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Bachelor's degree in Economics and Business

VIRAL MARKETING.
HOW EMOTIONS DRIVE CONTENT SHARING

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Table of content

1.Introduction

This thesis aims to deepen our understanding of Viral Marketing, with a keen focus on the pivotal role that emotions play in triggering content sharing. Through extensive research and analysis, this study endeavors to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of Viral Marketing's essence, mechanism, and the profound impact of emotions on its contagious success.

To trace the origins of Viral Marketing, we look back to its pivotal moment when the Hotmail case made history with its tagline *"PS i love you. Get your free email at Hotmail.com"* (Tim Dreper). This case serves as a captivating starting point to understand the transformative power of viral campaigns. Further in the thesis we explore the research conducted by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, whose seminal work in the early 2000s defined the six principles to follow in order to create a Viral Marketing campaign. Moreover, professor Jonah Berger's influential book "Contagious", introduced the STEPPS acronym, a comprehensive framework that encapsulates the essential elements for transforming any idea into viral content- Social Currency, Triggers, Emotions, Public, Practical Value, Stories.

In the new digital era, emotions became the driving force that fuels content sharing, as individuals feel a compelling need to share content that resonates deeply with their own feelings. In the thesis are going to be explained the emotions used to trigger the feelings of the viewer which eventually will make them share the content and make it go viral - surprise, joy, fear, anger, sadness, and disgust. Within this exploration, a series of case studies are going to be presented, showing how brands and organizations have skillfully harnessed the emotive potential within their campaigns.

The six campaigns we're taking in consideration are: Dove- Real Beauty Sketches, CocaCola- Share a Coke, Share a feeling, Patagonia- Facing Extinction, Metlife- My dad is a liar, BurgerKing- The Moldy Whopper, VolksWagen- Eyes on the Road.

These real world examples offer vivid illustrations of how emotions play a critical role in steering the contagious success of viral marketing endeavors, offering valuable lessons and strategies to marketers seeking to harness the power of emotions in their own campaigns.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Viral Marketing definition

Viral marketing is the promotional strategy that aims to promote and spread quickly and naturally a message or a product through digital and non-digital Word Of Mouth (WOM). The word "viral" is used to enhance the concept of uncontrolled and rapid spread from person to person, channel to channel drawing the audience's attention at an incredible rate. (Kagan, 2022)

Off the Internet, viral marketing has been referred to as "word-of-mouth," "creating a buzz," "leveraging the media," and "network marketing". (Wilson, 2000)

We can say that the main goal of viral marketing is to create "buzz" about a product, brand, or service that is being promoted to increase awareness about the subject treated. (What is Viral Marketing, 2023)

The creation process of sharable and engaging content, such as videos, memes, or challenges is important because it can trigger some emotions in the target audience, which can bring the person to interact/share that content with family and friends, thus activating a chain of interaction with the triggering content.

With the use of social media platforms and online communities as communication channels, a viral marketing campaign is more efficient in its objective of spreading fast and of reaching its target audience quicker than traditional marketing campaigns.

Viral marketing is an inexpensive way to generate awareness, leads and to increase conversions.

The success of a viral marketing campaign depends on creating shareable content, targeting the right audience, and encouraging people to share the content with their networks.

To better understand how it works is possible to follow 4 steps:

I. <u>Creation of shareable content</u>: the content generated has to be entertaining, shareable, engaging, or informative. This type of content can be of various forms: videos, images, memes, GIFs, and blog posts.

II. <u>Sharing the content</u>: the second step is to share the content created on digital platforms such as social media and online communities. The key is choosing the right communication channel for the targeted audience. By doing so digital marketers can quickly achieve the audience's attention

III. <u>Encourage sharing</u>: to make the content created go viral, people need to be encouraged to share it with their networks. This can be done by creating social media challenges, offering incentives (contests), or by asking people to share the content with their friends.

IV.   <u>Monitoring and measuring</u>: To ensure the campaign is successful, digital marketers need to track the campaign's reach, commitment, and conversion rates. This can be achieved by using analytical, marketing, and media monitoring tools. (What is Viral Marketing, 2023)

2.1.1   The HOTMAIL case.

A recurring example used to explain viral marketing is the "Hotmail case" (Figure 1), which is part of the origin of Viral Marketing. Hotmail was one of the first free web-based email services that became popular in the second half of the 90s; the company invested in a header that reminded anyone who received a message from the company of the possibility to get a free email. The tagline associated with each message, was in fact *"PS. I love you. Get your free e-mail at Hotmail" (Tim Draper)* followed by the direct link to the website were users could create their own email .(Serra, 2017)

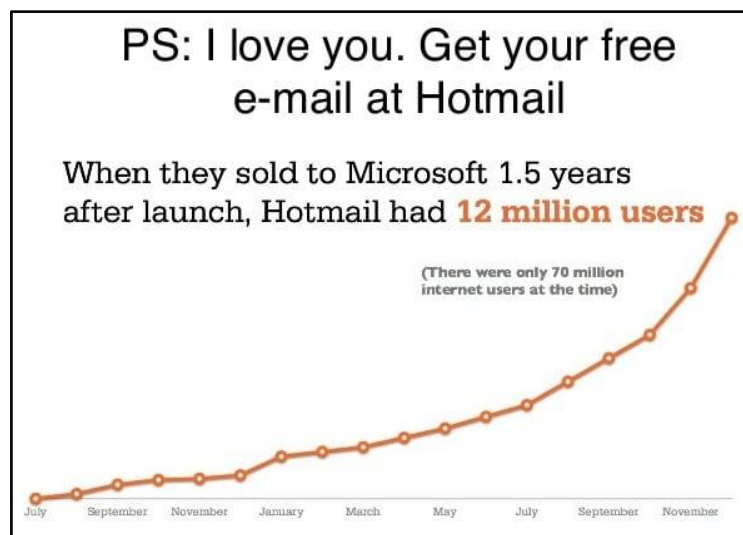*Figure 1 - the Hotmail case (Serra, 2017)*

