

## When a selfie is not enough: India abuzz over 'velfie' craze

MUMBAI, INDIA: Move over selfie, India is embracing the "velfie" with Bollywood stars, sporting heroes and even politicians taking and posting videos of themselves online using a range of new mobile apps.

From lip-synching famous movie scenes and quizzing political leaders to interviewing job candidates, Indian tech firms are betting on the latest craze to grip social media -- the video selfie.

"2014 was about selfies... 2015 is for #velfies!" screams the blurb for Velfie, a smartphone app similar to Dubsmash where users mime songs or quotes to pre-recorded audio before posting the clips on social networks.

German-developed Dubsmash has rapidly become a global phenomenon since its launch in November and has been downloaded more than 50 million times across 192 countries, according to its website.

The global craze is sweeping the Indian film industry, with numerous stars entertaining legions of loyal fans with dubbed videos which are uploaded to popular sharing platforms Facebook and Instagram.



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Actors Salman Khan and Ranveer Singh, and actresses Sonakshi Sinha and Richa Chadda are just some of the Bollywood stars to have embraced it, lip-synching everything from Hindi film dialogue to lyrics from Western songs.

A short clip of Khan and Sinha miming lines from a 1971 Indian movie has been liked more than 71,000 times on Instagram, while hundreds approved of Chadda's turn from controversial American hip-hop song "Baby Got Back".

Rammohan Sundaram, co-founder of India's Velfie, which was launched in April, said videos were a more entertaining way for Bollywood royalty and other celebrities to engage with their audiences.

"A selfie is only one picture but a 'velfie' can speak of emotions that you just can't render in a single photo," Sundaram told AFP.

"Selfies will remain because pictures will always be there but we're creating a whole new space that's more exciting, more engaging and more social in nature," he added.

Film star Akshay Kumar used Velfie recently to promote his film "Gabbar is Back" by asking fans to dub their favourite line from the movie to win a chance to meet him.

Indian cricketer Yuvraj Singh is also a fan -- his lip-synching of one of Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan's most well-known movie lines has been liked 12,000 times on Facebook.

The app -- which is free and limits videos to ten seconds in length -- has been downloaded 200,000 times and is already operating in around 140 countries, according to Sundaram.

He said its pause-and-play feature and the fact many of the videos are accompanied by subtitles differentiates it from Dubsmash.

"We've also made a lot of enhancement filters that make the videos look really good," the tech developer added.

Sundaram said Velfie plans to expand to become a "video social network" in the coming months, essentially a Twitter-like timeline consisting solely of video selfies.

Users will also be able to live-stream on the platform and Sundaram hopes brands will use it to advertise, generating revenue.

Another new Indian-based app available on Android and iOS is Frankly.me, which allows netizens to pose questions to celebrities, sports stars and politicians who then answer with video selfies.

Users of the app, launched in January, are also able to vote for certain questions to be answered, increasing the likelihood of a response, according to co-founder Nikunj Jain who says Frankly.me is aiding democracy in India.

In Delhi elections earlier this year, Aam Aadmi Party candidates including leader Arvind Kejriwal fielded thousands of queries directly from voters and then posted videos of themselves replying.

"For the first time in the history of this country we had a state election where candidates were using this platform to talk directly to the electorate and people voted based on the responses," Jain told AFP.

He said more than 400,000 questions have been asked and around 30,000 have been answered so far on Frankly.me.

"Casting directors are also using it to do auditions and companies are using it for hiring," Jain added.

He said that while popular video app Vine was about "broadcasting" short videos, Frankly.me aimed to create "rich, two-way conversation" with people replying to each other when it was convenient for them.

"We believe that video selfies can be the primary mode of all non-urgent communication on the internet," Jain stated.

*Source: AFP*

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