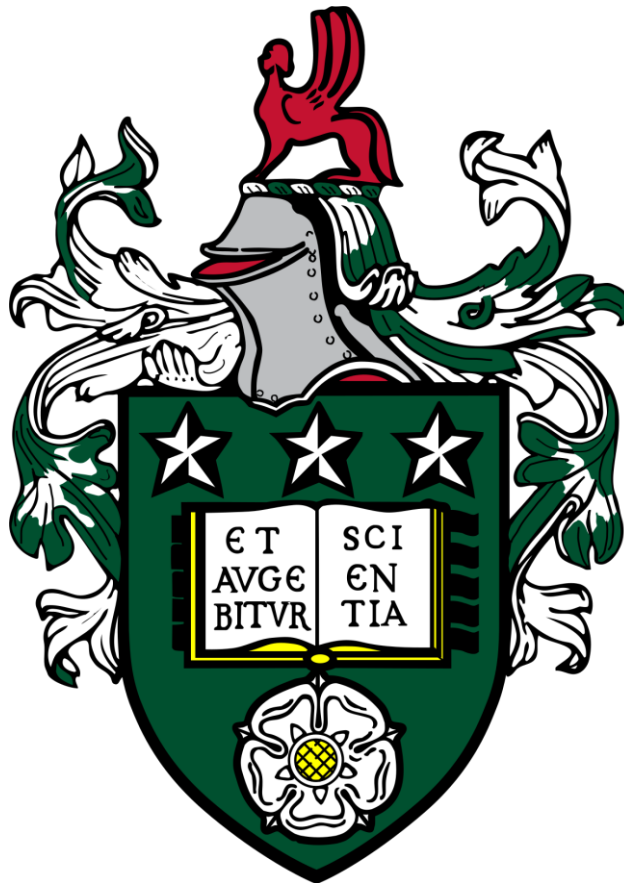


201111587
LAW5041
Word Count - 9999

Social Media and Violence: a study into the relationship between them and interventions to address this issue in West Yorkshire



Student ID: 201111587
Word Count: 9999
Supervisor: Kisby Dickinson

LAW5041M: Dissertation
Criminal Justice and Criminal Law LLM



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For modules [LAW5041M Dissertation] covered by University of Leeds ethical approval reference [AREA 16-126].

Student ID	201111587
Your name	Annabel Walker
Provisional title/ topic area	Social Media and Violence
Name of project/ dissertation supervisor	Kisby Dickinson

Are you planning to conduct fieldwork with (data on) human participants for your dissertation?	Yes	No
Yes (This includes online research methods and secondary data analysis).	X	
No, I am conducting <u>library based</u> research or content/ media analysis only.		X

If you ticked 'no' you do not need to take further action in respect of ethical approval. Please proceed to the declarations on page 8 and 9.

If you ticked 'yes' you need to complete the rest of this form.

You MUST submit your signed ethics form by date set by supervisor.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my dissertation supervisor Kisby Dickinson for her continued guidance, support, and invaluable feedback throughout the dissertation process.

I would also like to thank the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit for their collaboration. In particular, I would like to offer my special thanks to Jeremy Swire for his willingness to always help when needed. I would also like to thank the research participants for taking time to help me with my research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unconditional encouragement and belief in me. I would like to thank you for everything you have done for me throughout my time at university.

Abstract

The use of social media is growing exponentially, thus it is important to understand the issues this may present. This is a collaborative project with the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit into social media and violence, with a particular focus on youth violence. A thorough literature review was conducted to assess the various layers of the relationship between social media and youth violence and to establish interventions that have been developed to address this, as well as assessing their effectiveness. However, it is evident that there are gaps in the current literature regarding how online tensions 'spill' into the real world and a lack of research incorporating the views of professionals. Thus, following the literature review, primary research was carried out comprising of interviews with professionals who work with young people in West Yorkshire. This data was combined with data from a focus group provided by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit. The data from the interviews and focus group was analysed to establish the participants' perceptions on the relationship between social media and youth violence, their views on current interventions and the ideas they had for interventions that could be implemented in the future. This research highlights the need for a thorough understanding of the issues related to social media-driven youth violence for effective interventions to be developed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The internet has been one of the most 'transformative and fast-growing technologies',¹ with more people using the internet now than ever before.² As a result, the growth of social media has been exponential.³ 'In 2020, over 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025.'⁴ As the use of social media increases, particularly amongst young people, it is important and timely to consider the impact this has on behaviour and interactions in the real world. The incitement of violence on social media can quickly 'spill' into the real world causing violence. Thus, this research aims to explore the relationship between social media and youth violence and the interventions that could be put in place to address this.

This research will aim to explore the various layers of the relationship between social media and violence. Further, existing and future interventions surrounding social media and violence will be explored and evaluated. This is a collaborative project with the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and thus data from a focus group and interviews with professionals who work with young people in West Yorkshire has been used. For the purposes of this research 'youth' and 'young people' will be used interchangeably and will be considered as those aged fifteen to twenty-four. This is in line with the definition provided by the United Nations.⁵ A range of themes will be covered including the facilitation and organisation of crime, gang related violence and a variety of local and global interventions such as education and law enforcement. However, the key research questions to be answered are: What is the relationship between social media and youth violence? How effective are the interventions that are already in place, locally, nationally, and

¹ Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, 'Internet' (*Our World in Data*, 2015) <<https://ourworldindata.org/internet>> accessed 4 August 2021.

² 'Worldwide digital population as of January 2021' (*Statista*, 7 April 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>> accessed 4 August 2021.

³ 'Number of global social network users 2017-2025' (*Statista*, 28 January 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>> accessed 4 August 2021.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ United Nations, 'Youth' (*United Nations*) <<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>> accessed 4 August 2021.

internationally? Finally, what interventions might work in the future, again, on a local, national, and international basis?

First, this research will seek to analyse the literature surrounding the link between social media and violence, with a particular focus on youth violence. The first chapter of this research will also discuss existing literature covering interventions already developed in this area. Broad themes will be identified in the literature review which created a base for discussion in the interviews. This essay will then discuss the methodology used for this research including the aims and objectives, research design, ethical issues, and data analysis. This essay will then go on to present the research findings from the interviews and focus group, including professionals' views on the relationship between social media and youth violence, existing interventions, and ideas for future interventions. Finally, conclusions will be drawn regarding the research that has been carried out. It is hoped that this research will be useful, educational and help to inspire further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research aims to assess the relationship between social media and youth violence and explore interventions in this area; therefore, it is necessary to examine the existing literature. It is important to do this to direct the current research and identify gaps in existing research. 'Social media are nearly constant companions in the lives of many young people',⁶ thus, the need for a greater understanding regarding social media and youth violence is vital. If the relationship is fully understood, this will improve the chances of effective interventions. This chapter will be split into two parts. The first will assess the relationship between social media and violence. The second will review the interventions that have been developed. This chapter will outline a broad range of literature on a local, national, and international level to examine these issues.

Relationship Between Social Media and Violence

For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to explore how social media can influence youth violence in the real world. This literature review will demonstrate that some links have been identified, namely that social media can help facilitate collective action, the organisation of violent crime and gang violence. Despite this, this review will show how the relationship has been engaged with to a limited extent in terms of the 'spill over' effect.

Social media as facilitating collective action

Academics have argued that social media provides 'new opportunities for supporting the dynamics of collective action,'⁷ providing new formats for social interaction amongst young people.⁸ This appears to be largely uncontested amongst academics.⁹ Sæbø et al. argue that social media helps to facilitate collective action

⁶ Russell Wolff, Jack McDevitt and James Stark, 'Using social media to prevent gang violence and engage youth' (2011) <<https://www.mass.gov/doc/shannon-csi-resource-guide-7-using-social-media-to-prevent-gang-violence-and-engage-youth-march/download>> accessed 23 August 2021.

⁷ Øystein Sæbø, Tommaso Federici and Alessio M Braccini, 'Combining social media affordances for organising collective action' (2020) 30(4) Information Systems Journal 699.

⁸ Richard K Moule Jr, Scott H Decker and David C Pyrooz, 'Technology and conflict: Group processes and collective violence in the Internet Era' (2017) 68 Crime, Law and Social Change 47.

⁹ *ibid.*

for two reasons.¹⁰ First, there is a level of flexibility and openness on social media whereby individuals 'may behave more freely' because very few rules are enforced.¹¹ Second, it allows individuals to 'cross boundaries' and reach individuals outside their community.¹² Although this theory relates to collective action in general, it could apply to youth violence more specifically.

Similarly, academics have highlighted how social media provides for 'the connection of individuals and exchange of ideas' and thus has become 'the primary means by which groups identify the like-minded, engage with them, and garner their support'.¹³ Features of social media such as public group pages and hashtags assist with this, helping individuals to stay interconnected,¹⁴ and feel a sense of belonging.¹⁵ As Surette suggests, 'the isolated acts of 'reading the newspaper or turning on the television' have been replaced by the collective experience of posting, tweeting and 'going viral'.¹⁶ Gallacher et al. provide empirical support to show how social media can facilitate collective action.¹⁷ After analysing encounters between political protest groups on Facebook, they found that 'increased engagement between groups online is associated with increased violence when these groups met up.'¹⁸

Social media as facilitating offline violence

Social media can also help to facilitate the organisation of crime in a more practical sense through features such as comments, livestreaming and picture/video

¹⁰ Sæbø, Federici and Braccini (n7).

¹¹ Sæbø, Federici and Braccini (n7).

¹² Sæbø, Federici and Braccini (n7).

¹³ Tuesday Reitano and Andrew Trabulsi, 'Virtually Illicit: The Use of Social Media in a Hyper-Connected World in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic (eds) *Beyond Convergence* (2016) 215.

¹⁴ Sæbø, Federici and Braccini (n7).

¹⁵ Murat Mengü and Seda Mengü, 'Violence and Social Media' (2015) 1(3) *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications* 211.

¹⁶ Ray Surette, 'How social media is changing the way people commit crimes and police fight them' (*LSE blogs*, 2016) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/01/28/how-social-media-is-changing-the-way-people-commit-crimes-and-police-fight-them/>> accessed 18 August 2021.

