

The Impact of Virality on the Creative Process and Mental Well-Being of Film Creators in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The social media viral effect requires movie producers to consider achieving excellence in narrative art as well as incorporating measures for increasing the popularity and profitability of their work. In this script, *Behind the Feed*, the phenomenon of viral effect is demonstrated through a character named Lintang, a film graduate who utilizes viral effect through buying counterfeit views and followers to save a shelter for street kids, help take care of her family, and entice film companies. This qualitative narrative investigation applies theories related to Deception Behavior Theory and Image Repair Theory in incorporating aspects of how manipulating viral effect leads to a degradation of professional trust and relations. Restoration comes through admitting a mistake, taking corrective actions, and restoring a definition of success based on qualitative aspects opposed to quantity.

Keywords: film industry, mental health, social media, virality, virality manipulation

INTRODUCTION

Within the current dynamic and fast-paced digital environment, the concept of virality has become an important feature in the design of social media platforms. In this regard, Hardiansyah (2023) argues that the word "virality" has been derived from the word "virus," which symbolizes an object that spreads rapidly and effortlessly from one individual to another. In their work, the concept of virality shows the rapid spread of information from one individual to another by social networks (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). In the current digital environment, the concept of virality symbolizes the "virus-like" nature or the ability to spread from one individual to another from one platform to another (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the current advancement in the field of information technology, it has become possible to access data from different geographical locations at speeds that were not imaginable in the past. Viral content is often emotionally charged and "shareable," which allows it to attract the attention of the whole nation in a short span of time (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Viral phenomenon on social platforms has not only impacted interpersonal communication but has become an increasingly important phenomenon on different levels of business activities, including the film industry. The viral phenomenon can spread and receive massive interaction on various issues and products disseminated on online platforms. According to Rizki (2025), in a virtual world of social interactions on platforms and online communities, a phenomenon of user-generated content has taken different dimensions and names depending on various levels of creativity. Rizki explained different dimensions of user-generated content, including various content such as viral challenges involving different scene cuts.

This organically generated content (UGC) has been found to convey more promotion than commercial advertisements because UGC is seen as more authentic and personal (Martínez-Navalón et al., 2020). UGC also represents an evolution in the concept of audiences from passive information recipients to active contributors in the dissemination of promotion-related information across the internet. The concept of virality that includes the active contribution of various internet users in terms of UGC creation is not only an important

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factor in boosting overall levels of engagement across the internet but also helps in promoting the dissemination of specific information associated with entertainment and movies in the concerned industry. As Lin et al. (2018) emphasize that engagement of audiences in the creation of UGC can contribute to increasing the audience's interest in viewing the content or promoting the dissemination of the associated message into the digital world.

In an Indonesian context, many of the films appear to use the UGC in a very successful manner. For example, in the *KKN di Desa Penari* film of 2022, a reaction wave in the form of story analysis, video recording of theater-like settings, and parody videos was experienced on the TikTok and YouTube applications (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika, 2022). Additionally, in *Mencuri Raden Saleh* in 2022, the film has experienced widespread reaction and engagement by the viewers in the form of comments, re-releases, and online community discussions related to the content of the film (Ciersya et al., 2023 and Yeremia et al., 2024, citing research by the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in 2022). In the animated *Jumbo* film released in 2025, it is evident that social media can catalyze and influence the online popularity of films by movie players in an efficient manner (Marvela, 2025).

The viral contents from films in the social media may heighten audience interest in films, improve the film's reputation by virtue of increased interest and enthusiasm even before the film is officially released in theaters or after release. Social media helps the production houses of films reach the wider audience by penetrating the marketing expenditure limitation of promoting films by dispersing information from User-Generated Content in films that reach the audience in films with high efficiency (IDS Education, 2024). Therefore, the virality concept in the field of social media can be interpreted as the momentum behind the change in the pattern of film consumption and promotion in Indonesia or environments with the same culture and setting that the change is of significant effect in the marketing pattern and the audience engagement and interest in films in existence (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The role of social media platforms has been critical to this process, allowing movie content to go viral' through various platforms such as collaborations with influencers, engaging trailers, new and trending hashtag campaigns, and attractive behind-the-scenes segments (Lobato, 2010). But underlying this success story, the complexity of managing and tapping into virality effectively exists. This refers to the challenge of sustaining this momentum, since virality tends to have a short shelf life, with the need to continually develop methods to retain the community's interest once a new trend has passed into history. In addition, managing virality tends to be intricately connected with managing uncertainty of outcomes since this tends to be influenced by a multiplicity of factors such as the emotional response of target groups to content, algorithmic shifts on platforms, and rapidly evolving socio-cultural conditions. A particular content item may fail notwithstanding great planning on the part of content developers, or a humble post' may end up going viral.' Consequently, underpinning this thesis or research work, this creative endeavor, submitted to fulfill the requirements of a full-length movie/feature film on film industry topics, addresses virality' from a dramatic perspective.

