‘YOU DRINK!’ ON YOUTUBE: EVALUATING OLDER ADOLESCENT ENGAGEMENT WITH USER-GENERATED SUBSTANCE USE MEDIA CONTENT ONLINE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture & Technology.

By

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Washington, DC
May 1, 2013
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ABSTRACT

During the adolescent transition from high school and college, alcohol media messages are frequently seen by this population and can be influential towards alcohol use. New media platforms such as YouTube allow for user-generated content to circulate among this population. User-generated content is likely influential on adolescent behaviors due to the ‘authenticity’ and peer influence embodied in the media content. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how alcohol use among college students is depicted in user-generated content on YouTube, and how do college students engage with this content.

This study used a mixed-methods approach, through both a content analysis of YouTube content depicting alcohol consumption in college settings, and interviews with college students. The content analysis portion of this research found overwhelmingly positive depictions of alcohol use. The interview portion found that students who engaged with media content depicting alcohol consumption in college settings had more positive attitudes and higher intentions towards alcohol use, and were more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last month.

Adolescents are active on YouTube and both seek and share content depicting alcohol use online. With active YouTube users and positive outcomes depicted in YouTube content displaying alcohol consumption on college campuses, it is likely that the attitudes, intentions and behaviors of viewers of this content are influenced by these displayed norms.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“For all of the attention paid to "digital natives" it's important to realize that most teens are engaging with social media without any deep understanding of the underlying dynamics or structure. Just because they understand how to use the technology doesn't mean that they understand the information ecology that surrounds it. Most teens don't have the scaffolding for thinking about their information practices.

It's critical to realize that just because young folks pick up a technology before you do doesn't inherently mean that they understand it better than you do. Or that they have a way of putting it into context. What they're doing is not inherently more sophisticated – it's simply different. They're coming of age in a culture where these structures are just a given. They take them for granted. And they repurpose them to meet their needs. But they don't necessarily think about them.”

– danah boyd, “Living and Learning with Social Media” at Penn State University on April 18, 2009

The purpose of this study is to better understand what user-generated content depicting alcohol use in college settings exists online, and how college students are engaging with the online video streaming platform, YouTube. Through the use of a content analysis and interviews, both the media content and the viewer’s use of YouTube will be evaluated. This study seeks to examine the relationship between college students YouTube engagement and their attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards alcohol consumption.

Consider a high school senior, anxious and curious about the transition to college he is about to endure. While he is excited to move away from home, where his parents constantly monitor his activities and probe his relationships, he knows that there are many uncertainties in his near future: ‘Where will I eat? How will I wake up in the morning? How do I navigate a huge
campus? How will I make friends? What will the drinking culture be like? Do keg parties really exist?’

These questions have always existed. Throughout history, parents have sent their 18 year-olds off to college with a wide array of questions to be explored and overcome within their first days, weeks, and months of college. However, today’s adolescents have an enormous variety of resources from which to draw answers to these questions. Beyond the traditional forms of advice from parents, school advisors, or older siblings, information seeking is somewhat synonymous to internet research today. Unlike speaking to a person who pre-exists in one’s life, the student is likely less aware of the authenticity and biases of online information.

While this hypothetical student probably knows that Old School, Animal House, and Van Wilder are fanaticized and highly produced than edited depictions of college life created for box office success and crowd entertainment, he likely does not share the same ideas of online information. The 1970s saw a widespread moral panic among parents in the 1970s due to violence and sexual content on television. In turn, television viewing reforms produced today’s youth: the most media-literate generation yet of traditional forms of media. However, the digital media landscape provides new and unexplored challenges to media. As schools have begun to implement education curricula regarding website reliability for academic research, unexplored is the potential influence of peer-created content online.

In order to explore the ‘real’ college life, this student may search for authentic images of college campuses and parties using actual college student’s Facebook profile photos, blogs such as WordPress or Tumblr, or photo sharing applications such as Instagram. Perhaps the richest form of user-generated content online, YouTube has potential to provide video footage of real-
life scenarios. The opportunities for uncensored, peer-created content are exponentially expanded and accessible to adolescents today, and require attention and greater understanding.

Today’s college students are the first generation to be born in the ubiquitous world of technology, requiring heightened challenges in navigating the information deluge of older adolescence. On a daily basis, these “digital natives” are required to negotiate both traditional forms of media messages, in the forms of radio, print, and television, but are also tasked with the ubiquity of digital media messages that penetrate the boundaries of conventional communication and often intensify said messages. However, these students are also gifted with a lifetime of practice and potentially increased ability to negotiate between different media, and to rationalize the content for individual purposes.

While adolescence is traditionally defined as the developmental physical and psychological stages between ages 13-25, older adolescence is housed among college students, ages 18 and older (Arnett, 2007). This period of adolescence is uniquely in college populations as students experience the large transition of moving out of their parents’ homes and into increasingly independent living situations. An increased independence requires students to establish life habits and determine lifestyle preferences, which are seen to carry throughout the rest of one’s life. Of particular concern are student decisions made regarding risk behaviors, with potential outcomes of morbidity and mortality for this population. Traditional risk behaviors include: substance use, violence, mental health, stress, sleep, and sexuality. Because the life choices that students make, particularly in their first year of college, are often maintained
post-adolescence, it is important to understand and assist attitudes and behaviors during this period.

Adolescents are frequently in contact with media depicting various outcomes of engaging in risk behaviors. Substance use, in particular, is often depicted in television, movies, literature, and music today. Media may provide a forum to observe and model substance-related behaviors. Media are also influential in establishing adolescent attitudes and behaviors towards substance use, in part by supporting or promoting substance-related expectancies. Media messages regarding substance use have also been associated with increased positive attitudes and earlier initiation of substance use among adolescents. Yet, the majority of existing research regarding these media messages depicting substance use is housed in traditional media formats.

One of the most significant, yet least explored, elements of today’s digital adolescence is the influence of online health messages on attitudes and motivations of adolescent risk behaviors. Substance use media messages are being portrayed on the internet. The majority of adolescents today has internet access, and participates in social networking and video sharing sites more than any other age demographic. New media platforms, including social networking sites and video sharing sites, such as YouTube, allow for user-generated materials to circulate widely among this population. YouTube, the most popular online video streaming source, has 48 hours of content uploaded every minute; over 3 billion videos are viewed each day, and have 800 million unique users who visit the website each month.

Only eight years old YouTube may be a highly influential form of media. YouTube content is frequently user-generated, or created by non-professional means. User-generated content is frequently connected to three aspects of message engagement: information,
entertainment, and mood management. Studies suggest that due to the fulfillment of these needs, user-generated content may be more influential than other forms of media as the media content and behaviors depicted are often seen by viewers as more authentic and/or realistic.

Little is known about how user-generated content on YouTube may be influencing adolescents. The use of the media theories Uses and Gratifications Theory, Cultivation Analysis, and health behavior framework of Social Cognitive Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior best suit this area of research. Uses and gratifications theory explains how individuals actively engage in making choices about which media to consume. It discusses intentional media use for specific purposes and outcomes. Cultivation Analysis helps to understand the ways that media inform long-term perceptions, understandings, and beliefs of our world as a result of consuming media messages. It observes how people’s opinions are shaped or reinforced by the media messages that they do – or do not – consume. The Social Cognitive Theory understands how people learn through evaluating and re-enacting modeled peer behaviors. It explains why peer influence plays a large role in establishing individual behaviors. The Theory of Planned Behavior breaks down how new behaviors are adopted through the process of first increased favorable attitudes towards the behavior, followed by higher intentions to engage in the behavior, and finally enacting the behavior itself. Through the interaction of these frameworks, we may best understand how adolescents are seeking health media that may simultaneously reinforcing their worldview of health behaviors among college populations.

Through the long-standing traditions of a multimedia analysis through communication theory, we are best enabled to understand how college students’ attitudes and motivations towards substance use are potentially influenced by user-generated content on YouTube. Using
both a content analysis of user-generated YouTube videos, and a survey interview of college students’ media use, the theoretical framework set by these theories will illuminate the ways that traditional media theory applies to new media.

Hypotheses

Under the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, the following hypotheses are evaluated in this study in order to understand the relationship between different elements of YouTube use and participant attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards alcohol consumption:

H$_{1a}$: Students who own a YouTube account will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students who do not own a YouTube account.

H$_{1b}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H$_{1c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students with low media use.

H$_{2a}$: Students who own a YouTube account will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who do not own a YouTube account.

H$_{2b}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H$_{2c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students with low media use.

H$_{3a}$: Students who own YouTube account will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students who do not own a YouTube account.
H$_{3b}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H$_{3c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students with low media use.

Chapter Two will investigate the existing literature on college as a high-risk transitional stage for adolescents, the relationship between traditional media and new media, and health behaviors in media and online. Chapter Three provides a theoretical framework for the study, investigating the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Cultivation Analysis, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Chapter Four will explore the methods used in this paper, including both the codebook development and content analysis of YouTube videos themselves, as well as the development and implementation of interview survey data. Chapter Five delves into an analysis of the data collected, indicating significant relationships between participant engagement with YouTube videos with alcohol content and increased attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards personal alcohol consumption. Chapter Six will discuss implications of this information in three main areas (1) viewership (2) content and (3) impact. This chapter details both implications and limitations of this study. Finally, Chapter Seven will conclude this paper with summary information, as well as recommendations of future research, including investigating keyword search terms and YouTube account ownership more in depth.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the purpose of this study is to analyze user-generated online video content depicting alcohol use in college settings and to better understand how college students are accessing this content several disciplines play into the conceptualization of this project.

As media have changed over time, from traditional media such as television, radio, film, and print, to new media such as the internet, new interactive and user-generated content have become central to peoples' media consumption. As online platforms focused on harnessing user-generated content continue to grow, questions about the content itself emerge; specifically, user-generated content regarding health behaviors. While it is known that the majority of internet users seek health information online (one-third of Americans use the internet for health information and 80% of them begin their knowledge acquisition with a search engine), it is unknown what content they are accessing (Fox & Duggan, 2013). As information seeking and knowledge may influence health behaviors, such as substance use and mental health conditions, it is important to better understand what user-generated content regarding health behaviors is prevalent online today.

A particularly important setting in which to study health content online is through the review of user-generated content depicting alcohol use on college campuses. College students are frequent media users undergoing a period of transition entering into their freshman year of school during which they are particularly susceptible to engaging in negative health behaviors.

Through an understanding of the significance of the literature on the differences and similarities of traditional and new media and the adolescent transition into college, we can better understand the way that college students are accessing substance use content online.
Traditional to new media

In the last 25 years, society has experienced a shift from reliance on what people often refer to as traditional media, to new media. Old, or traditional, media usually refers to print and broadcast models, such as with television and radio. New media, or media that are predicated on the use of digital technologies, most frequently are defined as including the internet and video games, but also embody the manipulation of traditional media to digital formats, such as online video streaming and publication. New media are digital, and often have the characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive (Flew & Smith, 2011).

In traditional media, newspapers, radio and television functioned, as the major sources for information and the consumers of this information were largely passive in their reception of the media messages. Information provided in traditional media was mainly created and packaged by professional journalists and producers, and was therefore rather straightforward. With the expansion of the internet, media consumers have moved into an information age that has transformed the way people consume and produce information and knowledge.

Now in the era of Web 2.0, new media are interactive. People are proactive in both the consumption and production of media messages - or information. People can search, contribute, and share messages and information easily and quickly among friends and networks. Because this type of media is easy and inexpensive to create and share, the amount of information now available online is almost infinite.

The "emergence of new, digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources" (Shapiro, 1999 p. 322). While old media was regulated from a few producers to many consumers, new media opens the doors for
contribution from virtually anyone. “In this shift, we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication, and between public and private communication” (Neuman, 1991, p. 322).

The rapid dissemination of information, the digitalization of media, and media convergence all contribute to the concept of interactivity. As early as 1984, new media technologies were defined as communication technologies that enable and/or facilitate user-to-user, or user-to-information, engagement or interactivity (Schorr, Schenk & Campbell, 2003). The concept of interactive media refines a traditional ideal of media as disseminated information from "one-to-many," to a model in which media can be communicated "many-to-many" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2004). For example, historically, a traditional news channel would broadcast information to a wide audience, the audience would have little or no chance to respond or engage with the media message. In an interactive media model, news may be disseminated through a website, and media consumers can also play the role of media producers. Interactive media introduces the opportunity for the audience to create, respond, critique, or engage in discussion with a widespread community regarding the news topic.

