![isentia logo]

CONTENT VIRALITY
HOW TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT?

insight impact

IS CONTENT VIRALITY RANDOM? APPARENTLY NOT.

EXPLAINING VIRALITY

CONTENT SATURATION

It is not an overstatement to say that the Internet is saturated with content. In 2018, Forbes reported that 2.5 quintillion bytes of data is created each day. With the emergence and adoption of Internet of Things (IoT), this number is expected to accelerate.

In face of this phenomena, content creators should strive to drive virality to emerge from the flood of online content. Viral content are not merely popular pieces, but they garner excessive engagement to be considered *outliers*.

TWO FACES OF VIRALITY

Virality, however, has two faces. One comes in the form of positive publicity while the other is negative publicity. One builds up (the brand) while the other tears down.

THIS PAPER

For the sake of this paper, Isentia frames social engagement to include social likes, shares, and comments. This paper seeks to explore some common factors of viral content.

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> **Content virality may appear random, but there are common denominators across viral pieces.**

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ELEMENTS OF VIRALITY
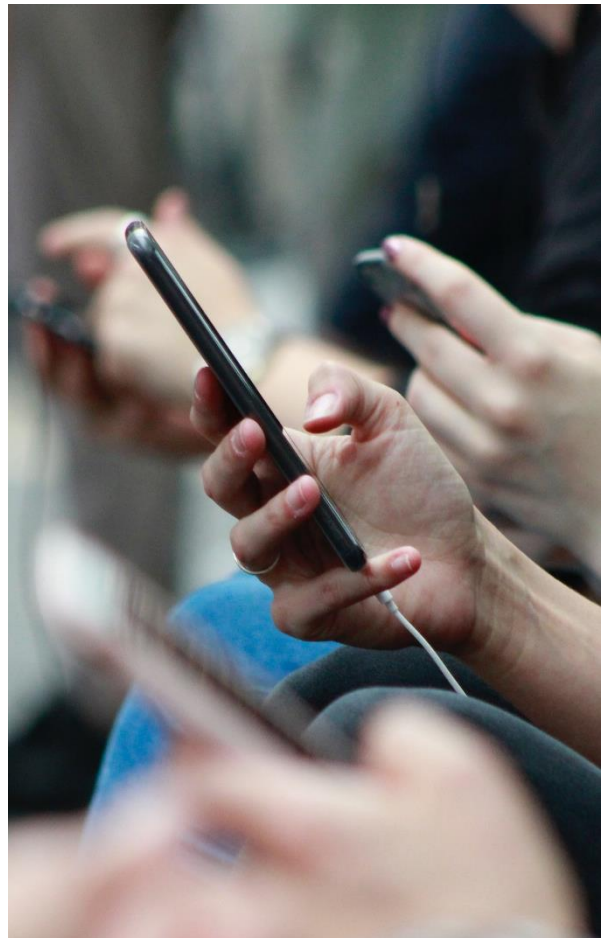
1. HIGH-AROUSAL EMOTIONS

Humans are emotional creatures, and emotions are what make humans cry, shout, laugh, talk, and share. Hence, in order to gain high volumes of social engagement, companies need to push the right emotional buttons to trigger the desired responses from the audience. This starts from having knowledge of what heightens the propensity of sharing or comments.

Certain emotions evoke greater reactions which lead to actions. Jonah Berger's famous academic study on "What Makes Online Content Viral" found that high-arousal emotions such as excitement, amusement, shock, surprise, anger, and anxiety have higher social transmission than low-arousal content that evoked contentment or sadness.

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"Arousal is a state of activation and readiness for action."
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(Jonah Berger)

