

The Rise of Viral Videos

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify which factors and trends can be seen in the rise of a viral video. A survey was conducted to find out the general populations opinion and ideas as to why a video goes viral and what outlets they use to receive and share videos. The results show viral videos all share common traits, which cause them to go viral. Many rise to fame through celebrity support, community participation, and shock factor. Social media's role in the rise a video is also discussed.

## Chapter 1

### Purpose of the Study

Seventy-two hours of content are uploaded to Youtube every minute, over 4 billion hours are watched on YouTube each month, and over 800 million users visit YouTube each month. YouTube videos can now be accessed on a smart phone, tablets and are easily shared through social media outlets. 500 years of YouTube video are watched every day on Facebook, and over 700 YouTube videos are shared on Twitter each minute. Videos on Youtube are constantly being liked, shared, favorited, and commented on. Youtube has created endless possibilities to interact with millions of videos on one website.

The ease of sharing and watching Youtube videos has created the “viral video” phenomenon. A viral video is a video uploaded online (in most cases using Youtube) that becomes extremely popular through sharing via social media. Viral videos have created Internet celebrities, one in particular is Psy, a Korean musician who created the viral video “Gangnam Style.” Currently “Gangnam Style” is the most watched video on Youtube. Not only was the song popularized and memorized, the musician also influenced the dance world by creating a unique dance which the rest of the world attempted to copy. The recent fad is creating a viral video with the intention of it being copied and remade by someone else. The viral video, “Harlem Shake” is another great example of that.

This study focused on finding the trend of viral videos and how these videos rise to fame. The study also focused on the role mobile devices and social media play in aiding a video to go viral. Many aspects play a part in making a video go viral. The

biggest factor is usually humor. Next would be a video the audience can relate to. The more funny and relatable a video is, the more likely it will rise to fame.

Of course, whom the video attracts will always vary. Not everyone will find a video appealing and entertaining. Youtube alone has millions of videos on its site, which makes it easy for a user to find exactly his or her niche and find something entertaining. Other websites help cut out videos a user may not be interested. Stumbleupon.com and wimp.com have created a niche specific for the user and users can rely on these sites to find exactly what they're looking for. This study will determine what kind of demographic makes a video go viral.

### **Significance of Study**

In recent years, creating viral videos has become a small business. Users are paid for every thousand views, as well as receiving payment for advertisements. It is possible for creators of viral videos to bring in up to million dollars for their video. These viral videos are also used for promotion of individual companies. Viral videos are here to stay and are already a huge influence on the social values, opinions, and trends of this generation.

### **Interest in Study**

As an enormous fan and follower of viral videos, I am extremely interested in the making of viral videos and how viral videos become insanely popular. I am also an avid sharer of Youtube videos and I am certain I have contributed to the success and

popularity of many viral videos. As a Graphic Communication major with a concentration in web and digital media, this directly relates to my studies and will be very useful with my future projects. This study will provide me with valuable information to the success of viral videos and how I can make future projects of mine hopefully just as successful.

## Ch. 2

### Literature Review

Internet videos have become one of the most popular trends of this decade. They are used to promote a business, entertain, educate, or even used just to vlog (video blog).

There are millions of these videos uploaded to the Internet every day, but of those millions of uploaded footage, only a small percentage eventually goes viral. These viral videos can be identified as videos that receive more than five million views in a three to seven day period and prompts discussion (Scallon, 2012).

Youtube has popularized viral videos, but other video sharing sites have also played a part their promotion videos. Around the same time Youtube was introduced, video sharing sites such as College Humor, wimp.com, Funny or Die, and Hulu. These sites also promote videos. Depending on the theme of their site, the videos on the page may vary. These videos are spread through word of mouth, social media, and other media outlets. Viral videos rise to fame because they appeal to a certain group of people.

### History

Youtube was founded and created by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawid Karim. Originally employees for PayPal, they drew up the idea for Youtube when they struggled to find and share a clip of Janet Jackson's performance at the Superbowl on the Internet. Youtube was created in February of 2005 and the beta version was launched in May of that same year. The first video uploaded to Youtube was a 19 second video of Youtube co-founder, Jawid Karim, at the San Diego Zoo, describing the elephants behind him (Fitzpatrick, 2010).

