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Dares in the Virtual: The Construction of Social Media Challenges

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

Social Media Challenges (SMC), which are structured activities completed by participants with the engagement posted to social media, have resulted in injury and even death. Conceptualised as a social phenomenon, SMC involve a range of stakeholders, including participants, consumers, journalists and researchers. This article-based thesis explores how different stakeholders construct dangerous SMC and what the implications of these constructions are for participants. News reports, academic material, and YouTube comments were analysed using thematic discourse analysis grounded in a social constructionist paradigm. A qualitative systematic review and evidence synthesis was used to critically explore the existing research on dangerous SMC. The review indicates SMC to be a relatively understudied, complex, and dynamic phenomenon. Yet explanations for participation tend to be developmental, psychological, and individualistic, imposing a range of common, acontextual explanations for youth behaviour. The subsequent three analysis chapters consider constructions of risk, participants, reasons for participation, and attributions of responsibility. The referencing of SMC as 'challenges' and as forms of fun and entertainment are portrayed as misleading by some stakeholders. Instead, the danger involved in participation is emphasized. Dangerous SMC are constructed by most stakeholders as an undesirable youth activity demanding intervention and prevention. Risk, however, is predominantly understood as involving physical harm with emotional consequences seldom being addressed. Participants are portrayed in diverse ways; as asinine inferior specimens deserving harm, as neurologically immature, as psychologically vulnerable, or as competitive fun-seekers. Self-identified participants, in contrast, speak of forced participation and of participation utilised as a coping strategy. A range of groups are identified as responsible for addressing risk, including social media companies, parents, and participants themselves. Attempts to control participation, such as the use of age restrictions are demonstrated to be by passable. Largely absent from discourse around risky SMC are the larger structural and contextual issues, which draw attention to dynamics specific to social media platforms and the financial investment of companies in SMC proliferation. There is a silence expressed in the form of ineffective and limited interventions that externalise responsibility onto individual participants and their families.

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Table of Contents

Abstract **2**

Acknowledgements **3**

Table of Contents **4**

List of Tables and Figures **6**

CHAPTER 1: Contextualising the Thesis **7**

1.1 Introduction **7**

1.1.1 Social media usage 7

1.1.2 Social Media Challenges 10

1.2 Rationale and Research Aims **12**

1.3 Overall Research Approach **14**

1.3.1 Epistemological Framework 14

1.3.2 Research Process 15

i. Selecting SMC to study 16

ii. Material collection 17

iii. Data analysis method: Thematic Discourse Analysis 19

iv. The Thematic Discourse Analysis Process 20

1.4 Thesis Structure **22**

CHAPTER 2: Dares in the virtual: A review of literature concerned with Risky Social Media Challenges **23**

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications **23**

2.1 Abstract **24**

2.2 Introduction **24**

2.3 Method **26**

2.3.1 Systematic identification of search terms 26

2.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria 27

2.3.3 Search strategy and process 27

2.3.4 Data analysis 28

2.4 Findings **29**

2.3.1 Global Engagement and participants 30

2.3.2 Reasons for Engagement 32

2.3.3 Inherently risky 33

2.5 Conclusion and Future Research **36**

CHAPTER 3: The Broad Constructions of Risky Social Media Challenges **38**

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications **38**

3.1 Abstract **39**

3.2 Introduction **39**

3.3 Methodology **41**

3.3.1 Research design 41

3.3.2 Material collection 42
3.3.3 Ethical considerations 43

3.4 Results and Discussion **43**
3.4.1 Characterisation 43
3.4.2 Risk 49

3.5 Conclusion **53**

Conflict of Interest Statements: **54**

CHAPTER 4: "Play stupid games, win stupid prizes": Construction of Engagers and Engagement in Risky Social Media Challenges ***55***

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications **55**

4.1 Abstract **56**

4.2 Methodology **58**

4.3 Findings and Discussion **59**
4.3.1 Participants 59
4.3.2 Reasons for participating 64

4.4. Conclusion **71**

CHAPTER 5: Accountability ***73***

5.1 Blame, and the responsibility for intervening **73**

5.2 Degrees of Participation **80**

5.3 Conclusion **83**

CHAPTER 6: Synthesis and Integrative Insights: Unifying Themes and Implications ***86***

6.1 How do various stakeholders construct SMC, and what is the impact on participation? **86**
6.1.1 The ways in which risky SMC are characterised 87
6.1.2 Risks 88
6.1.3 Identification of participants and hostility 90
6.1.4 Reasons for participating 92
6.1.5 Blame and responsibility 95

6.2 Clinical Implications: **96**

6.3 Overall Conclusion and Contributions **102**

6.4 Limitations and Future research **104**

REFERENCES ***106***

APPENDIX ***140***

Appendix A: Doctoral Research Case Study: Clinical Psychology Programme Massey University **140**

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Examples of different types if Social Media Challenges popular...................... **11**

Table 2. Examples of Social Media Challenges highlighted as dangerous or risky between 2006 and 2019 .... **39**

Table 3: A list of the risks described as associated or due to specific risky SMC by stakeholders across YouTube, Academic and News sources **48**

Figure 1. Summary of research procedure stages. **16**

Figure 2 Outline of the key processes involved in the Thematic Discourse Analysis used for this thesis study **20**

Figure 3. A flow-chart showing the systematic literature review process utilised, including the inclusion/exclusion criteria for manuscripts **28**

Figure 4. Summary of the reasons provided as proposing engagement or justifying participation by all stakeholders across sources analysed **64**

Figure 5. Summary of themes and presentation of themes across chapters.................. **88**

Figure 6 Clinical recommendations **100**

CHAPTER 1: Contextualising the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I aim to understand how different groups construct SMC as "risky" or "dangerous" and consider the implications of such constructions for those who engage in them. This chapter introduces readers to the purpose of this thesis and orients readers to the overall thesis structure. I begin with a general overview of social media before discussing the shifts in social media platform functionality that support user social interaction over time. The concept of user-generated content (UGC) and seeking capital are then raised. After, the primary topic of this thesis, Social Media Challenges (SMC), a form of UGC is introduced.

I then outline this thesis's research aim and rationale before discussing the general methodology process. When I first began investigating SMC, the phenomenon was understudied, with relatively few research journal articles available during the initial literature review. Given the limited work in this area, it was challenging to know which SMC were relevant to explore in this thesis and which were not. I therefore started by exploring SMC content on YouTube and web blogs to discern the risky SMC better to focus on in the literature review and, subsequently, in this thesis. I detail this process and general methodology within this chapter to provide insight and contextualize later chapters. Finally, I end this chapter with an outline of the overall thesis structure.

1.1.1 Social media usage

The definition of social media is consistently changing over time. However, broadly, it can be understood as referring to using media to allow social engagement with others online (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Web-based applications that allow material to be created or shared between people can be called social media (Aichner et al., 2021; Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). There are a variety of popular social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat, Snapchat, and Tumblr. Currently, 4.8 billion people use social media, with the average daily usage time per person being two hours and twenty-four minutes (Chaffey, 2023). In 2024, within Aotearoa, it is believed that about 78.7 percent of our population are users of at least one social media platform (Kemp, 2024). Not all platforms are equally popular. Different platforms tend to attract different age groups; for

example, most eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds are reported to prefer Instagram and TikTok, compared to Facebook (Pew Research Centre, 2021).

Some platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Reddit) have been around for well over a decade (i.e., since 2004, Ortiz-Ospina, 2019) with others having fallen out of favour over the years (e.g., Myspace). Over the past few years, we have witnessed a greater alignment of social media platform functionality across different platforms. For example, before 2011, Twitter was limited to text-based content, and yet currently, over 50% of Twitter's content is video or image-based (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). More recently, in 2022, the popularity of short-form video content has become noticeable, with social media giant YouTube adding 'YouTube Shorts' to compete with TikTok and Instagram (Criddle and Alim, 2023). The rise and fall in the popularity of social media platforms allows for space and opportunity to open up in the social media marketplace. For example, Twitter's Vine app, the first short-form video app, started in 2013 and was discontinued in 2017 (Gowriluk, 2018), resulting in one less platform that allows for short video content.

Social media mostly facilitates social and dynamic interaction, although it is not strictly created for socialization (Aichner et al., 2021). With the advent of technology, we have witnessed a significant change in how we interact with each other and the world around us (Azzaakiyyah, 2023). For example, social media is used for social interactions, including chatting or sharing content with others (Hall, 2018). These technological innovations have not only transformed the way we communicate and work, but have also affected our social dynamics. Social media can allow people to create online personas that shift internal perceptions of the users and shape external perceptions about users (Stahl & Literat, 2023).

The technological advancements have also facilitated the emergence of complex social phenomena (Kaletka et al., 2011). Created content by social media users posted on social media platforms are called user-generated content (UGC) (Naab & Sehl, 2017). UGC can be diverse and are interacted with by others shaping their creations and influencing those involved. They can be in the forms of blogs, vlogs, or posts on various social media sites (Naab & Sehl, 2017). The focus can vary and might include reviews of products related to hobbies or various facets of everyday life (Jun & Yi, 2020).

When UGC becomes popular and a creator gains a considerable following of other users ('fan bases'), a content creator can achieve "social media influencer" status (Jun & Yi,

2020). This can be a significant indicator of accumulated online social capital. Online social capital (Faucher, 2018) draws on the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam's (2001) work on social capital. Their work highlights social capital as resources that social actors gain through social interaction. Resources are made and kept through social connections within a community. Faucher's work on online social capital contextualises capital within social media platformisation. It also stresses the economic importance imposed on social connections, given the monetary incentives gained by both platforms and users with higher social capital. Social capital for social media users, in particular, is the outcome of online interactions that accumulate quantifiable expressions (i.e., likes/followers). These measures can be associated with a person's worth within the social media community. A social marketplace emerges as the visibility of these quantifiable measures of worth are pursued (Faucher, 2018).

Influencers often pursue monetization opportunities provided to them because of their large fan bases, a base that they then need to work to maintain continuously. The concept of social media influencer is relatively new, coined around 2015/16 on a news website (Giles & Edwards, 2018). Influencer is not the only term used. They can also be referred to as micro-celebrities, "insta-famous," and other terms to highlight their status of popularity having been developed through social media (Giles & Edwards, 2018). The seeking of fame online appears to be sold internationally with lists available online highlighting the capital of social media influencers. Aotearoa New Zealand also has some well-known social media influencers including some highly followed on Instagram who share posts about travels ("Abagail") or are lifestyle/parenting content posters (Natalie Robinson) (Collabstar, 2024).

A social media influencer's connections strengthen their status in the social structure, signalling their power and standing to others (Miller, 2017). Ordinary social media users who have risen to this status can be perceived by other users as more relatable (Lee et al., 2023). However, general users sometimes depict the influencer title as undesirable, as it has been associated with unfavourable practices such as 'buying' fans or followers (Arditi, 2023). In saying this, such user reactions have been constructed as envy (Lee et al., 2023). The desire to become a social media influencer is also described as a common desire among many content creators (Khamis et al., 2017).

These influencers are in positions of power to different extents and can influence what is popular, such as fashion and beauty trends (Nouri, 2018). They can be trendsetters for

their followers (Rutter et al., 2021). However, social media corporations shift power dynamics through their ability to oversee search algorithms, which shapes what content is more visible (Labrecque et al., 2013). Social media is a form of contemporary capitalism, not solely because of the financial profit corporations generate through user engagement (Zajc, 2015); however, also through creating a space for users to seek financial compensation for producing popular material incentivizing content creation (Kopf, 2020). Faucher (2018) argues that for social media corporations, the accumulation of unpaid labour by their users (like the creation of UGC) serves as social capital, as it can be converted into profit for the network. Nevertheless, among content creators and the platforms that host them are participatory consumers who also have some power. Consumers typically consume content passively by reading or watching without commenting. They are categorized as participants when they engage with content through commenting or sharing (Khan, 2017; Shao, 2009). Content can go viral through consumer content sharing.

The term' viral' indicates the rapid and exponential sharing of content (Berger & Milkman, 2012). It involves an 'electronic' word-of-mouth process where people, for example, share or forward content links to one another (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Content that goes viral on social media platforms can reach individuals who are not active social media users, as it can penetrate our everyday offline conversations or news reports (Gurney, 2010). What elicits something to be shared, thereby increasing its chance of becoming viral, can be influenced by what evokes emotional reactions from consumers (García-Perdomo et al., 2018). Viral content on social media (e.g., prank content; Haq & Rosyidi, 2021) are similar in content popular during television broadcasting years. Typically, there is a common emphasis on humor, often leveraging the shock factor through techniques such as highlighting the incongruity between viewer expectations and the video's content (Gurney, 2010).

Thus, it is in this context of the growth of social media, capitalism, massive viewer consumption and the pursuit of social capital and influencer status - all with different stakeholders (e.g., social media platforms, content creators, consumers)- that Social Media Challenges (SMC), a form of UGC, have become popular over the last few years.

1.1.2 Social Media Challenges

SMC, or 'challenges' in its shortened form, refers to a continually expanding array of dare-like or competition-like activities that are popular and featured on social media. Given the

differences between various SMC, a comprehensive definition of the term proves challenging. However, despite the differences between tasks, there are shared features. All SMCs involve a pre-set objective or goal that needs to be achieved. Social media plays an intrinsic role in various forms: whether it's uploading content by a content producer, viewing an SMC by a consumer, or learning about the engagement process by potential participants. In this sense, most SMCs are primarily user-generated content created by ordinary social media users. The social aspect of SMC can vary, with tasks being completed individually, in pairs, or groups. Table 1 outlines various SMC to provide examples of what has become or are popular.

Table 1. Examples of different types if Social Media Challenges popular

Bottle Flipping Challenge	*Throw a plastic bottle that is half filled with water/liquid to land on the right side up.*
Cereal Challenge	*A participant eats cereal from another participant's mouth. Participant One needs to be lying down for Participant Two to pour milk and cereal into Participant One's mouth. Participant Two then proceeds to eat the cereal with a spoon.*
Pillow Challenge	*Convert your pillow into a fashionable outfit*
Wipe it Down Challenge	*The song "Wipe It Down" by BMW Kenny is played in the background. Participants show themselves in front of the mirror, wiping down the mirror with a cloth. The aim is to cut to a different outfit in tune with the song. Initially, participants might be dressed casually; then, the scene cuts to them wiping the mirror dressed differently (usually in a more "appealing" style) before cutting back to their original outfits. Participants often also show themselves as "shocked" when the outfit changes.*
Ghost Pepper Challenge	*Eat a very hot chilli pepper and video record the reaction.*
One hundred layers challenge	*Participants are to apply or wear 100 layers of something (e.g., nail polish, clothing, make-up).*
Try not to dance Challenge	*Various "catchy" or popular songs are played and participants film themselves attempting not to dance to these songs.*
Outlet/Electric Socket Challenge	*Participants are to plug a phone charger about halfway into a power outlet and then attempt to slip a coin between the wall and the charger.*

SMC is conspicuous, being prominently featured in ongoing and increasing media reports internationally and, to a lesser extent, nationally in Aotearoa, New Zealand . Currently, prevalence information is unknown globally and domestically. The only data available on the engagement of SMC is from TikTok, which claims that thirty five percent of their users are said to have participated in a SMC (Singh, 2023). This percentage is in the context of an estimated 1.1 billion active users on this platform in 2023 (Shewale, 2023). It also does not reflect what engagement is like specifically within a New Zealand context. When a SMC reaches 'peak popularity,' we often see it drawing substantial attention, including celebrity engagement (e.g., The Mannequin Challenge was completed by over seventeen celebrities; Weaver, 2016). The 'digital revolution,' which enables the global and almost instantaneous distribution of videos, can also lead to a rapid rise and fall in the popularity of any SMC. Temporally, content can either be 'trendy' or 'viral' for a limited period (weeks) or extend over a longer period (up to months) (Ortega-Barón et al., 2022). While rapid distribution means that SMC trends frequently shift, particular SMC tend to reoccur, or new challenges can often take similar forms to prior SMC.

Mainstream media and 'creative content' inventors on social media platform channels or blog sites often informally categorize SMC when discussing them (e.g., Kore, 2020: "Funniest" challenges). In this way, SMC are clumped together based on subjectively perceived similarities. As depicted in Table 1, SMC activities can be focused on different areas, like food, dance, or appearance. Some can also be "risky" or “dangerous” challenges. Risky SMC have come to be described as those associated with the risk of harm through engagement (Minhaj & Leonard, 2021). There are many types of risky SMC, including, for example, the Outlet/Electric Socket Challenge. Another example is the Cinnamon Challenge, which involves swallowing a spoon of cinnamon. With cinnamon being an edible ingredient, harm to a person, was not initially recognised with a lack of recognition of the potential risks. However, it was later associated with severe injuries, including lung collapse, by the media and warnings being issued by health professionals (Lundsgaard, 2019).

1.2 Rationale and Research Aims

As highlighted earlier, when I began this study, there was limited work on SMC within the literature. I noticed that media reports were the primary coverage of the phenomenon. The dominant response in the media was that SMC were “risky” or “dangerous”. These terms,

particularly references to the term “risky,” were strongly present in these media coverages. At the time, broader styles of SMC (like those seen today that focus on dances or food) were not visible in the media. The conversations within wider media were also devoted to SMC that resulted in injury or death. Moreover, coverage and reports often only included the input of medical professionals (e.g., Ott, 2017), who are traditionally regarded as the representatives of science and as sources of 'objective truth' or 'wisdom' (Hancock, 2018). Other views, however, appeared to be neglected. Given my interest in clinical work and the observation of discourses of risk and danger, I became attentive to learning about the constructions of SMC by different groups and how these might inform proposed interventions to address risky SMC. Thus, the research question for this thesis is: *How do different stakeholders construct SMC as 'risky' and what implications do the constructions have for those who engage in risky SMC?*

When considering the connotation “risk”, this broadly refers to the likelihood of the occurrence of harm and the effect of said harm (Breakwell, 2014). The term danger refers to exposure to harm more broadly (Breakwell, 2014; Maurer, 2011). The connotation of 'risk' can vary in meaning depending on the lens through which it is explored, such as cultural or 'everyday' understandings, rather than being explored solely from a specific perspective, such as that of a medical viewpoint (Reventlow, Hvas, & Tulinius, 2001). Where this becomes important is in considering the selection of SMC and the research aim. The focus of this study is on constructions related to particular SMC that were already pre-described as “risky”. What was understood as risk, and what made a SMC risky was unclear at the time. Consequently, the aim was to explore and unpack this concept as presented in stakeholders' narratives.

Subsequently, the sources used in this study (news articles and reports, academic publications, and YouTube comment materials) were broad to allow for various stakeholder constructions to be incorporated. Groups that could be accessed through these sources included, but are not limited to, the SMC content producers and participants of SMC, the video commenters, families and friends affected by participation, general platform users that come across content, journalists, and health professionals. The term ‘stakeholders,’ is used as each of these groups have, to some degree, an investment in SMC. SMC is about far more than the individual identified in media and medical reports. It is a social phenomenon (Johnson, 2019) that circumscribes an extensive range of groups. The inclusion of a range of groups is important to see how these stakeholders construct SMC in texts. It is essential to

understand that such discourse is not external (or innocent) to the phenomenon but is internal to it, in that it co-constitutes SMC as a social phenomenon.

During the completion of this thesis, an increasing academic interest in the topic of SMC was observed, indicated by increased research output during the research period. The growing interest in this area reflects the importance and socio-cultural relevance of SMC. However, output appeared to be specific to a particular SMC, as will be further highlighted in the literature review (e.g., focus on the Blue Whale Game: Khattar et al., 2018; Khasawneh et al., 2020; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). A SMC-specific focus can allow for an in-depth understanding of that particular SMC. Yet, it does not tell us much about the general discourse around SMC, that is, the varying ways risky SMC are constructed as a general category. As such, these commonalities are lost on the solitary focus on particular SMC, obfuscating their status as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, larger patterns such as the 'trend'-like presentation and re-occurrence of SMC are excluded. This thesis, therefore, explores a range of risky SMC specifically selected for their identification by stakeholders as both widespread and dangerous. This was a systematic process that is further described in sub-section 1.3.2.

The current literature focuses on particular populations or niches, such as Reddit Users (Park et al., 2023) or Twitter and YouTube users (Khasawneh et al., 2021). A difficulty with this is that specific sites allow for particular views to be shared and can attract particular groups (e.g., Weibo, a microblog popular with communities in China in 2013) (Harwit, 2014). This thesis moves away from this specificity and concurrently explores various communities or stakeholders (news, academia, and YouTube). This provides a broader foundation for understanding prevention or risk reduction efforts.

1.3 Overall Research Approach

1.3.1 Epistemological Framework

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge, particularly what we can know and how we can get to know it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The epistemological position taken in this study is that of social constructionism. One tenant of the approach is that social constructionism posits our realities as a product of social processes (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017). It is through language that we create knowledge. Therefore, knowledge being simply 'observable' or 'objective' is rejected. Given this rejection of unbiased observable truths, social constructionism encourages a critical stance towards knowledge that is often taken for

granted. The notion of a universal truth is rejected, too. Instead, how we understand something (our knowledge) varies over time and is culturally specific (Burr, 2015).

As knowledge is an outcome of social processes, language is not just seen as a mirror of reality, simply reflecting what occurs. Knowledge is not grounded in 'evident truths' within an external reality (Burr, 2018; Gergen, 1999). Instead, language is productive (Edley, 2001). Moreover, these constructions are interweaved with power relations, as how something or someone is understood can have implications for how we engage with it or them (Burr, 2015). For example, participants of the Blue Whale Game are often described as engaging in the challenge because they are depressed. As such, they are often described as vulnerable, with recommended interventions usually being encouragement to seek professional therapy support. This can be seen as a socially acceptable response given the concerns around mental health. Social constructionists posit that our cultural norms and scripts shape how we think about and engage with a topic (Edley, 2001). So, given the importance and power of language, the analysis of language is a primary focus for work from the social constructionist perspective (Burr, 2015).

As stated earlier, social constructionism disputes the traditional positivist concept of objectivity. The claim that researchers can adopt a decontextualized 'neutral' position on a topic, where their values or beliefs do not influence their observations, is rejected (Burr, 2015). The interpretations in this study, particularly given the focus on discourses, draw on elements of the researcher's experiences and understandings. As such, researcher reflexivity, which involves questioning one's influence on findings (e.g., our identity and values), was interwoven into the research process (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). In order to aid this, I used a journal to document reflections, impressions, and observations throughout the research process. This reflective journal aids transparency and acknowledges my role in developing findings (Ortlipp, 2008).

1.3.2 Research Process

This sub-section details the overall process undertaken in this research. At the start of the research project, the umbrella term 'SMC' initially seemed to be an informal or even slang term found on social media sites and in videos, allowing reference to various challenges. For those unaware of the phenomena, the term "SMC" was often taken in the literal sense (i.e., challenges or difficulties faced using social media). While academic literature was minimal, informal material about SMC through blogs and social media content such as videos

abounded. The brief literature review conducted to guide the thesis topic selection indicated that within the limited research on SMC, those identified as risky in academic literature often lacked adequate justifications. Moreover, it was unclear why these risky SMC were the focus of academic studies, other than social relevance.

The area was too broad to simply begin the research process. As such, a brief systemised search to select SMC was completed to allow for appropriate inclusion of SMC. In Figure 1, the process of the overall thesis study can be seen from start to finish. What is important to note is that there were three primary systematic procedures completed during the process of this thesis.

Figure 1. Summary of research procedure stages

i. The systematic selection of SMC to study (pre-study phase).

The initial stage was to select which SMC to focus on (pre- primary study). My aim here was to select popular and enduring SMC. Some SMC do not reach the 'media fame' (or viral) level, and they remain less visible and unknown internationally. It was unfeasible to include every SMC associated with risk in this study, given the growing number of such challenges and the absence of a formal database listing all risky SMC. Consequently, a systemised process was employed to choose which risky SMC to include in this study.

Which SMC are understood as "risky" or “dangerous” is unclear, complicated by the lack of a formal definition. It is through attaining media infamy that most SMC seem to become classified or identified as risky. Although prior studies have explored a range of risky SMC, a rationale for why these were selected in these studies was never provided. One can speculate that they might have been chosen based on apparent popularity from the author's perspective or simply reflected the author's area of interest. This study, in contrast, systematically

selected risky SMC that reflect SMC described by internet users as widespread and seen as the riskiest.

Initially, a search was conducted on Google Search and YouTube in 2019 using the search term "social media challenges." On YouTube, there were a total of 214 videos associated with this search term. Only 84 videos were watched, as the remaining videos could not be accessed. The first 85 websites from the relevant results (about social media challenges and included the term/s: risk, risky, or dangerous) were accessed using the same umbrella term on Google Search. A list was created, including any SMC named in the videos or websites viewed. From this list, seven SMC were selected to focus on in this thesis based on being the most frequently referred to as risky and popular in the material. These were the Salt and Ice Challenge, Momo, Blue Whale Game, Choking Game, Tide Pod Challenge, Fire Challenge, and Cinnamon Challenge.

At the start of this study, I was concerned that these SMC might not remain trendy and thus relevant. However, it quickly became apparent during the research process that the shifting popularity of SMC is typical of this phenomenon. A few of the SMC selected had already risen and fallen from popularity, only to become popular again years later. For example, the Salt and Ice challenge was described as "resurging" in New Zealand in 2017 (Beeston, 2017) and again resurging in the United States in 2019 (CNN, 2019). The identification of these SMC concluded the initial stage of the research process, before the primary study itself began, starting with a thorough literature review (as seen in Figure 1).

ii. Material collection

In order to best respond to the thesis research question, the digital medium from which SMC had grown was identified as the most suitable means to gain material for analysis. Using digital space materials was contextually relevant and allowed for the opportunity to explore discourses through written content. Comments made on platforms and provided in response to videos thus formed one of the sources of texts for analysis. Ultimately, three sources of texts were selected as data analysis material for the main study to allow for various perspectives. One source included articles by journalists or news reporters. Then there was "grey" academic material, as well as the comments section excerpts from YouTube videos. The descriptions of the material collection process itself can be found in the relevant article chapters. Below, I reflect on the process briefly, highlighting why various sources were selected for material collection.

