

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the area of study

Communication dates back to the era where human beings started exchanging thoughts through sounds, which acquired meaning much later. Later along with the developments with oral or verbal communication, slowly evolved other forms of communication such as writing and then the mechanical printing press has changed the course and reach of communication.

The next major steps in the technological evolution of mass communication were the telegraph (1844), the telephone (1870) and the wireless (1896). These inventions ultimately led to faster means of communication, using electric, electronic and radio wave transmission of messages between distant regions on the globe, inaugurating the era of telecommunication ((Vilani, 1900. P.vii)

Gradually the process of communication became faster with time, and with the coming up of electronic media. New media in this case have made a greater contribution in the field of communication. With the coming up of new media in the process of communication, communicating and reaching the mass have been made easier and very quick. Anyone with the availability of internet can reach any target audience one wants to. Exchanging and sharing contents and messages over the internet is just a matter of few seconds.

The platform of new media includes the internet, the various search engines and the social networking sites like facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. The new media or the digital media has provided a platform for easy access to information as well as entertainment. Communicating with the mass across the globe has been made much easier with digitalisation. It is a free of cost platform where people like, share and comment on different issues. The new media has also given birth to a new genre of entertainment, popularly known

as “Cringe pop”. Because of social media platforms like Youtube, Facebook this genre is gaining much popularity and the cringe artists are turning to be internet sensations within a very short time. The digital media is stated responsible for giving birth to this new genre of entertainment. With an easy access to internet, cringe pop has penetrated our entertainment industry. The contents of cringe pop becomes viral and even though it annoys the viewers, people cannot stop watching them. The music, videos and the popularity of the cringe pop starts are taking over the traditional entertainment contents. Cringe pop, is the latest vocabulary in the social media world today. People like share and comment in these videos of the cringe stars and this is making them more popular among the younger group of people.

Rebecca Black's **freaky Friday** in the year 2011, marked the beginning of cringe pop. Since than many other cringe artists like Psy from South Korea, Taher Shah from Pakistan, BhimNiraula from Nepal, Dhinchak Puja and Om prakash Mishra from India have been gaining huge views from the social media platforms. This new genre has also gained huge popularity in Assam with many cringe artists who have gained popularity over the social media. Cringe artists like Rajkumar Thakuria, Kussum Koilash, Sristi Nandini are to name a few who's popularity have grown exponentially among everyone within a shortest span of time. Cringe pop genre of entertainment has been the most popular form to grab the attention of the audience at present.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The study is based on finding the reason behind the popularity of this new form of entertainment known as “cringe culture”. People are enjoying these cringe contents, specially the songs by the cringe artists all time and with the availability of a smart phone or a laptop, circulation of these contents are taking place hugely and within no time these contents are all over the social media. This shifting from mainstream or traditional form of entertainment to this new unusually trending form of entertainment is indeed a matter of concern. The group of

younger population are the main group of audience of these cringe contents available over the internet and the social networking sites. The viewers might not instantly like the contents but all inadvertently discuss and share these contents which popularise them and make the artists a star within a day.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- (i) To analyse the reason why people enjoy the cringe contents over social media
- (ii) To find the factors that are responsible behind the popularity of cringe artists.

1.4 Research Questions

The study undertakes the following research questions:

- (i) What is the reason behind the popularity of the cringe stars?
- (ii) Why people watch and enjoy the cringe contents, specially the songs?
- (iii) Are cringe contents a source of escapism for the audience?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study will be a significant endeavour, which will benefit the society in understanding the situations or personal and individual behaviour which is a factor behind choosing this new genre of entertainment, which is called the cringe pop. It will also help us understand the psychological aspects which are leading towards the change in the choice of entertainment by the individuals. The study also will help us analyse, whether it is an escapism from the daily monotony of life or actually the cringe stars are better entertainers. The study also aims to uncover the aspect and the need of gatekeeping over digital media contents especially over the social networking sites.