¹⁷ John D Gallacher, Marc W Heerdink and Miles Hewstone, 'Online Engagement Between Opposing Political Protest Groups via Social Media is linked to Physical Violence of Offline Encounters' (2021) *Social Media and Society* 1.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

sharing.¹⁹ However, two features should be given a particular focus. First, encrypted messages.²⁰ There are a plethora of examples demonstrating how these have helped facilitate offline violence but perhaps most strikingly and recently, they played a role in the insurrection at the US Capitol in January 2021.²¹ Second, location sharing and tagging.²² This includes 'Snapchat Maps', Apple's 'Find my friends' and features on Facebook and Instagram which allow users to tag themselves and use hashtags at certain locations.²³ Despite allowing people to connect with friends, there are concerns that this can contribute to incidents including stalking, domestic violence and youth violence.²⁴ In a recent case, 'Snapchat Maps' was used by young people to locate an individual who was subsequently assaulted.²⁵ This demonstrates how social media can exacerbate and accelerate the incitement of violence online, thus facilitating offline violence.

Furthermore, a plethora of academics have highlighted the issues which can arise from the ability to stay anonymous online.²⁶ Anonymity allows people to act and speak freely which Cantor notes can lead to 'desensitisation'.²⁷ Similarly, in their empirical study, Lapidot-Lefler and Barak found that alongside invisibility and the

¹⁹ Caitlin Elsaesser, 'How social media turns online arguments between teens into real-world violence' *The Conversation* (5 April 2021) <<https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-turns-online-arguments-between-teens-into-real-world-violence-155613>> accessed 21 May 2021.

²⁰ Reitano and Trubulsi (n13).

²¹ Caitlin Elsaesser, 'How social media turns online arguments between teens into real-world violence' *The Conversation* (5 April 2021) <<https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-turns-online-arguments-between-teens-into-real-world-violence-155613>> accessed 21 May 2021; Lucy Doyle, 'Social media and group violence: a parent's guide' (*Parentzone*)

<<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/social-media-and-group-violence-parents-guide>> accessed 17 August 2021.

²² Felicia Gans, 'Police warn teens and parents about Snapchat location-sharing' *Globe* (9 July 2017) <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/07/09/police-warn-teens-and-parents-about-snapchat-location-sharing/VXric6XsOCDSVmPDhKCbhJ/story.html>> accessed 19 August 2021.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Alana Tindale, 'The app being used by domestic violence perpetrators, stalkers and party gatecrashers – and changes are the children in your life have it' *Daily Mail* (17 March 2021) <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9370397/Safety-concerns-Snapchat-feature-Snap-Maps-experts-say-turn-Ghost-Mode-prevent-stalking.html>> accessed 18 August 2021.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Kimberley M Christopherson, 'The positive and negative implications of anonymity in Internet social interactions: "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog"' (2006) 23 *Computers in Human Behaviour* 3038 See also Lucy Doyle, 'Social media and group violence: a parent's guide' (*Parentzone*) <<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/social-media-and-group-violence-parents-guide>> accessed 17 August 2021.

²⁷ J Cantor, 'Media Violence' (2000) 27(2) *J Adolesc Health* 30.

lack of eye-contact, anonymity induces 'the toxic online disinhibition effect'.²⁸ Furthermore, social media users are faced with 'invisible audiences',²⁹ meaning they sometimes have a reduced emotional understanding and are thus unconcerned or unaware of the consequences of their actions.³⁰ Anonymity and loss of inhibition thus helps individuals with the organisation of crime, but it also means individuals can anonymously provoke and incite offline violence without getting directly involved.

Gang violence

One way in which tensions on social media cross over into the real world is through gang violence.³¹ As Patton et al. state, 'gang members carry guns and twitter accounts'.³² Empirical data shows that individuals in gangs use the internet and social media more than those who are not in gangs,³³ show more willingness to respond to disrespectful comments and subsequently are more likely to engage in online-offline violence.³⁴ The term 'internet banging', coined by Patton, a key academic, is frequently used to describe the ways in which gangs use social media.³⁵ 'Internet banging' is the use of social media by gangs to 'brag about violence, make threats, recruit gang members and plan criminal activity'³⁶ which may be as simple as using one emoji, such as a bomb or gun.³⁷ In a study similar to the present research, Patton et al. interviewed violence outreach workers and asked

²⁸ Naom Lapidot-Lefer and Azy Barak, 'Effects of anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact on toxic online disinhibition' (2012) 28(2) *Computers in Human Behaviour* 434.

²⁹ Danah Boyd, 'Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life' in David Buckingham (eds), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media (The John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning)* (The MIT Press 2008) 120.

³⁰ Desmond Upton Patton, David Pryooz, Scott Decker, William R Frey and Patrick Leonard, 'When Twitter Fingers Turn to Trigger Fingers: a Qualitative Study of Social Media-Related Gang Violence' (2019) 1(1) *International Journal of Bullying Prevention* 205.

³¹ Desmond Upton Patton, Robert D Eschmann and Dirk A Butler, 'Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop' (2013) 29(5) *Computers in Human Behaviour* 54.

³² *ibid.*

³³ David C Pryooz, Scott H Decker and Richard K Moule Jr, 'Criminal and Routine Activities in Online Settings: Gangs, Offenders, and the Internet' (2015) 32(3) 471.

³⁴ Moule Jr, Decker and Pryooz (n8).

³⁵ Desmond Upton Patton, Robert D Eschmann, Caitlin Elsaesser and Eddie Bocanegra, 'Sticks, stones and Facebook accounts: What violence in Chicago' (2016) 65 *Computers in Human Behaviour* 591.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Bryant Furlow, 'Media Violence and youth aggression' (2017) 1(2) *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 91.

them to describe how young people use social media.³⁸ All of the participants described behaviour including 'taunting rival gangs, posturing and boasting about violent events.'³⁹ This is consistent with other academic research.⁴⁰

Some academics explain how this 'spills' offline. Social media can 'escalate gang hostilities and stimulate violent retaliation in the real world'.⁴¹ An American study by Patton et al. concluded that the use of social media by gangs can be categorised into four groups: 'venting, dissing, calling out, and direct threat'.⁴² These behaviours can be attributed to wanting to create a sense of identity and belonging or to boost ego.⁴³ However, it is important to question the legitimacy of information shared by gangs;⁴⁴ information may not be shared by gang members or anybody who intends to be part of them.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the literature surrounding gang violence helps to show how tensions on social media can 'spill' into the real world.

Drill music

An element of social media that has been given particular attention in recent years in relation to youth violence is 'drill music'. This provides another example of how online violence can 'spill' into the real world. The term 'drill music' is typically used to mean music which is 'aggressive, dark, violent...it's called drill music because the

³⁸ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

³⁹ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

⁴⁰ Desmond Upton Patton, Robert D Eschmann and Dirk A Butler, 'Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop' (2013) 29(5) *Computers in Human Behaviour* 54; Desmond Upton Patton, Jun Sung Hong, Megan Ranney, Sadiq Patel, Caitlin Kelley, Rob Eschmann and Tyreasa Washington, 'Social media as a vector for youth violence: A review of the literature' (2014) (35) *Computers in Human Behavior* 548; Desmond Upton Patton, Ninieve Sanchez, Dale Fitch, Jamie Macbeth and Patrick Leonard, 'I Know God's Got a Day 4 Me: Violence, Trauma, and Coping Among Gang-Involved Twitter Users' (2015) 35(2) *Social Science Computer Review* 226 See also Keir Irwin-Rogers, James Densley and Craig Pinkney, 'Gang Violence and Social Media' in Jane L Ireland, Carol A Ireland and Philip Birch (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Human Aggression* (Routledge: Oxon 2018).

⁴¹ Keir Irwin-Rogers, James Densley and Craig Pinkney, 'Gang Violence and Social Media' in Jane L Ireland, Carol A Ireland and Philip Birch (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Human Aggression* (Routledge: Oxon 2018).

⁴² Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

⁴³ Reitano and Trabulsi (n13).

⁴⁴ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

⁴⁵ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

term "drill" refers to killing, doing a hit, or retaliating'.⁴⁶ 'Videos may include references to violence, weapons, drugs and sexual activity',⁴⁷ 'how much money they make or detail what the gang plans to do to their opposition'.⁴⁸ Given the fluidity, speed and reach of social media, these videos receive large audiences,⁴⁹ thus it has been suggested that this music might act as a 'catalyst for violence in the offline world'.⁵⁰ Some gang members acknowledge that this music can lead to violence often involving retaliation.⁵¹ However, Pinkney has argued that drill music is actually 'exacerbating' problems that already exist 'on the ground'.⁵² Nevertheless, many academics argue that drill music does contribute to youth violence in the real world, glamorising gang association and violent lifestyles, thus individuals aspire to be like them.⁵³ Further, retaliation provides individuals with a 'sense of power', 'authority', status and reputation.⁵⁴ Irwin-Rogers et al. develop this, arguing that those who produce drill music see the benefits such as 'status, fame and money' as outweighing the risks.⁵⁵ Some gang members suggest that making these music videos is fun, creative and allows careers to develop.⁵⁶ A prominent UK gang has received a number of music awards for their drill music videos, demonstrating the

⁴⁶ 'Drill rap' (*Urban Dictionary*, 2020)

<<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Drill%20Rap>> accessed 3 September 2021.

⁴⁷ 'What is 'drill music, how is it shared online and is it linked to gang violence?' (*Childsnet International*, 2018) <<https://www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals/hot-topics/social-media-and-gang-violence/what-is-drill-music-how-is-it-shared-online-and-is-it-linked-to-gang-violence>> accessed 16 August 2021.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Irwin-Rogers, Densley and Pinkney (n41).

⁵⁰ Moule Jr, Decker and Pyrooz (n8).

⁵¹ Irwin-Rogers, Densley and Pinkney (n41).

⁵² Mary O'Hara, 'Craig Pinkney: 'Young people caught up in gang violence are traumatised' *The Guardian* (11 February 2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/11/craig-pinkney-criminologist-young-people-gang-violence-traumatised>> accessed 21 May 2021.

