

## **“Merchan” como experiência de emancipação e cumplicidade: feminismo, autenticidade e consumo no YouTube**

### **“Merch” as an experience of emancipation and complicity: feminism, authenticity and consumption on YouTube**

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**Resumo:** *A partir de debates sobre as práticas que orientam as performances de microcelebridades em plataformas digitais, busca-se compreender como três influenciadoras socialmente engajadas negociam esse status na produção de vídeos patrocinados. Analisa-se qualitativamente seis vídeos ligados a pautas feministas publicados no YouTube pelas brasileiras Júlia Tolezano, Maíra Medeiros e NátaIy Neri. As conclusões apontam para negociações entre as esferas do ativismo e do consumo a partir de dois traços performáticos predominantes: o consumo como experiência de emancipação feminista e reforço da cumplicidade com a audiência.*

**Palavras-chave:** *influenciadores digitais; feminismo; consumo; YouTube; performance.*

**Abstract:** *Based on debates about the practices that guide the performances of microcelebrities on digital platforms, we seek to understand how three socially engaged influencers negotiate this status in the production of sponsored videos. Six videos linked to feminist agendas published on YouTube by the Brazilians JúliaTolezano, Maíra Medeiros and NátaIyNeri are qualitatively analyzed. The conclusions point to negotiations between the spheres of activism and*

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*consumption from two predominant performative gestures: consumption as an experience of feminist emancipation and reinforcement of complicity with the audience.*

**Keywords:** *digital influencers; feminism; consumption; YouTube; performance.*

## Introduction

The “digital influencer” category indicates the professionalization of individuals that build communities around themselves on digital platforms, using their capacity to express themselves to interfere in decisions about consumption, lifestyles, and, in the cases previously mentioned, in the popularization of certain debates among their networks. The specificity of the term – which despite the simple translation, is often adopted in English (digital influencer), denoting the purpose of linking it to an idea of globalization – is related to the ability of certain subjects to obtain relevance on digital social network platforms based on the dynamics of these spaces. In the field of marketing, an influencer, as the name implies, is someone who is able to make an impact on other individuals within certain relevant consumer audiences, “directing purchase decisions or contributing to mold concepts and opinions about products and brands” (ANTUNES, 2018, p. 161).

If, at the beginning of the popularization of digital platforms, the female presence in these spaces was mostly linked to categories such as exploitation of sensuality (SENEFT, 2013), fashion and beauty (KARHAWI, 2017), in recent years an expansion of discourses and bodies in social networks has been observed. In this sense, socially engaged digital influencers (EVANGELISTA, 2020) stand out, as well as producers of content on topics that involve relevant social agendas today, such as feminism, veganism and the anti-racist struggle, among others. Although they sometimes address other topics, the recognition of their online presence in media appearances and/or marketing campaigns is strongly promoted by the perception of their involvement with such agendas (EVANGELISTA, 2020).

This is the case, for example, of Julia Tolezano, known as JoutJout. In 2014, the journalist published a video on YouTube entitled “*Vai de Copinho*”<sup>2</sup> (“Use the small cup”), in which she described a series of discoveries after adopting the menstrual cup. The young woman quickly

2 Available at: <https://youtu.be/33lspg6LQBY>. Access on: Aug 4. 2021.

reached thousands of people with her production, which was shared exhaustively in feminist groups on Facebook. Raised to the position of YouTube “star”, she became a frequent character in advertisements on and off the platform, in addition to producing sponsored videos for several companies and services, often articulating discussions about themes related to feminism and sponsored actions.

In different times, combining an activist position with advertising campaigns in such an explicit way could have been a source of controversy. In the second decade of the 21st century, the approach to the market is presented with a certain pride, a sign of the status of counter-hegemonic discourses, cause and symptom of the changes in progress. For companies from different segments that invest more and more in actions targeting “female empowerment” – even creating their own classification for such initiatives, named *femvertising* (AKESTAM; ROSENGREN; DAHLEN, 2017) – it seems like a great enterprise.

