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Patterns of Content and Sharing among Social Media Users in Malaysia

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Abstract

There is a possibility for a user to unintentionally over or misuse the technology when sharing or receiving content with others. As a result, individuals will confront distrust issues, emotional disturbance, and information confusion stemming from user actions. This study aims to determine the patterns of content and sharing in social media. By using online survey research, a total of 408 users aged 20 years and above were selected through convenience sampling and required to answer a set of questionnaires through Google forms. The result shows that the majority of the users prefer to share rather than commenting and resharing the information on social media. They were interested in sharing topics related to health and current issues, or comments and re-share topics on humor and jokes. In conclusion, intentionally sharing information would stimulate a content to be viral on social media.

Keywords: Viral communication, Patterns, Topics, Social Media, Intention

Introduction

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2021), social media are divided into two categories – social and communication applications. Each application offers different functions and preferences for ease of interaction and socialization. Therefore, there is a tendency for each user to chat and share information either in public posts or private messages, from one platform to another by using a share button or plugins built-in with the platforms. The sharing behavior in social media is intended to maintain interaction and stimulate user engagement to chat about the shared information (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). However, these actions become negative when individuals fail to control emotions, impressions and manipulate technology for personal gain (Parkinson, 2008; Powers et al., 2011; Lyu, 2016). Even though there are various efforts made to curb the spread of information, it triggers questions about the patterns and topics to viral on social media.

Literature Review

According to the Users and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974), individuals use a media channel to pursue self-satisfaction. Not only that, self-satisfactions in social media occurs through social interaction, information sharing, entertainment, channels, and many more

(Whitting & Williams, 2010). Apart from being active users, individuals engage in media that provides added value and competitive social features. They would set a purpose or goal after selecting a media because any content performed in the media will be evaluated by the audience especially when individuals want to build influences in a particular media (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015).

Social media has become a comfortable space for millennials to conduct any activities as they allocate more time online (Cicevic et al., 2016) however, the usage are not limited to certain ages, careers, and individual personalities (MCMC, 2021; Cunha et al., 2016; Kim & Chock, 2017;). Several theories and model like Users and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Theory of Reasoned Goal Pursuit (Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019), and Information Motivation Behavioral Skills Model (Fisher & Fisher, 1992) concludes that individuals tend to act due to several factors including attitude, emotion, personal, social and environment.

Furthermore, individuals utilize social media to do random activities such as looking out for information, playing games, reading news, accessing glocal or global sites, and many more. Information sharing in social media has become a phenomenon due to the breadth of the target audience allows the information to be easier penetrate using the plugin's functions provided by a media platform. As a result, audience acceptance for the information becomes spacious because they can share any information on any social site or media channel that interests them. Therefore, it can be summarized that information sharing in social media are the combination of seeking, receiving and commenting information in a variety of content.

Information sharing in social media can be divided in several themes such as entertainment (Oliver & Raney, 2011), personal, sensational, political or casual (Osatuyi, 2013), current issues (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015), words of inspiration (Easton et al., 2018) and many more. Surprisingly, some users received pornographic content in Whatsapp (Ahmad et al., 2020), scattering rumors (Lai et al., 2020) and internet trolling (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2021) thus proving that sharing a negative and sensitive materials also happen in social media (Hornik et al., 2015).

It is undeniable that individuals will share embedded videos with links to other sources (Osatuyi, 2013) apart from sharing attractive topics and intentionally select, share or re-share the information to other users (Kim, 2015). The method of sharing and re-sharing in social media could be done in several ways through hashtags or aliases, in a public or private space, or in the form of text (articles, status) or visuals (pictures, videos). An attractive topic has an element of feeling or emotion (Botha & Reyneke, 2013), rational and in visual forms (Kim & Yang, 2017).

Therefore, when information shares continuously on social media, it will become viral. The virality occurs due to a topic started by an individual and trending because of individual action to share or re-shared by other users. Not only that, the other user would share or re-share the same information either commenting or resharing it to another user. An early study conducted by Sun et al (2006) explained this process as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) or a sharing and resharing technique (Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Alhabash et al., 2015) which summarised as viral behavioral intention.

Methodology

This study uses online survey research through two frequently browsed social media applications by Malaysians (MCMC, 2020), namely Facebook and Whatsapp. A total of 408 users ages 20 years and above were selected using simple and purposive sampling with a response rate of 70.59%. Next, the questionnaires consist of three sections measuring (a) demographics, (b) topics of choice to share in social media (Osatuyi, 2013; Ghaisani, Handayani & Munajat, 2017; SKMM, 2020), and (c) patterns on the intention to viral (Sun et al., 2006; Alhabash et al., 2015) with the reliability of 0.75-0.83. The data collection procedures were conducted through Google Forms link distributed in social media and analyzed using SPSS 23.0 software.

Findings and Discussions

Social media users who involved in this study are female (61.5%) and nearly 50 percent of active social media users were aged 25 to 34 years (49.8%). Majority of the respondents are Malays (89.7%) and came from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (38.0%). This situation indicates that women and youth are more interested to self-participate in the study. Moreover, good Internet access in the central region allows the questionnaire sharing easier to penetrate and achieve by social media users. Two applications of choice to do viral were Whatsapp and Facebook proves that communication applications are the demanding platform to do share, comment or re-share contents or information.