A year after the beta version of Youtube was launched, it was sold in the fall of 2006 for 1.65 billion dollars at a Silicon-Valley Denny's. The money was split between the three founders and a couple of sponsors. Unlike most of Google's purchases, YouTube remained relatively independent from the company. Youtube has been able to keep its same employees and headquarters even after the transfer of ownership. Although purchasing Youtube was definitely a gain for Google, Google knowingly inherited the legal issues Youtube had.

Immediately after purchasing Youtube, Google put aside 200 million dollars to cover the possible legal fees they may have to deal with. The biggest lawsuit came from Viacom Inc., the owner of MTV, VH1, and Comedy Central, who sued Youtube and Google for one billion dollars over copyright issues (The A.P., 2007). Viacom filed the lawsuit in 2007 and finally in 2010, the courts threw the case out stating that Youtube was protected by the safe harbors declared in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (McSherry, 2012). The safe harbors defined in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act protect server providers from liabilities caused by the activities of their users.

Universal Music Group also filed a lawsuit with Youtube over copyright infringement. Fortunately, Youtube and Universal Music Group were able to reach a deal and the result was the creation of Vevo.com. Universal Music Group provides the content for Vevo and Youtube supplies the brainpower. Youtube and Google attempted to reach deals with as many companies as possible in order to avoid any other lawsuits. The deals produced requires that Youtube share revenue with the company, in exchange for allowing Youtube to share their ads (Nakashima, 2009).

Viral videos began to appear almost immediately after Youtube was created. One early star was Youtube and MySpace user Lonelygirl15. She was a vlogger (video

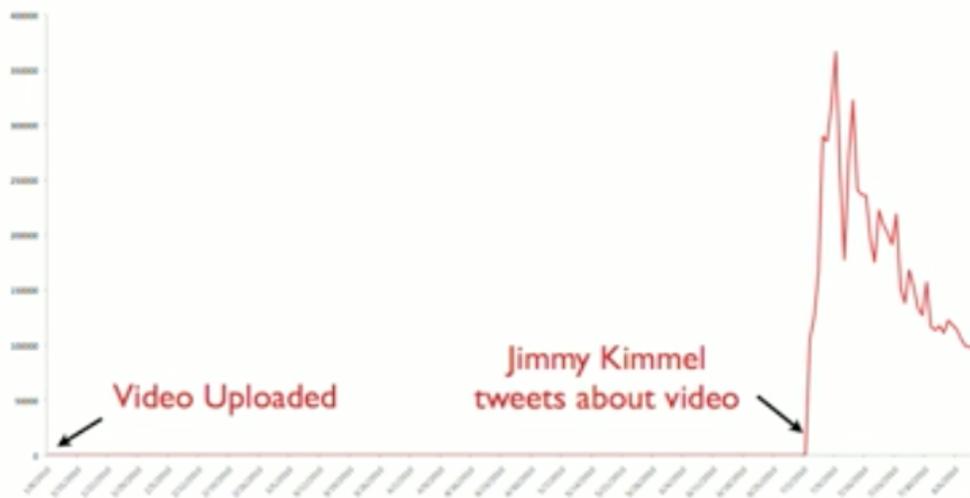
blogger) and regularly uploaded short videos, which were watched by an enormous fan base. Lonelygirl15, also known as Jessica Lee Rose, was eventually found to be an actress hired by a Hollywood studio to promote a film. The disappointment from her followers, as well as the curiosity from people who heard of the hoax brought Lonelygirl15's videos deeper into the viral world (Gentile, 2006).

### **How a Video Goes Viral**

Research has shown that there is no guaranteed way to make an Internet video go viral. Kevin Allocca, YouTube's trend manager, does not think he has the answer as to how to make a video go viral, but he has figured out what all viral videos have in common. Allocca was invited to speak at a TED Youth talk in 2011 and he discussed the three factors he discovered that contribute to making a video rise to fame.

