

UNDERSTANDING CONCEPT OF VIRALITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA FROM USERS' PERSPECTIVE

Nurana Atayeva

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Supervisor: Matias Lievonen

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Faculty Digital Marketing and Corporate Communications	Department School of Business and Economics
Author Nurana Atayeva	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The concept of virality is the subject that has been in the minds of many people for the past few years. In general terms, it is defined as a phenomenon where certain form of information spreads swiftly and widely across social networks. When applying this phenomenon to activities that are popular for ongoing generations, virality can mostly be observed in social media and content generated around it. Namely within past few years, short form videos have increasingly raised interest of public, and most of the content consumed nowadays in social media is through video formats. As a result, the interest in comprehending why certain type of content is preferred over another and becomes viral is continuously rising. Previously conducted research on a matter have identified that emotions, particularly positive ones, play as key drivers of virality, emphasizing the importance of content that elicits joy, excitement, or inspiration. However, much of this research has focused on quantitative analysis, leaving gaps in understanding from the users' perspective.</p> <p>Therefore, in order to complement existing knowledge, current study seeks to examine the concept of virality from users' perspective as well as define whether viral content is regarded as the most engaging nowadays. Given objectives would consequently allow to identify drivers that cause virality of the content, which in turn would be able to assist organizations in optimization of their content creation strategies in social media.</p> <p>To conduct current research, qualitative research method with an exploratory purpose has been applied. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven participants involved from three different age groups. Collected data was analysed with the assistance of thematic analysis to identify recurring themes on a subject. However, as a complementary approach, descriptive comparative analysis was additionally adopted to provide straightforward results of the findings and allow readers to directly review responses of participants and clearly understand their perception on a subject.</p> <p>Results of the findings have revealed that users' understanding of the concept directly matches academic definition of the phenomenon. Specifically, users define virality as a content, which is rapidly spreading across the platforms, reaching wide audiences, and becoming popular in an instant. In addition to the generalized definition of the term, users offer more insightful characteristics, explaining that viral content is described as visually appealing, short, authentic, emotionally impactful, and often humorous. Furthermore, current research offers additional findings into drivers that promote virality in social media as well as engagement attributes that influence interaction among the users. Lastly, results of current study offer managerial implications, suggesting brands to optimize content creation strategies by considering the likability and shareability of content, focusing on engaging and shareable formats, and adapting viral content attributes to maintain relevance and relatability.</p> <p>On a conclusive note of the research, limitations and ethical considerations were examined as well as recommendations for future research shared.</p>	
Keywords: virality, social media, content characteristics, user perception, user engagement, emotional impact, negative bias, confirmation bias	
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1 INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, virality has become increasingly important, as the rise of social media platforms has significantly impacted its ability to spread widely and with exponential speed (Paul, 2022). Platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have revolutionized how users interact with content, promoting a culture where short and entertaining videos quickly capture the attention of millions of users (Taylor & Choi, 2022). This rapid dissemination of content has not only reshaped digital communication but has also influenced user behaviour and preferences (Geysler, 2024). Therefore, the interest in comprehending the reason why certain types of content become viral is continuously rising.

The answer to this question Berger and Milkman strived to determine from psychological perspective in 2013.

One of the main findings of the research was identified in the importance of emotions (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Positive content tends to be more viral than negative, contrary to commonly held belief that negativity is exponentially dominating in all media sources (Berger & Milkman, 2013; Norris, 2021).

The given statement was additionally supported by Knossenburg, Nogueira and Chimenti (2016), where authors have stated that viral content has the tendency to evoke specific emotions such as joy, surprise, or anger. As it has been described by Knossenburg et al. (2016) the emotional responses of the audiences play a triggering role in sharing behavior.

With this in mind, Berger and Milkman (2013) further argued that the level of arousal or activation induced by emotions play a critical role. Content that triggered intense emotions, whether they were positive (such as awe) or negative (such as anger or anxiety), had a higher likelihood of being shared (Berger & Milkman, 2013). On the other hand, content that elicited less intense emotions (such as sadness) was found to be less likely to go viral (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

Moreover, Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai and Zhang in 2019 have additionally examined the drivers behind viral content and the findings have revealed that content evoking positive emotions such as amusement, excitement, inspiration, and warmth had significantly higher rates in sharing. Additionally, elements of drama, including surprise, plot, and likable characters such as babies, animals, and celebrities, were identified as effective in stimulating the sharing (Tellis et al., 2019).

Considering essential value of previously conducted research it is however important to highlight that most of the findings were evaluated through the lens of quantitative dataset. Moreover, in earlier studies researchers were striving to determine

definitions of virality as well the drivers behind content shared. Therefore, in order to complement existing knowledge, it would be additionally interesting to examine the concept of virality from users' perspective and to examine whether viral content is regarded as the most engaging nowadays.

1.1 Justification of the research and study objectives

In today's digital era, where individuals have unparalleled authority over their media consumption, it is fascinating to grasp how individuals ultimately perceive the same content, despite their varying preferences in content categories.

Moreover, it is important to highlight, that users nowadays are able to adherently recognize promotional content, which raises the question of whether organizations should apply characteristics of viral content to their own communication strategies in social media in order to maximize their success in wide reach as well as active interaction with target audience.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the viral content circulating on social media and the factors contributing to its spread on these online platforms. The primary aim of this study is to identify the attributes that make content go viral, with special emphasis on conducting a qualitative analysis to gain insights into the user perspective. Specifically, the study aims to determine what kind of characteristics users imply when describing viral content. Moreover, apart from generalization of the concept current research seeks to observe how users personally engage with social media platforms, what particularly triggers them to engage with the content and how much importance they place on engagement. The findings of conducted research can consequently offer valuable insight into how brands can optimize their content creation strategies.

As a result, the ultimate question of current research would be as follows:

1. What kind of characteristics describe viral content on social media?
2. What are the potential drivers that promote virality on social media?
3. What role engagement attributes play on virality?

1.2 Research structure

Current research will be written with the following structure. Firstly, this research will be supported with the theoretical background which not only support author's analysis with existing findings on virality of social media content but also offers readers further theoretical knowledge. The chapter of methodology, explains a detailed account of the actions taken for the research, allowing readers to evaluate the reliability of the findings. In results chapter, an unbiased and straightforward description of the findings will be provided, whereas the final chapter of this research will

share the significance of the results, situating it both with theoretical context and managerial implications.

Before proceeding with the research writing, it is essential to disclose that writing assistant tool Wordtune was incorporated exclusively for correcting grammatical errors and paraphrasing notes in order to refine the writing structure. The entire work was written solely by the author of this study, while heavily relying on previously conducted studies for support and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of information presented. At no point during the research process was any artificially generated text included.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to online platforms and technologies designed to facilitate social interaction among individuals, groups, and organizations (Mills, 2012). The given idea was also supported by Voorveld (2019), who defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications that are built upon the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0.

By highlighting the phenomenon called “Web 2.0” Mills (2012) additionally described that social media platforms serve as mediums that transform traditional one-way broadcast into dynamic dialogue involving participants from all over the world, which in essence empowers users to foster democratization of information.

More definite terms were additionally offered by Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021) who describe social media as digital environment where individuals can establish networks and exchange sentiments. As it has been exemplified by Li and authors (2021), social media platforms include multiple forms of communication, microblogging and content community sites that facilitate the formation of networking and based on shared interests and values.

From business perspective, the dynamic environment of social media provides firms with a great potential of exchanging and generating knowledge for their target audience (Mount & Martinez, 2014).

Social media have transformed the way firms and customers interact and influence each other (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). Through various actions, including communications and passive observations, individuals influence one another's choices and consumption behaviours (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). This social interaction, often referred to as word-of-mouth, plays a significant role in shaping consumer decisions (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). Additionally, social media data, characterized by volume, variety, and velocity, provide valuable insights for businesses to manage customer relationships and make informed decisions. (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021).

The proliferation of social media data enables companies to better understand customer behaviour, conduct market research, and gather new ideas through crowdsourcing (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). These data, derived from various social media platforms and formats, can be efficiently extracted, and analysed with modern information technologies (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). Therefore, social media data represent a strategic resource for improving marketing outcomes and creating value for businesses (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). As of the beginning of 2024, the most

popular social media platforms worldwide include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok (Dixon, 2024).

2.1 TikTok

TikTok, platform launched in 2016, known for its short-form video content, has swiftly gained attention, captivating millions worldwide (Herrman, 2019). Unlike its predecessors, TikTok's interface prioritizes algorithmic recommendations over curated friend feeds, offering users an endless stream of diverse content tailored to their preferences (Hermann, 2019).

Central to TikTok's success is its integration of artificial intelligence algorithms, which underpin its content recommendation system (Hermann, 2019). By analysing user interactions and preferences, TikTok curates a personalized 'For You' feed, continuously learning and adapting to individual tastes (Hermann, 2019).

Furthermore, as it has been highlighted by Geysler (2024), TikTok's appeal lies in its user-friendly interface and an array of features designed to facilitate seamless content creation and sharing. From video recording and editing tools to an extensive library of filters, effects, and soundtracks, TikTok empowers users to unleash their creativity and connect with online communities worldwide (Geysler, 2024).

Moreover, as it has been previously noted, TikTok drastically differentiates in its ability to spark viral trends and challenges, driven by its influential user base and engaging content format (Geysler, 2024). In fact, studies conducted by Cucu (2024) have confirmed that in the beginning of this year, TikTok has emerged as the leading social media platform in terms of engagement rate. Following the chart, Instagram, the second most engaging platform, registering a 0,70% average engagement rate (Cucu, 2024).

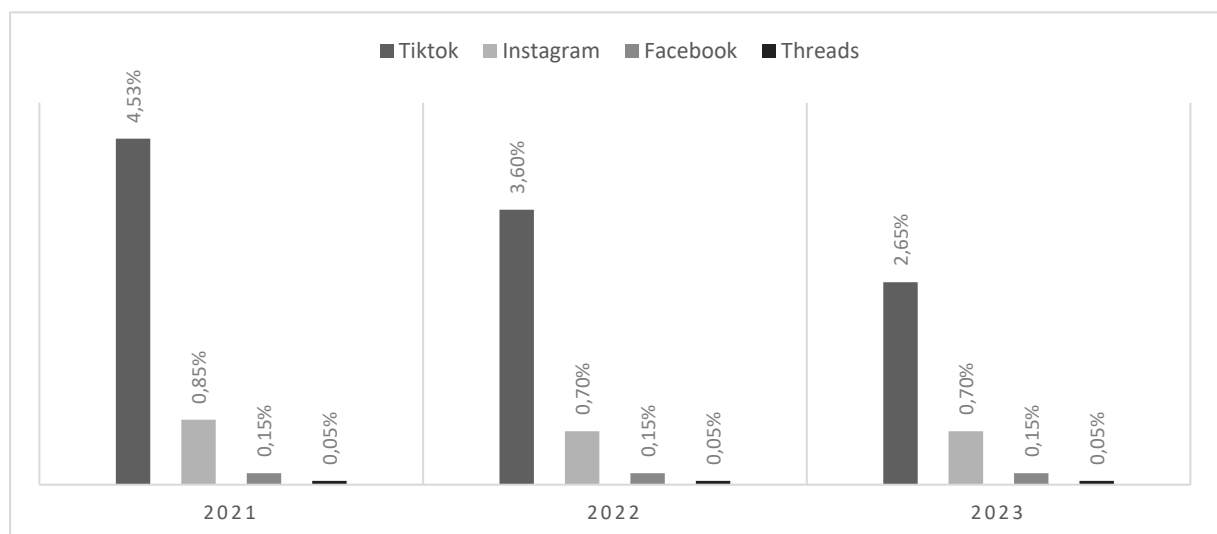


Figure 1. Social media engagement rate (Cucu, 2024)

At last, when considering the audience profile, Kemp's (2023) report sheds light on the demographics of the platform's audience, revealing that individuals aged 18 to 24 comprise 38,40% (i.e. 419,9 million users) of its advertising audience, while those aged 25 to 34 make up 32,50% (354,8 million users). Furthermore, individuals aged 35 to 44 accounted for 170 million users, constituting 15,60% of the advertising audience (Kemp, 2023). Users aged 45 to 54 totalled 87,3 million, making up 8,0% of the advertising audience, while those aged 55 and above numbered 60,10 million, representing 5,5% of the market (Kemp, 2023).

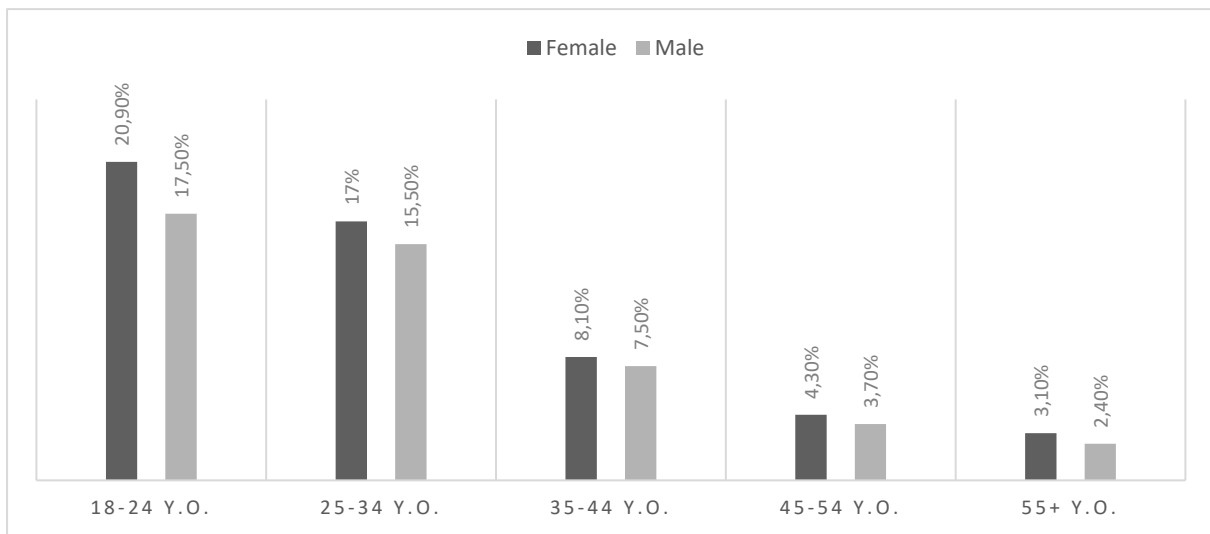


Figure 2. TikTok advertising audience profile (Kemp, 2023)

As a result, this data not only underscores that platform is popular among younger demographics, but also proves that content created in short video format is mostly preferred in younger generation, although there is also reasonable usage among individuals in their late 30s and early 40s (Kemp, 2023).

2.2 Instagram

Instagram is one of the social media platforms primarily focused on communications and content sharing (Rejeb, Abdollahi, Treiblmaier & Rejeb 2022). Within the platform, users can upload photos and videos, apply various editing effects, and share them publicly or with followers (Musonera, 2018).

In 2020, Instagram introduced Reels feature, which offers short-form video content (Milmo, 2024). Originally launched in 2010, Instagram quickly became a staple in the sphere of photo and video sharing (Amaral, 2015). However, in recent years, it faced formidable competition from TikTok, the platform known for its viral short videos (Milmo, 2024).

As it has been noted by Milmo (2024) Instagram's strategic move to incorporate Reels was widely perceived as a risen form of interest towards short form videos and thanks to broader user demographic as well as additional alternative features available on the platform Instagram is perceived as one of the leading social media platforms.

