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Sports journalism and Social media: Content Analysis of YouTube videos

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Introduction

The emergence of social media has profoundly impacted the delivery and consumption of sport (Filo et al, 2015). It is argued that social media research in sport management aligns with service-dominant logic and illustrates the role of social media in cultivating relationships among and between brands and individuals (*ibid*). Thus social media goes a long way in promoting sport and its brand across the world. The objective of this research paper is to determine which videos on sports go viral and based on what- does it promote a certain 'popular culture'?

The 50 videos studied in this are the official 2010 FIFA World Cup song, the official 2014 World Cup song, Kobe Vs. Messi videos, soccer, boxing and basketball. By understanding the shared characteristics of 'viral video', one can more accurately predict which videos will become successful and why this research can be very helpful in assisting companies with video marketing campaigns. For example, the Shakira World Cup song of 2010 getting maximum views goes ahead to show how promoters need to make videos to make a content go viral. Many other videos like 'Mike Tyson's bout' have become household names. By understanding the reasons behind video's successes, scholars will better understand the factors that lend themselves to popular culture. It is important to note that simply because the content of these clips seems to be different does not rule out the possibility of common elements. In fact, this research seeks to draw connections between elements such as video's presentation, run-time content and popularity.

Literature Review

Videos and popular culture

Scholars argue that viral video is a new driving force of popular culture. Linkletter et al (2009) claim the influence of online video is so strong; certain clips have persuaded people to take unhealthy risks. Burgess (2008) seeks to give meaning to these accusations by defining the parameters of a viral video. She argues that a viral video

is born when user-led distribution causes a clip to become widely popular. Furthermore, she claims that a viral video must contain some element that appeals to the popular culture of the time. Usually, this element of pop culture appeals mainly to the younger generation. Burgess' content surveyed a sample of 4, 300 popular YouTube videos. Burgess notes that these videos are usually not traditional media content. She concludes that 'oddness' and 'amateurism' lead to the irony found in much of her sample size.

Another factor scholars argue, behind popularity of certain YouTube videos is their 'layout'. Hilderbrand (2007) argues 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. Users on YouTube can quickly move from video to video to find popular content. Other researchers who have focused on the creative aspects of viral videos are Southgate et al (2010) and Briggs (2010). These researchers studied 102 video ads released in the United Kingdom. Their findings suggest that the creative details behind video advertising can be used to predict a video's popularity. Like Hilderbrand (2007), Southgate et al (2010) argue that the presentation of videos is directly related to their popularity. Specifically, Southgate et al (2010) focus on how visual branding drives a video's proliferation.

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 include quantitative research to track people's reliance on video to get their news. They also suggest that newsworthiness is a factor in determining a video's viral capabilities. Sagan et al. (2010) also suggest that a news video must 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.

Social media and sport

There has even been a rapid and widespread increase in the use of the micro-blogging and social networking platform Twitter by professional athletes, sports clubs, leagues and fans (Hutchins, 2011). For instance, 'tweets' or messages of up to 140 characters offer high-profile athletes like Lance Armstrong (cycling), Serena Williams (tennis), Usain Bolt (track and field), Lote Tuqiri (rugby) and Shaquille O'Neal (basketball) the ability to communicate instantly with fans, friends and observers, bypassing the gate keeping functions of journalists, publicists and sports officials (*ibid*). The existence of this order highlights the important changes in both production and consumption of media content, and necessitates a shift away from broadcast-centric understandings of media sport towards those that properly acknowledge the increasing significance of networked digital communications (*ibid*).

Social media, thus, has become more centre stage than any other form of mainstream media due to its recall value on YouTube, for example and its connectivity on twitter and Facebook. However, social media needs to be assessed in terms of its credibility even though it is more popular. Among some major sport shows like those of soccer and cricket, fans and viewers like to watch and re-watch a particular sport, not just for its 'recall value' but also for watching their favorite star perform a feat or a major performance.

Clavio & Walsh (2013) argue that ‘as social media provide athletic departments and their constituents with an additional point of engagement with their fans, it is important to understand the social media audience’. Their findings indicate that there is a relatively low level of social media participation among college sport fans in relation to official Twitter and Facebook feeds of the team. Their use of factor analysis reveals dimensions of gratification for social media use.