Intentions to share or comment and re-share are the first steps for the information to be viral on social media. Based on Table 1, users intentionally share topics related to current issues and health information. According to Osatuyi (2013), current issues fall under the sensational theme while Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2015) define current issues as a breaking news story or any information received elsewhere and individual makes it suitable for their social network. Sharing methods without providing any feedback or comments on the information shared is known as broadcasting (Oelderf-Hirsh & Sundar, 2015) through news feeds, wall posts, or personal messages.

Table 1

Topics of choice to viral in social media

Description	Intention to viral		Comment and re-share	
	Share		Comment and re-share	
Topics of choice	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Current issues	250	61.3	138	33.8
Health info	247	60.5	131	32.1
Motivational quotes	234	57.4	146	35.8
Government announcement	230	56.4	113	27.7
Humanitarian aids	224	54.9	154	37.7
Education	222	54.4	134	32.8
Life experiences	192	47.1	140	34.3
Entertainment	187	45.8	120	29.4
Humor and jokes	184	45.1	177	43.4
Promotion and discount	180	44.1	107	26.2
Politic	177	43.4	75	18.4
Friends and family	163	40.0	175	42.9
Relationship	136	33.3	93	22.8

Next, users intentionally choose to comments and re-share topics on humor and jokes because sharing jokes can attract the interest of other users to participate and engage with the content (Heiss & Matthes, 2021). Not only that, users also chose to comment and re-share topics related to friends and family on social media. It shows that the act of commenting will increase the acceptance of social support (Chun & Lee, 2017) through reciprocal interactions received on the content shared. Interestingly, less than 20 percent users interested to comment and re-share contents related to politics thus supporting a study by Pang (2018) which proves that users doesn't feel gratify to involve in any content related to political actions.

According to Table 2, although individuals agreed to share any information found or from one group to another, they do not agree to use the plugin's functions provided by some social media. This situation suggests that if individuals have any information to share on one application (for example, Whatsapp), they are unlikely to share the same information through cross applications using plugins such as "share to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Stories, LinkedIn, Pin it", and others. Next, individuals would share interesting comments while chatting, and the comments will attract responses from another user to reciprocate on the shared information. These actions are known as the bandwagon effect.

Table 2
Intentions to viral (n=408)

Description	Mean	S.D
Viral Intention		
Intention to share		
I share any information I found on social media.	3.24	1.10
Share information from one group to another.	3.23	1.06
Share all opinion information with other users.	2.78	1.27
Use the functions of plugins "share", "send to a friend", "send back" in social media.	2.23	1.10
Intention to comment and re-share		
Share interesting comments while chatting.	3.24	1.06
Share interesting extra info while chatting.	2.92	1.10
Asked to give an opinion on an issue during the conversation.	2.35	1.09
Influence other users to share information while chatting.	2.15	1.04
Influence other users to believe my opinion while chatting.	2.06	0.98

Note: S.D = Standard deviation

The repeated act of sharing or commenting and re-sharing by every user on social media will increase the information penetration to become viral. Based on Table 3, individuals choose to viral information they knew had been viral on social media. This method allows individuals to respond directly through liking, sharing, commenting, and re-sharing; depending on their emotional level (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019). Not only that, less than 40 percent would viral all information to everyone, thus indicating that individuals will share the information for own reading or are unsure of the authenticity of the information content therefore, would not viral the information publicly.

Table 3
Action to Viral

Description	Frequency	Percent
Viral info that I know is viral.	347	85.0
Viral all info to everyone.	150	36.8
Choose the info that I want to viral.	145	35.5
I'm not interested to viral.	135	33.1

The overall study concludes that individuals who live in the city and urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur and Selangor utilized the applications the most. Out of several popular applications used to share information, individuals chose Whatsapp and Facebook more than others like Instagram, Telegram, or Twitter. They prefer to share information related to health and current issues that suit their social media but do not tend to share information on politics, family, friends, or relationships. Next, social media users who tend to comment and re-share information about jokes, family, and friends indicate that users are interested in chatting about light and casual topics yet entertaining and heartwarming.

Therefore, these may be one of the reasons why youths prefer to surf social media because they want to be in a group of users who will share and reply to comments on topics that

interest them, relaxed and fun (Cicevic et al., 2016; Cunha et al., 2016; Kim & Chock, 2017). However, the least sharing of information with comments on the politics shows that the exposure will trigger non-civil commentary due to the ideological differences (Su et al., 2020). This is because; the role of ideology will affect users' willingness to take action and to rule out fights or misunderstandings when commenting and re-sharing topics on such information.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, viral on social media occurs when a user intentionally shares any information they found on the Net. The intention to do viral on social media will increase the possibility for any information to be disseminated actively or passively by a user. However, individuals need to be careful with the shared content or look for information from legitimate and authoritative sources to avoid misunderstandings or false information. The awareness and a sense of responsibility are salient in reducing the risk of individuals becoming social media victims; or the individuals will be the predator's choice who shares inaccurate information, screenshot, or cyberbully by sharing controversial content on social media.

If a user consciously (or intentionally) knows that the information shared will be viral then, the practical implications are to control the intentions of an action or utilized it by being a accountable information sharing agent. Before an individual decides to disseminate any information on social media, the individual needs to be sensitive to the audience in the social media involved. The information reception by different age groups will leave risks to their emotions and knowledge. Therefore, when individuals want to share information, they need to think about the target audience, purposes, or materials - in text or visual, picture or video because it will affect individual emotions in multiple ways (Staebler et al., 2009).

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