The script for the movie called *Behind the Feed* tells the tale of Lintang, a new film school alumnus who struggles with having his documentary film accepted by a production house but finds it rejected for being less commercially viable.' Instead, he is asked to make it go viral on social media websites. With all this going through his head, Lintang uses all sorts of deceiving strategies such as buying fake views and followers until his movie is finally made and readied for release. But before this release could take place, Lintang's going viral' scam is revealed, and this leads the protagonist of this movie's tale to take a closer look at what true success' means.

This screenplay sheds light on the issue of virality in the modern social media age and the repercussions that follow. The script also introduces the conflict that the creator encounters between his own belief system and the market forces that are always in conflict with film practitioners. The script touches upon the issues pertaining to ethics in the creative process that are relevant in the current social context. The Lintang character's manipulating behavior, such as

the purchase of fake views, is used in the script to critique the tactics that are commonly used in the film industry to gain immediate popularity.

In this script for the film, the research questions are: a) Why does Lintang perform the act of viral manipulation? b) What are the effects or consequences of Lintang's manipulation of virality? c) How does Lintang overcome the effects resulting from his actions of manipulation? Answers: a) Lintang's motives for carrying out his actions on viral manipulation are: save his workplace, his parents' standard of living will improve, and save money for marriage. b) Lintang experiences the effects of loss of professional trust, disturbance in interpersonal relationships between people at work and in his social life, and mental agony or crisis in the form of self-confidence crisis. c) Lintang changes his life by accepting his mistakes in the act of manipulation and rebuilding his social trust using digital media as reflection and self-image reconstruction.

From an academic perspective, the significance of this research is to fill the gap in the research regarding the effects of virality on the creative processing and artistic value, which is still unresearched and unexplored, especially related to the key factors regarding the literature on virality on social media in the context of the film industry. First, the lack of information or the need to fill the gap regarding the effects of virality pressure on the creative processing and decisions related to art in the Indonesian context. Various studies related to the topic also focused on the marketing-related aspects (Iskandar, 2025; Susanti & Wisesa, 2020; Satrio, 2024). From the practical perspective, the significance of this research is to offer insights on how to critically consider the reality of virality without undermining the artistic aspect. Thus, the significance of this film script is to offer relevance to the creative industry in the Indonesian context related to the topics of virality and art.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This script incorporates a few theoretical foundations related to the concept of virality. The first theoretical foundation used in this script is the Deception Behavior Theory by Sonja Utz in 2005. The theoretical foundation has been used to interpret Lintang's reasons and psychological conditions in indulging in viral manipulation. The other theoretical foundation used in this script is the Image Restoration Theory by Benoit in 2015.

The theory developed by Utz (2005) helps to describe the act of manipulation or deception during online communications. It identifies various online manipulations or deceptions and the reasons that drive individuals to manipulate online to achieve certain objectives. According to Utz (2005), there exist various forms of online deceptions that can be categorized into hiding one's identity on the internet, category deception online, and online aesthetic deception.

Type of deception used in this creative writing: Attractiveness deception. Attractiveness deception occurs whereby a person tries enhancing their looks by either photo editing or disseminating information about their social status. In most cases, this type of deception is normally fueled by idealized self-presentation. The process of idealized self-presentation involves a person's quest to have a more appealing self-image all in the bid to acquire acceptance socially. An example of this idealized self-presentation process involves people, mostly males, overestimating facts about their educational background, profession, or income status (Whitty, 2002). The above was done in a bid to improve one's socioeconomic standing in society. Attractiveness deception can be viewed as the most toxic form of deception amongst other types of deception. The motives of Lintang in carrying out this creative writing aspect of digital deception lie in saving his office space from eviction and giving his parents a better life.

The second theory used in this research is Image Restoration Theory. Image Restoration Theory was created by William L. Benoit in 2015. According to Image Restoration Theory,

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there is a need to repair an individual's reputation in cases of accusation, criticism, or suspicion

of negative action. Benoit identifies there are five types of image restoration: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The two types of image restoration that have been adopted in this screenplay to repair Lintang's public image are evasion of responsibility and corrective action.