Several factors were considered when selecting the sources. YouTube was selected as it was assumed that if commenters accessed a video to post on, then the content related to SMC had been viewed. YouTube also reflects a supposedly more representative age group of social media consumers and producers. That is, active YouTube users aged 15 to over 56 (Shepherd, 2023). It was also the platform selected to gather comment material since other platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, require employing a profile to access content fully. In contrast, YouTube allowed for public information to be gathered and used in research as it did not require an access account.

News articles and reports were used to gain the perspectives seen in the news media by journalists. Several international and local news websites were initially selected for the news blog and article data collection. Given the lack of understanding of the worldwide prevalence of SMC and the wide range of news sites available, it was challenging to select a news site to use. Google News was finally selected for material collection. All news and social media platforms have algorithms that can allow for biases (Calice et al., 2023). Google claims to try to mitigate this by using a prediction method based on how often something is searched by other users and through trending searches (Bonart et al., 2019). Google News is also a popular search engine (Das et al., 2007) and could allow access to content viewed more often.

The final source of information was 'grey material' (academic material that is not original articles). These were identified using a systematic search during the literature review. The material included in the study (grey material) was not included in the literature review. They were included in the materials for analysis to gain insight into academic constructions of SMC. This content was in the form of letters to editors, editorials, and case reviews, which are more opinion and insight-based than original material. The process of selecting this material is not included here, as it is discussed in detail in the next article-based chapter.

The number of items included for each source varied based on when the material reached a level of saturation (i.e., where items gathered become repetitive) (Ando et al., 2014), as well as information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The information power model considers the "study aim, sample specificity, use of an established theory, analysis strategy, and dialogue quality" in determining when an adequate amount of data has been collected (p.1754). In line with this, it was noted that the research question for this study was not too broad and that the analysis method chosen was appropriate for an exploratory study.

iii. Data analysis method: Thematic Discourse Analysis

Thematic discourse analysis (TDA), an established method (e.g., Singer & Hunter, 1999), was used to analyse the materials gathered. The method involves the development of common themes in addition to the exploration of how language is used in meaning-making. This method is flexible, as with most qualitative approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There is no set manualised approach with steps to follow. Some have argued that a TDA parallels a 'constructionist thematic analysis,' where general themes are developed in addition to the language being explored (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2019). However, in this thesis, themes, although used, were not the primary focus. Significant consideration was given to how language and grammar were used in sources to communicate and create meaning. This differs from a constructionist thematic analysis, where discourses are only superficially explored (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Discourse broadly refers to the use of language (e.g., metaphors, stories, statements, images) to communicate an event, object, or belief in particular ways (Burr, 2015; Van Dijk, 1997). There can be a variety of discourses about an object. Importantly, discourses are also understood in the context in which they occur (and which they shape). When considering discourses, they are not taken in isolation (Burr, 2015). A discourse analytic (DA) method is not a single unitary approach (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002) and has been used across disciplinary fields (e.g., sociology, psychology) involving differing theoretical orientations (Taylor, 2013). In the same way, TDA has no essential and specific theoretical lens (e.g., Foucauldian). In TDA, we can consider how language is used to construct objects, events, practices, people, and so forth, as well as the implications of such constructions for those who engage in SMC.

Given the research question, applying only TA would not suffice in understanding how SMC are constructed. It only allows for identifying broad patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, it adds to DA, which only focuses on the specific function of language, often omitting the broader picture of a phenomenon (Jaspal, 2020). Themes-based patterns are helpful to allow for a broader understanding of primary areas that are a focus of various stakeholders concerning SMC. However, analysing the language is important in trying to understand how SMC are constructed. Language is used to create meaning and reality (Jaspal, 2021). Looking at language use moves away from 'what' is being said (seen in TA) to noticing how things are being said (Paltridge & Burton, 2000). The consequence of this is

that stakeholders' constructions reveal certain (ideological) assumptions, which have implications for how we understand those who participate. Moreover, they also have implications for how we should intervene, and serve to reveal gaps and silences.

Moreover, granted the focus on general theme development, TDA shifts away from a traditional discourse analysis (DA). Nevertheless, the importance placed on language use differentiates it from a thematic analysis (TA). TDA thus draws on both DA and TA methods to exploit the benefits of both approaches. If a social constructionist epistemological framework is used, an integrated approach (interweaving TA and DA) allows for a compelling exploration of the arrangements of socially created themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

iv. The Thematic Discourse Analysis Process

As TDA lacks a manualised approach, a process was crafted that aligns with that found in related publications and methods. The process of this method is detailed in this sub-section, with brief summarised versions provided in future chapters as part of the article pieces. A simplified figure highlighting the key process can also be found below (Figure 1).

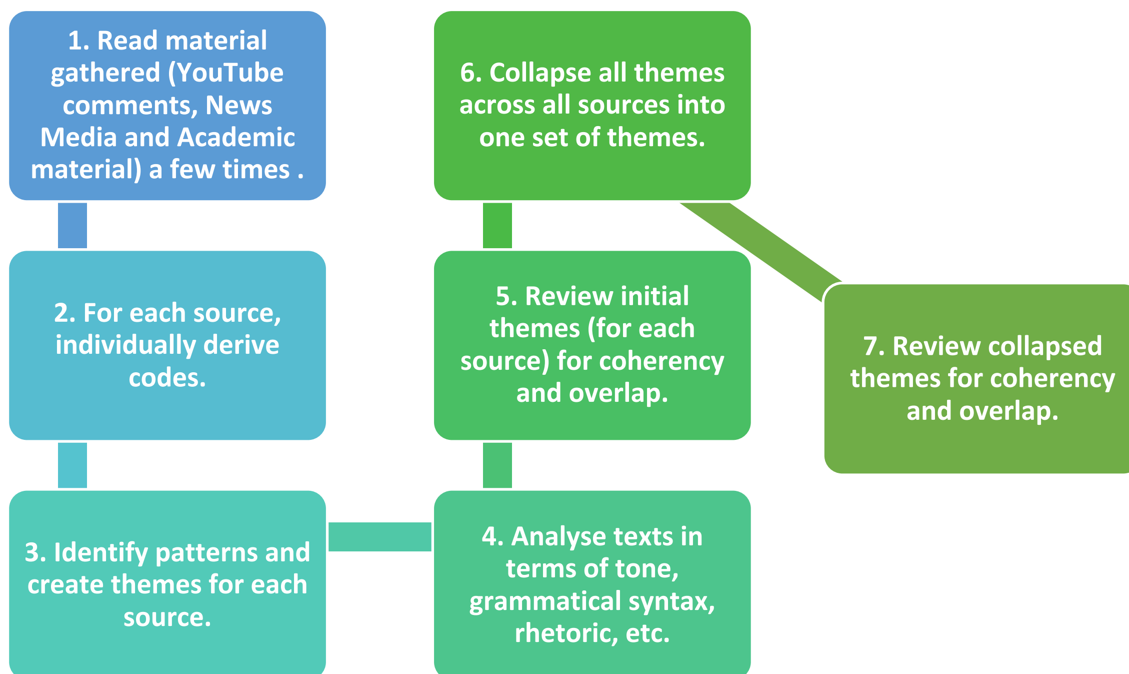

Figure 2. Outline of the key processes involved in the Thematic Discourse Analysis used for this thesis study

The initial stages of the analysis process reflected the first three steps of Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015). The first step involved reading over the material collected repetitively to become familiar with it. As the material for each source was gathered separately, these were each read separately. The next step was the generation of codes. Given that the material would later be re-utilized to explore how language was used, inductive codes (derived directly from the material) were used. However, the writer also included, at times, latent codes (capturing ideas/themes) (Clarke et al., 2019). These were color-coded. In step three, the identified codes were used to generate broad themes for that specific source type (i.e., news material). Roughly five themes were identified for each source. I maintained a reflexive journal, noting any observed patterns or thoughts throughout the research process, focusing particularly on these steps one to three.

With themes drafted, the material was explicitly explored for how language was used to construct SMC and the ways in which it then created social action through what was said in the source (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). A range of discourse analytic tools were used during this process for all sources (Taylor, 2015; Van Leeuwen, 2008). Initially, I focussed on grammatical units and rhetoric (e.g., use of verbs and adjectives and tools such as referring to "credible sources" and quotes or statistics). A rhetorical focus was also utilised, looking at the argumentative functions of language, that is, the persuasive aspect of the text, including the allocation of blame and responsibility (Billig, 2013). How contributors positioned themselves (e.g., as a medical expert, parent, concerned citizen, etc.) was also considered. There was a particular focus on the implications of particular constructions. I also considered broad social constructs such as "political correctness."

In step five, the initial draft themes were reviewed (this reflected step four of Braun and Clarke's method). The themes were reviewed for overlap and coherency. Given considerable theme overlap across the sources, in step six, all three source themes had their themes collapsed into one set. Collapsing the themes into one set across sources allowed for more insight into the differences and similarities between sources. Once themes were collapsed, in step seven, they were reviewed again and re-named.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. As this is a thesis with publications, three individual chapters consist of three articles in review (having been submitted for publication). Following this chapter, Chapter Two provides a literature review of the phenomenon being studied and is the first article. It introduces SMC by examining how seven risky SMC are constructed in the research literature. A primary aim of this review was to critically explore how SMC have been constructed, with attention to how this might be shifting over time. Chapters Three, Four, and Five then present the findings and answer the thesis research question: How do different stakeholders construct risky SMC, and what are the implications of these constructions for those who engage in risky SMC? Chapters Three and Four are both articles and were split to address limits on the word count.

Chapter Three, in particular, presents the broader construction of SMC held by stakeholders. Within this were the ways in which the various names of SMC are constructed as being challenged and held as non-representative of the tasks by stakeholders. This chapter also explores the theme of "risk," an important topic given the focus on dangers across sources. Chapter Four considers how participants are constructed across different sources (YouTube commenters, news reporters, and academic material). Depictions of who participants are focus primarily on age within media and academic sources and shift towards more generic referencing (devoid of age-related references) within YouTube comments. This chapter also considers how stakeholders constructed risky SMC participants' reasons for engagement.

Chapter Five presents the final theme, exploring how stakeholders constructed responsibility and blame concerning particular groups: Parents, social media platforms, and participants. Moreover, I argue that the participants' constructions by stakeholders externalize blame to others while marginalizing the role of commenters. Finally, Chapter Six summarizes the findings and addresses the overall research question. The role of the sources in these findings will be acknowledged, given the importance of context in discourse. Moreover, some implications of clinical significance will be discussed. Finally, the limitations and potential future research directions will be addressed.

CHAPTER 2: Dares in the virtual: A review of literature concerned with Risky Social Media Challenges

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of candidate:	Victoria Nazari
Name/title of Primary Supervisor:	Dr Clifford van Ommen
In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	Chapter 2

Please select one of the following three options:

○ The manuscript/published work is published or in press

- Please provide the full reference of the Research Output:

◉ The manuscript is currently under review for publication – please indicate:

- The name of the journal:
  New Zealand Journal of Psychology
- The percentage of the manuscript/published work that was contributed by the candidate: 90%
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the manuscript/published work:
  I, the candidate, completed the research and write up for this publication with the guidance of my supervisors. My supervisors provided me with feedback for amendments during revisions of the article.

○ It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal

Candidate's Signature:	[signature]
Date:	21 December 2023
Primary Supervisor's Signature:	[signature]
Date:	21/12/23

This form should appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as a manuscript/publication or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis.

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DRC 19/09/10

2.1 Abstract

Risky Social Media Challenges (SMC) involve completing a harm-related task or dare and uploading participation recordings onto social media. The phenomenon is internationally infamous and yet contextually relevant to Aotearoa, New Zealand, given local news reports highlighting the injury and death of New Zealanders. A qualitative systematic review and evidence synthesis were utilized to explore what is known about risky social media challenges within the academic literature. The search was completed at two points (2020 and 2023), allowing for observation commentary around the shifts in research. Three themes were identified: SMC global engagement and participants, engagement reasons, and risks from engagement. These identified themes reflect areas that need attention in future research to develop our understanding of a phenomenon that continues to grow in engagement.

Keywords: *social media challenges, online dares, internet challenges, risky behaviours*

2.2 Introduction

During the COVID-19 lockdowns (Elsayed, 2021), Social Media Challenges (SMC) became a common form of entertainment (Celona, 2022). They allowed for socialization and a way to cope with COVID-19 (Falgoust et al., 2022). SMC (referred to as "challenge" in its short form) is a descriptive umbrella term encompassing various online dares that have become popular on social media platforms (such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram). Depending on the specific SMC, the process and activity required to participate can vary (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2021). For example, the Cinnamon Challenge requires ingesting a tablespoon of cinnamon in under a minute. Another SMC, the Salt and Ice Challenge, requires the application of salt to a specific part of the body, while aiming to hold this in place for as long as possible despite the resultant pain. These SMC are generally described in the media as risky due to their association with injury or death.

Risky SMC are often reported in international news reports. They have not been studied in an Aotearoa, New Zealand context. However, this doesn't mean the phenomenon is irrelevant to our population. Many local news reports highlight risky SMC engagement within New Zealand schools (e.g., Choking Game occurring at Westlake Girls High School in Auckland, Dillan, 2022). Moreover, there have also been local reports of adults passing away

from engagement in risky SMC (e.g., Ice Challenge, Northern Advocate, 2014). A search on TikTok and other platforms (including YouTube) also provides examples of risky SMC engagement in Aotearoa, New Zealand. There is also acknowledgment by the Ministry of Education (MoE) around the risk that some risky SMC pose in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The MoE provides a "Template for informing families and whanau about 'choking games'" (Ministry of Education, 2019, p56). Thus, it is a phenomenon that, despite lacking academic literature, is relevant for Aotearoa, New Zealand health practitioners and researchers.

The ease of engagement in riskier SMC has been a longstanding concern, with warnings about the use of 'everyday' objects, such as salt, broadcasted in the news media (e.g., Davidson, 2012). In the sparse academic literature, some refer to the practice as risky behaviour (Roth et al., 2020). Risk-taking behaviours usually involve engaging in socially acceptable behaviours with awareness about the risks (e.g., drinking) or socially unacceptable behaviour where safety measures are disregarded (e.g., speeding) (Leather, 2009; Turner et al., 2004). Nevertheless, they have also been identified as being forms of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) (Braush et al., 2011). NSSI involves an injury to the self without the intent to die (Nock, 2010). SMC that are referred to as NSSI are often those that have an association with suicide themes, such as the Blue Whale Game, where the final task is for the participant to take their life (Khattar et al., 2018).

Risky SMC practice can also blur into pranks and crime (Chiu, 2020). Pranking behaviours are often hidden behind the façade of being forms of humour (Jarrar et al., 2020). In the name of entertainment, some risky SMC can also involve purposely giving misleading directions to a 'fellow' participant at that person's expense. For example, the Skull Breaker Challenge involves two participants telling a third "participant" that the challenge is to jump up and, as a group, take a photo in mid-air. This third "participant" is not in on the actual challenge. The other two are standing on either side of this person, and just before landing from the jump, the two, in on an actual task, kick the legs out from under this third "participant." This third person's subsequent falling, landing on their back, and hitting their head on the floor (hence the name, 'skull-breaker') is captured on video. The third person is left at the receiving end of ridicule or emotional and physical harm (Jarrar et al., 2020).

What can be seen is that there are different ways that different risky SMC are categorized (e.g., "non-suicidal self-injury" by Braush et al., 2011; or "thrill-seeking behaviours" by Avery et al., 2015; Bernacki et al., 2012; Defenderfer et al., 2016; Linkletter

et al., 2010; Mandysova & Bohac, 2016). There appears to be different understandings of what drives the phenomenon, influencing prevention and intervention understandings. A literature review can clarify how risky SMC are seen within the literature and what is known about them.

Current reviews of risky SMC (i.e., Astorri et al., 2022) explore various SMC or specific types of risky SMC (e.g., Burns-relate Challenges, Chu et al., 2018). This is all the while providing descriptive summaries about known health risks and participants. This article explores and interprets the literature surrounding SMC to synthesize knowledge while providing a critical lens on their depictions in academic material. Unlike previous studies in this area, the specific risky SMC explored in this study were systematically selected. The present critical literature review also moves beyond just a synthesis of evidence by exploring the literature at two different time points: 2020 and 2023. Given that individual SMC are 'trend' and 'viral' based practices that experience rapid shifts in development, considering two different points in time allows for observational insight into how this phenomenon might have developed over time.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Systematic identification of search terms

There is a wide range of SMC often categorized as "risky" or "dangerous" (e.g., "Ghost Pepper Challenge" or "Deodorant Challenge"). An exhaustive list would be impossible to collate and search, given the rapid development and change in popularity of SMC. In order to select SMC that were relevant and reflected as "risky", a systematic search was used to understand which SMC were most "commonly" perceived as risky. The systematic search process included utilising Google Search Engine and YouTube videos. Both searches involved a review of the first 100 content (in the form of videos, blogs, and news reports) with the search term "risky social media challenges." YouTube videos were sorted by "view count" to allow access to the most viewed content. All named SMC were collated, and the most commonly referenced were utilized for this study: the Blue Whale Game, Salt and Ice Challenge, Fire Challenge, Momo, Tide Pod Challenge, Cinnamon Challenge, and Choking Game.

2.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Materials in languages other than English were excluded, as were repeated manuscripts. Only material in the form of original research was included, in addition to case reports. Manuscripts were only included if they pertained to at least one of the seven risky SMC selected. The Choking Game, as well as many other SMC, are believed to have existed before its popularisation on social media platforms. However, challenges can take on new meaning within digital spaces. In line with the focus of this study, material exploring The Choking Game (or other SMC) without reference to social media platform contexts was excluded.

2.3.3 Search strategy and process

Each specific SMC (e.g., "Momo") was searched using four different keyword pairings: "challenge" (e.g., Momo Challenge), "trend," "game," and "online." The umbrella search terms "social media challenges" and "social media dares" were also used. The first literature search took place between August and September 2020. Search terms for each topic were searched separately with multiple variations across three databases: Scopus, PSYCHINFO, and Web of Science. The manuscripts from the initial search results (n= 30235) were screened based on the search term's relevant title and abstract content. An in-depth assessment for material inclusion was then completed, including reading abstracts or full journal articles to ensure the materials selected met the criteria for this study. At the end of this process, 23 manuscripts were included for initial analysis.

The second search occurred in August 2023 using the same search terms with a fixed year range from 2020 to 2023. As the Web of Science has been shown to overlap significantly with Scopus material and lacks some material (Singh et al., 2021), this search was limited to PSYCHINFO and Scopus. The new materials from this search were selected based on a title and abstract relevant to the search term. Like before, they were read and included based on inclusion criteria. A total of 15 manuscripts were then further included for analysis. The study process is depicted in Figure 3.

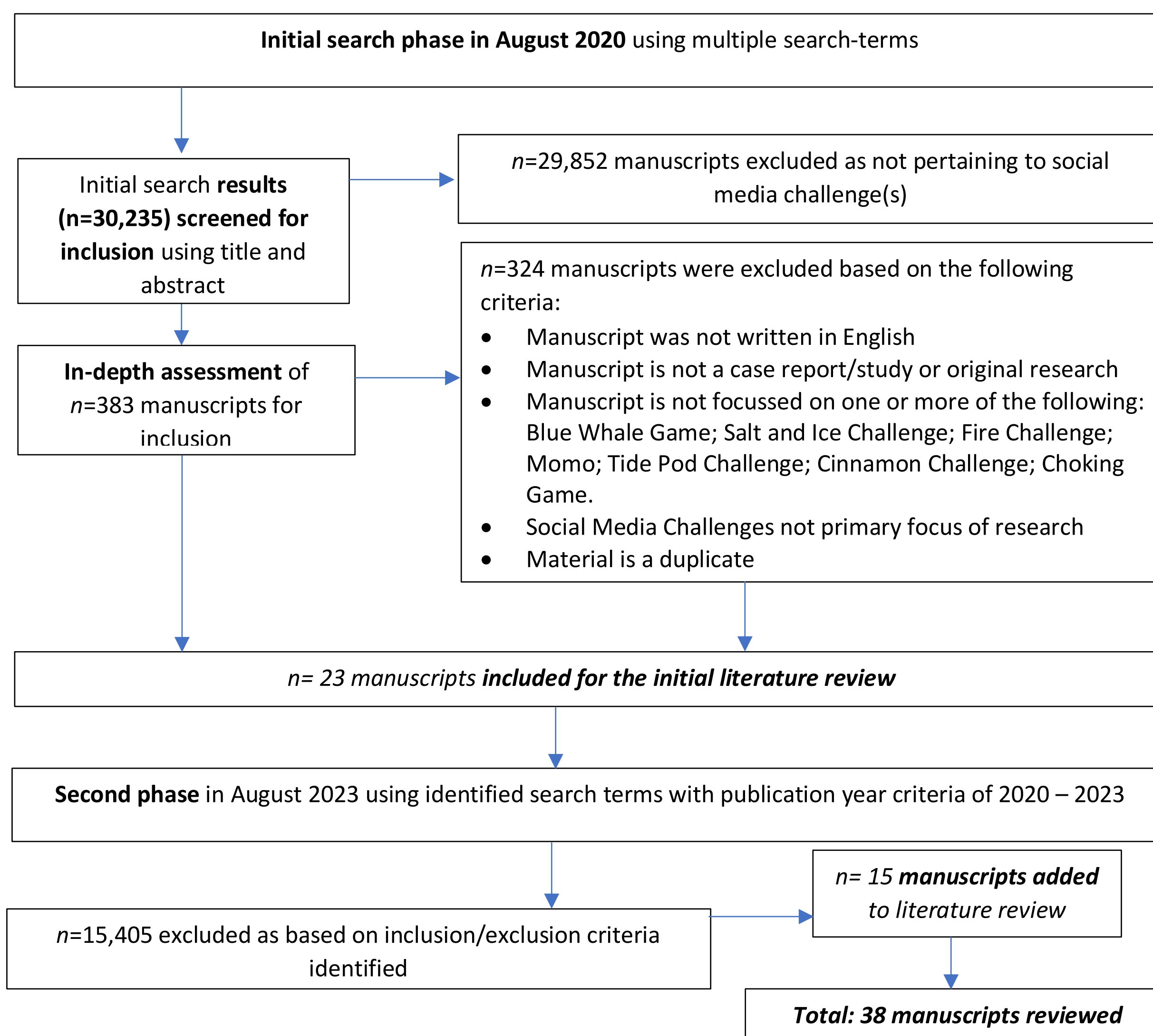

Figure 3. A flow-chart showing the systematic literature review process utilised, including the inclusion/exclusion criteria for manuscripts.

2.3.4 Data analysis

A systematic qualitative review and evidence synthesis were utilized (Grant & Booth, 2009) with the material identified. This process included reading the first set of manuscripts while noticing study limitations and gaps. Manuscripts were each read through at least twice. The material was then reviewed again, considering material findings and identifying common themes. Initial themes were developed and collapsed multiple times until three primary themes encompassing the essence of content were created. The second set of material from the review in August 2023 was analysed in the same way as the initial process. When

creating themes for the second set of materials, it became apparent that they were similar to the first. Thus, materials were analysed and integrated into current themes where relevant.

2.4 Findings

This review developed three themes: Global engagement and participants, the reasons for engagement in SMC, and risk as related to SMC. The underlying similarity across all themes was the observation of shifts in how SMC are studied in the academic literature within each thematic area. Moreover, the findings also highlighted that the phenomenon of risky SMC presents various challenges for researchers due to its continuous evolution over time.

Various research difficulties were also identified when studying risky SMC. A primary difficulty is that there appears to be a lack of acknowledgment in current research around the different names this phenomenon can be given. In an initial search completed in 2020, the term "Social Media Challenges" would result in academic material with a literal focus on "challenges" faced in social media. However, SMC was the dominant term used in mainstream media at the time to refer to the phenomena. Then, in the 2023 search, the term SMC was better known with more relevant search results in academic material. Yet, it was also referred to by other titles, namely "Tiktok challenges." This particular title was used as sometimes a challenge can be contextualised to the platform in which it becomes popular (Bonifazi et al., 2022; Falgoust et al., 2022; Minhaj & Leonard, 2021). This makes it challenging to synthesize material on risky SMC effectively, especially if other titles used are relatively unknown or unpopular. Moreover, some popular risky SMC (e.g., the Choking game) are not feasible for study as social media platforms can actively remove the content (Bonifazi et al., 2022).

Additionally, in this review, although there were concerns about dangers and its popularity in the media, some SMC (i.e., the Tide pod challenge, viral in 2018) that were supposedly ‘newer’ during the first search in 2020, did not garner any research results. The mainstream media have the advantage of not having to deal with the rigorous research process requirements active in the academic world (Chen, 2011). Consider how the Blue Whale Game became famous in 2016, yet research around this appears to have become dominant only from 2020 to 2021. A lack of academic material about a particular SMC can reflect their time-bound "trend" like nature. SMC can fall from popularity in under a year.

2.3.1 Global Engagement and participants

Within the literature, risky SMC are posited as being "played" internationally. They have been confirmed as practiced in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, India, Italy, Romanian, Russia, Turkey, and the United States (Avery et al., 2015; Khattar et al., 2018; Lupariello et al., 2019; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Uavis, 2018; Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022; Ward et al., 2021; Zack et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2022). Some specific SMC appeared to receive significant academic consideration in particular countries. For example, the Blue Whale Game studies were primarily completed in India (e.g., Khattar et al., 2018; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Ramkumar & Sadath, 2019). Socio- and political contextual details might influence the choice of SMC to focus on within academic literature. After the Blue Whale Game became well known due to press and online media reports in Europe and Asia, policies were created to persecute those involved (i.e., curators). The game was banned in India due to concerns about its potential to exacerbate already high rates of youth suicide, fuelled by its increasing popularity among younger people (Mukhra et al., 2019).

