Effects of 'Sudden Bursts of Popularity' on social media

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Abstract. With the development of the Internet, social media become an important way to disseminate information. Words and events spread quickly, and so do people. Today, there are many chances when a characteristic of one single person is exaggerated, leading to him or her becoming popular and suddenly going viral on the Internet. This seems to give people the illusion of becoming more connected to each other. However, there are good and bad effects behind the phenomenon, and this article focuses on discussing them. The research mainly focuses on the effect of the phenomenon, using methods of case and theory analysis to discuss the effects, mainly the bad ones. The finding is that there are negative effects on different groups of people from the person himself or herself, the audience, and young people. It comes to the suggestion that it is important to improve media literacy and emphasise value dissemination.

1. Introduction

As the technology develops, more forms of social media appear. There are more ways to disseminate the information. Information can be spread quickly to people in different places and of all ages. Information is shown to the audience and the audience posts comments towards what they see. The distance in time and space between information and the audience is shortened, leading to situations of things suddenly going viral on social media platforms [1]. It could be slang which is spread throughout the Internet and is suddenly used by people as a fashion trend of speaking. It could also be a person who is living a normal life but suddenly goes viral on the social media platform. The latter is becoming more and more common around people these days.

There are lots of studies towards social media, mainly discussing the facts about the bursts of popularity on a specific topic, slang or other celebrities. By contrast, there are few studies towards the phenomenon of common people getting famous and well-known suddenly, which means there has not been deep research focusing on this special group of people. However, the phenomenon is widely seen nowadays and has many negative impacts on the society. If not paid attention, it may lead to serious consequences.

This paper uses theory analysis to demonstrate the negative impacts of a normal person experiencing sudden bursts of popularity, setting its foot on four different aspects to explain the topic. The four different perspectives include the person himself or herself, audiences, teenager group and other social influences. This study aims to point out these negative

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impacts and give possible solutions.

2. Positive effects

2.1 Pressure-relief valve

The fast-coming and ongoing of viral phenomena act as a pressure relief valve. People lead very stressful lives, particularly adults. According to current research, while developing their personal careers and dealing with the pressures of high unemployment rates, high property prices, low salary incomes, and low occupational stability, people must also face the social responsibilities of raising children and supporting their parents [2]. The concept of "carnivalesque" is an old one, involving activities that ignore norms, and it is now applied in the form of Internet carnivals. In Bakhtin's view, the carnivalesque life was a necessary supplement to regular life, a regular catharsis and release of people's emotions, which served as a "decompression valve" for emotions [2]. People need a way to escape from life and free themselves. The sudden emergence of viral phenomena is related to the prevailing societal anxiety.

2.2 Providing opportunities

The phenomenon of people suddenly going viral will provide opportunities for people. In the era where likes and comments are money, when people go viral on the Internet, they suddenly receive much attention from the public. With the return of communication power to individuals in the form of social media platforms, individual creativity will be stimulated, and the deeply empowered individuals will generate more personalised demands, bringing more market opportunities to self-media entrepreneurs [3]. They can earn money, and their income can increase, which can make them richer. They can also get famous and be invited to bigger stage, such as television programs. Also, with the return of communication power to individuals, individual creativity will be stimulated.

3. Hidden dangers

There are hidden dangers behind this Internet carnival brought up by 'sudden bursts of popularity' on social media.

3.1 Hidden dangers towards the person who goes viral

3.1.1. Cyberbullies

The person who goes viral may suffer doubts and be subjected to cyberbullying. Internet users primarily use words to interact on social media platforms. They tend to express their speculations rather than valid evidence about things they are unfamiliar with, leading to irresponsible comments and intentional belittlement. However, words are the primary tool used to perpetrate cyberbullying. Individual behavioural characteristics and indulgent psychological traits of Internet users are the main reasons for the emergence of cyberbullying [4]. Victims of cyberbullying experience significantly negative effects, particularly on their social well-being [5]. Over time, they may find it difficult to integrate into society and could develop mental illnesses.

3.1.2. Short-time popularity

The person who becomes famous on the Internet can only experience a short-time popularity. A huge amount of new information emerges on the Internet every day and old ones, in most cases, will fade out of people's vision sooner or later. This can also be applied to the phenomenon when a person receives a sudden burst of popularity. People, if not historical figures, are hard to be remembered all the time.

