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Google processes approximately 40,000 search queries every second. Our digitally connected world leverages powerful social media platforms. Many brands are now using these social media platforms to increase their presence, placing emphasis on viral campaigns to reach large audiences. Over time, some brands have been successful with this strategy. However, many viral campaigns do not add much value to their brands. While some campaigns are very successful in getting shares, they do not necessarily convert into purchases or boost brand evaluation.

When a brand wants to create an advertising plot, they either demonstrate an informative appeal (focusing on the product’s features/benefits) or connect via an emotional appeal (using drama, mood, music and other emotion-eliciting strategies). Research shows that combining the benefits of both approaches will not only boost purchase intentions but also bolster brand-related outcomes. Our research focuses on how firms can generate valuable virality where their ads have both emotional and informative appeals.

**Key Factors Driving Valuable Virality**

Various advertising appeals have different effects on the way a brand is perceived by consumers. A brand using an emotional appeal might be more likely to be shared as emotional content is often more shared, and consumers might share emotional content (i.e., surprising, funny) in order to look good to others. On the other hand, some ads might use informative appeals, which might help consumers learn about the brand features, and therefore boost brand evaluation and purchase.

While it seems rational that ads involving both emotions and brand information is a best-practice approach, historical viral advertising data do not support this common wisdom. Some advertisers —feeling like integrating the brand in the emotional appeals might prevent getting shares— primarily focus on using emotional appeals. However, this approach does not necessarily show higher shares. In fact, research shows that integrating the brand in an emotional ad appeal does not reduce shares. Consequently, we wanted to explore the tradeoff between creating emotional ads and making the brand integral on getting shares and boosting brand evaluations at the same time.
Research Specific Information

Based on the field data, we found that ads are mostly shared in the first six months after launch. In fact, a major portion of such sharing happens in the first month. To understand the role of ad appeals (informative and emotional) and brand integralness on shares, we controlled for several dimensions such as ad characteristics (e.g., ad length, language, humor, celebrity presence) and brand/product characteristics (brand presence, type of brands) in the ad.

Results of the Research

Using field data of viral ads, we found that ad type and brand integralness were negatively related, in other words, compared to informative ads, emotional ads were making brands less integral part of the ads. Yet, including the brand in an emotional-appeal ad did not harm ad sharing. We also found a positive correlation between ad sharing and several control variables; specifically, ads that included celebrities, brands with large communities on Facebook increased ad sharing. While it is intuitive to think that using the brand as an integral part of the ad narrative will reduce shares of an emotional ad appeal, our results showed that it was not the case. This demonstrates that contrary to the common practice, emotional appeals could make the brands more integral to their content.

To better understand the relationship between ad types, shares and brand-related outcomes, we conducted a series of controlled lab experiments that gave us more insights on causality, ruled out alternative explanations and allowed us to understand underlying reasons behind observed effects. Consistent with the field results, the emotional appeal ads had the maximum number of shares. Brand evaluation was higher for informative appeal ads and emotional-brand-integral ads than emotional-non-brand-integral ads. While emotional-brand-integral ads increased ad sharing, informative ads increased the brand evaluation. Hence, an ad that contains both emotional appeal and integrates the brand into the narrative yielded the best results in terms of ad sharing and brand evaluations.

Implications for the Real Estate Industry

As with any other industry, the real estate industry needs digital platforms to connect with the consumer. Social media helps consumers know more about a company and acts as a channel of communication for the real estate firm. As a result of our research on virality, we suggest the following take-aways for the real estate industry:

1. Design ads or campaigns with an emotional narrative in order to increase shares for your content. The real estate industry might seem like serving utilitarian needs, but including emotions into the narrative increases the chances that consumers will share or talk about your ads.
2. While ads could be informative (e.g., talking about the features of the house), having only information is not a useful practice for going viral. An ad that talks about only the features of the real estate property is not likely to be shared. Try to come up with a narrative where features are communicated as part of the emotional narrative. This will increase both shares and purchases.

3. Create campaigns that are like Trojan horses. From the outside, it should be emotional, which gives consumers incentives to share it with others. But inside, you hide the brand, which is integral part of the emotional content. If your video makes sense and is still sharable, even if we drop content related to the brand, then your brand is not integral enough. Having the brand integral is essential, because that is how consumers will learn about the real estate products and companies while boosting brand evaluations or sales.

Virality of an ad has become a necessity in the digital world. Our research—conducted with both field data and controlled lab environments—shows how the sharing of an ad and brand evaluation of a product are dependent on ad content. Emotional and brand integral ads generate valuable virality.

**Recommended Reading**


**Reference**


**About the Authors**

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Dr. Ezgi Akpınar (PhD – Erasmus University) is an expert on word of mouth, viral marketing and social influence. She has received the McKinsey & Company Best Marketing PhD Dissertation award. Her work has appeared in top academic journals like *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Marketing Research*, and been mentioned in popular accounts such as *The New York Times*. She presents in major academic and industry conferences, consults several international companies, and co-founded startups.
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