2.1.2   The six principles of viral marketing

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson is an e-commerce consultant that in 2000 defined six principles to follow to create a viral marketing campaign (exemple in Figure 2).
A viral marketing strategy need not contain all these elements, but the more elements it embraces, the more powerful the results are likely to be. (Martins, 2020)
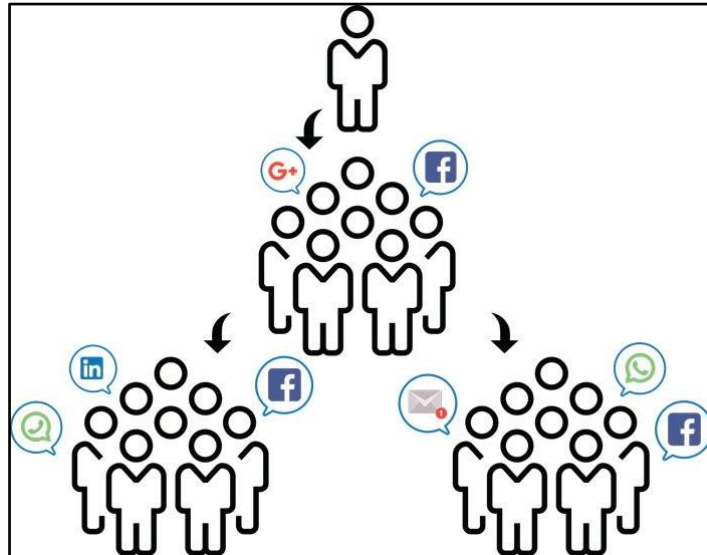
Figure 2 - Viral marketing campaign

The six principles are:

1. To give away product or services

2. To provide for effortless transfer to other

3. To scale easily from small to very large

4. To exploit common motivations and behaviors

5. To use existing communication networks

6. To take advantage of others' resources (Wilson, 2018)

1. Viral marketing strategies would have a higher chance to grow if they included the word "free" in their vocabulary. When people find something for free their interest in that product, brand, or campaign increases. At the beginning this tactic may not earn profit but as soon as the business/company gets some recognition, giving something for free to its customer will generate income for them. Examples are software programs that are free as long as you use it for its basic functions, when you'll need the more articulated ones you'll have to get the "pro" version.
    "Give away something, sell something" (Wilson, 2000, p.5).

2. The second principle suggests using a simple and straightforward medium to convey the marketing message to others. The ease of communication offered by technology has made viral marketing particularly powerful on the internet. This medium can vary, and each platform used works differently when it comes to carrying out the viral content. Viral

marketing thrives on the internet primarily due to the digital nature of the content, which makes communication effortless and affordable.

From a marketing perspective, it is crucial for the message to be simple, short and straightforward.

3. When employing viral marketing as a promotional approach, it is crucial for the business to be prepared to scale rapidly from a small to a large audience. In situations where viral advertising leads to a rise in web traffic, the website owner must ensure that the hosting server is adequately equipped to handle the anticipated influx of visitors within a short timeframe. If users notice that the site takes a considerable amount of time to load, they will likely abandon it and move on, resulting in a loss of potential customers. (Martins, 2020)

   If the viral effect only amplifies to the extent of overwhelming the host before spreading further, it will achieve nothing. The rapid growth will become precluded and ultimately fail.

4. An effective marketing strategy relies on comprehending and leveraging people's motivations and behaviors to facilitate its dissemination. The desire for understanding, love, and popularity compels individuals to seek with an expanding audience in order to gain recognition, this is also the reason for the success of various social media platforms, email service, and electronic messaging systems. Effective viral marketing tactics identify and capitalize on these fundamental human needs, employing content that evokes such emotions to attract individuals.

5. Each individual human being statistically has a network composed of about ten individuals with whom they interact on a regular basis. However, the potential network is much greater, given the enormous quantity of relational contacts that every person experiences daily. This phenomenon is further amplified by the digital component, which helps people to engage in socialization through various social media channels and establish networks, even without personal acquaintances (relation). The world of the web offers a wide range of relational tools and relationship-building platforms through which an individual can enhance and leverage for viral marketing, their personal social network.

   For marketers to effectively utilize these digital communities, it is crucial to comprehend how to promote messages within them, enabling the exploitation and cost-effective dissemination of marketing content. (Serra, 2017)

6. The most innovative strategies for viral marketing is to leverage resources to amplify the message. Affiliate programs, for example, place text or graphic links on others' websites, this ensures a wide readership without the need to create a new webpage. (Martins, 2020) Thus, someone else's print or web page becomes a conduit for transmitting your marketing message, sparing your own resources.

2.2 Viral Content Characteristics

It is essential to recognize that content qualities alone do not guarantee virality. Instead, certain critical elements must be present within the content to foster viral social sharing. Crafting viral content extends beyond incorporating qualities such as evoking strong emotions, simplicity, usefulness, and helpfulness. It necessitates the strategic utilization of promotional methods, selection of appropriate format types, and consideration of numerous other contributing factors. Integrating the aforementioned qualities into a comprehensive content promotion strategy increases the likelihood of widespread content sharing, although it does not guarantee virality. Rob Greenberg (2013) in his article "*11 types of viral content that spread on the internet*" defines three main factors that in his opinion may lead to content to go viral. The 3 classifications are:

- Positive content or optimistic messages: this type of content spreads faster than the negative and pessimistic one since content that has a negative impact on people is less likely to be shared.

- Sentimental content: this type of content is naturally more emotional. Usually the viewer can relate to this content.

- Informative and relatable content: the more people find this kind of content useful, informative, or relatable the more is going to be shared

2.2.1   STEPPS

In his book "*Contagious*", Jonah Berger (2012) conveys to the reader that predicting the extensive reach of a marketing message and ensuring its virality is an elusive task. The acronym STEPPS encompasses all the essential elements to transform any idea into one with widespread dissemination. However, the author emphasizes that it is not necessary to include all these factors in a campaign to trigger Word Of Mouth and sharing.

