

Why do Videos Go Viral?

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Why does so much conflict exist in the world? According to Joshua Green, it is because human brains only evolved to handle cooperating with a small tribe. Throughout most of human history, we only lived with small tribes and rarely encountered others. The modern world, however, brings multitudes of diverse groups of people together, and our brains haven't caught up to that yet.¹ In some places, it seems like this diversity is dividing us. Take the United States, where experts argue Americans are becoming more polarized. In his book, *The Big Sort*, Bill Bishop claims the trend that Americans have increasingly migrated to live near people similar to them has caused them to further divide.² Diana Mutz argues mass media could be blamed due to the increased pressure for media outlets to produce content that give people what they want, and not necessarily what they need.³

If the combination of mass media and people seeking homogeneity are the chief causes of polarization in the United States, how do we get rid of it? One possible solution is cultural globalization. Cultural globalization is when the rapid transfer of ideas and values around the world increase social relations. It's a form of cultural diffusion largely propelled by the internet, popular culture, and international travel. According to Guy Sorman, cultural globalization is a positive trend. "People from different backgrounds and nations discover one another, and their 'otherness' suddenly disappears," Sorman argues (36). He gives the example of a Korean sitcom that became popular in Japan and then transformed Japanese perceptions of Koreans.⁴ J. MacGregor Wise argues that cultural globalization promotes cosmopolitanism, which he defines as a willingness to engage with different people and have empathy for different kinds

¹ Wright. "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Uncertain Biological Basis of Morality." *The Atlantic*. November 2013. Accessed June 15, 2016.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/11/why-we-fightand-can-we-stop/309525/>.

² Bishop and Cushing. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008: 11.

³ Mutz. "How the Mass Media Divides Us." *Penn Libraries*: 242.

⁴ Sorman. "Globalization Is Making the World a Better Place." *Heritage*: 36. Accessed June 16, 2016. http://www.heritage.org/index/pdf/2008/index2008_chapter3.pdf.

of people. In his book, *Cultural Globalization*, he gives examples of how people become “deep citizens” by interacting with others who initially seem disparate. Wise argues that cosmopolitanism greatly helps reduce conflict.⁵

Viral videos are a form of rapid cultural diffusion that nurture cultural globalization. Also known as “contagion diffusion,” viral videos are videos digitally shared at an exponential rate because it’s so easy to do so on social media. According to Kevin Nalty, a viral video typically gets at least five million views within a week.⁶

Viral videos often transcend cultures. “Gangnam Style,” a music video for the song by South Korean rapper Psy, holds the record for YouTube’s most-viewed video of all time. A viral sensation, the video currently has around 2.6 billion views since its release on July 15, 2012.⁷ At its peak, it was averaging 10 million views a day.⁸ In addition, it currently has 7.5 as many “likes” as it has “dislikes.”⁹ UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon proclaimed the song’s success as proof that music can unite the world. For proof that Ki-Moon was not just overstressing the its importance, there are tens of thousands of tribute videos that surfaced from all over the world praising or incorporating the song.¹⁰ The song was so popular worldwide that BuzzFeed published an article examining the few countries where it *wasn’t* quite as popular. India makes the brief list, and author Kris Andres writes, “‘Gangnam Style’ also only managed to reach #2

⁵ Wise. *Cultural Globalization: A User's Guide*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2008: 151-153.

⁶ O'Neill. "What Makes A Video Viral." SocialTimes. March 9, 2011. Accessed June 24, 2016.
<http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/what-makes-a-video-viral/62414>.

⁷ Officialpsy. "PSY - GANGNAM STYLE(강남스타일) M/V." YouTube. 2012. Accessed June 19, 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bZkp7q19f0>.

⁸ Fletcher. "Oppa Data Style: Using Data to Track the Popularity of PSY." October 25, 2012. Accessed June 19, 2016.
<https://blogs.ischool.utexas.edu/digitalcuration/2012/10/25/oppa-data-style-using-data-to-track-the-popularity-of-psy/>.

⁹ Officialpsy. "PSY - GANGNAM STYLE(강남스타일) M/V."

¹⁰ Davies. "Rapper Psy Brings Gangnam Style Horseplay to United Nations." The Guardian. 2012. Accessed June 20, 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/24/psy-gangnam-style-united-nations>.

among India's Top Trending YouTube videos this year.”¹¹ If a music video can have such dramatically positive effects across a diverse range of cultures, perhaps world leaders should pay closer attention to *how* and *why* it became a viral sensation. After all, if one music video can help unite the world, shouldn't world leaders be pouring more resources into examining how they can repeat the process to reduce conflict?

This paper will evaluate not only how cultural diffusion benefits the world, but mostly why contagion diffusion occurs. Specifically, why do certain videos go viral, even across a diverse range of cultures, while most do not? I will synthesize commonalities of viral videos from a wide range of experts. I will analyze four different viral videos, and four similar corresponding videos that did not go viral. For example, after analyzing the aforementioned “Gangnam Style” music video, I will analyze another Korean pop song music video that shared many of the same characteristics and was released during the same year. Because this is a cultural geography examination, special emphasis will be on how viral videos exemplify cultural globalization.

Why does a video go viral?

Viral videos are certainly unique, and it is incredibly difficult to predict their success. Before examining videos specifically, it's logical to explore why *any* information goes viral. Information first began to spread rapidly when it was easy to do so. According to Quint Randle, by the end of the 19th century, two patterns emerged in the industrialized world. First, technological advances created more opportunities for leisure time, which in turn led to a rise in the consumption of mass-produced goods. Second, this rise in consumption led to the

¹¹ Andres. "Community Post: Countries Where "Gangnam Style" Is Not The Most-Watched YouTube Video Of 2012." BuzzFeed Community. December 18, 2012. Accessed June 20, 2016. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/krisandres/countries-where-gangnam-style-is-not-the-most-wa-6qn0>.

rise of mass marketing, especially in print media, but later on in motion pictures and radio.¹²

One of the earliest *videos* to go viral was *Reefer Madness*, a 1936 propaganda film that promoted the idea that marijuana had dramatically negative effects. In the 1970s, the film was rediscovered and became a “cult classic,” largely due to involuntarily becoming a satire. Pot activists began widely distributing the film via a new technology called Video Home System (VHS) tapes.

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In the internet age, it was only a matter of time before video sharing reached a golden age. In the 1990s, videos like “The Dancing Baby,” a simple animation of a baby dancing to Blue Swede’s “Hooked on a Feeling,” went viral through email chains.¹⁴ Things *really* accelerated, however, after Valentine’s Day, 2005, the day the domain name www.youtube.com became active. YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim uploaded its first video, entitled “Me at the zoo,” on April 23, 2005.¹⁵ Eleven years later, YouTube, the second largest website in the world, has over one billion users who watch hundreds of millions of hours of video every day.¹⁶ Today, anyone with a smartphone and a high speed internet connection can upload a video to share with the entire world within seconds. Because of social media, that person doesn’t have to put forth much effort to get the process started. However, because people watch billions of videos each day online, nearly everyone who uploads a video can absolutely not expect that video to go viral. There is simply too much clutter, and the amount of videos uploaded to the site continues to rapidly grow.

