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A means to an end: Using political satire to go viral

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of video sharing giants like Youtube and Google Video, coupled with increased broadband connectivity and improved sharing functionality across social networking sites, the role of the viral video has been cemented in many IMC strategies. While most agree about the importance of better understanding viral marketing, there is less agreement about what makes content become viral. While some content gets viewed by millions of people, others struggle to gain viral traction. Content specific, intrapersonal and interpersonal reasons have been proposed for viral marketing success. This paper focuses on the intrapersonal reasons for content going viral in the context of political satire. More specifically, the role of emotion in the spread of content online, is investigated. Political satire focuses on gaining entertainment from politics. Satire, and specifically political satire, forms part of using humour in advertising and has been influential in shifting public opinion since ancient Greece. This study compares success and unsuccessful viral campaigns that used political satire, by first analysing the online comments that viewers made about the video. Following these findings, an experiment is conducted and the influence of intensity, creativity, humour and utility on virality is modelled, controlling for valence and previous exposure. The findings suggest that, when using political satire in viral campaigns, creativity and the intensity of the emotions felt are key influencing factors in whether videos get “shared” or “liked”. Therefore, while many authors contend that particular emotions or positive content has a greater likelihood to become viral, this paper shows that it is not the particular emotion, but the intensity with which that emotion was felt that drives viral success.

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1. Introduction

The “connection generation” craves interaction with and connection to vast social networks (Pintado, 2009) through the sharing of information, photos, opinions, entertainment and news. This sharing comes in the form of electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM (Nelson-Field, Riebe, & Newstead, 2011) and provides marketing and communication managers with unparalleled opportunity to reach a large number of consumers quickly, and to interact with them. Viral marketing is a form of WOM (Blomström, Lind, & Persson, 2012; Porter, 2006; Rodic & Koivisto, 2012), and a marketing communications strategy (Rodic & Koivisto, 2012), that attempts to engage and affect consumers. These consumers, in turn, spread the communicated message further through different social media (Blomström et al., 2012). With the ever increasing growth of the internet and the rise of social network sites, viral marketing has cemented itself in the marketing and corporate agenda.

While many videos that went viral in the past were “lucky” spin-offs from advertising campaigns, marketers are increasingly making communicating through social media platforms a central part of their communication strategy. Nelson-Field et al. (2011) state that, with the rise of video sharing giants like Youtube and Google Video, coupled with increased

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broadband connectivity and improved sharing functionality across social networking sites, the role of the viral video has been cemented in many IMC strategies. This is evident from the transfer of advertising budgets from TV advertising, search and direct response campaigns, to viral video campaigns.

While most agree about the importance of better understanding viral marketing, there is less agreement about what makes content become viral. While some content gets viewed by millions of people, others struggle to gain viral traction. *Content specific*, *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* reasons have been proposed for viral marketing success. Authors espousing *content-specific* explanations, argue that viral content often has utility (Izawa, 2010). In other words, content gets spread across social networks because of its informational and value contribution. *Intrapersonal* reasons often centre around the emotional reaction that viewers have after consuming viral content, as well as the impression that it leaves on viewers (Izawa, 2010). These authors argue that it is how viral content connects emotionally with viewers (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007), and often focus on the spread of positive versus negative content online (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Rodic & Koivisto, 2012). Others state that it is the extent to which the emotion is felt (or the *intensity* with which the emotion is felt) or the specific emotion, and not simply a case of affect (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Nelson-Field et al., 2011).

Finally, *interpersonal* justifications are concerned with the social motivations for the spread of content online, and suggest that passing along content online builds social networks and social capital, it is important for society, and that people anticipate that others would feel happy and grateful to them for sharing viral content (Izawa, 2010). Regardless of the reason proffered, very little empirical evidence exists to support these claims (Nelson-Field et al., 2011) supporting the call for further research on what makes content viral.

A recently successful viral campaign made use of political satire. Political satire focuses on gaining entertainment from politics, and differs from political protest or political assent in that it does not necessarily have an agenda, and does not necessarily seek to influence the political process. Satire, and specifically political satire, forms part of using humour in advertising and has been influential in shifting public opinion since ancient Greece (Bal, Pitt, Berthon, & DesAutels, 2009). Mascha (2008), for example, states that political satire was critical in the rise of fascism. It entails the use of ridicule, irony or sarcasm to lampoon someone or something, and is designed to generate laughter (Bal et al., 2009).

In a country with a strong political history, using political satire in a viral campaign in South Africa is risky for various reasons. First, because “forwarding” or “liking” online content is a permanent act of communicating to many people at once, one would imagine that social network users are hesitant to associate with political content. Especially when sharing online content is a way to connect with others and to build community (Izawa, 2010), and sharing online content has permanent social implications. Two, a company runs the risk of alienating certain markets because of their political affiliation. This is especially true in the divided and often tumultuous South African political context. Third, it is unclear what the effect of such an advertising campaign would be on the reputation of a company.

