (music, films, best-sellers, fast food) and of young people's ways of being. That is, they build relationships in order to be perceived as authentic that then impact on the new ways of socialisation and consumption of digitally connected children and adolescents.

## METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

This article has its origin in research carried out as part of a dissertation for a Master's degree in Communication Sciences at the University of the Minho (Carvalho, 2019). It analyses how audiences of the channel *Sofia Barbosa* construct meanings about the commercial content and authenticity that the youtuber presents. The channel was chosen due to its popularity among adolescents in Portugal using YouTube, especially in the fashion and beauty niche. At the age of 12, Sofia is said to have been a timid girl who set up her channel as a hobby, inspired by international beauty youtubers (TEDx Talks, 2018). Today, at 19, this young woman presides over a channel with more than 270.000 subscribers and almost 39 million views. Her decision not to go to university and to move with her sister from Porto to the capital, Lisbon, in order to invest in her career, as well as the technical quality of the videos, the investment made in equipment and, above all, the fact that Sofia treats her channel as a full-time enterprise, are among the aspects that attest to its professional nature. Sofia Barbosa's videos usually offer a mixture of day-to-day frivolity and the glamour that the world of microcelebrity makes possible: Sofia cleans her house, is invited to product launches, photographs looks for well-known clothing brands, orders a pizza delivery on Sundays and goes on ski trips at the invitation of a sponsor.

This study was carried out based on qualitative methodology backed up by netnographic analysis (Fragoso et al. 2011), with a view to ensuring a systematic analysis of the comments of subscribers and of consumption practices and sociabilities protagonised by Sofia in 10 videos posted on her channel.

For the selection of the corpus, a content analysis (Igartua & Humanes, 2004) was carried out and a classification made of all videos shared by the youtuber in the period from January through October 2018. In all, 50 videos were classified in three different spheres, in line with the model outlined by Florencia García-Rapp (2017): 1) the community sphere – self-branding videos, with the influencer talking about herself, intimate subjects to do with her life, in a personal tone, as if she were chatting with a friend; 2) the commercial sphere – the vlogger displays her latest purchases or “recebidos” (items received), tries out products, tells viewers how to use them and presents brands; 3) the hybrid sphere – used in this study to categorise those videos that mix style and content from the first two spheres and which are often sponsored videos. This classification process identified 21 videos belonging to the community sphere, 12 relating to the commercial sphere and 17 in the hybrid sphere.

For the detailed analysis of the comments, a sample of 10 videos was selected, based on two criteria. The first concerns a balance between the three spheres. The second criterion takes into consideration the metrics of the popularity of and interaction with the videos (likes, dislikes, comments and views), which are the concrete feedback that followers most value (Tomaz, 2017). These selection criteria guaranteed the numerical representativeness of the comments analysed – of which there was a total of 1,961 – at the same time as making possible a diversity of samples as outlined in Table 1, below.

TITLE	SPHERE	SYNOPSIS
<b>"Vlog: primeiros passos para a minha mudança"</b> (Vlog: first steps for my move)	Community	The most watched video of 2018. Mixes scenes at home with images from outside it, including a train trip from Porto to Lisbon and visits to properties to rent in the capital. Moving home is the central theme, but part of the video is dedicated to showcasing beauty products.
<b>"Tag: 13 perguntas pessoais"</b> (Tag: 13 personal questions)	Community	This video appears in three rankings: most views, most comments and most likes. In conversational style, Sofia directly addresses the camera and answers questions such as "two things that irritate you?", "what do you usually order in Starbucks?" and "a guilty pleasure?".
<b>"Nova casa em Lisboa!"</b> (New home in Lisbon!)	Hybrid	Video sponsored by a cosmetics brand. The title suggests that Sofia will show off her new home, but the focus remains on the sponsor's products – the same as those presented in "Vlog: primeiros passos para a minha mudança". This is one of the videos that received most dislikes.
<b>"A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana"</b> (My morning routine for weekends)	Hybrid	Video sponsored by another cosmetics brand. Sofia takes viewers through her morning and beauty routine. The scenes show her waking up, having breakfast and making herself up. A different style of editing can be noted, in which the youtuber does not address the camera and the narrative is in voiceover, alternating with a soundtrack.
<b>"Lookbook swimwear 2018"</b> (Lookbook: Swimwear lookbook 2018)	Commercial	In a format similar to a video advert, Sofia is on the beach "modelling" various bikinis from the brand sponsor. There is no speech or narration, just a music soundtrack. In the description box there is information about the bikinis and links to buy them on the brand's website.
<b>"Chegou ao fim!"</b> (It's over!)	Community	This video, the second-most watched of 2018, has a confessional style with a high degree of subjectivity, with Sofia sharing her anxieties as her time at school comes to an end. Images of Sofia's bedroom are interspersed with images of the youtuber together with friends at their prom.
<b>"Maquilha e fala: não vou para a faculdade e a minha alimentação"</b> (Making up and talking: I'm not going to university and what I eat)	Hybrid	A video that mixes style and content from the community and commercial spheres. While making herself up, Sofia talks about some subjects raised by her followers. She talks about social pressure to go straight to university, even as she mentions the brand of blusher that she is using.
<b>"Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada!"</b> (Weekly vlog: I am a doting 'aunt')	Community	The youtuber shares her weekly routine. She chats in the living room of her new home, prepares an omelette and irons clothes; this is interspersed with images from a photo shoot, a visit to see the baby of a friend, also a youtuber, and a walk on the beach.
<b>"O tempo passa rápido"</b> (Time goes quickly)	Hybrid	Video to mark six years of the channel. Style similar to a video advert, with voiceover and images of Sofia walking through Lisbon, always holding a notebook from the brand sponsor, as she recalls milestone moments for her channel.
<b>"Haul back to school 2018"</b> (Back to school haul 2018)	Commercial	The video that received most dislikes of the year shows the youtuber sitting on the floor of her bedroom displaying and trying on various items of clothing that she has been given or bought. Some items are from the video's brand sponsor.