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1. HIGH-AROUSAL EMOTIONS
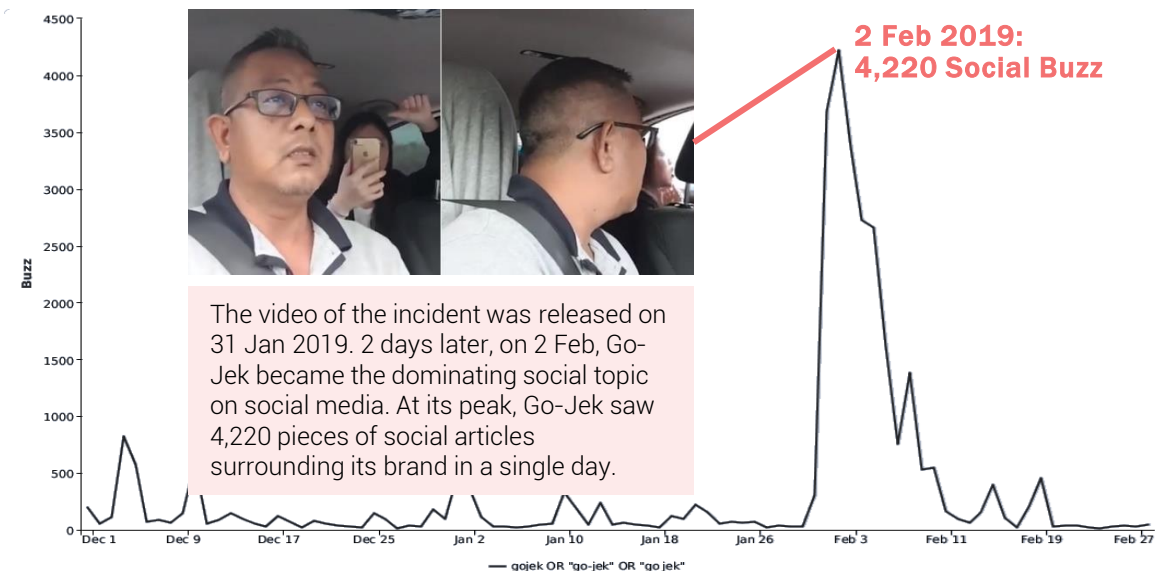
📍 SINGAPORE: GOJEK

VIRAL CAB INCIDENT: BACKGROUND STORY

(Jan 2019) A Go-Jek driver was accused of kidnapping a female passenger and holding her hostage when she could not comprehend the car doors' auto-lock function. She questioned the dispute by mouthing "Is it because I Chinese?" and those 5 words caused an Internet frenzy as many found it highly amusing.

MANY PARODIES OF THE INCIDENT WERE PRODUCED

Brands and organizations saw the entertainment value in the incident and were quick to ride on it by developing content with the gist of the incident. Those witty and humorous content pieces allowed participating brands and organizers to witness significant hikes in their social mentions.

Social Buzz Surrounding Go-Jek From 1 Dec 2018 to 28 Feb 2019

2 Feb 2019:
4,220 Social Buzz

The video of the incident was released on 31 Jan 2019. 2 days later, on 2 Feb, Go-Jek became the dominating social topic on social media. At its peak, Go-Jek saw 4,220 pieces of social articles surrounding its brand in a single day.

gojek OR "go-jek" OR "go jek"

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1. HIGH-AROUSAL EMOTIONS

HIKES WERE OBSERVED IN PARTICIPATING BRANDS & ORGANIZATIONS' SOCIAL MENTIONS

1. Caltex

Caltex posted a cartoon to remind passengers to wear their seatbelt. The characters depicted bear striking resemblance to the Go-Jek driver and his passenger.

"Your cars may have auto-lock functions, but your seatbelts don't. Remember to put on your seatbelts!"
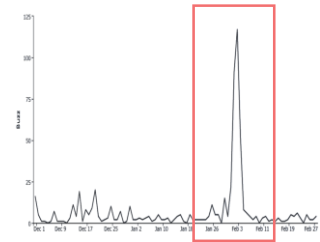
CALTEX (1 FEB)

613
TOTAL SOCIAL MENTIONS OF CALTEX

28x
INCREASE FROM 31 JAN TO 3 FEB (PEAK)

2. SCDF

SCDF took the chance to advise members of the public to call 1777 or seek alternative transportation for appropriate medical treatment.

*"*Psst, our ambulance doors auto-lock for your own safety. So do not be unnecessarily alarmed. Please!"*
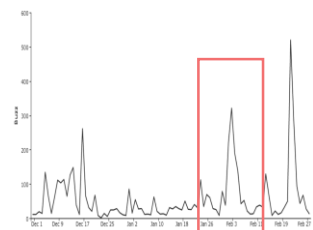
SCDF (2 FEB)

5,250
TOTAL SOCIAL MENTIONS OF SCDF

8.5x
INCREASE FROM 1 FEB TO 3 FEB (PEAK)

3. RSAF

RSAF wanted to showcase the teamwork of their pilots, who help to guard the Singapore skies even during festive periods.
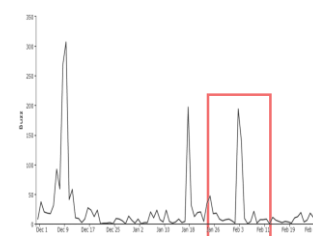
"And yes, the canopy auto-locks for safety!"