⁵³ Keir Irwin-Rogers and Craig Pinkney, 'Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence' (*Catch 22*, 2017) <https://cdn.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Social-Media-as-a-Catalyst-and-Trigger_Exec-Summary.pdf> accessed 20 May 2021 See also Jonathan E King, Carolyn E Walpole and Kristi Lamon, 'Surf and Turf Wars Online – Growing Implications of Internet Gang Violence' (2007) 41(6) *Journal of Adolescent Health* S66.

⁵⁴ Ben Beaumont-Thomson, 'Is UK drill music really behind London's wave of violent crime?' *The Guardian* (9 April 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/09/uk-drill-music-london-wave-violent-crime>> accessed 9 June 2021.

⁵⁵ Irwin-Rogers, Densley and Pinkney (n41).

⁵⁶ Keir Irwin-Rogers and Craig Pinkney, 'Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence' (*Catch 22*, 2017) <https://cdn.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Social-Media-as-a-Catalyst-and-Trigger_Exec-Summary.pdf> accessed 20 May 2021.

market and business prospects.⁵⁷ A question must follow whether positive messages could be shared through these videos. Nevertheless, the literature surrounding drill music provides further evidence of how online violence can 'spill' into the real world.

Spill over effect

Some academics suggest that the speed and reach of communication via social media allows violence to escalate and 'spill' into the real world instantly and easily.⁵⁸ The creation of the smart phone has exacerbated this.⁵⁹ Social media has become widely available and thus,⁶⁰ this is not only an issue amongst young people in gangs but also more widely.⁶¹ Messages, videos and pictures are shared efficiently inciting or spreading violence making word-of-mouth communication a thing of the past.⁶² Within minutes violence can 'spill out' creating violence in the real world. This literature review has shown that existing literature has engaged with the causes of violence from social media such as the organisation of collective action and the facilitation of offline violence, but it appears that apart from gang violence, drill music and the speed and reach of communication, there is a limited understanding of how and why it transitions into real-world violence.

Limited research

Despite the plethora of research discussed above, in an extensive literature review Patton et al. conclude that there are still 'major limitations with the existing studies' surrounding the relationship between social media and youth violence.⁶³

⁵⁷ Keir Irwin-Rogers, James Densley and Craig Pinkney, 'Gang Violence and Social Media' in Jane L Ireland, Carol A Ireland and Philip Birch (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Human Aggression* (Routledge: Oxon 2018) Citing C Ike, 'A breakdown of MOBO 'New Comer' nominees: Who are they and why they all deserve their nomination' (2016) <HTTP: www.kingsmediatv.com>.

⁵⁸ Mengü and Mengü (n15).

⁵⁹ 'Child Safety Online' (UK Council for Child Internet Safety 2015) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/487973/ukccis_guide-final_3_.pdf> accessed 18 August 2021.

⁶⁰ Marta -Marika Urbanik and Kevin D Haggerty, '#It's Dangerous': The Online World of Drug Dealers, Rappers and the Street Code' (2018) 58(6) *The British Journal of Criminology* 1343.

⁶¹ 'Child Safety Online' (n59).

⁶² Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

⁶³ Desmond Upton Patton, Jun Sung Hong, Megan Ranney, Sadiq Patel, Caitlin Kelley, Rob Eschmann and Tyreasa Washington, 'Social media as a vector for youth violence: A review of the literature' (2014) (35) *Computers in Human Behavior* 548.

Furthermore, it has been argued that there is limited empirical research involving the views of professionals who work with young people, hence the aims of the present research.⁶⁴ Patton et al. argue that gaps in academic research limit the ability to make recommendations for interventions in this area.⁶⁵ This literature review has shown that the relationship between social media and violence has been established to a degree but not in sufficient detail to understand the role of social media when it 'spills' into the real world. Despite this gap in the research, it is pertinent to consider academic contributions with regards to possible interventions.

Interventions

The second section of this literature review will examine interventions that have been developed for social media-driven violence. It will assess the scope of interventions, comment on their effectiveness and identify any gaps. The different layers of the relationship between social media and violence appear to be reflected in different layers of interventions. Lessig proposed a theory of regulation whilst arguing that behaviour can be regulated through four systems: norms, laws, the market, and architecture.⁶⁶ A review of literature in this area shows that this approach has been reflected in interventions of online to offline violence. The interventions appear to be limited and disjointed and thus are limited in effectiveness. Nonetheless, there have been some attempts which will be outlined below.

Education

At a broad level there are information-based resources, such as the NSPCC website.⁶⁷ These provide information to the public, highlighting the issues of social media-driven violence. Moreover, charities like the NSPCC have created guides to internet safety which can be accessed and downloaded from their website.⁶⁸

Furthermore, webinars such as that created by Craig Pinkney: 'Social Media &

⁶⁴ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

⁶⁵ Upton Patton, Hong, Ranney, Patel, Kelley and Eschmann (n63).

⁶⁶ Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (Basic Books 1999).

⁶⁷ NSPCC, 'Protecting children from online abuse' (*NSPCC Learning*, 2021)

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/online-abuse#article-top>> accessed 5 September 2021.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

Violence: Preventative Strategies for School Leaders' have been developed.⁶⁹ Although these are relatively passive and untargeted interventions and thus are perhaps of limited effectiveness, they serve an important educational function. Furthermore, they are available to a wide audience and can be used alongside more targeted interventions.

There have also been some large-scale educational programmes implemented to educate people on the issues of social media-driven violence. For example, the European Commission carried out a large-scale educational programme named 'Stop Violence on Social Media' or 'Safe Social Media' created 'for children aged 12-18, their parents and teachers'.⁷⁰ They developed the 'Daphne Toolkit' which included a variety of activities such as interactive presentations, competitions, and training.⁷¹ Despite being less targeted, the results appeared to be positive, improving the awareness of '5,000 children, 120 parents and 2,000 teachers'.⁷² Furthermore, 'according to the Basic Theoretical Model, the project reduced in teenagers their propensity to violence, acceptance of it, intention to commit violent actions and the consumption of violent media contents'.⁷³ Thus, it could be useful to develop more interventions like this. Some professionals who work with young people also feel uneducated in this area, thus educational tools could also be beneficial for them.⁷⁴

There are also some intervention programmes that have been developed in schools. Byars et al. suggest these include 'social/emotional learning curricula, school-based mental health services, and internal threat assessment protocols' and found that these are becoming more prevalent and are largely effective at reducing violence.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ 'Social Media & Violence: Preventative Strategies for School Leaders' (*National Online Safety*, 2021) <<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/webinars/social-media-violence-preventative-strategies-for-school-leaders>> accessed 5 September 2021.

⁷⁰ European Commission, 'Stop violence on social media' (*European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants/results/daphne-toolkit/content/stop-violence-social-media_en> accessed 23 August 2021.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

⁷⁵ Jason Byars, Emily Graybill, Quynh Wellons and Lonny Harper, 'Monitoring Social Media and Technology Use to Prevent Youth Suicide and School Violence' (2020) 24(3) *Contemporary School Psychology* 318.

However, this research only analysed one school, thus this study should be replicated to examine the effectiveness of prevention programmes in schools. Cantor and Wilson also suggest that programmes in schools are encouraging.⁷⁶ Despite this, after analysing intervention programmes in Northern Ireland, Reilly outlined that although schools were offering 'bespoke internet safety lessons' in conjunction with other stakeholders, they were unlikely to have a significant impact on reducing social media-driven violence because young people still have a large amount of unsupervised time.⁷⁷ Reilly argues that to improve school-based educational programmes, the perspectives of young people should be explored and included to empower them to take action themselves.⁷⁸

Law Enforcement

Academics also draw attention to how law enforcement agencies use social media to intervene. Some have been monitoring social media accounts, including 'hashtag' analysis to identify those who are inciting violence, to try and prevent it from spilling into the real world.⁷⁹ The 'velocity, volume, and variety of data that people share' helps to assist this.⁸⁰ Data such as text, images and emojis 'can allow for instant identification of risky behaviours' and can be used to create databases of those inciting violence.⁸¹ Furthermore, social media can 'provide deep insights into root causes and pathways to violence by showing connections to mental and physical health, neighborhood engagement, and proximity to psychosocial resources and city-

⁷⁶ Joanne Cantor and Barbara J Wilson, 'Media and Violence: Intervention Strategies for Reducing Aggression' (2003) 5(3) Media Psychology 363.

⁷⁷ Paul Reilly, 'Anti-social' networking in Northern Ireland: An exploratory study of strategies for policing interfaces in cyberspace' (2011) 3(1) Policy and Internet 1.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Megan Behrman, 'When Gangs Go Viral: Using Social Media And Surveillance Cameras to Enhance Gang Databases' (2015) 29(1) Harvard Journal of Law and Technology 315 See also Can Analysis of Tweets Inform Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence?' (*Measure Evaluation*) <<https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/newsroom/news/can-analysis-of-tweets-inform-interventions-to-prevent-gender-based-violence.html>> accessed 20 August 2021.

⁸⁰ 'Can Analysis of Tweets Inform Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence?' (*Measure Evaluation*) <<https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/newsroom/news/can-analysis-of-tweets-inform-interventions-to-prevent-gender-based-violence.html>> accessed 20 August 2021.

⁸¹ Desmond Upton Patton, Kyle McGregor and Gary Slutkin, 'Youth Gun Violence Prevention in a Digital Age' (2018) 141(4) Paediatrics <<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/141/4/e20172438>> accessed 24 August 2021 See also Megan Behrman, 'When Gangs Go Viral: Using Social Media And Surveillance Cameras to Enhance Gang Databases' (2015) 29(1) Harvard Journal of Law and Technology 315.

wide support'.⁸² This helps to target vulnerable individuals, thus, Patton et al. highlight the importance of using social media data for the prevention of violence.⁸³ This was implemented in the 'E-Responder' programme in New York whereby professionals were provided with a toolkit to identify and assess 154 risky social media posts and determine how to respond.⁸⁴ The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention also made use of these techniques.⁸⁵ A similar approach could be used in England and Wales. In the UK a project named 'Operation Domain' attempted to collate all gang-related content from social media, however the success of this is unknown.⁸⁶ These initial steps have so far appeared effective and thus should be developed further.⁸⁷

In the future, law enforcement agencies could work with computer scientists, community groups and social scientists to create a system whereby social media posts can be thematically grouped.⁸⁸ This could help 'to identify unique characteristics in social media data that might indicate when, how, and why' violence may occur and thus help prevent it.⁸⁹ However, popular 'trends' and 'hashtags' change rapidly, making it hard to keep up to date.⁹⁰ Furthermore, professionals

⁸² Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

⁸³ Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

⁸⁴ Desmond Upton Patton, Kyle McGregor and Gary Slutkin, 'Youth Gun Violence Prevention in a Digital Age' (2018) 141(4) Paediatrics

<<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/141/4/e20172438>> accessed 24 August 2021.

