

Investigating the Factors that Contributes most to the Virality of a Social Media Video advertisement

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Abstract

YouTube has emerged as a very popular advertising medium in the past few years. Many marketers use this platform as a launch pad for their branding campaign. However, success is not always guaranteed with some advertisements gaining major traction whilst others' effectiveness becomes questionable with poor traction. Thus, we are aware that social transmission is frequent and important but researchers are not yet clear about why certain content is more viral than others (Berger and Milkman 2011). In this research, we attempt to sift out the factors that contribute most to the 'virality' of any advertisement. We define virality as the average of likes, comments, dislikes, shares and hits for the advertisement. Our research builds up further on other research such as Berger and Milkman (2011) and Godes and Mayzlin (2009) within the Indian context by initially identifying 18 themes that were most commonly found in the advertisements here. The sample for identifying the themes was obtained from Youtube and was marked by 20 respondents on a scale of 1 to 7 based upon the degree of presence of the themes identified. Regression, factor analysis and a confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to finally arrive at a list of 7 factors. Though the adjusted R-square value was on the lower side as is the case in most such studies, our exploratory research is one of the first few such studies conducted within the Indian context and adds to our knowledge on virality in online advertising.

Key words: Social Transmission, Virality and online advertising.

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Introduction

Advertising is one word, which is commonly mistaken as the "Marketing" itself. But it is also a universal fact that it is just an integral function of the marketing. Since its inception from 300 years aback, advertisement has seen a lot of evolution and has been disguised in various definitions by various scholars. But all the scholars seemed to have been agreed on one or two words in their definitions i.e. "Marketing tool" and

"Communication". Since the inception of advertisement, marketers have been looking for new platforms for their advertisements.

Internet advertising v/s Traditional advertising

Advertising has a rich history of over than 300 years. Societies used symbols, and pictorial signs to attract their product users (Salman Saleem and Zain-UI-Abideen, Effective advertising and its influence on consumer buying behaviour). In these

300 years, no need to mention, advertisements have evolved a lot. The evolution of marketing is seen most vividly in the way that advertising has developed to respond to changes in the level of consumer sophistication (Advertising, Tom Yeshin). Coming into existence in the form of printed media, then developed to radio and television and advertising has stepped into the most fastest and effective form, internet advertising or 'Internet of advertising'. Internet has been proved to reduce the overall transaction cost between the merchant and the consumers (The Online Advertising Industry: Economics, Evolution, and Privacy, David S. Evans).

One of the most important dimensions that differentiate the new media from traditional media is the level of realism provided. On line media can incorporate level of vividness and interactivity that traditional media cannot (Advertising, Tom Yeshin). There are many tools recognized of Internet advertising that further varies from each other on the basis of degree of advertising.

- Internet presence sites (company websites),
- Web communities,
- Online stores,
- Banner ads
- Pop up ads,
- E-mail newsletters
- Unsolicited ads.

But in this research paper, authors have discussed the most common form of advertising that is on line video ads on platforms like YouTube. A video seen by one has the potential to reach millions of people, ignorant of the video at the very first moment. It proves to be boon for marketers. Now they just have to bring right package to the right people, and it will reach to the every potential prospect. Internet can be used to assist or mould a person's purchasing decision by providing the perfect information.

There is a growing tendency of viewers to share these video ads, to like and comment them. The marketers not only wish to advertise via you tube but they also aim at getting their ads viral. The term 'Viral' could be understood as 'the spreading of information and opinions about a product or service from person to person, especially on the internet'. Even with this simple meaning available, there is no standard definition recognized, of viral videos or other media content. More viral an ad goes higher are the chances for its being noticed and impact on the sales

Literature Review

Kaye & Medoff (2001) studied that online advertising started way back in 1994 with AT&T banner ad in HotWired, a web magazine. And it was sold on the basis of number of impressions. Marketers over years are creating and publishing different kind of online content ranging from banner ads, to web page ads to video ads. One of the most popular methods of advertising online is using online video ads. One of the study published by Google in April, 2015 suggest that "Online video is undeniably one of the key areas of focus for marketers in 2015, as well as for the next few years, because spending on desktop online video alone is projected to grow 21% every year until 2019." These videos are an effective medium to engage and connect with consumers. Their impact can be measured in terms of their virality.