This shift is part of what Sarah Banet-Weiser classifies as “branding culture” (2012), a scenario in which marketing exponentially articulates social and cultural relationships. For the author, such a movement is a historical construction arising from economic and political changes in the West, notably the consolidation of neoliberalism, which will change the ways of valuing culture and the individuals themselves. Thus, in addition to goods and services, the branding culture involves the commercialization and sale of what is immaterial – feelings and affections, personalities and values (BANET-WEISER, 2012, p. 7). In this direction, there is a growing appeal to consumers to be loyal to certain brands and products, no longer for their qualities, but as a form of political action, creating a kind of commodified activism (MUKHERJEE; BANET-WEISER, 2012). As a historical construction, the shift in question precedes the popularization of digital platforms. However, the business model built around digital influencers adapts itself and reinforces this relationship, as such professionals are, as a rule, supported by sponsored personal content.

In order to understand the articulations that involve the publicization of social agendas in the context of digital platforms, this work investigates advertising actions involving three socially engaged Brazilian digital influencers connected to feminism and black feminism. As discussed in previous works (EVANGELISTA, 2020), the work of these influencers is considered to dialogue, albeit with reservations, with the notion of popular feminism, linked to the forms of visibility of the movement in contemporary commercial media (BANET-WEISER, 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

Júlia Tolezano is 31 years old and began producing videos for YouTube in 2014. Since then, she has been the subject of several reports that classify her as the “chronicler of a generation” (RODROL; FINCO, 2016, online) and “the new YouTube sensation” (PARENTES, 2015) with “a touch of stand up comedy”. Despite the popularity, Tolezano announced a pause on the channel in December 2019 and, subsequently, the closure of updates. Known for addressing female taboos, “Jout Jout Prazer” still totals 2.4 million subscribers in October 2022. The journalist continues to produce videos for the segment “Jout Jout de saia” on the cable channel GNT. Maíra Medeiros is 38 years old and holds a degree in advertising. Her channel, “*Nunca te pedi nada*” (“I’ve never asked you for anything”), has existed since 2015 and has 2.1 million subscribers. The youtuber gained visibility after releasing feminist parodies of big hits in Brazilian popular music. Medeiros is also recognized for addressing issues related to pop culture.

Nátaly Neri, 28 years old, runs the channel “*Afros e Afins*”<sup>4</sup> (“Afros and Alike”), later renamed with the youtuber’s name, which has accumulated over 749,000 subscribers, since 2015. A member of feminist collectives linked to black movements, she became known especially for videos in which she discusses topics related to black self-esteem, anti-racist struggle, black feminism and veganism. In the process of elaborating the

3 For Banet-Weiser (2018), popular feminism would be a spectacularization of the movement that refers to the debates on post-feminism. We argue, however, that the work of the analyzed youtubers points to the need for more diverse and complex nuances of the concept (EVANGELISTA, 2020).

4 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjivwB8MrrGCMlIuoSdKrQg>. Access on: Aug. 5, 2021.

corpus, Neri was the most popular black youtuber producer of socially engaged content on the platform, although very distant from the others selected<sup>5</sup>.

After a brief discussion on the relationship between authenticity, performance and microcelebrities on the internet, we analyze six sponsored videos published between 2016 and 2018 on the channels “*Nunca te Pedi Nada*”, “*Afros e Afins*” e “*JoutJout Prazer*” (“JoutJout, nice to meet you”). In this way, we seek to understand which performance traits characterize the negotiations between influencers who use the reputation connected to activism as symbolic capital to obtain advertising messages, and vice versa<sup>6</sup>.

### **With how many revelations does one build the authenticity of an internet celebrity?**

As pointed out by Karhawi (2017), the “digital influencer” category has gained new guises according to the professionalization of the medium; in the early days of social media, influencers were considered prosumers or curators of content. For Crystal Abidin (2018), the term digital influencer refers to the professionalization of microcelebrity practices (SENF, 2008; SENFT, 2013; MARWICK, 2013; MARWICK 2015). In a research on the role of camgirls on the internet, Australian researcher Thereza Senft (2008; 2013) associated their appearance with the term microcelebrity, here understood both as a denomination and as a social practice. The practice of a microcelebrity involves the use of techniques that include using videos, blogs and social networking websites to amplify the popularity of an individual. Whatever the platform, the notion is based on the assumption that it is necessary to manage online profiles as if they were brands in the expectation that the public will do the same (SENF, 2013, p. 346). In a similar direction, Marwick and

5 One of the reasons for this disparity resides in the devaluation of black influencers by the market. When there is compensation, it is often lower than with white influencers (MONTEIRO, 2020).