¹² Randle. “A Historical Overview of the Effects of New Mass Media: Introductions in Magazine Publishing during the Twentieth Century.” *First Monday* 6, no. 9 (2001). doi:10.5210/fm.v6i9.885.

¹³ “10 Videos That Went Viral Before YouTube Even Existed!” TheRichest. December 12, 2014. Accessed June 24, 2016.

<http://www.therichest.com/rich-list/most-popular/10-videos-that-went-viral-before-youtube-even-existed/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jawed. “Me at the Zoo.” YouTube. 2005. Accessed June 24, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNQXAC9IVRw>.

¹⁶ YouTube. Accessed June 24, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

Still, each day some videos find a way to break through and rack up millions of views. One recent video of someone damaging their Porsche trying to park it into a tight space collected more than two million views in less than four days. The video ostensibly has no massive advertising campaign behind it, yet viewers have already watched it from around the world.¹⁷ Most brands dream of getting one of their videos to go viral. Yet, despite the fact that some companies spend millions of dollars trying to spread one of their videos, few manage to naturally get it to spread virally. While no one seems to have an exact “magic formula” to a viral video, many geographers, economists, and, of course, marketers have found certain patterns.

One of the earliest YouTubers was a marketer named Kevin Nalty. In his book *Beyond Viral*, Nalty explains there are certain attributes that make a video more likely to go viral. For example, he argues it helps if the content is topical, if it’s short, and if it doesn’t borrow too much from old ideas. He claims common traits of viral videos are music, dancing, attractive women, pranks, and children. However, the most striking conclusion from his book comes from the first chapter. When describing what makes a video go viral, he writes, “It’s largely unpredictable, and I view with skepticism anyone who promises to know the ‘secret sauce.’” (28)¹⁸ However, Nalty wrote this book in 2009, and due to the rapidly changing world of social media, it now seems embarrassingly outdated. Since then, numerous studies have made the success of viral videos seem less mysterious. I will examine them in the following paragraphs.

Probably the most extensive early analysis of a viral internet campaign came from researchers Ralf van der Lans et al. In 2005, they studied patterns of various successful viral marketing campaigns, and then applied what they had learned to a new viral marketing campaign attempt by a financial services company. After analyzing the sharing patterns of viral information, they

¹⁷ Delaneyjoel. "How to Park Your Porsche In Vancouver." YouTube. 2016. Accessed June 26, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwZwSlrMLmk>.

¹⁸ Nalty. *Beyond Viral: How to Attract Customers, Promote Your Brand, and Make Money with Online Video*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010: 28.

developed a viral branching model (VBM). The VBM states that a viral marketing campaign be created using a series of “seeds,” or strategically placed advertisements to be spread out according to demographic data previously collected. In order to get each consumer to share the information further and branch out, there had to be an incentive. For the financial services company’s campaign, customers played a fun game that led to a career profile. For a guaranteed prize, participants had to then fill out a form with personal information. However, they could win bigger prizes by inviting one or more of their friends to also play the game. The researchers concluded that the combination of strategically placed seeds and incentives for sharing made the campaign successful.¹⁹

Still, Lans et al. did not analyze an *organic* viral campaign. In fact, the campaign wasn’t too revolutionary- marketing companies had been evolving to create campaigns like that for decades, and it wouldn’t have been possible without advertisements. How can things go viral without any money spent? Jonah Berger, a marketing professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, probably knows more about how to answer that question than anyone. In his book, *Contagious*, Berger presents over a decade’s worth of research with a wide variety of data to come up with what he describes as “six principles of contagiousness.” (25) According to Berger, contagion diffusion occurs when something contains practical value and social currency, is triggered regularly, tied to our activating emotions, and able to be shown off easily and as a story.²⁰

¹⁹ Van Der Lans, Van Bruggen, Eliashberg, and Wierenga. "A Viral Branching Model for Predicting the Spread of Electronic Word of Mouth." *Marketing Science* 29, no. 2 (2010): 348-65. doi:10.1287/mksc.1090.0520.

²⁰ Berger. *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013: 25

Berger's Six Principles of Contagiousness

Berger first elaborates how social currency drives viral sharing. People share because they want to make themselves look better. “Scarcity and exclusivity boost word of mouth by making people feel like insiders. If people get something not everyone else has, it makes them feel special, unique, high status. And because of that they’ll not only like a product or service more, but tell others about it.”²¹ Berger brings up the New York speakeasy that is hidden inside the hot dog restaurant. It is incredibly difficult to find out anything about the place—the owners do not advertise nor do they even have a clear entrance—yet it is extremely popular due its exclusivity.

Berger’s second principle revolves around how information spreads when it is constantly brought up in our everyday lives. He describes this reason for information spreading constantly as a “trigger.” Triggers are things that are generally constantly on everyone’s mind, anyway. His best example of a trigger seen in social media is how people are constantly sharing information about Cheerios. While it may not be the most exciting subject, the popular cereal always comes up because it regularly contributes to daily routines around the world. Recently, the brand has actually surged thanks to a new viral sensation involving bored fathers stacking Cheerios on their sleeping babies.²² This is why brands are so important. Berger writes, “social currency gets people talking, but Triggers keep them talking.”²³

Next, Berger stresses the importance of content activating emotions. The key word is “activating,” as plenty of content appeals to our emotions yet doesn’t compel us to share. According to Berger’s research, content that activated emotions generally created awe, excitement, amusement, anger, and anxiety,

²¹ Ibid., 55.

²² Packham. "Cheerio Challenge: Dads Are Stacking Cheerios On Their Sleeping Babies' Heads." The Huffington Post. 2016. Accessed June 18, 2016.
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cheerio-challenge-dads_uk_5763c7e5e4b01fb658636781.

²³ Ibid., 92.

while content that did not generally created contentment and sadness. All of the activating emotions stimulated physiological arousal. In other words, people are more likely to share content if it gets their blood pumping faster.²⁴ This is also why timing is so important when sharing content. Contagion diffusion is more likely when more people are likely to respond emotionally in the same way at roughly the same time.

Jacopo Staiano and Marco Guerini expanded on Berger's "activating emotions principle" by studying thousands of articles on two news sites in which readers had to score their emotional reactions to articles they just read. After analyzing the results, they concluded that viral content creates "high-arousal emotions." To measure this, they utilized the Valence-Arousal-Dominance (VAD) model. Valence involves how positive or negative an emotion is, arousal involves how excited an emotion makes us, and dominance involves how an emotion causes us to feel in control. Staiano and Guerini found that content that elicited high-arousal emotions and a strong sense of control were the most viral. In addition, content that caused positive emotions generally was more viral than content that caused negative emotions.²⁵

Kerry Jones, Kelsey Libert, and Kristin Tynski expanded on Staiano and Guerini's study by asking people how they were emotionally simulated by popular pictures on the website Reddit. While their conclusions echoed the previous study, they also discovered that when content elicited high-arousal emotions and dominance, the associated emotions were "overwhelmingly positive and occasionally included an element of surprise."²⁶

Jonah Berger's fourth principle is revolves around how information spreads when it is able to be seen or heard easily. Humans imitate others. Berger

²⁴ Ibid., 108-109.

