THE VIRTUAL MAZE-HOW YOU TUBE VIDEOS INFUSES SYMBOLIC REALITY AND HYBRIDIZATION OF IDENTITIES: AN AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Sujata Mukhopadhyay

Head, Dept. Of Journalism and Mass Communication,
HMM College for Women, Dakshineswar, West Bengal

Tanmoy Rudra

Executive Secretary, Confederation of Indian Universities (CIU), New Delhi

Abstract: The virtual maze of Social Media and its allied application based communication systems have transformed society on two levels- one, it has forever metamorphosed the individual, who has transcended boundaries, crossed different identity stages, and is now in a state of hybridity. Two, society too has undergone a sea change with technology dominating social consciousness. In this complex situation, it needs more understanding and extended media literacy to decode the underlying messages of You Tube and Watsapp videos. Hence, proper media literacy juxtaposed with the apt understanding of the Public Sphere is needed to get out of the confusion that Social Media has created. Quoting Habermas, the Public sphere is in a state of trancendance, and human consciousness has gone into a spiral of silence(Newman).

Keywords: Social Media, Communication, Hybridity, Public Sphere.

Introduction: **New Media and the Communication Spectrum:** The prophecy that Darshan Perusekh made more than a decade ago when New media was at a very nascent stage seems to have attained a mammoth figure today. He suggested an excellent metaphor for the new shift in the Balance of Trade between the First world and the Third World in which, all images that are being produced- including cinema, books, camera techniques, locations, literature is arising from erstwhile colonies while the technological apparatus, like latest dubbing instruments, special effects, makeup, sets is emanating from the Western Metropolitan countries which process these Third World images and apparatus with sophistication.

Sitting at the threshold of the 21st century, it is thus not surprising to find that globalization that revolutionized the communication spectrum in its entirety, has not only created a multimedia superhighway, but has added more and more ammunition to it. The advent of New Media- and creation of user based interactive applications like You Tube and Whatsapp videos today has been instrumental in creating a state of contradiction, a virtual warfare. Technological determinism, as proposed by Marshall McLuhan has reached its peak with new Media Technology eating into the lives of people. Termed "social" media, the wide range of Apps developed daily has actually alienated the individual from reality. He now lives in a symbolic world, mostly cut out from reality, with images and sounds juxtaposed in a manner that suits the intention of the content maker. Like a wand, the institution that creates content on YouTube and Whatsapp videos have been highly successful, with masses gobbling up videos that are morphed, framed, primed or otherwise. In the name of bringing consensus among people and enhancing democratic features, multimedia files uploaded on YouTube have fostered separatist tendencies, fuelled religiouos intolerance, increased caste based discrimination, morphed images to subvert reality, families have become fragmented, relationships more complex. The qualitative changes in You Tube content and the sheer visual elements seen at the click of the mouse have forever transformed the individual identity, and the way he encountered images.

Youtube News Clips and Video Footages: Subjective Vs. Objective Reality: To many scholars, the universalization of YouTube and Whatsapp across countries has led wealthy and superior countries to

export and market framed news items earning handsome revenues in the information poor developing countries like India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. In the recent past, India has been witness to communal riots, uprisings and the advent of several micro and macro movements, all emanating from some form of video clip or the other. It has been alleged in most progressive news channels of India too, that political leaders have fanned religious fundamentalism, discrimination on castes by morphing pictures of public lynching of antagonistic communities from Pakistani channels and using them to promote riots. News videos keep on being uploaded, ranging from the most outrageous escapades of Gurmeet Ram Rahim, the self proclaimed Dera Saccha Sauda Sadhu, later identified as a sex maniac, to the superimposed Pakistani Flag in an Indian procession sparking communal riot, to uploading lynching, arson and destroying places of worship of the Hindus and the Muslims. In the words of Barker, "It raises crucial questions about culture and cultural identities for......(YouTube and Whatsapp videos) are a major disseminator of cultural maps of meaning and a resource for identity construction."

