

Context Description

All my life I have been interested in firearms and how they work. From a young age, my parents taught me the great power that comes with operating a firearm. As I grew older, my interest in firearms only grew, but so did my understanding of the responsibilities and problems that they created. I started watching “GunTuber” videos within the last few years. I have frequently visited multiple channels such as Kentucky Ballistics, Demolition Ranch, and Garand Thumb. In each of these channels, the guns were always interesting and the visuals were always stunning. However, these visuals are the same thing that got me thinking about the way these videos interact in the world that we live in. I grew up in a small town in East Texas that had less than 1000 people enrolled from k-12. In my graduating class there were only 47 students. Even in such a small school, we unfortunately were a part of a school shooting threat. Between 2018 and 2022 (the years in which I was enrolled in Shelbyville High school), there were 372 reported school shootings in the U.S. where at least one person was injured or killed. Regardless of any background or upbringing, the people that have any involvement in the education system, students, parents, teachers, administrators, campus police forces, etc., mass shootings have affected all of us. Along with the threats of mass shootings people in the United States face, we are also caught in the middle of a very polarizing political state. With the protests in Minneapolis and the increasing outrage with ICE and other political disagreements, Garand Thumb’s “How To” videos on his channel draw attention to the thin line that separates us from a full on Civil war. I believe that this project is important because it allows a deep dive into the inner workings of the gunTuber Garand Thumb and will show how his channel interacts with the world. In this paper, I plan to discuss what my RO is, who runs the channel, his background etc, then I explain what ballistic gel targets

are, followed by information on school/mass shooting and gun violence, violence in video games, gun culture and the different types of gun owners, then the ICE raids and public backlash to political overstep, finally ending with additional terminology and gun lingo.

What is my RO?

My RO is a YouTube Channel named Garand Thumb. Garand Thumb is run by Mike Jones, a former U.S. Air Force veteran. Jones enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after high school, serving as a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) specialist and later as a SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape) instructor. (The City Celebrity) He gained popularity through his YouTube channel, where he shares content on firearms, military tactics, and tactical training. Mike Jones has been active in the firearms community since retiring from the military in 2011, and his channel has garnered millions of subscribers due to his engaging and informative content. (WikiBiography) . I will focus on two different types of content the channel provides. The first are videos that include the use of human shaped ballistic gel. The second are videos that include military training and “how to survive” videos.

Garand Thumb’s channel is not only for people with no experience with firearms. Even though I, as a person with a decent knowledge and know how about guns, can still learn more information about firearms from watching these videos. The reason this channel can be interesting for both people who are just now looking to explore the world of firearms and people who have an extensive knowledge about them is that the channel experiments with firearms that some might not have the ability to use. If a person with no gun knowledge finds his page looking for information about firearms, they are able to get this knowledge before buying a gun. Same goes for the knowledgeable gun owner looking to add to their collection.

Human Ballistics Gel

The use of targets has been around since the use of ranged weapons. The first instances of targets come from the 1300s where archers would show their skills with the bow and arrow. Throughout the years, many different types of targets were created. Many of the targets were used in competition in which the different rings of the target procured different amounts of points for the shooter. The earliest recorded shooting match was one held in Eichstätt, Bavaria, in 1477(Britannica) As technology progressed, the use of paper targets became the norm. While we still use the standard “Bullseye” targets, the use of paper targets began to morph into any kind of picture. In 1917, British military officer C.D. Tracy published his concept of a design for a realistic humanoid target in his book, “The Service Revolver and How to Use It” (KRtraining) this design was the first use of a human shaped target. It eventually was shaped into the “B-21” target. This target has different scoring values according to the lethality of the shot. The B-21 target became the standard in military and police training until the 1960s and can still be used by gun enthusiasts today.

Ballistic gel targets were created in the late 20th century by Martin Fackler. Ballistic gelatin closely simulates the density and viscosity of human and animal muscle tissue, and is used as a standardized medium for testing the terminal performance of firearms ammunition.(Wikipedia) Realistic Human Ballistic gel targets use lifelike bones and organs to simulate the effects of different ammunition on the human body. There have been multiple instances of human ballistic gel use in television shows such as Mythbusters and Forged in Fire.

School/Mass Shootings

The first mass shooting in the United States occurred on September 6, 1949, when Howard Unruh killed 13 people in Camden, New Jersey. (Smithsonian) The first modern school shooting is considered to be the 1979 shooting at Grover Cleveland Elementary in Cleveland, Ohio.(The Lineup) In 2025 alone there were 510 mass shootings(Rockefeller Institute of Government) and 231 instances of gun violence at schools in the United States. (Omnilert) Along with mass shootings, our country has had multiple assassinations and assassination attempts in the past few years. Examples include the killing of Charlie Kirk in September of 2025 and President Trump's assassination attempts in July of 2024 and September of the same year. Something to note about the assassination attempt on President Trump in July of 2024, the shooter was found wearing a Demolition Ranch T-shirt. Demolition Ranch is another popular GunTuber who does similar videos as Garand Thumb.

Video games and Violence

A key part of my studies will be around violent video games and its effect on how people view guns. During many times in my life, I have heard about how detrimental the violent video games were to the youth. These claims that violent video games made me self reflect on the media that I consume. The claim that video games make children more aggressive or violent has been contested in recent times. An American Psychological Association (APA) study showed that there was little correlation that violent video games made the people who played them more violent. (APA) However, articles such as *Violent Video Games, Mass Shootings, and the Supreme Court: Lessons for the Legal Community in the Wake of Recent Free Speech Cases and Mass Shootings*

by Christopher J. Ferguson have findings saying the opposite. I believe that the connection between violent video games and the videos on Garand Thumb's channel are not very different. I believe that the visuals and "POV" type content are very similar in effect. By showing the point of view of the shooter and not the target, I think that this kind of content could be interesting to explore in my paper.