²⁵ Guerini and Staiano. "Deep Feelings." *Proceedings of the 24th International Conference on World Wide Web - WWW '15 Companion*, 2015. doi:10.1145/2740908.2743058.

²⁶ Jones, Libert, and Tynski. "The Emotional Combinations That Make Stories Go Viral." *Harvard Business Review*. 2016. Accessed June 16, 2016.
<https://hbr.org/2016/05/research-the-link-between-feeling-in-control-and-viral-content>.

and his colleagues examined data on 1.5 million car sales, and found about one out of every eight cars sold was because people were influenced by their neighbors. When one goes to looking for a new place to eat in an unfamiliar city, she or he is more likely to visit a restaurant that is packed because they likely assume the crowd is proof that the restaurant must be good. If information is more public, as it can potentially be online, it is more likely to spread.²⁷ Berger came up short in his research, however, because he didn't analyze more closely why humans imitate certain individuals or groups and ignore others. Derek Sivers, the founder of the online independent musician outlet CD Baby, picks up where Berger leaves off. He argues it's not enough to be public- it's more important that what is public is approved or recommended by others whom we trust. "It's important to show not just the leader, but the followers," he claims, "because you find that new followers emulate the followers, not the leader."²⁸ It's not just Sivers who stresses the importance of tastemakers (individuals or groups who set trends), who are essentially both leaders and followers. Kevin Alloca, the Head of Culture and Trends at YouTube, evaluated why a video of a man going crazy looking at a double rainbow went viral. The man, who had posted numerous nature videos on his YouTube channel before it with no apparent expectations of stardom, had posted the rainbow video in January, yet it did not go viral until the summer. Why? Because Jimmy Kimmel tweeted the video then. When Kimmel tweeted the video, it had only 200 views.²⁹ If it weren't for Kimmel's tweet, there is no evidence that this video would go on to have more than 43 million views.³⁰ Not only do Sivers' and Alloccas' discoveries explain why

²⁷ Ibid., 150-153.

²⁸ Sivers. "How to Start a Movement." TED. 2010. Accessed June 29, 2016.

http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement.

²⁹ Miller. "Cashing In on Your Hit YouTube Video." The New York Times. 2011. Accessed July 02, 2016.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/technology/personaltech/cashing-in-on-your-hit-youtube-video.html?_r=0.

³⁰ Allocca. "Why Videos Go Viral." TED. 2011. Accessed June 14, 2016.

https://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_allocca_why_videos_go_viral?language=en#t-48416.

marketing is so important, they explain why endorsements, brands, and access to advertising funds are so important.

Berger's fifth principle argues that contagion diffusion is linked to everyone's desire to find information they and everyone they know can *use*. If content has practical value, one is more likely to share it with others she or he cares about in order to help them. Berger provides an example of an 86-year old man who makes a simple video of how to clean ears of corn. The video was filmed in one minute, and uploaded to YouTube with no intention of promoting it. However, it soon accumulated millions of views.³¹ Why? Because it showed a way, albeit small, to make hundreds of millions of people's lives better. While Berger acknowledges there is likely too much useful information available, packaged correctly and marketed properly it will be much more likely to spread.

Finally, Berger stresses that presenting content as a story helps it spread rapidly. Because people naturally drawn to narratives, it makes more sense to turn the information into a story in order get more people to share it. Some of the most successful commercials tell a story. Purina Puppy Chow had a successful viral video about a man who impulsively adopts a puppy. The video presents a relatable (and of course adorable) story so well that the viewer might forget or not realize the whole thing is just a commercial.³² Yet, it's clear they are trying to sell their brand at the end. Berger warns that many companies fail to spread their brand because they forget to relate the story to the brand. For example, Evian had a hugely successful viral video of babies doing stunts on roller skates, yet lost market share the same year the video was introduced because the babies had little to do with their product.³³

Alloca's Three Reasons Why Videos Go Viral

³¹ Berger, *Contagious*, 155-156.

³² "Why Some Videos Go Viral." *Harvard Business Review*. 2015. Accessed June 14, 2016. <https://hbr.org/2015/09/why-some-videos-go-viral>.

³³ Berger, *Contagious*, 196.

While Berger largely looked why *any* content goes viral, Kevin Alloca gets paid to explore why videos go viral specifically on YouTube. According to Alloca, videos become viral when they are spread by tastemakers (as mentioned before), when they create large opportunities for community participation, and when they catch people by surprise.

Earlier, I mentioned how Jimmy Kimmel almost single-handedly made a video go viral because of his huge influence. Tastemakers exist in nearly every industry. Sales of Greek yogurt increased 2500% between 2005 and 2011. What explains the contagion diffusion of Greek yogurt? Likely, tastemakers (pun intended) caused the spike.³⁴ The fortunate companies have tastemakers who are in charge already. For example, Steve Jobs was a tastemaker for Apple and Dr. Dre continues to be a tastemaker for Beats headphones.³⁵ In the social media age, a positive tweet by a tastemaker is just as important as paying millions of dollars to a celebrity to endorse a product in a commercial.

Alloca's second principle revolves around community participation. He gives the example of Rebecca Black's "Friday," the 2011 viral music video that currently has nearly 100 million views on YouTube. Most who viewed it did not like the song and made fun of it for its cheesiness. Yet, herein lies the main reason why it viral- most participated in making fun of it and some participated in defending it. In addition, viewers of the video created countless parodies of the video, reviews of the video, and reactions to the video which in turn kept the discussion going. To date, the video still gets a new push every Friday, and its comments section is still extremely lively. The video became viral because not only did everyone have something to say about it- they had something to *do*

³⁴ Thompson. "How Did Greek Yogurt Get So Popular?" The Atlantic. Accessed June 17, 2016.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/08/how-did-greek-yogurt-get-so-popular/244025/>.

³⁵ Manjoo. "What the Beats Deal Says About Apple: It Loves Tastemakers." The New York Times. Accessed June 17, 2016.
http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/what-the-beats-deal-says-about-apple-it-loves-tastemakers/?_r=0.

about it. According to Allocca, the community participation around the video became a gigantic “inside joke.” (3:09)³⁶

Allocca’s third principle, catching people by surprise, is, ironically, the least surprising. People are generally impressed more by what catches them off guard. If people who are hard to impress are surprised, then the content is much more likely to go viral. Few are harder to impress than the judges of the reality television show Britain’s Got Talent. On episode one of season three, Susan Boyle left them shocked after she gave a strong performance that left the entire audience roaring. The video of the clip from that episode later went viral online because when Boyle walked onto the stage, presumably no one watching could have predicted how beautiful her voice was.³⁷ Indeed, it acted on prejudices, but it was successful because caught millions of people off guard.

