

DEMYSTIFYING ASTROLOGICAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: A THEMATIC ANALYTICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This research paper is an attempt towards comparing the popular astrological content on Instagram and YouTube Shorts and exploring the nature of contents covered at greater depth. The astrological contents have gained a lot of traction in recent times due to multiple factors at work. The people's narcissistic tendencies have been on the rise ever since the advent of social media. This has led to a greater self-consciousness and a sense of self-important. People now are interested in knowing more about themselves albeit at a very shallow level. The desire is not to immerse deeply into one self, rather the focus is on having access to quick and easy information based on how a person born on a specific date or born in a particular month would behave and would be perceived by the others. This tendency of the people clubbed with the very innate nature of the short reel-based platforms subsequently results in a plethora of content and equal number of content consumers. Looking into its commercial aspect, astrological contents on the digital platforms in India has seen a logarithmic growth in the past few years. According to some studies, the global Astrology App market size is valued at USD 3856.06 million in 2024 and will continue to rise during the forecast period at a CAGR of 16.82%, reaching USD 9800.41 million by 2031.

Hence, to explore nature of content on the two popular short reel-based platform, thematic analysis was done on 385 social media posts of popular astrologers. The study employed a thematic approach of qualitative analysis to explore the deeper layers of the contents. For the purpose of the study, the content was categorized primarily into the nature of astrological science displayed and aspect of life being talked about. Further upon the exploration of the content, other sub-categories were developed. The findings showed a tilt towards a specific type of content.

Keywords: Astrological Content, Short, Reels, Instagram, YouTube Shorts, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

The dictionary meaning of Astrology is that it is "the study of the movements of the planets, sun, moon and stars in the belief that these movements can have an influence on people's lives" Collins Dictionary (n.d.). This branch of study deals primarily with an individual's birthdate, time and the position of the celestial bodies to predict multiple aspects of a human life. According to a Pew Research Center's study, 70% Indians believe in fate or fatalism. Fatalism

is the idea that events in one's life are largely predestined. This is probably a logical reason for the astrology seeing tremendous growth in recent years. Integration of astrology with technology has opened up some new avenues for both the content creators (Astrologers) as well as the consumers.

Astrologers are now connecting with the people through popular apps as well as through the social media platforms. It has in-fact emerged into a full-fledged e-commerce opportunity. The expansion of content production-based technologies has had a far-reaching impact on the audience and thus is being economically capitalized spiraling into many employment opportunities for media aspirants too. Its impact thus can be termed as all rounded and that makes it even more crucial to understand the type of content that is keeping the audience glued leading to enhanced viewership figure year by year.

Review of Literature

The research has employed thematic analysis approach which is widely used in the research contexts. One of the most popular approach in the domain of media, it is used to explore media contents while also helps in deciphering the qualitative surveys of media consumers and viewers. It is commonly used to study experiences, attitudes and perceptions on topics concerning media education. In the field of study involving exploration of the astrological contents, the thematic analysis approach has been used plenty of times. Floyd (2023) has used this approach to study the psychological Significance of astrology in millennial women's lives. Similarly Moore (2012) has done the same by exploring the mushrooming of news pertaining to astrology. This study was largely focused on the role of media in "promoting empiricism and discouraging mysticism" (Moore, 2012). Similarly Dülberg (2023) & Przydatek (2023) have utilized the thematic analytical approach to explore the motivations for using spiritualism based application. Other similar studies forming a confluence of astrology and thematic analysis have hardly tried to explore the social media contents of the popular astrologers. Those studies have had the consumers mostly in focus or the mainstream media coverage.

On the other hand, the commercial side of the astrology too has not been directly addressed in the previous researches. The focus has mainly been centered on the culture industry as conceptualized by theorists like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Culture industry in itself is a term that refers to the commercialized system of mass media production that standardizes cultural content and promotes passive consumption (Lucero-Montaña, 2012). This however does not mention the name of the stream of astrology directly but it can be considered as a cultural content being commercialized.

