

Perception of Students towards Viral Social Media Content

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Abstract

This study delves into the intricate landscape of perception of students of a state agricultural university towards viral social media content, offering insights into gender, mass media ownership, extent of use, sources of viral social media content, perception of students regarding viral social media content, as well as benefits and constraints. The respondents consisted of 60 post graduate students of a state agricultural university, with a slight majority of female students (56.67%) and 43.33 percent male students. The prevalence of smartphone ownership (95.00%) and digital device usage (65.00% for laptops/desktops) underscores their reliance on technology. Internet usage was widespread, with 85.00% of students accessing it regularly. Our investigation revealed that YouTube serves as the primary source for viral social media content (85.00%), followed by WhatsApp (68.33%) and Instagram (66.66%). Students exhibited diverse perceptions, with 71.66% holding a neutral view, while 15.00% leaned towards a negative perception, and 13.33% maintained a positive outlook. Noteworthy benefits of viral content included its role in raising awareness (85.00%) and fostering creativity (70.00%). However, constraints were evident, notably the spread of false information (86.66%) and concerns regarding addiction (65.00%). These findings emphasize the paramount importance of promoting critical media literacy and responsible content sharing among students. In an era characterized by digital media dominance, this research enriches our understanding of how students navigate and engage with mass media and viral content, spotlighting both the opportunities and challenges they encounter.

Keywords: Awareness; Students; Social media.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media platforms has revolutionized the way information is disseminated and consumed, especially among the younger generation. Viral social media content, characterized by its rapid dissemination across platforms, has become a powerful tool for shaping opinions and behaviors. This research explores the perception of students at a State University regarding viral social media content, aiming to

understand their awareness levels, the factors influencing their perception, and the constraints they encounter in navigating this digital landscape. According to **Patel (2019)**¹⁰ Perception is the cognitive process through which individuals interpret and make sense of information from their surroundings, including digital content on social media platforms. Awareness and government laws or rules regarding what to share or sharing viral social media content can vary significantly from one country to another. These rules are often in place to address concerns related to misinformation, privacy, and the spread of harmful content. Present research investigation was an attempt to assess the awareness of students at the state university regarding viral social media content and to identify the factors that influence students' perception of viral social media content and to explore the constraints and challenges faced by students when encountering viral content on social media.

Review of Literature

Researchers in the field have highlighted various aspects related to the perception of viral social media content. **Smith (2018)**¹¹ argued that viral content often appeals to emotional triggers, shaping individuals' perceptions and influencing their online behavior. In contrast, **Johnson (2019)**⁵ emphasized the role of credibility and source evaluation in how students perceive viral content. **Garcia (2020)**³ conducted a study focusing on the psychological effects of consuming viral content. Garcia's research revealed that exposure to viral content can trigger both positive emotions, such as amusement and inspiration, and negative emotions, such as anxiety and envy, depending on the content's nature. **Chen (2017)**² examined the role of influencers and celebrities in amplifying the virality of content. Chen's findings emphasized that the endorsement of viral content by influencers significantly affects students' perceptions and sharing behaviors.

Lee (2019)⁷ investigated the influence of echo chambers and filter bubbles on students' exposure to viral content. Lee found that students within homogenous online communities tended to perceive viral content differently from those in diverse online environments. **Wang (2018)**¹² explored the ethical considerations related to the creation and dissemination of viral content. Wang's research highlighted students' concerns about privacy violations, manipulation, and ethical dilemmas associated with sharing and endorsing

viral content. **Harris (2016)**⁴ delved into the impact of viral content on political attitudes and beliefs among students. Harris found that viral political content often reinforced existing biases and polarized viewpoints, influencing students' political perceptions.

Nguyen (2020)⁹ examined the temporal aspect of viral content perception. Nguyen's research revealed that the timing of exposure, such as during exams or major events, significantly influenced how students engaged with viral content and their emotional responses.

Kim (2018)⁶ investigated the cross-cultural differences in the perception of viral content. Kim's comparative study found that students from different cultural backgrounds exhibited varying levels of skepticism and trust when encountering viral content. **Martinez (2017)**⁸ studied the influence of algorithmic curation on students' exposure to viral content. Martinez's findings indicated that students' timelines and feeds were heavily curated by algorithms, potentially limiting their exposure to diverse viewpoints.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents: The study involved a random sample of 60 post graduate students from a state agricultural university, representing diverse academic disciplines.