He presented six different methods for creating viral content (Figure 3):

1. Leveraging Social Currency

2. Connecting ideas to Triggers

3. Incorporating Emotion into messages

4. Turning private matters into Public content

5. Highlighting Practical value in ideas

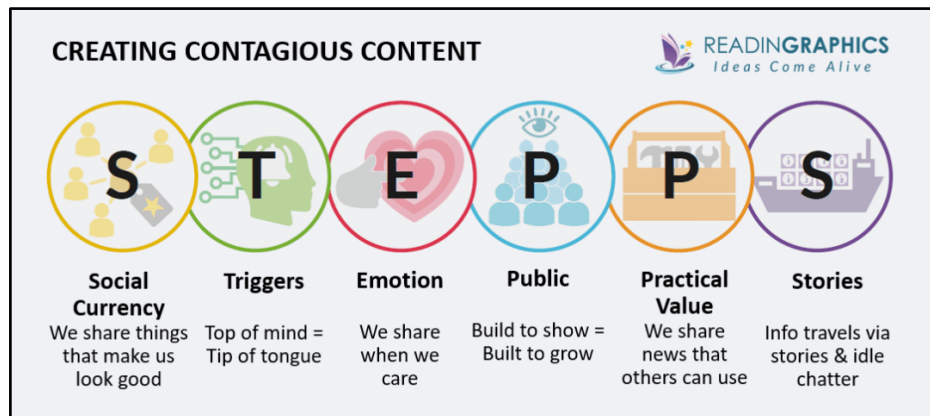6. Presenting potentially viral content in the form of Stories

Figure 3 - Visual overview of the 6 STEPPS (Readingraphics, 2023)

1. **S**ocial Currency (How others see me?): social currency revolves around the trends prevailing in the reader's social environment. It is a common inclination to seek recognition and strive to project a superior image of ourselves (Buttò, 2021). This awareness drives us to share on social media anything that enhances our appearance in terms of wealth, intelligence, or attractiveness. The most valuable content is that which can be easily shared among peers. Harnessing the power of social currency enables one to create exceptional and innovative content that captivates readers and positions the individual as a trendsetter in their industry. Understanding the audience and identifying whom they seek to impress are crucial aspects. Armed with this insight, valuable content can be crafted, resonating with the audience. Instead of pursuing fleeting fads, emphasis should be placed on producing high-quality materials, such as thought leadership pieces that readers genuinely want to share. Therefore, there is no need to worry about joining the latest viral dance trend to gain attention.

2. **T**riggers (top of mind, tip of tongue): for example, if I say peanut butter you think about jelly. (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2013)
   Triggers play a crucial role in associating brands or products in people's minds, ensuring long-term retention. They serve as powerful catalysts, prompting discussions, actions, and even driving potential customers to make purchases upon remembering the triggered brand

or product. The point is, something exciting is taken in the audience's mind, and in that moment, the message is augmented or attached. In his book, Berger uses the example of the KitKat marketing strategy to explain triggers in real life. The slogan of the brand *"Have a break, have a Kit Kat"*, aimed at using the brake as a trigger. Once they realized that it wasn't enough of a trigger, they came out with the idea of using coffee. Coffee is a prevalent part of everyday life, presenting a significant opportunity for Kit Kat to trigger thoughts and discussions whenever individuals indulge in a coffee break. This approach has proven to be effective, as the wide coffee consumption base led to a notable increase in Kit Kat's sales. Apart from having a captivating trigger, it is essential to assess the triggger's strength. The association between the trigger and the desired idea or product must be robust enough to yield benefits for the brand. The efficiency of the link between two ideas is enhanced when it is stronger, more original, unique, or novel. Additionally, for people aiming to spread their ideas effectively, they should consider the relevance of the trigger to the customers or recipients, ensuring it is beneficial when they become triggered. (Ruokolainen, 2019)

3. **E**motion: *"When we care, we share. The more we care about a piece of information or the more we're feeling physiologically aroused, the more likely we pass something on"* (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2013).

The emotional impact content has on both individuals and others is one of the most driving forces behind the reason why content is shared. Captivating customers with emotionally evocative content, allows them to establish a deeper and more personal connection. When individuals come across content that evokes intense emotions, whether positive or negative, they are more inclined to share it. (Buttò, 2021) The desire to experience and share emotions is driven by the wish of feeling connected with others. All negative or sad emotions should be avoided.

The essence of the book revolves around demonstrating to both individuals and companies that crafting contagious content is an attainable goal for anyone. It emphasizes that success does not depend on the possession of the perfect product; rather, it involves identifying the factors that trigger discussions and sharing, and incorporating those elements into the product or message. In the book it is stated that any product has the potential to be remarkable and evoke emotions. (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2013)

In this regard, during an interview for the *Business journal from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania* (2013), Berger uses the Blendtec campaign as an example.

Blendtec is a company that sells blenders, but since there's nothing remarkable about blenders they had to think about something that people were going to remember. Berger explains that they started a series of videos called *"Will it blend?"* where they put a series of different objects in a blender. In the video described by the author of the book, the CEO of Blendtec puts an iPhone in the blender (Figure 4). At the end of the video the iPhone is turned into powder, since it is something remarkable never seen before, the viewer is impressed and amazed and feels the need to share it with others. The underlying message is that anyone has the potential to craft contagious content, capable of evoking strong reactions and encouraging sharing among audiences.
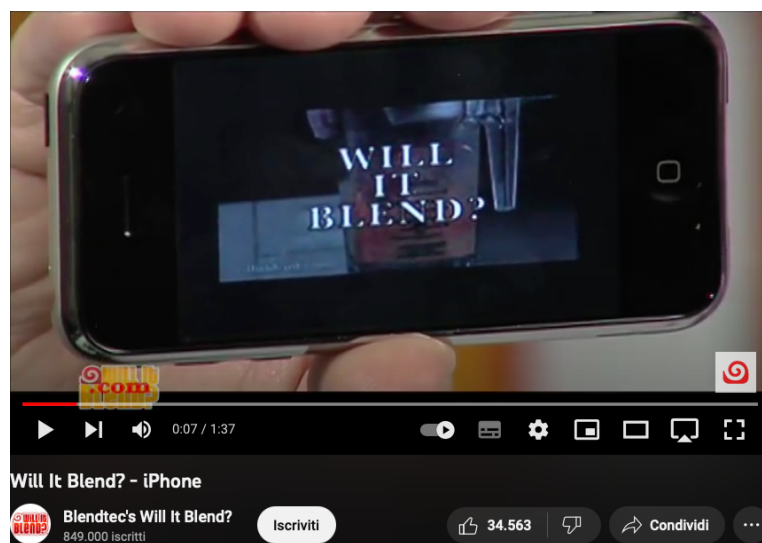

