"I See, I Hear, I Speak": How Audiovisuals Affect Brand Video Virality

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to identify contributing factors that make brand video content viral as well as the video content characteristics that affect the popularity of branded videos in Social Media. Using the method of netnography, a sample of 4000 Youtube user comments under four branded viral videos were collected and analysed. Additionally, an online questionnaire was circulated among 157 Social Media users who shared their experiences regarding their engagement with the content characteristics of the brand videos monitored through netnography. The results suggest that visuals, audio and plot can impact a Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks and consequently, increase its virality. Additionally, the results indicate that plot has the most impact among the three content characteristics and that the inclusion of celebrities and animals can significantly increase the chances of the brand video to go viral.

Keywords: viral videos, social media, video advertising

Introduction

Although scholars argue that viral video is the new driving force of pop culture (Linkletter et al. 2009; Burgess, 2014; Burgess and Green, 2018), the existing literature on viral videos and the factors that drive large numbers of Social Media users to create online stories about specific online videos/brand videos in Social Networks is still rather unclear and characterised by different opinions and findings.

Much research around viral marketing has focused on the impact of emotional responses (Dobele et al., 2007; Berger and Milkman, 2012; Eckler and Bolls, 2011; Nelson-Field et al., 2013). However, according to the findings of Nelson-Field et al. (2013), emotional responses cannot guarantee virality by themselves. Burgess (2014) on the other hand, studied a sample of 4.300 popular Youtube videos and found that much of her sample size included the element of irony. But what about the videos that managed to go viral without including the element of irony?

Other scholars have tried to focus on the creative aspects of viral videos. Southgate et al. (2010) for example suggest that creative details behind video advertising can be used to predict a video's virality. The question here is "which are these exact creative details and how do they impact large numbers of Social Media users creating online stories about specific brand videos in Social Networks?" While trying to answer this question, GenArts (2011) found that the use of visual effects can drive video popularity. However, Voltz and Grobe (2013) debate this view by suggesting that in order to go viral, a video should be raw, unfiltered and without any effects.

With regard to the research on individual video content characteristics and their impact on video advertising in general, some scholars ended up with interesting findings, but their research does not directly connect those findings with video/brand video virality. For example, Shir and Asadolla (2014) emphasised the effectiveness of motion graphics as a visual communication method, indicating that compared to other visual techniques, motion graphics are more effective in influencing audiences. Callcott and Phillips (1996) argued that commercials featuring animated characters were watched more often than other types of commercials. But is this the case in 2019? Lusensky (2011) states that music strategy creates brand awareness and attention by involving the consumer in a conversation about the music. Moreover, Allan (2007) and North et. al (2004) suggest that attitude toward a brand can become more positive if the meanings of the music and the rest of the advertisement fit well together from the listener's perspective, while other authors argue that attitude may become more negative if they do not (Shen and Chen, 2006). Furthermore, Godin (2005) and Chen et al. (2009) suggest that great stories are the true ones and that stories which are authentic convince the audience easier.

In general, although many scholars have studied the influence of different audio, visual and story elements on audiences and on video advertising (Shir and Asadolla, 2014; Lusensky,

2011; Allan, 2007; Godin, 2005), the research on how these elements can improve brand video virality is scarce. This is the main theoretical contribution of this paper which attempts to bridge this research gap.

Aims & Objectives

This research seeks to explore the impact that individual video content characteristics (visual graphics, audio, and plot) have on brand video virality in Social Media. This will be accomplished by evaluating how and the extent to which each one of the video content characteristics affects the Social Media user's decision to comment, share or like an audiovisual marketing message which consequently will improve the message's virality. To test the impact that individual video content characteristics have on brand video virality we hypothesise that:

- **H1**: Visuals impact the Social Media users' decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks.
- **H2**: Audio impacts the Social Media users' decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks.
- **H3**: Plot impacts the Social Media users' decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks.

Methods

For this research, the "netnography" marketing research technique was applied in order to gain primary data and user insights concerning the engagement of Social Media users with brand video content characteristics. According to Kozinets (2002), "netnography" is a form of ethnography that is adapted to the study of online communities. Additionally, Ampofo (2011)

describes netnography as studying online communities and utilising their publicly available information to identify their needs and desires. This research technique can provide online data and deeper insights into consumers' opinions, motives, and concerns, while also complementing data collected by questionnaires (Orgad, 2009; Kozinets, 2010).

