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How to create Viral content?

The advantage of Virality and Viral Marketing strategies to help spread one’s message

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The key purpose for the thesis research was to understand the importance of Virality and Viral Marketing concepts. Understanding the topic will assist businesses and individuals to realise the countless opportunities that arise from the rapid, organic spread of one’s ideas. This will eventually open new possibilities for marketers to spread their message to a larger audience.

The research is based on the secondary data resources applying the Viral theories to the real-life case examples which have gone viral for a reason or another – the cases are analysed and discussed in the end.

The research revealed that virality can be created both offline, though Word-of-Mouth, and online, through digital Viral Marketing. Viral content creates emotion, includes a remarkable information and delivers practical value to the receiver – amongst other contents depending on the message in question. When the viral message takes off online, it will be rather cost effective for a marketer compared to more traditional marketing methods. The interest in the thesis topic arose from the author’s personal interest into what makes some contents highly attractive for larger public. The opportunity that some brand, product, service or an idea can reach massive audiences in short time period of time is significant and should not to be underestimated.

Whatever the willingness to have one’s message disseminated, the author recommends getting familiar with the psychological factors influencing people’s minds and shaping their Consumer Behaviour. In addition, the author recommends using Viral Marketing as an integrated part of the marketing strategy rather than isolated approach. This way viral can increase both brand advocacy and improve brand awareness within mass-markets. It is also recommended to carry a further qualitative primary data research by interviewing digital marketing experts in the future in order to deepen the understanding of viral strategies used in the field of marketing.

**Keywords**
- Virality
- Viral Marketing
- Viral content
- Digital Marketing
- Word-of-Mouth
- Psychological factors
- Consumer Behaviour
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1 Introduction

When thinking about the nature of virality one might think message’s speedy spread through the Internet. That is not the only way to create it, virality is not a topic only brought by a digital media. People have been communicating verbally throughout centuries and Word-of-Mouth has been the most important source to learn what has been happening in one’s closest community and environment. Today, indisputably, the Internet has enabled the wild fire -like world wide spread for the viral message. The relevance of the topic in a globalised world is important. With the open market anyone have an opportunity to become an entrepreneur with an international customer base. As a phenomenon, virality enables to try out different digital viral marketing strategies to get the best possible outcome to spread one’s message to a vast audience. Businesses does not have to depend on the customer base within one’s national borders, although, viral can happen locally as well.

Every now and then one sees individuals becoming fast viral due to some entertaining video in social media, for example. Realising that, many businesses are trying to achieve the same visibility, although, many failing because of the lack of knowledge. In this thesis the author provides different viral theories and viral marketing strategies to help the businesses – and why not the individuals as well – to become familiar with the characteristics of viral content creation. With the guidance of the main thesis questions 1) how to create Viral content, and 2) how to take the advantage of Viral strategies to spread one’s message, the research drills into virality topics to look for an answer. Central characteristics are opened to be able to understand the larger picture around the topic. The author takes a closer look on how Social and Psychological characteristics are influencing on individuals and that way, have an influence on the overall Consumer Behaviour. As social influences spread through communication, Word-of-Mouth phenomenon is strongly linked into the thesis topic of virality as it is the most basic form of human communication.

Today the technical appliances are affecting the way how people are communicating. As viral messages usually spread the fastest online, one must get familiar with digital marketing, what it is and what characteristics distinct it from the traditional marketing. Later in the thesis, viral theories and viral marketing strategies are opened in more depth.
The overall topic of Virality will be defined and then developed with the help of famous researchers Malcolm Gladwell and Jonah Berger. Gladwell offers his understanding on the type of people who are in a key role for spreading the viral message. Berger categorises his views on viral content creation and proposes applicable characteristics on producing the best environment for a viral message. After, the author takes a closer look on how a viral can be commercialised in the form of Viral Marketing. Justin Kirby and Dr. Ralph F. Wilson offer their views on how viral marketing tools could be used to serve the marketers' best interest.

In the later part, findings of the research are presented, analysed and applied with the help of thoughtfully picked case studies. These cases will help the reader to recognise the practical elements of the viral theories, provide depth to the bigger picture, and hopefully, strengthening one’s understanding on the viral.

2 Literature Review

In order to understand what viral content is and what makes content to be shared and distributed by others, it is first important to understand the basics of marketing and creating content for an audience. In the theoretical part of the thesis, basics of Marketing theory will be discussed before diving deeper into the subject of virality.

Once the theoretical part is completed, the reader should have an improved understanding on how viral marketing could be used as a tool for spreading one’s message and gaining awareness for a brand, product, service or an idea – amongst the other objectives.

2.1 Marketing

Before going deeper into the thesis subject, it is relevant to clarify the basic principles of Marketing. Many people think marketing as selling and advertising, but they are only tiny pieces of the bigger and more complex Marketing theory. Authors Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (2014) highlight in their book Principles of Marketing that the main principle for business existing should be creating customer value and building profitable relationship with customers. The core of this principle is that one should understand the customer’s wants and needs, define its targeted markets, build persuasive value
propositions in which the business is able to grow and attract more potential customers. Kotler and Armstrong continue that if business is able to harness the value that the customer wants and needs, it is gaining back the value from customers in the form of sold products, services and the generated profits from them. Also, by giving the customers more than they were expecting to receive by investing their money into a specific company's outputs, customer loyalty builds up and generate profits in a long run. Thus, the Simple Model of the Marketing Process is both creating value for customers and capturing value from customers. (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014, p. 16-17)

People have needs which are driven by physical, social and individual characteristics, and wants which are formed from both cultural and individual personality. Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 28) define that, together with purchase power, wants become demands. People are demanding more value for their money which adds up to customer satisfaction. Businesses have market offerings which are defined as physical products and intangible services, such as banking and hospitality, to match with the needs and wants from customer demand. Demands come with expectations. Marketers must be cautious when setting up expectations as they have to deliver these expectations and satisfy the customer. If they fail, current customers may be satisfied but the larger audience is not captured. If they succeed and even exceed customer expectations, current customers are satisfied and most probably tell others about their positive customer experience. This will lead into attracting more customers for one's offerings and building new customer relationships while strengthening customer loyalty with current clients. Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 29) define these relationships as exchange: customers want value for their involvement, for example the money they invested, or to giving a vote for the political candidate. Marketer entities’ - whether they are businesses or non-profit organisations - key action is to be able to create, sustain and cultivate desirable exchange relationships with target audiences. (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014, p. 28-29)

Value is not only created when facing the customer, but it is built in the product or service during the value chain process. Suppliers and dealers are defining their standards and pricing when companies are buying their services, logistical arrangements affect the quality and time how products are manufactured. Marketing is making this value visible to customers and in the end, the salesforce is delivering the message of the end product or service to the customer. (Kotler, 2003, p. 70) Above mentioned selling and advertising are parts of the larger Marketing Mix, a set of tools which work together to help marketers
and business makers to implement their marketing strategies. Marketing Mix tools are separated into groups called *Four P*s, meaning the four controllable elements which marketer can affect. Firstly, the firm must create a *Product* which satisfies the customer need, secondly, they must define the *Price* for this offering, thirdly, define the *Place* to make the offering available for targeted audience and finally, the firm must communicate the created offering for the audience they have targeted through *Promotion*. (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014, p. 34) In the following Figure 1, one can see how the overall Marketing Strategy is managed around the Customer value creation and relationships, including the Marketing Mix.

![Marketing strategy and Marketing Mix](image)

Figure 1. Marketing strategy and Marketing Mix. (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014, p. 74)

George Silverman (2001) argues marketing is frequently thought to be fundamentally "sleazy" but according to him, it is one of the noblest of occupations. As Kotler and Armstrong, Silverman underlines how firms should take pride in the value they have created and be enthusiastic about their offerings. He continues how firms should think they are doing a favour for their customer by offering great-valued products and services, and he encourages them to think that the customer is doing himself a favour by purchasing the offering. When thinking about marketing messages, Silverman recommends firms to highlight the interesting features about their offerings, the features
which make people talk about them and spread the message of created value. (Silverman, 2001, p. 193-194)

As noted earlier, marketing is about creating value and that value is created for consumers. Marketers spend time understand customers and their behaviour in order to identify and provide value. The studies of consumers and their decision making is known as consumer behaviour.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour

According to Kotler (2014), the most significant component of the marketplace is the customers. Around the world, consumers vary drastically in age, income, education background and taste. In their book, Kotler and Armstrong are explaining that Consumer Buyer Behaviour means individuals and households who are buying goods and services for their personal consumption, and together they form the Consumer Market. When looking at the world through the glasses of a marketer, in addition to understanding what, where, when, how and how much customers are buying, one must understand why customers think and act the way they do. The first five questions are rather easy for marketers to locate and learn, but answering the last why is never simple, yet vital for Marketing Management to understand. The answers are in the minds of consumers, and it may be complicated for even themselves to tell specifically why they are behaving in the way they are, and which have eventually been the influencing factors for their purchase behaviour. Buyer Decision Process consists of five different stages presented in the following Figure 2. First, consumer recognises the need of purchasing something, followed by the searching the information and evaluating different alternatives. After weighing the options, consumer makes the decision followed by post purchase behaviour of either being satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 156-158, 176)

![Figure 2. Buyer Decision Process. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 176)](image)

Kotler and Armstrong (2014) also present The Model of Buyer Behaviour which consists of three major forces (see Figure 3 below). The first force is environmental factors, including Marketing Stimuli which contains the earlier mentioned four P’s – Product,
Price, Place and Promotion. Accompanied by Marketing Stimuli, there are also economic, technological, social and cultural factors which are affecting the environment the consumer is living in. These factors are diffused into the Buyer’s Black Box which forms the second force. In black box state, the consumer’s mind is doing the invisible work of thinking which is affected by two elements. Buyer’s personal characteristics influence on how one is reacting the Marketing Stimuli, and Buyer’s Decision Process will affect how one behaves in the end. When leaving the Buyer’s Black Box these factors are formed into Buyer Responses which makes the final force of the buyer behaviour. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 159)

Figure 3. The Model of Buyer Behaviour process. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 159)

Kotler and Armstrong are defining four major characteristics which are strongly persuading the consumer behaviour: cultural, social, personal and psychological. Unlike the controllable P’s, these are the characteristics which marketers cannot influence but they can help themselves by taking these factors into account when designing overall marketing strategy. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 159)

When thinking about the topic of virality and viral marketing, the author of the thesis has decided to concentrate on understanding more the social and psychological factors influencing the consumer behaviour as they are the most relevant for the subject. Virality means the rapid spread of ideas and messages either offline - by speaking to people through Word-of-Mouth - or online – forwarding content in the Internet. With commercial content virality becomes Viral Marketing which can be used for different goals, such as creating brand awareness. To be able to understand the concept fully, one must first understand the underlying factors affecting to human behaviour.

