CRUW 2016 Summer Internship Programme
Intern Final Reports

Name: Charitini Pitsiakou
Title of Project: A content analysis of vlogger and audience characteristics and interactions in YouTube vlogs
Supervisors: Dr Chris Fullwood

i) Rationale, aims and objectives
Blogging is one of the most popular online practices of user-generated content and it can be defined as “personal, frequently updated pages with a series of archived posts in reverse chronological order” (Nardi, Schiano & Gumbrecht, 2004). It is usually text-based, although other multimedia can be used (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004). Although blogs seemed to lose popularity over time (Pew Research, 2010), there is an emerging, new type of blogging, mostly in the form of personal visual diaries, videoblogging (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010). Videoblogging, shortened and known as “vlogging”, is a form of blogging which uses video as its medium and usually takes place on the platform of YouTube.com (Gao et al., 2010). It is a widespread and fast increasing practice, especially among the youth. Similarly to text-based blogs, online vlogs also feature a space for audience to leave their comments. Although research exists around blogging, self-presentation, motives, sex differences and more, daily vlogging is a young concept and not much research has been done on it. The aim of this study was to perform an exploratory content analysis to identify different ways in which “vloggers” present themselves online and what parts of their daily lives they choose to showcase, as well as how each gender chooses to do so. The audience types and interactions with these daily documentations were also looked at in the form of the accompanying comments. The contribution of the present study was to increase knowledge on an online practice that lacks relevant research volume and to provide a new scope into the different ways in which individuals express themselves in the online world.

ii) Method
This study employed a content analysis approach as this method is typically used to objectively analyse and interpret a large sample of pre-existing media content. It contained mainly exploratory components given the paucity of research within this area, however many of the codes were informed by existing work within the traditional blogging literature.
Therefore, the codebook used a mixture of a priori and emergent coding, with some of the codes established during the collection of pilot data.

The target population of the study was YouTube videobloggers (vloggers), as well as the comments made by the vloggers’ audience, based on content found on the site after random selection. More specifically, the selection occurred by typing “vlogs” in the YouTube search bar and then choosing “most recent”, as this provided a good variety of results, without only showing with the most viewed videos or the most popular YouTubers. Additionally, a minimum of six months of YouTube activity was required for a vlogger to be included in the sample. A coding form was completed for each participant/vlog according to the codebook’s criteria. Variables found in the coding form included gender, subscriber count, production value, level of interaction with audience, types of comments and more. 200 vlogs were analysed. Data collection occurred after the appropriate receipt of ethical approval.

iii) Findings
Firstly, some frequency statistics were performed to determine which Youtuber characteristics were displayed more frequently across the vlogger sample. These characteristics included gender, video theme, production value, resolution, addressing the audience and featuring another channel. According to the results, the majority of the vloggers appear to produce high resolution videos (95%), while production value tended to remain within the medium category (62.5%). All vloggers address the audience directly (100%), while most of them feature a second or “main channel” within the one analysed (67%). Finally, gender types were varied; males were 15%, females 32.5%, family/couples 40% and family/couples with special circumstances 12.5%. Secondly, a chi-square goodness of fit test was performed to examine the significance of observed frequencies among the categories. The upload schedule and production value observed frequencies appeared significant, with $\chi^2(3)=29.6$, $p=.00$ ($N=40$) and $\chi^2(2)=15.3$, $p=.00$ ($N=40$) respectively.

iv) Planned dissemination activities
My research was mostly experimental and although I feel there are things I wish I could have done differently, I believe that any research on this topic would be a good addition to the scientific community, especially in gaining a better understanding of the YouTube platform. My current plan is to gather more data, and if any interesting findings occur with a bigger sample, I will attempt to publish with my supervisor.

v) Future plans
Cyberpsychology is a growing field with a great amount of possibilities for multidisciplinary research. My future plans include further academic study within the field of psychology, and while I have not yet decided which path I will follow, I am confident that any psychological research I will conduct in the future will recognise and examine the influence that the presence of technology has and will have on any given subject area.