2.3 YouTube

Created in 2005, YouTube is one of the immensely popular platforms for video-sharing, which allows users to engage actively with it by uploading, watching, rating, sharing, and commenting on the content (Hosch, 2024). The platform features great variety of generated videos from both individual creators and corporate organizations, comprising TV shows, music videos, educational materials, live streams, and many other content formats such as video blogging, short films or video game footages (Hosch, 2024).

Similarly to Instagram, platform has embraced the trend of short-form video content exemplified by platforms like TikTok through the introduction of Shorts (Nieva, 2022). This strategic move by YouTube again acknowledges the evolving preferences of digital audiences, catering to the increasing demand for short and engaging content (Nieva, 2022).

2.4 Social media algorithm

Social media algorithms, as defined by Taylor and Choi (2022), are computational models that transform data into personalized content, shaping what individuals see on their social media feeds. These algorithms curate content based on various factors, such as user engagement metrics and personal preferences, with the goal of optimizing user experience and engagement on social media platforms (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

Whilst describing general role of given technology, Mills (2012) additionally describes that algorithms are used to gather and analyze data, such as the frequency of user preferences for the other person's posts, the platform being used, the duration of time spent on a post, and whether the user presses for the profile picture or the one who created it. These forms of information are consequently utilized to make predictions regarding the chances of a user engaging with a specific post (Mills, 2012).

Also, it is important to highlight that over time, the emphasis given to numerous factors within the algorithm are subject to change. (Mills, 2012)

In other words, as it has been described by Mosseri (2023), head of Instagram, there are thousands of signals that platform considers while suggesting any type of content. Starting with recent posts from followed accounts to user engagement history and preferences, social media platform carefully analyses data to avoid suggestion of

the same content twice, showing too much content from one creator as well as eliminate offensive or sensitive material (Mosseri, 2023).

In addition to the notes above, research conducted by Taylor and Choi (2022), suggests that there are two dimensions of human–algorithm interaction—Perceived Algorithm Responsiveness and Perceived Algorithm Insensitivity. Perceived Algorithm Responsiveness refers to the extent to which individuals believe social media algorithms understand, validate, and support their core sense of self, while Perceived Algorithm Insensitivity pertains to the degree to which individuals perceive algorithms as misinterpreting, suppressing, or undermining their identity and goals (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

Furthermore, the research distinguishes between algorithm awareness and algorithm responsiveness, being aware of algorithms does not necessarily translate into perceiving them as responsive or insensitive (Taylor & Choi, 2022). This underscores the importance of individuals' subjective evaluations of algorithmic content in shaping their experiences on social media platforms (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

Finally, the study finds that Perceived Algorithm Responsiveness contributes to the enjoyment of social media platforms, suggesting that perceived algorithm responsiveness influences user satisfaction and engagement. (Taylor & Choi, 2022)

In other words, authors believed that there are two types of perception and evaluation towards algorithmic content on social media platforms, hence highlighting the complex interplay between algorithms, identity, and user experiences in the digital age (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

3 CONTENT CREATION AND ITS TYPES

Content creation is a systematic process that involves planning, generating ideas, and tailoring them to meet the needs of the audience (Santiago, 2024). Furthermore, as it has been noted by Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020), the process of content creation involves generating and distributing digital material such as written articles (texts), visual content (images), audio and video streams with the main purpose of engaging with the audience or generally conveying information.

When considering categories unto which social media content can be classified Shahbaznezhad, Dolan and Rashidirad (2021) offered three major types: rational, interactional, and transactional. The first category, also known as informational, focuses on providing users with relevant and valuable information such as educational videos, how to guides, news updates etc. (Shahbaznezhad et al, 2021). The interactional category comprises content that fosters social experiences, such as personal stories, behind-the-scenes footage, community engagement posts, user-generated content, cause-related campaigns etc. (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

Lastly, the transactional category encompasses content that has a rewarding or promotional aspect, such as discounts and deals, limited time offers, contests and giveaways, loyalty programs or sponsored content (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). The summary of content types can consequently be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Content types (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021)

Type	Description	Examples
Rational	relevant and valuable information	informative articles, how-to guides, educational videos, news updates, industry insights
Interactional	social interaction and experiences	personal stories, behind-the-scenes footage, employee spotlights, community engagement posts, user-generated content, cause-related campaigns
Transactional	reimbursing or promotional type	product promotions, discounts and deals, limited time offers, contests and giveaways, loyalty programs, sponsored content

When considering practical perspective towards formats of content created nowadays, these could be divided into five categories. First, the prominent leader that has gained immense popularity among content types is short-form videos (Needle, 2023).

These videos are highly entertaining and proven to be effective in capturing attention of users (Needle, 2023).

Second in the category are the audio chats and live rooms, which mainly are used to facilitate direct communications with audiences and allow brands to foster closer relationships with followers (Needle, 2023). High-quality images, which is the third type, play a pivotal role in social media marketing (Needle, 2023). From product photos and memes to aesthetically pleasing visual content, images have the power to captivate audiences across social media platforms (Needle, 2023).

Text-based content, such as Tweets and thought-leadership posts is considered as another content category (Needle, 2023). It provides a platform for sharing insights and information in a clear and concise manner (Needle, 2023). Lastly, disappearing content, such as Instagram Stories, has grown lately in popularity. This format allows brands to create temporary content, such as product launches or exclusive offers, to generate excitement and encourage immediate action (Needle, 2023).

As it has been described by Needle (2023), content types could additionally be classified by: (6) user-generated content (UGC), (7) funny, trendy and relatable type, (8) shoppable content, (9) educational, (10) the one that represents brand values as well as (11) infographics (Needle, 2023). However, it could be noted, that each of the given types can also fall under five formats described above (Needle, 2023).

To investigate the attributes of viral content, current research consequently focuses on mainly short-form videos.

3.1 User Engagement and its categories

As social media platforms develop, content creators adjust their communication styles and strategies, guided by high demand of authenticity, i.e. presenting oneself genuinely to further cultivate connections with followers (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). In fact, Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) highlighted that due to the evolving technological and social landscapes, content creators must continuously adapt their approach in generating own content in order to maintain active engagement with the users.

Moreover, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) argued that nowadays the world is witnessing profound transition of customers' role, who from passive observers have become active participants in digital media. Namely, social media platforms have empowered users to become co-creators of content through their online interactions and behaviours (Mills, 2012).

For instance, users' engagement could be observed in their joint discussions towards the content, which generally encompasses a wide range of activities such as likes, shares, comments or even content generated by users themselves (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). As a result, given activities not only demonstrate users'

commitment to specific brand, but also actively involve target audience in developing its online presence (van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner & Verhoef, 2010).

Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, Brodie and Hollebeek (2016) in their research have determined that user engagement can be classified under six categories. These are creating, contributing, destructing (also commonly referred as active form of engagement) and consuming, dormancy as well as detaching (also classified as passive or individualized forms of engagement) (Dolan et al., 2016). Given forms of engagement could be additionally categorized by intensity of interaction, namely passive (low) or active (high) as well as positive or negative (Dolan et al., 2016). The table below further displays classification suggested by Dolan and authors.

Table 2. User engagement categories (Dolan et al., 2016)

Engagement Type	Engagement Level	Valence
Creating	Active (High)	Positive
Contributing	Active (High)	Positive
Consuming	Passive (Low)	Positive
Destructing	Active (High)	Negative
Dormancy	Passive (Low)	Neutral
Detaching	Passive (Low)	Neutral

While exploring understandings on the forms of engagement, Dolan and authors (2016) in their work described that passive form of engagement generally entails minimal form activity from the user. Examples could further comprise scenarios where users are browsing through social media, in an attempt to remain informed with the latest information (Dolan et al., 2016). Active engagement on the other hand, consists of members' strong desire to participate in the community as a whole, while particularly dedicating themselves to content creation, sharing and providing support to online community (Dolan et al., 2016).

The idea of engagement intensity of social media was additionally supported by Alhabash, McAlister, Hagerstrom, Quilliam, Rifon and Richards (2013), as they proposed that user activity such as content liking and commenting could be referred as active participation, while content clicking and reading only as passive behaviour.

When considering statistical perspective towards content categories with the highest form of engagement, in the research conducted by Cucu (2024) it was demonstrated that education stood out as a high performing category with content related to learning, tutorials, and educational tips. Arts and crafts also drew attention of the audience, with creative and visually appealing content (Cucu, 2024). Beverage industry was observed sparking interest and conversation among the users, leading to active form of engagement (Cucu, 2024). Fourth in the list appeared beauty industry, such

as makeup tutorials, skincare routines, and product reviews, exhibiting high engagement metrics where audiences actively participating in discussions, sharing, and recreating content (Cucu, 2024). Examination of these categories was conducted across TikTok and Instagram, with findings indicating that these two social media platforms considered to be the most engaging nowadays (Cucu, 2024).

3.2 Virality

Previous studies have found that the phenomenon of virality has shifted significantly due to the rise of new technologies, particularly the internet and social media, allowing consumers to interact, share, and create their own content (Knossenburg et al., 2016). Traditional media's control over what becomes popular has significantly diminished, with consumers now having more power in deciding what content gets shared (Broxton, Interian, Vaver & Wattenhofer, 2013). Emergence of Web 2.0 and social media has empowered users to actively participate in content creation and sharing, leading to the emergence of virality (Knossenburg et al., 2016).

The concept of virality on social media is commonly defined as a phenomenon where content rapidly spreads across platforms, gaining a large number of views or interactions in a short time due to extensive sharing among users (Wold, 2023). As Wold (2023) defined it in his research, virality is similar to a virus that is spreading quickly from person to person, reaching a vast audience beyond the creator's immediate network. Viral content can take various forms, including posts, videos, memes, or articles, and what makes content go viral involves several key factors (Wold, 2023; Tellis et al., 2019).

Firstly, virality is closely linked to the content's spreadability – how easily it can be shared and liked by users (Wold, 2023). This spreadability contributes to the rapid dissemination of the content across the platform as well as generate high levels of engagement (Wold, 2023; Tellis et al., 2019).

Moreover, as it has been discussed earlier, emotional impact plays a significant role in virality, as content that triggers strong reactions is more likely to go viral. (Berger & Milkman, 2013) This can include positive emotions like humour or inspiration, as well as negative emotions like anger or anxiety. (Berger & Milkman, 2013) Furthermore, content with perceived social value, practical usefulness, or engaging elements such as controversy or novelty additionally have higher chances of becoming viral. (Wold 2023; Tellis et al., 2019.)

3.3 Emotional impact on virality

While further expanding on the idea of emotions within viral content, Nikolinakou and King (2018) further confirmed statement of Berger and Milkman (2013) by noting in their work that positive emotions and high level of emotional arousal tend

to drive sharing behaviour. Storytelling was highlighted as an essential aspect of human communication, with compelling and engaging stories being preferred for sharing (Nikolinakou & King, 2018).

When exploring impact of emotions online, Nikolinakou and King (2018) have described that emotions foster connection, generosity, and empathy among the users, while continuously motivating individuals to share content to connect with others emotionally or offer support. Thus, rather than focusing solely on the informational or practical benefits offered by the content, individuals were more inclined to share content that evokes emotional resonance and connection (Nikolinakou & King, 2018).

Furthermore, the research underscored the role of emotional receptivity and expression in shaping sharing behaviour (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). It suggested that experiencing affection and awe made individuals more emotionally open and receptive to others, leading to increased emotional expression and sharing activity on social media (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). This ultimately indicated that content eliciting positive emotions had higher potential to cultivate stronger connections with the audience, driving greater engagement and sharing behaviour (Nikolinakou & King, 2018).

Nonetheless, given findings still contradict the common bias that negative news is more widely disseminated (Norris, 2021). In light of this, Berger and Milkman (2013) suggested that content which triggers strong emotions, whether positive or negative, is more likely to go viral. Namely, individuals are more prone to share content that triggers positive emotions such as happiness, inspiration or excitement (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

To elaborate on the subject, Berger and Milkman (2013) stated that in communications, the role of emotions proved itself to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. When considering the specific emotions involved, it becomes evident that the role of emotion extends beyond mere valence (reactivity) (Berger & Milkman, 2013). While awe-inspiring (positive) content tends to go viral, sadness-inducing (negative) content tends to have a lower virality rate (Nikolinakou & King, 2018; Berger & Milkman, 2013).

However, it is important to note that not all negative emotions are negatively associated with virality (Berger & Milkman, 2013). For instance, anxiety and anger-inducing stories have been shown to be more likely shared, even after controlling for an article's valence and emotional intensity (Berger & Milkman, 2013). This suggests that transmission is not just about sharing positive things and avoiding negative ones, but rather that content with strong emotional impact, regardless of its valence (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

To illustrate, the figure below provides a visual representation of the high arousal and valence relationship and its impact on content sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Arousal refers to the level of excitement or energy evoked by content, while

valence refers to the positive or negative emotions it evokes (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Studies have shown that content with a high arousal level combined with a positive valence is more likely to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

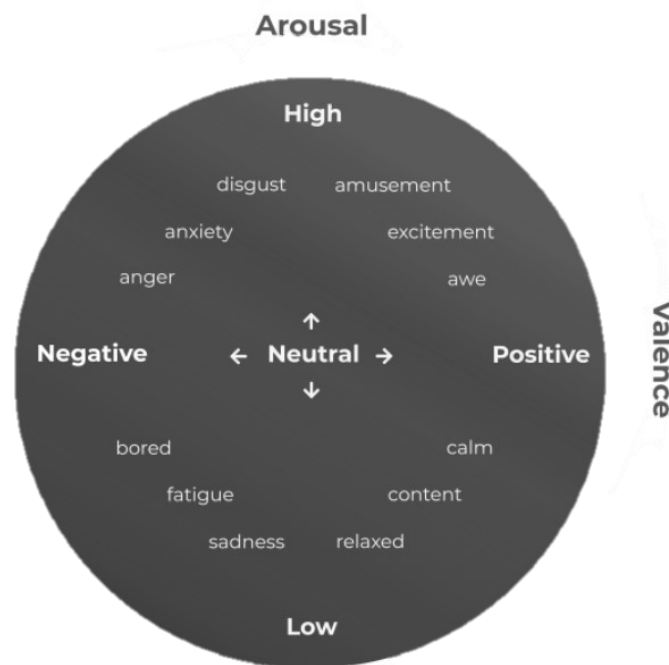


Figure 3. Emotional impact on viral content (Berger & Milkman, 2013)

Considering the above, it would be worthy to remind again that apart from emotional factors, context of the videos additionally plays crucial role in virality (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Namely, content that supplies valuable information, sparks curiosity, or offers unexpected insights tends to attract more attention and engagement from readers (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). These types of content are seen as more valuable to others, as they bring something fresh or thought-provoking to the audience (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Finally, attention-grabbing external factors, such as influencers or prominent figures, also strongly impact on what becomes viral (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

3.4 Viral marketing

Upon examination of definitions for viral marketing continuous debate was immediately noticed. For instance, De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) proposed in their work that virality refers to an accelerated form of word-of-mouth facilitated by technology. However, it is essential to acknowledge that viral marketing differs from word-of-mouth in one key aspect (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Specifically, the value of a given

piece of content to the original consumer is directly connected to its ability of attracting more users, thereby creating a self-propagating network (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

Petrescu (2014) on the other hand, defined viral marketing as a strategy where a message rapidly spreads and simultaneously increases its impact, whereas Welker (2002) proposed that viral marketing is an approach where a message spreads easily and exponentially, generating a substantial impact.

Lastly, Mills (2012) suggested that viral marketing transcends mere word-of-mouth for two reasons. Firstly, the term "viral" implies rapid and exponential spread (Mills, 2012). Secondly, the concept of "going viral" often pertains to the dissemination of tangible objects rather than abstract information, particularly in social media (Mills, 2012). While facts, phrases, and jokes may be shared, it is typically visual or multimedia content that spreads rapidly across networks (Mills, 2012).