⁸⁵ Joseph G Bock, *The Technology of Nonviolence: Social Media and Violence Prevention* (MIT Press 2012).

⁸⁶ Sarah Marsh, 'Social media related to violence by young people, say experts' *The Guardian* (2 April 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/apr/02/social-media-violence-young-people-gangs-say-experts>> accessed 20 May 2021.

⁸⁷ Upton Patton, McGregor and Slutkin (n84).

⁸⁸ Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

⁸⁹ Upton Patton, McGregor and Slutkin (n84).

⁹⁰ An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, 'The Work of Youth Offending Teams to Protect the Public' (2017) <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/10/The-Work-of-Youth-Offending-Teams-to-Protect-the-Public_reportfinal.pdf> accessed 24 August 2021 See also Can Analysis of Tweets Inform Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence?' (*Measure Evaluation*) <<https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/newsroom/news/can-analysis-of-tweets-inform-interventions-to-prevent-gender-based-violence.html>> accessed 20 August 2021.

would need to be highly trained to monitor social media and keep up to date with surveillance legislation and guidance.⁹¹ This can be complex and costly.⁹²

Law enforcement agencies have tried to intervene in this area using features of social media. Recently, the FBI created an encrypted messaging network allowing them to 'intercept more than 20 million messages' from criminal organizations, helping to prevent multiple acts of violence, making it a highly effective intervention.⁹³ Other agencies have managed to hack into encrypted messages, again helping to prevent violence.⁹⁴ However, a recent report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation noted that many law enforcement agencies have a limited understanding of social media and thus interventions are 'lagging behind'.⁹⁵ The effectiveness of interventions regarding social media and youth violence depends on the ability of professionals to navigate social media, thus, as previously mentioned, up-to-date training and guidance would be useful.⁹⁶

Moreover, law enforcement agencies can use social media to spread positive messages. Given that social media is often young people's favoured form of communication, interventions utilising it are likely to be effective.⁹⁷ There have been some social media campaigns which addressed youth violence. In 2018 the YMCA created a social media campaign featuring short documentaries to raise awareness of knife crime.⁹⁸ More recently, the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network sourced

⁹¹ An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, 'The Work of Youth Offending Teams to Protect the Public' (2017) <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/10/The-Work-of-Youth-Offending-Teams-to-Protect-the-Public_reportfinal.pdf> accessed 24 August 2021.

⁹² Upton Patton, McGregor and Slutkin (n84).

⁹³ Elliot Hannon, 'This Encrypted Messaging App Used by Organized Crime Was Created by the FBI' (Slate, 2021) <<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/06/encrypted-messaging-app-anom-fbi-organized-crime.html>> accessed 20 August 2021.

⁹⁴ NSPCC, 'Police and NCA infiltrate encrypted communication platform in UK's biggest ever law enforcement operation' (NSPCC, 2020) <<https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/police-and-nca-infiltrate-encrypted-communication-platform-in-uks-biggest-ever-law-enforcement-operation>> accessed 20 August 2021.

⁹⁵ An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation (n91).

⁹⁶ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

⁹⁷ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

⁹⁸ 'Young people launch social media campaign to tackle knife crime' (YMCA, 2018) <<https://ymcanewcastle.com/young-people-launch-social-media-campaign-to-tackle-knife-crime/>> accessed 5 September 2021.

real stories of knife crime to share with young people.⁹⁹ However, despite being effective in the short term,¹⁰⁰ the long-term effect is difficult to measure.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, campaigns like this help to communicate efficiently to a large number of people. It appears that no mass media campaigns have specifically addressed the dangers of social media-driven youth violence, thus, it could be useful to develop one.

Social media companies

Social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook have rules and guidelines which users must agree to before setting up an account.¹⁰² Facebook's guidelines state that they 'aim to prevent potential offline harm that may be related to content on Facebook'.¹⁰³ Furthermore, their algorithms identify harmful information and either remove it or create a warning for users.¹⁰⁴ However, many argue that these procedures are inadequate.¹⁰⁵ Arguably, social media companies are at the core of intervention and thus must moderate content more strictly.¹⁰⁶

Limitations and future interventions

A major limitation of the effectiveness of interventions regarding social media-driven youth violence is the 'continually evolving nature of these online venues'.¹⁰⁷

Interventions addressing social media-driven violence should be multi-stakeholder.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ Sophie-May Clarke, 'Campaign launched to tackle knife crime amongst Lancashire's youth' *Lancashire Telegraph* (15 September 2020) <<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/18720832.campaign-launched-tackle-knife-crime-amongst-lancashires-youngsters/>> accessed 7 September 2021.

¹⁰⁰ 'Can Analysis of Tweets Inform Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence?' (n80).

¹⁰¹ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

¹⁰² 'The Twitter Rules' (*Twitter Help Centre*, 2021) <<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-rules>> accessed 7 September 2021; 'Violence and Incitement' (*Facebook Community Standards*, 2021) <https://m.facebook.com/communitystandards/credible_violence/> accessed 7 September 2021; 'Community Guidelines' (*Instagram*, 2021) <<https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119>> accessed 7 September 2021.

¹⁰³ 'Violence and Incitement' (*Facebook Community Standards*, 2021) <https://m.facebook.com/communitystandards/credible_violence/> accessed 7 September 2021.

¹⁰⁴ 'The Twitter Rules'; 'Violence and Incitement'; 'Community Guidelines' (n102).

¹⁰⁵ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹⁰⁶ Giovanni De Gregorio and Nicole Stremmlau, 'Information interventions and social media' (2021) 10(2) *Internet Policy Review* <<https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/information-interventions-and-social-media>> accessed 24 August 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

¹⁰⁸ Reilly (n77).

This allows a range of professionals with different expertise to be involved in open discussions, helping to create balanced and inclusive interventions.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, academics have recommended an individualised approach towards intervention.¹¹⁰ One of the most useful suggestions comes from Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney who argue that interventions should involve three strategies.¹¹¹ The first stage, 'prevention', requires sufficient up-to-date training on social media for professionals and vulnerable young people, developed by the Home Office and widely shared.¹¹² Other academics also recommend this.¹¹³ Second, they suggest 'interventions', which could include encouraging professionals to use social media and the redrafting of legislature to encourage public bodies to monitor online content more closely.¹¹⁴ Again, this is supported by other academics.¹¹⁵ Third, Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney propose that 'suppression' is needed including making it easier to report online content and remove it efficiently.¹¹⁶ These three strategies could be a useful approach for future intervention. However, the lack of academic interrogation of the 'spill-over' effects from online violence currently limits the effectiveness of interventions.

In summary, the literature shows that there are a variety of links between social media and violence. There is a plethora of literature to support the links, however, there appears to be limited understanding of why violence 'spills' from online to offline. Furthermore, although there have been some interventions, they appear limited and disjointed, hence the need for further research to sufficiently understand the relationship and consequently develop successful interventions. This is the main

¹⁰⁹ 'Internet Governance – Why the Multistakeholder Approach Works' (*Internet Society*, 2016) <<https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2016/internet-governance-why-the-multistakeholder-approach-works/>> accessed 22 September 2021.

¹¹⁰ Cantor and Wilson (n76).

¹¹¹ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹¹² Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹¹³ 'Organized Crime Research Brief no.21: Social Media and Organized Crime' (Public Safety Canada, 2021) <<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/rgnzd-crm-brf-21/rgnzd-crm-brf-21-eng.pdf>> accessed 7 September 2021 See also An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, 'The Work of Youth Offending Teams to Protect the Public' (2017) <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/10/The-Work-of-Youth-Offending-Teams-to-Protect-the-Public_reportfinal.pdf> accessed 24 August 2021.

¹¹⁴ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹¹⁵ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹¹⁶ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

objective of the present research; the next chapter will discuss the methodologies used in this research to achieve this.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Bryman notes that a lack of transparency is common amongst qualitative research,¹¹⁷ thus this chapter attempts to make the methodology used in this research sufficiently clear. This helps readers to assess the 'reliability and validity' of the qualitative research.¹¹⁸ This chapter will include details about the aims and objectives, the research design and sample, interview procedure, research and ethics issues and finally, the method of data analysis used to analyse the data collected from interviews and a focus group provided by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

Research Aims and Objectives:

The central aim of this research project is to examine the relationship between social media and violence focusing on violent crimes carried out by those aged 15-24. The objectives in this study were:

- a) A review of existing literature surrounding evidence of the relationship between social media and violence
- b) A review of existing literature surrounding interventions already developed in this area
- c) Empirical research involving interviews with professionals regarding their perception of the relationship between social media and violence and their views on interventions to address this
- d) Integration of interview data with data from a focus group provided by the VRU

Research Design:

This research is a collaborative research project with the University of Leeds and the VRU. This research has been completed as part of my Masters in Criminal Justice and Criminal Law. A copy of this research will be provided to the VRU alongside a

¹¹⁷ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (5th edn, Oxford University Press 2016) 399.

¹¹⁸ *ibid* 383.

four-page briefing which will be published on the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner's website.

Due to the nature of the research, the VRU requested that research participants should be professionals who work with young people. Although quantitative data is beneficial because it is objective and is useful for comparing results,¹¹⁹ it fails to provide an in-depth understanding and interpretation of real-life situations.¹²⁰ In this research it was important to gather in-depth opinions and ideas from professionals who work with young people thus qualitative research was used. As Matthews and Ross state, 'qualitative research methods are primarily concerned with stories and accounts including subjective understandings, feelings, opinions and beliefs',¹²¹ thus it allows for contextual and deeper understandings of emerging and complex issues.¹²² Qualitative research is also useful for evaluating the effectiveness of processes and programmes,¹²³ thus, this research will test the hypotheses of the current literature surrounding social media-driven violence. Noakes and Wincup also draw attention to the value of qualitative research for the development of future policy and practice.¹²⁴ Further, as Bloor highlights, practice-oriented research can help to facilitate the development of good practice.¹²⁵

Sample

This research used purposive sampling, a method of strategic sampling that ensures that 'those sampled are relevant to the research questions.'¹²⁶ This project was a collaborative research project thus access to research participants was facilitated

¹¹⁹ Bryman (n117) 152.