There were attempts at profiling participants of risky SMC in terms of their age and ethnicity in the literature. When considering age groups, the focus was on youth. Whether or not this reflects the actual age group of SMC participants remains to be determined. In some cases, age ranges were estimates, as the sources used (videos) did not permit gathering such demographic information (Linkletter et al., 2010). The case reports provided the most accurate age ranges available as they were on confirmed participants (Avery et al., 2015; Lupariello et al., 2019; Poyraz et al., 2019; Uuavis, 2018; Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022; Zack et al., 2014). However, SMC incidents can be higher for youth within medical/emergency department visits (Avery et al., 2015), which was often the environmental context of reports.

Those who were invited to complete surveys or interviews about SMC were always under 28 years old unless the study was exploring the views of parents or professionals (e.g., Teachers, Doctors, Psychologists) (i.e., Bada and Clayton, 2020; Bernacki & Davies, 2012; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). This was because most studies with younger populations utilised general school or university populations and had age-limit constraints. In doing so, there is a potential to find what is being sought (i.e., youth engagers). However, Chu et al. (2018) named an example of a case study in their review of the literature about a 45-year-old female engaging in a burns-related SMC. So, a broader age population is engaging in risky

SMC, which is currently not acknowledged in youth-oriented research. This signals the need for researchers to understand better the age populations engaging in risky SMC.

The ways in which culture and ethnic identity are considered in relation to risky SMC have also shifted in the literature over time. Culture was seldom acknowledged in earlier literature. Instead, ethnic identification was considered, but only as descriptive sidenotes about participants. The Choking Game was stated as being played mainly by Caucasians (Linkletter et al., 2010), and the Fire Challenge was mostly by African Americans (Avery et al., 2015). These reports were further complicated by the ethnicity estimates based on visual cues of physical characteristics in selected YouTube videos. These cues can often be misleading and do not adequately reflect the diversity and complexity of ethnic identity. Thus, it reflects a generalization beyond the available evidence. The relevance of ethnic identity has not been established. Additionally, the misidentifying or foreclosing of a participant's ethnic identity is a possibility with ethnic estimations and is problematic. For instance, it can enable or create negative stereotypes (given that risky SMC are not positively viewed or accepted). Relevant ethnic groups may also be overlooked for psychoeducation about SMC risks if support becomes primarily targeted toward specific populations perceived to be at higher risk of engagement or impact.

The role of culture was only alluded to in the first set of literature (2020 search). For example, Findik and colleagues (2019) described the story of a young Syrian refugee patient who had engaged in "Mariam." Mariam's tasks were believed to be like that of "Momo." Mariam (reflected as also being spelled as "Meriam") was reported to be a popular form of Momo in the Middle East. However, there was a lack of information (e.g., what "Mariam" required participants to complete) other than that basic description. The adaptation of games by organisations to make them more internationally friendly (i.e., changes to depictions of religion, violence, or sex) is expected in the gaming industry (Eliman, 2019; Krotoski, 2006). In doing so, games become more relevant to that socio-cultural and political population. How SMC are adapted across cultures, given 'global' occurrence, by SMC participants is unclear.

Recent literature from the second set of material reviewed (2020 onwards) was observed to better acknowledge the role of culture in SMC. Within these, risky SMC was considered in relation to understanding concerns and cultural perspectives. For example, Zhu et al. (2022) consider how suicide or self-harm is understood in the cultural context of China.

A focus on cultural specificity for risky SMC is important to understand, as it would influence how risk is perceived and, subsequently, potential intervention strategies.

2.3.2 Reasons for Engagement

Understanding reasons for engagement in risky SMC is a primary preoccupation in the material reviewed. It came in two forms: First, the accounts of participants in the studies, and second, speculation by authors who shared their perspectives on what they believed was the reasoning for engagement in SMC. Author speculation was less frequent and incorporated more generally as statements. Speculations represented a reiteration of generalisations concerning youth behaviour. For example, young people are folding under peer pressure (Avery et al., 2015; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Ouellette et al., 2019), lack cognitive capacity, are thrill-seeking, and are testing out various ways of being in the world (Avery et al., 2015; Bada et al., 2020; Defenderfer et al., 2016; Khattar et al., 2018; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). This all involves imposition of general rationales from other fields of study rather than direct engagement with youth that engage in SMC. It is thus a strategy that simply reiterates previous rationales instead of researching the phenomenon directly, undermining the development of context-specific insights.

Considering participants' accounts of why they engage in risky SMC provides a more nuanced understanding that shifts away from imposing traditional rationales. This is likely to reveal various reasons for engaging in the same behaviour. For example, a 15-year-old who died as a result of engagement in the Blue Whale Game attempted to live broadcast the hanging of herself to friends (Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022). In another case (also involving the broadcasting of participation), a young person and her mother were encouraging and seeking likes for their SMC attempt (Ferreira Deslandes et al., 2021). The reasons for broadcasting engagement in these cases can be different. The distinctions can be lost through speculation or the imposition of traditional rationales. The implication is that an incomplete understanding of what drives engagement in SMC from participant perspectives prevents the provision of appropriate support.

Ward et al. (2021) found that participants aged eighteen to twenty and self-identified as having engaged in a range of risky SMC were driven by the desire to become popular and conspicuous online. Villani et al. (2019) (also using predefined responses) explored what students believed drove others in their age group to engage in the Blue Whale Game. Students believed participants were attracted to engage primarily because of a desire to

belong and increased social status. In using pre-set questionnaires to explore a relatively understudied area, responses become constrained when pre-set options are used. There is a risk of losing rich information that might be gained through other methods (e.g., interviews and open surveys).

Within case reports (Avery et al., 2015; Findik & Ceri, 2019; Uavis, 2018; Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022; Zack et al., 2014), reasons for engagement and 'risk factors' were interchangeably referred towards. Risk factors were often concluded from the presence of it being in the participants' clinical presentations. For example, some participants had a current or past history of mental health diagnoses/disorders (Findik et al., 2019; Luparillo et al., 2019). In some cases, reasons for engagement were not obtained as participants denied engagement despite evidence of engagement in the SMC (Lupariello et al., 2019). Sometimes, details were also limited or unavailable given the circumstances of the participant/client (i.e., participants had passed away due to the SMC, Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022).

Current conclusions about risky SMC risk factors appear to be similar to those in the broader literature related to suicide and self-harm. That is, risk factors (i.e., low mood and family dysfunction) are posited to be associated with higher suicide attempts in youth (Bae et al., 2005). However, other studies specifically exploring risky SMC engagement contend some risk factors. For example, Turan et al. (2022) more recently investigated the association between mental health disorders and engagement in the Blue Whale Game. They found no differences between depressed participants' engagement in a risky SMC compared to that of a non-depressed person. Moreover, the use of "risk factors" characterises SMC as an illness or problem to be addressed through mitigating factors that increase engagement risk. In communicating this stance, any positive outcomes of SMC engagement are rendered unimportant or non-existent. However, this characterization is being challenged as SMC continues to grow and become studied further in academic literature.

2.3.3 Inherently risky

The risk of physical harm from risky SMC participation was often detailed. The Choking Game, in particular, was said to be associated with a wide range of physical risks as a consequence of engagement: chronic headaches, short-term memory loss, seizures, concussions, retinal haemorrhage, stroke, brain damage, and death (Bernacki et al., 2012; Braush et al., 2011; Defender et al., 2016; Linkletter et al., 2010; Ouellette et al., 2019).

Continuing a focus on physical harm, the Fire and other Burns Challenges were reported in case reports as resulting in moderate to severe burns, scars, skin graft surgery, and infections (Avery et al., 2015; Chu et al., 2017).

Social media use has been argued to leave some youth susceptible or more likely to have mood concerns or low self-esteem (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Sharma et al., 2020). However, mental distress from risky SMC was not well explored in the academic literature. The Blue Whale Game was the only SMC that was highlighted as a risk for participants due to associations with suicide and mental health disorders (Khasawneh et al., 2019; Khasawneh et al., 2020; Khattar et al., 2018; Lupariello et al., 2019). However, mental distress was never clearly named as being a direct consequence of engagement.

There was substantial review and investigation on risky SMC associated with suicide contagion, such as the Blue Whale Game (Bada & Clayton, 2019; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Ramkumar & Sadath, 2019; Villani et al., 2019). Suicide contagion, or the Werther effect (Phillips, 1974), refers to copycat suicides influenced by media reports. The potential for media reports to increase the risk of suicide contagion after reporting on risky SMC associated with suicide was present in the literature. Some identified a lack of appropriate adherence to media guidelines to reduce contagion effects within risky SMC, thus highlighting a potential risk of harm from news reports (Khattar et al., 2018; Kobilke & Markiewitz, 2021; Sumner et al., 2019).

Some earlier literature considered the genuineness of risk, particularly surrounding the Blue Whale Game and Momo (e.g., Khasawneh et al., 2020). The actual occurrence and death rates were occasionally described as unknown or hoaxes (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2021). Some, like Khattar et al. (2018), argued that particular risky SMC occurrences, such as the Blue Whale Game, were instances of moral panic being created by others. Moral panic is associated with a practice that is characterised as a threat to society's moral fabric (Cohen, 1999). SMC discourse often refers to suicide, self-harm, and risk to children, which are indicative of such threats. During the peak popularity of Momo and Blue Whale Game, there was a significant media focus on the danger of these SMC (Khattar et al., 2018; Sumner et al.,2019). SMC were portrayed as over-sensationalised (e.g., celebrities like Kim Kardashian warning about risks to children). Although the media can sensationalise the news, over the past few years, with an increased focus on the phenomenon, government agencies and case report publications (e.g., Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022) have verified the risks.

At the peak of concerns about their "genuineness," arguments about moral panic were said to detract from potential dangers. However, one author argued that SMC were still risky (irrespective of genuine reports of mortality), as the SMC itself can become a 'risk factor' in the presence of moral panic for suicide contagion (Ortiz et al., 2018). The discourse of risk factors is continuously becoming an area of research interest and seems to have shifted how risk is understood. Harm need not be explicit reports of injury and death. Instead, progressively, an SMC appears to be seen as harmful if there is an association with risk factors, such as eating disorders (Hu et al., 2023; Joiner et al., 2023). SMC can also be harmful if inciting and fuelling social issues like racism (Zhao & Abidin, 2023). So, there has been a rapid shift in the literature from SMC being referred to as "dangerous" strictly due to explicit physical harms to considering broader impacts and associations.

The reasons why specific SMC are categorised as risky in the current literature are seldom made explicit. Only Mahadevaiah and Nayak's (2018) study highlighted the difference between "harmless" (not involving body parts, with engagement being funny, silly, or helpful) versus harmful SMC (which involves a body part and requires injury to complete a challenge). As highlighted earlier, there is a lack of focus on the emotional or other harms risky SMC can bring forward. Moreover, definitions of 'funny' and 'silly' can vary. Pranks are often classed by participants as 'funny' or 'harmless fun' but are also generally classed as forms of bullying or harassment (Jarrar et al., 2020).

Moreover, for some, activities that cause an injury might be perceived (and sought out) as 'funny' or entertaining. An example would be the Jackass franchise. The franchise is based predominantly on young men partaking in stunts/pranks, often with inherent risks. The pain experienced is always shown and often laughed at within the group of men present. Jackass is variably constructed, including as entertainment (in the form of comedic pain), a form of 'performative art' (Sweeny, 2008), or 'reflexive sadomasochism' (Savran, 1998).

Thus, what we might be seeing in contemporary risky SMC is another expression of pain as entertainment, where videos can be graphic, exhibiting "blood and pain," yet classed as entertainment (e.g., Salt and Ice challenge attempt video by PrettyBoyRio posted on YouTube). Pain as a sought-after form of comedy and entertainment is not new (e.g., van Ommen, 2016). However, the styles in which people might package this so that it becomes acceptable to find funny (e.g., as an "epic fail" as opposed to an accident) varies (Cheng,

2017). In this way, it becomes important to understand how risk is constructed by those who engage and those who view it.

2.5 Conclusion and Future Research

Researching risky SMC presents an opportunity for constructive analysis of a globally prevalent phenomenon that has implications for all involved. This review noted the continuous growth of research about risky SMC. However, researchers face many challenges in studying a shifting phenomenon. One such concern is the title or umbrella term of "SMC," which these challenges are known by, changing over time. In three years, the various search terms have become popularised in searching for SMC, and some (such as "TikTok challenges"") might have been missed in this review. This review explored only titles related to specific SMC and the umbrella term "SMC". Thus, academic literature using "TikTok Challenges" or other titles might have been missed. There is a need for researchers to begin ways in which to study live phenomena like risky SMC effectively so to keep up to date with the growing changes.

Social and cultural issues can be relevant to risky SMC (i.e., high suicide rates in India leading to fears around the risk of the SMC and its eventual banning) (Mukhra et al., 2019). However, current literature only alluded to the potential importance of cultural differences in risky SMC (e.g., Mariam, the Middle Eastern version of Momo, Findik et al., 2019). The focus of the literature was on the characterizations of participants, including age and ethnicity. Participants of risky SMC were often identified as being in younger age groups. However, this was speculative, concluded observationally (through videos), or was with studies exploring the perspectives of those under twenty-eight. Ethnicity estimates were based on visual cues of physical characteristics. So, it can be misleading and does not adequately reflect the diversity and complexity of ethnic identity. There is a need to acknowledge the complexity of ethnic and age identity within SMC to avoid generalizations beyond the available evidence. Further research is also needed to understand participants' cultural and social contexts in risky SMC engagement, moving beyond the simple characterizations of participants. Considering the lack of research in Aotearoa, New Zealand, a starting point might be exploring prevalence rates and risky SMC perceptions within our population.

The speculated reasons by non-participants and research authors for engaging in risky SMC (e.g., peer pressure) often rely on familiar tropes commonly used to explain youth behavior. These were not based on directly engaging with those participating and the context within which SMC occurs. However, the reasons given for engagement by participants were

illustrative of the context of social media feeding the seeking of fame, attention, and prominence. Although research increasingly considers participants' perspectives methodologically, they provide a priori reasons for participants to select from (Ward et al.,2021; Villani et al.,2019) rather than openly engaging with them. In doing so, there is the risk of continuously capturing similar or repetitive reasonings that are the current focus and excluding participant-led narratives.

Finally, although there was initial scepticism about the genuineness of the risks associated with SMC, it appears this has become less of a concern over time in the literature reviewed. The current descriptions draw on inherent risks primarily centred on physical harm. It is clear that risk goes beyond physical harm; however, given the long-term impact of some injuries, there is a growing focus on emotional harm. So, it is necessary to explore a broader range of perspectives (e.g., parents, social media users, youth, academics, participants, and medical professionals) to understand how the risks of SMC are being constructed. Through understanding these perspectives, more can be learned about the priorities and desires of different groups in addressing SMC.

CHAPTER 3: The Broad Constructions of Risky Social Media Challenges

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications

DRC 16

GRADUATE
RESEARCH
SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of candidate:	Victoria Nazari
Name/title of Primary Supervisor:	Dr Clifford van Ommen
In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	Chapter 3

Please select one of the following three options:

○ The manuscript/published work is published or in press

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- The name of the journal:
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- The percentage of the manuscript/published work that was contributed by the candidate: 90%

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Candidate's Signature:	[signature]
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GRS Version 5 – 13 December 2019
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Preface

Within this chapter, having now outlined what is known within the literature (chapter 2), I begin to share some of the findings of this study, which sought to explore constructions of risky SMC by different stakeholders. Within this chapter, in particular, the ways in which SMC appeared to be understood more "generally" is presented.

3.1 Abstract

Social Media Challenges (SMC) associated with harm can result in the death of participants. This study explores the construction of various risky SMC by different stakeholders. A thematic discourse analysis from a social constructionist perspective was utilised to understand how stakeholders frame these practices. Two particular themes are explored: The characterisation of SMC and the construction of these as risky. In characterising risky SMC, stakeholders construct SMC names as influential in their practice. Risky SMC were also framed as timebound (viral, crazes, and trends). However, contesting constructions framed them as long-standing through their offline practices. In the theme of risk, the harm from risky SMC was primarily centred on physical dangers. Emotional harm was considered in the context of loved ones being impacted. The findings of this study indicate that the current dominant discourses highlighted (viral challenges, posing a risk of physical harm and grief) can serve to shift the practice of risky SMC through their current descriptions ("challenge").

Keywords: *online dares; risky behaviour; social media challenges; tiktok challenges; thematic discourse analysis*

3.2 Introduction

Social media has created many consumer opportunities, including sharing content and engaging with others (Hajli, 2014). Social Media Challenges (SMC) is an umbrella term for activities people engage in where the process and outcome are often uploaded onto a social media platform. In short, they can be referred to as 'challenges' and can be learned by viewing their engagement online (Linkletter et al., 2010). It is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is influenced by what is popular in society at the time (e.g., a popular song by Drake, a music artist, being used to create the "Kiki dance challenge," Lyons, 2018). However, in the media, reports concerning SMC are predominantly about injuries or death from SMC,

centralising some SMC as 'risky' (see Chapter Two). A few SMC identified as popular and risky, particularly between 2006 and 2020, are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Social Media Challenges highlighted as dangerous or risky between 2006 and 2020.

Challenge	*Challenge description*
Blue Whale Game	Participants seek out 'curators' (game administrators who give the instructions) or are contacted by curators through social media. Participants are given one task to complete each day for fifty days (e.g., cut a whale shape into the wrist, watch horror movies, stay awake until three am). The final challenge is to complete suicide.
Choking Game	This challenge has many different names (e.g., the fainting game). It involves temporarily cutting off your air supply (e.g., using a belt around your neck) to evoke light headedness (understood as a 'high') before fainting.
Cinnamon Challenge	Individuals eat one spoon of cinnamon powder with no liquids in under one minute.
Fire Challenge	Individuals apply a flammable liquid (e.g., Lynx spray) onto their skin before lighting the liquid.
Momo	Participants contact or are contacted by a 'character' called 'Momo', usually on a WhatsApp number. 'Momo' sends violent media or instructs participants to complete certain tasks or dares. Contact can also be unsolicited towards children with 'Momo' clips being edited into children's cartoons on YouTube.
Salt and Ice Challenge	Participants first apply salt to a body part and then applying a piece of ice to the area. The goal is to maintain contact for as long as possible.
Tide Pod Challenge	Participants intentionally ingest laundry detergent tablets (Tide Pods) or other concentrated laundry detergents.

Risky SMC have been described as a 'risky behaviour' by academics (Avery et al., 2016; Bada et al., 2020; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). Constructions of risk-taking behaviours can be defined in different ways (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 2009). Mostly, risk-taking behaviours are perceived as dangerous because of the direct risks they pose (e.g., asphyxiation), due to other possible unknown consequences (e.g., lung damage), and the willingness of people to engage in the potentially harmful activities (Igra & Irwin, 1996; Michael & Ben-Zur, 2007). Although risk-taking behaviours can lead to unfavorable outcomes (Zuckerman, 2007), they can also result in positive short-term gains (Gullone & Moore, 2000). For example, a short-term gain with risky SMC might be acquiring a new 'fan'(people who subscribe/like/follow your content) (Ferreira Deslandes et al., 2021).

Many risk-taking behaviours (e.g., substance use) are claimed to perpetuate or precipitate further risky behaviour engagement (Baiden et al., 2021; Pinheiro et al., 2020). Some examples of risky behaviour include dangerous driving (Croisant et al., 2013), sexting (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017), and substance use (Bell et al., 2000). The rapid growth of social media has meant that there has been a shift in focus from the physical presence of risky behaviours to how they are practiced on social media. For example, a shift in focus from excessive alcohol use in person to its occurrence and depiction online (Vannucci et al., 2020). In particular, peer pressure (Avery et al., 2016) and identity formation (Menon et al., 2019) are speculated to drive engagement in risky SMC. However, participants themselves have referred to the role of life stressors and loneliness (Zhu et al., 2022) or wanting to become famous (Ward et al., 2021).

In this study, the focus is on how different stakeholders construct SMC labelled as "risky". SMC are often explored through particular lenses, particularly by seeking non-participants' views (e.g., Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). Since SMC are social phenomena, analysing different stakeholder accounts (news media, social media users, and academic professionals) allows us to understand how SMC are constructed by different groups that each have some sort of investment in the phenomenon to be explored. In doing so, assumptions can be made explicit. Moreover, despite references to danger, different stakeholders have not studied what is understood as risk. Since SMC tend to be recycled and resurge in popularity, they will be explored here as a collective set, using popular SMC identified as "risky" by the public (outlined in Table 2). A knowledge base around a range of SMC can then be created.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research design

This is a qualitative study grounded in a social constructionist paradigm. Broadly, social constructionism regards social realities as created through interactions in specific socio-historical locations (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). Our understanding of the world and our definitions of 'truths' is the outcome of thoughts, language, and interaction within a particular social, historical, political, and cultural context (Burr, 2018; Gergen, 1999). To understand meaning-making, a relational activity, the areas of relevance are social interaction and language, which play a part in constructing shared knowledge (McNamee & Shawver, 2004).

Discourse analytic methods provide insight into how individuals create understanding (Riley & Wiggins, 2019). However, as SMC are also relatively under-studied, a thematic analysis was also utilized to understand general patterns within the area. As such, this study utilised thematic discourse analysis (e.g., Bland, 2022; Botelle & Willott, 2020; Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

3.3.2 Material collection

i. Search terms

The search terms used were: "Social media challenges," "Salt and ice challenge," "Momo Challenge," "Blue Whale Game," "The Choking Game," "Tide Pod challenge," "Fire challenge" and "Cinnamon challenge."

ii. Process

Three different sources of information were used in this study, including online news media reports and news articles, comments from YouTube videos, and grey academic material (letters to editors/editorials and case reports). A Google News search identified 145 articles and reports using the established search terms, which were searched individually. Each established search term on YouTube was searched separately with the filter 'view count' applied. The seven most viewed videos were selected. All the comments for each video (or the first 100) were gathered for analysis (n=4,657). When gathering letters to the editor, case reports, and editorial materials, search terms for each topic were searched separately, with multiple variations across three databases: Scopus, PSYCHINFO, and Web of Science. All available grey academic materials were included (n=23).

iii. Exclusion and inclusion criteria:

Materials in languages other than English were excluded, as were repeated material. A broad publication timeframe for academic material (1999 to 2020) was set to be more inclusive. News report/article material search included material post-2013. A time period was needed for practicality, and 2013 was selected as it was posited to be the year SMC first became well-known (Stanford, 2016). Given the high number of daily uploads on YouTube and the movement towards removing social media challenge videos, videos accepted for inclusion were those uploaded within the past five years (from 2015 to August 2019).

iv. Data analysis

As part of the thematic discourse analysis, there was initially a repeated reading of the material before initial codes were generated. Based on emerging patterns, themes were

developed for each source (i.e., news, YouTube comments, and academic material). Each initial theme was then reviewed to assess for overlap and coherency, resulting in four to five themes created per source. The material was then re-read with a focus on the function of language. The focus was to explore how particular accounts of events are constructed through language. The function of language in the broader context and meaning-making was observed by considering the implications of constructions for the object of interest. After this process, the themes for all source material were collapsed into one set and four primary themes created.

3.3.3 Ethical considerations

This study received approval by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Northern Committee.

3.4 Results and Discussion

For the purpose of this article, two themes are presented for a deeper analysis discussion. The theme characterisation consists of the different features risky SMC were constructed to have. In particular, there is a focus on risky SMC names, popularity, resurgence, and the contexts in which they are practiced. Each of these features of risky SMC were constructed differently by stakeholders. The second theme, risks, encompasses how risky SMC were constructed as dangerous. The theme explores the physical harm, the lack of consideration for participant emotional harm, and the broader harm to family or community from risky SMC engagement.

3.4.1 Characterisation

SMC can be observed to have a specific pre-conceived descriptive category included in their names. Often, this can be a reference to the term "challenge," for example, in the Salt and Ice Challenge, or "game," such as in "Blue Whale Game." There are risky (and non-risky) SMC that don't always have a categorical descriptor, such as "Momo." However, within the sources explored, stakeholders often arbitrarily attached some descriptors ("Momo game" or "Momo challenge"). The origin of these categorical descriptions in titles is unknown in research. Stakeholders also didn't acknowledge how these categories had been created for particular risky SMC.

However, the use of pre-conceived descriptor categories was disputed and constructed by stakeholders across all sources, as inaccurate representations:

"Not a game but a sadistic way of cowardice murder suicide"

"Bro that's called suicide"

"This is not a game but serious and dangerous business!"

A 'game' implies that the activity is a form of entertainment (Nakatsu et al., 2017). However, such portrayal was challenged across sources.

Instead, risky SMC were constructed as forms of self-harm disguised as socially acceptable through being practiced as risky SMC. Normalization can occur through repetitive coverage and vast engagement (Daine et al., 2013; Hilton, 2017). Participants framed the presence of risky SMC on platforms like YouTube, as normalising self-harm behaviours.

"*What I dont get is so far every single one on this list is causing someone to physically harm themself. So people who are cutting themselves with a razor on their arms, wrists, legs, stomach that's selfharm and is a mental disorder/illness. And people seen or caught doing this usually get put on suicide watch, or taken to a therapist, a doctor or a mental ward because intentionally harming yourself like I said is a mental disorder/illness BUT ALL OF THESE ARE FINE WITH SOCIETY THAT IS STILL SELF HARM … MAKING IT A "FUN CHALLENGE " ITS TOTALLY FINE PUT IT ON YOUTUBE…"*

Self-harm refers to the intentional infliction of body damage, which can be with or without the intent to die (Mangnall & Yurkovich, 2008). Deliberate self-harm and non-suicidal self-harm (behaviours that include intentional bodily harm but with no intention to die) are usually regarded as maladaptive strategies for emotion regulation (Zelkowitz et al., 2016). Hiding self-harm is not uncommon for those who engage in it (Hambleton et al., 2022). The normalisation of risky SMC can provide those who struggle with a lack of adequate regulatory coping strategies a means to engage in self-harm behaviours and disguise this in plain sight as an SMC.

