



**VIRAL VIDEOS IN MALAYSIA: UNDERSTANDING
ONLINE SHARING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS
OF INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
MALAYSIA (IIUM)**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication)**

**Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Human Sciences
International Islamic University Malaysia**

SEPTEMBER 2017

ABSTRACT

The emergence of Web 2.0 allows users to share information online. Since then, the world has been introduced to YouTube. YouTube is a video sharing website where people upload videos and write comments on the video. YouTube has been popular among people as it has become a platform where one can promote themselves as well as spread information on certain issues or for entertainment. Ever since the number of viral videos has risen, these videos have become one of the preferred methods of sharing information online. The question is what is it that makes videos become viral in Malaysia especially in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)? This study attempts to answer questions about the categories of viral videos that students of IIUM share and the factors that make them share certain viral videos. Additionally, how Islamic teachings influence their sharing behaviour is also examined in this study. This study employs qualitative face-to-face interviews method to gather and analyse the data. The findings of the study show that students of the International Islamic University Malaysia prefer to share videos that are related to food, cooking and animals. In addition, videos that contain practical values and those that could bring an awareness to others are more likely to be shared by the students of IIUM. From an Islamic perspective, the study shows that IIUM students check the accuracy of the video contents before they share them online and also avoid sharing videos that contain the elements of *fitnah* and *'aib*.

ملخص البحث

إن الجيل الجديد من شبكة الإنترنت (Web 2.0) يسمح للمستخدمين تبادل المعلومات عبر الإنترنت. ومنذ ذلك، عرف العالم موقع يوتيوب (Youtube). ويوتيوب هو موقع إلكتروني بمشاركة الفيديو (Video)؛ إذ يقوم الشخص بتحميل مقاطع الفيديو، ثم يكتب المشاهدون تعليقات عليها. أصبح يوتيوب مشهوراً بين الناس؛ إذ صار منبرا يمكن للمرء الترويج فيه لنفسه، فضلا عن نشر المعلومات في قضايا معينة أو لغرض الترفيه. ومنذ أن ارتفع عدد مقاطع الفيديو الشائعة المنتشرة، أصبحت هذه المقاطع إحدى الطرائق المفضلة لتبادل المعلومات عبر الإنترنت. والسؤال هنا: ما الذي يجعل أشرطة الفيديو شائعة ومنتشرة في ماليزيا وخاصة في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا؟ تحاول هذه الدراسة الإجابة عن الأسئلة في تصنيف أشرطة الفيديو الشائعة المنتشرة التي شارك بها طلبة هذه الجامعة، كما تبحث في عوامل تصنيفها؛ فضلا عن ذلك، تبحث في تأثير المعرفة الدينية الإسلامية في سلوكيات مشاركة الفيديو لدى الطلبة. تستخدم هذه الدراسة النوعية المقابلات وجها لوجه لجمع البيانات وتحليلها. وتظهر نتائج الدراسة أن طلبة الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا يفضلون المشاركة في مقاطع الفيديو ذات الصلة بالطعام والطبخ والحيوانات، وفضلا عن ذلك، فإن مقاطع الفيديو التي تحتوي على القيم العملية والتي يمكن أن تجلب الوعي للآخرين هي أكثر المقاطع التي يشارك بها الطلبة. أما من المنظور الإسلامي فتبين الدراسة أن الطلبة قد تحققوا من دقة محتويات الفيديو قبل مشاركتها عبر الإنترنت، وكذلك تجنبوا مشاركة أشرطة الفيديو التي تحتوي على عناصر مخلة بالأداب والقيم.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Muhamad Zulhilmi Bin Rosde

Signature.....

Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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This work is dedicated to my parents,

Rosde Ahmad and Asiah Ahmad

To my supervisors,

Dr Aini Maznina A. Manaf and Dr Rizalawati Ismail

And also to my siblings and friends

*Thank you for providing me with encouraging words, endless support and motivation,
love, and prayers throughout the whole process.*

Without them, I wouldn't be able to complete this journey...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, Praise be upon Allah SWT who blessed me with courage and resilience to finish my master's dissertation. Blessings be upon the Prophet, Muhammad SAW, Allah's messenger who delivered to us the faith of Islam that we can rely on in doing worldly responsibility such as seeking knowledge.

Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Aini Maznina A. Manaf and Dr. Rizalawati Ismail for assisting and encouraging me in doing this research. I would not have been able to complete my master's dissertation without all of your motivation, assistance and knowledge. Thank you also to the committed lecturers and staffs at the Department of Communication for their invaluable support throughout the process; all Communication lecturers and also to Sr. Fuziah Ningah, secretary of Communication Department for her assistance throughout the completion of my dissertation.

Likewise, I also would like to extend my gratitude to my friends who are the sources of motivation and entertainment; Br Shawal Rashid, Br. Syafiq Abu Kassim, Br. Usman Suardi, Br. Zaaimudin Serajudeen, Br. Khairul Syakirin, Sr. Hartini Wakichan, Sr. Nurhafizah Ahmad and Br. Azrul Wakichan and also, to all graduate students at the Department of Communication.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved family who was there for me every step of the way and were my source of encouragement and motivation, love and prayers. I feel very thankful to have such supportive people around me who give me confidence even when I am most doubtful.

I am truly grateful and I cannot imagine walking through this journey without each of you.

Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the overview of the study. The chapter is divided into several parts. First, it provides the background of the study. Then, this chapter provides the statement of the problem of the study. It also discusses the significance of the study. In the third part of this chapter, the research questions and objectives for the study are given. The last part of the chapter provides the overview of the chapter of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The emergence of web 2.0 such as YouTube allows users to share information online. With the proliferation of social media such as Facebook, YouTube and instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp, anyone with access to the Internet can share anything with a large number of people instantly.

Nowadays, online information sharing becomes a preferred method among people. YouTube, a social medium, is used by people to share information online. YouTube has approximately one billion users; four billion videos viewed per day, 60 hours of videos uploaded every minute or one hour of videos uploaded to YouTube every second (Bullas, 2012). This online information sharing process in a form of video contributed to the phenomena known as “viral videos”. Viral videos are videos that have widespread popularity by travelling from person to person through email, instant messages and media sharing websites (Vogelbacker et al., 2014).

According to a report by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (2015), 60.3% of households in Malaysia have access to the Internet. It

shows that most Malaysians use the Internet in their daily lives. Thus, the chances of a video going viral immediately is high (Izawa, 2010). An example of this, is a one-minute video showing a man hitting a woman at Air Hitam Toll, Johor Bahru. The man, decked in a red T-shirt bashed the woman while another girl tried to protect her. The was video uploaded on the Durian Kopi O Facebook page on February 12, 2016, and garnered over 259,000 views and more than 3,600 shares in a just few days (Kili, 2016).

A viral video can also be a tool to trigger a social media revolution like what happened in Egypt in 2011 (Rekhranj & Jayasainan, 2014). The 2011 Egyptian Revolution started by activists in Egypt who called for an uprising. The reason for the uprising was to protest against poverty, unemployment, government corruption and the slow pace of change under the rule of President Hosni Mubarak. Social media such as Facebook and YouTube played a role as the catalysts for the event. Another example was the death of a young Egyptian man, Khaled Saed. He was brutally beaten and killed by the police in the Sidi Gaber area of Alexandria, Egypt on 6 June, 2010. He was arrested for theft and weapon possession based on the claim by police. Photos of his disfigured corpse spread through online communities. This sparked outrage over allegations that he had beaten to death by Egyptian security forces (Mainwaring, 2011).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the new age of technology, the Internet allows people to communicate everywhere through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social network sites. YouTube, a video sharing website is linked with other social media such as Facebook. Thus, it enables videos to be uploaded, viewed, rated and shared with other

people. This sharing behaviour causes effects when the videos become viral. One of the elements of a viral video is when the contents of the video are easy to be remembered. Also, those who watch it will have the tendency to watch it again.

