



## THE IMPACT OF VIRAL MUSIC VIDEOS ON THE YOUTH OF BENGALURU, INDIA

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**Abstract:** Viral music has gained popularity over the last decade and YouTube, along with other forms of social media have emerged as a popular platform for sharing content. Viral video is defined as the phenomenon of a video becoming highly popular through rapid, content and user-led distribution via the internet. This study analyzes three music videos that went viral on social media; ‘Gangnam Style’, ‘Why this Kolaveri Di’ and ‘Pen Pineapple Apple Pen’, and attempts to understand the factors that contributed to making these songs go viral. Using the theory of Uses and Gratification and School of Thought of Absurdity, this study analyzes if these viral music videos have an impact on the youth. The results show that viral music create an impact on the youth and they perceive meanings from these songs. The elements of these videos including the creative concept framework and audio-visual content contribute to the songs going viral. The study further provides an intuitive model to depict the different components that lead to viralization.

**Index Terms -** Viral music, YouTube Videos, Social media, Virality, Audience impact.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Why do some videos become widely popular and others don't? Viral Marketing has gained popularity in the last few decades and YouTube has emerged as the most popular space for viral advertising. YouTube has created a revolution within the area of sharing the contents online, which makes it an approved platform for commercial enterprise advertising. Viral videos are videos that have widespread popularity of at least 100,000 views by travelling from person to person through email, instant messages, and media-sharing websites (Wallsten, 2010). By understanding the shared characteristics of viral video, one can eventually state the “important determinants” for a viral video: title length, run-time, laughter, surprise component, irony component, minority presence, music quality, youth presence and talent accurately predict why few videos go viral and few don't. Stories and videos that gain traction on social media do so quickly, often within hours of initial reports and fade quickly as well (Leskovec, 2007).

The rapid expansion of new media industry has caused paradigm shift in the process of communication, posing challenges to social scientists and technologists. The term ‘new media’ is believed to be the creation of new media industry (Backlund and Sandberg, 2002) to distinguish itself from the conventional media industry of print and broadcast. New media is unpredictable to characterize as it means distinctive things to various individuals. What is new with respect to new media and why is it named new? It may be the access, functions, non-linear method and freedom to possess and use media at one's convenience, interests and desires that make these media totally different from print and broadcast. Further, new media have reinvented old or traditional media like print, radio and TV and have the potential to integrate a bouquet of media. What sets social media apart as a definite class within new media is its interactive nature, the nature of the social network. Social media shares most of the characteristics like participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. Social media is classified into six types (Tim Grahl), which includes social networks, blog comments and forums, social news, media sharing, bookmarking sites and micro blogging sites.

### 1.1 Viralization and YouTube

YouTube.com is the second most accessed social networking website globally after Facebook (Tankovska, 2021). It has become one of the most successful ways to express feelings, communicate with friends and advertise business messages (Grossman L). According to a recent study by Aalto University, YouTube is a leading digital music service with user-generated content at the heart of its success (University, 2015). Music is the most popular YouTube content by many measures, together with video views and search activity. Social networking aspect of the site is a key driving force of its success. Linking, rating and liking also make videos popular in a very organic fashion (Crane and Sornette, 2008). Going viral can lead to a career and can earn people profit simply by sitting on their couches (Ivry, 2011). Professional music videos are the top-viewed videos on YouTube, and promoting music on the site has given artists record-breaking sales numbers (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2012). School age youth are among the most prolific contributors to YouTube, not just as viewers but as producers as well (Stangelove, 2010). YouTube is one such example of how youth are operating online to create what many calls a participatory, remix culture, or a mashup culture, in which youth, operating collectively, combine existing material to produce their own work or parodies of the already existing ones. Not all content posted on YouTube gets the desired attention and only a fraction can reach a large audience. Social media marketers expecting millions of

views for their posts have a big job on their hands. YouTube has several embedded features to boost social interaction such as the user's ability to comment on a video, saying that they like or dislike it, or to share a video on other social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. Some users can become influential players in this process whose strong network ties or presence gives them many followers. Different platforms help create and promote videos by allowing content to be shared in many different ways, across different platforms. For instance, on YouTube a client can email, post on Facebook, Tweet, and download recordings. These alternative uses empower clients to exploit basic and quick approaches. Berger and Milkman (2010) said the "emotional engagement" of the audience is a key to the virality of any online video. Videos that elicited sadness were shared less often than those videos which elicited happiness and anger. When videos evoke anger, viewers might want to share their outrage.

