

10 Psychological Triggers That Make Content Go Viral

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What Is The Secret Sauce?

If you're like most marketers, you've probably thought about how to run a successful viral campaign.

After all, there's nothing better than getting your prospects to spread your marketing message to millions of people... for free.

But the problem is, there is no 100% rock-solid way to predict what will go viral. Some of the biggest companies in the world spend a lot of money hiring consultants and trying out different campaigns to see if they can get some traction.

But very few people know what's in the "secret sauce" that is guaranteed to unleash a viral effect.

That's right, viral campaigns are part art and part science. The "art" part of viral content is the true secret sauce – these are the mysterious factors that make content go viral, sometimes even when you least expect it. (Just ask any politician who's been swept away in a scandal.)

Often times you won't even recognize these factors until well after the fact – hindsight being 20/20 and all that.

However, what you can do is learn about the science of viral content. These are the proven psychological factors that push your viewer's emotional buttons and make their brains light up. These are the factors that get people hitting the share button more often...

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And you're about to discover ten of these factors for yourself right now inside this report. Once you know these ten factors, you'll be one huge step closer to unleashing the viral campaign of your dreams.

So let's jump in to discover the truth about what makes content truly "share-worthy..."

Factor 1: Accessibility

This is actually a really simple and almost common-sense factor, and yet so many overlook it that it's ridiculous. Simply put, the idea here is that your content needs to be easy-to-access.

Now, there are two factors that go into accessibility. Namely:

- The first factor is that anyone can access it. In other words, don't lock your content down behind passwords, don't make people join your list to get it, and don't put it on a platform that's only available to a minority of your audience.

For example: Don't put a video into a format that can't be accessed without special software. Instead, stick to major formats (like .MP4) and put it on YouTube where it's accessible to everyone.

- The second factor is that it doesn't take long to access it. You may have an idea for the coolest-ever 45 minute video. But you know what? Most people are going to take one look at the length and decide they don't have time to watch it. So keep the content short so that someone can view, read or otherwise consume the entire thing within just a few minutes.

That's the first factor. Pretty simple, right? Now here's another...

Factor 2: Share-ability

Here's the simple truth: people are more likely to share your content when it's easy to share.

Obviously, this overlaps with the previous factor in that content needs to be easy-to-access in order for it to be easily shared. However, we can take this all a step further with these tips:

- Put your content on a viral platform. Facebook is one of the best examples here, because the platform was designed for sharing content. All people have to do is click the "share" button. It doesn't get much easier than that to share content.

TIP: Whenever possible, put the viral content directly on Facebook, rather than linking to your website. Content that you

upload to Facebook is easier to share than content that you're linking to offsite.

- Install “share” buttons. Let’s suppose you have some sort of content that you can’t upload directly to Facebook and other viral platforms. One example might be a smartphone app. In this case, you’d still advertise and promote the app on viral platforms, except people would need to come to your site to download the app. When they arrive, they should see “share” buttons so they can post about your app on Facebook, tweet about it, or even directly email their friends.

Now here’s a pro tip for when you want really good results: create a call to action. This means you specifically tell people to share your content (and, when necessary, you tell them how to do it).

For example:

- “Share this post if you agree with it.”
- “If you love this video, just imagine how much your friends will love it. Click here to share it with them now.”
- “Amaze your friends by sharing this with them now.”

Next factor...

Factor 3: Consume-ability

Psst, here's a little secret...

People are a bit lazy. They don't want to have to "work" to consume your viral content. And that's why you should put it in a format that makes it easy to understand and easy to consume.

Here are the best and most popular viral formats:

1. Video. All people have to do is click the play button, and then sit back to watch your video. Easy peasy.
2. Infographic. This format is eye-catchingly attractive, which is a bonus. It's also easy to consume, since the words tend to be fairly sparse since the graphics tell much of the story. In other words, it's easy to consume since people can absorb the message in a short amount of time.
3. Other graphics. This might be a funny meme, or it might be an inspirational quote with a photo in the background. Either way, someone can glance it and within seconds be laughing, or be disgusted, or be otherwise moved by the graphical content.

So what about articles?

Oh sure, they go viral all the time. But I'm willing to bet that most the content you've seen shared over the years

came in a different format, such as photos, videos or infographics. Those other formats are easy to consume, easy to access and easy to share – which makes them a great choice for a viral campaign.