Despite a vast amount of YouTube videos shared online, it is also unfortunate to see that some videos had been inappropriately shared (Kimbelle, 2012). Most people who share videos sometimes do so only to promote themselves. By sharing the video, they will be acknowledged as people who share most updated news or videos. For example, people who share videos that portray negative elements such as child abuse are perceived by other people as someone who cares about the community (Kimbelle, 2012).

Similarly, in Malaysia, people share videos of artists or celebrities who do not properly cover their body. One of the recent controversies involved a national gymnast, Farah Ann Hadi, a Muslim girl, in which people questioned the appropriateness of her sporting attire (Loulla-Mae, 2015).

Videos that contain negative elements such as bullying or animal abuse are also the types of videos that become viral. Kimbelle (2012) claims that videos which become viral often contain negative elements, which display brutality and violent elements, such as bullying, child abuse and animal cruelty. The Internet community is borderless (Izawa, 2010). Thus, videos that portray people doing shameful behaviour can influence the young generation in a negative way.

On the other hand, videos that contain positive elements can also become viral. For instance, the acts of kindness, such as giving *salam* or helping other people are also popular. For example, “*Video Tak Kenal Maka Tak Salam*” by Pencetus Ummah, a reality show in Malaysia by ASTRO, became viral with 1.2 million people sharing the video in one day (Zainalabidin, 2015).

Even though much interest has been shown by scholars on the issue of viral videos (Izawa, 2010; West, 2011; Elliot, 2013; Guadagno et al., 2013) which focused on factors of videos becoming viral, few academic papers have been written on viral videos, especially in the Malaysian context. One of the studies on viral videos in Malaysia has concentrated on political aspects (Rekhraj & Jayasainan, 2014) and on how viral videos helped political leaders win the 13th Malaysian General Elections.

It is also important to note that previous studies on viral videos in Malaysia focused on advertising. For instance, a study conducted by Yeoh et al. (2013) focuses on viral marketing on medical tourists who seek medication in Malaysia. This study thus fills in the gap by taking a closer look at the sharing behaviour among Malaysian people to understand what makes YouTube videos become viral in Malaysia.

Another question that the researcher attempts to answer is whether religion plays a role in online sharing behaviour among International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students, particularly on how Islamic teachings play a role in their sharing behaviour of online videos. This study fills in the gap for this issue since there are not many studies done to examine this question.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Previous studies about viral videos have been mainly conducted outside Malaysia (Izawa, 2010; Hustead, 2012; Elliot, 2013; Guadagno et al., 2013); few studies have been conducted in Malaysia despite the increasing number of videos becoming viral in Malaysia. Previous studies on viral videos conducted in Malaysia only focuses on politics (Rekhraj & Jayasainan, 2014; Chow, 2015) and medicine (Yeoh et al., 2013). The study by Rekhraj and Jayasainan (2014) focuses on how political leaders use social media as tools to gain more votes, while the study by Chow (2015) focuses on

the appropriateness of parody content such as the “Listen! Listen! Listen!” video. The study by Yeoh et al. (2013) focuses on the viral marketing of medical tourism where tourists seek treatment in Malaysia after hearing about it through word of mouth. Essentially, this study focuses on what makes YouTube videos become viral in Malaysia by understanding why people share videos online and whether religion plays an important role in YouTube video sharing among IIUM students. The findings of the study provide an understanding of how Muslims, particularly in Malaysia and more specifically IIUM students, share videos online.

Specifically, findings of the study will benefit Muslim individuals or organisations who want to disseminate information through the online social network in several ways:

First, the study identifies the factors that make Malaysians share videos. While Kimbelle’s (2012) study lists emotions as one of the factors that make people share videos, this study identifies more factors on why and how YouTube videos in Malaysia become viral.

