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## Young male drivers' perceptions of and experiences with YouTube videos of risky driving behaviours

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** YouTube features millions of videos of high risk driving behaviours and negative consequences of high risk driving (“fails”), such as injuries or deaths. Unfortunately, no information is available on YouTube viewership of these types of sites or on the effects of these videos on viewers. The purpose of this study was to examine young male drivers' perceptions of and experiences with YouTube videos of risky driving behaviours. **Methods:** Using an exploratory qualitative descriptive approach, three 2-hour focus groups were conducted with young men 18–30 years of age to determine: (i) if they watch and share YouTube videos, including high risk driving videos; (ii) what effects high risk driving videos have on them and others and whether YouTube videos of negative consequences discourage high risk driving.

**Results:** Participants indicated three uses for YouTube; it has replaced television watching and provides entertainment and information. Motivations of both risky drivers in videos and viewers to engage in high risk driving activities included person characteristics (e.g., sensation seeking and responsivity to financial rewards for high view count videos) and socio-environmental factors (e.g., peer pressure). Most indicated that they would not try to imitate the risky behaviours exhibited in videos, although a few had tried to copy some risky driving moves from videos.

**Conclusions:** Social, not mass media is now the common information and entertainment source for young people. YouTube videos of high risk driving are common and ubiquitous. Findings from these focus groups suggest that viewers could influence subsequent content of social media videos and reciprocally, videos could influence behaviours of some viewers, particularly young male viewers.

### 1. Introduction

Street racing and on-road stunt driving are high risk behaviours and are of documented concern to the general public (Palk et al., 2011; Vanlaar et al., 2008). This concern is warranted; these behaviours are associated with increased risk of collisions, injuries, and fatalities (Knight et al., 2004; Leal and Watson, 2011; Vingilis and Smart, 2009; Wickens et al., 2017). Stunt driving includes activities, such as: drifting (causing some or all tires to lose traction with the road surface while turning); burnouts/doughnuts (spinning tires or causing a vehicle to circle); wheelies (lifting some or all tires from the road surface) and ghost riding (driving while the driver is not sitting in the driver's seat

(Highway Traffic Act, 2009). These behaviours have also generated much mass media attention (Daigle et al., 2014; Palk et al., 2011). For example, during February 2017 to Aug 2017 alone, numerous mass media stories have reported on street racing and stunt driving activities, just from the Greater Toronto Region, Canada (e.g., Khalil, 2017; Miller, 2017; News Staff, 2017; Patton, 2017; Pelley, 2017; Shum, 2017; Wilson and Freeman, 2017). Despite the prevalence of these media documented high risk activities, research on street racing and stunt driving is extremely limited (Vingilis and Smart, 2009).

Moreover, mass media examples of street racing and stunt driving are just cursory examples when examining what is available on social media. Using the key words “street racing” or “stunt driving” delivers

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millions of videos. For example, as of June 21, 2017, “street racing” yielded about 20,300,000 results on the Google video website that includes all videos (YouTube, vimeo, etc.) (accessed in London, Ontario). Of the first 10-featured YouTube street racing videos, all depicted street racing on public roads, often among traffic. Key words, “stunt driving”, produced 1,750,000 results. The top ten videos showed stunt driving with seemingly professional stunt drivers on private tracks, but also non-professional drivers on public roads and some “how-to” videos. YouTube also features videos of negative consequences of high risk driving (“fails”), such as traffic offences or collisions causing property damage, injuries or deaths. For example, for “street racing deaths”, 113,000 results were shown (as of June 21, 2017), a number of which were media or police video posts. Currently no published research has been found on the effects of these videos on viewers (Vingilis et al., 2017).

Thus far, media research on risky driving has been on mass media, not social media (Vingilis et al., 2017). Experimental, correlational and longitudinal mass media research has found that exposure to mass media that glorifies risky driving is associated with risky driving behavioural intentions or behaviours (Beullens and Van den Bulck, 2008; Beullens et al., 2008, 2010, 2011; Deng et al., 2015; Fischer et al., 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012; Huesmann and Taylor, 2006; Hull et al., 2012; Vingilis et al., 2013a). However, the applicability of mass media findings to social media is not currently known. The limited research on mass and social media effects has found that mass and social media have differing roles and influences on viewers (Cheng et al., 2016).