Media scholars have long debated the idea of audience agency in media consumption. While the study of film and television lend themselves to the concept of an audience of 'viewers' or 'consumers', new media content leans towards the idea of an audience of 'users' (Livingstone, 2004). Historically, media production has been created and supplied by a small number of media producers and content was highly controlled through exclusive and often political professional industries (Cha et. al, 2007). With the shift into Web 2.0 applications, the media industry
experienced a large paradigm shift in both media production and circulation: "Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between new and old media, are demanding the right to participate within culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 24). The outcome of this is room for regular people to create and distribute media content themselves, opening the door for diverse opinions and perspectives, or user-generated content (Deuze, 2007).

**User-Generated Content**

User-generated content (UGC) is media content made by regular people who voluntarily create and contribute media that is then used as information or entertainment online (Krumm, Davies & Narayanaswami, 2008). UGC allows hundreds of millions of Internet users to self-publish personal media content. Now, instead of buying a movie or subscribing to additional television networks, media consumers can access free content at shorter lengths, earning the name "bite-sized bits for high-speed munching" by Wired magazine (Wired, 2007). As opposed to traditional television content, where everyone watched the same content, UGC contributes constantly updated content allowing for a personalized viewing experience (Cha et. al, 2007).

Within Web 2.0, the internet is seen as a delivery platform for user control and participation, as seen by the flux of websites created focusing on microcontent and social connections between users (Alexander, 2008). The popularity of consuming UGC is largely due to the inexpensive nature of content, with the potential to inform or entertain, giving a real glimpse into real data from other people, unedited by media outlets (Krumm, Davies & Narayanaswami, 2008).
In particular, due to the interactive nature of the internet, UGC is likely more influential in the learning of risk health behaviors than any other form of media (Becker & Schmidt, 2004). This is significant as previous research has shown that social motivation to consume alcohol is largely influential in the decision to drink (Anderson, 2011).

**Adolescents and health information online**

Models of behavior change emphasize the significance of information seeking and gaining knowledge prior to implementing a health change in an individual's lifestyle (Glanz, Lewis & Rimer, 1996). Information seeking of any kind begins with intentional source selection (Wilson, 1999). A highly accessible, private, and inexpensive option for seeking health information is through the use of the internet. Seeking health information online ranks as one of the top ten internet activities for all internet users (Jones & Fox, 2009). While seeking health information online is seen across all demographics, college students are a uniquely significant population to examine with regard to this behavior.

In 2011, 71% of young adults (ages 18-29) reported seeking health information online; the highest percentage among all generations (Fox, 2011). Additionally, seeking health information is the third most-popular online activity for this population behind email and general search engine use (Zickuhr, 2010).

For college students, there are many sources of health information, including campus healthcare professionals, family, friends, television programming, magazines, and the internet (Kwan et. al, 2010). As the internet becomes increasingly more accessible and mobile, new sources for health information emerge, such as online communities and social networking sites,
where people can share information and personal stories regarding health information (Eysenbach et al, 2004). As the earliest adopters of new media and technologies, college students are confronted with a much larger landscape for seeking information, and face new challenges in interpreting this information (Kim & Sin, 2011).

For adolescents, it is particularly important to have access to accurate, reliable health information in order to guide their decisions regarding personal health behaviors, and in weighing alternative options or potential consequences of these behaviors (Eng et al, 1998; Fischoff, 1992). Even if adolescents do not accept messages of positive health behavior modeling, they still gain knowledge regarding the behaviors, which serves as an initial step in promoting healthy behavior choices (Glanz, Lewis & Rimer, 1996; Flay & Burton, 1990).

**Emerging adulthood as a time of behavior change**

In the year following high school, 60% of adolescents begin college (Arnett, 2004). Moving out of ones’ childhood home, often to another city or state, sets the stage for a large period of transition for adolescents. Out from under his or her parents’ roof, college freshman are suddenly in a position of independence and power that they have likely never experienced before. While living in a college environment can foster healthy decisions, the first six weeks at college are often seen as the largest adulthood transition and the negative decisions made can affect the rest of not only students’ college years, but also life to follow (Oster & Rosenbluth, 2005).

The age period from one’s late teens through their mid-20s is increasingly recognized as an especially unique period in adolescent growth, with distinctive developmental characteristics
(Arnett, 2007). Five main features of this time period include: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and many possibilities (Arnett, 2004). Often this period is discussed as the most heterogeneous period of one’s lifetime, as it is the least structured and experiences the most variance (as seen is the aforementioned five features of this time period) than any other period of adulthood (Arnett, 2007).

During this time, college freshman are pushed to expedite the process of entering adulthood, with pressures of accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Maysseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004). This period is considered one of a “transition” as it lasts about 7 years (from ages 18 to 25) and occurs gradually rather than suddenly – despite the pressures students face for immediate transition when entering college. New habits are seen to form at this point, early in the college career (Newton, Kim & Newton, 2006). Here, the main developmental question at hand is: what behavioral risks are taken during this transition from high school to college?

While these emerging adults mostly enjoy their independence and progress towards self-sufficiency, some students experience serious transitional issues such as mental health problems or substance use disorders (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006; Tanner et. al, 2007). This time is also a peak age period for risk-taking and experimentation in risk behaviors that society largely discourages, such as binge drinking, drug use, and dangerous sexual behavior (Arnett, 2005; Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Often, adolescents’ perceptions of the norms of their peers influence their behavior (Higher Education Center, 2006; National Norms Resource Center, 2007).
Perceptions of norms and alcohol use during the transition to college

The overall well being of college students, and the adults that they become, is intimately connected to the health behaviors they choose for themselves during this transition period (Dinger & Waigant, 1996). This manifests as a period of vulnerability where engaging in behavioral risks is prevalent (Fromme et al. 2008). One of the most prevalent risk behaviors that college freshmen engage in is alcohol consumption.

For adolescents today, the first year of college is the highest-risk time period for alcohol-related injuries, assaults, and other negative consequences including academic, emotional, physical, social, and legal outcomes (Oster & Rosenbluth, 2005; Wechsler et al., 1998; Muravan et al., 2005; Engs and Aldo-Benson, 1995). About half of students who report alcohol use report harms directly related to this behavior (Abbey, 2002; Hingson, 2009).

Research consistently indicates that college students drastically overestimate the levels and approval of alcohol consumption by their peers (Borsari and Carey, 2003). College settings have been shown to have two types of norms that affect perceptions of alcohol consumption: injunctive and descriptive (Cialdini et al., 1990). Injunctive norms refer to the perceived approval of alcohol consumption and discuss underlying values or morals of peers. Descriptive norms refer specifically to the quantity and frequency of drinking among peers. These perceived norms often lead to inaccurate perceptions of peers’ alcohol consumption. Students consistently indicate that they feel they drink the same or less than others, implying that someone else is always drinking more than they do (Larimer et al. 1997). College students also frequently report that they are more approving of the behavior among others than they are for themselves which
often makes alcohol use seem common and socially acceptable despite not actually engaging in the behavior themselves (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986; Prentice and Miller, 1993).

Adolescents, alcohol, and the Internet

While many factors contribute to adolescent alcohol use, including individual and social elements, research suggests a relationship between exposure to alcohol use in media and adolescent alcohol use (Robinson, 1998; Klein, 1993; Roberts, 2002). Prior research suggest that media exposure such as with television, advertising, and music videos have been associated with an increased likelihood of initiating alcohol use (Robinson, 1998; Austin, 2006; Ellickson, 2005; Snyder, 2006; Stacy, 2004).

The internet is an important new media venue that is popular among adolescents: over 90% of teens have Internet access and use social networking sites, and most report daily use (Lenhart, 2005; Sun, 2005; Jones, 2009; Ellison, 2007; Lewis, 2008). Among adolescent internet users, an estimated 65% of adolescents and >90% of college students report using social networking websites (SNS) (Jones, 2009; Ellison, 2007; Lenhart, 2007; Lewis, 2008). These websites allow users to create and share a personal web profile that may contain images (e.g. photographs) and text (e.g. blogs). References to alcohol use are prevalent among adolescents’ profiles, including descriptions of alcohol use experiences and personal photographs depicting alcohol use (Moreno, 2007; Moreno, 2009; Moreno, 2010).

As substance use is a long standing problem among college students, and behaviors established last throughout lifetime, it is important to study one of the most interactive forms of
social networking sites is on YouTube, where users can browse web videos anonymously and alcohol-related videos are prevalent.

**Online video sharing**

With the percentage of adolescents interacting online increasing, and the growing popularity of YouTube, content may not just be at a high volume but viewership can also be far-reaching (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010; Quantcast, 2010). Researchers have already suggested that virtual communication about shared health behaviors may lead to the normalization or reinforcement of perceptions of risk behaviors (Whitlock, 2009). Due to the probable access and influence of these videos, it is important to understand exactly how college students' are using YouTube and what kinds of content is available regarding substance use in college settings.

**Conclusion of Literature Review**

Existing literature details the older adolescent transition into college and experimentation with alcohol use as well as a large amount of literature reviewing alcohol use in media. Media has shifted from traditional to new, or interactive, media. Rather than communicating from “one-to-many,” media now can communicate from “many-to-many.” The internet is increasingly seen as a delivery platform for user control and participation, allowing for individuals to carefully and intentionally select their media sources. A new media location where users can browse web videos anonymously, YouTube content may be particularly influential on viewer attitudes, intentions and behaviors. Specifically, during the transition from
high school to college is a vulnerable developmental period among older adolescents with increased engagement in behavioral risks including alcohol consumption.

There is little research, however, discussing new media representations of alcohol use and its' potential outcomes on adolescent attitudes and behaviors. This study examines the scope of videos depicting substance use uploaded on YouTube and accessed by college students. This is the first study to formally examine the concept of alcohol media messaging on YouTube, which has implications for intervention, prevention, and management.

The next chapter with position this study in a theoretical framework that combines media theory and health behavior through the use of Uses and Gratifications, Cultivation Analysis, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The use of these four models provides insight into the significance of user-generated media messages depicting health behaviors among a college populace.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the literature review indicates, there is a rich tradition in communication studies regarding the potential influence of media content on viewers’ attitudes and behaviors. However, this research lacks insight into how traditional media theories apply to new media settings, such as YouTube, and in particular, lacks connections to the significance of the developmental period of adolescence. The two communication theories that may best examine the relationship between online media viewership and adolescent attitudes are the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and a Cultivation Analysis. In order to best conduct this work, one must first consider the inception of these theories and how the theories may be applied to a new media landscape before applying them to online video streaming.

Brief History of Media Research

Initially, media research functioned under the Mass Society Theory, which evolved from the threat of propaganda in World War I. Mass Society Theory views media consumers as a passive audience who are seen as victims of mass media. The theory suggested that audiences were not intelligent enough to make rational decisions outside of those dictated in the media messages they consumed.

Scholars then shifted towards viewing media in a limited effects model, with the idea that media messages have little, if any, effect on individuals and culture at large. This concept views media’s affect as minimized due to each individual audience members’ personal lives. Limited effects suggests that audience members have little agency in the way that s/he interprets a media message and the extent to which it impacts him or her. This small amount of agency is found in
the viewers’ worldview, which is formed by experiences creating perceptual screens affecting interpretations of messages.

Academics who felt these unflattering views were both inaccurate and unfair decided to investigate further the relationship between audiences and the media they consumed in order to better determine true influence. Through this work in the 1970s, both the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Cultivation Analysis came to life.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) discusses how people actively seek out specific media content for particular purposes and intentional goals (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). UGT establishes an active, rather than passive, audience member, who has the ability to consciously examine and evaluate media in order to accomplish specific outcomes (Wang, Fink & Kai, 2008). UGT embodied a functional shift of communications scholarship, from examining not what media did to people, but to what people could do with media.

UGT initially grew out of the needs and motivation theory, which suggests that people act in line with a specific personal hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970). Communications scholars quickly caught on to this notion and sought to determine typologies of needs for media consumption. Many versions of these typologies exist, and suggest a variety of categories of purposeful media consumption that people may engage in.
Assumptions of UGT

UGT “provides a framework for understanding when and how individual media consumers become more or less active and the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement” (West & Turner, 2010). The theory has five main assumptions: (1) an audience is active and goal-oriented in their media consumption, (2) media are used for gratifications, (3) media are in competition with other means of need satisfaction, (4) people understand their personal media use, interests, and motives enough to communicate with researchers about their choices, (5) the audience members are the only people who can make judgments regarding the value of the media content.