Usher (2010) defined virality in the words of Henry Jenkins, Professor-University of California "It is a kind of smallpox soaked blanket theory of media circulation, in which people become unknowing carriers of powerful and contagious ideas, which they bring back to their homes and work place, infecting their friends and family." Boynton (2009) classifies different definitions of "going viral" by analysing online videos in 2008. He opines number of views and rate at which a video receives its

views could be used to understand its virality.

Google study (2015) suggested that for “online video platforms such as YouTube, engagement metrics comprising of views, likes, shares, comments, and watch time provide a basic barometer showing how an audience responds to videos.” However quality content that the audience finds useful, entertaining, and shareable leads to positive results. The campaign is also evaluated in terms of awareness, audience interest and perception.

Even though the influence of viral video has been investigated to a great extent, much less attention has been given to the elements within viral videos. Cashmore (2009) argues that is virality just random or it can be predicted. Linkletter et al. (2009) opined in their pop culture research that the influence of online videos so strong that certain videos have even persuaded people to take unhealthy risks. Burgess (2008) defined the parameters of viral videos in terms of user-led distribution which causes a clip to become wildly popular. She also suggested that these videos must be reflection of popular culture of the time. Fletcher (2010) and Briggs (2010) have researched the reasons behind the popularity of certain videos. Briggs (2010) published a viral video case study in which he closely analyzes the “BlendTec Will it Blend” campaign. “According to Briggs, this campaign has been wildly popular and is a useful example of the methodology behind viral videos. He explains that BlendTec has been successful in its online video endeavors because it created buzz content.” Burgess (2008) researched a sample of 4,300 popular YouTube videos and observed that these videos are much different traditional media content. She suggested that “oddness” and “amateurism” lead to the virality. Hilderbrand (2007) argues that 'layout' is another important factor which leads to the popularity of certain videos. Southgate et al. (2010) studied 102 video

ads aired in the United Kingdom and concluded that the creative details behind these videos can predict their popularity. Jonah Berger and Katherine L. Milkman (2011) studied how characteristics of content affect virality. They examined 7000 articles from New York Times newspaper to study the number of times an article was shared and with it they observed the attributes of the articles (theme, position on the website). Tyler West (2011) analysed top 20 viral videos as per the TIME magazine. He conducted content analysis on each video and derived out the nine major factors that give makes a video viral. Apparently, TIME has taken the number of views as the measurement of virality. Dobelet et al.(2007) observed that a message which connects emotionally has more propensity to be shared among friends, family and peers. Thales Teixeira (2012) also reported in the Harvard Business Journal: “After analyzing thousands of reactions to many ads, second by second, and tracking exactly when people stop watching, we found that keeping viewers involved depends in large part on two emotions: joy and surprise.” Slovic (2007) examined what captures the attention of a viewer in just 10 seconds web videos. He concluded that “producing videos containing celebrities, emotional elements such as surprise, and evocative music are all steps to creating effective video content for an online audience.” However, Singh and Singh (2016) stated that it is difficult to provide a set definition of 'virality' and thus several studies have given their own definitions and criteria to determine it.

Research Gap:

Importance of consumer involvement level is well established and researched in the area of marketing and consumer research in past two decades. The level of involvement concept is vastly accepted in consumer behavior studies and it is used to classify products and advertising messages based on the

level of consumer involvement stimulated by them. It is defined as the extent of time and efforts invested by a prospective buyer while making a purchase decision. This research makes an attempt to study a range of brands based on consumer involvement level i.e. low involvement products like 5 star chocolates, detergents and high involvement products like life insurances.

Research Objectives:

The major objective of this research paper is to understand 'What makes a video ad viral?' An attempt is made in this paper to investigate the characteristics of the content resulting in its virality.