Consequently, Mills (2012) supported definition of viral marketing as the intentional release of branded content into the interconnected online ecosystem of the target audience, followed by its potential exponential dissemination, resulting from consumers receiving this content and being compelled to share it with others (Mills, 2012). Furthermore, Mills (2012) noted that the term "potentially" should be understood as a warning that not every piece of content that is posted to social networks will necessarily go viral.

Among scholars who argue that viral marketing extends beyond word-of-mouth evolution, Southgate (2010) adopts a conventional stance, comparing online consumer awareness generation to offline advertising measures such as distinctiveness, celebrity endorsement, enjoyment, and branding. In contrast, Dobeles, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme and van Wijk (2007) posit that effective viral marketing surpasses traditional advertising approach by evoking emotional responses and incorporating surprise elements to captivate recipients' imaginations.

At the heart of viral marketing lies the contagious nature of content, leading to exponential spread across social networks (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Ho and Dempsey (2010) observed that users with either individualistic or altruistic tendencies are more inclined to sharing content. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) in turn propose that the strength of connections between members within online community initially aids in awareness. Additionally, they suggest that perceptual affinity, which belongs to the shared values, attitudes, and preferences between the sender and receiver, plays a vital role in sustaining interest throughout the cycle of viral content (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

3.5 SPIN Framework

Correspondingly Mills (2012) suggests that there are four key drivers of success in viral marketing: the spreadability of content, the factor of propagativity, the integration of multiple media platforms, and the successive reinforcement of messaging.

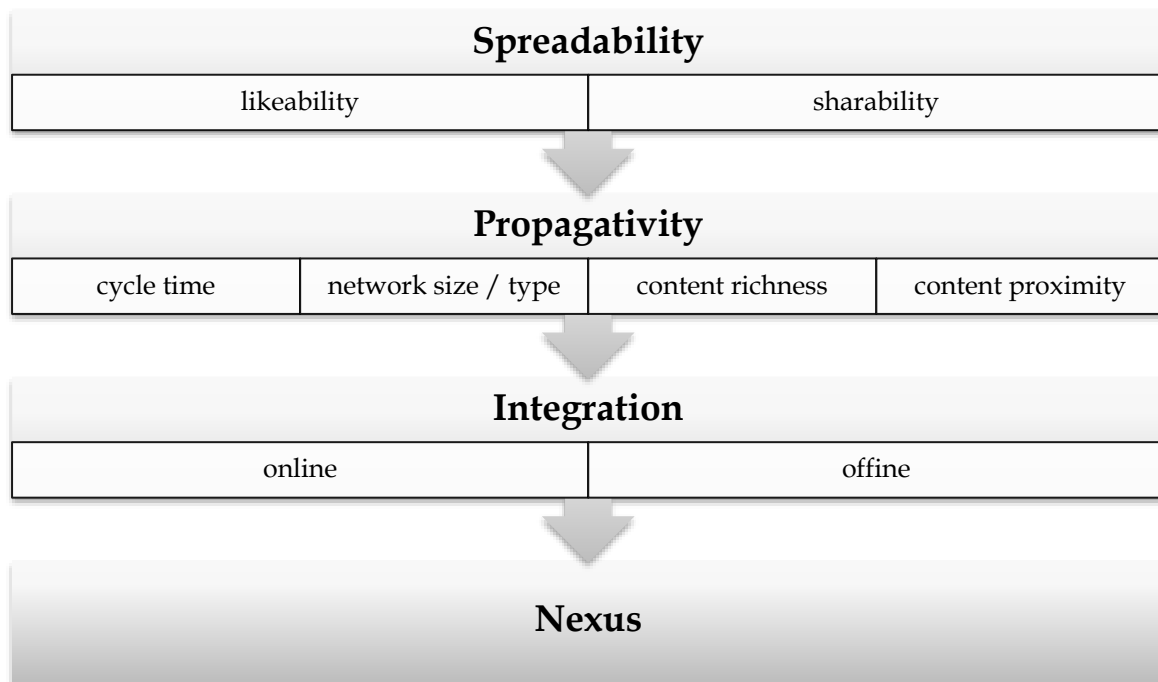


Figure 4. SPIN Framework (Mills, 2012)

Spreadability is the foundational stage of the viral marketing framework, emphasizing the ease with which a campaign's content can permeate through social networks (Mills, 2012). It relies on two key factors: likability and shareability. Likability refers to the degree to which the content is engaging or emotionally resonant, motivating individuals to become receptive to the message (Mills, 2012). Shareability, on the other hand, relates to individuals' willingness to distribute the content within their social circles (Mills, 2012). This stage hinges on the recipient's motivation to transition from a mere observer to an active advocate, thus amplifying the campaign's reach (Mills, 2012).

Propagativity refers to the mechanics of content redistribution and the role of different media platforms in facilitating or hindering this process (Mills, 2012). It encompasses various factors, including the technical accessibility of distribution channels, the size and nature of social networks, the richness of content, and the proximity of content to distribution channels (Mills, 2012). Successful propagativity entails leveraging the unique advantages of each social media platform to optimize content

dissemination (Mills, 2012). It also considers the cycle time for content propagation, although this is just one aspect among many in determining success (Mills, 2012).

Integration involves strategically harnessing multiple social media platforms to maximize exposure and engagement (Mills, 2012). It emphasizes the synergistic effects of orchestrating content distribution across various channels simultaneously (Mills, 2012). Successful integration ensures that content is disseminated cohesively across platforms, capitalizing on each platform's distinct features and audience demographics (Mills, 2012). This approach enables brands to reach broader audiences and reinforces the campaign's message by fostering cross-platform interactions (Mills, 2012). Moreover, integration extends beyond online platforms to encompass offline channels, amplifying campaign impact through a holistic, omnichannel approach (Mills, 2012).

Nexus represents the culmination of the viral marketing framework, focusing on the sustained reinforcement of the campaign through successive content releases (Mills, 2012). It entails strategically unveiling additional content or updates to maintain consumer engagement and anticipation over time (Mills, 2012). By delivering compelling content consistently and fostering ongoing dialogue with consumers, brands can prolong the campaign's impact and cultivate long-term brand loyalty (Mills, 2012). Nexus aims to keep consumers actively involved and eager for the next contribution of content, thereby promoting a deeper connection and affinity with the brand (Mills, 2012).

Current research mainly focusses on the first stage of the framework- spreadability, as within this research the main aim lies in understanding of virality from users' perspective as well as identifying attributes that would allow organizations to create viral content.

4 TYPES OF BIASES IN THE CONTEXT OF INFORMATION

Following description on social media context, it would be also important to support existing research with appropriate theories. A few times in discussion above the concept of negative bias as well as confirmation theory has resurfaced. Therefore, it would be essential to understand the subject in more detail.

4.1 Negativity bias

Beginning with negativity bias, Norris (2021) suggests that individuals tend to be more attuned to negative information compared to positive. This inclination has been observed across various studies (Norris, 2021), although there are occasional findings that indicate a preference for positive stimuli (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Despite these exceptions, the overarching pattern suggests that humans generally show a heightened sensitivity to negative stimuli, which can manifest in both behavioural responses and neural processing (Norris, 2021).

By supporting the statement above, Rozin and Royzman's research (2001) demonstrates that negative events are more contagious and develop more rapidly, necessitating rapid responses. Fundamentally, negativity bias is important in perception as it influences how individuals interpret and respond to stimuli in their environment (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Negativity bias is considered adaptive, as it prioritizes the avoidance of negative outcomes, which are often more threatening and informative than positive ones (Norris, 2021). This bias may have evolved to ensure survival in environments where avoiding danger is paramount (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

To elaborate, according to the negativity bias theory, individuals are more likely to remember and be influenced by negative information due to its evolutionary significance in detecting threats (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Given statement was additionally supported by Vaish, Grossmann and Woodward (2008) who argue that humans have a cognitive predisposition to prioritize and be more influenced by negative information compared to positive one.

In fact, Vaish et al., (2008) declared that negativity bias is a crucial adaptation that aids in well-being of individuals by facilitating the avoidance of potentially harmful stimuli. This bias serves as a mechanism for regulating emotions, understanding others' mental and emotional states, and shaping perceptions of their environment (Vaish et al., 2008).

When further expanding on the survival hypothesis, the study conducted by Bebbington, MacLeod, Ellison, and Fay (2017), found that negative events were more

likely to be remembered and shared from person to person compared to positive events, supporting the idea that negative information lasts longer in social interactions (Bebbington et al., 2017). Additionally, when people encountered controversial events or stories, they tended to interpret them negatively rather than positively, showing a preference for negative interpretations when things are unclear, which supports the notion of a bias towards negativity (Bebbington et al., 2017).

Correspondingly, Norris (2021) stated that inclination towards negativity varies between individuals. Namely, age-related differences in the negativity bias have been observed, with older people often exhibiting a reduced sensitivity to negative stimuli (Norris, 2021). This phenomenon is known as the positivity effect, wherein older individuals display a preference for positive information and experiences (Norris, 2021).

Some researchers attribute this shift to changes in motivational priorities, cognitive strategies, and emotional regulation mechanisms as individuals age (Norris, 2021). Older people may prioritize emotional well-being and focus on maintaining positivity in their lives, leading them to selectively attend to and remember positive information while filtering out negative stimuli (Norris, 2021).

In like manner, difference in negativity bias can be observed between genders, with females generally displaying a greater negativity bias than males (Norris, 2021).

This variability, as has been highlighted by Norris (2021), essentially indicated the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and environmental factors that shape individuals' perceptions and reactions to stimuli.

Considering findings on the negativity bias theory, it could be further noted that social media platforms often amplify this tendency by emphasizing negative content, which tends to be more engaging and provocative (Winstone, Mars, Haworth & Kidger, 2023). Users are more likely to remember and be influenced by negative information due to its evolutionary significance in detecting threats, as supported by Rozin and Royzman's research (2001). This cognitive predisposition to prioritize negative information over positive information, as argued by Vaish et al. (2008), shapes users' perceptions and reactions online.

The statement on higher dissemination of negative information on social media was additionally supported by Schöne, Garcia, Parkinson and Goldenberg (2023) as they explain in their research that negative content is shared more frequently than positive. Research conducted by Schöne, and authors (2023) was primarily analysed in tweets of public figures, and they have found that although public figures produce less negative content compared to ordinary users, the association between negative sentiment and the number of retweets is significantly stronger for public figures (Schöne et al., 2023). This consequently indicates that negative content of public figures has higher likelihood of being shared (Schöne et al., 2023).

In fact, Schöne et al. (2023) observed that a larger follower count for a public figure is directly proportional to the likelihood of a negative tweet being shared, indicating that the number of followers acts as a mediator between the user type and the dissemination of negative content.

4.2 Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias in turn refers to the tendency of individuals to favour information that confirms their existing beliefs or hypotheses while ignoring or undervaluing evidence that contradicts them (Kappes, Harvey, Lohrenz, Montague & Sharot, 2020). In essence, confirmation bias is the inclination to favour information that supports our existing views, leading to a biased interpretation of new information or evidence (Peters, 2022).

Generally, confirmation bias can lead to errors in judgment and decision-making of individuals, while they are inclining the interpretation of evidence in a way that aligns with preconceived notions or expectations (Kappes et al., 2020). In their work Kappes et al. (2020) state, that individuals have greater tendency to incorporate the strength of another person's opinion when it aligned with their own judgment compared to when it conflicted with their judgment.

In like manner, it could be said that individuals may be less likely to alter their opinions in the face of disagreement due to reduced sensitivity to disconfirming information (Kappes et al., 2020). Notably, confirmation bias is particularly expressed in self-related beliefs (Peters, 2022). For instance, individuals with positive self-views seek out positive evaluations, while those with negative self-views prefer negative evaluations (Peters, 2022). This phenomenon can not only contribute to spread and nurturing of false beliefs but also plays a role in stabilizing identities and behaviour within social groups (Kappes et al., 2020; Peters, 2022).

This psychological phenomenon could be further adapted in user's perception and engagement with social media content, as individuals tend to selectively interact with content that aligns with personal assumptions, hence reinforcing existing viewpoints. When people observe that content from others aligns with their own beliefs, they are more likely to trust those users and share similar content (Peters, 2022). However, this may also contribute to the dissemination of false information, as users often overlook this and instead hold to their opinions, even when there is evidence against them (Peters, 2022).

The findings discussed above were additionally supported by Modgil, Singh, Gupta and Dennehy (2021) as in their research they examined dynamics of confirmation bias in social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Within their research, the authors confirm that confirmation bias is predominantly observed on social media platforms, as users tend to favour information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs,

significantly influencing online behaviour and information processing (Modgil et al., 2021).

Moreover, through algorithms and personalized content delivery, social media platforms create environment where individuals are exposed primarily to information that reaffirms their existing viewpoints (Modgil et al., 2021). This phenomenon not only affects individual users but also spreads into supply chains (Modgil et al., 2021). According to Modgil et al (2021), stakeholders can develop biased views based on the information they come across online, which affects their decisions and perceptions towards the subject.

The impact of social media algorithms was additionally highlighted by Ghani and Rahmat (2023), as they described that these algorithms are designed to tailor content based on user preferences while incautiously contributing to the reinforcement of existing biases (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023). Users are often presented with information that aligns with their preconceived notions, thereby reinforcing confirmation bias within online environment (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023).

When further describing the matter, study presented by Modgil and authors (2021) reveal that social media's inability to filter information accurately contributes to the reinforcement of confirmation bias, leading to the development of uniform communities with shared beliefs (Modgil et al., 2021). Current form of bias generally exists in social media channels due to prevailing desire of individuals to belong to certain group or a community (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023). Therefore, Ghani and Rahmat (2023) argue that individuals are more inclined in accepting and endorsing information that aligns with the prevailing views of their online network (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023).

As a result, individuals tend to rely on their online experiences and interactions to validate their beliefs, further strengthening confirmation bias within social media ecosystems (Modgil et al., 2021). These findings therefore underscore substantial influence of confirmation bias in shaping online discussions and highlight its implications for information sharing and decision-making processes during times of crisis like global pandemic (Modgil et al., 2021). In other words, this phenomenon not only reinforces existing biases, but also might potentially hinder critical thinking and objective analysis among individuals (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023).

Nonetheless, study Ghani and Rahmat (2023) emphasize that participants with higher levels of self-control demonstrated a greater capacity to resist the influence of biased information and engage in more objective evaluation processes (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023). This finding further suggests that maintaining critical thinking skills and exercising discernment when navigating through social media channels are essential (Ghani & Rahmat, 2023).

5 METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct an effective study, one must acknowledge that conventional research methods cannot be applied universally to all studies. Therefore, it is essential for a researcher to select the most suitable approach for a particular study. Current chapter consequently provides a detailed explanation of the various tools and techniques that were applied in conducting the study.

As a follow up reminder, current study aims to gain a deeper understanding for the concept of virality from users' perspective. Upon examination of the concept, it is additionally expected to identify attributes that drive virality of the content as well as investigate which of the characteristics are commonly recognized by the audience. The results of the findings are additionally expected to assist brand's communication in social media as it will allow creators to optimize own content creation.

5.1 Research approach

As current research seeks to support already existing knowledge on the concept of virality, an exploratory research approach was adapted, for it is commonly used to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand, without necessarily aiming to validate or invalidate existing theories or generate new ones (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

Saunders et al. (2019) further note that main focus of exploratory research approach is to examine a phenomenon from new a perspective, investigate a problem, or gain insights into the topic. It is characterized by its open-ended nature, lack of predetermined hypotheses or conclusions (Saunders et al., 2019).