The first assumption says that people bring both their own activity and goals to media. Four goals involved have been defined as diversion, or an escape from daily routines or problems, personal relationships, or when media acts as a substitute for friendship, surveillance, or information seeking for media to assist in an end-goal, and personal identity, or the ways one can reinforce his or her individual values (McQuail et al., 1972).

The second connects a need to the agency of the audience in making a media choice. As UGT views audience members as active, they take initiative in seeking out media.

Third, the idea that media must compete with other sources to fulfill an audience’s needs, indicates that the audience and media do not exist in isolation but as a part of a larger society. This society influences both media, and audiences, in different ways.

A fourth assumption, that people are self-aware of their media use, discusses one of the perceived limitations of the theory. Some researchers feel that self-report data are insufficient for understanding media use, and that individuals may be unable to communicate their thought
processes or habits for purposes of research. However, this thought returns to the idea that audience members are inactive. Another concern was that media use is not always active so accidental exposure and influence can occur.

The fifth and final assumption of UGT requests that researchers make a concerted effort to remove their personal value judgments from the study of media content. As UGT discusses how an audience member fills his or her needs through the use of media, only an audience member should be able to evaluate the value of the given media content.

Needs Gratified by the Media

The needs discussed in UGT are best categorized into five main types: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Cognitive needs include information acquisition, knowledge, and comprehension. Affective needs are comprised of emotional, pleasant, or aesthetic experiences. Personal integrative needs build confidence, indicate status, or enhance credibility. Social integrative needs are enhancing of personal relationships with friends and family. Tension release needs involve escape and/or diversion.

Idea of an “active audience”

Building on the first assumption of UGT is the concept of an “active audience.” Various definitions of an active audience have circulated throughout communication and media studies. For purposes of this study, the definition suggested by Mark Levy and Sven Windhal (1985, p. 4) will be used: “a volunteristic and selective orientation by audiences towards the communication
process.” This definition fits with the ideas behind UGT, and correlates with Blumler’s (1979) ideas of the types of audience activity that exist: utility, intentionality, selectivity, and imperviousness to influence. Blumer defines utility as “using the media to accomplish tasks,” intentionality as occurring “when people’s prior motives determine use of media,” selectivity as “audience members’ use of media reflecting existing interests,” and imperviousness to influence as “the audience members constructing their own meaning from media content” (Blumer, 1979, p. 12). He notes that activity is both relative and individually variable, in that the consumer has a choice in both what the media consumer does and how much freedom the audience has from the mass media.

**UGT and New Media**

Scholars of communication and media are aware that the way audiences view media content shift overtime. Even in 1994, scholars such as Gilder discussed concepts of how a combination of a television and a computer would change society and its media consumption. He noted, in early editorial writing, that this hybrid product would “enhance individualism,” and “promote creativity.”

In some of the earliest work applying UGT to new media settings, researchers studied cell phones and how people used cell phones differently or similarly to their landline phones. They concluded that UGT was applicable to this new media setting in understanding goals of media selection and use (Leung & Wei, 2000).

The ability to apply a traditional media theory to the new media landscape is best understood by the observation that there is an “underlying consistency of the content of the
messages we consume and the nature of the symbolic environment in which we live” even if the delivery technology of the media changes (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999, p. 268). This idea is seen historically, as films took dominant message content from literature, and television did the same by repackaging radio programming. Marshall McLuhan (1964) suggests that a change in media is merely “new bottles for old wine.”

The theory has since been applied to many new media technologies, such as video games and predicting internet use (Sherry, Lucas, Rechtsteiner, Brooks & Wilson, 2001; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Additionally, even though the internet is relatively new still, it overlaps traditional media in terms of uses and gratifications; people seek out the internet for news in the same way that they previously used other forms of media for the need for orientation (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004).

Research shows great interest in the ties between traditional media motives and new media motives. Many studies have found support for similar motives in using television or the internet for specific means (Kaye, 1998; Ferguson & Perse, 2000). Prior research suggests that online health information seekers have specific motivations and goals in searching online for specific health issues (Fox, 2005). However, these health motivations fall into similar categories of traditional UGT motivations, including information seeking, diversion, and interpersonal needs (Chung & Kim, 2007).

**Cultivation Analysis**

Cultivation Analysis grew as a response to the pervasive television culture that was already well established in the 1970s. As a part of a larger study, George Gerbner and Lawrence
Gross (1972) began to conduct regular examinations of television programming and the “conceptions of social reality that viewing cultivates in audiences” (Gross, 1972, p. 99). Their initial idea was that mass communication cultivates certain beliefs about reality that are shared and held in common among mass communication viewers. Much later, Gerbner (1998) noted, “most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced,” suggesting that we “know” things due to the stories seen and heard in the media (Gerbner, 1998, p. 82).

Cultivation research in the internet era requires the consideration of cable and satellite networks, the use of digital video recording devices, and the internet. However, as McLuhan referenced with UGT, the packaging of the content may change but the fundamental frameworks around television consumption remain. The interplay between UGT and Cultivation Analysis has many implications for understanding media messages. It may suggest that people seek media that reinforce their worldview.

Cultivation Analysis sees media as a transmissional process in which media are sending messages across time and space, with a ritual perspective, where media are seen as representative of society’s shared beliefs. This process is further understood through the assumptions of Cultivation Analysis.

Assumptions of Cultivation Analysis

Cultivation Analysis says that the mediated reality depicted in mass communication functions as a mediated reality, from which consumers cultivate their own social reality. All assumptions of this theory were developed with television specifically in mind, highlighting it as a unique medium. This was due to the ubiquity of the technology, a lack of literacy necessary
for consumption (unlike print media), free access (unlike the movies), combined pictures and sound, no mobility required, and its ageless nature for all demographics.

The three assumptions for Cultivation Analysis, based on the relationship between television and culture, are: (1) television as essentially and fundamentally different from all other forms of mass media, (2) television as shaping our society’s ways of thinking and relating, (3) the effects of television are limited.

The first assumption relates to the concept of television as the “central cultural arm” of society (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox & Signorielli, 1978). This idea claims that television draws diverse communities of dissimilar groups together and highlights their similarities. Here, television is seen as a, “centralized system of storytelling” (1998) which unites audiences through its’ common narrative.

The second assumption discusses the potential influence of television. Gerbner and Gross (1972) note that “the substance of the consciousness cultivated by TV is not so much specific attitudes and opinions as more basic assumptions about the ‘facts’ of life and standards of judgments on which conclusions are based.” Television content is seen as disseminating a narrative of cultural truths, rather than outputting information to convince audiences of new lifestyles or behaviors. Television then functions to stabilize social patterns and cultivate resistance to change. Unlike similar communication theories, cultivation analysis does not claim to know what audience actions will be after viewing media, but that watching media will lead us to enforce existing societal feelings. For example, watching violent television does not necessarily make people more violent, but may reinforce their view that the world is dangerous.
The final assumption is that effects of television are limited. This mostly refers to the fact that observable, measurable contributions of television to culture are relatively small. Different from a limited effects perspective of media, Gerbner means to suggest that television is consequential but the size of its effect is less critical than the direction of its effect. So, although television’s measurable contributions may be small, they are still present and significant. This study, however, believes that television is incredibly powerful – a debate that does not alter but perhaps amplifies the foundation of this theory and its impact on viewers. Cultivation Analysis wishes to explain how it is not watching a specific television program that causes a specific behavior, but that the overall consumption of television in general has a collective and persistent impact on audiences’ views of the world.

*Processes and Outcomes of Cultivation Analysis*

Due to the large variety of effects to which a Cultivation Analysis may be applied, researchers developed specific strategies related to this theory.

**The Four-Step Process**

In order to demonstrate television’s effect on culture, Cultivation researchers created a four-step process for studying this effect: (1) message system analysis, (2) formulation of questions about viewers’ social realities, (3) surveying the audience, and (4) comparing the social realities of light and heavy viewers.

Message system analysis involves a detailed content analysis of the media in order to show the most recurring and consistent depictions of images, themes, values and portrayals.
Formulation of questions about viewer’s social realities asks researchers to develop questions about people’s understanding of their everyday lives as related to the media content subject. Surveying the audience posts the questions from step two to audience members as well as questions about levels of their media consumption. Finally, comparing the social realities of light and heavy viewers demonstrates the “cultural differential” between the different levels of viewers. Cultural differential, or the percentage of difference in response between light and heavy television viewers, gives an empirical result for cultivation. For example, if studying violence on television one may expect that people who watch the most television will also have higher perceptions of violence in the world than those who watch the least television. Cultural differential would measure the range of perceptions of community violence, as related to how much media the viewer consumes, therefore giving an empirical outcome to a theoretical concept. The focus here is on heavy viewers, or high media users. People who consume the most media are hypothesized to be more influenced by the way the world is framed through media than those who consume less media, especially in subjects in which the viewer has little first-hand experience. Light viewers often have many more sources of information than heavy viewers.

**Mainstreaming and Resonance**

The process of cultivation, in which television contributes to viewer perceptions of social reality through, happens in two ways: mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming occurs mostly for heavy viewers, and occurs when the symbols depicted on television dominate all other sources of ideas and information about the world. Here, viewers are seen to create a reality that
is more similar to television’s reality than any real-world, measurable reality. Cultivation also occurs through resonance, when television narratives are actually congruent with viewers’ everyday realities. This creates a “double dose” of messages that enhance cultivation effects further (Gerbner, 1998). An example is found in the earlier scenario of studying violence and television. A “double dose” occurs if a viewer sees many reports of violence on television and then also witnesses violence in his or her community. This repeated exposure to violence – whether or not it is representative of actual violence in the area – is more influential than watching television or witnessing a crime in isolation. So, if a media message is communicating a behavior such as violence, and then the viewer’s real world experiences are also communicating this behavior, the message is most likely to resonate with the viewer.

Both mainstreaming and cultivation see first and second order effects of cultivation. First order affects general ideas about the world, such as the prevalence of violence. Second order effects refer to learning specific values and assumptions from the media, such as opinions about the law or personal safety. These are the ways that knowledge is gained through television consumption.

Social Cognitive Theory

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is an interactional model of causation where personal factors, environmental events, and behavior all contribute as determinants of each other (Bandura, 1986). SCT functions as a framework to better understand mental functions – or human cognitions – with certain behaviors produced as outcomes. The theory is focused on understanding the mental process involved in a person’s learning.
A foundation of mass communication research, SCT is a pillar in understanding media effects including media violence, sexually explicit material, cultivation effects and persuasion (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

Assumptions of SCT

At the foundation of SCT is the idea that behavior, personal characteristics (cognitive and biological) and environmental factors or events, work together in a process that influences thought and behavior (Bandura, 1994). While learning happens in many ways, four specific characteristics are unique to SCT: symbolizing, self-regulatory, self-reflective, and vicarious capacities.

Human communication is based on shared meanings found in language and symbols. Symbolizing is the ability of people to understand and use symbols in order to store and process experiences into cognitive models. These models function to guide future actions and decision-making.

The concepts of motivation and evaluation are embodied in the idea of a self-regulatory capacity. People can motivate themselves based on goals, and they tend to evaluate their own behavior and either persists as they are, or making changes, accordingly.

On the same note is the idea of a self-reflective capacity in behaviors and learning, which involves a process of thought verification. People are able to self-check his or her thinking in order to make sure that the logic is correct. There are several modes of self-checking, in which people can assess the logic of their thoughts and actions, observe another’s experiences and outcomes in order to confirm or refute their own ideas, weighing of information in order to
negotiate potential outcomes with new information, and verifying previous knowledge in new scenarios.

Finally, a vicarious capacity is the ability of people to learn without a direct, personal experience. This element of SCT is largely stressed in the potential influence or impact of mass media.