The first factor is a tastemaker. All viral videos require a tastemaker in order to attract viewership. Allocca uses the example of the "Double Rainbow" video that has garnered over 36 million views. The video was first posted on January 8, 2010 by Paul "Bear" Vasquez. The following six months after he posted the video, there was relatively no viewership. On July 3rd of that same year, Jimmy Kimmel somehow stumbled upon the video and tweeted it out to his millions of followers. Thirteen days later on July 16<sup>th</sup>, CNN declared that the video had gained almost 5 million views. In this situation, Jimmy Kimmel was the tastemaker. Kimmel introduced something new that originally had not received any attention, and he brought this exciting, new video to his large audience, and from there it spread rapidly through the Internet.

## Views Per Day for Double Rainbow



The second factor contributing to the rise of an Internet video is community participation. For this factor, Allocca used Rebecca Black's music video "Friday" to prove his point. The world was first introduced to this jaw dropping music video by comedian Daniel Tosh, on his show Tosh.O. From there, Rebecca Black's viewership skyrocketed when users began to create a stir by commenting and discussing the video. Other Youtube users recreated her music video, as well as creating hundreds of parodies to her song. The music video, remixes, and parodies were shared through out all social media outlets. Without community participation, Rebecca Black's music video would not have risen as high as it has today (Allocca, 2011).

The last factor contributing to the success of a viral video is the factor of unexpectedness. Everyone loves to be surprised, and everyone remembers that feeling of being surprised. Allocca explains this perfectly with, "only that is truly unique and unexpected can stand out."

## **Life After a Viral Video**

Life after creating a viral video is not as simple as one imagines. Creating a viral video is a potential moneymaker and many viral video celebrities are unaware of this. Fortunately for them, there are agencies that have sprung up to help these new found celebrities find their fortune. One of these is Viral Spiral. It was created by Damian Collior, who originally started off as an entertainment consultant for Howard Davis-Carr, who was the creator of the viral home video, “Charlie Bit My Finger.” After “Charlie Bit My Finger” went viral, Davis-Carr was overwhelmed with requests from advertisers and chat shows. Collior aided Davis-Carr with dealing with these requests and Davis-Carr came out \$500,000 richer. Now Collior is the CEO of Viral Spiral and helps other newfound celebrities “bridge the gap between the owners of the world’s most viewed user generated content and brands, creative agencies, and production companies seeking to use such content” ([www.viralspiralgroup.com](http://www.viralspiralgroup.com)). Currently Charlie Bit My Finger has been successfully integrated into advertisements and social media and can be seen in Ragu’s, the pasta sauce, commercial, as well as featured in its own app (Rigby, 2012).

One of the most successful and well-known Youtube stars is none other than Justin Bieber. Bieber began his career by posting homemade videos of him performing covers of other artist’s songs. He was discovered by an Atlanta talent manager and eventually released his first single under Def James Records. Justin Bieber is now the first solo artist to have four songs on the Billboard’s top 40 before releasing a debut album. He also has one of the most watched videos on Youtube (Bream, 2009). He recently was pushed down to the second most watched Youtube video, with Psy’s “Gangnum Style,” taking the number one spot.

## **Impact of Viral Videos**

In Kevin Allocca's TED talk, he also talked about the impact these viral videos have on today's society. People are participating willingly in the rise of viral videos by contributing their own comments and providing their own videos in response to other videos. This is changing the way society has interacted with entertainment before.

Originally there was a large separation between entertainers and the rest of society.

Today, people can easily make the transition between the average person, to an Internet phenomenon. It has created a new kind of culture that everyone has access to and where the audience defines the popularity.

Youtube videos are not only changing how we view entertainment, but companies are sneaking these videos into our daily lives. Many Youtube videos are put into commercials or the Youtube stars make appearances in TV sitcoms and movies, or are used in commercials. Some videos are even being turned into ringtones. These viral videos are becoming part of the daily routine and eventually become the norm.

## **Methodology**

The goal of this study was to find the different factors that make a video go viral. Currently the younger generation rules the Internet. In my study, I took a look at this generation and attempted to find a correlation in the methods they used to find videos, and which of these methods made certain videos go viral. The objectives of this study were:

- Determine which methods of social media outlets make a video go viral
- What specific factors are most commonly seen in a viral video.

