

Social Media in the National and International Arenas

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the interest generated in social media of posts that were originally, just local or national concerns; yet, in time, became global phenomena. It studies two recent phenomena: the Arab Spring and Psys' Gangnam Style which demonstrate the transformative power of social media. Using secondary online data through data mining method, it looked into the Arab Spring incident and the popular video of Psy "The Gangnam Style," which is a global sensation. Results reveal the spread of popularity across the world of the two from being mere national phenomena. This validates the theory used in this study.

Keywords: Social change, social media, national issues and concerns, viral posts, social media posts, viral videos, viral hit, social media post in other countries.

1.0 Introduction

The way social media is changing not only communication but also culture and society has received a lot of attention these past few years. Aside from becoming the preferred medium for news and entertainment of people everywhere, social media has been cited as a factor in the social and cultural transformations of various societies. In some parts of the world, it has inspired mass movements like those in the Middle East which came to be known as the Arab Spring. Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring (Howard & Duffy, et al, 2011). Significantly, in time, from being just national concerns, social media conversations in several countries became viral worldwide. Another recent social media phenomenon is the music video of the song Oppa Gangnam Style by South Korean pop star Psy which became YouTube's most viewed video despite the fact that people worldwide hardly understood its predominantly Korean lyrics.

People have moved beyond getting information the traditional way and into more social ways of obtaining news, entertainment and other information. Social media as a means of getting news is growing in popularity to the point that traditional news outlets are being threatened. This is primarily due to the ability of the platform to get news from people using mobile devices and tablets. Social media content are so mobile and global that they have expanded the reach of many (Smith, 2013). Mobile Social Media makes use of its location - and time-sensitivity aspects in order for people to engage in marketing research, communication, sales promotions/discounts, and relationship development/loyalty programs (Kaplan, 2012).

Several studies are conducted regarding social media but few look into its rise as a tool for social change whether political or cultural. Thus, this paper will address this gap and thereby contribute to expanding the knowledge about the

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subject. This study will analyze the phenomenon through the two examples cited earlier – those of the Arab Spring and Psy's Oppa Gangnam Style which manifest the transformative effect of social media. It will analyze the rise of these social media posts from being unknown to being social media sensations.

Literature Review

Texas A&M computer scientist James Caverlee is studying the use of social media to harness collective intelligence to perform tasks, to persuade and change minds, and maybe even to change the world. As an expert in large-scale networked information systems—such as the World Wide Web, social media and mobile information systems—Caverlee looks at tremendous numbers of users and tremendous amounts of information, the places people go, the people they talk to and interact with, the content they are interested in, and the connections between them. These large-scale networked information systems are typically open and intentionally designed to encourage participation. “This has lots of good benefits,” he says. “You see self-organized systems. You see serendipitous discovery of new information and new uses of these systems beyond what the systems designers had ever imagined. You see communities form. There are all these exciting possibilities that happen when you let people collaborate” (Caverlee, 2012)

Social media tools are said to give people the ability to connect and unite in a crisis, raise awareness of an issue worldwide, and overthrow authoritarian governments. These tools can be used to quickly get information, such as the location of a hospital, to people in danger. The increased awareness brought on by social media

can help raise a significant amount of money for a cause. (Sheddy, 2011)

The study of Li (2007) about Prediction of Information Sharing Behavior in China: Understanding the Cultural and Social Determinants is merely all about understanding information sharing as an important challenge to companies around the world. This is especially true for those who engage in business in China. It is essential for them to understand information sharing in its particular Chinese context. The paper investigates the influence of cultural factors on information sharing in China with 207 views from researchers in a leading global IT research center in Beijing and a local university in Hong Kong. It is postulated that collectivism, Confucian dynamism and “guanxi” , have a significant influence on information sharing within divisions of the work organization, while it is not the case with factors external to the work organization.

In the study of West (2011) Going Viral: Factors That Lead Videos to Become Internet Phenomena, the author examined the top 20 viral videos as determined by Time Magazine. Each video's content was recorded for analysis of its main features. Eventually nine factors were deemed “important determinants” for a viral video: title length, run-time, laughter, element of surprise, element of irony, minority presence, music

quality, youth presence and talent. This research is important because an understanding element within viral videos, such as “Charlie Bit Me,” can help explain why they have become fixtures in today's popular culture. Likewise, understanding the prevalent elements within viral videos will allow for the prediction of which videos will become popular.

Although the influence of viral video has been

researched extensively, much less attention has been given to the elements within viral videos. However, scholars such as Fletcher (2010) and Briggs (2010) have published works analyzing the reasons behind the popularity of certain videos. Briggs (2010) published a viral video case study in which he closely analyzed 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. He also argues that the irony of blending expensive objects in a blender is part of these videos' appeal. Burgess' (2008) study surveyed a sample of 4,300 popular YouTube videos. Burgess noted that these videos are usually not traditional media content. She concluded that "oddness" and "amateurism" lead to the irony found in much of her sample size.