Figure 4 - Blendtec campaign example

4. **P**ublic: The more people engage in a specific action, the more influenced others are to do the same. Individuals tend to share posts if others have already done so, or they are more likely to comment on posts that already have a comment. The visibility of a behavior or action increases its likelihood of being imitated. Berger, in his book, uses the phrase *"build to show, build to grow"* (Berger, 2014) to highlight the public element. Public events and news, such as announcements or current affairs, generate higher engagement compared to overtly promotional content. The public aspect can be better incorporated into more informative content. An essential question to consider is whether there are any factors that might discourage readers from sharing the article or message. Delicate topics, opinion pieces with polarizing perspectives, not safe for work content, and irrelevant information are examples of potential deterrents. As a result, ensuring that the content appeals to the audience and encourages them to share it proudly is crucial.

In the same interview with the Knowledge at Wharton Staff (2013), Berger utilized Apple headphones as an example to explain how people make decisions by observing and trusting the actions of others. He explained that by changing the color of their headphones from black to white, Apple enabled easy differentiation between individuals using their mp3 player and those with old portable CD players. As more people adopted white headphones, it became apparent that buying the Apple mp3 player was the favored choice.

5. **Practical Value:** practical value proves to be a highly effective approach in viral content creation. In addition to being knowledgeable, people also desire to offer helpful information. This content provides social currency upon the sharer, portraying them in a positive light, while simultaneously providing useful information to the receiver. A common motive behind sharing content with practical value is the opportunity to secure great deals or discounts. It's important to note that the perception of prices varies among individuals, as they are assessed from different reference points. This diversity in viewpoints leads to unique interpretations of each price, depending on the person evaluating it. To illustrate this, Berger employs an example involving the elderly, who tend to remember prices from their earlier years, influencing their reference points when comparing today's prices with those of younger consumers. (Ruokolainen, 2019)

6. **Stories:** Customers are not interested in encountering yet another salesperson pushing products at them. What they truly seek are compelling narratives to listen to and even share with their friends. (Buttò, 2021) When information is incorporated into a narrative, it has a more profound impact as stories have the power to alter people's thoughts and emotions. To effectively communicate, utilize metaphors, provide practical examples, and showcase real life situations where the product can be put to use. Stories are crafted with the intent of being shared, captivating people's interest, and entertaining them along the journey. Moreover, they often contain hidden take-home messages, encompassing life lessons or morals. Engage the readers with material that can start conversations in any moment of everyday life. The stories narrated can revolve around personal experiences or highlight the experiences of satisfied customers. The more captivating the story, the more significant the impact, the greater the change.

   In the book (2014), a viral story is recounted by Berger, featuring an overweight student named Jared Fogle and his remarkable weight loss journey achieved by consuming Subway sandwiches. In his college days, Jared weighed 193 kg. Jared's roommate suggested he opted

for Subway as his dining choice, and so he did. He managed to shed an impressive 111 kg in tot. Jared's narrative is an example of Berger's six principles: Social Currencies, owing to its remarkable nature; Emotion, evoking awe; and Practical Value, by showcasing the advantages of healthy fast food. The story incorporates the brand Subway as an indispensable element, ensuring its continued mention during further dissemination.

2.3 Emotions as driver for viral content

2.3.1   Emotion Definition (Role of Emotion)

"By emotion, we mean a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it". (Bagozzi, Gopinath, Nyer, 1999)

Emotions are widely recognized as the primary drivers of virality and play a significant role in triggering forwarding behavior viewers. Dobele A., Lindgreen A., Beverland M., Vanhamme J., van Wijk R. (2007) presented in their study the six principal emotions that contribute to making content go viral. These six emotions are: surprise, joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust (Table 1).

Emotion	Explanation	Behavior	Physiological response	Other
Surprise	Generated when something (product, service, or attribute) is unexpected or misexpected.	• Facial expressions like opened eyes and mouth, and raised eyebrows. • Cessation of on-going activities. • Sudden and involuntary focusing on the surprising product, service, or attribute. • Heightened consciousness of the surprising product, service, or attribute. • Subsequent curiosity/exploratory behavior. • Increase in the ability to retain in memory the surprising product, service, or attribute.	• Changes in heart and respiration rates. • Increase in skin conductivity and neural activation. • Different cortical response wave patterns.	• Subjective feeling of surprise. • Spontaneous vocalizations ("Why," "Oh," etc.).
Joy	Expressed when a goal has been achieved, or when movement toward such an achievement has occurred. Also, joy is caused by a rational prospect of owning what we love or desire.	• Facial expression of joy is the smile. • Happy people are more helpful and cooperative. • Often energetic, active, and bouncy. • Prompts the person to aim for higher goals.	• Wanting, hoping, or desiring to have an object when it is not present. • Loving or liking the object when it is already present.	• Smile is used when people are not happy to mask another emotion.
Sadness	Experienced when not in a state of well-being, which is most often derived from the experience of a fearful event.	• No longer wishes for action, but remains motionless and passive, or may occasionally rock to and fro. • Often, focus is turned more toward the self. • Trying to solve the problem at hand. • Refuging from the situation.	• Crying or whimpering.	• Attention can decrease, but when completely focused on the situation at hand, it can increase.
Anger	Response to personal offense (an injustice); this injustice is in that person's power to settle.	• Attacking the cause of the anger through physical contact and verbal abuse. • Anger is extremely out of control (e.g., rage) and freezing of the body can occur.	• Raised blood pressure ('blood boils') • Face reddening. • Muscle tensioning.	• Culturally dependent. Northern European people show more muscular reactions, southerners show a bigger increase in blood pressure.
Fear	Experienced when people expect (anticipate) a specific pain, threat, or danger.	• A system is activated, bringing the body into a 'state of readiness'. • Escape and avoidance. • Facial expression as 'oblique eyebrows' and resulting 'vertical frown'.	• Internal discomfort (butterflies in the stomach). • Muscle tensioning. • Increased perspiration and heart rate. • Mouth drying out.	• In extreme form, making laughing or giggling sounds.
Disgust	Feeling of aversion that can be felt either when something happens or when something is perceived to be disgusting.	• Facial expressions like frowning. • Hand gestures, opening of the mouth, spitting, and, in extreme cases, vomiting. • Distancing from the situation, this by an expulsion or removal of an offending stimulus, removal of the self from the situation, or lessening the attention on the subject.	• Decreased heart rate. • Nausea.	• Making sounds like 'ach' and 'ugh'.