6 This work is a revised version of an article presented at XXX COMPÓS (PUC/São Paulo). We thank the colleagues for their comments that contributed to the improvement of the text.

Boyd (2011) postulate that celebrities themselves should be considered as a practice to the detriment of innate characteristics or media industry labels. Such a practice involves elements such as maintaining a fan base, building intimate performances, showing authenticity, being accessible and becoming a product. In order to better understand this relationship, it is opportune to recall the work of Joshua Gamson (1994) on the history of fame in American culture. The author states that the process of industrialization of celebrities that gained momentum from the second half of the 20th century in that country was accompanied by an increase in talk about the stars. In addition to the multiple publications and programs dedicated to showing the daily lives and projects of the famous, the production of celebrities itself starts to become a topic to be investigated. Celebrities, explains Gamson, came to be represented explicitly to the audience not only as people capable of increasing sales, but as part of business themselves, a product.

The practices related to the concept of microcelebrity, therefore, represent a kind of “extension” of this booklet. Individuals who practice microcelebrity treat their audience as a fan base, even though their connections are formed by friends and/or relatives at first. In addition, they invest in building their online profiles in order to present coherent identities that are easy for the audience to consume, using different engagement techniques (MARWICK; BOYD, 2011). Finally, a central aspect: while celebrities can be considered a practice that relies on the mediation of mass media as a decisive element to exist, microcelebrities do not have the same support; therefore, they depend on the management of the fans to maintain their status on the web (MARWICK; BOYD, 2011; MARWICK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015).

Since the relationship between digital influencers and the audience is basically constituted from the way the former present themselves on digital platforms, the connections in these environments are perceived as more “real” (MARWICK, 2015). Carefully crafted on different digital platforms, this performance would be, for Marwick (2015), related to the construction of a representation suitable for consumption.

Such movement does not necessarily occur blindly; occasionally, the intricacies that surround this elaboration are discussed by influencers themselves with their audience. However, in a scenario marked by the crossing of different contexts and fierce competition for the attention of individuals, some subjects will be more successful in trying to mobilize their networks. In order to understand how and why this takes place in the case of digital influencers recognized by their connection with feminism, it is necessary to analyze the strategies for recognizing the authenticity of their online performances.

One of the main authors to address the subject<sup>7</sup>, Schechner defines performance as the act of underlining “an action for those who watch” (SCHECHNER, 2006, p. 28). Far from belonging only to artistic and ritual movements, spaces in which the topic had already been extensively discussed (including by the author himself), performative action, explains the theorist, belongs to every manifestation of daily life. This is because every one of our gestures, whether long-term (ritual performances) or short-term (day-to-day acts, such as greeting someone), correspond, according to Schechner (2006, p. 34), to “restored behaviors”. When adopting certain habits, rituals and routines, we behave according to premises that are part of the social system in which we are inserted. Therefore, performance is constituted by a series of restored behaviors, which can be rearranged or rebuilt. In this sense, clarifies the theorist, it is not always possible to unravel the process of construction of these gestures, either because of the lack of knowledge of this original “source”, or because of the elaborations and distortions of myth and tradition, among other factors.

The author dialogues with Goffman’s (1975) perspective of interactions, for whom every social interaction is mediated by codes that will be activated by the subjects when they “present themselves” to others in certain contexts. Based on the theatrical metaphor,

7 Among the perspectives not addressed in this article are the relationships between performance and gender performativity (BUTLER, 2003), performance as epistemology (TAYLOR, 2013) and performance as a reference of individual value in the context of neoliberalism (EHRENBERG, 2010).



Goffman (1975) uses terms such as “facade” and “background” to name characteristics and behaviors deliberately exhibited by individuals to produce certain impressions (facades) and, by contrast, the aspects that they wish to hide, or keep in the backstage, under penalty of discrediting the “role” represented (background). Thus, the choice of elements such as language, clothing, makeup, gestures and postures that will compose each individual’s facade is guided by their willingness to present an expressive coherence (PEREIRA DE SÁ; POLIVANOV, 2012), able to fulfill the expectations of the audience and, at the same time, to reinforce the presented facade. It is not by chance that Schechner’s and Goffman’s contributions on performance have been taken up in recent research on interactions and representations in digital environments (KELLER, 2012; POLIVANOV, 2014; PAPACHARISSI, 2015; GARCÍA-RAPP, 2016; ANTUNES, 2018).

