

How to Emotionalize Content for Social Media Influence

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A growing body of research is supporting the need for content to strike an emotional chord if it's to go viral. Studies are now revealing what types of emotional content garner the most views, likes, shares and comments in social media.

Our own examination of YouTube recast commercials discovered the following *eight types of emotional content* to perform the best.

1. Sentimentalism
2. Humor
3. Inspiration
4. Public spontaneity
5. Pride
6. Incredulity
7. Nostalgia
8. Generosity

SENTIMENTALISM: *Touching Hearts with Tenderness, Compassion and Nostalgia*

A recurrent theme among the examined social videos involve the tearful joy stemming from tender moments. Pfizer captures this well in their heartwarming scenes of family members expressing their appreciation for each other.

These emotions are also aroused when feelings of compassion tug at our hearts. The success of social videos like Bangkok's Thai Life video and Sarah McLachlan's ASPCA video are largely based on their compassionate pleas and gestures.

In a similar vein, much of the imagery reaching the highest engagement in social media involves innocence. The scenes of toddlers, animals, young romance and other cute arousals allow us to live vicariously through a kinder and more promising world.

HUMOR: *Tickling Hearts with Social Order Deviancy, Comic Wit and Malicious Joy*

Another way to spark emotional connections from content is through humor.

Accounting for the vast majority of viral YouTube videos, laughter is produced when we see something out of sorts (comic wit), enjoy others' misfortunes (malicious joy) or release ourselves from inhibitions (social order deviancy).

INSPIRATION: *Restoring Hope through Bolstered Confidence and Pushing Limits*

The past few years have witnessed a dramatic rise in inspirational content often centered around pumping us up. Consider how P&G and Nike spots routinely post videos of young adults encouraged to push their limits or never give up. The videos often involve handicapped role models, outstanding athletes or parents motivating them to realize their potential.

PUBLIC SPONTANEITY: *Disrupting through Flash Mobs, Pranks or Surprise Routines*

In almost all cases, content that goes viral has an element of surprise to trigger attention. This "element of surprise" often happens as an unexpected twist revealed

toward the end of a content piece. In perhaps its most effective setting, the element of surprise is cast in a monotonous public setting that challenges crowd routines with a “let loose” spontaneity.

Dozens of flash mob videos garnered millions of views when cast in unsuspected public settings including malls, train stations, airports, public squares and universities. A similar jolt to our hearts can happen when publicly displayed pranks widely disrupt our otherwise peaceful settings. Another effective element of surprise involves an unexpected change of routine. Virgin Atlantic's #VXsafetydance video likely sparked attention from many bored passengers enjoying the break from monotonous safety instructions.

PRIDE: *Stirring Hearts through Team Winning, Family News and Solidarity*

Of the examined videos, many involved feelings of exhilaration experienced from the winning. Nike spots have had great success capturing the thrills of proud communities from winning championships, spectacular comebacks or retiring great players. A more sobering heartfelt feeling of pride can be aroused from hero salutes like those used in Hill Holiday's spots for Anheuser-Busch.

This stirring of emotions from community solidarity is an effective theme for brand storytelling. Chrysler rekindled American pride with a piece dedicated to the motor city. In a similar fashion, brands like VaynerMedia's Dove spots and TBWA's production for Apple have been highly effective in stirring family pride with pregnancy announcements or unexpected family achievements.

INCREDULITY: *Dazzling People with Beauty, Craftsmanship and the Human Potential*

Feelings are often aroused through a shock and awe after experiencing the wonders of nature, ingenuity or what our bodies and minds can achieve. Dove astonishes us with their extreme makeovers much like Honda's "Cog" dazzles us with their incredible attention to fine detail and masterful craftsmanship. Heart pumping sensations can be aroused when we explore the depths of natural beauty or witness dare devil feats and the extremes of human potential.

NOSTALGIA: *Warming Hearts with Fond Memories of Family and Better Days*

Nostalgic storylines stir our hearts from reflections on what means the most to us. Apple and MetLife , for example, portray the importance of family in healing emotional scars or restoring the sense of security we feel in the surroundings of loved ones.

Combining the sadness of loss with the joy of accomplishment is especially effective in garnering likes and shares. These scenes of tearful joy often include fathers letting go of their daughters when they first drive a car, go off to college or get married.

GENEROSITY: *Touching Hearts with Kindness*

Though not as commonly created as other forms of emotionalized content, videos displaying random acts of kindness, community benevolence or thankful gift giving often reach tens of millions of views. Consider the effectiveness of Everlast in their portrayal of a young boy who sacrifices his own pride to support the hungry.

Brands like Westjet reached 42M views from their Christmas Miracle video produced by Mosaic. In this case, the brand showed its generosity in surprise passengers with Christmas gifts coming down the carousel. This strikes an emotional chord similar to the generosity displayed in Cossette's spot produced for Duracell as they warmed up bus passengers waiting in the cold.

Conclusion

So with the alarming levels of content hitting the internet, it is clear that content marketers must find a way to distinguish themselves by emotionally amplifying their content. This will likely shift the bulk of content formats from one of instruction and information to one of entertainment and inspiration.

And to do this effectively, brands and small firms have to show their true colors while surprising us with playful content, awe inspiring imagery, sentimental pleas or passionate performances. Add stories of generosity or triumph; and you may find the key to establishing emotional connections that get your content to go viral.

So what other ways do you think content can strike an emotional chord with targeted audiences?