By elaborating on the idea, an open-ended nature of given approach allows researchers to explore a wide range of topics, ideas, and theories without predefined limitations or restrictions (Saunders et al., 2019). This flexibility extends to research design, methods, and data gathering techniques, enabling researchers to adapt their approach based on emerging information or insights (Makri & Neely, 2021).

Furthermore, when applying exploratory research to own study, Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2014) in their work highlighted, that main form data collection is interviews (either in in-depth or semi-structured form). In light of this, Saunders et al. (2019) argue that semi-structured forms are recommended to use, as exploratory design of the approach allows for a structured yet flexible method of data collection, enhancing the quality of input from interview participants. Furthermore, upon application of exploratory approach within this study, it was decided to proceed with inductive reasoning (Saunders et al., 2019).

The inductive approach in qualitative research involves deriving concepts, themes, or models from raw data through interpretations made by the researcher (Thomas, 2006). It is a methodological approach where theories emerge from the data itself, rather than being imposed on it beforehand (Thomas, 2006). Essential features of the inductive approach include engaging deeply with the data, allowing themes and patterns to arise organically, and employing techniques such as open coding and constant comparison to uncover underlying patterns and themes (Bingham, 2023; Thomas, 2006). This process requires careful attention to detail and an openness to unexpected findings, enabling researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bingham, 2023; Thomas, 2006).

5.2 Methodological choice

Following the discussion on research techniques, qualitative research method is correspondingly applied. Qualitative research is a methodological approach used to explore the meanings, understandings, and experiences of human behaviour, opinions, and phenomena (Bell, 2009). Unlike quantitative method, that has full focus on statistical data analysis, qualitative research seeks to understand subjective perspectives of social phenomena by examining non-numerical data such as texts, images or sounds (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, one of the main distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research lies in their approach to data collection (Saunders et al., 2019). Rather than seeking to generalize findings to a larger population, qualitative research focuses on relatively smaller samples and aims to provide in-depth insights and understanding of specific cases or contexts (Bell, 2009; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

According to Saunders et al. (2019), one of the main aims of qualitative studies is to uncover rich and detailed insights into phenomena by examining meanings, interpretations, and experiences of individuals or groups (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Qualitative study encompasses various methodologies, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, case studies, netnography, thematic analysis etc. (Given, 2008). Qualitative research is characterized by its flexible nature and is often applied in research, aiming to contribute to solutions or by providing nuanced understandings of complex human phenomena (Given, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019).

Moreover, qualitative research is particularly valuable when prior insights about a phenomenon are limited or when dealing with complex, unstructured problems (Saunders et al., 2019). It emphasizes interpretation, understanding, and exploration, offering a holistic perspective that quantitative methods may not fully capture (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

When considering current research, it could be further noted that generalized concept of virality has already been examined through the lens of numerical data.

However, insights of users who perceive social media content on daily basis is still missing. Therefore, in order to supplement existing findings, it would be valuable to review opinions of social media users.

5.3 Data collection

When striving to understand insights of social phenomena, there are numerous ways of data collection (Given, 2008). The process of data collection is defined as systematic gathering of crucial information that allows researchers to address main research questions and evaluate the outcomes (Kabir, 2016). This process aims to obtain quality evidence, which facilitates thorough data analysis and provides genuine answers to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel and Page (2015) in their work suggested that, within qualitative study data could be collected primarily through interviews, case studies, field observations, ethnography etc. Interviews, as described by Adams, Khan & Raeside (2014), are often adapted when the main focus of the study is to determine perceptions, motivations, and behaviors of certain social groups. As a result, while considering the current study's purpose, interviews were selected as a primary source of empirical data.

Correspondingly, when further examining given form of data collection, it could be further noted that the structure of interviews can substantially vary from highly structured into open ended conversations (Hair et al., 2015). Specifically, structured interviews comprise predetermined questions that are asked from participants in strict order, whereas unstructured (open-ended) interviews allow free form of communication towards defined subject (Hair et al., 2015). As neither absolutes are matching the purpose of this study, data collection of the current research was handled with the assistance of semi-structured interviews, i.e. interviews where respondents answer preset open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014).

In a semi-structured interview, respondents are guided by a researcher, which presents a schematic layout of questions or topics to be explored (Jamshed, 2014). However, following each question, the interviewer has the flexibility to ask additional complementary questions beyond the initial response from the participant (Adams et al., 2014). Therefore, while semi-structured interviews provide a planned direction, interviewers can introduce new unplanned questions during the discussion, potentially leading to richer research findings (Hair et al., 2015).

Thus, semi-structured interviews pursue an informal, dialogical approach, while following outlined beforehand topics (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Sample process

When beginning with the interview sampling process, it was essential to determine criteria for participants involved to accurately answer research questions. While continuously exploring the subject with the assistance of both methodological approach as well as background studies, the following conditions were outlined by the researcher. First, to fully comprehend the subject of virality and recognize content circulating on the popular platforms (i.e. Instagram, TikTok and YouTube), all research participants had to be active users of social media.

Secondly, as negativity bias suggested, inclination towards negativity varies between age and gender (Norris, 2021). Therefore, to comprehensively review emotional impact as well as perception of positive and negative (viral) content in social media (Berger & Milkman, 2013), participants involved had to be of both gender and different age groups.

When considering age groups, central focus in interview selection would be towards younger audiences, given their prominent position as the most active users on Instagram and TikTok (Kemp, 2023).

Moreover, although the main focus of the study group focused on general users, content creators would be additionally selected. It is important to note however, that by content creators, researcher did not refer to influencers with high following group. Rather, active social media users that employ all features of available platform (i.e. liking, commenting, sharing & generating own content)

As a result, during the selection process, certain challenges immediately occurred with invitations. While some individuals declined the request, others chose to ignore it. Furthermore, some candidates encountered scheduling constraints that prevented them from participating. For others, logistics issues reemerged. Additionally, there were participants who opted not to engage in face-to-face meetings due to shyness or personal preference. Lastly, in some cases, participants refused to join the interviews due to language barrier, while others failed to meet all the criteria required.

Nonetheless, as research methods which were applied in this study allow genuine flexibility among data collection, researcher was able to adapt into conditions of participants while at the same time ensuring quality of collected data. In this regard, challenges with scheduling, language, logistics and shyness were resolved by conducting interviews during the time comfortable for participants, communicating in the language comfortable for the users, conducting online interviews as well as ensuring absolute confidentiality for the participants that were shy in giving answers.

Eventually, total of eleven participants were selected, with eight females and three males, divided into three age groups: 16-24 years old (6 participants), 25-34 years old (3 participants), and 45-54 years old (2 participants).

Interviewee's overview

Overall, the interviewees were from Turkey, Egypt, Finland, and Turkmenistan, all currently residing in Finland. All participants reported using social media platforms on the daily basis, ranging from "chronically addicted" (as commented by one of the users) to users who spend only couple of hours per day on the platforms.

Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face with participant 1, who is a female aged 16-24, participant 2 (female, 16-24), participant 5 (female, 16-24), participant 6 (female, 45-54), participant 9 (female, 16-24), participant 10, who is a male aged 45-54, and participant 11 (female, 25-34). Two interviews were conducted through online meetings with a 25-34-year-old females (participants 7 and 8). The remaining two participants 3 and 4 (male, 16-24 years old) expressed a preference for communication through messaging platforms. The table below, consequently, shows clearer overview of participants involved.

Table 3. Participants overview

Participants	Gender	Age group (y.o.)	Engagement level	Interview type
1	Female	16-24	Active (high)	Face-to-face
2	Female	16-24	Active (high)	Face-to-face
3	Male	16-24	Active (high)	Messaging
4	Male	16-24	Passive (low)	Messaging
5	Female	16-24	Active (high)	Face-to-face
6	Female	45-54	Passive (low)	Face-to-face
7	Female	25-34	Active (high)	Online meeting
8	Female	25-34	Passive (low)	Online meeting
9	Female	16-24	Active (high)	Face-to-face
10	Male	45-54	Passive (low)	Face-to-face
11	Female	25-34	Active (high)	Face-to-face

When considering the table provided, it is important to reiterate that all participants actively use social media. To depict the level of engagement, active users are categorized as those who enthusiastically interact with content by liking, sharing, commenting, or even creating their own. On the other hand, passive engagement refers to individuals who view and share content primarily with their close network.

Interview technique

Before conducting the interviews, all participants were introduced to the research topic and the aim of the study. When interviewees did not clearly understand any question, the researcher rephrased it until they were fully understood. The interviews were conducted with utmost care to ensure confidentiality, with irrelevant participant details being disregarded within this study.

In light of the interview questions, each question was carefully being designed in correspondence with the existing studies as well as research objective. The structure of the interview was designed in the following manner. Initially, researcher has discussed subject of the study, while generally explaining the idea of the topic as well as inquiring participants' social media habits, including the platforms they use and their typical patterns of engagement.

Afterwards, in the second part of the interview, participants' understanding of virality was being examined. Within this section of interview, participants were asked to define in their own words concept of virality, how in their opinion it differentiates with regular content, and what characteristics do they think viral video should have to become successful. These questions were generally aimed to discern their perspective on social media content.

Following this, personal preferences towards content were explored. Namely, researcher asked to describe what type of content they encounter on daily basis, content they find the most engaging as well as what they prefer in sharing with others. Within this section, author not only sought to get insights on popular content types nowadays, but also to determine the attributes of content that audience particularly enjoys engaging with. More detailed information on interview questions could be further found on Appendix 8.1.

5.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research aims to identify and interpret patterns in the data (Adams et al., 2014). Unlike quantitative analysis, which typically follows structured steps, qualitative method usually applies repetitive approach, where data is continuously compared and revisited as new questions and relationships between subjects resurface (Hair et. al 2015; Bingham 2023). In fact, as it has been highlighted by Adams et al. (2014), analysing qualitative data presents significant challenges for researchers due to the extensive amount of information gathered from interviews. Throughout data analysis phase, researcher is required to review and decide whether emerging themes and patters are related to research questions (Hair et al., 2015).

To aid in this process, various approaches exist and allow facilitation of data evaluation (Adams et al., 2014). In case of the current research study, thematic analysis was applied. As it has been described by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method that is primarily used to identify, analyze, and organize data by themes.

While repetitively processing emerging themes from the data, the given approach provides a rich description of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hazée, Delcourt & van Vaerenbegh, 2017). Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is very adaptable and allows exploration of various theoretical perspectives while

capturing detailed and diverse information. However, the given process involves six distinct stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

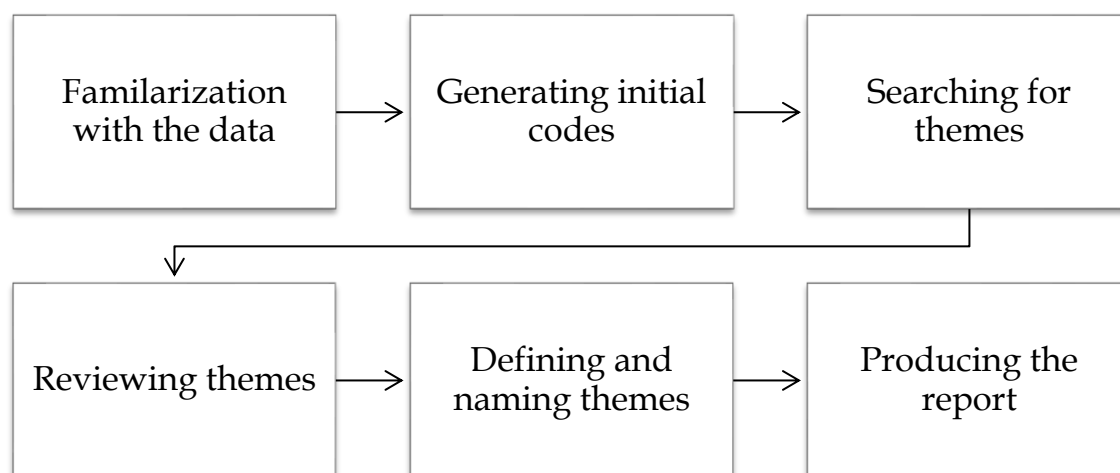


Figure 5. Six phases of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

As could be noted from the figure above, the first stage of the research process involves familiarization with the data, where researchers actively seek meanings and patterns within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This stage is crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the data's content and scope (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2016), verbal data needs to be transcribed into written form in order to facilitate thematic analysis. Despite being time-consuming, transcription assists researchers to become more acquainted with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It ensures that the original nature of the data is preserved, thereby facilitating accurate analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the context of current study, as described earlier, interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings with seven participants, online with two participants, and via direct messaging with two participants. All conversations were recorded with participants' consent, primarily in English, except for two participants who preferred communicating in Russian. Consequently, transcripts required translation and rewriting of major points, a process personally undertaken by the researcher, who is fluent in Russian. Nonetheless, in order to ensure authenticity of transcripts, copies of interviews were sent to participants for final verification. After receiving confirmation from all respondents, the familiarization process began by thoroughly reading and understanding each context.

Once familiarization with the data is achieved, Braun and Clarke (2006) further explain that researcher needs to generate initial codes, which involves systematically identifying and labeling interesting features of data segments. These initial codes form

the foundation for subsequent analysis which involves searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Correspondingly during the third phase of the process researchers should sort the generated codes into potential themes and generalize relevant data within each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

While further trying to comprehend data coding, Creswell (2007) in his work explained that a given process is defined as a course of data segmentation into meaningful themes and assignment of labels into given segments. This form of segmentation can include single words, phrases or paragraphs which consequently can serve in clarifications of important segments within the data set (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). Furthermore, Belk and authors (2013) noted, that coding is continuously repetitive process which requires adjustments to codes as more data is being collected.

In regard to the above, in this study, data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Word software. Coding of data was primarily conducted by firstly highlighting key codes from interview transcripts and later differentiating them in different colors. Generally, the idea of color coding aims to accentuate crucial information within the data collected (Bianco, Gasparini & Schettini, 2015). This process consequently facilitated the identification of similarities across various interview responses, aiding in examination of users' perspective on social media content across different scenarios.

Subsequently, the fourth step of the process involves reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence and distinctiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This review is conducted at two levels: by examining coded data extracts and considering the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After refining the themes, researcher proceeds with defining and naming them whilst identifying the essence and scope of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Sub-themes may also be identified in order provide depth to the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Finally, researchers are to produce the report, presenting a coherent account of the data's story, supported by evidence from the themes and data extracts, aiming to convince the reader of the validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Similarly to the process described above, the final step of data analysis in this research involved reviewing and refining themes to ensure distinctiveness of the findings. Thus, after careful evaluation of identified themes, each topic was given a name and interpreted in the Results chapter.

Moreover, it is essential to note that as a complementary analysis method, descriptive comparative analysis was employed in order to enhance understanding of the central phenomenon examined within this research.

Descriptive comparative analysis, as it has been highlighted by Nassaji (2015), is a methodological approach used in research to evaluate and compare different

variables on examined characteristics or attributes. Given approach mainly allows researchers to comprehensively understand studied phenomena by systematically describing and comparing various aspects, hence gaining insights into the nature of relationships between the themes. (Nassaji, 2015)

Descriptive analysis is particularly well-suited to address the research questions posed in current study, as it allows straightforward examination of the subject without imposing complex theoretical frameworks (Sandelowski 2010). Additionally, since the purpose of the current research is to determine the way in which users understand social media content, descriptive analysis offers the opportunity to present unbiased (by the researcher) findings, allowing readers to gain full insight into the opinions of the audience. (Sandelowski 2010; Bradshaw, Atkinson & Doody 2017)

6 RESULTS

During data analysis, several key themes emerged that were determined based on data collected. Summarized findings are therefore presented in the following figure.