Another factor that scholars argue leads to the popularity of certain videos is "layout." Hilderbrand (2007) argued that the site design of YouTube is much like that of television. YouTube allows the user to quickly move through videos by toggling arrow buttons. The interface also employs a large viewing area in the middle of the page. Hilderbrand argues that this quick viewing mechanism makes skimming videos easy. Users on YouTube can quickly move from video to video to find popular content. Hilderbrand also stressed the fact that many popular videos on YouTube have been aggregated from more conventional media sources.

A portion of the preceding research on the influence of YouTube has relied on anecdotal reports. For example, Rosenberg (2010) published an article profiling a university president's

experience with viral video. He argued that this college president's YouTube fame is to be expected. By using this anecdotal evidence, Rosenberg (2007) was able to explain that viral videos are often results of their environments. He suggests that videos originating in well-defined social networks (such as universities) are destined to become more popular.

Several researchers have studied the link between news proliferation and viral video. Sagan et al. (2010) argue that viral video is changing the way people get their news. They included quantitative research to track people's reliance on video to get their news. They also suggested that newsworthiness is a factor in determining a video's viral capabilities. However, newsworthiness does not act alone in determining the popularity of a video. He suggested that a news video must also appeal to viewers in the 18-25 age groups to become widely popular. To support their findings, these researchers used evidence from the 2004 election in which online video feeds of the event received over 670 million views, mostly by younger viewers.

Another researcher who has written about the newsworthiness of viral videos is West (2011). He suggested that the blogosphere has attributed to the rise of many viral YouTube videos. He also argued that, because many people receive their news from online bloggers, the video posts of online bloggers become very important. Many viral YouTube videos have ties to popular blogs and commentary.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Abadiano's Information Sharing Theory published in this online link: goo.gl/zQ2UnG which states that "Information

Sharing is maximized when the content is significant and the netizens are motivated in the context of multi-social media sites and platforms.” (Abadiano, Bonotan, & Makiling, 2014). The theory also posited that “posts and videos of national interest and are recognized in many countries become viral in social media.”

2.0 Methodology

This study uses descriptive method by mining secondary data available in social media sites YouTube and Twitter. For the YouTube data, actual statistics were taken from the website such as video statistics. The data was then analyzed for their significance to the phenomenon being studied. As for Twitter, data were gathered first from the website through the browser application

NCapture. afterwards, this was treated using the software NVivo. It renders the supposedly textual data in graphical form for easier appreciation.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Two global phenomena are said to have their auspicious beginnings in social media: the Arab Spring which resulted in sweeping changes in the Middle East and Psy’s Gangnam Style which created a worldwide dance craze.

The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protest in the Middle East and other North African countries particularly Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen beginning in 2010 until 2013.



Figure 1. #ArabSpring on Tweeter

Figure 1 shows the worldwide interest on the Arab Spring as evidenced by the number of tweets using the hashtag #ArabSpring. Significantly, there seems to be significant interest on the subject in Southeast Asia where plenty of Muslims also reside. There is also significant interest in Europe

and the United States where there are Muslim minorities. The data however, was taken after the height of the uprising; hence, it documents mainly the spread of interest on the subject to other parts of the world. The fact that social media has played a key role in the event is well-established. In

an article by Howard and Duffy, et al titled *Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?* the authors said: "Our evidence shows that social media was used heavily to conduct political conversations by a key demographic group in the revolution - young, urban, relatively well educated individuals, many of whom were women. Both before and during the revolutions, these individuals used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to put pressure on their governments" (Howard, Duffy, et al, 2015).

The Arab Spring is a controversial event. Said to have been inspired by a changed US foreign policy in the Middle East, it led to the downfall of dictators and totalitarian leaders such as Libya's Muammar Khadafy and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak.

America did not intervene during these uprisings allowing the regimes' fall, although in the past it has collaborated with these leaders in their wars in the region. The uprisings however, led to a vacuum of leadership and eventually the rise of ISIS which espouse extreme Islamic rule.

ISIS eventually succeeded in carving a territory in Syria and Iraq, claiming them as part of its caliphate. Young Muslims of various nationalities trooped to ISIS-held territories to the horror and chagrin of their country's leaders.

Psy's Gangnam Style

Another social media phenomenon is the popularity of South Korean sensation Psy and his viral video Gangnam style.