2.2.1 Social characteristics
There are three main Social Characteristics which are influencing consumer behaviour. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2014) these are divided as small groups, family and social roles & status. For the topic of virality, the most important of these is the group influence. Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 162-163) are defining that group is formed by two or more persons who are interacting for reaching personal or mutual goals. They continue to clarify two different group-types; there are groups to where person belongs and which influence is strong, these groups are called membership groups; reference groups on the other hand are the ones to which person does not belong but would want to belong. Reference groups are showing the lifestyle or new kind of behaviour which person would like to own and for this reason, the consumer is influenced by this group. How important group influence is varies depending on which brand or which product is in question, but it tend to be the most effective when the product is visible for others whom the buyer look up to. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p.162-163)

In his book *Understanding Social Networks*, Charles Kadushin (2012, p. 148) states that unlike recent research in social networks applied to epidemiology, groups may have more effective influence on people rather than single individuals. Also, according to three sociologists, James Coleman (1961) as well as Noah Friedkin and Karen Cook (1990, p. 122-143), the study of peer group influence amongst young adolescents is measured to be a key factor on how attitudes, information or fashion spread; it overcomes or even contrasts with the information coming from parents or school. These statements argue with Gladwell’s (2001) model of The Law of the Few as well as individual’s influence on starting epidemics which the author tackles on better later in the theoretical part of this thesis.

When discussing more about social characteristics influencing on consumer behaviour, highly relevant to this thesis topic and virality in the is the concept of Word-of-Mouth influence. Word-of-Mouth is basic form of spoken communication. People want to share and speak about their experiences in good and bad. Personal recommendation is the most influencing word compared to the recommendations from marketers. Word-of-Mouth is effective for its easiness. Sharing experiences about a brand or a product happens naturally when chatting with like-minded people. Brands, or especially the marketing people working for these brands, which are exposed to heavy group influence, must recognise the opinion leaders. They are the persons in the reference group whose word the larger audience is trusting and who they are looking up to. According to Kotler, these opinion leaders are known as the influentials, by some experts. *Buzz marketing* is
a concept of turning opinion leaders into some sort of brand-ambassadors to create the buzz to help to spread the word of their products further. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 163)

When getting familiar with different forms of groups, Online Social Networks are communities which provide the platform for people to socialise or exchange knowledge and opinions. Media forms for social networking ranges from blogs to social networking Websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 164) Kadushin (2012, p. 146) explains how networks like Facebook are creating virtual peer groups especially amongst teenagers. When marketing through online networks, marketers should remember that, in the end, the users control the created content in these social networks. Marketers must stay alert with their campaigns and the content concerning their brands as the consumer generated content might backfire for unintended reasons.

The final social characteristic which is affecting to buying behaviour, Kotler and Armstrong define roles and status. They vary in different groups. Taking an example of a working mother; she may be a human resources manager at the office, a mother and a wife at home and a soccer coach at her free time. All of these roles put her in different kind of positions when analysing her buying behaviour: as an office worker she buys formal clothing suitable to her status at work, and as a sports coach she wears soccer shoes in her free time. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 164-167) This point is relevant for the thesis subject of virality as these people who move in between different social groups are in a key role at Gladwell’s The Law of the Few theory which is introduced more in depth in the chapter 2.5.1 on page 15.

2.2.2 Psychological characteristics

Social characteristics in human lives influence the way people think and feel. Psychological characteristics are significantly related to the topic of virality as the human mind creates the thoughts and opinions which people want usually to share with others. They are divided to four parts: Motivation, Perception, Learning and Beliefs & Attitudes. In this chapter these attributes are opened more in detail respectively. Humans have many needs at the same time. There are biological needs such as hunger, thirst or discomfort, and personal needs as to be loved or gaining more self-esteem. Kotler and Armstrong imply that the level of intensity divides a regular need from a motivation. After a person becomes pushed by motive or drive to satisfy one’s need, the action can be
described as *motivation*. When applied to marketing and context of consumer analysis, psychologist Sigmund Freud’s famous theory on human motivation suggest, that people are mostly unconscious about the actual psychological forces forming their actions and behaviour. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 171)

In their book *Psychology of Marketing* Raab et al. (2010) present the usefulness of psychological theories when put into a business context. According to them it is important to use cross-scientific theories to fully understand consumer’s behaviour in the market. Raab et al. portrays one of the most famous motivational theories coming from psychologist Abraham Maslow who published *The Theory of Human Motivation* in 1943. In his paper, Maslow explains that people are motivated by specific needs at particular times. Maslow arranges the needs in a five-level hierarchy pyramid where the most pressing need is at the bottom, *physiological needs*, followed by *safety, social and esteem needs*, culminating in the least pressing need of *self-actualisation*. (Raab et al. 2010, p. 209-210) According to Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*, humans are driven by the need which is most urgent for them at that particular moment. For example, starving people are interested only to fulfil their physiological need to get food and not caring about the safety needs, but when the first need or hunger is satisfied, people move to seek to fulfil their second most pressing need of safety. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 172)

Taking the psychological perspective into the concept, the very key part of online social networks’ success is their capability to offer a channel for individuals to meet their basic and diverse needs (Pozzi, et al. 2017 p. 18). Different motivational needs, such as need for belonging is one of the main drivers which social networks are able to satisfy, people want to feel socially accepted (Leary, et al. 2001). Also, the need for cognition drives people to use social networks. People seek information and engage through social networks, but the strength of willingness to satisfy the cognitive need varies between individuals. (Pozzi, et al. 2017, p. 19) A study has proven that cognitive need is influencing different variables such as attitudes and intentions to purchase something and is this affects consumer behaviour, also on the Web (Das, et al. 2003, p. 185-202). Self-presentation through social networks has become easy and is an effective way for individuals to control their image online. This satisfies the individual need on impression management. (Pozzi, et al. 2017, p. 19)
Another powerful psychological characteristic affecting consumer behaviour is *Perception*, the process where people select, arrange and interpret the received information in order to be able to form a meaningful picture of the surrounding world. As human minds are different, individual perceptions of the world are as different. Kotler and Armstrong (2014) divide the perceptions to three different categories: selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention. People are exposed to thousands of advertising messages every day. *Selective attention* means that individuals screen out most of the information which is coming into their awareness – meaning, it is very hard to catch the customer’s attention with a marketing message. *Selective distortion* means people will take notice only on the information which supports what they already believe in, the rest of the information tends to forget. *Selective retention* means that consumer is likely to remember good points about one’s favourite brand or a product and forget the good qualities of the similar competitive product. These perceptions are making it hard for marketers to dive through the net of different perceptions and make a difference. Also, viral marketing strategies are taking advantage on human perception. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 172-173)

When continuing to define psychological characteristics affecting to consumer behaviour, *learning* is defined as changes in human behaviour which arise from a life lived and experiences gone through. According to learning theorists, most of the human behaviour is learned. Kotler and Armstrong (2010, p. 173) argue learning occur from the play of different *drives, stimuli, cues, responses and reinforcement*. Through doing and learning new things, individuals gain *attitudes* and *beliefs*. These are factors forming their buying behaviour. *Belief* is a graphic thought an individual has about something and is explained to be based on either knowledge, personal opinion, one’s faith or carry non-emotional explanation. Marketers want to know what these beliefs are and whether they are based on the right information about the brand or a product, and if not, they are willing to launch a campaign to form consumer beliefs more into direction of favourable buyer behaviour. *Attitudes* are individuals’ consistent assessments, feelings and aspirations about an object or an idea. Attitudes are hard to change as they fit into an individual’s set of different attitudes; if a person tries to change one, it might not be in alignment with another, and for this reason, the overall attitude is unlikely to change. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010, 173-174) Raab (et al. 2010) adds *values* and *prejudices* to the list of perceived attitudes shaping the buying behaviour. *Values* are particularly central presumptions for an individual. Everyone has several values, such as *healthy life*, which are driving their behaviour. *Prejudices* are presumptions which tend to stick in human
mind even though individual would face clearly contradictory perception. As attitudes, both prejudices and values are tremendously resistant to change. (Raab et al. 2010 p. 21-22)

As long as marketing messages are trying to influence on buyer behaviour, marketers must take these mental factors into account when designing marketing campaigns. The more engaging the message would be, hence, the more it is influencing us psychologically, the more willingly people want to talk about it. In the next section one of the earliest forms of virality is introduced.

2.3 Word-of-Mouth phenomena

As has been reviewed, people are social and want to share experiences and information with each other. According to Rui (et al. 2010) Word-of-Mouth phenomena is the oldest and most important mode of changing information between people; the word has been defined first time in 1533 in *Oxford English Dictionary*. It has been a way to spread the news between people. Even today, the people living in very small rural areas, use the Word-of-Mouth as their main source of local news. (Owen, 2016) In their book *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in the Marketing Context*, Ismagilova et al. (2017) argue that Word-of-Mouth communications are more important in developing countries, or in the areas where news media is less prominent.