In the case of microcelebrities who aim for the coveted place of “digital influencers”, this management of expressive coherence becomes even more delicate, since the legitimation of the reputation they seek to build is crucial for them to be able to obtain some kind of authority on the networks in which they are involved. Before we proceed, it is worth mentioning that, when asking how socially engaged youtubers present themselves to their audience, we are thinking about the identity constructions of human beings influenced by the feedback they receive from the audience (ABIDIN, 2015; BAYM, 2010). Therefore, we are more interested in understanding how such performances reflect the intercessions – and eventual controversies – between activism and practices of microcelebrities than questioning whether they are “fictional” or “untrue” identities.

### **Methodological path**

The corpus of this work is composed of six videos, two published in each of the selected channels<sup>8</sup>. The productions were selected from a survey

8 The selected productions are part of a larger sample of videos that composed the thesis defended by the author in 2019.

among all videos published on the respective channels between 2016 and 2018. The investigation of the material was based on precepts of content analysis (BARDIN, 2010) in conceptual articulation with studies about performance. From an intense reading of the data (GIBBS, 2009), we carried out the codification of the collected material, which consists of identifying passages related to certain themes (GIBBS, 2009) in order to build analytical categories that are relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon studied. The present article shows an analysis based on one of these categories, the relationship between feminist agendas and sponsored videos. We located five videos by Nátaly Nery, two by Maíra Medeiros and three by Julia Tolezano in these patterns. To arrive at a sample with the same number of videos for each youtuber, we used as a criterion the selection of elements in which “the characteristics of the research are present in an intense or evident way” (FRAGOSO; RECUERO; AMARAL, 2011, p. 79). Therefore, a sample of the intentional type and subtype by intensity (idem) was constituted.

The selected videos published by channel “*Afros e Afins*” were: “*Como aprendi a me amar*”<sup>9</sup> (“How I learned to love myself”) and “COLABORAÇÃO FEMININA - TAG #JuntasArrasamos”<sup>10</sup> (“FEMALE COLLABORATION – TAG #TogetherWeRock”). The first one was published in January, 2017, with the hashtag #PubliDoAmor (“#PublicationOfLove”), used by the youtuber to signal the sponsorship of the Stabilo pen brand. In addition to making drawings with the brand’s pens representing her process of self-discovery, the youtuber explains that she was invited to participate in the campaign “*Liberte suas cores*” (“Free your colors”). After recalling childhood stories and the suffering because of racism, she explains how the support of other black women was key in the conquest of self-love. In the case of the second video, entitled “COLABORAÇÃO FEMININA - TAG #JuntasArrasamos”, Nátaly promotes the movement “#juntas arrasamos” (“#together we rock”), created by Seda beauty brand. The youtuber highlights that “As you

9 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYDAMHHWwEU>. Access on: Oct 29, 2020.

10 Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_HsZEvlunr4&t=14s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HsZEvlunr4&t=14s). Access on: Oct 29, 2020.

know me, you already know that we do not participate in anything just to support the speech on diversity”. After that, she says she was invited by the brand to respond to the tag and talks about themes such as dreams, women who are important in her life, the meaning of the word sorority, and women youtubers who encouraged her to love her own hair.

In “*JOUT JOUT NEM IMAGINAVA*” (“*JOUT JOUT NEVER IMAGINED IT*”), Júlia Tolezano announces her partnership with the company Fleurity for the sales of menstrual cups. The video is shot as a fake documentary, with several women interviewed about their relationship with menstruation and the cup – two of them mention the channel “*Jout Jout Prazer*” (“*Jout Jout, nice to meet you*”) as an important source of information about the product. In the second selected production, “*6 TOQUES PARA UM CARNAVAL AGRADÁVEL*” (“*6 TIPS FOR A PLEASANT CARNIVAL*”), a warning in bold letters with a sound signal is displayed in the first few seconds: “Attention, you are entering a merch”. Then, Júlia appears wearing a costume and talking with Caio, her partner on the channel, about where to place a case of Skol beer, the sponsor of the video, and explaining that the idea is to talk about “round” (correct) and “square” (wrong) attitudes during Carnival – the terminology refers to the beer’s slogan, in which “round” means that the beer goes down smoothly. The youtuber uses a notebook to show what these wrong attitudes would be, such as harassing women during the festivity.