Yet some of these viral campaigns are extremely successful, while others are not. Political satire has been systematically neglected by researchers (Mascha, 2008). This study aims to contribute to both viral marketing and political satire literature, by investigating the interplay between content and emotion in viral campaigns that use political satire.

Researchers are increasingly using viral videos as the subject of their analysis in viral marketing (see Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Henke, n.d.; Izawa, 2010; Lagger, Lux, & Marques, 2011; Nelson-Field et al., 2011). More than three quarters of broadband users are regularly watching or downloading video content (Madden, 2007 in Reyneke, 2011). Because of the popularity of the medium, many companies have placed their ads on video sharing sites like Youtube to increase brand awareness and stimulate conversation about the brand (Reyneke, 2011). Reyneke (2011) also states that the increasing popularity of sites like Youtube, is changing the advertising landscape.

Traditional advertising research tools like surveys, rating services and viewer response profiles, may not be as effective in measuring conversation about a viral video. Traditional methods may also not be able to capture the nuances of an environment where consumer feedback to content is networked, rather than one-way (Reyneke, 2011). These consumer dialogues may provide marketing and communication managers with valuable insight into why some videos have gone viral and others have not. This paper starts off with an analysis of two online videos that used political satire to go viral. One was successful, the other was not. The design of this study, as well as the data and findings are discussed in the following section. Based on the findings from this study, an experiment is conducted to better understand the success factors of these two viral videos. The design and results of the second study is discussed in section three. This is followed by a discussion of the findings of both studies in the conclusions and managerial implications section. The paper ends with a brief summary of the possible limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for future research.

2. Study 1: a field study of viewers' comments

The first study used an exploratory approach to better understand the use of political satire in a viral campaign. Content analysis was done on viewers' comments of two Youtube videos. The selected videos as well as the process that was followed to analyse their comments, are discussed in the section below.

2.1. Data

While traditional viral marketing research focused on the spread of emails, and the majority of research in this area have used email, customer reviews and online forums, researchers are increasingly using viral videos as the subject of their

Table 1Summary of Youtube statistics^a for the two videos.

Video	Date added to Youtube	Number of views	Number of comments	Number of “likes”	Number of “dislikes”
Last Dictator Standing	24 November 2011	1,307,159 + 435,794 = 1,742,953	1110 + 524 = 1634	6126 + 2398 = 8524	158 + 74 = 232
Julius Malema	21 April 2009	338,123	372	325	6

^a As reported on the 12th of March 2013.

analysis (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Henke, n.d.; Izawa, 2010; Lagger et al., 2011; Nelson-Field et al., 2011). Izawa (2010) states that relatively few viral marketing studies have focused on video content, and consequently, little is known about the process by which viral videos are shared. This study uses online video sharing, particularly Youtube videos, as the unit of analysis. Youtube is one of the video sharing giants (Nelson-Field et al., 2011) and arguably the number one site where one can find viral videos.

Two videos, that focused on South African politics and used political satire, were selected for this analysis. The Youtube videos were selected based on the following criteria:

- They made South African politics the focus of their message while not being associated with government in any way.
- These branded and company generated videos resulted in a public relations debate. Both the videos, first launched as television advertisements, were taken off the air either because of threats from political factions.
- The relative popularity of these videos: to be able to compare results, one successful viral video was used, and one less successful one.
- Both videos have been online for longer than a year.

These criteria correspond to previous studies using a similar approach (see Reyneke, 2011).

In order to control for the influence of the quality of the content and subject matter of the videos themselves, the two videos were chosen to maximise the similarity between them: these videos both used humour and political satire and both made fun of controversial political figures. To control for the influence of the actual product or brand, two videos from the same company (Nando's, a popular fast food chain) were used. The selected videos were as follows.

2.1.1. Nando's "Last Dictator Standing"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1EX-vdvh4>.

This video portrays Robert Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe, having a good time with some of the world's most notorious dictators like PW Botha, Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and Idi Amin. Mugabe stands out as the sole remaining member of this “club” (Maclean, 2011) as the rest have all passed away. Many praised the fast food chain for its innovativeness, but many criticised it for Nandos' insensitivity (Maclean, 2011). Soon after the campaign was launched, Nando's was forced to pull the ad off the air because of threats from Zimbabwean youth militia (Conway-Smith, 2011). However, the video remained online.

2.1.2. Nando's "Julius Malema Campaign Ad"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8Aq042KPSg>.

The second video from Nando's featured a puppet named Julius, that referenced Julius Malema, the South African ANC Youth League president at the time, endorsing chicken. In the video, Malema demands “change” and states that Nando's can give you more “change” if you pay with more money. Political satire is created by representing Julius Malema as a puppet, which has implications and prescribes meaning far wider than Julius Malema talking about Nando's. As Grofman (1989) would say, the more you know about puppets and Malema, the more you understand the advertisement. This video suggests that Julius Malema (1) is a puppet for stronger political forces, and is directed by these political forces, and (2) is a “dummy” or not intelligent.