Burgess (2009) argues that ‘beyond the affordances of digital technologies and their potential to enable active cultural participation, YouTube also presents us with an opportunity to confront some of participatory culture’s most pressing problems: the unevenness of participation and voice; the apparent tensions between commercial interests and the public good; and the contestation of ethics and social norms that occur as belief systems, interests and cultural differences collide.

Thus it is noticed that YouTube contributors focus a lot on presentation and getting highest number of views. Popular videos related to sports which are high on the viewership scale point to the fact content on social media is targeted at a segment of youth as that brings in the revenues and contributes to the ‘political economy of YouTube’.

Theoretical Framework

It maybe said that these videos serve the needs of the viewers and gratify the senses of the audience. It caters to the fan-following and promotes a culture around ‘fandom’. Interest in the gratifications that media provide their audiences goes back to the beginning of empirical mass communication research (Katz et al, 1974). Such studies were well represented in the Lazarsfeld-Stanton collections (1942, 1944, 1949). Herzog (1942) on quiz programmes and the gratifications derived from listening to soap operas, Suchman (1942) on the movies for getting interested in serious music on radio, Wolfe and Fiske (1949) on the development of children’s interest in comics, Berelson (1949) on the functions of newspaper reading, and so on. A majority opinion of researchers opines to Weiss’ (1971) summary which states that:

When studies of uses and gratifications are carried out, the media or media content are usually viewed dichotomously as predominantly fantasist-escapist or informational-educational in significance (1971).

The authors have focused on issue-theoretical, methodological, and ideological- rather than on systematized findings. The questions asked are- whether the media do actually satisfy their consumers- an assumption that radical critics of the media take more for granted. Even though it is audience-oriented, the uses and gratifications approach breaks away from a slavish dependence of content on audience propensities by bringing to light the great variety of needs and interests that are encompassed by the latter. As McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) have argued , uses and gratifications data suggest that mass media may not after all, be as ‘constrained as the escapist theory makes out from performing a wider range of social functions than is generally assigned to them in western societies today’. In other words, instead of depicting the media as severely circumscribed by audience expectations, the uses and gratifications approach highlights the audience as a source of challenge to producers to cater more richly to the multiplicity of requirements and roles that it has disclosed.

Thus the consumers or the audience assist in providing rich content to media producers and content creators as they keep the quality in check. Media content

creators can enhance this quality as depending on the audience feedback and comments, which is made even better on social media and the internet. Based on the studies above, following research questions have been framed to study the sample.

Methodology

The following research questions can be framed in studying the sample size of top fifty videos based on their high viewership.

Research Questions

The research questions pertaining to the study are:

- Does social media add a ‘promotional’ value to a video?
- Is there a ‘popular culture’ and ‘fandom’ around such videos?
- What are the common elements highlighted in these videos?
- Which are the top-viewed videos?

Research Methodology

Content analysis study of top fifty videos with top views has been analyzed and assessed for the role social media has played in promoting the sport. It has been assessed whether such videos promote the sport among fans. The purpose of this research is also to determine the common elements of viral videos. This information could in turn help predict which videos may go viral in future. It is important to choose the right sample.

Coding units: To remain consistent in the findings, each video was subjected to the same analysis. From these videos a few common elements in videos were ascertained.

Coding protocol and categories: The first step was to evaluate each video based on a coding sheet in order to accurately evaluate the content, each video was watched twice. Each video was analyzed for the elements discovered in the pre-coding sample. The coding sheets for each video were marked ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or ‘short’ or ‘long’ based on the existence or non-existence of each element.