By using netnography, this research examined the engagement of Social Media users with the content characteristics of four specific brand videos that went viral. The selected videos were: WREN's – First Kiss, Volvo's – Epic Split, John Lewis's – #MontythePenguine and Budweiser's - Puppy Love. These brand videos were selected on the basis of four main criteria: 1) making different use of video content characteristics, 2) being global (watched globally), 3) being viral and 4) being examples of a recent viral marketing campaign (conducted during the past 5 years). Overall, the 1000 most recent comments that each one of these four videos received were collected in order to be analysed (4000 comments in total). This method of analysis (selecting and analyzing campaigns that already went viral) was also used by Dobele et al. (2007) in similar context.

The approach of the netnographic analysis and monitoring of the engagement of Social Media users with video content characteristics of brand videos that went viral, was complemented with the use of an online questionnaire. A sample of 157 Social Media users were asked to answer questions, regarding their engagement with the individual video content characteristics (plot, visuals and audio) of each one of the brand videos monitored through netnography. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they had previously watched the four brand videos. According to the their answers participants followed different question paths. Participants who were already familiar with any of the brand videos examined were asked to provide information on whether they have created any kind of an online

story about the specific brand video by sharing/liking/commenting it in Social Media and on the impact that the brand video's individual video content characteristics had on their decision to do so. Participants who were unfamiliar with the brand videos examined, were asked to watch the brand videos and then provide information on the likeliness of sharing/liking/commenting them in Social Media. Then these participants were also asked to determine the impact that each one of the individual video content characteristics had on their decision to do so.

Findings

After cleaning the data collected through the netnography method, it was found that there were a total of 1658 comments referring to individual video content characteristics. These comments were then classified into three main categories based on their content: a) comments referring to audio (493), b) comments referring to visuals (562) and c) comments referring to plot (603). In order to calculate the degree of statistical significance of the above data, and since the data was categorical, Chi-Square (X^2) tests were performed for each video content characteristic separately. This enabled this study to better determine how audio, visuals and plot affected the Social Media users' decision to comment and consequently create an online story about the videos examined and contribute to their virality. Table 1 illustrates the number of comments that each one of the videos received for its individual video content characteristics (audio, visuals and plot) in addition to the overall number of comments that all the videos received for each one of the specified video content characteristics.

The analysis conducted on the netnography data suggests that indeed, video content characteristics play an important role on the Social Media users' level of engagement with brand videos and on the users' decision to create stories about the brand videos in Social Media (H1,

H2, H3). This becomes clear when considering that 41.45% of the online stories created through comments under the brand videos examined were concerning the videos' visuals, sound or plot.

Moreover, the statistical tests performed revealed that plot is the strongest and most significant factor that makes Social Media users create an online story by commenting a brand video in Youtube (H3). However, the impact of plot seems to be changing from one brand video to another and this is where other factors may be considered. For example, the impact of plot seems to decrease when a popular guest appearance becomes part of a brand video's visuals. This becomes obvious when calculating the number of comments that the "Epic Split" brand video received about its visuals and Jean Claude Van Damme (261). This number was almost four times bigger than the number of comments that the brand video received about its plot (67).

With regards to the visuals, with 562 comments overall, it seems that they also played an important role in influencing the Social Media users' decision to comment on the brand videos (H1). Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the appearance of Jean Claude Van Damme within the "Epic Split" brand video generated a large amount of comments. What is also remarkable however, is the fact that the video which included 3D animation (Monty The Penguin) generated fewer comments about its visuals (79) than the brand videos that were based on live video footage.

Finally, the audio seems to be generating online stories and virality as well (H2). On the "Monty The Penguin" and "Puppy Love" brand videos, the audio generated more comments than visuals did. On the "Epic Split", 198 out of the 526 comments that the brand video received about its individual video content characteristics concerned its audio. Similarly, the audio of the "Monty The Penguin" received 94 comments out of the 312 and the audio of the "Puppy Love" received 149 comments out of the 439.

Furthermore, the data collected through the online questionnaires come to complement the data collected through the netnography method. By comparing the online questionnaire data collected for all the four videos examined in most cases, plot seems to be the most powerful video content characteristic in terms of its impact (H3). Table 2 summarizes the data collected through the online questionnaire for all the four brand videos examined and for the impact that their individual video content characteristics had on the respondents' decision to create online stories about them in Social Networks.