1.6 Review of Literature

The researcher as a part of the study have reviewed various websites which has published articles on the topic, books, and also research papers which are published by scholars who have worked on the topic of cringe pop culture. The reasearcher have taken few keywords while doing the review of literature which are, cringe pop, cringe artists, popular culture, psychology, and internet. Here are few of the mentionable literature the researcher have reviewed during the study which supports the study:

- **Websites And Web Pages:**

1. In the article, titled '**Cringe Benefits**', published on April 29th, 2016 PrashathyJ.Nath writes how cringe contents are irritating but people still cannot stop watching them. The article further discusses how the cringe contents go viral over the internet within shortest time.
2. In the article, titled '**We tried making sense of popular cringe pop lyrics & found some super existential messages**' published on the site dated July 23rd,2018 Aishwarya Dharni writes how cringe song lyrics have no meaning and are totally meaningless.
3. In the article '**what makes cringe pop viral**', published on August 25th,2017 Sooraj Divakaran writes that cringe contents go viral for all wrong reasons. The article also calls cringe contents so irritating yet one cannot stop watching. The writer highlights the reason why people watch cringe contents, to be derivation of sadistic pleasure. The audience derives sadistic pleasure from seeing the humiliation of the cringe artists. In the article the writer mentions that the keyword "cringe pop" is the highest searched topic over Google. According to the article cringe pop has been the genre which is gaining attention worldwide and the elements that make this genre viral are:

- a) Constant repetition
- b) Production value
- c) Whimsical in nature
- d) Mindless entertainment.

4. The article published by Hindustan Times titled **The psychology of cringe-pop fans: Why people like Omprakash Mishra's Aunty ki Ghanti?** By Samiksha Pattanaik on 25th September, 2017 describes the lyrics of cringe artist Omprakash Mishra's song as sexist. It also mentions the fact that despite the sexist lyrics the song has taken the internet by storm and the fans totally find the song and video entertaining. The cringe content fans have defended the singer and confessed that the song is both catchy and entertaining. The writer mentions Omprakash Mishra as a self-proclaimed 'Rap King' who has joined Dhinchak Pooja and Taher Shah as other stars of the cringe pop genre.

The article also mentions how another group of people have complained about the misogynistic lyrics of the cringe worthy song and demanded for media scrutiny. But the Indian meme pages are also responsible for making the singer a star within a night.

5. In the article, **Dhinchak Pooja's 'Selfie maineleliaaj': Why are cringeworthy videos so popular?** By Samiksha Pattanaik which was published by Hindustan Times on 11th June, 2017 the writer talked about the cringe contents and their memes have taken over the internet. The article also mentions the fact that even some love these contents and some hates them but both the groups cannot ignore the contents. The writer in the article questions why can't the viewers stop watching the contents when they are so annoying.

The article quotes a Delhi based psychologist who mentions that the people watch cringe videos to derive sadistic pleasure. The viewers enjoy the humiliation of others. The article talks about the strange ability of the cringe contents and memes to go viral within no time. The cringe stars have relied on social networking sites for the stardom they are enjoying at present.

6. The article published on the web page of DNA titled 'cringe pop or binge pop' talks about the fact that how human beings derive pleasure laughing at others specially at those who are below the level of self perceived level of sophistication. the article talks about how with the emergence of cringe pop , cringe artist are sniggered over the social media. The article also mentions how cringe pop is more a money making source than just a laughing source. The article talks about cringe artists like Baba Sehgal, Taher shah, Wilbur Sargunraj and also mentions the fact that they are not even closer to the fame that is enjoyed by the latest cringe artist India has, Dhichaak Pooja.”

7. The article, 'Cringe-Pop: The Genre That Has Taken The Internet By Stormby' Pratik Aswal published on the web page of Cosmopolitan dated 13th September,2017 mentions that we as audience are viewing the cringe contents for no good reason. The articles names RebbecaBlack as the founder of of this new genre with her song *Friday* in the year 2011. She is said to be the crown holder of Cringe pop genre with numerous views,shares and memes. The writer writes how six year latter after Black's song came another cringe quuenDhinchack Pooja who released the 'Mother of Cringe Song' *Selfie Maine le li aaj*. The writer in the article also mentions about the new male cringe star who is believed to rule the internet, Omprakash Mishra.

8. In the article published on the web page Arre named 'Taher Shah and rise on Cringe pop' mentions the writer how Pakistani Cringe star Taher shah became an internet sensation worldwide with his songs 'Eye to Eye' and 'Angel'. The article also mentions the fact how Taher Shah will join the race along with famous cringe stars like Rebecca Black and Psy.

