Successful Methods of Viral Marketing

How to achieve virality

Bachelor Thesis within Business Administration

Author: Jakob Ahlberg
Tutor: Rudrajeet Pal

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The author of this thesis would first and foremost like to acknowledge the tutor, Rudrajeet Pal. Without his perspective, this thesis would not have been the same. In addition, the author would like to thank all four of the participants in this study for making it possible at all. The author would also like to express his gratitude to the opposition group. Without their constructive criticism and good ideas, the resulting thesis would have been of a much lower quality. Finally, without the incredible friends and family that have supported the author throughout this process there would be no guarantee that he would have kept his sanity until the end.

Jakob Ahlberg
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Abstract

As the world of marketing has progressed into the age of the internet, new challenges and opportunities have emerged. The online environment has developed into a hub for social media platforms where information spreads like wild fire. This type of spread is often referred to as viral, since it gets transmitted from person to person at very rapid speeds. Companies have now started to pick up on this phenomenon and realized the potential that lies within it, but there is still not enough research on what makes viral spread happen and how brands can utilize or exploit this concept.

This thesis conducts a qualitative study of an exploratory nature with antecedent theoretical frameworks as its base. It presents new data collected through interviews with experienced marketing and social media professionals in an attempt to create a clearer image of the concept of viral marketing. It also aims to expand on existing theories and to discuss them in the context of the contemporary online environment.

The result of this study shows that while the theoretical base is still valid, it still needs to be expanded upon further. This thesis begins to scratch the surface of concepts previously undiscussed in the models and theories that lies as the foundation of this study. However, a lengthier study with a larger sample size may result in a better understanding of virality, viral marketing and human behaviour within the online culture.
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Disposition

This thesis is divided in seven sections, references and appendices excluded, and the disposition of these sections follows:

1. Introduction

The introduction aims to let the reader get acquainted with the topic at hand by reading about its background as well as introducing the problem, purpose and research questions of the thesis. It also discusses the authors’ chosen delimitations.

2. Literature and Theory

This section introduces some of the literature that already exists on the topic of viral marketing and also aims to provide the reader with the models and theories that the thesis will base its analysis on when elaborating on the empirical data that will be showcased in section four. These models and theories will also be relevant to the way interviews will be shaped during the collection of said data.

3. Methodology

The methodology will delve into how the research will be conducted and will touch on what philosophy, approach, design and method will be employed throughout the course of the research. It will not only discuss which these will be but also why they have been chosen, as well as the reasons why some methodology would not be suitable for this type of study.

4. Empirical study

This part of the thesis will present the data collected. The data consists of primary data collected through interviews with professionals who possess valuable knowledge about the subject that they have acquired through experience working in an online environment either for a company or as a standalone internet personality.

5. Analysis

The fifth section of this thesis will display the empirical data collected in relation to the models and theories discussed in the second part. Authors will give their interpretation and analysis.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this section a summary of the analysis as well as conclusions and answers for research questions will be provided. The aim of this is to verify if the purpose previously stated in the introduction has been fulfilled.

7. Discussion and Further research

In this final section, some thoughts on the thesis and some suggestions for how scholars can continue the research on this topic will be provided.
1. Introduction

The introduction aims to let the reader get acquainted with the topic at hand by reading about its background as well as introducing the problem, purpose and research questions of the thesis. It also discusses the authors’ chosen delimitations.

1.1 Background

Throughout history businesses have used marketing to gain a larger market share in one way or another. Traditionally, the main methods have been through word-of-mouth and print ads but as technology have developed over the past century some other forms of marketing have taken over, more specifically mass marketing. First came radio where companies could reach thousands of listeners with their advertising campaigns. After that came television which also used standardized mass marketing messages but to a larger audience. Now there is a new generation of marketing methods that has taken over, we are in the age of the internet. (Jones & Shaw, 2006)

Ever since the dawn of the internet people have been communicating with each other through peer-to-peer mediums such as e-mail, direct messaging, forums, blogs and social media websites. The internet made communication much easier, requiring a lot less effort to get a message to friends and co-workers. This of course opened up possibilities for communicating things that were not entirely essential such as e-mailing chain letters where the recipient is requested to send copies of the letter to people they know (Van Arsdale, 2016). The reason for mentioning this is that the way the internet works now, especially on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, is tangent to that very same principle. When people find something they find intriguing, humorous, interesting or shocking, they are inclined to share this with people from their social network (Johansson, 2017). The difference now is that they are most often not requested to share but do so anyway because they believe their peers may also have an interest to see that particular content. This is often referred to as electronic word-of-mouth and what happens is that if enough people share the content in question, its spread increases exponentially and this results in what people refer to as it “going viral”.

Viral content can reach millions of people in a matter of days and it is pretty obvious that this can become a very powerful tool for a company that uses it correctly. When looking at YouTube-videos this phenomenon becomes quite clear. In Figure 1.1 we can see the standard straight-line growth of a regular video compared to that of a video that reached viral success.
Traditional forms of advertisements such as TV-ads, print ads and radio ads are quite costly and also introduce various time constraints. A 30-second commercial spot on a local TV-station in the US has a cost ranging from $200 and $1500 while a nationally broadcasted advert costs $123 000 on average (Aland, 2017). On the internet a company can commence in quick, almost cost-less marketing that has the possibility of reaching people from all over the world. This is why a lot of companies have now begun to use social media and the internet in general as a means of improving public relations, increasing brand awareness as well as spreading their messages and advertisements across the globe.

Since there seems to be a lack of understanding in regards to what makes something “go viral” in today’s online climate, the author sees a need to investigate how companies can achieve this result on a consistent basis. One may argue that the internet both looks and works a lot different in 2018 than it did in 2008. That is why the literature can appear a bit lacklustre.

1.2 Problem discussion

Once companies started to use the internet, they soon realized that it was not only a way to transmit information to potential and existing customers but rather that it was an already fully-fledged marketing apparatus which they could not only use to broadcast, but also to interact (Kotler & Keller, 2006). There are a multitude of factors that need to be taken into account when developing a plan for online marketing such as which platforms and forms of media to use, what the appeal of the adverts should be (e.g. humour) and what message it should communicate (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Getting all of these things just right in order to make the ad go viral is a very difficult task indeed, but once done properly the company will be able to reap the massive rewards in a matter of days. Not only does it result in a massively increased brand awareness at times but it can also help the company develop a stronger, more favourable brand image (Kirby & Marsden, 2006).
As online communities have developed over the lifespan of the internet we have seen some platforms become giants in their own right. The largest global social media platforms out on the internet as of now are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. These social media sites have hundreds of millions of users, with Facebook having over two billion users and YouTube sitting comfortably at one and a half billion (Statista, 2018). Even though the audience is this huge it is still immensely challenging making content that reaches even a fraction of its full potential. In the case of YouTube this may be caused by the fact that in 2016, 300 hours of content was uploaded to the platform every minute (Statistic Brain, 2016). This means that companies somehow need to break through all the noise and stand out amongst this flabbergasting amount of content. The same goes for Facebook, there are a massive amount of content on this platform being posted every day but the difference is that Facebook incorporates a paid promotion feature that companies may use to reach an audience which size is determined by how much they pay (Facebook, 2018).

There are companies out there that have achieved great success using viral marketing such as Procter & Gamble’s ‘Old Spice’ brand of men’s shampoo. They managed to create multiple internet ads in quick succession that all managed to gain a huge audience from all over the world with 50 million views on their most popular one, all through the power of the internet. Although the first iterations of these ads were vastly successful raking in over ten million views each on YouTube alone, the structure they used quickly became stale and the views declined marginally for each new video (Old Spice YouTube-channel, 2018). But what was in the recipe for the first ads that made them so irresistible? Is it possible for other companies to learn from these ads and in some way incorporate what they learn into their own campaigns?

1.3 Research questions

The research questions for this thesis are:

- How can companies utilize principles and emotions to achieve virality in a practical way while creating marketing campaigns?

- How should companies structure their marketing efforts in order to have the best chance of achieving virality on a consistent basis?
1.4 Purpose

With established marketing models and theories utilized in the business world as a base this thesis hopes to expand upon existing knowledge and create a clearer and better understanding of viral marketing and how it could reach its full potential in the current online climate. Not only does it aim to explore ways of creating successful viral marketing campaigns but also how to do it in a consistent manner where the content created keeps the customer coming back time and time again. The exploration of how a company can, through viral marketing, improve upon their brand image and create a community of people who are loyal to the brand and its products or services is also of vital importance.

1.5 Delimitations

Since there are so many different ways to communicate through the internet these days, both on personal computers and mobile phones through a multitude of apps and websites the choice was made to focus on the very largest global social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter). This means that region specific apps and websites such as the Chinese WeChat are not a subject of research for this thesis. The reason for this is that region specific social media platform behaviour is hugely bound by the culture of that particular region. This would result in a study that is not representative or relevant on a global scale. It would also result in large difficulties in the acquisition of information about that specific platform.

When starting to form the idea for this thesis the decision was made to not only interview professionals that work for large corporations but also regular people who have managed to gain a larger than usual following on social media platforms in order to investigate what made them gain traction and how they work to expand their reach. After starting to contact potential interviewees it was clear that it is extremely difficult to approach both professionals and social media content creators and get them to agree to an interview. This is why the decision was made to not limit our research to people who work as professional marketers within the field of social media for established corporations since this will help with the acquisition of a larger sample of data with a greater variety of opinion and more diversity of experience.
This thesis was built on interviews with a limited sample size which means that generalizations that encompasses all companies in all industries are not possible even though several respondents may agree on certain areas.
1.6 Definitions

This section aims to provide the reader with clear definitions for wording and terminology that may prove difficult for the reader themselves to define.

**Viral Marketing**
The promotion of an organisation or its products and services through a compelling message engineered to spread, typically online, from person to person (Kirby & Marsden, 2006).

**Brand Image**
The image that a company wants to project to current and potential customers, often related to values and product quality (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990).

**Electronic Word-of-Mouth**
The spread of information through electronic means through person-to-person communication (Goldsmith, 2008).

**Facebook Tagging**
The act of mentioning someone’s name in a Facebook post comment section in order to create a notification for that particular person directing them to the post in which they were mentioned or ‘tagged’ as it is commonly called (Facebook, 2018).

**Influencer**
A person or group that has the ability to influence the behaviour or opinions of others: The influencer is the individual whose effect on the purchase decision is in some way significant or authoritative (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2018).

**Stealth Marketing**
Stealth marketing is an electronic word-of-mouth communication. Those spreading these marketing messages are required not to disclose the fact that they are being paid to promote the product for the organisation (Swanepoel, Lye & Rugimbana, 2009).