With regard to the visuals, the data received through the online questionnaire suggest that they have a strong impact on a Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks too (H1). "Epic Split's" actors/characters had an average impact of 4.24, while the video recording/footage of this brand video received the highest average impact (4.31) of all the four video recordings presented. "Epic Split's" video recording/footage was followed by "Puppy Love's" video recording (4.11), "Monty The Penguin's" video recording (3.98), and "First Kiss's" video recording (3.71). Although the actors/characters presented within the "Epic Split" brand video received a high average impact, "Puppy Love's" actors/characters received a slightly higher average impact (4.25). "First Kiss's" actors/characters overall received an average impact of 3.60 while "Monty The Penguin's" actors/characters received an average impact of 3.89. It is essential to consider that "Monty The Penguin" also included animation within its visuals, which received an average impact of 4.22.

With regards to the audio, the online questionnaire data also suggest that it has a strong impact on a Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks (H2). This argument becomes stronger particularly when talking about music. "Puppy Love's" background music/soundtrack received the highest average impact (4.26) of all the four

soundtracks included within the four brand videos examined, followed by the soundtracks of "Monty The Penguin" s (4.11), "Epic Split" (4.00) and "First Kiss" (3.80). The rest of the audio characteristics (speech and sound effects) used within the four brand videos examined were not as powerful as music in respect to their impact.

Overall, the four brand videos examined had four video content characteristics in common: actors/characters, video recording, music and plot. The impact of each of these video content characteristics was explored across the four videos through cross tabulation and Chi-Square (X^2) analysis, in order to examine any differences in the impact of a given characteristic on the four videos. Interestingly, the results suggest that the impact of the actors/characters content characteristic differs across the four videos ($X^2(6) = 12.847$, $p=0.046$). It is observed that actors/characters have lower impact on "First Kiss" and "Monty The Penguin", where nearly 1 out of 5 participants claimed that this video content characteristic had "No or Minor impact" on their decision to create an online story about these two brand videos in Social Networks (Figure 1). Moreover, it was observed that the impact of video recording and music was not significantly different across the four videos.

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, after collecting and studying 4000 Social Media user comments and after analysing the data collected through an online questionnaire, there is evidence to suggest that visuals, audio and plot can impact a Social Media user's decision to create an online story (share, like or comment) about a brand video in Social Networks and consequently, improve its virality. This supports the three hypotheses of this study (H1, H2, H3). Moreover, this reinforces the view of

Southgate et. al (2010), who support that creative details behind video advertising can be used to predict a video's virality.

Moreover, this research showed that across all the individual video content characteristics (audio, visuals and plot), plot had the most impact on a Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks. Also, the inclusion of a famous actor within a brand video (i.e. Epic Split by Volvo Trucks) can significantly increase the chances of the brand video to go viral. Another finding is that the inclusion of real animals within a brand video (i.e. Puppy Love by Budweiser) can also significantly increase the chances of the brand video to go viral. Furthermore, our study indicates that animation in general, and animated animals in particular, do not impact a Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video (i.e. Monty The Penguin by John Lewis) in Social Networks as much as live recording/footage and real animals do. This suggests that Callcott's and Phillips's (1996) argument that commercials featuring animated characters are watched more often than other types of commercials may no longer be valid. At the same time, this finding reinforces the view of Godin (2005) and Chen et al. (2009), who suggest that great stories are true ones and that stories which are authentic convince the audience easier. Finally, this study suggests that music has a strong impact on the decision of a Social Media user to create an online story about a brand video. This strengthens the view of Lusensky (2011), who supports that music strategy creates attention by involving the consumer in a conversation about the music.

While the above findings can contribute to research concerning the role of visuals, sound and plot in brand video virality and the content characteristics that drive viral brand videos being highly shared in Social Media, they also lead to a number of practical implications. Since the findings of this study suggest that animation and heavy visual special effects do not impact a

Social Media user's decision to create an online story about a brand video in Social Networks as much as live recording/footage does, practitioners may consider avoiding spending much money on these visual content characteristics. Instead, they can consider allocating more financial resources on the development of an interesting (to their audience) narrative by using live footage/video recording that does not go far from reality.

Moreover, budgets saved by the avoidance of using heavy special effects and animation could be used for the addition of famous celebrities/actors/characters/animals within the brand videos. In such cases, practitioners should carefully select a character who can represent their brand, products and services. A great example was the inclusion of Jean Claude Van Damme within "The Epic Split" brand video by Volvo Trucks. Jean Claude Van Damme and his famous split successfully conveyed the marketing message that Volvo Trucks wanted to communicate (the stability and power of their trucks). Other implications that the findings of this study offer, concern the use of audio in brand videos. Practitioners should have in mind that the addition of background music instead of voice and speech in online video advertisements increases the chances of the brand video going viral.