Commenters also contested other categorical titles, like "challenge," framing it as influencing the practice of risky SMC. For example, one YouTube commenter remarks:

"See, when u say it's a challenge its inclines other people to "COMPLETE" a challenge. If someone did it online and then say it was a one-time thing then it's

just a cool video or a video where someone did something crazy. When u put the title "challenge" its calling out to the internet to complete it."

It is pointed out that the term challenge is injunctive, a call for others to participate. This extract constructs risky SMC as self-enabling, where the very use of their name can result in participation and, thus, the potential ongoing existence of the phenomenon. The term challenge, being an incitement to participate, is also highlighted in one of its current definitions in the Cambridge online dictionary: "An invitation to do something difficult, funny, or embarrassing, especially on social media" (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2023). In this definition, SMC are seen as a practice that "invites" engagement, which softens the injunctive connotation of the term "challenge."

Competitive elements are also highlighted when considering the term "difficult" in the definition above. In self-disclosure YouTube comments, references were found to behaviours that current social conventions associated with competition:

"I ate 25 blue rasberry warheads at my friends party, i won 50 bucks and first place"

"So who won on all these challenges?"

Although not directly named in these extracts as a form of competition, this was implied in the referral to risky SMC engagement as something to be won. There is an element of something that needs to be beaten, which makes it a competitive task and incites engagement (DiMenichi & Tricomi, 2015). In the same way, the SMC explored in this study, referred to as "challenges" in their titles (Tide Pod Challenge, the Salt and Ice Challenge, the Fire Challenge, and the Cinnamon Challenge), all share this component. Participants must withstand something for as long as possible (Tide Pod Challenge, the Salt and Ice Challenge, and the Fire Challenge) or complete something in a set period (Cinnamon Challenge).

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Some risky SMC involve directly 'challenging' others or calling on them for engagement. For example, "Neknominate" is a risky SMC that takes the form of a drinking game explicitly involving verbally daring another person to participate at the end of the engagement (Barbieri et al., 2018). More recently, the Ice Bucket Challenge, a "good cause" challenge with limited risk, has applied a similar style, where people are called on to take part at the end of the challenge video (Phing & Yazdanifard, 2014). However, there appears to be a shift from this direct reference to competition or calling on others. The term "challenge" is framed as enough to imply the need for completion.

The notion of calling on others specifically to engage in something is synonymous with a 'dare,' which is a long-standing behaviour seen in schoolyards and used in rites of passage (Dukes, 2018; Dumbili, 2022; Sohatee et al., 2014; Witryol, & Calkins, 1958). Some YouTube stakeholders described having engaged in activities that mimicked risky SMC before social media use was common (or created):

"Not knew we did it in the eighties it made you fall asleep and when you woke up you felt high"

"Back in the late 80's early 90's the boys in my apt building used to do that shit...pushing on each other's chest luckily no one died"

Risky SMC is thus constructed as a phenomenon that is not new. The Choking Game is an SMC that has likely been practiced since the 1970s and as part of underground youth culture (Tucker, 2008; 2014). Although literature surrounding this SMC mostly explores its 'offline' (non-social media related), there is growing work on the role of social media in its current practices (Busse et al., 2015; Linkletter et al., 2010).

Additionally, other than being digitalised forms of long-standing practices, SMC were also constructed as resurging:

"Hoax made the rounds last year"

"Technique seen back in 2015"

"Mysterious trend subsided but came back in children's videos"

Repeating trend cycles tend to be seen with the social phenomenon of fashion styles (Althusser, 2015; Kim, 2013). These trends can be related to boredom and the influences of others that shift (Sarma et al., 2010). The limited research around the resurgence of risky SMC has also indicated their tendency to replicate previous forms. The Blue Whale Game, for example, was said to have led to the popularity of Momo and then internet pranks such as

Slenderman (Tucker, 2020). These resurgences, or repetitions, highlight the similarity of risky SMC in their forms.

Additionally, across all sources risky SMC were constructed as popular through descriptions such as “viral”, “trend” or “craze,” across all sources:

“Sick trend”

“Chilling craze”

“Almost every week there is a new viral Internet challenge”

Often, these terms occurred with short emotion-laden adjectives. Using emotive terms in mainstream and social media is a standard device to capture attention (Mitchell, 2023) and thus social and monetary capital. If a degree of emotional intensity is present (i.e., "chilling"), the constructions of SMC as risky are also attenuated. I argue that such are not used in a contemplative sense but rather attempt to capture attention by being alarming. It is emotion, not reason, that is being targeted through such descriptions. The references to SMC as viral links to fundamental fears. "Viral" is still used regarding the contagiousness of an illness that can spread from person to person.

At the surface level, the description "viral" implies that SMC engagement is becoming (or at risk of) more widespread. However, an SMC being deemed 'viral' can create a self-fulfilling prophecy by increasing the audience's curiosity to explore this area further, thus boosting views. When a post is deemed 'viral,' individuals are more influenced to share it (Berger & Milkman, 2010). Yet, the contexts or reasons for which risky SMC can become viral were not acknowledged in sources, despite SMC having been described as becoming popular during COVID and recently, mainly through the app TikTok (Alonso-Lopez et al., 2021; Feldkamp, 2021). However, using the other terms (craze and trends) frames risky SMC as timebound. Referring to an SMC as a "craze" constructs SMC as an activity seen as popular within a group for a short period. In contrast, when SMC are described as "trends," a lengthier period of popularity is implied, as trends occur longer than crazes (Carrington, 2023; Falgoust et al., 2022).

SMC were also consistently reported as engaged in globally, particularly in news sources:

“…has been seen on international level”

“… been linked to reports and rumours of youth suicide internationally”

“… sweeping schools around the world”

In the extracts, global engagement was depicted as a cause for concern, with descriptive terms such as "sweeping" used in pieces addressing SMC-related death or harm. Media can play a role in the construction of discourses (Taki, 2009). The constructions of international engagement of risky SMC were often framed in ways that glazed over how risky SMC become popular. Some SMC, for example, Blue Whale Game, are found to begin in specific countries and then gradually (over months to years) spread in popularity worldwide (Katzowits, 2018). Whether this is the case for all SMC is unknown.

How risky SMC transcend country boundaries and are international was highlighted through risky SMC being constructed as a digital space practice in mostly News sources:

"Appears halfway through children's content online"

"Participants are given series of task on online forums"

"Posted to social media Web sites such as YouTube and Facebook"

There was a repetitive reference to risky SMC as being present on 'social media' or 'online.' The focus on risky SMC as digitally contextualised occurrences minimises its practice offline and the long history of some SMC (i.e., Choking Game). Risky SMC are also then framed in the media as an online concern. However, social media is not confined to 'online' platforms (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Vannucci et al., 2020) in the same way that information from the internet is not confined to just the web (Bolander & Locher, 2020). SMC can be discussed in non-online platforms (e.g., at work or between friends at a social gathering) and, as such, spread through word of mouth.

Although there is a historical tendency to separate the internet realm from "real life" (Kellerman, 2014), social networking is a significant part of people's lives today, with access available on readily accessible mobile devices (Althoff et al., 2017). The online realm can better be conceptualised as an 'extension' of the offline world, with no clear separation between the two (Leander & McKim, 2003). SMC can be recorded in non-digital spaces (e.g., in the bedroom, or outside at school, outside in a playground) and live-streamed to viewers/followers regardless of where people are physically located.

Research has highlighted how sports game events being aired live on various social media platforms has meant that the distance/time gaps between audiences worldwide and the actual physical space in which the game is held have been bridged (Lee et al., 2023). In the same way, the digitalisation of risky SMC that were perhaps in existence and practiced prior to social media has meant transcending the physical space of the practice. People can live

stream content and perform now in multiple spaces (Lee et al., 2023). Digitisation has allowed people's lives to become spectacles where the once invisible (Berriman & Thomson, 2015) engagement in these "schoolyard" activities is posted online. In this way, SMC are becoming cultural artefacts. The socio-, political, and cultural contexts are immortalized in the production of a risky SMC by users, which gives insight into practices at the time (Kidd, 2020).

3.4.2 Risk

All SMC explored were portrayed as risky. Table 3 summarizes proposed risks from SMC engagement found across sources. The risk from engagement could be mild, such as scarring, through to more severe outcomes with life-altering impacts. Milder forms of harm from risky SMC were often described in terms of exuberant youth behaviour, such as 'youth foolery' and 'rough-housing. Across sources, there was a significant focus on more severe harm. In this way, risky SMC were not individually constructed as more or less dangerous. Rather, all risky SMC were framed as harmful. Specific risky SMC are constructed as resulting in specific injuries based on the specific task required for participation. Harm from risky SMC is therefore constructed as SMC task-specific.

Table 3: A list of the risks described as associated or due to specific risky SMC by stakeholders across YouTube, Academic and News sources

SMC	Risks associated with the SMC
Blue Whale Game	"Administrator will release, publish, share, and/or post something extremely personal or highly-sensitive online from their account" "Mutilating skin" "Cutting a whale into arm"
Momo	"Anxiety" "Sleep disturbance" "Violent and aggressive behaviour" "traumatised"
TidePod Challenge	"Central nervous system and respiratory depression" "Eye injuries" "Lung inflammation" "Death" "Burns to the skin, eyes, respiratory tract" "Vomiting" "Intense abdominal cramping and diarrhea" "Trigger asthma"

	“Seizures” “Stroke” “Brain damage”
Salt and Ice Challenge	“Nerve damage” “Frostbites” “Skin Graphs” [grafts] “Scars”
Choking Game	“Stroke” “Asphyxiation” “Coma” “Long-term brain damage” / “Neurological damage” “Death” “Chronic headaches” “Recurrent episodes of fainting” “Seizures” “Eye damage”
Fire Challenge	“Bald patch on arms” “Death” “Lose sensation…nerve endings”
Cinnamon Challenge	“Coughing” “Kidney failure” “Collapsed lung” “Choking” “Death”

The impact of general injuries in hindering occupation role choices, work attendance, and financial situations is well illustrated in the literature (Richmond et al., 2011). However, the potential long-term impact of physical injuries on different areas of life (i.e., work or school) was never explicitly acknowledged as a risk. Harm was named as “long-term” (e.g., “recurrent headaches”) and both implied (i.e., death). The more explicit and grounded descriptions of physical risk, where long-term impacts are named, seem to be for the Choking Game. This particular risky SMC, being more long-standing in its offline form, is thus more established in the academic literature, too (Busse et al., 2015).

Noticeably, what is minimised in the lists of possible and known harm from risky SMC (Table 3) is emotional harm as an outcome of engagement across risky SMC. Studies acknowledging emotional harm from risky SMC have recognised this as an impact when the risky SMC involves relevant themes (i.e., Blue whale game – suicide as a final task) (Khasawneh et al., 2020; Khattar et al., 2018). Moreover, emotional distress is often framed

as a risk factor. That is, mental health concerns, like depression, are highlighted as pre-existing and are framed as leaving people more likely to engage in risky SMC (Findik & Ceri, 2019; Lupariello et al., 2019).

Similarly, the sources explored highlight the emotional impact of engagement concerning Momo. Momo, in particular, is known to depict emotionally disturbing content (e.g., gore, images of death) to children (Alderton, 2021; Moore, 2023). The emotional harm of social media on children is a long-standing, socially relevant topic with a range of research (Alsehaima & Alanazi, 2018). Parents are often targeted to protect their children from activities described as risky (Khurana et al.,2015). Parents are also encouraged to be aware of signs and symptoms of engagement in risky SMC, like the Choking game (Bernacki & Davies, 2012). The focus of attention on emotional harm specifically related to risky SMC associated with children might be the function of the sources explored. Medical articles included in sources can have a physical injury bias, and news articles reported "observable" signs that parents can be vigilant about. News media frame their content to suit their agendas (Mello & Tan, 2016).

In the broader literature, mental health concerns, such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression, are reported to occur after injuries (Richmond et al., 2011). These can, like physical harm, potentially fall on a spectrum. For example, emotional harm can be mild discomfort, perhaps from experiencing social embarrassment if "trolled" online (Thomas et al., 2022). There has been ongoing work in Western societies to improve access to mental health support by reducing barriers, for example, through campaigns addressing stigma (Evans-Lacko et al., 2014). The lack of acknowledgment of emotional and long-term impacts for participants can perpetuate the silence around emotional risk. Attention to emotional harm is a gap in the literature that appropriate experts need to address.

Generally, injuries can impact the broader family system depending on their type and severity (Bakker et al., 2013). Despite the invisibility of non-physical harms for participants, the impact of grief and emotional harm on family and friends was an area of concern within YouTube and News sources

"Yes. My friend killed himself on Tuesday because of momo😭😭😭😭😭😭😭😭😭😭"

"I know someone who died because of this challenge.... Miss you friend 😢"

"This is so sad. My teacher was neighbors with this kid. She was telling us how it's not fun to someone. (I'm in 6th grade) … she started crying in class..."

Claiming to know someone impacted by an activity provides the position posited with veracity. As can be seen with these extracts, YouTube comments were often brief, with emojis used about the loss when it was related to self—Emojis in this context function to depict the intensity of emotions (Liu, 2023). Social sharing can be utilised to try and create a collective experience and a sense of connection for those with similar experiences (Eriksson, 2016; Suk et al., 2021). Some might share to try and gain social support, whereas others might abstain, perceiving it as 'over-sharing' (Giaxoglou et al., 2017).

Experiences of loss were more detailed only in news reports, where the focus is on the parent and their perspective:

"You would kind of see him drop and you would hear it, and it would be an audible sound of the belt restricting his air," recalls Carson's mother, Jennifer Steele. … Carson died on June 18, 2016. His parents and twin brother found him hanging inside his bedroom closet with a belt wrapped tightly around his neck. … had been playing the Choking Game for at least two months and had recorded himself at least four times...

Bereaved parents are often the primary voices within new media, particularly regarding current public health issues, reinforcing that this is a youth activity. Although such platforms allow bereaved parents to educate others, there is also the risk of 'sensationalising' their experiences (Moris et al., 2021). In the accounts depicted within the media sources, shocking details were often provided, which can serve to be morbidly attention-grabbing. These depictions provide a level of detail not often seen in the comments.

When risk was the focus of news media sources, the primary concern was often on more severe consequences:

"A Texas family says their teenage son killed himself because of a rumoured internet challenge known as Blue Whale."

"Two eastern Iowa kids are recovering from severe burns after trying a viral online trend"

Such cases were often presented as factual accounts using details such as age, name, and location. These details imply the genuineness of accounts and the risks that were being reported. Some SMC have been associated with doubt about their genuineness and existence in the academic literature. For example, it has been claimed that risky SMC such as the Blue Whale challenge and Momo were forms of moral panic with genuine death and engagement questioned (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2021; Khattar et al., 2018; Sumner et al., 2019). The use

of personal identifying information serves to communicate to readers that this is a genuine case.

3.5 Conclusion

Overall, the construction of risky SMC is complex, with different stakeholders holding different views. YouTube commenters framed inherent descriptive categories of risky SMC as influencing participation. That is, the inclusion of the term 'game' in risky SMC was constructed to frame risky SMC misleadingly as innocent despite the dangers. Moreover, YouTube commenters referred to risky SMC as "challenges" and framed it as inciting participation in the phenomenon. Thus, in this way, irresponsibility is implied when referring to risky SMC as games and challenges.

These activities are constructed as 'viral,' globally occurring 'crazes,' and 'trends' across all the sources considered, particularly in news sources. Risky SMC was also typically positioned by news and academic sources as an online occurrence. In constructing risky SMC as online activities, the more extensive physical, socio-political, and historical contexts that these SMC are embedded in become ignored. However, these activities occur not just online but are created, enacted, and recorded in actual physical spaces. They involve existing real minds and bodies that are recruited to participate and may get hurt in the process. Online and offline platforms are blurred (Bolander & Locher, 2020; Leander & McKim, 2003). Moreover, risky SMC activities are not unique to social media. Risky SMC were constructed in YouTube and news sources, as resurging over time, with some YouTube commenters stating that they had engaged in similar activities before social media existed. Risky SMC have a long history before social media (Tucker, 2008).

All stakeholders constructed the danger from risky SMC participation as genuine, ranging from mild to severe. There was a focus on physical injuries in all sources, specifically severe risks. This focus became the dominant construction, and this is the most visible description of harm across sources. What was lacking was the emotional and lifestyle impact of risky SMC engagement for specific participants. Emotional harm was only considered for risky SMC that involved unwilling children. The outlined risks are then framed as signs and symptoms for parents to monitor. The emotional impact of the loss of a loved one due to risky SMC engagement was acknowledged only by the family members and friends of participants. In this way, the emotional well-being of participants was minimised.

Thus, this study highlighted that different stakeholders can construct risky SMC in different ways. How risky was discussed is framed as influential (i.e., "challenge" inciting participation). Some constructions might also be more visible (i.e., physical harms) than others, which can impact constructions of the harms. When considering the lack of consideration around the emotional risk of engagement in risky SMC, the clinical and other implications (e.g., continuance of engagement in risky SMC despite harm to meet emotional needs) become important to explore in research.

Conflict of Interest Statements: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest'

CHAPTER 4: “Play stupid games, win stupid prizes”: Construction of Engagers and Engagement in Risky Social Media Challenges

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications

DRC 16

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

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Preface: The previous chapter focused on the construction of SMC and the consequences of participation. This chapter (in article format) continues to answer the research question about the construction of SMC by different stakeholders. It presents a second group of themes and focuses on how stakeholders constructed participants and their engagement and impact. .

4.1 Abstract

Risky Social Media Challenges (SMC) are practiced internationally and in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Participation can result in significant harm to oneself or others, intentionally or unintentionally. This study explores how stakeholders (participants, consumers, journalists, and researchers) construct risky SMC. Academic, news media, and YouTube comment sources were analysed using thematic discourse analysis. Two themes are the primary focus of this paper: the profiling of participants and the reasons behind engagement. Abusive and hostile responses towards participants for partaking in risky SMC, irrespective of age, were common. Hostile responses constructed participants as intellectually inferior. Participant characterisation was often related to age, namely being younger. When younger age was salient in descriptions by stakeholders, neurological immaturity was typically posited as the reason for engagement. Other accounts, less centralised on participant age, portrayed participants as seeking attention or fame. The accounts by self-identifying participants challenged such constructions of SMC participation as a simple matter of choice through disclosures of being forced to participate. Self-disclosures also constructed risky SMC as attempts to cope with difficult life stressors. Overall, the analysis highlighted a dominant imposition of simplistic notions of choice, where context is marginalised, and negative outcomes from participation are posited as deserved.

Keywords: *social media challenges, tiktok challenges, risky behaviours, motivation*

Social Media Challenges (SMC) involve completing specific tasks, where the participatory process and the outcome is uploaded onto social media platforms. Some SMC are entertainment-like activities, soliciting competitive participation from others with no obvious inherent risks (such as dance challenges on TikTok) (Ahlse et al., 2020). However, there is also a subset of SMC associated with injury or death (Ward et al., 2021). Risky SMC have been confirmed to occur internationally (Uavis, 2018; Ward et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022). In

Aotearoa, New Zealand, no academic research currently explores the phenomenon locally or confirms its existence. Risky SMC is difficult to research, given its trend-like nature. Moreover, platforms can delete posted content due to its association with harm (Bonifazi et al., 2022). However, its relevance in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is highlighted by media reports both on the risky phenomenon itself (e.g., Al-Sa'afin, 2018) as well as reports of its practice locally resulting in death or harm (e.g., Moore, 2019; Wellington District Court Reporter, 2023).

The harm of risk for some SMC might not be the intent for engagement. Instead, risks can be inherent to the task required for engagement. For example, the Cinnamon Challenge involves ingesting one tablespoon of cinnamon in under one minute but is associated with risks like a collapsed lung (Grant-Alfieri et al., 2013). Another is the Tide pod challenge, which involves intentionally ingesting laundry detergent tablets (Tide pods) or other concentrated laundry detergents, which can result in throat burns or poisoning (Noyes, 2018).

A few risky SMC require the intentional infliction of harm to oneself. For example, the Blue Whale Game requires participants to complete one daily task for fifty days. Instructions are provided by 'curators' (game administrators) and involve tasks such as cutting a whale shape into your arm. However, with the Blue Whale Game, some participants claimed to have been threatened by 'curators' when attempting to disengage from the game (Mirza & Gooding, 2018; Khasawneh et al., 2022). There have been fears about youth conforming and taking part in other risky SMC, like Neknominate, because of cyberbullying or harassment (Zonfrillo & Osterhoudt, 2014).

As we function in a world driven by social media, there is a drive to seek fame in the social media realm, grounded in an 'attention economy' driven by likes and subscription numbers (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Duffy, 2020). Online popularity can be alluring for many, including youth. Social media influencers with higher fan or 'subscriber' bases have high social status and thus social capital. The pursuit of internet fame, as a form of social capital, has also been identified as motivating people's production (Guadagno et al., 2013). Social capital refers to the actual or possible resources an individual or group can gain through their connections with other people (Lin et al., 2001). It can be measured by the size of an individual's network connections and the economic or cultural capital generated (Ellison et al., 2007; Kaljee & Chen, 2011). In academic literature, youth desire to gain acceptance and popularity through accumulating 'likes' (Roth et al., 2021).

Moreover, participation in SMC uploaded to TikTok is argued to provide a sense of belonging, improve social interaction, and bolster self-confidence (Falgoust et al., 2022). Others argue it is about the fear of missing out (FOMO), including experiencing sadness and anxiety from not being part of a 'trendy event' (Ward et al., 2021). There is a desire to be perceived as part of the in-group (Falgoust et al., 2022). In learning how various groups (e.g., academics, internet users, etc.) construct reasons for participation, an understanding of the environment in which these SMC are engaged and flourish can be obtained. These perspectives can be beneficial for informing educational or intervention strategies.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Research design and Aim

This study focuses on understanding the constructions of risky SMC in the texts of media reporters, social media users (including self-identified participants and SMC content viewers), and academic professionals. More specifically, in this paper we consider the characterisation of SMC participants and the implications of such constructions for our understanding of this phenomenon. Accordingly, the study is grounded in a social constructionist epistemological paradigm, where knowledge is regarded as constructed through language and as situated in a socio-cultural and historical context (Burr, 2015).

4.2.2 Search term selection

In order to understand different stakeholders' constructions, the specific risky SMC explored in this study were selected based on popularity. A web search and a separate YouTube search for "risky" and "dangerous" "Social Media Challenges" was completed. A list was compiled of any SMC mentioned associated with risk. The seven named most often were selected as the challenges to explore within this study, being the Salt and Ice Challenge, Momo, Blue Whale Game, The Choking Game, Tide Pod Challenge, Fire Challenge, and Cinnamon Challenge.

4.2.3 Research process

Three different sources of information were used to allow for a range of perspectives in construction sense-making, including online news media reports (n=145), YouTube video comments (n=4,657), and grey academic material (letter to editors/editorials and case reports) (n=23). The Google News search engine was used to identify news material for inclusion using the search terms identified. Grey academic materials were identified by searching each search term individually on Scopus, PSYCHINFO, and Web of Science databases. Each

search term was searched using multiple variations (including replacing "challenge" with "dare," then "game," or adding "online" to the search terms). All available letters to the editor, case reports, and editorial materials were included as "grey material" for analysis. Comments were selected by searching each established search term separately on YouTube. The filter 'view count' was applied, allowing the most popular videos to occur first in the search. Seven videos (for each search term) with the highest view counts were selected. Then, the first 100 comments for each video were included for analysis, or all comments (if less than 100 are available). Materials were only included for analysis if they referred to SMC (i.e., online practice) and were written in English.

4.2.4 Data analysis

In order to understand how stakeholders constructed SMC, this study utilized thematic discourse analysis. This method allows for exploration into key areas of the topic (themes) while exploring the role of discourses in shaping understanding (Bland, 2022; Botelle & Willott, 2020; Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Initially, to develop themes, all materials collected for each source were read repetitively to increase familiarity with the content. Initial codes (direct quotes from sources) were then gathered and explored for overlapping areas and emerging patterns, which became initial themes. These were then reviewed to assess overlap and coherency before being finalized as a theme. Each source had its own set of initial themes. Theme content (i.e., codes, which were in quote form) were then re-read with the focus now on the function of language. All themes were re-assessed and collapsed across all three sources, resulting in four final themes.

4.2.5 Ethical considerations

This study received approval by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Human Ethics Northern Committee).

4.3 Findings and Discussion

For the purpose of this article, two themes are presented for a deeper analysis. The two themes of interest are participants and reasons presented as motivating participation.

4.3.1 Participants

Who the stakeholders are and what motivates their engagement was a primary area of focus across all sources. Generally, participants were positioned as those who physically took part

in a risky SMC. Stakeholders positioned themselves as either non-participants or, for a small number, self-disclosed that they had participated in (a) risky SMC.

Identification of participants

The central focus was on participants' ages in the academic and news report sources. Participants were positioned as young and explicitly referred to as "children," "youth," "adolescents," "pre-adolescents," "teenagers," and "pre-teens." Adult engagement was typically not considered and, even when reported, was marginalized by the overwhelming content focused on youth.

"… a 13-year-old girl from a town near Bari"

"a 12-year-old girl from Detroit burned"

"11-year-old … died"

Media reports can reflect the current social impact of a phenomenon (i.e., its cultural relevance and popularity) (Adelman & Verbrugge, 2000). Statistically, youth are the primary users of many social platforms on which SMC can be found, such as TikTok (McCashin & Murphy, 2023). The centralization of this age group might reflect this notion. However, Framing Theory posits that how the media select and exclude material shapes the meaning of the phenomena being reported (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019) while also shaping subsequent consumer interpretations (An & Gower, 2009). Dominant narratives around who engages in a phenomenon can create implied and not explicitly stated 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' criteria for engagement. For example, there has been a pushback movement by #over30s individuals trying to normalize engaging in TikTok videos. The movement implies it is currently not socially acceptable for specific age groups to engage in TikTok videos. Youth being described as primary engagers might leave those adults engaging in these risky SMC unlikely to share engagement as openly.