The article mentions how the rise of cringe pop highlights facts like rise in technology and easy sharing of contents by anyone with a laptop and spare time. It also highlights the facts like internet obsession, human trait of meanness. It describes this phenomena as both hilarious and depressing.

9. In the article named, 'In Defense of Mr. Rajkumar' writer Nibir Dekha writes in his personal blog about how Rajkumar Thakuria is the most famous YouTube sensation of Assam. The writer writes that Rajkumar paves the way for many YouTube's of Assam. The article mentions how the songs of Mr. Rajkumar are most famous among the people of Assam and how crazy fans are of this internet sensation who was trolled by Carry Minati itself. The article also mentions the fact that Mr. Rajkumar has fans all over the country and people living in different parts of the country share his videos and enjoy the humour.

- **Research Papers And Articles Published**

1. In the paper, 'Social Networking, The "Third Place," and The Evolution of Communication' by: New media Consortium in the year 2007, mentions how internet is the new place for people's interaction apart from one's home and work place. It is termed to be a platform for communication across the globe and also interaction. This new technology has given us new means of communication.

2. In the paper, named 'Oppa"-tunity Knocks: PSY, "Gangnam Style" and the Press Reception of K-Pop in Britain' by Basil Glynn and Jeongmee Kimit is described how the song and the video of Gangnam Style by Psy has received popularity all over the world and also about its reception in Britain. It also tells about the fact how viral this song has gone and how it helped in the portrayal of image of the country Korea to the world. The paper studies the boost in Korean tourism after the popularity of Gangnam Style.

3. In the article, 'Painfully Funny: Cringe Comedy, Benign Masochism, and Not-So-Benign Violations', Marc Hye-Knudsen studies two situational comedy series, *The Office* and *the In betweeners* where he describes cringe as a totally different genre from the genre of comedy. The writer highlights the psychological state of the audience who find the cringe contents amusing. It says cringe contents evoke the negative emotion of embarrassment among the

viewers. The writer argues that the audiences find benignly masochistic pleasure watching the cringe contents.

4. In the article, 'Cringe Criticism: On Embarrassment and Tori Amos'

Nick Salvato studies about the songs of singer Tori Amos and describes them to be cringe, as the songs and the lyrics though popular generates the feeling of embarrassment among the audiences.

- **2. Books**

1. The book, 'Cultural Theory and Popular Culture An Introduction by John Storey', describes popular culture as a mass produced commercial culture. It also defines popular culture as a form which is a left out residue from the high class culture. Popular culture is produced for the mass, produced for mass consumption.

2. The book, 'Mc Quails Mass communication Theory', in page 118 describes popular culture as a product which is aimed at reaching the mass and also due to the huge demand of the people. The chapter quotes Fiske who calls popular culture as "meanings and pleasures". Fiske also describes these contents as a source to escape from social control.

The main gratifications obtained from the media which includes, information gathering, education, relaxation, social contact, emotional release , filling time to name a few. It says that people use the available media for various purposes. (Mc Quails Mass communication Theory p 118)

3. According to the theory the audiences actively exposes themselves to the available media. The use of media depends on the interest of the people along with aspects like perception, selectivity and beliefs. The theory also tells how audiences derives pleasure and satisfaction from the selected media they use. It further discusses the reasons why people use media which

are to seek relief from boredom, and monotony of everyday life, to relax, emotion release like people derive sadistic pleasures from certain contents, social utility. (Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication by VirBala Aggarwal and V.S. Gupta, p 38)

➤ **Gap of Literature**

The available literatures deal with the term what cringe pop is and also traces the history of the beginning of this genre in the world. The literatures available also study how cringe pop is penetrating because of the internet. But the present study aims at studying the reason behind the popularity of cringe contents and the cringe star and also studies about the cringe star of Assam Rajkumar Thakuria who is the most famously know cringe star of the region. The researcher aims at knowing the psychological state of the audience as well the cringe artists to study the reason behind cringe content popularity along with studying about the other cringe contents and artists of Assam.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The researcher, during the study has faced certain limitations. Though a number of literature work on the cringe pop popularity was reviewed during the study but the first limitation that the researcher faced was lack of literature available which studied the cringe pop popularity in India as well as in Assam. There is very limited literature published in this area. Literary works on cringe pop popularity was available in other countries but as far as penetration of cringe pop in India is concerned, literature is very limited. Moreover, as the study is concerned with the popularity of cringe songs, and study of cringe artist of Assam, no research paper was available to support the study. Whereas study on cringe artist of other countries were available. Study on the psychology of cringe audience watching cringe series of America was found but no study on the audience psychology in Assam was available to the researcher.