Julius Malema is a highly contentious political figure in South Africa, who has since been suspended from the ANC and is facing criminal charges. When the advert aired, the ANC Youth League demanded that it be removed as it was “intended at mocking” Julius Malema, and “in a racist fashion portrays political leaders as cartoons” (Hartley, 2009). Table 1 provides the Youtube summary statistics of these videos. Two separate links to the Last Dictator Standing video went viral, but both of these were deemed important in the analysis and were subsequently included.

Even though the Julius Malema video has been on Youtube for two years longer than the Last Dictator Standing video, it achieved considerably less views than the latter. It also had a much lower comments/view ratio of 0.1% (number of comments per views) as opposed to the Last Dictator Standing's 9%. At first glance, however, the videos appeared to be very similar as both used political satire and focused on African leaders. Viewers' comments were the first port of call to gain further insights into why the one video was more successful than the other.

The three general steps of qualitative data analysis, namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing (Malhotra, 2010) were the next steps in the research process.

Fig. 1. Leximancer map of online comments regarding the Nando's Last Dictator Standing advertisement.

2.2. Content analysis of viewers' comments

A text analysis tool (Leximancer, www.leximancer.com) was used to analyse viewers' comments. Leximancer is a simple, yet powerful, qualitative data mining tool that has been used in over 804 academic studies (Leximancer, 2013). It has often been applied to the analysis of online content (see for example Stockwell, Colomb, Smith, & Wiles, 2009) because of its ability to analyse a large amount of qualitative text. The Leximancer algorithm is based on Bayesian theory (Reyneke, 2011), and the automatic selection of key themes and concepts has been proven to agree with expert human judgement (Rooney, 2005 in Reyneke, 2011; Stockwell et al., 2009). Its primary benefits include that it builds concepts as opposed to counting words, pronouns and conjunction. These are all words with low semantic value and are automatically excluded from the analysis. It also does not do stemming, the practice of removing suffixes and reducing words to stem words. Lastly, Leximancer is able to read all types of types of text, including the grammatically incorrect comments often loaded on Youtube (Reyneke, 2011).

To discover themes and key concepts in the text, Leximancer does both a conceptual (thematic) and relational (semantic) analysis (Reyneke, 2011). Leximancer then displays the key themes and concepts through a “concept map” that visually displays the interrelationships between themes and concepts, as well as their relative importance. Key themes are represented by large circles and concepts are shown by dots (Reyneke, 2011; Stockwell et al., 2009). The more concepts per theme, the more important that theme is, while the size of the theme does not provide any specific indication of its importance. Heat mapping is also used to show relative importance where warmer colours, like red and orange, are more important than cooler colours, like blue and green (Leximancer, 2013). If concepts overlap in the map, or are closer together, they typically appear together in-text, as semantic links are represented by distance.

2.3. Results

The concept maps for each video will first be analysed, whereafter conclusions are drawn based on these analyses, specifically around the use of emotion in these videos.

2.3.1. Interpretation of the Leximancer maps

There were 1634 viewer comments on Youtube regarding this video. Fig. 1 provides the visual representation of these comments.

The major themes that emerged from viewers' comments were Mugabe (100% connectivity to the rest of the themes), people (86%), dictators (83%), white (45%), chicken (13%) and funny (11%). These themes converged around the following discussion threads.

The *Mugabe* and *People* themes were central in viewers' comments as is evident from the central position of these themes, and their colour (red and orange as opposed to blue or green). Viewers that commented on *Mugabe*, could broadly be classified into those who support his regime (linked to words like "country" and "Zimbabwe") and those who opposed him. These two opposing views are illustrated by the following comments:

"Mugabe deserves all the scorn in the world for the way he's treated his own people." Vs. "Long live Mugabe! He took land away from 6,000 European invade[rs] and gave it to over 200,000 poor blacks that have been exploited from imperialism for so long."

These show how comments regarding Mugabe himself are linked to comments regarding the people (theme 2), where many of the arguments for or against Mugabe revolved around the way he treated (or liberated) his people. The comments around *People* and how they were treated sparked a discussion of other *Countries* suffering, specifically *Libya*. The comments around Mugabe and the way he treated his people also sparked a debate around race. This can be seen from the words "black" and "white" emerging in the *people* theme. One viewer commented *"Please tell me what injustice, the type that Mugabe is doing to the remaining whites by taking their farms and having them killed?"* and another commented *"If I may ask are you white or black? The reason why those farms are taken is because the white farmers had land the size of a mini island while the blacks lived in barren small farms"*.

While many of the comments regarding *White* were race oriented, the majority were about viewers asking who the "white" "guy" was in the video. With the international audience of this video, many viewers did not know who the white dictator depicted in the video was. Consequently, the themes *White*, *Dictator* and *Video* were linked together and the themes *Dictator* and *Dictators* loaded separately. Comments regarding *Dictator* were mainly focused on finding out who was in the video, and viewers responded that it was former South African president P.W. Botha ("Botha") – a president associated with the apartheid regime.