When looking at *Marketing and communications* based literature, according to Greg Nyilasy (2006), the context refers only to interpersonal communication about commercial objects. He argues that Word-of-Mouth phenomena consist of three vital parts: 1) interpersonal communication distinguished from mass communication such as advertising and other diverse social channels; 2) communication about commercial content; 3) communicators not commercially motivated, at least by receiver’s perception. So, while in everyday language Word-of-Mouth can be used for any sort of social communication between individuals, in Marketing environment the definition is used only for interpersonal communication about commercial content, meaning, conversations about products, product categories or brands. Also, it is important that the conversation counterparts are not commercially driven, leaving the content of the discussion unbiased. So, compressed by Nyilasy, in Marketing context the Word-of-Mouth’s content is commercial but perceived to be non-commercial. (Nyilasy, 2006, p. 161-184)
As the topic of Word-of-Mouth continues to intrigue researchers, the definitions are constantly developing. For example, Webster (1970, p. 186) has defined the concept as “interpersonal communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a product or a service”. Bone has suggested at the beginning of 1990’s that Word-of-Mouth is “an exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source” (Bone, 1992, p. 579). The more current definition by Litvin et al. (2008, p. 459) states that the concept is “the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence”. Despite the different definitions, researchers fairly agree that Word-of-Mouth is made up of oral interpersonal communication (Nyilasy, 2006).

When defining the characteristics of Word-of-Mouth communications, both Chiosa (2014, p. 37-42) as well as Tabbane and Debabi (2015, p. 1-27) are stating that they can be characterised by Valence, Focus, Timing, Solicitation, Degree of management intervention and by credibility. Based on diverse descriptions, Ismagilova et al. (2017, p. 7) are updating the topic with the most recent definition by proposing their version of Word-of-Mouth being “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, service or organisation”.

When concluding the main points of Word-of-Mouth, Ismagilova et al. (2017) are arguing that it is a more effective form of communication than old-style mass media messages and through that, it can have an influence on consumer behaviour. The way it mostly affects people can be attitude changes, increased brand awareness and possible intention to purchase a product or service in question. Ismagilova et al. (2017) present that one of the main reasons why consumers are seeking Word-of-Mouth when purchasing products, is reduced risk. A good example of this are consumer reviews which have influence in purchase decisions: people share their opinions through Word-of-Mouth when they are either satisfied or dissatisfied with a product or a service of which they have experience. Especially, when purchasing services, these reviews are paid attention. Communicator’s characteristics, receiver’s expertise and the strength of the tie between them are the factors on which the effectiveness of Word-of-Mouth is depending. (Ismagilova et al., 2017, p. 13)
In their book, Ismagilova et al. (2017, p. 17-18) are also presenting a term of *eWOM* – *Electronic Word-of-Mouth* – which differs from the traditional definition that the conversations about brands or products have been communicated through the Internet.

### 2.4 Digital Marketing

Nowadays people are spending more and more time online. The rapid growth of digital technologies has essentially changed the way people live, communicate, shop, learn and share information in general. Digital technologies have a massive impact on different possibilities how the companies bring value for their customers. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 45) Thus, the field of *digital marketing* is constantly growing and developing. The need for digital application continues to spread into organisation processes and tactics. The term digital marketing is referring to marketing activities applied through diverse digital channels as websites, social media networks, email, search engines and mobile applications. (Kingsnorth, 2016, p. 6) When referring to the term, the author of the thesis is referring to a larger concept of both *digital* and *online* marketing as a whole. Chaffey (2016, p. 11) defines digital marketing simply being marketing objectives achieved by applying different digital technologies and digital media channels.

In his book *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, David Meerman Scott (2010, p. 18) highlights the importance of digital when talking about the difference in meaningful customer reach through mainstream and online: “*Marketers must shift their thinking from the short head of mainstream marketing to the masses to a strategy of targeting vast numbers of underserved audiences via the Web*”. As digital revolution and Internet usage is a vital part of the everyday life both on personal- and on professional level, more and more organisations are re-building their own marketing departments adding teams completely devoted to digital marketing strategies in order to gain the benefit from the new technologies. Technology growth is also affecting the number of websites available. Kingsnorth (2016, p. 6) states that nearly every business is presented globally through the internet; even the niche businesses with very targeted, geographically localised age groups have their own websites which offers them an opportunity to increase their customer reach through online. Due to the amount of technology available, similarly the level of available analytic tools is much vaster when compared to 15 years ago. Today’s businesses are much more likely to gain accurate data content on real time of how their products are selling or how effectively the marketing campaigns are affecting on a consumer level. Through this data, digital marketers are much more agile to offer tailored
services to fulfil the individual customer needs. They are much faster to make necessary changes to the data metrics or to marketing strategies in order to gain higher engagement, healthier sales conversion and due that, to gain a greater revenue for their products or services. (Kingsnorth, 2016, p. 6)

Touchscreens are widely available across each digital device. Smartphones and tablets are common in digital market and the spread of different applications have massively increased. These, together with Smart TVs and different Bluetooth operated services, have brought along another level of new business opportunities as well as opened competition. Understanding of the marketing models and their strategic application to digital technology, gives organisations the basis to start designing their wider marketing strategy. Kingsnorth (2016) emphasises how important it is for companies to include digital marketing as an integral part of marketing strategies as a whole; no more just an add-on marketing channel, digital marketing encompasses the whole marketing mix, including creative direction, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Public Relations (PR), brand, product, development, pricing, proposition and communication. (Kingsnorth, 2016, p. 7)

Digital shift has affected companies’ control over their content available online. Marketers can no longer control the discussions about their brands and products. Once a customer sees an advertisement or any brand-related content produced for marketing purposes, they can take the link and share it with their acquaintances. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 47) This again is a vital part of the thesis topic as, according to Kirby (2004), when the word-of-mouth spreads digital it becomes Word-of Mouse. Once being in digital format, the message can potentially lead to a viral, if conditions are favourable.

2.5 Virality

When defining virality, one famous view on it comes from Malcolm Gladwell (2001) where he equates the concept with epidemic spread: just as diseases spread, so can the viral message. He has written a book The Tipping Point where he proposes theories for “how little things can make a big difference” and how the epidemics are created in the world of word-of-mouth. A tipping point occurs when an idea, product or any kind of message or information appears to take off and starting to spread on its own. Gladwell’s theory includes The Three Rules of Epidemics, which are: 1) The Law of the Few, 2) The Stickiness Factor, and 3) The Power of Context. He argues that when an epidemic tips
out of symmetry, a change has happened in at least one, if not in every, of those three areas. He categorises social epidemics having the similar structure to how diseases like AIDS or HIV are spreading. According to Gladwell's theory of The Law of the Few, all these epidemics are driven by a few exceptional people. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 18-25)

Also, Jonah Berger (2014) perceives virality can be well explained through a spread of a virus, something that catches on, something that is contagious. Although, Berger highlights the main difference in the virus’ and social epidemic’s transmission process is the length. Diseases spread from person to person, and from them to yet another few new people, continuing on their own until a large number of people have been infected. When clarifying the idea about virality, one cannot, according to Berger, expect our ideas to spread from person to person automatically. Though, his theory STEPPS about contagiousness provides tools which help people to be more active on spreading knowledge, ideas or information of the new product they have stumbled on. (Berger, 2014 p. 6-7)

Kadushin (2012) has studied social networks and how they tend to be contagious. In his book he opens how people get influenced on both wanted and unwanted flows through networks. As Gladwell (2001) and Berger (2014) compares virality to an epidemic, Christakis' and Fowler's (2007, p. 370-379) study demonstrates the fact that also a physical quality as obesity can be an epidemic too: in their study researchers found that obese people are socially connected with other obese people. Kadushin states that in addition to psychological characteristics, people are also physically influenced by one another. He gives the examples of both obesity – a bad quality – and non-smoking – a good quality – and explains how these attributes tend to be contagious, spreading under the laws of virality, within social networks. (Kadushin, 2012, p. 8-9)

Virality in short, as any contagious epidemic, accelerates the spread within minimum time (Berger, 2014). Well-known Pareto principle, also known as 80/20 principle, often spoken by economists’ states: 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. Similarly, in his book Tipping Point, Gladwell introduces that there are few exceptional people who are in a key role when starting a word-of-mouth epidemic. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 18-19)

2.5.1 Gladwell’s Law of the Few: Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen
Gladwell’s *Law of the Few* characterises three different personalities - Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen - which are detailed and defined in this chapter respectively (see Figure 4).

Connectors have extraordinary social gifts. They are people who have natural gift of connecting with diverse people from every walks of life. Gladwell (2001, p. 45) argues these people collect connections like some people might collect stamps. Although, the networks created by connectors are often rather shallow. Gladwell describes these network contacts as “weak ties”, friendly yet casual connections contacted every now and then without a purpose of deepening the relationship, a concept originally presented by Mark Granovetter (1973, p. 1360-1380). Gladwell portrays the idea of Small-world Problem, originally discovered by the psychologist Stanley Milgram (1967, p. 62-67) in his *Psychology Today* article. Small-world problem explains how people are linked with each other through only few connections - also known as Six Degrees of Separation (Milgram, 1967). The concept does not mean that every people would be linked to the rest of the world through six people they know, it means people are linked to a very few exceptional ones who are linked with the rest of the world through six steps, and this makes everyone to be linked with the world through those exceptional few. Thereby, weak ties make the most important connections as they are outside from individual’s every-day social circles. Connectors move up and down, back and forth in all niches and subcultures and for this social movement, they can bind separate worlds into one. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 33-54)
Mavens, as Gladwell describes, are obsessed with gathering knowledge. They read more than rest of us, know things rest of us do not know, and they are willing to help. Information can be about products, prices or places, and once mavens have the knowledge, they want everyone else to know about it too. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 60-67) The major difference between a Connector and Maven is particularly a high willingness to help people with their decision making. As Gladwell explains, if a Connector would give a group of people advice or a recommendation, maybe few would take it and try it out. Whereas if a Maven will give the same advice, he would describe his recommendation in detail and justify why it is worth it to consider this option; due to his stronger message and genuine willingness to help, probably everyone would take the advice and implement it. Maven’s recommendations arise from innocently unselfish reasons and they are to be gathered in their brains during the years of genuine interest to learning something new about the market around them. For this reason, people are more willing to take a maven’s advice over some expert’s advice, because it appears to have arisen purely from the maven’s social need to be able to help everyone. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 69-70)