- Short title: If the title of the video was composed of three or fewer words, it was marked as ‘s’ for short. If it was longer, it was marked ‘l’ for long.
- Brevity: If the video was under two minutes it was considered brief
- Laughter: If someone laughed in the first 30 seconds of the video it was marked with laughter
- Promotional: If the video got popular because it was promoting a brand, it was marked as ‘promotional’
- Bizarre: If part of the video exhibited something contradictory to societal expectations it was marked bizarre
- Music: If the video contained a musical element it was marked musical
- Accident: If the video contained an element of a mishap or an accident, it was marked as ‘accident’
- Surprise: If a person in the video appeared to be surprised, it was marked as ‘surprise’

Observations were also recorded about each clip. By recording qualitative comments, the author was able to draw conclusions that they did not anticipate. This allowed them to discover unknown factors leading to the popularity of certain videos.

Table 1. List of sample videos

1.	“Shakira - Waka Waka (This Time for Africa) (The Official 2010 FIFA World Cup™ Song)”
2.	“We Are One (Ole Ola) [The Official 2014 FIFA World Cup Song] (Olodum Mix)”
3.	“Turkish Airlines - Kobe vs. Messi: The Selfie Shootout”
4.	“Turkish Airlines - Kobe vs Messi: Legends on Board”
5.	“SevenSuperGirls Try Gymnastics”
6.	“Seventeen(17) Craziest Field Crashers!!!”
7.	“Top 20 Knockouts in UFC History”
8.	“41-Man Battle Royal for a Championship Match of Winner's Choosing: Smack Down, October 14, 2011”
9.	“THE NFL : A Bad Lip Reading" — A Bad Lip Reading of the NFL”
10.	“The dirty side of El Clasico - Fights, Fouls, Dives & Red cards”
11.	“Rey Mysterio vs Gran Khali”
12.	“WWE 2K16 Paige vs Bayley NXT Women's Championship Bikini match”
13.	“John Cena, Batista & Rey Mysterio vs. Randy Orton & Jeri-Show: Tribute to the Troops, Dec. 20, 2008”
14.	“Top Soccer Shootout Ever With Scott Sterling (Original)”
15.	“The Knockouts Evening Gown Match Madison Rayne vs. Angelina Love”
16.	“Rey Mysterio vs. John Cena: SmackDown, November 6, 2003”
17.	“John Cena vs Randy Orton - Gauntlet Match Hell in a Cell”
18.	“20-Man Battle Royal for the vacant World Heavyweight Title: SmackDown, July 20, 2007”
19.	“Cristiano Ronaldo Best Skills & Goals Ever”
20.	“Mike Tyson Vs. Sammy Scaff HD”
21.	“John Cena & Randy Orton battle the entire Raw roster: Raw, March 17, 2008”
22.	“Brock Lesnar is surprised by the return of The Undertaker: Raw, Feb. 24, 2014”
23.	“The Great Khali's WWE Debut: SmackDown, April 7, 2006”
24.	“Top 20 Craziest Moments in Tennis History”
25.	“Sports pictures taken at just the right moment”
26.	“Michael Jordan Top 50 All Time Plays”
27.	“Women's Water Polo Dirty play - (HD) What happens underwater !!!”
28.	“Ronaldinho vs Cristiano Ronaldo”
29.	“Ronaldinho & Messi • THE MOVIE • Two Legends - One Story HD”
30.	“TOP INSANE CRICKET FIGHTS - INDIA 2016”
31.	“TITANS vs Conor McGregor Biggest MMA Fighters of All Time MMA”
32.	“Comedy Football”
33.	“Top 10 Best Corner Kick Goals In Football”
34.	“Ronaldinho , Ronaldo , C.Ronaldo , Henry and Robinho”
35.	“Funniest Fight ever”
36.	“Triple H vs. The Great Khali (Broken Glass Arm Wrestling) (2/2)”
37.	“ Conor McGregor vs The Mountain (Game of Thrones) ”
38.	“Zlatan Ibrahimovic • Craziest Skills Ever • Impossible Goals”
39.	“BEST OF - TOP 500 GOALS”
40.	“Funny Fail Sports Compilation Oops / Right Moment Pics □ ”
41.	“Greatest Trick Plays in Football History”
42.	“Bob Sapp vs. Mike Tyson”
43.	“Top 20 Unexpected Goals In Football”