Now if you're absolutely dead-set on sharing content via a text-based format (like a blog post or a report), then keep these tips in mind:

- Make it easy to read. Don't try to impress anyone with your \$100 words. Make the content accessible by making it easy-to-read for your audience.
- Insert plenty of white space. Don't put up a wall of text, as that will drive users to the "back" button. Instead, use bulleted lists like this one to create more white space. Also, use short sentences and short paragraphs for easy readability.
- Break up text with graphics. These draw the eye back into the content, and make a nice visual aid to reinforce your point.

Pro Tip: If your article relies heavily on graphics, then making an infographic may be the better option.

So here's the bottom line...

Imagine that your audience members are the absolute laziest people on the planet. They don't want to work too hard to get your message. What is the best format? If you can create a video, infographic or other graphic, you're golden.

Next up...

Factor 4: Novelty

It's scientifically proven that your brain loves new stuff, especially when compared to familiar stuff. That's why so many refer to the "learner brain," as your brain actually rewards you when you see something new. Your brain wants you to actively seek out new stuff.

Let me explain...

If you put something familiar in front of a person, the brain goes "meh." That's just a lukewarm response as far as synaptic connections go.

Now put something novel in front of the brain, and a part of the midbrain – which is the reward and pleasure center-- lights up like a Christmas tree.

Not only that, but this midbrain releases dopamine, which creates a very pleasurable feeling. You can kind of get high and hooked on this neurotransmitter, which is exactly what your brain wants. It wants you to seek out new stuff, and every time you do it gives you a rush of ultra-pleasurable dopamine.

So imagine this for a moment...

You put something unique in front of your prospects, and their brain is going to give them a mini-rush of good feelings. Now that they have a good feeling, they want to share this feeling. Bam, they hit the share button.

But here's a problem...

How do you create something novel, when it seems like there is nothing new under the sun?

Thing is, you don't have to create something completely and 100% unique. All you have to do is take something old and give it a new twist.

Let me give you an example...

Have you ever seen those popular memes that go around the internet? Take the "Grumpy Cat" meme. It's often the same exact photo of Grumpy Cat – and yet what happens is that someone adds a new caption to the photo, and the meme goes viral again.

See how that works? The photo is old, but the caption is new... and it still goes viral.

Another example...

Have you ever seen those lists, such as "Seven surprising things you can do with _____?" (Where the blank is some common household thing, like dryer

sheets, dishwashing soap, or coffee grounds.) Obviously, people know what to do with dryer sheets – put ‘em in your dryer.

But what these lists do is offer people new ways to use these items, which is very novel. And that’s what makes a person’s brain light up.

So the point is, it’s cool if you can come up with something totally novel. That will really light up your viewer’s brain. But if not, look for a way to put a new twist on something old.

Factor 5: Arouses Emotion

Now this is a big factor. Huge. Because in order for you to get anyone to take any kind of action, you generally need to push their emotional buttons.

Think about it...

What do all great novels have in common?

That’s right, they create an emotional response in people.

This is why people eagerly finish the books, they’re sad when they’re done with it, and they discuss the book with others. Generally, this happens when they’ve connected emotionally with a character.

Copywriters and sales people know their income depends on evoking emotion. That's because many people make the buying decision based on emotion, and then justify their purchase with logic. Read just about any sales letter, and you'll see the copywriter pushing the emotional buttons like crazy.

Point is, if you're looking to create a successful viral campaign, then your content needs to make your viewers feel something. You need to evoke a strong emotional response.

Now, if you take a look around – such as content like the nightly news – you might be persuaded into thinking that you need to evoke a negative emotion.

Nope, that's not true. While certain strong negative emotions (like disgust) can and do go viral, researchers have discovered that the biggest viral pieces tend to evoke positive emotions. These emotions include:

- Surprise
- Amusement
- Delight
- Hope
- Excitement
- Joy
- Interest

Think about some of the big viral pieces you've seen, and I think you'll agree that you need to hit the positive emotional buttons. For example:

- All those funny cat videos online? Amusement, joy, delight.
- That inspirational quote? Maybe it created hope, joy and excitement.
- That prank video? Surprise and amusement.

Now here's something to consider...

Find a way to connect an old idea to a new emotion. You can do this by finding an unexplored angle.

This does two things. First, you created something novel. And as you already know, your viewer's brain is going to lap this up like a kitten drinking milk.

Secondly, an unexpected tie creates surprise and interest, both of which are strong emotions. Now you're well on your way to creating viral content.

Let me give you an example...

Often times we see videos online about how humans have abused animals. Some of these videos go viral because people are outraged and disgusted (those are negative emotions, but they are strong emotions). Sometimes the videos offer hope, which helps them go viral.