In addition to the importance of comedy in viral videos, the structure of the videos, such as the ease with which users can remix or parody the content plays a key role in their popularity. The ability to parody is important because users might share the parodied version with others. After the parody is viewed, the original version will receive a refer back, thus increasing the number of views. Content and the catchy rhythm in popular music make it go viral. Songs and their lyrics traditionally express emotions in a concise-yet-ambiguous manner. Few of the viral music videos that have gone viral are because of their unique lyrics, which have caught the attention of the audience, especially among the youth.

### 1.2 Gangnam Style

Gangnam Style, a K-pop single by the South Korean musician PSY is his eighteenth release. The song was broadcast on July 15, 2012. The music video for Gangnam Style was the first clip ever to reach 1 billion views on YouTube/VEVO. At the MTV Europe Music Awards 2012, "Gangnam Style" received the highest honor for "Best Video", whereas at the American Music Awards, he took home their sought-after trophy as the year's "New Media Honoree". The song shows PSY's pride in his home. Some of that flaunting of wealth is apparent in the actual Gangnam district, which sits across the broad Han dynasty watercourse from central Seoul, the South Korean capital.

### 1.3 Why This Kolaveri Di

The word Kolaveri literally means murderous rage. The phrase has been normally utilized by the inhabitants of the Madurai locale of Tamil Nadu and it simply connotes any kind of commotion. The song has from then become a record-breaker on YouTube with varied imitations and parodies in the various languages of the world, depicting different types of situations. What works today is a mix of everything. Why This Kolaveri Di is a composition in two languages-Tamil and English. Dhanush wrote and sang the song. The "Tanglish" song with its distinct lyrics has over 1.5 million hits on the official page. It became a web sensation on informal communities, and has discovered fans among Bollywood big names as well as non-Tamil talking youth from the nation over. It made the whole country hum- "Why this Kolaveri Di" in style.

### 1.4 Pen Pineapple Apple Pen (PPAP)

Created by Japanese comedian Kazuhiko Kosaka, the viral video plays for about a minute and features largely nonsensical lyrics about pricking fruits with pens combined with a series of pulsating dance moves. PPAP showed its international legs once it became a monster hit after reaching 9Gag's Facebook page, where it got 50 million views and more than a million shares. The tune, which keeps going just about a moment, demonstrates Pikotaro in a brilliant golden shirt which is half unfastened and a panther print scarf worn around his neck as infectious, almost arcade-like music plays out of spotlight. The whole video is shot on a completely white background, with absolutely no props not even a pen, apple or pineapple simply Pikotaro revealing his invisible objects in each of his hand and then "smashing" them together to create something new.

It has all the ingredients of a viral song which is catchy and highly addictive rhythm, absurd lyrics and easy dance moves. The lyrics actually do not have any meaning. The melody has been so persuasive and viral that there are different spoofs to it. The Hitler version and The Indian version have turned into a web sensation via web-based networking media. The comments on YouTube were something that went viral as well. Some people felt this song to be "inspiring" or referred to it as a "cancer song". Few others commented that they wanted to play it at funerals.

### 1.5 Objectives

The sharing and re-sharing of videos on social sites, blogs, e-mail, and other means have given rise to the phenomenon of viral videos that become popular through internet sharing. In this study, the focus is intended on the following objectives.

- The broad objective of the research is to study the influence of viral music on the youth.

The specific objectives of the research include:

- To find out how the youth perceives meanings of the songs; 'Gangnam Style', 'Why This Kolaveri Di' and 'Pen Pineapple Apple Pen'.
- To assess the reasons as to why the selected music videos have gone viral.

### 1.6 Theoretical Framework

The uses and gratifications theory, developed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler, seeks to explain the relationship between the audience and they use the media. An audience based theoretical framework grounded on the assumption that individuals select media and content to fulfill felt needs or wants. These wants are expressed as motives for adopting particular media use and are connected to the social and psychological make-up of an individual. Based on perceived needs, social and psychological characteristics and media attributes, individuals use media and experience related gratifications. Audience members are responsible for linking gratification with their personal media choice. The media has the ability to compete with each other in order to gain audience satisfaction, and the audience is a credible source of information when the media needs to obtain current trends of mass media use (Peirce, 2007). Through this theory, researchers have identified types of needs/ desires that lead them to seek media and the media

messages for gratification. The types of motives for media-use are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs and tension free needs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

After analyzing 1.5 million videos that were randomly selected from a set of videos uploaded to YouTube between April 2009 and March 2010 it was noticed that sharing and re-sharing of videos on social media websites, blogs and other means have given rise to the phenomenon of viral videos. By analyzing the patterns of sharing videos on YouTube and its relationship to video popularity it was identified that the socialness of a video is quantified by classifying the reference source for videos as social that is through an email link or Facebook reference. It can also be nonsocial and that is through links from the related videos. Viewership patterns of highly popular social videos are different than that of less social videos. Videos with a higher fraction of views coming from social sources are more social than videos with a lower fraction (Broxton, Interian, Vaver, & Wattenhofer, 2011).

Social media is changing the way people create, share and consume information. People tend to electronically gather information from many sources, share back to their networks, and interact with friends on other networks. In a study that tried to understand how videos go viral on YouTube and how YouTube is one of the leading video-on-demand platforms. Viral phenomenon was measured using factors such as Video's Favorite count, Video's view Count, Video's Comment Count and Video's Likes and Dislikes. Data related to 100 all-time most viewed were collected from YouTube. The conclusion drawn out of the study was that popularity of video was not only through YouTube but also other factors like network dynamics and offline social capital, play crucial roles (Khan & Vong, 2014).

In an attempt to use of distinctly ranked blogs to predict, in actual time which videos would become viral, (Broxton, Interian, Vaver, & Wattenhofer, 2011) categorizes videos into popular videos, viral videos, viral video measure and unpopular videos. The researchers defined the videos through few categories which includes Popular videos (videos with a greater number of views in the first 30 days since the video upload where views defined such popular videos are the top 1% of videos in terms of views. This translates into videos with at least several thousands of views), viral videos (popular videos with at least 60% of social views in the first month), viral video measure (sum of embedded perspective on that URL coming from viral videos) and unpopular videos (videos with less than 100 views in the first 30 days).

A study on "I Am Farming and I Grow it" through interviews and YouTube revealed analytics of how a non-professional video created by three Kansas boys was spread all over the internet. The theory of Uses and Gratification and Two Step Flow Theory were used. In this study uses the theory of Uses of Gratification and understands the kind of gratification the viewers get after watching music videos even though the songs don't make much sense. The researcher analyzed the comments posted on this video and a comparative analysis was done on the comments by its viewers, which contributed to a million views which led to this un-professional video going viral. The study then concludes on how videos that go viral are through "opinion leaders". These opinion leaders spread message and video content triggers positive feelings such as humor, joy or praise (Elliott, 2008).

"It went viral", a term that is used commonly to refer to popularity and visibility on social media. Gangnam Style was the first to achieve views on the order of 1 billion. (Cintron-Arias, 2014) attempts to understand how something goes viral from the point of view of mathematical modeling, with particular emphasis on exponential growth. Few concepts are looked into that are traditionally invoked in models of infectious disease, such as reproductive number and final epidemic size. The study finds social networking sites provide a new lens compared to the traditional terms in epidemiology of communicable videos. Longitudinal observations show that the parameters estimate that number of views of Gangnam Style are aggregate as the repeated counts from individuals who viewed the video more than once are also taken into consideration. The elements present in these three videos like audio, visual or both can be the reasons for the videos to go viral.

As far as a viral video is concerned, different elements within the video are often not given a closer emphasis. A study by (West, 2011), seeks to systematically discover commonalities among viral videos. By understanding the shared characteristics of viral video, one can more accurately predict which videos will become widely successful and why. The researcher examined the top 20 viral videos as determined by the Time Magazine. Each video's content was recorded for analysis of its main features. Eventually nine factors were identified for a viral video: title length, run-time, laughter, element of surprise, element of irony, minority presence, music quality, youth presence and talent. The findings drawn from the video content analysis suggests there are a wide variety of factors that lead a YouTube video to become viral. There are certain elements will make viewers more likely to recommend videos on YouTube (West, 2011).

## III. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this research paper is to understand how viral music has an effect on the perception of meanings by the youth. This research paper solely concentrates on three viral videos that went viral: *Gangnam Style*, *Why This Kolaveri Di* and *PPAP*. This study uses quantitative research with the aid of questionnaires, which was administered through online google forms, face-to-face interviews and interviews through electronic media. The researcher has identified the independent variable is 'youth' and the dependent variable for the study is 'viral music'. The sample size consisted of 210 youth participants from Bengaluru between the age group of 15-29 years and 6 musicians were interviewed for the study.

Non-probability sampling technique for questionnaires and probability sampling for in-depth interviews was adopted. The respondents' views were taken into consideration and analyzed to interpret the collected data. Probability Sampling was restricted to 6 musicians from Bangalore and convergent interviewing was adopted. All the data collected through the questionnaires and structured interviews were tabulated to convert the raw data into information that was used to prepare the tables, graphs and charts. The period of the study stretched between October to December, 2020.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The primary data for the research has been collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The study constituted of 121 male respondents, 89 female respondents and 1 respondent from others category. According to the tabulated data, the highest numbers of respondents are males. In the age factor, 88 respondents are of 22-26 years, 49 respondents were between 15-18 years and 37 respondents each in 19-21 years and 26-29 years. Therefore, the highest number of respondents are from 22-26 years of age group and there is a similarity in the percentage of age group between 19-21 years and 26-29 years. 80 respondents are graduates, 77 of the respondents are post-graduates, 51 respondents from high school and the rest of the 3 respondents from others.

Out of the total population, 204 respondents have heard the song Gangnam Style, 202 respondents heard 'Why this Kolaveri Di' and 192 heard 'Pen Pineapple Apple Pen'. From the above statistics, it is clear that most of the respondents have heard the three songs that have gone viral and are aware that these three songs do exist. But on the other hand, there are also few respondents who have not come across either of these songs that went viral. Each individual has their own favorite playlist according to his/her desired genre of music. 137 respondents replied that one amongst the songs or all of the three songs has been a part of their playlist, which shows that the majority do like such songs and enjoy listening to these genres of songs. But the rest 73 respondents have heard these songs but would never have it on their playlist as they would just want to listen to it once and would not like to have it in their everyday playlist. In an attempt to understand if the respondents have viewed the videos more than once, 183 respondents said they have viewed Gangnam Style more than once. 173 respondents have viewed Why this Kolaveri Di more than once and 155 respondents for PPAP. Repetition of a video generally breeds affection. This could be better explained by the "mere exposure effect" which means that the viewers like something more merely because they have been previously exposed to it. Specific elements of the video are what gets the viewers to watch it repeatedly.

For a music video to go viral it needs to spread across to a large audience rapidly and have aspects that will capture the viewers' attention. In this study, 107 respondents said that the aspect of audio and video got all the three videos to go viral. In the song Gangnam style, the audio is something that went viral but most of the viewers could not understand the lyrics as it is in Korean. The visuals are cut really well, making the most of the interaction between the two. In the song Why This Kolaveri Di the visuals are only of the actor of the movie singing the song, which attracted the viewer's attention to an extent but what really went viral was the audio and the lyrics are in "Tanglish", which is a mix of Tamil and English. In Pen Pineapple Apple Pen the audio and video are what made it go viral as the visuals and lyrics both have content that captures the audience attention at some point in time. The respondents were also asked if they would follow the trends set by these songs and 118 respondents said that they would follow the trends set by these songs as the videos have gone viral and when they replicate something that has viral it would help with the image building of a youth. With the youth being so impressionable in today's times they follow the trends that have gone viral to impress their peers and they receive gratification out of this.

The song Gangnam Style has set dance trends that the audience started using it as different dance trends and for Zumba sessions. The dance is also simple to learn and extends the engagement from digital to the physical world. The format of the song lends itself to parody. The video provides content that is easy to replicate. The specific element that went viral about Gangnam style was its choreography and the signature horse step. 86 respondents chose choreography as the element that made the music video go viral. The step got so famous that now Seoul has a statue made only of the hand movement. Another video that is easy to replicate is PPAP. Pikotaro himself put a video with English subtitles to offer instructions as to how to perform the dance steps from the movie. This led to many famous parodies such as the Indian Style PPAP and the Hitler style PPAP, which are two amongst the many parodies made by the viewers. 56 respondents said that it was the concept as a whole that led PPAP viral. The audio and visuals were edited really well making most of the interaction between the two.

Why this Kolaveri Di turned out to be one of the highest viewed Indian videos on YouTube. This song showed the power of online media to the Indians. This song about his heartbreak hit 10 million views in three days. It is an Indian song that embraced nationally and internationally and its viewers followed its trends by way of cover versions, flash mobs and parodies. 127 respondents said that music was the element of Why this Kolaveri Di that led it to become viral. The lyrics of the song were both in Tamil and English. It has common terms, which the masses could relate to even if one does not speak or understand Tamil. The fact that this song has a catchy tune is another factor that caught up. When the respondents were asked to rate the three songs the highest number of combinations that was used was "3-2-1" that is PPAP first, Why This Kolaveri second and Gangnam Style third. Even though statistically, Gangnam Style received the most number of views, PPAP was rated by the viewers as number one and that is the primary reason for viral videos not staying viral for a long time. They do not have a lasting effect on the viewers. The viral song that was viewed recently is the one that the respondents would choose. This shows that viral videos do not have a lasting effect like the mainstream songs.

The majority of the respondents felt these songs did have an impact on the youth as the viral videos immediately grab the attention of the youth as they have a totally different concept and content in them. This leads to the creation of covers of the songs, or even audience dancing and making videos of themselves to these songs and uploading it on social media. But there also few others who feel the viral songs do not have an impact on the youth. PPAP has no meanings attached to it but it is one of the most successful viral videos in recent history. Different concepts led PPAP to go viral. It features a Japanese man in leopard print clothes performing dance routines and rapping about pineapples, pens and apples. The medium through which it's shared is also what makes it viral. The video was first uploaded on Pikotaro's official YouTube channel which then quickly spread to Facebook, where the original video has gone to more than 4 million views, the entertainment portal 9Gag's Facebook video surpassed that to draw more than 44 million views. According to the survey, the respondents said that it has all the ingredients for a viral video; an addictive beat, silly lyrics and a hilariously simple dance routine to back it up. The popularity of the video followed hundreds of tributes and covers of Pikotaro's tune.

**V. CONCLUSION**

Highly viral videos behave differently than less viral videos. They tend to peak more sharply and wane more rapidly. While they tend to generate more views in the short-term, they cannot keep up with less shared videos over the long-term. Viral videos rise to extreme levels of popularity. Any video that goes viral caters to what Elihu Katz presented in the last category of ‘Uses and gratification’ as ‘tension free needs’ which is also known as ‘escapism needs’. These viral videos do have an impact on the youth of Bengaluru as they act as a door to escape because all the three songs put a joy on the face of the viewers because of the content that is present in these videos.

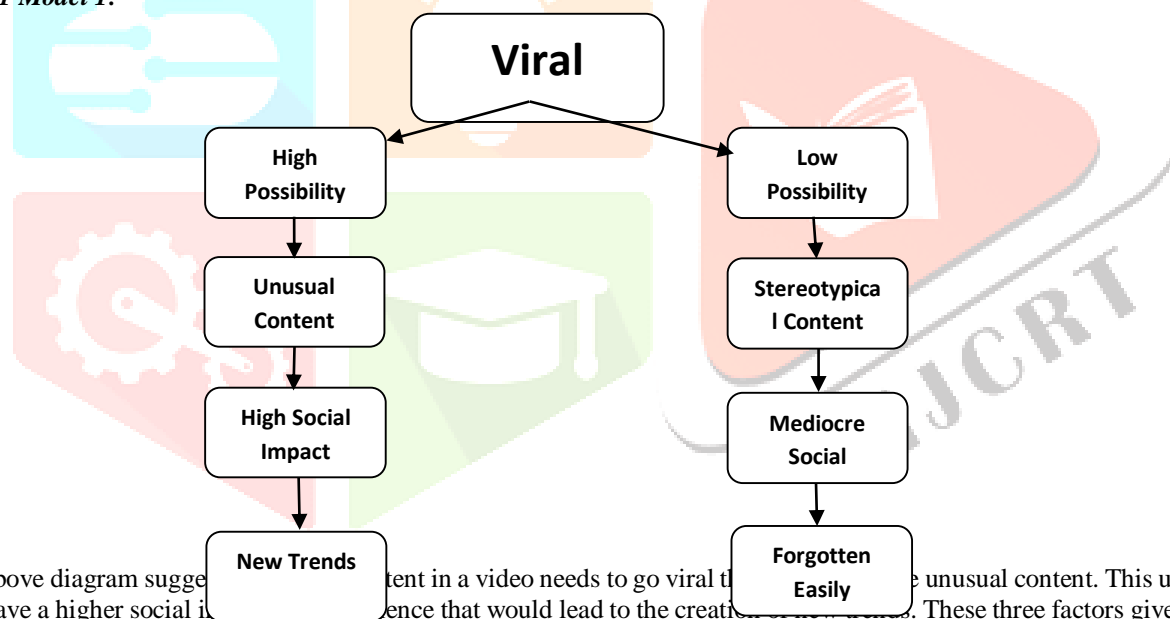
Apart from this, another need it caters to is Social Integration Needs as these videos demonstrate the power of sharing with their peers through word of mouth or through social media websites such as Facebook. The ones who were not aware of these viral videos got to know about them through their peers which led one to search for these viral videos and then watch it. During the survey, few recurring words were “funny”, “weird “and “absurd”. These words were used when the interviewees were asked why Pen Pineapple Apple Pen went viral. Absurdism is a philosophical school of thought that states the efforts of humanity to find the inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any. Its roots lie in surrealism and expressionism. Absurdism was a rebellion against the traditional methods of culture and literature.

The Absurdity arises out of the fundamental disharmony between the individual's search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe (Donald C A, 1988). Therefore, this gives us a clear picture as to why the three videos went viral as all the three videos had the concept of absurdity either in the form of lyrics, choreography or the visual representation. PPAP’s lyrics have no meanings attached to them but then the viewers attached meanings to its lyrics and they express these meanings through feedback mechanism by putting up comments in the comments section under the videos on various social media websites. Therefore, the school of thought of Absurdism proves that in a meaningless world of humans, they are so compelled to find or create meanings. The results of the survey reveal that viral music has an impact on a significantly good number of youth through various elements such as choreography, lyrics, music. Hence this is backed by the School of thought of Absurdism and the theory of Uses and Gratification.

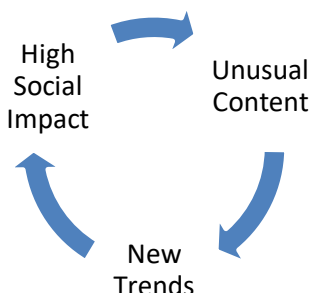
**5.1 Recommendations**

The following models of viralization have been suggested as a part of the study:

**5.1.1 Model 1:**

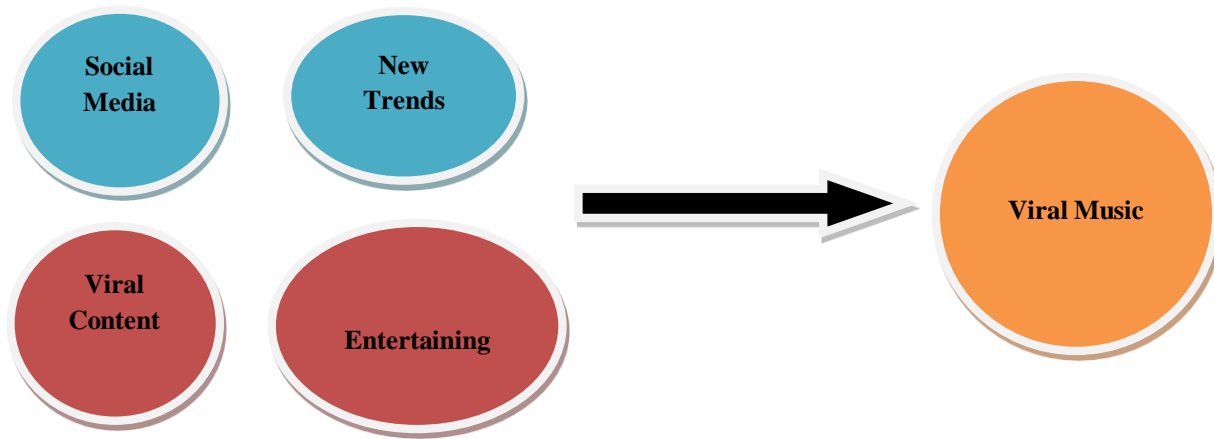


The above diagram suggests that content in a video needs to go viral through unusual content. This unusual content will have a higher social impact and hence that would lead to the creation of new trends. These three factors given in the below diagram go hand in hand to create viral content which can lead to the creation of viral music videos.



But on the other hand, when there is stereotypical content that is produced there are fewer chances for the music to go viral which would then lead to a mediocre social impact and the trends thereby set have high chances to be easily forgotten by the masses. Therefore, these key elements have to be kept in mind while making a viral music video.

## 5.1.2 Model 2:



As shown in the above figure, there are different elements that contribute towards a music video going viral. There are different elements including viral content, factor of entertainment, social media and the ability to drive new trends. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that a viral music video should have the content and the music as an essential factor. The reason being there is already an overload of content online and they do have a lot of similarities as well. This, in turn, would make the audience aware of such a video on YouTube. The findings and analysis from this study reveal that the viral content or elements such as audio, visuals, choreography and concept play a vital role in deciding how viral a music video could go.

A social media site, in general, is needed to share the video. For this study, most of the respondents revealed that YouTube and Facebook were the social media website used for all the three videos. The video content also leads to the creation of new trends. The entertainment factor in this research narrows down to emotions like “Funny” “Humor” “Joy” and these emotions lead to the creation or perception of meanings among the youth. While all these components vary for each viral video, it is unclear how important each element is. Also, it is assumed that there can be other elements that could make a music video go viral.

### 5.2 Scope for Future Research

There have been quite a few studies made on the formula for viralization and content analysis of lyrics of viral videos. This research paper has bridged the gap by analyzing its impact on the youth and perception of meanings by the youth for just three particular songs. Future research could include viral videos and gifs that have gone viral on social media and the perspective and outlook for which the target audience could be the older age group of the society. This group is also hooked to social media these days and their perception towards such viral videos can be looked into.

### 5.3 Limitations of the Study

As with any research this study also leaves the potential for future expansion. The key constraints were:

- Due to time and geographical constraints the study was limited to 210 respondents and interviews of only 6 musicians were conducted
- Expansion of the sample would lead to more valuable inferences.
- The study analyses only three viral music videos that went viral; ‘Gangnam Style’, ‘Why this Kolaveri Di’ and ‘Gangnam Style’.

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