**Clickbait**
A term used for attention-grabbing headlines or titles, mostly hyperbolic in nature, that encourage readers to click on article or video links (Haque, 2017).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meme</td>
<td>An idea or behaviour that spreads from one person to another within a specific culture, with the purpose of portraying a certain phenomenon or theme represented by said meme (Dawkins, 1976).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cryptocurrency</td>
<td>A virtual, digital currency used because of its cryptographic nature, often protecting the identity of its user (Greenberg, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Coin Offering (ICO)</td>
<td>An unregulated means by which funds are raised for a new cryptocurrency venture (Investopedia, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Engine Optimization (SEO)</td>
<td>A process in which companies attempt to affect their visibility in search results for search engines such as Google (Ortiz-Cordova &amp; Jansen, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Literature and theory

This section introduces some of the literature that already exists on the topic of viral marketing and also aims to provide the reader with the models and theories that the thesis will base its analysis on when elaborating on the empirical data that will be showcased in section four. These models and theories will also be relevant to the way interviews will be shaped during the collection of said data.

2.1 Viral marketing

The origin of the term viral marketing brings us back in time to the early nineties. This is the time period where companies first started to get a glimpse of the massive potential that this concept would later fulfil (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). Viral marketing in its essence is a marketing message engineered for the purpose of spread from one person to the next. This is done by encouraging or rewarding people who comply by sharing it with their peers (De Bruyn & Lillien, 2008).

Throughout the years of development that viral marketing has seen, people have chosen to define the concept in a few different ways. One view is that viral marketing is the promotion of an organisation or its products and services through a compelling message engineered to spread, typically online, from person to person (Kirby & Marsden, 2008). This is the definition chosen for this thesis. One can also describe it as an electronic way to utilize word-of-mouth. This means that a message is compelling or entertaining enough to incentivise people to pass it on to others, spreading much like a virus at no cost of the creator (Helm, 2010). This creates a kind of exponential growth in its spread since each person reached will typically spread it to multiple others.

Not only does the viral marketing message itself incentivise sharing but the way contemporary social media works also promotes it through various built in features such as the share button that is now present on almost every social media platform out there. It is a built-in feature on all websites being investigated in this particular study and sharing content from one website or social media platform onto another is as easy as two clicks or taps depending on whether one uses a computer or a mobile device.
Facebook has even gone so far as to share posts that you like, comment on or get tagged in with your friends (Rayson, 2015). This may result in people seeing posts on their feed from people or pages that they themselves have not chosen to follow, further increasing the potential of spreading content on Facebook.

### 2.1.1 Types of viral marketing

There are essentially two different types of viral marketing, *passive* and *active*. Passive viral marketing is, in its essence, broadcasting your brand through some type of media without it being the focus of the content (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). This can be equated to something like adding a watermark to a viral video. Many Facebook-pages have adopted this method. This results in a vast amount of people seeing the watermark even though the subject of interest is in fact what is happening in the video.

Active viral marketing works slightly different. In order for it to be considered active, there needs to be some kind of call to action and participation from the recipient (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). A good example of this would be any kind of contest on social media where any contestant is required to like, share or comment on a particular social media page to enter, resulting in it spreading like wildfire.

### 2.1.2 Advantages of viral marketing

One of the largest advantages of viral marketing is that, compared to advertising made through traditional media such as television or print ads, it is very inexpensive. There is no need to pay large sums of money in order to get airtime, no need to pay for printing or even for distribution. It is the design of viral marketing that makes this possible and it is therefore it is all the more effective than traditional forms of advertising media. Studies have shown that the generation most active on social media are millennials and this generation is also the one with the lowest trust for traditional advertising (Arnold, 2018). Millennials are shown to be more affected by influencer advertising than advertising made independently by companies. The reason behind this is both that they have more trust for their favourite internet personalities than companies and that they are more inclined to watch ads that will help support content creators (Arnold, 2018). Since many influencers see their videos go viral on a semi-regular basis, this type of marketing is highly relevant in the context of this study.

Another highly effective way to use virality in advertising is through stealth marketing. Stealth marketing is the concept of using influencers to promote a product without them disclosing that they are in fact engaging in paid promotion for the company in question. This can be even more effective than regular influencer marketing since it implies that the influencer is promoting the product or service because they like it even though they may do it solely for monetary reasons (Swanepoel, Lye & Rugimbana, 2009). This practice is seen by many as unethical but it is not uncommon. In the EU this type of marketing is illegal but the same is not true for the US where it instead is heavily regulated (Martin & Smith, 2008). It is, however, much more common for
influencers and companies to be upfront and honest about their promotional activities. YouTube now allows for influencers to include a small annotation on their videos that indicates promotional activity with the phrase “Includes paid promotion” (YouTube Help, 2016).

2.1.3 Disadvantages of viral marketing

The largest drawback of viral marketing methods is the lack of control that comes as a byproduct with nearly every single instance of this type of advertisement. Once it spreads to enough people, the creators of the advert no longer possess control over its distribution and use. This means that any mistake or error in the ad that people may find and take offense to will be exceedingly difficult to correct. This could result in a negative impact on a company’s brand image (Woerndl, Papagiannidis, Bourlakis & Li, 2008).

Another major risk that a viral marketing campaign may introduce is the power of association. Companies cannot control who receives and who shares their message so once people and groups start sharing the content there is no longer any control over who shares it. There may arise situations where someone spreading a company’s message is someone they would rather not be associated with (Miller, R., & Lammas, N. 2010).

2.1.4 Viral marketing principles

When engaging in different kinds of viral marketing strategies there are six essential principles that should be taken into account to achieve maximum success and effectiveness (Wilson, 2012).

1. *Give-aways of products or services*

   In the context of viral marketing there is one incentive for sharing that trumps most others, free products or services. When given something for ‘free’ in exchange for something as simple as passing information onto someone else, many people will not hesitate to participate. In fact, the promise of something ‘free’ generates interest at a much higher rate than if something is offered at a discount in the same kind of exchange. There does not even have to be a guarantee for a free product but a mere chance of winning something free will have a similar effect. This kind of marketing results in a viral spread which in turn produces a larger audience of potential customers that then view future marketing efforts and generate sales for the advertising company (Wilson, 2012).
2. **Effortless transfer to others**

Viral marketing campaigns only spread when they are easy to transmit, much like a virus that passes from one person to another through coughs, runny noses and sneezes. This means that if it is a bother to share content with one’s social network, it probably will not spread. This is the reason viral marketing works so well on the internet where sharing something with the people you know is as easy a click or two. The built-in share button on most social media websites make this process almost completely effortless. Social media users get constantly bombarded with information and this results in a relatively short attention span. This means that a short, concise and to-the-point messages are most effective since they are not only effortless to share, but also effortless to receive (Wilson, 2012).

3. **Easy scaling from small to very large**

In order for viral spread of marketing to succeed, there must be a way for the company that created the campaign to deal with the consequences. For instance, if a company manages to spread word about their website and the visitor numbers increases by 4000 percent, their servers must have enough computing power to handle the unusual spike in visitors. A virus is not effective if the host does not survive long enough for it to spread. Make sure to plan ahead (Wilson, 2012).

4. **Exploitation of common motivations and behaviour**

For a viral marketing campaign to reach its full potential it needs to incorporate appeal to common motivating factors such as greed, the need to be popular, loved and understood. All of these may contribute to communication between people. A company that designs their message with regard to these factors are sure to see success (Wilson, 2012).

5. **Utilization of existing communication networks**

People are, in general, social beings with a need to communicate with and be around other people. Most people already have a social network of friends and family, varying in size from just a few to hundreds depending on their social status (Wilson, 2012). With the introduction of social media websites, the possibility to keep in touch with larger groups of people has increased immensely. Many people have hundreds of Facebook-friends that they would not otherwise socialize or keep in contact with. This means that a viral marketer that manages to place their message into existing communications between people can rapidly multiply its dispersion (Wilson, 2012).
6. Taking advantage of others’ resources

This is the basis of viral marketing on social media platforms. The usage of web infrastructure developed by Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter is imperative in order to reach the maximum amount of people with a viral marketing message since they are all connected through these networks. This means that the message gets spread without depleting any of the creator’s resources (Wilson, 2012).

2.1.5 Emotions in viral marketing

Much like any other marketing activity the emotion that is conveyed in a viral marketing message is often just as important as the factual information (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Online content is often shared more quickly when receivers feel a strong emotional connection with the message and the six primary emotions that regulate this kind of behaviour are surprise, joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme & van Wijk, 2007). The theory that humans have six basic emotions is a well-tested theory and was confirmed by Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen while studying an isolated population in Papua New Guinea in 1972 (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). It is important to note that these emotions do not only apply to viral marketing but to marketing as a whole.

1. Surprise

The first emotion out of the six is surprise, which is of utmost importance to all marketing endeavours. A sense of unexpectedness creates a more impactful impression on the receiver (Gwynne, 2002). However, relying solely on surprise would be a mistake as it has a much greater effect when used in tandem with one of the other five emotions (Dobele et al., 2007).

2. Joy

One of the positive emotions used in marketing is joy (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999). This emotion suits brands that want a fun and easy-going image. It is also a good choice when trying to revitalize a product that may have existed on the market for an extended period of time. Joy is also suitable for products whose purpose is life improvement (Dobele et al., 2007).

3. Sadness

Sadness can be used as a negative emotion in marketing (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984) and is best used in messages that want a quick response to unfortunate events. However, the drawback of this emotion is that it often encourages short-term commitments instead of long-term ones.
Balancing sadness with a sense of hope or change can help create a more well-rounded message (Dobele et al., 2007).

4. **Anger**

Anger is the negative emotion most effective at generating a response from the viewer (Power & Dalgleish, 1997). It is best suited to messages that want to trigger an immediate response such as the feeling of injustice. Much like sadness this emotion also works best for short-term action (Dobele et al., 2007).

5. **Fear**

Fear is used in marketing campaigns and this is especially true for political campaigns (Brader, 2006). Just like the last two emotions, this one is also oriented towards short-term commitment to a perceived threat. This should be used sparingly as it may initiate a mixed response from the target market (Dobele et al., 2007).

6. **Disgust**

Disgust is best used when targeting young males and can give a brand an image of being rebellious. Men share messages involving disgusting humour twice as often as women (Dobele et al., 2007).

### 2.1.6 External drivers of virality

There are some external factors that may play part in how quickly viral spread can occur. One example of these external drivers can be where certain content gets featured (Berger & Milkman, 2011). Viral content spreads very quickly from one person to the next but once a media outlet or an internet personality with a large audience starts featuring that particular content, that is when the spread can really accelerate.

Some of these media outlets are link-sharing sites such as Reddit which calls itself ‘the front page of the internet’. Reddit is a site where people share online content with each other in various communities built around either a specific topic or around a certain concept (About Reddit, 2018). One of the most popular communities is called ‘AskReddit’ and it works by people posting open-ended questions that people from all walks of life can answer through the site’s comment section on that particular post (AskReddit, 2018). People then upvote and downvote these posts based on whether it is relevant to the community, if the post is of high quality in regards to entertainment value, a level of interest or just if they like or dislike the post. The site is the fourth most visited in America with over 330 million monthly active users. It has over 138 000 different communities and averages 14 billion screen views per month (About Reddit, 2018).
Getting featured on the front page of Reddit, where the most popular content from all communities gets featured, means that millions of people will be exposed to that particular content. This could mean that a great ad campaign can reach virality very quickly once people from a certain community starts upvoting it. Reddit is characterized by a herd mentality where people who see content that has many upvotes are also more inclined to upvote it themselves, it also works the same way with downvotes. This can result in an incredible snowball effect.

