

Hope on YouTube: Mixed Methodology Bridges Mental Health YouTubers and Viewers' Perspectives

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Abstract: The need for accessible therapeutic solutions has been highlighted by the observed youth mental health crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeking solutions involves a varied pathway, blending traditional therapist-client interactions with everyday aspects, like social media, particularly YouTube, which is used for informal counseling and as an entry point to formal mental healthcare. YouTube mental health content viewers value autopathographies (APs) for interest and mental health professional (MHP) content for information validity, both recently increasing. Hope, a non-specific factor fostering therapeutic change and building the therapist-client relationship, is crucial in the complex pathway to change. Unfortunately, this intricate pathway is often overlooked in psychological and media communication research. Additionally, relevant literature lacks guidance on effectively leveraging social media for user mental health. This study explores hope levels for therapeutic change in APs and MHP content viewers, focusing on the content's role in informal online counseling. Through a mixed methods approach, viewer hope is gauged through direct viewer surveys and indirectly through YouTube content creator interviews. Additionally, the viewer's perception of YouTubers within the informal counselor-client relationship is assessed, influencing counseling effectiveness. Findings indicate that YouTube's APs and MHP content can increase the possibility for therapeutic change for high-hope viewers in formal and informal counseling, underscoring the crucial role of the YouTuber-viewer relationship in informal online counseling. YouTube emerges as a valuable addition to an individual's mental health toolkit.

Keywords: YouTube, Hope, Hope for change, Mental health, Therapeutic relationship

1. Introduction

The advent of social media (SM) magnified online social interactivity, with platforms like YouTube forming hubs for public communication. This includes health communication (Auxier and Anderson, 2021), which is unsurprising with the ongoing young mental health (MH) crisis (Enos, 2020). Among the plethora of health communication research, MH communication on SM has also been explored and even saw a renewed research interest (Alonzo and Popescu, 2021; Latha et al., 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased demand in MH services (Vindegaard and Benros, 2020). People seeking MH solutions follow an intricate pathway to therapeutic change that includes the formal counseling setting (Larsen et al., 2007) but also informal counseling solutions (Llewelyn, 1984), such as using YouTube for MH communication (Johnson et al., 2021). *Autopathographies* (APs) and *mental health professional* (MHP) content on YouTube stand out in this context for their well sought-out user benefits of interest (Oliphant, 2013) and credibility (Foster, 2013), respectively. Moreover, an element that leads to therapeutic change is hope (Snyder, 1995). When assessed, it can build the counselor-client relationship and augment client well-being (Bartholomew, Scheel and Cole, 2015).

Despite all this, there is insufficient guidance for users to leverage SM for their MH and a lack of research on both online counseling via SM and the complex pathway towards therapeutic change.

This prosocial study addresses these gaps by exploring how viewers' hope and the YouTuber-viewer relationship can benefit the viewer's MH and overall wellness. Snyder's (2002) popular hope theory guides the application of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, facilitating efficient data triangulation and enabling the generalization of findings. The following research questions and hypotheses are investigated:

- RQ1: What are the levels of hope for change of viewers of mental health AP and MHP content on YouTube?
- H1: Viewers of both YouTube AP and MHP content perceive the respective YouTubers as high in expertise and trustworthiness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mental health communication on YouTube

YouTube's importance as a MH information disseminator and educator becomes clear through its rising amount of content (Madathil et al., 2015) and its popularity as a MH communication platform (Giustini et al.,

2018), especially in younger users (Oliphant, 2013) due to its visual and anonymity affordances (Naslund et al., 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2018). MH communication benefits of the platform involve psychoeducational dissemination to diverse age groups, overcoming related stigma, (Godwin, Khan and Yellowlees, 2017; Shu and Woo, 2020), and changing negative MH portrayals from mainstream media by enabling users to share APs, meaning personal MH stories (Ellis, 2012).

APs foster social discourse, helping the narrator and peers and giving valuable insights to medical professionals and the layperson (Ellis, 2012), and offer social and peer support (Foster, 2013). Platform metrics (i.e., likes, views, comment count) evince greater engagement with APs compared to MHP content, and a deeper involvement with personal stories over just informational content (Oliphant, 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2018). User engagement with user-generated and self-disclosure content varies by platform but typically enhances social connectedness, support, and psychological well-being (Balani and De Choudhury, 2015; Blair and Abdullah, 2018).