Second, the study provides a basis for Muslims in online sharing behaviour in accordance with Islamic teachings because Muslim youth nowadays simply share videos or certain information without considering whether they are against Islamic teachings or not. (Zaki et al., 2013). More importantly, it is hoped that the findings of the study will help organisations such as Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) create better guidelines on monitoring online video content.

Third, the study fills in the gap as most previous studies conducted used quantitative research method (Izawa, 2010; Hustead, 2012; Elliot, 2013; Guadagno et

al., 2013). This study was conducted using the qualitative research method where it adds to the body of knowledge in the area of studies on viral videos.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question addressed in this study was to explain the phenomenon of viral videos in Malaysia. The specific questions asked were:

1. What are the categories of viral videos that International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students share?
2. What are the contributing factors that lead to viral video sharing behaviour among IIUM students?
3. In what ways do Islamic teachings influence viral video sharing behaviour among IIUM students?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of viral videos in Malaysia, especially in IIUM, with social contagion theory as the main theoretical framework used as a support for this study. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the categories of viral videos that IIUM students share.
2. To explore the factors that contribute to viral video sharing behaviour among IIUM students.
3. To understand how Islamic teachings influence IIUM students in their decision to share viral videos.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This thesis consists of five chapters:

- Chapter 1 provides the background of the study by presenting the phenomenon of viral videos. It explains the rationale for exploring the study and how it becomes an essential contribution to practical and theoretical body of knowledge.
- Chapter 2 explores what can be obtained from the field of social media especially in the area of viral videos by reviewing some of the existing literature on social media, viral video and also the Islamic perspective of viral videos from the earliest study to date. The chapter also gives a definition of viral videos as well as an explanation of the theory that is used in the study.
- Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in the study. It discusses the research design and methods in gathering and analysing the data.
- Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study that were conducted in IIUM, Gombak.
- Chapter 5 offers the discussion on the findings of the study. Being the last chapter, it also provides an important conclusion.

1.7 SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the introduction of the study, background of the study, statement of problems, significance of the study, research questions and objectives, and the overview of the chapters. A review of literature related to the study will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to explore the phenomenon of viral videos in International Islamic University Malaysia, the knowledge on what is viral video and factors that make a certain video going viral need to be explored to give an understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, knowledge on Islamic perspective needs to be discussed and explored because the research also focuses on an Islamic perspective of viral videos.

This chapter discusses the literature related to the study. This chapter is divided into several parts. The first part describes the meaning of viral video itself, while the second part explains one of the social media that helps videos to become viral which is YouTube. The third part discusses the phenomena of viral videos in Malaysia. The fourth part of this chapter points out the factors that contribute towards reasons for videos becoming viral. The fifth part examines viral videos and YouTube in the Islamic perspective. The last part explains the theory that underpinning the study which is the social contagion theory.

2.2 DEFINITION OF VIRAL VIDEO

The word “viral” was used by Dawkins (1991) in his essay “Viruses of the Mind” who claimed that human beings become hosts of emotions such as happiness and unhappiness. He further explained that words that all human speak, especially about books, or articles that authors, reporters and bloggers write are the act of dissemination of ideas. The spreading process of ideas or “memes” to other people is

just the same as viruses disseminating their genetic materials from cell to cell (Dawkins, 1991).

According to Levinson (2009), viral videos used to be called “word of mouth”. He asserted that the word “viral” is something more than word of mouth because digital word of mouth can reach anyone, anywhere in the world, instantly, in contrast to old-fashioned spoken word of mouth, which can only reach the person right next to you, or by using telephones (Levinson, 2009). Jiang et al. (2014) claimed that a video is considered as a viral video when it becomes popular through a viral process of Internet sharing, typically through video sharing websites, social media and electronic mail. By sharing through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, videos can be spread quickly and become viral. Viral videos often contain humorous content and comedy sketches (Hoby & Lamont, 2010). Viral videos are not limited to web-only productions. Some eyewitness events have also been caught on video and have gone viral such as Battle at Kruger (BBC News, 2007), a woman hitting another car with a steering lock (Murad, 2014) and school bullying (Yunus, 2015).

