**What makes YouTube videos go viral?**

**Emotional triggers and shopper’s engagement in viral advertising**

**Abstract**

Companies have attracted viral advertisements in recent years, yet little is known how exactly it works from a consumer behavior point of view. This study contributes to how emotional triggers (e.g. positive emotion, negative emotion, tone) of YouTube viral videos affect attitudes e.g. like, dislike or making a comment. Results indicated that positive emotional tone elicits the strongest attitudes towards YouTube trending videos. The outcome was not significant for a negative emotional tone. In other words, consumers are interested in the message that are rich with positivity.

**Introduction**

Companies disclose many offers of brand information via print media, outdoor advertisements, internet, and social media. This is chaos for many shoppers as they often consider them as irritating (Page Fair, 2017), and to overcome this consequence companies are looking for alternative ways to connect with their consumers and because of this outcome, the price of online paid advertisement is increasing rapidly (Araujo, Neijens, Vliegenthart, 2015; Manly 2005; MindComet, 2006). The idea of viral commercials could mitigate this gap on the top of consumers’ indifference that can reach thousands or millions of natural consumers and motivate them (MindComet, 2006). In order to endorse or interact with a brand, a successful viral commercial can reach millions of uninvolved consumers within a few seconds. According to Lindstrom (2009), at least one-third of the 4100 brands worldwide have tried viral commercials. In the United States, both the company’s higher management and advertising agencies demonstrate a higher interest in investing more in viral marketing (Feed Company, 2008). Shoppers are engaged densely in YouTube online videos, and according to Purcell (2010), more than 61% of adult users watch videos on the popular video-sharing website.

The demand and popularity of viral videos are very understandable. However, skepticism still exists regarding the campaign and the mechanism of making a viral video (Feed Company, 2008; Lindstrom, 2009). Oftentimes, making an unconventional viral video could trigger negative reactions from their clients (Feed Company, 2008; Lindstrom, 2009). Yet, research shows highly emotional content e.g. sex appeal, intense humor which could risk actual brand communication (Kellaris and Cline, 2007; Severn, Belch, and Belch, 1990). So, a striking balance between creativity and emotionally engaging content is tedious in producing a viral video advertisement. The current study aims to explore the emotional triggers of YouTube video virality tendencies.

I begin with an overview of the literatures that describes how consumer’s emotion evoked by content and that drive YouTube videos to go viral. Specifically,researcher introduce the concept of emotional triggers that drive human to like, dislike or commenting in videos.researcher then turn to theoretical framework and hypotheses development. Finally,researcher examine the emotional triggers of making a YouTube video go viral.

**Viral Advertising**

Previous study e.g. Purcell (2010) have found that 7 out of 10 adult internet users have watched videos on YouTube or searching from Google. Moreover, this number almost doubled for the last few years. A recent survey outcome shows that in the U.S. two thirds of higher management (from a sample of 30 executives) from advertising agencies reported that their clients are very interested in using viral video marketing ideas, and from global brands nearly 33% of the company tried a viral video approach since 2008 **(**Lindstrom, 2009).

Few experimental researchers have explored the very basics of viral video. It is true that most of the content related to human emotional activation (Araujo, Neijens, Vliegenthart, 2015) goes viral quickly.

**Emotionality and Viral Advertising**

The campaign of making content viral depends on consumers' active participation, so the main goal of this kind of campaign is always an emotional impact of a product, not the product itself (MindComet, 2006). Since consumer’s emotional triggers are the core message that makes shoppers join this kind of content. London Go-Viral Agency mentioned that viral video content should be about topics that one cannot watch on television (Lindstrom, 2009). As mentioned by Phelps and colleagues (2004, p. 345), “Messages that spark strong emotional feelings-humor, fear, sadness, or inspiration-are likely to be forwarded." Furthermore, Lindgreen and Vanhamme (2005, p. 125) discusses, "emotions are key drivers of viral marketing campaigns." Specifically, emotional triggers in the content are at its core for success in viral video content. Another important study by Bardzell, Bardzell, and Pace (2008) argued that emotional responses to viral content are not straight forward and it is complex. Plus, more than 57% of these viral contents are more positive than negative. It is still surprising to see a high volume of negative content that goes viral.

**Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

According to appraisal theory, humans’ emotions invoke specific styles of appraisals in relation to human needs and goals and circle action towards cognitive disposition which direct human behavior (Frijda, 1989; Lazarus, 1991). Research regarding emotions argues that individual positive emotions serve specific adaptive functions and have unique effects on consumers’ cognition, positive and negative emotions, and behavior (Shiota et al., 2014b). This research applies appraisal theory to this study, because of consumer experience emotions while appraising online ads and video on YouTube, and the action tendencies of these emotions may impact their intention to achieve specific outcomes by sharing ads which may influence their sharing expressions. Second,researcher am interested in using the Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP) by Lang’s (2000), which is widely used as an applied theoretical model to explore how the human mind processes emotional media content. This model is grounded in the cognitive perspective of the human mind. This model is also used in various media content, more specifically, emotional health videos (Leshner, Bolls, and Thomas 2009). In this study,researcher am using the LC4MP to explore the emotional triggers of trending and/or viral videos on YouTube as a theoretical lens.

The following research questions will be explored, RQ1. How content characteristics drive the consumer to make YouTube videos go viral? We are interested to examine whether positive content is more viral than negative content but goes beyond mere valence to examine. RQ2. How specific emotions evoked by content, and the activation they induce, drive YouTube videos to go viral? Further understanding of emotional engagement in viral advertising in order to identify emotional triggers that may elicit strong likes, dislikes, and commenting effects.

Based on the empirical literature on the emotional triggers of viral marketing and shoppers engagement on the YouTube trending videosresearcher offer three hypotheses -

**H1.** YouTube trending videos tags, title and descriptions that elicit positive emotions will go viral more than negative types of expressions.

**H2.** Love and awe emotion will positively influence of liking, disliking, commenting on video content

**H3.** Love and awe emotion will not positively influence of liking, disliking, commenting on video content

**Methods**

I addressed current research questions to experiment with the emotional triggers to view, like, dislike and making comment on YouTube trending video. All participants were from the U.S.

**Overview**

The world-famous video-sharing website YouTube tracks a list of top trending videos on the platform. YouTube trending videos are different than most-watched videos within a year. In addition, these trending videos could be a music video (e.g. famously viral “Gangnam Style”), a TV performance and/or any user who creates a video for YouTube. Current data were collected daily between October to November 2018. We used a structurally improved version of the original data.

**Sample**

This dataset includes several months (and counting) of data on daily trending YouTube videos. Data is included for the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, and France with 200 listed trending videos per day. Data includes the video title, channel title, publish time, tags, views, likes and dislikes, description, and comment count.researcher used the U.S. sample for this analysis.

**Procedure**

Data were collected from Kaggle.com. Researcher used R statistical package to clean the data, no missing value was found (See appendix for R codes). Next, current author uploaded this clean data in Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Program (LIWC) to evaluate a positive and negative emotional component of given text based on its built-in dictionary and classified categories, e.g. the word agree or love belongs to affective, positive and/or negative feeling categories ([Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales, & Booth, 2007](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886911003291#b0105)). The LIWC software is available at<http://www.liwc.net/>. In order to measure emotional triggers, author examined the relative rate of positive and negative emotions from like, dislike, comment and view count in the categories (see LIWC output ample in the appendix). Plus, R statistical package to create a linear regression model, and likes, dislikes, views and comments count as dependent variable; positive emotion, negative emotion, anger, tone as independent variable (IV), to examine the significance level between emotional triggers and content characteristics.

**Results**

Multiple linear regression was calculated to predict emotional triggers (e.g. likes, dislikes, views, and comments on YouTube trending videos) based on positive and negative views of the YouTube trending videos (e.g. title, tags, description of the videos). A significant regression equation was found (F (190, 9) =188.2, p<.000, with an R-square of 0.8991 in the model-1. Table-1 demonstrates that model one and three are significant, however model two and four are not significant, where the positive emotion (posemo), anger and tone percentage score were calculated from the title, tag and video description using LIWC. Both positive emotion (posemo), anger and tone were significant of the emotional triggers (e.g. likes, dislikes, and views)

**Discussion**

This essay yields light on the role of emotional triggers in making YouTube videos go viral. This experimental study outcome illustrates the context of the viral video content has a linear relationship with positive emotion, tone and anger. Plus, our study outcome does not posit any significant relationship between negative content and viral videos. However, Bardzell, Bardzell, and Pace (2008) have found that more than 50% of these viral videos are more positive than negative.