vi) Personal evaluation
I believe that the CRUW summer internship programme has benefited me in many ways. Firstly, coming up and proposing my own research idea and having it selected has given me a lot of self-confidence and helped me understand the value of everything I learned throughout my Psychology degree. Additionally, designing the methodology and all the relevant materials with the guidance of my supervisor, without previous experience in qualitative research, has helped me gain confidence in my own skills and my ability to work independently. Moreover, since I was working on the project from a distance over the summer, this experience also taught me the importance of effective communication with my supervisor for optimal results. Finally, an important part of this programme was recognising my limitations and learning from my mistakes. I am feeling happy that by reflecting on this experience, I can take all the knowledge and skills obtained and apply them to future research endeavours, while hopefully adding valuable research to the scientific community. Finally, I highly recommend this internship to other students, as a great opportunity to learn valuable skills, gain deeper knowledge on both the subject area and different methodologies and, very importantly, as a first step in transitioning from a student to a researcher.

References
i) Rationale, aims and objectives

Revenge porn is the consensual sharing of private images or videos with the intent to embarrass or humiliate the victim. In recent years, many people have fallen victim to this crime, however there is little literature within psychology addressing this area. While being a victim of revenge porn has severe online and offline consequences, there is little research on why people commit the act of revenge porn. The aim of this project was to explore possible links between personality and attitudes towards revenge porn. People’s attitudes, behaviour and cognition to scenarios were measured, as well as their personality (the big five inventory; openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism). In these scenarios, we described the use of private materials being used to humiliate an ex-partner, and these materials could have been acquired in an unknown manner, or could have been previously shared with the perpetrator.

ii) Method

Data were gathered online, using SurveyMonkey. A total of 339 participants took part in the study, (170 males, 169 females). The Big Five Inventory – 10 was used (BFI-10), and 10 scenarios were written up in order to establish people’s attitudes towards revenge porn in both the consensual and non-consensual acquisition of the materials. Participants then rated these scenarios on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), following the ABC-model to investigate the affect, behaviour and cognition towards the scenario.

e.g.  
A: Person A is justified in an action because they are upset  
B: Person A was justified in taking an action because they did not think about their actions.  
C: It is acceptable for person A to want person B to feel embarrassed and hurt.

Participants followed a link to the survey, where they were informed of the study and could give their consent to continue to the survey. They filled out demographic questions, as well
as a personality questionnaire, and this was followed by the ten scenarios. Finally, participants were debriefed.

iii) Findings

It was found that participants showed a negative attitude towards revenge porn, as 99.4% of the scores were below 2.5 on the scale middle point. The difference between the scores on affect and behaviour was not significant, although affect was significantly lower than cognition, as was behaviour. This could suggest that participants have an overall negative attitude towards revenge porn, though this is likely due to negative thoughts about the act of revenge porn than thoughts about the emotion or thoughts linked to it.

When looking at the personality factors, it was found that Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Agreeableness were not significantly correlated to the attitudes, affect, behaviour or cognition scores. However, it was found that the higher people’s neuroticism levels were the more negative their attitude towards revenge porn was. This also included negative feelings (affect), and negative cognition. Behaviour was not significantly related to neuroticism. When a person has high levels of neuroticism, their thoughts about the feelings and cognitions about revenge porn will become more negative, however their thoughts about the behaviour do not change. It was also found that attitudes were significantly more negative when it was noted that the victims had previously shared images with the perpetrator than when the origins of the images were unknown. This could suggest that when images have previously been shared with the perpetrator, people view this as a breach of trust as the victim once trusted the perpetrator to share these images with him/her.

iv) Planned dissemination activities

A research paper has been submitted to the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*. Further to this, the paper will also be discussed at the CRUW conference in April.