Despite lower preference, MHP content addresses health professionals' concerns on peer-to-peer misinformation (Rupert et al., 2014), which can adversely impact the healthcare of SM users (Madathil et al., 2015), and users' value for authentic and reliable health information (Foster, 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2018). To combat health misinformation, along with promoting health and supporting users, Park and Goering (2016) suggested an active participation of health professionals on YouTube. MHPs heeded this call, as their clear preference for YouTube was shown by Wardi-Zonna, Hardy and Hardy (2020).

It is concluded that MH APs offer value to YouTube users based on interest levels, and MHP content offers value based on reliability levels. For this, this study utilizes these two types of YouTube MH content to explore its research questions.

2.2 Online Counseling and Social Media

Evolving online communication in the early 2000s made it possible to connect with people with no access to psychotherapists. The psychology field took note of this and initiated studies on cybertherapy. Suler defines cybertherapy as "any psychotherapeutic environment created by computers and designed, facilitated, or prescribed by a mental health professional" (2004, para. 1), which aligns with the dynamic nature of online environments. This broad definition contains online counseling, a popular variant in studies on online psychotherapeutic practices and services (Nagarajan and Yuvaraj, 2019; Speyer and Zack, 2003).

Counseling differs from psychotherapy in that the former can be offered by non-professionals but the latter only by professionals. Regardless, most standard definitions of counseling consider only the perspective of the counselor, without acknowledging that, despite diverse theories and practices, a shared element is that counseling requires the individual seeking help to wish or intend for counseling to occur (McLeod, 2003). A definition that matches others used but also incorporates a user-centric perspective is to undergo psychological therapy, either in-person or online, provided by a healer – professional or peer(s) – trained in a socially approved manner to administer such therapy (Frank and Frank, 1993, p. 2). The online element was added to the definition.

Indeed, scientific literature on online counseling bifurcates into formal and informal forms, where a clinician (Creaner, 2020; Speyer and Zack, 2003) or peer(s) (Johnson et al., 2021; Tan, 2008) is present, respectively. While it is evident that MHPs utilize SM as a tool to communicate, educate, treat (Frankish, Ryan and Harris, 2012), and converse about MH-related issues (Wardi-Zonna, Hardy and Hardy, 2020), research on online counseling via SM is lacking despite the heightened demand created by the pandemic for MH services (Vindegaard and Benros, 2020). Moreover, most existing research sees online counseling as intertwined with the therapeutic bond between therapist and client (Creaner, 2020; Osborn et al., 2014). This myopic view excludes MHPs that discuss MH issues with users on SM like YouTube. Challenging this view, a qualitative analysis of vlogs including YouTube (Johnson et al., 2021), concluded that YouTube content is utilized by some users as informal online counseling and can be a gateway to formal counseling.

Based on the aforementioned, in this study the term "informal online counseling" is stretched to encompass YouTube MHP content. Thus, the two types of YouTube MH content utilized, namely APs and MHP content, are explored in the context of such content being perceived by users as informal online counseling.

2.3 Hope and Informal Online Counseling

The therapist's and patient's perceptions of psychological therapy diverge (Llewelyn, 1984). This obfuscated process involves a complex pathway in individuals seeking therapeutic solutions, but this has been overlooked

in both psychological therapy research tackling online counseling (Rochlen et al., 2004) and media communication research tackling MH information dissemination via new media (Giustini et al., 2018). This pathway includes the therapeutic interaction, a dynamic and reciprocal process (Larsen, Edey and Lemay, 2007), as an incentive for change, but also situations that occur in other parts of individuals' lives (Llewelyn, 1984). One such part could be SM, as these networks are often utilized as a form of informal counseling and a gateway to seeking formal counseling (Johnson et al., 2021). Hope is highlighted in psychological therapy research as an important non-specific factor to psychological therapy (Llewelyn, 1984) that can lead to client change in therapy (Snyder, 1995), and assessing hope can build the therapist-patient therapeutic relationship, improving patients' psychological well-being (Bartholomew, Scheel and Cole, 2015).

Hope, a complex concept, has prompted various definitions, mainly categorized as unidimensional or multidimensional. Nuanced as it may be, the multidimensional perspective remains insufficiently investigated (Larsen et al., 2020). Abiding to a more unidimensional view but, still, well-articulated is one of the most influential hope models in psychology, as well as most widely used hope theory by far, Snyder's (2000; 2002) hope theory, which fits both a client and general population setting (Larsen et al., 2020; Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018). Based on Snyder's hope theory, hope is "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (2002, p. 249). In summary, hope is threefold: *pathways, agency, and goals*.