So picture this...

Recently I ran into a video showing a man on a pier trying to capture a pelican by the foot. I was already starting to feel outraged by this man who harassing a defenseless creature. I watched in horror as he made the catch – and then his friend helped him hold the bird still.

What happened next surprised me...

These two guys carefully and gently removed fishing linez and hooks from the bird's mouth. Then they released the bird to the applause of the bystanders on the pier.

My heart swelled. I felt joy. I felt hopeful. And yeah, you can bet I was thoroughly surprised when this video turned out to be so heartwarming, despite looking like it was going to be about a man teasing wildlife.

You know what I did next? I hit the share button.

So, you can see how this example hits several major emotional buttons. One of the strongest is when you can surprise people – make them think the video is going to be about one thing, and turn it into something else. This is particularly effective if people think the video is going to be about something bad (such as animal abuse) and it turns out to be just the opposite.

TIP: Your viral content will backfire if you give the impression that a video is about something good, and then it turns out to be about something bad. People will feel disgusted – at YOU. They'll feel

betrayed. So if you use this psychological trick, be sure to use it the right way (by turning a seemingly bad situation into a good one).

Next factor...

Factor 6: Enjoy-ability

This is an exceedingly simple factor, but it certainly comes into play big time with viral content.

Here's the scoop: when people enjoy your content, they want to share it with others so that they'll enjoy it too.

You can think of this factor as the "ice cream cone" of viral content. Eating an ice cream cone is enjoyable, right? But eating an ice cream cone with your best pals is even better. A shared experience makes a good experience even better.

So that's what is at play here. On the one hand, people want to share their joy with others. In some cases, people share content with their friends so that they can discuss that content. (E.G., "Dude, you have to see this video and tell me what you think about it.")

And sometimes, people share content they think others will enjoy because sharing raises their status. That's actually the next factor. Take a look...

Factor 7: Ego

Sure, there are a few purely altruistic people who share content solely for the purpose of spreading joy, education or something else positive with others.

But then there's the rest of your audience. Before these folks share any content, they think about how sharing will affect their status in a community or among their circle of friends. That's right, sharing can be act of narcissism or even outright ego-stroking.

So let's take a look at two of these ego factors that may come into play when someone is considering sharing your content:

- 1) Identity building
- 2) Status building.

Take a look...

Identity Building

The idea here is that people share content that supports their worldview and builds their identity.

Think about how social media works...

So many people have thousands of "friends" from around the world. Their connections are people with whom they've never had a one-on-one conversation. And the truth is, these folks don't have time to build individual relationships with everyone in their contact list. So what they do is share content that basically says,

“This supports my worldview. This is what I think. This is who I am.”

That’s why you’ll see people sharing links, videos and memes about important issues, including political issues, social issues and religious issues.

But that doesn’t mean you need to create content based on the huge issues of our time in order for it to go viral. Heck no. Just choose an issue that divides people, take a side, and create content showing a strong stance on that issue.

Your content doesn’t even have to be serious. When I say the issue “divides people,” I don’t mean that in a bad way. I’m just saying that folks have strong opinions. And this can occur even in light-hearted situations.

For example, people are pretty divided when it comes to sports teams. If you’re in a market catering to a particular sport, you could easily create a meme that makes fun of one team while exalting another. That’s the kind of stuff that goes viral, as fans of the exalted team share the meme and laugh.

Not only does this evoke emotion (always a good thing as you learned), but it also builds the sharer’s identity by showing which sports team they prefer.

Music is another example. People share music they like, memes about musicians and quotes from musicians. Again, telling others what kind of music you enjoy is a way to share something of yourself with others.

Still another example: sharing cute animal videos, or memes that denounce animal abuse. These all tell viewers something about the sharer.

Of course there are plenty of contentious examples too. Sharing outrageous quotes or conspiracy theories from the political fringe would certainly tell others a lot about the sharer.

So the point is, people like to share things that they agree with, as it helps them build their identity on a social media platform.

Now here's the other ego factor that comes into play...

Status Building

The concept here is that people share content that will make them look good in the eyes of their friends (which in turn makes them feel better). That's right, this is purely an ego play. It's a way for someone to build social capital, which they may cash in and spend at another time.

So here are three ways people use viral content to build their own status in a community:

People like to be the first to share cool content. This person likes to be seen as the one who always finds and shares the cool stuff first. In fact, this person is more likely to share content before the viral effect has really

kicked in. He wants to be the first, and if he's not then he probably won't even share it.