Adolescence is often stereotypically characterized as a time of increased risk-taking (Tamas et al., 2019). Stereotypes refer to an over-simplified belief or characteristic application that can be held or applied to a group of people that is generalised (Beeghly, 2015). Given the essentialist view of youth as biologically predisposed to 'risk-taking,' stereotypes about youth as vulnerable can also magnify the focus on youth engagement in risky SMC. Consider the Cinnamon Challenge, which was initially widely reported as a form of competitive entertainment with adult celebrity involvement (e.g., People Staff, 2012). However, once the risks became more publicized by health professionals, the news reports on this SMC shifted

towards highlighting statistics related to youth engagement (e.g., "poison control centre calls about teens doing the prank has increased dramatically (CBC, 2013). Other ages' prior and current engagement became obscured despite relevant videos still being available.

However, comments on YouTube only referred to youth when contextually relevant (i.e., the video from which comments were obtained showed youth). This depicted differences in the construction of risky SMC engagement by different sources. Only generic references were often present (i.e., simply stating "participants") in the YouTube source, rendering age irrelevant. Despite this, stereotypes about youth were dominant across all material and were often casually incorporated into the material. Examples included youth being too young to understand, being on social media constantly, being stupid/reckless, and not knowing any better: "Today's youth are clueless." Thus, there were hostile generalizations and an over-magnification of youth as participants in risky SMC.

Whether risky SMC participation is becoming another characterization associated with youth is raised. Supporting this idea is that there were references to this notion of "all youth engaging in SMC," as often seen with stereotypes where a negative characteristic is applied to a whole group: "*This idiot is everything wrong with the Millennials*." The negative portrayal of youth about risky SMC was observed as having some commenters explicitly distancing themselves from their "generation." One YouTube commenter stated:

> *"I hate my generation My generation eats poison to look cool and snort condoms to look cool say swag and yolo and dab it My generation doesn't know how to use a rotary phone or drive a stick shift write in cursive my generation can't function without any electronics my generation is full of snowflakes I'm none of these I've been told I should have been born before and I been told I have an old soul makes sense cause my generation is fucked."*

The utilization of stereotypes is never acknowledged in any comment, suggesting that such descriptions are uncritically accepted. These various stereotypes often make contradictory demands on youth. For example, as seen in this study, it is posited that it is 'wrong to engage in risky activities'. Yet 'engaging in risky activities is part of growing up or being young.' For youth, such contradictory portrayals leave them in a complex, if not impossible, position. It also highlights difficult power dynamics at play for youth trying to create an identity and pushback against adults (Omorogiuwa, 2021; Skott-Myhre, 2008).

Internalizing stereotypes or media representations of youth by youth is not a new concern (Cafri et al., 2005; Romano et al., 2022). However, currently, most research that explores generation-related stereotypes is contextualized within the workplace (e.g., intergenerational conflict within the workplace) or focuses on the effects on older populations (e.g., impact on health or health-seeking) (Weeks, Weeks & Long, 2017). Theories such as generational identity theory, social identity theory, and stereotype embodiment only highlight the impact of ageism and complexities that arise within workplaces due to their internalization and activation (Kornadt et al., 2017). There is work around the experiences of the elderly and inter-generational internalization of media representations (e.g., Robinson & Umphrey, 2006), but the literature exploring this for youth in particular (when not focussed on ethnicity (e.g., Sobande, 2018) or gender) is lacking.

Hostility

Reports of abuse are prevalent on various social media platforms (Ashraf et al., 2021). YouTube, in particular, has been noted to have highly offensive or insulting comments on user-generated content compared to other social media sites (e.g., Facebook) (Sagredos & Nikolova, 2021). Unsurprisingly, YouTube's comment section included abusive comments. In some cases, hostility was targeted at particular aspects of SMC (i.e., characters and the challenge itself). However, most comments primarily targeted the intelligence of participants.

"You are a stupid dumbass fool!!"

"Dumbass 🤦‍♀️"

"FUCKTARDS!!!"

Comments implied that the risk of participation should be obvious and involvement demonstrates poor judgment by the individual. These could be read as trolling instances aimed at riling others, creating discord, and provoking responses (Rohlfing & Sonnenberg, 2016).

Moreover, capitalization and short sentences can add to the impression of shock or anger. Using exclamation marks and capitalization is also distinctive of flaming (Turnage, 2007). Once a witty style of educating or controlling chat content on forums (Buck, 2016), it has become synonymous with abuse (Sambaraju & McVittie, 2020). Flaming can refer to the exhibition of hostility by swearing, insulting, or using offensive language (Moor et al., 2010).

The inclusion of emojis by some YouTube users indicated amusement at the expense of participants:

Fucking idiot 😂
Idiot 🤣
You fucking idiots. This was hilarious😂😂😂

The above extracts portray Schadenfreude (Cecconi et al., 2020), which refers to a sense of pleasure or satisfaction gained at someone else's expense (Leach et al., 2003). The misfortune of others is not caused by the person who experiences Schadenfreude (Powell & Smith, 2013; Van Dijk et al., 2011). Rather, Schadenfreude is indicative of the misfortune being perceived as being deserved or warranted (Smith et al., 2009). This can be due to the failure to act sensibly (i.e., being aware of inherent risks and still intentionally taking part) (Cecconi et al., 2020).

The construction of risky SMC participants as deserving of severe injury or even death was common:

"Choking challenge?? Really? And we're supposed to feel bad?"

"If your kid is dumb enough to do this they deserve to die."

"I'm glad he is hurt I have absolutely no sympathy for this stupid kid too bad he never died so he could never reproduce"

Participants are positioned as deserving of suffering or punishment for their 'poor choices.' Commenters appear unforgiving, with no interest in exploring the reasons behind engagement.

The vast amounts of flaming or trolling toward SMC participants might invite similar behaviours by other commenters, such as in an emotional contagion process (Cheng et al., 2018). Emotional contagion is the unconscious or conscious mimicking of the behaviours or emotions of others based on available environmental cues (Petit et al., 2021). Emotional contagion has been demonstrated on Twitter and Facebook, with people found to be more likely to post a negative comment if there are preceding negative comments (Ferrara & Yang, 2015; Kramer et al., 2014). Personal gain might also drive such abusive comments. Möller et al. (2019) found that negative or positive comments that are more extreme tend to receive more 'likes' or support. Given the largely negative tone about SMC, others may continue with similar anti-risk SMC posts, motivated by a desire to gain similar support or 'likes' (Faucher,

2018). Overall, the intensely hostile comments construct risky SMC as an undesirable activity and SMC participants as intellectually and rationally inferior.

Implied inferiority became more apparent when considering the repetitive referral to concepts such as natural selection and "Darwin awards" evoking an evolutionary discourse:

> *"Tbh i think that if people wanna do this why stop them? Its natural selection at its finest.... really though do we want more of these kinds of people?"*
>
> *"That's called natural selection. I hope these idiots all burn to death..."*
>
> *"This is THE dumbest thing I've ever seen. If your kid actually kills themselves because Momo told them to, that's just natural selection doing its job"*

Reference to Darwin Awards and natural selection highlights that the resulting deaths or injury from SMC is apparent; therefore, engagement in them rids the population of inferior specimens. The notions of evolution characterizing participants as inferior and undeserving of life and protection were present across all risky SMC explored. In these descriptions, participants are removed from their social contexts that could be encouraging, shaping, or even driving participation. Thus, there is an individualized rendering of participation that serves to vilify the engagers of the phenomena.

4.3.2 Reasons for participating

Figure 3 summarises the reasons for participation presented by stakeholders. These reasons included self-identified participant accounts and those presented by others. The possibility of multiple motivators for a single individual partaking in SMC was never posited in any of the texts. Instead, accounts proposed singular motivation across all risky SMC.

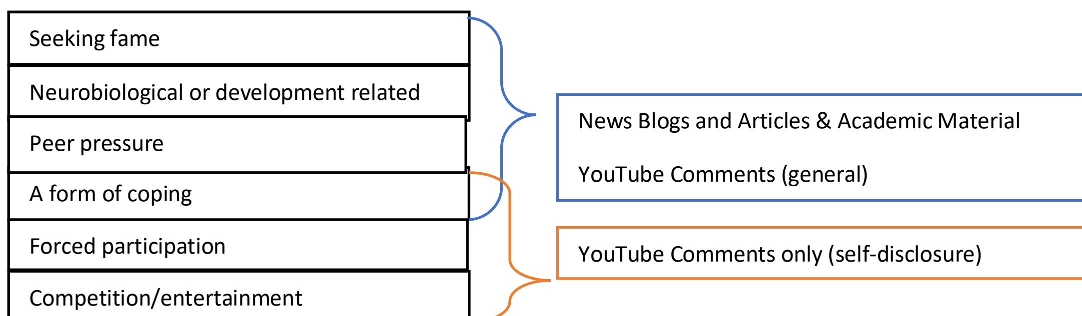

Figure 4. Summary of the reasons provided as proposing engagement or justifying participation by all stakeholders across sources analysed

A primary focus across all sources was the construction of participation as seeking validation and internet fame.

“They film each other doing the challenges and upload them in the hope they will become social media stars”

“I just can't believe anyone would do this to try and be famous when they could become famous by doing something awesome and cool and amazing, whilst actually having a fun and good time.”

The extracts above portray an assumption that seeking fame is a common ambition for participants. With the domination of social media, friendships (in terms of their formation and maintenance) have started to shift. Friendships and connections are shallow and meaningless (Manago & Vaughn, 2015).

Instead, a higher number of 'friends' or 'followers' indicates a higher social status in the form of 'popularity' (Kim & Lee, 2011; Manago et al., 2012). This desire to obtain likes and followers was likened to currency across sources, which is in line with Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of social capital.

“It is terrifying that our children are permanently injuring themselves for the sake of followers […]”

“Likes," "retweets," and "views," a modern form of currency. Teens are attempting outrageous ways to torture and mutilate themselves for likes”

Followers, likes, and views are constructed as akin to power. They are forms of social currency prevalent on various social media sites (Rosenthal-von der Pütten et al., 2019). Social capital is determined by the size of an individual's network connections and every network member's economic or cultural capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Kay & Johnston, 2007). YouTube and other social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) allow for the creation and maintenance of such social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Feroz et al., 2014).

In seeking social capital, individuals shape their online performance and content toward what they understand to be more popular. The adjustment of behaviours to preserve or promote the portrayal of the desired self is also found online and is sometimes called the "digital self" (Kramer & Winter, 2008). This reflects a process of impression management (Tuominen et al., 2022). Impression management (also interchangeably referred to as "self-presentation") emerged in work by Goffman (1959) and was linked to influencing one's place within social hierarchies, amongst other things (Picone, 2015). Specific to social media, the

motivation behind impression management of the digital self can include a variety of intrinsic factors (e.g., being well-liked, personal values) through to being shaped by societal pressures (e.g., conforming to current cultural-based values) (de Bérail et al., 2019; Pearce & Vitak, 2016; Tuominen et al., 2022).

The identification of societal context feeding the drive towards social capital was largely absent within YouTube comments. However, when considering online social capital, an 'artificial' economy is present in the form of "likes" and "attention" that can be counted and tied into capitalism. Social media sites create such functions to encourage participation, which is their own economic interests (Faucher, 2018; Kaljee & Chen, 2011). Risky SMC constructions of seeking fame and virality then leave out social processes, relations of power, and notions of self in contemporary society.

Statements made by health professionals in news media sources framed the search to be noticed online differently. Participants were portrayed as seeking validation, which was portrayed as the expression of a human need.

"Virtual peers can provide real validation […] even high achieving kids may crave this kind of attention."

"They base their self-worth how many likes they get on these videos"

"The game strategically traps the participants by boosting their self-esteem and giving them the much-needed validation, their life has been lacking"

The extracts above construct risky SMC as providing participants with something they have lacked, irrespective of intellect (i.e., 'high-achieving'). Such constructions contend with the earlier expressions of hostility by YouTube commenters towards participants, who were constructed as inferior as engaging in risky SMC.

Moreover, various contingencies shape and feed a sense of self-worth (e.g., competition, appearance, friendship) (Cambron et al., 2010; Crocker et al., 2003). Gaining likes and subscribers, too, are related to "self-worth" or personal value (Faucher, 2018). In the excerpt descriptions above, various psychological notions and theories are being rolled out to make sense of risky SMC and its participation. It is a psychologising of participant's activities, which can pathologize the process. In these constructions, the focus is not on deserving death or being viewed as evolutionarily defective, as in other narratives involving participants. Instead, participants are implied to be a vulnerable individual that needs some form of intervention.

Nevertheless, there were also significant references to neurobiological or developmental-related reasons for youth engagement in SMC across sources:

"[…] brains have not yet fully formed"

"Children's brains are not developed enough to understand the consequences of cutting off its blood supply"

Yet, some self-identified younger YouTube commenters argued that they were not all the same. A lack of maturation was challenged:

"Girl: you can try this at home…Me: well these girls are older than me and they are doing this....well I'm smart enough NOT to do this..."

As in the extract above, such messages were often lost amongst the dominant portrayals in news media and academic sources. In these, familiar tropes about youth as not developmentally ready to make rational decisions were perpetuated and repeated.

"[…]wants that immediate gratification without thinking about the long-term ramifications, especially because their minds are not mature enough to think about those"

"An 11 year old first off all doesn't realise what could happen. And even if he could realise what could happen, he's probably not imagining it could happen to him."

"gullible and would probably follow the video's instructions"

Young people are often characterised as uninhibited risk-takers, a stance often perpetuated by the media (Sternberg, 2004). Their behaviours are reduced to a general biological process, where they need protection until their 'brains mature.' An acontextual, asocial and natural maturation process is thus implied.

Moreover, a dominant focus on brain anatomy development oversimplifies the complexities involved in neurodevelopment. For example, some neurodevelopmental perspectives assert that inhibitory control systems are still maturing in youth. As a result, in emotionally heightened situations, reward-related circuits might be more activated (Spear, 2013; Van Hoorn, Crone & van Leijenhorst, 2017). The emotional neural reactivity in youth is significant in the presence of social stimuli (i.e., friends) (Albert et al., 2013; Guyer et al., 2016; Monk et al., 2003). In support of this are findings that youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviours in peer groups than alone (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). The dominant focus on brain anatomy development in youth leaves out social processes, relations of power, and notions of self in contemporary society.

Additionally, peer pressure was also an age-based characteristic presented by all stakeholders across sources as a reason for youth taking part in risky SMC:

"Children have a horrible tendency to egg each other on"

"😥Gotta sit the little people down & talk to them, about not being a follower"

"Doing ridiculous experiments – especially when peer pressure is involved – is just part of being an adolescent"

Previous studies have found that from the perspective of non-participants, peer pressure is a reason for others to engage in risky SMC (Bada et al., 2020; Khasawneh et al., 2021). Peer pressure occurs through being given an explicit offer and modelling (where behaviours are observed and copied) (Borsari & Carey, 2001). It is associated with adolescent-aged functioning and is often highlighted as the primary reason for risky or 'unacceptable' behaviours (Inguglia et al., 2019; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). For example, youth smoking in specific peer groups has primarily been attributed to peer pressure (e.g., Studer et al., 2014).

However, how youth participation is being constructed as 'peer pressure' simplifies (like with neurodevelopmental discourses) the social processes at play and the contextual settings of SMC. Youth are creating a 'self' in this contemporary world. They can look at content posted online and experience a fear of missing out or being different (Balt et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2021). Moreover, given the importance of acceptance (Masten et al., 2009), some youth can conform to their understanding of current social norms (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; van Hoorn et al., 2017). Thus, references to peer pressure remove youth agency, ignoring that youth can consciously experiment or engage in particular behaviours.

Self-disclosure comments on YouTube provided different constructions of engagement by users who positioned themselves as past or current participants. Within these, some users highlighted elements of competition:

"Me and my wife did this but we did it to see who can last the longest[...]"

"couple years ago my cousin and I did that challenge and my hand puffed up....I won btw....and we did the challenge more than once lmao"

The thrill of competition increasing participation in activities is not new (Kuech & Sanford, 2014). Risky SMC constructed as a form of competition invites its participation. It shifts the acceptability of its practice and brings forward constructs such as "sports," which are

normalized practices in society and have elements of danger and rivalry to win (Kosiewicz, 2010).

In other YouTube users, self-disclosure comments risky SMC were constructed as a form of coping.

"I did this as a self harm technique so now there are burns all over my arms and they itch so much."

"I am playing this game to i am at Day 21 if you ask why i just don't want to live it just doesn't feel right to live i don't know if i am scared or angry or some other shit but i am not happy and after what i went true in this 21 Days i never will be happy again i have only a mother my Dad died before i was born, … it was my choice to live or die and i realy don't regret my choice even if i feel a lot of pain…"

Self-harming refers to intentional injury of the self, with or without suicide intent (Skegg, 2005). In prior studies, specifically on the Blue Whale Game, participants have sought to engage to reduce emotional pressure, sometimes with intent to die (Zhu et al., 2022). An engagement in risky SMC was similarly constructed as a means to escape.

"I would do this, not to get a attention just to be away, away from life, I can't stand life, my grades are low and I'm getting on to a lot now and teachers are making fun of me cuz how I don't play attention which I do but don't understand, it's like I'm trap and I'm getting fat and just feel depressed and all my friends are fake"

The extract above details a range of psychological and interpersonal reasons for participating in the Blue Whale Game. As highlighted in the previous theme, YouTube commenters often responded extremely hostilely to participants.

However, participants who disclosed engaging in risky SMC with themes of self-harm or suicide (as in the excerpts above) sometimes elicited expressions of sympathy and compassion from other commenters:

"Plz don't do that I'm sure you're still young trust me life will get better, do you want your mother to suffer losing you after losing your father I hope god helps you whatever you're going through it's not worth it to take your life away Just live life day by day it will get easierNever comit suicide som1 will always love u ❤️"

"welp fuck! i wonder if he's okay. …"

"Call a suicide hotline. Please get help, it wouldn't be worth it"

Self-disclosure comments about non-suicidal self-harm (intentional damage to self without intent to die) (Mangnall & Yurkovich, 2008) or self-harm are shown in research to often be in

search of seeking validation of experiences by others (Simone & Hamza, 2020). Although discouraging engagement, the extracts above show how responses from others were often framed as supportive messages offering encouragement or signposting to support.

Finally, it was only within self-disclosure comments that a risk of assault or bullying was framed as a reason for engaging in risky SMC. In these passages, commenters name risky SMC as something imposed on them.

> *"I've had the fire challenge happen to me it wasn't my choice some girl walked up to me and sprayed me with something and before I figured out what it was she lit me on fire"*

> *"I was forced into this in a classroom when I was 13 back in 2013"*

The lack of consent and awareness before being engaged in a risky SMC separates these accounts from other descriptions of participation. The descriptions presented in these extracts by self-identified participants indicate a traumatic element (Chaitin, 2014) and an abuse of power. Yet, non-participant stakeholder accounts fail to acknowledge such power relations (except for the simplistic mechanistic renderings of notions such as peer pressure, which does not imply assault). Finally, it was only within self-disclosure comments that a risk of assault or bullying was framed as a reason for engaging in risky SMC. In these passages, commenters name risky SMC as something imposed on them.

Particular risky SMC, like the Blue Whale Game, have been associated with engagement related to threats, specifically from game 'administrators' who engage participants and then provide the tasks for game completion (Mirza & Gooding, 2018; Khasawneh et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022). Research in this area also posits that youth can conform due to fears of experiencing cyberbullying or harassment by peers if a challenge is not attempted (Zonfrillo & Osterhoudt, 2014).

The depiction of engagement without choice is more reflective of experiences of bullying and assault disguised as "pranks." Pranks in the context of social media have varied from harmful stunts to subtle or obvious forms of bullying enactments. The harm of such acts is minimized by using the term 'prank' or 'hoax' (Haq & Rosyidi, 2021; Stone, 2019). Generally, pranks involve acts that are planned ahead and in some way cause distress to the person pranked (e.g., shock, fear), which is perceived as amusing by the prankster (Jarrar et al., 2020). One example which gained substantial media coverage in the United Kingdom was "Happy Slapping." In this, a form of assault (e.g., slapping someone) is recorded on camera

and uploaded online. Such prank acts have been covered more thoroughly in recent years in the news media due to widespread attention on the internet (Palasinski, 2013).

In the general media, risky SMC can interchangeably be called "pranks" when a participant involved becomes identified as unwilling or when the SMC has resulted in criminal charges. For example, the "Hot Water Challenge," later referred to as a prank, involves boiling water being thrown at a person or given hot/boiling water to drink unknowingly through a straw. It was reported in the news as resulting in an arrest (i.e., Oliveira, 2019). Once such risky SMC result in criminal charges, they appear to dissipate in popularity quickly, especially in the light of public attention following a criminal conviction or court case (e.g., WKYT, 2019).

4.4. Conclusion

Overall, the constructions identified in this study concern who engages in risky SMC and why they reflect our society and everyday sense-making. Participants of risky SMC were the objects of conversation by those who positioned themselves as non-participants. Non-participant's constructions of reasons to engage in risky SMC involved the imposition of repetitive and generic notions associated with youth (e.g., fame-seeking, peer pressure, and neurodevelopmental biological process). Participants were respectively depicted as young and developing beings, "idiots" deserving of harm and death, vulnerable psychological individuals seeking validation, and individuals engaging in competition. In all these understandings, participants are removed from the social contexts in which they engage in risky SMC. The relations of power at play, including the role of social media platforms and the social roles of parents, peers, and those engaging in risky SMC, are ignored.

There was a disproportionate focus on youth in media and academic material, which can marginalize and exclude adults participating in these challenges. It also frames the characterisation of participants as only youth. The harm of potentially stereotyping youth as primary participants was not acknowledged formally across any source. However, the embodiment of these dominant constructions by younger age groups was present. Some YouTube commenters chose to distance themselves from those in their age group. These commenters claimed to be different as "mature" and not engaging in risky SMC. These references highlighted acceptance and broader generalization of constructions about youth as neurodevelopmentally immature and engaging in risky SMC. Further research is needed

around the internalisation of media constructions on risky SMC and youth constructions of self.

The contrasting stakeholder constructions about reasons for engagement in risky SMC can have different implications for stakeholder responses. To illustrate, the self-disclosure of risky SMC as a coping strategy when depressed with multiple life stressors placed participants in a vulnerable light and elicited caring responses from non-participants. However, at the same time, understandings of seeking to participate in risky SMC for validation or attention (and thus social capital) were met with disproval. The role of social media platforms in providing functionality and gaining monetary benefits (Ellison et al., 2007; Feroz et al., 2014) was not acknowledged. Instead, participants were constructed as "idiots" for engaging in risky activities framed as involving obvious inherent harms. Here, evolutionary discourses were drawn on rather than intervention, rendering participants deserving of death drawing on a natural selection trope.

Furthermore, self-disclosure comments constructed risky SMC as more than just harmful concerning inherent physical harm. These YouTubers named engagement as forced upon them. In such cases, the acknowledgment of power dynamics (a leading "participant" and a person being forced to engage, victim) was absent in non-participant stakeholder accounts other than in references to peer pressure, which typically implies peer encouragement rather than coercion. Thus, in the marginalising of particular views and minimising the role of social media platforms that profit from risky SMC content and other social relations, the constructions in this study serve to maintain the current status quo.

CHAPTER 5: Accountability

This chapter continues to build on the analyses of the previous chapters through the discussion of the final theme created in the thematic discourse analysis process . In Chapter Three, I explored the characterizations and risks of SMC. Then, in Chapter Four, the constructions of the participants and the reasons for engagement were explored. In Chapter Five, I will present stakeholders' constructions of blame and responsibility, highlighting risky SMC as a social phenomenon. First, the constructions of three specific groups (parents, social media organizations, and participants) explicitly named across sources as accountable for risky SMC will be discussed. I will also address intervention and prevention strategies against risky SMC during this. Finally, continuing the argument that risky SMC is a social phenomenon, I will contend the general positioning of some stakeholders as being outside the phenomenon since they position themselves as not physically participating in risky SMC.

5.1 Blame, and the responsibility for intervening

Most comments about risky SMC expressed outrage, shock, and hostility towards the participants of risky SMC (Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.1). Moreover, within YouTube sources, the practice was constructed as a form of self-harm disguised as socially acceptable behaviour, due to the infliction of harm. Stakeholder constructions of fame being the reasons for engagement (see Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.2) framed risky SMC as not worth engaging. In the context of such constructions, it was unsurprising that there were consistent and vociferous calls to stop risky SMC across sources.

"Blue Whale game should be stopped"

"The necessity of a proactive approach to curtail it"

"YouTube is home to many beloved viral challenges and pranks, but we need to make sure what's funny doesn't cross the line into also being harmful or dangerous"

The demands for stopping risky SMC were often interweaved with blame and responsibility. Particular groups would be framed as being at "fault" or accountable and then positioned as responsible for intervening. Multiple groups were constructed across sources as accountable, depicting risky SMC as a social phenomenon with stakeholders pursuing different interests.

On a smaller scale, social media platforms were constructed as responsible for intervening and preventing risky SMC content on YouTube and News sources.

"How the Hell are these videos still Posted on YOUTUBE. Can Ban Political BS but when something like this endangers kids and gives this sick crap a platform, YOUTUBE should be held Liable"

"…we should absolutely demand that they ["social media companies"] do more—consistently—to make sure that as new threats are identified, they act in good faith to tailor tools to address them"

In these extracts, platforms are being framed as selective in what they are restricting and banning. The blame for content is not placed on the participants who created the video content (as will be seen later). Instead, it is placed on the social media platform that hosts such content. There has been increased pressure from the public for social media giants to self-regulate and uphold corporate social responsibility (Grygiel & Brown, 2019). Social media has created a hyper-transparency of content that might have once been more private (Gillespie, 2018). Content is uploaded onto public and commercial platforms, which are storable and searchable. Thus, responsibility for social acts is being shifted from SMC creators to the social media platforms that provide the platform to make them visible (Mueller, 2019).