The two selected videos published by Maíra Medeiros were released in 2017. In the first one, “*PORQUE CHOREI NA MINHA PALESTRA DE AUTOESTIMA - Nunca Te Pedi Nada*” (“*WHY I CRIED IN MY SELF-ESTEEM LECTURE - I’VE NEVER ASKED YOU FOR ANYTHING*”), the youtuber alternates images in her home and images shot during a lecture on creativity and female self-esteem sponsored by the brand Cravo & Canela. The youtuber gets emotional while remembering tough moments in her professional life due to her appearance. The second video by the youtuber, “*PQ NÃO TENHO MAIS VERGONHA DA MINHA BARRIGA - Nunca Te Pedi Nada*”

(“WHY I’M NO LONGER ASHAMED OF MY BELLY – I’ve never asked you for anything”), was also sponsored by the brand. In the production, Maíra discusses the importance of “singularity”. After criticizing the social impositions and standards, the youtuber explains that there are “things that are yours alone” and that the brand “girl power” decided to sponsor the production because of the relevance of the theme. Afterwards, she recalls moments from the past when she was ashamed to show her belly, moments that she has already overcome.

### **Consumption as a mediator of popular feminism experiences**

Despite the differences between brands/products and the tone of the youtubers in the analyzed videos (sometimes more fun, sometimes more emotional), one common trait draws our attention: the notion that the articulation with the dimension of consumption can favor a certain emancipation. Unlike other “segments”, such as beauty and fashion, which are very popular among the influencers, the idea of making sponsored videos is not limited to knowing a potentially interesting product or service and presenting it to the audience. Gestures like Maíra Medeiros’ tears or JoutJout’s “squeals” when announcing the partnership for the production of menstrual cups and the very content of these videos suggests that, from the experiences provided by the respective companies, a space for reflection is established. Unlike a possible conflict with the socially engaged dimension of these channels, the strategies adopted by the youtubers suggest that the connection with advertisers would operate to expand the perception around this engagement. Microcelebrity practices, in their grammars that point to forms of behaving in order to build and maintain captive audiences in digital environments, provide important clues for reflections on how such articulations are materialized. As previously discussed, the exposure of the intimacy of digital influencers has been shown to be an important feature of the emotional connection between them and the audience

(MARWICK, 2015). Unlike “conventional” celebrities, whose public visibility is often promoted by an aura of glamour reinforced by different media devices (EVANGELISTA, 2022), digital influencers have their main asset in building and maintaining their online communities.

In the case of the analyzed channels, many of the videos in the most popular list feature personal testimonials by the youtubers. Stories about some moment in their lives or insights into reality that invited them to think about the difficulties experienced by women of different races and social classes in Brazil. In addition to their speeches, clothing elements (such as clothes and accessories that reinforce the connection with blackness [Nátaly Neri], fun elements [Maíra Medeiros] or the simplicity/lack of these elements [Júlia Tolezano]), gestures (facial and body expressions of incredulity and outrage, for example) and even the setting of the videos help to compose the facade of the youtubers as feminists under construction (EVANGELISTA, 2020). If the partnership with different advertisers could present itself as a threat to such a facade, it is the repetition of these elements allied to the advertising discourses that helps to sustain the expressive coherence of the influencers in the videos.

In Nátaly Neri’s production for the beauty products brand Seda, for example, the brand’s positioning is praised at several moments and the process of negotiation itself is explained as a way of seeking an expressive coherence with her previous videos. “That’s why I say that I’m very proud to be with Seda this year, because the effective, real actions to discuss female collaboration and encourage the collaboration between women will be taken”, she guarantees. On the other hand, more than any financial gains, she emphasizes that the partnership also represents her commitment to the idea of being more “positive”. In addition to encouraging her to become more optimistic, the partnership is pointed out as a reason for Nátaly to reflect on the idea of sorority, “a concept about which, I must confess, I have some suspicion. I’ve already said this here on the channel, but it is a term that I’m always forcing myself to rescue”. The youtuber also says she was invited to reflect on herself in

the campaign “#*Libertesuascors*” (“#Freeyourcolors”). “They asked me: Nátaly, what set your colors free? And I kept thinking ‘what set my colors free?’. These were very important processes that I’m sure might help you in some way”. In addition to praising the effects of the therapeutic process triggered by the partnership with the brand, the youtuber points out that the advertisement was the “perfect opportunity” because she had wanted to “talk to you about this for a while”. From there, she recalls different moments of her trajectory in search of self-esteem, emphasizing that “this is not my story, this is the story of all black women”.