Research Methodology:

The research is a blend of both quantitative and qualitative data. This research paper investigates content characteristics of video ads which drive virality. In particular, we have identified 18 different themes on the basis of literature review and see their impact on the overall virality of the video ads. We have considered total activity (brand engagement metrics) i.e. views, likes, shares and comments of a particular video ad as its virality.

Thus, hypothesis formed is as under:

H0: There is no significant relationship between different themes and virality of an ad.

H1: There is significant relationship between different themes and virality of an ad.

Recognition of themes:

The first task is to identify the themes that are used frequently in Indian video advertisements. This was done by literature review and content analysis. The 18 themes identified are as follows:

Practical utility- if the advertisement shows the basic utility of the product then it marked with theme Practical Utility. For example, a Colgate advertisement shows how Colgate helps fighting germs and sensitivity, so was put in this theme.

Element of Laughter- If the advertisement shows humour of any type and makes audience laugh then it is marked with the element of laughter theme. For example Flipkart's "Aur Dikhaao" advertisements makes the audience laugh hence marked with above mentioned theme.

Element of Surprise- If the advertisement surprises or shows something unexpected then it is marked with "Element of surprise".

Musical Quality- Some of the advertisements include high quality music or some good poetic lyrics which increases the audience's involvement. For example Microsoft Lumia used a great mix of Electronica and Hip Hop music which lures the young audience.

Youth- If the video advertisements show some events or emotions pertaining to young generation then it is marked with the Youth theme. Pepsi and Coca Cola often used this theme.

Occasion- When an advertisement is made and launched on some occasion like some festival or big event then it is marked with "Occasion" theme. For example, Pepsi made most of its advertisements keeping "Indian Premier League" in focus.

Friendship- We identified Friendship as one of the most used theme as everyone can relate to it at some level. Coca Cola and Pepsi have used this theme frequently in order to lure the young people.

Social Issues- If an advertisement shows some indication or inference of any social issue then it is marked with defined theme. Ariel used this theme

in its one advertisement.

Story Line- Most of the modern advertisements carry a story over a period of time. Any advertisement with a story line is marked with this theme. Pepsi advertisement is one of the examples. **User generated Content or User Engagement-** Nowadays many advertisements campaigns are based upon the content generated by users or audience itself or engages the user more than mere watching. Such advertisements are marked with above said theme.

Celebrity- Most of the advertisements campaigns feed upon the star power of a celebrity along with other few factors. For example Pepsi advertisements are predominantly marked with “celebrity” theme.

Simple and authentic- Some advertisements are just very obvious and easy to understand. They are related to any normal routine that a viewer usually does not pay attention to. Such advertisements are marked with this theme.

Fun- If an advertisements shows a visual of people having fun or some other fun activity that makes a viewer feel joyous then it is marked with this theme.

Happiness- if the visual of the advertisements makes a person feel happy and jolly then it is marked with Happiness theme.

Emotion- If any advertisement engages the viewer emotionally like Pepsi's school farewell advertisements then it is marked with this theme.

Informative- If an advertisement gives information about the product or services itself or somehow related to the product then it is marked informative.

Graphics- If an advertisement uses fancy and powerful graphics quality then it is marked with

Graphics theme.

Regional- Some advertisements are made keeping a particular region in mind be it a regional celebrity or folk music. Such advertisements are marked with regional theme.

Data Source:

We have identified and directly downloaded 40 video ads from the YouTube website along with the engagement metrics figures available i.e. shares, subscriptions, likes, etc. The criterion for including these videos is each having likes equal to or more than 50,000 hits. The you tube video ads were chosen for both low involvement and high involvement brands. This study focuses on video ads released during Feb 1, 2014- May 1, 2015 on you tube. The summary of you tube ads considered for this research is given in the annexure 1.

Sample Respondents:

A sample size of 20 respondents in the age group of 20-25 was considered. These respondents are management students who come from diverse backgrounds and have frequent access to YouTube.