YouTube has a built-in section for videos that are trending. Trending videos are meant to help viewers observe what is going on, both on YouTube and in the world as a whole. Some videos are expected to be trending such as a new music video from a famous artist but videos that end up on the Trending page can also be unexpected things like viral videos. This page is not personalized but instead gives a more general view of what is popular on the platform at that particular time by updating the content shown every 15 minutes. This works by taking videos that fulfill certain criteria decided by YouTube and featuring them to a larger audience (YouTube Help, 2018). These criteria include:

- An appeal to a wide range of viewers
- No misleading, sensationalist or clickbaity content
- Capturing the breadth of what is happening on YouTube and in the world
- Ideally, they are surprising or novel

In order to balance this, they also consider other signals that include but are not limited to:

- View count
- Growth rate in regards to views
- Where the views originate from (including from outside of YouTube)
- The age of the video

Even though all of these factors are taken into account they may not always guarantee what videos appear on the Trending page of YouTube to a complete extent. It is all taken care of by a system brought forth by the platform’s developer team (YouTube Help, 2018).

2.1.7 Successful viral marketing campaigns

Throughout the recent decade there have been several examples of online marketing campaigns that have achieved viral success. However, before delving into the details of these it is important to try to formulate some kind of definition or classification for what can be constituted as viral success. With success being the operative word, it can be excruciatingly difficult for one to quantify what success is. It is a concept of a highly subjective nature that can mean a lot of different things to different people, all depending on what goals have been set in the current situation. To simplify it to some extent one can say that success can be defined as the completion of an objective or reaching a goal (BusinessDictionary, 2018).
In the context of a viral marketing campaign success may be quantified as reaching a certain amount of people from the desired target audience. As previously mentioned, this could mean reaching 5 000, 500 000 or even 5 000 000 people. It all depends on the goals set up by the developers of the campaign. In order to shed some light on what professionals may, from their own personal point of view, consider successful viral marketing there will be inquiries aimed at this topic included in the interview design of this research. Hopefully it will help define the concept more easily, giving both reader and researcher a deeper understanding.

The following section will mention a few viral marketing campaigns that are widely considered successful, generating millions of views on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube which are arguably the best platforms for content to reach a viral spread. This is because they have the most active users with a combined userbase of a whopping 3,5 billion people (Statista, 2018) and because they make video content exceedingly easy to share. Since the Old Spice campaigns have already been mentioned, they have been omitted from this section.

**LG Ultra Reality Meteor Prank**

In 2013, Chilean LG posted an ad that showed them setting up a fake job interview with hidden cameras and an actor posing as an interviewer. The point of this campaign was that they had fixed an 84-inch LG monitor in place where a window was supposed to be.

During these fake interviews, the monitor posing as a ‘window’ showed a meteor heading towards and striking earth in the city close to where the interview was being held. Naturally the interviewees freaked out and got really scared. Once the would-be shockwave from the meteor hit the ‘window’ the room went dark. After a few seconds the light came on and the team behind the stunt came in to tell them what had happened. The reactions of the victims of this prank were quite different with some feeling relief and happiness while others got really angry.

The reactions for this ad on the internet, however, were hugely positive and the video spread like wildfire across the web with over eight million views in its first week (Digital Synopsis, 2013). It has to this day generated over 20 million views (Mundo LG YouTube-channel 2018).

**Dove Real Beauty Sketches**

Dove created an ad campaign that was published on YouTube in 2013. The point of the ad was to have women describe their looks to an FBI-trained forensic sketch artist. The artist then went on to draw a portrait based on their description. The artist could not see the women neither before, after or during the drawing. Additionally, each of the women were also told to get acquainted with one of the other participating women. They then proceeded to describe the other woman while the artist, once again, went through the process of drawing another portrait.

After two portraits were finished they were put up next to each other. The women then got to see both the one based on their own description of themselves and the one based on someone else’s description of them. For all of the women the portrait based on their own description generally had less pleasant aesthetical features than the ones based on the description made by
someone else. What this campaign helped show these women was there is a stark contrast in how they view themselves and what others see.

This ad gained massive popularity in a very short time period with 3.8 million views during its first month (Ankeny, 2014) and has since then accumulated almost 70 million views over the past five years (Dove US YouTube-channel, 2018).

**Volvo Trucks – The Epic Split feat. Van Damme**

In late 2013 Volvo published an ad campaign with the purpose of showcasing the stability and precision of their then new Dynamic Steering. To do this they took some help from famous action movie star Jean-Claude Van Damme. The video shows Van Damme standing on the side mirrors of two Volvo trucks with both of them going in reverse at the same rate next to each other. The trucks then pull away from each other, little by little, until Van Damme is in a full split between the trucks. All of this is carried out to the tune of Enya’s ‘Only Time’ for dramatic effect.

This ad campaign, much like the others mentioned, also received huge popularity instantaneously. During its first month it generated over 60 million views (Swift, 2013) and as of today it is a couple of million views shy of 90 million (Volvo Trucks YouTube-channel, 2018).

**Metro Trains Melbourne – Dumb Ways to Die**

As a way for Metro Trains Melbourne to increase awareness of the dangers around train tracks and metro platforms they created an ad campaign centred around an animated music video with cute cartoon characters showcasing various different dumb ways to die. They paired this with an easy-listening song with catchy lyrics and melody. Some examples that they demonstrate of these ways to die are getting your toast out with a fork, doing one’s own electrical work, teaching yourself how to fly as well as eating a two-week-old unrefrigerated pie (DumbWays2Die YouTube-channel, 2018).

The way this ad works is that it builds its entire premise on unexpectedness. It does not even mention anything about trains until the last three lines of the lyrics in the very last verse and by then the viewer is already hooked in and invested in the cute animated character design and catchy tune. Comparing standing too close to the metro platform edge to poking a stick at a grizzly bear really accentuates how unnecessary and stupid train accidents can be. It helps drive the message home in an incredible way.

This ad campaign was incredibly well received on YouTube and it has since its upload in 2012 generated over a staggering 165 million views (DumbWays2Die YouTube-channel, 2018). That is incredible for an ad campaign and it may very well be one of the most popular ones. It even received multiple awards worldwide (Crimmons, 2014).
ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was one of the most successful challenge-type video trends since the rise of social media. The challenge was based on dumping bucket of cold water mixed with ice over one’s body. This would obviously be a quite unpleasant experience but what came with the challenge was all the more wholesome. In order to avoid this voluntary ice water bath, people were given the choice of donating money towards a good cause, more specifically charities focused on furthering ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) research.

The challenge generated $115 million in donations just to the American ALS Association during 2014 (Derby, 2015) which helped fund six research projects and resulted in over 17 million iterations of these challenge videos on Facebook alone (BBC, 2016). Many celebrities such as George W. Bush took part in the challenge and in total these videos were watched by over 440 million people worldwide (BBC, 2016).

2.2 Relevant Marketing Frameworks

In order to establish a deeper understanding of how viral marketing can work on the internet, it is the contention of the author that further elaboration on antecedent marketing frameworks and theories is required. This will first and foremost help the researcher develop the interview design as it will provide a leg to stand on while structuring the interview questions. This means that the questions will test whether social media professionals believe that the precursory marketing theories mentioned in this section still hold relevance in the online community of today. It will also showcase any additions or changes to these frameworks that they deem necessary.

This section aims to mention some theoretical frameworks within the field of marketing and marketing communications that the author deems relevant. The models and theories mentioned will be explained and their relevance will be further explained and motivated in a, hopefully, satisfactory way.

2.2.1 Porter’s Theory of Competitive Advantage

With the massive amount of content that gets posted on a daily basis on the internet it can sometimes be hard to differentiate yourself in order to stand out through the massive amount of noise that exists. In order to gain traction and an audience, you need to develop a sort of competitive advantage of marketing. You need to find something that makes your content more interesting than the rest, something people believe is worth sharing. In order to help illustrate this, the author has chosen to elaborate on Porter’s theory of competitive advantage.
Porter argues in his theory for competitive advantage that even though a company might be the contemporary market leader, it does not mean that they will stay on top forever. Companies must find ways to create sustainable competitive advantage through the establishment of goals, strategies and operations. In order to help with this process, he developed a matrix with three different aspects; Cost, Differentiation and Focus (Porter, 2008).

The Cost aspect is all about pricing products and services in a way that creates better value for the customer than that of competitors. If a product or service provides utility with a worth of X at a lower price than competitors that provide products or services with the same utility worth, then that is a way to sustain competitive advantage. Consumers will always try to get as much value as possible for as low a cost as possible. This is usually achieved through cutting costs in other parts of the operation such as hiring lower cost labourers even though they may be less skilled or less competent in their work. Another example can be using lower quality raw materials in production because they are cheaper (Porter, 2008).

Differentiation is all about product quality. A company that builds their strategy of competitive advantage around differentiation will always try to provide a better product or service than competitors. This can mean things like improved production quality, more appealing packaging as well as a general level of utility for the consumer that is higher than that of competitors (Porter, 2008). Companies like Apple use this tactic by not only selling their high-quality products but by also selling the sense of luxury and exclusivity. This is because of their impeccable positioning as a high-end product. This is also why they can inflate their prices to exorbitant heights even though their products may not provide more actual utility to the consumer than that of competitors. The largest selling point of their products is instead the emotional utility that they provide (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The third and final aspect is Focus. Focus is related to the understanding and servicing of a company’s target market better than anyone else. In order to do that they can use either Cost Leadership or Differentiation. This can mean appealing to the large masses or focusing marketing efforts on a smaller more niched group (Porter, 2008).

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Figure 2.2, Porter’s Competitive Advantage Matrix (Porter, 2008)
In the context of viral marketing only two out of the three aspects in this model are really relevant. Since the cost for viewing content on the internet is essentially the same on free platforms (no monetary cost, time cost based on amount of content) this aspect should not really be taken into account for this research. However, both the differentiation and focus aspects are of utmost relevance.

What the differentiation aspect of this model shows is that, in the context of online content, there is a need to create value for the viewer and in this case, it is usually entertainment value. If marketers manage to create better entertainment value than their competitors, customers are more likely to not only want to view the advertisement from that company but also more likely to spread the content to others (Pescher, Reichhart & Spann, 2014).

As previously mentioned, there is a massive stream of content being uploaded on the internet on a daily basis. In order to stand out, content creators must differentiate themselves from others by either providing content with a higher production value, more interesting content or providing content with a higher level of creativity. It is also important for companies or content creators to know their audience and make sure that the content they produce caters to their target audiences’ interest. The specific ways one can differentiate oneself from others in the field of content creation will be further investigated in the interviews.

