

# *YouTube* Gunmen?

## Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos

---

Associate Professor Simon Lindgren  
Department of Sociology  
Umeå University, Sweden  
[simon.lindgren@soc.umu.se](mailto:simon.lindgren@soc.umu.se)

Before the school shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, as well as before the similar tragedies in Finnish Jokela 2007 and Kauhajoki 2009, the gunmen gave warnings by posting video clips on *YouTube*. This fact was strongly emphasized in the subsequent news media coverage of these events, and generally it can be said that there seems to have been a media panic about violence and the internet in the aftermath of the shootings. The aim of this paper is to look beyond the assumption that the panic reaction is all-encompassing. Firstly, I will review some search engine and online news statistics in order to evaluate the existence and extent of a panic reaction. Secondly, I will analyze *YouTube* user comment discourse on school shooting clips. Telling from previous research, it seems reasonable to assume that such participatory media discourse differs largely from traditional news media discourse. The overarching question is whether the panic reaction sequence can be identified in the *YouTube* comment discourse, or if the latter displays a different pattern.