The following question emerges.

RQ1: What are the levels of hope for change of viewers of mental health AP and MHP content on YouTube?

2.4 Perception of Therapist

As aforementioned, assessing hope benefits the therapist-client relationship (Bartholomew, Scheel, and Cole, 2015), which is crucial in the therapeutic process, accounting for 30% of therapeutic change (Thomas, 2006). It was also concluded that seeking solutions involves both therapeutic interaction (Larsen, Edey, and Lemay, 2007) and SM usage (Johnson et al., 2021) as an incentive for change. Clients' perception of the counselor's behavior is vital in the effectiveness of counseling outcome (Barak and LaCrosse, 1975) and this is assumed true also in informal online counseling. In this study, the YouTuber is the therapist, the viewer is the client, and the viewer's perception of the YouTuber is assessed.

Counselors' social influence on clients is determined by three key attributes: attractiveness, expertness, and trustworthiness. The counselor's influence on the client can be amplified when seen as credible and attractive. The CRF-S (see Methodology) measures these attributes and at least two of them together, expertness and trustworthiness, are linked to counselor credibility (Barak and LaCrosse, 1975; Strong, 1968).

Expertness is the perception of a communicator as a source of sound statements. This perception is determined by objective evidence of specialized training (i.e., diplomas, certificates, titles), behavioural evidence (i.e., rational and knowledgeable arguments, confidence in presentation), and reputation as an expert (Strong, 1968, p. 216). Perceived *trustworthiness* is related to four factors: the communicator's reputation for honesty, their social role (e.g., physician), their openness and sincerity, and perceived lack of motivation for personal gain (p. 218). *Attractiveness* is the client's perception of the communicator as likeable to them, compatible with them, and similar to them in background, opinions, etc. (p. 219).

A hypothesis occurs:

H1: Viewers of both YouTube AP and MHP content perceive the respective YouTubers as high in expertness and trustworthiness.

3. Methodology

Surveys and semi-structured interviews were used to assess hope for change in YouTube MH viewers. Informed consent was provided by all participants. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the authors' affiliated university.

3.1 Participants, Procedure, and Measures

3.1.1 Interviews

Seven YouTubers (3 MHP, 4 AP; see Table 1), chosen through purposive sampling, that fit the criteria (see Table 2) accepted the email invitation to participate in the study. The semi-structured interviews were

conducted via Zoom with the guidance of an interview guide. Data were transcribed verbatim with the help of Google's Live Transcribe app.

Table 1: Interviewees overview

Interviewee code	Type of YouTube content	Professional occupation (MHPs only)/ Channel's main MH focus (APs only)
P1	MHP	Psychotherapist
P2	MHP	Clinical psychologist
P3	MHP	Behavioural scientist and psychology researcher
P4	AP	Depression
P5	AP	Narcissism
P6	AP	Dissociative identity disorder
P7	AP	Dissociative disorders

Table 2: Inclusion criteria based on MH content creator type

Criteria	MHP	AP	Specifications
Be an active YouTube creator	Yes	Yes	Upload at least 1 video/ 3 months
Have at least 100 subscribers	Yes	Yes	First subscriber count milestone
Uploaded content focus primarily on MH	Yes	Yes	-
Primary channel focus on MH content through the lens of a non-mental health professional with personal experience with a MH issue	No	Yes	-
Be a licensed MHP at time of informed consent	Yes	No	-

