

STUDY OF VIRAL COMMUNICATION ON DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract:

In the era of this digitalization, especially social media, a new universe has opened up with the name of 'viral communication' through which the social issues and bad happenings are shown in the form of videos, messages or news. A viral communication is the one that becomes popular through the process of internet sharing typically through social media, video sharing websites, emails and chat messengers. The viral videos and messages have become an essential tool for the people who want to show and reveal the other side of the society. In the last 2 years, the digital media has been flooded from the viral videos, messages and other contents based on various real issues and entertainment.

Key words : Viral videos, Messages, Facebook, What'sApp, Social Media, Digital Media

Introduction :

Media consumption across the globe is increasingly happening in digital formats. The increase in the number of devices capable of supporting digital media along with increasing internet access speed, has provided consumers with an option to access the media content of his choice be it information, entertainment or social activity anytime, anywhere. Online media consumption has shown tremendous growth over the past few years. Among the digital devices, mobile devices have taken over as the preferred medium of consuming online media. The Smartphone market has seen an unprecedented growth in the last 5 years. In the context of Internet users, India is the 2nd largest internet consumer in the world.

Now in the era of this digitalization, especially social media, a new universe has opened up with the name of '*viral communication*' through which the social issues, real incidents, awareness or any other content related to public interest are shown in the form of videos, messages or news. A viral communication is the one that becomes popular through the process of internet sharing typically through social media, video sharing websites, emails and chat messengers.

Historically, videos and messages have been distributed by very large media organizations directly to consumers, whose choices were limited to switching to another centralized media organization or turning off the TV. These organizations acted, to some extent, as arbiters of taste, and they determined which videos and messages were good enough to be broadcast. In doing so, they impacted what would, or could, become popular. Now, this situation has changed due to the emergence of online video sharing sites and social networking. Now, many short videos that do not have the quality or format necessary to make them suitable for broadcast on more traditional media are readily available for viewing. The sharing and re-sharing of videos on social sites, blogs e-mail, and other means has given rise to the phenomenon of viral videos—videos that become popular through internet sharing.

Viral communications that gain popularity through the process of Internet sharing are having a profound impact on society. In the last 5 years, we have seen several cases in which people have shared self made videos and messages for a social cause and these particular contents were accepted by a

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large number of receivers. In a country like India, where people are concerned about social issues, corruption and other dimensions of social awareness, the viral communication is playing a vital role and has become a useful tool for them. The concept of viral communications are now have been using for social change and awareness mostly. In addition, the administration is also taking part in this and using viral communication (videos and messages) as a tool of evidence. With the risen of digital media in India, especially social media, a new universe has opened up in which various issues are debated. The social media marshalling has led to an eruption of opinions and self-expressions. An entire ecosystem of blogs, video sharing websites, online forums and social media groups now voice the sentiments of the people belong to middle and lower part of the society. The viral communication activities on digital media platforms like Facebook, What'sApp, Twitter, YouTube, hike etc. are also forcing mainstream media to pay attention on the issues reflected through viral videos and messages.

There are several cases in which the viral videos and messages have attracted the mainstream media and administration towards itself. One of the recent cases of viral communication is from the capital city of Uttar Pradesh state of India. A sub-inspector broke the typewriter of an elderly man by kicking it allegedly to remove encroachment from the area. The 65 year-old man has been sitting outside the GPO with his typewriter to earn his livelihood for the last three decades. The incident was clicked by a photojournalist while passing through the area and later the photographs of the incident went viral on the social media. It resulted that the policeman got suspended by the Chief Minister of the state and the old man got a new typewriter by the officials.

The importance of viral communication

1- (IAC, Facebook Page: 2012)

can be also understood through the movement of India against corruption (IAC), 2012. The movement was led by Anna Hazare and later joined by the current Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal and many other high profile officials. to spread this movement in various part of country, people have taken the help of social media and other digital platforms. This was, perhaps, for the first time when Indians were using social media for a social movement. A huge support for India against corruption (IAC) and Anna Hazare, indicated on Facebook by likes on posts. In the first four days of its existence, IAC had 116,000 fans on its community Facebook page¹. People created many other Facebook pages, and individual social media users debated, posted statuses, and uploaded videos and photos throughout the movement. The IAC smartphone application has as many as 50,000 users. The organization used all these outlets to publish photos of Anna Hazare fasting, Pro-Lokpal rallies, and examples of corruption. During this social media onslaught, Hazare gained support from other prominent Indian activists, as well as the general populace. The massive use of viral communications through social media in Lokpal movement can be seen as a trend setter and as a successful experimentation for good cause. People can use social media content to gauge the status of a movement and to identify the goals it seeks to attain. It is true that the viral videos and messages which were initiated by the social media geared up the mainstream media.