Whereas Mavens are human databases and Connectors social glue between everyone, there is still one last type of a persona from Gladwell’s theory to be described. Salesmen, as Gladwell argues, have remarkably persuasive personalities. They pursue the energy and charm which leaves the rest of us standing. Salesmen have the power of positive thinking which helps them to see less obstacles and more opportunities. There is more behind Salesmen’ way to convince people than just that: surrounded by positive thinking, likewise their non-verbal signals are highly potential to be upbeat as well - smiling while speaking has been found highly persuasive. Also, a physical movement as nodding while watching a commercial from a television, might lead the viewers’ opinion about the advertised product to be more positive compared to when watching without nodding. In communication, non-verbal cues are as important, or even more, than verbal cues. When two people are talking, Gladwell states it could be described as dancing. Participants’ micromovements are synchronised while speech rates are in harmony with each other. Correspondingly, as great speakers lead the conversation, they can sense when audience is with them and listening, and when not – although, latter would unlikely to be happen since talented speakers are great at engaging with their listeners. Salesmen are great speakers. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 71-83)

When describing Salesmen, Gladwell supports his concept with the theory from the 1994 book Emotional Contagion by two psychologists Elaine Hatfield and John Cacioppo.
They characterise *motor mimicry* which means to mimic the emotional state of the other person. Since motor mimicry exists, that means emotions are highly contagious. Emotions are usually perceived going from inside-out, but since *emotional contagion*, emotions are absorbed also from *outside-in*. The people with more charismatic nature are *senders* whose emotions are more contagious towards the rest of the crowd. Gladwell argues that only a charismatic person infects the other. If a person lacks charisma, he is not able to forward his emotional state to the other person, thus, the emotional contagiousness flows only from senders to receivers. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 84-85)

In his book, Gladwell argues the number one rule to take from his book *Tipping Point* is that only *Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen* are responsible of starting a word-of-mouth epidemic. When planning and preparing a marketing campaign, marketer should remember to concentrate on those three. Gladwell adds that even though “Band-Aid” solutions are often thought to be secondary options and thus dismissed, according to him, they are worth implementing. The idea behind Band-Aid problem-solving is putting in minimum efforts, while trying to save time and cost. Band-Aids make a lot out of a little, and that is the critical *Tipping Point*. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 255-258)

The second lesson to be taken from Tipping Point is that one should test one’s intuitions. It is rarely the first or the second time when an epidemic tips, but as Gladwell puts it, the change is possible. People are strongly influenced by their surroundings and other people around us. Our natures are volatile. For this reason, also the social change is as unstable as it is and hard to predict. When searching for the crucial *Tipping Point* can be difficult, there is a lot of hopefulness as well. Tipping Point lies in the power of one intelligent action: one just must find the right, *extraordinary* people who can lead your message and start the word-of-mouth epidemic. (Gladwell, 2001, p. 255-258)

Even though Gladwell’s theory about the tipping point’s epidemiologic spread has been largely popularised, there are critics who argue his theory lacks proof. Kadushin (2012, p. 153) states Gladwell does not offer a mathematical formula to define a tipping point. Despite that Gladwell’s theory notices the factors of *influence* – to receive the idea - and *contagion* – to spread the idea further, Kadushin argues that concept lacks third important factor: *resistance to change, adoption or disease*. On Kadushin’s point of view the third factor is so important - and maybe even too *obvious* as it has been unmentioned
from Gladwell’s definition - is that influence happens only when contagion overcomes resistance. In his book Kadushin explains:

Yes, there are tipping points, but we do not know what they are until after they have happened. We can see what happens, for example, if we stop intervention. But the tipping point model does not tell us when to stop the intervention. We would have to have done the field work or the research in advance before we could set parameters to predict what eventually happened. (Kadushin, 2012, p. 155)

René Thom’s *Catastrophe Theory* from 1972 may in fact offer a way of mathematically modelling a tipping point. Zeeman (1976) compresses Thom’s theory as follows: “Things that change suddenly, by fits and starts, have long resisted mathematical analysis. Catastrophe theory, a method derived from topology, describes these phenomena as examples of seven ‘elementary catastrophes’”. (Zeeman, 1976, p. 65-66) It might be worth pointing out that Gladwell missed an opportunity here. Even though *Tipping Point* does not have mathematical formula, still, one can take the other features from Gladwell's theory and use them as an advantage when creating on viral message.

On this point of the theoretical part, the reader should have already a hunch what virality is and what sort of personalities are potential to spread one’s message further, but when speaking about the content of a viral, the next chapter will open it in more depth.

### 2.5.2 Berger’s STEPPS approach to viral content creation

In his book *Contagious* Jonah Berger (2014) has been answering questions of what makes content go viral in the digital age and what makes people talk about some products, ideas or services more than others. He introduces six different ways of how viral content is created: 1) by offering **Social currency**, 2) attaching the idea of a certain product into **Triggers**, 3) including **Emotion** to one’s message, 4) making the private **Public**, 5) seeing there is **Practical value** in one’s idea, and finally, 6) gathering all this potentially viral content into a format of **Stories**. Altogether, these content features form into an approach which Berger calls **STEPPS**. (Berger, 2014) In this section, all of these steps are opened more in detail.

**Social Currency**
Starting from the beginning, Berger argues people are willing to share ideas and knowledge which give them Social Currency and make them show in a positive light compared to others. If someone share something interesting, funny or cool within their circle of people, the shared knowledge will make a good impression of the sharer in the eyes of a receiver. Therefore, the shared information gives the sharer new type of social currency. Berger states there should be something remarkable in the idea which makes people wanting to share the knowledge they just heard of. In his book he narrates several stories of business ideas or products which have been shared because of the remarkability factor. Giving an example, Snapple, an American producer of fruit-flavoured drinks, printed different kinds of small facts underneath the bottle caps. When a customer purchases a bottle of Snapple and read a real fact #27, for example, that ball of marble bounces higher when dropped on the ground than a ball of rubber, the customer finds the information so remarkable that he must share it immediately with someone. On the way, he happens to tell where he read this entertaining information from, and so, Snapple’s viral strategy is working as they get people to talk about their products. (Berger, 2014, p. 36-40)

Second type of social currency is deeply rooted into human psychology. Berger familiarises the group of insiders as something people naturally wanting to belong. Insiders are the people with exclusive knowledge compared to others. Exclusivity or scarcity make the knowledge more worthy, which helps the information to catch on and be shared more easily compared to so-called regular or normal everyday knowledge. People with exclusive information become insiders, and when they share the valuable info with others, it will give the sharers, again, positive social currency in the eye of the receivers. (Berger, 2014, p. 51-57) When the knowledge is shared by regular people and not through paid advertisers, Berger explains the knowledge will become more trustworthy and authentic. People are more willing to trust their peers rather than marketeers; free word of mouth is seen more effective than a paid one. (Berger, 2014, p. 59)

Triggers

On Berger’s STEPPS approach, Triggers are introduced as something which makes people remember some idea or a product. Triggers make them want to talk about the product or to act and go buy the product they were just triggered to remember. In his book, Berger (2014, p. 61-70) presents an example of a chocolate bar brand Kit Kat’s
marketing strategy. The brand was willing to give a boost to their sales and their marketing team was thinking how to get people to consider their chocolate bars over the others in the shelf. Kit Kat is known through their slogan of “Have a break, have a Kit Kat”, but having a break was not enough of a trigger for the brand to get customers purchase their product. They came out with the idea of using coffee as a trigger. Brand made several different commercials and catchy advertisements with jingles in radio and published them through different medias. Berger (2014) highlights the more frequent the trigger is, the better the potential for it to deliver the wanted action a brand is willing to receive. The more often ideas are top of our minds, the more often they are on tip of our tongues as well. Coffee is seen and thought frequently year around in everyday life, meaning, there is a huge potential people become triggered to think and talk about Kit Kat every time they see or think a coffee break. The strategy worked. As many people consume cups of coffee per day, Kit Kat got to boost their sales because of using this trigger. (Berger, 2014, p. 81)

In addition to having a catchy trigger, one should consider the strength of the trigger as well. The link between the trigger and the wanted idea or a product should be strong enough to be beneficial enough for the brand. The stronger, more original, unique or fresh the link between two ideas is, the better. Also, to be useful enough for people willing to have their ideas spread, they must think where it is beneficial a customer or a receiver becomes triggered. Taking again the example of Kit Kat: when having a break and going to a kiosk to buy a cup of coffee, the kiosk potentially sells Kit Kat bars – customer is triggered in a right environment. Compared to a weak trigger, for example, every time people see the colour red, they would think the brand Kit Kat. People connect the colour red to love, to danger and to several different brands, so red is much vaguer trigger than the coffee in Kit Kat’s case. (Berger, 2014, p. 86)

**Emotion**

According to Berger, *emotions* lead to action. He brings out the study that he concluded together with his test group where they were collecting articles from the New York Times. After six months and seven thousand articles later, they started to read these articles and analyse them, especially keeping in mind which sort of emotions these articles were raising in them. Then, after categorising, the study group started to investigate the rates how much the articles were shared through email or social media. Berger and his group came into conclusion that contents generating high arousal feelings, whether they are
positive like *awe* or negative like *anger*, are kindling the fire in people and creating a need to share the feeling with someone. In his book *Contagious*, Berger (2014, p. 102-105) pushes forward the idea of that sharing feelings helps people to connect. He puts it well into words, by saying “if we care, we share” (Berger, 2014, p. 109).

**Public**

People imitate their close environment: what kind of people they are surrounded with effects on their behaviour and to their lifestyle. As noted earlier, also Berger (2014, p. 128) claims that a person who lives surrounded by obese people, for example, has hypothetically a higher potential for becoming obese himself. Public visibility affects to human behaviour. The brand Apple took advantage of *observability* when bringing their first iPod into market. By that time, every digital music player had black cords in their headphones, but when iPod was introduced with white headphones, they stood out from the crowd. People were immediately able to spot the users who had switched from an old Walkman into a new more expensive Apple device. Berger (2014, p. 128) implies that this small feature, back then, gave iPod users new kind of *social proof* through visibility.