**Learning and modeling in SCT**

Perhaps the most important element of SCT is the idea of observational learning, in which a person observes others’ actions, the consequences of those actions, and learns from his or her observations. The importance of observational learning is that the learned behavior is then often reenacted by the observer who has learned about a behavior (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

Modeling is the process of behavior reenactment, with four main components: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1986, 1994). Attention requires that the person pay attention to a behavior and accurately perceive it in order to successfully model it. Retention requires that the modeled behavior be remembered and retained in order to be used again. Motor reproduction can be a slow process, and requires the ‘beginner’ to think about the components of the behavior in order to successfully reenact the modeled behavior. Finally, motivation functions as a major factor in a person’s decision to implement a modeled behavior into his or her own lives. Positive outcomes play a large role in motivating a person to model a learned behavior (Bandura, 1989).

Abstract modeling adds an additional layer to the rules of behavior, where elements learned in the past serve as a guide for future situations (Bandura, 1994). Existing ideas or
standards for ones’ behavior are never perfect or applicable to all scenarios, so people must use their past learning as a guide for future scenarios. Abstract modeling occurs in such new scenarios, where new behaviors emerge based on knowledge of previous behaviors learned. Practical advantages of abstract modeling include the use of personal standards for judging motivations and behavior of others, and heightened critical thinking skills (Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978).

**Outcomes of behavior modeling**

Often, people confront behaviors or information that conflicts with their own personal pre-determined behaviors. This requires people to reexamine his or her own motivations to engage in a new behavior, and causes two effects: inhibitory effects and disinhibitory effects (Bandura, 1994).

Inhibitory effects occur when a person refrains from a behavior, largely due to negative expectancies or outcomes of the behavior. This occurs when new information of a behavior is learned, and that information turns the person away from a given behavior.

Disinhibitory effects happen when a negative behavior is modeled, but it functions to encourage or support the decisions of others to still engage in the behavior. For example, children who see violent play with a doll modeled perform them more frequently than those who do not view violent play, and they are more likely to engage in violent behavior they have learned in past scenarios (Bandura, 1963).
SCT and media

Many studies show that the “realities” shown through mass media are inaccurate reflections of the real world. As previously discussed in Cultivation Analysis, scholars indicate that heavy television viewing often shapes viewers’ perceptions and beliefs so that they are more in line with the world as depicted in media. This media effect is called the social construction of reality.

The social construction of reality is repeatedly indicated as powerful in traditional media studies, reviewing perceptions of occupations, health concerns, and other life issues (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Mayes, 1981; McGhee & Frueh, 1980; Tan, 1979). Controlling for factors including sex, age, intelligence, and self-concept, participants continually display that the amount of media viewing and their worldviews are intimately related.

Considering new media, and user-generated content, the social construction of reality phenomenon is likely more influential in modeling behaviors, as the creators of the media are regular people, even more closely connected to viewers. Often used in conversations of peer-to-peer influence, SCT helps to explain the behavior modeling and following imitation that happens among groups of people.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) links attitudes and intentions to behavior (Ajzen, 1991). See Figure 1 below. TPB comes from the field of psychology, and steps beyond the concept of general dispositions as predicting behavior but rather explores the impact of
attitudes towards specific models in order to better explain how people choose to engage in behaviors.

Initial work on this theory resulted in the Theory of Reasoned Action, which said that a person’s attitude towards a behavior, their concept of peers’ attitudes, and their personal intentions towards the behavior influence their likelihood to engage in a behavior. The TPB, however, expands the use of attitudes, subjective norms, and motivations to include self-efficacy in the equation of behavior likelihood.

Self-efficacy is a concept borrowed from SCT, where the conviction of personal ability to successfully execute a behavior is required to produce outcomes (Bandura, 1986). While an individual’s evaluation of the expected outcome is important, self-efficacy is even more important in influencing behavior as it is an individual’s idea of whether s/he is even capable to engage in the behavior.

**Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior**

![Diagram of Theory of Planned Behavior]

*Basic concepts within TPB*
Beliefs and norms are the key concepts within TPB. Behavior beliefs are an individual’s belief about consequences of a behavior. Normative beliefs are an individual’s perception of social norms, which can function as a social pressure, surrounding a behavior. Perceived behavior control is an individual’s perceived ability – difficulty or ease – in performing a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1988). Control beliefs are a person’s beliefs about the presence or absence of factors that influence the performance of a behavior (Ajzen, 2001).

Behavior intentions are an indication of a person’s preparedness to perform a behavior, and are assumed to be an immediate predecessor to engaging in a behavior (Ajzen, 2002). It is based on the combined influence of the behavior beliefs, normative beliefs, and perceived behavior control.

Generally, the more favorable a person’s attitude toward the behavior and the subjective norm, and the greater the person’s perceived control, and the stronger the person’s intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2002).

Conclusion

This framework sets the foundation for this study. Media has changed throughout history from viewing consumers as having no agency in the way that s/he interprets a message to giving consumers the power to negotiate the terms of its influence. Uses and Gratifications indicates consumers as an “active audience” who seek out specific media to fulfill specific goals. Cultivation Analysis explains how message mainstreaming and resonance contribute to viewer perceptions of reality. The Social Cognitive Theory gives a framework for how behaviors are learned from peers. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how attitudes, intentions and
behaviors together prescribe behavior change. Television is shown to draw diverse communities of dissimilar groups together and highlights their similarities. While the medium used to consume media messages may change, the fundamental frameworks around media consumption and influence remain in tact with new media.

The next chapter, Methodology, will explain the procedures necessary in order to understand how this framework functions with user-generated YouTube content.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the available content and potential influence of user-generated videos online on college students’ attitudes, intentions, and behaviors towards alcohol use. Prior media studies indicate that media may be a forum for adolescents to observe and model substance-related behaviors leading to increased positive attitudes towards, and earlier initiation of, substance use. However, most media studies currently focus on traditional media formats, such as television; little is known about how user-generated content online may be affecting adolescents.

In order to test my hypotheses, I employed a multimethod approach through the use of both content analysis and interview techniques.

Data Collection –

Part One: Content Analysis

Content analysis is a strategy in which the content of a medium is categorized into detailed components in order to better understand the media as a whole. Performing a content analysis breaks material down into relevant, manageable pieces of data (Weber, 1990). Content analysis may be used for understanding many types of media – from print journalism to television shows to song lyrics.

In this part of the study, YouTube videos were analyzed for purposes of understanding how substance use in college settings is depicted online.
Online Platform: YouTube

Videos of alcohol use in college settings were collected from the online video streaming website, YouTube (www.youtube.com) between May 2011 and August 2011 for this content analysis study.

While YouTube was only founded in 2005, it has since been recognized as the most rapid and largest growth for video-sharing websites (Alexa, 2013; Nielson Wire, 2010). YouTube defines itself as “allow[ing] billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos [and] provid[ing] a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small” (YouTube, 2013). Of all websites online in 2013, YouTube is currently the third most popular website in the world (Alexa, 2013). About 11% of regular web searches are redirected to YouTube inquiries, and the average visit to YouTube lasts for about 20 minutes, with visitors spending around 71 seconds on each page view (Alexa, 2013). a

Keyword Selection

Keywords were used to identify videos for analysis. To determine keywords used to search YouTube profiles for alcohol-related content, college students were questioned in person in various public campus locations at the University of Wisconsin-Madison between March and May 2011.

a Because this study involved observation of publically available information it received an Institutional Review Board exemption from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
A total of 25 students were questioned in person. They were asked: “as an incoming college student, if you were curious about drinking or alcohol use in college, what search terms might you use on YouTube to find relevant videos?”

Video Selection

All content analysis took place by accessing www.YouTube.com on a computer. The top three search terms nominated by college students were “college parties,” “frat parties,” and “college drinking”. After entering each search term in the search function on YouTube, videos were assessed for eligibility by trained researchers. Inclusion criteria were that the video needed to be user-generated and among the top 25 most-viewed videos from each search term, for a total sample of 75 videos (25 videos from each of the three search terms). YouTube enables users to sort search output by the date it was uploaded, the relevance, or the number of views. This study investigated the most-seen videos and therefore sorted the video search by view count.

Codebook development

Evaluating content online requires both a systematic approach and an intricate data collection instrument: the codebook (Moreno, 2011). The codebook documented both descriptive information for the videos, as well as health criteria regarding media and substance use. The codebook was created using Excel and was grounded heavily on prior media studies including work on: television, music lyrics, advertising, and social networking sites.

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b No personal information was collected from students; I recorded handwritten notes of suggested keywords.
Content analysis of the video footage was performed for the 75 videos. A total of 49 content coding items from prior media studies were selected for inclusion in the codebook for this study. Some of the key examples of coding items included in the codebook were positive and negative alcohol outcome expectancies, the types of alcohol consumed (i.e. beer, wine, liquor), the time of day of consumption (i.e. morning, afternoon, evening), the settings of alcohol consumption (i.e. while cooking, socially, etc), problem drinking criteria (including drinking while driving and blacking out after drinking), explicit versus figurative alcohol use, and the use of humor (Fromme, 2000; Primack, 2008; van Hoof, 2009; Moreno, 2012; Gruber, 2005).

**Variables**

Descriptive data were collected for the 75 videos. Data recorded included information about the user who uploaded the video, the video itself, and the video’s viewership. The 14 descriptive items coded can be seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content owner</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Viewership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Username</td>
<td>URL</td>
<td>Number of views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported age</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Number of likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Number of dislikes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Number of comments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tagged keywords</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Date uploaded</td>
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<td>Length</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age restrictions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Descriptive Data Recorded.
Sample Descriptive Information Recorded
The 49 content coding items examined alcohol use outcome expectancies, positive and negative consequences of consumption, scenarios of consumption, risk indicators of consumption, and entertainment appeals.

Alcohol expectancies were used to understand the positive and negative outcomes adolescents may expect from alcohol consumption (Fromme, 2000). Alcohol use outcome expectancies can be both positive and negative (Fromme, 2000). The positive expectancies include sociability, liquid courage, tension reduction, and sexuality. The negative expectancies include cognitive and behavioral impairment, risk and aggression, and poor self-perception.

A second measure of positive and negative consequences is derived from the content analysis of alcohol use in music lyrics (Primack, 2008). Consequences of consumption are also measured as both positive and negative (Primack, 2008). This scale measures the presence of both positive and negative outcomes of alcohol use in 8 categories: mental, emotional, physical, social, sexual, legal, financial, or all categories.

Originally used for evaluating substance use in television series, the third scale in the codebook looks at the type of alcohol consumed, the time of consumption, and the situations of consumption (van Hoof, 2009). Scenarios of consumption measure several conditions of the setting of alcohol use (van Hoof, 2009). Types of alcohol consumed may include wine, distilled liquor, beer, or cocktails. The times of consumption are ranges from 6 AM to noon, noon to 5 PM, 5 PM to 8 PM, 8 PM to 6 AM, or unknown. The situations of alcohol consumption include social settings, culinary settings, consumption to suppress problems, before or during work, or other.
A fourth scale included is a traditional evaluation of problematic adolescent substance use, applied to evaluate social networking sites (Moreno, 2012). The CRAFFT criterion examines risk-drinking scenarios. The scale also looks at explicit versus figurative alcohol use. The CRAFFT criteria evaluates whether alcohol had been in use in a Car, in order to Relax, when Alone, causes Forgetfulness, family and/or Friends are concerned, and if Trouble has been a consequence of consumption (Children’s’ Hospital Boston, 2001). Explicit alcohol use includes phrases such as “wasted” or “drunk,” and images of drinking alcohol. Figurative use includes alcohol references that may or may not include actual alcohol consumption (Moreno, 2010).

The fifth measure in the codebook comes from evaluations of substance use and music videos, and looks for the presence of humor or playfulness (Gruber, 2005). Humor is indicated by the presence of a humorous component that can be considered silly, weird, or fun, and may be either heard or seen (Gruber, 2005).

**Coder Training**

Two coders were trained prior to data collection using a separate sample of videos that were not used in this study. The training process involved coding videos across five previously utilized alcohol-in-media scales, and was followed by a discussion to resolve any questions or intercoder discrepancies. During this pilot coding, assessments of the codebook were continually discussed through an iterative process to ensure clarity on the content coding item definitions. Interrater reliability was calculated across 15 videos and was more than 99% on all variables.
**Coding Procedures**

The study videos were then coded using the codebook, which consisted of the 14 descriptive items and 49 content coding items from the alcohol-in-media schema previously described, for a total of 63 items coded. Both coders independently coded all 75 videos over a two-week time period and entered these observations into Excel. The reconciled results of the coding comprise the data set.

