Viral videos are videos that have gained widespread popularity by travelling from person to person via email, instant messages, and media-sharing websites (Wallsten, 2010).

Because of the strong influence viral videos have in popular culture our research team focused on determining the factors needed to make a video go viral.

We focused on comedic amateur videos that have gone from being posted to video sharing sites such as YouTube or Vimeo to being parodied and showcased on popular television programs like Vh1’s Tosh.O and MTV’s Ridiculousness.

We chose to utilize a survey to gain a better understanding of the popular videos being shared and watched. We also used the survey to determine the similarities between videos that act as factors for viral video success.

We surveyed 98 students. The survey also asked for distinguishing characteristics such as race and gender to determine if there were any correlations between the groups surveyed. Following the survey we interviewed viral video sensation, Paige Reynolds from “Scarlet Takes a Tumble” to gain further perspective.

The results of our survey indicated that less than 20% of social media viewers actually post videos and of the videos posted by the 20% only a slim percentage are actually shared with other users.

There are certain factors that increase the likelihood of a video progressing to viral status. They are:

- The surprise/shock factor
- Spontaneity
- The popularity of the initial sharer,
- Reliable target audience.
- Timing of release or relevancy of topic
- Easy to replicate or parody of popular video

Though these factors do not ultimately determine if a video goes viral, at least one is present in the videos with the highest views.

How Often Do You Watch Viral Videos?

Very Often – Every day or two, 11.2%
Often – 2-4 times a week, 23.5%
Rarely – at least once every couple of weeks, 30.6%
Never – only when I’m bored or someone makes a point to show me one, 35.7%

K. Wallsten (2010). “Yes We Can”: How online viewship, blog discussion, campaign statements, and mainstream media coverage produced a viral video phenomenon. Journal of Information Technology and Politics. 7 (2-3).