If one would want people to talk about a cause or an idea which is not physical product and for this reason, impossible to make visible, Berger suggests making the private public. A good example of private cause is the concept of *Movember*, a month-long promotion for raising the awareness of men's health and collecting money for Prostate Cancer Foundations. Participants are sporting a moustache for a month in November and collecting money for a good cause through their Movember Foundation accounts from where the money is directed to the ones in need. Without the moustache-movement it would be hard for people to know about these foundations, but making the private visible, people are triggered to spread the knowledge. When some idea, brand or a product is built to show, it is highly potential to grow as well. (Berger, 2014, p. 138-153)

**Practical Value**

Out of the Berger’s six principles *Practical Value* is the easiest apply, every product has built-in practical value - the reason why they are existing - and the more remarkable the value is, the better. When one sees a video about the exceptionally well performing
product with great practical value, a blender, for example, one wants to forward the video to someone. Practical Value is easy to apply to viral content creation as when sharing the content it gives Social Currency to the sharer by making them show in a good light, while still being useful for the receiver. Berger (2014, p. 178) argues that sharing the practical value is not, though, all about selfish reasons. People want inherently help the other people, there is altruistic reasons behind.

The common reason for sharing practically valued content is prices. People are willing to help their peers to find that incredibly cheap offer of a great product they just saw online or in a local supermarket. The only thing is, that the prices are looked individually from different reference points, which makes every price to be seen differently depending on a person who is looking at it. Berger gets his point across by presenting an example of elderly; the old people remember the cheaper prices from their younger days. For this reason, they have different reference points when considering today’s prices, comparing to younger consumers. (Berger, 2014, p. 164)

**Stories**

Coming to Berger’s last principle on creating viral content, Stories collect every previous STEPPS together, and make its way into a narrated version of word of mouth. In the last chapter of his book Contagious, Berger (2014, p. 179-180) tells a well-known ancient story of a Trojan Horse: how the Greeks built a massive wooden horse and hid their best soldiers inside, and how the Trojans found the abandoned horse from the beach and dragged it into their city of Troy. When the night came and the Trojans were celebrating their victory of the war, the Greek soldiers escaped from the insides of the wooden horse and used the opportunity to take over and destroy the city of Troy completely, making it an end of a decade long Trojan War.

Stories are made for people to share, to catch people's interest and entertain them on the way. They also usually have hidden take-home message built inside them, a life lesson or a moral. Berger proposes making a story for a brand’s own “Trojan Horse” and to use it as a vessel for one’s message. One should include the valuable wanted message - such as idea, brand or a product - in the story and so the information comes along for the ride. He narrates a good example of a story gone viral about an overweight student called Jared Fogle and his successful weight loss by eating Subway sandwiches. In college Jared weighed 193 kilos (425 pounds). Jared’s flatmate was worried about his
friend’s health and recommended Jared to eat in Subway, and so he did; a big vegetarian sub for lunch and a half Turkey sub for dinner, every day, for months. He managed to lose weight altogether 111 kilos (245 pounds). The reason why Jared’s story is a great example of a viral potential, is because it contains various elements of Berger’s six principles: Social Currency as the story is so remarkable, Emotion as it creates awe and Practical Value as it tells the benefits of healthy fast food. In addition, it includes a brand Subway as a necessary element of the story, people must mention it when telling the story further. Although, they are forwarding the great story about Jared, Subway will benefit from the virality as the word spreads. (Berger, 2014, p. 187-189)

In this case the spread word makes sense for the brand and forms it into valuable virality. According to Berger, people, including the marketeers, who want to build word of mouth and get their ideas spread, should always focus on what people are talking about and not only trying to get them talk. Berger advises to make certain the information – for example a brand or a product - wanted to pass through is critical to story’s narrative, otherwise the viral will not gain the valuable visibility to one’s brand. (Berger, 2014, p. 193-201)

After all the six STEPPS of viral content creation are presented, it is good to familiarise on how to take advantage of the created content and make it part to one’s viral marketing strategy, and - in the best scenario – make it financially beneficial for businesses.

2.6 Viral Marketing

People no longer use Internet for only practical purposes such as searching information or shopping online. Due to the development and adoption of available technologies, the demand for online entertainment has been on the rise. Paul Marsden is defining Viral Marketing as “the promotion of a company or its products and services through a persuasive message designed to spread, typically online, from person to person.” As Berger (2014) stated in the chapter 2.5.2, also Marsden explains that the hook behind viral marketing is to provide remarkable content, to surprise, intrigue, to be humorous or delight – thus, being entertaining. This will create conversations and rise opinions in the minds of the receivers, potential target audience, who are willing to spread the message, for example a campaign video, further. If the conversational message is positive, sales are typically boosted. (Kirby and Marsden, 2006)
Marsden presents how the simple financial motivation behind viral-, buzz- and word-of-mouth marketing shows that the campaign buzz is just a means to an end, not the actual end itself. Campaigns generate conversations and those discussions kindle opinion sharing. For a question when viral techniques should be employed, Marsden’s answer is simple: when having a product which delivers an experience which exceeds consumer expectations. Exceeded expectations drive recommendations among consumers, and Word-of-Mouth based recommendations are seen the most trustworthy, hence the most effective, among consumers. Marsden compares the motivation between different marketing techniques by saying that advertising works when having something worth advertising. He finishes by stating that the same could be applied to this topic: viral, buzz and word-of-mouse marketing techniques work when having something worth recommending. (Kirby and Marsden, 2006)

Scott (2010) states that for marketers, one of the most intriguing things about Internet is that when something takes off, it can boost enormous visibility for a brand, or a product, for free. He presses that the key point on Viral Marketing is that someone else is telling your story on behalf of you and most of the times, the phenomena starts innocently, without a commercial motivation. Again, Word-of-Mouth generated content is seen the most effective way to influence on purchase decisions as they are perceived to be unbiased and non-commercial. Usually, when a message takes off and goes viral so that all of a sudden, the whole world seems to be sharing one’s content; for traditional marketing techniques to get an exposure as that, can be worth of tens, or even hundreds, of millions of dollars. (Scott, 2010, p. 93-94)

Consumers have learned to tune out the traditional marketing content on webpages. Kirby (2006) tells that marketers struggle to reach and engage with this marketing-shy, scattered audiences. Viral marketing focuses on creating content where the personal experiences with brands are in the heart of the message, which makes the marketing content look less commercial. Marketing through viral techniques uses the power of the consumers and takes advantage of their connections with other consumers. When used as an integrated part of the marketing strategy rather than isolated approach, viral marketing can increase both brand advocacy and improve brand awareness within mass-markets. The technique can be effectively used to help generate sales through created buzz about any brand or a product. Kirby (2006) reminds that even the most innovative and remarkable products need viral marketing techniques to be able to increase and magnify their expected “buzzworthiness”. Internet is full of wannabe viral
content, so in order to stand out from the crowded clutter, brands must remember to be even more creative and simply more revolutionary with their use of digital media. One of the main advantages of viral marketing is the possibility on ever-increasing Return on Investment (ROI) as they do not have fixed cut-off point for the money invested. Viral marketing campaigns are able to offer accountability as they can be traced, thus computing and providing ROI for the brand marketer. (Kirby and Marsden, 2006, p. 95-104)

As the reader should now be more familiar with the contexts of virality and viral marketing, the author is ready to move forward to the last sub-chapters of the literature review and take a closer look on viral marketing concepts and principles.

2.6.1 Kirby’s Word-of-Mouse phenomena in Viral Marketing

Close to the phenomena of Word-of-Mouth, Justin Kirby (2004, p. 4) sees viral marketing as a concept of *Word-of-Mouse*. He perceives that when there occurs a synthesis between advertised online marketing messages and offline mode of word-of-mouth, *Word-of Mouse* has been created. Kirby argues that going viral does not necessarily mean that one have to have a specific product or a service, accompanied by an incredible *wow-factor*, in order to promote awareness and generate the buzz or a peer-to-peer spread discussion among consumers. Instead, the *form* of an advertisement, for example a video, should be something which consumers enjoy spending time with, and which they want to share with their friends and acquaintances. He perceives that marketers need to utilize an online communication agent – for example the video - which will assist for the equivalent purpose only without the continuous need for marketing efforts. By this, Kirby means that where traditional advertisement needs to *buy* space from online, viral marketing efforts are creating the same space - only without marketing purchases - via consumer generated Word-of-Mouse. (Kirby, 2004, p. 2-4) The Word-of-Mouse concept presented in the following Figure 5.
Figure 5. Kirby’s Word-of-Mouse view on creating virality. (Kirby, 2004, p. 3)

According to Kirby (2004) personal experience should be highlighted as it makes the content of the message more authentic, hence, more effective when delivering information about brand value. Kirby narrates that 21st century word-of-mouth approach marketing tactics are focusing on individual’s experiences about the brand and are driven by individual consumers. He describes that with this sort of a method the information is moving through bottom-up word-of-mouth. The view is different compared to usual top-down information flow which is heavily directed my marketers and at the same time, understating consumer’s personal experience with the brand. (Kirby, 2004, p. 2-3) Word-of-Mouse is one of the views to look viral marketing, and another is presented in the following.

2.6.2 Wilson’s Six Principles of Viral Marketing

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson (2018) has studied Viral Marketing. As Berger (2014) and Gladwell (2001), also he perceives it easy to describe virality through a spread of a virus. Through his experience in viral marketing, he has developed Six Principles which give marketers tools helping to get their information or ideas spread. Wilson highlights that one does not necessarily need to implement all of these principles in order to succeed, but to hammer the effectiveness to get the message spread, one should consider thinking which of these principles could be worth to apply.

Wilson (2018) provides a famous viral marketing example of Hotmail and how they got their product spread starting from early July 1996. By the time Hotmail was introduced, the market was filled with email service providers which were charging money from
customers using their services. Hotmail’s version of a free-to-use email platform was new, and people wanted immediately to implement it and share it further. At the end of every email sent through Hotmail-account there was a button to click which stated: “Get Your Private, Free Email from Hotmail at www.hotmail.com”. The message succeeded to encourage one’s acquaintances to sign up as well. (Wilson, 2018) Hotmail’s viral marketing strategy seemed to be working. In a little over a year they got 8.5 million users and soon after that Microsoft bought Hotmail for USD 400 million; according to Berger (2014, p. 141) since then, they have got over 350 million users. Wilson (2018) has applied his Six Principles to the rapid spread of Hotmail and explains in the following how the case serves as an excellent example of viral marketing.