Siding away from the astrological contents, the studies around the possible risks of young people using social media were explored at length by Bozzola et al. (2022). According to the study, youngsters may be adversely affected by the huge amount of astrological data available on social media sites like YouTube and Instagram.

In a related study by Bhandari and Bimo (2022), the concept of the "Algorithmized self" is explored at length and shows how it impacts the ways individuals create their identities on social media. The individuals creating their identities on social media are not limited to only the creation but also exploration of the identities beyond what is known. Here astrology comes into the picture. Bhandari and Bimo's study findings are thus useful to add to the context to this study. On exploration of the studies related to the use of social media particularly surrounding YouTube and Instagram, one prominent study by Junawan and Laugu (2020) offers a broader understanding of social media usage, but it doesn't specifically address astrological content and how it's marketed. The effects of the epidemic on the uptake and marketing of astrological stuff on these platforms may be the subject of future studies. Similarly Duffy and Meisner (2022) found the difficulties and advantages of platform management. This finding is important for the marketing of astrological content because it emphasizes how crucial algorithms are to determining how widely and effectively such content is seen.

If we sum up the outcomes of the review of available and related literature, it is evident that the content analysis or the thematic analysis of the astrological contents is missing leading to a big gap that needs to be addressed.

Objectives

- To identify the prevalent nature of astrology-based content on web platforms
- To compare the distribution and characteristics of astrology content between YouTube Shorts and Instagram
- To assess the utility of astrology-based content for users on web platforms based on content analysis

Sample Size

385 (Astrological Content based Short Reels from Instagram and YouTube Shorts)

Sampling Technique

Simple Random Sampling (Probability)

Research Methodology

The study has employed thematic approach to analyze the contents of Instagram and YouTube shorts. The contents were chosen from popular open Instagram accounts and YouTube Shorts based on the keyword search and their contents of past three months were randomly chosen leading to a sample size of 385 short reels related to the astrological contents.

The astrological contents were then transcribed and Braun & Clarke (2006) endorsed six point framework of thematic analysis was employed. The proposed six points framework is as shown below:

- Step 1: Become familiar with the data
- Step 2: Generate initial codes
- Step 3: Search for themes
- Step 4: Review themes
- Step 5: Define themes
- Step 6: Write-up

Based on the generation of the initial codes and searching of the themes (i.e. Step 2 and Step 3 respectively), the emerged content themes and sub-contents of the themes are as shown below.

Theme-1: Branch of Astrology

- Vedic Astrology
- Tarot
- Numerology
- Vaastu
- Palmistry

Theme-2: Nature of Content

- Solutions through awareness of body parts and shapes
- Solution through food
- Solutions via Relationship with Planets
- Solutions through Vaastu tips

Theme-3: Outcome

- Promotion
- Science behind the Branch of Astrology
- Clearing Misconceptions
- More Self-awareness through different Branches of Astrology

Theme-4: Issues Covered

- Relationships
- Finances
- Health
- Others

Data Analysis and Presentation

Table 1

Platform					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Instagram	194	50.4	50.4	50.4
	YouTube Shorts	191	49.6	49.6	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	

The data reveals that program choices were exclusively from two platforms namely Instagram and YouTube Shorts. Instagram accounted for 194 reels chosen as the sample constituting 50.4% of the total items chosen and YouTube Shorts garnered 191 selections, representing 49.6%. Collectively, these platforms encompassed all 385 program selections.