RSAF (3 FEB)

2,203
TOTAL SOCIAL MENTIONS OF RSAF

194x
INCREASE FROM 2 FEB TO 3 FEB (PEAK)

Logo Source: Go-Jek
Picture Source: The Straits Times
Data Source: Isentia Social Listening Data
Data from: 1 Dec 2018 to 28 Feb 2019
Data Extracted on: 4 Apr 2019

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*Note: For all three brands, increase of social mentions was calculated by comparing social mentions on the day BEFORE the release of content and the PEAK of social mentions

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2. CURIOSITY GAP
+ ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

CURIOSITY PROPELS
CONTENT CLICK-THROUGHS

When brands strategically create a curiosity gap, the audience would be motivated to resolve this gap by obtaining information. For instance, the minds of readers would be tickled by headlines that fuel curiosity, nudging them to click through to access the full content.

CURIOSITY IS INNATE

Many scientists believe that curiosity is an intrinsic drive and one of human's basic elements of behavior. This explains why curiosity gap still reigns as one of the most effective copywriting practices.

CURIOSITY + SURPRISE = PERFECT
ENGAGEMENT PAIR

Imagine this. The audience is itching for an answer due to the curiosity gap created by the headline and eventually, the answer received is surprising. This type of content is likely to receive higher engagement rates since shock and surprise are high-arousal emotions (this concept was explained in the previous slide).

However, companies have to be careful with this strategy. If the audience is unsatisfied with the given answers, it may lead to frustration, which might be aired online.

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"The curiosity gap is the space between what we know and what we want or even need to know."

**-
(Joanna Wiebe, Copy Hackers)**

📍 MALAYSIA

▶ 1.1m   💬 5,966

(Nov 2018) Malaysian Youtuber, Harvinth Skin, pulled a prank on a sales assistant from JD Sports. After trying on a pair of sports shoes, he sprinted out of the store, leaving the sales person in shock. The video has since garnered over a million views.

SOCIAL MENTIONS

557
SOCIAL MENTIONS OF 'HARVINTH SKIN' IN MY (28 NOV 2019, PEAK)

Harvinth's actions were unusual, which piqued the curiosity in viewers as to how others (onlookers and sales assistant) reacted to the prank.

Picture Source: @harvinthskin (Instagram)
Data Source: Isentia Social Listening Data
Data from: 1 Dec 2018 to 28 Feb 2019
Data Extracted on: 28 Mar 2019

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3. HIGH SOCIAL CURRENCY

WHAT IS SOCIAL CURRENCY?
Social currency refers to the value that a piece of social content has. It affects social wealth – How good a person/brand appears to be on social platforms.

HOW DOES IT LEAD TO VIRALITY?
Humans have the natural tendency to impress, and this remains true behind the screens. The better it makes the 'sharer' look, the higher the chances of sharing. When a significant number of people share something collectively, it can be fanned into virality.

DETERMINATION OF VALUE
The same content may have different social currency across individuals since evaluations are often made emotionally instead of being based on a defined set of decision rules. However, there is an observed trend – Popular content tend to become even more popular. People are drawn to what others are interested in. Being on top of the latest trends can portray one as *trendy* and *relevant*.

BRANDS SHOULD BE CONCERNED
Apart from content, social currency can be attached to brands. Brands with high social currency are likely to get their content shared, which means higher brand visibility, awareness, recall - all of which will affect consumer purchase decision and brand performance.

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"Just as people use money to buy products or services, they use social currency to achieve desired positive impressions among their families, friends, and colleagues."

**-
(John Berger)**

📍 INDONESIA

STARBUCKS INDONESIA

Starbucks, a global coffeehouse chain, has earned itself a high social currency due to its renowned brand name, sleek-looking cups, frequent social contests, and humorous baristas that tend to get customers' names wrong.