¹²⁰ Bryman (n117) 166.

¹²¹ Bob Matthews and Liz Ross, *Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social Science* (Pearson Education Limited 2010).

¹²² Bryman (n117) 394.

¹²³ Loraine Busetto, Wolfgang Wick and Christoph Gumbinger, 'How to use and assess qualitative research methods' (2020) 14 *Neurological Research and Practice* <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>> accessed 9 September 2021.

¹²⁴ Lesley Noaks and Emma Wincup, *Criminological Research: Understanding Qualitative Methods* (Sage Publications 2004).

¹²⁵ Michael Bloor, Helen Sampson, Susan Baker and Katrin Dahlgren, 'Useful but no Oracle: reflections on the use of a Delphi Group in a multi-methods policy research study' (2015) 15(1) *Qualitative Research* 57.

¹²⁶ Bryman (n117) 408.

through a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers 'by virtue of their personal or work relationship to a respondent, are able to control who has access, and when, to the respondent.'¹²⁷ The VRU 'brings together specialists from health, police, local government, youth justice, prisons, probation and community organisations',¹²⁸ thus they were able to provide a variety of potential participants. Nonetheless, research participants who were not provided by the VRU were also contacted. This allowed for a varied sample of professionals including teachers, youth workers and probation officers, helping to create meaningful data. The interview sample consisted of twelve research participants. The data collected from these interviews was integrated with focus group data provided by the VRU from the VRU Community Advisory Group; a group of thirty-two individuals from the West Yorkshire Community from a variety of backgrounds.

Interview Procedure

Block ethical approval was granted by the University of Leeds ESSL Faculty Ethics Committee. Twelve interviews were carried out with professionals to ensure that the research aims and objectives were met to a high standard. Although their interactions with young people are largely face to face, given that social media pervades all aspects of young people's lives, it was likely that they would have encountered or been told about some of the issues surrounding social media and violence through their work with young people. This project will include a detailed examination of the findings from those interviews to examine social media-driven youth violence.

To gather interest for interviews, participants were initially contacted by email outlining what the research project involved. This ensured that participation was completely voluntary. Furthermore, this allowed the researcher to gauge the variety of participants meaning any missing areas could be targeted to ensure that a wide variety of professionals were involved. Following this, another email was sent to

¹²⁷ Paul J Lavrakas, *Encyclopaedia of Survey Research Methods* (Vols 1-0) (Sage Publication 2008).

¹²⁸ 'About: West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit' (*Police & Crime Commissioner, 2021*) <<https://www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/west-yorkshire-violence-reduction-unit/about>> accessed 3 August 2021.

participants who agreed to take part to arrange a date and time for the interview. It was important not to burden participants, so participants were provided with a wide timeframe in which the interviews could be conducted and were reminded again that participation was voluntary. Before the interviews were carried out, each participant was provided with an information sheet specifying details of the study so that they were able to provide informed consent. Bryman notes the importance of this to avoid any harm to participants and consequent criticism of the researcher.¹²⁹ Additionally, each participant was provided with a consent form which they signed and returned before the interview. Both the information sheet and consent form are attached in the Appendices.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews took place via Microsoft Teams. The invitations and links to these meetings were sent to the participants via email two weeks before the interviews took place, along with the information sheet and consent form mentioned above. The interviews lasted approximately half an hour, but this was flexible. At the end of the interview each participant was given time to ask any questions or add any further comments.

The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. A professional transcriber was paid to transcribe the interviews due to time constraints and for purposes of accuracy. After the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher removed any identifying information e.g., locations and names. The interview schedule is also attached in the Appendices.

Data Collection

This research project used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews 'enable research participants to talk about a set of questions or topics in their own way'.¹³⁰ They offer 'more opportunity for dialogue and exchange between the interviewer and interviewee'¹³¹, and thus are useful to explore concepts and themes

¹²⁹ Bryman (n117) 129.

¹³⁰ **Matthews and Ross (n121).**

¹³¹ Noaks and Wincup (n124) 81.

in more detail. As Adams acknowledges, they also help to facilitate new areas of knowledge emerging; research questions are not limited to what already exists in the literature so unexpected insights and perspectives can emerge.¹³²

As Wincup notes, for semi-structured interviews, it is important to establish rapport with the participant,¹³³ thus each interview started with 'warm-up questions' which allowed the researcher to explore the participant's job role and the service they provide to young people. The participants were then asked questions regarding their perception of the relationship between social media and violence, their views on current interventions, and ideas for future interventions. The key themes identified in the literature review were carried forward into the interviews to be explored in more depth. Semi-structured interviews offer 'more opportunity to probe, typically with the use of follow-up questions',¹³⁴ and thus the researcher was able to deviate from the interview schedule if necessary.¹³⁵ It also allows for participants to ask further questions for clarification and offer more detail on certain areas. These interviews facilitated both an evaluation of existing interventions and engagement with new ideas about what could work, thus serving the aims of the dissertation.¹³⁶ This interview data was integrated with data from a focus group provided by the VRU.

Research Issues and Ethics:

Whilst carrying out this research some research issues arose. One of these surrounded arranging interviews. Interviewees were contacted via email and some participants wanted more information to assess whether they would be suitable for the research, sometimes delaying the confirmation of interviews. Given that the interviews were carried out over the summer period, participants were contacted

¹³² William C Adams, 'Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews' in Kathryn E Newcomer, Harry P Hatry and Joseph S Wholey (eds) *Handbook of Practical Programme Evaluation* (4th edn, Wiley & Sons 2015) 492.

¹³³ Noaks and Wincup (n124) 81.

¹³⁴ Noaks and Wincup (n124) 81.

¹³⁵ Lesley Noaks and Emma Wincup, *Criminological Research: Understanding Qualitative Methods* (Sage Publications 2004) 81; Tim May, *Social research: issues, methods and process* (Open University Press 2011) 134.

¹³⁶ **Matthews and Ross (n121).**

early to ensure that they were not on annual leave. Nonetheless, it was sometimes difficult to find a suitable time to conduct the interviews.

Furthermore, there were ethical issues that needed to be considered during this research. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Leeds, and these standards were adhered to throughout the research. Each participant was provided with an information sheet and consent form before the interview was carried out. This included information such as the participants' right to withdraw, the use of audio recording and transcription, that words may be quoted but not attributed and that their information will be used in the dissertation and four-page briefing which will be published. All participants consented to the study.

Bryman highlights that anonymity and data protection are important to prevent harm to participants and prevent any personal information from becoming public.¹³⁷ Therefore, to ensure anonymity, each participant was provided with a number which they were asked to say at the start of the interview. Further, the audio recordings were stored on an encrypted laptop provided by the University of Leeds. The recordings were transcribed and anonymised as quickly as possible so that the recordings could be deleted. Thus, the only data stored long-term was totally anonymised. The researcher had sole access to this. When the research was complete, all data was deleted, and the laptop was wiped.

These issues are to be expected when carrying out primary research. Despite this, the research that has been carried out and the data that has been collected can be considered reliable and accurate.

Data Analysis:

The main findings from the interviews and the focus group are presented in this dissertation. These two datasets and the literature review have been relied upon to achieve the aims and objectives of this research, namely, to understand the

¹³⁷ Bryman (n117).

relationship between social media and violence and to explore interventions which address this issue.

To analyse the data, techniques based on thematic analysis and grounded theory were used. Key themes have been used throughout the dissertation including the literature review and research findings which allow for the aims of the research to be fulfilled. Grounded theory developed by Struass and Corbin was used to analyse the data to encourage the development of theories and concepts.¹³⁸ This approach was taken to generate further ideas of the links between social media and violence and to highlight recommendations for future interventions. Thematic and grounded theory analysis allow for flexibility and openness to concepts and themes that emerge; this reinforces the arguments in favour of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews.

This research is significant for assessing the relationship between social media and youth violence in West Yorkshire but also more widely, both nationally and internationally. The literature review covered local, national, and international research. However, the primary research carried out for this project concerned social media and youth violence in West Yorkshire, thus one should be cautious about generalising the findings. Furthermore, given that this is an emerging area of research, and a relatively small sample was used in this study, it would be useful if further research was carried out.

¹³⁸ Anselm Strauss and Juliet M Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA SAGE 1998).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter will present the findings of the primary research. The evidence used in this chapter will be a combination of direct quotes and notes taken whilst analysing the interviews. The main themes established in the literature review have been used to shape the presentation of the research findings in this chapter. This ensures consistency and clarity and allows for comparisons to be made between the literature review and primary research findings. Nonetheless, there are some additional themes that will be discussed in relation to the primary research findings. This chapter will be split into two parts; the first will explore themes relating to the relationship between social media and youth violence and the second will discuss the participants' views on current and future interventions.

Relationship Between Social Media and Violence

Social media as facilitating collective action

It was largely uncontested amongst participants that social media acts as a facilitator for collective action. This supports the findings by Moule et al.¹³⁹ One participant drew upon a specific example, namely bonfire night, where social media helped to facilitate collective action (Participant 9). In line with Sæbø et al. who suggested that social media facilitates collective action because it allows people to 'cross boundaries',¹⁴⁰ one participant suggested that social media is 'efficient' and 'accessible', helping people to reach others outside of their community (Participant 1). Moreover, similarly to Reitano and Trabulsi,¹⁴¹ one participant noted that on social media 'there is a wealth of information and groups that can support whatever you believe' thus it is useful for connecting with people who are like-minded (Participant 12). Although some participants agreed that social media can facilitate collective action, none explained how and why this occurs, meaning it remains difficult to understand how tensions 'spill' offline.

¹³⁹ Moule Jr, Decker and Pyrooz (n8).

¹⁴⁰ Sæbø, Federici and Braccini (n7).

¹⁴¹ Reitano and Trabulsi (n13).