Table 1: Videos selected to make up the research corpus

We observed the comments on 10 videos, considering: 1) themes raised; 2) interaction of followers with the YouTuber and with other followers with respect to commercial content; 3) requests for information about products and brands; 4) perceptions about the YouTuber's authenticity in relation to commercial content; and 5) approval or criticism of commercial content. In all 1.961 comments and replies to comments were considered, recovered by means of the YouTube Comment Scraper<sup>1</sup> and organised in a spreadsheet. As a way of better understanding the context in which the comments were posted, we also analysed the videos, taking into account the following aspects: 1) visual, such as scenario, editing, setting, people who appear, activities undertaken; 2) verbal, with intimate discourse, questions to the audience, tête-à-tête conversation, attention to authenticity and to what the audience has shown it values; and 3) commercial, such as the display of products, brands and transparency about sponsorship.

#### **WHAT DO AUDIENCES THINK ABOUT THE HYBRIDISM THAT SEEKS TO RECONCILE AUTHENTICITY AND COMMERCIALISM?**

Sofia uses a narrative permeated by light humour, touching on subjects of a personal and emotional nature. Her intimate rhetoric serves an essential function in her presentation and is effective in (Carvalho, 2019, p. 98):

- identifying family and friends: "at this moment I am alone at home; my sister went with my parents to Lisbon and my brother is working at this moment"<sup>2</sup> ("Primeiros passos para a minha mudança de casa!");
- speaking about her home: "a lot of people commented on my last weekly vlog that the light in my house is very pretty. As you can see, that is true. (...) thanks to everyone who noticed that" ("Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada");
- showing her habits: "as soon as I wake up I go straight into the kitchen to have breakfast, and anyone who's already seen my vlogs already knows what it is. It's yoghurt, oats and banana" ("A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana");
- reinforcing the idea that the audience knows her: "I sincerely think that you know almost everything about me" ("Tag: 13 perguntas pessoais");
- justifying a possible failing: "today is Sunday and first off I want to say sorry because yesterday I didn't record a vlog. And I'm sure that on Friday the day wasn't that full" ("Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada!").

In consuming this content, her followers often express pleasure at similarities between their tastes and those displayed by Sofia:

CHOCOLATE VANILLA AND CARAMEL! My friend, I have never shouted  
SAME so loud in my life! I love you more and more. AHHH WE COULD BE  
GOOD FRIENDS. (C.F. – "Tag: 13 perguntas pessoais")<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See <http://ytcomments.klostermann.ca>

<sup>2</sup> All Sofia words and comments from the videos have been transcribed just as they appear, so they may contain errors of punctuation or incorrect editing of one or another word or phrase, as well graphic symbols. Emojis were removed.

<sup>3</sup> Many YouTube users use nicknames rather than their real names. All comments by users posted on videos analysed in this study are identified by the initials of the names or nicknames, followed by the title of the video about which the comment is made.