2.2.2 Creativity in Marketing Communication

When devising any kind of advertisement there is one characteristic that seems to be a sure-fire way to at least capture the attention of the viewer and that is creativity on some level. Creativity used correctly in advertisements have resulted in the effectiveness of ad campaigns being multiplied by as much as 10 times (Priest, 2014). Even though creativity can decide much of how successful an ad campaign is, there is no clear definition of what people consider advertising creativity. It has previously been described as the defiance of expectations which was characterised by contradictory ideas. This way of thinking has led to the view of advertising creativity progressing and now there is a general consensus that it has two main characteristics. These two are divergence and relevance. Divergence is the attribute of being unique or novel while relevance just means that the ad campaign is meaningful in to the viewer in some type of way (Fill & Turnbull, 2016).

One of the main advantages of a creative advertisement is that it is attention grabbing. Studies have shown that it is when the viewer is free from distraction and has their focus on the advertisement alone that they can commence in a deeper cognitive recognition process. This means that the more divergent and attention-grabbing advertisements also correlate with a better depth of message processing. This in turn results in better recollection and recognition among viewers (Fill & Turnbull, 2016).

For creativity to be effective in advertising it also needs to belong to either a product- or audience-relevant context. This is what makes it differ from regular artforms since they are not bound by these types of constraint but instead aims to please the senses of the viewer. The
surrounding culture has a great effect on advertisers, content creators and audiences when deciding what the contextual component of creativity will be. This means that interpretations of what constitutes ad creativity vary heavily depending on the viewer’s context. For instance, collectivistic cultures where sharing, trustworthiness and honesty are important values will have these permeate the advertising in that culture (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). The same thing applies to other cultural aspects such as individualism, power distance, masculinity etc. (Hofstede, 2001).

This theory regarding creativity in advertisements has a significant relevance in the context of viral marketing as is demonstrated in the examples shown of successful viral marketing campaigns. All of the mentioned campaigns show some degree of creativity whether it is creativity in the form of music or animation, or in the concept of the advertisement itself. Being able to identify cultural aspects of the online environment, such as ‘memes’, also plays a very large role in the success of viral marketing campaigns. It seems that people appreciate creativity and, based on the theory presented in this section, that people also are more likely to share content that they themselves consider creative. This means that being able to keep the creative process going may be the deciding factor in whether or not companies can achieve consistency in the quality and spread of their campaigns.

2.3 Summary of the theory

When formulating the interview questions for this thesis, the author felt it was important that they would be based on the theories and models presented in this section in an effort to test and expand upon them. The questions will range from general questions regarding viral marketing as a way to get a grasp on the respondents’ understanding of the subject but will also delve deeper into the successful marketing campaigns mentioned in this section as well as the more theoretical aspects that have been showcased. The theories that will act as a basis for the interviews conducted for this thesis are The Six Principles of Viral Marketing model developed by Wilson (2012), The Six Emotions in Marketing theory that has been widely used for some time, some aspects of Porter’s Theory of Competitive advantage. There will also be elaboration on the importance of contemporary online culture and whether or not companies have the ability to react to it as a means to improve their viral spread as well as the deliberate usage of the external influences of virality previously mentioned.
3. Methodology

The methodology will delve into how the research will be conducted and will touch on what philosophy, approach, design and method will be employed throughout the course of the research. It will not only discuss which these will be but also why they have been chosen, as well as the reasons why some methodology would not be suitable for this type of study.

All empirical research should be planned and executed in a meticulous manner in order to instate the maximum amount of credibility possible. To do this, there are a few things that need to be clarified, explained and motivated to the reader. The following section will aim to do just that.

3.1 Research philosophy

When conducting research within the field of social science there are a few ways that you can interpret your surroundings. This can be affected by experiences, background etc. and because of this difference in opinion on how knowledge should be interpreted it is of high importance for the reader that the author provides information on what scientific approach is being used.

There are two dominant views in scientific literature for social research and these are positivism and interpretivism. Which one of these gets chosen has a lot to do with how the author views knowledge and what is relevant to the research methodology as a whole (Tupling, 2013).

Positivism in social science research is the more scientific approach of the two where knowledge is seen as objective more than anything else. Research conducted with this view is often quantitative with a focus on hard facts and underlying causes for certain effects. This type of perspective is most fitting for researchers who aim to engineer some type of statistical analysis of a large amount of collected data (Tupling, 2013).

Interpretivism, on the contrary, is the humanistic alternative that concentrates a lot more on subjective knowledge where research focuses on exploring, explaining and understanding reality on a more subjective level. This means that all cases are different and what is true in one situation may not be in another. The type of research most appropriate for this type of perspective is qualitative where data collection is more in-depth and where there is more room for elaboration (Tupling, 2013).

In epistemology, these two perspectives can be described as being on a spectrum with interpretivism on one side and positivism on the opposite end. However, it is important to note that these views are most usually not mutually exclusive but do instead leave room for overlap with one another. In this thesis there will be principles used from both sides of the spectrum but will be dominated by an interpretivist view.
Subjectivist approach to social science | Objectivist approach to social science
--- | ---
Interpretivism | Positivism

Figure 3.1 The epistemology spectrum illustrated (Author’s own illustration)

For this particular study of viral marketing the interpretivist view of knowledge is most appropriate since the aim of the research is to get an expert opinion of how they believe that viral marketing is best achieved. It is also of interest to know what methods they themselves have found to be most successful. Then the aim is to use the subjective knowledge they provide and relate it to the already existing marketing models and theories in order to gain a deeper understanding how they can be used in today’s online environment.

### 3.2 Research approach

When conducting a study there are basically three different approaches one can take; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. The exploratory approach was chosen since it is most effective when researching a concept that is broad, does not have a very specific definition or if the phenomenon in question is quite new. Exploratory research also often relies on formal qualitative research where the dominant methods are in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies and so on. This approach may also attempt to form some kind of hypothesis but does not aim to test it (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013).

The study will be of an exploratory nature since viral marketing is a new concept that does not have a lot of previous research. The thesis does, however, intend to “stand on the shoulders of giants” by building on already existing concepts and theories within the field of marketing such as Porter’s theory of competitive advantage (Porter, 1985) while conducting the research, and this will also play a large role in the development of our own theory, specifically targeting methods of successful viral spread of information. This means that a combination of primary data collection as well as secondary data collection will be used throughout the course of this research.

### 3.3 Research design

When choosing between the two different approaches of research design, which are deductive and inductive, the choice for this thesis was quite obvious. Since a deductive research design would have its basis in the testing of an already existing theory or hypothesis, this approach was not suitable for our exploratory work (Sternberg, 2009). This thesis will instead aim to gather and organize the information collected from which conclusions will then be drawn. This means that the inductive approach is more suited towards the type of research most appropriate for our thesis (Copi, Cohen & Flage, 2016).
3.4 Research methods

In regards to the method of data collection for this thesis there were two options, quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative approach focuses on gathering a large amount of data in an attempt to see its statistical value in order to gain a broad understanding of a specific issue (Given, 2008). Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses its attention on things like the details of an idea, peoples’ emotions or attitudes toward a certain topic and so forth (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005).

Viral marketing is a concept that many people probably have heard about but their familiarity with the subject might be limited at best. When looking at a concept as complex as viral marketing there is really only one way to expand one’s knowledge about this particular subject. Since the majority of people have limited experience with and knowledge about marketing the best course of action would be to ask an expert in the field, someone who has used it as their field of study or someone who has extensive experience working with the different concepts and theories of marketing. More specifically, engaging in conversation with someone who has a background working with social media marketing could be very beneficial in answering the research questions. This could be someone who works as a social media manager for a corporation or maybe just someone who has managed to find success and fame on some type of social media platform.

For this thesis the choice to opt for qualitative research seemed like the most appropriate one because of the previously mentioned reasons. The hypothesis is that it will provide us with information that is most relevant to the purpose of our thesis. It will be conducted by reaching out to people who work for large corporations within the field of social media management and hopefully there are possibilities to arrange some kind of interview, be it face-to-face or purely through e-mail correspondence. This approach will also be used to contact successful social media personalities since they may possess information that is vital to our area of research. Other qualitative methods such as focus groups and case studies were taken into consideration but were ultimately dismissed because of the added factors of logistics and the fact that it did not fit the goal of the research very well.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection is a mandatory activity in any research because without it, no research can be made. The two classifications of data are primary and secondary. Primary data is collected by the individual conducting the research for a specific purpose defined by the researcher and, additionally, it needs to be collected for the first time. Secondary data is the gathering of data collected by someone else for a different purpose (Wrenn, Stevens & Loudon, 2002).
Primary data

When conducting a study based on answering research questions or testing hypotheses, it is imperative not to limit oneself to already existing data. This is because one will seldom find information someone else has collected that is directly pertinent to the exact research question or hypothesis under investigation. If there is, any form of additional research on that very topic would be redundant because the answer already exists. Primary data on the other hand is collected for the specific purpose of a certain study (Wrenn et al. 2002), which makes it the perfect source of information for any type of research.

The primary data collected for this thesis was gathered through, so called, computer-assisted interviews where the interviewer sends the interviewee a set of open-ended questions by any kind of internet messaging service that they then try to answer to the best of their ability. The people chosen to appear in the interviews are two professional youtubers and three social media marketing professionals for large corporations.

Secondary data

Secondary data is of utmost importance when conducting most research as it can provide a better understanding of the problem situation as well as providing an outline. It may also contribute with any additional information and insight required to answer the research question or questions at hand. Additionally, it may provide the researcher with the necessary tools for designing the primary data collection process as well as a means for evaluating the primary data collected. The main advantages for secondary data is low time/monetary cost, ease of access and versatility. The disadvantages include poor relevance, accuracy, age and quality (Wrenn et al. 2002).

The secondary data collected for the purpose of the thesis are mainly in regards to theoretical background, giving it something to relate its newly collected primary data to. It also helps provide the reader with some understanding of the antecedent concepts that most marketing theories now build upon.

3.5.1 Interview design

The interviews that constitute the basis of this research are designed in a way that will let the researcher get the opinion of experienced social media professionals about the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks and models. The result of these interviews will determine whether or not these are still relevant in today’s online environment while also investigating if they need to be altered or added upon to better encompass the way viral marketing works in 2018.
The number of interviews has been limited to four, due to constraints in regards to the number of respondents willing to participate. Out of the 52 people and companies contacted for this study the affirmative response rate was a mere 7.7%. In this type of research four interviews can pass as an adequate sample size since it will result in a satisfactory diversity of responses to the questions asked without making analysis of these results excessively time consuming.

