

WhatsApp and Message Forwarding

Dr. Ambika Sankar Mishra

Associate Professor, Centurion University of Technology and Management, Odisha, India.

Abstract

After the information technology revolution, everywhere in the world, information explosion has taken place. This information explosion has given birth to the new medium of communication and this new communication medium is known as the most popular social media. With the help of tiny, handy mobile sets social media has become the voice of modern man to catalyze the process of information explosion. As a user centric democratic platform, it has brought changes in the communicative behavior of its users. These days people have started exchanging large amount of information through social media and the passions to communicate has increased in such a manner that people without considering the consequences and without even understanding the meaning of the messages, are forwarding messages ahead. We all know about the gate keeping process in main stream media but in social media there is no such opportunity to go for a keeping¹ in a strict manner. As a result, messages associated with the intention to create a social imbalance can also spread rapidly. The all-powerful social media has started influencing our lives in such a manner that, message forwarding has become a practice of the day. If this trend continues then it will be harmful for society. Information bias will create disastrous situation in society. It is always difficult to control the communication, if it is internet mediated but it is a truth that prevention is better than cure. So awareness is needed among the people in relation to message forwarding in social media. The paper aims to study the message forwarding habits of youth in WhatsApp by conducting a survey among them.

Key words: Message, Forward, Social Media, Communicate, Emotions

Introduction

After reading this paper nobody will be able to know at the initial stage that this paper is not typed through the computer in a normal way, rather it is a paper which is prepared using the Google voice to text service. Our Technology has reached to such a level that it has started influencing our habits and behavioral patterns.

With portable mobile devices on hand we have started communicating in different manner. Our radios are no more small boxes our televisions do not need tables to sit or screws to hang themselves on the wall. They have changed to apps and the communication has gone easy these days. We are communicating less words using our tongue and more by our fingertips. Most of us have our brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts as our friends in social media. Situation has reached to such a level that, in many cases we are communicating from one room to another using social media. The all-powerful social media which has become the new communication medium of the present generation has created a new type of communication system which is completely democratic and attractive. People using this media, have gone so much addicted with it that the narcotizing effects of social media can be well seen among the users of social media. Every morning we are getting up with good morning messages in this new medium and at night, good night messages are allowing us to close our eyes. With large options like using messages in text, image, audio and audiovisual formats this medium has gone able to provide a superb opportunity to communicate. This medium which is purely convincing participatory and democratic has started bringing changes in the communicative behavior of people using this media. Messages mostly designed like infotainment contents are fueling the addiction of social media.

Characteristics of Social Media

The social media as a powerful medium of modern communication has gone able to satisfy the communication needs of people in various manners and by character is quite different from the conventional media system. To speak in a nutshell it is:

- ❖ An instant faster form of communication.
- ❖ Mostly participatory and the rate of involvement of audience is very high.
- ❖ Audience has maximum opportunity to play the role of communicator and receiver.
- ❖ A liberal and democratic form of communication with ample opportunities for freedom of expression
- ❖ It is a new and attractive form of communication
- ❖ Creates a virtual world to provide a better satisfaction in communication.
- ❖ Communicator and respondent are known to each other.
- ❖ Individual members of the audience are mostly linked with a similar cultural background which makes the communication more effective.

The social media with above advantages has become the potential new medium of today and it has started satisfying the uses and gratification² perspective of people in a powerful manner. It has gone associated with our lives in such a manner that it has started influencing our lives in almost all spheres.

Political Life and Social Media- The social media during the American presidential elections and the UK prime ministerial elections has proved itself to be a potential medium in building public opinion. Similarly in India, this medium has created the “papu” image for Rahul Gandhi and few days back it was the debate in leading news channels that political parties are using the personal likes and dislikes data of people using social media to create opinions in favor of them. It is also becoming a tool for information dissemination among people and has proved its usefulness for governance. During demonetization and GST implementation social media played a persuasive role for building public opinion in favor of government decision.

Economic Life and Social Media: The social media has become an industry itself today. The you tube channels are now new platforms of media business for creative people. Social media is promoting financial literacy among people these days and it is become a new platform to promote business and has proved its effectiveness.