The comments regarding *Dictators* on the other hand, were linked to words like "Nando's", "commercial" and "banned". Many of these comments centred around how *funny* this ad was, as well as a discussion of the dictators included (and not included) in the ad. These sentiments are reflected in the comments below.

"Gotta [sic] love this ad – all the goons ripped off together—including PW Botha with Mugabe, Gaddafi etc. is also a nice touch. It reflects the contempt the average person has for the various african dictators."

and

"Where is Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew?" followed by "He's not dead." and "He was not that brutal."

Many of the viewers commented on *chicken* and how the chicken depicted at the end of the ad "looks delicious" or how they plan to go out and buy the chicken. Finally, comments around the *Song* in the video mostly resulted from viewers asking which song was used in the video.

Viewers also commented on the emotions that they felt while watching the video. The specific emotions referred to within the comments, were those around "pity" for Mugabe and "feeling bad" for him after watching the video. The following comments encapsulate these sentiments:

"I know these are/were bad people, very very bad people, but everytime [sic] I watch this I can't help but feel kinda [sic] sad for the guy." and "At the end, why do I feel bad for Robert Mugabe?"

Next, the video that used Julius Malema was analysed. Around 372 comments were used in the Leximancer analysis (Fig. 2).

The main themes that emerged from viewers' comments were negative comments around race and politics: *Black* (100% connectivity to all themes), white (37%), the country (21%) and the ANC (16%). By using a controversial political figure, Nando's sparked polarised comments from those for or against Julius Malema. The comments quickly turned into a racial debate where viewers fought about *White* people, *Black* people, and the *Government*. Many comments were made by participants. These were the central themes (according to position, linkages and colour) of the majority of the comments:

"... black people from other countries look at South Africa [and] its black government as laughable idiots. And if you knew your history, you would know that whites founded South Africa [and] NOT blacks."

"When are you people going to acknowledge that the reason black south africans are killing the farmers is because they want their land back. Take a look at zim[babwe]. After Mugabe took back the land, white people are living peacefully."

"...look at every prosperous nation [and] what do you find? White hands [and] white minds that invented, created [and] built those nations including South Africa. And if you like, you can say the black slaves of the times hands built them. But it was the white man who told them what to do [and] the black man who wasn't [and] isn't smart enough to, apart from destroying countries."

Fig. 2. Leximancer map of online comments regarding the Nando's Julius Malema advertisement.

The comments were either aimed at Julius Malema himself (*Julius* theme), or at the ANC government (*ANC* theme). These negative comments sparked a big debate from viewers around the world, where one viewer stated in response that “*the situation here [in South Africa] is complicated and the general population white, black no matter what colour is struggling. The only people benefitting seem to be government*”. This debate was further fuelled by the ANC Youth League threatening militant action if Nando’s did not remove the ad (Hartley, 2009).

The themes *take*, *shit*, *doing* and *apartheid* were all linked to the debates mentioned above. *Take* often referred to what “white” South African took from “blacks”, or what “blacks” are taking from “whites” now. *Doing* thus often referred to the acts that these two groups are doing to each other, many of these originating from apartheid: “*So sadly the ANC has reversed apartheid in what seems to be ‘payback’ which is causing both black and [sic] white to suffer*”.

The next group of themes referred to *south* and *funny*. *South* refers to comments around South Africa, many of which were also linked to the debate mentioned above. *Funny*, on the other hand, referred to one of two things. First, to how funny viewers found the Nandos ad. Second, to how “funny” the online racial debate that was generated by video was, where the word was often used sarcastically. The following comments are example of the latter:

"Hahahaha!!!! This is so funny. You know why it's [sic] funny? I read your comment . . ."

Many of the viewers also urged others to “*stop taking things so seriously*” as this was just a “*funny ad*”. The final group of themes centred around *Julius and change*. Comments around these themes referred to the actual advertisement where Julius Malema talked about the “change” you get when buying Nando’s. A few of the comments around change were also linked to sentiments around change in the country, illustrated by the link between this theme and the *South [Africa] theme*.

Viewers did not comment on any emotions that they felt, positive or negative, while watching the ad. The majority of comments around this video were negative and intense debate resulted from the video, however, this video did not generate many “hits” online compared to the Last Dictator Standing video. When considering that the video generated a lot of press, its number of hits is small. As one viewer commented:

“Honestly if he [Julius Malema] hadn’t thrown such a hissy fit about it [the video], it would never have gotten the same publicity it did.”

2.3.2. Valence and arousal (emotional intensity) within each video

When looking at viewers comments, these two videos appeared to be similar in that they generated commentary on the same current political climate and political issues. Both videos received a hostile reaction from politically oriented youth groups (the typical age group of online users). And with both videos, viewers commented that Nando’s was “funny”, and that they felt “amused”. In both sets of commentary, viewers exclaimed (albeit more in the Last Dictator group) that the video was the “best ad ever”. The videos were dissimilar, however, in that specific emotions elicited by the ads were mentioned in the Last Dictator Standing video, but no emotions were mentioned with the Julius Malema video.