In a similar direction, the video “*PORQUE CHOREI NA MINHA PALESTRA DE AUTOESTIMA*” (“WHY I CRIED IN MY SELF-ESTEEM LECTURE”), by Maíra Medeiros, shows the youtuber revisiting her maturing process. Between scenes of a lecture and explanations recorded afterwards, she says that she was moved by realizing the mechanisms of oppression that acted on her trajectory, related to the history of all women. “When I stop to think and take stock of my life, I realize how much male chauvinism and this sexist society is harmful (SIC) for the growth (...) of women in society”. In the video “*PQ NÃO TENHO MAIS VERGONHA DA MINHA BARRIGA*” (“WHY I’M NO LONGER ASHAMED OF MY BELLY”), sponsored by the same brand (which she classifies as “super girl power”), the youtuber explains that she was invited to discuss the concept of singularity, “that small thing that makes us be ourselves and ourselves only”. To do so, she recalls many stories from the past, linked especially to the rejection of her own body. “When I was much younger, I weighed 40 kilos less and never showed my belly on any occasion. I hid what made me feel unique”, she says. Although she does not use the term “feminism” or a similar one, she implies that everything changed from the moment when she realized she no longer needed to “stick to small social groups” in order to be accepted, a process she had already described in previous videos as part of her awareness as a feminist.

## **Irony as reinforcement of complicity: attention to “merchs”**

If Neri and Medeiros’ sponsored videos are very much guided by the sharing of personal information of the youtubers, the campaigns starring Júlia Tolezano are marked by a dose of irony. Incarnating, in a certain way, the ironic spirit through which a part of the audience analyzed the relationship between advertisement and celebrities (GAMSON, 1994), the young woman often places humorous alerts at the beginning of this type of production, announcing that they are “merchs”, a tender short for the term merchandising.

The meta-language around sponsored videos reaches its apex in “*JoutJout nem imaginava*” (JoutJout never imagined it”), which can be exemplified by the display of the alert “*JoutJout News em um automerchan*” (“JoutJout News in an automerch”) in the first few minutes of the production. The several “testimonies” highlight precisely Tolezano’s role in the promotion of the instrument – one of the first videos on her channel to gain visibility, in 2015, is called “*Vai de copinho*” (“Chose the cup”) and brings her experience on the use of menstrual cups. The only time the youtuber abandons her “serious” role as a reporter is when she explains the partnership with the brand. “Fleurity started making the cup because they saw this video, saw the repercussion and then launched themselves into the world of cups too and it was super successful, they sold a lot. And now we are going to make FleuritybyJoutJout cups. Isn’t that wonderful?”, she celebrates. In the sponsored video for Skol brewery, in addition to the initial alert about the “merch”, there is an emphasis on the conversation between Júlia and Caio, who acts as a cameraman, about the best way to position a case of beer: “It would be better to place it in the background, right? (...) Or would it be too much... Like, oh, we wanted to put in the back so that no one would notice that we put it in the back?”. Then, she slightly laughs, almost embarrassed, when mentioning that the brand, known for “going down smoothly”, has invited her to talk about “round” and “square” attitudes during Carnival.

In a certain sense, the posture in relation to the dialogue with market players reminds us of the irony pointed out by Joshua Gamson (1994) regarding the “construction” of celebrities. Knowing the intricacies behind the articulation of a star, explains the author, does not necessarily desecrate the industry of celebrities, but presents a new form of fruition of this universe by a part of the public. From this point of view, the celebration of advertising partnerships by some of the digital influencers can be understood as a step forward in terms of the popularization of a pedagogy of the formation of celebrities and of their cultural intermediaries. Revealing how the negotiations took place for the realization of a particular contract, or specifying that it is necessary to say the slogan of a sponsor during the recording of a video, is to open wide the Pandora’s box that keeps the secrets to fame, allowing the audience to follow in “real time” the consolidation of her status as a digital influencer.