News sources highlighted how social media platforms have attempted to curb risky SMC participation by banning content:

"YouTube announced they were pulling videos, often tagged "Tide Pod Challenge," to discourage people from intentionally harming themselves, violating the social video site's community guidelines."

"Facebook will remove #TidePodChallenge content from its site and Instagram."

In these extracts, social media platforms are constructed as taking responsibility for the wellbeing of their users. Despite current reports of banning risky SMC, organizations have been reluctant to remove user-generated content in the past, citing a breach of users' freedom of expression rights. This was regardless of the harm caused. For example, in 2006, Italian boys were filmed assaulting a nine-year-old boy with an autism spectrum condition; a bystander uploaded this video. When requested by the parents for it to be taken down, Google refused to do so until they received a court order (Sartor & Viola de Azevedo Cunha, 2010).

Over the years, this standing appears to have changed. In what is described as a "world first" in 2022, several prominent social media companies (including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok) signed a code of conduct with New Zealand, agreeing to support attempts at reducing harmful online content (Corlett, 2022). Such acts (banning social media content and signing a code of conduct) frame social media platforms as caring for their community of users. Stakeholders across sources did not acknowledge the benefit this can have for social media platforms. Platforms showcasing themselves as "responsible" and caring for their consumers are favourable for company image and can be supportive in brand marketing (Araújo et al., 2023).

For some stakeholders, the promises of regulation by social media platforms were not enough.

"…but YouTube has not taken any harmful content down. YouTube needs to take better responsibility"

Users demanded further action from social media platforms, calling them out for their lack of action despite regulation promises. Upholding YouTube community guidelines or regulations relies on individual "community" members (i.e., YouTube users). Users must repetitively report content for it to be reviewed by YouTube administrative staff and then removed (if appropriate) (YouTube, 2023). Thus, social media organizations are reaping (initially) the benefits of being framed as responsible by creating community rules. However, in actuality, it is a liberal intervention based on individual responsibility under the guise of corporate responsibility, which hands back down the task to its users.

Age restrictions are another tool used by social media platforms as a strategy to prevent viewing risky SMC content and other "adult" content. Accessing age-restricted content requires an account with birth year details showing you are over eighteen. It was designed to prevent younger audiences from accessing harmful content flagged as inappropriate for younger age groups (Krauss et al., 2017). Accounts for those under the age of eighteen years are automatically blocked from accessing content (given a message of content being age-restricted). For YouTube users who are not signed in to an account, the option to sign in (or create an account) to access content is provided. It is a strategy that was described as working to stop risky SMC content access:

"Why dis age restricted fuck youtube"

"wtf it is age restricted

"The video is age restricted 😕😕😕😕😕😕☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️😣😣😣☹️"

The extracts above demonstrate outrage at this intervention application by YouTube. For these users, age-restricting content is framed as unfair by those excluded because of their age.

Moreover, although it is presented as successful in stopping access to content through extracts like the above, it is framed to be not without limitations:

> *"Shane [name of YouTube video content creator] makes an awareness video telling people not to play this game ... YouTube age restrict it so the people who are most likely to play such a horrible game carnt be inlightrned about it"*

The extract above highlights how age restrictions seem to be arbitrarily applied without careful consideration of the actual content and, hence, the purpose of the tool (reducing exposure to age-inappropriate content) (Krauss et al., 2017). That is, age restrictions were not applied to video content depicting actual participation in risky SMC content. In the above extract, this user indicates that content designed to be positive and educational was blocked through the restrictions. Thus, there is a tension between the demand for control and the lack of control being highlighted.

Some YouTube users commented about their evasion of age restriction:

> *"I made a new account to watch this"*
>
> *"And the age verification? That's rubbish. All you have to do is click 'yes' to the question: "are you 18 or older?" , to any of these apps or videos"*

Age restriction, therefore, appears to be a blunt tool and simplistic (given its bypassability) to create a sheen of intervention by social media platforms. YouTube's comment section for an age-restricted video is accessible even if the video content is not. Comments describing ways to evade age restriction barriers generate awareness of possible ways to evade it. SMC then becomes constructed as uncontainable. Additionally, in an attempt to bypass restrictions, creating an account indicating that the user is over eighteen serves the platform by increasing the number of active accounts.

Other users challenged social media platforms exercising greater control, wishing to view content that had specifically been age restricted:

> "*YouTube don't be a pussy, we wanna see people suffer from thier stupidity"*

This is an example of how SMC are contested in discourse. On the one hand you have calls for organisational responsibility and on the other absolute non-regulation. The social media platform is positioned as lacking the courage to stand up for freedom from censorship. Moreover, this extract provides a construction of SMC as entertaining for users positioning themselves as viewers. The participants are (as in Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.1) positioned as deserving of their suffering because they lack intelligence. The blame and responsibility are placed on specific individuals (i.e., the platform that prevents content sharing, the participant who was stupid to engage).

On this note, other groups were also targeted across sources to take responsibility and intervene. Parents were the primary group consistently called on to take responsibility for participation by supposedly underage and vulnerable youth.

> *"Parents …need to be aware of this serious problem in order to educate and monitor their vulnerable youth"*
>
> *"…please pay attention to what your children look at on social media," Bogard said. "I know our kids always complain that we're being overprotective but it's ok, it's our job."*
>
> *"Here's a list of warning signs parents should pay attention to: Suspicious marks on the side of the neck…"*
>
> *"Parents need to know what their children are doing in order to monitor safety, not because they are nosy or intrusive."*

Chapter Three highlighted the construction of participants as young by news and academic sources (subsection 3.4.1). Parents are being held responsible for protecting their children from risky SMC ties into this construction. In these extracts, parents are encouraged to be the protectors of youth by monitoring their online activity and observing signs or symptoms of engagement. The discourses around parental responsibility related to risky SMC are constructed by explicitly challenging other public discourses about parents (parents as nosey or intrusive). The comments are injunctive (e.g., parents "need to" or it is "our responsibility").

Characterisations of 'good/bad' parents also become created when expectations and responsibilities are named. expression of expectations from parents in the above extracts lacks consideration of contextual factors (neighborhood, poverty, social networks) associated with youth and child rearing (Campos, 2004; Geinger et al., 2014). Structural inequalities are ignored on par with a neoliberalist framework (Hillman, 2016). Neoliberal ideologies and

practices that have dominated mainly the Western-European world are internalised into our social fabric and have shaped public discourse about parenting (Boczek, 2020). Parents are expected to support youth becoming good neoliberal citizens (Geinger et al., 2014). Over the last two decades, parenting practices have shifted substantially, with increased pressure to dedicate further time and resources to child-rearing; in addition to the countless programs with parenting advice, manuals for parents, and so forward, aimed at supporting parents to raise children with attributes that will secure them a role when older in the competitive job market (Boczek, 2020). Children are seen as economic objects with a greater chance of investment return, reflecting neoliberalist commodification ideologies (Laruffa, 2018). The placing of blame solely on parents ignores these larger socio-economic and cultural factors at play and shifts accountability from society to private households (Boczek, 2020).

The extracts below show how parental duties are constructed by YouTube commenters. Blame is placed on parents when standards about what it means to be a parent are not met:

"I blame the parents because they don't watch them"

"[y]our supposed to pay attention to your kids. Good thing your not my mom"

"This mother is all emo, but she didn't teach her daughter not to do stuff that is obviously stupid. She blames the internet -- the blame is hers"

Parents are judged as not appropriately supervising or educating their children. When responsibility is placed on individuals, such as parents, attention is drawn away from considering the roles of larger structures like social media corporations. As discussed in Chapter Four (sub-section 4.3.2), social media platforms design the functionality of their platforms, which serves to create a 'token economy' with likes and subscriptions traded for financial incentives. Although it can profit users (Perez et al., 2020), the social capital gained from the token economy primarily profits from social media organizations. YouTube currently gains revenue through providing free (with the inclusion of advertisements) or paid (i.e., monthly subscriptions) content (Beattie, 2023). In placing blame on parents (or others), attention is moved away from those providing these platforms and profiting from their use.

The advice parents were given around interventions, such as open communication, are those that are usually given for youth risky behaviours (e.g., sexual risk behaviours) (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Such advice was reiterated, predominantly across news and academic sources:

"Talk to your kids, maintain a free and open relationship where they can come to you if there's a problem"

"... a good tip for parents was to not necessarily dwell on any specific rumours but to advise their children to be responsible and let them know if they encounter anything online that appeared frightening or threatening."

"New Zealand's police said ... "We would recommend parents and caregivers sit down with their young people and speak with them about the dangers of viewing or engaging in the behaviour reportedly encouraged by this game..."

Earlier parental monitoring was highlighted in the sources as a recommendation by stakeholders. Parental monitoring is different from parental support. Parental monitoring requires parents to track whom youth are interacting with, where they are going, and to be aware of signs of engagement (Mills et al., 2021). However, parental support revolves more around providing warmth, comfort and, support, while encouraging open communication (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). These approaches and styles shift who is understood to be responsible. Although parents are still being asked to complete tasks (e.g., keep communication routes open), a degree of responsibility falls on youth, who are also required to cooperate or approach parents in parental support tactics.

Monitoring also included having parents watch for the "signs" (often physical) for engagement in risky SMC (i.e., "bloodshot eyes" from the Choking Game). In parental monitoring, parents engage in behaviours that allow them to learn about the activities of their children (e.g., friendships, where their children are at the time and, so on) (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Some parental monitoring behaviours without communication can reduce notions of trust, particularly as youth seek independence (Ying et al., 2015). Thus, different expectations can become difficult or unattainable. It demands open communication, which allows for trust development and a more balanced power dynamic. Yet, there are demands for monitoring, too, which requires parents to draw on the power in the parent/child relationship.

The final group who was also blamed and held responsible were participants:

"I feel sorry for the mother. I can tell from the video that she is a good mother. The kid on the other hand. Stop giving in to peer pressure"

"... it was her fault and its her fault that she is that stupid and dumb" [Context: Commenter is referring to the female participant who died in a SMC depicted in the video commented on]

"I know she's twelve, but how do you NOT KNOW that setting yourself on fire us bad?"

Discourses around “good” or bad parenting were still present, although not the primary focus. Instead, a simplistic individual responsibility, similar to what was seen in Chapter Four (subsection 4.3.1), is again present in the extracts. In repeating the peer pressure trope, the participant is held accountable for “giving into” the pressure of peers who encouraged engagement (as is implied by the notion of peer pressure). However, again, the role of the peers is not acknowledged. Yet how stakeholders are naming risky SMC as having effects on others - both themselves (in the evocation of pity) and the parents - reflects a social phenomenon (Gilbert, 1990; Markey, 1926).

Moreover, with danger from risky SMC being implied, as evident in these extracts, participants are positioned as taking part because immaturity (Chapter Four) is countered. Once again, the inferior specimen discourse is brought forward (sub-section 4.3.1). However, in this case, it is applied to a young person (“twelve”). Thus, we have platforms, parents, and children (participants) identified as needing to take responsibility. Yet this is contested. There is no agreement, again reflecting risky SMC as a social phenomenon where various stakeholders are in place.

5.2 Degrees of Participation

In Chapter Four, the focus of discourse was predominantly on those who physically participated in SMC. This implicitly positions the discourse producers as non-participants unless they self-identify as having engaged in risky SMC. Yet, with the growth of UGC the multiple roles people can take are being raised in academic discourse. Various terms exist to address the complexity of who a user is on social media, including “prosumers” and “producer” (Van Dijck, 2009). Generally, those who leave comments or interact with content are understood as "participants," while those who create the material are the "producers" as well as the "participants." "Consumers" are the users who read or watch content without posting comments (Khan, 2017; Shao, 2009). SMC growth by commenting and or watching content is less conspicuous. There is no explicit acknowledgement of the interwoven roles of stakeholders in sources, as things are often reduced to individual responsibility. However, I want to challenge the reading of those positioning themselves as non-participants outside of the phenomenon on which they are passing comment.

SMC is influenced by the platforms on which they appear, which encourages participation by viewers. Social media platforms are audience-interactive (Cunningham &

Craig, 2017). They allow for social integration where people can subscribe, comment, like, rate, and share content with others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Functions such as "subscribing" (or 'following' on other platforms like Instagram) allow people to stay updated with content. When new content is uploaded, they will receive notifications. It also communicates their interests to others and allows 'fans' of the same material to interact. The growing range of such functions has allowed for the growth of a participatory culture where users are not bound to passive viewing (Van Dijck, 2009). They can join communities and create content, which shapes material or content outflow (Jenkins, 2009).

Risky SMC content creators did have small groups of commenters, "fans" who would positively engage with their risky SMC videos in the YouTube comments:

"You guys are the best, I watch you every day"
"This was hilarious NEW SUBSCRIBER!!!!!!!!"
"Your videos is so entertaining i love this channel keep up the great content"

In the above extracts, the continued engagement in and uploading of SMC content is encouraged by depicting the participant as worthy of regular watching and as entertaining. Reflecting risky SMC as a social phenomenon, the phenomenon is shaped by demands for more content and thus impacts those involved. Earlier in Chapter Four, stakeholders named participants as driven by the pursuit of 'likes. In these extracts, content creators are rewarded by gaining a new 'subscriber.' Subscribers can be a driving force behind UGC popularity and demand (Feroz et al., 2014). They become part of the community that is interested in that content creator's particular material. Content creators with higher numbers of subscribers or views for content (higher social capital) are more likely to become social media influencers (Giles & Edwards, 2018).

Commenting and interacting with risky SMC content is framed as an intrinsic part of the SMC phenomenon when considering constructions about users posting material to get reactions (Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.2). Interaction doesn't always support content. For example, as seen in Chapter Four (sub-section 4.3.1), there was strong hostility towards participants. However, for those seeking fame and monetary rewards (sub-section 4.3.2), even 'hate' comments can be beneficial in the pursuit of monetizing a YouTube channel. The number of views a video has, as well as the after-viewing rate of comments can positively influence yearly monetary revenue earnings (Han, 2020). In this way the role of the commenter or the person who watches video content without commenting (consumer) is not

neutral, as framed by stakeholders, who position themselves as outside the phenomenon and not "participants".

Risky SMC are growing on social media platforms, where the "audience" is no longer bound to restricted domains of 20th-century audience participation (Burgess & Green, 2009). YouTube and other social media platforms allow and facilitate live interaction and the sharing of opinions through the comment features. In response to risky SMC content, YouTube commenters directly expressed discouragement in engaging in these activities through warnings:

"STOP DOING THESE STUPID CHALLEGE"
"#NoBlueWaleChallange"
"Guys do not do this challenge I have lost one on my best friends today it's not funny"
"Momo more like Nono"

Warnings included the commenter sharing personal accounts. The genuineness of these claims is not the element of significance; instead, it is that such comments shape the construction of risky SMC through being present on the platform, discouraging participation, and warning people not to engage. In these warnings, commenters also directly address participants. This differs from participants being talked about in the third person as seen in news media and academic material or in Chapter Four (sub-section 4.3.1), where participants are the objects of hostile comments. In the above extracts, the participants are positioned as needing to be educated. This still links to Chapter Four constructions of participants not knowing any better (immature trope) or are 'stupid' (inferior specimen trope). Nonetheless, it also frames participants as learning and living beings, beyond objects of entertainment (as constructed earlier in this chapter in comments requesting age restrictions to be removed).

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that stakeholders primarily constructed parents, social media platforms, and participants as responsible for preventing risky SMC from somehow involved. However, here we are also seeing that YouTube users were also taking on the responsibility themselves to intervene and prevent risky SMC engagement. On a few occasions, some YouTube commenters would provide alternatives to risky SMC engagement:

"…. so guys wot im gonna do is make a game and im gonna call it "Red Whale" (if i could lol) and do the opposite of things😊 like: Task 1: Go enjoy some time at home Task 2: Go hug ur parents Task 3: Love your life and do ur best to improve it. Task 4. Be happy and enjoy ur lovely life❤️ Task 5: Eat and do stuff that makes you happy.. :) And then.. REPEAT❤️ ily u guys no matter who u are just dont actually play those kind of games because they are bad. No likes needed❤️"

The extract depicts attempts at constructing their comment as genuine care by explicitly stating they do not want "likes", as discussed in Chapter Four, a virtual token to use to increase social capital. The commenter attempts to reframe an infamous challenge by encouraging participation in a different challenge comprised of offline tasks. . The "Red Whale Challenge" is said to be a prosocial form of the Blue Whale game, which was the most repeated positive version of a risky SMC within YouTube comments. However, no references to this adapted SMC in the media or news clips could be found.

Thus, risky SMC exist on platforms where functions create an environment that encourages social interaction, perpetuating risky SMC as a social phenomenon. Risky SMC can influence the behaviours of others (Markey, 1926) and can also influenced by people (i.e., attempts at intervening). Subsequently, the phenomenon has a variety of stakeholders who, through different styles of engagement with content, can aid in rapidly shaping discourses.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the repeated demands for the prevention of SMC across all sources were highlighted. Specific groups were targeted when considering constructions of blame and responsibility, some more than others. Parents were the primary group targeted to take responsibility. Earlier in Chapter Four, we saw that youth were constructed as primary participants within academic and news materials and, therefore, it follows that parents should be identified as salient in discussions concerning responsibility. Stakeholders from all sources placed contradictory injunctions on parents, including openly communicating with their children and developing trust while monitoring their internet use and disregarding complaints of being 'nosey.' The different expectations become unattainable, leaving parents consistently vulnerable to being positioned as bad parents.

Stakeholders also named social media platforms as responsible for stopping risky SMC content. Although, some YouTube users sought absolute non-regulation and free access, highlighting a tension for platforms to manage. Social media platforms were constructed by news sources as having taken responsibility by banning content (repetitive messages in news sources) and applying an age restriction tool. However, these platforms employ liberal interventions based on individual responsibility under the guise of corporate responsibility. Age restriction and content removal rely on individuals reporting the content and not responding honestly to age verification tools (Google, 2023). It allows social media platforms

to shift blame and responsibility onto individual users. Participants were constructed as at fault for risky SMC, too. However, this was framed by YouTube commenters as giving into peer pressure and neglecting the role of others in this socially motivated reason for engagement. Stakeholders constructed the individual at fault for not being intelligent enough to know the inherent risks of some risky SMC.

Stakeholders did not explicitly acknowledge their impact when encouraging or advising the "participants" not to engage in risky SMC. A form of social judgment, blame can be a form of action against SMC engagement and act as a deterrent for participants. In this manner, most stakeholders actively tried to reduce risky SMC engagement. YouTube users would post comments demanding and encouraging participation to stop or provide alternative ideas to a risky SMC. As a social phenomenon, SMC is reinforced through the implications of participation and social action, including prevention and intervention strategies by various stakeholders, which influence others.

I argued that SMC is best understood by discerning various degrees of participation beyond constructions of direct physical engagement in SMC. Current constructions by stakeholders, as participants or not, oversimplify the social context of risky SMC. Academic discourse highlights the roles of UGC participation: From content creators (participants and creators) to participants (those who view and comment) and consumers (interacting with no comments) (Khan, 2017; Shao, 2009). Risky SMC participation functions similarly, with the content also being UGC. Those positioning themselves as non-participants and as outside the phenomenon they are passing comments on are not outside of it. Commenters engage with content and provide incentives (comments or subscribing) for SMC material creation. They, therefore, co-constitute SMC with the producers who participate and create content. A dominant focus on direct participants obfuscates the role of other stakeholders in these activities. SMC is a social phenomenon; therefore, everyone involved has a stake in it, and their interactions shift and shape it.

Thus, the constructions of blame and responsibility were aimed at parents, social media platforms/organizations, and participants (children). However, this is contested. There is no agreement on who is to blame or responsible, reflecting risky SMC as a social phenomenon with various stakeholders. Risky SMC participation and constructions of blame and responsibility are contested zones with multiple vested interests that construct risk in various ways with various implications for stakeholders and the future of SMC. As a researcher, the

implication is that we need to consider how to frame our engagement with studying SMC. If we consider this a social phenomenon, we cannot simply focus on the participants (and thus risk slipping into individualistic, psychologising, and pathologizing constructions as some stakeholders do). Instead, we need to consider every aspect of this world: the participants, the activities, the comments, the professional responses, etc. All of these factors have a stake in this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 6: Synthesis and Integrative Insights: Unifying Themes and Implications

This final chapter will conclude the study by summarising the primary research findings about the research aim and question. Given my position as an intern psychologist completing a clinical psychology program, I will discuss some clinical implications of the findings being considered. Toward the end of this chapter, I will provide a conclusive summary statement and a reflection on the contributions and limitations of this thesis. Finally, this chapter will end with some areas of future research in SMC.

6.1 How do various stakeholders construct SMC, and what is the impact on participation?

SMC is a global occurrence that has become a part of and shapes our online experiences. In this study, risky SMC are framed as a social phenomenon involving various stakeholders, constructions, and implications. A social phenomenon involves a shared action in which the impact is not just on one individual (Gilbert, 1990). Instead, it can influence or result from others' behaviour (Markey, 1926). In this way, SMC is not a matter of individual participants that need to be understood psychologically but rather a contested zone where various stakeholders pursue different interests, including profit, entertainment, and safety.

I sought to learn how different stakeholders, that is, news reporters, those in academia, and YouTube users construct risky SMC and the impact this has on its framing of participation. Risky SMC constructions by stakeholders were predominantly around five particular areas (i.e., themes). These five themes depicting constructions were presented over three chapters: the characterization of risky SMC (theme one) and the presentation of risks (theme two) were discussed in Chapter Three of the thesis. Then, in Chapter Four, themes three and four, the identification of participants and reasons for participating were analysed. Finally, accountability (theme five) was discussed in Chapter 5. These themes included some dominant constructions, often reiterated across sources, and some contesting constructions by stakeholders. The themes will be discussed below in the order in which they appear in the thesis. The order of themes is depicted in Figure 5.

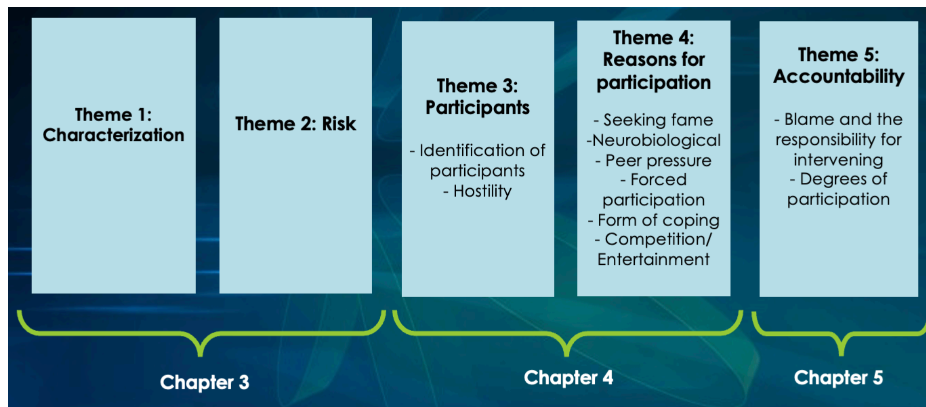

Figure 5. Summary of themes and presentation of themes across chapters.

6.1.1 The ways in which risky SMC are characterised

Language, specifically names of risky SMC, was constructed by stakeholders as influencing behaviour and participation in risky SMC. All SMC have names with pre-conceived categories (i.e., "game" or "challenge"). The origins of these names were never questioned in any analysed source and remain unknown in the current literature. Language can help shape the public's perception of a phenomenon, how people talk about it, and their responses to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Edley, 2001). Language can also normalize or legitimize a behaviour, as was the case with the framing of risky SMC as "socially acceptable" forms of self-harm. "Challenge" was framed as inciting participation and "game" as misleading people by YouTube stakeholders. In this way, risky SMC were implicitly framed as not a form of entertainment in the traditional sense (Nakatsu et al., 2017) despite other YouTube viewers seeking such content as being funny (Chapter Five, sub-section 5.1). In the context of SMC, using specific descriptive categories, such as "game" or "challenge," can impact how viewers perceive the activity and their willingness to participate.

Media serve as a crucial platform for the transmission of ideas and the construction of societal narratives (Taki, 2009). Media frequently constructing risky SMC as an online activityobscures complexity when consiering the identity of a participant. Do individuals who engage in SMC without uploading them still qualify as participants in the realm of SMC? I argue that by framing risky SMC as being predominantly on “social media” or “online,” we limit our consideration of the practice. Leander and McKim (2003) posit that the online realm is an extension of the offline realm. Specific instances of risky SMC may transpire in educational settings, such as school playgrounds, without documented evidence of participation or completion, as explained in Chapter Three (sub-section 3.4.1). In other cases,

people might have heard about a "viral" SMC without seeing it online, but simply through word of mouth. The assertion that the online world is an extension of the offline realm (Leander & McKim, 2003; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Vannucci et al., 2020) aligns with the understanding that social phenomena are often interconnected and influenced by both virtual and physical dimensions. It emphasizes the need to fully consider the context in which social phenomena unfold.

Moreover, some YouTube stakeholders framed risky SMC as a long-standing pratice. Through self-disclosure comments, these users described personal engagement in the same activities referred to as risky SMC before the popularisation of social media. The reference to risky SMC occurring in school playgrounds without 'recorded' evidence of participation (other than these shared comments) highlights that certain behaviours may be part of social phenomena even without explicit documentation. These activities can be social artifacts now present on social media because of technological advances. Social media is a platform for everyday occurrences and makes such activities more visible (Meikle, 2016). The implication is that opting out of engagement with activities on social media becomes more difficult due to their increased accessibility (Krotoski, 2011).