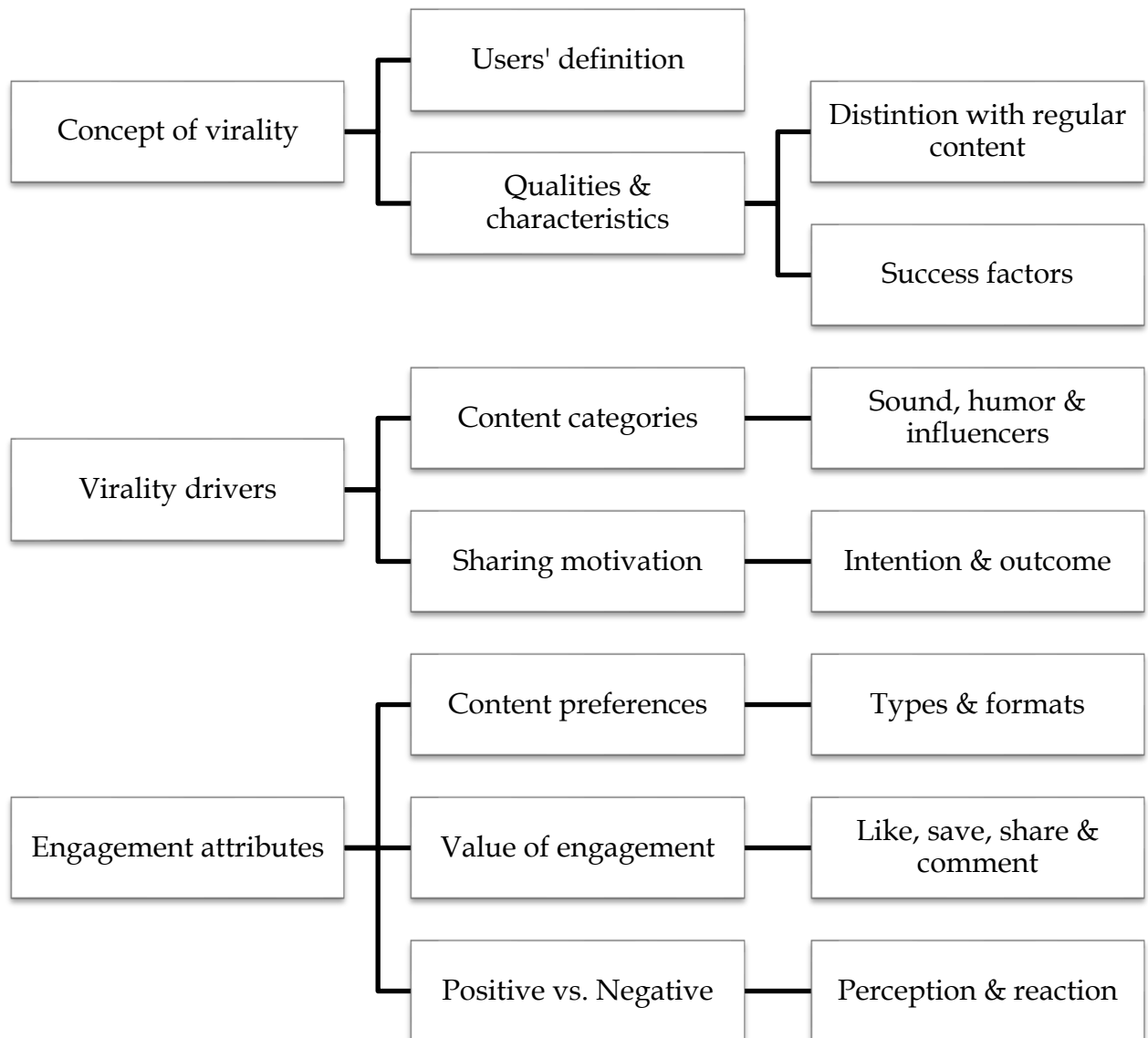


Figure 6. Results of thematic analysis

Upon observation of the figure displayed, it could be further noted that the summary of analysed data could be classified under three general themes. The first and primary theme that emerged is the concept of virality. In this theme, users' perception of the subject is described along with qualities and characteristics that users believe viral content should have. The second theme of virality drivers, the results of users' motivation in sharing content are observed, and the most viral content recalled by users is classified. Lastly, final theme of content types provides insights into the participants' preferences regarding the content they consume and their understanding of positive and negative content and its impact on virality.

The structure of the findings, in its turn, is presented in the following manner: firstly, the main theme is summarized and then a more detailed description is given for each topic.

6.1 Concept of Virality

The term of virality, as defined by users, is something that spreads rapidly, becoming popular and reaching a wide audience. Participants emphasize that virality involves content engagement across geographical boundaries, often being easily replicated by the general audience.

Viral content often features memorable elements like soundtracks or catchphrases that are adopted across social media platforms. Humor, visual attractiveness, diversity of audience, emotional resonance, and compelling narratives are often seen as key factors in enhancing virality, as noted by participants.

Moreover, uniqueness, relatability, and authenticity are identified as crucial attributes for the success of viral content.

Finally, participants expressed uncertainty regarding the predictability of virality, suggesting that even professional content creators cannot guarantee a video's virality from the start, as in their opinion, it is often decided by algorithms.

6.1.1 Users' definition

Continuing further on examination of results, concept of virality in social media from user perspective has similarly defined as something that is spreading fast, popular, and viewed by everyone. In addition to the above, participants (P) offer additional comments as follows:

P3: "the thing that is part of large people feeds"

P7: "something that is spreading fast, and something that people tend to engage and enjoy, maybe rewatch Like, Share, Comment, and tag people...share it on the other social media platforms...something that is being spread hastily...regardless of the geographical location, people will start engaging with the content"

P8: "What everyone is using and trying to copy or make it look alike but do it in their own unique way... mostly the same music, the same idea, the same content"

P9: "something popular...leads to more followers...thanks to both haters and followers, video that is spreading fast"

P10: "video that annoyingly often comes on my feed... something popular...whether you are interested or not, platform pushes it to you"

In generalized terms, it was suggested that virality implies content engagement regardless of geographical boundaries. It involves the replication of popular content with personal twists, that consequently leads to increased following which can be fuelled by both supporters and critics. Moreover, the sentiment of annoyance towards viral content is also noted due to its persistent presence, pushed onto users' feeds regardless of their interests.

6.1.2 Qualities and characteristics

Following the pattern, users were asked for additional information on the attributes that differ viral content from regular, on which the analysis revealed several key factors. Firstly, participants suggested that viral content varies from regular in a matter of popularity and widespread. It is primarily characterized by its awareness, while often featuring memorable soundtracks or catchphrases that are adopted by users across social media platforms.

P5: "from the viral posts, majority of people are aware of content, so there's going a lot of memes and inner jokes. For example, you can say something from that video out loud, and the likelihood of a person who is also on that platform catching a joke is very high. With the regular content, it is something rather from your preferences. Some random content that is popping out in your feed, like a mass post. Viral posts are known for a reason."

P11: "viral videos are very catchy... with time, most of the people would be using the sound of that video either to create their own content or just randomly citing it. Regular content on the other hand is a bit plain, common and without any catchy consequences."

Additionally, the emotional resonance of content, according to users, plays a crucial role in its potential of going viral. Content that addresses life's challenges in a creative or relatable manner tends to enhance its visibility. Compelling and empathetic narratives presented in a visually appealing and engaging format are particularly effective in capturing viewers' attention.

P6: "music for sure good quality of video good, outfit of the person...I would also say that in viral one, the audience is very diverse, people of all ages and nationalities watch them"

P7: "...probably the quality, the main point of the content, so it does, sometimes the quality doesn't really matter how the video shot was made. If the main point of the content doesn't match one's eyes, or attention, or it's not speaking to their heart in a way, then it will not go viral. But once it's something that is getting empathetic or something speaking of life's problems, and it's in a funky way, that people usually tend to make it viral."

P8: "...well, viral is like widely spread. it would be everywhere...every user will try to do it, so it will be the most visible...What I would say popular thing that people do or are interested in at that moment...This doesn't last long, so this is also one of the qualities of viral videos...they are interesting at the moment, but then after some time they get boring. So, people just stop doing that stuff or do something new."

P9: "something very uncommon. When you think of regular content you can get it from everywhere. For example, cookie recipes, you could have gotten from internet or mom. But when it comes to viral content, it always has something new."

P10: "Quality of the video. They are not made without professional assistance, lighting, budget, context, outfit and planning."

While expanding on the idea of video quality, participants noted that regular content is common for all audiences and in matter of need is easily accessible. Viral content in contrast captures people's attention and drives engagement. However, it is also noted that viral content tends to have a short lifespan. It might be highly interesting at the moment, but it can quickly become boring over time.

As discussion on content perception continues, all participants were asked what qualities of content creation might lead to its success of becoming viral.

Firstly, the influence of famous people and fashion was highlighted as a significant factor. This sentiment was initially suggested by participants 1 and 2 and reinforced by others, consequently confirming the impact of influencers on viral content.

The male participants emphasized the importance of humor and easy replication. Funny content and "life-changing drama" involving prominent figures were seen as strong contributors to virality. Additionally, unique, or quirky elements, such as "skibidi toilet" phenomenon, were noted as factors that can significantly enhance a video's viral potential.

P3: "Easy replication and in general being "funny" or life changing drama of semi famous people"

P4: "Probably some kind of content videos that has "skibidi toilet" in them"

Moreover, emotional resonance and uniqueness were identified as critical attributes of successful viral content. Videos that evoke strong emotions, whether positive or negative, tend to resonate deeply with viewers. In fact, content that triggers strong reactions, such as "cringeworthy dances" or controversial topics, has the potential to become cultural phenomena, evidenced by the popularity of specific dances or memes.

P5: "supposed to be something that is very common to people or very uncommon to people; for example, judging behavior of celebrities or events...evokes emotions... these viral videos they cause both positive and negative...from content maker perspective, you make videos on a daily basis and the one algorithm likes, blows out"

However, there was an acknowledgment of the unpredictability of virality, as according to users, algorithms play a significant role in determining which videos gain

widespread attention. This consequently suggests, that both professional content creators as well as normal users cannot guarantee virality of the video from the beginning.

Following on from the discussion, timing of content posted and its relevance to current interests were also noted as crucial factors. Namely, content that aligns with trending topics or is released during a relevant period has a higher chance of going viral. This was illustrated by content related to fashion and celebrity involvement, further confirming the influence of trends and public figures.

P6: "...the content may be what people do need for that particular period of time, what they are interested."

Engagement metrics such as views, likes, and shares were additionally cited as indicators of virality. Content that reflects viewers' situations or experiences tends to resonate with them more and thus achieves higher engagement. Authenticity and relatability were also emphasized as main qualities of viral content, reinforcing the idea that humor and the impact of influencers directly affect a video's success.

P7: "Number of views now, number of likes and number of shares... It doesn't really matter how many comments there are. People like to talk, if I see that the video was played or shared more than enough (even more than likes or comments), it pretty much tells me at least that it's viral and it speaks to someone's situation and people find themselves relating to them. Something that they find that similar to their situations, maybe and that's how it goes viral. So basically, number of views, likes and shares, not necessarily comments."

P11: "Something relatable yet in a new format. People might call it authentic. But maybe introducing a new sound, with a good sense of humor. Influencer might also play a big role in virality."

Lastly, the analysis highlighted that viral content often includes easy-to-remember movements, catchy music, and distinctive outfits. Additionally, the financial aspect was noted, with increased views and shares leading to higher revenue, indicating profit as a driving factor behind the creation of viral content.

P10: "Everyone is interested in profit. The more views video gets the greater profit (from ads)."

Following the details above, understanding of virality from users' perspective can be summarized with the table below.

Table 4. Summarized definition of viral content by users

Virality defined by users	Difference from regular content	Attributes that lead to success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of large people feeds • Spreading fast and engaging • Being widely used and replicated • Being popular and leading to bigger audiences (both followers & haters) • Expanding beyond geographical boundaries • Annoying (being persistently pushed towards users) 	<p>Viral Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High awareness (being acknowledged by the audience for certain reason) • Captures attention & drives engagement • Viral (original) content being copied / Replicated by others • Visually appealing (including both quality of the video & the outlook of the person in the video) • Emotionally resonating with the audience • Compelling narrative • Drives inner jokes among the audience • Can become a cultural phenomenon • Attracts diverse audience • Made with professional assistance • Novel • Has short life span <p>Regular Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference-based • Common • Plain • Easily accessible from other sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong emotional resonance • Relatability • Unpredictability • Controversy • Uniqueness (quirky elements) • Humor • Easy to remember (replicate) • Quality of the video (length, visual appeal, attractiveness) • Relevance to current interests • Influence of famous people • Nice sound (catchy music) • Distinctive outfits • Algorithm • Authentic • Time relevance • High engagement metrics (views, likes, shares)

6.2 Virality drivers

When progressively discussing the subject of virality, respondents were further requested to give examples of the most viral video they could recall. Notably, features that drive the most viral videos could be classified under three main categories: influencers, catchy sounds, and memes. Namely, influencers, such as Khaby, Abir El Saghir, Bella Poarch and Haley Kalil were given as examples, indicating that influencers' impact significantly contributes to virality. Additionally, specific sounds or songs (like "Gangnam Style" by PSY) were identified as another driver of virality. At last, memes and funny reactions also emerged as a third main driver, highlighting again the importance of humor and relatability among the viewers.

Among the drivers of sharing videos, most participants attributed their motivation for collective laughter. The videos were mostly shared in order to elicit some positive reactions from their friends and family, while at the same time cautiously evaluating whether content under consideration can potentially offend the viewer.

Also, none of the participants genuinely evaluated the attributes of the video seen. Instead, they focused on the immediate enjoyment and reaction of those they shared the video with.

6.2.1 Content categories

When interviewees were asked to name a viral video that immediately comes to mind. Responses from all participants generally fell into three categories: influencers, sounds, and memes. Influencers were a common theme, with mentions of figures like Abir El Saghir for her cooking, Bella Poarch for her famous "M to the B" video, Khaby for his reactions to simple problems, and Haley Kalil for recreating Doja Cat's Met Gala look.

P1: "Cooking by that Lebanese lady "

P5: "Khaby. Also, it was one edit for in gone with a wind community. "

P9: "Haleyybaylee videos when she made Doja Cat's look from Met Gala "

P11: "Bella Poarch for sure. Also, Khaby's videos "

Music was the second frequently mentioned topic. Particularly world-renowned Korean song "Gangnam Style" by PSY, "Georgian Disco" which went viral on social media with over 15 million views in just a month, and a teaser of a song that gained over 280 000 of likes in few weeks and in just and reached over 3 million views in just a couple of months.

P6: "What comes to my mind is the recent Georgian song, which covered Italian song. It was everywhere, but I really like how these three Georgian singers sung it "

P7: "...it was from an artist, the Christian Rap singer, and he was releasing some reel on Instagram of his music teaser. And I liked it. I think it was only like 14,000 likes at that point. But I really liked it. Then out of curiosity, I checked his video again and it was over 300k likes and many people started using his sound for personal content. "

P8: "K-Pop, everything related to that it...it might be songs that I listen to, because they're they are worldwide known. Mostly everything that I watch is like the one where I like the music. The music is what's makes video standout "

At last, memes and funny reactions of content creators emerged as another popular category, with participants referencing the "okay" meme, the "I am mechanic" video, as well as a content creator's hilarious reaction to a follower's comment expressing a desire to send him money.

P5: "there was one video, where a guy reacting to a comment from a follower funnily"

P7: "One that came to my mind is a bit stupid, but it is "okay" meme from which people created meme. Another funny video which went viral was "I am mechanic guy"

Moreover, respondents were asked to share what kind of video had been recently shared with their friends. Most of the responses were funny videos, or something that is known to be interesting for the other person.