When designing interviews there are a few different approaches one can take such as conducting a structured, semi-structured or unstructured interview (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

A structured interview is usually organized in a formal manner, following a strict interview protocol in order to guide the researcher. This type of interview does not allow for a lot of in-depth elaboration on topics that may get mentioned by the interviewee when they attempt to answer the questions at hand. These types of interviews are favoured when researcher has prepared a rigorous list of interview questions that targets specifics in what the interview aims to investigate. After an interview with this structure there should be little need for follow-ups and clarifications of incomplete or missing answers (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews are, much like the structured interviews, a guided conversation between researcher and respondent. However, they are a bit more relaxed with some allowance for conversational elements as well as the occasional tangent by the participant. It does follow a certain structure but also allows the interviewer to probe the respondent for further elaboration and details. Since there is a clear interview protocol to follow, the researcher should not worry about having to conduct multiple iterations of the interviews. Even though this is the case, there might still be a need for follow-ups on certain questions, mostly in order to record additional data in regards to the participants’ thoughts, feelings and opinions (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

Unstructured interviews can take be conducted with very few, if any, interview questions. This is a format that progresses the same way a normal conversation would with a natural focus on the relevant research topic. It builds on establishing a rapport and comfort with the respondent and this type of interview is well suited to topics that may be of a sensitive nature. Interviewers are expected to try and dig a little deeper in order to acquire the most detailed and in-depth information possible. There most likely will be a need for clarification and follow-ups, perhaps in multiple instances, in order to obtain the most relevant information and to get the best understanding possible for the research topic of interest (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

The most suitable level of structure for this research will be semi-structured since there will be a well-defined list of interview questions (see appendix) with room for a deeper level of elaboration. The interviews for this research will be computer-assisted. They will be carried out through written questions that the participators will also give their answers to in written form. All participants will answer the same questions although, for the Swedish participants, they may be translated for the convenience of the respondent. This will give the respondents plenty of time to construct their answers carefully, ensuring that the answers given will be of the highest quality and utmost relevance. It will provide the researcher with a naturally constructed transcript which will in turn reduce the workload in the data collection phase.
3.5.2 Selection of respondents

In order to conduct credible research on a specific topic one needs to make sure that the respondents included in the sample have the relevant qualifications and experience necessary to get the most accurate result possible. This study was based on interviews conducted with people who are knowledgeable within one or more of the fields of social media management, content creation or marketing. These three fields were chosen as they are highly related to viral marketing and because respondents skilled in these disciplines also have the highest probability of giving answers relevant to the research purpose.

In order to choose the right participants in this study a couple of criteria were developed and for a respondent to be eligible, they need to fulfil both of these. The criteria are:

- Respondent must have at least five years of experience working within marketing, communication or content creation on social media
- Respondent must be working actively with marketing, communication or content creation at the time of the interviews

A work experience level of at least five years would ensure that an understanding of marketing as a whole is present within all respondents. Having the second criterium met will further strengthen the notion that the participants have information that is up to date and that they can elaborate on experience relevant to contemporary online marketing and content promotion. The choice of respondents has no basis on what industry or sector they work in. The only deciding factor is whether or not they fulfil the criteria brought forth by the author.

Theoretically, samples are usually split into two different categories and these are probability samples and non-probability samples. Probability samples are characterized by the condition that all elements in the sample have the same probability of being chosen for the study. To illustrate this with an example one can ponder that a sample size of 10 people shall be selected out of a population of 1000 people. In this case all 1000 people have the same probability of being selected for the 10-person sample (Trochim, 2006a). Non-probability samples are samples where all elements do not have the same probability of being chosen. This means that there are specific factors that decide if one element gets picked over another. In other terms, chance is not a factor in selection of respondents for a non-probability sample interview process (Trochim, 2006b). This thesis employs a non-probability sampling process because of the previously mentioned criteria that needs to be fulfilled by the respondents.

Within non-probability sampling there are five different methods; convenience sampling, consecutive sampling, quota sampling, judgement sampling and snowball sampling (Explorable, 2009).

Convenience sampling is one of the most common methods of sampling. It is carried out by choosing samples based on their accessibility. They are chosen for the simple reason that they are easy to recruit. It is the least time consuming, least costly and most effortless option (Explorable, 2009).
Consecutive sampling is similar to convenience sampling but differs in the fact that it seeks to include ALL accessible subjects as a part of the sample. This results in fairly good representation of the whole population since it incorporates such a vast sample size (Explorable, 2009).

Quota sampling is a technique where the researcher attempts to gain a proportionate representation of subjects in the sample with the specific trait that works as the basis for the quota. For example, if the basis for the quota is university bachelor students, then there must be equal parts 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year students to ensure optimum representation (Explorable, 2009).

Judgement sampling is a technique used when subjects are chosen with a specific purpose in mind. This means that some prospective participants of the research may be more suited to the research purpose than others. Examples of this can be things like participants possessing certain competencies or skills that can be useful when answering the questions of the study (Explorable, 2009).

Snowball sampling is a method where the initial subjects are asked to find others that meet the criteria of the research, creating a kind of snowball effect (Explorable, 2009).

For this thesis the most appropriate type of non-probability sampling is the judgement sampling method. In order to fulfil the research purpose a very specific skillset and knowledge base is required from each of the study participants. Without these characteristics the information gathered would not retain relevance and it would not ensure the credibility of the research.

To ensure that the criteria chosen are met some precursor questions are posed to prospective participants in regards to their previous experience and their current working situation. It is worth mentioning that the author had some pre-existing knowledge about some of the prospective respondents’ level of experience as well as their current working situation prior to contacting them. This knowledge has influenced the decision to contact these particular people. However, there was no direct connection between participant and researcher on a personal level before conducting the interviews. Choosing to contact these prospects was merely done in an attempt to reduce time spent prospecting other participants and in turn allowing for the allocation of more time to the conduction of the interviews and analysing the results.
3.5.3 Interviewee backgrounds

In order for the reader to gain some perspective on who the empirical information presented in this section is coming from and why it should be trusted, some background information will be provided on each of the participants.

The first interview was conducted with Tim Lindqvist. He has got a Bachelor’s degree from Malmö University within media production and process design. He is an experienced project manager that has been involved in the Swedish YouTube-convention ‘Tubecon’. He is now working as a project manager for the company Nice One while simultaneously running two YouTube-channels and their social media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with a total following of over 120 000 people.

Danny Pedersen was the participant of the second interview conducted for this thesis. He graduated from Malmö University with a Bachelor’s degree in media production and process design and has since then worked as a web designer, digital creator and graphic designer for different companies in Skåne. He is currently working at The Fan Club in Malmö while also running two YouTube-channels and their corresponding social media pages with a combined following of over 120 000 people.

The third interviewee in this study is Andreas Jansson who studied marketing and business administration at Växjö University. He has an extensive background working in the fields of marketing, sales, project management and communication. His current position is as Communication Strategist at the advertising agency TROSS in Jönköping.

The fourth and final participant for these interviews has elected to remain anonymous and will be henceforth referred to as ‘Participant Four’. He studied economics for four years at the Stockholm School of Economics where he graduated with a bachelor and a master. Since then he has accumulated a lengthy career within digital sales and marketing. Now he is the Vice President of Marketing at a large multinational E-services company based on the west coast of southern Sweden.
3.6 Research trustworthiness

When conducting any kind of research, it is important both for the author and the reader that the study is credible and worthy of trust. This section was written in hopes of establishing that credibility and earning the trust of the reader. To establish the trustworthiness of qualitative research there are four different dimensions that should be considered. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). The following section aims to explain these dimensions and also seeks to explain how these will be utilized throughout the course of the study.

3.6.1 Credibility

The first dimension is in relation to internal validity, this means that it seeks to ensure that the researcher examines and investigates what is actually intended for the study. In other terms, the research method, being interview questions in the case of this thesis, needs to accommodate for answers that lie in agreement with what the purpose of the study is (Shenton, 2004). In order to achieve credibility for the research of this thesis, all interview questions have been derived from the research questions previously stated in the introduction. They have also thusly been designed with the theoretical framework in section two as a base. The selection of respondents for this research has also been conducted in a way that ensures the maximal possible relevance, accuracy and quality of the information in regards to the research purpose.

3.6.2 Transferability

The second dimension relates to the research’s external validity, which is concerned with to what extent the result of one study can be applied to other situations. Usually this can be explained as demonstrating that the findings of a particular study can be applied to a wider population, even when the sample size is relatively small. Some researchers argue that qualitative research with a limited sample size never can lead to a base for generalization. Others believe that even though each case may be unique in nature, they can still provide insight and broader application and should thus not mean direct rejection of possibility of transfer. There are also arguments that if enough contextual information is provided in the study, others should have the ability to utilize it in similar situations (Shenton, 2004). Since this study is conducted on a relatively broad subject that can be applied to many situations, there may not be a greater need for contextual information in this case. Because of this, the transferability of this study should be adequate or even satisfactory.
3.6.3 Dependability

The third dimension addresses the issue of whether the study can produce similar results if replicated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants (Shenton, 2004). In the context of this thesis, the results should be the same unless there are some fundamental changes in the mechanics of how information spreads on the internet. This can mean things like new social media sites emerging that utilize completely new concepts which changes the core of how people use the internet to communicate. A change like this seems highly unlikely in the near future since the current leading social media sites are so deeply ingrained in the way people utilize the web in today’s online environment.

3.6.4 Confirmability

The fourth and final dimension is based on the notion that research should not be influenced by the researcher’s biases and own perceptions of a topic. This means that to ensure the objectivity of the research, it must ensure that all results are findings based on the information given by the source (Shenton, 2004). The interviews conducted throughout the study for this thesis were all designed to not lead the participants to certain conclusions or answers but to instead encourage them to think for themselves. The objective of the data collection is to get a professional’s perspective and opinion on marketing frameworks both viral and regular. To do this, there can be no influence from the author. The respondents were also given a week’s time to answer the interview questions in order to really get the chance to give a reply of the highest quality and detail.
4. Empirical study

This part of the thesis will present the data collected. The data consists of primary data collected through interviews with professionals who possess valuable knowledge about the subject that they have acquired through experience working in an online environment either for a company or as a standalone internet personality.

4.1 Interview 1 – Tim Lindqvist

When asked to define what ‘going viral’ means to him, Lindqvist argues like many others that it is a very hard concept to give a quantified definition of. His opinion is that news outlets often use the term ‘going viral’ way too liberally. He describes that his way of looking at it is that content that has achieved virality gets broadcasted from multiple sources at the same time and that should not be possible for any regular social media user to avoid seeing it. In terms of YouTube, he believes that viral content should appear on the top 10 of the page’s Trending list. In terms of Facebook, its spread should be in the form of a vast number of people tagging each other on the post. As an example, Lindqvist mentions the latest viral video to make it big on social media called ‘Walmart Yodelling Kid’. The video was published on YouTube on the 1st of April 2018 and has accumulated over 24 million views in less than three weeks. Lindqvist then goes on to explain that any internet sensation that goes viral in the US warrants a feature on ‘The Ellen Show’ and that this video is no exception.