Two emotions that were specifically mentioned in the comments of the Last Dictator video were “happy” and “sad”. Viewers commented on how happy watching the video made them feel, or how surprised they were to feel sad for this controversial president after watching the videos. This suggests that a form of emotional convergence, called emotional contagion, took place with the Last Dictator video that might not have occurred with the Julius Malema video.

2.4. Discussion

The above analyses show that many of the comments from viewers, centred around the same themes. For example “black”, “white” and “government” featured in both the Nando’s videos. Both the Nando’s ads were also classified as being “funny”. Both videos proved to be humorous and creative – two key contributors for content to go viral. However, only one of these videos reached over a million viewers.

The theory discussed at the beginning of the paper suggests that viewers’ emotional reaction, as well as the level of intensity of their emotional reaction, may be key influencing factors in whether the video goes viral. While the comments above suggest that viewers had emotional reactions to the videos, the specific emotions involved could not be ascertained. The relationship between content-specific factors, and the emotion that it elicits, consequently needs further investigation.

The following study therefore used these same videos (while adding a third video as a control) in an experimental setting to better understand the relationship between content and emotion in viral videos.

3. Study 2: how the intensity of emotions impact its virality

Provided that both videos used political satire, both were creative, both had similar levels of utility and both were humorous, further research was necessary into the only seemingly variable explanation of the virality of these two videos: viewers’ emotional reaction to the videos. Theory suggests that a key determinant of viral marketing is the emotion that the content elicits (Dobele et al., 2007). When investigating the influence of emotions on viral content, one should not only look at the particular emotion generated by the online content, but also at the intensity of the particular emotion (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Nelson-Field et al., 2011).

3.1. Method

Fifty-two participants were exposed to all three videos (in a random order) and their emotional reaction (and the intensity of that emotion) was measured. This resulted in $n = 156$. The treatment was viral (Last Dictator) and non-viral (Julius Malema) online videos that focused on political satire. And in order to limit bias, a third control video was brought in. This approach was used to increase both the internal and external validity of the study (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). Other controls used in the experiment are discussed in greater depth in the following section, while this section focuses on the key research design elements.

The target population and sample size used for this study was similar to those used by others focusing on emotions in online video sharing (see for example Berger & Milkman, 2009). Respondents’ average age was 25 years, and around 60% were female. With regards to measures, the established positive affect negative affect (PANAS) scale was used (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Self-report measures of one’s subjective experience constitutes the most frequently used approach in the measurement of emotions (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Barsade, 2002). This follows a dimensional approach to the measurement of emotions (Russell, 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985), suggested by various authors (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Participants were also asked to what extent they felt the stated emotion, in order to measure the level of arousal or intensity of the emotion.

Viral behaviour can be measured either through self-report measures of intent (see Eckler & Bolls, 2011) or through actual sharing behaviour (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Nelson-Field et al., 2011). This study uses a combination of these where actual sharing behaviour was used in the selection of the videos, and self-report measures (of both simply “liking” and “forwarding” online content) were used to measure the dependent variables of the study. Most studies focusing on the spread of online content use either an objective or subjective measure of whether the content investigated was passed on to viewers’ social networks. New technology, however, provides viewers with an additional option of just “liking” the content. Consequently,

both were measured separately. However, both actions would mean that the viewers' social network would (1) see that the viewer has watched the video and (2) be provided with a link to the content.

3.2. Controls

Internal validity is a measure of the accuracy of the experiment while external validity refers to the generalisability of the experiment (Malhotra, 2010; Zikmund et al., 2013). One often sacrifices the one for the other (Malhotra, 2010). With the sheer number of online videos on Youtube, as well as the different types of videos, truly claiming generalisability of experimental findings would be next to impossible. With decreased external validity, the internal validity of the study was a key focus. This was improved by incorporating a third video in the analysis as a control measure.

The additional video was a controversial advert from First National Bank (FNB) called "controversial 2013 advert" (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8.0MYzz4cw>). This video was added to Youtube on the 22nd of January 2013. On the 13th of March 2013 it had 50,327 views, 150 comments, 290 likes and 22 dislikes. This video formed part of an integrated campaign where children were asked what they hope for in South Africa. A young girl is shown as part of a seemingly "live" broadcast, where she discusses the challenges faced by the country as well as her hopes for the country. The national government criticised the campaign for feeding into the opposition narrative that "sought to project the ANC and government in a negative manner" (News24, 2013). The CEO of FNB soon thereafter apologised to the government and pulled the campaign off air.

While this video is still comparable to the two Nando's ads in that it focuses on South African politics to get a message across, and received similar media attention and was ultimately pulled from the air due to political pressure. After being removed from mainstream media, it remained on Youtube. However, this video differs from the other two in that it does not use humour in political satire, but rather focuses on a different type of emotion (hope and inspiration) in order to get variance in the findings. It was also a video from a different South African company. The three videos were randomly shown to respondents.