P1: "Some kind of brownie recipe. I asked my mom to bake it "

P2: "It was some funny cooking video that I shared with my friend. "

P3: "I cannot recall exact video, but it was something funny "

P5: "I didn't share it. But I liked it. I knew it would go viral because it was addressing a hot topic at a time. But it was presented in their style. And there was a humor in it. "

P6: "if I know that the topic is interesting for the person to whom I sent, let's say funny videos about cats, I will share that. Or when I find that video funny or just in a mood of sharing videos "

P7: "you know, it's just, I found the stupid video. It was very funny. I laughed out loud. I shared it. I never thought of it going viral. Or for example, I see food. I share food. People say" it's good food" we say" yes, yes, yes" And that's how we end the conversation. "

P8: "Most probably the content might have been interesting or funny or something that was recently talked about within the like social interaction. "

P9: "I rarely share it. If I share it, it means that I really loved the video. As it gets popular it doesn't matter anymore, because everyone has already seen it. You know we are all the same, we all like the same things. Something funny, with the nice sound "

P11: "Some funny and relatable videos. I don't know if they actually went viral, but most of the time I just share what I know they might also find funny, relatable, or supporting "

Furthermore, respondents were asked if they had encountered any videos they believed might become viral. Some participants affirmed that she had identified a video likely to go viral due to its relevance at a time, while others expressed her reluctance to share it, reasoning that the topic was already widely known. The remaining respondents indicated that they did not typically consider whether a video would go viral. They did not place much emphasis on this aspect when watching or sharing videos.

6.2.2 Sharing motivation

Subsequently, it has been inquired about their motivations for sharing videos, the reactions they received, and whether it encouraged them to share more. The majority of respondents stated that they shared videos to enjoy a collective laugh, received the anticipated reactions, and would subsequently share more videos with those who reacted positively, rather than with a broader audience.

If a person ignored the video or if they perceived video as potentially offensive, respondents would refrain from sharing it further.

P2: "To laugh together, because my friend cannot cook, so I was laughing at her reaction "

P5: "I get the reaction that I expect. And of course it encourages me to share more. Opposite reaction is fine. Every opinion is respected and stuff. But if the person is ignoring it, I will change my attitude towards that person. Other times I did wanted to share video, but for one the language might sound inappropriate or offensive. So, because I know other might not like the swearing despite the humor, I will not share it "

P6: "So far reactions were good. I would usually share if I knew they might find it funny, so we might laugh together. But I will surely not share it if I see that the person doesn't like the videos. "

P7: "No, no, it always ends up in this short loop of my interactions. Or my family. The only further steps that I can think about are if that sandwich video was impressive, I would probably make that sandwich myself. But that's the only viral next step that will happen in my life. That's it. That's the lifecycle of this video. "

P8: "So we just laugh and joke around and continue like sharing the job. I will also share videos based on the interests. So, for example work related content I will only send to people which share the same interests or would be my colleagues, and then movies related or cartoons related content, I would share with my family because we watch them together to prove the point, joke, and for something else like recreation related. "

P9: "What motivation when spreading the video? As you share it, you just get laughing emojis "

P10: "I would share a video to morally support a person on the other line. If the person likes the video, I will share it more exactly with him/her. But I will stop if they ignore my content "

P11: "Liking or laughing at video at most. We rarely comment on content we share with each other. Not necessarily influenced, we just share and forget "

Additionally, many participants noted that there is no extended conversation about shared content. They noted that they would simply share a laugh for a brief moment and then continue with their day.

In light of the above, summary for sharing drivers could be observed in the figure below.

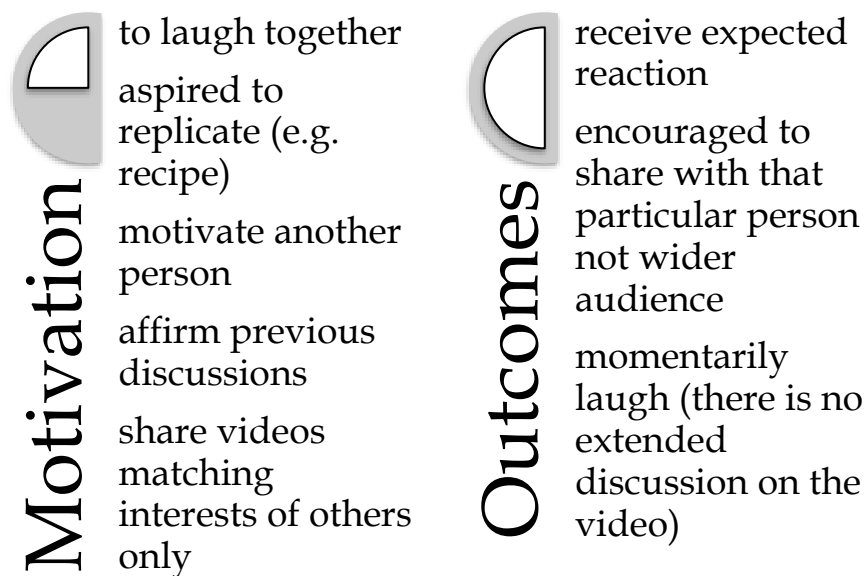


Figure 7. Drivers motivating to share videos and expected outcomes

6.3 Engagement attributes

The next section of the analysis was dedicated to types of content which users personally encounter on a daily basis as well as what they find engaging. While temporarily setting aside the concept of virality, this section aimed to identify not only the content formats and themes that captivate the audience, but also the "why" behind the audience's perception of this content as worthy of attention.

Correspondingly, data reveals that art, cooking, poems, fashion, and clothing-related content were highly favored by participants, along with video essays and political commentary. Educational content was encouraged by others, along with entertaining formats. Edited videos, particularly those with creative angles and music, were highlighted by one participant as particularly interesting.

When it comes to content themes, faith-related videos, animals, funny and goofy videos, as well as topics on beauty and fashion industry were mentioned. Additionally, humor, relatability, curiosity, and personal values mostly play as key triggers for engagement among participants.

Notably, interviews revealed that inclination towards given subjects mostly resonates emotionally with the audience. Moreover, practicality and entertainment play

a significant role among users, as for example cooking, education and / or fashion-related content offer useful tips and inspiration. In like manner, users tend to pay attention towards the content, which is visually appealing, allows expression of creativity, stimulates critical thinking, offers fresh perspective, or simply distracts from daily struggles with funny and goofy content.

Given the above, when users were asked about impact of positive and negative content on their feed, it was found that positive content was generally favored for its motivational and entertaining qualities, although negative content was found to be more dominant. Older participants highlighted their preferences for positive content, seeing it as a relief from overflowing negativity, while the younger demographic was more divided, with some acknowledging the motivational aspect of positive content while others noted its overshadowing by negative topics. Participants who are interacting occasionally with negative content explained that mostly curiosity leads them to check the content.

6.3.1 Content preferences

Beginning with the themes on content preferences, the analysis revealed that art, cooking, poems, fashion, and clothing-related content are counted as some of the most engaging topics. Video essays and political commentary were also favored, particularly content that promotes equal discussions and features professionals sharing knowledge based on personal experiences.

P10: "I enjoy watching equal discussion. Also type of content, where professionals of the field (for example in sports) share educational tips gained from personal experiences. I prefer and put my trust rather this kind of content, rather than self-proclaimed influencers who you can clearly see have little to no knowledge."

In fact, educational content was a highly favored theme, with several participants advocating for it. Alongside educational material, entertaining content was also highly appreciated. Edited videos, or "edits," especially those with creative angles and music, were particularly engaging. Content that resonates with personal experiences and memories was also highly valued.

P5: I love edits. It's interesting to watch content from a creative point of view, how people managed to see specific angles, I just love it. Then also 50% of the time I get stuck on the edits because of the music. They just put it very nicely. Rest is just entertaining content as "points of view" or videos that are relatable to daily life or childhood memories.

P9: "nothing in particular. Something that is pleasing to watch, something relatable to daily life. Music."

When considering the formats of the video, almost all participants emphasized the importance of appealing sound in videos. While expanding on the idea, it has

been noted that content should offer helpful information with proper structure, clear and easily understandable message. Accurate and timely messaging was also seen as crucial for social media content.

P6: "something related to education, fashion also may be fun videos. I would also be interested in "how to" videos...something that can be helpful for my children. I would also watch content that gives proper information, in a way that would be interesting for me to watch. Not boring. I don't like it when people are talking too much and "pouring it just like water. I want it to be structured and clear. I want it to be understandable for my age.

P11: "Something that would be on point, what I wanted / needed to hear...consciously or unconsciously. That's a good thing about AI algorithms, it does a good job of your preferences, although it might be very scary if one finds out how much personal data is collected behind it. Although, it is not directly involved with this topic."

At last, participant 7 expands on the subject and offers extensive insight into the types of content that audience finds the most interesting these days. Firstly, it has been highlighted that short video and memes are the most active formats of engagement.

P7: "I would say short videos, some memes, maybe comics, but they're not among viral content. I also see people interacting with kind posts."

Furthermore, the volume of the text in the post as well as the time posted play crucial role in the engagement:

"...not necessarily something that is text heavy, although there is a lot of text heavy viral posts that I saw, and I engaged myself, but it depends on the time of the day if I'm okay to read it or not.

If you're at work or studying, and there is one post that was shared, and you happen to be on social media, you don't have enough time to read it through or get the point. So, you just skim through it, or you maybe save it for later. It's pretty much like, you don't have necessarily "mind space" to go through it. So that's why you just skim through it. But then if you are at home on a weekend, or it's evening, and there is nothing else to do and you are on your social media, then of course, you will have time to read text, load pictures, or videos, or read the description..."

Content related to faith, animals (especially cats and dogs), and humorous or goofy videos were particularly entertaining. Interests also included hair, skincare, design, clothing, and car design discussions. Watching food preparation videos was enjoyed, even if cooking itself was not a favored activity.

P7: "...I am mostly engaged, something faith related, then animals (mostly cats for me) But then there are also dogs because they're a bit dumb...and it's funny to watch them do stuff.

Just some funny videos about anything. That might be funny and goofy, I will interact with it myself, or then I might share it with my family and friends as well.

I don't have specific topic I am following...basic girl stuff, I would say hair, skincare, designs and clothing. I really love clothing. And then I also cars lately, I've been following lots of car design.

I like food. I don't like the process of cooking. I just like the way they cook, and the way food turns out. *And then I wish I was eating that food.* Yeah, food, I would say if you thought about it, food is one of the main topics...

Correspondingly, the summary of users' preferences in content types and formats could be displayed in the figure below.

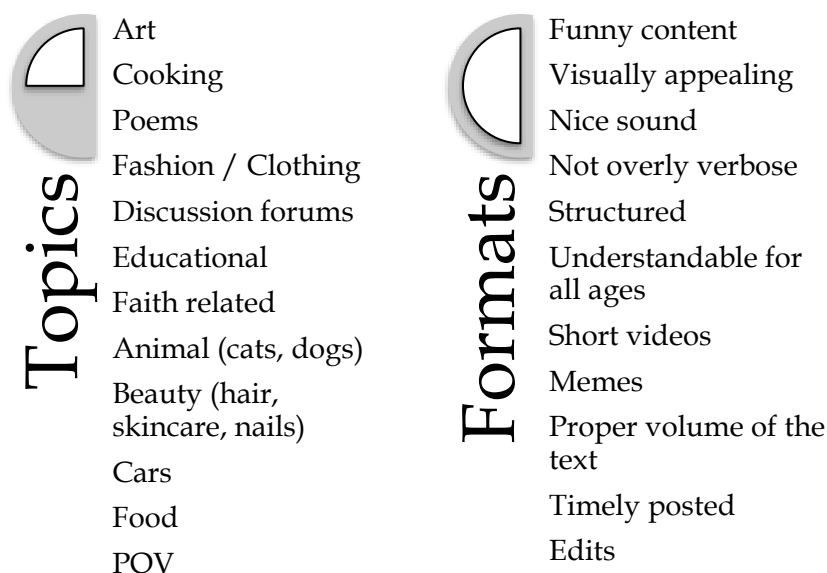


Figure 8. User preferences on content types

6.3.1 Value of engagement

When examining the topics that might trigger users to interact with the video, several participants mentioned humour. Namely, participants are triggered to engage with content that resonates with their personal experiences. This could include childhood memories, struggles in daily life, or events that happened in their lives.

P5: "It's humor, like kind of scenes sketches. I would probably react to Gen Z humors, with their punch lines. From crying spectra I'm not interested that much, however I might sometimes get emotional when I see family content. Then cooking probably, "how to" stuff or studies that came to my feed recently. I immediately save it that content so I will not lose it and sometime later I will go and watch it properly."

P6: "Maybe some negative and aggressive replies of other users. I catch myself on that. And after the video, I can see the conversation of the people. When person asks for help & advice (I check the comments)"

P7: "anything that is kind, something goofy, something funny, something that makes me feel like" oh my god, look at you, cutie patootie", "Oh, you're so stupid". Like, it's usually dogs. Or then there is some meme about studies or the weather I might share it with my family or friends. But mostly my engagement and interaction with the posts are liking, sharing and saving. I also like content if it's something nice, something beautiful, and I enjoyed it, aesthetically. Then I will like the video if there are some really kind words, and it just warms my heart. And then if it's something funny, I will also share it if I like to giggle or like laugh out loud. Then food of course, doesn't matter if the food looks good. I will

definitely share it either with my sisters or with mom because we definitely talk a lot about food.”

P8: “No. I’m quite a pacifist. I don’t like those kinds of things. I just observe them in my free time.”

P9: “truth of life” or relatable kind of content. For example, events that happened in life (childhood memories or struggles of daily life). Something funny. Memes or popular sounds”

P10: “I might engage with videos with wise sayings or beliefs. Something that has common values, what suits you or someone who you want to support (for example saying that you are not the first person to go through this hardship). So, something that will inspire to strive for the better.”

P11: “Faith filled content for sure. Baby videos maybe, or again funny videos. Other videos might be something that was scary...unexpected ones (you know like the ones where spider jumps at you). When something like this surprises you, you usually check the comments and see how other people reacted. Lately, comments section is the best part of the video (the video itself had nothing special, yet comments are wild)”

Engagement trigger is also noted with content out of curiosity or interest. This could be controversial content, such as aggressive replies or scary videos, which they may engage with to understand people's reactions. Additionally, unexpected, or surprising content may also trigger engagement, leading them to check the comments or discuss it with others.

Furthermore, personal values and beliefs emerged as influential factors in engagement. Participant 10, for instance, expressed a preference for content that aligns with her values, such as positivity, inspiration, and support. This included motivational quotes, affirmations, or content fostering personal growth.

Conversely, participant 8 described a passive approach to engagement, preferring not to interact with certain types of content. Instead, she observed content during free time without actively participating in discussions or interactions, reflecting a more passive consumption pattern.

It is important to note that time was again mentioned as something that plays a crucial role in their social media engagement. While two participants mentioned that they prefer saving videos for later to peacefully watch during their free time, others might scroll through the videos without investing much time, even if content might be interesting.