Cultural Life and Social Media: Social media has become the new platform for cultural exchange. By social media we are able to know the cultures of people at different places. We are knowing about traditions and rituals associated with different societies. Folk dance, music and festivals are spreading among people through social media. Similarly the media and entertainment industry has also started using social media and special platforms like Netflix have started working internationally to highlight cultures of different people through their own programs. In fact new forms of culture are created and cultural diffusion has taken place through social media.

Social life and Social Media: Due to its wide presence social media has started influencing the social life in a powerful manner. Campaigns like #Me too through social media has started developing a different type of gender consciousness among people. In regular intervals the social

media is highlighting issues of social interest and at the same time it is also talking about different discriminations and disparities prevailing in our society.

Educational Life and Social Media: Social media has proved its usefulness through different programs, groups, and etc. It has also become a platform to share eBooks and other such things for educational development.

Legal life and Social Media: The social media in these days have started influencing the legal life of people because through social media different legal awareness forums have started creating legal awareness among people and at the same different information relating to legal life have started influencing people.

Religious life and social media: May it be Durgapuja, Ramzan or Christmas these days the social media has become an important medium to spread the messages relating to religion. Sometimes the social media is responsible to create communal sentiments through its posts and those posts are also creating social disturbances.

The social media which has now reached to almost all areas of our lives and is influencing our lives in a fascinating manner has really created a new communication revolution with a credible and potential communication medium. As a democratic platform of communication, it has provided ample opportunity to people to communicate. Without the option of gate keeping² it has allowed free flow of information. The free flow of information has reached to such a level in this participatory communication medium, people are not ready to cross check the credibility of the information or source. Thus it has created a situation which is like freedom without responsibility. If such case happens in case of media, then it is like spreading rumors and rumors are like wild fires. Thus lack of gate keeping is always a problem in case of social media. Again if we consider the CML California , definition of media literacy then, Media Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms. But if we look towards the media literacy rate of India then the status of media literacy is also not very interesting. Thus the social media has become a new platform to forward any type of messages according to the mercy of the user. In fact most of the messages in social media are forwarded messages and people are forwarding maximum of them without thinking about the consequences of messages.

To understand the consequences of such message forwarding the examples of certain incidents which have happened in different states at different times can be taken into consideration.

Case-I-Demonetization

On 8th November 2016, at 8:00pm a small portion of India's population was accessing the news channels and the demonetization declaration came in the television channels. Close to 9:00pm all cash deposit machines and ATM machines got jam packed with long ques in front of them. The reason is, the message of demonetization moved in such a rapid manner that it created a panic among people and people without going deep into the messages ran rapidly to cash deposit machines or ATMs.

Case-II-The Child lifting group

In the month of May 2017 , in states like Odisha and Andhra Pradesh Several video clips went viral in social media showing a few men getting beaten up by the locals for allegedly stealing children from the localities. Earlier in the day, there were a group of people roaming in different areas and those people were involved in child lifting. The situation became so worse in Odisha that the DGP had to say. "We have directed the SPs to clarify in their respective districts if they come across such rumors". Again police sources said their counterparts in the neighboring States have found such claims to be false and malicious. Hyderabad Police has also dismissed the messages of kidnapping of children which became viral on social media recently. Odisha Police acknowledged that the messages of kidnapping of children by various gangs were making rounds on the social media, but termed the claims as baseless and urged the people not to panic.

The cases cited above are just one or 2 examples of message forwarding but WhatsApp has around 200 million of users in India. So the message forwarding situation can be more easily understood after looking towards the number of users. The company meanwhile has brought restriction that no user in India can forward a message more than five chats under individual or group category. It will also removal of quick forward button was also a part of the same decision. The company took such a step to reduce the circulation of fake messages on the platform. Similarly the Bhadrak communal riots³ case also is an example how message sharing on Facebook also created riot situation in Bhadrak. Thus these days the messages coming in social media are really powerful as they are coming according to the taste of people. The messages are highly powerful as they are prepared using the content localization⁴ approach.

The social media messages have gone so powerful in influencing public opinion that looking towards such message forwarding habits of people and realizing the power of social media the Chennai high court provided its verdict against message forwarding. Among some key observations made by the Madras High Court, the most notable one reads is “Forwarding a message is equal to accepting the message and endorsing the message.”