Content of Lindqvist’s own creation has gone viral three times within the confines of Sweden. He elaborates on this by saying that when this happens, the spread is so quick that it is difficult to keep up with views, likes and comments since they keep coming in almost every second during some periods. The videos he mentions are ‘Wingardium Leviosa på skånska’, ‘Fotbolls-EM på skånska’ and ‘Star Wars på skånska’. These three have all been widely popular on YouTube and Facebook and they were also featured in Swedish news outlets like Aftonbladet, Sydsvenskan and the genre specific news outlet MovieZine.

Out of the six principles of viral marketing developed by Wilson (2012), there are three that relate to the motivations for people to share content on the internet, namely principle one, two and four. When asked to choose which of these he found most useful Lindqvist chooses principle two, ‘Effortless transfer to others’. He does, however, not feel like these six principles are sufficient to describe the motivations that people have for sharing content with others on the internet. He instead argues that the factors of familiarity and relatability should also be included as people that can relate to specific content also have a much higher propensity of sharing that particular content with others. This can be simple things like geographical locations depicted within the content or even more complex aspects such as human behaviour. He likens it with horoscopes and argues that content should be relatable to anyone in order to be successful, virally in this context.
When looking at the emotional aspects of marketing developed by Dobele et al. (2007), Lindqvist was asked to pick the emotions he feels are most effective at engaging an audience out of the six presented in this thesis. He argues that anger, fear and disgust are the leading emotions that lead to a viral spread of information since these are the emotions that for instance drive the spread of political debate and things like information about animal abuse. He also mentions that joy is a very powerful emotion since people enjoy sharing content that makes them laugh. He also elaborates by saying that the six basic emotions presented by this model, either by themselves or in combination with each other, cover most bases within the marketing world.

When discussing external factors of virality like the link-sharing site Reddit, Lindqvist was posed with the idea of brands utilizing this kind of pages as a marketing tool. He thinks that this is a very real possibility for brands that dare and have the possibility to make quick decisions. He also argues that many large corporations are limited by the fact that they need to take so many factors into account while also going through a rigorous bureaucratic process over several weeks before they can make any type of decision on what gets posted on the internet. His opinion is that companies that dare letting go of control while ‘risking’ failure have got a grasp of the basis of creating successful viral marketing.

Lindqvist was asked to watch ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ in an attempt to investigate what he thinks the deciding factor of its success is and the first thing he mentioned was the catchy tune. He then goes on to say that it is important for the original creators of the video to allow for people to create parodies and alternate versions of the song. It is also his opinion that many content creators are afraid of people parodying their work and thus immediately seek to remove such content. However, it is Lindqvist’s experience that parodies actually boost the popularity of the original work rather than being a detriment. This is also why he believes that, in the case of this video, it would be a clever strategy to release the song without the vocal track to encourage this.

When presented with the differentiation strategy by Michael Porter (2008), and then asked about what he considers the best way to differentiate content while simultaneously creating entertainment value, he argues that this is a question that most advertisement agencies struggle with every day. He believes that as a content creator on social media it is of utmost importance to establish a personal relationship with the viewers in order to keep them coming back.

Creativity and culture in marketing is something that has a very substantial effect on its success and online culture in viral marketing is no exception. Lindqvist believes that in order to achieve viral spread in today’s online environment it is important to either start your own trend or to exploit already existing trends. He also argues that it might be easier for brands to do the latter since it would provide them with an already existing cultural framework to follow. However, he then goes on to say that this type of strategy may not work for all types of companies or brands. Lindqvist’s opinion is that it can be beneficial to tag along with the current viral trends but that it is not a necessity.
4.2 Interview 2 – Danny Pedersen

Pedersen believes that for something to go viral, it needs to first achieve a very rapid spread within a very tiny time frame. He also argues that it is important that for content to be called viral it needs to be recognized by most people, especially people outside the target audience for the content. However, his opinion is that it is exceedingly difficult to create one quantified definition of the concept in regards to how rapid the spread of content needs to be for it to qualify as ‘viral’. He says that these definitions vary with things like geographical factors. For instance, the audience for Swedish content is smaller than that of English content because of the simple reason that there are more English speakers than Swedish speakers in the world.

When presented with the Six Principles of Viral Marketing model developed by Wilson (2012), Pedersen immediately mentioned the concept ‘Fear of Missing Out’ and explained that he believes this to be one of the most contributing factors in motivating sharing of content on social media. He bundles this feeling in with the common motivators in principle four, *Exploitation of common motivations and behaviour* along with greed, the need to be loved etc. He argues that this fear of missing out can apply to viral content since not having seen it would make the person feel like they are not keeping up with the trends which in turn creates a feeling of being left out. He goes on to explain that he sees this type of behaviour on a daily basis on platforms like Twitter where this even characterizes mundane, everyday posts.

Out of the six basic emotions in advertising presented in this thesis Pedersen thinks that anger is often the primary emotion that leads the charge on a lot of the content that goes viral. He elaborates by saying that this is especially prominent in content that shows companies in a bad light because of ethically questionable practices. He discusses it further by rhetorically asking if anger and disappointment is easier to share than happiness and mentions that from his experience with, for example, Facebook that this may very well be the case. He also believes that a lot of people create content in hopes of provoking this type of reaction since it really does foster a viral effect on its spread.

In relation to the external factors that may help drive viral spread of information and content, Pedersen shares his view that Reddit definitely is used to its full capacity by companies in the form of a marketing tool. He then goes on to describe that it is imperative for brands to go through a rigorous, ground laying target audience analysis in order to figure out whom to appeal to. He elaborates by saying that he himself have seen many discussions in sections of Reddit dedicated to cryptocurrency and Initial Coin Offering (ICO) that were actually started by the companies that would benefit from them the most. His opinion is that it is a brilliant way for the brands to create a broader Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and consequently create a larger spread of their content.

After viewing ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ by Melbourne Metro Trains, Pedersen’s opinion was that the largest factors in the success of this video was probably its overall light-heartedness with its brightly coloured aesthetics, humorous situations and its catchy song. He also relates the video to a children’s TV-show that has them stuck in front of a screen for hours and elaborates...
by saying that this video has those very same qualities. He also creates a parallel with mobile devices saying that without colour image they would not be used by people to the same extent since humans are stimulated by colour and movement.

When introduced to the differentiation strategy developed by Michael Porter (2008), and then asked about what he considers the best way to differentiate content and create entertainment value for the viewer, Pedersen argues that it is a very tough question. His opinion is that content that gets communicated in an innovative and different way is the best way to keep the audience coming back. Pedersen believes that it is important for communication to feel natural since it helps drive home the message and creates a larger impact on its audience.

In regards to online culture being used by companies in marketing, Pedersen believes that it can be smart for brands to adopt digital trends in certain special situations but he does not believe that companies’ communication should be based entirely on it. He does, however, mention that being quick to respond to a digital trend can be beneficial and goes on to mention IKEA's response to a designer called Balenciaga basing his design on their iconic blue shopping bags.

4.3 Interview 3 – Andreas Jansson

Jansson’s take on the concept of virality is when content posted on the internet achieves an organic and highly rapid spread from person to person. He also adds that for it to be truly viral it also has to go beyond the limitations of a specific circle of people or a set social network.

After reviewing the Principles of Viral Marketing by Wilson (2012) related to the spread of content, Jansson asserts that all three of them are regularly used by TROSS’ customers and that they are all successful. He also argues that which one of these works best is highly dependent on the type of company that the message is created for. In his experience the promise of free products and services seem to be the favourite when companies try to introduce a new product line or service. He continues by saying that his opinion is that the exploitation of common human behaviour and motivators is the method for spread that works best when looking at a broader set of companies. He elaborates by saying that the need to be popular, loved and understood is an incredibly powerful motivator for viral spread since this is synonymous with being successful to many people. Jansson also states that this can be easily implemented in the world of business since companies generally want to be perceived by others as successful and that is why many decide to enlist the help of communications agencies since this is their specialty.

When presented with the six basic human emotions and their role in marketing, Jansson insists that surprise is the most powerful and persuasive. He argues that an element of surprise is almost always present in marketing and advertising and that the other five emotions also have their basis in surprise. He gives some examples such as surprise over someone doing a handstand on one of the tallest buildings in the world without a safety net, surprise over how cruelly some people treat animals, surprise over how someone who uses racist and misogynistic rhetoric can
hold one of the most powerful positions in the world. Jansson means that it is from this surprise that the other five emotions originate.

When discussing external influences of virality such as Reddit Jansson argues that they have the potential of driving viral spread in the future but he feels that the process right now is way too time consuming in comparison to sending web-based campaigns over platforms such as Instagram where people constantly go and can be reached more directly.

In response to watching ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ by Melbourne Metro, Jansson states that the showing of highly unlikely ways to die while pairing it with a happy melody creates highly humorous content. His opinion is that this makes the viewer lower their guard which makes them more receptive to the serious message and the point of the video when its revealed at the end of the video. He also relates it to the surprise mentioned previously, this time in the form of this unlikely combination of the slightly macabre visuals with such a happy melody.

After being introduced to the differentiation aspect of Porter’s Competitive Advantage model, Jansson was asked about the entertainment value companies need to provide in their advertising. His opinion is that in order to create this type of value, companies need to focus on delivering a meaningful message. In his experience, this is done most effectively by incorporating emotional aspects such as joy and humour. The value that the viewer gets is new information or knowledge while simultaneously coercing a smile and leaving them with a good feeling.

In relation to the highly dynamic and constantly changing nature of online culture, Jansson feels that it is both beneficial and important for companies to observe and react to contemporary trends. He elaborates by saying that this can be done by making posts on social media that are related to current topics. He gives an example by describing a situation where a politician might take a costly, long-distance taxi ride from a conference which then ends up on news outlets and social media. Then the local public transport may respond by publicly showing the cost of a train ticket for the same distance as a means of generating publicity.

4.4 Interview 4 – ‘Participant Four’

Four argues that virality is achieved when content is recognized by people who have no relation or connection to the subject matter of it and if they understand why it has spread. He elaborates by equating to the feeling of ‘pass it forward’. He also argues that it needs to break the mould a bit, it needs to be innovative or different. Four’s opinion is that virality can happen both nationally and internationally but states that he is in no position to give a quantified definition of the concept.

After learning about the Principles of Viral Marketing by Wilson (2012) that relate to the sharing of content, Four states that the choice of these is entirely dependent on which type of business activity the brand engages in such as Business-to-Business or Business-to-Customer as well as which their target audience is. In his experience, the offering of free products and services work really well in the context of B2C on platforms such as Facebook while the
exploitation of common behaviours and motivators work better in a B2B context on platforms such as LinkedIn. He argues that there it is more common to share things that make people think you are intelligent and that this can be done by sharing things that are useful and informative.