44.	“Top 20 Unexpected Goals In Football”
45.	“Biggest Football Hits Ever”
46.	“Best Taekwondo Knockouts KO”
47.	“Top 10 Mike Tyson Best Knockouts HD”
48.	“10 Olympic Athletes Caught CHEATING at the Games”
49.	“Worst Sport Accident”
50.	“Acrobatic Gymnastics Worlds 2010 Ukraine WG Combined”

Findings

In order to establish the commonalities between videos that are highly viewed, this study examined top 50 viewed videos on YouTube. During the coding of these videos, several video elements were analyzed including: title length, run-time, laughter, element of surprise, element of bizarreness, musical quality, promotional and element of accident among others. The study analyzed the overall percentage of ‘yes’ to ‘no’ in each category. In this way it could be determined whether a video element had enough of a presence to be considered a viable factor. This coding method allowed for the discarding of several coding categories. Coding results and the percentage of each category are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Title length: In this study, a short title was considered to be composed of five words or less. Following the coding sheet, any title five words or less was marked ‘S’ for short. Any title over 5 words was marked ‘L’ for long. The results for this variable are as follows: 76% or 38 out of 50 videos had long titles. This overwhelming proportion of long to short titles seems to reflect the sample size of the coding sheet. The average title length of the sample was 8 words.

Run-time: The difference between long and short run-times was more subtle than in most other variables. A video’s run-time was considered short and marked with an ‘S’ if it was three minutes or less. Any video that ran over three minutes was considered long, ‘L’. The results for this variable are as follows: 8 out of 50 videos or 16% videos are short or less than three minutes while 84% videos are long. The average runtime for all videos was 7.59 seconds. The longest video was of 25 minutes and 4 seconds where a bout is shown in ‘20-Man Battle Royal for the vacant World Heavyweight Title: SmackDown’ held on July 20 in the year 2007 in which the great Khali won. The shortest video is the ‘worst sport accident’ of just ten seconds which shows a pole vaulter fall down in a strange position on the mat.

Element of laughter: Within this study a video was considered to have an element of laughter during the first 30 seconds of the clip. This criterion allowed for a simple ‘N’ for no and ‘Y’ for yes on the coding sheet. Laughter can sometimes be difficult to notice. For this reason, each video in the sample size was viewed twice. The results for this variable are as follows: 4 out of 50 videos or 8% had laughter element while 92% did not have any laughter element in the video. The funniest one was the ‘funniest fight ever’ which shows a wrestling bout between a Japanese wrestler who is only 169 pounds fight against an African wrestler who is 600 pounds- the bout was a ‘funny’ fight.

Element of promotional: A video was considered to have a ‘promotional’ element if the clip seemed to promote a particular brand, airline, alcohol or sports brand. For

example, a video showcasing two players flying alongside an airplane that reads ‘Turkish Airlines’ would be promoting ‘Turkish Airlines’ brand. The results for this variable are as follows: 2 out of 50 videos were promotional.

Element of bizarre: A video that displayed an element contrary to what was expected was considered to exhibit an element of bizarreness. This variable was more difficult to measure, however, most videos analyzed seemed to display the breaking of normal records and something ‘out of the ordinary’. The results for this variable are as follows: 7 out of 50 videos or 14% videos are bizarre. The craziest moment was in ‘top 20 craziest moments in tennis history’ one of which was a fan from the audience asking Steffi Graf – ‘Steffi, will you marry me?’ to which Steffi actually replied asking, “How much money do you have?” You really wonder whether such videos are for real or simply put out there to increase views?

Element of music: Any video that displayed someone singing, contained background music, made references to a popular song, or was a music video was considered to have musical quality. For example, a video which had FIFA World Cup anthem song would fall under this category. The results for this variable are as follows: 2 out of 50 videos were musical. One of the best anthems has been the one by Shakira.

Element of accident: If a video showed a sport accident or mishap on the field while the event is going on, it was termed as having an ‘accident’ element. The results for this variable are as follows: 4 videos out of 50 have the element of the accident with the ‘worst sport accident’ as having the strongest element of the accident which shows a pole-vaulter falling down in a strange position on the mat below.