On the other hand, some participants questioned the extent to which social media facilitates collective action. One participant suggested that social media is a good way of 'instigating and getting people mobilised' on a larger scale, for protests for example, but is less so on a local level where peer pressure and word-of-mouth can be just as quick, particularly in areas where individuals don't always have access to smartphones and social media (Participant 3). Furthermore, one participant highlighted that we must be careful not to blame young people whilst ignoring wider systemic issues such as economic inequality (Participant 11).

Social media as facilitating offline violence

Again, much like the literature review, there was strong support from the participants that social media can facilitate offline violence by acting as an organisational tool. Some participants identified technical features like those recognised by Elsaesser,¹⁴² which help individuals to organise crime such as live-streaming, encrypted messages, and location sharing (Participants 1, 8, 10, 12, focus group). Furthermore, one participant identified that the ability to quickly delete things from social media helps to keep the organisation of crime 'closed' and 'secretive' (Participant 8). However, not all participants were particularly knowledgeable about the specific features of social media, thus some features highlighted in the literature review were not identified as frequently in the interviews. This gap in understanding between professionals and how young people use social media could be an area for further research. Additionally, very few participants explained how and why these features cause online tensions to 'spill' offline thus, again, limiting the understanding of this issue.

Like Christopherson,¹⁴³ many participants drew attention to the issues which can arise from anonymity. Similarly, to Cantor's suggestion that anonymity can lead to 'desensitisation' and Lapidot-Lefler's theory of the 'toxic online disinhibition',¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Elsaesser (n19).

¹⁴³ Christopherson See also Doyle (n26).

¹⁴⁴ J Cantor, 'Media Violence' (2000) 27(2) J Adolesc Health 30; Naom Lapidot-Lefler and Azy Barak, 'Effects of anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact on toxic online disinhibition' (2012) 28(2) Computers in Human Behaviour 434.

participants highlighted that anonymity affects behaviour because individuals are removed from the situation and thus do not feel any consequences or accountability (Participants 1, 3, 5, 9, 12). This corroborates Patton et al's findings.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, some participants stated that young people can 'hide behind a mask' (Participant 11) and thus are more confident (Participant 4). A couple of participants usefully described how anonymity can facilitate violence spilling out into the real world. One participant stated that sometimes when things are posted anonymously, individuals assume it has happened in their area, driving individuals to retaliate perhaps through violence, when it has actually taken place somewhere else (Participant 8). Further, one participant suggested that conversations on social media might be anonymous, but young people are offered 'an incentive to go and carry out an act and, before you know it, it's spilled over' (Participant 10). Social media normalises this type of behaviour, thus generating new norms. This provides useful insights into how anonymity can lead to violence in the real world; however, this should still be explored further.

In contrast, some participants drew attention to the fact that for some individuals the facility to be anonymous is not beneficial, such as those who are trying to publicise and promote their actions, like members of gangs (Participants 7, 11).

Gang violence

Patton et al. found that violence prevention outreach workers described young people's use of social media as including 'taunting rival gangs, posturing and boasting about violent events'.¹⁴⁶ Many of the participants also described behaviour like this. This is consistent with other academic research.¹⁴⁷ However, none of the participants had heard of or used the term 'internet banging' coined by Patton.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, some participants did describe activity covered by the term (Participants 6, 7, 10, 12). They noted that gangs use social media for recruitment

¹⁴⁵ Upton Patton, Pyrooz, Decker, Frey and Leonard (n30).

¹⁴⁶ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

¹⁴⁷ Upton Patton and others (2013); Upton Patton and others (2015); Upton Patton and others (2014); Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n40).

¹⁴⁸ Upton Patton, Eschmann and Butler (n31).

(Participants 7, 8, 12) which can occur by 'appealing to a sense of belonging and easy money' (Participant 12) and 'can be as simple as using one emoji' (Participant 7). Further, one participant noted that recruitment via social media is likely to have increased during the coronavirus pandemic (Participant 8). Another participant argued that gangs 'use social media to manipulate and spread messages that will directly and indirectly lead to violence' (Participant 4). Furthermore, like the literature, many participants agreed that gang violence was one way that tensions on social media 'spill' into the real world.¹⁴⁹ They noted this could be in the form of retaliation (Participants 8, 9, 11) to ensure 'credibility' (Participant 8) and 'status' (Participant 11) and not wanting to 'step down' to live up to their online image (Participants 8, 11, focus group). Thus, one participant described it as a 'back and forward competition with credibility, status and power' (Participant 11).

Drill music

Although there was youth violence before drill music, arguably drill music 'accentuates' it (Participant 10). Like Rogers et al. suggested,¹⁵⁰ multiple participants argued that drill music can paint gang culture and criminal lifestyles in a positive light and thus 'glamorises' and 'normalises' behaviour (Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, focus group). Arguably, this is part of the 'grooming process' (Participant 9). Young people 'relate to music' and thus, if 'a video has been made in a flashy way, then it looks cool, and people are more likely to identify with it' (Participant 9). One participant stated that young people are 'carrying knives like handbags' as an 'accessory' because social media has portrayed it as 'cool' (participant 3). Interestingly, one participant suggested that the messages spread from drill music are not 'subliminal' and that when people are in a new situation 'they only know to deal with that situation because of the things that they have heard': they recall the messages from drill music and thus violence is sometimes used (Participant 7).

¹⁴⁹ Desmond Upton Patton, Robert D Eschmann, Caitlin Elsaesser and Eddie Bocanegra, 'Sticks, stones and Facebook accounts: What violence in Chicago' (2016) 65 *Computers in Human Behaviour* 591; Keir Irwin-Rogers, James Densley and Craig Pinkney, 'Gang Violence and Social Media' in Jane L Ireland, Carol A Ireland and Philip Birch (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Human Aggression* (Routledge: Oxon 2018).

¹⁵⁰ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney See also King, Walpole and Lamon (n53).

These findings about drill music help to demonstrate how online youth violence can 'spill' offline.

However, some participants wanted to raise concerns about the argument that drill music causes youth violence. Pinkney suggested that drill music is 'exacerbating' problems that exist 'on the ground'.¹⁵¹ Some participants corroborated this, stating that drill music reflects society, much like gangster rap in the late 80's (Participants 10, 12). Further, one participant importantly suggested that 'drill music is mostly performed by black musicians and thus overarching views of it encouraging violence could be viewed as discriminatory without the perspective of the musicians' (Participant 12). Another participant drew attention to an important consideration, arguing that we should not be blaming young people, and noted the paradox whereby on the one hand millions of people listen to drill music and artists feature at festivals and make careers from their music but on the other hand arguments are being made that drill music is causing youth violence (Participant 11).

Sense of belonging

Many participants drew attention to the reasons why individuals get involved in social media-driven youth violence. Reitano stated that 'these behaviours can be due to wanting to create a sense of identity and belonging or to boost ego'.¹⁵² Participants also suggested that individuals feel a sense of belonging (Participants 1, 3, 8, 12). Being part of a group helps people to feel a sense of 'security' and 'safety' and helps them fit in with their community (Participant 8). This was covered by the literature briefly, however, participants mentioned it frequently. This is a general reason why people join groups; however, it could be argued that social media increases these feelings.

Miscommunication

A couple of the participants identified that on social media, information can be miscommunicated, leading to violence 'spilling' offline (Participants 4, 8, 9).

¹⁵¹ O'Hara (n52).

¹⁵² Reitano and Trabulsi (n13).

Miscommunication could be as simple as leaving caps lock on, which individuals perceive as a threat, thus leading to violence in the real world (Participant 8). One participant suggested that in schools, particularly with phones, 'things can happen very quickly, and information will get skewed with really serious consequences' (Participant 5).

Copy-Cat behaviour

A couple of participants mentioned the possibility of 'copy-cat' behaviour (Participants 1, 9). This was not a main finding from the literature review but is an important consideration because it can help to explain why violence 'spills' offline. 'Copy-cat' violence occurs because individuals aspire to be like others, because there is something missing in their lives, because there is nothing to do in their local area or because individuals want to prove themselves (Participant 9). However, some participants drew attention to the fact that 'copy-cat' behaviour has been around for years and is nothing new (Participants 1, 6) thus rebutting arguments surrounding social media and copy-cat violence.

'Spill over effect'

Like Mengü and Mengü and Patton et al.,¹⁵³ the speed and reach of communication was something that multiple participants noted as allowing violence to escalate and 'spill' offline quickly and easily (Participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, focus group). Apps are becoming more 'open' and thus it becomes 'less about the friendship group you want to speak to, it's just getting the message out to anyone' (Participant 9). Thus, the world is becoming 'globalised' and 'interconnected' (Participant 11). However, difficulties can arise when individuals who all want to occupy the same space have conflicts with each other (Participant 11). Tensions can 'spill' offline because individuals have no time to 'reflect', creating 'an environment where things can escalate significantly quicker' (Participant 1). On social media individuals have a

¹⁵³ Murat Mengü and Seda Mengü, 'Violence and Social Media' (2015) 1(3) Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications 211; Desmond U Patton, David Pryoz, Scott Decker, William R Frey and Patrick Leonard, 'When Twitter Fingers Turn to Trigger Fingers: a Qualitative Study of Social Media-Related Gang Violence' (2019) (1) International Journal of Bullying Prevention 205.

wider audience making it 'more challenging for an individual to back down or retract what they said, or even apologise' (Participant 1). The invention of the smartphone has arguably exacerbated these problems (Participant 9).

Coronavirus Pandemic

Some participants briefly mentioned the effect the coronavirus pandemic has had on youth violence. This is not something that was raised in the literature because it is too recent. Nonetheless, one participant highlighted that social media has allowed individuals to carry out crime during the pandemic and has allowed more individuals to get involved (Participant 1). In response to this, one participant suggested that the pandemic has 'highlighted the need for more activity and regulation in this area' (Participant 4).