Another limitation faced during the study was, not many people from the music industry agree to give their inputs on the topic of the study. As a matter of fact, the sample size is limited in the study.

The researcher has chosen the cringe songs only as a part of the study as the topic cringe pop engulfs a vast area for study and due to constraint of time it was impossible to cover every aspect of the genre. The researcher has also chosen one cringe artist of Assam, as a sample of the study, due to limitations like time, reach and also economic issues.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The contents uploaded by the cringe stars gains many numbers of likes, share and comments and within a very short time the cringe videos goes viral. People turns out to be the active viewers and also plays a vital role behind the popularity of the contents as well as the cringe stars. The term **cringe** used in the study refers to something which is embarrassing yet the term **cringe pop** refers to the genre of pop culture which is not the mainstream entertainment genre, and its contents are irritating but still the viewer's cannot stop watching them.

The researcher has come across term **Sadistic pleasure** as mentioned in the chapters 3 and 4 of the study. The study defines the term as deriving pleasure from the humiliation of others.

The term **delusional disorder** used in the chapters 3 and 4 of the study refers to the state of mind where a person drifts away from reality. Another term **defence mechanism** referred in the Chapters 3 and 4 means the situation in which a person looks for social approval to satisfy their ego.

The researcher in the Chapter 3 of the study has done a content analysis of the YouTube channel and a Facebook Fan Page of a cringe artist of Assam, where the comments were categorised into three categories, **Abusive, Insulting and Praise**. The comments where the viewer has used harsh sentences or words for the content falls into the abusive category. The comments consists of words and phrases like, kick you to death, slaps, or slangs etc.

The next category consists of comments categorised under the category of **Insulting**, where in the comment section viewers posted comments which directly insulted the cringe artist and the his contents. Comments like, death after listening to the song, disliking the content even before watching it, body shamming the artists, commenting on the physical appearance of the cringe artist etc.

The third category of comments categorised under the category named **praise**, consists of comments where the viewers praise the contents and comment good song, great voice etc.

Another category of comment was added while carrying out the content analysis of the Facebook fan page that is the category of **Mentions**, this category consisted of comments where a viewer mentions other friends over social media in the content and shares it.

Further in the content analysis of the Facebook fan page the reactions of the viewers were categorised under the various reactions available over Facebook, **Like, Haha (laugh), Sad, Angry, Love and Wow.**

The study is based on the concept of popular culture. The term 'mass culture' is likely to remain in circulation but the alternative form 'popular culture' (meaning essentially 'culture which is popular'-much enjoyed by many people) seems preferable and no longer carries a pejorative association. Popular culture in this sense is a hybrid product of numerous and never ending efforts for expression in a contemporary idiom aimed at reaching people and capturing a market and an equally active demand by people for what Fiske (1987) would call 'meanings and pleasures'(McQuail, D. (2010). *Mc Quail's Mass Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Pp-118)

A second way of defining popular culture is to suggest that it is the culture that is leftover after we have decided what is high culture. Popular culture, in this definition, is a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture. In other words, it is a definition of popular culture as inferior culture (, John Storey ppStorey, J. (n.d.). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*).

The popular culture concept comes up with many definitions but we cannot deny what Fiske states which is also relevant to the study. Fiske (1987) defines a media text as the outcome of its reading and enjoyment by the audience (Mc quail's Mass Communication Theory pp-118). Fiske comes up of the view that audiences can interpret messages disseminated to them in their own way. Every message or content can be decoded differently by different people. Fiske further states "If the cultural commodities or texts do not contain resources out of which

the people can make their own meanings of their social relations and identities, they will be rejected and will fail in the marketplace. They will not be made popular. Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology. The victories, however fleeting or limited, in this struggle produce popular pleasure, for popular pleasure is always social and political.”

