SPREADABLE MEDIA

“If it doesn’t spread, it’s dead.”

Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li, and Ana Domb
Definitions of Viral

Viral is a term that has been used to describe an entire spectrum of practices. So in order to begin thinking about these practices analytically, we have to first examine some of the definitions of the term and how they’ve shaped the thinking around this whole “viral” phenomenon. From there we can start to see some of the limitations and fuzziness present and really begin to think about how to describe what’s going on in all of this.

“… These media events are not like viruses. The are viruses . . . [such as] the common cold, and perhaps even AIDS.”

Douglas Rushkoff
“Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”

\Richard Dawkins
So coming out of memetics, this idea of “viral” media was a biological metaphor that basically maintained that messages could be secretly or subtly buried inside popular media content that people would pass along because it was interesting, unsuspectingly spreading the message. He uses the example of the Trojan horse where the true purpose of the horse was hiding inside, unbeknowest of its hosts.

This way of thinking about what “viral” media is dramatically removes user-agency from the equation, maintaining that content just propagates on its thanks to a meme structure.

A commonly used example of this in both marketing and academic literature is Hotmail, where every time you send a mail, you also send a message to join hotmail, which is attached at the end, so that you passed it on whether you wanted to or not.
“People don't engage with each other to exchange viruses; people exchange viruses as an excuse to engage with each other”

Douglas Rushkoff

"the main feature of viral marketing is that it heavily depends on interconnected peers. Viral Marketing is therefore inherently social"

Shenja Van Der Graaf

viral in a networked mediascape
the evolution of lolcats
"We are all susceptible to the pull of viral ideas. Like mass hysteria. Or a tune that gets into your head that you keep on humming all day until you spread it to someone else. Jokes. Urban legends. Crackpot religions. Marxism. No matter how smart we get, there is always this deep irrational part that makes us potential hosts for self-replicating information."

\Neal Stephenson
“Stickiness”
Will it stick?
Sticky

Attract and hold the attention
Concentration
Unified consumer experience
Interactivity
Individual users
Sales force markets to consumers.
Pull
Marketers, and consumers are distinct
Finite channels for communication

Spreadable

Motivate circulation
Dispersion
Diversified experience
Participation
Social networks
Grassroots intermediaries as brand advocates
Push
Increased collaboration between roles
Localized and temporary networks
Tensions in the paradigm shift
Spreadability
1. What aspects of the contemporary media environment support the spread of media across different communities?

2. How do consumers create value for themselves and for companies through their spread of media?

3. What kinds of media content is easy and meaningful to spread?

4. How do companies benefit from the spread of their content?
Motorist Clubs

vs.

Saturn Brand Tribe
Addressing an existing community

GET THE SCOOP
and then speak out with GirlTalk!

Obsession – It’s Not Just a Perfume
Having a crush on someone shouldn’t crush you. Are you obsessed much?

Periods: What’s a problem? What’s not?
Periods happen every 28 days or so. Or do they?

Quince Style: Beauty Tips for You
This is your night to shine. So shine brighter than ever before!

GirlTalk is just 4 U!

YOU TELL US!
Latina chikas, U set the trends! Vote every week for your hot/not picks, check the results AND submit your ideas for next week’s list!

NEW Hot or Not Polls!

ask Iris

Cramps & Exercise
Foodie!
Peer Pressures
How often do I shave?

KAT DELUNA
Go now 4 song samples and FREE downloads!

¡It’s fiesta time!

Crazy ‘Bout Quinceañeras

Check out the latest episodes of your favorite Chikas, Yasmine and Crash
Widgets:
Digital Swag
“Where once there was simplicity and limitation, everywhere there is now social difference, and that difference proliferates into ever more diversity, variety, heterogeneity.” — Grant McCracken
The Evolution of Chuck and Huck
The Long Tail
Social Networks

MySpace

Social Network

Music on MySpace

Crank That

Social Networks
Participatory Culture
The Gift Economy
“A gift is a thing we do not get by our own efforts. We cannot buy it; we cannot acquire it through an act of will. It is bestowed upon us.”