Interventions

Current interventions

None of the participants identified any of the interventions which were discussed in the literature review. Further, very few participants were aware of any interventions regarding social media-driven violence in the West Yorkshire area or more widely. Nonetheless, some participants provided examples of interventions related to youth violence more broadly. For example, some were aware of charities that deliver workshops (Participants 1, 10, 12) and training that takes place (Participant 4) surrounding youth violence. Others were aware of education in schools such as PSHE lessons (Participants 5,6), assemblies (Participant 6), tutor time meetings and support from pastoral staff (Participant 5). Further, one participant mentioned an educational intervention called 'bitesize' lessons: short 30-minute presentations which are provided by a charity to a range of stakeholders including schools, professionals, and parents on topical issues. Following this, the stakeholders can ask for the full-length workshop if they are interested (Participant 7). Arguably, one could be developed surrounding social media and violence. Moreover, one participant did mention an intervention surrounding social media-driven violence more specifically. This participant said that they had done drill music workshops

where individuals were taken to recording studios to create music with positive lyrics which they could share to their followers (Participant 8). They suggested that this appeared to be highly effective (Participant 8). Thus, this could be developed further.

Interventions in the future

Very few participants provided examples of interventions they thought should be put in place to address social media-driven youth violence, thus participants were given prompts and asked whether they thought certain interventions would work and discussion developed from this.

Much like Reilly suggests,¹⁵⁴ participants agreed that interventions surrounding social media-driven violence should be ‘the job of society as a whole’ (Participant 5) and thus multi-stakeholder (Participants 1, 3, 5, 9, 10). This should include ‘sharing information, knowledge, and resources’ (Participant 5). One participant suggested that interventions should be cross-agency with each one acting like a ‘shop’ offering different interventions (Participant 11). Some participants felt that interventions should be individualized and targeted (Participants 1, 3, 6, 11). Participants suggested that a holistic response should be taken with a ‘tool kit’ of interventions (Participant 1), using a ‘360’ (Participant 11), multi-pronged approach (Participant 6). Moreover, some participants noted that interventions should be a ‘mixture of both preventative and reactive’ (Participants 1, 9, 12) to prevent people engaging in social media-driven violence in the first place and to react to those who ‘slip through the gaps’ (Participant 9).

Social media companies

Much of the literature suggested that current interventions implemented by social media companies are inadequate.¹⁵⁵ Many participants agreed with this and like Gregorio and Stremlau,¹⁵⁶ argued that social media companies must moderate content more strictly (Participants 4, 6, 8, 7, 9, focus group). Social media companies

¹⁵⁴ Reilly (n77).

¹⁵⁵ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

¹⁵⁶ De Gregorio and Stremlau (n106).

need to take responsibility if they are continuing to 'facilitate conversations about violent crime' on platforms where 'young people are often on there totally unsupervised' (Participant 9). More extensive content control would be beneficial because if individuals knew something was breaking the guidelines/rules and consequently would be taken down, it may stop individuals from posting it in the first place (Participant 8). On the other hand, this participant acknowledged that this effect may be limited because not everyone will read all the T&C's when signing up to social media (Participant 8).

Some participants suggested ways in which social media companies could intervene more obviously. One participant suggested that it would be useful for social media companies to work with individuals who have been affected by social media and violence (Participant 9). Further, one participant mentioned that in Australia a law was passed to hold social media companies responsible and suggested that a similar approach could be taken in England and Wales (Participant 6). Warnings like those created for the coronavirus pandemic that direct people to factual sources could also be created for violent social media posts (Participants 2, 7, 9). However, it could be difficult to impose this (Participants 6, 7).

Requirements for identity checks

Recent propositions have suggested that to set up a social media account individuals should have to prove their identity.¹⁵⁷ Many of the participants reacted positively to this (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, focus group). Participants said this could increase 'responsibility' and 'accountability' (Participant 1, 9), assist with police investigations and prosecution (Participant 9) and prevent hate speech (Participant 6). However, many questioned whether having a 'catch-all' (Participant 3) would work in practice. Not everyone has identification for various reasons and thus it could be unfair to require this (Participant 9). Other participants commented on the need for anonymity for people's safety (Participants 1, 6, 9). Furthermore, one participant

¹⁵⁷ 'Make verified ID a requirement for opening a social media account' (*UK Government and Parliament Petitions*, 2020) <<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/575833>> accessed 6 October 2021.

questioned whether it would infringe upon individual liberty too much (Participant 10) and one participant called this intervention 'idealistic' (Participant 3). One participant did not think identity requirements were necessary at all (Participant 12) and some questioned whether it was too late to implement measures like these (Participants 7, 10). Thus, it appears that there are mixed opinions on this intervention.

Social media analysis

No participants were aware that these methods had already been used in some jurisdictions. Nonetheless, some participants did make some insightful comments when prompted. Some participants thought that this would be a good method of intervention where necessary (Participants 4, 9, 12) however, again, they raised concerns about the practicalities of monitoring social media accounts (Participant 9) and balancing this with individual freedoms (Participant 4). These are not concerns that the literature highlighted. Furthermore, HM Inspectorate of Probation highlighted that professionals would need a high level of training to be able to monitor social media accounts.¹⁵⁸ One participant also mentioned this and noted that it can be costly (Participant 4). Moreover, one participant highlighted that tweets, hashtags and trends on social media are too 'malleable', thus there might be better ways that individuals could be 'mapped' in terms of the expectation that they may engage in violent behaviour (Participant 1).

Social Media

Much like the literature,¹⁵⁹ using social media as a method of intervention appeared popular amongst participants (Participants 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12). One participant used the examples of the public campaigns surrounding smoking and wearing seatbelts to show how effective widespread social media campaigns can be and recommended that one should be made for social media-driven violence (Participant 10). One participant from the focus group noted that art is a useful form of communication and thus suggested that a poster could be made as part of a mass campaign (focus group).

¹⁵⁸ An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation (n91).

¹⁵⁹ Upton Patton, Eschmann, Elsaesser and Bocanegra (n35).

Moreover, social media could also be used to 'create a forum for positive discussion' and to show communities what is being done about social media-driven youth violence (Participant 1). One participant said it could be useful 'to design a recovery gang culture platform' where young people can access a website where people share experiences of getting out of gangs and violent behaviour (Participant 12). Some participants picked up on the value of consulting young people when developing interventions to ensure they are sufficiently engaging (Participants 9, 12). Features to draw young people in could include 'music reviews' and 'free games' (Participant 12). However, despite the popularity of using social media as an intervention, one participant emphasised the need for detached work too, given that not everyone has regular access to the internet (Participant 8). Nonetheless, social media is often young people's favoured form of communication so interventions utilising it are likely to be effective (Participants 1, 3, 9, 10).

Schools

Despite Byars et al's. suggestions that educational interventions are becoming 'more prevalent' and are effective at reducing youth violence,¹⁶⁰ participants frequently stated that education surrounding social media-driven violence was insufficient. Furthermore, in line with Reilly's suggestions, participants suggested that education is unlikely to be effective because individuals still have a large amount of unsupervised time.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, participants did make some valuable suggestions for ways in which schools could be used as a means of intervention for social media-driven youth violence. Some participants suggested that education should be introduced from an 'early age' (Participant 4, focus group) and could be basic across the country and subsequently developed in areas where there is extra need (Participant 8). Participants noted that the transition from year 6 to 7 is an important age to focus on (Participant 7, focus group). Participants suggested that guest speakers, real case studies, video clips and discussions are impactful and effective methods of educational interventions (Participants 4, 5, 9, 10). One

¹⁶⁰ Byars, Graybill, Wellons and Harper (n75).

¹⁶¹ Reilly (n77).

participant interestingly noted that some schools need more educational interventions than others, for example those where students are from communities which have known rivalries (Participant 5). Participants noted that in addition to education surrounding social media-driven violence, it would be useful to help young people build 'interpersonal communication skills' and 'soft skills' including things like 'building resilience so they can say no in challenging situations' and 'building self-worth' (Participant 11, focus group).

In addition to education, other participants highlighted that young people are bored (focus group) and thus suggested that we need to 'saturate young people with activity opportunities' (Participant 12) and provide young people with alternatives such as youth clubs, free recording studios and sports clubs (Participants 3, 12). Interventions like these were not covered in the literature surrounding social media-driven violence, however, it appears to be worth further research and development.

Furthermore, young people need to build relationships with people they trust (Participant 8). As a solution to this, like Wolff et al.,¹⁶² one participant suggested that a co-ordinator in schools could help young people with issues relating to social media-driven violence (Participant 4). Similarly, another participant suggested that pastoral staff could 'take a youth worker approach where there is no right or wrong' and provide advice and support (Participant 8) and thus should receive more training surrounding social media and violence (Participant 5).

However, participants questioned how effective interventions in schools can be. One participant suggested that schools are an 'authoritative place' (Participant 3) and thus young people do not always respond well to interventions (Participant 3). Furthermore, one participant stated, 'the idea that all we need...is more education or more information just doesn't stand up because we've always had education information' yet these issues still exist (Participant 6). Thus, any educational

¹⁶² Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

interventions that are developed need to be well thought out and supported with evidence (Participant 6).

Training

This primary research reaches similar conclusions to Irwin Rogers and Pinkney,¹⁶³ finding that some professionals feel uneducated regarding the issues of social media and youth violence. Therefore, participants suggested that more training for professionals would be useful (Participants 4, 5, 7, 10). This training should be delivered by a 'professional who understands the nuances and who are relevant and up-to-date with the latest trends on social media' (Participant 10). Teaching professionals what to look out for means they can be effective in intervening quicker and putting the appropriate safeguarding in place (Participant 7).

Public health approach

One participant suggested that interventions surrounding social media and youth violence will not work unless youth violence is treated as a public health issue (Participant 11). This participant used Chicago and Glasgow as examples where youth violence has been addressed with a public health approach, and it has worked at reducing violence. This participant was relatively skeptical about the effectiveness of interventions suggesting that awareness sessions and other interventions are just 'diversionary activities' and suggested that we need to look at the whole 'culture of violence' (Participant 11).

Difficulties of interventions

Most participants raised concerns over the difficulties of implementing interventions hence their sometimes limited effectiveness. On a broad level, participants stated that 'the biggest challenge is underfunding of services' (Participants 9, 11, 12, focus group). Wider structural and systemic issues were also challenged by some participants (Participants 6, 11) who stated that the issue of social media-driven violence is not an 'isolated problem' (Participant 6) with a 'quick fix' (Participant 6).

¹⁶³ Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (n56).