The results described above, could be therefore summarized in the following manner:

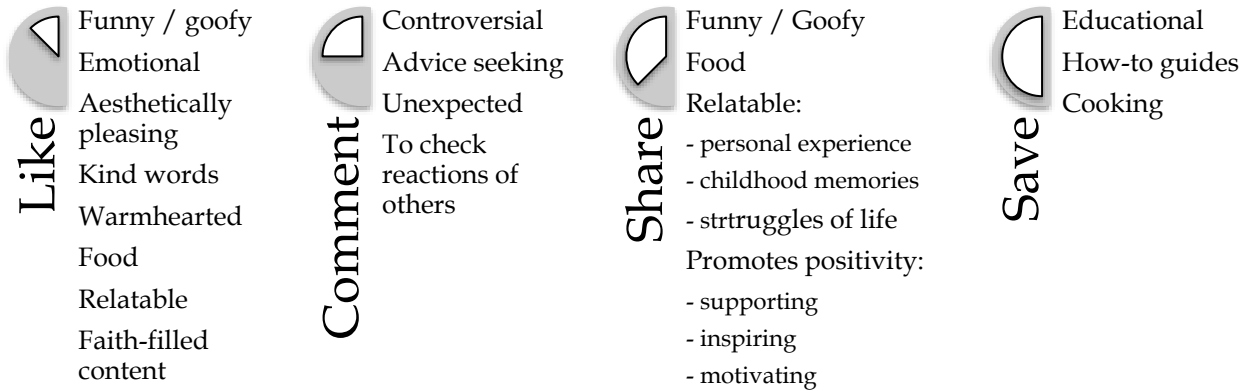


Figure 9. Content types that trigger engagement

In the examination of engagement approaches, interviewees additionally offered insights into significance they put towards the reactions of others. Some interviewees notably highlighted that users put a certain amount of importance towards comments in understanding opinions and interests of others.

P2: "Yes, I check, just to see people's interest. How they think."

P5: "it's like crowd syndrome. When I see something getting popular, I can understand why, but it depends if I will engage with comment or not. For me, mostly I will engage with a fanbase, because there's a lot of funny people writing there. I just love it. But then again, there might be some content talking about "women must do this and that", on those I might put dislike. Rarely, but this might happen. Also unfortunately, sometimes the comments change my mindset, for example, if there's a girl super skinny, and I wouldn't like "oh, she's skinny". But when I go to comment and they're like, "it's photoshopped, the wall is wavy". And I'm like "oh actually true."

Similarly, comments were perceived as an indicator of users' reception of content. Namely, given feature offers can influence users whether to watch a video or not.

P11: "One of my active forms of engagement is maybe sharing videos or checking comments. But I rarely like them or leave comments myself. Also depending on the time of the day, how much time I have to spend; but I do like checking comments occasionally.

Also, with TikTok it was comparatively better than on Instagram, because I used to stop and watch the video based on the count likes. If I see that the video has over millions of likes I might stop and watch it...and see why so many people liked it (similarly to the comment section; you see that video is boring, but you open comments you can understand why it went viral. People are just hilarious). With Instagram on the other hand, you might

not see like counts, so you don't focus as much on them and open comments only when you feel like it"

Conversely, a group of participants expressed that they are checking comments only occasionally, preferring to form independent opinions without external influence.

P6: "Often I just check the discussion of people because some of the topics are I might find important, so I want to see the replies of these people, but I avoid putting likes or dislikes and sharing. I might share some videos or funny videos with my children. That's it"

P10: "Rarely. They are not that interesting to me; I can make up my own opinion."

Others engaged with comments primarily for practical purposes, such as gathering information or gaining insights into events, rather than for social validation.

P8: "Not frequently. Very, very seldom depends on what I'm watching, and I will go to the comments only to find, for example, what is the music that was used in the video or stuff like that. Otherwise, I don't like going there because people start to also engage in discussions that are not related to the videos at also not interested."

P9: "Not often, I don't need that. Might look into it when people are speaking on certain events."

However, a nuanced perspective emerged from an interviewee who acknowledged that comments are essential to the assessment of content quality. Although she did not actively monitor comments or reactions, engagement metrics were often checked when evaluating content. Furthermore, participant's preference was for content with a higher like count or visible like count, believing that a low like count or hidden like count was indicative of low quality.

P7: "Not necessarily, but then if it's creepy, then I'm like "why is it creepy at all" Especially on YouTube, you feel like it's really weird and when you start wondering what is this video about, you see this video has just five or seven likes, and I'll be like "ah, okay, let's just scroll through this or delete from the history". Because I don't want to see this anymore. It's really creepy. I don't know how they really pop up. But this doesn't really affect me much. Sometimes when I like the video, I might check how many likes were there already? Or then if video from some influencers, how they just present themselves, I check like how many likes this video got because it just was so professionally done. I might not necessarily like it myself, but I would just check how many likes were there. But then if it's some videos that are hiding the like count, I will not bother checking. The content is just cool. I liked it. If not visible, I won't go further"

6.3.1 Positive versus negative content

While conducting research on user perception on social media, one aspect that requires further examination is the audience's perspective on negative and positive content types. Interview conducted revealed that the majority hold a favourable view of positive content. They associate it with motivation, entertainment, and a sense of relief from negativity. Positive content is seen as a breath of fresh air in an online environment that can often be dominated by negativity. Moreover, as noted by

participants, positive content typically includes such elements such as uplifting stories, humorous videos, or content that evokes positive emotions.

P1: "It's good, give motivation; increase it to start something"

P2: "They are good until you open comments section."

P4: "Positive content is good and helpful, but you should still focus more on the positivity rather than just social media which corrupts your mind"

P6: "Yeah, for sure. Positive is always good for my opinion. Because people love entertainment. They love to watch something fun. Something nice, happy with some positive emotions. Not negative. There is a lot of negative stuff all around us already."

P7: "I don't know. It depends maybe on the market where the content goes viral. But yeah, people are tired. I think everyone wants to just see some light, you know, although there's lots of negative stuff also going on the internet surface, even if people will interact with it like twice or three times. I'm pretty sure everyone wants to get back to something positive because no one has enough time or capacity to deal with negativity on the internet as well. So, I would say, yes, positive content has more chances to go viral, although it might not be the fact, like people still do get tackled in the negative stuff as well. So, I can't say yes or no, it really is. A matter of discussion of a long discussion."

P11: "I would say so. People tend to like funny videos. Seeing how much toxicity in the world, some content that has aspiring positive aftertaste might be good"

Despite the general consensus that positive content highly regarded online when seen from a virality perspective, nearly everyone pointed out that negative content is actually more prevalent.

P3: "Positive content goes less viral in my experience and opinion. There is more curiosity on a bit crueller or controversial trend. "

P5: "Why a little bit less than something negative or something controversial. To understand something positive, you need to do a little bit of analysis or reflect on it. For example, one content creator who was making a lot of food in Africa. basically, it's a good thing. It's a kind and positive thing. But it went viral not because of the content that she was creating, but because of the hate that she gets. So, it's a little bit controversial. "

P8: "they are equal because even if positive content is the one that people try to like and look at it; negative content has just as much of power, and it spread just as quickly, so that sometimes they it might be negative content might be even faster, widespread than the positive. But I think they hold the same power to each other, so they are equal in my opinion "

P9: "Maybe, but at this moment people are very mean. Mainly people are being drawn out of interest and curiosity. For example, if one guy said that one has a crooked nose, people got interested why he has crooked nose, so everyone goes to look at that crooked nose. "

P10: "No. Because any type of content aimed to impact your emotions. For example, very sad events (similar to the ones happening today). People want to see how people react; what is the first reaction you get from people "

Based on the comments provided above, it could be noted that despite its divisive nature, negative content tends to have a higher frequency of occurrence. While some participants express a strong antipathy to it, others highlighted that audience tends to be more drawn to negative content out of curiosity or to observe others' reactions.

When examining the results from age perspective, participants in the older age groups (25-34 and 45-54) despite acknowledging presence of negative content, expressed a greater preference for positive content, emphasizing its ability to offer brief relief from the negativity dominating online platforms. However, the younger demographic (16-24) is more divided. While some acknowledge the motivational aspect of positive content, others note its prevalence being overshadowed by negative or controversial topics.

Furthermore, in the discussion of negative content, participants cover wide range of topics such as war, conflicts, judgmental opinions, hate speech, aggression, bullying, discrimination, racism, poverty, robbery, harshness, humiliation, fear, anger, and political news.

P5: "When I define negative, it doesn't necessarily mean something like someone beats up or some cruel acts. From scale of judging someone to posting absolutely inappropriate stuff (of intimate moments). I don't know. It's absolutely disgusting. Thankfully, I didn't reach that point. When thinking of judgement, you could bring for example Disney events like actor choice. These are going viral, yet it's not a positive content. It's judging. Controversial, scandalous. Such content picks my interest."

P6: "Aggression, war, murder, blood."

P7: "something toxic...Hate...when people bullying each other. Of course, there are also a lot of people and haters who comment on the influencers. When influencers start to prove themselves, I understand there are people as well. But when they start to bully people back and do their content based on that. It's just feels again intoxicating. It's just disgusting. then of course, like discrimination, types of news. And then like, racism, or bullying of women. But I will say, so far, what I've seen is that like, when people are just hating each other, just because, because of their insecurities"

P8: "negative content is the one that maybe would be bit closely related to daily life, like a flash news or something related to daily basis situations, something that is not considered normal in daily life. For example, the news of robbery, poverty, inflation, those kinds of things; the ones that really, really, really affect people and also people in relationships like bad behavior, misbehavior, those kinds of things, they will spread widely, and people will start posting and reposting it, showing that they don't support that kind of stuff."

P9: "Judgmental content, demotivating stuff."

P10: "Humiliation. Harshness to get the profit. No mercy. Content where people have mindset "the end justifies the means" or where ambitions exceed moral rights"

P11: "when you think of virality people might say that there is a lot of hate online, still there is a lot of good stuff. Negative content is usually filled with hate, fear, maybe some angry message or some daily political news"

Reactions to negative content reveals that participants primarily respond by either avoiding or scrolling past such content. This reaction is prevalent among many respondents, indicating a strong desire to minimize exposure to content that promotes negative influence.

P1: "It depends on the topic...not my thing, skip it. If it relates to my topic of interest I would continue to watch"

P2: "Yes, I don't respond but I check, just to see people's interest. How they think; I just scroll if it's too much"

P3: "My mind differs a lot depending on the topic so there is no general answer."

P5: "if it's like super triggering I would maybe discuss it with some people around me, but mostly I just scroll away. For something that I really unpleasant to watch, I might press" not interested". Once there was also a case, where a man was absolutely improperly hyping up own cause. I hated everything about video. I don't usually block people. But that was a moment when I blocked the user because I didn't want to see them on my" for you" page anymore"

P6: "I skip it. I just don't want to watch it. If I don't like a video, I would definitely skip it. Because, once I open it, it will appear all the time, like a virus"

P7: "I can't watch it; I'm scrolling through straightaway. Because they start to yell, like you just jumped on the video, and they start yelling. Whatever content is about I don't spend much time on that. And I'm just scrolling, and not staying there. Not even reading comments or anything, because I don't have time for that"

P8: "I really don't want to watch that thing. It makes me depressed."

P9: "My reaction is "Do as you please", I just skip their video. I rarely block users, there's way too many of them. But there are a few videos where I might watch the (also curiosity)"

P10: "trying to avoid it, scroll away"

However, some individuals admit to being curious about negative content, either to understand others' reactions or to observe the topic itself. Despite this curiosity, several participants express discomfort towards negative content, associating it with feelings of disgust, sadness, or anger.

This highlights a strong preference for avoiding content that evokes negative emotions. Additionally, a few participants engage with negative content by reading comments or discussing it with others, indicating an interest in understanding different perspectives or expressing their own opinions. Some participants also take proactive measures by blocking or removing negative content from their feed, demonstrating an active effort to maintain a positive online environment.

6.4 What attributes make content go viral?

Finally, during a free form discussion, each participant was asked if they had anything to add after considering discussion on the topic of virality. Four participants highlighted the "crowd effect," where a broad social media audience follows individuals who stand out from the crowd (P5, P6, P9, and P10). Participant 10 also noted the emotional impact that content can have, which significantly contributes to its virality.

P6: "It's a crowd effect. Nobody knows how it begins, but all of a sudden people start repeating the same stuff. Only unique individuals are standing out of the crowd, rest are just copying those individuals"

P10: "Videos that are aiming on psychological / emotional moments. Something that is triggering to consciously or unconsciously to engage with it. Curiosity, fear or some other unsettling emotions push the audience to check the content. Also, there is something called crowd effect, the moment few people push the content, it's like a snowball will raise in sizes and eventually become viral"

However, when discussing original content that initially drives the engagement, Participant 7 emphasized the importance of the message. Specifically, she noted that attributes such as video quality, sound, and lighting are crucial for success. However, when people browse through social media, they "want a break from all the toxicity" and prefer to watch something light, pleasant, and heartwarming. They don't tolerate other types of content as much.

Participant 9 supports this idea and adds that people are tired of overly complicated concepts. She appreciates simplicity and novelty. Hence videos that are offering such format are going viral (referencing Khaby's videos).

P7: "I would say the message of the content. Maybe only after that, the quality, the setup of the video, the sound, the lighting, and the whole aesthetics of the video. But most importantly it's a message because if the video is not nice, the sound is not nice, but if the whole point of the video is funny, or kind or wholesome, then there is a high probability that the video will go viral. So, I would say whoever creates the content, just has to create a good message that is simple and speaks to people's hearts and minds. Because no one has time for fancy or toxic stuff. Everyone wants to break into something nice or like, very light and warm hearted to check. And if it's not like that people will not tolerate that much so."

P9: "Bringing something new and simple. People are tired of overcomplicated things. Also, the outlook of the person who is in that video, visually attractive content is more appealing to watch."

On the contrary, Participant 11 brought up the concept of beauty privilege, arguing that many original content creators might struggle to make their videos go viral due to their appearance. She further explained that there have been numerous cases where attractive content creators replicate original videos (without giving due credit), and their videos go viral. As a result, everyone associates the video with the second content creator, leaving the original creator frustrated that their content was stolen.

P11: "Maybe one thing I also noticed is that original creators might not get their video viral. But then some other content creator steals it (even without credits), and the video blows out. They say that video sometimes blows out, because of the outlook of the second creator. The quality of video is better, they look better. I'm not sure, but these notes sadly are still affecting virality. People call it beauty privilege if I remember it right

7 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The last chapter of this study discusses the main empirical findings presented earlier and their relationship to previous studies discussed in literature review. The research questions proposed in the introduction will further be answered. Additionally, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed. Finally, evaluation and limitations of this study will be further discussed to objectively review existing findings.

7.1 Theoretical contribution

As one might understand, nowadays social media plays one of the dominating roles in media consumption, while being a primary source of information for many individuals. In fact, most of the trends circulating around the world, are all related to social media content, be it of direct or indirect impact. Thus, concept of virality is continuously circulating among the audience, motivating academic circles to evaluate and determine its idea.

For decades researchers have been carefully building the definition of the concept of virality attempting to determine attributes that drive all its forms (Beeler, 2000; Tellis et al., 2019). However, as the world continuously evolving, with substantial shift on technological advancements, perception of virality is subsequently gradually evolving (Knossenburg et al., 2016). As a result, many researchers have successfully managed to actualize the findings with reevaluating the concept from social media perspective (Wold, 2023), as well as detect drivers that allow content to go viral (Tellis et al., 2019; Berger & Milkman, 2013).

Nonetheless, most of the research conducted present generalized quantitative perspective towards the findings, and insights towards virality from users' perspective is still missing. Therefore, the purpose of current research was to gain a deeper understanding of users' comprehension on a subject as well as examine what aspects of content are noticed by users themselves. As the result, research questions have been established as follows:

1. What kind of characteristics describe viral content on social media?
2. What are the potential drivers that promote virality on social media?
3. What role engagement attributes play on virality?

7.1.1 Characteristics of viral content

In essence, results of the findings have revealed that nowadays social media users view concept of virality in similar manner as academic research suggests. To elaborate, the term of virality was something by users as content, which is rapidly spreading across the platforms, reaching wide audiences and becoming popular in an instant. This consequently supported the idea presented by Wold (2023), who analogically described virality as a phenomenon of quickly spread content that gains large numbers of views and interactions.