**Part Two: Interviews**

The goal of the interviews in this study was to better understand how college students are using YouTube both generally, and related to content depicting alcohol consumption. Interviews allow for quality research within many potential research constraints (Groves, 2009). Survey interviews allow researchers to collect data in several ways: telephone, by mail, online, in-home, in public setting intercepts, or in combinations of the above. Some benefits of survey interviews are that they are easy to administer, often take less time to develop than other methodologies, can be cost-effective, can be conducted remotely, can handle large numbers of participants, and can ask many questions at once. Interviews for this project were administered on the phone, which has been shown to allow for participants to feel more comfortable in sharing stigmatizing information than through internet formats (Opdenakker, 2006).
Study Setting and Subjects

This study was conducted between May 15, 2011 and April 15, 2012 and received approval from the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Wisconsin – Madison and the University of Washington – Seattle.

A total of 625 graduated high school seniors who were planning to attend the University of Wisconsin – Madison and the University of Washington - Seattle were recruited the summer prior to beginning college. Participants were eligible if they were between the ages of 17 and 19 years and enrolled as freshmen for Fall 2011 at one of the two universities. Students were randomly selected from the registrar’s lists of incoming freshmen students from both universities.

Recruitment

Students were recruited through several steps, beginning with a pre-announcement postcard. Over a 3-4 week recruitment period potentially eligible students were recruited through up to 4 rounds of emails, phone calls and Facebook messages. Students were excluded if they had already arrived on campus for summer early-enrollment programs.

Students were offered $30 for their first interview, which would be raised by $5 each year that they stayed in the study (sophomore year students would earn $35 per interview, junior year $40 per interview, and senior year $45 per interview).
Consent process and Facebook friending

During the consent process for this study, students were told that this was a longitudinal study involving both their Facebook (FB) profile as well as phone interviews, and that friending our research team profile was a requirement of the study. Participants were informed that FB content would be viewed, but that no one on the research team would post any information to the participant’s profile. Participants were asked to maintain open security settings with our research team during the study. Students who provided consent to enroll in the study were sent a friend request. As some FB profiles had “private” security settings, full content was only available after we had “friended” that profile.

Interview Procedure

This study involved two general types of interviews. The baseline interview occurred the summer before students entered college, between May and September 2011, and the second, follow-up interview between May and September 2012. Participants were notified by email and by phone calls when it was time to schedule the interview. Interviews were conducted by trained interviewers, and were done via phone calls scheduled at the participants’ convenience. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes on average, data collection during interviews was done with a data collection spreadsheet and written notes for qualitative questions. The interviews were not recorded. Interviews were designed to assess participants’ attitudes, intentions and behaviors regarding alcohol use and media use through the use of closed ended question with a small number of open-ended follow-up questions.
Measurements

**Alcohol Use:** Attitudes towards alcohol use were measured with the question, “On a scale between 0 and 6, with 0 as very negative, 3 as neutral, and 6 as very positive, what would you say your own attitude towards alcohol use is?” This question was developed based on previous work that developed Likert scales to assess young adults’ attitudes towards alcohol (Devos-Comby & Lange, 2008; O’Callaghan et al., 1997; Benevene & Scopelliti, 2012). Participants’ responses to this question were scored and categorized exactly as they appeared on the Likert scale, with 0=very negative, 1=negative, 2=somewhat negative, 3=neutral/don’t know, 4=somewhat positive, 5=positive, and 6=very negative.

We also asked about perceptions of attitude change throughout one’s freshman year with the question, “How do you think your attitude towards alcohol has changed throughout your freshman year? For example, do you think your attitudes towards alcohol has become more positive, more negative, or stayed the same over the course of your freshman year?”

**Intentions** towards alcohol use were asked if the participant had never used the substance in question, or were not current (past-28-day) users. They were asked, “How likely do you think it is that you will consume this substance in the next 6 months? Please answer from 0 ‘not likely at all’ to 5 ‘very likely.’” This scale has been used for alcohol assessment in previous work and was found to have an alpha of .93 (Devos-Comby & Lange, 2008). Participants’ responses to this question were scored and categorized exactly as they appeared on the Likert scale, with 0=not at all likely, 1=unlikely, 2=somewhat unlikely, 3=somewhat likely, 4= likely, 5=very likely.
Behavior, or any consumption of alcohol in one’s lifetime, was measured with the question, “Have you ever used alcohol in your life?” If a participant had ever used alcohol, they were asked how old they were when they had first tried alcohol and whether they had used it in the past 28 days.

Social Media Use: Participants were asked both closed-ended and open-ended questions regarding account ownership and practices across 4 social media platforms – YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

For all media platforms, the question “Do you have a [platform] account?” was asked. Expanded questions regarding YouTube included:

- Have you ever uploaded a video on YouTube?
  - If so, was the video private or public?
- Have you ever watched a YouTube video about alcohol or other substances?
  - If so, what prompted you to do so?
- Do you visit YouTube everyday?
  - If so, how many times do you visit per day?
  - If no, how often?

Demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, and type of school housing was also obtained.
Methodology Conclusion

Through the use of a multimethod approach comprised of both content analysis of YouTube videos and interviews with college students, one can best explore the content and influence of user-generated videos on college students’ attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding alcohol consumption.

Next chapter will investigate the findings of this study. It will study what types of media content depicting substance use currently exist on YouTube, as well as examine the factors that are most indicative of positive attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards alcohol use.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to better understand what user-generated content depicting alcohol use in college settings exists online, and how college students are engaging with the online video streaming platform, YouTube. It uses a content analysis strategy to examine YouTube content depicting alcohol use. This strategy allows for a better understanding of the media messages college students may currently be viewing. It also uses interviews with students to better understand their use of YouTube, as well as attitudes, intentions and behaviors relating to alcohol consumption.

The findings are two-fold. First, the content analysis portion indicates that the user-generated alcohol videos on YouTube receive high viewership and positive viewer evaluations. The videos are shown to depict social settings with explicit substance use, in mostly positive outcomes of alcohol consumption despite modeling dangerous behaviors. Second, the interviews suggest that attitudes, intentions and behaviors of alcohol consumption have a positive relationship with high media use, have a negative relationship with YouTube account ownership, and have a strong relationship with having seen or shared videos with substance use content.

Part One: Content Analysis

In order to understand the potential effects of YouTube videos depicting alcohol consumption, it is important to first evaluate the media content itself. I performed a content analysis of the top 25 most-viewed YouTube videos across the top-three keywords recommended by college freshmen: “college parties,” “frat parties,” and “college drinking.” The process began with casual interviews with freshmen to determine what keywords to use in this search. Then,
descriptive data was collected for the 75 total videos. Next, the video content was coded across the codebook comprised of measures evaluating depictions of alcohol use in media.

**Keywords**

Keywords were collected from college freshmen in order to understand how they would search for substance use videos in college settings online. Participants nominated a total of 33 keywords that students may use to search videos depicting alcohol use in college. The top search term recommended by students was “college parties,” (14/25 keyword nominations). Other terms nominated included: “frat parties,” “college drinking,” “drinking in college,” “alcohol,” “parties,” “house parties,” “alcohol in college,” and “social life.” Searches conducted on with these keywords on YouTube.com yielded my sample of 75 videos.

**Descriptive Data**

Basic characteristics of the videos included in this study include: the length, number of views, number of likes, number of dislikes, number of comments, the category classification, and any age restrictions set.

The average video is 3 minutes and 24 seconds long (sd ± 2 minutes 45 seconds). Many people view these videos, with an average viewership count of 288895.95 (sd ± 640649.110) on the day of collection. The videos are mostly evaluated by viewers with positive reinforcement, with the average video “likes” at 1058.64 (sd ± 4407.486) and the average video “dislikes” at 144.17 (sd ± 411.245). Viewers also engage with the videos through “comments,” which averaged 480.92 (sd ± 1389.739) within this sample.
**Video Characteristics**

Almost half of the videos included in this sample were categorized by the owner of the video as “Entertainment” (42.7%), followed by “Comedy,” (28%) and “People & Blogs” (9.3%). See Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
<th># of Videos</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People and Blogs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How-to and Style</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film and Animation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, only 19% of videos (n=15) were categorized by their owners as containing information appropriate for audiences 18 or older.

**Video Content**

Overall, videos depicted an overwhelming majority of positive alcohol expectancies, such as sociability (92%; n=69) and sexuality (76%; n=57). Examples of these references include peer-to-peer interaction and co-ed physical contact.

A total of 282 positive outcomes, and 81 negative outcomes, were depicted across the 75 videos. Most frequently, video presented the positive outcomes of mental (92%, n=69), emotional (88%; n=66), social (88%; n=66) and sexual (76%; n=57) settings such as hugging,
dancing and group interaction. Negative outcomes were seen in less than half of the videos (48%, n=36), including students vomiting and passing out. Additionally, most videos with negative outcomes included equal or more depictions of positive outcomes (83.3%; n=30).

Many videos display multiple types of alcohol in the video (44%; n=33), with the majority of videos depicting beer consumption (68% n=51), followed by cocktails (44%; n=33) and distilled beverages (45%; n=15), and no videos demonstrating wine consumption. Videos often also show other substances being used simultaneously with alcohol (36%; n=27) such as marijuana and hookah. Scenes often depicted large groups of students (76%; n=57), explicit substance use (64%; n=48), and desired if not definite sexual contact. Humor was present in the majority of videos that depict negative outcomes (66%; n=24), compared to fewer videos (30.8%; n=12) with no negative outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, the content analysis portion of the study highlights a high frequency, viewership, and positive evaluations of user-generated alcohol content on the video-sharing websites, YouTube. The videos are most often available to all age groups and the majority of videos depict positive outcomes of alcohol consumption. The videos displayed positive alcohol expectancies and modeling of dangerous behaviors. Most videos depict social situations with explicit substance use, often with a variety in the types of alcohol present as well as other substances being used in conjunction with alcohol.

As previous studies have illustrated, representations of alcohol consumption at college are probably influential (Robinson, 1998; Austin, 2006; Ellickson, 2005; Snyder, 2006; Stacy,
2004). This study supports prior media studies due to the huge reach of YouTube’s videos, evidenced in high view counts of the videos. Further, the studied YouTube videos have potentially greater influential compared to other forms of media, as they are user-generated rather than commercially produced. User-generated content allows for viewers to identify personally and envision themselves in the media message, which increases the perceived self-efficacy in the behavior, and is therefore more influential in behavior enactment. As user-generated content may be more influential on attitudes, intentions and behaviors, and this study found both high viewership and extremely positive viewer perceptions as seen in the number of “likes” versus “dislikes” on videos, the social learning involved for adolescents viewing this video is likely much higher, and behaviors therefore may be better received (Fogg, 2007).

The next portion of the analysis examines the viewing behaviors of college students in order to better understand how they engage with this content, and the implications of the content’s potential influence on their attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding alcohol consumption.

**Part Two: Interview**

YouTube videos depicting alcohol use in college settings were examined through interviews with college students, who are the viewers of interest for these videos. In yearly interviews, participants were questions about their media use and lifetime experience, as well as current practices, with alcohol.
Demographics

A total of 315 participants were included in the interview component of this study. A majority of students were female (56.2%; n=177) and Caucasian (75.6%; n=238). A little over half of the participants (59.4%; n=187) went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the remainder attended the University of Washington.

Media Use

About half of the participants (49.5%; n=156) owned a YouTube account. Of those who owned a YouTube account, about half of the participants (48.5%; n=79) had ever uploaded a video on YouTube. Among those who had uploaded a video, the majority of participants (81.6%; n=68) report that they had previously uploaded a “public” video, or a video without privacy settings so that anyone could view it.