Table 2

	Yes	No	Total
ISSUES COVERED			
Relationship (%)	59.50	40.50	100.00
Health (%)	29.90	70.10	100.00
Finance (%)	28.80	71.20	100.00
OUTCOME OF THE PROGRAM			
Science behind Astrology (%)	18.40	81.60	100.00
Clearing Misconceptions (%)	17.90	82.10	100.00
Self-Awareness (%)	59.50	40.50	100.00
BRANCH OF ASTROLOGY			

Vedic Astrology (%)	29.60	70.40	100.00
Tarot (%)	23.90	76.10	100.00
Numerology (%)	43.90	56.10	100.00
Vaastu (%)	21.00	79.00	100.00
Palmistry (%)	24.70	75.30	100.00
NATURE OF CONTENT			
Solution through Alteration / Modification of Body Part (%)	8.60	91.40	100.00
Solution through Food or Consumption of Something (%)	70.4	29.6	100
Solution Through Relationship with planets (%)	47.3	52.7	100
Solution Through Vaastu (%)	19.2	80.8	100

Issues Covered

1. Relationships

Approximately 59.50% of the content addresses relationship issues while 40.50% does not.

2. Health

29.90% of the content focuses on health-related issues while 70.10% does not.

3. Finance

Around 28.80% of the content discusses financial matters and 71.20% does not.

Interpretation

The data suggests that a significant portion of the astrology-based content is geared towards addressing relationship concerns, followed by health and financial matters. This indicates that creators and consumers of such content are particularly interested in guidance related to relationships, with health and finance being of secondary importance.

Outcome of the Program

4. Science behind Astrology

Around 18.40% of the content emphasizes the scientific aspects of astrology, while 81.60% does not.

5. Clearing Misconceptions

About 17.90% of the content aims to debunk misconceptions about astrology, while 82.10% does not.

6. Self-Awareness

59.50% of the content focuses on promoting self-awareness through astrology and 40.50% does not.

Interpretation

The majority of the content does not prioritize scientific explanations or debunking misconceptions about astrology. Instead, a significant portion is dedicated to promoting self-awareness through astrology, indicating that users are more inclined towards introspection and personal growth rather than critical analysis or debunking. This also serves as a bait for fulfilling the narcissistic urges of the viewers.

Branch of Astrology

7. Vedic Astrology

29.60% of the content revolves around Vedic astrology, while 70.40% does not.

8. Tarot

Approximately 23.90% of the content is centered on tarot, while 76.10% is not.

9. Numerology

43.90% of the content focuses on numerology, while 56.10% does not.

10. Vaastu

Only 21.00% of the content pertains to Vaastu, while 79.00% does not.

11. Palmistry

Around 24.70% of the content is about palmistry, while 75.30% is not.

Interpretation

Numerology appears to be the most prevalent branch of astrology in the content analyzed, followed by Vedic astrology. This suggests that creators and consumers have varying interests in different branches, with numerology being relatively more popular.

Nature of Content

12. Solution through Alteration / Modification of Body Part

Merely 8.60% of the content suggests solutions through altering or modifying body parts, while 91.40% does not.

13. Solution through Food or Consumption of Something

Around 70.4% of the content proposes solutions through food or consumption, while 29.6% does not.

14. Solution Through Relationship with planets

Approximately 47.3% of the content offers solutions through relationships with planets, while 52.7% does not.

15. Solution Through Vaastu

Only 19.2% of the content provides solutions through Vaastu, while 80.8% does not.

Interpretation

The majority of the content suggests solutions through food or consumption, indicating a prevalent belief in the influence of diet or consumption habits on various aspects of life. Additionally, a significant portion offers solutions through relationships with planets, highlighting the perceived connection between celestial bodies and personal affairs.

Table 3

Relationships * Platform Crosstabulation			
Count			
	Platform		Total
	Instagram	YouTube	

Relationships		117	112	229
Health		77	38	115
Finances		38	73	111
Others		3	0	3

The data shows the number of programs related to different topics—relationships, health, finances and others—across two social media platforms: Instagram and YouTube Shorts.

For relationships, there were a total of 229 programs, with a slightly higher number on Instagram (117) compared to YouTube Shorts (112). For Health-related programs totalled 115, with Instagram hosting more programs (77) than YouTube Shorts (38). For Finances had a total of 111 programs, with YouTube Shorts featuring more (73) compared to Instagram (38). The data illustrates the distribution of content across these platforms, indicating varying levels of focus on different topics. It suggests that while some topics might be more popular or prevalent on one platform, others might receive more attention on another platform.