My Findings

Before I share my research, it’s important to recognize similar research conducted by Tyler West, in which he analyzed each of the top twenty viral videos of 2009 according to *Time Magazine*. Similar to Allocca’s third principle, West found that 90 percent of the top twenty viral videos contained something that caused people to be caught by surprise. In addition, West found that 75 percent of the top videos had a short title length and 60 percent had a short run-time.³⁸ I think some of the variables West analyzed, such as whether or not there were young people or minorities in videos, seemed arbitrary and irrelevant because clearly viral videos come from a diverse range of backgrounds. West was additionally restricted by sticking to *Time’s* 2009 top twenty videos. It is likely

³⁶ Allocca. "Why Videos Go Viral."

³⁷ UKAdvertChannel. "Susan Boyle - Britains Got Talent 2009 Episode 1 - Saturday 11th April | HD High Quality." YouTube. April 11, 2009. Accessed June 28, 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxPZh4AnWyk>.

³⁸ West. "Going Viral: Factors That Lead Videos to Become Internet Phenomena." *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2, no. 1 (2011). Accessed June 30, 2016.

only a handful of editors that organized that list, and those videos are all now at least seven years old. Therefore, it is necessary to update West's analysis with new, more extensive research, as well as a more diverse, albeit more concise, collection of viral videos.

Based on my synthesis of the findings by viral video experts, I will analyze four different viral videos according to the following criteria:

1. The video was deliberately marketed to the appropriate demographic

Based on the use of data-driven marketing, a video will be more likely to go viral if it's strategically targeted to the demographic that is predisposed to appreciate it.

2. The video provides extrinsic rewards if it is shared

A video will be more likely to go viral if people know they will get any type of external reward for doing so. Within this criterion is Jonah Berger's "social currency" principle. In other words, people are extrinsically motivated by the reward of looking better to others. Therefore, they will share a video that makes them look more exciting, more intelligent, more compassionate, etc. Also, using the Valence-Arousal-Dominance model as a guide, if a video gives us a strong sense of control it will be more likely to go viral.

3. The video's subject matter is something that is already constantly on everyone's mind.

Both of Berger's "Triggers" and "Practical Value" principles fall within this criterion. Whether it be parking a car, Cheerios, Fridays, or music, a video that contains something that is routine already, also known as a trigger, will be more likely to go viral. In addition, if a video contains useful advice, it will be more likely to go viral because what is utilitarian is inherently universal. The reason why Laura in the Kitchen, a YouTube cooking channel, has hundreds of millions of views is because everyone eats and nearly everyone cooks.³⁹

³⁹ LauraVitalessKitchen. "Laura in the Kitchen." YouTube. Accessed July 01, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/user/LauraVitalessKitchen/about>.

4. The video creates high-arousal emotions.

Using the Valence-Arousal-Dominance model again as a guide, a video will be more likely to go viral if it evokes emotions that get us excited. While it is generally preferable that the emotions are positive, if the viewer is highly aroused then it could counterbalance negative emotions. The best emotion is surprise. If a video defies expectations or prejudices, it is more likely to spread.

5. The video is made highly visible by tastemakers

A video will be more likely to go viral if a person who has thousands if not millions of people trust and admire share it. Whether it be Jimmy Kimmel sharing the quirky double rainbow video or trying out a restaurant in a new city simply because it is crowded, people are hesitant to try new things out unless a tastemaker says it checks out. An obscure rock band likely could not get most of their own friends and family to listen to their music or come to their shows. However, if MTV suddenly did a feature on the band their friends and family would be telling everyone they knew about it!

6. The video tells a story

People are naturally drawn to narratives. If a video has a clear beginning, middle, and end, it will be more likely to go viral.

7. The video creates opportunities for community participation

If a video is easy to emulate, satirize, or talk about, it will be more likely to go viral. Rebecca Black's "Friday" became the world's biggest inside joke long after it first went viral because it created many opportunities for community participation, for better or for worse.

8. The video is concise

With the exception of perhaps compilation videos, the vast majority of viral videos are under ten minutes. According to one web site, nine of YouTube's ten biggest non-music viral videos of all time are six minutes or less.⁴⁰ They even

⁴⁰ Garnsworthy. "YouTube's 10 Most-Viewed Viral Videos of All Time." StyleCaster. 2015. Accessed July 01, 2016. <http://stylecaster.com/most-viewed-viral-videos-on-youtube/>.

have short titles. Likely because it is trying to stand out amongst the clutter, a video will be more likely to go viral if it's designed for a short attention span.

It is worth noting that this criteria could be applied for changing virtually any human behavior. They are universal principles that could be applied to almost anything anyone consumes. These principles help explain the homogenizing effects of contagion diffusion. Next, I will apply these eight synthesized principles to four different viral videos.

Video #1: History of Japan⁴¹

Bill Wurtz's comedic, quirky, and unorthodox account of the history of Japan fits contagion diffusion at its most organic (meaning no massive marketing campaign directed it). It clocks in at nine minutes, and is filled with flashy and engaging animations, strange sound effects, singing, jokes, and even some actual history. It was published on February 2, 2016. Before its release, Bill Wurtz had a relatively small following on YouTube and Vine making mostly videos shorter than 30 seconds, but nothing that could compare to how his following grew after this one video.

How did "History of Japan" spread? It was first posted on Reddit on the day of its release by a username called "MannschaftPilz." The Reddit community overwhelmingly embraced it, and it is currently the most upvoted post in Reddit history.⁴² Because of Reddit, within one week of its release the mainstream media outlets began to pick it up. The video currently has more than 15 million views.

"History of Japan" fit the criteria for principles 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. It didn't fit the criteria for 1 and 5 because the video was not marketed nor was it picked up by a major news source or celebrity until after it was already viral.

2. According to my original research, the video was shared nearly 100,000 times on Facebook. People who shared the video likely felt like they were sharing

⁴¹ Wurtz. "History of Japan." YouTube. 2016. Accessed July 01, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh5LY4Mz15o>.

⁴² "History of Japan • /r/videos." Reddit. Accessed July 01, 2016.

https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/43wsdi/history_of_japan/?sort=old.

something that was intelligent yet entertaining. Therefore, social currency appeared to be a factor because people presumably wanted others to think they were smart yet fun by sharing it. When the website Vox posted the video on May 25th, hundreds of people posted comments criticizing Vox for being “late to the party.” Facebook user Ramon Ortiz Jr. posted, “I’ve seen this video like 7 times. Get it together Vox.” Clearly, these users were proud that they were hip enough to watch and share the video right after it came out.⁴³

3. Japan is a country that well-known in the world. In 2015, nearly 20 million tourists flocked to the island country.⁴⁴ Its culture goes far beyond its borders.⁴⁵ Odds, are, most people are at least somewhat familiar with Japan already. If this would have been a history video about Augusta, Kansas, it likely would not have gone viral.