3.1.2 Survey

Purposive sampling guaranteed the participation of viewers of the YouTuber interviewees. The survey link was shared under the YouTubers' videos and among their official fan communities on Facebook and Reddit. A total of 129 participants (38% 25-34 years-old; 83.7% female) were asked to rate their hope for change via the Hope for Change Through Counseling Scale (HCCS), which utilizes the most widely used hope theory by Snyder (2000; 2002). HCCS is a 19-item 8-point Likert scale adapted from Bartholomew, Scheel and Cole (2015; 1 = Definitely False, 2 = Mostly False, 3 = Somewhat False, 4 = Slightly False, 5 = Slightly True, 6 = Somewhat True, 7 = Mostly True, 8 = Definitely True; $\alpha = .96$) and comprises three subscales, namely pathways ($\alpha = .91$), agency ($\alpha = .93$), and goals ($\alpha = .84$). A brief definition of counseling was included in the instructions to avoid possible misconceptions by the participants. The definition, with the added online dimension, was based on what Frank and Frank (1993, p. 2) defined as psychotherapy. In their definition, they mention that the healer does not need be a professional, and a peer(s) could fill the role. The author did not specify this in the provided definition and, instead, left it open to each participant's interpretation. The original instructions were simplified to minimize word count, so as not to tire the participants. Participants' perception of the YouTuber they watch was measured via the Counselor Rating Form-Short version (CRF-S) by Corrigan and Schmidt (1983; $\alpha = .99$), a 12-adjective bipolar scale. CRF-S is a revised version of the Counselor Rating Form (CRF) by Barak and LaCrosse (1975) and was shortened to decrease the length of the subscales while maintaining their reliability, reduce the minimum educational level necessary for reliable word comprehension, and assist greater use of the full 7-point range scale when rating each item (Epperson and Pecnik, 1985). The respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the YouTuber associated with the channel where they encountered the survey link by using a 7-point scale (1 = not very and 7 = very). Three separate 4-item subscale scores derived from summing the items, namely trustworthiness ($\alpha = .93$), expertness ($\alpha = .97$), and attractiveness ($\alpha = .97$). Sub-scale scores can range from 4 to 28. An initial specification on viewer type (MHP vs AP) and demographics were also requested.

4. Results

4.1 Thematic analysis

Generally, the transcribed interview data was analyzed via grounded theory and thematic analysis. In applying grounded theory, key principles, such as its iterative nature and constant comparison, guided both data gathering and analysis. Iterative analysis informed subsequent data collection cycles, while constant comparison refined theoretical constructs emerging from data analysis (Lingard, Albert and Levinson, 2008). During data transcription, components like the iterative nature were already employed, involving repeated listening for enhanced data comprehension and the emergence of key themes before thematic analysis commenced (Allan, 2018). Within the grounded theory framework, the researcher followed the six thematic analysis phases as described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: Data will be transcribed and then read and re-read while taking notes of initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: Interesting characteristics of the data will be systematically coded across the dataset, arranging data according to code relevance.
3. Searching for themes: Codes will be assembled into potential themes, amassing all data that is relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes: Two levels of theme reviewing will be followed. In level 1, the emerging themes will be inspected to ensure fit with the coded extracts. In level 2, the emerging themes will be inspected to ensure fit with the entire data set. Through this two-level process, a thematic “map” of the analysis will be produced.
5. Defining and naming themes: Continuous analysis will refine the features of each theme and the general derived story. Each theme will eventually arrive at a clear definition and name.
6. Producing the report: At this final opportunity for analysis, expressive, powerful extract examples will be selected. The selected extracts will be put through final analysis to relate back to the literature and the research questions, generating a scholarly report.

The thematic analysis process is not linear but rather recursive, and phases were revisited as needed.

Specifically, a holistic extraction of the theme “YouTubers’ perceptions of viewers’ hope connected to YouTube channel” via theoretical/deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was done guided by Snyder’s (2002) hope theory. The process involved scanning for hope indicators (revealed pathways, goals, and/or agency) and inhibitors (factors impeding pathways, goals, or agency). Both indicators and inhibitors pertained to viewers’ ability or hindrance in deriving pathways that led to desired goals and engaging in self-motivation via agency thinking to use those pathways, as perceived by the YouTuber. Additional instruction that aided the extraction process was taken from Hanna’s (2002) counselor implicit/ viewer implicit approach to therapy, as it fit well the circumstances of the current study where statements of hope without a direct discussion of hope were examined. This approach suggests that “The gift of hope is the gift of a desirable future. Thus, hope building is done through any approach that can make the future more tolerable” (p. 265). Thus, statements that fit this mentality were deemed relevant during the extraction process.

Pathways, goals, and agency sub-themes were present in all interviewees’ statements. Hope indicators surpassed hope inhibitors in both number and strength (see Figures 1 and 2), indicating a high presence of hope in viewers of both MHP and AP MH content on YouTube. Indicative quotes that match sub-themes are the hope indicator (pathway) “So, I think people know who I am by watching my videos, um, I don’t think I’m a particularly [raise brows] good therapist, I just think that people...because of that comfort of knowing who this is, they do reach out for either mental health advice or wanting to be a therapist...” by P2 that matches the sub-theme “Initiate contact with YouTuber” and the hope inhibitor (goal) “Um, I definitely get [nod] a lot of people asking for mental health advice [nod], um, which some of them I will definitely, like, turn down because, you know, I’m not [shake head], like, a clinical professional. Um, sometimes I will get people being, like, ‘I’m in a crisis right now and I need support’, and I’m not trained for crisis [shake head].” by P6 that matches the sub-theme “YouTuber did not offer support”.