In addition to the statement above, results of conducted interviews additionally expand on the definition while explaining that viral content extends geographical boundaries, it is attracting diverse audiences as well as mostly involves continuous replication of original (viral) video by other users, which consequently leads to increased following audience (may it be both haters and fans). Moreover, among the older generation, viral content is perceived slightly annoying, as it is persistently pushed on users' feed (also known as timeline).

Furthermore, results of interviews analyzed, additionally offer qualities and characteristics of viral videos. Namely, compared to regular content, viral videos possess high awareness among the users, and they are broadly accepted by the audience across multiple social media platforms. Viral videos offer memorable sounds and catchphrases, which consequently prompt users to recite them.

Furthermore, virality of content is observed in its visual appearance (aesthetically pleasing), duration (short) and authenticity (unique, novel and uncommon to the audience). Among other characteristics, presence of celebrities and influencers within the content is found to bring impact towards virality, together with the recognition of time relevance as well as short life span.

Algorithm was also mentioned as another characteristic contributing to virality. Most users highlighted the role of social media technology (algorithm) in pushing content to others' feeds, though none particularly understand how it works. This consequently supports findings by Taylor and Choi (2022), who distinguished algorithms by their awareness and responsiveness. Being aware of the algorithm does not necessarily mean perceiving it as responsive or insensitive (Taylor & Choi, 2022). Hence, it could be noted that users' awareness of algorithms influences their content perception, but it does not directly translate into a clear understanding of how these algorithms affect the visibility or spread of videos.

Lastly, emotional impact was highly regarded within viral videos. As it has been revealed by the users, viral content most of the time carries humorous and relatable context, which genuinely resonates with personal experiences of the viewers. Given results thus support studies conducted by Nikolinakou and King (2018), who further

stated in their work that high levels of emotional arousal tend to drive sharing behavior.

7.1.2 Drivers promoting virality in social media

Upon examination of virality drivers in social media, research found that general classification could be grouped into three main categories: public figures (influencers), memorable audio and humor (memes).

When examining the first category of influencers, findings presented by Schöne and authors (2023) could be particularly noted, as their research has verified that the number of followers serves as a direct mediator between the user type and the dissemination of content. In fact, studies conducted by Shahbaznezhad, and authors (2021) additionally confirm current findings, as they have stated that influencers and prominent figures play as one of the external factors which highly impacts the virality. Particularly in this research, it has been noted from users' comments that the content presented by influencers offers most of the characteristics of viral videos such as: strong emotional resonance (for example relatability or humor), unpredictability (controversy) high quality videos (visual appeal, lighting, outfits) etc.

Within the audio category, most of users referred to videos that featured snippets of popular music or specific sounds. Given sounds were mostly referred due to their catchy and memorable characteristics, making them easy for users to replicate and share.

Lastly, humor emerged as the third key driver of viral videos, characterized by positive, funny, and relatable content. Memes and funny reactions often featured spontaneous moments of laughter, which research has found to be the ultimate motivation for sharing content.

To elaborate on the idea, during data analysis it was found that users are highly inclined on sharing videos to evoke positive reactions from their friends and family, while at the same time cautiously evaluating whether content under consideration can potentially offend the viewer. Correspondingly given statement supports the idea of confirmation bias which states that individuals selectively interact with the content while endorsing only information which aligns with prevailing views of their online community (Peters, 2022; Ghani & Rahmat, 2023). By the same token, it is however important to note that insights shared by users contradict statement of Bebbington et al. (2017) who argue that negative content is more likely to be shared. As it has been explained by users during the interview, they are carefully reviewing and selecting content before sharing it with others.

7.1.3 Engagement attributes

In view of the above, it would be consequently interesting to review general qualities of content that trigger users to engage with the video. As characteristics of viral content have already been described above, it would be essential to emphasize that users also appreciated when the video is well structured, not overly verbose, and understandable for all ages. Moreover, apart from the humor, relatable content as well as content that offers practical information was regarded as highly engaging.

By the same token, content involving compelling, faith filled as well as narrative context attracts attention of users to further engage with it in the form of liking and sharing it with others with the motivation of promoting positivity and support for others. Given result, consequently, supports the idea of Nikolinakou and King (2018), who explain that users are inclined to share content that fosters emotions of generosity and empathy among users.

Equally important to highlight that results above additionally support the idea of confirmation bias, as it can be seen that individuals favor and engage mostly with the content that aligns with their preset beliefs and opinions (Kappes et al., 2020; Peters, 2022). As it has been earlier discussed by Kappes and authors (2020), individuals selectively interact with content that reinforces existing viewpoints.

Given phenomenon, as explained by Ghani and Rahmat (2023) can be mostly observed due to individuals' strong desire of belonging, consequently relying only on the experiences that validate their personal beliefs (Modgil et al., 2021).

Correspondingly, confirmation bias has also been noticed among the last triggers of content that users find engaging, i.e. controversial. This type of content usually triggers curiosity and awe of users to jump into the wave (e.g. read comments, watch other videos on a subject) and review whether people online have similar opinions as themselves. This, in turn, not only supports the findings by Tellis et al. (2019) stating that content with perceived social value and engaging elements of controversy promotes virality, but also confirms the findings of Berger and Milkman (2013) on the relationship between emotional arousal and valence, which explains that highly reactive emotions trigger content to go viral.

Positive over negative

Finally, when reviewing user engagement through comparative lens of positive versus negative content online, processed analysis has revealed that positive content is generally favored among the audience, although most of the users perceive that negative content is dominating in posts they encounter. Older participants expressed a preference for positive content as a relief from overwhelming negativity, whereas the younger demographic was more divided. Some acknowledged the motivational aspect of positive content, while others noted its overshadowing by negative topics.

Participants who occasionally interacted with negative content explained that their curiosity often led them to check such content. The given statement again supports findings by Berger and Milkman (2013) over arousal and valence relationship.

Correspondingly, this observation aligns with the negativity bias theory discussed in Rozin and Royzman's research (2001), suggesting that people psychologically perceive external environment as predominantly negative. Moreover, as Norris (2021) indicated in her work, younger audiences are more exposed to negative content, which often is driven by curiosity, while the older generation attempts to avoid it.

Nonetheless, the interview findings support studies by Berger & Milkman (2013), which suggest that positive content surpasses negative. Specifically, when users discussed the attributes of viral content, they mentioned only positive features. When recalling the most viral content, they remembered only positive videos. When explaining the types of videos they share with others and the purpose behind it, everyone mentioned positive intentions (i.e. to share laughter, to motivate others, support them and/or inspire). Thus, despite the assumption that negative content dominates, current research proves that most viral videos are associated with humor and catchy sounds.

7.2 Managerial implications

When striving to offer organizations solid foundation of creating potentially viral content Mills' SPIN framework could be potentially applied (Mills, 2012). Particularly, the first stage of the framework - spreadability will be examined. As it has explained by Mills (2012), spreadability implies two key factors likeability and shareability. Likability refers to a level to which the content is engaging or emotionally resonant, while shareability relates to audiences' willingness to distribute the content within social network (Mills, 2012).

Given framework already provides organizations with potential understanding towards the results of communications. Namely, whether they want to impact they audience with the message shared or they are potentially aiming for the widespread.

To elaborate on the idea, during the interviews it has been revealed that most of the users are interacting with the content in two different manners: they personally engage with it (like, save, or review comments) without further interaction or they share liked video with their social circle.

To put it differently, it could be suggested that content is divided into two categories: engaging and shareable ones. Engaging content, as noted by users imply content formats that are personally resonating with the interests of the audience. Given category specifically involves content types that are funny (or goofy), controversial, surprising, emotionally impactful (inspiring, warm hearted, faith-filled), visually appealing, educational as well as relatable.

Shareable category similarly to engaging type, includes funny, relatable, emotional and educational content. However, most of the time, given category triggers audience to discuss the context with others. For the most part, users share the videos to laugh together. However, they additionally share videos with an intention to motivate each other, reaffirm previous discussions or aspire to replicate seen video.

While further expanding on the qualities that users prefer in videos that trigger them to interact with it, it was found that online audience prefers to interact with content that carries well planned structure, has clear and understandable message for all ages, it is short, has catchy sound (or phrases), timely relevant, does not bring too much text, unique, offers something new and authentic, unpredictable, easy to remember (and replicate), involves prominent figures (celebrities or influencers) and offers distinctive quality (i.e. aesthetically pleasing to watch)

However, one of the aspects which has been highlighted by the majority of users, is that interaction with seen or shared videos is only momentary. As it was explained by users, they watch the video together, share a laughter and it always ends in this short loop of interaction. Therefore, it could be suggested that no extended discussions should be expected from the content created.

As a result, characteristics of video formats presented above should serve as a basis for brands creating videos that could encourage their online audiences to interact with them.

Finally, brands can also take advantage of viral (at a time) video and recreate their own version referencing the brand. As a result, all features of viral video can be applied to personal content, while maintaining relevance and relatability to the audience. However, when adopting such a solution, time relevance must always be considered, as viral videos not only have short lifespans, but can also be found irritating when too many similar videos appear on users' feeds.

7.3 Evaluation of the study

While reviewing presented findings, it is critical to emphasize ethical considerations within this research. Namely, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) explain that ethical research is a systematic examination of work undertaken with the utmost regard for moral principles and values. Given principle involves responsible and transparent handling of research activities while simultaneously respecting the rights, dignity and well-being of all individuals involved in the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Ellis-Barton, 2016)

When expanding on the idea, Ellis-Barton (2016) further elaborated that central to ethical research is obtaining informed consent, where participants understand the research purpose and any potential risks. Privacy and confidentiality are crucial, especially in online environment where information can easily spread (Ellis-Barton,

2016). Researcher must be fully honest about the purpose of the study: the way data will be used and what might the subsequent implications (Ellis-Barton, 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Upholding professional integrity by avoiding plagiarism and giving proper credit to authors whose studies were mentioned in the work, is another essential aspect of ethical research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As a result, it contributes trustworthiness of academic findings and promotes a culture of openness, honesty, and respect within the research community (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

For this reason, it is important to highlight that ethical principles were highly regarded during the entire research process. This research was handled very transparently, with every step of the process being explicitly documented.

During data collection process, while handling interviews with participants, all members were informed beforehand on the study, clearly stating research purposes as well as the role of participants, providing them with an opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns they might have.

Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly considered in order to protect participants' privacy. Measures were taken to ensure that participants' identities were kept confidential. Any personal information collected during the study was stored securely and accessible only to the author of this study, thus preventing any form of unauthorized access.

Finally, plagiarism was strictly avoided throughout this study. All forms of secondary data used within this study were diligently cited following directly academic standards and references of original sources can be consequently found in chapter titled References.

Nonetheless, similarly to all projects, current research has its own limitations. Firstly, the qualitative nature of the study introduced subjectivity into both data collection and analysis. As research relied on semi-structured interviews, the interpretation of participants' responses might have been influenced by researcher's perspective and bias. Despite taking all the required actions of maintaining objectivity of the results, the manual nature of data collection may have caused inconsistencies in how responses were recorded and analyzed. In this regard, to minimize the effect of bias, as mentioned earlier, transcripts of interviews were sent back to participants for verification of discussion.

Furthermore, the small sample size of eleven participants restricts the generalizability of findings. Due to limitations in time and resources, current study was constrained in scope, focusing on a narrow demographic. Nonetheless, substantial effort was put to diversify the sample, which in turn allowed to evaluate the concept of vitality from multiple perspectives.

Lastly, current study encountered limitations in theoretical grounding due to the limited information available on current understanding of virality. This constraint might have occurred due to the rapidly evolving nature of online platforms and user behaviors, leaving a gap in theoretical development. As a result, current study focused primarily on data driven findings, however future research could prioritize the development and refinement of theoretical models to better understand the mechanisms driving virality.

Ultimately, considering the background study and methodology applied, this research successfully explored the concept of virality from users' perspectives. The assistance of the literature review not only helped in constructing interview questions and setting criteria for sample collection but also facilitated the comparison of findings with previous studies. The exploratory nature of the study, coupled with semi-structured interviews, adequately allowed the researcher to address the research questions by identifying the concept of virality and its engagement qualities. Additionally, it enabled the researcher to suggest managerial implications for brands in content creation. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that, when evaluating the argument and interpretation provided in this study, the understanding of virality from the perspective of users was substantially expanded.

7.4 Future research

Finally, when thinking of directions for future research, one of the first recommendations which could be highlighted would be evaluation of content analysis. Specifically, reviewing the most viral videos and identifying prominent features that attract audiences. To elaborate, the findings of current research provide a list of prominent qualities that are associated with viral content. Among such characteristics of humor, music, video quality and many others were presented. What could be done in the future research however is selecting the most viral and all-time favorite videos and in great detail analyze content within. The result of the given study can consequently offer nuanced classification of content that is recognized as the most appealing among all audiences, hence offering better understanding towards content preferences.

Secondly, studying perspectives of content creators towards viral content can additionally provide valuable insights into the subject. Namely, researchers could examine how content creators perceive their experiences with viral videos, what are their general thoughts towards user engagement and what could they share on the gap between expectations versus reality when creating content. Consequently, understanding their motivations, reactions, and interactions with viral content as both viewers and creators can offer insights on the challenges and opportunities when stepping into content creation in social media.

Alternatively, to further comprehend dynamics of virality in social media one can organize case studies focusing on stories of popular influencers and brands. Namely, researchers could investigate how these models managed to captivate their audience and maintain their popularity over time. By examining both successful and failed stories, researchers can determine key strategies, trends, and potential pitfalls in achieving and sustaining virality.

Furthermore, as already mentioned in limitations, conducting a thorough review of literature with a strong theoretical grounding is additionally recommended for future research. By synthesizing existing theories from psychology, sociology, and communication studies, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of virality. This theoretical foundation in turn might enrich future studies on virality and provide solid framework for analysis. It should enable researchers to dive deeper into the underlying mechanisms and drivers of virality, facilitating a more nuanced approach in conceptualizing user behaviors and their engagement dynamics.

Lastly, during a free form discussion with participants in current research, when attempting to personally answer research questions, one of the surprising comments that was supported by many respondents was the idea of “crowd effect.” While expanding on the term, they have noted that broad social audience has a great tendency to follow individuals who stand out from the crowd. Nobody knows how virality of the content begins, but all of a sudden everyone is aware of it, follows it as well as recreates personal versions. In academic terms, Stam (2020) has defined the phenomenon as contagion theory, which implies that ideas, behavior, or attitudes can spread among individuals rapidly similar to the spread of contagious disease. The examination of the current subject, due to the time constraints, was unfortunately not pursued. Nonetheless, it would be very interesting to explore in depth in the future, and thus it is included in the list of recommendations.

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8 APPENDIX

8.1 Interview questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your social media habits? Which platforms do you use regularly, and how often do you usually engage with it?
2. When it comes to social media content, how would you define "virality"?
3. In your opinion, what distinguishes viral content from regular one on social media?
4. When you think about content going viral, what specific attributes or qualities do you believe contribute to its success?
5. Considering videos, you come across on a daily basis, which content do you find most engaging?
6. How much importance do you place on comments and reactions when deciding to engage with or share content?
7. Is there a certain type of content that you know might trigger you to engage with it in any form?
8. Do you think positive content has a better chance of going viral? Why or why not?
9. How about negative content? Which content would you define negative? What follows your mind when you encounter them?
10. Can you recall a specific viral video that made an impression on you? What about it stood out?
11. Have you ever shared a video or piece of content with others that you thought had the potential to go viral? What motivated you to share it?
12. How did the people you shared the content with react? Did their reactions influence you to share it further?
13. Thank you so much for your time and sharing personal perspective. It is highly appreciated. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we conclude?