4. Judging by the comments on Reddit, the audience was mostly in awe with what they watched. Comments saying how the video was “amazing” or that just said “wow” numbered in the hundreds.⁴⁶ They likely were surprised at how uniquely entertaining the video was.

6. Clearly, the video tells a story. All of Bill Wurtz’s other videos are short and do not, and none of those videos have cracked even one million views.

7. As evidenced by the 3048 comments on Reddit and 81,566 comments on Facebook, many who watched the video were compelled to discuss it. At least 161

⁴³ Lopez. "The Most Bizarre, Entertaining History of Japan You'll Ever Watch." Vox. 2016. Accessed July 01, 2016. <http://www.vox.com/2016/2/3/10905274/japan-history-video>.

⁴⁴ Tomoko. "Visitors to Japan Surge to Record 19.73 Million, Spend All-time High ¥3.48 Trillion | The Japan Times." Japan Times RSS. Accessed July 01, 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/19/national/japan-sets-new-inbound-tourism-record-2015-comes-just-short-20-million-target/#.V3bJSpMrKi4>.

⁴⁵ Wurm. "Reflexive Horizons." Reflexive Horizons. Accessed July 01, 2016. <http://www.reflexivehorizons.com/2014/02/18/anime-and-the-internet-the-impact-of-fansubbing/>.

⁴⁶ "History of Japan • /r/videos." Reddit. Accessed July 01, 2016. https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/43wsdi/history_of_japan/?sort=old.

reaction videos were created in response to it.⁴⁷ Several memes on Tumblr also were inspired by the video.⁴⁸

8. Both the title of the video and the length of the video are short.

Corresponding Video to “History of Japan”

“The Shogunate: History of Japan”⁴⁹

The Dragon Historian’s “The Shogunate: History of Japan,” was the closest video that I could find that was similar to Bill Wurtz’s “History of Japan.” It was published on YouTube nine weeks after Wurtz’s video, but did not go viral, and currently has under 2,000 views. Like Wurtz, the Dragon Historian uses flashy and engaging animation, and even as subtle music and a bit of humor. However, the Dragon Historian’s video is specifically about the Shogunate period in Japanese history, and it is clearly meant to educate, not entertain, like Wurtz’s video. Both videos are brief, with the Dragon Historian’s video clocking in at just over six minutes.

“The Shogunate: History of Japan” only fit the criteria for principles 6 and 8. Regarding the other principles, it clearly was not marketed, as it has too few views and was ostensibly not even shared on any outside social media. There are no extrinsic rewards for sharing the video. One could be seen as intelligent for sharing the video, but without other dynamics such an individual might be hesitant to sharing the video because they might be worried others would think it was too dull or dorky. While most people are familiar with Japan, they are not likely familiar with the Shogunate system of Japan. The video does not create any high arousal emotions. Though it is well produced, there is nothing surprising or captivating about it. Basically if one is a Japanese history fan, they might share or comment on the video, but that’s about it. Due to its obscurity, it clearly has not

⁴⁷ YouTube. Accessed July 01, 2016.

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=reaction+bill+wurtz+history+of+japan.

⁴⁸ Geller. "See Why The Internet Has Fallen In Love With This 'History Of Japan' YouTube Video." A Plus. 2016. Accessed July 01, 2016. <http://aplus.com/a/hilarious-history-of-japan-youtube?c=9836>.

⁴⁹ DatKoreanNerd. "The Shogunate: History of Japan." YouTube. 2016. Accessed July 01, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP0NoVSqyuk>.

been made public by tastemakers. Finally, it does noticeably call for any kind of community participation, and the lack of sharing of this video on social media obstructs any such opportunity.

6. It does clearly tell a story.

8. It is brief.

Comparing these two videos, it is quite clear why “History of Japan” went viral and “The Shogunate: History of Japan” did not. Having a well produced video that is brief and concise is only a starting foundation. Again, so much of what makes a video go viral are the universal qualities of human behavior.

Video #2: Chewbacca Mom⁵⁰

On May 19, 2016, at 3:07 p.m., Candace Payne, a seemingly ordinary mother from Dallas, Texas, decided to make a Facebook Live video to broadcast her excitement over a recently purchased mask that imitated Chewbacca from Star Wars. As she put on the mask and looked at herself in the mirror, she could not stop laughing. The laugh is infectious, and the whole thing is clearly not rehearsed. She captioned the video, “It’s the simple joys in life....” At 6:09 p.m., Facebook user Aaron Sharp wrote, “I am praying this goes viral.” Payne responded by writing, “Someone messaged me if you have 10k views in under 24 hours, it’s viral. Don’t know the source she got that from. But, she’s legit. Hahaha. So, technically it has?! So funny.” In fact, it had *tens of millions* of views with twenty-four hours. It currently has nearly 160 million views.⁵¹

The video went on to become the most-watched video in Facebook history.⁵² The video was shared more than 3.3 million times. So many people requested to be Payne’s Facebook friend that she could no longer have “Facebook friends,”

⁵⁰ Candace Payne Facebook profile. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/candaceSpayne/videos/vb.1245618915/10209653193067040>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rayne. “Texas Mom Breaks Facebook Record with Chewbacca Mask Video.” PEOPLE.com. 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016.

http://www.people.com/article/texas-mom-breaks-facebook-record-with-chewbacca-mask?xid=socialflow_fac ebook_peoplemag.

just “Facebook followers” (she now has more than 800,000 followers). Within a few days, Payne was on national media outlets such as Good Morning America, NPR, and the Late Late Show with James Corden. When asked by Corden why she shared the video, Payne explained she just wanted to prove to her friends and family that it was her mask before her kids had a chance to snatch it from her.⁵³

“Chewbacca Mom” fit the criteria for principles 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. It didn’t fit criterion 1 because the video was obviously not marketed. Payne initially wanted to just share the video with her friends and family, and never expected much attention or to make any money from posting it. In fact, Facebook doesn’t yet monetize its videos, so if she wanted to make money from advertisements played over the video she could have posted it to YouTube. Little did she know that she would go on to make hundreds of thousands of dollars and even begin charging for autographs because of the video.⁵⁴ Her video did not fit criterion 2 because little social currency could presumably be gained from sharing the video and no extrinsic rewards were ever offered. It did not fit criterion 5 because tastemakers only found out about her after the video had already gone viral.

3. Star Wars is the largest movie franchise in history.⁵⁵ Due to its enormous popularity, nearly everyone has at least heard of the film series. More importantly, everyone can relate to the pure joy Payne exhibits in the video- it is authentic and easy to relate to.