Literature Review

The communication scholars have taken several approaches to explore what kind of information is shared among people. Linkletter et al. (2009) claim the influence of online video is so strong; certain clips have persuaded people to take unhealthy risks. Burgess (2008) seeks to give meaning to these accusations by defining the parameters of a

viral video. She argues that a viral video is born when user-led distribution causes a clip to become wildly popular. Furthermore, she claims that a viral video must contain some element that appeals to the popular culture of the time. Usually, this element of pop culture appeals mainly to the younger generation.

Heath (1996) conducted three studies using surveys to see what kind of information people tend to pass along in terms of its extremity, valence (positive or negative), and congruence (whether the valence of emotion evoked by the information is congruent with the valence of the topic). The first study asked 111 college students to rate how likely they would pass along stories that differed in extremity and valence. The second study took a within-subjects approach and compared the responses of 32 college students on whether they would pass along moderate, extremely positive, and extremely negative stories. The third study had 25 college students rate the relevance and valence of each story and then asked the likelihood of passing each story along. The results showed that information moderately surprising rather than extremely surprising, positive stories on positive topics, and negative stories on negative topics are more likely to be passed along based on the finding of Heath (1996) about the congruence of valence of emotion. According to Mohapatra (MOHAPATRA, 2013) the massive use of viral communications through social media can be seen as a trend setter and as a successful experimentation for good cause. People can use social media content to gauge the status of a movement and to identify the goals it seeks to attain. It is true that the viral videos and messages which were initiated by the social media geared up the main stream media.

Theoretical framework

The growth of viral communication in the form of video and messages through digital media platform can be understood through the

Diffusion of Innovation theory and Collective Action theory. The Diffusion of Innovation theory suggests that diffusion occurs when an innovation is communicated through certain channels among members of a social system whereas Collective Action theory demonstrate the power that lies in shared group interests and the subsequent communal pursuit of a public good.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To study how digital media has given a platform to viral communications.
2. To know what kind of viral videos and messages people get frequently.
3. To know the perception of people towards viral communication.
4. To know the involvement of youth in sharing the viral videos and messages.

Methodology

The study is carried out with primary as well as secondary data. The primary data for this study is collected with the help of survey method and by using self made close and open ended questionnaires. Primary data collection is given the highest priority in this study and it draws information directly from the field. The nature of this study is relied on quantitative and qualitative data which is taken from descriptive method.

Sampling

Population of the study

The population of the study comprised four segments of the people.

- (i) It involves school and college students of different age groups.
- (ii) It involves school and college teachers.
- (iii) It involves media professionals and
- (iv) It involves random people, belongs to various professions

Universe of the study

The universe of the study is the capital of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal.

After applying purposive sampling, the

researchers have selected a total of 140 respondents as the participants for this study.

Table 1 Sample Selection

SN	Source of sample	Frequency
1	School and College students	80
2	School and College teachers	20
3	Media Professionals	20
4	Other Professionals	20
Total		140

Data analysis and interpretation

The Data gathered for this study is organized, coded and analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) where Frequency and Percentage were used to present the result of the study.

Table 2 Showing demographic statistics of respondents

SN	Demo. Variables	Category (s)				
1	Age (in years)	14-17	17-23	24-30	31-40	Above 41
		16.8%	25.6%	28.4%	16.3%	12.9%
2	Gender	Male			Female	
		58.6%			41.4%	
3	Occupation	Students	Teachers (School and College)		Media Professionals	Others
		57.1%	14.2%		14.3%	14.4%
4	Education	Secondary	Senior secondary	Graduate	Post graduate	Other
		18.4%	20.6%	26.5%	23.2%	11.3%

Table 2 it is revealed that:

Out of all, maximum number of participants belonged to the age group of 24-30 years (28.4%) and followed by participants of the age group of 17-23 years (25.6% I). 16.8% are from 14-17 years age group. 31-40 are 16.3% and only 12.9% participants are from the above 41 age group. Male respondents were more (58.6%) as compared to female respondents (41.4%).