v) Future plans

I am currently working with Dr Alison Attrill-Smith and Dr Chris Fullwood on an additional paper in Revenge Porn. The study from the internship has allowed us to build on the research further and there is still so much more to be done in the area. It is still a very new and unexplored area so it is very exciting to be able to work on this further.
vi) Personal evaluation
I would most definitely recommend the internship programme to other students! It was a great way to learn new skills ranging from writing up the ethical proposal, to collecting and analysing data to writing up a paper up to the standards of possible publication. I feel I gained some essential writing skills and that this project honed my ability to do so in a professional and academic manner. The project also made me feel more comfortable to conduct experiments in my PhD, which ultimately benefit my future career. I am also incredibly grateful to Alison, as she is an amazing supervisor who is always willing to work with ideas and offer her opinion in a constructive way. In addition to this, the support and input from all the CRUW members was invaluable, and if someone were to do this internship programme, they can count on having all the support they may possibly need to succeed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Adam Beesley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Project:</td>
<td>Likes and credibility: The role of social capital as a heuristic cue in the acceptance and propagation of conspiracy theories within online social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors:</td>
<td>Dr Lisa Orchard, Dr Niall Galbraith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i) Rationale, aims and objectives
Recent studies have found social capital in the form of greater amounts of likes, shares and comments, may act as a heuristic cue for positive perceptions of source credibility and subsequent sharing behaviour within social networking sites (Koroleva, Stimac, Krasnova & Kunze, 2011; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Alhabash et al, 2013). This may act as potential mechanism in the spread of false and misleading information online. Conspiracy theory groups on social networking sites for example represent closed off groups, with large numbers and little dissenting opinion (Bessi et al, 2015; Lewandowsky, Cook, Oberauer & Marriott, 2013). This allows posts and shared articles from such groups to virally accrue large amounts of social capital, which when shared with non-members by in-group friends, may potentially be viewed as having higher perceived credibility and utility as information to be shared. However, no studies have investigated the potential role of social capital in perceptions of conspiracy theory credibility and propagation within social networking sites. The present study therefore aimed to test whether this potential relationship between social capital and perceptions of conspiracy theory credibility and sharing behaviour existed. It was hypothesised that (1) participants would rate a novel conspiracy theory as being significantly more credible if it had high social capital in a social media post comparative to low social
capital. (2) Participants would have greater intentions to share a conspiracy theory on a social media platform if it had high social capital comparative to low social capital. (3) These effects would remain significant when accounting for the role of potential moderating variables.

ii) Method
The study was online based and utilized a one-way experimental, between subjects design. Participants were recruited via an opportunity based sample, with advertisements for the study placed on the Wolverhampton University SONA participant pool as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit. Recruited participants were randomly allocated to one of three groups and each asked to read a novel conspiracy theory blogpost relating to spurious health risks of high caffeine energy drinks, adapted from a valid fictitious conspiracy theory designed by Swami et al (2011). Group one was primed with an image of a shared Facebook link to the blogpost indicating high levels of social capital. Group two was primed with an image of a shared Facebook link to the blogpost with low social capital. While group three was a control condition which was shown only the blogpost. Participants were then asked to complete a series of measures related to the blogpost’s credibility (Kang, 2010), their likelihood to share (Alhabash et al, 2013) as well personality and cognitive factors found to mediate conspiratorial belief, including agreeableness/openness (John & Srivastava, 1999), distrust of authority (Swami et al, 2010), prior conspiratorial belief (Brotherton, French & Pickering, 2013) and delusional ideation (Peters, Joseph, Day & Garety, 2004).

iii) Findings
An ANCOVA was carried out to test the effect of social capital group on total scores in the perceived credibility measure after controlling for the effect of known extraneous variables: namely scores in measures of agreeableness, openness, distrust of authority, conspiratorial belief and delusional ideation. After adjustment for the stated covariates, no statistically significant variation was found between mean scores in the social capital groups, $F(2, 136) = 2.12, p = 0.12$, partial $\eta^2 = .030$. Overall there was a trend of higher mean credibility scores in the control group comparative to the other groups, with participants also scoring higher in the high social capital group comparative to the low social capital group (see table 1.). However these differences between the groups were not large enough to be statistically significant.
Table 1
ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Credibility Score in Social Capital Group and Covariates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Observed Mean</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Social Capital</td>
<td>25.52</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Social Capital</td>
<td>24.69</td>
<td>24.67</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>28.14</td>
<td>27.65</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>333.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>333.16</td>
<td>6.52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>74.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>74.99</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiratorial Belief</td>
<td>402.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>402.19</td>
<td>7.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delusional Ideation</td>
<td>162.56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>162.56</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust of Authority</td>
<td>139.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>135.91</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital Group</td>
<td>216.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>108.35</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>6943.66</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>51.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8952.43</td>
<td>143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R² = .22, Adj. R² = .18.

* = p < 0.05

Due to a violation of the ANCOVA assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, the sharing intentions DV was analysed via a Kruskal-Wallis H Test in order to determine if there were differences in sharing intention score between the low, high and control social capital conditions. The mean rank of sharing intentions scores was not statistically different between groups χ²(2) = 4.05, p = .132. Indicating social capital did not have an impact on sharing intentions.