Additionally, in an increasingly interconnected world, global influences also play a role in shaping social phenomena. Across all sources, risky SMC were described as a global occurrence, which, as seen in Chapter Two, is supported by research (Avery et al., 2015; Khattar et al., 2018; Lupariello et al., 2019; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Uavis, 2018; Uysal Yazıcı et al., 2022; Ward et al., 2021; Zack et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2022). Risky SMC were also described as viral trends and crazes by all stakeholders. Using terms like trends or crazes, construct risky SMC as timebound. In news sources, specific risky SMC were constructed as short-term occurrences (crazes). Meanwhile, through ongoing reports of various risky SMC in the media, the phenomenon was constructed as a long-term occurrence Risky SMC appear to lack originality, often following cyclic trend patterns similar to those observed in fashion (Kim, 2013), which also reflects social phenomena influenced by trendsetters and prevailing popularity (Sarma et al., 2010).

6.1.2 Risks

Physical harm as an outcome of participation was the most highlighted area across sources and was described as having long-term consequences. The infliction of harm was accepted across sources as a genuine danger. However, in the academic literature on this topic, it was

highlighted in Chapter Two (sub-section 2.3.1) that this was not always the case (Khattar et al., 2018; Sumner et al., 2019). The physical risks of SMC are well documented in current academic research (Avery et al., 2015; Braush et al., 2011; Defender et al., 2016; Linkletter et al.,2010; Zack et al., 2014) and were similar to those listed in Chapter Three of this thesis. The risk from SMC was constructed across all sources as falling on a continuum of varying degrees of physical harm following participation. However, often, the harm was constructed, particularly by news and academic sources, as extreme (death, kidney failure, brain damage). Although physical injury can result in multi-faceted outcomes, including adverse occupational, spiritual, and social effects (Richmond et al., 2000; Wiseman et al., 2016), none of these wider areas were acknowledged by stakeholders.

What is noticeably absent was the risk of emotional harm to participants from the engagement in risky SMC. Stakeholders rarely addressed this unless it was explicitly associated with children (specifically, Momo). In these cases, emotional harm was presented to be observable behavioural signs (i.e., violent and aggressive behaviour, sleep disturbance). In such instances, news and academic sources constructed parents as one of the groups responsible for stopping and preventing engagement in risky SMC by their children (Chapter 5, sub-section 5.1). Visible signs of harm can be compelling in getting parents to act, and more importantly, serve to provide 'signs' and 'symptoms' for monitoring, which was constructed as part of a parent's role, particularly in news sources (Chapter 5, sub-section 5.1).

Framing risks as primarily physical and visible can minimize the non-visible (i.e., behavioural observable) emotional distress people can experience. For example, Chapter Four highlights the abuse towards participants (sub-section, 4.3.2). Generally, content creators are shown to find hostile or 'hate' comments hurtful to differing degrees (Thomas et al., 2022). On a broader level, given that such constructions are present on social media, a highly visible domain, YouTube comment discussions can become a part of the phenomenon, shaping public perceptions about participants (see Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.1). Drawing from the broader literature, given the lack of research on risky SMC, embarrassment is identified as a barrier to support seeking for those experiencing difficulties in areas that face stigma or social backlash, including gambling (Pulford et al., 2009) or self-harm (Coulson et al., 2017). Stakeholders, positioning themselves as non-participants, did not acknowledge their impact on creating harm. The hostility towards participants portrayed as intellectually inferior could impact their willingness to seek help (Chapter 5, Section 5.2).

The emotional ramifications, notably overlooked by most stakeholders in discussions related to participants, were however acknowledged about family and acquaintances. Within the domains of YouTube and news sources, these stakeholders broadened constructions of harm, characterizing it as exerting influence on the family system. In this context, emotional harm to family and friends was addressed, including grief, loss, and affliction experienced by families. Social sharing of grief through self-disclosure comments was also observed. Notable was the role of self-disclosures as a communicative tool employed by users to further their agenda, specifically in altering engagement patterns by dissuading participation in SMC. However, the focus in these comments was again the hurt or loss of the family member rather than the harm incurred by the participant. The recognition of emotional harm to family and friends indicates that the consequences of risky SMC go beyond individual participants. It highlights a complex interplay of social dynamics, where participants' actions are constructed to have ripple effects on interpersonal relationships and family systems, moving beyond online realms. In this way, participants are constructed as to blame for actions (Chapter Five, sub-section 5.1).

6.1.3 Identification of participants and hostility

Across all sources, most stakeholders implicitly positioned themselves as non-participants unless they self-identified as participants. In this way, participants of risky SMC are constructed as those who physically engage in the risky SMC. However, SMC involve different stakeholders, including participants, consumers, journalists, and researchers. It is a social phenomenon that takes place on social media platforms. In watching content and interacting with it, there is an implication for users involved (viewers are perhaps being entertained, and participants posting content are being rewarded in views or likes). Participatory culture is normalized, with barriers for people to engage with content being reduced, given the strong support for creating and sharing (Jenkins, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009). With profit-generating agendas, social media platforms encourage user participation, which can lead to further monetary avenues for corporations (Verdegem & van der Graaf, 2014).

In the YouTube source, participants were constructed broadly without referencing identifying characteristics such as age, unless contextually relevant (Chapter Four, section 4.3.1). What is meant by contextually relevant is that participants were only referred to as "youth" if the video being commented on had youth as the focus. However, news and academic sources centred descriptions on youth. Participants were constructed as teenagers,

children, or "youth." As highlighted in Chapter Four, youth were often framed as vulnerable by news and academic sources who construct youth as developmentally immature and susceptible to peer pressure. In this way, adolescents engaging in risky SMC are constructed as requiring protection by adults.

Nevertheless, in the YouTube self-disclosure comments by 'youth,' these commenters distanced themselves from what they named their "generation." In doing so, these YouTube commenters described themselves as different, "intelligent," and "mature." Young people being perceived as different from adults who are "mature" is a discourse in modernist psychology highlighting power and hierarchy differences (Skott-Myhre, 2008). Adults can have more influence and authority given this maturity. It aids the agenda of neoliberalism, whereby youth who deviate from being an ideal social subject can be called out on and corrected as part of the maturation process and privilege of adults who are 'mature' (Omorogiuwa, 2021; Skott-Myhre, 2008).

Irrespective of age, participants were constructed in an abusive and hostile manner in the YouTube source. Comments from this source were framed aggressively (i.e., threatening and swearing). As discussed in Chapter Four, YouTube and other social media platforms display high levels of abuse, harassment, and bullying directed toward content creators in their comment sections (Obadimu et al., 2019). However, the hostility observed in the YouTube sources towards participants was not just random or opportunistic instances of hate speech or abuse that can be seen on social media (Davidson et al., 2017). Abusive comments were centralized on participants' intelligence, who were described as "dumb" or "idiots." These responses mainly target their intelligence and use simplistic evolutionary notions to justify their suffering and death. The constructions positioned and reduced them to simple objects for entertainment, resting on a simplistic reading of liberal ideology where the individual is entirely responsible for their actions. In this way, the role of various other stakeholders with vested interests (context and society) was erased.

The function of abuse online, when in the form of criticism, can be a style of social reprimanding (Kapoor, 2022). Chapter Four discussed how participants engaging in risky SMC were constructed, across all sources, as completing SMC for attention or validation. The use of abusive comments is particularly punitive when evolutionary notions are invoked, such as suggesting that participants should be 'removed from the gene pool,' thereby portraying them as inferior and denying their worthiness as humans. Abusive comments by

YouTube commenters often were about participants rather than addressed at them. Through being spoken about, participants are excluded from the discussion. Participants are left marginalized, particularly as there are limited options for addressing abuse. Those who are creating primary constructions, which were repeated across sources, such as news sources or academic material (e.g., SMC as viral, as risky), have the stronger voice with constructions more likely visible. In this way, participants constructions fall into the background, as they make up the minority, as was the case in this study.

Unfortunately, as hostility or abuse occurs on social media platforms, the seriousness of such comments can be minimized. The YouTube comment sections are increasingly said to be represented by mainstream media as unregulated spaces of hostility (Murthy & Sharma, 2019). The anonymity offered by social media platforms, like YouTube, can encourage those desiring to engage in "flaming" (Lingam & Aripin, 2017). People might also not be as concerned about their social image when anonymity is offered (McCambridge, 2022). Facilitated in the described ways, these practices (flaming, trolling, and abusive comments) remain entrenched. Content creators can choose to turn off comments for videos or enable a function where comments are filtered for "hate" (Perez, 2020). The platform, YouTube, itself however will only delete content deemed as "hate" speech. So, the comments made on YouTube about risky SMC participants by YouTube commenters can often remain visible, if these terms (‘hate speech’) are not breached.

6.1.4 Reasons for participating

Those positioning themselves as non-participants speculated as to the reasons for others engaging in risky SMC. These constructions were present across all sources, whereby participants were constructed as seeking attention and validation, engaging due to peer pressure, or partaking due to being developmentally immature. In the YouTube source, self-disclosure comments by participants indicated reasons not often highlighted in research. Engagement in risky SMC by these YouTube commenters was constructed as being due to coercion, as a form of self-harm, or as a form of competition/entertainment.

The constructions behind engagement were framed simplistically. That is, attention was never placed on how people are not simple-minded beings and given the influence of various factors (i.e., social contexts) can engage in a risky SMC for more than one reason. Moreover, this framing of participants engaging in a risky SMC for one specific reason (i.e., fame) implies a “cause and effect” approach. This type of description can be beneficial when

considering an agenda-based approach to intervention (i.e., SMC platforms - people are seeking fame from risky SMC content, therefore we will ban dangerous SMC content). However, it is too simplistic and doesn't genuinely allow for prevention and intervention opportunities.

The self-disclosure descriptions of YouTube users about having been forced into the engagement of a risky SMC (e.g., having someone approach them and begin to "choke" them until they have passed out) is indicative of abuse disguised as an innocuous SMC. These YouTube commenters thus construct risky SMC as non-consensual occurrences. Co-participants of risky SMC appear to be able to engage in acts of violence (e.g., throwing hot water on people, as done in the Hot Water Challenge) and have this act minimized by referring to it as an 'SMC'. Referencing an activity, an 'SMC' can serve as a strategy for diffusing responsibility, using normalized constructs such as 'pranks' to conceal behaviors that would otherwise be socially unacceptable. The boundaries between extreme forms of risky SMC and pranking behaviours, where harm to another is the amusement point (Jarrar et al., 2020) becomes blurred. There have been various cases where people, including young persons, have been held accountable in law for harming someone in supposed SMC (e.g., Skull Breaker Challenge, reported by McCarthy, 2023). However, such cases reported in the news media are often extreme, and have resulted in significant injury or, more often, death.

Risky SMC were constructed as coping strategies when distressed in self-disclosure YouTube comments. In these constructions, it was explicitly named "self-harm" by some, acknowledging the implications of engagement. That is, engagement in SMC is constructed as known to be harmful to the self. Clinically, descriptions of engaging in risky SMC overlap with traditional understandings of self-harm and NSSI. That is, self-harm is deliberate, either with or without intentions to die (Mangnall & Yurkovich, 2008). Academic research highlighted engagement in the Blue Whale game as associated with various risk factors (refer to Chapter Two, literature review) (Lupariello et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). In the same way, participants rationalized engagement, highlighting emotional pressures in life.

If risky SMC are being engaged in as part of coping strategies and self-harm, then risk should be constructed as greater. This is because participants are selecting to intentionally take part in a task with the intention to inflict harm on themselves or die. In such cases, educating about risk and other attempts at prevention used for risky SMC (i.e., age restriction or banning of the content discussed in Chapter 5) will not be sufficient for this group of users.

The use of risky SMC for emotion regulation was not present in the dominant reasons posited by stakeholders positioning themselves as non-participants. It was for some self-identified participants. The function of self-harm is understood as primarily internal (i.e., to regulate emotions) (Mikolajczak et al., 2009). Education about SMC risks or banning content might not dissuade engagement, as core concerns driving self-harm can be particular to the person. The framing of risky SMC engagement as a coping strategy stresses a potential for 'underground' engagement of risky SMC. There is the possibility that some engage in risky SMC as a façade to keep their genuine intent behind engagement (self-harm as a means of “emotion regulation”) private. This becomes a possibility when considering that the identification of engagement in risky SMC in some cases occurred only upon severe injury, or death or was actively and adamantly denied by participants (Lupariello et al., 2019; Poyraz Findik et al., 2019; Uavis, 2018; Zhu et al., 2022).

Self-disclosure constructions highlighted reasons behind the engagement of risky SMC that were otherwise lost within the dominant discourses present by non-participant stakeholders. More 'traditional' discourses related to engagement (peer pressure and developmental immaturity) were present primarily within opinion pieces of medical professionals (academic material) and news sources. These constructions minimise the presence of social processes, such as the growing digitalisation of the world of youth (e.g., the integration of social media in classrooms, Abe & Jordan, 2013). Youth are adapting to digitalization, which is influencing changing practices related to friendships, sexual connections, and the creation of self, all of which are increasingly occurring online (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Moreover, constructing youth as 'neurobiologically' immature to understand risks reduces youth proactivity in creating a 'self' in the contemporary world. In studies exploring risky SMC video content, children are described as aware of the commercial benefits of social media; they then try to create a particular image of themselves in their risky SMC content for their YouTube channel (Ferreira Deslandes et al., 2020).

YouTube stakeholders associated participation with obtaining social capital. Across all sources, particularly YouTube, participants were constructed as engaging in risky SMC for attention, fame, and validation. In this way, risky SMC were framed across sources as providing opportunities for fulfilling these desires and goals. The accumulation of social capital has become a measure of validation and self-worth driven by social media platforms that provide quantifiable measures of depicting popularity (i.e., likes, follows, re-tweets, and subscriptions) (Kim & Lee, 2011; Manago et al., 2012). However, in seeking capital through

likes and subscribers, a high degree of work is required to maintain capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social media influencers are known to work constantly to sustain and renew their connections by interacting with comments and trying to meet subscriber requests (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Within the YouTube source, commenters implied risky SMC were too much 'trouble' for accumulating likes.

6.1.5 Blame and responsibility

Preventing risky SMC was a consistent demand across sources. Three groups were constructed across sources as responsible: parents, social media platforms, and participants. Placing blame and responsibility on particular groups constructs SMC as a social phenomenon, as it recognizes that SMC behaviours influence or change that of another (Markey, 1926). However, the constructions of responsibility and blame across sources as inherently individualized also reflect how neoliberal ideologies inform broader understandings of this social phenomenon (Boczek, 2020).

Parents were primarily the focus of accountability. The framing of responsibility by stakeholders reflected long-standing discourses about parenting. Through clinicians and general internet users' suggestions, parents were required to monitor their children's internet activities (e.g., using parental locks). However, parents also needed to respect their children's privacy and engage in open communication. The restriction and banning of risky SMC through monitoring content by social media platforms was deemed ineffective by YouTube users. Risky SMC content was described as still available. However, the use of age restrictions on YouTube, another form of monitoring, was contested by some YouTube users. Some YouTube users argued that this function stripped away the chances for appropriate education around risky SMC, which could reduce engagement. In this way, it was ineffective. Others (who would have been younger than 18 years of age since they could not access the content) were frustrated as their source of 'entertainment' was removed. In these cases, some shared successfully bypassing the restriction by creating a new account. Thus, stakeholders' descriptions of prevention attempt by different groups (monitoring, banning, and restricting) made risky SMC challenging to control and uncontainable. Such strategies to manage risky SMC appear to be long-term implementations (i.e., banning). In addressing the prevention of risky SMC over time, these risky SMC are constructed again as a long-term phenomenon, a trend (refer to Chapter Three).

YouTube users, academic writers, and media reporters encouraged people not to partake in risky SMC. Despite stakeholders across all sources placing responsibility on three groups for prevention, stakeholders then, through their comments, were part of the social action against risky SMC. Individual participants were encouraged to contact helplines or get "professional help" across the sources explored. In this way, platforms were following media guidelines related to suicide and self-harm behaviours (Roth et al., 2020). Moreover, self-disclosure on YouTube comments (e.g., loss of someone close or the occurrence of a personal injury) was used in addition to a plea for disengagement. The attempts at stopping risky SMC became a platform for creating different "positive" SMC forms. YouTube users, in some instances, would suggest alternatives to the current standing risky SMC ("Red Whale Game" instead of self-harm and other activities in the original Blue Whale Game). These alternatives constructed risky forms of SMC as undesirable activities; however, positive SMC were acceptable. Thus, stakeholders never acknowledged that, as a social phenomenon, responsibility is an interwoven process. In the same way, prevention strategies against risky SMC were framed across sources as singular (i.e., parents had to communicate with their children). However, intervention for a social phenomenon where multiple stakeholders are involved and impacted by the engagement should be multi-modal, involving schools, parents, and communities (Khasawaneh et al., 2022).

6.2 Clinical Implications

Given that this thesis is in the context of a Clinical Psychology qualification, an analysis of my findings concerning implications for clinical work will be highlighted. Current academic research on risky SMC provides recommendations for managing risky SMC. Suggestions include asking youth who present with injuries to medical practices about engagement in risky SMC if indicated by the type of injury (Avery et al., 2015). Many recommend monitoring for signs and symptoms of engagement and supervising "youth" online (Bernacki et al., 2012; Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018; Menon et al., 2019). Such recommendations were also present in the findings of my study by stakeholders (refer to Chapter Five). Other researchers in the literature have suggested the instigation of awareness and education programs for teachers and schools and adding the phenomenon topic to curriculums in schools (Bada et al., 2020; Bernacki et al., 2012; Ouellette et al., 2019; Vasconcelos & Eisenstein, 2022).

Moreover, as some stakeholders have sought in this study (refer to Chapter Five), researchers have also suggested platform responsibility (e.g., removing specific algorithms to reduce exposure to risky SMC or educating users on safe content creation) (Khasawneh et al., 2021; Khattar et al., 2018). Within the academic literature, safer media reporting about risky SMC has also been emphasised (Ramkumar et al., 2019; Roth et al., 2020; Sánchez-Muros, 2021). A limitation of the suggestions within research is that most are brief acknowledgments about the need for the strategies and do not discuss what such actions might involve, particularly in clinical practice, when engaging with the person.

This subsection brings a psychological perspective (limited to the current material available on risky SMC). Psychologists and others in health professions can play a role in shifting the practice of risky SMC while considering socio-cultural and contextual settings. When considering culture, there appears to be a growing movement towards understanding that ethnic/racial identity seems to have some influence on the SMC trends. However, this is the early days of research (refer to Chapter 2: Literature review). It is a reminder that clinicians must be mindful of their cultural competencies bound to their ethical codes of practice (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2018). Although the role of culture in risky SMC is an area for future research, an awareness or openness to learn about the role of culture in risky SMC engagement is essential. For example, rural and non-rural lifestyles can be quite different within Aotearoa New Zealand. Although most SMC occur within 'online platforms,' in this study, engagement in risky SMC offline, prior to the popularisation of social media, was acknowledged by stakeholders. SMC participation might occur in different ways for communities, particularly rural communities, that might not have easy access to provisions such as internet or phones due to financial or perhaps connectivity issues (Erturk & Fail, 2015). The popular SMC trends might also be different compared to non-rural parts. Awareness of these differences allows for more insightful approaches to individual and community-level support of risky SMC engagement.

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, there is a long-standing "she'll be all right" attitude that highlights hegemonic masculinity and gender performativity (Rushton et al., 2022). These attitudes have been shown to influence drinking levels in rural populations where such beliefs are held stronger (Campbell, 2020). Moreover, such beliefs can also negatively influence help-seeking levels (Wrigley, 2005). Although such research is not directly related to risky SMC, it highlights the importance for clinicians to consider how culture can influence engagement in risky SMC and help-seeking.

Moreover, culture must be considered more widely, including youth culture or the "online/social media" culture. Many online communities exist (e.g., Reddit platform users create particular Reddit forums for people to join). These online communities have their own culture, governed by written and unwritten rules and ways of being (Fiesler et al., 2018). As was seen in this study, people can be reinforced (through "likes" or verbal validation) or punished (through hostility) for engaging in risky SMC. Such rules and ways of being within particular online communities can shift the actions and attitudes of their users (Oddný et al., 2023) and possibly the practice of risky SMC. Clinical psychologists need to be aware of this world that clients can access and present themselves in. Although these communities are 'worlds' that are 'online' (and thus require internet connectivity), they can follow us every day in "offline" spheres (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Rufas & Hine, 2018) through conversations, rumination of worries at night, and so forth.

Clinical recommendations

There are three areas of clinical significance and recommendations for mitigating risky SMC when drawing upon the insights gleaned from this thesis study. These clinical recommendations are depicted in Figure 6 and will be now be discussed in this chapter. These suggestions highlight the role of a Clinical Psychologist and other health professionals as important in preventative and intervention-based support. Moreover, within the application of the recommendations, it is important to stress that the role of health professionals can be community-based through to an individual level. For example, psychoeducation can be provided on an individual level through the co-creation and sharing of a formulation of concerns or a general description of risky SMC. However, such support can also be completed on a whanau or community-based level through the creation of programs by clinical psychologists to be delivered in a community or other settings.

Figure 6: Clinical recommendations

Psychoeducation and media literacy

The findings from this thesis study stress the importance of raising awareness around risky SMC for relevant clinical health professionals (e.g., doctors, psychologists, counsellors, nurses, and social workers). As observed and highlighted in case reports, health professionals are witnessing increases in risky SMC injury presentation at their clinical practices (Chu et al., 2017; Poyraz Findik et al., 2019; Zack et al.,2014). It was concerning to see within the academic literature that health professionals were largely unaware of risky SMC and provided incorrect descriptions of SMC (e.g., as memes) (Mahadevaiah & Nayak, 2018). Health professionals need to understand the phenomenon, given that clinicians might be sought out for support. Knowledge of relevant practice areas is essential when providing quality healthcare (Benner et al., 2008). Developing awareness around practices relevant to youth culture can also aid clinicians in building general rapport. For example, knowledge of trends popular with youth can allow for points of entry into conversation with younger audiences (Baxter, 2009).

Clinicians might also want to become familiar with the broad definition of SMC, the types of SMC, and the various reasons for engagement. Health professionals are placed in a difficult position given that risky SMC are framed as trends and crazes within academic, news, and YouTube sources (see Chapter Three). Thus, risky SMC can shift quickly. It might be tempting for professionals to utilize news media reports to remain "up to date" or aware of the adaptions of risky SMC. However, clinicians might want to do so conservatively, as news reports are not always factual (Sahu & Majumdar, 2017). The findings of this thesis highlighted that academic and news sources constructing risky SMC could sometimes uphold news media agendas versus other source constructions like those on YouTube (e.g., youth as primary participants).

Following this, health practitioners, considering the limitations of using news sources as a primary source of information, should try to draw on more recent academic publications related to risky SMC. Chapter Two highlighted the increasing ways to refer to risky SMC. Thus, health professionals must remember that the phenomenon's title is not static when searching for risky SMC. Different titles are possible, casually used in the media or academic literature (i.e., Internet Challenges, Social Media Challenges, TikTok Challenges, Online Dares). An awareness of the growing changes in risky SMC titles can aid in a more relevant search.

Assessment and screening

Given the range of explanations available and our limited understanding of this phenomenon, clinicians must be cautious regarding the imposition of typical explanations (e.g., peer pressure, fame, etc.) and instead focus on the client's sense-making. As indicated in this thesis, the reasons behind the participation in risky SMC are constructed in many ways (see Chapter Four, sub-section 4.3.2). However, clinicians need to be mindful that the engagement function for risky SMC can be specific to a participant and not always specific to just the risky SMC task. For example, in the academic literature, it has been indicated that some engage in the Blue Whale Game out of curiosity (Narayan et al., 2019), and others with intent to die (Zhu et al., 2022). Again, what is being stressed here is the importance of approaching the topic with clients non-judgementally and with naïve curiosity. In creating a shared formulation, treatment can be better informed and more likely to be effective with the client's buy-in (Gazzillo et al., 2021).

Most health profession roles, such as Clinical Psychologist, require self-reflection and awareness of one's beliefs and values to work with clients competently and effectively (Silander et al., 2020; Waltman et al., 2016). Within this study, across academic, news, and YouTube sources, stakeholders (including health professionals) expressed outrage and shock about risky SMC, which were framed as needing to be stopped (refer to Chapter Five). Thus, although it can be expected that there will be opinions and judgments when approaching the topic of risky SMC with clients or their families, practitioners should be mindful of their values around the risky phenomenon. They should refrain from expressing judgment or applying personal values to clients. In a non-judgmental approach, care is taken not to condemn, criticise or shame clients for participation (Gilbert, 2009).

Psychologists can assess how social media challenges affect clients' mental health, self-esteem, and well-being. Some YouTubers in this study, for example, self-disclosed participation due to being physically forced (Chapter Four, section 4.3.2). Risky SMC can blur the lines between pranks. With a lack of research on this area, it is unclear whether pranks (or risky SMC) can be targeted at particular individuals repetitively (as would be seen in bullying) (Jarrar et al., 2020; Palasinski, 2013). In such cases, clinicians also need to assess the client's current safety. There is also a need to consider the impact of such experiences on identity development and self-perception (Salmivalli et al., 1999).

In the limited work addressing participants' engagement in risky SMC, participants were named as not being forthcoming about engagement in risky SMC until the engagement

was identified due to harm being reported (Avery et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2022). Sharing of such experiences might not occur with participants fearing repercussions or punishment. Using a non-blaming style when engaging with young people has encouraged rapport in clinical practice (McCutcheon et al., 2007). More importantly, clinicians' unbiased and empathetic style can aid in sharing sensitive information with adolescent clients (Thompson et al., 2007). Clinicians should actively utilize such skills and qualities to support youth and help them feel safe to disclose. Clinicians can also support clients in understanding and finding healthy ways to cope with and respond to bullying (Hikmat et al., 2024; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).

Skills based support: Emotional Regulation & Stress management

The engagement in risky SMC was constructed by stakeholders in YouTube self-disclosure comments as forms of what is clinically described as maladaptive coping strategies (Zelkowitz et al., 2016). The issue of risk with risky SMC means that understanding the function of the behaviour early on in interactions is important. Some participants may be engaging in risky SMC as forms of NSSI or self-harm with the intent to die. These cases would be managed with the usual safety risk assessment procedures and safety plans (Jacups & Kozlowski, 2023; Pettit et al., 2018).