I feel so proud of you I've been watching you since I was 11 and now I am 14 and I feel you deserve everything you have, I wish I could get to know you one day. (I.C. – “Primeiros passos para a minha mudança de casa”)

Sofia you are just like me I love bolognese sauce :3. (K. G. – “Tag: 13 perguntas pessoais”)

I think I appreciate your videos more and more Sofia. Edit: when I am your age I want a home like that :). (C.F. – “Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada”)

The feeling of proximity to the YouTuber is such that there are followers who express a feeling of gratitude towards and an almost blind confidence in Sofia:

I haven't seen the video yet but I have already clicked like and said that you are the best person in the world and thank you for giving me the most support psychologically, i love you (F. F. – “A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana”)

The youtuber's narrative intimacy is successful when “Sofia as friend” prevails over “Sofia as microcelebrity” and her work on YouTube is seen as disinterested or the “unquestionable result of an unshakeable faith in the realisation of a dream or an individual endeavour” (Tomaz, 2017, p. 162), as can be perceived in this comment:

this video is so inspiring!! To see everything that you have achieved with your work and dedication and with you not even expecting anything in return. I look forward to many more years of your videos big kiss Sofia. (S.M. – “O tempo passa rápido”)

There are subscribers who, absorbed by feelings of affection and intimacy, do not clearly perceive the market-oriented slant present in the channel. In addition, the fact that audiences do not appear to have much knowledge of how the chain of production of celebrity works (system of algorithms, partnership programme, advertising contracts, influencer marketing agencies, investment in equipment and technology, among other factors) helps to construct the idea of fame as an involuntary result of the talent or effort of young microcelebrities such as Sofia (Tomaz, 2017).

As important as intimate rhetoric for an effective self-branding strategy is the conveying of authenticity. The youtuber reinforces the idea that it is important “to be yourself”, in sharing tastes (popular series, music festivals, brand launches, travel tips), in affirming what she defines as her own style, and in her performed spontaneity (recording “errors” or unexpected scenes are kept on in the edited videos). She thus does not stop recording in order to open the door for a pizza delivery, adjust the framing, look for her glasses in her bag or handling her phone. In one scene she appears seated in the living room of her home, addressing the camera, when she suddenly looks away to warn her sister that she has spilt milk onto a book and that she needs to clean it up straight away (Carvalho, 2019).

The audience gives signs of perceiving Sofia as authentic and tends to make mostly positive or encouraging comments, using words such as “original”, “real”, “different” and “sincere” (Carvalho, 2019):

... I loved the editing and the way that, more and more, you let yourself really shine through to this side :) keep it up. (B.C. – “Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada!”)

Many congratulations for the video I loved it and especially I know you were very sincere... (I. C. – “O tempo passa rápido”)

I would like to see more videos on fashion and beauty, your tips always give a little help for daily life. Your videos are fantastic and original, I am always surprised and that is what makes you *amazing!!!* (F. S. – “Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada!”)

Congratulations Sofia, you are an example and an inspiration I am 12 and I also want to create a channel on YouTube A big kiss, and keep going, I wish you all the best. (C.R. – “O tempo passa rápido”)

The praise and words of encouragement extend to her recommendations of products and brands:

Hi sofia, (...) I miss your favourites they always helped me a lot in discovering new products clothes or films!! Kisses I love you <3. (D. – “Weekly vlog: sou uma tia babada!”)

The video “Nova casa em Lisboa” is in vlog<sup>4</sup> format and in it the youtuber intersperses scenes shot inside her home, in which she addresses the camera directly, with scenes outdoors in the city of Lisbon. She starts by talking about her house move and then focusses on the subject of skincare, saying that she has received many requests for her to share her skincare routine. This is the cue for her to introduce the paid publicity for a well-known French brand of cosmetics. This 11-minute video, which the title suggests should focus on her new home in Lisbon, devotes about four minutes to the youtuber presenting the products of the brand sponsor. This apparent attempt to camouflage the market-oriented slant by means of the title was understood as such by one follower (Carvalho, 2019):

Sofia I was expecting a video showing your new home. I don't know why you chose this rather misleading title. (C.S. – “Nova casa em Lisboa”)

<sup>4</sup> Videos that show the personal routine of a microcelebrity, in the form of a personal diary shared in front of the camera (Marôpo et al., 2018). Sofia tends most often to do what she calls “weekly vlogs”, in which she recounts the events of a whole week.

In the description box there was a note of thanks to the brand sponsor, but once more an attempt to play down the advertising can be seen in analysing this comment:

I love your videos, I'm just sorry that you don't flag it when you advertise something, either in the video or in the description box it is extremely important to flag advertising, even if only in the description box with a \*this video is sponsored, because it clearly is sponsored by garnier. (C. – "Nova casa em Lisboa")

In other words, it is probable that the note of thanks put up by Sofia was inserted later, after the video was uploaded. Besides this comment demanding transparency, we identified other expressions of criticism about advertising content present on the channel. One comment that attracted 18 likes from other followers highlights the fact that in recent months Sofia's videos "aren't the same any more" and that many people feel that the YouTuber seems to be recording them out of obligation, because she is receiving things from brands. The author of the comment gives an example by citing that same video, in which Sofia spent half the time talking about a product and presented practically no other content.

It can thus be seen that, whether it is a matter of "camouflage", because of the failure to mention the sponsorship, or of the casual insertion of products in the middle of day-to-day scenes, there is a clear effort to lay stress on an apparently authentic performance of Sofia's daily life, in detriment to greater transparency about the sponsored content.