Data Collection: Data was collected through structured survey through Google Form. The survey included questions about students' awareness of viral content, their views on its impact, and the constraints they felt. Survey provided an in-depth exploration of their perceptions.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from interviews were subjected to statistical analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Gender

It has been defined as the state of being male or female in relation to the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women. The gender distribution can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of students according to 'Gender' (N=60)

| Categories | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 26 | 43.33 |
| Female | 34 | 56.67 |

It is evident from the Table that there were 43.33 percent male students and 56.67 percent female students. Thus, irrespective of the actual intake by the university, the proportion of male and female students reported above is based on the availability of contacts to students at the time of data collection.

2. Mass Media Ownership

Students have been using mass media devices according to their preferences or choice for various purposes. The ownership of mass media and their frequency of use by the students can be observed from the Table 2.

3. Extent of Mass Media Use

It refers to much the students' make use of mass

Table 2: Distribution of students according to 'Mass Media Ownership' (N=60)

| Mass Media Ownership | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Smartphone | 57 | 95.00 |
| Smart Television | 9 | 15.00 |
| Laptop or Desktop | 39 | 65.00 |
| Tablet | 8 | 13.33 |
| Radio | 3 | 5.00 |
| Internet | 33 | 55.00 |

From the above table 2 it can be concluded that maximum number of students i. e., 95.00 percent students owned a smartphone, 65.00 percent students owned a laptop or a desktop, 55.00 percent students owned internet, 15.00 percent student owned smart televisions, 13.33 percent tablet and 5.00 percent owned a radio.

media in their daily life. The extent of mass media use by the students can be observed from the Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of students according to 'Extent of Mass Media Use' (N=60)

| Extent of Mass Media Use | Frequency of Use | | | Percentage | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Regular | Often | Never | Regular | Often | Never |
| Smartphone | 49 | 9 | 2 | 81.66 | 15.00 | 3.33 |
| Smart Television | 7 | 31 | 22 | 11.66 | 51.66 | 36.66 |
| Laptop or Desktop | 29 | 30 | 1 | 48.33 | 50.00 | 1.66 |
| Tablet | 10 | 20 | 30 | 16.66 | 33.33 | 50.00 |
| Radio | 4 | 11 | 45 | 6.66 | 18.33 | 75.00 |
| Internet | 51 | 9 | 0 | 85.00 | 15.00 | 0 |

It can be illustrated from the table 3 that a maximum 85.00 percent of students used internet on a regular basis, than 81.66 percent students used smartphones on a regular basis, 75.00 percent students never used radio. Half 51.66 percent student often used smart television, 50.00 percent students often used laptop or desktop, 50.00 percent students never used tablet, 48.33 percent students regularly used laptop or desktop, 36.66 percent students never used smart television, 33.33 percent students often used tablet, 18.33 percent students often used radio, 16.66 percent students regularly used tablet, 15.00 percent students often used both smartphone and internet, 11.66 percent students regularly used smart televisions, 6.66 percent students regularly used radio, 3.33 percent students never used smartphone and only 1.66 percent students never used laptop or desktop for accessing a viral social media content.

These results might have been due to the reason that large number of students who had smartphones and internet connectivity regularly utilized it for entertainment, communication, social networking and educational purposes.

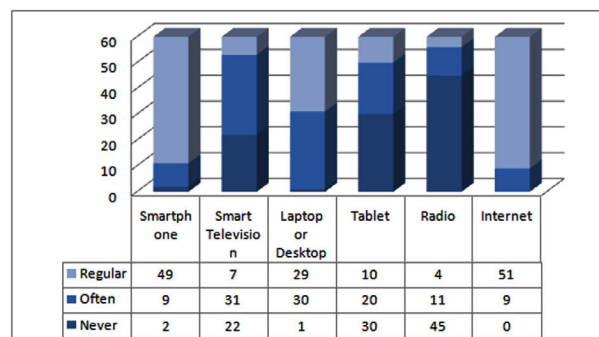


Fig. 1: Distribution of students according to 'Extent of Mass Media Use' (N=60)