The interplay of the various protagonists, their relationships amongst one another, and common emotions such as love hatred jealousy, and revenge all take place within the context of the drawing, sitting or the dining room make them a perpetual favourite of millions of peoples across the world. Irrespective of peculiarities in cultural moorings and ideology, these clippings, seen either publicly or privately, bring forth a unique viewing experience as its main ingredient is sensationalism and voyeurism. Somewhere down the line, it blurs the identities of the spectators, who are on one hand the producer, as well as the consumer of the contents produced in the news clippings. For example,most of the whatsapp videos, memes are local in character, using local dictions, mannerisms, culture, fads and fashions. When the audience produce these clips, they have a specific intent in mind, which can range from blatant fundamentalism to expressing their nascent feudal character.

However, when the same producer turns audience to other peoples memes, they change their character totally. In order to perpetuate the image of a rational human being, they start protesting against the misogynist contents that are often uploaded on YouTube and whatsapp. Not only this, a constant exposure to different news clips, ranging from child prostitution to liberalization measures to promoting a clean "swacch" environ, makes him a hybrid over time, who becomes a mere spectator, bombarded with images, but unable to take a stand on any issue. The magic bullet theory, once redundant has become true with the onslaught of videos on YouTube. Research reveals that young people are hooked on to this all the time, detached from reality, creating and linable green environment, yet living in their own symbolic world, deciphering incidents as perpetuated by the System.

It is this subliminal flow of both individual and collective identities that create a culture that is neither global nor local or both—it is a kind of hybrid identity, where one draws inspiration both from his own individual identity and the global influences that he undergoes. This convergence between the global and the local is an ideal seat for a hybrid identity. In fact, no audience can today boast of being entirely original, unperturbed by other cultural forces.

It is this hybridisation of identities that goes in making the modern democratic man. He is international in his beliefs on issues like Liberalisation of the economy and the entry of Walmart, the initiation of SEZs, developed infrastructure and new consumer habits, shopping malls and flyovers, yet he becomes local as far as religious values are concerned, and that includes rituals and festivals, caste and religious consciousness. He is a sensitised individual who fights for sustainable green environment, and yet does all to destroy it by testing chemical weapons. Research on the comments given by individuals on the top 10 rated YouTube videos have revealed that a particular individual responds in various news video he sees, contradicting himself. A person who tweets or vlogs his dissent of American Military forces conducting drone warfare in Gulf States becomes fanatic regarding arson committed by his own brethren on other community. A man vouchsafing for gay marriage conducts honor killing in his home state.

***The Glocal YouTube Audience:* Juxtaposition of the Majority with the Marginal:** Gone are the days when international news could only be viewed on CNN or on BBC World. Today, any layman has his own views on the remotest of issues be it ranging from the War on Iraq, to the use of biological weapons, the victory of Trump, to the Plight of Osama bin Laden to the altered position of India in the Security Council post 9/11 attacks via YouTube clips. People give comments, subscribe to these contents. Not only international news or events, public who regularly watch YouTube news videos give their own representations of the key global issues, thereby creating their own specific truths and constructing a very particular reality.

At the same time the marginal audience, the local has also raised its voice in the form of exporting their culture, like rap and reggae to the West. The peculiar ways of dressing and the cosmetics derived from Ayurveda has a huge market in the West, as is for Oriental notions of Karma and Nirvana. Not only this, even pop stars like Madonna has made the liberal use of the Mehendi on her palms and sported the nose ring. As with the case of the musical videos, they are not at all influenced by the ideology of the capitalist nations, but the whole process is mediated by the 'ideology of mass culture'. Some communities imbibe certain traits of a particular culture which corresponds to their own culture and interpret it in their own ways.

Notwithstanding the fact that Interactive Social Media such as YouTube and Whatsapp can and must be applauded for injecting and inculcating a new consciousness not seen earlier, be it in socio-political or economic frontiers, yet it has rendered us helpless in front of the teeming multitude of imagery, thwarting us forward without any prior intimation to a global culture for which die mind is not yet prepared.