1. “Gives away free products or services”
   The strategy of including a word free into marketers’ message is the most effective tool to guarantee a buzz around the product or a service. Wilson (2018) adds that by using words inexpensive or cheap one might create a buzz as well, but when using free, it is almost certain to get one’s message spread. In Hotmail’s case, as mentioned above, free-to-use email service was unheard-of by the time it was introduced. By giving something away for free does not mean that the service provider would not gain profits for it. It does mean, though, that the revenue will not come in immediately, but it is helping with the user-base growth. Revenue can be generated later through advertising costs, for example, and the wider the user spread is, the more advertising revenue coming in. (Wilson, 2018)

2. “Offers for an easy transmission to others”
   Viral marketing works best in the Web because forwarding content, ideas, knowledge have been made so easy and affordable. Wilson (2018) tells that viruses spread only in the cases when they are easily transmitted, the same could be again applied for viral messages. When the first users sent emails through their new account, Hotmail provided an easy-to-click link in each of the sent email. That link funnelled more people to try the new service and when more and more new users sent emails to their friends and colleagues, etc., the message was easily transmitted. Wilson encourages marketers to create simple messages for a quick understanding and implementing: “Get Your Private Free Email” worked fluently. (Wilson, 2018)

3. “Scales effortlessly from small to great in size"
As mentioned above, as the scaling for large amounts of people signing up for the new service was made effortless for them, the viral would have not been possible if Hotmail’s servers were not prepared for a fast scale-up. If their servers would have not been able to take the pressing heat from masses of incoming users, the servers would have crashed and the possible viral would have been killed. On their case, luckily, the servers were prepared for a rapid scale-up and viral marketing strategy functioned on this principle as well. (Wilson, 2018)

4. “Exploits shared motivations and behaviours”
Psychological motivations drive people’s basic needs as to be loved and recognised, for example. Wilson recommends marketers to create content which awakens these basic needs in people (Wilson, 2018). Also mentioned by Berger (2014) in chapter 2.5.2, the social and emotional needs of people motivates them to spread messages further - was the reason the awe or just the need to feel cool about themselves.

5. “Uses current communication webs and systems”
Majority of people are social by their nature. Throughout the history, people have built communities and networks to communicate with each other and today many of these networks exist online. Wilson (2018) recommends marketers to take advantage on these existing communities when planning possible placement strategies, these networks offer the possibility for a speedy diffusion for one’s message.

6. “Takes benefit of additional resources”
Wilson provides the example of Affiliate programs and says it is one of the most commonly used strategy within viral marketers. These programs counts completely on existing websites by placing the affiliate-link to a blog portal, for example. The administrator of the webpage will get paid for clicks when users are examining the link, but once the link has been noticed and forwarded by somebody who does not get rewarded of using the link, the affiliate strategy becomes cost-effective. (Wilson, 2018)
Now, as all relevant literature based theory and key definitions has been familiarised, it is time to move forward on this thesis and introduce the Research Methodology before moving into Findings and Discussion.

3 Research Methodology

Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 128) define Marketing Research as “systematic design, collection, analysis and reporting of data relevant to specific marketing situation facing an organisation”. Marketing Research can be used in variety of different situations, and in this case, it is used to explain and complete the thesis research. Marketing research process is directed by four steps which are presented in the following Figure 6.

![Figure 6. The key steps in The Marketing Research Process. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 129)](image)

First and foremost, it is important to carefully define the problem in order to set the research objectives. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 129) The interest in this thesis topic arose from the author’s personal interest into what makes some contents highly attractive for larger public. In today’s digital world, the concepts of Virality and Viral Marketing are important to understand as the rapid spread of ideas opens countless business opportunities. The Internet and various digital appliances have brought the possibility for nearly anyone to become known world-wide within only a matter of days. The opportunity that some brand, product, service or an idea can reach massive audiences in short time period of time is significant. The key in Virality and Digital Viral Marketing are their organic spread, which means the message is possible to spread with rather low budgets compared to traditional marketing. The reasons for choosing the research questions was that they would help the thesis author to narrow down what existing data to use and to guide the analytical process throughout the theoretical part. When starting of the thesis process, the following research questions were written down:

RQ1: What are the theories generating virality?
RQ2: What makes ideas and content spread?
RQ3: What makes us share content?
RQ4: What makes us share content online?
After stating the questions, the next step is to develop a decent research plan on how to collect the information needed to answer the preceding questions. With the help of existing Secondary data, this thesis should be able to answer the question of How to create viral content. Secondary data is collected through the university’s traditional and online library databases. Additionally, the author has been keeping an eye on the viral topics in different medias throughout the research process. As Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 131) are suggesting, the author is making sure that the secondary data sources have been analysed critically, they are shown to be relevant, accurate, current and impartial for this thesis purpose to use.

After the research plan has been opened it is time to put that into practice and analyse the data. In the next chapter the author will go through different secondary data case examples with applied theory and finally, interpret and report the findings.

4 Findings: Research Analysis & Discussion

After developing an understanding on the viral theories, the reader becomes familiar with three different marketing campaigns which have become viral for one reason or another. The campaigns will be presented and analysed in detail, for example, what sort of viral theories would be applicable. In addition, the author introduces a recent Word-of-Mouth buzz case from Finland which went accidentally viral nationally in February 2019. After four different cases, the overall research findings are discussed through.

Parisian Love by Google, 2009

Search engines are not the most apparent products to create emotion. When creating an ad for Google’s new search engine features in 2009, the Graphic Designer Anthony Cafaro thought there must be a more engaging way to present the new user interface opportunities. He did not want to advertise the features in a generic way as by doing that it would be very likely that the ad would not stick in the viewer’s mind - meaning, would very unlikely go viral. He came up with the idea to create a story around various Google searches and so the Parisian Love (2009) was born – an emotional advertisement which arouses a tear in viewer’s eye. One can find the link to the ad from the thesis bibliography.
Throughout the campaign video the screen is filming only about Google’s search engine. In the beginning, there is no talk, no singing and seemingly nothing humane – at least it might appear so. The story begins with a silent music in the background where presumably American guy types first “study abroad Paris France” to the search bar. Soon after, the guy searches “cafés near the Louvre” and one can hear a girl smiling in the background. Music builds up as the video is continuing. He types “translate tu es très mignon” to which Google provides a translation of “you are very cute”, followed by searches of how to “impress a French girl” and how to find “chocolate shops in Paris”. Music continues, one can hear a phone beeping and girl answering on the phone in the background while the guy types “long distance relationship advice” to Google’s search bar. Next, he continues seeking “jobs in Paris”, “AA120” flight schedule, and “churches in Paris” while one can hear wedding bells ringing in the back. Music stops and there’s a short break in typing to the search bar. In the final search he types “how to assemble a crib” while a baby starts giggling in the background. A text of “Search on” appears in the middle of the blank white screen. (Parisian Love, 2009)

It is hard not to let the story effect on one’s emotions. As Berger (2014) stated, when creating emotionally contagious content, the strength of an emotion must be high arousal in order to get shared – in Google’s case, it totally is. The author has watched the ad now several times during the thesis research and it gives her shivers every time. It is remarkable how Google was able to create something so emotionally appealing only from a search engine. Creating emotions is a strong tool to generate potential virality. In a following quote, Anthony Cafaro, a designer who helped to develop Parisian Love, encapsulates the core message which is in the very heart of Berger’s step of Emotion: “Whether it’s a digital product, like Google, or a physical product, like sneakers, you should make something that will move people. People don’t want to feel like they’re being told something – they want to be entertained, they want to be moved.” (Berger, 2014, p. 123)

The campaign has been published in well-known video platform YouTube where the film has gained over 8 million views and received over 23 thousand likes (Parisian Love, 2009). The author thinks Google’s ad is a great example of a viral marketing because the product alone may be seen as a boring tool to advertise but the method Google used worked in the end to gain a huge audience. When looking into more in detail of Berger’s STEPPS in addition to emotion, one can see the video gives a great example of practical value as well. Google’s search bar is a very efficient tool to investigate and compare
various different things, for example the new traveling destinations and tips for cafes which are provided on the map. Google’s product provides great value for its users, which is the main purpose of the product’s existence based on the *Simple Model of Marketing Process* (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014, p. 16-17). Parisian Love is an advertisement that is already over ten years old today so many of its new features are seen as obvious in 2019’s digital world. By the time the features were published the search engines were not as developed and Google’s market position was not as strong as it is today. For this reason, the author is sure the video has gained a big amount of views only for its practical value message and every-day handiness for people’s lives.

The whole advertisement has been formed into a *story* which makes the strongest viral content feature in Google’s ad when analysing Berger’s (2014) STEPPS. Throughout the video the story builds up. From the beginning on it is rather easy to jump into the script and follow what is likely to happen when whoever is moving abroad for studies. Finding a crush, starting a relationship, falling in love. Building the campaign film into a form of a story, the brand is making it easy for the viewer just enjoy the next plot twist in the film without paying too much of attention to the product Google itself. The strength of the story overcomes the marketing message which makes the advertisement feel authentic and relatable for the viewer.

All in all, the author perceives *Parisian Love* is a great example on viral content creation because of the surprising element what arises from combining something as technical as Google’s product with something as humane as emotion of love. In addition to romantic love, a campaign might also go viral by promoting the importance of *self-love*, as in the next case example.

*Real Beauty Sketches by Dove, 2013*

The beauty industry has been criticised a lot about being superficial and harsh by providing a certain type of a generalised image about what is perceived to be beautiful. The skin-care brand *Dove* has taken its place to stand against the stereotypically superficial beauty format. The brand has been famous of bringing the idea of *overall beauty* into centre of its marketing by using people from different shapes, colours and age groups as its brand representatives. In his *Six Principles on Viral Marketing* theory Wilson (2018) highlights that there is no necessary need to implement all of his six principles into the viral message in order to succeed. For the effectiveness to get the
brand message spread, though, one should consider which of his principles would be worth to apply to gain the best outcome for the particular message in question. In this chapter the author applies three of the Wilson’s Six Principles on viral marketing which apply well in the following campaign.