4. Source of Viral Social Media Content

It refers to various social media platforms from which a piece of content, such as a post, video or image has become extremely popular and is being shared by a large number of people. The source of viral social media content can be observed in the table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of students according to 'Source of Viral Social Media Content' (N=60)

| Source of Viral Social Media Content | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Facebook | 13 | 21.66 |
| Instagram | 40 | 66.66 |
| Twitter/X | 7 | 11.66 |
| Youtube | 51 | 85.00 |
| Snapchat | 13 | 21.66 |
| Whats App | 41 | 68.33 |

The findings from the above table 4 reflects that a maximum 85.00 percent of students believed youtube as a source of viral social media content, then 68.33 percent students whats app, 66.66 percent students Instagram, 21.66 percent students believed Facebook and snapchat as the source of viral social media content and 11.66 percent

5. Perception of Students' regarding Viral Social Media Content

Students were asked to select preferred score against each statement for their perception of

Table 5 (a): Distribution of students according to 'Perception of Students' regarding Viral Social Media Content' (N=60)

| S. No. | Statements | SA | | A | | N | | D | | SD | |
|------------------------------------|--|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|
| | | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Perception of Viral Content | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | I frequently come across viral content (e. g., videos, memes, articles) on social media platforms. | 30 | 50.00 | 16 | 26.66 | 12 | 20.00 | 2 | 3.33 | 0 | 0 |
| (ii) | I believe that viral content on social media is generally harmless. | 7 | 11.66 | 15 | 25.00 | 21 | 35.00 | 10 | 16.66 | 7 | 11.66 |
| (iii) | Viral content often influences my opinions and attitudes. | 9 | 15.00 | 19 | 31.66 | 20 | 33.66 | 8 | 13.33 | 4 | 6.66 |
| (iv) | I have changed my viewpoint or taken action based on viral content I encountered on social media. | 6 | 10.00 | 15 | 25.00 | 25 | 41.66 | 12 | 20.00 | 0 | 0 |
| (v) | I believe that the rapid spread of viral content can lead to misinformation or misunderstanding of important issues. | 25 | 41.66 | 27 | 45.00 | 5 | 8.33 | 3 | 5.00 | 0 | 0 |
| (vi) | Creators of viral content should be responsible for fact-checking their content before sharing it online. | 36 | 60.00 | 16 | 26.66 | 6 | 10.00 | 2 | 3.33 | 0 | 0 |
| (vii) | I am concerned about privacy when viral content involves sharing personal stories or experiences. | 29 | 48.33 | 18 | 30.33 | 12 | 20.00 | 1 | 1.66 | 0 | 0 |

Table cont...

students believed twitter/X as a source of viral social media content.

The above outcomes may be due to the reason that in India the cost of internet is cheaper and is available to almost every person. In the university every student has their own smartphone and internet connectivity and are also active in most popular social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter etc. Therefore, the information over the internet is easily accessible and available to them in real time.

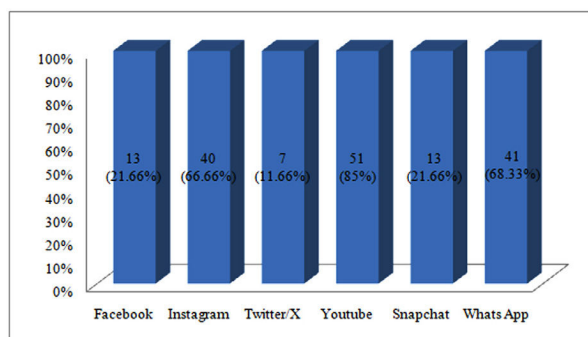


Fig. 2: Distribution of students according to 'Source of Viral Social Media Content' (N=60)

students' regarding viral social media content. The frequency and percentage of students falling under each category can be observed in the Table 5(a).

The overall perception of students towards online education can be seen in the Table 5(b).

