

Digital Art on Facebook: A Case Study on Social Media and Environmental Communication

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Abstract: *Communication tools are used for awareness. The use and implication of the tools does have a chronological interconnection with respect of a technological change/shift. Indian environment which is rich with diversity is in danger in the post colonial period and its policies. There are measures taken by governmental and other bodies to make aware against the exploitation of the environment. The main purpose of these campaigns is to develop of understanding the issues and a step (action) to take forward. There are also events and competitions conducted in high profile as part of campaigning. As a result a large amount of media text (mainly posters) is being shared and circulated over new media platforms, hence its effect on environment protection is yet to understand. This paper aims to understand the trends and scope of such environmental awareness posters which are created and shared with digital media. The effect of an awareness program is successful only with the mass reach-ability and new digital media stands for the same.*

Key Words: *Social Media, Environment, Design, Environment.*

1. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS – AN INDIAN CONTEXT:

Communication tools are used for creating awareness on environment and related issues. The use and implication of those tools does have a chronological interconnection with respect of a technological change/shift. In the past two decades, environment has attracted the attention of decision makers, scientists and even laymen in many parts of the world. They are becoming increasingly conscious of issues such as famines, droughts, floods, scarcity of fuel, firewood and fodder, pollution of air and water, problems of hazardous chemicals and radiation, depletion of natural resources, extinction of wildlife and the dangers to flora and fauna. People are now aware of the need to protect the natural environmental resources of air, water, soil and plant life that constitute the natural capital on which man depends. The role of media in this process is significant.

The environmental issues are important because the absence of their solutions is more horrible. Unless environmental issues are not solved or not taken care of the coming generations may find earth worth not living. The need of the planet and the needs of the person have become one. Meinhold and Malkus notes social context, external conditions and personal norms and habits are three principal barriers to behaviour change (2005). The major aim of any environment awareness is to make an impact over these three barriers for people.

In Indian context, Ministry of Environment & Forests organizes various awareness programs through traditional, institutional and new media. The Ministry has taken various initiatives for strengthening Environment Education (EE) in the formal education curriculum. For this purpose, the Ministry had been closely interacting with the University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the State Education Department to ensure integration of environmental concept into the curriculum. Apart from governmental actions, there many private organizations and NGO create environmental awareness among Indian citizens (Annual Report 2011-2012 of the Ministry of Environment and forests). The use of new media (social networking websites) for environmental awareness has seen in recent years globally. This paper aims to study those texts for environmental awareness (aimed at Indian environment or made for Indian audience) created digitally and circulated online. The primacy of this study is to understand the trends and scope of such environmental awareness texts (mainly posters and other digital arts) which are created and shared with digital media. The effect of an awareness program is understood only with the mass reach-ability.

2. DIGITAL ART: AS A TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:

Digital art is a general term for a range of artistic works and practices that use digital technology as an essential part of the creative and/or presentation process (Paul, 2006). The contemporary digital art extends its creativity along with traditional art forms – paintings, drawing, and sculpture and music/sound art (Gere, 2006). There are many innovative digital arts such as games and interactive videos in the online market. Human – computer interaction (HCI) plays a colossal role in this awareness.

Play with Fire (PWF) is an interactive installation challenging its participants to ignite generative fires over live streaming video of forests. The installation is designed to raise awareness towards sustainability issues such as climate change and forest fires. PWF initially presents its audience with a mash up of forest fire news, followed by playful

interaction with fire and forests through a gestural interface. Finally, it connects to its audience mobile phones granting access to a user specific web application depicting the forest they burnt, regenerating in real-time. The forest will take from some months to years to revolve to its original state, depending on the user's performance (Monica Mendes et al., 2012).

At the virtual Green Museum (www.greenmuseum.org/what_is_ea.php) there is a forum discussing terms eco-art, art in nature, land art, etc. stating that 'environmental art' is "art that helps improve our relationship with the natural world" while admitting that the definition itself is a work in progress as the discussion continues. Tiffany Holmes defines eco-art as "art of all media with an ecological theme" but emphasizes that "eco-art tends to focus on singular works that occupy or reclaim a particular geography for a specific reason, such as designing a park on a public landfill"(2006).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN:

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper aims to study new media texts for environmental awareness (designed for Indian environment or made for Indian audience) created digitally and circulated online. For the study 30 posters were selected. The posters were created as part of World Environmental Day poster designing competition and of 2012 with the theme green economy. The branding management company Organic BPS (<http://www.organicbps.com>) conducted the event and promoted through a Facebook page named Kerala Tourism (<https://www.facebook.com/Keralatour>). The selected 30 posters were shortlisted out of 350 for the final round.