A fifth of participants (n=60) report accessing YouTube on a daily basis. Most daily YouTube users report accessing YouTube 1-1.5 times per day. See Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of times/day of YouTube Access</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1.5 times per day</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2.25 times per day</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3.5 times per day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-4.5 times per day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more times per day</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The vast majority of participants (n=248) report that they do not access YouTube on a daily basis. Most non-daily users report accessing YouTube 3-4 times per week. See Table 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of times/day of YouTube Access</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per week</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per week</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times per week</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 times per week</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 times per week</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 times per week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per month</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per month</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both daily YouTube users and non-daily YouTube users can be categorized into levels of media use. Overall, the most participants (21.9%) report using YouTube 2-3 times per week, followed by 4-5 times per week (18.6%) and 3-4 times per week (17%). See Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Use</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per month</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per month</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per week</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per week</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times per week</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 times per week</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 times per week</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 times per week</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1.5 times per day</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2.5 times per day</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3.5 times per day</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-4.5 times per day</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more times per day</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This full chart of frequency of YouTube access may be converted into categories that indicate levels of media use: high media use, (daily users), medium media use (weekly users), and low media use (monthly users and those who use YouTube 1-2 times per week). See Table 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Use Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Searching and Sharing**

While the majority of participants (58.8%; n=180) do not report seeking out YouTube content regarding alcohol use, nor receiving this type of content directly from a friend, a sizable number (39.2%; n=126) of participants does report engaging in the aforementioned behaviors. See Table 6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share</th>
<th>Search</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Fisher’s Exact Test p&lt;.000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>(n=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>(n=60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n=180)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baseline attitudes, behaviors and intentions**

As the Theory of Planned Behavior indicates, attitudes, intentions and behaviors are important components in understanding behavior initiation or change. Here, we evaluate the
way that these components of TPB relate to owning a YouTube account, having seen or shared substance use YouTube content, and levels of media use.

**Attitudes –**

H₁₀: Students who own a YouTube account will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students who do not own a YouTube account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YouTube account</th>
<th>Negative (n)</th>
<th>Neutral (n)</th>
<th>Positive (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.7% (20)</td>
<td>27.4% (43)</td>
<td>59.9% (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21.2% (33)</td>
<td>28.8% (45)</td>
<td>50.0% (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.9% (53)</td>
<td>28.1% (88)</td>
<td>55.0% (172)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 p<.094$

Investigating how attitudes relate to owning a YouTube account, we find that the hypothesis is not supported. In fact, the converse relationship appears to exist, where students with a YouTube account seem to have more negative attitudes towards alcohol consumption (21.2%; n=33) than those without a YouTube account (12.7%; n=20), and those without a YouTube account have more positive attitudes towards alcohol consumption (59.9%; n=94) than those with a YouTube account (50%; n=780).
$H_{1b}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever shared or seen videos</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=14)</td>
<td>(n=17)</td>
<td>(n=66)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=39)</td>
<td>(n=68)</td>
<td>(n=103)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=53)</td>
<td>(n=85)</td>
<td>(n=169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 p < .006$

Students who have seen or shared videos containing alcohol content have more favorable attitudes towards alcohol consumption (68%) than those who have not seen or shared these videos (49%). Additionally, a lower percentage of students who have seen or shared these videos have negative attitudes towards alcohol consumption (14.4%) than those who have not seen these videos and hold negative attitudes towards alcohol consumption (17.3%). This hypothesis is supported and is statistically significant at the .000 level.

$H_{1c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students with low media use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Use</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=17)</td>
<td>(n=32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=33)</td>
<td>(n=63)</td>
<td>(n=125)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=52)</td>
<td>(n=86)</td>
<td>(n=167)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 p < .059$
The attitude component of this hypothesis indicates that high and medium media users (54.2%; 56.6%) have much higher attitudes towards alcohol consumption than those of low media users (38.5%). All three media use categories demonstrate similar percentages of participants who indicated “neutral” attitudes towards alcohol use. Additionally, low media users had the highest percentage of negative attitudes towards alcohol consumption (38.5%) compared to medium (14.9%) and high (16.9%) media users. This hypothesis is supported and is approaching statistical significance at the .06 level.

**Intentions**

H$_{2a}$: Students who own a YouTube account will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who do not own a YouTube account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YouTube account</th>
<th>Intention towards alcohol in next 6 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unlikely (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unlikely (40.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely (59.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>Unlikely (39.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely (60.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fisher’s Exact Test p<.665*

Looking at intentions, we find a similar pattern to the attitudes section, the findings are converse to our original hypothesis. These findings are not statistically significant. Here, YouTube ownership seems to have little or no influence on intentions towards alcohol consumption in the next 6 months.
H$_{2b}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have a more positive intention to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever shared/seen videos</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=65)</td>
<td>(n=80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=76)</td>
<td>(n=120)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fisher’s Exact Test p<.004*  

Students who have seen or shared videos containing alcohol content have higher intentions to drink in the next 6 months (78.4%) than those who have not seen or shared these videos (55.2%). We are able to support our hypothesis and the findings are statistically significant at the .000 level.

H$_{2c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students with low media use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Use</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=13)</td>
<td>(n=21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=53)</td>
<td>(n=90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 p<.315$  

Looking at the intentions examined among various types of media users, the majority of high (61.8%) and medium (62.9%) media users intend to consume alcohol in the next 6 months,
while most low media users (55.6%) do not intend to. Additionally, of those who indicate that they are likely to consume alcohol in the next 6 months, most cases fall into the medium media use category (75.6%). These trends, while compelling, are not statistically significant.

**Behaviors –**

H₃a: Students who own YouTube account will be more likely have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students who do not own a YouTube account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YouTube account</th>
<th>Alcohol consumption</th>
<th>No consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=94)</td>
<td>(n=61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=111)</td>
<td>(n=46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=205)</td>
<td>(n=107)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fisher’s Exact Test p<.074

Examining YouTube account ownership’s relationship with students’ reported behavior we find a similar outcome to the attitudes section (H₁a), where YouTube account ownership indicates that students are more likely to have abstained from alcohol consumption in the past month (39.4%; n=61) than those who do not own a YouTube account (29.3%; n=46). These findings are approaching statistical significance at the .07 level.
H₃b: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever shared/seen videos</th>
<th>Alcohol consumption</th>
<th>No consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77.2% (n=98)</td>
<td>22.8% (n=29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>57.3% (n=102)</td>
<td>42.7% (n=76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>65.6% (n=200)</td>
<td>34.4% (n=105)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fisher’s Exact Test p<.000*

Students who have seen or shared videos containing alcohol content (77.2%) are more likely to have drank alcohol in the last 28 days than students who did not see or share these videos (57.3%). We are able to support our hypothesis, and the findings are significant at the .000 level.

H₃c: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students with low media use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Use</th>
<th>No consumption</th>
<th>Alcohol consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>32.2% (n=19)</td>
<td>67.8% (n=40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>34.2% (n=75)</td>
<td>65.8% (n=144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>42.3% (n=11)</td>
<td>57.7% (n=15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>34.5% (n=105)</td>
<td>65.5% (n=199)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 p<.656 \]
Finally, investigating the behavior of participants as related to their media use, we observe that the highest percentages of alcohol consumption in the past 28 days are among high media users (67.8%) and the highest percentages of abstaining from alcohol consumption are among low media users (42.3%). These findings, however, are not statistically significant.

**Overall Trends**

Attitudes, intentions and behaviors regarding alcohol consumption are found to be related to YouTube account ownership, having seen or shared videos with substance use content, and level of media use – but not always in the ways predicted. While positive attitudes, intentions and behaviors generally correlate positively with having seen or shared videos with substance use content, as well as with higher levels of media use. YouTube account ownership, however, indicates the converse of our hypothesis and suggests that owning a YouTube account actually decreases participant attitudes, intentions and behaviors regarding alcohol use.

The strongest finding of this portion of the analysis is the relationship between the attitudes, intentions and behaviors of students who have seen and/or shared YouTube videos with substance use content. All three dimensions were statistically significant at the .000 level, and suggest these students have the most favorable attitudes towards alcohol in general, have the strongest intentions of consuming alcohol in the next 6 months, and are most likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days.
Regression Models

This section of the analysis looks at participant attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in a multiple variable context with controls. The models, Ordinary Least Squares Regression and Binary Logistic Regression, help to provide insight into predicting which variables best classify participants based on their reported information.

Dependent Variables:

Attitudes – students reported overall attitude towards alcohol use. Measured on a 7-point likert scale from extremely negative to extremely positive. This variable will be modeled with Ordinary Least Squares Regression as it is interval level data.

Intentions – how likely students report they are to consume alcohol in the next 6 months. Measured on a 6-point likert scale from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. This variable will be modeled with Ordinary Least Squares Regression as it is interval level data.

Behaviors – whether or not the student had consumed alcohol in the last 28 days. This variable will be modeled with Binary Logistic Regression, as this dependent variable is dichotomous.

Independent Variables:
While many variables potentially play a role in understanding students’ alcohol use and media consumption, below are several variables of interest for this study.

Seen/shared videos – whether or not the student had seen and/or shared a video with alcohol media messaging in it.

University – which of the two universities in the study the student attends; the University of Washington or the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Media use – collapsed variable of how often students use YouTube. Categorized into high, medium, and low use.

YouTube account ownership – whether or not the participant has a YouTube account.
### OLS Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seen/shared videos</td>
<td>.130*</td>
<td>.246*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account owner</td>
<td>-.119*</td>
<td>-.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>-.246**</td>
<td>-.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>-.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R² for equation</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p ≤ .01  *p ≤ .05

### Attitudes

\[
\text{Attitudes} = a + b_1x_{\text{shared/seen videos}} + b_2x_{\text{university}} + b_3x_{\text{media use}} + b_4x_{\text{YouTube account owner}} + b_5x_{\text{gender}}
\]

The dependent variable, attitudes, was evaluated using an Ordinary Least Squares Regression model. 9.5% of the variance in participants’ attitudes towards alcohol consumption can be explained by participant: media use, university enrollment, YouTube account ownership, and having seen or shared videos with alcohol content. The model is statistically significant at the .000 level.

The standardized regression coefficients allow us to compare what variables are the strongest and weakest predictors in a solution. Here, the beta values indicate that having seen or shared videos with alcohol content is the best predictor in this model, and is statistically significant. Media use, however, is not statistically significant.

### Intentions

\[
\text{Intentions} = a + b_1x_{\text{shared/seen videos}} + b_2x_{\text{media use}} + b_3x_{\text{YouTube account owner}} + b_4x_{\text{university}} + b_5x_{\text{gender}}
\]

The dependent variable, intentions, was evaluated using an Ordinary Least Squares Regression model. 6.2% of the variance in participants’ intentions for alcohol consumption in
the next 6 months can be explained by participant: media use, university enrollment, YouTube account ownership, having seen or shared videos with alcohol content, and gender. The model is statistically significant at the .005 level.

The only statistically significant variable in the model is having seen or shared the videos. Here, the beta values indicate that having seen or shared videos with alcohol content is the best predictor in this model. The coefficient is robust (.246) and statistically significant. Media use and university enrollment, however, are not statistically significant.

Behaviors –

\[
\text{logit}(\text{Behaviors}) = a + b_1 x_{\text{shared/seen videos}} + b_2 x_{\text{university}} + b_3 x_{\text{media use}} + b_4 x_{\text{YT account owner}}
\]

The dependent variable, behavior, was evaluated using an Binary Logistic Regression model. The overall model statistics indicate a good fit. The Chi Square (24.162) is statistically significant at the .000 level. The Homer and Lemshow Test (3.347) is not statistically significant (p=.851), indicating a good fitting model. The pseudo R² coefficients indicate that 7.7% (Cox & Snell) or 10.6% (Nagelkerke) of the variance in participant behavior is explained by participant: media use, university enrollment, YouTube account ownership, and having seen or shared videos with alcohol content. The Wald Statistic is statistically significant at the .000 level for the model, and all of the variables in the model are statistically significant at the .05 level except media use, which is not statistically significant.

The initial classification analysis indicates that 65.9% of cases are correctly predicted. After taking into account the predictors, 67.9% of the cases are correctly predicted. Specifically,
the model is able to correctly classify 88.4% of cases that have consumed alcohol in the past month, and 28.2% of those cases that have not consumed alcohol in the past month.

The unstandardized logistic regression coefficients allow us to roughly estimate what variables are the strongest and weakest predictors in a solution. Here, the beta values indicate that having seen or shared videos with alcohol content is the best predictor in this model. Media use, however, is not statistically significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant University</th>
<th>YouTube account</th>
<th>Media Use</th>
<th>Seen/shared videos</th>
<th>Predicted Probabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.68360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.83996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.72375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.86421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.76059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.88529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.56976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.76286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.61625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.79595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.66070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.82549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.51781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.56563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.75980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.61226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.39694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.61522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.44388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.65973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.49184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.70159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No cases fell into this category.*
Predictive probabilities can be used to evaluate the likelihood of all potential scenarios and outcomes. Here, these predictive probabilities can be used in order to test specific hypotheses. The predictive probabilities are on the dependent variable of behavior – or whether the participant had consumed alcohol in the last 28 days. As the variable was coded as 1, yes s/he had consumed alcohol, and 0, no s/he had not consumed alcohol, the higher the predicted probability the more likely the case is to have consumed alcohol. For example, a participant from Wisconsin who does not have a YouTube account, has high media use, and has seen or shared videos with alcohol content is 88.5% likely to have consumed alcohol in the past 28 days. Another example is if a participant is from Washington, who owns a YouTube account, has low media use and has not seen or shared videos with alcohol content is 39.7% likely to have consumed alcohol in the past 28 days.