These strategies of hybridisation between content from the commercial and community spheres are once more questioned by subscribers in the video "A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana", which is sponsored by another well-known brand of cosmetics. This is one of the videos that received most dislikes and negative comments. The production is similar to that of an advertising video with a pre-prepared script that tells a story: what Sofia does on a weekend morning. The video begins with Sofia waking up in her bed and ends with the youtuber walking in the park. In its course, Sofia uses numerous skincare and makeup products, all from the brand sponsor. Once more the failure to flag sponsored content was perceived by followers, and once more this prompts the conclusion that the mention of advertising present in the description box was added after the video was uploaded and probably after these expressions of disapproval were made.

Criticisms were also made about Sofia ethics in using products from companies that permit testing on animals. One follower comments:

Sofia, I say again, if you want to use more ethical makeup, that is, cruelty free it isn't a good idea for you to use and support Clinique. They test on animals. (S. – "A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana")

However, it is the idea that commercial content compromises the appearance of authenticity fostered by Sofia that prompted the criticism with the greatest repercussion in the audience. This comment received 93 likes:

Routine with just one brand is not a real routine. It doesn't do any harm, but it's too obvious that it's not a realistic and sincere video. (C. – "A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana")

This other comment also takes the same line:

The video is very good, but in my opinion it doesn't correspond to reality. To start with the video is sponsored by makeup brands and no one uses 10 different bits of makeup before going out EVERY day ... (U. – "A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana")

There was also an appeal to Sofia not to let her authenticity be influenced by sponsors:

...please don't stop being "you" and don't stop giving your sincere opinion about products and brands, just because of the sponsorship, because I at least have always followed you because you are super honest and modest, and it would be a shame if now you started stopping being like that towards your subs... Kiss. (M. M. – "A minha rotina matinal para os fins de semana")

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis in this study of comments made by followers of the channel *Sofia Barbosa* has contributed to a better understanding of contemporary infantile and juvenile sociabilities in the ambit of consumer culture as fostered in the digital environment.

The audience reciprocates Sofia's strategies of intimacy and authenticity with frequent expressions of affection. The praise, positive feedback, attempts to find affinities with the YouTuber and the expression of the desire that Sofia become a real friend, off screen, are examples of this. In this relation of apparent proximity can also be perceived a strong acceptance of the commercial content fostered by her.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find the occasional example that indicates that the appeals to consumption present on the channel are not assimilated without any kind of critical spirit. At various moments, there is a reflectiveness in relation to the commercial practices protagonised by Sofia, namely when they are dissimulated.

The lack of transparency about sponsorship, when perceived, was not well received by a small portion of subscribers. Other strategies to hide the presence of commercial content, such as in the case of the title seen as "misleading", were also received critically by the audience. Some followers pointed to ways of resolving the question with requests that Sofia always identify sponsored content. There were also expressions of criticism, albeit rarely, in relation the brands themselves, as in the case of the follower who queried Sofia's use of brands that allow testing on animals, taking a political position in defence of that cause.

This more sceptical stance on the part of some followers may be interpreted as reacting to an uncomfortable notion that they are suddenly being catapulted from the

status of “friends who know everything about Sofia” to the position of mere consumers. It is possible to perceive in the comments a feeling of weakening loyalty in view of the artificiality of certain content and the attempt on the part of the YouTuber to monetise her position based on commercial relations with certain brands and products that are presented as genuinely personal preferences.

These expressions of disenchantment with the YouTuber may contribute to balancing a romanticised vision that many subscribers have of microcelebrities with a more rational comprehension of the industry that sustains them. In this sense, the commercial content was at some points just a vehicle to promote brands and products, but was then transformed into a space for followers also to be able to position themselves critically in their comments.

In these moments, the young audience shows that it has some literacy that helps it to develop the skills to analyse and discern content to be found on the channel, including the market-oriented content (Pereira, Pinto & Moura, 2015). Nevertheless, in general, the comments demonstrate that children and adolescents know little (or care little) about the commercial processes interwoven in the world of digital microcelebrities.

The presence of children and adolescents on the internet and on social networks can and should also be interpreted with a positive eye, revealing new possibilities for their construction as social actors with an impact on the context around them by means of interaction, learning and the expression of their cultures and identities. However, much work is still needed in terms of digital literacy for children and adolescents who use social networks in order for them to perceive more consciously how the industry has taken advantage of the visibility and credibility of microcelebrities such as Sofia. This is true not only of brands but also of major internet players such as Google and YouTube, whose business model is based on co-opting content and audiences. There is a need for more new studies in this area, with digital media offering a broad field of study and children and adolescents serving as fundamental agents in these investigations.

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