### **Data Collection Plan**

In this study, 56 people ages 13 to 29 were interviewed to determine what methods they use to find videos. My research consisted of methods such as word of mouth, to discovering videos on Facebook. Also, the group interviewed was also asked what factors they look for in viral videos.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

All responses to the questions and comments from the interviewee were recorded. This study determined which method is most effective in making a video go viral. Also, the study determined what factors are most valuable for a viral video.

## Ch. 4

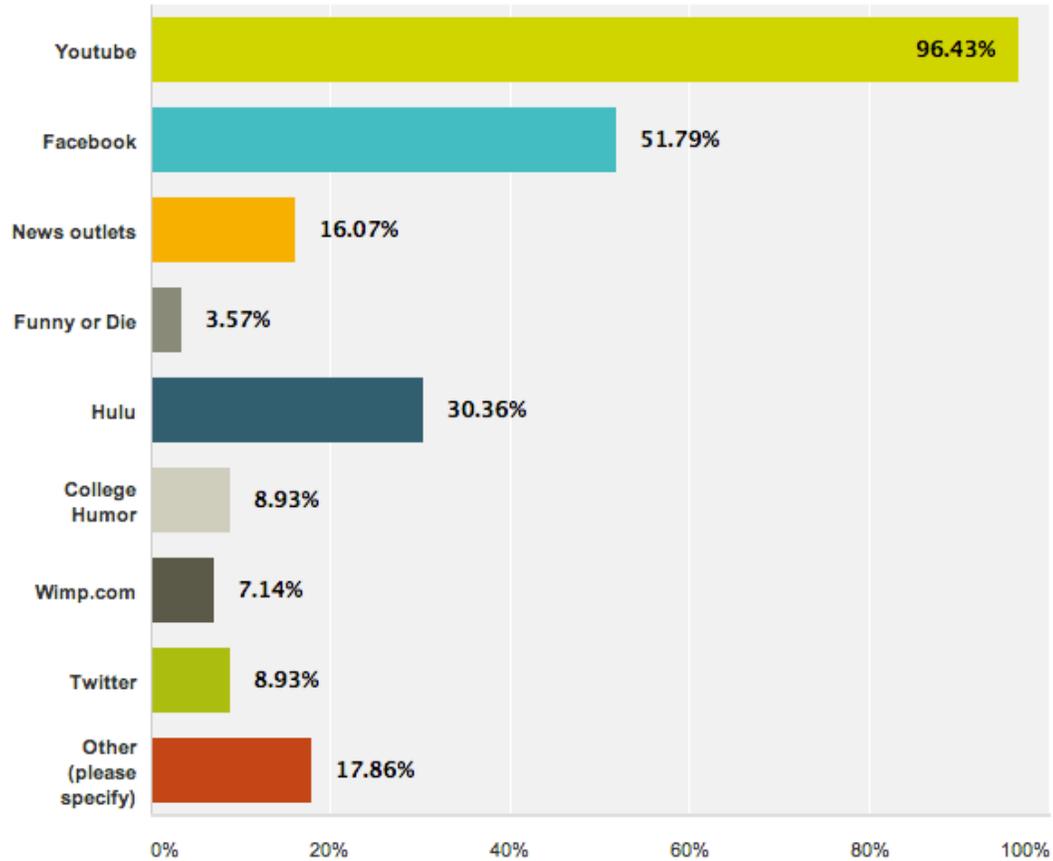
### Data Collection

I used SurveyMonkey.com to collect responses. ~~Majority~~ The majority of the responders are Cal Poly Graphic Communication majors and the rest are from separate universities, but all in the same age range. For all questions there was always a strong response toward a certain direction. It's very plain to see the average young adult's idea about viral videos from this survey. The images on the following pages show the responses of those surveyed.