57.1% school and college students from different age group have participated in this study. Also, 14.2% teachers, 14.3% media professionals and 14.4%

respondents from different professions participated in this study as active respondents. After analyzing the data, the researcher found that the ratio of graduate respondent is higher in this study i.e. 26.5% followed by post graduate respondents i.e. 23.2%. The percentage of secondary and senior secondary students is 18.4% and 20.6 % respectively. 11.3% respondents are from different other educational background i.e. PhD, Engineering, Medical etc.

Usage

Table 3 Showing percentage of internet users

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	133	95%
2	Sometimes	7	5%
Total		140	100%

In table 3, it is clearly shown that in this era of digitalization, almost everyone is using or connected to the internet. 95% respondents have confirmed that they use internet frequently and only 5% respondents have said they use internet sometimes.

Table3.1 Showing the percentage of mobile and laptop users

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Mobile	62	44.3%
2	Laptop	35	25%
3	Both	43	30.7%
Total		140	100%

In table 3.1, it is revealed that out of all, 44.3% respondents prefer mobile phones for using internet and 35 respondents (25%) have said they use internet on laptop or personal computers. 30.7% respondents said that they use internet on both i.e. mobile as well as laptop.

Table 3.2 Showing the percentage of respondents using social media

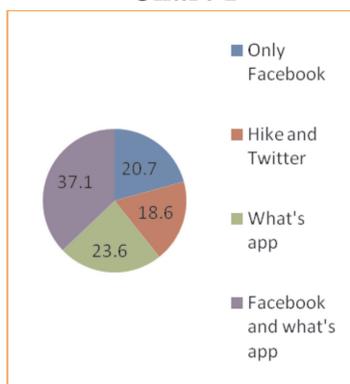
SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	101	72.1%
2	Sometimes	10	7.1%
3	No	29	20.7%
	Total	140	100. %

In table 3.2, it is shown that the number of social media users is very high. 101 respondents (72.1%) have said that they use social media frequently and 7.1 % have said they are not the frequent users of social media. It is also revealed that out of all 29 respondents (20.7%) are those who do not use any social media platform but have seen viral videos and messages on other websites.

Table 3.3 Showing the social media and chatting platforms use by respondents

SN	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Only Facebook	29	20.7%
2	Hike and Twitter	26	18.6%
3	What'sApp	33	23.6%
4	Facebook and What'sApp	52	37.1%
	Total	140	100%

Chart 1



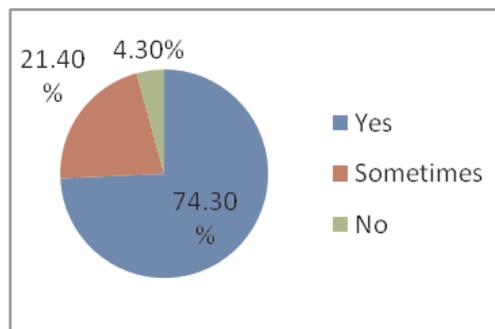
After analyzing the data, it is clearly understood in table 3.3 and chart 2 that

Facebook and What'sApp are the main and favorite social media and chatting platforms for the respondents. Out of all, 37.1% respondents have said they use Facebook and What'sApp both very frequently. 23.6% respondents use What'sApp very frequently because they feel it is very user friendly. 20.7% users are the frequent users of Facebook and only 18.6% respondents have said that they are active on hike and twitter.

Virul video content seen

Table 4 Showing percentage of respondents seen viral videos or messages

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	104	74.3%
2	Sometimes	30	21.4%
3	No	6	4.3%
	Total	140	100%



In table 4, almost every respondent have said that they have seen viral videos. Out of all 104 respondents (74.3%) have said they get viral videos or messages frequently and 30 respondents (21.4%) have said they have seen these sometimes. Only 6 (4.3%) participants said that they have never seen any viral video or messages.

Table 4.1 Showing percentage of getting viral contents in a week

In table 4.1, it is revealed that maximum number of respondent i.e. 34.3% get viral videos or messages 4-6 times in a week through What'sApp, hike or Facebook, followed by

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-3 times	40	28.6%
2	4-6 times	48	34.3%
3	7-9 times	26	18.6%
4	10-12 times	26	18.6%
	Total	140	100%

28.6% who get viral contents 1-3 times in a week. 18.6% participants have said they get viral contents very frequently in a week i.e. 7-9 times and 10-12 times in a week.