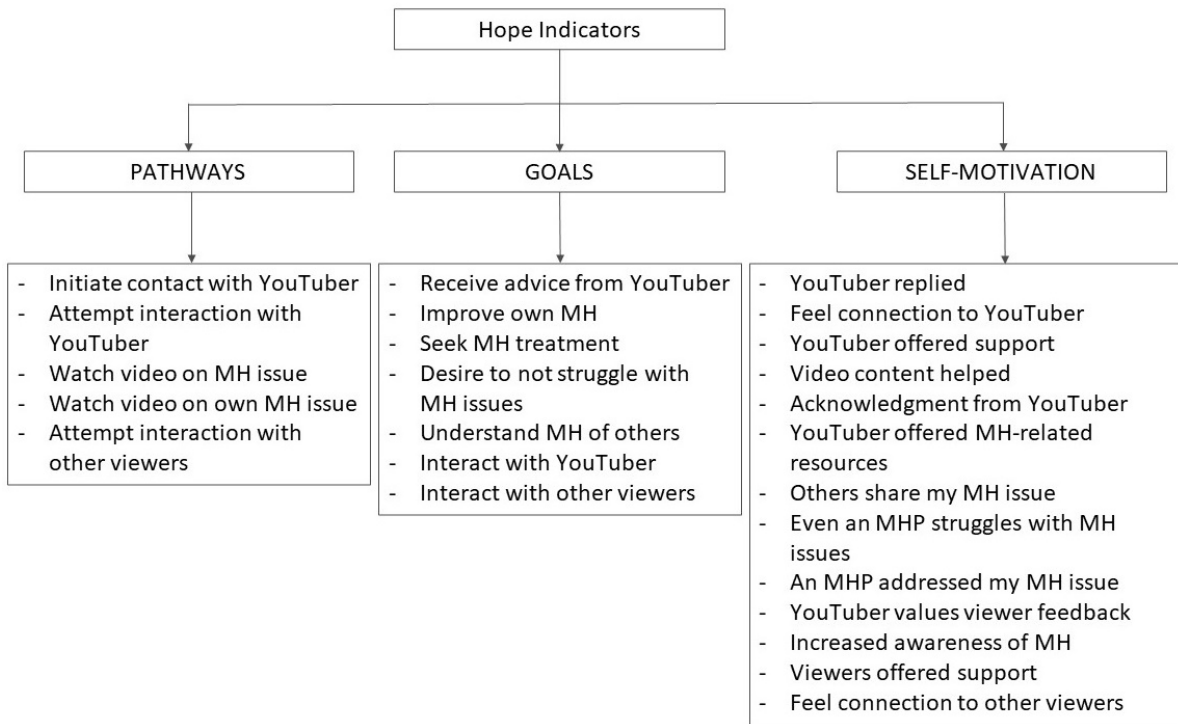


Figure 1: Hope indicator sub-themes in descending strength

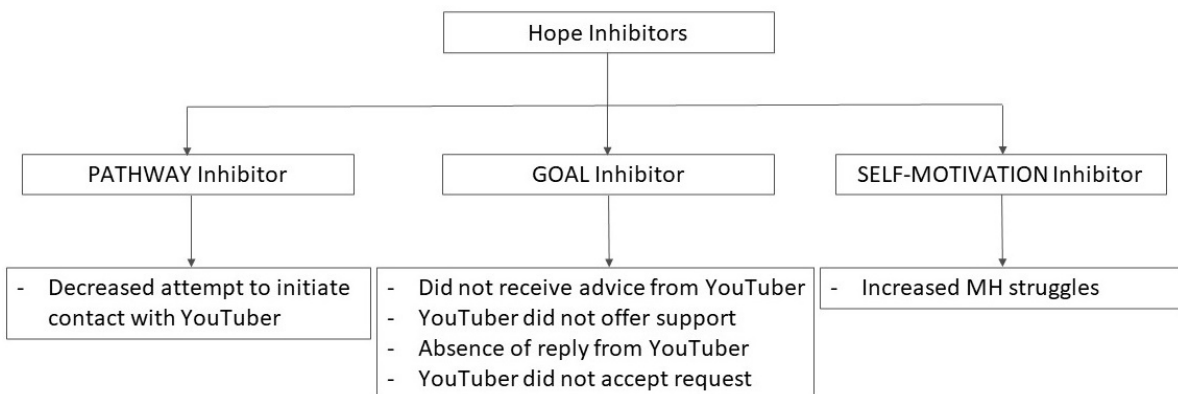


Figure 2: Hope inhibitor sub-themes in descending strength

4.2 Survey Data Analysis

4.2.1 RQ1: What are the levels of hope for change of viewers of mental health AP and MHP content on YouTube?

The HCCS scale and its subscales were computed (see Table 3), revealing overall positive responses. Mean scores for the total scale (M = 6.32, SD = 1.26), pathways (M = 6.49, SD = 1.28), agency (M = 6.24, SD = 1.50), and goal identification (M = 6.17, SD = 1.29) exceeded 6.00 on an 8-point Likert scale, indicating hope for change in MH viewers. The mode for the complete scale was 6.58, and for pathways and agency it was 8.00, indicating most assigned the highest hope scores to those subscales.

Individual group analyses demonstrated similar positive findings (see Table 3). In the MHP group (n = 111), mean scores for the total scale (M = 6.31, SD = 1.26), pathways (M = 6.49, SD = 1.26), agency (M = 6.24, SD = 1.51), and goal identification (M = 6.14, SD = 1.29) surpassed 6.00. The mode for the complete scale was 7.00, and for agency it was 8.00, indicating that most assigned the highest hope scores to this subscale. In the AP group (n = 18), mean scores for the total scale (M = 6.36, SD = 1.34), pathways (M = 6.51, SD = 1.45), agency (M = 6.24, SD = 1.49), and goal identification (M = 6.33, SD = 1.30) also exceeded 6.00. The mode for the pathways subscale was 8.00, indicating most assigned the highest hope scores to this subscale.

Minor score variations, likely due to sample size differences (MHP: n = 111, AP: n = 18), did not significantly impact results.