***YouTube Videos Triggering Sex and Violence:* A Public Sphere in Transition:** In the words of Mike Featherstone in his book 'Global Culture' he says, "There may be merging sets of Third cultures which themselves are conduits for all sorts of diverse cultural flows, which cannot be merely understood as the product of the bilateral exchanges between nation states. It is misleading to emergence of Third cultures as an embodiment of logic which points at homogenization, are binary logic which seeks to comprehend culture via die mutually exclusive terms of homogeneity/heterogeneity.,. must be discarded. At best, these conceptual pairs work on one face only of the complex prism, which is culture. Rather, we need to inquire into the grounds the various generative processes involving the formation of cultural images and traditions as well as the inter group struggles and interdependencies which led to these conceptual oppositions becoming frames of reference for comprehending culture within die state society which then become projected onto the globe."

The incorporation of Music videos, news clips, advertisements has set forth a new semiological environment where texts are decoded keeping in view the recipients' cultural assimilations. The feeding of violent portrayals like mob rampages, gunning spree, terrorist activities, self immolation, suicide bombers, torture on illegal immigrants has bred a new generation of audience who viciously imitate what ever is being shown.

For example, a teenager who cannot distinguish clearly between real and morphed/ superimposed or framed images might vent his anger on his younger brother by beating him up with a rod without realizing the implications of it. Recent clips ofokes a depressed soul to commit suicide by reclining him to do various task the Blue Whale Syndrome repeatedly provokes an individual to commit suicide after 50 days of the completion of various self harming 'tasks'. The game provokes the player to complete daredevil suicidal stunts, leading to several fatal accidents and even death. Moreover, a person who cannot assimilate culturally with the foreign depiction of violence, inundated with exotic settings, different from his own finds it utterly confusing to react to the violence though he is thrilled with the new experience. It can be said that in spite of existing in a social milieu where the tradition of tolerance and non-violence is rooted, the very fact that violence is portrayed in so many forms, is registered in his immature brain, recorded to its minutest detail.

Whatsapp, a very personalised and encrypted interactive social medium too is not able to escape GIFs or even video clips, often ranging between one and five minutes. Said to entertain these clips often perpetrate images of sodomy, rape, masochism, that lay latent in the minds of the people who create such content, who often garb these visuals in the form of humor. Be it clips on Savita Bhabhi, a desi nymphomaniac, to memes of individuals, most content creators according to research want to vent hatred and fear against their peers. There is a latent agression that lay hidden in the mind of the child who shares his parents cellphone during play ,and he matures into an adult, negotiating the meanings that are produced and reproduced on whatsapp videos.

Uses and Preferences of Youtube Audiences: **A Research Study:** For this study, a random sample survey of 100 users of YouTube between age 12 and 18 were interviewed. The first phase of the survey involved informal interviews with the help of a pre-designed questionnaire. The questions related to their viewing habits and their likes and dislikes. Ten of them were later interviewed again for detailed interaction in homely environment.

Out of this study's sample, 55 per cent said they preferred to watch films or film songs on YouTube. The rest preferred to watch tutorials, news clips and cartoons. 10 per cent preferred preferred horror and crime videos. 5 per cent liked sports - mostly cricket . Of the largest group that liked films and film songs more than anything else, 39 gave films especially violent and fighting movies as their first choice.

When asked who decides what is to be watched, an interesting picture emerged. When watching alone, 87 per cent users watch whatever they want; only 13 per cent users are told - in absentia - what they should be watching and what not. It was not clear how many of them actually listened to their parents' instructions.

Fondness for Crime and Horror- Horror and crime serials and news followed as second and third priorities. But during sports events, sports programmes took precedence over all other kinds of programmes. Many of the younger users interviewed said they believed the cartoons to be real characters. The parents interviewed mentioned a number of behaviour problems that they attributed to overexposure to YouTube, were defiance of authority, lack of concentration and swings in moods.

Vishnu Rajan, a fifth standard student of Bhavan's Vidya Mandir,58 Kochi, says that he will go in only for Van Heusen shirts and Park Avenue trousers when he grows up. Concern for appearance is not new. But it was never the obsession that it has turned now. Mrs.Greeta Girish, a beautician, noticed that her clientele longed to get younger, trendier and more beautiful. "With so many channels there is so much of awareness today.

The youngsters in music videos on YouTube all days and by the evening want to look like them," she opines. Mrs.Beeda Antony, 59, a Kolkata -based school counsellor backs Mrs.Greeta's views as she has found young girls, barely into high school, plucking their eyebrows and waxing their legs.