Based on the literature review, the influence of emotions on the virality of the videos was investigated while controlling for:

- *Valence*. Many studies show that positive content is more likely to spread than negative content (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Izawa, 2010; Rodic & Koivisto, 2012).
- *Emotional intensity*. An increasing number of studies have shown that it is not necessarily the valence of the emotion that influences its virality, but the intensity with which the emotion is felt (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Harber & Cohen, 2005; Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001; Henke, n.d.; Nelson-Field et al., 2011; Rimé et al., 1998).
- *Creativity*. Creative content has often been shown to be more successful in IMC campaigns than other approaches to advertising.
- *Humour*. Similarly, funny videos are suggested to spread further and quicker than others (Golan & Zaidner, 2008).
- *Utility*. Last, in the study of urban legends, ideas that are informative to the listener have been shown to spread further than those that are not (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Rodic & Koivisto, 2012).
- *Exposure to the video*. As existing online content was used, we also controlled for the influence that seeing the video before the experiment had on viewers' propensity to forward and like content.

3.3. Results

First the descriptive statistics that were measured in the study are discussed in Table 2, where after the models are fitted.

On average, participants found that the videos had a high level of creativity, but average levels of humour and utility. The Last Dictator Standing video was rated to have the highest level of creativity and humour by participants, but provided participants with little utility value. The control video (FNB) was rated, on average, to have little to no humour and an average amount of utility.

Participants also experienced high intensity in the emotions that were elicited by the three videos, where the intensity for the Julius Malema video was slightly less than the overall average, and the Last Dictator Standing's intensity slightly higher. The majority (94%) of participants experienced positive emotions when watching the Last Dictator Standing. The spread between positive and negative emotions was slightly more varied for the other two videos: Julius Malema (79% positive, 21% negative), FNB (67% positive, 33% negative). Finally, regardless of the amount of time that these three videos have been on Youtube, relatively equal percentages have seen the three videos: Julius Malema (67% have not seen the video), FNB (64% have not seen the video) and Last Dictator Standing (62% have not seen the video).

Independent sample *t*-tests were used to test whether intensity and valence, when tested independent of other controls, influenced viral behaviour. Participants who experienced high-intensity emotions were more likely to forward online videos ($p = 0.00$, $t = -4.96$) and were more likely to "like" online videos ($p = 0.00$, $t = -4.21$). Similarly, Pearson Chi-square was used to test whether there was an association between valence and viral behaviour. Valence was found to positively influence whether participants "forwarded" the video ($p = 0.00$, Chi-Square = 6.93) and if they "liked" the video ($p = 0.00$, Chi-Square = 23.60). Consequently, both valence and arousal were found to significantly influence viral behaviour, such that the greater the intensity of the emotion experienced, the greater the likelihood that they will "forward" and "like" the video.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of predictors.

Video	Predictor	Mean	Std. deviation
Overall	Intensity	7.05	1.63
	Creativity	7.43	2.21
	Humour	5.50	3.61
	Utility	5.17	2.49
Julius Malema	Intensity	6.48	1.55
	Creativity	7.00	2.18
	Humour	6.53	2.62
	Utility	5.18	2.32
FNB	Intensity	7.12	1.65
	Creativity	6.61	2.40
	Humour	1.36	1.41
	Utility	5.47	2.69
Last Dictator Standing	Intensity	7.56	1.54
	Creativity	8.65	1.40
	Humour	8.46	1.83
	Utility	4.86	2.44

^aMeasured on a scale from 1 to 10 (from 1 (not at all) to 10 (extremely so)).

Similarly, videos evoking positive emotions are more likely to be “forwarded” and “liked” than videos that evoke negative emotions. These findings are consistent with previous research (see for example Berger & Milkman, 2009; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Izawa, 2010; Nelson-Field et al., 2011), however, few studies have controlled for other factors while investigating the influence of valence and arousal on viral behaviour.

Forty-one percent of participants indicated that they would “like” the ad, but only 21% stated that they would “forward” the ad. Within those respondents who stated that they would not “like” the video, 97% indicated that they would also not “forward” the video. Conversely, of those who indicated that they would “like” the video, only 47% indicated that they would forward the video. Only 19% of participants stated that they would both “like” and “forward” the video.

Next, the influence of emotion (valence), the intensity of the emotion, and the control variables discussed on viral behaviour (“forward” or “like” online videos) are addressed. First the model fit statistics for each model is discussed. Each model, except for the model predicting if participants would forward the Last Dictator Standing, was significant (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3
Model fit statistics.