An independent t-test (see Table 3) compared hope for change levels in counseling between MHP viewers (M = 6.31, SD = 1.26) and AP viewers (M = 6.36, SD = 1.34). The Levene’s test was not significant (F = .01, p = .913), indicating equal variances, $t(127) = -.175, p = .861$.

Table3: Descriptive statistics and t-tests for scales and sub-scales

Measures		Viewer type	Mean		SD		t	df	p			
Hope for change	Pathways	MHP	6.49	6.49	1.26	1.28			-			
		AP	6.51		1.45							
	Agency	MHP	6.24	6.24	1.51	1.50						
		AP	6.24		1.49							
	Goal	MHP	6.14	6.17	1.29	1.29						
		AP	6.33		1.30							
	Total	MHP	6.31	6.32	1.26	1.26				0.18	127	0.86
		AP	6.36		1.34					-	-	-
Perception of counselor	Trustworthiness	MHP	24.00		5.69		0.43	127	0.67			
		AP	24.61		4.46		-	-	-			
	Expertness	MHP	24.06		5.57		1.55	127	0.12			
		AP	21.83		6.17		-	-	-			
	Attractiveness	MHP	23.86		5.66		0.77	127	0.44			
		AP	24.94		4.21		-	-	-			

4.2.2 H1: Viewers of both YouTube AP and MHP content perceive the respective YouTubers as high in expertness and trustworthiness.

Three independent t-tests (see Table 3) explored the impact of viewer type on trustworthiness, expertness, and attractiveness scores in the context of informal MH counseling.

For trustworthiness, MHP viewers (M = 6.00, SD = 1.42) versus AP viewers (M = 6.15, SD = 1.11), the Levene’s test was not significant (F = 2.23, p > .137), indicating equal variances $t(127) = -.434, p = .665$.

For expertness, MHP viewers (M = 6.01, SD = 1.39) versus AP viewers (M = 5.46, SD = 1.54), the Levene’s test was not significant (F = .54, p = .465), indicating equal variances $t(127) = 1.55, p = .123$.

For attractiveness, MHP viewers (M = 5.97, SD = 1.41) versus AP viewers (M = 6.24, SD = 1.05), the Levene’s test was not significant (F = 2.83, p = .095), indicating equal variances $t(127) = -.774, p = .440$.