4. The video definitely creates high-arousal emotions, especially joy. Current research suggests joy creates contagion diffusion more than any other emotion.⁵⁶ There is plenty of evidence that the video creates joy. Facebook user Lisa McLeroy commented on the video, “I’m not sure what I love more...the super cool

⁵³ TheLateLateShow. “Chewbacca Mom Gets a Surprise from the Real Chewbacca.” YouTube. 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT3MVRv0TT4>.

⁵⁴ Hirsh, “Chewbacca Mom Has Made over \$400k and Now Charges for Autographs,” Mashable, 2016, Accessed July 02, 2016, <http://mashable.com/2016/06/08/chewbacca-mom-charged-autographs/#UV0KsHWLKsqM>.

⁵⁵ The Numbers. Accessed July 02, 2016. <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchises/>.

⁵⁶ Shaer. “What Emotion Goes Viral the Fastest?” Smithsonian. Accessed July 02, 2016. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-emotion-goes-viral-fastest-180950182/?no-ist>.

amazing mask or the level of your joy.” User Jessica Nicole Calvert wrote, “This is my favorite video I have EVER seen! I’m laughing so hard with you!” User Michelle Fallen wrote, “So much better than a video where someone is TRYING to be funny, and we just giggle a little. This right here...pure inner joy...radiating from within!” These are just three examples of many.

6. Even though it’s a simple story, the video tells the story of how Payne got the mask and how she is excited about the purchase.

7. The video generated enormous amounts of community participation, as evidenced by the thousands of results when you search for “Chewbacca Mom parodies” on Google.com

8. Both the title of the video and the length of the video are short.

Corresponding Video to “Chewbacca Mom”

“Me with a Chewbacca mask...”⁵⁷

A video posted by Facebook user Nancy Reece Cole with the caption “Me with a Chewbacca mask...” was the closest video that I could find that was similar to Candace Payne’s Chewbacca mask video. It was published on Facebook Christmas Day of 2015, about five months before Payne’s video. This video is more brief, but it also features a woman goofing around with a Chewbacca mask. The laughing mostly comes from the people around her, though. It currently has less than 100 views and one comment.

“Me with a Chewbacca mask...” fit the criteria for principles 3, 4, 7, and 8. It didn’t fit the criteria for 1 because it was not marketed, for 2 because there were no extrinsic rewards for sharing it, for 5 because no tastemakers shared it (apparently no one did), and for 6 because it does not tell a story.

3. Just like with “Chewbacca Mom,” the popularity of the Star Wars franchise provides content almost everyone can already relate to. They can also relate to how fun the mask is.

⁵⁷ Nancy Reece Cole Facebook profile. December 25, 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/reecencole/videos/10205580514136706/?autoplay_reason=gatekeeper.

4. I would argue the video also creates joy, although not as much as “Chewbacca Mom.” My perspective is limited, however, because it is subjective. Obviously, the video did not resonate with Nancy’s Facebook friends much, but based on Facebook’s algorithm, probably most of Nancy’s Facebook friends never even saw the post, especially with it being on Christmas Day.⁵⁸

7. Just because they don’t develop doesn’t mean there are not opportunities from the video for community participation. While the Chewbacca mask was not as popular as it was after “Chewbacca Mom” went viral, it was still widely available as the exact same product for much cheaper during the 2015 holiday season.⁵⁹ The mask could have been made popular another way as there is enormous potential for activities associated with it.

8. The video is brief, but perhaps *too* brief to get any substantial message across.

Comparing these two videos, we get a much clearer picture of contagion diffusion. The reason why “Chewbacca Mom” went viral and “Me with a Chewbacca mask...” did not was because it viewers could connect with Candance Payne. She was comparable to an old friend we could trust by showing vulnerability and pure, unadulterated bliss. While “Me with a Chewbacca mask” was somewhat impersonal, “Chewbacca Mom” showed a real moment that everyone could relate to.

Video #3: David After Dentist⁶⁰

Similar to “Chewbacca Mom,” “David After Dentist” captures a real moment that catapulted an ordinary family into stardom after it went viral. Today, if you search “this is a video,” in the YouTube search engine, this video will show up

⁵⁸ Guliani. "Facebook's New Algorithm Change Is A Blessing In Disguise." Forbes. June 30, 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/parulguliani/2016/06/30/why-facebooks-new-algorithm-change-is-a-blessing-in-disguise/#3f2312c961f9>.

⁵⁹ French. "How a Chewbacca Mask in the Clearance Bin Turned into Free Advertising for Kohl's." MarketWatch. 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/how-a-chewbacca-mask-in-the-clearance-bin-turned-into-free-advertising-for-kohls-2016-05-23>.

⁶⁰ Booba1234. "David After Dentist." YouTube. 2009. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txqiwrbyGrs>.

second. In the video, a father films his son, David, acting strangely due to the effects of anesthesia after having a tooth removed. The entire thing comes across as extremely comedic. The surgery took place in May 2008, but after receiving several requests to see the footage, David's father uploaded to the video on January 30, 2009. He had only meant for a few family and friends to see it, and could never imagine that eventually more than 133 million viewers would see it. The family has reportedly made more than \$200,000 just from the YouTube advertisements.⁶¹ David's father told the Today show in 2015 that the money had paid for David's private school.⁶²

Despite the fact that David's father did not even have a Facebook account to share the video, it is incredible how quickly the video spread.⁶³ It was like hitting the lottery. This was one of the earliest viral videos, and yet seven years later the family is still deeply affected, similar to "one-hit wonder" musicians.

Just like "Chewbacca Mom," "David After Dentist" fit the criteria for principles 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. It didn't fit criterion 1 because it was not marketed until well after it went viral. It didn't fit criterion 2 because little social currency could presumably be gained from sharing the video and no extrinsic rewards were ever offered. No tastemakers picked up on this video until long after it was posted, so it also didn't fit criterion 5.

3. In developed countries, going to the dentist is a common occurrence. For example, only about 2 percent of the population in the United Kingdom have never visited a dentist.⁶⁴ Surgeons perform hundreds of millions of procedures

⁶¹ Kircher. "This Dad Left His Job and Is Still Raking in Cash for a Viral Video He Made of His Son 6 Years Ago." Business Insider. 2015. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/david-after-dentist-video-creator-manages-video-as-a-job-2015-6>.

⁶² "See David Long 'After Dentist' - 7 Years Later." TODAY.com. Accessed July 02, 2016.

<http://www.today.com/popculture/david-after-dentist-7-years-later-learn-how-video-helped-t18401>.

⁶³ Kircher. "This Dad Left His Job and Is Still Raking in Cash for a Viral Video He Made of His Son 6 Years Ago."

⁶⁴ "Facts and Figures - National Smile Month." National Smile Month. 2014. Accessed July 02, 2016.
<http://www.nationalsmilemonth.org/facts-figures/>.

each year.⁶⁵ Viewers were likely already familiar about how waking up from surgery equals odd behavior.