The evasion of responsibility technique is adopted when an accused refuses to completely disavow any involvement in an improper action but simultaneously attempts to minimize the negative impact of that action towards his or her own public image with respect to that action (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Various forms of evasion of responsibility include provocation, defeasibility, accident, and basis of intentions. In the film script, Lintang employs the basis of intentions form of evasion of responsibility because he does not deny his actions but only asserts that his intentions were positive, not to harm anyone but to do other things through other means (p. 24). The second technique is that of corrective action. When a person is accused of improper action, he or she may promise to make corrections to prevent the occurrence of improper action again. An apology in its sincere form would thus make an enormous impact with respect to repairing any damage to his or her public image. In the film script, there is an apology offered by Lintang to all his fellow workmates, family, and girlfriend for his initial mistakes committed against them. His apology may have a positive impact with respect to his public image.

The methodology of the study uses a qualitative approach that takes a narrative approach to explore individual meanings in depth in connection with the virality phenomenon in the film industry. According to Creswell (2007), the qualitative approach through the narrative method has enabled the researcher to conduct interviews with the target five participants to derive a comprehensive and realistic understanding of individual meanings of the effects of virality on their creative undertakings and mental states. A narrative approach has enabled the presentation of the findings of the study in an orderly manner to enrich the film script with meanings from social reality and individual experiences of professionals in the creative world.

In this manner, the authors were able to recreate the experiences of the participants through carrying out interviews with professionals in the film industry particularly screen writers, producers, and directors to fully understand the effects the phenomenon of virality has on the aforementioned. This narrative structure allows the findings from the research to be presented in an organized manner in a way in which the result will add meaning to the screenplay through knowledge informed by the experiences of industry professionals.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

This genre chosen for the film script is drama. Using the definition provided by Selbo in 2014, this genre of stories tends to examine themes with realism and a seriousness of intent. In most cases, stories written using this genre have themes of human weaknesses, disappointment, hope, and even tragedy. In this film script, the drama describes Lintang's journey as a protagonist. I will help the character accomplish his goal of saving his workplace, as well as increasing the quality of life for his parents, as well as saving money for marriage.

The screenplay written for this film is done from a third-person perspective. This makes it easier for the audience to understand completely about the character's internal world related to their desires, needs, motivations, and emotions. Besides, there is a linear narrative structure used in this script with some flashbacks to explain internal reasons behind some specific traits exhibited by the main character.

Genres codes and Convention

Each movie genre, as stated by Selbo (2014), has its own unique elements which make a film interesting, and one of these elements is related to the usage given to the cinematic elements and conventions. The first element is the character, which in most cases should represent the "ordinary person," carrying experiences that will appeal to the viewer. The significance appears through the central protagonist, who challenges the current status quo that is labeled as "virality" in the film industry.

Regarding the setting, Selbo (2014) believes that stories set in the contemporary era tend to be more easily understood by the audience. Regarding the setting in the film, the setting is centered in familiar areas including a boarding house, a coffee shop, Lintang's parents' residence, and finally the production house. Often the occurrences in the story tend to involve situations which relate to the deep emotional aspects involving lack of hope, low self-esteem, confidence levels, and the inability to protect oneself. These aspects occur in the screenplay as Lintang's documentary RESCUE is rejected by the production house for being too commercial and further heightened by the economic pressure imposed on him by his parents.

Theme

This screenplay examines the issue of the burden of virality in the film industry and its outcome as a barrier for creatives. To conceptualize this issue, the plot revolves around Lintang, a new graduate in film who struggles to get the production house to accept his animal rescue-themed film. The reason for rejecting the film is that it lacks commercial viability and should rather start by going viral on social media. To live up to these standards, Lintang turns to deceit and buying fake views and likes in cyberspace to make his film go viral, finally succeeding in having a production through various manipulations. Just before the release of the film, the trick behind making it viral gets uncovered, and Lintang ends up facing the morality behind achieving success in the viral culture era.

Plot

In writing the story *Behind the Feed*, the structure of the plot uses the Eight-Sequence framework that was originally created by Frank Daniel and later detailed in the work of Paul Joseph Gulino in 2004. The eight sequences are comprised of the Status Quo & Inciting Incident, the Predicament & Lock-In, the First Obstacle & Raising the Stakes, Rising Action & the Midpoint, the Subplot, the Climax of the Second Act, the Main Culmination & Aftermath, and the Resolution.

The story begins with Lintang, an idealistic young film graduate, attending a pitching session at the Arrow Production House to pitch his idea of saving dogs from a slaughterhouse in his movie. The reason Lintang's movie idea was rejected was because it was "non-commercial." The producer's advice to Lintang was that he should first create the buzz about his movie on social networking sites to generate market interest in his work. This is the point at which the story takes a turn and Lintang plans more manipulative ways to achieve his goal.

