

# Prospectus

## Introduction

My project will closely analyse how the YouTube channel Garand Thumb operates in the world. I will look closely at the way Garand Thumb interpellates its viewers, explore the ways his content intersects with the United States long history of gun violence, and analyze how he expresses his view of the world and politics through his videos. I want to answer the questions: How does this content hail its consumer? How does his content create a conversation around gun and gun violence? And how is this content contributing to the political state of the world? To do this, I will be closely analysing two distinct kinds of videos on his channel. The first type are videos that show the use of human shaped ballistic gel targets that he uses to test his firearms. These videos include slow-mo shots of targets with lifelike human anatomy being fired upon by multiple different weapons. In these videos, Mike Jones, the creator of Garand Thumb, tests different firearms and types of ammunition on human-like targets in order to inform the public on the effectiveness of these certain weapons. I want to use literature surrounding violent video games to further explore the glorification and fetishization of violence. This literature will help me understand how the “point of view” of the shooter instead of the one being shot is an important if not concerning aspect of this content. The second type of content I will be analyzing are videos that show how to survive in a possible collapse of society or foreign military occupation. In these videos, Jones uses his knowledge he has from prior military experience to teach the viewer how to survive and fight back against potential enemies. He has multiple videos explaining how to survive in different

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environments such as mountains, winter/ cold environment, and urban settings. Each of these videos brings a new set of information on how to defend and fight back against enemy combatants. I want to focus my literature on sources that explore radicalization and publics and counterpublics. I would like to understand what kind of people he and the audience imagine are their “combatants” and how he tries to shape that through his rhetoric.

## **Lit Review**

### Video Games

There have been countless studies exploring the idea that video games make people violent. Most studies focus on children and teens and their behavior after playing video games. There has been a large debate surrounding the findings of these studies. While I have seen some articles that say that violent video games have a definite increase of violent behavior in the children that play them, the majority say that these findings are full of bias and misconceptions. Scholarly articles such as “The Effects of Reward and Punishment in Violent Video Games on Aggressive Affect, Cognition, and Behavior.”(Carnagey), and “Violent Video Games Do Contribute to Aggression.”(Scharrer) say with absolute certainty that violent video games have a direct correlation with children and violence. However, literature such as “How Violent Video Games Really Affect Kids.” (Toppo), “Video Games and Adolescent Fighting.”(Ward), “Do Stereotypic Images in Video Games Affect Attitudes and Behavior? Adolescent Perspectives.” (Henning et. al) and “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” (Ferguson) say that

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data that these studies conduct can be skewed by different variables. These variables include age, gender, and predisposition to violence before video games such as upbringing. I was particularly interested in the article “Retaliatory Aggression and the Effects of Point of View and Blood in Violent Video Games” (Kremar & Farrar). In this article, they found that third person video games resulted in increased aggressive behavior in children rather than first person shooters. While they also say that the results can be skewed, they noticed a distinct difference in the two POVs. They concluded that because the player could see the entire body of the character of the video game, the player was more immersed in the game and that resulted in an increase of violent thoughts. They, like many of the other authors, do mention that there is no long term statistics that show a direct correlation with violence and video games. These findings are very interesting when thinking about the media we consume. If there is no direct correlation to violent actions as so many of these authors say, then why do we continue to consume media and play video games such as these? The chapter “Playing out Identities and Emotions.” In *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, The author explores how video games can be a way of expression for many children. These games allow children to express themselves in ways they are not able to in the real world. Whether it is customizing characters with muscles and wild clothing to letting frustrations out on bad guys, video games are a healthy outlet for personal ideas. The idea that video games allow for self expression and finding an identity is also backed up with the article “The Ideal Self at Play: The Appeal of Video Games That Let You Be All You Can Be.” Both of these authors explain how video games can be an outlet for children to express themselves in constructive ways without having real world consequences.

These scholars are relevant to my project because of the connection of seeing and imagining conducting violence. In the videos on Garand Thumb’s channel, the viewers are shown

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examples of what to do if they are in a situation where they have to use a firearm against a person. They can imagine themselves in a situation where they are acting how Jones would react without acting on that imagined scenario. The viewers of this content can find their identity of being a gun owner without having to ever use the firearm in the way Garand Thumb shows it. It allows people who are interested in guns to have an outlet to their possible fears of gun ownership and the responsibilities that come with it. These videos are able to show what could happen in certain situations without putting the viewer in that specific situation. From the literature that I found, I can conclude that watching these types of videos does not concretely increase the use of firearms against other human beings, but opens a dialogue for people curious about firearms.