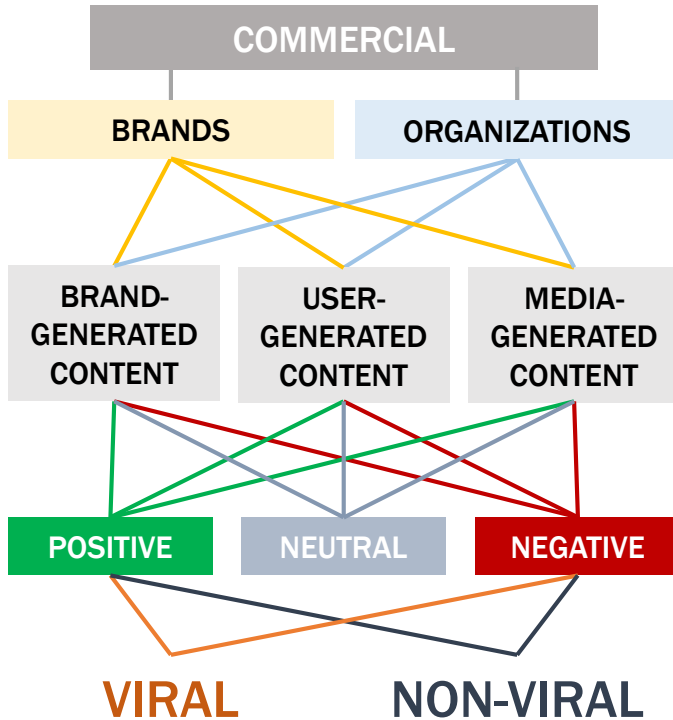#starbucksindonesia
155,070 posts

#pinkvoicestarbucks
637 posts

Starbucks drinks are always presentable. In the words of the Internet, they are *"insta-worthy"*. Apart from the aesthetics of the drink itself, Starbucks adjusts their cup decor according to the season. Its seasonal and campaign-related crafts tend to spark social conversations.

Picture Source: Instagram
(#starbucksindonesia, #pinkvoicestarbucks)
Data Extracted on: 4 Apr 2019

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BRANDS SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH VIRALITY. HERE'S WHY.

BRAND REPUTATIONS ARE AT STAKE

COMMERCIAL

BRANDS **ORGANIZATIONS**

BRAND-GENERATED CONTENT **USER-GENERATED CONTENT** **MEDIA-GENERATED CONTENT**

POSITIVE **NEUTRAL** **NEGATIVE**

VIRAL **NON-VIRAL**

Content surrounding brands and organizations are generally classified in 3 categories: Brand-generated content, user-generated content, or media-generated content (content generated by media or news outlets as entertainment value was derived in certain information).

For content, reactions can be categorised as positive, neutral, or negative. Content that goes viral are usually positive or negative instead of neutral, since high-arousal emotions evoke sharability and neutrality does not qualify as high-arousal.

OPTIMAL FOR BRANDS:

OWNED MEDIA	Create content that is capable of garnering positive responses from the audience and has the potential to go viral.
EARNED MEDIA	Earned media is essentially free. If a company has been positively featured by media outlets, it acts as a bonus to the company.

WHAT BRANDS SHOULD AVOID:

OWNED MEDIA	Wasting resources to generate content that do not gain traction nor contribute to the company's Return on Investment in any way.
EARNED MEDIA	Negative publicity, regardless of virality – Not all publicity is good publicity as negative publicity can have long-term consequences.

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THE KNOW-HOWS

TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE PUBLICITY:

INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF VIRALITY	The list of elements mentioned in this paper is not an exhaustive list. Elements of virality generally stem from consumer psychology. Knowing how consumers read and behave is highly beneficial in crafting effective and hopefully, viral content, since curators will be aiming to hit psychology soft spots.
SPOT TRENDS	Popular topics often enjoy increasing popularity as initial interest shown in a particular subject matter results in publicity, gathering curious crowds, who in turn draw even more audience. Hence, brands need to master the art and science of spotting trends to increase the chances of inducing virality.

TO PREVENT NEGATIVE PUBLICITY:

MEDIA MONITORING	When there are early signs of negative sentiments towards the company (e.g. rise of negative chatter), cause of chatter and dominant conversation themes can be identified by media monitoring. Early detection buys companies some time to put out the fire before it becomes viral and cripples their reputations.
MANAGE REPUTATION & CRISES	What if negative virality has already taken place? Apart from addressing the root issues, companies have to assess and take practical steps to ensure that this short-term negative virality does not roll over into long-term reputational damage.

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VIRALITY: IT CAN *MAKE* OR *BREAK* YOUR REPUTATION.

Go viral for the right and good reasons.

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Thank you.

To find out how else Isentia can value-add to your brand's marketing and communications strategy, please contact:

Isentia Singapore
t. +65 6593 9888
e. singapore@isentia.com

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