### Question 1:

#### What outlets do you use to find videos?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0

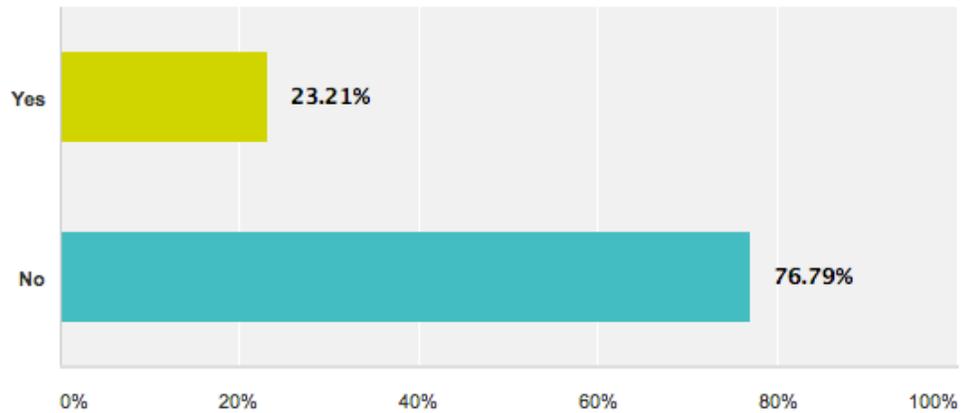


For this question, the group was able to select as many outlets that applied to them. Fifty-six people answered this question and 54 (96.43%) people chose Youtube as an outlet to find videos. Next is Facebook with 51.79% of people using it to find videos. Ten people (17.86%) also responded "Other" and specified what that was for them. Two people responded Reddit, three people responded Vimeo, and the rest wrote in Netflix, Tumblr or BuzzFeed.com.

**Question 2:**

**Have you ever posted a video to Youtube, Facebook, etc in an attempt for it to go viral?**

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



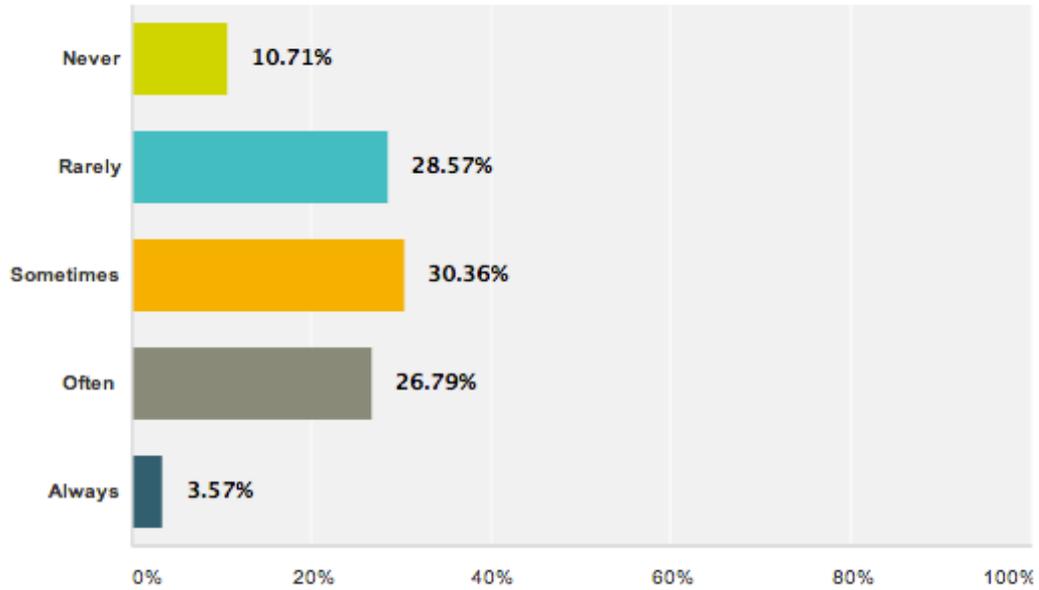
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	23.21%	13
No	76.79%	43
Total		56

Out of the 56 people surveyed, 43 people (76.79%) have never attempted to make a video to go viral. Only 13 (23.21%) have.