Table 4

Content Nature * Platform Crosstabulation				
Count				
		Platform		Total
		Instagram	YouTube	
Science_behind_Astrology		30	41	71
Clearing_Misconception		35	34	69
Self_Awareness		118	111	229

Table 5

Solution_Through_Alteration_Modification_Body_P	Yes	23	10	33
Solution_through_food	Yes	133	138	271
Solution_through_relationship_with_planets	Yes	91	91	182
Solution_Through_Vaastu	Yes	42	32	74

- The table presents the count of various solution types discussed across Instagram and YouTube Shorts. Among the solutions, "Solution Through Alteration/Modification of Body Part" had a total of 33 programs, with 23 on Instagram and 10 on YouTube Shorts. "Solution Through Food" was the most prevalent, totalling 271 programs, with 133 on Instagram and 138 on YouTube Shorts. "Solution Through Relationship with Planets" had 182 programs in total, evenly split with 91 on both platforms. Lastly, "Solution Through Vastu" totalled 74 programs, with 42 on Instagram and 32 on YouTube Shorts. This data highlights the different types of solutions being explored across these platforms, providing insights into the topics that are receiving attention and discussion.

Table 7

Chi-Square Tests			
			Asymptotic Significance
	Value	df	
Relationships * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.111a	1	0.739
Health * Platform			

Pearson Chi-Square	18.004	1	0
Finances * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	16.284	1	0
Others * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	2.977a	1	0.084
Promotion * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	4.501a	1	0.034
Science_behind_Astrology * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	2.305a	1	0.129
Clearing_Misconception * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.004a	1	0.951
Self_Awareness * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.293a	1	0.588
Vedic * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	3.649a	1	0.056
Tarot * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.318a	1	0.573
Numerology * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.730a	1	0.393
Vaastu * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.002a	1	0.963
Palmistry * Platform			

Pearson Chi-Square	1.926a	1	0.165
Solution_Through_Alteration_Modification_Body_Part			
* Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	5.382a	1	0.02
Solution_through_food * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	.630a	1	0.427
Solution_through_relationship_with_planets *			
Pearson Chi-Square	.021a	1	0.885
Solution_Through_Vaastu * Platform			
Pearson Chi-Square	1.486a	1	0.223

Significance in statistical analysis indicates whether the observed differences or associations in the data are likely to be due to chance or if they reflect a genuine relationship or effect. In the context of chi-square tests, a significance level below a chosen threshold (usually 0.05) suggests that there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis, indicating a significant association between variables. From the provided chi-square test results:

Significant Associations ($p < 0.05$):

1. Health * Platform: The association between health content and the platform is significant ($p = 0.000$), suggesting that the distribution of health-related content differs significantly between Instagram and YouTube Shorts.
2. Finances * Platform: Similarly, the association between financial content and the platform is significant ($p = 0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the distribution of financial-related content across the two platforms.
3. Promotion * Platform: The association between promotion and the platform is significant ($p = 0.034$), implying a significant difference in the distribution of promotional content between Instagram and YouTube Shorts.
4. Solution_Through_Alteration_Modification_Body_Part * Platform: The association between content related to altering or modifying body parts and the platform is significant ($p = 0.020$), suggesting a significant difference in the distribution of such content between Instagram

and YouTube Shorts.

Conclusion

The expansion of the astrology-based content in Indian digital media landscape has been facilitated by technology. The concept of prompts inquiries and easily digestible content has made the consumption easy and quick leading to its subsequent rise. This research examined the intersection of tradition and digital advancement crossing paths with the astrological content across online platforms. Social media and mobile apps offer astrologers expanded outreach, fostering engagement with diverse audiences. The social media based astrological contents focus heavily on relationships, self-awareness and the numerology the most. This is an indicator of the changing psychological landscape amongst the viewers and subsequently shaping content preference.

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