For example, if a viral video has already made it to the front page of YouTube or it's trending on Twitter, this person won't share it.

Pro Tip: This is the type of person who can help you kick start a viral campaign. Find these sneezers on blogs, on Facebook and similar communities. Then get your content into their hands as soon as it launched (or even just before) so that they can maintain their identity as the person who finds the cool stuff first.

People share content that will help others. The second way people build their status is by sharing content that helps others. It makes them look good to their friends, and it makes them feel good too.

But here's something else...

Helping others also trips the reciprocity trigger. When we do for others, they often feel obligated to do for us. That's why if you give a friend a birthday card on his birthday, he'll likely reciprocate and give you a card when your birthday rolls around.

So, someone who regularly shares useful content with others tends to trip the reciprocity trigger and build social capital. When this person wants something from his friends, he's more likely to get it since he's been so helpful to them.

And finally...

People share content that will make others feel good.
We've already talked about this just a bit earlier, in that people who enjoy something will want to share it so that others can enjoy it too. But here this factor isn't altruistic – rather, the person is sharing the content to build their own status.

There's a bit of behavioral conditioning at play here, at least with some people. Let me explain...

People who go on a first date and do something thrilling – such as riding a rollercoaster – often attribute this good feeling with their date rather than the rollercoaster itself. And that's after just one event. Imagine if you paired a thrilling event (and good feelings) with a particular person repeatedly.

That's right, now we're getting into Pavlovian territory. Pavlov trained his dogs to associate the sound of a bell with food. So all Pavlov had to do was ring a bell, and his dogs would automatically drool in anticipation of food. That's called conditioning.

Now imagine if a certain person in a community is constantly sharing good content that produces good feelings among his friends. His friends would laugh, feel delight and generally feel good whenever they see the content. However, some of their good feelings would become associated with the person himself.

Point is, it's a sneaky yet surprisingly effective way for someone to build their status in a community. If they can share content that makes others feel good, then they'll look good to their friends.

So, you get the picture here. People don't always share for altruistic reasons. Sometimes they share to build their identity or build their status. Keep that in mind as you develop your own viral content ideas.

Okay, next factor...

Factor 8: Relate-ability

The idea behind this factor is that people share when they're able to relate to the content.

But here's the key...

Different types of people relate to different types of content. And that's why you need to know your audience inside and out before you even attempt to create viral content. You should know:

- Their age.
- Their gender.
- Their familiarity with pop culture.
- Their tastes in music, movies, books and sports.
- Their education level.
- Their interests.
- Their fears.

- Their hopes and dreams.
- Things that make them laugh.
- Things that frustrate them.
- Things that outrage them.
- Things that motivate them to take action.

...And anything else you can find out about your target market.

How do you collect all this information? Here are two ways:

 Survey your market. Just know that sometimes surveys are inaccurate, simply because people tell you what you want to hear rather than telling you the truth. What's more, biased questions can skew the results. And finally, if your group isn't a random selection of your target market, you may get skewed results.

Point is, be very careful about how you collect survey data. Then trust it, but verify it using the next method...

 Immerse yourself in your market. Join forums, Facebook groups, and offline meet ups. Get to know the market as much as possible. If you're able to, do what your market does so that you have a better understanding of their joys and problems. (E.G., If your market consists of fly fishers, then take up fishing to learn more about the market.)

Once you know as much as you possibly can about your market, then you'll be better able to create content that they can really relate to. End result? A bigger viral effect for you.

Next factor...

Factor 9: Connect-ability

One study suggests that about 78% of people who share content do so as a way of connecting with their friends.

You can see how this works if you give it some thought.

On social media, people aren't having one-on-one conversations with all the contacts in their friends list. So they post something thought-provoking, something controversial, or something that otherwise will engage others.

So maybe the other people will just "like" the content.

Better yet, perhaps the others will discuss it with the person who shared it. That's a great way to connect or re-connect with friends. They can laugh about that cute cat video together.

They can share some outrage over what some celebrity said about someone else. They can discuss an important social issue, which grows respect and even bonds the two people if they share the same view.

Of course sometimes people don't even know all the "friends" on their contact list. In that case, this sort of connection can become very valuable. Someone might lurk for months without ever commenting on another's content.

And then one day an issue touches them so deeply that they join a discussion, which connects them with everyone else who's joined the same discussion.

The point is, when you're thinking about what kind of content to create, ask yourself if this is something that might connect people with others.

Next factor...