**Question 3:**

**Do you share videos that you like?**

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



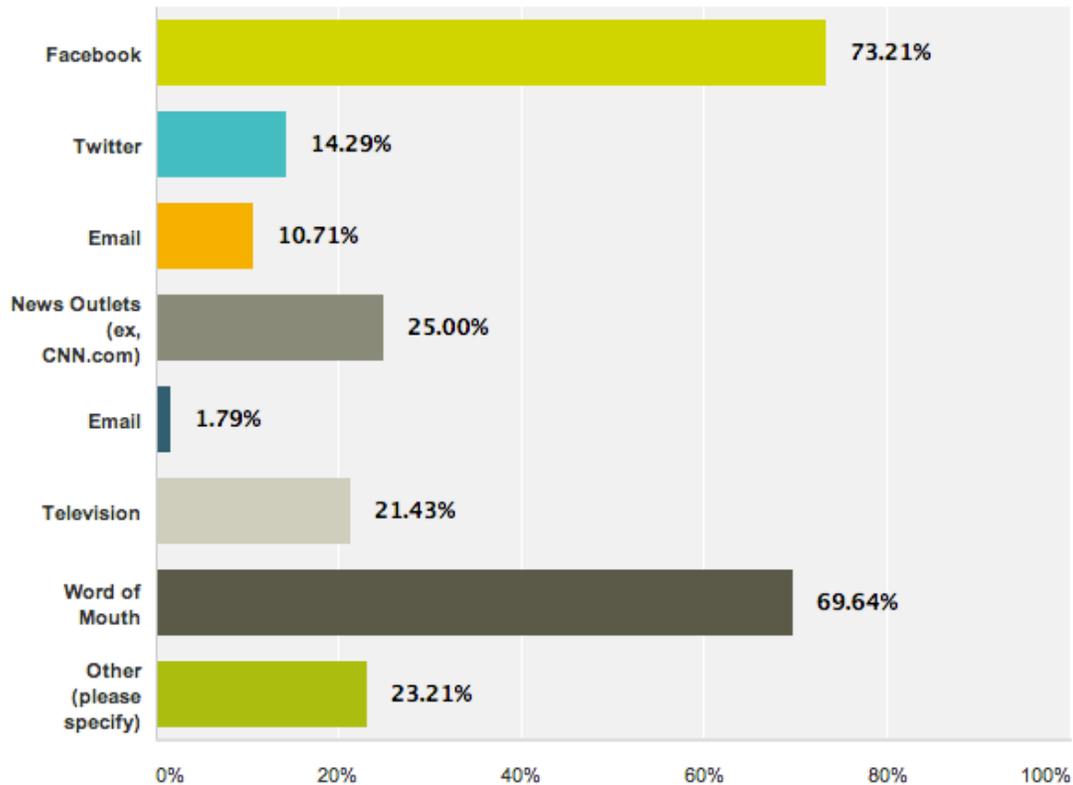
Answer Choices	Responses
Never	10.71% 6
Rarely	28.57% 16
Sometimes	30.36% 17
Often	26.79% 15
Always	3.57% 2
Total	56

Majority The majority of the responses went to “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” or “Often.” ~~17~~  
Seventeen people (30.36%) chose “Sometimes,” with “Rarely” coming in a close second with 16 people (28.57%). “Often” was chosen 15 times (26.79%).

#### Question 4:

### Where do you normally hear of a viral video?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



This question goes hand in hand with the first survey question. The difference is instead of the viewer looking for a video, the viewer comes across the video or hears about it from somewhere or someone. The two top answers were Facebook and Word of Mouth.