Methodology:

The respondents were asked to flag the chosen 40 video ads for the 18 themes present in them on a scale of 1 to 7. Where 1 denotes absence of theme and 7 denotes the highest degree of theme presence in the given ad. Thereafter, an exploratory factor analysis is conducted by using SPSS 16 on this data and a set of 7 factors/ constructs were identified. Further, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by using Amos 20 to validate them. Thereafter, regression analysis was run by taking Virality Z score as dependent variable whereby virality was average of hits, subscription, likes and shares and the 7 factors obtained from factor

analysis. The factors/constructs obtained after factor analysis are: Context, Music & Humour, Enthusiasm, Rationality, Contemporary, Celebrity and Graphics.

Analysis and Discussions

Step 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Prior to conducting CFA and Integrated Measurement Model Fit, EFA (Exploratory factor Analysis) was conducted to validate the factors received from review of literature. Table 1 presents the KMO value as .834 (sig. at .000) and total

variance explained as 70.217, which represents that the variables were good fit for EFA. Total 7 factors were retrieved in which 2 variables formed independent factors (Celebrity & Graphics) and 1 variable (simple & authentic) was discarded due to low reliability and factor loading value. The five factors that were further considered for CFA & integrated measurement model fit were Context, Music & humor, Enthusiasm, Contemporary and Rational. The factors loading value for all the variables were more than the accepted value ($< .5$). The three factors were having reliability value (α) above 0.7 and two factors were carrying α value of .638 and .588.

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis

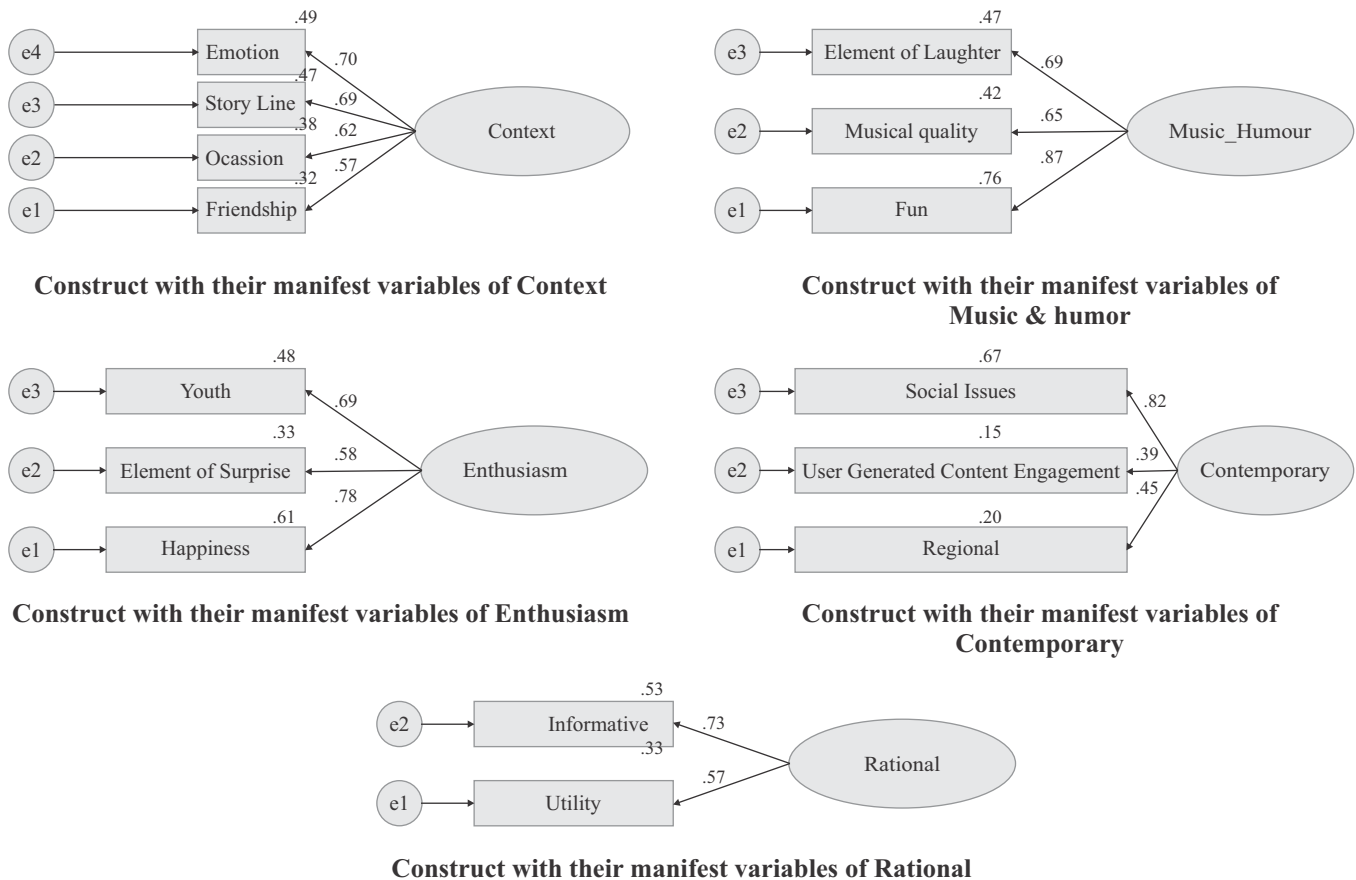
	Factors	Variables	Factor Loading	Variance explained (70.217)	α
Virality	Context	Emotions	.795	17.861	.737
		Story Line	.742		
		Occasion	.727		
		Friendship	.634		
	Music & Humor	Element of Laughter	.872	16.443	.775
		Musical Quality	.826		
		Fun	.703		
	Enthusiasm	Youth	.830	10.167	.722
		Element of surprise	.814		
		Happiness	.729		
	Contemporary	Social Issue	.796	8.042	.638
		User Generated Content Engaement	.778		
		Regional	.591		
	Rationality	Utility	.819	7.076	.588
		Informative	.814		
	Celebrity	Celebrity	.748	6.225	
Graphics	Graphics	.741	4.402		