Figure 2. #GangnamStyle on Tweeter

Figure 2 shows the worldwide appeal on Tweeter of Psy's Gangnam's style as evidenced by tweets using the hashtag #Gangnam Style. Using the software NVivo and its browser application NCapture, these data were gathered and graphically represented here for easier

appreciation. Figure 1 shows the global interest on the phenomenon regardless of race, culture, geographical location, etc. There are tweets using the hashtag #GangnamStyle in Asia, Europe, the United States, South America and Australia.

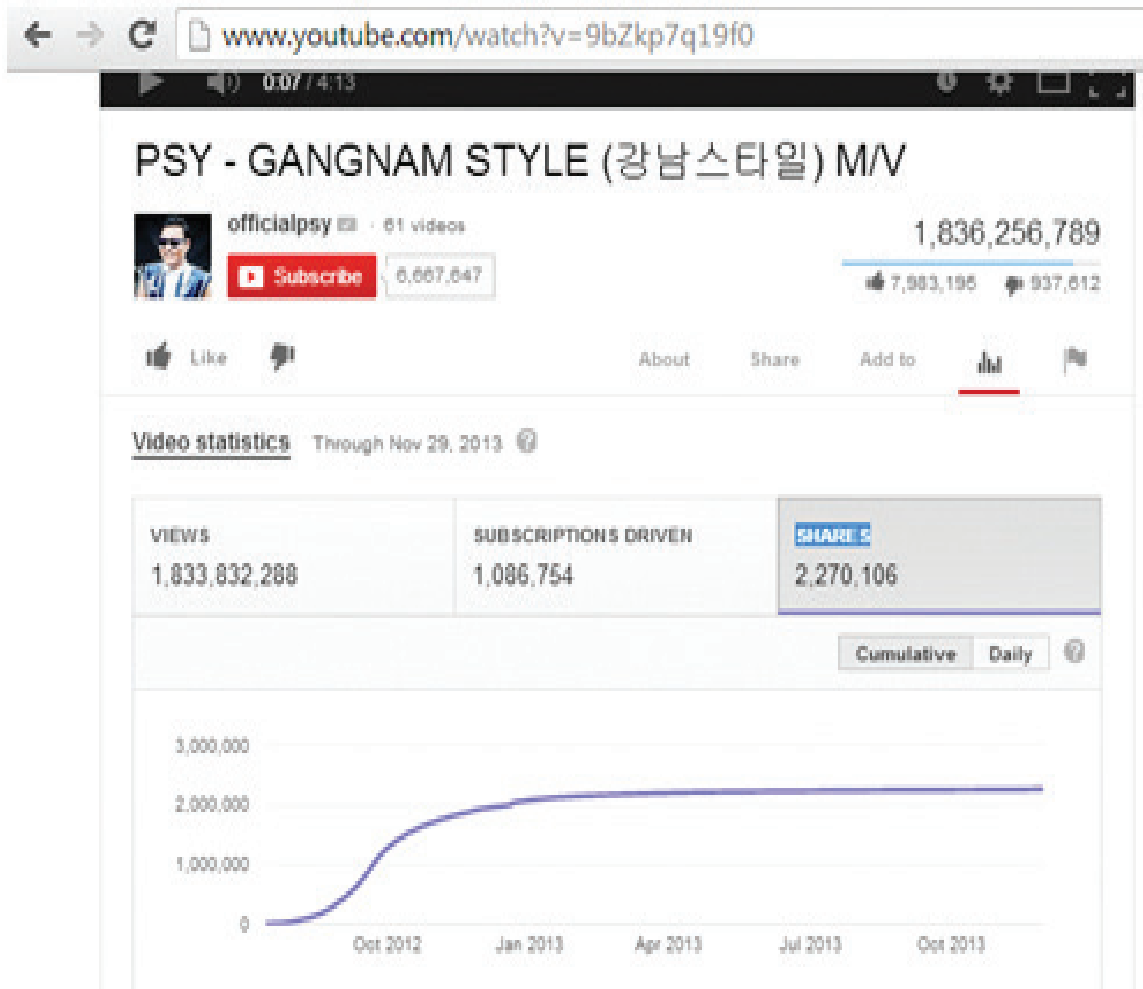


Figure 3. Video Statistics of Psy's Gangnam Style in You Tube

Figure 3 shows the rise in popularity of Psy's Gangnam Style, a Korean video on You Tube with limited English lyrics. It was the first You Tube video to reach 1 Billion audience views. It became a global phenomenon yet, many didn't exactly understand its mostly Korean lyrics.