Overall model	Model	R		R square		Adjusted R square		Std. error of the estimate	
		0.47	0.56	0.22	0.31	0.19	0.29	0.41	0.42
	ANOVA	Sum of squares		df		Mean square		F	
	Regression	6.79	11.75	6		1.13	1.96	6.78	10.88
	Residual	23.88	25.73	143		0.17	0.18	Sig.	
	Total	30.67	37.47	149				0.00**	0.00**
Last Dictator Standing	Model	R		R square		Adjusted R square		Std. error of the estimate	
		0.32	0.49	0.10	0.24	−0.02	0.13	0.51	0.45
	ANOVA	Sum of squares		df		Mean square		F	
	Regression	1.28	2.77	6		0.21	0.46	0.82	2.2
	Residual	11.35	8.88	44		0.26	0.20	Sig.	
	Total	12.63	11.65	50				0.56	0.05*
Julius Malema	Model	R		R square		Adjusted R square		Std. error of the estimate	
		0.50	0.59	0.25	0.35	0.15	0.26	0.37	0.43
	ANOVA	Sum of squares		df		Mean square		F	
	Regression	1.99	4.28	6		0.33	0.71	2.41	3.89
	Residual	6.05	8.07	44		0.14	0.18	Sig.	
	Total	8.04	12.53	50				0.04*	0.00**
FNB	Model	R		R square		Adjusted R square		Std. error of the estimate	
		0.59	0.66	0.35	0.44	0.25	0.36	0.36	0.40
	ANOVA	Sum of squares		df		Mean square		F	
	Regression	2.76	5.05	6		0.46	0.84	3.66	5.36
	Residual	5.16	6.43	41		0.13	0.16	Sig.	
	Total	7.92	11.48	47				0.01**	0.00**

The first values relate to the models where “Forward” was the dependent variable, the second to the models where “like” was the dependent variable.

* Significant at a 5% level of significance.

** Significant at a 10% level of significance.

Table 4

The influence of emotion, intensity, creativity, humour and utility on viral behaviour.

		Overall model		Last Dictator Standing		Julius Malema		FNB	
		Forward	Like	Forward	Like	Forward	Like	Forward	Like
Predictors	Intensity	0.17 [^]	0.15 [^]	0.01	0.17 [^]	0.15	0.001	0.27 [^]	0.13
	Creativity	0.33 ^{**}	0.29 ^{**}	0.35	0.33 ^{**}	0.47 [*]	0.45 [*]	0.29 [^]	0.20
	Humour	−0.01	0.00	−0.09	−0.01	−0.15	−0.05	0.02	−0.15
	Inform	0.05	0.10	0.01	0.05	0.09	0.12	0.09	0.36 [^]
Control variables	Valence	0.08	0.26 ^{**}	0.07	0.08	−0.12	0.19	0.26 [^]	0.28 [*]
	Seen video before	−0.003	0.05	0.01	−0.003	−0.004	0.13	0.004	−0.16

Linear regression was used. The dependent variables, “forward” and “like”, as well as the control variables were coded binomially. Standardised coefficients are reported.

[^] Significant at a 10% level of significance.

^{*} Significant at a 5% level of significance.

^{**} Significant at a 1% level of significance.

Creativity, followed by intensity, appeared to be the greatest influencer of viral behaviour when using political satire in viral campaigns. Creativity significantly impacted the majority videos' viral behaviour and had the greatest influence on viral behaviour in the overall model. Intensity was found to influence both whether participants forwarded and “liked” online videos. The video where it had the greatest influence was the one of Julius Malema. Valence (or whether the video aroused positive or negative emotions), however, only impacted whether participants “liked” the video, and not whether they forwarded the video to their online social networks. Whether participants had seen the video before or not, had no influence on viral behaviour. This suggests that future research can similarly make use of existing videos to study viral behaviour. The utility of the video, as well as the humour contained in the video, did not appear to have an influence on viral behaviour.

3.4. Discussion

The results show that it is important to distinguish two types of viral behaviour: “forwarding” or passing along content, and “liking” content. Even though the factors that contributed to these behaviours were similar, there were positive nuances in the way that creativity, affect and the intensity of the emotion elicited by the video impacted them. The creativity of the content, as well as the intensity of the emotion that it evoked, impacted whether participants forwarded the videos. While these two factors also predicted whether participants would “like” the videos, the valence of the video also played a role. This could possibly explain why previous studies have found inconsistent results with regards to the effect of valence on content going viral.

While almost all participants who stated that they would “forward” the videos, also stated that they would “like” the videos, but the reverse did not hold. Some participants indicated that they would “like” the content, but not necessarily forward it. This suggests that viewers of viral content see these two behaviours as distinct.

The majority of participants perceived all three videos to be positive. Around 30% of participants thought that the FNB and Julius Malema ads were negative, but less than 10% thought that the Last Dictator video was negative. In this case, it would appear that the video eliciting positive emotion, was more successful than the one eliciting negative emotion. The results suggest that not only valence, but also the intensity of the emotion felt influences its' virality.

4. Conclusions and managerial implications

Making fun of beloved politicians or the government in general is a risky communication strategy. All three cases mentioned in this study resulted in political backlash and both positive and negative publicity. All three videos ultimately had to be removed from its above the line media slots, and were left on social media only. The question is therefore, when does this strategy pay off?