\Lewis Hyde
“Unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges.”

\Lewis Hyde
Gift economies are relatively dynamic in terms of the fluid circulation of goods, while commodity cultures are relatively dynamic in terms of the fluid social relations between participants.
In a gift economy, 'status', 'prestige,' or 'esteem' take the place of cash remuneration' as the primary drivers of cultural production and social transaction.

—Lewis Hyde
“A commodity has value...
A gift has worth.”

\Lewis Hyde
Facebook Gifts

- **Water Globe Gifts**
  - Show 1 of 1 water globes.
  - Manage Your Water Globes

- **Happy Hour!**
  - The following drinks have been sent to Damian...
  - Jacintha, Jan, Paddy
  - Join in on the Happy Hour!
  - Social Feed: What your friends are doing

- **Naughty Gifts**
  - Rank: Gangsta
  - Recently Received Gifts

- **Photos**
  - 1 album.
  - MIT Created October 28

- **Growing Gifts**
  - 2 of 2 flowers.
  - Manage Your Growing Gifts

- **St. Paddy's Day Drinks**
  - Send Drinks to your friends

- **Drinking Buddies**
  - Just so everyone knows who to take advantage... hahahaha reply to Jenna Basson

- **Naughty when Drunk**
  - Sent by Jenna Basson
fantasies of

commodity culture

Personal Expression
Freedom
Social Mobility
Escape from Constraints and Limitations
New "possibilities"
"Transformation"

gift economy

Nostalgia
Tradition
Reciprocity
Friendship and Community
Mutual Obligation
Familarity
Not All Gifts Can Be Accepted

Hey! It's...a piece of wood...

I read somewhere that you eat that.
Tensions between the Gift Economy and Commodity Culture

Life without Fan Fiction

Fan Fiction at FanLib.com
Tensions between the Gift Economy and Commodity Culture
Tensions between the Gift Economy and Commodity Culture

Life without Fan Fiction
Fan Fiction at FanLib.com
Fanfiction by Fangirls

OTW: because I want us to own the goddamned servers, ok?  
 cesperanza
Communities of Users
Who are you?

Supporter
User
Consumer
Coworker
Advocate
Fan
The question is not how to reach the “influencers” but, how do individuals relate in a networked society?
Segments include consumers participating in at least one of the indicated activities at least monthly.

- **Creators** (13%):
  - Publish Web page
  - Publish or maintain a blog
  - Upload video to sites like YouTube

- **Critics** (19%):
  - Comment on blogs
  - Post ratings and reviews

- **Collectors** (15%):
  - Use RSS
  - Tag Web pages

- **Joiners** (19%):
  - Use social networking sites

- **Spectators** (33%):
  - Read blogs
  - Watch peer-generated video
  - Listen to podcasts

- **Inactives** (52%):
  - None of these activities

Base: US adult online consumers

Source: Forrester’s NACTAS Q4 2006 Devices & Access Online Survey
Corporations and the KKK
Why **Rumors** Spread:

1. To articulate the shared experiences and values of the community and declare affiliation

2. To explain difficult to understand events or circumstances and assert control

3. To establish boundaries for who belongs within the community
We don’t share clips just because of what we have to say about the ad, but also because of what the ad might have to say about us.
Forms and Strategies
If you’ll notice, a lot of “viral” videos are really funny.

Humor is a highly spreadable form, because for something to be funny, all the parties involved have to have a shared cultural context and points of view. So it’s useful in defining “insider” status based on “getting” a joke.
Really common uses of humor are absurdity or surprise, and parody. Gorilla blends both, using the Phil Collins song as a way to keep the absurd situation from becoming too wholly surreal by providing cultural touchstones.
Gorilla Remixes

Parody evokes the shared cultural history and knowledge that helps establish the boundaries of a community, creating an “in-group” that eager to share it with others that they perceive to be part of that particular scene.