Thus the society has started realizing the importance of message sharing in social media. At same time, people have not stopped from forwarding messages and they are continuously doing it. As human beings we all communicate and without communication our lives will become miserable. Thus communications will continue through social media but to understand communication through social media, we need to understand the process of message forwarding habits of people while using social media as a large portion of the social media messages are the forwarded messages.

Objectives:

The study aims to find out the message forwarding habits of people in WhatsApp and the reason behind such message forwarding.

Methodology and the study

To understand the message forwarding habits of people using social media, a study was conducted among 150 students of Centurion University, Bhubaneswar. Survey method using interview schedules was used for the study. Both primary and secondary data are used in the study. The study is conducted among the university students because among people of different ages and professions, college and university students are the maximum users of WhatsApp. Sampling technique used for the study was purposive sampling. The reason of using purposive sampling was to ensure that students using WhatsApp are included in study. Variable of the study are time period and media preference of the students.

Outcomes of the study:

Answering to the questions during the study, regarding message forwarding only 50% of them told that message forwarding is good and 95% of them told that they forward messages. Regarding their preference of app to send the messages, 90% of them told that WhatsApp is their first preference, then they preferred messenger, later, SMS, then Hike and telegram was of least preference.

40% of them explained that they forward messages to others because they want to inform others about facts they know and 40% of them told that they forward messages, because they want to create fun and

20% of them told they send without any reason. Most of them told, they prefer to send messages sent to them by others.

Talking about types of messages for forwarding, Text messages were the first choice, photos were the second choice, Audio and video messages were of equal preference for forwarding. Regarding content selection, they told that they strictly choose the receiver according to the content.

Regarding purpose of sending, most of them told that they do not like to send messages for wishing good Morning, Good Night or to wish in special occasions, but they do so because others are doing. Regarding seriousness during message sending, most of them told, they check messages before sending. They were not able to confirm that messages are coming to them as a result of forwarding by others. Around 70% of them were not sure of the fact that, whether message forwarding is necessary or not but around 30% told it is a necessity and around 80% of them were unable to say that, whether message forwarding is a good or bad habit and 20% told it is good to forward messages.

Regarding message receiving and forwarding 45% told that 0-25% of Messages coming to them are forwarded messages, 35% told that 26-50% are forwarded and 20% told they receive forwarded messages up to 75%. 45% told, while receiving a message they do not check the source, 30% told they check the source and others were not sure about the answer. 55% told if they receive the same message again and again they react and 40% told they accept such messages as it has become a practice of the day and 1% told they feel irritated and helpless.

Regarding message sending 70% told they do not think about messages before sending them and 30% expressed their inability to answer. 90% of them told that it is necessary to analyze messages before sending and 30% agreed that messages sent without proper checking can have serious harmful effects on society and 50% told that no such thing will happen if messages are not checked before sending and 20% expressed their inability to answer this question.

Conclusion:

Thus , looking into the above facts , it can be said that message forwarding has become a trend of the day and people at most of the cases are forwarding messages but their preference of message forwarding are different and in most of the cases it is not a fact that they are forwarding it without understanding it.

Notes:

¹ Gatekeeping theory provided by

² The uses and gratification theory is a theory provided by the

³ Bhadrak district is a district in Odisha. A communal riot occurred there following a face book post

⁴ Content localization is an approach in communication to match the message to the communicative ecology of target audience

References:

1. <https://countercurrents.org/2017/06/13/bhadrak-communal-riot-2017-a-fact-finding-report-to-the-nation/> retrieved on 11.07.2018
2. <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2018/may/28/no-child-lifting-gang-in-state-says-odisha-dgp-1820385.html> retrieved on 14.08.2018
3. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/you-can-forward-a-message-just-5-times-now-on-whatsapp/article24476981.ece> retrieved on 10.08.2018
4. <https://www.medialit.org/media-literacy-definition-and-more> retrieved on 16.08.2018
5. <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/you-can-land-in-jail-by-sharing-or-forwarding-another-persons-message-on-social-media-heres-what-legal-experts-say/1176786/> retrieved on 12.08.2018