This model indicates that students who have searched for or had shared with them videos of alcohol use are consistently more likely (i.e. have higher predicted probabilities) of having consumed alcohol in the last month than students who have not seen these videos.

Interview Conclusion

While our findings support both hypothesis 2 and 3, we are unable to support hypothesis 1. Both high media use and having seen or shared videos with alcohol content indicate higher attitudes, intentions, and behaviors towards alcohol use among college populations. While the first hypothesis is not supported as it stands, the data revealed an opposite relationship than expected – students who own a YouTube account have lower attitudes, intentions, and behaviors
towards alcohol consumption – which remains important in the understanding of college student engagement with alcohol content on YouTube.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The general purpose of this study is to better understand what user-generated content, depicting alcohol use in college settings, exists online, and how college students are engaging with the online video streaming platform, YouTube. Specifically, the study was designed to explore the content of user-generated videos depicting alcohol use in college settings on YouTube, and how college students consume these videos. The content of the videos helps to inform student reactions to the videos and the potential learning or applications of the behaviors in the videos. It is these student video consumers who the study wishes to understand.

This study evaluates existing YouTube content, the ways that college students engage with YouTube and other media platforms, and the relationships between their media use and attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding alcohol consumption. The following hypotheses are explored in this study:

H1a: Students who own a YouTube account will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students who do not own a YouTube account.

H1b: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have a more positive attitude towards alcohol use than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H1c: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have more positive attitudes towards alcohol use than students with low media use.

H2a: Students who own a YouTube account will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who do not own a YouTube account.
H$_{3a}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H$_{2c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will have higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months than students with low media use.

H$_{3b}$: Students who own YouTube account will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students who do not own a YouTube account.

H$_{3c}$: Students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days students who have not seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use.

H$_{3c}$: Among those students who have seen or shared a YouTube video depicting alcohol use, those with high media use will be more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days than students with low media use.

The study reveals that attitudes, intentions and behaviors regarding alcohol consumption are found to be related to YouTube account ownership, having seen or shared videos with substance use content, and level of media use – but not always in the ways predicted.

**Important findings**

This study has several important findings for understanding college student engagement with YouTube content depicting alcohol use. Through both a content analysis of videos and survey interviews with college students, this study outlines a portion of the media landscape among college students who seek substance use information online. These noteworthy findings may be framed under (1) viewership (2) content (3) impact.
(1) Viewership: YouTube account ownership

Owning a YouTube account is a somewhat unexplored concept. The initial rationale of this study was that YouTube account owners would engage with the platform more frequently and probably display behaviors of high media use – potentially leading to the hypothesized more favorable attitudes, increased intentions and behavior of alcohol consumption. As we found that the videos in the sample certainly had a far reach (averaging 288,895.95 views per video), first instincts dictated that those who were members, or account owners, might have higher viewing habits. In practice, however, YouTube account ownership did not greatly affect participant frequency of YouTube use (and therefore did not affect participant levels of media use). Interestingly, it seems that YouTube account owners were actually less likely to consume alcohol than their peers without YouTube accounts.

There are several potential reasons that may explain this outcome. First, it may be that a different type of user community is drawn to engage with the YouTube platform. As profiles are somewhat anonymous and there is little interpersonal engagement on the website, many of the social and peer-to-peer incentives of social networking website are absent. Additionally, YouTube does not require consumers to be an account owner to watch videos but only to upload videos or comment on videos.

(2) Content: The use of humor

Humor is a functional part of media persuasion and message recognition, and was found in about half (48%) of the videos included in the content analysis portion of this study. In isolation, it is important to note that if a student consumes media depicting alcohol use in college
settings, it is likely that s/he will engage with content that utilizes a humor appeal. However, more importantly is perhaps the statistic that humor was present in 66% of videos that depict negative outcomes. While negative outcomes were present in about half of the videos in the sample (48%), they comprise the majority of humor appeals. As videos with negative outcomes are usually (83.3%) loaded with equal or more positive outcomes, the additional humor appeal may detract further from the communication of true negative consequences that can arise from alcohol consumption. While it is important to understand that not all videos show positive outcomes in isolation, it seems as though the negative outcomes may be used in a context that further incentivizes, rather than detracts from, alcohol consumption. The light-hearted spin of negative outcomes may make these videos even more influential, as they are not omitting the downside of risk behaviors but rather making them enjoyable or even perhaps desirable.

(3) Impact: Searching for and sharing videos

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that those who sought, shared and/or received a YouTube video depicting alcohol use in a college setting positively relate to all elements leading to behavior change. These students report more favorable overall attitudes towards alcohol use (those who had seen or shared the videos reported 68% positive, 17.5% neutral, and 14.4% negative while those who had not reported 49% positive, 32.4% neutral, and 18.6% negative), a higher intention to drink in the next 6 months (78.4% among those who had engaged with the videos versus 55.2% of those who had not), and were more likely to have consumed alcohol in the past 28 days (77.2% versus 57.3%). This variable was also the strongest predictor in all models developed in this study.
While no claims of causality may be made from this work, there is a clear relationship between consuming this YouTube content and concepts of alcohol consumption. As these videos are user-generated, flaunt positive evaluations online, and depict attainable social scenarios, it is likely that these videos create or re-enforce viewer perceptions that drinking is inherently part of making friends in college. Although YouTube as a platform does not have extensive social networking features, the videos themselves function as a form of displaying behaviors for purposes of peer-comparison. Unlike previous work on social networking sites such as Facebook – which emphasize peer-to-peer evaluation interpersonally because the platform literally requires “friending” in order to see others’ profile materials – YouTube simply allows for open information to be uploaded and interpreted regardless of who filmed it or who views it. Removing the interpersonal relationship from the images may reduce any perceived barriers to engaging in the behavior. And, while removing potential relationships or personality biases one may have when a real-life friend uploads media content, videos are a richer media than photographs which are shown to be more engaging and influential on attitudes.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

A review of both communication and health theories further contributes to understanding the importance of YouTube’s alcohol content and its influence of viewers. Recall the theoretical scenario in the Introduction that paints an image of a student entering college who wishes to better understand college drinking. While Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Cultivation Analysis (CA) help to understand the media dynamics at play in video messaging, The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) help to understand
the mental process involved in a person’s learning of or engagement in behaviors. The findings from this study are illuminated by the literature that functioned as a foundation for this work. The YouTube videos have high viewership, positive evaluations and depictions of alcohol use, social settings, and humor appeals. The attitudes, intentions and behaviors of alcohol consumption among college students are positively related to high media use and interaction with substance use videos online, and negatively related to YouTube account ownership. These results are all clarified through the theoretical framework of this study.

Both the assumptions of and five main types of needs fulfilled by media, as outlined in UGT, play a role in the potential for adolescent use of YouTube for understanding drinking behaviors. UGT assumes that people bring their own goals to viewing media, including diversion, personal relationships, surveillance, and personal identity. The studied YouTube content fulfills all of these potential goals; the videos can be viewed as a diversion from the pressures of real life, act as a substitute for real friendships, function as a source of information, or reinforce individual values. Cognitive needs include information acquisition, knowledge, and comprehension – or the basic information seeking strategy that a student engages in by looking specifically for peer-to-peer media content on this medium. In seeking out user-generated videos, for perceived authenticity of the content, viewers are making conscious decisions about the media they consume. This study demonstrated the fulfillment of these cognitive needs in through high average viewership (288895.95 sd ± 640649.11) and 21.6% of participants reporting searching specifically for these videos themselves. These videos are widely viewed and are sought out by college students. Affective needs, or the desire for pleasant experiences, play a role in the students’ evaluation of the scenarios and outcomes depicted in the videos. If
the scenario shown in the video seems exciting to the viewer, and the potential negative outcomes are minimal or subdued, then the viewer is more likely to desire engaging in the modeled behaviors in his or her personal life. Both the categories of the videos and the viewer evaluations of the videos support the concept of affective needs found in media consumption. The videos most commonly fell into the categories of “entertainment” (42.7%) and “comedy” (28%), which indicates that most of the videos depict pleasant experiences and outcomes of alcohol consumption. Given the opportunity to “like” or “dislike” videos, the videos averaged far more positive evaluations (1058.64 sd ± 4407.486) than negative evaluations (144.17 sd ± 411.245). Personal needs build confidence or enhance credibility and may also largely play a role in why a student would seek out this information prior to entering college, in order to look like a seasoned or informed student rather than someone who is out of place in a party setting. Rather than seeming unknowledgeable about substance use, the viewer can apply knowledge learned from the video and function as a connoisseur of the subject. Additionally, social integrative needs play to the need of enhancing personal relationships, and is important to a college freshman as s/he creates and maintains new relationships in his or her transition to school. As most of the videos (76%) depict social scenarios for alcohol consumption it is likely that the videos create or re-enforce viewer perceptions that drinking is inherently part of making friends in college. Finally, tension release involves escape, or for adolescents, enjoyable experiences that often involve risk. Students likely consume alcohol, in social settings, with friends to disconnect from the stressors of school, and to enjoy free time engaging in risky behaviors together with their peers. Tension release is shown through limited negative outcomes of alcohol consumption depicted in the videos, with the vast majority of videos with negative
outcomes (83.3%) included equal, if not more, positive outcomes to outweigh the negative. Tension release is also seen through the large number of videos (66%) that use humor as an appeal.

This study also mirrors the four-step process involved in CA, leading to message resonance, in turn demonstrating YouTube’s potential effect on culture. The first step, message system analysis, requires a detailed content analysis of media in a specific subject – as performed in the first part of this study with user-generated YouTube videos depicting alcohol content. The second and third steps require that the viewer’s realities regarding the subject – or here, college students’ attitudes towards alcohol consumption – be evaluated, as outlined in the interview portion of this study. In the fourth and final step, attitudes regarding the subject area are evaluated across different levels of media users. This study saw that media use is positively correlated with increased attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding substance use. High media users were found to have positive attitudes towards alcohol consumption (56.6%) than low media users (38.5%). The study also found that high media users had higher intentions to consume alcohol in the next 6 months (61.8%) than low media users (44.4%) and were more likely to have consumed alcohol in the last 28 days (67.8%) than low media users (57.7%). This process leads to mainstreaming and resonance, where the messages are re-enforced if they mirror viewer realities and/or the imagery used in media content dominates all other ideas or information. In a college population, it is likely that the messages seen in videos are replicated in day-to-day experiences, which have the potential to make students believe that extreme incidences of alcohol consumption are the social norm. As noted above, perhaps most
significant is the relationship between students who had seen or shared videos with substance use content and their attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards alcohol.

Students who had seen or shared videos with content involving alcohol use showed more favorable attitudes towards alcohol (68%), high intentions to drink in the next 6 months (78.4%), and a high likelihood for having consumed alcohol in the last 28 days (77.2%). There is a clear connection between those who engage with online media content depicting alcohol use and real attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards alcohol use. A key component of SCT, observational learning takes into account others’ actions and the associated consequences for those actions, in order to learn from the behaviors viewed. The viewing of YouTube videos involving alcohol consumption fulfills the modeling component, or process of behavior reenactment, of SCT, including: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Attention requires that the viewer accurately perceive a behavior to successfully model it. In viewing these videos, drinking behaviors are repeatedly depicted and reinforced by positive outcomes (among all videos, percent showing type of positive outcome: 92% mental, 88% emotional, 88% social, and 76% sexual). Retention necessitates that the behavior is remembered in order to be later re-enacted. Due to the peer-to-peer nature of this media, making its content feel accessible and more realistic, viewers are likely to envision themselves in the behaviors, and the common use of humor appeals reinforce the memory of the behaviors depicted. Also influential in the recall of the messages is the use of humor in many videos (35%), particularly in videos that show negative outcomes (66%). Finally, motor reproduction allows the viewer to slowly adapt his or her behaviors to mimic those shown in the videos. For example, while a student may see someone consuming a beer through the use of a funnel, s/he may first take
smaller steps such as chugging a beer in a personal container, before escalating the behavior to exactly mimic the model. The final concept of learning and modeling in SCT is motivation, which largely ties to the underpinnings of TPB.