Element of surprise: A video was considered to have an element of surprise if someone in the clip made a visual or audible expression of surprise. For example, a video showcasing a practical joke in which the subject screamed would be considered to have an element of surprise. The results of this variable are as follows: 28 out of 50 videos have an element of surprise. 56% of the videos have an element of surprise while 44% of the videos do not have an element of surprise. The video with the most visible surprise element is ‘The Best Taekwondo Knockouts’ and the element of surprise is there in which each winning player hits the loser with the hook kick or even the spin kick.

Table 2. Existence of Coded Elements by Video

No.	Title Length	Run-Time	Laughte r	Promotional	Bizarre	Music	Accident	Surprise
1.	L (14*)	L03:30	N	N	N	Y	N	N
2.	L (14)	L04:06	N	N	N	Y	N	N
3.	L(8)	S01:00	N	Y	N	N	N	N
4.	L(8)	S01:00	N	Y	N	N	N	N
5.	S(5)	L10:42	Y	N	N	N	N	N
6.	S(4)	S01:49	N	N	Y	N	N	N
7.	S(6)	L07:24	N	N	N	N	N	Y
8.	L(15)	L34:04	N	N	N	N	N	N
9.	L(13)	S02:48	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
10.	L(11)	L10:15	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
11.	S(5)	L05:44	N	N	N	N	N	N
12.	L(10)	L06:48	N	N	N	N	N	Y

13.	L(17)	L11:53	N	N	N	N	N	Y
14.	L(8)	L05:17	N	N	N	N	N	Y
15.	L(10)	S01:46	N	N	N	N	N	Y
16.	L(8)	L13:33	N	N	N	N	N	Y
17.	L(11)	L08:33	N	N	N	N	N	Y
18.	L(12)	L25:04	N	N	N	N	N	Y
19.	L(6)	L06:37	N	N	N	N	N	Y
20.	L(6)	S02:53	N	N	N	N	N	Y
21.	L(13)	L12:37	N	N	N	N	N	Y
22.	L(13)	L07:08	N	N	N	N	N	Y
23.	L(8)	L09:55	N	N	N	N	N	N
24.	L(7)	L12:00	N	N	Y	N	N	N
25.	L(8)	L03:15	Y	N	N	N	N	N
26.	L(7)	L15:43	N	N	N	N	N	Y
27.	L(9)	S01:22	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
28.	S(4)	L06:45	N	N	N	N	N	Y
29.	L(10)	L18:22	N	N	N	N	N	Y
30.	L(6)	L04:47	N	N	Y	N	N	N
31.	L(11)	L10:40	N	N	N	N	N	Y
32.	S(2)	L03:27	Y	N	N	N	N	N
33.	L(8)	L03:41	N	N	N	N	N	N
34.	L(6)	L06:27	N	N	N	N	N	Y
35.	S(3)	L05:49	Y	N	N	N	N	N
36.	L(11)	L07:35	N	N	N	N	N	N
37.	L(8)	L08:18	N	N	N	N	N	Y
38.	L(7)	L04:23	N	N	Y	N	N	N
39.	S(5)	L04:23	N	N	N	N	N	Y
40.	L(8)	L23:09	N	N	N	N	N	N
41.	L(6)	L13:38	N	N	N	N	N	Y
42.	S(5)	L06:09	N	N	N	N	N	Y
43.	L(6)	L05:59	N	N	N	N	N	Y
44.	L(6)	L05:50	N	N	N	N	N	Y
45.	S(4)	L04:13	N	N	N	N	N	Y
46.	S(4)	L04:40	N	N	N	N	N	Y
47.	L(7)	L05:37	N	N	N	N	N	Y
48.	L(8)	L06:48	N	N	N	N	Y	N
49.	S(3)	S00:10	N	N	N	N	Y	N
50.	L(7)	L03:31	N	N	N	N	N	Y
	L=76% S=24% Avg=8 words	L=84% S= 16% Avg= 7:59 Mins.	No=92 % Yes=8%	No=96% Yes=4%	No= 86% Yes= 14%	No= 96% Yes=4 %	No= 92% Yes= 8%	No= 44% Yes= 56%