Mass media communication represents a one-way path of a message typically from a professional source through a medium (e.g. radio, television, newspaper) to an essentially passive and anonymous audience (receiver) (Bandura, 2001; Budd and Ruben, 1988; Vingilis and Coultes, 1990). Although mass media, such as video games, are not passive because they actively involve the audience, the audience does not typically produce the message. That is, the audience is not the source of the message. Social networking technologies have shifted the media paradigm in “democratizing” media; now people can be the source of the message because they can create their own content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In addition they can be more socially interactive with other people’s content through posting “likes” or “dislikes” as well as comments (Khan and Vong, 2014). Hence, “social” media has become an important tool for communication (Khan and Vong, 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011). This shift in media engagement is especially apparent with video media (Google, 2012). YouTube was launched in 2005 and purchased by Google in 2006 (Ahern et al., 2015); by 2006, YouTube was logging 100 million videos daily (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009). YouTube has over a billion users monthly, almost one third of all people on the internet (YouTube, 2017a,b,c). YouTube reaches more 18–49 year olds in the U.S. than any TV network (YouTube, 2017a,b,c). Youth watch more digital video than TV (McAlone, 2017). Moreover, the heaviest users of YouTube are young men (Nielsen, 2011; Nielson, 2014).

Young men are also the most dangerous group in traffic, engaging in more per capita violations and experiencing more per capita injuries and fatalities than older cohorts and females (e.g., Parker et al., 1995; Reason et al., 1990; Transport Canada, 2008, 2015). Thus, the cohort most likely to engage in risky driving, is also the one most likely to use YouTube (Vingilis et al., 2017). Despite the fact that young men are the heaviest users of YouTube and the most dangerous on the roads, no research has been conducted to examine the effects of risky driving YouTube videos on young men. So far, only content analyses of YouTube videos of other high risk behaviours, such as alcohol intoxication, non-suicidal self-injury, fire setting, and use of a hallucinogenic drug (salvia divinorum), have been found. These findings have suggested that YouTube videos could be normalizing high risk behaviours and influencing behaviours, particularly of youth (Ahern et al., 2015; Lange et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2011; Primack et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2012; Vingilis et al., 2017). However, as Lewis et al. (2012) stated:

“Examining the video content alone is insufficient to understand the potential impact of the videos. It is important to investigate viewer responses to these videos” (p.380-1).

The purpose of our study was to examine viewer responses, that is, young male drivers’ perceptions of and experiences with YouTube videos of risky driving behaviours. Specifically, we conducted focus groups with young men to determine: (i) if they watch and share YouTube videos, in particular driving-related videos, and (ii) their perceptions on what effects high risk driving videos have on them and potentially on others and whether YouTube videos depicting negative consequences (violations, collisions, injuries) could discourage high risk driving.

Focus groups are a particularly useful exploratory research methodology to conduct an initial examination of a topic about which little is known (Adler and Rottunda, 2006; Morgan, 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Vaughn et al., 1996), “as well as in studies with the purpose of learning about the interviewees reasoning, opinion, understanding, etc. of the research topic” (Møller, 2004, p. 1086). An additional advantage of focus groups over other data collection techniques is the interaction among group members that fosters exploration and clarification of group members’ views which are less accessible in individual interviews (Carey, 1995; Carey and Smith, 1994; Kidd and Parshall, 2000; Morgan, 1988; Rothwell, 2010).

Focus group methodology has sometimes been used in road safety research; focus groups have been conducted with a wide variety of groups including cross-cultural groups, as well as older adults and young drivers (e.g., Adler and Rottunda, 2006; Beck et al., 1991; Basch et al., 1989; Møller, 2004; Rivers et al., 1996; Winter et al., 2011; Yassuda et al., 1997; Zhang et al., 2006). For example, Zhang et al. (2006) conducted three focus groups with 18 experienced drivers in China that were replicated in Boston, to identify similarities and differences in perceptions and behaviours regarding road safety between the two locales. Adler and Rottunda (2006) conducted three focus groups, comprised of three to five older adults in each group who had discontinued driving within the past two years, “to better understand issues and behaviors about driving cessation and to identify ideas for programs and policies that could help ease the transition to a non-driving status.” (p. 228). A sample of 29 young drivers were examined through four focus groups to explore the relationship between lifestyle and driving behaviour (Møller, 2004). The findings suggested that young drivers’ driving behaviour was affected by personal motives of attention seeking, status, control and mobility which were not necessarily congruent with safe driving (Møller, 2004). However, to date no research has been found on young male drivers’ perceptions of and experiences with YouTube videos of risky driving behaviours.

## 2. Methods

A descriptive narrative qualitative research design is considered appropriate for such exploratory research (Sandelowski, 2000; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). As Sandelowski stated “Qualitative descriptive studies are arguably the least “theoretical” of the spectrum of qualitative approaches, in that researchers conducting such studies are the least encumbered by pre-existing theoretical and philosophical commitments” (p.337). Qualitative descriptive questions focus on people’s responses (e.g., thoughts, feelings, attitudes) to and concerns about an event (Sandelowski, 2000).

### 2.1. Study population and sampling

Homogeneity of focus group participants has been shown to increase the scope and diversity of focus group discussion (Morgan, 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Vaughn et al., 1996). Hence, potential participants were selected on pre-determined characteristics of same-sex (men), age (18–30), valid driver’s licence, living in focus group region and YouTube viewing. Potential participants were recruited

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