Overall, the conclusions drawn by this study can assist businesses and marketing practitioners in developing brand videos that are more likely to go viral and consequently, in better communicating their marketing messages by making a "buzz" about their brands, products or services through video advertising.

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List of Tables

Table 1: Comments regarding individual video content characteristics

Viral Video	Comments on Audio	Comments on Visuals	Comments on Plot	OVERALL
FIRST KISS	52	116	213	381
EPIC SPLIT	198	261	67	526
MONTY THE PENGUINE	94	79	139	312
PUPPY LOVE	149	106	184	439
OVERALL	493	562	603	1658

Table 2: Impact of individual video content characteristics on the decision to create an online story about the four brand videos examined.

FIRST KISS by WREN						
	No Impact	**Minor Impact**	**Moderate Impact**	**Strong Impact**	**Very Strong Impact**	**Weighted Average**
Actors/Characters	3 (8.57%)	3 (8.57%)	7 (20%)	14 (40%)	8 (22.86%)	3.60
Video Effects	1 (2.86%)	7 (20%)	11 (31.43%)	10 (28.57%)	6 (17.14%)	3.37
Video Recording	0 (0%)	5 (14.29%)	8 (22.86%)	14 (40%)	8 (22.86%)	3.71
Music	0 (0%)	5 (14.29%)	7 (20%)	13 (37.14%)	10 (28.57%)	3.80
Speech	1 (2.86%)	5 (14.29%)	8 (22.86%)	13 (37.14%)	8 (22.86%)	3.63
Plot	0 (0%)	1 (2.86%)	2 (5.71%)	12 (34.29%)	20 (57.14%)	4.46
EPIC SPLIT by VOLVO TRUCKS						
	No Impact	**Minor Impact**	**Moderate Impact**	**Strong Impact**	**Very Strong Impact**	**Weighted Average**
Actors/Characters	1 (1.85%)	0 (0%)	11 (20.37%)	15 (27.78%)	27 (50%)	4.24
Video Recording	1 (1.85%)	2 (3.70%)	5 (9.26%)	17 (31.48%)	29 (53.70%)	4.31
Music	2 (3.70%)	4 (7.41%)	10 (18.52%)	14 (25.93%)	24 (44.44%)	4.00
Speech	2 (3.70%)	8 (14.81%)	13 (24.07%)	17 (31.48%)	14 (25.93%)	3.61
Plot	6 (11.11%)	1 (1.85%)	5 (9.26%)	14 (25.93%)	28 (51.85%)	4.06
MONTY THE PENGUIN by JOHN LEWIS						
	No Impact	**Minor Impact**	**Moderate Impact**	**Strong Impact**	**Very Strong Impact**	**Weighted Average**
Actors/Characters	1 (2.17%)	8 (17.39%)	6 (13.04%)	11 (23.91%)	20 (43.48%)	3.89
Animation	1 (2.17%)	1 (2.17%)	7 (15.22%)	15 (32.62%)	22 (47.83%)	4.22
Video Recording	1 (2.17%)	1 (2.17%)	11 (23.91%)	18 (39.13%)	15 (32.62%)	3.98
Music	1 (2.17%)	3 (6.52%)	6 (13.04%)	16 (34.78%)	20 (43.48%)	4.11
Sound Effects	2 (4.35%)	4 (8.70%)	7 (15.22%)	14 (30.43%)	19 (41.30%)	3.96
Plot	1 (2.17%)	0 (0%)	3 (6.52%)	6 (13.04%)	36 (78.26%)	4.65
PUPPY LOVE by BUDWEISER						
	No Impact	**Minor Impact**	**Moderate Impact**	**Strong Impact**	**Very Strong Impact**	**Weighted Average**
Actors/Characters	0 (0%)	3 (5.26%)	12 (21.05%)	10 (17.54%)	32 (56.14%)	4.25
Video Recording	1 (1.75%)	3 (5.26%)	8 (14.04%)	22 (38.60%)	23 (40.35%)	4.11
Music	1 (1.75%)	0 (0%)	11 (19.30%)	16 (28.07%)	29 (50.88%)	4.26
Sound Effects	2 (3.51%)	4 (7.02%)	17 (29.82%)	13 (22.81%)	21 (36.84%)	3.82
Plot	1 (1.75%)	0 (0%)	5 (8.77%)	11 (19.30%)	40 (70.18%)	4.56

List of Figures