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|
| (viii) | I actively share viral content on my own social media profiles. | 9 | 15.00 | 10 | 16.66 | 20 | 33.33 | 10 | 16.66 | 11 | 18.33 |
| (ix) | I prioritize sharing viral content that aligns with my personal beliefs and values. | 10 | 16.66 | 18 | 30.00 | 20 | 33.33 | 7 | 11.66 | 5 | 8.33 |
| Credibility Assessment | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | I always consider the credibility of viral content I encounter on social media. | 17 | 28.33 | 20 | 33.33 | 18 | 30.00 | 3 | 5.00 | 2 | 3.33 |
| (ii) | I have encountered viral content that turned out to be false or misleading. | 14 | 23.33 | 28 | 46.66 | 14 | 23.33 | 3 | 5.00 | 1 | 1.66 |
| (iii) | I fact-check viral content before sharing it on my social media profiles. | 16 | 26.66 | 27 | 45.00 | 15 | 25.00 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3.33 |
| Emotional Impact of Viral Content | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | Viral content often makes me happy or amused. | 13 | 21.66 | 19 | 31.66 | 21 | 35.00 | 3 | 5.00 | 4 | 6.66 |
| (ii) | Viral content has provoked sadness or empathy in me. | 10 | 16.66 | 11 | 18.33 | 26 | 43.33 | 8 | 13.33 | 5 | 8.33 |
| (iii) | I have felt anger or frustration due to viral content on social media. | 14 | 23.33 | 18 | 30.00 | 19 | 31.66 | 6 | 10.00 | 3 | 5.00 |
| Social Pressure and Influence | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | I have felt pressured to engage with or share viral content because others were doing so. | 7 | 11.66 | 12 | 20.00 | 19 | 31.66 | 12 | 20.00 | 10 | 16.66 |
| (ii) | Viral content has the power to shape cultural trends and societal norms. | 18 | 30.00 | 18 | 30.00 | 18 | 30.00 | 6 | 10.00 | 0 | 0 |
| Popularity and Engagement: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | The popularity of viral content does not influence my likelihood of engaging with or sharing it. | 12 | 20.00 | 29 | 48.33 | 15 | 25.00 | 3 | 5.00 | 1 | 1.66 |
| Future of Viral Content: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (ii) | I believe that viral content will continue to play a significant role in shaping online discourse in the coming years. | 15 | 25.00 | 19 | 31.66 | 20 | 33.33 | 5 | 8.33 | 1 | 1.66 |
| Platform Regulation: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | Social media platforms should play a role in regulating or moderating viral content to ensure accuracy and minimize harm. | 20 | 33.33 | 25 | 41.66 | 13 | 21.66 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3.33 |
| Awareness and Precautionary Measures: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (i) | I am aware of the potential risks associated with engaging with viral content on social media. | 28 | 46.66 | 20 | 33.33 | 8 | 13.33 | 3 | 5.00 | 1 | 1.66 |
| (ii) | I actively educate myself on how to identify false or misleading viral content. | 19 | 31.66 | 24 | 40.00 | 15 | 25.00 | 1 | 1.66 | 1 | 1.66 |
| (iii) | I encourage my peers to be cautious about sharing viral content without verifying its credibility. | 23 | 38.33 | 20 | 33.33 | 15 | 25.00 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3.33 |
| (iv) | I report viral content that I believe is harmful or spreading misinformation on social media platforms. | 21 | 35.00 | 29 | 48.33 | 8 | 13.33 | 1 | 1.66 | 1 | 1.66 |
| (v) | I take steps to protect my personal privacy when sharing or engaging with viral content on social media. | 29 | 48.33 | 23 | 38.33 | 7 | 11.66 | 1 | 1.66 | 0 | 0 |

Table 5(b): Distribution of students according to 'Perception of Students' regarding Viral Social Media Content' (N=60)

| S. No. | Categories | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Negative Perception (<54. 40036) | 9 | 15.00 |
| 2. | Neutral Perception (54. 40035614 to 83. 26630386) | 43 | 71.66 |
| 3. | Positive Perception (>83. 26630386) | 8 | 13.33 |

It is evident from the table 5(b) that a maximum 71.66 percent student had neutral, than 15.00 percent

students had negative and only 13.33 percent students had positive perception regarding viral social media content.

The results might be due to the reason that maximum numbers of the students in the university are conscious towards their academics and doesn't find themselves in linking with any viral content.