Table 4.2 Showing digital platforms where participants see viral contents

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Facebook	38	27.1%
2	What's app	29	20.7%
3	You tube	20	14.3%
4	What's app & Facebook	53	37.9%
	Total	140	100%

Table 4.2 shows that out of all 53 respondents (37.9%) have said they see viral videos or messages on WhatsApp and Facebook both. 27.1% participants have said they see viral contents on Facebook only and 20.7% said they see these on WhatsApp only. Since, YouTube is a video website and quite popular among the internet users. After analyzing the data, researcher found that only 14.3% respondents go through YouTube for viral contents.

Table 4.3 Showing respondents who have seen fake viral videos or messages

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	88	62.9%
2	Sometimes	41	29.3%
3	No	11	7.9%
	Total	140	100%

Table 4.3 shows that almost every respondent have seen viral videos or messages. 62.9% and 29.3% respondents have said that they have seen fake viral videos or messages either frequently or sometimes respectively. Only 11 participants (7.9%) have said that they have never seen any fake viral contents.

Category

Table 5 Showing what kind of viral videos or message people usually get

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Real incidents	33	23.6%
2	Entertainment	16	11.4%
3	Corruption	19	13.6%
4	Fake videos	12	8.6%
5	Social issues, entertainment & Corruption	60	42.9%
	Total	140	100%

In table 5, it is shown that out of all 60 respondents (42.9%) have said that they generally get viral videos or messages like social issues, corruption and entertainment. 23.6% revealed that they get messages of real incidents only, followed by 13.6% who said only corruption. 11.4% respondent i.e. only 16 people have said that they get videos or messages of entertainment and only 12 participants (8.6%) have get fake viral videos.

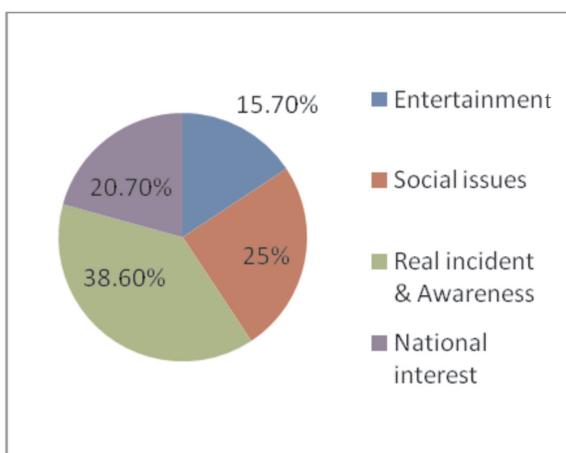
Table 5.1 Showing percentage of respondents who forward viral content

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	39	28%
2	Sometimes	59	42%
3	No	42	30%
	Total	140	100%

In table 5.1, the percentage of participants is shown who forward viral videos or messages when get. Out of all, 98 participants (70%) have said that if they get any viral videos or messages, they do forward them always or sometimes. they forward viral contents through WhatsApp or Facebook. The researcher also found that 42 participants (30%) do not forward any viral videos or messages.

Table 5.2 showing what kind of viral videos or message people forward most

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Entertainment	22	15.7%
2	Social issues	35	25%
3	Real incident & Awareness	54	38.6%
4	National interest	29	20.7%
5	Total	140	100%



In table 5.2, 38.6% participants have said that they forward mostly real incidents and awareness videos. 25% have said they prefer to forward viral videos which are related to social issues followed by 20.7% who forward contents related to national interests. Out of all 22 respondents (15.7%) have said that they forward only entertainment videos.