Table 1 - Six principal emotions (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, van Wijk, 2007)

2.3.2 Positive or Negative?

In every successful viral marketing campaign, the ability to evoke an emotional response holds a crucial position. It is an inherent aspect of human nature to share experiences that deeply move their emotions, enthusiastically sharing them with others. When powerful and profound emotions such as surprise, anger, fear, disgust, sadness, and joy are evoked in connection to a particular experience or message, the impulse to engage in social sharing becomes inevitable. The more intense the

emotions felt by individuals, the greater the likelihood that the content will be widely shared. Strong emotions are the key factors that drive the extensive sharing of content.

Berger J. and Milkman K.L., in the report *"Social Transmission, Emotion and Virality of viral content"* of the research they conducted, they understood that the saying *"if it bleeds, it leads"* (2010) suggests that negative information commands greater attention and interest in the audience. This is attributed to the survival value of negative information, which serves as a cautionary signal, alerting individuals about potential threats and hazards. Nevertheless, when considering the dynamics of information dissemination, various factors point to the likelihood of positive content being more conducive to virality. The act of sharing content is often motivated by the desire for self-enhancement or to convey one's identity to others. Consequently, positive content tends to be shared more extensively, as it reflects positively on the sharer's self-image and aligns with their desired identity projection. Evidently, individuals prefer to be recognized as suppliers of uplifting stories and sources of positive emotions, rather than being associated with content that evokes negative emotions. The emotion of awe represents the state of self-transcendence, marked by a sense of admiration and elevation when confronted with something greater than oneself. The hypothesis put forward is that awe-inspiring content holds a higher potential for virality. Awe[1] is considered a social emotion that fosters interpersonal connections and motivates individuals to share their experiences with others. Moreover, experiences that evoke awe also prompt individuals to look beyond their immediate selves and forge deeper connections with the broader social world. This inclination towards a more profound social connection may, in turn, facilitate content transmission, as awe-inspiring encounters encourage people to spread the word and engage with a wider audience. (Berger & Milkman, 2010)

In the conclusion of their report, Berger and Milkman (2010), shed light on the contentious topic of content sharing preferences. Contrary to the common belief that negative news is more widely shared, their research reveals that positive news, in fact, demonstrates greater virality. The two researchers used articles and the entire corpus of New York Times content to demonstrate that positive content maintains higher levels of sharing. These findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of content dissemination and contribute to the ongoing debate about the prevalence of positive versus negative content sharing tendencies.

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[1] Awe is the emotion of self-transcendence characterized by a feeling of admiration and elevation in the face of something greater than the self. (Berger & Milkman, 2010)

2.3.3 Definition of the six principal viral marketing emotions

Surprise

"*If you have time to anticipate an event and do so correctly, then you cannot be surprised. [...] Surprise is triggered both by the unexpected and by what might be called the "mis-expected" event. An unusual event which was unanticipated [...] is called unexpected rather than mis-expected because at that moment the surprised person was not expecting anything in particular to happen. [...] The event is a mis-expected surprise [if] there was an aroused specific anticipation for something different to happen at that moment.*" (Ekman, 2003). 'Unexpected' refers to imprecise and poorly-defined expectations regarding a product, service, or attribute; while 'miss-expected' is the definition of specific expectations about said aspects that ultimately fail to materialize. Although the emotion of surprise itself is neutral, it is often accompanied by another emotion that gives it a positive (e.g. surprise + joy) or negative (e.g. surprise + anger) tint. This accounts for the common references to good/positive surprises and bad/negative surprises. Positive surprise is believed to result in customer delight, which is considered the pinnacle of customer satisfaction and is thought to yield higher customer retention rates compared to lower levels of satisfaction. (Lindergreen & Vanhamme, 2003)

Joy

"*Joy marketing is a term that describes marketing activity that is specifically designed to elicit a feeling of joy in an audience*" (Mercè, 2022).

In the realm of contemporary marketing, emotional branding has emerged as a potent strategy to foster deeper connections between brands and consumers. Joy stands out as a powerful catalyst with far-reaching implications for brand perception and consumer behavior. The cultivation of Joy in marketing can evoke feelings of happiness and contentment among the target audience, ultimately shaping their perceptions and attitudes toward the brand. Marketers employ creative techniques such as portraying customers being happy and joyful while using the product and featuring adorable animals in advertisements to generate feelings of delight. By emphasizing the joy that their products bring to consumers, brands establish a strong emotional association, positioning themselves as providers of happiness. This in return, fosters trust, brand loyalty, and positive brand image, creating an enduring impact on consumers decision-making. As brands continue to explore the potential of emotional branding, introducing joy as a central theme in marketing strategies proves to be a compelling avenue for building lasting connections with consumers and achieving success in today's competitive marketplace. (Dagostino, 2022)

Fear

"*Fear-based appeals appear to be effective at influencing attitudes and behaviors.*" (Sliwa, 2015).