When presented with the model for the six basic human emotions and their place in the marketing world, Four’s opinion is that the use of these also depend a lot on the context. When constructing marketing efforts, he believes that it is important to consider what type of people you want to appeal to with your message before choosing which emotional appeal to use. He also argues that it is important to know what the purpose of the campaign should be. In his experience, surprise works really well when the platform where spread is intended is informal such as Facebook where people share with friends and family outside of a business context.

In the context of external influences of virality, Four immediately mentions that he believes that companies already use link-sharing websites and forums such as Reddit to create a discussion about their product. He adds that in order for this to work, brands start these discussions under aliases to encourage more organic replies. In his experience, this can be quite risky as it can sometimes be very difficult to anticipate and control the direction of these discussions. Four elaborates by mentioning that people on Reddit-like forums tend to think and act rationally and that is why he believes that brands need to have a certain level of confidence in their product or service, brand and personnel before attempting something like this.

After watching the Dumb Ways to Die-video from Melbourne Metro Trains in an attempt to decipher what made it so successful, Four states that he believes the aesthetical aspects in combination with the melody and humorous lyrics to be the winning concept. He also believes that it is due to the element of surprise since they do not mention trains at all until the very end.

In relation to the differentiation aspect of Michael Porter’s theory for competitive advantage, Four mentioned a few different factors that brands should take into account when trying to provide the audience with the maximum amount of value. He argues that in order to use the potential of digital channels in an intelligent way, brands need to consider the time factor. He elaborates by explaining that it is of vital importance to release the right message at the right time. In his experience, it is also important to look at the geographical aspects, make sure that the content is relevant to the audience by incorporating cultural phenomena from the region of your target audience. His opinion is also that it is important to keep updated while creating content to keep its relevance. According to Four, all these things create value for the viewer.

When asked if online culture can play a role in viral marketing campaigns, Four argues that it does. He states that it is important for brands to keep up with the online culture since it can minimize unnecessary risk by allowing companies to release a campaign at the right time. In his experience, it can be beneficial to use cultural aspects such as ‘memes’ but in that case, brands should be aware of the risks that come with it. He elaborates by saying that these things often generate equal amounts of publicity and criticism.
5. Analysis

The fifth section of this thesis will display the empirical data collected in relation to the models and theories discussed in the second part. Author will give their interpretation and analysis.

5.1 Theories and framework

When reviewing the answers given by the participants of this study it becomes clear that most of the underlying theories and frameworks examined in preparation of data collection still hold their relevance in the online environment today. This section aims to delve deeper into each of the concepts mentioned throughout the interview in an attempt to analyse them in relation to the data provided in this study.

5.1.1 Virality

All of the participants hold knowledge of the concept of viral marketing and they all give clear definitions of what they consider virality. Most of them are similar, if not identical, but the common theme is that no one is able to give a quantified and generalised answer to what virality is because it can mean so many different things for different people. Pedersen (2018) explains it well by saying “The number of views is hard to pinpoint, since a viral hit can achieve virality within different areas geographically speaking”. Four (2018) agrees by saying that he believes that “[...] viral spread can be both national and international”. Lindqvist (2018) also raises an interesting point regarding this geographical phenomenon by saying that it is easy to recognize when people go viral in the US since “By then the Ellen Show have picked up on them and had them as a guest on the show”. The carryover from online culture to mainstream media seems to be an indicator of virality in different locations since Lindqvist (2018) also mentions that the times his content have gone viral in Sweden they “[...] were featured both in newspapers (Sydsvenskan, Aftonbladet) as well as genre specific magazines like MovieZine”. The common understanding of virality among all participants, however, seems to be as Jansson (2018) puts it, “[...] content that spreads fast and organically” and that it is “[...] not limited to a specific audience”.

5.1.2 Principles of Viral Marketing

Half of the principles in this model do not really relate to what makes content spread across the internet but instead focus on things we now take for granted in the world of social media such as taking advantage of other’s resources, for instance web infrastructure. This is why they have not been discussed with the participants. Perhaps with the development that internet infrastructure has taken, the fifth and sixth principles may no longer be needed at all. All of the participants of this study feel as though the three principles relevant to spread of information in this model are still in use today and can still act as a base for viral marketing. The most popular answer to question two among the participants is the exploitation of common human behaviours and motivators. Pedersen (2018) exemplifies this with the concept ‘Fear of Missing Out’ by
saying “If there is a viral hit that ‘everyone’ has seen or participated in, there are probably reasons for people to tag along in order to not seem out of the loop”. Jansson (2018) agrees that this principle is the one who works for most brands but his take is that “[...] many people strive to be popular, loved and understood. If you are, then many people also consider you successful”. This also translates into the business world as he then states that “[...] a company wants to both be and be perceived as successful”. While Four (2018) seems to agree with this sentiment, his take is slightly different since he focuses on formal and informal context. His perception is that formal platforms such as LinkedIn are better suited for the exploitation of human behaviour. This is because it is a platform people use to make themselves look good in a professional context and thus the need to be respected, understood and valued is even larger. This is also because the perception people have of a company or individual have a direct impact on their economic success. He explains this by saying “[...] to share smart/useful/interesting content can reinforce one’s professional status”. In his opinion sharing competitions with a promise of free products or services work better on informal platforms such as Facebook since posts in this context do not have that large of an impact on the perceptions people have on one’s professionalism. There have been cases where potential employers have looked up public profiles on social media platform in attempt to gage the personality that a potential employee has. This means that informal platforms could too have an effect in this context.

Lindqvist (2018) argues that effortless transfer to others is one of the main deciding factors whether content gets shared with others. If sharing something required a lot of effort, people would be more reluctant to do it. However, this is not the factors he chooses to discuss at length. His main point is more related to the exploitation of common human behaviours, much like the others. While Pedersen (2018) mentioned Fear of Missing Out, Lindqvist (2018) instead focuses on another aspect of human behaviour, namely relatability. He mentions geographical triggers of this behaviour such as “I’ve been there” or behavioural triggers like “I always do that”. He elaborates by saying “It is almost like horoscopes, it should be easy for anyone to somehow identify with the content”. The ability to relate to a situation, a person or their life experience is perhaps the most human behaviour of all. It is empathy.

In order to motivate people to share content, the most effective way seems to be exploiting common human behaviours. Even though the things discussed by the participants are all related to this principle in different ways, the author feels as though there is a lack of depth in regards to this principle in the actual model. This is something that needs to be elaborated on in the context of different online content in order to gain a better grasp of what different types of behaviours can be exploited most effectively. The examples mentioned by Pedersen and Lindqvist are prime examples of these types of behaviour. The concept of empathy also needs to be further explored within the context of viral marketing.
5.1.3 Emotions in Marketing

The results gathered from the question about emotions in marketing were quite diverse. According to both Pedersen (2018) and Lindqvist (2018), the negative emotions like anger and fear influence people the most when sharing content. They both put this in different contexts and Pedersen (2018) states that it in his experience this often happens when people give “[…] negative feedback to companies”. Lindqvist (2018), however, mentions “[…] a combination of fear, anger and disgust” while observing “[…] political discussions and debates”. He also mentions that it can be “[…] connected to animal cruelty” among other things. Pedersen also argues that many people may consider that “[…] anger and disappointment is easier to share than joy”.

Jansson (2018) instead argues that what really captures an audience is surprise. He goes on to explain that “[…] many of the emotions in this framework have their basis in surprise”. This is a very valid point and the examples he gives to help in his discussion solidify it even more. Four (2018) also state that surprise “[…] works well in an informal setting, like on Facebook”. When researching viral marketing campaigns and finding examples of the most successful ones, it is easy to recognize that there is an element of surprise to all of them. For instance, the Volvo campaign that was previously mentioned. When seeing the first shot of Van Damme’s face, there is no way you will predict that he will be doing a split between two massive trucks while they are in motion. Predictability seems to lose the interest of the audience while the element of surprise is what keeps it.

Even though his initial thoughts are on the negative emotions, Lindqvist (2018) also argues that “[…] joy is also a very effective emotion” and that “people want to laugh and will share funny things in order to feel better”. This can also be seen in the aforementioned viral marketing campaigns in this thesis. Both Dumb Ways to Die and the LG Meteor Prank have humorous elements to them that invoke the feeling of joy in the viewer. It is also evident that funny content gets a lot of attention on the external influences of virality like Reddit and YouTube Trending. Lindqvist (2018) also mentioned the viral content that he produced and it all lies under the category of humour.

Like Four (2018) mentioned, which emotional appeal gets decided on when creating marketing campaigns should “[…] depend on who you want sharing the content”. It is important to adapt to the situation that you are in, like with most things. It is, however, of utmost importance to include an element of surprise when creating viral campaigns because without it, brands will not keep the attention of the viewer and they will definitely not motivate anyone to share content. One can equate it to watching a movie. If one knows what happens in the end of it before watching, it will not be as thrilling to watch. The secondary emotion that comes along with it may vary depending on the purpose of the message. For political campaigns it could be a will to incite anger towards other parties and their policies so that will then decide the appeal used for that particular campaign. Another example can be campaigns to raise money for charities that help disadvantaged people in other countries. This way, sadness is most often the appeal that these organizations tend to utilize.
5.1.4 External Influences of Virality

The thoughts presented by the participants on the issue of deliberately using external influences to create more impact with viral marketing are rather unanimous. They all believe that if it is done correctly, it can create great effects. However, they also all agree that it is very complicated, risky and unpredictable. Jansson (2018) explains that “[...] the process is way too time consuming when compared to broadcasting a digital campaign on platforms like Instagram where people constantly look and can be reached directly”. Lindqvist (2018) agrees and states that “many organisations are so large and there are so many parts involved that it can take weeks before a post is vetted and approved”. He does, however, believe that “daring to relinquish control and ‘risking’ that something does not turn out perfectly is the basis of creating viral marketing campaigns”. This is a good point, since external influences are in fact external. Brands cannot hope to keep control of their content once they post it on sites like Reddit since these platforms are controlled by the users. They are the ones with full autonomy while commenting and sharing. This means that a brand can be impacted either in a very positive way but perhaps even more so in a negative way. Four (2018) explains it by saying that it is “[...] like playing with fire since you can’t control the direction of the discussion”. Both Four (2018) and Pedersen (2018) do believe that some brands are in fact using these sites to create a buzz about their products or services in different communities. Pedersen (2018) elaborates in his reasoning by saying that these discussions provide “[...] a brilliant way for brands to create a broader search engine optimization and spread of their content”. In other words, external influences can and are being used by brands to create a larger spread of their content. Whether it is feasible to utilize them on a regular basis with predictable results is another story. It is more of a high risk, high reward situation that companies have to take into account when considering this type of strategy.