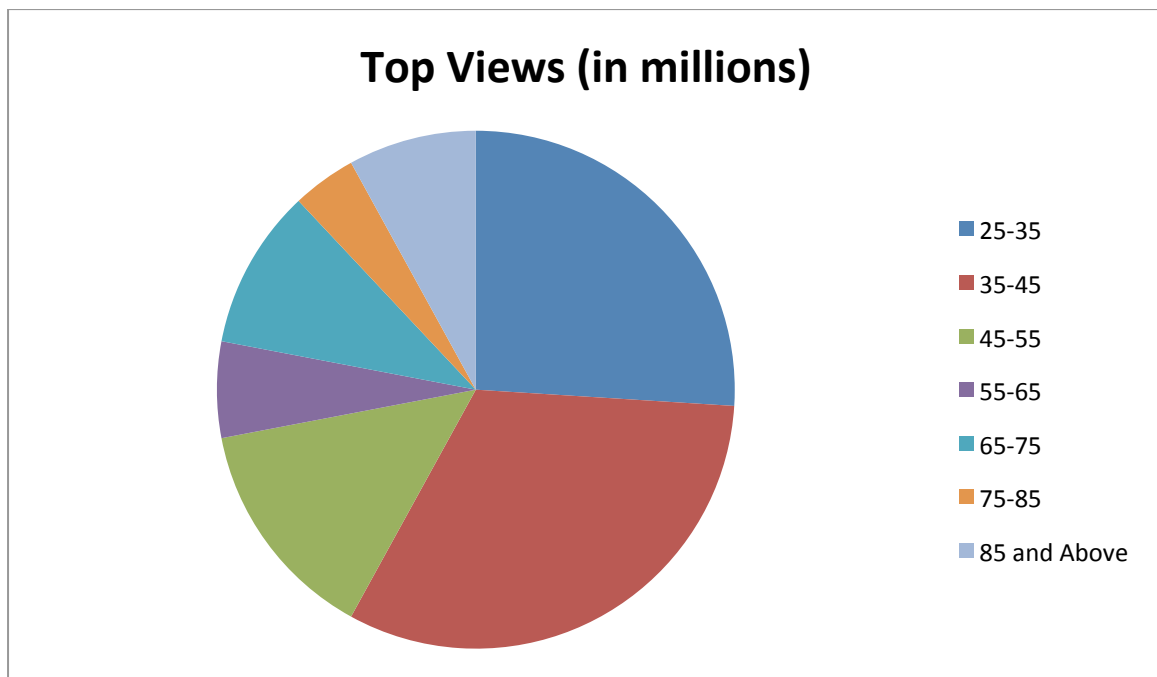
*The Arabic number represents the number of words **Run-time is in minutes and seconds