Step 2: Validating The Constructs

Figure 1 operationalization of the construct with its manifest variables is shown on the basis of review of literature. The assignment of measured variables to each latent construct is graphically equivalent to drawing arrows from each construct to the measured variables that represent construct. The

degree to which each measured variable is related to its construct is represented by that variable's loading. Only loading linking of each measured variable to its latent construct as specified by the arrows are estimated; the rest are set to be zero. Since a measured variable doesn't explain latent variable perfectly, an error term is added.

Figure 1: Constructs with their manifest variables



In Figure 1, the measurement model of Context, 4 variables were estimated in order to check the extent of relationship between the latent variables and manifest variables. These four variables were emotions, storyline, occasion and friendship. Music and Humor is represented by the three manifest variables: Element of Laughter, Musical Quality and Fun. The three manifest variables (Youth, Element of Surprise and Happiness) represent the latent variable Enthusiasm and latent

variable Contemporary is consists of three manifest variables namely Social Issues, User Generated Content Engagement and Regional. The two manifest variables, informative and Utility are estimating the latent variable Rational.

Step 3: Assessing The Measurement Model Fitness

After specifying the measurement model, next step

is to test the fitness of the measurement model in order to check the variance between the estimated covariance matrix and the observed covariance matrix. For taking this rule into account, the researcher has used 4 measured variables for Context, 3 measured variables for Music & Humor, 3 manifest variables for Contemporary, 3 for Enthusiasm and 2 measured variables for Rational.