A case film *Real Beauty Sketches* by Dove is exploring the gap between how people perceive themselves and how unknown people are perceiving others. Each person in the film - mostly women - is subject to two different portraits: first on how they describe to see themselves and the second portrait on how the other person described their looks. The man on the film is Gil Zamora, an FBI Trained Forensic Artist who has worked for police department in San Jose from 1995 until 2011. He has a strong experience of drawing people from spoken descriptions. (Dove Real Beauty Sketches, 2013)

Dove’s film locates to an empty loft-space filled with light. There is a couch and Zamora with a drafting board facing backwards to the camera while a light white curtain separates him from the couch area. People start entering to the space one by one and each walk to sit next to him behind the curtain, at any point they do not see each other’s faces. He starts asking questions from these people such “tell me about your hair” and “tell me about your chin”. People do not know the reason for their visit but after several questions it becomes clear that he is drawing them. Once he gets a sketch, he thanks them, and the visitors leave the space without him seeing them. All that it was told for the visitors before the sketching and entering the room was that they should get friendly with another person in the waiting area. In this point of the short-film it becomes clear that he was not only sketching one portrait. When the visitors were sitting on the couch, Zamora asks different questions about the appearances of the other person’s face they just had met before entering the room. One can hear how people describe the other person positively, such as “she had nice thin chin”; the other visitor describes another by saying “nice eyes, they lit up when she spoke”; someone says, “cute nose”; while somebody is commenting “she had very nice blue eyes”.

Later, Zamora presents the final portraits to people individually: “this is the sketch you helped me create, and that’s a sketch somebody described of you.” In the revealing part it becomes clear that many of the people had highlighted their seemingly negative features on each’s faces, such as dark circles around their eyes, “fat rounder face” or uncommon moles on their cheeks. Most of the first portraits have overall sadder, “fatter” or closed-off appearances. When the visitors see the second drawing on how unknown
people have described their faces, they recognise a positive difference in the looks. The viewer can see the emotion in the visitor’s eyes when they are exploring the second portrait - many tear up. The negative features are long gone, and the portraits are clearly more upbeat, open and happier compared to the first ones. People in the latter drawings had brighter eyes, smoother skins and younger appearances compared to the original portraits. After taking their time to analysing the drawings, one of the women say: “I should be more grateful of my natural beauty. It impacts the choices of the friends that we make, the jobs we apply for, how we treat our children – it impacts everything. It could not be more critical to your happiness.” Next, Zamora asks her a question that does she think that she is more beautiful than she says - she agrees. The text stating “You are more beautiful than you think” appears to the screen in the end. (Dove Real Beauty Sketches, 2013)

The video sends an important message of self-love and self-appreciation. Also, it communicates the feeling of being accepted and being beautiful by just being oneself. The author argues these may have been the strongest emotions which the viewers might have been feeling when watching the short-film by Dove. As presented in Berger’s (2014) STEPPS theory, also Wilson (2018) highlights the importance of creating emotionally contagious content when preparing a potentially viral campaign. Wilson’s fourth principle on Viral Marketing stating that the campaign should exploit shared motivations and behaviours in people. As noted in the theoretical part, psychological motivations are driving people’s basic needs as - in Dove’s case - to be loved and recognised. The brand is skilfully highlighting these emotions in the ad, which also Wilson is recommending doing when marketers are creating content which awakens these basic needs in people (Wilson, 2018).

The campaign has gained massively over 68 million views and nearly 170 thousand likes in YouTube alone (Dove Real Beauty Sketches, 2013). YouTube is also offering the short-film - as Wilson’s second principle suggests - an easy transmission to others just by clicking the button and sharing the link. When using an easy transmission mode, the message becomes correspondingly affordable for the marketers to use. Organic spread through the regular people sharing the ad is much cheaper than the bought space from the web. Lastly, the fifth of the Wilson’s principles recommends taking advantage of the current communication webs and systems. In Dove’s case, the author argues that people must have shared the advertisement widely through social network platform Facebook. They must have wanted to share a reminding for their friends and contacts to love and
appreciate themselves, stressing the importance that the sender cares about them just as they are. These sort of emotional posts in Facebook tend to gain more shares as they are easily relatable and applied for everyday life.

The author leads the reader from pressuring female beauty stereotypes to the meaning of the masculine role model in today's society. The next viral campaign case offers the reader an example when the carefully detailed viral strategy does not create the brand awareness the marketers might have planned.

**The Best Man Can Be by Gillette, 2019**

Today, it has become more common that the brands are taking a stand on social and political issues. The reasoning for this is rather obvious: according to some surveys, almost ¾ of consumers believe that the brand should position themselves for something more than just the most obvious, the product which they have to offer. (Robles, 2019) Many brands have taken a stance of focusing on sustainability, for example. Both of the previously introduced advertisements have been great examples of positive virality, but as going viral is complicated to plan ahead, that is not always the case. Procter & Gamble shaving brand Gillette's advertisement film experienced huge attention in the beginning of the year 2019, ending up being shown and shared in a rather negative light. The author sees the ad as a good example of a viral flop.

The whole campaign gathers around a short-film which replaces Gillette's well-known brand slogan, "the best a man can get", with "the best men can be". The campaign is taking a step towards social issues when raising topics such as bullying, aggressive behaviour, and more controversial topics as sexism and sexual harassment. (Robles, 2019) The campaign's short-film starts by listing the today's most-spoken social issues, such as mentioning about #metoo movement and toxic masculinity. Narrator asks, "is this the best a man can get?" while Gillette’s older campaign material from the late 1980’s is rolling in the background. The narrator continues:

We cannot hide from it, it has been going on far too long. We cannot laugh it off making the same old excuses, “boys will be boys”. But something finally changed, and there will be no going back, because we believe in the best in men - to say the right thing, to act the right way. Some already are, but some is not enough,
because the boys watching today, will be the men of tomorrow. (We Believe: The Best Men Can Be | Gillette, 2019)

Throughout the ad the camera shows different social situations, comparing the controversial – for example sexist - behaviour to the optional and more socially inclusive behaviour where the old, toxic social patterns are questioned. The campaign encourages men to stand for more feminist values where everyone would be equal, and no one should not feel insecure to be oneself. The overall message in the video has clearly been created thinking of the wider good. Campaign’s motivation was to help today’s men to feel more comfortable with new era of masculinity. The brand built the campaign to a form of a Story as one of Berger’s (2014) STEPPS suggest, which is potentially one of the reasons it went viral. The brand was acknowledging its role in influencing culture and wanted to show the men through a story that they are not alone, that they can take a step towards a better future, together. (Robles, 2019) Although, the problem in the ad is that the campaign is accusing its own target group, men, of acting disrespectfully towards the other men and women around them. Also, the campaign blames men showing toxic example for the younger generation. These have potentially been the reasons why the campaign faced a strong backlash.

As noted earlier in the theoretical part of the thesis, if the message in the ad creates emotion in the viewer, it is more likely to be forwarded and shared with one’s acquaintances. As noted, in his STEPPS theory, Berger (2014, p. 109) highlighted that it does not matter whether the emotion is positive or negative; as long as the feeling has a high arousal, people have the need to share the emotion with someone. After watching the ad, men feel they have been attacked against by their trusted brand, Gillette. The brand brutally stereotypes most of the men being and acting in a wrong way while there would be only few showing a good example. Parenthood, especially the topic of raising a child is generally very sensitive topic: fathers watching the ad might feel the brand is accusing them of being a bad example for their children. Gender equality, especially in the workplace or in the marriage, is also a topic to be cautious with - how does the ad make its own target group feel when blaming them on sexist behaviour in everyday-life? In the author’s opinion, the topics the brand raised in this particular campaign are important to talk with a wider public, but the way Gillette made the issues the centre of its campaign, is perhaps not the best way to do it. Brands should encourage, not blame, inspire, not judge. Gillette tried its best to boost the positive atmosphere but succeeded to do it with the cost of its reputation amongst its most important target group, adult men.
Well-known saying goes *there is no such thing as bad publicity*. In YouTube alone, brand’s video ad has been viewed for over 30 million times only within three months. Contrasting the campaign examples presented in previous chapters, in Gillette’s short-film the amount of dislikes is almost double to the likes: 1.4 million dislikes over 786 thousand likes. (We Believe: The Best Men Can Be | Gillette, 2019) Despite the fact that the overall attention around the campaign was not positive, the possible negative effects due to virality affecting on Gillette’s sales numbers are still unknown as the case is so recent.

Virality is a complicated topic and everything not always go as planned - Gillette’s case is currently rather infamous in this aspect. Although, many times *going viral* happens without planning and surprises the team behind the viral message. Additionally to advertisements, the author introduces a Finnish viral phenomenon which happened sort of by accident but applies well to Gladwell’s (2001) theory *The Law of The Few*.

**Baked Feta Pasta by “Liemessä” food blogger Jenni Häyrinen**

Nowadays celebrities and other *some-how-famous* people have huge impact on what is seen to be “it”. As noted earlier in the theoretical part of the thesis, the Word-of-Mouth has often stronger influence on individual consumer than traditional advertising. If the words and recommendations are coming from a trusted friend or an associate, it has an impact on consumer buying behaviour. A recent case from Finland shows that - in addition to Gladwell’s theory - also *Word-of-Mouth and Berger’s viral content creation* theories apply and actually played a major part in the viral diffusion. The case might be seen small in international scale but in the country sized as Finland, it had a wide recognition.