The major limitation of the study is to understand the empirical reach and impact on a wider audience of these posters. However the user engagement within the original posters is studied in terms of social connections (likes, share, and comments) which help to understand the virility and accomplishments of the posters. The users of Facebook here could like, share and comment on the posters. Hence, the posters turn to be viral and become public service awareness text. The trends and scope of the posters can be determined by understanding the designing aspects (strategies), appeal of posters and audience initial response on the page.

4. TRENDS AND SCOPE OF DIGITAL ART ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

The Facebook page of the study is Kerala Tourism with 64,747 likes as on November 10, 2013. All the selected posters are posted in separate album World Environment Day Poster Design Contest ([https://www.facebook.com/media /set/?set=a.433718606652004.102246.112098462147355](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.433718606652004.102246.112098462147355)). The main theme of poster design competition was Green economy. Hence, the most of the posters were of ecological significance with reference to the economy. There were different appeals in posters created by contestants. Logical, humor, satire, fear and emotional appeals were used principally for the posters which are selected. The majority of posters demand the audience to repay to the nature; realize the danger of the nature and adapt to alternative and environmental friendly changes. There were also a recognizable trend in posters for a longing for past i.e., learning from the history. Few posters were futuristic with the connotation of there is no future if we move with this pace of environmental destruction.

The potential scope of such posters and other digital arts are to be understood with a dimension of new media studies. Every campaign is validated as a success by its mass reach-ability and action. An advertisement is justified when it is striking public cause or interest. The following chart shows the social connections of the posters under study in the album.

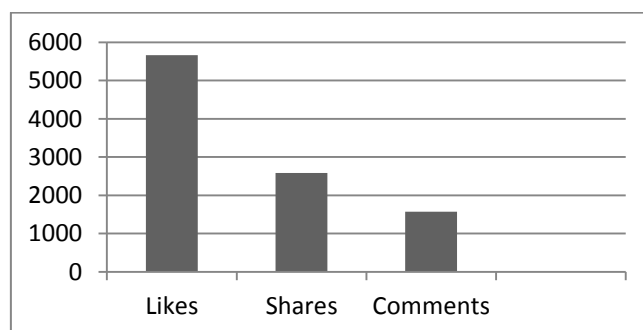


Table 1. The total numbers of likes, shares and comments on selected posters

With the result in Figure 1, it is understood that that highest user liked (5659) than shares (2588) and comments (1570) (as on 26 November 2013). Facebook has become one of the largest platforms in the world for sharing real time information (Parveen, 2011). Facebook allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user generated content in a virtual community. By understanding this significance of online medium the media producers can achieve more result in creating awareness on environment. The concept of viral does depend on the quantity of social connections (shares, likes and comments) of a media text uploaded. In his seminal

work on social networking shares, Daniel Kahneman (2011) concludes the idea that a person shares online text when the text represents his conscious and unconscious system of thinking. The former level of thinking and sharing will get more effect in real – time (real – life) action towards the environment here in this case. He also contributes the following variables as factors of sharing (liking) the content – repeated experience, clear display, coherence, good mood, feels effortless, feels true, good and familiar (Kahneman, 2011). Here, the Facebook page (Kerala Tourism) with users from India does engage with the posters of WED 2012 by Organic BPC. The total number of shares does imply the accomplishment of the texts.

5. CONCLUSION:

A message becomes viral when more users engage with the text (Burman, 2012). Users retain the text within mind and also share to their circle as their representation. With the study of selected posters and literature, it can comprehend that the digital art can serve as a communication tool for making environment awareness. The underlining capacity of the digital is with the artist (messenger) who creates the art (message) and the content manager who post and circulate the media text online (environment of the message).

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WEB REFERNECES:

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