Subscale scores (Table 3) were calculated to assess YouTuber perceptions within each viewer group. A score of 16 indicates a neutral perception. For the trustworthiness subscale, scores exceeded 16 in both MHP viewers (M = 24.00, SD = 5.69) and AP viewers (M = 24.61, SD = 4.46). For the expertness subscale, scores exceeded 16 in both MHP viewers (M = 24.06, SD = 5.57) and AP viewers (M = 21.83, SD = 6.17). For the attractiveness subscale, scores exceeded 16 in both MHP viewers (M = 23.86, SD = 5.66) and AP viewers (M = 24.94, SD = 4.21).

Overall, perceptions were positive in both viewer groups. Subscale standard deviations were slightly high, possibly due to mean scores leaning toward the scale's extreme right limit, resulting in variance concentrated to the left. This may stem from the scale's nature and the study sample, as participants assess their perception of YouTubers they actively watch.

5. Discussion

The HCCS scale and thematic analysis incorporated Snyder’s (2002) hope theory, maximizing data triangulation and findings generalization. Thematic analysis and HCCS scores support the presence of hope for change in both MH viewer types, with scores showing no statistically significant difference in hope levels between the two types. Since SM like YouTube can function as a gateway to formal therapy (Johnson et al., 2021), the

increased hope levels could facilitate change in that formal context. Interestingly, high levels of hope could be connected to help-seeking intentions from informal sources (McDermott et al., 2017). Individuals with high hope can devise multiple routes to their goals (Rand and Cheavens, 2009), a point supported by hope sub-themes from thematic analysis. Moreover, individuals may prefer informal sources for one issue and formal for another (Ciarrochi and Deane, 2001). Thus, the role of YouTube MH content is highly relevant both as a gateway to formal counseling, but also as informal online counseling, given preferences for informal over formal support or help (Jorm, Christensen and Griffiths, 2005). Since attitude toward a behaviour and intention to perform said behaviour are positively correlated (Ajzen, 1991), further research could explore connections and predictions of help-seeking attitude and hope levels based on MH YouTube content type.

High hope levels imply a high possibility for therapeutic change (Frank and Frank, 1993; Snyder, 1995) from the viewers, and a possible therapeutic relationship (Bartholomew, Scheel and Cole, 2015) between YouTuber and viewer. This relationship is vital for the therapeutic process (Thomas, 2006) and counseling outcome effectiveness hinges on the client's perception of the counselor's behaviour (Barak and LaCrosse, 1975). This is assumed to be true for informal online counseling as well. MH viewers' perception of YouTubers scored very high on the CRF-S scale, with no statistically significant difference between viewer types. Combined with positive hope results, this underscores the importance of the viewer-YouTuber relationship in MH content watching as informal online counseling. The high CRF-S score on the expertness and trustworthiness subscales indicates MH viewers find both MHP and AP YouTubers credible.

Overall findings suggest that MHP and AP content on YouTube can have a positive effect on the viewer's MH, both as a gateway to formal counseling and as a standalone source of informal online counseling.

This study has limitations. The small sample size ($n = 129$) reduces result generalizability. The significant size difference between MHP (111 participants) and AP (18 participants) viewers may impact statistical comparisons. Consideration of scales is crucial; the HCCS's validity has been criticized (Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018), and Snyder's (2000; 2002) hope theory, though widely used, faces critiques for being overly unidimensional (Larsen et al., 2020). The CRF-S struggles to encourage broader use of the lower end of its 7-point rating scale (Epperson and Pecnik, 1985).

The interviewee sample was small (3 MHP, 4 AP YouTubers). Further studies are needed to validate this study's thematic analysis of hope levels in MHP and AP YouTube viewers. Thematic analysis, a descriptive method, may miss some context within interview transcriptions. However, integrating theory related to the survey's variables aids thematic analysis by providing a clearer framework, enhancing reproducibility.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the levels of hope for therapeutic change in YouTube viewers of AP and MHP content, in the context of such content being utilized as informal online counseling. The viewer's perception of the YouTubers, in the context of an informal counselor-client relationship, was also assessed, as this contributes to the effectiveness of counseling. Key findings suggest that APs and MHP content on YouTube can increase the possibility for therapeutic change in high-hope viewers in both formal and informal counseling settings and that the YouTuber-viewer relationship is vital in the informal online counseling context. Overall, YouTube can be a useful tool in an individual's MH toolkit.

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