Two videos were chosen because of the similar strategies that they followed: the same company, using political satire and comedy, making fun of politicians, to sell product and build reputation. However, the one campaign was successful whilst the other was not. The findings from this study suggest that using political satire to gain viral traction is not enough: these videos need to be creative and evoke strong emotions in viewers.

While the creativity of the videos played a key role in the selected videos going viral, not all content can be creative in nature. Marketing and Communication managers should rather focus on the one element that is present in all viral videos: the *emotion* that the video elicits. This paper shows that the emotional reaction that each video had on the viewer, as well as how intense that emotional reaction was, had a key influence on its online traction.

Using political satire in advertising could increase the likelihood of viewers having more intense emotional reactions when watching the videos. People generally have higher emotional reactions to issues that hits closer to home, and using politics to increase emotional-intensity, is a smart tactic by companies like Nando's.

When using political satire in viral campaigns, marketing managers should focus on the emotions elicited by the content, and not only on the content itself. When debate centres solely around the content (for example in the Julius Malema video), then the video is less likely to gain viral traction. The relationship between content and emotion is consequently central to viral success.

4.1. Possible limitations of the study

While this paper took an exploratory look at the influence of political satire on the spread of content online, the generalisability of the findings is a limitation of this study. By only using two videos (and the FNB video as a control), as well as the narrow focus of these videos (South African politics), the findings from this study cannot be extrapolated to all viral content. Ideally, representation would have been gotten in terms of both positive and negative videos, different types of videos (for example, informative, creative), user vs. corporate generated, etc. The findings of this study, however, are consistent with those of others, and our current understanding of viral behaviour, lending confidence thereto. Also, with the number of Youtube videos uploaded daily, getting a representative sample of videos from this platform would be close to impossible. Ideally, we would have controlled for other factors like valence, arousal and virality in a factorial. Consequently, the following section suggests ways in which these findings, as well as extensions thereof, could be investigated.

4.2. Avenues for future research

Really good viral campaigns transform the emotions of viewers and a process of emotional contagion takes place. Emotional contagion refers to the transfer of moods from one person to another (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994) and among people in a group (Barsade, 2002) and is concerned with the impact that people's emotions have on the people in their environment. Emotional contagion is therefore the tendency of people to "catch" and feel the emotions that others are feeling. In their seminal work, Hatfield et al. (1994) state that the underlying mechanism of emotional contagion is a tendency to mimic and synchronise facial expressions, vocalisations, postures, and movements with those of another person automatically and, consequently, to converge emotionally. Schoenewolf (1990), however, uses a broader definition and states that emotional contagion is a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behaviour of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioural attitudes (Schoenewolf, 1990).

The Last Dictator Standing video, more than the Julius Malema video, encouraged this emotional contagion in viewers. Not only did participants in the experiment state how their emotions changed after watching the video, they also commented on this in Youtube. A few of the comments by viewers referred to how sad the video made them feel, even though they know that the video portrays really bad people. While none of the comments from the Julius Malema video elicited such remarks. This suggests that the Last Dictator video facilitated this process of emotional contagion better than the Julius Malema video. Future research should look into how emotional contagion facilitates the sharing of content online.

Research regarding viral behaviour, viral marketing and the spread of content online, in general, lacks theoretical depth. While there is a large body of knowledge from sociology and psychology that focuses on human emotions and emotional reactions, these seldomly get incorporated into viral research. Authors often simply state that emotions play a role (Dobele et al., 2007), or use disparate scales to measure and classify emotions (see for example Berger & Milkman, 2009 versus Nelson-Field et al., 2011). Some classify sadness as a "low arousal" emotion (Nelson-Field et al., 2011) while others classify it as a "high arousal" emotion (Berger & Milkman, 2009). Future research should attempt to better incorporate theories regarding emotion and the sharing of emotion within social networks. The social sharing of emotion (Rimé, 2007; Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé, Paez, Kanyangara, & Yzerbyt, 2011), theory regarding memes (Heath et al., 2001) or the Emotional Broadcaster Theory (Harber & Cohen, 2005) serve as good examples of theories that could contribute to the current understanding of viral behaviour.

The difference between "forwarding" content and "liking" content as two different forms of viral behaviour was interesting and warrants further investigation. Authors disagree about the role that valence plays in viral marketing: some suggest that positive content, in general, have more viral success (Eckler & Bolls, 2011), while others state that "going viral" is more about viewers' emotional-arousal, regardless of the valence of the content (Berger & Milkman, 2009; Nelson-Field et al., 2011). Our findings suggest that valence does play a role if respondents are simply required to "like" content, but not necessarily if they are asked to "forward" content. Could the differences in previous studies be accounted for by how viral behaviour was measured? And what is the substantive difference between "liking" and "forwarding"? We suggest that simply "liking" content requires less commitment from viewers. While the content that viewers' "like" still gets shared with their social network, they do not, in a sense, take responsibility for originally posting the content. Also, "liking" could be seen as showing supportive behaviour for the content that others have posted, where "forwarding" content requires more commitment from viewers. These assertions certainly call for further investigation.

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