More specifically to social media-driven youth violence, Wolff et al. stated that a limitation of interventions is the ‘continually evolving nature of these online venues’,¹⁶⁴ making it hard for professionals to stay up to date with trends.¹⁶⁵ Some participants had similar thoughts (Participants 1, 3, 9). Further, one participant noted that ‘when things are happening at such a pace, it removes opportunity for various interventions’ (Participant 1).

This chapter has reported the findings from the primary research carried out, shaped by the themes in the literature review. In the first section regarding the relationship between social media and violence, the research findings largely corroborated the findings from the literature review. Additionally, some further links were identified by the participants in this research. In the second section participants’ views on interventions were outlined. Very few were aware of any interventions already in place regarding social media and youth violence. However, participants were able to offer some useful views on interventions which could be implemented in the future including educational programmes, drill music workshops and further training. Despite this, arguably there was little cohesion between what participants thought would work in terms of interventions.

¹⁶⁴ Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (n6).

¹⁶⁵ An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation See also ‘Can Analysis of Tweets Inform Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence?’ (n90).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The findings from this research project are significant. A thorough literature review examined the relationship between social media and youth violence and the level of interventions developed to address this. From this, a series of themes were identified and used to form the basis of twelve semi-structured interviews with professionals who work with young people in West Yorkshire. The research methodology was also set out including the aims and objectives, research design, ethical issues, and the chosen methods of data analysis. Following this, the findings from the interviews and focus group were presented leading to several conclusions about the relationship between social media and violence, and interventions.

The proposition that social media facilitates offline violence was largely uncontested in both the literature review and primary research findings. There are various layers to this relationship. Social media can be used to facilitate collective action by allowing individuals to reach others outside their community. Moreover, it can be used to facilitate the organisation of violent crime more practically through features such as encrypted messages, location sharing and anonymity. However, there is a lack of understanding of how tensions 'spill' over into the real world. Nonetheless, the literature and the interviews identified gang violence and drill music as ways in which it does 'spill' offline. Further, the speed and reach of communication were highlighted as exacerbating and accelerating social media-driven violence. These conclusions were made in both the literature review and the primary research.

The various layers of the relationship between social media and youth violence are reflected in the interventions that have been developed. There are some less targeted interventions which are in place such as websites, webinars and toolkits and more targeted ones including social media analysis and educational programmes. Several recommendations of interventions were made by the interview participants. These included warnings placed on violent content on social media, educational programmes involving guest speakers and raising awareness to parents and professionals through mass media campaigns and training. However, ultimately

interventions should be individualised and multi-stakeholder if they are to be effective.

Further research is necessary to understand the relationship between social media and violence fully. A key conclusion from the literature review and interviews relates to the lack of understanding over how tensions online 'spill' into offline violence amongst young people. A more thorough understanding of this would allow effective and successful interventions to target social media-driven violence amongst young people. This could involve further research involving young people themselves to understand the issues they face.

Overall, it is clear there is a relationship between social media and youth violence with various layers. The literature review and primary research demonstrate that current interventions are relatively ineffective. Therefore, there is potential for further interventions to be implemented across West Yorkshire to address social media-driven violence amongst young people.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

This is an interview into the relationship between social media and violence. Can I ask you to state your participant number please?

Opening/Warm-up Questions

Job Role

- Can you describe your job role to me and the service you provide to young people?
 - What are your main duties/responsibilities?
 - How long have you been in this role?
 - Do you work with other people in a team to provide this service to young people?
 - Do you work closely with any other organisations who also provide services to young people?

The relationship between social media and violence

Organisational function

- Does social media facilitate the organisation of violent crime?
 - *Prompt - group chats, encrypted messages etc.*
 - More prominent in gang-related violence?

Gang-related violence

- What do you think the relationship between social media and gang-related violence is?
 - How do you think they use social media?
 - *Prompt: Recruitment, Organisation, Posturing, Emulate*
- Are you aware of the phrase internet banging? Do you think it has an impact on violent crime?
 - Definition if needed - gang affiliates using social media sites to trade insults or make violence threats that lead homicide or victimization.
- Do you know what drill music is? Do you think this has an impact on gang-related violence?
 - *Prompt - UK drill artists often rap about violent and hedonistic criminal lifestyles*

Facilitation of violent crime

- Do you think that the facility to be anonymous online has an impact on people's behaviour and how?
- Do you think the speed and reach of communication via the internet has an impact on violent crime?
- Are there any other technical features or characteristics of the internet that facilitate or exacerbate violence?
 - *Prompt: location sharing, lack of content regulation, exposure to large number of people, encryption*

Other Questions

- Do you think the desire to 'copy-cat' or to 'one-up' is a significant cause of violent crime?
- Do you think that excessive use of the internet increases tendency for violent crime?

Interventions

We know that there are difficulties with the relationship between social media and violence, so we are now going to talk about interventions that could address this issue.

Effectiveness of existing interventions

- Are you aware of any interventions that address the issue of social media and violence in the West Yorkshire area?
 - How effective do you think these are?
 - Why do you think they are effective/ineffective?
 - Any there any specific examples from your workplace?
- Are you aware of any interventions that are already in place more widely?
 - How effective do you think these are?
 - Why do you think they are effective/ineffective?
 - Do we need stricter age and identity requirements?
 - Do you think analysis of people's activity online e.g. monitoring online use e.g., tweets and hashtags could prevent violence?
 - *Prompt - Law enforcement agencies could look out for certain information to predict where/when violence might occur – violence hotspots and use this information for preventative policing*
 - *Street outreach. A street outreach worker monitoring Twitter could attempt to intervene when they become aware of a potential altercation*
- Do you think social media itself could be used as a means of intervention?

- *Prompt - mass media campaigns, educative tool, agencies are using social media to engage with youth, information sharing and outreach, keeping in touch with youth, gathering information for investigations/monitoring activity*
- Could these be implemented in West Yorkshire? – practically can they be implemented and if so, how successful are they likely to be?
- School resource officers?
- Educational aspects?
 - *Prompt - media literacy, both for youth and for professionals*
- Were there any specific elements that were particularly successful or unsuccessful? (applies if it was a programme of intervention)
 - Particularly memorable guest speaker?
 - Statistics shared?
 - Rewards for time off social media?

Interventions in the future

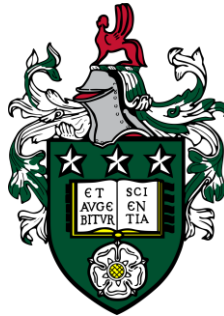
- Do you think there is a solution to this problem?
- Which stakeholders do you think are best placed to tackle this issue? Or should it be multi-stakeholder?
 - Social media companies?
 - Youth themselves?
 - Parents/families?
 - Wider communities?
 - Schools?
 - Government?
 - Police?
 - Youth groups?
- Should interventions be preventative or reactive? Or a mixture of both?
 - A suggestion made by leading academics involves three distinct but complementary strategies: prevention, intervention, and suppression
- What does a successful intervention look like to you for the West Yorkshire area?
 - Successful defined as a significant reduction in violent crimes linked to social media
 - Have you got any ideas for interventions that could be implemented?

Closing Questions

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Thank you for your time and thank you for taking part in this interview. Do you have any further comments or anything that you feel is important that has not been covered?

Appendix B



Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. This document will explain more about the study and explain your role in the research process.

This is a collaborative study with the University of Leeds and the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) into the relationship between social media and violence. I am currently studying for my Masters in Criminal Justice and Criminal Law and am completing this research project as my Dissertation.

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between social media and violence, particularly amongst young people. It aims to explore the different links between social media and violence by conducting a literature review and primary research consisting of interviewing professionals who work with young people. In addition, this research aims to examine interventions which have been developed to target this area; this will be carried out by reviewing the literature in this area and carrying out the interviews.

Interviews

You have been selected to take part in this research project due to your expertise in working with young people. To understand your perception of the relationship between social media and violence, the researcher would like to interview you. The interviews will take place online; they will be audio-recorded and are expected to take 30 minutes, but this is flexible. The interview will be semi-structured and thus a series of questions will be asked to stimulate discussion. The information you provide in your interview will be integrated with data provided from the VRU from focus groups they have conducted. This data will be used for research purposes only. The research has been given ethical approval by the University of Leeds. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

Data Protection

The researcher will assign you a participant number at the start of the interview in order to ensure anonymity. The researcher will ask you to say this number out loud at the start of the interview when the recording starts. The interviews will take place online on an encrypted laptop provided by the University of Leeds. The interviews will be recorded, and this data will be stored on the encrypted laptop. A professional transcriber will subsequently be paid to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible.

to ensure that audio recordings are deleted quickly and the only data stored on the laptop long-term is anonymised transcripts. All personal information will be anonymised. The researcher will have sole access to the transcripts throughout the research. After the research has been completed, all data will be deleted, and the laptop will be wiped and handed back to the University.

The Final Dissertation

The final dissertation will be submitted in October 2021 to the University of Leeds. A copy will also be provided to the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). Alongside this, a four-page briefing will be provided to the VRU which will be published on the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner website. If you would like to receive a copy of the dissertation or the four-page briefing please let the researcher know and this will be provided after the final assessment has taken place and marks have been received. Again, thank you for agreeing to take part in this study, if you have any questions, please let me know.

Researcher details

Annabel Walker
lw17agw@leeds.ac.uk

Dissertation supervisor details

Kisby Dickinson
Teaching Fellow
k.m.dickinson@leeds.ac.uk

School of Law
The Liberty Building
The University of Leeds
LS3 1DB

Appendix C



Research Participant Consent Form

A study into the relationship between social media and violence and the effectiveness of interventions developed in this area.

Please tick/cross the boxes to indicate that you consent to the statements and then sign and date the form. (The signature can be electronic, the form can be printed signed and scanned, or you can just type your name)

1. I have read and understood this information sheet and agree to take part in the interview ☐
2. I agree that by taking part in the interview my interview will be recorded and transcribed ☐
3. I understand that my words may be quoted in the research report, but my personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified. ☐
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason ☐
5. I understand that the information I provide will be used for the dissertation briefing which will be submitted to the University of Leeds and will be made available to the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit ☐
6. I understand that the information I provide will be used for a four-page briefing which will be published on the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner website ☐

Participant

Signature

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Word Count - 9999

Date

Researcher

Signature

Date