Factor 10: Evokes Curiosity

A lot of people who're creating viral content – such as a video – put a lot of thought and effort into creating something polished, professional and share-worthy. But then when it comes to the title or description of the content they write a few lines that are as boring and dry as burnt toast.

Here's the deal...

If you want to kick start a big viral effect, your title and description (where applicable) need to get attention and get the click. And one good way to do that is by arousing curiosity.

The idea here is to create a “itch” that your visitors can only scratch by viewing your content. You arouse their curiosity with a title, and then satisfy that curiosity within the viral content itself.

Now if you want a crash course in curiosity-arousing titles, all you have to do is visit one of the many content-curation sites that specialize in sharing viral content. One really good example of this is the popular site UpWorthy.com.

Today as I write this, I can find plenty of curiosity-arousing titles on UpWorthy. Here’s a quick sample:

- “JK Rowling Responds Perfect To a Girl Who Gets Teased For Wanting to Write”

The target market is going to immediately be curious about what JK Rowling told this girl – and they have to watch the video to find out.

- “This Special Dog is Saving Our Bees – She’s The Only One Who Can”

This is going to raise questions that can only be answered by watching the video. Why is this dog so special? How is she saving bees? Why is she the only one that can?

- “These Tigers Have Never Been Swimming Before. Here’s How They Reacted To Their Brand New Pool.”

This title certainly arouses curiosity about how these big cats will react to a pool. It makes me want to watch it – what about you?

So the point is, your viral content needs to have a good title if you want people to view the content. At that point, the content itself should include the other factors we’ve talked about in order to get people sharing it across your market.

Now let’s wrap things up...

Creating Your Own Secret Sauce

As you know, creating viral content isn’t 100% science. If it was, then big companies around the world wouldn’t pour so much time, effort and money into campaigns that flopped. There is always that factor that no one foresees that either makes or breaks a campaign.

Unfortunately, there aren’t any crystal balls that can give you a sneak peek into the future of your viral campaign. But what you can do is use the ten factors you just learned about in this report.

Let’s recap:

- Factor 1: Accessibility
- Factor 2: Share-ability
- Factor 3: Consume-ability
- Factor 4: Novelty
- Factor 5: Arouses Emotion
- Factor 6: Enjoy-ability
- Factor 7: Ego
- Factor 8: Relate-ability
- Factor 9: Connect-ability
- Factor 10: Arouses Curiosity

Now the key here isn't to just pick a factor and focus all your time and effort on being sure your viral campaign nails that factor.

Instead, you want to include as many of those factors as possible. Ideally, your content should be nailing all ten of those factors.

Think about the last big viral video that rolled across your Facebook feed for several. I'm betting it included all of these factors – or at least the vast majority. Am I right?

Let's take the example I gave you earlier in this report, about the guy who grabbed the pelican by the foot and then ended up pulling fishing hooks and lines off its beak.

It was easy to share, access and consume (because it was a short three minute video on Facebook). Those are the first three factors.

Factor 4: It was novel too me, because I had never seen anyone catch a pelican like that before.

Did it arouse emotion? You bet it did. First outrage, then surprise when I realized the video was about helping rather than hurting an animal, then happiness. For these reasons it was also thoroughly enjoyable.

Factor 7, ego. Yes, I shared it. And yes, it probably made me look good to my friends when I shared with them this heart-warming video. This also created a connection with my friends (Factor 9).

The video also hit Factor 8, in that I could relate to it. No, I can't exactly relate to capturing a pelican, but I certainly can relate to helping those who can't help themselves.

And finally curiosity – it had that too. The title was something along the lines of, “This man catches a pelican – you won't believe that happens next.”

So the point is, even a simple video like the pelican video nails all ten of those factors. Your viral content simply won't get much traction if you don't inject all of those factors.

So here's what I suggest you do next...

Start brainstorming viral content for your niche. Study your market first if you don't know much about them. Then go to sites like YouTube, Facebook and others to

see what sort of content is already trending in your niche.

Does your market like infographics, videos, memes or other content?

Do they like humorous content, motivational, inspirational or something else?

What topics seem to grab their attention the most?

Point is, reverse engineer the viral content that's currently working in your niche to see if you can figure out what your prospects respond to, and then create something with similar factors.

NOTE: Don't create similar content, as that destroys the novelty factor. Instead, create content that hits the same factors and triggers as the popular content in your niche.

One last tip...

Be sure to kick start your viral content. This means you put it in front of as many people as possible on the day you launch it, as this will help it gather the momentum and critical mass it needs to go viral in a big way.

Good luck – and here's to seeing your content on the front page of YouTube or trending on social media soon!

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