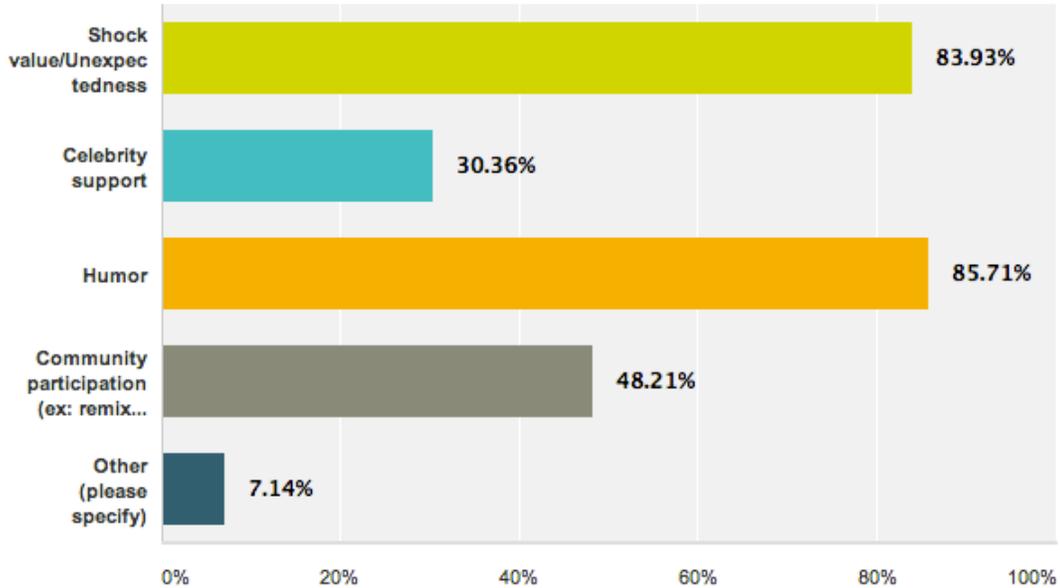
41 ~~Forty-one~~ people (73.21%) chose Facebook and 39 (69.64%) chose Word of Mouth.

Email was considered the least impactful with only 7 people (10.71%) choosing this.

**Question 5:**

**What factors do you think makes a video go viral?**

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



Forty-eight people selected Humor (85.71%) and forty-seven people (83.93%) chose Shock value/Unexpectedness. Twenty-seven people chose community participation. Celebrity support received thirty-seven responses. The responses for other included, empathy, money, and Reddit.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to discover the different factors that cause a video to go viral. The factors examined were qualities the video had that made it go viral or rise in popularity as a result of sharing through social media. It was determined that although there are no guaranteed methods to make a video go viral, there are many similar qualities and factors that all viral videos share. A video may go viral from community participation, celebrity help, sharing through social media outlets, and the shock level of the video.

These results were derived from a questionnaire, which asked takers his or her methods to finding popular videos, and their participation in the sharing of a video. This survey was given to users between the ages 13 to 29. This age group was chosen because of their high involvement and contribution to social media, and the Internet in general. There is an obvious correlation between their responses and the research previously discussed.

Majority of survey takers find their video content through popular sites such as Youtube and Facebook. Almost 100% of survey takers chose Youtube as a source to find videos. About 50% chose Facebook. While Facebook was the second choice for users as a means to search specifically for new videos, Facebook came out as number one for the place users normally hear about new viral videos. Word of mouth was a close second. Emailing videos was proven to be the least impactful on video sharing. This most likely reflects the younger generations preference for social media as a means of communication, rather than email.

These answers sync well to Kevin Allocca's three factors that make a video go viral: tastemaker, community participation, and unexpectedness. As previously stated in Chapter Two, a tastemaker is someone who introduces the video to a large group of people. Community participation includes user comments, remixes, parodies, or video responses and so on. And finally, unexpectedness, also known as the shock factor.

From the results of the survey, it also seems the majority of people share the videos they like or find interesting. ~~30%~~Thirty percent of survey takers said they sometimes share videos, 29% said rarely, and 27% said they often share videos. These results show that videos are consistently being shared, but at a different rate according to the viewer. Even if a viewer rarely shares a video, that video will still be in constant circulation by someone else. Out of the 56 people surveyed, only six people said they never share videos.

As much as people enjoy watching and sharing a video, it seems as though the push to create a viral video is significantly not as strong.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study**

In addition to the multiple choice options included in the survey, it would have been very beneficial to have involved many of the write-ins the survey takers used for the "Other" option. One of the more popular write-ins was Reddit, which was written in by at least one survey taker in every question with the "Other" option. It would be interesting to see if the numbers would shift if survey takers had had the option to choose Reddit.

After looking back at the survey answers, if time had allowed, it would have been interesting to survey people of a different age group. It would be useful to see the differences in views of the different age groups. It also would have been interesting to

create an attempt at a viral video using the factors found from research and the group surveyed. Furthermore, it would have been very beneficial to interview someone who has created a viral video to see how he or she felt about viral videos and what factors they used in their video to have it go viral.

To carry on this study, a recommendation would be to use a bigger and more diverse selection of survey participants, to create a viral video, and to interview someone who has produced a viral video.

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