Parameters for Goodness-of-fit Hair et al., (2005) stated that the validity of the measurement model is ascertained by goodness of fit indices. The fit indices intend to inform the researcher how closely the data fit the model. Table 2 represents the standard fit indices that are considered for making interpretation about model fit:

Table 2: Model Fit Indices

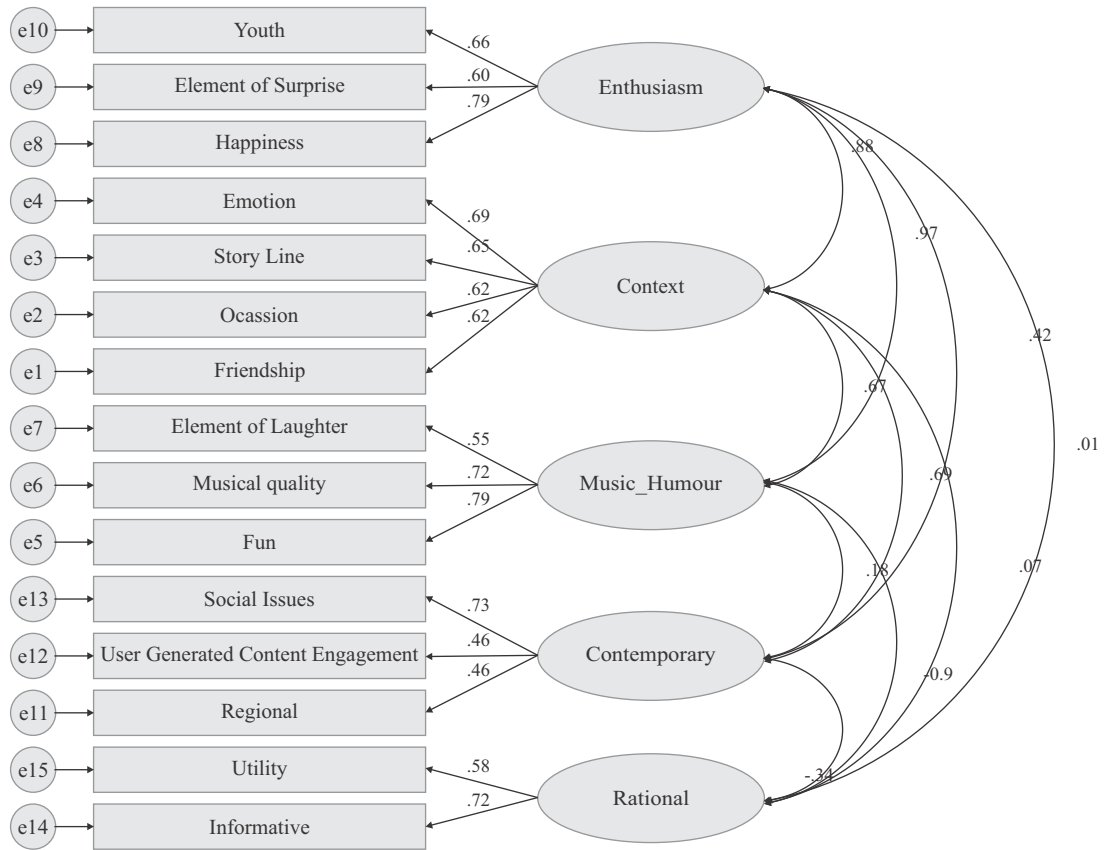
Index	Recommended Value	Model Indices: Context	Model Indices: Music & Humour	Model Indices: Enthusiasm	Model Indices: Contemporary	Model Indices: Rationality
GFI	Greater than .09	.999	.995	.998	.990	-
Ratio χ^2/df	Less than 3	.681	.260	1.566	3.868	-
CFI	Greater than .09	.997	.999	.998	.948	-
RMSEA	Less than .08	.001	.002	.031	.115	-
RMR	Less than .05	.028	.027	.060	.064	-

Table 2 encapsulates the model fit indices of all the constructs namely Context, Music & Humor, Enthusiasm, Contemporary and Rationality. In case constructs, Context and Music & Humor, all of the indices values were above the cut-off level, which implies that these constructs were good fit for model. The other indeces values for construct Enthusiasm were in acceptable range except for RMR (.060) which was a bit high. For factor Contemporary, the RMSEA and RMR values were a bit above the good fit range but the GFI, CFI and

CMIN/df values were in good fit range. For Rationality, the values were not calculated as as only two variables were present in this construct and in CFA, one construct must have 3 or more variables and to calculate the model fit values.