Viral videos existed since the beginning of 2007 where people used to share videos through e-mail (Gurney, 2010). Even though some people do not have regular Internet access back then, they were presented with information through reports of newspapers, magazines and broadcast television. Viral videos consist of a mix of subject, form and meaning. Examples of this are videos that are recontextualizations of pre-existing media texts (remix or mashed up movie trailers, parodies of films and television), original and parodic song videos, videos made by producers who never intend to get a wide audience, short amateur videos depicting freak accidents, adorable animals or various moments that will be presented on reality shows such as America’s

Funniest Home Videos (Gurney, 2010). There are even videos of people and animals, dancing, singing, falling, and crying that become viral (Fletcher, 2010).

Viral videos occur when a video is posted online and viewers of the video decide to copy the link to the video and share the video with other people (Hustead, 2012). Those people share the videos with other people that they know and then those people could spread it to people they know and the cycle goes on. Any video can become viral if somebody decides to share it through the Internet, from movie trailers to webcam product reviews to a video of a cat that has learned a funny new trick. It shows that viral videos start off as a simple link to the video to become viral (Hustead, 2012).

The popularity of viral video depends on the creativity of the producer of the video. Southgate et al. (2010) who studied how creativity drives a video to become viral affirm that creative details on viral videos can be used to predict a video's popularity and they argue that the presentation of the video alone contributes towards its popularity.

The online environment helps people to express their opinions and emotions that they cannot do in their everyday life. Even though their identity is known, the opportunity of becoming physically invisible helps them to not worry when they are sharing viral videos or commenting on posts. Thus, it promotes sharing of ideas (Suler, 2004).

Viral videos also help people to get news and must be appealing to younger viewers. Sagan et al. (2010) suggested that a news video must appeal to viewers in the 18-25 age group to become widely popular.

2.3 YOUTUBE

YouTube is one of social media that helps some of videos to become viral. YouTube is a video sharing website that allows users to upload, view and share videos. It was founded in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim (Trier, 2007). According to Cheng et al. (2007), YouTube is a video sharing site that has grown since its acquisition by Google in 2006 and has become one of the main media in distributing or spreading information. Today, it is the third most visited website in the world (Alexa, 2015). Elliot (2013) asserted that the site began as a platform for amateurs to create videos and share it with each other (Kim, 2012).

YouTube provides a variety of contents, ranging from music, sports to news (YouTube, 2015). Naim (2007) explained that the term “YouTube Effect” refers to a phenomenon that consists of videos produced by individuals acting on their own that are rapidly disseminated worldwide that gains responses when aired on television. Nowadays, mainstream media journalists also use YouTube as a source of news. This is because they can be presented or not at the place or source of news. Since people are carrying mobile phones that record video everywhere they go, reporters or journalists feel more relaxed as they can always use videos that have been sent online through their news agency website or search for the video on YouTube (Elliot, 2013). A vivid example can be seen from an incident where a young Malay lady hit an old man’s car with a steering lock in Kuantan. The incident involved a 30-year old woman who overreacted by repeatedly hitting the car of the 68 year-old man, called him “very stupid” and demanded him to pay compensation because he accidentally bumped into her car (Murad, 2014).

However, not everyone who posts a video on YouTube wants others to only watch it. Some of the video creators simply seek for social interaction (Lange, 2007).

According to Benevenuto et al. (2008), YouTube has many features that boost social interaction such as the ability to give comments, the option to like or dislike a video or even share it through other social media platforms such as Facebook. YouTube also allows its user to interact with each other and share their opinion or responses to the content (Madden et al., 2013).