Perception

Table 6 Showing the perception of respondents towards viral contents

SN	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Can't Sav	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Do you think viral videos/messages are bringing any changes in society?	18 (12.9%)	51 (36.4%)	34 (24.3%)	13 (9.3%)	24 (17.1%)
2	Do you support viral videos or messages?	10 (7.1%)	48 (34.3%)	46 (32.9%)	25 (17.9%)	11 (7.9%)
3	Do you think people are also spreading false information through viral videos/messages?	51 (36.4%)	53 (37.9%)	19 (13.6%)	17 (12.1%)	00
4	Do you feel people are using viral communications for gaining popularity?	33 (23.6%)	52 (37.1%)	30 (21.4%)	25 (17.9%)	00

In table 6 the perception of participants about viral videos and messages are shown. After analyzing the data it is revealed that,

- Out of all, 51 respondents (36.4%) have said that they believe viral videos related to social issues and real incidents are bringing change in society. 24.3% participants have said they are not sure about this. 17.1% and 9.3% have said they do not think it is bringing any changes to society and 12.9% are very much sure about this that viral contents are changing the perception of society and spreading awareness.
- It is also revealed that 41.4% respondents do support viral videos and messages on the basis of their content. They believe that viral contents on social issues bring changes in society. In addition, 32.9% participants are neutral on this question as they do not think about this. 25.8% respondents said that they do not support any viral content.
- Out of all 104 participants (74.3%) have also said that they think now a day's people are also spreading false information through viral videos and contents. Since these contents do not have a particular gatekeeper, they can spread the message easily with the help of social media and chat messenger. In the last few months, various cases are also seen related to this. During the data collection, various participants said that they have seen several videos and messages that the newly launched Indian currency has a chip inside. Apart from this many respondents also said that they got messages related to India-Pak war. 13.6% respondent said they are not sure whether viral contents are spreading false information or not and 12.1% are disagreeing on this question. They think viral contents are good and they are not spreading any false information.
- The last point of table 6 shows the

percentage of participants who thinks people are also using viral content medium to gain popularity. 37.1% participants have strongly agreed on this point followed by 23.6% who just agreed on this. 21.4% respondents are not sure about this and out of all only 25 participants (17.9%) have said they do not think that people are using this medium for gaining popularity.

Table 6.1 Showing percentage of respondents who discuss the content of viral videos and messages with friends or family

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	49	35%
2	Sometimes	61	43.6%
3	No	30	21.4%
	Total	140	100%

In table 6.1 it is revealed that almost 110 respondents (49+61=110) have said that they do discuss the content of viral videos or messages with their friends or family members either always or sometimes. The percentage of these respondents is 35% and 43.6% respectively. Out of all 21.4% respondents confirmed that they do not discuss any content of viral videos or messages with anyone.

Conclusion

This study aimed to know the reasons and factors behind making content viral. After field experience and analyzing the data, the researcher came to this point that people prefer to share those videos and messages which are based on social issues, real incidents, corruption and entertainment. The researcher also observed that youth are playing a major role in making contents viral as they are very active on digital platforms. In the context of devices, out of all 62 participants have said they prefer smart-phone to use internet. On the basis of this finding, it could be understood that since smart-phone is handy and user friendly people give preference to this medium and the professionals use both. Almost everyone has said that they have seen viral

videos or messages at least once in a while and they also support viral contents of a particular genre. Linkletter et al. (2009) claim the influence of online video is so strong; certain clips have persuaded people to take steps for social causes. In the light of the findings of this study, the statement of Linkletter seems to be proved that people have accepted that the content of viral videos or messages are bringing change in society. This point is also clear after seeing the case of Sub inspector and the old man in Lucknow. After the video went viral, the sub inspector got suspended by the chief minister of the state. With the risen of digital platforms, especially Facebook, What'sApp and YouTube, it has become very easy for people to make the content viral and if it is related to some social cause, people accept the content of the viral videos or messages very frequently. This point is also discussed in Collective Action theory in which the power that lies in shared group interests and the subsequent communal pursuit of a public good. With a medium like the Internet, the success of sharing a viral communication (videos and messages) does not take a conscious effort. Instead, viral success can be reached by the simple, unsystematic and collective act of forwarding and linking the content of the video or message.

In addition, after analyzing the data the researcher came to the point that there are also people who are spreading false information through viral videos and messages. Maximum number of participants said that they have seen videos and messages related to the new currency of 500 and 2000 that it have a tracking chip inside. Respondents said that they got the videos and messages related to this almost every day through What'sApp, Facebook or any other digital medium. After getting the same information again and again, they started believing on this. Despite the above written barriers, participants said that they do support those viral videos or messages which are spreading social information and bringing changes in society. They have their own

understanding for viral communications as per their social and educational background. The findings and observations of this study also prove the theories on which this study is based

upon. The examples mentioned above proving the facts and concept of theory of diffusion of innovation and collective action theory.

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