4. While the subject matter was familiar, David's behavior was not. It was so unique, yet charming, that it certainly caught people off guard. One of the most prevalent comments found underneath the video is "OMG," even seven years after its publication.⁶⁶

6. The video tells a simple story that is one many can relate to.

7. The video generated plenty of community participation, as evidenced by the thousands of results when you search for "David After Dentist parodies" on Google.com

8. The video is less than two minutes and has a three-word title.

Corresponding Video to "David After Dentist"

"Alby Acting funny because of anesthesia"⁶⁷

"Alby Acting funny because of anesthesia," posted to YouTube by Albert Michaud, was the closest video that I could find that was similar to "David After Dentist." The video shows a young man named Alby, who is probably in his late teens, right after getting his wisdom teeth taken out. He is also acting strangely due to the effects of anesthesia, and his Dad is also filming him right after the surgery. Alby's video was uploaded just over ten months after "David After Dentist," and it currently has less than 1,300 views.

Alby's video fit the criteria for principles 3 and 6. It didn't fit the criteria for 1 because it was not marketed, for 2 because there were no extrinsic rewards for sharing it, for 4 because there is no "surprise factor" after being released almost a year after David's video and the fact that it is not as entertaining, for 5 because no

⁶⁵ Meara and Greenberg. "The Lancet Commission on Global Surgery Global Surgery 2030: Evidence and Solutions for Achieving Health, Welfare and Economic Development." *Surgery* 157, no. 5 (2015): 834-35. doi:10.1016/j.surg.2015.02.009.

⁶⁶ Booba1234. "David After Dentist."

⁶⁷ Alby32123. "Alby Acting Funny Because of Anesthesia." YouTube. 2009. Accessed July 02, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8Am-dTbQ90>.

tastemakers shared it, and for 7 because, while there is enormous potential for community participation, by this time it had all been done before because of its later publication. Finally, it did not fit criterion 8 because it is not concise. While the video clocks in just under ten minutes, there are dull moments throughout in which no apparent developments take shape. Plus, the title is longer and more awkward than the catchy “David After Dentist.”

3. Again, just like with David’s video, viewers were likely already familiar about how waking up from dental surgery equals odd behavior.

6. There is a simple story to this video.

On the surface, there is not too much difference between Alby’s video and David’s video. However, upon closer examination, it is no surprise that Alby’s video did not go viral. There would likely have to be a significant twist to the narrative for a post-surgery and anesthesia-influenced video to spread rapidly again.

Video #4: Gangnam Style⁶⁸

According to my research, the previously referred to, most-viewed YouTube of all time, “Gangnam Style,” still gets tens of thousands of views a day. Music videos do better than all other genres online, but this video certainly is special. The performer, South Korean rapper Psy, has earned millions of dollars from the single video. While the song is catchy, there is no doubt Psy owes success to the entertaining video, which features easy to imitate dancing, striking and intriguing visuals, fun choreography, and a goofy sense of humor. The video was mostly a hit *outside* of South Korea, which implies that most people who love

⁶⁸ Officialpsy. "PSY - GANGNAM STYLE(강남스타일) M/V."

it have no idea what the lyrics are saying.⁶⁹ The lyrics are actually about nothing too spectacular, mostly about attractive people from a wealthy district in Seoul.

Why did “Gangnam Style” go viral? This time, marketing and seeding played a significant role. Psy’s record label, YG Entertainment, had intentionally tried to get into the United States and United Kingdom music industries. Before “Gangnam Style,” YG had millions of subscribers to various YouTube channels and followers on other social networks. By the time “Gangnam” was produced, YG had long established a strong network. When the video went live on July 15, 2012, it got a big bump from a tweet from @allKpop, a Twitter account reporting Korean pop music news that currently has 2.76 million followers. After one day, the video already had over half a million views. Within a few days, websites like Gizmodo and Gawker picked up the video which further helped it spread.⁷⁰

“Gangnam Style” fit the criteria for all eight of my synthesized principles. It is the perfect example of a video with all of the right elements for contagion diffusion.

1. As mentioned before, the video was marketed extremely well. The seeding platform for Psy’s record label and their advertisement campaign were both very effective.
2. The video was shared millions of times on Facebook and Twitter. More importantly, it currently has over 5.2 million comments on YouTube. People who shared the video likely felt like they were sharing something exciting and novel. Social currency appeared to be a factor because people presumably wanted others to think they not only were fun but also “worldly.” The video became so huge that Nigel Hollis argues peer pressure alone led to people sharing and

⁶⁹ Yang. “Gangnam Style’s U.S. Popularity Has Koreans Puzzled, Gratified.” WSJ. August 28, 2012. Accessed July 03, 2016.
<http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/08/28/gangnam-style-viral-popularity-in-u-s-has-koreans-puzzled-gratified/>.

⁷⁰ Barr. “How Gangnam Style Went Viral” 10Yetis. September 2, 2012. Accessed July 03, 2016.
<http://www.10yetis.co.uk/news/how-gangnam-style-went-viral>.

talking about it. People did not want to be seen as unfashionable for not being aware of it.⁷¹

3. The most successful videos online are music videos. The top ten most viewed YouTube videos of all time are music videos.⁷² YouTube has sent billions of dollars in royalties to record labels and musicians.⁷³ Pop music is definitely a trigger that is universal.

4. The video is engaging, well produced, and funny. Even by Korean Pop standards, it is unique, which is why it got so many viewers excited.⁷⁴

5. Tastemakers helped spread this video. In addition to AllKPop, Gizmodo, and Gawker, Telegraaf in Holland, Billboard, and several celebrity musicians, like Katy Perry, gave the video a huge push.⁷⁵

6. As with most music videos, this video tells a story. Again, the story *does not* have to be complicated.

7. As I mentioned before, parody and tribute videos were made all around the world. The most visible way this video created global community participation was Psy's unique, "riding a horse" dance that was easy for viewers to mimic.

8. Like most music videos, this one was under five minutes.

Corresponding Video to "Gangnam Style"

"Epik High- 'Up'"⁷⁶

South Korean rap group Epik High published the music video to their song "Up" on YouTube about three months after "Gangnam Style." The song is similar

⁷¹ Hollis. "10 Reasons Why Gangnam Style Became a Global Hit." 10 Reasons Why Gangnam Style Became a Global Hit. Accessed July 03, 2016.
<http://www.millwardbrown.com/global-navigation/blogs/post/mb-blog/2012/11/21/10-reasons-why-Gangnam-Style-became-a-global-hit.aspx>.

⁷² "Most Viewed Videos of All Time • (Over 200 Million Views)." YouTube. Accessed July 03, 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLirAqAtl_h2r5g8xGajEwdXd3x1sZh8hC.

⁷³ Green. "The Music Industry Seems to Love YouTube. Why Do They Keep Saying They Hate It?" Recode. 2016. Accessed July 03, 2016.
<http://www.recode.net/2016/5/10/11645760/youtube-hank-green-response-irving-azoff-artist-rights>.