6. Benefits of Viral Social Media Content

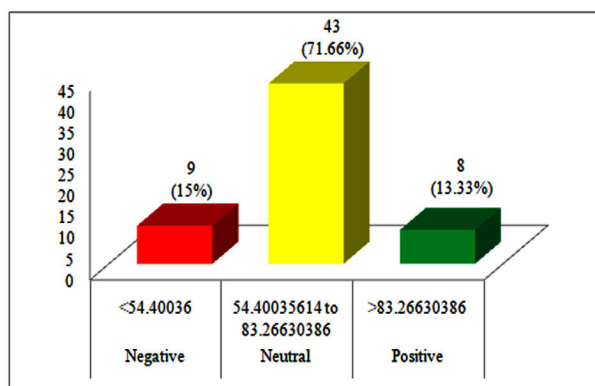


Fig. 3: Distribution of students according to 'Perception of Students' regarding Viral Social Media Content' (N=60)

Students are fascinated towards watching contents of their interest over the internet on various social media platforms. Also, they are willingly or unwillingly exposed to the content which is being shared over and over again over the internet on any social media platform. Thus, they had their own utility for the content which is being shared. The level of benefits which students felt regarding viral social media content can be observed in Table 6 (a).

Table 6(a): Distribution of students according to 'benefits of viral social media content' (N=60)

| S. No. | Statements | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Raising awareness about important social issues. | 51 | 85.00 |
| 2. | Providing a platform for creative expression and talent. | 42 | 70.00 |
| 3. | Creating a sense of community and connection among users. | 39 | 65.00 |
| 4. | Offering entertainment and amusement to users. | 37 | 61.66 |
| 5. | Inspiring positive change or social movements. | 37 | 61.66 |
| 6. | Keeping users informed about current events. | 39 | 65.00 |

| | | | |
|-----|---|----|-------|
| 7. | Fostering a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals. | 21 | 35.00 |
| 8. | Facilitating the spread of useful information and tips. | 32 | 53.33 |
| 9. | Boosting self-esteem through social validation (likes, shares, comments). | 25 | 41.66 |
| 10. | Promoting cultural diversity and global awareness. | 25 | 41.66 |
| 11. | Offering opportunities for learning and skill development. | 26 | 43.33 |
| 12. | Encouraging empathy and understanding. | 21 | 35.00 |
| 13. | Providing a break from everyday stress and routine. | 30 | 50.0 |
| 14. | Allowing users to participate in viral challenges or trends. | 22 | 36.66 |
| 15. | Showcasing unique and inspiring success stories. | 30 | 50.00 |

The overall benefit which students' felt from the viral social media content can be observed in the table 6 (b).

Table 6 (b): Distribution of students according to 'benefits of viral social media content' (N=60)

| Categories | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Low (<3.319867) | 12 | 20.00 |
| Medium (3.319867 to 12.58013343) | 36 | 60.00 |
| High (>12.58013343) | 12 | 20.00 |

It is evident from the Table that majority (60.00 per cent) of the students was in medium category followed by high category (20.00 percent) and only few students (20.00 percent) were in low category.

An apprehension for above outcomes might be that the benefits which students felt out of enlisted ones ranged in medium category this means majority of students gained benefits from viral social media content.

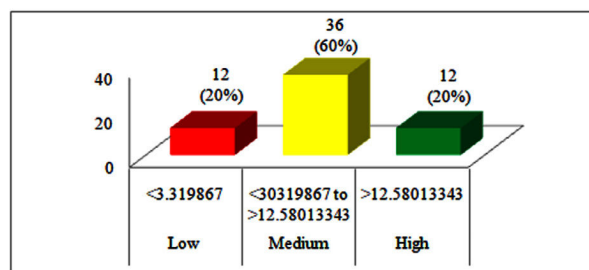


Fig. 4: Distribution of students according to 'benefits of viral social media content' (N=60)