Video statistics

Views and discovery

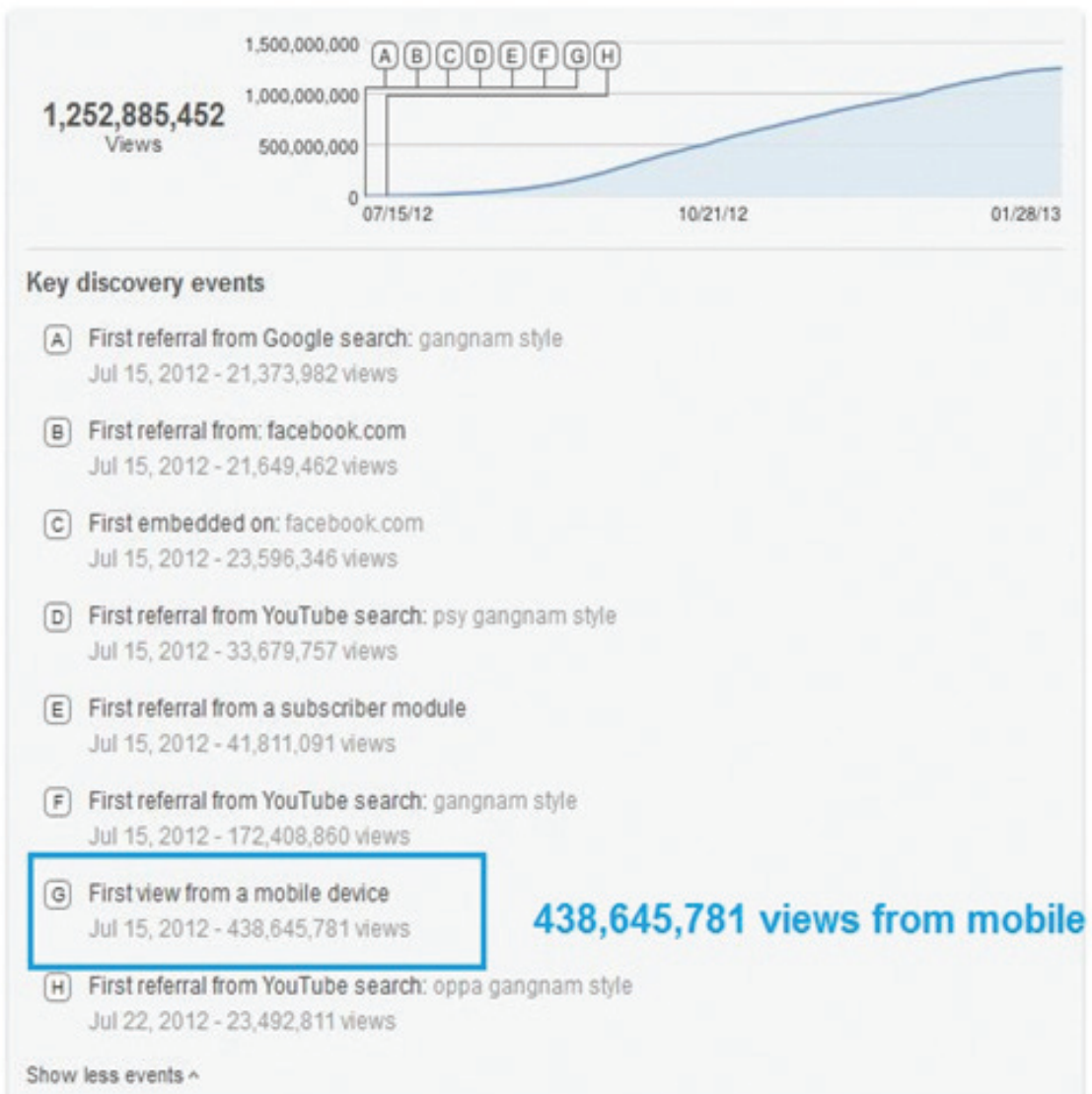


Figure 4: Psy's Gangnam Style YouTube Discovery Statistics

Table 4 shows a more detailed statistics of Psy's Gangnam Style video. It shows that as of January 28, 2013, Gangnam Style had almost half a billion views from mobile computer or gadgets with an enormous audience of 438,645,781. Aside from revealing the preferred platform of its viewers, the statistics also confirms the undisputed rise of mobile devices as the platform of choice of most people nowadays.

Indeed, as mankind pushes the frontiers of science in mass communications, so must the scope of free expression expand. Twitter, Facebook and other social media are the most recent technological expansions of the freedom of expression. Originally used for bonding with friends and relatives, they have become new tools of social transformation and reformation.

"The social Web and social media have essentially become weapons of mass persuasion. You have large numbers of people interacting with each other, so you see not only spam but political campaigns involved in this. You see evidence of governments and hate groups engaging in this" (Kriewald, 2012)

4.0 Conclusion

It can now be concluded that posts and videos of national interest recognized in many countries become viral in social media. Social Media knows no borders or boundaries. It's breaking cultural and social barriers but may also be instrumental in galvanizing Muslim extremism worldwide.

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