Framing much of this study, the Theory of Planned Behavior indicates that attitudes towards a behavior impact intentions towards the behavior, and intentions lead directly to behavior change. TPB emphasizes the important of understanding the beliefs and norms surrounding behaviors. Normative beliefs and perceived behavior control function together to enable, or disable, someone from adapting a new practice. The videos are particularly influential as they are user-generated and positively evaluated online. This may impact the viewers’ normative beliefs regarding substance use in college settings, guiding him/her to believe that binge drinking or extreme drinking circumstances are the social norm. The viewer’s perceived behavior control may also be impacted, as the viewer is watching peer-like participants in the video engage in the risk behaviors, perhaps making the behavior feel more accessible or increasing the self-efficacy of engaging in the behavior. In this sample of videos, the viewer’s perceived behavior control may be particularly impacted due to the video’s depictions of negative outcomes and extensive use of humor.

Limitations of the study

Although this study successfully explored its intended subject matter, there were several limitations. The first limitation deals with the sample. While two institutions were utilized in conducting this study, they were both large state schools. Although geographically different, future studies may wish to investigate these trends among smaller, or private school populations.
The second limitation deals with self-report data. While self-report data is extremely valuable for insight into personal details of participants’ daily lives, it is possible that reported behaviors are not accurate to what participants actually do in situations.

Conclusion of discussion

College students’ use of video streaming websites is high and with about 96% of participants reporting daily or weekly use of YouTube, the media messaging of online video streaming platform is increasingly present in college students’ lives. Additionally, 39.2% report that they have either actively sought out, or received, videos depicting alcohol consumption in college settings. These videos are prevalent in college populations, and the effects are important to understand for potential future intervention and prevention strategies.

The interplay between media dynamics and health behaviors pushes us to return to the purpose of the study: understanding how college students are engaging with user-generated alcohol use content on YouTube. As we continue to move away from an old media approach to understanding media, we have re-enforced that many of the foundations of television apply to new media, too. However, these new media elements are likely more influential to viewers, as new media provides increased agency for consumers to select media that fulfills a specific purpose. UGT tells us that we select media for specific outcomes, and CA shows that media can re-enforce one’s worldview of a subject. Together, these theories indicate that people may seek out information that in turn re-enforces their worldview – all of which is only further enabled by the ease of access from the Internet. SCT helps to explain why user-generated content probably increases the influence of YouTube media content, and TPB shows that an individuals attitudes
influence their intentions that influence behavior. If YouTube content is mostly created by individuals, rather than large media production companies, the perceived authenticity of this ‘candid’ content allows for the social learning of SCT and in turn can increase perceptions of social norms and attitudes, which have the ability to impact behaviors.

When students wish to better understand college drinking, rather than asking a peer or a parent they are likely to turn to the internet to seek ‘real,’ ‘candid’ perspectives of the subject. Using specific, guided search terms in the YouTube search engine, they can select media that is frequently viewed, note the reviews of the video, take away the information desired form the video, and re-enforce or begin to shape their views of what college drinking is.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Summary

This study investigated college student use of the online video streaming platform, YouTube, as well as the platform’s media content depicting alcohol consumption, and the students associated attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. This paper first outlined a review of the literature, examining the disciplines of communication studies, media theory, child development and adolescent medicine. It reviewed the transition from traditional to new media, the birth of user-generated content, the concept of emerging adulthood and behavior change in the adolescent transition to college, and norms surrounding risk behaviors in college settings. The theoretical framework then detailed the four theories that would inform this study: Uses and Gratifications, Cultivation Analysis, Social Cognitive Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior. It then detailed the methodology required of this study, breaking down the detailed components of both a content analysis of online videos and survey interviews of college freshmen. Next, the results section reported on the many findings from data collection. The discussion section provided some context to these findings, including three overarching themes within the findings: viewership, content, and impact.

Implications for future research

Three main implications of this study are in evaluating the comments section of YouTube content, YouTube account holder authenticity, and further investigating search term keyword selection.
An important area of understanding how viewers interact with YouTube content is through an evaluation of the comments left with the videos. Every YouTube video has a ‘comments’ section that provides viewers with an open text box for interacting with the content. The comments section requires that those who comment have a YouTube account log-in, so the comments are not necessarily anonymous, but holding an account requires no identification authentication and leave room for false accounts. Videos used in this study feature a range of comments, including: “all is fair in love and blackouts” and “there is a time and place for everything and it’s called college.” As reported, this study found an average of about 500 comments per video. These comments include a feature that allow for up-voting, meaning that the most popular comments are highlighted at the top of the comment section, directly below the video section. The comments may also be influential on the attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of viewers and their alcohol consumption. Future studies may focus on understanding what types of comments are most common in these forums, what kind of people post to these forums, and which types of comments are most or least popular.

On the same note is the question of YouTube user accountability. While YouTube has taken steps to ensure that its’ content is only viewed by the appropriate audiences, the current rules in place are problematic and ineffective. While I found that most users who uploaded videos in our study did list their age and were of legal drinking age, there are no limits to who can upload this type of content, and there is no way that YouTube verifies user information. For example, the second-most popular video in our study, with 1,055,477 views, had recent comment on it reading: “I liked the part when they drank.” This user was listed as being 105 years old. While other social networking sites are initiating identity verification services as they expand to
cater to all age groups, YouTube and many similar services does not yet have systems in place to prevent youth from falsifying information for increased content access. Future research should investigate the level of authenticity of user information, and try to understand how this effects social interaction on YouTube and viewer perceptions of media content and comments.

Search term selection may be an important guide into the underlying values among adolescents. During the keyword selection process, in which students were asked what search terms they would enter to find our desired alcohol content in college settings, a variety of options were presented. A very common suggestion was variations of “social life [institution name].” Unlike the most popular search terms utilizing somewhat straight-forward terms that connect college and alcohol, such as “college,” “parties,” “frat,” and “drinking,” the suggestions regarding social life are potentially indicative of a much larger value system. While joining a “frat” or attending “parties” may be somewhat congruent with college notions of alcohol consumption, the suggestion of “social life” as a keyword to target these behaviors suggests that in order to engage in “social” activities – such as having friends, or fun – one must drink alcohol in college. While social norms and expectancies regarding alcohol consumption are not a new concept, the application of these ideals into search terminology is. As youth increasingly grow up exposed to new technologies, including increasingly intelligent search engines, navigating online content is ever more accessible to adolescents. If a college student today is looking for a specific article, from a specific time period or by a specific author, one can be assured that s/he will skillfully navigate his or her way to exact the content s/he desires. In the same way, if a student is searching for health information online, it is almost certain that the student will apply these refined search skills to find exactly what s/he is interesting in. Therefore, it may be
important to utilize search as a resource for insight into underpinning values among populations of interest.

Questions of intervention and prevention

The internet provides a new medium for understanding risk behaviors among adolescents. The traditional media landscape was more contained, and delivered the messages of a few people to many viewers. Now, new media allows for consumers to also function as producers, challenging both established media companies as well as new media platforms to create higher quality, more innovative and exciting media products. User-generated content, however, has skyrocketed. With few skills necessary in order to conceptualize and create content, people can now share and collaborate content through the use of the internet in ways that were not possible before. This new media landscape is constantly developing and is not entirely understood through research. With the rise of user-created content comes an influx of personal information shared in public settings. Policy makers, businessmen, and researchers alike are confronted with ethical issues of what to do with this information.

Questions of personal security are particularly important, including privacy, safety and health. While we now have access into deeper, more personal levels of people’s lives, there are few standards surrounding how to handle this content. Individual companies – such as YouTube – try and set standards and best-practices for their online communities but users have little to no incentive to follow the range of these standards. While inappropriate content (content of a sexual or violent nature) is explicitly banned on YouTube, for example, there is not a committee of employees dedicated to enforcing this rule, but rather a peer-reporting system if one viewer is
troubled by another’s content. So, what happens when huge groups of at-risk individuals, such as college freshmen, begin to openly display their personal behaviors online? Should university judicial offices be permitted to use online content for purposes of punishment? Should the university a student is enrolled in be accountable to track behaviors and reach out when something seems awry? And if so, what would this type of intervention look like? And what happens to those who are not enrolled in an institution?

Many questions remain regarding the use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for intervention or prevention strategies. While Facebook has discussed the potential for creating a “help” button when users see updates online that seem like the profile owner is under distress and may need professional guidance, little has been done to implement this innovation. Could it become mandatory for college students to allow universities access to all personal accounts? And further, if we know that it seems that we must return to the oldest idea in the book: media literacy. As this study showed that YouTube content is potentially influential among college student risk behaviors, it joins in the rank of the studies before it looking at television, movies, music lyrics, music videos, and other social networking sites. The content that exists will only continue to expand, as seen in the shift towards new media, and rather than focusing on restricting content or shutting down web platforms it is probably more productive and important to simply teach youth how to go online safely and responsibly. As the internet continues to add increasingly personal and therefore influential content, it is important to detail how to understand a reliable versus unreliable resource, how to know if a webpage is secure or not, how to interpret personalized
sidebar advertisements, how search engines shape the results produced… and how to process media content.

Moral panic from parents around risk behaviors, such as sexual contact, violence, mental health issues, and substance use, are not new. But now, there is a new format in which adolescents can receive persuasive messaging – most frequently disguised as user-generated, ‘true’ content. Through educating early adolescents, it is possible to raise more informed, healthier young adults.
APPENDIX A
CONTENT ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

YouTube videos -

Basic Information
1. Video URL
2. Video title (as determined by uploader)
3. Uploader name
4. Uploader reported age
5. Video Description
6. Category (as determined by uploader)
7. Tags (as determined by uploader)
8. Date uploaded
9. Number of “views” on date of review
10. Number of “likes” on date of review
11. Number of “dislikes” on date of review
12. Number of “comments” on date of review
13. Length of video (in minutes)
14. Is the video YouTube age restricted? (as determined by uploader)
15. Are other substances present in the video?

Scale One: Fromme (adolescent outcome expectancies of alcohol use/consumption)
Positive Expectancies
• sociability
• tension reduction
• liquid courage
• sexuality
Negative Expectancies
• cognitive and behavioral impairment
• risk and aggression
• self-perception

Scale Two: Primack (originally for song lyrics)
Positive
• mental
• emotional
• physical
• social
• sexual
• legal
• financial
• all
Negative
• mental
• emotional
• physical
• social
• sexual
• legal
• financial
• all

Scale Three: van Hoof (originally for television series)
Type of alcohol consumed
• wine
• distilled
• beer
• cocktails/mixer
Time of consumption
• 6 am to noon
• noon to 5 pm
• 5 pm to 8 pm
• 8 pm to 6 am
• unknown
Situations of alcohol consumption
• social setting
• culinary setting
• to suppress problems
• before/during work
• other

Scale Four: Moreno (problem drinking applied to social networking site analysis)
CRAFFT
• car
• relax
• alone
• forget
• friends or family
• trouble
Explicit vs. figurative use
• explicit use
• explicit intoxication
• figurative use

Scale Five: Gruber
• humor
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions -

Alcohol Use
1. This first question is about your attitude towards alcohol in general. On a scale between 0 and 6, with – as “very negative,” 3 as “neutral,” and 6 as “very positive,” what would you say your own attitude towards alcohol is?
2. How do you think your attitude has changed throughout your freshman year? For example, do you think your attitude towards alcohol has become more positive, more negative, or stated the same over the course of your freshman year?
(3). Facebook profile coded by researcher for alcohol display (present or not)

Social Media Use
1. Twitter
   a) Do you have a Twitter account?
2. Facebook
   a) Do you have a Facebook account?
3. LinkedIn
   a) Do you have a LinkedIn account?
4. YouTube
   a) Do you have a YouTube account?
   b) Have you ever uploaded a video on YouTube?
   c) If so, was the video private or public?
   d) Have you ever watched a YouTube video about alcohol or other substances?
   e) If so, what prompted you to do so?
   f) Do you visit YouTube everyday?
   g) If yes, how many times per day?
   h) If no, how often?
REFERENCES


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