⁷⁴ Barr. "How Gangnam Style Went Viral"

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ OfficialEpikHigh. "EPIK HIGH - 'UP' (ft. Bom of 2NE1) M/V." YouTube. 2012. Accessed July 03, 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EIYWmRkeRE>.

in style, which is undeniably Korean pop (K-pop), is about the same length, and is also well produced with a lot of engaging visuals, mostly of people performing stunts in a skate park. The group's song was on the same record label as Psy- YG Entertainment. Because of this, Epik High was marketed the same way Psy was. The three members of Epik High are just a few years younger than Psy, and both acts were veterans in the K-pop scene. YG had signed both Psy and Epik High to actually help them have comebacks, as both had dwindling music careers and scandals.^{77, 78} Both Psy and Epik High were still respected in the South Korean music industry, and both acts actually wrote their own music.⁷⁹

So why isn't Epik High a household name around the world? Sure, they are very popular in South Korea, but outside the country they are obscure outside of K-pop circles. The answer is not so clear. The video I analyzed, "Up," is still quite popular, with just over 3.2 million views, but "Gangnam Style" currently gets that many views approximately every three months. One of the highest rated comments on the "Up" video on YouTube is, "The most underrated Kpop song EVER."⁸⁰

Epik High music video for "Up" fit the criteria for principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8. It didn't fit criterion 4 because there is nothing that gets the viewer too excited. While it is a catchy song with a slickly produced video, there is nothing too revolutionary going on in it. It didn't fit criterion 5 because no tastemakers outside of South Korea picked it up like they did for "Gangnam Style." It didn't fit criterion 7 because no active community participation was sparked due to this video.

⁷⁷ "Icarus Walks." Icarus Walks. Accessed July 03, 2016.

<http://www.icaruswalks.com/111103interview-tablo-uncut-an-interview-with-epik-highs-charismatic-leader/>.

⁷⁸ "Psy Opens up about His past Marijuana Scandal | Allkpop.com." Psy Opens up about His past Marijuana Scandal | Allkpop.com. Accessed July 03, 2016.

<http://www.allkpop.com/article/2012/08/psy-opens-up-about-his-past-marijuana-scandal>.

⁷⁹ Joonni. did"YGE Chose Tablo and Psy Because They Are Singer-Songwriters." Soompi. 2011. Accessed July 03, 2016.

<http://www.soompi.com/2011/11/15/yg-entertainment-we-chose-tablo-and-psy-because-they-are-singersongwriters/>.

⁸⁰ OfficialEpikHigh. "EPIK HIGH - 'UP' (ft. Bom of 2NE1) M/V."

1. “Up” was marketed similarly to “Gangnam Style.”
2. Outside of South Korea, people could presumably gain social currency by sharing this video due to appearing worldly and also promoting a catchy and hip song.
3. Again, the most successful videos online are music videos, and pop music is definitely a trigger that is universal.
6. The song tells a story.
8. The video and song clock in at less than four minutes.

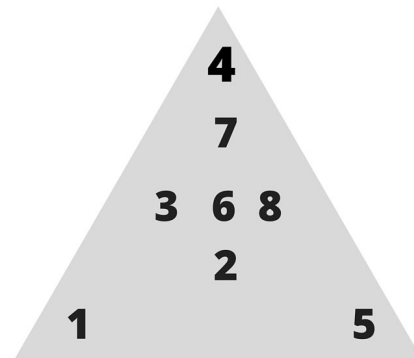
Comparing the two videos gives us evidence that principles 4 and 7 are perhaps more significant for contagion diffusion to occur. If “Up” activated more positive emotions and gave more opportunities for community participations, then tastemakers (criterion 5) would have picked up on it and it would have gone viral.

Conclusion

Based on my evaluation of four viral videos and four corresponding videos that did not go viral, I can create a hierarchy of importance for my eight principles. I synthesized the data by totaling up how many principles each viral video had. Next, I totaled up the principles the corresponding videos had. If a corresponding video had the principles, it reduced the merits of the principle.

Based on this synthesis, the most important principle is 4. A video has to create high arousal emotions in order to go viral. The single biggest specific factor within this principle is that the video must defy expectations or prejudices. The next important principle on the hierarchy is 7. It is critical that a video is easy to emulate, satirize, or talk about. Principles 4 and 7 stand alone, and are the two most essential standards for any video to have a chance. They are so important compared to the rest, that I would argue the other principles are not actually essential at all.

The other principles do help quite a bit. All four viral videos I analyzed fit the criteria for principles 3, 6, and 8, which would be next on the hierarchy. It's extremely important for videos to contain triggers, tell a story, and be concise if they want to have a chance to go viral. The three principles are lower on the hierarchy because three of the corresponding



videos also fit the criteria yet it didn't help them spread. Underneath principles 3, 6, and 8 is 2. If there has to be some extrinsic reward in order to share a video, it could help a video go viral but it's not vital.

Finally, at the bottom of the pyramid are principles 1 and 5. As it turns out, brilliant marketing and the influence of tastemakers are the least important of the eight because they are the least organic on the list. If all a video needed was clever marketing and a celebrity to endorse it to become viral, then there would simply be a lot more viral videos, as advertising agencies have plenty of money to focus their efforts on this. The Chewbacca mask recently sold out everywhere not because of some clever ad campaign, but because of some random woman posting herself with the mask on Facebook. I found no evidence that anyone saw this coming.

On Valentine's Day, 2011, Randy McEntee posted a video from his iPhone showing his twin baby boys having a lively conversation in what sounds like gibberish. Called "Talking Twin Babies," it is ridiculously adorable. It currently has over 136 million views.⁸¹ The video was not marketed, shared by any tastemakers, nor provided any apparent extrinsic rewards for sharing. However, everyone could relate to the cute babies in the video. Everyone loved the pleasant surprise of the "conversation" in the video that seemed to tell a story. They loved

⁸¹ Jayrandall22011. "Talking Twin Babies - PART 2 - OFFICIAL VIDEO." YouTube. 2011. Accessed July 04, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JmA2CIUvUY.

the opportunities to participate in a community because of the video, and the fact that the video brought such joy in two minutes. This video transcends cultures. It did well everywhere around the world. “I think the reason it’s caught on around the world is there’s no language,” McEntee said.⁸² Most importantly, contagion diffusion exists when the content is *universal*. People from all ethnic groups, religions, political affiliations, and nationalities could put all that aside and agree that this was a special human moment.

How can world leaders reduce conflict? The answer is complicated, but it is rooted in humans from all backgrounds better understanding and truly having empathy for each other. Viral videos help nurture that. They offer a glimpse of what is possible when people universally enjoy a series of moments captured on film. As more and more humans have access to the internet, expect this rapid cultural diffusion to only become more prevalent. If all of us can dance to “Gangnam Style,” can’t all of us learn to cooperate? The possibilities and implications are promising. Maybe we can realize that we are not so different after all.

⁸² Claire Cain Miller. “Cashing In on Your Hit YouTube Video.”