"*These appeals are effective at changing attitudes, intentions and behaviors. There are very few circumstances under which they are not effective and there are no identifiable circumstances under which they backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes*" (Albarracin, 2015)

Fear, as an innate motivator deeply rooted in our primal survival instincts, exerts a powerful influence, compelling individuals to think critically, shape their beliefs, and act swiftly. As a result, fear-based narratives have become a favored tool employed by marketers to convey their messages or promote products effectively. This is conspicuously evident in a myriad of advertisements directly incorporating fear-inducing elements, such as vivid depictions of the fatal consequences of smoking, the pernicious effects of drug abuse, or politically charged smear campaigns. While fear appeals have demonstrated their efficacy in capturing audience attention and influencing behavior, their implementation warrants careful consideration to achieve optimal outcomes. When employing fear-based marketing strategies, it is imperative for marketers to present immediate and viable solutions. As customers are often exposed to such information only once, the initial reaction carries tremendous significance. (Temple, 2016)

The researchers observed that fear appeals proved to be effective, particularly when accompanied by recommendations for one-time actions as opposed to repeated behaviors, and when targeted towards a larger proportion of women in the audience. Additionally, their findings corroborated previous studies, demonstrating the efficacy of fear appeals when outlining specific measures to mitigate the threat, such as getting vaccinated or using a condom. (Sliwa, 2015). However, a word of caution lies in avoiding excessive reliance on fear tactics without providing constructive resolutions, as this may lead to a fleeting engagement that lacks any genuine emotional connection to the brand. Successfully navigating fear-based marketing necessitates a delicate balance between provoking a sense of trepidation in the audience without overly alarming them. Drawing from insights in basic psychology, marketers can adeptly manipulate emotions and responses, thereby ensuring that fear serves as a catalyst for constructive action rather than inducing paralyzing anxiety. (Temple, 2016)

Sadness

Sadness typically arises as a reaction to unfortunate events and tends to have a limited propensity for going viral. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this pattern, notably observed in cases involving high-profile deaths, entertainment gossip, natural disasters, and other newsworthy events. (Jones, 2012)

The experience of feeling down is generally undesirable for individuals. Nonetheless, sadness plays a crucial role in fostering empathy and emotional connection, which, in turn, leads to an increased inclination towards altruism and the motivation to extend support. This aspect is frequently utilized in charity campaigns, where the framing of objectives often involves the incorporation of sad photos, experiences, or speeches to inspire action and aid. Moreover, sadness also serves as a catalyst for offering hope. From a business perspective, leveraging the capacity to provide solutions to sad circumstances can be advantageous in marketing endeavors. (The effects of emotions in marketing, 2023)

"Seeing sad-faced appeals triggers this feeling that we're being manipulated; that they are trying to make us feel this negative emotion for the purpose of the ad. In general, people like to feel happy, so we don't have this same response when it's a positive image because the image isn't trying to take us from a positive mindset to a negative emotion." (Ferraro, 2019 quoted from Smith Brain Trust, 2019).

Anger

"Content that evokes high-arousal emotions like awe, anger or anxiety is more viral." (Berger & Milkman, 2012 as cited in Berger & Milkman, 2013)

The elicitation of anger holds significant power in the creation of viral content, with a distinction from 'hostile' anger, referring to the emotional response when individuals strongly disagree with a particular position or message. Experienced copywriters are well aware of this and often use it in their headlines to grab the readers' attention. (Jones, 2012)

Although sadness, anger and anxiety are all considered negative emotions, their impact on content virality differs significantly. While sadder content tends to have less viral potential, content that evokes anxiety or anger actually exhibits higher virality. Positive and negative emotions associated with activation or arousal, such as awe, anxiety, and anger, are positively correlated with virality. Conversely, emotions characterized by deactivation, like sadness, are negatively associated with content virality. (Berger & Milkman, 2012 as cited in Berger & Milkman, 2013)

Disgust

Disgust is commonly associated with the feeling of repulsion, rejection, or offense triggered by unpleasant stimuli. It is generally described as a negative, high-arousal emotion, known to evoke strong behavioral avoidance responses. (Rubeking, 2012)

In the article "*Captivated and Grossed Out: An Examination of Processing Core and Sociomoral Disgusts in Entertainment Media*" (Rubenking & Lang, 2014) it is argued that disgust, despite

evoking negative feelings, has functionally evolved to compel attention, making it a quality of entertainment messages that can effectively engross and engage audiences. Over time, the types that trigger a disgust response have undergone evolutionary changes. Initially, basic core disgusts, such as encountering blood, guts, body product, or contamination, were closely associated with individuals' oral rejection systems. These stimuli were considered particularly repulsive and elicited strong feelings of disgust. However, as time has progressed, the scope of stimuli that can provoke disgust response has expanded. In addition to the traditional core disgusts, the concept of disgust now includes sociomoral violations, such as witnessing injustices, acts of brutality, and instances of racism. These broader categories of stimuli can also evoke feelings of disgust and contribute to people's complex emotional responses. (Rubenking & Lang, 2014).