The midpoint is where Lintang decides to use the manipulative approach through the buying of fraudulent views and followers. His campaign Instagram account (@rescuethepaw.id), receives tremendous popularity on social media sites and soon goes viral. Mainstream media websites soon cover the news. Even Lintang gets called back to talk about his project again at Arrow Production House. This midpoint indicates the utmost turning point in the dynamic relationship between the characters since Lintang realizes the potential ramifications associated with his act.

The story of *Behind the Feed* ends with the resolution, in which Lintang finds reconciliation with himself and his family, specifically his father. Despite the failure of his feature film, he feels that he has achieved his intent with his attempt to make a documentary. The resolution of the story emphasizes the personal development of Lintang in realizing that success does not always require numbers. Instead, it can pertain to its impact.

Characters

Main Characters:

Lintang

Age: 23 years old

Lintang is a young film school graduate with lots of ideals and empathy related to animal rescue causes in general and dogs in shelters in particular. His personal history of having to watch animal abuse in his youth due to his own family's financial struggles makes him feel a compelling need to fix this past issue through his social activism and filmmaking projects. However, this young artist still pursues his passion through his voluntary work at the animal shelter and managing their Instagram account in his free time as a barista in a coffee shop to make ends meet. On the other hand, Lintang is impulsive, obstinate, and tends to take actions independently without discussing them with others (for instance, buying his way to look credible to his profession by buying followers and views to project success). In both relationships, those of family and Novia, Raymond has complex feelings. He cares for them all but struggles in communication and is torn between his ideals and financial necessities and the requirements of those around him.

Supporting Characters:

Novia

Age: 23 years old

Novia is Lintang's girlfriend. She has been his girlfriend for five years. She has a job at Arrow Production House, and she is shown to be tidy, organized, and financially stable. Novia is a supportive girlfriend. She lends Lintang her work phone, buys him small gifts to show she cares, and encourages him to think ahead of his future. At the same time, she is very aware of Lintang's lack of communication, at one point being so disappointed that she starts to become distant and develops an emotional closeness with another man. As an individual, Novia shows the struggle to balance loyalty with reason while at the same time being extremely emotionally drained because of her relationship.

Ratna

Age: 52 years old

Ratna, Lintang's mother, is depicted as a caring and loving homemaker who always takes her son's side despite the poor financial situation of the family. She sometimes becomes a mediator between Lintang and Arif during instances of fighting between them, trying to understand Lintang's idealism but at the same time being conscious of her family's requirements. During times of distress, Ratna seems to be beset with a feeling of guilt, for example, while justifying why they must sell Chiko, their pet dog.

Arif

Age: 55 years old

Arif, Lintang's father, is a practical, no-nonsense working-class man who is very sensitive about monetary issues, thanks to the impact of debt and the cost of living. He looks at most issues in the same way that he looks at making ends meet, to the extent that he is forced to sell Chiko to settle his debts. He is a man who will resort to aggressive behavior if he feels disrespected by Lintang, but the paradox is that despite his rough, dictatorial way of showing it, Arif is a man who truly cares for his family, but in a way that is not in sync with Lintang's idealism.

Conflicts

In the script *Behind the Feed*, three different kinds of conflict are experienced by the protagonist, Lintang, all of which are interrelated. Man vs. society conflict is encountered by the protagonist when his intentions to “make films that are driven by the interest of the people” are threatened by the need to make “viral and profitable videos.” Man vs. himself conflict is experienced by the protagonist as he is “forced to choose between his values and the profit and prestige that come from using deceptive methods, like paying for fake views and followers—but

these actions come to haunt him through his guilt and emotional anguish.” Finally, the version of the conflict that involves man vs. man is presented through Lintang’s conflictual relations, firstly in his relation to his parents, who neither understand his occupation in the film industry, and secondly, in his relation to his friends, who offer him different suggestions on what to do.

CONCLUSION

The script *Behind the Feed* exemplifies the way the trend of virality on social media has set the standard for content developers across all scales and sectors, including the film business. This is shown through the character’s rejection from Arrow Production House and the challenge issued to him to make his conceptual story go viral to reduce the risk he faces in business. *Behind the Feed* highlights the character known as Lintang, who depicts the role of filmmakers and content developers in the film business and the way they maintain their own set of values and beliefs concerning their work.

Furthermore, when Lintang’s manipulation of virality is discovered by Arrow Production House, he decides to create a documentary film to raise funds for the Paw Rescue shelter. Through this documentary, Lintang pursues two objectives. The first is to gather donations to extend the shelter’s rental period, while the second—unbeknownst to him—is to raise public awareness about animal welfare within their communities. The documentary medium serves as an appropriate vehicle for this mission due to its inherently realistic and relatable nature.

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