Table 7(a): Distribution of students according to ‘Constraints of viral social media content’ (N=60)

| S. No. | Statements | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Spreading false or misleading information | 52 | 86.66 |
| 2. | Encouraging harmful behaviors or trends | 31 | 51.66 |
| 3. | Promoting addiction and excessive screen time | 39 | 65.00 |
| 4. | Creating a fear of missing out (FOMO) among users | 37 | 61.66 |
| 5. | Perpetuating cyber bullying and online harassment | 28 | 46.66 |
| 6. | Breaching personal privacy through invasive content | 27 | 45.00 |
| 7. | Fostering negative emotions such as jealousy or envy | 28 | 46.66 |
| 8. | Contributing to the spread of rumors and panic | 37 | 61.66 |
| 9. | Creating unrealistic beauty or lifestyle standards | 35 | 58.33 |
| 10. | Facilitating the spread of extremist ideologies | 23 | 38.33 |
| 11. | Overwhelming users with excessive information | 25 | 41.66 |
| 12. | Influencing users to conform to peer pressure | 24 | 40.00 |
| 13. | Causing information overload and stress | 26 | 43.33 |
| 14. | Diverting attention from real-world issues | 28 | 46.66 |
| 15. | Undermining the credibility of traditional news sources | 19 | 48.33 |

7. Constraints of Viral Social Media Content

A constraint of viral social media content refers to negative impact on the students when exposed to viral social media content. Some of the constraints which students felt regarding viral social media content can be observed in Table 7(a).

The overall constraints which students’ felt from the viral social media content can be observed in the table 7(b).

Table 7(b): Distribution of students according to ‘Constraints of viral social media content’ (N=60)

| S. No. | Categories | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Low (<2. 956603991) | 11 | 18.33 |
| 2. | Medium (2. 956603991 to 12. 34339601) | 38 | 63.33 |
| 3. | High (>12. 34339601) | 11 | 18.33 |

A cursory look at the table 7(b) shows that maximum 63.33 percent student felt constraint in medium category, then 18.33 percent students

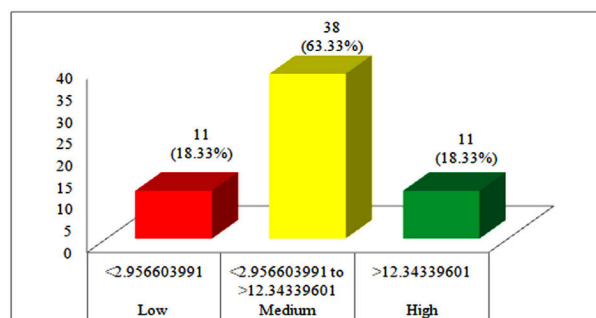


Fig. 5: Distribution of students according to ‘Constraints of viral social media content’ (N=60)

felt constraint in high category and equally 18.33 percent students felt constraint in low category.

The reason for above results may be due to students’ involvement in their academics or co-curricular activities in the university is more as compared to reflecting on any viral social media content over the internet on preferred social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The study explored several key aspects related to perception of students of a state agricultural university towards viral social media content. First, in terms of gender distribution, it was found that 43.33% of the surveyed students were male, while 56.67% were female, indicating a gender distribution based on available contacts at the time of data collection. Regarding mass media ownership, the majority of students owned smartphones (95.00%), followed by laptops or desktops (65.00%), and internet access (55.00%). On the other hand, smart televisions, tablets, and radios were less commonly owned. In terms of the extent of mass media use, 85.00% of students regularly used the internet, with 81.66% using smartphones regularly. Conversely, 75.00% of students never used radios, indicating a heavy reliance on smartphones and the internet for various purposes, including entertainment and education.

The study also explored the sources of viral social media content. It was revealed that YouTube (85.00%) was the primary source, followed by

WhatsApp (68.33%), Instagram (66.66%), and Facebook (21.66%). This trend was attributed to the widespread availability of the internet and students' active presence on popular social media platforms. In terms of students' perceptions of viral social media content, 71.66% held a neutral view, while 15.00% had a negative perception, and 13.33% had a positive perception. This suggests a balanced perspective among students, possibly due to their focus on academics and limited engagement with viral content.

Students identified several benefits of viral social media content, including raising awareness about social issues (85.00%), providing a platform for creative expression (70.00%), and fostering a sense of community (65.00%). However, they also recognized constraints, such as the spread of false information (86.66%), encouragement of harmful behaviors (51.66%), and addiction concerns (65.00%).

The study provided insights into perception of students of a state agricultural university towards viral social media content, mass media ownership, extent of mass media use, sources of viral content, perceptions, benefits, and constraints related to viral social media content. Also, apart from perception of students, these findings highlight the need for critical media literacy education and responsible content sharing on social media platforms among students.

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