1.9 Theoretical Framework

People with an internet access, actively shares the cringe contents over social media and likewise these contents gain much viewers and with increasing number of viewers the artists turns out to be famous internet sensations. The study is based on the theory called, Uses and Gratification Theory, which was introduced by Elihu Katz. The theory states exactly opposite of what the magic bullet theory states. The uses and gratification theory states that the audience actively exposes themselves to the media. In nutshell, this theory which deals in individual functions and dysfunctions view that mass media audiences make active use of what the media have to offer arising from a complex set of needs which the media in one form or another gratify (Aggarwal, V. B., & Gupta, V. S. (2001). *Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication*. New Delhi, India: Concept Publishing Company. P 38)

By applying the uses and gratification theory the researcher will explore how people actively expose themselves to the cringe contents and also help it become popular within no time. According to this theory the audience are responsible for choosing their convenient media and likewise attains satisfaction.

Functionalist sociology viewed the media as serving the various needs of the society- for example, for cohesion, cultural continuity, social control and a large circulation of public information of all kinds. This in turn presupposes that individuals also use media for related purposes such as personal guidance, relaxation, adjustment, information and identity information (McQuail, D. (2010). *Mc Quail's Mass Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Pp 423)

The theory of Uses and Gratification classifies some uses of media by the users such as information seeking, relaxation, escapism, time pass etc. the gratifications are Information, guidance, advice, relaxation etc.

The following points from (Mc Quail's Mass Communication Theory, Denis Mc Quail pp 427) refers to the media gratifications obtained by the users:

- Information and education
- Guidance and advice
- Diversion and relaxation
- Social contact
- Value reinforcement
- Cultural satisfaction
- Emotional release
- Identity formation and confirmation
- Lifestyle expression
- Security
- Sexual arousal
- Filling time

1.10 Research Methodology

The researcher after identifying the research problem of the study has chosen the sample of the study by the method of observation. As the study mainly aims at studying the popularity of cringe songs available over the social media, the researcher has chosen the cringe artist Rajkumar Thakuria as a sample for the study. The reason behind choosing Rajkumar Thakuria as the sample apart from him being the first most popular cringe star of North East India has large number viewers and followers over the social media and also for the reason that the contents of this cringe star are not only famous in the state but also it has gained popularity across the nation which is why Mr. Rajkumar is an internet sensation popular in India as well as abroad. His songs and films have more views and are maximum shared compared to the contents of other cringe stars of the state.

The study has been conducted using both primary and secondary methods of data collection. As primary data collection tools the following methods were used:

➤ **Interview:** the method of interview was taken as a primary source to conduct the study. The researcher has taken both personal interviews as well as over the phone interview of five Assamese singers, two directors and also interview of two psychologists. The main focus of conducting the interviews was to find out the reason behind the inclination of the audience towards this new genre of entertainment and what is the impact of the penetration of contents mostly through the internet into our social system. The researcher has also interviewed two psychologists, to know the psychology of the viewers as well as the artists.

Interview of a fan page admin of Mr.Rajkumar over Facebook was taken. An interview of 10 members of the fan page was also taken by using the method of convenience sampling,

Personal interview of Rajkumar Thakuria was also taken by the researcher to know about what makes me go for making a film or a video song. His views on the trolls he receive and also about the huge fan base he has across the world.

➤ **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus group discussion was done among the students of four colleges in Guwahati and also among students of Gauhati University as a part of the study. The study was conducted among the age group of 18 to 25. The main aim behind conducting the Focus Group Discussion among this group of young population was to find out the reason behind viewing cringe contents so extensively that the cringe contents are viral within no time over the internet. Another point of discussion was to find out whether cringe according to them is all comic content and what their opinion about the cringe artists is. As a part of the Focus Group discussion, three videos of cringe artist Mr. Rajkumar and Dhinchaack Pooja were shown and then based on the videos the discussion was conducted regarding why they prefer this new genre of entertainment.

➤ **Social Media Content Analysis:** Content analysis of only the contents of Mr. Rajkumar over his fan page in facebook and also the contents uploaded in his YouTube channel was done where the comments of the viewers were analysed and categorised into four categories. The analysis was done for the time frame of three months, September 2018 to November 2018. The content analysis is presented in the form of chart and pie diagram.

Thus the above mentioned tools were used for data collection which the researcher has used to fulfil the aims and objectives of the research and also to find the answer behind the research questions.