**Scholarly Implications**

This study addressed the aforementioned shortcomings in the extant of viral marketing literature. First, this research provided evidence why YouTube videos go viral and, what makes consumer to “view”, “like”, and “dislike” content on YouTube. Although previous study e.g. Bardzell, Bardzell, and Pace (2008) have found negative content goes viral quickly than positive content, however, current experiment have found positive content goes viral quickly. YouTube video content view, comment, like, and dislike behaviors fall into unique types as well as many levels. For instance, in terms of levels, like denotes the lowest level, comment is the intermediate level. As regards to types, on the other hand, like is affectively, comment is cognitively elicited. These findings suggest that advertising firms, marketers, digital content creators, and public relations researchers need to treat two YouTube human behaviors separately, not to lump them together.

**Managerial Implications**

Positive emotions in the video content go viral quickly than negative emotions. This finding of this study suggests that love and awe emotion in the videos can be employed as triggers to activate virility in YouTube videos. This study also shows besides positive emotions anger in the videos could elicit a sharing expression of a video. Ads should convey love and awe at a higher level in order to make YouTube videos go viral.

**Limitations and Future Direction**

This research specifically focuses on the emotional triggers of trending YouTube videos. In order to further develop an understanding of how discrete emotion influence the likelihood of sharing videos in individual social media platform and going viral, future research should include other discrete and consumers action tendencies. This should include consumer tendencies of sharing a video e.g. duration from watching a video to sharing a video in their social media. More specifically, future research could further investigate the likelihood of the consumers’ cognitive dissonance in sharing a video.

I would like to add two more small studies to make this paper publishable in a marketing journal. To achieve this goal, in study 2,researcher would like to recruit participants via Amazon Mechanical Turk who has shared our selected advertisement in their social media profile. This will inform us what makes the consumer create a viral ad. In addition, in study 3,researcher would like to run sentiment analysis on the viral advertisement comment and/or audio and video analysis of the top 10 advisements published by the national daily newspaper, *USA TODAY*.

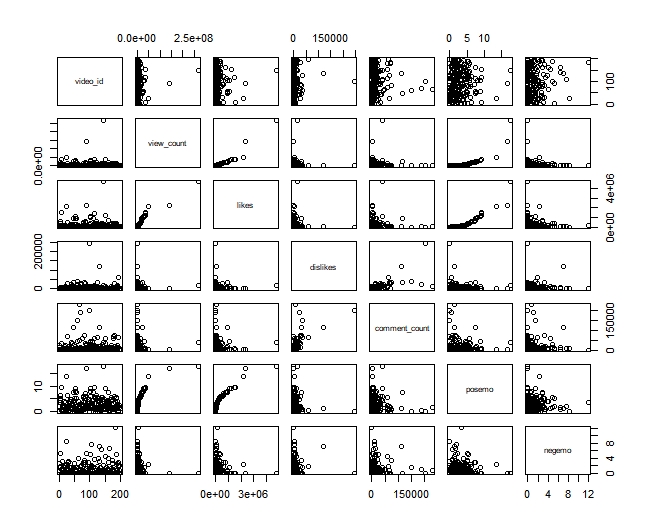
Table 1: Regression Models outcome and LIWC results by text emotion

**Charts and Tables**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *R Statistical*  *Package* | **Model 1**  *Likes* | **Model 2**  *Dislikes* | **Model 3**  *View\_count* | **Model 4**  *Comment\_count* |
| *R-square* | **0.8991** | 0.04463 | **0.7611** | 0.04457 |
| *F* | 188.2 | 0.9862 | 67.25 | 0.9847 |
| *DF* | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| *P* | 0.0000\*\*\* | 0.4528 | 0.0000\*\*\* | 0.454 |
| **LIWC** | **Mean scores for the levels of categorical independent variable** | | | |
| Affect:  Neg. Emotion | Pos Emotion | Tone | Anger |
| 1.20565\*\*\* | 2.94885 | 53.0303\*\*\* | 0.412 |

***Bold face and \*\*\* denotes significance level with p<0.05***

**Fig 1: Scatter plot matrix**

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In this scatterplot matrix: there is a correlation between likes and positive emotions because the plot looks like a line. There is probably less of a correlation between likes and negative, and no correlation between dislikes and negative emotion. More statistical analyses would be needed to confirm or deny this.

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**Appendix: R code and Regression models**

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