3. Case studies

3.1 DOVE - Real Beauty Sketches (surprise)

Figure - 5 Dove Real Beauty Sketches (YouTube)

In 2013, *Dove* released the video of the Real Beauty Sketches campaign. (Amaral, 2017). Numerous women were requested to provide descriptions of their own appearance to the FBI forensic sketch artist, Gil Zamora, who, while concealed behind a curtain, proceeded to craft portraits based on the information provided. Subsequently, an anonymous individual was randomly selected and asked to describe the same woman to Gil, facilitating a comparison between the two accounts. To everyone's surprise, the outcome yielded two entirely distinct portraits. Notably, the portrait derived from the stranger's description exhibited qualities of enhanced beauty, happiness, and accuracy. The conducted experiment effectively confirmed a prevailing notion: a considerable number of women underestimate their own beauty. In order to inspire countless women worldwide, who struggle to recognize their intrinsic beauty, a concise yet poignant video was produced. This video captures the reactions of the participants upon viewing the portraits, underscoring the profound impact of their newfound self-perception. (Dove Real Beauty Sketches, 2013)

3.2 Burger King, Moldy Whopper (disgust)

Figure - 6 Burger King, Moldy Whopper campaign #NoArtificialPreservatives (YouTube)

In February 2020, Burger King debuted a controversial ad campaign titled "the moldy Whopper" showcasing a moldy Whopper to signify the chain's departure from preservatives and artificial ingredients. This move came as the Restaurant Brands International chain announced its intention to eliminate artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives from its signature sandwich in the U.S.
The spot was launched, and currently over 400 outlets already offer the additive-free burger, with the company anticipating that all Whoppers will adhere to this change by the end of the year. However, the campaigns' approach of featuring mold in a food advertisement defies conventional meal promotion rules, which typically entail beautifully-shot, stylistically arranged items. (Handley, 2020)
In the initial part of the "The Moldy Whopper" advertisement, a Burger King sandwich is displayed, resembling the typical polished appearance commonly portrayed in food commercials. Yet, as the ad progresses, it reveals the same sandwich after a period of thirty-four days, with no semblance of its initial appeal. Instead, the viewers are confronted with a disgusting looking moldy Whopper, showing the effects of natural decay over time. (Meriano, 2020)

3.3 Patagonia, Facing Extinction (anger)

Figure - 7 Patagonia, Facing Extinction (YouTube)

"*We all must make it clear to our elected leaders that there is no room in government for climate deniers and their inaction is killing us. We need our leaders to act on the science and follow the market forces—do their jobs and create policies that protect our planet and our communities. Our customers are demanding we act—this generation of youth is not backing down and neither should we.*" (Rose Marcario, President and CEO, Patagonia).

Inspired and encouraged by the passion of young activists advocating for climate action, Patagonia fully aligns with their belief that the time to address our planet's escalating temperature is long overdue. The campaign showcases striking imagery, featuring photos of youth activists boldly displaying the words "facing extinction" across their faces. These activists fearlessly confront the climate crisis by participating in school strikes, protests, and urging elected officials to take action. This campaign is used as the means to deliver a clear and urgent message "We must act on climate now because without profound changes, humans could end up on the endangered species list." (Byars, 2019).

The campaign "facing Extinction" invokes emotions of anger and despair, but it also serves as a rallying call to prevent the very thing that evokes these sentiments. This call to action proves to be remarkably effective. Although the ad may not directly promote a specific product, it serves as a brilliant method to boost brand recognition and foster a connection with the audience. The campaign successfully reached an audience of more than 4 million individuals and generated approximately 26 million impressions across multiple platforms. Additionally, it served as a catalyst for inspiring

young activists worldwide to engage in meaningful action against global warming. (Grossi, "How to make an audience angry (and consequently sell more)").

3.4 Coca-Cola, Share a Coke, Share a Feeling (joy)

Figure - 8 Coca-Cola, Share a Coke, Share a Feeling (Kenya campaign) (YouTube)

In the captivating commercial "Share a Coke, Share a Feeling" (in Kenya), the scene unfolds in a vibrant classroom setting, where students are wearing the official attire in a striking combination of white, gray and red garments. The carefully selected colors reflect the iconic Coca-Cola color palette. This uniform dress code not only adds to the character's representation but also symbolizes the youthful energy thriving within society- the students' exuberant joy stems from their delightful interactions with Coca-Cola products. The slogan accompanying the advertisement is effortlessly memorable, serving as a compelling call-to-action for the audience to embrace the spirit of sharing by purchasing more Coke drinks and spreading happiness among others. Notably, the slogan beautifully emphasizes that once Coke is shared, a profound feeling of connection is shared as well, artfully equating Coke to a heartfelt emotion, making it an awe-inspiring metaphor. Through this brilliant advertisement, Coca-Cola champions inclusivity and unity, promoting the idea that everyone deserves to be part of this shared feeling within society. (Mochama, 2020)

3.5 VolksWagen, Eyes on the Road (fear)
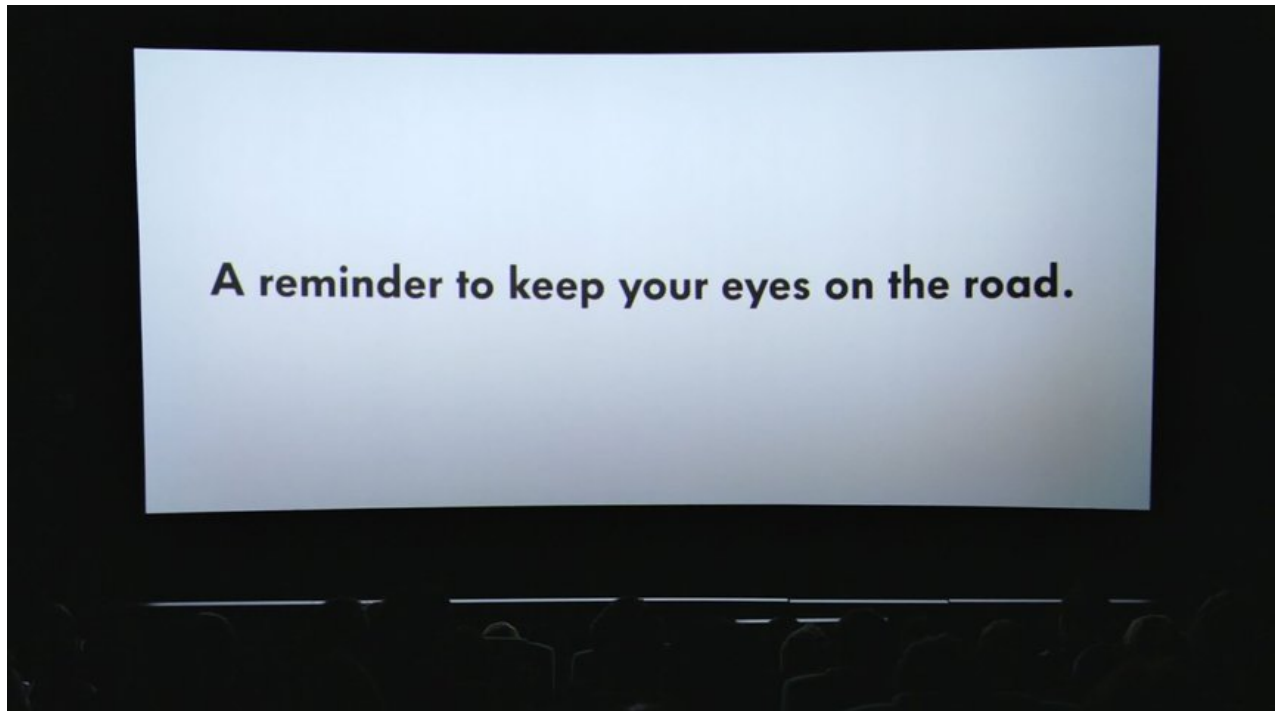
Figure - 9 VolksWagen, Eyes on the road (YouTube)