In this direction, the humorous tone acts in favor of the construction of emotional connections between the youtuber and her audience: by showing herself to be “sloppy” regarding the way to behave in commercial videos or dazzled with the release of a product with her name, Júlia reinforces performance traits built throughout her trajectory on the channel. Almost always wearing no makeup, with her messy hair and simple clothes, the youtuber, among the ones analyzed, is the one that invests the most in the notion of accessibility, that she is a “common” person. In the sponsored actions, she highlights the ironic tone by using metalanguage as a narrative resource, as if she were simultaneously in the place of those who promote the advertising message at the same time as she is thinking about the best way to do it without “deceiving” her audience.

Such a position also reminds us of the relationship that Shifman (2012) establishes between comedy genres and the cultural logic of the internet. In an analysis of popular mimetic videos on YouTube, the author argues that parody and pastiche were cultural practices relegated to smaller groups, such as certain fandoms. With the popularization



of the web, activities such as copying, imitating and changing certain texts became commonplace, contributing to the development of a certain grammar. Although the kind of humor present in the videos of the channel “*JoutJout Prazer*” (“JoutJout, Nice to meet you”) is not necessarily mimetic, it can be considered that some characteristics of the author have been consolidated throughout the years as a “youtubety” of the videos on the platform (BURGESS; GREEN, 2009). In other words, part of the elements that contributed to consolidate a perception about the specificity of the videos that circulate within the video portal.

Finally, just like Maíra Medeiros and Natály Neri, the youtuber also reveals the intention to promote collective benefits for women. More than emphasizing the quality of the products advertised in the videos (the beer, for example, appears in the video almost as a “necessary evil”), the productions focus, in different ways, on the defense of female freedom. Although this strategy is far from unprecedented, especially in times when the previously mentioned *femvertising* is on the rise, what is worth highlighting in the analyzed material is the intertwining between the areas of consumption and the social engagement mediated by the figure of the digital influencers in question.

### **Final considerations**

As occurs with microcelebrities in a broader way, managing the aura of authenticity necessary to establish connections with the audience – at the same time as this influence is important in advertisement campaigns – involves a delicate balance. Even though the audience is aware that certain content published by these authors is sponsored, they need to believe that there is a real endorsement and, at the same time, that the connections with certain brands do not change behaviors and ways of thinking exposed in their profiles on digital platforms, which would discredit the identity “materialized” by them. When it comes to microcelebrities that seek more explicit connections to issues related to social agendas, achieving such balance becomes an even more complex endeavor. The analysis presented suggests a movement of symbiosis

between the discourses promoted from partnerships with different brands and the performances presented by the youtubers on their channels. Just as the endorsement of celebrities humanizes consumption (ROJEK, 2008), the discourse of microcelebrities contributes to bringing the audience closer to the social causes that they defend, since this mediation takes place in a context strongly marked by emotional bonds. In this sense, the investigation points to another amalgam, in which the proposals of advertising campaigns merge with reports about the life trajectory of the protagonists to produce “empowerment” speeches. In other words, participation in the actions does not only act as a means of financing the work they already develop – which probably would already be a reason for recognition by their fans – but represents a new stage in their search for self-esteem and acceptance. Therefore, the participation in the aforementioned campaigns also contributes to humanizing digital influencers even more, presenting them as accessible, humorous and vulnerable people. In this context, the participation in advertising campaigns appears as another element capable of contributing to the development of certain notions of femininity, becoming important for the repertoire of restored behaviors, to use Schechner’s term, which will be performed from then on.

If, on the one hand, the endorsement of certain brands by youtubers is accompanied by an attempt to legitimize their products and services and also their commitment to the ideals they defend, there are several occasions in which the women themselves use their channels for critical reflections on the market in which they act as poster girls. For example, we mentioned a speech by Maíra Medeiros in the video “*Pq as mulheres estão 100 anos atrás dos homens?*” (“Why are women 100 years behind men?”). The youtuber points precisely to consumption as one of the factors for gender inequality. “Notice that a man has two or three pairs of shoes... We are socially stimulated to have many pairs”, highlights the same youtuber who did advertising actions for a brand of shoes and handbags in the videos analyzed in this work. The episode illustrates a relationship filled with contradictions, in which commodified

activism (MUKHERJEE; BANET-WEISER, 2012) seems to coexist with strategic uses of dialogue with the market for the development of feminist identities in constant (re) elaboration.

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