YouTube also has helped in the process of election. One of the examples is “Obama Girl”. The video entitled “I Got a Crush on Obama”, acted by Amber Lee Ettinger, portrayed a woman singing about how she has a crush on the former American president Barack Obama. The video has an impact on the 2008 United States of America election (Levinson, 2009). The video resulted in many voters under the age of 30 voting for him. The video had gone viral because people in that age group use that video to learn more about Obama. The video portrayed Obama as someone who is cool, interesting and interactive. The concept of creating answer and response video also helped in the creation of the “Obama Girl” and it gave producers of the video a good way to attract a big audience which thus made the video viral (Levinson, 2009).

2.4 THE PHENOMENON OF VIRAL VIDEOS IN MALAYSIA

There are many videos that have become viral in Malaysia. For instance, an amateur video that become viral was of a woman hitting another car with a steering lock (Murad, 2014). The video had been uploaded to YouTube and instantly became viral. The video received negative feedback from people who watched it. Another example of a viral video in Malaysia is video on school bullying. The video showed a male student who got beaten up by other students (Yunus, 2015). The video was shared more than 2,300 times and garnered 700 comments in three hours after it was posted.

It showed that amateur videos which recorded by people who pass by can be instantly become viral.

Essentially, viral videos are also used to create a worldwide sensation. YouTube is one of the best viral video tools that helps people to become famous (Elliot, 2013). Just like many parts of the world, Malaysia has produced some talents through YouTube. One good example is Najwa Latiff, who started her singing career by posting a lot of singing videos on YouTube.

Viral videos have also become the medium for politicians to gain popularity. Malaysian leaders and politicians are beginning to use social media to gain votes from the public. Twitter, Facebook and even blogs are used for that purpose. Political leaders such as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak even has Twitter and Facebook accounts where he can post updates, photos, and videos about the legislation and constituency relating to the country. YouTube hosts about 66,700 videos of the 13th General Elections in Malaysia which consist of the before and after events that were viewed thousands of times (Rekhraj & Jayasainan, 2014).

One of the most viral videos that has been shared in Malaysia is a parody. Chow's (2015) study on the "Listen, Listen, Listen" video which is a musical parody supports the idea that the parody type of video is one of the most shared videos in Malaysia. "Listen, Listen, Listen" video became viral because a woman, Sharifah Zohra Jabeen Syed Shah Miskin, the host of a talk show and also the president of Suara Wanita 1Malaysia (SW1M) stopped another person, Bawani K.S, a student of University Utara Malaysia (UUM) from asking a question with the phrase "Listen! Listen! Listen!".

In a similar vein, there are negative videos that have portrayed people doing wrongful acts such as bullying or child abuse that are shared in Malaysia (Kimbelle,

2012). There is a study about viral videos in Malaysia that focused on positive and negative elements of viral videos. Kimbelle (2012) who studied positive viral videos states that videos that portray negative elements such as “Woman Caught on Nanny Camera Abusing Infant Twins” are more popular than viral videos that contain positive elements. Decreasing morale influenced by sharing videos that show negative elements such as bullying and child abuse is the driving force that makes such videos viral.

On the other hand, even though some people share videos that contain negative elements in Malaysia (Kimbelle, 2012), there have been videos that contain positive messages that are being shared online in the Malaysian community as well. For example, the video entitled “My Generasi” by JinnyBoyTV has gained 2 million views and counting. The video recalls the primary school situation in the 1990s before the emergence of smartphones and electronic gadgets. Many comments from YouTube users have been positive some of which say that the video brought them back to their childhood. Besides being nostalgic, the video also shows the difference in the life of children in the 1990s and today’s generation (Bedi, 2012).

2.5 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS VIRAL VIDEOS

Emotion is one of the factors why certain articles, pictures or videos become viral. A study by Nisbett and Wilson (1977) on cognitive process found that people prefer passing on good news. This is because recipients of the good news will then share the news with other people. However, Heath (1996) argues that people prefer to share bad news. A study on emotion was also done by Berger and Milkman (2011) who look at the emotional content of The New York Times’ articles. Their study shows that people