Figure 2 shows the integrated measurement model for all the five constructs followed by the model fit indices of Intergrated Measurement of all constructs in Table 3.

Figure 2: Intergrated Measurement Model



Although the Model fit highly depends on the number of respondents (inverse relationship), this integrated measurement model was found to be in acceptable range (average model fit). Table 3 represents that all the indices values were near to

acceptable range and can be used further for structural equation modelling to check their impact on virality. For this research paper, the impact of the factors on virality is checked by multiple regression.

Table 3: Model Fit

Indices	Values
CMIN/df (less than 3 = Good Fit; 3-5 = Avg. Fit)	4.642
GFI (greater than .95)	.927
CFI (greater than .9)	.899
AGFI (greater than .8)	.889
RMSEA (less than .05)	.078
P Close	.000

Step 4: Regression Equation

Looking at the low Adjusted R-Square=0.198 from the model summary (Table 4), one may predict that the model able to explain just 19.8% variability of the dependent variable. However, it is a well known fact that in such problems involving

attempts to predict human behaviour such as psychology, typically has R-Square lower than 50%. Humans are simply harder to predict than, say physical processes. The Table 5: Anova, shows that the model is significant at 0.0% significance level with F value of 22.076.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.456a	.208	.198	.89592157

a. Predictors: (Constant), Zgraphics, Contemporary, Enthusiasm, Rationality, Zceleb, Humour & music, Context

Table 5: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	124.037	7	17.720	22.076	.000a
Residual	473.579	590	.803		
Total	597.615	597			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Zgraphics, Contemporary, Enthusiasm, Rationality, Zceleb, Humour & music, Context

Furthermore, even if R-Square is low but the predictors are statistically relevant, then one can draw important conclusions. We know that, in a linear Regression Model, p-value for each term tests the null hypothesis. A low p-value (<0.05) indicates that the null hypothesis can be rejected. Thus alternative hypothesis (H1): There is significant relationship between different themes and virality of an ad is accepted. In other words, a predictor that has a low p-value is meaningful to the model as a change in it is related to the change in dependent variable. As per Table 6:

Coefficients^a, all the factors/ constructs except for Rationality (0.319) has a p-value less than 0.05 which signifies the relationship between these themes and virality. However, contemporary, enthusiasm and graphics has inverse relationship with the virality of an ad. Thus the regression equation is:

$$\text{Virality} = 6.268 (\text{Context}) + 7.520 (\text{Humor \& Music}) - 2.705 (\text{Enthusiasm}) - 2.668 (\text{Contemporary}) + 4.393 (\text{Celebrity}) - 2.035 (\text{Graphics})$$

Table 6: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.003	.037		.091	.928
Context	.330	.053	.330	6.268	.000
Humor & music	.385	.051	.384	7.520	.000
Enthusiasm	-.160	.059	-.160	-2.705	.007
Contemporary	-.110	.041	-.110	-2.668	.008
Rationality	.040	.040	.040	.998	.319
Celebrity	.188	.043	.188	4.393	.000
Graphics	-.078	.038	-.078	-2.035	.042

a. Dependent Variable: Virality

Research Findings

The key findings based on statistical analysis are:

Based on exploratory factor analysis, a total of 7 factors were retrieved in which 2 variables formed independent factors (Celebrity & Graphics) and 1 variable (simple & authentic) was discarded due to low reliability and factor loading value.

The five factors that were further considered for CFA & integrated measurement model fit were Context, Music & humor, Enthusiasm, Contemporary and Rational.

The constructs were identified with underlying manifest variables for 5 latent variables i.e. context, music and humor, enthusiasm, contemporary and rational.

The model fit indices values were above the cut-off level, which implies that these constructs were good fit for model.

The calculated value of adjusted R-Square was .198, however, the relationship between different themes and virality of an ad was significant.