However, these shared narratives also highlight the possibility of a requirement for skills teaching to support some clients. Skills based teaching is advantageous when considering that most clinicians would be able to offer skills teaching support, with less training needed than other formal modalities. Briefer therapy modalities that are based on skills work are being shown to be more accessible to clients (Bekker, Griffiths & Barrett, 2017; Ha & Kim, 2020). Different therapeutic models provide different skills that can be used with clients to support client concerns and meet treatment targets.

One area of support might be developing mindfulness skills to help clients become aware and present in the moment (Iani et al., 2020; Luberto et al., 2014). In this way, clinicians can support clients towards greater ability to name what is occurring for them and develop effective coping strategies over time (Iani et al., 2020). Other skills that can be taught that aid emotion regulation include behavioural relaxation strategies such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation, which can result in profound reductions in the experience of stress (Toussaint et al., 2021). Distress tolerance skills taught in treatment approaches such as dialectical behavioural therapy are also helpful in the management of distress and self-harm management (Prada et al., 2018).

There are often higher levels of conflict on social media platforms. It is easier for people to share and "bully" given social media's anonymity and non-direct aspect, where people are behind a screen (Khamala, 2016). However, although conflict can occur online, it is not always kept to that platform. The teaching of problem-solving skills, or pros and cons list making, can be effective in supporting clients to make decisions that are effective on their own when needed (Modecki et al., 2017).

Health professionals can also help clients recognize and regulate emotions triggered by social media interactions. This can be completed in various ways, depending on the clinicians' training and the chosen therapeutic models, while acknowledging that different approaches have different underpinnings. From a cognitive therapy approach, perhaps the use of a "5-part model" or a thought record table might be appropriate to begin to explore the situation and what occurred for the person in four areas (i.e., thoughts, emotions, bodily reactions, and behavioural actions) (Dryden, 2011). Another approach could be using multiple chain analysis to understand the function of a behaviour (e.g., cutting the wrist) (Koerner, 2013) and learn about triggers. Moreover, the chain analysis allows for considering where to put strategies in place (Lynch et al., 2006).

Narrative therapy and art therapy are two therapeutic modalities that draw ona social constructionist perspective (epistemological framework of this study) in their therapy approach (Riley, 1997). Narrative therapy considers the ways the client constructs the problem, attending in particular to the consequences of these constructions for their wellbeing. The utilisation of this sort of therapy means that health professionals can work with clients as they try to create a new story for their concern, while drawing on the client's belief system (Riley, 1997). In this way, the client can share their experiences of say SMC engagement with the therapist, who looks at their interpretation, allowing for the creation of dialogue (Riley, 2013). In this way, more "normative" understandings around social media are deconstructed, using the social interactions of the therapist and client (Doan, 1998). In the same ways, art therapies are seen to be a process in which clients can change or highlight their story. Through dialogue with the therapist new insights can be determined, and beliefs can be shifted through the medium of art (Meldrum, 1999; Read, 2003).

6.3 Overall Conclusion and Contributions

Primarily, this thesis shows how SMC is a social phenomenon, the dynamics of which are reflected in stakeholder constructions. However, stakeholders don't actually construct it as

a social phenomenon themselves. Constructions by said stakeholders overwhelmingly individualize blame through reifying neoliberal notions of individual responsibility (Boczek, 2020). Also, although predominantly framed as concern about the participants, there is a substantial degree of concern for self and personal agenda (i.e., the impact of losing others for friends/family, personal beliefs on risky SMC needing to be stopped, news systems using risky SMC stories for views, etc.). This leaves the attempts at addressing risky SMC without the involvement of the actual participants. The interventions being proposed and implemented (monitoring, age restrictions, banning content), often by stakeholders positioned as non-participants, can be inappropriate when considering potential functions of risky SMC (i.e., 'coping'). Considering this phenomenon is relatively poorly understood, current interventions appear to be attempts at trying to control or manage it with the same old mechanisms applied to other issues framed as 'problematic' in society (i.e., ban or prevent).

It is difficult for researchers to be able to keep up to speed with the phenomenon, as risky SMC are viral by nature and constructed as crazes that can rapidly resurge or fall from popularity. The instigation of and then the actual research output on specific risky SMC can take years to publish and even longer to be implemented within preventative and intervention-based initiatives that seek to limit the harm of certain SMC. During this time, the risky SMC might become unpopular and no longer be constructed as an ‘issue’, the clinical interventions and support being sought at the time missing the mark. Instead, the categorization of risky SMC based on similar issues (i.e., intentional risk and intrinsic to challenge unintentional risk) within research, as was done in this study, becomes useful. These groupings of SMC can provide an initial point of contact for clinicians who are faced with young people who present with psychological issues associated with engagement with risky SMC. Given the viral nature and sheer speed in which these ‘challenges’ arise, the grouping of risky SMC doesn’t have to be perfect or static models, but can provide a pragmatic approximation to help guide best practice. For example, suppose a new challenge arose, where no research on that particular challenge is available to clinicians. In that case, these general and iterative groupings can provide some evidence-based guidance as to current understandings that may be useful in treatment, interventions, and public health interventions. The emergence of each new SMC that clinicians situate within this grouping helps to further develop professional understandings of the groupings themselves while also being open to slower-paced academic research to inform how clinicians draw on and develop these groupings. Having research with similar types of SMC (i.e., intentional vs intrinsic and

unintentional) can address the research speed gap. It is pragmatic, as it allows clinicians and others to be able to draw on relevant material and, although isn't about the specific emerging SMC, is placed within similar clinical issues (e.g., intentional risk- NSSI). Clinicians and others can then have a body of research that is both theoretical and practical to access, which allows for approaching a risky SMC in an empirically grounded manner. Although these ideas do stray from the often pristine and idealistic forms of 'traditional' research that value methodological certainty over being timely, the simple reality is that the social is exponentially outpacing the academic, and clinicians need a way of engaging meaningfully with this social phenomenon.

6.4 Limitations and Future research

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the use of YouTube, although relevant, does not appear to be the most commonly utilized platform for SMC. These are uploaded onto TikTok and Instagram. An exploration of the phenomena on the platform it is engaged most often might provide different constructions, as users may interact with content differently. This limitation, and those noticed within the current literature, highlight the need for further research on this phenomenon.

There is evidence of risky SMC injury and death in New Zealand. For example, recently, a 10-year-old boy was injured after passing out from an engagement in the Choking game in Auckland (Lawton, 2015). One area for future research would be the continuance of building information around the level of engagement in risky SMC. There is no prevalence rate information, particularly within Aotearoa, New Zealand. This information will be helpful when considering intervention programs or the basis for further study. For example, the response to risky SMC incidents is unknown in New Zealand. The New Zealand Ministry of Education provides an emergency and traumatic events response team to support traumatic incidents. Schools are responsible for enlisting in this service when needed, with clear steps provided on the Ministry of Education website (Ministry of Education, 2023). Whether or not SMC-specific details might be helpful for staff and others managing an SMC-related incident when considering intervention could be a further area of research.

As stressed in this study, SMC is a social phenomenon. It does not occur in a vacuum and involves different stakeholders. Computer modelling has shown that intervention on a community level (teachers, students, parents) can potentially be a more effective way to

address the dangers of risky SMC participation than if one particular group (i.e., social media platforms) is targeted (Khasawaneh et al., 2022). However, there is a lack of research on implementing such programs and, thus, identifying their limitations.

There is ongoing work in academia learning about why participants engage in risky SMC. However, as noted in Chapter Two, the research around this can pose constrictions that limit what is identified (i.e., age caps). Semi-structured interviews with participants of risky SMC without such age limitations can provide space for participants to share their experiences with risky SMC. These may then shed light on reasons for engagement beyond those provided in questionnaires for participants to select from (refer to Chapter Two). Moreover, it might highlight some age-related differences in engagement, if any. Moving beyond reasons for engagement is essential, considering the lack of focus on supportive interventions post-participation. There are growing YouTube clips with people who have participated in risky SMC, providing commentaries on their experiences and the "aftermath." Thus, there is a need to understand the implications from the participants' perspectives beyond observable or reported physical injuries, including consequences faced (e.g., being banned for content).

Another area for future research is understanding how SMC are created and popularised. This can tie into what drives participants to participate in risky SMC. Some ethical concerns with such research need to be considered (i.e., material might later be used to try and increase content views). However, it would be helpful to learn about this and to see whether people have engaged in SMC after watching content, as is one of the arguments for banning interventions. In this way, again, such research would feed into support around prevention and intervention. However, it could also provide information about the phenomenon in terms of its dynamics (e.g., is it becoming more extreme, is it becoming more or less popular). Finally, as noted in Chapter Two, the specific cultural significance of risky SMC is often unknown. Yet, some studies indicate what becomes popular (i.e., viral) can be influenced by cultural standings on what is valued in emotional expression (Hsu et al., 2021). In learning more about the role of culture (e.g., particular socially and contextually relevant topics that are more popular), interventions can be better tailored.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Doctoral Research Case Study: Clinical Psychology Programme Massey University

Massey University

Clinical Psychology

CASE STUDY 6

Doctoral Research Case Study

Clinical Psychology Programme Massey University

Supervisors:

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Abstract

This case study outlines the influence of my doctoral research on my clinical practice during my internship year within a Community Mental Health Team setting. The aim of my thesis research is the exploration of how different stakeholders construct 'risky' Social Media Challenges, and what the implications of this are for Social Media Challenge participation. The research process, including use of various sources, such as YouTube comments, videos, and their analysis, will be described. This study is currently in the analysis stage, but preliminary finding descriptions will be outlined in order to contextualize learning and parallels from the research to my experiences in my internship. My thesis findings highlight the significance of the title of 'health professional' and that the presence of this title meant that these narratives were valued over that of others (the Social Media Challenge participants). Within this case study, I reflect on the presence of authority/power in health profession roles and the impacts on clinical practice. Moreover, I also reflect on the importance of taking a critical stance, a skill which was developed during my thesis process.

Overview of Doctoral Research

Introduction and Research Aim

A Social Media Challenge is a term used to describe engagement in a specific task, often with a predefined goal or objective to complete. The subsequent process and/or result of the 'challenge' attempt is recorded and uploaded onto social media platform(s) in any media format (i.e., pictures or video). "Evidence" material from Social Media Challenges is commonly uploaded onto social media sites, such as YouTube and Tiktok. One example of a Social Media Challenge is the "The Duct Tape Challenge," where people are taped down to an object, e.g., wall or chair, and need to get themselves free without help. Although the prevalence rates for engagement in Social Media Challenges are unknown, these challenges are believed to be engaged in and viewed widely. Clips about Social Media Challenges on YouTube can generate millions of views, with celebrity involvement often resulting in an escalation of views (e.g., the "Tiktok challenge with Shakira" on the Tonight Show has Shakira take part in dance challenges made famous on Tiktok, resulting in 12 million views over five months).

Challenges can rise and fall in popularity and, often come and go in trends. There have been periods of time where certain Social Media Challenges have become highly discussed in the news media. For example, the 2014 "Ice Bucket Challenge" which involved dumping a bucket of ice water on yourself and nominating others to do the same, in support of raising awareness for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). In 2022, after $2.2 million was raised, and the ALS foundation had funding approved for and began distributing "AMX0035," a medication which can slow progression of ALS (ALS Association, 2022; Onque, 2022). Often Social Media Challenges are infamous, with reports highlighting their dangers and risks. In example, the "The Duct Tape Challenge," resulted in a brain aneurysm for a participating 16-year-old after a fall (ABC News, 2016), and a crushed eye socket and cheek of a 14-year-old boy after trying to free himself (TodayNews, 2016).

Participation in Social Media Challenges, including more 'risky' challenges that might in death or injury, appear to be consistently growing, with new challenges identified as dangerous each year. Despite continuous concerns voiced about the risk of Social Media Challenges, and various policies being applied (e.g., YouTube changing terms and conditions to remove risky challenge or 'prank' uploads), there is very limited research around Social Media Challenges. The phenomenon is referred to by many different names, including social media "trends" or "games" or "dares" or even "memes," which implies different understandings of what this phenomenon might be or is classed as. Yet, the current information available regarding such engagement is based on the perceptions of health professionals, rather than that of participants or viewers of such challenges. Moreover, Social Media Challenges are described as "risky" and "dangerous" based on inherent risks that come with some challenges (e.g., "planking" resulting in death/injury from fall). However, it is unclear how this risk is

understood or if it is perceived as such by different groups (e.g., parents, youth, social media organizations). This becomes important when considering what might be the driving factors for engagement in Social Media Challenges for individuals. If not understood as 'risky' people might be more open to engagement in these activities that result in death. The aim of my doctoral research is to explore how different stakeholders construct 'risky' Social Media Challenges, and what the implications of this are on Social Media Challenge participation. The remainder of this section of the case study aims to provide some contextual background information regarding the research process by outlining the methodology and results.

Methodology

Epistemological position

In social constructionism social realities as regarded as created through interactions in specific socio-historical locations (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). Our understanding of the world and our definitions of 'truths,' is the outcome of thoughts, language, and interaction within a particular social, historical, political, and cultural context; it is not grounded in 'evident truths' within an objectively observable reality external to the observer (Burr, 2018; Gergen, 1999; Grenier, 2020). To understand meaning-making, areas of relevance are social interaction and language, which play a part in the construction of shared knowledge (McNamee & Shawver, 2004). Social constructionism disputes the traditional positivist concept of objectivity, whereby it is claimed that researchers can adopt a 'neutral, position' where their values or beliefs do not influence results (Burr, 2015). As such, researcher reflexivity, which involves questioning one's influence on findings (e.g., our identity and values), will be reviewed during the research process (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). One such tool to aid in this will be the use of a journal, in which researcher reflections, impressions, and observations are documented throughout the research process. Such a journal aids in transparency and assist in the acknowledgement of the researcher's role in the development of findings (Ortlipp, 2008).

Keyword selection and data collection

Social Media Challenges are often referred to by various terms. The range of "risky" Social Media Challenges is ever growing. For the purposes of practicality, it became important to specify which Social Media Challenges would be explored in this study. The thesis study initially started with a review of which Social Media Challenges were understood to be the "riskiest" in 2019. On YouTube, there were a total of 214 videos associated with this search-term. Only the 84 videos that were related to SM challenges were randomly selected to be viewed. including news blogs through a google search using the umbrella term "Social Media Challenges" and keywords, "risky" and "dangerous." The

Social Media Challenges that were the most often named as 'risky' or 'dangerous' were selected as the focus of this thesis, in order to narrow down the study for practical reasons. These were: Salt and Ice Challenge, Momo, Blue Whale Challenge, The Choking Game, Tide Pod Challenge, Fire Challenge, and the Cinnamon Challenge.

From there, three different sources were selected to provide various lens' on Social Media Challenges. These were the YouTube comments section, news blogs and articles, and relevant academic literature. Material collected from the public domain cannot be limited to New Zealand since a large amount of this data is arises from international users. Google News was selected as the search engine for the collection of a total of 145 articles or reports. YouTube was the platform selected to randomly gather a total of 4657 comments from 44 videos. This platform did not require a profile (i.e., profile account with personal identification information to access the social media site). Moreover, as material was public, content was more accessible. The academic material included editorials, reviews, and letters to the editor.

Material in languages other than English was excluded for all sources, as was repeated material. Material was only included if they pertained to at least one of the seven search-terms selected. A broad timeframe for inclusion of material (1999 to 2020) was set to be more inclusive for academic material. The material for news blogs/article and YouTube videos were restricted to the following period: June 2013 to December 2019. For source material from YouTube (comments section) given the high number of daily uploads on YouTube and movement towards removing social media challenge videos, videos accepted for inclusion in this study were those that had been uploaded within the past five years (from 2015 to August 2019).

Research design and data analysis

This study utilized a bricolage methodology whereby a reflexive thematic analysis was combined with critical discourse analysis. A bricolage approach is not uncommon, and there have been other studies which have utilized the merging of a thematic analysis with that of discourse analysis (e.g., Botelle & Willott, 2020; Singer & Hunter, 1999) Thematic analysis using a social constructionist epistemological framework is argued, like discourse analysis, to allow for exploration into the arrangements of socially created themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, the discursive patterns of speech or ways of talking about a topic are lost. Discourses are regarded as intimately related to power relationships and as shaping how people can understand an experience (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Wetherell et al., 1987). Critical discourse analysis tools were also utilised in order to allow for a deeper understanding around how the form, structure and content of discourses produces meaning (Grady, 2022; Kogan, 1998).

Each source was initially individually analyzed. This process involved focusing on one source at a time, beginning by reading all the material collected for that source, at least twice. This was following

a thematic analysis framework (familiarization with material, Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, anything that stood out would be recorded in a journal. Then material was then re-read with the focus on common patterns, as well as linguistic characteristics such as sentences, grammar, word choices and metaphors (Grady, 2022). The ways in which the language was used (e.g., indicating an attitude about a group, whose interests were being served, what tone was being conveyed and its impact) were considered during this process and coded. Once codes were created, they were categorized into common initial themes. For each source the process of finalizing themes included the re-reading and collapsing of themes multiple times. Once the themes for each source were finalized, a comparison was made across themes from all sources. Themes were collapsed into one final overarching set of themes incorporating all sources. Here, the aim was not to remove or to reduce material to only what 'fit'. Rather, themes were collapsed into common topics that appeared across the sources (Howitt and Cramer, 2010).

Ethical considerations

This study received approval by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Northern Committee at their meeting held on Monday, 10 June 2019.

Findings

Four primary themes were identified across all sources of material (listed in Table 1). The first theme, the Development of Social Media Challenges incorporates the ways in which people were trying to understand and demonstrate this understanding about different challenges. Often the focus was on basic descriptions of what a challenge was (e.g., game versus meme), how people could take part and where these challenges were believed to originate. Social Media Challenges were portrayed as a phenomenon that was yet to be understood well with contradictions present in descriptions. The theme "development of Social Media Challenges" brings to light this search for understanding of what constitutes Social Media Challenges and their emergence. In the "participation" theme, who was believed to partake and reasons for why is summarized, with medical discourses often being prevalent. The "who" participates in Social Media Challenges appeared to be centralized on youth. However, within the comments section those who claimed to be participators of Social Media Challenges, named themselves as falling within the 'adult' age groups. When discussing participants, this was often negative, as summarized in the theme, "reactions to Social Media Challenges and its participation." The stances of those who were self-identified participants varied – with narratives distancing oneself from Social Media Challenges, or for others attempts to become part of the "in-group." It appears that across all stakeholders, Social Media Challenges were perceived to be risky with various injuries noted in the theme, "Risks of Participation."

Themes	Sub-themes
Development of Social Media Challenges	Descriptors Participation process Popularity and origins
Participation	Participant profile creations Rationalising involvement
Reactions to Social Media Challenges and its participation	Abuse and threats Responsibility and blame Taking action
Risks of participation	Injury or death Wider system involvement

Table 1. Themes developed within the research thesis

The impact of context, i.e., where the material was sourced, impacted strongly on form and content. For example, definitions of what a specific social media challenge was, were less likely to be provided if the comment was within a YouTube comments section, as compared to within a news article or academic piece. Moreover, the style in which they were spoken about was targeted to audiences (e.g., parents in news blogs, versus other researchers in Letters to the Editor). The range of "stakeholders" voices present in the material was vast including casual internet/social media users, social media challenge participants, fans of Social Media Challenges, youth, parents, older adults, educational provider staff, journalists, and academics. The sources of information used provided information writer/creator (e.g., academic at a particular university, or reporter for a particular online news agency). However, there was self-identification present within the material included too "(e.g., 13-year-old boy naming his age, gender, and self as participator in Social Media Challenges within the comments section on YouTube). If taken at face value (given the ability to be whoever one wants online) self-identification comments within the material reflected where the perspectives of material analyzed came from.

Impact on my clinical practice within the Clinical Psychology Internship year

I began an Internship with the Adult Community Mental Health Team in March 2022. Within this setting, I primarily worked with clients in their early adult years, although had a few clients in their late 50s. Clients were predominantly from Asian or Pakeha ethnic backgrounds. Through writing this reflection piece, I have identified two primary parallels or learnings from my research findings that were relevant to my work in clinical practice. First, the importance of acknowledging the power inherent in health professional roles and, second, the importance of engaging in critical analysis in practice.

The impact of the health "professional" role.

At the early stages of my thesis when completing the literature review, I noticed that participants of Social Media Challenges were always 'talked about' in the literature. Their voices – their narratives, were missing from the material itself. Health professionals' views were dominant being described as 'knowledgeable' and as being 'experts. Social media challenge participants often had explicit reasons for engagement dictated, and rarely was their rationale for engagement shared in these publications. Although, health professionals were assumed to be 'knowledgeable', they often presented with gaps in this knowledge base (e.g., challenges referred to as a 'new' phenomenon, despite known evidence of engagement many years ago). The opinion of the health professionals took precedent over the experience of the actual participant, despite participants being the 'experts' on their reasons for engagement.

There have been movements towards more balanced approaches away from traditional health models (e.g., medical model) that alienate and disempower health service users. When considering health institutes, of which a community mental health setting is a part of, power imbalances inherent within the status or title of the health profession role is not a new theme and has a longstanding history. My thesis findings re-highlighted the importance of being mindful of such power imbalances in clinical practice and the silencing of marginalised voices or the mediation of these voices through expert discourses.

This position of authority or power associated with being a professional in the field of Psychology was an area that I struggled with as an Intern. The ability for health staff to hold notes about clients, diagnose, and the general profession related knowledge held by health staff are all forms of power difference (Fors, 2021; Lasswell & Kaplan, 2017). Power differences do not always have to be so prominent. For example, in sessions I sought collaboration by engaging in joint agenda setting, the use of guided discovery, and providing rationales for components of therapy and checking in around client preferences. This collaborative and strengthening stance can aid my therapeutic relationship with clients and empower them. The perception by clients of health professionals as being knowledgeable was also beneficial for client treatment progress. For example, sometimes clients would be open about working outside of their comfort zones (e.g., engaging in behavioral experiments) and that they needed to trusted that the person working with them had appropriate knowledge and expertise. This perception of expertise could allow someone to move towards the changes they desired, and allow for advocacy of a client's needs.

In roles of power, there is a duty to advocate where possible and where appropriate for clients. Within the community mental health team, I was working within, the power differences present and vulnerability of clients was a consistent consideration. It was always aimed to bring the voice of clients into team meetings. In treatment decisions between various team members, even when the client was not present, care was taken to advocate for the client's needs. It was important to ask

whether therapy is something the client was interested in, or if the referral was primarily reflecting the agenda of others (e.g., getting a client support to reduce liability, or allow respite for the caretaker involved). Therefore, the ability to recognize power differences enables one to work to mitigate the adverse impact of power.

Applying a Critical Lens

Applying a critical lens was one of the primary skills I developed within my thesis research process, and a skill that I continue to develop during my internship. It was needed for my thesis when considering theme development, as I needed to move beyond the basic text, while being aware of my assumptions. I needed to explore and create themes from the material gathered, rather than have themes already in mind then seeking confirmation in my data. Similarly, in the clinical practice, I need to hold a hypothesis without allowing it to rigidly dominate my line of interviewing questions in an assessment or therapy session. Ethically, being aware of biases is important within the field of Psychology. I practiced this skill during my thesis process in needing to be mindful of what assumptions I was bringing into my analysis process. As an Intern, I used my supervision sessions to consider my biases and assumptions regarding clients and continuously sought to develop my self-awareness.

The ability to consider text critically, or to go beyond the text was important within my thesis, and allowed me to develop my critical analysis skills. For example, my thesis research involved a focus on 'stakeholders' perceptions (i.e., news bloggers, or reporters, parents, youth, etc.), which were present in the different sources (news pieces, YouTube comments and academic grey material). When considering material from a news piece, often the identity of the writer was solely that of a news reporter. From this, there is an assumption tied in with discourses about news reporters, that there should be an unbiased or 'neutral' view provided. Taking a critical stance on this meant considering what the impact of applying a singular lens on a person's worldview could mean. Specifically, it renders the influence of people's contexts and backgrounds invisible. Identities can be multiple and the roles that people slip into can be vastly different to the primary role prevalent contexts. However, our other roles are always present. For example, within my research, a "news blogger" who had written an article on a specific social media challenge had brought in their various roles, in addition to their journalism lens, for example: his parent role (worried about what their kids might be doing) and "80s" generation adult (perceiving youth as "tech savvy" and engaging in "dumb" challenges).

Critical analysis skills are important in all fields and were a useful skill to develop. Individuals are complex, within health settings there is a risk of clients being reduced to a set of specific problems or a diagnosis. However, clients are more than what they present as within the brief sessions that they attend during their support. My thesis findings reminded me that what we see – just in like from the research process - is a glimpse. As is encouraged within Clinical Psychology, my aim is to take on a

curious stance with clients, and continue to develop their conceptualization across all sessions. Moreover, I needed to apply a critical lens to the material that I was reading – in this case, about the clients. I would look read through notes made available about clients, however, would not necessarily use these to guide interview sessions. A critical lens on clinical notes is important, as current notes might not accurately depict client perceptions, or reflect current standing.

My thesis research was also a reminder that sometimes there can be limited evidence-based information available on a topic and a critical lens needs to be applied when considering quality. This is important in the field of Clinical Psychology where the Scientist Practitioner model is central. It focusses on being knowledgeable in both research and clinical practice, and using evidence-based practice to inform clinical practice. In practice, the therapy modalities selected by myself to work with clients were often those that were deemed the "gold standard" as they had been found to be efficacious for the specific presenting concern(s). However, I would also consider the role of culture. For some of my clients, who came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, I needed to take on a more critical perspective on the efficacy of studies with such populations, particularly when there were limited studies.

Conclusion

Within my research it became clear that medical discourses overpowered that of others. Although, Psychology, like other health profession roles entails relational power dynamics, these can be mitigated through awareness and movement toward session collaboration. Moreover, within the field of Clinical Psychology in particular, we need to keep in mind the importance of the scientist practitioner model. A critical lens is part of this and involves taking literature not just at face value but thinking beyond this.

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