5.1.5 Dumb Ways to Die

Analysing what made this particular campaign so successful was ultimately a pretty easy task for each of the participants and they all had the same idea. Since they, themselves, are people it was easy for them to see what people might like about the campaign. They all agreed that the recipe for this campaign’s success is a combination of the music, its aesthetics, humorous premise and the element of surprise. Jansson (2018) mentions that “[...] the macabre concept of someone getting hurt and dying, the catchy tune in combination with the cute characters” creates a sense of surprise and “[...] creates humour in the content”. What is interesting to note about this video and the other videos discussed in this thesis, is that the production value that went in to make them is of the highest level. It is not difficult to see that content created for the online environment, for all purposes, possess a much higher quality than they did 10 years ago. It is now almost a requirement to maintain a certain level of quality in production of images, video, audio etc. in order to create and maintain an audience.
5.1.6 Creating Value Through Differentiation

It is clear from reviewing the data collected through this study that this topic is one of the most difficult for participants to answer. It is also the topic with the highest level of diversity in the responses. Four (2018) mentions different ways to control a message through the digital channels by “time managing” and “geo-managing”, basically broadcasting a message at the right time to the right people. Jansson (2018) argues that the best way to create entertainment value for viewers is to “[...] convey an important message and doing it by invoking emotion”. In his experience, value is created when the viewer “[...] gets informed while having a smile on their face”. Lindqvist (2018) believes in “[...] having a personal connection to the viewer/customer”. His view is that it is important to create a community around a brand to ensure loyalty. In Pedersen’s (2018) experience, the value that brands create is “[... a reason to stay and to come back” and according to him that can be done through “[...] innovative and different ways to communicate the message”. He also feels that when communication “[...] feels natural it probably helps the message reach the target audience”. All of the respondents make excellent points and all touch on different aspects of how to create value for customers and viewers. It is important to consider as many parameters as possible while developing marketing campaigns and when building brands.

All of these different aspects in combination is what brands need in order to create and captivate an audience. There needs to be consistency in the flow of content from the brand, both when it comes to the regularity of new content as well as its production quality. Producing quality content helps when creating a community around it, but this community should also be nurtured by the brand to make it last. In order to retain the attention of the viewer, there is also a need to utilize emotional appeals while also sending a meaningful or relevant message to the viewers. Being able to keep content fresh and creative is also a major factor in the world of marketing. Repetition can be good in moderation, but eventually brands need to update their formulas so that they can stay relevant with contemporary trends.

5.1.7 Online Culture

When it comes to online culture used in viral marketing campaigns responses from this study are quite unanimous. There is a general consensus that it is beneficial for brands and companies to observe the online environment to keep updated with concurrent news stories and trends. Lindqvist (2018) argues that “in order to achieve viral spread you can either start your own online trend or participate in an already existing one” and that as a brand it is easier to do the latter. He also elaborates by saying that “[...] it is absolutely not something that works for all companies”. In Jansson’s (2018) experience “it is important to quickly be able to catch on” with online trends and sometimes make “[...] related posts on social media”. This can often generate a positive response if the company doing it has a type of brand perception among their customers that allows for it. This means that organisations that command high respect like big banks and governmental agencies should probably abstain from utilizing these trends in their marketing. Four (2018) sees the observation of online culture as a means of “[...] avoiding
unnecessary risk” and “[...] delivering the right campaign at the right time”. Pedersen (2018) argues that while it is good to be a first mover on news and trends, “[...] basing communication efforts entirely on these” is not in a company’s best interest.

The entire premise of using something from such a highly dynamic culture in marketing efforts is very risky. Since the culture changes so rapidly with new trends emerging weekly or even daily, companies and brands run the risk of antiquating their efforts very quickly. The trends that people take part in one week, may no longer hold any relevance in the next. Observing online culture can still be beneficial since it helps eliminate risk. This is probably the most useful aspect of it. However, brands with the right image, resources and timing can reap large rewards in the form of exposure if they take part in these trends. The trick is to do it without offending people since that will often generate more negative responses than positive ones.
6. Conclusion

Throughout this section a summary of the analysis as well as conclusions and answers for research questions will be provided. The aim of this is to verify if the purpose previously stated in the introduction has been fulfilled.

The purpose of the study conducted in this thesis is to study the underlying theories and models created for viral marketing as well as expanding upon them in an attempt to provide a clearer picture of the concept. It is also the intention of the author to investigate ways to achieve viral spread on a more regular basis and to keep customers and viewers coming back. The research questions posed by the author were:

- How can companies utilize principles and emotions to achieve virality in a practical way while creating marketing campaigns?

- How should companies structure their marketing efforts in order to have the best chance of achieving virality on a consistent basis?

After reviewing the data collected in the interviews, one can see that there are many different factors that go into creating a successful viral marketing campaign. The theories and models that have been discussed throughout this study still hold their relevance, but one can argue that on their own they do not manage to capture the entire spectrum of this complex concept. There needs to be a combination of the Principles of Viral Marketing, the Emotions framework, the differentiation strategy as well as the observation and occasional interaction with online culture. All of these theories work as individual cogs in the viral marketing machine, together they make things happen.

In regards to the first research question, companies need to allocate more time to study the behaviours and motivators that drive people to share content with each other. The basics that are mentioned in the model like greed and the need to be loved seem only to be the tip of the iceberg with many more, rather complex, online behaviours underneath the surface. The interviewees touched on a few of these by mentioning fear of missing out and empathy but there is still room for further exploration. The usage of emotions is also imperative in order to create a lasting impact on viewers and customers. From what the interviews showed, there is a need to adapt to the situation and when looking at the successful marketing campaigns it is evident that there is essentially a requirement to include some sort of surprising element. This should be used in tangent with another emotional appeal for maximum effect.

In regards to the second question, what is really important to focus on is what keeps the customer or viewer coming back. Essentially, what value can brands provide that makes people want to come back. There were ultimately a few aspects that were discussed in regards to this value. The interviews yielded quite diverse opinions on this matter with many good points being made. Value to the customer can be things like community, relevance of the message, creative and fresh concepts, emotional appeal and production quality. There is also a need to not only...
get acquainted with online culture but also to keep updated with its highly dynamic nature. If not to exploit trends, then to minimize risk. It is the contention of the author that all of these aspects are needed in combination in order to create a loyal customer or viewer base. Not only that, these aspects also contribute to the spread of the content. Viral spread happens when people share with one another and these factors make people want to share.

In the end, this thesis has begun to dig deeper into the elements that make up a successful viral marketing campaign but has not provided a clear-cut framework that works every time. It has, however, fulfilled its purpose and hopefully future scholars may find this study useful.
7. Discussion and Future Research

In this final section, some thoughts on the thesis and some suggestions for how scholars can continue the research on this topic will be provided.

This study was conducted in an orderly fashion, however, there is most likely a need to conduct additional research on the same topic with a larger sample size to gain even more insight into what makes viral spread happen. The largest issue with this study is the limited sample size due to the affirmative response rate of potential participants being so low. However, the responses that were collected are of high relevance and quality. They discuss, in depth, important factors that pertain to the purpose of the study. This means that the interview design was successful but that it should have been conducted on a larger sample. It also implies that the theories chosen as the foundation for the interviews are satisfactory and relevant to the topic.

When discussing and investigating different aspects of viral marketing, one clear topic for further research came to mind. The behaviours and other factors that motivate sharing on the internet. It would be interesting to see an elaboration on this topic that digs deeper and tackles a larger variety of behaviours. However, that would perhaps be a more psychology-oriented type of research.
References


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Appendix

Interview Questions

To accommodate the reader and to help them understand what is being investigated in the interviews, the author has elected to include this section where all interview questions will be listed. There are seven questions of a qualitative nature and they are as follows:

1. In today’s online environment there are different types of content such as videos, news articles and images that sometimes spread across the internet at an incredible rate. This is usually referred to as a ‘viral’ spread, but at the moment there is no quantified and generalized definition of how large the spread of said content must be in order for it to qualify as ‘viral’. What is your take on the phenomenon? What extent does the spread have to reach for it to be considered viral?

2. Viral marketing works because there is a spread from one person to another. This means that there must be something that motivates the viewer to share the content with their peers. According to a model developed by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson (2012), there are six different principles for viral marketing. Three of these are related to what motivates sharing, these are:

   - The promise of free products or services in exchange for sharing the content
   - Effortless sharing with others
   - The exploitation of common human behaviour and motivators such as greed, the need to be popular, loved and understood

Which one of these three do you think is the most effective and why? Do you think there are important factors that are not included in this model? If so, which ones and why?

3. Emotions play a large role within viral marketing. Just like in any marketing activity, there is a need for emotional appeal in order for the message to reach its full potential and for it to make as large an impact as possible on the audience. According to the model developed by Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme and van Wijk and other frameworks, there are six basic human emotions that marketing campaigns can exploit and these are:

   - Surprise
   - Joy
   - Sadness
   - Anger
   - Fear
   - Disgust
Which of these six emotional appeals do you think is the most effective for viral spread and why? Do you think that there are other emotions one can use that are not included in this model? If so, which ones and why?

4. Brands can sometimes be helped by external influences when trying to achieve a viral spread of their content. This can either be deliberate or coincidental. Reddit is a web page where people share digital media across different communities for various subjects. The site has over 330 million active users from the whole world. This means that popular content on this website has the potential of reaching millions of people globally. Do you believe that brands can use these types of websites as a marketing tool in order to reach a faster and broader spread of their content on a regular basis? Why/why not?

5. Since the internet developed into a platform for social media communication has been much easier. This has resulted in some marketing campaigns reaching new heights and a larger audience to a lower cost. Some of the most successful campaigns are Dove’s Real Beauty Sketches, Volvo’s The Epic Split feat. Van Damme, The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the massively popular Dumb Ways to Die campaign by Melbourne Metro Trains. In order to investigate the last one’s success and the reasons behind it, please watch the video and answer the following. What aspects of the content in this video do you believe to contribute most to its success and why?

Watch the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR2EpS0jw

6. Since a massive stream of content is published every day on the internet there is a need for brands to find something that allows them to stand out from the masses. This is very important in order to reach a larger audience on a regular basis. Michael Porter developed a model for competitive advantage. In it, he mentions a strategy based on differentiation from competitors through providing better value for customers, or in this case viewers and in this context, it is all about entertainment value. Which do you find to be the most effective way to create value for the viewer in regards to digital media and content? Why?

7. Creativity plays a large role within marketing since it is an aspect that can capture and keep the attention of the viewer. Fill and Turnbull (2016) argue that creativity is largely dependent on the context where it is put. This is highly related to which culture the audience belong to. With global online platforms also come a very dynamic culture that is everchanging because of external influences from across the globe. Do you believe that it is important for brands to keep updated on online culture? If so, why? Are there possibilities for brands to use aspects of online culture such as ‘memes’ in order to achieve viral spread? Why/why not?
Interviewees

Tim Lindqvist, professional YouTuber and Project Manager at Nice One, 2018-04-19

Danny Pedersen, professional YouTuber and Graphic Designer at The Fan Club, 2018-04-22

Andreas Jansson, Communication Strategist at TROSS AB, 2018-04-27

‘Participant Four’, Vice President of Marketing at [REDACTED], 2018-05-03