Overall these findings suggest social capital does not play a part in individual perceptions of novel conspiratorial information online. There are a number of potential explanations for this finding. For example previous studies which have investigated the role of social capital as a heuristic cue for information credibility have focussed on perceptions of neutral information (i.e. Koroleva, Stimac, Krasnova & Kunze, 2011; Alhabash et al, 2013). It is possible therefore that the controversial nature of the presented conspiracy theory reduced
participants utilisation of social capital as a heuristic. Metzger, Flanagin & Medders (2010) for example found the extent to which information online conformed to participants own prior opinion and attitudes to be an important factor when assessing credibility. Therefore as the study directly recruited students, a population found to regularly consume high caffeine energy drinks (Norton, Lazev & Sullivan, 2011), it is possible that their appraisal of the caffeine drink based conspiracy theory was more sceptical as a result. Also Koroleva et al. (2011) hypothesise that social capital is utilised more as a heuristic cue in instances of information overload (i.e. when an individual has too many items in their news feed to properly evaluate each item), with level of affiliation with the sharer also playing an important role, which are potential factors the present study did not account for. Other studies have also tested this effect with more naturalistic methods, Koroleva and colleagues for example utilised a Facebook application to manipulate posts from participant’s actual news feeds. While Messing and Westwood (2014) asked participants to appraise manipulated news articles within a web interface similar to Facebook. It is possible therefore that merely displaying an image of a Facebook post, lacks the ecological validity required to properly assess the effect of social capital.

iv) Planned dissemination activities
I plan on presenting my findings at the 2017 Wolverhampton University CRUW conference. I am also planning on enquiring as to the potential for publication within a research journal. Although my findings did not support the stated hypotheses it's evident from recent events that understanding how “fake news” and conspiratorial belief spread online is currently a matter of increased interest to both the public and researchers. Therefore I believe the study’s finding that social capital may not lead to more favourable perceptions of source credibility and sharing intentions may potentially be of interest to research publishers. It is certainly an area of research deserving of further study.

v) Future plans
Due to the present study being the first to directly investigate the potential effect of social capital on perceptions of false and conspiratorial information online, its findings may be considered as exploratory in many respects. As previously discussed there are a number of refinements which could be made to the study’s methodology in order to improve the generalisability of its findings and test further factors which may moderate the effect of social capital on perceptions of false information credibility and sharing behaviour. For example I would be very interested in carrying out a similar study, utilising methods which more closely resemble real-life social networking site interfaces, as well as investigating the potential role
of sharer affiliation and information load. It would also be interesting to investigate individual's attitudes toward news consumed through social media compared with other sources. The tendency toward higher scores of perceived credibility in the control condition may be indicative at least within this student weighted sample of a general distrust of online news shared through social media, which would certainly be an understandable phenomena in light of recent events such as the controversies surrounding the 2016 US Presidential election.

vi) Personal evaluation
I have found the CRUW summer internship to be a very rewarding experience which I would wholeheartedly recommend to other students. Through completing the internship I have gained skills and experience which will be invaluable as I progress through my postgraduate studies. For example the internship has provided me with first-hand experience of supervision and ethical review at a more involved and technical level than I experienced when completing my dissertation. This has already been of great use to me in my Masters study, it has allowed me to more effectively utilize supervision for my thesis project as well as have a better understanding of how to write an effective ethics application which stands to greater scrutiny comparative to my experience at undergraduate level. The invitation to monthly CRUW meetings has also been very useful. Learning about other CRUW member’s current cyberpsychology projects and successes has been very interesting, while discussions in meetings on topics related research publication, conference presentations and funding have been very insightful. I expect too that the opportunity to present my findings at the 2017 CRUW conference will be particularly rewarding, as it will provide me with first-hand experience in presenting research findings to experts and peers, which as I progress through my postgraduate study will be invaluable experience to have. Above all else it has been especially rewarding to be given opportunity to conduct and gain experience in cyberpsychology research. It is a field that will only grow in relevance, as our daily lives become ever more involved with technology and internet mediated communication. To have even a limited grounding within this field at such an early point in my academic career, is something I am very grateful for.

References:


