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THE EFFECTS OF VIRAL MESSAGES ON NETIZENS' EMOTIONS

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1.   INTRODUCTION

2020 is the kick start for a new norm in life for all people worldwide. Covid-19 has triggered people to live in a digital world. Face-to-face communication has been replaced with video call and texting applications. E-commerce has overtaken physical business and shopping whereas online banking and services have become more convenient than walk-in banking services. Many government services have also provided online systems to reduce physical contact among clients. These changes force a major transition from manual to online services to occur especially in communication. One of the communication mediums is social media which connects people around the world and has become vital nowadays. Viral messages via social media are common nowadays. By sharing content among others and making it viral, there is little or no consideration for the involved parties' privacy issues, ethics, or thought of any possible damage or harm that such action may cause.

The effects of viral content can be devastating to netizens' emotions as well. Emotion is one of the significant elements in sharing content via social media. It is one of the factors why we share or react to each social media content. Panger (2017) indicated that emotion plays an important role in social media and has been the subject of considerable research and media attention. Shahbudin (2020) said emotions that exist in an individual are classified as inner nature, which is, the feelings that exist through a person's response towards something. Jones et al. (2016) stated that articles with large comments were found to evoke high-arousal emotions, such as anger and happiness, paired with low-dominance emotions where people felt less in control, such as fear.

Emotions that exist based on these situations and environments are experienced by the individual himself and spread around him. Individuals respond to their emotions in direct and indirect responses. Shahbudin (2020) stated that there are various emotions conveyed through communication in text writing such as joy, firmness, and sadness. The emotions and expressions of these social media users are reflected through the writing of texts on social networks through different socialization processes. The problems that plague social media users have a huge impact on individuals and organizations such as promoting poor mental health, cyberbully, and the spread of fake news. Despite the positive benefit of rapid information sharing, social media enhances people to create false identities and superficial connections, which cause depression which is the primary recruiting tool of criminals and terrorists (Jacob Amedie, 2015).

This study utilizes the Paul Ekman Basic Emotions Facial Expression Theory (Ekman et al., 1972; Ekman, 2003; Ekman, 1992a) in examining the effect of viral messages via social

media on netizens' emotions. Results of the study indicate that positive types of viral messages such as joy and surprise have a significant effect on the netizens' emotions in Malaysia. Thus, the aim of this study is threefold namely (1) to identify the level of influence of types of viral messages via social media towards netizens' emotions; (2) to examine the relationship between types of viral messages via social media towards netizens' emotions; and (3) to explore the effects of types of viral messages via social media towards netizens' emotions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study has carried out quantitative research methods. Quantitative methods are cheaper to apply, and they can be applied within a shorter duration of time as compared to qualitative methods (Almeida, 2017). This study has utilized a survey using a simple random sampling method which involves 384 respondents who own social media accounts, aged between 16 years old and 60 years old in Lembah Klang, urban areas with the highest population in Malaysia (Krejcie, 1970). The population is first divided into mutually exclusive groups that are relevant, appropriate, and meaningful in the context of the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The questionnaires have been distributed via social media such as Facebook, email, sharing a link on Instagram and WhatsApp because the study focuses on readers who own and use social media. Data has then been analysed using descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis to answer the research objectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study. The results are discussed based on three objectives of the study as mentioned above.

3.1 Level of Influence of Types of Viral Messages via Social Media Towards Netizens' Emotions

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis for Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Independent	Joy	384	3.4568	.61928
	Surprise	384	2.8859	.60736
	Anger	384	2.6185	.58613
	Disgust	384	2.2778	.79056
	Fear	384	2.9596	.62049
	Sadness	384	2.6141	.62791
Dependent	Netizen Emotions	384	2.8770	.68842

According to Table 1, results have indicated that mean value among all the IVs (joy, surprise, anger, disgust, fear, and sadness); IV Disgust is the lowest range with mean value M=2.2778 and other IVs fall in the moderate range. It is shown that Joy has the highest mean value with m=3.4568 among all the IVs. Therefore, the findings have proven that people love to share and read joy content more than negative content which is consistent with Ahmed Al-Rawi's (2017) study where it reveals that awe content is more viral while sadness-inducing content is less viral, yet some negative emotions are positively associated with vitality. Ahmed Al-Rawi (2017) also justified the result of the mean value for anger and surprise in which it can moderate influence the viral messages towards netizen's emotions. The study has also

shown that most viral news that online readers want to read, view, and share are significantly positive rather than negative. Javier Serrano-Puche (2015) supported the result for the mean value of disgust, fear, and sadness in which he found that when positive expressions were reduced, people produced fewer positive posts and more negative posts; when negative expressions were reduced, the opposite pattern occurred. The results concrete Javier Serrano-Puche's (2015) study as it indicates that emotions expressed by others through Facebook influence the emotions of the user; as for emotional contagion to occur, face-to-face contacts with non-verbal cues that accompany such interaction are not essential.

Meanwhile, the mean value for DV Netizen Emotions is M=2.8770 also in between the moderate range. Therefore, this result agrees with William et al. (2017) that shows a strong relationship between each word or message posted or shared on social media and the emotions. Shahbudin (2020) supported the result as emotional influence occurs uncontrollably due to the panic attitude of social media users themselves. This result also agreed with Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013), that a strong relationship between emotions and viral content spread in which there were shared in social media more often and more quickly.   In line with Zheng and Zhu (2019) that emotional contagion means that in daily life, emotions such as happiness, anger, and sadness can be "transmitted", like an infection, from one person to another in a short time. Thus, this study has indicated that viral messages influence the netizens' emotions to express their feeling via social media.

3.2 Relationship between Types of Viral Messages via Social Media (Joy, Surprise, Anger, Disgust, Fear, and Sadness) towards Netizens' Emotions

Table 2: Summary of Pearson's Correlation

Variable	Pearson's Correlation	Sig. Value
	r-value	p-value
Joy	.388	.000
Surprise	.452	.000
Anger	.386	.000
Disgust	.113	.000
Fear	.220	.000
Sadness	.307	.000

DV=Netizen Emotion

According to the result in Table 2, it shows that joy, surprise, anger, disgust, fear, and sadness have a relationship with the netizens' emotions. This study has found that the ranges of correlation between IVs and DV are between moderate to low correlation as aligned by Sekaran (2013) and Franzblau (1958) that the result should correlate between 0.2 to 0.4. Thus, there is a significant relationship between viral messages via social media towards netizens' emotions. The result of this study also shows evidence to support the existence of a relationship between the types of viral messages via social media (joy, surprise, anger, disgust, fear, and sadness) towards netizen's emotions. The finding is in line with Celli et al. (2015) where some correlations are easy to explain, such as the one between sharing satisfaction and an upbeat communicative style. They have also found surprisingly significant correlations in which open-minded people do not intend to share disappointing content. This finding partly corresponds with previous research of Santos (2018) such that emotional valence does influence the sharing intentions among social media users, and more importantly, the negative emotions may lead to a higher willingness to share. Further, it has also shown that women are sharing more content online as compared to men.

3.3 The Effect of Types of Viral Messages via Social Media Towards Netizens' Emotions

Table 3: Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	Model Summary	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		R^2	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.472	.227		.039		
JOY	.279	.055	.251	.000		
SURPRISE	.275	.064	.242	.000		
ANGRY	.183	.072	.156	.011	.284	.000
DISGUST	.016	.044	.018	.716		
FEAR	-.009	.060	-.008	.877		
SAD	.061	.065	.056	.345		

Dependent Variable: NETIZEN_EMOTION

The result in Table 3 explains that joy, surprise, and anger are the factors of the viral messages to spread which have a significant effect on the netizens' emotion as it has become consistent with Jones et. al (2016) that admiration and happiness have a strong correlation with high dominance. It appears to be relevant as the motivation of sharing positive content may be rooted in self-presentation. These findings partly correspond with previous research on viral news (Berger and Milkman 2012), as they have shown that the viral news that online readers are highly interested to read, view, and share is significantly positive rather than negative. Besides, this study is also in line with Javier Serrano-Puche (2015) in which positive expressions were reduced as social media users produced fewer positive posts and more negative posts. When negative expressions were reduced, the opposite pattern occurred. Emotions expressed by others through social media have also influenced the emotions of the user. The table has also shown that the R square value is 0.284, and the significant value is 0.00 (p-value <0.01). Therefore, the overall model is fit by 28.4% as evidenced and the significant value supports the result (Cohen, 1992). The results prove that emotions are one of the major forces that lead content to become viral as the emotional content draws people's attention to the message which has been advertised as well as increasing its attractiveness among the general audience (Santos, 2018).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

For recommendation, firstly researcher proposes the government to strengthen and analyse the communication and multimedia policy aligned with the digital development nowadays and onwards to avoid negative viral messages from influencing the netizens' emotions. This study has found that there is a relationship between viral messages and netizens' emotions via social media. Therefore, the researcher suggests the social media users utilize this research as guidance in posting any viral messages and to prevent the social media criminal from causing harm to other users' emotions with negative content. Lastly, in the future, the researcher has also suggested a further study about the relationship between emotions of joy, surprise, and anger among social media users in Malaysia to be carried out. In conclusion, this study has found that viral messages influence the netizens' emotions. It also indicates three types of emotion which are joy, surprise and anger appeared to be affected by any viral messages. Netizens love to read positive and happy viral messages rather than negative viral messages since negative messages can create unhappy emotions such as sadness, anger, disgust, and fear.

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