## Interpellation

Louis Althusser was the person who coined the term interpellation. Interpellation refers to the process by which individuals are “hailed” by dominant ideologies. It is used in many different aspects of our lives. Companies interpellate their target audience with advertisements that are suited for people with specific views and ideologies. Content creators hail their viewers with language and images that connect with the viewers ideas and desires. Articles such as “Exploring Althusser’s theory of interpellation in advertising” by Darina I . Savova explores how Althusser’s theory can be found in advertising and how showing people overly pleasant or unpleasant images or using language can have an effect on consumers and how they view products. This can be directly seen in the gun industry through marketing to impressionable and vulnerable people. Articles such as “Bugging Out: Apocalyptic Masculinity and Disaster Consumerism in Offgrid Magazine” (Belmont, Stroud) and “The Marketing of Guns to Women: Factors Influencing Gun-

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Related Attitudes and Gun Ownership by Women” (Blair, Hyatt) show how gun advertisements are using people's fear to drive sales of guns. Both of these articles are unique in the way they approach the people who are being interpellated. While in “Bugging Out” the authors focus on the hailing of men with the sense of masculinity and power, “The Marketing of Guns to Women” shows how gun advertisements towards women play on protection and safety.

I will be using interpellation extensively throughout my project. I want to understand how Garand Thumb reaches his audience and how his audience responds to his content. How does Garand Thumb hail to his viewers and why do the viewers respond to this hailing? Garand Thumb’s channel is projected towards people who are interested in firearms, but may not have the ability to try them out for themselves. In his Ballistic gel target videos, he gives clear insight to how firearms perform and how effective they can be at killing people. This calls to the people who are interested in self-defense and ballistic sciences. He shows what exactly a firearm will do when faced against another person. He hails to the people who are interested in these statistics that do not have the ability to test these firearms themselves. As for the paramilitary training videos, he interpellates the viewer who has fears of societal collapse, whether from a foreign military or governmental overreach, and gives them information to staunch their quench for reassurance in the thought of survival. Examples of this can be seen in the prepper community as well. Garand Thumb understands the fears that people have about untrustworthy government and foreign nations and cashes in on that fear with these videos.

Public and Counterpublics

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Michael Warner is the founder of the term Publics and Counterpublics. Warner describes a Public as a self-organized space that is created by being addressed (Publics and Counterpublics, Warner). Counterpublics are the people who do not get addressed and are left out of the publics. They create counterpublics in response to publics. Gun influencers have been a part of a major counterpublic on social media since Comcast decided to stop gun and ammunition advertisements in 2013 (USA Today). Since gun advertisements can not become a part of the public of mainstream media, they have to create their own space for discourse through other means. Articles such as “Characteristics of Gun Advertisements on Social Media: Systematic Search and Content Analysis of Twitter and YouTube Posts” (Jordan) show how the use of these counterpublics fights against the television ban by using social media as a platform for their gun advertisements. I find parallels between gun and tobacco advertisements. In articles such as “Is "YouTube" telling or selling you something? Tobacco content on the YouTube video-sharing website” (Freeman, Chapman) the authors write about how tobacco products found their way into popular YouTube videos once the ban of tobacco advertisements on mainstream media.

I find the same instance happening here with Garand Thumb. The counterpublic that is created by the absence of content on mainstream media arises on social media instead. Garand Thumb along with other gun content creators create a counterpublic to spread information around firearms. Garand Thumb also creates a public that includes people who are in the prepper community through his paramilitary survival tactics videos. In this public, he creates a space for discourse around survival in apocalyptic-type events. The creation of these publics and counterpublics is key to my project because it allows me to think about the people these videos are created for. Like I mentioned in my previous paragraphs about interpellation, learning about who these videos are made for and how they are calling them is crucial to understanding why Garand

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Thumb makes these videos. This project is about understanding the public and counterpublic these videos create and exist in.

## **Methodology**

I plan to do a close visual analysis of four videos. Two videos that include the use of Ballistic Gel targets, and two videos about the paramilitary survival tactics. I may reference more than these four videos throughout my paper, but I will focus my analysis on these four. While analyzing these videos, I will keep my focus on who these videos are for, what kind of people Garand Thumb is calling to in these videos, and how these videos intersect within his channel. I am curious to see if the same people who are being hailed in the ballistic gel videos will be different than those who are being hailed in the survival tactics videos. I will also explore the comment sections in these videos to see what kind of interaction there is between Garand Thumb and his viewers as well as between viewers themselves. I also want to explore the imaginary world that Garand Thumb creates when he makes his content. I will focus on his rhetoric in his videos about the use of firearms and why he uses certain weapons and techniques. I will show how through his language about being a responsible gun owner, being prepared to defend yourself, and staying prepared for an apocalyptic event, Garand Thumb hails his audience towards a gun culture counterpublic.

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