In a groundbreaking collaboration for the creation of the commercial "Eyes on the road", Volkswagen and a Chinese advertising agency tackled one of the most pressing issues on the roads today: the alarming rise in road fatalities caused by the dangerous use of smartphones while driving. Determined to make a lasting impact on young drivers and create a campaign they wouldn't forget, they created an ingenious and unforgettable approach. Inside a Hong Kong cinema, an unsuspecting audience settled in for a movie experience like no other. As a short trailer unfolded on the screen, portraying the perspective of a car driver, the viewers began to immerse themselves in the scene. From the projector room, a location based message was directly sent to the smartphones of those present, mimicking the distraction that occurs while driving. Curious and unaware of the profound impact this message would have, most people instinctively reached their phones. In that very moment, a jarring and frightful sound filled the theater. The stunned audience experienced firsthand the danger of being distracted while driving, as the campaign ingeniously simulated the sensation of receiving a text message while behind the wheel. The emotional impact was undeniable. This trailblazing campaign, which artfully combined technology, storytelling, and real-life experience, sought to transform behaviors and instigate positive change. It aimed to create a generation of responsible and aware drivers who would put their smartphones aside and focus on the road, safeguarding not only their own lives but also those of their fellow travelers. (Eyes on the road, 2015)

3.6 Metlife, My dad is a liar (sadness)

Figure - 10, MetLife, My dad is a liar (YouTube)

"My dad is a liar" is an advertisement crafted by an Asian insurance company, Metlife, that has touched millions of individuals on YouTube. This emotive commercial, gaining over a million views, revolves around the daily life of a father and his daughter. The little girl presents her father with a heartfelt letter, extolling his virtues as the sweetest, smartest, and most handsome man. The father appears like a superhero in his daughter's eyes, a strong and powerful figure, devoted to her every need and desire. They share playful moments, meals, and study sessions, with the father providing everything she wanted. Yet, the reality of her father's life is far different. Behind his face of strength, the father is tired and weary, bravely facing life's uncertainties and imbalances. He portrays an image of abundance and happiness, concealing the challenger he endures. In the letter, the daughter then states that her father is a liar because she knows that he doesn't have a job, doesn't have the money. She knows he lies about his tiredness and about his hunger, she also knows that he does it all for her, to ensure her happiness.

Metlife's campaigns skillfully explores the concept of an educational insurance for children, emphasizing the importance of securing their future. It captures the essence of a great parent's struggles to provide the best for their offspring. The story serves as a moving reminder of the importance of securing a child's future, allowing them to pursue their dreams and aspirations with confidence and support. (Margatina, 2018)

4. Conclusion

This work enhances the importance of emotions, since we can conclude that they are the main element in marketing campaigns as individuals want to be touched by what they're watching. The emotions selected to be the most important in viral marketing are six and the real life examples provided at the end of this thesis are a good representation of each of these emotions.

Each of these campaigns has been selected because in a short amount of time they got shared millions of times between individuals. Hence, from what the thesis states we can deduct that the reason why this campaign worked was because they triggered the viewer's emotions by following the "rules" of viral marketing.

In conclusion, this thesis serves as a significant steppingstone for readers to expand their knowledge and grasp a deeper understanding of the dynamic realm of Viral Marketing and its intricate relationship with emotional triggers. As demonstrated through the literature explored in the first chapter, the core of viral marketing lies in the content sharing. By taking in consideration the research of scholars, this study presents a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the central characteristics and elements that propel content towards viral success.

One of the fundamental findings of this research is the importance of emotions in viral marketing campaigns. As individuals engage with content, they seek to be emotionally moved and connected to the narrative they encounter. The identification and use of the six emotions (surprise, joy, anger, sadness, disgust, and fear) emerge as the foundation upon which successful viral campaigns are built. The real life examples provided in the latter part of the thesis serve as compelling representations of each of these emotions in action. Each of these campaigns within a short frame garnered millions of shares among individuals. The campaigns' resounding success can be attributed to their ability to adeptly harness the emotional triggers while adhering to the "rules" of viral marketing. Through these case studies, it is possible to witness the transformative potential of emotional storytelling, capturing the hearts and minds of audiences worldwide. The impact that these campaigns had reinforces the notion that emotions stand as the cornerstone of successful marketing endeavors in the digital age.

To conclude this thesis we can say that the fusion of emotions and viral marketing unveils a powerful tool for businesses and organizations seeking to amplify their reach and impact in an increasingly interconnected world.

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6. Case studies links

"Moldy Whopper" by INGO, DAVID Miami & Publicis Bucharest for Burger King | The One Show 2020

Dove Real Beauty Sketches | You're more beautiful than you think (3mins)

Share a Coke, Share a Feeling in Kenya

Volkswagen: Eyes on the road

My Dad is A Liar!

Facing Extinction