3.1.3. Over-consumption of the person's privacy

People who become famous can suffer from the over-consumption of their privacy. With the development of social media, the consumption of privacy is becoming increasingly widespread [6]. Discussing others' privacy can greatly affect people's daily lives and personal spaces, leading to consequences ranging from negative emotions to mental illnesses for the person being discussed.

3.1.4. Oversharing

The phenomenon may lead to the consequence of people oversharing on social media platforms. An individual who gains notoriety on the Internet may create their own account and continue sharing on social media platforms. They often focus on a certain aspect and use it repeatedly because this ensures that they can consistently attract an audience. Ben Agger introduced the concept of Oversharing. Oversharing can illustrate the negative impact. Their life was normal like everyone else's, but they could overshare their life and even fabricate unreal elements to gain attention. Furthermore, according to Erving Goffman's theory of "Presentation of the Self," a person lives backstage in their daily life, but when they use a social media platform to draw attention, they step into the limelight, attempting to perform in front of the camera and present specific content.

3.2 Hidden dangers towards the common audience

Audiences may blindly follow what they see on social media platforms without critical judgment [7]. They are also compelled to receive information curated by reporters and journalists, potentially losing their ability to think independently. The concept of "symbolic violence" and its contemporary interpretation can help elucidate this phenomenon. Originally, symbolic violence described how a higher class imposed its views on a lower class. In the contemporary context, reporters with access to first-hand information can be seen as a higher social class, attempting to impose their perspectives on the audience who learn about news from the Internet [7].

3.3 Hidden dangers towards young people

This phenomenon may be harmful to young people. According to a research, in social networking programs can mix messages, images and videos that cannot block it to reach teens accounts [8]. It is concluded that social media itself drive the formation of the high school students' behavior [9]. Researchers have found that young people may start to harbour misconceptions about expecting overnight success without putting in the necessary effort [10]. They may also lose their sense of responsibility, influenced by reports that suggest they can disseminate any information they wish [10]. Both of these factors can pose a significant threat to the development of young people and propagate harmful values.

4. Suggestion

4.1 Improve media literacy

It is important to focus on media literacy education for Internet users. Recent research reveals that it is related to common people's authority to access, interpret, and produce printed texts, which needs to be improved [11]. Research also explains that without a democratic and critical approach to media literacy [12], the public will be positioned merely as selective receivers, consumers of online information and communication. Research further demonstrates that the promise of media literacy, surely, is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user - from passive to active, from recipient to participant, and from consumer to citizen [12]. Internet users include the well-known person who tries to show themselves more on the Internet and who should learn to express true and creative content rather than fake and repeated content. Besides, the audience are also Internet users who should be warned if they try to harm other people intentionally by words. Several models exist for promoting and assessing public awareness and understanding, including education, public understanding of science, print literacy and health promotion [12]. According to the research [12], the author argues that media literacy should be recognised as a key means, even a right, by which citizens participate in society and by which the state regulates the manner and purposes of citizens' participation.

4.2 Emphasise value dissemination

Value dissemination should be emphasised. Nowadays, the emergence of social media has led to an increasing spread of value orientation to more people. According to the research, the value dissemination of media nowadays has the following problems: 1. Public media blindly extend social events and pay more attention to wrong information on events 2. Events are elevated, so people post comments before fully understanding them, which causes value deviation, criticism and even antagonism among the public. 3. People lack independent thinking. Negative value dissemination will not only lead to the deviation of personal value orientation but also cause the whole nation to fall into a predicament of thinking in serious cases. Instead, when releasing information, subjects of new media should be objective and fair, learn the truth, discuss the facts, and analyse events rationally; the public should not follow what they see online blindly and develop independent thinking [13].

5. Conclusion

There are hidden dangers behind the sudden bursts of popularity on social media. This report focuses on discussing normal people who suddenly become well-known from three different aspects. It has influenced the person, audience, and young people. There are some suggestions for the bad influence. The innovation of this paper lies in the fact that there are few studies about the sudden bursts of popularity on social media platforms, but it actually can be noticed many times in everyday life. No one can be sure when they will get famous and be put on social media platforms. While people are expecting uncertainty, they should also be aware of the hidden dangers that can be neglected easily.

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