The proposed regression equation for the virality is:

$$\text{Virality} = 6.268 (\text{Context}) + 7.520 (\text{Humor \& Music}) - 2.705 (\text{Enthusiasm}) - 2.668 (\text{Contemporary}) + 4.393 (\text{Celebrity}) - 2.035 (\text{Graphics})$$

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research conducted in this paper reflects the idea that presence of certain themes will make viewers more likely to share videos on YouTube. Although not every theme on the coding sheet was deemed highly influential, every theme recorded in the pre-coding sheet was later found present in the video studied.

This research could be used by the marketers and advertisers creating digital content and videos to communicate with their customers by being viral (better engagement metrics). The understanding of the different constructs in viral videos will make it make it easier to create a video that will become widely distributed on the Internet. However, this research did not address the communication model these viral videos will follow to achieve popularity on social media. For this reason, continuing research on this topic should be combined with communication model fit.

Scope for Future Research

The concept of virality is very broad. There are multiple social media platforms at which the content can attain virality. The further studies could be conducted to understand the characteristics of viral hashtags, Instagram reels, Whatsapp viral messages and other social media posts apart from YouTube alone.

Limitations

The sample size considered for this research is small and limited to the age group of 20-25 years old individuals. Another limitation of this research is that only You Tube video ads are studied for this research.

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Annexure 1: Summary of You Tube ad videos chosen for the study.

S.No	Advertisement Date	Brand	Shar-es	Subscr-ptions	Hits	Likes	Dis-likes	Comm-ents
1	Feb-14	Coca cola	278	514182	237762	622	49	39
2	Mar-14		284	514182	164894	403	66	59
3	Nov-14		95	514182	77504	253	21	27
4	May-15		1199	514182	12,38,095	1788	283	150
5	May-15		249	514182	3,28,952	350	44	46
6	May-15	Pepsi	243	29727	4900921	238	93	36
7	Jun-14		15165	29727	2207762	13665	805	699
8	Mar-15		718	29727	1884793	1062	522	84
9	Oct-14		4292	29727	1068950	5644	285	392
10	May-15		59	29727	1441563	55	43	14
11	Mar-15	Amazon	241	5240	2075433	293	32	23
12	Mar-15		85	5240	875124	113	24	4
13	Apr-15	Flipkart	920	18702	2270909	1281	859	127
14	Apr-15		374	18702	567671	450	724	93
15	Feb-15		252	18702	457450	119	17	12
16	Mar-15	Myntra	6	8193	1915	6	3	3
17	Mar-15	Samsung		1297605	128218	2529	110	315
18	Jan-15	Ariel	36	1364	436626	19	6	8
19	Mar-15		57	1364	28112	46	11	10
20	Jul-14		7	1364	50848	6	5	1
21	Jul-15	KFC	9	2723	68784	18	12	4
22	Jun-14		5	2723	75981	3	4	2
23	Jun-14		6	2723	44118	2	1	1
24	Aug-14	Colgate	8	5836	235231	30	25	
25	Sep-14		11	5836	227565	10	2	
26	Aug-14		21	5836	614208	45	25	6
27	Mar-15		22	5836	675772	8	8	0
28	Feb-15		276	5836	931970	131	35	0
29	May-15		31	5833	969440	10	15	0
30	Apr-15	Dominos	30	4038	449548	28	3	4
31	Jan-14		5	4038	61558	12	6	4
32	Oct-14	LG	6	6032	130851	8	3	0
33	Apr-15	Airtel	68	51511	887000	22	22	3
34	Sep-14		104	51511	3529804	2411	1205	169
35	Apr-14	5 star		3945	493240	71	11	11
36	Dec-14		62	3945	84104	233	152	30
37	Dec-14		231	3945	516987	155	16	11
38	Aug-14			3945	1503988	158	59	7
39	Mar-15	Samsung		1335587	138096	2564	114	320
40	Feb-14	Birla sun Life	18	3034	126186	48	18	1