But what makes it additionally spreadable is that the absurd nature of what’s being shown acts as a sort of implict challenge to established expectations of behavior, and thus an invitation to transgress established roles, such as those of producer and consumer, so that people were encouraged to make remixes and spoofs, which lead to more buzz and circulation.

Fundamentally humor like this works because if the advertisers don’t take themselves too seriously, it invites others to get in on the fun.
Parody is tricky though, because while it can potentially alienate people for the same reason that it draws them in, so it runs the risk of being too niche.

A couple of good examples of parody done well: Coke GTA and Toyota WoW.

What they did was create levels of accessibility, so that you could get the content without “getting” all more and more subtle in-jokes.
Toyota WoW

This is one also interesting because it parodies a particular community, but adds in some self-reflexivity to avoid being a mockery. It makes fun of itself a bit so to avoid making fun of the community its parodying.
Mini Cooper

When parody misses the mark -- it lacked in-jokes, specificity in what it was parodying, references were too broad.

So to be clear, it's not just the form, but the execution still matters.
In addition to humor, another common characteristic is content that is confusing or ambiguous in a way that encourages people to verify its authenticity or intent.
Ford Mondeo and “homemade” ad

about 5000 comments on youtube, picked up by major media outlets due to the “raging debate” around the video

All trying to figure out a number of things: if it was real, and how closely was it tied to Ford. Discussion and debate continued even after it was revealed the next day that it was done by a crane paid for by Ford.

So this plays into one of the elements that gave content worth in a community, which was explaining confusing events and thereby asserting some form of control -- what matters is ultimately that seeking of information more than the answer.
Subservient Chicken

Interactive content that leaves literal gaps. A number of websites and wikis devoted to testing the limits of what the chicken could be made to do -- solidified community ties through a shared endeavor.

This also engaged user participation in the creation of content, because even though the videos are premade, they not only don't play until the user enters a command, but their meaning is defined by the user's command.

This is different than content that is merely interactive, wherein the user is engaged only in accessing what's available.
community and nostalgia
The spread brings the $$$

**Dove’s Evolution**
- 75 sec. video
- YouTube release
- 5 million views
- Awards
- Twice the viewers as Superbowl
- $2.5 million vs. $0 distribution

**Cadbury Gorilla**
- Sales up by 7%
- 6-8 weeks 5 million views
- Wide YouTube distribution, appropriation
- 30 percent above the average of industry market growth
- Recovered from chocolate recall
## Entertainment: A Glimpse Of The Next Episode

### Global Findings

When asked what they use the internet for:

- **46%** have IM conversations
- **39%** watch TV
- **37%** browse music online
- **29%** regularly write, comment and blog
- **27%** share free music
- **28%** access social networking sites
- **11%** attend events in virtual worlds
- **10%** showcase personal creative work
- **9%** contribute to story lines on internet TV programs
- **8%** present their own podcasts
- **7%** get paid for uploading film/music content
- **6%** set up own pirate radio channels

When asked what they use mobile devices for:

- **53%** send emails
- **50%** search for information
- **46%** take pictures
- **46%** read the news
- **37%** send IM
- **26%** shoot video
- **25%** download music
- **25%** watch music videos
- **24%** watch films
- **23%** watch TV
- **22%** play video games
- **22%** store music
- **17%** use navigation & maps
- **17%** access TV to record
- **11%** attend events in virtual worlds
- **10%** showcase personal creative work
- **9%** contribute to story lines on internet TV programs
- **8%** present their own podcasts
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### Services used at least once a week

- **30%** MySpace
- **22%** Windows Live Spaces
- **21%** Facebook
- **10%** Orkut
- **58%** MSN IM
- **22%** Skype
- **57%** YouTube
- **17%** MORPG

Source:

Entertainment: A Glimpse Of The Next Episode
The Future Laboratory