Erotica is so casualty tossed into most of these videos that it leaves the users a harried lot. To Sigmund Freud,however, there is nothing alien about youngsters indulging in such spectacles. In describing the aggressiveness, which he took to be a characteristic of human beings, Freud quoted the words of the Roman playwright Plautus "Homo Hominy Lupus"—man is a wolf to man. Freud viewed aggressiveness among humans as the expression of 'Thanatos' or the drive towards Death and destruction that is opposed and harnessed to the drive towards life, creativity and love, or Eros. In his words, "Their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill Him."

Some younger users see the horror serials 'X-Zone', 'Anhonee', 'Kohra' etc. with great excitement. However, a closer scrutiny reveals that most of the episodes deal with adult problems like extramarital

affairs, love triangles etc. where the murder occurs. Hence, sex is mixed with violence, creating an atmosphere of fear. Children, thus not only experience fear of the horror scenes but also participate voyeuristically at the shameless passions of crime. It is this sense of excitement and fear that is greatly capitalized by the producers who love to give users the "thrill". It is this latent voyeuristic gaze that remains with them for their later years, being vented during times of aggression.

Misogyny, Torture and Pseudo Patriotism: Many YouTube videos which go viral demonstrate a woman being tortured and humiliated , this will be the orientation with which they will view their own lives, waiting for it to surface. This in the future manifests in one way or the other, permeating the social environment with violence— thus forming the background for a popular culture where violence pervades. Thus violence in the context of our popular culture is reflected by and is itself a reflection of Social Media Platforms. The excitement of inflicting pain or death and the terror of seeing these up close, they suggest we may so learn to steel ourselves, to become better able to "take" the violence before our eyes. A common accompaniment of such learning is to come to look at the infliction of suffering in a purely aesthetic way, to make judgments about the expertise or the strength or the courage of the combatants, or to look for elements of beauty in the encounter itself.

The Indian orientation towards violence as said earlier, is also the by-products of its tensions with Pakistan, the entire political map being inundated with fears of war, disasters, terrorist attacks, and riots. This animosity also finds reflection in TV serials and films where the patriotic sentiment is exploited to the fullest, giving sanctity to war for the benefit of the motherland. In news programs like 'Hindustani'we find Indian soldiers whose actins are dramatized, showing how they create all kinds of violence in order to defend their motherland. Recently, after the resuming of fresh tensions on the borderline of India and Pakistan, increase of terrorism and abductions the theme of patriotism pervades our popular culture. These viral news clips in their endeavour to boost patriotism among the masses, actually succeeds in creating mass hysteria against the Muslims. Pakistan or rather Pakistanis are branded as Zealots and traitors who perpetuate violence. Indian serials depicting patriotism often goes on to filmic excesses, hailing the country as Mother and that Indian soldiers can stoop to any limits to protect their sovereignty, if it is even at the cost of other peoples lives.

As William James points out, "What excites and interests the looker-on at life, what the romances and the statues celebrate and the grim civic monuments remind us of is the everlasting battle of the powers of light with those of darkness, with heroism reduced to its barest chance, yet ever and anon snatching victory from the jaws of death." The same notion is reiterated by Bok in her book 'Mayhem' pg. 29 in regard to the film 'Independence Day' that "appeal to the sense of delight we know from childhood in wreaking havoc, knocking down towers, and seeing fireworks explode and buildings crumble to dust. It is when the harms done to the victims is to be enjoyed for its own sake that the paradox of entertainment violence is most striking to the uninitiated."

Viral Horror Videos, Real and the Vicarous: The boundaries between reality and unreality are especially permeable for young users of YouTube. They are unable through at least the age of 13 or 14 to distinguish fact from fantasy. Even older users rarely manage to keep "real life" and vicarious experience in watertight compartments. Children are also mare likely to conclude that violence on die screen reflects real life abuses if they have any personal experience of abuse in their family or neighborhood. For them, what they witness at home and on the streets reinforces what they see on the screen. They are exposed, before they are in any position to distinguish what they see on the screen on the screen from real life, to amounts and levels of entertainment violence that are potentially more brutalizing than many adults.