Table 3. Results by Percentage of Each Coding Category

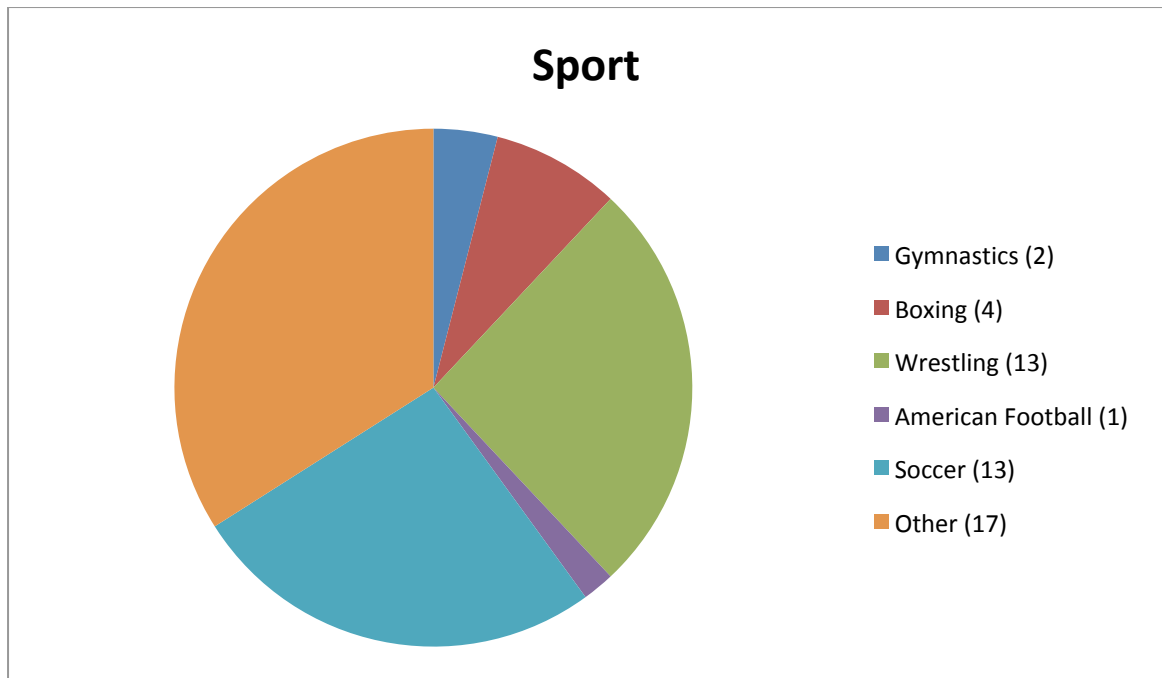
Variable	Percentages	
Title Length	Short= 24%	Long=76%
Run-Time	Short= 16%	Long= 84%
Element of Laughter	Yes= 8%	No= 92%
Element of Promotion	Yes= 4%	No= 96%
Element of Bizarre	Yes= 14%	No= 86%
Element of Music	Yes= 4%	No= 96%
Element of Accident	Yes= 8%	No= 92%
Element of Surprise	Yes= 56%	No= 44%

More Infographics

Top views



Sport



Analysis and Discussion

The findings drawn from the video content analysis suggests that there are a wide variety of factors that lead a YouTube video to become viral. Most of these videos serve the purpose of being ‘promotional’ wherein these promote either some other brand or the brand called YouTube itself. Many findings of the study supported the author’s earlier observation derived from the pre-coding sample that social media and online viewing culture gives rise to a popular culture around fandom and good audience studies. This answers the first two research questions that this study sought to answer: does social media add a ‘promotional’ value to a video and is there a ‘popular culture’ and ‘fandom’ around such videos.

As Giseline Kuipers said:

The short history of the internet is reminiscent of the history of older media such as television, radio, telephone and print. While experts were making optimistic predictions about the serious applications of the new medium- innovations in business and commerce, political reform and empowerment, scientific communication, journalistic progress, the emancipation of challenged groups, educational applications- audiences embraced the medium for a less elevated purpose: entertainment (2006: 380).

Among the findings were surprising relationships between variables. For example, it was found that only 8% had an element of laughter. Although the factors of surprise were a lot, almost 56%, few videos had an element of music and accident. The element of bizarre existed in quite a few videos, too. This information answers the other research questions- what are the common elements highlighted in these videos, which are the top-viewed videos and do these videos highlight a ‘political economy’ of YouTube as it maybe noticed that high number of likes and comments drive home the point that audiences contribute to the revenue and profit of YouTube. The content analysis also shows us that people are drawn to the extremes of both candid and practiced content.

Conclusion

So far there has been limited research in the field of top-viewed YouTube videos. This research paper sought to understand a few common elements in videos with top 50 views. This research conducted reflects the idea that certain elements will make viewers more likely to recommend videos on YouTube. Although not every factor was deemed highly influential, every factor recorded on the pre-coding sheet was later found present in the study.

This research could prove very useful for individuals hoping to relay messages through viral video. By understanding the most prevalent elements in viral videos, it is easier to create a video that will become widely distributed on the internet.

Few limitations of this study which could be kept in mind while doing other studies based on this one is that several key factors for why a video becomes viral are identified. However, the research did not address the path videos take to reach wide popularity. In this regard, authors such as Wallsten (2008) argue that much of the reason a video becomes popular can be attributed to its distribution through social networks. For this reason, continuing research on this topic should also include social media pathways. An effort should be made to understand how and why the video becomes viral and how social media promotes the medium, fabricating viral videos will become more of an art form than a guessing game.

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