A food blogger and an entrepreneur Jenni Häyrinen has been writing her blog *Liemessä* (translated as “*in the soup*” or “*in a mess*”) since 2006 (Häyrinen, 2019a). She started blogging when lifestyle blogs were not common in Finland and so, she was one of the first few making them more familiar to the wider public. The other player in the story is also a blogger-entrepreneur Natalia Salmela who also – despite her young age - has a long history in blogging. She is formerly known to be a fashion blogger from her *White Trash Disease* blog, but currently, when growing out of her 20s, Salmela has become a huge *foodie* and most recently have been appointed to CEO position in a Finnish food-firm *Satokausikalenteri*, “The Harvest Season Calendar” (Kauppalehti, 2019).
On 4th February, Häyrinen (2019a) posts a recipe of *Uunifetapasta, Baked Feta Pasta*, to her blog which she playfully calls a “hit pasta”. Few days later Salmela and Häyrinen are meeting casually over lunch and Häyrinen serves the dish she has invented when she had to prepare something simple and quick for lunch. Salmela is blown away by the recipe which she captures to image and links to her personal social media channel in Instagram by giving credits to Häyrinen. Two weeks after publishing the recipe, Häyrinen is informed that due to the massively positive response from the consumers, the demand for feta cheese has doubled, and, in some cases, feta has even been sold out from many grocery stores in Finland (Häkkilä, 2019).

In the beginning of February 2019, both of the bloggers had about the same following base in Instagram, around 18-19 thousand followers (Salmela, 2019; Häyrinen, 2019b). After Salmela’s post in Instagram, Häyrinen started to realise that playfully named *hit pasta* has really became the hit dish in Finland. Her Instagram was flooding of comments and people’s images of their versions of the viral pasta. The author sees the way people were reacting to the hype as a strong example of the Word-of-Mouth influence. When regular people post unfiltered, everyday-images to their Instagram Stories and tag the owner of the recipe, their followers are more likely to be encouraged trying the pasta themselves, comparing to the strength of the influence of only seeing the gorgeously produced photos from Häyrinen’s blog (see Figure 7). Within few weeks Häyrinen informs to have gained *nine thousand* followers due to the viral recipe. In Finnish scale, gaining that number of followers in social media have meant years of work but due to the Word-of-Mouth viral, she gained them in a flash speed. Today, after three months, her follower base is at over 27 thousand followers in Instagram (Häyrinen, 2019b).
In this particular case story the author perceives that Häyrinen as persona applies greatly to Malcolm Gladwell’s (2001) definition of a *Maven*: a person who connects people by sharing knowledge about making delicious and simple food. When applying theory to Salmela, the author sees her both as a *Connector* - a person who connects people to each other over the subgroups of food and fashion blogging. Salmela also applies well into description of a *Salesman* - being a person who uses the knowledge she has learned from her *Maven*-friend to engage and persuade bigger crowds to go, buy and try this magnificently simple and delicious recipe on their own. Due to these two different people, they were able to magnify the viral message and drum it out to the wider public. As Gladwell states in his theory, *The Law of The Few* means that few people are exceptionally capable to spread the viral message further, and that was exactly what Häyrinen and Salmela did.

When applying Berger’s (2014) *STEPPS* theory on viral content creation, the author perceives Salmela gained *Social Currency* by sharing the recommendation about the must-try recipe; she had a piece of information which made her to belong in the group of insiders. When thinking of all those hundreds of photos seen in Finnish Instagram during the hype, one could state that many others wanted to belong to the same *insider group* as well. Berger mentioned in his chapter of *Emotion* that when people feel *awe*, they are willing to share the message with their acquaintances. The most surprising part in the recipe might be how effortless and cheap it is to prepare: all one needs to do is just cut the chili, before gathering the ingredients to the oven bowl – definitely wort the awe. Being as cheap and easy to cook as it is, these factors are giving the recipe a great *Practical Value* as well.

Häyrinen and Salmela both write their public blogs and moderate their own public social media channels, which makes the *Public* part of Berger’s *STEPPS* covered, too. Public visibility affects to human behaviour, people wanted to try the hit pasta themselves. As Salmela, also the people sharing their images through social media created new kind of *social proof* through public visibility. The Baked Feta Cheese virality case does not, in the authors opinion, include the last step of Berger’s theory, which would have been a *Story*. The reason for this case not being in a form of a story might be that the recipe went viral purely by accident and so, no one could not expect preparing a story around...
the topic. Although, after few months have past, the viral hype around the Baked Feta Pasta in Finland makes a good story itself.

Discussion and limitations

When scrutinising all of the previously presented cases together, one can see common factors. The core message behind Kirby’s (2004) Word-of-Mouse theory is that marketer’s does not have to buy the space from the web for marketing purposes, instead, the space is created through user-generated clicking and sharing. Kirby was pressing that personal experience should always be highlighted as it makes the brand-message more effective compared to the advertisement or other campaign material created by the marketing forces. In Google’s and Dove’s cases the users may forwarded the campaign films due to the emotions – such as love, care and empathy – the campaigns were raising in them when watching the videos. These videos might have been a way to show to one’s loved-ones that one care and think about them after seeing these films. The main motivation has not presumably been to promote Google or Dove’s products, although, acknowledgement of the brand might have created some sort of an emotional bond in the viewer’s mind. For businesses, the most beneficial feature in viral campaigns is the massive brand awareness these videos have gained.

In Gillette’s case there were emotion, but the emotions were different comparing to the previous examples; some people might have felt anger due to wrong accusation by the brand, some people might have despised Gillette’s tone of voice in the ad. For those reasons, people wanted to share the ad to get support and approval for their own negative, or even hurt, feelings. In every one of these cases, applied emotion have made each sharing experiences personal, and for that reason, as Kirby’s theory suggests, brand messages have been stickier in the minds of the consumers. The last example of Baked Feta Pasta would greatly be applicable to Kirby’s theory from sharing a personal experience -aspect, but since this particular viral phenomena did not have a commercial motivation behind it, the author skips the Word-of-Mouse theory from it.

The author’s thoughts about virality and viral marketing in general have changed during these past few months. Throughout the thesis research it has become clear that for something to become viral, it does not have to be actually that extravagant or unbelievable. Of course, these features might help, but usually people are interested to see something quite normal, something to which they could relate themselves with.
Virality is about the feelings created when watching or reading the viral content. People share content to bond with one’s family or friends and highlight the tie in between them. They want usually to see normal people, as them, to do and feel something ordinary, with a little twist. As noted, human psychology defines what people need. In Dove’s case, it was just a self-love and a recognition of one’s true beauty. Google’s ad - the story about a student travelling abroad and all of a sudden falling in love - is a beautiful story, but also something to which people can easily relate to.

A pasta dish becoming a viral hit in a way that Feta cheese is sold out from Finnish supermarkets – sounds fascinating at least. The key here, in the authors opinion, is that people want to see and feel something which have a touch base with their normal lives. With a busy schedule, one does not usually try to cook anything majorly different compared to one’s normal routines - especially if one is not interested about cooking. They do not have time for that. In this case, people were appreciating the practical value of the recipe: how it helped them to coordinate something quick and inexpensive for lunch during the busy everyday life. Many impressed their family members by cooking something different for dinner so effortlessly. The act of doing something together strengthened the bond in between them and they potentially enjoyed cooking together with their loved-ones, sharing the moment with each other. There again, a viral is about something which is easily relatable - with a hint of remarkable, as Berger (2014) stated.

Thesis’ findings are gathered completely based on the author’s own research and critical analysis on the virality topic from secondary data resources. What it comes to the limitations of this thesis, the author was not able to finish the primary data research and ended up completing this thesis research with using secondary data only. As noted in chapter 3, primary data is usually collected to gain deeper understanding and to be able provide more specific answers for the research questions used. The author did develop an interview structure and interviewees were contacted through online method by email in April 2019. In the email, a small group of carefully picked digital marketing experts were suggested to take part to a Qualitative research to focus on, descriptively, the quality and value gained from few respondent’s answers. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014, p. 131-136) Although, primary data research was not applied in the end due to the timing issues on getting no interviews successfully done.

For the prior reason, the authors recommendations for future research is to get early in touch with the Digital and Viral Marketing experts to interview them and to gain deeper
and sufficiently realistic understanding on what strategic Viral Marketing really is. This way, the researcher would be able to provide more complex analysis and offer more effective techniques for marketers; for example, how to be successful and strategically build viral campaigns to benefit ones' business. The author has gathered the following ideas how the topic could be tackled from different points of views in the future:

- How to create viral content: Digital Marketing expert view
- How a viral can be harmful for the brand image: Case study
- How to create engaging viral content: Case study comparing different generations' need
- The difference of viral marketing strategies nationally VS. internationally: Case country

5 Conclusion

To start with, the reason for thesis research was the author’s genuine interest on how the viral content is created and what are the underlying factors to get one’s message spread. During the process, the author has learned that there is various ways of trying to create viral content, but the answer does it ever end up going viral, is always a mystery. With virality strategies one might be able to get as close to the viral potential as possible, but the result is on the hands of one’s audience. Viral is a sensitive topic. One day something might make people laugh, relate and share the content, but on the other day the similar content might get them furious. Reasons are unknown, there might have been a change in country’s political atmosphere, for example, and for that reason the content is treated differently. Everything is connected.

On the topic level of virality, if the content is shared, one should not care about the reason behind why it is shared as long as it reaches wide audiences - unless, the viral content is commercially motivated. Viral Marketing is aiming to gain positive virality to boost one’s brand awareness. With the help of viral theories marketers are willing to chase the recipe of successful virality but as mentioned, one can never know where the created content will end up. According to Gladwell, with a strategic positioning and sharing the content with the few exceptional people, one might get closer to the desired result.

Finally, virality is a powerful tool to create brand recognition. The author is recommending the businesses and marketers to get familiar with the viral theories as they might help one to see the topic from a different point of view. Theory might shake the old prejudices of how to get once message spread. Digital world has changed rapidly within the last two
decades offering diverse ways to gain huge audiences within a short period of time. When thinking about the secret behind going viral, one might think of creating a great product; a good start, but no the whole story. Creating a viral message is not only about the remarkable product, it is also, or even majorly, about creating remarkable feelings and emotion in the user consuming the content.

To conclude, one must remember that the content is always created for humans. It is important to get familiar with the motivations and needs of people to be able to influence and move them. Once one achieves this and the viral message gets moving, there will be nothing to stop it.
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