Gun Culture

As someone who has grown up around firearms, I know a thing or two about guns. Gun culture in the U.S has a long and deep history. As a country that fought for its freedom in the Revolutionary War, the United States has had a deep connection with firearms. The Second Amendment states that we as United States Citizens have the right to keep and bear arms. Many people in my life use firearms to hunt animals to put food on our tables. I myself own multiple firearms including a 30-06 caliber rifle for deer hunting, a 22. caliber rifle for varmints and a 9mm pistol for self defense. There are many different types of gun owners. The first type of gun owner is the hunters. These are the people who use firearms to hunt and harvest animals for food or recreation. Research suggests that approximately 28-35% of American gun owners use their firearms for hunting purposes. (The Gun Zone) The most common type of firearm for hunters are rifles. Calibers such as the .270 and the .30-06 are very popular for big game hunters to use on their hunts. (Texas Game and Wildlife) The videos from Garand Thumb can be popular with hunters by showing what different caliber guns do to flesh in order to determine which firearm to use.

The second group of gun owners use their firearms as a mode of self defense. According to a research from Pew Research center, 72% of U.S. gun owners say protection is a major reason

they own a gun.(PEW Research) These people primarily use handguns for their self defense. Many GunTubers including Garand Thumb's channel have multiple videos covering the "Best gun for self defense." Garand Thumb's channel would be interesting to many first time gun owners looking for a self defense firearm due to the showing of the effectiveness of different calibers, ease of use of different brands of firearms, and use of different ammo types, such as hollow points and deep penetrator or armor piercing rounds.

There is a subgroup of people that call themselves Preppers. These people try to stockpile materials and develop plans for possible catastrophic disasters or emergencies, usually by stockpiling food, ammunition, and other supplies. (True Prepper) These kinds of people are afraid that there is a danger of societal collapse or something of that nature will happen that they need to be prepared for. These types of people can seem excessive or over the top in their desire to be prepared, oftentimes over stockpiling weapons and ammunition. The videos on Garand Thumb's channel play towards this kind of mindset with his military how-to survival videos. The rhetoric of needing to be prepared for a military takeover aligns with a preppers point of view in the world.

These different types of gun owners do not exist in and of themselves. Many people like myself own different firearms for different reasons. The reason Garand Thumb is so popular is that it gives content to all kinds of gun owners looking to add to their arsenal.

ICE Raids and Public Outlash

One of the main reasons why I wanted to do this project is due to the political turmoil that is happening in Minneapolis. With the death of Alex Pretti at the hands of ICE agents due to his

firearm ownership, it brings to question, is the right to own and carry a firearm at stake in this political state we are in? The possibility of a civil war or insurrection that could stem from this outrage is visible. Garand Thumb's "How to survive a military occupation" videos come to mind when seeing this kind of political turmoil in the U.S. The fact that these protests are happening in Minneapolis brings back visions of the 2020 protests surrounding George Floyd and Kyle Rittenhouse's actions during that time.

Additional Terminology/ Gun Lingo

Throughout this Context Description paper, I have used certain terminology that could be difficult to understand without prior knowledge. I will explain some of the terminology here

Caliber refers to the internal diameter of a gun's barrel and therefore the size of projectile fired. It is usually measured in either inches like .22 or .45 or millimeters like 9mm or 7.62mm. For example, a .22 caliber round is .22 inches in diameter. The 9 mm is 9 millimeters in diameter. (Gunline Shooting) Rounds such as the 30-06 get their name from their caliber and year they were created. The 30-06 is simply a .30 caliber bullet adopted in 1906. Another way they classify rounds is by powder strength. The Winchester 30-30 is a .30 inch caliber round filled with 30 grains of gunpowder.

Grains are a unit of measurement used to determine the weight of a bullet or amount of gunpowder in a round. A singular grain is 1/7000 of a pound. Grains are used to specify how heavy the actual projectile is, not the full round. Grains are important to gun owners due to the stark differences in performance, recoil, and overall skill of the shooter. (Shooters Log)

Wound Channel is something that is referred to in many of Garand Thumb's videos. This term refers to the path of damaged tissue a bullet creates as it travels through a target. It is used in

ballistics as well as forensic studies. Because Garand Thumb's videos show the damage a round does to a human body, he refers to a wound channel when describing how well a projectile performs in his tests. These different classifications can be very difficult to understand, especially when someone does not explain what they are. GunTubers such as Garand Thumb talk as if the viewer knows what they mean without explaining.

Conclusion

My research object intersects with many different communicative objects we can find in our world. I think that the intersection with Gun violence and the Minneapolis protests are an interesting tie to the information to my RO that will allow me to explore topics in the future. I also think that the history of targets and gun culture is pertinent to my project in how it gives context to what the visuals of these videos show. I think that the reader needs this information to understand what is going on in the videos of Garand Thumb. I also think that knowing that the person who runs Garand Thumb is ex-military gives context to why he is so interested in gun culture and how he gained his knowledge in military tactics. The information on mass shootings and gun violence is also included due to the fact that I am studying gun culture and GunTubers. I want to show that there is an epidemic of gun violence in the United States. Some questions that I want to answer while completing this project are, how do the visuals of violence play to different people? What types of gun owners enjoy these videos?

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