In Britain, the video 'Child's Play 3' was at issue when two 10 year olds tormented, then murdered a toddler, James Bulgar, after viewing and later when a teenager Suzanne Capper, 65 The fear that inanimate objects could come alive to terrorize us is an old one; many a ghost story and Twilight Zone episode has been based upon it. The scariest element, though, is the uncertainty involved in the object's animation. Is the doll actually alive, or is the character being plagued by foe doll simply going insane?

And how are we, as viewers, supposed to tell the difference? There are other serials that bring out the condition of the Indian society.

'Haqueequat' is a hard hitting dramatized version of real life stories of atrocities ranging from child abuse to child labor, dowry deaths, custodial torture, rape and death, immoral traffic, domestic violence and so oa Having dealt with several Human Rights violations including the famous Bhagalpur Blindings Case66, Haqueequat also featured recent news items where it dramatized the modus operandi of two women who were convicted and sentenced to death by hanging by die Supreme Court for their crime of kidnapping kids, forcing them to beg and later kill them. Another recent incident whose dramatized version telecasted related to die fake mental asylum in Erwadi near Chennai where mentally deranged people used to be chained caught fire in which all the 25 patients were burnt alive.

Also shown were episodes on militancy in Kashmir and the August 6* incident in Muzaffarpur where their parents hanged the two young lovers because they were against their progeny's love for each other. Not onfy this, if we analyze the construction of gender and nation in the YouTube clips, we would actually encounter die ideological assumptions underlying and reinforcing the stereotypical definitions of Indian nationhood. Prahlad Kakkar, owner of an Advertising Agency in North India, has observed: —" The household usage of women is truly exploitative, showing women as dowdy, unattractive housewives who slave for their families without any personal ambition of enslaving."

Conclusion and Observations: The backbone of the present study of YouTube videos, news clips, musical videos and how it is situated in the contemporary global order clearly indicates a basic assumption that New and Interactive Social media like YouTube plays in the role of human behaviour modification, both on an empirical plane as well on an intuitive plane. As far as the question of impact of mediated messages are concerned, the level at which it occurs is still incohesive or blurred. Numerous researchers and field studies have been carried out to gauge the layers at which media impact is at its height, but no conclusive evidence has been found relating to the fact that New Media is the sole cause of a certain effect or impact in any individual". However, one can infer with certainty that mediated messages do have an effect both in terms of long-term cultural transformation as well as change in individual perception. This perhaps would furnish an explanation regarding the influx of advertisements in the YouTube media content.

Now that the question of New media effects is on the affirmative, one can advance an interesting as well as illuminating subject of media studies - interpretation of mediated messages. It is evident from related literature that people of different cultures interpret mediated messages differently. Thus, the question of the influence of television violence on children will be treated from different angles across different cultures. This could either negate or affirm the erstwhile predominance of the western theorising on media effects.

This research has focus mainly focussed on a number of issues- the first being how YouTube as a medium is perceived by young urban users, how and in what form do programs containing violence influence them. The second question that this research tries to address is how it manifests itself.

It should be mentioned at the outset that this study is done keeping in mind the regional and cultural differences between the two parts of the globe. As such, India as a developing country is typified by certain characteristics as far as propagation of New media is concerned - it is denoted as a "high-context" culture as elaborated by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1977). According to Hall, mass media operates differently in different contexts. Hence for the feasibility of our research, we must operate keeping certain basic tenets into consideration. First, communication in a culture such as ours is typically short, pithy and poetic. They can be understood by members of the "in group" in question by a member of the group in question but will be baffling to outsiders. When dealing with touchy issues, our communication style is not particularly specific, but weaves a web of inference around that issue assuming that the parties involved can draw their own conclusion.

Keeping in mind the throngs of illiteracy in juxtaposition with New media spear-heading like an imperialist it remains to be seen whether violent content in television immunises users forever or whether it is the cause of latent tension and aggression which manifests itself from time to time. Working on an area of such magnitude is not an easy task as the main respondents had very strong individual and often contradictory opinions on the portrayal of violence.

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